ComputorEdge™ Online — 06/19/09

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Twitter and the Future Wave of Instant Messaging

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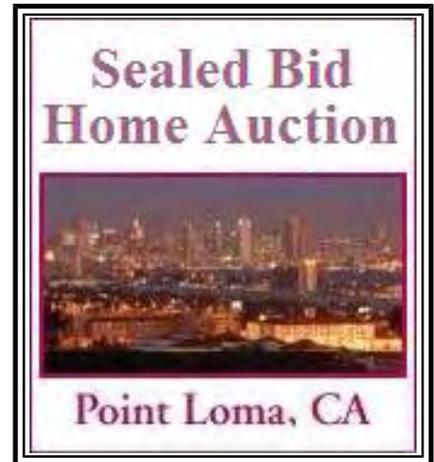## [EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher](#) by Jack Dunning

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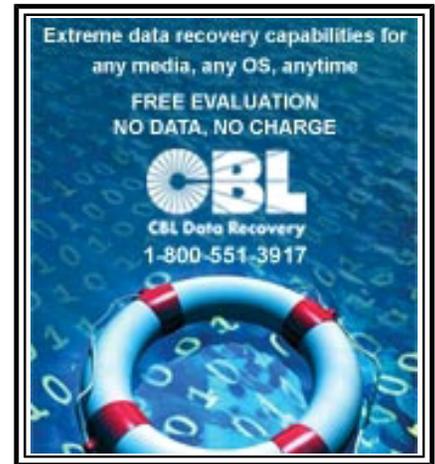
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Digital Dave

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

A reader is unclear about how to properly use his e-mail client's Bcc field; a reader wants help configuring the top bar in Internet Explorer; a reader needs to change his default e-mail program.

Dear Digital Dave,

I read that I should use the Bcc box when sending an item to a lot of people so someone can't get addresses of the recipients and get into their computers. Good idea, but *I found out that a name has to be in the To box or the message won't be sent.*

Then, I read that you should use your own address in the To box. OK, I tried it, and I noted that my name is entered in the Bcc box about every fourth or fifth time! Then I went back to entering the first person's name I would have put in the Bcc box. All felt OK until someone asked how he got the message that was sent to someone else.

I am using Vista and EarthLink for my mail.

I am confused.

Phil Norton
Colorado Springs

Dear Phil,

The original purpose of Bcc (Blind Carbon Copy) was to send the same typed letter to multiple people without anyone knowing who else was getting the letter. This was in the days before e-mail (and computers, for that matter). When the e-mail standard was developed, Bcc was added to the implementation, but it has not been consistent in performance across all e-mail programs. The primary reasons that people use Bcc are either they don't want the addressee to know who else is getting the message, or they want to hide all the e-mail addresses from spammers and/or other readers.

Using Bcc is awkward. The first problem is that every e-mail must have an addressee in the To field (visible to all). If you decide to use your own e-mail address, as many people do, it looks like you're sending e-mail to yourself. (By the way, I don't know why your program puts your name in the Bcc group when you put your name in the To field. It must be a bug.) If you pick someone else for your To field, people may think that they are receiving mail from strangers.

Bcc has its uses, but nothing that can't be accomplished by forwarding the thread to the

recipient separately. There may be other reasons you want to send only one e-mail. It could be you want to be able to know who saw an e-mail without searching for more than one. Plus, Bcc is considered polite in mass mailings. People get touchy about their e-mails being given out.

On a personal level, I don't use Bcc. For one thing, it's been freely identified with spam. When I get a message addressed to someone else, I assume that it is of a commercial nature and generally ignore it. If the message is To and From the same person, it had better be someone that I know very well or it's immediately deleted.

When I send to multiple people, they all usually know each other. I'm not trying to hide them from each other (or the e-mail addresses, which they probably all have). Even CC (Carbon Copy) can be problematic. I've seen cases where attachments will go through to anyone in the To field, yet are deleted for the CC people. How these features are implemented is dependent upon the e-mail client software and will vary.

CC is preferable to a mailing list program because you generally have a different audience for every e-mail. At least the way I use it, the person in the To field is the person who is expected to respond and CC people are just being kept in the loop.

If you are sending e-mail to a consistent and large group of people for professional reasons, then it is better that each receive the message "To" them individually, and "From" you (or your organization) personally. Rather than use the rather lame Bcc, or the CC, another answer to the problem is to get mailing list management software—especially if you are truly doing mass mailings. This software is capable of generating individual e-mails to each person on a mailing database into a standard e-mail. It works in a fashion similar to a mail merge when printing multiple letters from word processing software.

Since I've had little opportunity to use mailing list management software, I ask anyone who is currently using mailing list management software to please let us know what you use and how it works for you—especially if it's free. It has to be better than using Bcc and is less likely to end up in the Junk Mail folder.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

Some time back, you shared with us (at least I believe it was you) how to change what was seen on the top bar in Internet Explorer. It had to be in either the late '90s ('98-'99) or early 2000.

I put that issue aside (mistake). Then, when I moved from La Mesa, I couldn't find it. Is there any way you can share that info again, or let me know if that article is archived?

Louis Gray
Dallas, TX

Dear Louis,

It's difficult to remember what I wrote in the late 1990s, but I suppose that it's about time to address the issue again. Internet Explorer has certainly evolved since that time, with version 8 being the latest. It's likely that whatever you were using in 1998 is not the same Internet Explorer.

For configuring your menu bars, the most important piece of equipment is the right button on your mouse. (I've found this true almost regardless of which program of any type that you're using.) Generally, when you hover over an item on your screen and click the right button on your mouse, a menu will open. This menu is generally sensitive to the location of the cursor on the screen. Therefore, when you hover over one of the top menu bars and right-click, you will usually get a drop-down that will help you to change the menus (see Figure 1).
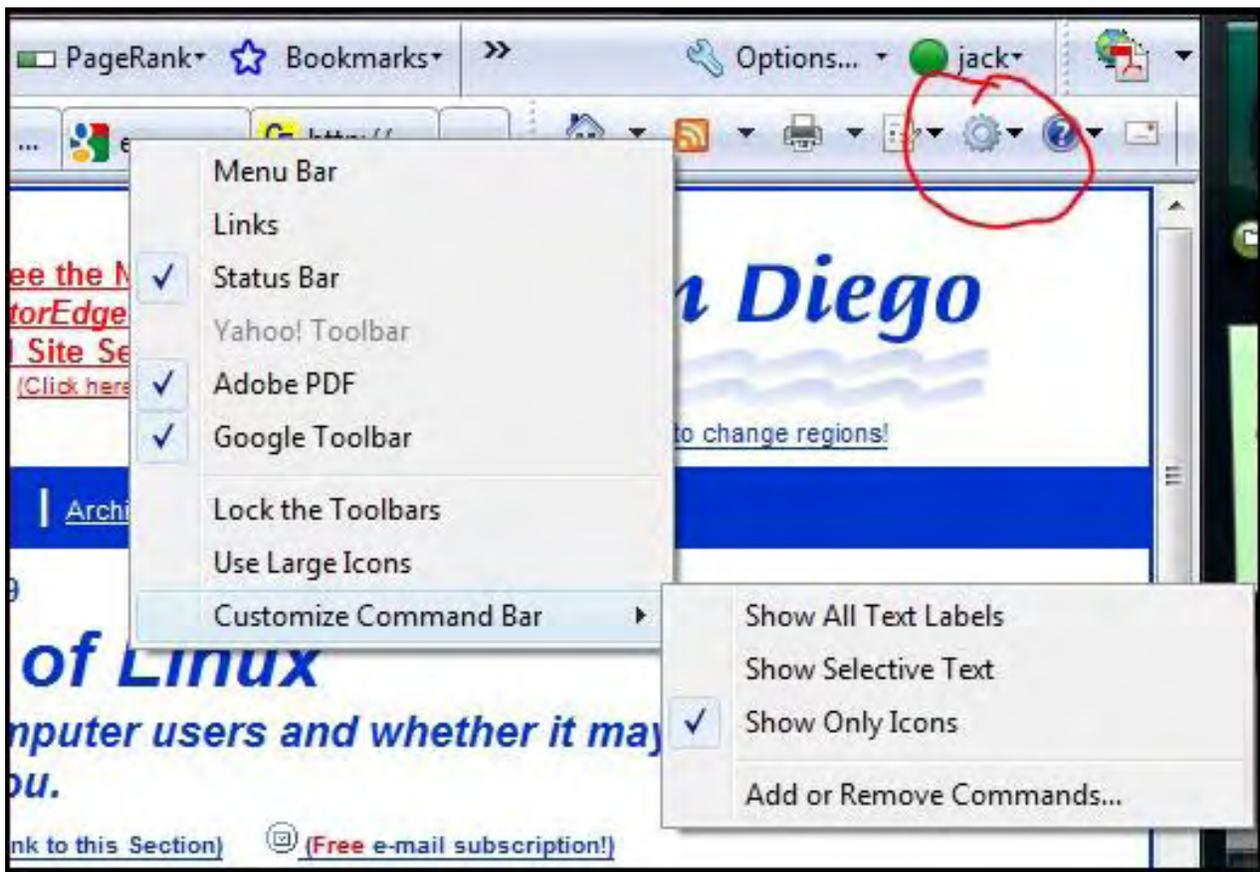

Figure 1. Right-click on the menu bar in Internet Explorer.

You may need to be careful where you click. Often you need to right-click in a space between buttons, depending upon which menu bar you are configuring. A right-click on a button may give you a menu for that button. Play with it, and you will uncover the options.

If you don't have a right mouse button, then, if you have a Tools button on your top bar, you can use that to open this menu. It will either say Tools or show the gear icon (circled in red in Figure 1).

The check marks on the drop-down menu indicate which menus and/or items are turned on. Clicking (left-mouse) will toggle those items on and off. If you want to add more buttons, then

you can select Customize Command Bar, then Add or Remove Commands from the same right-click menu. Another window will open, as shown in Figure 2.
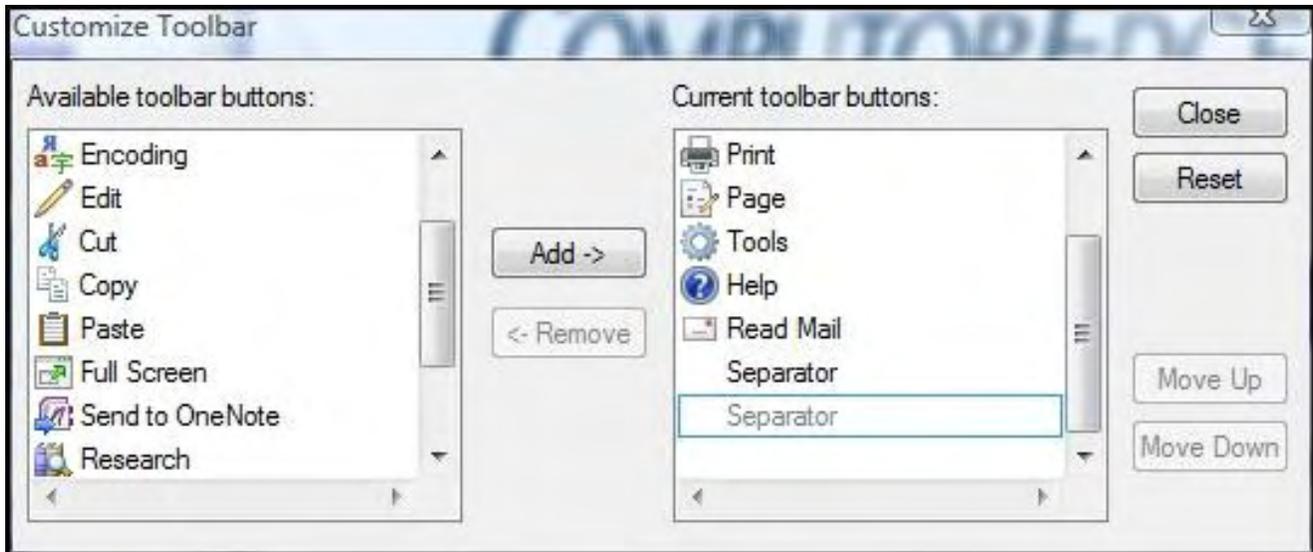

Figure 2. Internet Explorer Customize Toolbar window.

In this window you can select functions to either Add to or Remove from the toolbar. You can also move the location of each button through selection and Move Up or Move Down.

While there are differences in how Firefox and other browsers allow their toolbars to be configured, virtually all of them will respond to a mouse right-click if it's done in the right spot.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have been a longtime ComputorEdge/Byte Buyer *reader.*

When I'm in an application and try to e-mail a file from there (right-click and then send to/e-mail recipient), the Outlook e-mail function opens, which I have never used. How can I get the Outlook Express e-mail function to open instead?

Thanks for any advice you may offer.

Don Jackson
San Diego, CA

Dear Don,

Default programs for all types of files are generally set through changing file-type associations. However, when you are dealing with Internet default programs, such as your browser and e-mail programs, there are a couple of more direct ways to change the default.

First, when you load one of the Internet programs, they usually check to see if they are the default program. Unless you have set the program not to perform the check anymore, loading

Outlook Express should give you the opportunity to set it as the default.

If that doesn't work, then you should be able to deal with the Internet defaults directly through Internet Explorer. Load Internet Explorer and select Internet Options from the Tools menu. Select the Programs tab. In Windows XP, which I assume you're using, you should be able to select your default e-mail program directly, then click apply.

Digital Dave
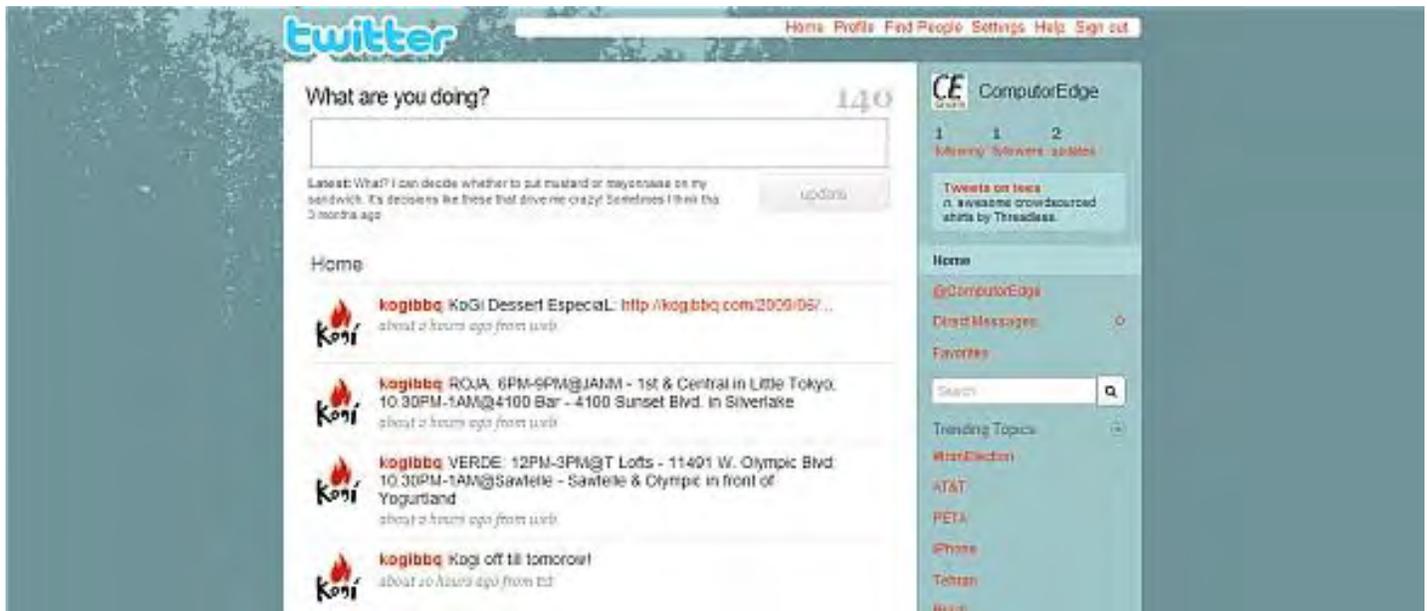
To Tweet or Not to Tweet
"What are you doing right now?" by Marie Loggia-Kee

> In this age of reality entertainment, Twitter offers a glimpse into a user's private world, answering the question: What are you doing?

What do you have to share with 10 people? How about 1,000 followers? And 1 million subscribers to your every published posting?

When my mother comes home from getting a pedicure and asks about "that thing called Twitter," I know some technology niche has hit mainstream. Twitter (*twitter.com/*) describes itself as a "free social messaging utility for staying connected in real-time." The platform is similar to sites such as MySpace and Facebook, which *ComputorEdge Magazine* will feature later this year. Users sign up for an account and name, and start broadcasting short status updates, under 140 characters, that answer the question: What are you doing? While users are on one side of the information stream, on the other side are followers—people who want to receive the broadcasts.

In this age of reality-entertainment, Twitter offers users a glimpse into a user's private world. Fans of the show "So You Think You Can Dance" may see Nigel Lythgoe's public persona, but followers of #dizzyfeet, will learn that the director/producer needs to undergo a "cervical spine op," and will miss the New Orleans auditions. For non-celebrity types, it's a convenient and easy way to stay in touch with friends and family.

"They call him The Twitterer! He tweets people until they go crazy!"

Patrick Neeman, a business analyst and user experience consultant, started a Twitter account for his company Usability Counts in September 2008. By October 1, he had garnered 150 followers. Recently, he gave away a George Forman grill to his 1,000th follower. When asked how he built a reader base so quickly, he laughed and said he didn't "do anything." Instead, he's used the technology to work for him. "A lot people do it manually," Neeman explained. "Most of what I do with Twitter is done automatically."

That automatic functionality comes through apps—applications that help streamline the process and organize the sometimes overwhelming ocean of information.
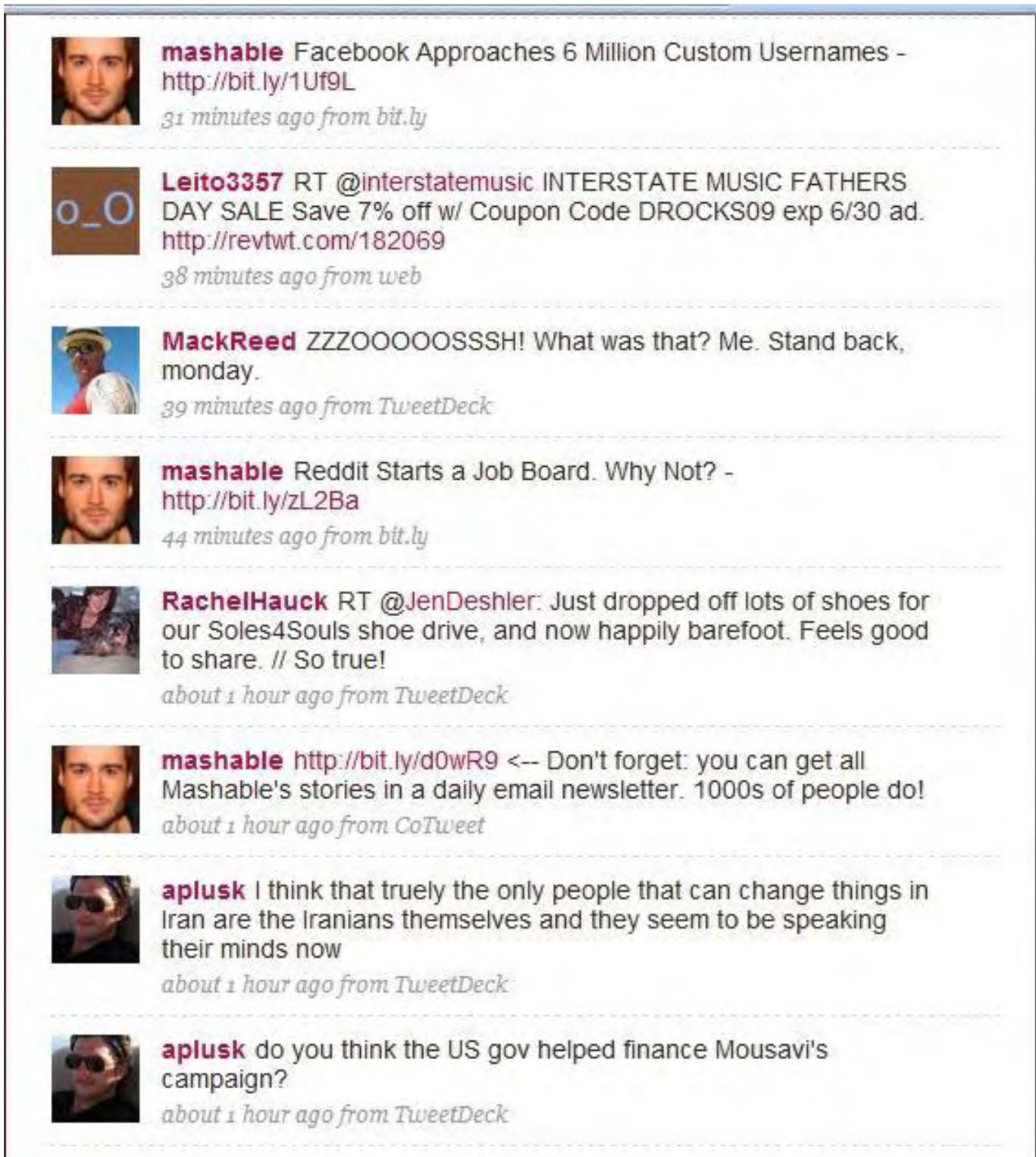
Marketing Madness

Los Angeles-based Kogi Korean BBQ uses the feeds to direct their 30,000+ followers to their food trucks. The company posts cross-street locations and time slots, and fans show up to devour the delicacies. Kogi's strategy obviously works, and well, but potential marketers need to keep one thing in mind: the following base, explained Mack Reed, a former Los Angeles Times reporter, who now works as an information architect and social engineer. "Unfortunately, a lot of misguided marketing types see it as another method of spamming us all with unwanted information—without fully understanding that we actually have to opt *in* to their message to hear it in the first place and likely never will," Reed said.

Wendy Toliver, young adult author of the books "The Secret Life of a Teenage Siren" and "Miss Match," said she uses Twitter to stay connected. "I started tweeting when my friend Sara Zarr (also an author) mentioned it as a good way to advertise new blog posts to the world."

With an already strong following on Facebook and MySpace, Toliver—who does all of her updates herself—uses some additional Twitter functionality to save time. "I have it set up so that whenever I tweet, my Facebook page is automatically updated," she said. "It also appears on my Web site, giving my Web site a more current feel."

Neeman, on the other side of the technology-field, has his WordPress blog set up to automatically post to Twitter, and he sees a direct correlation that 20% of his traffic comes from Twitter.

The free application TweetDeck aggregates content from Twitter and Facebook. Users have the option of updating the status on both sites simultaneously. Want to know how it's being done? Below the Twitter feed is a notification that the status update was published "*from TweetDeck,*" or various other apps, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Twitter shows app used to publish at the bottom of each Twitter feed.

Cell Phones & Interfacing

One of the best functions of Twitter is its portability. Apps such as TwitterBerry and Twitterfon allow users to access information via their cells. That's how Kogi potentially reaches their customers and leads them to their roving location. Neeman mentioned that he often attends conferences where next to the speaker's stage is a screen with a live feed of the tweets commenting on the presentation. Not only are people who don't attend the conference able to receive information on what was missed, but speakers can

get real-time feedback and interactivity with the audience.

Joz, who works as a strategy consultant for an interactive design company and runs her own site, said that she spends way more time online than offline. "I really like the concept of 'lifestreaming' and have always wanted my blog to be the convergence of all my online activity; I've found that service through FriendFeed for the moment," Joz explained. "Everything is pushed out to Twitter and once a week my Twitter feed is aggregated and published back on my blog (searchable on my blog). I use my iPhone to Tweet while I'm remote (I use TwitterFon, which is free) and occasionally I use my work PDA to publish via IM (Fring)."

Even without a special app, Twitter makes it extremely easy for users to receive updates via text messaging on their cells. Enter in a phone number, and then an activation message is sent for confirmation. Keep in mind that text messaging rates do apply. T-Mobile charges .15 cents per message. If a person doesn't have a plan, those rates can add up to an unsightly bill. For the iPhone, unlimited messaging is $20 a month. It's better to be prepared than surprised.

Trolls and Spambots

Where there's an upside, there's often a downside. President Barack Obama (1,381,910 followers) and actor Ashton Kutcher (2,134,822 followers) are two well-known contributors. For the sake of research, I began to "follow" both. Within an hour of signing up, I had two new followers. Both had obvious false fronts, featuring attractive females with few updates, and a linked invitation to "check out" their photos. So now I wonder, if the trolls attach themselves to followers of Obama or Kutcher?
"While unsolicited follows from marketing companies and spambots are one of the worst things about Twitter," said Reed, "one of the greatest pleasures is being able to block them immediately."

Like all social networking sites, users need to evaluate their level of privacy. Do you want to be listed on the main directory where everyone can see your updates and become a follower? Do you want your information kept private, except from those friends you allow in? Make sure to check your settings. And, as Reed mentioned, users also have the option to "block" someone from seeing their information.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Some call Twitter a "fad," and it's uncertain how the model can turn a profit. An April 2009 Nielsen report, "Twitter Quitters," found that "more than 60 percent of U.S. Twitter users fail to return the following month." In a June 10, 2009 blog post (*forum.nin.com/bb/read.php?9,731489*), Nine Inch Nails lead singer Trent Reznor announced that he's "out" of the social networking game. Reznor said that the noise outweighs the benefits. Since that post, Reznor continues to contribute, but no longer accepts RTs (return tweets).

While there is some obvious fall-off, Neeman said that the audience is there, and the high amount of active users proves it. "If the audience is well read, technologically savvy and connected to the social media," Neeman said, "Twitter is great."

While there may be some changes in store for Twitter, Toliver thinks the concept will remain. "All these sites will evolve. I don't think there's any going back, though," Toliver said. "Now that it's here, we're all too curious to see what other people are doing at any given time. I know several people who admit to being addicted."

Twitter Apps & Sites

• Alltop (*twitter.alltop.com/*)—Similar to a search engine, Alltop says it answers the question "What's Happening" on topics of interest.
• FriendFeed (*friendfeed.com/*)—Software that aggregates content that's shared from friends.
• Fring (*www.fring.com/*)—Mobile Internet service that allows users to take their Online communities on their mobile phones.

iPhone and IPod Touch Functionality:
• Tweetie (*www.atebits.com/tweetie-iphone/*)—Software runs Twitter on iPhone and iPod Touch. Also, runs on the desktop of Mac OS X.
• Twitterfon (*twitterfon.net/*)
• Twitterrific (*iconfactory.com/software/twitterrific*)

• TwitterBerry (*www.orangatame.com/products/twitterberry/*)—Exactly how it sounds: Twitter application for the BlackBerry.
• TweetDeck (*tweetdeck.com/beta/*)—Desktop software that helps keep track of all your tweets, friend's posts, and interfaces for Facebook. In essence, you can update your status via TweetDeck and it'll update on both Twitter and Facebook.
• Twitterfeed (*twitterfeed.com/*)—Sets up a blog to automatically feed to Twitter and other platforms.
• Tweet Later (*www.tweetlater.com/*)—Offers free and fee-based productivity tools where the user can schedule tweets and much, much more.
• We Follow (*wefollow.com/*)—Offers a listing of the top Twitter users.
• Word Press Tools (*wordpress.org/extend/plugins/twitter-tools/faq/*)—Offers plug-ins to work with the Word Press blogs.

10 to Follow

While these suggestions are not necessarily the top users, or have the most followers, they offer an interesting mix. On the latest Jane's Addiction tour, Dave Navarro gave away concert tickets. From authors to musicians to professional athletes, the key to Twitter success is to be selective in who you choose to follow. Pick your favorites.

• Meg Cabot—#megcabot
• CNN—#cnnbrk
• Anderson Cooper—#andersoncooper
• Kogi BBQ—#kogibbq
• Ashton Kutcher—#aplusk
• Mashable—#mashable
• Dave Navarro—#davenavarro6767
• San Diego Chargers—#chargers
• Kevin Smith—#ThatKevinSmith
• Steve Wozniak—#stevewoz

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

Google Wave Combines E-mail with Instant Messaging
"Is Google's new venture right for your communications?" by Jack Dunning

> Google Wave, planned for initial release later this year, could be the future replacement for both the current e-mail system and instant messengers.

I still use an instant messenger (IM) occasionally. One of my sons has his on almost all of the time, while the other never loads his anymore. (The conversational text demands are annoying for my second son.) My first son must be using his IM regularly with various people, which would explain his IM's "always-up" mode. When my daughter was in college, while she was in her room she would keep her IM loaded at all times. That's how we knew she was alive. Now, she uses it only occasionally. I no longer keep AIM running continually, loading it only when I need to converse with my first son.

When we do use the IM to chat, it is usually in circumstances where it is a preferred form of communication. Sometimes—if you have the keyboard skills—a train of thought can be better developed with a text chat than with live voice. Plus, if it is a technical conversation, there is a record of the interaction for later referral. You could do something similar with e-mail, but the time lag between messages hinders the flow.

Many techno-prophets are predicting the end of instant messaging. (Some of those same people tell us that Twitter is a fad.) At this point, one can only guess how technology—and more importantly, how we *use* the technology—will evolve. However, while most of us plod along with our e-mail (spam and all), instant messengers and cell phones (no texting here), there are people who are developing new systems based upon how they think e-mail and computer chatting should have been done from the start.

Google's Next Wave

Before launching a new project, Google believes in rethinking how things should have been done in the first place. The company is every bit as innovative as Apple, but without the let's-own-everything-ourselves culture. Google will develop a new product or system while seeming to have no idea how it can ever make money. Its goal always appears to be, "Let's build that new system now. We'll figure out the financial part later." This is the case with Google Wave, one of the latest new projects from Google.

Google Wave (*wave.google.com*), planned for initial release later this year, could be the future replacement for both the current e-mail system and instant messengers. By rethinking the 40-year-old e-mail system and integrating instant messaging techniques, Google has combined the functionality of both while opening it up to collaboration. Although it is not a totally new way of viewing Internet communications, Wave does pull together the concepts underlying e-mail, instant messaging and network meetings.

Google Wave is open source. That means Google is making it freely available to developers for building their own apps. While Google will be offering Wave accounts hosted on its own servers, anyone will be able to host their own Wave server, which can either be inside a private network or connected to the wider Google Wave community—your choice. Google Wave is more a protocol for developing communications systems than it is an end product.

How Does It Work?

Google Wave operates entirely through your Web browser. There is no additional software, such as a separate e-mail program (Outlook Express) or instant messenger (AIM, iChat, etc.) to install. (One graphics-sharing feature of Wave does require Google Gears (*gears.google.com*) to be installed in your browser.) This makes Google Wave independent of specific operating systems, whether it be Windows, the Mac OS, or Linux. As long as you can browse the Web, you will be able to use Wave.

Rather than using terms like "message," "session," "e-mail," or "chat" to describe the digital missive that holds our thoughts, wishes and dreams, Google has implemented the term "wave." The wave is the analogy for the message (not as in the pun, "Google's Next Wave"). Just as an ocean wave spreads as it hits the shore and moves across the beach, later returning to the sea, the Google wave reaches out to anyone who is designated (one or many) by the wave creator—similar to the way an e-mail is sent to multiple addressees. The difference is that when someone responds to the wave, rather than answering in a separate return message, their words become part of the wave for all wave participants to see.

Similar to e-mail, if a recipient is not immediately available, the wave will be there waiting for viewing at the first opportunity. It works the same way for responses. There is no need to sit and wait for a live answer as you would with an instant messenger. However, if one or more of the wave invitees is online, then immediate communication is available. Google Wave is e-mail if you want it to be, or it's instant messaging if you want it to be.

Unlike e-mail, when you respond to a wave, there is no redundant copy of the old message enclosed. Each wave is a distinct container for the particular topic. There is no new e-mail for response. All communications from the originator and all invitees are held within the same wave. No more searching through multiple e-mail replies to find the one with the right information.

Similar to either e-mail or IMs, the Wave accounts need to be hosted by servers—in the beginning it will be primarily Google servers. After logging in through a Web browser, the user is presented with a screen similar to Figure 1. On the left is a navigation menu and contact list. The center pane shows a list of all the available waves—active or semi-active. The pane on the right displays the content of the currently selected wave.

Figure 1. Google Wave screen.

In a fashion similar to computer forums, or the old Bulletin Board Systems, a wave participant can respond to any particular part of the wave directly in that same spot in the wave. The new comment or answer will become part of the wave at that location for everyone else to view. (If you need to make a private comment to only one person, there is a button for that.) Whenever the wave content changes, all the participants will see a change in the wave name, similar to the boldface of unread e-mails in Outlook Express.

In the default chat mode, people can see the notes being typed in real time. Rather than waiting (typing, typing, typing) for someone to hit the Enter key, you can formulate and start your response while they are still writing. (Some people don't like this real-time key-by-key viewing feature, but I've found that with standard instant message chatting, I'm answering one question while the other person is moving on to another.)

More Google Wave Applications

While it is difficult to know in the long run whether Google Wave will actually impact how we use our computers to communicate, it's easy to speculate how it could. Wave takes advantage of the current Internet technology to make it easier to form collaborative groups—whether social or professional. A wave is e-mail combined with a real-time chat room. Rather than being based upon one-to-one interaction, it is designed for group exchanges. Although, only those who have been invited to the wave may attend. A wave could be as simple as an e-mail sent just once, or it could be as complicated as a group of teenagers planning a weekend party.

The fact that Google Wave is open source and designed to support third-party applications is one of its strongest points. Rather than merely being another form of e-mail and/or instant messaging, Wave is a platform for deploying other collaborative applications. Maybe it's a game of chess, as shown at the left, an exclusive social interaction, or a complex collaborative business application. Rather than be dependent upon social networks such as Facebook and MySpace, people will be able to put together their own private social/business network. The possibilities are limited only by the imagination—and programming skills.

Anything that overcomes the limitations of e-mail and instant messengers, while maintaining their strengths, is a good thing. Google Wave certainly has broken with the concept of communication being primarily one-on-one. It combines the benefits of both real-time interaction and delayed thoughtful response with the ability to control the number of people included. Will it become the new way to communicate over the Internet with our computers? Only time will tell.

My Mother Would Have Loved It

When I was a kid (before the time of PCs and the Internet), my mother was involved in what she called a round robin. The round robin consisted of writing letters to her mother, her sister, and sister-in-law. Rather than write a letter to each person, each member of the family would write one letter to everyone. The letter would be sent to one person who, after reading the letter, would add one of her own. The letters were then sent to the next person, who did the same. Eventually, the original letter would be returned with the three new letters—one each. After replacing her letter with a new one, my mother would send them all off again to the next person in the circle. In those days, this was how people could communicate with a group without writing a letter to each person. (There were no copy machines—carbon paper was messy and considered impersonal.)

Google Wave reminds me of my mother's round robin, only no one needs to wait their turn to read the mail or respond. The circle doesn't get broken by someone who's slow about replacing their letter. Photos can be added without worrying about not getting them back. (Occasionally, my grandmother had sticky fingers.) Although a round robin can be stimulated by sending one e-mail to everyone, it's like creating an electronic chain letter. Each one generates multiple additional e-mails through forwarding and replies (or worse, nothing at all). The e-mail clutter can be astonishing, while never capturing the feeling of opening that fat round robin paper envelop with three fresh letters and one old one.
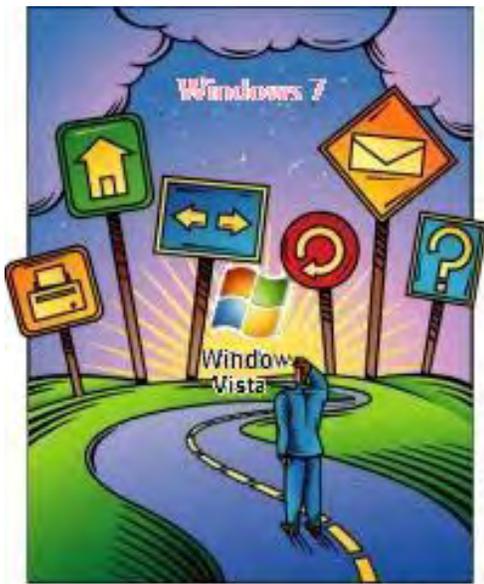
I look forward to trying out Google Wave when it arrives later this year.

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

Windows Vista (and Windows 7) Tips and Tricks

"The Program Compatibility Wizard" by Jack Dunning

A look at the little-known Windows Program Compatibility Wizard for solving program-compatibility software problems.

There is a little-known wizard in Windows Vista specifically for dealing with program-compatibility problems. While I haven't used the utility on any problem software (only tested it), it is something that may be of use to people who are having problems. (If you've used the wizard to solve a problem, or do so at some time in the future, please let us know how it works out.) The utility is called the Program Compatibility Wizard.

Initially, I came across it on my HP laptop when checking the Troubleshooting Tools in the Help and Support window by viewing the "Performance and maintenance tools." The wizard was listed as "Check program compatibility." However, it was more difficult to find on my non-HP computer, since that computer was not HP. Apparently, HP has done a great deal to improve the Windows Vista help system. The best bet for finding the wizard is to search for "compatibility" or "program" in the Help and Support window (see Figure 1). This worked on either computer.
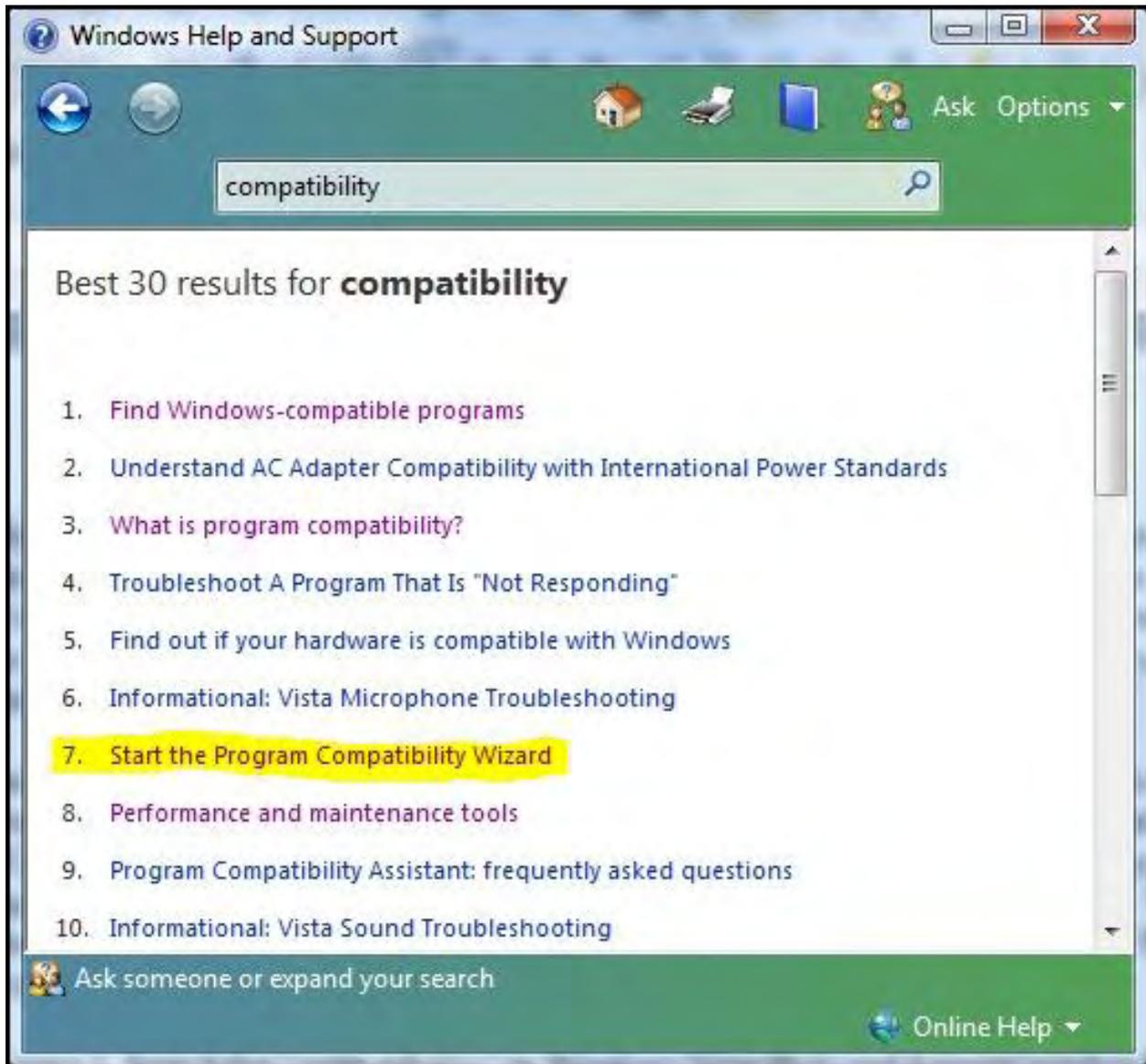
Figure 1. Search for "compatibility" in the Windows Vista Help and Support window.

The item "Start Program Compatibility Wizard" is highlighted in yellow. Using Help and Support is important in Windows Vista because it is the only way that I could find to launch the wizard. Nothing that I did from the Start Menu would find the wizard. Even knowing the name of the executable file for launching from the Run command didn't help because more parameters were needed. This is one of the frustrations of Vista. Sometimes the only way to launch certain utilities is to find them in Help and Support. (Later in this column, I'll talk about the approach in Windows 7, which makes the discovery of useful programs and utilities much easier.) When you select the highlighted help item, you will get the following help window (see Figure 2).

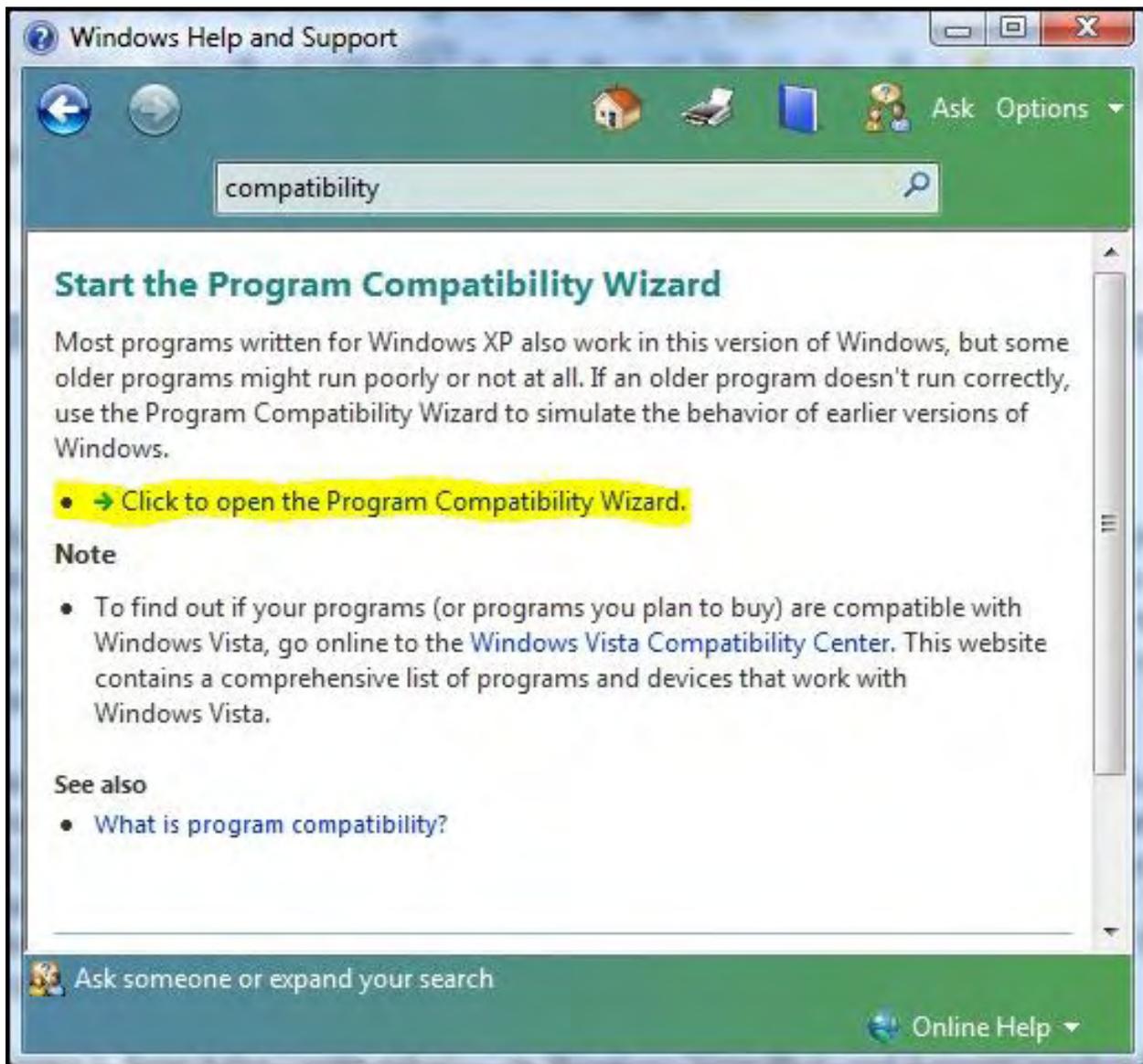Figure 2. "Click to open the Program Compatibility Wizard.".

When you click the highlighted item, the utility will start displaying with the screen shown in Figure 3. The purpose of the Compatibility Wizard is to help you test launch a program that is giving you trouble. As you work through the Wizard, it will give you options, helping you set the modes needed to make the program run properly.
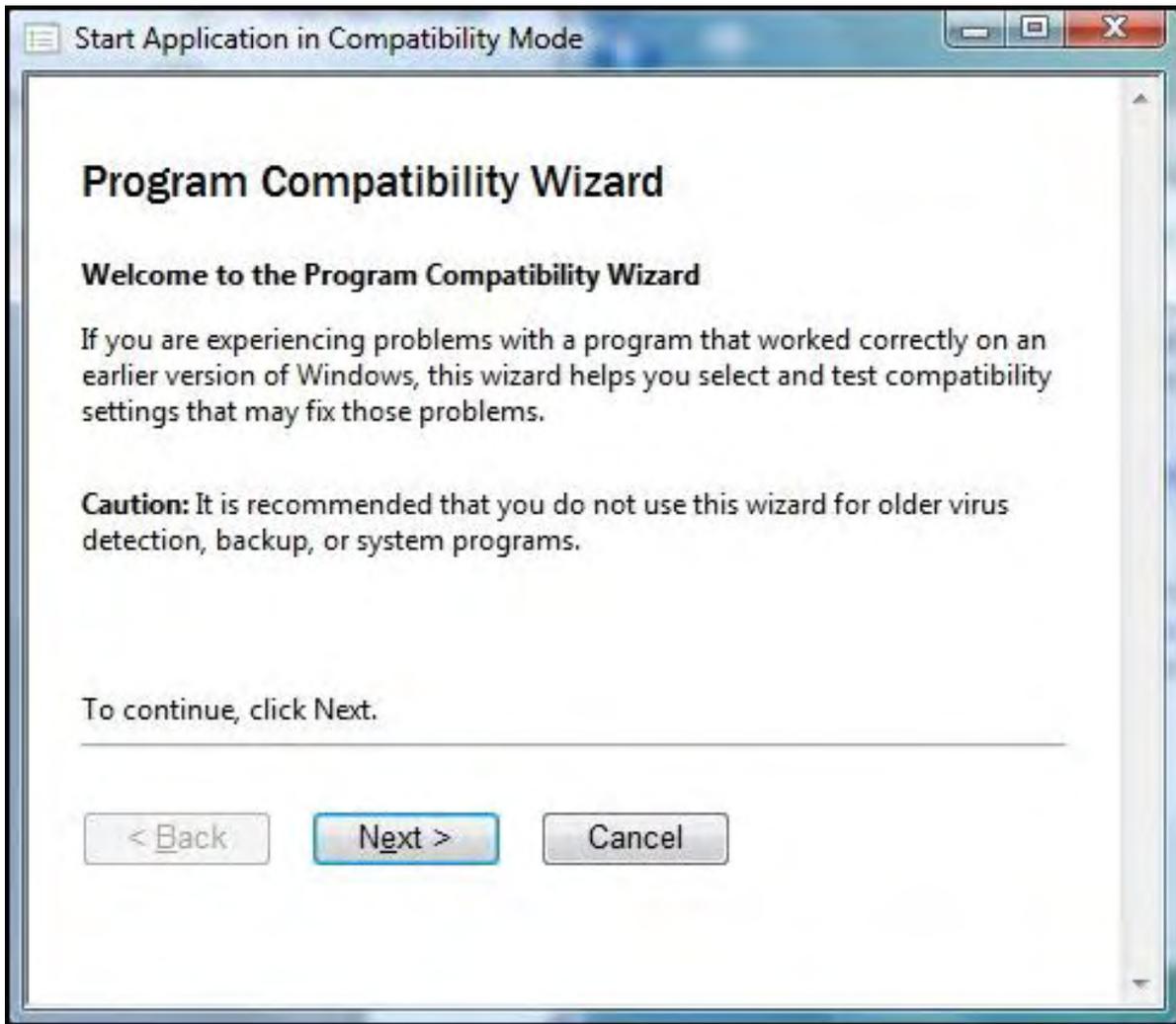
Figure 3. The Program Compatibility Wizard.

The first option is to select the program that you want to launch (see Figure 4). When you click Next, the program will start searching your computer for installed software. This is yet another way to find programs that you didn't know were installed. Eventually, you will see a list of installed programs (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Select a program to launch.
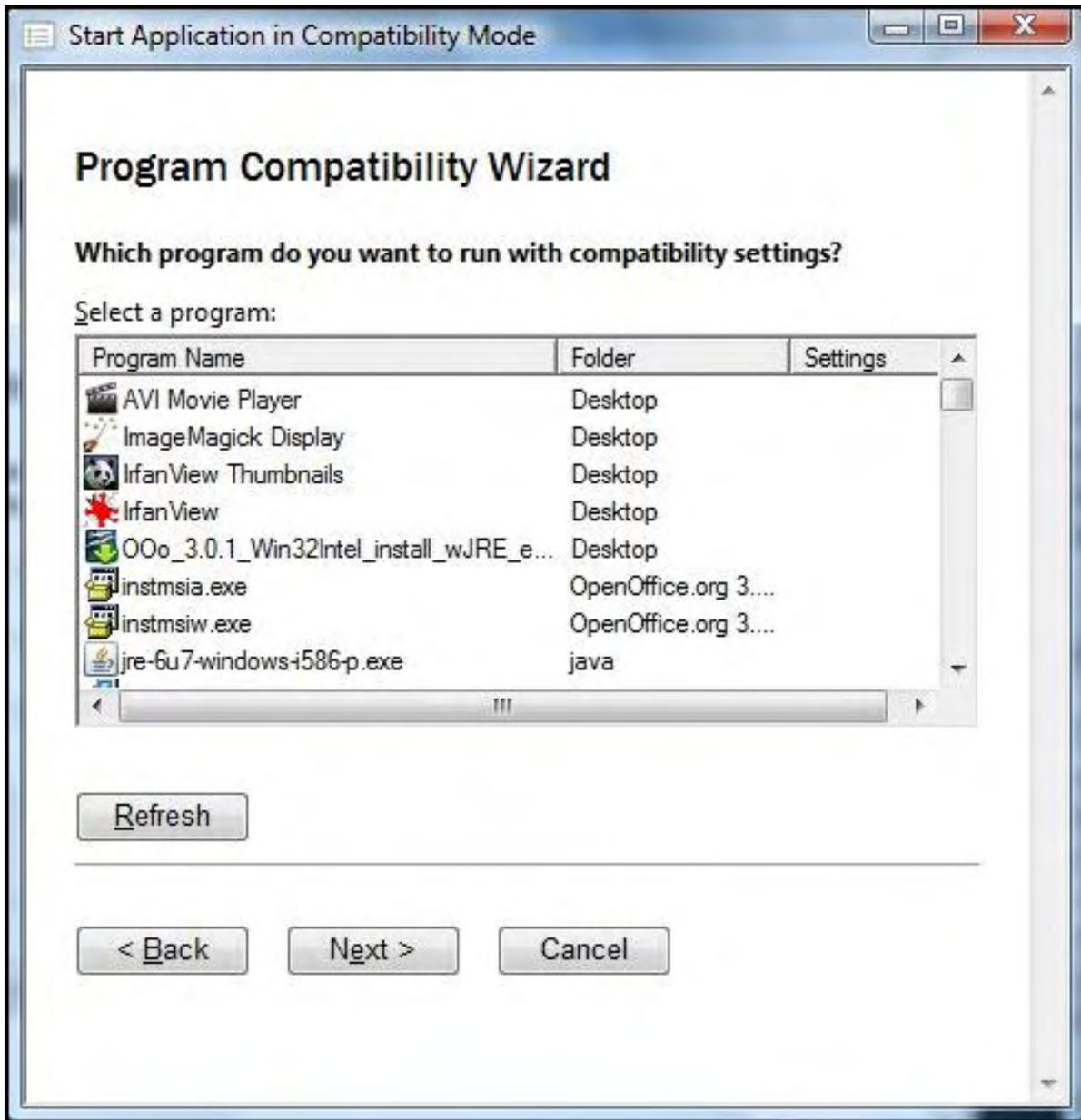
Figure 5. List of installed programs.

After you have selected a program and clicked Next, you will be given an opportunity to designate the last version of the Windows operating system that you know has run the program (see Figure 6).
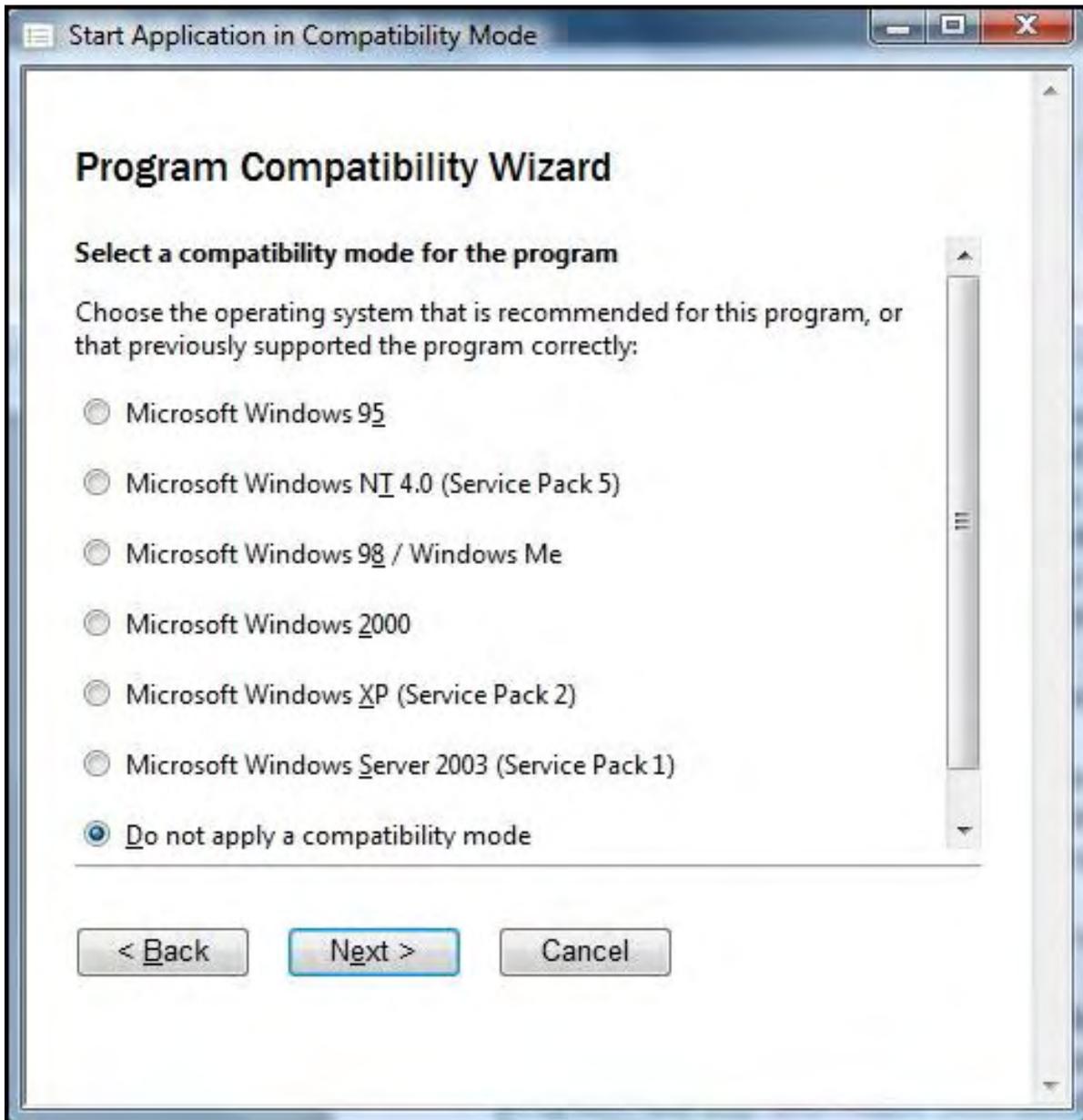
Figure 6. Choose the version of Windows you want to use.

The next window of the wizard is for programs experiencing display or menu problems (see Figure 7).
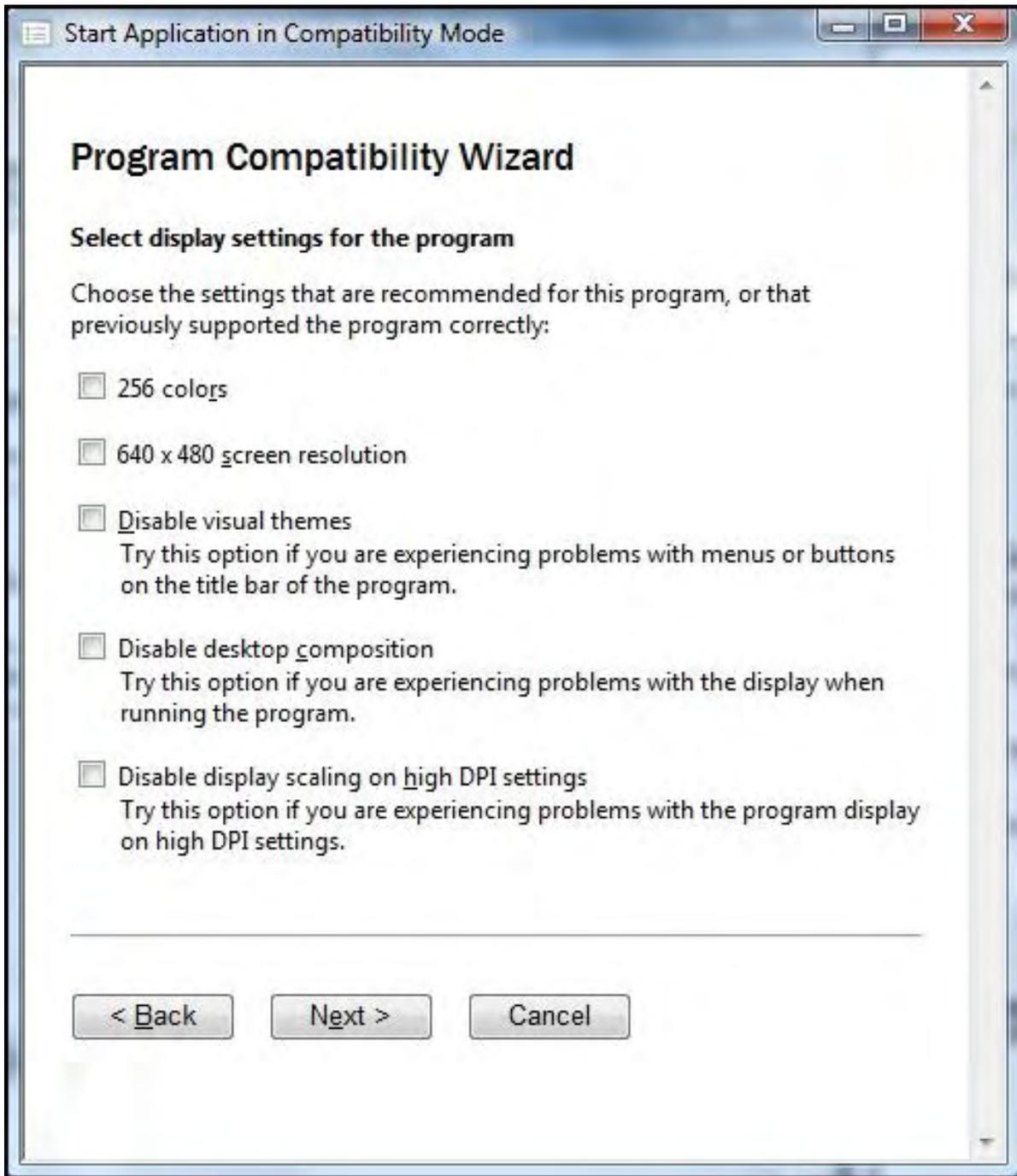
Figure 7. Select the appropriate display setting for the target program.

The next window is for launching the program with full administrator's rights (see Figure 8).
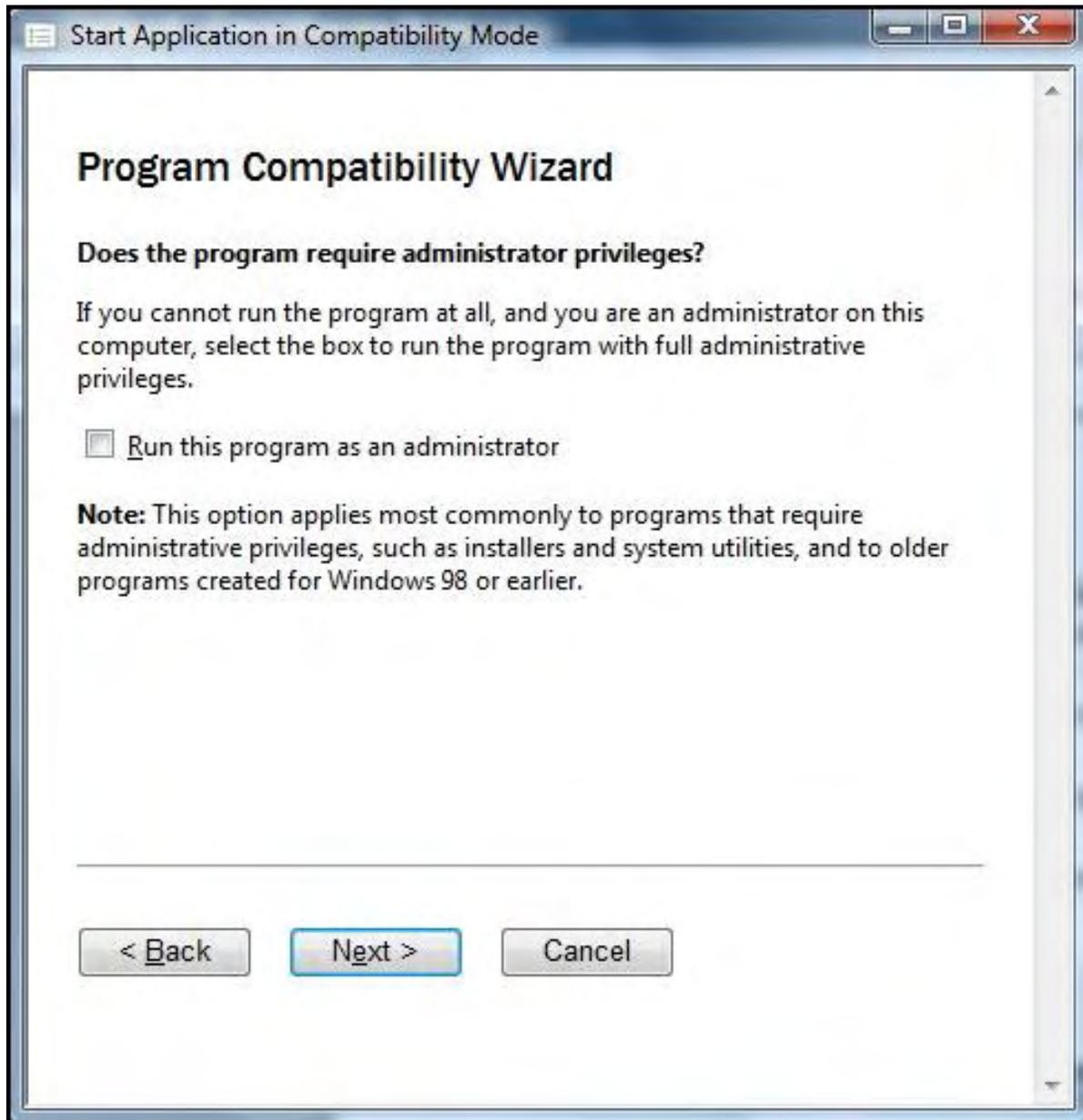
Figure 8. Set administrator's rights.

In the next window, all of the selected changes are shown (see Figure 9). When you click the Next button, the program will launch with all of the changes. Don't freak out if you selected a different screen resolution and everything changes before your eyes. This is a temporary change. When you close the program everything will go back to normal.
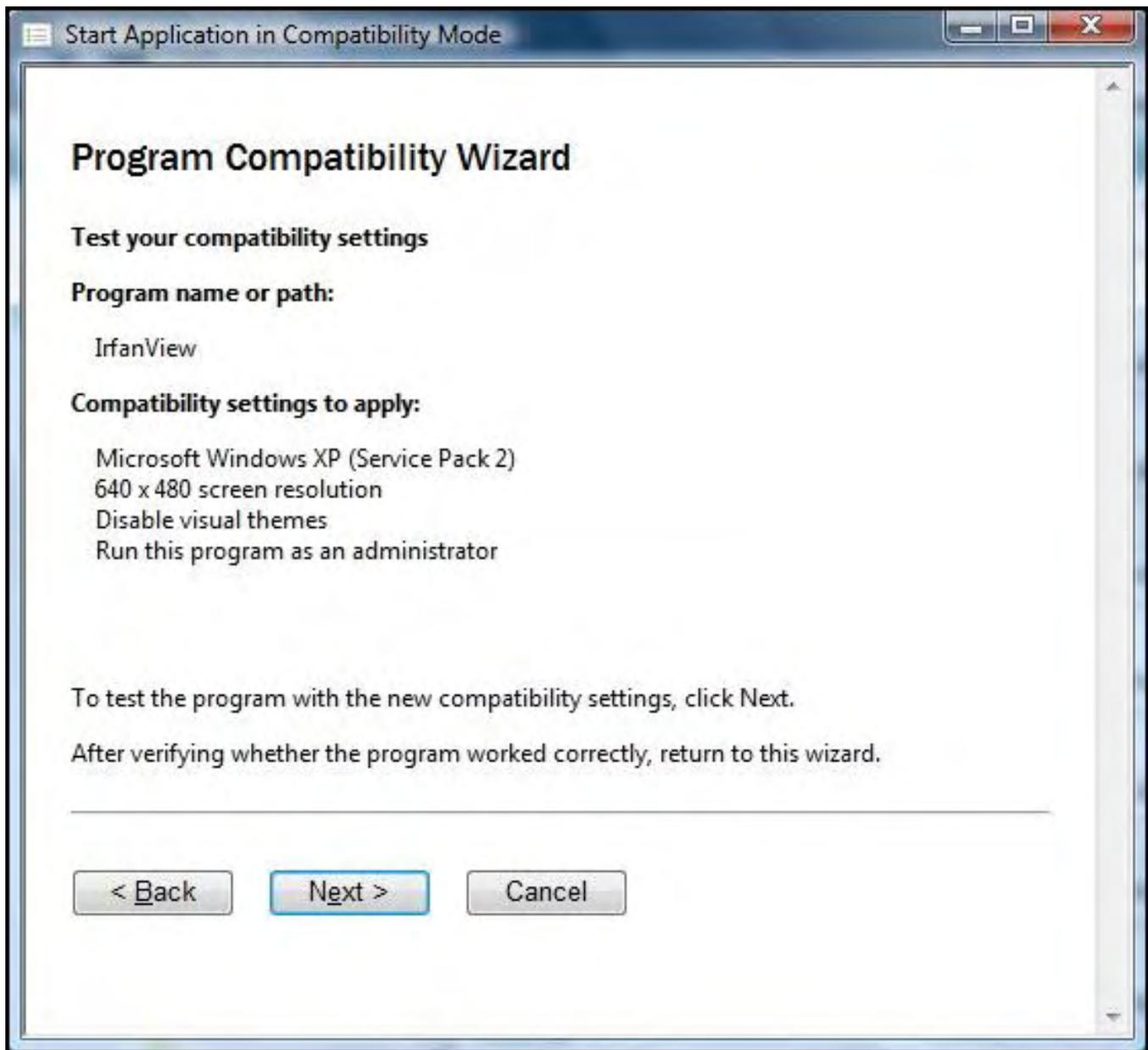
Figure 9. List of changes and launch program with the Next button.

In the last window, you're given the opportunity to either save all of the changes, start over, or quit trying (see Figure 10). Remember, all the changes are temporary until you select "Yes, set this program." If you do make the changes permanent—at least until the next time you run the wizard—you will be given the opportunity to tell Microsoft. Presumably this is to allow Microsoft to know the proper configuration for that particular program.

Figure 10. Save the changes, start over, or quit the wizard without making changes.

If you do accept the changes, the wizard will implement all the necessary changes in the program settings, making them permanent. The next time you launch that program, it will take on all the characteristics that you specified. For example, if you changed the screen resolution, the display will adjust when you load the program. When you close the program, the screen will go back to the original resolution. This comes in handy if you need to run a program in other than your standard mode, but don't want to manually change your computer/screen properties settings every time you run it—later being forced to manually change the settings back.

Easier to Find in Windows 7

In Windows 7, I was able to type "program" or "compatibility" into the "Search programs and files" field in the Microsoft Start Menu to get a list of suggestions from the Control Panel (see Figure 11). "Run programs made for previous versions of Windows" loads the Windows 7 Program Compatibility Wizard. While the Windows 7 version of the wizard does not operate in the same manner as the Vista version, it serves essentially the same function while doing more troubleshooting.

Figure 11. Windows 7 Start Menu with "program" typed into the search field.

It is interesting to see how many help functions have been incorporated in search features of Windows 7. For example, with the Control Panel open, any search in the upper-right-hand corner will produce a list of suggestions describing the program functions. Merely entering the letter "c" (for compatibility or computer?) produces a huge list of possibilities similar to those found in Figure 11. This help/search integration may turn out to be one of the best new features in Windows 7.

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

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Instant Messaging on the Mac" by Wally Wang

By using either Adium or Proteus, you just need to learn and use one instant messaging program, yet you'll be able to chat with anyone on multiple instant messaging services. Also, with the MacBook name now freed up, is Apple's rumored 10-inch device on the way?; the demise of Microsoft Money is indicative of Microsoft's faulty business plan; and a tip on opening files inside a different program.

Instant messaging is for times when you absolutely have to reach someone right now, much like making a phone call, except without the personal interaction. The way it works is that you and the person you're trying to contact each connect to the same instant messaging network. Then you can connect to that other person and chat using text, audio, or audio and video.

The most popular instant messaging program for the Macintosh is iChat, which comes free and uses the AIM (AOL Instant Messaging) network. This lets you chat with anyone else who uses AIM as well, including the millions of people who use AIM on other types of computer, such as Windows.

Although instant messaging can be handy, the biggest drawback is that there are so many separate instant messaging networks, and they don't work together. This would be like having a cell phone on the Verizon network that can make calls only to other people on the Verizon network. If you wanted to call someone on the AT&T network, you'd have to get a separate AT&T phone. Likewise, if you wanted to call someone on the Sprint or T-Mobile network, you'd have to get additional phones just for making calls on those networks.

To get around this problem, you have several options. First, and easiest for Macintosh users, is to just stick with the AIM network using iChat. Since every Macintosh has iChat, that means you'll always be able to chat with other Macintosh users. However, you won't be able to chat with Windows or Linux users unless they also use the AIM network.

In case you want to chat with people on other networks besides AIM, you can burden your computer with multiple instant messaging programs, or you can get an instant messaging program that can access multiple instant messaging networks. Two popular and free instant messaging programs that offer this are:

• Adium (*adium.im*)

• Proteus (*proteusx.org*)
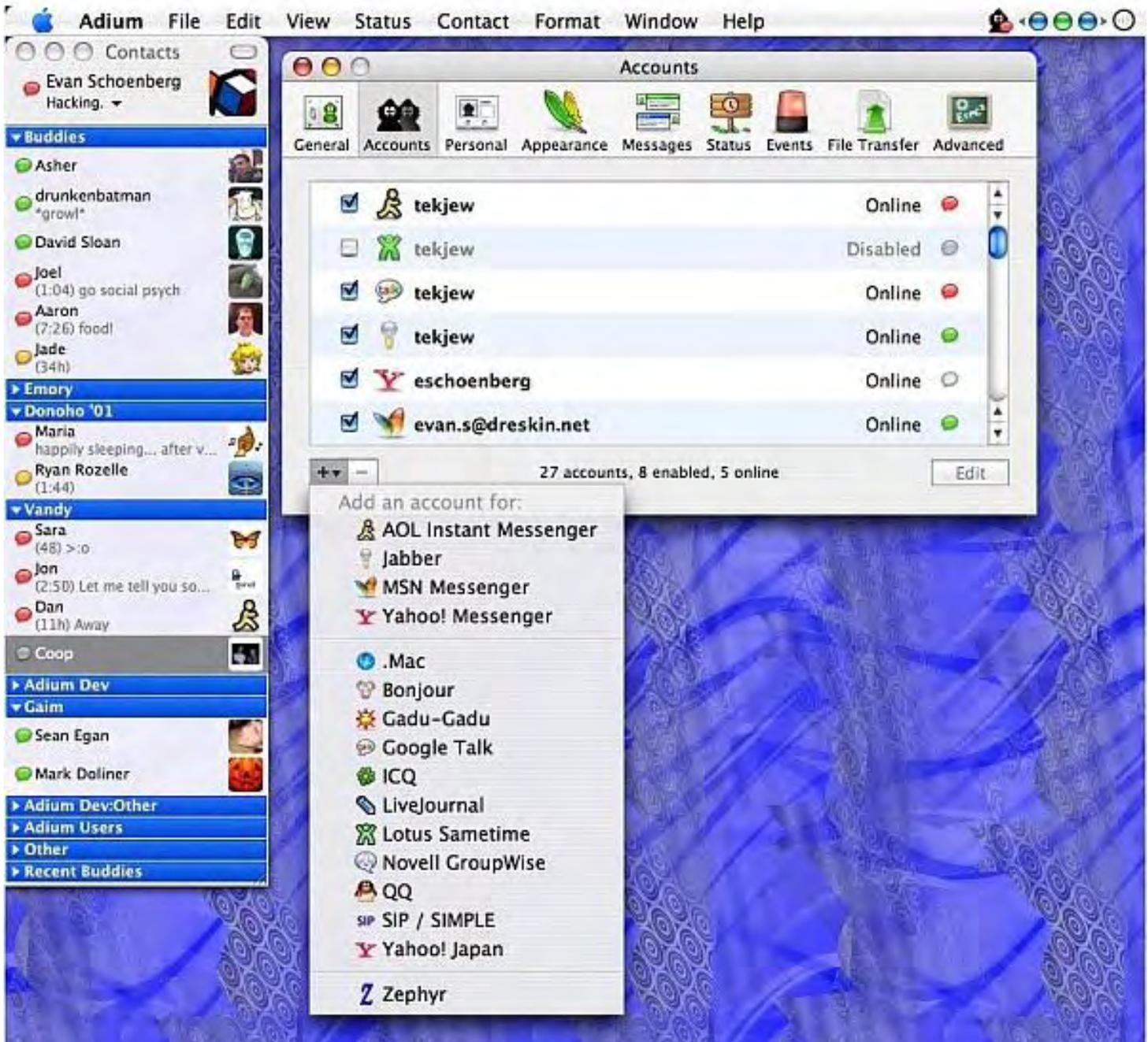
Figure 1. Adium lets you access multiple instant messaging networks.

Adium and Proteus work with AIM, MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, MySpace and Facebook, among others. By using either Adium or Proteus, you just need to learn and use one instant messaging program, yet you'll be able to chat with anyone on multiple instant messaging services.
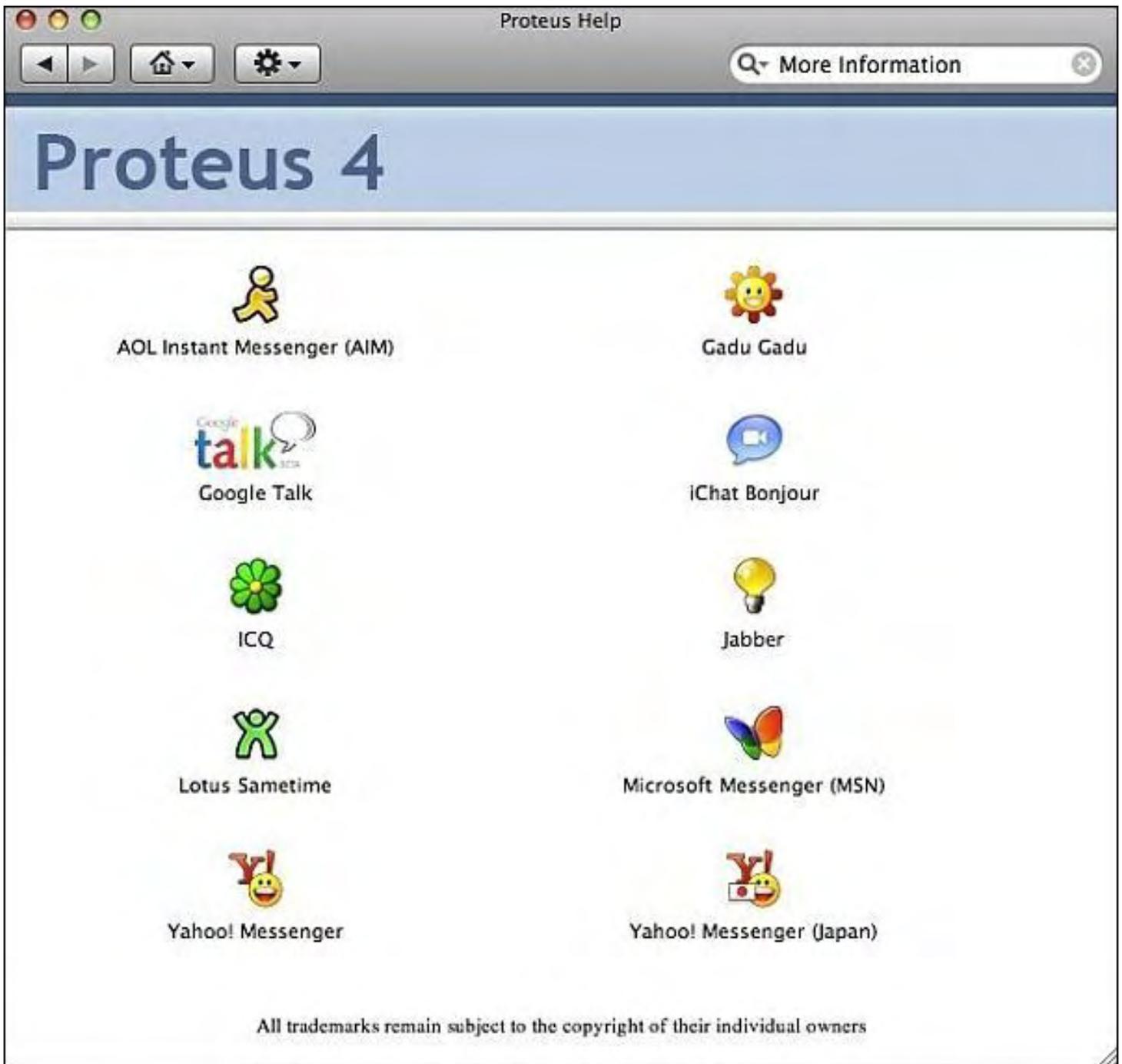
Figure 2. Proteus can also access multiple instant messaging networks.

The Future of the MacBook

Apple recently announced new 13- and 15-inch laptops. By lowering the prices and packing in more features like a Secure Digital (SD) card reader and a Firewire 800 port, Apple has brought the price of its latest laptops more within line of similar PC laptops.

However, the most notable feature is the name change. All aluminum laptops are now called MacBook Pros, while the old plastic laptop model is the only one still sporting the MacBook name. Now the big question is, what will Apple do with the MacBook name?

An obvious answer is that the long-rumored 10-inch netbook/tablet will inherit the MacBook name. So if

you want a portable netbook/tablet, you'll have to get a MacBook. If you want a real laptop, you'll have to get a MacBook Pro.

Whether this rumor comes true or not depends on next year. Most likely, Apple won't announce a 10-inch device this year unless it does it soon to flood the market for the back-to-school season.

Failing a summer announcement, Apple could release the 10-inch product any time between January to August 2010. Most likely Apple will want to time the announcement to capture the next back-to-school season, where waves of students will want it for taking notes or writing reports.

Whether the 10-inch device is true or not, the now empty MacBook lineup is wide open for a new product. Depending on its features and price, there's a good chance that Apple will redefine the netbook category in the same way it redefined the mobile phone (iPhone) and music player (iPod) categories.

Some notable features to watch for include low weight (less than two pounds), long battery life (at least five hours), the ability to run either ordinary Mac OS X programs or iPhone apps, Wi-Fi and 3G Internet connectivity, and a price ranging from $500 to $999.

The Demise of Microsoft Money

Microsoft recently announced that it will no longer develop its financial management program, Microsoft Money. For Macintosh users, that's no big loss since Money was just a Windows program anyway. But with Microsoft abandoning Money, you have to wonder if anyone at Microsoft has a strategic vision for the company in the first place.

It seems like whenever someone leads in a market, Microsoft immediately tries to release a similar product and take over that niche. Microsoft Money targeted Quicken, but failed. Windows Live Search and now Bing are targeting Google, and chances are good it won't wrestle control away from Google in the search market. Microsoft Zune targets iPods and so far has been failing. The Xbox targeted Sony's PlayStation and has finally wrestled away control, but only after Microsoft poured billions into keeping the Xbox alive.

The big question is, why does Microsoft spend billions on research and development, and then blindly rush off to copy whoever becomes the market leader next? What does the Zune, Bing and Microsoft Money have in common with each other? It seems like Microsoft is content to throw money at a problem and worry about developing a strategic plan later.

Compare this with Apple and its Mac OS X operating system, which powers the Macintosh and iPhone. Learn how to program the iPhone, and you'll also know how to program the Macintosh. Since both Mac OS X and the iPhone share a common code base, Apple's programmers aren't working on two completely separate projects, but two related ones, cutting the time and cost to improve both of them.

With Microsoft products, it's an entirely different story. Despite the name similarities, Windows 7 and Windows Mobile share little in common but a company logo and a superficial look and feel. Underneath, Windows 7 is as drastically different from Windows Mobile as Mac OS X is from Mac OS 9.2.

The problem isn't that Microsoft is incompetent, but that it spreads its energy across so many different markets with products that don't always support one another. Any research done to make Windows 7 more powerful will likely be unable to help the programmers working to make Windows Mobile more

powerful. With duplication of effort and a lack of a cohesive vision, Microsoft seems more like a conglomeration of multiple companies going in separate directions rather than a single company that knows what it wants to do and stays within its boundaries to excel in its niche.

What this means is that Microsoft products are under attack from multiple angles, and each separate division is fighting its own war without any help from the rest of the company. Despite being one of the richest software companies in the world, Microsoft seems disorganized. If Windows 7 can't continue funneling billions into Microsoft's coffers every day, then it's only a matter of time before the company continues dropping products and loses its influence on the computer market that it once dominated.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

If you double-click on a file icon within the Finder, you'll open that file using the default program for that file. So if you double-click on a Microsoft Word file, you'll open that file inside Microsoft Word.

However, what if you want to open a file inside a different program? For example, you might want to open a Microsoft Word document inside the Pages word processor. Here are two ways to do that.

First, right-click on a file to display a pop-up menu. Select the Open With command, and you'll see a submenu listing all programs that can open that particular file.
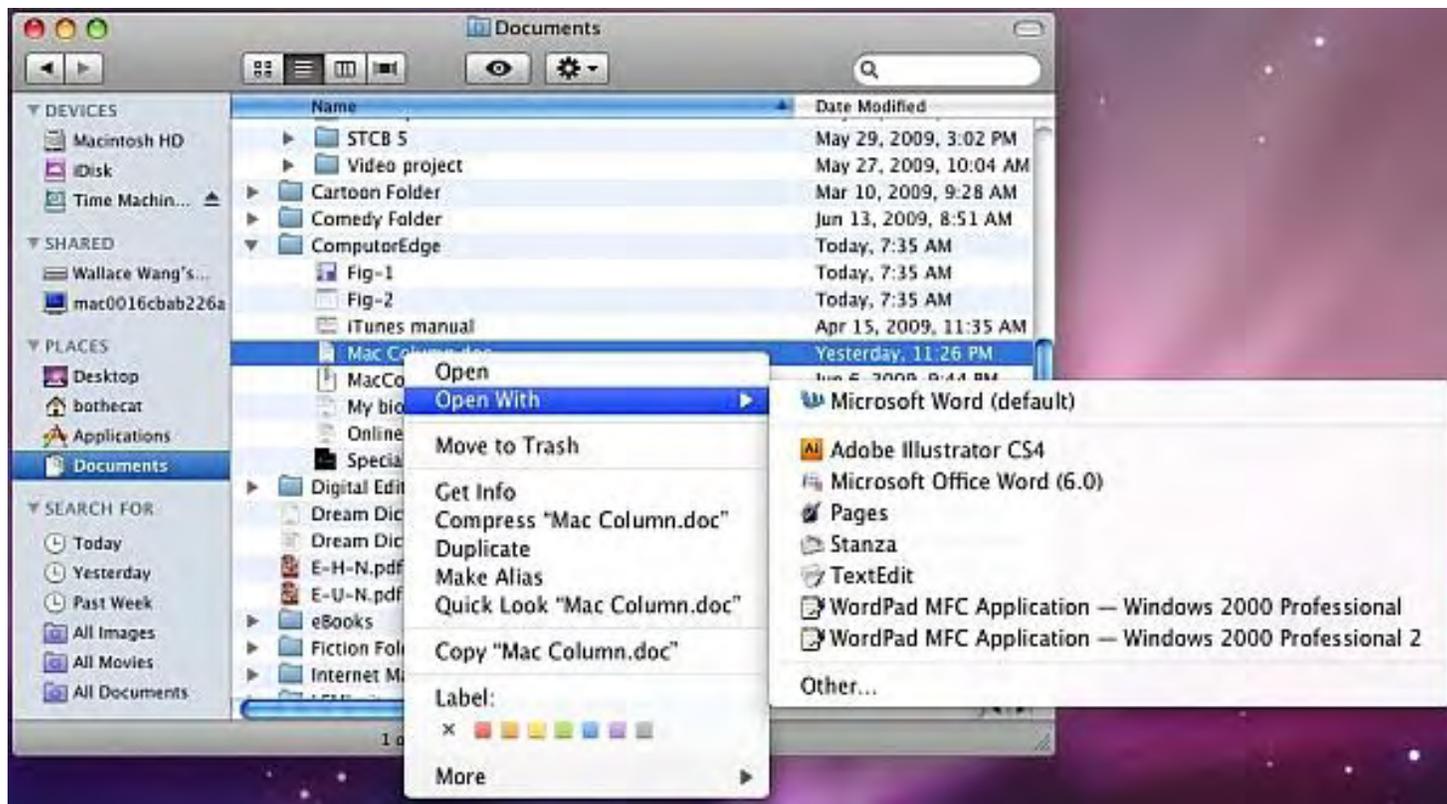

Figure 3. Right-clicking displays the Open With option for choosing a program.

Second, drag the file from the Finder window over a program icon displayed in the Dock. If you dragged a Microsoft Word file over the Pages icon in the Dock, your Mac will open that file in Pages.

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/*).
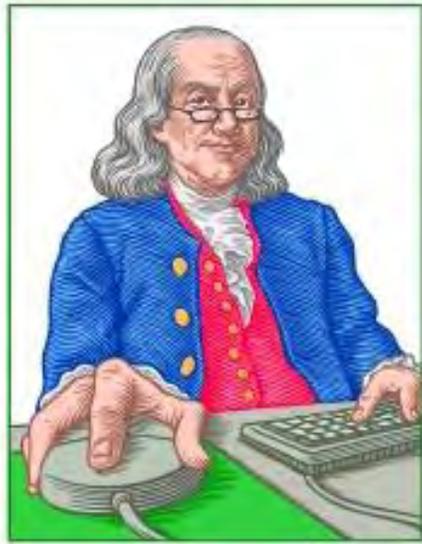
Little Linux Lessons: Tips and Tricks from Users

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

A reader points out an easier way to burn your ISO to a CD-ROM; a reader needs to remove Ubuntu from a partitioned hard drive; and a call for tips for using Linux without needing the command prompt.

Why Not Just a Right-click?

Regarding the June 12 tip "Burn your ISO to a CD-ROM with cdrecord":

Yes, this is a tip that does work; however, this is exactly why some people shy away from trying Linux. The command line can be daunting for many computer users. This task can be easily accomplished by a right-click on the .iso file. A menu will open with a "Write to Disc" option. Click, click, done. This is using Ubuntu 8.10 I'm sure there are many other distros that work the same way.

Jay Emme

How Do You Remove Ubuntu?

I have two computers, both with Ubuntu. I would like to remove Linux from my HP with WinXP in one partition and Ubuntu in the other partition. I have been told this can be done only with a special Linux program. Can you confirm this and/or tell me how to remove Ubuntu from the one partition? Thank you for your advice, and yes, I do enjoy *ComputorEdge*—have for several years.

Al C.

More GUI Tips

Apparently, Linux can be just as user friendly as any other operating system as long as there is a graphic user interface (GUI). Is there a possibility that someone could submit some tips for using Linux without needing the command prompt? *ComputorEdge* can easily include screen shots.

ComputorEdge Editors

Give Us Your Linux Tips and/or Questions

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

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

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

Jack Dunning

ComputorEdge

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

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

Rob, The ComputorTutor Does Microsoft Access

"Access Report Groups" by Rob Spahitz

Last week we explored some of the sections available in Access forms and reports, such as Form headers and Report Page footers. This week, we will continue this exploration with reports and extend it into section groups.

Last week, we explored some of the sections available in Access forms and reports, such as Form headers and Report Page footers. This week, we will continue this exploration with reports and extend it into section groups.

As usual, if you'd like to see previous versions of the database, look for them at *www.dogopoly.com/ce*.

Last week we created a new report called rptStateByCountry. The purpose is to show a report of regions (states) for each country in our database.

There were several problems with the report, as seen in Figure 1.
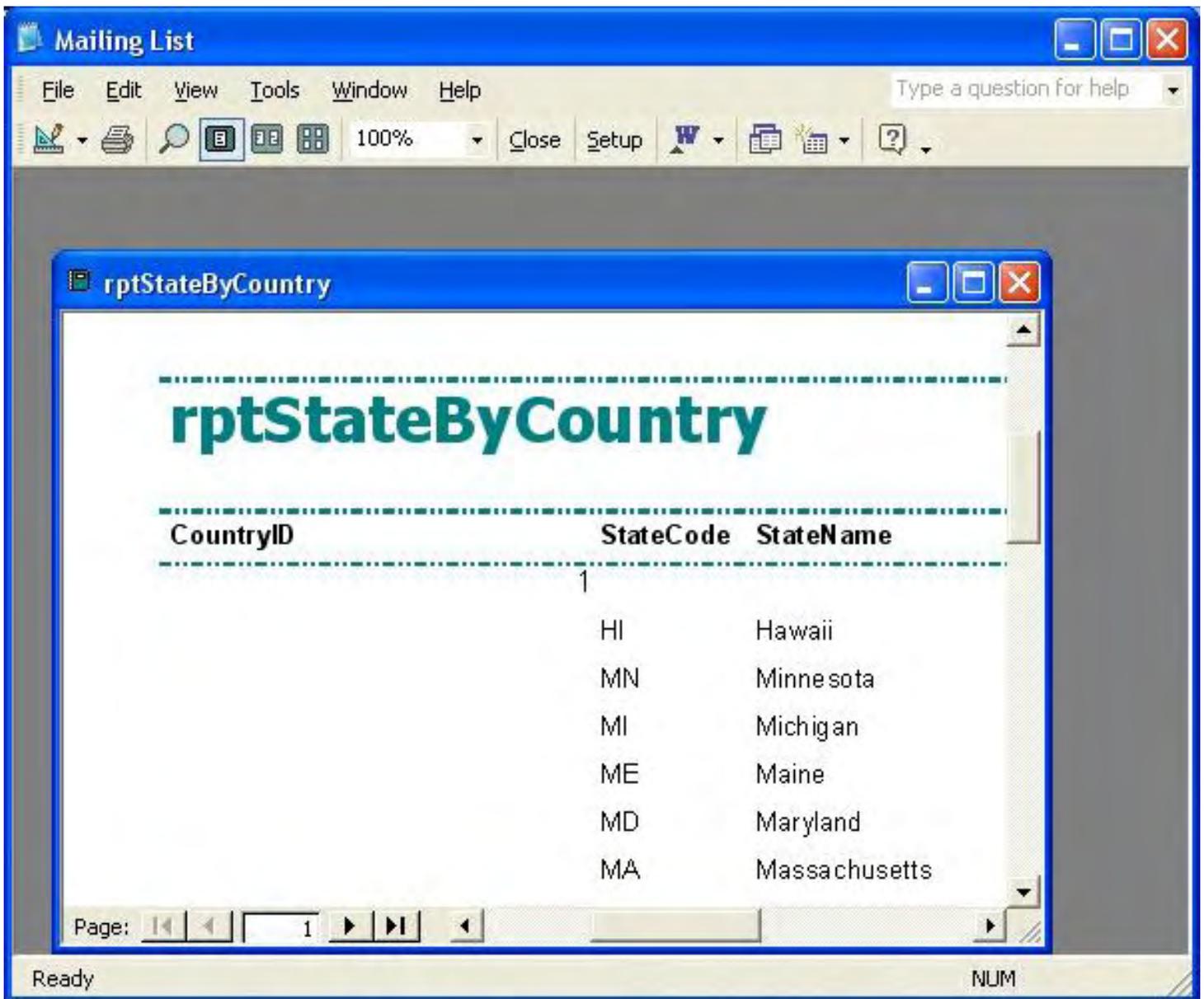
Figure 1. State report.

First, we see that the report header is not right. You'll also see that the window title is similarly not right. Next, the CountryID is not a name and is also too far right. Then the states are not sorted. Finally, the field headings are missing spaces. Let's address each of these.

Go to this report and proceed to Design view.

Fixing the report header is pretty obvious. You'll see the label with the errant text right at the top. Change it to something nicer, such as "State Report By Country," by changing the Caption property (F4 to show the properties window if needed). You'll also need to move the little black "drag handle" box on the right edge to make it wide enough to see all the text (or you can update the Width property). See Figure 2 for the results.
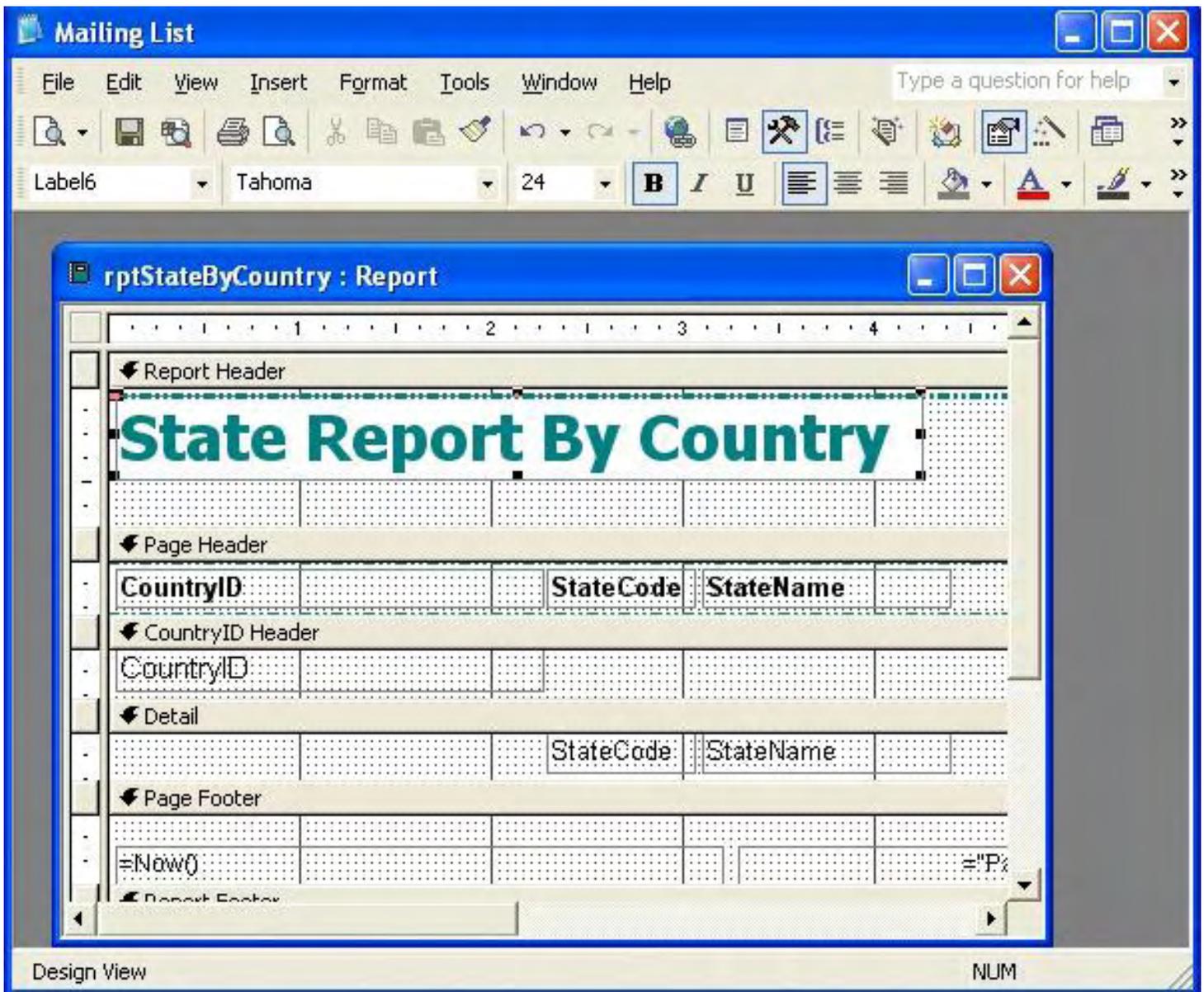
Figure 2. Fixing the report header.

To fix the window title, select the Report from the properties window and change the caption, probably to the same thing as the report header. Although this won't show up in Design view, if you switch to Report Preview, you'll see it.

Changing the field headings is pretty easy. Just select each label in the Page Header section and update the caption property so that each contains a space. You may also want to change CountryID to "Country Name" since that's what will be there shortly, even though, technically, we're still retrieving the CountryID as the field's control source.

Building Report Lookups

Now let's solve the CountryID issue. This would be best served as a name rather than a number, and left-justified. There are really two ways to deal with this problem. Let's explore the easy one first. One of the nice features of Access is that it lets you change controls from one type to another if they are compatible. If not, you have to delete the item, and then add the new one and link the Control Source property to the

right field. But here, you can simply select the CountryID field inside the CountryID Header, then go to menu Format/Change To/Combo Box.

Lo and behold, your text box is now a combo box. However, that did not solve the problem of showing numbers rather than the desired text. The reason we did that is because text boxes do not support a feature to look up data in another table, but combo boxes do.

Now that we have a combo box, go to the Row Source property and let's run the wizard to get it to show what we want. (Note: Also make sure that the Row Source Type is Table/Query.) On the Row Source property, since we don't have a query to get what we want (meaning that we can't select it from the dropdown list), we need to get to the Query Builder by clicking on the "..." button. Do that and add tblCountry, which contains the country name that we're looking for. Also, since the combo box's ControlSource property uses CountryID, we will automatically get the piece necessary to grab the country name from the country table.

So in the Query Builder, select the "*" since we don't mind bringing back all fields. Technically, all we need is CountryID (so the combo box can link to the table) and CountryName (so we can get the desired text), but that's all fields, so "*" does the job nicely. Close the query and select the Yes button to bring back this new query into the Row Source property.

Next, you'll want to update a few more properties of the combo box. Change the Column Count to 2 since we brought back two fields. Then change Column Widths to "0;1" so that the ID is hidden and it only shows the country name. Note: When you leave the field, each number will have a quote mark added after it to represent inches, which really means very little these days.

Now when you preview, you should see the country name appear as the label (and left-justified) rather than a number right-justified.

There are only two problems with this, which we will address later: First, the country name is on its own line (OK, maybe that's what you want, but maybe not); and second, the country names are sorted by CountryID rather than CountryName (which is not obvious on our report since we only have one country in our database.)

Sorting and Grouping Data

Let's explore what's needed to sort this report's state names. Since this is related to the data being pulled into the report, you'd think that you would want to select the report's Record Source property and change the query so that it pulls data sorted by StateCode. However, if you try this you'll find that it has no effect. The reason is that reports use their own sorting criteria. This allows you to create one query for a collection of reports that can all be sorted differently rather than create a new query each time you want to sort a report a different way.

To solve this one, we need to explore a new part of the report: Sorting and Grouping. To get there, choose this option from the View menu or the toolbar (next to the toolbox icon), as seen in Figure 3.
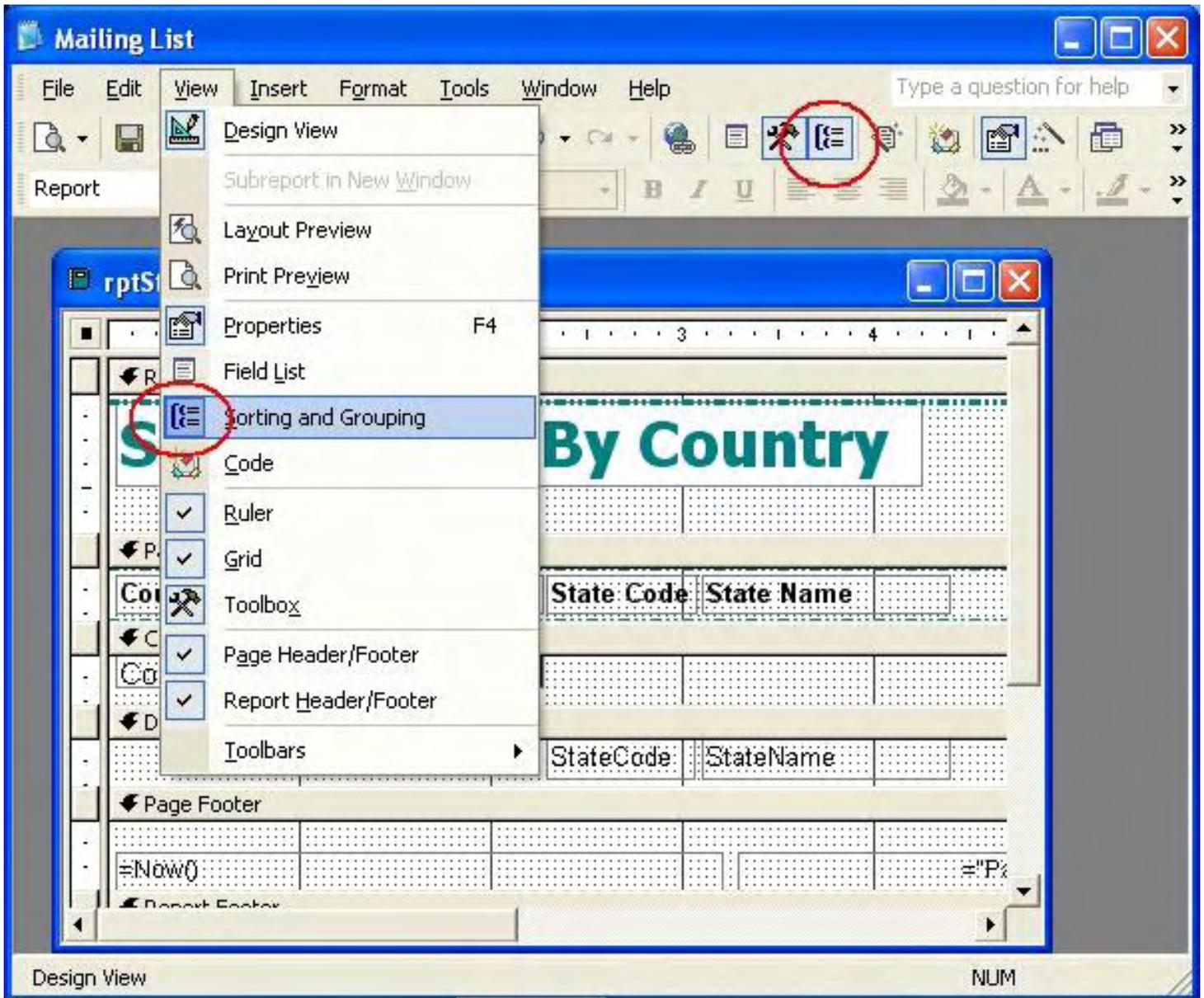
Figure 3. Opening the Sorting and Grouping window.

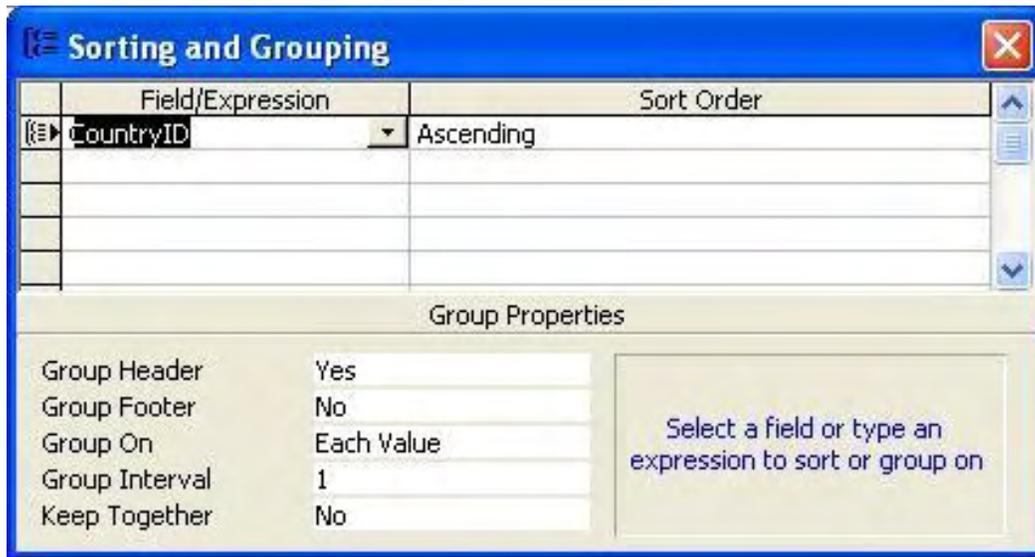When you do this with our report, you get the window shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Sorting and Grouping window.

In this case, we got the CountryID because we asked the wizard to group by that when we ran it last week. For now we'll keep this, since we want to see the states listed by country, but we need to add the states.

On the next blank row, underneath CountryID, select StateCode from the dropdown list that appears when you click it. By default, it will assume that you are sorting from lowest to highest for numbers or first to last for letters or, more specifically, according to something called the ASCII set for symbols or combinations of symbols, letters and digits.

This window also includes some other nice features in the Group Properties section at the bottom. If we decide to have a separate section for this sorting, we can add it here by selecting Yes for Group Header and/or Group Footer. Notice that CountryID has its header enabled, but not the footer. You can actually see that the footer is missing from Figure 2, since it should appear directly below the Detail section (since the footer sections go in reverse order of the header sections).

In addition, you have more grouping options. For numbers, you can group on individual values (e.g, 1,2,3) or groups (e.g. 10,20,30); for text fields you can similarly group by the specific values (California, Colorado, New Mexico) or a certain number of characters, such as the first letter; for dates, you get other options like year and month. Group Interval lets you define additional details of the grouping, and Keep Together prevent page breaks within a group.

At this point, the states are ready to sort when we preview, so give it a try. Sure enough, within the country, the states are now sorted. Feel free to close that window.

Extended Field Selection

At this point, the source of data for our report is simply the state table. However, we are showing the country name through a dropdown list that grabs the state's country ID (a number) and gets the country name from the country table. Although this looks nice, we can't sort on CountryName since it's not part of our record source (only part of the control's lookup). What we get by sorting on CountryID is a numerical sort that may or may not match the alphabetic sorting of the countries.

The solution to this is to add the CountryName to the record source. To do this, simply go to the Report in

the properties window and update the Record Source field. Right now it shows tblState. If you click there, you get a dropdown list of tables and queries, but none of these have a Query that includes the information we want. Instead, click on the "..." next to field and it will launch the Query wizard after a warning message. That is what you want, click on the Yes button since we are planning to change from a table query (tblState) to a SQL query (SELECT...).

We start with a blank query that includes the state table. Since we don't want to lose any existing functionality in our report, we should include all fields (unless you are intentionally looking for a different query) by adding the "*" to the first column (which will show up as "tblState.*").

Now we need to get the country name. Since there's a relationship between the state table and the country table, we can simply add tblCountry (using menu Query/Show Table, and then adding tblCountry and closing the window). Notice the line between the table blocks showing the relationship that we had created when we first designed the table. In this case, if that were not there you could manually add it, but it's better to have it done at the database level so you don't have to build this relationship every time you need it.

Next, add the CountryName field to include it in your new query, as seen in Figure 5.

Ready   NUM
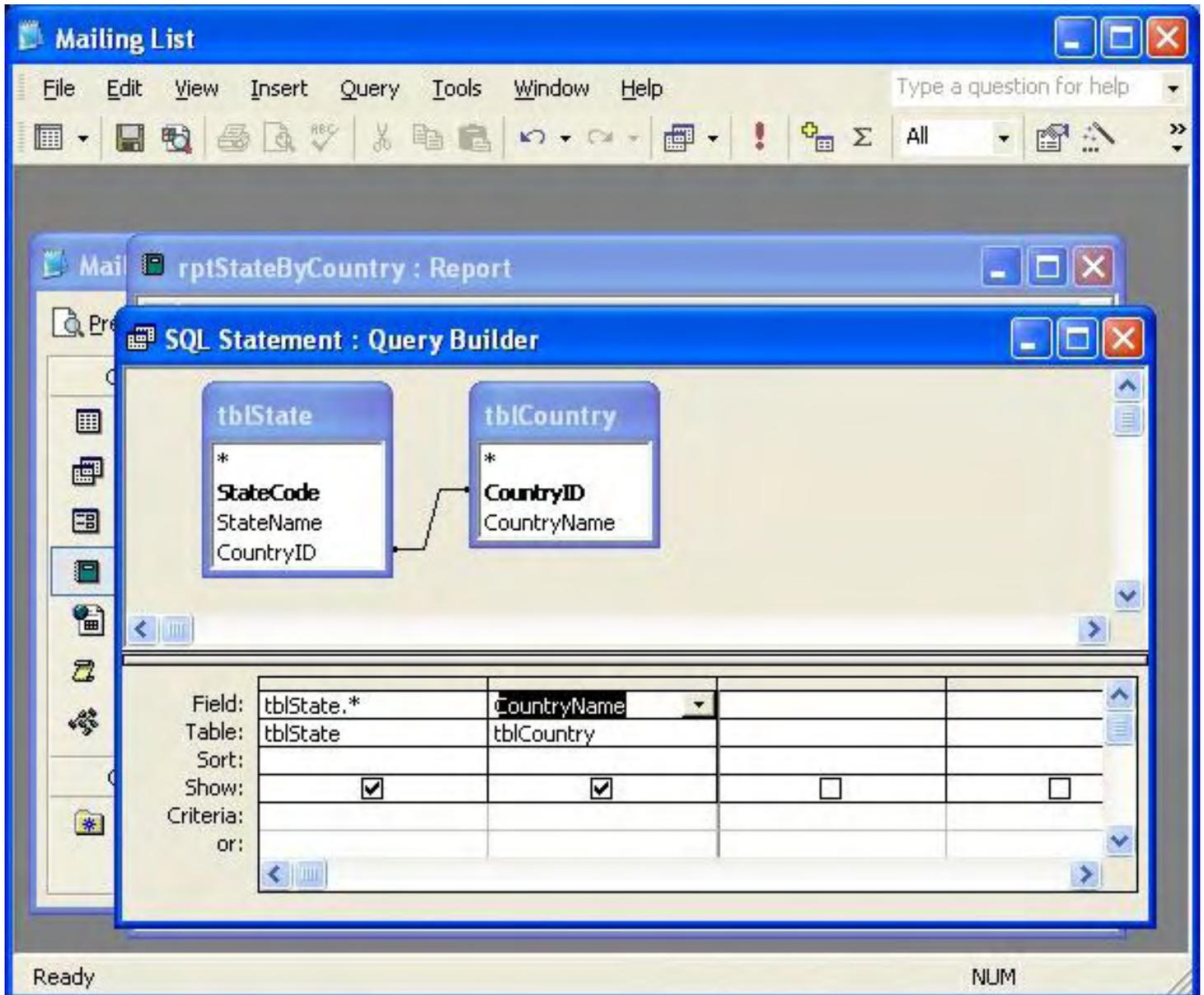
Figure 5. State and Country query.

When you close this window using the "X" in the upper-right corner, click the Yes button on the message so that this new query is returned to the report. You could also save the query and close, but there's really no reason to save this as a separate query unless you plan to use this query in other places. At this point, I don't see a need for that. If I need it, I can always come back here and then save it or just recreate it.

The last step is to set up the report's grouping to sort by the country name. Again, open the Sorting and Grouping window. At the top, click on CountryID and replace it with CountryName from the list. Note that CountryName was not there before, but appears now since we included it in the Record Source.

At this point, there's no data to prove that it works. I'll go add Canada to the Country table and Ontario (code ON) and a few others to the States table (through the Country form). Yes, yes, it's not a state, but close enough for our purposes. Try it and you should see Canada show up first. If you were to switch the sorting back to what we had before, you'd see USA show up first, since its ID number is 1 and Canada is 2.

Compacting the Report

Now that the report is properly sorting, you may want to make it more compact. In the Detail area, drag the CountryID dropdown list down into the detail area. Since the CountryID Header area is now empty, re-size it to nothing by dragging the bottom of it up.

Previewing the report, you can see that it takes up less space, since the country name is not on a separate row. However, it now shows up for every record. To fix that, select the control in Design view and change the property named "Hide Duplicates" to Yes. Preview now, and you have a great compact report.

Just for one more nice touch, I added a line into the CountryName Footer to separate the countries.

Next week, we'll look at calculated fields in reports, then get back to some VBA.

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

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

Worldwide News & Product Reviews

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

The MacGyver Approach to Starting a Business—With a little creativity, you can MacGyver together an office that is both fully functional and economical; The Internet Book—A review of the book for anyone who wishes to make the most of the Internet; Plextor PXQ840U External DVD RW Drive—A review of the device.

The MacGyver Approach to Starting a Business

Steve Adams, marketing VP for Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) provider Protus (*www.protus.com*), sends in some pretty good advice for starting a business in tough times.

Back in the 1980s, a popular television show named *MacGyver* gave rise to a whole new term. Essentially, the cleverness of his ability to extricate himself from life-or-death situations by making something out of practically nothing led to the use of his name as a verb. As in, "I locked myself out of the house, but I managed to MacGyver a paper clip onto a Popsicle stick with some chewing gum and used it to unlock a window so I could get in." MacGyvering (being in the process of building something) and MacGyvered (telling the story of your triumph afterward) also became quite popular.

Entrepreneurs who are starting their own businesses in the current economy—whether by choice or circumstances—could learn a lot from our friend Mr. MacGyver. Because while starting a business using conventional methods can be expensive, there are things you can do to severely reduce costs without reducing your ability to do the work or service your customers properly. Here are a few ideas on how to MacGyver your seed money to make it go farther.

Opt for used computers instead of new

Yes, everyone loves a bright, shiny new PC with all its bells and whistles. The thing is, most small business owners really don't need all that processing power. Take a look at what you want the computer to do. If you're planning to use it with basic office applications such as word processors and spreadsheets, send and receive e-mail, and surf the Internet, a used or refurbished PC will likely work just fine.

You can purchase used or refurbished computers online for as little as $99. Many of these computers are units that have come off-lease from large corporations, so you know they should have the core capabilities and speed you need.

If you need to share files or resources with one or more coworkers, you can build simple file- and print-sharing networks with used wireless routers or low-cost devices available at local retailers (as long as you have a little MacGyver in you to put the network together.) As a bonus, by purchasing used technology you'll also be helping the environment by keeping those PCs out of landfills.

Create a business phone system using mobile phones

Mobile phones and PDAs are rapidly displacing the old landline phones among consumers. In fact, the latest figures show that roughly 20 percent of all American households are wireless-only. Now the technology exists to move business phones in the same direction.

Virtual phone services for small business allow you to overlay an entire business phone system on top of any working phone number—including a mobile number. Here's how they work: When you sign up for a virtual phone service, you are assigned a phone number (which will become your "business" number). Usually you can choose between a toll-free or local phone number, although "local" is a loose term since you can choose the area code you want. The service provides business-oriented features such as an auto-attendant to greet callers and direct them to the right people, the ability to assign extensions to different people in the company (even if those people don't work at the main office), voicemail, call forwarding and more.

Calls to the business phone service number go to the service provider, and then are routed to the phones you identify as being part of your phone system. Here's where it really gets good.

Each of the extensions can be forwarded to your employees' own mobile and/or home phones, saving on the cost of phone equipment. Users can receive notifications that they have a voicemail message in their e-mail, or even receive a file with voicemail message in their e-mail so they don't have to call in to retrieve it. Anyone on the system can initiate a conference call, and in some cases bring in as many people as they want whenever they want. All of this functionality (and more) comes for a monthly fee that's often less than the price of one landline—and with no added cost for equipment or technicians to run it.

As for your personal mobile phone becoming your business phone, not to worry. Your old mobile number will still work too, so it's easy to distinguish between business and personal calls. The phone number is just the peg on which to MacGyver the service.

Skip leasing office space

The first two ideas enable this third one. There is something thrilling about having an actual office to go to; nothing says "legitimate" like a separate office. But if you're trying to conserve cash in a tight economy, consider passing on leasing one office space for your organization in favor of some thrifty alternatives.

An obvious one is to have everyone work from home. There's no cost for the space, and you can use an online service to store and share documents, creating a de facto network for the organization. You'll also save on many of the things you don't think of at first, such as office furniture, decorating expenses, coffee for the office (along with a coffee maker), a common copier and more.

If you feel you personally need an office that's separate from your home, see if you can sublet space from another company in your area. With all the downsizing that's occurred recently, especially in service-oriented businesses, many companies are probably paying for empty space. If you can sublet one of those empty offices, you'll both win. And with the virtual phone service, you won't even have an impact on their phone bills.

You can also look into common office space—the type where several organizations share certain resources, such as a common lobby, conference rooms and admin support—while occupying different

offices. Often they come equipped with furniture and other office equipment, helping you keep your costs lower. Shop around a little and you may find a great bargain.

Shopping around also applies to traditional office space. The down economy has created a lot of empty spaces that are costing commercial real estate companies money. Lots of it. Nationally, a little more than 13 percent of office space is unoccupied now. In some regions, though, the figure is almost double that.

Ask around to see where space has been empty for a long time and put on your negotiating hat. Right now commercial real estate companies may figure some income is better than none, and you can move into space you normally couldn't afford as a startup.

The key to MacGyver's genius (and popularity) was how creative his solutions were. He didn't have James Bond's Q Branch creating devices for him. He simply improvised using whatever he thought would work.

Remember that most small businesses fail within the first year because their spending outpaces their income. The best way to beat those odds is to keep your spending to a minimum. With a little creativity (and a little help from the right technologies), you can MacGyver together an office that is both fully functional and economical. And one that will serve as a launching pad for when the economy gets better.

The Internet Book
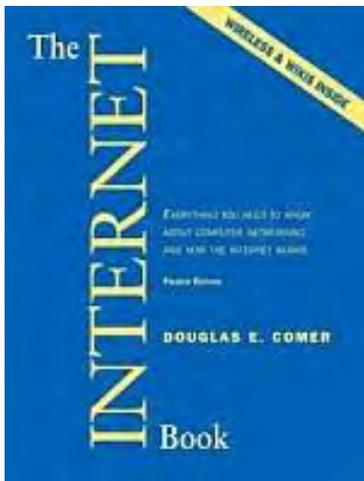
Douglas E Comer's *The Internet Book: Everything You Need to Know About Computer Networking and How the Internet Works (*www.mypearsonstore.com/bookstore/product.asp?isbn=0132335530*)* (4th edition, ISBN-10: 0132335530, $65 list) explains to readers in easy-to-understand language what the Internet is, its history, how computers communicate with each other, and how you can use the Internet and Internet services to make your own life better. Comer doesn't require you to already know a lot of technical terms because he knows that's why you're reading his book—to gain an understanding of those very terms and concepts. All in all, this is a very good book for anyone who wishes to make the most of the Internet.

I've read a lot of so-called "beginner" books and came away feeling more confused than when I started. Not so with this book. In some places it feels more like you're reading a fascinating story rather than a technical book.

If I had one criticism of the book I would say he spends maybe a little too much time talking about the history of the Internet. I realize, though, that many people may actually like that aspect, and he does at least cover that information in an interesting way.
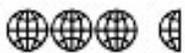
Review contributed by Sandi Stoppel

Plextor PXQ840U External DVD+RW Drive

Plextor's PX-Q840U external DVD multi-drive (*www.plextoramericas.com/index.php/dvd-rw/external-dvd-rw/px-q840u*) (about $100) teams up with Sonic Solutions' Qflix and Roxio's Venue software programs to allow users to do a lot more than just burn to and read DVDs and CDs. Qflix-enabled drives

and Qflix-designated media make short work of purchasing, downloading, burning and organizing your favorite movies and TV shows simply by connecting to CinemaNow.

Another included software package, PlexUTILITIES, really opens up the drive's feature set. View basic and advanced drive information like the drive's serial number, general capabilities, firmware version and even jumper settings. You also get complete information about the inserted disc, including format, session info and manufacturer. And that's just the beginning. You can also measure disc-burn quality, the mechanical characteristics of media, and even write quality by checking the jitter rate of media. Check the quality of the information you have written to disc by comparing the "pits" and "lands" to drive specs. Updates for not only the drive, but also all installed apps are handled automatically.

Finally, the included Roxio Creator 10 CE program provides all the tools needed to create, share and enjoy your movies, pics and music.

Hardware requirements:

• Burns at up to 20X on single layer DVD+/-RW media (4.7 GB), and 8X on double/dual layer media (8.5 GB) and 12X on DVD-RAM media.
• CPU: Pentium 4 1.3 GHz or equivalent (minimum)
• RAM: 128 MB, 512 MB Windows XP or Vista Basic
• HDD: 1 GB free space for copying CD to CD image 5GB to 9GB free space for DVD authoring
• Interface: USB 2.0

We did not have a single problem with this drive in the time we had it. Highly recommended.

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

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

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

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

important events in the tech world.

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

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

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

Learn more at *www.charlescarr.com.*

EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher

"The Handheld Computer Makes a Comeback" by Jack Dunning

> It is the cell phone in the form of the iPhone that is making the handheld computer viable—and it's not because it can make phone calls. It's the software.

Sometimes the effect of changes in technology are hard for someone to take. Twitter is one of those phenomenons that attracts a great deal of disdain from computer people. It seems as if it's designed for all the texters that are addicted to knowing every little ridiculous detail of everyone else's life. "What did he have for lunch?" "Where is she going now?" It all seems like nonsense. At least, until there is an application that makes you say, "That makes sense!" That's how Marie Loggia-Kee's example of Kogi Korean BBQ using Twitter struck me. If you have a mobile business, it makes perfect sense to relay your position to your customers via their cell phones. Until Twitter existed, there was no easy way for a small business to do that.

I've always regarded the cell phone as a secondary device only for making an occasional call—and emergencies. I've scoffed at using it for anything else. Of course, when I first heard the news geeks talking about their Twittering, I thought it silly, thinking it would soon pass. (I still feel that many of the inane uses will fall away.) However, every new development finds its niche—or goes away. I think that Twitter will find its place and become a semi-permanent part of the landscape. (I say semi-permanent only because you never know when something new will come along and dislodge the current winner.)

I'm also softening my view on the iPhone. I always felt that a device that requires tiny fingers could never be more than a specialty market. Years ago, I owned a Pocket PC, which, for about a year, I used extensively. But eventually, I gave it up because it couldn't handle many of the applications I needed. I put the handheld computer away and the battery soon died, never to be reactivated. I didn't see the small devices having much impact—other than as an organizer for organized people. I certainly didn't want a phone in my computer.

Now, there is a twist of irony. It is the cell phone in the form of the iPhone that is making the handheld computer viable—and it's not because it can make phone calls. Taking calls on an iPhone is often an inconvenient nuisance if you're using one of the apps. "Don't annoy me while I'm playing." It's because the iPhone is a computer that has applications that are actually useful. There are a couple of pieces of technology required for the iPhone to work its real magic. The combination of GPS and Internet access allows the well-crafted applications to provide something that you will get nowhere else. The cell phone is actually an unnecessary accessory—although it's required with every purchase.

Why am I now impressed? There are a couple of iPhone apps that have proven to me that these little machines are valuable tools for many people.

The first is one for golfers. I don't know the name of it—I'm not a golfer. This iPhone golf program will tell you where you are located on the course, how far you are from the hole, and in which direction. The second application, shown to me by a real estate agent, tells the user which houses in the local vicinity are up for sale. It offers details on the houses with full-color pictures.

Both of these apps use the built-in GPS, while the second is also dependent upon the Internet. (The golf app probably needs the Internet to download the golf courses.) While these two apps are only a couple of examples in what is now a long list of programs (growing every day) for the iPhone, they illustrate that the uses for this type of handheld computer are not insignificant.

While I may object (a little) that Apple is trying to control the entire iPhone applications market, the fact that many apps cost only a couple of bucks makes it hardly worth complaining. For the first time Apple has the advantage that it has always lacked in every other computer market—a preponderance of third-party software. While Palm and other handhelds are trying to counter with their own products, they don't have what they need most—software. This may be Apple's opportunity to become a mega-giant in the ilk of Google, Intel, or Microsoft—if they don't blow it.

I've said in the past that I don't care about the phone part of the iPhone. I still don't care. It was suggested that I should get the iPod touch. Sorry, the iPod touch doesn't have GPS or cellular broadband Internet access. It won't do the trick for the most impressive mobile apps. You're forced to buy the phone if you want the functions.

It will be interesting to see how this tiny (in physical size) computer market develops. I'm convinced that it has a bright future. I even think that there is a place for Twitter, although five years from now it will look completely different.

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

Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

"Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns." by ComputorEdge Staff

"Why Not to Upgrade to Reader 9," "Dave's 64-Bit CPU Lesson," "Malfunctioning CD-RW Drive," "A View of Windows 7," "More Thoughts on Windows 7"

Why Not to Upgrade to Reader 9

[This letter is in regard to Jack Dunning's April 17 article, "A Look at Adobe Acrobat."]

I have just deleted Reader 9.1 and am looking for a replacement, preferably free.

My reason for dumping 9 was because every time I clicked on a PDF file to open it, the Reader 9 installation program would open to "install or repair" the Reader. It was already installed straight from an Adobe download, but I kept having this problem.

Occasionally, clicking would produce an "open with" option, and that would work, but most of the time I couldn't dodge the installer. And after the installer finished "repairing" the Reader, the same thing would happen when I clicked on the document again. This was not just one defective document, it was any PDF. No help from the Adobe Web site, either.

I did have a copy of Adobe Air waiting to be installed; I don't know if that could be the problem. It was in a group of add-ons to Firefox that I downloaded, but hadn't finished installing. If it was, Reader 9 gave no hint of it.

-Robert Di Giorgio, San Diego

Dave's 64-Bit CPU Lesson

[This letter is in regard to Digital Dave's June 5 column, where Dave discussed 32-bit vs. 64-bit systems.]

Dave! You know better!

All recent CPUs are 32- *and* 64-bit! I can't think of *any* way you could buy a new just-32-bit computer.

You *can* buy a new system and install a 32-bit OS on it now, then upgrade to a 64-bit OS later, if you really wanted to do that.

-Bud Jamison, San Diego, CA

Of course you're right, Bud, about the current crop of CPUs. I was using the terms "computer" and "system" to include all the components that make up a 64-bit system: processor, motherboard, operating system, applications. (I should have done the same in the paragraph where I used the term "processors," although, technically it was not in error.)

The issue of 64-bit systems is primarily one of operating system selection. From a practical point of view, most people won't gain from 64-bit computing—which only increases the limit on addressable memory. In fact, 64-bit could be slower with the inefficiencies caused by addressing more memory—but the majority of users will never notice this.

The real question about 64-bit computing is, "Why not?" With the exception of legacy applications that won't run in the 64-bit environment and possible driver problems, there is little reason for someone to stick with a 32-bit system. Almost all of the 32-bit applications will continue to run.

The marketing hype for 64-bit machines is so great that in a couple of years it will be difficult to find a machine that is not pushed as 64-bit.

-i#Digital Dave#

Malfunctioning CD-RW Drive

[The following letters are in regard to Digital Dave's May 29 column, where Dave helped a reader whose system was not recognizing his second installed CD-RW drive.]

Something I would try with the PC *off*: Unplug power and logic cable from drive not working and power on PC. Next, power off computer, then reconnect power and logic cable to the drive. Power on the PC again.

-CF, Broomfield, CO

If the CD drives are IDE, they come as drive 0. If you install in primary or secondary IDE port, then you must move the jumpers on one of the CD drives to drive 1 or use cable select IDE ribbon cable.

-Walter, San Diego

I would recommend opening the BIOS on startup and verify that both drives are recognized by the system first. If they are, then you can move on to the OS for the possible source of the problem.

-Garrett, SD, CA

A View of Windows 7

[This letter is in regard to Jack Dunning's June 5 Windows Vista (and Windows 7) Tips and Tricks column.]

I would like to add my experience. For those readers who are afraid of Win 7's Vista pedigree, I'll say what many Win 7 users are saying; it's what Vista was meant to be. The bottom line is: It works. Vista was a system hog; 7 uses hardware more efficiently. Vista had terrible problems with compatibility; 7 solves those problems—and then some. Win 7 is the future, as well: It's the first OS optimized for SSD drives. SSDs are not in most consumers' price range now, but they will be in the next year or two. Traditional hard drives have always been performance bottlenecks; now we are approaching where the SATA 300GB/s is the bottleneck, and newer models of SSDs will require SATA 3.

Not only does Win 7 bring with it a complete XP virtualization mode, but it can also install old programs

in other compatibility modes, such as Win 95 and 98SE. I have tried to convince my Dad, who complains that M$ is constantly changing the OS when it runs just fine for him. In a way, I agree that there's no reason to change your personal OS if it works fine for you. On the other hand, 7 is going to have the best of both worlds—compatibility for your old software and hardware, and optimizations for the future.

Take it from someone who hates Vista and for whom performance is key, Win 7 is the future of computing. And the free RC is, well, it's just silly not to download and copy it. It is more full featured and complete than Vista ever was. And if you're still a little squeamish, you could always dual boot Win 7 and XP. My wife loves it. It runs great on my laptop—way better than Vista ever did.

-Scott

More Thoughts on Windows 7

[This letter is in regard to Jack Dunning's May 29 Windows Vista (Windows 7) Tips and Tricks column, where Jack discussed installing Windows 7 RC.]

Here's what I think, Jack, seeing how you asked. Instead of creating another not-so-different version of Window$ for the sake of stocking their already well-stuffed coffers, I'd be ecstatic if and when Bill and his team decide it's high time to seriously address Windows' inherent, long-standing problems in properly handling and clearing memory. What gives, anyway, I ask? I'd be willing to pay double for their OS if they'd actually do that!

-Ron Myers, El Cajon (writing from Bangkok, Thailand)

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

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