ComputorEdge™ Online — 08/28/09

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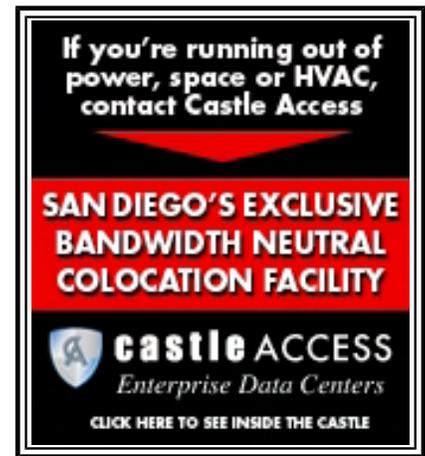
Digital Dave

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

A reader needs information on booting up two different versions of Windows; a reader needs opinions on Registry repair software; a reader wants to talk more about resizing windows like the System Configuration screen in Windows.

Dear Digital Dave,

I had to install a new hard drive on my SATA system due to one drive biting the dust. I'm not exactly sure how it happened, but for a while I had a choice between booting Windows 7 and "Older version of Windows." Then, after some stupid mistakes, I lost that option.

Now I have Windows 7 installed in one partition and XP on another partition. I'd like the option to use Win7 myself, but my wife uses XP. Now I can't figure out how to get back to being able to boot Win7, as the last operating system installed was XP (on the E drive), but when I look on the C drive, there is Win7.

Can you help?

Larry McLaughlin
Aurora, CO

Dear Larry,

The methods for editing the boot drive options are different for Windows XP and Windows 7, since, like Vista, Windows 7 does not use a boot.ini file.

For a quick possibility, in XP use Run to load MSCONFIG. Select the BOOT.INI tab. Check to see that the timeout is not set to zero. The default is 30 seconds. This may be one of the most common reasons for losing the boot option menu. You should also be able to see the boot options in the boot.ini file listing. If so, you will be able to select and set a new default system/drive to change to Windows 7. (You will find similar options with MSCONFIG in Windows 7, although there is no boot.ini file.) Outside of that, the techniques for working with multi-boot options are pretty detailed and can get complicated. They vary for XP and Windows 7.

One of the simplest ways to deal with these boot problems may be to get a copy of the free program EasyBCD (*download.cnet.com/EasyBCD/3000-2094_4-10556865.html*). It will be easier to use than the Windows tools and give you many more options in setup.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

What is your opinion of Registry repair software, free or paid? I do a little of it myself, and know that it is something best left for experts, but I don't trust these programs either. Can you recommend any?

Thanks,

Bob Di Giorgio
San Diego

Dear Bob,

Personally, I don't use Registry cleaners because, if at all possible, I like to know what is happening with my computer system. I would avoid most of what's available in Registry-cleaning software, either because the program will likely either do next to nothing or too much. Some of the programs will clean out items in the Registry that are still needed, causing more problems at a later date. Most people don't need to clean their Registry.

Note: I would never respond to a pop-up ad on the Web that claims to have detected problems on your computer—whether for a Registry cleaner or antivirus program. Those tactics are using scare techniques to get you to respond. The truth is that a Web pop-up has no way of detecting problems on your computer.

Recently, I read comments from ComputorEdge readers in ComputorQuick Reviews. Based upon their experiences, if I were to try one (which I'm not), I would probably go with
CCleaner (*download.cnet.com/ccleaner/?tag=mncol*). It's free and appears to be pretty sound.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

In your July 10 column, reader David Posner inquired about resizing windows such as the System Configuration window. Can you explain what misguided logic caused Microsoft to limit the size of such windows, especially those containing enough information that scroll bars are triggered? We enjoy increasingly large monitors these days, and these limitations on windows is incomprehensible.

Also, do you know if this situation is being corrected in Windows 7?

Many thanks for your attention to this, and all the past requests.

Don
San Diego

Dear Don,

It's not always easy to explain the logic at Microsoft. In this case, I think that the System Configuration window (msconfig.exe) is regarded as a quick and dirty startup debugging tool that originated with Windows 98. It was never envisioned as the ultimate utility, but rather a quick way to work with startup programs and edit system files (files that are no longer used in Vista and Windows 7). Since that time, System Configuration has changed in format, but it is essentially a quick tool for startup or (added in Vista) getting to other tools.

Microsoft has never bothered to make the System Configuration window resizable, nor is it any different in Windows 7. The program was designed to be used primarily for troubleshooting and debugging startup problems. There are other utilities that do a better job of configuring services. I guess that window resizing was never considered a high priority for System Configuration.

Digital Dave

Secret (Free) Tools for Windows

"The Sysinternals Suite shows what's going on inside your Windows computer." by Jack Dunning

> The Windows Sysinternals utility suite offers a great set of tricks for anyone who wants to know more about the inner workings and hidden mechanisms of a Windows computer.

Sometimes a secret is a secret merely because very few people know about it. It's not that the information is hidden. It may be very easy to find. The problem is that people either don't look, or aren't sure where to look. This is the case with Windows Sysinternals utility suite.

Windows Sysinternals (*technet.microsoft.com/en-gb/sysinternals/default.aspx*) is a set of advanced Windows system utilities—67 in all—that first became available on the Web in 1996 and were purchased by Microsoft in 2006. They are now offered free to all users. The tools were originally developed for computer professionals and software developers. However, they contain a great set of tricks for anyone who wants to know more about the inner workings and hidden mechanisms of a Windows computer.

Many of the Sysinternals tools may seem cryptic to the average user, but there are quite a few that could be useful to anyone. Some of the programs may be run directly from the Web, while others need to be downloaded and unzipped. Many programs run in the command window; others operate in an independent window. If you download the entire Sysinternals Suite (*technet.microsoft.com/en-gb/sysinternals/bb842062.aspx*), you will need to unzip them. For a complete list of the programs with short descriptions of each, check out the Sysinternals Utilities Index (*technet.microsoft.com/en-us/sysinternals/bb545027.aspx*).

Many of the programs appear to be much more powerful and useful than the standard tools that are installed with Windows—they certainly offer much more information. If you're in the computer service business, then you will recognize which tools will be the most useful to you. If you're not sure what a program does, or how to work it, follow the link on the Utilities Index page listed above. There is a wealth of information in the Sysinternals portion of the Microsoft site, including users' forums.

Most of the programs are passive in that they will dig into your computer system and return information without affecting any changes to your system. However, there are a few that may cause changes—which is

always a little dangerous. If you're not sure what a program will do, be cautious and read the documentation.

I found that most of the programs will run in the various versions of Windows currently in use, as well as Windows 7.

The following are some of the highlights of the Sysinternals Suite:

BgInfo

If you want to have all the basic information about your computer (CPU, memory, IPs, free disk space, etc.) at your fingertips at all times, BgInfo will embed it into your desktop for quick viewing (see Figure 1). You can rerun the program at any time to update the screen or have it update on login.
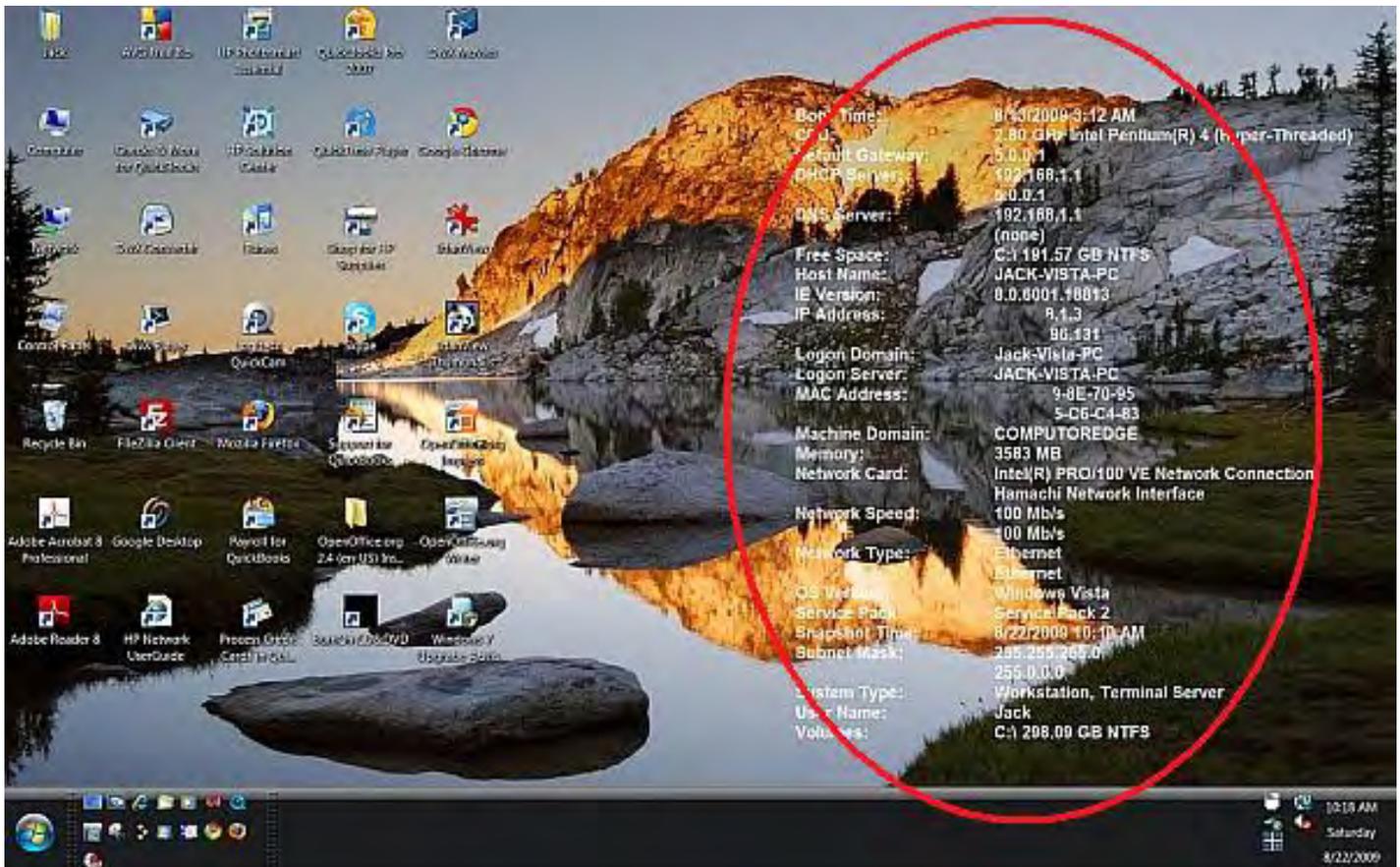
Figure 1. System information generated with BgInfo from Sysinternals on the desktop of a Vista computer.

Desktops

If you're cluttering your working desktop with too many open programs and you want better separation, then Desktops will create more virtual working desktops for you—up to a total of four. For more details on how Desktops works, see this week's Windows Tips and Tricks column.

Diskmon

Is the light from your hard drive disconnected or burnt out? Diskmon is a drive-monitoring program that will either give a view of or log all of the disk accesses, or (if minimized) act as a disk activity light to your taskbar—red for write, green for read.

DiskView

Ever wonder what the surface of your hard drive would look like if you could see all the data? DiskView provides a graphic representation of data written to the disk (see Figure 2). Click on one of the colored lines, and the name assigned to the data is displayed,
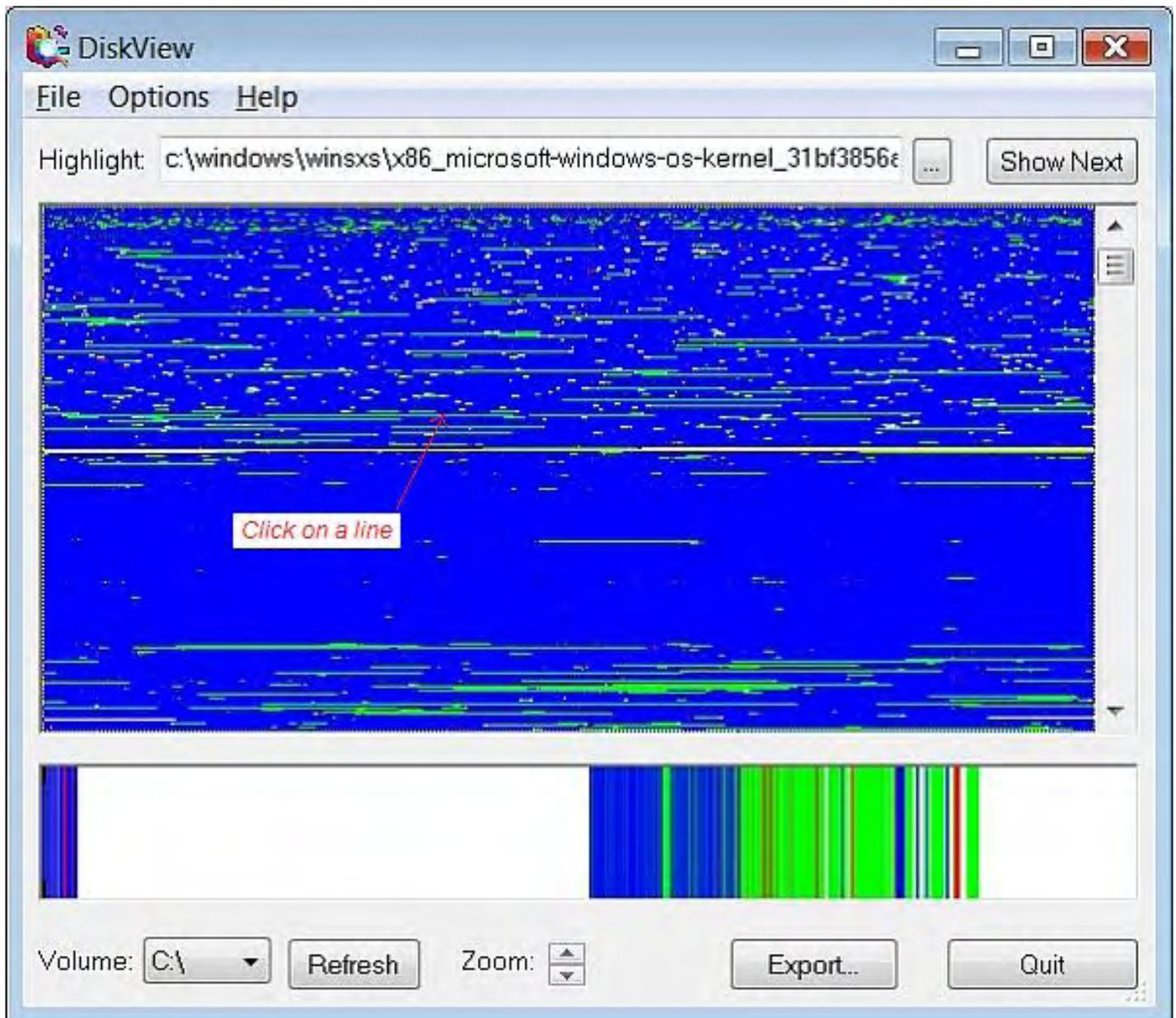

Figure 2. Drive file information is displayed with DiskView from Sysinternals.

Hex2dec

A quick command-line utility to convert hexadecimal numbers to decimal and back again.

LoadOrder

If you want to know what order device drivers are loading into your system, LoadOrder is the tool for you.

Process Explorer

Find everything you wanted to know about the processes running in your system—but were afraid to ask—with Process Explorer (see Figure 3). Track down open files and out-of-date DLLs.
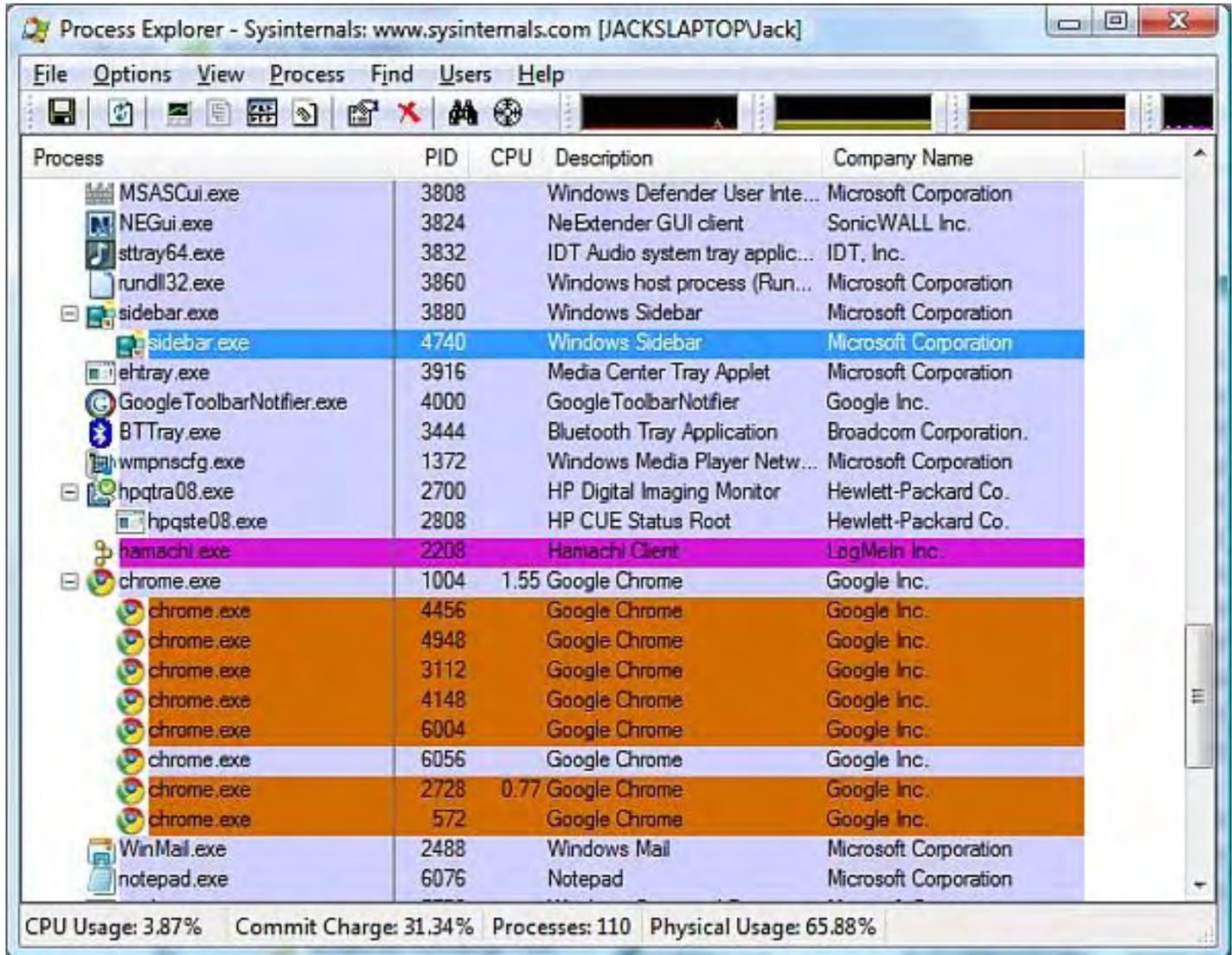
Figure 3. Process (running program) information is displayed with Process Explorer from Sysinternals.

SDelete

Make sure that all remnants of your file deletions are wiped off the disk. With SDelete, not only are the filenames deleted, but the physical disk surface is overwritten to ensure the file will never be recovered.

VMMap

For those who are curious about what is really going on in their computer's memory, there is VMMap (see Figure 4). In this case, a copy of Notepad running in memory is displayed.
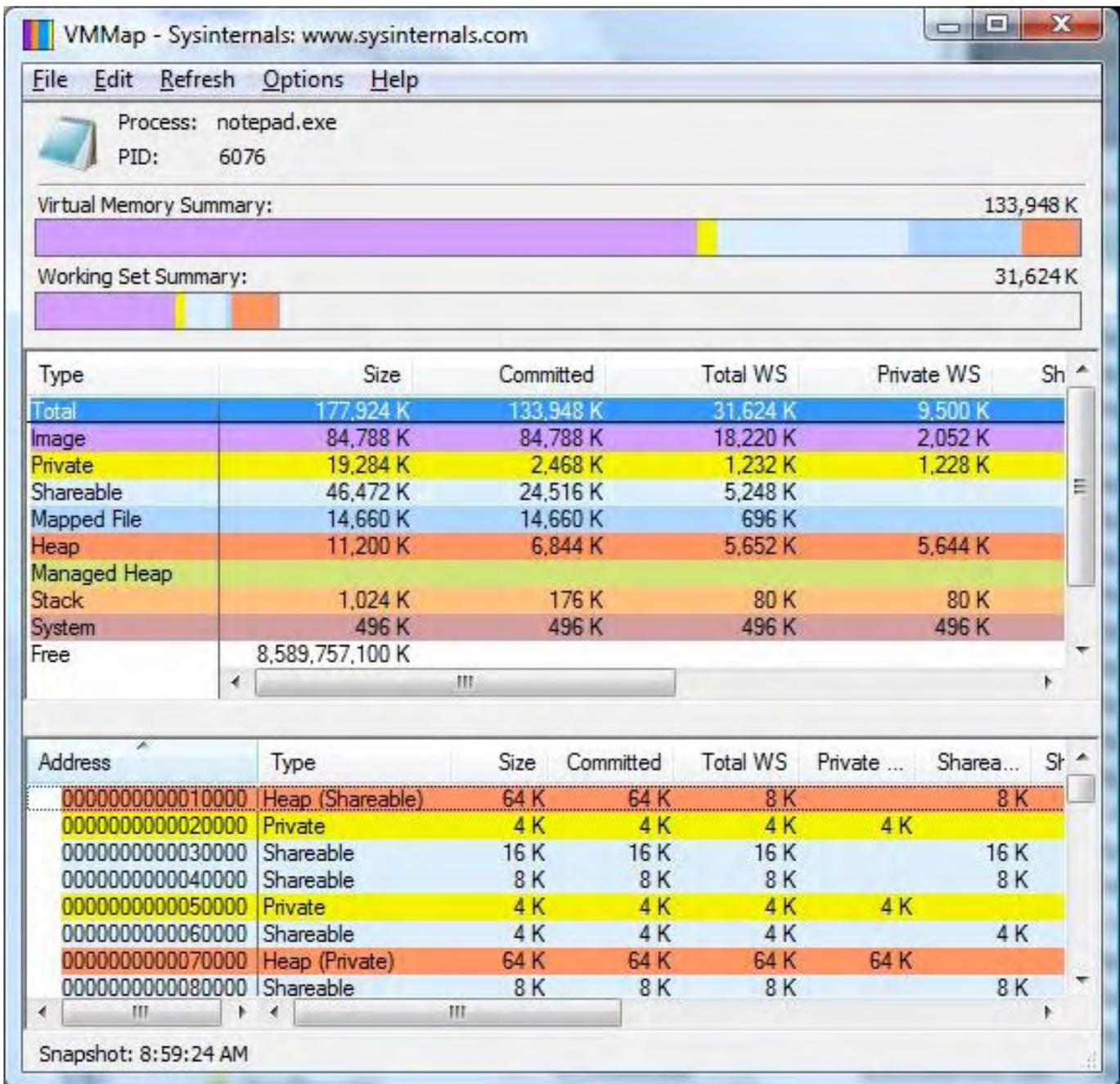
Figure 4. A map of the memory is displayed with VMMap from Sysinternals.

ZoomIt

Last, (alphabetically), is a handy little program that will zoom in on the screen with the stroke of a key combination. The screen can be marked up and text added as part of a demonstration (see Figure 5). This comes in handy for seminar screen projections and remote computer conferences.
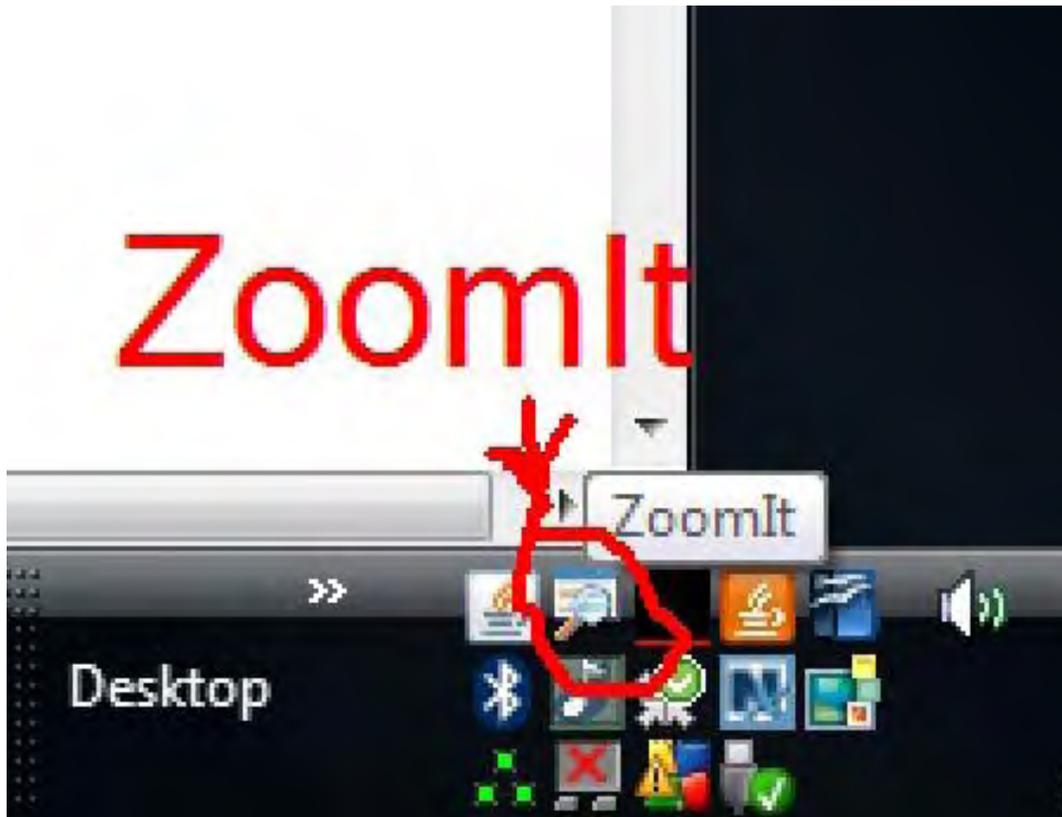
Figure 5. Enlarged screen with markup and text using ZoomIt from Sysinternals.

The above is just a taste of what's in Window Sysinternals. Maybe there are one or two programs that will make your job easier.

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Favorite Tools Hidden in Windows

"Little-known programs save time and boost productivity." by Dawn Clement

> From MSCONFIG to the Windows Backup Utility, Microsoft has included many tools to make your Windows experience easier. They're there, they're just hard to find.

Microsoft has some extremely useful utilities built into Windows. Quite a few of these are "hidden," meaning that there isn't a whole lot of documentation on them. Estimates range that there are between 100 and 200 undocumented features of Windows. Although these little programs come with every installation of Windows, they are rarely used because no one knows about them.

Most of these utilities can be accessed from the Run box. In Windows XP, the Run box is located off the Start menu, but in Windows Vista it is hidden by default. To reveal the Run box in Windows Vista, complete the following steps:

1. Right click on the Start button and select Properties from the drop-down menu.
2. Click on the Customize button of the menu you are using (either Start or Classic Start)
3. Scroll down until you see either Run command (Start Menu) or Display Run (Classic Start)
4. Check the box and click on Apply

MSCONFIG

My personal favorite Windows tool is the Microsoft System Configuration Utility—also known as MSCONFIG. You may not realize it, but many programs quietly start running every time you boot up your computer. All of these running programs can significantly slow down your computer. MSCONFIG is a nifty little tool that you can use to turn these programs off. You won't actually be disabling anything, and you won't be uninstalling anything; you will simply be telling them not to start running unless you actually need them.

"I always get a little nervous when he starts taking out his Windows tools."

MSCONFIG is available in both Windows XP and Windows Vista. In both operating systems, all of the essential Windows programs are loaded from Windows Services. What this means in practical terms is that you can safely turn off all of the items in your startup list (although you may want to leave some running, such as your antivirus program). If you don't know what a particular item is, you can always look it up online; try Pacman's Portal (*www.pacs-portal.co.uk/ startup_index.htm*), which has a database of 19,335 potential start-up items along with a brief description of each. Turning off even some of your start-up programs will have a noticeable effect on your computer's performance. The Configuration Utility is easily accessible from the Run box (which is

located on the Windows Start menu). Simply type MSCONFIG in the Run box, click OK, and click on the Start Up tab. Go ahead and try clicking on the Disable All button (you can always go back in and recheck items).

Another really useful tool is the Windows Update Manager. If you don't have a link to Windows Update on your Start Menu, don't worry! Simply open up your handy-dandy Run box and type in wupdmgr. This will take you directly to Windows Update. This command works on well on Windows XP, but some Windows Vista users have reported issues with this program.

Useful Tools and Tricks

Another useful tool is the Windows Backup Utility, which again can be accessed from the Run box (the command is ntbackup). If you use Windows XP Professional, the Windows Backup utility should be ready for use. If you use Windows XP Home Edition, you'll need to install the program off of your installation disc. Windows Vista does not come with the Backup Utility because it has a built-in Backup and Restore Center. However, the Backup and Restore Center does not allow you to choose specific folders to back up, and some Vista users have taken to copying the Windows Backup Utility from an XP machine and installing it on their Vista machines in order to continue using this feature. If you choose to install the Windows XP Ntbackup program on your Windows Vista computer, you will need the following files from a Windows XP computer: Ntbackup.exe, Ntmsapi.dll, and Vssapi.dll.

There are many more little tricks you can do from the Run box. You can view the current contents of your clipboard with Clipboard Viewer (clipbrd) *[clipbrd.exe is not included with Vista]*, and you can find out all sorts of information about your computer with the System Monitor (perfmon).

You can even delete files immediately, without having them moved to the Recycle Bin first. In Windows XP, type gpedit.msc (Group Policy Editor) in the Run box, and navigate to User Configuration/ Administrative Templates/Windows Components/Windows Explorer. Locate the "Do not move deleted files to the Recycle Bin" setting and select it. Voilà! In Windows Vista, you need to navigate to Computer Configuration/Administrative Templates/System/Logon.

Of course, not all Windows tools are programs—some are built-in keyboard shortcuts. Once you have them memorized, keyboard shortcuts can save you quite a bit of time when you use your computer. You probably already know that CTRL+C will copy text and CTRL+V will paste text. But did you know that CTRL+Z will "undo" your last action? SHIFT+DELETE will bypass the Recycle bin (similar to the Group Policy Editor, but on a case-by-case basis)? Pressing the F2 key after selecting an item will allow you to rename that item without right-clicking and navigating to Rename (saves a keystroke). The F3 key will bring up a Find window, and the F4 key will display a navigation bar in My Computer or in Windows Explorer (useful for finding the path to a specific file). You can also prevent a CD-ROM from automatically playing when you put it in the CD-ROM drive if you hold down the Shift key while the disc loads.

Microsoft has included many tools to make your Windows experience easier. They're there, they're just hard to find. If you're interested in learning more tricks about using Windows, make sure you check out Microsoft's own Help and Support Center. The knowledge base is filled with useful information, including more keyboard shortcuts (*support.microsoft.com/kb/126449*).

Dawn Clement is a freelance writer, domestic engineer, and mother of three with a Masters of Arts in Philosophy and over nine years experience in technical support.
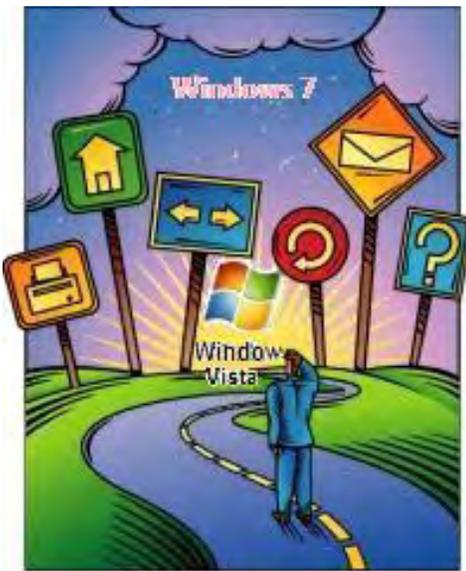
Windows Tips and Tricks

"Exploring the Desktops Tool"
by Jack Dunning

Desktops is a simple little program that creates new work areas in your Windows computer, helping you get organized—and hide that video game from the boss.

This week, Windows Sysinternals (*technet.microsoft.com/en-gb/sysinternals/default.aspx*) are highlighted in the article "Secret (Free) Tools for Windows." As I was reviewing the collection of free Windows tools, one program in particular caught my attention. That application was Desktops. Rather than being a utility, Desktops could change the way you work with your computer.

Desktops is a simple little program that creates new work areas in your Windows computer. It does this by creating virtual desktops (up to a total of four), which are accessible through selectable key combinations— or the notification icon in the lower right-hand corner. These are not merely other windows that open, but the entire initial screen layout that you see when first logging on—minus some tray icons and the Windows Sidebar in Vista. (There are a few other limitations, but the basic Windows functionality is available in each Desktop created.)

There are two reasons for using a program such as Desktops. The first is organization. If you're like me, you have numerous programs open, running multiple copies of each. I leave the programs open because it saves so much time when switching between tasks. The opening and closing of applications can be quite time-consuming. If I get a phone call on a particular subject, I usually have the appropriate window already open. The only problem is finding it on the taskbar or desktop.

By loading Desktops, I can put browsing and e-mail in one desktop, programming in another, and use a third work area for photos and video. This way, locating the appropriate files is quick and easy (see Figure 1). Switching is done by either clicking on the icon in the Notification Tray or selecting the appropriate key combination.
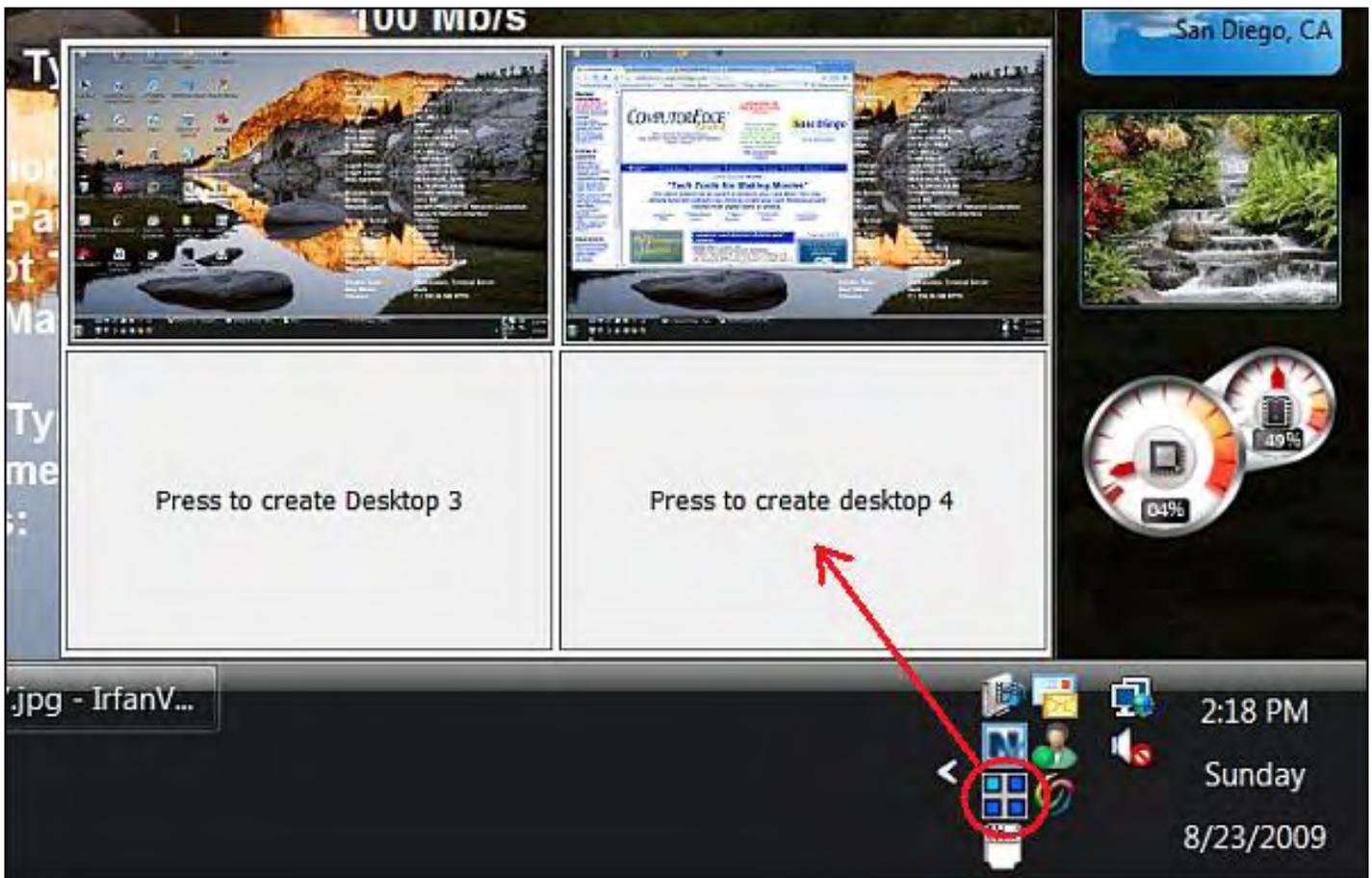
Figure 1. Desktops may be selected from the Notification Tray icon with a click.

When initially loading the program, it's probably best to do it before you load too many programs. The first time I tried it on my 64-bit Windows computer, I experienced a problem when I tried to create a new desktop. The computer locked up on the new screen without loading anything other than the background. I was able to get out of it by using the Microsoft Flag+L (lock) combination to get the logon screen, then switch user and restart. I don't know if the problem was caused by having too many files open the first time I ran it, using the file listing in the Start Menu to launch it, or not running the program as administrator. (I didn't have time to figure it all out.) In any case, once I dragged the program onto my desktop and launched from there, it ran just fine.

The first time you run the program, an Options window will open (see Figure 2). You can also open Options by right-clicking on the tray icon. This is where the preferred key combinations are set. These key shortcuts are a quick way to jump between the work areas.

Figure 2. Desktops Options window.

There is also an option to "Run automatically at logon," which is selectable in the Options window. If you plan to use Desktops regularly, I recommend checking the box.

[Note: Since first writing this column, I've experienced the previous lock-up problem when I've logged on with the "Run automatically at logon" box checked. I think that there was some interference with one of my other startup programs. Again, I haven't had time to narrow it down. For now, I've unchecked the box and load it manually after logon. I don't know if this is a bug or a conflict caused by another program.]

The main quirks that I noticed in Vista were related to the Windows Sidebar. If I had a window maximized in desktop one, after I returned from another desktop, any program that I had maximized would slip behind the Sidebar. (It could be fixed by putting another program into full-screen mode, then exiting that mode. Go figure.) Also, programs such as Mail and Sidebar (again), which will open once, won't open in a new desktop if already running in another. That's probably the only way it could work. Fortunately, Windows 7 doesn't include Sidebar. (Don't worry, Windows 7 still has gadgets—you just place them on the desktop.)

Other than logging off, there is no way to terminate Desktops (probably Windows Task Manager will work— not recommended). This is to prevent orphans and other problems from occurring. Also, most tray icons will appear only in the first work area, plus there is no way to move a window between desktops.

Oh, the second reason for wanting this program is for hiding your doings from your boss or any other person worried about your computer activities. When someone comes into the room, you can quickly change to your work screen from your play screen (see Figure 3). This is how most people will use Desktops.
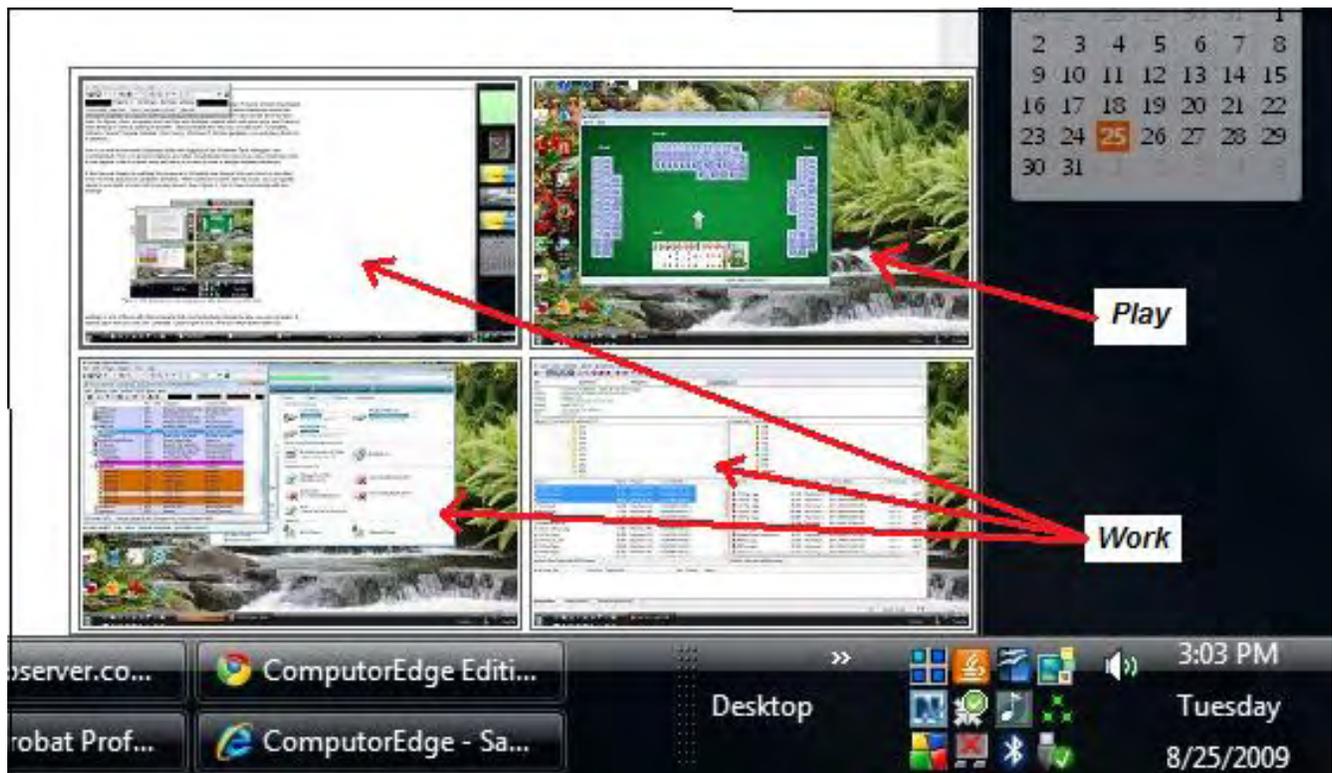
Figure 3. With Desktops you can separate your play area from your work area.

Desktops is one of those nifty little programs that could potentially change the way you use a computer. It depends upon how you work with your computer. I plan to give it a try. I'll let you know how it turns out.

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
"Snow Leopard" by Wally Wang

Like most Apple products, Snow Leopard isn't something you really need, but it's probably something that you'll still want anyway. Also, Switch is a free utility that lets you convert your WMA files into a more universal standard, and a tip on using drag-and-drop functionality to simplify different tasks.

Right now, I'm typing this on the beta of Microsoft Word 2010, running on the release candidate of Windows 7, which is running inside a virtual machine through VMware's Fusion on my MacBook that's running a beta of Mac OS X 10.6 Snow Leopard. This convoluted system of running beta software on top of other beta software is normally risky, but Snow Leopard, Windows 7 and Microsoft Office 2010 appear remarkably stable and usable.
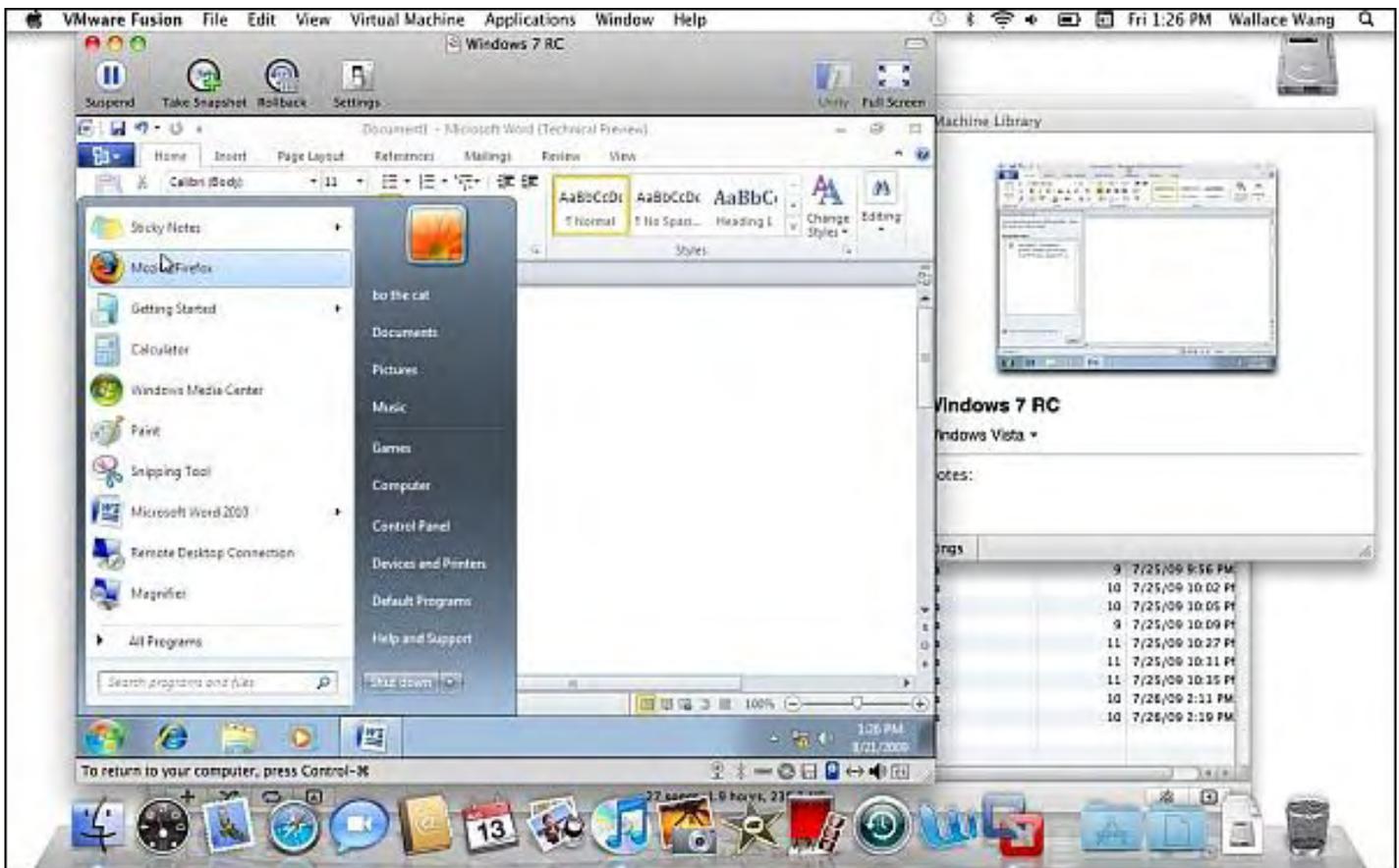

Figure 1. The Microsoft Office 2010 beta running on the Windows 7 beta running as a virtual machine on the Mac OS X 10.6 Snow Leopard beta.

While Office 2010 for Windows isn't due out until the first quarter of 2010, Windows 7 will appear by October 22, 2009. If the rumors are correct, Apple should release Snow Leopard early on August 28, which means by the time you read this, you can run out and get Snow Leopard on your Macintosh.

If you buy a new Macintosh, make sure it comes with Snow Leopard on it, so you can start off with the latest version right away. If you recently bought a Macintosh, you can upgrade to Snow Leopard for $9.95.

If you have an older Macintosh, should you upgrade to Snow Leopard? If you have a really old Macintosh running a PowerPC processor, you can't run Snow Leopard, so you have no choice but to stick with Leopard. However, if you have any Macintosh that uses an Intel processor, you can upgrade to Snow Leopard for $29. Since the cost is minimal, the real question boils down to whether it's worth upgrading or not.

The two main features of Snow Leopard are speed and stability. Like Windows 7, Snow Leopard is remarkably stable for a new release. While the latest version of Leopard (Mac OS X 10.5.8) seems stable, you might want to switch to Snow Leopard just because Apple will likely focus more attention on improving Snow Leopard and less attention on maintaining Leopard.

The main reason to switch to Snow Leopard is speed. While you might not see much of a speed difference when using a word processor or checking your e-mail, Snow Leopard supports multiple processor cores. Today's Macs use dual-core processors, so Snow Leopard will give you marginal speed increases over Leopard. If you need absolute speed, then $29 for Snow Leopard seems fairly reasonable.

However, you probably won't see the real advantage of Snow Leopard until you get a Macintosh with quad or eight-core processors. With so many additional processor cores, Snow Leopard will likely run circles around Leopard on the same computer.

The bottom line is that Snow Leopard is nice, but not necessary. It does offer minor user-interface tweaks, such as letting you turn on Exposé just by pointing at a program icon on the Dock and seeing all currently open program windows as thumbnail images. Like most Apple products, Snow Leopard isn't something you really need, but it's probably something that you'll still want anyway.
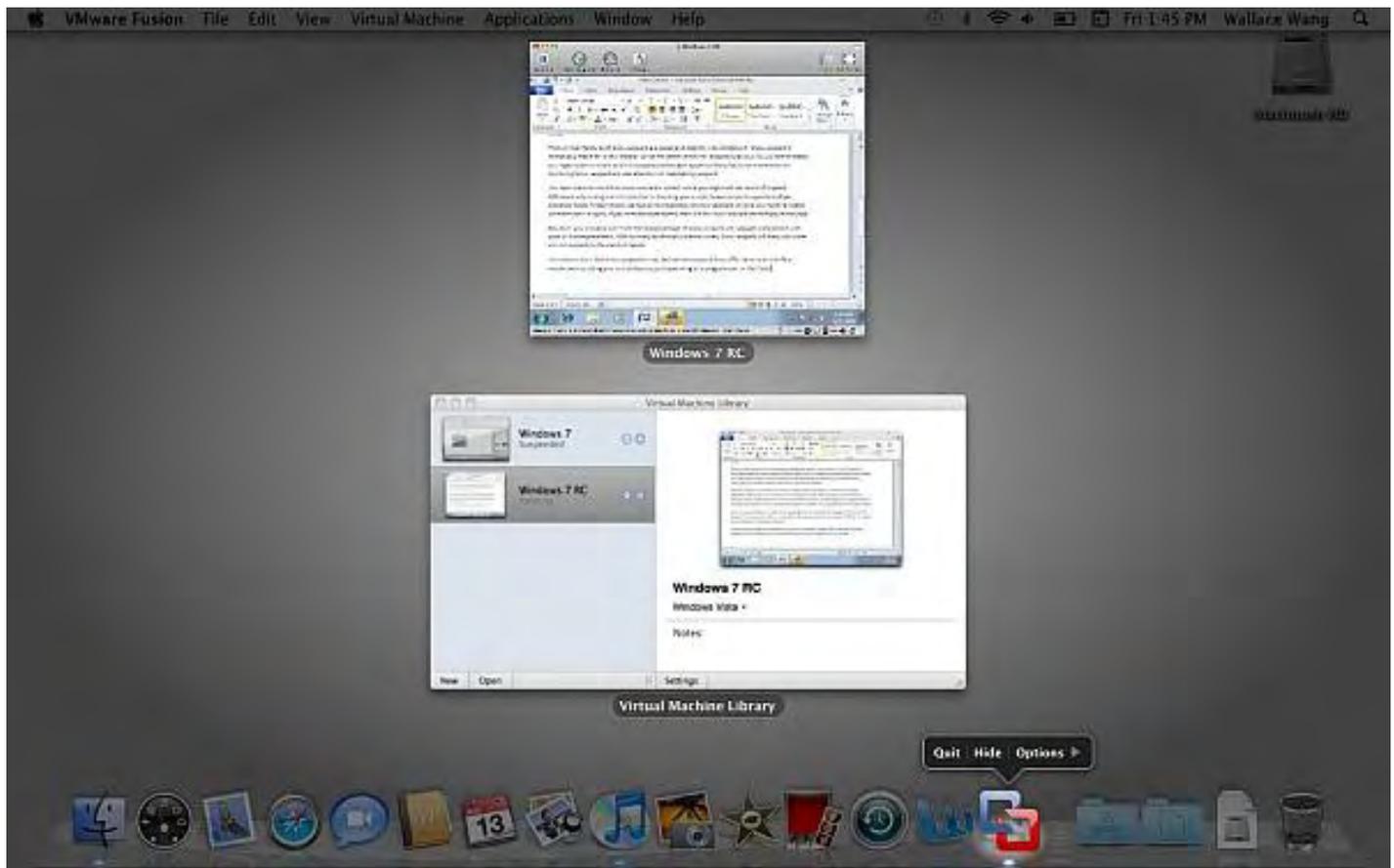
Figure 2. Pointing at a program icon on the dock displays all open windows of that program.

Converting Audio Files for Free

Many people use digital voice recorders, which look like little microphones that you hang around your neck or hold in your hand. When you're finished recording yourself, you can plug this recorder into your computer through a USB port and transfer the audio file to your computer.

The problem with many of these digital recorders is that they store audio files as WMA (Windows Media Audio) files. To play WMA files on your Macintosh, you'll either need to get additional software that can play WMA files, such as the free and open source VLC (*www.videolan.org/vlc*), or convert the WMA file into a format that your Mac can understand and use, such as an MP3 file.
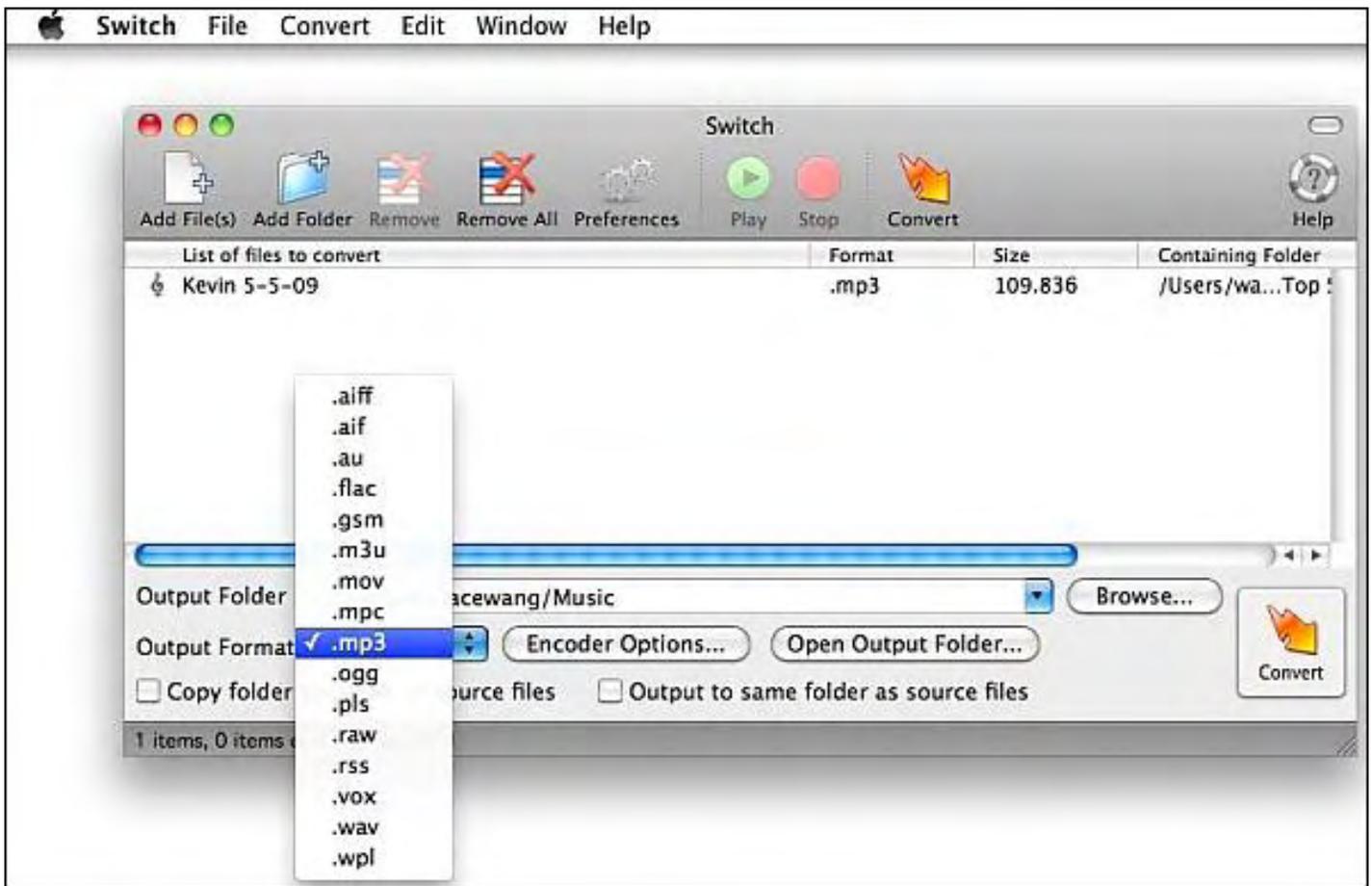
Figure 3. The free Switch program lets you convert audio files into various formats.

To convert audio files, grab a free copy of Switch (*www.nch.com.au/switch/plus.html*). Just load an audio file into Switch, define the type of audio file format you want to create (MP3, Ogg Vorbis, FLAC, etc.), and you'll be able to convert your WMA files into a more universal standard that everyone (not just Windows users) can hear.

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

The slow, clumsy way to do anything is through pull-down menus. But this can be clumsy, so the fast way to do most things on a Mac is to drag and drop. If you want to open a file using a different program than the one that created it, you have two choices.

First, you can right-click on that file so a pop-up menu appears. Then choose Open With to display a submenu that lists different programs to open that file.

Figure 4. The Open With command lets you open a file through different programs.

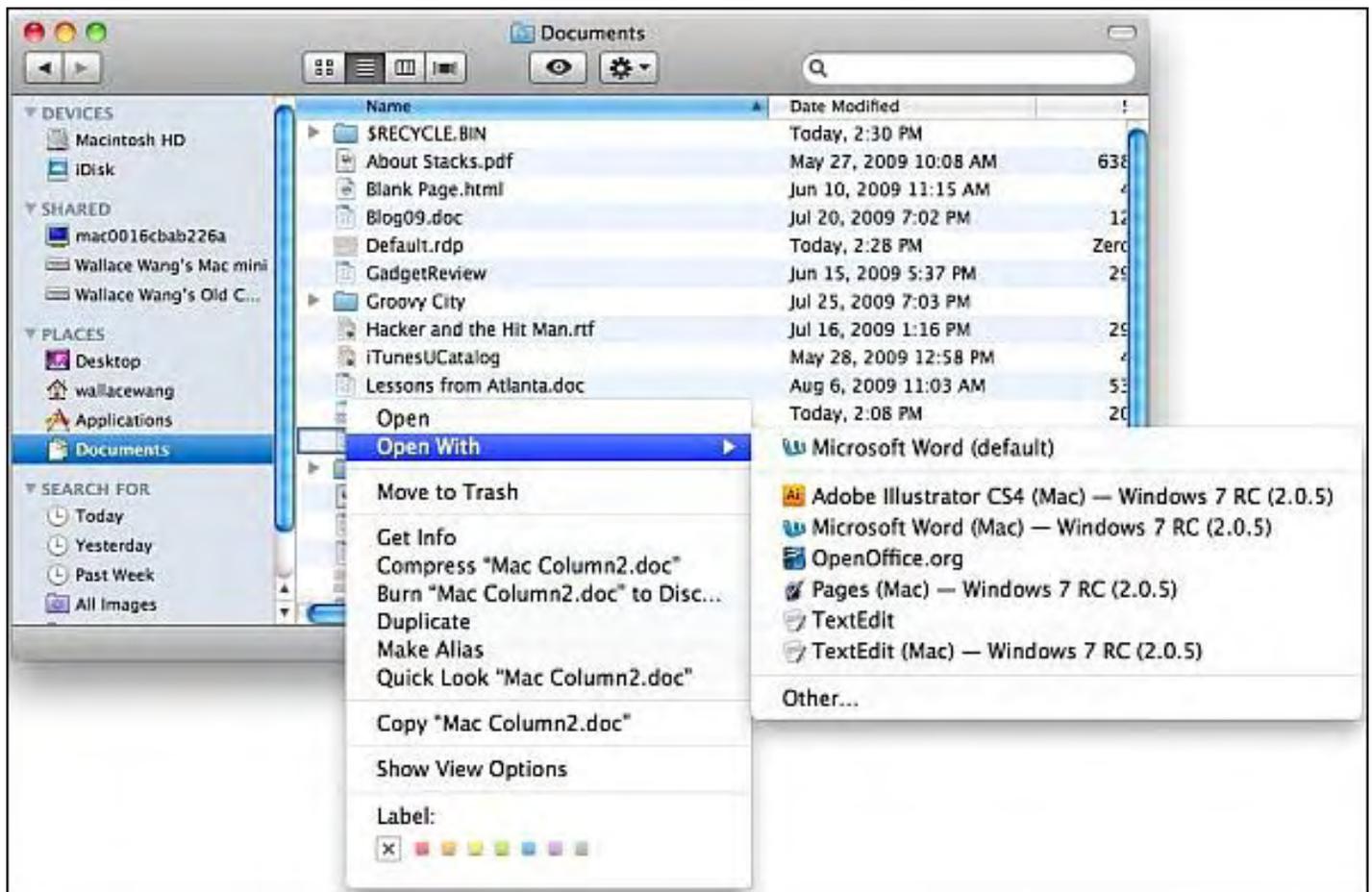However, using the drag-and-drop method, you can just drag a file out of the Finder window and drop it over a program icon on the Dock. If you wanted to open a Microsoft Word file in Pages, just drag that file and drop it over the Pages icon on the Dock. This will simultaneously load Pages and the file you just chose.

Both the Open With menu command and the drag-and-drop method accomplish the same results, but the drag-and-drop method just feels more intuitive than right-clicking and choosing menu commands. As you get more familiar with the Macintosh, experiment with dragging and dropping, and you may be pleasantly surprised at how many times this method works to simplify different tasks.

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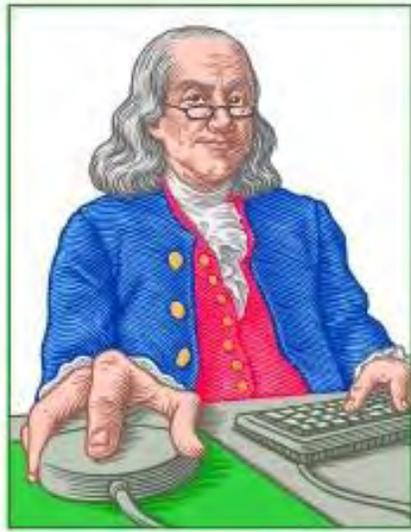
Linux Lessons: Tips and Tricks from Users

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

A reader recommends Thunderbird as an e-mail client; another reader wants to help spread the Linux word; and a reader takes umbrage with the contention that the command line no longer matters in Linux.

Use Thunderbird for E-Mail in Linux

I went with Thunderbird for my e-mail because I can use the same program in Windows and Ubuntu. One problem with Thunderbird for me was the search function for newsgroups. Thunderbird does not download the messages, so the CTRL+ALT+F command that I was using in Windows doesn't work. However, there is a search function in the upper-right corner that does work.

Ted

Spreading the Word

Thanks for the Linux coverage in the latest issue. I've just sent this e-mail to the Kernel Panic LUG (KPLUG)'s newbie mailing list. A while back I e-mailed a note to you explaining that there are very few "newbies" in that group—or in fact, *ComputorEdge* readers—but there are some very knowledgeable people who I hope will make the effort to help spread sorely needed Linux lore via your excellent publication.

Longtime reader,

Ed Pastore

Command-Line Controversy

In regard to Craig's post titled, "Forget Lessons on the Command Line":

In his post, Craig suggested that articles in *ComputorEdge* should avoid command-line topics, and "try to avoid columns about command-line utilities like ls and ps and grep and the like." He also alluded to shifting focus from the command line to the GUI, stating, "The major Linux distributions migrated away from the command-line shell and toward the GUI several years ago."

I understand his point. However, there are a few things to consider—and being a 10-year *nix veteran, I was somewhat baffled that Craig could make such a distinct separation between the GUI and the command line. I was stunned that a Linux user with that much experience did not make this connection.

Indeed, in Linux, nothing that you see in the GUI happens, except that it first originates from the command line. In fact, those of us who work with Linux and deal with the command line can so appreciate and relate to movies such as *The Matrix*, where all perceived reality stems from the code from which it originates.

So, in Linux, the best you can hope for is to convince yourself that the command line does not exist, i.e., you can wish it away. But it is still there, nevertheless. And although the average user may not see it on the screen, they are interacting with it, whether they realize it or not.

I would not be so quick to "Forget Lessons on the Command Line." They may come in handy someday.

Oh, and when you find yourself in a bind in Linux, never fear: The command-line gurus will be here to assist you.

Pete

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

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, or a favorite Linux software application, 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 VB.Net 2010

"Controls in VB.Net 2010" by Rob Spahitz

This week, we'll look at some of the common controls in the VB.Net 2010 toolbox and see how they work.

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CHALLENGE (due 9/4/2009):

The Windows Registry is simply a database. Sometimes when you write an application, you need to save data. How would you save data so that it can be loaded the next time you run the application? Send me your ideas.

SOLUTIONS:

I previously asked what control you would use to play a movie. We'll explore some ideas this week.

Toolbox

We previously talked about toolboxes in my columns for Excel and Access. The same applies to VB.Net except that all of the tools are greatly improved. Aside from the expected items you'd see on a typical data-entry form, you also get a few other things to help manage an application. For example, you get controls for menus, databases and containers. Let's see what's out there.

Open VB.Net (I'm still using version 2010, but most of the controls are the same as what came out with the original release in 2002). Select a Windows Application project so you get a starting form and call it MyControls. After the form appears, open the toolbox and lock it in place by clicking on the little pushpin icon at the top of the panel, as seen in Figure 1.
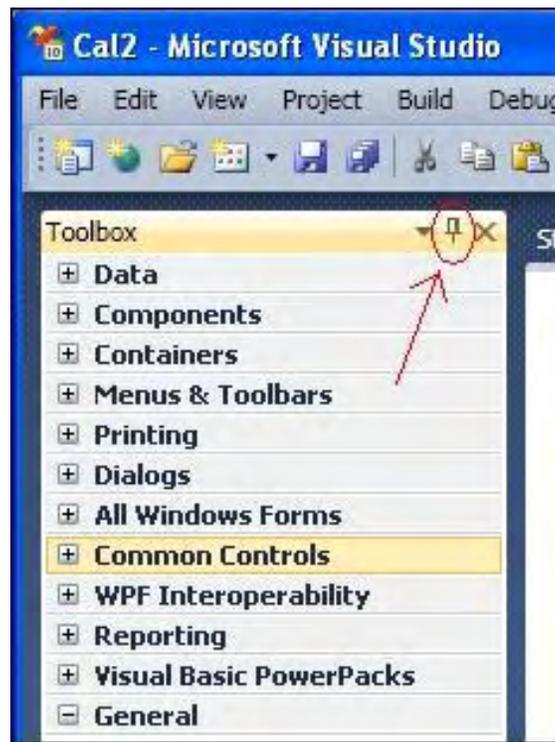
Figure 1. VB.Net toolbox.

The toolbox in VB.Net is organized by categories. This helps you to find them, since there are so many to choose from. Among the categories you find are: Data, Containers, Menus & Toolbars, Dialogs, and Common Controls, in addition to All Windows Forms. Each group contains a set of controls, most of which have a visual component on a form or other container.

Controls are really just mini-programs. Each one is designed to assist a developer by offering a collection of routines that do some of the work for you. As an example, a textbox handles all of the input processing necessary to get information from a user. That means you don't have to check the keyboard to see what keys are being pressed and you don't have to worry about backspaces and arrow keys. You also don't have to worry about checking to see if the mouse is selecting some text, and you don't have to worry about how to display the text that is being entered, with things like fonts and sizes and colors.

By avoiding these extra steps, you can move on to other things, like what to do with the text that the user gives you. As part of this, you'll also need to learn what the control is capable of doing so that you can properly manage it, typically through its properties (settings), methods (procedures) and events (what it responds to).

Through object-oriented programming, we can simply load a control by adding a reference to it in our program and then asking the program to build one so we can use it through a process called instantiation. Behind the scenes, each control is really just a computer "Class." When we instantiate one, we create an object. If we instantiate another from the same class, we have a second object with its own independent settings. By changing different settings, we can get an object to do what we'd like (within its own capabilities).

Common Controls

When you look at a typical application, you'll see some things appear over and over. You'll typically see borders and a title area plus a picture on the top left corner and the red box with the "X" in the top right

corner. Inside the border you'll often see menus and maybe some toolbars. Beyond that you'll see things like buttons, checkboxes, pictures and miscellaneous text. You'll often see other things that you can interact with. Each of these is likely to be a control that you have available in the toolbox. Let's find them.

First, let's explore the Common Controls. Scroll down in the toolbox and find that. Expand it as necessary by clicking on the little "+" next to it. Ignoring some of the lesser-used ones, we find that the group includes a Button, CheckBox, ComboBox, DateTimePicker, Label, MaskedTextBox, NumericUpDown, PictureBox, ProgressBar, RadioButton, TextBox, ToolTip, TreeView and WebBrowser. Each of these is a Class. So the Button is really the Button Class; the CheckBox is the CheckBox Class; etc. Therefore, when you add one to your form, you are referencing all of the accessible portions of a Class (which is a mini-program, as indicated earlier). In a future column, we'll explore much more about Classes.

The idea of Classes is to create a convenient way for other software developers to use your code, without them necessarily having to worry about how you made things happen. For example, if you use a Math Class that includes a procedure for calculating Pi (the ration of a circle's diameter to its circumference, typically considered 3.14), you don't have to worry about how the result was calculated (as long as you trust that the results are correct). Similarly, if you use a Date Class that offers the number of time periods between two dates, you don't really have to care about how it determined the number (again, as long as you trust it). And, as mentioned earlier, if you need the ability to accept text input, you don't have to write the code to do this as long as you trust the TextBox Class.

With that said, Classes are very well designed for an Object-Oriented (OO) environment. With OO Classes, you simply reference the Class, instantiate it and start using it. Each of the above controls fits these criteria by offering useful properties, methods and events to help you manage it. In addition, they may offer a collection of constants (usually through enumerated lists) that can assist with setting values for some of the properties. This will be discussed in a future column.

Back to the controls. Double-click on the Button tool to add it to the form. If it is not already selected in the Form, single-click on it so that the corresponding properties appear in the properties Window, usually appearing in the lower right corner, as seen in Figure 2.
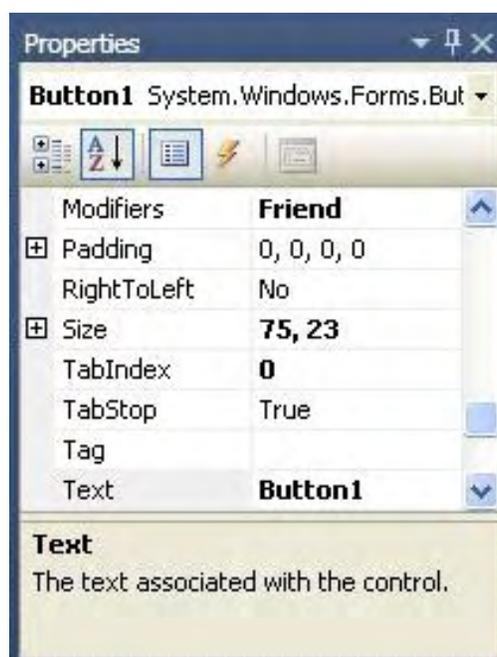

Figure 2. VB.Net 2010 Properties.

When you add a control to a form in VB.Net, you are doing graphical programming. Drop a control, and VB adds code for you based on what you added and where you added it. When you update properties, VB also updates its code for you in the background. If you move a control around or resize it, VB updates the code for you. The nice thing about graphical programming is that it typically creates bug-free code (no errors), since the process will usually ensure that only valid values are assigned to the properties. The drawback is that the things you can do are very limited.

This process of adding controls is referred to as RAD. RAD, or Rapid Application Development, is the process of creating a very quick visual prototype. Within a few minutes, you can typically create a Windows application that looks the way you (or your boss) want. This is a great way to impress someone as to what a terrific programmer you are. This concept is what led to the quick rise of the Dot-Com industry in the late 1990s, because investors saw some awesome prototypes and decided to pay for the concept behind it. Of course, prototypes are typically non- or semi-functional applications. If you trick your boss this way, you're likely to get burned when he assumes that you can complete the entire project just as fast.

After the prototype, you have lots of work to do to get the application working in a useful way. This is what led to the "Dot-Bomb" (Dot-Com failures) in the early 2000s, as people who were great at creating prototypes came to realize how difficult it can be to translate people's requests into working applications. So RAD is a great time-saver, but it's only about 5 percent of a typical application.

So let's quickly finish up the RAD portion for now. With the new button selected, change the Name property (located near the top) to btnMessage (and press the Enter key to accept it). Then go down to the Text property and change it to Message. You've now reprogrammed the button. Let's add something useful when someone clicks on the button at run time. Since buttons do not have useful functionality (as explained in previous columns), double-click on it so we can make it do something useful. That process should open the code window so you can talk to the application in the language of Visual Basic, similar to Figure 3.
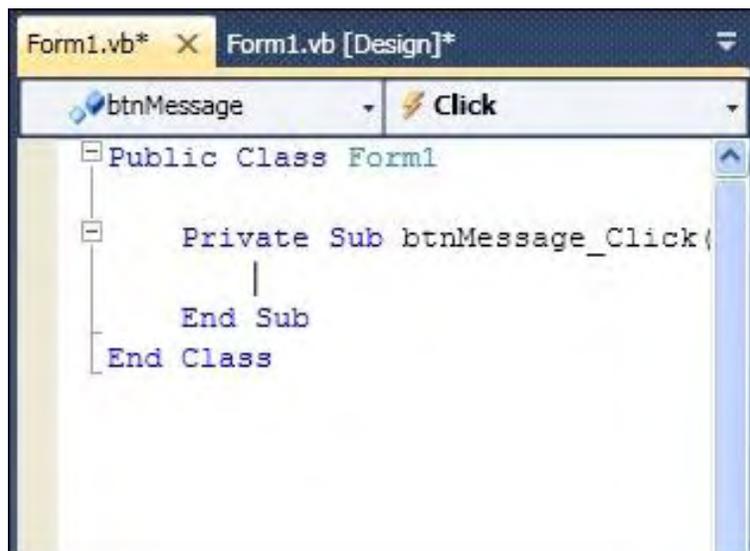
Figure 3. VB.Net Code window.

Notice how the code window shows that your project is a Class, called Form1. You might wonder why it's not called Form. Isn't this a Form? Yes it is! However, we are not creating the Form Class. We are creating a custom form based on the Form Class. Since I haven't renamed the form yet, it gets the default name from the original class and a number after it. Since this is the first form I'm adding to the project, it gets the default name of Form1. What this means is that we are creating a new class called Form1. The name is arbitrary and

can be anything that meets the valid naming convention for VB Classes (contains only letters, digits and underscores, plus a few other criteria).

For now, just program it by putting the following code where you see the blinking cursor (above the line "End Sub"):

```
MessageBox.Show("Thanks for clicking me!")
```

Run the application (by pressing the F5 key). If you successfully added the code, VB will check the entire project (compile it), and eventually you should see the application window similar to Figure 4.
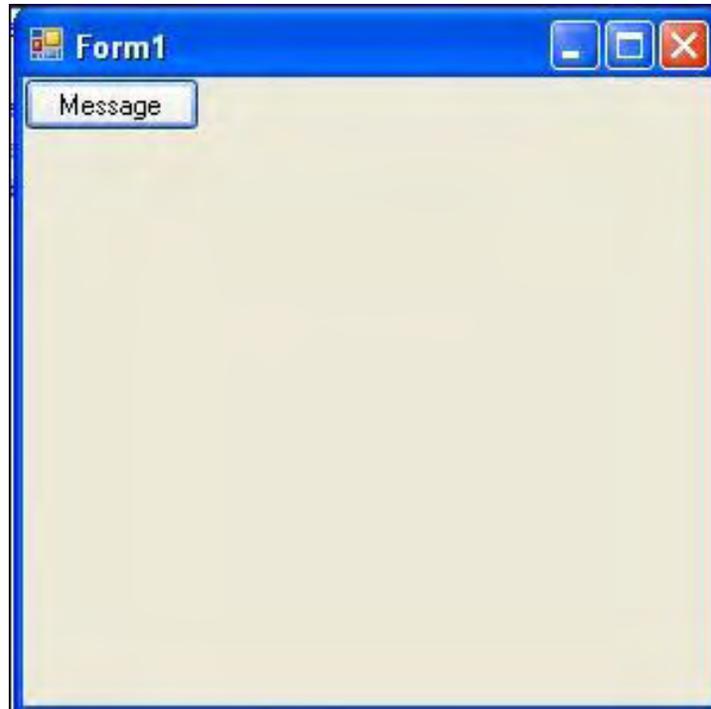
Figure 4. Our Application.

Click on the button that shows Message, and you should see the custom message you added in the code window, as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Custom Message.

Before we complete this section, click the OK button, then the X in the corner to close this application. Back in the toolbox, what control would you use to play music? Well, there used to be one in VB6 called the Multimedia MCI control. Since this control is gone from VB.Net, we can either use that old control (if we can locate it), or we can try an alternate solution. Since each takes a bit more space than we have this week,

we'll explore that when we start exploring additional plug-ins or extending VB to support additional components that are not part of the standard installation.

Summarizing this week, what we've seen so far are the basic features for creating a Visual Basic application. You create a form, add controls, change properties and add methods by selecting an event that is relevant. With that in place, let's get on to the real stuff—how do we actually make a useful application with Visual Basic?

Application Design

To create a useful computer application, you need to know what you want to do. Typically, there's a problem that needs a solution. With most computer applications, you need to write code that gets input, processes that input, and output something. Each step has different aspects. However, with Object-Oriented programming, much of the input and output becomes very easy, and you only need to focus on the processing.

In addition, if you programmed in the "old days" (mostly before 1990), then you may also need to get used to the idea of event-driven programming, where one controlling application (such as the operating system) decides when your application gets to run. It also expects the application to interact with it, so it can share time with other applications to get what's referred to as a multitasking environment (where multiple tasks can appear to run simultaneously).

As with any profession, computer programming and application design take time. You'll need to learn various strategies for how to create effective applications. And as with building a house, more complex designed are often best handled by experts in the various areas, such as graphic design, form design, database design and programming.

Next week, we'll start exploring more application design as we work toward making several useful applications. Meanwhile, send in your thoughts for my challenges.

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

Ten Lesser-known Truths About Pay-Per-Click Search Advertising: A new book exposes some little-known facts; Buyer Beware: Fake UL Marks Out There—Guidelines on how to identify counterfeit and genuine UL marks; Wolverine F2D Slide Scanner —A review of the color-slide-scanning apparatus; Linksys Webcam Internet Home Monitoring Camera —A review of the device that can send live video to any Web browser.

Ten Lesser-known Truths About Pay-Per-Click Search Advertising

The new book, "The Truth About Pay-Per-Click Search Advertising" (*www.ftpress.com/store/product.aspx?isbn=0789738325*) (by Kevin Lee, *www.FTPress.com*, $18.99 list, ISBN: 0789738325), reveals some interesting facts about the popular field of Internet marketing called Pay-Per-Click (PPC). Through PPC, sites pay to improve their placement (ranking) in search results.

Some surprising facts:

1. As you read this, your competitors may be illegally manipulating the Google Quality Score to eliminate your ads from the search rankings.

2. Content networks (like AdSense) and "pure search" networks (like AdWords) can yield surprisingly different conversion rates.

3. You'll get the best ROI focusing your search spend on only the best-converting 20 percent of your search clicks.

4. Using special pricing, you can track offline conversions driven by online search. Customers who request the special price must have first seen that price suggested on a paid search landing page.

5. All search is generated by an interest. And so you can use searches for your business as a metric to measure interest generated by your offline marketing.

6. Unless you direct Google otherwise, your Google campaign will automatically feature keywords only tangentially related to your campaign—increasing your reach, but also driving waste into your campaign.

7. Fixing your landing page can be the trick for salvaging a poorly performing keyword.

8. If you allow affiliates to bid on your brand terms, you may be unnecessarily paying them for traffic that would have come to you without their help anyway.

9. Online chat features can significantly improve landing-page stickiness.

10. B2B and B2C searchers often use identical keywords. B2B marketers can increase their ROI by clarifying their offering in search ad copy—thereby attracting business searchers, and driving B2C searchers away.

Buyer Beware: Fake UL Marks Out There

According to CableOrganizer.com, "For over 100 years, Underwriters Laboratories' ever-recognizable UL Mark has been a beacon of safety and peace of mind, guiding consumers to reputable electrical products that have been rigorously tested and approved for safe use. To this day, the mere presence—or lack of—the trusted UL Mark is enough to make or break the purchases of millions of consumers worldwide."

CableOrganizer.com has issued guidelines on how to identify a counterfeit and genuine UL mark on electrical products to help consumers discern real versus fake UL Marks when shopping for electrical goods.

"Like money, art, clothing, and just about anything else of value, the UL Mark has been targeted by counterfeiters," notes Paul Holstein, CableOrganizer.com COO. "Products of questionable manufacture, which haven't undergone quality evaluations or safety testing, are regularly sent to market bearing false UL symbols, and can threaten the people who purchase them with risks of fire, shock, and electrocution."

How to Recognize a Genuine UL Mark

Whether a UL Mark comes in the form of a label or is die-stamped, silk-screened or molded into a product, it needs to contain the following four design elements to be verified as legitimate:

• The UL trademark: the letters "UL" arranged diagonally (descending left to right) within a circle, with a small ® symbol directly below the U

• The word "listed" printed either below or beside the circle in all capital letters: LISTED

• A four-character alphanumeric control number, or a four to six-digit issue number. In the case of the issue number, it may or may not be preceded by the phrase "Issue No." as well as one or two letters

• A product identity phrase that concisely names what the product is

Additional signs of a genuine UL Mark are:

• A UL file number (which will often have the letter "E" as a prefix)

• The manufacturer's company name or logo

• Applicable electrical ratings

• Information designating the product's Catalog, Model, or Type designation

Indication that a UL Mark is Counterfeit

When shopping, steer clear of products whose UL Marks are missing the four main elements outlined above. In addition, keep an eye out for the following red flags, which can also be telling signs of a bogus UL Mark:

• Products whose packaging makes reference to UL, but is free from a company name, trademark, trade name, or other UL-authorized designations

• Low-quality, cheaply manufactured products with the letters "UL" printed side by side, instead of diagonally and inside a circle

• The use of words like "approved" or "pending" in place of classified or listed. Neither "approved" nor "pending" are sanctioned or used by Underwriters Laboratories, Inc.

• "UL marked" product packages containing a large number of spelling and grammatical errors

• The lack of appropriate product documentation, including instructions for use, safety warnings, and information on proper care and maintenance

• Products whose packaging lacks a toll-free customer service number, company address, or other corporate contact information.

Buyer Beware

There are a few retail environments and instances in which you're more likely to come across counterfeit UL marks. Exercise extra caution when:

• Shopping at deep-discount stores. If you come across a product that looks OK but is missing crucial information like a product name, brand or certification marks, don't stop and think about it—walk away

• You're tempted to buy electrical products from flea markets, street vendors, or other "temporary" sources that don't accept product returns, and whose credibility can't be confirmed. Instead, stick with reputable retail establishments that allow returns and have a history of customer satisfaction

• A product's price seems too good to be true. If an electrical product is being sold for significantly less than seemingly comparable items, there's usually a reason—and that reason is often cheap materials and sub-par manufacturing. Spend a few extra dollars and be on the safe side

How Is UL Battling Counterfeits?

"In addition to training U.S. government agencies like the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE)," CableOrganizer adds, "Underwriters Laboratories has worked to battle counterfeit UL Marks by educating consumers and retailers on counterfeit products, providing law enforcement with real-time support, and publishing detailed anti-counterfeit reference materials. However, from the consumer standpoint, UL's most noticeable preventive measure is undoubtedly their recently developed Holographic Mark, which [was] put into full effect on newly manufactured products as of July 1, 2009. Intended for use on the products most likely to be counterfeited, the new holographic UL Mark features:

• A gold background that is quickly and easily identifiable to consumers, retailers, distributors, law enforcement, and customs officials

• Color-shifting ink

• Micro-printing, wavy lines, and a pattern of floating UL symbols (one of which is surrounded by a burst detail)

To learn more about UL Marks and to view examples, visit *www.ul.com/marks_labels/mark/index.html*. Visit

www.CableOrganizer.com for a selection of UL-approved electrical products.

Wolverine F2D Slide Scanner

Over the years, I have amassed about 3,000 color slides. I have been wanting to scan them into my computer but, up to now, had not seen a scanning product that would allow me to get the job done in a reasonable amount of time. One day I came across the Wolverine F2D 35mm Film to Digital Scanner while surfing the Internet. It seemed like the answer I was looking for. I read a number of reviews and found a wide variety of opinions. People seemed to love it or hate it, but the positives were greater than the negatives, so I decided to try it. I was not disappointed.

The unit is self-contained, though you can connect it to a computer USB port for power. However, no computer is required to use it. In fact, I am using it on an island in my kitchen. The unit comes with two film holders, one for slides and one for color or black-and-white negatives.

The unit saves the images to an SD card in JPEG format. Before saving the images, they can be mirrored or rotated if necessary. The package includes the unit, the two film holders, an AC adapter you can plug the USB connector into for power, a brush to clean the internal screen, a 1GB SD card, and a 19-page manual. The first thing I did was go to the Wolverine Web site (*wolverinedata.com/f2d*). I downloaded a PDF copy of the manual so these tired old eyes could better read it. I also downloaded the latest firmware update and installed it. I then stared my project.

I can scan 125 slides in about 30-35 minutes. The more images that need to be rotated before saving, the longer it takes. They advertise 5 MP images, but I found most of mine ran from 900Kb to just over 1MB.

There are a couple of things to watch out for. The most important is to make sure your slides (up to four) are

properly seated in the tray. If they are not, the tray will bind up in the scanner. I have had a couple of close calls on this one. Also, I have found that for no good reason the image on the screen of the unit will shift to black and white or have some goofy colors. I have found in most cases pressing the mirror button twice will fix the problem. If not, turning the power off and back on will do the trick for sure.

There is one other item the manual warns about. It is not to tip the unit backward to better view an image on the unit's screen. The reason is that the connector on the USB power cable plugs in near the bottom on the back of the unit. The connection is a small USB connector, like the one on your camera. Repeated tipping can place stress on the connector, causing it to fail. Pricing varies.

A Google search for Wolverine F2D brought a range of prices from $119 at the Wolverine site to $99.99 on the Costco site. I am quite satisfied with the product. If you take care in using it, you will be too.

⊕⊕⊕⊕

Review contributed by Joe Nuvolini

Linksys WVC54GCA Webcam Internet Home Monitoring Camera

The Linksys WVC54GCA Webcam (*www.linksysbycisco.com/US/en/products/WVC54GCA*) (about $100) has something pretty special going for it. It can send live video of what's going on at home, work or any other place to not only any computer on your local network, but to any Web browser in the world without the device having to be connected to a computer. That's because the device contains its own Web server and can connect directly either over Wireless-G (802.11g) or a 10/100 Ethernet cable.

You can mount the Linksys WVC54GCA on a wall or use the included stand to put on a desktop or table. Because the camera has a fixed focus, you can shoot through a window, for example, without having to worry about it focusing on the window pane. It also has a useful feature called Security Mode that sends video to up to three e-mail addresses any time it detects motion.

The video it shoots is captured in either MPEG-4 or Motion JPEG video compression at up to 640x480 resolution. Picture quality is pretty good—about what you'd expect from a device at this price point. Besides,

if it shot in high-def, you'd run out of hard drive space pretty fast.

Unfortunately, I wasn't too crazy about the included software. It was quite slow, and you have to select files one at a time to delete them. That's too bad because, if you're monitoring a busy area, the files can really start piling up. Hopefully that will be changed in an update, if it hasn't been done already. Also, the camera saves files in a SEF file format that can be viewed only by the included software. Being able to see them using something more universal like Windows Media Player, QuickTime or Classic Media Player would be great.

For the most part, I liked the Linksys WVC54GCA Webcam. Hopefully, some of the issues I and others have raised will be addressed soon.

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Review contributed by Paul DiMolia

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*.

ComputorQuick Reviews

"Computer Product Opinions from ComputorEdge Readers and Staff" by ComputorEdge Staff

A call is put out for Webcam recommendations, experiences and uses.

What Are Your Webcam Recommendations?

I own two Webcams. One is a Logitech camera plugged into my Vista desktop computer—which I discussed last year in "ComputorQuick Reviews". The other is the Webcam that's built into my laptop—which I reflected upon in "Edgeword" last year. While the Logitech is much more capable (autofocus, zoom, etc.), the fixed-focus camera in the laptop seems to work just as well for an Internet video call—at least on my end. The problem is that when you're trying to watch your grandkids, who are continually running around, the autofocus is constantly going in and out of focus.

I would like to know what Webcams other people are using, and how they are using them. Has anyone set up a Webcam in their home for monitoring over the Internet? I tried it with the Logitech via the computer and Windows Remote Desktop Connection, but the software would lock up the connection, requiring a reboot.

I think that we are only scratching the surface of what we will be doing with Webcams. Give us your thoughts by either clicking the "Tell us what you think About this article!" link at the top or bottom of this page, or e-mail us at ComputorQuick Reviews Submissions (*ceeditor@computoredge.com*). Your responses will appear here and in a future column.

Jack Dunning

We Want Your Opinions About Hardware, Software and Web Sites

Over the years, *ComputorEdge* has had great input from our readers. In particular, people have submitted short reviews of equipment, software and Web sites that they really like. In some cases readers have offered tips (such as avoiding flakes on Craigslist). ComputorQuick Reviews is our column dedicated to highlighting those things that you most like and want to recommend to others. The problem is that if this column doesn't appear, it becomes forgotten and less likely to receive input from you.

We have decided to include this feature in every issue as a reminder that this is your magazine—even if we don't have any new reader reviews. If you would like to see the type of reviews that we have run in the past, then check out ComputorQuick Reviews (*webserver.computoredge.com/sitemap.mvc?feature=Columns&columnedcode=persrev&column=ComputorQuick%20Reviews*) in the *ComputorEdge*

Site Map. You will find that they are quite varied. We would like to see more. Consider this column a gentle prod saying that we would like to hear from you.

You can send us an e-mail at ComputorQuick Reviews Submissions (*ceeditor@computoredge.com*).

The purpose of this column is to give our readers an opportunity to express their opinions about products and services that they have found particularly useful. If you have had experience with hardware, software or a Web site that made you say, "This is really great! I want to tell everyone about it," then this is a good place to do it. While we do want to post warnings, we are not interested in slamming the obscure bad products, because there are too many of them. We would like to hear about those things that you would recommend to your best friend. The only caution is to please use proper capitalization (do not use all caps) and complete sentences. If it takes us too long to edit the piece, it may be a long time before it's published on this site.

*Please send your personal reviews to ComputorQuick Reviews Submissions (*ceeditor@computoredge.com*).*

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*.

EdgeWord: Betting on Android

"Is there an alternative to Android for cell phone makers?" by Jack Dunning

> Moving to the free Android system is a natural alternative for the cell phone builders who want to compete with Apple's iPhone.

Motorola is betting heavily on the Linux-based Google Android OS to help its ailing cell phone business. On September 10, the company is scheduled to introduce new Android-based cell phones. Expectations are not high, but that may work to Motorola's advantage—maybe not. It's hard to know if Motorola's future in cell phones depends upon this new introduction.

But it doesn't matter if Motorola is successful. Other Android-based cell phones are on the way—including models from Samsung, Sony Ericsson and others. (The Android based MyTouch 3G by HTC is already available from T-Mobile.) It seems that most manufacturers are planning some form of new cell phone running Android—even computer builder Dell. (For the latest developments in Android phones, see Androphones.com (*www.androphones.com/*).) Naturally, this is all an effort to compete in the impressive smartphone business virtually created by Apple.

Apple's iPhone appears to have an insurmountable lead in the smartphone arena. Apple rapidly built the market through its innovation and creativity. (This is the history of Apple.) The iPhone apps (more than 1.5 billion downloaded) are a huge source of revenue to Apple. Yet, there are certain factors that may make it next to impossible for Apple to maintain its dominance.

First, as pointed out in the July 17 Edgeword, Apple is primarily a hardware company. It makes its money by designing leading-edge products and demanding a premium price for them. They will not sacrifice either quality or margin for market penetration. It usually gets its market by being first in and establishing a loyal base of customers. Historically, Apple has maintained profitability by catering to its base—who is willing to pay a little more for Apple products. It has been an excellent strategy for the company, but it leaves openings for the competition—especially in the price point.

Where most analysts miss the boat is in thinking that Apple is competing with Microsoft or Google. Fundamentally, this is not the case. As a hardware company, Apple is competing with other hardware manufacturers. In computers, that would include manufacturers such as HP and Dell. In cell phones, it includes Nokia, Samsung, LG, Sony Ericsson and a multitude of others. These competitors are looking at Google's Android operating system, not because it's better than the Apple iPhone OS, but because it's free and available. If they were allowed to build iPhone-compatible hardware, they would.

A major variable that exists in the cell phone market, but not computers, is the cell service provider— companies such as Verizon, T-Mobile, Sprint, AT&T, etc. They are the outlet for marketing the cellular hardware. Traditionally, the cell phone service providers subsidize the hardware through offering low-cost (or no-cost phones) in order to get two-year contracts. They are looking for the same packaging in the smartphone business. They don't care whether they sell an iPhone, or any other brand, as long as they get the service contract. This will give an edge to Apple's competition. Manufacturers using the free Android system will be able produce less expensive phones, thereby helping cell service providers offer a low-cost or free phone to consumers.

The fact that cheaper smartphones will start flooding in over the next couple of years may not cut into Apple's current iPhone base as much as it will impact the yet-unfulfilled potential in the smartphone market. Apple will continue to dominate the high end of the market. Its users tend to be intensely loyal. Yet, the culture of Apple and the policies that come from that mindset will prevent it from holding its current lead in the overall smartphone business. The first hindrance to Apple is its historic aversion to licensing operating system software, which would allow other manufacturers to build Apple-compatible products. This has been true with the Mac and continues with the iPhone.

Apple could generate significant revenues by licensing the iPhone OS and thereby earn even more through the downloads of iPhone apps. But that would mean allowing the competition to build iPhones. That is a non-starter for Apple, since hardware is its primary business. This also forces the other manufacturers to pursue other means for competing. Moving to the free Android system is a natural alternative for the cell phone builders.

The second factor (more correctly, decision) that has constrained the future of the iPhone was the exclusivity given to AT&T for iPhone service. (It is rumored that Apple is only now starting to loosen this bottleneck with a deal in the works for Verizon.) There is no cell service provider who will quietly sit by while being locked out of a market. During this AT&T-exclusive period, Apple lost the opportunity to build a wider market.

Ultimately, it looks like Microsoft is the one that will be left out in the cold. As a software company, Microsoft makes its money by selling operating system software and peripheral packages such as Office. The fact that Google's Android is free kills Windows Mobile. It's difficult to see why cell phone manufacturers (and app developers) would want to invest in a product that owns about 10 percent of the market and charges a licensing fee. (Apple was never a threat to Microsoft because it had no intention of licensing its OS to other companies.) Who's going to bet on Windows Mobile OS?

One of the complaints about Android is that the implementations seem lame compared to the iPhone. No doubt there are many problems associated with any product being rushed to market. Over time, the Android phones will get better.

It's hard to see why cell phone makers would stop pursuing Android. Cell phone manufacturers are now building Android phones to hedge their bets against the future. If something is going to work in the future, they want to be there. Android may just be a hedge that pays tremendous dividends for the cell phone companies.

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

"Computer Cases," "More Laptops Tips," "Free Fax Online," "Try CCleaner"

Computer Cases

[This letter is in regard to Wally Wang's August 14 article, "Must-Have Laptop Accessories."]

Enjoyed Wally's article on dragging your laptop on the road! I have experienced a lot of travel worldwide with my laptop. The worst problem I found is with those wheel-about bags. They insist on falling over every time you let go of the handle!

Some years ago at a trade show, I came across a four-wheeled bag that didn't fall over, and you could even sit on it! What's more, it still would fit in an overhead locker on a plane. I have had two over the years, and they put up with a lot of abuse. They are made by a company called Tutto (*www.healthyluggage.com/ deofonwh.html*).

Suggest you take a look.

P.S. I don't work for the company!

-Bruce Allen, Ramona CA

More Laptops Tips

[In response to Digital Dave's August 14 column, where Dave wrote "Digital Dave's Quick and Dirty Guide for Buying a Laptop Computer"]:

Additional notes: When away from home, only Web-based e-mail will work. You can receive your regular e-mail, but you can't send. Make sure that your e-mail client leaves your e-mail messages on the server so you can retrieve them when you return home!

I also found that the MS wireless mouse is much easier to use than the touchpad. Wi-Fi works where available, but I would sign up for G3 service, which works almost anywhere cell phones work.

-Walter, San Diego CA

Free Fax Online

[Regarding Jack Dunning's August 7 article, "Free Faxing From Your Computer"]:

GotFreeFax.com is another Web site that allows users to send free faxes online to the U.S. and Canada. Users can either upload a PDF/Word file or enter text to fax. Plus, it does not add advertisements to a user's

fax, which makes it more suitable for faxing formal documents.

-James

Try CCleaner

[Regarding the July 24 ComputorQuick Reviews column, where a call was put out for good Registry cleaners:]

I have been using CCleaner for about a year for Registry cleanup. I always backup the cleanup, but have never had to restore the backup. I have never had a problem with this program. It seems to work very well at cleaning up garbage in the Registry without causing problems.

-Grady Johnson, San Diego, CA

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.*