

ComputerEdge™ Online — 12/11/09



This issue: Making Your Calendar for the New Year

Make a fresh start in the New Year with calendaring software that can help you keep track of appointments, schedules and more.

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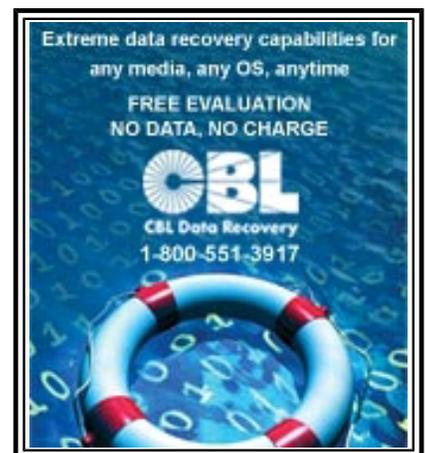
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Digital Dave

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

A reader is looking for a program that will organize and find duplicate MP3 files; a reader seeks a big, portable HDD that does not install backup or other software; what constitutes a Web site that you shouldn't visit?

Dear Digital Dave,

This has probably been asked before. I am looking for a program that will organize and find duplicate MP3 files. I have a rather large collection. Some of the programs I found with a Google search were OK, but did not do exactly what was needed. Any help would be appreciated.

*John Call
San Diego*

Dear John,

This is the type of thing that libraries are designed to do. A library is a way to collect files from various sources into one viewing window. It does not actually move any of the programs into a new folder, but rather finds and catalogs the files that are in the added folders—whether they are local or remote. If you set the view to Song at the top level of a music library, then all of the songs in the entire library should appear in alphabetical order on your screen. Skimming the list will quickly show you where your duplicates reside. If you add the file path to the categories displayed in the list, then you will quickly see where each song is located.

However, in most libraries duplicates are not automatically compared and displayed, which appears to be your desire. There are programs that offer this feature, but I don't know them well enough to make a recommendation. Perhaps someone else will have a recommendation.

It's always dangerous to start deleting duplicates in libraries. The problem with deleting duplicates is that the library is merely a pointer to the physical location of a song. Deleting what appears to be a duplicate (one on your computer and one on another computer or network drive) could conceivably remove that song from the network drive and another music library on another computer. If you're concerned about not removing the wrong copy of a song, you will want to take care.

Windows Media Player is a music library program, although not particular intuitive. It will automatically find all music that is connected to your computer as long as your computer has access.

If you have Windows 7, then you can create your own music library (as well as other types of libraries) with the Windows 7 Libraries. You can access all folders from anywhere. The sorts are easy to do and can be quickly configured.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I'm thinking about one of those big, portable hard drives from WD or Seagate for a backup solution. But I am wary of the software that comes preinstalled on them. For small stuff I used a SanDisk flash drive, but the software it installed on my computer was nothing but trouble. I now use and prefer a flash drive that just looks like a dumb drive. No problem.

I want a big, portable HDD that does not install backup or other software on my computers, but just looks like another drive. Is such a thing available? Can the Seagate or WD Passport be used that way?

Thanks

*Dave H.
Carlsbad*

Dear Dave,

There is a very simple solution for dealing with the software that comes with an external drive—whether a hard or flash drive. To make sure that it's clean of extraneous software, reformat it. In Windows, just right-click on the drive in Windows Explorer (Microsoft Flag key plus E) and select "Format..." That will remove all that extra junk.

In the case of a Windows computer, you may want to reformat the drive as NTFS. Most external drives come in the FAT32 format for compatibility with the various types of computers. However, there are certain features of Windows, such as Backup and Restore Center, which require that an external drive be in the NTFS format to work properly. The reformatting of the drive as NTFS will both maximize your Microsoft compatibility and wipe off the needless programs. (Don't do this if you plan to move the drive to a device that won't read NTFS, such as a Mac. In that case, just reformat as FAT32 to remove the junk.)

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I'm very interested in this point from your reply to a letter about your Security Essentials review, regarding safe practices to avoid malware problems.

"People either install something they shouldn't or they go to the wrong Web site."

OK, the first part of that is quite clear—it's a very basic concept not to install anything that is not from a trusted source. But could you clarify what you mean by the second part? Visiting a Web site should not be akin to installing software. If it is, I would like to ask for clarification—presumably it's that Web sites can use scripting or something like that to exploit vulnerabilities in Web browsers. But you seem to imply that it's possible to make a judgment about that by a hyperlink or a URL.

What constitutes a Web site that you shouldn't visit? I hope you can't be saying that you should only ever visit Web sites from large companies. How do you know what is on a Web site before you visit it? What exactly are your guidelines?

*Andrew MacDonald
San Diego, CA*

Dear Andrew,

You are absolutely right to ask for clarification. While the vast majority of Web sites are safe to visit, there are some that are out to get you. Fortunately, browsers are designed in such a way that unless you inadvertently do the wrong thing (clicking the wrong link or downloading an unknown file), you are generally going to be alright. Another plus is that the search engine is involved in helping to identify sites that you should avoid.

If you use Google, a Web site known to have problems is marked with "This site may harm your computer," as shown in Figure 1. If you click on the link anyway, then you will get an additional warning page with options.



Figure 1. Google warns about known problem sites.

The same site in Chrome after a Yahoo search generated the warning shown in Figure 2.

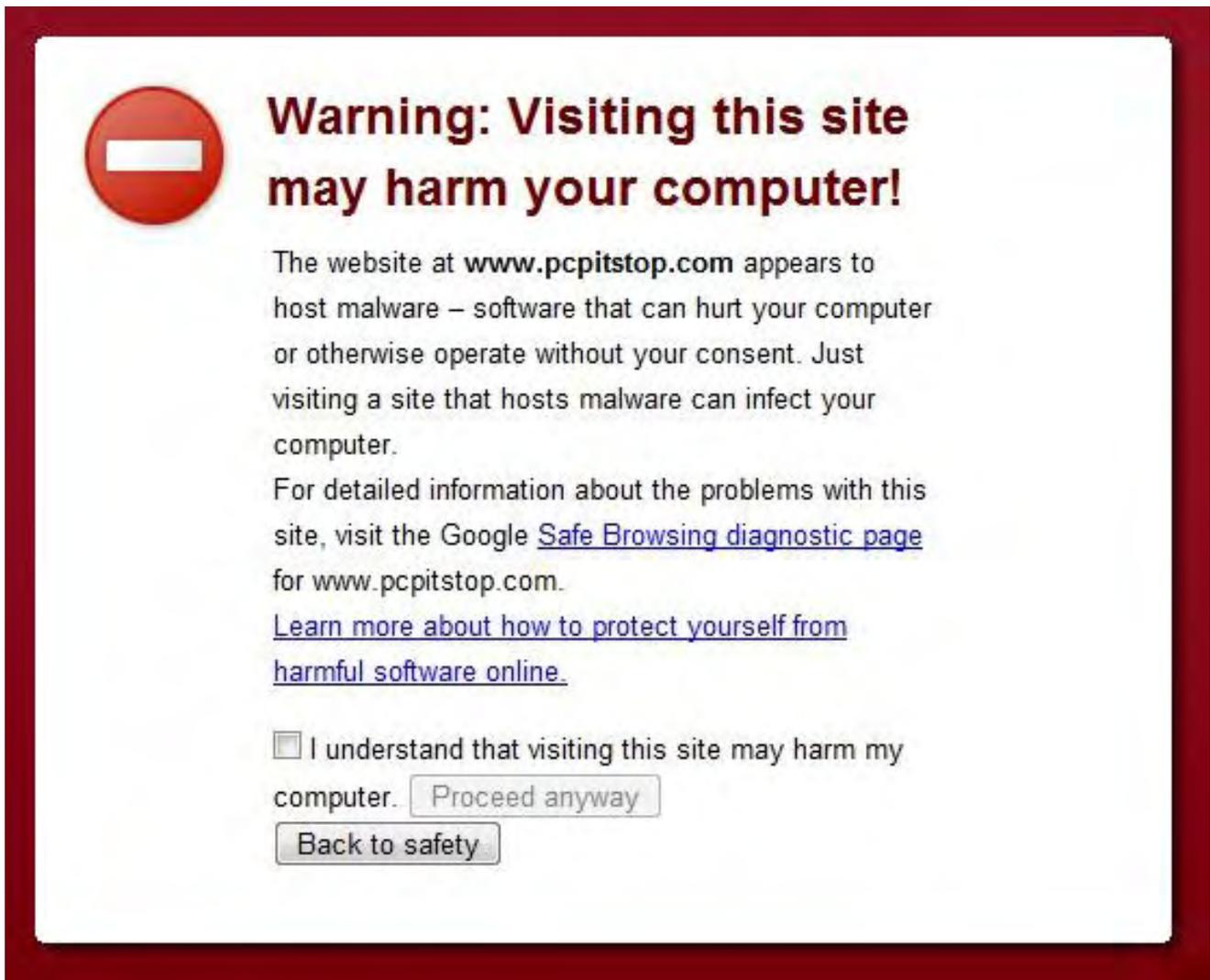


Figure 2. The Chrome warning page about a Web site.

My tests of Internet Explorer and Firefox browsers did not yield any warnings, nor did the Yahoo or Bing search engines. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with the site, or it's just not on the other search engines' lists. I suspect that Google probably does a little better job of identifying dangerous sites—and by extension, the Google Chrome browser feeds off the same database.

Many anti-malware programs claim to block bad Web sites, but I suspect that they have trouble keeping up with this monumental task. Ultimately, you will need to depend mostly upon your own good judgment.

Shady portions of the Internet often will attempt to infect your PC. These are typically sites that offer pirated media. Also, you should make sure you trust the creator before using a bit torrent, as this is another popular vector for malware. It's not really very hard to tell whether a site is legit or not in this respect. If it offers an illegal product, it's probably not a good idea to go there.

You should be able to initially visit virtually any site as long as you don't click anything. This is the point at which you will need to make your judgment.

- If the site prompts you to download something, even Flash or Adobe reader, don't do it unless you know it to be a reputable site. It's better to be safe and go directly to the Adobe site to get these add-ons.
- Be wary of offers to scan your computer for viruses or to increase your computer speed. These are ploys that are used to place malware on your computer.
- Avoid downloading drivers or programs from anyone other than a well-established download site, such as CNET's Download.com (*download.com*) or the manufacturer.
- If a Web site gives you the willies for any reason, go elsewhere. There are plenty of other places on the Web that won't mess with you.
- The number-one action is non-action. Never let anything be downloaded to your computer unless you absolutely know what it is.
- If there are too many pop-ups, you should leave just as a matter of practice—too annoying.

One last step is to check out Web site ownership with a Whois search (www.networksolutions.com/whois/). You will be able to see if the ownership matches up with the site's address name. Some malevolent Web sites will sign up for an unused extension such as ".org" or ".us," thus appearing to look like the real thing.

Digital Dave

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Windows Live Calendar

“Keep your life organized and running smoothly.” by Pete Choppin

Windows Live Calendar is designed to make it easier to share your appointments, travel plans, schedule, and basically your life with friends and family.



I've never really given the electronic calendar all that much attention in the past. Perhaps this is due to my lack of organizational skills, or maybe I simply have never seen a very good practical application where it might be used. OK, I admit it. It is my poor organizational skills.

It wasn't until I began using a smartphone equipped with a calendar—all my contacts, e-mail, and of course a phone all in one device—that I came to the realization that I am indeed a PDA addict. Now I cannot live without it. Everything from my doctor appointments to my wife's birthday are all stored on that little device, and if I lost it, well—let's just say I would have to revert back to my prior nonexistent organizational skills, i.e., my life would become a disaster.

Fortunately there is another alternative: Windows Live Calendar (calendar.live.com). Windows Live Calendar is designed to make it easier to share your appointments, travel plans, schedule, and basically your life with friends and family.



One caveat before you start to get too excited. Be sure to download and install the Windows Live Essentials (download.live.com) to take full advantage of using Windows Live Calendar. This will allow the synchronization and update functions to work. Also, it will allow Microsoft Office applications to work in conjunction with Windows



Marvin realizes that it's time to change the password on his calendar software.

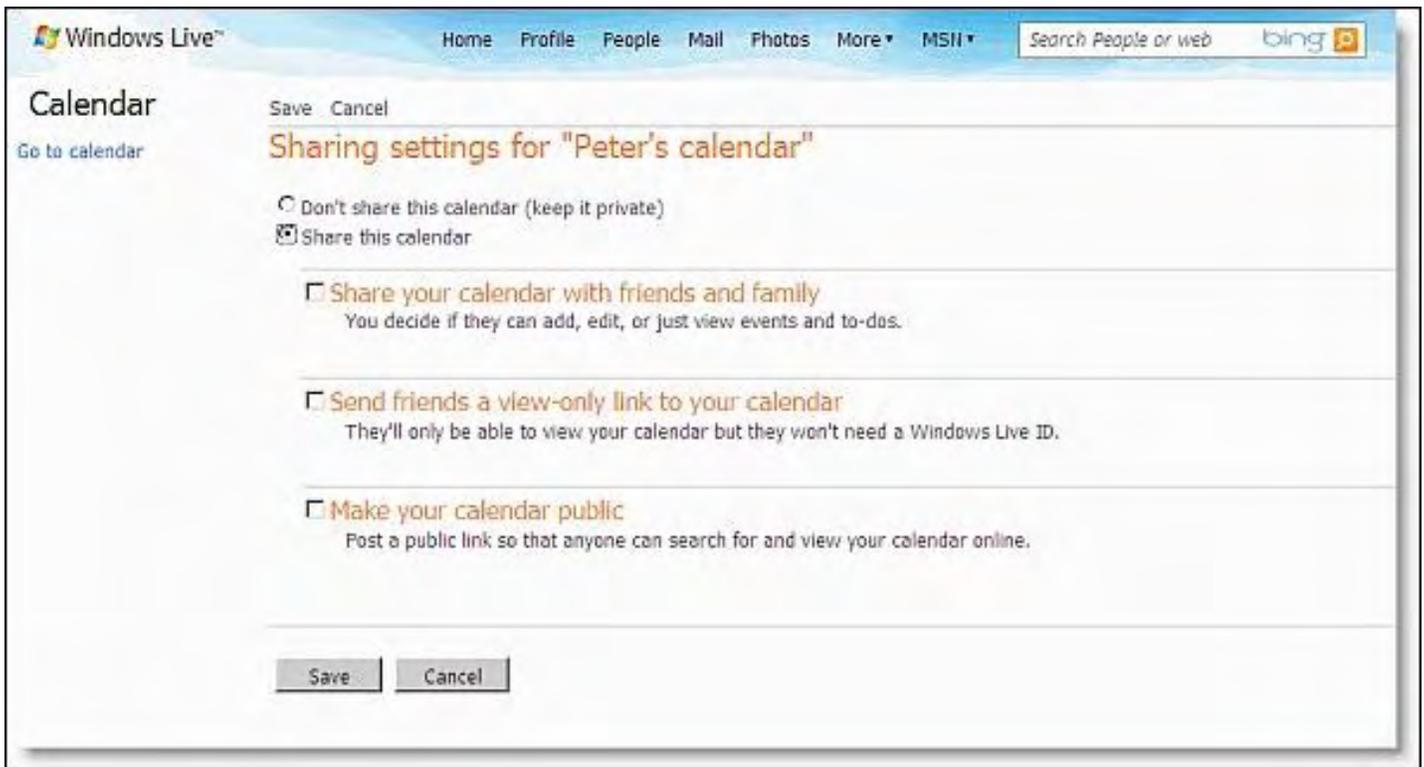
Live.

If you've ever used something like Google Calendar, you have some idea of the advantage of using a tool that is accessible from anywhere you have Internet access. Now let's take it one step farther and have the ability to synchronize multiple calendars and then share these with friends and family. Get the idea? And it doesn't stop there.

Using Windows Live Calendar, you can share your calendar with people in your Windows Live

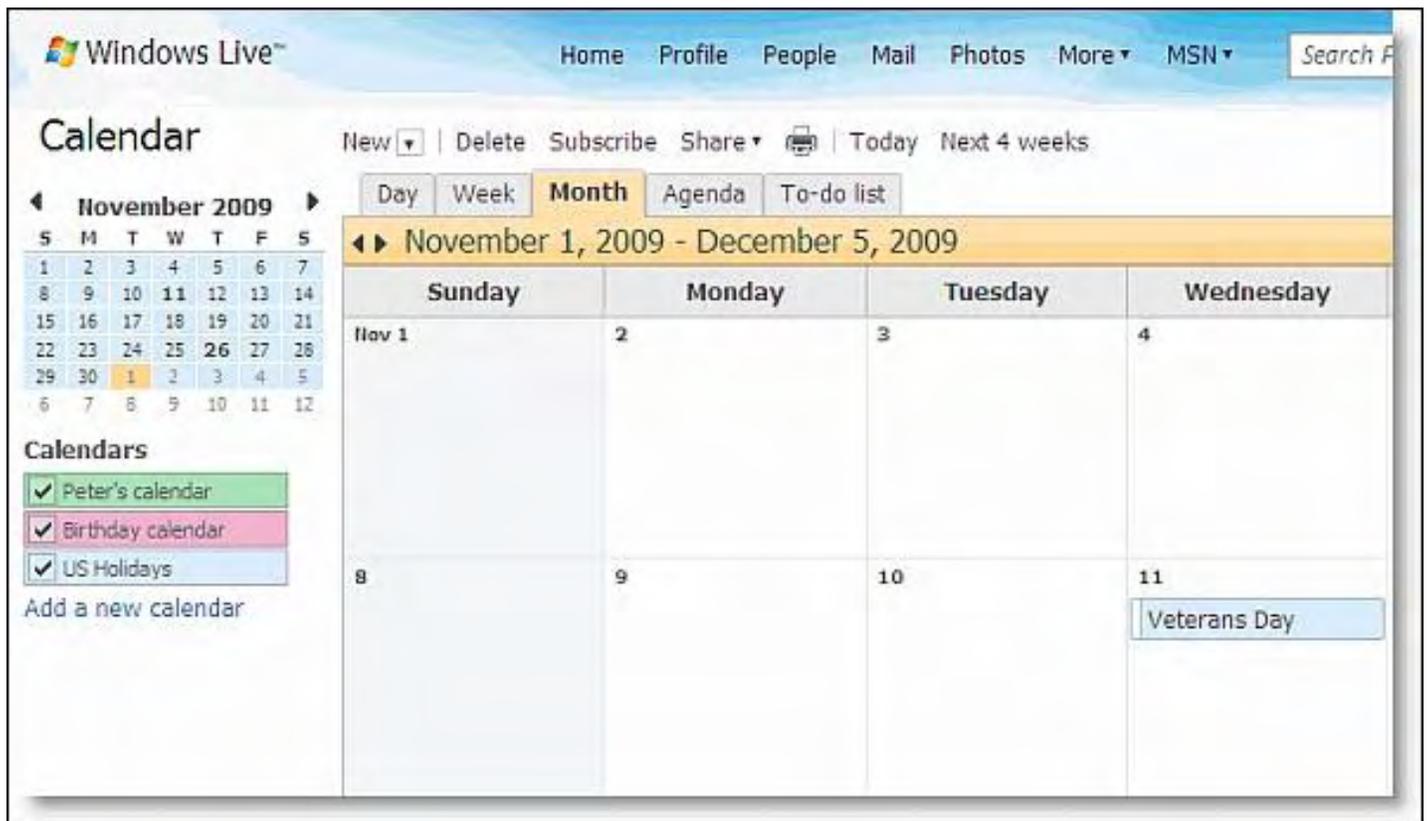
Contacts. For those using Windows Live Calendar, they can accept an invite to view your shared calendar, which will then appear in their account when they log in to Windows Live Calendar. For friends who don't have Windows Live IDs, you can send them a secret link to view your calendar without the need to sign in.

Here is the screen to set up calendar sharing:



Just select the option that most applies to what you intend to do, and you are provided with three ways to share the calendar: HTML (Web based), ICS (application importing) and RSS (view in a feed reader). It's that simple.

Keeping track of schedules is no easy task for me. I prefer to spend more time living life than organizing life with an overly complicated tool. Here are some of the features of Windows Live Calendar that make this task so much easier for me.



Making Plans with Ease

Using a technology called AJAX (www.wisegeek.com/what-is-ajax.htm), it is easy to see calendar events and view days and times more quickly. Here are some enhancements AJAX technology adds to Windows Live Calendar

- In a rush? Simply click a time anywhere in the week and add an event.
- Forgot where your next class is? Mouse over an event to get more details.
- A doctor's appointment got moved? Drag and drop it to the right day.

There are also some nice features to help you scan through your schedule easily. Navigating from month to month has never been quicker—use your mouse wheel to scroll through until you find the right week.

Stay Coordinated with Friends and Family

It is hard enough to figure out my own schedule, let alone keep track of others. The sharing features make this a whole lot easier. Share your calendar as you want with free/busy, read-only, or read/write permissions. You can also make your calendar public, so if you're involved in a business or an organization that is keen on promoting events, you can make it easy for people to find out what's going on.

Web developers will also find embedding their calendar in a Web page is no problem. Just click on Share and choose the calendar you want. From the Sharing Settings screen, make the calendar public and then get the HTML link. You will be provided the HTML code to add to a Web page to embed the calendar.

Save Cancel

Sharing settings for "Peter's calendar"

Don't share this calendar (keep it private)

Share this calendar

Share your calendar with friends and family
You decide if they can add, edit, or just view events and to-dos.

Send friends a view-only link to your calendar
They'll only be able to view your calendar but they won't need a Windows Live ID.

Make your calendar public
Post a public link so that anyone can search for and view your calendar online.

Permission:

Time zone:

If you want people to see all the details of your calendar, use these links.

[HTML: Preview in a web browser](#)

[ICS: Import into another calendar application](#)

 [RSS: View in a feed reader](#)

Reminders

If you're like me, you forget appointments and events all the time. Windows Live Calendar sends reminders through e-mail, Windows Live Messenger, or it can send a text message to a mobile device. Now I don't have any more excuses.

Because Windows Live Calendar supports the iCal standard (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ICalendar), you can add any ICS-based calendar you find on the Internet so you don't miss out on your favorite sports games, movie openings or upcoming holidays. Check out the holiday calendar list (www.windowslive-hotmail.com/calendar/default.aspx?locale=en-US&page=importcalendar) or go to the iCalShare Web site (icalshare.com/).

Synchronize with Outlook

To really take advantage of this feature, you will want to download and install the Microsoft Office Outlook Connector (office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook/HA102225181033.aspx). This will allow you to view and synchronize your Windows Live Calendar with Outlook.

A Global App

This is truly a global calendar. You can easily travel the world with Windows Live Calendar. It's offered in the United

States, United Kingdom, Japan, China, India, France, Germany, Spain and Russia, with many more to come. Events can be created in different time zones from your day-to-day time zone. You can even float your events, so no matter where you are in the world you can stay on time.

Windows Live Calendar is so much more than a simple online calendar. With so many ways to keep in touch, share, and organize with friends and family, no matter where they are, this really helps with keeping up with events. Now I don't need to miss appointments, birthdays, or any other events, even when they occur on someone else's schedule.

Pete Choppin has worked in the computer and IT industry for 13 years. He currently works as a network and systems administrator for a company called Albion based in Clearfield, Utah. His interests include cooking, sci-fi, computers and technology, and web design—a semi-professional endeavor, having designed Web sites in the dental field, e-commerce businesses, and for the Boy Scouts of America. Pete also contributes regularly to Ptolemy's Tribute (*ptolemystribute.blogspot.com*)—a blog which covers political and technical topics and issues. Pete has been a devout reader of *ComputerEdge* since 1990. He has contributed to articles and responded to topics on *ComputerEdge*. He can be contacted at *pchoppin@comcast.net*

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Calendars for Your Web Site

“Add a calendar to your Web presence.” by Michael J. Ross

There are countless uses for calendaring functionality on your personal or professional Web site, but you don't have to program it yourself—some excellent free alternatives exist.

There are many reasons why you may want to include a calendar on your personal or organization's Web site. In the case of a personal site, you could have a private page displaying a calendar reflecting your own or your family's schedule, including upcoming vacations. In the case of a Web site for a corporation or nonprofit organization, there are countless uses for calendaring functionality, such as project planning and reporting.

To make all this possible, you do not have to create any calendaring software yourself, nor find the time to learn how, because there are numerous calendar programs already available—some of which are outstanding, and many of which are free of charge. In this article, we will examine two of the most useful solutions on the market, and explain where you can download and use them. In addition, we will look at some screenshots, to give you an idea of how they could appear on your own site.

Before you begin the process of obtaining, installing and configuring any given calendar program, you need to take into account the underlying architecture that your Web site is built upon. There are two major alternatives: Either your site was built—by you or by someone else—using a content management system (CMS), or it was built from scratch utilizing a Web scripting language such as PHP or ASP, or static HTML, with no scripting utilized.

Content and Calendars

Most Internet users may be unfamiliar with content management systems, even though these folks may frequently visit Web sites that were constructed using a CMS. To put it simply, think of a CMS as a framework that allows a Web developer to create a site for you more efficiently than if it were done by hand. According to The CMS Matrix (www.cmsmatrix.org), there are at least 1,083 CMSs that your developer may have used to create your site. Because of this huge number of possibilities, and the space limitations of an article such as this, we can focus only upon a calendar solution for just one of the more popular CMSs—in this case, the one favored by many professional Web developers, Drupal (drupal.org).

Assuming that your Drupal-based site is up and running, and either you or your developer knows how to enhance its functionality through the use of third-party modules (referred to as "contributed modules"), then there are at least two available modules that you can leverage for adding a calendar to your site. The Event module (drupal.org/project/event) is a capable tool, but in this article we will instead examine the aptly named Calendar module (www.drupal.org/project/calendar), partly because it is probably the first option that experienced developers turn to when they want to add calendaring capabilities to a Drupal-based site.

Install and enable this and all other modules mentioned here, just as you would for any other Drupal contributed module: Download the latest stable version from the Drupal.org modules area (drupal.org/project/Modules); unzip the installation file (it will have the extension ".tar.gz"); save the module in the sites/all/modules directory; enable the module at Administer/Site building/Modules (admin/build/modules); and configure the given module as specified in the installation instructions.

After the Date module has been installed in the appropriate directory, you will find it listed in the "Date/Time" section of admin/build/modules. Our solution requires a number of other modules before it can be implemented: Views (drupal.org).

[org/project/views](http://drupal.org/project/views)) and Date (drupal.org/project/date), as well as Date API and Date Timezone, which are both part of Date. When all five modules are enabled, the Date/Time section of your admin/build/modules should look like the screenshot below.

Date/Time			
Enabled	Name	Version	Description
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Calendar	6.x-2.2	Views plugin to display views containing dates as Calendars. Depends on: Views (enabled), Date API (enabled), Date Timezone (enabled) Required by: Calendar iCal (disabled), Calendar Popup (disabled)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Calendar iCal	6.x-2.2	Adds ical functionality to Calendar views. Depends on: Views (enabled), Date API (enabled), Calendar (enabled)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Calendar Popup	6.x-2.2	Replaces the links to calendar items with a javascript popup to view the calendar. Depends on: Calendar (enabled), Views (enabled), Date API (enabled)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Date	6.x-2.3	Defines CCK date/time fields and widgets. Depends on: Content (enabled), Date API (enabled), Date Timezone (enabled) Required by: Date Tools (disabled)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Date API	6.x-2.3	A Date API that can be used by other modules. Required by: Calendar (enabled), Calendar iCal (disabled), Date Popup (disabled), Date Repeat API (disabled), Date Timezone (disabled)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Date Locale	6.x-2.3	Allows the site admin to configure multiple formats for date/time. Depends on: Date API (enabled), Locale (disabled)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Date PHP4	6.x-2.3	Emulate PHP 5.2 date functions in PHP 4.x, PHP 5.0, and PHP 5.1. Depends on: Date API (enabled)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Date Popup	6.x-2.3	Enables jquery popup calendars and time entry widgets for sites. Depends on: Date API (enabled), Date Timezone (enabled)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Date Repeat API	6.x-2.3	A Date Repeat API to calculate repeating dates and times from a date. Depends on: Date API (enabled)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Date Timezone	6.x-2.3	Needed when using Date API. Overrides site and user timezone. Depends on: Date API (enabled) Required by: Calendar (enabled), Date (enabled), Date Popup (disabled), Calendar Popup (disabled)

Figure 1. Drupal date modules enabled.

Three other needed modules are CCK (drupal.org/project/cck), Views (drupal.org/project/views), and Views UI (part of Views).

Go to Administer/Site configuration/Date and time (admin/settings/date-time), and set the time zone to the appropriate option. Then go to Administer/Content management/Content types (admin/content/types), and create a new content type for events. In our example, we will name it "Calendar event," of type "event." Under "Workflow settings," it is best to disable automatic promotion to your site's front page.

Calendar event Edit Manage fields Display fields

Identification

Name: *

 The human-readable name of this content type. This text will be displayed capital letter and contain only letters, numbers, and spaces. This name must be unique.

Type: *

 The machine-readable name of this content type. This text will be used for contain only lowercase letters, numbers, and underscores. Underscores will must be unique.

Figure 2. Drupal calendar event content type.

Then add a new field to this new content type. We will name ours "Event date and time," with the field name suffix set to "event_datetime" and the data type set to Datetime. If the form element is set to "Text Field with custom input format," then users will have to format the input dates perfectly; thus, it is best to use "Select List," the default, so they can choose a date using drop-down listboxes.

Calendar event Edit Manage fields Display fields

Add fields and groups to the content type, and arrange them on content display and input forms.
 Note: Installing the [Advanced help](#) module will let you access more and better help.

Label	Name	Type	Operations
+ Title	Node module form.		
+ Menu settings	Menu module form.		
+ Body	Node module form.		
+ Revision information	Node module form.		
+ Comment settings	Comment module form.		

Add

+ **New field**

Label Field name (a-z, 0-9, _) Type of data to store. Form element to edit the data.

Figure 3. Drupal event datetime field.

The field settings on the subsequent page can for most purposes be left at their default values, except under "Global settings," make the field required. For events spanning multiple days, change the "To Date" to Optional or Required.

Now you are ready to create a test event, at Create content/Calendar event (node/add/event).



Figure 4. Drupal test event.

This last phase can be the trickiest, and the most likely place where you might go astray. Go to Administer/Site building/Views (admin/build/views). Enable "Default Node view: calendar (Calendar)" and clone it. Feel free to change the default values as needed. Clicking the Next button will take you to the View Edit screen (admin/build/views/edit/calendar). In the Arguments panel, click on "Date: Date (node)". Under "Date field(s)" near the bottom of the page, uncheck "Node: Updated date," check "Content: Event date and time (field_event_datetime)" and click the Update button. The purpose of all this is to set the calendar to use the start time of your event.

In the Fields panel, add a new field of type "Content: Event date and time (field_event_datetime)." In the configuration panel that appears next, stick with the default values, except set Label to None. Edit the "Node: Updated date" field, and set the label to "Exclude from display." In the Filters panel, add a new filter of type Node: Type. On the configuration screen that next appears, leave the operator as "is one of," but change the node type to "Calendar event." In the Sort criteria panel, add a new criterion of type "Content: Event date and time (field_event_datetime)."

At this point you are ready to begin adding events to your calendar. Go to Create content/Calendar event (node/add/event), and define a couple test events. To confirm that your newly created calendar view works, go to the calendar page on your site (?q=calendar).



Figure 5. Drupal calendar.

We see that the day listed, the 8th, has a blue background, and the event days—both the single-day event on the 17th, and the three-day event the next week—are colored yellow. Admittedly, this first cut at a calendar is not fancy, but further styling of the page can be done without much difficulty. To learn more about the capabilities of the Calendar module, check its page, which has links to some tutorials. Also, there is an excellent DrupalTherapy screencast (www.drupaltherapy.com/node/76) demonstrating how to use the Date and Calendar modules.

Calendars by Hand

If your Web site is not powered by a CMS such as Drupal, but instead is displaying static HTML pages or dynamic ones generated by scripts that pull their content from static files or values in a database, you still can have attractive calendars on your Web site. There are several calendar software packages available—some free, some paid, and some offering a combination of both options. An example of the latter is localendar (www.localendar.com), which provides both free and premium plans. Under the free plan, you get personal and group calendars, with search functionality, event announcements, guest calendars, custom styling, embedded weather, and integrated RSS news feeds. The premium plan adds import/export capabilities, no ads, calendar merging, custom sharing, task editing, a printable view, and a discussion forum.

We will try the free plan, to create a calendar similar to the Drupal one we did above. After you obtain a free account, login to the workspace, where you will start with an empty calendar for the current month.



Figure 6. localendar start.

Click on the "Add Event" button in the left-hand control panel.

The screenshot shows the 'Add Event' form on localendar.com. The form is titled 'Add Event' and has a 'Save' button, a 'Save and Add Another' button, and a 'Preview' button at the top. The form fields include:

- Title:** A text input field.
- Description:** A rich text editor with various formatting options.
- Background Color:** A color palette with a 'Select' button and a 'or custom color #' input field.
- Location:** A text input field labeled '(Street Address)'.
- Date:** A date picker showing 'September 8, 2009'.
- Time:** A time picker showing '10:00 PM' and a duration picker showing '1 hour 00 minutes'.
- Sharing:** A dropdown menu set to 'Private' and a checkbox for 'Publish as Local Event in zip code 10023'.
- Category:** A dropdown menu set to 'General'.
- Additional Options:** Three checkboxes: 'Add an image to this event', 'This event repeats', and 'Set a reminder'.

At the bottom of the form, there are 'Save', 'Save and Add Another', and 'Preview' buttons. The footer of the page contains the text: 'Share your public events! Send friends to: <http://www.localendar.com/public/0benenson>. What's New | About localendar.com | FAQ | Co-branding | Legal | Privacy Policy | Contact Us. ©2009 localendar.com, Inc. All Rights Reserved Worldwide.'

Figure 7. localendar add event.

The user interface is quite straightforward, and allows you to set the title, a longer description, a background color (from a palette, or a custom hexadecimal RGB value), the event date and start time, the duration of the event, whether it is private or public, a ZIP code, a category, an image that you can upload, and event repetition (with plenty of control over the settings). You can even request to receive an e-mail message and/or pager message, to remind you of the event, anywhere from five minutes to two weeks before it takes place.

Remarkably, despite all of these options, there did not appear to be a way to perform a rather simple task—namely, starting a multi-day event at a certain time on the first day, and having the event end at a different time on the last day, without messing up all the start and end times. The system insisted that those start and end times be reflected every single day that the event is scheduled (demonstrated in the screenshot below).



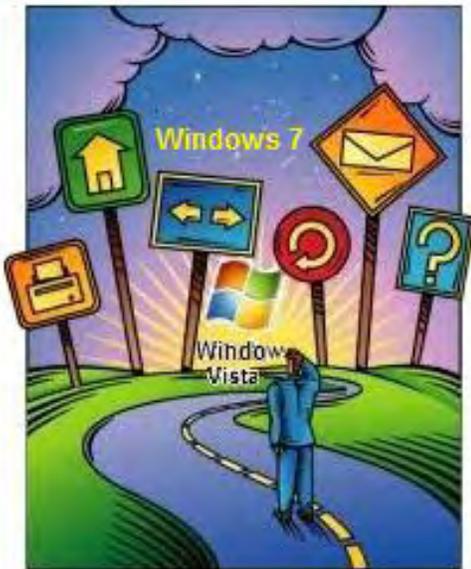
Figure 8. localendar finished.

Because localendar hosts the calendars on their own servers, they allow you to link from your site to any calendar that you have created on theirs. That poses the problem of how to present your calendar within a page on your own site. Presumably you could place it in an HTML iframe tag (we won't go into the details of that here) or, if the calendar does not need to be updated dynamically and is instead fixed, then you could put the HTML rendered by localendar in a page on your own site.

The two calendar solutions outlined above only scratch the surface of the options available to you, as a Web site owner. Regardless of how your site has been built—or how you would like your future site to be built—there is always a way to add a calendar to your Web presence.

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

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Windows Tips and Tricks

Windows Tips and Tricks

“Using the Windows On-Screen Keyboard” by Jack Dunning

Windows has a tool called On-Screen Keyboard, which makes it easier to find and insert the various characters of the Wingdings font.

A few weeks ago I talked about how to access special ASCII characters by using the ALT key and inputting the appropriate code (say the British pound sign—£). That's great if you want to be limited to the special characters offered by the ASCII table, but what if you want to be a little more creative?

The first step is to find a new set of characters. Windows has a few possibilities in the form of fonts. Every Windows computer comes with a set of fonts for giving typed characters a different look. Most of these are in the form of a slightly varied set of letters and numbers with names such as "Times New Roman" and "Arial." Some fonts are very formal while others, such as Mistal, almost look like scribbling. The fonts of interest here are called Wingdings.

If you use any of the font drop-down menus that appear in most word processing programs, you will find the Wingdings at the bottom of the menu (see Figure 1). These are standard fonts that produce special graphics for inclusion in your documents. As you can see there are three sets of Wingdings and another called Webdings. The Webdings relate to a Web font available within HTML, although you can certainly use it in your word processing documents.



Figure 1. Wingdings in Windows Vista as shown by OpenOffice.org Writer.

The problem with using these fonts is first knowing what characters are available, then finding them on the keyboard. I'm sure that there are lookup charts for these fonts readily available on the Web; however, studying charts can be a bit of a hassle. Fortunately, Windows has a tool called On-Screen Keyboard, which makes it easier to find and insert the various characters, although this capability may not have been the motivation behind the design of the on-screen tool. To activate On-Screen Keyboard open the Start menu following All Programs/Accessories/Ease of Access (or Accessibility in XP) and select "On-screen Keyboard" from the menu. (In Vista and Win 7, you can type "key" into the Start Search field of the Start menu, then select On-screen Keyboard when it appears on the menu.) The keyboard windows will open on the screen (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Windows On-Screen Keyboard.

Now, to see the available characters in any of the fonts, select "Font..." from the Settings menu on the on-screen keyboard. Select one of the Wingdings fonts from the menu and click OK. The keyboard will change to a scheme similar to Figure 3 (Wingdings 3).

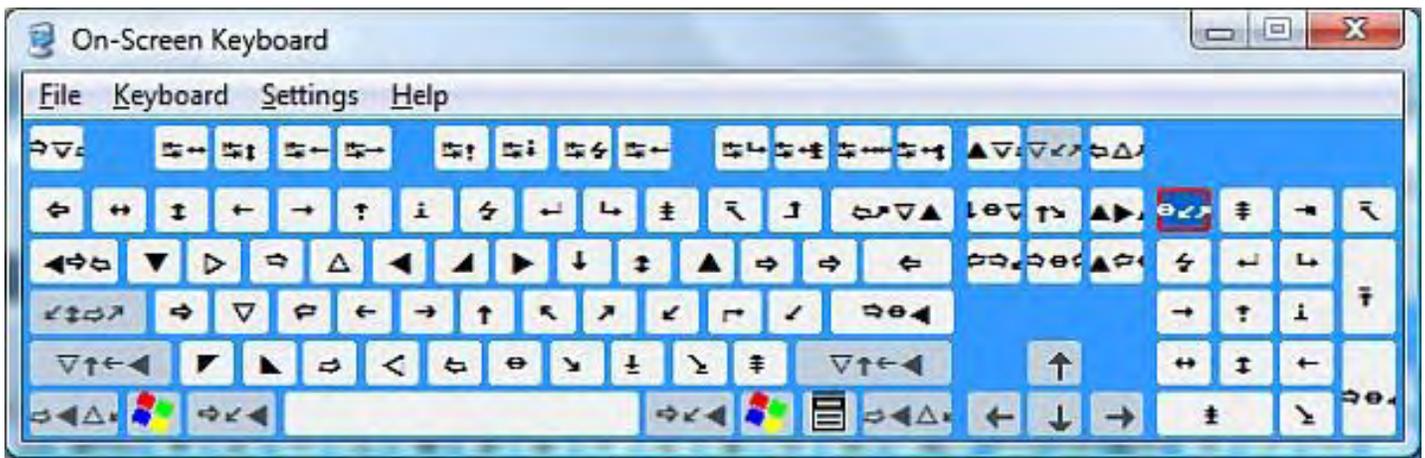


Figure 3. Wingdings 3 selected in the On-Screen Keyboard in Windows.

At this point you will see a good number of the special characters. If you hold down the Shift key, you will see even more of the available characters. Once you have selected the identical font in your word processing program, the typed character will be embedded in your document each time you hit the appropriate key on either the On-Screen Keyboard or the regular keyboard.

Hint: While you're working on a document with the real keyboard and the on-screen version, put the On-Screen Keyboard in the "Always on Top" mode in the Settings menu. (You may need to turn it off and back on again to get it to work.) In this mode you won't lose the keyboard window when you move the cursor to the word processing window.

You can use the On-Screen Keyboard to check out all of the fonts by merely selecting a different font in the On-Screen Keyboard Settings menu. I noticed that there are also some special MS Reference fonts for other uses (math?).

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

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm: Calendars

“An iCal Alternative” by Wally Wang

By itself, iCal is adequate, but consider a free program called Chandler for your calendaring needs. Also, more on Runtime Revolution, which allows you to create programs faster by requiring less code; a look at some alternatives if you're tired of waiting for the promised update to Quicken for the Macintosh; and a tip on making a program load automatically on startup.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

Every Macintosh comes with a free calendar program called iCal. Like most calendar programs, you can store appointments or create separate calendars for work and home. By itself, iCal is adequate, but its real advantage is its ability to synchronize with the iPhone or MobileMe.

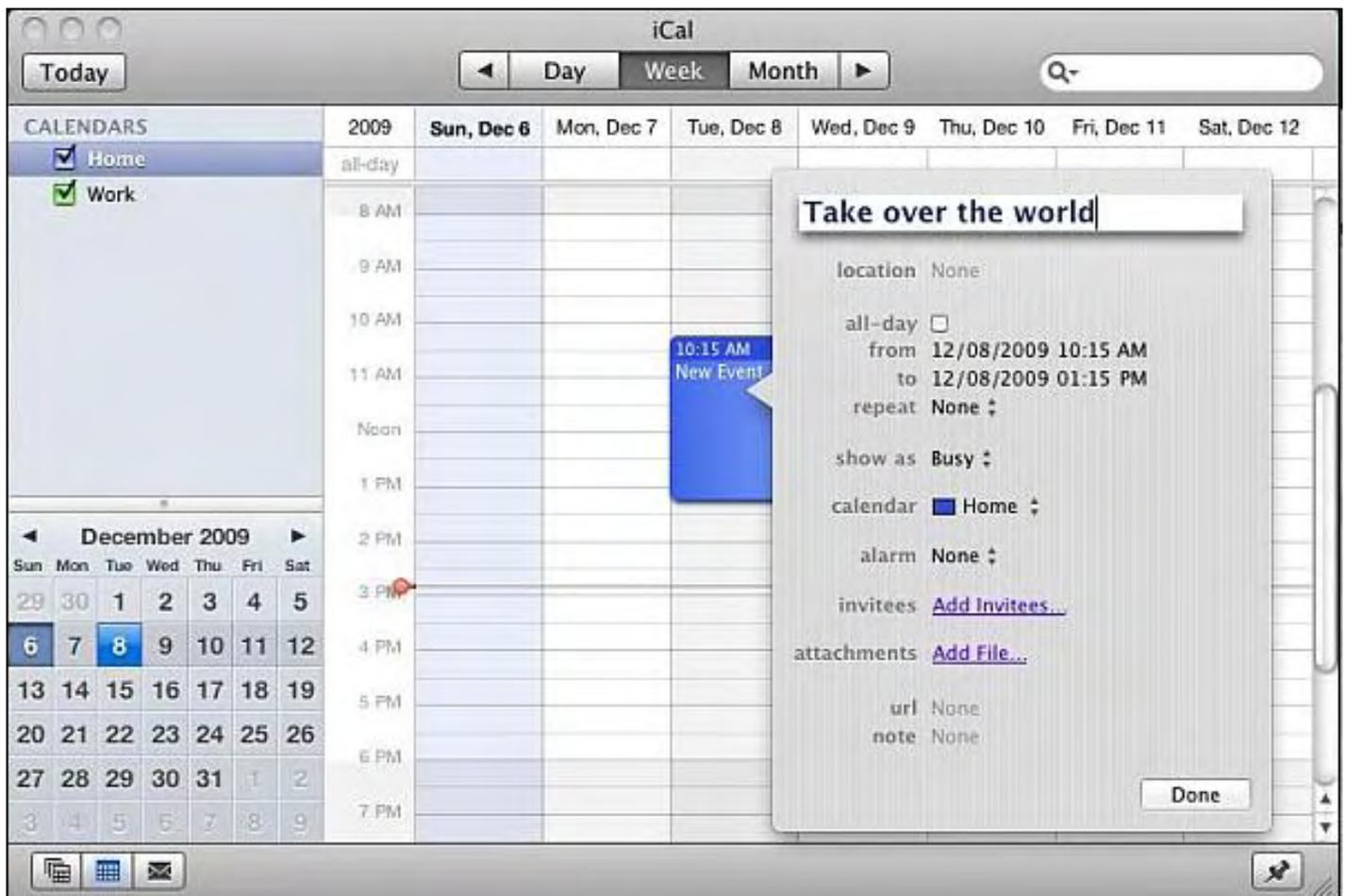


Figure 1. iCal provides basic calendar features for storing and searching for appointments.

While iCal will get the job done, consider a free program called Chandler (chandlerproject.org). Chandler began as an open-source version of one of the first personal information organizers called Lotus Agenda, which Lotus billed as a "spreadsheet for text."

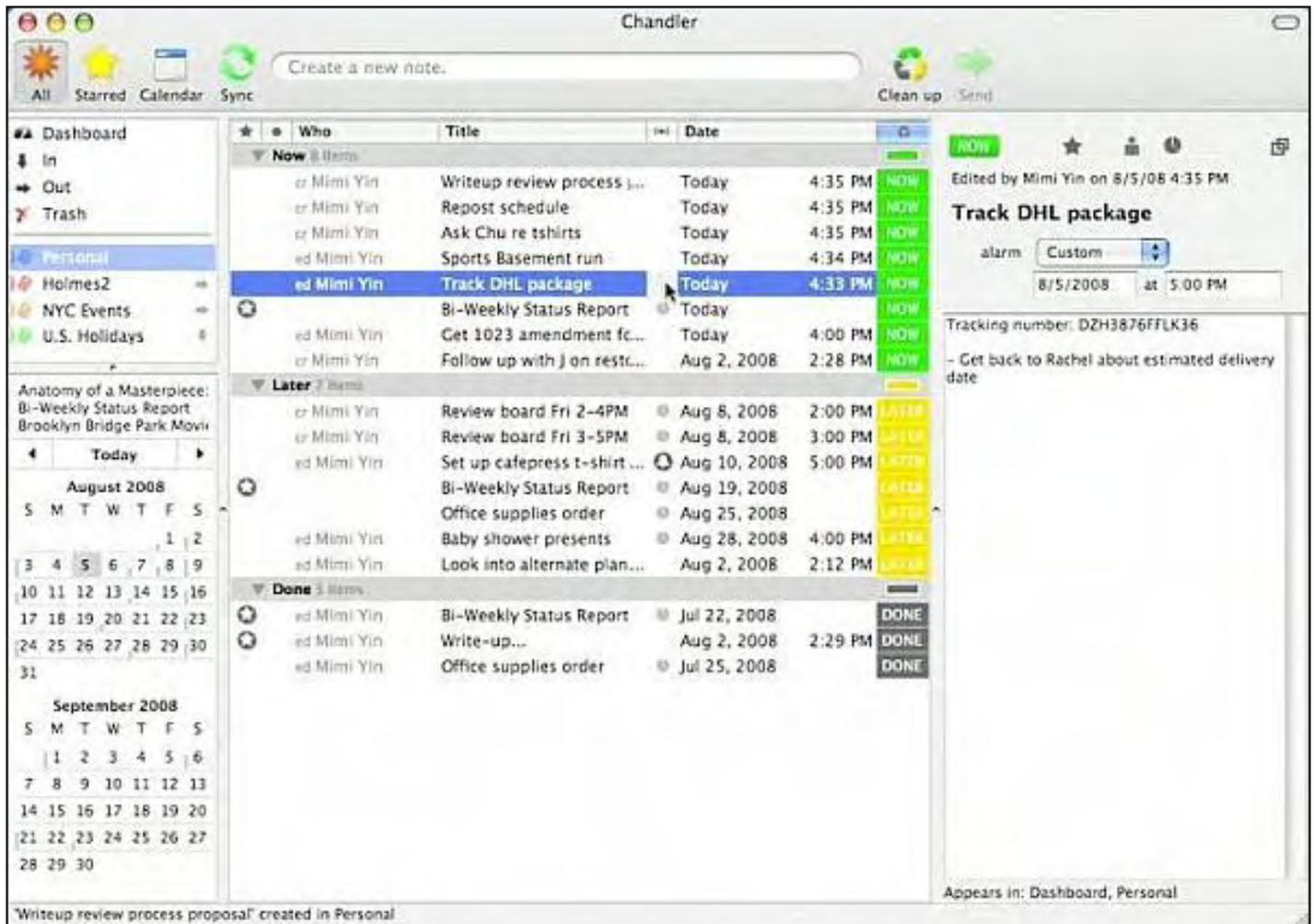


Figure 2. Chandler can organize tasks, appointments and notes.

The main idea behind Agenda was that you could dump data into the program, and based on how you defined its rules, it would automatically sort and organize your information.

Although Lotus heavily promoted Agenda, the program flopped due to its complexity. With version 2.0, Lotus tried to provide predesigned templates so you could use the program right away without defining any rules, but by then it was too late and Lotus quietly abandoned Agenda. (For those still interested, you can get a free copy of Agenda (www2.support.lotus.com/ftp/pub/desktop/Agenda/dos/2.0/misc) and run it under MS-DOS.)

Chandler builds and improves upon Agenda's original design by making it simpler to use with a focus on collaboration. If you sign up for a free account with the Chandler Hub, you can synchronize data from iCal with Chandler.

The free Chandler Hub also lets multiple people share data and calendar appointments with one another. By using Chandler as a group calendar tool, you can keep a bunch of people organized.

To learn more about Chandler, watch this three-minute YouTube video (chandlerproject.org/pub/Projects/FeatureTour/3-minutes.mov). Since Chandler is free, give it a try and see if it can help keep your life better

organized. Like all calendar/organizer programs, you'll need to devote time to learn how to use this program, but depending on what you need, the time invested in learning Chandler could pay off later with increased efficiency, just as long as you're disciplined enough to take advantage of everything Chandler has to offer.

Revisiting Runtime Revolution

In the December 4 issue of ComputerEdge, Ron S. stated that object-oriented languages like Visual Basic can perform high-level tasks in one line of code, such as:

```
Label_File.Font.Size = Scrollbar.Value
```

Technically, he is correct since this one line of code can perform a high-level task. However, object-oriented languages really just hide the code needed to complete high-level tasks. Although the above command appears to complete a task in one line of code, it's actually relying on multiple lines of code buried out of sight in other objects.

That's part of the beauty of object-oriented languages. They let you craft your own routines to perform high-level tasks with a single function call, or they let you use a framework that someone else has already created for you. In both cases, you don't have to see the complexity of the code that's really doing all the work.

So object-oriented languages create the illusion of performing high-level tasks with a single line of code, but in reality, they still rely on multiple lines of code to do everything.

The biggest problem with programming is the complexity behind it, and that's what separates Runtime Revolution from traditional languages like C++. A novice may have a great idea and want to write his own program, but might try tackling a programming language like C++ right away and smash face first into the steep learning curve of mastering both C++ syntax and object-oriented programming techniques. If this last sentence already sounds confusing, you probably don't want to learn programming with C++ right away.

Trying to learn C++ as a first language is possible, but so is learning to drive for the first time by entering a NASCAR competition. You could do it, but there are much simpler and gentler ways to learn.

For novices who just want to create a program as quickly and easily as possible, very high-level languages like Runtime Revolution (www.runrev.com) can provide the tools needed without the complexity. The drawback is that if you bump into the limitations of Runtime Revolution, you're stuck with what they have to offer. However, if you bump into the limitations of an object-oriented language like Visual Basic, you can modify an object (or just create a new one) to do what you want.

Raw novices who know nothing about programming will likely learn and appreciate Runtime Revolution because it's easy to use and allows you to create programs faster by requiring less code.

Experienced programmers will likely dislike Runtime Revolution because it won't seem familiar as traditional languages like C++ or Python. An experienced programmer will try to use Runtime Revolution like C++ and get frustrated by its perceived limitations, which aren't limitations of the language but of the programmer's own mind in trying to use the traditional programming paradigm to write programs in a non-traditional environment like Runtime Revolution.

The bottom line is that Runtime Revolution is great for non-programmers or programmers willing to accept something new. Runtime Revolution simply will not work for experienced programmers who don't want to change their way of thinking beyond the traditional programming paradigm they learned from writing C++ or Java code. Runtime Revolution may not be the right tool for everyone, but it's definitely something to consider the next time you need to write a

complicated program in a hurry.

The Lingering Delays of Quicken

Quicken has been the leading money-management program on both Windows and the Macintosh for years. However, Quicken keeps promising, but never delivering, a fancy new version for the Macintosh. Initially they promised a 2008 release. Now they're promising a 2010 release. If you're tired of waiting for this promised update to Quicken for the Macintosh, here are some alternatives.

If you want a no-risk alternative, try Buddi (buddi.digitalcave.ca), an open-source money manager that's like a stripped-down version of Quicken. One problem with Quicken is that Intuit kept layering on the features until the program is overkill for most users. If you just want a simple money manager, Buddi may be for you.

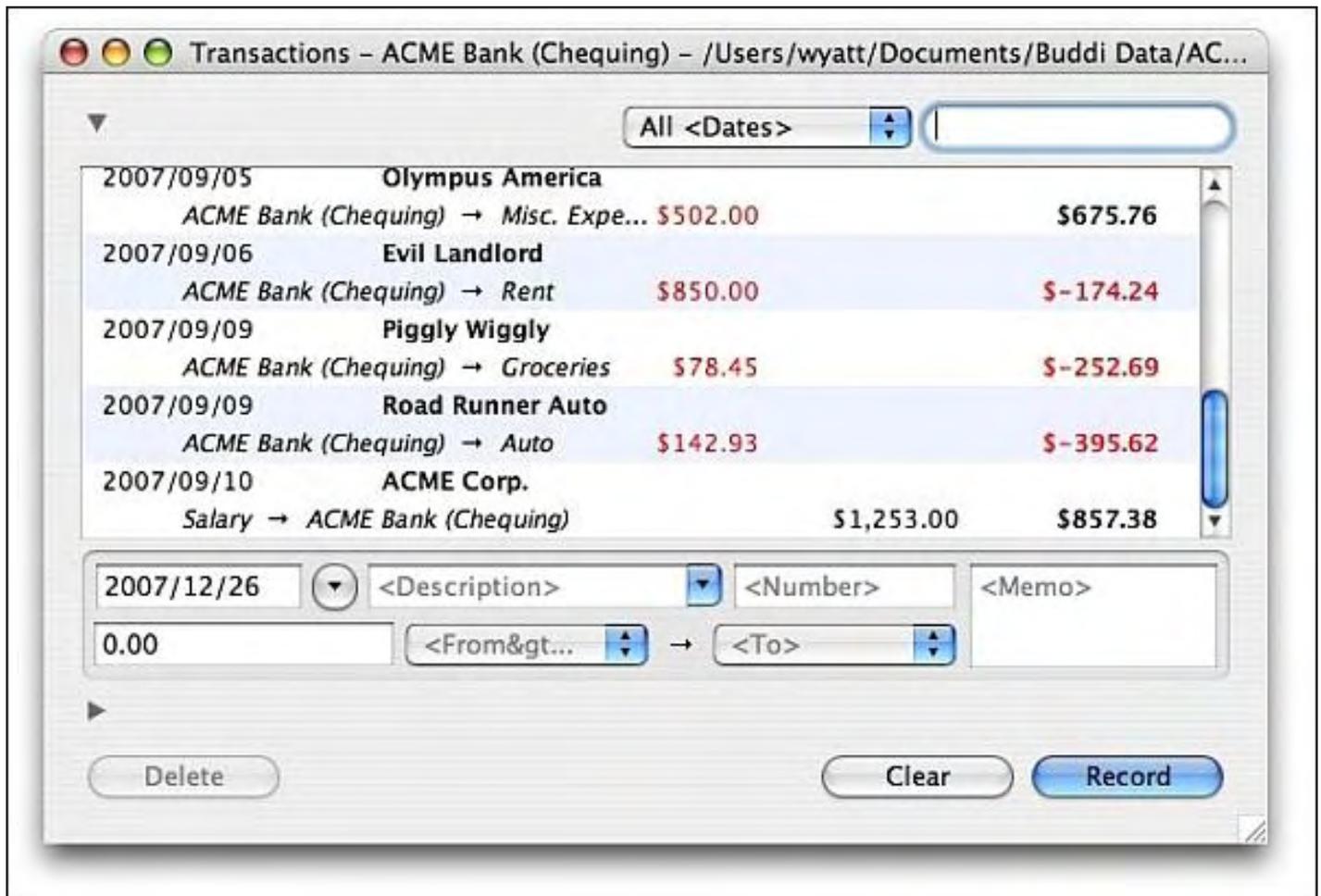


Figure 3. Buddi provides a simpler interface than Quicken.

For another no-risk alternative, try the free, open-source GnuCash (www.gnucash.org), which can help manage your stock or mutual fund portfolio along with balancing your finances with double-entry accounting. If you have files trapped in Quicken format, import them into GnuCash and free yourself from Quicken forever.

Why a large company like Intuit can't update Quicken for the Macintosh for several years is a complete mystery. Either the company completely fouled up the latest version or they simply don't care how late they release their software. In that case, you might as well ignore Quicken for the Mac and find a better alternative such as Buddi or GnuCash. That way the first thing you can do to balance your budget is figure out how to spend the money you didn't waste buying a new copy of Quicken for the Macintosh.

* * *

Each time you start up your Macintosh, it can automatically load one or more programs. This can be convenient if every time you turn on your Macintosh, you want to check your e-mail or visit your favorite Web page. To make a program load automatically, click the Apple menu and choose System Preferences to open the System Preferences dialog.

Click the Accounts icon under the System category. Click on your account and then click the Login Items tab. (You may also need to click the Lock icon in the bottom-left corner of the Accounts dialog so you can make changes.)

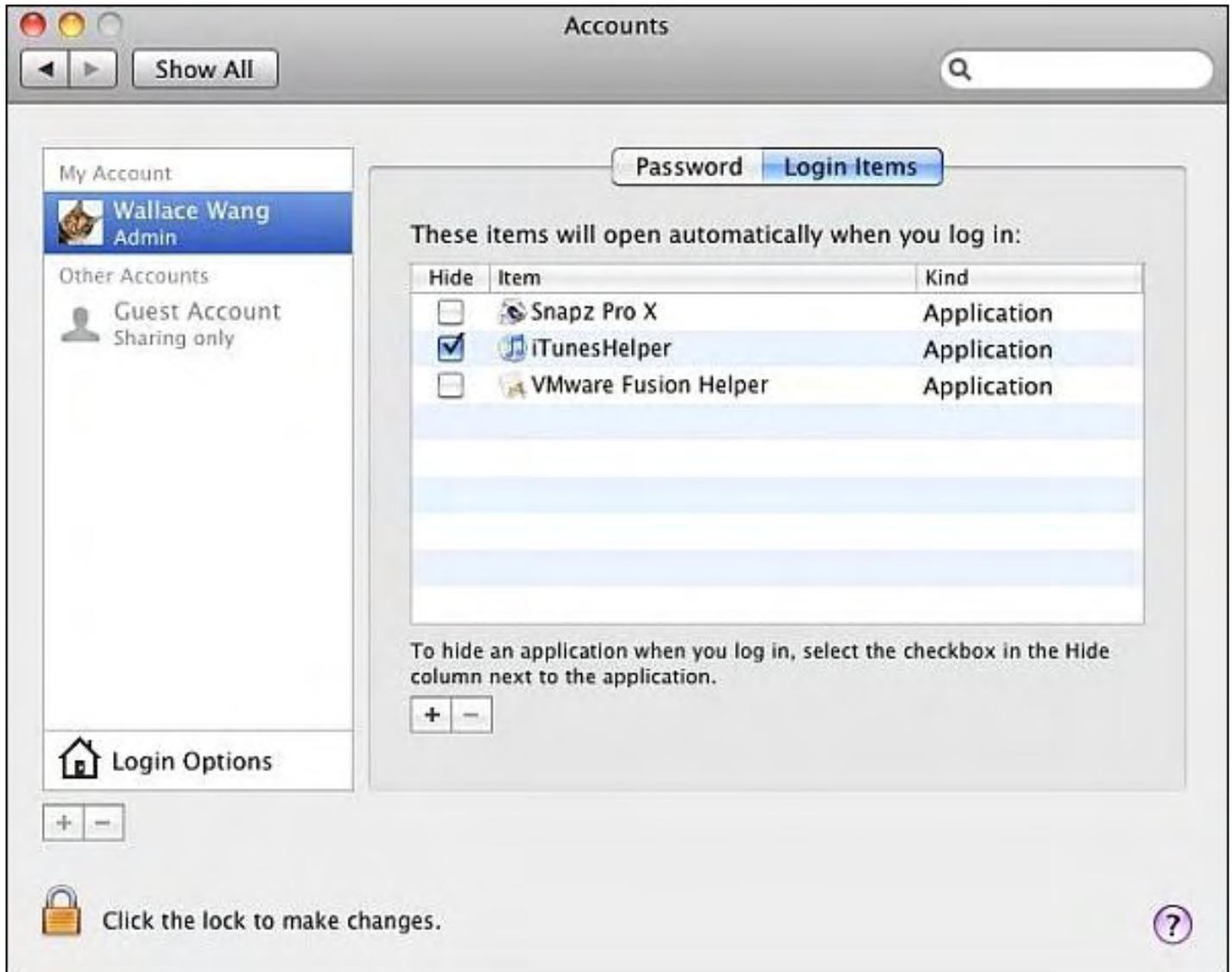


Figure 4. The Accounts dialog lets you define a program to run at startup.

Click the + (plus sign) icon to open a dialog, letting you choose the program you want to start up. If you ever get tired of having a particular program load each time you turn on your Macintosh (or switch to your account), click in the check box of the program you want to remove and then click the - (negative sign).

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 particples with Jack Dunning and go to the gym to pump iron with Dan Gookin.

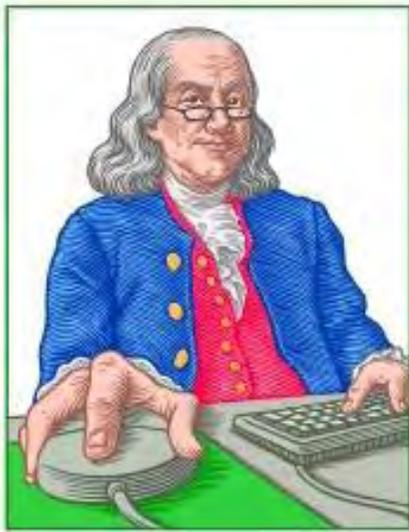
Wally is responsible for the following books:

- 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).

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.

In his spare time, Wally likes blogging about movies and writing screenplays at his site "The 15 Minute Movie Method." (www.15minutemoviemethod.com/) Wally can be reached at wally@computoredge.com.

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LINUX LESSONS

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

Linux Lessons: Using Ubuntu

**"The Ubuntu
Command Line"** by Pete
Choppin

Last week, we looked at some of the features seen when you first load Ubuntu. This week, we will discuss more about the command line and the Linux file system.

Pete started this Ubuntu series with the first three parts covering installation of Ubuntu:

- *"Step One: Getting Ready for Ubuntu"*
- *"Step Two: Partitioning."*
- *"Step Three: Finishing the Installation."*

Last week, we looked at some of the features seen when you first load Ubuntu.

This week, we will discuss more about the command line and the Linux file system.

The Ubuntu Command Line

For many longtime users of Linux, the command-line interface is their main tool for modifying configurations, installing and launching applications, creating and editing scripts, and many other uses. In fact, many will say they prefer the command line to the GUI interface because of the complete control they have over whatever they are using.

The command line can also be intimidating, especially to those new to Linux or those who have been working primarily in a GUI interface such as Microsoft Windows, where the command line is neither desirable nor very effective. Still, in Linux it is difficult to get away completely from the command line. Anything from the simplest installation to complicated script writing can involve the use of the command-line interface.

There are a few things on the command line that can be useful for most users. Simple file navigation, for example, is probably one of the more common uses. So here are a few of the basic commands that you may find useful.

First, let's open something called a *terminal*. To open a terminal, go to the Applications, Accessories menu and select the Terminal from the menu. You should see something like Figure 1 appear on the screen.

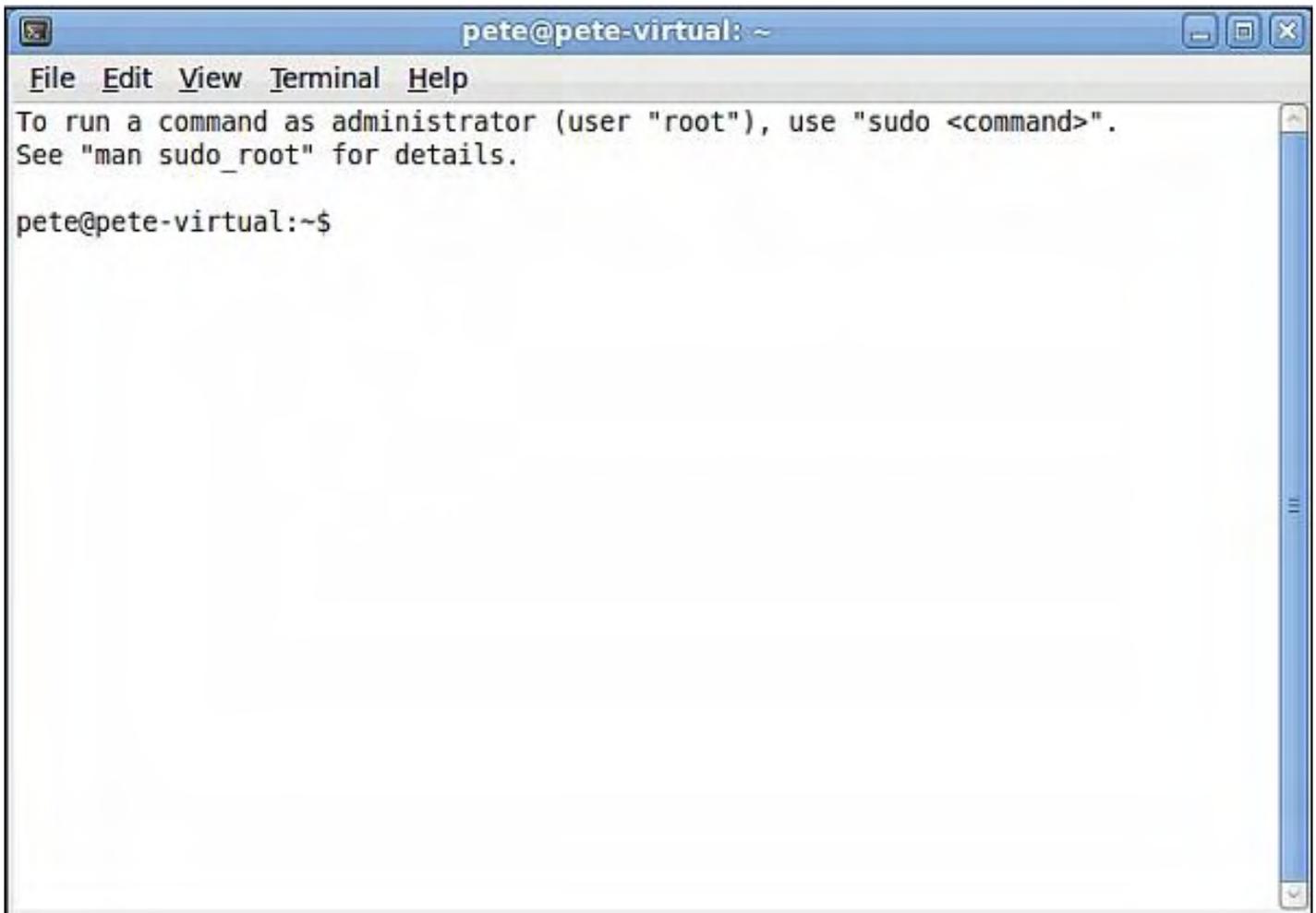


Figure 1. The Ubuntu terminal window showing the command-line prompt.

Without going into all the details, essentially what you see is a command-line prompt. Mine is displaying my username and the name that I gave the computer during the installation. This prompt can be modified, of course, like most things in Linux, but for this discussion we will leave this like it is.

Let's enter a very simple command that will list the contents of the current directory—where we are located in the Ubuntu file system. That command is simply `ls`. Just type `ls` at the command prompt and press Enter. You should then see a list of files and directories that are in the current directory. Ubuntu has created several directories for you in this area. One of these should be called Pictures. To change to this directory, enter the command: `cd Pictures` (without the quotes) and press Enter.

If you get a message like "No such file or directory" it is possible that you typed the word "Pictures" with a lower-case `p`. Remember that Linux, unlike DOS, is always case sensitive. Just retype the command using a capital `P` and this should change your current directory to Pictures. To go back up to the previous directory, type `cd ..` and Enter. The two dots mean go up one level in the directory structure. You should now be back where you started.

Incidentally, when you open the terminal, you are automatically shown to be at your home directory. The home directory is where you normally store personal files. It is similar to My Documents in Microsoft Windows.

There are literally hundreds of powerful and very useful commands that can be used from the command line. If you are interested in learning more, just go online and Google "Linux commands." You will get dozens of results that list many commands and their uses.

The Linux File System

Let's discuss a little about the Linux file system. It is probably easier to visualize this by opening a file manager. The file manager for Ubuntu is found by going to the Places menu and then selecting Computer. You should see a similar screen to Figure 2.

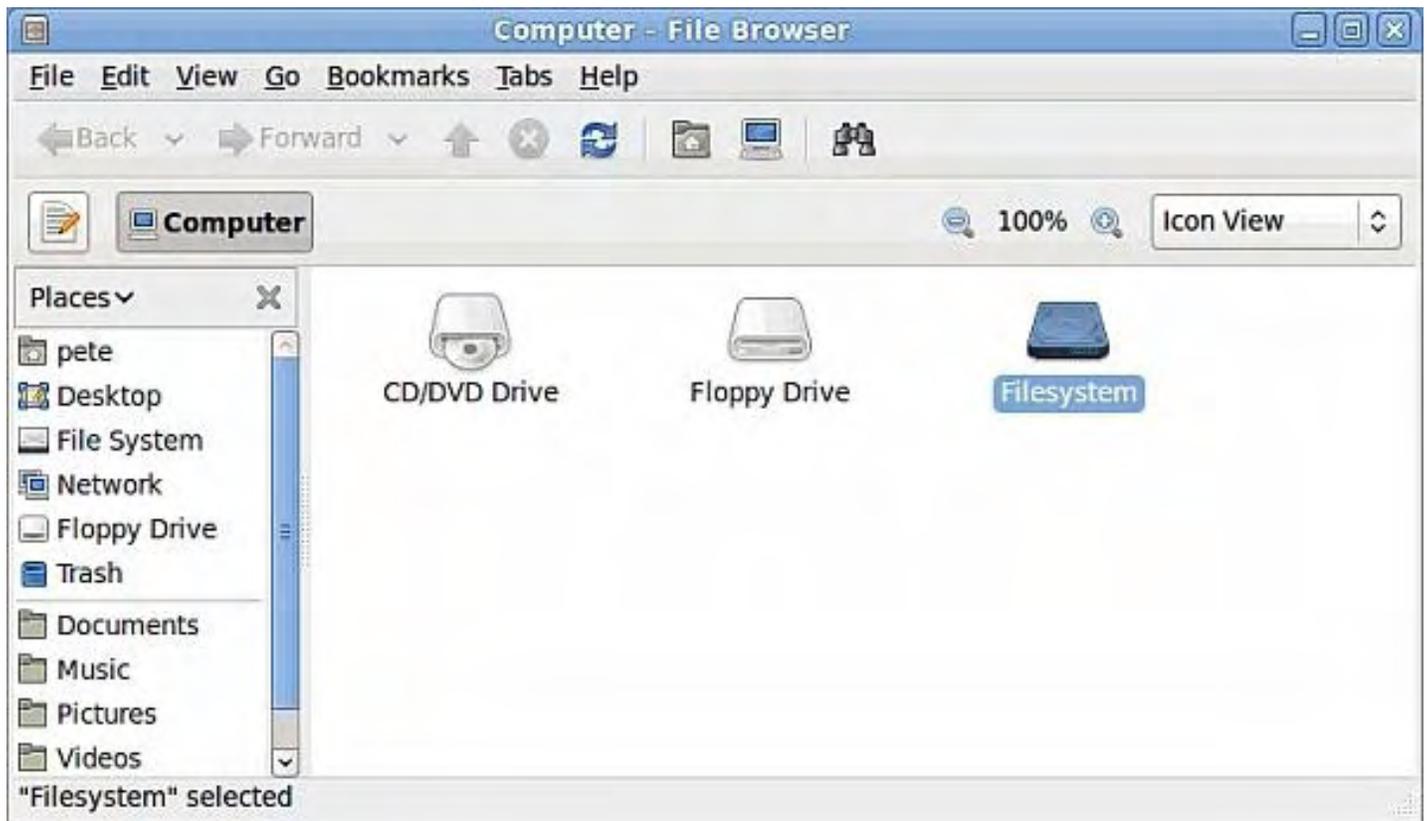


Figure 2. The Ubuntu file manager.

Open the filesystem icon. This will then display all of the directories of the hard drive. This is the Linux file system (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The Ubuntu file manager showing the file system.

Most Linux files and directories are set up similar to what you see in Ubuntu. Here is a brief description of some of the more crucial directories in the system:

- root*—The home directory for the root user.
- home*—Contains the user's home directories.
- bin*—Commands needed during bootup that might be needed by normal users.
- usr*—Contains all commands, libraries, man pages, games and static files for normal operation.
- usr/bin*—Almost all user commands. (some commands are in /bin or /usr/local/bin).
- dev*—Device files for devices such as disk drives, serial ports, etc.
- etc*—Configuration files specific to the machine.
- var*—Contains files that change for mail, news, printers log files, man pages, and temp files.
- mnt*—Mount points for temporary mounts by the system administrator.
- tmp*—Temporary files.

I found this list and the descriptions at The Computer Technology Documentation Project (www.comptechdoc.org/os/linux/usersguide/linux_ugfilestruct.html). A Google search for "Linux file structure" can also provide a ton of information on Linux file systems.

That concludes our presentation of Ubuntu. Please feel free to submit questions. We will be pleased to post them and hopefully provide some answers as well.

Pete Choppin has worked in the computer and IT industry for 13 years. He currently works as a network and systems administrator for a company called Albion based in Clearfield, Utah. His interests include cooking, sci-fi, computers and technology, and web design—a semi-professional endeavor, having designed Web sites in the dental field, e-commerce businesses, and for the Boy Scouts of America. Pete also contributes regularly to Ptolemy's Tribute (ptolemytribute.com).

blogspot.com)—a blog which covers political and technical topics and issues. Pete has been a devout reader of *ComputerEdge* since 1990. He has contributed to articles and responded to topics on *ComputerEdge*. He can be contacted at *pchoppin@comcast.net*

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ComputerQuick Reviews

**News and
Reviews from
Readers and Staff**

ComputerQuick
Reviews: Free
Windows
Software
“Computer
Product Opinions
from
ComputerEdge
Readers and
Staff” by
ComputerEdge Staff

Wally Wang's Apple Farm column often talks about free Mac software that also runs in Windows, so check it out even if you're "a PC." Also, a call for experiences with Firefox.

Mac Column About More Than Macs

I read Wally Wang's Apple column each week partially because it's part of my job. I don't own a Mac, but I would like to. (I already work on so many Windows machines that I wouldn't have time to look at a Mac.) Wally certainly promotes Apple (sometimes to the annoyance of others)—which I find is common among Mac owners. One of the reasons that Macs have such a high customer-satisfaction rating is that people who already love Macs are Apple's best customers.

Despite the jabs that Windows users may need to endure, I highly recommend that Windows people read Wally's column each week. It's not that you should convert to Apple, but there are many free software programs that Wally highlights in his column that run on Windows (and Linux) as well as the Mac. For example, this week Wally offers a free calendar program called Chandler and two free replacements for Quicken—all of which run on Windows.

All it takes is a quick scan of the column, checking out the links. That's if you can avoid taking offense at the jabs at Microsoft and Windows—not all of them undeserved.

Jack Dunning
ComputerEdge

* * *

Next Week: The Firefox Web Browser.

Next week, we're looking at Firefox. Which Web browser do you use and why? Your comments will appear right here in ComputerQuick Reviews. Send your thoughts to ComputerQuick Web Browsers (ceeditor@computoreedge.com).

We Want Your Opinions About Hardware, Software and Web Sites

Over the years, **ComputerEdge** 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). ComputerQuick 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 ComputerQuick Reviews (webserver.computoredge.com/sitemap.mvc?feature=Columns&columnedcode=persrev&column=ComputerQuick%20Reviews) in the **ComputerEdge** 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.

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

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

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Spam of the Week

Spam of the Week: American Express Online Form

“The latest in annoying and dangerous e-mail currently making the rounds.” by ComputerEdge Staff

A fake American Express phishing scheme is making the rounds, and the Facebook spam scam is reemerging.

The Facebook spam scams (“Spam of the Week” October 30 and November 6) have reemerged this week, possibly taking a shot at new Facebook users.

More recently, there has been a fake e-mail that appears to be from American Express. (It's not!) Most have a subject line of “important information” or some variation of that (see Figure 1). If you hover the cursor over the “American Express Online Form” link in the middle of the e-mail, you will note that the extension beyond the “americanexpress.com” indicates that the linked site is actually somewhere in Europe. Others may show the U.K. (United Kingdom) extension.

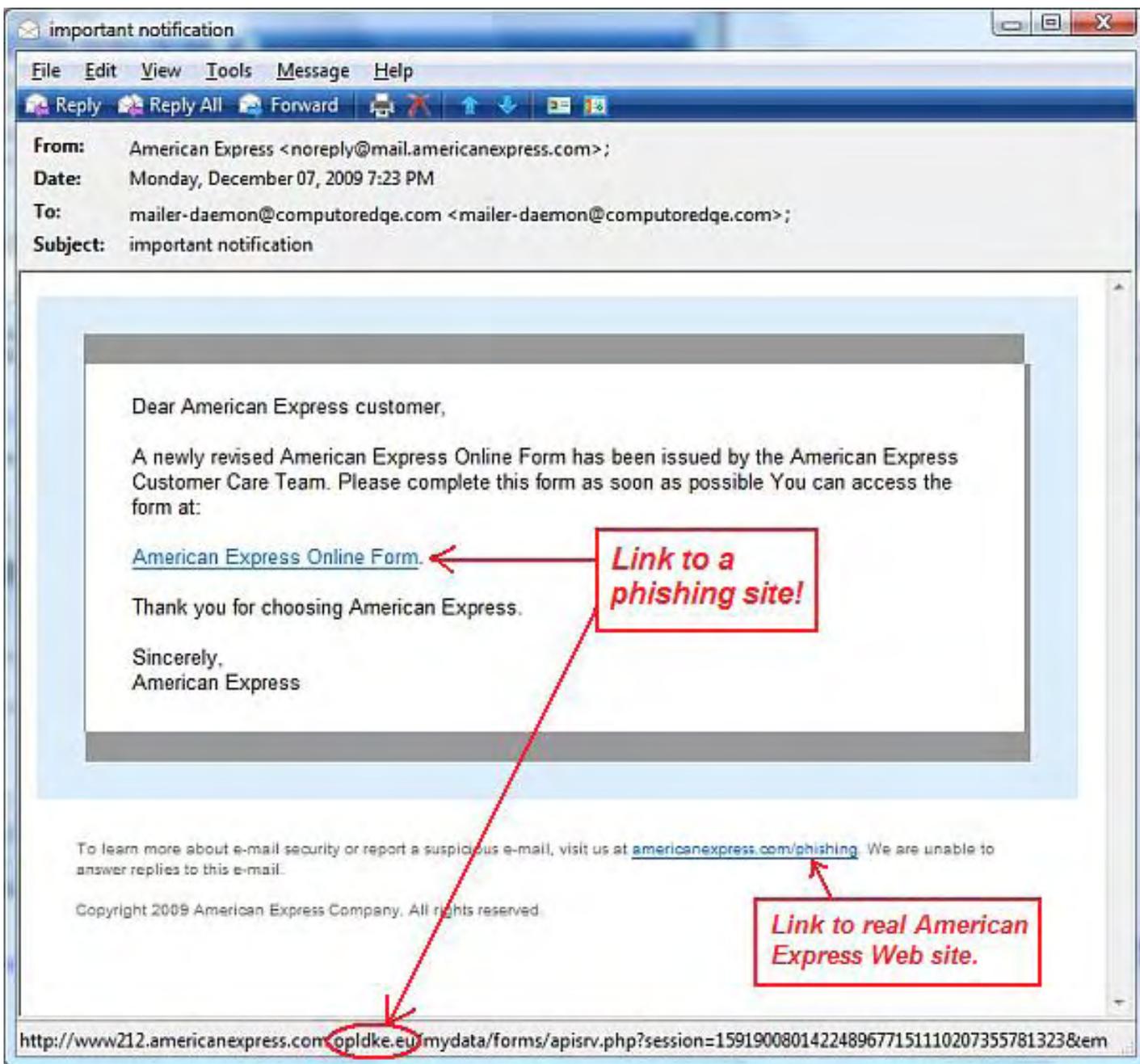


Figure 1. Fake American Express phishing scheme.

Fortunately, most of the linked sites appear to have been either taken down or removed from the DNS. With a twist of deliberate irony, the link at the bottom of the e-mail actually goes to the Fraud Protection site for American Express.

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

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

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EdgeWord: The New Editorial Search Tool

“ComputerEdge site searching made easier.”

by Jack Dunning



Part of what makes ComputerEdge Online a valuable site is the library of past issues with all the past articles and columns. Now, with the new Editorial Search tool, accessing this information is easier than ever.

I removed the Twitter link from the site. I did it mostly to make room for the editorial search field at the top of the page, but that's only part of the story. Quite frankly, I think that most people are already bored with the text-messaging service. Twitter will always be popular with cyber-stalkers who follow the musings of celebrities, but for most of us it isn't worth the hassle.

I think that there is an important place for Twitter within certain types of businesses that need to inform a number of people of recent changes, but having it on the *ComputerEdge* site was too much stress for me. I was under pressure to find a new (possibly interesting) short item to post every day. After all these months, only 36 people were signed up to "Follow" the *ComputerEdge* account—and at least half of them were trying to sell something. It's time to use the Web real estate for something more important, such as the new *ComputerEdge* Editorial Search Tool.

Part of what makes *ComputerEdge Online* a valuable site is the library of past issues with all the past articles and columns. I've always known that one of the primary reasons people come back to the Web site is to find articles on a particular topic. The problem on any Web site is finding what you want. Solving that problem was the original idea behind the Site Map (webserver.computoredge.com/sitemap.mvc)—which is linked in the header at the top of the page. There are a number of ways to leaf through the older issues including by issue, by columns and by writers. However, some of those lists can get pretty long—and they only offer what's in the titles and summaries. I tried the Google site search tool for about a year, but it didn't do a good job of locating and displaying searches for specific types of articles. Plus, Google jacked the annual fee way up. I decided to implement our own search.

Last summer I wrote a simple routine that would search both the titles and summaries of the articles, as well as execute an alternative full-text search of the articles. This was added to the top of the Site Map in place of the removed Google search. There is nothing complex about how it works. If you enter a single word into the search field while Title Search is selected, it will return a list of those articles in which that word appears in a title or summary. If you select Text Search, the entire text of each article will be checked for a match. If you enter two or more words (no quotes, plus signs, or other punctuation should be entered), the words are parsed and individually checked. If all of the words appear in a search (even if only contained in a portion of a word), then the article will be returned in the list.

It is best to pick unique words, such as a software name or hardware product. The terms Windows, Microsoft and Apple are used so much that the list of articles can become quite long. The listing will always show the most recent articles at the top.

A few weeks back I noticed that the Text Search was not including Digital Dave. This was occurring because Dave uses a different system from the rest of the editorial. This problem has been corrected, plus a search can now be limited to a particular column or writer. Merely find the column or writer in the Site Map tree structure, then execute a search. Only results from the selected column or writer will be returned. To return to the current issue of *ComputerEdge*, click the logo in the header at the top of the page.

If you do a search from the main *ComputerEdge* page, the search will default to the titles and summaries in all the articles and columns. The Site Map page will appear during the search offering other alternatives. Hopefully, the *ComputerEdge Search Tool* will make this Web site more helpful for you. If you have any thoughts, please leave a comment via the link "Tell us what you think About This Article!" (webserver.computoredge.com/editorial/prg/letters.mvc?article=edge&issue=2750) at the top or bottom of this column (or just click the link).

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

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Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"Wi-Fi at Denver Airport," "Toshiba Overheat Dust Buildup," "USB Disk Ejector," "Thanks for the Heads Up," "Microsoft Security Essentials," "More on Moving Windows with No Mouse"

Wi-Fi at Denver Airport

[Regarding Dawn Clement's October 16 article, "Finding Free Public Wi-Fi" and responding letters:]

It's a sign of the times that Internet is so ubiquitous that some people complain about access limitations even when it is free! As a traveler that has spent many hours waiting for flights at DIA (Denver w/free Wi-Fi) and IAH (Houston w/o free Wi-Fi), I am very grateful to have any free Internet at all.

Mr. Foley should check with his company to see if they have installed Outlook Web Access, a browser-based version of Outlook that can be accessed from DIA, or if they have a secure VPN connection setup he can employ to log into the company network where Outlook wouldn't be blocked. I'm sure that his company's IT security folks would have major heartburn should an employee use Outlook e-mail over any non-secured connection! With my own employer, that is grounds for termination as is use of the company laptop in public areas where others can view the screen.

-Stewart Levin, Centennial, CO

The problem with the MS Outlook client, if accessing the corporate Outlook Exchange server, may not be wholly the airport's fault. Most corporations block public access to Exchange except with the optional use of OWA. That's Outlook Web Access, where the IE browser can use HTTP/port 80 to connect to the Exchange server.

-Steve, San Diego

Toshiba Overheat Dust Buildup

[Regarding the November 20 Digital Dave column:]

The dust-in-a-laptop question caught my eye, and I'm glad I read the issue. Personal computers have always had dust buildup and, around smokers, it's worse. I never thought about it with laptops, but I had my Toshiba laptop open once *after unplugging at the wall and putting the power supply tip in my pocket* to re-seat a video ribbon cable. I decided to do a little spring cleaning, but everything I could see looked only a little dusty, not nearly as bad as a PC which has stayed closed for two or three years.

Then I looked at the fan and heat exchanger/radiator. For such a small area, it gathered and trapped a lot of dust. Usually a vacuum cleaner helps me pull dust from a computer (see next paragraph), but I wanted to know for sure how much dust had accumulated. A small screwdriver, tweezers, gravity, my breath and canned air cleaned it all out. Particularly potent: With the fan removed, I used canned air to backwash the radiator, low pressure at first. I followed this up with a vacuum cleaner. Remarkable. The fan runs less frequently, slower and quieter.

Why a vacuum cleaner? I worked help-desk for a tire manufacturer and took calls from the stores. On one hardware call

the guy said, "Yeah, I took the case off and cleaned it with compressed air." Tire stores have high-pressure air, as much as 80 PSI, maybe more. Whatever didn't get blown off or out of the computer got blown in so hard it'll never come out. **Always** use a vacuum cleaner. Well, almost always.

-Tom K., Cincinnati, OH

USB Disk Ejector

[Regarding the November 20 Digital Dave column:]

I have been using USB Disk Ejector (quick.mixnmojo.com/usb-disk-ejector) for quite some time now, and it has never let me down. You just click on the icon and all disks attached to USB ports are revealed; you can select any to shut them down by clicking on the one you want to close.

Just Google "USB Disk Ejector" to find the program and download it.

-Carl, McGregor, Ontario

Thanks for the Heads Up

[Regarding the November 20 Spam of the Week column:]

Useful. Thanks for the heads up.

It might also be good to repeat the age-old advice about looking carefully at the language, spelling and grammar of these phishing messages. Both the examples you highlight are chock-full of red flags in that regard.

-Werner Maurer, Baja California, Mexico

Microsoft Security Essentials

[Regarding the November 20 Windows Tips and Tricks: Microsoft's Free Anti-Malware Tool column:]

As in Vista, Microsoft's Malware Removal Tool comes with Win 7 and Windows Update. So does Windows Defender, although it no longer has the option to appear in the notification area. I believe the Security Essentials download replaces both of these, since it is a true antivirus product. However, for those of us who are proud of the old "Red Badge of Courage" from the Defender icon, we can still choose to rely on MMR and Defender and not download the Security Essentials or any other antivirus[program].

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

I am most pleased to have read your review of Microsoft Security Essentials. For several years, I have been one of those hapless keyboarders searching for the well-obfuscated link to the latest version of Free AVG, after having been duly warned that the current version of that excellent program was expiring. I'll bet I am not the only reader who will be sorely tempted to avoid that strain next time by trying Microsoft's solution. I've got it bookmarked.

-Cicero Walker, Colorado Springs, CO

More on Moving Windows with No Mouse

[Regarding the November 6 Windows Tips and Tricks: Resizing Windows Without a Mouse column:]

Previously I said:

"...I've been wondering what the purpose of the move and size menu was. Even when I need it on my low-res pocket Vista computer or on my old Win 98 laptop in Safe Mode, I didn't know how to use it..."

However, it's still not useful on a low-res computer if you need to click on a button near the bottom of the screen. You can move the window up to view the bottom, but when you try to click on it the window pops back down so the TOP is in view (not staying where you put it), so that the bottom is again not reachable. That is, you can hide the window below the bottom of the screen, but you can't hide it above the top of the screen. The latter would be far more useful.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

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

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

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