ComputorEdge™ Online — 01/22/10

This issue:
Computer Careers

Despite the economy's doldrums, signs point to a promising future for IT professionals. What are the hot areas for jobs in computers and the Internet?

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Rob, The ComputorTutor: Technology Solutions by Rob Spahitz

Duplicate Files, Part 2

Last week we continued looking at the idea of locating duplicate files on your Windows system. Since we ran into problems creating an on-the-fly database, we decided to explore other ideas. I'll share one today.

Spam of the Week by ComputorEdge Staff

The latest in annoying and dangerous e-mail currently making the rounds.

Natural disasters are an opportunity for the scammers to come out of the woodwork and prey upon those who truly want to help out those in need. The earthquake in Haiti is no exception.

DEPARTMENTS:

EdgeWord: Put Dates on Your Web Site and Don't Yell! by Jack Dunning

Old news is bad news on the Web.

If you host a Web site, Jack encourages you to make a point of adding a date to every post or article, legitimizing your information. Also, lose the all-cap missives in e-mails and on Web sites!

Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers by ComputorEdge Staff

Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns. "Predictions 2010," "Cleaning Your PC"

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Digital Dave

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

Can a virus attack secondary hard drives as well as primary?; a reader is locked out of certain files due to file-permission issues; a reader wonders where all the spam has gone.

Dear Digital Dave,

I have three separate hard drives in my computer, and when the antivirus software automatically scans the computer, all three hard drives are being scanned. Can viruses attack the secondary hard drives too?

Art Benavidez
San Diego, CA

Dear Art,

In a word, yes! While the extra drives may not have a system area—a prime place for viruses to hide—they are still capable of carrying the infected files. Therefore many viruses will copy themselves onto all available drives, including extra drives, external drives and flash memory drives.

If a person inadvertently double-clicks an infected program on any drive, the infection process can be re-initiated. This is the reason for antivirus software to scan all drives, especially a newly inserted unknown flash drive. You don't know where it's been or with whom it has been associating.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

How can I remove the stubborn read-only attribute of files? Through the process of backing up, restoring and copying files to DVD/CD and external hard drives that are shared by multiple computers, I have ended up with many data files in various folders that are marked "read only" and cannot be deleted.

I have tried removing the attribute with Vista, but it seems to be permanently stuck. Even though I cannot move them from one drive to another, I have been able to copy from one drive to another. However, that leaves duplicates behind that cannot be deleted! Help!

Ron B.
Temecula,CA

Dear Ron,

File rights and ownership can be one of the more confusing aspects of computing for any type of computer. Old Linux users are accustomed to dealing with these problems, but the problem became real for Windows users only in Windows 2000 with the introduction of NTFS and the Unix-like file rights management.

When you right-click on a file and select Properties, you will see a window similar to Figure 1. While this image comes from Windows 7, it looks similar in all versions of Windows.

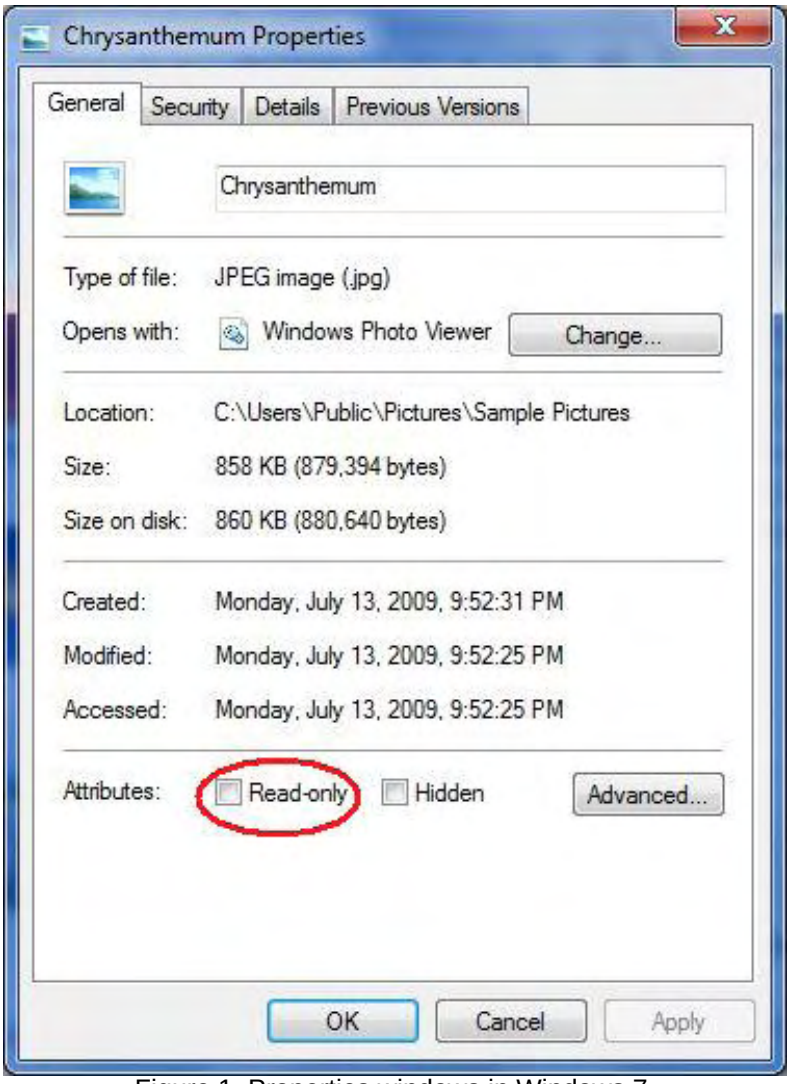

Figure 1. Properties windows in Windows 7.

The Read-only box appears to be the obvious way to eliminate your problem—which I believe you have already tried. If the box is not checked, it seems that you should be able to eliminate the file. However, the other rights-management factors take precedence over the read-only check box.

Select the Security tab (see Figure 2). In this tab you will see a number of options that may be a bit cryptic. In the top portion appears "Group or user names." The bottom half shows the "Permissions for" the selected group or user.

Note: In Windows XP, if you don't see the Security tab, then you will need to do the following:

1. Open Windows Explorer.
2. Select "Folder Options..." from the Tools menu.
3. Select the View tab.
4. At the bottom of the list in the "Advanced settings:" box, uncheck the "Use simple file sharing (Recommended)" check box.

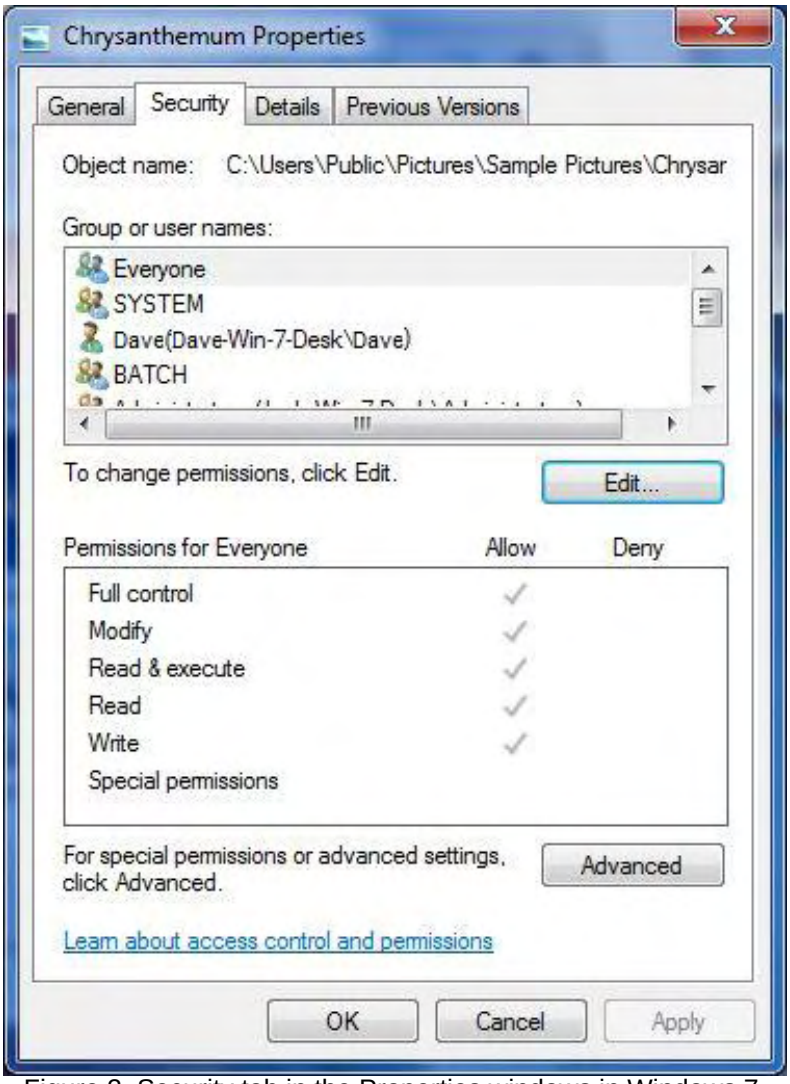

Figure 2. Security tab in the Properties windows in Windows 7.

You will most likely find that there is a Deny set for one of the groups or users that is preventing you from deleting the file. There are three basic types of permissions: read, write and execute.

Read permission will allow only the assigned user or group to read the file without changing or executing it. Write permission will allow changes to be made and saved to the file. If you are denied write permission, then you will not be able to delete the file. Execute permission allows you to run a file.

To change any of these permission, click the Edit button. You will open a window similar to Figure 3. As long as you have administrator rights, you should be able to adjust the permissions of any of the files.

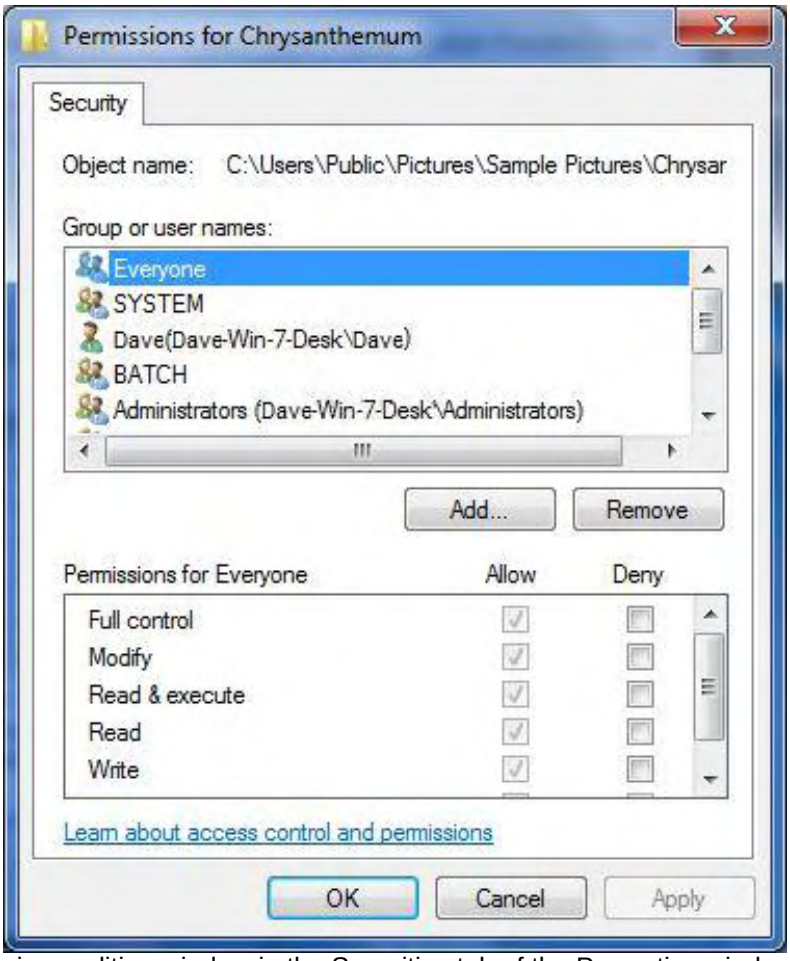

Figure 3. Permissions-editing window in the Securities tab of the Properties windows in Windows 7.

It is possible to cause yourself even more confusion by playing the permissions. For example, if you deny yourself all rights to a file to which you do not have ownership, you will not be able to return to re-edit those permissions, because you won't have permission to undo what you just did. In this case you will need to take ownership of the file (or login as a different user with administrative rights).

To take ownership, open the Owner tab in the Advanced Security Settings windows (click the Advanced button in the Properties window) and change the owner of the file.

Ultimately you should be able to delete the files that you want to delete by changing these permissions. If you are having problems deleting folders, the same permission settings are available for folders just as they are for files.

Digital Dave

Digital Dave,

Why is it that in the last two years I have received just two spam e-mails? I discovered this when I checked my Junk box in my e-mail program. I have not set up any filters. I checked processes, and no spam filters were running.

I am using Gmail for my e-mail addresses and download it via POP3 to my e-mail program, Evolution. My operating system is Ubuntu 7.10-9.04. My ISPs are AT&T and ACSAlaska. I've never checked the e-mail accounts from AT&T or ACS, since I don't use them.

Dennis
San Diego, CA

Dear Dennis,

There are a number of reasons why you may not see much spam. First, I've heard that Gmail has particularly good spam blocking, but there is more to it than that. In order for you to receive spam, the spammer needs to know your e-mail address. There are spamming programs that guess at addresses for particular domains, but if you don't use a common name in your e-mail address, it is unlikely that your e-mail address will be hit. That means to get spam, you need to make your address available.

The most common way addresses are revealed is to reply to commercial e-mail. Many spammers are selling products that look attractive. If you respond, then your e-mail could end up on a variety of lists.

Another way that spammers get e-mail addresses is from Web sites. If your e-mail is posted to any Web site, then there is a reasonable chance that a spammer's harvester bot will collect that address and add it to the lists. If you never post your e-mail address on the Web or give it in any solicitation, then it is difficult for it to be captured.

By far the best way to avoid spam is to never use your e-mail, as is the case for your last two e-mail accounts.

Digital Dave

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Computer Careers: Succeed in an IT Job

"Watch hot trends and pay attention to your own skill set.**"** by Pete Choppin

While paying attention to the sweeping trends in hot IT job categories, it's still important be conscious about your own career and where you want to be going.

If you ask the experts what to expect in the information technology (IT) sector for 2010, you will get more responses than there are careers in the field. It seems there is never one single correct answer. As the calendar turned to the New Year, endless amounts of reports, predictions and surveys came out that told us the tech-employment picture is getting better—or worse or both—all at the same time.

"Need computer help? I'll put down the Doritos as bait, then you jump him when he comes out."

Perhaps more useful than the myriad statistics and predictions is the outlook on specific IT job titles. For example, at the end of the year recruiter Robert Half Technology (*rht.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=131&item=791*) named three IT job titles they found to be the best prospects for prosperity and salary increases, a definite anomaly in these recessionary times: network administrator, information systems security manager, and systems engineer.

Is this, however, a realistic measure of IT careers? And perhaps a more important question might be, what does this information do for *your* career and job stability. It's interesting, but not necessarily critical, to read this kind of data with the hope of seeing definitively into the future. It's also not particularly helpful in the short term to learn that a particular job title is hot if it's an area you know nothing about or have no intention of pursuing.

That's why after a little research, my advice is simple: Be conscious about your own career and where you want to be going. Embrace your specialty; get better at it, Twitter about it (maybe), network in person and online, and get ahead of your competition. At the same time, do pay attention to the sweeping trends in hot IT job categories. Maybe you don't know anything about security or virtualization or cloud computing, but what if you start learning about it now with an eye toward steering toward it next year? That sounds like a sensible New Year's resolution to me.

Another step toward career stability is to make sure to maintain (or upgrade) what we refer to as your marketable skills. Here are six of the most valuable, according to *Computerworld*:

1. Programming/Application Development

A colleague of mine once told me early in my career in IT that no matter what area I choose with computers, I will at some point need to learn some programming. That has turned out to be increasingly true as I have become more skilled. Beginning in an entry-level help-desk position for me was fine for a while, but eventually I moved on. As positions required more complicated tasks, I found that in order to get the results from whatever task I was performing, some kind of scripting, coding, or programming was required. This was especially true in Web development. I could only drag-and-drop for so long until I had to modify the code behind the pictures and Web apps. According to Dave Willmer, a *Computerworld* columnist and executive director of Robert Half Technology, a provider of IT professionals on a project and full-time basis, companies will look for developers with knowledge of . Net, Java, Web development, open source and portal technologies such as Microsoft Corp's Sharepoint.

2. Help Desk/Technical Support

My heart is still in IT technical support. That is where I started in this business and I actually enjoyed it. Tech support gave me the foundation of troubleshooting, people skills, communication and the technical experience that I still rely on today.

The fact is that the need for support technicians tends to reflect general business conditions, and companies will hire more people as business grows, which in turn requires more technical-support positions. But the same skills required by a technician are valuable in almost all areas of IT.

3. Networking

The growing complexity of networks—which includes virtualization and popular approaches to application delivery, such as cloud computing and Software as a Service—will require more IT professionals to be knowledgeable with network technologies. There will be a need for people with a mix of server, software and networking skills to support networked storage and server devices contained in a single chassis. This will require a level of troubleshooting that crosses multiple technical boundaries—from hunting down a network communication problem to discovering it was merely a locked table in a database—all in the same appliance.

And let's not forget how much has been transformed from analog to digital with emerging technologies such as voice over IP (VoIP) and video conferencing, as well as mobile computing, wireless networks, smartphones and iPhones, all requiring the well-honed skills of network IT professionals that coordinate and connect it.

4. Project Management

No part of a business is immune to or exempt from the need to use computing any longer. Where I work, the need to look at a lean workflow is driving projects that are converting what was once entirely a paper process to a streamlining of digital information. Knowing how technology fits into each business process and taking advantage of those processes, making them more efficient in time and labor, will be highly desirable and add value to any company you work with. The ability to coordinate and manage the people working in all aspects of these projects is becoming important to business. IT professionals interested in building skills in these areas should seriously take a look at improving their project-management skills.

5. Security

Security is one of those skills that never become obsolete. If you know how to help keep your company's information secure, there will be a home for you forever. This is especially true now with so many business applications being transferred to the Web. Security needs are changing from high-tech firewall and intrusion skills to experts who can manage all business communications, responsible for keeping all the enterprise's communications secure, not just the network. Internal users pose the biggest risk to the enterprise through their use of hard-to-control technologies, from cloud computing to crowdsourcing (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crowdsourcing*), that leave the enterprise vulnerable to attack or manipulation.

What does that mean? It means that the way information security does its job will change and there will be an increase in demand for staff with surface-level knowledge of security technology, as well as a decreased need for

technical depth, at least for many of the technologies that currently exist, as well as knowledge of business processes and the risk management associated with these processes.

6. Business Intelligence

Business intelligence (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Business_intelligence*) put simply is the information that companies use to analyze where they are and where they will be going, and then to make business decisions based on this data. It involves trends, technologies and applications that businesses use to predict performance and other factors that help make better business decisions.

Business Intelligence (BI) has traditionally been understood as a system that collects historical data and provides tools to analyze it. Businesses are now more interested in real-time BI that relies, for instance, on people entering competitive data into a wiki and providing that information almost instantaneously via a portal.

Professionals with data-gathering skills combined with programming/analysis knowledge to work with and who can relate the numbers and raw data of data tables, database joins and data structure to business requirements, will always be in demand.

Conclusions

The IT professional is no longer just the stereotypical computer genius that works in a data center staring at a computer screen all day writing code. Skills such as business savvy, communication and interpersonal skills are now valued as much or more than technical prowess. IT professionals with a much broader skill set and the ability to see how technology can add value and reduce the cost of doing business will be what employers are looking for in 2010.

Be prepared to continually upgrade your skill sets, whether you are currently working or are in the market for a change. The ability to learn new technologies, apply these to business processes, and to market yourself as a "value-add" to the company is how IT professionals will secure their careers in the future.

Pete Choppin has been an IT Professional for over 15 years. He currently works as a network and systems administrator for a company called Albion based in Clearfield, Utah. He has experience in all types of hardware, software, and networking technologies. He is proficient in many operating systems including Linux, Windows and Macintosh. 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 has been a devout reader of *ComputorEdge* since 1990 and contributes regularly to featured articles as well as the Linux Lessons section of *ComputorEdge*. He can be contacted at *pchoppin@comcast.net* but prefers to have comments on *ComputorEdge* articles submitted to the editor and posted for the benefit of all readers.

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Careers on the Web

"The world of computers could be a promising place to make a living." by Michael J. Ross

Despite the IT horror stories of the past, as well as the current economic meltdown, there are several signs that point to a promising future for those who choose IT-related professions.

Given how modern societies seemingly run on computers, it would appear only logical that anyone seeking a viable professional path would be wise to consider a career in computers—hardware, software, information management, etc. After all, if the companies, governments, nonprofit organizations and overall economies of the world are completely reliant upon information technology (IT), then surely there must be ongoing demand for people capable of keeping the machines, programs and Web sites humming along. This belief probably peaked in the late 1990s, when programmers and high-tech entrepreneurs were turning even the most ridiculous business ideas into multimillion-dollar payoffs in the form of dot-com IPOs. We were told that these fabulously wealthy nerds were the new rock stars.

Yet judging by several measures, computer and Internet-focused careers have certainly lost their luster, in some fields declining in stature like post-crash NASDAQ stocks. Beginning with the onset of the recession in 2001, programmers and other digit-heads throughout the land heard a growing number of reports of high-tech companies going under, massive layoffs of IT staff, remaining employees working horrendous hours, perks disappearing, working conditions deteriorating and a dramatic increase in the outsourcing of software development and maintenance work to competitors overseas.

Even as programming jobs disappeared, and some old veterans came out of retirement to shore up their devastated IRAs, there was still great concern as to whether America would have enough software talent in the future. Colleges and universities routinely warned of lower numbers of students choosing computer science, engineering, and other technical fields in which to receive degrees—even worse than during the 1990s, when the U.S. media raised alarms over foreign students dominating the science and engineering degrees in American collegiate institutions. At an earlier stage in the process of grooming this country's future technical talent, American high school students were indicating little interest in pursuing academic and professional paths that seemed, in their minds, to lead only to the cubicle-bound misery of Dilbert.

More Computer Work

Despite the IT horror stories of the past, as well as the current economic meltdown devastating all types of jobs in America (except "banksters" and other government employees), there are several signs that point to a promising future for those who choose IT-related professions—including Web designers and developers, security specialists, computer technicians, SEO marketing experts, and countless other fields—some of which didn't even exist a decade or two ago.

Even though the majority of companies now have their own Web sites and have made significant progress in converting their operations to the new digital and online environment, most of them still have a long way to go before they have optimized how they reach new customers, develop and refine their products and services, store customer and sales data for maximum results (while maintaining privacy), and generally run their businesses. That work needs to be done—by computer professionals, many of whom have yet to be hired. In fact, much of the work has yet to be even identified, by managers and other business leaders who truly understand the potential for improving their operations and outdistancing the competition.

Furthermore, those individuals leaning toward careers on the Web can only benefit from a trend that is becoming increasingly obvious every day: As more people use the Internet for storing and communicating data, they are also using it as a replacement for functionality traditionally performed by desktop software (i.e., programs that must be installed and run locally on one's own computer). Commonly cited examples include Web-based e-mail services (such as Gmail) supplanting e-mail client programs (such as Microsoft Outlook), and office productivity services (such as Google Docs) grabbing market share from office suites (such as Microsoft Office). This will add further wind to the sails of Web site designers and developers, whose talents will be called upon for creating the online and mobile applications of the future.

Lastly, in a world of declining revenues and availability of credit, businesses and other organizations will be forced to find new ways of saving money and operating in a leaner fashion. These efforts toward greater economizing will likely fuel more demand for converting manual processes to automatic, for replacing paper-based documents with far more usable and searchable electronic versions, and for every other imaginable way that data and data processing can be made more efficient, while producing greater results—regardless of whether the data and programs are local or "in the cloud." All of these efforts will call for computer skills of every type.

More Benefits

One of the biggest factors in attracting college graduates and other young adults to one profession or another is the perception of how well each career might pay. This is especially critical for those who are new to the job market but certainly not new to the pressures of being in debt, resulting from years of student loans and other expenses piling up—while these individuals studied in school and did not earn a sizable paycheck, aside from government work-study gigs and other low-paying part-time jobs.

Fortunately, for people who are bright, hard-working and technically savvy, most if not all of the computer-related positions out in the job market tend to pay well—provided that the work requires solid technical understanding and/or valuable creative skills, and not just performing mindless tasks on a computer, or using a computer merely to make traditional phone-centric jobs more efficient.

Study after study indicates that computer and engineering jobs are some of the best-paying technical professions to be had. In fact, senior programmers at good companies, for instance, can easily make six-figure incomes, and oftentimes will turn down offers to move upward in management, despite the salary increases, because those people prefer to continue doing the technically creative work that makes them enjoy their jobs, more than overseeing the work of others. Even for recent college graduates, choosing the right technical path can lead to excellent starting salaries. Three years ago, when CNN Money published a study (*money.cnn.com/2006/02/13/pf/college/starting_salaries/*) on starting salaries, they found that liberal arts majors and marketers would begin at approximately $30,000 and $36,000, respectively, far behind computer science majors and chemical engineers, who at the same time would be earning roughly $20,000 more.

Admittedly, salary is only part of an overall professional package, and it is oftentimes not the top consideration for industry veterans who have found quite satisfying jobs that allow for a great deal of creativity and control—especially if they are not feeling the pressures of loan debt. In a more recent study (*money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bestjobs/2009/*), CNN Money returned to the topic of assessing careers, but this time broadened the study to all levels of age and experience, and considered overall job satisfaction. In their search for the best jobs in America, they ranked network security consultants in position eight, IT project managers in the fifth position, and systems engineers as the winners.

With parents increasingly choosing to home-school their children, and white-collar professionals willing to do just about anything to avoid the expense and stress of a daily commute, working from home has become a lifestyle devoutly to be wished. This is typically the first choice for freelancers—particularly those doing Web-focused work, which requires no equipment aside from a computer and a connection to the Internet. For employees of companies larger than one, telecommuting—if only for one or two days per week—is an attractive option, and is facilitated by the much greater use of Internet telephony (VoIP) and teleconferencing, which saves even more money for firms with offices or clients located on other continents.

More Downsides

Although the advantages of working with computers can be significant, anyone considering such a career should not be blinded to the disadvantages as well: For one, not everyone has the intellectual chops to get hired as a programmer or other technical professional, much less do well enough in the job to keep it, and receive salary raises and bonuses. People who flourish in the world of computers generally must be quite detail-oriented, coldly analytical, and have the mental capacity and burning interest to learn new technologies and techniques almost every day, simply to keep up with what is probably the fastest changing field of human endeavor.

Even worse in terms of one's health, any sort of IT work can be rather stressful—mentally and physically. In fact, a number of studies and articles have pointed out that IT professionals are more likely to suffer from stress than any

other white-collar workers. One study—performed prior to the global economic crisis added even more job pressures—found that a remarkable 97 percent of people working in information technology stated that their jobs are quite stressful, every day. Problems at work quickly become problems at home, for those techies who must be on-call, in one form or another—such as a pager that can go off in the middle of the night, or even just a phone whose number is known by demanding clients in other time zones. Such domestic pressures can then ruin family and marital life.

High levels of stress and other career problems can result from any number of factors, some of which a job applicant could not possibly foresee before getting dropped into the thick of it. For instance, you might get hired on as a software engineer at a company that is understaffed (most of them are), where the workload on your back will pile up quickly, with relief possible only if you were to quit or be let go. Even if you put in stellar performance every workday, plus weekends (many companies expect this), you may receive little recognition from your managers or peers, if they are highly technical (and frequently quite arrogant). It can be even worse if your supervisors are clueless about computers, and think that writing software is just glorified typing, and can be done at the same speed, or that building a Web site is not much different from what they do to add text and pictures to their Facebook pages. Over the long haul, this could take more out of you than a stingy paycheck.

Regardless of these and other potential pitfalls in a computer career, if you have the mental and intestinal fortitude to make a profession of the type of development and design skills that you enjoy using for your own projects, then the world of computers could be the most promising place for you to make a living.

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

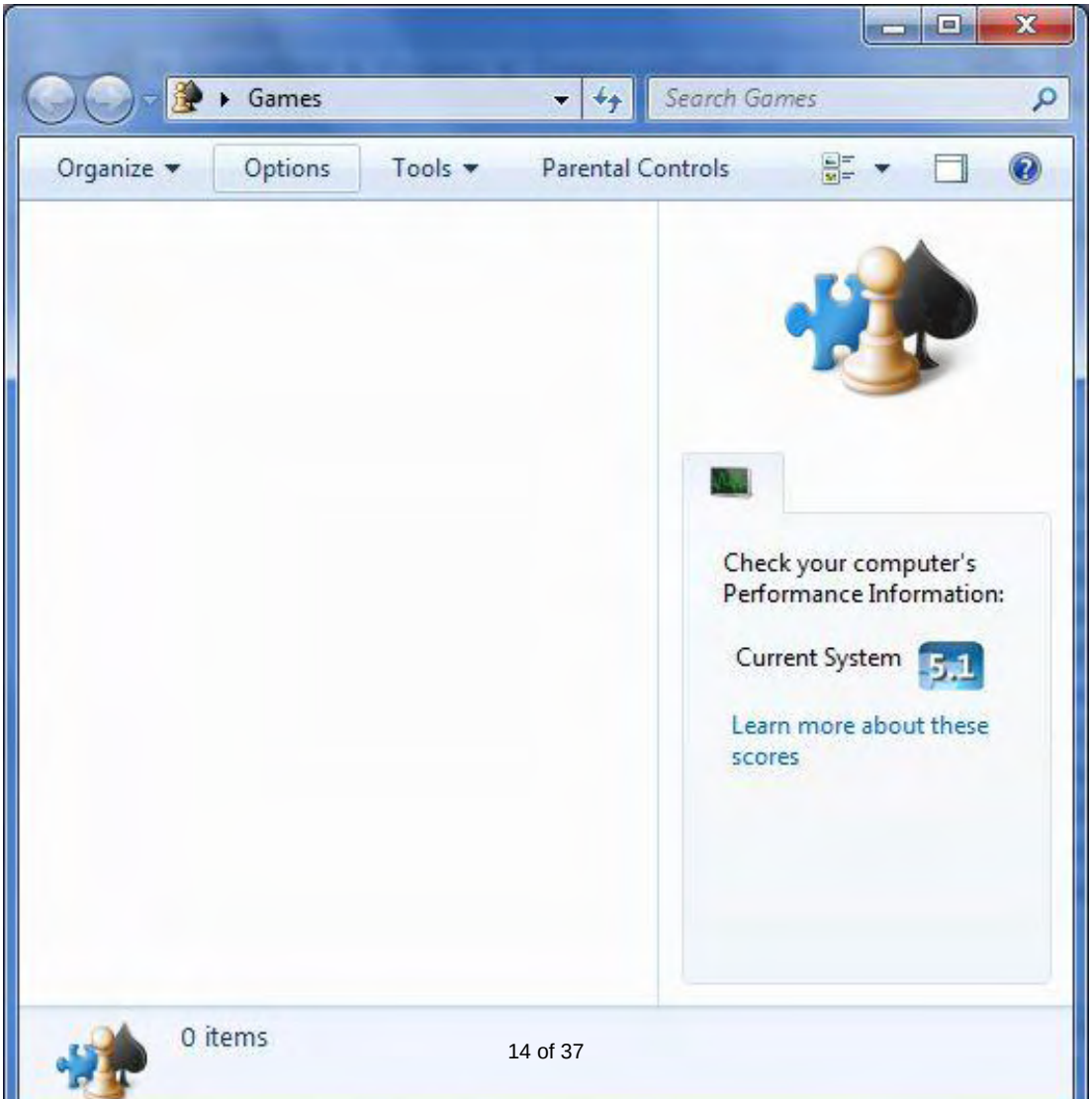
Windows Tips and Tricks: Playing Games

"If you can't find the entertainment, here's how to activate it." by Jack Dunning

If you get the Professional version of Windows 7, you may wonder where all the games are—Microsoft hides them. Find out where to look for them.

Similar to Vista, if you get the Professional version of Windows 7, you may wonder where all the games are. I'm not sure why Microsoft hides the games from the Professional users. This is not the case with the Home version. Maybe Microsoft doesn't want you to play games at work—like it's any of their business. Microsoft might think that (if you're a professional) your boss won't want you to know that you have games available. In any case, if you can't find the entertainment, here's how to activate it.

Windows 7 has a folder entitle "Games Explorer." To open the folder, simply type "games" in the the Search field of the Start menu and select it from the list. If you see an empty window (Figure 1) then you will need to activate the games.



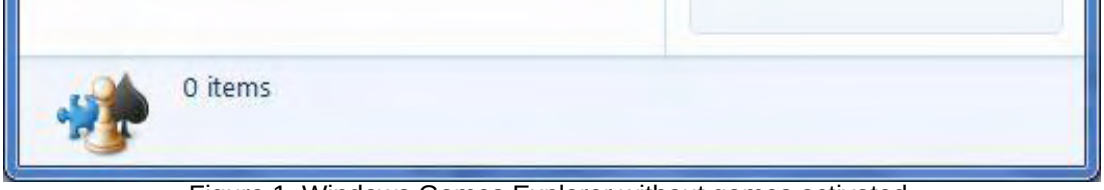


Figure 1. Windows Games Explorer without games activated.

To activate the Games Explorer, open either "Programs" in the Control Panel or "Programs and Features" under "Programs" in the Control Panel (or type "programs" in the Search field of the Start menu, and select "Programs and Features" from the list). In either window, click a link called "Turn Windows features on and off" (see Figure 2). (In "Programs" the link is under the "Programs and Features" heading. In "Programs and Features" the link is in the left-hand navigation bar.) Check the Games check box at the top of the list and click OK. Windows will activate the games.

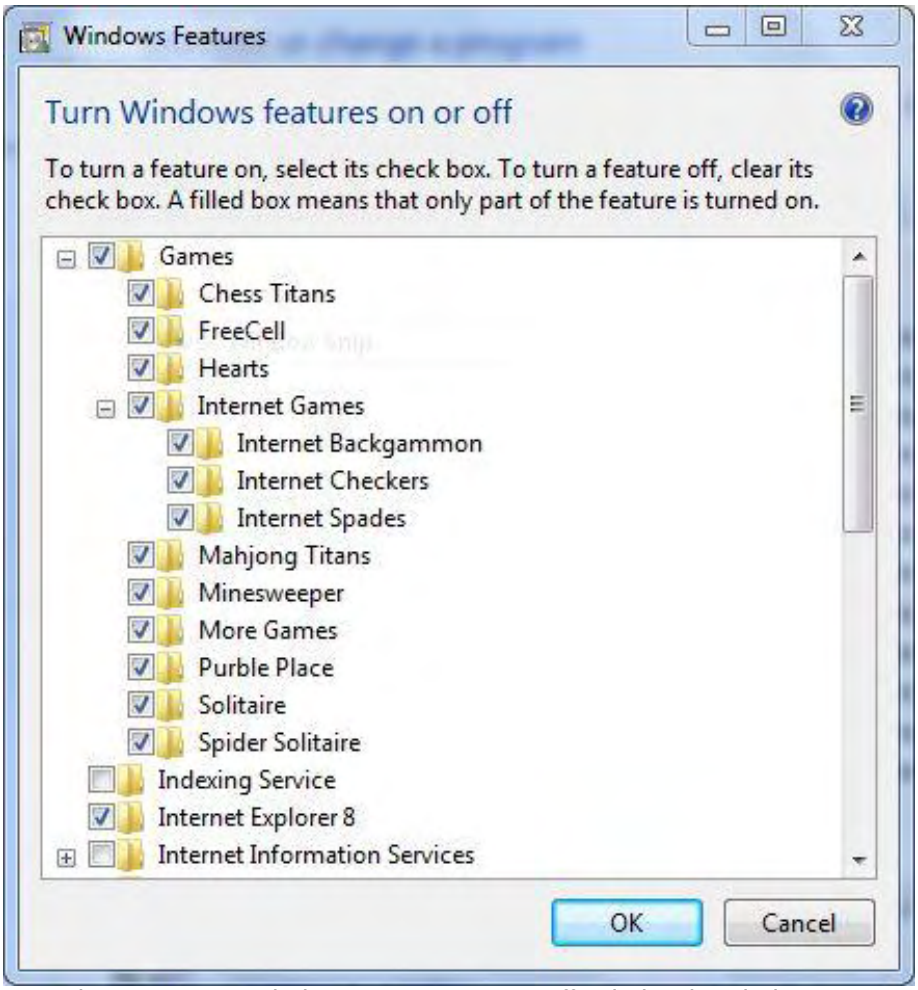


Figure 2. "Turn Windows Features on or off" window in Windows 7.

Once the games are activated, Games Explorer will display the available entertainment (see Figure 3). Not all versions of Windows will necessarily display the same games. Microsoft states "Some Windows games, such as Chess Titans or Internet Checkers, are available only in some editions of Windows." I haven't done any research to determine what you gain or lose with the Basic version of Windows 7.

Hint to annoy your kids: *If you find that you can't get to your computer because the kids are playing the games on it all of the time, use the reverse of the above procedure to deactivate the games. If the kids complain that their games have disappeared, tell them that it must be a virus.*

Figure 3. Windows Games Explorer with games activated.

If you don't find you have enough games to drive your boss crazy, click "More Games from Microsoft." (See Figure 4.) It seems there is enough there to completely waste your life away.

Figure 4. More Games from Microsoft.

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

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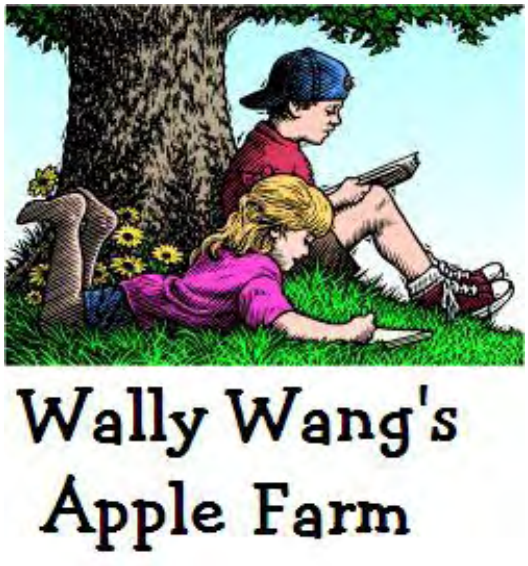

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Computer Careers" by Wally Wang

While a computer science degree can help land a job, a better approach would be to combine computer science with another field. Also, a look at what's missing from the recent deluge of tablet computers—and how Apple's will be different; and a tip on using the Save As command in Microsoft Office to save to a different filename or file format.

Many people study computer science in school in hopes of getting a job. While computer science alone can help land a job, a better approach would be to combine computer science with another field.

For example, besides studying computer science, study accounting. Now if a company like Intuit wants to hire programmers to help them work on its TurboTax program, guess who they'll likely pick? Someone with just a computer science degree or someone with a computer science degree plus a minor in accounting?

If you'd rather study law, you could become a computer programmer developing legal software. Another alternative is to become a lawyer specializing in software patents and litigation. By combining computer science with another field, you essentially double your chances of landing a job in a specialized field that ordinary computer science graduates could never get.

Combine computer science with finance and you could get involved in something called high-frequency trading (*www.nytimes.com/2009/07/24/business/24trading.html*), which is where mathematicians create computer programs, dubbed "black boxes," that automatically buy and sell stocks based on probabilities that occur every millisecond the stock market is open.

By analyzing real-time market conditions and spotting statistically favorable opportunities that humans can't find and react to in time, high-frequency trading involves creating the best and most efficient algorithms to play the stock market.

If your tastes lean more toward biology, consider bioinformatics (*www.bioinformatics.org*), which is the combination of computer science with molecular biology. The basic idea behind bioinformatics is that you can represent DNA as text strings that you can manipulate with the computer rather than conducting expensive real-life experiments in a laboratory.

Combine computer science with a law enforcement background and you could work for the FBI in the field of computer forensics (*www.computerforensicsworld.com*) where you'll get to analyze data stored on suspects' hard disks. Whether you have experience or interest in hotel management, construction, retail, or trucking, you can apply your computer science skills to a particular niche and separate yourself from the herd of other computer science graduates who are just hoping to get any job.

If you enjoy the study of psychology, combine that knowledge with computer science and develop software that can detect and identify people's behavior, which could come in handy for developing a computer program that can scan a crowd and analyze anyone who appears to exhibit a high amount of stress. Such high levels of stress could indicate a potential terrorist trying to sneak on to an airplane.

The point is that just learning computer science places you in a herd crowded with other people with the same computer science background. However, if you combine your computer science knowledge with another field, you

can separate yourself from the pack and get a job that only you may be uniquely qualified to fill.

Everyone has a unique skill or interest that they could combine with their interest in computer science. By marrying those two interests together, you'll define your own niche in the job market and most likely be happier (and possibly wealthier) as a result.

What's Missing From These Tablet Designs?

At the Computer Electronics Show (CES), everyone was showing off tablet computers, but hardly anyone could tell you exactly why you'd want one. To avoid being left out of the "We have a tablet PC design too" herd, Dell introduced a five-inch tablet device called the Mini 5.

Figure 1. The Dell Mini 5 is one of the smallest tablet computers.

Strangely enough, this tablet computer can double as a mobile phone and a camera in addition to letting you play music, read e-books, or watch video. Like all tablet designs, Dell also focuses exclusively on content consumption (reading e-books or watching video) and ignores the killer problem of content creation.

However, what's really missing from Dell's Mini 5 is that it runs on Google's Android operating system instead of Microsoft's Windows 7. For Dell, that's actually a smart move because Android allows them to customize the Mini 5's touchscreen without the bloated overhead of running a full-blown desktop operating system like Windows 7.

If Dell is capable of creating a portable device without relying on Windows, what does that tell you about the future of Windows on tablet devices?

Also at CES 2010, Lenovo introduced its tablet design called the U1 Hybrid. Unlike other tablets, the U1 Hybrid is an ordinary laptop computer with a screen that pops out to act as a tablet.

Figure 2. Lenovo's U1 Hybrid.

Lenovo plans to release this U1 Hybrid for $999 by this summer, but its solution to the problem of content creation still relies on a physical keyboard. Pop the screen out to use it as a tablet and you're back to the limitations of a tablet again. Despite all the technology journalists getting excited about this device, it's just another limited design that avoids the problem of content creation on a tablet by giving you a detachable physical keyboard.

A few rumors of Apple's tablet focuses on a virtual keyboard, but they almost always display the virtual keyboard with the keys in fixed rows and columns, essentially mimicking the physical limitations of a real keyboard with the lack of tactile feedback of a virtual keyboard.

Figure 3. Any virtual keyboard on Apple's tablet will likely not mimic the space restrictions of a physical keyboard.

What's the point of creating a virtual keyboard that limits you just like a physical keyboard? By January 27, we'll all know for sure what Apple is going to release, but the real difference between Apple and every other computer company is that Apple isn't trying to follow the crowd; they're trying to lead the crowd, which is something that few other companies want to risk doing.

Even Microsoft, one of the largest and most powerful software companies in the world, couldn't come up with any tablet design more exciting than just slapping Windows 7 in a tablet PC and letting Steve Ballmer demonstrate it at the Consumer Electronics Show. For a billion dollar company with tremendous resources at its disposal, this is the best they could do? For more information about this tablet, read PC World's article "Why the Microsoft-HP Tablet is a Big Disappointment (*www.pcworld.com/article/186172/why_the_microsofthp_tablet_is_a_big_disappointment.html*)."

If you look at all the tablet PC designs, they're all missing a reason to use them. It's easy to see why someone would want a Kindle, if they don't mind the relatively high cost. It's hard to see why someone would want a tablet PC that just seems to mimic a Kindle.

The big difference between the PC industry and Apple is that when the PC industry introduces a product, people have to think whether they need it or not. When Apple introduces a product, people don't care if they need it or not, they just want it.

My bet is that Apple wouldn't introduce a tablet unless it completely amazes people with what it can do. With its acquisition of FingerWorks back in 2005, it seems increasingly likely that Apple's tablet will introduce a revolutionary way to interact with a tablet computer that nobody in the PC industry (including Microsoft) has ever thought possible.

To see how backwards the vision of Microsoft can be, check out this YouTube video of Steve Ballmer (*www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5oGaZIKYvo*) ridiculing the iPhone because it doesn't have a keyboard. The iPhone's greatest advantage is that it doesn't rely on a physical keyboard, and Steve Ballmer insists that this is its biggest weakness.

If Steve Ballmer were alive at the turn of the century, he might as well ridicule Henry Ford by telling him that the Model T is useless because there's no place to attach a horse.

In the children's book "The Phantom Tollbooth," a boy named Milo discovers a land where people walk everywhere by focusing on the tops of their shoes. By looking at their shoes, these people fail to see the beautiful landscape around them.

That's what the Consumer Electronics Show is like. All of these major computer manufacturers are staring at their shoes. Instead of looking toward the future, they're focused on what minor changes they can make in the present. People who stare at the tops of their shoes can't see where they're going, so they either have to rely on following someone else (like Apple), or they just walk straight into a brick wall.

When Apple announces its tablet computer on January 27, be prepared to hear a lot of computer companies smashing their faces into a brick wall. Then watch these same companies turn around and start copying Apple because that's the only vision they know how to follow.

* * *

If you're familiar with Microsoft Office for the Mac, but want to switch to iWork, here's one difference you'll notice right away.

In Microsoft Office applications, such as Word, you can choose the File menu and then Save As. This Save As command gives you two options. First, it lets you save your current document under a different name. Second, it gives you the option of saving your current document under its original name, but in a different file format.

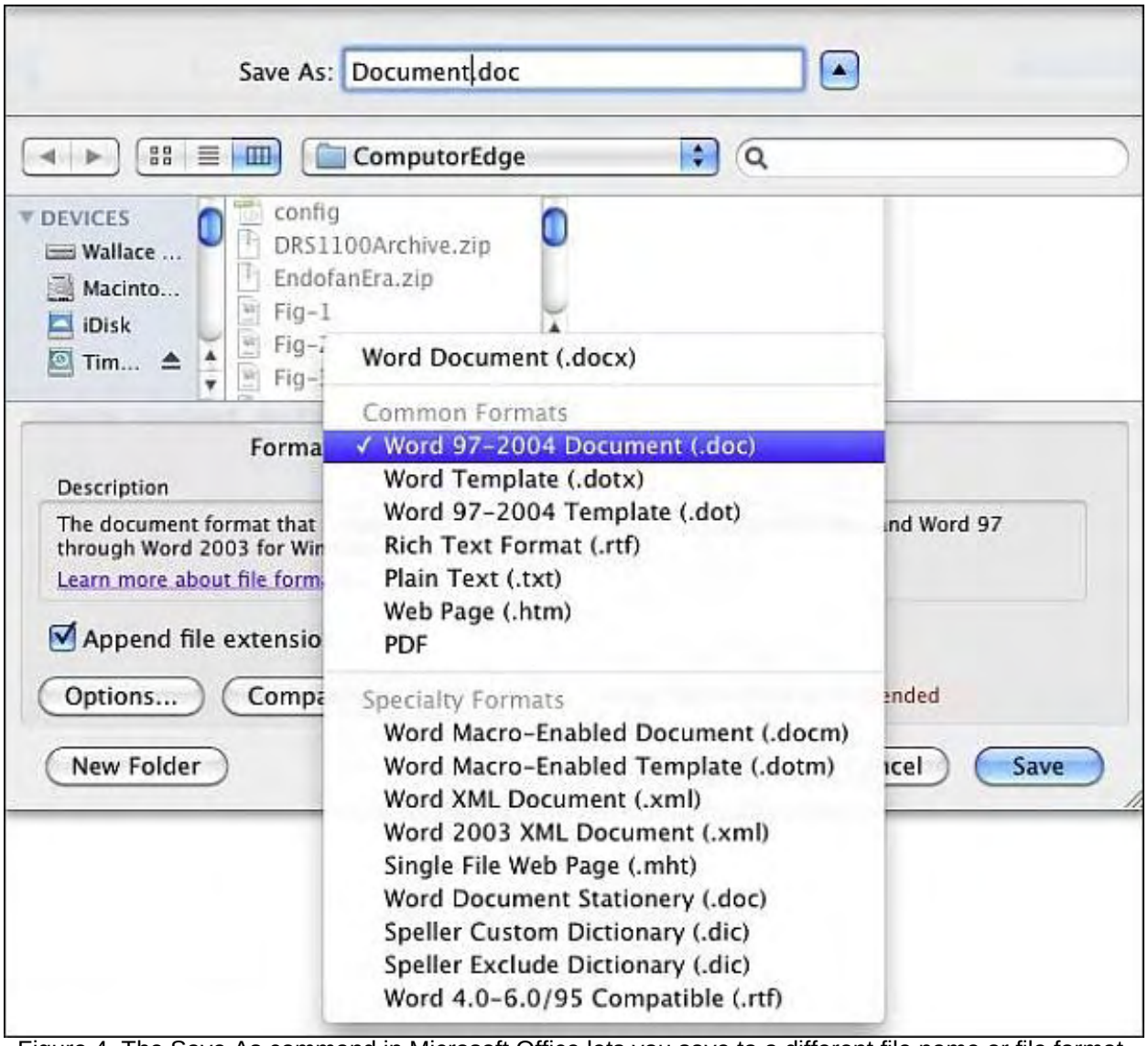

Figure 4. The Save As command in Microsoft Office lets you save to a different file name or file format.

Letting one command serve multiple purposes might seem more versatile, but it can also be confusing as well. A more straightforward approach with iWork is to break these features into two distinct commands.

If you want to save your current iWork document under a new name, you choose the File menu and then the Save As command. If you want to save your current iWork document in a different file format, you choose the File menu and then the Export command.

Which method is better? Microsoft's method offers the potential for greater confusion in return for more versatility. Apple's method offers easier understanding with the clumsiness of two separate commands on the File menu.

This seemingly minor difference is what defines how Microsoft sees the computer world and how Apple sees the computer world. Neither choice is necessarily the best or the "right" one, but it does highlight the philosophical differences between the two companies and the products they create.

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*).

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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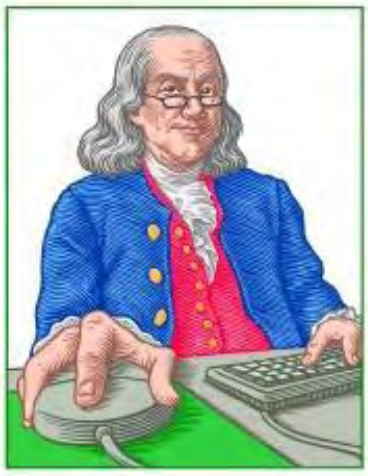

Linux Lessons: Tips and Tricks from Users

"Which Distro Is for You?" by ComputorEdge Staff

With hundreds of Linux distros out there to choose from, how do you find the right one for you?

Mr. Pete Choppin,

I've really been enjoying your Linux Lessons in ComputorEdge*. I've been considering moving to some Linux distro for a while and have been familiarizing myself with Ubuntu. Until recently I was under the impression (incorrectly) that Ubuntu was the only GUI Linux offered. I have several friends on* www.gokgs.com *who use Debian and they highly recommend it.*

Could you give us a rundown on the various Linux distros and give us their pro and cons? There are just so many it is very confusing to a Linux noob.

Thank you,

Paula E. Barefoot
Borrego Springs, CA

Paula,

Thank you for your comments on Linux Lessons.

I can certainly understand your confusion about the many distributions of Linux out there—there are hundreds.

You are not the only person with this question. Many people cannot decide which distro to choose from. I usually tell people your choice of Linux distributions can depend on several different factors. How much experience do you have with Linux? What will you be doing with Linux? What features do you want installed with your distro? What kind of hardware will you be installing Linux on, etc.?

I understand that many users new to Linux may not know all the answers to these questions, which is why we decided to begin with Ubuntu for *ComputorEdge* Linux Lessons. Ubuntu is a very easy-to-use and easy-to-install distro, which is ideal for first-time Linux users. This allows you to become familiar with the operating system without fighting with configurations. You can learn the ins and outs of the OS, and then decide which distro best suits you (although it is likely that you will stay with the one you began on. That is what happened with me. I still prefer Fedora (Red Hat).

I have not tried out every Linux distribution out there. That would take me many years. However, there is a Web site that does list many of them and gives you a good idea of what they are, reviews, screen shots, histories, etc. That site is DistroWatch.com (*www.distrowatch.com*).

Good luck and have fun in your quest for the perfect distro.

Pete

* * *

I'll be back next week with more Linux tips.

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

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

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Rob, The ComputorTutor: Technology Solutions

"Duplicate Files, Part 2" by Rob Spahitz

Last week we continued looking at the idea of locating duplicate files on your Windows system. Since we ran into problems creating an on-the-fly database, we decided to explore other ideas. I'll share one today.

Last week we continued looking at the idea of locating duplicate files on your Windows system. Since we ran into problems creating an on-the-fly database, we decided to explore other ideas. I'll share one today.

When you think about it, a database is really anything that holds data. A "true" database is nice for storing large amounts of data and giving you tools to access that data. However, anything that holds data can be considered a database, like a text box, a file, or even a picture. Since we already had a ListBox in our project, and our database needs were really minimal, I decided to extend its use to handle all of our needs.

Duplicate File Locator Project

For those who may have missed it, let's recap. We decided to create an application that will wander through the Windows file structure and locate all duplicate files. Since the concept of duplicates can have many meanings, we decided to go with the simple concept of those files with the same name rather than those with the same content or same time-stamp or whatever else.

We quickly created a VB.Net 2008 project called DupFinder. We created it to look like Figure 1.

Figure 1. DupFinder Application Prototype.

The lstFiles box is a listbox that will hold the names of the files that it finds while scrolling through Windows. The two Labels on the right are used to show file information (there are two so you can compare sizes and timestamps). The Begin button starts the searching process; Review lets you examine files with matching names; Exit closes the application.

The big problem we previously solved was recursively navigating through subfolders to find all available files. What remained was a way to organize the files so that we could show the duplicate names.

To solve the problem, I did two things. First, I set the lstFiles Sorted property to True. This will force all entries added to the list to be put in alphabetical (or numerical) order. Now all items with the same starting name will appear together. The only problem is that we are adding the entire path as we go, so it's really sorting path names rather than filenames. To solve that, rather than put the information into a database, I decided to capture the filename and simply prefix it so it appears at the beginning of the entry; then I add the full path right after.

Since I want to be able to get the path later, I need to put a separator between the two. If I simply put a hyphen or space, that wouldn't work since filenames can contain those characters, so I wouldn't know where the filename ends and the path begins. Instead I chose to insert a tab character like this: Me.lstFiles.Items.Add(strFileName & vbTab & strFilePath)

With that in place, sorting incoming filenames as they arrive, and adding the file path at the end, I get all the information I need to visually locate duplicate filenames. The next step was to allow the user to pick a starting folder since we had previously selected an arbitrary starting place to test the process. Using the entire C drive will be a slow process (especially since the listbox will be sorting as it goes, so we wanted to limit the testing to something reasonable). (Oh, and to help, we allowed you to click on the form's background to stop the process in case it still took too long.)

Now it's time to start making the app a bit more user friendly. To that end, I decided to add a Folder-Picker feature. When the user clicks on the Begin button, it asks which folder to use as the source. For this, I added a FolderBrowserDialog.

Here's the new code for the whole project:

```
Public Class Form1
    Private mbInterruptProcessing As Boolean = False
    Private Sub btnExit_Click(ByVal sender As System.Object, ByVal e As System.
EventArgs) Handles btnExit.Click
        Me.Close()
    End Sub
    Private Sub btnBegin_Click(ByVal sender As System.Object, ByVal e As System.
EventArgs) Handles btnBegin.Click
        Dim objCursorSave As Cursor
        Dim strDesiredPath As String '= "C:*bckslsh*windows*bckslsh*system32"
        If dlgFolder.ShowDialog = DialogResult.OK Then
            strDesiredPath = dlgFolder.SelectedPath
            objCursorSave = Me.Cursor
            Me.Cursor = Cursors.WaitCursor
            Me.lstFiles.Items.Clear()
            mbInterruptProcessing = False
            AddFilesToList(strDesiredPath)
            Me.Cursor = objCursorSave
        End If
    End Sub
    Sub AddFilesToList(ByVal FileProfile As String)
        Dim strFilePath As String
        Dim strFileName As String
        Dim strDirectory As String
        Try
            For Each strFilePath In FileIO.FileSystem.GetFiles(FileProfile)
                strFileName = FileIO.FileSystem.GetName(strFilePath)
                Me.lstFiles.Items.Add(strFileName & vbTab & strFilePath)
            Next
            Application.DoEvents()
            For Each strDirectory In FileIO.FileSystem.GetDirectories(FileProfile)
                AddFilesToList(strDirectory)
```

```
                If mbInterruptProcessing Then
                    Exit For
                End If
            Next
        Catch ex As Exception
            Debug.Print("unable to access directory")
        End Try
    End Sub
    Private Sub Form1_Click(ByVal sender As Object, ByVal e As System.
EventArgs) Handles Me.Click
        mbInterruptProcessing = True
    End Sub
    Private Sub btnReview_Click(ByVal sender As System.Object, ByVal e As System.
EventArgs) Handles btnReview.Click
        Dim strFirstFile As String
        Dim objFileInfo As System.IO.FileInfo
        If Me.lstFiles.SelectedItems.Count > 0 Then
            strFirstFile = Me.lstFiles.SelectedItems(0)
            objFileInfo = FileIO.FileSystem.GetFileInfo(strFirstFile)
            Me.lblFileInfo1.Text = objFileInfo.Name & vbNewLine _
                & "Size=" & objFileInfo.Length & vbNewLine _
                & "Created " & vbNewLine & objFileInfo.CreationTime & vbNewLine _
                & "Last Changed " & vbNewLine & objFileInfo.LastWriteTime
        End If
    End Sub
    Private Sub Form1_Load(ByVal sender As System.Object, ByVal e As System.
EventArgs) Handles MyBase.Load
        Me.dlgFolder.SelectedPath = My.Computer.FileSystem.CurrentDirectory
    End Sub
End Class
```

Code Translation

Let me translate this code. The first and last line ("Public Class Form1", "End Class") define this Class, which is basically the whole project. In this case, it defines the Form that will be displayed. Within these two lines are a collection of procedures (Sub...End Sub) to handle the various tasks; plus we have one line, "Private mbInterruptProcessing," to allow the loading process to get interrupted.

"Private Sub btnExit_Click" simply handles the shutdown when the user clicks on the Exit button.

"Private Sub btnBegin_Click" handles the process to begin sorting. I'll get back to the contents of that in a moment.

"Sub AddFilesToList" is used by btnBegin_Click. More on that shortly too.

"Private Sub Form1_Click" is used to stop the loading if the user clicks on the form.

"Private Sub btnReview_Click" shows the information about the currently selected file. This hasn't changed—yet.

"Private Sub Form1_Load" runs when the form first starts. I decided that it's good to set up the folder-picker with the project's starting folder initially to transfer the current directory into the folder's starting path: Me.dlgFolder. SelectedPath = My.Computer.FileSystem.CurrentDirectory

OK, now back to btnBegin_Click. Previously we have a predefined location picked out and saved into variable strDesiredPath. Now we start by showing the folder's dialog window (dlgFolder.ShowDialog) and waiting for the user to pick a folder. If the cancel button is not pushed, this process will return DialogResult.OK and we can proceed with our process.

So next I save the selected path (strDesiredPath = dlgFolder.SelectedPath), change the cursor, clear any existing data in the list, perform a procedure to add the files, and then restore the cursor when done. Most of this was the same as our previous version. The main difference is asking for the user to pick a path.

Moving on to the AddFilesToList procedure. This was modified to capture the filename from the path that is being retrieved (strFileName = FileIO.FileSystem.GetName(strFilePath)) then adding not just the file path but also the filename, separated by a tab character (Me.lstFiles.Items.Add(strFileName & vbTab & strFilePath)).

Aside from those minor changes, everything else remained the same. When you run it now, you get something like Figures 2 and 3.

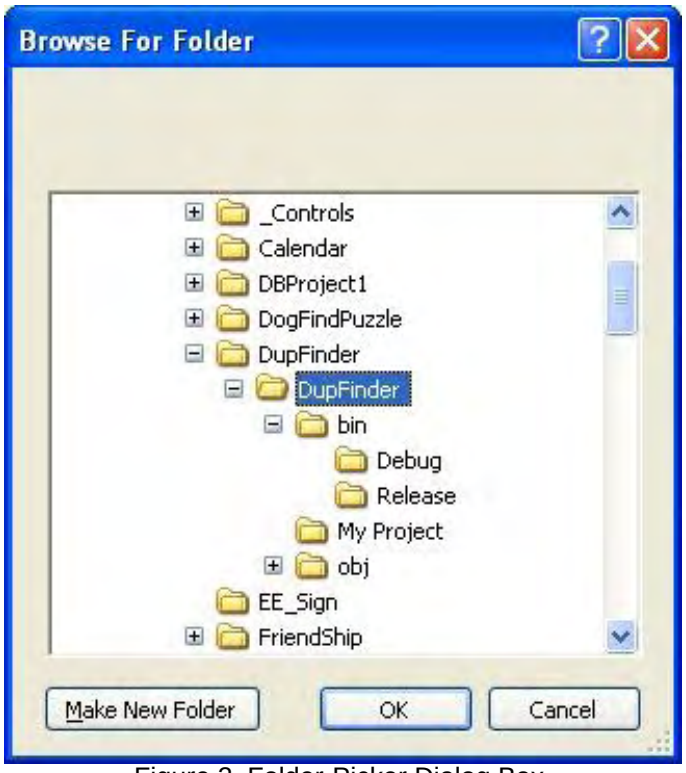

Figure 2. Folder-Picker Dialog Box.

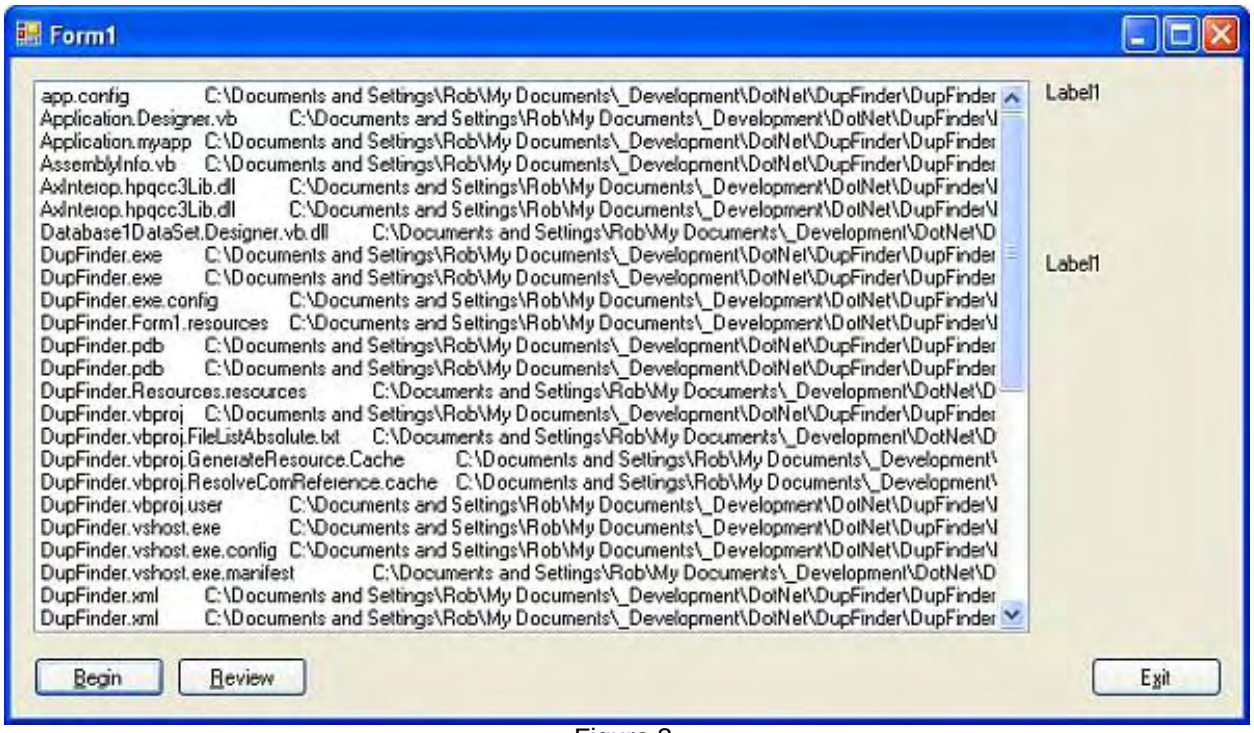

Figure 3.

When you look at the above result, which lists the files in my VB development folder, you can see some duplicate filenames followed by a gap (tab) and the folder where it exists. Because of this change, we will need to modify the Review process since we are no longer capturing just a file path.

In the btnReview_Click procedure, after we capture the SelectedItem, we will need to strip off the filename. One easy way, since we are adding a tab character, is to split the text at the tab and take the second part. Add this to solve the problem:

```
strFirstFile = strFirstFile.Split(vbTab)(1)
```

The Split function will take some text and split it, using the specified character (delimiter), into a zero-based array. Array item 0 is the item before the first delimiter, item 1 is just after the first delimiter and before the second delimiter (if it exists), etc.

One more thing: Since it's possible that a file gets deleted before the user clicks on the Review button, error-trapping (Try/Catch) should be added. My final code looks like this:

```
        Dim strFirstFile As String
        Dim objFileInfo As System.IO.FileInfo
        If Me.lstFiles.SelectedItems.Count > 0 Then
            Try
                strFirstFile = Me.lstFiles.SelectedItems(0)
                strFirstFile = strFirstFile.Split(vbTab)(1)
                objFileInfo = FileIO.FileSystem.GetFileInfo(strFirstFile)
                Me.lblFileInfo1.Text = objFileInfo.Name & vbNewLine _
                    & "Size=" & objFileInfo.Length & vbNewLine _
                    & "Created " & vbNewLine & objFileInfo.CreationTime & vbNewLine _
                    & "Last Changed " & vbNewLine & objFileInfo.LastWriteTime
            Catch ex As Exception
                MessageBox.Show
("File not available at this time.", "Not available", MessageBoxButtons.OK)
            End Try
```

```
        End If
```

Now the only thing left to do is to have VB wander through the list and check duplicate names to see if the files appear to be the same. At this point I'll leave this for a future article. Have fun with this and send any responses you have related to this project. Next week we'll move on to something else.

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

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Spam of the Week

"The latest in annoying and dangerous e-mail currently making the rounds." by ComputorEdge Staff

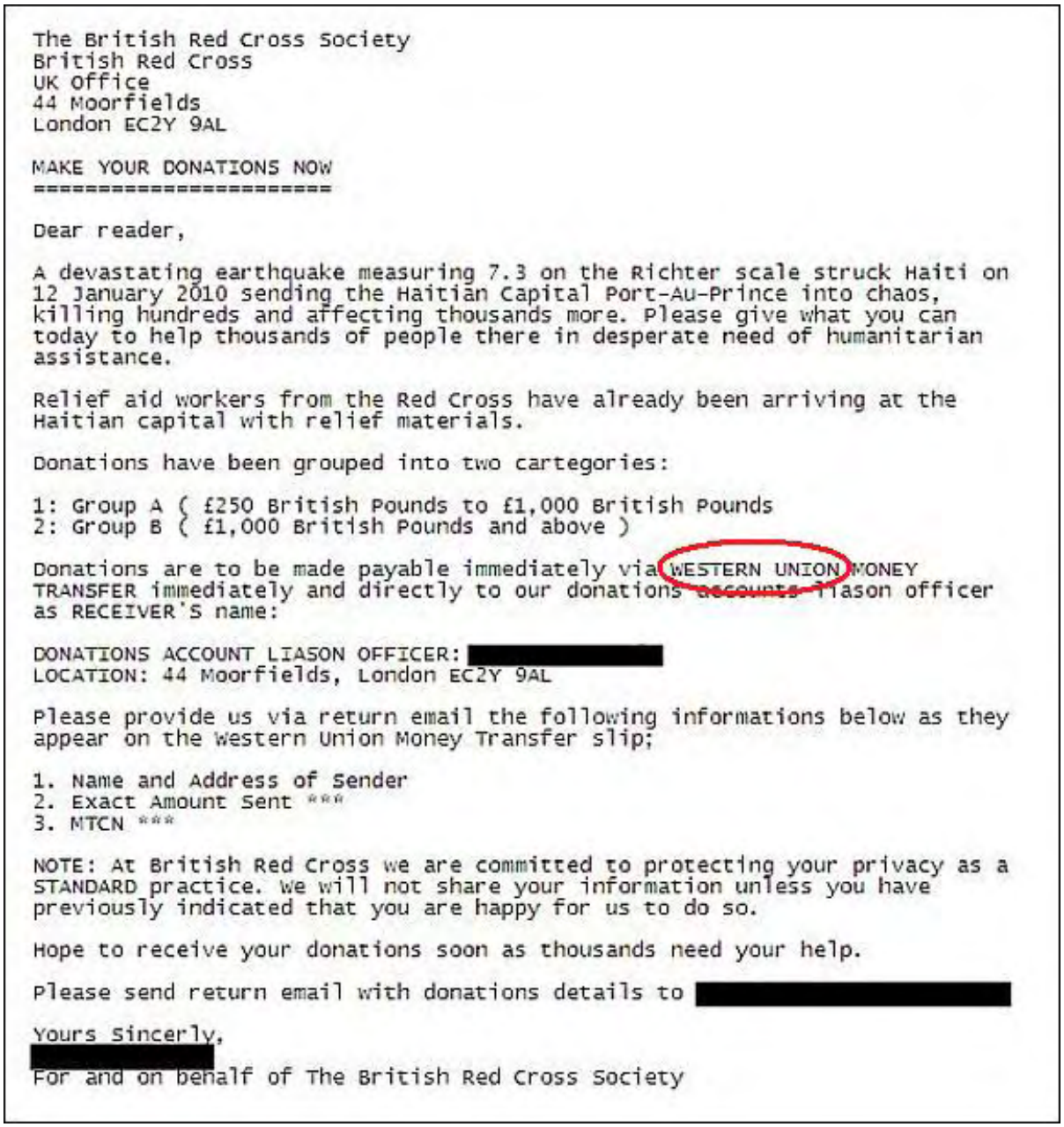
Natural disasters are an opportunity for the scammers to come out of the woodwork and prey upon those who truly want to help out those in need. The earthquake in Haiti is no exception.

The primary purpose of the Spam of the Week feature is to help readers to recognize what dangerous e-mails look like. They follow patterns that, if you see enough of them, make the phishing and viral schemes fairly easy to recognize and avoid. While there are specific types of malware associated which each spam, we don't always know which one or how to remedy the problem if you inadvertently succumb to one of them. We merely want to help people recognize and delete potential problems.

This week rather than displaying an active spam, we are highlighting a potential problem caused by the earthquake in Haiti. Natural disasters are an opportunity for the scammers to come out of the woodwork and prey upon those who truly want to help out those in need. These nefarious people will set up fake Haitian relief sites that solicit donations and send spam directing charitable people to those phony Web sites. While we haven't yet received any specific spams associated with Haiti, no doubt they are in the works.

As noted in the USA Today article, "Computer scammers solicit 'donations' for Haitian relief" (*www.usatoday.com/money/industries/technology/2010-01-18-haiti-relief-effort-scams_N.htm*), you should not respond to e-mails to make donations, but rather go directly to a known legitimate donation Web site. Need a list of legitimate sites? The Web site *www.usaid.gov/helphaiti/* is a good place to start.

Below is a scamming spam supposedly from the British Red Cross.



The British Red Cross Society
British Red Cross
UK Office
44 Moorfields
London EC2Y 9AL

MAKE YOUR DONATIONS NOW

Dear reader,

A devastating earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale struck Haiti on 12 January 2010 sending the Haitian Capital Port-Au-Prince into chaos, killing hundreds and affecting thousands more. Please give what you can today to help thousands of people there in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

Relief aid workers from the Red Cross have already been arriving at the Haitian capital with relief materials.

Donations have been grouped into two cartegories:

1: Group A (£250 British Pounds to £1,000 British Pounds
2: Group B (£1,000 British Pounds and above)

Donations are to be made payable immediately via WESTERN UNION MONEY TRANSFER immediately and directly to our donations accounts liason officer as RECEIVER'S name:

DONATIONS ACCOUNT LIASON OFFICER: [redacted]
LOCATION: 44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL

Please provide us via return email the following informations below as they appear on the Western Union Money Transfer slip;

1. Name and Address of Sender
2. Exact Amount Sent ***
3. MTCN ***

NOTE: At British Red Cross we are committed to protecting your privacy as a STANDARD practice. We will not share your information unless you have previously indicated that you are happy for us to do so.

Hope to receive your donations soon as thousands need your help.

Please send return email with donations details to [redacted]

Yours Sincerly,
[redacted]
For and on behalf of The British Red Cross Society

Watch out for something of this nature—especially any reference to Western Union. Donations are *not* submitted through Western Union.

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

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

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EdgeWord: Put Dates on Your Web Site and Don't Yell!

"Old news is bad news on the Web." by Jack Dunning

If you host a Web site, Jack encourages you to make a point of adding a date to every post or article, legitimizing your information. Also, lose the all-cap missives in e-mails and on Web sites!

A comment came in recently that talked about the Air Scooter. You'll note that it is referring to an article that *ComputorEdge* published in July of 2005.

*[Regarding the July 15, 2005 EdgeWord column (*webserver.computoredge.com/online.mvc?issue=2328&article=edge*):] The people at Air Scooter II have been promising a production model next year since around 2004. It seems apparent that the basic design is a death trap since* when *(not if) the engine fails, it drops like a rock above 10 feet or so. No auto-rotation is possible since there is no variable pitch. They promised to research a safety chute years ago with no progress reported at all. Even their own pilot won't fly it much above 10 feet of altitude. Since it's not for sale, they can promise any price they want with no danger—how about $500? In my opinion, it's the old 'promise them anything to attract investors' plan. So many companies do it that it has become the norm. They are probably too smart to actually market something with that much liability. People have wanted a personal helicopter since they were invented. Most people do not have the inclination nor the skill required to learn to fly one safely. That's just the way it is.*

Harvey Katz
Marietta, GA
12/16/2009

I did a little research on the Web and as near as I could determine, the company mentioned in the article doesn't even exist anymore. A close look at the date that appears at the top of every article would have told the reader that this article is a little old (2005). His comments are certainly valid—although probably moot.

This highlights a pet peeve of mine: Web sites that don't date their articles. Relying upon information gathered on the Web is dangerous enough without dealing with articles that could be years old. Far too many sites may have useful knowledge to pass on, but it is often tainted if it is not timely—especially in relation to computers and the Internet. I often find myself scanning through an article that appears to be on point, yet when I can't find a publication date, I feel that I'm wasting my time.

This is one of the positives of most forums and blogs. They automatically include timestamps that will help the reader to evaluate the freshness of the material. Everything on *ComputorEdge* is automatically associated with the publication date at the top of the article.

If you host a Web site, I encourage you, or your Webmaster, to make a point of adding a date to every post or article. I would think that there are many people besides myself who are interested in *when* you first published your word of wisdom.

* * *

While I'm ranting, on the user side, people who submit their comments in all uppercase (CAPITAL) letters drive me crazy. (I probably shouldn't say anything about this because now I might receive a slew of comments in all capital letters.) On the Web, comments or blogs in all uppercase are considered a form of shouting—and when you read them, it certainly seems like someone is yelling at you. (What am I—hard of reading?) I can understand a word or two being put in caps for emphasis—we generally change those to italics, but an entire comment in uppercase is intolerable—if not rude.

I know that it is easier to type without bothering with the shift key, but I would prefer to see comments in all lowercase (no caps) then feel the wrath of an uppercase screed. Plus, it is much easier for *ComputorEdge* editors

to throw in a few initial caps then convert an entire section to lowercase letters.

It was good to get that off my chest.

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

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

"Predictions 2010," "Cleaning Your PC"

Predictions 2010

[Regarding Jack Dunning's December 25 article, "A Peek(?) at 2010":]

The technology that I am most excited about, and was not mentioned here, is USB 3.

-Steve, Escondido

You could have a point about netbooks, but there is no way a phone will replace the netbook on its own. Most people that I observe with their BlackBerrys or iPhones don't rely on them for their primary e-mail system/ application; it's easier to type on a full-sized keyboard. Also, most of these people (I have observed) use these phones for texting. Yes, most people prefer not to "squint" when looking at their netbook screen, but then, a 15.4-inch notebook screen still makes you squint (unless you are looking at a 17-inch notebook screen)!

I know: I have both types (sizes) of notebook computers. You have to understand that most of us use a desktop with a 19-inch-plus screen at home; mine is a 22-inch widescreen. And many of us use dual monitors at work. We accept the smaller screen "adjustment" when working with notebook computers; this is the trade-off. However, paranoia still exists; there is a huge difference between comfort (peace of mind) and worry (data security).

Until they develop a practical and economical Bluetooth storage device that holds gigs of data, has fast data transfer, tight encryption/security, and comes in a portable package (e.g., it could be carried as a necklace around your neck or even like a bracelet around your wrist, nobody will feel truly comfortable with a portable computer (netbook or notebook computer).

-Albert, San Diego

TI99/4A—My Grandpa bought one of these for each of his kids. So I loved it, loved the games, loved the "expansion box" that held the 5 1/4-inch floppy drive. The expansion box was about two times the height of a VCR. Anyway, I assumed everyone had one of these amazing boxes, until I went to school at four or five and nobody knew what it was. Anyway, I loved it, and credit my current geekiness in part to that little TI.

-tmcguire47, San Diego, CA

Cleaning your PC

[Regarding the December 25 Digital Dave column, which discussed cleaning your PC's innards:]

If you do use compressed air to blow dust out of your PC, be very careful around the fans. Do *not* "spin-up" the fan cooling the CPU, or the video, or any fan. These are not 10,000 RPM motors, and when over RPM-ed, the bearings will be damaged. Holding the fan still, I stick a pencil through it, to keep the fan from spinning when blowing the air on it.

-CF, Broomfield, CO

When and if you blow dust out of a power supply, also examine the capacitors in the power supply. If you see the top of the capacitors [having a dome-shaped top] or one of the capacitors is busted, you then have a bad power supply.

-EY, San Diego, CA

A toothpick would make a better fan hold than a pencil! Of the three PCs I have, I can't get a pencil through the power supply fan holes!

-Walter, San Diego, CA

The power supply has capacitors that retain quite a lot of juice even after the computer has been turned off and unplugged. On the older ATX-style PSU "without the 4-pin extra connector for 12 volts," there are no bleed-off resistors inside on the high-voltage side of the capacitors. Extreme caution is to be used when inspecting the inside of the power supply. Discharge the high-voltage side of the power supply by using an insulated metal-tip item to touch the anode and cathode together on the capacitors. Then it's safe to touch/inspect.

-Tim, El Cajon, California

On Pentium 4 mainboards, look near the CPU cooler at the tops of the capacitors. If brown, dried-up goop appears on the top of the metal cylinders, the mainboard will not be giving enough wattage to the CPU. This will always cause the machine to be unstable or reboot at random times. [This is] noted more often when CPU usage spikes a lot or is at 100 percent for extended periods of time. Also, unpatched versions of Windows XP may be getting the msblast packet, causing instant reboot or blue screen crash/reboot.

-Tim, El Cajon California

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*.

Send mail to ceeditor@computoredge.com with questions about editorial content.
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