

ComputerEdge™ Online — 02/05/10



This issue: Microsoft's Windows Live

Now working in conjunction with Windows 7, what is Windows Live and how good is it?

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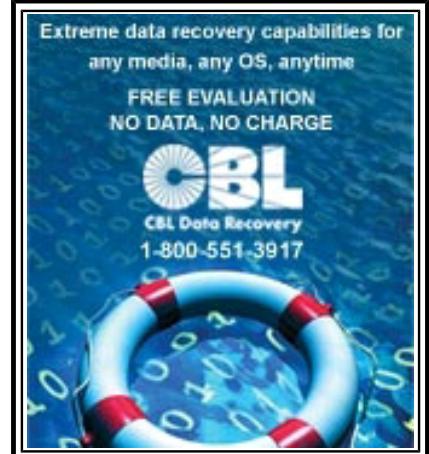
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Digital Dave

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

A reader wants to buy an LCD monitor he can live with, but aspect ratio issues are confusing; a reader isn't sweet on cookies leaving a trail on his computer; sorting and indexing at a snail's pace is leading a reader to regret moving to Win7.

Dear Digital Dave,

I've been trying to buy an LCD monitor that I can live with. It must be an all-around capable unit that is good for office as well as photo and movies.

I suppose my question is, what gives with the 16:9 ratio? LCD monitors are mostly used for business and not watching widescreen movies (unless you want to get fired). Ninety percent of the LCDs don't even make decent movie screens anyway, as they are limited-viewing TN panels.

Another argument I heard for widescreen was to facilitate displaying two documents side by side, but most people don't do that, and if you do, then you probably need dual-head.

Anyway, why trade off side-by-side documents, which is less frequently used, for vertical view that is mostly used? From what I can tell, people will seem to live with 16:9, but want PVA or better IPS presentation quality. Gamers, which are fewer, might settle for TN because of better update speed. It seems to me that this technology area is being driven by hardware developers getting into the media business.

Chris R.
San Diego

Dear Chris,

The answer is optimization. When first looking at high-definition, a comparison of all the various screen formats was done. It was found that all of those formats would fit within dimensions very close to 16:9. Therefore, 16:9 was chosen as an optimal solution. It has since become the standard for HD.

There are a number of advantages to the new standard:

- Widescreen is great for programming, where lines can get very long.
- Web surfing often requires less scrolling in widescreen, as the page adapts to the screen.
- You can display more columns in a spreadsheet or table.

- If you work with graphics, it leaves more room for your toolbars.
- More people probably watch TV and movies on their PCs now than you think.
- Lastly, human eyes are side by side, so a widescreen monitor more closely approximates the human field of view, making it more aesthetically pleasing and less confining. If you don't believe me, try using a widescreen for a month and then go back to your 4:3 and see if you don't feel like you're trapped in a box.

I'm not sure I understand what you mean by "limited viewing TN panels." TN panels don't have perfect color reproduction as they are only 18 bit, but I don't think most people would even notice. Most people don't notice or care that they are stretching a 4:3 image on their 16:9 display, so I don't think minor color differences are important to them. It doesn't matter unless you are a professional artist or notice the difference yourself. I still don't know what "limited viewing" means.

You're not trading vertical for horizontal. You're trading nothing for horizontal. When you look at the resolution ranges for 16:9 versus 4:3, you can see that they just add pixels onto the horizontal.

High-definition is king in marketing, so anything that looks the same 16:9 shape gains a marketing advantage. The plain truth is that there is not enough of a market for any monitor with a format other than the widescreen for manufacturers to pursue them. Yes, it's driven by the media business. Luckily, at worst, it's an arbitrary neutral choice, and, at best, it's an improvement.

On the bright side, you can always earn extra income by renting out the extra space on your widescreen monitor.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have a desktop computer running Windows Vista. Each day Symantec AntiVirus scans my system and removes a "tracking cookie." The next day such a cookie is back and has to be removed. This has been going on for about six months. My question is, how do I get rid of the cookies so they do not return every day?

*Phil Rostodha
San Diego*

Dear Phil,

Unfortunately cookies have become very misunderstood, and programs such as Symantec have slurred the reputation of the simple cookie. Most cookies are good, not bad—even if identified by antivirus software as a "tracking cookie."

A cookie is a tiny file that is placed on your computer by your Web browser when you visit a Web site. The only way to avoid cookies is to set your browser to not allow them. The problem

with this is that many Web sites use the cookie to recognize you and help you to save your usual setup. Without them, you would need to go through the same tedious setup each time you visit the site. In essence, every cookie is a "tracking cookie."

There are some cookies that have been designated as "not good" by antivirus software because they are known to report information back to marketing departments. They do not contain viruses and cannot access your computer. This is probably the type of cookie that you keep seeing. The reason that you continue to get the same cookie is because you are visiting a site that uses that cookie. It is only removed until you visit the site again—then it is placed on your machine as if you're a new visitor.

You can generally review all the cookies on your computer by checking the Tools/Options feature of your Web browser. Each browser you use will have its own set of cookies.

I don't delete cookies because they serve a useful purpose. I wouldn't worry too much about the returning cookie.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have a subdirectory on my second hard drive where I store video clips. There are about 1,200 clips in various formats.

When the directory first is displayed, or when I sort the clips by date or by type or by filename, the file list begins to rewrite, but the file sort takes up to 20 seconds! A progress bar that lists the drive/folder moves slowly from left to right.

I have tried changing indexing settings, but have had no luck speeding up this sorting. As long as I don't change a clip or add a new file, any subsequent sorts are speedy, but otherwise sadly slow. Any suggestions? I am beginning to regret moving to a new PC with Win7 Pro and 64-bit.

Joe
Rockville, MD

Dear Joe,

Sorting and indexing is one of the most time-consuming tasks for a computer, especially if there are a large number of items to be sorted. However, 1,200 does not seem to be excessively large. How Windows 7 prevents long searches and sorts is by indexing files on your hard drive. An up-to-date index will quickly find a file or rearrange your listing. When you change or add data, it is necessary to re-index—although minor changes should not take long. It sounds like your system is doing a complete index every time you make a change. You should ensure that your second hard drive is included in the set of files to index.

To check this, type "index" into the Search field of the Start menu. Select "Indexing Options" for the top of the menu. The Indexing Options window will open. Click Modify, and the Indexed Locations window will open (see Figure 1). You should see a list of all your drives plus selected folders. If your second hard drive does not appear, click "Show all locations."

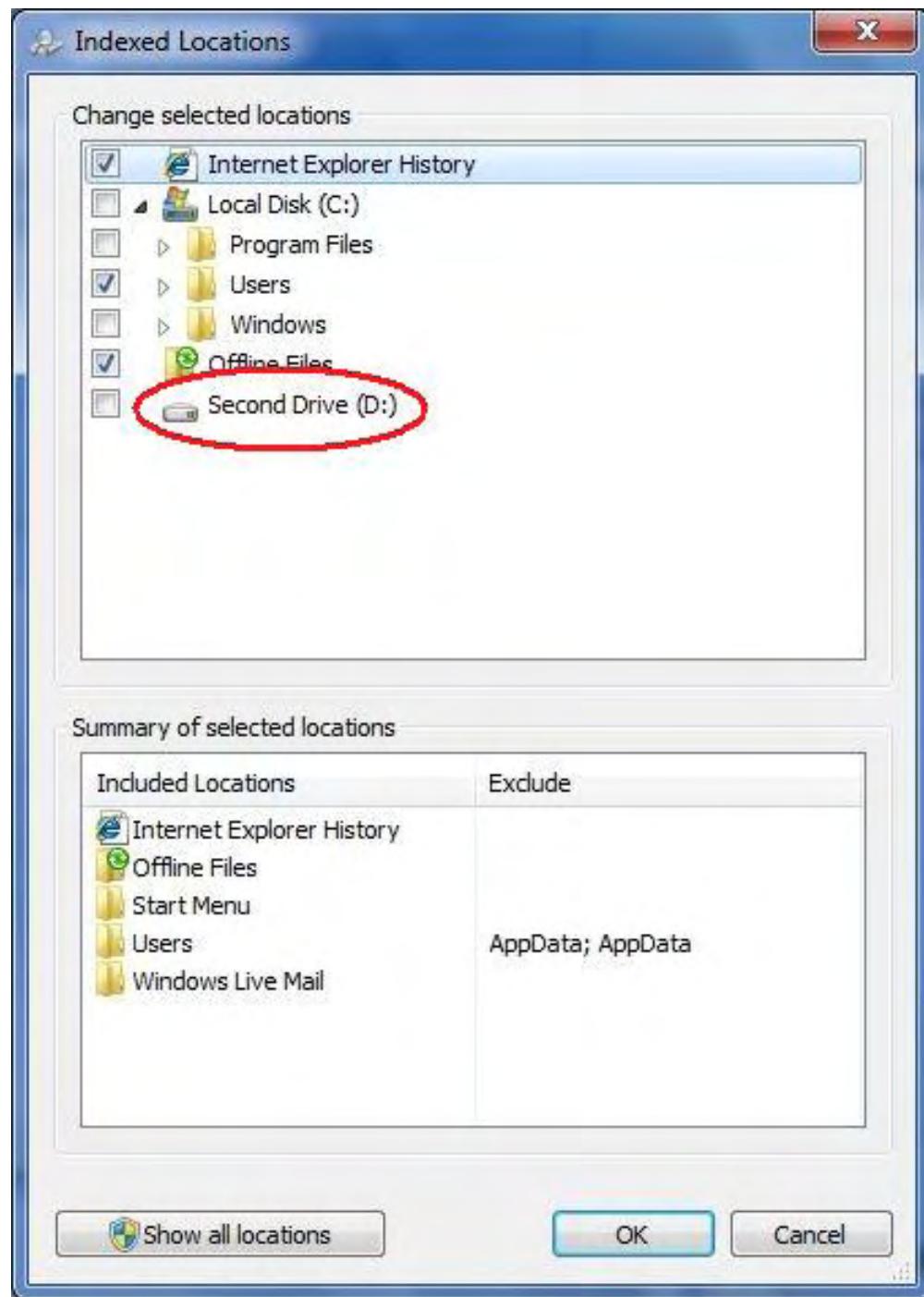


Figure 1. Windows 7 Indexed Locations window.

Be sure to check the second hard drive for indexing, or, rather than indexing the entire drive, you may want to specify the folders on the second drive that you want included. Once the indexing is completed, all of your sorts should appear much faster.

If this is not the source of your problem, then perhaps another reader will offer an idea.

Digital Dave

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Windows Live: Too Little, Too Late

“You don't have to be first to market if you own the market.” by James Hartnett

Sometimes Microsoft comes out with software that changes the way we look at computers. But sometimes it just steals someone else's ideas. Windows Live, its latest offering, is one such time.

In the computer biz, the most important thing is to be first to market. Whether you are selling a new disk drive or a new software package, whoever gets the technology out first, wins.

This is commonplace in the world of technology, and it applies to every company but one: Microsoft.

Microsoft is the company with the money and clout to get around the first-to-market problem. It doesn't have to be first to market, because it owns the market. And if a good product comes along, it can just buy the company that made it, which is what Microsoft did with Visio, or it can put a duplicate product in place and nip at the heels of the market leader for years, decades if need be, and hope the market leader eventually makes a mistake.

This is how it happened in the spreadsheet market. It used to be owned by Lotus 123, but Microsoft had Excel, and they kept working on it. Eventually, Windows came out and Excel could work well on Windows, whereas the Lotus 123 port to Windows was months late. As a result, Excel is now the number one spreadsheet, and Lotus is long gone.

Google Is In Bill Gate's Sights

These days, the market leader whose heels Bill Gates is nipping at is Google, the monster search engine company.

Even in Internet time, Google's rise has been remarkable. Only 11 years old, it has risen from the ashes of the dot.com bubble to challenge even the mighty Microsoft. When Microsoft first started, I recall hearing commentators wonder that a company could make so much money from selling

software—they didn't even manufacture one thing.



“Herman said he was excited about using Windows Live, but it looks more like Windows Dead to me.”

the way we look at computers.

But sometimes it just steals someone else's ideas. Windows Live, its latest offering, is one such time.

Windows Live is a suite of free Web services. You get your own Web page, storage space, Hotmail account, photo album, blog, and customized home page. All of these are a straight lift from Google's offerings. Windows Live is the way Microsoft is re-packaging some of Microsoft's second-place Web offerings, like Hotmail, for a new attempt to take over the market. But, based on features, or lack thereof, it is an attempt that is doomed to fail.

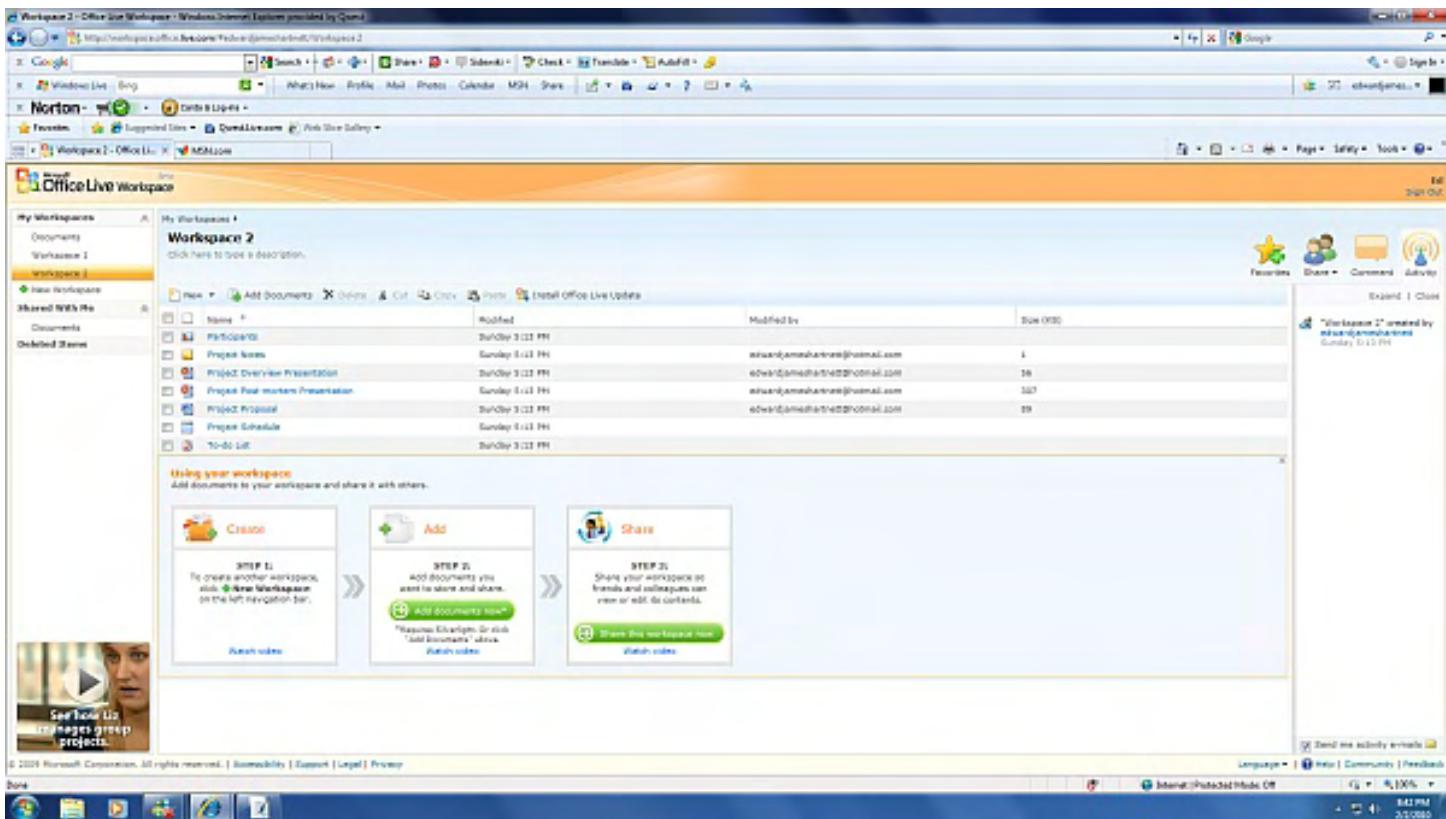
Office Live

Office Live is a suite of free office applications: a word processor, spreadsheet and presentation program. The programs are offered free, on the Web, just like Google documents.

Windows Live also offers the capability to organize documents into workspaces (as Google does with folders). Like Google, simple spreadsheets and presentations can be handled reasonably well by Windows Live. The Office Live services are so close to those offered by Google, it's a little embarrassing. With all that engineering talent, apparently Microsoft can't do much better than to copy what Google already has done.

Google is even more abstract—it gets rich from giving away free software! Welcome to the 21st century. Google's mojo is much feared in the halls and conference rooms of Microsoft's splendid campus in Redmond, Washington.

But Bill Gates has faced down many a rival since he founded Microsoft, and it would not hold the formidable position that it does without generous amounts of brainy engineering, and world-changing technological innovation. Microsoft can occasionally come out with some really ingenious new way of looking at an old problem. With Windows, with Visual Basic, and with Visual Studio, in the past, Microsoft came out with software that changed



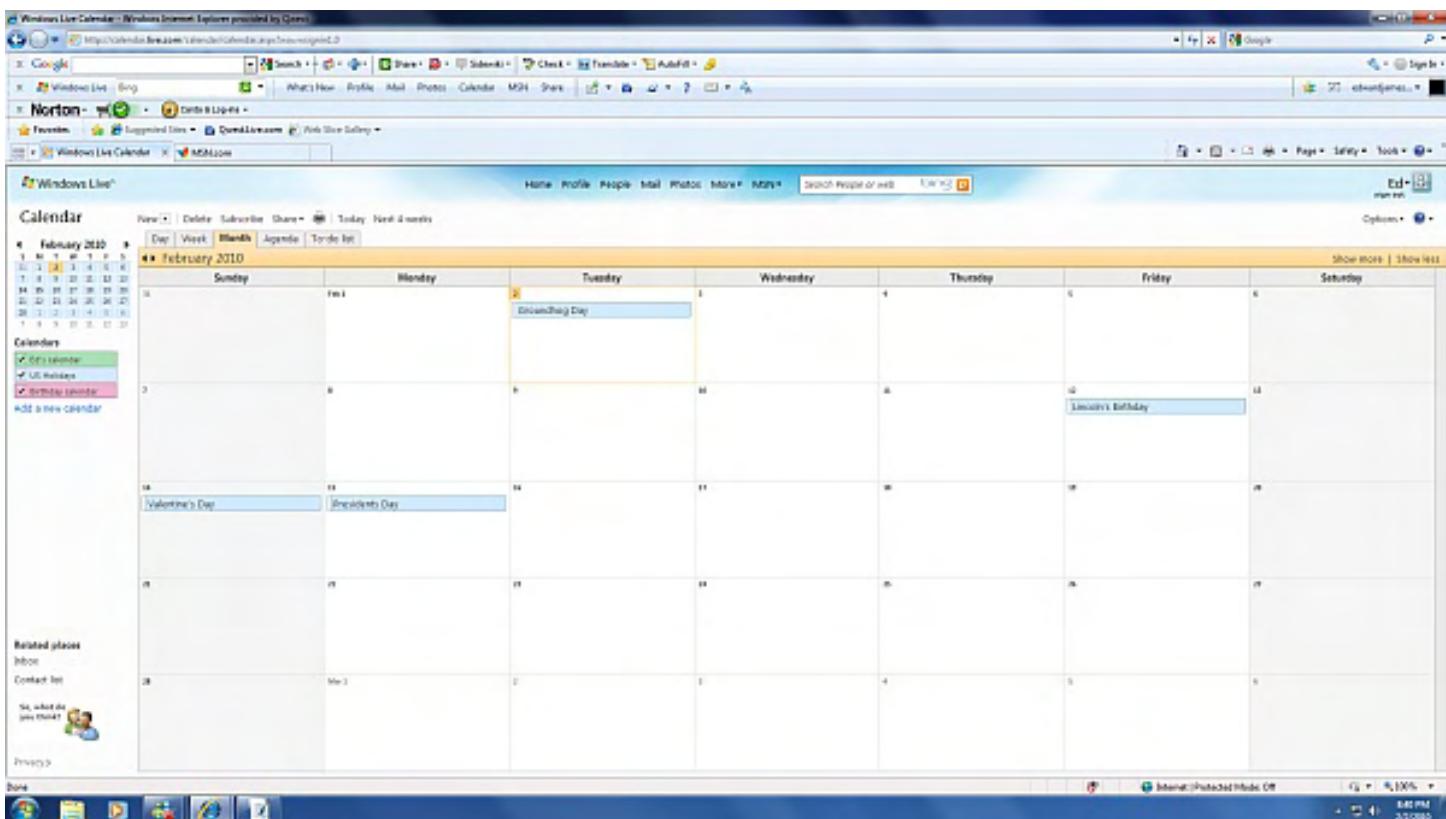
The surprising thing about the Office Live part of Windows Live is that it gives away a lot of the Microsoft store. Microsoft Office is one of the main money-makers for Microsoft. But Office Live provides a word processor, spreadsheet and presentation program. Although they are far slower and less fancy than the MS Office versions, they certainly can get the job done most of the time. Very few people would use any capability of Microsoft Office that is not provided in Office Live for free. Why, then, should companies routinely buy a copy of MS Office for every employee?

It seems that these days, the average corporate user should use Office Live. Now that simple spreadsheets are available for free, only the financial people will need the full powers of Excel. Now that simple letters and proposals can be done online, for free, only serious wordsmiths will need to shell out cash for Microsoft Word. And anyone who needs to do a simple presentation can do so without spending any money on PowerPoint. So why buy Microsoft Office at all?

The Serious Windows Limitation of Office Live

There is one very serious limitation to Office Live: the Office Live documents can be viewed and edited only on Windows machines.

This is a buzz-kill for anyone into Web-based applications. The entire philosophy is to treat the computer as infrastructure, which should be invisible to the user. In an ideal world, the user should not need to know whether they are on a Windows machine, or a Mac, or a Linux box.



The browser and Google applications come close to meeting this infrastructure ideal, but Windows Live is a sharp crash back into a Microsoft-only world. Documents on Windows Live cannot even be viewed on other operating systems. (Surprising, since rendering in HTML would hardly be difficult, whatever the operating system.)

The Windows-only limitation of documents, spreadsheets, and presentations for Office Live means that there is no real reason to use them. The same capabilities are provided in a platform-neutral way by Google. And, unlike Office Live, the Google office services don't depend on any particular operating system, and can be edited from any machine with a browser.

The Blog

The Windows Live blog service is very nice—clean and capable. The blog software is fully in the browser—it doesn't depend on any special Windows services, and so runs just fine on Macs and other systems. The interface readily allows video and photo embedding. For anyone desiring to enter the blogosphere, I believe Windows Live would present an easy way to do so.

As with the rest of the Windows Live suite, the blog component is a Microsoft take on a capability already offered for free by Google. The features all seem to work fine, but nothing new is offered. Existing blog writers will find nothing here to tempt them away from the solution they are already using.

As with the rest of the Windows Live suite, the surprising thing with the blog is what is missing: anything to set Windows Live above the rest of the herd. With all those expensive programmers in Redmond, I thought they would have come up with some original, innovative new ways to interface with the Internet and the rapidly changing personal computer. But no, nothing new is offered. Just the same blogging capability that is offered elsewhere.

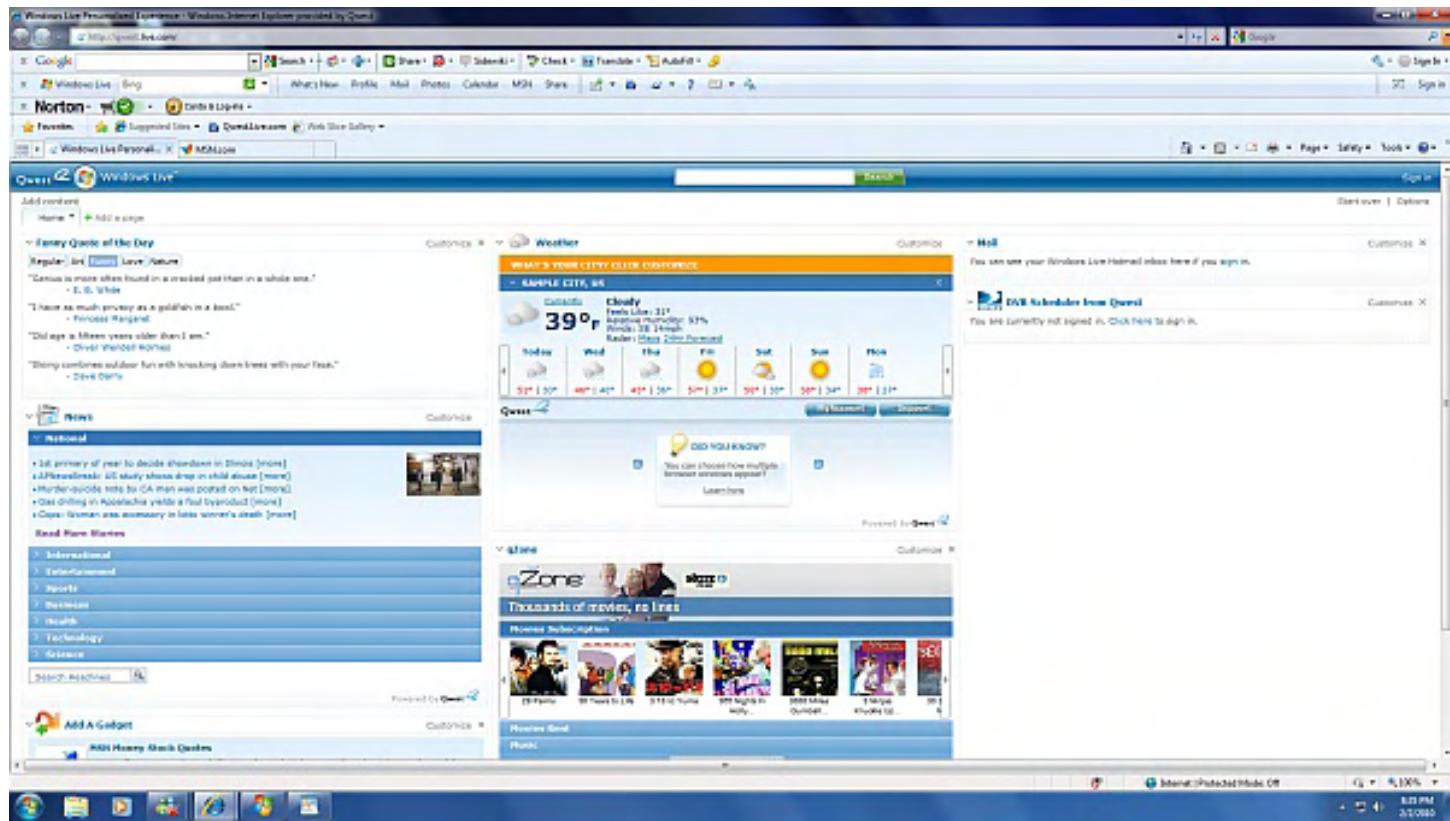
Free Home Page

One area that Windows Live goes ahead of Google is in the provision of free Web pages. The Windows Live Web page is easy to manage and, while it is not full-service, it is quite capable for a personal Web page. The Windows Live Web page allows you to choose your URL, and displays your blog posting and other relevant information automatically.

The free home page is one feature that will set Windows Live out from Google, but free home pages are now so common that this is not going to bring anyone running to Windows Live. Once again, Microsoft has entered the arena late, and without anything special to show for it.

Social Networking

Facebook has become one of those revolutionary computer systems that comes along from time to time and changes the world. There are more people in the Facebook network than there are people in the United States of America. That's a lot of social networking! There's got to be money in that kind of popularity, and now plenty of companies are trying to get on the bandwagon, including both Google and Microsoft. The Windows Live effort of social networking is a mix between Facebook, which has better graphics, and Google, which has better screen layout and a cleaner interface, and far more users.



The idea of social networking is that you load up a picture of yourself, plus a few personal details, and then you hunt for friends. You do this by searching the database of the social networking site, or by having it scan your e-mail for people that have pages, or, best of all, by year of graduation from a particular school.

Once you have some friends, the social networking site can also suggest new ones, based on friends of your friends. You can send messages to your friends, and monitor their messages.

But social networks are, ironically, very anti-social with each other. Facebook users won't see your posts on Windows Live, and Windows Live users will not see the posts of their Facebook-using friends.

Once again, Microsoft has arrived with too little, too late. For social networking, Facebook is where all your friends already have accounts. Whoever doesn't will have a Gmail account. I don't know anyone with a Hotmail account any more, much less Windows Live. Social networking on Windows Live is going to be very lonely.

Bing!!

Taking on Google's search engine seems like a real gutsy move. This is Google's territory!

How do you tell if Microsoft succeeded, anyway? Evaluating a search engine is about as easy as evaluating a dictionary. Bing brought up reasonable results for everything that I asked, for whatever that is worth. But Google's is the search engine that everyone is already using, and it has a very clean and familiar interface. What does Bing have? Lots of advertising!

Hard as it may be for Bill Gates to imagine, there are still people out there on slow connections—some people even use dial-up modems for their networking. This means that pages with lots of picture and animations load slowly or not at all.

Google has long been sensitive to this problem. Its advertising is all text—no pictures. As a result, its page loads as fast as can be. When you search, you get answers quickly.

Microsoft, on the other hand, obviously employs a lot of graphics design people for its search screen, because it has slow-loading, screen-hogging graphics that distract and annoy. I don't remember how long a year is supposed to be in Internet-time, but I can tell you how long three seconds are in Internet time—too long to wait for my search results to load. Or perhaps the Microsoft server is slower.

I was able to count to "five-Mississippi" waiting for Bing to look up "Google," but I can't even finish one Mississippi before Google brings up information about "Microsoft."

It's amazing how spoiled we have become! But spoiled we are, and I'm not waiting around a whole four extra seconds for Bing. It's back to Google for me.

Conclusions

Microsoft has made many fundamental contributions to the way that we use computers, but, unfortunately, Windows Live is not one of them.

Microsoft has often been guilty of promulgating its own inferior version of a technology that has been available for years elsewhere, and that is what we see with Windows Live: a bunch of implementations of software that was innovative when it was first introduced by Google years ago. But the Microsoft version also adds some crippling Windows-only limitations to the supposedly Internet-based tools.

I have read that Microsoft is so very wealthy that it could continue to function at full staffing for more than a decade, even if it stops making money tomorrow. This capability will come in handy if it is counting on making any money from Windows Live. It's not even worth using for free.

Let's hope that somewhere at Microsoft, some smart engineers are working on the next ground-breaking innovation to come out of Redmond. Because Windows Live is too little, too late.

James is a writer and software developer who has been with the free software movement from the beginning. He lives, writes, and programs in sunny Colorado.

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Windows Live for Mobile

“Connect with friends, information and entertainment on your mobile device.”
by Pete Choppin

Windows Live for Mobile brings to life many of the features that you wish you could use on your phone, but you either don't know how to use them or where to find them.



I've always been intrigued by how versatile and useful mobile phones and PDA/smartphones are, and yet I never really have taken full advantage of all the features of my PDA. One reason might be that, even though my PDA runs Windows Mobile 6.1, it seems that many of the multimedia features and some of the communication features are hidden or rather complicated.

Recently I attended an IT Technology Seminar and one of the keynote speakers was Chris Henley, an IT professional and self-proclaimed Microsoft Evangelist. Among other things, he admitted in his presentation that Microsoft still has yet to come up with a good software solution for mobile computing.

However, Microsoft has developed a package called Windows Live for Mobile that addresses this shortcoming. Windows Live for Mobile brings to life many of the features that you wish you could use on your phone, but you either don't know how to use them or where to find them. It also enhances, or adds to what you might already be using, such as text messaging and Internet browsing.

Let's take a look at some of the ways we can connect with friends, information and entertainment on your mobile device. I run each of these on a Samsung Saga i770.

Hotmail for Mobile

This is not merely a link to Hotmail.com. This is a connection that downloads your Hotmail to your device. Not only that, but you can add all your Hotmail contacts to your mobile phone contacts with Hotmail for Mobile.

With Hotmail for Mobile you can read, compose and delete messages on your phone more simply and quickly than you thought possible because it is designed expressly for your phone's screen. This lets you see more of your inbox and messages without scrolling.

Windows Live Messenger for Mobile

Not unlike the messenger that you use on laptops and desktops, Windows Live Messenger for Mobile allows you to connect with all your friends, view the status of your contacts, participate in group chats, and see and send emoticons. It is formatted especially for your mobile screen, and you can carry on a decent conversation. The nice thing about using Windows Live Messenger for Mobile is that I never need to miss an instant message, although this can be cumbersome at times if I want to get away.

Windows Live Spaces for Mobile

Windows Live Spaces, the one *not* for your mobile device, provides a blog space for you to post blog entries on Windows Live. It is just another option offered to keep in touch and connected with all your contacts online. But haven't you ever had an idea or wanted to put something on your blog—say a photo and some text along with it? With Windows Live Spaces for Mobile, that's exactly what you do. Now you won't need to wait until you get to your office or back home to post to a blog. You can do it anywhere.

Live Search for Mobile

Sorry, Microsoft has replaced this with Bing for Mobile. Essentially, it is Microsoft's new search engine optimized for mobile devices. There is no download or install necessary. Simply enter in your mobile Web browser and you will access Bing, Microsoft's search engine.

Mobile technology is becoming easier and more accessible all the time. A friend of mine commented that it is getting to the point that you believe that nothing is impossible anymore. Can I connect to my VoIP phone over my PDA? Yep, there's an app for that! Windows Live for Mobile isn't quite at the miraculous stage yet, but it is improving.

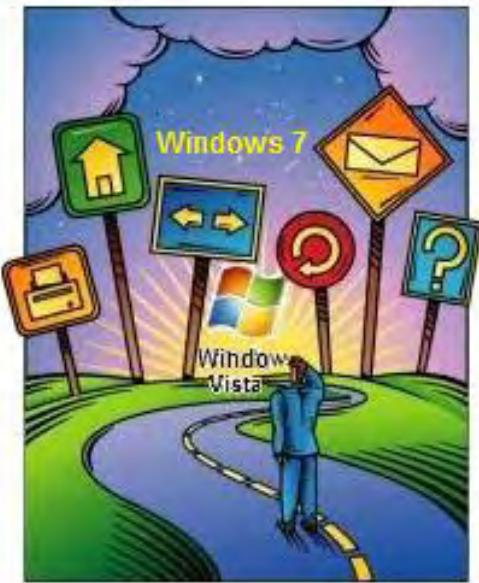
At the IT seminar I attended, one of the main themes that ran through almost every presentation was that IT is important to everyone, all walks of life, all ages and stages. Differing cultures do not matter and income does not appear to be a factor. Everyone in every part of the world uses technology and this includes mobile technology. In fact, in many parts of the world, mobile technology is now outgrowing traditional stationary desktop computing. Companies such as Microsoft are positioning themselves to take advantage of mobile computing with applications like Windows Mobile and Windows Live for Mobile.

Resource

Windows Live for Mobile Web Site (www.windowsliveformobile.com/)— Send a link right to your mobile device and get started with Windows Live for Mobile

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 *ComputerEdge* since 1990 and contributes regularly to featured articles as well as the Linux Lessons section of *ComputerEdge*. He can be contacted at pchoppin@comcast.net but prefers to have comments on *ComputerEdge* articles submitted to the editor and posted for the benefit of all readers.

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Windows Tips and Tricks

Windows Tips and Tricks

“Unable to Enable: A Windows Troubleshooting Dilemma” by Jack Dunning

A reader is on a troubleshooting odyssey after seeking to activate the recording of played audio—and being stonewalled by Windows. Can tinkering with the Registry help?

I was very excited about your article [Windows Tips and Tricks: Recording Played Audio], and when I got a new laptop with Windows 7, decided to try it. I'm with you as far as "select recording tab." When I do that, only the line about microphones shows. I continue, and right-click at the bottom. I see "show disabled devices" and "show disconnected devices," both already checked. I right-click on the mixer. I see "configure speech recognition" on one line and "disable" on the next. Neither is checked. I see "show disabled devices" and "show disconnected devices," both checked. No "enable" line. Right-clicking on the mixer again brings up the same result. I am lost and confused. Please help.

Sally
Corpus Christi, TX

While I don't know all the specifics of Sally's hardware, whenever I see that an option is not appearing (or grayed out) in a right-click menu in Windows, my first thought is that it is not activated in the Registry. That means that either the option (in this case, to see the "enable" line) is turned off or the entire Registry entry is missing. This could be caused by the appropriate drivers missing, although the fact that you can see "Stereo Mix" indicates that it is loaded even though you can't enable it.

On a new Windows 7 machine I put together, I needed to install the audio drivers for the motherboard before I could see and enable "Stereo Mix." You might check the discs that came with your computer to determine if you can install or reinstall the audio drivers. Another option is to check with the manufacturer's Web site for up-to-date audio drivers for your computer.

The research I did showed that this specific problem is not uncommon with certain laptop computers, although I did not find a fix. My recommendation would be, after checking forums at your computer manufacturer's Web site, you should conduct a Web search that includes both the name of your computer and the words "stereo mix" as search terms. There is a good chance that others have experienced the same problem. You may even be given links to drivers that will solve the problem, or, less ideally, the Registry entries to make yourself.

I'm always a little touchy about changing anything in the Registry. Everything looks so similar, and if you do the wrong thing you can cause more problems than you solve. If you are going to tinker with the Registry, always create a restore point before you start. That way, if something goes wrong, you can get back to the original configuration.

This is part of what at times makes Windows so frustrating. Just as Sally discovered when taking all of the steps to activate recording of played audio, there is something missing at the end of the line. Each computer manufacturer has dealt with the audio record capability a little differently, apparently some eliminating the enable option completely. There is a fear of lawsuits from the music industry, so the audio record feature is disabled even though there are many legitimate reasons for recording computer sound.

If you can't find a reasonable solution, then there are other workarounds (recording speaker output) and software that will do the job. One is third-party software such as Free Sound Recorder (download.cnet.com/Free-Sound-Recorder/3000-2168_4-10698910.html?tag=mnc0). I haven't tried it, but reading the user reviews may tell you if it may be a good solution. Other readers may have more recommendations. If so, please leave a comment.

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

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Understanding the iPad Point of View" by Wally Wang

Where most companies tried to work around the physical limitations of the tablet, Apple focused on overcoming these limitations, creating a product far in advance of its competitors. How does the HP Slate compare? Also, a tip on using the Share menu to e-mail files from any iWork program.

In my article "The End of an Era", published on January 15, almost a full two weeks before Apple announced the iPad, I made a number of predictions that largely came true (the iPad would have a virtual keyboard to allow creating content, it would run iWork, it would use an App store for installing software, etc.). While most people focused on the iPad's e-book-reading feature and another group focused on the iPad's game-playing potential, the biggest opportunity for the iPad that everyone still seems to be overlooking is the ability to create content.

In the past, companies have looked at the tablet form and asked, "How can we create a tablet with a keyboard?" The result has been the current heavy and bulky tablet PCs with screens that swivel around and fold flat over the keyboard to create the tablet.

Once the screen lays over the keyboard, you can't use the keyboard to input any data. Instead, you have to rely on a stylus and handwriting-recognition software. No matter how accurate the handwriting-recognition software may be, typing is still a faster method to input large amounts of text rather than handwriting.



Figure 1. Tablet PCs rely on physical keyboards to input data.

Other companies looked at the tablet form and assumed that without a keyboard, you can't input text easily, so they designed tablets to focus on displaying content, not creating it. The end result is devices such as Amazon's e-book reader, the Kindle.



Figure 2. The Kindle is an example of a tablet that focuses on displaying content.

The real question everyone should have been asking is not, "How can we create a tablet with a keyboard?" but, "How can we create a tablet that lets you input text?"

Roger von Och, the author of creativity books such as "A Kick in the Seat of the Pants" (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0060960248?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0060960248) and "A Whack on the Side of the Head" (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0446404667?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0446404667), demonstrates how the types of questions you ask frames the types of answers you'll find. In his books, he tells a story about the past when it was fairly common to accidentally bury people alive.

One village looked at this problem and decided to build a shaft into every coffin with a bell and a string. If someone were buried alive, they could pull on the string inside the coffin and ring the bell that protruded above the surface of the grave. The ringing bell could alert others that someone had been buried alive so they could be rescued.

A second village simply built sharp, wooden spikes on the inside of every coffin lid. That way when they closed the lid, the spike would pierce the person's heart.

The first village reframed the question as, "How can we make sure we don't bury someone alive?" The second village reframed the question as, "How can we make sure that every person we bury is really dead?" The questions you ask define the answers you'll find, so that's why it's important to ask the right questions.

By focusing on a physical keyboard, most companies created clumsy and bulky tablet PCs that made data entry messy. By focusing on data entry, Apple created the iPad as a fully functional

computer in the smaller tablet form that relies on a virtual keyboard.

In his book "Strategic Entrepreneurism," (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894) author Jon Fisher defines how businesses should define their products for maximum success using something he calls "The Holy Grail" problem, which works like this.

Imagine the ideal, impossible product that you would like to have. Now create a product that strives to reach that ideal, impossible product as much as possible. By striving to achieve the impossible, you'll create a product that defines its own category and thus appeals to a large majority of people.

For example, anyone opening a hamburger restaurant next to a McDonald's probably won't last very long. The reason is simple. If you offer just another "me-too" product, there's little reason for anyone to choose your product over another one. In that case, you'll probably be forced to compete on price, which is the problem that PC manufacturers face in differentiating their products from each other.

Now imagine the "Holy Grail" of hamburgers, such as a hamburger that cures cancer and stops the aging process while tasting better than McDonald's hamburgers. If you sold those types of hamburgers, do you think you could compete with McDonald's?

Create a hamburger that gets close to solving this "Holy Grail," such as a tasty hamburger that's loaded with vitamins and minerals scientifically proven to slow down the aging process, and you'll be on your way to offering a unique product that people will flock to buy regardless of the cost or the competition.

Focusing on this "Holy Grail" problem is exactly what Apple did with the tablet design. Where most companies tried to work around the physical limitations of the tablet, Apple focused on overcoming these limitations. By striving to solve "Holy Grail" problems, Apple creates products that seem far in advance of their competitors because everyone else seems satisfied with mediocrity.

According to DigiTimes (www.digitimes.com/news/a20100129PD217.html), the low price of Apple's iPad (\$499) makes it almost impossible for rivals to compete in the tablet PC market. Rival tablet makers can't compete on features, so they're forced to compete on price. Take away any price advantage, and they can't even offer a product in the first place.

There seems to be two types of reactions to the iPad. The first comes from people who see what's missing. The second comes from people who see what's possible.

Focusing on what's missing can be constructive, or it can simply blind people to the iPad's potential. Focusing on what's possible can similarly blind people to the iPad's shortcomings, but can also open your eyes to tremendous opportunities.

Given these choices, what types of questions will you ask? The questions that you ask will determine what you might do with an iPad.

The HP Slate Revisited

Hewlett-Packard has released a YouTube video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=apwliqlKf84) about its forthcoming Slate PC to rival Apple's iPad. If you watch this YouTube video, you can hear the HP representative focusing on how the slate will be great for helping people consume all types of rich media. What you won't hear is how people could use the Slate to create content.

Even stranger are the comments on YouTube from people criticizing the iPad and claiming that the HP Slate PC is a better design. Let's look at the features.

First, from the HP video, we know nothing about the price, speed, memory storage, or anything else about the HP Slate, so comparing it to the known features of the iPad and claiming that the HP Slate is superior is simply delusional thinking.

Second, one person commenting on the YouTube site claimed that the HP Slate is superior to the iPad because the HP Slate runs a real operating system. Strangely enough, the iPhone operating system is a real operating system too, so what's this person's definition of a "real" operating system?

Third, the HP Slate runs Windows 7. Is this version of Windows 7 optimized for a slate form so you can control it easily through touch gestures? Maybe, but we don't know for sure. What we do know for sure is that if this is identical to the Windows 7 version running on desktop PCs, then it will contain plenty of superfluous commands, dialog boxes, and menus that a slate PC user won't need. (Does anyone using an HP slate PC really want to see a dialog box that lets you customize a keyboard and a mouse?)

More importantly, running Windows 7 on a tablet brings up the question of whether any Windows 7 programs need to be optimized to work with the tablet form. Plug Microsoft Office on an HP Slate, and will you be able to navigate around a document through touch gestures alone? Or will we need to wait until companies produce special touch versions of their software? If you load Microsoft Word, can you edit and create documents on the HP Slate? If so, how will the HP slate let you create content within the tablet form?

If the HP slate is running Windows 7, does that mean you also need to run the usual collection of antivirus, anti-spyware, and firewall software? Will you need to clean and optimize the Windows Registry periodically? Until we know the answers to these questions, it's impossible to say whether the HP Slate is better than the iPad or not, but these questions alone hint that the HP Slate may be more trouble than it's worth.

* * *

Most people share documents with others by e-mail. The usual procedure is to save a file, load your e-mail program, attach a file (if you can find where you stored it) to a message, and then send it off. To make this process much easier, iWork offers a special Share menu that works with the Mail program that comes with every Macintosh.

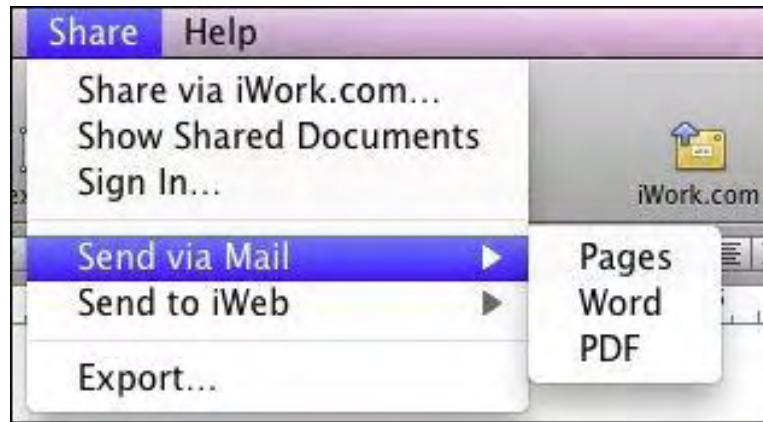


Figure 3. The Share menu lets you e-mail files from any iWork program.

From the Share menu, choose Send via Mail, and you'll get to choose various options such as PDF, Word, or Pages document format. Pick an option and Mail, combined with your iWork program (such as Pages) creates a message and attaches the file for you. All you have to do is choose an e-mail address to receive your file.

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

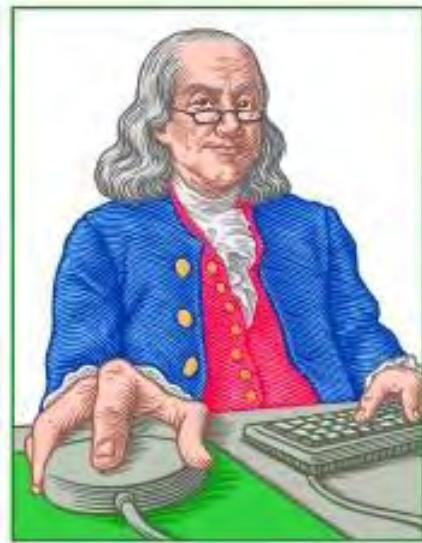
Wally is responsible for the following books:

- 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:

Fedora, Part 4

"Helpful apps and utilities, as well as more information on commands." by Pete Choppin

This week is the last session of the Fedora installation and configuration series. There are a few remaining small apps, utilities and commands to discuss.

This week is the last session of the Fedora installation and configuration series. There are a few remaining small apps and utilities that I will discuss that may be helpful.

Also, I would like to go over a few basic commands from the command line, specifically those we have discussed on these tips. This will help clarify how these commands work. Hopefully this will also make it easier to work with the command line in general.

Messenger Clients

There are a few Internet messenger clients out there for Linux, but one distinction that Linux makes with messengers, which seems to be so different for Windows users, is that Linux users tend to use clients that combine multiple chat networks. Windows users have a tendency to use separate clients for each network.

One such messenger client is called Pidgin (www.pidgin.im/). With Pidgin you can connect to 16 different networks all at the same time. So it doesn't really matter what network your friends are using, Pidgin can connect with all of them.

Pidgin should already be installed with Fedora as long as the graphical Internet packages were installed during setup.

Author, Burn, Backup CD/DVDs

There are several of these as well. My favorite by far is one called K3b (www.k3b.org/). K3b has all the functionality of the best Windows versions of CD-burning software.

K3b does not come installed on Fedora. To install, open a terminal and enter the following at the command prompt:

```
su -c 'yum install k3b'
```

That should be plenty to work with and make Fedora quite functional. If there are specific applications that you have questions about, please post them and I will try to find the answers.

Commands

The commands we have been using have primarily been for installing software. There are also a few that we use that allow us to have the access rights on the system to do this.

First of all, you probably noticed that I use the command su. This command tells the shell (the part of Linux that we send commands through) to use the credentials of another user on the system. Most of the time, this is the root user. The root user is the system administrator and has permission to do anything on the system—and I do mean *anything*. So be very careful and pay close attention when using command under this login. You will need to know the password for root to use this command.

Switches

Some commands can be given special instructions or given certain ways to function when you use them. These are often indicated with switches. For example the command su -c carries the -c switch. This tells Linux to execute only the command that follows that line with the root user. It is a small distinction, but it can be a protection to prevent you from doing something you do not intend with root, because after the command is executed, the user will return back to your own credentials.

There are many switches, most of which are specific only to those commands that use them. For example, the command cp is used for copying files; cp does not have a -c switch. So using cp -c will return an error. It will not apply this switch for any command because it does not exist for cp.

RPM

Another command we used was rpm. This command refers to the Red Hat Package Management system and will invoke specific package installations from that system. Our installations have been primarily referencing the packages available on the Red Hat repositories, and they use the rpm command. The switches are causing the command to install, use verbosity, use human readable formatting, etc. If you want more information on the rpm command, try entering 'man rpm' at the command line. This will open a manual on the rpm command.

Incidentally, nearly all Linux commands are documented in a man page. Entering man plus the name of the command will probably give you a lot of great information on your command.

Another great way to get help with a command is by typing the command and then add —help after the command. This will give you a summary of the command and most of the switches available with a short description of the switch.

Please feel free to submit any questions you have about these commands or anything about the Linux Lessons and I will be glad to help.

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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Rob, The Computer Tutor

Rob, The ComputerTutor:
Making Your Own Web Pages
“How to Create Web Pages” by
Rob Spahitz

Let's start building a Web page! By following some basic rules, you'll create Web pages that can be seen properly by anyone who accesses it.

Since we're all about solutions this year, I decided to start a few articles on making your own Web pages.

Background

First, when considering what a Web page is, you need to understand a bit about the background of the Internet. Since this has been discussed in *ComputerEdge* before, I'll keep it brief. The Internet is a communication channel for transferring computer information. Web pages are ways to help organize that information in a logical fashion. The Web browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Opera, Google Chrome browser, etc.) is a tool to help view the data in an organized way defined according to rules.

In the early days, the Internet simply sent normal reading text. The rules were set up to allow basic formatting of the data with the ability to define some text as bold, others as italics, etc. Also, the idea of showing pictures was added as well as a few other enhancements. There were also rules that allowed the viewer to jump from one page to another by a simple mouse click with something called hypertext. The rules are called "markup" because they are used to mark up the document to tell the viewer (browser) how to interpret the information using those rules. Since the rules are organized as a specific logical fashion, they are collectively called a language. All together, this mechanism, or rules for transferring data from one computer to another, is called HyperText Markup Language, or HTML.

Just for your information, another common communication mechanism uses something called the File Transfer Protocol, or FTP. Typically, this lets you send files that are not going to be interpreted using the HTML rules. Other transfer mechanisms are also used for various things such as e-mail, etc.

Browsing the World

When you use a browser to connect to a Web page on the Internet, you are probably using HTML. However, these days browsers have expanded into being much more. They are almost operating systems in and of themselves. They not only interpret HTML, they also support a different set of languages to further enhance the page (typically through JavaScript or VBScript). Most also support additional "plug-ins" to offer features that are not already built in. One of the most common and useful is a "Flash" plug-in to allow the browser to download the rules for something that can look and act like an application.

One of the nice things about Web page documents is that once you grab it from the other computer, it can be used without need for the other computer. That is, once you download an HTML document, you can disconnect from the Internet and use it any time you want. As long as the content is entirely HTML, the page will work as long as you use the browser to interpret it.

That said, often the other parts of the document are not stand-alone. If you click on a hypertext link within the document, it may or may not be able to locate it on your local machine and might just try to jump across the Internet to get it. Similarly, if the document reference pieces of Flash, those pieces may want to connect to another computer to get more information. Likewise, JavaScript may want to grab a few related pieces from another location and may fail to work as expected if they are not in the right places or are otherwise inaccessible.

Building Pages

Since you can view previously captured (downloaded) Web pages without being connected to the Internet, this means that you can also create pages without being connected. That's what these lessons will be about. For one thing, all of the tools you need to create Web pages are probably built into whatever operating system you're using. If you have a Web browser and a text file editor, you're ready to go.

By the way, you may have heard about things like Dreamweaver and FrontPage. These are tools that help you build Web pages. Dreamweaver is probably the defacto standard for most professionals. FrontPage was Microsoft's initial attempt to compete against Dreamweaver. They almost got it at one point, then dropped the ball and very few people seem to want anything to do with it, including Microsoft, which has now focused on using different tools to manage Web pages. Dreamweaver will set you back a few hundred dollars; Microsoft's new tool, Visual Web Developer, while being free is, in my opinion, even worse than the worst complaint I had heard about FrontPage (and I actually liked FrontPage 2000 but not 97 or 2003). Anyway, I'm not really impressed with Dreamweaver either, but I realize that it alleviates some of the tedium of building an entire site or Web pages.

HTML Language

I don't want to make this a tedious collection of commands and what they do, but somewhere along the way you have to learn the language if you want to play the game. When you work with tools like Dreamweaver, it tends to hide most of the HTML from the Web page developer. However, I've yet to find a tool that does everything I want done exactly the way I need it done, so even if I use Dreamweaver I spend a lot of time in the HTML view to make the page do what I need done. Since Dreamweaver is slower than a pure text editor, I spend most of my time in the text editor, especially after the core parts of the page are set up.

OK, so here goes. Let's start building a Web page.

To begin, you need a document. Technically, the document needs some mark-up to let the browser know how to interpret the document as HTML; however most browsers are set up to treat straight text documents as unmarked HTML documents.

Since I typically use Windows, I'll refer to things in Windows terminology, but these things will also work in Macs and Unix/Linux systems.

Open Notepad (the easiest Windows text editor to use). If you can't find it elsewhere, click on the Start button, click on the Run link, then enter "notepad" in the box and click the OK button to launch it. You should see something like Figure 1.

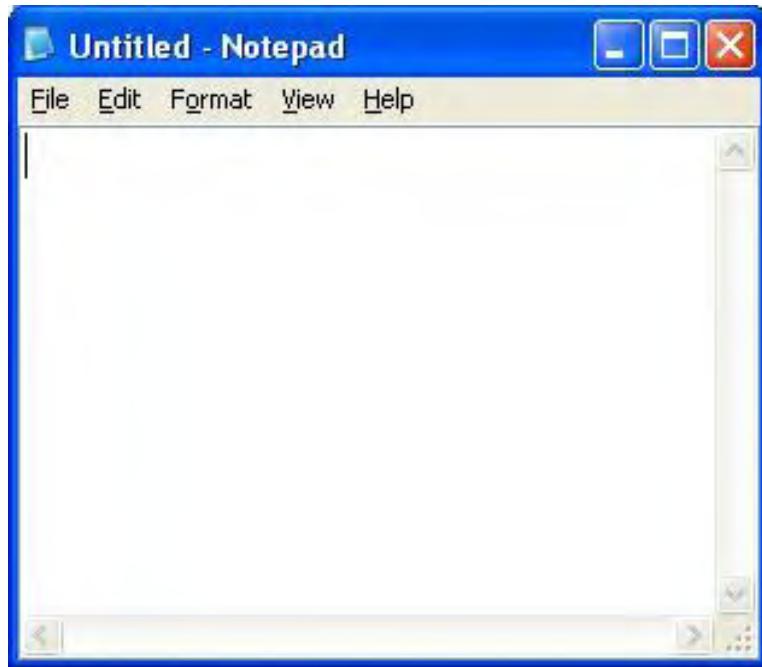


Figure 1. New Notepad Window.

One thing to note: Some editors will not save text files correctly (and HTML files should always be saved as text files so they transfer properly). Even worse, some document editors like Microsoft Word assume that your Web page should have all sorts of fancy Windows features included if you save it as a Word-style Web Page. Expect your Web page to become bloated and otherwise trouble if used in non-Microsoft browsers or non-Microsoft operating systems. Since your Web page could eventually be seen on other operating systems, you want to avoid tools that lock you into one system. By following some basic rules, you'll create Web pages that can be seen properly by anyone you give it to (directly or by making it available on your own Web site).

OK, now you have your text editor ready to go. Enter some text such as "Rob the Computortutor" and save the file in a convenient location such as the My Documents folder. Use the name "mydoc.htm." (If using Notepad, include the double-quotes to ensure that it saves the file with the proper Web-compatible file extension rather than its default "txt" extension.)

With your new Web page in place, let's open it and see what we get. You can either open Windows Explorer's My Documents directory and double-click on the file named mydoc (or mydoc.htm, depending on your system settings), or you can open your favorite browser and use its File/Open to locate and open it. Either way, you should get the text you typed appearing in the browser, showing nothing fancy, as seen in Figure 2 in IE6.

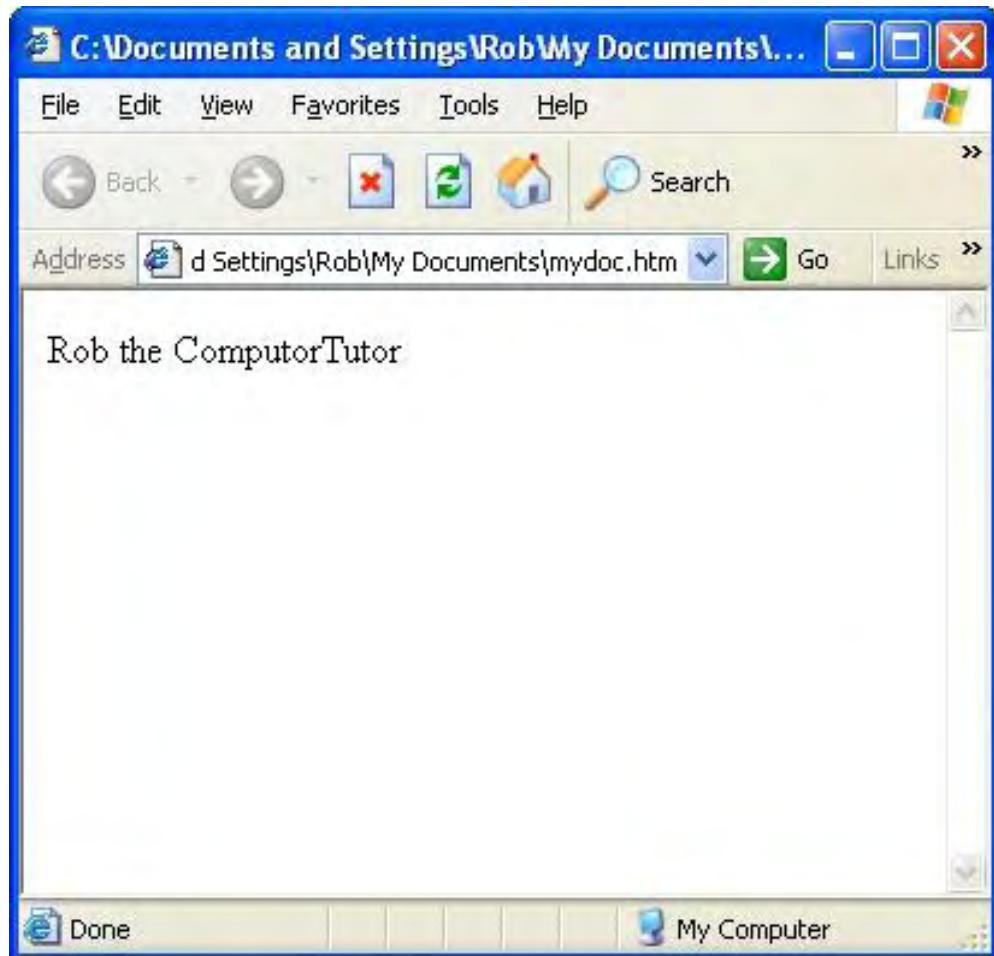


Figure 2. Document in Browser.

Now let's go back and make it right. The document has the htm extension (which will also work as "html"), so the browser assumes it must be an HTML document. Let's prove it right.

To do this, we need to understand a bit about the HTML language. The way it works is that every instruction to the browser should be surrounded by "angle bracket" (often called less-than and greater-than symbols). So to make this a true HTML document, we start with <html> (either upper or lower case, but the commonly accepted version these days is all lower case). These blocks of instructions are called tags. Since we're creating mark-ups, we start marking up something, then we have to stop it somewhere. To stop any particular mark-up, we create a closing tag by using the same name but starting with a slash such as </html>. The new document will look like Figure 3. Depending on the tag, these will either be placed directly next to the text it is marking up or on its own line as I did.

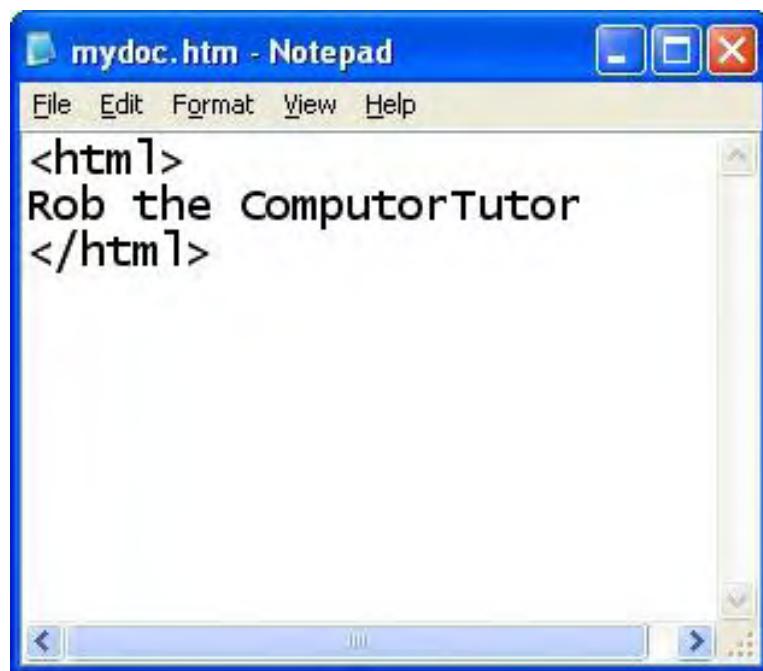


Figure 3. HTML Document.

If you save this and view it in your browser, it should look the same. All we did was identify the type of document.

Continuing, documents are broken down into two parts: the header and the body. The header includes things like the title and other information used to help the browser figure out what to do with the document. The body includes the main content that you want to appear in your browser window. It turns out that the tags used to identify these parts are called, respectively, head and body. Here's what we have so far:

```
<html>
<body>
Rob the ComputerTutor
</body>
</html>
```

Again, save and notice that the result doesn't change. All we did was to properly tell the browser where that text belongs.

Now let's do some minor changes to the way the information gets displayed. Let's make the first word bold and the last word italics. The tag for bold is "b" and for italics is "i." When you put this all together, you get this:

```
<html>
<body>
<b>Rob</b> the <i>ComputerTutor</i>
</body>
</html>
```

Notice how the bold and italic tags are adjacent to the text that we want the browser to display differently. When you view this in the browser, you'll see something like Figure 4.

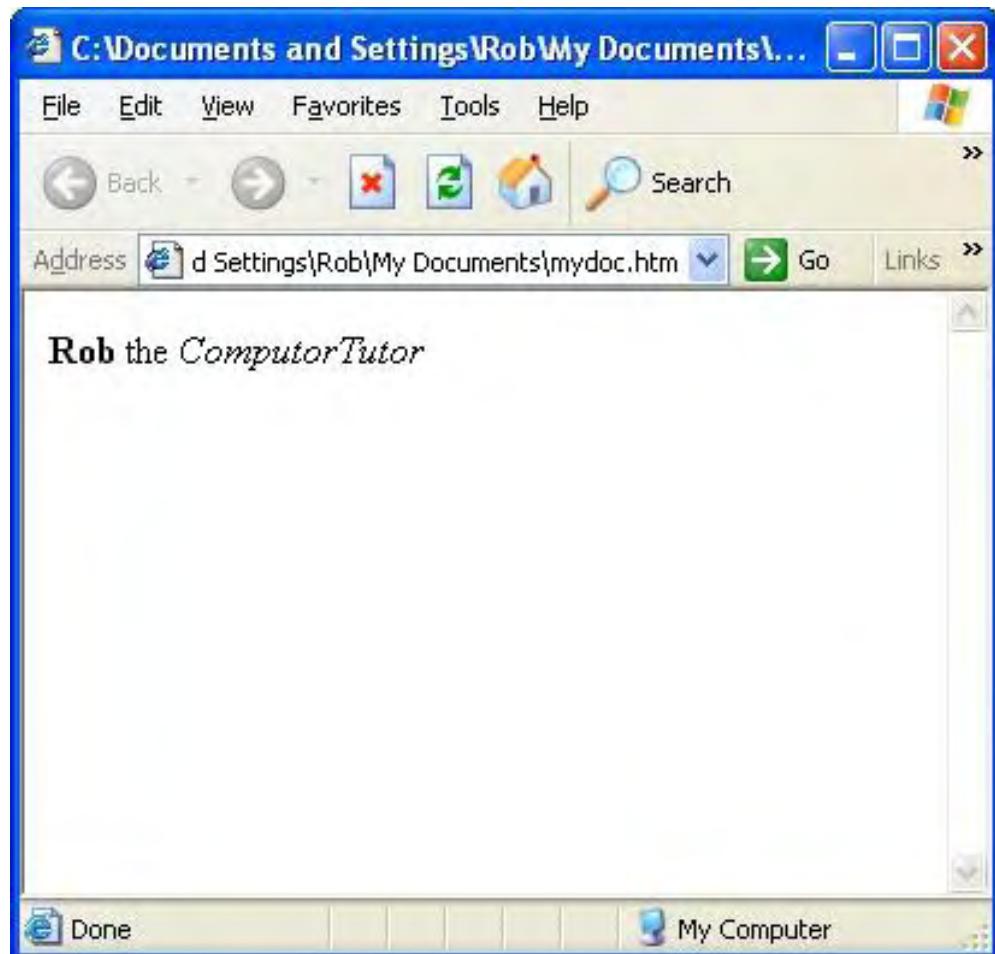


Figure 4. Marked-up Document.

Next week, we'll explore a few more things you can do with HTML. Eventually we'll explore something called cascading style sheets (aka CSS) and JavaScript.

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

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



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Beyond Personal Computing: Spooks in Space--Cyberspace

"A Look at the Human Side of Computing" by Keith Taylor

The adventures of a venerable veteran as he tries to navigate the Internet and social networking.

As befits one who served 22 years, nine months and 11 days in the Navy, I ended up in a veteran's group. In fact I was one of the earliest members of the Naval Cryptologic Veterans Association, even served as its president. While on active duty we did our deeds behind locked doors. Naturally the general service guys called us "spooks," a sobriquet we happily adopted as our own.

Come the Internet, it was natural that someone start a message group comprised of spooks. One old-timer would write about a bar in a far-off land, and a dozen old shipmates would add his own fond memories of the joint and its habitués. Ahhh, the good times rolled.

But we had our share of bad news, as well. When we read of an old shipmate's dying, it hit home. The announcements were a reminder of our own frailty. Still, each obit reminded us of the good times and evoked lots of LOLs.

A dedicated and overworked Webmaster held the group together. His employer, the University of Colorado, donated some space on its Web site. The Webmaster donated his own time, keeping the exchanges apolitical, amicable and properly formatted—nice and shipshape as we say. Things went along smoothly until the U of C needed their bandspace back. The Webmaster had to come up with a new means of allowing some 600 aging spooks to brag, lament and reminisce.

With step-by-step instructions, he herded us over to our new home on Yahoo.com, or tried to. Surely the migration wouldn't be a big problem to folks, practically all of whom had been dial spinners in a world bounded by electronics long before some geek came up with the term cyberspace. I was even further ahead of the game as a member of three other Yahoo groups, plus a Delphi group and Facebook.

But the term SNAFU was coined for a reason, and the god of cyberspace did not respect age, wisdom or expertise in dial spinning. It smote me with a vengeance, but (so far as I could tell) nobody else.

For starters, I was thwarted just by trying to use my e-mail address, one I've had for more than two decades. Every time I had to type in DipsyDmstr@aol.com, Yahoo spurned me with "Please enter a valid e-mail address." It didn't help a bit to use my other e-mail address. Yahoo had it in for me and that was also rejected.

The same thing had happened with other venues, but I always got around the problem by contacting a real person at the service provider. But Yahoo avoids that problem by keeping that real person out of reach. I tried its FAQs, and "click here for a personal answer" blocks. Nothing worked. I reluctantly sent an e-mail to the Webmaster.

Believe me, there is a caste system in cyberspace, and I was down there with the untouchables. Listen closely to those folks who communicate in cyberspeak, and you'll discern the disdain with which they hold we who are struggling to move about in their sacred world of beeps, buzzes, boinks and bells. Ask one a question, and his answer always starts with "It's easy." That may be the last thing you understand until he adds that you are the only one in the entire universe who has that problem.

The Webmaster insinuated it was the fault of AOL. In fact, I asked every computer nerd (except Wally Wang) I knew for help, including my son, a computer engineer. Each delighted in telling me that the problem was with AOL.

I worried it had something to do with age, perhaps the inability to cope with something new. These beeping contraptions came along late in my life. My only childhood association with computers were those on Buck Rogers' spaceship. Now here I am zooming through my golden years, suspecting the synapses in my gray matter aren't kicking in as well as they ought to.

Finally I solved my problem, not by logic, not by understanding algorithms, or even by luck. I snuck up on it. Rather than type in dipsydmstr@aol.com, I found an e-mail addressed to me, and cut-and-pasted it into the box.

It was easy! I thwarted Yahoo in its own sanctum of geekdom.

That hurdle out of the way, I breezed through the rest of initiation process, even answered the final question, which wanted to know why I wanted to be a member. I replied that I'd been one of the earliest members of both the message group and the Naval Cryptologic Veterans Association itself. Indeed, I was a speaker at six of NCVA's organization and its Web site. My reason for wanting to join was to keep track of which shipmates I'd outlived. Really, what better reason for a dottering geezer on the verge of entering his 90th decade on the planet?

Oh oh, Yahoo wasn't the only mirthless cog in the mechanism. That silly answer wouldn't do. Via e-mails, the Webmaster and I stood toe-to-toe in cyberspace.

One guy sounded like my boot camp commander. He gave me 14 days to respond correctly. His reason was a classic one from a master chief: Everybody else does it, so there is no reason why you shouldn't.

I replied that I remembered I'd left boot camp behind 62 years earlier and didn't feel like fighting with folks who can be as stubborn as an automated Internet service.

Yahoo took his side in the argument. It sent me a terse notice: "Your request to join USNCVA is denied."

A little saddened, I refused to comply with his order in the 14-day timeframe. I just hope I don't die without reading my obit online.

Keith Taylor lives in Chula Vista, Ca. He is retired after 23 years as an enlisted man and officer. He can be reached at *DipsyDmstr@aol.com*

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Spam of the Week

Spam of the Week

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

The Microsoft Outlook/Outlook Express spam scam has reared its ugly head again. It made the rounds last year and has emerged to attack the unsuspecting.

This week the Microsoft Outlook/Outlook Express spam scam has reared its ugly head again. It made the rounds last year and has emerged to attack the unsuspecting. The attack is particularly insidious because it takes advantage of the fact that so many people use these programs. We have not seen many of these lately, but feel that it's worth the warning just in case a barrage is planned.

Notice that the From: and To: address both contain the same e-mail address (see Figure 1). When this happens, it is a good indicator that the e-mail is spam. The rest of the e-mail looks harmless enough—there is no misdirected link. However, the danger lies in the attached file. If the file is executed, it will install a Trojan horse of the troj/Spy-CU variety.

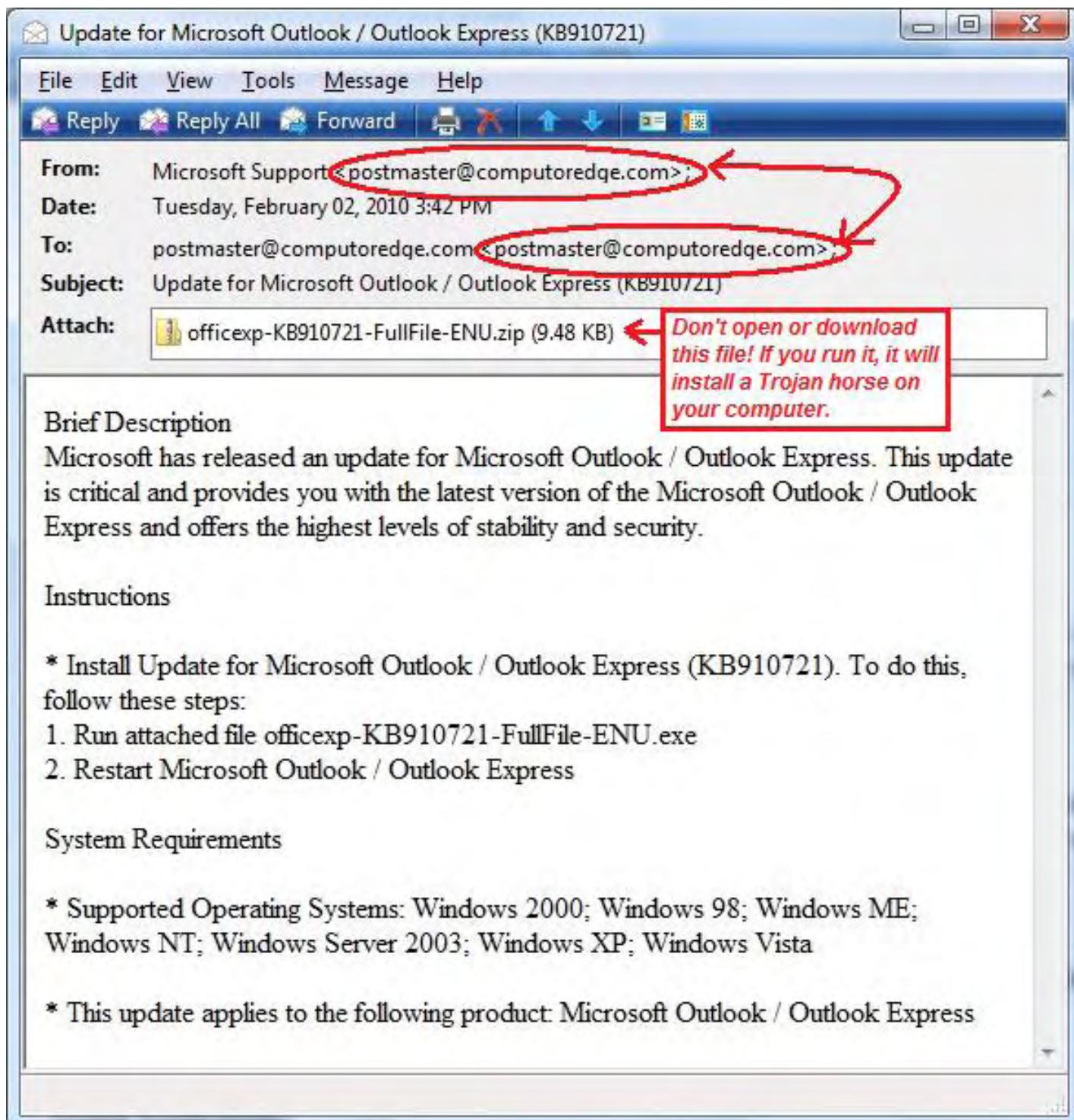


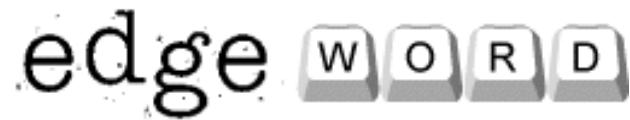
Figure 1. The Microsoft Outlook/Outlook Express spam designed to load a Trojan horse on your computer.

Microsoft does not send out unsolicited updates. Even if you suspect that there is a real update in existence, do not try to do it from the e-mail. Go directly to the Microsoft Web site and find the update yourself.

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 "ComputorQuick Review", or yell at us, please e-mail us at ceeditor@computoredge.com.

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EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher

“The Case Against Cloud Computing” by
Jack Dunning

The more information we save on the Internet, via "cloud computing," the greater our concerns about security. Is our information really safe when we store it with third parties?

With all of the offerings of free software and Web services, computing gets nothing but more complicated. It's much easier for users to stick with the tried and true, rather than venture out into the unknown problems of using cyberspace applications. This resistance to change is one reason why many of the predictions about Web applications and "cloud" computing are unlikely to come to fruition. Yet there are fundamental reasons why the investments by Microsoft, Google and others in Internet computing may not pay off.

The primary issue is one of control. A profound impact of the computer has been the movement of power to the individual. One person with a computer and the right peripherals can compete with large institutions in speed and quality of work. This creates a sense of autonomy previously unknown to the average person. Computer users closely guard their freedom and privacy.

The Internet increased the individual's sense of autonomy. Many activities, including communications, gathering of information and controlling finances, were previously executed or filtered through larger organizations forcing people to deal with the bureaucracies. Now the free flow of e-mail, Web searches and Internet accounts for personal business has empowered people to take better control of their lives. However, there is a cost.

The more information we save on the Internet, the greater our concerns about security. Is our information really safe when we store it with third parties? Maybe we trust the people who run our Web services today, but will they be bought out by even larger companies tomorrow? What happens when our free Web applications turn into the next Big Brother? Will we be trapped when they start charging for the service? And they *will* charge eventually. Do we really want to give up that much control?

While there has been a stampede by many to the cloud, it is likely to slow in the future. There are too many potential (and real) problems. Large companies have encountered security breaches with Google Apps because an employee carelessly let a password out. When our Internet connection is down, will that mean our business is down? Most people do not want to give up that much control.

There has been a huge number of online backup service companies springing up over the last decade, but their number-one rival may not be another online backup service. The hard drive has become so inexpensive that there is no reason to spend even a few dollars a month to do regular Internet backup. You don't need to trust it to someone else. If you want off-site backup, you can do it over the Internet with your buddy's computer or your home network drive.

Other than sharing files, I see no reason to use Google Apps. The OpenOffice.org suite of

business applications is free and will install on all of my computers. Do I need to access the files from another location? I can set up a Virtual Private Network (VPN) allowing me access over the Internet to all of my computers from anywhere in the world.

I see cloud computing and the huge applications being broken down by individual computing needs. Wouldn't you prefer to have your own little Internet cloud, which serves all of your needs, without depending upon the big guys? The next movement in computing and the Internet will be Virtual Offices, Virtual private networks and Internet-accessible network drives all run counter to control by the big guys. People want for themselves the control that will be afforded by operating their own resources. I'm not betting on either Windows Live or Google Apps in the long run.

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

"Technology Solutions," "Income Tax-Preparation Software," "Doing Your Taxes for Free," "Apple's iSlate," "Earbuds"

Technology Solutions

[Regarding the January 15 Rob, The ComputerTutor: Technology Solutions column:]

This was one of the *best* articles I have ever read on problem-solving (with or without a computer). And I've been reading them since 1979. *Bravo!* I work for the federal government, and this article should be in a frame on the wall of every government employee who is tasked to try to solve problems, real or otherwise.

-Lewis J. Miller, San Diego, CA

Income Tax-Preparation Software

[Regarding Michael J. Ross' January 15 article, "Income Tax-Preparation Software":]

The article failed to mention that the IRS Web site, and also the 1040* instruction booklet, lets you order IRS printed tax forms by U.S. Postal Service mail as well. Assuming you tackle your taxes a few weeks in advance of the deadline, you don't even have to leave your home to get them done by hand the traditional way.

-Stewart A. Levin, Centennial, CO

The article is very good in identifying what is available, costs and differences between companies and their various editions. Prior to reading the article I had planned to purchase a program locally for \$50. Now that I am better aware of available options, I will not be doing that.

-Richard Hardy, San Diego

TurboTax

[Regarding the January 15 EdgeWord: TurboTax Has Lost Me column:]

I wholly agree with Jack Dunning. I was hooked on TurboTax for a few years until I discovered TaxCut, which could import files from Turbo Tax, but not vice versa.

Intuit should follow the business model of fast food chains and make [money] in volume, not in price.

Big mistake in raising their price!

-Hector Olivera, Garden Grove, CA

Jack,

I agree with your comments about the skyrocketing cost of TurboTax. I'll be trying another tax preparation software this year too, after many years of using TurboTax.

-sdf

TurboTax lost me because of bloatware—could scarcely run the help files, lack of flexibility, and some poor calculations to boot.

TaxAct is great. They've also added free online returns, which my kids use. I've used it for years now.

Remember when Borland went to selling Pascal for \$99 when Microsoft was selling their equivalent for \$600 (1983 or so)? Blew the market apart. You can't be arrogant to your customers, or they won't be your customers any longer.

-Kent, Texas

Right on, Jack. TurboTax was my first tax software about eight years ago, and I continued to use it for several years. Then, they did several things that showed they were doing their best to maximize profits versus customer satisfaction, so I switched to TaxCut for a few years. Then, TT seemed to realize that if they put their customers before profits, the profits would still come. Now, they're back to their old ways, which they probably never left. I almost paid Costco's \$50 price, but thought as you have. Now, thanks to your article in this week's issue, I have some clear paths to follow; one of them will not be TurboTax.

-Richard Hardy, San Diego

I dropped TurboTax years ago when I noticed "version creep." Seems each year one or two features migrate from Basic to Deluxe.

-Bob Matschulat, Lakewood Colorado

Doing Your Taxes for Free

[Regarding Jack Dunning's January 15 article, "Doing Your Taxes for Free":]

Very good for identifying resources.

-Richard Hardy, San Diego

Apple's iSlate

[Regarding Wally Wang's January 15 article, "The End of an Era":]

Wally's presumption that the iSlate will revolutionize the computer industry may be a bit

premature. The real revolution will occur when voice recognition is good enough to replace the keyboard, virtual or otherwise. Still, I found his article informative and interesting. Will the iSlate make major inroads into the laptop/notebook market? Given Apple's pricing history, and assuming the iSlate will be pricey, I would also assume that Apple's share of this market will not improve significantly. Who's right? We'll see when we see.

-Ron Gosewisch, San Diego

"First, get a Macintosh and start using Apple's flat keyboards to get used to typing on a two-dimensional surface."

The major point this article fails to recognize is that the Mac with a flat keyboard has a vertical screen for viewing things with your eyes and a lower horizontal keyboard for typing with your hands. A slate without a keyboard will just be viewed as a beautiful-to-look-at device unsuitable for use by humans.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego

Earbuds

[Regarding the January 15 Worldwide News & Product Reviews column:]

Earbuds are most interesting, *but* what about us that wear in-the-ear hearing aids?

-Wm Tiwp, Toledo, OH

Thanks. Saw the ad in one of those Geek catalogs and was wondering about the wireless feature. Now that I see how clunky it is physically, I know I'm not interested. When are companies going to realize that we want to go wireless, but not by turning headphones into a Rube-Goldberg contraption? They need to use Bluetooth (built into many devices already), and they need to think small, small, small for the buds and radio receiver.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego

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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