ComputorEdge™ Online — 04/09/10

This issue:
Calendaring Software

Using computers and the Internet to keep track of everything that you need to keep track of.

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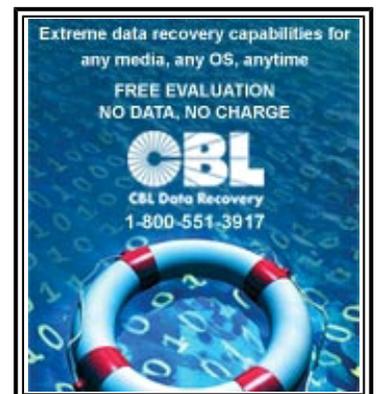
Digital Dave

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

A reader needs details about accessing the advertised 4G cellular network; an IP addressing conflict is causing Internet disruptions; a reader paid more for older DDR2 memory than for newer DDR3 memory—why?

Dear Digital Dave,

As I understand it, in the advertisements for the new 4G phone networks, the term 4G means a "fourth-generation" network-accessing method used in cell phones.

Is this a new networking method that can also improve the performance of my laptop or desktop computer? If so, how do I get access to a copy of it to load to my computers?

Wayne G.
Denver, CO

Dear Wayne,

Yes, 4G (fourth generation) is the coming improvement in the cellular phone system over the current 3G (third generation) system. It is speculated that once implemented, data speeds for the cellular networks will increase by about 10 times. (Actual performance will vary based upon how the wireless phone companies decide to implement their solutions.)

However, 4G is not a software program that can be loaded onto your computer, but a communications systems consisting of towers and antennas that are designed to provide the Internet to 4G mobile phones and computers with a cellular 4G modem.

If you are looking for a faster network between your laptop and computer, then gigabit routers and network cards (which are 500 times faster than the probable 4G speeds) are readily available. But they will help you only between your computers. Once on the Internet, you are choked by the speed that your Internet Service Provider (ISP) offers—which is way slower than what you can do between computers on a local network.

The reality is that 4G will probably deliver Internet speeds that are merely comparable to your current cable modem connection. It is not likely to be a solution for your home or office Internet connection—unless you have no other reasonable alternative. By the time 4G is fully implemented, the Internet speeds provided into homes will be even faster than today's cable speeds. When thinking about 4G, think mobile computing.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I get this message a couple of times a day: "Another computer on this network has the same IP Address as this computer."

My network consists of a desktop, external hard drive and printer, all of which are hard-wired to my router. I also have a laptop that ties in wirelessly, but I get the message whether or not I have the laptop turned on. Could someone nearby be attempting to connect to my network?

POZ
San Diego, CA

Dear POZ,

It's not likely that someone else is trying to connect to your network. It's much more likely that you have an IP conflict between devices connected to your router—which could be the printer, if it's a network printer. (It could also be the laptop, even if it's turned off.)

The Internet Protocol (IP) address is how computers and devices are recognized on a network and the Internet. If two devices have the same address, it causes confusion. There are two ways that your computer can get its address. (Internal network IPs are usually of the form 192.168.xxx.xxx.) Either it is automatically assigned by the router, or you can permanently assign a fixed address in the Properties setting for the network card. If a device with a fixed IP comes onto the network after another device has already been assigned the same IP by the router, there will be a conflict.

Normally, a router is set up to automatically assign addresses (IPs) to computers as they come up on the network—that is, as long as the computer is set up to accept an automatic IP assignment. This usually prevents a conflict, since the router will keep track of all the assigned IPs.

However, there are times when a fixed IP will be assigned to a computer or device. This is usually done when it is important that an IP does not change—even when the computer is rebooted or a router is reset (most often servers). Once the router has assigned an IP, it will not normally reassign it to another device—at least not until a reset of the router. That means a computer with a fixed IP could appear to have a conflict if it comes online after another computer was previously assigned the same IP, even if that first computer is no longer online.

A network printer could also be assigned a fixed IP, which to the router looks just like another computer with a potential for conflict.

To find the IP conflict, you need to know the address of each device on the network. There are various techniques for finding the IP of a device. For computers you can use programs such as ipconfig and netstat in the Command Prompt window. In Windows Vista or Windows 7, you can consult the Network Map available via the Network and Sharing Center. When you hover over each computer in the network, the IP is revealed. For network printers, printing a test page from the printer setup will usually reveal the IP.

There are a couple of approaches to fixing the problem. The usual is to ensure that all devices on the network are set to "Obtain an IP address automatically" in the Internet Protocol Properties settings for the network card. This way, once you reset the router and bring up network devices, each will be assigned a unique IP. If it is necessary to keep a fixed IP on a device, you can either assign fixed (non-conflicting) IPs to each device, or make sure the device with the fixed IP comes online first. (You can also set the router to assign IPs in a range that will not include any of the fixed IPs.)

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

Last week you told Randy: "The cheaper computers will include DDR2 memory, while the more expensive rivals will offer the newer DDR3 memory. DDR3 memory is faster and has more future expansion potential, but for most uses DDR2 is fine and less expensive when adding more."

Having just returned *some significantly cheaper DDR3 for the DDR2 (+30%) that works in my machines, I think that point at which the old memory starts getting rarer and more expensive has arrived.*

Mike Viehman
Julian, CA

Dear Mike,

You're absolutely right! Memory is a commodity and subject to the laws of supply and demand. Since DDR3 RAM is the memory of the future, manufacturers are phasing out the older DDR2 in favor of the new. However, manufacturers of computers contract well in advance and were able to offer DDR2 at the former lower price. Plus, as demand for DDR2 drops (and more used memory comes on the market), you will probably be able to expand without paying the premium you encountered.

My quick check of memory prices shows expansion memory to be comparable for either DDR2 or DDR3—at least for today. While most technology costs less year over year, memory is the one part of a computer that can increase in price if there is a jump in demand while a manufacturing shortage.

Digital Dave

Calendars for Everyday Use

"Which Web or desktop application is right for you?" by Andrea Dunning

> Calendar software is a crowded field, filled with free, for-sale and subscription-based software for individuals, small businesses and corporations. Here's how to figure out which Web or desktop application is right for you.

Calendar software is a very crowded field, filled with free, for-sale and subscription-based software for individuals, small businesses and corporations, but our focus here is the individual user.

The current generation of calendars all support the iCalendar format (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ICalendar*), making it easy to import calendar data. Most support multiple calendars (such as work, personal, etc.) and will color-code them so that you can overlay them on one calendar. The majority include some sort of e-mail functionality, allowing for generation of e-mail event invitations and appointment reminders, and all of the calendars include to-do lists. The major division is between desktop and Web applications.

Desktop Applications

Apple iCal is the calendar application built into Mac OS X. iCal has both e-mail and pop-up reminders, which is somewhat unusual among the desktop applications. As iCal is built into OS X, the programmers were able to tightly integrate the functions of the various OS X applications, so event invitations are created in Mail at the direction of iCal (*www.apple.com/macosx/what-is-macosx/mail-ical-address-book.html*).

Microsoft Outlook (*office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook/default.aspx*) and Microsoft Entourage (*www.microsoft.com/mac/products/entourage2008/default.mspx#/interacting_entourage/*) are part of Microsoft Office Suite, respectively for PC and Mac. Entourage is basically Outlook for Mac, with a few minor functional differences, and will be replaced by Outlook in the next version of Office for Mac. Outlook and Entourage are e-mail programs, but they both have calendar functionality. The two programs only have pop-up event reminders, which means that you have to leave the program running in order to get event reminders, but there is

What do you mean we can't make Mayan calendars after December 21, 2012? It's not the end of the world!

J.Whiting

a third-party module you can purchase for Outlook to enable e-mail reminders. The major difference between Outlook and Entourage is in the way they deal with multiple calendars. Both programs allow for multiple calendars, however Entourage does not have an overlay function and allows you to view only one calendar at a time. Outlook allows you to look at multiple calendars, either side by side or as an overlay.

Sunbird (*www.mozilla.org/projects/calendar/sunbird/download.html*) and Lightning (*www.mozilla.org/projects/calendar/lightning/download.html*) are the two calendar programs by Mozilla, both of which are free to download and run on multiple platforms. Sunbird is a stand-alone calendar program, while Lightning is a calendar module for Mozilla's e-mail application Thunderbird. Sunbird is best described as a calendar-only program, with no frills and no e-mail integration. The two programs only have pop-up notifications, but e-mail notifications and event invitations are planned for the next release of Lightning. The programs do have the ability to send event invitations to other users with Sunbird or Lightning by remotely subscribing to their calendars. The programs then show if the invitee is free during the event time slot.
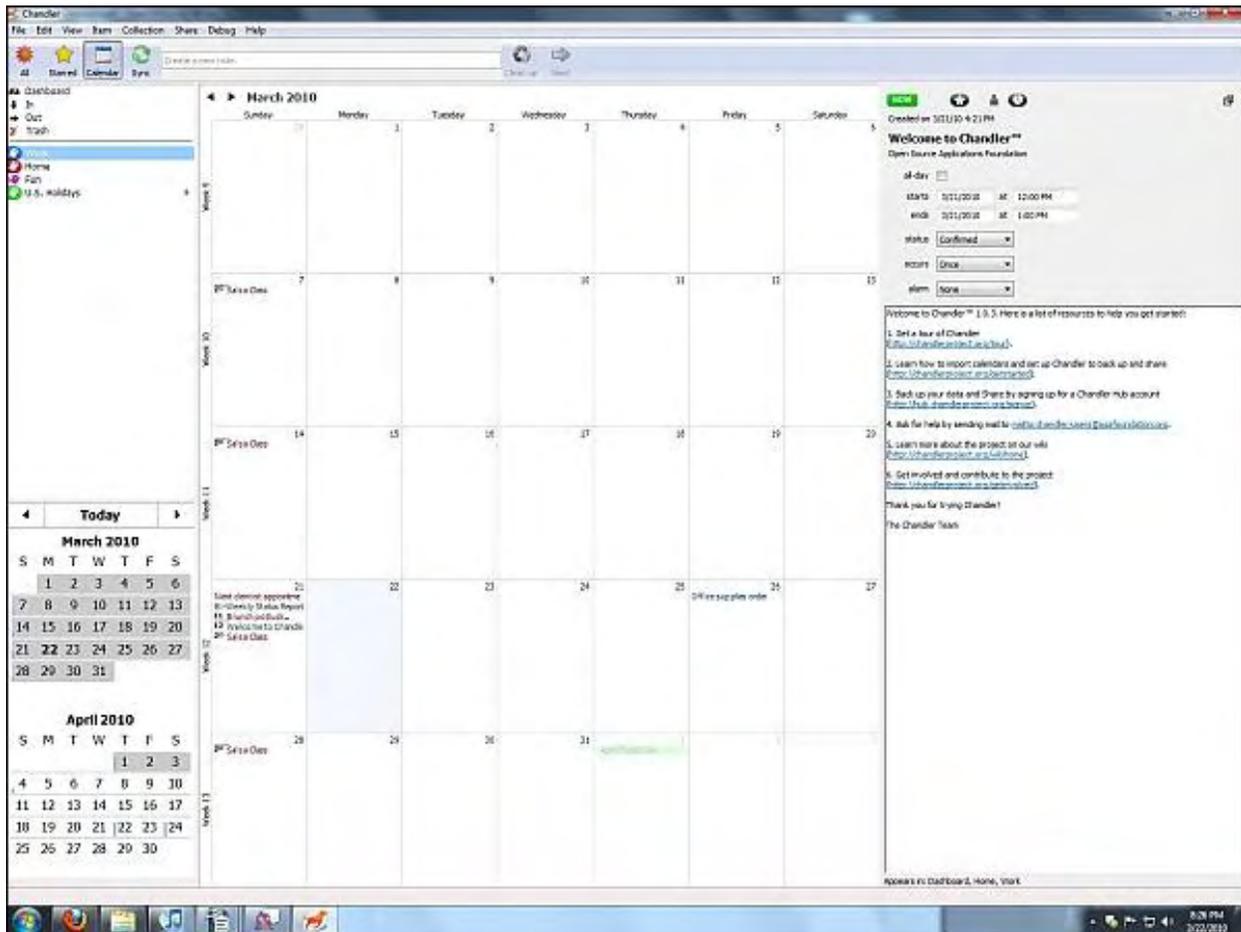
Chandler Free Calendar Application

Chandler (*chandlerproject.org/*) (seen in image above) is a desktop application with less name recognition than Outlook or iCal, but that is probably a result of it being developed by the Open Source Applications Foundation rather than Microsoft or Apple. Functionally, it is comparable to any of the major calendar applications, and is a free cross-platform program. Chandler is slightly different from other calendar applications in that its main focus is on the To-Do list. Your information on Chandler can also be accessed online, via Chandler Hub, blurring the line between desktop and Web applications. When you sign up for a Chandler Hub account, your Chandler desktop application automatically backs up your data onto Chandler Hub. The downside of Chandler is that, because of its small developer base, it may not be updated frequently. However, it appears to be very easy to transfer data to other programs, should you ever want to switch.

Web Applications

Windows Live Calendar, Google Calendar and Yahoo! Calendar are the Big Three of the Web calendar applications, in the positive omnipresent sense. Each calendar is available to anyone with a free account, and all offer fairly similar features. All of the Web calendars can send e-mail event reminders, and these calendars can also send out a daily e-mail event summary, which seems a particularly sensible option if you tend to have multiple events per day and don't want the hassle of separate reminder notices. In addition to the standard day, week and month views, Yahoo! Calendar (*calendar.yahoo.com/*) enables you to view the entire year, while Windows Live Calendar and Google Calendar also offer an agenda view that lists upcoming events. Windows Live Calendar (*windowslive.com/Online/Calendar*) automatically generates a birthday calendar based on network contacts. Google Calendar (*www.google.com/calendar/*) can create a calendar of your contact's birthdays, but you have to find the option several steps into a menu. In either case, this process relies on your contacts having birthday information accessible to the program, which doesn't seem to be the case for the most part.

All three calendars can be shared with other account holders, in view-only mode or with editing capability, and can also be made public. Windows Live Calendar and Google Calendar can be synced with Microsoft Outlook. Yahoo! Calendar can sync with Outlook, but Yahoo! Help warns against it if you're not experienced in that sort of file transfer.
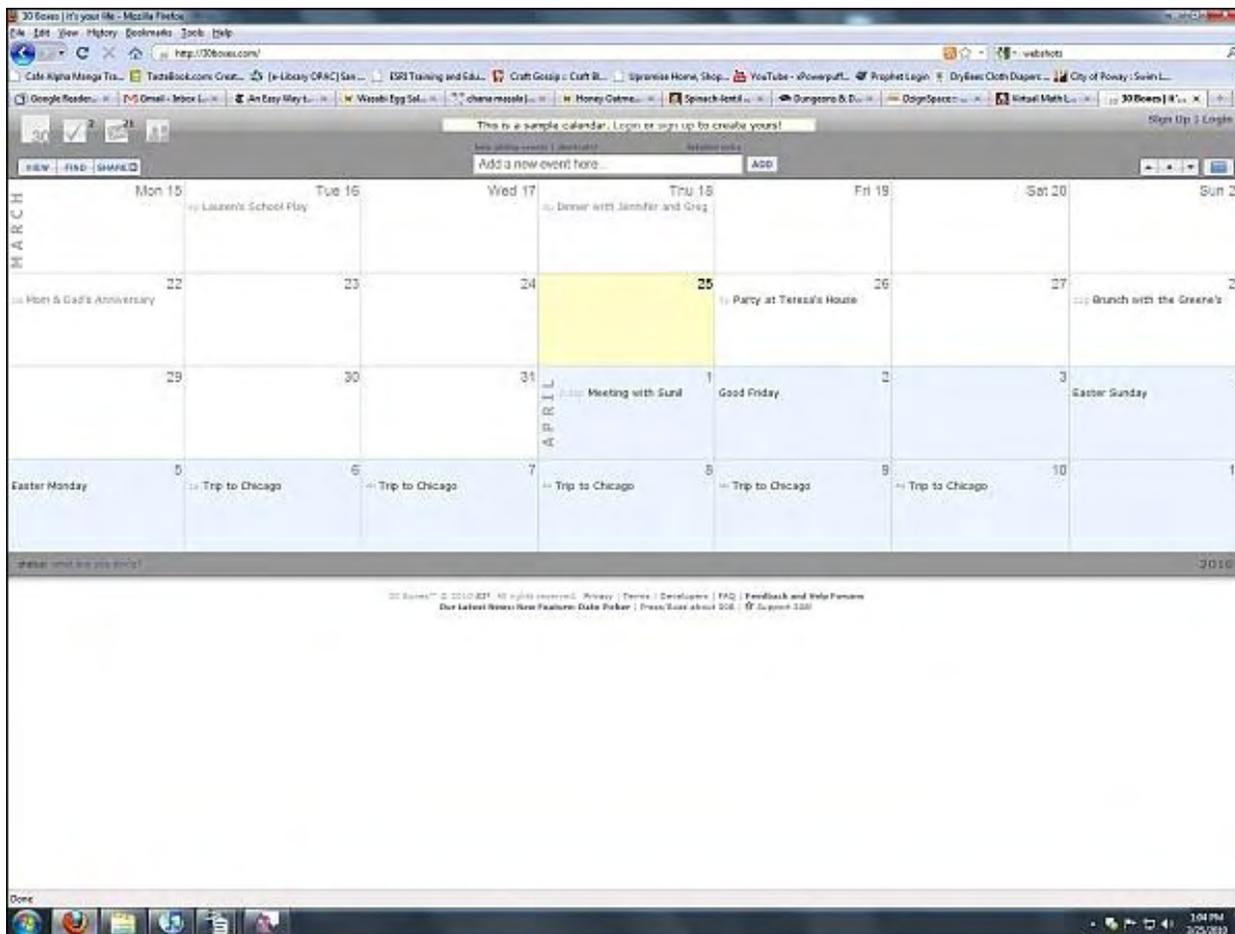
30Boxes Online Calendar

A less well-known application, 30Boxes (*30boxes.com/*) (as seen in the graphic above) is nevertheless an interesting calendar, if not quite as robustly tooled as the Big Three. Also including free sign up, 30Boxes bills itself as a social calendar. It can publish RSS and iCal

feeds, as well as create HTML and flash badges for blogs and MySpace. The calendar purports to be a "dynamic journal," using Flickr, MySpace, Webshots and blogs to track and document events in one place, though in reality that just means that the 30Boxes member page links to other social media. The calendar does have one particularly novel feature: You can hyperlink events to Google Maps or Web pages. If you've plugged in a few addresses, such as home and work, into your account, the calendar can even generate directions.

There are a few gaps, however, in the features of 30Boxes. The application does not support multiple calendars with overlay. Instead, events are tagged and can be color-coded by tag. The application also has a more limited selection of views than other calendars. You can view by month (hence the name) or by day's events only.

Andrea Dunning is a digital cartographer, AutoCAD drafter, World of Warcraft player extraordinaire and blogger with a Master's in Education. She also serves as tech support for her less computer-savvy family members.

Google Calendar for Time Management
"A highly capable, customizable time-management tool." by Michael J. Ross

> Nowadays, the typical user's hodgepodge of scheduling and time-tracking utilities is being replaced by online calendars and to-do lists. Google, arguably the leader in Web applications, has its own time-management tool known as Google Calendar.

During the past few years, we have seen the emergence of some major trends in information technology, including widespread social media and marketing, Web 2.0, and a huge increase in the use of mobile devices for accessing the Web. Yet one trend has received less attention from the public and evoked less fanfare by the industry media and pundits: the transition of data storage and processing from the desktop to the Web. When once people used Microsoft Outlook for downloading and managing e-mail messages on their local computers, now they simply log in to their Gmail or Yahoo Mail accounts. Likewise, Web-based office productivity tools, such as Google Docs, are threatening to supplant their desktop predecessors, such as Microsoft Office.

There are a number of advantages to keeping your personal and business data and programs "in the cloud." They can be accessed from anywhere in the world, as long as you have access to a computer connected to the Web. In these cases, for the majority of common tasks, you no longer need to tote around a laptop, but instead can take advantage of the resources offered by colleagues, libraries, Internet cafés and satellite offices. None of the data is vulnerable to hard drive failure, because even though the Web servers themselves store your data on hard drives, the failure rates are much lower, and everything is backed up anyway. Speaking of which, you no longer need to worry about making backups of your own, provided that you have chosen legitimate Web services, such as those offered by the major Internet firms.

These advantages are prompting more people than ever to utilize the Web for even the most mundane computing tasks. One example of this is time management, which for many years was typically handled by dedicated applications running on the desktop, or applets, which are built into the popular operating systems. Nowadays, the typical user's hodgepodge of scheduling and time-tracking utilities is being replaced by online calendars and to-do lists. In fact, more specialization has been made possible, and is being actively pursued by Web application developers. Witness the numerous apps that have been created specifically for time and task management for software development projects.

View the Future

Given that Google is arguably the leader in Web applications, it should come as no surprise that the company offers its own time-management tool, known as Google Calendar (*www.google.com/calendar/*). It was introduced in April 2006, in beta form, and was not blessed as ready for prime time until more than three years later (true to Google form).

As with most Google software, the user interface for Calendar is clean and attractive.
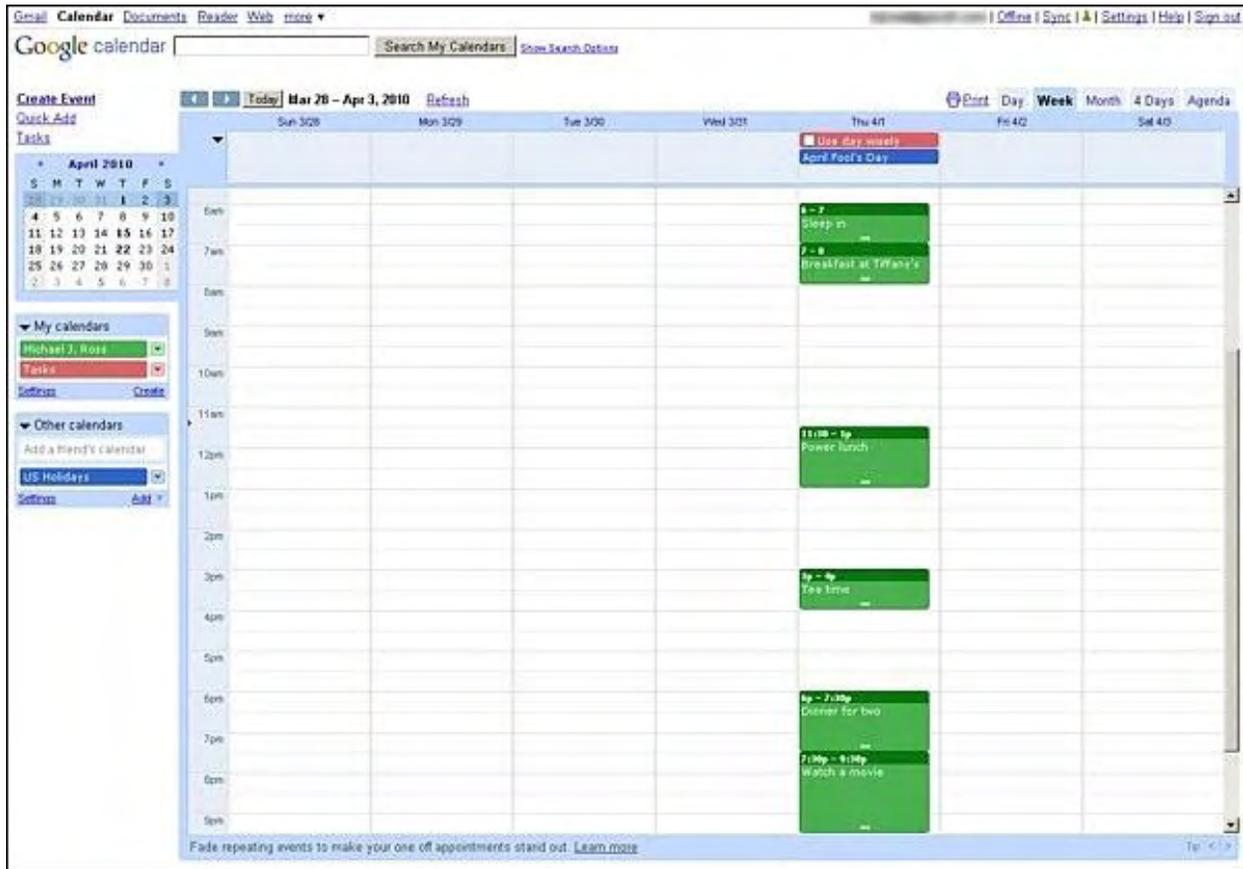
Figure 1. Google Calendar user interface.

The calendar view occupies most of the screen, and is formatted according to which view is currently chosen—which is done using the tabs just above the calendar, to the right of the printer icon and Print link. The default view is for the current week, and shows the seven days, starting with Sunday (unless set to a different day).
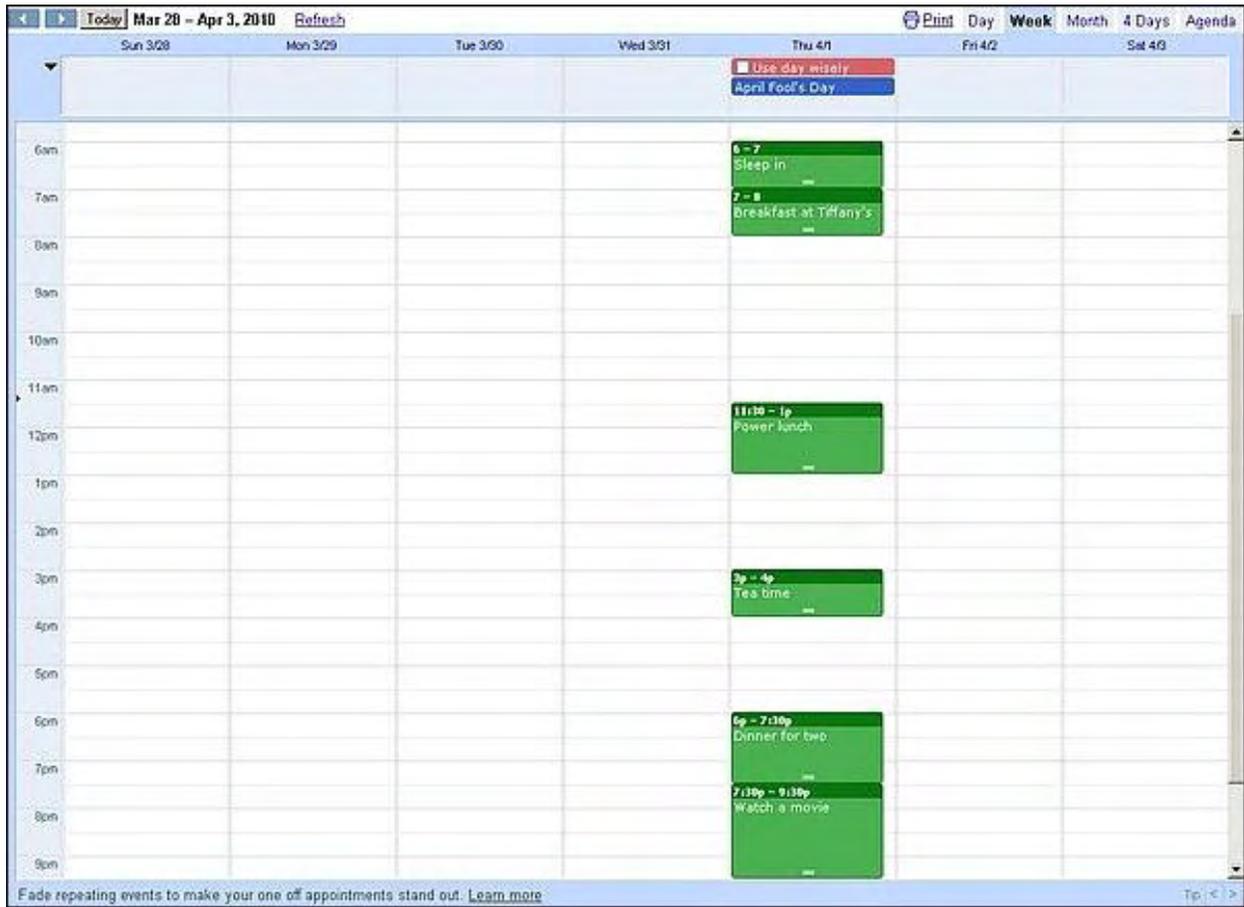
Figure 2. Week view.

You can switch to a day view, which is able to display lengthier event descriptions in full.
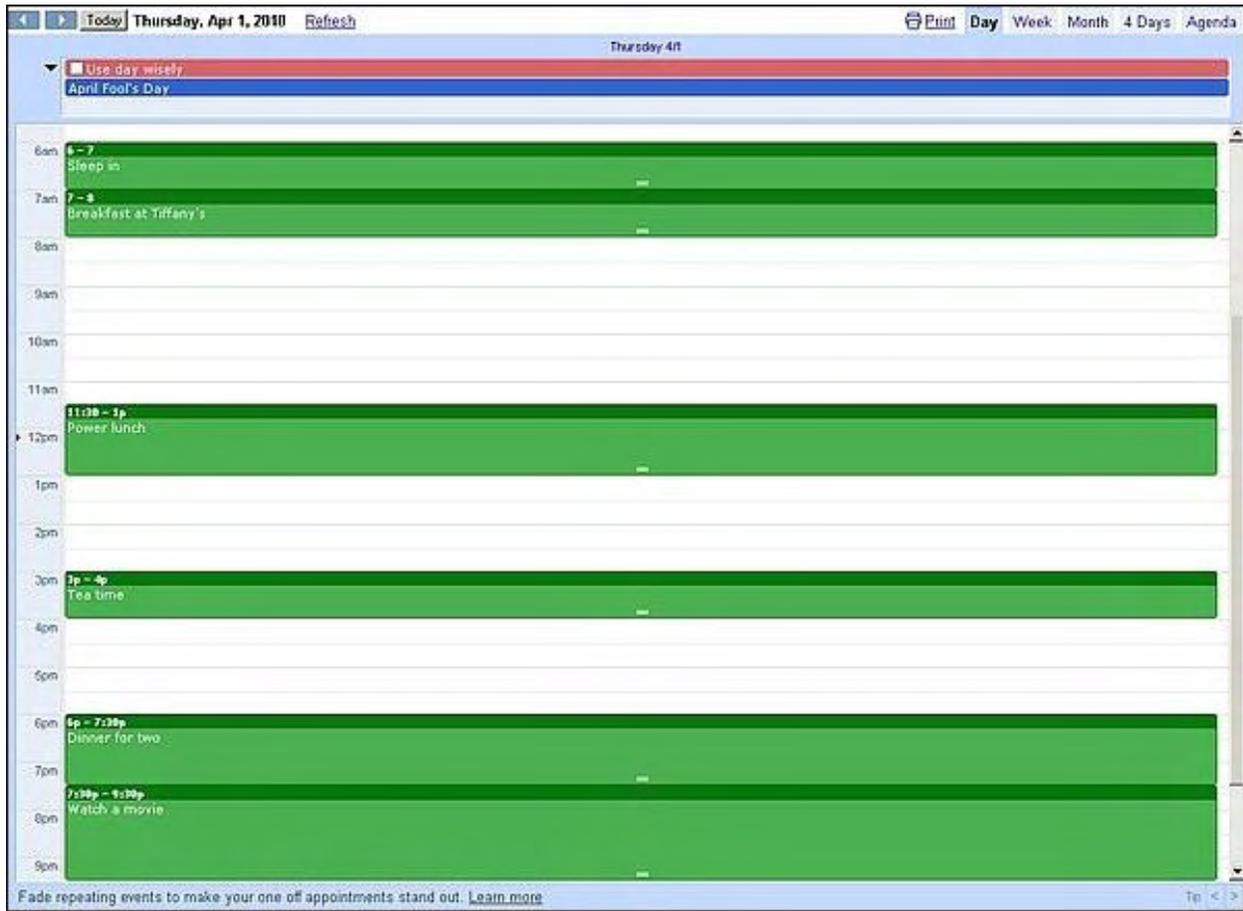
Figure 3. Day view.

The month view allows less space for each day, and displays a link to show any overflow, e.g., "+2 more."

Figure 4. Month view.

The "4 Days" view would be ideal for a printed schedule of a weekend of travel, away from Web access.
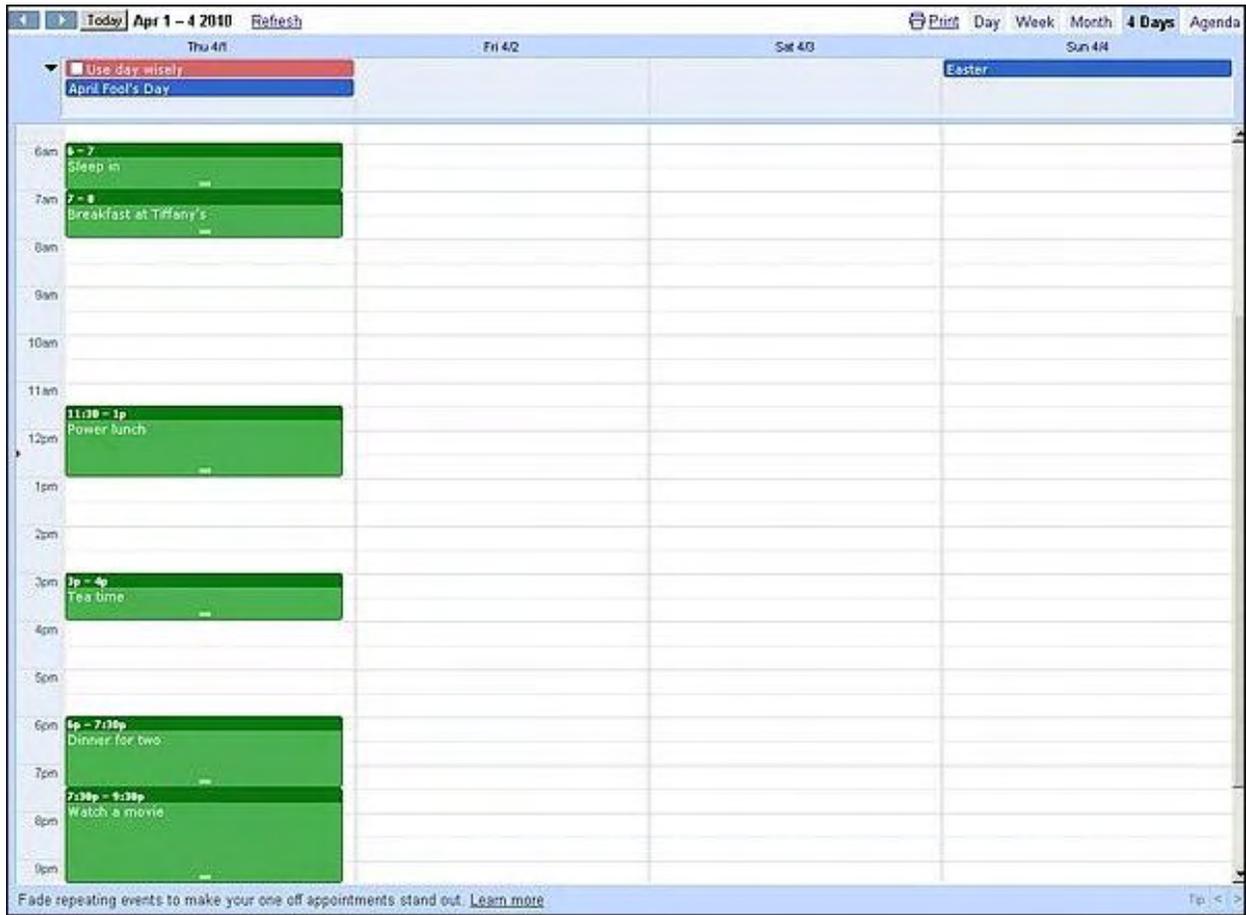
Figure 5. Four days view.

Lastly, the agenda view collapses all of the days, to show content only, and minimal empty space.

Figure 6. Agenda view.

Control Your Destiny

In any of the views discussed above, you can create a new event simply by clicking on any empty event slot; you can modify an existing event by clicking on it; you can move an event by clicking and dragging it; and you can change the start and end times by clicking and dragging the top and bottom borders. Aside from those actions, most of your calendar management is accomplished by using the control panel located on the left side of the screen.

Figure 7. Control panel.

It contains links for creating a new event in detail, creating one quickly, and toggling the tasks' sidebar. Let's consider that first one.
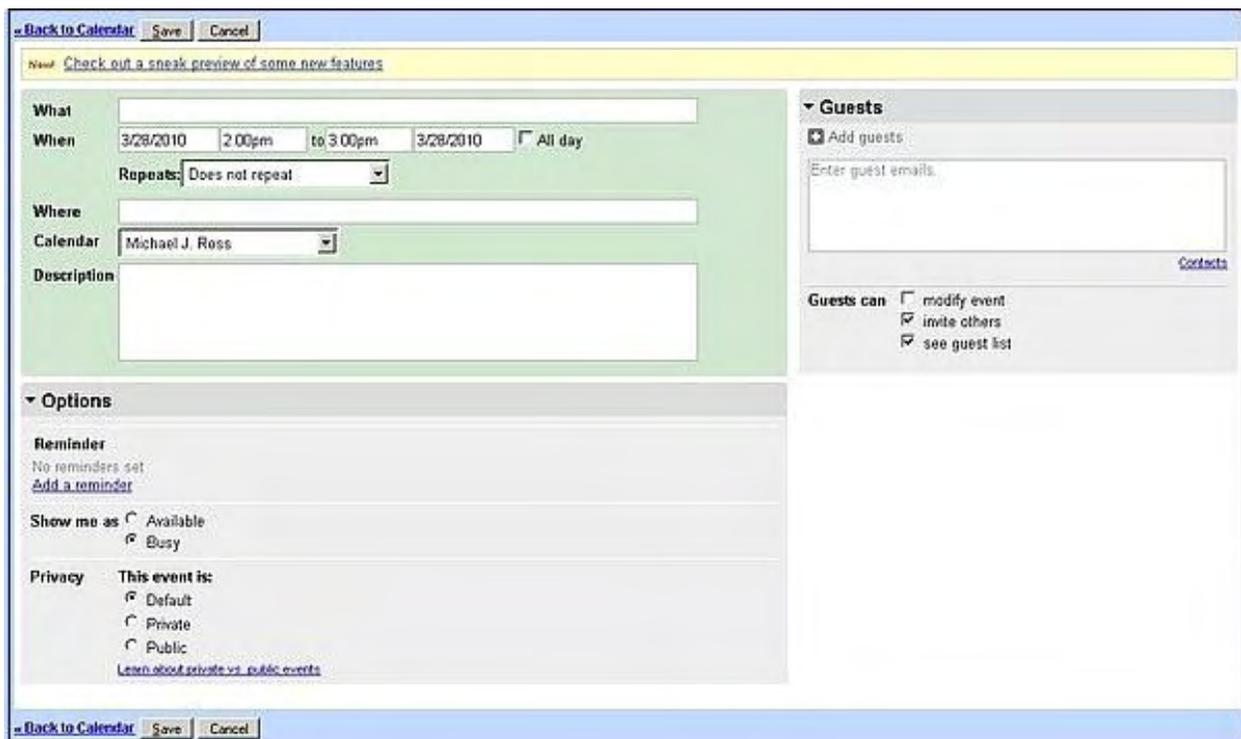
Figure 8. Create event.

Every event can have a name, start and end dates and times (or be an all-day event), a location, a calendar assignment and a description.

You can optionally set a reminder to yourself, specify whether the event is private or public (or allow the default), invite other people to the event (by providing a list of their e-mail addresses), and allow guests to invite other guests or to see the guest list.

The Quick Add feature makes it possible to create an event by typing in the minimum information needed (e.g., "Breakfast at Tiffany's 7 a. m. April 1"). The Tasks link will display or hide the tasks panel, located to the right of the large calendar. Tasks can be checkmarked to indicate completion.

Figure 9. Task completed.

Below those three links in the control panel is a simple display of the selected month, with double-headed arrows for quickly switching to past and future months. Below that is a list of calendars. Initially there is only one, colored green, and labeled with your personal name. When you view the Tasks section the first time, a tasks calendar, colored red, is created. You can use the Settings and Create links to modify existing calendars and make new ones. In the bottom section, titled Other Calendars, you can import calendars from other people, or stick with only the default, your nation's holidays. In the illustrative screenshots above, we see how created events are colored green, holidays are blue, and tasks are red.

Get Some Google Time

To use this time-management application, you need an account with Google. You will already have one if, for instance, you have a Gmail account. Otherwise, go to the Google Calendar home page (*www.google.com/calendar/*) and sign up, which is a straightforward process. You need to provide a valid e-mail address, a chosen password, and your name, location and time zone. Enter the displayed CAPTCHA, read the terms of service (which everyone does, of course), and click the big button to create your account. By the way, if you are not delighted with your current e-mail provider, you may as well try Gmail, because then you automatically have a Google Calendar, and you can also try out an e-mail service that will probably win you over. If you have a business, then consider signing up for an account with Google Apps, using your organization's domain name. For instance, with the domain name "example.com," you could always go straight to your calendar at the address "http://www.google.com/calendar/hosted/example.com."

Once you have logged in to your Calendar account, you may want to check the settings for your account, to make sure that they are optimal for your circumstances. Click on the Settings link in the upper right-hand corner of the screen. As of this writing, there are four tabs in the Settings section: General, Calendars, Mobile Setup and Labs.

In the General subsection, you can specify such settings as your current time zone, preferred date format, whether to display the local weather, and even what day starts the week (party enthusiasts may prefer to change that to Friday). The Calendars subsection allows you to create new calendars, update or delete existing ones, share them with other people, unsubscribe from unwanted calendars, and browse a list of "interesting" calendars (i.e., international calendars). In this era of ubiquitous cell phones, the Mobile Setup functionality could be quite useful, because you can request to receive Calendar alerts and updates on your mobile phone. The Labs subsection lists a number of Calendar add-ins developed by outside programmers, and contributed to the system.

Regardless of how much or how little you customize your Google Calendar, more than likely you will find that it is a highly capable time-management application, which integrates nicely with any other Google products that you are using.

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.
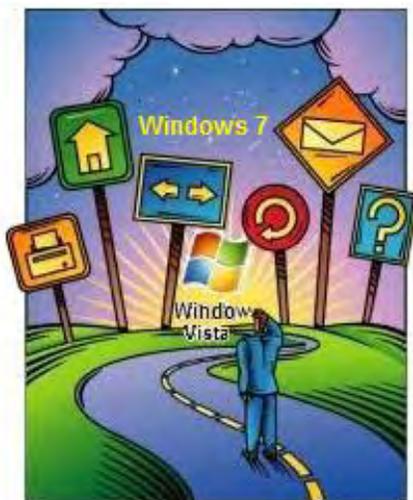
Windows Tips and Tricks: Windows 7 Paint

"Windows 7's Quick and No-So-Dirty Paint Program" by Jack Dunning

Windows 7's version of Paint is by no means a substitute for professional-level graphics programs, but for the vast majority of people it will be useful for quick little jobs.

Even since I can remember, Windows has included a Paint program for working with image files. It has always been a basic program with just enough capability to get a quick-and-dirty job done. It was simple to learn and—as far as I know—until now has never changed through the various versions of Windows. With Windows 7, there is a new Paint program. It is every bit as quick to use as the old Paint program, but not quite so dirty. This newer version of Paint is by no means a substitute for professional-level graphics programs, but for the vast majority of people it will be useful for quick little jobs.

For people who use the old Paint program, there is a little bit of a learning curve—although it is much more intuitive than many of the graphics programs I've tried. It uses the tab and ribbon menu layout, putting most of the features directly in view (see Figure 1). All of the graphic tasks are directly available from the Home tab.

Figure 1. The Paint program in Windows 7.

Windows 7 Paint is certainly a step up from the older Paint program. It has features that I have found important, such as resizing images based upon pixel size, but it also offers more brush types (two types of calligraphy brushes; an airbrush; plus oil, marker, crayon, pencil and watercolor brushes). One of the more interesting (and possibly more useful for people who need to mark up images) are the number of shapes (including a lightning bolt) that can be inserted and resized for the purpose of highlighting and annotating images. See marked-up image in Figure 2.
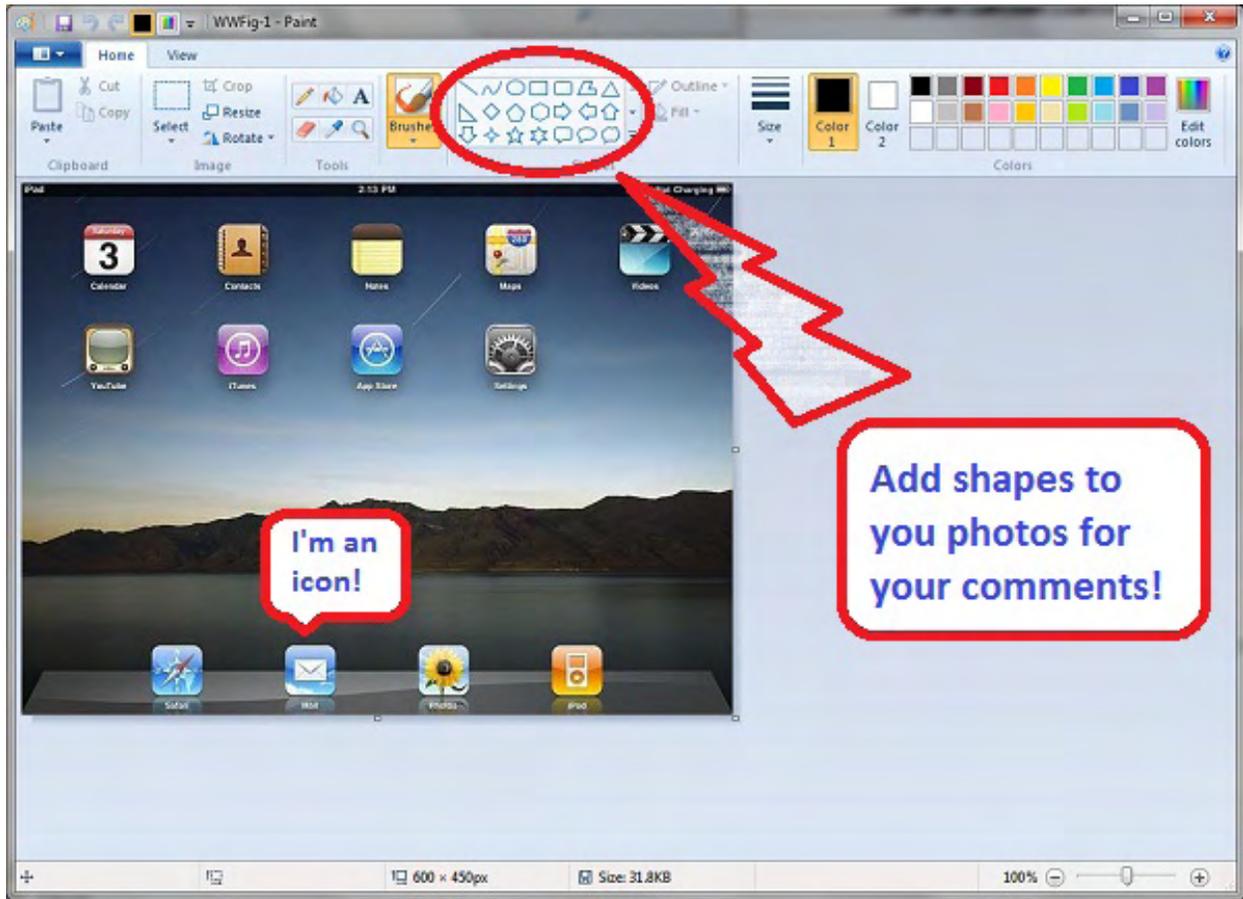
Figure 2. Windows 7 Paint program is a handy, quick way to mark up images.

One feature that I found surprising and useful was how the selected text I was inserting would change to preview the font, size, or color as I hovered over the menu selections.

To open Paint, go to All Programs/Accessories, or type "paint" into the "Search programs and files" field in the Start Menu, and it will appear as the top option. If you load it and start playing with it, in about 10 minutes you will learn everything that it can do for you.

Admittedly Windows 7 Paint doesn't rank with the professional graphics programs, but my contention is that most features in those high-powered applications are rarely ever used. This version is a leap over the older Windows Paint, and for most people it may be all they ever need.

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm
"Calendars and Time Management" by Wally Wang

Once you can master time management, the rest of your life will just naturally seem to fall into place. Also, the iPad makes a first impression; exploitive sales tactics—whether for cars of computers—will cause company losses in the long run; and a tip on how to peek at all the data downloaded from a Web page.

Almost everyone feels like there isn't enough time in the day to do what they want to do. To help manage your time, companies have been releasing various time-management and organization software for years.

One of my favorites was Lotus Agenda, which popularized the personal information management (PIM) category of software. The problem with most PIM programs was that they took too long to learn how to use. By the time you figured out how to use them, you could have completed half the tasks on your daily to-do list!

A second problem with PIM programs was that no matter how carefully you organized your data, it remained trapped on your computer. As long as you sat in front of your computer or lugged your laptop around with you, you might stay organized, but if you needed to check your appointment calendar away from the computer, you had to print out your data and carry this printout with you.

If you use the iCal program on your Macintosh, you'll be able to store appointments and set alarms to remind you ahead of time, but unless you stay near your Macintosh, you may not stay organized. To help keep your data with you wherever you go, you have three options: MobileMe, an iPhone, or an iPad.

MobileMe is Apple's limited version of cloud computing, where you can upload your iCal data to Apple's computers. Now if you want to see or edit your appointment calendar, you just need any Internet-capable computer to access MobileMe.
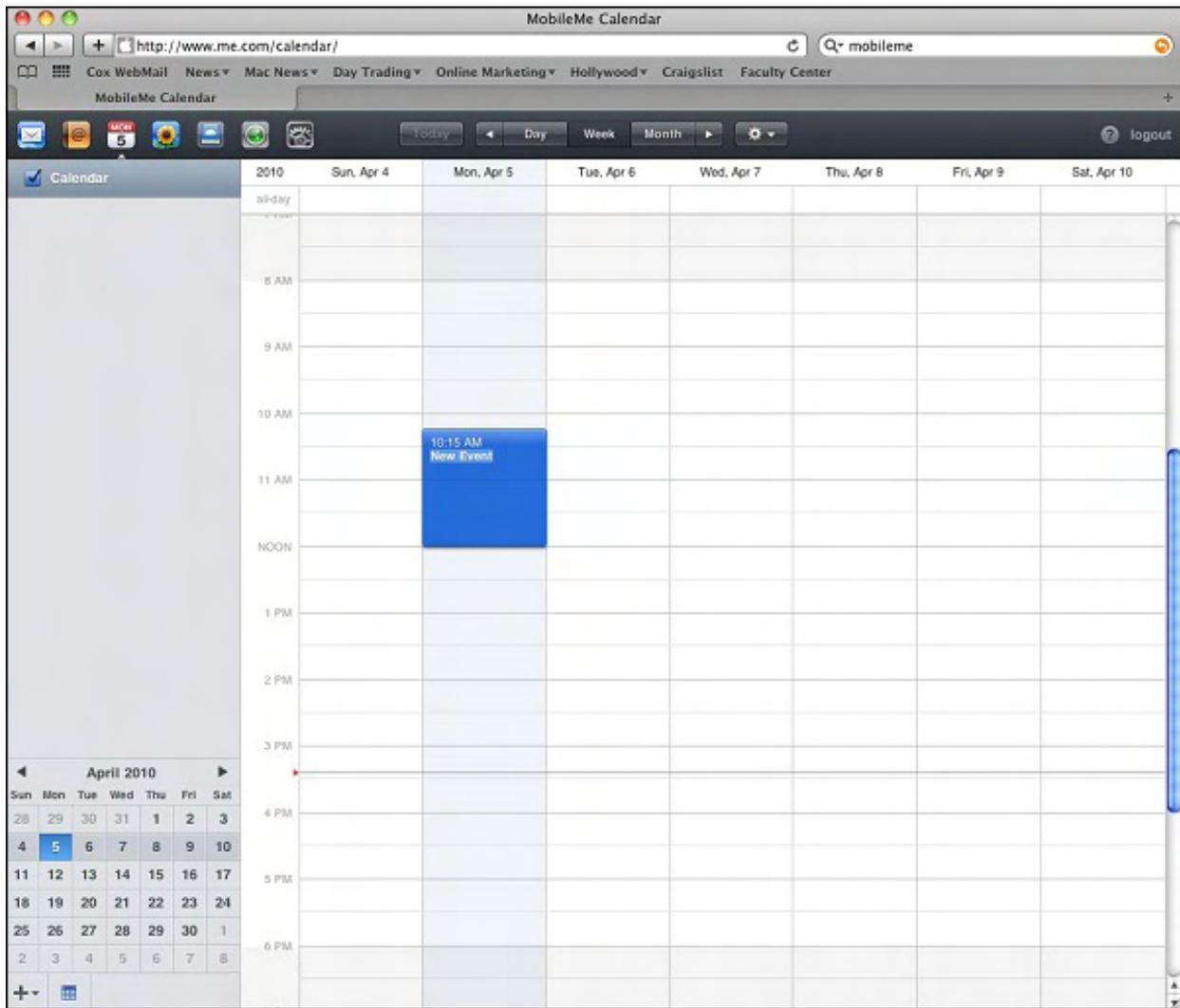
Figure 1. MobileMe provides one way to access your iCal appointments using any Internet-ready computer.

MobileMe lets you access your iCal data using a Windows or Linux computer, but if you don't always have access to the Internet, a much simpler solution is to synchronize your iCal data to an iPhone or iPad.

Synchronizing data means plugging your iPhone/iPad to your computer using a USB cable, and then using iTunes to synchronize your data. Once you've synchronized your data on both your computer and your iPhone/iPad, you can view and edit your appointment list using your iPhone or iPad.
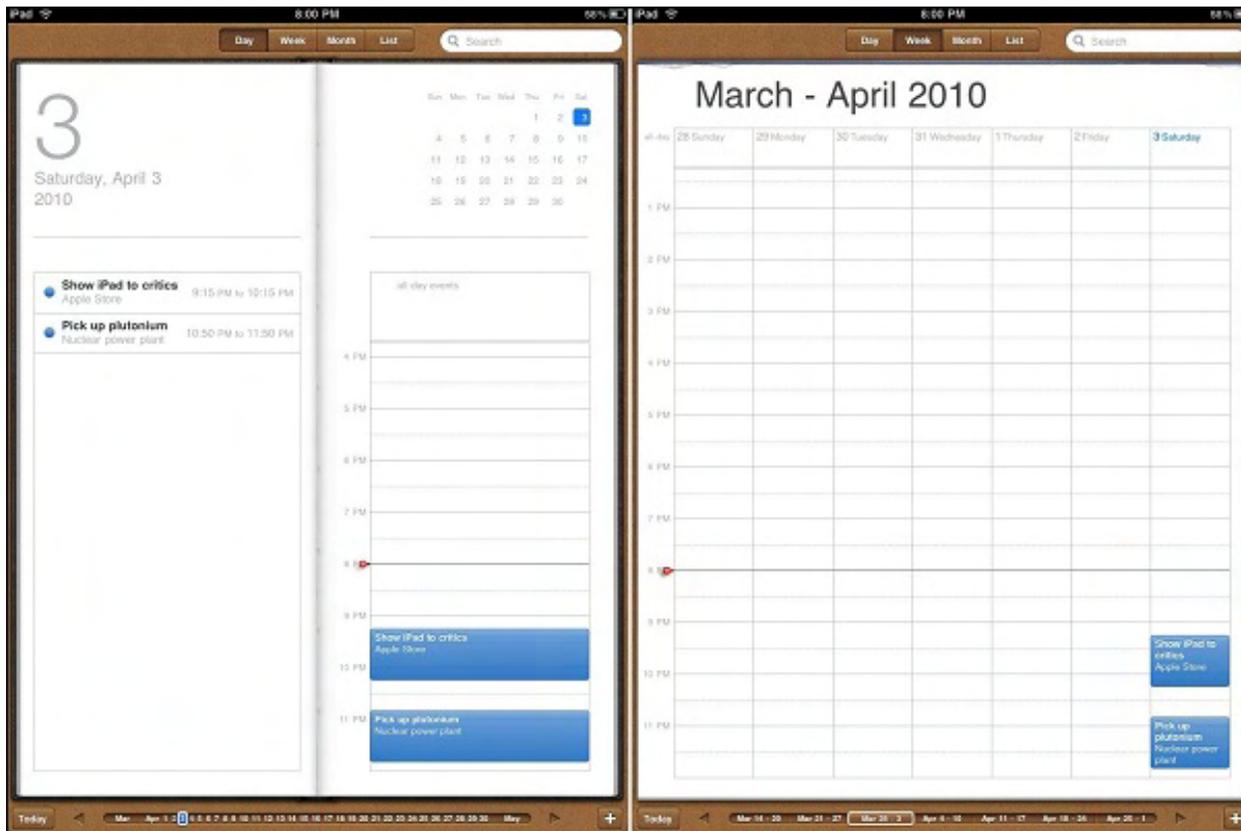
Figure 2. The iPad provides multiple ways to display appointment data.

Of course, the real secret to managing your time doesn't rely on fancy gadgets like an iPhone or iPad, or even sophisticated software. If you're really interested in managing your time, you need to take the following steps, which require nothing more than a pencil and paper.

First, track how you're spending your time on a regular basis. Whether you're rich or poor, everyone has the same amount of time every day. The difference between effective and ineffective people is the way they spend their time.

To see how you might be spending time unwisely, keep a daily journal. Every time you start a different task, even if it's as simple as looking up your favorite sports scores or entertainment news on the Internet, jot down how much time you spend on that task.

While this may seem like a nuisance, it helps make you aware of how many times you pursue unproductive activities and how long you spend doing them. If you honestly track your time for just a few days, you may be shocked at how much time you're actually wasting.

Once you recognize that you're probably wasting time, the next step is to identify what you should be spending your time doing. Since every person is different, you need to set your own goals. Some people may want to spend more time with their family. Others may want to spend more time practicing a new skill or making another sales call. By identifying what's most important in your life, you can allocate chunks of time to make sure you fill your life with your most important tasks.

Whenever you catch yourself getting distracted, ask yourself, "Is this the best use of my time right now?" If so, then keep doing what you're doing. If not, then stop doing what you're doing and figure out what you should be doing to achieve your own priorities.

One of my favorite time-management books is *The No B.S. Time Management for Entrepreneurs (*www.amazon.com/gp/ product/1932156852?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1932156852*)* by Dan Kennedy. One point that Dan Kennedy emphasizes is to take control of your time rather than let external circumstances control you.

One example he gives is seeing men talking on their cell phones while urinating in a public rest room. While this might look like a clever use of time by getting two tasks completed at once, it's actually a waste of time because while urinating, you can't focus your attention completely on your phone conversation. Given a choice between doing a task half-heartedly or with your full attention, which do you think will produce better results?

If you can't organize yourself and prioritize your time to pursue the most meaningful goals in your life, then all the fancy software and iPhones or iPads in the world won't help you either.

Bruce Lee once said, "The most dangerous man in the world is an ordinary man with laser-like focus." If you're not focusing on what's most important to you, then you risk wasting your time being effective on trivial and ultimately useless tasks.

Managing your time is the most crucial skill that everyone needs to master. Once you can master this skill, the rest of your life will just naturally seem to fall into place.

First Impressions Using the iPad

To avoid the crowds at the Apple Store, I opted to pre-order an iPad and have it delivered to my home on April 3. Overall, the iPad is what I expected and more, but I do have a few reservations about this device.

Despite its small size, the iPad feels dense, like a slate of lead that you could use as a weapon if necessary. Before you can use the iPad, you must connect it to any Windows or Macintosh computer running iTunes version 9.1. After this initial synchronization and registration procedure, you can start using the iPad.

The iPad's Home screen resembles the iPhone's Home screen, except with the icons spaced further apart. Unlike the iPhone, which provides only a plain black background, the iPad lets you use photographs as the background wallpaper.

Figure 3. The iPad's Home screen.

Turning on the iPad reveals a screen with amazingly crisp and sharp resolution. Even though the iPad's screen (9.7-inch diagonal) is smaller than most netbook screens, watching videos on the iPad's tiny screen doesn't feel cramped or crowded. Two people could comfortably watch a video as long as they sit close to each other.

Every iPad owner can download the free iBooks app, which comes with a free e-book version of Winnie the Pooh complete with color illustrations.
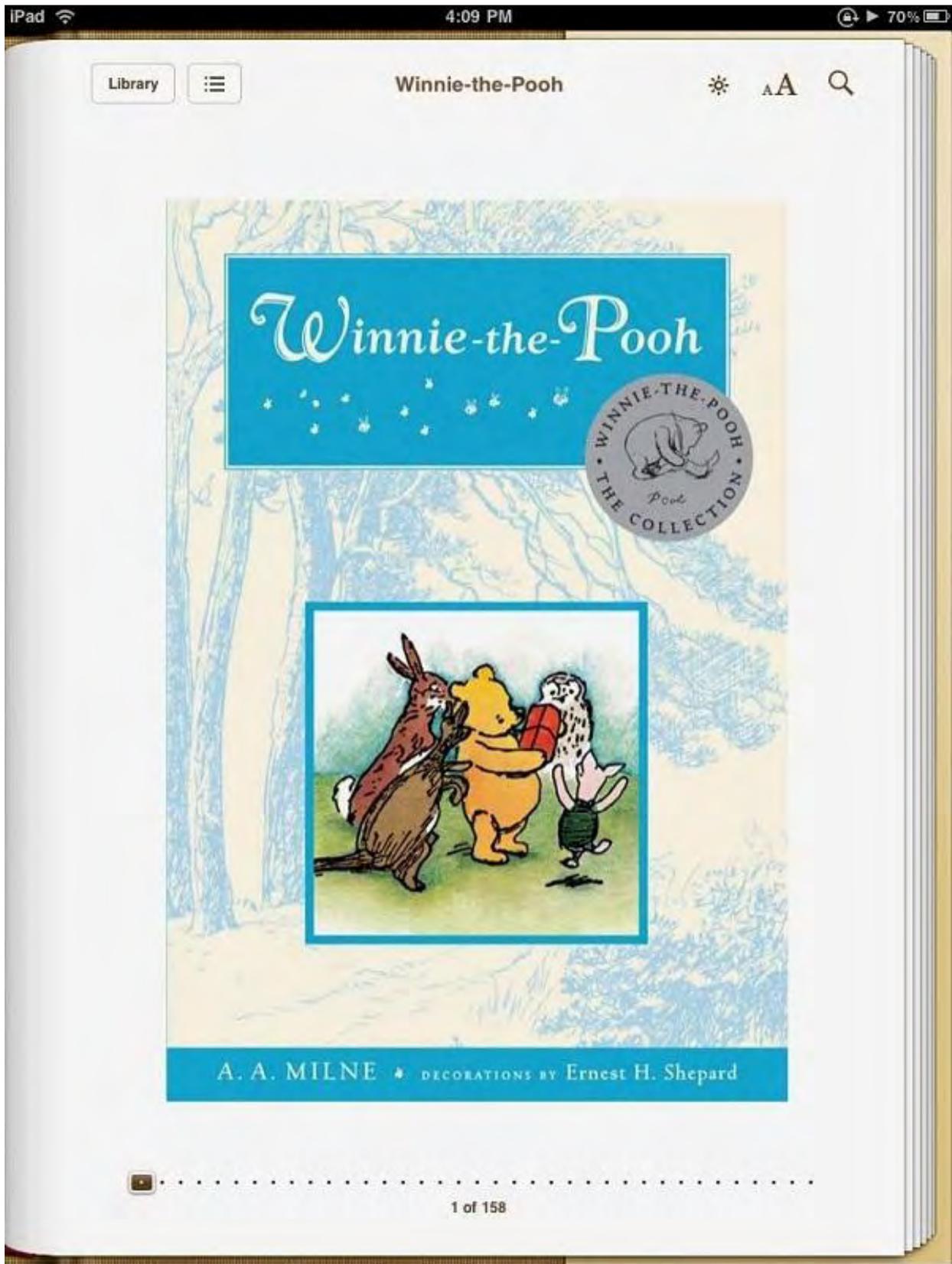
Figure 4. Winnie the Pooh as an e-book on the iPad.

To turn a page, you can flick the screen from right to left. Slide your finger slowly and the page turns slowly. Slide your finger quickly and the page flips quickly. Such attention to detail gives the iPad a feel of turning real pages in a book.

Playing music on the iPad is also incredibly clear. The iPad's tiny speakers appear on the bottom of the unit, yet the sound clarity is far better than the cheap speakers found on most netbooks and laptops.

You can plug ear buds or headphones into the top of the iPad, but unless you need to keep sound from reaching others, you'll probably prefer listening to your music collection through the iPad's external speakers.

Perhaps the one major concern is the iPad's virtual keyboard. Typing on the iPad is surprisingly easy since the keys are so large that your fingers don't accidentally touch the wrong key, which happens way too often with the iPhone. However, if you're a touch typist, you'll find the iPad's virtual keyboard difficult to use.

Figure 5a. The iPad's virtual keyboard in portrait mode.

Figure 5b. The virtual keyboard in landscape mode.

The problem is that touch typists rest their fingers on the keyboard. On a physical keyboard, this light pressure isn't enough to type a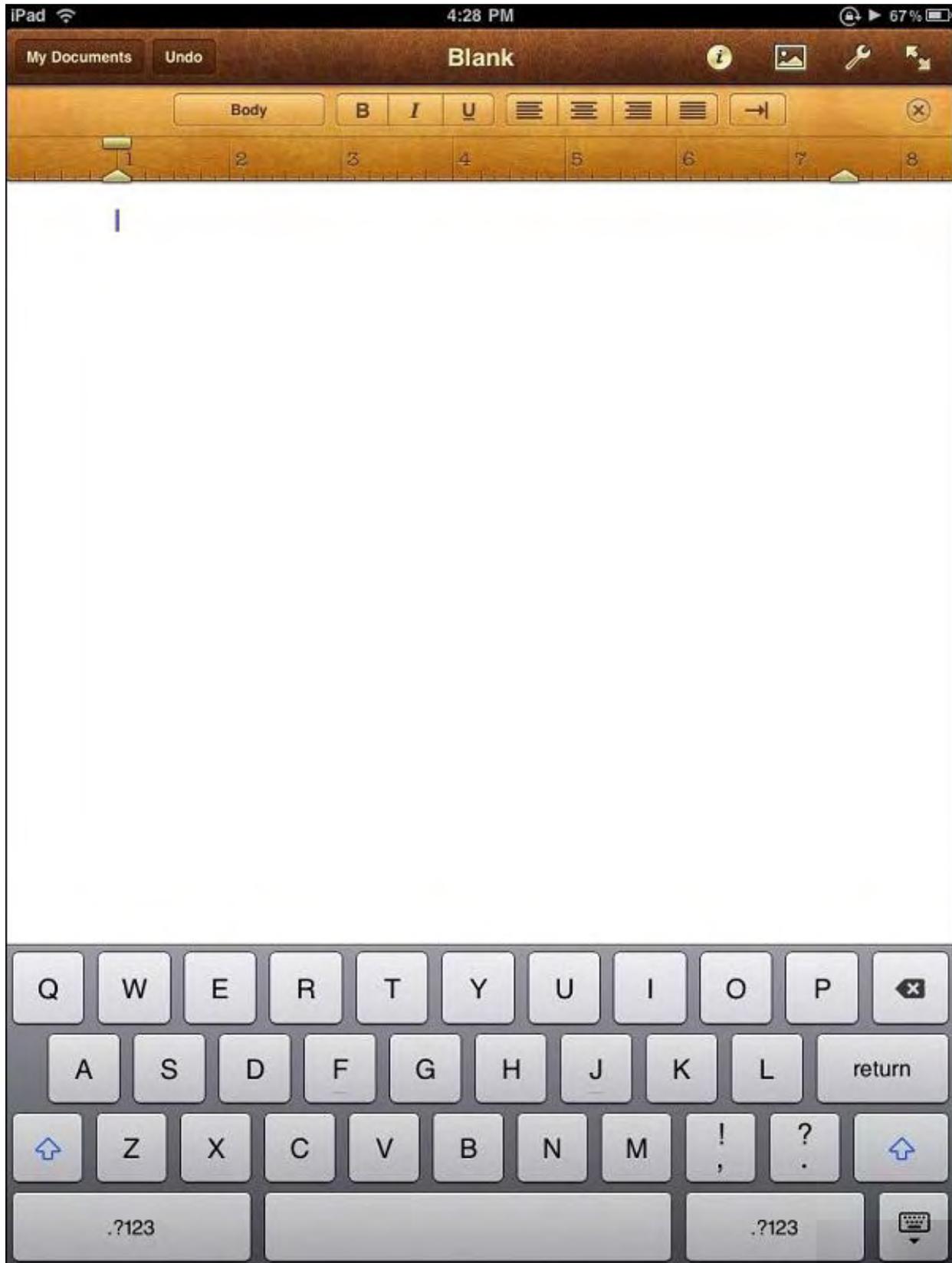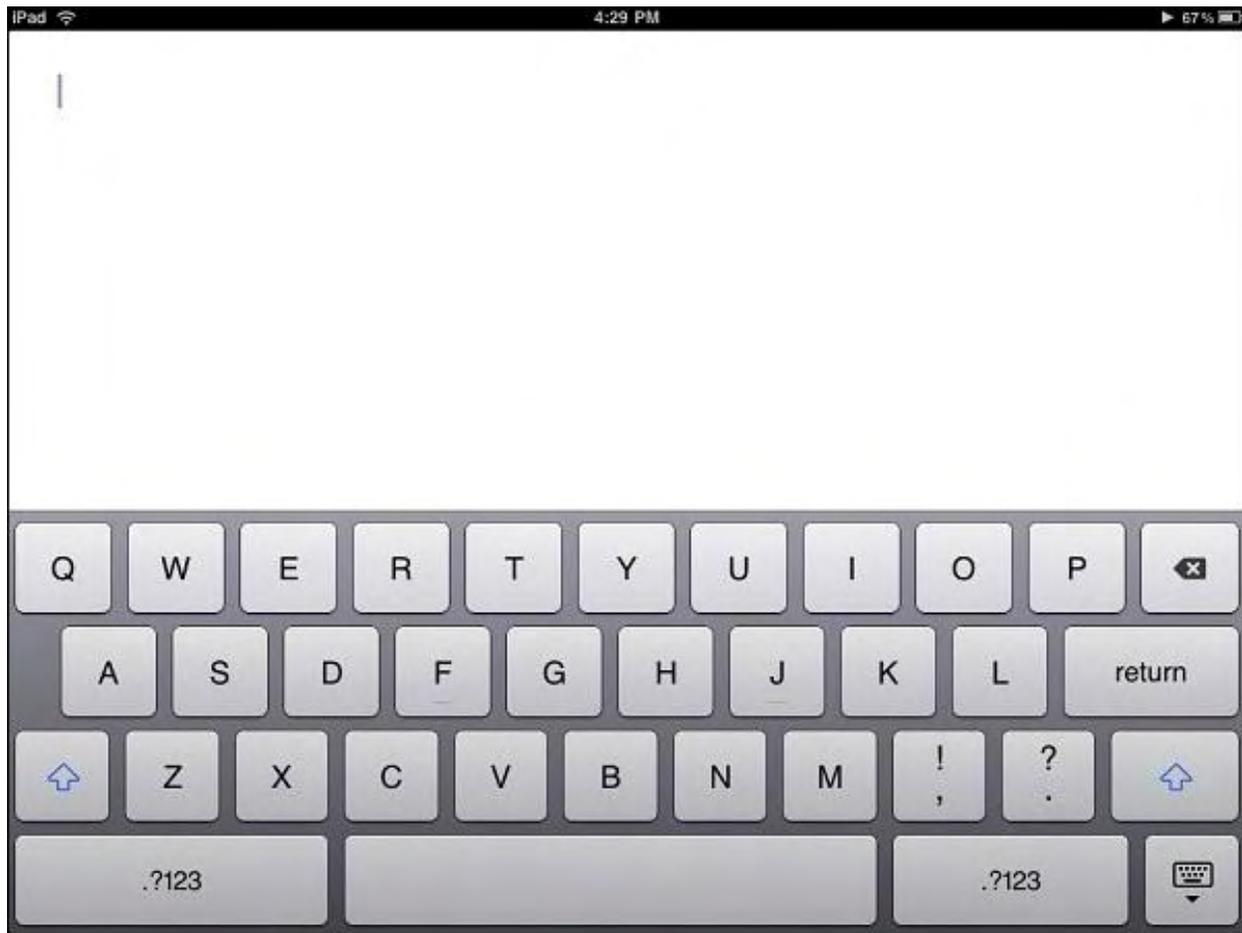 character, but on a virtual keyboard, resting your fingertips on the home row of keys triggers the virtual keyboard into thinking you're typing something. As a result, you can easily wind up typing a flurry of characters by mistake. Touch typing on a virtual keyboard will simply take time to adjust from using a physical keyboard.

One nice feature is that the virtual keyboard can automatically suggest correct spellings after you've typed a few letters. The virtual keyboard also capitalizes the first letter after each period, too.

Overall, the virtual keyboard is much better suited for editing existing text or typing small amounts of text. If you need to type letters or reports on a regular basis, you probably won't want to use the iPad's virtual keyboard. However, if you're like most people who need to type only an occasional e-mail message or search for text on the Internet, then the iPad's virtual keyboard will work just fine.

The iPad isn't going to replace a laptop computer, but it certainly threatens to replace cheap netbooks for people who just need to view information rather than create it. BusinessWeek even ran a story about how netbook sales are slowing down (*www.businessweek.com/technology/content/apr2010/tc2010041_600018.htm*) because people are disappointed by the less capable netbooks and looking for more capable alternatives like the iPad.

For a first-generation product, the iPad is polished and fun to use. It's not going to replace my MacBook Air, but it will definitely supplement my iPhone and MacBook Air for those times when I need something in between. The iPad may not be right for everybody, but it certainly points the way to a simple, easy-to-use computer that anyone can use without becoming a computer expert first.

Exploiting the Ignorant for Fun and Profit

I recently visited a Honda dealer in National City to buy a car. The salesman let me test drive several vehicles, and when I found one that I liked, I decided to buy it, especially after seeing that a price tag, dangling from its rearview mirror, stated that it was on sale for $1,000 less than its original listed price.

That's when the salesman told me that the sale price was incorrect because this price tag actually belonged to another car and had gotten into this car by mistake. When I checked the sales tag again, I spotted an identification number that exactly matched the car, proving that the sales tag hadn't been misplaced, but did belong to that car after all.

After confronting the salesman with this fact, he quickly agreed that the price should have been $1,000 less, and calculated the total cost of the car. Not surprisingly, the new total price of the car wound up exactly equaling the total price of the car under his original calculations when he claimed that the car was priced $1,000 higher than the sale price. Also not surprisingly, I didn't buy a car from this salesman and simply bought a car from CarMax, where a salesman treated me with respect and offered a no-hassle pricing policy.

This experience made me realize how easily salesmen can deceive people unfamiliar with complicated products. A friend of mine recently bought a Dell computer. Since her goal was to buy the least expensive computer possible, she wound up with an inexpensive desktop PC that came only with a DVD-ROM drive, which meant that it could read DVDs and CDs, but not write to them.

Not understanding how to decipher the difference between a DVD-ROM and a DVD-RW drive, this woman wound up getting stuck with a computer with less capability than she wanted. Apparently to close the sale, the telephone salesman had simply reduced the price of her PC without clearly explaining what she would be sacrificing. Needless to say, this wound up giving Dell a sale, but also wound up greatly upsetting this woman, who has vowed never to buy another Dell computer ever again because she felt deceived by the company.

Her experience got me curious, so I looked on Dell's Web site to see how easy it would be for someone unfamiliar with computers to get a low-cost computer that isn't quite what they expected.

If you look for Dell's Inspiron 11z netbook, you'll see a low price of $349. However, notice that this netbook comes with just the Home Basic version of Vista. Why is Dell selling netbooks with Vista when it should at least be installing the equivalent Windows 7 Starter instead?

Figure 6. Despite the existence of Windows 7, Dell still uses Vista on some netbooks.

The answer seems obvious when ordering an Inspiron 11z with Vista, because Dell now offers a $30 option ($60 if you want the Belkin Easy Transfer cable too) to load Windows 7 Home Premium instead, which not-so-subtly jacks up the price. Even more alarming is that this particular netbook uses a relatively weak Celeron 1.3GHz processor. Windows 7 Starter edition might be able to run on such a slow processor (and maybe Windows 7 Home Premium too), but how well will Vista run on such limited resources?

Figure 7. Adding Windows 7 is an additional expense.

Anyone buying this $349 Inspiron 11z netbook might think they're getting a bargain, but may wind up sorely disappointed at running Vista on such a slow machine. Rather than marketing technical specifications that most people don't understand anyway, shouldn't Dell be trying to sell capable computers without sacrificing features that will likely surprise and ultimately disappoint their customers? Low prices might sell a computer, but is it worth the risk of alienating the future pool of potential repeat customers just for short-term gain right now?

* * *

Every time you visit a Web site, your browser needs to yank data from the Web server to display on your computer screen. In case you ever wanted to know exactly what the Safari browser is downloading from each Web page, just choose the Window/Activity command and a window pops up, listing everything Safari downloaded from the currently displayed Web page.

Figure 8. Peeking at all the data downloaded from a Web page.

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*.
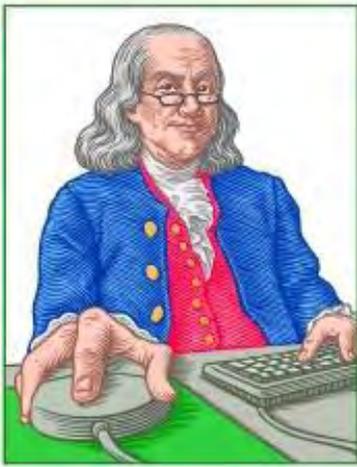
Linux Lessons: Tips and Tricks from Users
"Introducing Linux Virtual Machines" by ComputorEdge Staff

Virtual machines are incredibly versatile and easy to install. This week's Linux Lesson introduces an easy way to set up a Linux machine using virtual software.

This week's Linux Lesson introduces an easy way to set up a Linux machine using virtual software. I have mentioned the use of virtual machines in past articles that discussed creating a virtual environment used to set up a Linux machine from scratch.

This week, we will go over how to use a Linux image that you download that is ready to run—no installation required. All you need to do is load the new VM in your virtual software, and you are up and running with an OS that is preconfigured.

Why Use a Linux Image?

The simple answer is, because it's easy. No configuration to bother with, no installations—it is a complete image that starts up and runs every time. Also, the image was preconfigured especially for the virtual environment. This means that you never have to worry if you missed something in the installation, or if you might have to deal with a problem later. These are clean images that have been set up specifically to run in a virtual environment.

Virtual Linux images are ideal for test environments and for learning the software. Because these are images that you can store and restore at any time, you can completely mess up your image and then restore the original. You have not lost the hours it might take to reinstall the whole system from scratch. Just delete the modified image and restore the original.

Professionals might use these virtual machines for testing software or to figure out problems they are having with another system, without having to cause problems to the production system. If you are new to Linux, a virtual Linux is a great way to explore all the features and functionality of Linux without worrying about crashing your computer. Also, if you are not sure which distribution you like, install several distributions. Test-drive several, and then chose the one you like.

How to Set Up Virtual Linux

To begin setting up a virtual machine, you first need some kind of software that will be able to set up a virtual environment. There are a few out there, but my favorites are VMware and Virtual Box.

VMware

VMware is actually a company that makes a multitude of virtualization products. You can certainly purchase the VMware Workstation, which allows you to create a virtual machine, but since you only need to use a preconfigured VM, you can download the *free* VMware Player (*www.vmware.com/products/player/*). From there, all you need to do is install the Player and open a Virtual Machine in the Player.

To download a preconfigured Linux virtual machine for the VMware Player, visit the Virtual Appliances download site (*www.vmware. com/appliances/directory/cat/508*) for VMware and search for the OS you want.

Virtual Box

Virtual Box is a free product from Sun Systems (now Oracle). All you do is download and install the Virtual Box software (*www.sun.com/ software/products/virtualbox/get.jsp*) from the Web site. This product has the ability to actually create new virtual machines, but you can download a preconfigured virtual machine for Virtual Box.

To download a Linux Virtual Box image, go to the VirtualBoxes download site (*virtualboxes.org/images/*). All the available OS's are listed on this site.

Note: You will notice that neither of these sites offers any commercial operating systems as a free download for a virtual environment. That is because even virtual commercial operating systems require a valid, purchased license to install. Since Linux is free open-source software, it is, of course, freely available to install in a virtual environment.

Virtual machines are incredibly versatile and easy to install. If you want to just try out Linux and see how it all works without having to do a full installation on a hard drive, try a virtual Linux. It is one of the best ways to try out Linux.

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

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

Rob, The ComputorTutor: Technology Solutions

"More JavaScript in Action" by Rob Spahitz

Last week, we started using JavaScript to validate data in a field on a Web page. This week we continue that validation.

Last week, we started using JavaScript to validate data in a field on a Web page. This week we continue that validation.

Validating Web Forms

Here's a Web page so far, with a little JavaScript to validate the user's name, and a form to accept user input:

```
<html>
<head>
<script language="JavaScript">
function checkName()
{
   if(document.forms[0].elements["PersonName"].value.length < 3
   | document.forms[0].elements["PersonName"].value.indexOf(" ") == -1)
   {
      alert
("The Person Name field should contain a space and must be at least 3 characters.");
      return(-1);
   }
   return(0);
}
</script>
</head>
<body>
<form action="processme.exe">
<p>Name: <input type="text" name="PersonName" size="25" onBlur="checkName()" /></p>
<p>Street: <input type="text" name="Street" size="50" /></p>
<p>City: <input type="text" name="City" size="25" /></p>
<p>State:
<select name="State">
   <option value="CA">California</option>
   <option value="CO">Colorado</option>
   <option value="NM">New Mexico</option>
</select>
</p>
<p>Zip Code: <input type="text" name="ZipCode" size="10" /></p>
<p>E-Mail: <input type="text" name="EMail" size="50" /></p>
<p>Website: <input type="text" name="Website" size="50" /></p>
<p>Message Category:
<select name="Message_Category">
   <option value="0">Select an option</option>
   <option value="1">1-Comment</option>
   <option value="2">2-Request</option>
   <option value="3">3-Order Inquiry</option>
   <option value="99">99-Other</option>
```

```
</select>
</p>
<p>Message:
<textarea name="Message" cols="20" rows="3"></textarea>
</p>
<p>Would you like a response?
   <input name="SendResponse" type="radio" value="Y">Yes</input>
   <input name="SendResponse" type="radio" value="N">No</input>
</p>
<p>
<input type="submit" value="Submit" />
<input type="reset" value="Clear" />
</p>
</form>
</body>
</html>
```

We've already validated that the name must be at least three characters and must contain a space. If not, the user is notified, but the cursor still moved on to the next field. Let's quickly fix that. To force the cursor to return to the field, we can simply set the focus to that field, best entered right after the "alert" line:

```
document.forms[0].elements["PersonName"].focus();
```

We'll include that in each future validation.

More Field Validation

Looking at the Street field, first we want to consider whether we want validation; then we can consider what type of validation. In this case, I would suggest that the user of this form can omit the field, so we should allow it to be empty. But if the person enters data, how do we validate it? The problem with addresses is that they are so varied that it's almost impossible to confirm that one is right. You might think that you could at least check to see if it starts with a house number, but what about people who use a postal box (P.O. Box) as an address? Those would start with one of several variations of "P.O.," "PO," "P. O." etc. I'll suggest we skip validation on this field entirely and move on.

In the City field, how do we validate? Again, I think this should be an optional field, so a missing value is valid. Other than that, cities typically contain only letters. However, they can also contain non-alphabetic characters such as spaces and periods (e.g. St. Louis) and maybe other punctuation such as apostrophes. And I don't know of any that contain digits, but I won't rule that out as a possibility. That leaves the same problem as the Street field with one exception. If we had access to a database of all valid cities, we could check that database to see if the entry exists. Since that database would probably *not* be in our JavaScript code, would probably be changing on a regular basis, and might not include all variations (like NYC and New York City), I think this validation is overkill for a Web form, so I'll also skip the validation here.

On to the State field. Assuming that we are collecting information from someone in the U.S. or Canada, the State field can be set up to verify input. However, since we created a dropdown list to limit the input to whatever we offered, it's really pre-validated, and all we can do is hope that the user picked the right choice. One more thing: If we had a valid list of cities for each state, we could add some dependency validation where we check to see if the selected state has a corresponding valid city name; if the city did not exist in the state, we could notify the user that there is a mismatch (although we would not know which piece is wrong).

ZIP Code Validation

Continuing on, let's go to the ZIP Code field. For U.S. addresses, there are really only three choices: no ZIP Code, 5-digit ZIP Code, or 9-digit ZIP Code (with an optional hyphen). If we expand to Canada, we would have to allow for six characters with a space in the middle. Of course, they don't call them ZIP Codes and we didn't offer any Canadian provinces as choices in the State field, so let's simply validate using the U.S. system. Here's the piece in question:

```
<input type="text" name="ZipCode" size="10" />
```

Let's add a routine called checkZipCode when the user leaves the field (onBlur event):

```
<input type="text" name="ZipCode" size="10" onBlur="checkZipCode()" />
```

Up in the JavaScript section, add a new function to match this with the default being a successful validation (returning a value of zero:

```
function checkZipCode()
{
    return(0);
}
```

Now let's add the validation before the "return" so that missing values are ignored and we only check if something is entered:

```
if(document.forms[0].elements["ZipCode"].value)
{
}
```

This looks a bit odd because the condition does not have a comparison. How can we get a true-or-false result if we are not comparing anything? The answer is that there are many common shortcuts used in programming. In the programming world, typically a value means true and no value means false. With text, no text means false and any text means true. With numbers, zero means false and any other number means true. With objects, a missing object means false and any existing object means true. By understanding this, you can better understand other programmers' code. Personally, I like to be a bit more explicit because that removes all doubt about what the code is trying to do, but the above is so common that I will leave it that way. If you really wanted to be explicit, you could change the line to this:

```
if(document.forms[0].elements["ZipCode"].value != "")
```

Notice that the "!=" means not equal to (since the "!" normally means "NOT" in JavaScript.) Also note that the "" is known as an empty string or null string. If the user did not enter any data in the ZIP Code field, it would be an empty string. The condition would be false because we are checking to see if the value is NOT equal to an empty string, and so we would not get into the rest of the "if" block of code.

Now we can check the ZIP Code value only if it is entered. Inside the braces, add the following:

```
var zipValue = document.forms[0].elements["ZipCode"].value;
if(Number(zipValue))
{
    if(zipValue.length != 5 && zipValue.length != 9)
    {
        alert("Please enter a 5-digit or 9-digit Zip Code.");
        document.forms[0].elements["ZipCode"].focus();
        return(-1);
    }
}
else
{
    if(zipValue.length != 10 || zipValue.substr(5,1) != "-" || !Number(zipValue.substr
(0,5)) || !Number(zipValue.substr(6,4)))
    {
        alert("Please enter a valid Zip Code.");
        document.forms[0].elements["ZipCode"].focus();
        return(-1);
```

```
    }
    else
    {//alert("valid");
    }
}
```

The first thing I did was to create a variable to hold the current value of the field. This is done to make it easier to do subsequent comparisons because it's easier to check a small name than a complex collection of references to properties of objects or other objects. I could have also put this before previous "if."

Next, I use the JavaScript Number function to see if the value is all digits. If so, I'll do some additional checking of the number; if not, I'll check if the non-numeric portion is valid.

So if the value is numeric, it must be the proper length. The only two valid lengths are 5 and 9, so if the length is not 5 and also not 9, then the number entered cannot be a valid ZIP code, so I show an alert for that and then force the cursor to focus back on the field before exiting the function with a value of -1 (to allow any calling procedure to recognize that there was a problem with the validation, as explained last week.)

If the value is not numeric, it does not mean it's invalid. However, there is really only one valid format: 5 digits, a hyphen, then 4 more digits. This can be checked in several ways. I chose to check with four separate conditions, combined with "or" checks:

```
zipValue.length != 10
zipValue.substr(5,1) != "-"
!Number(zipValue.substr(0,5))
!Number(zipValue.substr(6,4))
```

The first piece, you can probably tell, checks to see if the length of the value is 10. If not, we have a problem. And since all of the comparisons are "or" checks, if any one of the conditions is true, then the entire check must be true, so we will show a message to help the user overcome the problem.

The next check uses the substr function. This function has two parts: where to start and how many characters to take. In this case, "5,1" means go to index position 5 (which is the 6th position since JavaScript counts starting at zero) and take one character. So if the 6th character is not a hyphen (well, a dash character), then we have a problem and will report an error.

The next two start with "!". Remember that in JavaScript this means NOT. Looking at the rest, we again use the Number and substr functions to check the first five characters and last four characters to see if they are numbers. If they are not ("!") then we have a problem and will report it.

Notice how I also have an else portion here with an alert preceded by two slashes, indicating that the alert is commented out. Sometimes you'll want to add things like that to help while you build complex conditions like this.

To test something like this, you'll want to try a combination of valid and invalid values. I suggest testing with values that will hit each condition with a true and false portion. The first check is to try a null string value; if you don't get a message, it may have succeeded. If you want to be sure, add an alert at the end of the procedure to let you know where you are.

The next check is with any value to get into the first "if." This then checks for numeric, so try entering any number, like 123. This should go into the first block, which then has another check.

So here are some good values to use for checking:

```
*  empty value (valid)
*  123
*  123456
*  1234567890
*  12345 (valid)
```

* 123456789 (valid)
* abc
* 12345-7890 (valid)
* 12345-67
* 12345+6789
* ABCDE-1234
* 12345-ABCD

If you get the expected results for these values (messages for errors and no messages for valid values), your function is probably pretty sound and ready to go.

E-Mail Validation

Let's tackle e-mails and call it a wrap for this week. As before, add a procedure to run when the user leaves the field:

```
<input type="text" name="EMail" size="50" onBlur="checkEmail()" />
```

Depending on your expectations for the form data, you may want to require an e-mail address. Or you may decide that either e-mail or street address may be fine. We'll handle this next week. For now, let's make the e-mail optional.

And add a function to get started:

```
function checkEmail()
{
   var eMail = document.forms[0].elements["EMail"].value;
   if(eMail)
   {
   }
   return(0);
}
```

To validate something, you need to understand the rules. In the case of e-mail address, you may think that it's just an arbitrary collection of characters. In fact, there are several rules that you'll realize as I describe them. First, e-mail consists of two parts: the user name and the domain where the user is defined. These two parts are separated by the "@" symbol. The user name is defined by the server and can be just about anything as long as it does not contain @, spaces or a few other symbols.

Typically the user is defined. These two parts are separated by the @ that either these are just letters, digits and dots, but we'll keep it open-ended and not validate anything beyond the above two checks. On the server side, this is typically a valid domain name (although we probably don't want to confirm that the domain is valid since this changes daily). The domain name can have several formats, but all must have a name followed by a dot followed by a "high-level domain type" (such as com, net, org, and gov, but it can also be things ca.us or uk). To avoid too much complexity, we'll just check for a dot. This should handle it:

```
function checkEmail()
{
   var eMail = document.forms[0].elements["EMail"].value;
   if(eMail)
   {
      if(eMail.indexOf(" ") != -1)
      {
         alert("E-mails may not contain spaces.  Please correct this.");
         document.forms[0].elements["EMail"].focus();
         return(-1);
      }
```

```
    if(eMail.indexOf("@") == -1)
    {
        alert("E-mails must contain @ symbols.  Please correct this.");
        document.forms[0].elements["EMail"].focus();
        return(-1);
    }
    if(eMail.substr(eMail.indexOf("@")+1,999).indexOf(".") == -1)
    {
        alert("E-
mails must contain a domain name after the @.  Please correct this.");
        document.forms[0].elements["EMail"].focus();
        return(-1);
    }
  }
  return(0);
}
```

The first two checks are pretty straightforward. They simply check to see that there is no space and there is at least one @. The next check is a bit more complicated:

```
eMail.substr(eMail.indexOf("@")+1,999).indexOf(".")
```

Looking from the inside out, I check the index position of the @ and add 1. I then use that as the starting position of the substr function and check for 999 characters after that. This will give me the domain name. I then check that to see if it contains a dot (.). If not, the result is -1 and it fails the check and I report an error.

Although we could make this more sophisticated, like ensuring that there is at least one character before the @, at least one between the @ and dot, and at least one character after the dot, I'll leave that to the reader to try. In addition, you should check to make sure that only one @ exists (by checking for the existence of @ after the position of the first @.

At this point, we've validated all of the fields that we care about. Next week, we will look at form-level validation, which includes things like making sure that dependencies are filled in and that mandatory fields are supplied.

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

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

Worldwide News & Product Reviews
"The latest in tech news and hot product reviews."
by Charles Carr

The Apple iPad: Reasons to Wait—One opinion says not to rush out and buy Apple's newest device; iPad—Apple Thinks Different Again—A decidedly different take on Apple's iPad says it's a user-friendly and time-saving device; PcsProtector Is Anything But—This rogue anti-spyware program uses Trojans to infiltrate PCs with disastrous results.

The Apple iPad: Reasons to Wait

According to TechStartUps.com: "While many Apple enthusiasts can't wait to be in line to own their newest creation, the iPad, others are taking note on some of the reasons why the hype may not be worth all it's made out to be. While the iPad certainly sounds and looks cool, making it seem as though Apple is yet again leading a technological revolution, it may not be all it's cracked up to be."

TechStartUps.com has compiled the following list of reasons that will force even the most avid Apple junky to think twice before making the leap of purchase.

• No Multitasking—No searching the Web as you chat on AIM, no listening to Pandora as you read an eBook. Sure, the iPad is faster than your smartphone, but what good is added speed when you will have to be constantly going in and out of apps instead of being efficiently able to use them all at once?

• No Flash—An understandable limitation in the world of cell phones, but this is unacceptable in a product trying to position itself in the world of notebooks. Not only do many Web sites require flash to view certain content, some require it to access the Web site.

• Limited Software—Like the iPhone, the iPad only runs apps from the Apple's App Store. Although there are tons of apps at Apple's store, it still bans certain apps, such as Google Voice, your notebook does not.

• What will you use it for?—The iPad is not going to replace any of your existing technology. Your smartphone may have a smaller screen, but it does just about everything the iPad does (not to mention makes phone calls), the iPad's clumsy touchscreen keyboard and limited capabilities make it incapable of replacing your laptop, and even a Kindle is a more practical alternative to the iPad as an e-reader.

• It is sure to get better—If you still feel like you really need an iPad, at least wait until the next model comes out. By then Apple will have heard all the above complaints and the device will be greatly improved and probably cheaper. Case in point: the iPhone.

iPad—Apple Thinks Different Again

One of our own intrepid reviewers, Barry Fass-Holmes, has a decidedly different take on the iPad:

"Is iPad a touch of genius or out of touch?" is the headline of the April 2, 2010 San Diego Union-Tribune front page article (*www. signonsandiego.com/news/2010/apr/02/is-ipad-touch-of-genius-or-out-of-touch/*) about Apple's latest product. The article's author also asks rhetorically "...whether people really need another device to [read e-books, browse the Internet, buy and watch movies and organize their day]" and "A netbook mostly?"

After having observed the iPad up close and digital, I think these are the wrong questions to ask. A more valuable question instead is whether the iPad would better meet a given user's needs than a cell phone, music player, netbook, or notebook computer. I think it very well could and here's why.

Figure 1. The iPad lacks a file system, is fast, has a legible screen, and costs less than
its MacBook (Pro) cousins, making it a time-saving and user-friendly alternative
to portable music players, cell phones, netbooks and notebook computers.

First, the iPad (unlike netbooks) does not have a user-accessible file system. This is important because it means that you just use the iPad to do whatever (e.g., read e-books, browse the Internet, etc.) without spending time organizing and maintaining files and folders. Your time is valuable, and any time you spend fussing with a file system is time you could put to more productive use. Therefore, IMHO, the iPad could be a more user-friendly and time-saving device than a netbook.

Second, the iPad is fast. My observations at a local Apple Store are that the iPad responds to the user's taps much more quickly than my first- or second-generation iPod touch—apps launch, screens display and control features pop up noticeably faster on the iPad. This means you can accomplish tasks (e.g., reading or viewing content, playing games, navigating to the tune you want to hear) more promptly while on the go with an iPad than with other devices. Admittedly, these are qualitative impressions rather than quantitative benchmarks. If real-world tests confirm my impressions, however, they will reinforce the point that the iPad could be a more user-friendly and time-saving device than a portable music player. iPad benchmarks have been reported at AppleInsider (*www.appleinsider.com/articles/10/04/04/ benchmarks_rate_apples_ipad_2x_as_fast_at_apps_as_iphone_3gs.html*).

Third, the iPad's screen is a good size for tasks that involve reading while on the road. The 9.7-inch screen displays more written content at a time and in a more legible format than the iPhone's, iPod Touch's, or other comparably sized gadget's screen. This means that the user will spend less time scrolling and more time reading on an iPad than on a device with a smaller screen. In this way, the iPad again is a more user-friendly and time-saving device than palm-sized gadgets.

Lastly, the iPad's entry-level price tag could make it a highly cost-effective product for users looking to complement their desktop computer with a portable device. For years, Apple's products have been dinged as too expensive (aka the "Apple tax"). Well, folks, here finally is a sub-$500 Apple computer. It costs about half as much as the entry-level MacBook and way less than any MacBook Pro model. In fact, you could purchase a brand-new iMac and iPad for less than a 15.4-inch or 17-inch MacBook Pro alone. If the iPad's price tag still seems too steep for you compared to other notebook computers, please reconsider the first point above.

And one more thing…for the naysayers who assert that you cannot make phone calls with the iPad, check out "Who Says The iPad Cannot Be Used As A Phone?!?" (*www.geardiary.com/2010/04/03/who-says-the-ipad-cannot-be-used-as-a-phone/*)

My recommendation is to forget about what the pundits and naysayers have pontificated about the iPad. Instead, if you have the least bit of interest in this device, go to your nearest Apple Store or authorized reseller and give it a test spin to decide for yourself whether it fits into your digital lifestyle.

You are your own best judge of this.

PcsProtector Is Anything But

BluePenguin Software (*www.BluePenguinSoftware.com*), makers of SpyZooka malware detection and removal software, writes in this week about a nasty new computer threat called PcsProtector:

PcsProtector can be acquired by a computer when video codecs are installed from suspicious Web sites to watch online movies. This rogue anti-spyware program uses Trojans to infiltrate PCs with disastrous results.

PcsProtector comes from the Winisoft family of rogue applications and from pop-ups to security warnings, this junkware will tell you anything to try to dupe you into buying their product. Doing so will only lead to a loss from your bank account and added frustration.

Once this Trojan has gained access, it will embed itself into computer registries and configure itself to run automatically each time Windows is logged into. A deluge of fake security alerts will appear along with system scans that provide false results about innocuous infections. The files that are displayed are the same ones that are randomly named and placed there by PcsProtector itself.

PcsProtector encourages users to purchase their software to protect themselves from viruses PcsProtector has installed. A sample of the warning message displayed may look like this:

Spyware Alert!

Your computer is infected with spyware. It could damage your critical files or expose your private data on the Internet. Click here to register your copy of PcsProtector and remove spyware threats from your PC.

"PCsProtector's warnings can look extremely authentic and alarming but do not be fooled. You will not be protected from anything," said Carl Haugen of BluePenguin.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Learn more at *www.charlescarr.com*.

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

Look out for strangers after your heart.

It's been another slow week for the usual commercial Spam, so we thought that we would address another type of Spam which attacks us where we live—in our hearts strings. We all receive these introductions from lonely people (almost always women) who only want to meet us. ("Who wouldn't like me?") The problem is that they are not very discriminating about who they reach. Note the blind list of recipients in Figure 1 below.
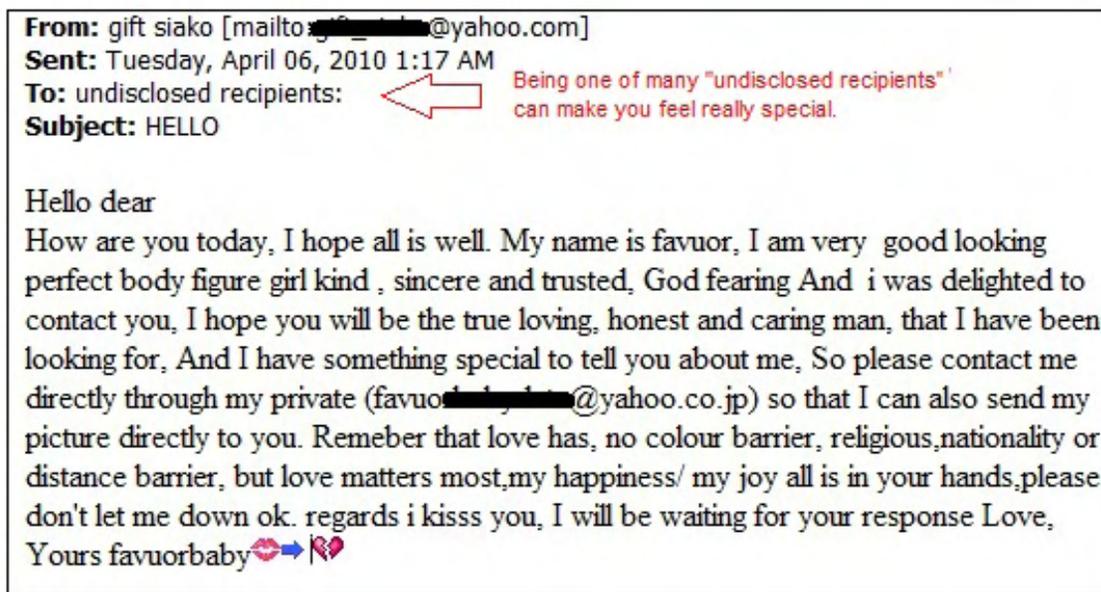

Figure 1. Looking for love in all the cyber spaces.

In this case, the misspellings make the e-mail seem more authentic. The little graphics at the end are a cute touch. The only problem is that the person who is sending the e-mail probably is six feet tall, has a beard and weighs 250 pounds. Yes, she could still be a woman, but there's no point in taking a chance.

Somebody must be responding to these Spams. (We obscured part of the e-mail addresses least one our readers be tempted to correspond.) Otherwise, why do we continue to receive them? Don't take a chance. The only thing that the people on the other end want out of you is your money, identity, or a few passwords. Just delete it!

ComputorEdge always wants to hear from you, our readers. If you have specific comments about one of our articles, please click the

"Tell us what you think about this article!" link at the top or bottom of the article/column. Your comments will be attached to the column and may appear at a later time in the "Editor's Letters" section.

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

EdgeWord: Another iPad Perspective
"Is the iPad really revolutionary?" by Jack Dunning

With the hype on both sides of the iPad debate it's time for some perspective.

It's time to put all the hoopla about the iPad into perspective. People on both sides are over hyping their positions. Apple lovers claim that the iPad will revolutionize the world of computing. Detractors can't figure out why anyone would want to own a tablet computer at all. As usual, reality is somewhere in the middle.

First, Apple did not invent tablet computing. It's been around for decades and is in common use today. People who have mobile jobs— delivery people, meter readers, medical personnel—have been routinely using tablets in the their jobs on a daily basis. Most of these tablet computers are specialized devices rather than the general market computer that iPad represents. This type of mobile computing which requires walking access to a computer is not a new market, but it is likely to benefit from the better technology which is offered by Apple. However, there are open questions involving which type of device will best suit these workers on the move. As expressed in Medical Tablet PC back in 2008 (*www.medicaltabletpc.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=636&Itemid=1*), the iPhone may be too small for doctors while a tablet PC may be too big.

Another obvious area of use for the iPad is within the visual arts. The higher accuracy of touchscreen may make it a much better medium for drawing. This is a step up from the computer drawing pads of the past which has often left the computer artist frustrated. The technical slop in the tablets let lines stray from their intended locations. Apple works very hard to build a superior product which commands loyalty from the artistic class.

Beyond those niches where the iPad is a natural fit, Apple's new product will be an elaborate toy for many people. It does such cool things, that everyone needs to own one just to play with it. Don't get me wrong, we love our toys and that alone is enough of a reason for the iPad to be a stupendous success. As it stands right now, Apple appears to have the best tablet computer on the market. But revolutionary or a new paradigm? I don't think so.

The invention of the typewriter was revolutionary. First introduced commercially in the 1800's, the typewriter took advantage of a human feature that has historically made all thing possible for mankind—fingers. The design of the typewriter keyboard which allows rapid movements of the human digits to create written communications at an exceptional pace has not been improved on in over a century. There have been attempts at changing the layout of the letters on the key, but most have been dropped as trivial changes. The computer keyboard remains essentially the same design as the old typewriter. Why? Because it works exceptionally well.

The idea that somehow a computer without a good keyboard is going to overwhelm the computer market is definitely thinking out of the box —maybe too far out of the box. Attaching an external keyboard to the iPad would be counter productive. That would merely produce another laptop with a separate keyboard and screen. It would be of little benefit in those niches that fit well with the iPad.

One of the best side effects of all the hype around Apple's iPad is that it has people taking a serious look at tablet computing. Many people are having trouble determining where it will fit into their life, but nevertheless they need to own an iPad. Possibly there will be important uses for tablet computing that have not yet been recognized, but my feeling is that we need to ask the question again six months to a year from now—after the current crop excited buyers have had a chance to explore. Will the iPad become an integral part of their life? Will it be a source of continual entertainment which goes with them everywhere? Or, will it be relegated to a special spot on the desk—rarely ever touched.

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

Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"File Version Confusion," "Installing XP Mode on Windows 7," "A Caution for Bookkeepers," "Subversion URL," "Spam of the Week: Your Amazon Order"

File Version Confusion

[Regarding Jack Dunning's March 12 article, "Oops! Where Did That File Go?":]

Years ago I was fortunate enough to have a Digital Equipment Corporation VAXStation workstation. In the VMS, OS files had a name, extension and version number. The format was filename.ext;1. It was great. You could set the maximum number of versions to retain (five by default), and the latest version was always opened by default. If you wanted another version you could specify the version you wanted. This saved my bacon on more than one occasion.

-Marcus B., Alabama

Installing XP Mode on Windows 7

[Regarding the March 12 Digital Dave column:]

Alan wrote about some software not running on his 64-bit version of Windows 7. It is unfortunate that a Microsoft support person recommended that he upgrade to Professional, because that would never solve the problem. You recommended that he download and install Virtual PC to run Windows XP Mode. It is important to download and install "Windows XP Mode" and not "Windows Virtual PC." They are two separate products. Windows XP Mode is always 32-bit, whether it is running on the 32-bit or the 64-bit version of Windows 7. If his software was running on his old Windows XP computer, it should run fine on Windows XP Mode.

-Rick Joyce, San Marcos, CA

While they are two separate products, Virtual PC is required to run Window XP Mode. Windows XP Mode runs inside Virtual PC. Both are available only with Windows Professional and above. —DD

A Caution for Bookkeepers

[Regarding the March 12 EdgeWord: A Caution for Bookkeepers? column:]

No legitimate business advertises for a high-paying job that is easy to do. They can find plenty of people who will do it for low pay. Anybody with real-world experience knows that high pay correlates with a high skill set or difficult tasks or a bad work environment.

Likewise, real businesses keep tight control over the receipt and disbursement of money. While some bookkeeping tasks can be outsourced, it will not be the ones with direct control over cash!

-Jim Amos, Denver, CO

Subversion URL

[Regarding Michael J. Ross' March 12 article, "Subversion for File-Revision Management":]

Subversion is being absorbed by Apache and the URL is now *subversion.apache.org/.* The old site still functions but is moving over to this site.

-Marcus B., Alabama

Spam of the Week: Your Amazon Order

[Regarding the March 12 Spam of the Week: Your Amazon Order column:]

When you say that these spammers are "targeting Amazon customers with fake order cancellations," do you mean that only Amazon customers are receiving this spam? Does this spammer have a list of Amazon customers?

I received this spam. I had not recently canceled any Amazon order, so using the Amazon link in My Favorites I checked the order number. I then reported the e-mail to Amazon. It looked so real that it gave me pause.

-Chuck Farmer, Broomfield, CO

No, the spammers do not have an Amazon list. They blindly e-mail to any address they have on their spam lists hoping to get lucky. People who have an open order with Amazon would be the most tempted to respond. You did just the right thing by using your Favorites and reporting it to Amazon! —Editor

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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*.