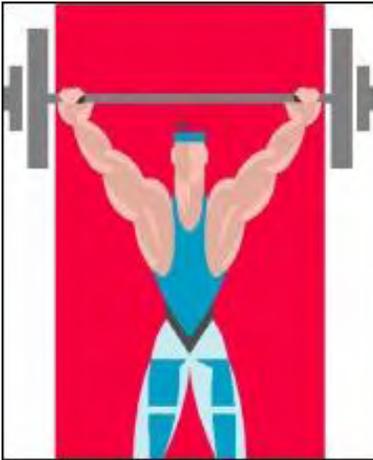


ComputerEdge™ Online — 04/23/10



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[Spam of the Week: Twitter Spam](#) by ComputerEdge Staff

The latest in annoying and dangerous e-mail currently making the rounds.
 Beware of fake Twitter e-mails designed to lure you to an unsafe site.

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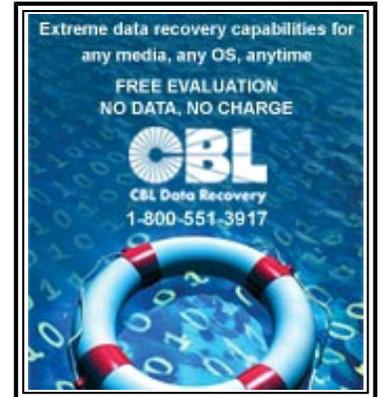
The iPad may present a lose-lose scenario.
 Either the iPad is the best thing since sliced bread—at least for Jack's personal entertainment—or it is overrated and he'll get bored with it.

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 "Screenshot Software: We Missed a Few," "Streaming Video Problem Follow-Up," "Windows 7 Annoyances"



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Digital Dave

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

How can you set the color of icon label backgrounds permanently in Win 7?; a reader wonders what happens when an e-mail is designated as "junk"; can sound cards built into the motherboard perform heavy-duty music-recording functions?

Dear Digital Dave,

In Windows XP, it was possible to set your desktop color to a desired color (say yellow) and have all the icon labels on your desktop appear in yellow. The color change would only be effective after you unchecked the setting "Use drop shadows for icon labels on the desktop" in Control Panel/System/Advanced/Performance/Settings.

However, for some reason, this setting will not stay unchecked in Windows 7 when you reboot. We have always used a handy little program called Iconoid to remember icon colors and locations, and the inability to have this setting stay unchecked prevents Iconoid from keeping the label colors intact across a reboot. I have also tried changing this setting directly in the Registry ("Listviewshadow"), and it resets as well.

This is a major annoyance since the default icon color (at least in an Aero theme) is transparent. Depending on what picture you have as a Windows background, the transparent labels are next-to-impossible to read.

Do you or any of your readers have any ideas as to how you might be able to set the color of icon label backgrounds permanently?

Thanks

*Chen Coulter
San Diego, CA*

Dear Chen,

I'm not familiar with Iconoid, so I'm not sure if this will completely answer your question, but it seems that you may want to disable Windows Aero.

Open Personalization by right-clicking on the Desktop and selecting Personalize (Control Panel/Appearance/Personalization). Select any of the Basic and High Contrast Themes at the bottom of the options. You can then use Window Color to select the color of the background.

If you want to keep Windows Aero (any of the Aero themes), there are settings for removing the transparency in Windows Aero and setting the color darker, as well as controlling the appearance of specific feature such as icons. Select Window Color at the bottom of the window to open the Window Color and Appearance window, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Window Color and Appearance in Windows 7.

In this window you can uncheck the "Enable transparency" box and save the changes. You can also increase the color intensity to the maximum, although it did not appear to have much effect on the icons.

For further tests of what may help in your quest, click "Advanced appearance settings..." at the bottom of the Window Color window (see Figure 2).

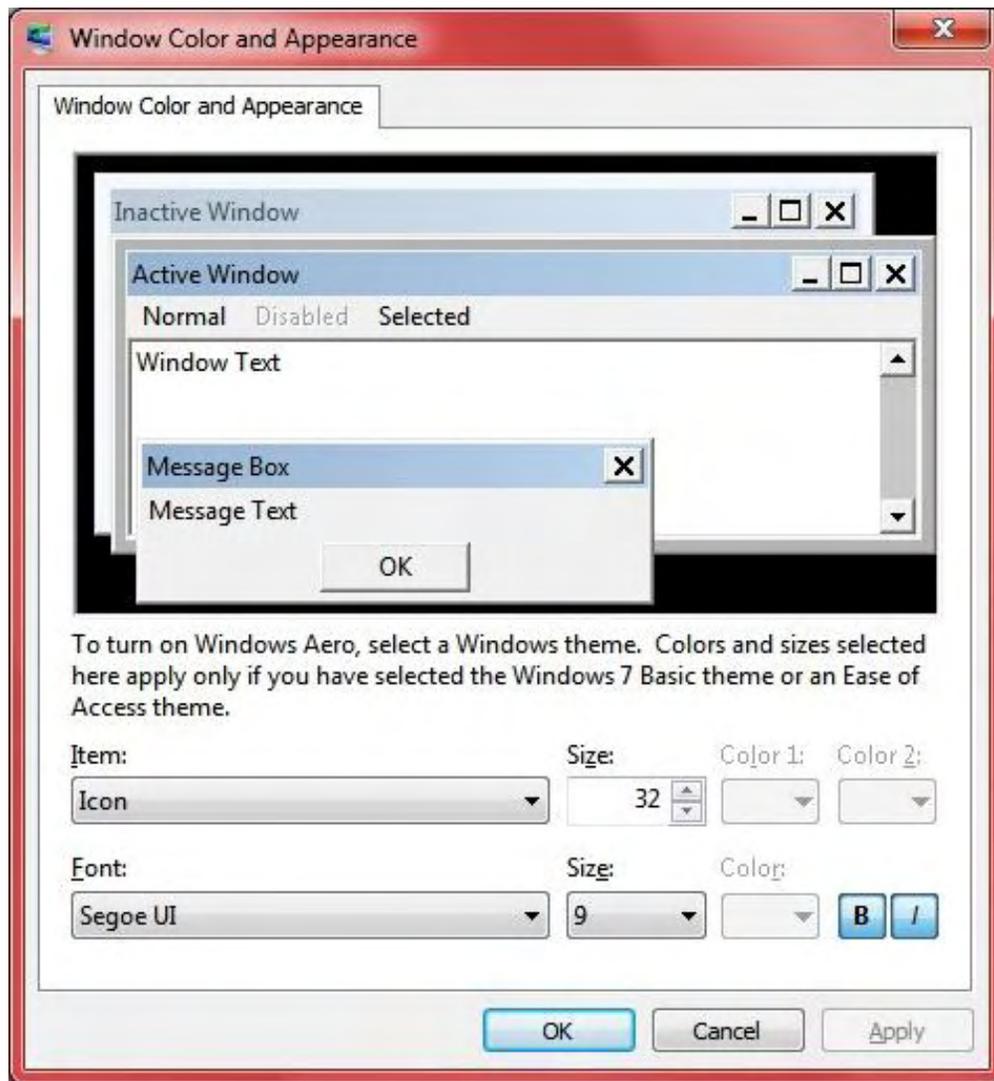


Figure 1. Advanced appearance settings in Window Color and Appearance in Windows 7.

There are a number of settings that directly relate to the icons, including the style and size of the font. Perhaps there are options here that will make your icons appear in a more favorable way. (Note: Don't be misled by the note in this window. The fonts and sizes you select for your icons will take affect even in Windows Aero.)

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

When I add e-mail to the "Junk Sender" list, what actually happens?

*Jack
Chula Vista, CA*

Dear Jack,

What actually happens when you add an e-mail to a junk sender list depends upon your e-mail program and how you have it set up.

In many e-mail programs there is a folder labeled "Junk e-mail." If you click the Junk button (in some programs it may be in a right-click menu), it may be merely sent to that folder for safekeeping. You will have security options that will determine whether the spam is sent to a special folder or deleted permanently. (Sometimes valid e-mail will be sent to the Junk folder. This is the reason for not immediately deleting e-mail marked as Junk.)

You may also have the option to block e-mail addresses and/or domains. This is where the junk sender list (or blocked list) comes into

play. If you add the sender to the list, the entire e-mail address is added. Then any e-mail from that specific address will be blocked. If you add the sender's domain (the portion after @), then any e-mail originating from that domain will be blocked. Neither of these options is particularly effective, since spammers are continually changing both e-mail addresses and domain names.

The programs and services that block spam generally do a better job, because they use a number of different techniques for blocking e-mail. One of them is IP (numerical Internet address) blocking, which will stop traffic originating from a server known for spamming. While IP for servers can easily be changed, it is still more effective than e-mail addresses or domain names. Entire ranges of IPs can be blocked.

Check out the security functions in your e-mail program, but be careful about making your settings too strict. You may end up blocking some of your friends.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

When I ordered my Dell desktop 10 years ago, I had a Turtle Beach Santa Cruz DSP sound card included, as I wanted to move music from vinyl/tape to CDs. Now that I am contemplating a new desktop purchase, I understand that sound card function is now included in the motherboard and a separate sound card is required only for extreme gaming/music applications.

Will the built-in sound card provide the necessary RCA left and right input jacks, mic jack, stereo mix, and necessary circuitry to do the vinyl-to-disc bit?

Many thanks for your attention to this request.

*Don Kaniarz
San Diego, CA*

Dear Don,

Almost any of today's computers should do the job for you. Most of today's motherboards do include on-board stereo audio. The higher-end boards will even include eight-channel audio for surround sound. You can quickly recognize the capability by looking at the back of the computer or the connectors on the motherboard itself. The standard connections are the TRS 3.5mm mini jacks. (To use the line-in or line-out with RCA left and right input jacks that are common with stereo equipment, you will need an adapter cable.) The three standard connections are microphone (pink), stereo line-in for external input (blue), and stereo line-out to speakers or for external output (green). If you see three additional connectors, then the motherboard probably has the eight-channel capability with those jacks providing the additional outputs. (Some motherboards that support surround sound require a special cable to access the needed channels.)

One caution for recording from vinyl or tape is that you want the audio signal-to-noise ratio for your computer sound capability to be at least 90 dB. Most chipsets on the motherboards offer over 100 dB, which is great, but you should check the specifications to be sure.

Digital Dave

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Hidden Tools in Windows 7

“Subtle gems make Windows 7 truly what Vista should have been.” by Pete Choppin

Most of the big news about Windows 7 has been on interface changes, stability and how it is Microsoft's fix for its Vista embarrassment. But there are quite a few less obvious and publicized improvements.

Most of the big news about Windows 7 has been on interface changes, stability and how it is Microsoft's fix for its Vista embarrassment. But there are quite a few less obvious and publicized improvements, such as several new or enhanced tools included in the OS. Let's take a look at some of these, starting with the Action Center. (Control Panel/System and Security/Action Center).

Action Center

The new Action Center for Windows 7 is a central location of your OS where you can go to deal with security issues, troubleshooting and recovery. This eliminates the headache of searching all over the place for separate applets. It is all combined in an easy-to-use Control Panel applet, where you get maintenance and security messages and can view performance information, change user settings and more.

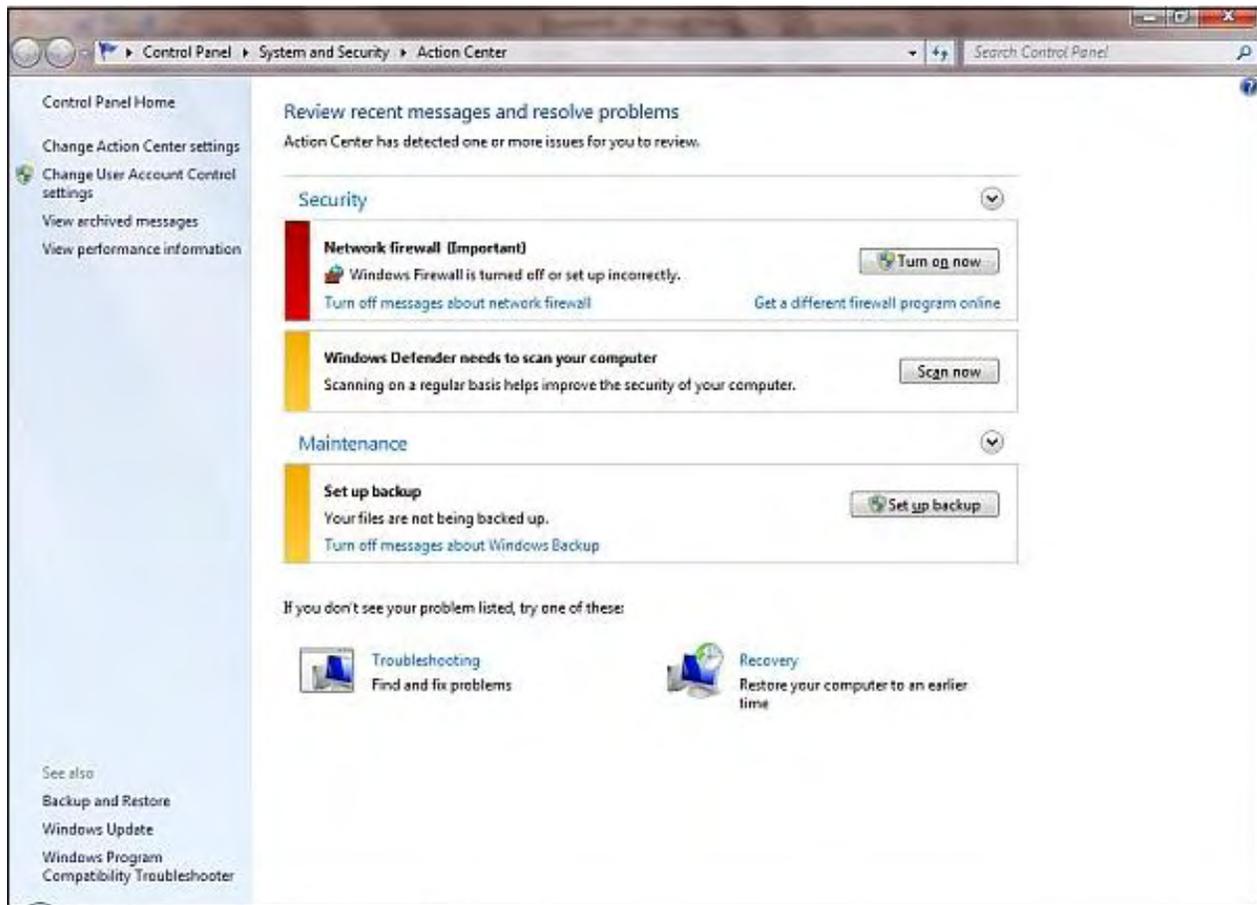


Figure 1. Action Center for Window 7.

Turning On or Off Notifications

Within the Action Center is a nice touch. Microsoft makes it easy for you to turn the various types of notifications on or off, as shown here. So if you have an antivirus program installed that Windows doesn't recognize, you don't have to deal with constant messages urging you to install one—just turn off virus-protection messages.

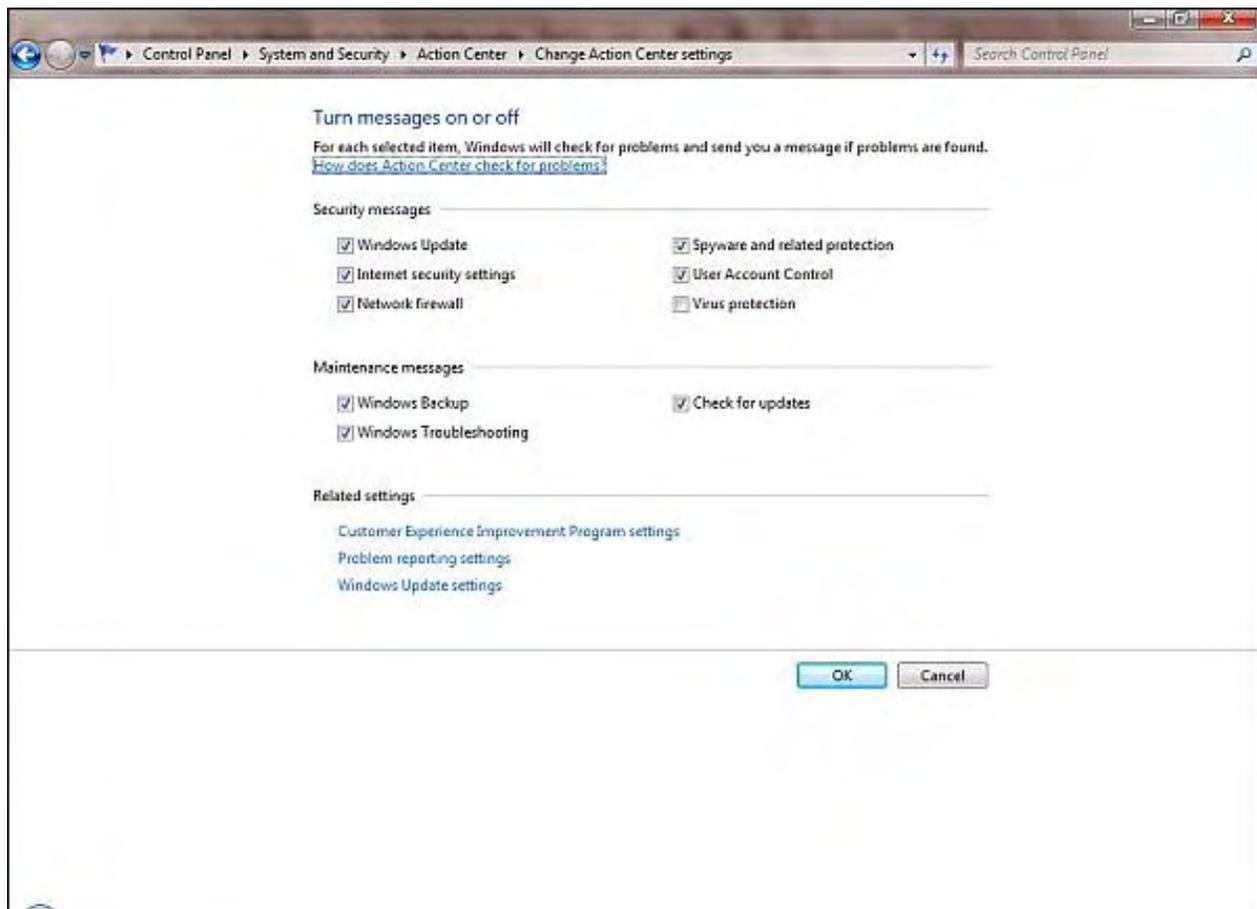


Figure 2. Change Action Center settings.

Problem Steps Recorder

One of the coolest new tools in Windows 7 is the Problem Steps Recorder (PSR)—especially for those of us who provide tech support to Windows users. No matter how hard they try, users often have problems accurately describing the problem they're experiencing or the steps they took before or after experiencing it. After all, if you know where you went wrong, it's more likely you'd figure it out yourself, right? Sure, Remote Assistance can be a godsend in those situations. But you can't always connect to the user's computer in real time. That's when the PSR comes in handy.

It's really a type of screen-capture software that records all actions—keystrokes, mouse clicks, etc.—and saves the sequence of events in an MHTML (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MHTML) page that documents every step the user took, along with screenshots. You start the PSR by entering psr.exe in the Start menu Search box or at the command prompt.

You can view the recorded steps in IE by double-clicking the saved zipped MHTML file. The interface is shown here.





Figure 3. Problem Steps Recorder (top). Problem Step Recorder playback (bottom).

ISO Image Burner

An ISO image is a type of archive file that is often used to distribute software. In Windows 7, Microsoft addressed something that's been on the wish list of many users for a long time. Now you don't have to download and install a third-party program to burn an ISO file to disc.

It's a simple process: After you download an .ISO to your hard drive, just double-click it and Windows 7 will open the Burn Disc Image dialog box, shown here. This also works for images with the .IMG file extension.

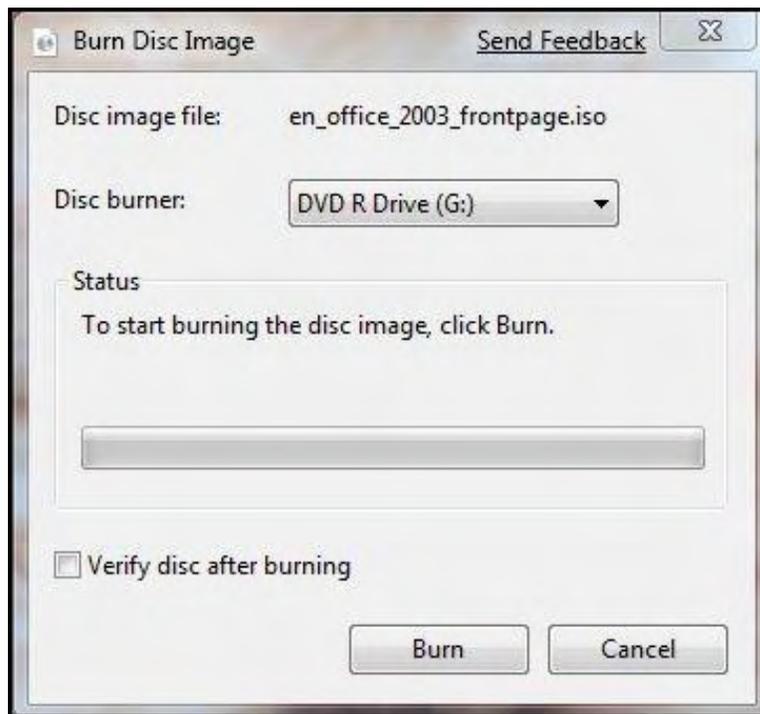


Figure 4. Burn Disc Image dialog box.

Biometric Scanning

In earlier versions of Windows, biometric authentication and management of biometric devices (fingerprint sensors) required third-party software that might or might not integrate well with the OS. Now it's built in.

Windows 7 includes the Windows Biometric Framework, which gives developers an API they can use to build biometrics into applications. Makers of fingerprint sensor hardware, such as UPEK and AuthenTec, work with Microsoft on the development of the Framework. Biometric devices are managed through a Control Panel applet.

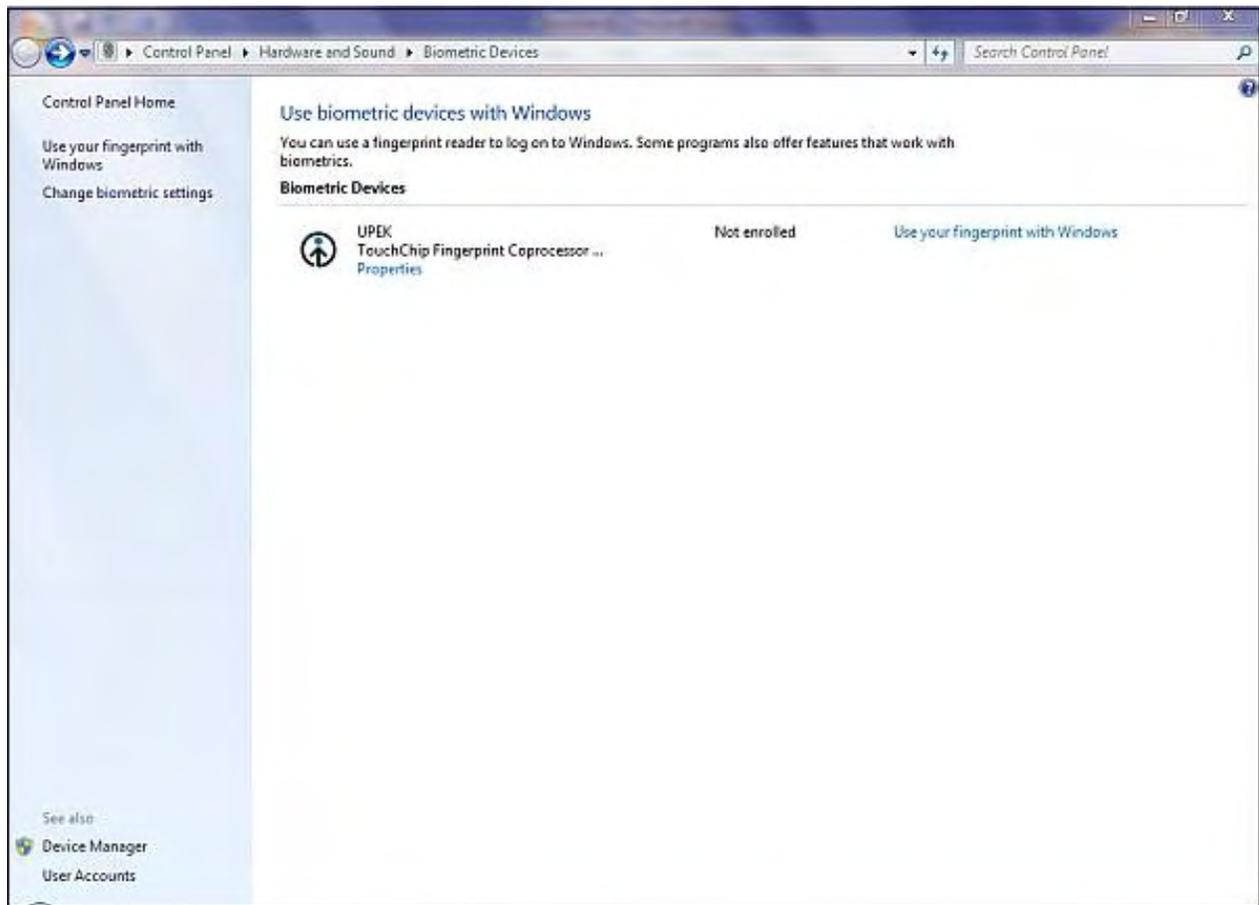


Figure 5. Biometric Devices.

Credential Manager

The Credential Manager is another new feature in Windows 7. It is similar in some ways to the password-management feature in Vista's User Accounts applet, but is more sophisticated. You can manage Windows credentials for various computers that you sign onto, certificate-based credentials, and other generic credentials (for e-mail accounts, Web accounts, etc.). These are all stored, by default, in the Windows Vault.

Perhaps the best new feature in Credential Manager is the ability to back up and restore the Vault. Microsoft recommends that you back up your credentials to a removable drive, such as a flash drive, to make it easier to restore them if you have a hardware failure.

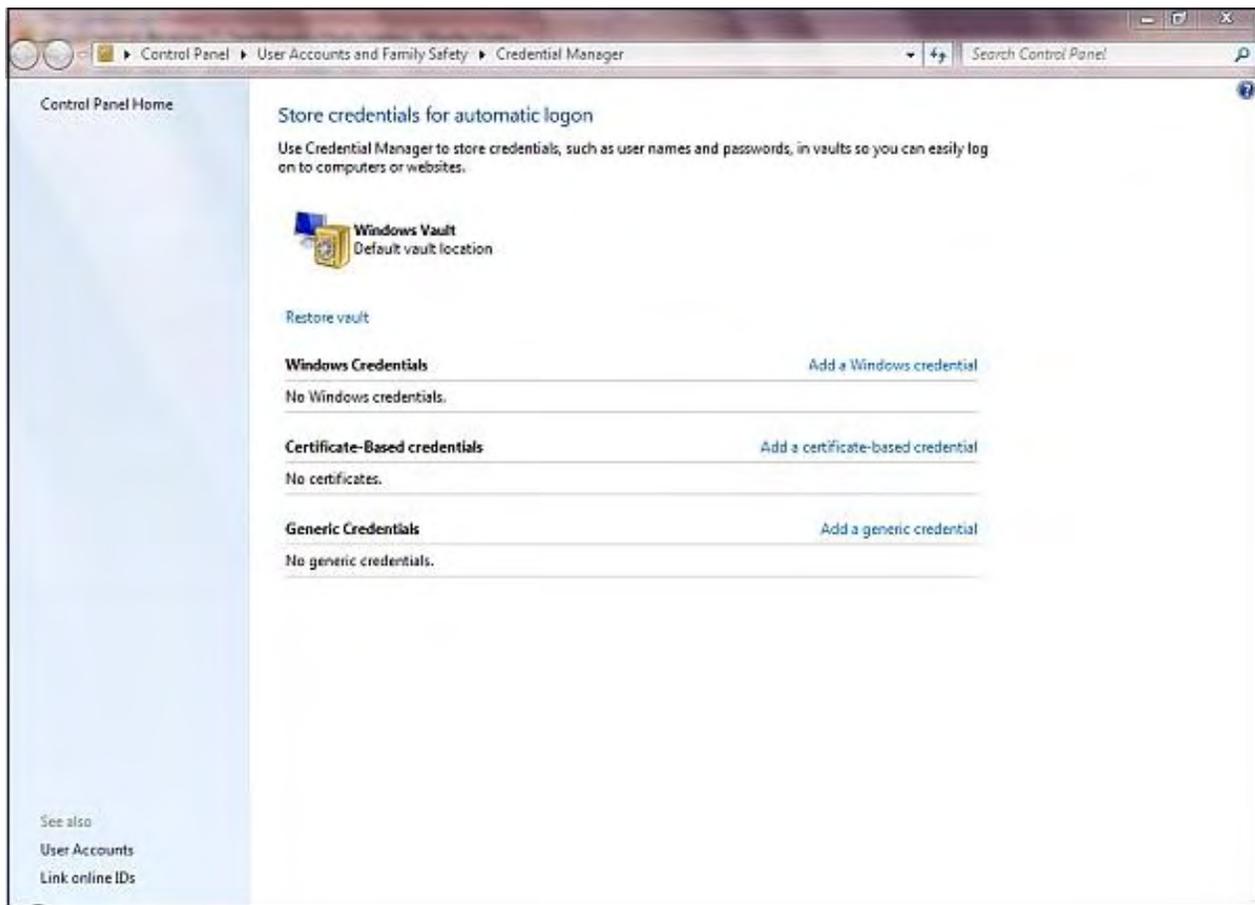


Figure 6. Credential Manager.

Display Projection

If you give lots of presentations, you'll welcome a new tool in Windows 7 that makes it easy for you to display your Windows 7 portable computer's desktop on a projector. Just press the Windows logo key + P, and you'll see the pop-up box shown here.

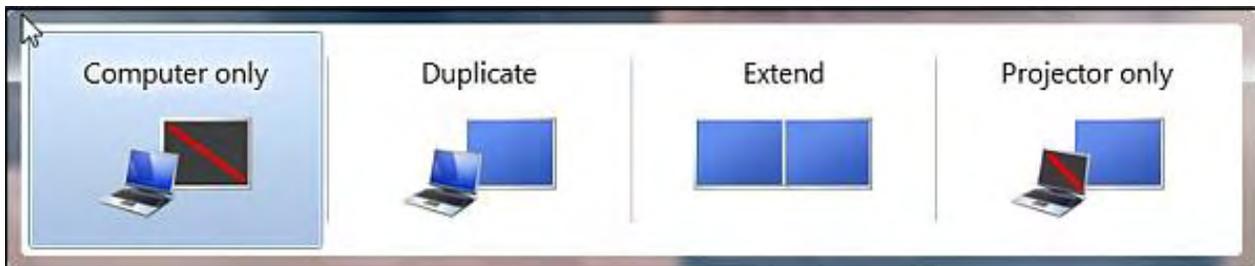


Figure 7. Display Projection.

The first setting is the default and displays on the computer screen only. The second setting clones the display on the computer screen to the projector. The third setting extends the desktop across both the computer screen and the projector, and the fourth setting displays via the projector only and turns off the computer screen.

Mobility Center

The Mobility Center provides several settings that make mobile computing more efficient. Pressing the Windows logo key + X opens up the Windows Mobility Center. Through this interface, you can turn on Presentation Mode. This disables your screensaver, sets your wallpaper to a neutral one, and even puts your IM client on "do not disturb" status. *[By default Windows Mobility Center is enabled only on laptops.]*



Figure 8. Windows Mobility Center.

Repair Disk

The Vista Service Pack 1 betas included a new feature that let you easily create a system-repair disc with a friendly graphical interface, but it was removed in the final release of SP1. Windows 7 restores this functionality. Just click Start and type System Repair in the Search box. Click on Create A System Repair Disc to open the dialog box shown here.



Figure 9. System Repair Disk.

To use the disc, put it in your drive and reboot the computer from the disc. (You may have to set the CD/DVD drive as the primary boot device in your BIOS.) Then, you'll get a list of system-recovery options.

Windows Backup

Of course, previous versions of Windows included a backup utility, but this tool has been significantly improved in Windows 7. Vista's backup program was user friendly, but not very flexible. Windows 7 gives you more granular control over what you want to back up.

You can invoke the Backup And Restore applet from Control Panel or by typing Backup in the Search box on the Start menu. You can back up your files to a local hard disk, a removable disk, a DVD, or another computer on the network. (You may need to provide

credentials to access a network location.) Then, you can choose to back up libraries or individual folders. You can also exclude specified folders from the backup.

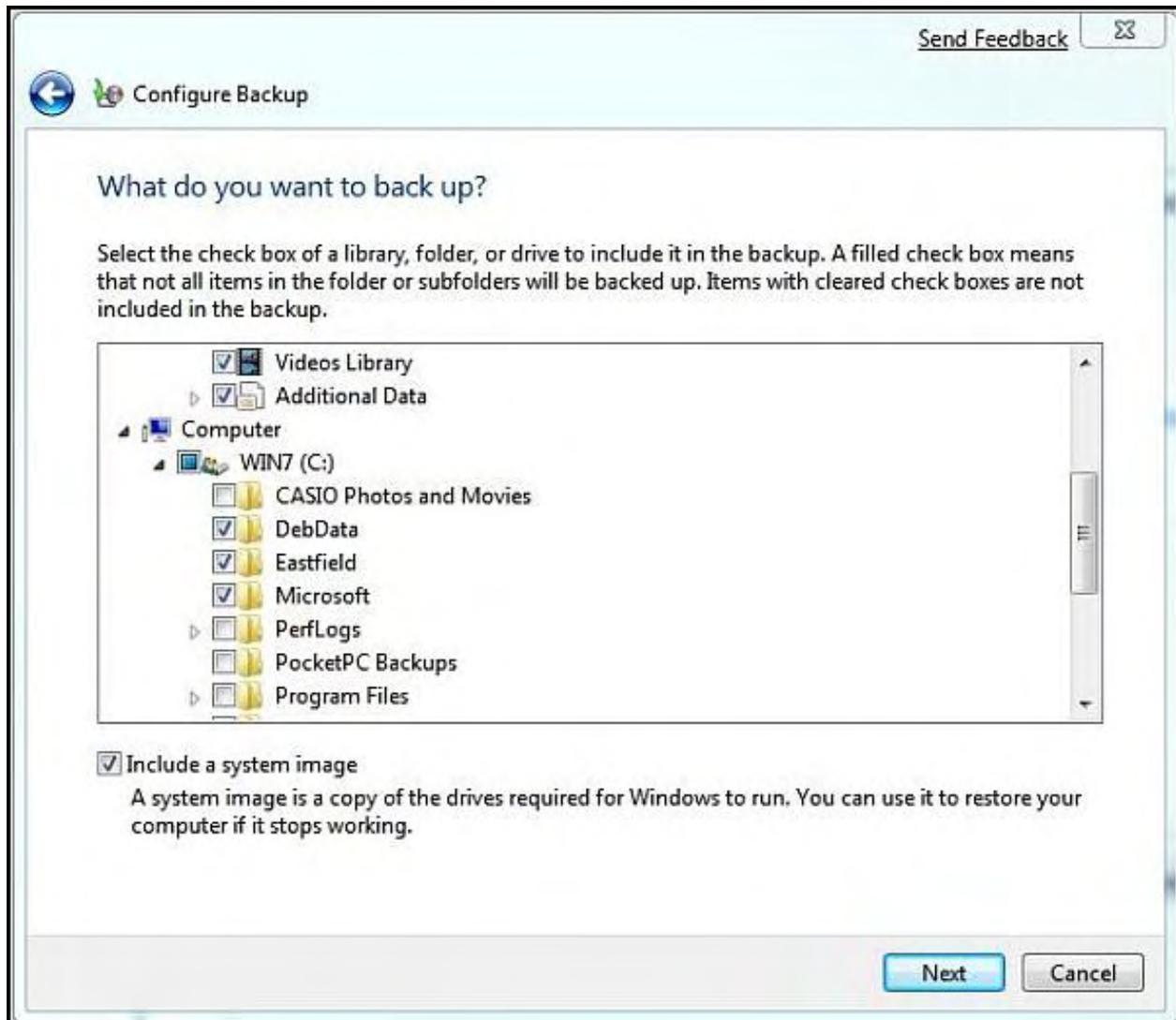


Figure 10. Backup And Restore.

PowerShell

Windows PowerShell is a command-line shell interface and scripting tool that makes it easier for Windows administrators to automate tasks using cmdlets, which are commands that perform single tasks, and scripts, which are made up of multiple cmdlets to perform more complex, multistep tasks.

Previous versions of Windows include a command-line interpreter (command.com or cmd.exe), but PowerShell is much more powerful, providing a Unix-like command environment that can automate almost every GUI functionality.

PowerShell can be downloaded to run on Windows XP or Vista, but Windows 7 is the first client operating system that comes with it built in. (It is also installed by default in Windows Server 2008 R2.) PowerShell v2 adds about 240 new cmdlets, as well as new APIs and features, such as the ability to invoke PowerShell scripts and cmdlets on a remote computer.

Windows 7 is truly what Vista should have been. In addition to the improved interface and much more efficient utilization of system resources, Windows 7 has many built-in utilities and enhancements that make this operating system clearly the future of computing for Windows users. It is worth a closer look at some of the lesser-known tools built into the OS.

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 Autorun Management Utilities

“Some digital detective work can stop the startups.” by Michael J. Ross

Numerous software developers—ranging from well-known computer security companies to individual programmers—have created utilities designed to make it easy for you to see exactly what applications are getting started on bootup, and how you can disable them if desired.

Anyone who has used Microsoft Windows for some length of time will probably notice that software applications can automatically start running as soon as the computer has finished booting up and Windows has finished loading. These are often referred to as "autorun" or "startup" applications. Each may reveal itself as a standard window displayed on the desktop, ready for immediate use, or it may be evidenced only by a small icon in the Windows system tray (which is located in the lower right-hand corner of the screen, just to the left of the digital clock, and may have most of its icons hidden if it is not expanded).



Windows Chainsaw! Every time you start it, your Windows computer will run faster!

How do these programs end up on your computer? Some may be invited, such as when you install an application and, during that process, you are given an option to have the application begin running automatically as part of the Windows initialization process. Others may be quite uninvited, such as when you purchase a new computer from a big-name vendor that loads up your new machine with all sorts of "free" programs and offers. Or you or someone in your household might download and install some program that is infected with adware or some other "Trojan horse" surprise—unbeknownst to the vendor, or not.

In order to rid your PC of the malware autorun programs, or simply disable legitimate programs from starting up like that, the best method depends upon which category each one falls into, and how well the authors of the software have designed it so that you can easily change that configuration setting. In the latter case, you can usually go straight to the program settings (typically in its Tools/Options menu), locate the dialog box for general settings, and disable the option to start up the program. In the former case, the malware programmers will have done no such favors, and invariably

try to make it as difficult as possible for you to see how and where their nasty program is getting called.

There are four common ways that applications can be set to start up automatically. The most straightforward way is for a shortcut to be placed in the Windows Startup folder (normally C:\Documents and Settings\All Users\Start Menu\Programs\Startup and, for every user X, C:\Documents and Settings\X\Start Menu\Programs\Startup). Or there may be an entry in the Windows Registry, such as HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run. Or the program may be listed in the file win.ini, in the [windows] section, as a "load=" or "run=" entry. Lastly, if the program is a service, it should be listed in Settings/Control Panel/Administrative Tools/Services.

Given that there are multiple ways that unwanted programs can be made to fire up, and making changes to some of these components of Windows can be quite risky (especially for the uninitiated), it may appear that you will have to do some digital detective work to stop the startups, or hire someone to do it for you, or simply resign yourself to the annoyance of manually shutting them down each time you turn on your computer.

Fortunately, numerous software developers—ranging from well-known computer security companies to individual programmers—have created utilities designed to make it easy for you to see exactly what applications are getting started on boot up, and how you can disable them if desired. We will examine a couple of the more promising such utilities.

Autoruns

From the company that understands Windows better than any other, Autoruns (technet.microsoft.com/en-us/sysinternals/)

bb963902.aspx) is a free utility offered by Microsoft. As expected, it does an outstanding job of ferreting out all of those "autorun" applications and services. In fact, the first time you run this utility, you will most likely be quite shocked as to how many such programs there are on your system. The plethora of applications seen in the screenshot below is not uncommon. But note that most of them are native to Windows, and needed for proper functioning of the operating system. As always, only disable autorun applications if you know what you are doing, because otherwise your computer may no longer work as expected.

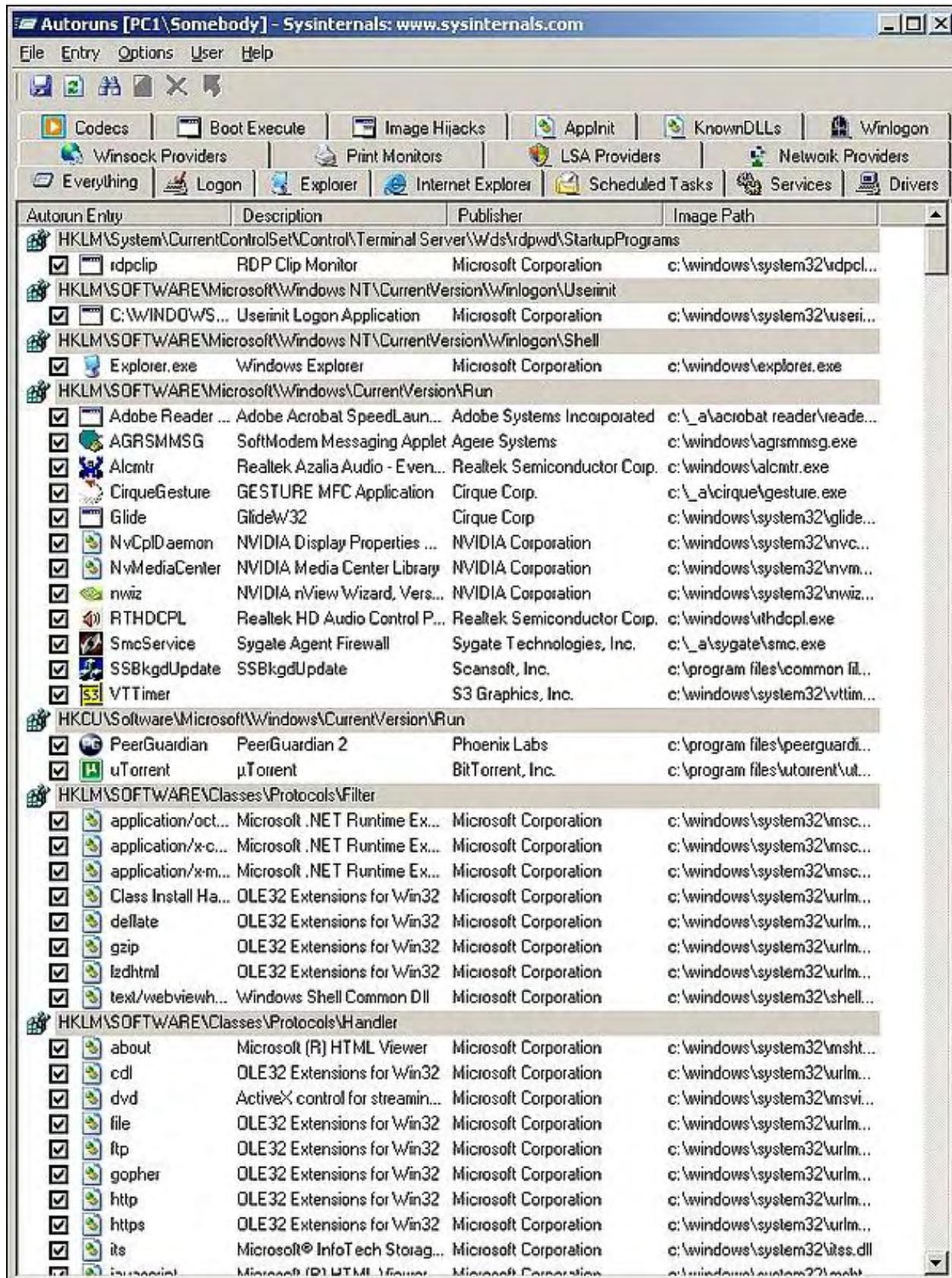


Figure 1. Autoruns interface.

The archive file that you can download from the Microsoft page listed above contains four files: Eula.txt (the license agreement), autoruns.chm (a self-contained help resource), autorunsc.exe (the command-line version of the utility), and autoruns.exe (the graphical user interface version). Most readers will need only that last one. It can be placed directly into any folder on your system, and run directly; it is not an installation file (that would install other files). It may be easiest to create a shortcut to that executable, and place the shortcut on your Start menu.

If you are not entirely sure as to the purpose of a particular application, you can do a "Search Online," either from the Entry menu or by right-clicking on the application's entry to display its context menu. Using either method, Autoruns will launch Internet Explorer (unfortunately), try to connect to the server "supertoolbar.ask.com," and perform a Web search using the Ask.com search engine. Confusingly, within Internet Explorer, it is automatically forwarded to a URL that does not exist. For instance, if you try to find online information for the "CirqueGesture" entry within Autorun, then it will go to <http://auto.search.msn.com/response.asp?MT=gesture.exe&srch=5&prov=&utf8>, which is invalid. If you simplify the URL to <http://auto.search.msn.com/>, then it will forward to Bing, Microsoft's replacement for MSN Search.

Instead of dealing with this IE/Microsoft/Ask/Bing three-ring circus, it would be much easier to use a better browser, such as Firefox (www.mozilla.com/firefox/), and simply type the application name into your favorite search engine. Firefox even has a built-in search entry field in the upper right-hand corner, next to the Web address field.



Figure 2. Firefox search field.

Comodo System Cleaner

For gaining control of your Windows autorun applications, you will find that some utilities are wholly dedicated to that functionality, while the same can be achieved using a general Windows management utility, which includes autorun management as just one of its many features. An example of the latter is Comodo System Cleaner (system-cleaner.comodo.com/), which has a built-in autorun manager in addition to a host of tools for easily configuring Windows settings, cleaning up the Windows Registry, optimizing system performance and disk space utilization, diagnosing sources of current and future system problems, and maximizing computer privacy by deleting all history, cache and other temporary files from Web browsers and other applications.

Comodo System Cleaner is free to download and use, and runs on Windows XP, Vista, 7.0, and Server 2003. The vendor states that it occupies only 32 megabytes of system memory, and 20 megabytes of hard disk space. In addition to the regular version, there is a portable one that would be ideal for use on a USB thumb drive, because all of the program's settings are stored on the removable media, and thus there is no need for installation. The comparison chart (system-cleaner.comodo.com/comparison.html) on the Comodo site shows how the company's System Cleaner stacks up against the competition, and the results are quite favorable.

Installation of the current version (2.2.126408.3) was straightforward, although at least three times the installer tried connecting to remote servers, without any warning or explanation. Disallowing each attempt did slow down the installation process, but did not prevent it from completing, nor prevent the application from running properly.



Figure 3. Comodo System Cleaner interface.

The screenshot above shows the initial display of the System Cleaner. The control panel on the left-hand side has links for the eight different sections of the utility. Autoruns Manager is the fourth one from the top. Before leaving that screen, most users will instantly see a problem with the design of the interface—namely, the Comodo developers unwisely chose to make the top portion and outer edge transparent. As a consequence, whatever happens to be behind the program's window appears within the System Cleaner interface itself. (In the screenshot, it is the System Cleaner Web page peaking through.) This clearly makes all of the navigation icons and labels in that area even more difficult to read, and is an excellent illustration of the principle that just because something is possible in software or Web design, does not mean that it is advisable. In addition, the interface's fonts are very poor, although that is probably not discernible in the screenshot here.

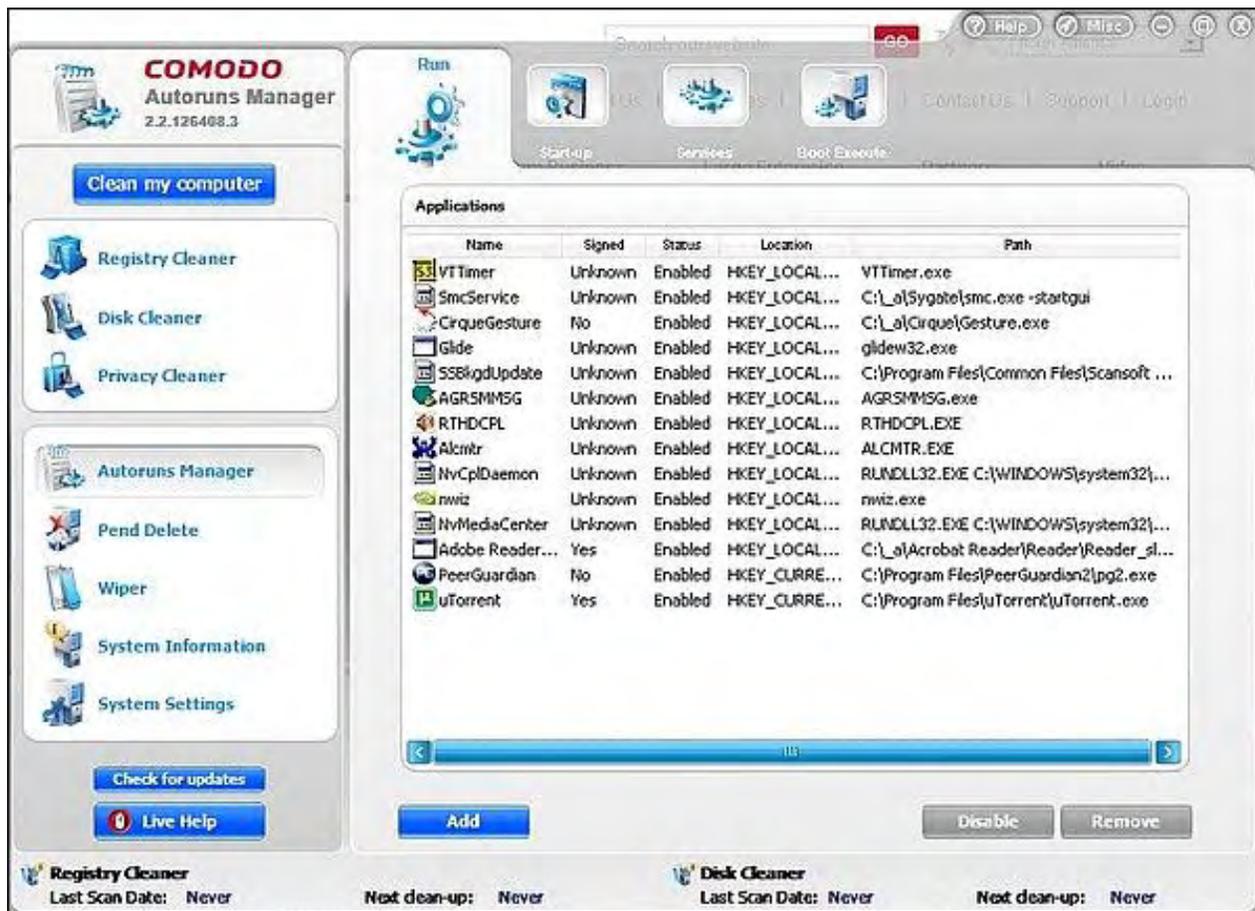


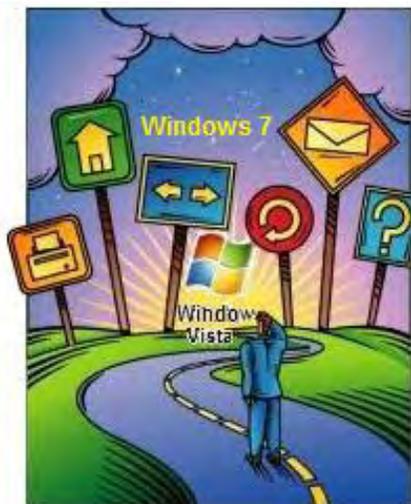
Figure 4. Comodo System Cleaner Autoruns Manager interface.

The Autoruns Manager has four sections, each with its own tab in the navigation bar in the upper right part of the interface: Run, Start-up, Services and Boot Execute. That first section, Run (shown in the figure above), apparently lists the autorun programs that are on your computer as a result of installing regular applications in the past. That second section is probably for shortcuts found in the Windows Startup folder(s), mentioned earlier. The third section is obviously for Windows services, most if not all of which should be left as is. It is not immediately clear as to what the fourth and last section is for, and the screen does not offer any explanation, nor any tool tips on mouse hover. Clicking the Help button above the section's navigation bar does not display help information, but instead causes Comodo System Cleaner to try to access a remote server to download a file, help.chm. This help file should have been included in the initial installer package and installation process.

Even though the Comodo System Cleaner displays fewer entries than Autoruns, either one of these utilities should be more than adequate to help you exorcise your computer of the digital demons that insist upon consuming your computer's resources every time you turn it on.

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

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Windows Tips and Tricks

Windows Tips and Tricks

“An Accidental New View” by Jack Dunning

While seeking strange Windows 7 key-combination phenomena, Jack encountered a trick that can give you a different view of the world.

Sometimes I stumble upon tricks by accident. This happened to me the other day while I was fooling around with key combinations on the Windows 7 computer. (It is always a little scary to test new key combinations, since most of the time I don't know what they will do.) I believe that this is a Windows 7-only trick, and it may depend upon which graphics card you have installed in the computer.

As I was testing the effects of various key combinations, looking for unusual phenomena, the screen suddenly went blank after I pressed CTRL+ALT+Left Arrow. I was temporarily freaked out until the screen returned—only the view had turned sideways by rotating 90 degrees to the left, as shown below in Figure 1.

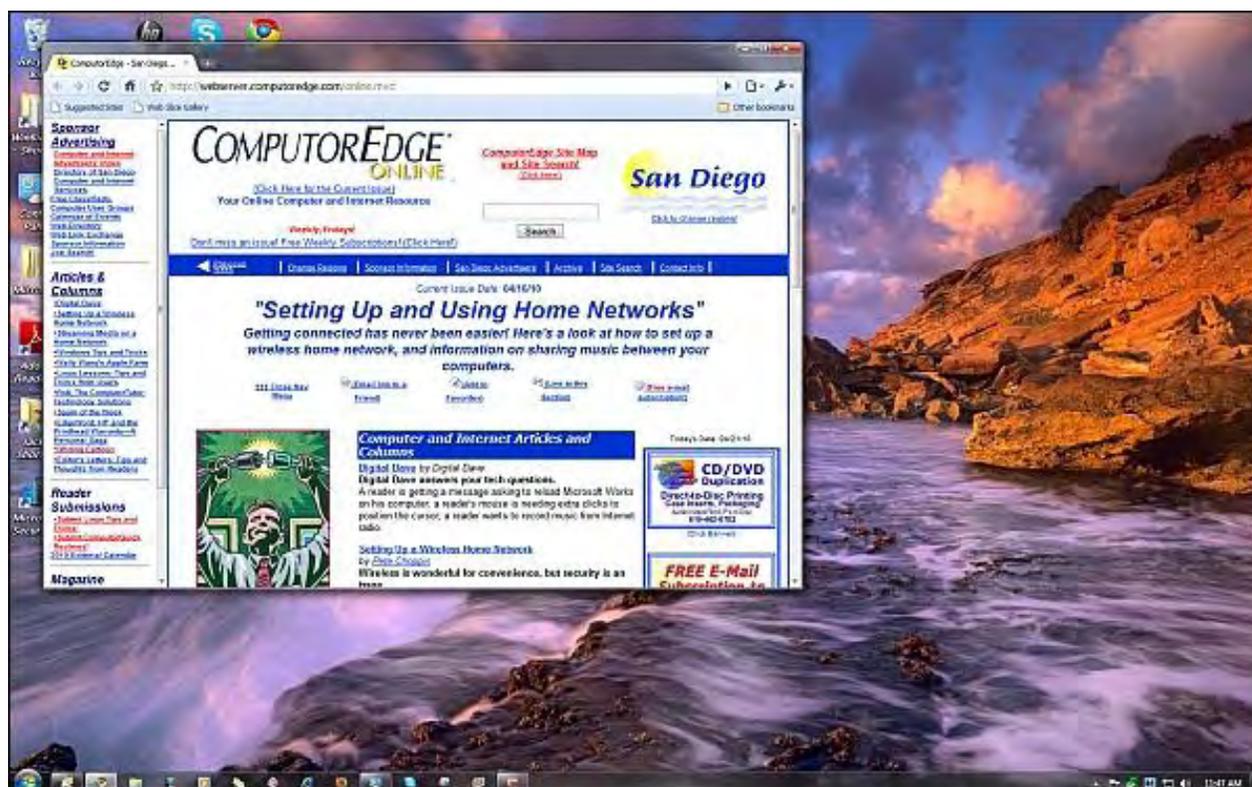




Figure 1. In Window 7, the screen rotated 90 degrees to the left when CTRL+ALT+Left Arrow was pressed.

As I continued to play with the combinations, CTRL+ALT+Up Arrow set the screen upright again, CTRL+ALT+Right Arrow rotated 90 degrees right, and CTRL+ALT+Down Arrow turned the screen upside down. It was immediately obvious that these shortcuts were for Windows 7 people who either had turned their monitor on its side, or who owned a tablet computer that could easily be rotated. I tried this technique on Vista and XP, but they yielded no results.

As I did further research, I found that many people had accidentally encountered the same key combination—most often it was either an overzealous child hitting the keys randomly or a cat sitting on the keyboard. They had no idea what had caused the problem or how to fix it. (It was fortunate for me that I was actually looking for strange effects when I came across it, so I knew what to try next.)

Most Windows computer systems will allow the rotation of the view on the monitor if the graphics card supports it, but it is not usually embedded in hot keys. In Vista and Windows 7, the easiest way to find the settings is to right-click on any empty space of the desktop. In Vista, you should be able to select the graphics card Control Panel from the menu (e.g., Nvidia Control Panel). In Windows 7, you will have both "Graphics Properties..." (the equivalent of the graphics control panel in Vista) and Graphics Options as show in Figure 2. (For Windows XP, you will probably need to locate the Control Panel for your graphics card to determine if the rotation feature is supported.)

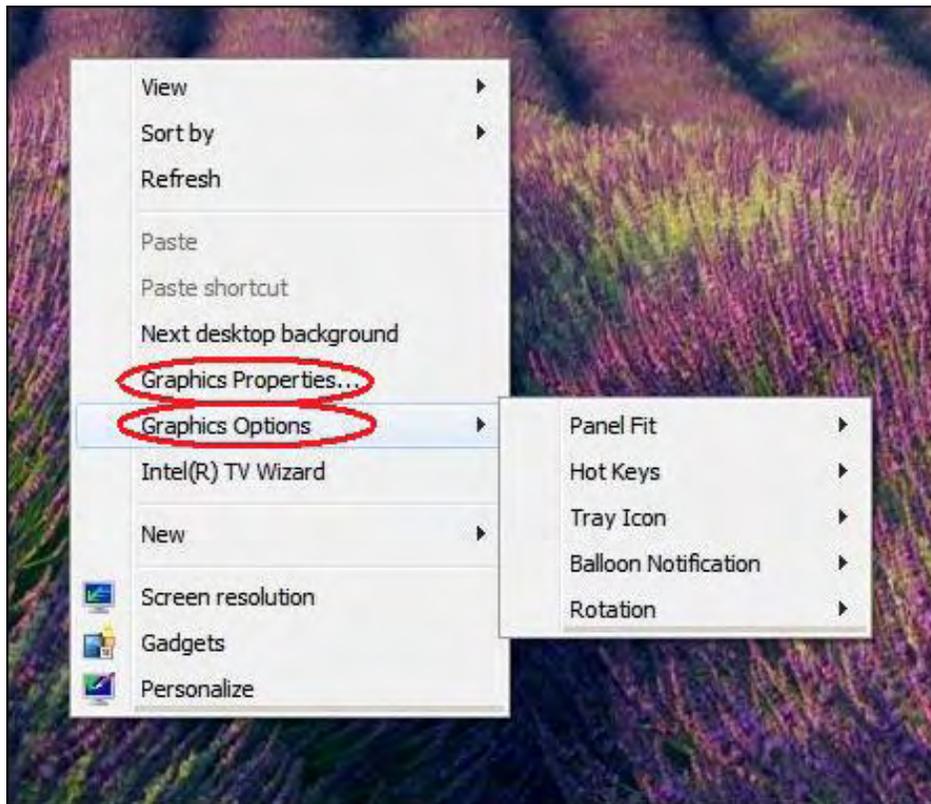


Figure 2. In Window 7, right-click on an empty area of the Desktop to open the Graphics Options menu.

As you can see above, in Windows 7 there are options for both disabling/enabling the graphics hot keys, as well as directly changing the screen rotation. When I accessed the graphics Control Panel from the "Graphics Properties..." option, I had the choices of enabling/disabling, changing or eliminating the hot keys.

If you want to perplex Windows 7 users, apply CTRL+ALT+Left Arrow to their computer while they are not looking. It will give them a different view of the world.

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

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“The Appalling Ignorance of Apple Critics” by Wally Wang

People traumatized by their previous computer inaccurately assume that the faults of their current computer must also apply to any product offered by Apple. Also, a tip on removing Safari plug-ins that may be slowing you down.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

Most anti-Apple critics are appallingly ignorant. By ignorant, I don't mean stupid or inferior. By ignorant, I mean that they just don't have all the facts in front of them. Probably everyone reading this is ignorant in ancient Russian literature. That doesn't make us stupid or inferior; it just makes us unqualified to criticize ancient Russian literature because we don't know all the facts about that particular topic. The same holds true for so many anti-Apple critics.

I recently met a man who complained that Apple products were way overpriced, so that's why he was sticking with Windows. Upon further questioning, it turns out this man visited an Apple Store, took one look at an iMac (\$1,199 and up), and mistook the entire iMac for just a computer monitor with an Apple logo on the front.



Figure 1. At first glance, an iMac just looks like an ordinary monitor.

In other words, because he was familiar with PCs, he couldn't picture a computer unless it came in a tower case with cables sticking out everywhere and connected to a separate monitor. To his mind, it was impossible to imagine a computer that consisted of an all-in-one design where the entire computer and monitor took up the same amount of space as a regular monitor.

Even more surprising was when he looked at the Mac mini. Thinking that all computers must come in an ugly tower case that clutters your desk or gobbles up a chunk of space on the floor by your feet, this man was shocked to find that the Mac mini could squeeze an entire computer in a minuscule form that's only two inches high and 6.5 by 6.5 inches square.



Figure 2. The minuscule size of a Mac mini.

After realizing that the price of an iMac wasn't just for a monitor, but also included a Macintosh computer, and that a Mac mini cost only \$599 instead of the thousands of dollars that he thought all Macintosh computers cost, this man was willing to take a second look at switching to a Macintosh, simply because he took the time to learn the facts and dispel his initial ignorance about Macintosh computers.

Another man complained to me that the iPad was useless because it didn't offer multitasking. Of course, I had to explain to him that the iPad does offer multitasking, but it only multitasks its built-in apps, not third-party apps. So his initial belief that the iPad (and the iPhone) do not multitask at all was completely incorrect.

Upon further questioning, I learned why this man valued multitasking so much. It seems that every time he tries to do something as simple as search for an e-mail message or telephone number on his Windows PC, it takes so long that he gets tired of waiting. So rather than wait and stare at his computer screen, he just launches his browser or a game to amuse himself until the task is completed.

Besides explaining to him that the iPad does offer multitasking, I also explained to him that the iPad doesn't slow down over time like a Windows PC does, that most tasks done on an iPad aren't as processor-intensive as tasks that might be done on a regular computer, and that the iPad responds so quickly to most tasks that there's no need to wait and multitask to be productive.

In other words, this poor man was so used to an inferior, mediocre and frustrating experience with a computer that he automatically assumed that all computers behaved that way and that waiting to accomplish a simple task on any computer always required waiting a few minutes.

Upon learning that he could speed up his Windows PC by optimizing the Windows registry periodically (along with defragmenting his hard disk), this man realized that multitasking was important to him simply because his computer was too slow. Upon seeing and trying an iPad, he also came to realize that the iPad could complete tasks so rapidly, without requiring a lengthy waiting period, that he couldn't even load another program to multitask at all, essentially making the whole question of multitasking irrelevant.

Then there's the man who told me that he would never get an iPad because it didn't have replaceable batteries, and the only reason he valued replaceable batteries was because his Windows laptop could barely hold a charge for more than two hours, so he needed to carry a heavy replacement battery at all times. To this man, it was impossible for any computer to hold a charge for almost an entire working day (the new MacBook Pro models can hold a charge from eight to 10 hours). Therefore the lack of replaceable batteries meant that the iPad would be useless to him after two hours.

Upon learning that the iPad can hold a charge for 10 hours, and the latest 13-inch version of the MacBook Pro can also hold a charge for 10 hours, this man realized that replaceable batteries were only necessary when using his older laptop. To this man, it was simply impossible for computer batteries to last all day just because his computer couldn't do that, so therefore all computers must behave that way too.

Yet another man complained that the iPad lacks handwriting recognition, so that's why he was going to buy a netbook. Of course, a

netbook also lacks handwriting recognition, so his logic made no sense whatsoever, assuming that handwriting recognition was the reason to get a new computer in the first place. I explained that many companies sold tablet PCs, which were special laptops where the screen folded over the keyboard so you could write with a stylus on the screen.

After toying with various tablet PCs, this man realized that the handwriting recognition feature on tablet PCs worked great, but that the tablet PCs cost more than the average laptop, the batteries rarely lasted more than two hours, the laptops themselves were bulky (with the monitor folded over the keyboard), and the entire computer weighed too much to carry and use comfortably in one hand (most tablet PCs weigh four pounds and up).

In other words, the tablet PCs had all the features this man wanted, yet because of its limitations, he couldn't use it anyway, making the whole cavalcade of features utterly useless in the long run. On the other hand, the iPad might lack handwriting recognition, but its small size, light weight and virtual keyboard make it much more usable.

The pattern seems clear. People traumatized by their previous computer inaccurately assume that the faults of their current computer must also apply to any product offered by Apple. Therefore the incorrect conclusion is that Apple products aren't as good either, so it's cheaper, better and easier just to stick with what you already know (and what most people already know doesn't work and gives them an unending stream of headaches and frustration).

Apple products aren't perfect, but neither are other companies' products. If you're going to criticize any product, at least do so with facts and not with prejudice. For those still ignorant about Apple products, here's a quick translation guide that might help you learn more.

Complaint #1: Apple products are too expensive.

Translation #1: I haven't looked at prices of different Apple products recently, so I'm not sure if Apple products really cost as much as I think, but since I'm probably afraid of change anyway, I'll use price as my rationale for not looking at Apple products.

Complaint #2: I need multitasking; Apple's iPhone and iPad don't offer multitasking, so I can't use an iPhone or iPad.

Translation #2: I haven't bothered to verify that the iPhone and iPad do offer multitasking for their built-in apps and will allow third-party apps to multitask by the end of the year. I also haven't checked if the tasks I do on a computer really require multitasking or are just a workaround to deal with a slow, inefficient computer. Because my computer takes too long to accomplish a simple task, I assume that all computers take a long time as well, thereby making multitasking essential.

Complaint #3: The iPad is useless without a replaceable battery.

Translation #3: My laptop's battery can barely hold a charge for more than two hours, so this is obviously how long every portable computer's batteries last. Thus, without replaceable batteries, every portable computing device is doomed to failure, even though newer computers do have batteries that can last an entire day and don't need replacing as often as the older batteries did.

Complaint #4: I can get another computer cheaper that does everything that an Apple computer can do.

Translation #4: I've never used an Apple product so I don't really know what an Apple computer can do.

Complaint #5: My Windows PC gives me access to all the software available on Windows, which isn't always available on a Macintosh or other Apple products. Since I can run more programs on my Windows PC, that makes my Windows PC superior.

Translation #5: I don't know that the Macintosh is built on Unix, which can run all Unix programs that a Windows PC can't run. I also don't know that I can run Windows on a Macintosh, thereby giving me access to the combined library of Unix, Windows and Macintosh software, which is more software to choose from than a Windows PC can run.

Complaint #6: I don't like Apple and refuse to buy any of their products.

Translation #6: I don't understand that people are loyal to Apple products because they appreciate the smoother and more satisfying experience in using them. Instead, I believe that anyone who buys an Apple product must do so just for the logo, to feel cool, or for any number of other irrational reasons. Since I am not an irrational person, I'll stick with my irrational prejudice against Apple to prove that I'm not irrational.

The logic behind much anti-Apple criticism reminds me of a story about an East Germany defector who wrote back to his parents that in

the West, an ordinary person could own a car, eat meat every day, and own a house. His parents were shocked and utterly convinced that the West had brainwashed their son because in their world of East Germany back in the 80s, only high-level government officials could afford a car, and that required a five-year wait to get a shoddy piece of machinery that often broke down.

The idea of eating meat was such a luxury that they couldn't imagine it was possible for anyone to eat meat every day, and they knew that most people lived in apartments and could never get rich enough to own a house, so therefore it was utterly impossible that their son could be telling the truth.

Like many Apple critics, this East German couple allowed their own experiences and perceptions to distort facts to appear impossible and unbelievable. Because this East German couple believed that the whole world worked like their dismal life under the former East German communist government, they remained convinced that it was impossible that life could be any different or better than what they already knew.

Now if you're an ardent Apple critic, ask yourself, are you thinking like this East German couple? Touting the larger market share of Windows as proof of its superiority is like claiming that 99 percent of all East German citizens lived in East Germany, so therefore the East German communist way of life was obviously superior to the life of the handful of East German defectors who escaped to the West. As you can see, it all depends on your point of view.

* * *

If your Safari browser seems to be acting erratically or slow, you may have too many plug-ins trying to help Safari work. Sometimes a buggy plug-in can make Safari crash, so if you load Safari, click the Help menu, and choose Installed Plug-Ins, you can see a list of all installed plug-ins.

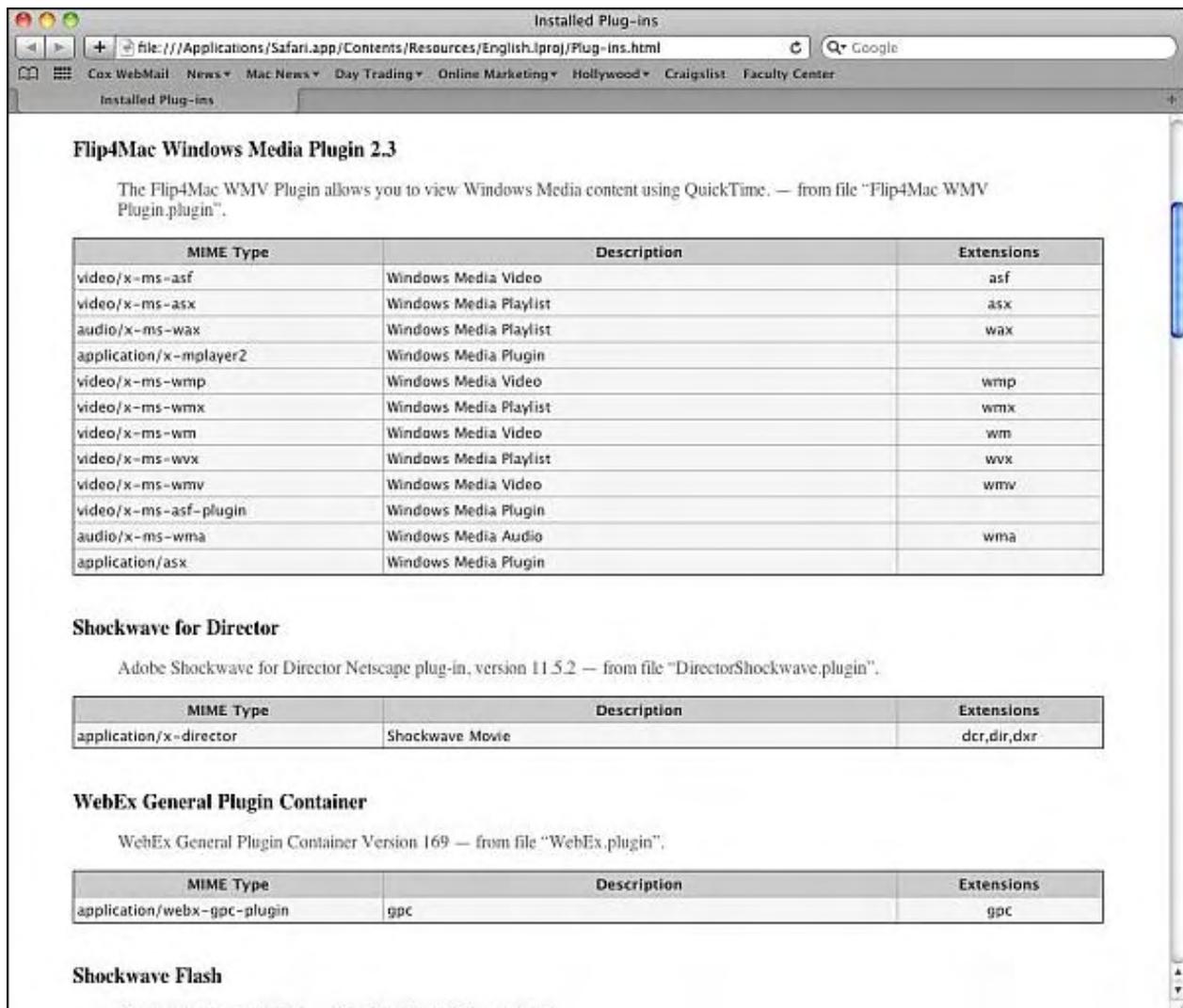


Figure 3. Viewing the list of Safari plug-ins.

To remove a plug-in, open the Finder, click the hard disk icon, then choose /Library/Internet Plug-ins. This will display a list of plug-ins that you can drag and drop into the Trash.

A second place where plug-ins hide is in each user's directory, so click on your user name in the Finder window, then choose /Library/Internet Plug-Ins and you may find more plug-ins. Drag and drop the plug-ins you don't want in the Trash, and Safari should hopefully run smoother without so many plug-ins cluttering things up.

In the early days, before Wally became an Internationally renowned comedian, computer book writer, and generally cool guy, Wally Wang used to hang around The Byte Buyer dangling participles with Jack Dunning and go to the gym to pump iron with Dan Gookin.

Wally is responsible for the following books:

- Microsoft Office 2007 for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470009233?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470009233),
- Beginning Programming for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702),
- Breaking Into Acting for Dummies with Larry Garrison (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468),
- Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470108541?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470108541),
- Steal This Computer Book 4.0 (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050),
- Visual Basic Express 2005: Now Playing (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593270593?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593270593),
- My New Mac (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271646?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271646),
- My New iPhone (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271956?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271956),
- Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon Fisher and Gerald Fisher (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894).

When not performing stand-up comedy or writing computer books, he likes to paper trade stocks with the video game Stock Reflex (www.plimus.com/jsp/download_trial.jsp?contractId=1722712&referrer=wwang), using the techniques he learned from a professional Wall Street day trader.

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

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Rob, The Computer Tutor

Rob, The ComputerTutor: Technology Solutions

“Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) and
JavaScript” by Rob Spahitz

Last week, we wrapped up Web form validation. This week we go in a new direction: Using JavaScript to manipulate parts of the screen.

Last week, we wrapped up Web form validation. This week we go in a new direction: using JavaScript to manipulate parts of the screen. However, to get there, we need to learn about how browsers handle their screens.

CSS

In the beginning of Web pages, you were able to add formatting to individual pieces. That's what HTML is all about. For example, `` is used to start setting some text as bold. However, what does "bold" actually mean? Typically in the computer world, it means that the text is double-struck and slightly offset to the right. But typically we think of much more. We think about the font that's being used, the color applied to the text, the size, etc.

Related to this, sometimes you create a Web page with many different settings for paragraph text settings, bullet text settings, table settings, etc. If you later decide that you'd like to change the settings (for example, to add seasonal holiday color themes), you have to do a lot of work to fix all of the many settings scattered throughout the page. To deal with this, the Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) concept was created so that you can apply all of the styles once at the top of the document and then let the browser figure out how to apply them. Further, you could also have the page reference an external page of settings so that you can simply replace that one settings page and all of your Web site pages that reference that are automatically updated at once.

For those who have worked with more advanced word processors, such as Word and WordPerfect, you've had this feature available through Styles. In Word, you get a dropdown list in the toolbar showing something like Normal + Bold. These can also be renamed to anything you want, such as My Bold Style. If you apply this style to some text, the text will change to that style. If you later decide to change that style to bold plus italic, you change the style definition and every place in the document that the style is used will get changed to your new style.

Let's look at a few of these in HTML. Start with a simple document:

```
<html>
<head>
</head>
<body>
<p>Here is some <b>bold</b> and <i>italic</i> text inside a paragraph.</p>
<p>Here's another paragraph with <b>bolded</b> and <i>italicized</i> text.</p>
</body>
</html>
```

When you view this in a browser, you will get a default font that the browser decides to use, such as Figure 1.

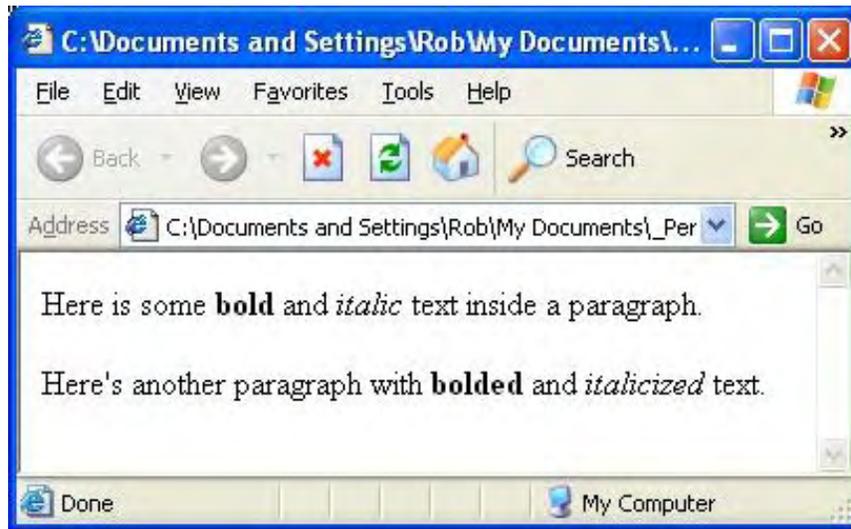


Figure 1. Default-Formatted Text.

Notice how the font is black in a specific size and with serifs ("feet" on the ends of the letters.) If you wanted to change the font color of the first bolded text, you could add a font tag like this: `bold` If you reload the page, the first bolded text will turn red.

Now suppose that you wanted to make *all* bold text red? To handle that using the above technique, you'd have a lot of manual effort to fix all of those bold tags, and would risk missing some tags or possibly improperly coding some through mistyping or pasting in the wrong place.

To help with this, the HTML standards committee offered style sheets. To use these, you need to learn a new language, although it's not overly complex. The basic language defines a style as the name of the tag, a setting name, a colon and the setting. If you apply this directly to an existing tag, you just define the setting name, colon and value. For example, rather than the above collection of tags, we could have done the same with styles within a single tag like this:

```
<b style="color:red" >bold</b>
```

When using this on all bold tags, you may still miss some, and you may mistype or mis-paste the style, but the chance is less since you only have to enter one piece (within the bold tag) rather than one piece before the opening bold tag and another after the ending bold tag.

OK, so you may have been wondering about the name of this feature. Why is it called a cascading style sheet? Why not just a style? Well, in the above cases, we are simply applying a style. However, as mentioned earlier, you will probably want to set this up to apply across the page (or multiple pages). For this, you will want a "sheet" of styles that define the pieces used by any particular tag. This, of course, will leave you with a style sheet. And, as it turns out, a style from one setting can be combined with or overridden by another style, giving a cascading effect where one setting flows into another, then into another, etc., giving the effect of a collection of waterfalls flowing down into a resulting stream that gives the final result. Basically, you can define an external sheet of styles that gets overridden by the local page's styles that can get overridden by a specific tag's style. Let's see how this works.

Style Sheets

The above style-setting is nice, but not practical for mass changes. Instead, most seasoned designers will generate sheets that define the settings for specific tags and put them at the top of the page, usually in the heading. When using Dreamweaver for Web page design, its default seems to be to put styles in like this, almost in excess (for every slight change, a new style is created). Conversely, Microsoft Word will attach all style information directly into tags, causing a chaotic collection of elements that bloat the size of your page.

There are several ways to create style sheets. I'll present the one that is very "object-oriented" since it will make it more intuitive when using JavaScript. With this version, we define a style section and then define a collection of classes that can be applied to specific tags. The style section for our example might look something like this in the heading:

```
<style>
.new_color
{
    color: red;
}
</style>
```

Notice how you create a style tag to define the section. Within that you place a dot (like a subset element in JavaScript) followed by an arbitrary class name. After that, you define the settings for that class as you might in JavaScript. However, you must use valid "property" names like color for them to work. After that, you place the colon and value (as we did earlier when applying to the tag directly). The semicolon at the end, as in JavaScript, simply helps to define the end of the setting. You should also normally place the value in quotes, but I omitted it for convenience here since it normally works fine that way.

With that in place, all you have to do is to reference this new style wherever you want some text to turn red. For example, we can turn the bold and italic portions of the first paragraph red, and then make the entire second paragraph red like this:

```
<p>Here is some <b class="new_color">bold</b>
    and <i class="new_color">italic</i> text inside a paragraph.</p>
<p class="new_color">Here's another paragraph with <b>bolded</b>
    and <i>italicized</i> text.</p>
```

Notice how I set the class attribute of the first bold and italic tags and the second paragraph tag. With this, the result appears like Figure 2.

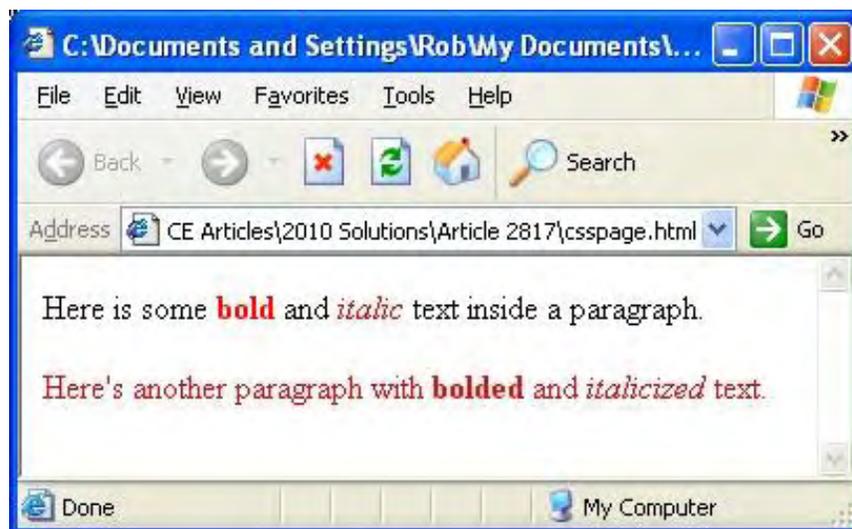


Figure 2. Using bold, italics and color.

Now, this will be helpful for JavaScript. However, I want to clarify that this approach is a bit different from what I described earlier, where you'd like every bold tag to be set a certain way. For that, try using existing settings like this:

```
b
{
    color: green;
}
```

If you apply that, you'll see that the second bolded text turns green. Why not the first? Because it is overridden by the "local" setting applied directly to the tag.

Let's do some really basic JavaScript and call it a wrap for this week.

Suppose that we want to use all of the above, and then change the first bolded text to blue if you move the mouse across. For that, we can change the color of the style when the onmouseover event occurs like this:

```
<b class="new_color" onmouseover="style.color='blue' ">bold</b>
```

The end result will still be what is seen in Figure 2 above. However, when you move the mouse over the first bolded text, it turns blue, as seen in Figure 3. This text will remain blue until you refresh the page.

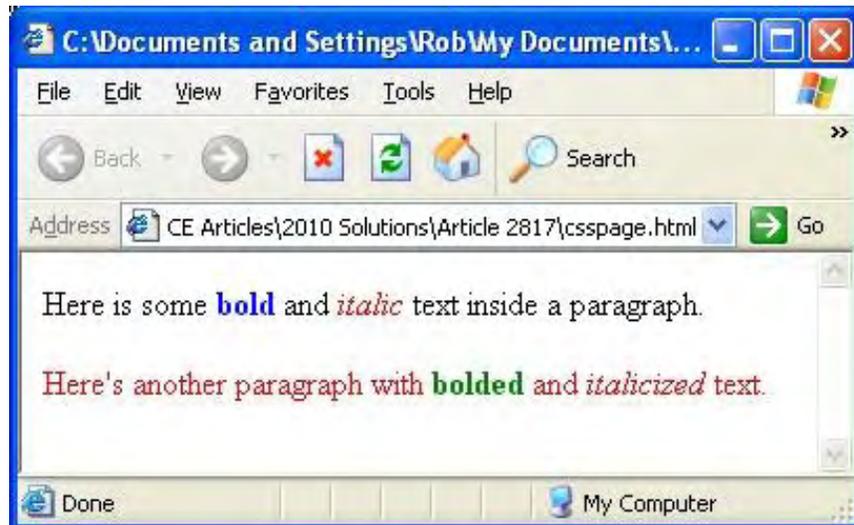


Figure 3. Changing color with onmouseover.

The entire HTML now looks like this:

```
<html>
<head>
<style>
.new_color
{
  color: red;
}
b
{
  color: green;
}
</style>
</head>
<body>
<p>Here is some <b class="new_color" onmouseover="style.color='blue' ">bold</
b> and <i class="new_color">italic</i> text inside a paragraph.</p>
<p class="new_color">Here's another paragraph with <b>bolded</b> and <i>italicized</
i> text.</p>
</body>
</html>
```

For more information about style sheets, there are plenty of tutorials on the Internet. However, at some point I would recommend going to the source of the definition: the World Wide Web Consortium, aka w3c. Their information and references are located at www.w3.org/Style and www.w3.org/Style/CSS/learning.

Although they often do not have the best tutorials, you're sure to get the most accurate information there.

Next week we'll explore a little bit about using CSS and JavaScript to have fun with animating an image.

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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Worldwide News & Product Reviews

“The latest in tech news and hot product reviews.” by Charles Carr



Business Phones Meet the Needs of the Many—A look at virtual phone services for small business; Logitech MetroFi 220vi Noise-Isolating Earphones—They offer a smooth, powerful sound and great design; "Listen Different" Revisited—Performance flaws and customer-service issues force another, less-favorable look at two audio products.

Business Phones Meet the Needs of the Many

Kevin Baker, product marketing manager for Protus (www.protus.com), makes the pitch why a virtual phone service—such as his company is offering, my1voice—is a better choice than a traditional phone service:

Although it may seem like we should have Aristotle or at least Goethe to thank for the quote "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one," in fact it's not any of the great philosophers. It's really *Star Trek's* Mr. Spock, who first said it in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*.

While that may take a little of the luster off the quote for some, as it turns out that simple movie line actually applies to many situations in life—including how small business owners manage their business calls. Because what works well for an individual user often doesn't work as well for the multiple users involved in a business.

As individuals, we all have multiple phone numbers these days—work, home, mobile, sometimes even our vehicles have their own numbers. Yet it seems like the more ways we have to be called, the more difficult it is to reach us.

That's what makes those free "consolidate all your phones under one number" consumer services look so attractive. Having a single number that rings all your phones at once makes so much more sense. Callers don't have to try to figure out where you are, or worry about your schedule. They just call the number and the technology takes care of the rest.

Again, that's perfect for the one. Where it falls apart, however, is when you try to apply that same free technology to the few, or the many—i.e., a small business. At that point, you get what you pay for.

Let's say you're a business owner, and you have two additional employees. You each get a number from one of those services with the idea that each employee can now be reached anywhere. It still means customers, prospects, business partners, etc. have a choice of three mutually exclusive numbers to call. If you add another person later, that's one more number in the mix. And if the caller knows only one of those numbers already, there's no way for him/her to discover what the others are. As Mr. Spock would say, it's not logical.

Instead, the better choice is a virtual phone service for small businesses. A virtual phone service allows you to unite all of your employees under a single phone number using a virtual receptionist (or do you say auto attendant?) and create individual extensions for each user—even if those users are spread all across North America. The individual extensions can then be set to ring all of the users' different phones one at a time or all at once, providing the same level of "reach-ability" as those services for individuals.

The value of a virtual phone service for small business goes well beyond "one number to call" convenience, however. It also adds functionality that improves the business on several levels.

One is creating a more professional image. When customers, prospects, etc. call the virtual receptionist, they are met with a professional greeting, just like they would receive if they called a large corporation. The virtual receptionist also includes a dial-by-name directory, helping callers find the right person even if they're not sure who the right person is.

Having multiple extensions under one number makes it possible for employees to transfer or forward an outside call from one employee to another, if needed. That's something you can't do with the consumer services.

A virtual phone service even helps with marketing the business. You can advertise a special offer, and have customers call a specific extension to learn more. This technique not only promotes the offer—it allows you to determine which advertising medium is most effective so you know where to concentrate future marketing efforts.

What if you're an entrepreneur who doesn't have any other employees? Wouldn't the consumer-level service work then? Yes—providing you always plan to be a one-person shop.

If you hope to add employees in the future, though, it's not such a good idea because the phone number you'll receive isn't portable. In other words, you'll spend a lot of time and effort promoting one number, then will have to retrain customers, business partners, etc. when it's time to move to a more business-oriented phone service. It would be the equivalent of building a Web site with a specific address, spending a lot of money driving traffic to it, then changing that address down the road. It can be done, but not without a lot of pain.

Consumer phone services are fine for helping individuals manage their different phone numbers. But they're not very good for business users. To address the needs of the many, or even the few, opt instead for a virtual phone service for small business. It may not help you live longer, but it will definitely help you prosper.

Logitech MetroFi 220vi Noise-Isolating Earphones

The MetroFi 220vi earphones (www.ultimateears.com/_ultimateears/store/products/metrofi220vi.php) (\$89 list) give you smooth, powerful sound and great design all in the same package. The MetroFi 220vi has a titanium-coated speaker for what the company calls "a crisp sound signature. You get a fuller mix with more detail in the higher ranges so you can hear deep bass and clear treble."

There's also built-in noise isolation so you can stay tuned into what's going on around you even while you're rocking out, thanks to 16 dB of noise isolation.





Frankly, I don't know all that much about titanium this or dB that, but I do know that these earphones look, feel and sound great. One thing I really like is that they have a design that keeps them from sticking too far out of your ear. I always worry someone will bump my ear and push the earphone into it. Very painful. These sit almost flush inside. They also give you several ear-cushions of different sizes, so you can be sure one of them will fit well enough to make Goldilocks happy. Also, you can order replacements from the Web site (above).

If you've got an iPhone, a BlackBerry or any other compatible device with a 3.5 mm jack, you're all set to make use of the MetroFi 220vi's built-in high-performance microphone to switch between making calls and enjoying music and video. And you can answer or finish a call just by pushing a button.

Finally, they seem really well-made and the cable seems connected at both ends in a way that looks like it can take a lot of punishment. That's always where my other earphones have gone bad—right where the cable goes into the earphone or where it goes into the jack that plugs into my MP3 player.

By the way, you also get a nice little carrying case, and the earphones are color-coded so you know which ear is which. You also get a one-year limited warranty.



Review contributed by Janet Meesan

"Listen Different" Revisited

Our January 2010 reviews of Sleek Audio's SA1 earphones and W-1 Audio Wireless product regrettably were a bit premature. We gave both products favorable reviews and four-globe ratings based upon considerable testing, but now must revise those ratings due to 1) a performance flaw that became more serious during extended usage, and 2) customer service's handling of this issue.

The performance flaw was noted in our W-1 review as follows. "The only condition under which I experienced a momentary (but repeatable) interruption [of audio] was when I tilted my head toward the floor while listening at a distance (20–30 feet) from the transmitter." During extended usage of the SA1 earphones and W-1 Audio Wireless, interruptions of audio repeatedly occurred while listening at a distance of less than five feet from the transmitter, and when I turned my head left or right, up or down. The interruptions also occurred occasionally while I walked. The only condition under which no audio interruptions occurred was when I kept my head level and still.

This problem was specific to the SA1 driver connected to the W-1's right cable; I heard audio interruptions only in my right ear under the above conditions. After swapping the drivers so that the problem one was connected to the W-1's left cable and good one to the right cable, I then heard audio interruptions only in my left ear. After swapping the drivers back to their original sides, I heard audio interruptions only in my right ear.

I sent a message to Sleek Audio's customer service and was directed to request a return merchandise authorization (RMA) number by sending a message to a different employee at a different e-mail address. After doing so and receiving the RMA number, I dispatched the problem driver and subsequently received a replacement. The replacement driver exhibited the exact same symptoms under the exact same conditions.

To test whether the problem was specific to how I used the product, I turned it over to my wife. She found the interruptions to be so obnoxious that she refused to continue using it.

Another pair of messages to Sleek Audio's customer service, and the RMA person produced another replacement driver. It also exhibited the exact same symptoms under the exact same conditions.

My next message to customer service reiterated questions I had asked previously without getting any answers. Was I using the product improperly? What could be done to prevent needing to return yet another replacement unit?

The reply instructed me to "Open and close your mouth while inserting [the drivers] while tugging on the top of the ear." Although I have never heard of such a method nor needed to insert other brands' earphones this way, I followed these instructions about half a dozen times and got the exact same symptoms under the above conditions. Additionally, with the problem driver connected to the W-1's right cable, I inserted that driver into my left ear and the good driver into my right ear. I heard repeated audio interruptions in my left ear only.

I reported my findings to customer service, and the response again referred me to the RMA person. This time, however, I did not receive a reply. I followed up, and then was informed that the RMA person had decided against issuing me a third RMA number.

I then sent another message to customer service, and subsequently received a reply from my original contact person in Marketing. He directed me to return the problem unit so that the company's lab could investigate. I wonder what happened to the first two problem units I returned.

In summary, my experience with Sleek Audio's SA1 earphones and W-1 Wireless Audio product has been seriously tarnished by repeated, reproducible interruptions in audio. These interruptions are sufficiently frequent that they almost certainly will spoil the user's music-listening enjoyment. While it is reassuring that customer service stands by the conditions of the company's warranty, the time and hassle involved in the RMA process further tarnishes the user's experience. If readers decide to give this product a shot, I can only hope that their experience is more satisfying than mine.

Reviewed by Barry Fass-Holmes

In addition to being an editor and columnist for *ComputerEdge* 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.

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Spam of the Week

Spam of the Week: Twitter Spam

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

Beware of fake Twitter e-mails designed to lure you to an unsafe site.

This message sure looks like it's really from Twitter (see Figure 1). It even has the Twitter logo. The "Twitter Support" link in the lower right part of the e-mail is real. The problem is that when you hover over the primary link, it shows a redirected URL.

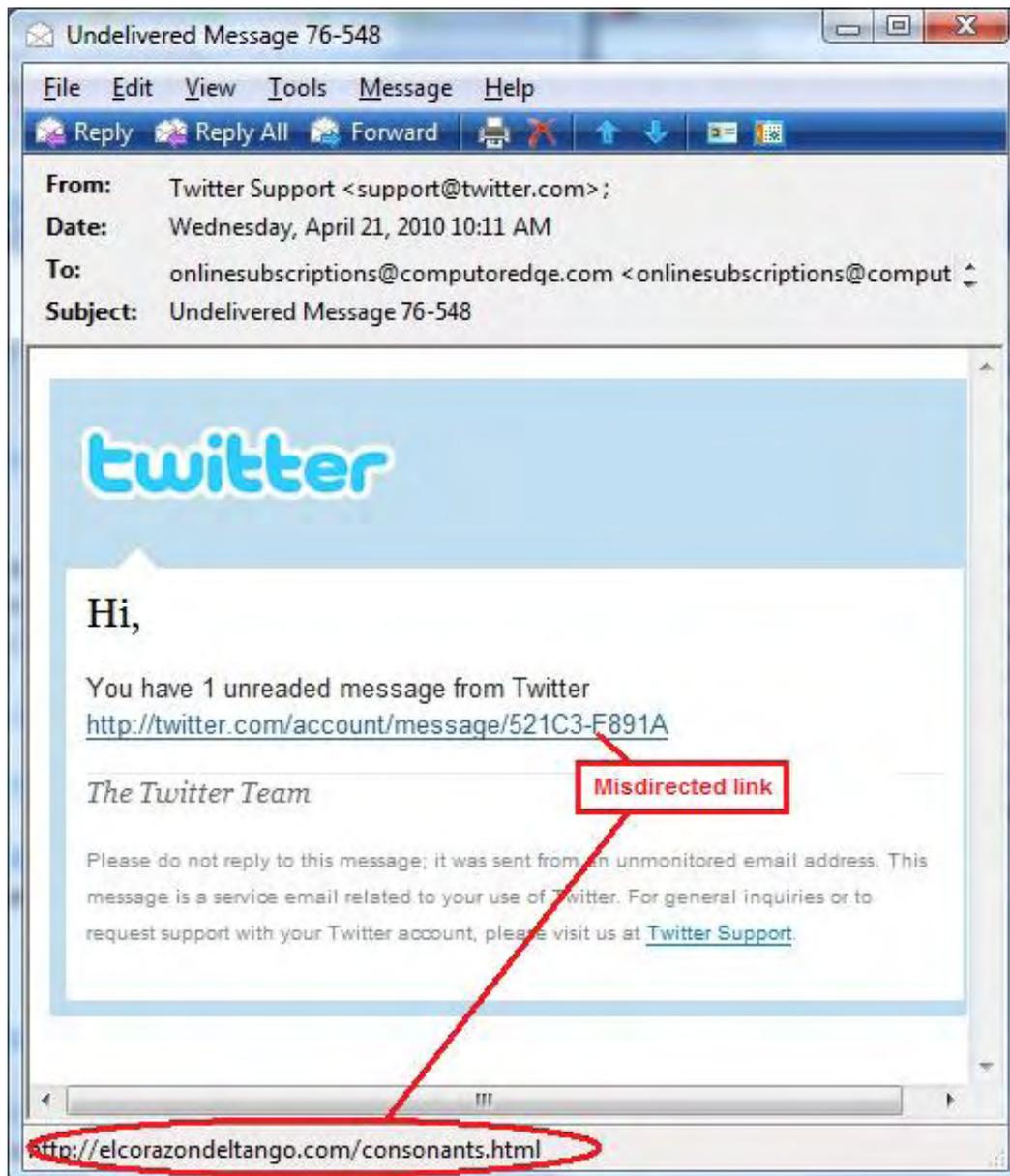


Figure 1. Fake spam that appears to be from Twitter.

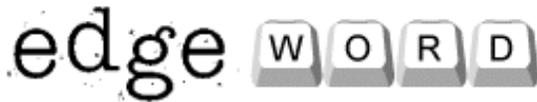
If you have any questions about your Twitter account, go directly to *twitter.com*. As for this type of e-mail, just delete it. We weren't concerned about our Twitter account because we're already bored with it.

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

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

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EdgeWord: To iPad or Not to iPad



“The iPad may present a lose-lose scenario.” by Jack Dunning

Either the iPad is the best thing since sliced bread—at least for Jack’s personal entertainment—or it is overrated and he’ll get bored with it.

Last week I was walking by an Apple store, and I noticed that there were a multitude of iPads available for testing. They were tethered to tables with almost all of the flat devices in active use. The entrance to the store was well guarded by an employee. There was a great deal of enthusiasm in the air. I did manage to find an open tablet that someone had just laid down. This was my first time touching the computer.

The iPad screen was open to a Web browser. I immediately touched the address line and the keyboard popped up. I typed in "www.computoredge.com," and this site quickly loaded. I was fascinated with the reorientation of the screen every time I rotated it. (I had seen this feature in commercials for the iPhone and iPad, but had never done it myself. I was like a kitten with a ball of string.)

I wanted to close the browser to try something different, but I couldn't find a close button on the screen. I turned the display a few more times while searching. I finally noticed the sole manual button on the front of the panel. I figured it was probably the power button, so I pressed it. The home screen, or desktop, then appeared. The screen was loaded with a number of other applications. I didn't have time to do much more—I had to move on—but I do admit that the iPad was very intuitive to use. (The television commercials helped quite a bit.) Do I want one? You bet I do!

There is only one problem with owning an iPad. It's not the cost. It is certainly affordable at its current price level. It's not a lack of quality. With the iPad in my hands, it gave off a sense of technically superior design—plus I've read enough about it to know that it has reviewed well. It's not that I would have no use for an iPad. I would probably have too many uses. That's the problem!

I could see myself spending hours on end playing with the iPad. I would keep it with me all of the time—in front of the TV to look up where I've seen some actor or actress before—or to find the source of a song. I would keep it handy at the breakfast table while cheating on crossword puzzles. I would probably become absorbed in a particular iPad app that would literally eat up my available (and unavailable) time. This is what worries me the most.

I would also love to own an Xbox—but I won't. I can't afford the time that computer games consume. When my oldest was little, we played a couple of computer games together. He had not yet developed the computer confidence to play the games on his own. (He was pretty small.) Even though they were the crude games of more than two decades ago, I was fascinated by them. I realized that I could spend an unlimited amount of time pursuing virtual goals—to the detriment of everything else in my life. I gave up computer games.

I view the iPad the same way. It may be too good for me. If I owned one, I may be too fascinated with it. I don't feel that I could afford the time to allow myself to play with an iPad. It would not be an immediate replacement for the other computers in my work, yet it could draw me away from them when I needed to be productive. At least I hope that it would be that way.

If the iPad is not that all-consuming type of device, then it's not all that it's cracked up to be. After a relatively short period of time, with its newness wearing off, the tablet would go into a drawer with my other unsuccessful personal experiments (handheld computers, electronic organizers, my HP super calculator). The iPad is far too nice a device to deserve that fate.

I'm in a no-win situation. Either the iPad is the best thing since sliced bread—at least for my personal entertainment—or it is overrated and I will get bored with it. In the first case, I risk losing control over my time (and relationships). In the second, I waste my money.

If someone forced an iPad on me, I wouldn't turn it down. Who knows? In a few months I might buy one. (I can't stop looking.) If a time comes when I own an Apple tablet computer, then I guess I'll just have to learn to deal with it.

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

"Screenshot Software: We Missed a Few," "Streaming Video Problem Follow-Up,"
"Windows 7 Annoyances"

Screenshot Software: We Missed a Few

[Regarding Pete Choppin's March 26 article, "Screenshot Software: A Comparison Review":]

I read Pete Choppin's interesting article on screenshot software, and saw some that I might like to try—considering the pros and cons.

I was looking to see if he had included the free screen-capture utility I use, which I am quite satisfied with—he didn't. It's called Printscreen by Gadwin Systems (www.gadwin.com). (They also offer other interesting utilities.)

Printscreen is a full-blown utility that has a slew of preferences and options to choose from. Tab headings include General Preferences, Source Options, Destination Options and Image Options.

One feature that I really like about Gadwin Printscreen is that it "freezes" the screen when activated, making it possible to stop and capture moving images, like a single picture from a video, or one that is part of a moving slide show. It also lifts the image off of the screen, and does not copy the whole underlying video as an object, which then continues to run, as some screen-capture utilities do that I have tried.

Printscreen is activated by selectable hot keys, and gives you the option of finely arranging edges before pressing Enter. This is done by viewing the cursor through a small draggable and resizable magnifying screen, which allows you to drag-define image borders in terms of exact pixel rows and columns.

Then, upon executing the Enter key, Printscreen: 1) copies the desired image to the clipboard, 2) deposits it into a preselected subdirectory, and 3) also copies it into your favorite graphics editor in lossless "bmp" format, where you can further work with it, if desired. (These are all selectable options.)

Lastly, with Printscreen, you are not locked in. Meaning, you can cancel the capture process by the escape key, something I use quite often.

What can I say? I like it. Give it a try; you might like it too. The one thing I wish Printscreen did is define angular borders, not just squares and rectangles, but that can be done in your graphics editor.

-Ron Myers, San Diego, CA

Faststone Capture resizes to any size you want including preset standard sizes 640x480, 800x600, etc. I would think at that point resizing to any percentage would be quite easy.

-Steve, Escondido, CA

You missed what I consider the best and easiest screen-capture program around—AnalogX Capture. Check it out at AnalogX (www.analogx.com/contents/download/System/capture/Freeware.htm). It's simple to use, always ready to be used with a simple left click, and it's free. Below is [a quote] from the AnalogX Web site.

"Capture is a quick-and-easy screen capture utility for Windows (and NT), which allows you to capture the entire screen, at any color depth and resolution, and save it into a Bitmap file for editing. If you are interested in only capturing one window, you can select to capture the active application window only, to save time editing screen shots! Capture runs on the Windows Tray (the lower right corner), and takes a screen capture every time you left click on the picture of a camera (please cut me some slack on the icon, I'm a musician, not an

artist and it was late), and a bitmap will be saved into the directory Capture is running from. You can take as many captures as you want, limited only by your imagination, and hard drive space. To exit Capture, just right click on it, and select Exit; it's just that simple. Capture works on all versions of Windows, from Window 95 to Windows 7 and everything in between (including XP, Vista, Win2k, etc)."

-Bill France, San Diego

Have been using Printkey 2000 V5.05 print-screen utility since 1999. It is freeware. Loads of options. The major bug is when set for multiple prints you must reset to 1, or else when printing through other utilities you will still get many copies.

-William B. Tiep, Toledo, Oh

Streaming Video Problem Follow-Up

[Regarding the March 26 Digital Dave column:]

After I submitted my question about why my browser freezes up when watching *ABC.com's Lost*, I read the fine print on the site's help file and discovered that a minimum 300 Kbps download speed is required. I (being a frugal Scotsman) am only paying \$19.95 for Cox low-speed Internet service, which is only about 78 Kbps. Mystery solved.

Thanks for your answer anyway Dave.

-Buck F., San Diego

[Regarding Buck's problems streaming video from Cox:] Check again, Buck. I, too, pay for the lowest speed of connectivity that Cox offers, and it's 786 Kbps, not just 78. I know the numbers can be confusing. So I don't think that's your issue. (Sorry that I can't help otherwise. Also, check your Cox bill. It probably has increased to \$21.95/month, like mine and everyone else's.) But I've been *quite* happy with this bargain/speed for years!

-Brian, San Diego, CA

Cycle your cable modem power; remove/replace cat5 cable; cycle PC power. If you have a router between the modem and PC, cycle power on it too! I had that problem and it turned out to be a bad cat5 cable!

-Walter, San Diego, CA

Windows 7 Annoyances

[Regarding the April 2 Windows Tips and Tricks: Windows 7 HomeGroup column:]

In the March 12 issue, I mentioned the possibility of removing "annoyances" like Favorites and Libraries. If you did that then you probably don't wish to clutter up Explorer with HomeGroup. Although there is a simple Registry deletion that has been proposed to remove the Homegroup (social.technet.microsoft.com/Forums/en-US/w7itproui/thread/39ef7e42-bbd4-46d1-a8e7-8ce15f5a2f4a), I was able to accomplish the same thing by setting up my home network as a "work" network. Vista lets you choose between two types of networks (Public and Private), while Windows 7 gives you three choices (Home, Work and Public). I haven't tried it yet with more than one Windows 7 computer, but if it reappears with multiple Windows 7 computers, it's good to know there is a Registry fix.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

I'm not sure that I understand this obsession with removing links (Favorites, Libraries, HomeGroup) from Windows Explorer in Windows 7. This is like saying that you don't want the full functionality of Windows 7 because it annoys you. If you want to remove the Homegroup link, I recommend the second method (make all your networks "Work" networks) suggested by Ron. Messing with the Registry for such a trivial matter doesn't make sense to me.

If you are looking for a Windows Explorer that will take up less space in Windows 7, select "Show all folders" under the Navigation pane in the General tab of the Folder Options window and click Apply (window found with Organize/Folder and search options). Then each time you open Windows Explorer, you can minimize the

Desktop link, leaving only two links showing: Favorites and Desktop.

-Jack Dunning, ComputerEdge

The reason for all the Google hits on "get rid of" is simply meaningful customization. In Windows 98 it was easy to find any file or folder simply by looking under the C: drive folder list in Explorer or making your own shortcut to it. No need for the limited views, wasteful duplication, and new rules imposed by User folders, Favorites, Homegroup and Libraries.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

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

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