

ComputerEdge™ Online — 08/13/10



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Digital Dave

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

A reader's laptop lid is broken and won't open; a reader needs a cheap way to create a transparent background for a PNG image; a reader seeks a way to boost signal strength for his Verizon broadband USB connection device.

Dear Digital Dave,

I have a Dell M90 laptop. I closed the lid this afternoon and it clicked (like it always does). Well, when I went to open it (using the button that slides to the right to open the lid), it would not open. It felt like the lid was locked or something. Is that possible? Or is the lid broken?

I was able to open the lid by using two small screwdrivers to push the two clips to the right. However, I am afraid to close the lid again in fear it might not open again.

Any suggestions?

*Sincerely,
Angry Dell User*

*Paul
CT*

Dear Paul,

The display latch on your laptop is not locked—it is broken. While the spring that hold the clips in place seems to be pulling the clips into place when it is closed, somehow the slide button is no longer attached for moving the clips aside when opening. I don't know exactly how the slide button is attached, but the Dell support documents (support.dell.com/support/edocs/systems/wsM90/en/sm/index.htm) may help (see display).

If you are not comfortable with taking your laptop apart, then you should take it to a computer repair service. Or, as an alternative, you can carry the two small screwdrivers with you for opening the display—although you may have trouble getting them onto a plane. You might also be able to use credit cards to pop open the display.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

What's a cheap way to create a transparent background for a PNG image? Can it be done with MS Paint, or a free image editor? The image will be used on my Web site.

John Piesik
Oceanside, CA

Dear John,

It depends upon what you're trying to do. If you are setting a single color to transparent for the purpose of setting a floating image with invisible surround over other images or text, then you can do it in IrfanView (www.irfanview.com/) as well as other image software. The PNG standard supports a transparent color. In IrfanView, when you save a PNG you can choose which color will be interpreted as transparent. Then, when you open the PNG (say, in a Web page), that color won't show up and you will see right through it.

While MS Paint will allow you to make a color transparent while placing a new graphic into an image, it does not appear to support saving a transparent color.

If you are looking to increase the transparency (decrease the opacity) of the entire image to use the image as a Web page background, then there are other approaches.

A transparent image is created by lowering the opacity of the colors in the graphic file. As the opacity is lowered it is possible to better see the images and text underneath—although those images will continue to be obscured to some extent. Most capable graphics and drawing programs (e.g., Photoshop, OpenOffice.org Draw (why.openoffice.org/why_great.html)) will do this; however, the basic paint programs offered with Windows will not. The purpose of transparency is to see through the image, not make the image a background behind the other text, photos and drawings. (You can use a transparent image for a faded background, but it isn't necessary.)

Drawing programs place images and text as objects in layers. Whatever is on top will be fully exposed while the lower layers will be covered by other images. In those programs, it is possible to move the objects to different layers (top, bottom, etc.). Increasing the transparency of the upper-layer images will allow the lower images to show through. In paint programs, everything is combined into one image—there are no layers.

A Web page has some similarity to a drawing program in that you can place a background behind all the text and other graphics. It may be useful to implement a transparent background since it is less likely to interfere with reading text and viewing images on top; however, you can get the same result by choosing complementary backgrounds that will not distract, or by lightening the image by increasing the brightness with a program such as IrfanView (www.irfanview.com/), the freeware graphics viewer and editor. See Figure 1.

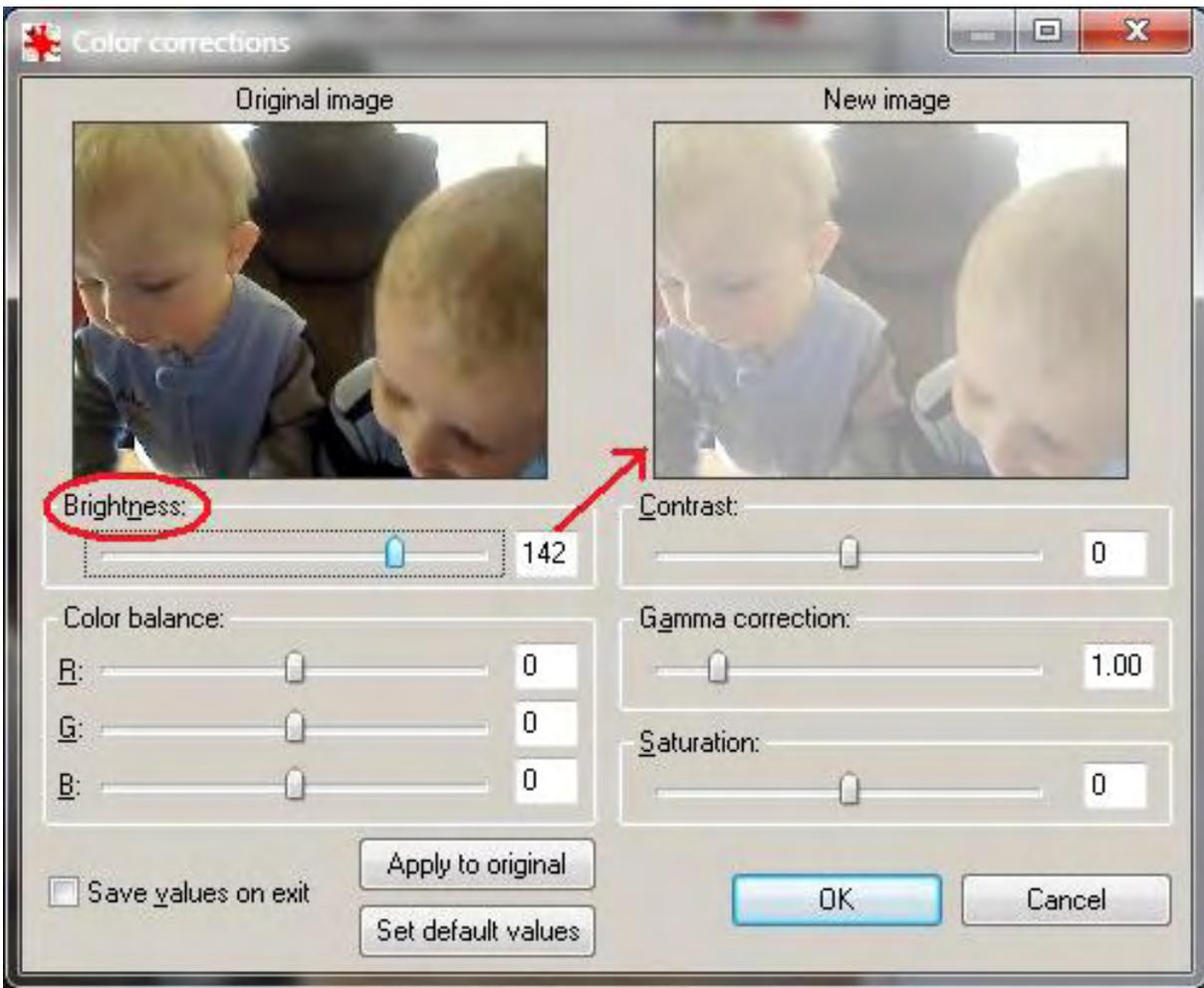


Figure 1. The image becomes more faded as the brightness is increased in IrfanView.

To add a background image to a Web page, you can set the HTML style for the <body> tag with the following parameter:

```
body {background-image:url('mybackground.gif');}
```

You can then test various images to see how they will look with your main text and images. The background should not interfere or distract from the rest of the page.

You can also use the background parameter within specific HTML objects:

```
<table background="http://www.mysite.com/images/mybackground.gif" >
.
.
.
</table>
```

There are parameters for setting the opacity of images in the HTML Web page language; however, they are not consistent across all browsers, which means it won't work for everyone using your Web page.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have a Verizon broadband (UM175) USB connection device. What is the longest length of USB cable I could hook to it and still have it function correctly and at good signal strength? Is there some kind of repeater I can put near the window? The issue is that the computer is in the basement and not near a window (about 25 feet away) and I get low signal strength, but it gets better as I move the UM175 closer to the window. It's really not an option to move the computer. Thanks for your time.

*Dave Vail
King George, VA*

Dear Dave,

The technical limit for the USB 2.0 cable length is five meters (about 16 feet), which wouldn't quite reach your window. (The distance is three meters for USB 1.0.) You could add a USB hub to extend the distance, but there is a better way to approach the problem.

Rather than take your broadband modem to the window where the signal is stronger, all you need to do is bring the signal to it with an external antenna and possibly an extension cable. You can get an external antenna for your UM175 (3gstore.com/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=126), which will both give you better reception and allow you to place it in a better location. Just plug it into your external antenna port (see Figure 2). To reach the proximity of the window you will most likely need an extension cable for the antenna, (3gstore.com/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=99) since most will come only with 10 feet of cable.



Figure 2. The external antenna connection on the UM175 wireless modem.

You could also get a booster or amplifier for your modem, but in your situation, you will most likely get the best result from the external antenna. Those devices work best in situations where the signal is weak based upon tower location and power rather than interference caused by your building structure.

Digital Dave

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Computer Printer Update

“The latest offerings for printing photos and documents.” by Andrea Dunning

Whatever your needs, printer companies keep releasing new and different printers and ink cartridges in an effort to fulfill your exact requirements better than the competition.

Finding the right printer is a matter of finding the sweet spot within the ranges of prices and features available. If you print photos, photo quality is important. If you print a lot, speed and ink refill costs may be your main concerns. If you just need to print out the occasional page of driving directions, you're probably focused on printer cost. Whatever your needs, printer companies keep releasing new and different products in an effort to fulfill your exact requirements better than the competition.

There are a few trends guiding the industry as a whole. Most printers now available in the over-\$100 category come with built-in wireless connectivity. This is a particularly nice feature in a multi-computer household, as previously the printer would need to be plugged into an active networked computer in order for other computers on the network to be able to access it. With a wireless model, all of the computers within a wireless network can print to the printer, regardless of whether or not the other computers are active. Some can even print from wireless devices, such as iPhones. This feature seems a little superfluous, but I'm sure it's very exciting for those people who insist on doing everything via their iPhones. LCD screens are also becoming more common on mid-range printers, but this is more of a cool gadget feature than a useful improvement in printer technology. All-in-one models, which copy, scan and usually fax in addition to printing, are displacing single-function models. Kodak doesn't even offer any basic printers—its entire line is all-in-ones.

All-in-one printers are quite the boon in terms of cost and efficiency. Rather than having to buy (and find space for) a separate printer, scanner, copier and fax machine, you just pay a little more for the printer and the other features are part of the bundle. I bank online, so I've got to have a scanner in order to be able to deposit checks. Some models

have a document feeder, which is nice if you do a lot of scanning or copying, but also makes the machine bulkier. Not all all-in-one printers have fax machines, and not all all-in-one printers with fax machines allow you to do so directly from your computer, so make sure to do your homework if you're the sort of person who might ever use the fax feature.

HP is the biggest name in printers and has a wide variety of features and prices. HP's D1660 printer is the cheapest printer on the market, retailing for \$30. HP can sell it so cheaply because it is just a printer, with no frills of any sort. No wireless capability, no memory card support, and it doesn't even come with a USB cable. What it does do, printing, it does to the satisfaction of reviewers.

Lexmark Pinnacle Pro901
Part # 90T9105
JUST ANNOUNCED

World's Lowest Black Ink Cost. Print 510 pages with a \$4.99 cartridge.
Go way beyond printing with 4.3" color LCD touch screen, fax and 1-touch apps. Rest easy with a 5 year warranty, and increase efficiency with a 50 page automatic document feeder.

\$199⁹⁹ ~~\$299⁹⁹~~
You Save \$100.00!
In Stock.

Figure 1. Lexmark has the cheapest ink refills, but not on its cheapest model.

Apparently the griping from consumers each time they have to purchase a printer cartridge has finally spurred development of print cartridges that are still profitable when sold for less money. Lexmark has the cheapest refills at \$5 for black ink for the Pro901 and Pro905, but the S305, its least expensive model, requires a more expensive cartridge. The S305 does have the distinction of being the fastest printer in the under-\$100 category (reviews.cnet.com/multifunction-devices/lexmark-impact-s305/4505-3181_7-33770758.html?tag=contentMain;contentBody;1r#reviewPage1).

<p>Ink Combo Pack, 10B + 10C</p>  <p>\$27.98</p>	<p>Color Ink Cartridge, 10C</p>  <p>\$17.99</p>	<p>Black Ink Cartridge, 10XL</p>  <p>\$16.99</p>	<p>Black Ink Cartridge, 10B</p>  <p>\$9.99</p>
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Figure 2. All Kodak printers use the same ink cartridges.

Kodak, a relative newcomer to the home/office printer field, is making a grab for market share with a new campaign focused on paying less for refill ink cartridges. Kodak has also simplified cartridge replacement, using the same type for all its printers. Reviews of the cheaper printer models (www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=node%3D172635&field-keywords=kodak&x=21&y=18&fsc=-1

http://reviews.cnet.com/1770-5_7-0.html?query=kodak+printers&tag=srch) on Amazon and CNET are somewhat negative, but that is also the case for the cheaper models from most of the other manufacturers.

Most printer manufacturers make their money on the refills, but Kodak and Lexmark are trying to tap in to the more budget-conscious segment of the market. By only offering cheap ink on its midrange models, Lexmark is clearly trying to make their money on the printer itself. Kodak, which offers less expensive ink on all its printers, seems to be shooting for slim profits and an increase in market share.

Every year brings a new iteration of printers, and with them a few new features. Wireless is a nice feature for a printer, and I know I'd be loathe to give up my all-in-one for a single-function printer. LCD screens are shiny and pretty, but not a good reason to buy a particular printer in and of itself. Being able to connect directly to your wireless devices is another feature that would be classified as nice, but gimmicky. How often are you going to be printing directly from your iPhone when you aren't also within reach of your computer?

In the end, budget is the major concern for most buyers of home/office inkjet printers. When shopping for a new printer, it comes down to a debate between initial cost and repeat cost. Kodak printers retail for \$70 and up, whereas single-function HP printers start at \$30. So, if you only want to print periodically and don't need to be able to scan or copy, it may still be worth it to go with HP. Otherwise, it seems that Kodak is really putting the screws to the competition. Those ink cartridge replacements really do add up!

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.

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Who Really Needs a Printer?

“Where does the evolution of the paperless society stand?” by Jack Dunning

Many people get by fine without a printer, and new technologies are cropping up that may make old-fashioned paper printouts a thing of the past.

Occasionally I glance over at the box that sits near my computer off to the side. The vast majority of time, that's what my printer does—it just sits there doing nothing. I really wish that I didn't need it at all. I don't use the machine very much, but there are times when the alternatives are few. I know other people who seem to get along fine without a printer.

My son, who lives a day's drive away, stopped using his printer when the ink dried up and he didn't feel motivated to spend the money for more ink. He certainly doesn't seem to miss it much. When he needs to print something, which isn't often, he can do it at a library or local copy place for pennies. He doesn't print photos because experience has taught him that it's a complete waste of time and costs too much to do it himself. It's cheaper to send the images over the Internet to Costco (nine cents a copy when they issue a coupon—otherwise 13 cents) or upload them to one of the numerous online services to get your prints on photo paper mailed to you. Not only is it economical, but he doesn't squander the immense time involved in trying to print your own photos at home. (Enough time is spent cropping and removing red-eye.)



Jim has developed a new technique for avoiding the high cost of computer printer ink.

My son is not the only one who is doing without their printer. My daughter, who lives only a half mile away, has yet to set up her printer. She's been there a year, but she needs to print something so rarely that she uses mine when something absolutely must be on paper. I've now set her up on the Virtual Private Network (VPN) so that she can print to my printer without even leaving her home. Of course, there remains the issue of picking up the hard copy. I don't see her setting up her printer anytime soon.

It's not good for a printer to sit without being used. The ink tends to dry up and clog the print heads. Yet, when it is rarely ever used, it's easy to forget to occasionally print even a test page.

The current process of signing documents by printing a file or fax, applying your legal signature, scanning the document, and e-mailing it back to the proper people is a kludge. Although much faster than mailing documents back-and-forth, it's a messy process and often, after a few iterations, leaves the documents unreadable. There are devices for applying electronic signatures, but not many people have those at home. The truth is that you could digitize a copy of your signature and apply it to documents with a paint program and it would be just as readily accepted. For that matter, anyone could do that with your signature, yet this system of printing, signing and scanning is used—and accepted—every day.

The goal needs to be the elimination of paper. It seems almost tragic to produce everything electronically, then, at the last second, reduce it to paper. The newly printed copy will soon most likely be tossed into the trash can (or run through a shredder for security). But there is hope.

We commonly see and use the electronic signature pads at the supermarket when paying by credit card. These types of pads and software are available for computers, but it would impractical to buy one for the occasional signature events.

There are online signature services such as DocuSign (www.docuSign.com) that will allow documents to be sent with special signature boxes embedded. When the document is received via e-mail, the recipient can sign by selecting from a number of different signature types. (There is an online demo available to evaluate the process.) The only thing that bothered me was the fact that none of the signatures looked like my readable scrawl. Still this seemed better than the printing, sign, scan, send routine.

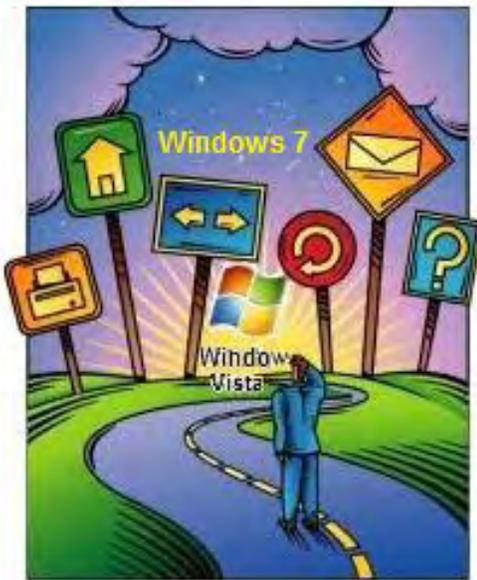
The most promising future for applying a digital hand signature is the touchscreen. There are apps for the iPhone and iPad for adding your mark to digital documents. The wide adoption of the touchscreen on computers would most likely be a bad omen for legal documents on paper, as long as there is a way to prove who placed the signature. (Possibly the computer would snap your picture while you sign and attach it to the document. That would be cool. Be sure to dress appropriately.)

I'm not going to find a way to eliminate the printer in the near term. There are still too many people who think they need to print their work on paper before they edit it. Of course, people do need to make an occasional copy of a recipe with the scanner/printer or print a reference piece from the Web.

Perhaps tablet computers will be better suited for the kitchen so we won't need a paper copy of our favorite Web barbecue sauce (www.amazingribs.com/recipes/BBQ_sauces/kansas_city_classic_BBQ_sauce.htm). I do hold out hope that eventually I won't need to waste space on a desk or table for a printer that I will only occasionally use. But for now, I still need my printer.

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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Windows Tips and Tricks

Windows Tips and Tricks

“Energy Analysis in Windows 7” by Jack Dunning

The Windows 7 Power Efficiency Diagnosis Report can provide useful information for saving power and battery operation time, and may help you design a better power usage scheme for your computer.

In Windows there is a program called `powercfg.exe`, which controls the power settings for a computer. It is accessed through the Command Prompt window. It's little known because there are user-friendly tools in Windows that do the same thing, normally making its use unnecessary. It is available in Windows XP and Windows Vista; however Windows 7 has added a new switch that could be a great help for anyone who is trying to extend the battery operating time of a laptop computer. This new feature will actually evaluate the energy usage of your computer and give a detailed report of useful information.

If you are a Windows XP or Vista user, even though you don't have the energy diagnosis feature, you may be curious about the `powercfg.exe` program. To get more information, open the Command Prompt located in All Programs/ Accessories. (In Windows Vista and Windows 7, you can type "cmd" in the search field in the Start Menu and the same program will appear in the Programs list.) To see the features of the command, at the Command Prompt type "`powercfg /?`" (without the quotation marks) then press the Enter key. You will be provided with a comprehensive list (see Figure 1).

```

Administrator: C:\Windows\System32\cmd.exe
C:\Windows\system32>powercfg /?
POWERCFG <command line options>
Description:
  This command line tool enables users to control the power settings
  on a system.
Parameter List:
  -LIST, -L  Lists all power schemes in the current user's environment.
             Usage: POWERCFG -LIST
  -QUERY, -Q Displays the contents of the specified power scheme.
             Usage: POWERCFG -QUERY <SCHEME_GUID> <SUB_GUID>
             <SCHEME_GUID> <optional> Specifies the GUID of the power scheme
             to display, can be obtained by using powercfg -l.
             <SUB_GUID> <optional> Specifies the GUID of the subgroup
             to display. Requires a SCHEME_GUID to be provided.

  If neither SCHEME_GUID or SUB_GUID are provided, the settings
  of the current user's active power scheme are displayed.
  If SUB_GUID is not specified, all settings in the specified
  power scheme are displayed.
  -CHANGE, -X Modifies a setting value in the current power scheme.
             Usage: POWERCFG -X <SETTING> <VALUE>
             <SETTING> Specifies one of the following options:
             -monitor-timeout-ac <minutes>
             -monitor-timeout-dc <minutes>
             -disk-timeout-ac <minutes>
             -disk-timeout-dc <minutes>
             -standby-timeout-ac <minutes>
             -standby-timeout-dc <minutes>
             -hibernate-timeout-ac <minutes>
             -hibernate-timeout-dc <minutes>

  Example:
    POWERCFG -Change -monitor-timeout-ac 5

  This would set the monitor idle timeout value to 5 minutes
  when on AC power.

```

Figure 1. Listing of help for powercfg.exe in Windows.

The commands are executed by adding the parameter after the primary command. For example, if you enter "powercfg -list" or "powercfg -l" you will get a list of all the power schemes set up on the computer. Some of the features require that the program be run as administrator, as is the case with the energy analysis tool in Windows 7. (Again, the energy analysis is not available in Windows XP or Vista.)

To access the energy analysis feature in Windows 7, run the Command Prompt as administrator by typing "cmd" into the "Search program and files" field of the Start Menu, then right-click the "cmd" link at the top of the menu under Programs and select "Run as administrator" from the list. You will be asked if you want to allow the program to make changes to the computer (click Yes), and the Command Prompt will open. Enter "powercfg -energy" at the prompt. The program will work for 60 seconds, then generate a report. The location of the report file, which is in HTML (Web page language), will be listed on the screen (see Figure 2).

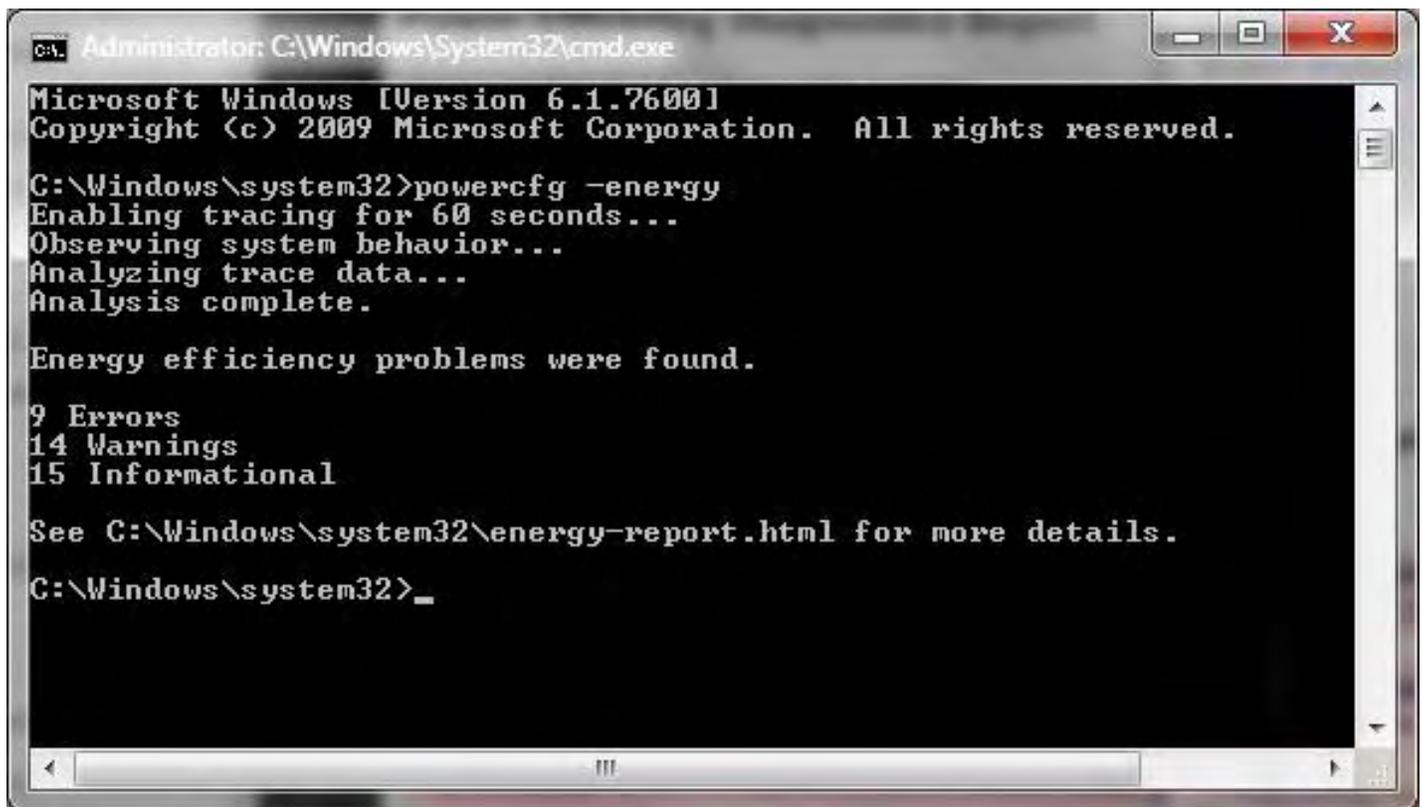
A screenshot of a Windows command prompt window titled "Administrator: C:\Windows\System32\cmd.exe". The window shows the output of the command "powercfg -energy". The text displayed is: "Microsoft Windows [Version 6.1.7600] Copyright (c) 2009 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. C:\Windows\system32>powercfg -energy Enabling tracing for 60 seconds... Observing system behavior... Analyzing trace data... Analysis complete. Energy efficiency problems were found. 9 Errors 14 Warnings 15 Informational See C:\Windows\system32\energy-report.html for more details. C:\Windows\system32>_". The window has a standard Windows XP-style title bar with minimize, maximize, and close buttons.

Figure 2. The Windows powercfg -energy program generates a file with energy analysis output for the computer.

In this case, the report called "energy-report.html" is located in the Windows/system32 folder. If you open Windows Explorer (Microsoft Flag Logo key plus E, or type "windows explorer" in the search field of the Start Menu) and navigate to the folder, opening the file (normally a double-click on the file name) will load your default Web browser displaying the report (see Figure 3).

Power Efficiency Diagnostics Report

Computer Name
 Scan Time **2010-08-11T17:40:10Z**
 Scan Duration **60 seconds**
 System Manufacturer **MICRO-STAR INTERNATIONAL CO.,LTD**
 System Product Name **MS-7529**
 BIOS Date **07/10/2009**
 BIOS Version **V4.1**
 OS Build **7600**
 Platform Role **PlatformRoleDesktop**
 Plugged In **true**
 Process Count **82**
 Thread Count **1011**
 Report GUID

Analysis Results

Errors

Power Policy:Sleep timeout is disabled (Plugged In)
 The computer is not configured to automatically sleep after a period of inactivity.

System Availability Requests:System Required Request
 The service has made a request to prevent the system from automatically entering sleep.
 Requesting Service **RasMan**

System Availability Requests:System Required Request
 The device or driver has made a request to prevent the system from automatically entering sleep.
 Driver Name **\FileSystem\srvtet**

USB Suspend:USB Device not Entering Suspend
 The USB device did not enter the Suspend state. Processor power management may be prevented if a USB device does not enter the Suspend state when not in use.

Device Name	Logitech USB Camera (Pro 9000)
Host Controller ID	PCI\VEN_8086&DEV_27CC
Host Controller Location	PCI bus 0, device 29, function 7
Device ID	USB\VID_046D&PID_0990
Port Path	1

Figure 3. The Windows 7 Power Efficiency Diagnosis Report can provide useful information for saving power and battery operation time.

The displayed image is only a small portion of the entire Power Efficiency Diagnosis Report, which may be quite long. Perusing the information may help you to design a better power usage scheme for your computer.

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

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“Color Laser Printers vs. Inkjet Printers” by Wally Wang

As color laser printers continue dropping in price, they'll start displacing inkjet printers as quickly as inkjet printers pushed aside dot-matrix and daisy-wheel printers. Also, more Apple rumors; Apple continues making inroads into the college market; the Tactile Pro keyboard offers tactile feedback for touch typists; Microsoft Office 2011 for the Mac is coming; and a tip on a faster way to jump from one tab to another.

If you need to print in color, your choices boil down to inkjet printers or color laser printers. The main advantage of inkjet printers is that they're extremely affordable, often under \$50. The huge drawback is that the cost of replacement ink cartridges can get expensive over the lifetime of the printer, especially since ink cartridges rarely last as long as you might expect. For years, inkjet printers were the only affordable color option, but not now.

At one time, color laser printers cost \$5,000 or more. Nowadays, color laser printers are dropping rapidly in price. If you visit a site like TechBargains (www.techbargains.com), you can catch great, limited-time deals on a variety of equipment. Just recently, Samsung was selling its color laser printer CLP-315 for only \$120.

Even though the cost of color printer toner cartridges may be more expensive than inkjet cartridges, toner cartridges tend to print far more pages than ink cartridges, making the average printing cost far lower for a color laser printer than for an inkjet printer. Print sample pages from a color laser printer on display at your favorite office supply store, and you can see that the color printing quality is amazingly sharp and doesn't have the drawback of printing streaks or wet pages like an inkjet printer might.

If you need to print color regularly, a color laser printer is definitely an option to consider. If you only need to print color occasionally, an inkjet printer may still be cheaper initially, but watch out for the cost of replacement cartridges. By the time you buy a handful of replacement ink cartridges, you could probably have bought yourself an inexpensive color laser printer instead.

As color laser printers continue dropping in price, they'll start displacing inkjet printers as quickly as inkjet printers pushed aside dot-matrix and daisy-wheel printers. You may not want to get a color laser printer today, but tomorrow you can expect that a color laser printer will simply be a necessity that every computer will need. Color laser printers are the future, so consider putting your inkjet printer in storage and you might be able to sell it for a bundle of cash as an antique on eBay one day.

More Apple Rumors

It's no secret that Apple is planning to release a new version of the iPod Touch, which will include a front and rear-facing camera to allow iPod Touch users to do videoconferencing through a Wi-Fi connection using FaceTime, which

was first introduced on the iPhone 4. This ability to video conference with an iPod Touch is especially interesting because it points to a future of calling without the extra cost of a cellular telephone company acting as a middleman.

On the iPhone 4, people can call you through FaceTime by using your telephone number. On an iPod Touch, people will be able to call you through FaceTime by using your e-mail address.

Once Apple gets FaceTime working on the iPod Touch, it takes no stretch of the imagination to believe Apple will soon add FaceTime along with a front and rear-facing camera to the next version of the iPad. One iPad rumor claims that Apple will also release a smaller iPad version (seven-inch screen vs. the current 9.7-inch screen).

Numerous rumors keep pointing to an iPhone 4 for Verizon coming by January of next year. If Apple starts releasing the iPhone 4 beyond AT&T, then we can see whether Google's Android is popular just because it gives you the choice of a carrier or because it's better than the iPhone.

Another rumor claims that Apple will re-introduce the MacBook Air. Initially Apple positioned the MacBook Air as an ultra-light, but expensive laptop. Soon Apple will re-position the MacBook Air as an economic laptop that's smaller (11.6-inch screen vs. the current 13.3-inch screen) and less expensive, which might make it perfect for students.

The next version of iLife will come with a massive revision to iWeb, so you'll be able to create HTML 5 code for displaying animation on Web pages without relying on Flash. A new application of iLife will reportedly let you create content for the iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch, such as creating digital books and magazines quickly and easily, turning everyone into a digital publisher.

If you're looking to buy a computer for a college student, wait and see what new products Apple introduces in the next month. With a smaller, cheaper MacBook Air, an iPod Touch capable of video conferencing, a smaller iPad that can also support video conferencing, an iPhone 4 on Verizon or other carriers, and a new version of iLife to run on the Macintosh, college students will have a wider variety of tools they can use to continue ignoring their parents, except when it's time to ask for more money.

Apple Tackles the College Market

According to Fortune (tech.fortune.cnn.com/2010/08/07/big-macs-on-campus/), Apple has recently replaced Dell as the leading computer of choice among college students. The Student Monitor (www.studentmonitor.com/), a research firm that tracks college students' choices, claims that Dell once held 47 percent of the college market in 2005. Five years later in 2010, Apple now holds 47 percent of the market while Dell has dropped to 12 percent.

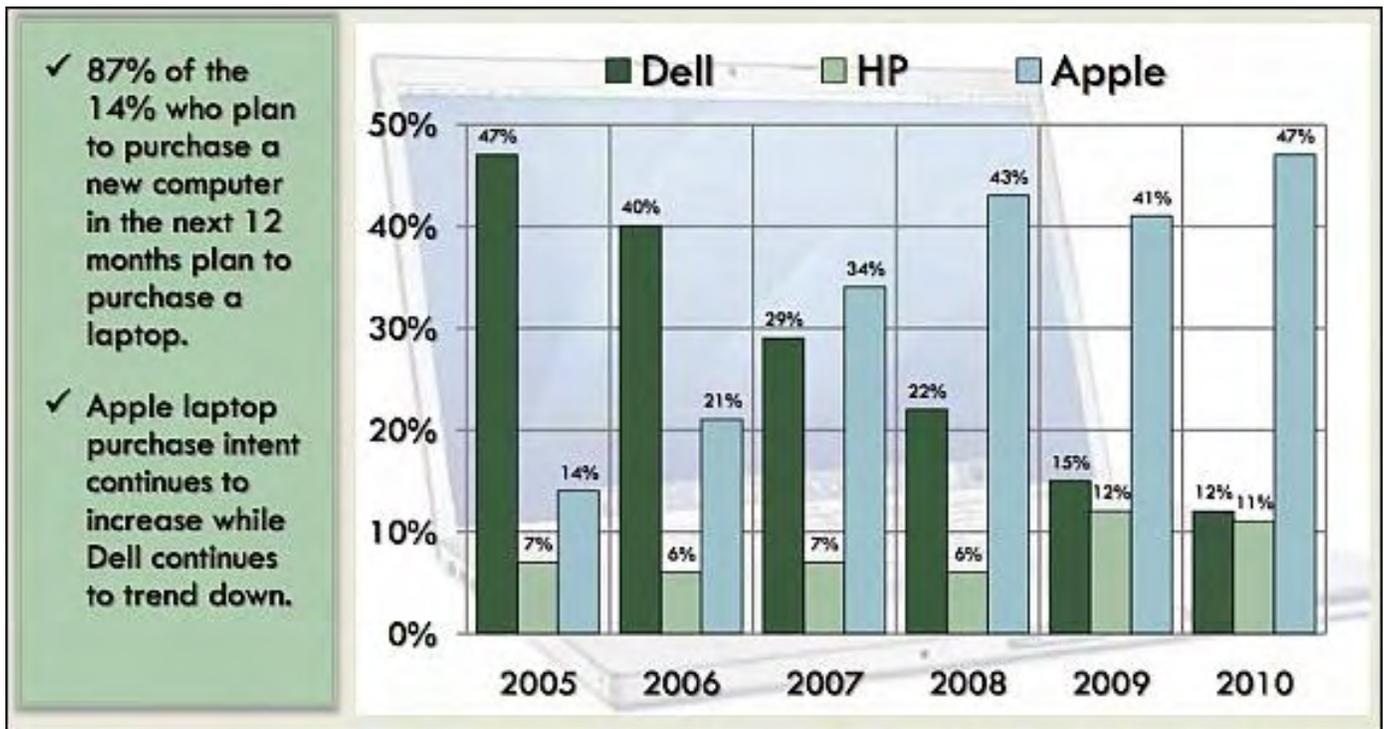


Figure 1. Dell is gradually losing favor with college students while Apple grows in popularity.

What makes Dell's declining market share even more surprising is the price difference between a typical Dell and a Macintosh, as shown in a recent comparison chart created by Dell. According to this chart, buying a Dell laptop can save you \$1,249 over buying a comparable MacBook Pro with nearly identical technical specifications.

Apples to Apples

Compare and save on popular deals from Dell



Compare and save



System	Studio 15	MacBook Pro 15	Studio 17	MacBook Pro 17 ¹
Processor	Intel® Core™ i7	Intel® Core™ i7	Intel® Core™ i7	Intel® Core™ i5
Color	Available in 6 colors	Silver	Available in 6 colors	Silver
Webcam	Built-in 2.0MP	Built-in iSight	Built-in 2.0MP	Built-in iSight
Screen	15.6" TrueLife™	15.4" Glossy	17.3" TrueLife™	17" Glossy
Memory	4GB ¹	4GB	4GB ¹	4GB
Hard Drive	500GB ²	500GB	500GB ²	500GB
Graphics Mem.	1GB ¹	512MB	1GB ¹	512MB
Software	Windows® Live Essentials	iLife®	Windows® Live Essentials	iLife®
Warranty	1 Year Limited ³ 1Yr LoJack for Laptops Theft Protection	1 Year Limited	1 Year Limited ³ 1Yr LoJack for Laptops Theft Protection	1 Year Limited
Price	\$1348.99	\$2,199	\$1268.99	\$2,299
Discount	\$399	\$0	\$219	\$0
Total	\$949.99	\$2,199	\$1049.99	\$2,299
Savings:	\$1249 Buy Now!		\$1249 Buy Now!	

Figure 2. Dell's latest marketing campaign claims massive cost savings over similar Apple MacBook Pros.

Dell laptops have almost always been less expensive than similar Apple laptops, yet this price difference alone should show Dell's college market share increasing, not decreasing. The fact that more people are willing to pay extra for an Apple laptop instead of a Dell suggests that there's more to a Macintosh than simply comparing prices and technical specifications like processor speed or memory.

While Dell and Apple laptops may perform similar functions, the iPad is currently in a class by itself. Medical students at the University of California Irvine will now receive an iPad (www.macsimunnews.com/index.php/archive/incoming_uci_medical_students_to_receive_ipads/) that includes notes and digital textbooks as part of its new iMedEd Initiative.

Dr. Ralph V. Clayman, dean of the UCI School of Medicine, said, "It is our firm belief that a digitally based curriculum will be the wave of the future, and UCI seeks to be a leader in the innovative presentation of information to students. In the future, physicians will literally carry a library's worth of information on a tablet computer in the pocket of their white coat or suit jacket. The age of electronic medicine is upon us, and both patient and practitioner will benefit. UCI's iMedEd curriculum is a step in that direction."

As Apple continues making inroads into the college market, more college graduates will enter the corporate world with years of experience using Apple products, which will likely influence the types of computers corporations start buying. If you spent four years or more using an Apple product in school, would you want your employer to stick with Windows XP, upgrade to Windows 7, or integrate the Macintosh and other Apple products like the iPad into their workforce?

Apple's Extended Keyboard Rises Again

The latest batch of Apple keyboards may look sleek and futuristic, but they may not be comfortable for regular typists. Touch typists generally prefer a keyboard that provides more positive tactile feedback, which is one of the reasons why Apple's Extended Keyboard was so popular in its time.

Since Apple no longer makes the Extended Keyboard, a company called Matias has made an Apple Extended Keyboard clone called the Tactile Pro (www.matias.ca/tactilepro3/). Unlike the current Apple keyboards, the Tactile Pro provides positive tactile and audio feedback with every key that you press.

"the best keyboard Apple ever made"
rises again.



tactilepro™
a better keyboard for your Mac

Figure 3. The Tactile Pro keyboard offers tactile feedback for touch typists.

The Tactile Pro costs \$149.95, which might seem steep for a keyboard, but if you're a touch typist, you may find the Tactile Pro makes typing far easier than any other keyboard. The Tactile Pro also includes three USB 2.0 ports for connecting flash drives or synchronizing your iPhone or iPad to your computer. (These USB ports on the Tactile Pro keyboard aren't powerful enough to charge your iPhone or iPad though.)

If you don't do much typing, you probably won't want the Tactile Pro, but for anyone who types constantly, the Tactile

Pro could be the most comfortable keyboard you've ever touched.

Microsoft Office 2011 for the Mac

For those who rely on Microsoft Word, Microsoft plans to release the next version of Microsoft Office 2011 for the Mac in October. The most notable change will be the user interface, which includes both pull-down menus like traditional Macintosh programs along with the Ribbon interface that completely dominates Microsoft Office 2010 on Windows.



Figure 4. The next version of Microsoft Office for the Mac offers pull-down menus and the Ribbon interface.

If you use Office 2010 on Windows, you have no choice but to use this Ribbon interface unless you buy an optional add-on (www.addintools.com) that lets you view commands in the familiar pull-down menu structure. Fortunately users of Microsoft Office 2011 for the Mac can just use the interface (pull-down menus or the Ribbon) that they like best.

* * *

If you've opened up several Web pages in Safari as separate tabs, you can easily switch between each tab by clicking on the tab that represents the Web page you want to see. For a faster way to jump from one tab to another, just press Ctrl+Tab to switch from the leftmost tab to the next one on the right. To jump from tabs heading from right to left, press Ctrl+Shift+Tab.

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

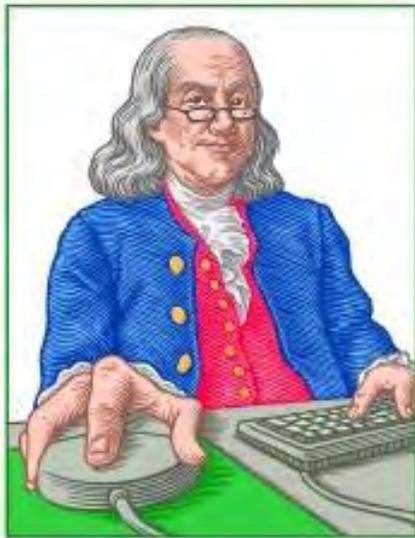
Wally is responsible for the following books:

Microsoft Office 2010 for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470489987?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470489987),
Beginning Programming for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702),
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),
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),
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),
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),
My New iPad (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593272758?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593272758),
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),
How to Live With a Cat (When You Really Don't Want To) (www.smashwords.com/books/view/18896).

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

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

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LINUX LESSONS

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

Linux Lessons: Tips and Tricks from Users

"It's On with Cron"
by Pete Choppin

This tutorial will explain how to use cron and crontab to execute a command, or a script with a sequence of commands, at a specified date, time or at set intervals.



Cron is a program that enables you to execute a command, or a script with a sequence of commands, at a specified date, time or at set intervals. The commands or scripts that you want cron to run are defined in a file called crontab, and every user has their own independent crontab file. Cron is a system program that is running all the time and is similar to the Windows scheduler (although it is much more powerful).

There are many different uses for cron, from checking your broadband connection overnight to maintain a stream or hefty download, or simply checking up to see what's going on in your digitized social space. For example, you may want to check the output of the command 'w' every hour to see who's on.

This tutorial will explain how to use cron and crontab and contains some basic working examples that should hopefully illustrate how it functions.

Breaking Down Cron

There is a special format for entering crontabs:

Minute Hour Day Month Day Task

Minute = Minute of the hour, 00 to 59. * Will indicate every minute (details later)

Hour = Hour of the day in 24-hour format, 00 to 23. * Will indicate every hour (details later)

Day = Day of the month, 1 to 31. * Will indicate every day (details later)

Month = Month of the year, 1 to 12. * Will indicate every month (details later)

Day = Day of the week, 3 chars - sun, mon, tue, or numeric (0=sun, 1=mon etc).... * Will indicate every day (details later)

Task = The command you want to execute

Note: Each of the above must be separated by at least one space.

The common way to use crontab is via the crontab command.

```
# crontab -e
```

This command 'edits' the crontab. When you use this command, you will be able to enter the commands that you wish to run. My version of Linux uses the text editor VI to open the crontab file and edit the contents. (See last week's Linux Lessons for an explanation of text editors.)

Here is an example of a crontab command:

```
0 1 24 5 0 w
```

That will run a command at 1:00AM on Monday, May 24th. Now this gets a bit cryptic, so to make it a little better, this would also work:

```
0 1 24 may mon w
```

But what if you want it to run every hour, regardless of date? An "*" means that that field doesn't matter, or do the command no matter what is in those fields. So to run our 'w' command every hour, the command would be this:

```
0 * * * * w
```

Which means that it runs every day, every hour at the 0 minute mark, meaning the beginning of the hour.

A bunch of different variations of fields can be generated like this. For instance, say you wanted a command to run every two hours. You could specify the "hour" field as this: */2 Which would run at 2,4,6,8, etc. You can also use commas to specify more than one time. For instance, say you want to run it at half past the hour, and a quarter of. You could specify the minute field as this: 30,45

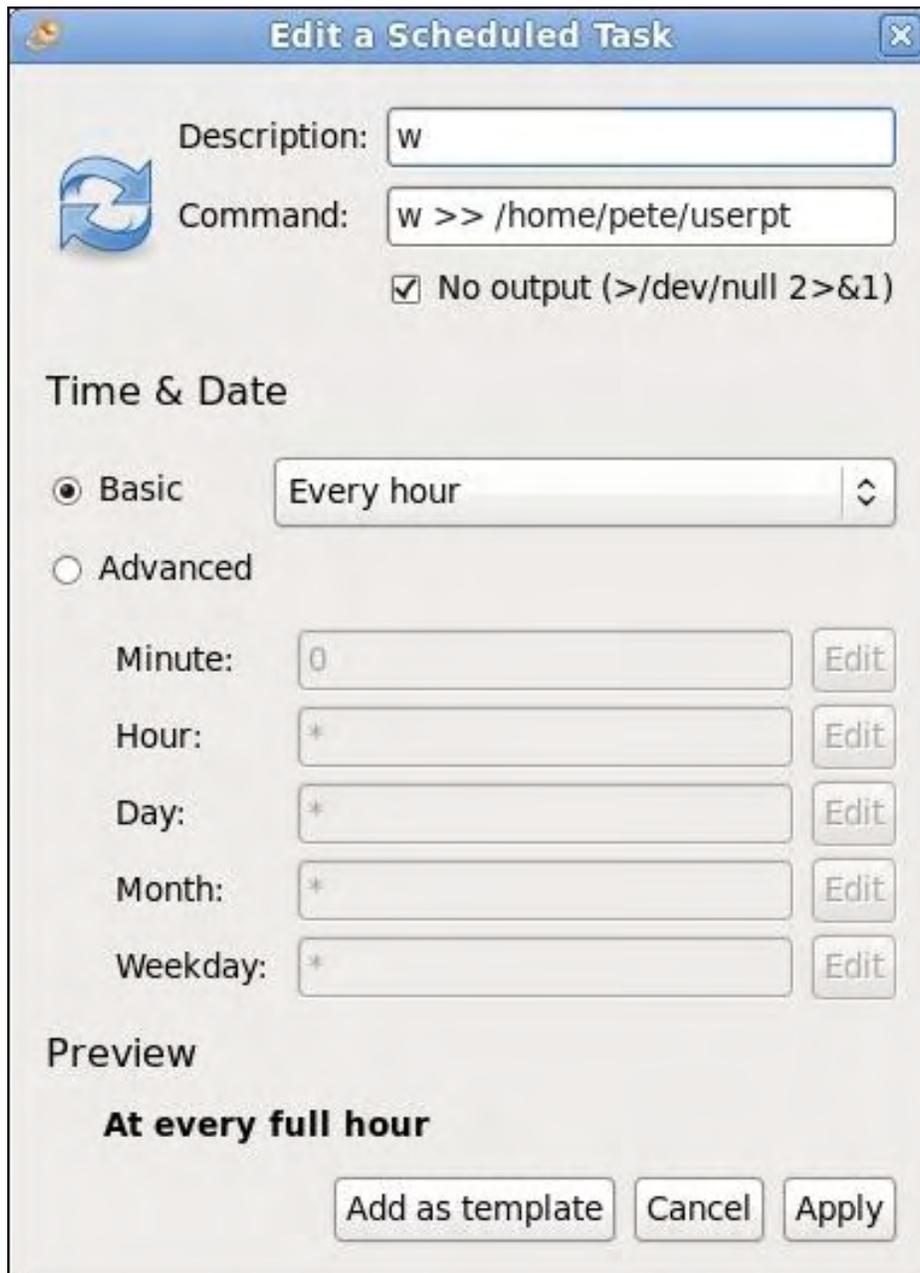
If you use a dash between two values, it will include everything in between them. An example of this would be to run a command every day for the first week of a month. The day of the month field would be this: 1-7

So to have the command run every two hours, at half past and a quarter of, and run for the first seven days of a month. We would have this:

```
30,45 */2 1-7 * * w >/dev/null 2>&1
```

Alternative to the Command Line

So you still don't like using the command line? There is an alternative—the Gnome Schedule (KDE has a similar utility called Kron). This is a graphic utility that simply edits the crontab for you.



Simply set up your schedule and enter the command or script you want to run and click Add. Your task is then added to the crontab.

Stop Bugging Me

You may notice that we added the ">/dev/null 2>&1" string at the end of the command above. The default cron job will always send an e-mail to the root account whenever a command is executed. This can get very annoying. If you don't want to receive e-mails every day notifying you about your job's execution, place this at the end of every instance of every crontab command. It sends the notification into a null holding area—essentially, the message goes nowhere.

Back It Up

Many administrators, and even some users, have a crontab that has multiple schedules, all relying on one crontab file. It is a good idea to create a backup copy of this file in case you lose it or overwrite something you did not intend. Here is a very simple way to create a backup of your crontab:

```
# crontab -l > crontab.txt
```

This command creates a list of the scheduled tasks in the crontab and then appends this to a file called crontab.txt. If you need to retrieve your crontab you simply open the crontab.txt file.

There are literally tons of things that can be done with cron. Hopefully this gives you a brief overview of some of the possibilities. You can combine complicated scripts into a single cron job and set up multiple schedules to run them, or simply have one task that you want to automate. It just depends on what your needs are and how automated you want to get. The possibilities are endless.

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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Rob, The Computer Tutor

Rob, The ComputerTutor:
Tech Solutions with
Microsoft Word
“Microsoft Word Macros & VBA”
by Rob Spahitz

This week, we delve into the world of automation, using macros in Word through VBA to help save you time or make a job less tedious.

This week, we delve into the world of automation, using macros in Word through VBA.

First I'd like to offer a bit of commentary.

I've been running the Microsoft Office 2010 Beta for a while. As part of the contract to run it, I had to supply my e-mail address to Microsoft. That's not really a big deal. Microsoft is a reputable company that doesn't really spam you with marketing. Well, now that the production version of Office 2010 is available, I've been receiving e-mails informing me that I can upgrade. Again, that's not a real problem since a "beta" product is one that is not intended to be fully ready for production. Furthermore, at least at this point, the beta version continues to function.

So I followed the link in the e-mail to the Microsoft purchase area (www20.buyoffice.microsoft.com/usa/?torb=3&email=2010beta) and checked out its offering. Here's what I found:

Office Home & Business 2010, \$279.95

Office Professional 2010, \$499.95

Office Home & Student 2010, \$149.95

OK, so what's the difference?

Home & Student includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote. Home & Business includes those plus Outlook. Professional includes those plus Publisher and Access.

So, since I often use Access for database projects and at this point have no need for Publisher, I wondered if I could get just the pieces I needed. They had links to individual products near the bottom. Access by itself costs \$139.95. Well that's almost the cost of the Student version. How much is Word? Also \$139.95. How about Excel? Also \$139.95. As I went through the offerings, all of the above listed programs were \$139.95 except OneNote, which runs \$79.95. In addition, you can buy Visio for \$559.95 and something called Project Professional for \$999.95.

I really wondered where Microsoft came up with its pricing. In these hard economic times, I guess that \$150 for some good products like word processing with Word and spreadsheets with Excel is not bad. However, that doesn't include e-mail with Outlook, so then you have to add \$130 for the business edition (or \$140 by itself). Does Outlook really count as a "Business" product? I guess there's always Outlook Express—do they still offer that? I guess the current push is toward Window Live Mail, which I haven't tried, but *ComputerEdge* articles have previously been written to discuss it. And I guess that Outlook also offers scheduling, calendars, task assignments and a few other handy things, but I'm still not sure I can justify that much money on the salary that *ComputerEdge* pays me (which is nothing, by the way, so please check out my Web site at the end of every article).

Also, the cost of these products does not really give you much more than the previous versions, so I don't think it's worth upgrading unless you have money to burn or want the latest products.

Looking further, for me to do the basic things I do at home—word processing, spreadsheet processing, database manipulation and e-mailing—I would end up paying \$280 for the Business edition plus another \$140 for Access, giving me a total of \$420 in products to handle basic things. Granted, these products are high quality, and many people pay more than that for programs like DreamWeaver so they can make Web pages. However, for someone who may not be making money with these products, and in a down economy, it seems that these products should be about half that price—and even then I'm not sure it's worth the upgrade if you already have them.

I'd love to hear other people's opinions on this so I can share other voices (and to know you're out there).

With that said, let's continue with today's topic, especially since the topic will work equally well with previous versions.

Macros on Micros

When I wrote about Excel about two years ago, I discussed macros in detail. Here's a summary. A macro is a collection of little (micro) commands that are collected together and given a name. Interestingly, in the computer world, a collection of little commands given to a computer is called a computer program. With macros, these commands are often applied to programs and applications (groups of programs tied together to perform a collection of tasks). Because of this strong tie between programming a computer and "programming" an application, Microsoft decided that its macros could be written using a programming language. Microsoft chose Visual Basic, a product the company had developed mostly for beginner application developers and soon found that it could also be applied in a way that allows anyone to customize applications that are set up a certain way (which includes all of the Office products and many non-Microsoft products).

As it turns out, the language used to create Word macros is identical to the language used to create Excel macros: Visual Basic. Since this is applied to customizing an application rather than creating an application, Microsoft decided to call it Visual Basic for Applications, or VBA. The main difference between VBA and the VB used to create Windows applications is that (1) you cannot create stand-alone applications in VBA (i.e., the application requires the Office product to run); and (2) VBA will automatically connect to the application that calls it so that it can properly talk to it.

I also previously mentioned that VBA can do just about anything that VB can do as long as you follow the above restrictions. And since VB can do anything that can be done in Windows, this means that VBA can do anything that Windows can do! Of course, trying to do some of those things can get quite challenging, so most people use it to handle simple tasks in the specific application where it's launched.

So why would you need VBA/macros? In Word, every version comes with more features that make it easier to do everything that the average person needs, negating the need for macros. However, sometimes you'll just run across that one thing that could help save you time or make a job less tedious.

Let's start with a simple task, just to prove the point, then work our way to more sophisticated tasks in future articles.

Suppose that your boss has told you that every Word document you create has to start with the company name and address at the top. How do you handle that? Well, there are many solutions. In early versions of Word, you had to put it in manually every time, or have it saved in a text file that you opened, copied and pasted. Or if you were careful, you'd create a master document and always open that first, then save it with the name of the new document, then continue. Later, the idea of templates made that job easier and persists today as probably the best choice for handling that.

However, suppose that you simply couldn't figure out how to make templates work? Another option is to record a macro and use it as needed. Let's do that.

Simple Address Macro

Open Word 2010 (or any version) and start with a new blank document. Our goal is to teach Word what we want it to do. That means we have to do it at least once (and hopefully at most once). However, before we begin, we have to tell Word to listen. Proceed to the View menu tab and notice that there is a Macros group box, as seen in Figure 1. In older versions, you can find this under menu Tools/Macro.



Figure 1. Word 2010 Macros.

When you click on the lower portion of the Macros option, one choice is to Record Macro. This is the option that tells Word to start listening. Click that button and notice the window that appears to let you give Word more information about the macro you are creating, as seen in Figure 2.

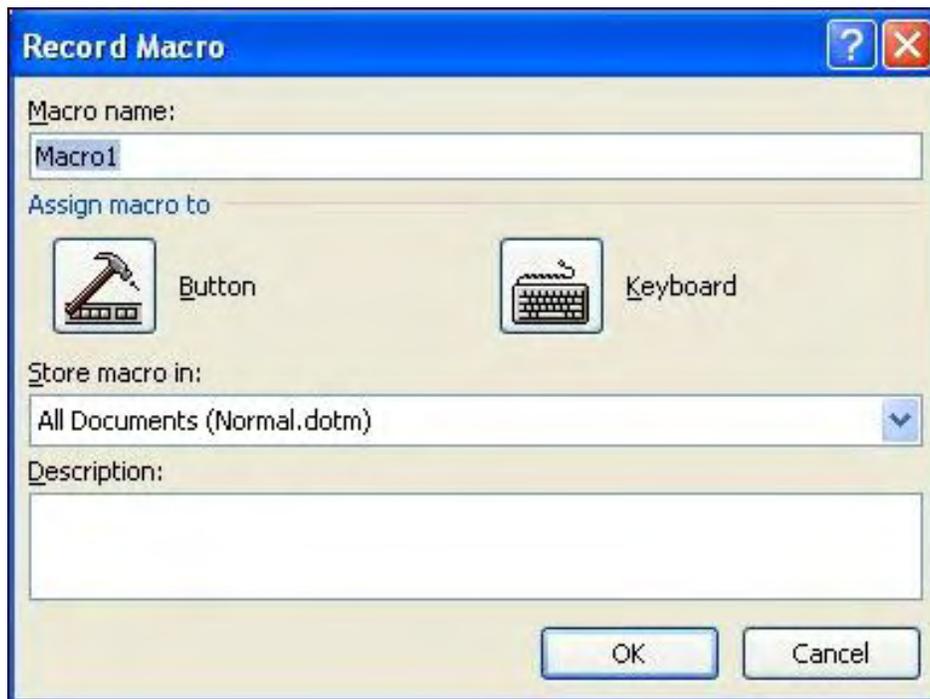


Figure 2. Defining a Word Macro.

In Excel, you may remember a similar process. However, the definition window was a bit different because Word

wants to handle things in its own way, which is different from Excel. Behind the scenes, the process is really the same.

In the first box, you will want to pick a name for this macro. Often this is the hardest part. You want to pick a name that is not too short and helps to describe the action that you are going to perform. Also, the name must follow the naming conventions for VB, which is that the name can have only letters, digits and underscores, up to 32 characters starting with a letter. (This may have changed a bit with newer versions, like maybe you can enter 255 characters now, but do you really need a name that long?) Furthermore, if you plan to use this in many documents, you'll want to pick a name that will make sense to you if you create 20 or 30 other macros over a period of time. For this project the task is to add the company name and address, so let's call it, using the naming conventions, `Add_Company_Info`. Enter that into the first box.

Next you see two buttons with pictures. One of the nice features of Word is that there are many shortcuts to do specific tasks. For example, you have a task to change a word from upper case to all lower case. In Word 2010, you can accomplish this with the lower case option in the Home tab's Font group box, or `Alt+H+7+L` (or Format menu's Change Case, or `Alt+O+E+L` in Word 2003). Similarly, when you create a macro, you can create a button or Alt shortcut key that can be used to run the macro. If you choose to do neither, you can still run the macro from the Macros area, which is what we are going to do this time. So don't bother clicking on either of those buttons.

Next you have a drop-down list entitled "Store macro in." When you look at the choices, you will see that you can store it in one of two places: "All documents" and the current document. In many cases, the macro you are creating will be used over and over in the current document and is not used elsewhere. For those cases, make sure to change the scope of the macro; otherwise it will appear whenever you open a different document and see what macros are available. It's not really a problem having it available at all times, but it may confuse you or otherwise just clutter up the box of choices. For any case where you plan to use this macro across documents, you should store it in the Normal template so that every time you create a new document based on the Normal template (which is pretty much everything), the macro will be available. Also note that if you had other documents open, you could store the macro in one of those. Let's store it in the local document since it's only a test that we'll throw away when we delete the document.

In the last box, enter anything that you think might help you to remember what this macro is used for. If you came up with a good enough name, you may never need to add anything here. The final result before you click on the OK button looks like Figure 3.



Figure 3. Macro Ready to Record.

When you click the OK button, Word is watching your keystrokes to see how you'd like to accomplish something. To show that, the arrow cursor changes to include an image of a little cassette tape, reminiscent of the old tape-recording devices.

Since Word is watching, let's enter the company information in a nice way and see if it properly captured it. First go to the Home tab and pick a nice font and color, such as Light Blue, Monotype Corsiva size 16. Now enter a company name such as Spahitz Software. Press Enter, maybe change the font size to 12, and complete the address as seen in Figure 4.

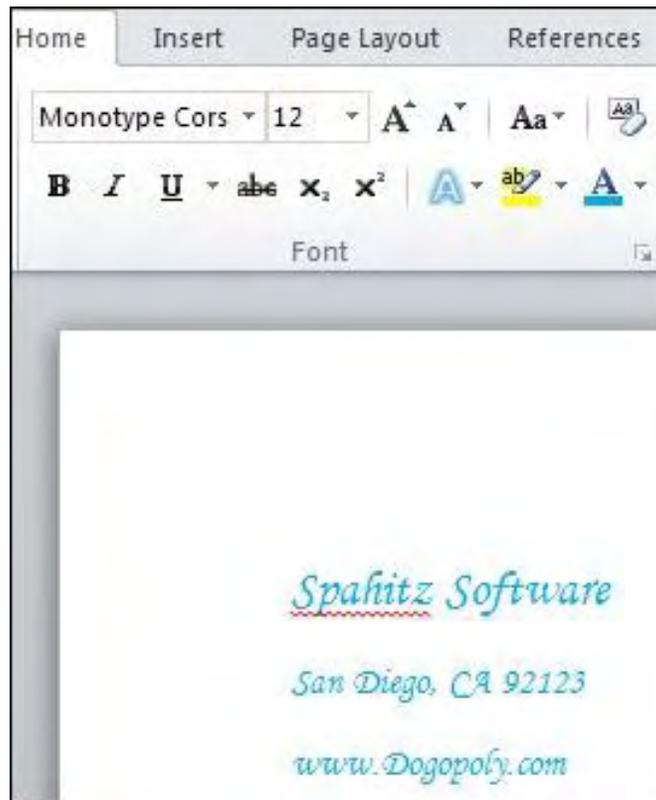


Figure 4. Address Recorded in Macro.

Assuming that you finished without errors (or corrected errors along the way), the task is done and we can tell Word to stop recording. To do this, either return to the Macros group box and select Stop Recording (where it previously showed Record Macro) or click on the blue square that appeared near the bottom left of the Word window, as seen in Figure 5.

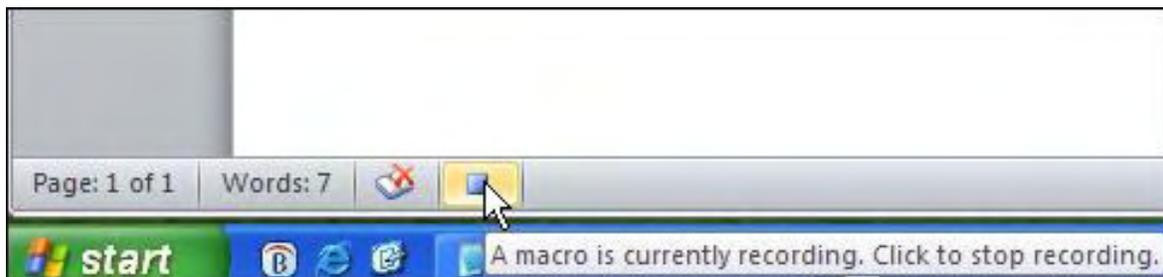


Figure 5. Button to Stop Recording.

This blue button will change to a picture of a form to indicate that the recording is done. Failure to stop the macro means that Word will continue to watch and record your steps, sometimes including things like opening other applications and typing into those other programs.

You have now recorded a macro. So what? How does that help?

The next step is to see if Word can repeat the instructions that we gave it. Proceed to a new line on the document so we can confirm that the macro works. Ideally you'd go to a new document, but we said to keep the macro only in this document. To play back the document, in the Macros group box click on the Macros picture or select View Macros from the choices we saw in Figure 1. You will now see a window showing all of the macros available to run, as seen in Figure 6. Note that you can also show this Window by pressing the Alt+F8 combination, and if we had attached this

macro to a key combination, such as Ctrl+A, then that would have also worked (although Ctrl+A is used to perform another task—Select All—so you want to avoid overwriting existing functions like that).

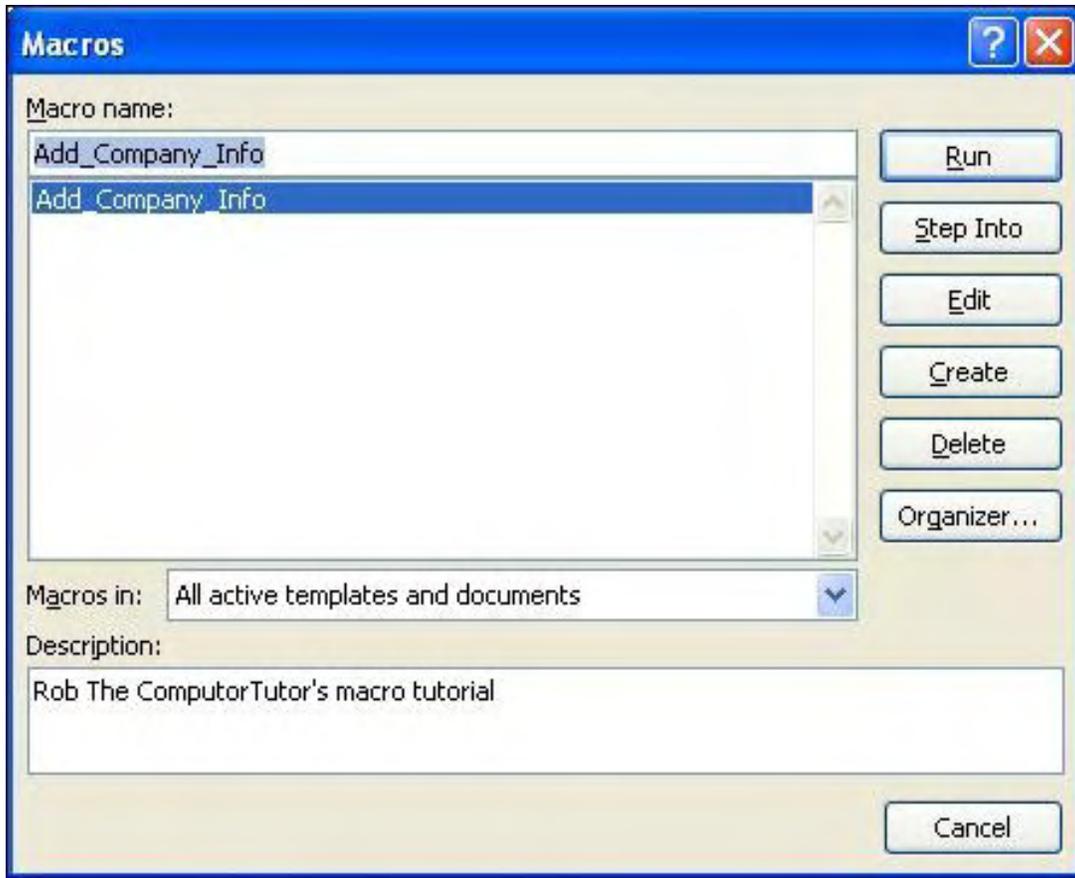


Figure 6. Current Macro List.

Make sure that the macro you want to run is selected (which it will be if you have only one) and click the Run button. You should quickly see Word repeat everything that you previously entered, exactly as you entered it. I changed font size from 16 to 12 after my first line and the macro did the same. If you change colors and font styles and other things, the macro will perform the task exactly as recorded. Also, it will not restore your settings to their previous state since it is acting as though you typed it. And, anything you did not record, such as bold, will not get reset by the macro unless you explicitly recorded it as part of the macro. We'll go over some of these oddities in a future article.

Enjoy the power of VBA. Next time we'll continue this exercise and find out exactly how it tracks this and how we can modify the macro later without having to re-record it.

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



Service Providers Should Get Their Heads in the Cloud—
 A new report makes a case for virtualization;
 Entertaining Your Head When IT'S in the Clouds—
 NeuroSky's games and other applications will impact a
 variety of arenas; Upgrading and Repairing PCs, 19th
 Edition—A review of the book by Scott Mueller; Make
 Your Mac Purr with Snow Leopard—Snow Leopard's
 focus is on refinement rather than new features.

Report: Service Providers Should Get Their Heads in the Cloud

According to the latest report from Analysys Mason (www.analysismason.com), service providers must embrace cloud services and bundle them into their enterprise solutions. More from the report:

"The business model behind cloud services is similar to that behind established communications network services. A service provider amortizes its upfront data-center-related capital investment over a period of months, coinciding with the monthly fees charged to end-user enterprises for the use of the infrastructure," stated Steve Hilton, report author and Principal Analyst at Analysys Mason.

"For a service provider, this model should be very comfortable," he added. "Less comfortable is the unregulated nature of the business—there is no guaranteed return on investment—and the non-telecoms-centric services they will be required to market and sell."

Year-on-year growth rate will be 43 percent in 2011, but will decrease to 13 percent over the next five years. Software-as-a-service (SaaS) will account for 70 percent of revenue in 2010, while the share taken by infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS) will increase from 30 percent to 40 percent over the next five years.

Other key findings from the report include:

- Operators should bundle cloud-based application and infrastructure solutions with core connectivity.
- Operators should focus on the SME segment, rather than large businesses.
- Traditional IT and application partners must embrace cloud solutions to avoid missing out on more than USD \$14 billion in revenue by 2015.
- IT and application vendors should seek out the particularly high-revenue opportunities in the developed markets in the Asia-Pacific region, North America, and Western Europe.

For further details, visit Analysys Mason: Enterprise cloud services: worldwide forecast 2010–2015 (www.analysismason.com/Research/Content/Reports/RDME0_Enterprise_cloud_services_Jun2010).

Entertaining Your Head When IT'S in the Clouds

The brain-computer interface technology company NeuroSky (www.neurosky.com) is most well-known for the use

of one its chips in the extremely successful Mattel Mindflex and Uncle Milton Star Wars Force trainer toys. However, the technology is also incorporated in products as various as automotive, health care, education industries, and more. The company believes that its games and other applications are sure to have an impact in a variety of arenas in the coming years.

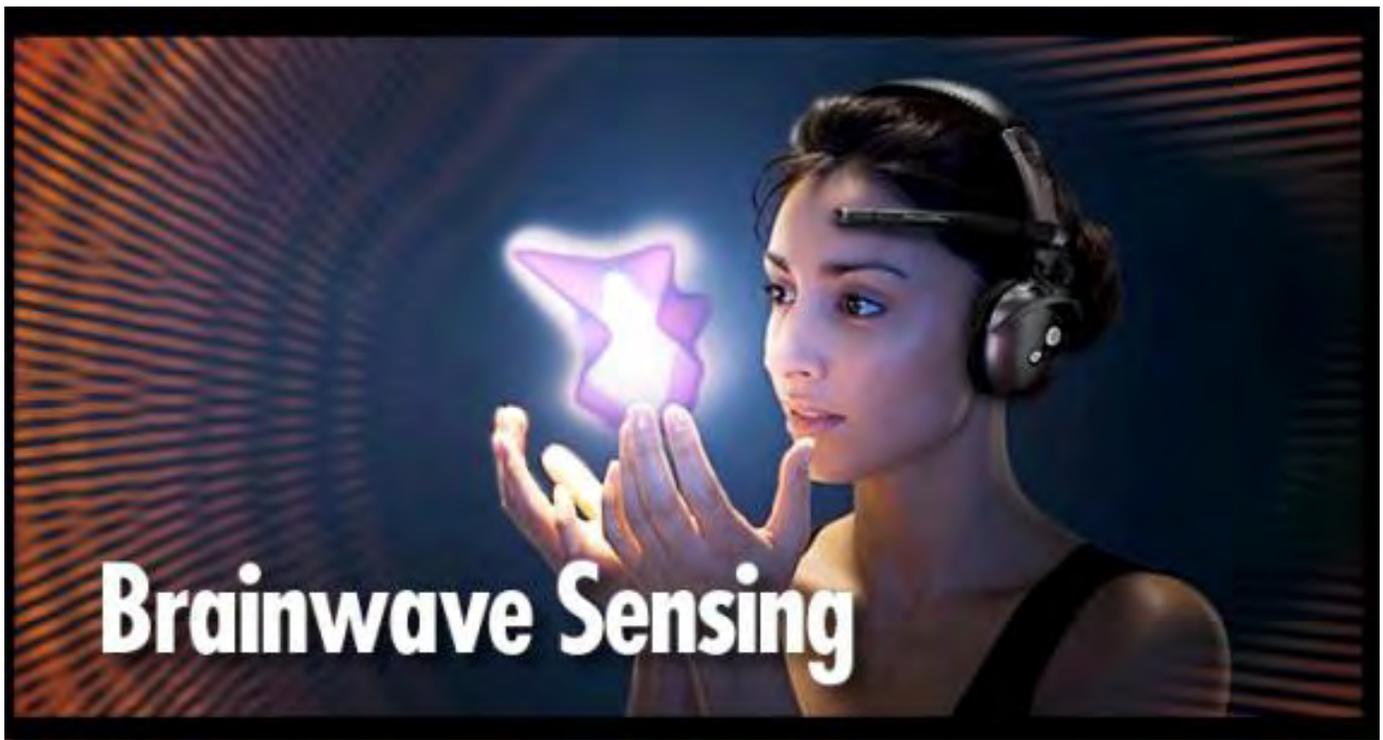
For example, the global aerospace industry was treated to a sneak peek into the future of in-flight entertainment as the Toronto-based tech company InteraXon demonstrated a prototype of its thought-controlled in-flight entertainment system containing NeuroSky technology at a recent industry event.

Attendees, including executives from Boeing, Bombardier, and even Canadian astronaut Bjarni Tryggvason, stayed long after the day's programming ended to play one of four brainwave-controlled games specifically designed for use at 35,000 feet.

"We think it's time that in-flight entertainment does more than simply distract you," says InteraXon CEO Ariel Garten, "We create in-flight experiences that offer value even after the flight is over." The system includes a NeuroSky MindSet and suite of applications InteraXon has created for the conference, which involves a meditation trainer that helps travelers relax and an EEG Golf trainer that helps users improve their concentration, focus, and even their golf game.



The system measures the brain's electrical output and sorts them into waves. The system reacts to alpha waves, associated with relaxation, and beta waves, associated with concentration. As the users relax or focus their thoughts, their brainwaves become the joystick with which users control the game.



"InteraXon is working to bring thought-controlled computing out of research labs and into the mainstream," explains Chris Aimone, CTO.

To view additional video featuring Apple founder Steve Wozniak trying InteraXon's technology, see InteraXon's video press release (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywclyhnmwUQY).

Upgrading and Repairing PCs, 19th Edition

For 20 years, *Upgrading and Repairing PCs* (19th Edition; by Scott Mueller, ISBN: 0789739542, \$49.99 list) has been the best book out there to teach newbies and techies alike how to figure out what's going on inside the big metal box they alternately love and hate.

I always want to keep the book within arms' reach to troubleshoot just about anything that might come up. Believe it or not, it's actually fun to leaf through its more than 1,000 pages even when your computer is running well (which, thankfully, is most of the time) just to learn how things work.

For example, by reading *Upgrading and Repairing PCs*, I figured out that I needed a new video card to play games faster and at higher resolutions and was then able to speak (relatively) intelligently to the salesperson when I went in to buy one. I also saved a lot of money because I learned from the book that I didn't need the latest and the greatest (translation: most expensive) to get still excellent quality.

In its 19th edition, *Upgrading and Repairing PCs* has been completely updated to provide the most up-to-date info about CPUs, motherboards, storage options, memory, video cards, power supplies, and even how to set up a network and get connected to other machines and services.

According to the book's publisher, the new edition includes updated info on:

- Intel's and AMD's hottest new processors, including the Intel Core i Series and AMD Phenom family
- The latest PC system designs and form factors, including the new mini-ITX and DTX motherboard form factors

- State-of-the-art graphics cards, GPUs, and chipsets from NVIDIA and ATI/AMD
- Terabyte-class hard disks, solid state drives, and other data storage innovations
- Revamped coverage of building PCs from scratch—from selecting and assembling hardware to BIOS setup and troubleshooting

The included DVD contains more than two hours of high-quality how-to's on just about everything covered in the book. There's even a guide to teach you exactly how to build your own computer from scratch using components you can buy at almost any computer store.



Review contributed by Jenny Deersine

Make Your Mac Purr with Snow Leopard

Snow Leopard is the big-cat moniker for the sixth version of Apple's Macintosh operating system ten (Mac OS X). In the past 12 months since Snow Leopard's inaugural release (August 28, 2009), Apple has produced four updaters (akin to Redmond's "service packs"), and a fifth one reportedly is on the verge of widespread beta testing by third-party developers beta testing by third-party developers (www.appleinsider.com/articles/10/07/26/apple_preparing_first_betas_of_mac_os_10_6_5.html).

Unlike previous versions of Mac OS X, Snow Leopard's focus is on "refinement" (www.apple.com/macosx/refinements/enhancements-refinements.html) rather than new features. Leopard, Tiger, and their predecessors delivered beaucoup new functionalities such as Automator, Boot Camp, Exposé, QuickLook, Spotlight, Time Machine, etc. Snow Leopard instead delivers optimization and performance improvements with only a smattering of new functionalities (details below).

Snow Leopard's most noteworthy optimizations include the following: faster installation; new 64-bit versions of Finder (Figure 1) and system-related apps; faster shutdown, bootup, and wake-from-sleep; and implementation of Grand Central Dispatch and Open CL technologies that leverage, respectively, the horsepower of the multicore CPUs and discrete graphics cards in MacBook Pros, iMacs, and Mac Pros for speedier gaming, video editing, etc.

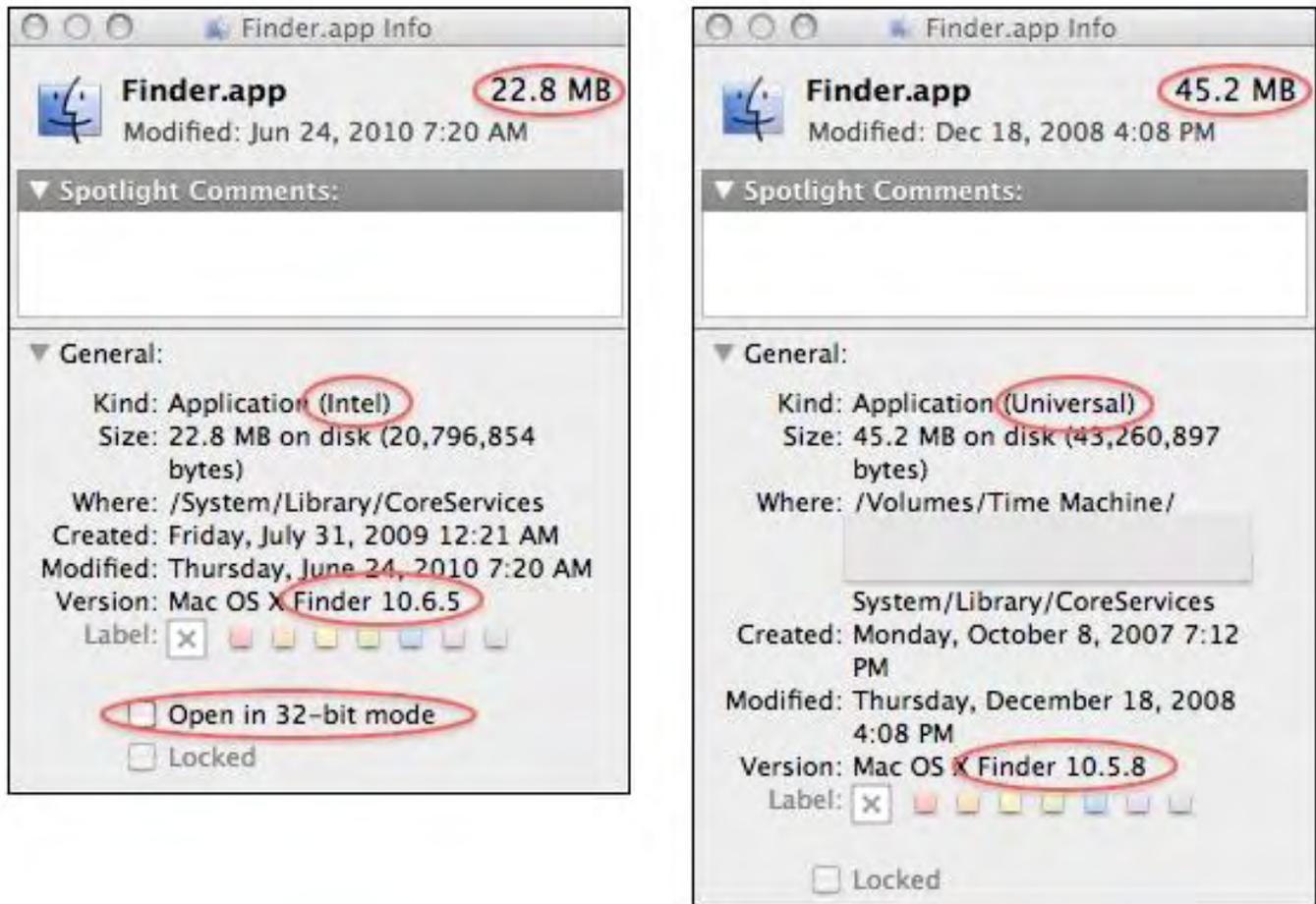


Figure 1. Snow Leopard superficially resembles Leopard, but under Mac OS X 10.6's hood lies a 64-bit, Intel-only optimized version of Finder (left) that replaces 10.5's 32-bit PowerPC-compatible counterpart (right).

Although Snow Leopard's optimizations are important and worthwhile, my guess is that most Mac users will scarcely notice them. For instance, Snow Leopard's speedier shutdown, bootup, and wake-from-sleep are difficult to appreciate without a stopwatch. What's up with that? Is Apple distorting reality? One explanation is that our Macs have become so inherently fast (thanks, in part, to their multicore CPUs) that Snow Leopard's performance gains are too small in absolute terms to perceive. It's like switching from a car that does 0–60 mph in five seconds to one that does it in four; the 20 percent improvement is sizable but makes little perceptible difference to most drivers. In sum, unless you're a professional graphic artist, digital video editor, or serious gamer, you likely will have trouble detecting Snow Leopard's performance improvements.

One optimization (www.apple.com/macosx/refinements/enhancements-refinements.html) in Snow Leopard that most users almost certainly will notice is its reduced appetite for hard disk space. Snow Leopard's footprint is smaller than Leopard's. To quote Apple's Web site, "Snow Leopard takes up less than half the disk space of the previous version, freeing about 7GB."

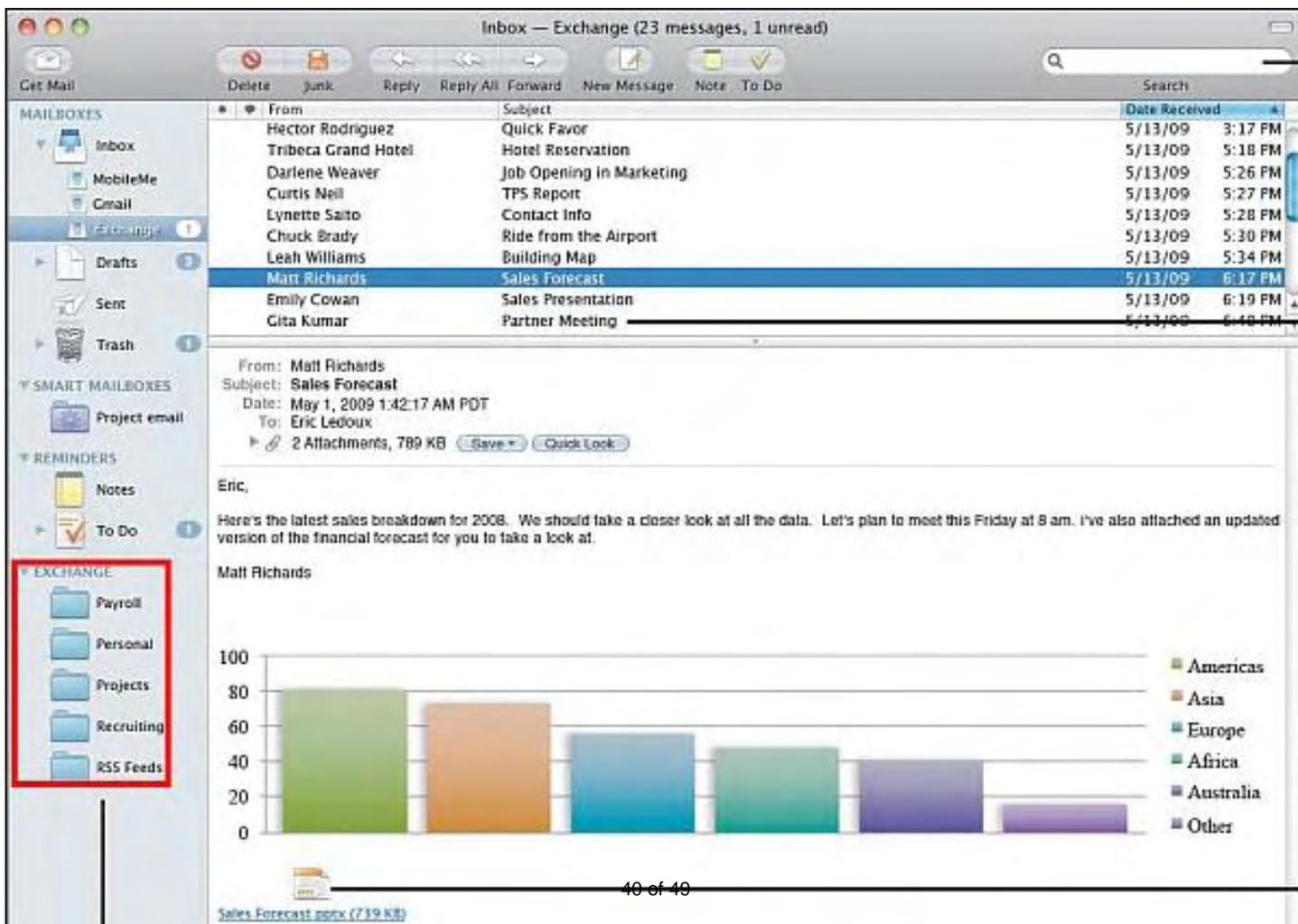
How Apple accomplished Snow Leopard's footprint reduction is pretty interesting. First, Snow Leopard installs only the printer drivers that you need rather than all available ones; when you need a different printer driver or new versions become available, Snow Leopard downloads them from the Web. Second, Apple has ditched legacy code that supports Macs with PowerPC CPUs (a side effect, however, is that Snow Leopard runs only on Macs with Intel CPUs (www.apple.com/macosx/specs.html)). Third, Snow Leopard has a different way of calculating hard drive space. Where Leopard (and predecessors) left you wondering how come your 320GB hard drive showed up with only

298GB in Disk Utility (hint: 1GB actually contains 1,074MB rather than 1,000 (www.macfixit.com/article.php?story=20090828002847714)), Snow Leopard shows the same hard drive with 320GB (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Because Snow Leopard calculates hard disk space differently than previous versions of Mac OS X, a 320GB hard drive shows up in Disk Utility with 320GB rather than 298GB.

Although optimization is Snow Leopard's *raison d'être*, it does include quite a few new features and enhancements. One major new feature is out-of-the-box support for Microsoft Exchange 2007 servers (www.apple.com/macosx/exchange/). This is a big deal for folks who own a MacBook, MacBook Air, or MacBook Pro and want to connect to their Windows-only workplace's e-mail server, Outlook calendars, and/or enterprise address books. This feature is brain-dead simple; it just worked immediately for me during my testing. Simply open the Preferences window in Snow Leopard's Mail program, click the Accounts tab, add a new account, follow the instructions for configuring it to be your existing Exchange account, and voilà—your Exchange account automatically is accessible in Mail, iCal, and Address Book (Figure 3).





iCal

Today

2009 Monday, Oct 5 Tuesday, Oct 6 Wednesday, Oct 7 Thursday, Oct 8 Friday, Oct 9

CALENDARS

- Personal
- Activities
- Chores
- EXCHANGE
 - Calendar
 - Projects
 - Tasks
- SUBSCRIPTIONS
 - US Holidays

NOTIFICATIONS

Demo Meeting
Thu, Oct 8 1:00 PM
Time changed

Maybe Decline Accept

Time	Monday, Oct 5	Tuesday, Oct 6	Wednesday, Oct 7	Thursday, Oct 8	Friday, Oct 9
8:00 AM				9:00 AM Presentation Prep	9:45 AM Get Out Charge
9:00 AM	9:00 AM Monday Morning Kickoff	9:00 AM Drop Off Nancy at Airport	9:15 AM Weekly Team Meeting	9:00 AM Customer Group Present	
10:00 AM					
11:00 AM	11:00 AM Brainstorming Session	11:00 AM Lunch with Françoise	11:00 AM Lunch Meeting	10:15 AM Dental Appointment	10:00 AM All-Hands Meeting
12:00 PM		12:00 PM Finish Presentations	12:15 PM Lunch with Françoise & Scott		
1:00 PM	1:15 PM Design Review	1:00 PM Create Planning Document			1:00 PM Demo Meeting
2:00 PM					
3:00 PM			3:00 PM Customer Meeting	1:00 PM Weekly Team Meeting	2:45 PM Feature Review
4:00 PM	4:15 PM Coffee with Bill				3:15 PM Lunch
5:00 PM					
6:00 PM	1:30 PM Yoga	1:30 PM Judo Practice		5:30 PM Walk	6:30 PM Lock's Birthday Dinner
7:00 PM					

Address Book

Group

- All Contacts
- Exchange
- On My Mac
- Exchange
 - Contacts
 - Engineering
 - Finance
 - Marketing
 - Personal
 - UI Review Team
- Last Import

Name

- Anne Johnson
- Cindy Paxton
- Darlene Weaver
- Enrique Porter
- Jimmy Foster
- Melissa Long
- Chuck Brady
- Gita Kumar
- Sydney Bailey

Anne Johnson

work (555) 555-5555

email 1 annejohnson1@me.com

work 1234 Main Street
Cupertino, CA 95014

Note:

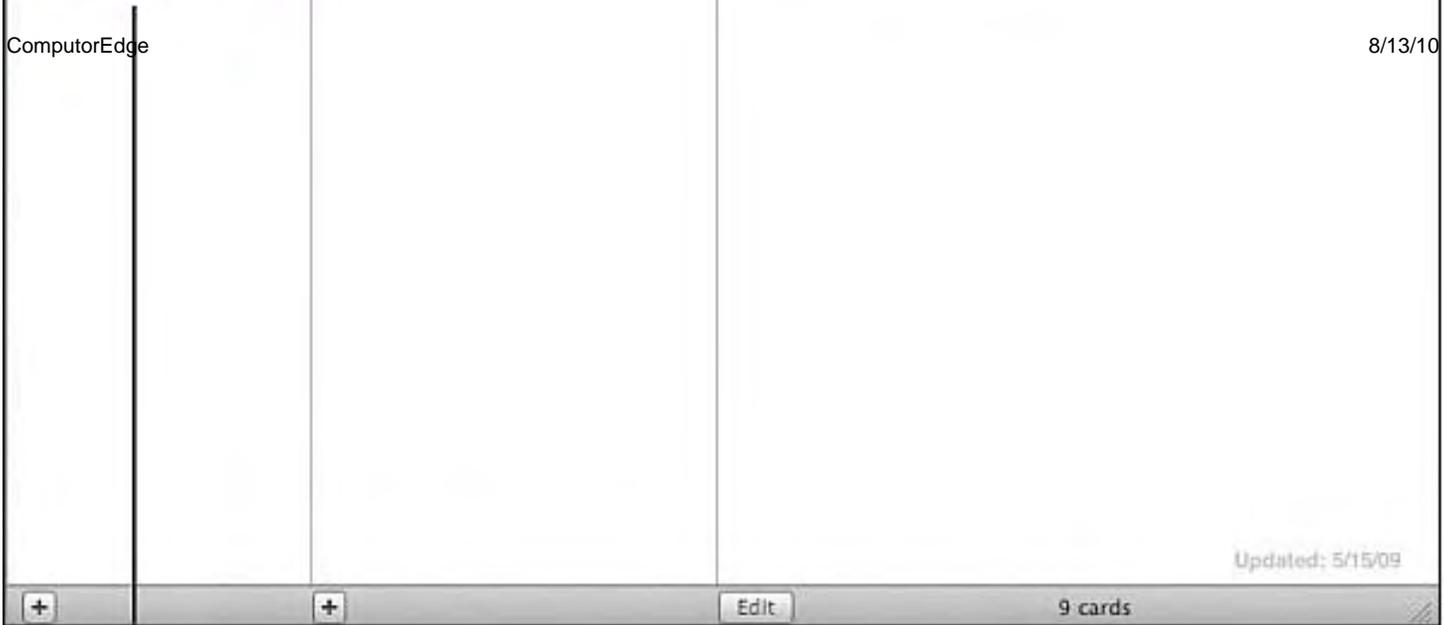


Figure 3. With Snow Leopard's built-in support for connecting to Exchange servers, Mac owners now can access and use their enterprise e-mail account, calendars, and address books from within Snow Leopard's Mail (top), iCal (middle) and Address Book (bottom) programs.

Another major new feature is Snow Leopard's price and licensing arrangement. The cost for Snow Leopard (\$29) is \$100 less than for previous Mac OS X versions (\$129). However, there's a catch. The \$29 price tag is for Leopard users only. Tiger users who have an Intel Mac need to purchase the Mac Box Set (store.apple.com/us/product/MC581Z/A) for \$169 to comply with Snow Leopard's license agreement. The Mac Box Set includes Snow Leopard, iLife '09 (Apple's suite of consumer applications—GarageBand, iDVD, iMovie, iPhoto, and iWeb) and iWork '09 (Apple's suite of productivity applications—Keynote, Numbers, and Pages). My guess is that most Tiger users will skip the Mac Box Set because they're running Tiger on a PowerPC Mac and Snow Leopard requires an Intel Mac (not because of the Mac Box Set's price or included suites).

Additional noteworthy new features in Snow Leopard include (but are not limited to) new versions of Apple's Web browser (Safari) and multimedia program (QuickTime), a new thesaurus, and 512x512 icons in the Finder that display navigation controls when the cursor is positioned over the icon (Figure 4). Many of Snow Leopard's other new features are listed at Apple's Web site (www.apple.com/macosx/refinements/; <http://www.apple.com/macosx/refinements/enhancements-refinements.html>).

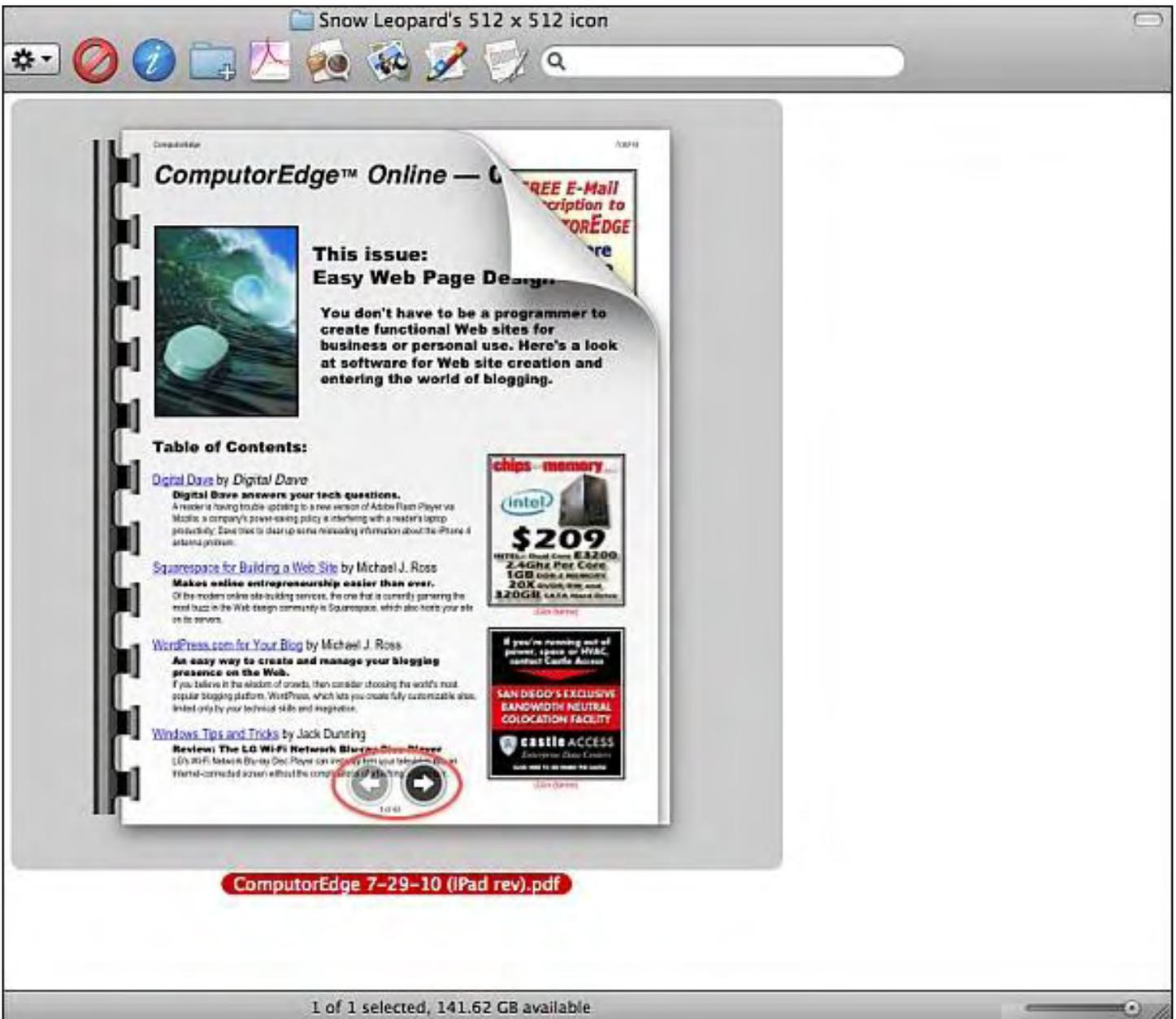


Figure 4. Snow Leopard's Finder supports 512x512 icons with a preview feature that displays the file's contents; it additionally displays navigation controls when the user hovers the cursor over the icon.

Snow Leopard also has some new features that Apple has chosen not to document or publicize. You can uncover many of them at Mac OS X Hints (www.macintoshhints.com). One of my favorites is in the authentication dialog; i. e., the dialog in which you type your user account's password to switch user accounts or wake your Mac from sleep mode. In Leopard and prior versions of Mac OS X, a "wrong password" alert displayed when you mistyped your password and clicked the dialog's OK button. To dismiss this alert and try again, you needed to click the alert's OK button. In Snow Leopard, however, the warning is displayed in red text within the authentication dialog; no alert to mess with. Subtle, but sweet!

After six months of using Snow Leopard, I can confidently recommend it to users running Leopard on an Intel Mac. Snow Leopard's support for Exchange 2007 accounts alone is worth the price of admission for users with an account at their workplace. At the time of Snow Leopard's inaugural release, however, I would have hesitated to recommend it to users who depend upon third-party programs. The reason for my hesitancy is related to Snow Leopard's under-the-hood changes. Such changes can break third-party software's OS compatibility, especially utility programs that add

functionality to the OS. This is no longer a matter of concern because most third-party developers have released new versions of their products that include Snow Leopard support.



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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EdgeWord: How to Share Your Printer

“Sharing printers may be the next step toward getting rid of printers.” by Jack Dunning



If you're sharing an Internet connection, it's a piece of cake to share a printer. The key is setting up a virtual private network (VPN).

After writing this week about sharing printers (in order to get rid of printers), I thought that it might be a good idea to give a little more information about how to do it. Plus it got me thinking about how many more things we might like to share. For example, it seems a little ridiculous for everyone in the neighborhood to have a high-speed Internet connection when they are so easy to share—at least with your next-door neighbor. Your ISP isn't going to like it because it could cost a service contract or two for the Internet connections. It's also out of the question if your neighbor is a jerk. (It could be you who's the jerk, but it's the same difference.)

The range of an 802.11n Wi-Fi router is approximately 230-250 feet—twice the range of older 802.11g routers. That makes it much more practical to share with at least your next-door neighbor. If the router is located upstairs and the houses are laid out conveniently, then you may be able to include even more locals. You could get more access points and increase the range even further, but at some point you will reach the law of diminishing return. (That point is immediately apparent the first time one person hogs all the bandwidth with simultaneous BitTorrent downloads, video streaming, Internet phone calls and Internet radio.)

If you're sharing an Internet connection, it's a piece of cake to share a printer. All that is needed is for the printer to be available on the network (shared by the computer if attached to a computer) and the print drivers to be loaded on the local computer. Sharing a printer would certainly be more economical, especially if you're not the one who must buy the ink. Although it does have its downside.

If the printer is in someone else's house, you must go there to pick up the output. This is not particularly convenient if you like to work in the middle of the night. Plus, anything that you send to the remote printer is free reading material for the occupants of the print zone. You would need to think twice about sending over your secret recipes.

It isn't so great for people who own the printer either. They are responsible for keeping the printer loaded with paper and ink. Who's paying for all this? Plus, people may think that they can show up anytime to get their printouts—even at completely inopportune moments.

If you don't live close to someone's printer, then Wi-Fi is not going to be your solution. You will need to send your documents over the Internet. That's what my daughter, who lives a half a mile away, does. The process for doing this for non-commercial purposes is neither complicated nor expensive. (At least no more complicated than sharing a computer on a home network.) The first step is to set up a VPN (Virtual Private Network).

A VPN is similar to a home network except that it works over the Internet. Because the Internet is wide open, VPN connections are encrypted for security. In order to do the proper encrypting, there needs to be some software and/or hardware installed on each end wherever there is a computer in the VPN. One of the easiest way to get started is to use the free version of LogMeIn Hamachi (secure.logmein.com/products/hamachi2/download.aspx). After you sign up and download a small piece of software, Hamachi assigns an Internet address to your computer. You can then create a VPN that other Hamachi users can log into. When users are logged in, they are on the same network (over the Internet), and all the members will appear in the network listings such as Windows Explorer. The rules are the same as they are for any network.

If computers (or hard drives) are shared, remote users can open the folders, play the music and print to printers. There are a few key points to keep in mind. First, make sure that your users have an account and a secure password on the computer acting as a host to the printer. Even though you are sharing, you want the remote users to log in before they get any access. This will help block potential intruders. Create an account with access for each remote user. If you're responsible for the printer (it's in your house), then you will need to share both the printer and the hard drive (for queuing) on your computer. The only other problem encountered when sharing my printer with my daughter was that she needed to open Windows Explorer and click on my computer in her Network listings to get the login dialog box to open.

Once the remote printer was installed on her computer and she was logged in, the printing worked surprisingly well. I don't know how VPNs will affect the future of computing. I suspect that we will start to see far more uses than just listening to music and printing. Most people may have no use for remote anything over the Internet, but every time I do it, I really impress myself.

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

"ComputerEdge Solutions Keep Delivering," "Downloading Files with Google Chrome," "Will Support Whatever Transition Occurs," "FTP with FileZilla," "Free Bumper Cases for the iPhone"

ComputerEdge Solutions Keep Delivering

Hello,

I just want to say *thank you* for your continued delivery of good information.

I live in San Jacinto, Calif., but I am currently in Baldwin City, Kansas. I have received the information from you via Verizon, my e-mail [provider]. I purchased an HP laptop for my daughter, and have to set it up for her before I go home. I enjoy the easy solutions that you have for so many problems.

-Vivian Brown

Downloading Files with Google Chrome

I have trouble downloading files and programs bigger than a couple of megabytes, especially during peak usage hours on a Cox.net low-speed [Internet connection]. It seems that my computer (an AMD quad-core with 8 gigs of RAM) times out the download session if the download pauses for X number of seconds or if it takes longer than X minutes for the download to complete. With most sites that offer something to download there is no provision to restart or resume the download if it stops.

Well, [since] I haven't found out how to make the download time longer in Win 7 Home (anyone out there who has had a similar problem and solved it?), the workaround I'm using is to open the recent downloads page in Chrome and cut and paste the URL of the download site into Free Download Manager (WWW.freedownloadmanager.org/). There is a setting in this program that will open a new download window when you copy a URL to the clipboard. FDM (Free Download Manager) will allow you to restart a download from the point it was last stopped, if that partial file still exists in your download folder. It shows you how much of the file is downloaded and the current speed of the download as well as a history of previous downloads.

This procedure works most of the time except when the site insists on using their own installer—which won't show you the URL for the actual install program. (I tried for 1 1/2 hours to update my JAVA program.) I hope this is helpful to anyone who has trouble downloading programs.

-Buck

Will Support Whatever Transition Occurs

[Regarding the July 2 EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher column:]

I am a 66-year-old occupational therapist of 44 years who has been reading since *The Byte Buyer* days (probably in the late '80s); my son got me hooked. I started with an Atari in 1986 and have progressed to a computer and operating system that will handle Adobe CC5. I have been a customer of one of your advertisers, Best Deal in Chula Vista, for years. I have purchased new machines, upgraded, purchased other equipment and supplies, and have received advice from them and also watched them struggle to keep afloat. Their personalized service cannot be beat.

But like you, I have gone through many transitions. I am still working, but for myself in my profession, and have narrowed my focus to being a consultant to group homes for the developmentally disabled. I did an online post-professional MS degree in my profession from 2006 to 2008. Since September 2009, I have been spending the free time I have taking multiple computer-related courses through the San Diego Community College Continuing Education program at their North City campus (about 40 courses, over 400 in class hours and many hours with several different online classes). And all these classes with excellent instructors have contributed to my current work, volunteer and personal interests. I also have become adept at using both the PC and Mac platform.

I thank you and all of the people that have contributed to the *ComputerEdge* over the many years for so much information I have gained, making me computer literate and able to enjoy the many different venues I have been able to explore. Hopefully the transition may evolve into another cutting-edge experience that your faithful readers have gone through in the past. When you had the printed version, I always picked up two copies; one for myself and one for my father who is now 91 years old. That was one of those "family traditions."

Sincerely,

-Susan McClure, MS, OTR/L, San Diego, CA

FTP with FileZilla

[Regarding Michael J. Ross' July 9 article, "FileZilla for Transferring Files":]

Good article. I have used FileZilla for years. Seems to work great and meets all my FTP needs. It's a quick and visual solution, and does the job very nicely. And, it's a freebie.

-Ron Myers, San Diego

Free Bumper Cases for the iPhone

[Regarding the July 30 Wally Wang's Apple Farm column:]

Unfortunately, Apple has committed many mistakes in relation to the antenna on the new iPhone 4. First, the phone suffers from a "design flaw from a radio frequency reception point of view" as mentioned by Digital Dave in this month's column. Second, Apple's end-user documentation (support.apple.com/manuals) (*click on the iPhone*) contains no disclaimers regarding potential loss of signal strength as a result of grasping the phone near the antenna. As you point out, Nokia HAS included this warning to their users of the E71.

Third, Apple has attempted to diffuse culpability by stating that many mobile phones from other manufacturers also suffer from similar problems. The backlash Apple has experienced from other hardware manufacturers as a result of these statements is in my mind rightly deserved. In the entire history of consumer cellular communications, I can't recall dropped calls and loss of signal strength being so closely linked to a single device. Of course, the scope of this problem should be investigated, with real adverse outcomes such as dropped calls used as endpoints. As you have noted, the large number of iPhone users may make these sorts of issues more evident. Once the iPhone is available

on other GSM carriers, the role AT&T plays in this problem will also be more apparent.

-Gabriel, San Diego, CA

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