ComputorEdge™ Online — 08/20/10

This issue:
The Internet Streaming to Your Television

How the Internet and home networks are becoming more involved in our entertainment.

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Digital Dave

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

How can you download and save a video clip from a Web site?; a rogue pop-up window is issuing a warning, and a reader is wary; a reader's computer inexplicably freezes up two minutes into any YouTube video.

Dear Digital Dave,

How can I capture and copy a video clip from a Web site, or an e-mail link sent to me from a friend? Do I need to download special software for this?

George
San Diego, CA

Dear George,

Many Web sites make it difficult for people to download and save video because they either want to make sure people watch the video on their site or there is a copyright issue. Most often it's because they want the Web traffic and ad revenues. However, anything that can be played on your computer can be recorded one way or another.

One of the common ways to download videos is through specially designed Web sites such as KEEPVID (*keepvid.com/*). (There are many others; perhaps someone will tell us their favorites.) These Web sites allow you to enter the URL of the video into a special field that will download it to your computer. (You can copy the exact URL of a YouTube video by clicking the Share button below the video window. It will appear in a field just below.) KEEPVID also allows you to drag an icon into the Links portion of your browser, which will automatically open the site with the proper URL of the playing video.

Another approach is through browser extensions and add-ons. Most Web browsers have add-ons that will offer video downloading. Firefox has a number of them and Chrome has at least one that will add a Download button to your YouTube screen. To find them, access Extensions or Add-ons through your browser Tools menu (see "Get more..." or "Browse all..." when in the proper section) and search for "video downloader" functions.

It is important to note that most of the videos will be in the Flash video format (FLV) and will not readily play in many media programs. In many cases, you will be given the option of picking the format when downloading. Otherwise, you may need to convert the file to a format that will play with your media program. (Hint: The free viewer IrfanView (*www.irfanview.com/*) will play most formats when all the plug-ins are loaded—including FLV.)

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

Tonight, while surfing the Web, I experienced a pop-up on the screen, warning me that a page I just opened contained "attacks" according to my current security settings. I didn't bother to look into it further than that, but on the pop-up was an option button where I could choose to close the page immediately.

I had never seen anything like this before, so instead of clicking on the button supplied on the pop-up to

get me out of possible trouble, I instead opted to close the page through my Task Manager.

Is this a good practice to get into, when you're unsure of clicking on a button or a link on a Web page, in case that page's links or buttons will download unwanted programs to your computer?

Jerry Hughes
San Diego, Calif.

Dear Jerry,

It is indeed a good practice when you are unsure about a pop-up window. It is possible that any action such as clicking anywhere on the box will either attempt to download something, redirect you to another Web page, or open another pop-up. If the window attempts a download, then you will most likely get a warning from the operating system, but I too like to close these types of pop-ups without touching the window.

A quick way to access the Task Manager in Windows is to hold down the CTRL, SHIFT and ESC keys simultaneously. This will go directly to the Manager while skipping the logon screen. The rogue window will appear in the Applications tab. Select it and click End Task.

Another even quicker technique is to hold down ALT plus the F4 key. This will most often close the selected window or program without clicking on any other windows or feature.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have been a fan for many years (I remember the good old ComputorEdge *hard copy days). By the way, in consonance with this issue's review of printers, I won't give mine up—otherwise, how would I print out your gems of wisdom and have them on file when I need them?*

Anyway, my question: Why does my computer freeze up when I'm about two minutes into any You Tube video? It does it every time. It drives me nuts! I have never been able to finish any "show." The computer does not freeze at other times. Hope you can help.

Gabby DeDonato
San Clemente

Dear Gabby,

There are so many things that could affect your video playback. I will list a few, then, if any readers have encountered a similar problem, ask them to give their solutions.

The first thing to do is ensure that you have the latest version of Adobe Flash (*get.adobe.com/flashplayer/*) installed. If you do need to upgrade, you may want to uninstall the old version first through Programs and Features in the Control Panel. Some people have had a problem otherwise. You should also check to see if you're using the latest version of your Web browser. Just go to its Web site and check if the latest version is your version. (You can find your version number by selecting About from the Help or Tools menu.)

Sometimes there are conflicts between video in browsers and other video-playing programs. Make sure that there are no such programs automatically running or loaded on startup. Skype has been known to be a source of this type of problem. Check the Task Manager (CTRL+SHIFT+ESC) if nothing is obvious.

The next thing to do is check to be sure that all your video drivers are up to date. On Windows computers this can be done through the Device Manager in the Control Panel. If you have an older machine, sometimes you may need to get a more

powerful video card, although this is not usually the problem if you are playing other video.

I don't know what your memory situation is, but if you have too little it could be a problem. Many of the older Windows XP machines are still operating on 512 megabytes of RAM. Getting your total memory up to two or more gigs can make a huge difference in the overall performance of your computer and help with streaming video playback. If you're using Vista, get it up to four gigs.

If you have a slow Internet connection, especially dial-up, then that could be the source of the problem.

These are just a few things that you may check. If someone has solved this problem on their own computer, please enlighten us by leaving a comment.

Digital Dave

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Multimedia Network Drives

“The Future of Home Entertainment?” by Andrea Dunning

> If you're looking for multimedia network drives, you're going to be looking within a limited scope of products. Still, video streaming looks to be part of the future of home entertainment.

In a world of digital cameras, Hulu, Pandora and YouTube, the ability to access media files from anywhere in your house is becoming less of a luxury and more of a necessity. Multimedia network drives/players plug into your TV and allow you to directly access your digital media files with your TV or other networked device, without using a computer as an intermediary. More advanced models also allow access to online media.

There are three main players in the U.S. multimedia network drive market: Iomega, Western Digital and Seagate. As multimedia network drives have been on the market only a few years, features have not been completely standardized across the market. Each company's devices offer a variety of features, but no device offers all features, so buyers really have to think about how they're going to use the device before settling on a particular model.

There is an important difference between a multimedia drive and multimedia player. The multimedia drive is designed to be primarily a network drive that holds your media files and plays them on your television. A stand-alone media player does not have hard drive capacity, but will stream media from your network and the Internet, depending on the capabilities of the player. A particular product may combine both the hard drive and player limited in streaming capability, although the current emphasis seems to be on dedicated media players—especially in regard to Netflix streaming. Ultimately, it would be expected that all the features of network drives, digital video recorders (DVR), and network/Internet streaming would be combined into one box, but this is not yet the reality.

Figure 1. Iomega ScreenPlay Director HD Multimedia Drive (left) and ScreenPlay Plus HD Media Player (right).

Iomega offers two models of its ScreenPlay multimedia network drive. The standard version, ScreenPlay Plus (*go.iomega.com/en-us/products/multimedia-drive/screenplay153-multimedia-drives/screenplay-plus/?partner=4760*), offers file access only, while the premium version, ScreenPlay Director (*go.iomega.com/en-us/products/multimedia-drive/screenplay153-multimedia-drives/screenplay-director/?partner=4760*), also allows access to online content, such as Flickr, Internet radio, RSS feeds and podcasts. It used to be able to access YouTube, but if you dig deep enough you'll learn that YouTube made some changes (*iomega-na-en.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/iomega_na_en.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faqid=22931*) in April, and ScreenPlay is no longer able to access the site. Hopefully they'll patch it up soon, since the company is still name-dropping YouTube in its advertising.

ScreenPlay Director also comes with Protection Suite software. ScreenPlay Plus comes with 1TB of storage, while ScreenPlay Director has 1TB and 2TB models. Both models can be connected to your home network via Ethernet cable, but the ScreenPlay Director is also wireless-ready, though you need to buy a separate Wi-Fi adapter.

Figure 2. Seagate FreeAgent GoFlex TV HD Media Player (right) and FreeAgent Theater+ HD Media Player (left).

Seagate has two products competing for the same market: the FreeAgent GoFlex TV HD Media Player (*www.seagate.com/www/en-us/products/home_entertainment/hd-media-player/*) and FreeAgent Theater+ HD Media Player (*www.seagate.com/www/en-us/products/home_entertainment/freeagent_theater_plus/*). These two devices connect to your home network via Ethernet cable or Wi-Fi (with adapter), and files saved on attached drives can be accessed by networked computers. You can stream directly from any networked computer or the Internet (including Netflix, YouTube, vTuner, Picasa, and Flickr). GoFlex has access to Paramount; Theater+ doesn't. GoFlex works with GoFlex drives (or any other USB drive); Theater+ works with FreeAgent drives (or any other external hard drive). You can purchase Theater+ with or without a hard drive, but GoFlex can only be purchased on its own. Features are nearly identical on the two models because GoFlex was released a year after Theater+ and is basically just an updated version of the device.

Figure 3. Western Digital's WD Elements Play (left) and WD TV Live Plus (right).

Compared to Iomega and Seagate, Western Digital's multimedia offerings are a little behind the times. Western Digital has WD Elements Play (*www.wdc.com/en/products/products.asp?driveid=863*), which stores media, plugs into your TV, and that's it. The device has no network connection. Files have to be transferred via USB connection from your computer to the drive. The drive then has to be physically moved and plugged into your TV.

Western Digital's networked device is WD TV Live Plus (*www.wdc.com/en/products/Products.asp?DriveID=832*). This device can stream from any networked computer, Netflix, YouTube, Pandora, Flickr, and Live365.com (Internet radio). WD TV Live Plus, when connected to an external hard drive, can be used as a network drive, but only if you modify the firmware (which undoubtedly voids the warranty).

Figure 4. Emtec Full HD (1080p) HDD Multimedia player and recorder S800H.

Now, the Emtec Full HD (1080p) HDD Multimedia player (*www.emtec-international.com/en/produit.php?categorie=STMOB&gamme=DISQUES%20DURS&ss_gamme=S800H*) and recorder S800H is probably the best multimedia network drive on the market. It supports streaming and transmission, can connect through a router or directly to wireless devices, supports Internet radio, can replace your DVR, and has an integrated Web server that allows you to set up a BitTorrent to access files remotely. Or seed a torrent with all of those totally legal things one tends to do with torrents. Unfortunately, it's only available in Europe. If you search around a bit you can find them available for import, but the DVR function doesn't work with U.S. TV. Emtec is starting to enter the U.S. market, though, so hopefully we'll be seeing U.S. versions of these devices in the future.

LaCie (*www.lacie.com/us/products/range.htm?id=10049*) also offers a range of multimedia drives, although they do not seem to be set up for streaming video such as Netflix.

All in all, if you're looking for multimedia network drives, you're going to be looking within a limited scope of products. Not all of them stream, not all of them have integrated memory, and WD Elements Play doesn't even hook up to your network. None of them will replace your DVR yet (though judging from the Emtec S800, that is probably on the horizon), so you will have to find space for yet another device beneath your TV. None of the devices currently available in the U.S. can be accessed from the Internet.

Still, it's not all bad news. Most of the devices available support HD (or at least come in an HD version), USB ports are plentiful, and most of the sites you want to stream from work with most of the devices. Of course, if you happen to live in a household with an Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3, you already have a multimedia network drive/player comparable to any on the market.

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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The Netflix Label on the Box

"With plenty of Internet streaming competitors, Netflix is the one to watch." by Jack Dunning

> While there are numerous standards and services that are supported by media hardware devices, the one way to ensure that your equipment will be capable of Internet streaming is by recognizing that Netflix logo on the side of the box.

Netflix recently made a deal with EPIX, which holds rebroadcast rights for content from Paramount, Lionsgate and MGM, to stream video over the Internet starting September 1, 2010. In an effort not to kill its current pay-per-view and on-demand cable business, the deal is limited to offering films and television shows 90 days after their first release to EPIX—which is the vast majority of its holdings. The price is $900 million over five years. This is a major step for Netflix (almost $1 billion), but the company expects to see a savings in its current DVD postage costs, which run about $600 million per year.

Elmer used to wait every day on his horse by the mailbox for his Netflix DVD until he discovered that they would stream all the original *Mavericks* over the Internet.

The increase in streaming inventory will greatly enhance the attractiveness of the $8.99 per-month rate that Netflix charges its users—regardless of the number of programs watched. This is devastating to cable and satellite services—plus the other Internet streaming companies such as CinemaNow—which may charge anywhere between $2.99 and $6.99 for viewing a single film or program. The only question is if having to wait a few months to view programs—many of which are already old—will outweigh the desire to see programming immediately. Of course a subscriber can always fall back on the mailed DVD, which is included in the same monthly fee.

Although it has tried, Netflix has not made progress with HBO, which holds cable and Internet rights to films from Warner Bros., Twentieth Century Fox and Universal Pictures. HBO says it has no interest in working with Netflix, which HBO most probably views as a threat to its core business—if it's smart.

The purpose of highlighting this news is not to push Netflix. I own no stock and have no personal interest in the company. Netflix is one of the few companies that has the foresight and guts to cannibalize its own core business—DVDs by mail. Ultimately, Internet streaming will devastate DVD rental as well as expensive on-demand rentals. While HBO may think that it holds excellent cards right now, Netflix is poised to become the next Internet giant in the same manner as Amazon, eBay and Google in their respective markets. Eventually, HBO will be seeking out deals with Netflix in order to recoup some of their costs of doing business.

There are plenty of Internet streaming competitors emerging, so why is Netflix the one who will come out on top? Netfix has quickly captured the dominant market position. Everyone else is now playing catch-up. Netflix has become the trademarked label that blesses hardware for Internet streaming. For many people looking for a new multimedia drive, Blu-ray DVD player, or other media player, the questions is, "Will it play Netflix?" The Netflix label is appearing in advertising and on the boxes of media hardware. If choosing between two pieces of equipment, the one with the Netflix logo gets the nod. While you can immediately stream Netflix and other Internet content to your computer, there are a number of ways to enjoy Internet streaming to your television.

Game Consoles

If you own a PlayStation 3 or Wii game console, you can immediately start Internet streaming of entertainment. All you need is an Internet connection and an account with the streaming service (you may need a setup disc). If you have the Xbox game console, then to get Netflix you will also need an Xbox Gold Live membership that will run $40 per year. (Microsoft wants its due.)

Media Players

If you don't own a game console, then one of the least expensive ways to get started is with a media player designed for Internet streaming, such as the Roku (*www.roku.com/*) ($69.95). All it consists of is a box that plugs into your television (or receiver) and a Wi-Fi connection to your Internet source. Other Netflix-blessed players are the Seagate FreeAgent Theater+ HD Media Player (*www.seagate.com/www/en-us/products/home_entertainment/freeagent_theater_plus/*) ($199.99) and the Western Digital TV Live Plus HD Media Player (*www.wdc.com/en/products/products.asp?DriveID=832*) $149.99.

Blu-ray Players

There is a large array of Blu-ray players that, when connected to the Internet (look for a built-in Wi-Fi adapter, not the option), also offer Internet streaming—most do. With the promising future of Internet streaming, it is a feature that is fast becoming a must on all Blu-ray drives. This type of DVD drive is ideal for those who will be both streaming video and playing DVDs that are not yet available for streaming.

HD Televisions

Many of the new HD televisions now have Internet streaming capabilities built-in—no extra media box required. If you are looking for a new HDTV, then this feature is certainly worth considering.

Home Theater Systems

If you're going to the expenses of putting in an entire home theater system, then it is worthwhile to include Internet streaming capabilities. There are a number of models that include the features. All you need to do is look for the Netflix logo.

There are many ways to get Internet video streaming to your television. There are many companies offering the service. While there are numerous standards and services that are supported by media hardware devices, the one

way to ensure that your equipment will be capable of Internet streaming is by recognizing that Netflix logo on the side of the box.

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

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Windows Tips and Tricks

Windows Tips and Tricks

"Pining for XP? Get to Know Windows 7" by Jack Dunning

A reader still swears by key functions in XP as opposed to Windows 7 offerings. Is it prudent to stick with the OS you know and love, or force a change to a better product?

I was worried about my beloved seven-year-old PC that faithfully runs XP. So back in April, almost five months ago, I purchased a new computer with Windows 7 installed. Both machines are available anytime and sit side by side on my work table.

To try to encourage myself to use the Windows 7 machine more, I moved all working files over to that machine so it is now also a file server for both PCs. But in all honesty, I still use the old XP PC 80 percent of the time and the newer Gateway PC with superior hardware and Windows 7 only 20 percent of the time.

The reason is the File Manager program, or as it is now known, Windows Explorer. Key functions that I rely on heavily were removed from the new Windows 7 version of Windows Explorer.

If I were to buy a brand-new PC today, I would insist that it have a clean install of XP Professional on it.

Rajhar, Denver, CO

Rajhar, I appreciate your sentiment. Microsoft is noted for making changes that confuse and set back users. Just ask anyone who uses the Microsoft Office suite of programs. However, seven years is a long time for a computer to last —well done. While there have been changes to Windows over that time, if you ignore Vista, I don't think that they are drastic. When a feature was removed from Windows, it was usually because an alternative (often better) feature was added. It may help to review the actual items that were removed after Windows XP (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_features_removed_in_Windows_Vista*) .

In relation to Windows Explorer, there were a number of key commands that worked under Windows XP in both the navigation pane (left) and the main pane (right file list) that no longer work in the navigation pane in Windows 7, such as single-click to rename a folder or ALT+ENTER to display the Properties windows. These functions do continue to work on a highlighted item in the main pane. However, the features can be accessed with the right-click menu in the navigation pane. (The F2 key will work for Rename in the navigation menu.)

These changes probably relate to the introduction of the Favorites/Libraries/Homegroup features in the navigation pane of Windows 7. While I consider these new options an improvement for people who want to better organize how they use their computer without needing to rework the structures on their hard drives, many people find them annoying. They are not as straightforward as the tree structure in Windows XP, which reflects the folder/file layout on the hard drive. The same tree structure is available, but it's been relegated to a less significant location further down the list.

As for key functions being removed from Windows 7, I can assure you that while some may not work in certain

instances such as described above, there are far more key functions than exist in Windows XP. As an example, the Windows Explorer key functions for Windows XP (*support.microsoft.com/kb/301583*) are listed in Figure 1. The Windows Explorer key functions for Windows 7 (*windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows7/Keyboard-shortcuts*) are listed in Figure 2.

Windows Explorer keyboard shortcuts

- END (Display the bottom of the active window)
- HOME (Display the top of the active window)
- NUM LOCK+Asterisk sign (*) (Display all of the subfolders that are under the selected folder)
- NUM LOCK+Plus sign (+) (Display the contents of the selected folder)
- NUM LOCK+Minus sign (-) (Collapse the selected folder)
- LEFT ARROW (Collapse the current selection if it is expanded, or select the parent folder)
- RIGHT ARROW (Display the current selection if it is collapsed, or select the first subfolder)

Figure 1. Windows XP Windows Explorer keyboard shortcuts.

Windows Explorer Keyboard Shortcuts for Windows 7

Press this key	To do this
Ctrl+N	Open a new window
Ctrl+W	Close the current window
Ctrl+Shift+N	Create a new folder
End	Display the bottom of the active window
Home	Display the top of the active window
F11	Maximize or minimize the active window
Ctrl+Period (.)	Rotate a picture clockwise
Ctrl+Comma (,)	Rotate a picture counter-clockwise
Num Lock+Asterisk (*) on numeric keypad	Display all subfolders under the selected folder
Num Lock+Plus Sign (+) on numeric keypad	Display the contents of the selected folder
Num Lock+Minus Sign (-) on numeric keypad	Collapse the selected folder
Left Arrow	Collapse the current selection (if it's expanded), or select the parent folder
Alt+Enter	Open the Properties dialog box for the selected item
Alt+P	Display the preview pane
Alt+Left Arrow	View the previous folder
Backspace	View the previous folder
Right Arrow	Display the current selection (if it's collapsed), or select the first subfolder
Alt+Right Arrow	View the next folder
Alt+Up Arrow	View the parent folder
Ctrl+Shift+E	Display all folders above the selected folder
Ctrl+Mouse scroll wheel	Change the size and appearance of file and folder icons
Alt+D	Select the address bar
Ctrl+E	Select the search box
Ctrl+F	Select the search box

Ctrl+E	Select the search box
Ctrl+F	Select the search box

Figure 2. Windows 7 Windows Explorer keyboard shortcuts.

Admittedly, many of the shortcuts you're using may be in the list of General keyboard shortcuts not shown here, but even then there are 39 such shortcuts in Windows XP and 45 in Windows 7.

I actually think that you are doing the right thing for you by keeping the two computers side by side. I operate in a similar fashion with a Windows Vista laptop and a Windows 7 desktop computer. I still do most of my work on the Vista laptop because my primary computer needs to be a laptop for when I'm traveling. I will often use the Windows 7 machine when working because it's faster and I can take advantage of Favorites and Libraries to work directly on the laptop's hard drive.

When your XP dies (and it will eventually), you will be able to continue on with the Windows 7 machine. It will take a little getting used to, but not as long as you think—once you are using it all the time. Sometimes we don't make changes until we force ourselves to change. I think that looking for Windows XP on a new computer would be a mistake. Windows 7 is a much superior product and well worth the learning curve involved.

When I do get a new laptop as my new working machine, it will be a Windows 7 computer. I would never consider going back to Windows XP. For me, that would be just a little bit too much living in the past.

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

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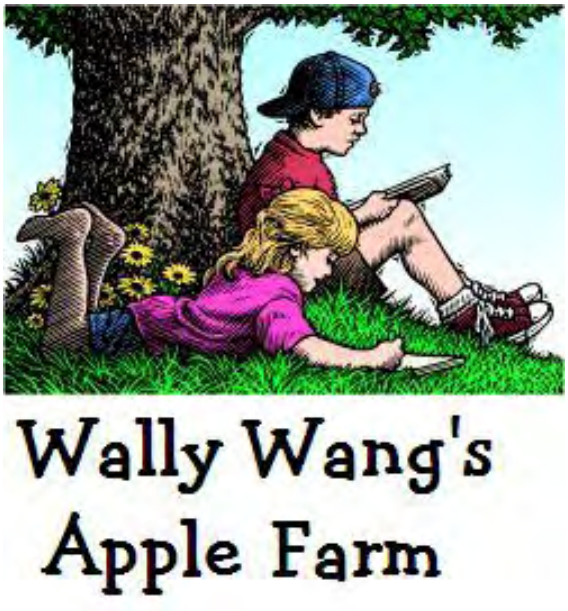

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Home Entertainment" by Wally Wang

Apple TV can be handy for watching videos on a big-screen TV, but when you want to move around the house, you might prefer the iPad. Also, more on Flash, or Frash, on your iPhone; Apple tackles the college market again; Microsoft's latest arguments against choosing a Macintosh; anyone with a dream can create their own cartoon series; and a tip on customizing the way your files appear in the Finder.

When many people think of using a computer for home entertainment, they may think of how they can watch movies or play music on it. Some people might even think of connecting a computer to a television cable and watching TV programs directly on their computer screen.

For those who want to connect their computer to a television, there's always Apple TV. The basic idea behind Apple TV is to act as a bridge between your computer and your television. Take your digital photographs on your computer, send them to Apple TV, and the Apple TV displays them on your television set.

Load iTunes on your computer and you can play music or video on your television set as well. If you regularly watch streaming video on your computer, Apple TV lets you watch it on your much larger television screen instead.

As an alternative, you can eliminate the computer altogether and just plug your Apple TV into a television set and a high-speed Internet connection. Now you can use Apple TV to buy or rent movies and watch them on your television screen. Renting the latest releases costs $3.99 ($4.99 for high definition), while renting older titles costs only $2.99 ($3.99 for high definition).

Apple TV can be handy for watching videos on a big-screen television, but when you want to move around the house in a room that may not have a television set, you might prefer using the iPad instead.

Cooper Murphy Webb (*coopermurphywebb.com/ipad-consumer-usage-study*) recently polled iPad users to question what they did with their iPad. Over 43 percent of iPad owners used their iPad over 10 hours a week, and 24 percent of iPad owners used the iPad as their primary entertainment device. (Ordinary computers were used as the primary entertainment device by 33 percent of iPad owners.)

For reading, 31 percent of iPad owners preferred using the iPad instead of printed copies and 41 percent of iPad owners preferred the iPad over reading printed books. For gaming, 37 percent of iPad owners preferred the iPad over gaming consoles.

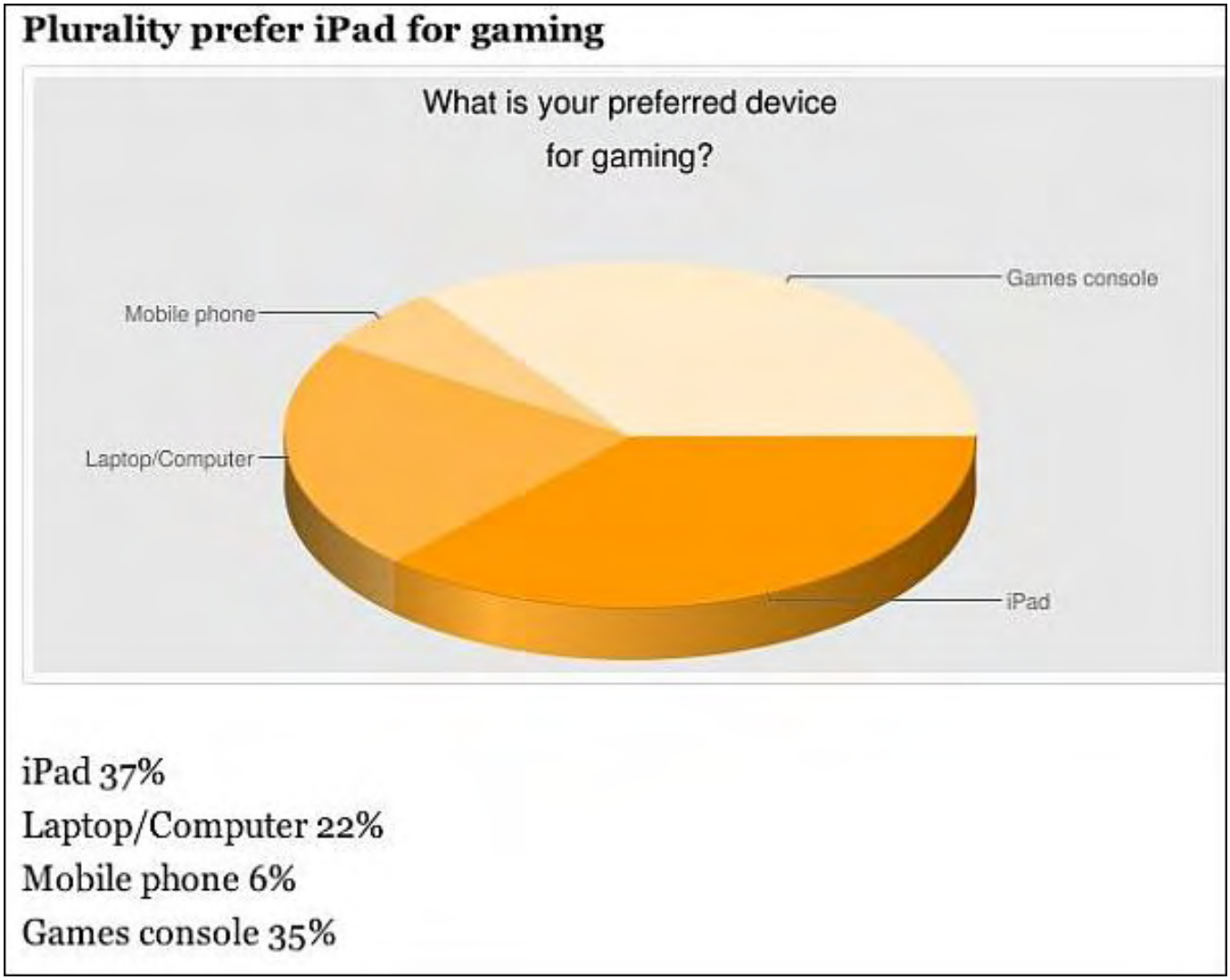

Figure 1. iPad owners prefer playing games on the iPad over dedicated game consoles.

Overall, iPad owners are happily reading and playing games on the iPad rather than using traditional alternatives. Unlike Apple TV, the iPad is completely portable, so you can read or play games anywhere you want.

Apple TV may be better for watching full-length movies, but the iPad is far better for reading or playing games. Even better, you can still use the iPad for doing something productive, so you can write the iPad off as a business expense.

Then again, if you really want to watch movies, it may just be cheaper to rent a DVD from Redbox (*www.redbox.com*) or Netflix (*www.netflix.com*) and skip the computer altogether.

Flash on the iPhone

For those who want Flash on their iPhone, there's a solution called Frash. To install Frash, you have to jailbreak your iPhone, which allows you to customize and install any apps on your iPhone.

CNET recently tried Frash (*news.cnet.com/8301-27076_3-20013186-248.html*) and found that it did allow the iPhone to run many Flash sites. What's missing in the article is whether running Flash drained the battery and if so, by how much. What's more telling is this comment about running Flash games on the iPhone, which tended to crash.

"This can't be blamed on Frash as much as on the fact that Flash games have been developed to take advantage of keyboards and mice—Adobe is working hard with developers to get them to rewrite old games to work on mobile

hardware. Even so, visiting these mobile-optimized versions did not end up with playable games."

In other words, to run Flash properly on mobile devices, every Web site on the Internet must redesign their Flash pages. Until this happens, Flash on mobile devices will never be 100 percent identical to running Flash on a regular computer.

Although Flash on mobile devices can never be exactly equal to the experience of running Flash on a computer (until mobile phone processors and battery life increase in power), Flash support on mobile devices may be adequate for most people. The key is whether Flash on mobile devices proves acceptable enough that nobody will mind its inherent limitations.

Just remember that running Flash also provides hackers and malware with another route into your mobile device. The United States Computer Readiness Emergency Team (US-CERT) recently issued a warning about security vulnerabilities in Flash (*www.us-cert.gov/cas/alerts/SA10-223A.html*) where they recommended updating to a newer version of Flash or disabling it altogether.

For some people, Flash is important enough that they're willing to overlook its drawbacks. For others, Flash's limitations make alternatives, such as HTML 5, more attractive every day.

Apple Tackles the College Market (Again)

According to the University of Virginia, usage of Windows and Macintosh computers is nearly equal. Usage of Windows at the school peaked in 2004 before gradually dipping, while Macintosh usage steadily grows.

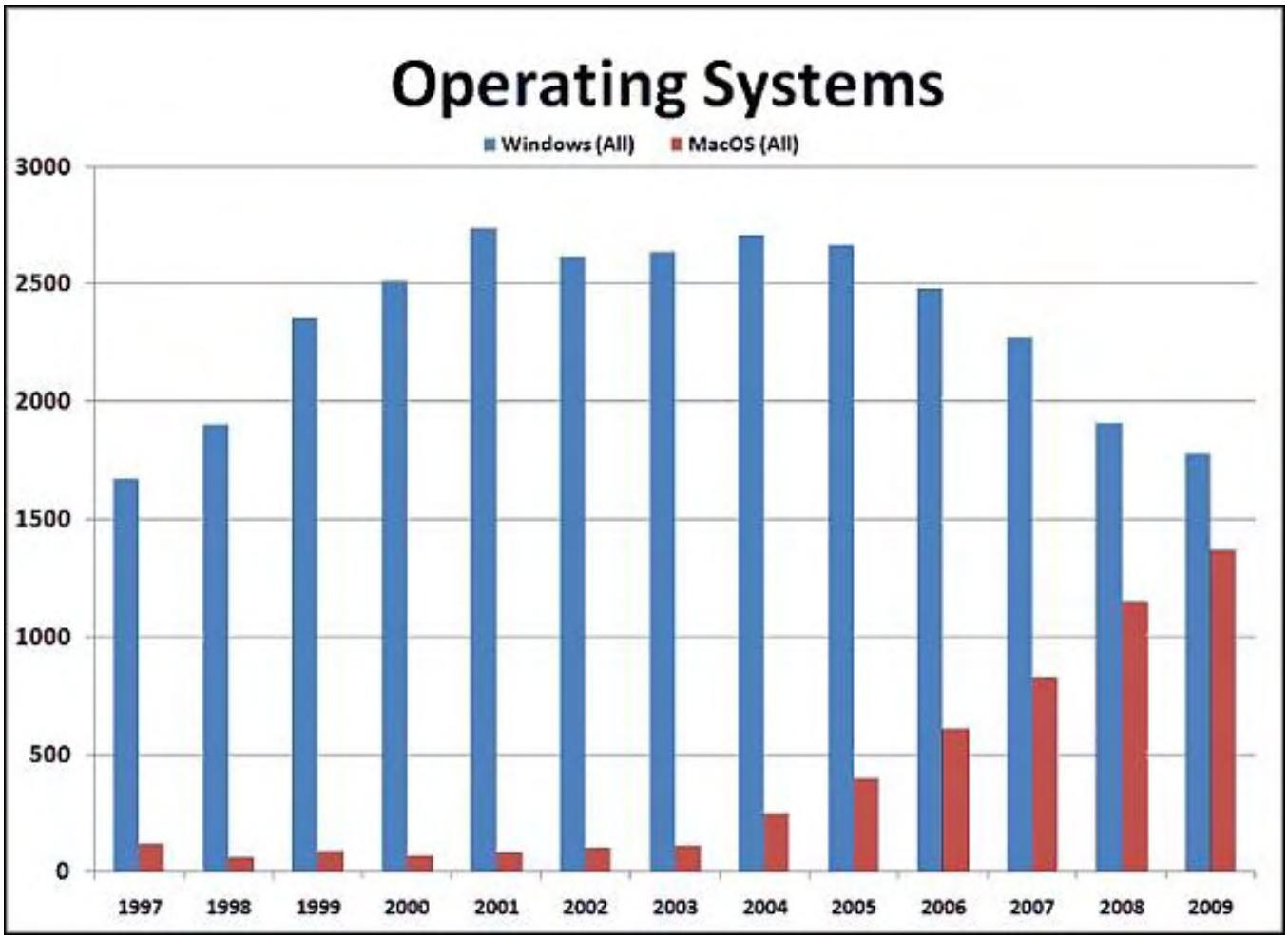

Figure 2. The ratio of Windows to Mac computers is nearing equality.

Is this ratio of Windows vs. Mac computers unique to the University of Virginia? Most likely, this represents a trend of college students in general, which provides a glimpse into the future for when these college students graduate and enter the working world.

Walk into any Starbucks store and count the number of Windows and Mac laptops people are using. Just five years ago, nearly everyone used a Windows laptop. Today, you can often see a large number of Mac laptops mixed in with Windows laptops. Clearly more people are using the Macintosh than in years past.

Even back in 2007, a student journalist noted the growing number of Macintosh users at Princeton University (*www.dailyprincetonian.com/2007/10/05/18871/*) to the point where more Princeton students were buying Macs than Windows PCs.

Are college students just ahead of their time or are college students simply out of touch with the rest of the world? Wait a few more years and we'll be able to see for ourselves.

Figure 3. In this picture of a college auditorium, count the number of students using a Macintosh laptop identified by its telltale lit up Apple logo.

Another Head Scratcher From Microsoft

Microsoft recently launched a Web campaign to explain why Windows is superior to the Macintosh (*www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-7/compare/pc-vs-mac.aspx*). While most of their arguments make sense (such as the inability to get a Blu-ray drive built-in to a Macintosh), other arguments make no sense whatsoever.

Microsoft claims that the Macintosh requires a learning curve because "the mouse works differently." Nowhere does Microsoft explain what this statement even means. How does the mouse work differently? You can plug a Microsoft mouse into a Macintosh and the left and right mouse buttons still let you click to point and choose commands.

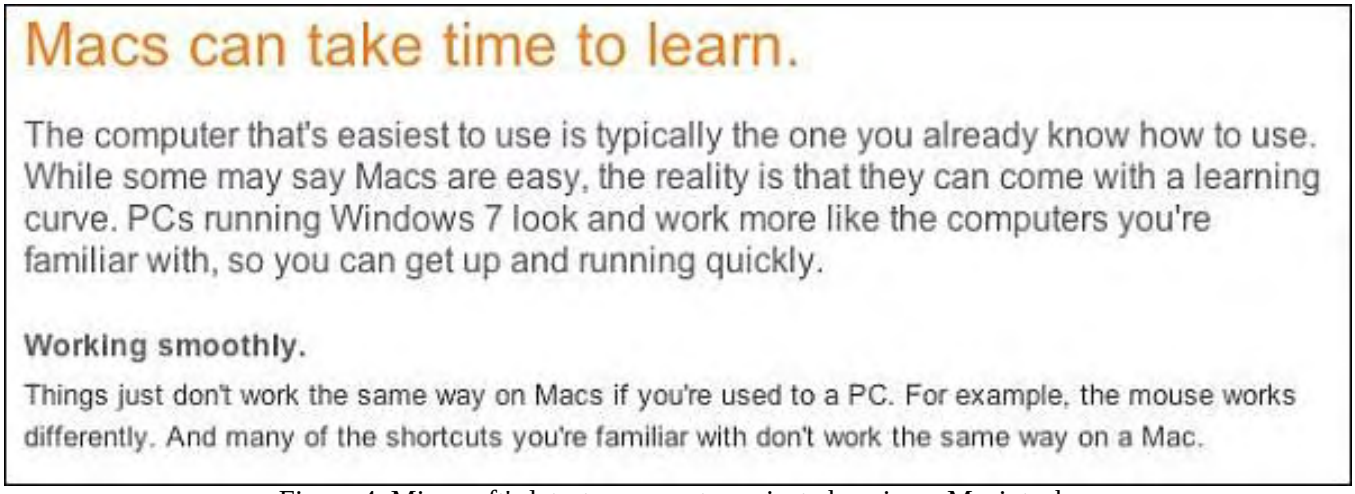

Figure 4. Microsoft's latest arguments against choosing a Macintosh.

The argument that Macs take time to learn can apply to using any device that you're not already familiar with. Instead of saying, "PCs running Windows 7 look and work more like the computers you're familiar with," you could just as well have said that back in 1990, to imply that MS-DOS is superior to Microsoft Windows, "PCs running MS-DOS look and work more like the computers you're familiar with."

Go back further in time when CP/M-80 was the dominant operating system and the statement reads the same to imply that MS-DOS is inferior, "PCs running CP/M-80 look and work more like the computers you're familiar with."

Instead of touting the benefits of Windows 7, Microsoft uses the fear of change as a reason to avoid trying the Macintosh. There are valid reasons not to switch to the Macintosh (such as the need to run a specific program that only runs on Windows), but there are also equally valid reasons to switch to the Macintosh based on its technical features (you don't have to worry about problems stemming from corrupting the Windows Registry).

Another silly argument that Microsoft makes is that if you use Microsoft Office on Windows, then your files may not appear correctly on a Macintosh using Apple's iWork office suite. The solution to this problem is simple. Get Microsoft Office for the Mac.

Rather than use facts to make a compelling case for sticking with Windows, Microsoft relies on scaring people who may not have the technical knowledge to understand and verify the answers for themselves. The next time someone tries to convince you not to consider a Macintosh, ask yourself if they're using fear tactics. If so, chances are good they have to rely on fear tactics because they don't have enough evidence to support their case otherwise, just like Microsoft.

Flash and a Dream

Over ten years ago, Michael Montijo had a dream. He wanted to create a cartoon series based on his own life, so he developed a show called The Adventures of Pachuko Boy (*www.pachukoboy.com*).

Figure 5. The Adventures of Pachuko Boy began as a Flash cartoon.

With the help of a professional animator, Phil Ortiz, Michael created a demo cartoon episode using Adobe Flash. Then Michael promoted his cartoon idea to Hollywood and is on his way to selling his cartoon series to a major network.

In the old days, creating a demo cartoon episode was out of the reach of everybody except for professional animation studios. Today, using any computer and the right software, anyone with a dream can create their own cartoon series and possibly sell it to Hollywood too.

Visit the The Adventures of Pachuko Boy Web site and keep in touch with Michael to learn when The Adventures of Pachuko Boy will be airing on a network so you can watch it on TV one day.

Nisus Thesaurus

A spell checker can be handy for correcting typos or misspellings, but when you're writing, you may need a thesaurus instead to help you find the right word. Rather than buy a paperback thesaurus, download a free copy of Nisus Thesaurus (*www.nisus.com/Thesaurus/*).

Based on a research project from Princeton University, called WordNet (*wordnet.princeton.edu/*), Nisus Thesaurus lets you repetitively search for synonyms and antonyms of a word until you find a word that you like.

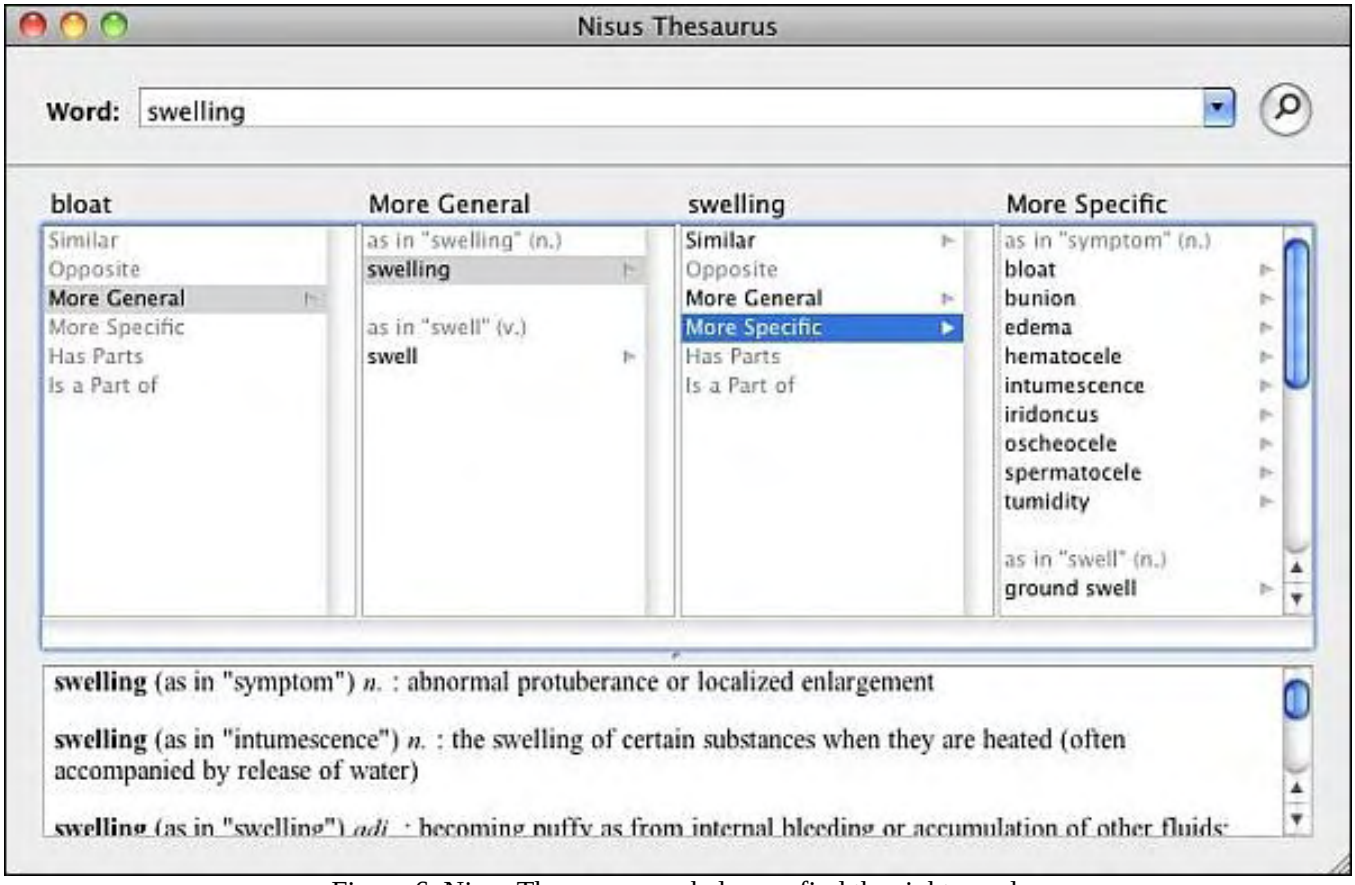

Figure 6. Nisus Thesaurus can help you find the right word.

Since Nisus Thesaurus is a separate program, you can use it side by side with any other program such as your favorite word processor, e-mail program, or instant messaging client. Now the right word can not only be on the tip of your tongue, but also within reach of your keyboard as well.

* * *

When you view your files in the Finder window, it may display the file name, size, date, and other information that you may not care to see. To hide this clutter, just right-click on any file to display a pop-up menu. Now choose Show View Options.

A window appears, listing all the options you can select (or de-select) to customize the way your files appear in the Finder.

Figure 7. You can customize the way your files appear in the Finder.

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

Wally is responsible for the following books:

Microsoft Office 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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Rob, The Computor Tutor

Rob, The ComputorTutor: Tech Solutions with Microsoft Word

"More Word Macros" by Rob Spahitz

Last week we learned how to record a macro so that Word can save our steps and play them back on demand. This week we sneak a peek at how all this works behind the scenes.

Last week we learned how to record a macro so that Word can save our steps and play them back on demand. This week we sneak a peek at how this works.

Record the Macro

First let's go ahead and record a macro again.

In Word, open a new blank document. In Word 2010, go to the View menu tab, and in the Macros group box click on the arrow below the picture and then select Record Macro, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Recording a Macro.

Note: If you are using Word 2003, go to menu Tool/Macro/Record New Macro to perform the same task.

In the dialog box that appears, enter a valid name such as MyAddress (without spaces or special punctuation except for underscores, letters and digits, as described last week). Also, in the "Store Macro In" dropdown list box, select the current document (Document1) rather than All Documents (Normal.dotm or Normal.dot). Finally, click on the OK button to start the recording.

With the macro now recording (as seen by a small blue box in the bottom status bar in Word 2010, or a small window that appears with that same blue box and another symbol), go ahead and type your name and address similar to this:

Rob The ComputorTutor
www.ComputorEdge.com
San Diego, CA 92123

Then click on the blue square or return to the menu item and select Stop Recording. You have now recorded a macro, including any misspellings that you have in the text.

To play back the recording, simply ask Word to play it back. Typically, you move the cursor to the place where you want to start, and then run the macro. For this, I'll suggest moving to the line below the current text; you could also delete the current text since what you recorded is independent of that. You could even put the cursor in the middle of the other text, in which case the replayed text will appear in the middle of the other text (which will make it appear wrong in this case).

With your cursor at the desired location, play the macro. To do that, click on the macros picture (or in Word 2003 select Tools/Macro/Macros or press the Alt+F8 key combination). You'll get the macro selection window, as seen in Figure 2.

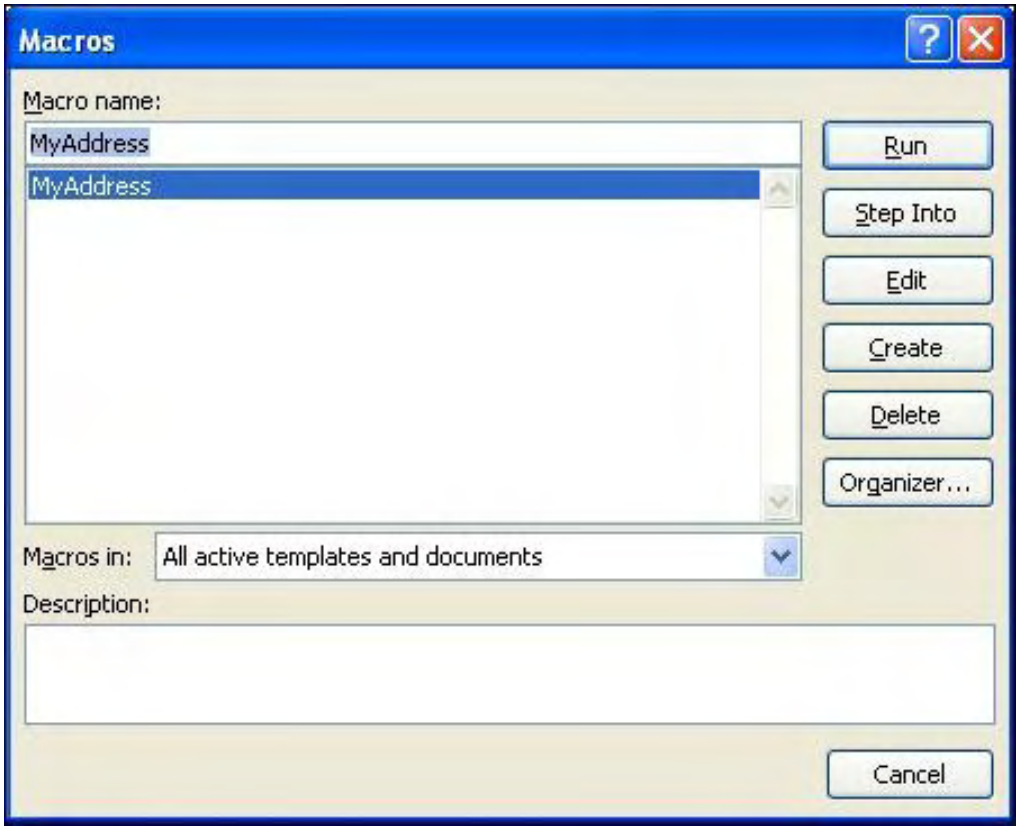

Figure 2. Macro Selection Window.

Select the macro to play back (MyAddress) and press the Run button. You should see the previously typed text appear at the place where you put the cursor, as though you had retyped it.

Inner Workings of Macros

OK, so what's really going on with these macros? First, understand that a macro is really just a collection of commands that the Word application uses to perform a task. All current versions of Word (since 1995) use Visual Basic (VB), a computer programming language, to collect the commands and process them. For this reason, Word and other Microsoft Office products call macros VBA (Visual Basic for Applications). This means that if you learn Visual Basic, you can learn how to make macros work more effectively.

Do you really care that macros are made using VBA? Well, if the macro you recorded can play back and give you everything you need, then learning VB will not help you. Also, if you can re-record your macro easily, then you don't need to learn VB. And, over the years, new versions of Word added more and more useful features that have overcome the need to make simple macros. But if you find that Word doesn't offer what you need, you can use macros to do that for you. As an example, you may want Word to import information from a Web site and format it. Since there are no built-in functions for that yet, macros can help you to accomplish that if you learn enough about how VB handles these things.

So let's see what got created when we recorded our macro. To do this, we need to proceed to the Visual Basic area of Word. For now, you can get there from the same macro window shown above in Figure 2. Proceed there and instead of pressing the Run button, select the macro to view and press the Edit button. You should see a new window open, taking up a large portion of the screen, similar to Figure 3. This is currently the same regardless of which version of Word you use, from Word 95 to Word 2010.

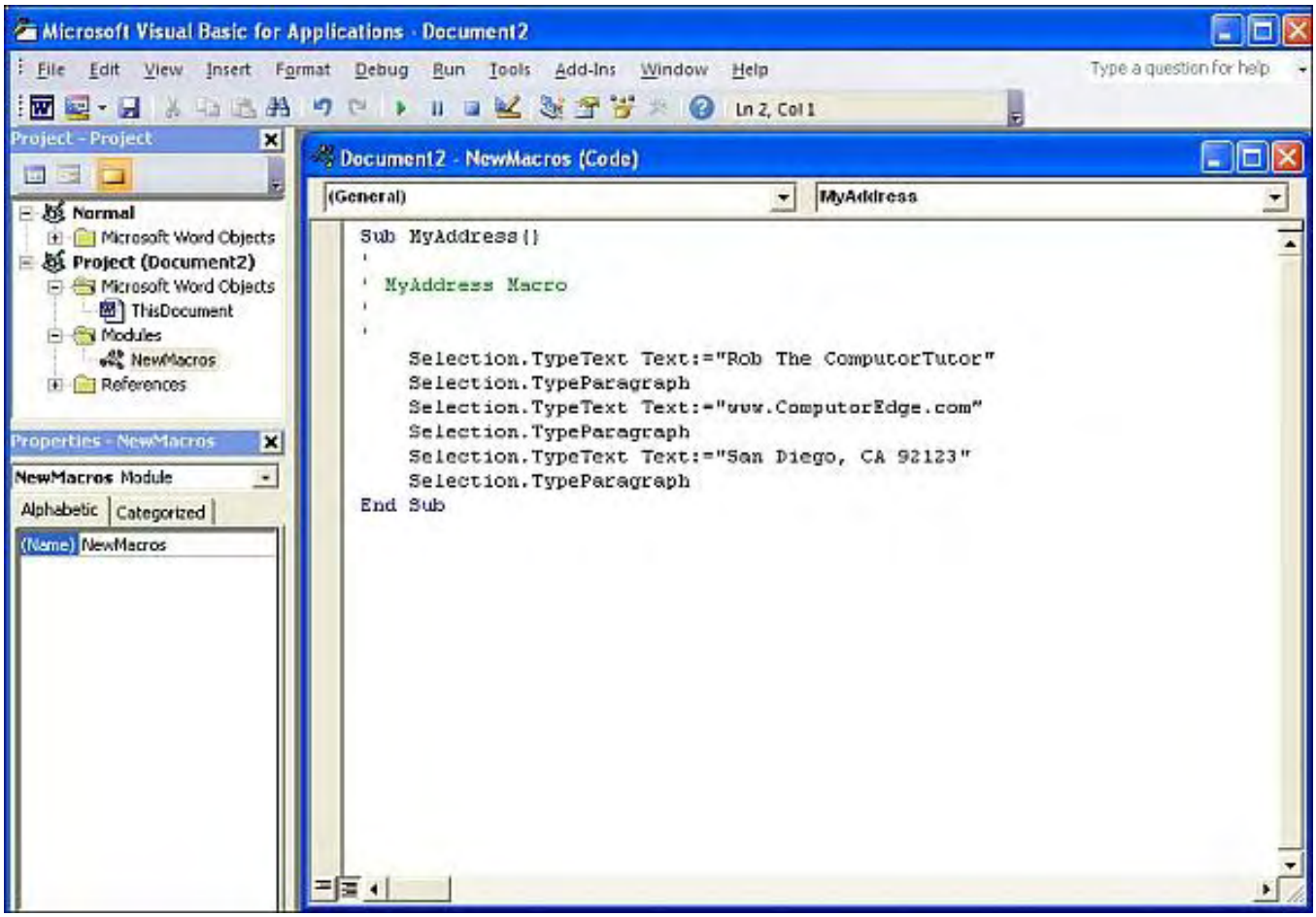

Figure 3. Visual Basic Macro Environment.

Looking at the Visual Basic environment, you see four main regions. The first region is the menu and toolbar area at the top. This includes many traditional features such as Save, Copy and Paste. It also includes some computer-programming features to assist in checking the instructions to make sure it works correctly.

The next region, near the top left corner of the window, is the Project window. This contains information about the current projects available, organized in typical folder-document style structures. Notice how one piece is called Normal and the next is Project with your document name in parentheses (mine is showing Document2). The reference to Normal is looking at macros that are stored in Word's Normal template, and includes macros that are available to all documents. Since we stored our macro in the current document, it should not appear in the Normal group unless you forgot to select that dropdown list when recording the macro. Also note that below the project is a folder called Module. This is the traditional place for storing macros. Within that folder is something called NewMacros, which is the name that Word gives the file that will contain the macro you just created.

The next region, below the Projects, is Properties. This contains additional settings for various parts of the project. In this case, you can see that the NewMacros project is selected and you can rename it following standard VB naming conventions (letters, digits and underscores, starting with a letter). As we select other items we will see other things appear in this window.

Finally, the most dominant area of the environment is the programming window. The title of the window is the name of your document followed by the name of the file (currently NewMacro) and the type of file (VB Code). Beneath this are two dropdown lists. The left one, showing (General) identified the current object you are looking at. Since we're not looking at any particular object, it falls into the category of just a general-purpose object. The list on the right shows a collection of things called events when looking at objects. But for General it's just some general procedures (macros) available in the document. Beneath that, the big white text area, is where your macros are defined using the Visual Basic language.

In VB, a macro is called a procedure or subroutine. These subroutines are used to process a collection of instructions to perform a task. These start with the word Sub (for Subroutine) followed by the name of the procedure, which matches the name of the macro. This is why macros must follow the naming conventions of VB. At the end of the subroutine is a line that ends the subroutine: End Sub. Between these two lines are all of the instructions used to help make the macro work.

Looking more at the subroutine, you see that the first four lines are green and the rest are black. In VB, green items are "comments" or messages to the programmers. In this case, the macro recording wizard added the name of the macro, which is somewhat redundant since you can find the name in the Sub line. If you had added a description in the macro wizard, that would also appear along with any Alt/Control-key combination that you may have attached to the macro. Since these messages are just for the programmers, they can be changed as needed without affecting the macro process.

The black lines of the subroutine define the commands. Sometimes you will also see blue text, which are VB commands (Such as Sub and End). Since we see only black, we know that VB is simply controlling Word in a sequence of Word commands.

Word Macro Language

Interestingly, this VB window really shows us two different languages working together. The VB language helps to control the flow of the pieces, and the Word language helps to control the document. There's no blue; most (or all) of the code is related to VB telling Word to perform an action. Let's look at the first line:

```
Selection.TypeText Text:="Rob The ComputorTutor"
```

This really consists of four parts. Looking from the left, we see the word Selection. This is part of the Word language that means to look at whatever is currently selected within the document (which could be nothing, in which case it's wherever the blinking I-bar cursor is located).

The next part, TypeText, is a special command (called a method or procedure) related specifically to the Selection object. As you might expect, this was created specifically to allow you to indicate what text you'd like added at the selection (which means to remove whatever text is currently selected, and then insert some text). The next part, Text, is optional, but indicates what part of the TypeText method is getting a value. It turns out that there's only one option so it's not needed, but it can be used to help clarify what the value means. If used, as it is here, it's followed by a colon and an equal sign, then the value. Since the value is not a number, it is enclosed inside double-quotes.

So summarizing, this line says to take the text, "Rob The ComputorTutor," and use that as the Text value in the TypeText method of the selection. Or, more briefly, type "Rob The ComputorTutor" at the cursor. Another way you could have written this was:

```
Selection.TypeText "Rob The ComputorTutor"
```

After VB tells Word to perform that action, Word does that and then tells VB it is done. VB then goes on to the next line:

```
Selection.TypeParagraph
```

Again, this starts with the Selection object, but this time it uses a different method: TypeParagraph. As might be expected, the creators of this made it so that it inserts a new paragraph, which is the equivalent of pressing the Enter key on the keyboard. There are other ways this could have been done, but most are much more cryptic.

As you look at the next four lines, you can probably tell what they do: type more text, go to the next line, type more text, go to the next line. And depending on how you created your macro, the last line may not be there and some of the other pieces may be a little different.

Fixing Macros

OK, now suppose that you realized that you had a mistake when you created your macro. You could re-record the macro and hope you get it right the second time. If it's a small task, that's probably a good way to go, but if it's a bigger task with many steps, you increase the chance of making another mistake as you go. Instead, it's good to learn how the macro pieces work.

As mentioned, VB is just a tool to control the things that happen to the Word document or various other things. In the above case, it simply tells Word to type some text. You could also have it attempt to save the document, add a table, format the text, or do just about anything else that Word can do. This is because Word was specifically set up to allow automation, a concept that lets you program Word to do many things from a controlled computer program. Also, for this reason you need to be careful about opening unknown Word documents since they can contain dangerous VB code that could do harm to your system if you aren't careful. Next week, we'll explore ways to manage that better.

Let's quickly record one more macro and see what we get. This time we'll type the same text, except that first we'll turn on bold for the first line (and off at the end), and then underline for the second line and italics for the ZIP code. Also note that if you type first and then apply the formats, the recorded macro will be different, so for now try to follow the order specified. So turn on the Macro Record and name the macro something like NewAddress and store it in the current document, enable bold, type the first line, disable bold, press the Enter key, enable underline, type the second line, disable bold, press the Enter key, type the city and state, enable italics, type the ZIP code, disable italics, press the Enter key and stop the recording. The end result should look like Figure 4.

Figure 4. Formatted Name and Address.

When you go back and edit the macro, you'll see the code that got created. Note that the macro will be written in the same Module if created within the same session. It will look something like Figure 5, depending on how accurately you followed the above directions.

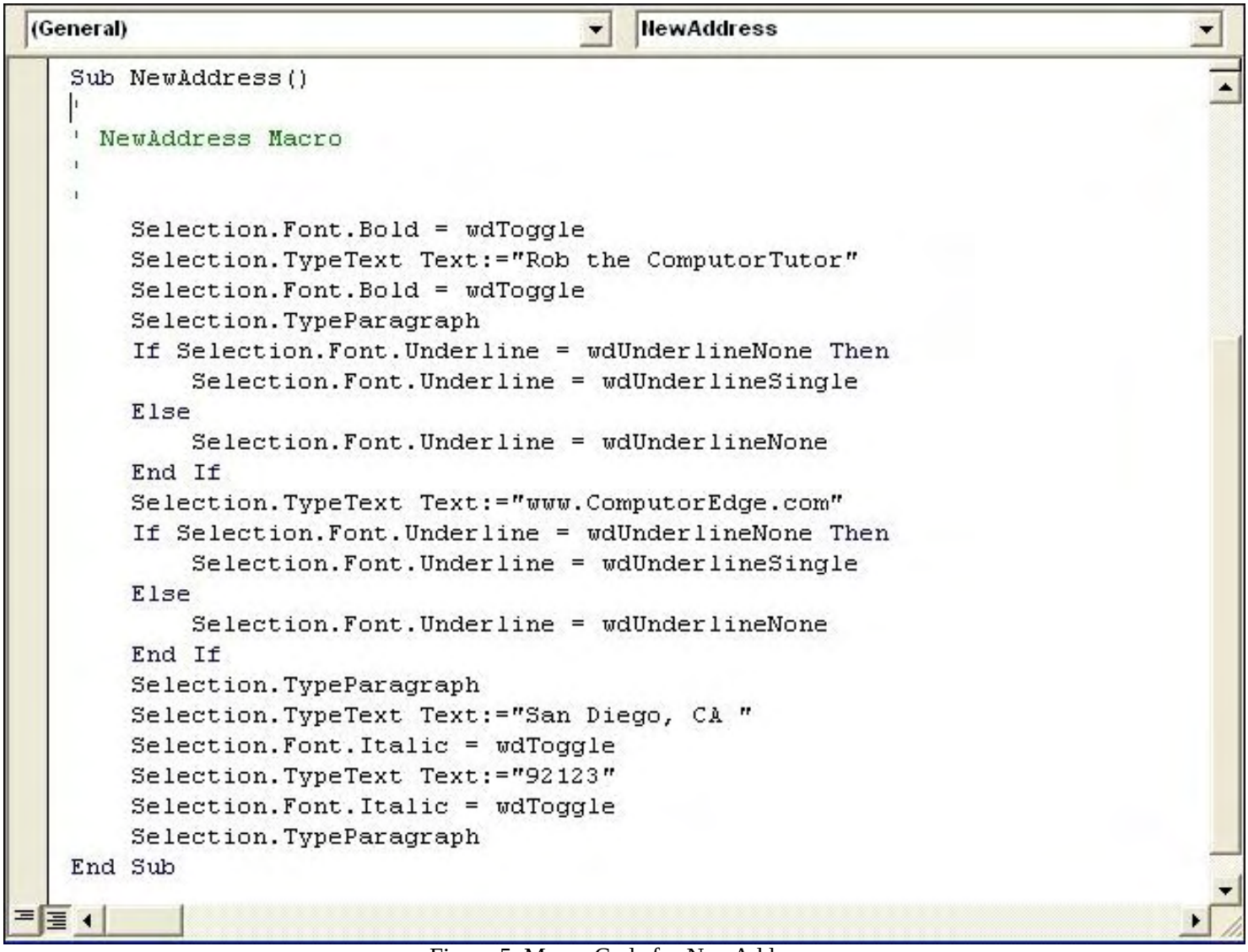

Figure 5. Macro Code for NewAddress.

You'll notice that there are still lots of references to the Selection object. Much of what you do with recorded macros is related to the information where the cursor is located, so that makes sense. However, you'll also see some text in blue, indicating that VB is managing some parts and not letting Word do everything.

Very quickly, here's a rundown of what's happening in each line:

```
Selection.Font.Bold = wdToggle
```

This says to look at the current selection, find the font portion of that, and look at the bold portion of the font. Set that value equal to a "toggle," which means to switch it away from what it is now. If it turns out that it can either be True or False, this will switch it from off to on. Ideally, this should be set to True or it may not give you the results you expect, but the wizard doesn't always do what you expect.

The next line types the text. After that it toggles the bold again, thereby turning it off. Next it goes to a new line.

The next part is more interesting: underlining. In this case, VB checks to see if the underline setting is None and if that's true (which it is) it will set it to single underline. We'll explore more of this in a future article. Next it types the text, checks underlining and turns it off, then goes to a new line.

Finally, it types the city and state, toggles the italics, types the ZIP code, toggles the italics again, goes to a new line, and ends the procedure.

Looking at these two macros, we see that recording a macro from Word allows you to create some computer code to control parts of a Word document. Next week we'll explore this a bit further, examining how to control Word to prevent malicious viruses and computer code from invading your system, and we'll also explore a few more things we can do with macros.

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

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EdgeWord: Apple iPad Versus Amazon Kindle

"The tech giants aren't really competing after all." by Jack Dunning

While there is a slight overlap in the Apple iPad and Amazon Kindle markets—e-books—it is not significant enough to cause a hiccup at either company.

It's been predicted by many that Apple's iPad will be the death of Amazon's Kindle e-book reader. While on the surface this seems like a logical conclusion, a look at each company tells us that not only will one product not cause the demise of the other, but the two mega-companies are not even in the same business. It's often assumed that just because two companies offer similar devices that they are competing in the same market.

Over a year ago, I mused about the differences between Apple, Microsoft and Google. I noted at the time that Apple is a hardware company, and above all else its goal is to sell hardware—whether computers, music-playing devices, smartphones or tablet computers. Everything else Apple does is tailored to push the sales of the equipment it builds. This is why the iTunes stores is dedicated to supporting only devices Apple builds. This is both the brilliance of the Apple strategy and a major limitation. Many people do not like being locked into a single source for applications.

When looking at how Amazon's Kindle fits into the mix, it's necessary to look at Amazon's primary mission. The answer goes all the way back to day one. With today's massive size of Amazon as an online retailer of almost anything, many people forget that Amazon started as an online bookstore. The company spent huge amounts of money on television commercials touting Amazon as the largest bookstore in the world. At the time, it seemed like insanity to spend so much on a fledging, unproven business based on the Internet. Now look! Since that time, Amazon's core business has not changed—it still sells books.

The purpose of the Amazon Kindle is to sell books—not Kindles. In the book market Amazon wins almost every contest. A few years ago the Kindle was introduced to get into the e-book business. Amazon now sells more e-books than printed books. The uniqueness of people who own Kindles is that they like to read books. They are not buying the small, light electronic tablet just to read a newspaper or browse the Web—although they can do both. They want to sit down with their favorite literature enjoying a few hours of electronically licking their fingers when turning each page. The Kindle is designed for reading novels, not watching videos or playing games. It is also designed to sell e-books. Apple's iPad will not impact Amazon's e-book market because Apple wants to sell e-books only if it helps to sell an iPad.

Amazon would give away the Kindle if it thought it would help to sell more books. (Pricing the Kindle too low would be a waste if it attracts too many people who have no interest in buying books.) Apple would never price the iPad below a per-unit profit level just to sell more. That would be a form of Apple insanity. Hardware is how Apple makes its money. There is no free Internet with the iPad, but for only a few dollars more, the Kindle hardware includes 3G Internet access throughout the world with no additional monthly cellular bill. This alone could make the already cheaper Kindle well worth the price of admission, even when browsing in grayscale.

One could say that Amazon is cannibalizing its traditional book business with the Kindle in much the same way that Netflix is cannibalizing its own DVD rental by mail business with Internet video streaming. Both are generating significant savings by cutting the cost of shipping out of the process. Both are leading the charge in their respective niches.

While there is a slight overlap in the Apple iPad and Amazon Kindle markets—e-books—it is not significant enough to cause a hiccup at either company. Apple is looking for greater diversity in applications, reaching out to a

more general market that wants the sizzle of the iPad and a cool device to show friends. Amazon needs to ensure that the Kindle is the best book reader ever. After all, Amazon is catering to people who actually read and buy books.

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

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Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"Windows 7 Update," "Company Policy Workaround," "Thank You!," "Windows 7: What's Next?," "System Boot Disc Question"

Windows 7 Update

[Regarding Andrea Dunning's August 6 article, "Windows 7 Update: How Is It Doing?":]

Windows 7 is a monster from hell!

-Dick Fischbach, Denver, Colorado

Not the OS from hell!

I hate it when somebody doesn't understand an OS and then *blames* the OS! What is this person's tech level? Can this person's hardware run this OS? Is the problem caused because of incompatible (hardware) drivers? Incompatible software? This is why Microsoft provides a link to find out if your system can "handle" this OS. If it cannot, then don't do it. Stay with XP, or go to a Mac running OS 10 Snow Leopard. Or go to Ubuntu (free). Or go to an expert "friend" that can show you where you went wrong (install, etc.).

-Albert, San Diego, CA

When I purchased my laptop, I had the choice between the pre-loaded Vista and XP, which I could have had loaded instead. I thought, "What the hey! Why would I want to stay with old technology?" So I kept Vista. For what I do as a user, either one would have been fine. I was not enamored of Vista, though. The incompatibility with some programs and devices was annoying. It was OK, though. I have two other machines with XP, so I fall back on them for a couple of specific programs. When the upgrade discount for Windows 7 was offered I took it, too. I assumed 7 would fix any of the problems I had with Vista and it pretty much has. None of my choices were driven by "I gotta have it!" feelings.

I think that most people and businesses have reached a very long plateau with applications. There aren't too many killer applications that you "have to have." I'm not a gamer or a user of the top-end programs. I'm fundamentally a Web surfer and I use e-mail and the basic office suite (Word, Excel, etc.). I really don't need the latest version of anything as soon as it comes out. Office 2007 will probably carry me for 15 years more. I think we're at a stage where the basic needs of the vast majority are satisfied. I don't need the really advanced features of Window 7. I'm primarily looking for the most stability. There's not much motivation to invest more money there. The innovation is occurring in handhelds and smartphones. That's where the future is, not on the desktop or laptop.

-Bill Greenlee, San Diego, CA

My desktop runs Linux Mint, but I need Windows to access the company Web site through Citrix, so I purchased a laptop with Windows 7. From my experience it's OK—much better than the dreaded Vista which my wife has—but not a patch on Mint. At least Microsoft is going in the right direction.

-Paul, Wellington, CO

Company Policy Workaround

[Regarding the July 30 Digital Dave column:]

A company I worked for had IT policies like this. I bought my USB mouse jiggler (*www.amazon.com/WiebeTech-Mouse-Jiggler-Slow-Version/dp/B000O3S0PK*) back in Sept. 2009 at Amazon. I have heard there are software versions of a mouse jiggler also.

-Chuck, Broomfield, CO

Thank You!

[Regarding the July 9 Digital Dave column:]

I want to *thank you* for the wonderful articles. I am in Kansas, setting up my daughter's laptop. I have saved articles, in San Jacinto, Calif. and they are *very* helpful.

-Vivian Brown, San Jacinto, CA.

Windows 7: What's Next?

[Regarding Jack Dunning's August 6 article, "Are You Still Using Windows XP?":]

While I did upgrade (from XP) to Windows 7 and absolutely love both operating systems, my biggest concern is what Microsoft is thinking about for the future—say 2014. They will no longer be supporting XP then, and Windows 7 will be five years old. Surely they will have yet another new operating system ready for the streets before then, and would they be considering dropping support for *both* XP and Windows 7? Sounds like a good business move to me—then all of us would have to upgrade yet again. Or am I being too pessimistic?

-Pat, Oklahoma

System Boot Disc Question

[Regarding the August 6 Windows Tips and Tricks column:]

Like many in your audience, no doubt, I didn't make a boot disc when I first set up the new computer. Now it has about six months of use. Is it too late to make a boot disc? If not, how different will this bootup disc be from one that would have been made at the very beginning of using the new computer?

Additionally, this is a Lenovo T510 laptop and came with a whole bunch of Lenovo diagnostic tools.

-Pat, Oklahoma

[You can make the boot disc at any time. Also, the discs that came with the computer may contain everything you need to get up and running again. —Jack]

Thanks for the timely advice. I've been concerned about what I would do if this system crashed.

-Dwaine Howell, Poway, CA

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