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Digital Dave

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

A reader is having trouble downloading Google Earth; a reader wonders how to navigate to My Documents in Windows 7; a reader is shopping for a laptop and needs advice on where to purchase it.

Dear Digital Dave,

I don't know if you are familiar with Google's Earth program, but it is a great *atlas and extremely useful to someone like me, who tries to follow the news and locate areas of interest on a map.*

I attempted to download Google Earth onto my HP desktop that runs Vista Home Premium 64-bit. When I attempted the download with IE8, I got a pop-up that said IE was unable to connect to the server. IE did download and install Google's Chrome, but would not install Earth.

I attempted to download Earth using Chrome and got a message that said, "This type of program may cause damage to your computer. Do you wish to continue?" Can you tell me what the deal is with Earth? I have used the program with no problems on other computers, and it seems to me that Google of all people would fix any major problems with such a major program.

P.S. I also tried to download Earth onto an old laptop running XP with the same results. So the operating system is not the problem.

Thanks for any help you can offer.

Mike Z.
Dacono, CO

Dear Mike,

It sounds like you were practically there, but you may have misunderstood some of the messages. I don't know what the problem was with Internet Explorer, but the message you received with Google Chrome ("This type of program may cause damage to your computer. Do you wish to continue?") is a normal security message designed to protect your computer system from malware. Virtually any program or file that you download will trigger this type of message.

If you know that the software is coming from a reputable source, such as Google, then clicking Yes will continue the download in Chrome. (The downloaded file will then appear on the bar at the bottom of the Chrome screen.) However, if you see the message and you are not sure about the software provider, then it is always safer to cancel the download. This is just good Internet hygiene. Be sure you know what something is and where it comes from before you pick it up.

Once the downloaded file appears on the bar at the bottom of the Chrome screen, chick on the GoogleEarthSetup.exe file to install Google Earth. You will get another warning from Windows: "Do you want to run this file?" Click Run. You will then most likely get the warning: "A program needs your permission to continue." If you give permission, then the program will be installed.

All of these warnings are designed to help us protect our systems. Unfortunately, all too often, we start to ignore the cascade of cautions and click right through them—only to inadvertently install a virus. In these situations, I like to pause and reflect on what I'm doing—as well as my place in the world.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

How do I get to My Documents in Windows 7?

Wayne Wood

Dear Wayne,

By far the simplest way to find and open My Documents in Windows 7 is to type "my documents" into the "Search programs and files" field in the Start Menu. (Click the Microsoft logo in the lower left-hand corner to access the Start Menu.) My Documents should appear under the heading Files. Click on that link and Windows Explorer will open with it located on that folder.

This search feature is one of the best things about Windows 7. You can find any folder or file (as long as it's been included in the index) by merely typing its name into the Start Menu search field. I've found it to be a great time saver—especially when I forget where I've put something.

There is a Documents link in the Start Menu (right side), but it is not the same as the My Documents folder. Documents is a Windows Library that may include My Documents as one of its folders. Once you find the folder, you can pin it to the Start Menu or the Taskbar for quicker opening—or continue to use the search feature.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I need advice on the name/model of a "top-rated" laptop to purchase in the $1,500 range. The price must include the following programs and services:

• Lightweight
• Large screen
• Home Installation
• Great for Desktop applications
• Large memory
• Home office/entertainment
• Microsoft Word/Excel

- *Virus Security*
- *Insurance*
- *Photo, video and graphic programs*

The store must have a service department to do the setup and installation, transferring files from my existing desktop, installing Outlook accounts and Internet accounts, and downloading and transferring business software program files.

I appreciate the time and assistance you can supply to the above request.

DM
San Diego, CA

Dear DM,

With the budget you have available, you should easily be able to find a laptop computer that will meet your requirements. There are many that will do the job, and most brands are comparable. Your problem is not which computer to buy, but where are you going to get the support you need.

Going to a discount store such as Costco will not suffice, since they won't help you transfer files to the new computer. You need to either visit a full-service computer store (*webserver. computoredge.com/online.mvc?zone=SD&article=prodindex*) that will do the extra work, or hire an expert to help you select a computer, and then get the machine running the way you want it. You need to find the service before you make your computer decision. I recommend that you check with a full-service computer store first (there are a couple found in San Diego through the link above), then, if they don't seem right for you, contact computer repair and service experts. They should be able to both advise you on which computer to buy, plus get you set up. Then, in the long term, you will have a resource in case you run into problems.

Alternatively, a savvy friend or family member is often the solution in these cases, especially when price is an object.

Digital Dave

Malware Protection Beyond Applications

"There is more to keeping your PC safe than security software." by Michael J. Ross

There are some simple but quite effective countermeasures that can be used to better protect your PC against malware and the attackers who create and spread that kind of code.

Most computer users nowadays are far more cognizant of the various types of online threats than they were years ago when first venturing out onto the Internet. Partly in response to the publicity of these threats, more people than ever before are trying to protect their computers using various applications that are designed to detect and eradicate all forms of malware, including spyware (which sends data back to the villains) and viruses (which spread through replication, and oftentimes contain a nasty "payload").

As a result of the proliferation and dangers of malware, a number of computer software vendors responded to the problem by developing and distributing a range of security products, including programs that focus on battling one particular type of malware, as well as programs that attempt to be all-encompassing. The effectiveness of these products, as you would expect, has not been consistently stellar. In fact, when people search online for anti-spyware products, for instance, a large portion of the programs that appear in the search engine results are actually spyware in disguise!

Yet there is more to keeping your PC free of malware than choosing and installing a decent computer security application—regardless of the claims by its vendor. Unbeknownst to most computer users, there are some simple but quite effective countermeasures that they can be used to better protect their PCs against malware and the attackers who create and spread that kind of code.

Raise the Drawbridge!

For anyone new to computers and especially computer security, the term "firewall" may be confusing, because traditionally it has referred to a fireproof wall—in a structure such as a

building or a ship—designed to slow down or even prevent the spread of a fire. But in the world of the Internet, a firewall is any form of technology that is intended to prevent unauthorized people or programs from accessing a computer network—including the ultimate network, the Internet.

Firewalls work by monitoring each of the individual components of Internet traffic —known as "packets"—and blocking any incoming traffic that is questionable or positively identified as dangerous, based upon the IP address of the originating computer on the Internet. In addition, a properly configured firewall will prevent access to your computer through entryways other than your browser. In layman's terms, if an attacker knocks on the front door of your computer (known as a "ping"), your firewall will know not to allow the attacker access to your computer through any virtual doors or windows (known as "ports").

Ralph was told that he should have a firewall for his computer system.

But firewalls can additionally be used for policing any outgoing traffic. Consequently, if some spyware manages to infect your computer, and then tries to contact "the mothership" (any server controlled by the spyware miscreants), your firewall can be set to prompt you to ask if you should allow that program to access the given server name, at which time you can prevent that particular connection, and optionally any future connection attempts to that server. Of course, if you do not understand why that particular application is trying to call out to the Internet, be sure to scan it for spyware.

Firewalls are generally of two types: hardware and software. The former type is usually purchased by consumers as components of routers, which are hardware devices that make it possible for multiple computers to access the Web using a single broadband connection (such as DSL or cable service). Moreover, a router forms a network among those computers, allowing each one to access shared resources on the network, such as a printer. Firewalls can also be found in the better DSL modems, but require a bit of configuration to work properly. If you have a broadband modem, be sure to check with your ISP (or whomever provided the modem) to see if it can be configured to act as a firewall.

Software firewalls are of course computer programs that can be downloaded from their vendors' Web sites. Most of the offerings are commercial, but should be well worth the price, which is usually quite reasonable. But if you want to avoid paying any money for a firewall, consider searching for some of the free alternatives, such as those listed on popular shareware sites.

All versions of Microsoft Windows since XP have built-in firewalls, but are generally considered inadequate by security experts. For instance, the firewall in Windows XP SP2 (Service Pack 2)

only paid attention to inbound connections, and thus was useless for outbound connections, such as those generated by spyware. In Windows Vista and 7, the firewall supposedly monitors both inbound and outbound connections, but security researchers quickly discovered that it blocks only outbound connections that match existing rules, and by default, there are no rules! In other words, the outbound monitoring is enabled, but it just doesn't happen to be doing anything.

Note that hardware and software firewalls are not mutually exclusive, and can be used in conjunction with one another. In such a scenario, the hardware firewall can serve as the first line of defense, and the software firewall can serve as backup protection from intruders—a lifesaver in case, for whatever reason, the hardware firewall has been accidentally disabled or misses an inbound connection that should have been blocked. Furthermore, the software firewall can also block any malicious outbound traffic. Some folks might contend that the combination of a hardware and a software firewall is overdoing it, but when you weigh the dangers of malware accessing your computer, then it can be argued that it is better to be overly cautious than insufficiently so.

Practice Safe Browsing

Possibly the most common way that a computer becomes infected with malware is when the user lands on an infected Web page, whose underlying code causes the Web browser to download and install malware onto the computer. This is often preceded by an innocuous-looking button or pop-up message that requests the user's permission to install supposedly safe software in order to give the user access to something enticing. Some attack sites have the gall to ask your permission to scan your computer to check for any malware, and then if you make the mistake of agreeing to the offer, it begins installing malware and possibly causing other damage.

The vulnerability of the browser to such an attack partially depends upon what brand of browser is being utilized. Although its market share is (thankfully) declining, Microsoft Internet Explorer's many versions combined still dominate the browser market. Sadly, many versions of this browser are vulnerable to many different types of attacks—depending on the security settings that you have specified, or if you are using the default values without reconfiguring them, which far too many Internet users do.

Your best bet is to abandon Internet Explorer and upgrade to a better browser, such as Apple's Safari (*www.apple.com/safari/*), Google's Chrome (*www.google.com/chrome*), Opera (*www. opera.com/*), or Mozilla's Firefox (*www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/*)—in other words, anything but "Internet Exploder"! All of these browsers will run fine on Windows and Mac OS X.

But if for some reason you are forced to stay with Internet Explorer, then you should make it much more secure by blocking ActiveX controls that are not signed with a certificate, and make IE prompt you before launching ActiveX controls. To do so, the sequence of menu choices is Tools/Internet Options/Security/Internet zone/Default Level (or similar choices, depending upon your version of IE); then set the Security level to Medium or higher.

In addition, you can download and install IE-SPYAD for ZonedOut (*www.spywarewarrior.com/ uiuc/resource.htm*), which makes it easy to place thousands of known malicious domains into the Internet Explorer Restricted Zone.

So as you formulate and refine a strategy for protecting your computer from malware, do not

restrict yourself to the standard security applications or even the security suites that promise to be fully protective. There is more that can and should be done, and it is well worth the effort, if only for the peace of mind of knowing that your computer is well secured.

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

BitLocker for Windows 7

"A full disk-encryption feature that can save your valuable data." by Pete Choppin

> For those who require heavy data protection, BitLocker Drive Encryption can be a valuable asset to save you, and possibly your company, time and money when fighting unauthorized access.

BitLocker Drive Encryption is a full disk-encryption feature included with the Ultimate and Enterprise editions of Microsoft's Windows Vista and Windows 7 desktop operating systems, as well as the Windows Server 2008 and Windows Server 2008 R2 server platforms. It is designed to protect data by providing encryption for entire volumes. By default it uses the Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) encryption algorithm in Cipher Blocking Chain (CBC) mode with a 128-bit key.

Since its introduction with the original shipping release of Windows Vista, BitLocker has undergone a regular series of improvements. The initial version of this technology was conceived as full-disk encryption—that is, it will encrypt any entire partition, not just parts of it —that works both online and offline (i.e., at boot time and when the drive is disconnected) thanks to integration with underlying Trusted Platform Module (TPM) 1.2 (and higher) chipsets. (BitLocker can also utilize a USB memory key or an alphanumeric password if TPM hardware isn't present.)

With the introduction of BitLocker in Windows Vista, it wasn't very popular. This might be because it is available only for Windows Vista Ultimate and Windows Vista Enterprise. But the main reason probably is that it is complicated to set up.

Windows 7 BitLocker (available in the Ultimate and Enterprise editions) is now far easier to configure and install, and no longer requires manual partitioning or even a separate tool: You can simply right-click a drive in Explorer and choose "Turn on BitLocker" from the context menu that appears. And there's no need to create a special partition, because it's already here: Windows 7 creates a hidden partition for this very purpose during setup. Windows 7 also adds Data Recovery Agent (DRA) support for all protected disk volumes so that enterprises can store recovery data in Active Directory and recover volumes if needed. Windows 7 also extends BitLocker support, for the first time, to removable storage devices. This feature is called BitLocker To Go, which we will discuss later.

Why Use BitLocker?

BitLocker Drive Encryption helps protect your data by creating a small partition on the drive as well as encrypting the contents on the drive itself. If your hard drive or system is lost or falls into the wrong hands, your data will be protected.

Not only can you store your recovery key for BitLocker to a thumb drive or a smart card, but even if your laptop and thumb drive are both stolen, the thief would still need to know your password to unlock the drive. This adds an additional layer of security that is nearly unrivaled.

Unlike the Encrypting File System, which allows you to encrypt individual files, BitLocker Drive

Encryption encrypts the entire drive, meaning the second you move a file into the drive, it is automatically encrypted, and when you move a file off of the drive, it becomes unencrypted. This makes it much easier to manage your encrypted files so you never have to double check to make sure every important file is encrypted.

You can even access a drive locked with BitLocker Drive Encryption over a Windows network, as long as you have the encryption password. You can also set a drive to automatically unlock right when you log into your computer.

Setting up BitLocker in Windows 7

In Windows Vista, setting up BitLocker was a troublesome procedure, forcing you to manually shrink your current partition and create a BitLocker partition. Microsoft then created the BitLocker Drive Preparation Tool, most likely after realizing that the current method was a bit too technical for new users. In Windows 7, however, the BitLocker Drive Preparation is fully integrated into the Control Panel and does most, if not all, of the work for you (see Figure 1).
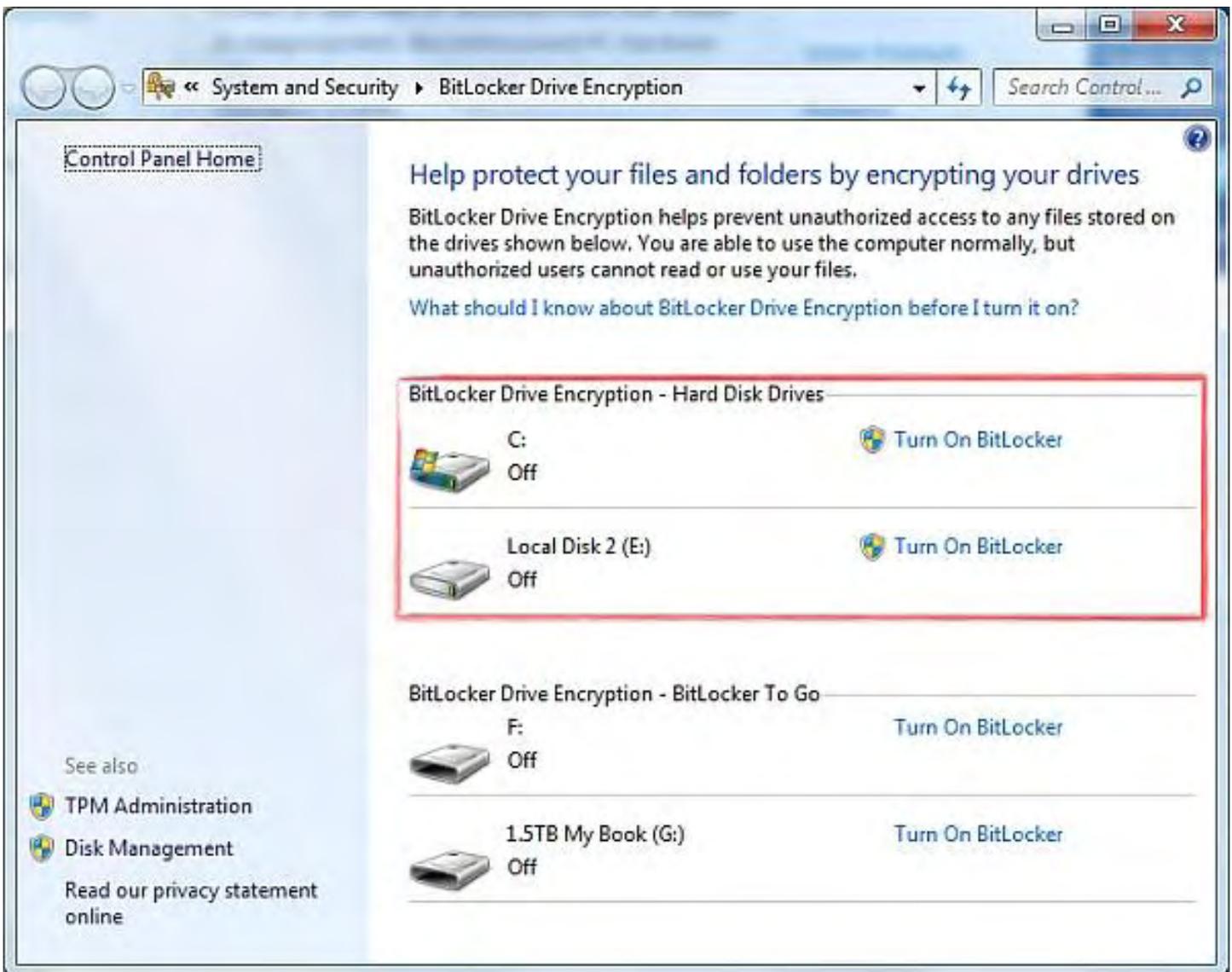

Figure 1. BitLocker Control Panel in Windows 7.

You can encrypt a drive right from Windows Explorer—simply right click on the drive, and choose Turn on BitLocker. After going through the setup process you can choose a password and your drive will be fully encrypted.

You can also modify more advanced settings from within the Group Policy Editor. To do this, navigate to Administrative Templates/Windows Components/BitLocker Drive Encryption to see specific settings that can be modified. From here, you can modify settings for fixed data drives, operating system drives and removable data drives, as well as general settings like how to recover BitLocker-protected drives.

One notable setting allows you to configure the use of passwords, being able to set passwords, and minimum password complexity allowed. You can also now modify settings for the pin used in Windows Startup and can choose how long the pin should be (up to 20 characters), as well as enabling extra characters such as symbols, uppercase and lowercase letters, and numbers.

Unlike with Vista, BitLocker for Windows 7 creates only a small 100MB partition that is fully hidden so an individual cannot accidentally or purposefully overwrite or delete the partition. While you can see the partition in Disk Management, it is well secured to ensure nothing happens to lower the integrity of the protection.

Another nice security feature is the use of a "recovery key"—a 40-digit code provided specifically as a means to access your data if there is a problem with your system or you lose your PIN. You can save the recovery key to a USB drive or a local file, or you can print it out.

Is BitLocker Right For You?

BitLocker Drive Encryption is a great, fully integrated way of protecting your hard drives from unauthorized use. However, while the encryption is powerful, it can be a bit over the top for users who don't fully require the encryption.

For example, if you forget your thumb drive key for your laptop, you could end up with a locked machine and be unable to access it until you recover it. Because of this, day-to-day use can be a bit bothersome with extra work just to get into your own system.

All that aside, for those who require heavy protection, such as enterprise users or users with very important or confidential data, BitLocker Drive Encryption can be a very valuable asset to save you, and possibly your company, time and money when fighting unauthorized access.

BitLocker Drive Encryption does its job very well, and in my opinion has risen above alternative encryption systems, both paid and free.

Pete Choppin has been an IT Professional for over 15 years. He currently works as a network and systems administrator for a company called Albion based in Clearfield, Utah. He has experience in all types of hardware, software, and networking technologies. He is proficient in many operating systems including Linux, Windows and Macintosh. His interests include cooking, sci-fi, computers and technology, and Web design—a semi-professional endeavor, having designed Web sites in the dental field, e-commerce businesses, and for the Boy Scouts of America.

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

Windows Tips and Tricks

"Gadgets Galore Without Clutter" by Jack Dunning

If you like to have your Windows 7 gadgets in view, yet don't want to lose precious desktop space, there are compromises and tricks to try.

Gadgets are those handy little apps that can be placed on your desktop for "almost always" viewing. They may give you stock quotes, local or remote weather, the local traffic conditions, or serve many other useful functions. In Windows Vista the gadgets are placed in the Sidebar or dragged to the desktop from the Sidebar. If the Sidebar is closed, all the gadgets are closed. In Windows 7, the Sidebar has been eliminated so the gadgets may reside at any chosen location on the desktop.

One of the benefits of the Vista Sidebar is that, by default, it is always in view. This is handy for checking traffic, weather, the time or any of the other gadgets that you have added. The problem with the Sidebar was that it took space away from the desktop—which is especially annoying if you don't have a large screen. While you are stuck with the Sidebar in Windows Vista, if you like the benefit of always having your gadgets in view, yet don't want to give up any desktop space in Windows 7, there is a compromise approach that you can use.

First, you add gadgets to your Windows 7 desktop by right-clicking on your desktop and selecting Gadgets. The Desktop Gadget Gallery will open (see Figure 1). (You can also type "gadget" into the "Search programs and files" field in the Start Menu and select Desktop Gadget Gallery.)

Figure 1. The Desktop Gadget Gallery in Windows 7.

As you can see in Figure 1, the installed gadgets are displayed in the gallery. To add a gadget to the desktop, simply drag the icon to the desired location (or double-click the icon and the gadget will be added to the desktop). If you want to search for more gadgets, click "Get more gadgets online" in the lower right-hand corner of the window. (Exercise the usual caution when downloading gadgets as you would with any software. Check the customer ratings, number of downloads, and the creator of the gadget before you trust it for download and installation.)

As you add gadgets to the desktop, you can place them in an unused corner of the screen (see Figure 2). Initially, every time you maximize an open window the gadgets will be covered. To bring them to the top again hold down the Windows key (Microsoft logo key) and press the G key. (Win+G doesn't work in Vista.) This will display all of the active gadgets until you click in another window again.

Figure 2. A traffic gadget, a clock and computer operation gadget added to the desktop in Windows 7.

If you want any of your gadgets to remain in view at all times, right-click on the selected gadget and click on "Always on top" (see Figure 3). This will ensure that no other window will cover the gadget.
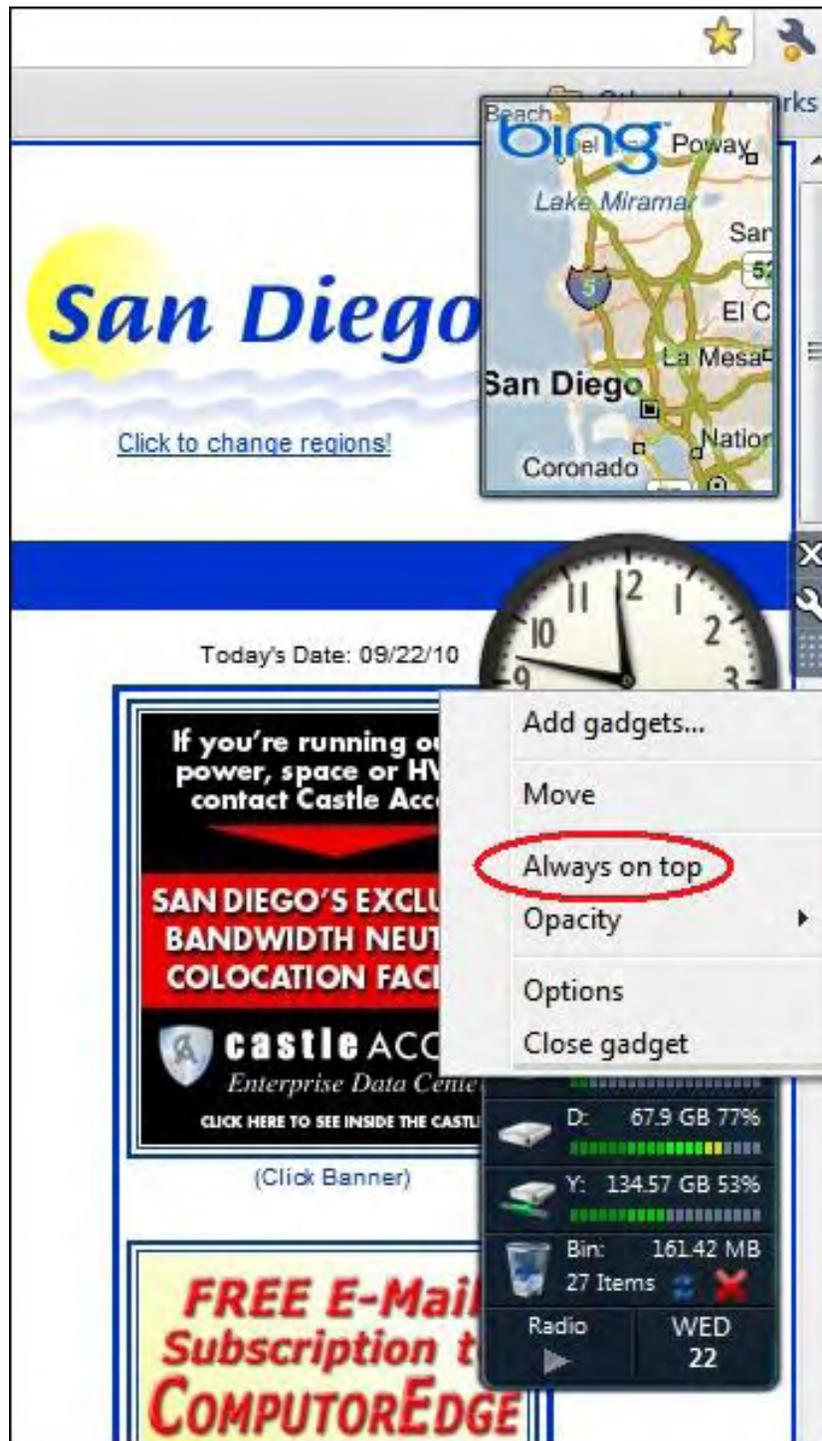
Figure 3. Right-click and choose "Always on top" to keep a gadget in view at all times in Windows 7.

The problem is that the gadget may be obscuring an important part of your maximized window. Rather than closing the gadget or unchecking the "Always on top" feature, you can make the gadget mostly transparent by selecting 20 percent opacity in the same right-click menu (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Transparent gadgets cause less problems for open windows in Windows 7.

If you want the full view again, merely hover over the gadget that you would like to better see (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Hover over a transparent gadget to make it readable again in Windows 7.

If the "Always on top" gadget is in the way of a link or some other program function in the open window, then you will need to either move it by dragging it to another part of the screen, uncheck the "Always on top" feature, or deactivate it. As an alternative, you could get a second monitor just to hold all of your cool gadgets.

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*

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Computer Security" by Wally Wang

Switching to Linux or Mac OS X means you'll have to worry only about the handful of threats that could attack those operating systems. Also, the computer industry is changing, so don't get left behind; is there a conspiracy to hide bad news in the PC industry?; Apple's Magic Trackpad relieves wrist stress; Photoshop Elements 9 and Premiere Elements 9 release your creativity; and a tip on Apple's Multi-Touch Trackpad Update, which can update an older Apple laptop to support finger gestures.

If you had a choice between living in Baghdad, dodging sniper fire, land mines, death squads, suicide attackers and car bombs, or living in the safety of Beverly Hills, where would you rather be? Of course, Beverly Hills could be as dangerous as Baghdad if it also had snipers, land mines, death squads, suicide attackers and car bombs blowing up every day, but they don't. If such threats ever did pop up in Beverly Hills, the answer is easy. Just move to a safer place.

Most people in Baghdad don't have a choice of moving to a safer place like Beverly Hills, but all computer users have that choice. Rather than wrestle with antivirus and anti-spyware software along with a constant threats of worms, Trojan horses and spyware lurking on Windows computers, the simplest solution is to move to an operating system that isn't currently under assault, and that means looking at Linux or Mac OS X.

Switch to Linux or Mac OS X and buy a virtualization program from VMware (*www.vmware.com/*) or Parallels (*www.parallels.com/*). Both programs let you convert your Windows PC into a virtual machine that you can run as a guest operating system on Linux or Mac OS X. As a virtual machine, your Windows PC can remain safely isolated from the Internet while still allowing you to run 100 percent of any Windows programs you need to use.

Just access the Internet through Linux or Mac OS X, block Internet access to your Windows virtual machine, and the majority of threats that attack Windows computers will never reach your Windows data. Now you'll have the safety of another operating system with the benefits of using Windows. On the off chance that something does attack your Windows virtual machine, just erase it and revert back to an earlier version of that virtual machine, which allows you to turn back time and restore your Windows virtual machine back to a pre-infected state.

Switching operating systems and running Windows as a virtual machine is the safest way to protect your Windows data without exposing it to the numerous threats that constantly appear on the Internet. Or you can just stubbornly stick with Windows, shore up your defenses with constant antivirus and anti-spyware updates, keep up with the latest news stories (*www. windows7news.com/2010/09/14/stuxnet-malware-4-zeroday-exploits/*) of worms and Trojan

horses that could slip past your software defenses, and waste time maintaining and protecting your computer rather than actually using it for something productive.

Does it make sense to stay in Baghdad if you have a choice of moving to Beverly Hills? Likewise, does it make sense to stay with Windows if you have a choice of moving to Linux or Mac OS X and running Windows as a virtual machine? Better yet, just switch to Linux or Mac OS X completely and you'll never have to worry about Windows-specific viruses, worms, Trojan horses, or spyware ever again.

Instead of worrying about the thousands of threats that could attack Windows, switching to Linux or Mac OS X means you'll just have to worry about the handful of threats that could attack those operating systems. Given a choice between worrying about thousands of threats or just a dozen or so, where would you rather be?

Signs of Change

When I was working with a bunch of day traders in New York, they were training a class of novices. One student kept complaining that he couldn't make money in the market because the market sucked. Every time he lost money on a stock trade, his excuse was that the market sucked. Finally, the instructor pulled this student aside, jabbed a finger in his chest, and screamed in his face, "No, the market doesn't suck. You suck."

The instructor's point was that it doesn't matter what the market was doing that day. If you just reacted to reality instead of clinging to fantasies, you could always make money. If you thought the market was going to go up but it went down instead, all you had to do was switch strategies to make money as the market sank. If you thought the market was going to drop but it rose instead, all you had to do was switch strategies to take advantage of the market as it rose.

In the book *Market Indicators (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1576603318? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme- 20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1576603318*)* , the author, Richard Sipley, lists numerous ways to analyze the stock market to determine what's likely to happen. The basic idea is to study these various market indicators and make your decision based on objective interpretation of facts rather than on emotions or the desire to be right.

By dealing with reality and not with delusions of what you hope or wish might happen, you can better respond to what is happening right now. In the words of John Maynard Keynes, "When the facts change, I change my mind."

In the world of Windows and Macs, you can look at what you hope will happen, or you can look at what's really happening. Here are the facts that you can interpret any way you wish:

Magazines like PC World and PC Magazine used to ignore Apple products completely and focus strictly on Windows and PC products. Nowadays, both PC World and PC Magazine print fewer pages than they did in the past, and they both cover Apple products and the Macintosh on a regular basis. PC Magazine even published their Reader's Choice Awards (*www.pcmag.com/ article2/0,2817,2368146,00.asp*), and Apple won the best notebook, desktop, cell phone, portable media player and network router categories.

Companies are selling Windows-to-Mac transition books such as *Switching to the Mac: The Missing Manual (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0596804253?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0596804253*)* along with tools like Parallels and Fusion, which allow you to transfer a Windows PC to a virtual machine to run on a Mac.

At one time, Windows enthusiasts could claim that the Macintosh didn't run software like the latest video games or AutoCAD. Now AutoCAD has announced that they're releasing a Macintosh version of their software (*usa.autodesk.com/adsk/servlet/pc/index?id=15421056&siteID=123112*) and Valve (*www.geek.com/articles/games/mac-gaming-disrupted-steam-launches-tomorrow-20100511/*) has ported their Steam game engine to the Macintosh so Macintosh video games will be released at the same time as the PC version.

Rockstar is even porting their Grand Theft Auto game series to the Macintosh (*www.next-gen.biz/news/gta-trilogy-heading-mac*) as well. While the Macintosh is finally becoming a recognized gaming platform, Apple's iPod Touch and iPad are rapidly gaining acceptance as handheld gaming platforms, even threatening Nintendo and Sony (*www.gamepro.com/article/news/216511/apple-closes-in-on-nintendo-portables-in-u-s/*).

Best Buy's CEO claims that sales of iPads may be cutting into PC notebook sales (*online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703376504575491533125103528.html*). Intel is cutting prices (*www.electronista.com/articles/10/09/17/intel.drops.chip.prices.by.50pc.to.recover.sales/*) on their processors to boost demand as PC builders reduce their orders. Financial analysts are starting to recognize that PC sales are slowing (*articles.moneycentral.msn.com/news/article.aspx?Feed=MY&Date=20100916&ID=11915445&Symbol=DELL*), even during the traditionally strong back-to-school season. Morgan Stanley's research indicates that sales of PC notebooks are dropping (*www.businessinsider.com/netbook-sales-negative-ipad-2010-9*).
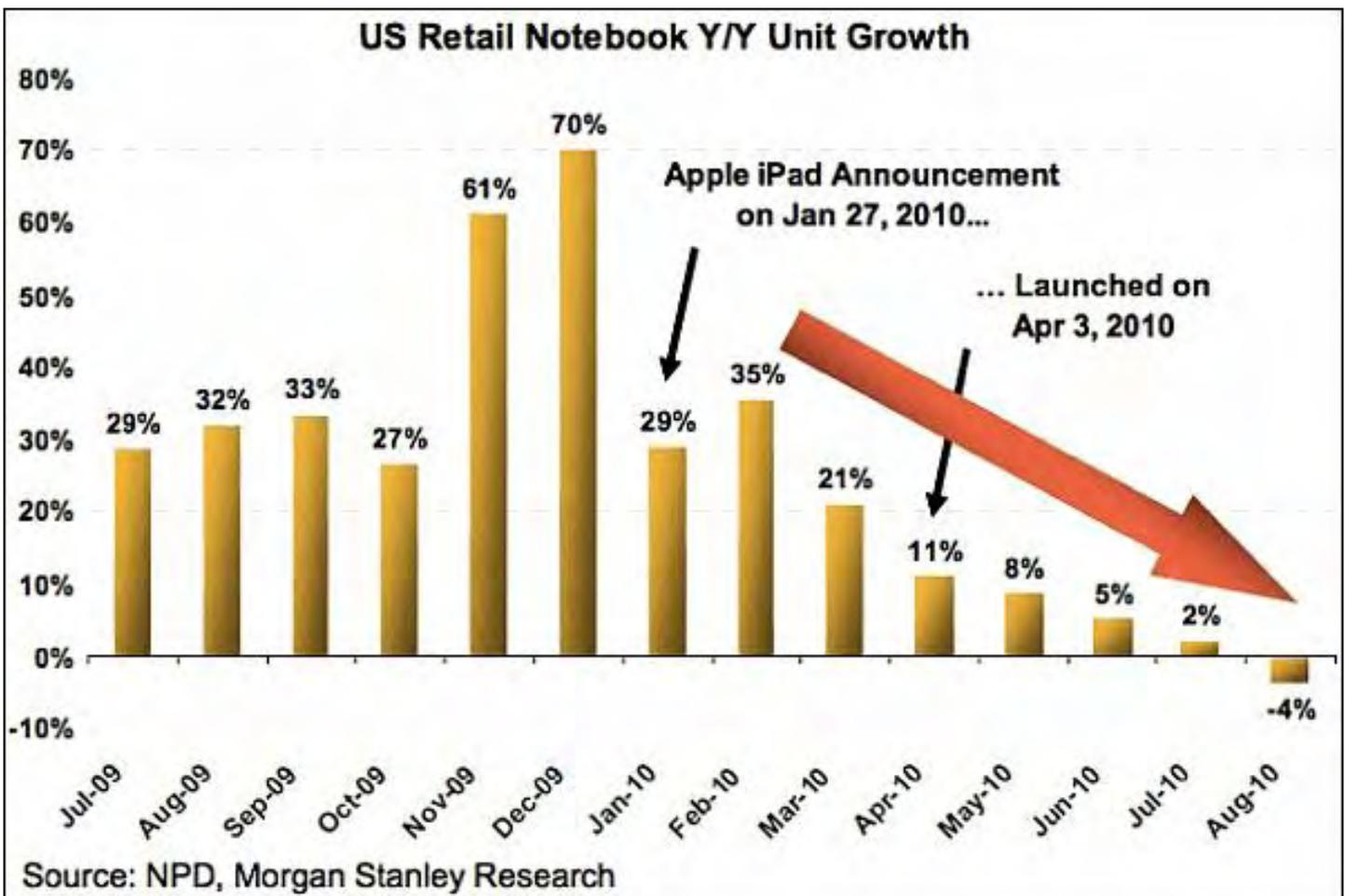
Figure 1. Sales of PC notebooks are steadily sinking.

So what conclusion can you reach based on this latest barrage of information? If you just look at the latest news, you can't help but conclude that the computer industry is changing. Now it's up to you to adapt to these changes. As long as you make decisions based on reality, you'll find that you can respond intelligently no matter what's going on around you.

Conspiracy Theory

A friend of mine in the mortgage industry told me an interesting story recently. He said that while everyone believes the housing crisis started in 2007, insiders in the mortgage business saw the warning signs as early as 2006. The mortgage industry simply hid this information from the public as long as possible to keep the profits coming.

Could this withholding of crucial information be playing out in the PC industry? Back on August 10, an analyst warned that PC sales were "falling off a cliff" (*www.eetimes.com/electronics-news/4206027/Analyst—PC-orders—falling-of-a-cliff—*). Apparently this analyst noticed that PC suppliers had dramatically reduced their orders during the last part of July.

Since this report of PC sales "falling off a cliff," no other report has emerged citing similar dire statistics. Perhaps this analyst was simply exaggerating and everybody ignored it. Then again, what if this analyst was right and everybody in the computer industry is trying to hide this information from the public as long as possible? After all, would you want to buy a PC if you heard that nobody else was buying one (*www.betanews.com/joewilcox/article/Where-have-all-*

the-PC-sales-gone/1282935253)?

Best Buy's CEO had to retract his earlier statement (*technolog.msnbc.msn.com/
_news/2010/09/17/5126836-best-buy-ceo-now-says-ipad-remarks-were-exaggerated*) that the
iPad had dramatically cut into PC notebook sales. However, what if Best Buy's CEO was actually
telling the truth and simply retracted his earlier statement to keep the PC builders happy?

PC manufacturers have reported weaker than expected back to school sales (*www.marketwatch.
com/story/weak-pc-sales-cited-as-ubs-cuts-h-p-intel-ratings-2010-09-08*). If PC sales for the
upcoming holiday season don't at least equal last year's results, that could be another warning
signal, especially if sales of Macintosh computers keep rising. If the news that PC sales have
really fallen off a cliff turns out to be true, remember, it probably won't come as a surprise to the
insiders who knew about this for a long time before the public ever did.

Apple Inc vs. Peers		
Company	Market Cap	YTD Price Performance
AAPL Apple Inc	244.9B	+27.2%
MSFT Microsoft Corporation	216.6B	-17.9%
IBM International Business Machines Corp.	162.5B	-1.6%
HPQ Hewlett-Packard Company	89.1B	-23.7%
DELL Dell Inc.	24.1B	-13.8%

Figure 2. Apple's stock keeps increasing while its competitor's stock keeps sinking.

The Magic Trackpad

When you buy an Apple laptop, you get a built-in trackpad that lets you control the mouse pointer
through various finger gestures. These finger gestures make using a laptop even easier than
controlling a desktop computer with a mouse.

Apple tried to bring these finger gestures to their desktop models through the Magic Mouse, a
touch-sensitive mouse that supported only a limited number of gestures. Instead of accepting the
limitations of the Magic Mouse, you'll be better off with the Magic Trackpad.

Figure 3. The Magic Trackpad provides a trackpad for desktop Macintosh computers.

The Magic Trackpad finally gives desktop Mac users the same trackpad capability as Apple laptops. More importantly, using finger gestures is far less tiring than using a mouse.

To move the mouse pointer a long distance with the mouse, you have to move your hand and arm. To move the mouse pointer that same distance with the Magic Trackpad, you just have to move one finger. As a result, the Magic Trackpad places less stress on your wrists and hands, making it more comfortable to use for longer periods of time.

The future is easy to see. One day pointing devices like the Magic Trackpad will become standard and the mouse will become an antique. Likewise, the physical keyboard will become obsolete because a virtual keyboard is not only more flexible (able to switch between foreign language characters), but also requires less stress to type on than a physical keyboard.

Combine a virtual keyboard with a Magic Trackpad and the physical stress on your arms, hands and wrists practically disappears. Use a virtual keyboard and Magic Trackpad for an extended period of time, then go back to a mouse and a physical keyboard and you'll find that it takes more effort to use the mouse and physical keyboard.

While you can only use a virtual keyboard with the iPad and the Magic Trackpad with a Macintosh, these two devices are going to work together one day. Get an iPad and use its virtual keyboard, then get a Magic Trackpad and use it with your desktop Macintosh. Your arm, hands and wrists will thank you for it.

Photoshop Elements 9 and Premiere Elements 9

Adobe recently announced Photoshop Elements 9 and Premiere Elements 9. Photoshop Elements is Adobe's consumer-oriented version of Photoshop that offers most of the commands of Photoshop, but with a much friendlier interface for creating fun effects easily.

One new feature in Photoshop Elements 9 is the ability to convert a picture and make it appear as if part of the image is sticking out of the frame in a 3-D effect. Doing this in Photoshop would be difficult for a novice, but doing this in Photoshop Elements 9 is easy since the program guides you step by step along the way.

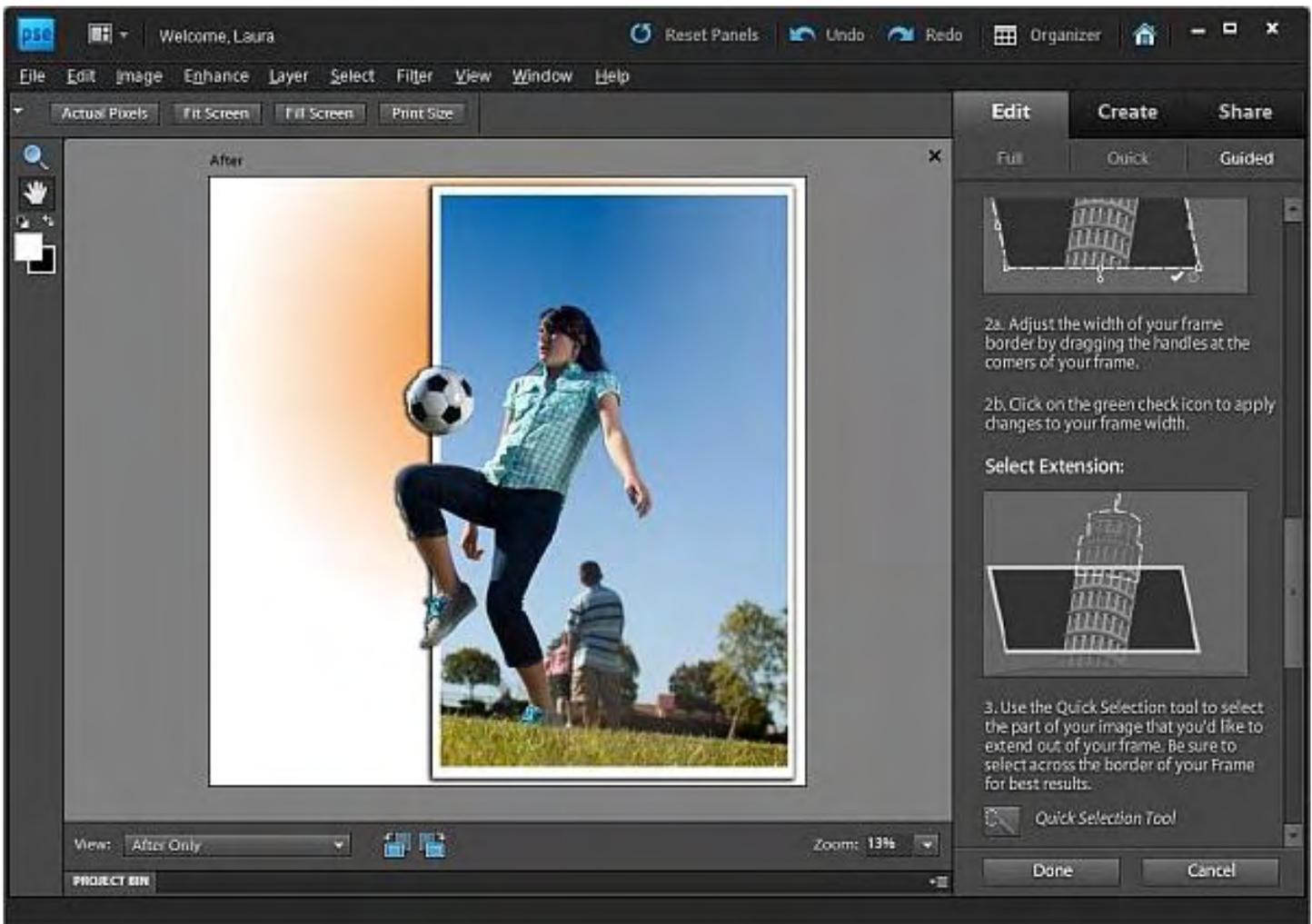Figure 4. Highlight the portion of the image you want to extend out of the frame.

Figure 5. A picture shown with a 3-D effect.

Premiere Elements 9 is Adobe's video editor, which was previously available only on Windows. If you've tried iMovie and want more editing power, then Premiere Elements may be for you.

Each program costs $99 (or $149 if purchased together). Both programs may be for casual users, but the effects they let you create can turn ordinary pictures and video into unique creations that you'll be proud to show others.

You could just save your pictures and video to a CD/DVD and pass it around, or you can use the built-in sharing features that let you post pictures or video directly to your Facebook site.
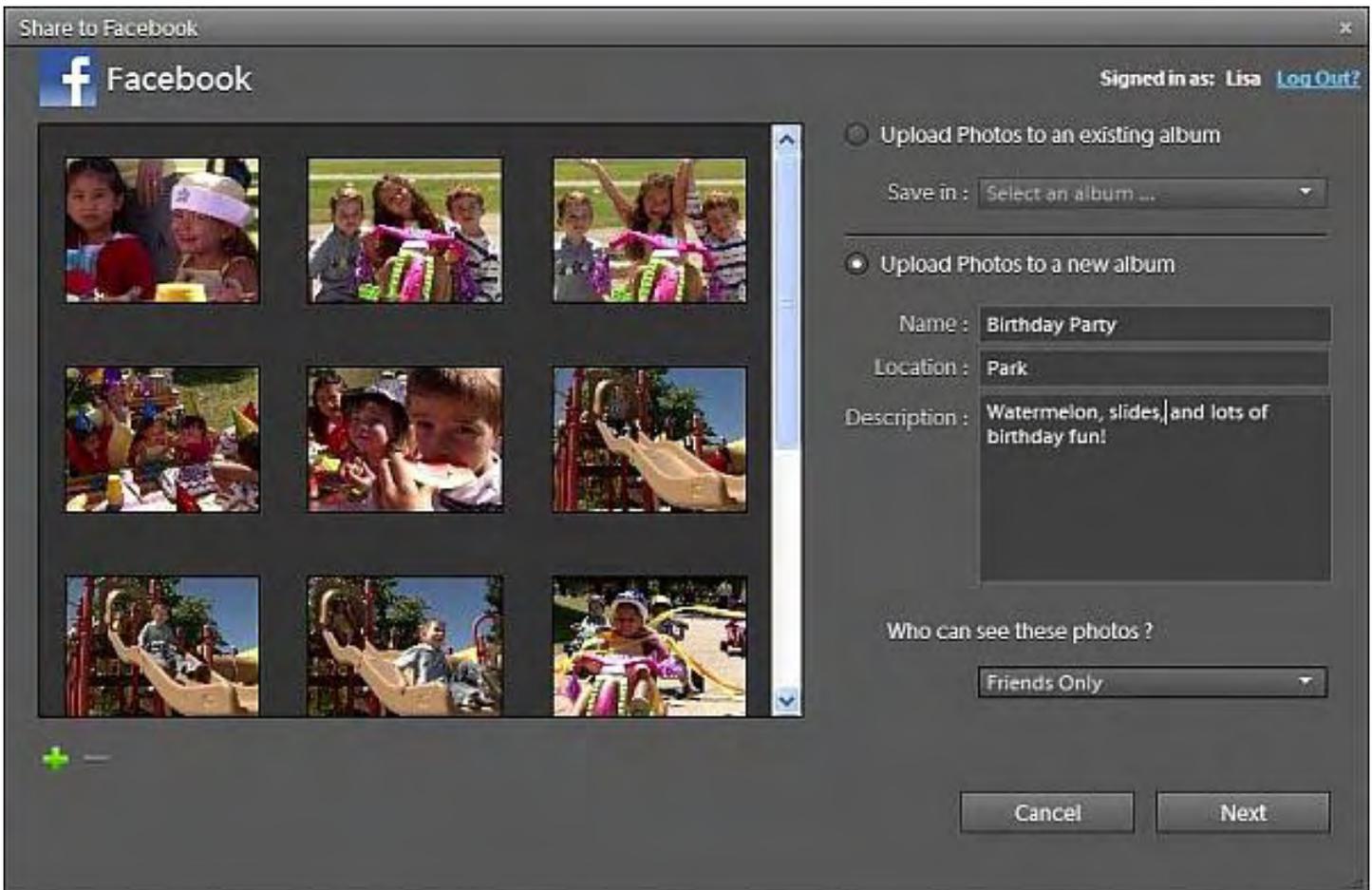
Figure 6. Photoshop Elements 9 lets you share pictures directly to Facebook.

If you want power without the high price and steep learning curve of Photoshop or Premiere Pro, then you'll find Photoshop Elements 9 and Premiere Elements 9 will fit your budget and release your creativity in less time than you might believe possible.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

If you have an older Macintosh laptop, you can download Apple's Multi-Touch Trackpad Update (*support.apple.com/kb/DL1066*), which allows older Apple laptop trackpads to support the multi-finger gestures available on newer laptops.

The one feature the older trackpads can't support is the ability to press down on the trackpad to use it as a button, but all other finger gestures are fully supported including rotating, pinching and swiping. By installing this trackpad update, you can keep an older laptop running almost like a new one.
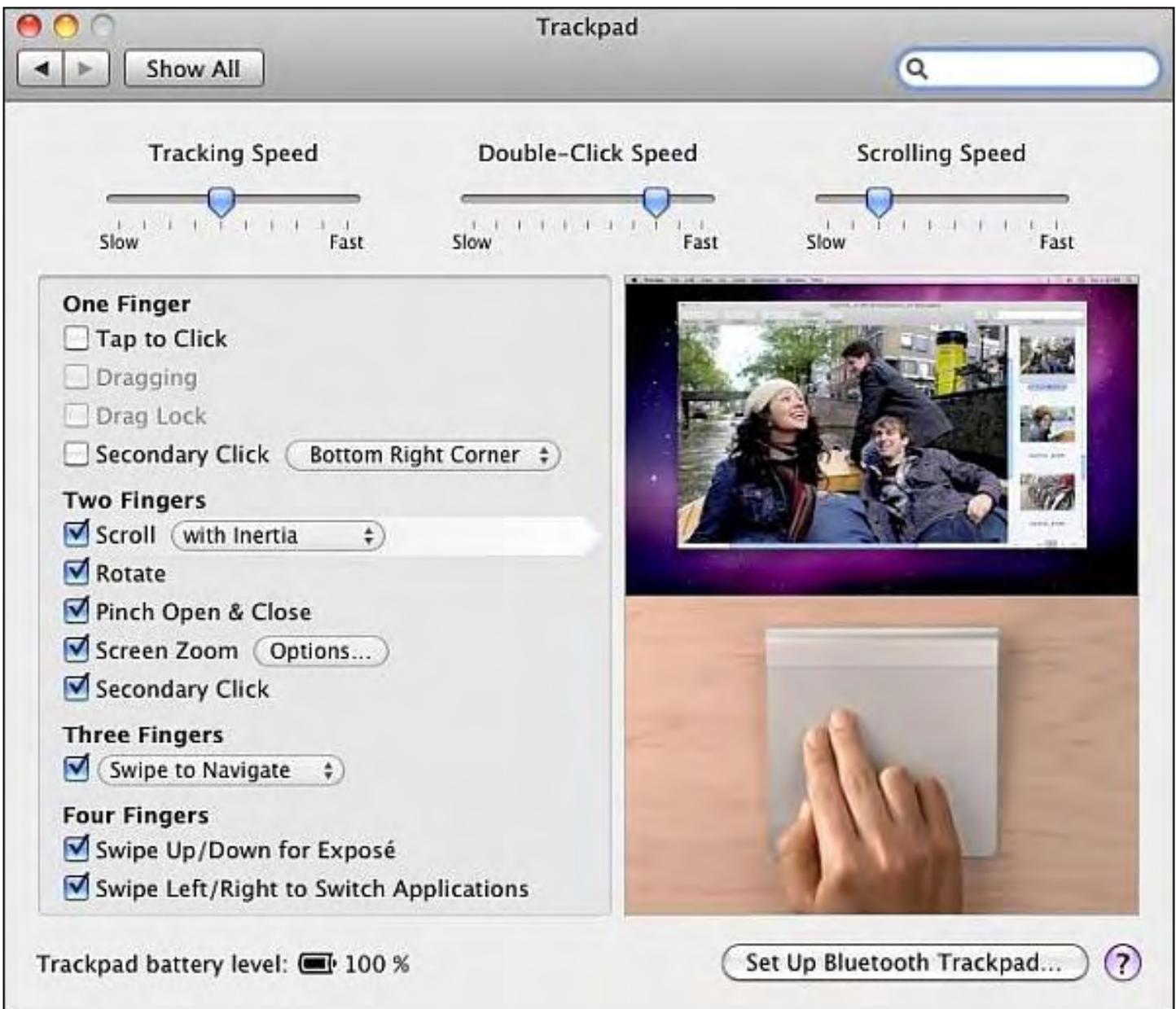
Figure 7. The Multi-Touch Trackpad Update can update an older Apple laptop to support finger gestures.

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*.

Rob, The ComputorTutor: Technology Solutions

"OpenOffice.org Word Processing" by Rob Spahitz

This month we continue exploring a free competitor to Microsoft Office: OpenOffice. This week, Rob takes the leap and writes the entire column in OO's Writer.

This month we continue exploring a free competitor to Microsoft Office: OpenOffice (OpenOffice. org (*www.openoffice.org*)). This week I'll take the leap and write the entire column in OO's Writer.

So far, every column I've written has been done in Microsoft Word. I typically take an existing template that has my header information, and then I begin writing. Along the way, I capture and save some images and then link them into the document. When I'm done, I spell-check and then save as a standard Word document.

My goal for today is to produce the same result (a Word document) and then open the document in Word to see if it looks worthy.

Writer Findings—Paragraphs

The first thing I notice as I write this column is that the spacing between the paragraphs is a bit more than I'm used to seeing in Word. To see what's happening, I copied a few paragraphs into Word and noticed that the extra spacing carried over, but also showed that the paragraph's "Spacing After" showed 5.75pt. This means that every paragraph has additional spacing at the end, whereas my normal Word documents had 0pt after each paragraph. Although this is not a big deal for an electronic document, for those who want to print, this could mean more pages to print, but maybe easier-to-read paragraphs.

The interesting thing, as I think about it, is that this may just be a better way to create electronic documents. Why? Well, I come from the old-school typewriters where you used to indent the beginning of every paragraph to make it easier to see where it started. When documents went electronic, the idea of the indent changed and instead you double-spaced paragraphs (meaning that you pressed Enter twice at the end of every paragraph.) Now, with extra spacing built into the paragraph, maybe I don't need to do that for normal columns. However, since I'm sending this to *ComputorEdge* for conversion to work on its Web site, I want it to look and act the same as it did before. So let me fix that.

As in Word, I right-click on a paragraph and select Paragraph from the fly-out menu. On the Indents & Spacing tab, I see that the "Below paragraph" spacing is 0.08" (which apparently corresponds to 5.75pt.) as seen in Figure 1. By adjusting this to 0, things are back to what I expect.
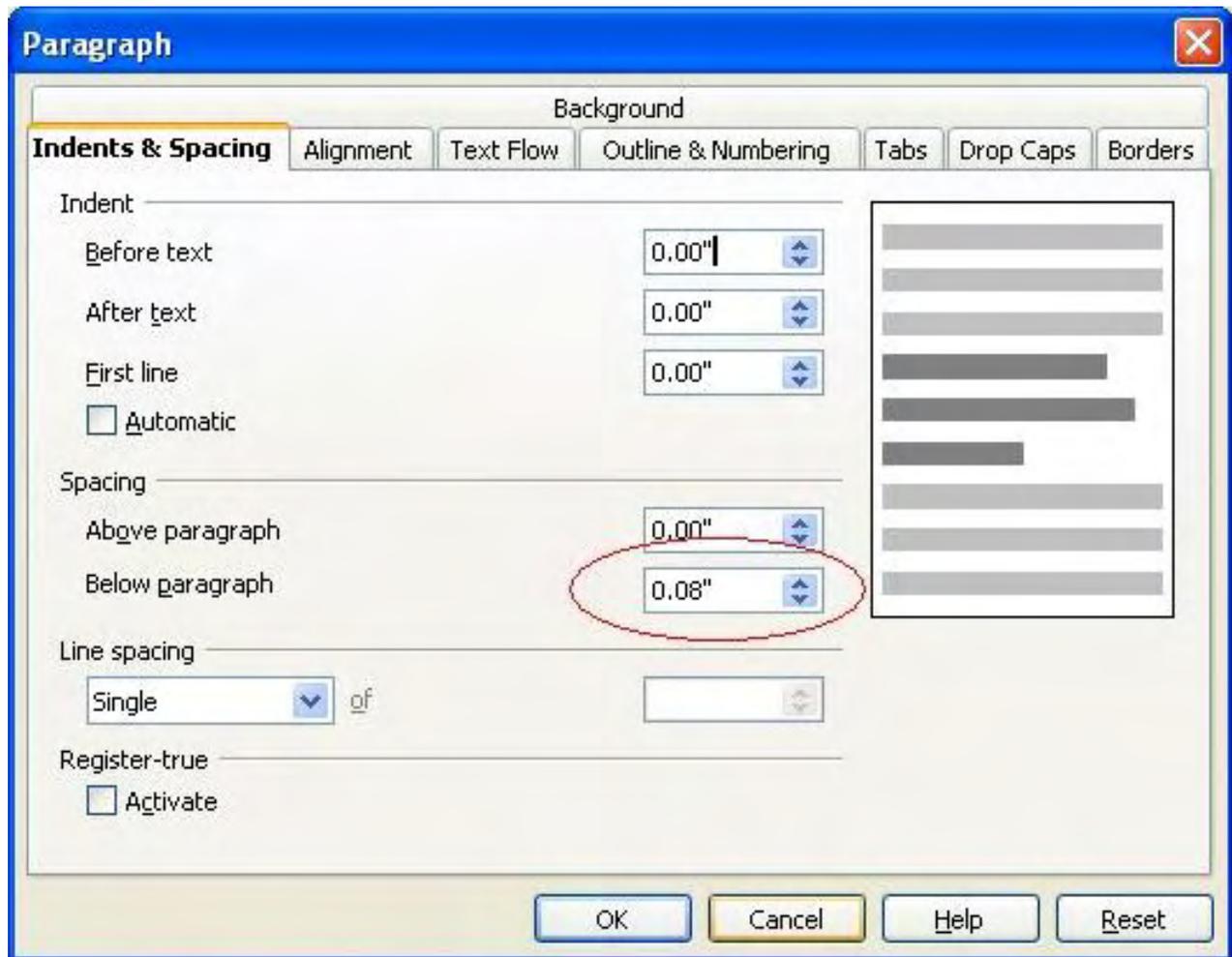
Figure 1. Paragraph Spacing.

Inserting Pictures

This leads to the next issue. To include Figure 1, I had to insert a picture. I've always included images as a separate item and just linked the pictures into my document. When I went to the Insert menu and selected Picture/From File, I was able to locate the file, but how do I make sure that the picture is not embedded but is only linked?

In Word, to link a picture, I had to click an arrow next to the Insert button, as seen in Figure 2.
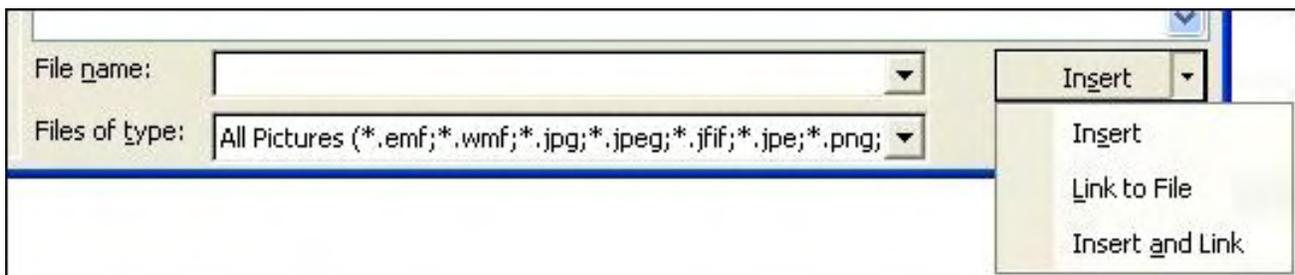

Figure 2. Insert a Linked Picture into Word.

In Writer, I see that there's a checkbox to link a picture, as seen in Figure 3.
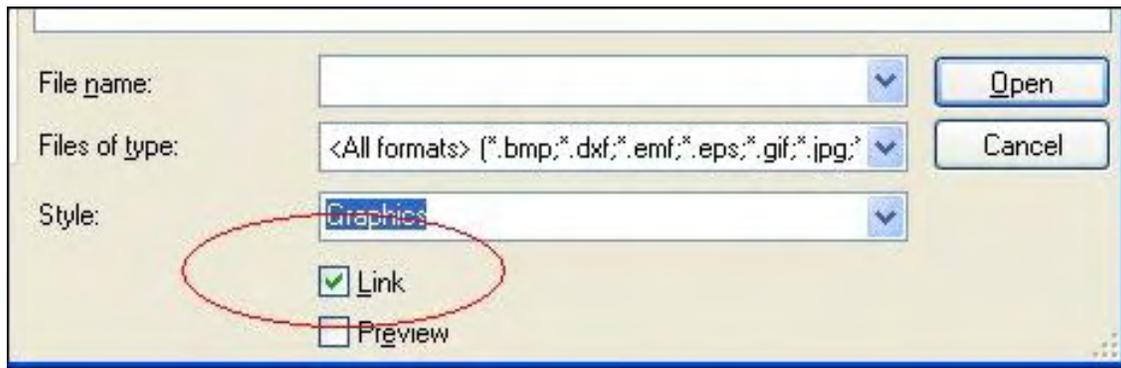
Figure 3. Insert a Linked Picture into Writer.

One nice thing is that the checkbox remains on from picture to picture, whereas I never saw an option for that in Word, and I always had to click the arrow to link every picture.

In Word, to make inserting a picture easier, I simply added an existing toolbar (menu View/Toolbars/Picture) and an icon was there. I see that there's something similar here and it seems to offer essentially the same options. Very good!

One other side note is that inserted pictures in Writer seem to be centered on the page, whereas in Word they are left-justified. In my case that's not important, so I won't bother trying to change it.

New note: As I continue to write this column, I see that I can add the Picture toolbar, but it keeps going away after I insert a picture. If I click on a picture it returns, but I'd really like to have it stay when I asked it to be shown. I'll consider this a big minus if I can't lock custom toolbars the way I want them.

Spell-Check

As with any good word processor, Writer also includes a spell-checker. And as with Word, any word that it does not recognize gets a red zig-zagged underline. Apparently this is part of its AutoSpellcheck feature, and I see a button in the toolbars to enable or disable this, right next to the Spelling and Grammar button, as seen in Figure 4.
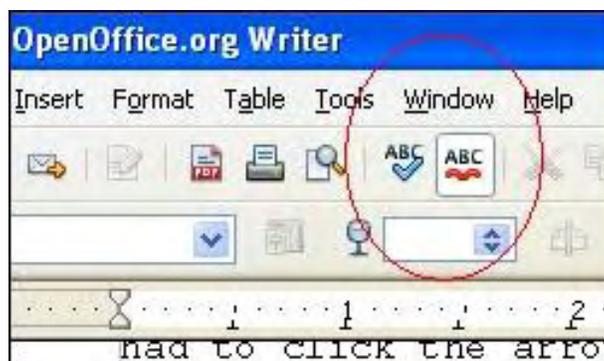

Figure 4. Spelling and Grammar.

When I click on the Spelling button, it opens up a spell-checking dialog control very similar to Word, with very similar features as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Writer Spell-checker.

One related side note: I noticed that as I was typing, sometimes Writer decided that I was starting to type a word that I had previously typed and it tried to help me out. For example, when I type "spell-check," after typing "spe" it spells out the rest of the word for me as though I had highlighted it. However, the typing cursor is still at the position where I was typing. If I press the Enter key (instead of continuing my typing), then it auto-types the rest of the word for me. I've seen this feature a lot in Excel, where if you go down a cell and start typing, Excel will try to autotype something from a cell above it if it looks like a match. Although this could be a really nice feature if you get used to it, I find it a bit distracting and annoying, especially in a word processor where you are likely to be typing long sentences rather than tidbits of information as you would in a spreadsheet. However, if you continue to type, it ignores the "suggestion," so at least it self-corrects. If you like or dislike this feature, drop me a note and let me know why or why not.

Saving

OK, here's the big one. When I finish my document, it has to be in MS Word format. I wrote this whole column without saving (although I copied it and pasted it elsewhere in case something happened). What I need to do is to save it in a format that some recent version of Word will recognize. Here goes: Ctrl+S (or menu File/Save)

And the answer is...

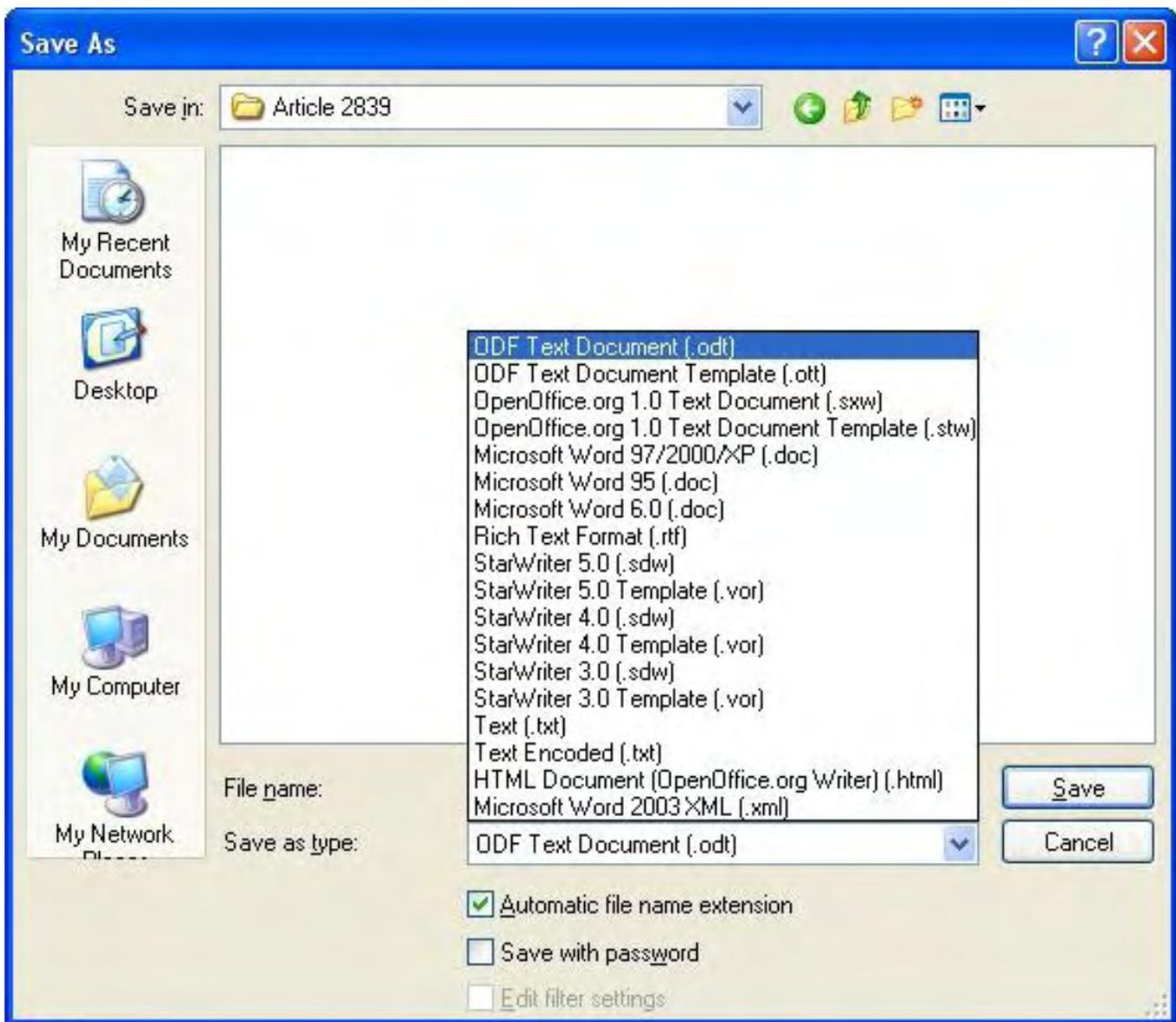Well, look at Figure 6. You can see the different save formats supported.

Figure 6. Writer Save Formats.

Note that for sanity, I saved it as an OpenOffice document (odt). When I then tried to save in the Word format, it notified me that it was in a different format and gave me the option of continuing with the new (Word) format (and possibly losing features) or saving it as ODT format.

Now that I have this "Word" document, let me open it to see how it looks in Word before I send it off.

And the answer is: It translated pretty well. I found a few minor differences in the spell-checker. But the text formatting and the pictures remained intact (although it retained the centering, which is probably to be expected). We'll see if the translated version successfully translated when re-translated to fit on the *ComputorEdge* Web site.

Next week, I'll start exploring Calc, Open Office's Spreadsheet program, competing with MS Excel.

_____

Rob has been in the computer industry for over 25 years and is currently a part-time teacher,

offering classes in Excel, Access, Visual Basic, and a variety of other technical tools. He has loved *ComputorEdge* since 1990 and can be contacted at *RSpahitz@Dogopoly.com*.

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

Worldwide News & Product Reviews

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

Name Brands at Fat Discounts? Fat Chance—Advice on avoiding online auction scams; The King Is Free—Phoenix Online reveals tidbits about the second episode of its King's Quest-inspired series; Cross-Country "TextKills" Tour Aimed at College Students—Iconosys embarks on a cross-country tour of college campuses to raise awareness of the dangers associated with texting and driving; Logitech Performance Mouse MX—Beats the previous model by a whisker.

Name Brands at Fat Discounts? Fat Chance

Aileen Brody of 5W Public Relations (*www.5wpr.com*) provides us the following useful information on avoiding online auction scams:

As anyone who has ever been in the market for new, highly sought-after electronics can attest, deals that seem to be too good to be true normally are just that. Yet every day consumers shopping on Craigslist, eBay and various other sites are successfully baited by scammers.

• Seller history. If they are relatively new sellers with no experience successfully selling high-end products, the likelihood of them offering a "can't miss" deal is very low.

• Overseas seller. Many online scams are conducted by individuals in third-world countries. Even if they claim to be based in the U.S., the use of broken or improper English can be a tip-off.

• Method of payment. Refusal to accept PayPal, credit cards or other secure payment methods that allow for disputes.

• Stock photos. Instead of using a photo of the actual item you are bidding on, scammers will often use an image taken from the product's Web site, a sure sign that they most likely don't possess it.

• No serial number. Any seller should be able to provide a legitimate serial number for a product, allowing the buyer the ability to confirm its validity. Again, no serial number most likely means they don't possess it.

• Buy it now. While the "buy it now" feature can be helpful when trying to grab a got-to-have item, an item that is priced to sell much lower than what similar items are going for is almost always a certain tip-off.

• Phony history. A common tool of online scammers is the use of sob stories, tapping in to human emotion as a means of covering up the truth. A sick mother with skyrocketing medical bills, a lost

job or any number of tales can explain why an item is practically being given away.

• Don't ask. Any reputable seller understands the importance of customer relations. The inability to provide clear answers to simple questions about a product most likely means there is something to hide.

The King Is Free!

Phoenix Online Studios (*www.postudios.com*) has info for us about the second episode of its King's Quest-inspired series ("The Silver Lining"), available for free (*www.tsl-game.com*):

"Two Households" follows protagonist King Graham on an all-new adventure to save his family from mysterious evil forces. With a longer play time than the previous episode ("What Is Decreed Must Be"), more opportunity for exploration, and a number of inventory and logic puzzles, "Two Households" marks a return to the classic adventure gameplay of the bestselling King's Quest series. In The Silver Lining's premiere, King Graham learned that the curse that placed his children into a deep coma could only be cured by a complex spell. Now his quest to save Alexander and Rosella truly begins as he travels the Green Isles to gather the needed ingredients, all the while searching for answers about the cloaked stranger who attacked them— a greater foe than any Graham has faced.

Upon its launch in July, Phoenix Online's team has continued to work behind the scenes to bring fans the gaming experience they expect with the addition of several requested features, including an option for shorter narrations, widescreen support, and the ability to toggle between walking and running. These updates have also been incorporated into a new version of the first episode.

Phoenix Online Studios is currently working on their first commercial endeavors.

Cross-Country "TextKills" Tour Aimed at College Students

Iconosys, developer of the smartphone safety app SMS Replier, is taking to the road with a "TextKills Tour" (*www.textkills.com*) to raise awareness of the dangers associated with this addictive behavior via a cross-country tour of college campuses. According to the company:

Iconosys has developed a Collegiate Version of SMS Replier and plans to give away 100,000 copies over the course of the tour, which began Sept. 9. The company is partnering with FocusDriven.org, an advocacy group of the National Safety Council for victims of motor vehicle crashes involving drivers using cell phones, for the TextKills College Tour. Iconosys intends to raise money for FocusDriven.org during this college tour, including donating $2 from every sale of this special version of SMS Replier over the next two months to FocusDriven.org.

According to the NHTSA, in 2008, nearly 6,000 people died and more than half a million were injured in crashes involving a distracted driver. More than 20 percent of all crashes that same year involved some type of distraction, such as texting while driving (TWD).

"With the latest reports indicating that 100,000,000 smartphones are sold per quarter, we have become a mobile world," commented Iconosys founder Wayne Irving. "Iconosys is committed to developing viable, life-saving solutions for the addictive and potentially destructive behavior that a growing reliance on these devices generates."

The world's infatuation with texting has grown from 4.1 trillion text messages per year in 2008, to more than 1.6 trillion text messages per day in 2010. Irving warns that the side-effects of this practice (death and injury due to car accidents) is yet to be fully realized. It seems to be an undeniable trend that the world is becoming more and more dependent on texting as a primary means of communication, particularly among teenagers who reportedly average more than 4,000 text messages per month. This "always-on" aspect of our daily lives, which borders on an addiction for many, is opening the world's eyes to the very real dangers of TWD.

Logitech Performance Mouse MX

Logitech's Performance Mouse MX (*www.logitech.com/en-us/mice-pointers/mice/devices/5845*) ($99.99 list) is my new favorite mouse—but only by a whisker.

My old favorite was Logitech's venerable MX 1100, also a wireless mouse (the only way to go now that battery life has been greatly improved).

The Performance Mouse looks almost identical to the MX 1100. Still has that great like-a-glove feel. Thanks to what Logitech calls Darkfield Laser Tracking, the Performance Mouse will work in places where others fear to track—even on glass.

A couple of things I like less: The button that rests under your thumb feels a bit squishy to me compared to the same one on the MX. Also, the Performance Mouse has one less button than the MX. Don't know why you'd ever let a programmable button go, but I've come up with a

workaround. That extra button allowed me to dedicate one pair of buttons to browse forward/ back and another pair to volume up/down—something I use many times a day.

That said, the Performance Mouse has two significant pluses over the MX: First, it's rechargeable. It will also work with one AA battery, I've discovered, but the battery lasts for a much shorter period of time than the one in the MX 1100 did. Still, no biggie—just keep the included charger cable plugged into a spare USB port and you can fully charge the included AA overnight or, in a pinch, you can run the mouse with the cable plugged in. Hey, it's like the old days!

The biggest improvement over the MX, to my mind, is the very low-profile receiver. It's so stubby it can be left in your notebook all the time, even when packing and unpacking. Remembering to unplug the MX 1100's one-inch dongle—lest I bang it on something and damage it or, far worse, my laptop—was one extra hassle I didn't need. That tiny receiver has something called Logitech Unifying receiver technology built right in. It allows you to add other wireless devices (drawing pads, headphones) as you need them, just so long as they meet the Unifying receiver spec. I haven't done much with this yet, but it's easy to see the potential. If it catches on, it might come built into new laptops, desktops and pads.

The Performance Mouse is my new favorite pet, at least until all the bugs are worked out of the new self-aware units and they stop the senseless revenge killing of cats.

⊕⊕⊕⊕ ℂ

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

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

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

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

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

He has won many writing accolades, including Press Club awards for Best Column Writing,

Consumer Writing and Best Arts and Entertainment, and has repeatedly taken top honors in San Diego Songwriter's Guild competitions for his original musical compositions.

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

Learn more at *www.charlescarr.com*.

EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher
"The iPad and the PC Market" by Jack Dunning

It may be a stretch to say that the iPad has affected sales of "notebook" computers. The PC industry as a whole is sluggish due to the economy.

One of the benefits of working on *ComputorEdge* is that I get to read Wally Wang's column before anyone else. While there is no doubt that Wally is an ardent Apple supporter, he does a great deal of research and always adds interesting links to his column. I don't necessarily agree with his premise that people are avoiding Apple products because they fear change. That may be one reason, but more likely they just don't feel like changing—or don't see a need to switch from their present comfort zone.

In this week's column, Wally adds a number of interesting links for comments and articles about the computer market. I have a slightly different perspective from Wally, and I thought that these ideas would be worth mentioning.

The first is with regard to the drop in the year-to-year growth of "notebook" sales. (I put notebook in quotes because at times I thought they may have been referring to netbooks rather than laptop computers.) The implication is that the iPad is killing "notebook" sales. If they are talking about the sales of the diminutive netbooks that have done so well the last few years, then I can certainly see it. I always thought that the netbook was a low-cost novelty built for people with tiny fingers. If I were to choose between a netbook and an iPad, the way cooler iPad would win every time. However, if the discussion is referring to laptop computers, then I seriously doubt that much of the drop in the increase in sales of laptops is caused by the iPad. There would be a much more serious concern at work.

As Wally has pointed out on a number of occasions, the iPad has succeeded because it is such a different product from the PC (including laptops). It is being used in unique and different ways within many varied professions and applications. People are using the iPad for its strengths and Apple has—once again—launched a new industry. I would contend that the vast majority of iPad users are not replacing their computer with an iPad but rather supplementing their computing experience with what the iPad has to offer. If the launch of a successful tablet computer is indeed a new market, then its growth is primarily due to the enthusiasm in that market and its special applications. I would like to own an iPad, but not to replace any of my current computers. The slowing in the sales of laptop computers is related more to the economy than to the existence of the iPad. The iPad is in a new market that would do well in any economy—as evidenced by its current success.

The more serious concern is a general drop in PC sales. The computer (whether PC, Mac, or Linux) is the backbone of today's business. There are very few businesses that do not depend upon computers for their daily functioning. The sales of computers have become a barometer of not just current business activity, but a measure of future growth. If sales are dropping then that explains why the announcement that the recession ended in June of 2009 was greeted with skepticism. The situation seems to have gotten worse since last year, which may be an indicator

of the dreaded double-dip recession.

I'm please to see the success that Apple is having with the iPad. Any company that spawns new futures deserves applause. Eventually, all aspects of the economy will benefit for that growth. If the iPad is killing netbooks, then I say good riddance. But I think that attributing the sluggishness of the rest of the computer market to Apple's winnings is a bit of a stretch. There remains that 75 percent of the Windows business users that are hanging onto XP. It's not because they are waiting for the price of a Mac to come down.

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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

"OpenOffice.org," "Thanks for the CNET Tip!," "Converting Music Files," "Specifics on Backing Up"

OpenOffice.org

[Regarding the September 10 Rob, The ComputorTutor: Technology Solutions column:]

Last time I used OpenOffice several years ago, I found that, while document compatibility with MS Office was fairly good with simple documents, more complex documents didn't convert very well. Might be something to look at as you explore OpenOffice.

-Phillip, Alexandria, VA

Word has had a block select for a long time. Move your mouse to where you want to start selecting, hold down the Alt key and then hold down the left mouse button and move the mouse to include what you want to highlight. You have to use the mouse, not the arrow keys. I think I have used it in OpenOffice also, so the block select may allow the use of the arrow keys.

-Marcus, Alabama

I have been using OpenOffice for about a year because when I installed Word I often had problems with it opening or working at all in Vista. I have files that are 20 years old, some of them Word Perfect, some old 3.1 Word—OpenOffice opened them all well. If it did not want to convert, I simply copied to the clipboard, created a new document and pasted the old document into the new. There are always many ways you can handle a problem.

I have found that OpenOffice is a good program and I have made a database for my diabetic files to send to my doctor. I have PDF Creator (you can download a free copy online) and copy these files into a PDF file and e-mail them to my doctor. This saves my doctor time and me money. It is certainly a program worth giving a try.

-MK, Denver, Colorado

Hey Rob, glad to see people openly talking about options other than Microsoft. With so many alternative programs available, it's good to hear from professionals like you and get an opinion based on hands-on experience.

Thanks and please keep 'em coming.

-Bob, Chula Vista

Thanks for the CNET Tip!

[Regarding the September 10 Digital Dave column:]

I agree about using CNET and just did so after the last advice I got here! Thanks to a comment from your reader about my slow computer after boot, I uninstalled AVG and that was the problem!

From CNET I downloaded Glary and previously, CCleaner—it's good. I also downloaded Avast for antivirus to replace AVG. So far so good, and it's thanks to you and your readers! Your reasons for using CNET are right on—it can be trusted and there are reviews from other users.

Many thanks again!

-Sandy, San Diego

Converting Music Files

[Regarding the September 10 Digital Dave column:]

Be careful about using copyrighted music. Many people have paid hefty fines for using them. Personal use should be OK. Just a heads up.

-David Powell, San Diego, CA

Specifics on Backing Up

[Regarding James Hartnett's September 10 article, "Who's Got Your Back?":]

Ravishly I read your your article but, it does *not* tell me *how* to back up. Is it [in the same place] as Edit/Copy/Save is? Where do you find a button or link to perform backing up My Documents? And *where* do I do it? I'm a frustrated newbie with Windows XP. Thank you.

-Grandma Julie, Alpine, CA

The link for "recovering data" software is a bit too general. What may be more appropriate is "backup" software. Microsoft provides a simple free backup program (*www.microsoft.com/ downloads/en/details.aspx?familyid=c26efa36-98e0-4ee9-a7c5-98d0592d8c52&displaylang=en*) that lets you select files and folders from an Explorer-like tree to be backed up externally. I use it to back up to a local USB hard drive, which is much faster than going over a network connection. Also, you can view your backed-up files individually since they are not compressed into a ball of data, but simply copied. The word "sync" is used to indicate that previously backed-up data that has not changed is not backed up again.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

Sorry Grandma Julie, I neglected to add some fundamentals to the article.

One way to make a backup is to just copy the file. For example: Open Windows Explorer to the folder that holds your Word documents (by default the My Documents folder).

To make a backup of one of these documents, copy it to another disk drive or storage unit. In

Windows Explorer, or on the Windows desktop, you can do this by clicking on the document and dragging it to the new location.

If you plug in a USB data stick, a folder for it will appear on your desktop. If you drag the file to that folder, it will be copied to the data stick. You have just made a backup!

You can back up an entire folder in the same way. If you copy the My Documents folder, all of the contents will be copied to the data stick. It's very quick, too, compared to old magnetic media systems, like tape and floppy.

This is the free way to back up your files. If you are very careful, and don't make any mistakes, you will never lose a thing. But most of us are neither very careful nor perfect, and so we all lose files eventually. But mostly this works for personal stuff.

If you sign up for a service like Mozy, they will ask you to specify all the folders that contain important information. Then they will do all the copying necessary, behind the scenes.

Of course they will be much more clever about it. They will only copy changes to files, and they will be sure to never keep two copies where one will do. They have lots of clever, college-educated Java programmers who will reduce the entire problem to something you can just set up and then forget about. Yet it will always work perfectly when you need it.

This is a much more sure-fire solution, but costs real money, which seems to be harder to come by these days.

Thanks for reading!

-James Hartnett, Boulder, Colorado

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