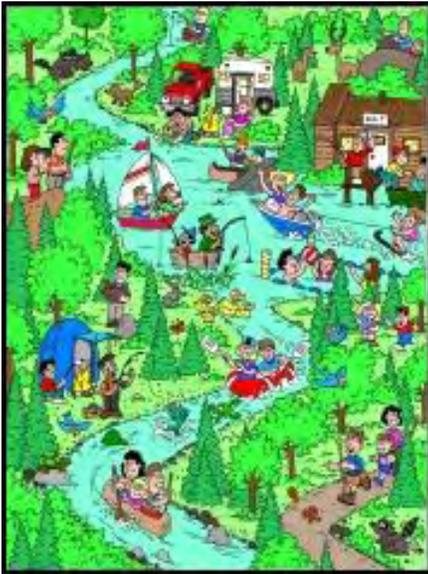# *ComputorEdge™ Online — 10/22/10*

This issue: Twittering About Social Networking

An update on the status of Twitter and a look at the major people-to-people sites.

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EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher by Jack Dunning

There are those who join social-networking sites, and then those who don't.
For some people, social networking activity becomes a form of addiction. Others, like Jack, are decidedly "meh" on the latest forms of Web-based interaction.

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Digital Dave

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

A reader wants advice on fixing up a stack of problem PCs; a reader needs to power up a computer in a home that's off the power grid; do all those Windows updates clean up after themselves?

Dear Digital Dave,

I've purchased about 15 PCs over the last 30 years, and they don't seem to last more than two years. I've tried to upgrade a PC myself a couple of times, and all I've done is get very frustrated and put the PC aside after spending a couple of hundred dollars. Now I have a stack of used PCs that may only have one component that failed in them. Is there a weekend class I can take to learn how to build a PC from parts I purchase so I don't add to the waste problem here in San Diego?

David White
Ramona, CA

Dear David,

This type of training (build your own computer) is not as common as it used to be. Every time computers drop in price, there is less incentive to repair them. However, with all the computer parts you have on hand, it could be good fun to see if you can get anything to work. However, since your boxes are spread over 30 years, you will probably experience many incompatibility problems.

One of the first places that I would go is local computer user groups. These are clubs that meet on a regular basis in an effort to help each other with their computer interests. They are usually dedicated to a particular special interest and are full of people who generally want to do nothing but help other people. Some of the groups even have special build-your-own meetings.

Also, check with your local community colleges and adult continuing education programs. They may have classes designed for people entering the computer repair field that could be quite useful.

In addition, check out a book store (or Amazon) for books on repairing or upgrading computers. Working on computers is not as complicated as it may seem. Most procedures involve replacing a card and loading drivers. Once you've changed a video card one time, it is pretty much the same thing, whether you're replacing a network card or another type of expansion board. The same thing goes for memory, although how the memory clips in and pops out will vary.

As for adding to the waste problem, communities have special programs for recycling electronics. They don't want to load the landfills with the contaminants in the equipment. If you do decide to dispose of the unusable equipment, don't toss it in the trash. Make a point of taking it somewhere they will actually recycle it—or at least dispose of it properly.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I'm building an off-grid adobe home in Jamul. I know there are huge losses with inline AC/DC (Alternating Current/Direct Current) power supplies for monitors and printers. I assume desktops suffer in the same way. Seems dumb to invert DC to AC, then go back to DC.

Are there ways to go from my battery bank directly to DC gadgets (cut out the inline AC/DC power supply in the process)?

Mike Freyler
Jamul, CA

Dear Mike,

Anytime you make power conversions you will experience loss—including converting the voltage of DC output for use with DC devices. However, the loss you will experience with DC-to-DC voltage changes should be less than a DC-to-AC, then back to DC conversion. Therefore in a DC-driven home you will want to choose to run directly on DC if possible.

Having said that, DC-to-DC voltage conversion is used all of the time in automobile power adapters that plug into the cigarette lighter (accessory power). While car adapters may not be the right solution, DC-DC voltage converters are relatively common and you should have no problem locating on the Web an array of devices for varied situations.

As you're probably well aware, to complete the process of eliminating the AC-DC power supply that goes to the electronic device, you need to ensure that the output DC voltage of the converter matches that required by the device. Plus, you need to make sure that the positive and negative terminal points are appropriately matched. Getting either of these wrong could fry your equipment.

I've also seen DC computer power supplies available that, when installed in a desktop computer, will take 12, 24, or 48 volts DC input without conversion. There are also propane-powered refrigerators (commonly used in recreation vehicles) that require no electrical power at all.

If anyone out there has direct experience with this type of system, please leave a comment.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I'm always getting pop-ups from Windows that an update is ready to be installed on my computer—which is cool, right? But some of them are a lot; I once saw up to 11. Anyway, I was

wondering what they do with the old updates. Do they delete them or are they still on my computer wasting space? And if they are, how can I get rid of them?

Aaron Abrams
Ocean Beach, CA

Dear Aaron,

As a rule, Windows updates should clean up after themselves once they are installed. (As I understand it, Windows XP would wait 10 days before deleting the install files.) Even if the install files are still on your computer, whether or not they are wasting space is more of a philosophical than practical question.

Unless you have a really tiny hard drive, any remaining Windows update files are likely taking up an insignificant amount of space. Plus, unless you can show that the space is needed elsewhere, it can hardly be called wasted—it is merely occupied. It is far more likely that you have redundant copies of personal files and loads of spam and/or downloads you will never look at again, which are sitting on much larger blocks of your drive. If you need more space, look to these for deletion. Their removal will clear up more storage and be less dangerous than messing with the hidden mechanisms of the system.

I've always found it far safer to ignore the existence of Windows files, then to start deleting them. I get many letters from people who say that they were cleaning up their computer and they accidentally deleted a key file. I want to say, don't clean up your computer! But of course, it's too late. It is far safer to leave a file in place than to delete it. (The exception is when you *know* that it is a malware file.)

I know that only some people will agree with me. For many, the thought of a file sitting on their computer hard drive that has no particular use is unbearable. For them it is best that they not know those files exist, much less where they are located.

Digital Dave

P.S. I did address a similar question on July 2. Although the question does address more specifics, I can see my answer hasn't change much.

Twitter Pros and Cons
"To tweet or not to tweet." by Michael J. Ross

> Will Twitter gain enough users, stability and respect to eventually eclipse Facebook, MySpace, and other social networking systems? Or will it become the poster child of content-free online blabbing and a notorious waste of time?

Nowadays we hear a growing number of people peppering their conversations with bird-like sounds—"tweets" and "Twitter." To anyone who is not up to date with the Internet in general, and social networking in particular, it may sound as though today's younger generation has suddenly taken an interest in ornithology. Actually, the source of the craze is Twitter (*twitter.com/*), which is, in the words of the Wikipedia entry (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter*), "a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers who are known as followers."

"Here's a list of girls following your Tweets! I want you to block

Within a year of its launch in 2006, Twitter began to experience remarkable growth in use, which has only increased during the years that followed. According to the Web analytics company Compete (*www.compete. com/*), at the beginning of 2008, the Twitter site was receiving half a million unique visitors every month, and by December of that year, it was up to 4.43 million—an astonishing growth rate of 752 percent. Just a few months later, it was up to 8 million and counting. Each day, anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000

"Here's a list of girls following your Tweets! I want you to block them on your Twitter account!"

people signed up for new accounts. By February 2009, the year-over-year growth rate had reached 1,382 percent. All of those statistics (except possibly growth rate) are likely higher now, with the number of Twitter users reported in the tens of millions.

This surging popularity is undoubtedly a consequence of several factors. The technical media pundits, including bloggers with massive audiences, tend to jump on whatever Web bandwagon is in the spotlight, and this sort of buzz simply builds upon itself. In turn, more individuals, businesses and other organizations see any new hot phenomenon as something that they too should adopt, if only to appear "with it"—regardless of whether or not they have objectively determined that the benefits outweigh the costs. They may not even understand the technology in question, as well as its advantages and disadvantages, which are worth considering for a communication technology such as Twitter that is rapidly permeating daily life for anyone on the Web.

Microblogging at Its Best?

For Twitter to have become so widespread, there definitely must be more to it than the compounding effects of media excitement and coverage. One obvious factor is that countless individuals do not have the time, interest or writing capacity to maintain a steady stream of blog posts—each of which is expected to comprise at least several paragraphs. For people in this predicament, microblogging can be a godsend, because each Twitter "post" is limited to a sentence or two (or more, with extensive abbreviating), which can take most of the pressure off of the aspiring blogger, since just about everyone is aware of the size limitation. Moreover, there is no expectation that a tweet will contain any associated multimedia, such as digital photos and short videos, which would otherwise add to the effort needed to create an acceptable post. Also, getting started with Twitter is relatively straightforward and quick (in fact, the most challenging aspect may be in coming up with a Twitter username that has not already been taken). In contrast, starting up a conventional blog—even with some of the better hosted solutions—can be more involved and, to the non-techie, rather intimidating.

The anecdotal evidence of Twitter's value just keeps piling up, as more people meet new friends, learn about job openings, find freelance projects and collaborators, discover last-minute and unpublished travel deals, meet new gaming buddies, get real-time weather reports from people in the area, locate fellow travelers to share expenses, elicit honest feedback on restaurants and movies, and much more.

Many Internet users prefer getting as much news and other information as possible in a central location—namely, their RSS newsreader—rather than having to visit favorite sites regularly, including Twitter. Fortunately, you can subscribe to a Twitter feed and view it with a reader that does not support authentication (like Google Reader). But you will see only 20 tweets, and you will not get any updates—which makes it essentially useless. For such a scenario, FreeMyFeed (*freemyfeed.com/*) is a service that will take a feed that requires authentication and, by adding your username and password, give you a new feed that doesn't require authentication.

For businesses, Twitter can serve as an effective component of a company's social media strategy on the Web, to the point where now the homepages of countless large U.S. corporations

each has a link to the company's Twitter page. Admittedly, many of these tweet streams are nothing more than duplicates of the company's RSS newsfeeds, filled with links to dull press releases. However, there are some organizations that truly understand and leverage the interactive nature of microblogging and social media, and use it to engage their customers and prospects. For instance, most of the major cable news channels now try to incorporate tweets from viewers into their broadcasts, which naturally attracts viewers who would like to express their opinions, or at least see their names on the screen. In addition, Twitter can be used internally as an always-on communication medium for a team of any size.

But are the world's top corporations managing their Web presence well enough to have secured the Twitter accounts for their company and product names? Apparently not. According to research by trademark attorney Erik J. Heels and published on January 8, 2009, an astounding 93 of the top 100 U.S. brand names have failed to secure those names on Twitter, and consequently a "Twittersquatter" in each case has taken the username that the company's marketing staff should have locked in as soon as Twitter became clearly visible in the commercial world. Don't let your promising start-up enterprise make this mistake.

In the realm of politics and governance, social news is playing a greater role. Just like the use of fax machines and e-mail in the past, political observers and protesters are discovering the value of being able to immediately send out short messages to all their followers, typically transmitted from cell phones. Twitter has been used successfully by all sorts of governmental and nongovernmental organizations in most Western countries, Israel and elsewhere. At the U.S. federal level, NASA has used Twitter to send out real-time updates on a number of missions, including the Mars Phoenix Lander and the repair of the Hubble Space Telescope. At the state level, a growing number of universities are not only announcing schedule changes via Twitter, but allowing students to participate in discussions during class. Elementary schools are preparing children for a networked future by teaching them how to communicate using various social platforms.

Twitter has even proven its utility for pranks. In December 2009, TechCrunch.com reported (*www. washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/13/AR2009121300007.html*) that a best man in a U.K. wedding waited until his newly married friends were absent on their honeymoon, slipped into their house, and placed under their mattress a pressure-sensitive device that tweeted the weight on the mattress, the start time, the duration, and the frenzy index (on a scale from 1 to 10). Now anyone on the Internet can follow the action (*twitter.com/newlywedsontjob*).

Media Hype at Its Worst?

The raw statistics may give one the impression that Twitter is fast becoming the greatest thing since, well, Facebook. But some of the figures might turn out to be misleading, because the total number of users does not imply that all of them are active. Back in April 2009, David Martin of Nielsen Online reported that more than 60 percent of American Twitter users fail to return the following month after signing up. So for each person who appears to be energetically tweeting their every thought and action, there may be several others who tweeted for a few weeks or months, and then lost interest—much like the abandoned personal Web sites of the late 1990s.

Yet statistical puffery could be the most innocuous of the barbs aimed against Twitter and its proponents. Critics of all stripes have argued that most tweets are pointless drivel, churned out by a user base composed of "twits"—narcissistic individuals desperate for attention, and

corporate suits fearful of missing out on the latest online craze and thereby appearing disconnected from and irrelevant to hip young consumers. Scott Adams perhaps nailed this perspective in his Dilbert cartoon of November 24, 2009, in which Dogbert states, "I decided to Twitter because everything that pops into my head is fascinating."

Given that every tweet is limited to 140 characters, one must wonder just how much value the Twitterati is offering the world, and whether the service tends to attract people with terribly short attention spans in terms of both reading and writing. Social observers may worry that Twitter is but one more steppingstone in the degeneration of human thought and communication, as we descend from substantial books, essays and letters, to ghostwritten fluff books, grammatically challenged blog posts, and tweets describing bodily functions. Moreover, circumscribed messages in any medium run the risk of some readers misinterpreting and being offended by a quip that cannot be set in context. Will this lead to an escalation of the Twitter-fueled flame wars already spotted in the wild?

This of course assumes that the participants can read the tweets of others, and either counterattack or give those tweets a virtual thumbs up (by "retweeting" them). What happens when the entire Twitter system is unavailable? Such has been the case on several occasions, apparently caused by software instability, excessive traffic and other problems that can strike at any time. During such an outage, visitors to the site cannot access their tweets or followers, but instead see the now famous "fail whale," an image depicting a white whale being hoisted out of the water by eight red birds, with an explanation that cleverly begins "Too many tweets!"

While some commercial enterprises have wholly embraced Twitter, and others are still testing the waters, the bulk of the commercial interest appears to be limited to the United States. Some of the largest firms in Europe and the U.K. are generally ignoring this new social networking platform, and have no intentions of trying it—even companies in the Internet and telecommunications sector, such as British Telecom. In fact, the top search result for "Twitter" on that company's site, as of this writing, is a short article (*www.btvision.bt.com/showbiz-news/im-quitting-twitter-says-fry/*) announcing that actor Stephen Fry will suspend tweeting to his more than one million followers, so he can get the "absolute peace" and "zero distraction" needed to finish writing a book.

If even one of the most enthusiastic techies of the world is finding the "Twittersphere" too distracting, then what hope can we mortals have? Will Twitter gain enough users, stability and respect to eventually eclipse Facebook, MySpace, and other social networking systems? Or will it become the poster child of content-free online blabbing, a notorious waste of time, and something our elders will warn us about in public service announcements on television titled This Is Your Brain on Twitter?

The truth is no doubt somewhere in between. Like any tool, Twitter can be used wisely or poorly. Just be careful what you communicate to the world on Twitter—even unintentionally, such as if you get married under the watchful gaze of a mischievous best man.

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.

The Big Four of Social Networking

"Will Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn stand the test of time?" by
Pete Choppin

> The big four of social networking, which include Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn, have
> exploded in popularity, but are they all still on the rise? Who is really using these networks, and are
> they still being used as intended?

It's OK to be sick and tired of social networking. It may be the most overhyped technology we've
seen since the CB radio. Social networking hasn't gone beyond much more than an info-
plaything used primarily by teens and tweens.

And yet the major social networks still cannot be ignored. Obviously, their impact on the Internet
and with communication and networking has changed the face of the Internet. The big four of
social networking, which include Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn, have exploded in
popularity, but are they all still on the rise? Who is really using these networks, and are they still
being used as intended? Let's take a look.

Facebook's Fire Cools

No one can dispute Facebook's impact on the world. It is *big*, and with
millions of posts and interactions each day, the influence of its users is the
envy of every marketing professional. Traditional media professionals and
other old people will be tempted to look at popularity trends and data and claim that the social
media "fad" is over and on the decline, and they would be mistaken.
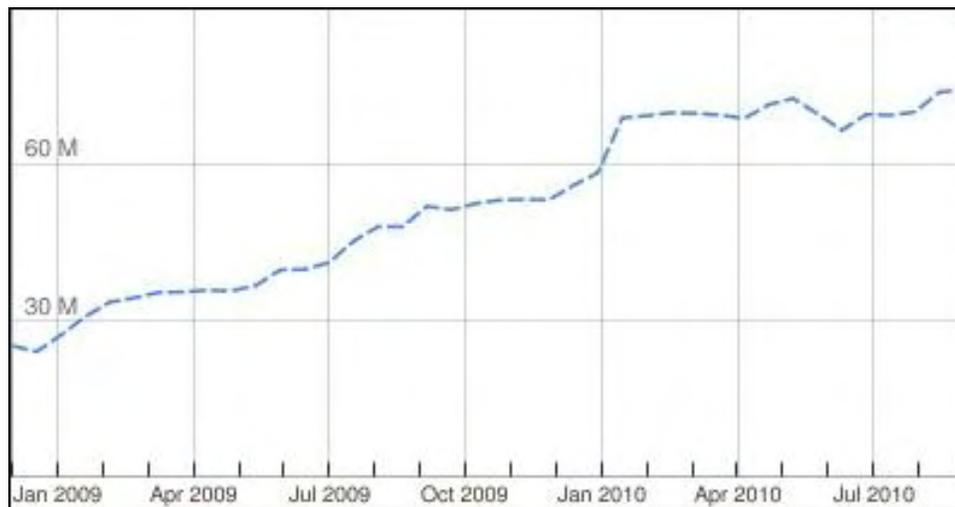
Facebook data.

Although Facebook's growth may not continue indefinitely, its amazing growth in users from 2008
to the start of 2010 was being fueled by a viral exploration of a new media that allowed people to
connect in a way they never had before.

You might be surprised in the drop of 10 million users during July of 2010. However, this is only

significant in that it shows a leveling off of growth. The average time on the site is more than 23 minutes, which is much longer than the other three major U.S. social media tools (MySpace, 14:40 minutes; Twitter, 13:10 minutes; LinkedIn, 9:50 minutes). This is important, as more time spent means more interaction and more influence by users and advertisers. Now that the new car smell has worn off, I believe we are seeing the coming of age of a new social media. We'll get to that later.

Twitter Continues to Pause

By and large, Twitter is a misunderstood site. I admit that when I first took a look at it, I was confused. What do you do with it? The main misconception when first encountering Twitter is that visitors think of it as a two-way network. Twitter revolves around the principle of followers. When you choose to follow another Twitter user, that user's tweets appear in reverse chronological order on your main Twitter page. If you follow 20 people, you'll see a mix of tweets scrolling down the page. But its concept is not a conversational network. It is more comparable to message boards where you post your musings of the day that other people browse through.
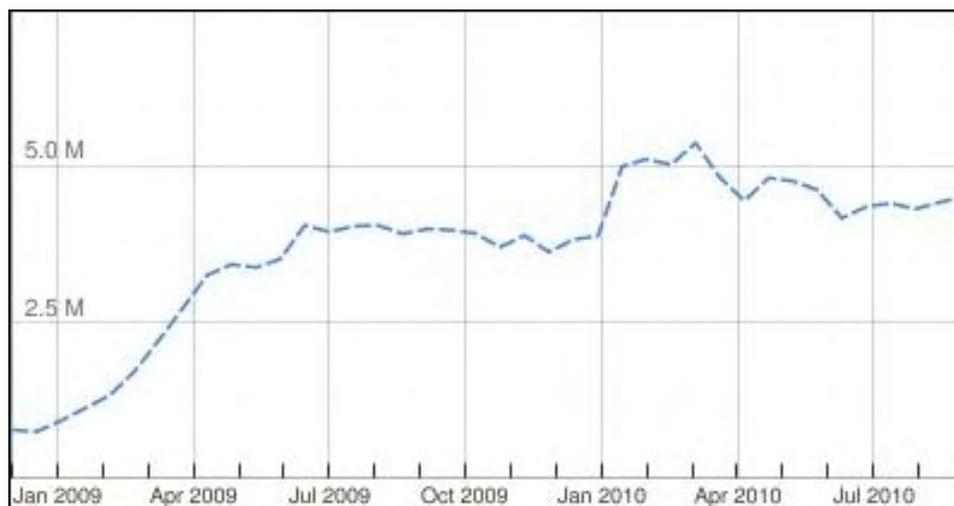

Twitter data.

Twitter's daily visits have leveled off in the last six months, and some might see this as an ominous sign for the hyper-fast social media tool. Twitter's lack of significant growth in the number of users is due, in part, to a continued lack of understanding of the value of the tweet. The impact of Twitter is not in the posts, but the conversations and the URL links to other blogs and Web pages. Twitter is like headline news for new ideas and concepts. Often posts reveal a new approach or cutting-edge information that won't be in the traditional public arena for months.

MySpace Back from the Brink?

It's no surprise, at least to me, that MySpace has continued dropping users. I have predicted the end of MySpace for some time, but in January 2010 it did something bizarre … it gained users. The reason? Well, no other major social media tool lets you search by gender, and age, and height, and race, and body type, and sexual orientation —are you getting the picture? MySpace is a social dating site as much as anything else, and lonely people make up a lot of our world's population. So maybe MySpace has found its niche as

a romance network and that will stop the freefall of the past two quarters.
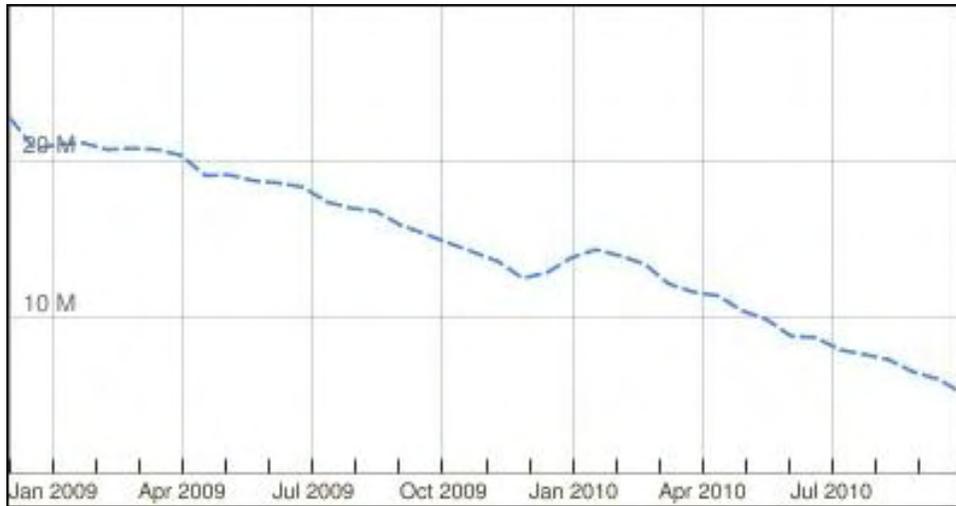
MySpace data.

One of the problems with MySpace is its trashy reputation with younger users and the predators (*www.switched.com/2008/01/15/another-myspace-predator-caught/*) that have frequented the sites. MySpace has taken measures to combat this by limiting the "find-a-friend" search function to give the results of people age 18 and over. That is a smart move to protect minors; however, some teenagers have simply listed themselves as 18 or older to circumvent the limitation. Unfortunately, this has led to much of the deteriorating reputation and drop in users for MySpace.

LinkedIn Drifting in Niche

The latest statistics show that despite millions of people looking for work, the business person-to-business person Web site LinkedIn is not growing.
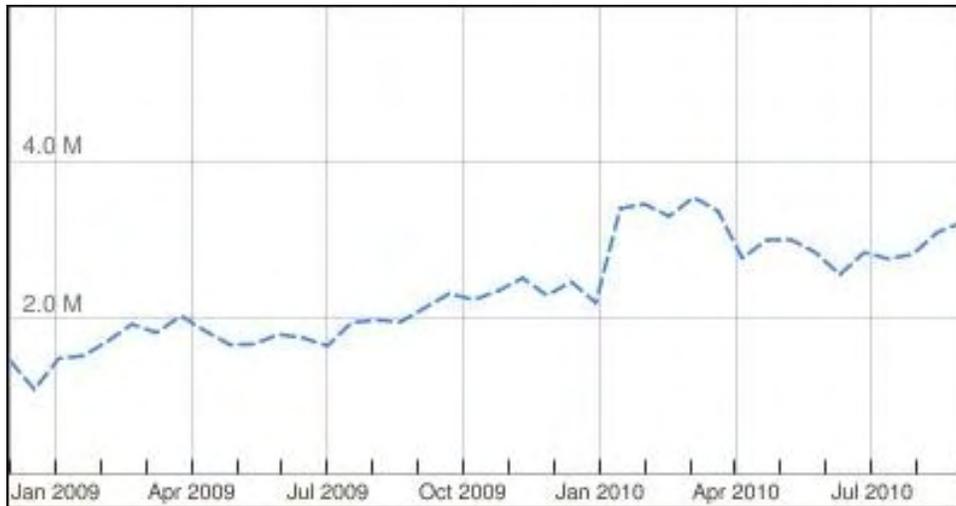
LinkedIn data.

Like MySpace, LinkedIn has found its niche. Essentially, LinkedIn is a business-oriented Web site that provides a job-exchange service. Most users are using the networking Web site as their digital résumé in order to attract job offers. In the Tom Peters "Re-Imagine" business world where

branding is a key element of survival, LinkedIn is a Mecca for self-promotion.

Unfortunately, LinkedIn is not as successful as Facebook and Twitter in two-way interaction. Both of those social media tools do not have as much as of an agenda by individual users as LinkedIn. Users of the business-oriented network seem to spend more time professing what they know and don't spend as much time listening to others. This is the traditional media model of one-way communication, which is the style of communication that social media has displaced. For some, the self-promotion run-a-muck style of some LinkedIn users is a turn-off that may hurt the site in the long run.

Future Predictions

I believe we are seeing a refinement of each of the big four social media tools. Facebook has become the social sharing network; Twitter is the thought-provoking, learning network; MySpace is the social relationship network; and LinkedIn is the branding and résumé network. Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn will likely end 2010 about where they are now unless something viral either causes a rush of new users, or sends people running away. Twitter still has potential significant growth, but I don't see that happening anytime soon.

Social networking is still a fairly new phenomenon among teens, businesses and professionals; however, now that there seems to be a calming of the major networks, the value and purpose is becoming clearer. That will allow the big four to lock in their market—but it will also open the door for other networks to identify areas of opportunity and weakness.

In 2011 we should see more defined purposes of social media. Much of this will be user driven. Business will certainly want to capitalize on the growing popularity of social media, and we should see more clever marketing to take advantage of the growth.

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.
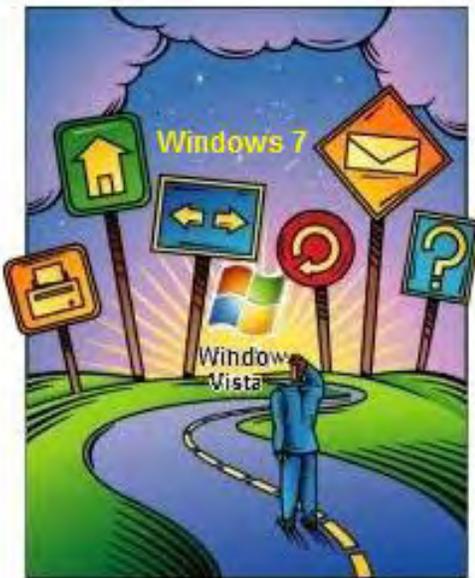
Windows Tips and Tricks

"Personalizing Your Windows 7 Desktop" by Jack Dunning

In Windows 7 you can turn your desktop background into a slide show or incorporate international elements, adding further personalization to your computing experience.

One of the features of Windows that makes a computer "your computer" is selecting the background of the desktop. This can be any stock photo or one from your personal family collection. Earlier versions of Windows offer the selection of one background, but in Windows 7 you can turn your desktop background into a slide show. Your desktop background options can be selected by right-clicking on the desktop and selecting Personalize (Properties in Windows XP) from the menu.

In Windows 7, you select Desktop Background Slide Show to create a slide show for your desktop with the images in the directory of the selected theme. If you make changes to the Slide Show, an Unsaved Theme will be created with the new settings. You can save the theme with a new name by right-clicking on the selected theme and selecting "Save theme" or "Save theme for sharing" if you want to create a portable file. By creating a desktop slide show, you add more interest to your Windows 7 experience.

There is a standard set of images that comes with all Windows 7 installations. A number of the photos are of scenes from your installation's geographic location (i.e., the United States). However, it is possible to access the scenes for a few other locations by activating the themes from these other countries. This is done by locating some hidden system files in Windows 7.

The first step is to open Windows Explorer and select Organize/Folder and search options. In the View tab, uncheck the "Hide protected operating systems files (Recommended)" and click Apply, then OK. See Figure 1. This will allow the hidden folders that contain the other desktop landscapes to be visible to Windows Explorer.

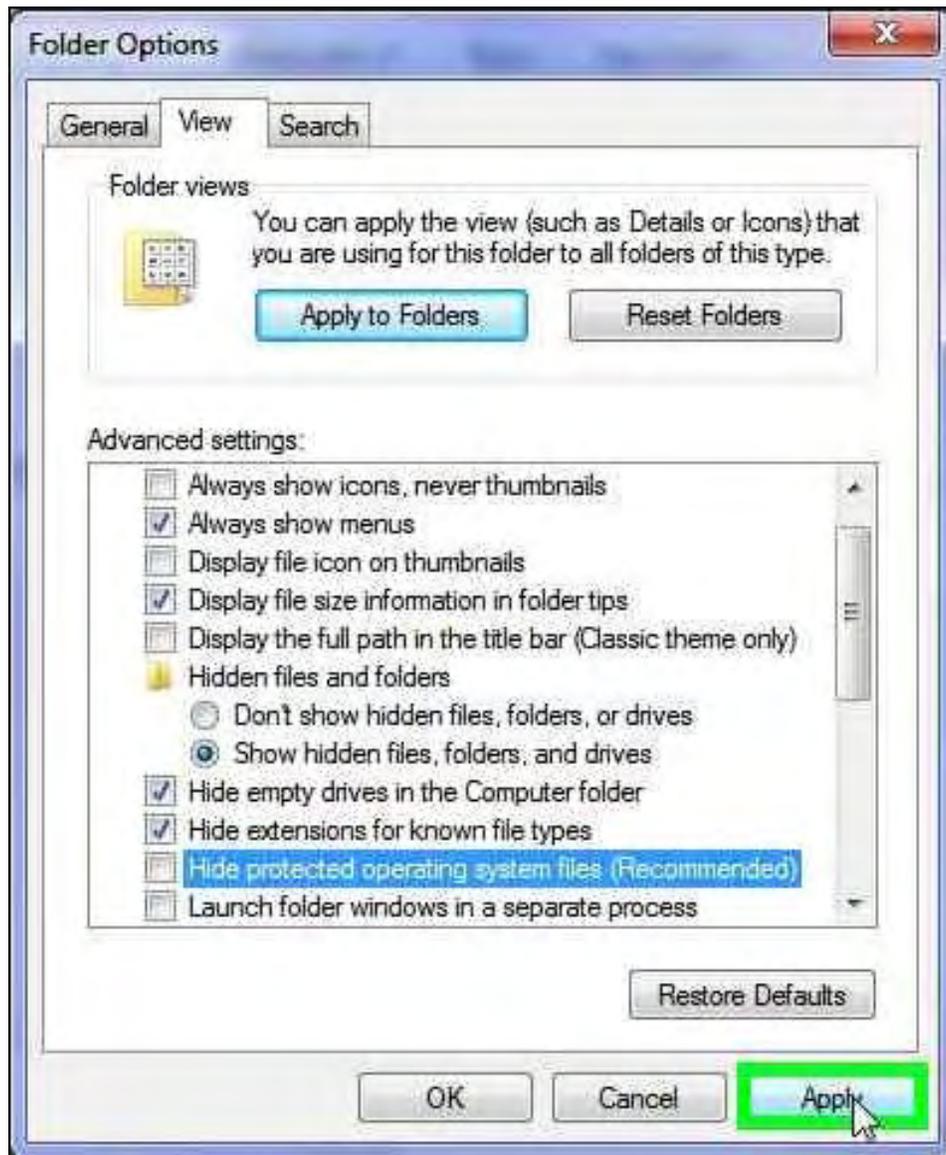Figure 1. Open the View tab in the Windows 7 Folder Options windows to deselect hidden systems files.

The next step is to navigate to Windows/Globalization/MCT. You will find five folders, as shown in Figure 2. AU is Australia; CA is Canada; GB is Great Britain; US is the United States; and ZA is South Africa. Each of the respective folders contains folders with a theme and images specific to the country.
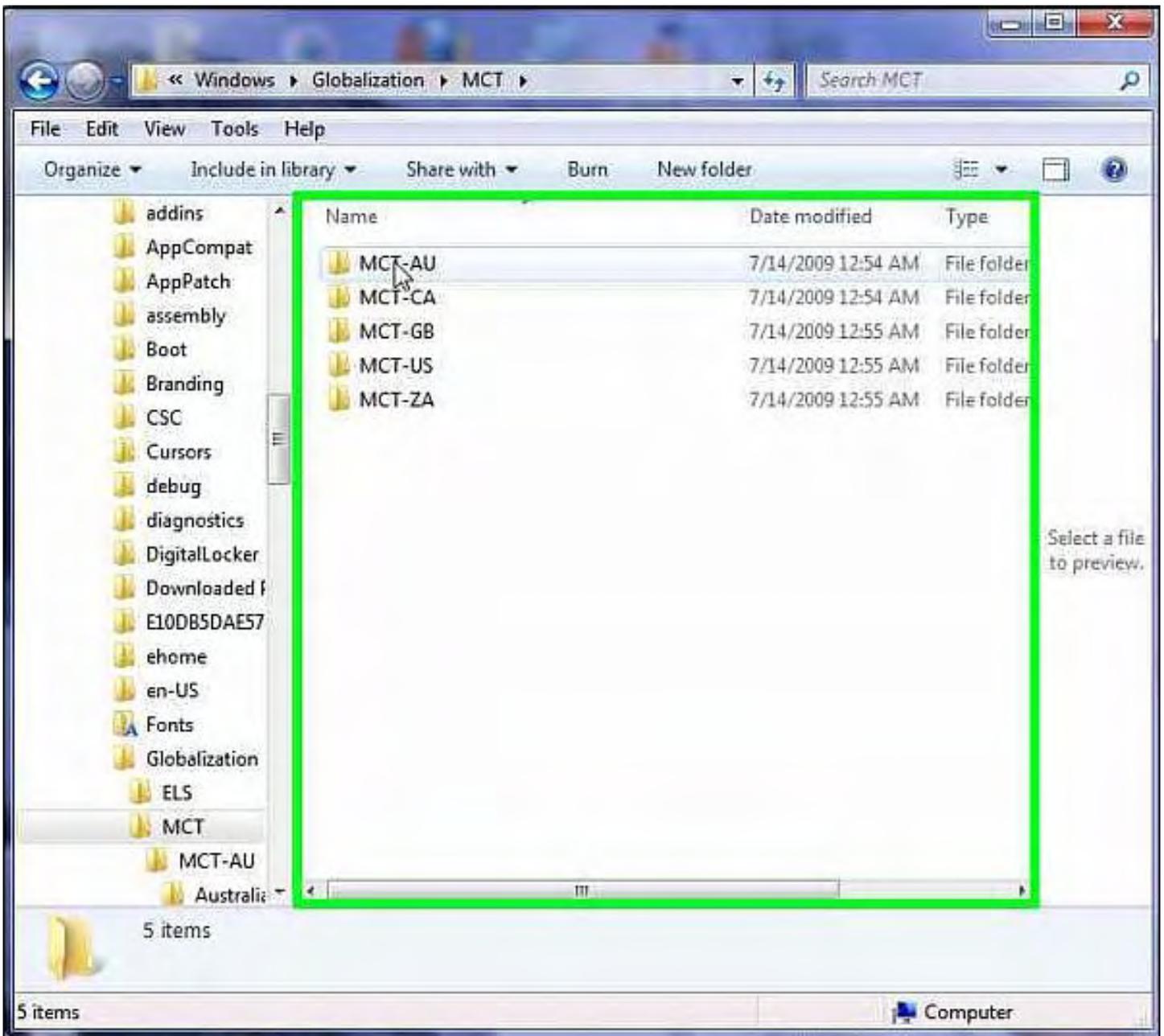
Figure 2. The MCT folder contains five folders for country-specific desktop themes.

When you open one of the folders, you will find three subfolders: one with the country name (i.e., Australia), RSS Feed, and Theme. The "country name" folder contains the images included with the theme; and the Theme folder, when opened, contains the theme file, as shown in Figure 3. (If you do not have "Hide extensions for known file types" checked in the View tab of the Folder Options window, then you will see the ".theme" extension added to the AU.)

Figure 3. The Australian (AU) theme file is shown in the normally hidden Theme folder.

Double-click (or right-click and Open) the file name, and the theme will be implemented while opening the Personalization window. See Figure 4. The new theme will be added to the list of My Themes.
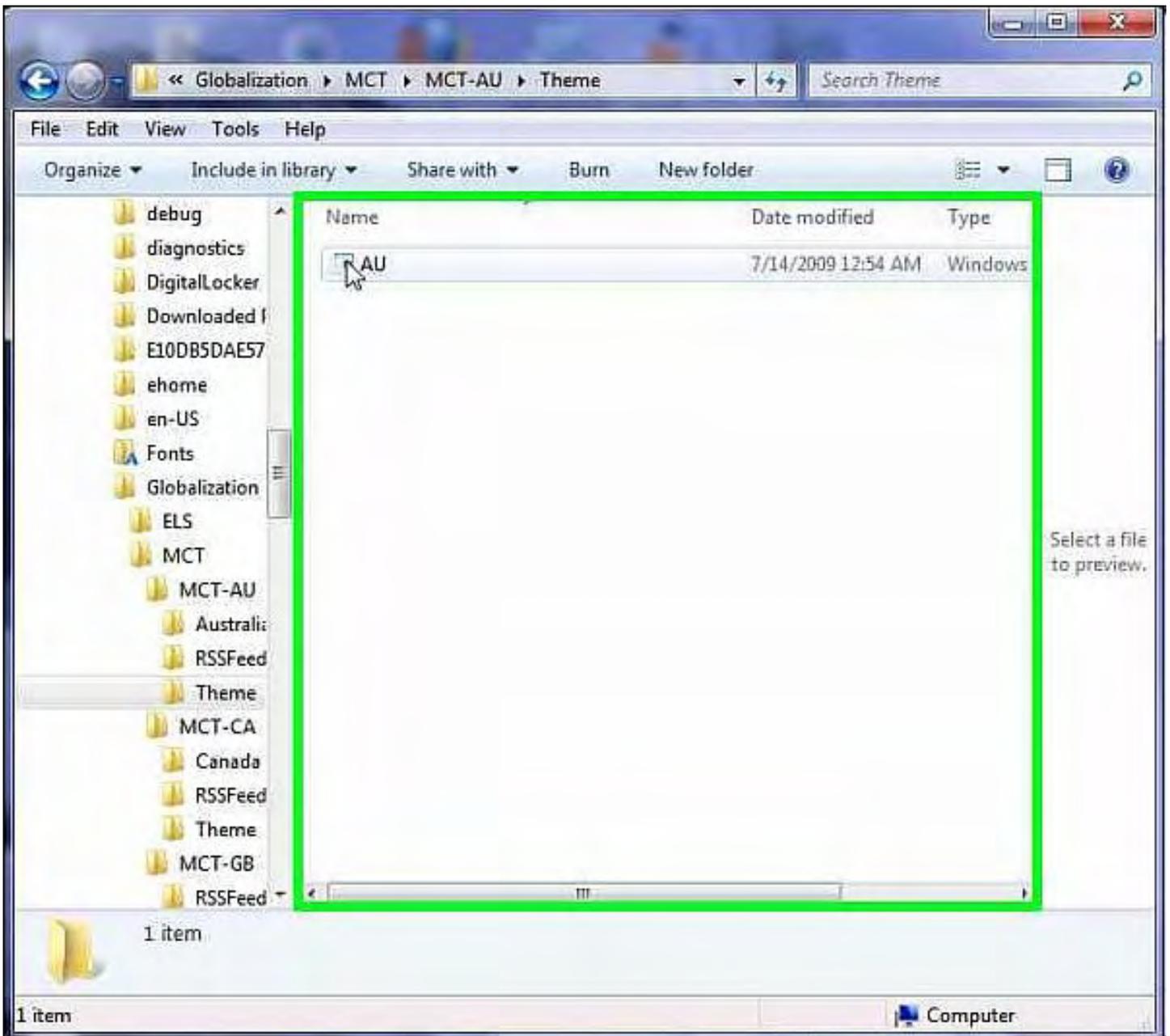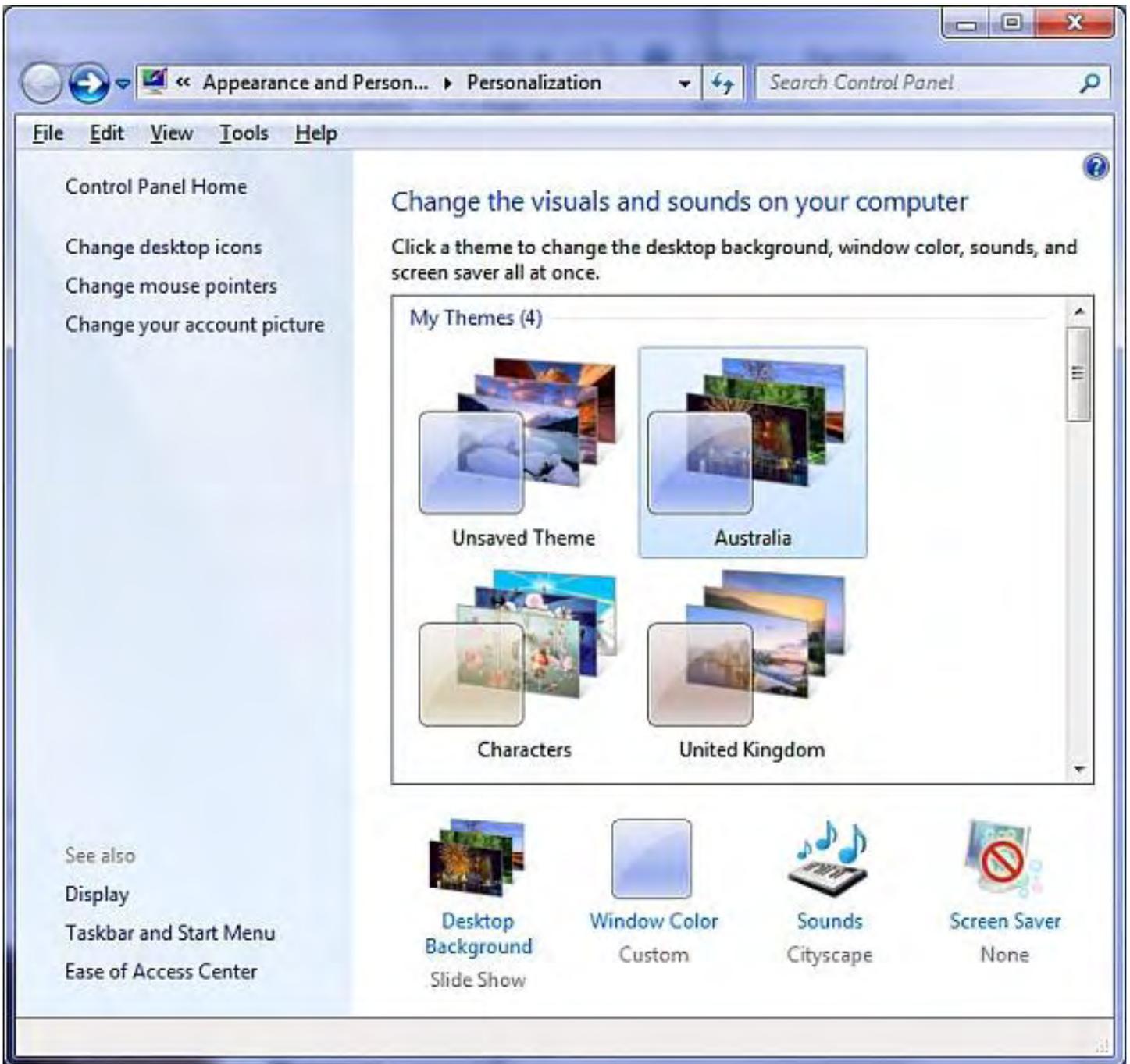
Figure 4. After activating the new theme, the Windows 7 Personalization window opens showing the new theme.

When you have completed the process for all the desired themes, reverse the first process for exposing the system folders and files to view. This will prevent you from inadvertently deleting important files.

If you want to create a slide show of all the included country images, all you need to do is put copies (select Control+C on images, then click in target folder and Control+V) of the image files in the "country name" folder of the theme that you plan to activate. (You will need to give administrator permission to copy to these folders.) You can also copy all of the images to a new folder and create a new theme by navigating to that folder in the desktop background Slide Show option at the bottom of the Personalization window shown above. Then save the new theme.

You can flip through your images by right-clicking on the desktop and selecting "Next desktop background."

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
"Twitter as a Business Tool" by Wally Wang

If you want to monitor customer feedback via Twitter on your iPhone, iPad or Macintosh, Twitterific makes it easy to view and respond right away. Also, anti-Apple critics and their convoluted thinking; another anti-Apple prediction goes wrong; if iPads are counted, Apple has almost 24 percent of the computer market; Apple beats Wall Street expectations; and a tip on using List View to display files and folders alphabetically.

To see how useful advertising in specific magazines or newspapers might be, businesses often print coupons with special codes on them. That way they can track which coupons customers are finding and using, which indirectly tells them which advertising medium seems most effective in bringing in customers.

Businesses can use Twitter in that same way. Issue a special coupon that people can use for a limited time, and then see how many people actually respond. Unlike print advertising, Twitter advertising is free, so even if you get only one customer, that's one more customer that you wouldn't have gotten if you hadn't tried Twitter at all.

By monitoring Twitter, companies can detect when people are saying negative comments about them, which offers a chance to respond immediately rather than let the one negative comment influence and drive away others who might want to use a business. For more ideas on how to use Twitter as a business tool, visit Mashable (*mashable.com/2010/04/20/twitter-for-business/*).

If you want to monitor Twitter on your iPhone, iPad or Macintosh, take a look at Twitterific (*iconfactory.com/software/twitterrific/*), which makes it easy for you to view the latest tweets and respond right away.

Figure 1. Twitterific lets you view the latest Twitter tweets.

Just as many people initially resisted cell phones, personal computers and e-mail, it may seem natural to resist using Twitter. However, if you take a little time, see how others are using Twitter, and think of ways to use Twitter for yourself that can enhance your life or make you more productive, you may be surprised at what you'll find out.

In the book *Empowered (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1422155633?
ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-
20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1422155633*),* the author, Josh Bernoff, gives two stories about Maytag and Best Buy.

A customer bought a Maytag washing machine and it broke down. After numerous calls for help and a repairman coming out three times to fix it, the washing machine still wouldn't work and Maytag didn't seem to care or respond to her constant complaints, even though the machine was still under warranty. Finally out of frustration, this customer started blogging about her problems with Maytag and posted her comments on Twitter for all of her followers to read. Her messages spread until Maytag finally fixed her machine, but not after suffering an irreparable public relations disaster.

In comparison, another customer bought an iPhone from Best Buy along with a replacement warranty. When the iPhone conked out, he tried to get an iPhone as a replacement, but Best Buy tried to replace it with a BlackBerry instead. After this angry customer took his problems to Twitter for everyone to read about, a Best Buy social media specialist quickly contacted him, called him at home, and instructed the local Best Buy to give the customer a replacement iPhone

instead of a BlackBerry. As a result of this swift and immediate response, the customer soon sent out tweets about how wonderful Best Buy's customer service was, which helped turn a potential nightmare into a public relations showcase for Best Buy.

With every new form of technology come advantages that you can exploit if you only look hard enough. Twitter may not be for everyone, but with a little imagination and an open mind, it could find a use for you, but only if you're willing to consider it first.

The Ongoing Convoluted Thinking of an Anti-Apple Critic

After boldly proclaiming that the iPad was ugly, too expensive, and not what people wanted back in January 2010 (*www.windows7news.com/2010/01/28/why-the-ipad-will-fail-and-help-windows-7-to-succeed/*), Mike Halsey, the author of *Troubleshooting Windows 7 Inside Out (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0735645205?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0735645205*),* wrote a more recent blog post on the Windows 7 News site (*www.windows7news.com/2010/10/11/ipad-fail-windows-7-succeed-part-2/*) that explained why the iPad is really succeeding.

Mike Halsey claims that the iPad is selling so well only because it's the only tablet on the market today. "If someone has wanted to buy a tablet," Mike says, "there's only been one place to go. How can the iPad fail under those conditions?"

Of course, Mike conveniently ignores all those Tablet PCs (*www.tabletpcreview.com/price/*) that Microsoft has been peddling since 2003, which means that the iPad is not the only tablet on the market today.

Figure 2. Contrary to Mike Halsey's claim, there are plenty of tablet devices competing with the iPad.

In addition, all those Windows Tablet PCs had a seven-year head start over the iPad, making the iPad's dominance in the tablet category even more remarkable in such a short period of time. For seven years if someone wanted to buy a tablet, their only choice was a Tablet PC, so how did the Tablet PC still fail under those conditions?

By ignoring these facts about Tablet PCs, Mike Halsey can avoid the possibility that the iPad is successful because its design is intuitive and versatile, which is impossible to admit if you don't want to praise anything made by Apple.

Mike Halsey at least admits that his earlier claim that the iPad would help sell Windows 7 tablets was wrong, but he holds out hope that rivals such as the ExoPC (*www.exopc.com/en/exopc-slate. php*) will manage to compete against the iPad by enhancing Windows 7 (*www.windows7news. com/2010/10/13/ipad-exopc/*).

Mike also believes that if everyone waits a few years, Windows 8 will arrive and help Microsoft corner the tablet category and push the iPad into a niche category. As Mike cheerfully states, "By then of course the iPad will have had almost a three year head start and will be in its second or third incarnation. I don't believe that iOS will change much, though, and this is where Apple could face serious problems down the line."

In other words, Mike believes Apple will simply stand still for the next three years until Windows 8 catches up and surpasses the iPad to dominate the tablet category. Mike, like so many anti-Apple critics, seems to follow the same familiar, self-delusional pattern when criticizing Apple products:

Step 1. Apple releases a new product that anti-Apple critics deride as useless and worthless, with not a single redeeming feature whatsoever, which is destined to fail.

Step 2. Apple's new product meets with initial success, causing anti-Apple critics to claim that copycat products will soon arrive that will be better than Apple's product.

Step 3. Copycat products arrive that aren't as good as Apple's product, but anti-Apple critics claim that if everyone just waits a few years, the next version of the copycat product will be almost as good as what Apple already offers right now.

Step 4. Go back and repeat steps 1 through 3 over and over again.

Consider how this pattern worked with the iPhone and Windows Phone 7:

Step 1. When Apple introduced the iPhone in 2007, anti-Apple critics claimed the iPhone would fail because it lacks cut-and-paste, multitasking, Flash support and a physical keyboard. Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's CEO, even laughed at the iPhone (*www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXq9NTjEdTo*) and criticized its lack of a physical keyboard as a major drawback.

Step 2. The iPhone sells extraordinarily well as Microsoft announces it's creating a new phone operating system from scratch that will be better than the iPhone.

Step 3. Windows Phone 7 arrives three years later and lacks cut-and-paste, multitasking, Flash support and a physical keyboard (on some Windows Phone 7 devices). Steve Ballmer is not heard criticizing Windows Phone 7 for models lacking a physical keyboard, but anti-Apple critics do claim that if you're willing to wait, the next version of Windows Phone 7 will offer cut-and-paste and multitasking, which are two features the iPhone already offers right now.

The point isn't whether Apple is better than Microsoft, but that so many people despise everything Apple does, yet praise anyone that copies Apple with nearly identical products (and problems). Why this double standard?

This communist-style, Orwellian logic, which selectively applies in favorable situations but never applies in unflattering situations, forms the basis for most criticism against Apple. Anti-Apple critics claim that Windows PCs are better than Macs because they're less expensive, yet Linux is far less expensive than Windows and can run on the exact same hardware. If price makes Windows superior to Mac OS X, then logically Linux is better than Windows and anti-Apple critics should be using Linux.

Anti-Apple critics claim that Apple controls its products too tightly so you're locked into built-in limitations. Yet Linux lets you examine and change its source code, so it's far more open and less restrictive than Windows. If openness is so important, then logically, Linux is better than Windows and anti-Apple critics should stop using Windows and switch to Linux.

In many IT departments, anti-Apple critics resist introducing Linux or Macintosh computers into a corporate network, citing security concerns. Yet the majority of security problems affect only Windows, so if security is the real issue, both Linux and Mac OS X are far more secure than Windows, and IT departments should be banning and removing Windows PCs from their networks.

Almost every claim that anti-Apple critics can make against Apple can also be used against Windows to prove that Linux is superior. So what is the real reason people defend Windows, hate Apple so much, and refuse to even learn the basic facts about Linux or Mac OS X before dismissing them as totally worthless?

Another Anti-Apple Prediction Goes Wrong

For another time-capsule moment about overlooking the obvious in favor of the obsolete, watch this 2008 video of Gary Krakow (*www.thestreet.com/video/10419419/iphone-needs-to-up-its-game.html#1577987846*) explain why the iPhone has no chance to succeed in the corporate market unless, as Gary Krakow puts it, "Steve Jobs has to bite the bullet. He either needs to get BlackBerry on there or Windows Mobile on there. It's the entire answer."

Who is Gary Krakow (*www.thestreet.com/author/1122001/GaryKrakow/all.html*)? Only TheStreet.com's senior technology correspondent. When discussing BlackBerry and Windows Mobile, Gary claims that "...both have their pluses and minuses—not many minuses to either one." Fast forward to 2010 and BlackBerry's market share is sinking and Windows Mobile is nearly gone while corporate America has embraced the iPhone (*www.geek.com/articles/mobile/survey-corporate-america-likes-iphone-4-and-ios-4-20100628/*).

Why do so many critics of Apple products get their predictions so astoundingly wrong? It's because they compare each Apple product to an existing product, see how the existing product offers obsolete features that the Apple product lacks, and then conclude that the Apple product will fail as a result, without considering how the Apple product might be more useful. This is like comparing a word processor to a typewriter and seeing that the word processor doesn't create text using replaceable inked ribbons like a typewriter, so therefore the word processor must be inferior and doomed to failure.

So-called technology specialists need only examine each Apple product objectively on its own merits to avoid making bold predictions that fail dramatically afterward. However, that would mean evaluating facts and using their imagination, which is a lot harder than criticizing something without bothering to think.

The Macintosh Hits 10 Percent Market Share

Whenever sales go up, companies like to pat themselves on the back and claim that the reason is because of their wise decisions and strategic planning. Yet when sales go down, companies inevitably blame the economy or outside circumstances beyond their control, but never take responsibility for their problems.

As PC sales fail to maintain their previous steady growth, PC manufacturers are also using the recession as an excuse. Yet during this same recession, Apple's sales continued growing to the point where the Macintosh has garnered 10.6 percent of the market (*news.cnet.com/8301-*

31021_3-20019514-260.html?tag=topStories3). If you include sales of the iPad as part of Apple's computer market share, Deutsche Bank estimates Apple has now captured nearly 24 percent of the market (*www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2371000,00.asp*).
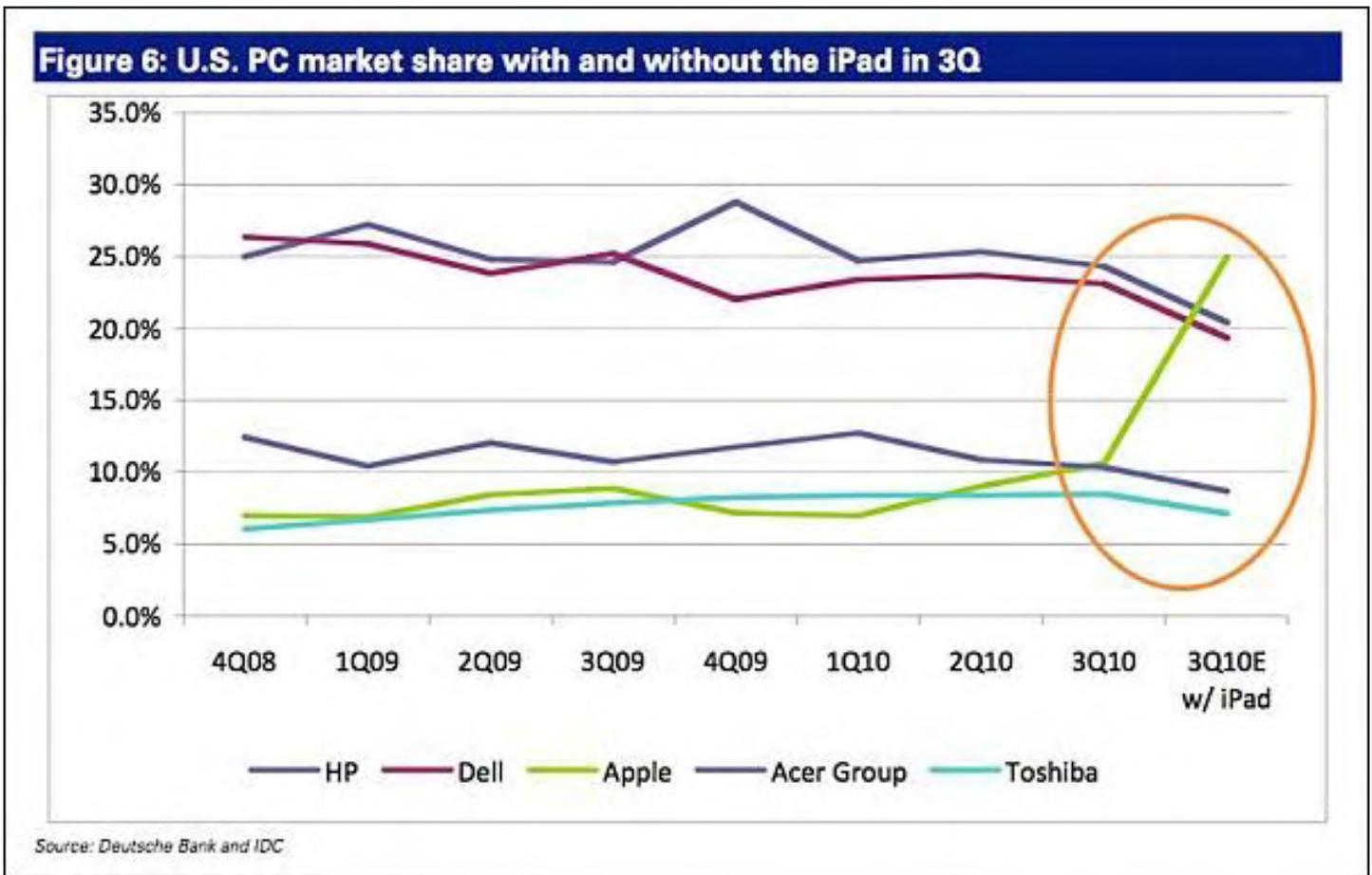

Figure 3. If iPads are counted, Apple has almost 24 percent of the computer market.

So why are sales of Macintosh computers growing during a recession while sales of PCs remain flat? No one can pinpoint the exact reason, but the common myth that anti-Apple critics love to promote is that people who buy a Macintosh are doing so only because they see other people buying a Macintosh, so they have to follow like sheep without thinking.

Of course if you examine this rationale carefully, you'll realize that if the Macintosh has roughly 10 percent of the market, then Windows has close to 90 percent of the market. Logically if people are following the crowd, they'd be buying more Windows PCs instead, especially since Windows PCs are much cheaper. The fact that a growing number of people are buying Macintosh computers suggests that they're not following the crowd, but breaking away from the crowd, which takes much greater effort and initiative.

So what's the real reason why more people are buying a Macintosh? Maybe it has more to do with the greater satisfaction people have for their Macintosh than they ever had for their Windows PCs. With Apple gaining an 80 percent customer satisfaction rating and the nearest PC maker (Gateway) earning only a 66 percent customer satisfaction rating (*news.cnet.com/8301-13579_3-10222213-37.html*), it seems more reasonable to believe that Windows PCs are simply frustrating and disappointing far too many users in comparison.

A certain percentage of Windows PC users will simply get so fed up that they'll be willing to consider a Macintosh, while a much smaller percentage of Macintosh users will want to switch to a Windows PC. The end result is what we're seeing today: a steady erosion of the Windows PC market share and a steadily growing Macintosh user base.

Apple Beats Wall Street Expectations (Again)

Every quarter, Wall Street estimates how much Apple probably earned, and every quarter, Apple exceeds those expectations. This time, Apple earned $20 billion in revenue (*www.marketwatch. com/story/apple-earnings-soar-on-iphone-ipad-sales-2010-10-18?dist=afterbell*) while selling 14.1 million iPhones and 4.2 million iPads. Sales of Macs also increased by 28 percent over last year to 3.89 million Macs sold.
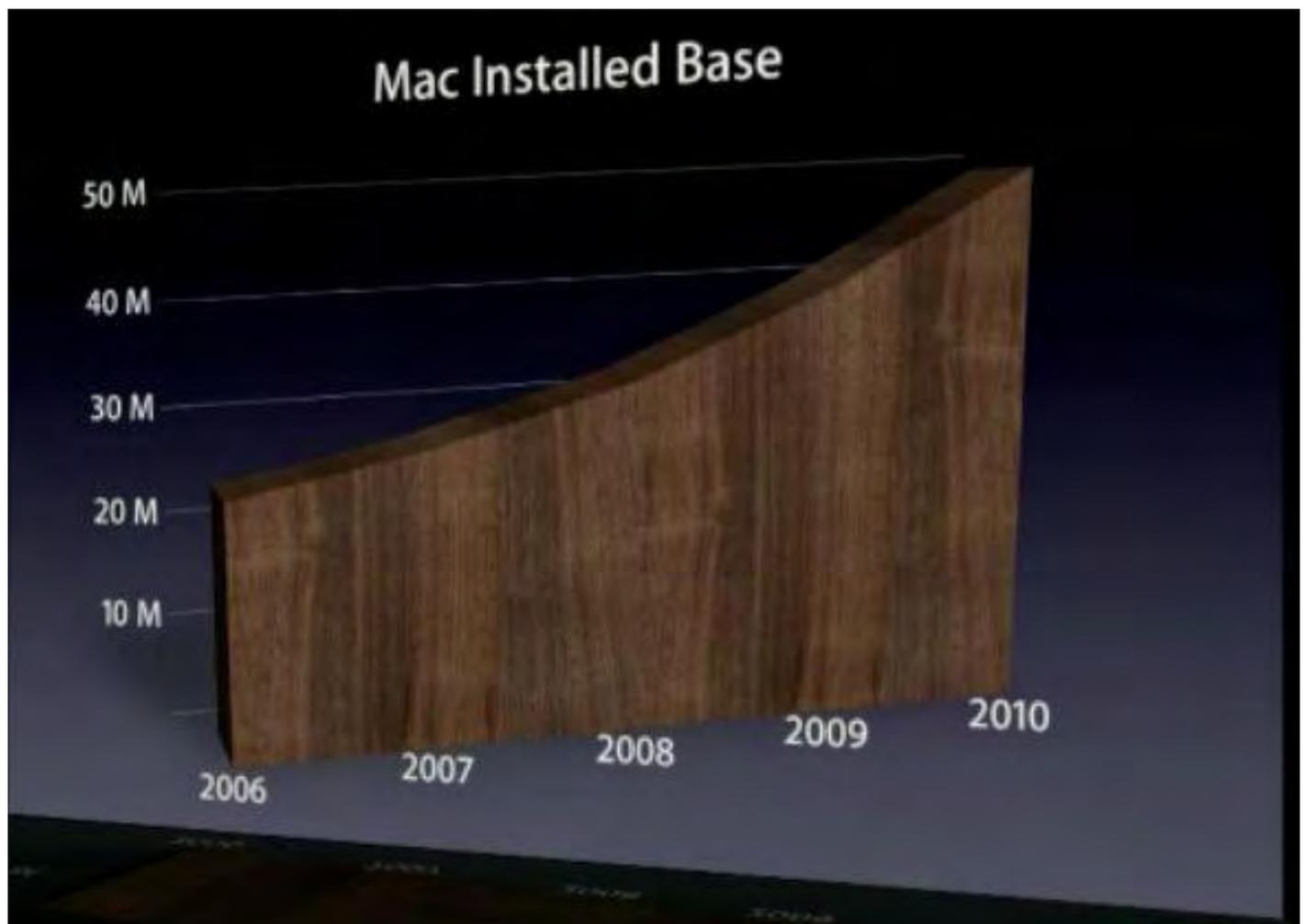
Figure 4. The user base of the Macintosh keeps steadily growing.

Yet, all of this occurred in the middle of a recession. This might appear to defy logic, but only if your logic refuses to deal with the reality that Apple makes products that more and more people seem to like and want to use. Naturally, Apple products aren't right for everyone, but if you honestly and objectively analyze Apple's products next to rival products, you'll find that they compare favorably in many cases and often set the standards (iPod, iPad, iPhone, iTunes, iMac, MacBook Air, Mac mini, iPhoto, Mac OS X. etc.) that others are trying to emulate.

Figure 5. Sales of the Macintosh are rising faster than sales of PCs.

To continue its assault on the computer industry, Apple recently introduced a new version of iLife 11. The latest iPhoto 11 makes it easier to create printed cards and books from your pictures, while the latest iMovie makes it simple to create trailer-like movies to show off your latest videos. Within iMovie 11 you can also do audio editing to adjust the volume in case a video clip might look perfect but the audio is too loud or too soft.
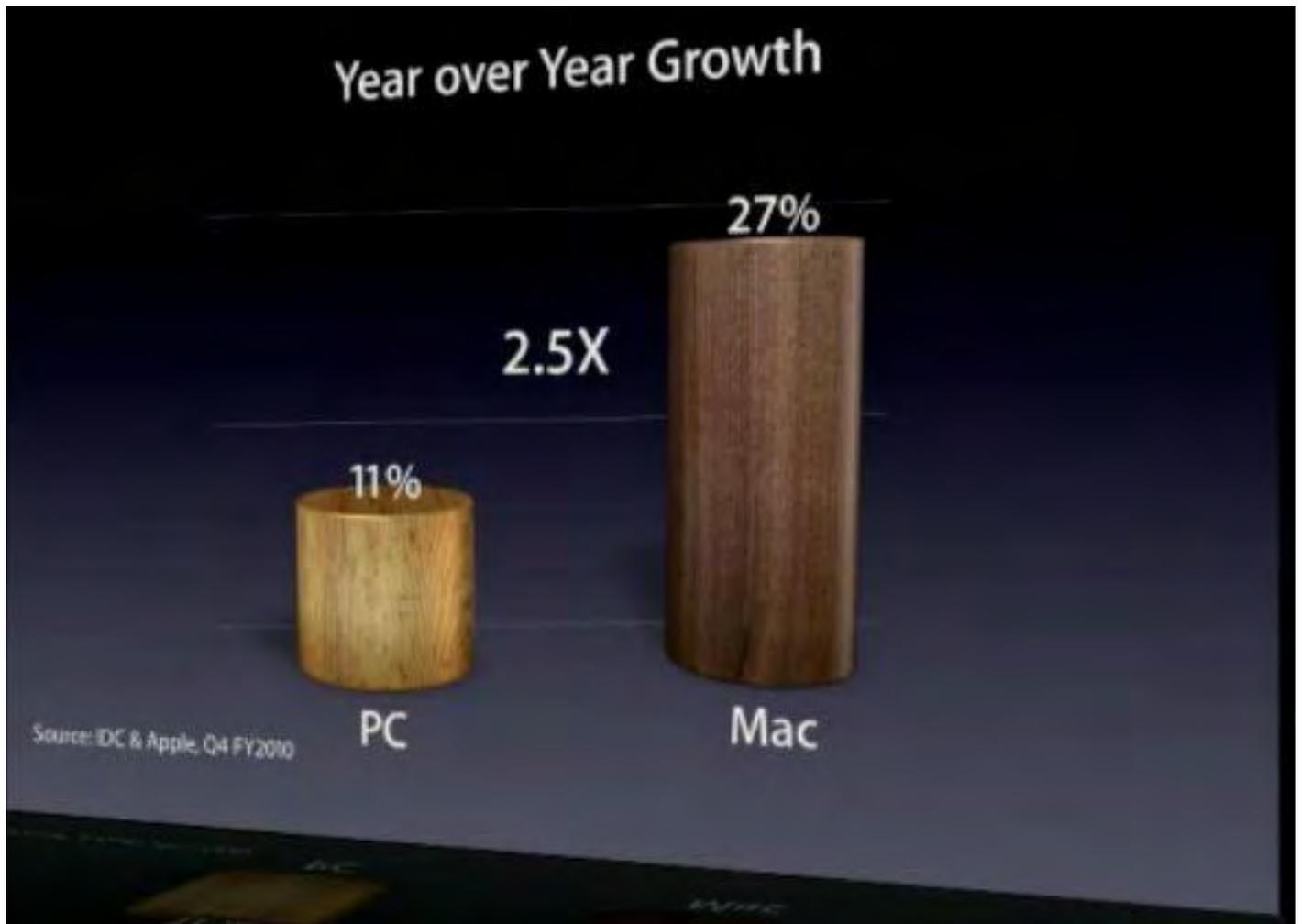
The new GarageBand 11 also lets you do simple audio editing to fix recorded audio. For anyone interested in learning to play an instrument, GarageBand provides interactive lessons that let you play along. As you play, the program highlights mistakes in real-time so you can see exactly where you messed up and can review those sections where you need to practice harder.

Apple also previewed Mac OS X 10.7 Lion, which will offer FaceTime (a beta of FaceTime can be downloaded now) so you can do video conferencing with iPhone and iPod Touch users. Within 90 days, Apple will also release the new Mac App Store where you can purchase, download and install software for your Macintosh. If you want, you can still download software the traditional way, but the new Mac App Store makes it easy to find, download, and install software without having to figure out how to unzip or install a program.

Finally, Apple introduced a new version of the MacBook Air that uses solid-state storage for instant-on capabilities, greater reliability and longer battery life. With both a 13.3-inch and 11.6-inch version of the MacBook Air available, prices start at $999 for the entry-level model all the

way up to $1,599 for the larger model with more storage. The MacBook Air is more of a super-netbook with limited storage space, so if you need to install and use huge programs like Microsoft Office, you may want to consider a MacBook Pro with a larger hard disk.

With software like iLife and hardware like the MacBook Air, Apple has set another new standard for the Windows world of PCs to meet. Can Windows PCs compete? We'll find out.

<div style="text-align:center">*   *   *</div>

In the Windows world, it's possible to display a window with folders arranged on top and files stacked underneath. To mimic this on Mac OS X, first you need to switch to the list view by choosing View/As List.
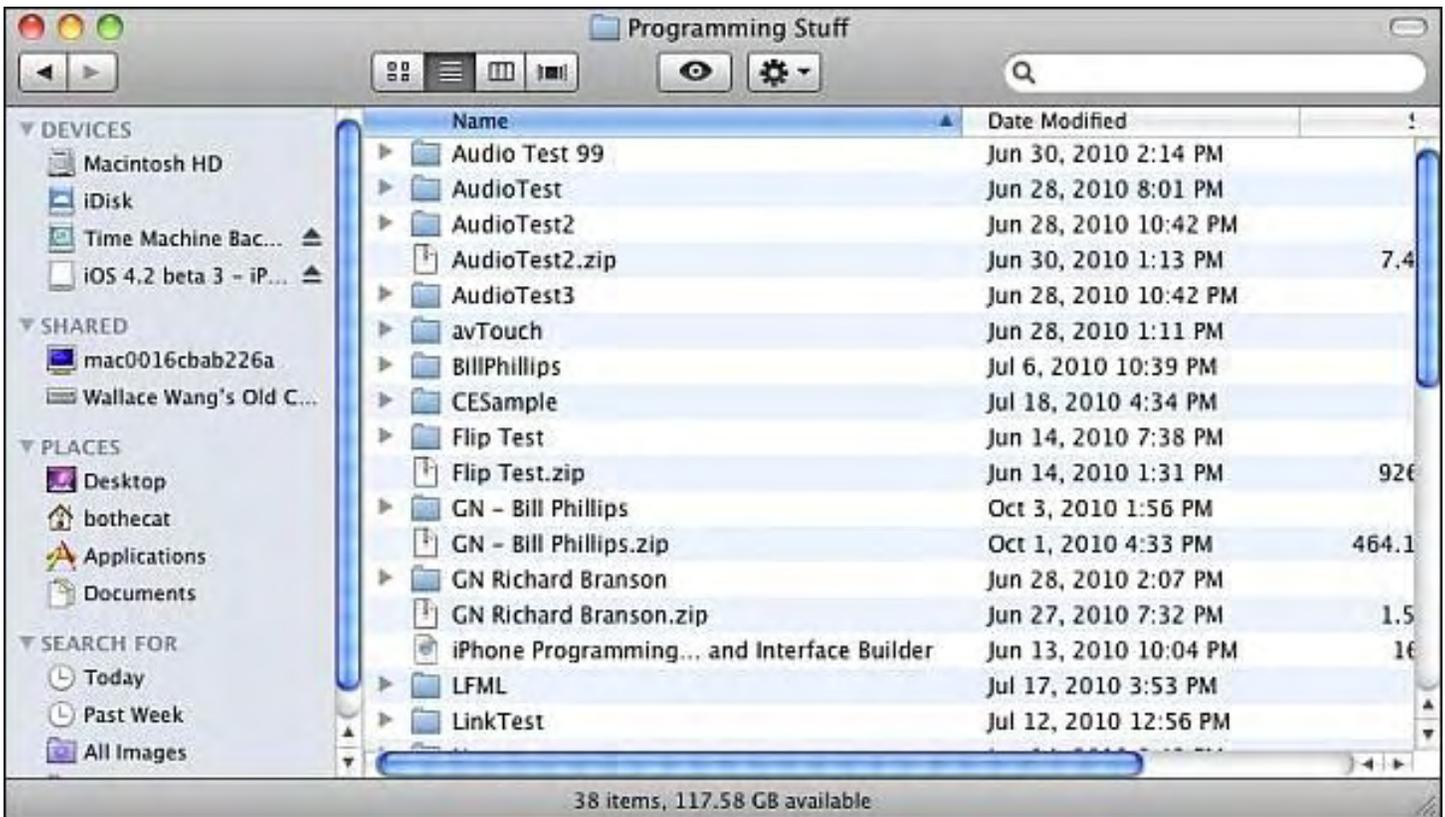

Figure 6. List view displays files and folders alphabetically.

Next, choose View/Arrange By/Kind. This stacks all your folders on top and all your individual files underneath.
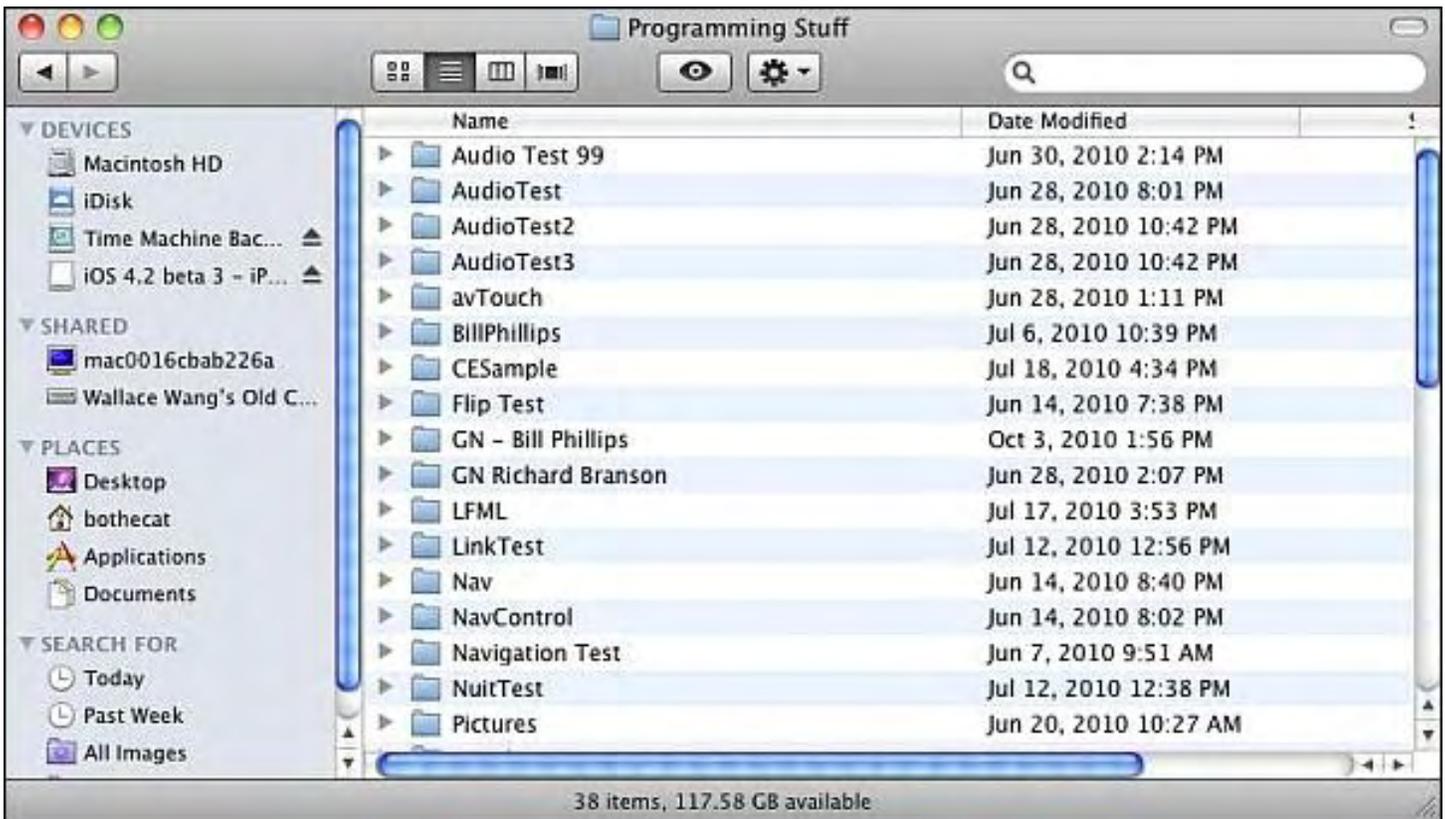
Figure 7. Arranging by Kind puts folders first and then files.

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 Spreadsheets" by Rob Spahitz

This week we continue our investigation of the Calc tool from OpenOffice, a free competitor to Microsoft's Office suite. Calc is the competition for Excel.

This week we continue our investigation of the Calc tool from OpenOffice, a free competitor to Microsoft's Office suite. Calc is the competition for Excel. As a reminder, you can download the free OpenOffice applications from *www.OpenOffice.org*.

Feedback

First, an item of my own. As I was working with Writer, the OpenOffice word processor, I tried to copy an image from a Web site. Unfortunately, the Web site was designed so that the image was really broken down into three adjacent images made to look like a single image.

I pasted the first image into Writer and it appeared centered at the top of the page. In MS Word, it usually appears to the left, but that was fine.

Where it became a problem was when I copied the second image and pasted it. In Word it would appear beneath the other image (since it was more than half the width of the page; otherwise it would appear next to it). In Writer, it appeared on top of the other image. Again, not specifically a problem, but it wasn't what I expected. No problem, I thought. I'll just move it down. I went to move it and found out that the first image was gone. Hmmm...that's not right.

It turned out that when I pasted an image, it auto-selected the image. When I pasted the next image, it replaced the selection (as is typical) and replaced it with the new one. This is merely a matter of getting used to the differences between what you expect (from years of MS Word) and a new product.

OK, so I undo and see the first image I pasted. Click away to deselect the item, and paste the new image, which appears on top of the other image. So I drag the image down so that it lines up under the other one, but I have to manually do this and it takes some effort to line it up precisely. Since I had some trouble getting it perfectly matched up, I tried using the up and down arrow keys to move up in little increments. However, that's not how Writer works. Instead of tiny pixel shifts, Writer moves the image what appears to be the size of a paragraph.

After playing with the settings a bit (by double-clicking on the image), I found that I could Anchor the image in different ways. By changing it to "As character" I was able to get it to work more like MS Word and left-align and automatically line up underneath.

Next, with the image in the document, I wanted to make several copies of it on the page. In MS Word, I simply drag the mouse along the page and select the images the way I would select

characters in a collection of paragraphs. Once selected, I could copy the group and paste where I wanted in the document.

Apparently that's not how Writer works. I tried to copy the collection of images with the mouse, but was unable to select more than one. So I tried using other techniques from other applications, such as Shift+MouseClick and Ctrl+MouseClick, but that didn't work either. I have yet to find out how to select multiple images so that I can paste a group. If you know the answer, please drop me a line.

Third, I got some feedback from Don P:

Rob, love most of your columns as they get into the nitty gritty of the products. Regarding your column on Calc's quirks:

1) I agree that as with any program there are some quirks in Calc and other [OpenOffice.org programs]; however, I see fewer [quirks] than I see in the MS products.

2) Once you get to what I call the "power user" mode the OO.o functions, while different from the MS products, once a power user gets used to the OO.o functions they are better than the MS products. Examples:
You showed the example where you only need to enter "1" and drag the box to create a sequence.

Calc and its Delete Key Function. Once set to a specific criteria"'Delete All," it stays at that criteria until you change it. Therefore, if you only want to eliminate the "format" you simply check it and it stays.

Your charting example is a perfect case of this power-user interface, as you state in the article This is much nicer than Excel 2003 and very similar to Excel 2007; they are finally catching up.

Once you get used to using OO.o, you will find [the programs] much better thought-out than MS.

Format Page where everything having to do with the Page Formatting is contained in one spot is an excellent example.

Thanks Don. As I mentioned several articles back, I am reporting my views of these free products from the perspective of a long-time MS Office user. That means that I know how to do things in Word and Excel and am guessing how they may work in Writer and Calc. Sometimes I guess wrong, but this seems to me like the issues that other MS Office users may experience, so I share them so we can all learn from it.

Just a side note: On today's project I entered a date and tried to copy it down a few times. As I copied it down, it auto-incremented the date, which is not what I wanted. So I copied and pasted the date and it gave me a warning that the cell already had data. That's nice when you unexpectedly changed a cell, but I knew for sure that I wanted to change it, so the warning box was unexpected and interrupted my flow of work. Now, with the first two items in place, I selected both and tried to copy down. In Excel, it takes multiple cells and increments based on the difference between the cells, which was zero here, so I expected it to copy the same date over and over. Apparently that feature was not copied here and it continued to increment my date.

However, copy/paste works, so I had to use that. Just another issue of getting used to differences.

At this point, I like some of the features of OO.o better than MS Office and vice-versa. And given the cost of the two (about $250 for MS Office and $0 for OO.o), it certainly seems worth accepting these differences.

Grocery Tracking

Back to business. This week, let's look at a task I recently went through with one of my students. She was tracking all of her purchases at various grocery stores to see how the prices stacked up and how much she was spending. I obviously don't have time to totally replicate her efforts of every shopping trip since January, but let's at least explore the concept for a single month with some simulated data.

First, she visited grocery stores with names similar to these: Van's, Waldorfmart, Amberson's and Rolf's. She also tracked the date and categories, which included: Food, Non-Food, Pets, Medicine (RX), Taxes and a few others.

She was looking for a way to summarize data. For example, she wanted to know how much she spent at Van's for the month and also how much she spent on her pets.

In Excel, there are several ways to solve this. You could use filtering and then sum the filtered data; you could use a conditional IF function (SUMIF); or you could use pivot tables, which is a nice tool for summarizing large blocks of organized data. I chose to use pivot tables so that she could get better at using them. This worked very effectively, but was not so nice when crossing between sheets, since she had one sheet per month. I suggest that it was better to have everything on one tab then use pivot tables to pull just the months she wanted. However, since this was the tenth month and she had a lot of data, we left it alone for this year.

The sample data I used for this article is shown in Figure 1.

G14			fx Σ =					
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Store	Item	Category	Date	Price		Stores	
2	V	Chicken	F	10/01/10	12.45		Van's	V
3	V	Carrots	F	10/01/10	2.99		Waldorfmart	WM
4	V	Cat food	P	10/01/10	1.25		Amberson's	A
5	V	Spatula	NF	10/01/10	3.75		Rolf's	R
6	V	Tax	X	10/01/10	0.34			
7	WM	Chips	F	10/04/10	2.99		Categories	
8	WM	Pens	NF	10/04/10	3.49		Food	F
9	WM	Tax	X	10/04/10	0.60		Non-Food	NF
10	A	Cups	NF	10/12/10	3.69		Pets	P
11	A	Lettuce	F	10/12/10	1.49		Medicine	RX
12	A	Tax	X	10/12/10	0.32		Taxes	X
13								
14								

Figure 1. Sample data.

At this point, I'm not sure if pivot tables are proprietary to Excel. However, as far as I can tell, they are simply fancy summary blocks that could be created using a variety of built-in Excel functions. Let's see what I find.

In Calc, I searched for pivot tables and found, under the Data menu, something called Data Pilot. With some simple exploration, it appears very similar. For it to work, it looked like I had to preselect my data (whereas Excel will auto-search for a data block based on where the cursor is located). So I selected cells A1 through E12 and started the tool. The first thing that appears involves whether you want to use the selected data, as seen in Figure 2.
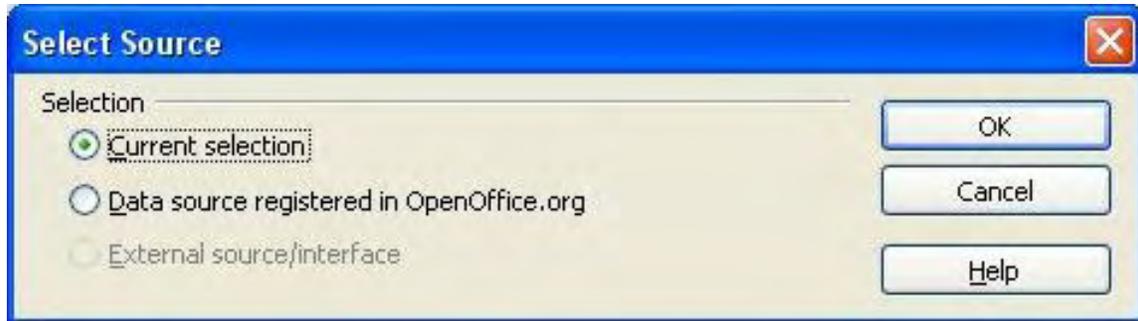

Figure 2. Data Pilot tool.

After clicking the OK button, you can start setting up the pieces, as seen in Figure 3.
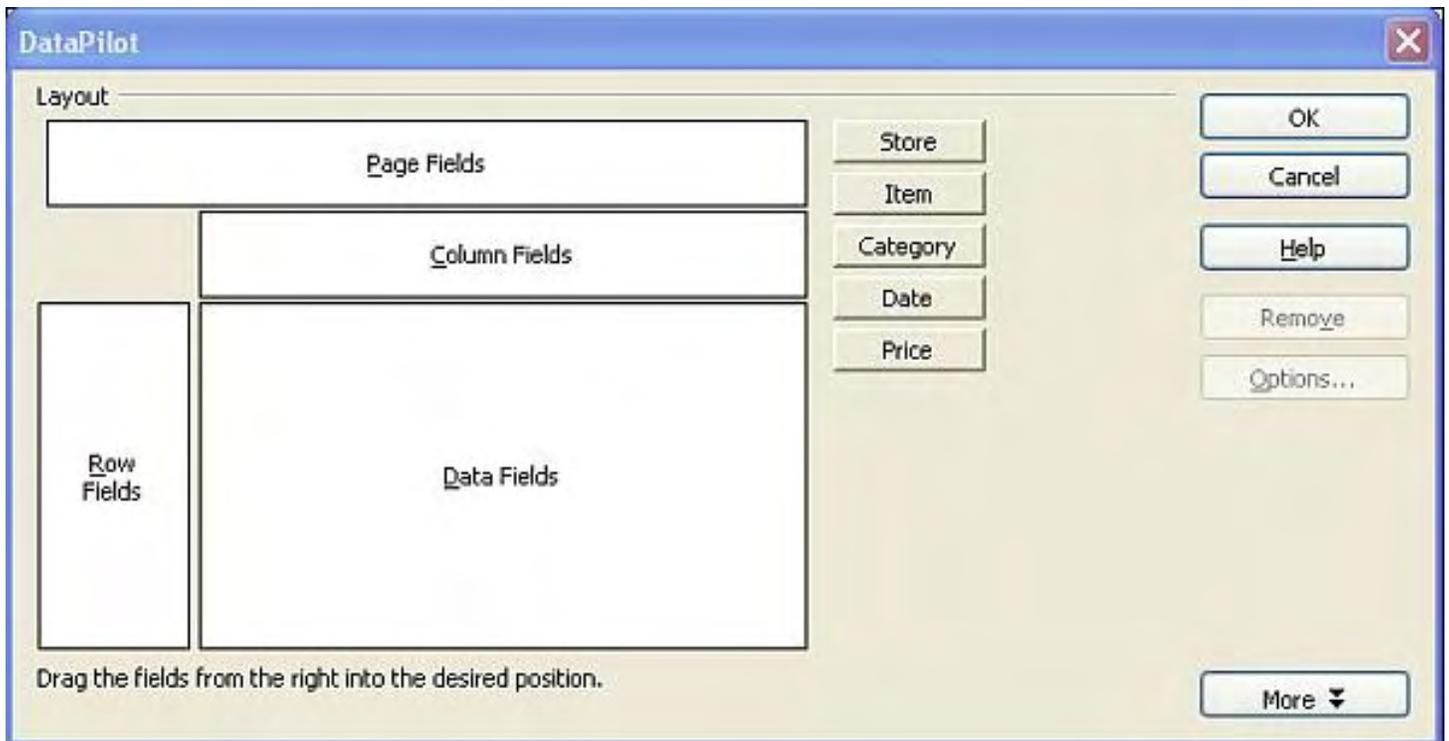

Figure 3. Data Pilot selection screen.

I see that it is very similar to a pivot table. The left half is how you organize the parts, and the middle section contains the columns you'll use as the parts (identified by their column headings).

By following the directions, I can set up the parts. In this case, I dragged the Store item to the "Row Fields" section, the Category to the Column Fields, and the Price into the Data Fields. The result is in Figure 4. Also, to adjust other parts, you can click on the More button, which I've also shown in Figure 4.
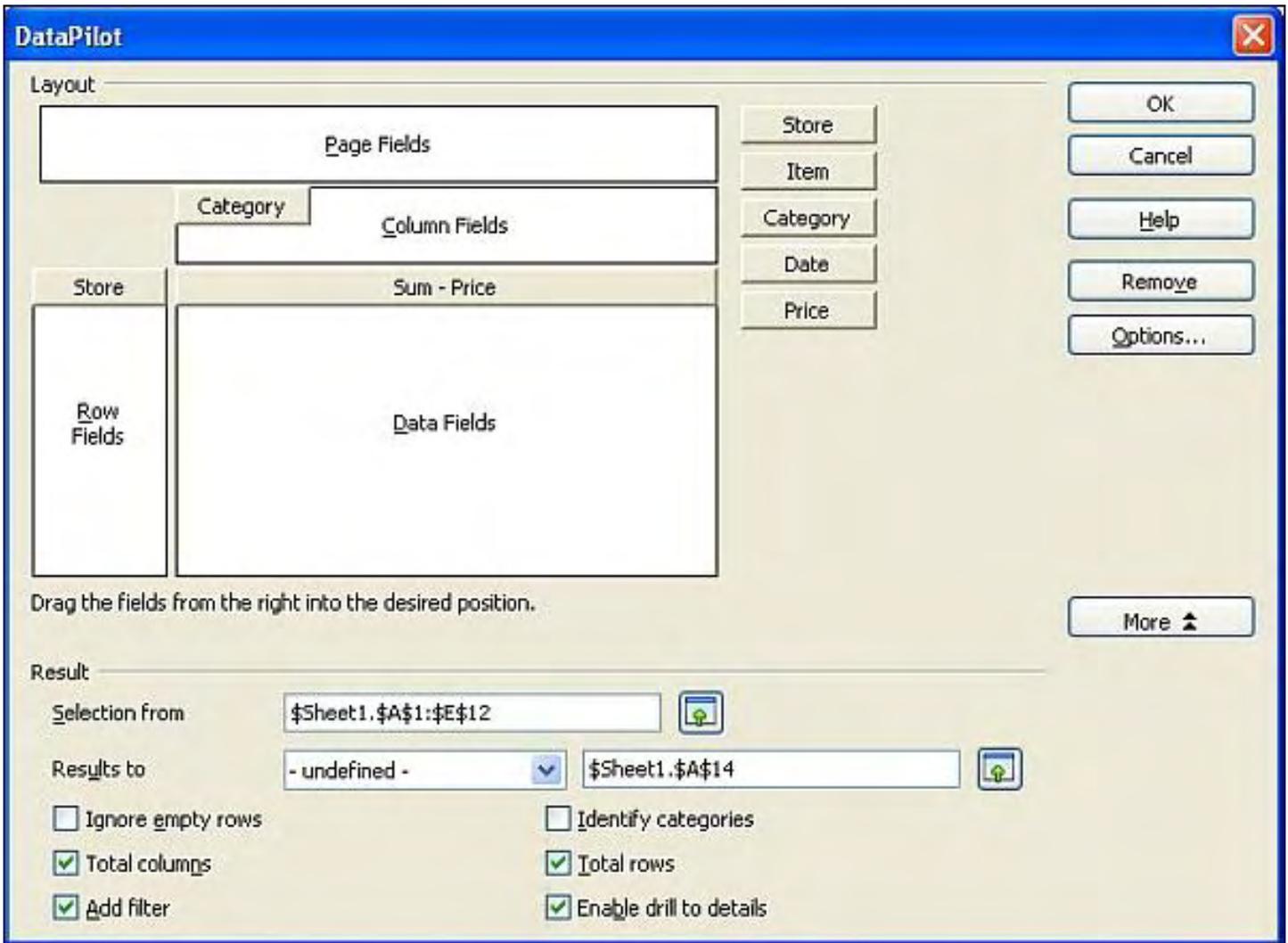
Figure 4. Data Pilot ready for use.

When you click on the OK button, it adds a group just below your data block, as seen in Figure 5.

	A						
11	A	Lettuce	T	10/12/10	1.49		Mean
12	A	Tax	X	10/12/10	0.32		Taxes
13							
14	Filter						
15							
16	Sum - Price	Category					
17	Store	F	NF	P	X	Total Result	
18	A	1.49	3.69		0.32	5.50	
19	V	15.44	3.75	1.25	0.34	20.78	
20	WM	2.99	3.49		0.60	7.08	
21	Total Result	19.92	10.93	1.25	1.26	33.36	

Figure 5. Data Pilot on sheet.

If you click on the Filter button, you can hide parts of the data block that you do not want to include in the Data Pilot block, similar to what Excel offers through dropdown lists in the pivot tables. Also, in Excel you can click on the top left corner cell (A16) and adjust the way it summarizes the data (count, max, min, etc.). I don't see an option for that here, although it may be related to the More section in the previous screen, which you can get back to by right-clicking in the block and selecting the Start option. Since I don't often use those other features in Excel, it doesn't bother me here that Calc does not offer it the same way (if at all).

One more nice thing here is that you can summarize the block another way. By dragging the Category box under the Store box, it regroups as seen in Figure 6.

13			
14	Filter		
15			
16	Category	Store	
17	F	A	1.49
18		V	15.44
19		WM	2.99
20	NF	A	3.69
21		V	3.75
22		WM	3.49
23	P	V	1.25
24	X	A	0.32
25		V	0.34
26		WM	0.60
27	Total Result		33.36
28			

Figure 6. Data Pilot regrouped.

So, continuing to explore the features of Calc, I see that it offers many features similar to what Excel offers. Sometimes the way it handles things are a bit different, but if you want to save money and maintain a lot of compatibility with Excel, this continues to look like a viable alternative.

Next week, we'll wrap up our Calc exploration before moving on to some of the other items offered in the OpenOffice suite.

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

Olympus Wants to Share—A new online photo service that aims to make photography easy and fun; LED 101—How is LED different from LCD?; Windows 7 Annoyances—This book is being called "an absolute necessity" if you own Windows 7; Turn Your Table Into a Speaker—Tunebug's Vibe uses just about any surface to deliver audio from a mobile gadget.

Olympus Wants to Share

Olympus Memory Works America has launched "ib on the net, (*ibonthenet.com*)" a new online photo service that aims to make photography more fun and easier by fully integrating and streamlining the process of shooting, storing, organizing, sharing and printing photos. More from Olympus:

Initially "ib on the net" offers users two gigabytes of free space to share photos at full resolution with family and friends; and to shop for digital photo albums, photo prints and other photo gifts. The service also provides online photo backup to ensure that photos will be safe from mishap or disaster. Olympus will continue to enhance the service to more tightly integrate unique end user benefits with its camera line.

"Ib on the net" simplifies the entire photo experience, offering:

• Group photo sharing to send and receive photos easily

• Photo Books and Photo Prints custom printed with your photos

• Photo backup service to protect your memories

• Merchandise for purchase: photo book, photo print, calendar, greeting card and other related items

"We're excited to offer our customers a complete photo solution to make it easier than ever for them to manage and get the most out of their photos," said Michael Timar, director of business development for Olympus Memory Works America Inc. "Imagine going to a bridal shower, wedding or baby shower. After the event, you can create a share space where everyone can add their photos, and enjoy the complete collection of photos. Then, with a few clicks, each can create a beautiful photo book using their favorite pictures, not just the ones from their own camera."

LED 101

Today, there are more options than ever before when it comes to purchasing a flat-panel HDTV. The newest, hottest technology in HDTV is the super thin and lightweight LED TV. But how is LED different from LCD? Should you expect to pay more for an LED TV? What are the benefits of LED vs LCD? Westinghouse Digital sent us this illuminating primer on ... er, illuminating flat panel displays:

How are LED TVs different from LCD TVs?

Simply stated, an LED TV is an LCD TV that is lit with an LED (light emitting diode) light source instead of CCFLs (cold cathode fluorescent lamp). Manufacturers such as Samsung began the trend of marketing the LED-lit LCD TV as an "LED TV" likely in an attempt to easily differentiate the product from typical CCFL lit LCD products.
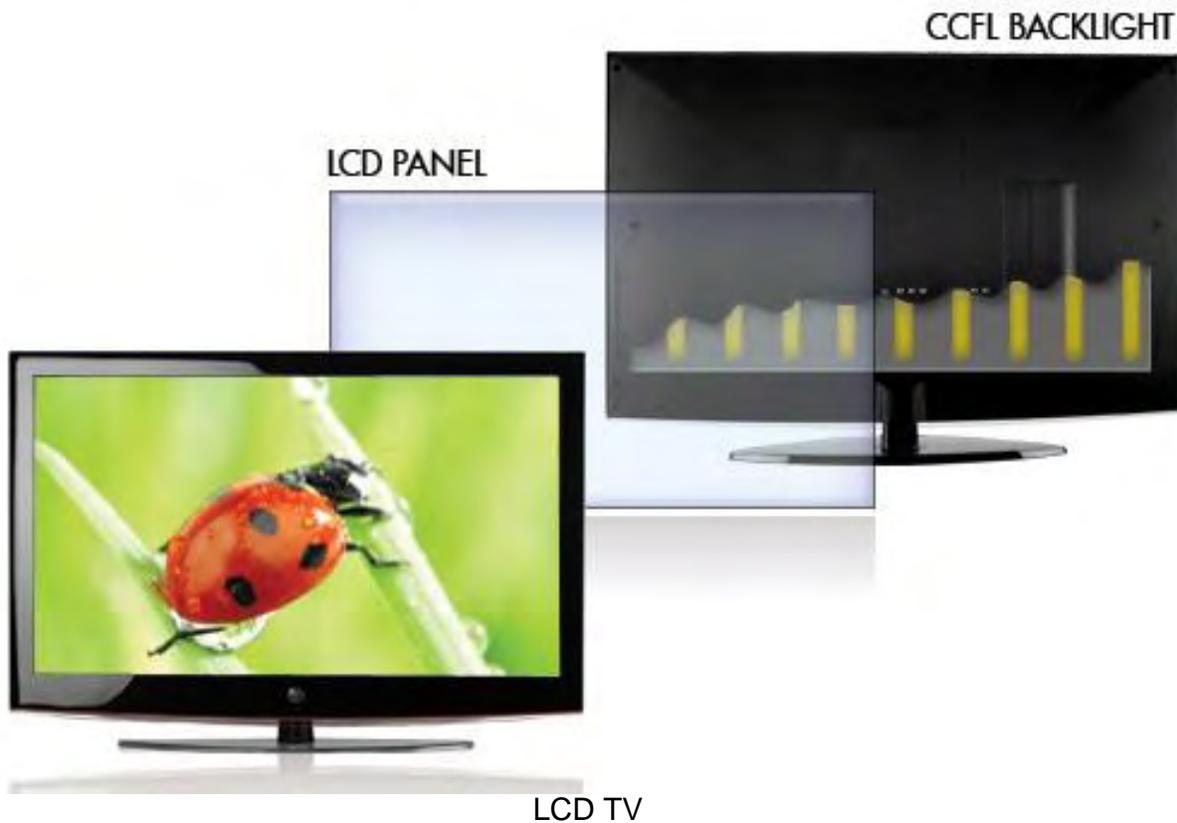
LCD TV

An LCD TV is comprised of several layers. The front layer is a piece of glass filled with liquid crystals that move and change to produce the images we see on the screen. But images can be viewed only when the screen is illuminated. This requires a light source. The light source is the difference between LED TV and conventional LCD TV.
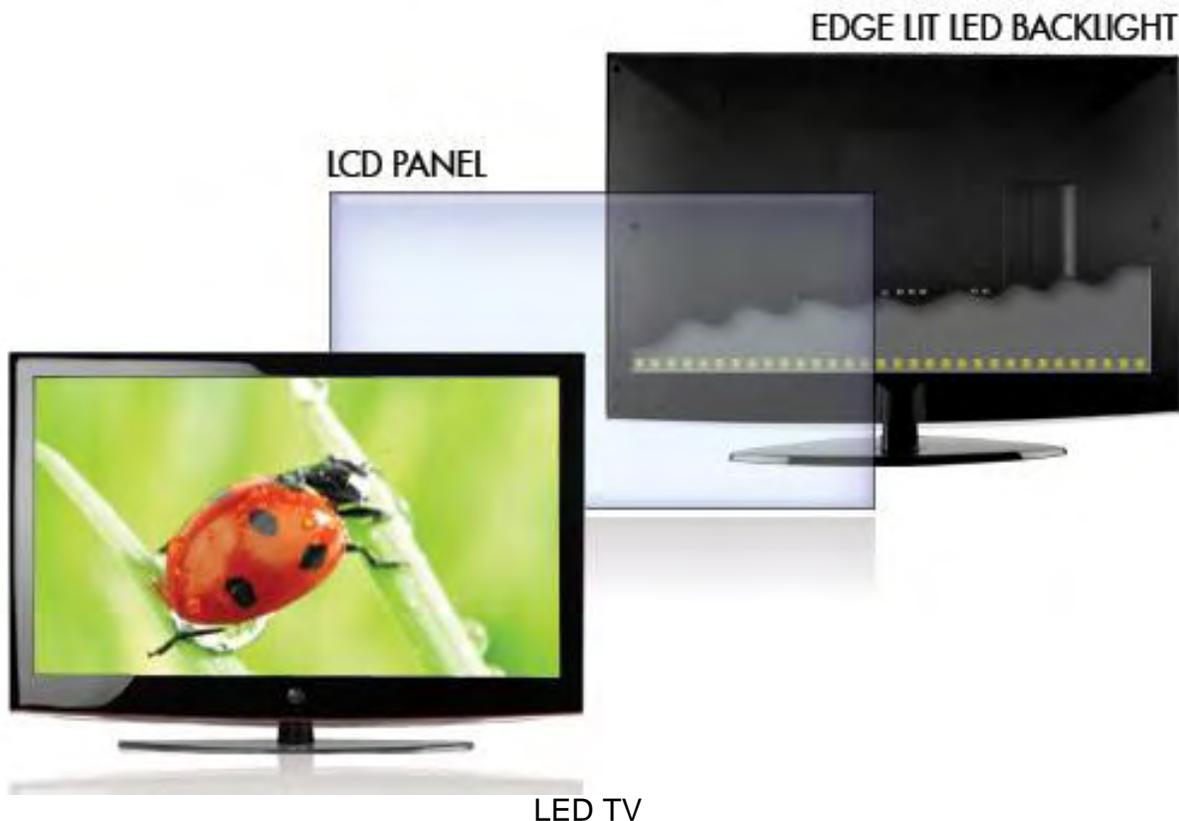
LED TV

Here's a simple explanation of how it works: Conventional LCD TVs use fluorescent tubes (CCFL) to provide light to illuminate the LCD panel and make the images viewable. In an LED TV, the LCD panel is lit with an LED backlight. LED lights can be more precisely controlled and can produce richer blacks and a better contrast ratio for a more vivid viewing experience.

Should you expect to pay more for LED TV? What are the benefits of LED vs. LCD?

LED TVs in general use less energy (and are therefore more efficient and economical to operate) than LCD TVs. LED TVs are thinner and weigh less than LCD TVs and generally create a brighter picture with better contrast ratios. And, LED TVs contain no mercury or lead.

Edge-lit LED TVs (like Westinghouse's) are generally more energy efficient, weigh less and cost less than so-called full array LED TVs, which spread LEDs behind the entire screen.

More info at Westinghouse Digital (*westinghousedigital.com/support/led-101/*).

Windows 7 Annoyances
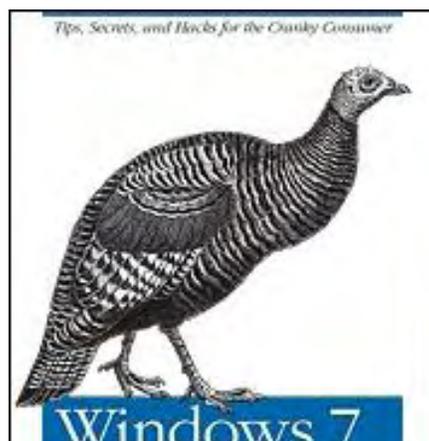
*Windows 7 Annoyances, Tools and Techniques to Improve Your Windows 7 Experience (*www.annoyances.org/exec/show/book_7*)* (by David A. Karp, O'Reilly Media, $39.99 print, $31.99 eBook, ISBN: 978-0-596-15762-3,) is, to my mind, an absolute necessity if you own Windows 7. If you're having trouble with the OS you, of course, need it, but you also want this book if you love Win 7 (as I do), just so you can learn all the cool things you didn't know it could do.
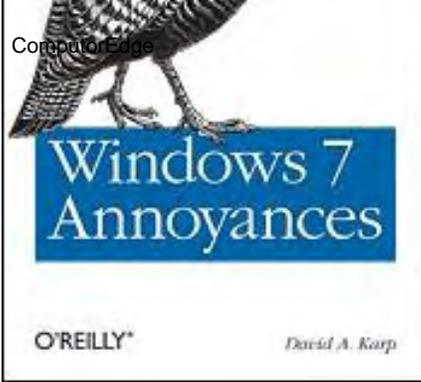
Windows 7 is a much more stable and considerably faster OS than Vista and, compared to XP, it's just a lot more fun and feature rich, but it's not perfect (what OS is?).

I've always liked David A. Karp's "Annoyance" series because each book follows the same template: providing you the tools to fix problems, save time, discover new features, and do some pretty cool hacks all on your own.

For example, the book shows you how to do better and faster searches and take control of the User Account Control prompts that drove so many of us nuts with Vista. Working with the Registry you'll learn how to customize an incredible number of Win 7 features and settings, including how to deal with Windows when it won't start correctly. I also got a lot of help understanding how to work with permissions and learned how to speed up my home wireless network.

Karp also shows you how to get nearly all of the features that come in the very expensive Ultimate version, no matter which version of Windows 7 you own. That's the price of the book right there.

But, hey, don't take my word for it. Look at all these great reviews:

"Blunt, honest, and awesome."
-Aaron Junod, Manager, Integration Systems at Evolution Benefits

"This could be the best [money] you've ever spent."
-Jon Jacobi, PC World

"...the most comprehensive and entertaining guide you can get for turning Windows into an operating system that's a pleasure to use."
-Preston Gralla, author of *Windows Vista in a Nutshell,* and Computerworld contributing editor

For more information about the book, including table of contents, index, and author bios, check out O'Reilly Books and Videos (*www.oreilly.com/catalog/9780596157630*).

Review contributed by Kyle Siellers

Turn Your Table Into a Speaker

Suppose you and your companion(s) want to simultaneously listen to music stored on a music player, cell phone, or tablet computer without sharing earphones or headphones (e.g., at a swimming pool, while riding a train, etc.). Although you could use portable speakers, they still might be too impractical and/or inconvenient due to their size and weight. A chic alternative solution is Tunebug, Inc.'s Vibe (Figure 1 (*www.tunebug.com/tunebug-vibe-specs.php?reg=us*)).

Figure 1. Tunebug's Vibe uses just about any surface to deliver audio from a mobile gadget to users' ears. Intriguing concept, but audiophiles could be disappointed.

Tunebug describes the Vibe as a "portable surfacesound speaker." This is marketing-ese for a technology that "turns most surfaces into a flat panel speaker"; i.e., it transmits audio through the skin of objects such as empty boxes, plastic containers, furniture, etc. Imagine using your kitchen counter or bathroom vanity as a music speaker while cooking or grooming—pretty intriguing!

SurfaceSound technology is packaged in Vibe's rounded-triangle-shaped case made of brushed zinc and plastic with a felt-covered ~7/8 inch disc on its underside that emits the technology's magic (you can readily hear and feel the disc's vibrations while music is playing; details in a moment). Vibe is highly portable—it's smaller than a hockey puck (2.3-inch diameter by 1 inch tall), but about as dense (it tips the scale at 5.3 ounces.). What makes this package so dense is a 450mAH lithium ion battery that is officially rated at five hours of playtime before requiring a recharge (your mileage may vary; after all of my testing, the evaluation unit is still humming along on its inaugural charge). Thanks to this internal battery, Vibe does not drain your iDevice.

Vibe's industrial design can be legitimately characterized as elegant. Its minimalist and outstandingly simple interface consists of a fingertip-sized on-off button located on the device's upper surface (this button is illuminated green while the power is on, unlit while off) and a standard 3.5 mm headphone jack at the apex. That's all there is to it! In case you're wondering how to pause/play or boost the volume, that's totally controlled by your music-containing gadget. To play music, firmly push Vibe's button and connect the unit to your music-containing gadget using the included cable with standard audio plugs at both ends. To charge Vibe's internal battery instead, connect the unit to a powered USB port or third-party power adapter using the included USB-to-audio cable (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Vibe comes with an audio connector cable (left) and a USB charging cable (right); iDevices, computers and recharging units with USB ports are user-supplied.

In my testing, Vibe worked with a wide variety of surfaces including boxes, plastic containers, walls, doors, tables, a desk, stool, mirror, lamp, toaster-oven, and also my jaw (Vibe can use the human jaw similarly to the Audio Bone device we reviewed previously). More rigorous testing would be necessary to determine what features or surfaces are most important—material (cardboard vs. wood vs. metal vs. glass, size, thickness, etc. I got the subjective impression that a shoebox sounded better than the Vibe's box (Figure 1) and mirrors better than walls. Metal (the toaster oven and lamp) was qualitatively worse than other materials due to excessive vibration. My jaw worked remarkably well (note that holding the Vibe against one's jaw can be a bit awkward and unsightly, however).

Although this product offers some laudable advantages (elegant design, portability, support for various surfaces/materials), they are more than offset by a number of critical shortcomings. First and perhaps foremost is audio quality. Serious audiophiles and average users whose ears are offended by the internal speakers of Apple's iDevices and notebook computers almost certainly will be offended by the Vibe's audio quality. My tests left me with the impression that the Vibe's output is monaural (connecting the Vibe to an iDevice disables the latter's internal speaker), a tad tinny, and weak on bass.

Another critical shortcoming is the internal battery—it cannot be replaced or serviced. Tunebug, Inc.'s FAQ (*www.tunebug.com/tunebug-vibe-faq.php*) includes the following information.

• Will the battery ever wear out?
The battery will provide years of enjoyment. Final battery life depends on charging frequency.

• How do I replace the battery?
The battery is internal, and there is no need to replace it as it is a rechargeable battery.

• What do I do when the battery finally wears out? Do I just throw it away?
You must use a recycle station that accepts Lithium Polymer batteries. Do not try to remove the

battery—simply recycle the entire device.

• Does Tunebug offer a battery replacement or upgrade?
Tunebug does not offer a battery replacement or upgrade service. The device will need to be recycled in the event the battery completely wears out over time. Therefore, when the battery finally dies—and the company provides no information about expected number of recharge cycles before this happens—the owner's choices are to use the Vibe as a paperweight or make time to responsibly dispose of it.

Two additional shortcomings to mention—the Vibe's warranty is valid for only 90 days and only for the original purchaser, and its MSRP seems a bit high at $69.99.

In sum, the Vibe is based upon an intriguing concept of turning surfaces into flat panel speakers. It potentially could be useful for groups wanting to simultaneously listen to spoken-word podcasts (e.g., lectures) or audio for which quality does not matter. However, since the Vibe does not deliver stereo or improve upon iDevices' built-in speakers' audio quality, does not have a replaceable battery, but does have a very limited warranty and a pricey MSRP, I am reluctant to recommend this product as a stocking stuffer for true music lovers.

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Reviewed by Barry Fass-Holmes

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

"There are those who join social-networking sites, and then those who don't." by Jack Dunning

For some people, social networking activity becomes a form of addiction. Others, like Jack, are decidedly "meh" on the latest forms of Web-based interaction.

*A small group of British women are sitting around the kitchen table talking (*www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uiQy6kqaxg*). Referring to her husband's computer activities, Caroline says, "He can spend all night on MyFace." "No." "Yes, he and his friends." Later, when the conversion picks up again, Caroline continues, "Sometimes I wake up and he's still on it." (From the British comedy series "Clatterford"—originally "Jam and Jerusalem.")*

This interaction tends to sum up my view of social networking Web sites. On one hand there is a misunderstanding about what the Web sites actually do, and on the other hand, for some people the activity becomes a form of addiction. I'm not sure what to make of the phenomenon. While I personally feel little need to participate in these Web societies, they are massively important, if only for the millions who use them on a regular basis. The sites are similar to the blob from the old horror movie, capturing and sucking people in while offering no face or shape. At any point in time, one blob may be king (MySpace), only to be over taken by another newer blob (Facebook). Who's to say that in a few years Facebook won't languish—either by the efforts from a younger challenger or user fatigue and/or boredom?

I certainly don't see this type of social networking going away. As is pointed out in this issue, there are too many novel and specific uses for the media that add to its importance. It seems to morph almost on a daily basis, yet it is certainly subject to eventual public and personal fickleness.

I'm probably not a good person to evaluate these Internet concerns. All of my excursions into this new world have ended with neglect. I did (probably still do) have a MySpace account. At the time, family members were using the site to post photos. I never added anything to my account, and now it is in disuse since others have either stopped their account or moved to Facebook. I haven't built up the energy to start a Facebook page. Lately, I've been getting links to family photos from Picasa and Shutterfly.

For a while, I was using Twitter for *ComputorEdge*, but the pressure of coming up with something relevant for every message was unbearable. I finally stopped (and removed it from the site), receiving only one lament from a loyal reader. It's difficult for me to be deep and meaningful in 140 characters—even if I knew how to be deep and meaningful, which I don't. Also, I don't do text messaging on my cell phone, so following others would be either a Web-based hassle or a monthly charge.

Years ago I joined LinkedIn because someone sent me an invitation. I called him first to make sure it was legitimate and not a phishing scheme. Since that time I've linked with people who request it—only if I know who they are. Other than that I never go on the site, and would guess it

is the same for the vast majority of LinkedIn members.

My feeling (I have no facts to substantiate this feeling) is that when people first join a networking site, they exhibit great enthusiasm and work diligently day and night to engage with the new world. However, after a period of time (months? years?) the newness wears off. They then wander off to new locations on the Web for other forms of entertainment. (This is hastened when the Web site either screws up security, adds too many ads, or misuses personal data.) It's easy to join; it's easy to leave.

I think social networking is great for everyone else, but I've found that Skyping with my grandkids, e-mailing family and friends, and using the Web to cheat on crossword puzzles is about as much socializing as I can handle. Maybe it's a personality disorder, but I don't want know that much about other people—what they eat and their latest trip to the grocery store. Maybe there are some other compelling reasons for me to join Facebook or any of the other sites. If there are, I wouldn't mind hearing about them.

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

Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"Keyboard Follow-Up," "OpenOffice Calc," "Copying a Web Page to MS Word," "Video on Cell Phones"

Keyboard Follow-Up

[Regarding the October 1 Beyond Personal Computing column:]

Marilyn's sense of humor is priceless. Got me laughing at every new paragraph. Especially intrigued by her solution to keyboard keys with no letters: pressing the key to see the correct letter pop up on the screen, then painting it onto the key with fingernail polish. Clever way to stop filling the landfill with keyboards that are perfectly functional.

Go Green!

-Sandy Rubicz, Oceanside, CA

It's funny the keyboard stories friends and acquaintances have relayed to me after reading that humor essay. Most of the stories fall into either what-went-wrong disaster stories, or what they'd like to change about keyboards.

Judy told me of the time her cat got so excited watching birds out the window in front of her computer, that the kitty turned around and promptly barfed on her keyboard.

Walter and I had a long discussion online about whatever happened to keyboard "skins," those molded plastic covers over keyboards. He says they were good at keeping debris from falling between the keys. But I countered that the ones I've used were more of an annoyance. The "skins" I've typed on never seemed to fit well. The plastic always seemed to slide around, and/or stick up a quarter of an inch or so above the keys, making typing difficult.

My friend Erik hates the light touch of computer keyboards. Like my alpha-male husband, Erik wants typewriter-type keys he can pound on, instead of the "sissy touch" of computer keyboards. Maybe guys crave more of a physical relationship with a keyboard, like incorporating an "exercise" component.

Or perhaps it's easier for guys to get jazzed about what they are typing if they take more of a "construction approach," building their story/article by pounding it into their computer. (Comedian Tim Allen contends that a Man's Theme Park would simply be split into Construction-Land and Destruction-Land.)

I even remembered another personal computer keyboard story. Years ago, I was offered a used laptop for $100 from a young co-worker. He'd won it in a poker game and never used it. Only one

problem: The screen half wouldn't sit up by itself; it had to be propped up. My husband talked me out of buying it, and probably for good reason. It would have been a problem to have the screen half suddenly crash down on my fingers and the keyboard, after the slightest jostle away from the behind-screen prop.

Are "adjustable touch" keyboards in our future? Will one-piece rubber keyboards eliminate the "disaster stories" of beverage spills and puking pets on keyboards? Will keyboards ever have sturdy and large letters and numbers that don't rub off? Stay tuned!

-Marilyn K. Martin

OpenOffice Calc

[Regarding the October 1 Rob, The ComputorTutor: Technology Solutions column:]

I have been using OpenOffice for several years as an alternative to Microsoft Office. In comparing Calc to Excel, I have noticed in most ways they are comparable, with a few exceptions. The most notable involve some of the right-click menus, and the fact that Calc does not have the Clear Contents option. However, Excel seems to open faster, but after it opens there is no noticeable speed difference.

-Mike Walker, Westminster, Colorado

Copying a Web Page to MS Word

[Regarding the October 1 Digital Dave column:]

All you have to do is click the Web page (any blank area), press Control-A and then Control-C. Then open your word processor and press Control-V. That just copies text only, no images or HTML coding!

-Walter, San Diego CA

There is an alternative to copying/pasting from a text editor. Within Works or OpenOffice, select Edit/Paste Special/Unformatted text. OpenOffice also has the option of using CTRL+SHIFT+V.

-Neal King, San Marcos, CA

Regarding Ivy's problem pasting Web content, maybe she should try Paste Special as unformatted unicode text.

-Cathy Murphy, Arvada, CO

Video on Cell Phones

[Regarding the October 1 EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher column:]

I go even farther than Jack Dunning. Why must a *phone* be everything? All I want is a phone. And I don't use it every minute/second of the day. You've seen those people who come out of their house or car and they are already on the phone. What did these people do when there were

only phone booths?

-Paul Lee, San Diego, CA

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

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