

ComputerEdge™ Online — 11/12/10



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Digital Dave

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

A reader seeks easy-to-learn information on Web site programming; Dave explains the life expectancy of CD-R and CD-RW discs and their data; a reader's "fatal error" deleted an entire e-mail account's contents. Is there any recovery?

Dear Digital Dave,

My grandson is trying to learn how to program a Web page. I created my own Web page maybe 10 years ago by following in my older brother's footsteps, who is a whiz at that sort of thing. But I don't remember anything about HTML programming. Can you suggest some books or Web sites where I might find some easy-to-learn information on Web site programming?

*NonDigital Don
Red Oak, Iowa*

Dear Don,

A little boy was asking his mother one of those questions that little boys ask, when his mother decided to redirect the task to his father. "Why don't you go ask your Dad?" she suggested. The boy thought about it, then adamantly replied, "I didn't want to know *that* much!"

This is the problem with learning Web programming. How much does your grandson want to learn? If his goal is to produce Web pages that look good, but he's not one of those who cares about the inner workings and hidden mechanisms, then he may be well-suited to use a program such as Dreamweaver (which is oriented to individual page design) or one of the many that are available when signing up for those inexpensive services hosting Web sites. If he is interested in Content Management Systems, which will help in designing entire, easy-update sites, then he may be interested in Joomla (www.joomla.org) or one of the other systems for controlling and updating Web sites. These CMS programs make the entire process easier, integrating the PHP programming and MySQL databases.

However, if your grandson wants to understand how Web pages really work (what goes on behind the scenes), then the starting point is HTML. (The other systems mentioned hide the HTML code, making it easier for the average user.) The best place to start is with a tutorial that will build a foundation as he learns. There are step-by-step books available, but he may want to start with a Web site such as W3Schools (www.w3schools.com/html/html_headings.asp) or HTML.net (www.html.net/). This process will take more time than using one of the Web design tools, but he will truly learn how Web pages work—including style sheets and other extensions of HTML.

Once he has a good feeling for HTML, he can start to integrate JavaScript into his pages. Then he can eventually move into PHP or another type of server-side Web program. The last piece of the puzzle will be making the Web pages database-driven with MySQL database server.

The advice you give him should depend upon the type of person he is. If he loves puzzles and tinkering, then start with HTML. If he just wants the resulting Web page with a minimum amount of hassle, then there are applications that will do the job—many of them free, such as KompoZer (download.cnet.com/KompoZer/3000-10247_4-10655200.html?tag=mncol), Nvu (download.cnet.com/Nvu/3000-10247_4-10412423.html?tag=mncol), or WebDwarf (download.cnet.com/WebDwarf/3000-10247_4-10068166.html?tag=mncol).

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

From the October 4, 2010 San Diego Union: ". . . digital sound files can be corrupted and widely used CD-R discs only last three to five years before they start to fade," said co-author Sam Brylawski.

Huh? Digital files start to fade?! What does he mean?

*Ronn R.
San Diego*

Dear Ronn,

I presume that what he actually means is the discs will deteriorate or degrade over time, which will cause the stored files to become corrupted. The term "fade" is vague when applied to digital media because, although the materials in the disc will experience degradation, the files themselves will eventually become unreadable by the loss of data bits. The files themselves will not "fade" like an old photo, but may pixelate or become unreadable. However, the statement "only three to five years" may be a little too conservative when applied to a CD-R—depending upon the quality of the discs, and how and where the disc is stored.

CD-R discs are a write-once read-many media, meaning that you can record to them only one time. Once you have recorded on a CD-R disc, you cannot erase it—nor record over the old data. This type of disc is commonly used to make music mixes of favorite songs for playing in CD players. They are ideal for this use since once they are recorded, there is normally no reason to change them.

CD-RWs are write-many read-many discs that can be erased and rewritten in a way similar to the old floppy disks. These are useful for temporary storage of data that may change from time to time, such as shared data files or backups of computer work. The longevity, or useful life, of CD-R and CD-RW discs varies due to the differences in the processes and materials required to produce each.

Generally, a CD-R is expected to have a life approximately twice that of a CD-RW. The fact that the CD-R is only written once has made it easier to produce stable discs, although they will not have the same estimated life as the non-writable music CDs you buy in a store. It is generally accepted, based upon accelerated aging tests, that a CD-R should last at least five to 10 years—CD-RW discs half of that. (Many manufacturers claim a much longer life for their discs, which will vary with the quality of the manufacturing process.) The actual life of any disc may be much longer depending upon how you store them, plus exposure to sunlight, temperature and humidity. They could conceivably last 100 years, although not many of us will ever get a chance to verify that.

One of the primary reasons that discs start to break down is the result of the deterioration of the elements used for the reflectivity and chemicals used in the dye, which change color when recording. When silver is used as the

reflective agent, it is less stable than gold. If your primary concern is storing music or data over the long term, then you can purchase archival discs that cost a little more, but they replace silver with gold in parts of the manufacturing process.

The type of discs you need will depend upon how you're planning to use them. If you are merely moving changeable data sets or making temporary backups, then CD-RW will serve you best. If you are making mixes of music for entertainment while driving or at a party, then CD-R will be better suited to the job. If you want to save the discs for future generations, then look for an archival gold type of disc. Then you should store them vertically, out of the sunlight with moderate temperatures and low humidity.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I made a fatal mistake. Upon returning to San Diego after being absent for about six months, I was trying to set up my Windows Live Mail program. I thought I would set up a separate account because I spend six months each year in different locations, and I could use the accounts to make the connections at the two different places. Wrong.

I now understand that I have been operating with one account and I really want to use only one account. Anyway, as I went along in the process of setup, I managed to delete my e-mail account—meaning my folders, messages and history of multiple years quickly vanished! Might I retrieve this from someplace in my computer? I had no luck looking in any trash files that I could locate.

*Joann Stang
San Diego, CA*

Dear Joann,

Your first step is to go to the Windows Backup and Restore feature, which you have set up to do regular backups of your files to a USB hard drive or a second drive. Then you can click "Restore my files" and search for "*.eml" files, which are your e-mails. If you never set up your automatic backups, then the situation is a little more desperate.

If you have not been backing up your files, then the next alternative is a program such as Recuva (www.piriform.com/recuva), which can recover files that are not found in the Recycle Bin. However, it may be too late for many of your e-mails if you've been using the computer since you lost those e-mails. While the files are not erased when they are deleted from your system (they are merely marked as deleted), they will eventually be overwritten by other files as you use your computer. Yet you may still be able to recover the majority of them. Again, all the e-mail files will end with the .eml extension.

It is always a good idea to make sure you have regular backups, but I also take other steps with my e-mail. Since I use a number of computers, I have all of them pick up my e-mail accounts, which gives me backups on different computers. I set the account to leave the mail on the server for five days, which will be plenty of time for the various machines to receive copies of the mail before it is deleted. This may seem a little redundant to many people, but I've found it quite useful on a number of occasions.

Digital Dave

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Data Backup on the Web

“Online backup services are everywhere, but are they right for you?” by Michael J. Ross

Our data has become mission-critical not only to our businesses, but our personal lives. Numerous Web-based data-backup services have emerged to help bring peace of mind.

According to Norton Online Backup (www.backup.com), a hard drive crashes every 15 seconds, only a third of PC users back up regularly, and 44 percent of PC owners have lost files due to hard drive failure. Has large-scale data loss claimed you as a victim? If so, then in that moment when your hard drive failed to spin up after you activated the computer's power switch, and your operating system informed you that no bootable disc could be found, then you were probably engulfed in a wave of panic, as well as regret for not doing full backups more frequently, or at all.

The severity of your grief naturally depended upon how much data was lost, and the strength of your emotional attachment to it. If, like a growing segment of the computer world, you keep most of your important data in Web-based applications (such as Gmail and Google Docs), then the event was probably more of an annoyance rather than a catastrophe—solvable by purchasing a new hard drive, loading it with your operating system and Web browser of choice, and then logging back into your online services. But if that hard drive contained critical data that existed nowhere else, then you may have been in a terrible panic. That's the reason why some data recovery companies recruit phone reps who have experience handling incoming calls on suicide hotlines.

If all of the data that you lost is personal, then the emotional and monetary damage may be confined to just you and possibly your family. But if that data—and also any custom applications—was essential to the functioning of a commercial enterprise, then the damage could affect a large number of employees and clients. According to a report (www.deepspar.com/wp-data-loss.html) by DeepSpar Data Recovery Systems, the average cost of technical support in the recovery effort (in-house and outsourced) is \$1,150 per incident, while the productivity loss will cost \$1,750 (from user downtime)—totaling \$2,900 per incident. This amount does not appear to include the loss of business or potential legal penalties if that data cannot be recovered—which arguably could be the largest cost of all. Various sources have estimated that the total cost to businesses in the United States is in the tens of billions of dollars.

One should not assume that the odds of your company being hit by a major data loss are low enough to be ignored, nor that the cost of such a loss can be simply paid, and business continues as usual. According to data compiled years ago by the national CPA firm McGladrey and Pullen, an estimated one out of 500 data centers will experience a severe disaster each year. More shockingly, 43 percent of the companies that encounter disasters never re-open, and 29 percent close within two years of the event.

Services with Servers

The next time you experience a hard drive failure—and here's hoping that it never happens to you—you can be engulfed in a wave of relief instead of panic, but only if you learn the backup habit before that hard drive goes kaput. Too many computer users assume that, to make full backups of their systems, they must have a second hard drive, a stack of CD-RWs or rewritable DVDs, or (far less commonly) a tape backup device. Yet the majority of computer users are now connected to the Internet via broadband, which allows the uploading of large amounts of data from their computers in a reasonable amount of time—using Internet-based backup services, which can reliably and automatically back up all of the files on a computer.

In response to the needs of computer users and businesses, numerous Web-based data-backup services have emerged, which typically charge fees to allow you to store large quantities of your data on their servers. Most of the newer services will let you back up smaller quantities of data at no cost. Naturally they are hoping that you will be pleased with their service, and eventually reach the point where you or your company decide to store even more data, and are willing to pay to do so.

What sort of characteristics should you look for in such a firm? First, it would be best to choose a service that maintains its facilities outside your city or, even better, your state—to mitigate the risks of widespread natural disasters affecting a major region of America. Second, the company should be able to point to its best practices in backing up its own servers. Third, the service plan that best meets your needs should be affordable; be sure to shop around before making a decision. Fourth, ask if the service is set up so that your data is protected from prying eyes, and even their staff cannot read your confidential information. Lastly, do they offer some sort of system whereby your backups are made automatically? This would be especially valuable to anyone who is too busy or usually too distracted to remember to perform regular backups manually.

Some of the companies—such as Data Vault (www.datavaultcorp.com/ and VaultLogix <http://www.dataprotection.com/>)—have been around for many years, while others are relatively new to the field. If you want to maximize your chances that your chosen backup company will still be around five or 10 years from now, you may want to go with one of the veterans that has demonstrated longevity and, presumably, profitability. But that's not to say that all of the veterans are completely open about their policies and pricing. For instance, Data Vault provides that information openly on its Web site, while VaultLogix forces the prospective customer to provide contact information, which probably means that the prospect will get added to the company's marketing database. In many cases, the secretive companies tend to be far more expensive than their competitors. So when you are shopping around, bear in mind that some services could be much more expensive than others. By the same token, heavy Internet advertising does not imply that the firm is reliable, nor open to the customer about quality of service.

There are too many online backup services to explore in any detail in this article, but here is a list of additional ones that can serve as a starting point in any research: ADrive (www.adrive.com/), Amazon S3 (aws.amazon.com/s3/), Badongo (www.badongo.com/), Box.net (box.net/), DivShare (www.divshare.com/), Dropbox (www.dropbox.com/), Drop.io (drop.io/), DropSend (www.dropsend.com/), ElephantDrive (www.elephantdrive.com/), FileDen (fileden.com/), FileDropper (www.filedropper.com/), FileFactory (filefactory.com/), File Qube (www.fileqube.com/), FileSavr (www.filesavr.com/), 4Shared (www.4shared.com/), Humyo (humyo.com/).

com), IBackup (www.ibackup.com), IDrive (www.idrive.com), MediaFire (www.mediafire.com), MEGAUPLOAD (www.megaupload.com), Mozy (mozy.com), Nakido (www.nakido.com), Neebit (www.neebit.com), RapidShare (www.rapidshare.com), ShareSend (sharesend.com), Syncplicity (syncplicity.com), Upload-Drive.com (www.upload-drive.com), Windows Live Mesh (www.mesh.com), Windows Live SkyDrive (skydrive.live.com), and YouConvertIt (www.youconvertit.com). By the time you read this, some of these services may have disappeared or merged with another company, which is just one more reason to seek out a service that has demonstrated staying power.

Remote or Local?

Compared to the cost of doing your own offsite backup onto a drive, Web-based solutions are far more expensive. For example, an online service might charge \$300 per year to store 10 gigabytes of data. But you could get a hard drive that stores 100 times that amount of data (one terabyte), at a third of the cost. In other words, the online service costs 300 times as much. Furthermore, the hard drive option becomes even more economical past the first year, whereas the service fees for the online service never end, and quite possibly could be increased. Hence, from a monetary perspective only, storing your data "in the cloud" may seem like a baseless decision by someone infatuated with the Internet and with his head in the clouds.

But there are additional advantages to online backups. Some people lack the technical acumen or interest to install a second hard drive in their PC, or even attach a second drive in a USB enclosure. Other people are constantly on the go, carrying their laptop from one location to the next, and yet with the need to backup far more data than would fit on a USB thumb drive; for such people, Web-based backups make a lot of sense. Also, there are countless instances in which backup technology and practices have failed to adequately protect data. Many users back up their data, only to later discover that their backups are useless, in that crucial moment when they need to restore from them. These backup plans can fail because they rely on a combination of proper technology and human diligence for success. Stored hard drives, optical discs, tapes, and tape drives do not always work properly, due to their dependence on mechanical perfection. Less commonly, backup software can become corrupted or unavailable. Users accidentally back up corrupted or incorrect information, or inadvertently overwrite a needed backup.

Although the best backup option depends upon the individual and his needs, and each option involves trade-offs of time and expense, it is absolutely clear that backups are essential. This is because our data has become mission-critical not only to our organizations, but our personal lives. Even if you are never hit by hard drive failure or other technical problems that threaten your data, backups are worth it if only for the peace of mind.

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

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Online Storage Services

“Store, share and mobilize your files and data.” by Pete Choppin

Online storage services provide peace of mind and can save money, time and heartache. Although it will take time for people to get used to storing their files elsewhere, online storage appears to be one way moving to the cloud is put to good use.



In the past, we used file cabinets, briefcases, safety deposit boxes, fireproof safes, external hard drives, floppy disks, flash drives and other devices in an effort to preserve and protect our important documents and data. The need to securely store information still exists; however, there is a new option for safe storage that doesn't involve a personal storage gadget that can get damaged or lost. Online storage services protect and store your personal information in a location other than your home, office or on your person.

Digital data is becoming more common as we move closer to a paperless society. Though files stored in a computer are safe from many threats, there is still a chance of a natural disaster, like a fire or flood; or a computer-generated disaster, like a virus, worms or

Trojans damaging your files. Digital information is hard and sometimes impossible to recover.

Online storage is becoming less expensive. To date, Mozy, one of the leading online storage services, offers unlimited storage for only \$4.95 a month and you can get a 2GB account free.

The price of online storage continues to drop, especially with rumors of the gdrive (googlesystem.blogspot.com/2010/01/gdrive-is-coming.html). This is Google's version of online storage that would provide its users with unlimited storage space—similar to Gmail, but you could save any type of file instead of just e-mail.

Online storage is a cost-effective and practical option. Your files are transferred and stored with SSL encryption that ensures your personal information remains personal. Additionally, accounts are password-protected.

There are some benefits to using online storage versus storing your data on a traditional hard drive. Some advantages to online storage include:

- You are able to access your information from any computer connected to the Internet.
- It's easy to transfer files to a new computer.
- There is no need to save files on discs, external hard drive, or flash drives.
- You can share files with friends and family by e-mailing the files directly to the person, or assign the files a Web site address so people can go to the address to access the files.
- Files are secure online. You don't have to worry about losing the files or damage by a natural disaster or virus.
- You can access your files with a mobile device like a PDA or smartphone.

There are also some considerations when using an Internet storage service. Some helpful guidelines include:

- Choose a reliable service that fits your needs—There are many online storage services available. Your decision will largely depend on how much space you need and how often you want to access your information. Most services offer a free account so you can try the service before buying an account.

- Back up your files frequently—The more often you back up your files, the less likely you will lose information. Some services allow you to set scheduled backups.
- Keep a copy of your files on your computer—Though online storage services are very secure, nothing is foolproof. It's wise to keep a copy of important files on your computer where you can access them even if your Internet connection goes down.
- Organize your files—There is no sense in storing files online if you can't locate them later. Internet storage sites allow you to create folders and add tags to your files. It's a good idea to do so.
- Keep passwords safe—Online storage accounts require a password to access them. Always keep your username and password safe so your personal files aren't compromised.

People have files that can't be replaced, such as photographs, and files that it would be nice to access anytime and anywhere, like a resume. Important files to consider uploading to an online storage service include:

- Photographs
- Home video
- Audio files
- Tax information
- Important documents for work or school
- Resume
- User manuals
- Important insurance information
- Important e-mails

Online storage services provide peace of mind and can save money, time and heartache. Here are some of the highest-rated services:

SugarSync (www.sugarsync.com/)

The logo for SugarSync, featuring the word "SugarSync" in white text on a black rectangular background.

SugarSync is a great way to store, share and mobilize your files and data. It is a comprehensive solution for online storage, online file sharing/collaboration and multiple computer syncing. With advanced features and mobile options, your files are automatically everywhere you need them to be. SugarSync offers a unique combination of features, simplicity and amazing flexibility.

OpenDrive (www.opendrive.com/)

The logo for OpenDrive, featuring the word "OpenDrive" in white text on a blue rectangular background.

OpenDrive is one of those online storage services that might look weak on the surface, but when you get down to what it truly has to offer, you will find few online storage services that are more powerful. OpenDrive provides its users with an ample feature set as well as impressive security options. It would be nice to see the company add more storage space at good prices and implement live chat support, but those are minor flaws that don't take away from a powerful service.

Mozy (mozy.com/)



Mozy isn't so much an online storage service as it is an online backup service. However, as I was going over some of these services I came to realize that it doesn't matter too much anymore. Even though it's great as a backup service, this service still lets you store files online and retrieve them remotely, which is all you really need from an online storage service.

One reason that Mozy is so attractive as an online storage solution is the price; this service's subscription is practically unbeatable. Few other services offer that kind of price per storage space value.

Carbonite (www.carbonite.com/)



Carbonite provides a good backup and storage option for those who need a reasonably priced solution with unlimited storage and remote access. It is also a good option for those who need full Mac support and automatic backup options. The service could use a richer feature set, but the fact that it can pretty much run itself carries a lot of weight as far as making it a practical solution for those who do not want to have to think about backing up their system manually all of the time. Overall, Carbonite is a great online storage service with some good features and a great yearly price for unlimited online storage space.

There are many advantages to online storage services. Access your files anytime and anywhere. Share your files with friends, family or the world. Protect your most valuable data. Although it will still take time for people to get used to storing files somewhere else, other than on their computer, online storage appears to be one way moving to the cloud is put to good use.

Online Storage Reviews (www.nextadvisor.com/online_backup_services/index.php)

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

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

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Windows Tips and Tricks

Windows Tips and Tricks

“Customizing the Power Button” by Jack Dunning

The Windows 7 power button can be configured for your preferred use, such as Restart or Shut Down.

One of the features of Windows 7 is the capability to customize the power button accessed through the Start Menu. In the past, the main power button in the Windows Start Menu was limited, usually to Log off or Shutdown, while the arrow at the right-hand end allowed the selection of other options such as Switch User, Log off, Lock, Restart, Sleep, Hibernate and Shut Down. Windows 7 has the same options, only you can now select which option appears on the menu (see Figure 1).

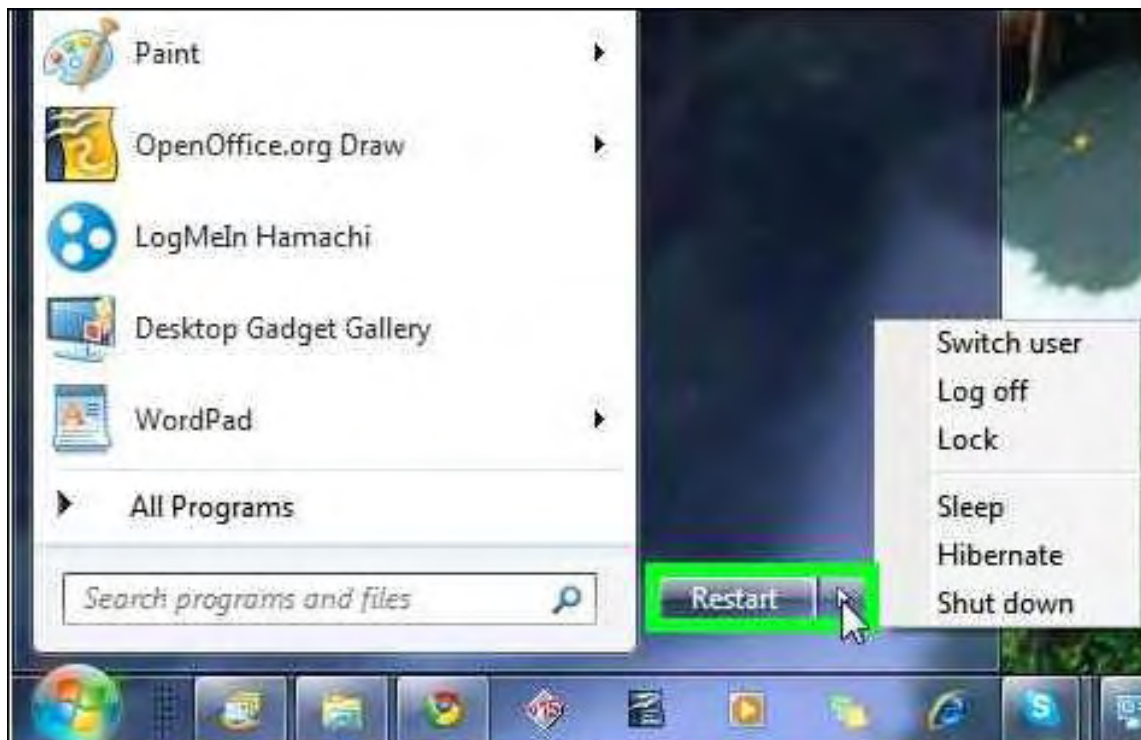


Figure 1. The Windows 7 power button can be configured for your preferred use.

This comes in handy when you have kids in the house who may inadvertently shut down your computer while they are randomly clicking the mouse on the screen. By changing the function of the main button from "Shut down" to "Lock," you will get a little bit more protection. Although, to be fair, the child could still accidentally open the menu and select "Shut down."

Maybe a more appropriate use for tailoring the power button would be to set the operation to something you are most likely to do, such as "Restart." Then you will be able to save yourself one click every time you need to reboot. If you have many users on the same computer, you may want to change the button to "Switch user."

The first step to changing the function of the power button is to open the Start Menu and right-click on the power button. (Caution: Make sure that you actually right-click. A left-click may cause your computer to start shutting down—depending on the mode to which the button is set.) Then select the Properties label (see Figure 2).

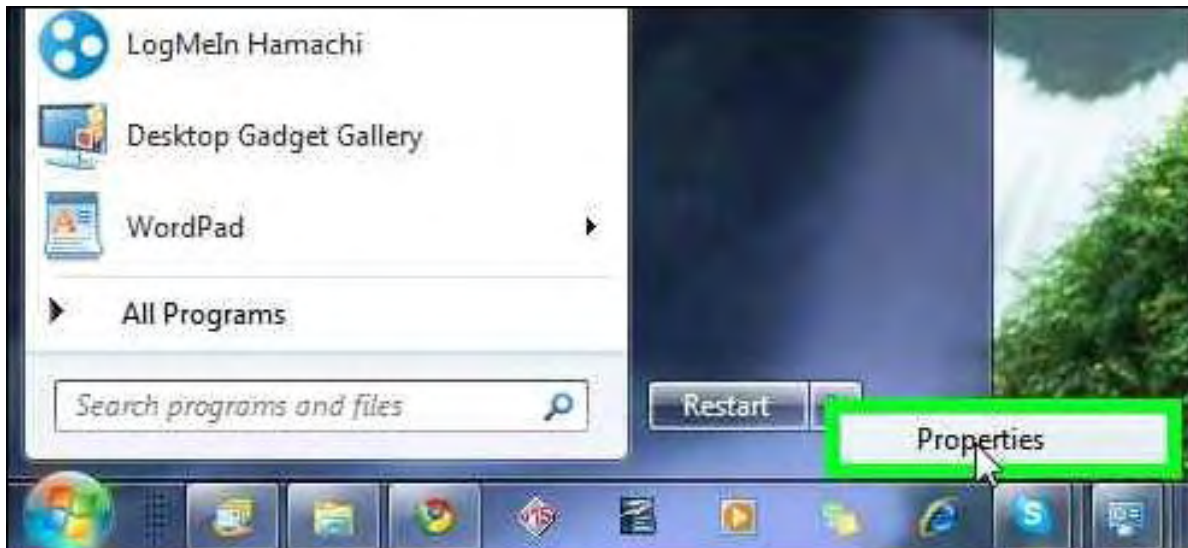


Figure 1. In Windows 7, a right-click on the power button will cause the lone item "Properties" to appear for selection.

The Taskbar and Start Menu Properties window will open. When you open the "Power button action" menu, you will be presented with the seven options previously listed (see Figure 3). Make your desired selection and Apply.

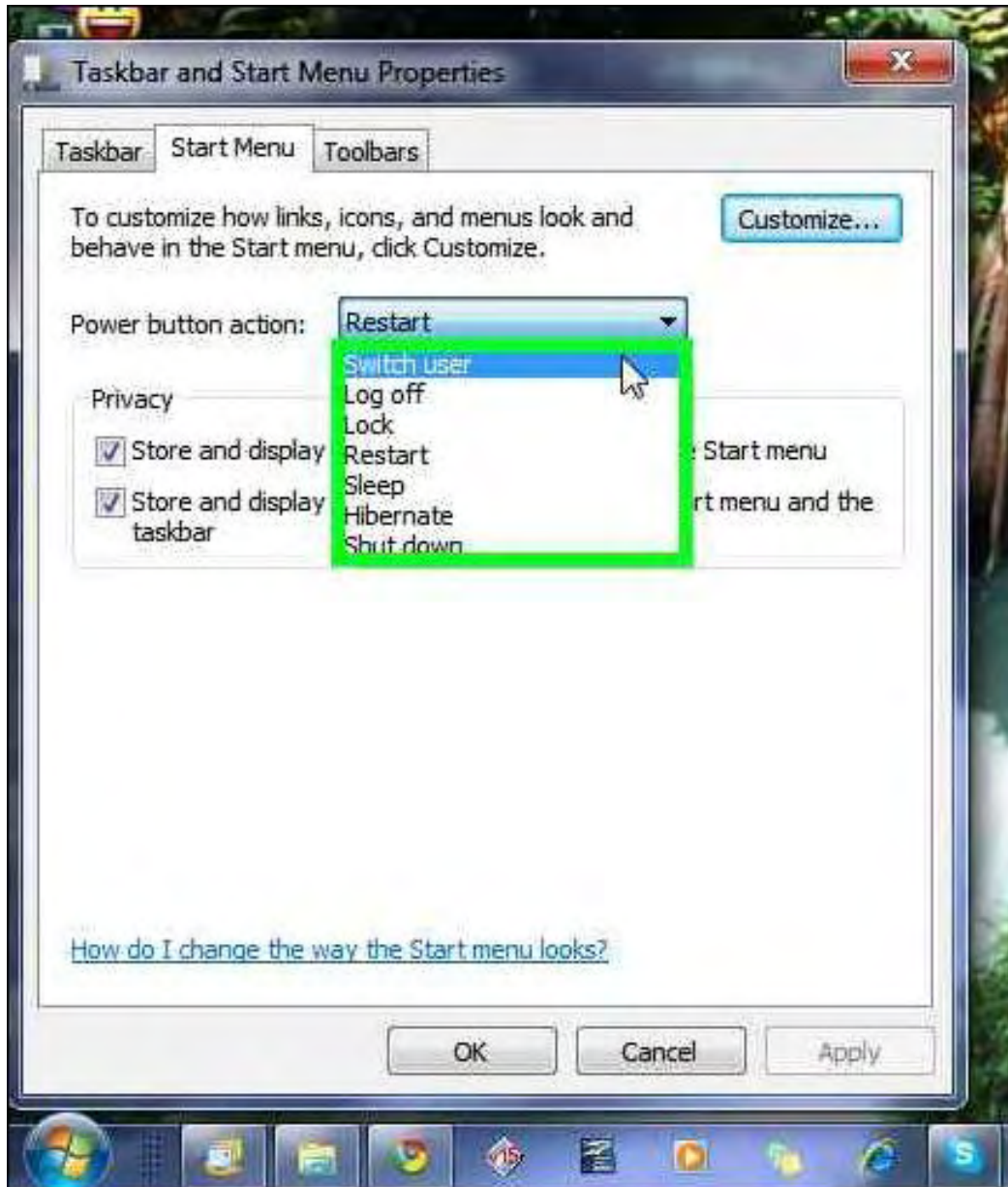
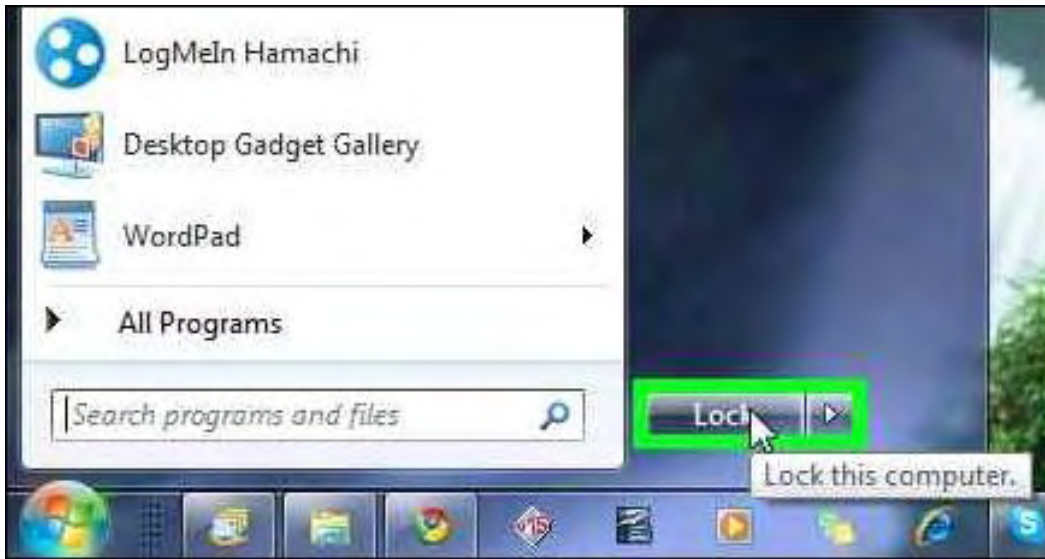


Figure 1. In Windows 7, the "Power button action" options are found in the Start Menu tab of the Taskbar and Start Menu Properties window.

Once you've changed the function of the button, it will appear on the main power button on the Start Menu (see Figure 4). In this situation, every time the button is clicked the computer will display the logon screen, thus locking the computer.



Locking the computer with a click of the power button.

While not of major importance, this is a nice-to-have feature of Windows 7. Set your power button to your favorite mode, such as "Sleep." In this day of time-consuming computer projects, we need to save every click that we can.

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

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“Online File Backup” by Wally Wang

Online backup sites offer data protection at a reasonable cost. Also, construction industries are adopting iPads; if your livelihood depends on Flash or Dreamweaver, it's time to expand your skills; REAL Studio and LiveCode give you a quick way to start developing Macintosh programs and selling them on the new Mac App Store; a new look for Mac OS X 10.7; and a tip on using App Store search engines to help you find the app you want.

If you attach any external hard disk to a Macintosh, you can back up your files effortlessly using Time Machine. Besides backing up your entire hard disk periodically without your involvement, Time Machine also makes it easy to retrieve a file by picking a date and viewing the contents of your Mac on that date. Find the file you want, copy it and paste it back into your computer so you can use it today. While other computers have offered similar backup methods, Time Machine makes backups simple, intuitive and easy, which increases the chances that you'll actually back up your files and, more importantly, know how to retrieve the one file you want when you need it.

For laptop users, Apple offers Time Capsule, a combination Wi-Fi router and wireless external hard disk. Instead of keeping your Macintosh tethered to an external hard disk through a USB cable, Time Capsule lets your Mac wirelessly back up its files using Time Machine.

Whether you use Time Machine with an external hard disk or with Time Capsule, the problem is that your data still remains vulnerable if your entire home or office burns down or floods. To avoid this problem, you should also back up your files to an offsite location. Many corporations store backups on tapes and then store the tapes in another building, but individuals can simply store backups of their files online.

Online backups require an Internet connection and a computer to store your data. If you run your own Web site, your hosting company (such as GoDaddy) may provide enough storage space that you could tuck your files into a private folder to hold your files. However, a simpler solution is to use a special online backup site instead.

Apple offers its relatively pricey \$99 MobileMe service, which gives you 20GB of storage (in addition to other features such as the ability to track your iPhone or iPad, which is far more valuable than MobileMe's meager disk storage). For a better option, consider ADrive.com (www.adrive.com), which offers a free online account that offers 50GB of storage. If you want more storage space, you can pay for it, but 50GB should at least help you store your most crucial data.

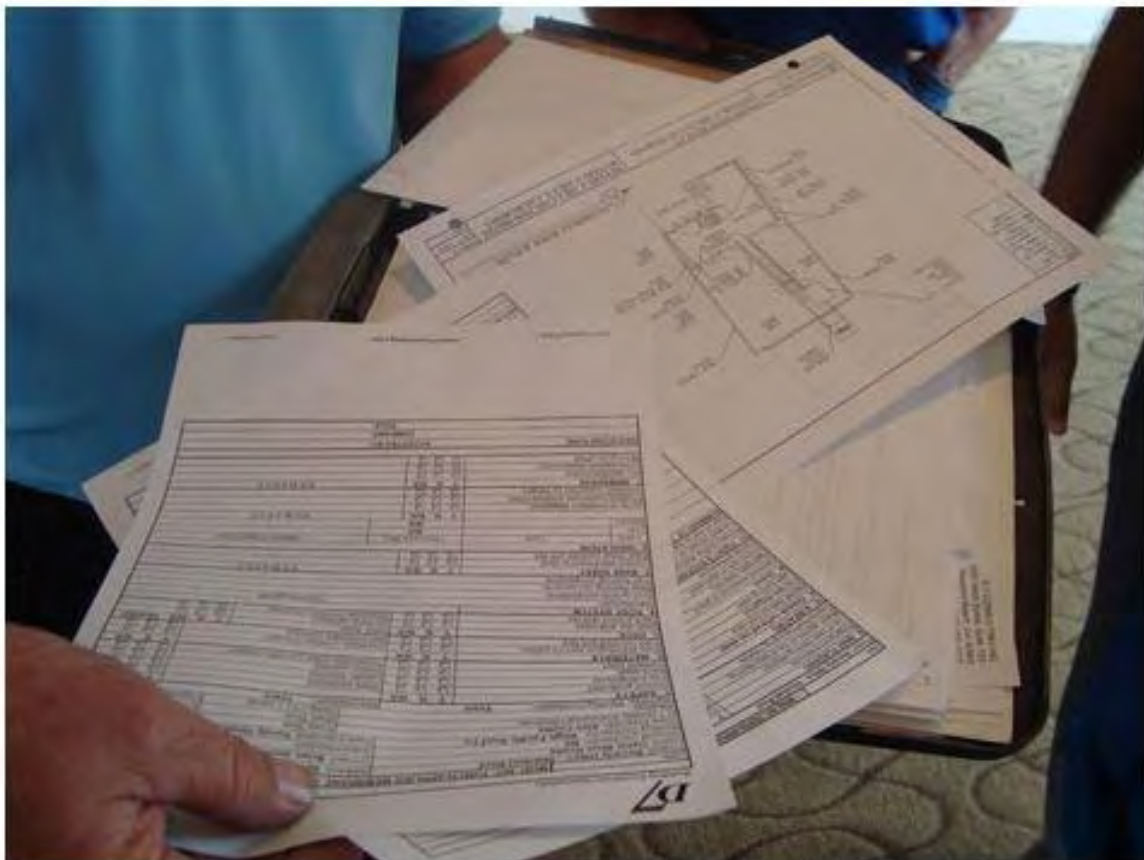
Besides ADrive.com, there are plenty of other online backup services that also offer free storage, but they all work the same. Sign up for a free account and see how easy it can be to store data online and retrieve it again. Then pay extra for more storage space.

The advantage of an online backup service is that your data remains safely stored in another location so if a complete disaster wipes out your Macintosh and external disk, your data will still be safe somewhere else. The second advantage is that you can use your online backup service to store valuable files that you can access from anywhere in the world if you need them.

Backing up your data may not be the most exciting task you'll ever do with a computer, but it's an important one, so start backing up your data now, both locally on an external hard disk, and online. Like wearing seat belts and buying car insurance, backing up your data may never seem important until you really need it.

The iPad in Construction

The iPad's seemingly simple design makes it adaptable in all sorts of environments, but now even construction industries are adopting iPads (www.cio.com/article/601227/iPad_at_Work_on_Dirty_Jobs_5_Lessons_Learned). Rather than force workers to lug around paper forms to fill out by hand, D7 Consulting has found that the iPad is easier to carry and simpler to use.



D7 Consulting wants to replace this ...





... with this.

Figure 1. D7 Consulting replaced paper forms with iPads.

One advantage of the iPad over traditional laptops is the lack of a physical keyboard that needs to be protected from dust and dirt. With its virtual keyboard, the iPad can handle dusty environments with no problem, although construction workers did find that the iPad overheated in the Las Vegas sun. After letting the iPad cool off for about 25 minutes, it started working again.

When the iPad first arrived, people criticized its lack of a physical keyboard as a drawback. Now as construction workers found out, this lack of a physical keyboard can actually be a virtue.

With its physical keyboard, a netbook could never replace the iPad in the dusty environment of construction work. The one virtue of a netbook is its low cost, but even a Microsoft executive claimed that the iPad was cannibalizing netbook sales (blog.seattlepi.com/microsoft/archives/227094.asp).

If you just want a cheap, disposable laptop, a netbook is fine. If you want something more versatile, then you'll probably want an iPad.

Dying Technology

Back in 2005, Adobe merged with Macromedia for two reasons. First, Adobe wanted to own and control Flash, the video standard for the Web. Second, Adobe wanted to own and control Dreamweaver, the number-one Web page editing tool. At the time, acquiring Macromedia for those two technologies seemed like a smart idea so Adobe could dominate the future of the Web.

Five years later, both Flash and Dreamweaver are stumbling toward obsolescence. Both are still great programs, but Flash was designed in the era of desktop computers and Dreamweaver was designed for the era of designing Web sites by creating individual pages. Both of those assumptions are now fast disappearing.

Flash has faced the most obvious scrutiny. During a review of the new MacBook Air, Ars Technica discovered that without Flash installed, a MacBook Air's battery lasted up to 33 percent longer (arstechnica.com/apple/reviews/2010/11/the-future-of-notebooks-ars-reviews-the-11-macbook-air.ars/3) than with Flash installed.

The problem is the way Flash works. If you send a digital photograph, the picture may gobble up a massive amount of storage space and take a long time to transmit, but once it's on your computer, you can display it immediately any time

you need it.

Flash differs from digital photographs because it's vector-based, which means instead of downloading an actual image, Flash sends instructions for creating an image. Sending instructions over the Internet is much faster than sending an actual image.

Unfortunately, to create and display a Flash image on your screen, your computer must constantly process those Flash instructions to create that image. When you see ads that bounce or move on a Web site, your computer must process those Flash instructions to create that animated effect. By constantly requiring processing, Flash forces your processor to run all the time.

If your processor is always running, it can't power itself down to save energy. As a result, Flash inadvertently runs down the batteries of laptops and other mobile devices. Adobe is constantly working to optimize Flash, but the nature of Flash means it will always need processing, which means it will always drain your batteries to some extent. If Flash can drain the batteries of a MacBook Air, think how much Flash will drain the batteries of a mobile phone or tablet device.

Dreamweaver hasn't attracted as much attention as Flash, but its future is in jeopardy too. Instead of designing individual Web pages, which is what Dreamweaver excels at, many people are using content management systems (CMS) that let you design the format of a page, but fill in the text and graphics later. One of the most popular CMS programs available is WordPress.

The idea behind a CMS is that you spend a lot of time designing the structure and layout of your Web site. Then you can load new text and graphic images into the CMS, and the CMS takes care of displaying that data as a Web page. By using a CMS, you don't need to fiddle with the complexities of HTML coding.

If your livelihood depends on Flash or Dreamweaver, it's time to start learning HTML5 (as an alternative to Flash) and CMS programming (as an alternative to Dreamweaver). Of course, there will always be those resistant to change. Such people risk clinging to Flash and Dreamweaver, and watching opportunities for using both technologies gradually fade away.

In the book *Spies, Inc.* (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0137079176?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0137079176), the author, Stacy Perman, noted that:

"It is, of course, human nature to look at the strange or the unusual and define it as questionable or dubious. Contemplating the implausible means to give it equal credence to what is already considered plausible."

To many professional Flash and Dreamweaver users, the idea of Flash and Dreamweaver becoming obsolete is questionable or dubious, which means they'll likely ignore facts that threaten their seemingly more plausible belief that Flash and Dreamweaver will be around forever.

(In the previous paragraph, substitute any other noun for "Flash and Dreamweaver" such as "Windows" or "iPod" and the statement still holds true.)

In *Spies, Inc.*, Stacy gives the example of how the Israelis noticed the Arab military buildup prior to the Yom Kippur War, yet blissfully ignored all of these warning signs because they believed the Arabs would never attack them. For another quote from the *Spies, Inc.* book:

"If I have a proper concept to interpret information, I say it's a reinforcement of my concept but not necessarily of the

information I have. If I have information, but not a proper concept, then I say the information is not important or I don't see it at all."

In hindsight, it's always easy to see where you can go wrong by ignoring any information that's contrary to what you want to believe. Let's hope that Flash and Dreamweaver professionals (and computer users in general) will adapt to change rather than refuse to abandon dying technology and risk becoming obsolete because they're unwilling to learn anything new.

The Mac App Store

On the iPhone and iPad, the only (legal) way to install software is to download it from the App Store. The advantage of going through an App Store is that it greatly reduces the risk of downloading something suspicious that could later turn out to be spyware that steals your passwords.

Although the Macintosh doesn't suffer from the onslaught of malware like Windows does, there's always the possibility that hackers will start creating Macintosh malware. That's why Apple is now introducing a Mac App Store where people can download software vetted by Apple to minimize the risk of downloading something malicious by mistake.

Besides reducing the risk of malware, the new Mac App Store also offers a new way for software developers to promote their products in a single location that every Macintosh user in the world can find. That can translate into a lucrative business for Macintosh developers.

The traditional way to create Macintosh programs is by using Objective-C. If you're an experienced programmer or someone with a lot of patience, learning Objective-C is fine. However, if you're a non-programmer who just has a good idea that you want to translate into a Macintosh program, Objective-C may prove too frustrating.

As an alternative, look at REAL Studio (www.realsoftware.com/realstudio/) and LiveCode (www.runrev.com/home/). Both tools are much simpler for novices to learn, yet powerful enough to create sophisticated programs. Even better, both tools let you write a program once and create both a Macintosh and Windows version of that program, allowing you to sell your program to the growing Macintosh market and the still large Windows market.

The idea behind REAL Studio and LiveCode is simple. Just design your user interface and then write instructions to make your user interface actually do something. Instead of learning a complicated programming language like Objective-C, REAL Studio uses the BASIC programming language (which was designed to teach novices how to program) while LiveCode uses a modified version of the HyperTalk programming language (which closely resembles English language commands).

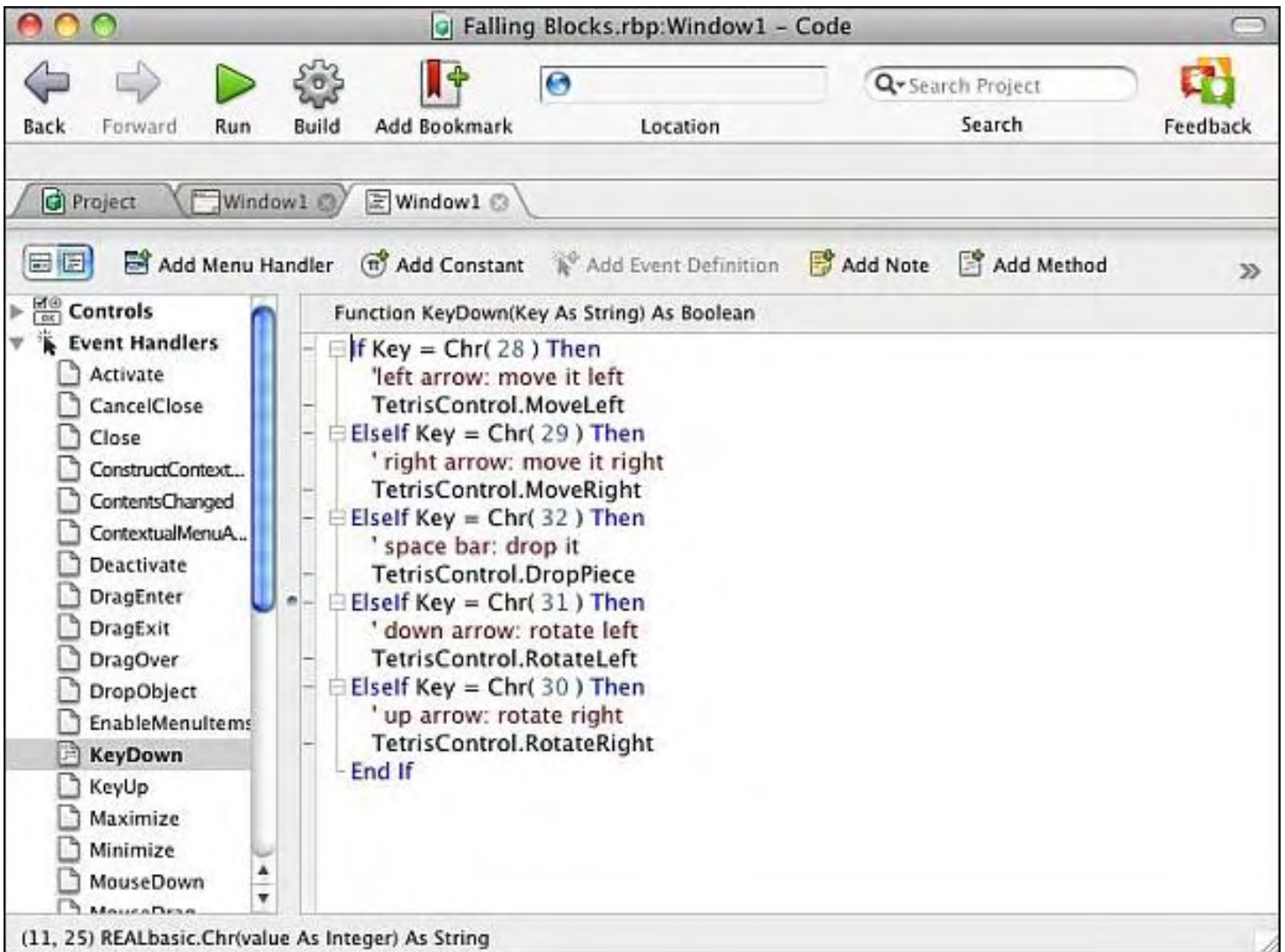


Figure 2. REAL Studio uses the BASIC programming language.

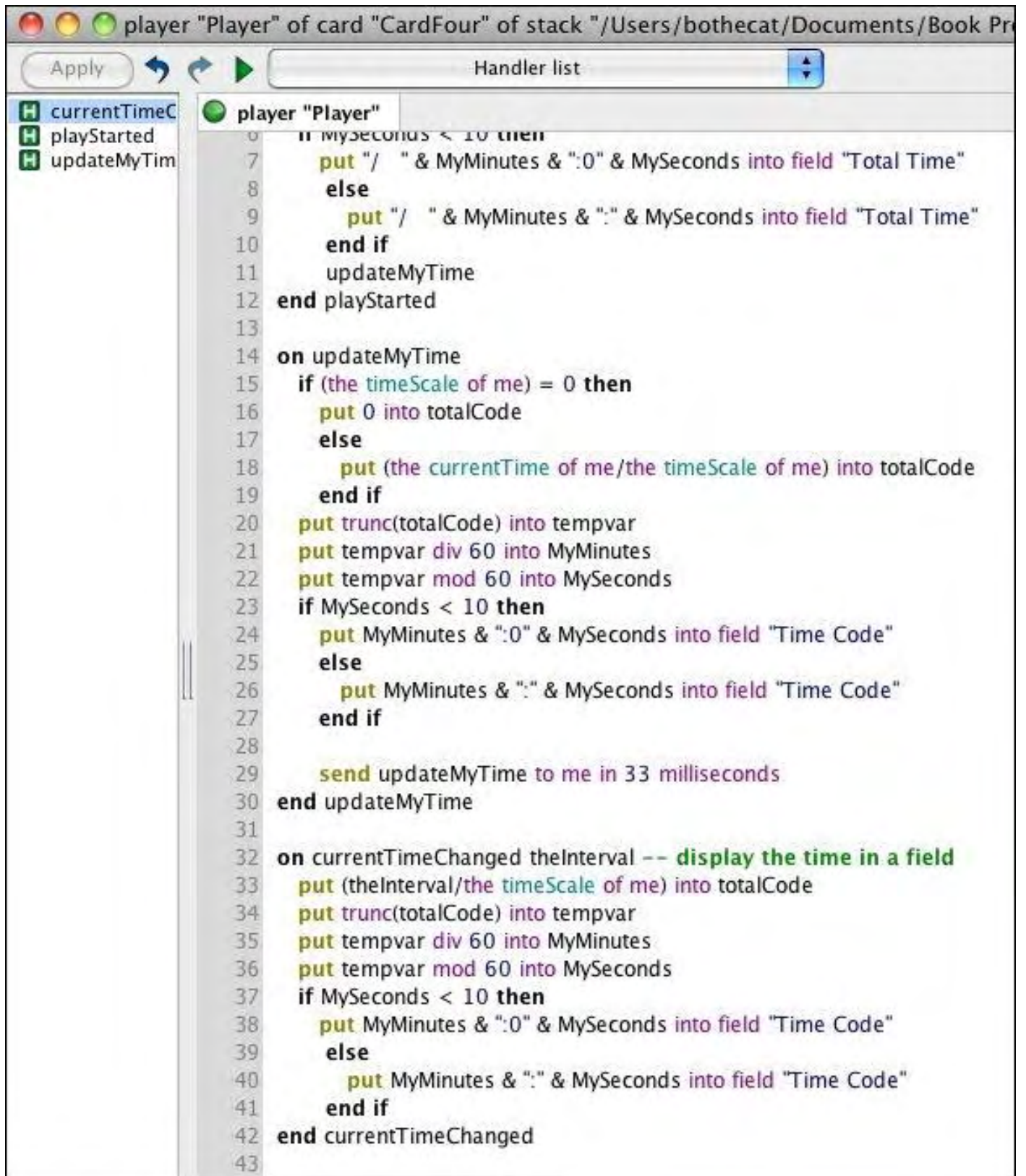


Figure 3. LiveCode uses HyperTalk, which resembles English words.

```

// Implement viewDidLoad to do additional setup after loading the view, typically from a nib.
- (void)viewDidLoad {
    [super viewDidLoad];
    activities = [[NSArray alloc] initWithObjects:@"sleeping", @"eating", @"working", @"thinking", @"crying",
        @"begging", @"leaving", @"shopping", @"hello worlding", nil];

    feelings = [[NSArray alloc] initWithObjects:@"awesome", @"sad", @"happy", @"ambivalent", @"nauseous",
        @"psyched", @"confused", @"hopeful", @"anxious", nil];
}

-(NSInteger)numberOfComponentsInPickerView:(UIPickerView *) pickerView
{
    return 2;
}

-(NSInteger)pickerView:(UIPickerView *) pickerView numberOfRowsInComponent:(NSInteger)component {
    if (component == 0)
    {
        return [activities count];
    }
    else {
        return [feelings count];
    }
}

-(NSString *)pickerView:(UIPickerView *)pickerView titleForRow:(NSInteger) row forComponent: (NSInteger)
component{
    switch (component) {
        case 0:
            return [activities objectAtIndex:row];
        case 1:
            return [feelings objectAtIndex:row];
    }
    return nil;
}
}

```

Figure 4. Objective-C looks much more cryptic.

If you're already familiar with programming, especially Visual Basic, then REAL Studio should be your choice. REAL Studio's BASIC dialect closely resembles the original Visual Basic language, which means it's possible to take a program written in Visual Basic 6, load it into REAL Studio, and create a Windows and Macintosh program with few modifications.

If you know nothing about programming, you might find LiveCode easier to learn. To someone familiar with programming, LiveCode's language may look completely foreign, but to someone learning to program for the first time, LiveCode can actually be much simpler to learn. If you have any old HyperCard programs laying around, you can feed them into LiveCode and create a Windows and Macintosh version of your HyperCard program.

Both REAL Studio and LiveCode give you a quick way to start developing Macintosh programs and selling them on the new Mac App Store. Who knows? With enough imagination and skill, you could create the next popular Macintosh program that can make you rich, or at least earn you a steady part-time income.

A New Look for Mac OS X 10.7

Apple's long-term goal is to simplify the Mac OS X user interface to make it as intuitive and simple as using the touchscreen interface of an iPhone or iPad. The latest Apple user interface patent focuses on scrollable menus (www.patentlyapple.com/patently-apple/2010/11/a-new-patent-reveals-scrollable-menus-toolbars-for-os-x-lion.html).

The idea is that instead of overwhelming users with a monstrous list of commands, a scrollable menu could just show a handful of commands at once while letting the user scroll through to find additional commands.

Such scrollable menus could be linear or even circular. The idea is to minimize the number of commands displayed (to minimize confusion) while still letting you find those commands that you need at the moment (to maximize productivity).

Apple's New Scrollable Menus and Toolbars will Apply to OS X and iOS

FIG. 19

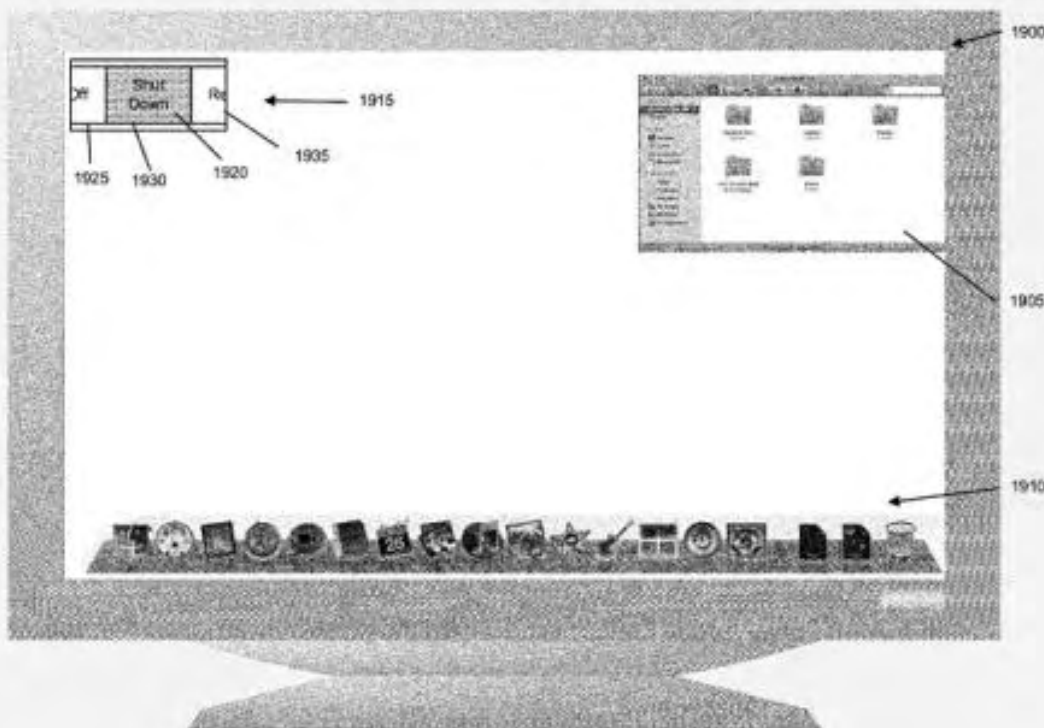


FIG. 21

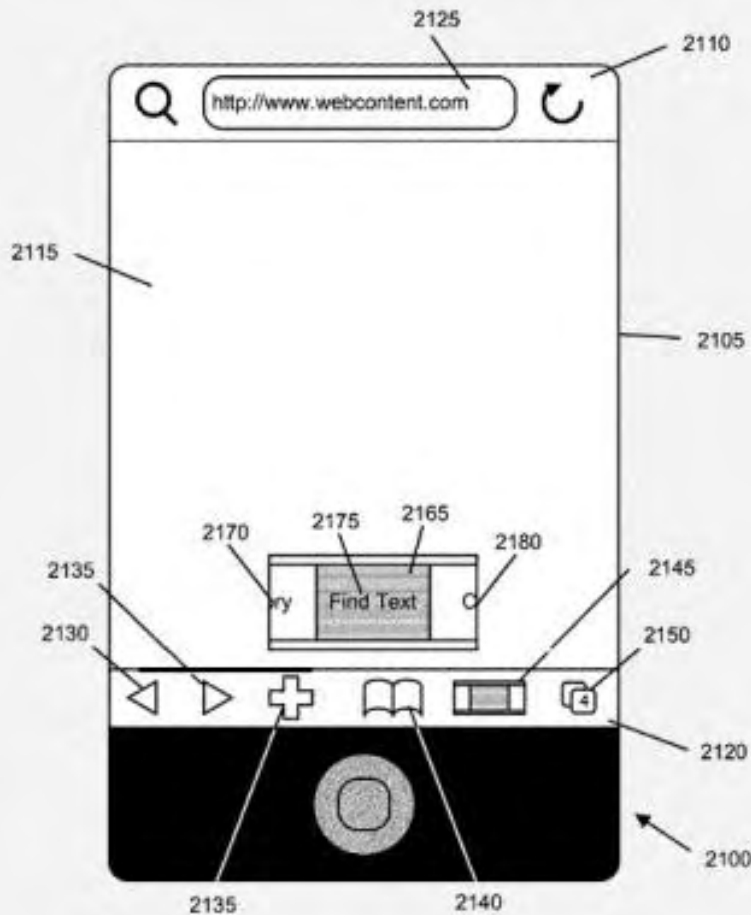


Figure 5. Mac OS X 10.7 Lion's possible new look.

* * *

The iPhone/iPad App Store currently holds 250,000 apps and the number keeps growing every day. To help you find an app, you could exhaustively browse through the App Store or just use a special app search engine such as UQuery (www.uquery.com), Chomp (chomp.com), or AppPicker (www.AppPicker.com).

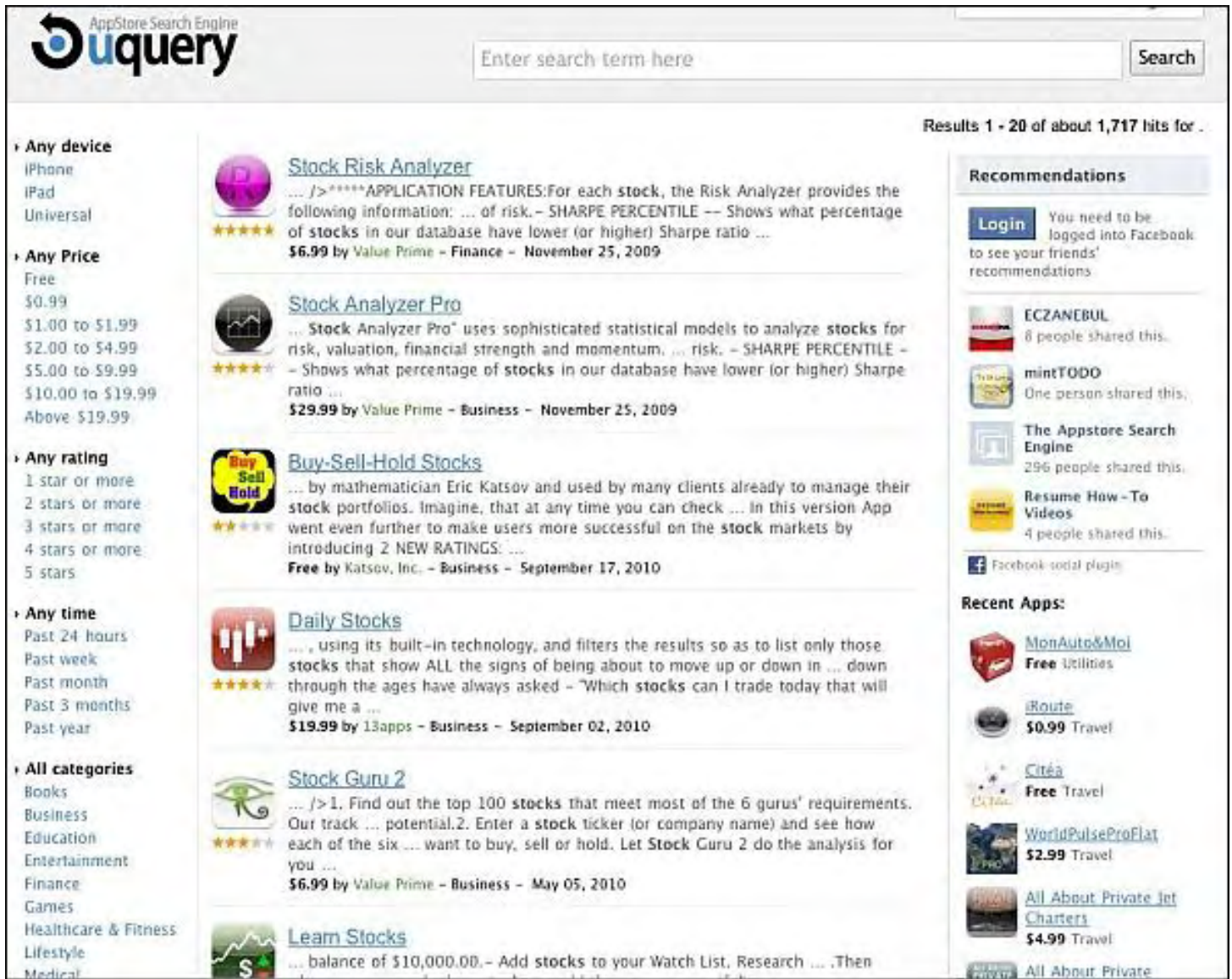


Figure 6. An App Store search engine like UQuery can help you find the app you want.

Just type in a description of the app you want to find and these app search engines will display a list of apps that might interest you for your iPhone, iPod touch, or iPad.

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

Wally is responsible for the following books:

Microsoft Office 2010 for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470489987?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470489987),
Beginning Programming for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702),
Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470108541?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470108541),
Breaking Into Acting for Dummies with Larry Garrison (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468),
Steal This Computer Book 4.0 (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050),
My New Mac (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271646?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271646),
My New iPhone (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271956?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271956),
My New iPad (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593272758?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593272758),
Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon Fisher and Gerald Fisher (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894),
How to Live With a Cat (When You Really Don't Want To) (www.smashwords.com/books/view/18896).

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

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

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Rob, The Computer Tutor

Rob, The ComputerTutor: Technology Solutions

“OpenOffice Databases” by Rob Spahitz

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

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

Last week we explored the table-creation wizard. This week we'll see some of the features of the tool after you create the database structure.

If you followed last week's instructions, you ended up with a database of fields related to tracking friends: Contacts. When you re-open that, you see something similar to Figure 1.

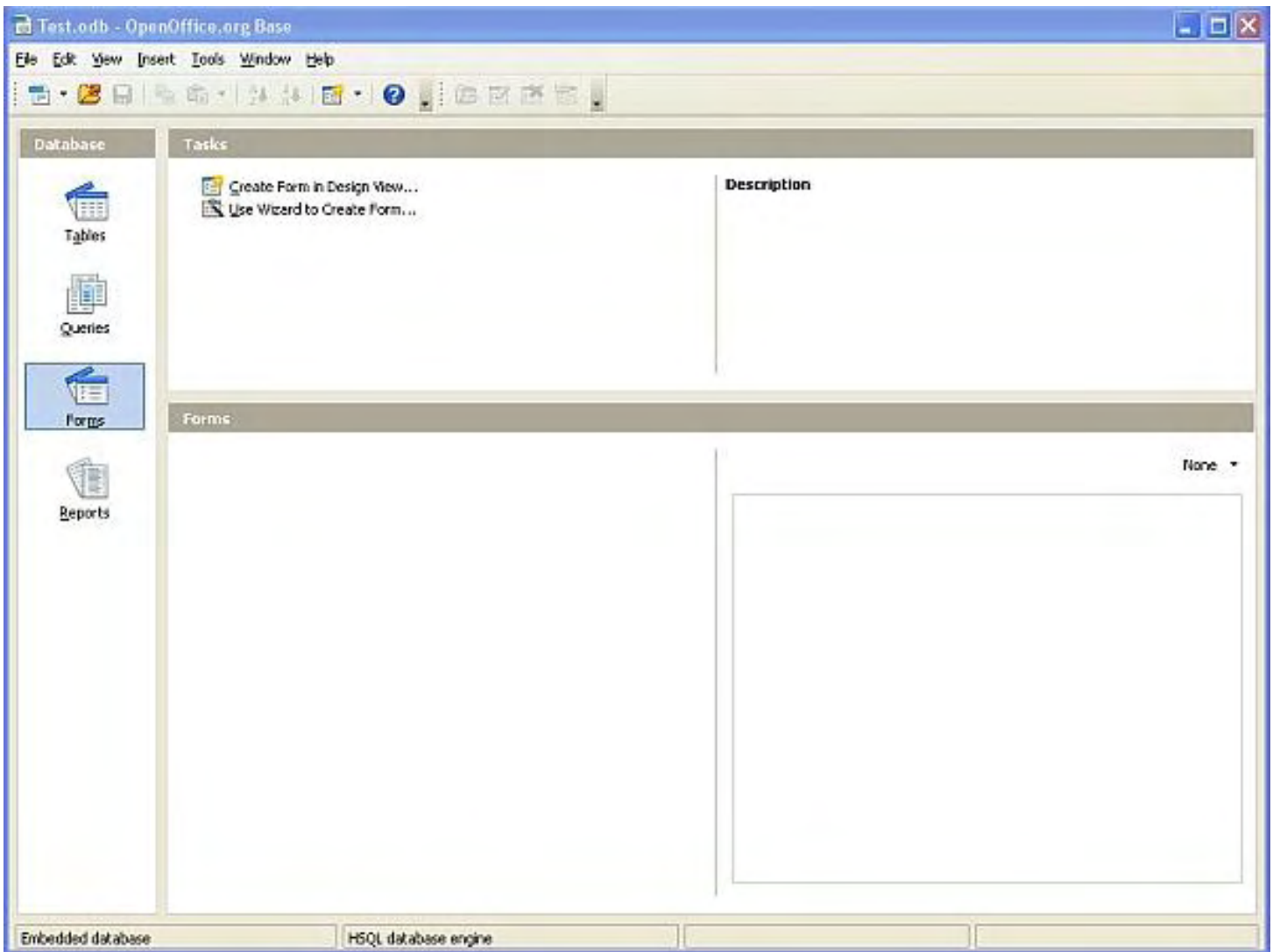


Figure 1. Base features.

Looking at this, we see a panel on the left for navigating to various parts. And since I have spent lots of time with Microsoft Access, and Base seems to be developed to act like Access, I'll guess that the Tasks panel contains things you can do in a given area (such as Forms shown in the figure above). The panel below that should then contain parts related to that area, such as a collection of tables, queries, forms and reports.

Click on the Tables area in the left panel. From last week's database, we see the Contacts table, as shown in Figure 2.

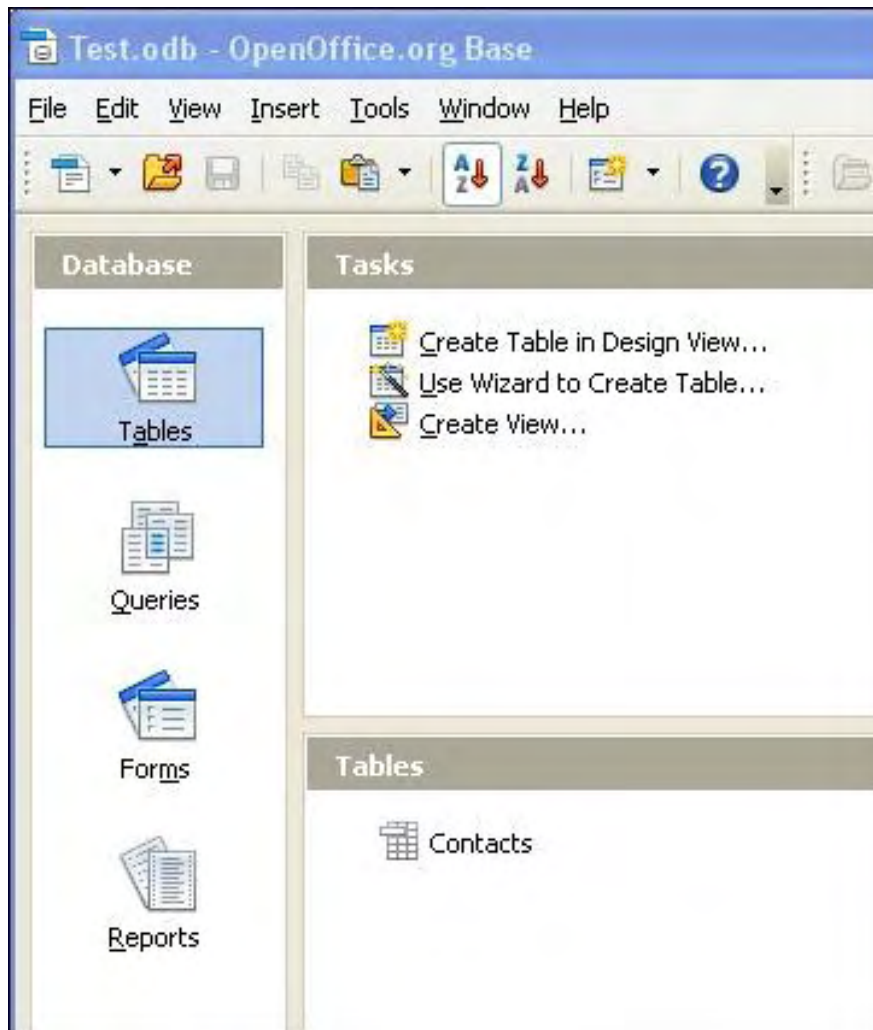


Figure 2. Tables.

First let's talk about this. When designing a database, there are two commonly used naming conventions. In the bigger databases (Oracle and SQL Server), the tables that hold the data are essentially the only part of the database. Because of this, the table names are given "traditional" names. As seen here, "Contacts" is simply a name given to hold a list of contacts. To use the tables in these big databases, you normally create an external application and connect it to the DB, either directly to the tables or connected through Views that query the tables for information.

However, in personal databases like Access (and apparently Base), the tables are really only a portion of the pieces used to work with the data. The tables hold the data; the forms allow controlled data entry; and the reports show the data nicely formatted. The forms and reports connect to the tables directly or through saved queries.

Because of this difference, the forms and reports are often created to connect to individual tables, so you may have a Contacts form and a Contacts report. Although you can use those names, as you work with the database you will probably start to get confused as to which Contacts piece you're dealing with. And if you start writing procedures (database programming) to work with the parts, you'll have to go out of your way to tell the code which piece you want to work with.

So in personal databases, we often use a different naming convention. Instead of naming your table Contacts, you give it an additional identifier like Contacts_Table or, more commonly, tblContacts. Using the latter, it now becomes easy to differentiate tblContacts from frmContacts and rptContacts while still seeing that they are all related to Contacts.

I'll leave the table name as it stands for now, since we can always give the prefix to forms and reports while keeping the database names without the prefixes.

Exploring Tables

Now let's look at how Base works with tables. As a reminder, the purpose of tables is to hold the information that you want to organize and store. Tables are set up with a collection of fields, and each field is defined to hold a specific type of data (numbers, text, dates, etc.). In addition, some fields may be used for special purposes, such as being the primary way to access the rest of the data in this table (called a primary key) or another table (called a foreign key).

Right-click on the Contacts table and choose menu item Edit (which corresponds to the Access Design option). You'll see something like Figure 3.

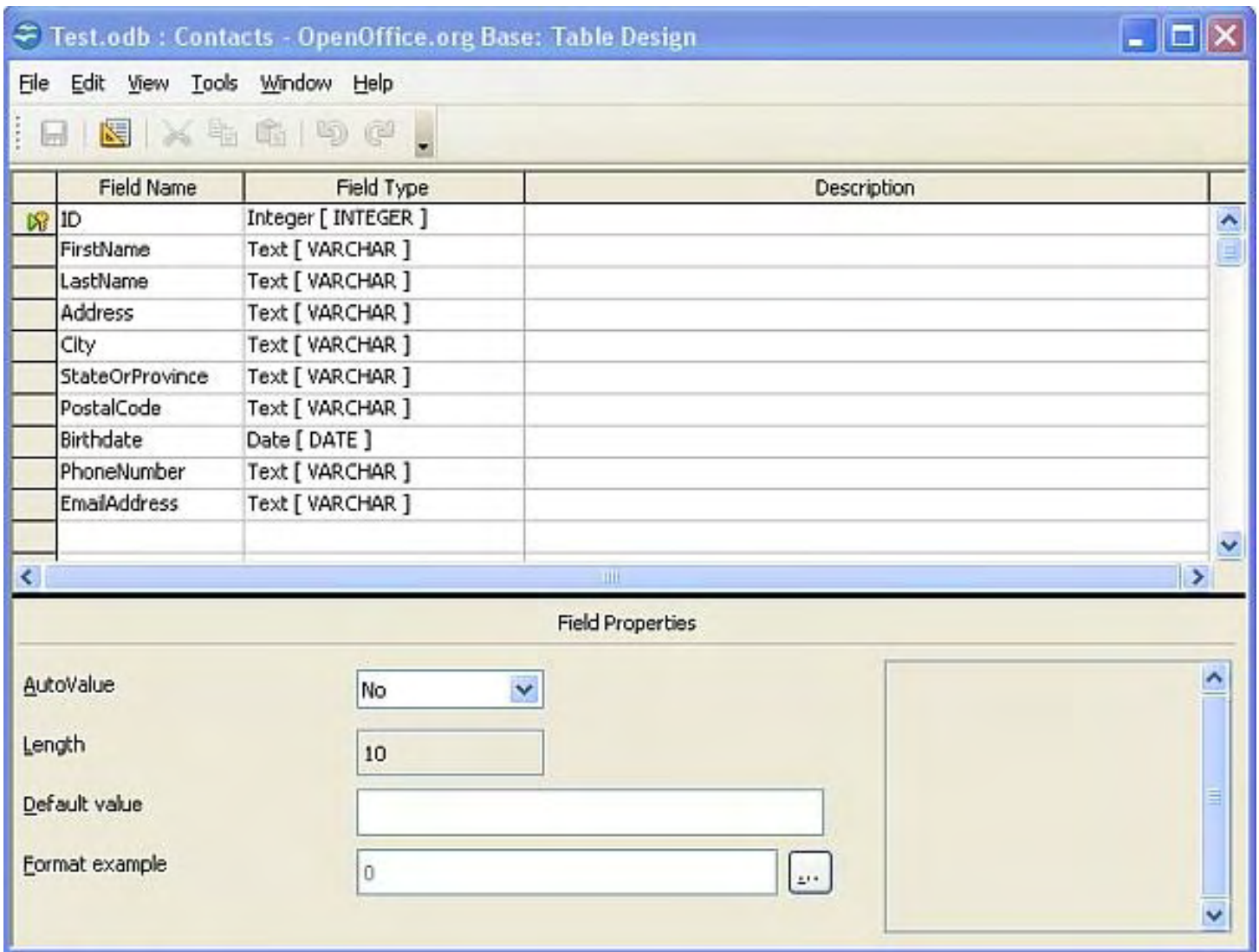


Figure 3. Table design.

This is organized to show the names of the fields in the first column, the data type in the second column, an optional description column, then additional information at the bottom related to the selected field (in this case "ID"). In addition, just to the left of the field name is a gray column that shows a picture of a green triangle (showing the currently selected field) and a key next to the ID field (indicating that this is the primary key).

Let's look further at the first line. Since this is the primary key field, the value here must be unique as data is entered. As mentioned in a previous article, the primary key can actually be multiple fields, does not have to be the first field in the table, and is often best handled by a number selected by the database (although it could also be other data types if handled manually).

So we see the data type as Integer (INTEGER). That just seems redundant, doesn't it? Well, yes and no. The first part ("Integer") is the common name for the type of data supported, and the second part ("INTEGER") is the internal name for the type of data. In this case they are the same, but in other cases they will be different. Some other common ones include: Tiny Integer (TINYINT), BigInt (BIGINT), Image (LONGVARBINARY), Text (fix) (CHAR), Decimal (DECIMAL), Float (FLOAT), Text (VARCHAR), Yes/No (BOOLEAN), and Date (DATE). Probably the most unexpected is the Image data type called a long variable binary (LONGVARBINARY). Essentially, this uses a variable number of individual bits (zero/one, on/off, true/false, whatever you want to call it).

Looking below the ID field, there are plenty of text fields. The most common types are probably Integers, Text, Decimal (float or double) and Date (or Date/Time).

In the lower section of the window we see Field Properties. These are extra settings beyond the name and data type. In the case of the ID field we see AutoValue. I'm not sure why this is set to No. As described above, this should probably be Yes or we will need to manually supply a unique identifier with every new record. The Length is grayed out. That's because most data types except for Text have predefined sizes. The "Default value" is not needed for an AutoValue since it will change every time, so a default value would be good only once and never again. Further, if you switch the AutoValue to Yes, that box becomes hidden. "Format example" I will guess is used to help display the information for input forms. Clicking on the "..." button next to this, I see the window shown in Figure 4.

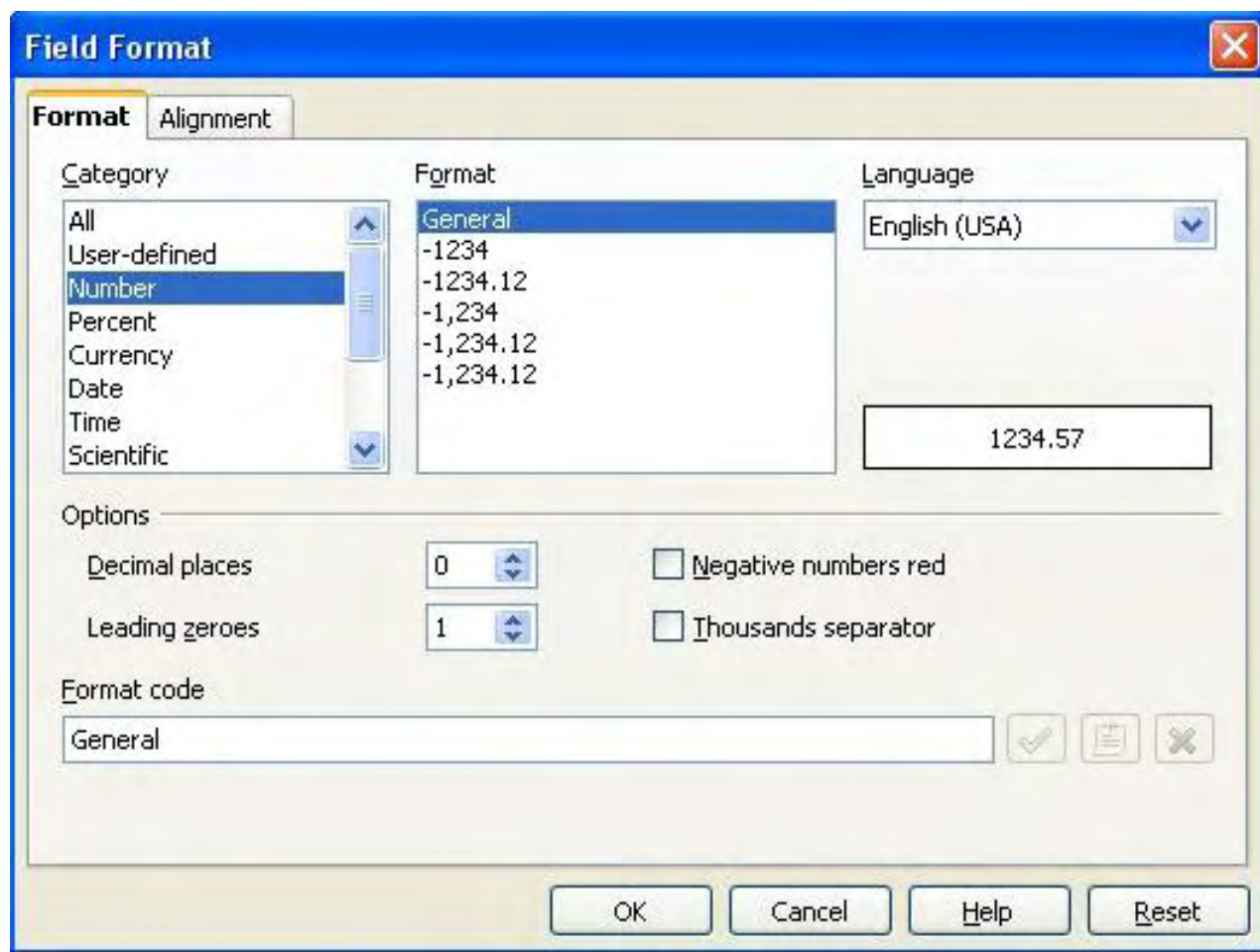


Figure 4. Field formatting.

As seen, you have some options similar to Calc or Excel. I leave it to the reader to further investigate these options, but I would suggest that these are most useful for currency fields or those that need decimal values, and certainly unexpected for ID fields (the database will create these numbers so there's little reason to even make them available to users other than as a quick way to uniquely identify a record (e.g., ID 1 rather than John Smith's record)).

Back to the field definition window, if you select the FirstName field, you'll see that the green triangle on the left moves to that field and the Length box becomes editable. In this data type, the Format example shows simply as @, which apparently means to show all text as stored in the database. When you select the Birthdate field, you see that there is no length field since dates come in only a single version (unlike numbers) so this is omitted. In the Format field you see 01/01/00, which is apparently an example of the date format.

Data Entry

With the field definitions reviewed and fixed, you may want to quickly enter some data. Close the definition window and save any changes you made. Back on the main screen, double-click on the table (or right-click and select Open). You'll see a new window similar to Figure 5.

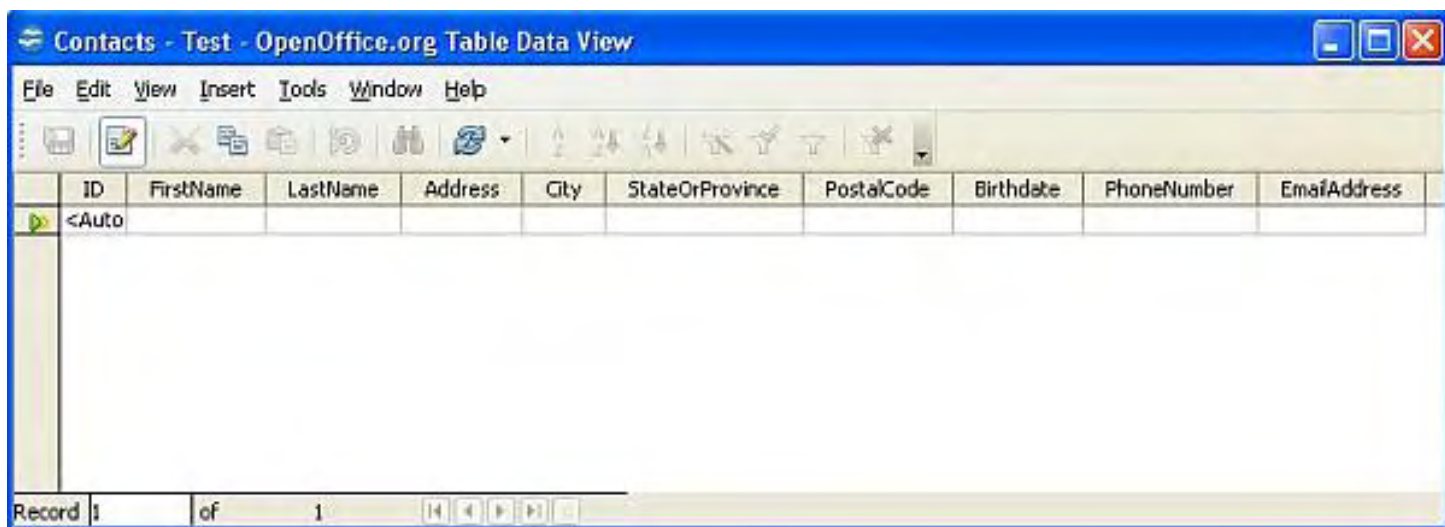


Figure 5. Data entry.

Similar to entering data in Access or other tools, you see a grid with field names as the titles and a collection of rows representing single records (collections of related pieces of information).

Notice how the ID field shows AutoField (well, cut off). That's because I told Base to make that an AutoValue field so I don't have to (and shouldn't) enter any value there.

Also, at the bottom, you see some common data navigation pieces, showing the currently selected record and the total number of records plus buttons for navigating around the data set (first, previous, next, last and new).

With this all out of the way, we now have the ability to create a table, change pieces if needed, enter data and view the data that we've previously entered.

Next week we'll look at the Queries, Forms and Reports section so that we can look at better ways to enter and view table data.

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

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



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Does Your Little One Have a "Digital Footprint"?

"A Look at the Human Side of Computing" by Marilyn K. Martin

Babies can start a "virtual life" even before they are conceived and grow to wreak all sorts of digital havoc.

Babies haven't exactly taken over the Internet. And, except for videos of dancing babies about to lose their diapers, they haven't gone "viral." Their "personal relationship" with computers seems to stay in the sticky-fingers-on-monitor and upchucking-on-keyboard stage forever. But adults, especially that extremely biased group known as New Parents, are determined to make sure that everyone on the planet is aware that an Important Person has just entered this life.

Actually, babies can start a "virtual life" even before they are conceived. Seriously! A Web site called PredictYourBaby.com (*PredictYourBaby.com*) lets you upload two photos to see what your future (or possibly never) baby will look like. Boasting "FBI grade technology which scans photos to locate all features used for 'face prediction,'" they will create your baby's predicted face for free. And this service isn't limited to just married couples hoping to conceive. Not at all! You can upload your photo and, say, a photo of a celebrity or a secret crush, to visually predict what your combined faces would produce.



"This is great! Now we can watch little Charlie all day without ever leaving the computer."

Which opens up new possibilities for meaningful contact in those great "Fertility Mingling Institutions" called Singles' Bars. Forget the standard pickup lines about astrology signs, or what hair or body parts are "real." Instead, you can now go for an approach like "I, uh, have noticed you here before. A lot. And, um, I think we could make a beautiful baby together. Here's what she would look like."

I predict a female would definitely take a look at the photo. Then hand it back saying, "Cute. But you are height challenged and wearing taped-together glasses. And I'm marrying Bruno the Wrestling Bartender next weekend. Which is that big guy behind the bar watching this exchange very carefully."

Guys approached by a female with this pitch may, possibly and suspiciously, glance at such a photo. Unimpressed as they hand back the picture, they would be more interested in the young woman's face or appearance, and then slurringly blurt out "Gotta girlfriend. But stick around, you may look better as the night goes on." And it's Hormones = 1, Sincerity and Quirky Appeal = 0. Again.

Once a baby is kickin' it around inside mommy, they start leaving their "digital footprint," even before they're born. A recent survey by a security company found that one in four unborn babies have their ultrasound images uploaded by trippy expectant parents. And by six months, the average baby already has an Internet presence through uploaded photos, mainly to parents' social networking accounts. (Good point, parents, to wait 'til the kid is born before spreading around what you perceive to be cute photos. Ultrasound images, all grainy, splotchy black and white, could be picturing a unborn mongoose for all details the casual viewer can discern.)

Once your little gestated bump is born, and has advanced beyond all-you-can-see-is-a-bald-head-and-screaming-mouth stage, Internet entrepreneurs start to take notice. There's money to be made in them there drooling faces! You can start your baby's own Web site, fleshed out with articles about your family ancestry and the city/state/country baby was born in. And throw in lots of updated photos. It's especially helpful to always identify siblings, to explain who that older child is in one photo, smiling gleefully while sitting on an unhappy baby. Or why your gurgling baby has a handful of hair in a chubby fist, as a screaming mystery child is seen fleeing the shot.

Add an e-mail account, and your drooling, blubbery new life doesn't just have a digital footprint, they've got a bonafide "digital impact." Get your little Prince or Princess a Social Security number, and you too can get bumped off your next airline flight, because your baby shares a name with 10 other known (and presumably grown) terrorists. And don't get enraged to the point of uttering terrorist threats when dealing with a governmental maze, while trying to explain that, No!, your 18-month-old *cannot* be drafted or perform jury duty.

Graphics geeks can even take a photo of your baby and concoct a rather strange "your dancing baby" animated video, as your personal entry into that bizarre cultural phenomenon. (Never mind that later your "baby," upon watching this as an appalled middle-schooler, will quickly destroy the original and all known copies. All the while wondering what virtual-zombies possessed their parents to pay good money for such an abomination, while they were totally defenseless with droopy diapers and no teeth.)

And, when you throw controversy into the mix, you know that a subpopulation has finally "arrived" into the global consciousness. People have already invented Internet-etiquette-for-babies poems, with dubious advice intoning to not worry about the validity of what you post, just post it 30 times a day to make sure you get noticed. And stick to the tried-and-true by voting-down every new band, but tweet thumbs-up for every emerging celebute or boy singing group. (At least until you can get a clear photo, and mingle-faces for your "virtual baby.")

All words to live by for edgy Generations X and Y, I suppose. Their coming of age wasn't during a global war, dust bowl depression or anything-goes hippy era. Instead, their "molding experiences" involve conundrums like: How many phone apps are too many? Should they tell someone their neighbor must be a major hacker or spy? Since the lights all over the neighborhood flicker at exactly 8 p.m. every night, when the neighbor's roof opens up and a laser comm-beam blasts out to an overhead satellite?

Or can their aging Xbox take another upgrade of Maniacal Future Warrior 10? Can they safely transfer their 40,000 PC/Internet games and scores when they upgrade to a new computer? (Such a drag to have to lose their King of the Universe scores and status, after all. Just when the RomanianRuinator and AussieAx are closing in on their top scores.)

All while Generation Z is presumably still crawling around on the floor, totally unaware of those embarrassing ultrasound and dancing-baby videos circling the globe every nanosecond. Their coming-of-age stories will probably include things like: Should I join a participatory sports team in orbit? Should I remove my embedded GPS chip when I start college, and want to party-hardy? Will it emphasize my "initiative and creativity" on my hob resume if I admit I used to be a virtual-spy (which used to be called a "hacker"), for snatch-and-go raids into foreign corporations' computer networks?

Today there is even controversy over the sale of infant learning DVDs being advertised on children's TV channels. The argument being that babies who can't even focus on their toes yet shouldn't be plunked before TVs to watch educational videos. Although I guess videos of big purple dinosaurs, muppets and tours of Kiddie Theme Parks are OK. (And for cranky babies, everyone knows that CSPAN can put anyone to sleep.)

Strange but colorful plastic "playtime computers" now count as toys. And major New York City toy stores report that "electronics" are the hottest selling Christmas toys anymore. (As well as repeated requests for "Anything NOT made in China.")

By age three, kids have discovered "the joys of real computing," and can point-and-click with the best of them. They know that a "mouse" is really an un-alive black plastic pod that magically moves an arrow around on a computer screen. And they can even play toddler-type computer games involving cutesy animated animals, where a furry mouse can walk upright and talk and is called a "rat." (Which is not to be confused with an actual person their angry Daddy calls a "rat," amid a volley of colorful adjectives baby won't understand until s/he hits puberty.)

Even at this tender age, children love the mystique of computers. I watched my three-year-old nephew one time, hammering keys with both hands like a pro. Only he wasn't the least bit interested in watching the screen. Must have been that emerging-testosterone mentality of hit-it-until-something-happens, so beloved of little boys with sticks, rocks and pet alligators.

When my nephew finally scampered off to a new activity, I examined the monitor. Sure enough, my nephew's key-pounding had resulted in an opening screen now filled with nearly microscopic icons. It was worth it though, to hear my frustrated brother-in-law calling tech support, and starting out "Uh, hi. My three-year-old was playing on my computer, and now all my icons just look like dots ..."

I'm sure raising kids with computers is now so commonplace, it's taken for granted that Junior will need his own laptop by age five. So you can throw away all the flash-cards, kiddie board games (with most of the pieces missing, anyway), and pen-and-paper games like tic-tac-toe. Just turn on your computer, and let Junior do his thing.

Although some adult supervision is highly recommended. Since it may take awhile to check your e-mails if the keys are stuck together, the monitor smudged with peanut butter, or your opening screen icons are all the size of breath mints.

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EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher

“Turn Your Windows PC Into a Backup Machine” by Jack Dunning



If you want to set up your own personal backup service in Windows, it's not as difficult as you may think. Plus, you can do it at no extra cost.

If you want to set up your own personal backup service in Windows, it's not as difficult as you may think. Plus, you can do it at no extra cost. Once set up, you can travel anywhere in the world and whenever you hook up to the Internet, your computer files are being backed up. All you need is two computers, file synchronization software and a Virtual Private Network (VPN).

If you own the Business or Professional version or above of Windows 7 or Vista, then you already have sync software that will work over a network or VPN in the Windows Sync Center. (See Windows Tips and Tricks: "Automatic Backups over a Network" and Windows Tips and Tricks: "Syncing in Windows 7 Professional Libraries.") However, even if you don't have the network syncing capability in your version of Windows, you can obtain a free copy of Sync Toy, which can turn one of your computers into a backup machine.

The way the backup system works is by using the sync software on the host backup computer to make copies of the files on the target computer being backed up. On the host machine, the drives/folders on the target computer are first mapped as if they were local drives. Mapping a network drive makes the drive appear as if it is an additional hard drive on the host. Then the sync software is set up to make useful copies of the target files. (In sync programs, those copies will be "available offline" for use—even when there is no connection between the computers. Then when the computers are reconnected, the files will sync—update—again.) If you want the automatic backup available at all times, you will need to leave the host computer running (no sleeping or hibernating) and attached to an active Internet connection.

To create a backup system over the Internet, you will need to put the two computers on a VPN. You could get a VPN router with a fixed IP address (the IP comes from your Internet provider), but there are easier, cheaper ways. For personal use, you can get a free account with LogMeIn Hamachi (secure.logmein.com/products/hamachi2/). This will allow you to network with a VPN for up to 16 computers over the Internet. (A VPN network will also allow you to remote control any of your Windows computers with the Business or Professional version, or above, of Windows by using Remote Desktop.)

If you've set up your VPN and mapped the appropriate drives, then it's necessary to sync the folders that you want to back up. This causes the host computer to update the copies of the files every time it detects changes. (Depending upon the sync software, you may need to prompt the syncing process, although you should be able to set it up to continually sync whenever the files are available online.) Then when both computers are online, your files will automatically back up.

I use this arrangement as one form of backup, but I've also found it convenient to carry one of those small USB hard drives with me on trips. Then I can be set up to automatically work the built-in backup features in all versions of Windows. This may be one reason why I've never bothered with the online backup services. I may regret that one day.

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Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

“Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns.” by ComputerEdge Staff

"Twitter Conversion," "Off the Grid, Cleaning Up after M\$," "Reader with no DSL Available," "Remember, the Internet Is a Tool," "Antivirus Protection"

Twitter Conversion

[Regarding Michael J. Ross's October 22 article, "Twitter Pros and Cons":]

Having never subscribed to Twittering, I can for the first time appreciate the potential of this method of communication I have only heard of. The cogent and well-written article delineating the pros and cons has convinced me to commence "twittering." Thank you!

-John Alan Ross, Spokane

Off the Grid, Cleaning Up after M\$

[Regarding the October 22 Digital Dave column:]

The "in" thing in data centers is to create a **DC only** power grid to run the new blade-based systems. Centralized UPS and control become easier that way. Your 12VDC and 5VDC lines are hardwired to the backplanes, much like the old mainframes—back to the future, except **each computer** is a plug-in PCB and you swap out the whole computer when you change a board. Storage area networks take care of the files.

On the Microsoft (M\$) sloppiness when it comes to cleanup: They are not alone in keeping house.

I run CCleaner after any software upgrade **and** now on a daily basis thanks to the **bloatware** that has taken over many useful apps. I wouldn't upgrade many apps, except **other** apps become dependent on them (M\$.NET is a very good example of this problem.

-Art Blackwell, Evergreen, CO

Reader with no DSL Available

[Regarding the October 15 Digital Dave column:]

I was able to get excellent Internet speeds using my Verizon 3G connection in the Grass Valley area (actually, Penn Valley) in Northern California—faster than my DSL is at home in San Diego. I got around 1.5MB download speeds using an Android phone and the free app EasyTether, so I didn't have to pay anything in addition to what I'm already paying for the cell phone and data plan.

-Steve Powell, San Diego, CA

Remember, the Internet Is a Tool

[Regarding the October 22 EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher column:]

Humans are social animals. However many (like myself and some others) wonder why many people become the tools (pun intended).

The original idea that created the backbone ARPANET was strictly for moving data. RS232 and a station wagon of mag tapes shuttling across country wasn't cutting it for the DOD, us (Cray) and the different nuke labs.

The earliest social networking involved tests of the links. Face it, you get bored sitting in front of an ASR 33 all day.

Networking (both senses of the word) have evolved to the point of seeing the *Twits* that use *Twitter these days*. Twitter is an example of information overload, IMHO.

I did the former; when we got bored, we tried to log in to as many machines (Cray and others) as we could to get a round robin session started.

Nowadays, it seems like the "in thing" is to have the same connectivity on as many sites as possible.

I have accounts on some sites. Some professional sites are used as tools, Monster and LinkedIn come to mind.

The rest have seen very limited information and use; they have not been very professional in how they handle the personal information, IMHO.

If a tool is useful, you use it more often. But always remember, *it is only a tool*, not your whole life.

-Art, Evergreen, CO

I'm still listening.

"The pressure of coming up with something relevant for every message was unbearable." That's why you were/are the only one I allowed to access my 20-cent-per-message SMS. Apparently you are the only one who felt such pressure. You don't have to post every week; just let us know when something really big happens in tech. But I would not suggest that anyone follow me, as I'm more of an information sink rather than source.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

Antivirus Protection

[Regarding Pete Choppin's October 29 article, "Antivirus: Why Buy When Its Free?":]

Hey Pete, you missed possibly the best *free* antivirus app available to Windows Users, Microsoft Security Essentials.

-Steve, Escondido

Recently started using Avast and I like it so far (complemented with other programs that clean up). We had to do some experimenting after having the problem that was discussed with Digital Dave where the computer bogged down for at least a half hour before it would work properly. After I uninstalled AVG, the problem was gone. So I'm a little leery of AVG!

-Sandy, San Diego

Thank you for this article. I am going to download one of these programs to my PC. Although I always worry about these programs and their ability to install other features onto your computer without you knowing it. Does this happen, and if so, how would I know?

-Harry, Victorville, Calif

I had the free AVG antivirus software on my laptop for some time. I noticed that some Web sites would frequently be not found. Had two of these Web sites not been Microsoft and Google, I might have just dismissed this as being very busy. When I tried to go to the Web sites on my desktop, they opened immediately. After I removed AVG, this problem went away. As I was also using Internet Explorer on both computers, I didn't consider it to be part of the problem. Since then, I have stayed away from AVG and am using Avast. I hope they have fixed this issue, but just in case...

-Mike Walker

The 'Rising Free Antivirus' has kept my home PC remarkably clean for two years. Can be set to update on its own nightly.

-Frank J., San Diego, CA

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

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ComputerEdge Magazine, P.O. Box 83086, San Diego, CA 92138. (858) 573-0315