

ComputerEdge™ Online — 12/24/10



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Digital Dave

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

A reader's CD and DVD drives have inexplicably stopped working. Could corrupted drivers be the culprit?; more on the etiquette of forwarding e-mails; when transferring digital documents to his e-reader, a user finds himself locked out.

Dear Digital Dave,

I have a three-year-old Dell XPS 420, Intel Duo Core, 32-bit, running Vista Home Premium. Several weeks ago the two CD drives (one a CD-RW/DVD-ROM drive, the other an Optiarc DVD-RW drive) stopped working. The BIOS recognized them as working and Device Manager could see them, but showed an error code: "This device cannot start (error code 10)." I replaced the SATA cables; still no luck. I buckled and bought a new HP multifunction DVD-CD 1270t writer and installed it in place of the CD-RW/DVD-ROM drive. At first it showed the same error code, then started working. One week later it slipped back into not starting.

It seems like there might be a conflict somewhere, but I don't remember adding any software or making hardware changes before they stopped working. I can't go on without a disk drive. How can I get these drives working? Upgrade the OS? Should I just buy an external USB drive and forget about it?

*Jackson B.
Coronado, CA*

Dear Jackson,

Rather than buying a new drive, the first thing you should have done is check online with Microsoft Support. Apparently this CD/DVD drive issue is not an uncommon problem, although I haven't encountered it myself. There used to be a specific article (kb314060) that addressed the steps required to resolve the problem, which seems to be related to corrupted drivers (*support.microsoft.com/mats/cd_dvd_drive_problems*). While the article is no longer available, the steps have been incorporated into Microsoft Fixit (*support.microsoft.com/fixit*).

Rather than force users to navigate numerous (sometimes cryptic) troubleshooting steps found in the articles, Microsoft is offering more automated solutions through Microsoft Fixit. If you find your problem in the list, it is certainly worth a shot. The alternative is to search the Web and look for the specific error. I'm guessing the discontinued Microsoft article was similar to this About.com solution (*pcsupport.about.com/od/findbyerrormessage/a/code-10-error.htm*).

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I am enrolled in an online MBA course that has digital books in PDF format. I download them to my computer, then type in a user name and password to unlock and read them. I would love to transfer them to my e-reader, which also does PDF and ePub documents. I have tried downloading, unlocking and then transferring to the e-reader; however, upon opening it on the e-reader, it is locked again. Is there a way to unlock it on the computer and then move it, unlocked, to the e-reader for reading?

*John Murphy
New Town, ND*

Dear John,

It is perfectly reasonable (and legal) for you to want to read your PDF on more than one device. It sounds like the password doesn't work when you transfer the document to the e-reader. (Otherwise, I don't see a problem.) If this is the case, then you will need to remove the password from the PDF. Although I've never done it myself, it seems to be fairly easy to do. There are numerous programs listed at CNET for unlocking PDFs (download.cnet.com/1770-20_4-0.html?query=pdf+unlocker&searchtype=downloads). You should read the user reviews before you download one. There may be other programs that *ComputerEdge* readers have found useful. There is also a program called Free PDF Unlocker that is commonly mentioned on the Web, although I didn't locate it at CNET, which makes me a little more cautious.

If the problem is that you want to convert the PDF to another e-book format, then calibre (calibre-ebook.com/) seems to be the product to use. This may need to be part of your solution, but converting PDFs to other formats does not always go smoothly due to the differences in how PDF files and e-book files are created and laid out.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

What Wayne from Escondido was asking about regarding the dangers from forwarding e-mails without cleaning them up first was the following: When we receive those e-mails (some funny and interesting) that get forwarded around the country, they sometimes still have many people's e-mail addresses on them as well as old virus scan results at the bottom. I always "clean them up" before resending those that I choose to send. I have asked a couple of friends to do the same, so that my name will not appear forever around the country (or world), but often they do not do it! That's my pet peeve, and it could be dangerous (personally or politically with the government getting more into people's lives).

*Nancy
Chula Vista*

Dear Nancy,

I guess that was not the way I interpreted the question. Since I have no sense of humor (it has been surgically removed), I never forward the inane jokes and cartoons that some people are so

fond of inflicting on others. Therefore this is not a problem for me. However, it is important to note that the inclusion of previous e-mails and addresses is vital to the *proper* use of e-mail forwarding.

The original purpose for e-mail forwarding was to both relay information and to let people know who else had seen it. In business, this is commonly used to share information with people who have a need to know. The problem is that the Forward button has become the lazy person's method for sharing useless bits of chaff (and annoying people that they wrongly suppose are their friends).

You are absolutely right. If people are going to e-mail something of a questionable value that they somehow find amusing (supposing that others will also find it amusing), then they should have the courtesy to copy only the germane portion, thus removing the e-mail addresses of any of the previous culprits, and create a new e-mail, thereby claiming sole responsibility for the silly missive. (It's also a good idea even if the chain e-mail has a serious purpose, such as a warning about a particular new computer virus.) It is a little more work (which many people will never do), but it is both better manners and safer.

Digital Dave

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Comparing Apples and Oranges

“Is the iPad turning the computer world on its head?” by Jack Dunning

Comparing the iPad tablet with desktop and laptop computers creates a false choice. They are two different animals foraging in different territories. They don't threaten each other, but rather complement each other.

I've never been a fan of netbook computers. They are just too small for me. People are not planning to change the size of their fingers to accommodate tiny keyboards. I can see special situations where they may be useful, such as those laid out by James Hartnett in this issue of *ComputerEdge*, but I always felt that the entire concept was a flash in the pan that would eventually burn out. For that reason, I give very little credit to the iPad for the seeming impending death of the netbook. (Actually, if there are many people who are in love with their netbooks, I would like to hear about it. I want to give credit where credit is due.) The netbook has never replaced the laptop, nor will the iPad replace the laptop.



I must give the Apple iPad a great deal of credit, but I don't view it as a desktop or laptop killer. Apple has taken a languishing market, tablet computers, and made it vibrant through good technology and excellent marketing. There have been a huge number of iPads sold since its introduction, and many more will sell in the coming years—although probably not as many as



“I told you that the iPad was superior. It flies much farther than a netbook computer.”

some market watchers are predicting.

While there are a number of unique iPad applications being demonstrated in many areas (e.g., medicine, education, art, music), studies show that the vast majority of iPad owners are using them for browsing the Internet or reading e-books. This

makes sense, as they are light and portable while being large enough to read on. (The small size of smartphone screens is one reason why those handheld device will not likely become a standard for Web browsing or watching video. It is possible to do, but who wants to deal with the tiny screen when you don't need to?) Most iPads are not being used in a capacity that would replace a standard computer, unless that computer were only used for Web browsing. The iPad is certainly superior to the computer as an e-book reader.

The use of tablet computers is hardly new in business. Specially designed tablets have been used for years, (such as for UPS and Federal Express). It may be that businesses will decide to dump their special-purpose tablets in favor of the iPad or other Android-type tablets (when they eventually build an Android tablet that people want), but that type of changeover will take years. I acknowledge that there are many field-type applications for an iPad-like tablet and expect that we will see much more of it. However, these are not applications which will replace the standard desktop or laptop computer. There are too many business functions that require full computer capabilities—a real keyboard with tactile feel. The fact that you can get the iPad to do some particular task does not make it the ideal platform for that task. The iPad is growing into a new market aimed at utilizing its unique characteristics, not replacing the old computer market—except where there may be substantial overlap.

Another outcome of the iPad studies is that the vast majority of buyers are men who make more than \$100,000 a year. This indicates that many of these buyers may regard their purchase as a lark or even a man-toy in the same category as a 3-D DVD player. The sales of the iPad have been incredible, but if the level of predicted future sales comes to fruition, then almost everyone in the United States will own an iPad within the next five years. The demographics, while supporting strong sales, do not suggest the overwhelming forecasts being offered by many.

I would guess that most people who own a netbook computer use it primarily for Web browsing and e-mail. It certainly would not make the best e-book reader. The netbook's strongest features are its diminutive size and dirt-cheap price. It is easy to take with you for a few of those necessary tasks, but it was never a replacement for the desktop or the laptop computer. (Whereas laptops have been regularly replacing desktop computers over the last decade even in stationary—non-travel—situations.) It could be that the iPad is replacing the niche of the netbook, but it wasn't much of a role. The iPad certainly looks more suited for those tasks being performed by netbooks although, as I have expressed, the netbook has not been on a good road ever since cell phone companies stopped giving them away.

Comparing the iPad tablet with desktop and laptop computers creates a false choice. They are two different animals foraging in different territories. They don't threaten each other. If anything, tablet computers, such as the iPad, will become complements to our other computers for when

we want to relax on the sofa or need to do specific tasks in a travel mode.

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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Years of Yumminess: How Has the Asus Eee Worked in the Field?

“The Eee is a valued travel computer and backup desktop machine.” by James Hartnett

Yum-yum, the author's Asus Eee Linux-powered netbook, has been a constant computer companion for the last 20 months, working as a diligent and pleasant travel companion and backup desktop machine.

Back in April 2008, I wrote a review of the Asus Eee mini-laptop in *ComputerEdge*, "My Tiny Little Linux Computer," (webserver.computoredge.com/online.mvc?zone=SD&issue=2617&article=cover) one of the first netbooks to appear on the market.

Since ditching my previous 17-pound monster laptop, the Eee has been my workhorse laptop and, for many months, my main desktop machine. Though I have run up against its limitations many times, I am still filled with admiration for this wonderful little computer.

Every computer needs a name, and I always name mine after Gilbert and Sullivan characters. The name for this little beauty popped into my head the moment I saw it: Yum-yum, from the Mikado ("three little girls from school are we..."). Yum-yum has been my constant computer companion for the last 20 months, and I've never liked a computer more.

The Keyboard, Touchpad and Screen

The Eee is tiny. The keyboard is so small that it almost seems impossible to type on it, and it does take a little getting used to. But with a bit of practice, I can type almost as quickly on the tiny keyboard as I can on a full-sized one. A full-sized keyboard plugged into a USB port makes for smoother input, but the built-in keyboard is more than good enough when traveling.

The same cannot, unfortunately, be said for the touchpad. From the first day it seemed very hard to use, and it has seemed to degrade over time. Now, even though it has been very lightly used (because it is so annoyingly difficult), it seems to be completely non-functional. On one trip, finding that I had left my USB mouse at home, I had to go out and buy one just to use the computer to check e-mail.

The 7-inch screen (with 800 x 480 resolution) is as tiny as the keyboard. It has never failed and is crisp, with bright colors. I can read it even in very bright conditions with ease. But the screen is far too small to fully show even a small Web page or document. By using a very small font, I can use the screen for editing simple documents, or writing source code, but it is too small for spreadsheets and complex documents to have enough real estate to be workable. It works great for e-mail, but good Web browsing demands a screen big enough to show a full Web page at once.

The VGA port allows an external monitor to be used, and higher resolutions are available. With an external monitor, keyboard and mouse, the Eee makes a fine desktop solution.

The Operating System, Easy and Advanced Modes

The operating system on the Eee (Xandros) is based on Ubuntu Linux, but includes a special "Easy" mode graphical interface. The Easy mode presents the Eee as a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) rather than as a fully functional Linux workstation. The advanced mode gives you an X Window-based graphical interface, as is usual on Linux computers.

The Easy mode does have the advantage of simplicity. Even someone completely unfamiliar with computers can find their way around this interface—it is more intuitive than most cell phone handset interfaces. My children, even as young as 7, could instantly use the easy interface without assistance. (And they loved the Planet Penguin Racer game that came installed.)

Since you can switch from Advanced to Easy with a menu selection, the best solution is to make the advanced interface the default one, but switch to the easy interface whenever loaning the device to someone else—for example, when my kids wanted to play games on an airplane.

Memory Matters

The Eee I bought came with only half a gigabyte of memory. This was very limiting, so I threw a 2GB RAM chip in the back of the system. This allowed the installed operating system to access 1GB of RAM, but the second extra gigabyte was hidden due to some limitation in the setup of the Eee.

For the tasks I perform, one gigabyte is plenty—I never run out of RAM, and slow performance is usually due to the network being slow, because so much of what I do on the Eee is network-based. With Google Docs taking over the role of office software, a network connection is as important as a keyboard.

Another serious memory consideration is that about half of the already meager 4GB onboard storage is taken up by an original boot image of all the Eee software distributed with the machine. This is a complete copy of the operating system and all programs distributed with the Eee.

The motivation for this rather shocking waste of space (remember, there is no disk drive) is to provide the capability to hit a hardware reset button, and have the Eee return to "just-shipped" state. This is common in Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), and the Eee was initially positioned as a sort of super-PDA.

Wireless Champion

The built-in Atheros wireless card in the Eee is top-notch. It consistently works better than any other wireless system I've encountered. In marginal circumstances, when other machines experience intermittent or slow performance, Yum-yum has no problem.

The Little Processor that Could

The 900MHz Intel Celeron M processor is part of a family of processors not known for speed or performance. In fact, the market has moved on beyond the Celeron, and that's a good thing. But the use of Linux instead of Windows makes all the difference. The Celeron is a fine processor, it's just that Windows requires 80 percent of it just to keep from crashing. Linux uses only a small percentage of the CPU cycles, leaving the rest for me, and it seems to be plenty.

As a test, I have used Yum-yum to build complex software packages that required lots of processor time. Although it is slower than my desktop powerhouse, it is not painfully slow. Even for (Linux-based) software development, I think the Eee is quite workable, with faster compiles than would be seen in most programmer workstations only a decade ago.

Mini-SD and USB to the Rescue

The mini-SD cards are a wonder. Even in Star Trek, the memory cubes used by Spock were big and clumsy compared to the mini-SD cards. (Which come in an even smaller size for cameras!) Although the solid-state hard drive of the Asus Eee is severely limited, one 2GB microSD card, always left in the slot, has served as an alternate hard drive, as have USB data sticks.

The USB interface is one of the wonders of the computer age. The engineering feat of having so many different devices communicate was not gained without much hard work, late nights and lost recreational opportunities for hundreds of engineers. (They probably would have just stayed home to watch Star Trek anyway.)

The magic of USB is well-served with a netbook like Yum-yum. The Eee serves as a great portable workstation for anyone with a passion for photography, videography, electronics and anything that can benefit from being hooked up to a computer. With its keyboard, screen and ability to run serious software packages, the Eee is a terrific computer for students.

Superb Travel Computer

I have never had a better travel computer. I will never go back to full-sized laptops, any more than I would go back to carrying around a slide rule (and those didn't weigh 15 pounds, like my old laptop). There is simply no substitute for the light weight and small size of the Asus Eee.

These days, when traveling, a computer with Wi-Fi is more than a luxury. Airline tickets, tourist information, train and bus schedules and hotel reservations can all best be dealt with online. Wi-Fi is now a standard feature in business hotels throughout North America and Europe, and having a computer can mean the difference between a pleasant and interesting trip, and one of those travel stories that are only funny when you tell them later.

Since I have owned it, I have not traveled without Yum-yum. She has been dropped (a few times), but still gets the job done. On my next trip, Yum-yum will be in my carry-on bag. And crammed into the economy section with me, this is one place where this machine's diminutive size is most appreciated: It even fits quite comfortably on the airline tray table, with room for the mouse and a cup of coffee.

Desktop Stand-In

Although Yum-yum is generally my travel PC, there was a little problem with my desktop system this summer (caused by me swapping about the hardware). For about eight weeks, my little Yum-yum was all that stood between me and complete absence of any working computer. I almost fell back to the technology of cavemen.

Fortunately for the continence of civilization, little Yum-yum was there to fill in for my broken desktop system. With a nice monitor, keyboard and mouse the Asus Eee put on a grown-up face,

and worked just like a top-of-the-line Linux workstation. Sure, my compiles were slower, but the performance for normal personal computer functions, such as word processing, simple spreadsheets and Web browsing, was indistinguishable from my desktop. Though not as fast as my four-core, 64-bit desktop processor, the Asus Eee was more than fast enough to function as a viable desktop machine for all but the most demanding of users.

Signs of Old Age and Hard Usage

Yum-yum has not come through all this hard use unscathed. The touchpad is, for all intents and purposes, broken. It controls the cursor, but so poorly that I defy anyone to come up with the patience to use it to edit a word processing document, or even navigate around the Web. However the touchpad can be ignored as long as I can find (or remember to bring) a USB mouse.

More seriously, two of the three USB ports are experiencing intermittent problems. When I plug the mouse into those ports, sometimes it works, sometimes not. Probably what has happened is that the frequent use of these ports has broken the solder that holds them to the motherboard inside the computer. When the connector is pressed down, it holds the solder joint together, and the USB port works, but when I let go, the connection sometimes opens, and the port stops working. This is a serious problem, since this machine is heavily reliant on the USB ports. To preserve the existing USB port, I may switch to an old-fashioned serial mouse, from the days before USB. This will allow me to use the serial port on the back of the machine for my mouse.

No More Linux Eees

Alas, I will not be able to replace my Eee with another Asus netbook. Asus has gone to Windows.

I cannot conceive of anything sillier than carrying enough processing power for Windows when all I need can be accomplished quite handily with a fraction of the processor and memory power on Linux. And I have a dislike of the gratuitous changes that Windows users somehow put up with. Why should I learn a new way of doing things every time a new version of Windows comes out?

So I will have to find a Linux netbook, or go back to the old-fashioned method of paying for Windows, only to install Linux over it the first chance I get. But that's wasteful (of money and time). One thing is for sure—I am not going back to the old-fashioned giant laptops of yesteryear. Anything heavier than three pounds is too heavy for me to carry!

Until Yum-yum suffers more hardware damage, it will remain my valued travel computer and backup desktop machine.

James is a writer and software developer who has been with the free software movement from the beginning. He lives, writes, and programs in sunny Colorado.

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

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“Netbooks vs. the iPad” by Wally Wang

You can choose a tiny, cheap netbook or the more exciting world of the iPad, for which people from different backgrounds are constantly finding new uses every day. Also, Word Lens is the next iPhone "killer app"; the ongoing saga of Flash; turn your own idea into a successful app by studying what works; and tips on downloading and installing updates.

The biggest advantage netbooks have is their low price (around \$300). In return for a cheap computer, you get a tiny screen, cramped keyboard, and either Windows XP or Windows 7 Starter Edition. If you just want a light computer to do occasional tasks and want to use something familiar rather than learn something new, then a netbook may be perfectly fine.

On the other hand, if you're smart, you'll also consider all your options, and that includes the iPad and MacBook Air. The cheapest iPad is \$499 and the cheapest MacBook Air is \$999, so if you're shopping solely on price, you can stop reading right now and go out and get yourself a netbook.

If you're still reading, you might want to look at the iPad because tablet computers are the wave of the future (www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art_aid=141463).

According to eMarketer, "Tablet computers are poised to transform the marketplace for personal computers and consumer electronics." Estimated worldwide sales of tablet computers are projected to exceed 140 million units by the end of 2012. That's a combined total of 15.7 million devices sold in 2010, plus a projected 43.6 million in 2011 and another 81.3 million in 2012.

Of course, when analysts talk about tablet computers, they're basically talking about the iPad since there are no credible rivals at the moment. By the time Research in Motion comes out with its PlayBook and Hewlett-Packard comes out with its Slate PC running webOS, and everyone else comes out with Android tablets, they'll all cost nearly as much, or even more, than the iPad while offering a smaller screen (seven inches vs. 9.7 inches for the iPad) along with fewer available apps to extend the usefulness of your device.

If you're waiting for a tablet running Windows, you might recall Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's CEO, boasting (www.pcworld.com/article/206962/ballmer_promises_windows_tablets_by_christmas.html) in October that, "You'll see new slates with Windows on them. You'll see them this Christmas." Beyond Hewlett-Packard's feeble marketing of its HP Slate 500 (h30406.www3.hp.com/campaigns/2010/promo/HPSL/index.php), good luck finding a Windows tablet for Christmas this year.

Essentially a rival tablet device will cost you more (www.electronista.com/articles/10/12/18/viewsonic.gtablet.pulled.from.staples/) and give you less. Gartner analysts predict the glut of tablet rivals will simply confuse consumers (blogs.gartner.com/nick_jones/2010/12/16/too-many-tablets-too-few-buyers/) with less compelling products.

What makes the iPad so compelling is partly what makes netbooks so compelling. Grab a netbook and you can run any Windows program (although not always as fast as you might like). People don't necessarily want a netbook as much as they want to run Windows programs on a device that doesn't cost a lot and weigh too much.

Similarly, the iPad has an amazing amount of apps that allow you to do things in a truly portable device that you can take and use almost anywhere. The North Point iBand in Georgia used a variety of musical instrument apps to play Christmas Carols for their church assembly using nothing but iPhones and iPads (www.thestar.com/news/world/article/907371—video-christmas-songs-played-entirely-on-iphones-and-ipads).

You can watch a YouTube video of their performance and see for yourself how to make music on an iPad and iPhone (www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9XNfWNooz4).

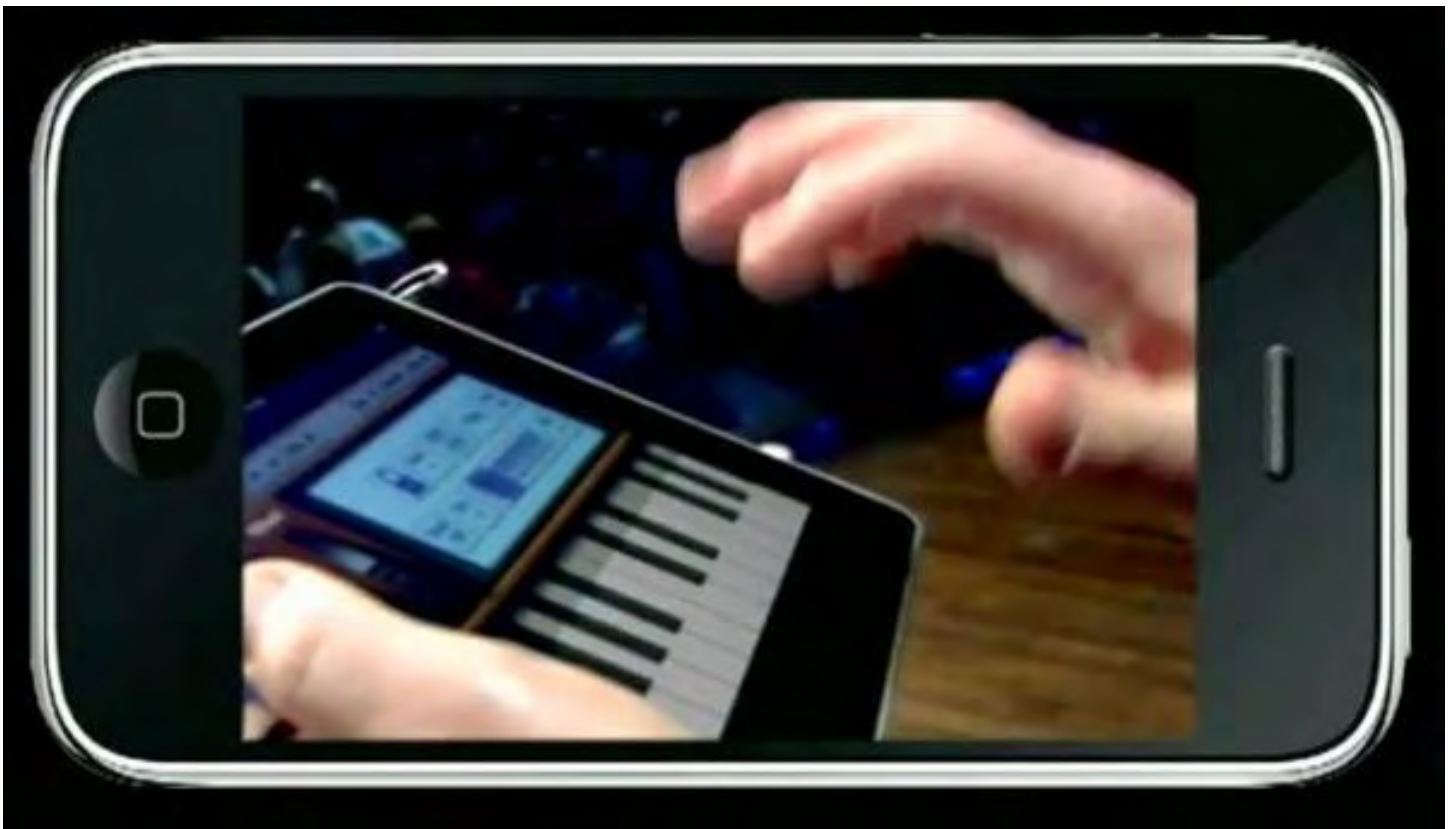


Figure 1. With the right app, you can turn your iPad into a musical instrument.

Investment managers on Wall Street are using iPads to replace bulky briefcases (www.wallstreetandtech.com/trading-technology/228800022) filled with papers. Anthony Mayo, chief technology officer and managing director of asset management technology at Dreyfus, said, "The primary benefit of the iPad is to enhance the sales experience for both the sales personnel and their clients. It eliminates the need for all of this paper-based dependency, and you are able to

have a more engaging conversation."

Even small businesses, such as a winery, have found a practical use for an iPad (www.thestreet.com/story/10947821/1/apples-ipad-luring-small-businesses.html). "Five years ago you'd go in with pictures in a book, flyers and magazines—everything was done with paper," said Lisa Mattson, Jordan Winery's director of communications. "Now we're at a point where we can have this really cool dynamic presentation that people can move with their fingers, and see beautiful imagery that goes way beyond the two-dimensional world."

Jordan's winemakers also use the iPad to remotely monitor quality control and the temperature of its wine tanks. The company even plans to transition the design of its fermentation tank maps from Macs to the iPad sometime next year.

Children in Los Gatos are using iPads (www.santacruzsentinel.com/nationalbreaking/ci_16858253) to learn history and practice Spanish and Mandarin lessons. Students record their voices speaking a foreign language and then e-mail that audio clip to their teacher, who critiques their pronunciation.

Every use for an iPad could probably be duplicated on a netbook, but not as easily, which is like saying every possible calculation that a spreadsheet can do can also be duplicated by an abacus (and an abacus is even cheaper to buy than a netbook and a spreadsheet program). With so many people finding unique, diverse uses for an iPad, you can go with a tiny, cheap netbook or the more exciting world of the iPad where people from different backgrounds are constantly finding new uses for the iPad every day.

For those who insist that they need a real laptop to do their work, take a look at the MacBook Air for \$999. Beyond its sturdy and aesthetically pleasing aluminum construction, the MacBook Air is light (2.4 pounds for the 11-inch model), small (11.8-inches wide and 7.56-inches for the 11-inch model), and fully capable of running both Mac OS X and Windows 7.

Toss in a program like Parallels or Fusion and you'll be able to run Windows simultaneously with Mac OS X, giving you access to the software libraries of both Windows and Mac, which no netbook can offer.

With a netbook you can spend a little money and get a little functionality, which may be all you really want. With an iPad or MacBook Air, you can spend a lot more money and get a lot more versatility and features. Given the choice between a little or a lot, which option do you think will prepare you for the long-term future?

For another point of view on choosing a netbook or an iPad, visit ZDNet, which has even made a mock Time Magazine cover and chosen the iPad as the technology of the year (www.zdnet.com/blog/perlow/technology-of-the-year-apples-ipad/15230).



Figure 2. ZDNet has declared the iPad as the technology product of the year.

"When the iPad was first introduced to the public in late January," ZDNet reminds everyone, "there was immediate derision of the product by naysayers that felt that it was nothing more than an oversized iPhone or iPod Touch (www.businessinsider.com/apple-ipad-yawn-2010-1). The mainstream technology press questioned (www.pcworld.com/article/187888/no_second_coming_apples_ipad_just_a_big_ipod_touch.html) whether or not the product would even catch on.

"They were proven wrong. Very. Very. Very. Wrong."

So many vocal critics cited numerous reasons why the iPad would fail, yet these same vocal critics have suddenly lost their voices today. Perhaps if one of these once-vocal critics could say something, they might help clarify whether a netbook is better than an iPad or vice versa.

The Missing Killer App

The main reason anyone ever chose a particular computer was not because of its features, but because they wanted to run a killer app that they couldn't run on any other machine. In the early days, people bought Apple II computers so they could run VisiCalc, the world's first spreadsheet.

Later, people rushed to the world of MS-DOS so they could run the next killer app, Lotus 1-2-3, a spreadsheet that extended the features of VisiCalc. When Microsoft introduced Windows, people rushed to use Windows so they could use Excel, a major improvement over Lotus 1-2-3.

One of the earlier killer apps for the Macintosh was PageMaker, which allowed desktop publishing. Another killer app was HyperCard, which allowed novices to create their own simple programs. A lesser killer app was iPhoto, which made storing and organizing digital photographs popular on a computer.

Today, killer apps for the Macintosh include Parallels and Fusion, which give you the ability to run another operating system, such as Windows, on a Macintosh nearly as fast as running Windows on a dedicated computer while running Mac OS X at the same time. To attract consumers, Apple introduced another killer app, the iLife suite, which includes programs like GarageBand and iMovie. If you're a musician, GarageBand can help you play and record music easily. If you're an amateur director, iMovie can help you edit your home made movies.

Now ask yourself, what's the killer app that drives people to want to use Windows 7? Go one step further and ask yourself, what's the killer app that drives people to want to use a netbook?

While you're busy searching for an answer to those questions, take a look at this possible killer app for the iPhone, Word Lens, which lets you take a picture of an image that contains text in a foreign language and displays the translation in real-time (techcrunch.com/2010/12/16/world-lens-translates-words-inside-of-images-yes-really/#disqus_thread).



Figure 3. Word Lens translates images in real-time.

Word Lens currently works with only a limited number of languages, but the company plans on releasing additional language packs in the future. The idea of pointing your iPhone at a foreign language and seeing the English translation (or vice versa) can help everyone deal with so many different languages surrounding us at all times. To see a video clip of Word Lens in action, watch this YouTube video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2OfQdYrHRs&feature=player_embedded) and ask yourself if people wouldn't want an iPhone (or an iPod touch) just to use Word Lens as the next killer app.

The Ongoing Saga of Flash

Many critics claim that they won't get an iPhone or iPad because it won't run Adobe's Flash. Fortunately, those people might be interested in knowing that Adobe recently announced a new Flash 10.2 beta (labs.adobe.com/technologies/flashplayer10/) that promises to dramatically decrease processor usage and reduce memory usage, but this also implies that the current version of Flash still isn't suitable for mobile devices.

Electronista (www.electronista.com/reviews/samsung-galaxy-tab.html) recently reviewed Samsung's Galaxy Tab, a seven-inch tablet competitor to the iPad. While the Galaxy Tab offers dual cameras, its ability to play Flash is severely limited, as mentioned in the review:

"The implementation of Flash on the Galaxy Tab is somewhat of a double-edged sword. While it is functional and can be handy in a pinch, intense implementations of Flash (such as Samsung's own galaxytab.samsungmobile.com) play back miserably; the video and audio were both choppy. Smaller uses of Flash, such as simple banner ads, displayed just fine but could also lengthen the load time for a page. If Flash is to be supported, it needs to work consistently, and despite Adobe's feverish hopes, it just doesn't yet. Apple may be stubborn in refusing to allow Flash and

insisting on HTML5, but when a lot of Flash content either works poorly or isn't wanted, having the plug-in isn't really an edge. That there's an option to only enable Flash on a tap should tell you all you need to know about Samsung's confidence."

For those stubbornly insistent that Flash on a mobile device is an absolute necessity, perhaps you can wait until Adobe perfects its latest 10.2 Flash player. Maybe by then, Flash will play acceptably on mobile devices, which was the hope of version 10.1. If not, we can all sit around and wait for the next release of Flash. And if that release doesn't work, then we can just keep waiting and waiting and waiting.

Designing Apps

When the iPhone App Store first opened, it made some people incredibly wealthy. The guy who developed the iFart app was once earning \$10,000 a day selling a 99-cent app that made flatulence noises. Of course, those early days of app riches are now gone because the App Store has more than 300,000 apps, which makes it difficult for any one app to stand out.

If you're thinking about creating your own iPhone or iPad apps, you could pick up a programming book, but a better solution would be to learn what makes an app appealing in the first place. That's the idea behind *Tapworthy* (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1449381650?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1449381650) by Josh Clark.

Instead of overwhelming you with technical jargon, *Tapworthy* provides examples of well-designed apps and explains the design principles behind them so you can duplicate those features in your own apps. By taking the time to study what makes an app successful, you can turn your own idea into a successful app rather than rush blindly ahead and hope for the best (which likely will lead you to a dead end).

Another book to help you turn your ideas into an appealing app is *App Savvy* (www.amazon.com/gp/product/1449389767?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1449389767) by Ken Yarmosh. This book also guides you through the basic steps to creating an app, but without the technical jargon. By reading either *Tapworthy* or *App Savvy* before you start programming your app, you can make sure your idea for an app makes sense before you waste time trying to make it.

* * *

If you have Microsoft 2011 for the Mac, open up a program such as Word and choose Help/Check for Updates. This will install the latest update to Microsoft Office to make it more stable.

If you want the latest version of iTunes, be careful. If you download and install the latest iTunes through the Software Update option in the Apple menu, your copy of iTunes could fail to work. Instead, go directly to Apple's site (www.apple.com/itunes/) to download and install the latest version of iTunes.

In the early days, before Wally became an Internationally renowned comedian, computer book writer, and generally cool guy, Wally Wang used to hang around The Byte Buyer dangling

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

Wally is responsible for the following books:

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

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

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

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Rob, The Computer Tutor

Rob, The ComputerTutor:
Technology Solutions
“OpenOffice Draw” by Rob Spahitz

This week we wrap up our investigation of OpenOffice with a more in-depth look at the free-form drawing tool OpenOffice Draw.

This week we wrap up our investigation of OpenOffice. As a reminder, you can download the free OpenOffice applications from www.OpenOffice.org.

Draw Wrap-Up

There were a few outstanding things from last week that I wanted to investigate before wrapping up.

First, how does this tool stack up for free-form drawing? I'll try to create a simple Christmas tree.

First I'll draw the outline, and then I'll fill it in with colors. Last, I'll add some ornaments.

As I look for a tool to handle freehand drawing, the closest I find are a pen tool for drawing lines and a pencil tool for drawing curves.

When I use the pencil tool, I'm able to draw a shape that looks like a pine tree. However, due to the nature of this tool, the drawing is auto-adjusted as I create it, making the curved areas more pointed or otherwise modified. I'm not quite sure the reason for this, but my guess is that the tool is trying to create a mathematical formula to re-generate this image, and it's taking a few shortcuts as the curvature gets more complex. Figure 1 shows my initial efforts of a quick sketch. Notice the draw toll in the bottom left corner of the figure.

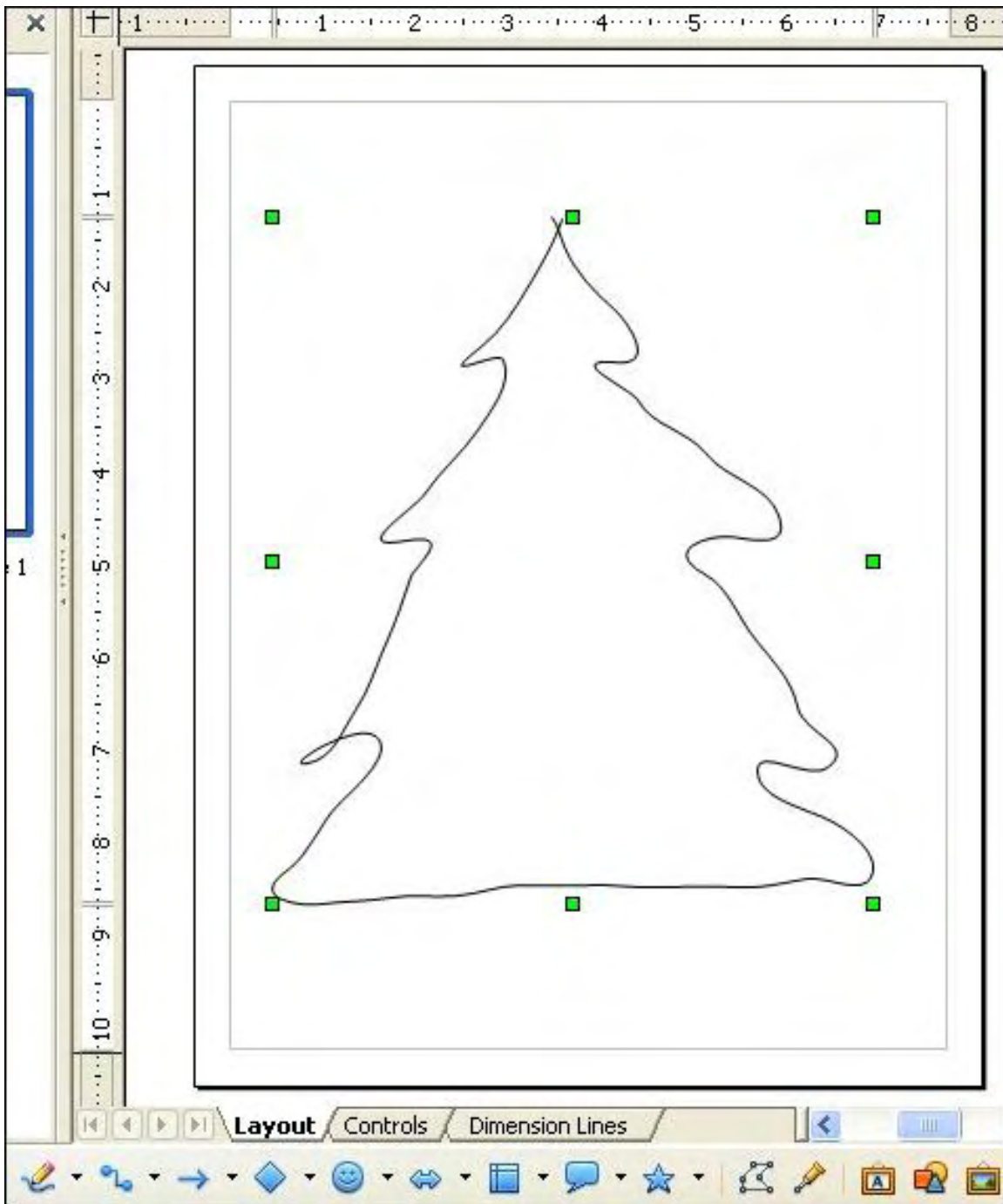


Figure 1. Quick Draw using the curve tool.

Next, I'll add a rectangle at the bottom for the trunk. Since this is a self-contained object, it automatically features a fill color (although it's light blue by default). By right-clicking on the drawn shape and selecting the Area option, I can fill it in (as done last week) with a brown color.

Next I tried to fill the tree in with green. I selected the tree and saw the little green "drag handle" boxes surrounding it to let me re-size it. At this point, right-clicking does not offer an option to fill in the shape. Looking at the toolbars, where I previously saw a paint bucket (fill tool), it's now dimmed and inaccessible, as seen in Figure 2.

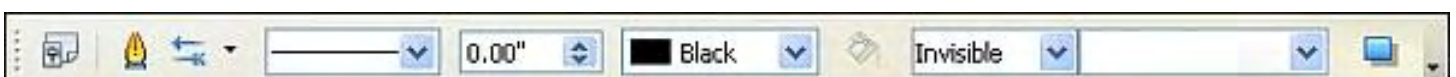


Figure 2. Line and filling toolbar.

I can change the outline from Black to Green, but the fill tool is not available. The drop-down lists to the right of that seemed to have potential. Instead of Invisible, I could choose Color, Gradient, Hatching or Bitmap. The Color option by itself did nothing, but I hadn't chosen the next drop-down list. That one offered a bunch of colors, so I selected Light Green, but it did nothing.

After some further research, I determined that I simply used the wrong tool for the job with the tree. I noticed that next to the curve tool was a little arrow to open additional choices. One of those was identified as Freeform Line, Filled. I deleted the tree and redrew it. It's a bit odd how it draws, since it starts with a closed shape. As you draw curves, the end of the curve reconnects to the starting point. After completing the shape, it's already connected and fills in with the default blue color. As before, selecting the Area option from the right-click menu allows me to change the color.

To continue, I can add a few oval shapes, but I'd really like them to be perfectly round, so I can choose the Basic Shapes option (which initially appears as a blue Diamond) and change it to Circle. After adding one, I have to go back to the Circle tool to select it again to add another each time, but it also seems to be set to automatically size to a specific size, maybe based on a grid. That allowed me to make each one the same size without copying and pasting. A quick change of colors to a select few, and they look great.

To wrap it up, put a star on top. Although I could draw a free-form star, there's one in the Symbol Shapes option (which initially appears as a blue smiley face). Well, they call it a Sun, but since the Sun is a star, that works. I decided to add a nice gradient, which is one of the options, just to make it look a bit nicer.

My finished product appears in Figure 3.

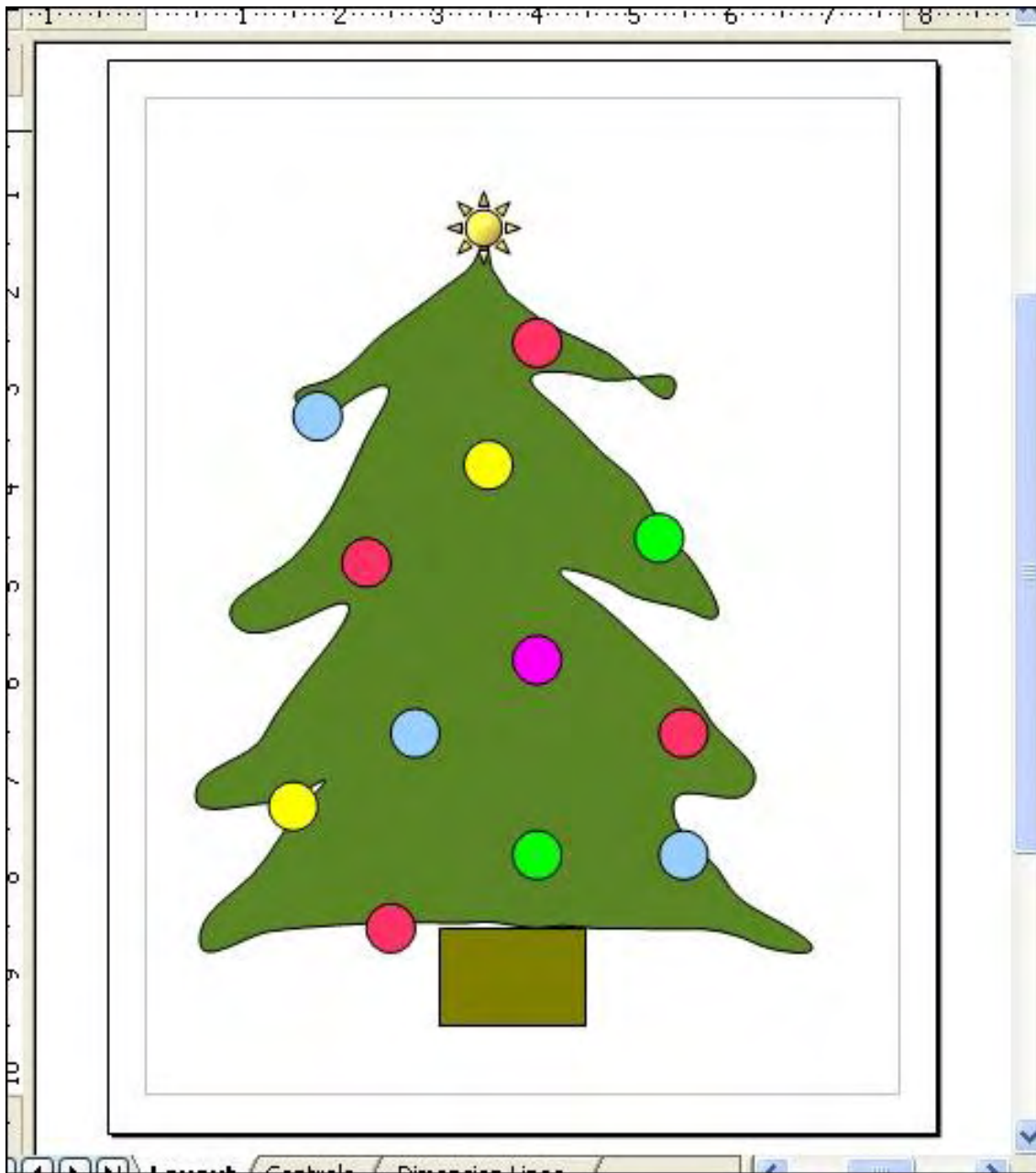


Figure 3. Completed tree drawing.

Flowcharts

As I've reviewed this tool, it appears that it was really designed for discrete shapes to be assembled into an image. From the above you can do other drawing, too, but everything still seems designed for discrete shapes. As such, let's build a quick "logic flow," which is a way to explain the flow of a process (commonly used in computer programming to define the flow of the logic applied to the algorithm that defines the program).

Let's look at a simple algorithm. If you've ever played the Guessing Game, you'll know this. The idea is that one person picks a number from 1 to 100. The other person makes a guess. The first person indicates if it's correct, lower or higher. This guessing repeats until the number is guessed. Typically you also count how many tries it took.

So the flow of this would be similar to the following:

1. Pick a number from 1 to 100.
2. Set Guess Count to 0.
3. Make a guess.
4. Add 1 to guess count.
5. If guess is more than the pick, indicate "guess is too high" and return to step 3.
6. If guess is less than the pick, indicate "guess is too low" and return to step 3.
7. Congratulate the guess and indicate the Guess Count.

Turning this into a "flow" chart, we see the three basic parts of flow: process (Pick/Set/Add), compare (If), loop (return to step 3).

Usually a process is defined by a rectangle or slanted rectangle for input, comparison is a diamond, and loop is an arrow pointing back to another shape. You also usually start and end with a "rounded rectangle" (which looks like an oval but with a flat top and bottom). Note that I had to drag a little yellow circle on the rounded rectangle shape to properly adjust the curvature on the sides so they were round rather than flat.

Looking at the toolbar at the bottom of the tool, next to the Curve shape mentioned above there is a Connector object. We also see all of the shapes mentioned. By applying them like the numbered list above, and adding connectors between the shapes and inserting some text (select the shape, and then click on the big "T" in that same shape's toolbar to apply text to the shape), we get the picture shown in Figure 4.

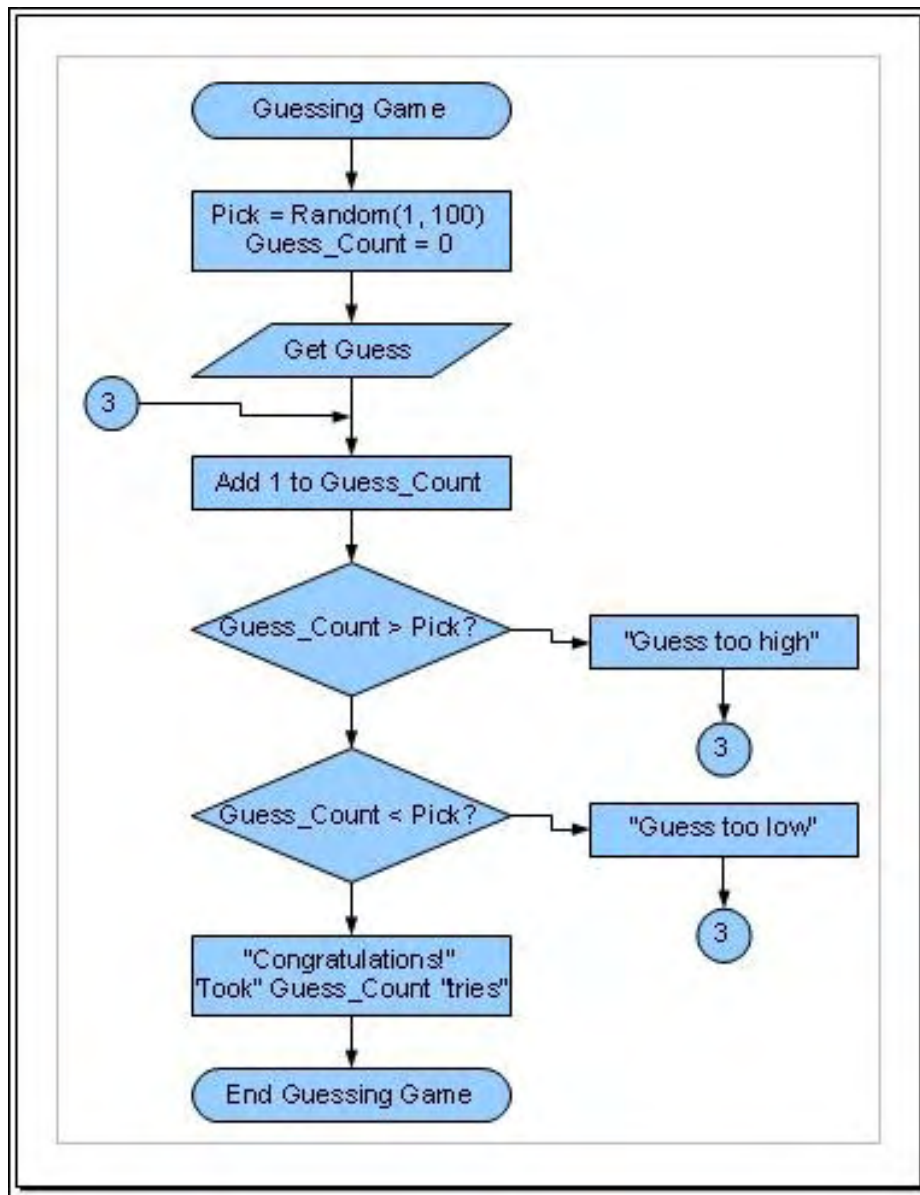


Figure 4. Flow-charting.

If a flow chart like that above is done well, any decent computer programmer can write a program to apply that logic.

Write, Calculate, Store, Show, Draw

Now that we've explored the OpenOffice suite of productivity tools, let me give a quick summary of the features and how it compares to the industry-standard Microsoft Office.

First, let's compare Write to Word.

Write matches up well with Word 97 through Word 2003. Most of the functions are the same, including the items in the menus. In some cases the names of options may be different, probably because the creators thought that there may be some legal issues. There are also a few enhancements to some of the parts like the templates wizard, which often make things happen better. Where I've found issues are with (1) the spell-check which, while good, is not as good as the one supplied with Word; and (2) copy-paste, which sometimes seems a bit clumsy as I drag

to select and then try to "grab" the text to move it. There are also some other minor things, such as inserted pictures are centered rather than "text justified" (embedded within the text as with Word). However, both tools allow changes to match the others' features, so this is just a matter of preference.

Next, how about Calc versus Excel?

For this tool, again, almost all of the features matched the 97/2000/2002/2003 versions of features. Again, some of the words in the menu were different. For example, Pivot Table has been changed to DataPilot. Otherwise I found that I liked Calc a little better. However, I prefer the macros in Excel better, and I'm not sure how well these translate if saved in Excel format.

Next is Impress, competing with PowerPoint.

I'm not an expert with PowerPoint, but Impress seemed to offer all the same features I've used and in similar ways. I'd rate these as virtually equal.

Continuing, we get Base, designed to compete with Access.

Base seems to be a full-featured database application. It's capable of creating tables, adding queries, building forms and generating reports. It handles things very similar to the way Access handles things. Although there was nothing specific that I didn't like, it just felt a little more clumsy than Access. However, being an open-source tool, I would like to think that it might be a better choice as a simple portable database if you use Java to create database applications (versus Microsoft .NET, which can create "Access"—technically Jet—databases natively).

Finally, there's Draw. This partially competes with Visio.

Things may have changed in Visio since I used it extensively years ago. I don't remember a free-form drawing feature. And many of the features of Draw seem to make it a convenient tool to supplement the other parts of the package. It's not great for vector-based drawing, and it's not great for bitmap-based drawing, but I found it very easy to create flow charts. If that's its main purpose, I wonder why they called it "Draw" rather than something like "Flow."

All in all, for a free tool, I'd have to give OpenOffice 4.5 stars out of 5, with MS Office getting the same for offering some things better, while some are in need of minor improvements.

This wraps up my review of this tool. Next week, we'll start taking things in a new direction.

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

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



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Worldwide News & Product Reviews

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



Travel Tips for IT Security—With ID theft from mobile phones and other lost devices at an all-time high, users must take care when traveling; Christmas (and other) "Cookies": Good or Bad—A look at the disadvantages and dangers of cookies; PBS Apps for iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch—Newly available at Apple's App Store; Atrio Earphones—a Bassoholic's Best Friend Forever—High fidelity has a cost, but it may be worth it.

Travel Tips for IT Security

As millions travel this Christmas, thousands of mobile devices will go missing and unclaimed at airports, according to a survey conducted by Credant Technologies. Will you be one of those leaving more than their troubles behind at the security gates when jetting off this holiday season?

The lost property offices of 15 U.K. airports, including Heathrow and Luton, report that more than 5,100 mobile phones and 3,844 laptops have been left behind so far this year; with the majority still unclaimed and many more expected to be left over the Christmas holiday peak season—and that figure is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg as we get into the holiday season. Also note that those figures do not take into account all those devices that were stolen, or kept by the "lucky" finder.

Credant also found that in the majority of cases, devices that aren't reclaimed are then either sold at auction or donated to charities. However the fact is that these devices may still contain information that could be available for the new owner! With ID theft from mobile phones and other lost devices at an all-time high, users should really take special care this Christmas when traveling.



According to a representative at Luton Airport, the most common place devices are forgotten is at the security check point, as it's a very pressured environment with numerous distractions. Often, once the travelers have boarded the plane and left the country, it's just too expensive to return for the device, which in most instances will be covered by insurance, resulting in the majority going unclaimed.

But the device's value is the last thing organizations should be worrying about, explains Seán Glynn, VP at Credant. "What is much more concerning are the copious volumes of sensitive data these devices contain—often unsecured and easily accessed. Without protecting mobile phones, laptops and even USBs with something even as basic as a password, a malicious third party can have easy access to the corporate network, e-mail accounts and all the files stored on the

device, including the contact lists. Users also store such things as passwords, bank details and other personal information on the device, making it child's play to impersonate the user and steal their identity—both personal and corporate."

Here are Credant's top tips for secure travel—at any time of the year, not just the holidays:

As you leave—whether it's the check-in desk, security check point, or even the train station, make sure you take everything with you, including your mobile devices. A few seconds to check could potentially save you hours of frustration and embarrassment.

Protect your mobile device with at least a password (and ensure that it is a strong one, containing letters, numbers and symbols). Better still, use an encryption solution so that even if your device is left behind, the data on it is not accessible to anyone who finds it.

Don't elect to automatically complete online credentials, such as corporate network login details, so that if you and your device should become separated, it cannot operate without you.

Backup your device and remove any sensitive information that you do not need. If it's not there, it can't be breached.

As noted above, remove SMS and e-mails that you don't need anymore—you'd be surprised how many people keep their default password e-mails on their mobiles and other hugely sensitive information like PINs, bank account details or pass-words!

Don't leave your mobile device open to access (e.g. leaving Bluetooth or Wi-Fi turned on) somewhere visible and unsecured.

Include your name and contact details in the device so that, if it should be lost, it can easily be returned to you. Some operators have a registration service to facilitate this.

Finally, speak to your IT department before you leave the office this year—that's what they're there for. They'll help make sure your device is better protected should it find itself languishing all alone at the airport.

Christmas (and other) "Cookies": Good or Bad?

Bruce Freeman from ProLine Communications sends us this answer to the common question: What are the disadvantages or dangers from cookies?

Cookies are not viruses. They can't access your hard drive or mess up your computer like a virus can; it's just information. But that doesn't mean they're not important or dangerous. You get cookies when you visit Web sites, but you can also get them any time an HTTP request to the Internet occurs, even from sites you've never explicitly visited and don't want. This also includes content that is loaded when reading an e-mail message or from opening a document. Often, the user does not even notice that it's happening.

Many Internet providers use dynamic IP addresses. This means that every new Internet connection needs a new IP address. This address is essential to identify a PC on the Internet. The server only knows the address to which it should send the data requested, not the person who exists behind the address. However a server can now send a cookie to the browser with a

unique user identity and give it a long lifespan. After the browser is closed, the cookie is stored and, the next time the user visits that site, he can be identified, regardless of whether he has been given a new IP address.

So the disadvantage of cookies is that they can be used to construct a profile of Internet usage of individual users, showing their total Internet activity patterns. Cookies become really irritating when personal data is linked to the user's surfing activities—all of this is available because the user once entered his name and address, etc., via an input form on a Web site. This creates a reusable profile of that user, which can be exploited by others without permission.

PBS Apps for iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch

PBS has announced the beta launch of a newly designed PBS.org (www.pbs.org) site featuring local content from member stations and auto-localization features. According to PBS:

The launch coincides with the release of PBS for iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch. These efforts continue PBS's transformation into a multiplatform media leader, serving Americans through television, mobile, the Web and other platforms, such as classroom interactive whiteboards.

PBS' new digital products build on successful initiatives that have launched over the past 18 months. These include the introduction of the PBS local-national video player (video.pbs.org), featuring more than 4,700 hours of full-length video from PBS and local stations, spanning all PBS genres and its most renowned, award-winning programs.

PBS KIDS has six iPad and iPhone apps for children (www.pbskids.org/mobile) on the App Store. In addition, PBS KIDS has introduced a subscription-based teaching tool for home and classroom (www.pbskidsplay.org), a suite of interactive whiteboard games (www.pbskids.org/whiteboard), and nearly 1,000 free, educational games (www.pbskids.org).

The new PBS.org is the first major media Web site to fully integrate local content on a national platform. PBS member station and partner content is now seamlessly featured alongside national productions as part of the home page, topic pages, special features and series sites.

For example, when visitors go to the PBS.org Arts & Entertainment topic page, video content from *Masterpiece* and *American Masters* is presented alongside locally produced arts programming, providing opportunities for visitors to also explore what's happening in their local arts community.

In addition, PBS.org is automatically localized so visitors can view video, TV schedule information and content that is specific to their community.

PBS apps for iPad, iPhone and iPod touch are available today from the Apple App Store (www.itunes.com/appstore).

Atrio Earphones—a Bassoholic's Best Friend Forever

In the olden days of cassettes and vinyl, audiophiles faced a dilemma in pursuing the ultimate high-fidelity stereo system—which component is the weakest link in the quality chain? Fast forward to the 21st century where mobile music lovers' weakest link is likely to be the hardware they insert into their ears. A recommended solution for listeners—especially bassoholics—who

are prepared to afford the cost of high fidelity is Future Sonics' recently released Atrio Special Edition (ASE) m5 Professional earphones (www.mcssl.com/store/futuresonics/atriso-se-m5-chocolate-professional-earphones). Here's why.

Future Sonics specializes in ear monitors (the devices that musicians wear during performances), which are built for people who have truly discerning ears and a sizable credit limit on their plastic accounts. This company also makes a line of earphones—Atrios—for mere mortals. The new ASE earphones represent an evolutionary and environmentally responsible progression in this product line.

Before going any further let's discuss price, because it potentially will generate sticker shock. The ASE earphones' MSRP is \$229. Some readers might balk at this sticker because it is roughly equivalent to what an entry-level iPod Touch costs and exceeds what iPod Shuffles and Nanos cost. Other readers could object that this price point is difficult to afford and/or justify in the current economy. For those who instead wonder, "Will I really notice enough difference in audio quality with this product to warrant its price?," however, this article is geared to provide some answers. The important thing to keep in mind, though, is that high fidelity has a cost, and the ASE earphones definitely are a high fidelity audio product.

How do the ASE earphones sound? Users switching from the standard 'buds included with iPods likely will perceive a considerable difference. Actually, the ASE earphones' audio quality is patently better than any of the models and brands that I've previously reviewed for *ComputerEdge's* readers; most noteworthy is the clarity and detail of instruments and vocals, regardless of whether they're highs, mids, or lows. Bass is particularly strong and clear without any hint of muddiness, but not overpowering like the pounding "thumpa thumpa" emitted by some vehicles. Even though I know my music library in detail, I was surprised during this review to discover instruments and vocals that I'd never heard before in my favorite tunes. An additional surprise was the remarkable stereo separation—the ASE earphones deliver what resembles a surround experience where the main vocals and instruments seem to be "inside" my head, while supporting ones sound as if they were outside my ears.

The ASE earphones' sound quality, like that of other brands, is contingent on a good seal. If bass guitar is missing, the ASE earphones need to be reinserted in the users' ear canals properly. In my testing, the best seal and audio quality were achieved by inserting the ASE earphones upside down, with the cables draped over the user's ear lobes. I noticed a big improvement after inserting the earphones upside down rather than the conventional way.

ASE earphones' high-fidelity sound is attributable to their distinctive under-the-hood features. These features include "The Power of 1," proprietary dynamic drivers designed to produce frequencies below 150Hz (the company claims that these drivers are more effective than multiple driver designs at preventing electronic or comb filtering artifacts, phase issues and crossover dropouts), MG7 transducer, TrueTimbre audio, 18Hz–20,000Hz frequency response, 112dB @ 30Hz sensitivity and +/- 26 dB Ambient Noise Rejection.

In addition to their distinctive hardware features, ASE earphones have a distinctive look and design. Their housings somewhat resemble a tear drop from one angle (Figure 1) and the letter "L" from another (Figure 2), measure roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ " x $\frac{3}{4}$ " x $\frac{1}{2}$ ", and are available in only one color—"chocolate." The joint where the 51-inch long QuietCables emerge from these housings is reinforced with Kevlar-like material similar to the cables' coating (Figure 1); this design looks solid

and should minimize the risk of breakage. QuietCables feature a splitter (without a built-in remote control or microphone) about 13 inches downstream with a plastic slider above the splitter to manage the equal-length left and right branches. A gold-plated standard 3.5 mm plug with a right-angle shaped reinforcement (which likewise looks solid and should minimize risk of breakage) is at the cables' opposite end.



Figure 1. ASE earphones sport a distinctive shape, size and color with a reinforced joint between the housing and QuietCables that should lessen the risk of breakage.

Distinctive standard equipment accompanies the ASE earphones. Unlike competitors, Future Sonics includes a uniquely designed travel pouch fabricated from trucks' inner tube rubber (Figure 2). The company also includes beaucoup sleeves to ensure that the buyer finds a proper fit—eight pairs of various sized foam sleeves (four pairs in black, four in beige) and three pairs of black dual-flanged silicone sleeves (large, medium and small). The dual-flanged sleeves are, without a doubt, the most comfortable I've ever used. I have worn them for hours at a stretch without any pain whatsoever; in fact, I scarcely notice them at all. To keep these sleeves and earphones properly cleaned, a metal loop tool is included as standard equipment.



Figure 2. Standard equipment accompanying the ASE earphones includes a cool, uniquely designed pouch made from truck tires' inner tubes.

Documentation for this product is distinctively earth friendly. An English-only Quick Start guide comes on a 3 x 5-inch card made of Forest Stewardship Council mixed sources paper with instructions on one side and a 20 percent off coupon toward the purchase of Future Sonics' custom-fit Softerware sleeves on the opposite side. The English-only user guide is printed on three 6 x 5-inch sheets (also from recycled papers) with a dark gray card stock cover; the guide's contents include instructions, troubleshooting steps, care and maintenance, a warning about excessive volume, limited warranty (one year) and contact information, and promotional information.

The packaging that Future Sonics has developed for these earphones also is environmentally responsible and user friendly. It is made from post-consumer paper, plastic and plant fibers (Figure 3). The plastic bubble containing the earphones is opened without needing to employ industrial strength scissors and is easily resealed.

Aside from their potential sticker shock, the ASE earphones have only a few shortcomings of note. The most important one is that the included documentation makes no mention of inserting the earphones upside down to achieve a proper seal for optimal sound quality; hopefully this will be remedied to advise new users and potentially preclude buyer's remorse. Another shortcoming is that, as with most brands, the "L" and "R" labels are challenging to discern.



Figure 3. ASE earphones ship in an eye-catching, user-friendly and environmentally responsible package.

In summary, the ASE earphones deliver high-fidelity music that aficionados (especially those who are fond of bass) can savor. These gems are worth saving up for, especially if you can find them at a discount. Enthusiastically recommended.



Review contributed by Barry Fass-Holmes

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

Carr has covered such diverse topics as pesticide use in area schools, invasive background

checks for county volunteers, asthma awareness, the debate over standards-based grading, potential vulnerabilities in electronic voting machines, and Southern California's devastating 2003 and 2007 wildfires. He has also written many humorous pieces.

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

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

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

He has won many writing accolades, including Press Club awards for Best Column Writing, Consumer Writing and Best Arts and Entertainment, and has repeatedly taken top honors in San Diego Songwriter's Guild competitions for his original musical compositions.

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

Learn more at www.charlescarr.com.

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Beyond Personal Computing

“The Computer Mouse: History in Hand” by Marilyn K. Martin

In its half-century of existence, the venerable computer mouse has been a fun and well-used computer component.

The history of the computer gets pretty crowded with competing inventions and milestones after 1950. But there is no controversy over the lowly mouse. It popped up almost as an afterthought when the monitor and keyboard seemed to have a gaping hole: "Something" was needed to move the cursor around on the display, with more fluid, precise movements than just punching keys.

The first trackball was invented in 1952 by a team working on the Canadian Royal Navy's secret DATAR project. It was a square frame and circuitry around a small Canadian bowling ball. This was an adult hand-sized, hard rubber ball (with no finger holes), designed to play a uniquely Canadian game of five-pin bowling. (In a sense, the very first "gaming mouse.")

Independently, Douglas Engelbart at the Stanford Research Institute invented the first computer mouse prototype in 1960. His mouse was a clunky affair, a small wooden box with two gear wheels perpendicular to each other, but it did fit under an adult hand. The rotation of each gear wheel translated into motion along one axis. Just a few weeks before Engelbart released his demo model in 1968, however, a computer mouse with a tracking ball had already been developed and published by the German company Telefunken.

Nevertheless, Engelbart's 1970 patent was for an "X-Y Position Indicator for a Display System." He nicknamed it a "mouse," because of its size, shape and cord "tail," as well as the fact that "mouse" was easier to say than "Position Indicator for a Display System." (In typical historical fashion, of inventing something so brilliant that people didn't yet realize how badly they needed it, Engelbart's patent ran out before the mouse became widely used. Thus, he never received any royalties from his invention.)

In 1976, Steve Jobs shipped out 200 Apple-1s from his parents' garage. It was the first home or personal computer to feature fully preassembled motherboards. It had no casing, keyboard, monitor, mouse or power supply. But, according to Newser.com, Christies is getting ready to auction off an original Apple 1, in its original packaging, with original manuals and a signed letter

from Jobs. It is expected to bring in at least \$240,000.

Slowly, personal computers started being shipped out with integrated mice included. Telefunken (1970), and Xerox Star Information System (1981) were the first to include a mouse with each computer they sold.

By 1984, PC Columnist John C. Dvorak was clearly not excited about computer mice. "There is no evidence," he wrote, "that people want to use these things." Which makes him only the latest of backward-thinking computer prognosticators. Joining:

"We have reached the limits of what is possible with computers." John Von Neumann (1949)

"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers." Thomas J. Watson, IBM Chairman (1943)

Today, no one would think of having a personal interface type of computer without some sort of mouse, trackball, touchpad or joystick. Although, laptop and notebook touchpads or tiny trackballs are more of an irritant to adult hands, since accidentally brushing them can cause the cursor to jump. More and more laptop and notebook owners are buying attachable mice.

And there are new types of mice being invented all the time. You can even buy wireless keyboards and mice now, as well as optical mice, inertial and gyroscopic mice, 3-D mice and tactile mice. (Logitech seems to be the company on the cutting edge of inventing new types of mice.)

And everyone seems to offer their own variations of "ergonomic" mice, mainly since computer mice have already found their dubious place in computer history, for causing carpal tunnel syndrome and other hand/wrist injuries from too much "mousing." Vertical mice are the newest rage of "ergo mice," since they keep the hand in an upright, handshake posture.

Also, computer hardware incompatibility or software glitches many times manifest through a "frozen" mouse, which probably shortens the working lifespan of the average computer mouse: Its portable size makes it easily the most obvious computer component to be launched across a room in fury.

And then there are the unbelievable stories heard by phone-in help desks and tech support that have gone on into the Myth and Lore of Mousing. One caller complained that her new computer mouse was too hard to control with its "dust cover" on. Turns out the "dust cover" was the plastic bag the new mouse was packaged in.

Another exasperated caller had dutifully unpacked her computer and plugged it in. But the computer wouldn't turn on. When asked what happened when she turned the power button on, her response was, "I pushed and pushed on this foot pedal and nothing happened!" Turns out the "foot pedal" was the mouse.

Other "first time with a mouse" stories include the college student who held the mouse in his hand, and rolled the underside trackball around with his fingers, while others preferred to work their mouse horizontally, or even upside down, either working the trackball with finger-tips, or because their optical mouse "looks prettier with the light on top." One gentleman even managed

to install his mouse inside his just-unpacked computer, and then complained to tech support that his monitor cursor wasn't working.

Instructions between "right click" and "left click" buttons atop a mouse have apparently confused a great many users. Some users actually changed hands to right-click or left-click, per help desk instructions, or else complained, "But I'm left-handed. I don't want to right-click." In another instance, tech instructions to "Now click your left mouse button" elicited the confused response, "But I only have one mouse!" And a PhD actually over-intellectualized the simple process, thinking that the left-click/right-click buttons atop a mouse corresponded to left or right "choices" on the screen.

Some users even confused left/right with their political leanings, like the gentleman who staunchly refused to "left click—I only right click," or the customer who told tech support that, "My mouse has two buttons but they are both left buttons." The quick-thinking tech then instructed "OK, just click on the right side, left mouse button."

Older seniors many times have to be coaxed to try a computer, and techies forget that this WWII generation takes instructions quite literally, not having been raised in the spatially disorienting Electronic Age. One tech was working a computer demo show when a group of retired teachers showed up. He told them to "use the mouse to point to things on the screen." They did. One was moving her mouse around *on* the screen. Another pointed the mouse at the screen and clicked it madly, like it was a TV remote. Yet another moved the mouse "up and down" quite literally, off the table and into the air. And one lady would point her finger at the screen, then click the mouse at the same time.

One tech support guy asked a phone-in user to "click twice on the picture of the disc" on the monitor. He heard strange taps. The customer was literally tapping the monitor with the mouse. Another customer complained that the cursor always moved in the opposite direction from the movement of the mouse, and how hard it was to hit the top buttons. Turns out she had the mouse backwards, and needed to rotate the mouse so the tail/cord was pointing away from her.

Other spatial-misunderstandings include the gentleman who complained that his mouse wouldn't go any further across the screen. It turns out he had "run out of desk space," and thought the position of the mouse was analogous to the position of the pointer on the screen. He had no idea you could pick up the mouse and re-position it without messing things up on the screen. Another gentleman was moving his mouse off the desk onto books, or around and under his desk, to make sure his on-screen cursor would keep going in the right direction.

Although not much can top the lady whose cat had eaten her mouse trackball, and she had to move the cursor by putting her finger in the cavity and moving the mouse rollers manually. Or the older nurse who swore her computer mouse "likes it when you stroke it."

Thankfully, long gone are the early days of mouse pads, to make the early mice's trackballs work. One lady went shopping for a "mouse mat." When told the store had a large variety of mouse pads, the lady responded, "But which ones are compatible with my computer?" Other users couldn't get their mouse to work on a mouse pad, with help desks suggesting, "Have you tried flipping your mouse pad over, so the sticky (non-slip) side is down?"

One young person came home to find a half dozen mouse pads carefully placed in corners

around his house. His mother cheerfully explained that she'd gone shopping, saw them on sale, and had bought six. But she couldn't figure out "how the mice's feet stick to them, since they don't feel that sticky."

Alas, once touchscreen monitors take over, "mousing" as we now know it will probably be a thing of the past for most computer users (unless shoulder-lunging injuries occur from too much pointing, or sore-finger injuries appear, due to too much screen-touching). And the new types of future mouses will probably be along the lines of laser pointers anyway, if you don't want to touch your display screen.

So although mouses will continue to find a welcome audience as notebooks downsize to makeup-compact size, it doesn't look like mouses will be an integral part of most future computers. But, in their half-century of existence, they've been a fun and well-used computer component, as well as spatially instructive to those of us coming late to the Virtual Electronic Environment. And who knows? Maybe grade-school students will finally get back to memorizing that "mice" is the plural of mouse—not "mouses."

And, just in case, I plan to wrap my computer mouse up carefully and save it. Maybe a few generations down the path, my relatives can sell it to an early computer collector for 4 billion galactic credits.

Marilyn K. Martin is a freelance writer of nonfiction and fiction living in East Texas. She is the author of several published mini-articles and is currently writing a Young Adult Science Fiction series, *Chronicles of Mathias*, (www.amazon.com/Chronicles-Mathias-One-Reptilian-Rebirth/dp/1598249002) Volume One and Two are available on Amazon.

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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

"Installing Windows 3.11 on a Modern Computer," "Lift Not One Screw!," "Sub for MS Money," "My 3-D TV Experience, Suggestions"

Installing Windows 3.11 on a Modern Computer

[Regarding the October 1 Digital Dave column:]

Following up on my query and your advice, I turned lemons into lemonade by converting a trashed IBM T42 laptop to Ubuntu "Lucid" and then installing the free Sun/Oracle VirtualBox software on it. I first installed MS-DOS 6.22 in its own 1GB virtual machine via an ISO image and then installed Windows 3.11 via another ISO image. Using kermit(!) and 14 ZIP archives, I transferred all the files on my Windows 3.11 PC to another PC and created a third ISO image in order to copy those data to the W311 virtual machine. The final step was to track down the vgapatch.com utility to allow the new Win 3.11 virtual machine to display 1024x768. While the old PC continues to hum, I'm ready to switch when it dies.

-Stewart A. Levin, Centennial, CO

Lift Not One Screw!

[Regarding the December 3 Digital Dave column:]

Look at the *specs*, for your computer and perhaps even the motherboard!

Whomever you bought from should know *if* they are techie enough and you should be able to trace it back through the manufacturer.

No chassis lifting involved!

-Michael Viehman, Julian, Ca

Sub for MS Money

[Regarding the December 3 Digital Dave column:]

GnuCash (www.gnucash.org) is an open-source accounting software with online banking capabilities. It is available for Windows, Mac, and Linux operating systems. You can download it from the Web site. I'm amazed that such a quality program is available at no cost.

-Dennis, San Diego, CA

I have used Quicken for about six years. It is great, easy to use, and there is a backup link to saving all your info in case of a crash. I update every year, but it is still very simple. I have never had a problem. I use their bill pay, and if you send a payment in on time and it is lost or late, they cover everything.

-Lynne, Magnolia, Texas

I, too, needed to discontinue the Money program, which I had been using for years. I ended up purchasing Quicken with some apprehension. The instructions for conversion of data from Money into Quicken were very clear. I followed them explicitly, and to my surprise all my data, expenditures, investment history, everything moved over into Quicken, preserving all my historical information. Quicken is totally different to use, so I'm still on my learning curve, but it was worth it.

-Paul G., Coronado, CA

Of all the online services that access financial and investment information auto-magically, Fidelity's FullView has been far and away the best in handling the ever-changing login requirements of the dozens of web sites that frontend our family's finances.

-Stewart A. Levin, Centennial

My 3-D TV Experience

[Regarding the October 8 EdgeWord: Who Needs 3-D TV? column:]

I own a 55-inch Samsung Model 55C8000XF and find that the 3-D effect from a five-foot distance is very convincing. I bought it five weeks ago and have seen about a dozen movies, both on Blu-ray discs and cable. My friends and family are very impressed. Yes, the glasses are an inconvenience, but tolerable when one wants to enjoy the best of present technology.

-Joel Garcia, California

Suggestions

[Regarding the November 19 Editors Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers column:]

I, too, have been reading the *ComputerEdge* since the early '80s. Before buying any computer-related product, I checked the ads in your magazine. Like many of the commenters, I also miss the paper edition. So here are some suggestions.

Format the mag to a computer screen size.

Integrate the ads into the article (just as in print) as hyperlinks for more detailed info on the ad. No blinking ads (just as in print)!

Make the pages quick-loading and able to "flip" through the pages by pressing the Page Up and Page Down keys. A page is a screen full. No scrolling.

Basically, it is your print edition in landscape orientation, with hyperlinks to the ads.

This model also has potential for tablets and mobile phones.

-Dennis, 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.

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

Send mail to ceeditor@computoredge.com with questions about editorial content.

Send mail to cwebmaster@computoredge.com with questions or comments about this Web site.

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