ComputorEdge™ Online — 02/11/11

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Handling E-mail Better

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Digital Dave

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

In Windows 7 a reader added himself as a "standard" user and now is unable to access My Pictures and My Documents; Digital Dave's Quick and Dirty Guide for Buying a Laptop Computer (2011).

Dear Digital Dave,

I thought this would be of general interest—if you know the answer.

I recently got a new computer and had Windows 7 installed. I added myself as a "standard" user since Windows warns about issues with setting yourself up as administrator. However, sometimes when I try to open certain folders I'm told that access is denied.

I can understand that for certain things, but where I have trouble is in My Pictures located under My Documents. The odd thing is that I can get there if I navigate through certain paths (although I'm still trying to figure out exactly which ones), but not from My Documents.

I checked the help files for a clue and confirmed that the permissions on the folder match my logged in username (since it's my *folder!)*

Any ideas how to "safely" override this access denied I get in my own folders?

(BTW, I'm not really liking the new Windows 7 Explorer yet...seems like I have to work a lot harder to get anywhere.)

Thanks!

Rob Spahitz
San Diego

Dear Rob,

First, I'm not a fan of setting myself up as a standard (non-administrator) user. Unless someone is a secondary user (or guest) I see no reason to limit access to the computer. After all, you will be the one who must make all the changes to the computer.

Another reason that I don't like the idea on not having administrative privileges in my primary account is because—by the time I need to switch to admin—I've forgotten the password. Set up standard accounts for neophytes and the kids.

Having said that, your problem with My Pictures has nothing to do with privileges. The folders My Documents, My Pictures and such no longer exist in Windows 7. Yes, they appear to be there, but that is merely for backward

compatibility with software programs which may have used those names in their default installations. This is the reason that you can't view the contents of these non-folders. The "My" folders have been replaced with folders by the same name with the "My" dropped. Look for Documents, Music, Pictures, etc.

My Documents and My Pictures are actually what's called a junction by Microsoft. (It's similar to a symbolic link in Linux, but not the same. If it was really like a symbolic link, it would just open the actual folder when you click on the junction folder.) While they appear to be a folder, they merely point to another real folder with no "My" in the name. This is shown when you use "dir /al" in the Command windows (see Figure 1).

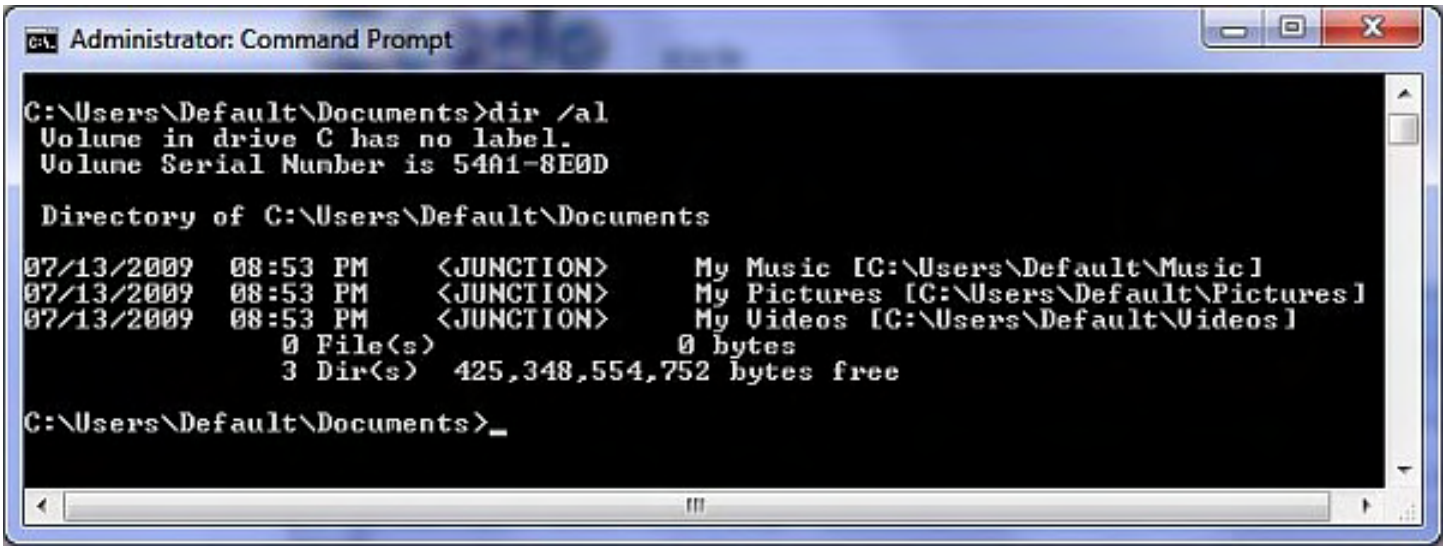

Figure 1. The "My" folder are shown as junctions in the Windows Documents folder.

There are the junctions in the Documents folders. If you try to access one of these junctions via the "My Documents" junction in Window Explorer, you get an access error precisely because they don't actually exist at that location.

Honestly, I'd have to say that Microsoft did it wrong, because there is no upside that I can see in having these apparent broken folders appear in Windows Explorer. It only causes confusion.
However, once you get used to it, Windows 7 will make things easier—especially if you make good use of Windows Libraries and the search capability.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

In August 2009, you authored a "Quick and Dirty Guide for Buying Laptop Computer." I found the info invaluable. Now my daughter wants to buy a laptop. Would you please update and print that article again?

A long, long time subscriber

D. Cameron
San Diego, CA

Dear D.,

I didn't know that it was that long ago. Here's an update:

Digital Dave's Quick and Dirty Guide for Buying a Laptop Computer (2011)

If you buy a laptop off the shelf, you get whatever is in the package. You can special order a laptop with those features you want most, but often you will get everything you need plus more through buying a prepackaged computer. But, what do you need? I've put together this quick guide to help you decide whether you can get by with the $500 (or less) laptop or if you need to spend a little more.

You see prices for laptop computers varying from $500 to $1200, depending upon their configuration. (If you get every possible upgrade, a laptop may cost $5000-$6000.) Looking at laptops can be pretty confusing, so I decided to take a look at what may be standard in a laptop computer costing $500 to $600 dollars, and highlight the features that will increase the price. I used HP laptops for these purposes, but most other laptop brands, except Apple, will be competitive with these numbers.

Note on Apple Laptops: Apple laptops have an excellent reputation, but you will pay more for the name and quality. (This is one reason why Apple is so profitable. They have the products and an image that commands the higher prices and generate customer loyalty.) Apple laptops generally run from $1200 to $2200. For the same features in a Windows 7 laptop you could pay as much as $1000 more to buy a MacBook Pro. Is it worth the additional cost? That's a personal decision. Beyond the hype, Apple makes good products, but are they better enough to offset the higher cost and slight learning curve caused by a switch from Windows?

This is meant only as a guide for how to compare computers and to understand how much a computer with a certain configuration may cost you. I have deliberately omitted netbooks from this discussion. Things are confusing enough, although many of the same principles apply. If you compare the specs of netbooks to the laptops, you will see why netbooks are so much cheaper.

The Standard Laptop

Laptop computers have a number of features that are now considered standard. It's unusual to find one without these capabilities. Therefore, any $500 laptop should include these:

- Built-in speakers and microphone
- Integrated Webcam
- ExpressCard/54 Slot (for expansion card)
- 5-in-1 integrated digital media card reader
- Two to four USB 2.0 ports
- RJ-45 (LAN) 10/100 Ethernet (hardwired network)
- Wi-Fi 802.11 b/g/n (wireless network)

Today most laptops also include an HDMI (high-definition connector for Hi-Def television), but the IEEE 1394 FireWire (for devices that require FireWire connections) seems to have dropped to the wayside. While I have these features available, I have never had an occasion to use either one. Although, if you plan to feed your HDTV with your laptop, then HDMI will be important.

Most connections to other devices are now being made by USB ports. Some of the laptops are now sporting one USB 3.0 port (in addition to USB 2.0), but unless you have a device which will take advantage of USB 3.0, this is not essential in your laptop. If it is part of a package, then get it. It will still do USB 2.0 and will be there when you do get a 3.0 device.

With the exception of Apple laptops, most are now coming with Microsoft Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit. Unless

you need to run old software, there is probably no reason to be looking for 32-bit Windows. There should be no price difference between 32-bit and 64-bit. However, to get Windows 7 Professional will be about $122 extra. You will want Professional if you're running legacy software or need to remotely access the laptop via a Virtual Private Network (VPN). In most cases, Home Premium is fine. You don't need to remotely access computers if you bring them with you.

I don't care about software that comes with the computer (Norton's, Microsoft Works or Office, etc.). There are too many free software packages available to worry about bundled software. I usually will remove it all anyway using OpenOffice.org and Microsoft Security Essentials—both free.

The size of the laptop dictates the size of the screen, the keyboard and the battery. Each has physical limitations. If you are doing graphics work, then you may need a larger screen. However, if you go with a 17.3" monitor, the computer may not fit in your computer carrying case. Naturally, larger computers are heavier and more cumbersome to tote. If the laptop will replace your non-moving desktop (very common today), then by all means, go with the bigger laptop. It will only add about $50 to the price of the system and you will also get a bigger, fuller keyboard.

Processor (CPU)

There is a great range of CPU power available, but most CPUs are plenty fast enough for the usual type of computing. Generally, more expensive laptops will carry more powerful CPUs. Dual-core processors are now standard on most models. Upgrading to the quad-core will add about $250 to the bottom line, but you can add as much as $600 more when upgrading the CPU.

Unless you're doing multitasking (a number of programs running simultaneously), your buying decision is likely driven by other factors. Quad-core processors are about multitasking rather than single process performance, so it's not as much a consideration for graphics work or gaming as it is for how many things you're trying to do at once.

If your looking for more power in your laptop, I do know that the next wave of mobile processors (Intel Core i5-2540M and Core i7-2620M based on Sandy Bridge technology) will be the biggest leap in speed and efficiency in five years. They should be coming in the next few months. (Originally scheduled for February 20th, but a defect has caused a delay for some systems.) If you want quicker encoding and decoding of video, the Sandy Bridge microprocessors are more power efficient than their predecessors and offer faster application and graphic performances. In light of that, if possible, it might be better to wait a little while.

Memory (RAM)

Many models come standard with 4GB of RAM, which today is the newer DDR3 memory. If not, it will cost you about $30 per gig to bring it up to 4GB. (It is unlikely that you will be able to take memory from your old laptop to use in the new one.) In a 64-bit system you can add more memory beyond the four gig 32-bit limit. If the laptop is capable of 8GB (or more) of RAM, it will cost about $120 per four gigs to take it there from the more standard 4GB. That's hundreds of dollars less than 2009 prices. Some laptops will take 12 or 16GBs of RAM, but be sure to check the specifications for the maximum physical memory capacity.

Hard Drives

To speed up from a 5400 rpm SATA Hard Drive to 7200 rpm will add about $20 to the price of the computer (down from $100 in 2009). To add storage capacity from 500GB to 1TB, it will be another $150.

One option to consider is solid state drives, which like thumb memory drive have no moving parts. They offer a huge benefit in a laptop computer in terms of power efficiency, speed and heat management. To add a 160GB solid state

drive flash module adds $275. For a 256GB solid state drive add about $480.

Optical Drives

A DVD drive is standard on a laptop. To add a Blu-ray drive adds $100. Unless you're watching Blu-ray movies, I don't feel the Blu-ray drive is worth the price. (I know I don't need one.) It is better to get an external hard drive if you're looking for backup media.

Graphics and Video

It is standard to see 15.6" displays on today's laptops. Some machines sport 17.3" screens. Although it is difficult to calculate, I estimate that it costs about $20-40 to more to upgrade from the smaller 14" model to 15.6" or 17.3". Remember, a bigger screen means more weight, but also a fuller keyboard.

Note: Some keyboards are back-lit for working in the dark. If you often work in the middle of the night in a dark room, you may want to consider a laptop with a back-lit keyboard.

Independent of the size of the screen is the resolution expressed in pixels by width and length (i.e., 1366x768). The higher the resolution, the higher the price. I've seen different-size screens (i.e., 15" and 16") with the same resolution. In that situation, the larger computer doesn't offer much over the smaller in visual quality—it's possibly even blurrier.

If you want the better-than-standard graphics capabilities, the addition of separate 512MB ATI Mobility Radeon HD 6370 graphics is about $50 more—1GB graphics is $100 more. It's important to remember that laptops are not built to be game machines. They have been optimized for portability, but many people now use them for their games.

Communications

Wi-Fi 802.11 N is rapidly becoming today's standard wireless, and will be installed in most laptops. While Wi-Fi N will be included, a gigabit Ethernet LAN connection might not be included. Check the specs to be sure. If not built-in, Bluetooth will cost another $25.

The prices I mention are not the prices for adding the capabilities at a later date, but rather the additional cost that you are likely to see on the tag. Make a list of the features that are most important to you, then compare them to the computer's specifications. You will likely end up with a little more than you think you need, but that's how they package laptops these days.

After updating this piece from 2009, as usual you are getting much more for less money—hundreds of dollars less. A computer which would have cost $1200 (or more) two years ago, now is priced at about $700.

Digital Dave

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Social Media May Just Save E-mail

"Social media is changing business communication and the use of e-mail" by Tom Gibson

> Both Google and Facebook are introducing new ways of e-mail effectiveness. Outlook is behind, but there is hope via a Social Connector feature. All of this is redefining business communication and e-mail organization.

E-mail has been the whipping boy for all things bad about business communication. That may change soon with help from an unlikely new friend.

Is E-mail Sexy Again?

In August, Google introduced Gmail Priority Inbox (*mail.google.com/mail/help/priority-inbox.html*), a new feature that learns to identify your important e-mail for you. Imagine, just the e-mail you need right now, right in front of you.

Then in November Facebook announced a major messaging rethink. Facebook messages will be a "modern messaging system" that unifies e-mail, Facebook messages, chat and SMS in a single application. Like Google, Facebook also recognizes that some e-mails are more important than others. What's important for Facebook? E-mail from Friends of course. Non-Friend e-mails will side-step the Inbox and land in the "Other" folder.

Two new but very different takes on an old e-mail effectiveness challenge: how to bring your important e-mail forward.

Gmail, Facebook? ... But I Use Outlook!

Yes, at work we all do, and like most other business e-mail users you too might be

"Didn't you get my e-mail?"

wondering how these and other social developments affect you.

As for highlighting important e-mail, don't expect help from Microsoft anytime soon. While Outlook excels as an e-mail program, it's the Outlook add-in market we look to for productivity automation. On the social front there is hope. Outlook 2010 includes a Social Connector feature for passive awareness. A good start.

What's Social Got to Do with Business? Why Now?

In case you are inclined to dismiss social communication and its tools as only for younger generations (or to use when not at work), I challenge you to consider that our interactions at work couldn't be more social. E-mail is often awkward and too formal in our social world of business. That these emerging social tools better handle it outside of e-mail, and in a complementary way to e-mail, is now a re-defining opportunity for e-mail, and for you. Read on to learn how.

Three Indisputable E-mail Truths

To better understand how social media can help e-mail, let's be up front about what we all now know to be true.

Truth Number 1—E-mail doesn't do social.

An asynchronous medium, e-mail fails us for communications requiring real-time back and forth, discussions, emotionally sensitive issues, and urgent matters.

Truth Number 2—E-mail is for the keepers.

E-mails to set meetings and interim updates are annoying. In contrast, we like and want to keep e-mails that contain (1) information to do our jobs with colleagues and clients, and (2) external information like e-newsletters that keep us informed.

Truth Number 3—E-mail is the world's most popular business information system.

Surprised? Where does your most important business information reside? Many haven't noticed, but with automatic sorting and browsing tools, vastly improved searching and cheap disk space all converging, e-mail now rocks as a way to manage your information.

Three Ways to Up Your E-mail Game

1. Use SMS and Chat for throw-away e-mails.

Your first surprise may come when you notice people who are unresponsive via e-mail often respond quickly to your text (SMS) messages. And you'll find chat surprisingly effective for clarifying things in quick Q&A sessions. It's easy to set up free accounts.

Is it professional? Absolutely, when used appropriately. You'll see rapid and broad uptake of these tools this year. For your team, consider Yammer (*www.yammer.com*), a social networking product designed specifically for internal communications. Either way, start with those you communicate with most, and you'll soon enjoy correspondingly fewer e-mails.

2. Separate out your important E-mail.

When helping clients we look to see how many newsletters they receive. If just a handful, Outlook's Rules feature can handle the job. For more, we recommend Nelson E-mail Organizer (*www.caelo.com/*), an Outlook add-in that separates correspondent (important) mail from bulk mail that can be read later.

3. Keep all the Outlook e-mails you want.

People who work hard deleting e-mail and religiously file to folders may feel efficient, when in fact they're stuck in old ways. The trend today is to e-mail less but save more of it, and find it using new browsing and searching technologies instead of filing.

We help shift people into the new ways. For many, improving their work flow and how they use Outlook is just what's needed. For those managing many external relationships, more is needed. Nelson E-mail Organizer has its own version of "friends"—it puts all e-mail (sent and received) from each person you correspond with into automatically-created NEO virtual folders. It makes it easy to browse to any e-mail you need.

For those who just want to improve on Outlook's search, X1 (*www.x1.com/*) or NEO Find can be a great fit.

Can Social Media Really Save E-mail?

Not entirely, but increasingly it will take over the social exchanges e-mail is poor at. Then e-mail programs can do what they do best—manage the information we all need to better do our jobs.

Tom is principal trainer for Slipstream Advantage Group. He coaches busy professionals and trains companies in the new ways to manage e-mail. Contact Tom at *SlipstreamAdvantageGroup.com*.

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"iOS vs. Android" by Wally Wang

iOS vs. Android; the Verizon iPhone; another pro-Windows enthusiast criticizes Microsoft; more iPad adoption; the next wave of displaced workers; Cyber War; developing apps easily; one less reason to choose Windows; the convenience of the Sidebar.

Here's one of many embarrassing facts for Microsoft. After heavily promoting Windows Phone 7 during the holiday season, Windows Phone 7 has grabbed only two percent of the market according to the NPD Group (*www.eweek.com/c/a/Mobile-and-Wireless/Windows-Phone-7-Share-Lags-Windows-Mobile-NPD-Group-518015/*).

Holding two percent of the market may not sound bad when you consider that Windows Phone 7 is still relatively new, but then you need to realize that Windows Mobile, which Microsoft essentially abandoned to promote Windows Phone 7, still holds a 4 percent market share, down from its once-dominant position of 20 percent of the market share.

When your new phone operating system sells half as many copies as its obsolete predecessor, that's a cause for concern similar to the time when more people opted for Windows XP rather than using Vista. (The fact that many people still prefer Windows XP, a nine-year old operating system, over Vista and Windows 7, is another embarrassment for Microsoft.)

There's nothing wrong with Windows Phone 7, but there's nothing necessarily compelling about it either. Compared to Android and iOS, the operating system running the iPhone and iPad, Windows Phone 7 isn't a vast improvement over the current batch of smart phones like the iPhone and Android were over Blackberries and Windows Mobile phones.

With Hewlett-Packard releasing webOS-based smart phones and tablets, the competition is going to get more crowded for Microsoft. Apple's iOS and Google's Android look to take the lead with everyone else (Nokia, Microsoft, Research in Motion and Hewlett-Packard) struggling for a distant third place.

Android appears to have the lead in market share, grabbing 53 percent of the market according to the NPD Group (*tech.fortune.cnn.com/2011/01/31/npd-android-os-phones-now-outsell-everyone-else-in-us-combined/*). While that sounds impressive, you have to remember that Google makes nothing from Android. The goal of Google is to get as many Android-based devices on the market to increase the chances that more people will see Google's ads, which is how they're really making money.

Apple's market share may only be at 19 percent, yet they've grabbed roughly half of the profit (*www.asymco.com/2011/02/02/making-it-up-in-volume-how-profit-and-volumes-traded-off-in-the-fourth-quarter/*)

from the mobile phone market.

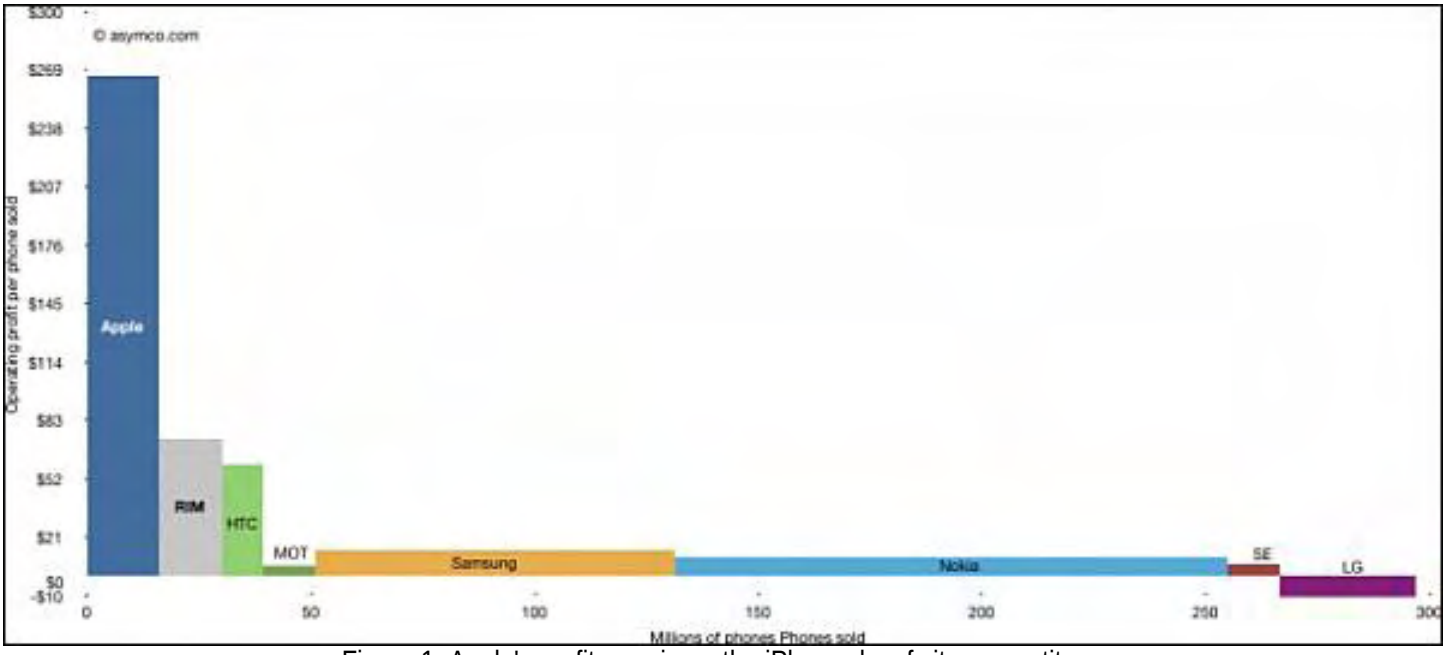

Figure 1. Apple's profit margin on the iPhone dwarfs its competitors.

So who's winning? Google wins because their business model depends on spreading as many Android-based devices around the planet as possible. Yet, Apple also seems to be winning because their profit margins are extremely high, especially compared to Nokia, which sells more phones but makes less money.

Sound familiar? Remember, Dell sells more computers than Apple, yet makes less money. Nokia sells more phones than Apple, but also makes less money. Apple doesn't necessarily need a large market share just as long as their profits continue growing and grabbing the lion's share of the market.

A glance at all the major phone companies in 2007 shows Nokia earned the most profits. Just three years later in 2010, Apple took the lead (*www.asymco.com/2010/08/17/androids-pursuit-of-the-biggest-losers/*) with Nokia dropping from 63 percent to 22 percent. How do you lose leadership in a market you once dominated and that nobody thought would ever change? You do what Nokia did and coast on inertia until something dramatically changes the market and forces you to react. Anyone from Microsoft taking notes on this? Do you think Microsoft's CEO, Steve Ballmer, is still laughing at the iPhone (*www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXq9NTjEdTo*) like he did when it was first introduced and Windows Mobile held 20 percent of the market?

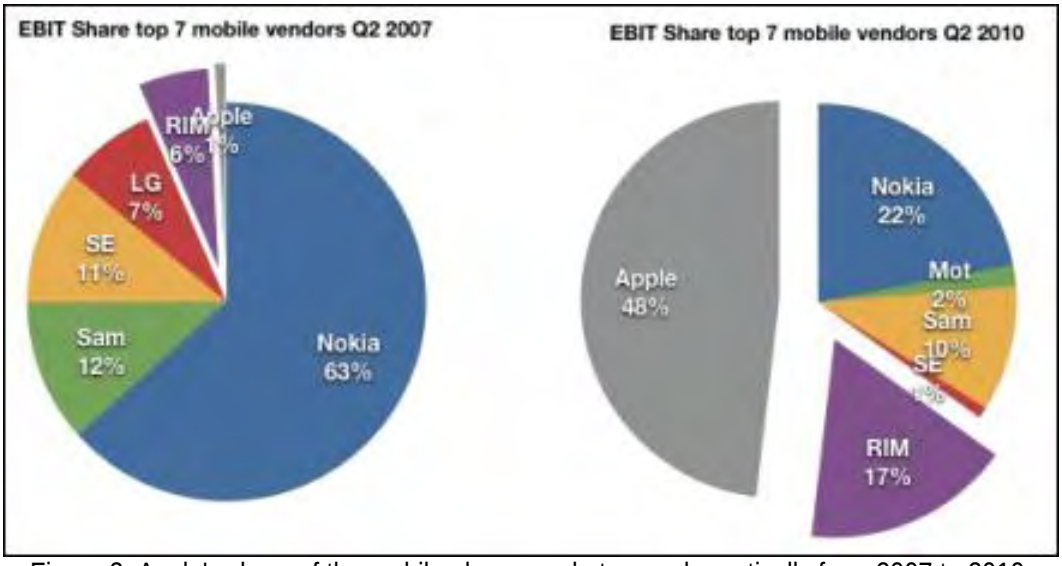

Figure 2. Apple's share of the mobile phone market grew dramatically from 2007 to 2010.

The real winner is both Google and Apple, and the real losers are everyone else who have to compete against Google and Apple. If you try to compete with the high-end of the market, you'll run straight into Apple's iPhone. If you try to compete on the low-end of the market with inexpensive phones, you'll run into Google's Android.

Where does that leave Microsoft's Windows Phone 7, Hewlett-Packard's webOS, and Nokia's Symbian and MeeGo operating systems?

The Verizon iPhone

Now that the iPhone is finally out for Verizon (*ptech.allthingsd.com/20110202/verizon-apple-iphone4-review/*), the consensus seems to be that Verizon is better than AT&T for actually making phone calls, but slower than AT&T when it comes to data such as browsing the Internet. Verizon also can't make a phone call and maintain an Internet connection at the same time—although it does offer tethering so you can share your iPhone's Internet connection with multiple devices such as a laptop or iPad.

If you value making phone calls, then Verizon seems to be the winner. If you value having a portable computer in your pocket or purse, then AT&T is the winner. In either case, Verizon has dropped their marketing support behind Motorola's Droid phones (for now) and is heavily promoting the iPhone instead.

Both Verizon and AT&T also market phones by other companies like Blackberries and Android, so rival smart phones will continue selling. The question is how much of Verizon's market will the iPhone get and when will the iPhone be available on other carriers like Sprint and T-Mobile?

For rival phone makers, the more disturbing question is how can they survive when the iPhone and Android phones are grabbing all the attention?

Another Pro-Windows Enthusiast Criticizes Microsoft

Paul Thurrott has been a pro-Windows enthusiast writing about computer technology for years. While Paul initially thought that the iPad would fail (*www.winsupersite.com/blogs/tabid/3256/entryid/75681/apple-drops-an-idud.aspx*), he later changed his mind after seeing sales of the iPad take off.

In the past, Paul has been pro-Microsoft, but lately he's been shifting his thoughts from supporting Microsoft to

criticizing them. His latest post questions whether Microsoft should just give up competing in the consumer market and just focus on the enterprise market (*www.winsupersite.com/article/microsoft-products/Microsoft-Should-Abandon-the-Consumer-Market.aspx*) instead.

Whether Paul is right or wrong, the amazing fact is that a pro-Microsoft enthusiast would even entertain the idea that Microsoft is losing in the consumer market so they might as well cut their losses and give up. When was the last time any pro-Microsoft enthusiast felt that Microsoft, with all of their money and people, couldn't compete against any rival?

Clearly even pro-Microsoft supporters recognize that the computing industry is changing and the world will no longer be a Microsoft dominated landscape. If Microsoft's ardent supporters are starting to believe this, and such supporters are likely the last people to accept this as a fact, then just how far has the shift away from Microsoft really gone?

More iPad Adoption

A year ago, some people were scratching their heads over the purpose of the iPad, while others were totally convinced that the iPad would fail dramatically. Yet there were enough people who saw the potential of the iPad to buy it right away. In the first nine months of its introduction, Apple sold over 14 million iPads.

Dan Frommer at Business Insider (*www.businessinsider.com/tablets-2011-2*) believes that Apple will continue dominating the tablet category despite challenges from RIM's Playbook, Hewlett-Packard's webOS slate, and Android-based tablets. Besides corporations adopting the iPad, the U.S. Department of the Interior is purchasing iPads (*www.informationweek.com/news/government/mobile/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=229201135*) for their workers to use while the state of Georgia is mulling over the idea of introducing iPads in the classroom (*blogs.ajc.com/political-insider-jim-galloway/2011/02/01/tommie-williams-state-considering-ipads-for-students/*). Even the Dallas Cowboys and other NFL teams are considering using the iPad to replace multiple printed pages of their playbook (*news.cnet.com/8301-13772_3-20030638-52.html*).

Remember when the tablet market was a niche category? Now a report from IHS iSuppli (*www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2379450,00.asp*) predicts that "...tablets, are expected to grow from 17.4 million units in 2010 to 242.3 million in 2015." For a device that was supposed to fail, the iPad has re-energized the tablet market and meeting the needs of various users in and out of the government.

On the other hand, Forrester Research (*www.informationweek.com/news/government/info-management/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=229200137*) found that less than half of all Federal employees are satisfied with the tools provided for them at work. With the dominance of Windows PCs in the workplace, does anyone want to guess which type of computers most Federal workers are probably unhappy using?

The Next Wave of Displaced Workers

At one time, Borders built a growing business selling books and music. Then they got hit by digital music wiping out audio CDs and now they're getting slammed by e-books reducing sales of printed books. Amazon recently claimed that e-book sales (*www.sify.com/news/amazon-kindle-e-book-downloads-surpass-paperback-books-in-us-news-international-Ib3pEeghfii.html*) finally surpassed sales of paperbacks, which isn't good news for Borders.

With printed books fading in importance, and the market shifting from reliance on Microsoft products, it takes no stretch of the imagination to see that sales of printed Windows books are going to get hurt next.

With fewer people buying books and fewer people relying on Windows, sales of Windows books should plummet,

leaving all those Windows book authors standing around, wondering what happened after years of collecting fat royalty checks for the past decade.

Windows book authors are suddenly going to find their knowledge obsolete and their Windows skills irrelevant in a world where Android and iOS dominate the computing landscape that is increasingly focused on mobile devices.

When I talk to most Windows book authors, they simply dismiss the idea of declining sales as temporary, denying the thought that book sales may never return to their previous highs. When these authors realize that book sales, and Windows book sales in particular, have no hope of ever improving, panic will likely ensue. Eventually when they can't avoid reality any longer, resignation should sink in as they finally shift their attention to learning other computing skills that don't depend on Microsoft.

What's frightening about so many Windows book authors is that their whole livelihood depends on Windows. If Windows loses its dominance, all of these Windows book authors won't know how to duplicate their previous financial success that was based on the popularity of Windows and not on their name or writing ability.

Anyone who remains stuck with Windows for too long will simply find themselves increasingly isolated like WordStar enthusiasts who refuse to stop using their favorite, but ancient word processor, or Commodore 64 enthusiasts who refuse to learn another type of computer.

It's easy to see how ridiculous it can be to cling to ancient technology like WordStar or a Commodore 64, but when will Windows enthusiasts realize that it's starting to look equally ridiculous to cling exclusively to anything related to Microsoft? Today's Windows book authors are going to be tomorrow's unemployed and unemployable unless they develop non-Microsoft computing skills in a hurry.

The era of easy money from Microsoft products is coming to an end. From now on, anyone associated with Microsoft will actually have to work for a living.

Cyber War

In his book *CyberWar (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0061962236?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0061962236*),* author Richard A. Clarke discusses how vulnerable this country's infrastructure is to cyber attacks from terrorist hackers and hackers of other nations such as China and Russia.

However, what caught my attention was the author's claim that much of the computer vulnerabilities stems from Microsoft Windows. Richard A. Clarke, who has worked for various Presidents from Reagan to Bush, states:

"Microsoft insiders have admitted to me that the company really did not take security seriously, even when they were being embarrassed by frequent highly publicized hacks. Why should they? There was no real alternative to its software, and they were swimming in money from their profits. When Linux appeared, and later when Apple started to compete directly, Microsoft did take steps to improve its quality. What they did first, however, was to employ a lot of spokesmen to go to conferences, to customers, and to government agencies lobbying against moves to force improvements in security. Microsoft can buy a lot of spokesmen and lobbyists for a fraction of the cost of creating more secure systems."

Whatever you think of Microsoft, the monoculture nature of a single vendor's software leaves any network ripe for exploitation. The government, and any company concerned about security, would be better served with a mix of computer operating systems so a virus or hacker couldn't exploit a single flaw in every computer on the network. Can anyone say that a Microsoft-dominated world works to anyone's benefit but Microsoft?

Developing Apps Easily

With the growing popularity of the tablet market and the iPad in particular, many people are wondering how to write apps for the iPad. The hard way is to learn Objective-C programming. The simpler way is to use a $99 program called NimbleKit (*www.nimblekit.com/*).

The idea behind NimbleKit is that instead of using a traditional programming language, you use HTML and JavaScript, which are the languages that many Web page designers already know how to use.

Instead of creating an app using programming language commands, NimbleKit lets you create an app much like creating an interactive Web page. While interactive Web pages may not be as versatile as Objective-C coding, it's much faster and more intuitive for many people, especially graphic artists.

One Less Reason to Choose Windows

For years, PC users could claim that the Mac didn't offer certain software. While Mac users could get around this problem by installing Windows through Parallels or Fusion, many companies are simply developing native-Mac applications to take advantage of the suddenly growing Mac OS X market.

AutoCAD now offers a Mac version (*usa.autodesk.com/adsk/servlet/pc/index?siteID=123112&id=15597568*) of their program along with a free trial of the program so you can see how it handles your current AutoCAD files.

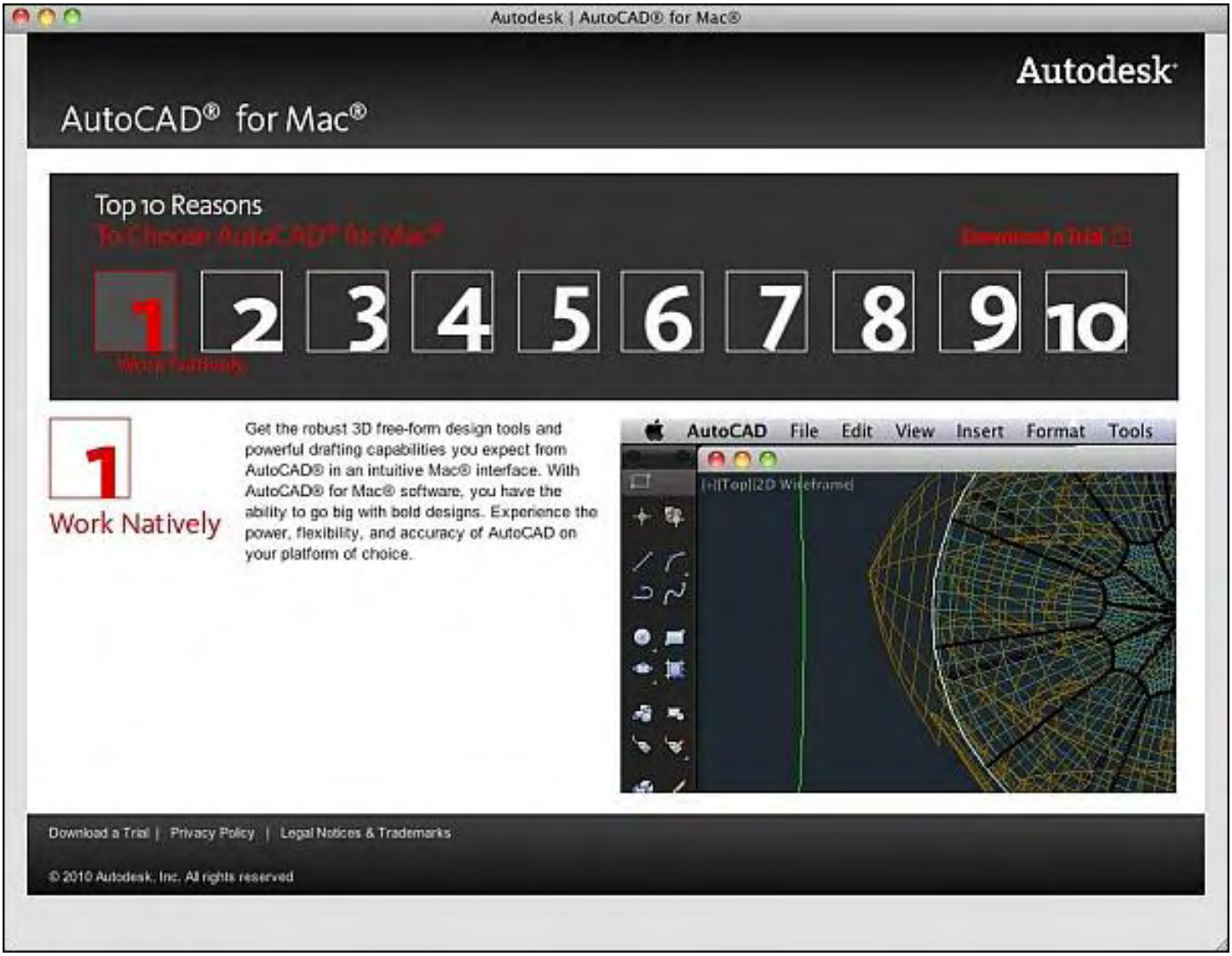

Figure 3. AutoCAD is now available for the Macintosh.

SolidWorks, another computer-aided design program, offers a free 2D drawing program for both Windows and the Macintosh, with a Mac version of SolidWorks (*www.solidworks.com*) coming this year. For two major CAD software companies to create a version of their software for the Macintosh indicates that they see a growing market catering to Macintosh users.

* * *

If you open the Finder window, you'll see the Sidebar, which is a pane on the left side of the window that lists common folders such as Documents and Applications. If you have a folder that you need to access regularly, you can drag that folder on to the Sidebar. Now every time you open the Finder window, you'll see your chosen folder in the Sidebar available for easy access.

To remove any item from the Sidebar in case you don't need it any more, just right-click on it and choose Remove From Sidebar. This command simply removes the folder's icon from the Sidebar but does not delete the folder in any way.

Figure 4. The Remove From Sidebar command lets you take a folder off the Sidebar.

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*).
Mac Programming For Absolute Beginners (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1430233362?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1430233362*)

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*. He also blogs about the latest technology trends at his personal site *www.wallacewang.com*.

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Beyond Personal Computing

“Electronic-Overflow: Distractions, Deletions and Dastardly Drama**”** by Marilyn K. Martin

Distractions can lead to office disasters. Auto-save and backup help prevent many more potential mishaps. Kids are now growing up surrounded by electronic distractions—becoming pros at multitasking. They are embracing this, rather than finding it a distracting nuisance.

PCs and the Internet are terrific work tools. You can research, write and print out reports or projects in a fraction of the time it once took. And the finished product is crisp and professional looking, like it just came back from a Professional Printer who'd had it for a week.

Or ... not so professional. Especially if you gave your teenager $20 to print out and bind a Project Report over a weekend, that was due a month ago. As s/he rocks to iTunes through a headset, they're obviously somewhat distracted. So don't be surprised if your Report lacks a few pages, or the graphics are upside down. ("Bummer, Dad. I thought the mountain-slope thing was supposed to go up, not down!")

Or else it's printed in purple ink, with tiny gothic icons in all four corners of the first page. (Try to be philosophical: What corporation doesn't have some toxic people that could be represented by a shrunken-head, a chainsaw dripping with blood, a rose with a bloody dagger through it, or the old skull-and-crossbones?)

Distractions seldom bothered us back when we were plunking on a typewriter. You could abruptly stop for any amount of time, and go back to the exact spot where you had left off. The typewriter and paper hadn't moved: Frozen In Time. This lulled us into subconsciously assuming that all manner of typing-devices would most likely have the same kind of stop-everything-with-no-risk convenience. Unfortunately, with computers this is no longer the case.

This is how costly computer data losses too often occur. We've traded lumbering non-memory, stiff keys and one-page-at-a-time typewriters, for the one-key-from-disaster "convenience" of computing. It's no wonder then, that for many of us the commands for "Undo" or "Restore" are the most worn out keys on our keyboard.

So all this speed and deceptive-ease provided by computers, now demands a necessary level of focus and attention to detail to avoid disastrous mistakes. Sounds of fists hitting a desk, some peripheral seen sailing by over cubicle walls, or a blurted out stream of obscenities are well known office reactions to a user whose computer just executed its own DE (Dump Everything) Command.

And I know well how office distractions can be on the scale of uber-proportions, if you have job aspects other than typing. I spent several decades doing clerical work in Los Angeles. And I can remember, more than once, being

pressed for time to finish a typing project, and the blasted phone wouldn't stop ringing!

Which just highlights that, whether at home or in the office, social compromises usually have to take precedence over work, as unavoidable distractions. "Reaching a good stopping point" is sage advice, that somehow seldom works in Real Life. A crying child with a bleeding hand, a cubicle-mate with a sparking, smoking tower, or a spouse excitably shaking a lottery ticket in your face, demands your drop-everything attention. Forget fumbling around, murmuring "Just a minute ...", to find a "good stopping point" in whatever you are working on.

And exactly what *is* a 'good stopping point'? It seems totally open to subjective interpretation. End of a sentence? End of a paragraph? End of a page? When your spouse puts a towel over your monitor at 3AM? When you wake up with little squares all over your cheek, from having fallen asleep on the keyboard?

If you work in an office floor cubicle city, ominous distractions may portend a serious crisis for everyone. And these potential distractions that may be a crisis are generally heard before they are seen. So hearing something like "Oh My God! Did you *see* that?" will cause most people to abruptly jump up, or at least roll over to poke their head out of their cubicle. The more excitable will even run pell-mell out of their cubicle hollering "What happened? Did someone plug the coffee machine into the copier again?"

Then, as the lights flicker and you smell smoldering dog hair, you rush back to your PC. And see the words "Forced Restore to Save Mainframe" on your screen. Meaning that all your computer files not backed-up and stored separately, are now as gone-gone-gone as the dodo.

If you work from home, you may have a spouse who likes to stand in the doorway and update you on the latest murder and mayhem tidbit from the local news. Or you have children who burst in after school, and plunk their latest 'fridge-art on the keyboard in front of you, while chattering a mile a minute. When they depart, your stomach churns when you discover that all your work since your last Save has been lost.

Even pets can cause distractions, whether at home or in one of those companies where pets can accompany their owners to work. From a cat knocking a beverage onto a keyboard, to a dog pulling the mouse off the desk and chewing on it, since it looks like a toy. I usually work with a cat on my desk, who is prone to sitting down on my keyboard to demand attention. So suddenly I'm looking at cat fur bordered by monitor icons. Or else she goes to sleep with her head on my mouse, and I look up to see my cursor traveling across the monitor screen all by itself.

People everywhere are fond of saying "Everyone makes mistakes." Which is supposedly a nifty excuse (or cover-up) for distracted or boneheaded mistakes. Especially since you are implying that you are just joining that vast sea of humanity who is always making mistakes. No wonder, then, that our society is obsessed with backing up everything, so that our "mistakes" can't take on monstrous proportions.

So, understandably, office software now comes with Oops-Options. These usually manifest when you hit Delete, and helpful little screen pop-ups ask: "Are you really, truly sure you want to delete this?" Recycle bins already double-check if you really want to Delete this or that, before you hit Final Delete. Which is even then not a permanent Delete, since that item is still tucked away in your hard-drive. Somewhere. But you'll need more expertise to retrieve that Deleted item than a screwdriver and a helpful cubicle-mate who mutters "Well, yeah, I saw this done once. How hard can it be?"

I wouldn't be surprised if keyboards and even monitors got into the Delete-Protection business next. Maybe there will soon be key commands, possibly among those nebulous F-keys, for "Auto Back-Up Save Despite Delete", Or "75 Second Pause Before Delete". Or even "Mandatory Save In Mistaken Delete File."

Maybe monitors will automatically make you play Are You Sure? Games before a Final Delete: "Do you know what month and day it is? Do you know what time it is? Have you checked to see if this data has been backed-up? Are you hungry? Do you want to take a Lunch Break and think over this Pending Delete?"

A recent article in the New York Times is titled "Growing Up Digital, Wired for Distraction" (*www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/technology/21brain.html*) (11/21/10). Researchers report that all this electronic gadgetry is rewiring kids' brains. Instead of being distracted by the constant stream of stimuli from computers and cellphones (like most adults), kids are embracing this constant barrage of electronic information. It's apparently less of a distraction to kids, than a challenge to stay on the cutting edge of up to the second news, gossip and must-answer e-mails from far and wide.

So kids today already know how to constantly switch tasks and focus within the electronic maze. This not only feeds their juvenile desire for "immediate gratification," but also poses profound new challenges for public education. Not many classrooms can replicate a "Three Second Quiz! Which Celebrities Look The Absolute Worst Without Makeup?" kind of stimuli. But teachers are gamely trying.

While some parents fear that kids will end up addicted to a "virtual world" of unending and superficial new stimuli, many schools are trying to embrace this electronic-blizzard to keep their students' engaged: "Today in History Class, Animation and Discussion: Would Superman Really Want To Stop The Bullet That Killed President McKinley?"

So I guess an adult's Distraction, of all this electronic barrage of stimuli and information, is just a young person's New Normal. While we adults struggle to multi-task, fracturing our focus, kids can bounce around the Internet with mini focus madness. They can read forty factoids and answer thirty text messages, all in 15 minutes or less.

But will all these electronic bits stick in their memory? Or make them want to research further? Or even choose careers that can't be absorbed in an unending stream of bits and pieces of electronic stimuli? Is patience and a long attention span a thing of the past? I haven't got a clue. Go ask your kids. Your son is playing Nuclear Meteorite for the Top Score in the universe. And your daughter's on her Virtual Farm, currently feeding her virtual pigs while milking her virtual goat.

I suspect the very definition of "distractions" while computing is already changing. After we adults ploddingly learned the spatial connectedness of mouse-to-monitor cursors, we still tend to burst out in colorful language at all the pop-up ads and misdirected Internet searches. This virtual electronic landscape is too fast, too illogical and at times counter-intuitive to our brains wired by the Real World.

While these New Normal kids, with their rewired brains craving all this electronic-stimuli, know exactly how to deal with all the info bits turned up while scanning the Internet or their incoming messages. Their brains must have a Priority Program that goes something like this: E-mails or text messages from best friends, romantic crushes, or parents asking about that funny smell in their room get answered first.

So an adult's electronic-distractions, are just a prioritizing-challenge for kids today. While we adults mumble at all the distracting advertisements and not even remotely close search engine sites, kids are gleefully surfing the Internet for the latest and coolest gossip, gadgets and games. Adults prefer multitasking toward multiple, but important, goals. Kids just want to answer instant messages with the least amount of key punching, and quickly scan favorite specialty sites for anything that catches their attention.

So adults, enjoy! Multitasking is giving way to mega-scanning. And kids? Welcome to the Future. Otherwise known as the Bottomless Abyss of Electronic Information.

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 ComputorEdge Staff

"Disable Pop-Up Information Balloons," "Dos Forever," "E-mail Move," "Win 7—64-bit," "Informative and Very Interesting"

Disable Pop-up Information Balloons

[Regarding the January 21 Digital Dave column:]

Pop-up balloons may be controlled (enabled/disabled) via the check box in "Folder Options" — "Show pop-up descriptions for folder and desktop items".

-Chris Romel, San Diego, CA

[Sure, if you want to do it the easy way. Thanks for the reminder. It is a much easier and safer way to approach the problem. —DD]

Dos Forever

[Regarding the January 14 Digital Dave column:]

I am still using some 16-bit DOS programs. Recently they stopped working because of perhaps a new antivirus program. I found I can still run them in DOS Box. It is an awfully handy free program.

-Mark Christensen, Glendale, AZ

E-mail Move

[Regarding the January 14 Digital Dave column:]

I use Thunderbird, it runs on Linux (Ubuntu) and Windows, and looks like the same whatever version of OS you are using. My transitions have been painless. Once I figured out how to set accounts :-).

-Ted, Poway

I'm late to the party, catching up on this issue :). It's surprising that no one mentioned Gmail. We just changed ISP and I'll never use an ISP e-mail again (such as @dslextreme.com or @sbc.com, etc). However, it was easier this time because we established a new Gmail account and imported everything, even contacts. Too bad I didn't know earlier before I started forwarding everything to myself from the old e-mail.

-Sandy, San Diego, CA

Win 7—64-bit

[Regarding the January 21 Digital Dave column:]

Legacy apps are painful for backwards compatible issues, but with the need for more RAM, 64-bit is a must and will one day be the norm in my opinion—get used to the environment.

My solution: multi-boot OS.

I've been running Win7-64 bit with the virtual machine to play with it mainly, but when *a must* dBase is needed, use the Win XP 32-bit. It is just a reboot away. Because I like features of 2003 server for term-serv, I have a 3-way boot. It works really nicely. It works well for old games without corrupting my Win 7 profile with garbage ads and additional startup apps that you don't want anyways.

In addition to OS compatible issues, it allows a quick test to see if hardware/apps are the issue or a Win7-64bit issue. (Say troubleshooting blue-screens: is it driver, CPU, or peripheral issues?)

Again, it's just a reboot away. When I'm trying to fix someone else's machine and need to test it on a known good, it's all just a reboot away and it doesn't cost anything more, except the education or someone that knows how to set it up :).

Thanks for your time,

-Chris Nastav, San Diego, CA

Informative and Very Interesting

[Regarding the January 21 Wally Wangs Apple Farm column:]

Once again, an informative and very interesting article has been produced by Wally Wang for the pleasurable consumption of Luddites in all major computational dominions... or something like that.

-Cicero, Colorado Springs

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