ComputorEdge™ Online — 02/25/11

Watch Out! He's Sifting through Your Stuff on the Internet!

This issue: Searching the Internet for Treasure

The Information You Post Is Being Collected—for Good or Evil.

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Digital Dave

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

A reader wants to set up his system to fax; a reader is receiving a memory error on his computer that is generally associated with software problems; Smoni is a Windows network error.

Dear Digital Dave,

I have a Canon MX-850 printer, Dell Inspiron 530, Windows 7 32-bit Professional, Microsoft 2010, and Cox Internet Service with Digital phone service. Now I want to setup my system to fax. My computer and printer is Ethernet connected to my router. My laptop is connected wirelessly to the router. I would like to install a PCI Internal Fax card to allow me to fax from Word and also have the capability to send from my Canon MX850's platen and through my laptop wirelessly. Could you please recommend a digital internal PCI fax modem and suggestions on how to setup my system?

Thank you.

Poz
San Diego, CA

Dear Poz,

Unless I'm mistaken, you won't need to buy an internal fax card, unless you're planning to fax from your laptop while traveling. The Canon MX850 already has fax capability built-in which you should be able access over your network for faxing from any other computer.

It's important to remember that faxing is primarily based upon telephone technology. If you have fax capability in your printer (or a fax card in your computer), all you need to do is plug in your telephone line as you would any telephone handset. While there are systems which will fax over the Internet (both software and Web based), they are merely simulating the phone line faxing operation delivering either to another fax machine or via e-mail. The fact that phone service is over the Internet (Voice over IP) is irrelevant to the fax operation.

Whatever you can do with your current setup is all in the software. I'm sure that there were programs which either came with the Canon printer or you can download from the Canon Web site that will do what you want. (You can also look for third-party programs.) The same is true for an internal fax card. Most of them will come with some type of software which will allow you to fax from your computer.

I can't recommend any specific fax card because I only send about two faxes a year. In that case, I just do it from my fax printer. I usually work with e-mail and PDF files which give much better quality. Other readers who are much more involved with the world of faxing may be able to make more specific recommendations.

While I believe the long-term life of faxing is severely limited, there are security advantages to sending pages over the phone line (i.e. signed documents). However, even those advantages go away if you accidentally send the fax to the wrong number.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

What does the following message mean, and how do I fix the problem? "The instruction at '0x03877f78' referenced memory at '0x03877f78'". The memory could not be "written".

Thanks for all your good tips over the years.

Don
Boulder, CO

Dear Don,

This is a Windows error generally associated with software problems—not memory problems. Sometimes it will be encountered when newly installed software conflicts with older programs, while at other times it may be the fault of bugs in the program. It is sometimes caused by add-ons in a Web browser, but could also be the result of malware.

If you've recently installed a new program, and you're running that program when you get the error, you should consult the software company or its Web site. Often, they are aware of the problem, although they will never advertise it.

Also if it occurs during a specific program, such as a Web browser, you can try disabling all of the add-ons to see if that solves the problem. If so, then turn the add-ons back on one at a time until you find the culprit.

Another thought is to temporarily disable the startup programs, one of which may be grabbing memory required by another program.

If the error seems to be more random, then you may want to try restoring to an earlier system restore point—prior to when you started to get the error. It could be that something newly installed is conflicting with another installed program.

Try using a registry cleaner to remove excess debris from uninstalled programs and temporary files.

Make sure that your antivirus software is up-to-date and that your computer is free of malware.

The last resort is to reinstall the operating system and start all over again. Hopefully, you will have isolated the problem early in the troubleshooting process, thus not needing to do the ultimate computer clean up—the OS reinstall.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

What is Smoni? I'm operating with Windows 7 and using Norton Internet 2010 at this time.

Israel
San Diego

Dear Israel,

To the best of my knowledge, Smoni is a Windows network error. It is most likely to occur when there is an IP conflict detected within the network. It most commonly appears in a window as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Smoni error window.

When two devices on a network are assigned the same IP, then it is impossible for them to be distinguished from each other. This conflict will generally make both devices inaccessible. Most commonly people have encountered this problem when they have a Brother printer on the network with a Linksys router—although it can be any device. Sometimes it crops up after new software is installed.

The solution is to change the IP (network address) of the offending device. This can be done directly by giving the device a fixed IP which is high enough to not interfere with automatically assigned IP. (The last set of digits of the IP might be 30 or 40, when you only have a few other devices on the network, i.e. 192.168.1.40.) This will minimize the chance of a conflict.

You can also power down all the devices on the network including the router, then bring the router back up first. As you power up each device, the router should assign an available IP to that device avoiding conflicts. In this situation, if you have assigned fixed IPs to some devices, bring them up first. This will avoid that fixed IP from being assigned to a previous device.

Digital Dave

Data Mining: Privacy Issues to Anti-Terrorism Tools

## "Are we trapping ourselves by using the Internet?" by Marilyn K. Martin

More and more personal information is becoming available on the Internet through social networks, online shopping and other means. Due to this, data-mining has become a business, leading to legal and ethical issues. As a result, privacy apps are being developed to protect certain information which can be viewed both negatively and positively.

Almost everyone knows by now to not answer Spam e-mails asking for detailed personal information. The come-on of some desperate stranger needing your help (even though they never address you by name), and dangling the promise of 50% of the pending proceeds for your "help," is a well known ploy for identity-theft, and/or to empty your bank account.

I've never done online banking, sticking with the tried-and-true method of calling for a daily balance and keeping an accurate account of deposits and withdrawals in my register. For a time, I even had a second checking account at another bank. I kept minimal funds in that account, and only used them for online or phone purchases, that couldn't be traced to my main checking account.

I also never joined any social-network sites, despite numerous "invitations" from friends already on those sites. Now, years later, my reticence has been proven correct, as too much personal information on those sites is ending up in the wrong hands. Too many people post too much personal information, and either don't understand or don't use the "privacy filters." They set themselves up for predators, bullies and criminals, probably carefully disguised as potential girlfriends or boyfriends the younger
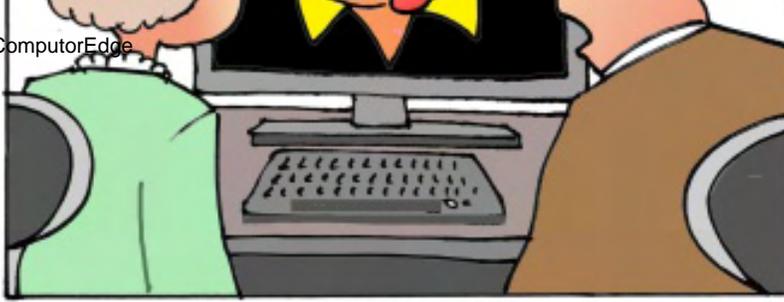
"I really love what this software does, but it isn't very user-friendly."

users are looking for.

Pro Security Zone (*Prosecurityzone.com*) states that "American users of social networking sites reveal too much personal information, and suffer from social side-effects of misusing the technology." Up to 33% of young people have posted nude or semi-nude photos—with a shocking 61% admitting that they had been coerced to do so. And 40% of social network users believe that they could actually lose their jobs, if their managers read the information they'd posted on those sites.

Worst of all, CyberTipline (*cybertipline.com*) reports that most information on networking sites is "cached" by search engines, and can be retrieved long after the site is deleted. Some state Attorney Generals are now posting "Cyber Crime and Internet Safety" articles on their government Web sites. And Massachusetts has just passed sweeping Anti-Bullying legislation, which also covers Cyber-bullying. Too little too late?

But now I'm noticing data-mining endeavors all over the Internet. Too many innocuous sites now require your "registration" first. Even if asking for just your name and address (or e-mail address), this information can easily add to a struggling site's revenue, by being sold to advertisers. And some online magazines, especially women's magazines, require "participation" in their blogs. Sometimes bloggers get preferential treatment when submitting articles. Other times the blogs are used as a data-mine of story ideas by the editors, who can go on to assign articles on specific ideas to their staff writers.

A few months ago, I read an article that stated that signing up with online survey sites was an easy way to earn a little extra income. I signed up with numerous survey sites available to me. Unfortunately, I quickly realized that most of these surveys were more about personal data-mining than any interest in my opinions!

First of all, I didn't fall into their most desirable categories of income and product/service purchases. So I'd answer a few questions and immediately drop out, or be diverted to another survey. Suddenly most of the surveys I was taking, on all the sites, involved answering lengthy and tedious questions about my financial practices, and all manner of health concerns! I strongly suspected that these had little or nothing to do with product or service marketing.

Then I started noticing that some sites had "extra surveys," even more personal, not for money or points, but promoted as letting the survey sites "know a little bit more about you." Supposedly so that they could target more appropriate surveys for me. The day I saw page upon survey page asking what medical problems I had, minor to major, I unsubscribed from all those survey sites!

Data-Mining as a Business

Data-mining is now a big business. It is being actively studied by colleges from the University of Helsinki to Georgia Tech. IBM's QUEST data mining project at their Almaden Research Center, offers demos to seminars, as well as information on their data-mining product, "The Intelligent Miner." While Dr. Usama Fayyad, CEO and co-founder of "DigiMine," has been working on data-mining technology since 1989. There is even a "Data Mining and Analytic Technologies" Web site, to share information on data-mining, with links to further information.

Now there are even industrious companies advertising "data-mining smart software" to the public. They are tailored to mine just the specific Internet information you want, and can be downloaded to your hard drive or even CDs/DVDs, to

be read later. "Internet data mining, Web harvesting, systematized screen scraping, parsing and re-configuring into a seamless enterprise accessible to all!" is part of one sales pitch.

Even "JPEG images can be ripped and stored on your hard drive, or onto a CD or DVD!" these companies advertise. These "SaaS" (Software as a Service) companies can even let buyers set up agents to routinely extract, store and publish data to multiple destinations. They insist that "All the data is secure and hosted in class A data warehouses, but can still be accessed over the Web securely."

Legal and Ethical Issues

So what does the law say about this exploding field of data-mining? A 2006 E-Commerce Times (*ecommercetimes. com*) article was titled "Data Mining: Where Legality and Ethics Rarely Meet (*www.ecommercetimes.com/ story/52616.html*)." It discusses how everyday ATM visits, credit/debit card purchases, and even Internet browsing and purchases, are all information routinely collected by data-mining programs and companies. But who uses this information and why?

Some consumer-oriented companies use the data to enhance the customer experience, and keep the data safely in-house. But when "data alliances" are formed among multiple marketers, or information on a Registration card for a purchased item is repeatedly sold by a data management agency, the consumer is no longer the focus. The idea then becomes, "It's legal, but is it ethical?"

Suddenly the mined data is being used to create "psycho-graphic profiles," with possibly erroneous or incomplete information being shared among unknown data alliances. These profiles can be misused by credit rating agencies, and loan applicants deemed "risky" can be denied mortgages. This not only infringes on privacy, but limits the choices and negotiating power of that (deemed) "risky" consumer.

Data-mining of highly personal information is also a deepening concern, especially about sensitive medical information. My alarming experiences with online surveys aside, there was a recent spat of media stories about hospital workers, from California to Florida, who were arrested for selling extremely private medical data on celebrities to tabloids. And quite recently, DNA analysis that can identify children of incest is a hot topic.

These stories inflame public suspicions that illegally (and/or intentionally) leaked personal medical information can be extremely damaging to all aspects of their lives. Although medical data-mining is supposed to be anonymous and used only for analytics, the public perception is that damaging medical information can be too easily stolen. Leaking negative medical data to insurance companies or even employers, the public thinks, can result in canceled or denied insurance, lost employment, and possibly legal issues and destroyed family bonds.

Testing the medical information issue, state Attorney Generals in 2008 started to tackle prescription data-mining. Some health companies make their living by selling information on doctors' prescriptions to drug companies. One of the cornerstones of pharma marketing, sales reps use the data to identify physicians whose prescribing habits might be open to new drugs with more advantages.

These newer drugs are also usually more expensive, and thus more profitable for the pharma companies. Critics charge that this medical data-mining drives up health care costs. But the pharma companies say anti-data-mining laws keep valuable information on new drugs out of doctors' hands.

By June 2009, the FDA's Law Blog reported that more states were banning prescription data-mining, and legal challenges to those new state laws had largely failed. But by November 2010, PharmPro.com reported that a U.S. Court of Appeals in New York shot down Vermont's anti-data-mining prescription law as "a restriction on commercial

free speech that violates the First Amendment." Vermont is expected to appeal.

But what about governmental data-mining? Can it be used effectively as a Terrorist Detection Tool, while still protecting civil liberties? The U.S. Government released a document in February of 2008, titled "Data Mining and Homeland Security: An Overview," by Jeffrey W. Seifert. Everyone agreed that the inherent challenge of data-mining is to simultaneously protect the nation from terrorism, while also protecting civil liberties.

On the local front, more law enforcement is using data-mining for "predictive analysis," from Intelligence Gathering to Crime Analysis. The idea is to use the data to anticipate or predict crime, and then to be proactive by analyzing the data as Confirmation or Discovery. Targeting "risk," which is considered a negative factor in financial data-mining, is considered a life-saving technique when used to recognize and manage criminals, real or potential.

Laws are also changing about electronic data retention, in terms of what electronic information is stored, and for how long. Again, law enforcement concerns are cited, and many "deleted" calls, e-mails and text-messages routinely turn up in court. In the corporate setting, IT professionals who store and manage all that electronic data, can end up in the cross-hairs.

Some IT jobs require the pros to be "data architects," generating in-house reports for Sales and Marketing based on their mined customer data. But if pressed for how safe that mined and warehoused data is, or if it is ever sold to a third party, most IT pros don't know the answers. Most don't concern themselves with their company's privacy policies, and leave the legal and ethical issues to their Legal Departments. But Legal Departments are not known for riding hard on stored electronic data, or how this information is being used or stored by a third party.

So there may be legitimate questions in the public mind about how safe all that retained corporate data is. Even if the data is only about customer purchases and preferences, cyber-criminals could still steal the information from third parties, and target high-end consumers for identity-theft or bogus online "sales."

Data-mining, along with legally retained information, is a natural outgrowth of the explosion in electronic technology. As more and more electronic data continues to be generated, the retained or analyzed-then-stored data will need more safeguards to protect all concerned. The continuing release of Wikileaks data, of sensitive U.S. military and diplomatic communications never meant to be made public, is an example of how a few malicious individuals can "leak" highly sensitive information to expose secrets and harm delicate diplomatic relationships.

Privacy Apps

From the other perspective, new "privacy apps" are now making an appearance. A new iPhone app called "TigerText," advertises that it can totally remove deleted text messages, from both sender and receiver phones. Its advertising pitch is "Send texts that don't live forever!" So now possibly incriminating (and non-verbalized) text messages can instantly disappear.

As these "privacy apps" proliferate, the public will at least have more tools to use against data-mining. This may be the easiest way for the general public to "manage" their own privacy issues. Especially since "privacy filters" on networking sites, and understanding the long-range implications of search engines' cached private data, are still too complex for most of the public to fully comprehend.

There are also How To articles popping up around the Web, on how to clean your personal or sensitive information off of a computer or even the Internet. (Highly recommended anyway, since Hiring Managers check candidates' Internet trails.) Articles, software and even hired Internet-cleaners now offer help for private individuals to erase foot-in-mouth Internet posts, embarrassing photos, and even learn how to clean their own hard drives. How these scrubs or

removals will affect law enforcement and mandated electronic-data retention, remain to be seen. Or even if search engines still have that embarrassing "scrubbed" Internet data cached.

So expect data-mining to grow exponentially, along with continually advancing technology to manage all this raw data. Most experts feel that as long as data-mining is used as a strictly anonymous aggregation technique for analysis, most data-mining should stay within the boundaries of privacy laws. But also expect an ongoing stream of state laws to address new or overlooked issues, when it comes to protecting the public from illegal or misrepresented data-mining.

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.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm
"Browsing in Private" by Wally Wang

Wally explains several ways to browse in private, including browsing through a virtual machine. Beating Apple on price; eliminate the middleman; the strange paradox of Motorola's Xoom; an office suite for tablets; auto-completion features in computer programs.

Every time you visit a Web site, your browser keeps track of your activities in case you want to visit a previously viewed site. That's why browsers offer a History menu, so you can look back at the sites you visited and return to them.

Of course, anyone who gets access to your computer can do the exact same thing, and discover which Web sites you've been visiting and in which order. If you don't like the idea of leaving behind a trail of bread crumbs on the Internet for other people to follow, then try using the Private Browsing feature on the Safari menu. (Firefox users can choose the Tools => Start Private Browsing command.)

Figure 1. The Private Browsing command appears on the Safari menu.

While the idea of private browsing sounds nice, it's not fool-proof, so if you want another way to browse privately, grab a copy of Parallels (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0041DVQ8M?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B0041DVQ8M*) or Fusion (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002Q72JB8?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B002Q72JB8*), then run Linux as a virtual machine. Within Linux, run a browser like Firefox with its private browsing feature turned on. Now if someone wants to track your browsing activity, they'll have to know you used a virtual machine to mask your activity.

Browsing through a virtual machine has an additional advantage as well. Since many Web sites are booby-trapped to install spyware on a Windows PC, such spyware tactics won't work on a Macintosh running Linux as a virtual machine. Although you may still spot malware threats on the Internet, running Linux as a virtual machine effectively shields your computer from any possibly infection.
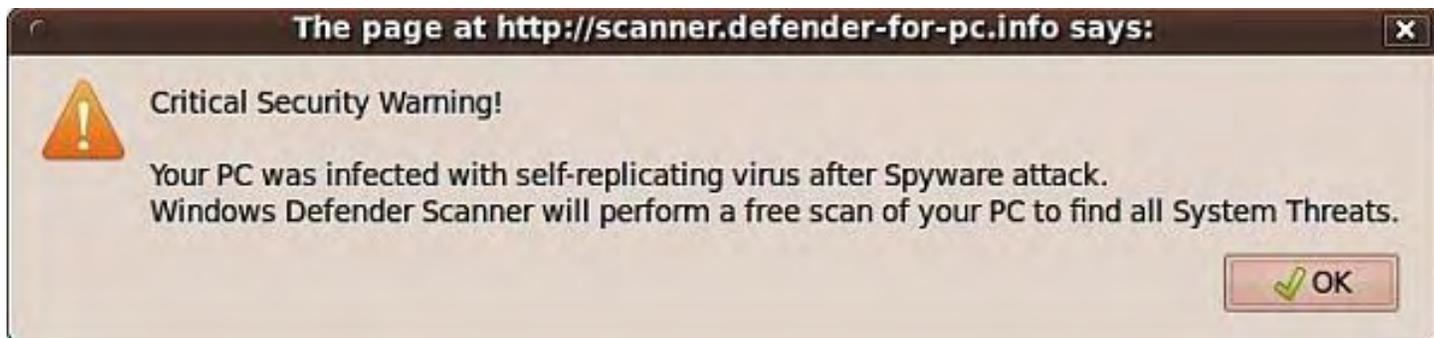
Figure 2. Identifying phony malware threats is easy when browsing in Linux running on a Macintosh.

For the really paranoid, install Linux as a virtual machine on your Macintosh, then browse through Linux using a proxy such as The Cloak (*www.the-cloak.com/anonymous-surfing-home.html*). A proxy server lets you browse through another computer. Instead of storing your browsing history on your computer, a proxy stores it on its own computer. Now if someone tries to track your browsing habits, they'll only be able to trace them to the proxy, but any Web sites you visited through that proxy won't be stored anywhere on your computer.

Of course, the simplest way to browse the Internet anonymously is to use another computer. Now you can feel safe visiting the Communist Party site and any pornographic adult sites just as long as you use a computer that belongs to someone else, such as your boss's. As long as nobody knows you're secretly using a particular computer, they'll never be able to trace its browsing history back to you.

If you don't have access to someone else's computer, visit an Apple Store and use one of their computers. You may not get much time to stay in one place for long, but with so many people using the same computers every day, anything you do will get lost in the activities of everyone else who uses that same computer too.

Anyone in China ever consider using a Macintosh in an Apple Store to browse the Internet anonymously? Apple has already opened several stores in China, including a Shanghai store with a 40-foot tall glass cylindrical entrance. Now if we could only get Apple to open stores in North Korea, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iran, we might get more people access to anonymous Internet browsing than ever before.

Figure 3. The Shanghai Apple Store consists of a 40-foot tall glass tower for an entrance.

Beating Apple on Price

For years, people have shied away from Apple products, citing the "Apple tax" that made Apple products more expensive than similar products. Despite Apple's higher price, the sales growth of Macs (*www.asymco. com/2011/01/24/how-does-the-mac-gain-share-while-increasing-its-price-premium-over-the-windows-pc/*) have outpaced sales growth of PCs for nineteen straight quarters. The asymco site states that "the Mac price premium at the end of 2007 was at least 93% and it now is at least 114%.
So here's the real surprise: How does the Mac gain share while increasing its price premium over the PC?"

Given a choice between a Macintosh or a Windows PC, people used to take one look at the price and choose the Windows PC. Now it seems that more people are choosing Macintosh computers despite the higher price. What happens if the Windows PC costs more than the Macintosh?

Both Dell and Hewlett-Packard found that out the hard way when Apple introduced their MacBook Air and Dell countered with their thin laptop dubbed the Adamo while Hewlett-Packard countered with their thin Envy 13 laptop (*www.electronista.com/articles/11/02/19/hp.drops.envy.13.in.favor.of.envy.14/*). With prices slightly higher than the MacBook Air, both the Dell Adamo and Hewlett-Packard Envy 13 sold poorly, leading Dell and Hewlett-Packard to kill their thin laptop competitors.

When a Windows PC costs less than a Mac, many people are still choosing a Mac. When a Windows PC costs more than a Mac, more people definitely choose the Mac. No matter what the price difference, a growing number of people appear to be choosing the Mac over a Windows PC because how else could Apple keep selling more Macintosh computers every quarter?

Eliminate the Middleman

Borders is shutting down nearly one-third of their bookstores around the country. Can trimming expenses save the company? Probably not. Walk into any Borders store and it will seem like walking through a museum of antiques.

Besides printed books (which are being replaced by e-books) and magazines (which are losing readers as fast as newspapers and being replaced by Web sites), Borders also sells music CDs (which have been wiped out by MP3 files), movies on DVDs (which are being wiped out by streaming video rentals), and paper maps (which are being wiped out by smart phones that offer interactive maps). Look around the carcass of any Borders store and the only thing of theirs that you can't get over the Internet is a cup of coffee and a pastry.

Borders, and every bookstore in the world, simply sells obsolete products. They might as well be selling typewriters, slide rulers and buggy whips. While Borders helped kill themselves through less-than stellar executive decisions that once directed online customers to buy books through Amazon, Borders is also the victim of the entire dying book industry.

The New York Daily News (*www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2011/02/18/2011-02-18_bankruptcy_of_borders_proves_that_flooding_the_market_with_books_doesnt_work.html*) states that the book "...industry colluded to push an overpriced product on a public whose purse strings were tightening and whose tastes were changing. Demand dropped steadily, but supply kept soaring—only now is it coming down to earth. Nothing reminds me so much of those tracts of foreclosed houses in Florida as stack upon stack of hardcover books, desperate to be bought for $25.99."

Where has this story of an industry pushing overpriced, mediocre products at customers been told before? How about the music industry that artificially boosted audio CD prices despite the fact that CDs were easier and cheaper to ship than boxes of vinyl records?

Look at the movie industry that spends millions pumping out mediocre movies, and then looks on in alarm as weekend box office revenues continue plummeting each year?

The loss of so many Borders bookstores means less distribution for everyone. Lower distribution means the chances of profits are less, which forces publishers to print fewer books. With profits so uncertain, publishers will take fewer risks and only publish "sure-fire" hits like books by celebrities or known authors. With fewer books available, buying books will become even less appealing, causing fewer people to buy books and forcing the publishing industry into a vicious cycle of printing fewer and fewer books to save money.

The problem stems from the middleman. Amazon eliminates the middleman by letting customers search and purchase practically any book they want, which they had to special order from a bookstore in the past. Netflix eliminates the middleman by letting customers search and view movies right away without wasting time visiting a Blockbuster Video store and choosing from their limited selection of the latest movies. Get rid of the middleman in any industry and that's the future of that industry.

In the publishing industry, the two middlemen are the bookstores and the publishers. Bookstores determine what customers can buy from their limited selection while publishers limit what people can buy by deciding what gets published in the first place.

Today, bookstores are going away as the middleman standing in the way between customers and the books they want. Tomorrow, publishing companies are going away as the middleman standing between customers and the authors.

Here's the future to eliminate both bookstores and publishers as the middleman: Amazon's Kindle (*www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?ie=UTF8&docId=1000234621*). Not necessarily the Kindle itself, which looks woefully antiquated next to an iPad, but the whole Amazon distribution of e-books through its Kindle software and devices.

Figure 4. Amazon offers self-publishing options for the Kindle.

Sign up for free with Amazon's Kindle Publishing Program and you can distribute your e-books or periodicals (magazines or newspapers) to any device that can run the Kindle software. Even better, by selling directly to customers, you can keep 70 percent of the profits while giving Amazon 30 percent.

Compare this business model with the traditional book distribution model where authors get 10 to 15 percent of the profits while the publishers take the lion's share, give part of the profits to book distributors, who give part of the profits to bookstores. Eliminate the bookstore, the book distributor, and the publisher's share of the profits, put them directly into the author's pocket and you have a far more enticing business model for any author.

Bookstores, book distributors and publishers are going to get hurt, but smart authors are going to get rich by taking advantage of this direct-to-customer publishing experience offered by Amazon's Kindle platform.

With every new change in life, you can either mourn for the past and waste time, or you can look for new opportunities and take advantage of them as they appear. John C. Maxwell, author of *How Successful People Think (*/www. amazon.com/gp/product/1599951681?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1599951681*)* refers to this as "possibility thinking." Instead of looking at any situation and focusing on what's wrong, possibility thinking focuses on looking at what's right.

Looking for what's wrong shuts the door to spotting opportunities. Looking for what's right opens doors to opportunities. With the same opportunities available to everyone, possibility thinkers see them while critics do not. You can either take advantage of possibility thinking like Amazon and Netflix did when they recognized the potential of the Internet, or you can miss this opportunity by clinging to the past where you'll eventually wither and die like Borders and Blockbuster Video. Where do you want to bet your future?

The Strange Paradox of Motorola's Xoom

One of the major selling points of Motorola's Xoom tablet has been its ability to run Flash. Now it appears that while Motorola will launch the Xoom on February 24, it won't have Flash support (*www.electronista.com/ articles/11/02/21/motorola.xoom.ships.february.24.without.flash/*) until later in the spring. Several other tablet manufacturers also had to withdraw support for Flash despite earlier promises. What's going on?

Apparently Flash performance on mobile devices still isn't good enough to keep the average consumer happy. All of those critics who claimed that the iPhone and iPad were worthless because it didn't offer Flash support should now be boldly claiming that every smart phone and tablet in existence is equally worthless because they all lack full Flash support. Once again, the problem doesn't lie with the smart phone or tablet manufacturers but with Adobe as they desperately try to optimize Flash for mobile devices before their whole investment in Flash disappears as more people stop relying on it.

Motorola also confirmed that the Xoom tablet will cost slightly more than the iPad with a starting price of $800, which may also require one month of cellular phone activation as well. When rival products are cheaper than Apple products, critics claim that Apple products are overpriced and thus inferior. When rival products are more expensive than Apple products, critics claim that the features you get justify the higher cost.

So using this convoluted logic, shouldn't Macintosh computers be superior than Windows PCs because of their features that are worth the higher price? And shouldn't the iPad be superior than more expensive tablet rivals because the iPad costs less? Therefore it's safe to assume that all those anti-Apple critics out there are now rushing to buy Macintosh computers, iPhones and iPads based on their own impenetrable logic.

An Office Suite for Tablets

Although most of the world relies on Microsoft Office, Microsoft hasn't committed to releasing a version of Office for the iPad or Android. If you want to create and edit Microsoft Office files on a tablet, you have two choices.

If you have an iPad, you can rely on Apple's own iWork suite, which consists of Pages (a word processor), Numbers (a spreadsheet) and Keynote (a presentation program). Each iWork app costs $9.99 so the whole iWork for the iPad suite will only cost you $29.97. While iWork apps can import Office 2007/2010 files (such as .docx, .xlsx, and .pptx files), they can only export the files as older Office 2003 files (such as .doc, .xls, and .ppt).
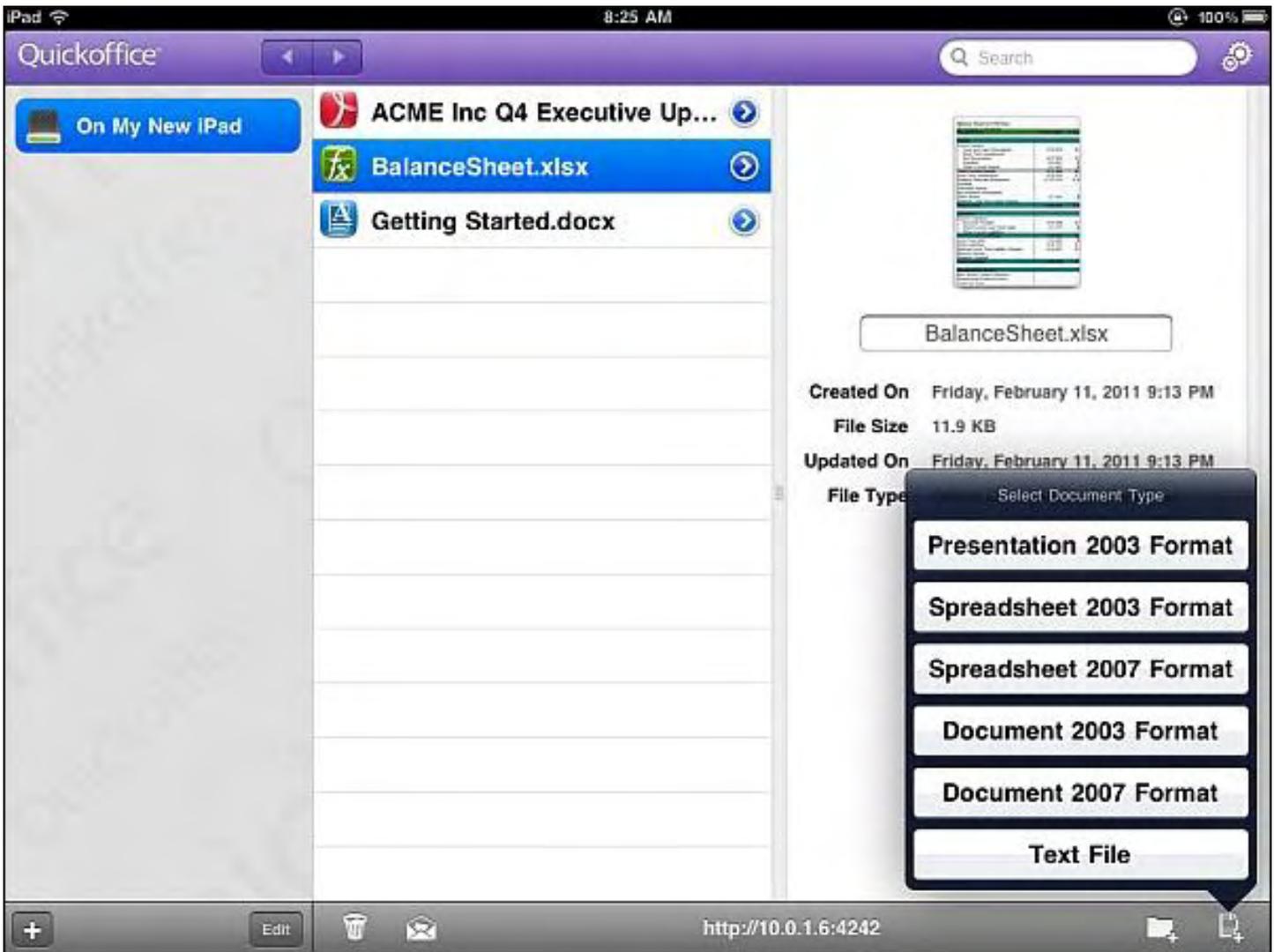
Figure 5. QuickOffice supports Office 2003 and 2007 file formats.

Naturally, iWork for the iPad can save files in native iWork file formats, but that's only useful if you're sharing files with other iWork users, which effectively limits your files to Mac users.

If you want the ability to edit and create Office files without importing and exporting them, then you may want to look at QuickOffice (*www.quickoffice.com/*). Not only is QuickOffice available for the iPhone (unlike iWork), but it's also available for Android and Blackberry devices too. QuickOffice for the iPad is only $24.99, which includes a word processor, spreadsheet and presentation program, so it's cheaper than iWork as well.

QuickOffice supports both Office 2003 and 2007 file formats for both Word and Excel files so you can edit and modify docx or .xlsx file without converting it first. However, QuickOffice only supports editing PowerPoint 2003 files (.ppt). While you can view and display a PowerPoint 2007 (.pptx) file, you cannot edit it.

Despite this minor limitation, QuickOffice is amazingly full-featured for a tablet office suite. You can type, edit and format text including changing fonts and color and add pictures and shapes through the intuitive touch screen of the iPad. If you're on the road, QuickOffice lets you capture your ideas for a document, spreadsheet, or presentation, then save it to your computer for more extensive modification.

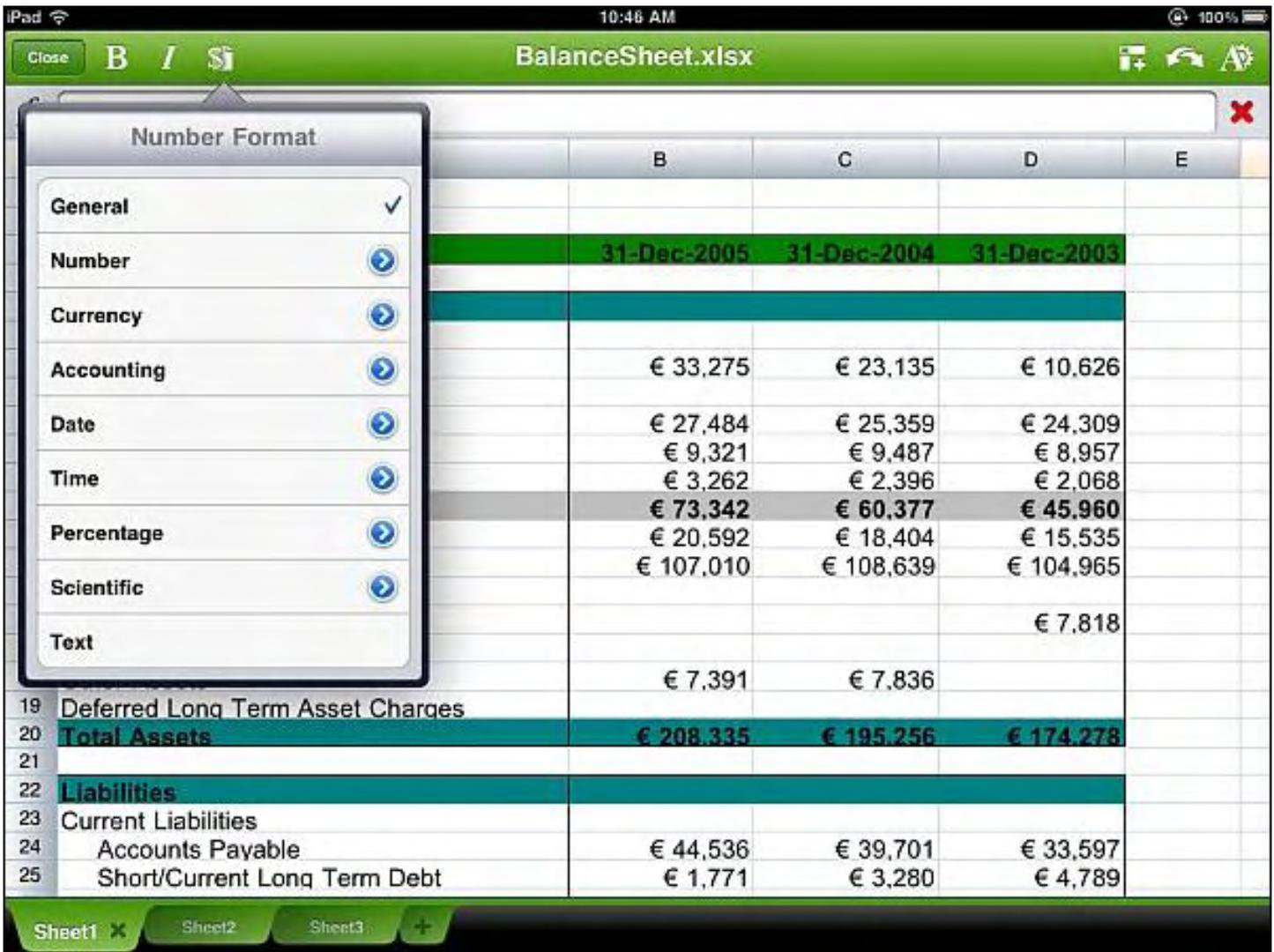Figure 6. You can create and format text in a Word document.

Figure 7. QuickOffice offers formatting features for Excel spreadsheet data.
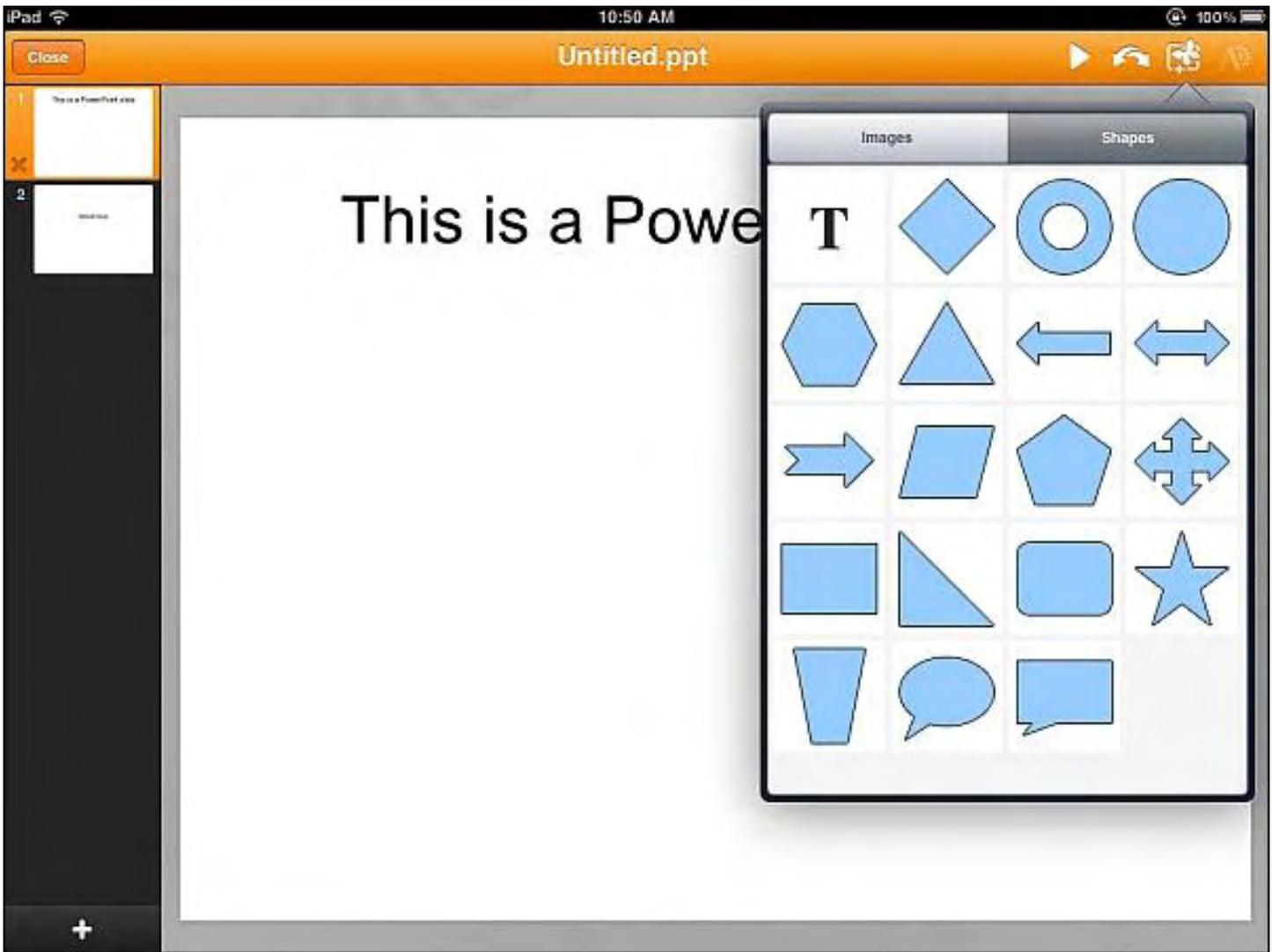
Figure 8. You can create and edit PowerPoint 2003 files.

However, it's perfectly possible to create an entire document, spreadsheet, or presentation in QuickOffice without relying on Microsoft Office on a computer at all. You won't get all the fancy features of Microsoft Office such as the ability to create an index in a word processor document or PivotTables in a spreadsheet, but you do get enough features to do the most common tasks for creating or editing Word, Excel and PowerPoint files.

Since you'll likely need to share your QuickOffice files with a computer, QuickOffice provides the ability to transfer your files from your iPad to iTunes on your computer through either a USB cable or a WiFi connection. You can also store and access your files remotely through cloud storage services like MobileMe, Dropbox, Google Docs, Box.net, Huddle and SugarSync.

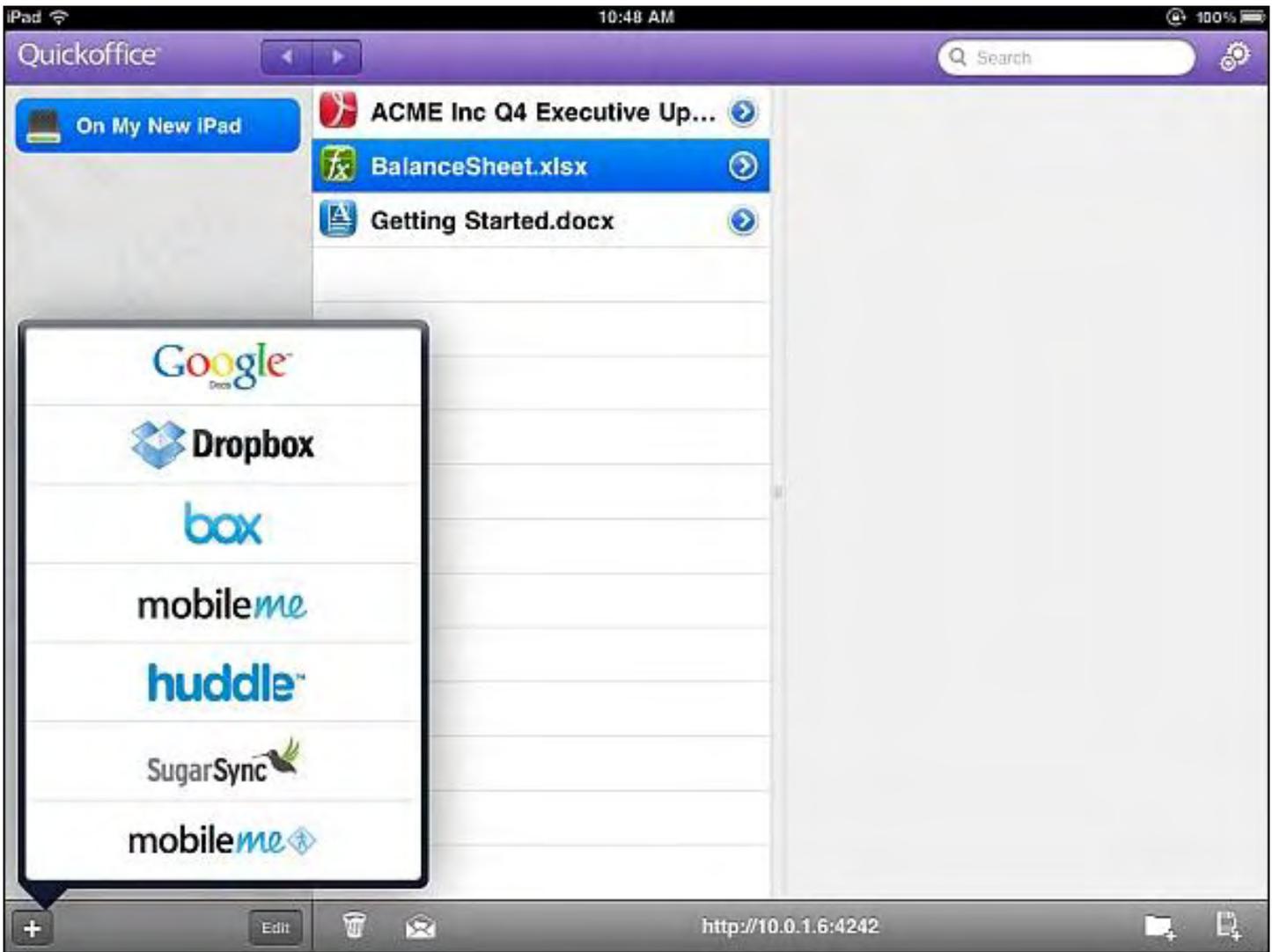Figure 9. QuickOffice makes it easy to share and transfer files.

If you rely on Microsoft Office, you'll probably want to use QuickOffice instead of iWork. Even if you don't depend on Microsoft Office, you'll still want to compare QuickOffice to iWork to see which one best meets your needs. Since the majority of the world still relies on Microsoft Office, QuickOffice is the closest you'll get to a version of Microsoft Office on the iPad.

*   *   *

To make using a computer easier, many programs offer an auto-completion features. Just type part of a word and the program displays a list of words it thinks you're trying to type. This most often works in the Search box of Safari, but you can often use this in most other Macintosh programs as well such as Pages.

Just start typing a word and press Command+. (the Command key followed by the period key), and you'll see a menu of word choices the program thinks you want to type. Just click on a word and save yourself from typing the whole word yourself.
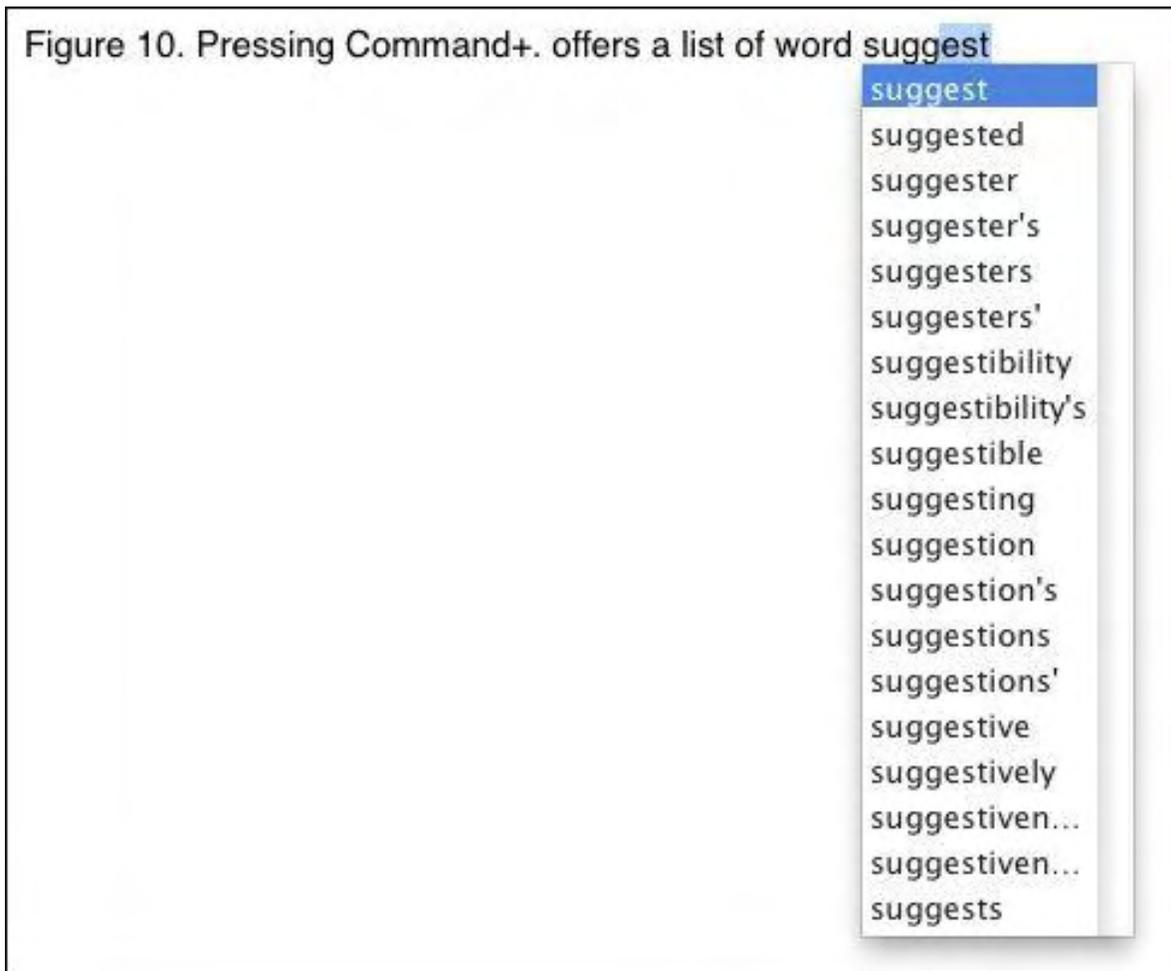
Figure 10. Pressing Command+. offers a list of word suggestions.

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*.

Beyond Personal Computing

"Computer Icons: Meaningful or Mindless?" by Marilyn K. Martin

Computer icons were developed in the 1970s. Since then, they have progressed from obvious "road signs" to unintuitive illustrations. Marilyn explains the evolution of icons and how they have burst into pop culture.

We all love our monitor screen icons. They are strange and funny little pictograms that (supposedly) tell us at a glance what program or function they represent. Some are even short-cuts to games or other quick-launch programs. They are usually arranged in tidy rows to one side of our screens, and we can move, enlarge or shrink them on command with left-mouse clicks. But exactly when and where in the cluttered History of Computing, did these funny little symbols arise?

The Xerox Palo Alto Research Center first developed icons in the 1970s, as a tool for making computer interfaces easier for novices. They were the first to use an icon-based "graphical user interface" (GUI) to display screen information, designed around an "office" metaphor (another first). So their Xerox Alto (1972) and the later Xerox Star (1981) computers contained the first on-screen icons.

Nothing fancy, these first icons were just little black and white squares with identifying titles like Blank Document, Program, Printer and so on. These function-icons, then as now, responded by the user placing the cursor on the icon, and then clicking the mouse or trackball. (As a Clerical Temp, I loved that Blank Document icon! Click on it, a blank page pops up, and I could start typing. All without having to rummage through someone's word processing program looking for a fresh page.)

When Apple and Microsoft soon adopted and popularized them, the public came to expect that all computer interfaces would be icon-driven. The 1984 Apple Macintosh even contained the first artist-designed icons, by Susan Kare (*kare. com*). Her tiny black and white icons were brilliant, minimalist studies in how to identify a program or file at a glance. Her idea, that icons were more "road signs than illustrations," is considered the driving philosophy behind Apple's early commercial success.

Icons have now matured to represent practically anything accessible by an online computer, from internal programs, to shortcuts to favorite Internet sites, to quick launches for games. Icon designers today strive for original and distinctive icons, that can be easily seen on a wide variety of monitors set at different resolutions.

For awhile, most icons were virtually idiot-proof. A distinctive pictograph and a few words, and no confusion. Today, however, some icon-design is spinning in an alternate universe. Some overly-designed icons are so distinctive that

designers think no explanatory words are needed. Well known company logos are one thing. But what exactly does a frog, crossed swords, a fried egg or a pebble in an empty jar mean?

There are now a wide variety of supposedly intuitive-icons on monitor screens far and wide, that can totally stump a new or casual user. Does a tiny icon of people sitting around a conference table mean Meetings? Networking? Scheduling? Exactly what file or program is represented by a faceless head with a crown? A motorized vehicle part? Or "Happy Daze" on a tiny tombstone?

How about a big red 'X' over a cookie jar? A mind-psych game for weight-loss? A nutritional protest of processed sugar? Or a reminder to keep that quick-to-empty cookie jar in the kitchen full?

Meanwhile, icons representing global Internet companies, can be down right other-worldly. Internet Explorer's blue "e" with a yellow orbit is understandable. But one newsreader's icon is a satellite with no words. So how is the casual viewer to interpret that satellite? Is it sending or receiving? And where to or from? Is it weaponized? Should we start wearing titanium helmets?

And lots of companies today want to advertise their international operations with tiny Earths. Without any explanation, how are we to understand a tiny Earth with a "For Rent" sign? ("Extraterrestrials? Come on down!") Or a couple of tiny, overlapping Earths? ("Missions in Mitosis!") Or how about a tiny Earth with the moon sitting on top of it? ("Space Colonies Are Closer Than You Think!")

Honestly, if icon designers want to translate macro-concepts into mini-icons without using any explanations, they need to do a better job. We already have graphical motion and sound for emoticons. Why not for icons too? A standing-up piggy-bank with dollar signs swirling around it, means your online bank account is healthy. But if you are overdrawn, that piggy-bank should be on its side, flat or broken, and emit a croaky, half-dead oink if the cursor clicks on it.

Are you in the midst of planning a tropical vacation? Then a sunglasses icon to your vacation file, should have a palm tree and a pair of plane tickets in the background. If you are feeling blue, staring out at a snowy landscape, clicking on those sunglasses and hearing a few notes of reggae would sure be nice.

Then again, trying to keep secret or illegal files hidden under wordless or unclear icons, may not save you. Are you a snoopy type with a rap sheet for stealing encrypted or super-secret data? Then expect the Feds to open your binoculars icon and find all your stolen IDs, passwords or hacker-notes. That toothy-smiley face with gold dollar signs on each tooth? Bad place to hide your hedge fund miscalculations.

Icons today have truly taken on a life of their own. They can be anything the user wants, from triggering a macro command, to mood-signaling through emoticons from their own toolbar. Special icons can even be downloaded for free from various Internet sites. Iconarchive.com, with about 40 categories of icons, has everything from Science Fiction to Paranormal, Nature to Holiday icons. You can even buy special software to design your own icons. So, like special cursors and screensavers, icons can now veer toward personal artwork, and can be used to individualize your PC experience.

There is even a whole new category now for "mystery icons," or icons that suddenly pop up on computer screens, and the users have no idea how they got there. Such as "Hey, Bob—I suddenly acquired a three-little-trees icon on the opening screen of my laptop. Did I just flunk Forestry again? Or has someone given me 3-for-1 Gift Trees on sale after Arbor Day?"

And profound mystery surrounds the tilde (~). These seem to pop up all the time on monitors as icons, alone or in combination, and no one knows why. Well, I tracked down the explanation for the pop-up tilde, and it sounds more like

a children's storybook: "One fine day, not-so-nice Tilde, the backup address book, suspiciously arrived in PC land riding on a great hulking Cumulative Patch. But there was a nasty bug in that Patch, that could crash PC land! And since Tilde is just a backup, Mr. Antivirus or Mrs. Anti-spyware didn't flag it as suspicious. Oh dear! How is PC land going to get rid of that terrible Tilde? Is it time to call in the Desktop Destroyer? Just as soon as his wrestling tour ends with the Ignoble Icon and the Menu Mangler?"

Internet blogs are full of icon-complainers, ranging from "I've got a mystery icon of a little box with stairs inside. Anyone know what this is?" to "What does a folder with an exclamation point in the middle mean?" As well as endless complaints about deleted icons that keep popping up again.

People can now contact numerous free PC Help sites with their "icon conundrums." Like the school child from his school library computer, who e-mailed a blog to inquire about "techy looking" icons with strange names like Putty or Lockdown. (The answer was pretty straight forward. "Leave 'em alone, kid! Those are for system admins!")

These PC Help sites routinely deal with questions like "My computer is really running slow. And I just deleted four new icons that popped up on my desktop. Am I in trouble?" To complaints about "appearance-changing icons," and "moving desktop icons on multi-user desktops."

All the way up to the bizarre "I've got a mystery icon that is replicating itself! Now I've got six of 'em!" (I fully expect a new horror movie coming out any day now. Something like "The Icon That Replicated My Life!" Or even "When Mutated Icons Attack!" Or maybe "My Brain Is A Computer Icon!")

But young people, in general, have embraced the Electronic Age to the point that they've helped some computer icons burst out into Pop Culture. Like the broken-circle-with-1, which means Start or Power On. This icon has turned up on everything from t-shirts to car dashes to (it is rumored) New York City condom wrappers.

Somewhat related, there are even Web sites now asking for "photos of iconic images." They want you to upload a photo of anything from a birthmark that looks like France, to Che Guevarra on a moss-covered stone. Or even Jesus's face on fried tortillas (that's a biggie). A recent media photo even showed the "panda calf," or a newborn calf with the black-white markings of a panda.

I'm not sure what all this "icon-izing" says about our society. We add, remove, change, create and fret over computer icons. Yet we're delighted to find an "iconic image," like a President's face on a burnt pancake. With a collective unconscious memory of religious icons, do we somehow feel closer to a famous person, or singled out for "specialness," if we recognize their mug shot in mold on tree bark? I honestly don't know.

So, in closing, if a mystery icon pops up on your monitor screen, run all your security features. And then search out a knowledgeable Internet blog, to get help figuring out what it is and how to get rid of it. And stay on the lookout for that mutant race of tildes, by all means.

And if you turn up with a famous company's logo on your wall, after you threw a piece of combo pizza at it, by all means take photos, and upload them. You never know. Those photos might go viral, and you could end up with a hefty book-deal to write and photograph "The Iconic Interior Design Aspects of Pizza."

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.

EdgeWord: Targeted Deception in Advertising

"Unethical Techniques Used in Advertising." by Jack Dunning

When an advertisement seems too good to be true, it often is. Unethical techniques are used in advertising through computers and technology. Jack explains an example of this that is done via IP addresses.

Any time I see advertising that makes an endeavor such as earning a living look too easy, I get suspicious and tend to turn away. If it was simple to "Make $6795/Month Working Part Time" from home, most people would be quiting their day jobs and signing up. Simple logic says it's not likely to be true (about a year ago I expressed my opinion on one particular work from home scheme), yet reputable national companies will carry advertising on their Web sites which leads to other Web pages using clearly deceptive tricks. I don't know if the hierarchy of the news media outlet carrying the advertising is aware of the practices being employed to seduce their readers, but running those types of ads reflects upon them poorly. The technology of computers and the Internet makes it easier to engage in techniques which are clearly unethical—if not illegal.

This morning while browsing through the national news Web site mentioned above (and left unidentified to avoid any inadvertent endorsements), I happened upon this Web page (*news1reports.com/default-js-8v1.asp? view=2&funnelid=F701&a=b&ep=N&siteid=HRS*) for earning income from home. I clicked on the link because I thought it was a news report about the validity of work-at-home schemes. I was intrigued by the Web page not because it was made to look like a news story (note the word "advertorial" at the top of the page in Figure 1), but because the star of the ad, Jessica Holcomb, lived in the same small town I was currently visiting. What a coincidence!

I thought it was a bit strange that I just happened to be in the same location as Jessica. Maybe I could drop by and talk to her about her home business? The idea that someone is this small town was making it big suggested that anyone could do it. But was she really here?

I could have looked her up in the phone book, but I suspected that she would be unlisted. It then occurred to me that maybe I was only supposed to think that she was in the same village as me. The Web page might be using the location of the ISP to determine where I was located, then inserting the name of the town into the page. But how would I prove this?

Fortunately, I have direct access to the *ComputorEdge* servers which are located in San Diego. I could log in, load a Web browser, then navigate to the same page. That's what I did and, sure enough, Jessica now lived in San Diego (see Figure 1). I'm willing to bet that Jessica Holcomb lives in every city in the world—simultaneously. Check out the link above yourself. It will tell you where you are—as if you didn't already know.

Figure 1. Jessica Holcomb lives in every town in the United States—and possibly the world.

There is a good deal of information available via your IP address, although none of it is particularly dangerous on its own. A Web page can easily be designed to make you think that you are viewing something in your home town.

While probably not against the law, this type of ad employs deception in an attempt to make the reader more comfortable. For that reason alone, I wouldn't do business with this company. For that reason alone, reputable Web sites should not accept advertising from companies which employ these easily provable lies.

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

Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"Beyond Personal Computing, an Exception," "Ten Types of Friends," "Comment about DSL speeds," "Hurray for Choices"

Beyond Personal Computing, an Exception

[Regarding the January 28 Beyond Personal Computing column:]

Enjoyed the article with one minor exception. GAO stands for Government Accounting Office not Government Accountability Office.

Think about it—when was the government ever accountable in a positive sense?

-Bob Parker, Escondido, CA

That reminds me of Jack Nicholson's character's definition of :-{} "I think of a man and take away reason and accountability."

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

Bob,

Thanks for your comment. I agree with your assessment of the GAO. But, according to Wikipedia, the Government Accounting Office (established in 1921), changed their name to Government Accountability *Office in 2004, "to better reflect the mission of the office."*

Let the political jokes fly ...

Ron,

What can I say? I don't like my half of the species much either. I can only hope I'm a "reasonable and accountable" cut above.

-Marilyn K. Martin, Texas

Ten Types of Friends

[Regarding Nicole E. Hansen's January 28 article, "Ten Types of Friends":]

We doubt that we have that many types of friends, but we never thought about friendships in such diverse categories. So...maybe we'll have to consider our friendships a bit differently—in a fun way!

Interesting article. Easy to read. The author did an excellent job of making the categorical distinctions.

-Roger and Gara, Minden, NE

How fun! I am The Mothering Friend for sure and I am not ashamed of it. I love keeping up on my kids and this is one way to do that. I hope we hear more from this author. It was an enjoyable read.

-Teresa, Nebraska

Absolutely true and hilarious! Very creatively stated! I'll "plead the fifth" on my status.

-Wendy, San Diego, CA

Comment about DSL speeds

[Regarding the January 28 Digital Dave column:]

You might want to check on your DSL speeds. If you live in an area served by Qwest (*www.qwest.com/ residential/internet/broadbandlanding/*), you may be able to get 40Mbps. The slowest they offer is 7Mbps.

Also the cost is much less expensive than the local cable—at least here in Colorado.

-Glen Mills, Centennial, CO

Hurray for Choices

Wally does seem to want things black and white, bless him! And since I usually agree with him, this doesn't usually bother me. But I feel his black and white position on books misses some things.

For example, the analogy to the CD vs. digital audio files misses the fact that you can't have an experience with the CD itself, but a book is a standalone item you can experience in many ways. Which brings up another thing missing: the fact that you can have experiences with a physical book that you can't have with an e-book. I could list several.

One is that I often have multiple books open at once. I don't have several iPads, though. And I often forget I have e-books, but love to browse my bookshelves and scribble in my book margins. Is the tactile side of reading without value? Not always. Did you ever have an e-book disappear? Or want to lend it to someone? Or have it cost more than a paperback?

Don't get me wrong. I love e-books and have many—and someday may have many more e-books than physical ones. And yet, physical books are far from obsolete—in my world.

It's the traditional publishing models that are obsolete. At the same time, better digital printing processes and print on demand books make it easier and more cost effective to have print when you want it. It's horrible to have to print out a digital book file on my desktop printer so I can carry it around, draw on it, take it apart, and work with it in other ways only possible with paper. Hurray for choices!

-Krasna Svoboda, Carlsbad, CA

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

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

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

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

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