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the Sneers. Is One Right for You?

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Digital Dave

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

A reader is having problems with Internet Explorer 8 reloading; recording from a DVR to a DVD recorder or to a computer; replacing purchased downloads.

Dear Digital Dave,

I enjoy reading your column, but haven't needed advice until now. I have a new Dell Inspiron N4010 14" laptop with Windows 7, 64-bit OS, a 500GB hard drive and 4GB of RAM. Today I started having a problem with Internet Explorer 8. It keeps reloading around every second or two. I tried restoring to the last restore point, but the problem remains. I can select Yahoo from the drop down list and it is stable and usable. I hope you can help.

Ken

Adelaide, Australia for 1 year

Dear Ken,

My usual answer to Internet Explorer problems is to get another Web browser, such as Firefox or Google Chrome. I rarely see problems with IE since I rarely use IE. However, there are times when you made need to use IE for a particular IE only site.

I'm assuming that you are encountering a Web page which has automatic refreshes built-in and this is not occurring on all Web sites. This is why it stops when you navigate to the Yahoo! search engine.

One thing you might try is disabling auto-refreshing in Internet Explorer. Open the Tools menu and select Internet Options. Click the Security tab and select Internet Zone. Next click "Custom Level..." Go down the list until you reach "Allow META REFRESH" under Miscellaneous. Click Disable and OK. This should stop the automatic refreshing of the browser. If this doesn't work, then it may be time to switch to a less annoying browser.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have a DVR from AT&T U-Verse and was wondering if there is a way to record the programs on the DVR to a DVD recorder or to a computer? I have tried to use the USB port on the DVR, but with no results. Any help would be appreciated.

Dave

Oceanside, Ca.

Dear Dave,

First, I should tell you that they (the media establishment) don't want you to record from your DVR to either a DVD recorder or your computer. (The commercial advertisers would prefer that you didn't even have a DVR.) That's why they are always coming up with new ways to stop you from recording. If you have one of the latest DVD recorders, you may find that many shows cannot be recorded. That's because a chip in the DVD recorded detects that there is a copyright which would be violated and prevents the procedure.

Having said that, if you can play something, you can record it. The process involves placing a recording device (not subject to current recording controls) at the output of the DVR. There are usually multiple types of video and audio outputs on most DVRs. (The USB port is not one of them.) All you need is to use the connections which are compatible with your recording device or computer video graphics card. Then you would play the DVR recording and record on the attached device. Although you may continue to be blocked by encoded programming, software, and possibly computer operating system protection systems, ultimately with the right hardware and software you will be able to do the job. Older equipment may be better for this purpose since it won't have the newer protective chips. Other readers who have done this type of setup may be able to recommend hardware and/or software for the job.

It's not illegal to record from cable if you're not selling or distributing the copy. The cable company does not own the copyright and the copyright holders would be no more pleased with you recording to the official DVR than some other device. However, there are so many ways to see exactly what you want to see when you want to see it between the various streaming services, network Web sites, and disc rental services that cable TV and the syndication model is starting to look silly for everything except 24-hour news and sports.

My desire to make additional recordings drops on a daily basis. I have little enough time to watch something the first time it appears, much less go back and ever watch it again. On those rare occasions that something is worth saving (this almost never happens), I buy the commercial DVD and put it in my collection.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I'm about to swear off buying programs as a download. A couple of years ago I purchased Adobe Photoshop Elements online as a download, for \$92. I asked at the time, "What if the computer crashes?" "No problem, we'll re-activate!"

Problem: For some nutty reason, Adobe of all people does not take e-mails—at least no e-mail address is offered via their Web site, only phone numbers. I call any number (and I've called every number) and the wait is 50 to 70 minutes. That's an hour wait time to regain a copy of something I already purchased. Adobe's indifference to a paying customer seems corporate dumb. They might make great software but their business processes suck.

*Jon Christensen
San Diego, Ca.*

Dear Jon,

I couldn't agree with you more about working with some corporations. Some companies get so big that customer service seems like an afterthought. I'm guessing that Adobe finds it difficult to respond to e-mail, although most

companies would prefer to deal with problems through e-mail.

Having downloaded your software is not the primary problem. Even if you owned a disk with the program, there is no guarantee that you would have been able to activate the program again. You are usually limited by Adobe to installing software on two computers—a desktop and a laptop. Once that is done, you usually will need to go through a process of deactivation/activation on another computer—often found in the program and done over the Internet. If you are unable to do this—even owning the disks—then you will still need to call.

If your version is still the current version of the software, try downloading the trial version again and activating with the original registration code—if you can find it. (This is a strong argument for making a copy of the original downloaded installation file and registration numbers, which would have put you in the same situation as you would have been with purchased discs.) Owning the purchased disks is only marginally better than a download since you won't need to make a copy of the install file.

I'm afraid that you may have to face the telephone queue. I did it a number of years back when I was moving Adobe Acrobat to another computer after a crash. Put the phone on speaker while you wait and do other things. Eventually, you'll get through. It may also help to call very early in the morning. Set your alarm.

One trick for getting through faster is to call their sales line and feign interest in upgrading to the latest product. Since the company places high priority on anything that generates more cash, you will get through quicker. Then you tell them you need to get the old program up and running (activated) before you can upgrade. You may get quicker help... or maybe not.

As for buying downloaded software, I've sworn off buying programs on physical media. There is no advantage to it and if I need to, I can make a disk. Also, no shipping charges and it takes up no space on my shelf. You just have to make sure you understand the recovery process when you make the purchase and plan accordingly. A disc will wear out, break or get lost, leaving you in just as much of a jam and it still requires activation these days. The problem isn't the media, it's the company.

Adobe will say the problem is the pirates, because they force these security measures, but none of their techniques slow the pirates down at all. They only affect honest paying customers.

Digital Dave

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Beyond the Hype: Do You Need a Tablet Computer?

“Tablets Versus Laptops and Cellphones” by Jack Dunning

When tablets appeared on the market there was a lot of speculation, but now it is obvious they are here to stay. Jack discusses what tablet computers are and aren't—there are still benefits to laptops, but tablets are hard to beat for one-handed computing.

Over a year ago Apple introduced the iPad tablet computer to both shouts of enthusiasm and dire predictions of doom. As is their way, Apple fashioned a product that would widen a major market for computers. In the past year, over 14 million iPads have been purchased making up 17% of Apple's revenues. By any measure the iPad has been an astounding success, causing many to predict that the tablet computer will spell the demise of laptop computers. Now, in an attempt to close the instant lead Apple has created, all the other computer manufacturers are scrambling to produce their own versions of tablet computers.

With gratuitous praise from Apple lovers and constant snipping from its critics, it is difficult to get a reasonable view of tablet computing. Should someone buy a tablet for their next computer? Will tablets actually replace laptops? Is there a compelling reason to buy a tablet computer right now? Some perspective is needed.

While I have great respect for Apple, I'm not an Applephile. I like (and dislike) all computers equally. I only care about what a computer will do for me. I proceed with this evaluation (first with a look at the tablet computer in general, then next week, specifically the iPad) with a fairly open mind. I've decided that there is indeed a future for tablet computing and I intend to be part of it. I thank Apple for awakening the market (including myself) to tablets, but I intend to still be there even if Android tablets take over the market. I plan to hedge my bets.

What Tablet Computers Are Not

Tablet computers are not a replacement for either other types of computers or smartphones. While tablets are much more portable than notebooks (and less portable than smartphones), they represent a different type of computing with its own unique markets. Those markets have very specific requirements, which are difficult to fill with traditional

keyboarded computers. Beyond that, tablet computers are not the panacea in computing that many people project or desire.



“Phil has saved a lot of money since Sally has started using the iMad app on her iPad to throw virtual dishes at him.”

In order to use the iPad as a replacement for the laptop, people have been buying add-on key boards and special tablet support stands. While the on screen keyboard is adequate for many operations, it is not a substitute for a full separate keyboard. Without some type of a stand, a tablet computer needs to be supported for viewing while typing with two hands. To avoid purchasing a separate tablet stand, some people will prop it up with pillows while others may use a stack of books. I would argue that once you have added an external keyboard and start propping up the tablet for viewing, you have built a makeshift laptop computer. If this is going to be the primary way that you are using your tablet, then you may as well own a laptop.

Some iPad user seem to agree that it loses some of its luster after using an ultra portable MacBook Air. As noted by Susie Ochs at MacLife (www.maclife.com/article/features/qa_my_month_macbook_air), "Honestly?

Yeah. Poor iPad, between the one-two punch of my iPhone 4's superior Retina Display and the 11-inch MacBook Air besting it as a couch-bound Internet-and-entertainment machine, my iPad just doesn't get used as much anymore. I had been using it a lot to watch Netflix videos in my TV-less bedroom, but the MacBook Air's just as good as that, and doesn't need to be awkwardly propped up with a stand or pile of pillows."

This is not to be taken as doom for tablet computers—far from it. The problem is that a myth has grown around the iPad and its potential. iPad lovers feel that it should be the center of the computer universe—doing everything for everyone. The critics would like to see the iPad fail, if only to prove themselves right. However, neither will get satisfaction. Tablet computers have a very specific place in computing and, thanks to Apple iPad, it is now being taken seriously.

What Tablet Computers Are

The Apple iPad is quite versatile. If someone takes the time, as I have, to explore its capabilities and features, it is without a doubt impressive. I have surfed the Web, picked up e-mail, watched Netflix movies in bed, cheated on crossword puzzles, worked on the ComputerEdge Web site (a little awkward compared to a laptop), kept up on world events, and read computer manuals (mostly about iPad) on the reasonably sized device. It is just big enough to pass the fat fingers test.

The problem I have with smart phones are two-fold. First, unless I can trim my fingers, it's a hassle to navigate on the small screens. Second, even with the larger screens (which will still fit into a shirt pocket), the smart phone is too small for many viewing sessions. I can lay in bed with the iPad and get the big screen cinema effect with the tablet sitting on my chest (or stomach for more elevation). Second, my fingers do not overlap the keys on the iPad pop-up keyboard as they often do on a smart phone. I can usually tap the proper on screen link without randomly hitting one of the

neighboring buttons.

Although a smart phone is more portable, operationally a tablet computer is superior in almost every situation—except when making a phone call. I do not want to surf the Web on a phone except as a last resort. While not quite as easy as using a regular computer (laptop or desktop), iPad surfing is simple and straightforward.

Tablet computers are lighter and more portable than laptops. This is one of their advantages. You can take them to places that would be awkward and cumbersome for a laptop. They can easily be tossed into a briefcase or carried in an over-sized coat pocket. It's conceivable that some iPads could stop or deflect a bullet if covering an appropriate part of the body. You would never carry a laptop in a manner that it would afford you personal protection.

One-handed Computing

Tablet computers belong in one particular computer niche. Once you understand that special type of computing, you can quickly determine if a tablet is in your future. It's called one-handed computing. Tablets are useful in activities where it is necessary to hold the computer in one hand while operating it with the other. Only one hand is available for operations. This is what makes innovative touchscreen so important to tablet computers. Complex manipulations can be done without the need for a mouse or a keyboard, both of which are commonly used in two-handed computing.

One-handed computing requires a light device which can easily be wielded in one hand (left or right, it doesn't matter) while operating it with the other. A person may be sitting, standing, walking (even chewing gum) while operating a tablet computer, as long as it is light enough for such activities. While a smart phone will meet these one-handed requirements, it does not pass the fat fingers test nor create the movie theater experience. Laptops, even the smaller netbooks, are just too awkward (and heavy) for one-handed computing.

Once one-handed computing is understood, it's easy to see if a tablet computer will fit into current activities. If it is currently done with a clipboard, then maybe there is a tablet in its future. A prime example of such an activity is reading a book, which is a classic one-handed pastime. The book is held in one hand while the other hand is used to turn pages (and eat potato chips—which may leave oil on the pages—or the tablet). Reading books is one of the current most popular uses for the iPad. Both the Amazon Kindle and the Nook are book readers designed for one-handed use. At this point, both of those reader are considered better one-handed devices (at least for reading) than the iPad because they are lighter and easier on the eyes.

Doctors doing their rounds engage in one-handed activities while scribbling unintelligible notes into medical records. Contractors and architects can take advantage of one-handed computing when on site—if only to look important while carrying a clipboard or plans. Auto mechanics have a need for one-handed computing when running test—although they will need easy clean screens after navigating with fat "greasy" fingers. The key to finding where tablet computers will be most useful is locating those activities that need more than a smart phone, yet the convenience of using only the fingers from one hand on a touchscreen with an ultra portable device is invaluable.

Do you need a tablet computer? Only if you need to do one-handed computing.

Next week a closer look at the iPad.

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

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The iPad 2

“Introducing the iPad 2” by Wally Wang

The iPad 2 is thinner and lighter, challenging other tablet producers to improve products that have yet to be released. The only credible competitor is Android, with Motorola's Xoom.

Apple recently announced the iPad 2 that's thinner and lighter than the original iPad along with sporting a front and back-facing camera for video conferencing. While the iPad 2 didn't offer anything unexpected, its new features along with maintaining the current price structure of the original iPad suddenly means all of those iPad copycats are starting to look woefully inadequate.

Samsung's vice-president, Lee Don-joo, said that the iPad 2's features (english.yonhapnews.co.kr/techscience/2011/03/04/9/0601000000AEN20110304009300320F.HTML) make it difficult for Samsung's forthcoming 10.1 inch Galaxy Tab to compete. "We will have to improve the parts that are inadequate," Lee told Yonhap News Agency. "Apple made it very thin."

Research in Motion (RIM) has an even greater challenge with their 7 inch Playbook tablet (news.cnet.com/8301-31021_3-20017625-260.html) that was announced in September of last year, and five months later still hasn't been released. With a smaller screen, RIM will need to price the Playbook competitively against the iPad 2 or else people will simply ignore the Playbook instead.

Hewlett-Packard is in the same position as RIM. Having embarrassed themselves last year by announcing the Slate PC in early 2010 and finally releasing it nine months later to sell a whopping 9,000 units, Hewlett-Packard announced their TouchPad (indepthwithtech.com/2011/02/09/full-video-of-todays-hp-webos-press-event-with-the-touchpad-announcement/) tablet in February 2011 and promises to release it sometime this summer.

Hewlett-Packard still hasn't released the complete technical specifications (www.palm.com/us/products/pads/touchpad/index.html) of the TouchPad, including battery life or price, so it's impossible to tell what the TouchPad can do. However, Hewlett-Packard has listed the TouchPad's weight at 1.6 pounds, which now makes it heavier than the iPad 2's weight of 1.3 pounds. The TouchPad also offers only a front-facing camera, while the iPad 2 offers a front and back-facing camera.

Unless Hewlett-Packard can compete on price, their TouchPad suddenly looks as obsolete as RIM's Playbook, and neither product is even shipping yet.

Motorola's Xoom (www.marketwatch.com/story/is-the-motorola-xoom-tablet-toast-2011-03-03) is priced higher at \$799 and is actually shipping (unlike RIM's Playbook and Hewlett-Packard's TouchPad), while offering a bigger screen and Android 3.0 that is optimized for tablets. The biggest drawback is that the Xoom (1.6 pounds) is heavier than the iPad 2 (1.3 pounds).

In the meantime, Microsoft is promising Windows 8 on tablets (www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-03-03/microsoft-windows-for-tablet-computers-is-said-to-come-to-market-in-2012.html) by 2012. So rather than get technology today that does what you want, you can wait two years for Microsoft's solution that may or may not be what you need.

With no distinct, compelling advantage over the iPad 2, the Xoom, TouchPad, Playbook and Galaxy Tab cost as much or even more than the iPad 2, weigh more, and still don't offer anywhere near the vast library of apps available, such

as iMovie for editing video or GarageBand for making and editing music.

By now, everyone has recognized that tablets aren't just a fad, but a viable computing category. The problem is that nobody else has figured out how to keep up with Apple. Rather than slavishly copy Apple, these other companies should be focusing on creating the best products they can and meeting the needs of consumers in their own unique way.

Of course that would take intelligence and leadership, so it's just easier to copy Apple instead. Does anyone think the CEOs of these other companies deserve even a fraction of the salary that they're stealing from the companies they're supposedly leading?

Getting an iPad 2

On March 11 at 5:00 pm, you can buy the new iPad 2. The obvious place to get one is by waiting in line at an Apple retail store, but you can also order one online on March 11 from Apple's Web site as well.

If you want to get the iPad 2 version that can connect to a cellular phone network, both AT&T and Verizon should be selling them on March 11. Best Buy and Target will also be selling the iPad 2 along with Wal-Mart, so you should have plenty of options for finding an iPad 2 near you.

The iPad vs. Android

In the smart phone market, the only credible competitor is Android and now with Motorola's Xoom, the only decent alternative to the iPad is Android 3.0. The biggest drawback with Android-based tablets right now is simply the lack of apps, but that should change in the next year as more Android-based tablets arrive.

What helps the iPad is the iPhone. Once you know how to use an iPhone, you already know how to use an iPad (and vice versa). That loyalty could spill over into the Android market too.

With so many people using Android-based smart phones, they'll naturally want to stick with something familiar by using an Android-based tablet. The big difference is whether people will be willing to pay slightly more for an Android-based tablet like Motorola's Xoom and wait for Android tablet apps to start arriving.

If you check the listings for developers (www.intomobile.com/2011/03/04/dice-android-job-listings-now-outnumber-iphone-listings/) on a site like *Dice.com*, you'll find that listings for Android developers is starting to outnumber listings for iOS developers. That doesn't necessarily mean that people are switching from iOS to Android, but that developers who already have iOS apps for sale also need to port their apps to Android as well.

Companies know that they can't just have an app on iOS any more and be happy. They need to have an identical app on both iOS and Android to reach the broadest market. The smart phone market is already a choice between the iPhone and Android. We already know that the iPad has cornered the major share of the tablet market. Now we just have to see if Android can carve out a chunk of the tablet market as well.

Where does that leave rival tablet makers like RIM's Playbook and Hewlett-Packard's TouchPad, both running proprietary operating systems that aren't getting as much attention from consumers and developers alike?

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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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“Opinions, methods, and techniques about and for Apple products and devices.” by Wally Wang

Spreading Android; mobile PC sales to slow; liberal arts vs. techno-geeks; the return of the netbook; the trick to hiding file extensions.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

Spreading Android

One advantage Google can exploit with Android is its free availability. Any company that wants it can use it, which is why Swedish auto maker Saab elected to use Android (www.technewsworld.com/story/71991.html?wlc=1299255225) for its in-vehicle entertainment system.



Figure 1. Android is now controlling car systems.

Currently the most popular automotive operating systems are QNX and Microsoft Windows Embedded Automotive, which is used by Ford. While automotive operating systems may not seem sexy or exciting, they're part of a growing market. Companies can either pay for QNX or Microsoft Windows Embedded Automotive, or go with Android for free.

Given the choice between paying for something or getting an equivalent operating system for free, can you guess which option can be financially attractive?

From a consumer's point of view, it won't matter which operating system is in your car just as long as it works. For Microsoft and other operating system companies, the threat of Google's free Android could effectively kill their business. Without Apple to compete against in the automotive operating system market, Google literally has no competition.

Mobile PC Sales to Slow

In the wake of the iPad and other tablets, Gartner has lowered their forecasts for PC sales in the coming year. "We expect growing consumer enthusiasm for mobile PC alternatives, such as the iPad and other media tablets, to dramatically slow home mobile PC sales, especially in mature markets," said George Shiffler, research director at Gartner.

"We once thought that mobile PC growth would continue to be sustained by consumers buying second and third mobile PCs as personal devices. However, we now believe that consumers are not only likely to forgo additional mobile PC buys but are also likely to extend the lifetimes of the mobile PCs they retain as they adopt media tablets and other mobile PC alternatives as their primary mobile device. Overall, we now expect home mobile PCs to average less than 10 percent annual growth in mature markets from 2011 through 2015."

Gartner claims that consumer interest in media tablets (such as the iPad) will hurt the mobile PC market as consumers look at tablets instead of laptops. While Gartner believes laptop sales will suffer, Apple continues selling more laptops each quarter, so apparently the only laptop sales that are suffering are those running Windows.

With Microsoft losing in the smart phone market, completely absent in the tablet market, and dependent on a slowing PC market, how many people still think that you should cling to Microsoft rather than learn new technology?

Mike Halsey at the Windows 7 News & Tips site (www.windows7news.com/2011/03/02/day-apple-announced-ipad-2-delivery-windows-7-tablet/) offers up a curious explanation for why he chose an ExoPC tablet instead of an iPad, claiming that "... there's the question of do many people actually need something as friendly as the iOS operating system? Frankly there are a great many people, the more technically-minded, who will feel more at home with Windows on a tablet than they would with iOS or Android..."

So rather than choose something that's admittedly easier to use, Mike prefers something more complicated just because it's familiar.

Mike Halsey concludes by saying, "So go and buy your iPad 2, it's a great device, but I'm sticking with the ExoPC and if you're a power user like me, I think you'll like it too."

Mike's choice simply highlights the difference between Microsoft's solutions and everyone else's. Power users (technically minded geeks) love playing with the complexity of Microsoft's software so using Windows 7 on an ExoPC tablet makes perfect sense.

Unfortunately, the majority of people don't enjoy struggling with the complexity of technology. To the techno-geeks, a power user is someone who understands technology. To everyone else, a power user is someone who can actually produce something useful rather than wasting time fiddling around with technology without getting anything done in the process.

Would you rather get your business report printed now or waste the next hour and a half fiddling with various computer

settings and still not have your business report printed by the end of the day? A power user should be someone who can get more done in less time, not someone who gets less done in more time but happens to know more about technology.

Techno-geeks who call themselves power users without being more productive are simply deluding themselves that they're special because of their knowledge. Knowledge alone doesn't make you more productive or else all those Ph. D. film school graduates would be making better movies than Steven Spielberg (who got rejected from the University of Southern California's film school).

Since techno-geeks love the complexity of Microsoft, they can't understand why nobody else loves dealing with technological complexity on a daily basis too. Then since the techno-geeks are in charge of approving technology for corporations and advising novices, they steer everyone towards complicated solutions without regard for what people really want or need.

If you enjoy toying with technology and complexity, Microsoft is perfect. For everyone else who just wants to get work done, look at Microsoft's solutions and then look at your alternatives. Chances are good that when you honestly compare the two side by side, you'll make the right decision.

Liberal Arts vs. Techno-Geeks

One of the reasons why Apple focuses on usability while companies like Microsoft focus on technical features is because they design products that are important to their own needs. Techno-geeks love technology for the sake of technology, so they gladly suffer under complexity because they see it as just a rite of passage to gain membership into the techno-geeks society.

As a result, techno-geeks design computers for other techno-geeks. If people are confused by these designs, it's their fault. They should take the time to learn the techno-geek logic and force themselves to adapt to the way technology works.

On the other hand, Apple combined the liberal arts with technology and created technology for the purpose of empowering people to expand their creativity. The goal was not just to make technology easy to use, but make it powerful enough to allow people to do things they couldn't do before, such as print their own newsletters and control the fonts of their text (desktop publishing), write their own programs (HyperCard), edit their own digital photographs and video (iPhoto and iMovie), and edit and capture music (GarageBand).

For a dated perspective on this marriage between the liberal arts and technology, read Brenda Laurel's 1993 book *Computers as Theater* (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0201550601?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0201550601). This book examines how computer programs should display information on the screen similar to the way a play appears on a theatrical stage.

A theatrical stage play doesn't just throw actors and scenery on the stage to look good, but for a specific purpose, and user interfaces need to keep that thought in mind as well. The techno-geek solution is to bombard the user with menus (or force the user to memorize multiple commands) to do anything. The liberal arts approach is to guide the user into seeing only those relevant choices and to understand what the consequences of those choices might be beforehand.

By making user interfaces guide and direct a user's attention, programmers can help users naturally learn how to use a program without the associated complexity involved in typical computer programs.

Or you can design something that only makes sense to you and then blame the user for not being enamored with

technology as much as you are. Then you can use your knowledge of technology to make everyone around you feel incompetent.

Which approach do you think is more effective in the long run?

The Return of the Netbook

In case you thought the iPad was wiping out the netbook market, Asus is planning to release new netbooks that use the MeeGo operating system (that Nokia abandoned) along with Android (www.businessinsider.com/android-is-not-just-for-phones-and-tablets-its-coming-to-asus-netbooks-2011-3).

By using Android, Asus hopes to tap into the growing Android app market without having to create a tablet to compete against the iPad. Such netbooks would focus on the original netbook promise of being cheap and geared towards simple tasks rather than trying to do everything a full laptop can do.

When Microsoft lowered the cost of Windows XP and released Windows 7 Starter edition, they appeared to have locked up the netbook market, but combined with the iPad, these new Asus netbooks represent yet another threat to the Microsoft dominated world of Windows.

Anyone still think that Windows should be the only operating system you should ever learn in your lifetime? Failure to learn anything beyond the world of Windows will simply make you obsolete and limit your future opportunities whether you like it or not. The longer you refuse to learn anything new, the further behind you'll get, like all those people who initially refused to leave the complexity and familiarity of the MS-DOS command-line interface for the easier graphical user interface of today's computers.

* * *

When you look at a list of files in the Finder window, you may not want to see all the file extensions of each file with cryptic acronyms like .doc or .mp3. To hide these file extensions, just right-click on a file and choose Get Info to display an Info window.





Figure 2. Hiding or displaying file extensions.

Now select or clear the Hide extension check box to hide or display file extensions for that particular file. Doing this lets you selectively hide file extensions of certain files while leaving file extensions visible for other files.

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

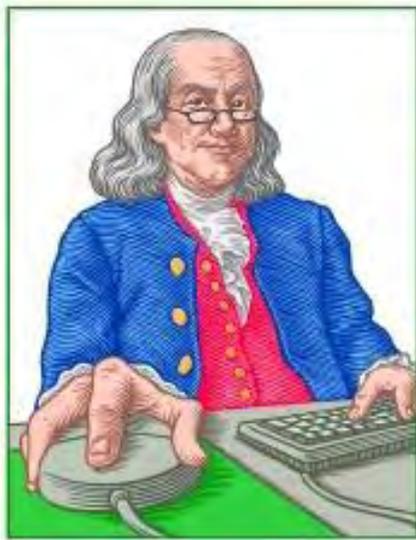
Wally is responsible for the following books:

Microsoft Office 2010 for Dummies (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470489987?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-

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

**"AN INVESTMENT
IN LINUX KNOWLEDGE
PAYS THE BEST
INTEREST."**

Can You Answer
a Dual Boot
Ubuntu/Vista
Question?

"Booting Ubuntu" by
ComputerEdge Staff

A reader has a Linux question about dual booting Linux and Windows. If you have an answer, please leave a comment.

John Cultrera asks the following Linux question:

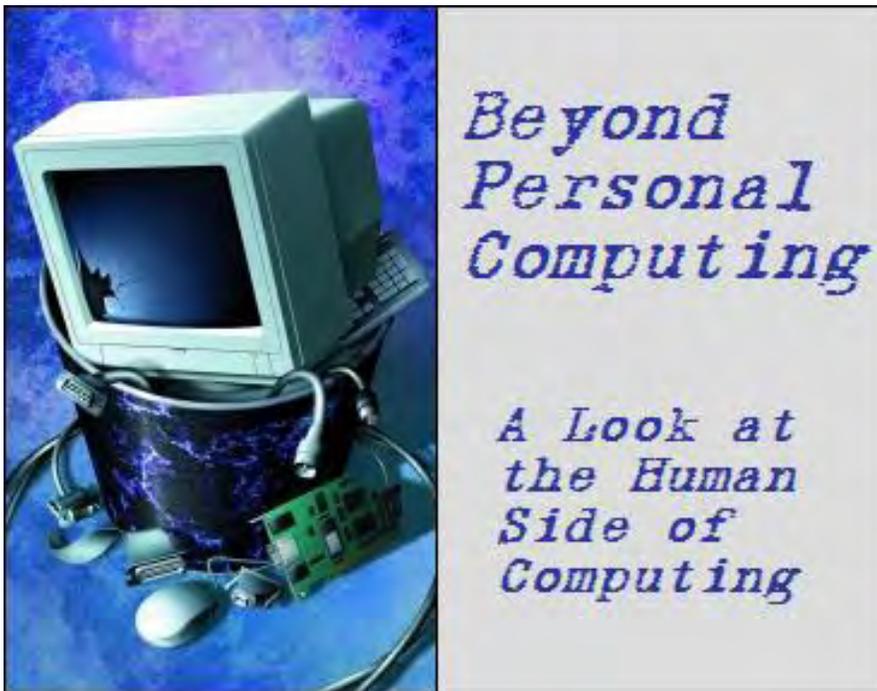
I would like to know how to make Ubuntu 10.10 boot second? I have installed it in Vista, and upon turning on the computer, Ubuntu boots automatically, unless I scroll down and tell it to boot Vista instead. Is there a way to make it boot Vista first? Perhaps you can solicit help from the ComputerEdge Linux question section. Have been a reader since my San Diego days.

If anyone has an answer for John, please leave a comment with the "Tell us what you think About This Article!" link at top or bottom, or use the "Submit Linux Tips and Tricks!" in the left-hand navigation menu under Reader Submissions.

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

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

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Beyond Personal Computing

“Don't Fold, Staple or Mutilate: Floppy Diskettes” by Marilyn K. Martin

Marilyn reviews the humorous history behind portable storage units for computers, reminding us to be glad and amazed that software can be downloaded off the Internet today.

Today, grabbing a "portable storage unit for electronic data" is a no-brainer. Everyone seems to have a haphazard collection of blank CDs or DVDs by their computers, and recorders attached to their big screen TVs. While new music groups/singers are known to "accidentally" leave their CD demos everywhere, to try and drum up more fans. The high-volume users can buy CDs or DVDs by the stack, and practically every six year old knows how to easily burn a CD.

But our very first portable storage units for computers, back in the middle of the last century, were funny and flimsy little squares called diskettes. The story of their creation and development is fraught with enough techno-drama and unintended humor to be worthy of their own Believe-It-Or-Not! episode.

It all started in 1967, when IBM asked their Storage Development Center to come up with a simple and inexpensive system for loading microcode into their mainframes. Their System 370 mainframes used semi-conductor memory. So every time the power went out, all the data in the 370s went kaput, and had to be reloaded. The 370s had various tape drives, but they were large and slow. IBM wanted something faster and portable, that could also be used to send out updates to customers for around \$5.

Thus the read-only 8 inch floppy disk was born, developed under Alan Shugart, IBM's Product Manager. Floppies were a thin, flexible magnetic storage medium, covered with a pliable plastic shell, and stored in paper sleeves. They were called diskettes, because the term sounded pleasingly similar to cassette.

Meaning, I guess, that IBM was trying to link their floppies in consumer minds to the simple on/off, in/out functions of a cassette player-recorder. (Thank goodness they didn't name them 8-Trackers. Referencing those disastrous "portable song storage units" where, between songs, you could hear the bleed through of all the other tracks' songs!)

Shugart next moved to Memorex, where he helped develop the 1972 Memorex 650, the first read-and-write floppy disk drive. (Obviously, these were the days before having to sign iron-clad "intellectual property" documents, to hinder new ideas/technologies marching off to competitors.) Shugart eventually moved on to found his own company, Shugart Associates, in 1973.

By 1976, two Shugart Associates employees, Jim Adkisson and Don Massaro, were approached by An Wang of Wang

Laboratories. Wang felt that the 8 inch floppy format was too large for the desktop Word Processing machines he was developing at the time. Meeting at a bar in Boston, Adkisson asked Wang what disk size he wanted.

Wang pointed at a cocktail napkin on the bar and said, "About that size." Adkisson stuffed the napkin in a pocket and took it back to California. Thus the square 5 1/4" floppy disk was born. (Which also means that it was darn fortunate that the smaller disc wasn't nicknamed a "vodkette.")

Throughout the '70s and '80s, the 5 1/4" floppy diskette was the primary storage system for PCs, since the micros had no hard drive. The entire Operating System could boot a PC from one floppy, then be removed for another floppy to add the Application.

This was also about the time businesses, schools and the general public were starting to buy personal computers. This new-fangled technology had a steep learning curve for most non-techie minds. And understanding the delicate nature of diskettes was frequently overlooked amid brief and generic instructions of how to use a computer.

So who could blame the legions of new users who routinely (and unintentionally), mangled their diskettes. All of which gave rise to that pop-culture warning, "Don't fold, spindle or mutilate!" (Such as the lady who "mutilated" all her floppies by keeping them in a three-ring binder, punching holes in the floppies instead of just the paper sleeves.)

When PCs started to invade the work-place, many new users just treated their floppies like everything else on their desk, from sturdy metal staplers to those indestructible paper clips. Users saw nothing wrong with cleaning their floppies, like the rest of their computer, with glass cleaner. (All this talk about "windows," after all.) And more than one IT Pro, responding to problems about non-reading floppies, discovered that either mis-applied labels covered the disk window, or that the square diskette was inserted sideways in the drive.

When computers started to make their way into schools, students were excited about marching valiantly up that learning curve. Consider the student who asked his teacher, "Why isn't my computer saving to my floppy?" The teacher responded, "Is it in the disk drive?" "Uh, no," the student answered. "Does it need to be?" School Computer Lab Supervisors had an inkling about how confusing computer technology was for young users, when they started hearing questions ranging from "Can I use this disk? It has a hole in it." To "How do they get the words small enough to fit on there?"

One Computer Lab Instructor handed out mystery disks to a high school class one day, and then boldly announced "Let's see what's on these disks!" The question did not compute. Instead of inserting the diskettes into the computers in front of them, the kids all sat staring intently at their disks to try and "see" what was on them.

And then there was the polite student who wondered, "Can I use this disk in this Computer Lab? It's blue." While a computer programming student, who should have known better, turned in his completed program with the printout neatly stapled to the disk. Starving college students, especially, preferred to carry around one well-used floppy forever. And sometimes lost the only copy of their college thesis, when that one worn floppy finally gave up the ghost at the wrong time.

One popular misconception with 5 1/4" floppies, was that the pliable plastic case over the magnetic medium needed to be "removed" before the diskette could be used. So many a student laboriously cut off the plastic case of a new floppy, and then proudly displayed it to their horrified teacher or Lab Supervisor.

And the headaches only multiplied for Help Desks and Call-In Support. One customer called in to complain that he needed to print something, but that the computer wouldn't boot properly. The Tech asked him to "Look in your drive. Is there a floppy inside?" The customer was back on the phone in seconds. "No. There's just a sticker saying there's an

Intel inside."

Tech Support sometimes traveled to Help Calls, where the users' complaints about non-working floppies were instantly solved with quick visual clues. "Why does this floppy have a coffee cup ring on it?" a Tech asked one group of users. A guilty hand went up, with what he felt was a perfectly reasonable excuse: "Well, I didn't want to stain the table."

Or pity the Support Tech sent to an office where the software diskette had just arrived the day before, and was suddenly unreadable. Upon arrival, the Tech asked to see the offending disk. The user reached around and pulled the floppy off the side of his metal file cabinet, where it had been attached with a magnet.

Most new users were happy to ask for help, especially from younger relatives. (Remember this joke? "If you've got too many computer problems, you obviously don't have a teenage boy in the house.") So consider the VCR-savvy gentleman who asked his computer-savvy son, "So how do I rewind the disk?"

Then there were the newbie computer users who insisted they didn't need any help, from anyone. They could figure things out all by themselves—and maybe educate some of those smarty-pants Support Techs in the process. Such as the lady who insisted that, Yes, her huge file could indeed fit on a floppy, since it was a "3 meg" disk. When the confused Tech asked what a "3 meg" disk was, she pointed to the disk. "See? It says right here, '3M'."

Or the lady who called a Help Desk as a last resort, because she had a floppy from a company that used a copy protection scheme that required it to be "write enabled," and it wouldn't install. The lady kept getting an annoying correction message, referencing this "write enabled" disk. So she'd finally picked up a pencil and wrote "enable" on the disk. And, darn it, it still wouldn't install in her computer!

Although it's hard to beat the gentleman who called a Help Desk to complain that he'd "fixed" his problem with a floppy disk that wouldn't stay in the disk drive. But now his computer wasn't working right. So exactly how did he fix that problem? "Simple," he responded. "I super-glued the floppy into the disk drive."

Other users went to great and imaginative lengths to self-diagnose their own floppy problems, to the befuddlement of Computer Professionals trying to be helpful. One woman in a computer store told a convoluted story about all the "ruined" floppies stacked by her home computer. She was convinced that her top floppy had "leaked" and ruined the lower floppies in the stack. And that's why she couldn't find any of her floppy files on her computer. Salesman after salesman tried to correct her, to no avail.

As the frustration level in the salesmen were going up along with their blood pressure, one quick-thinking young salesman threw caution and computer logic aside. He boldly suggested that, in the future, she keep her disks in Ziploc bags. That way they couldn't "leak." Finally satisfied with an explanation she could understand, she happily departed.

By the end of the 1980s, the 5 1/4" floppies gave way to the 3 1/2" diskettes, with their hard plastic covers and metal doors. And this Technological Leap Forward also left a trail of befuddled, confused or I'll-figure-it-out-myself computer users behind.

Computer Lab Supervisors reported that it wasn't unusual for student users to routinely put the wrong disks in the wrong drives. Some users just folded or cut 5 1/4" disks to fit in 3 1/2" drives. While others shoved their 3 1/2" disks deep into 5 1/4" drives. They all belatedly asked for help, when the smaller disks got stuck in the back of the larger drives. Or the folded/trimmed larger floppies couldn't be read by the smaller drives.

Even then, another rumor abounded, that "formatting" this smaller new disk meant ripping the metal door off—to the horror of Computer Lab Instructors. One explanation given, to back up the rumor with a morsel of semi-logic, was "I

thought you had to expose the disk for it to work ..."

These smaller, harder diskettes weren't as easy to mangle and mutilate as the floppies. But Lab Supervisors and Support Techs still reported seeing utterly unusable diskettes with footprints, cracks, bent corners, and labels with layers of white-out. And, of course, it was always the computer's fault if the mangled 3 1/2" diskette couldn't be read.

And then came the fateful day when America Online and other companies started sending out free diskettes in the mail, to anyone and everyone. It turned out to be yet another good idea gone bad. People, with or without computers, started calling up these sender-companies, primarily to ask if they were going to be charged. (No.)

But even then, some recipients had profound problems with the no-value concept of "free." One lady angrily called up and demanded to speak to someone who could "credit" her for that free disk. Or how about the gentleman who arrived at a store to find that all the free disks had already been given away. He angrily demanded a "rain check" for that free disk!

For the recipients of these free disks who didn't have a computer, the most frequent question (and stab-at-humor) was "So when are you gonna send me a computer to go with this disk?" One non-user thought he'd figured things out, though. "Is this one of those new home security systems?" he called up to ask. "Where all I have to do is put this thing in a window, and it'll scare away any burglars?"

But the "scary disk" stories got better. Such as the elderly woman, before the Unibomber was caught, who called up to ask, "Should I call the police? There's this silver thing that slides across, and then it clicks. What *is* that?" The Tech just told her to throw the disk away, that it wasn't dangerous at all. "So you're sure this isn't a bomb?" she insisted.

Then there was the little girl who called to complain that the free disk didn't fit her computer. So what kind of computer did she have, the Help Desk asked. "A Talking Whiz Kid," she answered proudly.

Today, software can be downloaded off the Internet. And you can even store files in your e-mail. So put your dusty "Talking Whiz Kid" in your next garage sale. (Unless you still have the all-important box and instructions, and can start a bidding war among early computer collectors.) And then raise your wine glass, beer or energy drink in gratitude, that we've all managed to survive the mind-boggling days of floppy diskettes!

(Much of this information and funny anecdotes can be found on multiple Internet sites. But special thanks to *Computernostalgia.net*, *Rinkworks.com* and *Netsmartinc.com*)

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

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Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"E-mail Organization," "Intuitive Vector Based Drawing," "NTFS Format," "VNC vs. RDP," "Web Site Time Outs," "Windows Accounts," "Latin Origin of 'Data'," "Captivating Articles"

E-mail Organization

[Regarding Tom Gibson's February 11 article, "Social Media May Just Save E-mail":]

I've found Google Desktop search invaluable for dealing with stored e-mails. At this point I only move e-mails to a folder when the count gets near 16K, the limit imposed by Outlook for a folder. No more subfolders to name, organize and search.

-Stewart A. Levin, Centennial, CO

Intuitive Vector Based Drawing

[Regarding Jack Dunning's February 18 article, "Computer Aided Design (CAD): Software for Engineers":]

I am an architect that designs laboratory buildings for Universities, Government and Industry. I worked as a drafter for many years on AutoCAD, but when I went from a drafter to a designer I needed a simpler electronic drawing form instead of sketching by hand in front of the client. AutoCAD is designed to be very powerful to design everything from a bolt to the space shuttle, too powerful to be used for interior room layouts in my opinion. When I bought my iPad I started searching for sketch programs or Apps. I found what I believe to be the simple, intuitive, quick drawing program that I have been searching for in TouchDraw (elevenworks.com/web/TouchDraw.html) by Elevenworks. They listen to their testers and come out quickly with new updates so it is constantly refined to be even quicker.

-T. Brown, San Diego, California

NTFS Format

[Regarding the February 18 Digital Dave column:]

Nearly all USB flash drives are still using the 1990s era FAT32 format. If you want to save anything larger than 2GB, you need to reformat it to NTFS. This can be done quickly with the Windows explorer. (Copy off any important data first.) This is also the likely cause of the memory loss. Of course, an NTFS formatted flash drive will *not* work with Windows 95, 98 and Millennium, and should be unplugged only after using the "Safely Remove Hardware" icon.

-John Thomas, Vista, CA

VNC vs. RDP

[Regarding the February 11 Digital Dave column:]

When I get people who want to remote into the computer, but don't want to pay for the professional version of Windows I tell them to download TightVNC (www.tightvnc.com). I like to use RDP to get to the box, but VNC will work fine and it's free :).

-David, Highlands Ranch, CO

Web Site Time Outs

[Regarding the February 18 Digital Dave column:]

My work around for time outs is to simply reload the page when I get a warning of impending time out.

-Steve, San Diego

I use to have the same problem with my bank. I went into my account and changed my settings to increase the time that I am allowed in that particular page from 5 minutes to 20. Since I mostly do my banking from my house, I do not have the risk of somebody messing with it while I walk away for a minute or two.

-Carlos, San Diego

Windows Accounts

[Regarding the February 11 Digital Dave column:]

Running in a standard account is done as a security protection when connected to the networks. It limits the ability of unauthorized programs to install (e.g. malware). It is considered a security violation to perform routine work operations in an administrative mode while connected to the networks. One does not need to establish a mandatory password when setting up multiple accounts, so forgetting a password is no excuse.

-Chris Romel, San Diego, CA

Latin Origin of "Data"

[Regarding the February 18 Editors Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers column:]

Regarding Rob Spahitz's comment about certain plural words like "data": They have been taken directly from the Latin. It's datum/data, formula/formulae, locus/loci as examples of singular/plural versions of three words from the three genders, neuter, feminine and masculine, respectively.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego

Captivating Articles

[Regarding the February 11 Wally Wangs Apple Farm column:]

For at least the last three weeks I have been simply captivated by these "Apple Farm" articles. Wow! This is captivating material for this inveterate user of Microsoft operating systems.

-Cicero, Colorado Springs, CO

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

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