ComputorEdge™ Online — 12/28/12

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Instant AutoCorrection for All Your Windows Programs

How you can add AutoCorrection for common misspellings and typos to all of your Windows programs whether editing in a program or on the Web.

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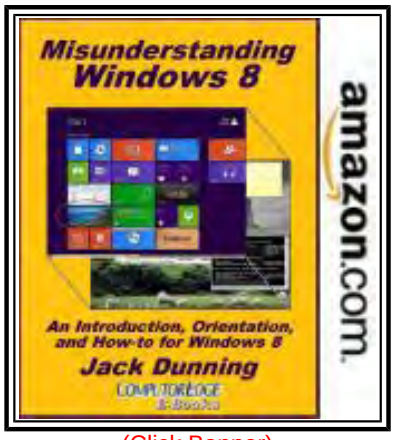

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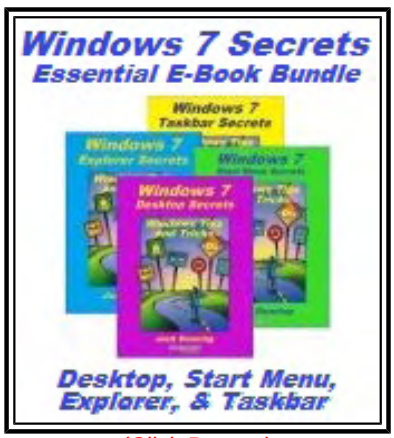

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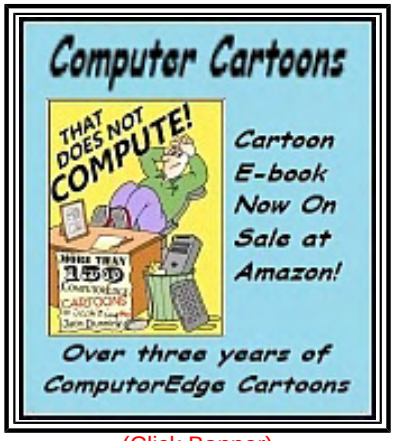

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Digital Dave

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

Are Tablets Replacing the PC?; Slow Booting Up; How Important is Battery Life?

Dear Digital Dave,

I've heard so much about tablets replacing the PC. I was wondering what your opinion is.

Mike
Denver, CO

Dear Mike,

While it is true that the tablet computer has taken off as a computing device and it is cutting into the sales of PCs, it's not going to replace the PC. The tablet will replace the PC for some people because those users only need Internet access for browsing the Web, the ability to play games, read books, or other interesting apps. Maybe the tablet computer should be called an entertainment device. The tablet computer is its own market fitting between the smartphone and laptop computer.

There are many serious uses for tablets, but I don't see them completely replacing PC. There are a couple of reasons that tablets appear to be wiping out laptops and desktop computers. The first is that anytime there is a new market—in this case tablet computers—it explodes in the early years growing at unbelievable rates. During this period of rapid growth people predict that it will go on forever. However, after the boom years the rate of growth of the market slows as it becomes saturated, consisting primarily of upgrades and replacements. This will eventually happen to tablets.

In the meantime, the PC market is already saturated, consisting almost exclusively of upgrades and replacements. There are very few new computer users. The operating systems, whether Windows, OS X, or Linux, are stable enough that there are few compelling reason to upgrade. It is only this year that the number of Windows 7 installations surpassed the number of Windows XP installations. Windows 7 is pretty stable, so I don't see Windows 8 as a strong argument for upgrading to the new tablet-like interface. A saturated market is never going to show the growth of a new market.

For many people, a tablet computer is an acceptable alternative to a full laptop or desktop computer. In those cases, the tablet sales are eating into PC sales. However, unless they turn a tablet into a PC (the Surface Pro?), there is no chance that the PC market will be eliminated. Reduced? Yes. Eliminated? No.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I read all kinds of things about different battery lifes for tablets, smartphones and laptops. Is there one important factor about batteries that I should pay attention to?

Jules McFarland
La Mesa, CA

Dear Jules,

As with so many aspects of computer decisions, the importance of battery life depends upon how you use your device or computer. For a smartphone, the battery specs are critical, while for a tablet or laptop computer it may be almost incidental.

The primary function of a smartphone remains acting as a phone for staying in touch with friends and/or business associates. That means being almost always on (except when on an airplane or in a movie theater). The life of the battery may be the difference between getting that important call and the line going dead. Smartphones use so much more power than regular cell phones that it is a constant battle to keep even the best of them charged up—especially if you use its computing and Internet features regularly. The other problem with cell phone battery life is that the small physical size of the batteries which will fit into the phone limits the amount of available charge. There is a direct relationship between available charge life and the size of the battery.

While they may draw more power than a smartphone, the battery demands on tablets and laptops are not usually continuous. Even if your laptop only has a battery life of four or five hours, the charge may last for days or weeks if you don't need to run on battery regularly. It's usually easy to charge a tablet or laptop between battery only operation, even if that is the only way you use the computer. Therefore, unless you envision using the tablet or laptop on battery for extended periods of time, the rated operating charge time is not nearly as important as it is for a smartphone.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have an HP 3013 laptop. Do a lot of shortcuts on the Desktop slow down the booting process? It seems to take a long time to boot, so I usually just close the top for the sleep mode?

Thank you again,

Jim White
Spokane

Dear Jim,

You didn't mention which operating system that you're using, but Windows Vista usually has slower boot times than other current versions of Windows. Having said that, while the number of shortcuts on the desktop will not appreciably slow down a computer startup time (the threading of other startup activities may make the adding of icons seem slow), it could be indicative of other startup activities. Often, programs will have update routines and other snippets which are automatically loaded at startup. They often access the Internet looking for updates which also adds to the time. (Companies like to get into your startup.) While many of these are not necessary for the normal functioning of your computer, they can significantly lengthen your computer boot time.

To check your startup items, open the System Configuration window, Run (+R) => *msconfig* and select the Startup tab. (In Windows 8, the Startup tab has been moved from System Configuration to the Task Manager, CTRL+SHIFT+ESC). You may see something similar to Figure 1 which is loaded with startup items. Disabling many of these can greatly decrease your boot time. However, be sure not to disable items that you actually need for your regular computer activities.

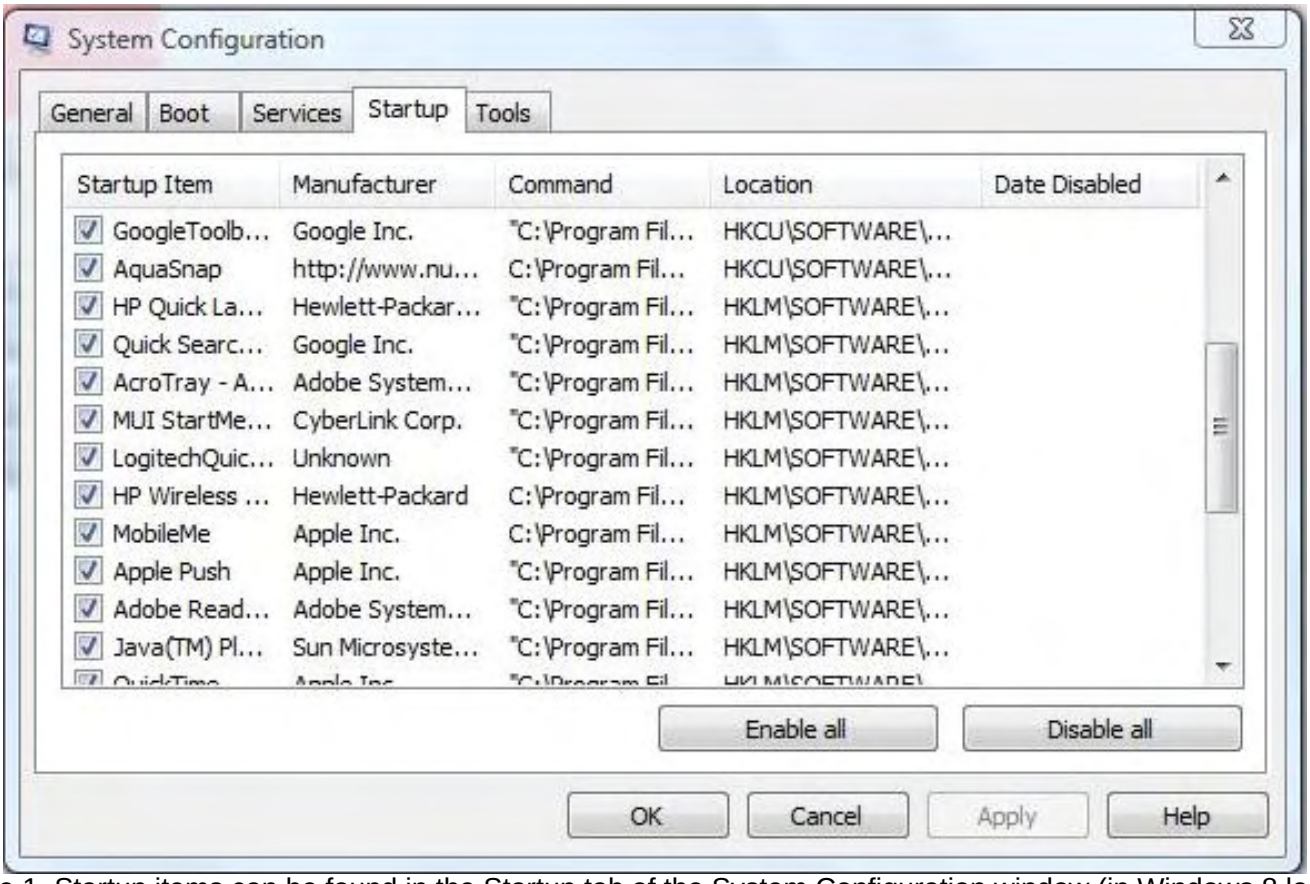

Figure 1. Startup items can be found in the Startup tab of the System Configuration window (in Windows 8 look in the Task Manager).

Not only can these startup items slow the booting of your computer, but many of them initiate regular activity slowing your computer at other times. If you regularly use a program, it will often check for updates when you load it. You don't need it to check every time you start your computer.

Digital Dave

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Add AutoCorrection to Your Windows PC

"For People Who Fall Victim to Typos and Common Misspellings" by Jack Dunning

Microsoft Word offers AutoCorrect, but now you can add it to all of your other Windows software and Web browsing. You can even add your own personal pet peeves to the list.

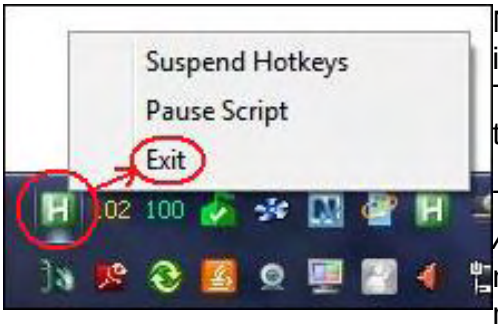
Have you ever wished that you could type résumé when your need it without searching for the "é"? Are you like me, a little dyslectic, and occasionally enter "thier" rather than "their" when typing on your keyboard? Or, "hte" when your mean "the"? Microsoft Word has AutoCorrect which will fix these errors, but what if you're using Notepad, blogging on the Web, or sending an e-mail? Do you want a quicker way to enter the trademark symbol (™), copyright (©), or registered trademark (®)? Now you can use a program which will automatically correct common typos and misspellings on the fly and works in any program or any Web page—not just Microsoft Word.

This program uses Wikipedia's "Lists of common misspellings (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Lists_of_common_misspellings*)," "Typo (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Typo*)," the Microsoft Office autocorrect list, the OpenOffice autocorrect list, and various other lists (*www.autohotkey.com/forum/topic8057.html*). The original program file is rather old, but last time I checked common typos and misspellings haven't changed much in the last century.

This AutoCorrect program is not a replacement for a spell checker, but an extension which immediately makes changes to common errors—not all misspellings. Nor does it scan a previously written document looking for misspellings. It works only while you are typing and corrects the errors immediately without prompting. The list of

words is limited to common, not easily confused, mistakes, but there are still over 5,000 entries in the list. Generally, a spell checker merely highlights a word not found in its dictionary, then you make the decision.

This AutoCorrect program is an AutoHotkey script, but since many people may not be interested in installing or learning AutoHotkey, I've compiled the basic file into an executable, *AutoCorrect.exe*, which will run on any Windows computer—even if AutoHotkey has never been installed. I've posted it as a free download on DropBox (*www.dropbox.com/sh/4qu48lyqtixdg7t/QdMY1dNuy7*) in the same folder as past AutoHotkey downloads. If you download the *AutoCorrect.exe* file and double-click it, you will get the benefit of this program without further installation. If you would like the program to automatically load whenever you log into Windows, open the Startup folder (Run => *shell:startup*), and add either a copy of the program file or create a shortcut pointing to the program. (I recommend a shortcut as discussed in this week's AutoHotkey column.)



Note: When the *AutoCorrect.exe* file is loaded a green icon with an "H" in it will appear in the System Tray on the right side of the Windows Taskbar. (See the figure to the left). To stop the program, right-click on the icon and select Exit.

The only downside to using the compiled "run-anywhere" program, *AutoCorrect.exe*, is that you won't be able to modify it for your special needs. If you want to tailor your list of AutoCorrect words, then you must install AutoHotkey (*www.computoredge.com/misc/Installing_AutoHotkey_and_writing_your_first_script.html*) and make the modifications yourself to the AHK source file which is in plain text. (The source code I used for AutoCorrect, *AutoCorrect.ahk*, can be found in the same DropBox download folder. For more information on DropBox, see "Forget E-mail! Dropbox for Moving and Sharing Files!") Even if you don't plan to use the *AutoCorrect.ahk* file with AutoHotkey, you can view the words included in this version of the program by opening *AutoCorrect.ahk* with Notepad.

There are many people who could have written this program, but my hat goes off to those who took the time to compile the lists, make corrections, and add new functionality. The original source (unmodified by me) can be found at the AutoHotkey site (*www.autohotkey.com/download/AutoCorrect.ahk*). (You can review this page on the Web rather than downloading my *AutoCorrect.ahk* file. It is almost identical except for the changes I note below.) This may be one of the most useful scripts from AutoHotkey and the reason why I'm now offering it to *ComputorEdge* readers.

How AutoCorrect Works

The operation of AutoCorrect is built on one of the most basic features of AutoHotkey: substitution. Within the script is a long list of common errors. Whenever one of those non-words is typed, it is replaced on the spot with the correct word. Of course errors which are also other real words aren't included. That could become correction chaos. You still need to know whether you want "your" or "you're" when typing, although "you;re" will be changed to "you're."

If you type "btu" it will be replaced with "but", but only if it follows a comma or semicolon and a space. Otherwise you would never be able to use the British Thermal Unit (BTU). "Embarass" becomes "embarrass" even when part of "embarrassment." Here are some random samples from the "a" list:

```
::amoung::among
::amung::among
::amoungst::amongst
::ammount::amount
::ammused::amused
```

```
::analagous::analogous
::analogeous::analogous
::analitic::analytic
```

The word after the first double colon is automatically replaced with the word following the second double colon ("ammused" => "amused") when it is followed by a space or a punctuation mark. It's that simple. After you load the script (double-click *AutoCorrect.exe*), open Notepad and give it a try.

Fancy Foreign Words in English

If you want to add effete snobbery to your e-mails, then included is a list of foreign words found in English which use those ridiculous accents and umlauts. "He went to the smörgåsbord soirée with his protégé because he wanted some crêpes or a soufflé" or, "Señor will fish for pirañas mañana." You might want to refer to a moral from one of "Æsop's" fables. Is that pretentious enough for you? Here are a few examples from the foreign word file:

```
::outre::outré
::papier-mache::papier-mâché
::passe::passé
::piece de resistance::pièce de résistance
::pied-a-terre::pied-à-terre
::plisse::plissé
::pina colada::Piña Colada
::pina coladas::Piña Coladas
::pinata::piñata
::pinatas::piñatas
::pinon::piñon
```

Pet Peeves

Here is one that I added to my list just for all those sports announcers who don't know that many fans have more "athleticism" than any of the players.

```
::athleticism::athletic ability
```

athleticism 1. an active interest in sports. 2. an obsessive participation in physical activity.

Now whenever someone wants to use "athleticism" it is automatically changed to" athletic ability." Too bad this doesn't work when the announcers are talking on air. I wanted to change it to, "It's 'athletic ability' you airhead!", but I thought it would be too rude.

I've added:

```
::i could care less::I couldn't care less
```

since most people actually couldn't care less, even though they say they could.

I've also added a line to change "on accident" to "on purpose" since the former is obviously a Freudian slip used by people trying to hide the truth. Otherwise, they would say "by accident" just like innocent people do. It turns out that "on accident" is commonly used by people under 35 while "by accident" is used by

more mature individuals. Some put the blame on *Barney and Friends*, but that doesn't work since *Barney and Friends* started airing in 1992. By then my second son, the first person I heard say "on accident," was ten years old and he wouldn't have been caught dead watching that show.

I considered putting in ("gone missing" => "disappeared"), but I've watched too many British mysteries to make that change.

Correcting the British

If you want to force the British expatriates in your office to be more American, then you will need:

```
::colour::color
::capitalise::capitalize
::organisation::organization
```

For a more complete list of British spelling variations see Karen's Linguistics Issues (*www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/BritishCanadianAmerican.htm*) and Wikipedia (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_and_British_English_spelling_differences*).

There is no limit on making additions to the list, but you can't do it to the compiled *AutoCorrect.exe* file I posted. You need to start with either the *AutoCorrect.ahk* file or cut-and-paste the original linked code into a new AutoHotkey AHK file.

What Else is Included?

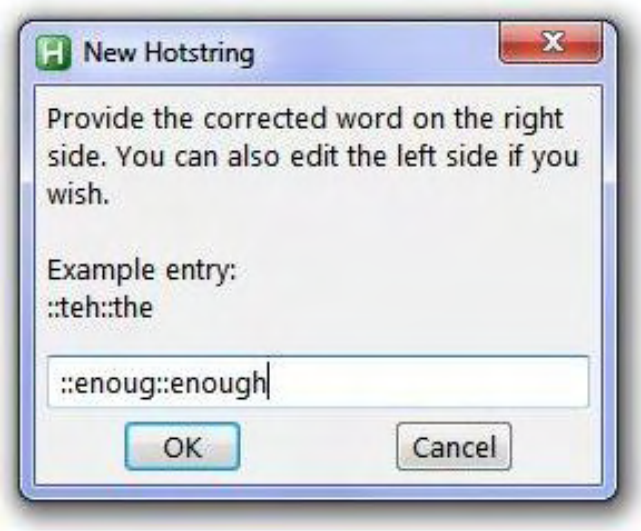
In addition to the over 5,000 common misspellings and typos, the list includes common word endings ("sice" => "sive") and beginnings ("asociat" => "associat"). There is also a fairly long list of non-operating options that would need to be added to the active list before they could be used. You must decide which result (if any) would work for you. Here is a small portion of that inactive list.

```
::calaber::caliber, calibre
::calander::calendar, calender, colander
::cancelled::canceled  ; commonwealth vs US
::cancelling::canceling  ; commonwealth vs US
::canon::cañon
::cant::cannot, can not, can't
::carcas::carcass, Caracas
::carmel::caramel, carmel-by-the-sea
::Cataline::Catiline, Catalina
::censur::censor, censure
::ceratin::certain, keratin
::cervial::cervical, servile, serval
::chasr::chaser, chase
::clera::clear, sclera
::comander::commander, commandeer
```

To make any of these changes, install AutoHotkey (*www.computoredge.com/misc/Installing_AutoHotkey_and_writing_your_first_script.html*) and update the original *AutoCorrect.ahk*. Then you can either run the AHK file with the installed software or you can recompile it into the *AutoCorrect.exe* program which will run on any Windows computer.

This AutoCorrect program will also automatically capitalize the days of the week and months (except March and May which have alternate meanings).

Adding Your Own Corrections



If there are common typing errors for particular words which plague you, and if you're running the AHK file with the installed AutoHotkey program, you can select (highlight) the error and use the WIN+H (+H) hotkey combination to add it to the *AutoCorrect.ahk* file. For example, suppose mistyping "enoug" when you mean "enough" is a common typo for you. Rather than always going back during proof to edit "enoug", you can add it to the *AutoCorrect.ahk* file by selecting it and pressing WIN +H (+H). An editing window for adding new corrections will open (see the figure to the left). Simply edit the word on the right to the correct form, then click OK. The correction will be added to the bottom of the *AutoCorrect.ahk* file. (Remember, this will not work with the *AutoCorrect.exe* compiled program since you can't add to the executable file. You need to first add changes to the AHK file, then recompile it into a program file.)

The following is a list of corrections I added before compiling the version posted on Dropbox:

```
::(c)::©
::(r)::®
::(tm)::™
::creme::crème
::expose*::exposé
::resume*::résumé
::ne::né
::athleticism::athletic ability
::i could care less::I couldn't care less
::on accident::on purpose
::enoug::enough
```

I first added the copyright and trademarks symbols (©, ®, and ™) . They are automatically converted when you enclose the corresponding letters in parentheses. I added "crème" because I would never use it without the accent. Plus, here are a few fractions:

```
:*:1/4*::¼
:*:1/2*::½
:*:3/4*::¾
```

Note that in order to distinguish when I want to use "exposé" or "résumé" rather than "expose" or "resume" respectively, I just add an asterisk to the end of the word which will covert it to the accented form. I did the same for the fractions, although they will convert instantly when the asterisk is added due to the asterisk option between the first two colons (:*:).

If for some reason AutoCorrect is changing something you don't want changed, you can usually correct it

by temporarily leaving out the space or punctuation at the end of the word (the correct won't activate), then go back and add the space later.

It Works Everywhere

This AutoCorrect program should work anywhere that your keyboard works (word processors, e-mail, Web page edit boxes, Notepad, and more). If you're happy with the compiled *AutoCorrect.exe* program then there is no need to download AutoHotkey and learn to edit scripts. But if you want to tailor the AutoCorrect program to your work, then a little editing of the *AutoCorrect.ahk* file will go a long way (i.e. removing the "on accident" => "on purpose" replacement). That means learning a little AutoHotkey scripting (*www.computoredge.com/misc/Installing_AutoHotkey_and_writing_your_first_script.html*). Once you get to know it, AutoHotkey is really not that difficult.

* * *

Next week in the AutoHotkey column, I'm showing a cool, simple script that sets up a reminder pop up window for important appointments, such as eating lunch. Pick a time later in the day, enter a message, then, at the appointed time, the reminder pops up in the middle of your computer screen.

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*. Jack is now in the process of updating and compiling his hundreds of articles and columns into e-books. Currently available:

Now at Amazon! Jack's *A Beginner's Guide to AutoHotkey, Absolutely the Best Free Windows Utility Software Ever!: Create Power Tools for Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7 and Windows 8 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009SI3F52/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009SI3F52&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*).*

Our second compilation of stupid *ComputorEdge* cartoons from 2011 and 2012 is now available at Amazon! *That Does Not Compute, Too! ComputorEdge Cartoons, Volume II: "Do You Like Windows 8 or Would You Prefer an Apple?" (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009JY65QQ/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009JY65QQ&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*)*

Currently only at Amazon.com, *Jack's Favorite Free Windows Programs: What They Are, What They Do, and How to Get Started! (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008BLUZRS/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20*).*

Available from Amazon, *Misunderstanding Windows 8: An Introduction, Orientation, and How-to for Windows 8 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B007RMCRH8/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20*)!* Also available at Barnes and Noble (*www.barnesandnoble.com/w/misunderstanding-windows-8-jack-dunning/1109995715?ean=2940014229463*) and ComputorEdge E-Books (*www.computoredgebooks.com/Windows-Tips-and-Tricks_c4.htm?sourceCode=writer*).

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*Getting Started with Windows 7: An Introduction, Orientation, and How-to for Using Windows 7 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B007AL672M/?&tag=comput0b9-20*),*
*Sticking with Windows XP—or Not? Why You Should or Why You Should Not Upgrade to Windows 7 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00758J4L6/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20*),*
and *That Does Not Compute! (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0052MMUX6/ref=as_li_ss_tl?

ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20*),* brilliantly drawn cartoons by Jim Whiting for really stupid gags by Jack about computers and the people who use them.

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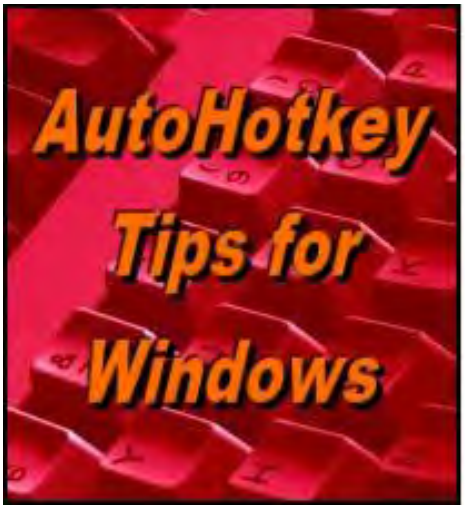

Updating Programs on Multiple Computers and the Disappearing Taskbar

"A Trick for Replacing Program Files on Computers with Dropbox, Plus Quick Hiding Windows Taskbar**"** by Jack Dunning

> You are writing and compiling your AutoHotkey scripts on one computer, but using the compiled EXE programs on a number of other Windows computers. Here's how to use Dropbox for a no-hassle way to keep all the connected computers updated. Plus, a tip on how to move the Windows Taskbar out of the way.

This week the main theme of *ComputorEdge* is using AutoHotkey for auto-correcting spelling and typos on the fly. If this is a service that fits into your daily computing, then you'll want the AutoCorrect.exe program to load it every time you log in or start up the computer. Plus, if you have multiple computers, rather than installing the complete AutoHotkey software on each, it's much easier to compile the AHK scripts into EXE programs on one computer, then share that executable with all your other computers.

Here's how to use the Dropbox file sharing system (*db.tt/rRn27Ury*) to automatically share and update your program files on all your computers, launching the new version on the next logon or startup.

If you don't already have one, the first step is to open a free Dropbox account. Dropbox is a program which sets up a folder on your computer, then automatically shares files you put in it with your other computers and devices on the same Dropbox account (Windows computers, Macs, iPad, Kindle Fire, etc.). Dropbox is an Internet service which also stores the shared files in the Cloud. (For more information on free Dropbox accounts see "Forget E-mail! Dropbox for Moving and Sharing Files!")

Once you have Dropbox on all of your Windows computers, put your compiled AutoHotkey file (i.e. *AutoCorrect.exe*) into a special folder. I used one called Dropbox => AutoHotkey, as shown in Figure 2 (top).

Adding AutoCorrect.exe to Startup

To automatically load programs and utilities when you log on, place a program shortcut in your Startup folder. Any program (or shortcut pointing to a program) located in the Startup folder will load as part of the log in process. The easiest way to open the Start folder is to Run (+R) => *shell:startup*. This opens the Startup folder (see Figure 1). If you want a program to open for all users, place the shortcut into the Common Startup folder—Run (+R) => *shell:common startup*.

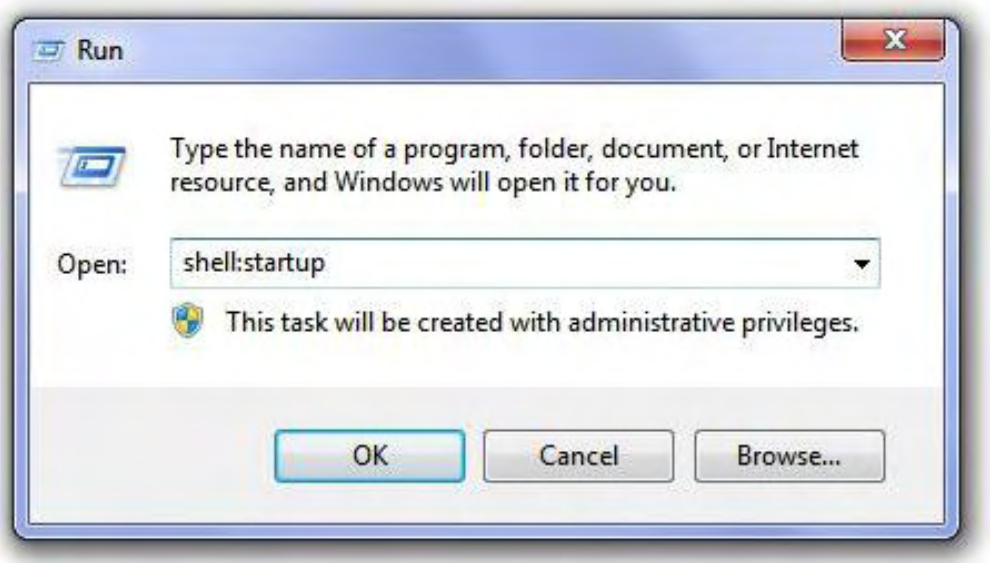

Figure 1. Selecting Run from the Start menu and entering shell:startup will open the Startup folder.

The next step is to make a shortcut for the AutoHotkey file in the Startup folder. It is important to create a shortcut rather than placing the actual program in the Startup folder. The reason for this is that once a program is launched the original file is locked and can't be copied over while it is running from the Startup folder. However, if the shortcut in the Startup folder is running the program directly from Dropbox, the original file will continue to update through Dropbox. This means that you will be able to update your Dropbox AutoHotkey programs even while they are running.

The easiest way to create the shortcut is to open both the Dropbox folder and the Startup folder, then while holding down CTRL+SHIFT, click and hold the left mouse button on the target program file and drag it to the Startup folder (see Figure 2).

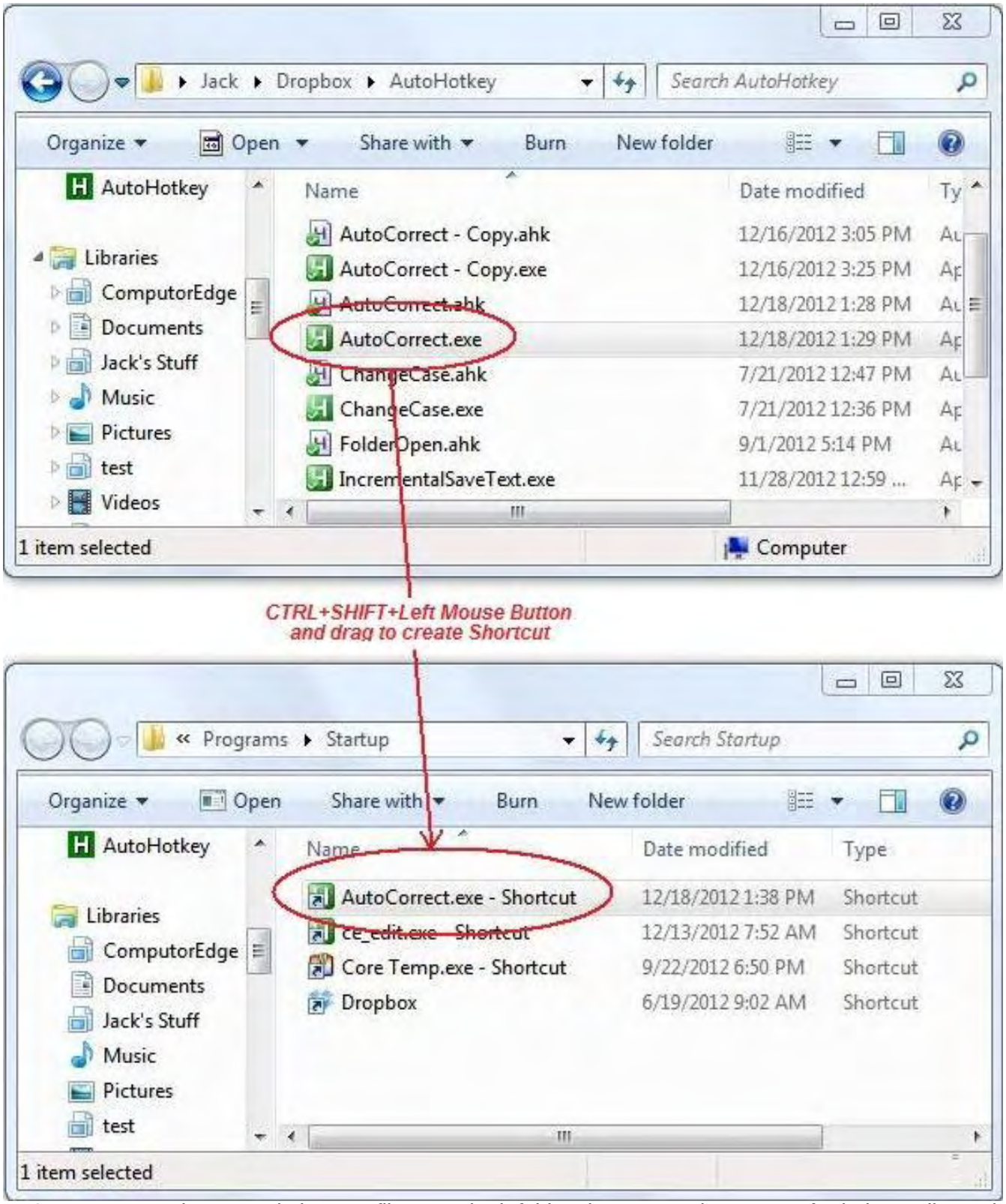

Figure 2. To create a shortcut pointing to a file, open both folders in separate instances of Windows File Explorer and drag the file to the new folder while holding down CTRL+SHIFT.

Once each computer has Dropbox installed and the appropriate shortcuts have been created in the respective Startup folders, you will be able to update the AutoHotkey scripts and programs on one computer, then copy them via Dropbox to all the other computers in one move. When logging on to the updated computers, the new version of the AutoHotkey file will load.

Plus a Disappearing Taskbar Trick

I'm not sure about the usefulness of this next Taskbar trick. What it does is remove the Taskbar (with the exception of the Start Menu button) from the screen. One instance where this technique might be useful is when the Taskbar is in Auto-hide mode. If there is a control in a window at the bottom of the screen, it's annoying to go to the control only to have the Taskbar pop up and hide it. With this hotkey combination activated with WinHide in AutoHotkey, you can temporarily remove the Taskbar.

Figure 3.

The following is the code for hiding the Windows Taskbar:

```
^#!H::WinHide ahk_class Shell_TrayWnd
```

Once activated, hold down CTRL+WIN()*ALT+H. The Taskbar will disappear (as shown in Figure 4).

Figure 4. Windows Desktop with the Taskbar removed the bottom of the screen.

It's important to activate a second hotkey combination to restore (WinShow) the Taskbar. Otherwise, it can become a hassle to get it back:

```
^#!T::WinShow ahk_class Shell_TrayWnd
```

Hold down CTRL+WIN()*ALT+T to bring back the Windows Taskbar. If you inadvertently forget to include a WinShow command for restoring the Taskbar, you can get the Taskbar back by opening Task Manager (CTRL+SHIFT+ESC) and ending all instances of *explorer.exe* in the Processes tab (select and click End Process), then move to the Applications tab and start a new instance of *explorer.exe* with the "New Task..." button.

* * *

Next week, we look at a cool AutoHotkey reminder pop up.

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*. Jack is now in the process of updating and compiling his hundreds of articles and columns into e-books. Currently available:

Now at Amazon! Jack's *A Beginner's Guide to AutoHotkey, Absolutely the Best Free Windows Utility Software Ever!: Create Power Tools for Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7 and Windows 8 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009SI3F52/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009SI3F52&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*).*

Our second compilation of stupid *ComputorEdge* cartoons from 2011 and 2012 is now available at

Amazon! *That Does Not Compute, Too! ComputorEdge Cartoons, Volume II: "Do You Like Windows 8 or Would You Prefer an Apple?" (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009JY65QQ/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009JY65QQ&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*)*

Currently only at Amazon.com, *Jack's Favorite Free Windows Programs: What They Are, What They Do, and How to Get Started! (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008BLUZRS/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20*).*

Available from Amazon, *Misunderstanding Windows 8: An Introduction, Orientation, and How-to for Windows 8 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B007RMCRH8/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20*)!* Also available at Barnes and Noble (*www.barnesandnoble.com/w/misunderstanding-windows-8-jack-dunning/1109995715?ean=2940014229463*) and ComputorEdge E-Books (*www.computoredgebooks.com/Windows-Tips-and-Tricks_c4.htm?sourceCode=writer*).

Available exclusively from Amazon, *Windows 7 Secrets Four-in-One E-Book Bundle (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00801M5GS/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20*),*
*Getting Started with Windows 7: An Introduction, Orientation, and How-to for Using Windows 7 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B007AL672M/?&tag=comput0b9-20*),*
*Sticking with Windows XP—or Not? Why You Should or Why You Should Not Upgrade to Windows 7 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00758J4L6/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20*),*
and *That Does Not Compute! (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0052MMUX6/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20*),* brilliantly drawn cartoons by Jim Whiting for really stupid gags by Jack about computers and the people who use them.

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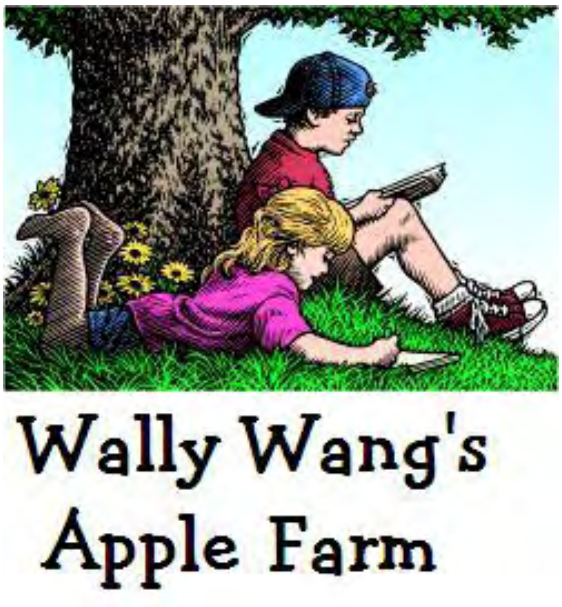

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"The Best Buy Experience" by Wally Wang

The Best Buy Experience; Happy New Year; The Curious Case of Getting Serious Work Done; Read About Space on iBooks; The Dark Pools of Wall Street; Kill the Messenger; Microsoft Word 2011 Close All Command.

Ask most people what they think of Apple Stores (ignoring the people who hate Apple no matter what) and the general consensus is that they come away with a positive retail shopping experience. Now ask most people what they think of Best Buy (*www.zdnet.com/can-best-buys-pc-business-survive-7000009104/*) and the general consensus is a poor retail shopping experience.

This is one reason why Microsoft had to open their own stores. Microsoft can't trust their partners to sell PCs competently, and they also can't trust their hardware partners to build decent products without loading them down with crapware along with cheap components that spoils the entire Windows experience.

Of course, Microsoft isn't doing themselves any favors with Windows 8, but at least with the proper hardware and retail shopping experience, Windows 8 can be tolerable. Without proper hardware and a lousy retail shopping experience, Windows 8 PCs simply look worse.

When I bought a Windows 8 laptop from Best Buy, the Best Buy site claimed that a $299 Windows 8 laptop was in stock at a certain store. Of course when I went to that store, they were out of stock, even though the site still insisted that they had $299 laptops in stock, so I had to settle for a $319 laptop instead.

When I wrote a complaint to Best Buy, the manager of that particular store wrote back and said the store would credit me $20, which seemed like a nice gesture. Then they never credited me the $20 they said they were going to do.

Now it's bad enough that they didn't have the $299 laptop in stock when they said they would. Then they corrected their mistake by offering a $20 credit. Then they screwed that up by not giving me the $20 credit they promised.

How can Best Buy last with such shoddy, incompetent service like that? Most likely they won't last, so expect them to disappear like Circuit City. With retailers offering such shoddy service to promote Microsoft products, how can Microsoft thrive? If Microsoft opens more of their own stores, they'll likely lose money running these stores. If Microsoft relies on their retail partners to sell their products, they'll likely lose customers due to incompetent retailers.

At one time, everyone thought Microsoft was brilliant for making the software and letting everyone else profit from it through sales of PCs. Now that same marketing strategy no longer works when everyone keeps cutting corners until Microsoft's products wind up looking like cheap components sold in poorly run

stores.

With sales of their Surface tablet struggling and Windows 8 sales not exactly skyrocketing, Microsoft has enough challenges ahead of them to make you wonder how much worse things can get for them before it gets better. Perhaps the Mayan calendar really did predict the end of the world, at least the end of Microsoft's dominance in the computer market.

Happy New Year

Many people like the idea of crowding into Times Square to watch the crystal ball drop and mark the beginning of the new year. Since most people won't be able to get to Times Square, try the next best thing and download the free Times Square app (*click.linksynergy.com/fs-bin/stat?id=15PJQz44Qcc&offerid=146261&type=3&subid=0&tmpid=1826&RD_PARM1=https%253A%252F%252Fitunes.apple.com%252Fus%252Fapp%252Ftimes-square-official-new%252Fid408688944%253Fmt%253D8%2526uo%253D4%2526partnerId%253D30*) instead.

With the Times Square app on your iPhone, you can watch the events live, take pictures, and share them with your friends. The app also lets you read the history of the Times Square New Year's celebrations along with giving you weather and other live event information so you can celebrate the new year wherever you are and still feel like you're cheering among the crowds in New York.

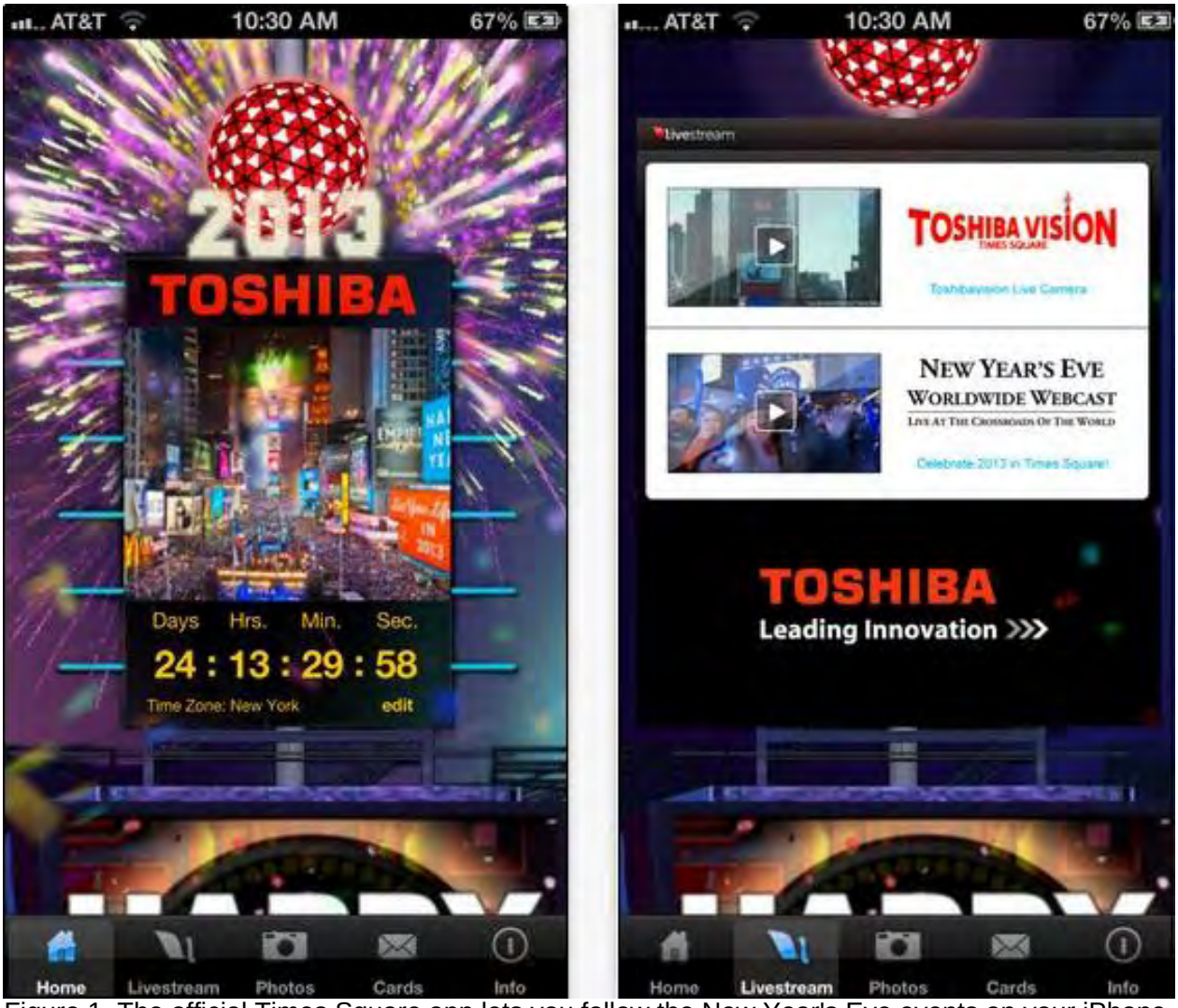

Figure 1. The official Times Square app lets you follow the New Year's Eve events on your iPhone.

The Curious Case of Getting Serious Work Done

One of the most persistent myths about the iPad and Macintosh to some extent is the belief that you can't get "serious" work done on them. Most people who believe this claim that you can only get "serious" work done if you use Windows and Microsoft Office.

First, the operating system itself has nothing to do with getting work done. What's important are the applications that run on that operating system. If you need to run a program that only runs on Windows, then you need a Windows PC, but that doesn't mean someone else can't also get "serious" work done on a non-Windows PC if they don't need to use a Windows-specific program.

In fact, there are many programs that only run on other operating systems but don't run on Windows. Since some of these non-Windows programs may be easier or more powerful than their Windows counterparts, it's equally valid to say that you could get work done faster or more efficiently if you used a different operating system besides Windows.

Second, Microsoft Office is nothing more than a suite of different programs. If you believe that only Microsoft Office lets you get "serious" work done, then you're basically saying that the quality of your work depends on the program you're using and not on your own skill and ability.

A good writer can create a report using any word processor just like a good artist can paint a picture using any paintbrush. Of course, the better the tool, the easier the person can create something. The question is what one person thinks is "better" in Microsoft Office, another person might think is actually "better" in another program.

If there's a specific feature you absolutely need in Microsoft Office that you can't find in another program, then you have a specific need to use Microsoft Office but someone else might not. What's important is how easy a particular program lets you accomplish your tasks.

When most people claim that Microsoft Office is necessary for "serious" work, they're often making two unspoken claims. First, they don't want to learn another program to do word processing, spreadsheets, databases, or presentations. Not wanting to learn something new or different isn't the same as claiming that only Microsoft Office has the features you need. Most people don't use the fancy features of Microsoft Office so they could create their "serious" work with any office suite such as Libre Office or Google Docs.

If someone already knows how to use Microsoft Office, learning another office suite just to accomplish the same task might be pointless, but that doesn't necessarily mean that no other office suite will let someone create "serious" work on them. They just might have to learn how to accomplish the same task differently, and most people don't want to do that. Ultimately the argument that Microsoft Office can only create "serious" work boils down to "I'm used to accomplishing tasks a certain way with Microsoft Office and anything that doesn't work exactly the same way must be inferior."

Second, most people want to maintain file compatibility with other Microsoft Office users. File format translations can be risky so it's best to have near 100 percent file compatibility if you need to share files with others. Yet file compatibility has nothing to do with getting "serious" work done. File compatibility can make your work easier to share with less headaches, but by itself, it doesn't help you create anything. A poorly written report is just as bad whether it's stored as a Word document or a Pages document.

Basically, the main argument for using Windows and Microsoft Office often boils down to not wanting to learn something new and not wanting to deal with the headaches of file format compatibility. Both of these are valid arguments not to use something else, but both arguments also have nothing to do with the ability to get "serious" work done.

You can get "serious" work done using an ancient CP/M-80 computer running WordStar as you can using a Windows 8 PC running Microsoft Word. Given a choice, most people would likely find Microsoft Word on

Windows easier than WordStar on CP/M-80, but you can get "serious" work done on both.

Science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke reportedly used WordStar on an MS-DOS PC to write his later books even when Windows and Windows-based word processors were available. Anyone want to argue with Arthur C. Clarke that he never did any "serious" work because he wasn't using Microsoft Office on a Windows PC?

Science fiction author Ray Bradbury never even used a computer at all, preferring to write his short stories and novels on a typewriter. Anyone want to accuse Ray Bradbury of not getting any "serious" work done because he wasn't using Microsoft Office on a Windows PC?

Ultimately, the idea that only Windows and Microsoft Office lets you do "serious" work is an illusion. Microsoft Office on Windows is simply what most people are comfortable and familiar using. If you don't want to switch to something else, then don't. But don't spread the myth that only Microsoft Office and Windows lets you get any "serious" work done. If an operating system and office suite is the only factor that determines the quality of your work, then you have bigger problems that no amount of technology can ever really help.

Read About Space on iBooks

Old fashion e-books are little better than PDF files displaying static text and pictures. This is why e-readers are just a temporary solution, but the real future of e-books are interactive e-books that can respond to the reader. If you're interested in space, you might want to download and read some iBooks by NASA to teach you more about science and space exploration.

Figure 2. NASA's free iBooks introduce readers to science through space exploration.

The first free iBook, *Hubble Space Telescope Discoveries (*click.linksynergy.com/fs-bin/stat?id=15PJQz44Qcc&offerid=146261&type=3&subid=0&tmpid=1826&RD_PARM1=https%253A%252F%252Fitunes.apple.com%252Fus%252Fbook%252Fhubble-space-telescope-discoveries%252Fid588428410%253Fmt%253D11%2526uo%253D4%2526partnerId%253D30*),* focuses on how the Hubble telescope has helped scientists learn more about the universe. The second free iBook, *James Webb Space Telescope Science Guide (*click.linksynergy.com/fs-bin/stat?id=15PJQz44Qcc&offerid=146261&type=3&subid=0&tmpid=1826&RD_PARM1=https%253A%252F%252Fitunes.apple.com%252Fus%252Fbook%252Fjames-webb-space-telescope%252Fid588445824%253Fmt%253D11%2526uo%253D4%2526partnerId%253D30*),* focuses more on explaining the different parts of the galaxy such as black holes, super novas, and the planets in the solar system. Both iBooks rely on video and interactive graphics to supplement the static text and pictures typically found in most printed books.

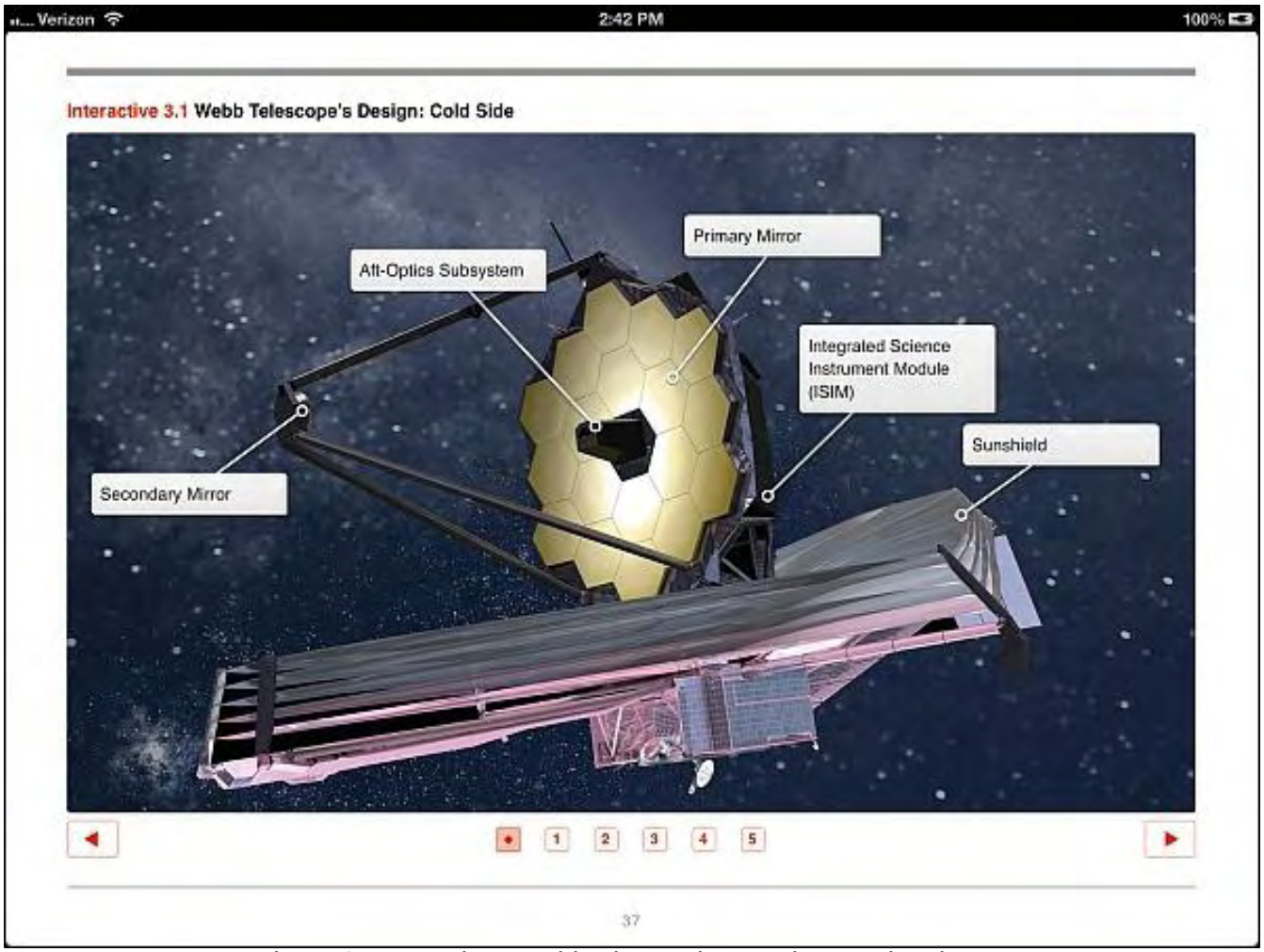

Figure 3. Interactive graphics let readers explore as they learn.

Since both iBooks are free, download a copy and let your kids learn about science and the universe. Of course, adults might find these iBooks fascinating as well for both the content and the interactive nature of the iBooks that make reading more responsive and playful. By browsing through these two free iBooks, you can see the future of the e-book market and it's not going to depend on boring black and white, static text and pictures.

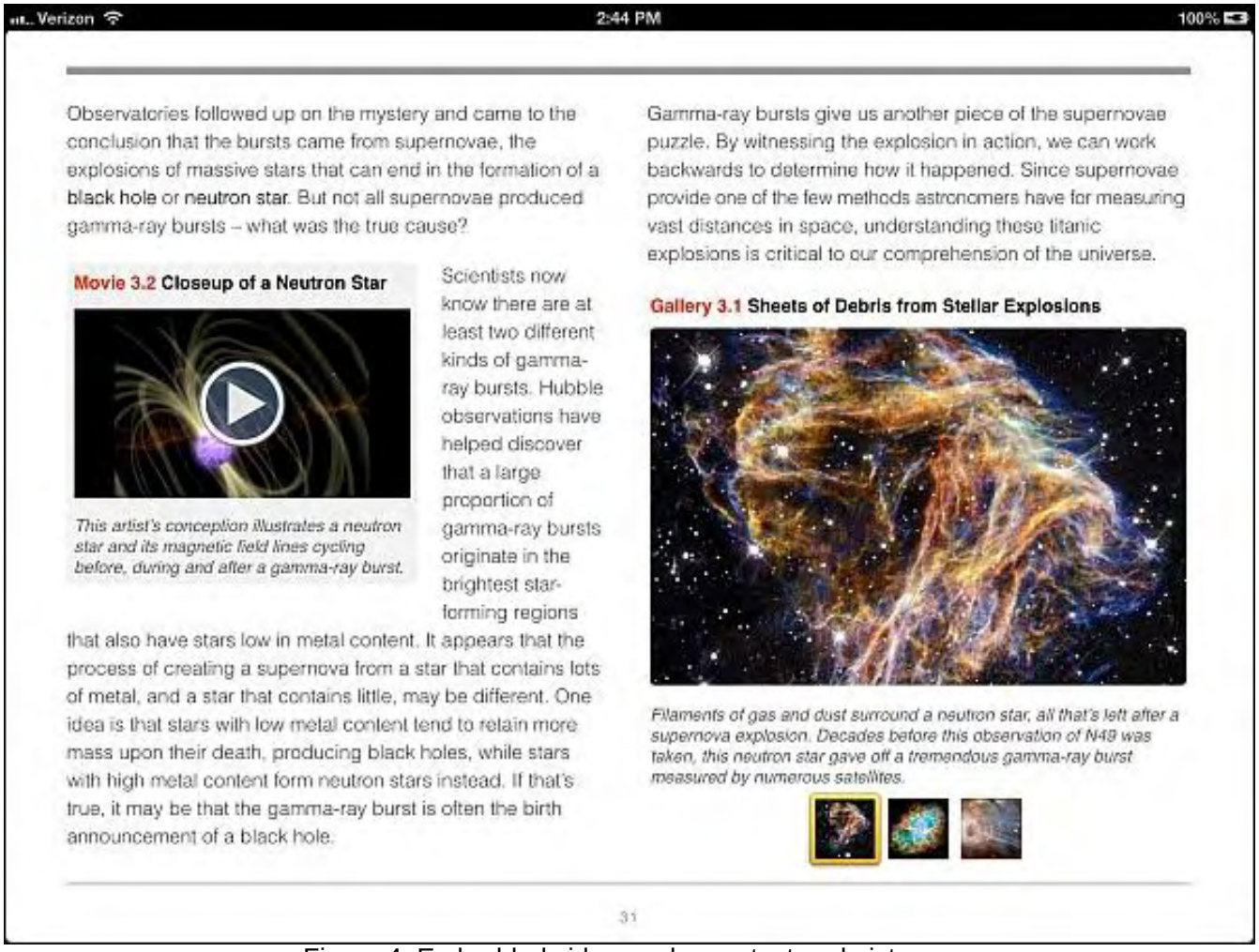

Figure 4. Embedded videos enhance text and pictures.

The Dark Pools of Wall Street

In the old days, people used to trade stocks by placing an order with a stock broker. That stock broker relayed that order to the actual stock exchange, such as the New York Stock Exchange, where someone would write down your order on a piece of paper and try to find a buyer or seller for your stock. Since 2000, that method is obsolete.

Today, most stock trading is done through computers known as high-frequency traders. Computers eliminate the inherent wastefulness and inefficiency of finding a buyer or seller of stock face to face. Instead, computers can match their buyers and sellers with other buyers and sellers, and trade a stock within milliseconds.

On the surface, this sounds fine, but behind the scenes, Wall Street is totally dependent on high speed computer networks run entirely by artificial intelligent algorithms. In other words, even the stock exchange regulators have no idea how these networks really work, so they're powerless to enforce any rules whatsoever.

That means most stock trading is done by computers with no regulation. That's the subject of the book *Dark Pools (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0307887170/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0307887170*),* which explains how Wall Street evolved from face to face trading to computerized trading where the human element has been removed altogether. The book gets its name from the trading networks that remain hidden from public scrutiny, leading them to be called "dark pools."

In an open market, all trades can be seen by everyone. If someone wants to sell 100 shares of Apple stock at a certain price, everyone can see that price and either buy or sell that stock. In a dark pool, the prices of stocks are only visible to the trading computers, but not to the general public. So you can guess that a small group of people will find a way to exploit this advantage to the detriment of the general public.

"Dark Pools" describes how computer programmers, engineers, and mathematicians teamed up to create the fastest, most adaptable algorithms possible to wrench pennies of profit per trade. Then they trade stocks thousands of times a second. What happens if a trading algorithm screws up? Then you get something like the May 6, 2010 Flash Crash that dropped the Dow Jones Industrial Average by 9 percent in a single day. The problem isn't just that computerized traders control the markets, but that they have the capability of tearing it down completely within seconds if something goes wrong.

If you want to learn how computerized trading threatens your IRA or 401k plan, you might enjoy "Dark Pools" to read how computer hackers turned their skill into cracking Wall Street. Then again, you might want to deny these unpleasant facts and pretend everything is working out for your benefit so you don't have to face the ugly truth that the value of all your investments could evaporate within seconds if a trading algorithm just happens to have a bug in its code.

Kill the Messenger

The New York Times recently reported that Windows 8 failed (*www.nytimes.com/2012/12/24/technology/tepid-sales-of-microsofts-windows-8-point-to-shaky-market.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0*) to increase sales of PCs. If you don't like this fact, write angry letters to *The New York Times* and other news services to accuse them of "Windows bashing" by reporting unpleasant truths that you don't want to acknowledge.

For everyone else, the shift to mobile computing is just changing people's buying habits in the same way that DVDs created the shift from VHS cassette tapes. Nobody believed that VHS would magically make a comeback against DVD players, so no one should believe that the world of desktop/laptop computers will suddenly rise when everyone's really shifting to smartphones and tablets. Of course, the smartphone that everyone is chasing is the iPhone, and the tablet that everyone is chasing is the iPad.

While Microsoft remains silent on the number of Surface tablets they've sold, Apple has trouble keeping enough iPad mini tablets in stock to satisfy all the people who want one. Microsoft hopes to sell 3 million Surface tablets by the end of the year. Apple sold three million iPads (*techcrunch.com/2012/11/05/apple-sells-3-million-ipad-minis-and-4th-generation-ipads-in-3-days/*) during the first weekend that they introduced the iPad mini.

The Surface tablet is actually a fancy laptop, so its tepid sales have less to do with the quality of the hardware and more to do with its limited nature as a tablet and its stronger performance as a laptop. Try using Microsoft Office on the Surface tablet without a keyboard and you'll find the virtual keyboard practically unusable. Use Microsoft Office on the Surface tablet with a keyboard, and it mimics a laptop. That means putting the Surface tablet on a flat surface to use it just like a laptop.

The big problem is that laptop sales are falling, so the Surface tablet is chasing after a shrinking laptop market. The iPad is targeting the tablet market. The Surface tablet is targeting the tablet market too, but with a laptop design. This would be like a company selling bicycles to people in the market for a car. You may have the best bicycle in the world, but if you're selling to the wrong crowd, you're going to get poor sales.

Microsoft should market their Surface tablet as a Surface laptop that just happens to have touchscreen capability like many other touchscreen enabled Windows 8 laptops. At least then people would find it most useful as a laptop first and a tablet second.

* * *

If you're using Microsoft Word 2011 for the Macintosh, you may have several documents open. To close them, you could shut them down individually, but a faster way is to hold down the Shift key and then click the File menu.

Instead of displaying the Close command, Word's File menu will now display a Close All command. By choosing this Close All command, you can shut down all your open Word windows at once.

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:

*My New Mac, Lion Edition (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593273908/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=1593273908*)*
*My New iPad 2 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/159327386X/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=159327386X*)*
*Steal This Computer Book (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050*)*
*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*)*
*Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon and Gerald Fisher (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=159079189*)*
*How to Live with a Cat (When You Really Don't Want To) (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006DJYL70/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=B006DJYL70*)*
*The Secrets of the Wall Street Stock Traders (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006DGCH4M/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=B006DGCH4M*)*
*Mac Programming For Absolute Beginners (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1430233362?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1430233362*)*
*Republican Fairy Tales (Children's Stories the 1% Tell About the Rest of Us) (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006QSKM3A/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B006QSKM3A*)*

*The Zen of Effortless Selling with Moe Abdou (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006PUFPGI/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B006PUFPGI*)*
*The 15-Minute Movie Method (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B004TMD9K8/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B004TMD9K8*)*
Erotophobia (A novel) (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009POEAJO/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B009POEAJO&linkCode=as2&tag=the15minmovme-20*)

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

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Beyond Personal Computing

“Junk, Clutter, Stuff and Gear: Personal Essentials in The Digital Age**”** by Marilyn K. Martin

Amusing anecdotes about how something can be stuff to one person and junk to another.

It is truly amazing how, in the Digital Age of Wi-Fi computers and the Internet, our human psyche still needs our physical "stuff." But when does stuff get downgraded to clutter, and then one-step-from-the-dumpster junk? Or upgraded to important (and usually expensive) gear?

Hitting Rock Bottom With Junk—Or Not

We've all seen these sad stories on TV, of strange people who have turned their apartments/homes into mounds of refuse. It may once have been "stuff" of value, however momentary. But stacks of ten-year-old newspapers and magazines went from clutter straight to junk at about the three year mark.

Or they gave up fixing that broken window and now feed half the feral cats in the Brooklyn, with an Eau de Pee stench that keeps the neighbors running around chasing the scent, armed with aerosol sprays. They are Hoarders, and seem to have a serious problem throwing broken and otherwise totally useless things away. Or settling down with one pet that won't claw their eyes out if they dare attempt to pet it.

In our current Digital Age, junk also refers to mounds of outdated computer parts dumped behind a building, or a stack of keyboards in your closet that teeter precariously whenever you reach in for wardrobe. Ditto for floppy discs and 3-inch diskettes. It may have some sentimental value ("My very first monitor hand-me-down!"). But if you don't plan on ever using it again—as in Never—time for junk-sorting and safe disposal. Just keep telling yourself that you'll now have room for updated "stuff" that actually works. And you can finally yank down that "Danger! Mercury Leakage!" sign on your door left by the City Inspector.

To be fair, there are also TV shows about "junk finders/renovators," who have reached that lofty status after years of questionable activities like "dumpster diving" and attending hillbilly auctions to bid on stuffed raccoons. You watch guys in jeans and t-shirts stumbling through a broken-down barn that has been locked up for fifteen years. Terms like Safety Inspections, Liability and Tetanus don't faze these guys. They are looking for junk that can be cleaned up and sold, or totally renovated and then sold to people like collectors of "antique hunting targets" that are probably overdue for a brain-scan.

These "junk guys" are deadly serious, with a keen eye and decades of practice to know instantly how much a Model T hood ornament can sell for. They are in an experienced "junk league" of their own, since most of us wouldn't have a clue if a torn half of a baseball card is equal to or more valuable than a 1930s

toilet seat.

When Clutter is Really Junk

Clutter is one step up from junk, in that it may still have some sort of value. It is usually found on desks, at work or home. If your job is marginally stable, and your desk or cubicle seems unnecessarily cluttered, the dividing line between "clutter" and "junk" seems to be whether the items would be useful or appreciated by someone else taking over your job, even temporarily.

I mean, if you attended a Zombie Parade and slipped and fell on someone's dropped fake ear, then your "desk clutter" would quickly be evaluated by whoever sits at your desk while you recover from a broken tailbone. They would probably keep your strange but obviously sentimental items, like that chipped rock paperweight with "Camp Hungatunga—Summer 1970" painted on it. But your never-pruned computer files on your three-tier, let's-guess system of Here, There and Everywhere, would probably not make it past the first week with your temp replacement. The same with your jumbled hoard of icons all in a pile in the bottom left corner of your opening computer screen.

Which means you could return from Sick Leave to find your computer joke file gone, your screen icons in neat rows, and your computer filing system now fifty labels long. Your clear push-pins might now be all pink or neon green and arranged as a smiley face on your wall. But you'll smile that the Temp found your long-lost pencil cup from first grade, cut from a liquid detergent bottle, with glued-on macaroni and spray painted blue.

There are, however, exceptions to the "desk clutter" rules. (Yes, this is like learning a foreign language; one rule and thirty exceptions.) If you share your cubicle with a neat-nik, who sing-songs under their breath every day, "A place for everything, and everything in its place!", your desk clutter could sniffingly be referred to as junk. Or, the unkindest cut of all—"garbage." As in "When are you going to throw away all that garbage, since you can never seem to find anything?"

So yes, the test is always how fast you can find what you are asked to produce amid your "desk-junk-disguised-as-clutter." If you are semi-organized with stacks of related clutter you may pass. If your desk is a sea of papers with door-stop hard, forgotten donuts underneath, your long-suffering cubicle-mate may gift you with books, like Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui (*www.amazon.com/Clear-Your-Clutter-Feng-Shui/dp/1561707619/ref=ed_oe_a*) *by Karen Kingston. Or else they'll request a cubicle switch, and you'll trade a neat-nik for Bluto, the Bronx Baron of Flatulence Jokes and Ample Demonstrations.*

Is All Desk Clutter Really That Bad?

Not really. Desk clutter typically means papers, print-outs and odds and ends like dirty coffee cups and your Push Pin Army for when things get slow. It also includes questionable items of sentimental value, like broken staplers or pencil sharpeners only you know how to operate. But they have your college or fraternity logo, or your child wrote their name on it with nail polish or a sodering iron. And, if you are on your thirteenth job in six years with yet another shaky start-up, you cling to your worn desk clutter like your toddler does to his rattiest stuffed animal. It's like carrying your Comfort Zone from job to job with you. Perfectly understandable.

And you know the pattern. When the start-up CEO starts asking who'd like to help out the company by reading horoscopes over the phone, you can sigh and start packing up your cluttered Comfort Zone. Including your leaning clay Pep-Sign from fourth grade ("Think Forever!"), "lucky" green paper-clips, and the chipped coffee cup you stole from that high school bully who is now a Sales Rep for a kitchen-gear company called "Grate Stuff!"

The Middle-Ground of Stuff

So what differentiates stuff from clutter? Stuff is actually a step up, since it denotes items both useful and important, if only to one person. A vacuum-sealed peanut-butter-and-jelly-sandwich and bag of jalepeno chips in a backpack may be one person's must-have emergency-meal—but not someone else's idea of "food-stuff" they'd touch with a ten-foot pole.

Stuff also denotes a sense of territory, as in "Don't touch my stuff!" or, "Don't throw things away just 'cause you don't know what they are!" usually delivered in exasperated tones to siblings and parents when you were living at home, and now to thoughtless roommates or cubicle-mates. "What's this pile of half-crushed boxes by the floor printer?" you may hear someone call out from down the hall. That's your cue to pop your head up over the rats-maze of cubicle walls and holler, "That's my stuff! I had to clear out my locker for the roach exterminator tomorrow! Leave those boxes alone!"

Real Estate Agents, especially in a bad market, all turn into Stuff Specialists and are prone to start using the word stuff like a verb. "You've got a lovely home, Mrs. Terminator. But, really, we need to seriously de-stuff your living room. All these weapons your husband brought back from the future just scream Conspiracy Nut, and we'll never get anyone past this room to the hallway. Which also needs some cheery plaster and paint, after you get rid of those laser-grid motion-sensors."

The Primo World of Gear

This term is everywhere today. Used to be, only the military had gear. Besides uniforms and weapons, soldiers headed out on patrol with night-vision goggles, intricate heavy weaponry in parts, GPS and communications equipment. And today, possibly including some "rugged gear" computers and headless-robots to carry the excess. Military "gear" is not only necessary for fighting and survival, it is tinged with secrecy that hints at exotic devices and camouflage-painted surprises. Like a portable drone in one backpack, and a joystick-operator the size of box of crackers pulled out of another backpack.

But today, gear has become a catch-all meaning "lots of expensive related stuff." Crib stores sell Baby Gear, sports stores sell Football Gear and Hunting Gear. And anyone out of school with a bulging backpack doesn't have gadgets—they've got gear. It's probably all electronic, show-off Cool, and most likely new. (Although with upgrades to popular gadgets coming every six months now, "new" can mean a year old device in perfect working condition bought off of that renowned Used Gear Store, E-bay.)

Today, Preppers and Survivalists don't just have supplies (like food and water for a decade) they also have gear to stuff in their bunkers, like Hunting Gear, DVD Gear and Rebuild-Society Gear. (I guess they never heard that only chain-saws stop zombies.) But to most people, juggling so many portable computers and electronic gadgets is now referred to as "I've got all my gear—let's go!"

If you aren't going into a forest to play a GPS location-game or hunt for a new drop-load of video games, and only headed to a movie theater, your companion may ask tentatively what "gear you need to take to a slasher-movie" is in your bulging backpack. If your companion finds jars of fake blood, an air-horn and a flip-top can of pea soup in your backpack of scary-movie-gear—you are soooo busted!

Third World Business Gear

*Today, all the world has embraced the Digital Age. And important Computer Gear can be transported by donkey over rubble (*www.funny-games.biz/pictures/185-movingacomp.html*). Or used to set-up a temporary working office (*www.funny-games.biz/pictures/189-streettech.html*) virtually anywhere.*

Toys as Gear?

Which brings up another topic: Can you use the word gear to lend importance to coveted items like your toys, gimmicks and joke-stuff? If your new boss visits your cubicle and wonders if that can of off-off-off-brand peanut brittle is that "pop out of a can stuff," and they spring out and break his glasses, could your

defense be "Yeah, it's part of my Motivation-through-Humor Gear"?

Could you apply the term "gear" to your rubber-band and paper-clip slingshot, upgrading it from "desk stuff" to "Test Gear for my upcoming app on workplace weaponry"? I suggest that you first need to ascertain if your boss has a sense of humor. If not, your Fun Gear will probably end up in the wastebasket, as angrily broken and crumpled junk.

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*Marilyn is a freelance writer and humorist, with a special interest (besides computers and technology) in Science Fiction. A SF Horror story appeared in July 2011 in Deadman's Tome (*www.demonictome.com/*). And in January 2012 she had a SF Police Procedural appearing in* Cosmic Crime *magazine, and a SF Dystopian Romance appearing in the* Strange Valentines *anthology. She also has almost seventy articles on Helium.com (*www.helium.com/users/573405/show_articles*), and is writing a humorous Young Adult SF series,* Chronicles of Mathias (*www.amazon.com/Chronicles-Mathias-One-Reptilian-Rebirth/dp/1598249002*). *Volumes One and Two have received a "Gold Star for Excellence" from TeensReadToo.com (*www.teensreadtoo.com/ReptilianRebirth.html*), and are available from most on-line bookstores.*

ComputorEdge E-Books has converted many of Marilyn's computer humor columns into four e-books.

Now available in a four-book Kindle bundle from Amazon.com The Best Computer and Internet Humor, Anecdotes, and Jokes Found on the Web (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00ACVX2PC/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00ACVX2PC&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*). *Marilyn's collection of the funniest stories about our computing machines and how we use them at home, the office, and in cyber space. Save 25% off the individual book price!*

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Audio E-books

[Regarding Jack Dunning's September 30 article, "Adding Audio to Your E-books":]

Fantastic!! I just wrote my first e-book for the Nook tablet. I have working video and audio. Thank you, Thank you, Thank you.

Now to teach my students how to do it. It is soooooo simple. It's a sin. :)

-Merle Hall, Macon, Missouri

GPS That Warns of Red Light Cameras?

[Regarding Jack Dunning's December 14 article, "A Guide to Shopping for Tablet Computers":]

I'd love to know what make/model GPS you have that warns of red light cameras!

-Rich Ernst, San Diego

The GPS is a Garmin nüvi 3790. I added the red light camera database as a 30-day trial. I think that most of the Garmin models will do it with the add-on from the Web site. It was free for 30-days, but it's still working six months later without paying. I don't know, but I may lose it when I do an update. I know there are other databases on the Web which may work with most GPSs.

-Jack Dunning, *ComputorEdge*

What Are Your Computing Goals?

[Regarding Jack Dunning's December 14 article, "A Guide to Shopping for Tablet Computers":]

*First off I don't know if I can say this in 2,000 characters or not. That said, I will preface this (rant?) with, "Are the new computer platforms "*dumbing down*" the way we use the technology or is the tech evolving to the lowest common denominator? I'm admittedly an old-timer in the PC field and sometimes doubt whether the new platforms can truly be called "Computers" or are they merely smart entertainment devices?*

I started out on an Atari, then tried a Sinclair, a TI 94 and "graduated" to a Commodore 64. I then decided to pursue a career in the computing world and went to a school for fixing the "PC." The school taught board level maintenance and repair on IBM PCs and XTs, DOS, Basic programming and installation and configuring of DOS programs. I'm not going to define any of these terms. If you don't know what they are then "Google" them. This was from 1987 to 1990, from then to 1993 I tried to make a living as a PC repair Tech, but soon discovered that I just wasn't flexible enough to go from a PC, monitor and simple printer to devices that would measure growth rate & protein content of your toe nails and a host of other devices

that proliferated from 1993 to 95 as add-ons to the basic PC,—which you as a tech had to understand and be able to install, tweak the software and resolve any conflicts with the other hardware on the system, (no Plug & Play).

I continued to buy and work on my own and friends' computers from then until now, but as far as I know I have never actually profited from any PC or laptop that I have owned. I've probably spent upwards of 6,000 dollars on computers and peripherals in the ensuing years. I wonder how many others out there have owned multiple PCs without realizing any benefit other than enjoying the novelty of a device that can tell you when it's not working correctly, even though it is saying it in a cryptic language that leaves you scratching your head and thinking, "what the heck does that mean?"

-Buck-o, El Cajon, CA

Removing Incredibar

[Regarding the December 7 Digital Dave column:]

I downloaded and installed some software recently that also included the Incredibar toolbar. The mention of an Incredibar install was listed waaaaaay down inside the EULA (of course, we all completely read through every EULA, don't we). The first time opening Firefox after the install, there it was, staring me in the face.

I tried everything under the sun: traditional uninstall, CCleaner IObit Uninstaller; nothing worked. Doing a Google search revealed the answer I was looking for, and with this bit of info I finally got rid of it on Firefox. Below is the link to the answer. I'm sure a search for an Incredibar Chrome browser uninstall will also prove fruitful.

*http://*www.bybe.net/blog/removing-mystart-incredibar-search-from-firefox.html

Cheers.

-Andrew Kliss, San Marcos, CA.

[Regarding the December 7 Digital Dave column:]

*Thanks, Dave, for your answer to Incredibar. I removed it using this little download (*www.softpedia.com/get/Antivirus/Removal-Tools/AdwCleaner.shtml*) I found Tuesday.*

-Tom Waleska

Router Passwords

[Regarding the December 14 Digital Dave column:]

How do *you change the default password on a wireless router? It would also have to be changed on other wireless equipment using the same router; i.e. laptops, printers, tablets, PSP's. Please explain.*

-CAS, El Cajon

[See the December 21 Digital Dave column for the reply.]

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