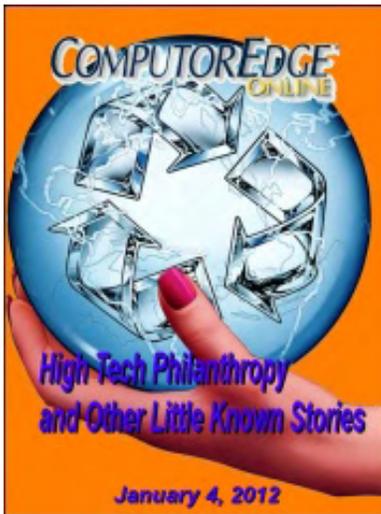


ComputerEdge™ Online — 01/04/13



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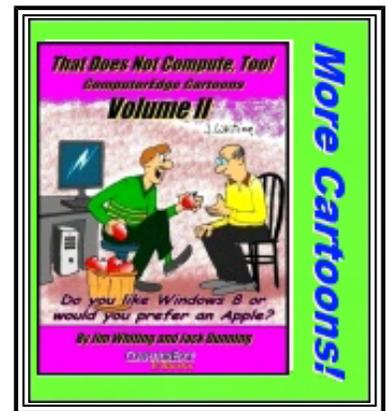
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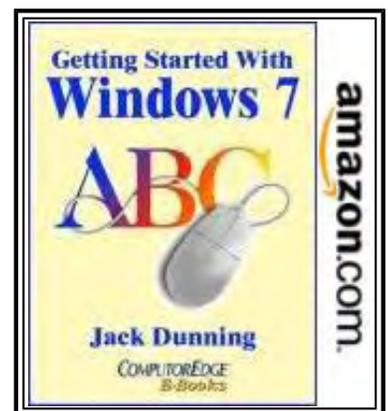
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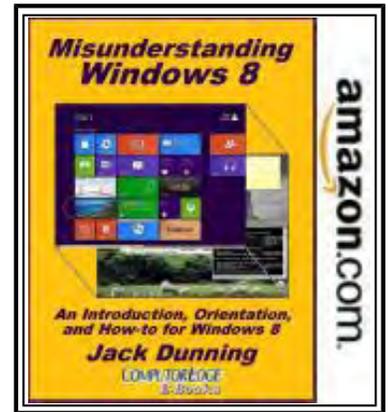
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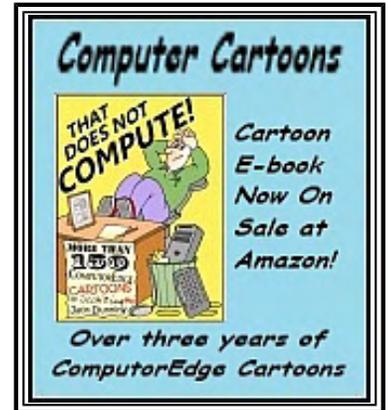
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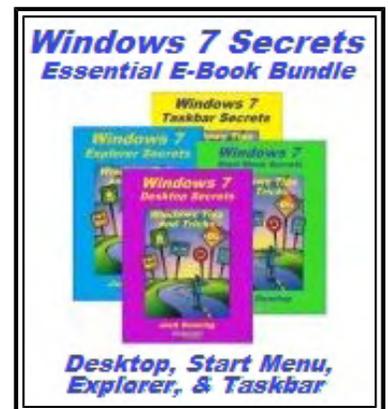
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Digital Dave

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

Do I Need to Load Java, Quicktime, and RealPlayer at Startup?; The Best Antivirus Software?; Web Pages Not Working.

Dear Dave,

I see in the 12/28/12 edition you recommended to a reader he check his Startup programs to possibly reduce start up time. I checked mine and saw that Java, QuickTime, and RealPlayer, all boot up at Start. What would the consequences be if I stop them from booting at Start up? Will I have to reload one or the other each time I want to watch a video or YouTube?

Thanks, and keep up the great work. You are better than a Community College class.

Joe Piluso
San Diego, CA

Dear Joe,

It's safe enough to disable the launching of those programs in Startup. The routines loaded are primarily checking for updates. When you actually need a program whether Java, QuickTime, or RealPlayer, it should load automatically as needed—as long as it is the default for the specific file type.

If after disabling the Startup feature of a program you notice a problem, you can always enable it again.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

What is the best antivirus according to your experience?

Thanks

Jorge Alvarado
San Diego, CA

Dear Jorge,

In my experience, the best antivirus is you. Most infections are the result of user error (opening the wrong attachment, clicking the wrong link, etc). Unfortunately, antivirus software cannot detect the new viruses until after they get released and are already infecting computers. All of the malware prevention programs include a database of known viruses and algorithms for detecting possible problems, but the people who want to infect your computer know this and figure out how to circumvent the protections.

You still should use antivirus software if only to protect from the known malware. I used to recommend a number of the free programs, but they have all become so annoying with their continual attempts to get you to upgrade to a paid version, that I now recommend Microsoft Security Essentials (windows.microsoft.com/en-

US/windows/security-essentials-download)—also free. (Windows 8 already has the same level of protection as Security Essentials built into it.) If you're using Windows XP, Security Essentials is not available, so you will need one of the other free programs.

If you want user evaluations of the various free antivirus programs (*download.cnet.com/windows/antivirus-software/?tag=mncol%3Bsort&filter=licenseName%3D%22Free%22%7C&filterName=licenseName%3DFree%7C&pp=10&sort=userRatingAsc*) available, go to CNET and read the user and editor's comments.

Your best protection is to practice safe computing. Don't download any software, open any e-mail attachment, or run any program unless you know it is safe. If a friend sends you a link or attachment you're not expecting, check it out with him or her before opening it.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have loved your question/answer section for many years, but never had reason to seek your help. My problem: Each time I sign on to my laptop which is running Windows 7 I am unable to complete the logon to any one or two Web pages. It will take me to the page that I enter my user name and password, then it takes me to a window that states "unable to open this webpage." A few days later I can open the former problem page, but find that another Web page cannot be opened. I can open the problem page on my desktop. Any suggestions?

*Cathy Lee
La Mesa*

Dear Cathy,

I don't know how much I can help as this appears to be a random problem—which is the worst kind. I've had the same thing occur to me, but usually using a different browser (switching to Firefox, Internet Explorer, or Google Chrome—whichever is not the default browser) or rebooting the computer will resolve the problem.

You might try clearing the history in your Web browser. (Look in History or Tools => History for options.) It is possible that the page saved in the history cache has an error. Clearing it will force the browser to reload all pages from the Web servers rather than loading the cached page.

It is also possible that you are having random problems with your Internet connection and/or router. Try resetting both, then reboot your computer. These devices may operate for many months without a problem, then, when there are random issues, we don't even think to reset (turn off, wait 30 seconds, then back on again) the modem and/or router.

It is always worthwhile to update your virus software and run a scan.

Digital Dave

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Tech Philanthropy and More Little Known High Tech Stories

“Digital Charity, Electronic Toy Blocks, Scuba-Tank Air Bike and Tips for Start-ups” by Marilyn K. Martin

Tech Philanthropy; Tracking Devices; Coupon Daily-Deals Sites Losing Money; Tech for the Disabled; Start-up News and Advice; Vehicle Tech; High Tech Clean Fuels; YouTube and Netflix at Crossroads; Google Maps 6.0; Apps to Help Customers; TV Tech; Innovative New Apps; Digital Comics.

High Tech Philanthropy

With hard times upon us, some remarkable folks are looking for ways to be more charitable. And yes, there are Web sites and apps to help, as revealed by the *Christian Science Monitor* in November 2012.

VolunteerSquare.com (www.volunteersquare.com/) helps match nonprofit agencies in Connecticut with potential volunteers (www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference/Change-Agent/2012/1116/Volunteer-Square-matches-willing-helpers-with-charitable-tasks) who don't know where to apply their particular skills. There are also some smartphone apps to help you find some worthwhile global charity apps (www.csmonitor.com/Innovation/Tech/2012/0820/iPhone-and-Android-apps-to-help-you-do-some-good) like iKiva (www.kiva.org/), which is a micro-loan service I wrote about earlier.



The *CS Monitor* also profiled eight innovative philanthropists (www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference/2012/1118/Giving-back-Eight-innovative-philanthropists-around-the-world/A-bike-as-economic-engine) around the world. Starting with F.K. Day who started a charity called World Bicycle Relief (www.worldbicyclerelief.org/). It distributes sturdy bicycles to the poor in developing nations, which not only makes far destinations more accessible, but allows farmers to pedal more of their products to market. (Click the "Next" blue dot at the top of the article, to read about the other global philanthropists who are making a real difference.)

In early 2012, the *Denver Post* revealed an unusual charitable app (www.denverpost.com/outwest/cj_20103234) that partners with stores and manufacturers. Nonprofitshoppingmall.com (nonprofitshoppingmall.com/) recruits Shop-Anthropists who choose a charity from the site's list, and then download the app. Then every time they shop online at major listed retailers, a portion of their purchase goes to that chosen charity. (As always, please run a prospective charity you like through charitynavigator.org (charitynavigator.org) first, to

make sure that most of the money you are giving actually gets to the targeted group.)

Low Tech Philanthropy

Not all of us have the time or money for major charitable work. But here are some ordinary but remarkable people who still manage to make a difference. In October 2012 in SiliconValley, Larry Magid profiled (www.siliconvalley.com/larry-magid/ci_21750922/magid-palo-altos-bookshare-shows-benefits-open-standard) a Palo Alto (California) storefront bookstore. Benetech (www.benetechinc.com/) is the parent organization, which "focuses on using technology to enhance human rights, literacy and environmental conservation." But it is more well known for its largest project, Bookshare (www.benetech.org/literacy/bookshare.shtml), which provides free electronic and audio books for people with disabilities.

For a book seller in Florida with little time or money, she decided (www.miamiherald.com/2012/11/13/3096001/how-to-make-the-time-for-giving.html) to do "one small good deed every day for a year." For others, they can target deficiencies within their career field, or they can join in on the hot new trend to combine exercise with volunteer work.

To Track—or Not to Track: Personal Gadgets to Cloud Computing



With GPS tracking devices now affordable for the general public, when does tracking cross the line from protection to invasion of privacy? In October 2012, the *New York Times* ran a review of GPS tracking products (www.nytimes.com/2012/10/25/garden/tracking-family-with-gps-dont-forget-the-dog.html?ref=personaltech), which now offer a vast array of devices for remote monitoring of everyone from children to teen drivers to Seniors with Alzheimers, and even the family dog.

In November 2012, the *New York Times* reported that cloud services in Europe are finding out that national governments, fearing theft, are refusing to sign up (www.nytimes.com/2012/11/21/technology/european-governments-staying-out-of-the-cloud.html?ref=technology) for moving their databases to the cloud. Some countries, like Britain, have moved some governmental databases to the cloud, but not others, preferring a go-slow approach. According to the Washington DC based group SafeGov (safegov.org/), these fears are well founded since the biggest cloud companies (like Microsoft and Google) have not yet detailed exactly how they would protect governmental databases.

Coupon Daily-Deals Sites Losing Money



SiliconBeat reported in November 2012 that Groupon (www.groupon.com/), the once hot daily-deals company, had seriously disappointing third-quarter earnings (www.siliconbeat.com/2012/11/08/groupon-stock-continues-march-into-oblivion-after-q3-earnings-disappoint/). Wall Street reacted by driving down Groupon's stock to less than \$4/share. An analysis in *Contra Costa Times*, also in November, said that all the daily-deals companies are piling up losses (www.contracostatimes.com/business/ci_21980060/analysis-groupon-fights-its-life-daily-deals-fade). While Groupon and LivingSocial (www.livingsocial.com/deals/how_it_works) are racing to diversify, polls find that up to 40% of merchants using these daily-deals either lost money or gained too few new customers through these companies.

Later in November 2012, Investopedia reported that

“To get their Groupon Internet deals working, they had to include a facial treatment with every pizza.”

Groupon's shares shot up (www.investopedia.com/stock-analysis/2012/tiger-global-management-buys-9.9-stake-in-groupon-grpn-aaplgoog-fb1121.aspx#axzz2Erpof9FP) when hedge fund Tiger Global and George Soros bought a 9.9% stake in Groupon. By the end of November, LivingSocial announced it was cutting 9% of its staff (400 jobs), and Groupon had already shed 648 positions. While investment sites reported that Groupon's CEO may be fired (www.newser.com/story/158452/more-bad-news-from-daily-deals-world.html), CEO Andrew Mason avoided the ax. And by December 1st, Groupon was reported to be profitable again (www.businessinsider.com/why-groupon-ceo-andrew-mason-wasnt-fired-2012-11).

Tech For the Disabled



In October 2011, Mashable ran an article on the top seven tech breakthroughs (mashable.com/2011/10/05/tech-disabled/) for people with disabilities. The DynaVox EyeMax System (www.dynavoxtech.com/products/eyemax/) lets paralyzed people participate in spoken communication using only their eyes. Navigations systems for the blind are covered, as well as prosthetics, cochlear implants and an iBot stair-climbing wheelchair (www.dekaresearch.com/ibot.shtml).

An undated article in About.com reviews some high tech gadgets (learningdisabilities.about.com/od/collegevocationalschool/a/High-Tech-Gadgets-For-Learning-Disabled-College-Bound-Students.htm) to help college students with learning disabilities. From a digital smartpen that records and transcribes written notes, to software to help learning-disabled students organize their thoughts and write essays. There's even a free app all students could find helpful since Assignment Planner (play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=gene.android&hl=en) helps students keep track of assignment and project due dates, as well as test times.

In December 2012, the *Seattle Times* reported that a Kinderling Center (www.kinderling.org/) in Bellevue, Washington, for children with special needs, is having success with iPads (seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2019809496_needy02kinderling.html). For severely autistic children who can't speak, the iPads are a fun bridge through which directions and even sharing can be successfully intermingled.

Start-up News and Advice

The Denver Post reported in December 2012 on how some toy start-ups in Boulder (Colorado) are successfully mixing technology with play-things (www.denverpost.com/business/ci_22099962/boulders-high-tech-toys-local-startups-mix-technology). Seamless Toy Company and Modular Robotics, Inc. are launching lines of electronic or magnetic blocks that can be used alone or to help create everything from robots to magic wands. There are other Boulder toy start-ups working on plush toys or balls controlled by smartphones or tablets. (Links are embedded in the article.)

The same month, the *New York Times* reflected on how \$1 Billion start-ups may not be as much fun (bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/18/disruptions-a-1-billion-start-up-might-not-be-so-fun/?ref=technology) as lower priced start-ups. For starters, only a handful of rich and established companies could afford to buy you out. And popularity and press doesn't always translate to success in going public, like Facebook and Groupon found out. Hiring talent can also be a problem, since plenty of high tech professionals are happy to join a \$10 Million start-up expected to grow to \$1 Billion, but no one can expect to get rich joining a \$1 Billion start-up that may be over-valued and destined to slip to six or seven figures.

In November 2012, the *Boston Globe* offered seven public relations goals (www.boston.com/business/blogs/global-business-hub/2012/11/7_pr_tips_for_s.html) for start-ups. The tips range from the expected (Know Your Market, Find Partners), to the not-so-obvious subtleties of Pitching to the Media, and Maintaining Media Relationships.

More on Automated Cars

Automated vehicles continue to fascinate us, even though most prototypes right now only feature aspects of autonomy, and are still a long way from being totally self-driving. But in October 2012, the *Seattle Times* announced that the US government was launching a "research initiative to determine the safety and reliability (seattletimes.com/html/business/technology/2019502657_apusautomatedcarsnhtsa.html) of automated driving technologies." The government's primary interest is in saving lives, citing stats that human-error was a factor in 90% of traffic deaths in 2010.

In November 2012, the *Denver Post* reported that Toyota is testing cars that can communicate with each other (www.denverpost.com/technology/ci_21979550/toyota-tests-cars-that-communicate-each-other). At a just-completed Intelligent Transport System site in central Japan, cars receive information from sensors and transmitters installed on streets to minimize accident risk from such common problems as running a red light and pedestrians. The system is also testing how cars can transmit such heads-up information to other cars.

Vehicle Tech—Useful Apps to Voice Commands

In November 2012, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on five free smartphone apps to help drivers (www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-auto-apps-20121121,0,1114172.story). GasBuddy (www.gasbuddy.com/GasBuddyMobileApps.aspx) locates nearby gas stations and posts their gas prices for comparison. Big City drivers especially can appreciate the other apps, which help with finding inexpensive parking, live traffic flow and speed-trap information, and even estimates for specific repair jobs in your area.

Also in November 2012, the *Miami Herald* reviewed four new 2013 cars with Voice Command systems (www.miamiherald.com/2012/11/14/3095294/cars-that-play-requests.html). The idea is to minimize distraction for drivers who can keep their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel. Some of these new systems can even play music the driver asks for by name through iPhone, iPod or plugged-in USB thumbdrives. They rated the 2013 Lexus GS 450H the best (4 out of 5 stars), as a "tech tour de force" which also gets surprisingly good fuel economy, for about \$60,000.

In December 2012, the *New York Times* reported that one of our most staid industries—car insurance—is starting to change (bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/05/car-insurance-gets-personal/?ref=technology). In Oregon, a company called MetroMile (www.metromile.com/press-release) sells insurance based on how many miles you drive. They use an in-car sensor that logs the miles, and sends a monthly bill based on miles driven, like a utility meter. The company says they can save the average driver (5,000 to 8,000 miles a year) up to 30% savings a year, compared to conventional auto insurance. These in-vehicle sensors also collect diagnostic and emissions data, and the company hopes to eventually offer their drivers tips for safety and how to get better mileage.

High Tech Clean Fuels—Including a Scuba-Tank Air Bike

In November 2012, the University of Rochester (New York) announced a research breakthrough in substantially improved light-based hydrogen production (www.rochester.edu/news/show.php?id=4892). Chemistry graduate students and professors (with funding from the US Department of Energy) have advanced the "holy grail" of energy science (using sunlight) by adding durability with nanocrystals and using inexpensive nickel as a photocatalytic system. Still in the basic research stage, the system was robust enough that it kept producing experimental hydrogen for weeks—until the researchers ran out of patience and stopped it.

Wired reported in November 2012 on a new air-powered motorcycle (www.wired.com/autopia/2012/11/air-motorcycle/) with a rotary engine that runs on a scuba tank of air. The O2 Pursuit (o2pursuitdeanbenstead.wordpress.com/) started as a project by an Australian engineering school graduate and has impressive stats: 62 miles on a full tank of air, can hit a top speed of 87 mph, and doesn't need electricity or batteries. Filling-up with air takes a couple of minutes, compared to hours for electric charging, and it can be stored in its inert state forever.

YouTube and Netflix at Their Own Crossroads

In November 2012 the Associated Press reported that despite Google's promise of 100 new channels of original programming on YouTube, the transformation is yet to happen (www.contracostatimes.com/business/ci_21981885/youtube-furthers-bet-original-programming-though-results-are). Now in their second round of funding, it will be on a "per channel basis," while those YouTube channels not offered money will be encouraged to seek their own financing. This is also reflected in YouTube's new emphasis on a user's playlist of channels, which has increased YouTube subscribers by 50%. Google's picky choices to receive money from their second round of funding also more accurately reflects YouTube's desire to move away from user content, and lure more professional content from Hollywood and advertisers.

Also in November 2012, SiliconValley's Troy Wolverton analyzed (www.siliconvalley.com/personal-technology/ci_21940943/netflix-is-at-crossroad-carl-icahn-reed-hastings) whether Netflix is washed-up, or poised for a resurgence. Corporate raider Carl Icahn and others are betting on a Netflix rebound. Although Netflix's managers are sticking with their vision of the company as "Internet television," focusing on its streaming business while letting its highly profitable DVD-by-mail option fade away. Netflix stocks soared when Icahn moved to buy a 10% stake in the "undervalued" company, that he thinks is ripe for acquisition.

Google Maps 6.0—Now with Indoor Maps

In November 2012, Google Maps 6.0 rolled out their new indoor floor plans (www.techhew.com/news/now-look-indoor-maps-with-google-maps-6-0-on-android/) for everything from airports to malls. Google's new map release also has floor plans for some major stores, from Home Depot to Bloomingdale's. Other features include a drop-down menu for quick switching, so it's easier to jump to Places, Navigation, Latitude, etc. And the new home screen includes "popular searches" based on your current location, and enhanced 3D views.

Floor Plans and Other In-Business Apps to Help Customers

The Boston Globe reported in late November 2012 that mobile apps can now help make holiday shopping less painful (www.boston.com/business/innovation/2012/11/26/shopping-apps-help-ease-the-pain/UJ2ey2j8YAs0DMKe0mUXhl/story.html) by helping find the best prices on popular items, locate hard-to-find gifts, and even make gift suggestions. The best apps even offer barcode scanning and GPS/location technologies, for shoppers to compare products between real stores and online retailers. They also organize coupons according to your location, and weed out expired deals. And most of these smartphone apps are free.

SiliconValley reported in November 2012 that frustrating wait-lines at restaurants may be a thing of the past, with new apps and Web sites digitizing wait-lists (www.siliconvalley.com/personal-technology/ci_21964949/restaurant-waitlist-apps-ease-diner-frustration). New apps like NoshList (www.noshlist.com/) lets restaurant staff manage parties and seating from an iPad or iPhone. The app also has a one-button feature to send a text or recorded call to the customer's cell phone when their table is ready—eliminating a screaming hostess to the parties waiting outside, some of whom have already given up and left. The app also tracks wait-times, for parties who want to shop or run errands until their table is ready.

I've already written about how more restaurants are posting their menus, and even Daily Specials, on their Web sites. And in November 2012, the *Denver Post* did a story on a Fort Collins (Colorado) beer bar using a smartphone app to help customers review (www.denverpost.com/technology/ci_21931615/bar-using-tap-app-help-beer-drinkers) their 100 different beers. The Mayor of Old Town bar has released a customized computer Web site and app (themayorofoldtown.com/beer/) that lists all their beers, on tap or in bottles/cans. The app also lets customers list their taste preferences and see which beers match.

TV Tech: News and Updates

In late November 2012, the *San Jose Mercury News'* Troy Wolverton released a review of the latest TVs (seattletimes.com/html/business/technology/2019752360_newtvreviewxml.html). With prices ranging from \$100 to \$25,000, it's easy to fit a new TV into any budget, with price guided by features offered—not necessarily screen size. LCD TVs with LED-backlighting have surged in popularity, and are now available in all

screen sizes, with the feature now standard rather than a premium on most mid-range TVs. (But if you have a dimly lit room, you'd do better with a plasma TV.) Most important add-on features are faster refresh rates, 3D viewing options, and smart-TV capabilities.

In October 2012, Larry Magid at SiliconValley reviewed (www.siliconvalley.com/larry-magid/ci_21736167/magid-tech-slingbox-announces-new-digital-media-recording) new Slingbox (slingbox.com/) digital media recording devices. The new devices let you access live and recorded programs on your home digital video recorder from wherever you are via a computer, tablet or smartphone. Both the Slingbox 350 (\$180) and Slingbox 500 (\$300) give you up to 1080p HD streaming. Both connect to your home network for Internet access and to your tuner or DVR to access your programs. The 500 has Wi-Fi and the ability to enable your TV to display personal media (like photos or video) from your smartphone.

Innovative New Apps

In November 2012, SiliconBeat reported that Google had just released a Jam With Chrome (www.jamwithchrome.com/unsupported?link=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.jamwithchrome.com%2F) experimental app, where Chrome users can play virtual instruments (www.siliconbeat.com/2012/11/08/jamming-with-chrome-googles-musical-experiment/) with up to three other friends online. Its simple graphics hides a sophisticated app, where users can choose from 19 instruments, adjust the tempo and key they want to play in, and even use one of several auto-play options.

The Boston Globe in November 2012 revealed that commuter rail riders in Boston have embraced the T's new smartphone ticket app (www.boston.com/metrodesk/2012/11/14/says-smartphone-ticket-app-hit-with-commuter-rail-riders/sziqvlkSzzbS7ussM9iRFI/story.html). Riders can pay for tickets through the free app developed by the British mobile-ticketing company, Masabi (www.masabi.com/). The rider just puts in credit card information, and the ticket is displayed in black and white until the user presses "activate" when the conductor nears. Then the ticket is rendered in color for a limited time before the ticket expires. Currently only available to commuters using lines originating at North Station, the app is more cost-effective than installing more ticket vending machines.

Also in November, the *New York Times* reported on a new iPhone app that can analyze your phone bill automatically, and then determine which data (bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/20/ratemizer-iphone-app-savings/?ref=business) and calling plan will be the best and cheapest for you. The Ratemizer (www.ratemizer.com/us/home/) makes a recommendation for the most economical plan based on your user patterns, and shows how much you will save by switching to that plan. It works with all major American carriers, and some global carriers.

Digital Comics

SiliconValley reported in November 2012 that DC Comics was moving all their (www.siliconvalley.com/personal-technology/ci_21948435/dc-comics-moves-digital-titles-ipad-kindle-nook-batman-superman) monthly titles to iPad, Kindle and Nook formats. This makes DC Entertainment (www.dccomics.com/) the first major comics publisher to make its titles available through online stores the same day they're on sale in comic stores. This expands its digital storefront even beyond Cosmixology (www.comixology.com/), the other top digital comics purveyor.

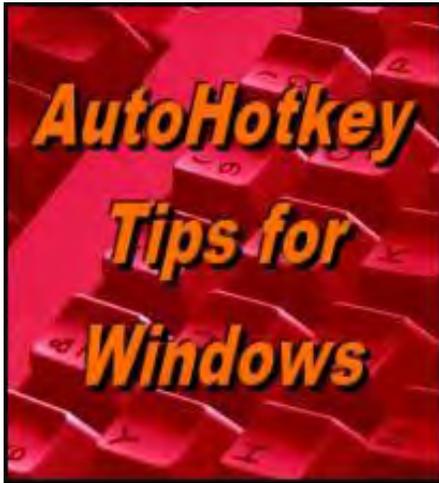
Also in November 2012, the *New York Times* reviewed smartphone and tablet apps that can now let adults and kids shoot their own cartoons (www.nytimes.com/2012/11/08/technology/personaltech/cartoon-tools-for-tapping-your-inner-disney.html?partner=rss&emc=rss). Aardman Animations has released an iOS6 app, Animate It (itunes.apple.com/us/app/animate-it/id544691268?mt=8), which is one of the simplest and coolest stop-motion animation apps. LEGO Super Heroes Movie Maker (itunes.apple.com/us/app/lego-super-heroes-movie-maker/id516001587?mt=8) is similar, but may not be what you want for a non-LEGO cartoon. More sophisticated apps are Interactive Universe's Lapse It (www.lapseit.com/) and iStopMotion (itunes.apple.com/us/app/istopmotion-for-ipad/id484019696?mt=8).

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.

ComputerEdge 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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Yet, One More Reason to Use AutoHotkey Free Software!

A Cool Little Appointment Reminder for Windows

“Don't Forget Those Scheduled Meetings You Can't Afford to Miss!” by Jack Dunning

AutoHotkey's flexibility is demonstrated with a script which sets up a personal reminder in Windows that breaks through the haze.

There are times when you make appointments that you absolutely don't want to miss. That is when it is handy to have a quick reminder—both easy to set up and use—that will pop up in the middle of your computer screen screaming at you to get moving. This type of alarm is especially useful if you are the type of person who immerses yourself in your work (or play) oblivious to the rest of the world. I set about the task of finding an AutoHotkey reminder script that would do just that.

While I'm sure that there is one out there somewhere, I didn't find a reminder script that was both simple to use and easy to code. I decided to write one myself keeping complication to a minimum. I liked the idea of writing an AutoHotkey script which schedules a reminder at a later time in the day because it would show both the flexibility and power of the scripting language. This reminder app is not the usual text substitution that most people think of when working with AutoHotkey.

The Reminder App

The reminder script is basic in its function. Press the hotkey combination CTRL++R (R for reminder) and a setup window pops up. It uses both the GUI (Graphic User Interface) command for picking a time and adding a message, then sets a timer for a pop-up to appear at a later time in the same day (see Figure 1).

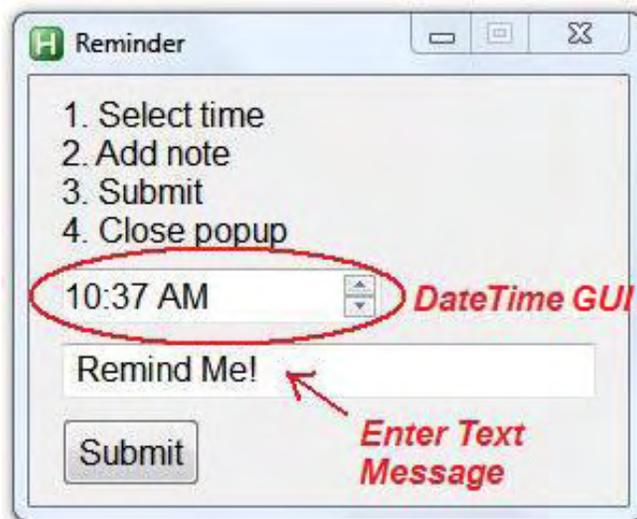


Figure 1. Select a time later the same day and enter a message to set the reminder.

After clicking the Submit button a confirmation window pops up showing the new reminder (see Figure 2). If you accidentally select a time earlier than now, then a different window pops up explaining that you need to pick a later time. In its first form, the reminder can only be set up to midnight, but I explain later in this column

what's necessary to make it a 24-hour reminder. Also, since it is sitting in memory unsaved, if you shut down the computer, the reminder will be lost. I'm sure that it can be saved in a file to add persistence to the reminder system, but that's a more advanced topic suitable for a later time.

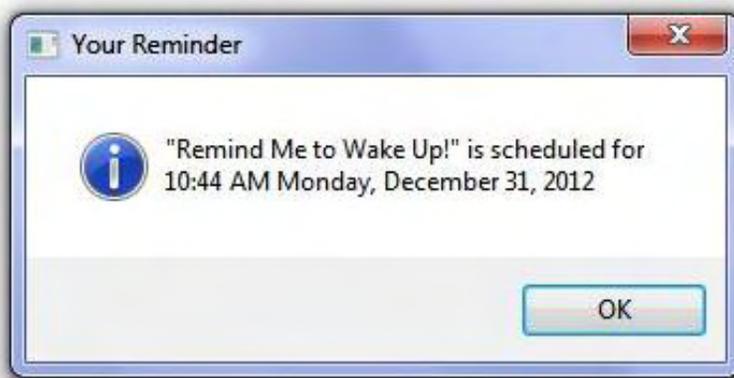


Figure 2. The pop-up tells you when the reminder will occur.

This AutoHotkey reminder script is a simple scheduler for one quick and easy prompt. If you try to schedule a second reminder, it will overwrite the first. (Adding multiple reminders is another more advanced topic.) When the scheduled time arrives, another window pops up displaying the reminder (see Figure 3). It both chimes (if the audio is turned on) and the window stays always-on-top until it is closed.

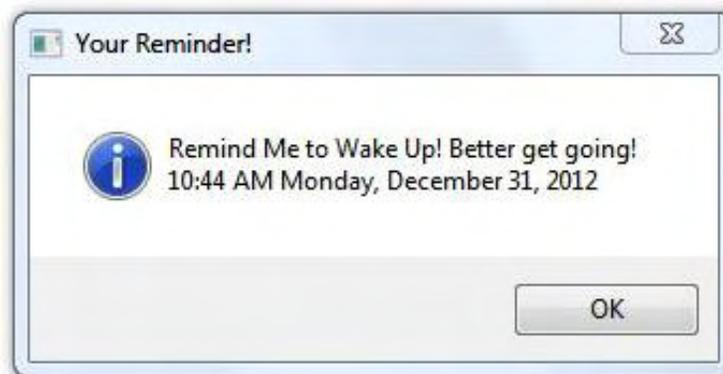


Figure 3. The reminder pops up at the scheduled time and stays always-on-top until it is closed.

Writing the Reminder Script

If you are new to AutoHotkey, you may want to check out our Web page for getting started, "Installing AutoHotkey and Writing Your First Script (www.computoredge.com/misc/Installing_AutoHotkey_and_writing_your_first_script.html)."

Even if you have never used most of them, it is worthwhile to be familiar with what AutoHotkey commands are available. It's like knowing what's in your toolbox. The first step for me was figuring out how I could set an alarm. I looked for a command which would could set a clock time at which it would launch a routine. That requires a function which continuously checks the clock until the appointed time. I didn't find a scheduling command in AutoHotkey that checked the clock.

However, I did find the SetTimer (www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/SetTimer.htm) command which is similar to a kitchen timer for soft-boiled eggs. With the SetTimer command a routine can be scheduled to run a routine a specific number of microseconds later. To use this command for the reminder script I needed to know the current time, the scheduled time, and the difference between the two in microseconds.

Fortunately, AutoHotkey includes a data/time specific GUI command (www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/

GuiControls.htmDateTime):

```
Gui, Add, DateTime, [time variable, format]
```

This GUI, `DateTime` command allows the entering of a scheduled time by either direct editing or using the up and down arrows on the right side of the interface as shown in Figure 1. Without this date/time gadget, the problem would be much more difficult. It's important to note that even though only the time can be entered in the pop-up shown in Figure 1, both the date and time are saved to the variable.

The problem with the date/time variable is that it uses the Year/Month/Day/Hour/Minute/Second format as described in an earlier `AutoHotkey` column and shown in Figure 4. But to set the timer the time delay must be in microseconds. Subtracting the current time from the scheduled time in the standard date/time format will yield nonsense since the seconds, minutes, and hours are all in odd increments (24 hours, 60 minutes, and 60 seconds). First, both times need converting to seconds before finding the time interval (the difference between current time and scheduled time).

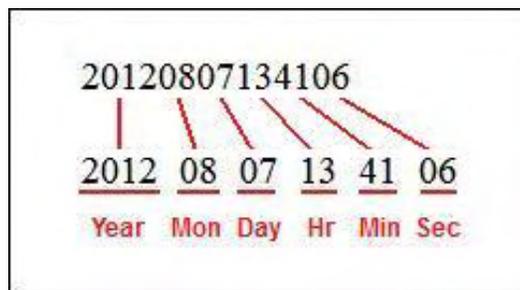


Figure 4. The computer sees the date/time as digits from the year down to the second.

Since I'm only dealing with the current day, I can calculate the number of seconds in both the current time and scheduled time by adding the seconds (the last two digits in the time variable) to the minutes multiplied by 60 seconds (the second to last two digits in the time variable times 60 seconds) plus the hours multiplied by 3600 seconds, (the third to last two digits in the time variable times 60 minutes times 60 seconds). The difference between the scheduled time and current will give me the delay needed in seconds. Since, the `SetTimer` command uses microseconds, multiply the seconds by 1000.

Once this logic is worked out, it's a matter of putting the script together.

The `Reminder.ahk` Script

As usual I put in the code for creating the pop-up first (Figure 1):

```
^#R::
Gui, Font, s12, Arial
Gui, Add, Text,, 1. Select time`n2. Add note`n3. Submit`n4. Close popup
Gui, Add, DateTime, vMyTime w150 1, hh:mm tt
Gui, Add, Edit, vMyNote w250, Remind Me!
Gui, Add, Button, Default, Submit
Gui, Show, , Reminder
Return
```

The first line creates the hotkey combination CTRL++R (^#R) for activating the `reminder.ahk` script.

The second line (`Gui, Font, s12, Arial`) formats the text in the pop-up as described in earlier columns.

The third line of code (Gui, Add, Text,, 1. Select time`n2. Add note`n3. Submit`n4. Close popup) adds the short list of instructions for the pop-up. Note that the "`n" is the special character for creating a new line.

The fourth line of code (Gui, Add, DateTime, vMyTime w150 1, hh:mm tt) adds the DateTime function to the GUI. The "vMyTime" creates the variable *MyTime* which stores the scheduled time when the Submit button is clicked. The "w150" sets the width of the time editing field.

By default the DateTime GUI has a dropdown calendar associated with it, but since we don't need or want a calendar with this app, the number "1" appearing in the options replaces the dropdown calendar with the up-down control on the right. The format "hh:mm tt" provides input fields for hours, minutes, and AM or PM. Note that there is no gLabel included to launch a subroutine. The reason for this is the DateTime GUI would immediately trigger the label every time it detected a change which is far too often for our purposes here. Instead a Submit button and routine are used.

The fifth line of code (Gui, Add, Edit, vMyNote w250, Remind Me!) adds the edit field for the reminder text. The text is stored in the variable *MyNote* when the Submit button is clicked. The "w250" sets the width of the field. "Remind Me!" is the default value appearing in the field.

The sixth line of code (Gui, Add, Button, Default, Submit) adds the Submit button to the GUI which initiates the action when clicked.

The last line of code (Gui, Show, , Reminder) before the "Return" marks the end of the GUI portion of the script displaying the pop-up with the title "Reminder."

Adding the Action

The remaining code may look a little intimidating to the novice script writer, but, once broken down, it is relatively simple. There are three subroutine: "ButtonSubmit:" the default routine for clicking the Submit button; "GuiClose:" which deletes the original pop-up so you can rerun it without causing an error; and "ShowReminder:" which is the label for activating the reminder at the preset time. The entire routine for setting up the reminder triggered by clicking the Submit button is as follows:

```
ButtonSubmit:
Gui, Submit, NoHide
If (MyTime > A_Now)
{
    FormatTime, HrTime , %MyTime%, HH
    FormatTime, MinTime , %MyTime%, m
    FormatTime, SecTime , %MyTime%, s
    NewTime := ((HrTime*3600 + MinTime*60 + SecTime)
                - (A_Hour*3600 + A_Min*60 + A_Sec))*1000
    FormatTime, Schedule, %MyTime%
    MsgBox,4160,Your Reminder, "%MyNote%" is scheduled for`n%Schedule%
    #Persistent
    RemMessage := "Better get going!"
    SetTimer, ShowReminder, %NewTime%
}
Else
{
    MsgBox, The time must be later in the same day!
    GuiControl,,MyTime, %A_Now%
}
Return
GuiClose:
Gui, Destroy
```

```
Return
ShowReminder:
FormatTime, RightNow
MsgBox, 4160, Your Reminder!, %MyNote% %RemMessage%\n%RightNow%
SetTimer, ShowReminder, Off
Return
```

In the "ButtonSubmit:" routine, the first line of code (Gui, Submit, NoHide) stores the set time to the variable *MyTime*. The NoHide parameter keeps the pop-up visible and available for change until it is closed by clicking the X in the upper right-hand corner of the GUI.

Next, based upon the set time, the "IF" conditional is used to determine if the scheduled time is a later time or earlier time by comparing the current time (*A_Now*) to the time stored in *MyTime*. If the user accidentally inputs an earlier time, then there is not point in continuing with setting the appointment. Thus the "ELSE" portion of the conditional displays a message (MsgBox, The time must be later in the same day!) stating the problem and replaces the time displayed in the pop-up with the current time (GuiControl,,MyTime, %A_Now %). Since the pop-up doesn't display seconds, it is often necessary to increment at least one minute forward to set an appointment.

If you decide that you want to make this routine a true 24-hour reminder, then you must change the "ELSE" portion of the conditional to the same code as the "TRUE" portion and add 24 hours worth of seconds to the calculation (60 seconds per minute times 60 minutes per hour times 24 hours per day) prior to the microsecond conversion.

The "TRUE" portion of the "IF" conditional checks for a time later than the current time (If (MyTime > A_Now)). If *MyTime* is greater than (>) the current time (*A_Now*) then the condition is TRUE. The selected time must be converted to seconds. To do this, the number of hours, minutes and seconds needs to be parsed and store to variables using the FormatTime command (www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/FormatTime.htm):

```
FormatTime, HrTime , %MyTime%, HH
FormatTime, MinTime , %MyTime%, m
FormatTime, SecTime , %MyTime%, s
```

The variables *HrTime*, *MinTime*, and *SecTime* store the hours, minutes, and seconds found in the set time variable *MyTime* respectively. Then each is multiplied by the appropriate number to convert to seconds, then added together to get the total number of seconds ($HrTime*3600 + MinTime*60 + SecTime$).

Using the variables for the current hour, minute, and second, the current time is converted to the total number of seconds ($A_Hour*3600 + A_Min*60 + A_Sec$). This value is subtracted from the set time number of seconds, then multiplied by 1000 to convert to microseconds and stored in the variable *NewTime* ($NewTime := ((HrTime*3600 + MinTime*60 + SecTime) - (A_Hour*3600 + A_Min*60 + A_Sec))*1000$).

NewTime is the value in microseconds needed for the SetTimer command (SetTimer, ShowReminder, % NewTime%). *ShowReminder* is the label for the routine to pop-up the Reminder window. At *NewTime* the subroutine *ShowReminder* will activate.

Prior to setting the timer, a pop-up window using the AutoHotkey MsgBox command (www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/MsgBox.htm) activates which confirms the time of the reminder (MsgBox, 4160, Your Reminder, "%MyNote%" is scheduled for\n%Schedule%). The number "4106" indicates the type of window to open and makes it always-on-top as described in the "Making an AutoHotkey Help Window" section of a previous Windows Tips and Tricks column. The title of the window is "Your Reminder" with the input text (*MyNote*) and the time that it is scheduled as shown in Figure 2 above.

When the term "#Persistent" is added to a routine, it will continue to run even if an EXIT is executed. This is commonly used in routines using SetTimer to prevent it from prematurely terminating even after the pop-up is closed.

The next line (RemMessage := "Better get going!") is completely optional and adds nothing to the logic of the routine. It is merely a personal prompt.

Waiting for the Reminder

Once the timer is set (SetTimer, ShowReminder, %NewTime%) both of the open windows can be closed. At the appointed time the label *ShowReminder* will activate.

```
ShowReminder:
FormatTime, RightNow
MsgBox, 4160, Your Reminder!, %MyNote% %RemMessage%\n%RightNow%
SetTimer, ShowReminder, Off
Return
```

The current time and date will be stored in the default format to *RightNow* using the FormatTime command (www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/FormatTime.htm).

Then in the same format as previously discussed the MsgBox command displays the reminder (MsgBox, 4160, Your Reminder!, %MyNote% %RemMessage%\n%RightNow%).

The SetTimer command is used to disable the timer. Otherwise, it would repeat the routine activation at the same time interval. The repeat of SetTimer can be disabled by making the interval in microseconds a negative number.

The complete AutoHotkey code for the Reminder.ahk program is as follows:

```
^#R::
Gui, Font, s12, Arial
Gui, Add, Text,, 1. Select time\n2. Add note\n3. Submit\n4. Close popup
Gui, Add, DateTime, vMyTime w150 1, hh:mm tt
Gui, Add, Edit, vMyNote w250, Remind Me!
Gui, Add, Button, Default, Submit
Gui, Show, , Reminder
Return
ButtonSubmit:
Gui, Submit, NoHide
If (MyTime > A_Now)
{
    FormatTime, HrTime , %MyTime%, HH
    FormatTime, MinTime , %MyTime%, m
    FormatTime, SecTime , %MyTime%, s
    NewTime := ((HrTime*3600 + MinTime*60 + SecTime)
                - (A_Hour*3600 + A_Min*60 + A_Sec))*1000
    FormatTime, Schedule, %MyTime%
    MsgBox, 4160, Your Reminder, "%MyNote%" is scheduled for\n%Schedule%
    #Persistent
    RemMessage := "Better get going!"
    SetTimer, ShowReminder, %NewTime%
}
Else
{
```

```

    MsgBox, The time must be later in the same day!
    GuiControl,,MyTime, %A_Now%
}
Return
GuiClose:
Gui, Destroy
Return
ShowReminder:
FormatTime, RightNow
MsgBox,4160,Your Reminder!, %MyNote% %RemMessage%\n%RightNow%
SetTimer, ShowReminder, Off
Return

```

You can copy-and-paste this code into an AutoHotkey script, run it, then set a reminder with the hotkey combination CTRL++R.

Reminder.ahk Notes

As previously mentioned, if you would like to make the reminder script a full 24-hour script, then it is necessary to add 24 hours worth of microseconds to time which occurs before the current time. The ELSE portion of the "IF" conditional could be changed as follows:

```

FormatTime, HrTime , %MyTime%, HH
FormatTime, MinTime , %MyTime%, m
FormatTime, SecTime , %MyTime%, s
NewTime := (((HrTime*3600 + MinTime*60 + SecTime)
            - (A_Hour*3600 + A_Min*60 + A_Sec))*1000)+86400000
FormatTime, Schedule, %MyTime%, h:mmtt
MsgBox,4160,Your Reminder, "%MyNote%" is scheduled for\nTomorrow at %Schedule%
#Persistent
RemMessage := "Better get going!"
SetTimer, ShowReminder, %NewTime%

```

Note that 86400000 microseconds (24 hours) have been added to *NewTime*. Plus the *FormatTime* is changed to reflect only the hour and minutes with AM or PM. This is done because it's easier to just add "Tomorrow" to the *MsgBox* message, than calculating the date for the next day—especially if you're on the last day of the month. For now you need to take my word for it, because it is beyond the scope of this particular column. If you want future days as reminder options, then add the drop down calendar back into the *DateTime* GUI. It will be easier than writing a function to do the obtuse calendar math. However, you will need to convert days (in the form of *YDay*—day of the year, bypassing months) into your microseconds calculations. (I'm sure that there are better options for long-term appointments.)

If you want to include multiple reminders, then you will need multiple labels (*ShowReminder1*, *ShowReminder2*, etc.) and set up a way to track which are in effect so you don't overwrite them. It appears that you can't use a variable for the label at the head of the routine itself, which means adding separate routines for each reminder—even if the code is identical. Possibly a function could be used within the label, but again I haven't tried that and it's beyond the scope of this column.

Another weakness of this reminder routine is that it sits in memory. If you restart your computer, you lose your reminder. There are ways to make it more robust which include saving the basic information to a file. I see that the commands are available in AutoHotkey for getting this done, but it is an advanced topic which I will save that for another time.

If you would like to test the compiled version of the 24 hour reminder (*Reminder.exe*), it can be found at the *ComputerEdge* AutoHotkey Dropbox (www.dropbox.com/sh/4qu48lyqtixdg7t/QdMY1dNuy7) folder. Download *Reminder.exe* and double-click to load. Use CTRL++R to activate. Check the confirmation window for either today's date or the word "Tomorrow" to confirm when the reminder will actually happen—if you don't turn off your computer first.

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. 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 *ComputerEdge* cartoons from 2011 and 2012 is now available at Amazon! *That Does Not Compute, Too! ComputerEdge 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/B007RMC8H8/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 ComputerEdge 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 Topsy-Turvy World of Business Models” by Wally Wang

The Topsy-Turvy World of Business Models; The Decline of Print; Programming on the iPad; A New Year's Resolution: Make More Money; Autofill Feature in Safari.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

Everyone seems to think if they follow a certain business model then their own business will suddenly thrive. The particular business model actually matters less than the particular market.

Microsoft's business model involves selling software for hardware partners to license to sell their own products such as smartphones, tablets, and computers. Initially, this business model seemed brilliant when Windows captured well over 90 percent of the computer operating system market and Windows Mobile captured 20 percent of the smartphone market.

Back then, everyone thought that Microsoft's strategy of licensing their software was the right business model and Apple's more closely integrated business model was a failure. After all, the Macintosh only held 4 percent of the market at one time.

Then Apple introduced the iPhone, which now makes more money than every Microsoft product combined. Apple followed this up with the iPad, which has destroyed the netbook market and seriously hurt the desktop/laptop market as well. Now everyone seems to think that Apple's integrated business model is superior to Microsoft's licensing business model.

Yet it's not the business model that guarantees success. ARM Holdings actually follows Microsoft's licensing business model while Intel follows Apple's integrated business model.

Intel not only designs their own processors, but manufactures them as well. As fewer people buy desktop and laptop computers, Intel's business is stagnating. Yet they're following Apple's business model.

On the other hand, ARM Holdings designs processors but licenses these designs to other companies such as Apple and Qualcomm. These other companies now modify and manufacture the licensed designs to sell or use these processors in their own products. Practically every smartphone and tablet uses an ARM-based processor whether it's made by Nvidia or Qualcomm.

So everyone thinks Microsoft's business model is faulty by licensing products, yet ARM Holdings thrives using that same business model. Everyone thinks Apple's integrated business model is the reason for its success, yet Intel is struggling using that same business model.

It's not the business model that defines success or failure, but the market. Right now, the market for desktop and laptop computers continues to decline and it won't likely reverse course any time in the near future. That means Microsoft (using the licensing business model) and Intel (using the integrated business model) both get hurt.

With the shift to mobile computing, Apple (using the integrated business model) and ARM Holdings (using the licensing business model) are both thriving and will likely to continue doing so until the mobile computing market slows down.

It doesn't matter what business model you choose if you're stuck in a declining market. Likewise, it doesn't matter what business model you choose if you latch on to a growing market. Follow a growing market and your own business will also grow. Stick with a stagnating market and your own business will also stagnate.

Basically, just follow the growing trends and avoid the declining trends. Of course to do that, you have to be willing to objectively examine facts that show you what's growing and what's declining. Failure to notice growing and declining trends as early as possible will result in a lot of happy or upset people, depending on which trend you insist on following.

The Decline of Print

When e-books were starting to become popular, the idea that print books would become obsolete upset many people who could see no advantages of e-books over printed books. Yet as the *Los Angeles Times* reports, more people are reading e-books (www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/cotown/la-et-ct-ebook-reading-jumps-as-print-declines-20121227,0,561206.story) and fewer people are reading printed books.

One way to interpret such news is to write angry letters to the *LA Times* and accuse them of "printed book bashing" by reporting facts that you don't want to hear if you prefer printed books. A more logical way to interpret these facts is to recognize that the low cost of e-readers and the popularity of more versatile tablets is encouraging more people to read e-books.

The Pew Research Center claims that more Americans are buying e-readers (www.zdnet.com/good-bye-books-hello-e-books-7000009208/) and tablets. In May 2010, only 6 percent of Americans owned an e-reader or tablet. By November 2012, that figure had climbed to 33 percent.

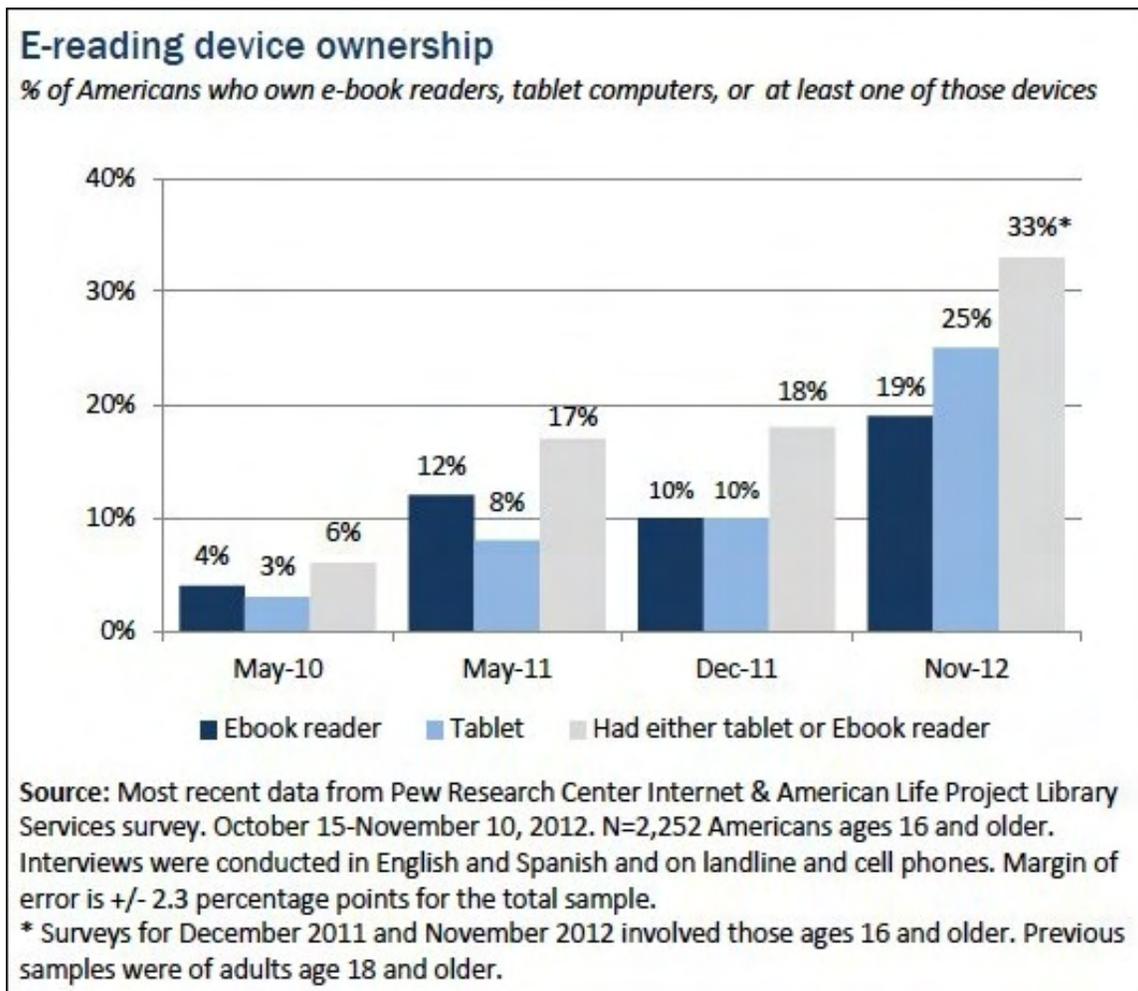


Figure 1. E-readers and tablets continue growing.

The study found that e-book readers tend to be well educated, with a college degree, in a household earning more than \$75,000, and between the ages of 30 and 49. Basically financially successful people can afford to read, which simply increases the likelihood that they'll continue being financially successful as long as they read books that teach them something useful. Harry S. Truman even said, "Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers."

If you want to improve your life, the simplest step is to start reading. Matt Morris, the author of *The Unemployed Millionaire* (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470479817/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470479817) claims that the quickest way to become an expert is to read just five books on a single subject. Doing so will give you more knowledge than most people know about that particular topic.

Although printed books may be disappearing, reading isn't. Just as music shifted from the physical media of vinyl records and CDs to digital files, so will books shift from printed paper to digital files. The big difference is that e-books have the potential of being far more interactive than today's traditional static text and pictures.

Right now, Apple's iBooks Author and their iBooks app for the iPad represent the most popular platform for creating interactive e-books. In the meantime, Amazon is cruising along, fat, dumb, and happy with their huge lead in e-books that contain nothing but static text and pictures. Can anyone guess what's going to happen if Apple continues promoting interactive e-books while Amazon does not?

Programming on the iPad

Most of the time, my laptop computer just collects dust since it's so much easier to use the iPad instead. The only time I ever need a laptop computer is when I either need to create an interactive iBook using iBooks

Author or do some programming using Xcode or another programming tool. For the majority of tasks, the iPad works just as well as a laptop.

Now there may be another reason to leave a laptop behind when you want to program as well. A company called Byte Works sells an iOS app called techBASIC (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%252Ftechbasic%252Fid470781862%253Fmt%253D8%2526uo%253D4%2526partnerId%253D30) that runs on both the iPhone and iPad. By using techBASIC, you can write programs on your iOS device using the easy to learn BASIC programming language.

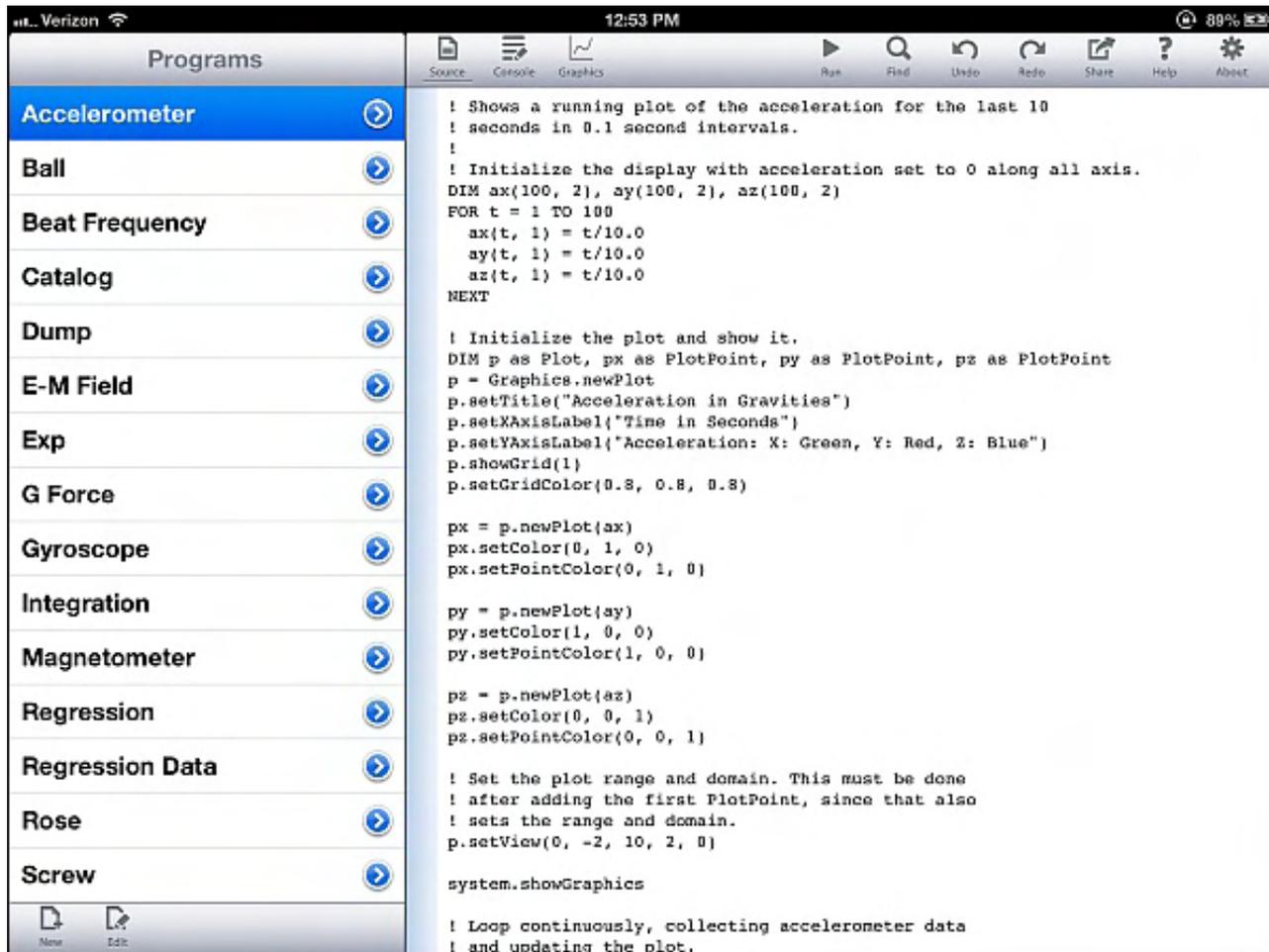


Figure 2. techBASIC includes plenty of sample BASIC programs for you to examine and run.

Although C programmers often deride BASIC as a "toy" language, it actually includes built-in commands for array manipulation and matrix calculations, which is something that even languages like C lack. By using the iPad or iPhone's virtual keyboard, you can type BASIC commands. When you're done, run your program directly on your iPhone or iPad. If your program has any bugs, hunt them down with the debugger that lets you step through your code, line by line, or watch certain variables to see exactly when they change values.

In other words, any type of debugging you can do on a regular computer, you can also do on your iOS device using techBASIC. With techBASIC, you can write, run, and debug a program without ever using a regular computer at all.

The main strength of techBASIC is to access data through outside sensors. At the simplest level, techBASIC can access the accelerometer in your iOS device so your techBASIC program can determine how far you moved it. On a more complicated level, techBASIC programs can access any Bluetooth-enabled device to collect data. The company even explains how they used techBASIC to collect data from a rocket (www.byteworks.us/Byte_Works/Blog/Entries/2012/10/31_Collect_Data_from_an_iPhone_Rocket_Flight.html). If you

need to retrieve data, you can use techBASIC to get and analyze it on your iPhone or iPad.

Once you've retrieved data from an outside source, techBASIC can convert that data into graphs to help you understand what it might mean. Such graphs can be colorful in different shapes.

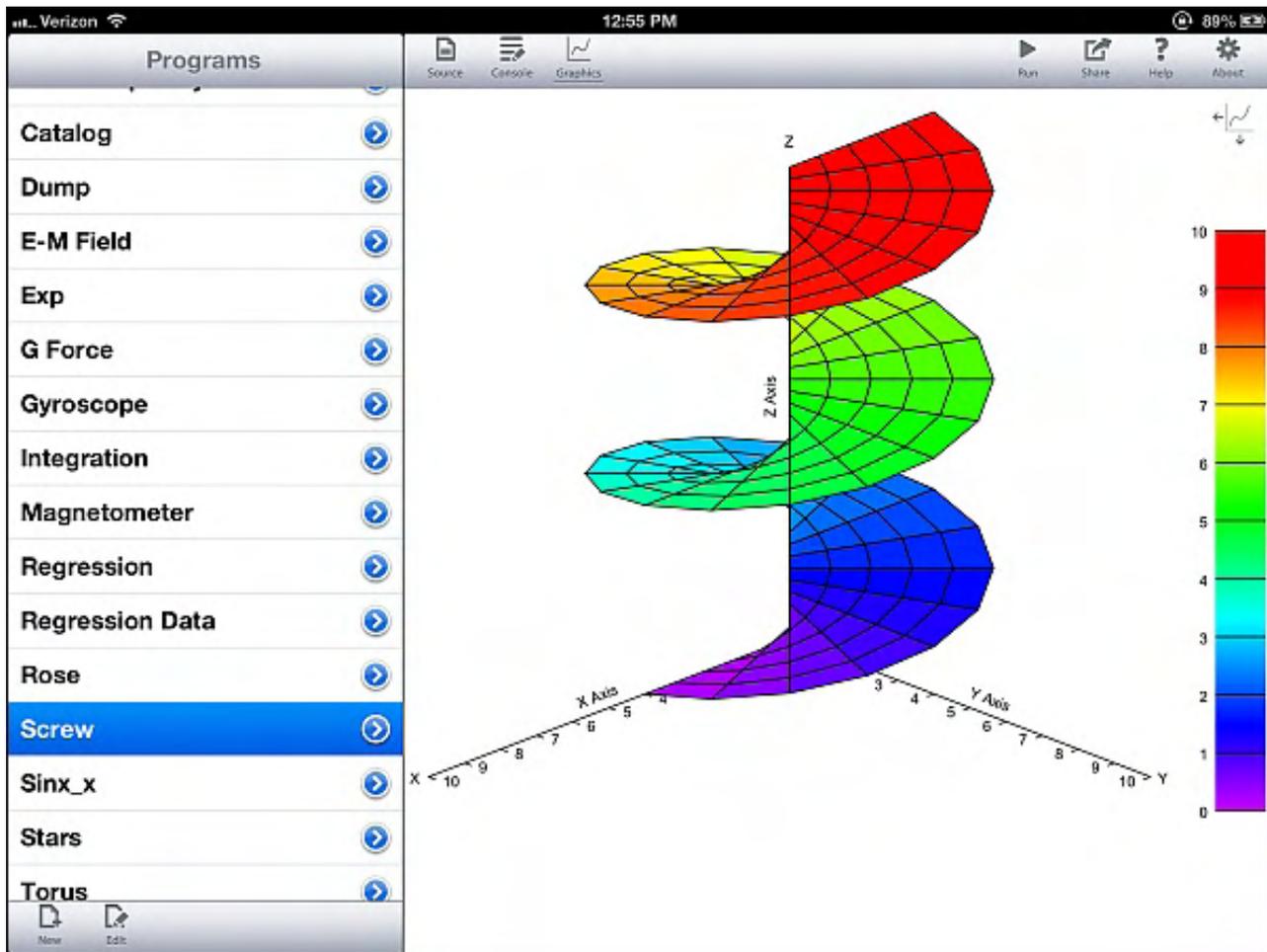


Figure 3. techBASIC can convert data into eye-catching graphs.

Right now, techBASIC is suitable for creating your own iOS programs and running them within the techBASIC app. Unfortunately at this time, you cannot compile your techBASIC apps and sell them through the App Store.

Despite this limitation, techBASIC brings the power of creating and running programs to iOS. With its powerful matrix and array manipulation commands and its ability to convert data into graphs, techBASIC is best suited for scientific and numeric work.

By letting you write your own programs directly on an iOS device using the simple, but powerful BASIC programming language, techBASIC proves that the iPad can be versatile enough to consume content as well as create it. With techBASIC on your iOS device, you can have fun programming, which gives you one more excuse to leave your laptop at home and do everything with your iPad or iPhone.

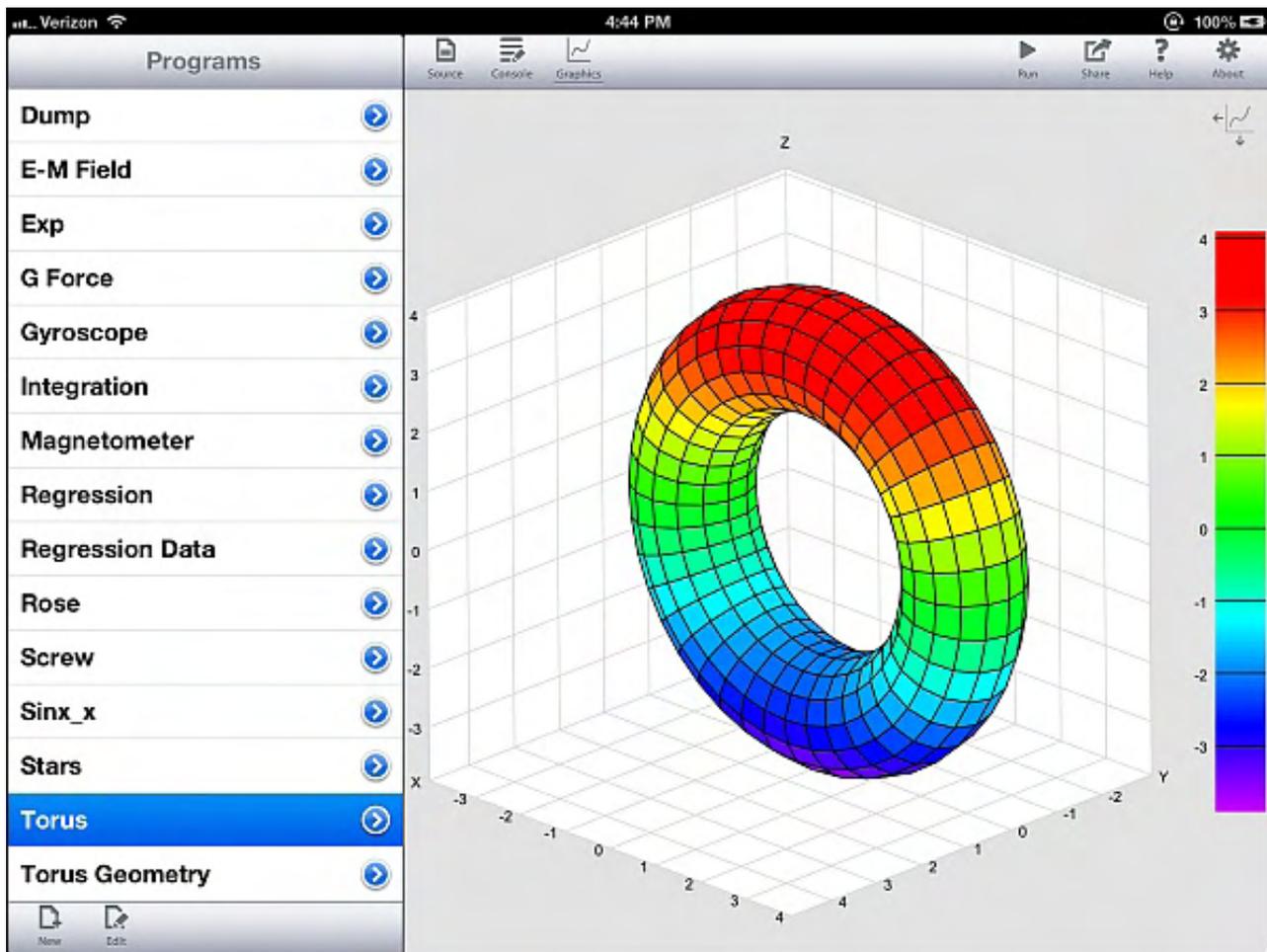


Figure 4. techBASIC provides different types of graphs to make data easier to understand.

If you like programming as a hobby, an intellectual challenge, or a way to create custom iOS apps, you'll find techBASIC fun, easy to use, and powerful enough to perform heavy-duty data analysis.

The next time someone tries to tell you that the iPad can only be used to consume content, show them techBASIC on your iOS device. Then write a program in front of that skeptic's face and show how techBASIC can turn your BASIC commands into a program that collects data and analyzes it in a colorful graph. To show your results to others, just send them a copy of that graphed data by e-mail.

After seeing such a demonstration, even the bitterest critics will have to admit that techBASIC has brought the power and versatility of programming to the iPad and iPhone. By playing around with techBASIC, you can create your own iOS programs in your spare time wherever you happen to be.

Download the techBASIC manuals (www.byteworks.us/Byte_Works/Documentation.html) for free and see for yourself the capabilities of techBASIC. With its robust debugging features and BASIC commands, techBASIC makes programming more accessible to everyone, whether you still use a desktop or laptop computer or not.

A New Year's Resolution: Make More Money

After dieting, one of the most common New Year's resolutions is to make more money. However, what stops most people from making money isn't the lack of education or intelligence, but their own mental limitations they impose on themselves, which defines what opportunities they'll see or ignore.

Before money existed, people had to barter with one another to get the goods they wanted. If one man had a chicken and a second man had a bushel of apples, they had to decide how many apples would equal a chicken. If they agreed, they could trade.

In many cases, the man with the chicken might not want apples but milk instead. This would force the man with the apples to trade his apples for milk. If the man with the milk didn't want apples but wanted new shoes, then the man with the apples would have to trade his apples to get the new shoes to get the milk. Barter made trade clumsy.

That's where money comes to play. Instead of bartering physical goods, people can barter with physical goods and money. Money measures the value of something. If you have a bushel of apples, you might be able to sell them for \$10. Now you could use that money to buy something else. Here's where people get confused.

Thomas Pynchon, the author of the novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (www.amazon.com/gp/product/0143039946/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0143039946), once said that "If you can get people to ask the wrong questions, they'll never find the right answer." The wrong question to ask about money is always based on the scarcity mindset that there's only a fixed amount of money available. Most people ask, "How can I make more money?"

Yet the US Mint prints millions of dollars all the time. Money isn't a limited resource but a measuring unit like centimeters. Saying that you don't have enough money makes about as much sense as saying you don't have enough centimeters.

Money measures value. The right question to ask isn't how to make more money, but "How can I create more value?"

Creating value is all about solving problems for people. Solve a small problem and you earn a small amount of money. The manager of a McDonald's restaurant can't take orders by him or herself. So the manager needs to hire cashiers. When you work as a cashier, you solve the manager's problem of taking orders. Since running a cash register is a small problem, it earns only a small amount of money.

Solve a big problem and you earn a large amount of money. How much does a heart surgeon make? Obviously a lot more than a cashier at a fast food restaurant. That's because a cashier solves a small problem, but a heart surgeon solves a large problem.

Solve a small problem for a lot of people and you can still earn a lot of money. Ray Kroc, the man who created the McDonald's franchise, earned a huge amount of cash by solving the simple problem of providing fast food to people in a hurry. While a heart surgeon solves a huge problem for a handful of people, McDonald's solves a small problem for a large number of people.

So if you don't have enough money, just look for ways to solve problems for others. To earn more money, most people whine, bitch, and complain, which never solves any problem. What people should really do is look for ways to solve problems for others. At your job, find ways to be more useful by solving more problems. The more problems you can solve for others consistently, the more likely you'll get promoted and earn more money. If they refuse to promote you, start solving problems for people outside of your job.

Solving problems for others means identifying a problem and finding a solution. Jobs are basically ways to solve specific types of problems. An accountant solves the problem of managing someone's finances. A security guard solves the problem of not feeling safe. A doctor solves the problem of curing your illness.

All you need to do is identify what types of problems you can solve best, then go out and find people who need that type of problem solved. Will it be easy? No, but if you don't take control of your destiny and actively look for problems to solve for other people, you'll be guaranteed to stay exactly where you are right now in life.

Each time you earn money, record it in a spreadsheet such as Numbers for the Macintosh (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%252Fnumbers%252Fid409203825%253Fmt%253D12%2526uo%253D4%2526partnerId%253D30) or Numbers for iOS (http://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%252Fnumbers%252Fid409203825%253Fmt%253D12%2526uo%253D4%2526partnerId%253D30)

252Fitunes.apple.com%252Fus%252Fapp%252Fnumbers%252Fid361304891%253Fmt%253D8%2526uo%253D4%2526partnerId%253D30). Spreadsheets let you type numbers that represent measurements such as the number of cars sold, the temperature of a city on a certain date, or the amount of products purchased.

Nearly all numbers in a spreadsheet represent some form of measurement and that includes money. Now when you type in the amount of money earned, look at that number as a measurement of the value you provided by solving a problem for someone else. If that number seems too small, you have two choices.

First, find a way to solve a bigger problem. Second, find a way to solve the same problem for more people. Third, find a way to solve multiple problems for others. Whichever choice you make, you'll greatly improve your chances of earning more money.

As long as you focus on getting more money, you'll never find the right answer. As long as you focus on solving more and bigger problems for others, you'll inevitably make more money. The next time you use a spreadsheet, type in the amount of money earned along with the number and relative importance of the problems you solved to earn that money. By focusing on solving more important problems for more people, you may be surprised to see how much money you can make in the new year.

* * *

If you order products online, you might get tired of typing in your name and address over and over again. Instead, just type your name and address once in the Contacts program that comes with every Macintosh. Then turn on the AutoFill feature of Safari.



Figure 5. Safari's AutoFill feature can spare you from typing your name and address.

Start Safari and choose Safari > Preferences to open the Preferences window. Click the AutoFill icon and make sure the "Using info from my Contacts card" check box is selected. Now the next time you order a product, you can choose Edit > AutoFill Form or wait until Safari asks if you want to use the AutoFill feature to type in your name and address automatically.

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:

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=1590791894)

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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Worldwide News & Product Reviews

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

 Don't say we didn't warn you.

  What is that store's return policy?

   We've seen better; we've seen worse.

    You'll probably be happy you did.

     What are you waiting for?

Tips for Editing Your Holiday (and Year-round) Photos; Our Cellular World; New Semiconductor Kicks Sand in Silicon's Face; The War Z for PC.

Tips for Editing Your Holiday (and Year-round) Photos

"According to National Geographic, there were approximately 3.5 trillion photos taken last year. The sophistication of today's consumer digital cameras is creating an expectation for higher quality, professional-looking photos," said CyberLink (www.cyberlink.com) CEO Alice H. Chang.

Cyberlink sends in these helpful tips for picture-snappers across world as they sift through literally billions of holiday memories:

- *Share the Year's Highlights in a Slideshow*

Slideshows are a wonderful way to share with friends during the holiday season. With the popularity of smartphones and tablets, you can take slideshows along with you anywhere. Adding pan-and-zoom and music to slideshows makes them feel more dynamic. It's fun to create a soundtrack to your photos from something on your current playlist. Include a title slide at the beginning of the slideshow to let everybody know the people or event that you are sharing.

- *Don't Delete that Photo*

There's often a way to make a poor shot better. Almost every photo captures some special moment or memory, even the worst of your shots. Today's software is easy to use and great for fixing basic photo problems like lighting and color balance. Plus, removing unwanted elements and fixing up portraits is well within reach. Many modern image editors are also non-destructive so you don't need to worry about ruining your original photos.

- *Get Creative*

Every once and in a while, it's great to spend some time exploring the creative side of image editing. Take ordinary photos and turn them into eye catching works of art with filters, special effects, compositing tools, frames, titles and bling highlights—to name a few. Whether your artistic eye tends toward Andy Warhol-style pop art, HDR wizardry or beyond, give yourself the chance to try something new and have some fun. After you've created your masterpiece, show it to the world.

- *Banish Unseasonal Images from Photos*

Sometimes you wind up with things in your photos that you just don't want there: power lines, objects or even people you'd rather not see. Fortunately, there are simple and easy ways to remove unwanted objects from photos—which can now be found in a number of consumer editing packages. You'll be amazed what you can do in less than five minutes. When removing objects from the foreground, be mindful of the background to ensure that you don't stretch anything out of place.

- *Perfect Color Tones*

Achieve the right color balance for indoor and outdoor scenes. If you are shooting indoors and there's enough light, try turning the flash off to get more natural lighting and color. Shoot near the windows to take advantage of available natural light. For outdoor scenes, it is best to stand with the sun at your back so that your subject is facing the source of light. Correct color casts after you shoot by adjusting the White Balance in your editing software.

- *Manage all Your Photos*

When taking pictures of people, it can be tough to get that one ideal pose. Snap away and review the pictures afterwards on your Mac or PC to find just the right shot when everyone is in the best spirits—and have their eyes open. When you bring your photos into your computer, use tagging, face recognition, rating and custom albums to sort and organize your pictures. Techniques for comparing photos such as side-by-side display make it easy to view different shots to find the best one.

- *Crop for Success*

When taking photos, try using the Rule of Thirds to position your subjects. Imagine two horizontal lines and two vertical lines dividing the frame into nine equal parts and place your subject at any of the intersections. Using your photo editing software, try cropping your photos based on other compositional guidelines such as diagonal, isosceles or triangle.

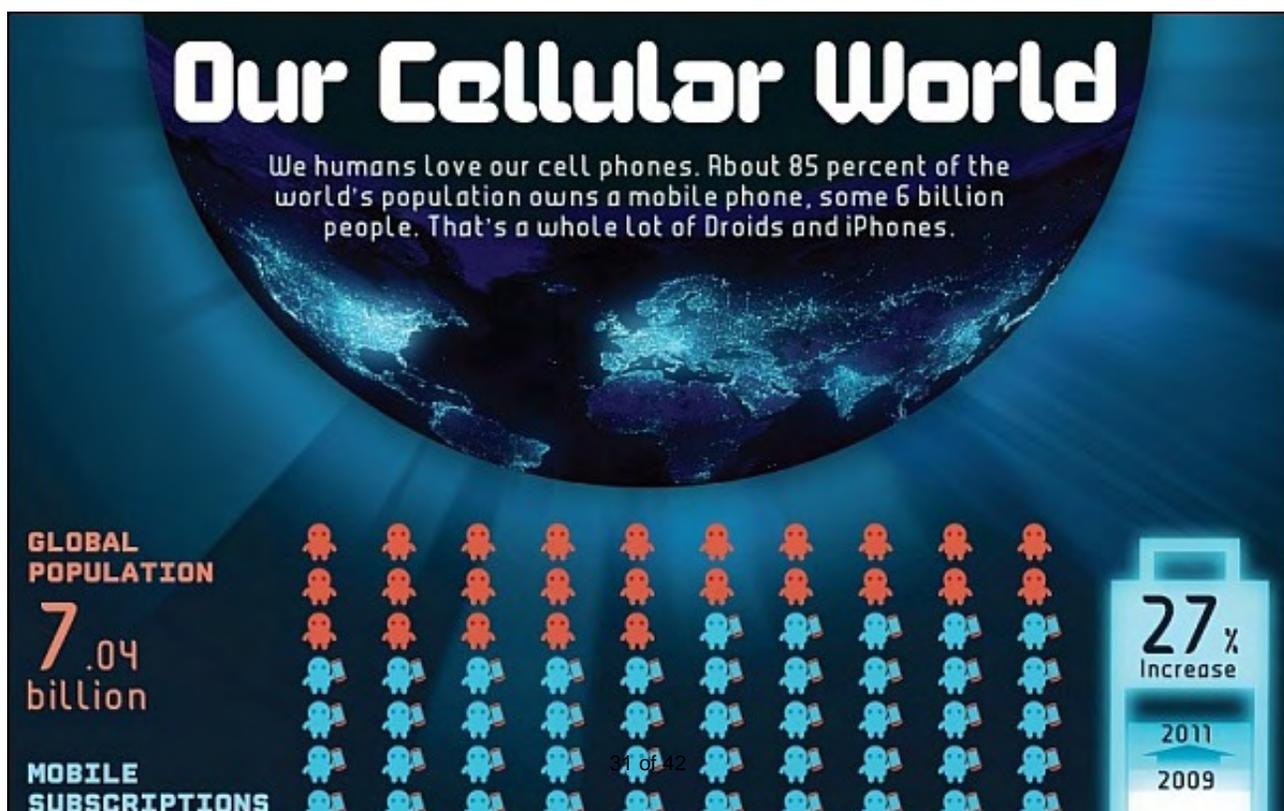
Our Cellular World

Rick Neil, Account Director with Percepture PR, sends in these fascinating cell phone trivia tidbits:

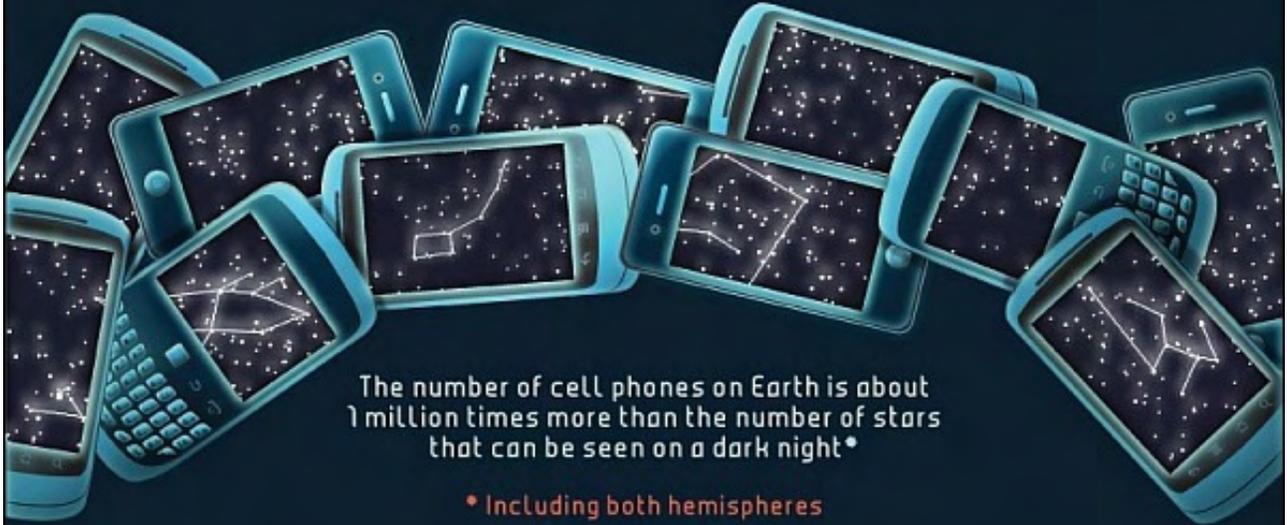
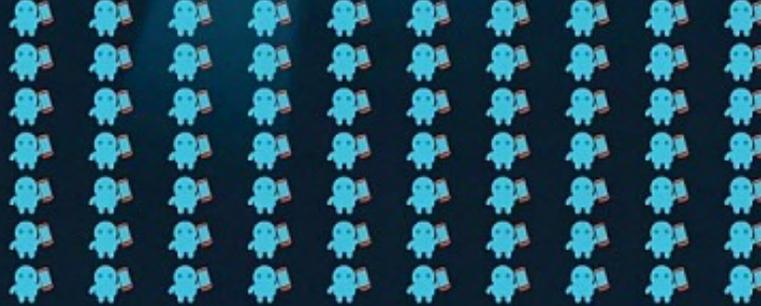
We humans love our cell phones. About 85 percent of the world's population owns a mobile phone, some 6 billion people. That's a whole lot of Droids and iPhones.

The current estimated global population is 7.04 billion. There are currently about 6 billion people with mobile subscriptions around the world. Twenty-seven percent of those people came on board between 2009 and 2011.

The number of cell phones on Earth is about 1 million times more than the number of stars that can be seen on a dark night. And that's including both hemispheres!



7.04 billion
MOBILE SUBSCRIPTIONS
6 billion



The number of cell phones on Earth is about 1 million times more than the number of stars that can be seen on a dark night*

* Including both hemispheres



Every New Yorker, those who live in the city where the first-ever public cellular call was made, would have to be on the phone 16 hours a day to make that many calls in a single year.



A single person trying to use all those minutes would have to talk nonstop for

4.3 million years

A single person trying to use all those minutes would have to talk nonstop for

4.3 million years



The average phone weighs about 108 grams; with 6 billion active cell phones in the world, that's the equivalent of about

11.3 billion

hard-boiled eggs.

Good luck, Cool Hand Luke.



Cell phone proportional size

All those cell phones are about the equivalent in weight of

4,400

blue whales, the largest animal ever to live on Earth.

The average phone includes about



That's more than

26,000
tons of gold

The value of that gold is about

\$1.1
trillion
in U.S. markets

That's roughly the GDPs of Switzerland, Greece and Egypt combined



The average phone is about a half-inch thick. All the world's phones stacked up would soar more than

48,000

miles high.



That's tall enough to reach the International Space Station and come back again

120

times.

www.topcomputersciencedegrees.com

SOURCES:

NASA • NOAA • U.S. Census Bureau • Discover Magazine • UC-Santa Barbara Bren School of Environmental Sciences and Management • gsmarena.com • onluggold.com • mobithinking.com

NASA • NOAA • U.S. Census Bureau • Discover Magazine • UC-Santa Barbara Bren
School of Environmental Sciences and Management • gsmarena.com •
onlygold.com • mobithinking.com

In the United States there are currently more cell phones than people: 314 million people, 331 million cell phones!

About 2.29 trillion cell phone minutes were used in the US in 2011. Every New Yorker, those who live in the city where the first-ever public cellular call was made, would have to be on the phone 16 hours a day to make that many calls in a single year. A single person trying to use all those minutes would have to talk nonstop for 4.3 million years.

The average phone weighs about 108 grams; with 6 billion active cell phones in the world, that's the equivalent of about 11.3 billion hard-boiled eggs. Good luck, Cool Hand Luke.

All those cell phones are about the equivalent in weight of 4,400 blue whales, the largest animal ever to live on Earth.

The average phone includes about 3% gold; that's more than 26,000 tons of gold. The value of that gold is about \$1.1 trillion in US markets. That's roughly the GDPs of Switzerland, Greece and Egypt combined.

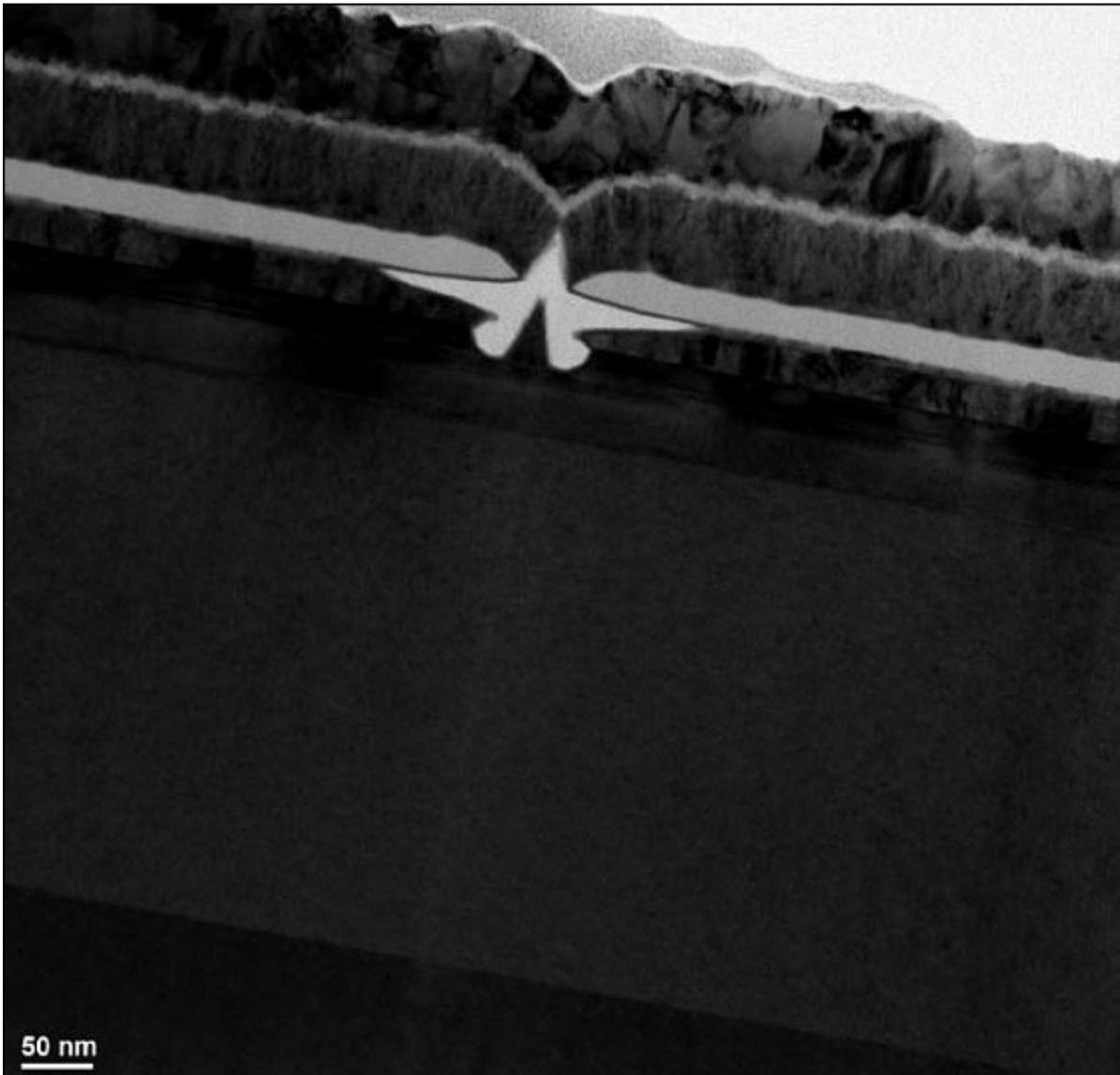
The average phone is about a half-inch thick. All the world's phones stacked up would soar more than 48,000 miles high. That's tall enough to reach the International Space Station and come back again 120 times.

New Semiconductor Kicks Sand in Silicon's Face

From Helen Knight of the MIT News Office:

Silicon's crown is under threat: The semiconductor's days as the king of microchips for computers and smart devices could be numbered, thanks to the development of the smallest transistor ever to be built from a rival material, indium gallium arsenide.

The compound transistor, built by a team in MIT's Microsystems Technology Laboratories, performs well despite being just 22 nanometers (billionths of a meter) in length. This makes it a promising candidate to eventually replace silicon in computing devices, says co-developer Jesús del Alamo, the Donner Professor of Science in MIT's Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS), who built the transistor with EECS graduate student Jianqian Lin and Dimitri Antoniadis, the Ray and Maria Stata Professor of Electrical Engineering.



To keep pace with our demand for ever-faster and smarter computing devices, the size of transistors is continually shrinking, allowing increasing numbers of them to be squeezed onto microchips. "The more transistors you can pack on a chip, the more powerful the chip is going to be, and the more functions the chip is going to perform," del Alamo says.

But as silicon transistors are reduced to the nanometer scale, the amount of current that can be produced by the devices is also shrinking, limiting their speed of operation. This has led to fears that Moore's Law—the prediction by Intel founder Gordon Moore that the number of transistors on microchips will double every two years—could be about to come to an end, del Alamo says.

To keep Moore's Law alive, researchers have for some time been investigating alternatives to silicon, which could potentially produce a larger current even when operating at these smaller scales. One such material is the compound indium gallium arsenide, which is already used in fiber-optic communication and radar technologies, and is known to have extremely good electrical properties, del Alamo says. But despite recent advances in treating the material to allow it to be formed into a transistor in a similar way to silicon, nobody has yet been able to produce devices small enough to be packed in ever-greater numbers into tomorrow's microchips.

Now del Alamo, Antoniadis and Lin have shown it is possible to build a nanometer-sized metal-oxide semiconductor field-effect transistor (MOSFET)—the type most commonly used in logic applications such as microprocessors—using the material. "We have shown that you can make extremely small indium gallium

arsenide MOSFETs with excellent logic characteristics, which promises to take Moore's Law beyond the reach of silicon," del Alamo says.

Transistors consist of three electrodes: the gate, the source and the drain, with the gate controlling the flow of electrons between the other two. Since space in these tiny transistors is so tight, the three electrodes must be placed in extremely close proximity to each other, a level of precision that would be impossible for even sophisticated tools to achieve. Instead, the team allows the gate to "self-align" itself between the other two electrodes.

The researchers first grow a thin layer of the material using molecular beam epitaxy, a process widely used in the semiconductor industry in which evaporated atoms of indium, gallium and arsenic react with each other within a vacuum to form a single-crystal compound. The team then deposits a layer of molybdenum as the source and drain contact metal. They then "draw" an extremely fine pattern onto this substrate using a focused beam of electrons—another well-established fabrication technique known as electron beam lithography.

Unwanted areas of material are then etched away and the gate oxide is deposited onto the tiny gap. Finally, evaporated molybdenum is fired at the surface, where it forms the gate, tightly squeezed between the two other electrodes, del Alamo says. "Through a combination of etching and deposition we can get the gate nestled [between the electrodes] with tiny gaps around it," he says.

Although many of the techniques applied by the team are already used in silicon fabrication, they have only rarely been used to make compound semiconductor transistors. This is partly because in applications such as fiber-optic communication, space is less of an issue. "But when you are talking about integrating billions of tiny transistors onto a chip, then we need to completely reformulate the fabrication technology of compound semiconductor transistors to look much more like that of silicon transistors," del Alamo says.

Their next step will be to work on further improving the electrical performance—and hence the speed—of the transistor by eliminating unwanted resistance within the device. Once they have achieved this, they will attempt to further shrink the device, with the ultimate aim of reducing the size of their transistor to below 10 nanometers in gate length.

The War Z for PC

Developer: Hammerpoint Interactive

Publisher: Arktos Entertainment

Web site: www.thewarz.com (www.thewarz.com)

Price: \$15 to \$50 depending on how much in-game currency you want start with

Also on: PC only

Rating: M for Mature (lots of gore)

The Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) game *The War Z* (not to be confused with the wildly successful (and fantastic) ARMA2z mod, *DayZ*) has rapidly become something of a legend—but not the good kind. Almost since its launch *The War Z* has been steeped in controversy.

You've seen this kind of open-world zombie survival game before and that's okay. If there's one thing people have shown, it's that they can't get enough of zombies in any form whether it be comic books, TV shows, or computer games. The problem is that *The War Z* fails on an extraordinary number of levels: game physics, server performance, in-game hackers, even pricing.



The game's plot is nothing new. As one of very few survivors of a deadly plague your challenge is to survive basically by scavenging or fighting or a combination of the two. But when you're fighting for your life in a world filled with blood-thirsty zombies things are, at the very least, supposed to be fair.

The War Z is a very difficult world in which to survive and the penalty for death is uncommonly high—you lose everything you're carrying, which can be hair-rendingly frustrating in that there are so many unfair ways to die. For example, the game will kill you for simply walking down a grade it deems to be too steep. Also expect to be constantly attacked by other players who have hacked into the game. On the friends' computer on which I played, I was constantly beset by hackers who have figured out ways to steal from other players. I lost all sorts of items (weapons, meds, armor) for which we had paid actual cash money or that had been acquired in hard-fought battles. (To be fair, you can also scavenge most items.) I was also never able to set up my own server within the game, as the publisher's Web site promises. Another way to die: A couple of times I was "revived" (allowed back into the game after dying) in the middle of a nest of zombies before my character could fully defend himself. Also contributing to premature hair loss: Being revived can take hours.



The developer has promised to fix these and other problems but, as of just two weeks ago, I was still able to click buttons that didn't do anything or resulted in a "coming soon" message. Pretty ridiculous for a supposedly finished retail game. That's not even beta quality. Barely alpha.

The War Z is an incredibly frustrating experience, one which makes you feel that someone somewhere is laughing at the same time they're taking your money. It's too bad, too, because The War Z definitely has its moments. Sometimes the game world can look downright beautiful.



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

Carr has covered such diverse topics as pesticide use in area schools, invasive background checks for county volunteers, asthma awareness, the debate over standards-based grading, potential vulnerabilities in electronic voting machines, and Southern California's devastating 2003 and 2007 wildfires. He has also written many humorous pieces.

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

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

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

He has won many writing accolades, including Press Club awards for Best Column Writing, Consumer Writing

and Best Arts and Entertainment, and has repeatedly taken top honors in San Diego Songwriter's Guild competitions for his original musical compositions.

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

Learn more at www.charlescarr.com.

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EDITOR'S LETTERS

Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"Disaster Tech," "Get a Netgear Router," "What Can You Do with FreeDOS?" "Phocus Accent for iPhone"

Disaster Tech

[Regarding Marilyn K. Martin's December 21 article, "Little Known High Tech Stories...Disaster Tech and More!":]

Fantastic!!! I am organizing a neighborhood disaster prep committee.

-Mark Burton, Albuquerque, NM

Mark - Glad to hear it! (And yes, I know it's Dec. 21st, our non-doomsday.) Without being as extreme as the Preppers and Survivalists, everyone should have a Disaster Kit with at least bottled water, canned food and batteries. And community-based disaster-prep is the way to go, since in a disaster, these are the folks you'll be relying on with emergency services tied up elsewhere. The DHS even has a First Responder training course. And you can check "Popular Mechanics" for other survival tips.

-Marilyn, Texas

Get a Netgear Router

[Regarding the December 21 Digital Dave column:]

Bob, six years in a Linksys WRT45G router is great. Now go buy a Netgear and your problem will be solved. Happy Netgear user after two Linksys WRT45G routers that failed just the way you described.

-Harold, San Diego, CA

What Can You Do with FreeDOS?

[Regarding the December 21 Editors Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers column:]

Yup, it's worthless for most people since computers are available for free or very low cost to just about anyone in the United States from all sorts of sources. If you can afford \$300, you can get a brand new (albeit low end) notebook computer.

If you're really interested in FreeDOS and add ons, such as Web browsers and e-mail clients, follow the links given and in the links those links provide. I found the Arachne Web browser link broken but a quick search for it came up with:

<http://www.glennmcc.org/>

Enjoy!

-Rich Ernst, San Diego, CA

I have an accounting program and some job costing programs that I wrote in Basic back in the 80's that I still use today. I use FreeDOS to run it on a linux machine. I haven't found a commercial program that can do what

mine do as fast and easy. I converted and compiled them in Quick Basic in the 90's, but I'm too lazy to rewrite them in another language.

-Dennis, San Diego, CA

Phocus Accent for iPhone

[Regarding the December 21 Worldwide News & Product Reviews column:]

Thanks for the great article about the new Phocus Accent for iPhone. Just got through ordering it, to be able to have quicker access to a camera to take photos when I am on the go and don't have my other cameras within quick reach. I am working on a special project, Sensory San Diego, for the developmentally disabled population, that is utilizing photos of San Diego.

-Susan McClure, MS, OTR/L, San Diego, CA

ComputerEdge always wants to hear from you, our readers. If you have specific comments about one of our articles, please click the "Tell us what you think about this article!" link at the top or bottom of the specific article/column at ComputerEdge.com (webserver.computoredge.com/online.mvc?src=ebook). 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. If you would like to review our recent e-books, please visit ComputerEdge E-Books (www.computoredgebooks.com/).

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ComputerEdge Magazine, P.O. Box 83086, San Diego, CA 92138. (858) 573-0315