ComputorEdge™ Online — 01/18/13

This issue:
Robots, Smart Technology and More Little Known Stories

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Digital Dave

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

Claro Adware Virus; Deleting the Deleted E-mails; Windows 8 Media Center Problem; Troubleshooting Windows System Crashes.

Dear Digital Dave,

My Firefox browser has been attacked by the Claro virus. I have tried everything I can to get rid of it. I even went so far as to completely remove Firefox including deleting the folder and any install programs. Claro won't let me reset my home page and uses its search program. I used Spybot and several other virus programs to find it. Please, do you have any other suggestions on how to get rid of it? I have been a reader since The Byte Buyer years.

Thanks

*Art Bowen
San Diego CA*

Dear Art,

These adware programs, such as Claro, that add toolbars and/or capture your Internet search capabilities are driving people crazy more than any other type of computer problem. It seems that almost every week I get a similar type of question. Claro is generally recognized by the URL http://claro-search.com or http://isearch.claro-search.com in the browser address field. It commonly infects all three major browsers, Internet Explorer, Firefox, and Google Chrome.

The reason uninstalling and reinstalling Firefox doesn't work is because Claro installs a program in Windows which is independent of the browser. That is also how it can independently insert itself into other browsers. It is important to remove these programs in Programs and Features first (Add or Remove Programs in Windows XP). See Figure 1. Otherwise, regardless of anything else you do, Claro will return to your browser. You should look for any and all programs with either Claro or Babylon in the name and remove them.
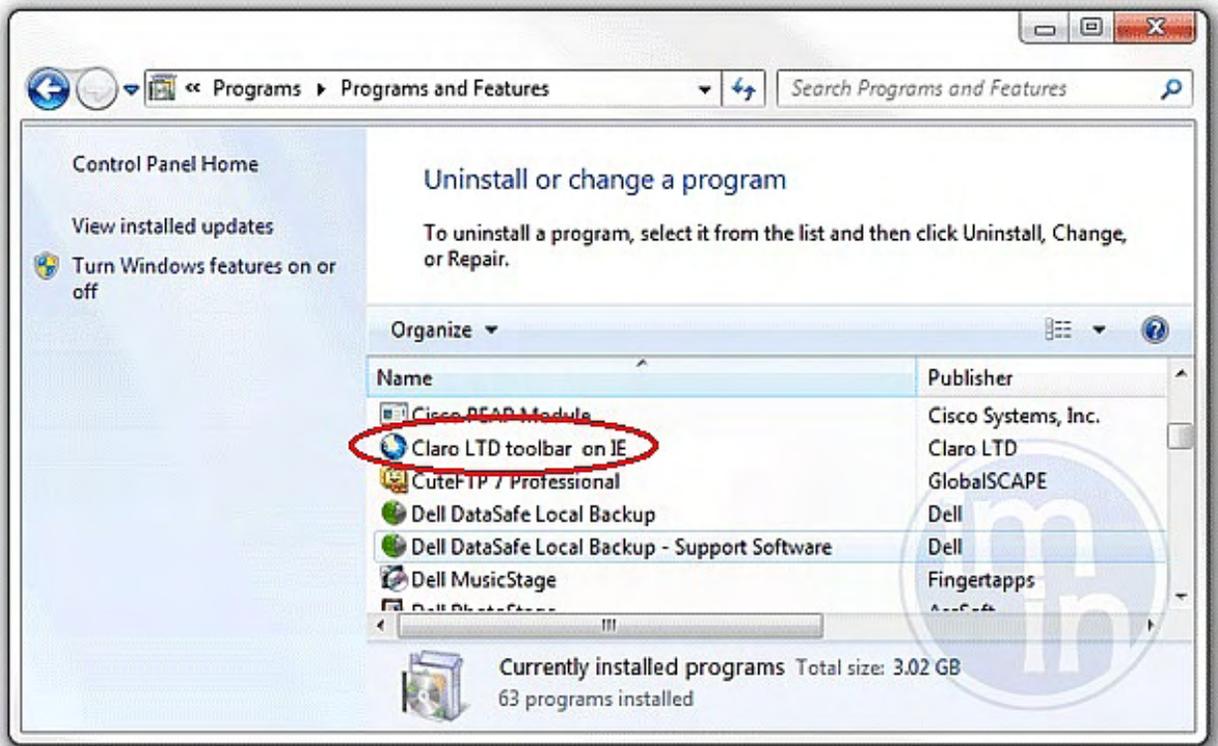
Figure 1. Remove Claro from Programs and Features.

The next step is to clean the browsers. Even though you have removed the main program, the browsers will still be set to defaults using Claro. There are a number of areas to check in each browser.

First, disable and remove all extensions or add-ons related to Claro or Babylon. Next, check your Web start up pages to make sure that they do not include links to any of the problem sites. Finally, look at your default search engine. If it is still set to Claro, then you will be using the problem Claro search engine, even if everything else has been removed.

The final step is to run your anti-malware scan again.

There are a number of sites that give more specific instructions for removing Claro (*malwaretips.com/blogs/claro-search-virus/*). It would be worthwhile to review the steps for each browser.

The referenced Web page is a come-on for Malwarebytes' Anti-Malware software. I've heard good things about it and it reviews well on CNET. The article recommends running it to clean up the residuals in the Registry. I expect that CCleaner (*www.piriform.com/ccleaner*) would also find those orphaned bits and remove them.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

My laptop, using Vista, has just removed all the e-mails that I put in the delete files. I usually like to keep several month's worth before removing them. Any ideas why it took upon itself to do that?

Barbara Niles
Phoenix, AZ

Dear Barbara,

First, if you want the deleted e-mails back, you might check the Recycle Bin. I'm not saying they will be there, but it's worth a look.

I'm not sure what caused the deletion of the messages in your Deleted Items folder. Usually it is the result of a

Disk Cleanup program which is recovering hard drive space—although I didn't see an option in the Windows Vista version that would delete e-mail files. Depending upon which e-mail program you're using there could be a function which empties your Deleted Items folder automatically. Most likely it is some type of cleanup utility which caused it.

I'm not one for cleaning out my Deleted Items folder. I just checked it and I have messages running back to 2008. My bad, but with the size of my hard drive, I don't have much incentive to titivate.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I upgraded one of my Windows computers to Windows 8 with the $39.99 download. I noticed that I could get Windows Media Center free until January 31. I applied for the registration code and received it via e-mail in a couple of days. After installing Media Center as a new feature, my copy was no longer activated. When I go to the Activation feature, it just says I can't do it now. It doesn't give me a way to do it. It says I should call Microsoft, but I'm sure that won't be easy.

David Simms
Las Vegas

Dear David,

I had a similar experience. Apparently a flaw in the Windows Media Center free offer had made it possible for people to get Windows 8 without paying. Microsoft has since fixed this loophole, but in the process made things more confusing for legitimate purchases. After installing Windows Media Center, Windows 8 becomes deactivated with no apparent way to reactivate it. However, there is a fairly easy resolution.

Use the WIN+R (+R) key combination to open the Run window. Enter "slui.exe 4" (without the quotes) and click OK. This will open the Windows Activation wizard. Select your country and Next. In this window you will see a toll-free phone number to call. (Don't worry. It's an automated attendant, not a call to India.) The automated system will have you read the numbers shown in the window, then give you some numbers to enter. If everything checks out (it did for me), then your copy will be activated.

If this doesn't work for you, then you may need to actually talk to someone at Microsoft.

Digital Dave

Digital Dave's Tip

Windows Event Viewer

I was recently working on an old laptop computer which was experiencing random crashes—the worst kind of problem. The difficulty lies in tracking down a random problem, which whether hardware or software can be quite tedious. It's hard to know where to start. That's why I went to Event Viewer.

Event Viewer is a log of the activities within your computer. Sometimes these logs will give you hints as to what may be causing problems. It is certainly a better starting point than randomly guessing.

The next time the computer crashes (or displays other unusual activity) write down the time. Reboot the computer, then start checking the logs in Event Viewer.

To open Event Viewer in the most recent versions of Windows, a search for "event" or "viewer" in the Start Menu will bring up the option. It can also be found in Administrative Tools or Computer Management. (In Windows 8, Event Viewer is one of the items in the +X power tools menu.) Click open Windows Logs list. See Figure 2 (top). You will note a number of different logs. Since you don't know the source of the problem, all of them are

worth reviewing.
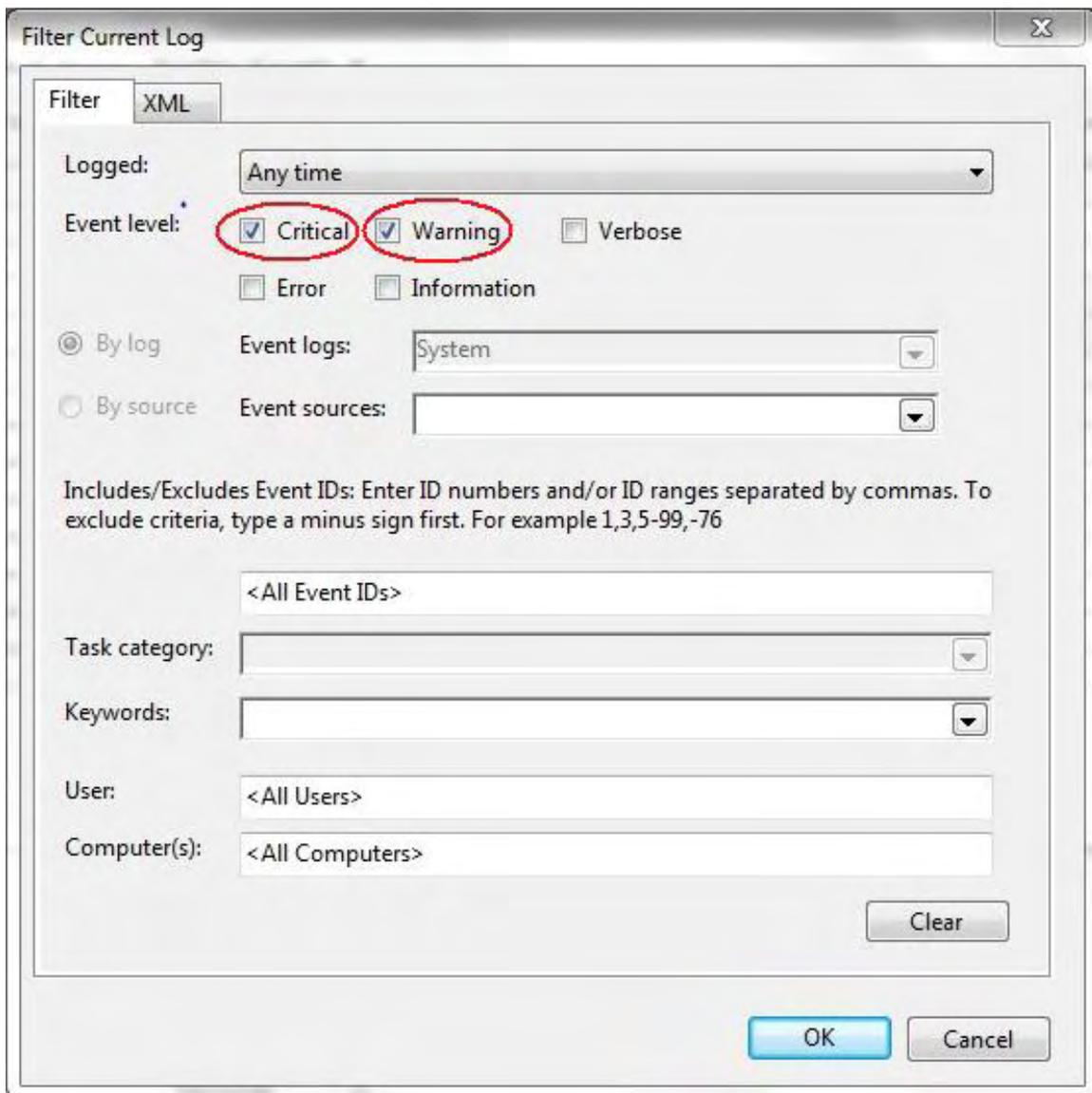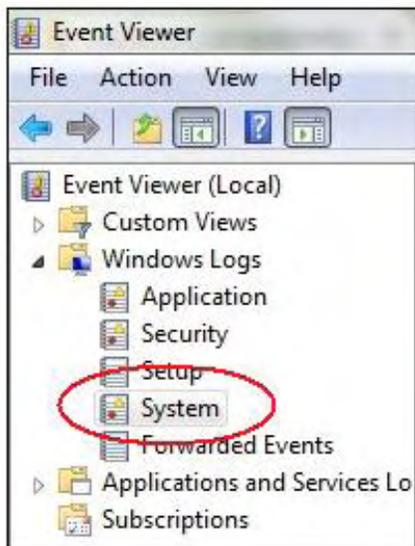
Figure 2. The Event Viewer navigation menu (top). The Event Viewer Filter Current Log windows (bottom).

The event viewer logs can get quite long usually including information about normal operations. You want to

isolate the critical and warning type errors by setting a filter through the Action menu. See Figure 1 (bottom). By setting Critical and Warning filters, the normal entries will be removed from view. Look at entries occurring around the time of the last known problem. See Figure 3.

Figure 3. The filtered Event Viewer System log.

There is no guarantee that those errors will be the source of the problem, but it is a good starting point. However, the information is often cryptic and difficult to understand. The next step is to do a Google search using the cryptic term, in this case "atikmdag", the operating system, and possibly the word "problem." If there is a known issue, this may yield results.

This led me to the ATI Catalyst Control Center which has had problems with Windows 7 in this particular laptop. It's possible that an updated version could resolve the problem, but to make sure it was the source, I uninstalled it completely. So far the laptop has been running without a problem. If, after a couple of weeks, the problem doesn't return, I'll look at installing an updated version.

Event Viewer may not be able to come up with an immediate solution to a computer problem, but it might get you looking in the right place.

Digital Dave

P.S. The problem is still there, so I'm now forced to explore other alternatives. I suspect everything. The laptop is a Dell model PP39L—just in case someone happens to know the answer to this issue. Apparently there were a lot of problems with this model laptop from Dell. I'm glad it's not my computer.

More Little Known High Tech Stories

"Learning Through Moocs, Job Telepresence, Tech Giants' Patent Applications" by Marilyn K. Martin

Innovation Summit; MOOCS; Job-Search and Job-Telepresence; Patent Apps Cutting-Edge New Products; Robots Helping; Military Robots; Small Businesses Stressed and Slipping; Intelligent Technology Too Smart?; Global Tech Innovation; Early-Stage Innovation; War Tech; Criminals and Electronics; High Tech For Clubs and Bars; Facebook and Homework.

Seattle's Technology Alliance Innovation Summit in Nov. 2012

In the *Seattle Times* in November 2012, Brier Dudley reported (*seattletimes.com/html/technologybrierdudleysblog/2019788997_innovation_summit_isilon_updat.html*) on Technology Alliance's Innovation Summit (*www.technology-alliance.com/events/2012summit.html*). One speaker, Bill Richter, opened with an anecdote that in 2001 a Seattle Microsoft veteran had started a new company that eventually gave birth to Isilon (*www.isilon.com/*), a data storage company recently acquired for billions by tech giant EMC (*www.emc.com/index.htm?fromGlobalSiteSelect*). Richter, President of EMC's Isilon Storage Division, went on to call for a new lobbying coalition in Washington state that "will push for education investments, incentives and a more tech-friendly business climate."

Other conference speakers echoed the ideas for attracting tech-talented people to the region (even from overseas), and putting greater emphasis on computer science education. One idea even called for requiring local high school students to learn and pass (*seattletimes.com/html/technologybrierdudleysblog/2019788378_innovation_summit.html*) the subject in order to graduate. Big Data and Cloud Computing are also centered in the region, with one speaker foreseeing "a 15-year investment horizon."

MOOCS—Free Online College Courses

In March 2012, the *New York Times* reported that computer night classes, online instruction and even smartphone apps that teach programming (*www.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/technology/for-an-edge-on-the-internet-computer-code-gains-a-following.html*) are booming. These students understand that the Internet is fast becoming the hub for everything from work to entertainment, and want to understand "how the digital pieces fit together." Sites like Codecademy (*www.codecademy.com/#!/exercises/0*) are teaching people everywhere how to code for free.

The New York Times in November 2012 discussed how MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are now reaching tens of thousands of online students, and applying crowd-sourcing technology (*www.nytimes.com/2012/11/20/education/colleges-turn-to-crowd-sourcing-courses.html*) to discussion forums, grading and even

how professors reserve on-campus class time for interactions with online students. These new and free online college courses are connected to brick-and-mortar universities, and are now available through Coursera (*www. coursera.org/*) and EdX (*www.edx.org/*). So college professors must now grapple with new issues like how online students can share their ideas, to how the professors know that their students are learning.

High Tech Job-Search and Job-Telepresence

Bloomberg reported in December 2012 that professional job recruiters are exchanging job-hunting sites for professional social sites (*www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-12-13/job-recruiters-eschew-monster-to-find-hidden-talent-on-linkedin.html*). Adobe Systems (*www.adobe.com/*) is using sites like LinkedIn (*www.linkedin.com/static? key=what_is_linkedin*), the biggest professional-networking Web site, which has already introduced tools for headhunters to view profiles and contact "matches" for their open positions—even if the person isn't looking for a new job. Two-thirds of companies already use Facebook (*www.facebook.com/facebook*) to find recruits, and FB debuted a Social Jobs Application in November that aggregates more than 1.7 million job listings from other sites.

In December 2012, the *Seattle Times* ran an AP story on how Telepresence Robots (*seattletimes.com/html/ businesstechnology/2019969818_apusbeamintowork.html*) are letting employees "beam" into work from other states. An engineer in Indiana attends his Silicon Valley office meetings, jokes with colleagues and roams his office building through a video-conferencing machine called "Beam" from SuitableTech (*www.suitabletech.com/*), which anyone can purchase for just $16,000 (*www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-09-27/beam-yourself-anywhere-for-16-000*).

Tech Giants: Patent Apps and the Race to Cutting-Edge New Products

In November 2012, the *Los Angeles Times* broke a story that Microsoft may soon go into the specialized-eyeglass market (*www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-microsoft-glasses-patent-20121123,0,5571726.story*). A patent application from Microsoft discusses an information-delivery system for live events, in a head-mounted display that looks like eyeglasses. It would connect to a "processing unit" worn on the wrist, and connected to the special-glasses by wire or Bluetooth technology. Google is already working on something similar, called Project Glass (*plus.google.com/+projectglass/posts*), with prototypes already unveiled at conferences and on YouTube. Even Apple filed a patent in July 2012, for a similar "wearable display device."

NextBigFuture announced in November 2012 that Samsung is ready to launch its first bendable-screen smartphone (*nextbigfuture.com/2012/11/flexible-samsung-smartphones-to-launch.html#more*) in 2013. Speculation is that this will be the eagerly awaited Galaxy S4, rumored to have a 1080p Full HD display. The new technology would substitute plastic for glass and incorporate OLEDs. This will both cut down on smartphone weight, and make them almost unbreakable. Other companies (like Sharp and LG Display) are already selling liquid-crystal displays. These are thinner smartphones due to integrating touch sensors into the liquid crystal display, and eliminating the need for a separate touchscreen layer.

Robots Helping Seniors and Astronauts

There has been some media chatter recently about using robots to care for lonely Seniors, and/or to comfort them as they lie dying. But Futurity reported in October 2012, that Seniors like having robots to help with household chores, but prefer real people for more personal tasks (*www.futurity.org/science-technology/seniors-less-comfortable-with-caring-robots/*) (like dressing and bathing) and social interactions. Researchers also found that Seniors trust robots with monitoring or physical assistance, but not with decision-making tasks.
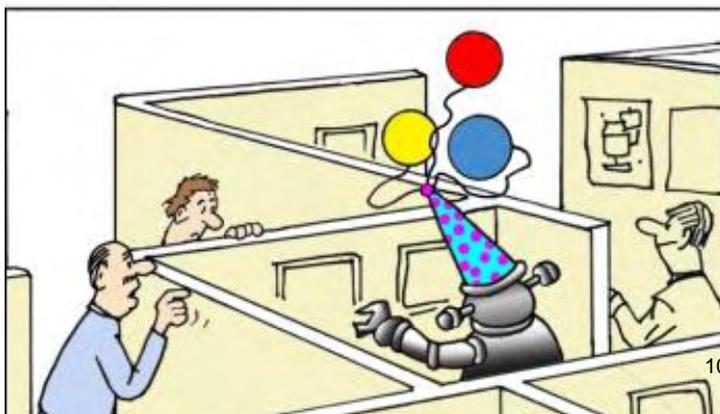
NASA already has the upper half of a Robonaut2 (*www. nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/main/robonaut.html*) on the International Space Station. It accomplished its first task in October 2012 by monitoring air velocity, which could be compromised by a human's breath. In December 2012, *Newsmax* reported that the Japanese are developing a small robot (*www.newsmax.com/SciTech/ japanese-robot-space-station/2012/12/03/id/466201*) that can speak and hold conversations with astronauts aboard

"Not only is the robot a better programmer than Joe, but it also has a better sense of humor."

the ISS. Kibo (which means Hope in Japanese) is only 13-inches tall, and will be launched in summer 2013 with Japanese astronaut Koichi Wakata. If Kibo is a success, scientists plan to duplicate him for everyday use on Earth.

Military Robots—Carriers to Killers

NextBigFuture ran an update in December 2012 on the military's continual work on in-field carrying robots (*nextbigfuture.com/2012/12/darpa-robot-can-follow-human-leader.html*). Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency Research, or DARPA (*www.darpa.mil/*), is the Pentagon's research and development arm. As combat soldiers are expected to carry more and more on overland forays, the need for a nimble robot carrier who could take verbal instructions quickly developed. Called the Legged Squad Support System (LS3) this dog-like robot can now carry up to 400 pounds of equipment, follow people through rugged terrain even at night, and even serve as a mobile auxiliary power source to charge batteries and gadgets while on patrol.

In November 2012, a British news site urged a ban on killer robots (*www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/ban-urged-on-killer-robots/article5456209/*). Human Rights Watch (*www.hrw.org/*) and Harvard Law School's International Human Rights Clinic (*www.law.harvard.edu/programs/hrp/ihrc.html*), want an international treaty outlawing military weapons systems that decide "without a human in the loop" when to pull the trigger. Right now, most robotic weapons (like armed-drones) need human intervention before firing, but biometrics with facial recognition capabilities are on the horizon for autonomous armed-drones. So the rights groups want an outright ban on fully autonomous robotic weapons now, before they are deployed.

Small Businesses Stressed and Slipping

The Denver Post in December 2012 had an article about how small business owners are stressing out (*www.denverpost.com/business/ci_22206437?source=pop_section_business*) in our bad economy, losing sleep and having their health suffer. Reasons cited in polls are that the small business owners worry about not attracting enough new customers, having to pass on higher costs to clients, tight credit markets and a lack of government support. Colorado has seen more than 24,000 businesses/individuals file for bankruptcy protection in 2012, and the US Small Business Administration is seeing a steady increase in unpaid principal levels and charge-offs for bad loans.

A *Wall Street Journal* blog from 2008, however, said a bad economy can still be a boon to small businesses (*blogs.wsj.com/independentstreet/2008/09/15/bad-economy-bad-for-small-business-or-is-it/*). Since larger companies traditionally shrink their marketing budgets in a bad economy, smaller businesses can make inroads into their competitors' turf and introduce less expensive items, as well as finagle better deals with suppliers and landlords. A site called BusinessKnowHow offers Ten Business Survival Strategies for a Bad Economy (*www.businessknowhow.com/marketing/getgoing.htm*). Their suggestions include using the Internet and Social Media more, contacting former customers and competitors, and even teaming up with other vendors for joint sales.

The Small Business Report, by Automatic Data Processing (ADP) in early January 2013, reported a net gain of 25,000 small, non-farm businesses created (*www.slideshare.net/adp/adp-small-business-report-dec-2012*) from November through December 2012. The breakdown said that 6,000 Very Small Businesses (1-19 employees) had closed, while 31,000 Small Businesses (20-49 employees) had been created.

What Happens If Intelligent Technology Gets Too Smart?

In line with the above section on killer-robots, AP reported through the *Seattle Times* in November 2012, that Cambridge University (*www.cam.ac.uk/*) in England wants to study "technology's risk to humans (*seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2019765655_computerthreat26.html*)." They are proposing a Center for the Study of Existential

Risk, to bring together experts to evaluate how Intelligent Technology (like artificial intelligence) might outsmart humans someday and try to take over the world. From HAL in "2001: A Space Odyssey" to SkyNet in "The Terminator" movies, we've been prepped for smart-machines whose interests don't include human welfare. But now that those ideas are getting closer to reality, the Cambridge professors want to be ready.

Debate.org (*www.debate.org/opinions/is-advanced-technology-invading-our-freedom-to-think-and-work*) asked the question "Is Advanced Technology Invading Our Freedom to Think and Work?", and invited public discussion. About 60% said No and nearly 40% answered Yes, which at least establishes some genuine concern and need for dialogue about smart-machines. Some say that advanced technology is "freeing" us from menial tasks to focus on more important things, and that "no one could ever take over the entire Internet." Others think that advanced technology is weakening our ability to work and think, and has already lessened our "activeness" and contributed to obesity. Some believe that constant technological surveillance is impinging on our freedom. While others think technology is making our lives easier and more convenient, which they consider the ultimate goal of advanced technology.

Global Tech Innovation—Controversy to Boot Camps

Counter to conventional wisdom that tech start-ups must start out in Silicon Valley if they want to succeed, Founder Institute (*fi.co/*) chief Adeo Ressi (based on Silicon Valley) preaches the opposite (*www.siliconbeat. com/2012/11/05/founder-institutes-adeo-ressi-says-better-to-bring-silicon-valley-to-entrepreneurs-than-it-is-to-bring-entrepreneurs-to-silicon-valley/*). Ressi thinks it's more important to export Silicon Valley know-how to tech start-ups wherever they are, and wants to help create "1,000 enduring technology companies a year in 30 cities across the globe." University of California economist Enrico Moretti agrees, that a collection of smart people in "innovation hubs" tend to attract more bright people, as well as help grow local ecosystems.

The Chicago Tribune in December 2012 announced a 9-week Development Bootcamp (*www.chicagotribune.com/ business/breaking/chi-dev-bootcamp-coming-to-chicago-next-spring-20121203,0,853880.story*) next spring 2013, to train software developers for their local tech community. The idea is to train programmers who can plug into the city's burgeoning technology and start-up scene. Dev Bootcamp (*devbootcamp.com/*) started in San Francisco in February 2012, for intensive training in professional Web development. Chicago is accepting applications for its inaugural class in April 2013, with rolling admissions to graduate about 15 students every three weeks. Tuition is $12,200, and aims to produce employable software developers who can immediately join companies as entry-level developers.

Early-Stage Innovation: Incubation and Investment

In fall 2011, PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel launched a new company called Breakout Labs (*www.breakoutlabs.org/ home.html*), to fund cutting-edge, early stage science and technology research ideas (*gigaom.com/2011/10/25/ peter-thiel-breakout-labs/*). It aims to incubate research proposals that are too radical or too new to attract development money from venture capitalists or government grants. Also, by funding with entrepreneurial money, successful projects can go on to run standalone businesses and not be beholden to their funding organizations. (Although they are asked to voluntarily assign a modest portion of their revenue back to Breakout Labs.) In December 2012, Breakout Labs latest grant went to the Canadian company, Avetec (*www.avetec.org/*), to develop its clean-energy idea of harnessing the power of atmospheric vortexes, using the physics of tornadoes.

In December 2012, the *Denver Post* profiled a Boulder firm giving Denver-area start-ups another avenue for financial support (*www.denverpost.com/business/ci_22197465?source=pop_section_business*). A 20-year old college student with money and contacts, Michael Abdy, joined a veteran public relations firm, Metzger Associates, to launch TeQuity Capital & Communications (*tequity.co/*). It is trading small investments and services (such as marketing and Web development) for equity stakes in start-ups. Unlike other tech incubators and accelerators, TeQuity doesn't put entrepreneurs through training or into shared workspaces, but uses their couple dozen staff members to "help start-ups bring their products to market and stories to life."

War Tech—Incoming-missiles to Sorting Drone Data

In November 2012, the *Christian Science Monitor* ran a story on an Israeli mobile app (*www.csmonitor.com/World/ Global-News/2012/1120/When-Hamas-launches-a-rocket-Israeli-iPhones-buzz*) that warns when a rocket is fired

from Gaza, and where in Israel it is projected to land. Color Red was developed by a 13-year-old in Israel, and is based on the government's public warning alerts about incoming missiles from Gaza. Israelis can have "Color Red" alerts sent to their smartphones, and can choose all Rocket-Fired alerts, or just alerts in a specific area from an all-Hebrew list.

USA Today in December 2012 ran a story about how the U.S. Air Force is reaching out to ESPN for help in analyzing the flood of video imagery from their drone aircraft (*www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/19/drone-video/1770337/*). I've written about previous attempts to reach out to TV companies for better ways to analyze drone video. This article talks about how the Air Force met with the sports cable network, ESPN (*espn.go.com/*), to help develop training and expertise for military analysts sorting through the mountain of drone video for what is really important. The overseas drones are piloted from a base in Nevada, but the video is watched and analyzed in Virginia. What the Air Force really seems to be looking for is analytic-software that can identify "something amiss" in hours upon hours of drone surveillance video.

Meanwhile, according to *Wired* in November 2012, the Army has its own analysis-software scandal (*www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/11/no-spy-software-scandal-here-army-claims/*) going. At the center of the imbroglio is a Big Intel analysis-system called Palantir (*www.palantir.com/*) with its own fanboys singing its praises and claiming that it can make relevant connections from mounds of Big Data.

The scandal broke when it was revealed that the Army already has a $2.3 Billion system that's supposed to do what Palantir does, called "Distributed Common Ground System - Army" (DCGS-A)—which has been judged to be too complicated, easily hackable and too unreliable. An initial Army investigation agreed that Palantir was indeed superior—then ordered all copies of the final report destroyed. It was replaced with a similar report that did not make recommendations to buy Palantir. Then came charges that pro-Palantir generals were just corporate stooges, that field requests for a Palantir server were denied, amid other bureaucratic screw-ups. Stay tuned.

Criminals and Electronics

In November 2012, the *Seattle Times* ran a story on a local attorney accused of raping massage therapists, after using electronic devices (*seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2019803528_grant01m.html*) to track them down. A judge gave police permission to "forensically search" the lawyer's iPhone and GPS system to look for evidence that could link him to the attacks.

At the end of December 2012, the *New York Times* reported that a perversion of smartphone technology called stalking apps (*www.nytimes.com/2012/12/24/opinion/sneaking-after-cellphone-users.html*) are quickly becoming a matter of national concern. One such stealth app called Girls Around Me, lets men search out women—unbeknown to them—by cross-matching GPS technology with social media sites like Facebook. The Senate Judiciary Committee has already taken a step to "protect the privacy of all cell phone users, and close legal loopholes that enable stalking-apps." This will also encompass the routine monitoring of children's locations and phone habits for commercial purposes, since kids and parents are usually totally unaware they are being monitored.

High Tech For Clubs and Bars

In December 2012, it was announced that upscale neighborhood bar and restaurant chain, Bar Louie (*www.barlouieamerica.com/*) has teamed up with Seattle start-up graZie Mobile (*www.graziemobile.com/*) to develop a mobile app that allows Facebook users to send, receive and request Bar Louie drinks (*www.mobilecommercedaily.com/bar-louie-lets-consumers-buy-a-drink-via-mobile-app*) from Facebook friends. The app is free through iTunes, with a link on Bar Louie's Web site. Facebook users can post their special upcoming occasion at Bar Louie on their wall to solicit "gift drinks," search through their Facebook friends to send them a drink, or redeem Bar Louie drinks that have been sent to them.

World of Beer (*wobusa.com/*) is another franchise specializing in craft beer, with 500 selections from 40 countries. They offer a free Loyalty App (*wobusa.com/World-of-Beer-Mobile-Loyalty-App.aspx*) to view their beer inventory and a "smart filter" to find the right beer for the right occasion. If you can't make up your mind, shake your smartphone and the app will pick a random beer selection for you. They also cover the events and live music offerings at all their WOB locations, if you are traveling.

I've already written about the mobile app SceneTap (*scenetap.com/*), which offers potential patrons useful real-time tips on how many people are in a prospective bar/club, their ages and male to female ratios. The company collects images using a "facial detection reader" inside the bars, locking onto a head silhouette and in seconds analyzing 14 points on the face to determine if the subject is male or female, and about how old. The app wasn't developed to invade people's privacy or identify them, but alarms started going off when SceneTap launched in San Francisco in spring 2012. SceneTap is now in 30 Boston area bars and clubs, and the *Boston Globe* reported on the app's growing controversy over biometric identification (*www.boston.com/lifestyle/specials/2012/12/26/ scenetap-facial-detection-company-brings-controversial-nightclub-app-boston/B42RhbvaOiyVQtDoRg4JbM/story. html*) in a December 2012 article.

Facebook and Homework

Mike Cassidy of *SiliconBeat* wrote in November 2012 that his teenage daughter seems to spend her entire life either on Facebook or doing homework. So he was thrilled when online education innovator CK-12 (*www.ck12.org/ about/*) and Facebook took aim at a sweet-spot where they could intersect (*mikecassidy.wordpress. com/2012/06/05/facebook-and-others-should-take-a-bigger-role-in-educating-kids-and-their-parents/*). Facebook has opened up an application called Study Help (*apps.facebook.com/studyhelp/*), where kids can connect with other students anywhere in the world at any time, which "reflects the world they will work in once they are finished with their formal education."

The Denver Post in December 2012 ran a story about Facebook CEO Zuckerberg donating $500 Million (*www. denverpost.com/technology/ci_22222449/facebook-ceo-zuckerberg-donating-500m-stock*) in stock to a Silicon Valley charity to fund health and education issues. The 18 Million Facebook shares went to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (*www.siliconvalleycf.org/*), a non-profit that works with donors to allocated their gifts. In a quick perusal of the Foundation's Web page, I found a call to apply for scholarships, a portal to donate to the survivors of Hurricane Sandy, as well as a new voter app to register Latinos.

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

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

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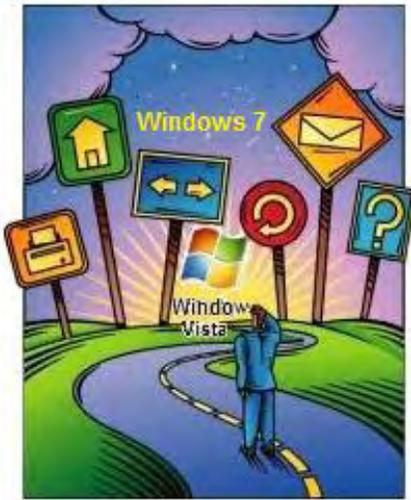
Windows Tips and Tricks

A Free QuickLinks Windows App from Jack

"All Your Favorite Programs, Web Sites and Documents Are Only a Click Away" by Jack Dunning

Jack Dunning offers a simple, easy to use, free app which can replace both the Windows Taskbar and Start Menu links (even in Windows 8). Guaranteed safe. Jack should know. He wrote it.

Starting with the introduction of Windows Vista I've heard complaints about the loss of the old Windows XP file tree in the Start Menu. When opening the default Start Menu in Windows Vista and Windows 7, "All Programs" opens folders in place without displaying the cascading folder/file tree structure. In Windows Vista you can return to the Classic XP style Start Menu through Properties, but that capability was lost in Windows 7. Furthermore, there is no Start Menu at all on the Taskbar in Windows 8.

I like the Favorite Links section of the navigation pane of Windows File Explorer which was first introduced with Windows Vista. I slip key editorial folders in and out of Favorite Links every week. However, it is fairly limited in space and only available when Windows File Explorer is open. What if there was an easy to access dropdown menu similar to the Windows' right-click menus which is always available, easy to use, organized by category, and tailored to open those folders, programs, and Web sites used most. *ComputorEdge* is now offering a free app which does just that (see Figure 1). This app might replace some of the inadequacies in the Windows Start Menu and the confusion create by loading the Taskbar with numerous (uncategorized) quick launch buttons.
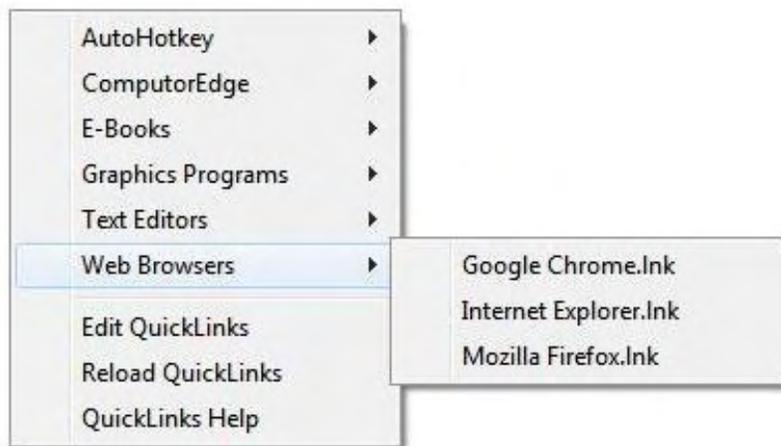
Figure 1. QuickLinks is a Windows dropdown menu which can be tailored with categories of programs, Web pages, folders, and documents. Activated with WIN+Z or ALT+Comma (for left-handed people).

I'm sure that there are many such apps freely available for Windows computers, but this one was built for its simplicity, plus ease of setup and use. There is no installation program and it runs in all versions of Windows—including Windows 8 Desktop. Simply download it, extract it from the ZIP file, and double-click on the filename to load. More importantly, since I wrote it, so I know that there is nothing in it that will hurt your computer system.

Yes, I wrote the short script in AutoHotkey—my obsession—but you don't need to know anything about AutoHotkey. You don't have to install AutoHotkey on your computer or learn how to use AutoHotkey. The program is a compiled executable file (EXE) which will run without any other software or extensions. (For those of you who

do want to know how it's done, this week the accompanying AutoHotkey column explains how the app was written, but I won't bore you with those details here.) First, here's how QuickLinks.exe works. (The free download information is found at the end of this column.)

How the QuickLinks App Works

When QuickLinks.exe is run for the first time on a Windows computer (double-click the extracted QuickLinks.exe file name), it looks for a folder named QuickLinks in the individual user folder. If the QuickLinks folder is not found, the app automatically creates it. An icon composed of a green square with an H inside (for AutoHotkey, shown at left) will appear in the System Tray on the Taskbar. If you hover over the icon, you will see the name of the app. If you right-click on the System Tray icon, a menu with the options Suspend Hotkeys, Pause Script, and Exit will pop up. These options can be used to control the running of the AutoHotkey app.

To activate QuickLinks, hold down WIN+Z (⊞+Z) or ALT+Comma (for left-handed mouse users). The QuickLinks menu will appear at the location of the mouse cursor, see Figure 2 (top). Initially, there are no categories (folders) shown in the QuickLinks folder. They must be added by the user. Click on Edit QuickLinks and the QuickLinks folder will open in Windows File Explorer, see Figure 2 (bottom).
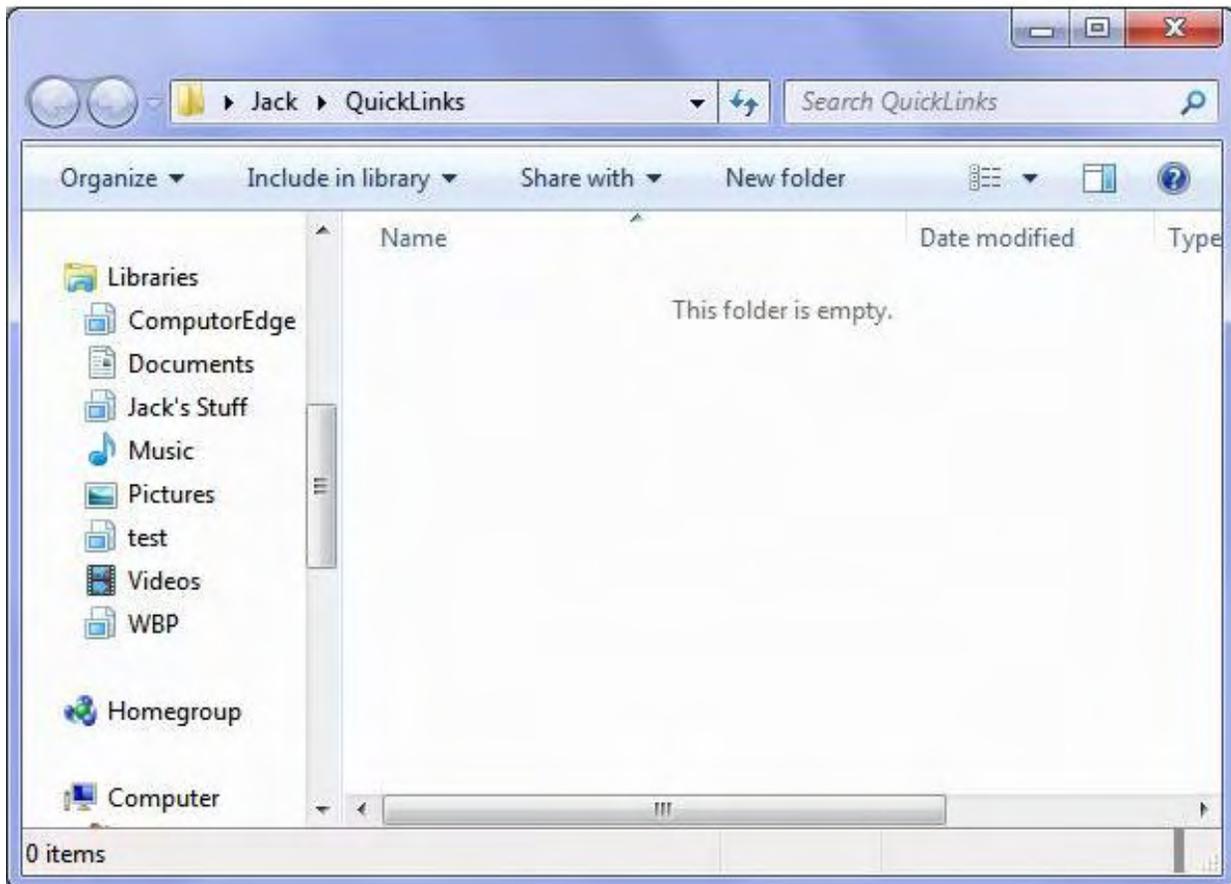
Figure 2. The first QuickLinks menu (top) has no categories. Click Edit QuickLinks to open the QuickLinks folder (bottom).

Note for Windows 8 Users: The keyboard combination ⊞+Z is used in the Windows 8 Modern Start interface to open the Toolbar within apps and the Start screen. This hotkey for the Modern interface will be disabled if you run

QuickLinks.exe. However, a right-click of the mouse has the exact same effect as ⊞+Z in the Modern interface and has the added advantage of selecting tiles at the same time. ⊞+Z and ALT+Comma (left hand mouse) were selected for their proximity and ease of use with a mouse—easy two-finger combination. If you like QuickLinks, but want to change the hotkeys, then you can recompile the source code (this week's AutoHotkey column) with different keyboard combinations. When activated, the QuickLinks menu always (and only) appears on the Desktop, even if activated when the Windows 8 Modern Start Screen is open.

Adding Categories to QuickLinks

In its current form, QuickLinks has two levels of functionality. The first is a collection of categories used to group the links based upon the user's preferences. Each category is a folder stored in the QuickLinks folder. To define a new category, merely create and label a folder with the desired category name within the QuickLinks folder. (While the QuickLinks folder is the active window in Windows File Explorer, right-click and select New => Folder to create a new folder—or press ALT, F, W, F in order. In Windows 7 and Windows 8, you can press the keyboard shortcut CTRL+SHIFT+N simultaneously to create a new folder.)

Note: While anything (folders, shortcuts, documents, etc.) can be placed in the QuickLinks folder, only folders, each of which represent a category, will be read by the QuickLinks app. The links themselves must be located within the individual category folders.

The second level of functionality in QuickLinks consists of the shortcuts located within the category folders. These shortcuts can be for anything acceptable to Windows File Explorer, including programs, Web site URLs, documents, folders, etc. Folders linked within a category folder will merely open the folder. For simplicity, this version of QuickLinks does not support multiple layers of categories (folders with folders of links—and so on).

After adding a new category folder to the QuickLinks folder, select Reload QuickLinks from the menu (⊞+Z). This updates the menu with any changes. The next time the QuickLinks menu is activated (⊞+Z), the new category will appear, as shown in Figure 3 (top). Since there are currently no shortcuts in the new category, the menu item is an active link for opening the category folder. One click and that folder opens in Windows File Explorer, see Figure 3 (bottom).
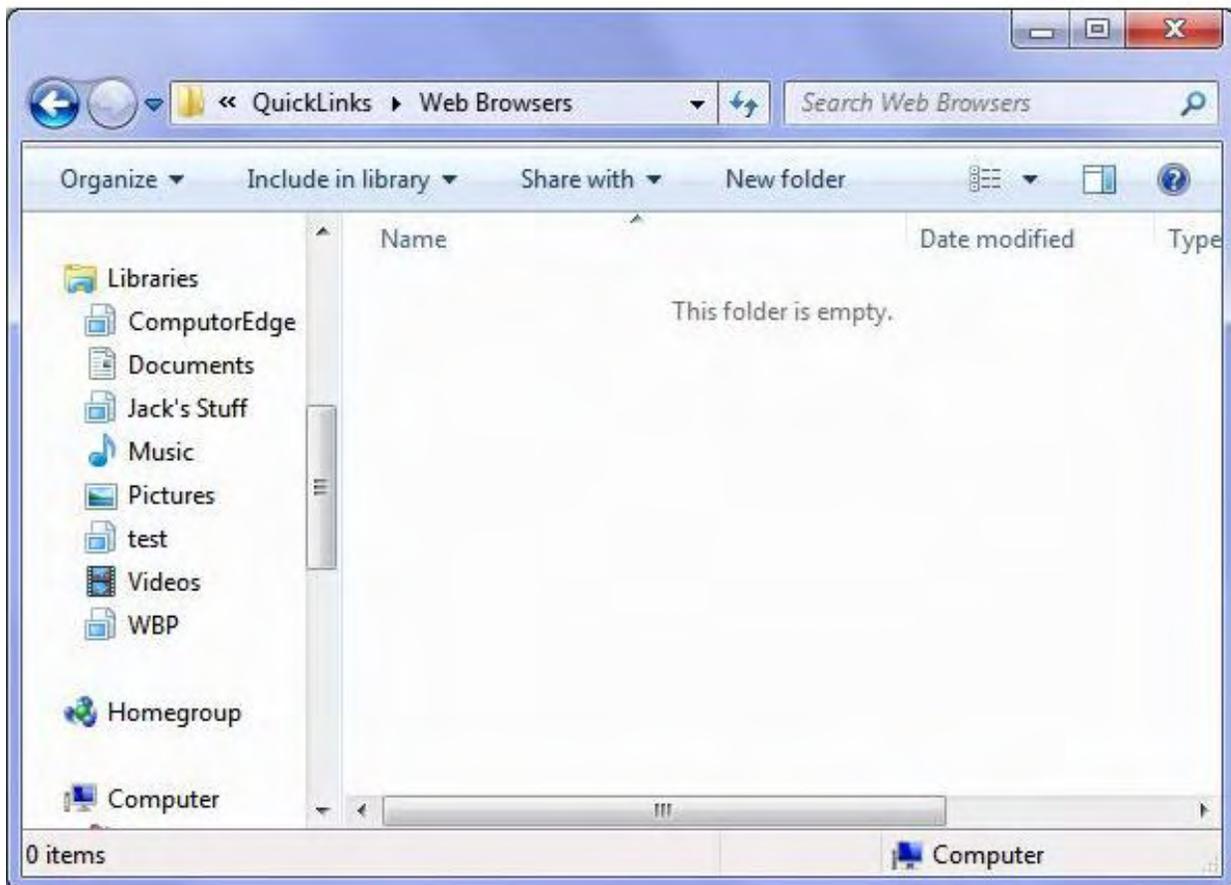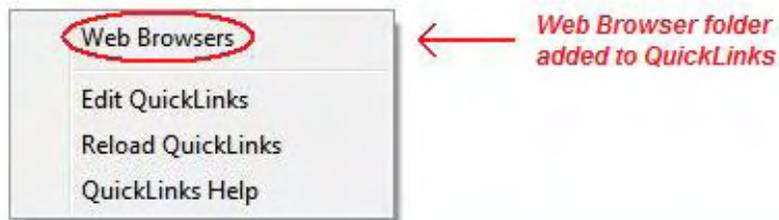
Figure 3. After reloading the QuickLinks menu, the new folder (Web Browser) appears (top). Click on an empty category and the folder opens in Windows File Explorer (bottom).

Adding Shortcuts to QuickLinks Categories

While it is possible to add any type of Windows file to a category folder, it's recommended that only shortcuts be used. QuickLinks is designed merely as quick access to anything the user desires, not a repository for programs, files, folders and other data of a more permanent nature. If programs, documents, and such are placed in a category folder, they will open in the same manner as a link, however, once it is no longer relevant for QuickLinks uses, the user will need to be careful to move it to a more appropriate place. Otherwise it will continue to appear in the QuickLinks menu until it is moved or deleted. If you delete it, the program or file is sent to the Recycle Bin. Yet, when an obsolete shortcut is deleted, the original folder, program, or file is not affected.

There are a number of ways to add shortcuts to the category folders. Some of the easiest are by dragging an icon from one location to the category folder opened in Windows File Explorer. The hotkey for creating a shortcut for a folder or file is to hold down CTRL+SHIFT while dragging the icon to the new location. However, this can be a bit tricky if you forget to use the key combination or use the wrong combination (CTRL for move). I prefer to use a systematic approach creating shortcuts which doesn't run the risk of disappearing a program file or folder into some unknown folder because the mouse or a key slipped. Plus, the following technique works equally as well for Web site shortcuts.

The first step is to find the program, file, or folder, right-click on the file name and select Create Shortcut. Once there is a shortcut available in Windows File Explorer it can be either copied and pasted or dragged directly to the category folder. If the shortcut is needed at its current location, copy it rather than dragging. If this is the case, then you're done and reloading QuickLinks will update the 🪟+Z menu.

If you are looking at replicating a shortcut on the Start Menu, the Taskbar, or the Desktop, then right-click and select Properties. The Properties window will open, as shown in Figure 4. (If the shortcut is on the Taskbar in Windows 7 or Windows 8, hold down the SHIFT key, right-click and select Properties.) Select the Target path (highlight by clicking at the beginning of the path, holding the left mouse button, and dragging to the end) and copy it (CTRL+C or right-click => Copy). This is the program or file path used when creating a new shortcut in the QuickLinks category folder.
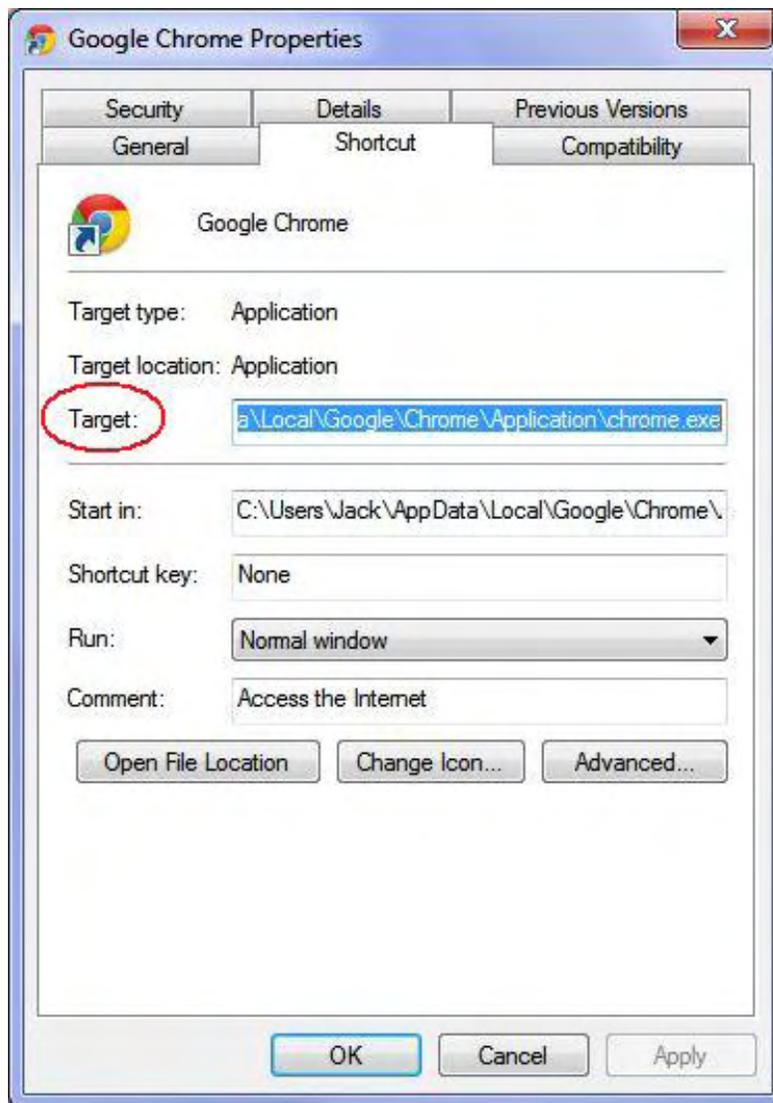
Figure 4. The Shortcut tab in the Properties window of any shortcut shows the Target path needed to create a new shortcut for a program or file. Copy this path before returning to the QuickLinks category folder in Windows File Explorer.

Note: When adding Web pages to QuickLinks open the target Web page in any browser and copy (CTRL+C) the selected (highlighted) URL located in the browser's navigation field. The following techniques for creating shortcuts work equally as well for Web page shortcuts when substituting the URL for the target path.

To create the new shortcut, return to the QuickLinks category folder in Windows File Explorer, right-click in the main file area and select New => Shortcut from the menu (see Figure 5).
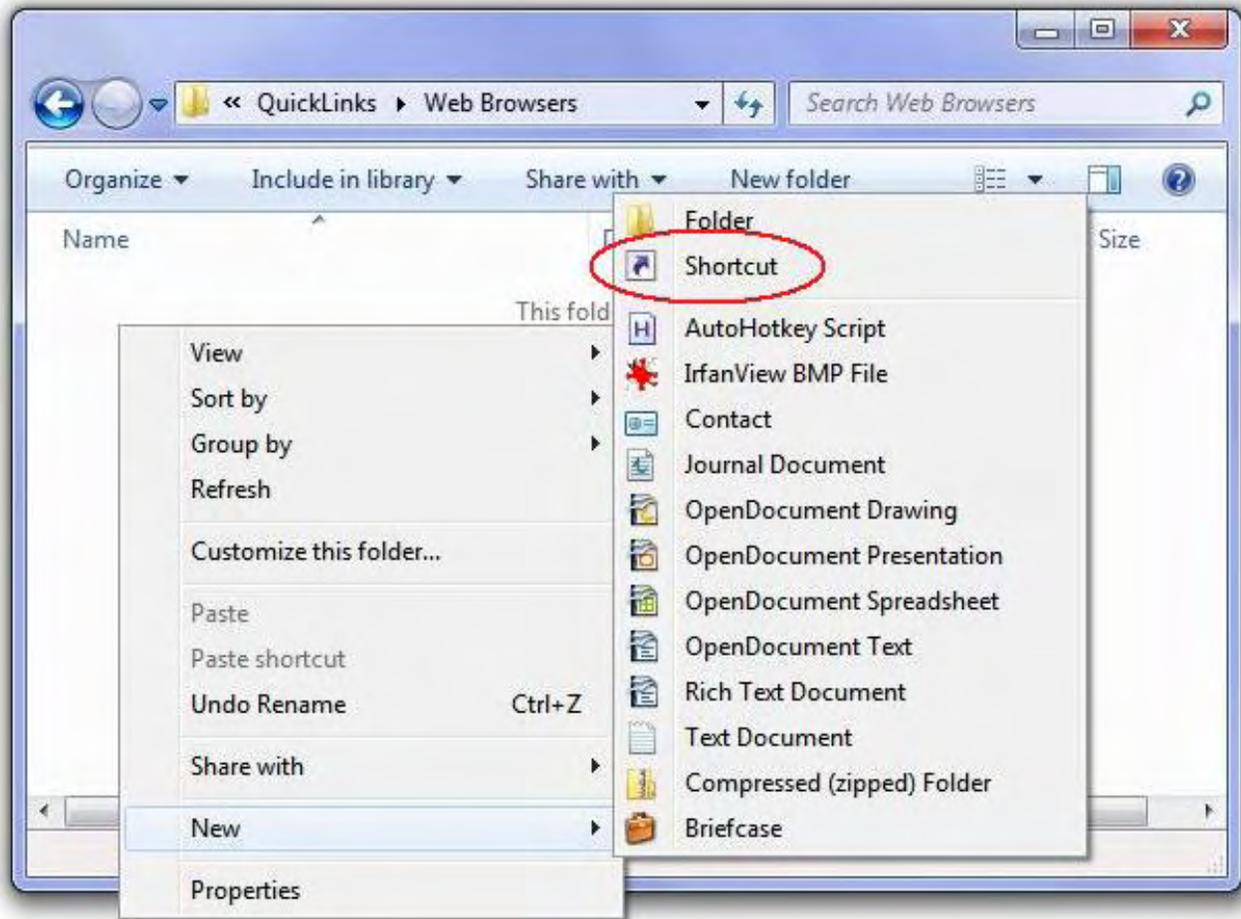
Figure 5. Right-click in the main file area of the QuickLinks category folder in Windows File Explorer, then select New => Shortcut from the menu. The Create Shortcut dialog will open.

An alternative method for opening the same Create Shortcut dialog is to press the keys ALT, F, W, S successively.

Paste the copied file path (URL for Web pages) into the "Type the location of the item:" field as shown in Figure 6, then click Next.
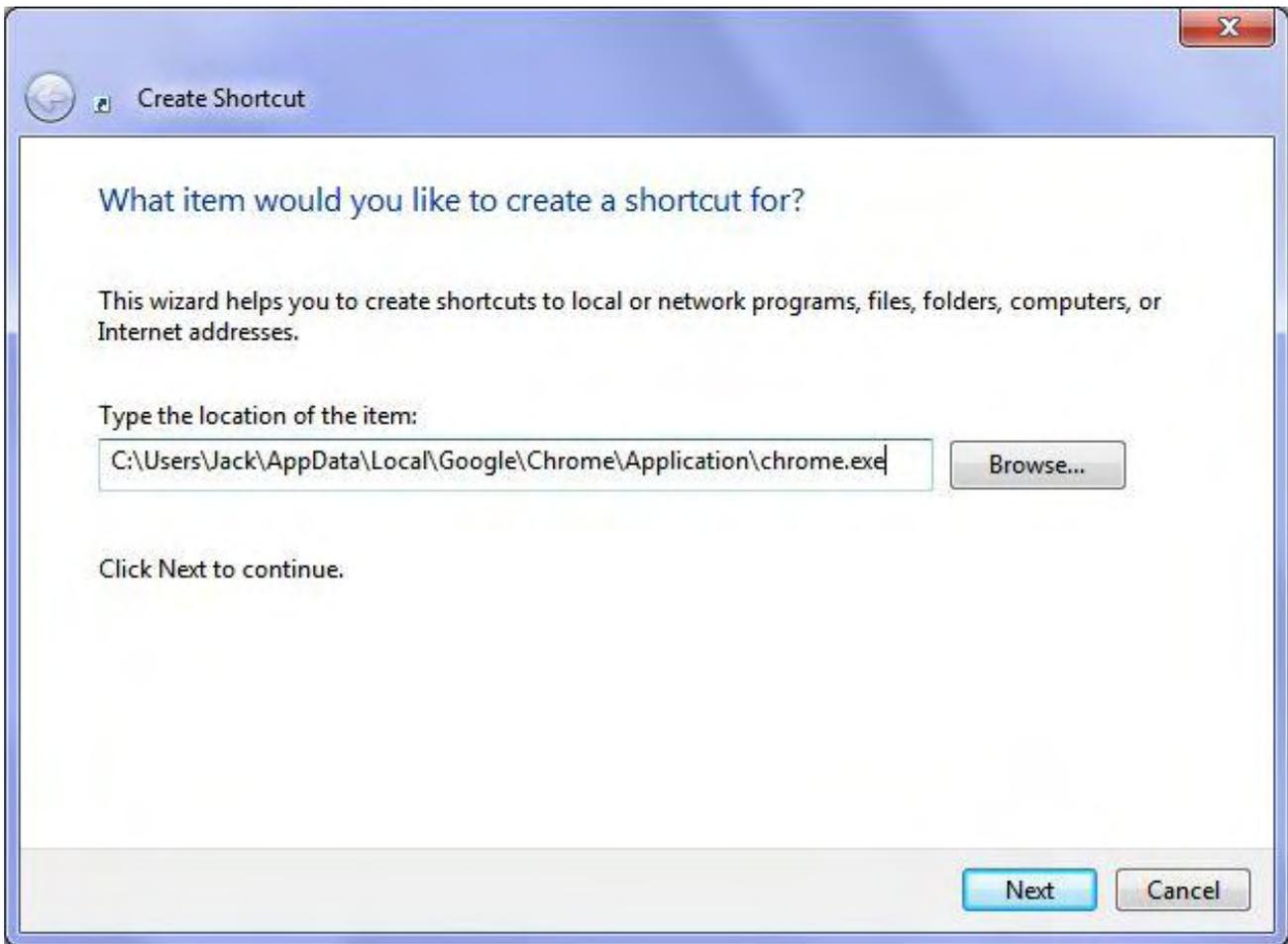
Figure 6. Paste (CTRL+V) or type the target file path or Web page URL in the location field.

In the next window, type the name you want assigned to the new shortcut (see Figure 7). This is the name which will appear in the QuickLinks menu. Clicking Finish creates the shortcut.
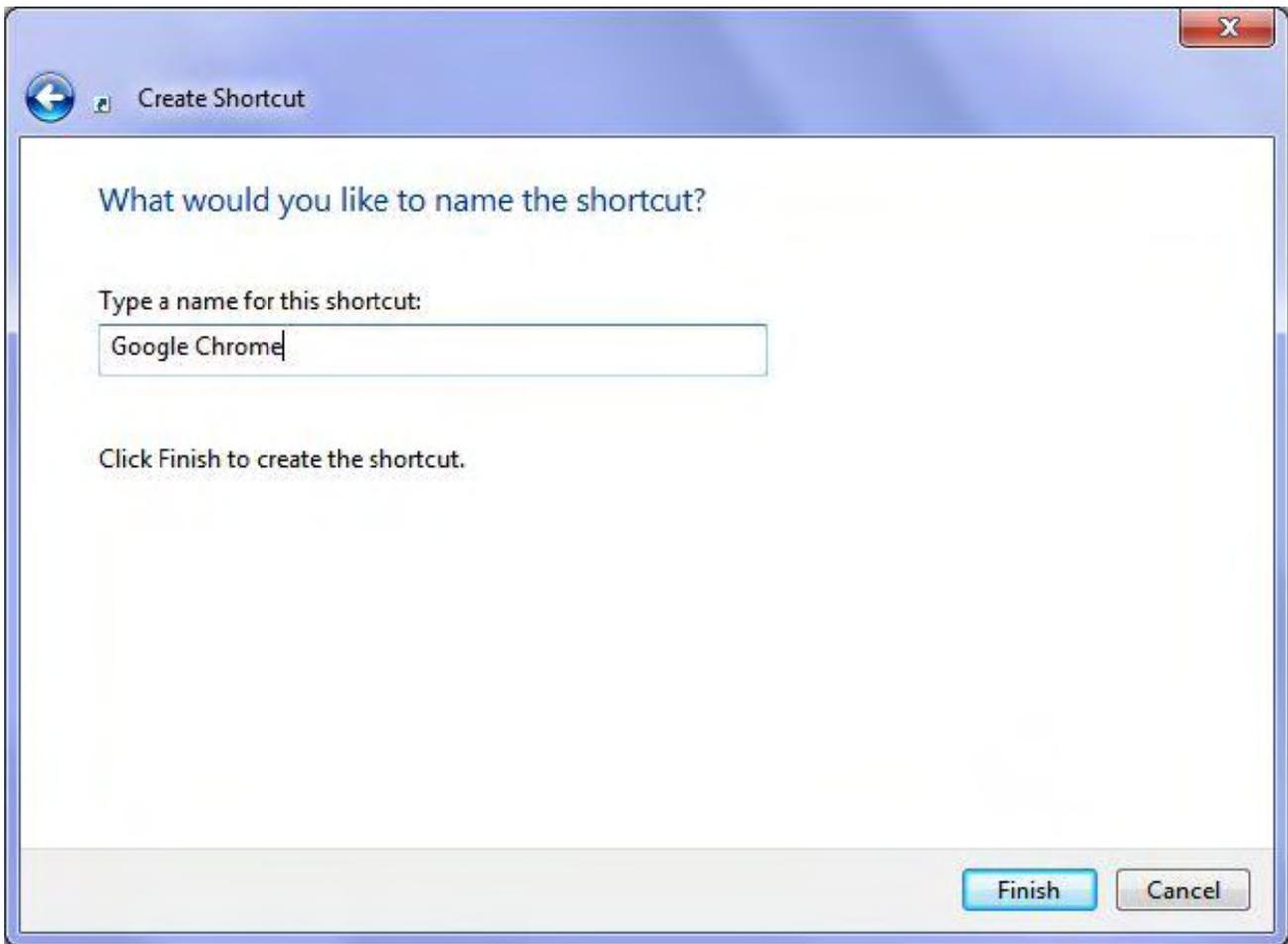
Figure 7. Type the name you want assigned to the new shortcut, then click Finish.

The QuickLinks menu does not update until the script is reloaded. Activate the menu (+Z), then select Reload QuickLinks, as shown in Figure 8 (left). On the next   +Z, hovering over the recently changed category folder displays the new addition(s). See Figure 8 (right).
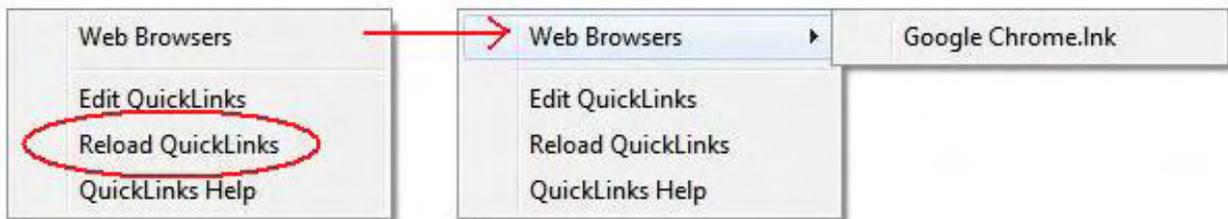
Figure 8. Reloading the QuickLinks menu (left) causes the empty category folder link to change to a menu (right).

Continue this process of adding category folders and shortcuts within each folder, until you're satisfied with your QuickLinks pop-up menu. The top level QuickLinks folder can always be opened with Edit QuickLinks option. Figure 9 shows my personal QuickLinks folder in its current state. Each category folder has at least one shortcut within it.
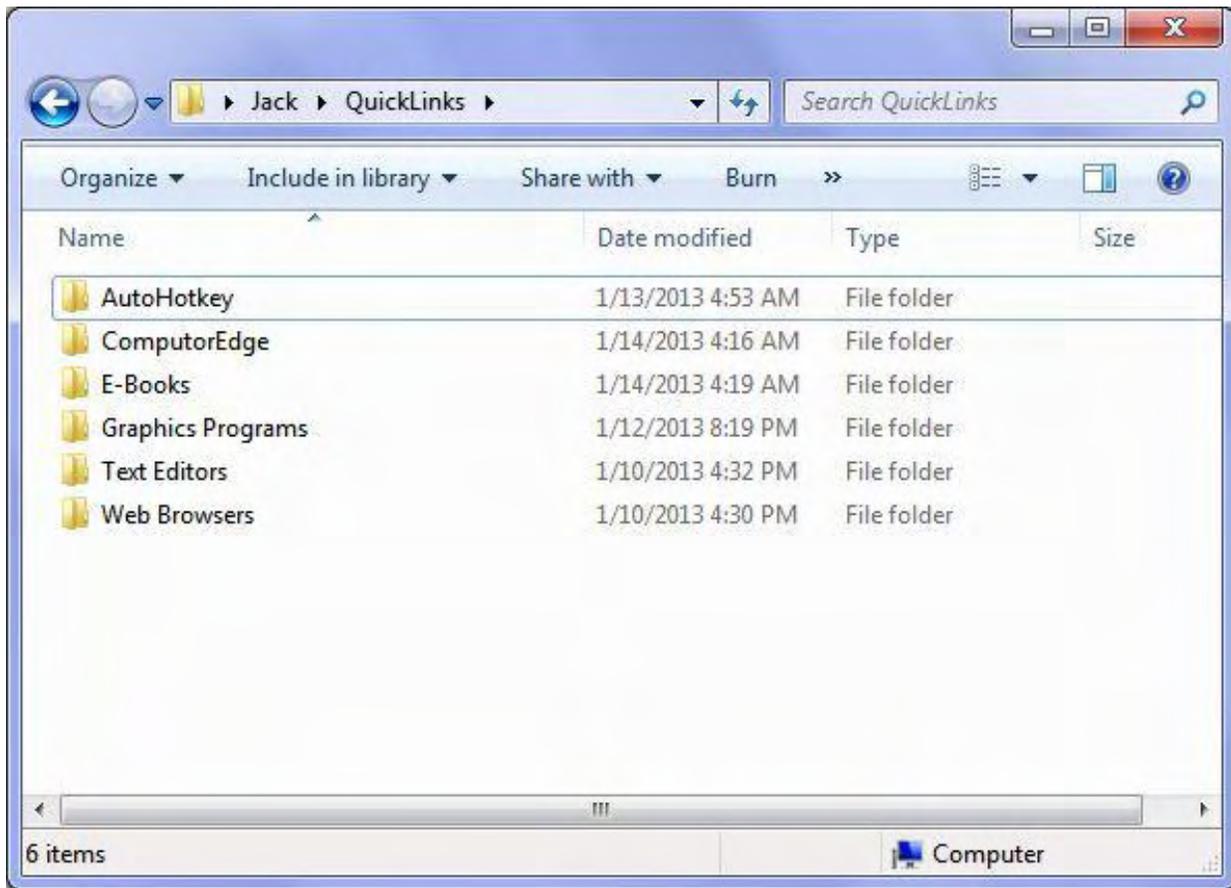
Figure 9. The QuickLinks folder open is Windows File Explorer showing the category folders.

When the QuickLinks menu is activated on my computer the links display as shown in Figure 10 (two examples shown). The QuickLinks Help option (circled in red in the bottom example) takes the user to this Web column— since it is the most extensive (and only) how-to on the topic.
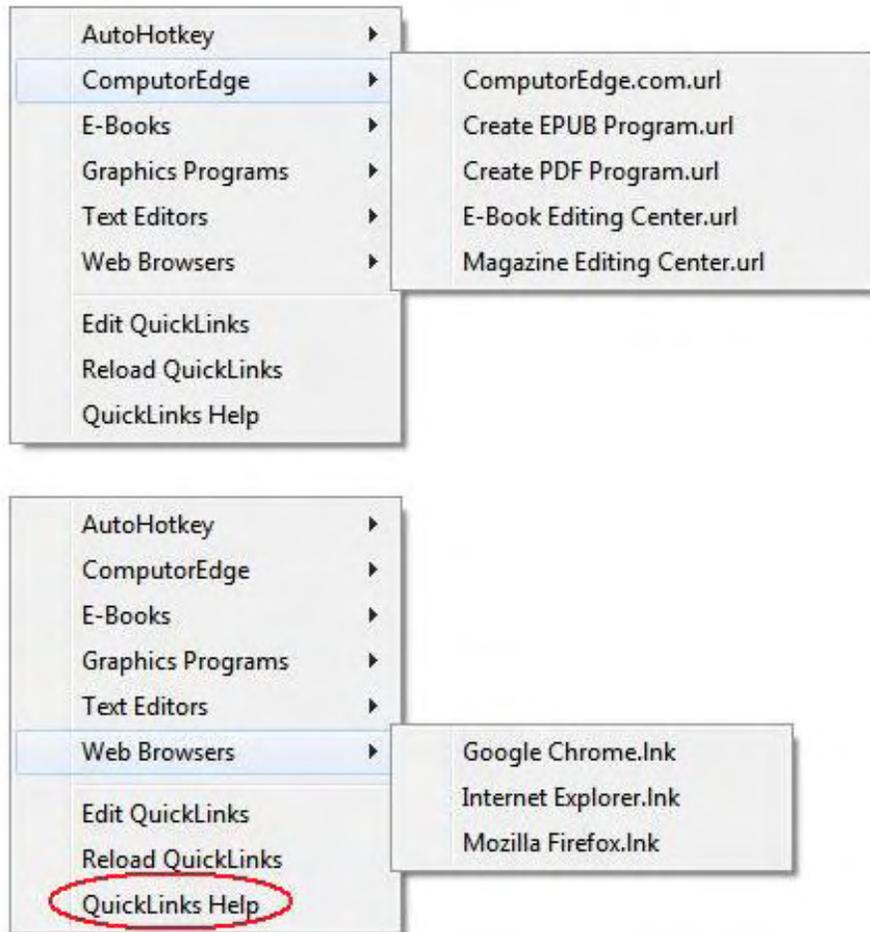
Figure 10. Two examples of Jack's personal QuickLinks menu.

You'll note that the link names in the category show the extensions (".url" for Web links, ".lnk" for regular shortcuts). While I could have written code to avoid displaying these extensions, for the sake of simplicity and the function of the AutoHotkey Menu tool, I left it as is.

Downloading and Installing QuickLinks

If QuickLinks sounds like an app that might be useful to you, then you can download it free directly from my Dropbox account (*www.dropbox.com/s/l3lzd6bvlh48slr/QuickLinks.zip*). You will need to save the ZIP file to your computer. (You will probably gets warning about the file coming from an unknown source. Don't worry, it's safe.) The program (EXE) file is compressed in a ZIP file and needs to be extracted. Open the ZIP folder (double click on QuickLinks.zip) to view the compressed the EXE file. To extract the QuickLinks.exe file from the ZIP folder either click "Extract all files" at the top or right-click and select "Extract All..." from the menu. See Figure 11. Save to a new or chosen folder.

1/18/13
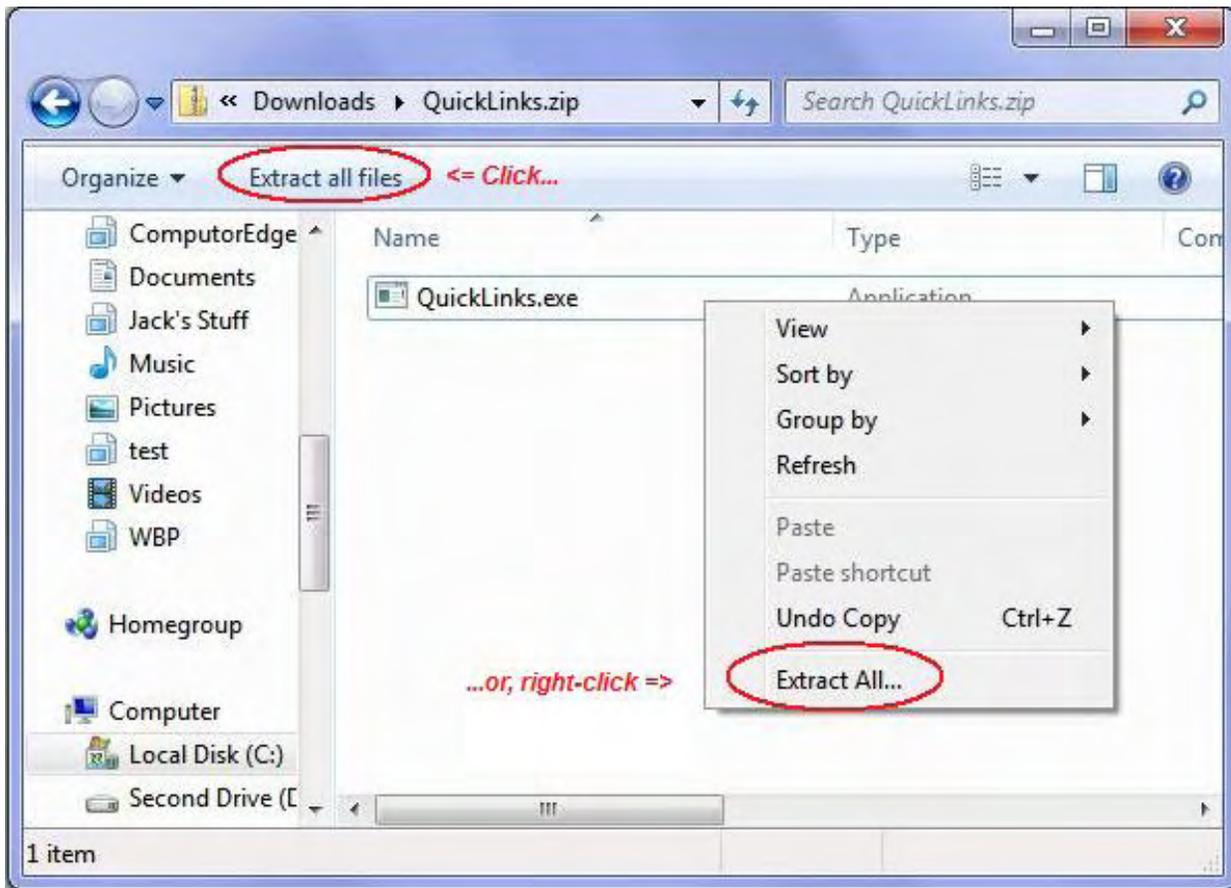
Figure 11. To extract the QuickLinks.exe file from the ZIP folder either click "Extra all files" at the top or right-click and select "Extract All..." from the menu.

Once QuickLinks.exe is extracted, in the new location double-click or right-click => Open to run the *QuickLinks.exe* file. The first time you run the program, since your computer doesn't know me, you will most likely get another warning from your security software. It's safe to run (as long as you get the app directly from my link and not some unknown source).

If you would like the QuickLinks app to run every time you use your computer, Run "shell:startup" to open the Startup folder and place the QuickLinks.exe file or a shortcut inside.

If you do give it a try and run into problems, please leave a comment or send an e-mail to ComputorEdge Editor (*ceeditor@computoredge.com*). In any case, let me know what you think. I'm not doing this as part of a software business. It is merely a sample app of one of the many things that AutoHotkey can do. If you would like to look at QuickLinks.exe's inner workings, then check out this week's AutoHotkey column. It is a fairly short, easily modified script. I also offer ideas on how to make it multi-layered, but that gets a little nerdy. If you find any bugs (always possible in new apps), please let me know right away.

If you like QuickLinks, please share it with your friends.

Jack is the publisher of *ComputorEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is *www.computoredge.com*. He can be reached at *ceeditor@computoredge.com*. Jack is now in the process of updating and compiling his hundreds of articles and columns into e-books. Currently available:

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

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

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

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

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

How to Make a Pop-up Menu for Programs, Web Sites and Files
"Reading Files from Folders to Build a Menu Structure with AutoHotkey" by Jack Dunning

Jack discusses how his new app QuickLinks was written with a short AutoHotkey script.

I was digging around the Web looking for another interesting AutoHotkey application when I came across the menu structure shown in Figure 1. I was intrigued because I had looked at all of the GUI (Graphic User Interface) objects, yet nothing resembled this. The pop-up has the look of a standard right-click menu, but is obviously tailored for a specific AutoHotkey task. The person posting the image raved about how it was helping his company. Unfortunately, as is so often true on the Web, the script writer didn't even give a hint as to how he did it.

Figure 1. Sample AutoHotkey menu structure.

Armed with only the image and the knowledge that it could be done, I started reviewing (again) the AutoHotkey commands (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands.htm*). It didn't take very long to find the two commands crucial

to this type of menu feature. (The "commands in large font are the most commonly used.") I soon narrowed down the application's tools to the MENU command (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/Menu.htm*) and the LOOP command—or more specifically the LOOP (files & folders) command (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/ LoopFile.htm*). I had previously noticed the MENU command and intended to do further investigation, but had let it slip to the back burner. Seeing an app which navigated through files had piqued my interest. While a pop-up menu with links might be convenient for any Windows user, this type of app would most help Windows 8 users who no longer have a Start Menu. I went to work on the QuickLinks app. Introduced as a free download in this week's Windows Tips and Tricks column, the MENU and LOOP commands are the backbone of this simple app (see Figure 2).
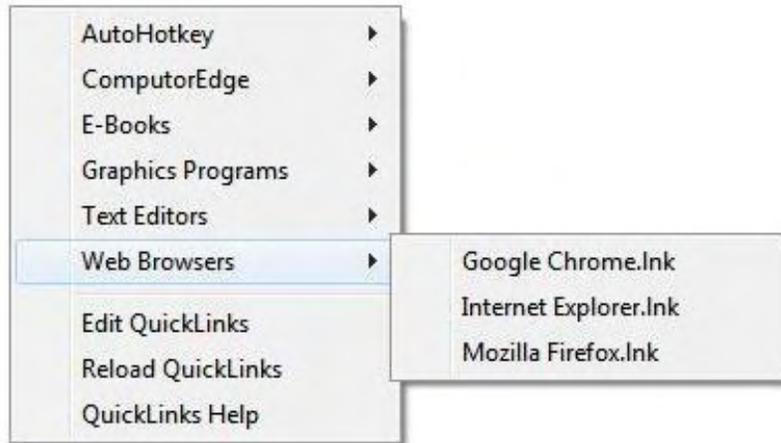
Figure 2. AutoHotkey QuickLinks.ahk menu.

While the QuickLinks.ahk script may look short and simple to some people, it is not a beginning level exercise. As well as the MENU command, the code employs a LOOP within a LOOP, a few conditional IFs, and a couple of programming tricks not well known to the novice. (For those *ComputorEdge* readers who are new to AutoHotkey scripts, many apps are easy to write and run on your Windows computer. See Installing AutoHotkey and Writing Your First Script (*www.computoredge.com/misc/Installing_AutoHotkey_and_writing_your_first_script.html*).) The entire script code for *QuickLinks.ahk* is shown in Figure 3. Key portions of the script are highlighted with red text.

```
IfNotExist, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\        1. Create QuickLinks
    FileCreateDir, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\    Folder

Loop, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\*.*, 2 , 0        2. Categories Loop
{
    Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %A_LoopFileName%, MenuHandler

    MainMenu := A_LoopFileName
    CountLoop := 0
    Loop, %A_LoopFileFullPath%\*.*, 1 , 0                3. Links Loop
    {
        if A_LoopFileAttrib contains H,R,S  ;Skip any file that is
          continue                          ; H, R, or S (System).

            Menu, %MainMenu%, Add, %A_LoopFileName%, MenuHandler
            CountLoop := 1
    }
    If (CountLoop = 1)
    {
        Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %MainMenu%, :%MainMenu%    Add Submenu
    }
    Else
    {
        Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %MainMenu%, FolderHandler    Open Folder
    }
}

Menu, QuickLinks, Add ;Add a separator bar

Menu, QuickLinks, Add, Edit QuickLinks, QuickLinksHandler    Standard
Menu, QuickLinks, Add, Reload QuickLinks, ReloadHandler      Links
Menu, QuickLinks, Add, QuickLinks Help, HelpHandler

Return

MenuHandler:
run, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\%A_ThisMenu%\%A_ThisMenuItem%
return

QuickLinksHandler:
run, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\
Return

FolderHandler:                                              Label
run, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\%A_ThisMenuItem%      Routines
Return

ReloadHandler:
Reload
Return

HelpHandler:
Run, http://webserver.computoredge.com/online.mvc?zone=SD
          &issue=3103&article=vista&src=qcklnks
Return

#z::Menu, QuickLInks, Show                                  Keyboard
!,::Menu, QuickLInks, Show                                  Combinations
```

Figure 3. AutoHotkey QuickLinks,ahk script code.

Creating the QuickLinks menu is the result of three primary steps. The first (1) is the creation of the QuickLinks folder (if it doesn't already exist). Second (2), the script loops through the QuickLinks folder listing only the category folders within it while creating menu items for the top level. Third (3), for each folder found at the top level the script loops through its files creating links for each to add to a submenu. If nothing is found in the subfolder, the category menu item action defaults to opening that folder.

Next in the script, the standard links are added at the bottom of the category menu followed by the labels (routines) containing the action executed when an item is selected from the pop-up menu. Lastly, the keyboard combinations are assigned; one for right-handed people (+Z) and one for left-handed people (ALT+Comma). For those who wish to copy-and-paste the code, the complete script (without standard boilerplate from a new AutoHotkey, AHK , file) can be found near the end of this column.

How the QuickLinks Script Works

Since QuickLinks uses a standard folder (QuickLinks) found in the user folder, the script employs the IfNotExist (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/IfExist.htm*) command to look for it. If the folder does not exist, it is created with FileCreateDir (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/FileCreateDir.htm*) command.

```
IfNotExist, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\
    FileCreateDir, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\
```
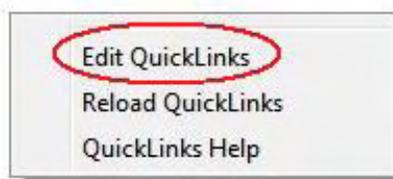
The script immediately starts the process of scanning the QuickLinks folder with the LOOP (files and folders) (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/LoopFile. htm*) command. If there is nothing in the folder, then it skips to the end where the standard menu items are added. At this time, when activate with one of the hotkey combinations (+Z or ALT+Comma), the QuickLinks menu will appear as shown in the image at the left.

LOOP is a powerful command for reading Windows file and folder names in Windows File Explorer. It automatically increments through the items in a folder providing data on each. The basic format of the command is simply Loop followed by the path of the target files. Standard wildcards such as "*" and "?" can be used in the folder/file path. The first LOOP command is as follows:

```
Loop, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\**.*, 2 , 0
{
    Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %A_LoopFileName%, MenuHandler
}
```

Note that the variable *A_UserName* is used in the loop path. This makes the app more universal and tailored for each user. The "*.*" is the wildcard for checking every folder/file. The parameter 2 found after the path and comma tells AutoHotkey to only retrieve folders. The default for this parameter is 0 which will retrieve only files. To retrieve both files and folders the value must be set to 1. The last parameter shown (set to 0) tells AutoHotkey not to look beyond this current folder. If set to 1, the LOOP command will continue recursively looking into all subfolders.

The LOOP command uses the standard curly brackets ({}) to enclose the code executed each time the loop is incremented to the next file or folder. In this case the primary function of the loop is to create a menu item for each category folder. The first step in creating a menu is to ADD the menu items. In this case, a menu item named with the folder name (the value of *A_LoopFileName*, the variable which stores the name of the current folder or file) is added to a menu named *QuickLinks*. If this menu item, as it is now, is left on the final menu, the label (subroutine) *MenuHandler*, found later in the script, would execute when clicked on the activated menu. In this script, each category menu item is changed later depending upon whether there are files or folders within this folder.

I see now that I could have saved a couple of lines of code which occur later in the script by immediately assigning the FolderHandler label rather than MenuHandler label—which is only needed in the submenus. It's not unusual to start down one path, then later realize that there is a simpler way to reach your goal. A person doesn't always see all the implications of his approach until he actually gets there. Rather than rework it now, I'll use it as a learning point. More on that later.

Left alone, this loop would create a menu of the folders located in the QuickLinks folder. The next step is to add a second loop within the first loop (inside the curly brackets of the first loop after the MENU statement) so that each time a folder is found it immediately looks for files within that folder:

```
MainMenu := A_LoopFileName
Loop, %A_LoopFileFullPath%\*.*, 1 , 0
{
  if A_LoopFileAttrib contains H,R,S  ;Skip any file that is
    continue                          ; H, R, or S.
      Menu, %MainMenu%, Add, %A_LoopFileName%, MenuHandler
}
```

The variable *MainMenu* is created to save the name of the category item. Once within the second loop *A_LoopFileName* will take on the value of each item located in that folder as it increments through them. *MainMenu* is used as the name for the submenu when the items are added.

This second LOOP command uses the parameter 1 to retrieve all folders and files. Unlike the listing in Windows File Explorer, the AutoHotkey LOOP command, when used with files, retrieves all files regardless of their attributes —including hidden and system files. To ensure that none of these types of files are included in the new menu, a conditional IF (if A_LoopFileAttrib contains H,R,S) is included to skip those files by executing the CONTINUE (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/Continue.htm*) command which skips the loop to the next file/folder. The H (Hidden), R (Read Only), and S (System) parameters must be separated by commas with no spaces between them.

The MENU command is almost identical to the command in the first loop except that *MainMenu* (the category folder name) is used as the menu name rather than QuickLinks. Once exiting the loop all of the relevant files have been added to the menu *MainMenu*, but they need to be added to QuickLinks as a submenu.

```
    Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %MainMenu%, :%MainMenu%
```

There are limited number of options for types of items when adding to an AutoHotkey menu. The first is a label (to run a subroutine) as shown in the first couple of examples. The second is to add a menu as a submenu to an already existing menu item. This is done by place a colon in front of the name of the higher level menu item name (:%MainMenu%). A menu item can either execute a label or contain a submenu—not both. The line of code above replaces the original menu item (which includes a label) and changes it to the prompt for a submenu. A error in this script can occurs when no files are found inside the category folder while attempting to add a submenu to the top level menu.

There are a number of different ways to deal with this situation. One is to add an item to the submenu before entering the second loop—possibly an item which would open the category folder. Another option is to add a toggle which would only trigger if an item is found in the category folder. I choose the second option only because I thought of it first. If I were doing it now, I would probably go with the first option and add a link which opens the category folder for editing to every submenu. (Maybe I'll do this in a future version.)

Adding a toggle or switch is a common programming trick when the program needs to know if a loop or conditional is entered. To implement my toggle solution I created the variable *CountLoop* and set the value to 0:

```
CountLoop := 0
Loop, ...
   {
    ...
    ...
    ...
   CountLoop := 1
   }
If (CountLoop = 1)
  {
```

```
      Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %MainMenu%, :%MainMenu%
    }
  Else
   {
    Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %MainMenu%, FolderHandler
   }
```

If there is a file inside the category folder, the loop will run and set the value of *CountLoop* to 1. On exiting the loop, IF *CountLoop* equals 1, the submenu is added to QuickLinks. If not (Else), the category menu is set to the label FolderHandler which will cause the folder to open when clicked.

This is where I could have completely eliminated the ELSE portion of the conditional by setting the label on the first MENU statement to FolderHandler. Then that MENU statement would only need to be changed if files are found in the category folder, thus turning it into a submenu. Of course, I could completely eliminate the need for the CountLoop *toggle and conditional by using the second option I mentioned above and creating the item for editing the category folder in every submenu prior to entering the second loop.*

The third possiblity for the MENU ADD command is to add a separator bar by leaving the label/submenu space blank:

```
Menu, QuickLinks, Add ;Add a separator bar
```

The last three lines of code before the RETURN and subroutines add the menu items which appear on every QuickLinks menu:

```
 Menu, QuickLinks, Add, Edit QuickLinks, QuickLinksHandler
 Menu, QuickLinks, Add, Reload QuickLinks, ReloadHandler
 Menu, QuickLinks, Add, QuickLinks Help, HelpHandler
```

The labels (each followed by a colon) contain the actions (subroutines) initiated when the menu items are selected. Note that they all use the RUN command with the exception of the one RELOAD command.

```
MenuHandler:
run, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\%A_ThisMenu%\%A_ThisMenuItem%
return
QuickLinksHandler:
run, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\
Return
FolderHandler:
run, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\%A_ThisMenuItem
%
Return
ReloadHandler:
Reload
Return
HelpHandler:
Run, http://webserver.computoredge.com/online.mvc?zone=SD
           &issue=3103&article=vista&src=qcklnks
Return
```

The MENU command only provides three variable for returning data when a menu item is selected: *A_ThisMenu*

(name of the menu selected), *A_ThisMenuItem* (name of the menu item selected), and *A_ThisMenuItemPos* (numeric position of the menu item in the menu). The first two are used in the subroutines to build the paths needed to launch the shortcuts. Since these values are based upon the actual folder and file names, the commands for opening the shortcuts can be built on the fly using the same label.

The purpose of the RELOAD subroutine is to allow the update of the menu after changes are made in the folder.

The last two lines of the script set up the hotkey combinations for showing the menu:

```
#z::Menu, QuickLinks, Show   ;right-hand mouse
!,::Menu, QuickLinks, Show   ;left-hand mouse
```

The menu will not display until the MENU SHOW command is executed. The hotkeys were selected based upon their proximity to the right and left hand, depending upon which hand the mouse is operated with.

The entire script is found here for copying and pasting:

```
IfNotExist, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\
    FileCreateDir, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\
Loop, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\*.*, 2 , 0
{
   Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %A_LoopFileName%, MenuHandler
   MainMenu := A_LoopFileName
   CountLoop := 0
   Loop, %A_LoopFileFullPath%\*.*, 1 , 0
   {
     if A_LoopFileAttrib contains H,R,S  ;Skip any file that is
       continue                          ; H, R, or S (System).
         Menu, %MainMenu%, Add, %A_LoopFileName%, MenuHandler
         CountLoop := 1
   }
   If (CountLoop = 1)
    {
      Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %MainMenu%, :%MainMenu%
    }
   Else
    {
     Menu, QuickLinks, Add, %MainMenu%, FolderHandler
    }
}
 Menu, QuickLinks, Add ;Add a separator bar
 Menu, QuickLinks, Add, Edit QuickLinks, QuickLinksHandler
 Menu, QuickLinks, Add, Reload QuickLinks, ReloadHandler
 Menu, QuickLinks, Add, QuickLinks Help, HelpHandler
Return
MenuHandler:
run, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\%A_ThisMenu%\%A_ThisMenuItem%
return
QuickLinksHandler:
run, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\
Return
FolderHandler:
run, C:\Users\%A_UserName%\QuickLinks\%A_ThisMenuItem
%
```

```
Return
ReloadHandler:
Reload
Return
HelpHandler:
Run, http://webserver.computoredge.com/online.mvc?zone=SD
          &issue=3103&article=vista&src=qcklnks
Return
#z::Menu, QuickLinks, Show
!,::Menu, QuickLinks, Show
```

QuickLinks Notes

One question I asked myself was, "Why not subcategories?" The current QuickLinks app only works at two level: the categories level and the links within the categories.

To increase the capabilities of the QuickLinks app means adding more complication to the script. The MENU command only operates at two levels: menu and menu items. When a selection is made only the name of the menu, the name of the menu item, and menu position are available. If the menu is to drill down further than those two levels, then unless special provisions are made for tracking path data, the intermediate level path data will be lost. The additional levels either need to be hard coded into the script with specific path data or global variables (arrays) need to be created with unique (recall-able) names.

This tracking of path data can be done a number of different ways, but to maintain flexibility for the user some type of array structure based upon the menu position variable may be the best bet. That would require that the index (concatenated string of successive levels) would need to appear in some form in the menu item name. This is the only way that I can see to easily tie the menu items to the array variable. An assignable variable as part of the MENU ADD command would have resolved this issue, but that does not appear to exist in AutoHotkey.

As another alternative, storing more complete path information at each successive level is conceivable, but this would require displaying that path information in the menu itself. At each level the menu drills down, the displayed menu name gets longer.

Another complication for adding more layers is the handling of the increased number of LOOP commands within loops within loops. The best option might be to put the internal loops into a function which calls itself as it drills down through the folder tree structure. If this is done with a function, the array variables would need to be declared global as they are created at each level. Otherwise the data would be lost in local variables.

Wow, I just read over the last few paragraphs. "What a nerd!" If you made it this far then more power to you. I think I may have gone beyond the scope of what I planned to accomplish here. However, if you have any thoughts or questions, I'd sure like to hear them.

The LOOP (files and folders) and MENU commands are two more power tools to add to your bag of AutoHotkey tricks. When combined with other tools many more apps are possible.

Jack is the publisher of *ComputorEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is *www.computoredge.com*. He can be reached at *ceeditor@computoredge.com*. Jack is now in the process of updating and compiling his hundreds of articles and columns into e-books. Currently available:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Blame the Windows Bashers" by Wally Wang

Blame the Windows Bashers; Tracking Trends with Google; Android Struggles; Present Your Ideas with ScrollShow; Handwriting on the iPad; Make (a Little) Money; QuickTime Player on Macs.

MarketWatch reports that in the last quarter of 2012, PC sales dropped (*articles.marketwatch.com/2013-01-10/industries/36255426_1_pc-sales-pc-market-market-research-firm*) by 6.4 percent while Reuters reports that for the first time in five years, PC sales dipped during the holiday buying season (*www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/11/pc-sales-down-for-holidays_n_2452480.html*). The reason for the drop in PC sales is obvious. If the news media would stop reporting unpleasant facts about dismal PC sales, PC sales would suddenly take off. Therefore the real problem must be all those Windows bashers in the news media.

Of course, blaming Windows bashers for the dismal state of PC sales is like blaming the Mayan calendar for the end of the world. The real problem is that as evidence piles up that PC sales have been declining over time, it gets harder to keep dismissing these facts.

At first, everyone blamed the recession for low PC sales (despite the fact that Macintosh and iPad sales kept climbing during the same recession). Then people blamed the hard disk shortage in Thailand for low PC sales (despite the fact that Macintosh computers also use hard disks and kept selling). Finally, people claimed that PC sales were down because everyone was waiting for Windows 8. When Windows 8 appeared and PC sales remained low even during the holiday buying season, we can now expect people to blame low PC sales on the Mayan calendar, the Egyptian pyramids, and the statues on Easter Island.

The fact is that PC sales are dropping because people can get the majority of their computing tasks done with smartphones and tablets. Desktop and laptop computers simply can't compete against smartphones and tablets.

Anyone remember when computer stores were everywhere and PC-related magazines were loaded with new information about the latest computer technology? Now most computer stores are gone and most PC-related magazines are gone or shriveled up to the thickness of a pamphlet. The excitement has largely left the desktop/laptop computer market.

There are two clear paths to the mobile computing market. One, you can follow the established leaders and get an Android or iOS device. Two, you can follow another operating system like Blackberry OS or Windows 8/RT, and hope that they can grow (or at least survive) so you'll be able to continue using them for years to come.

The big risk with Windows 8/RT is that it's trying to bridge the gap between desktop computing and mobile computing without compromise, yet by its very nature it can't help but offer compromises. Desktop users find the tile interface clumsy to us without a touchscreen while mobile computing users find the transition between the tile interface and the ordinary Windows desktop interface jarring.

As the world shifts to mobile computing, you can decide if you want to use a device designed strictly for mobile computing or a device designed to do both desktop and mobile computing at the same time. For many people, the desktop computing compromises of Windows 8/RT simply hold them back from fully embracing the mobile computing world.

Expect PC sales to continue dropping over time. It really has less to do with Windows 8/RT and more to do with people wanting a dedicated mobile computing device that can give them benefits now, not later in some mythical future. As the PC world continues to crumble, you can spot further evidence of decline in the few remaining Barnes & Noble bookstores and notice how few PC-related magazines you see remaining. Even *PC World* magazine reports that PC sales are dropping across Europe (*www.pcworld.com/article/248531/pc_sales_drop_in_europe. html*).

You can also visit the Bing search engine and type in "PC sales." Now when you see a list of articles about declining PC sales, you can write angry letters to Microsoft (the owner of Bing) and accuse them of Windows bashing by showing you information you don't want to acknowledge. That won't change anything, but it will probably make you feel good about yourself for another five seconds until another wave of declining PC sales appears in the news all over again.

In the meantime, you can read about how Kodak recently sold their digital imaging patents (*finance.yahoo.com/ news/kodak-patent-sale-plan-gets-183255988.html*) for $525 million, although they were hoping to get as much as $2 billion. Anyone remember when Kodak dominated their market and nobody could imagine that they would ever not be the leader in photography forever? Following Kodak's demise should be instructional to everyone, except for those who deliberately choose to ignore the lessons of history.

Tracking Trends with Google

Tracking trends is easy; just read the news and notice the frequency of certain stories over others. A long time ago, everyone was talking about MySpace. When stories about MySpace faded, new stories about Facebook appeared. Just by noticing those trends, you could spot the shift from MySpace to Facebook.

That's the basis behind a book called *Pulse (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B004W3GFFU/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_tl? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B004W3GFFU*)* by Douglas W. Hubbard. The basic idea is that traditional surveys and polls take too long and aren't as accurate as simply watching trends in real-time on the Internet. By tracking Twitter, people can monitor flu outbreaks in different areas as well as home buying patterns.

Besides tracking social media networks like Twitter or Facebook, you can also track trends using Google. People often search for information before taking action, so it's possible to determine dips in unemployment just by tracking job searches, or predict stock prices by following which companies people are most interested in.

To see for yourself, visit Google Trends (*www.google.com/trends/*) and type in a word or phrase to see how its popularity as a search term has fared over the years. Start by searching the term "Microsoft" and you'll see that back in 2005, many people searched for that term, but over the years, the number of people searching for that word has steadily dropped.
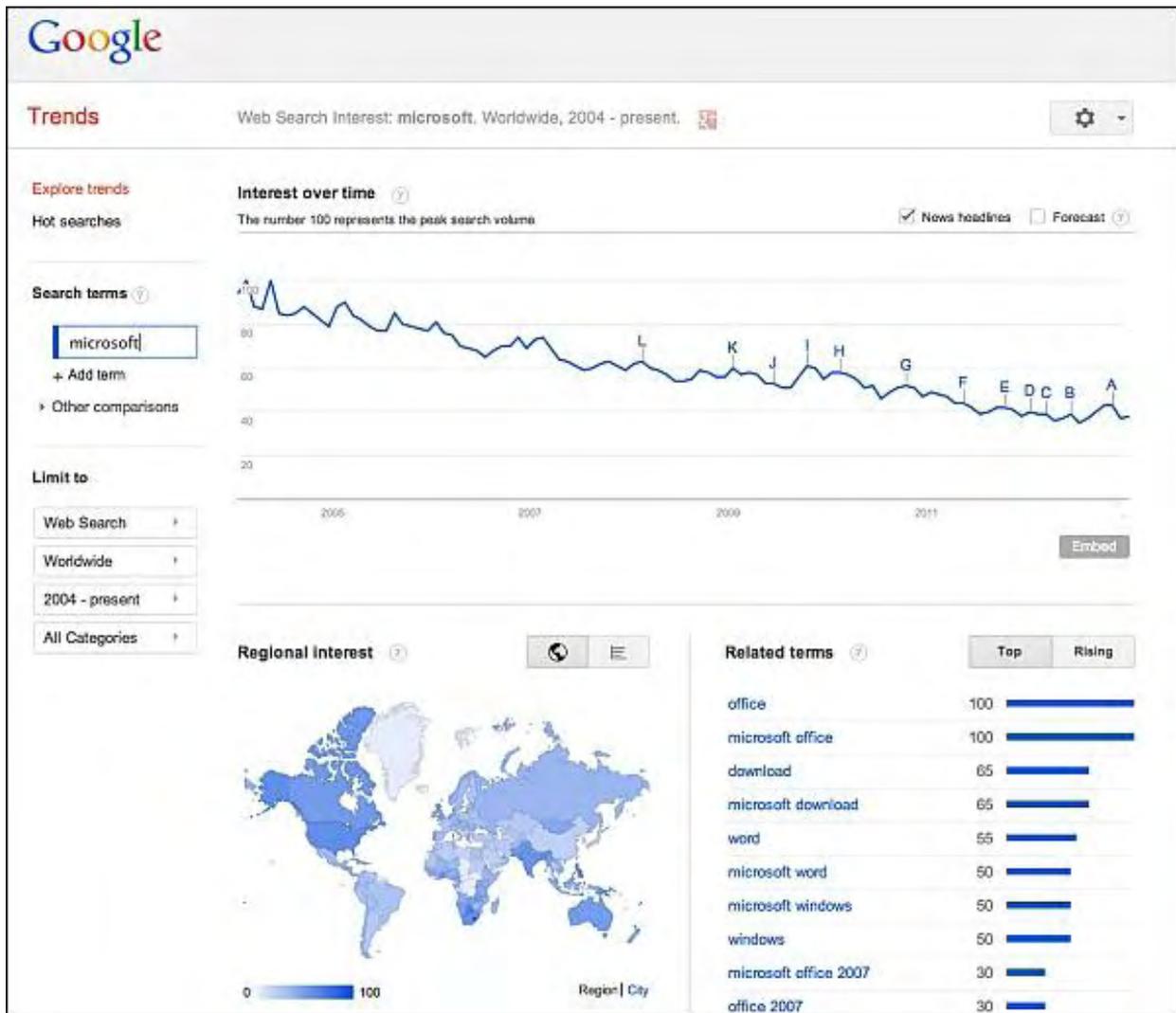
Figure 1. Google Trends shows that interest in the term "Microsoft" has steadily been dropping.

Now search for "Apple" and Google Trends will show you how more people have been searching for that term since 2005. With more people searching for "Apple" compared to "Microsoft" over time, this could indicate the shift away from a Microsoft-dominated world.
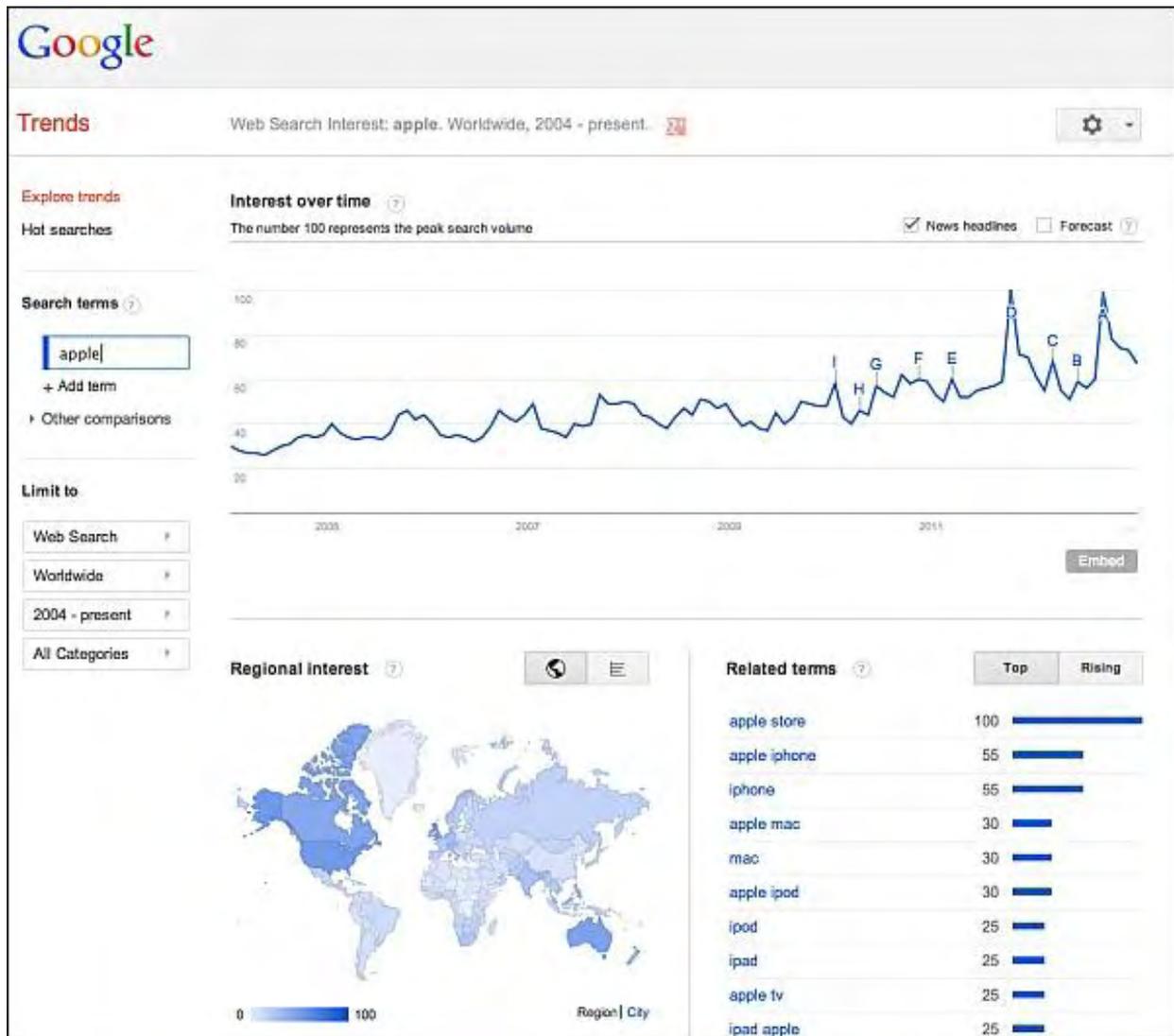
Figure 2. Google Trends shows more people steadily searching for "Apple" over time.

Search Google Trends for "MySpace" and you'll see that interest in searching Google for "MySpace" peaked around 2007 and steadily declined from there. That seems to reflect the gradual shift away from MySpace over time.
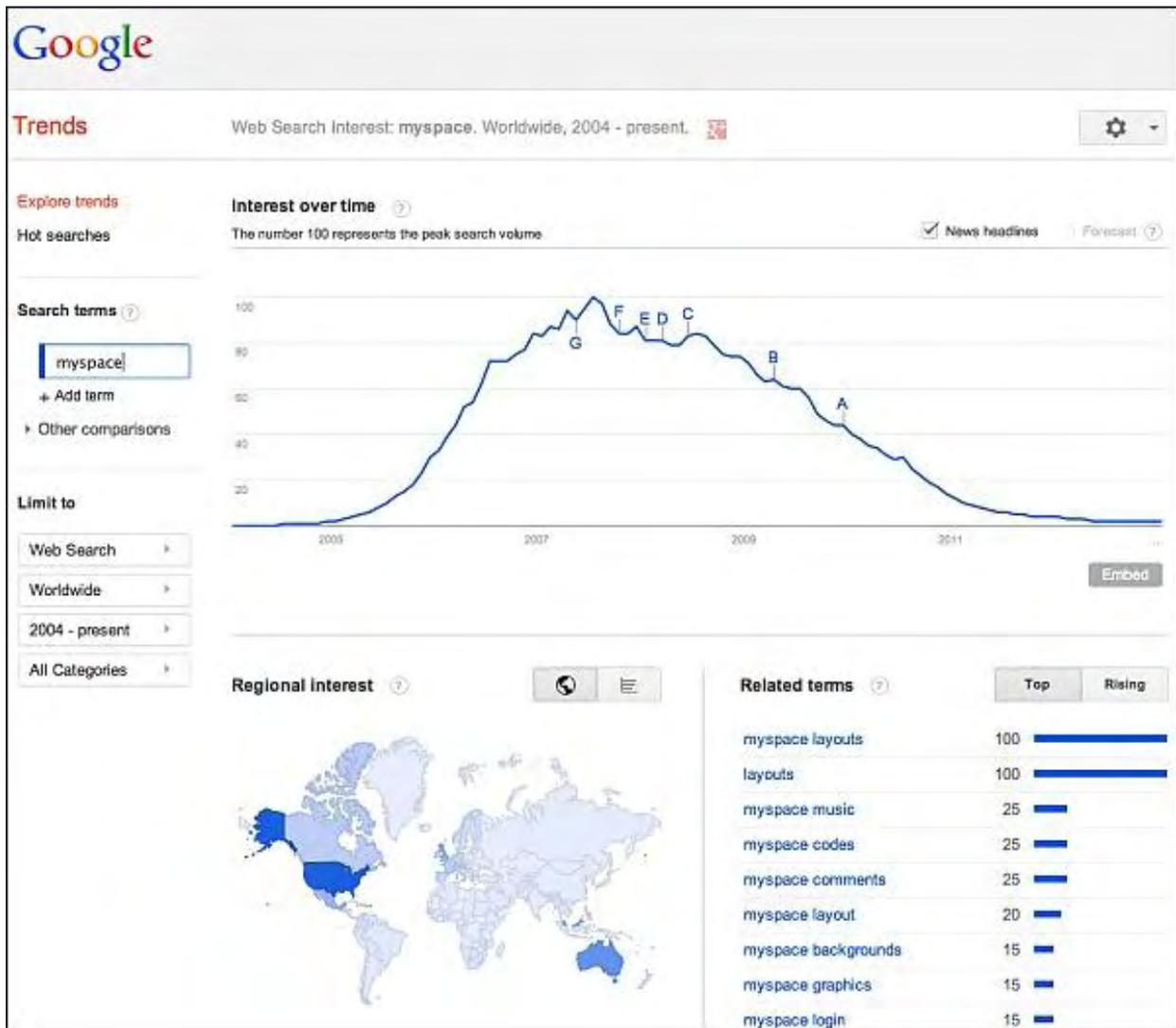
Figure 3. Google Trends highlights the peak popularity of "MySpace."

Now search Google Trends for "Facebook" and you'll see how Facebook gradually became popular in 2009 and kept increasing from that point on, which basically mirrors the growing popularity of Facebook among the public.

Figure 4. Google Trends shows the rise of "Facebook" over time.

Use Google Trends to analyze any two topics such as tracking the declining popularity of Paris Hilton to the growing popularity of Kim Kardashian. Google Trends gives you a way to objectively measure the popularity of various search terms. Of course, if you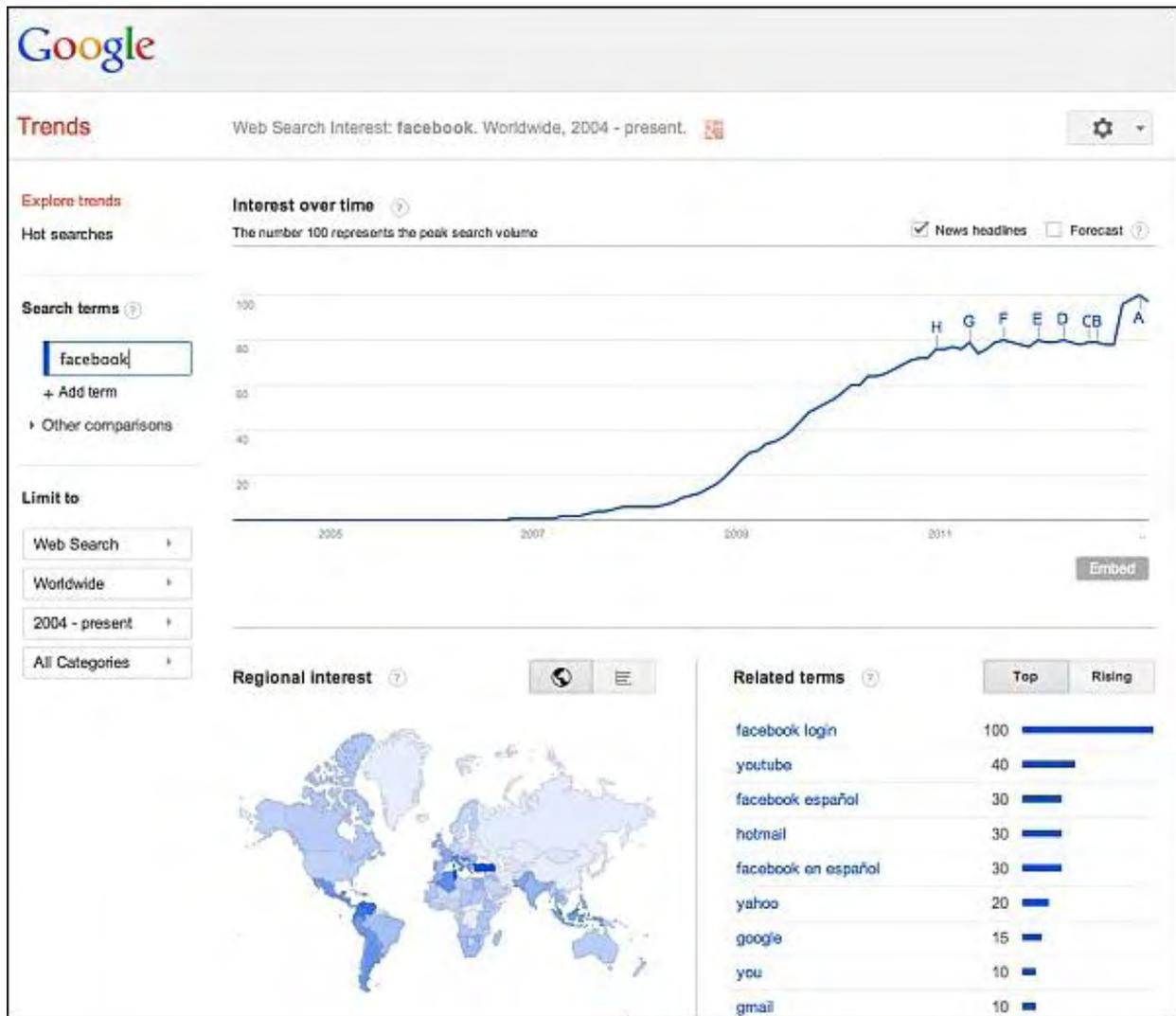 don't like the trends that Google Trends might show you, you can always blame Google for unfairly bashing your beliefs for how you think the world should really be.

Android Struggles

One of the most curious paradoxes is that Android dominates the smartphone market, yet iOS dominates the profits along with Internet usage and app buying. Logically, you would think that Android's huge user base would translate into more people buying apps, shopping, or just browsing the Internet but reports consistently claim that iOS users are more active (*gigaom.com/2012/11/26/why-are-android-users-less-engaged-than-ios-users/*) than Android users.

Several theories abound, but none seem convincing by themselves. Perhaps in combination they all somehow combine to keep Android users from doing much with their smartphones while iOS users cheerfully exploit every feature of their iPhones.

One theory is that Android is simply harder to use than iOS, although how tapping on an icon on Android or iOS can be that much harder seems difficult to believe. Another theory says that Android users are more price conscious so they are less likely to shop online, but that doesn't explain why they wouldn't browse the Internet more often anyway.

Android fragmentation could be partially responsible for Android's woes. Smartphones using Android often develop

their own interface layer so a smartphone by Samsung running Android won't always look or behave exactly the same as an Android phone made by HTC. Features in one Android phone often don't appear in Android phones by another manufacturer.

For the past year, *TNW Magazine* has been releasing an iPad-only digital issue (*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%252Ftnw-magazine%252Fid481037450%253Fmt%253D8%2526uo%253D4% 2526partnerId%253D30*). Eventually, the company decided to make an Android edition (*thenextweb.com/ insider/2012/12/30/no-more-tnw-magazine-for-android/*) of their magazine, but that's when the problems started.

The magazine editors said, "In theory you simply adjust for a different format and platform and do a new export. But then trouble starts. As one developer put it to us: 'You make a beautiful magazine for the iPad, and then you dumb it down for Android.'

"That meant removing movies, sound, interactivity and content. But even then we had to deal with frequent crashes, a less intuitive interface and a platform that is even more fragmented than iOS."

The magazine estimates that "Turning an iPad retina magazine version into a iPad regular or iPhone version takes a few hours at the most. Turning an iPad magazine into an Android magazine takes 3 to 4 days."

Even worse, for every Android user who downloaded the digital magazine, 80 iOS users downloaded an issue. For all that extra work dealing with Android, *TNW Magazine* simply wasn't finding an audience with Android users. Eventually *TNW Magazine* gave up and decided to focus on creating a better iOS magazine and abandoning Android altogether.

Android so closely resembles iOS that there should be no reason why Android can't enjoy the same level of support and popularity as iOS. Yet the fact remains that Android users as a whole seem to lag behind iOS. Whatever the reason, it can't help but hurt Android in the long run. Google better keep updating Android, but the success of Android needs to go beyond simply flooding the market with Android devices running a half dozen different versions that often can't be updated.

Perhaps the real problem isn't Android but the manufacturers who have the financial incentive not to bother keeping Android up to date on their products. Once they sell you an Android product, too many manufacturers simply hope you'll go away until it's time to buy another Android device from them all over again. Such lack of customer service might be the real reason why Android continues struggling against iOS.

Present Your Ideas with ScrollShow

The most common way to present ideas on an iPad is through Keynote, which creates presentations that mimic a slideshow. While this can be adequate, you might want to look at another presentation program called ScrollShow (*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%252Fscrollshow%252Fid452980514%253Fmt%253D8%2526uo%253D4% 2526partnerId%253D30*). Unlike Keynote that mimics separate slides, ScrollShow mimics a long scroll that you view by scrolling left or right.
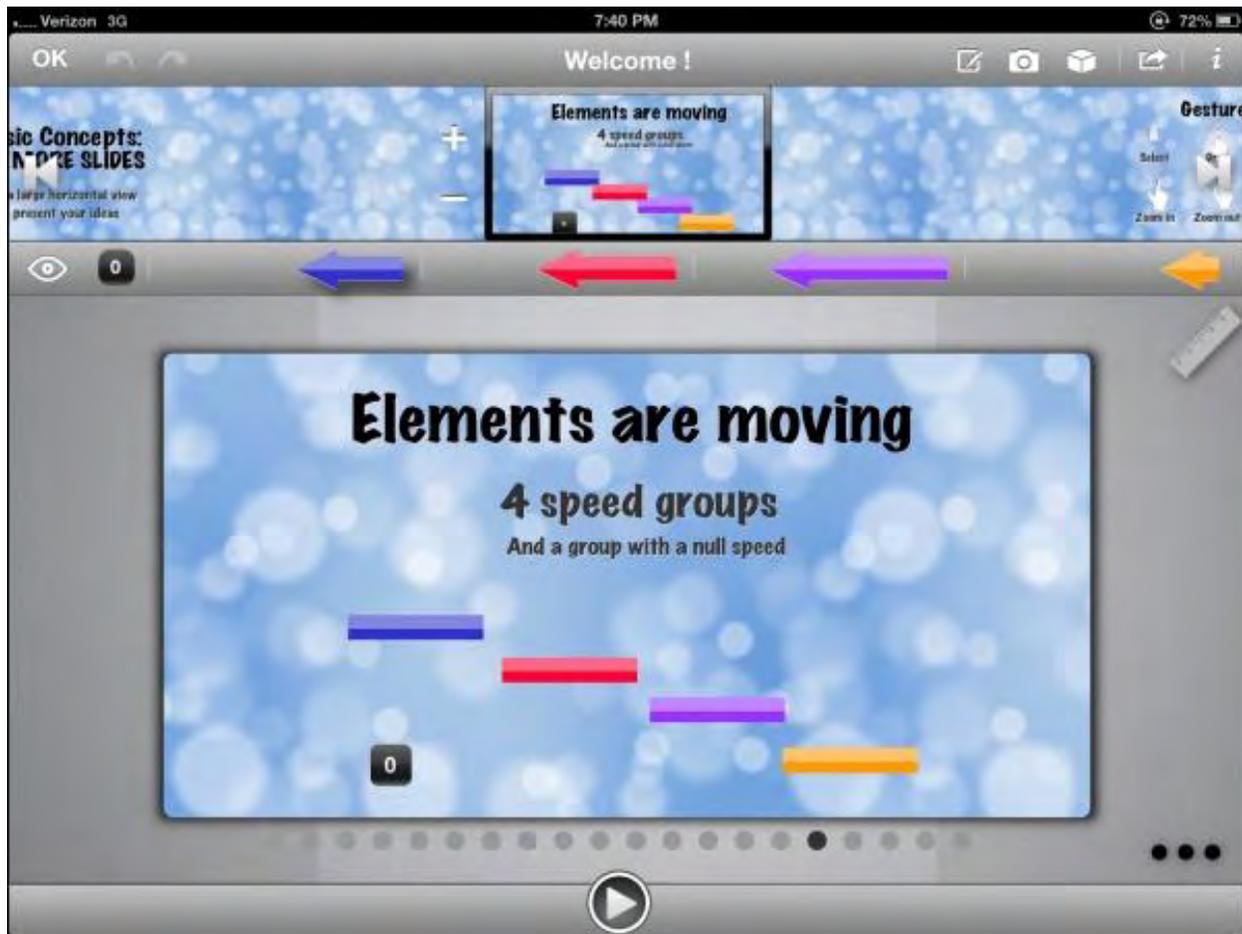
Figure 5. ScrollShow lets you place text and pictures on a long scroll to view.

Visually, the effect is nearly identical to flipping through multiple Keynote presentation slides, but ScrollShow offers the ability to assign different speeds to your text and graphics. That way when you scroll to display your next slide, the information appears on the screen at slightly different speeds. The effect sounds simple, but when seen in person (*scrollshow.com*), it makes the presentation more visually interesting to watch.

Like Keynote, ScrollShow offers different themes to choose. Then it's just a matter of adding text and graphics, along with assigning different speeds to each chunk of information to create interesting visual effects as part of your presentation.

ScrollShow is a deceptively simple presentation program that you might find more flexible than Keynote. The advantage of Keynote is that you can always export your presentation to your Macintosh and edit or present it on your Macintosh or your iPad. With ScrollShow, your only choice is to present on the iPad.

Since many people are relying more on the iPad and less on computers, you may find ScrollShow the only presentation program you need. With programs like ScrollShow, you can see how apps are making the iPad more independent of desktop and laptop computers all the time.

Handwriting on the iPad

Most people don't like to type, yet they still may need to record information. For those people, get a stylus or just use your finger and write naturally directly on your iPad's screen using an app called SpeedText HD (*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%252Fspeedtext-hd%252Fid393871896%253Fmt% 253D8%2526uo%253D4%2526partnerId%253D30*).
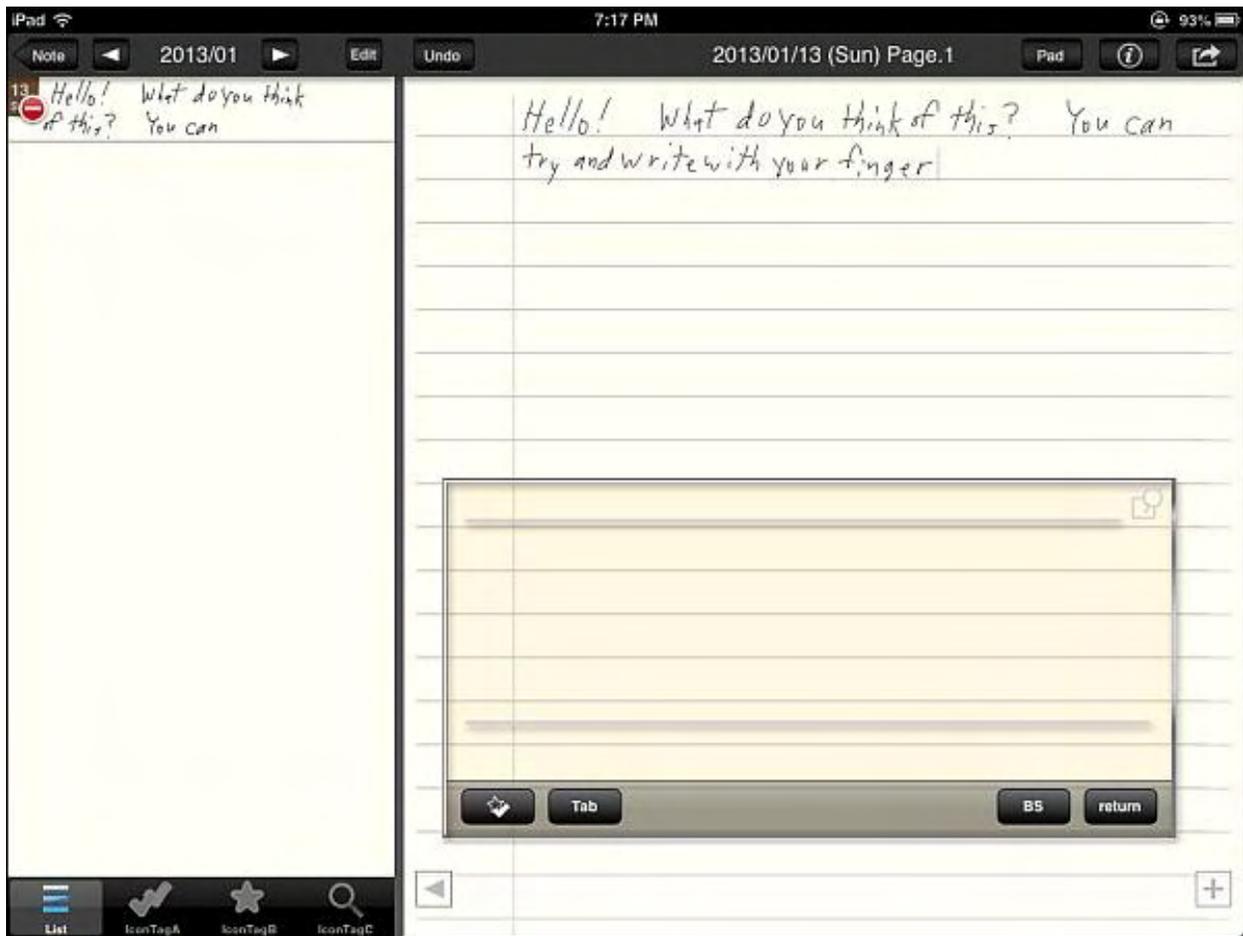
Figure 6. SpeedText HD lets you write and store your handwritten text.

SpeedText HD works by displaying a big box on the screen where you can write your text in either cursive or block letters. As you complete each word, the app stores it as part of your note. Press the BS (backspace) button and you can delete entire words, but not individual characters.

For someone who prefers typing, SpeedText HD might seem like a giant step backwards, but for those who prefer writing by hand, SpeedText HD makes it easy to capture handwritten notes. When you're done, share your notes as a PDF file with others.

Capturing handwritten notes can save the unique visual appearance of your notes that typewritten text can never duplicate. Although typing may be faster, handwriting is more natural. While you can write with your fingertip, you may find it simpler to write with a dedicated stylus instead (just don't lose that stylus).

SpeedText HD won't translate handwriting into text, but it might still be useful just the same. By turning your iPad into a writing notebook, you can find one more way to capture your thoughts as quickly as possible.

Make (a Little) Money

Most people depend completely on finding a job to make money. If they can't find a job, they don't earn any money. Obviously, waiting for someone to create a job for you puts your fate in the hands of another person, so for those who prefer not waiting for a job and being dependent on others, freelance your time through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (*www.mturk.com/mturk/welcome*).

The Mechanical Turk gets its name from an ancient chess automaton that its inventor touted as a chess-playing machine. In reality, the chess board hid a midget underneath its base, and this man really played chess against human opponents.

Amazon's Mechanical Turk works by listing different types of trivial jobs that pay anywhere from one penny to several cents. Just complete these simple tasks and get paid. When your account reaches a certain amount such

as $100, you can get a check.
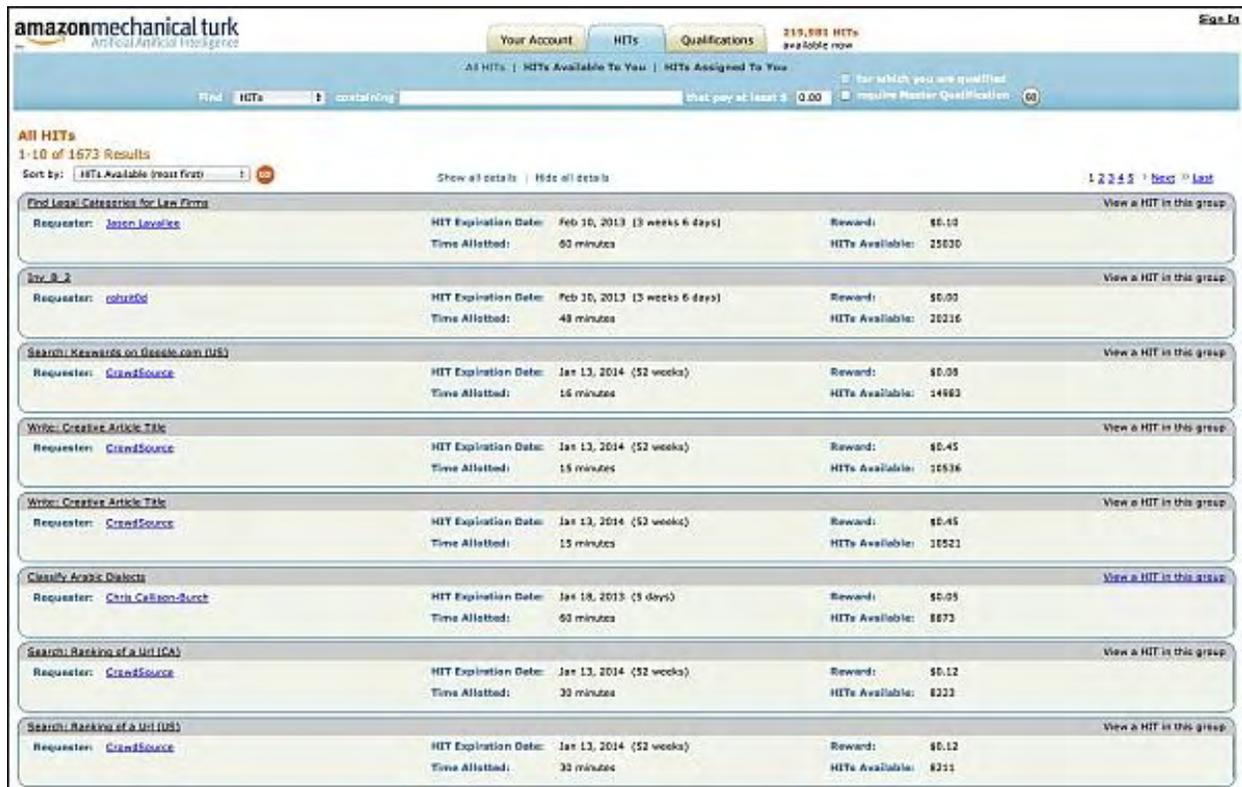
Figure 7. Amazon's Mechanical Turk offers simple jobs for anyone to complete.

The amount of time needed to complete these tasks typically requires a few minutes, such as verifying that a Web site might be family friendly or writing a title for an article. Since each task takes a few minutes, the pay is small, but the more simple tasks you do over time, the more your money will add up. You probably won't get rich working for Amazon's Mechanical Turk, but you can earn a small amount of spare change in your free time.

If you have access to the Internet, you can never complain that you don't have a job because you can always work for Amazon's Mechanical Turk. You probably can't make a living earning a few pennies for minutes of your time, but something is better than nothing. In fact, many people complete Amazon's Mechanical Turk's tasks while doing their real job, which tells you how challenging they probably find their real jobs.

*   *   *

Most people don't realize that the Macintosh comes with a free QuickTime Player program. While this program can play audio and video files, it can also capture movies from your Webcam, capture screen activity, or capture audio from your computer's microphone.

Figure 8. The free QuickTime Player program can record audio or video from a webcam or the screen.
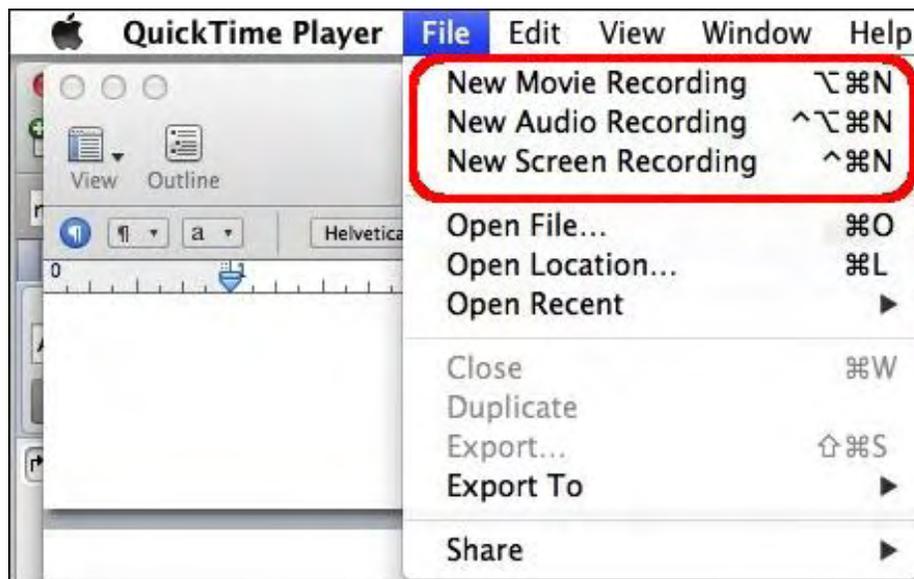
In the early days, before Wally became an Internationally renowned comedian, computer book writer, and generally cool guy, Wally Wang used to hang around The Byte Buyer dangling participles with Jack Dunning and go to the gym to pump iron with Dan Gookin.

Wally is responsible for the following books:

*My New Mac, Lion Edition (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593273908/ref=as_li_tf_tl? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=1593273908*)*
*My New iPad 2 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/159327386X/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=159327386X*)*
*Steal This Computer Book (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050*)*
*Microsoft Office 2010 For Dummies (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470489987?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470489987*)*
*Beginning Programming for Dummies (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702*)*
*Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470108541? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470108541*)*
*Breaking Into Acting for Dummies with Larry Garrison (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468*)*
*Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon and Gerald Fisher (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=159079189*)*
*How to Live with a Cat (When You Really Don't Want To) (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006DJYL70/ ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=B006DJYL70*)*
*The Secrets of the Wall Street Stock Traders (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006DGCH4M/ref=as_li_tf_tl? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=B006DGCH4M*)*
*Mac Programming For Absolute Beginners (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1430233362? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1430233362*)*
*Republican Fairy Tales (Children's Stories the 1% Tell About the Rest of Us) (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/ B006QSKM3A/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B006QSKM3A*)*
*The Zen of Effortless Selling with Moe Abdou (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006PUFPGI/ref=as_li_tf_tl? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B006PUFPGI*)*
*The 15-Minute Movie Method (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B004TMD9K8/ref=as_li_tf_tl? ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B004TMD9K8*)*

*Erotophobia (A novel) (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009POEAJO/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_tl?
ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B009POEAJO&linkCode=as2&tag=the15minmovme-20*)*

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

Worldwide News & Product Reviews

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

Touchscreen Can Differentiate Between Users; Americans' Social Media Viewing Habits; Pantech Flexes Some Muscle; Sun-Powered Typing.

Touchscreen Can Differentiate Between Users

Gideon A. Marken of Marken Communications (*www.markencom.com*) writes in this week about a team working at Disney Research Pittsburgh which is developing a capacitive sensor system with the capability to differentiate between users of the touchscreen:

The [system] is based on technique called swept frequency capacitive sensing. To implement this technique, the system measures the impedance between the user and ground across a wide range of AC frequencies. To put this into context, a conventional capacitive touchscreen might measure electrical draw at 1 kHz.

The team's approach measures electrical draw at many different frequencies in the range of from 1 kHz to 3.5 mHz. Utilizing this method, a curve can be developed in real time that represents the electrical properties of the person touching the touchscreen.

Since all people have different bone densities and muscle mass, wear different footwear and so on, the result is a different impedance profile for each user. The idea is that, by measuring these characteristics and learning from them, the system develops information that can be used to identity each user from among several users. The approach can be applied to both single and multiple touch contacts.

A video that presents a demonstration of touch identification technology can be found here. In the video, the technology is shown applied to a game application. In this instance, the technology is used to enable means to keep track of an individual's score when the game is played by multiple persons.

The development of the original capacitive sensor prototype took over two years. This was followed by six months of research on person differentiation. During this period, the team tested the system on 12 volunteers.

Part of what was learned is that the system is not yet fully perfected. It was found that a user could fool the system by adjusting some aspect of their person or position in a way that modified the curve representing their electrical properties so that it became more like that of another person.

While this situation is not conducive to good security, it may well be acceptable for likely initial uses of the system. That is, to look for differentiation when two people simultaneously play a game on a tablet. [The team believes] it should be possible to combine the capacitive sensing method with computer vision, speech processing and motion detection in order to get better accuracy...Any single sensing method might be 90% accurate, but when combined, they could be as accurate as 99%.

Going forward, the challenge facing the team is to make the system more robust and to work in real world phone and tablet products.

Americans' Social Media Viewing Habits

Allan Ripp from Ripp Media (*www.rippmedia.com*) writes in about a recent Morrison & Foerster Socially Aware Blog posting which delves into Americans' increasing obsession with social media, along with their increasingly fractured attention spans. Some of the statistics might surprise you:

The amount of time the average person spent monthly on social networking more than doubled between 2006 and 2011—from 2.7 hours to 6.9 hours

More than half of TV viewers are multi-tasking in front of the tube: 61% of viewers surf the Internet while watching TV; 29% use Facebook while in front of the TV

Social media now accounts for 18% of time spent online

The fastest growing segments of social networking users are men of all ages and people over 55 years old—both groups grew by more than 9% between July 2010 and October 2011.

Facebook is the undisputed leader among social networking sites: Visitors spend an average of 6.75 hours on the site each month—nearly twice the amount of time spent on Tumblr, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn, and GooglePlus combined.

The percentage of Americans who have a social-networking profile has more than doubled in recent years—from 24% in 2008 to 56% in 2012.

You can view the entire Time Spent Statistics infographic at sociallyawareblog.com (*www.sociallyawareblog.com/2012/11/21/time-americans-spend-per-month-on-social-media-sites/*).

Pantech Flexes Some Muscle

Product name: Flex
Manufacturer: Pantech
Carrier: AT&T
Web sites: www.att.com (*www.att.com/shop/wireless/devices/pantech/flex-gray.html#fbid=ENPZW86KsnB*); www.pantechusa.com (*www.pantechusa.com/phones/flex*)
Price: 99 cents with two-year commitment, $249 with one-year, $349 month-to-month

My first reaction to being offered a review smartphone made by a company called Pantech was: "PanWHAT?" I was expecting to hear the name Apple, Samsung, LG, HTC, or RIM—the familiar aggregation of smartphone manufacturers—so it's always refreshing to see a new player edge up to the table. Let's see if Pantech, which has been making traditional cell phones for nearly a decade, can come up with a big enough ante with Flex and other models to buy a regular seat at the smartphone table; perhaps even raise the stakes a little.

To begin, Flex has all the features you'd expect in a top-notch smartphone: 4G LTE speed (select markets), a 1.5GHz dual-core processor, a stunning 4.3" qHD Super Amoled display, an 8MP rear-facing camera (2 MP front-facing), and Android OS 4.0.

The phone has a very solid feel, one which belies its lightness and slenderness of frame. The back pops off easily for access to cards and the (thankfully) removable 1830mAh battery. There's a rubberized edge running all around the screen which should help with drops, but be sure to get a case for it anyway. Cracked screens on modern phones are a pain to replace.

But Flex gets its name by aiming to create a flexible user interface to serve the two primary user experiences called Easy Experience and Standard Experience.

Easy Experience is for people who want it clean and simple. Think a not-particularly tech savvy mom, dad, or grandparent. You get one home screen with fast access to key features like the Web, phone, contacts, camera, messaging, and basic apps and menu options. Buttons are large with easy-to-read text. It's easy to get around and scrolling is kept to a minimum. And setup is greatly simplified. Just the basics with easy-to-understand choices and options.

Standard Experience is either for the above mom, dad, or grandparent who has already been operating the phone for a while using the Easy Experience or for those who want the full Android experience with no handholding or training wheels.

All-in-all, the Pantech Flex feels to me like it's holding a winning hand — and it's sure great to see another player at the table.

Full Specs (from Pantech):
_____

Battery Type Lithium Ion: 1,830 mAh
Standby Time Up to 430 hours
User/Talk Time Up to 10 hours

Resolution Super AMOLED qHD (540 x 960 pixels)

Display Size 4.3" touchscreen

8GB card slot (expandable memory) - 32GB (microSD)
Predictive Text
Wireless Technology
4G LTE

5.1" H x 2.6" W x .32" D

1080p HD - Playback: 1080p

Music Player

Camera Resolution 8MP
Zoom 4X zoom (rear), 2MP (front)

Sun-Powered Typing

Product name: Wireless Solar Keyboard K760
Manufacturer: Logitech
Model: Y-R0029
Website: www.logitech.com (*www.logitech.com/en-us/product/Wireless-Solar-Keyboard-K760-for-Mac?crid=26*)
Price: $79.99

Wireless keyboards have become increasingly commonplace. For example, iMacs have included a wireless keyboard as standard equipment (*mactracker.ca/*) since the late 2009 models. Although wireless keyboards are convenient because they reduce clutter on the user's physical desktop, they also are inconvenient because they repeatedly need battery replacement or recharging (occasionally at an inopportune time). Logitech's solution for this inconvenience is their Wireless Solar Keyboard K760 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B007VL8Y2C/ ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9- 20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B007VL8Y2C*). This product is available in two flavors—one for Windows, the other for Mac OS. The latter is the subject of this review.

The Wireless Solar Keyboard ships in a white cardboard box (~12 x 6.5 x 1.5 inches) with the product's picture on the front, a summary of major features (described below) on the back, and details (what's in the box; system requirements; warranty information) on the bottom. Inside this box is a plain brown cardboard box that includes the keyboard, an English-only "getting started" pamphlet (12 pages), and a multifold brochure containing safety, regulatory, and warranty information in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese.

If you're familiar with the iMac's wireless keyboard, you might think that the Wireless Solar Keyboard bears a striking resemblance. That's because, like Apple's keyboard, Logitech's has an aluminum-like finish on its upperside (Figure 1A) and white polycarbonate on its underside (Figure 1B). Both models also lack a dedicated numeric keypad and navigation keys (Home, End, Forward Delete, Page Up, and Page Down). What distinguishes these two products' appearance, however, is the batteries' location (two bulges on the Wireless Solar Keyboard's underside instead of the tube on Apple's keyboard) and the presence of a solar panel measuring 1.375 x 10.875 inches on Logitech's keyboard which makes it somewhat larger (11.5 x 6.5 x 0.7 inches) and heavier (17.6 ounces) than Apple's.

The features that distinguish the Wireless Solar Keyboard from Apple's counterpart make it a compelling upgrade. Although both keyboards can connect (via Bluetooth) to a Mac or iOS device (iPad, iPhone, or iPod touch) without using a USB cable and port, Logitech's keyboard makes Bluetooth pairing far easier than Apple's keyboard. After pushing the Bluetooth pairing button on the Wireless Solar Keyboard's underside (Figure 1B), each of its first three function keys begins flashing its blue indicator LED light (Figure 2). The user then can press one of these three keys to associate that key and pair the keyboard with an available Mac or iDevice that has its Bluetooth turned on. These steps are explained very clearly in the getting started pamphlet and online (*logitech-en-amr.custhelp.com/ app/answers/detail/a_id/31610/section/troubleshoot/crid/404/lt_product_id/9869/tabs/1,3,2,4,5/cl/us,en*); they can be performed up to three times to assign and simultaneously pair three different Macs and/or iDevices with these function keys and keyboard, respectively. Users who do so with a Mac, iPhone, and iPad will be able to switch the

Wireless Solar Keyboard between these devices by simply pressing the appropriate F key (Figure 3). Cool!

Figure 1. Logitech's Wireless Solar Keyboard looks similar to Apple's wireless keyboard due to the aluminum finish on its upper side (A) and white polycarbonate on its under side (B) where its solar rechargeable batteries (red rectangles) and Bluetooth pairing button (red circle) are located.

Figure 2. The three Bluetooth pairing keys on the Wireless Solar Keyboard make it easy to connect with a Bluetooth-active Mac or iDevice.

Another distinguishing feature of Logitech's keyboard is its solar panel for recharging. According to the company, natural or almost any indoor light can be used to recharge the batteries (*www.logitech.com/en-us/keyboards/ keyboards/Wireless-Solar-Keyboard-K760-for-Mac*). A full recharge requires 6 hours in direct sunlight; a quick recharge requires only one hour and the keyboard is fully usable while recharging. Solar recharging is my favorite feature of this product because it is environmentally beneficial and eliminates the need for a charging brick.

Figure 3. The three Bluetooth function keys (Figure 2) make it easy to switch using the Wireless Solar Keyboard between three different Apple devices; just press the appropriate key for the Bluetooth-active device that you want to use, and what you type on the keyboard will appear on that device's display.

Several additional battery-related features that distinguish this keyboard from Apple's deserve mention. Logitech claims that a full charge is good for 3-6 months (*logitech-en-amr.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/31560/section/troubleshoot/crid/404/lt_product_id/9869/tabs/1,3,2,4,5/cl/us,en*) depending upon usage. I can neither confirm nor deny this claim, but I can vouch that the battery level indicator light on the sample for this review remained green throughout testing despite my using it in a room with poor northern exposure and dim artificial lighting. Another distinguishing feature is the dedicated battery check key (Figure 4A). After pressing this key, if the associated battery status light (Figure 4B) shines green, the batteries are sufficiently charged; if it shines red instead, the batteries need charging. Although the charge indicator light doesn't tell you how much charge remains, this really isn't necessary because the batteries are continuously recharged as long as some light is available.

Figure 4. The Wireless Solar Keyboard has a dedicated function key (A) for testing the batteries' charge level; after pressing it, the charge indicator light next to the on-off toggle switch (B) illuminates green to indicate that the batteries are sufficiently charged or red to indicate that they need recharging.

The above distinguishing battery-related features might be handy and environmentally friendly, but what about typing on this keyboard? The keyboard's feel is another feature that distinguishes it from Apple's product. Logitech's product has letter keys with a slight concavity in the middle (the function, arrow, and modifier keys are flat), Apple's has ones that are completely flat; the former consequently might be preferable especially for touch typing. This potential advantage is weakened, however, because the Wireless Solar Keyboard's keys are slightly smaller (~0.0625" by my measurements) than Apple's counterparts. Additional points worth considering— Logitech's keys have a somewhat squishier or spongier feeling and they are somewhat noisier (sound like rattling to my ears) when pressed than Apple's.

The Wireless Solar Keyboard's function keys are configured by default for the following Mac-specific features— display Mission Control and Launchpad, control brightness and audio volume, play/pause music, and eject disc. Two of the function keys are configured by default for the following iDevice features—display the home screen and virtual keyboard. Users who want the function keys to behave the same like their counterparts on Apple's keyboard will need to download and install Logitech's Control Center System Preference (*www.logitech.com/en-us/support/ Wireless-Solar-Keyboard-K760-for-Mac?section=downloads&crid=404*). Users who want to pair this keyboard with a Mac running Windows under Boot Camp or virtual machine software will need to look into an appropriate third-party utility that configures the function and modifier keys for Windows compatibility.

The most serious drawback of Logitech's keyboard, in this reviewer's opinion, is that its two NiMH batteries are not replaceable. When they have expired, the user is expected to remove them for proper disposal. Worse yet, the keyboard itself is rendered useless and also must be disposed. Although the product's getting started pamphlet includes illustrated instructions for properly removing the batteries from the keyboard's underside (Figure 1B), Logitech does not take them back for disposal and only guides the user to dispose "according to local laws." Moreover, the company does not provide any information that I could find in the pamphlet or on their Web site about the batteries' expected lifespan under ordinary usage. It would be helpful to know, in advance, this product's expected useful lifespan.

In conclusion, Logitech's Wireless Solar Keyboard (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B007VL8Y2C/ref=as_li_ss_tl? ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B007VL8Y2C*) for Macintosh is elegant, practical, and at least somewhat environmentally friendly. If it supported replacement batteries so that the keyboard could continue being used rather than being relegated to the landfill, it would qualify for our magazine's highest rating (five globes).

Review contributed by Barry Fass-Holmes

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In addition to being an editor and columnist for *ComputorEdge* 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*.

Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers
"Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns." by ComputorEdge Staff

"Long Boot Times," "Microsoft Security Essentials," "QuickTime, Java, Etc. at Startup," "'Fxing' Linksys WRT54G"

Long Boot Times

[Regarding the December 28 Digital Dave column:]

Dave,

In addition to using Windows System Configuration, I have used two programs that do a good job of helping you review and adjust how the start-up programs are managed.

1. CCleaner from Piriform: It is free and has a nice, easy to use interface. In addition to other disk optimizing features it has, under the tools menu a start-up tab that allows you to enable or disable programs that start, when you turn on your computer.

2. Slim Cleaner-Free from Slimware Utilities: It too is free as the name implies. It also has optimizing features but the difference from CCleaner is that it not only has the option to enable, disable and delete the programs that start-up upon boot, but has a "Community Rating" and a button for "more information" that will take you to their online database to help you decide if you want to keep it or get rid of the program in question. The information on the site is built up from users that post their knowledge and experience with the programs. There is also a Hijacklog that will analyze what actually gets started and it has a radio button for Novice and Expert (which gives you a warning about what can happen if you delete the wrong items).

Again, be sure not to disable items that you actually need for your regular computer activities.

As with all Internet downloads, be careful that you get only what you want to install. Always look at all the options, and check out the advanced buttons before clicking OK!

-Dave Bisbee, Chula Vista, CA

Microsoft Security Essentials

[Regarding the January 4 Digital Dave column:]

Dave,

A quick comment regarding your recent Microsoft Security Essentials (MSE) post. The MSE is indeed supported on Windows XP. I know that from experience as I've personally installed it on hundreds of systems, but you can also verify this on the official Microsoft page (http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows/security-essentials-download), which states "Supports Windows 7, Windows Vista, and Windows XP ".

By the way, I've switched to MSE for the very same reason—all the nagging from AVG and other freeware tools got to be too much, and users often ignored the required upgrade. MSE handles these upgrades and updates very quietly and gracefully. While MSE likely does not provide the best protection (it recently failed the AV-Test Certification), I firmly believe that when combined with safe computing practices, it provides more than adequate protection.

Thanks for a great column.

-Zrinko Modrusan, San Diego, CA

"The best antivirus is you", well said, thank you for making it first!

I uninstalled MSE from any systems I did it on when two of them got viruses that AVG (free) blocked. I may be biased, as I've used the free AVG version for many years (except to try MSE until the above), and still prefer it as it seems to have one of the lowest system speed impacts of any I've tried. McAfee and Norton seem to be the worst, and since I mostly deal with older systems, slowing them down more isn't a good thing... :)

AVG seems to update/upgrade automatically just fine for my systems I've installed it on, and except for the ad at the bottom of the main screen (if you pull it up, say to do a manual scan), I haven't seen any nag stuff from then at all so not sure what the commenter Zrinko means by that.

-Rich Ernst, San Diego, CA

QuickTime, Java, Etc. at Startup

[Regarding the January 4 Digital Dave column:]

If the user is up to it, check the processes running *after* system is up and running (wait 5-10 min for any/all updates to finish) and see if QuickTtime, Java and/or RealPlayer are still running. If so, disable those processes in Startup. QuickTime, Flash (usually updated via browser though), and Java, in particular are important to ensure all updates are in as the updates are mostly security flaw patches. Personally, I see little RealPlayer stuff any more, so uninstall it entirely.

-Rich Ernst, San Diego, CA

"Fxing" Linksys WRT54G

[Regarding the January 4 Editors Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers column:]

Even better than going to another router (I've had three Netgear home routers fail on me), would be to install current free operating system/firmware on that old Linksys and bring out it's true capabilities as well as reliability!

http://*www.dd-wrt.com/wiki/index.php/Supported_Devices#Cisco* for info.

Or, if you're local to San Diego, let me know and I'll take that old Linksys off your hands and do it myself to enjoy... :)

-Rich Ernst, San Diego, CA

ComputorEdge always wants to hear from you, our readers. If you have specific comments about one of our articles, please click the "Tell us what you think about this article!" link at the top or bottom of the specific article/column at ComputorEdge.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 "ComputorQuick 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 ComputorEdge E-Books (*www.computoredgebooks.com/*).