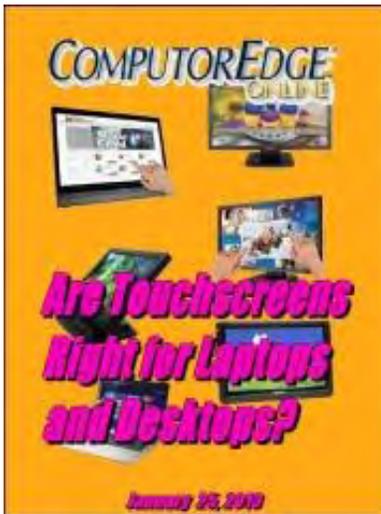


# ComputerEdge™ Online — 01/25/13



## This issue: Are Touchscreens Right for Laptops and Desktops?

Touchscreen have come into their own on tablet computers, but do they make sense for PCs.

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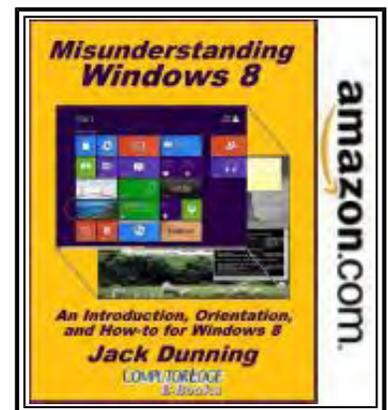
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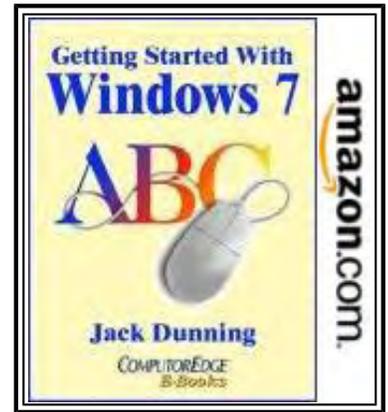
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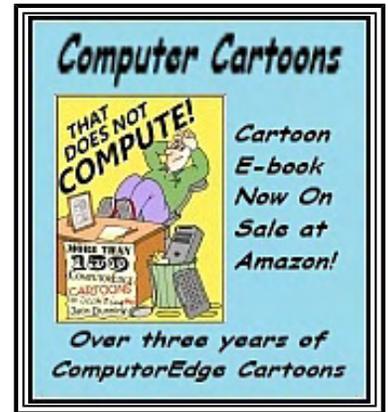
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"Netflix Browser Vs. Windows 8 App," "Touchscreen Apps," "Windows 8 and Free Stuff," "Locking Down Wi-Fi"



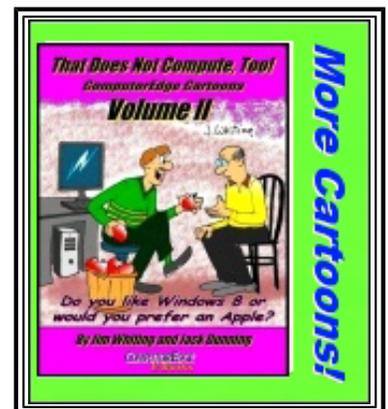
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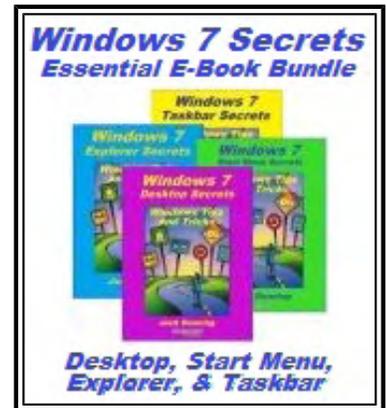
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## Digital Dave

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

Boot-up Times for Windows Vista; Internet Connection Reality; Microsoft Security Essentials Recommendation?

*Dear Digital Dave,*

*I was told booting up and shutting down on an HP desktop with Windows Vista is extremely slow. Is this common?*

*HP Pavillion A6110n is the desktop I have.*

*Marian  
Aquebogue, New York*

Dear Marian,

Yes, it is both true and common, but not because it's an HP computer. Windows Vista is well-known for its slow boot times and lazy shutdowns. Both its predecessor, Windows XP, and its successor, Windows 7, have better benchmarks.

There are a few things that you can do such as make sure that you don't have too many programs loading at start-up. To check this out there is a free utility from Microsoft called Autoruns for Windows ([technet.microsoft.com/en-us/sysinternals/bb963902.aspx](http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/sysinternals/bb963902.aspx)). This should help you find programs that don't need loading at boot time.

Another way to avoid slow start-ups and shut downs is to leave your Vista computer running.

Digital Dave

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*Dear Digital Dave,*

*Does my Cox cable Internet speed depend upon how many people in my area are logged in? If so, how can they charge me by the speed of my connection when my neighbors' usage affects my speed? And if my neighbor can use my wireless router supplied by Cox without my knowing, how can they charge me for the speed of my connection?*

*Jon P Vivian  
Lakeside, CA*

Dear Jon,

First, unless you have left your Cox router unsecured, it's not likely that your neighbors are using your connection. They can only access it via Wi-Fi which you should have encrypted with a password.

There are a number of things that can affect the speed of your Internet connection. One of those is the number of people sharing the same bandwidth.

Bandwidth can be compared to the size of a pipe providing water. The larger the pipe the greater the flow of water. However, if there are too many smaller pipes drawing from the same larger pipe, the water pressure will drop causing a slower flow for each smaller pipe. It is quite possible that at peak times when many people are using their Cox Internet that you will see a slow down. If this is the case, other Cox customers will be experiencing the same problem at the same time.

I'm sure that Cox will explain that you are purchasing an average bandwidth which could be slower at high-demand times. This doesn't make charging full price for substandard service right, but unless Cox upgrades their equipment (pipes), there isn't much you can do about it—except switch to another provider.

However, there could be other Cox policies in play. Some Internet providers (notably Cox and Comcast) have been known to institute both data caps and/or bandwidth throttling. A data cap is a fixed amount of data which can be downloaded within a certain period (usually one month) before limitations are put on the account. Bandwidth throttling is the restriction of data flow when the providers feel you're overusing your connection. If this is happening to you, then this is another valid complaint—although there isn't much you can do about it except switch to another provider. You're paying for a certain bandwidth, but if you actually use it to the max, many providers (including Cox) think you should pay more. How can they do that? They just do. The monthly data limits for Cox San Diego ([ww2.cox.com/aboutus/sandiego/policies/speedsusage.cox](http://ww2.cox.com/aboutus/sandiego/policies/speedsusage.cox)) depending upon your package.

The Preferred Internet package from Cox offers 200GB of data per month which equates to about 50 hours of Netflix per week (1 to 1.5GB per hour of streaming HD videos). That's a lot of movies and TV shows.

You can certainly go to another provider (if there is one in your area), but not one where you won't experience the same problems and treatment. There are not a lot of options in the San Diego market. That's why they can institute these silly policies and pretend that bandwidth is way more expensive than it is while not investing in more infrastructure.

If you want to determine if you're a victim of bandwidth throttling there are a series of tests you can run called Glasnost Tests ([broadband.mpi-sws.org/transparency/bttest.php](http://broadband.mpi-sws.org/transparency/bttest.php)).

Not all slow downs are the fault of the Internet provider. If you have too many people in your house who are using the connection at the same time, then, depending upon what each person is doing, you can all experience a drag. Also, the problem could be on the other end. Even Netflix has limited bandwidth on its servers. On Friday or Saturday night, you might temporarily experience slow buffering and reduced picture resolution because the Netflix servers are overloaded with too many customers.

If you're consistently experiencing a slow connection, then there could be other things at play including bad connectors or cables. Have Cox check it out.

Digital Dave

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*Dear Digital Dave,*

*Are you still recommending Microsoft Security Essentials after the bad reviews it has been getting recently?*

*Steve*

Dear Steve,

I have to admit that I was not aware of the recent Microsoft Security Essentials test failures ([reviews.cnet.com/8301-3667\\_7-57564385/microsoft-bombs-another-security-test/](http://reviews.cnet.com/8301-3667_7-57564385/microsoft-bombs-another-security-test/)) and the accompanied publicity at the time I wrote that last answer about antivirus software. I may be a little more circumspect about making any malware protection recommendations in the future. Having said that, I haven't switched to another product myself for a number of reasons.

First, the nature of computer malware changes rapidly which means the most dangerous threats won't be added to the databases and detected until after they've infected many computers. A particular package which may be on top today could be at the bottom in a couple of months.

Second, the publicity from the failure is likely to light a fire under the Microsoft group responsible for Security Essentials. I wouldn't be surprised to see them make a comeback before too long.

Third, it's difficult to evaluate the relevance of the test methodology to the real world of malware. I'm not saying that the testing wasn't solid, I just don't know enough about it to determine if it warrants a panicked change.

Most importantly, 95% or more of all malware infections result from user carelessness or error. Taking proper precautions when downloading software, reading e-mail, and surfing the Web is most important. None of the antivirus programs are 100% effective and I expect that the relative rankings will continually vary. People should use the program that makes them feel the most comfortable while not annoying them too much. Some anti-malware programs are so aggressive that they often identify innocuous files, such as AutoHotkey scripts with a couple of lines of text, as a problem.

Digital Dave

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## Will the Touchscreen Help the PC?

“Many Windows 8 Computers Now Have Touch Capability. Is It Useful?” by Jack Dunning

Microsoft has gambled that the dual interface in Windows 8 and touch capability on the PC will spark the market. So far, there is little evidence that it will work.

We are now living in a world of two different computer input systems. The first is the old reliable keyboard and mouse system which has become our primary way to work with laptop and desktop computers. When doing any type of productivity work, this combination of typing and mousing has become as natural as eating with a knife and fork.



The second major input system is our index finger on a touchscreen. Starting with smartphones, the touchscreen has moved to tablet computers making it just as popular for what it does as the keyboard and mouse on a PC. Without this type of one, two, or more, finger input, the tablet computer would be inconceivable. It has become so much a part of our computer sense that we catch ourselves occasionally poking at our desktop computer monitor even though it's not touch sensitive.

It is difficult to say that one approach to operating our computers is better than the other. Both the keyboard/mouse combination and the touchscreen have their place. But the future of the relationship between typing, mousing and touching is murky at best.

### Microsoft's Dual Computing Approach

Microsoft is bringing the touchscreen to PCs without relinquishing the keyboard and mouse. Windows 8 is designed to include both the traditional Windows Desktop with primarily a keyboard/mouse orientation and the Windows 8 Modern interface which is geared toward touch—although it operates almost as well with a mouse. The Microsoft Surface Pro, due out January 26, includes both the Modern touch interface and the traditional Windows Desktop optimized for the keyboard and mouse while responding to touch. If the concept of combining touch with keys and a mouse catches on, then Microsoft might get the credit.



It's a nice idea, but the problem is that most traditional Windows programs just don't operate very well with touch. The Windows Desktop program screens are



## JOE PURCHASES THE LATEST IN TOUCH SCREEN TECHNOLOGY.

laid out with text menus and links designed for the accuracy of the mouse cursor, but often fail to activate with fat fingers on a touchscreen. Needing to zoom in (reverse pinch) to hit a menu item doesn't make a program more user friendly. This is one of the reasons that software companies are not rushing to adapt their Windows programs to touchscreens. There are a few software developers, such as Corel ([www.corel.com/corel/pages/index.jsp?pgid=800574&storeKey=us&languageCode=en](http://www.corel.com/corel/pages/index.jsp?pgid=800574&storeKey=us&languageCode=en)), who are making an effort to produce desktop software suited for a touchscreen, but their type of software falls into categories where touch makes sense (drawing, photo, etc.). It's possible that in the future much more desktop software will take advantage of the touchscreen, but developers want to see successes before making heavy investments in upgrades. In the meantime, people buying Windows computers with touch capability are frustrated by the lack of touch software for the Windows Desktop.

On the other hand, apps developed for tablets and smartphones are designed for touch. In fact, doing anything with text is a little more hassle on a tablet with touch than a laptop or desktop with a keyboard. If you're looking for software for your touch only device, then you will have no problem finding applications—many of them free. This is true for Apple iOS, Android and even the new Windows 8 Modern interface. The problem with using touch with programs in the Windows 8 Pro Desktop is the same as the problem with a Windows 7 touch capable computer.

### Adding Touch to Windows 7



If you have a Windows 7 computer and a touchscreen monitor, then you can add touch capabilities and a few apps to your computer by installing Microsoft Touch Pack for Windows 7 ([www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=17368](http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=17368)). However, after looking at the apps which come with the Touch Pack, it becomes apparent that Microsoft is not sure how to integrate touch with the Windows Desktop. These apps included:

- *Microsoft Blackboard*, an intricate game of physics in which you solve a puzzle by creating a fanciful machine on a blackboard.
- *Microsoft Garden Pond*, a tranquil game that takes place in serene Japanese water gardens.
- *Microsoft Rebound*, a game in which you use your fingertips to control Tesla spheres with an electrical field between them to catapult a metal game ball into your opponent's goal.
- *Microsoft Surface Globe*, a program that you can use to explore the earth as a flat 2-D map or as an immersive 3-D experience.
- *Microsoft Surface Collage*, a program that you can use to explore and interact with your photos and arrange them as a desktop background.
- *Microsoft Surface Lagoon*, a screen saver and interactive water simulation, complete with a meditative rock arrangement and playful, shy fish.

Other than a few programs, such as Corel Draw Paint It! touch ([www.corel.com/corel/product/index.jsp?](http://www.corel.com/corel/product/index.jsp?)

[pid=prod3720128&cid=catalog20038&segid=534&storeKey=us&languageCode=en](#)) and other touchscreen software from Corel (Digital Studio 2010, PaintShop Photo Express 2010 and VideoStudio Express 2010), Roxio PhotoShow Touch ([www.photographyblog.com/news/roxio\\_photoshow\\_touch\\_for\\_windows\\_7/](http://www.photographyblog.com/news/roxio_photoshow_touch_for_windows_7/)), and WinDVD Pro 2010 ([www.corel.com/corel/product/index.jsp?pid=prod3520075&cid=catalog20038&segid=667&storeKey=us&languageCode=en](http://www.corel.com/corel/product/index.jsp?pid=prod3520075&cid=catalog20038&segid=667&storeKey=us&languageCode=en)) (also Corel), the list is fairly sparse.

Despite claims, even the new Microsoft Office ([www.fastcodesign.com/1670308/what-the-new-microsoft-office-gets-wrong](http://www.fastcodesign.com/1670308/what-the-new-microsoft-office-gets-wrong)) has failed to make the transition to the world of touch. While attempting to appear otherwise, even on the Surface RT (not real Windows), the program throws the user back into a form of the old Desktop which is not designed for touch operation.

This lack of Windows 7 (and Windows 8) Desktop software may change with time, but maybe there is a fundamental incompatibility between using your fingers and the Windows Desktop with its small dropdown menus and buttons.

## Touchscreen Health?



Adding touchscreens to PC is not a new concept. "I need to remind people that both touchscreen laptops and touchscreen PCs have come and gone in this marketplace." points out John Dvorak in PC Magazine ([www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2412195,00.asp](http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2412195,00.asp)). The problem with touchscreens is that while they work well on smartphones and tablets which are either used in one-handed computing or lying in one's lap, the vertical orientation of monitors on PCs and laptops is not conducive to touch operation. Many are concerned about the health problems (e.g. tendinitis, gorilla arm ([www.catb.org/jargon/html/G/gorilla-arm.html](http://www.catb.org/jargon/html/G/gorilla-arm.html)), etc.) that might be caused by continually reaching up to tap a screen.

Not everyone agrees. "With Windows 8, touchscreens are more relevant than ever before. However, some pundits have long believed that a touchscreen simply doesn't belong on a laptop." Tablets and laptops are treated as to two completely separate types of computers with their own almost mutually exclusive input methods. This may not be the future. Sean Hollister ([www.theverge.com/2012/11/30/3710900/gorilla-arm-touchscreen-laptop-windows-8-apple](http://www.theverge.com/2012/11/30/3710900/gorilla-arm-touchscreen-laptop-windows-8-apple)) continues in the Verge, "We've been looking at this all wrong. A touchscreen isn't a replacement for a keyboard or mouse, it's a complement." We have learned to use the mouse in conjunction with a keyboard. Why not add the touch capability when it makes sense?

If you think that you can do everything with touch in the Windows 8 Desktop, think again. The Desktop was built for the keyboard/mouse combination. There are many operations that just aren't possible ([www.theverge.com/2012/12/20/3787750/best-all-in-one-pc-desktop-windows-8-touchscreen](http://www.theverge.com/2012/12/20/3787750/best-all-in-one-pc-desktop-windows-8-touchscreen)) with the tap of a finger. Possibly Microsoft will make it easier in the future to use touch on the Windows Desktop, but I don't see that happening any time some.

However, people do like options. The keyboard is certainly best for inputting text and data. The mouse is excellent for point-and-click operations—especially when the work requires cursor position accuracy. Yet, sometimes it would be nice to reach up and tap the screen to open or reposition a window without moving the mouse. People who are accustomed to using tablets often wish they could just tap their desktop computer screen with their finger rather than grab the mouse, move it to the right spot, then click. The mere availability of touch capability on a laptop could seduce a person into using it—at first only occasionally, later frequently.

## Touchscreen Monitors



There are computers which come with touchscreen capability built-in. The best seem to be the laptops since the screens are optimized for touch. However, the smaller the screen (and correspondingly smaller links and



menus), the more problems encountered when using touch in the Windows Desktop. The touch all-in-one computers come in second.

Adding a touchscreen to a Windows 7 or 8 desktop computer seems to be the riskiest proposition since there may be dead zones on the extremes and ghosting when scrolling with a finger drag on larger monitors. It's important to read the user reviews when looking at touchscreens. A couple of key points are monitor height off the desk and sloping capability. Whereas the usual desktop computer monitor is set at eye height with an almost vertical orientation, lowering a touchscreen to the desk for easy reach and laying the screen back at an angle seems to work better for a touchscreen.

If you buy a Windows 7 computer with a touchscreen, then the Windows Touch Pack should be pre-installed. If you want to add touch capabilities to your Windows 7 computer, then the first step is to buy a multi-touch capable monitor. The lack of true touch software would make me hesitate to add a touchscreen monitor to a Windows 7 computer. However, I would have no such reluctance with Windows 8 because at least there are plenty of touch apps for the Modern interface—even if lacking for its Desktop.

There are many touchscreen monitors on the market. Read the reviews and user comments. Most range in price from about \$300 to \$900. Some have extras such as cameras built-in, but the quality of these add-ons is suspect. I prefer a separate camera which I can easily move to any computer. Speakers have become a common place in most separate monitors.

### The Future of Touch on Desktops

If I were to buy a Windows 8 laptop, I would want touch capability. I wouldn't expect it to be much help on the Desktop, but it should work well with the Modern interface apps. I have an interest in the Microsoft Surface Pro which with the keyboard is essentially a laptop that can turn into a tablet. Its success or failure as a product will say a lot about the future touch on laptops and desktops. If the Surface Pro does well, you can expect to see much more touch software available for the Windows Desktop.

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Jack is the publisher of *ComputerEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is [www.computoredge.com](http://www.computoredge.com). He can be reached at [ceeditor@computoredge.com](mailto: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](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009SI3F52/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009SI3F52&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20)).

Our second compilation of stupid *ComputerEdge* cartoons from 2011 and 2012 is now available at Amazon! *That Does Not Compute, Too! ComputerEdge Cartoons, Volume II: "Do You Like Windows 8 or Would You Prefer an Apple?"* ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009JY65QQ/ref=as\\_li\\_ss\\_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009JY65QQ&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20](http://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](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008BLUZRS/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20)).

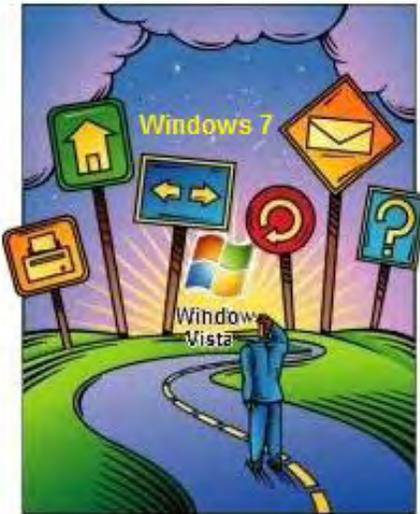
Available from Amazon, *Misunderstanding Windows 8: An Introduction, Orientation, and How-to for Windows 8* ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/B007RMCRH8/ref=as\\_li\\_ss\\_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B007RMCRH8/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20))! Also available at Barnes and Noble ([www.barnesandnoble.com/w/misunderstanding-windows-8-jack-dunning/1109995715?ean=2940014229463](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/misunderstanding-windows-8-jack-dunning/1109995715?ean=2940014229463)) and ComputerEdge E-Books ([www.computoredgebooks.com/Windows-Tips-and-Tricks\\_c4.htm?sourceCode=writer](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0052MMUX6/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20)), brilliantly drawn cartoons by Jim Whiting for really stupid gags by Jack about computers and the people who use them.

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# Windows Tips and Tricks

## Lonely? Make Your Computer Talk to You!

“Add Many Cool Features to Your Windows Computer with the Free NirCmd Utility” by Jack Dunning

NirCmd is free command line utility which can open and close your DVD trays, hide the clock on the Taskbar, make your computer read to you, and much more.

If you want to open and close DVD drive trays without touching the computer case, hide the clock on the system tray, or make your computer read out loud to you, then there is a cool little utility which makes it easier—and it's free. Called NirCmd (*nircmd.exe*), it's a command line program which can control many of the functions of your Windows computer. For example, if you don't have multimedia controls on your keyboard, then you can add them to your Desktop with this little utility.

NirCmd is not new. It has been around for a number of years as a free Windows utility. It offers many simple features which normally aren't easy to access from the Windows Desktop. Since it was first written for earlier versions of Windows, some commands don't work in Windows 7 and Windows 8. However, the most useful (and interesting) features work in Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7 and Windows 8, making it an almost universal Windows tool. I'm most interested in NirCmd because it can read text out loud with the Windows Narrator voice. (This week in the AutoHotkey column I add this audio feature to the AutoHotkey Reminder script so that when the reminder message pops up at the appointed time the computer reads the text prompt.)

NirCmd is a command line program—meaning it is an app which can be added to a script with the appropriate parameters for a desired action. While you can put NirCmd commands into a batch file (BAT), you can also run them from the Command Prompt or with the Run (⊞+R) window. See Figure 1 for an example of using the Run (⊞+R) window with *nircmd.exe*. (The Run dialog can also be opened by selecting "Run..." from the Start Menu—if your version of Windows happens to have a Start Menu. For Windows 8 select Run from the ⊞+X menu.) The NirCmd options are listed at the Nirsoft Web site ([www.nirsoft.net/utills/nircmd.html](http://www.nirsoft.net/utills/nircmd.html)). The options include "Mute the system volume," "Turn off the monitor," "Speaks the text stored inside *speak.txt* into *speak.wav* filename," "Turn off your computer," "Set the My Computer window to right-to-left order (For Hebrew and Arabic languages)," "Empty the recycle bin in all drives," "Wait 2 seconds, and then save the current screen to *shot.png*," and many more.



Figure 1. The nircmd.exe program is used to read out loud the contents of the Windows Clipboard.

If you're interested in testing *nircmd.exe*, the download can be found halfway down the Web page just after the Versions History or you can download the program ([download.cnet.com/NirCmd/3000-2094\\_4-77191.html](http://download.cnet.com/NirCmd/3000-2094_4-77191.html)) from CNET. The download is a compressed ZIP folder containing three files. Open (double-click) the ZIP file to view the files (see Figure 2). Extract the files to a new folder.

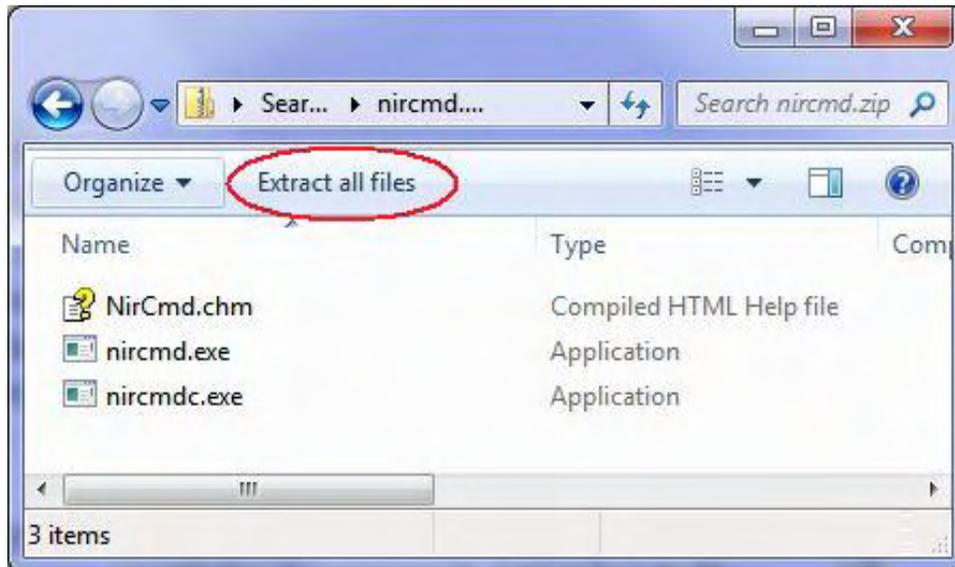


Figure 2. The nircmd.zip file contains three files. Click "Extract all files" to open a new folder with the uncompressed files.

The two files, *nircmd.exe* and *nircmdc.exe*, are essentially the same program with, for our purposes, little practical difference. Right-click on *nircmd.exe* and select "Run as administrator." The only purpose of this initial run is copying the file itself to the Windows System folder. That will put the file in the system path making it possible to run it from anywhere on the computer (see Figure 3).

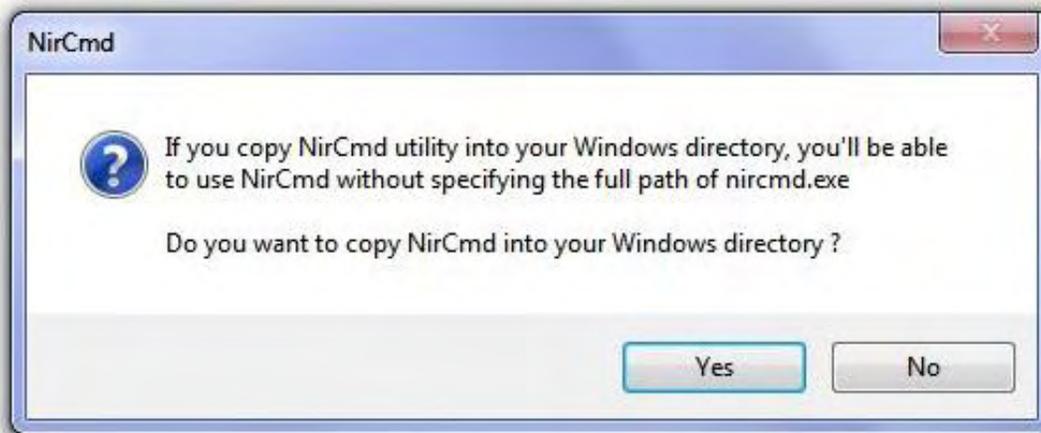


Figure 3. When the nircmd.exe program is run from the Windows Explorer (File Explorer in Windows 8), it copies the file to the Windows System folder. This puts the program in the path for running in scripts, from the Run command, or any directory location in the Command Prompt.

That's all there is to it. The program can now be used in scripts such as batch file or AutoHotkey, run from the Command Prompt, or just used with the Run (Windows +R) dialog. For a test, open the Run (Windows +R) dialog box and type in (or copy-and-paste) *nircmd.exe speak text "You're so cool!"* (including quote marks) and click OK. See Figure 4. Doesn't that feel good?



Figure 4. With nircmd.exe located in the Windows System folder this Run command will tell you, "You're so cool!"

You can find more information about the commands and options further down the same Web page ([www.nirsoft.net/utills/nircmd2.html#using](http://www.nirsoft.net/utills/nircmd2.html#using)).

Do you want to hear the current day of the week and date?

```
nircmd.exe speak text ~$currdate.dddd,MMMMdd,yyyy$
```

Say "Hi!" to the current logged on user?

```
nircmd.exe speak text "hi,"~$sys.username$
```

Display a pop-up message box? (See Figure 5.)

```
nircmd.exe infobox "This is a message box !" "message"
```



Figure 5. A pop-up message box with nircmd.exe.

Do you want to see the calculator? Click "Yes" in the pop-up to open it.

```
nircmd.exe qbox "Do you want to run the calculator ?" "question" "calc.exe"
```

There are even commands for creating shortcuts and working with the Registry (careful).

Many of the commands are similar to AutoHotkey commands, although AutoHotkey is a more robust scripting language. It is relatively easy to integrate NimCmd commands into AutoHotkey scripts which in many cases may be easier than trying to do it all with AutoHotkey. For example, while it is possible to write speaking scripts with AutoHotkey, it is much simpler to add the NimCmd speak command—as is done in this week's AutoHotkey column. However, NimCmd would need to be available on each computer using the AutoHotkey app.

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Jack is the publisher of *ComputerEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is [www.computoredge.com](http://www.computoredge.com). He can be reached at [ceeditor@computoredge.com](mailto: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?](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009SI3F52/ref=as_li_ss_tl?))

ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009SI3F52&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20).

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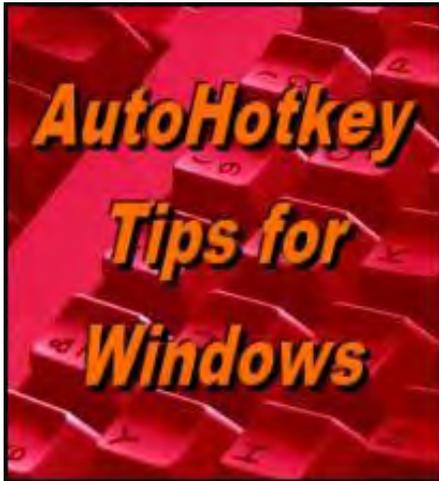
Currently only at Amazon.com, *Jack's Favorite Free Windows Programs: What They Are, What They Do, and How to Get Started!* ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008BLUZRS/ref=as\\_li\\_ss\\_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008BLUZRS/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20)).

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](http://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](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/misunderstanding-windows-8-jack-dunning/1109995715?ean=2940014229463)) and ComputerEdge E-Books ([www.computoredgebooks.com/Windows-Tips-and-Tricks\\_c4.htm?sourceCode=writer](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0052MMUX6/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20)), brilliantly drawn cartoons by Jim Whiting for really stupid gags by Jack about computers and the people who use them.

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

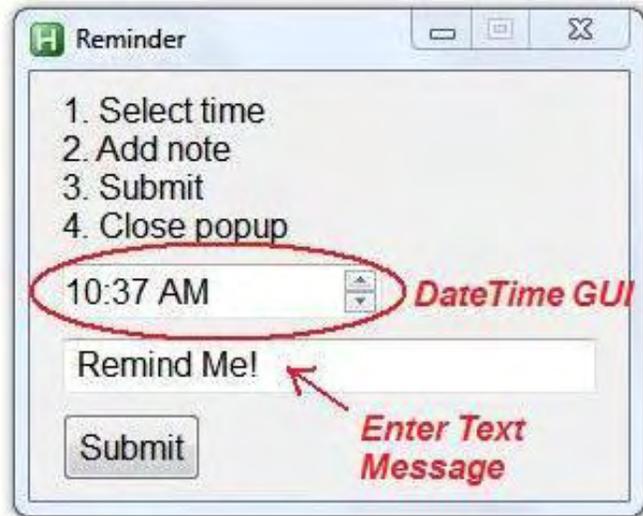
## A Talking Reminder for Windows

“Add the NirCmd Speak Command to an AutoHotkey Reminder App” by Jack Dunning

Now you can make your AutoHotkey Reminder app read your appointment out loud. Plus, there's a better way to calculate time/date differences in AutoHotkey.

*I've read a number of reviews of AutoHotkey which stress that it's not for everyone. While it's true that AutoHotkey does require at least a little simple script writing, far more people are capable of using it than many would have you believe. Some computer users avoid anything that looks foreign to them even though a little familiarity offers great benefits. If you're curious about AutoHotkey, but find the discussion in this column mildly intimidating, then check out our beginner's page "Installing AutoHotkey and Writing Your First Script" ([www.computoredge.com/misc/Installing\\_AutoHotkey\\_and\\_writing\\_your\\_first\\_script.html](http://www.computoredge.com/misc/Installing_AutoHotkey_and_writing_your_first_script.html))*

In the January 4 AutoHotkey column, "A Cool Little Appointment Reminder for Windows", I offered a short script that would schedule a reminder for sometime later in the day, then pop up the reminder at the appointed time (see Figure 1). Although the script works well, I complained at the time about not finding an easy way to calculate the difference between times and dates. Most other programming languages I've used included functions or commands to deal with the problem. Since that time I've discovered that AutoHotkey does indeed have ways to quickly and easily get the time/date calculations. It is so simple, yet it was hard to find—no special dedicated command or function. In this column, the Reminder script is rewritten using the built-in AutoHotkey time/date calculation thus eliminating quite a few lines of code.



**1. Enter the message and time.**



**2. Prompt confirms schedule.**



**3. Message pops up to remind you.**

Figure 1. The Reminder.ahk script has three pop-up windows: the setup box, the confirmation message, and the reminder which pops up at the scheduled time.

The second purpose of this column is to show how AutoHotkey can integrate with other scripting languages—in this case NirCmd and its Speak command. The Speak command in NirCmd is more powerful and flexible than any text reading features in AutoHotkey. This makes it ideal for adding to the Reminder app. Now, not only will the Reminder app pop up and stay always-on-top until closed, the text message will be read out loud every fifteen seconds until you either close the box or you're driven crazy.

Note: To use the NirCmd commands in an AutoHotkey script, the program *nircmd.exe* must first be installed in the Windows System folder per the instructions given in this week's "Windows Tips and Tricks" column.

## The New Reminder Script

The script for the Reminder app has been modified to include both the built-in time/date calculation and the implementation of the NirCmd Speak command with a new label (see Figure 2 in red boxes). This new version also uses the "%" expression technique for converting to the microseconds needed by the SetTimer command. (You may want to review the previous Reminder script since only the changes will be discussed here.)

```

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

ButtonSubmit:
Gui, Submit, NoHide

If (MyTime > A_Now)
{
    NewTime2 := MyTime - A_Now, s    Calculate the difference in seconds.
    FormatTime, Schedule, %MyTime%
    MsgBox,4160,Your Reminder, "%MyNote%" is scheduled for n%Schedule%

    #Persistent
    RemMessage := "Better get going!"
    SetTimer, ShowReminder, % newtime2*1000    Change to microseconds using the % expression.
}
Else
{
    NewTime2 := MyTime + 86400 - A_Now, s    Add 24 hours (in seconds) and calculate the difference in seconds.
    FormatTime, Schedule, %MyTime%, h:mmtt
    MsgBox,4160,Your Reminder, "%MyNote%" is scheduled for`nTomorrow a
    #Persistent
    RemMessage := "Better get going!"
    SetTimer, ShowReminder, % newtime2*1000    Change to microseconds using the % expression.
}

Return

GuiClose:
Gui, Destroy
Return

ShowReminder:
FormatTime, RightNow
#persistent
SetTimer, TalkToMe, 15000    Set timer for speaking prompt.

MsgBox,4160,Your Reminder!, %MyNote% %RemMessage%`n%RightNow%
SetTimer, ShowReminder, Off

IfMsgBox, OK
    SetTimer, TalkToMe, Off
return

TalkToMe:
run, nircmd.exe speak text "%MyNote% %RemMessage%
Return
  
```

Figure 2. The original Reminder.ahk script is altered to include the built-in time/date calculation format, the NirCmd Speak command, and an example of using the "%" expression within another command (SetTimer).

## Calculating New Times and Dates

I happened upon a better way to calculate new times and dates only because I was curious about the EnvAdd command ([www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/EnvAdd.htm](http://www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/EnvAdd.htm)).

```
EnvAdd, Var, Value [, TimeUnits]
```

I noticed the "[, *TimeUnits*]" option at the end of the command and found that "*TimeUnits* can be either Seconds, Minutes, Hours, or Days (or just the first letter of each of these)." This was the answer I was looking for in the referenced previous column. I could now calculate the time differences without resorting to the mathematics in the previous script shown here:

```
FormatTime, HrTime , %MyTime%, HH
FormatTime, MinTime , %MyTime%, m
FormatTime, SecTime , %MyTime%, s
NewTime := ((HrTime*3600 + MinTime*60 + SecTime)
            - (A_Hour*3600 + A_Min*60 + A_Sec))*1000
```

This *TimeUnits* option also works with other operations:

```
Var += Value [, TimeUnits]
Var -= Value [, TimeUnits]
```

The *TimeUnits* option is not mentioned in the expressions section which include ":", "+=", "-=" and other operators. I could now replace all the previous code above with one line:

```
NewTime2 := MyTime - A_Now, s
```

For convenience, I moved the microsecond conversion (\*1000) to where it was needed in the SetTimer command ([www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/SetTimer.htm](http://www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/SetTimer.htm)).

## Forcing an Expression

There are times when rather than using a variable within a command, an expression is useful. (This does not apply to output and input variables.) By preceding the expression with a percent sign (%) and a space or tab, the following expression will be evaluated. See "Force an expression ([www.autohotkey.com/docs/Variables.htm#Expressions](http://www.autohotkey.com/docs/Variables.htm#Expressions))" on the Variables and Expression Web page for examples. In this script an expression is forced to calculate the number of microseconds for the SetTimer command.

```
SetTimer, ShowReminder, % newtime2*1000
```

Note that no additional percent signs are required around the variable *newtime2*.

## Making the Reminder Speak

Adding speech to the AutoHotkey Reminder app is done through integrating the NirCmd Speak command into

the script. This is done by simply using the AutoHotkey Run command ([www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/Run.htm](http://www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/Run.htm)) to activate the *nircmd.exe* program within the new label routine *TalkToMe*:

```
TalkToMe:
run, nircmd.exe speak text "%MyNote% %RemMessage%"
Return
```

Note that AutoHotkey substitutes the value of *MyNote* and *RemMessage* for the text between the quotation marks. In this situation (text option), the quotation marks are required for the Speak command to work.

To start the audio, an additional *SetTimer* command is added to the original *ShowReminder* label routine.

```
SetTimer, TalkToMe, 15000
```

This sets the new label *TalkToMe* which includes the *nircmd.exe speak* statement to run starting 15 seconds after the pop-up and every 15 seconds thereafter. This audio read back of the message will continue forever unless there is a way to stop it. Therefore the following code which ends the label routine *TalkToMe* was added:

```
IfMsgBox, OK
    SetTimer, TalkToMe, Off
return
```

If the OK button is clicked or the pop-up is closed, *TalkToMe* is turned off.

To implement the entire new Reminder script (which runs with hotkey combination CTRL++R), copy-and-paste the following into a new or current AutoHotkey script:

```
^#R::
Gui, Font, s12, Arial
Gui, Add, Text,, 1. Select time`n2. Add note`n3. Submit`n4. Close popup
Gui, Add, DateTime, vMyTime w150 1, hh:mm tt
Gui, Add, Edit, vMyNote w250, Remind Me!
Gui, Add, Button, Default, Submit
Gui, Show, , Reminder
Return
ButtonSubmit:
Gui, Submit, NoHide
If (MyTime > A_Now)
{
    NewTime2 := MyTime - A_Now, s
    FormatTime, Schedule, %MyTime%
    MsgBox,4160,Your Reminder, "%MyNote%" is scheduled for`n%Schedule%
    #Persistent
    RemMessage := "Better get going!"
    SetTimer, ShowReminder, % newtime2*1000
}
Else
{
    NewTime2 := MyTime + 86400 - A_Now, s
    FormatTime, Schedule, %MyTime%, h:mmtt
```

```

    MsgBox,4160,Your Reminder, "%MyNote%" is scheduled for`nTomorrow at %Schedule%
    #Persistent
    RemMessage := "Better get going!"
    SetTimer, ShowReminder, % newtime2*1000
}
Return
GuiClose:
Gui, Destroy
Return
ShowReminder:
FormatTime, RightNow
#persistent
SetTimer, TalkToMe, 15000
MsgBox,4160,Your Reminder!, %MyNote% %RemMessage%`n%RightNow%
SetTimer, ShowReminder, Off

IfMsgBox, OK
    SetTimer, TalkToMe, Off
return
TalkToMe:
run, nircmd.exe speak text "%MyNote% %RemMessage%"
Return

```

After the script is loaded, CTRL++R opens the appointment setup window. This version allows you to set a reminder up to 24 hours later and reads the message every 15 seconds after the reminder activates. Adjust the SetTimer, TalkToMe time in the script to vary the interval.

Jack is the publisher of *ComputerEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is [www.computoredge.com](http://www.computoredge.com). He can be reached at [ceeditor@computoredge.com](mailto: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](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009SI3F52/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009SI3F52&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20)).

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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](http://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](http://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](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/misunderstanding-windows-8-jack-dunning/1109995715?ean=2940014229463)) and ComputerEdge E-Books ([www.computoredgebooks.com/Windows-Tips-and-Tricks\\_c4.htm?sourceCode=writer](http://www.computoredgebooks.com/Windows-Tips-and-Tricks_c4.htm?sourceCode=writer)).

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## Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“The iPad vs. the iPad mini vs. the Microsoft Surface”  
by Wally Wang

The iPad vs. the iPad mini vs. the Microsoft Surface; Creating Apps in BASIC; Future Products From Apple; Gravity Falls and the Future of Television; Dictation & Speech on Your Macintosh.

# Wally Wang's Apple Farm

When Apple first introduced the iPad, critics poked fun at the name, claimed tablets were useless, and waited for the iPad to fail. When the iPad started to kill netbooks, eat into PC sales, and define an entirely new mobile computing category, such early critics are now strangely silent.

Initially, the iPad was the only real choice for a tablet, ignoring those Tablet PC monstrosities with screens that folded back over the keyboard and were extremely heavy and bulky to use and carry around. Now that everyone has accepted tablets as useful (forgetting all the earlier criticism claiming that tablets were useless), the choices are not as simple any more. If you just want an e-reader, then a Kindle Fire is acceptable. If you just want a cheap tablet, then any Android tablet will do as long as you don't expect its app selection to be as large as the iPad app selection.

However, the three main tablet choices often boil down to the iPad with its 9.7-inch Retina display screen, the iPad mini with its 7.9-inch screen without the Retina display, and the Microsoft Surface tablet.

The Microsoft Surface tablet ([surface.microsoftstore.com/store/msstore/Content/pbpage.Surface](http://surface.microsoftstore.com/store/msstore/Content/pbpage.Surface)) is more of a laptop with tablet capabilities added on. If you're looking more for a laptop specifically to run Microsoft Office, then the Surface tablet will be your only choice. The cost will be at least \$499 plus another \$100+ for either a TouchCover (that lets you press letters fixed on the inside cover) or the TypeCover, which is a real keyboard.

If you only want to run Microsoft Office and nothing else, then the current Surface tablet is fine. If you want to run traditional Windows programs, you'll have to wait for the heavier and thicker Surface Pro tablet, which costs at least \$899.

The big advantage of the Surface Pro is that it can run any Windows programs. The big disadvantage is that few of those Windows programs will be touch-compatible, so you'll need to rely on the external keyboard to control them. That means using the Surface Pro more as a laptop that you can place on a flat surface rather than using it like a tablet. Few people will ever need to whip out a Surface Pro tablet and start using Photoshop or Quicken while standing in line at a bank or movie theater. You might pull out a tablet to run an app while waiting in line, but few people will want to do the same with a Surface Pro.

If you need a tablet more than a laptop with tablet capabilities, then you'll want to look at the iPad or iPad mini. The iPad mini's size and weight makes it easy to take everywhere you go, which increases your chances of doing something with it. The big disadvantage of the iPad mini is that its screen is not a Retina display, so text can look grainy, especially when compared to the Retina display of the larger iPad.

The larger, 3rd generation iPad with the Retina display makes text appear completely smooth with no visible pixels whatsoever. Once you see a Retina display, you'll never look at an ordinary screen the same way again.

The other advantage of the larger iPad is that the screen makes it easier to type on. If you're the type who uses an external Bluetooth keyboard, then the size of the screen won't matter. But if you prefer typing on the virtual keyboard, then the larger size of the iPad will make typing far more convenient than the smaller width of the iPad mini.

Basically the choices boil down to this. If you just want a tablet to run Microsoft Office and nothing else, then get the Surface tablet for \$499. If you want a lightweight laptop computer, then get the Surface Pro tablet for \$899. If you want a larger iPad screen with the Retina display, get the ordinary iPad for \$499. If you want the smaller size and lighter weight of the iPad mini, then prepare to spend at least \$329. Toss in another \$100 for accessories and that will be the real cost of any of your choices.

Tablets are the new computer market. As their capabilities improve and their apps get more sophisticated and powerful, it's only a matter of time before people will wonder why anyone could have argued against tablets as a viable form of computing. Of course by then, these early tablet critics will be busy arguing against the next revolutionary change in computing and they'll be just as loud and illogical in their criticism, and just as quick to slink away in silence when history proves them wrong all over again.

## Creating Apps in BASIC

In the days of MS-DOS, everyone could learn programming with the free QBasic interpreter that Microsoft included with every copy of MS-DOS. By using the BASIC programming language, QBasic made it easy for anyone to learn programming and create simple programs they could run and share with others.

Sadly, most computers these days omit a programming tool. If you want to learn to program your computer, you'll have to find your own programming compiler. Some programming compilers are free while others cost money. While you can find plenty of programming compilers for Windows and Mac OS X, there are far fewer programming compilers for iOS. One of the easiest to learn is techBASIC ([itunes.apple.com/us/app/techbasic/id470781862](http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/techbasic/id470781862)), which lets you write and run BASIC programs directly on your iPhone or iPad.

The one drawback of techBASIC is that any programs you create with techBASIC can't be shared or sold through the App Store. However, if you buy the techBASIC App Builder ([www.byteworks.us/Byte\\_Works/techBASIC\\_App\\_Builder.html](http://www.byteworks.us/Byte_Works/techBASIC_App_Builder.html)) program for \$49, you can write BASIC programs on an iPhone or iPad, copy the source code to your Macintosh, and then compile your program so you can sell or give it away through the App Store.

Using techBASIC App Builder is a bit odd. First, you need a copy of techBASIC on your iOS device so you can write and test your program on your iPhone or iPad. Once your program works, you need to copy the source code to your Macintosh computer, such as sending yourself an e-mail message.

Now you need to open Xcode, Apple's free compiler, and paste your techBASIC source code into Xcode. Essentially, techBASIC App Builder provides a skeleton Objective-C program that encompasses your techBASIC program. When you compile your program, Xcode treats it as an Objective-C program so you get all the benefits of Xcode without the hassle of learning Objective-C.

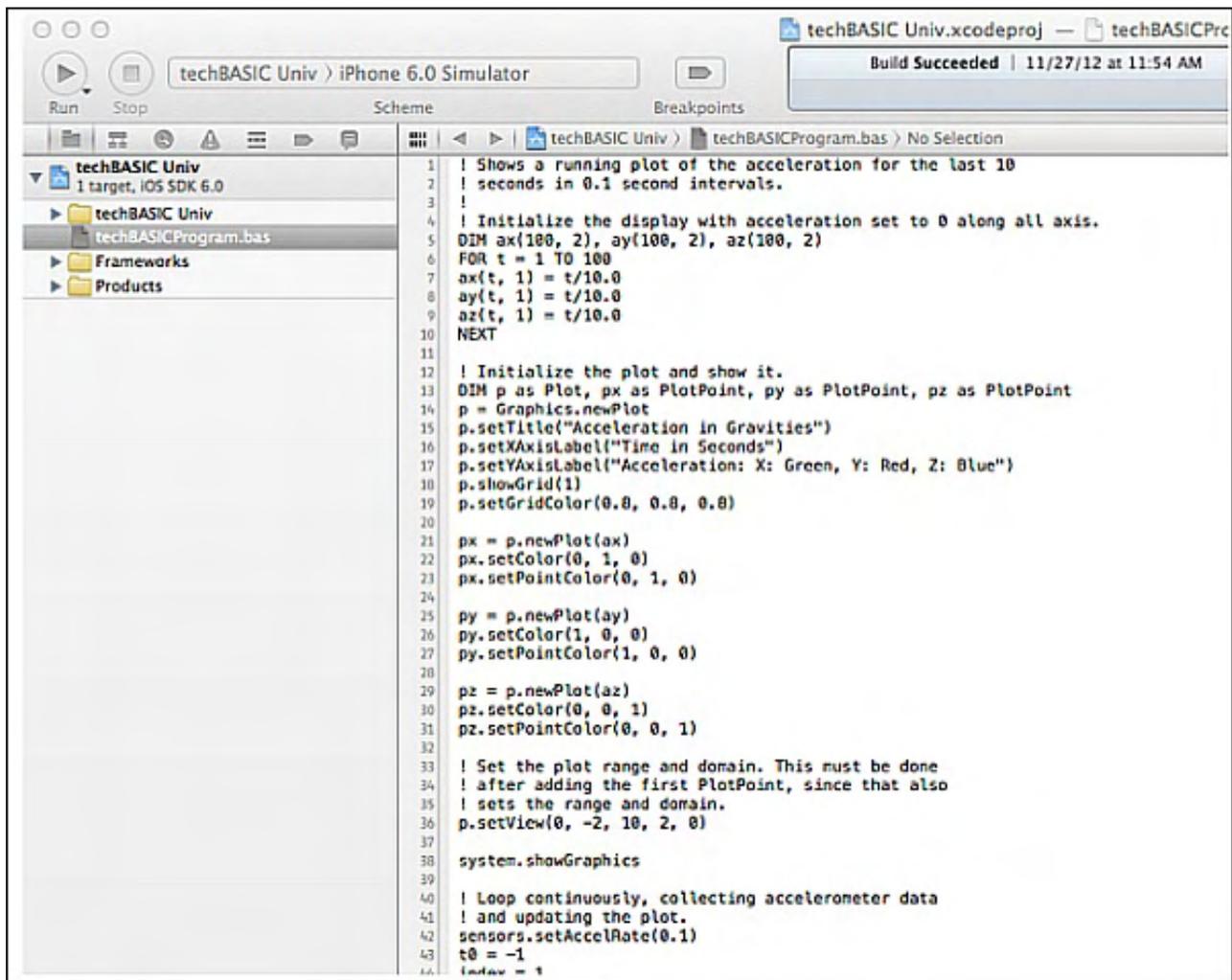


Figure 1. You need to paste your techBASIC source code within Xcode.

To learn more about the process of converting a techBASIC program into a real iOS app, read the techBASIC App Builder guide ([www.byteworks.us/Byte\\_Works/techBASIC\\_App\\_Builder\\_files/techBASIC%20App%20Builder.pdf](http://www.byteworks.us/Byte_Works/techBASIC_App_Builder_files/techBASIC%20App%20Builder.pdf)) to see how the whole process works.

By using techBASIC App Builder, you can create iOS apps using the easy to learn BASIC programming language with the added benefit of writing and testing your program right on your iOS device. If you decide to learn Objective-C and use Apple's free Xcode, you'll have to write your app on your Macintosh and test it within the iOS Simulator program, which isn't always accurate. As a result, you'll eventually need to test your program on a real iOS device anyway.

With techBASIC, you can create your program right on your iOS device and test features such as the accelerometer. Now you'll know exactly how your program will work before compiling it to an iOS app using techBASIC App Builder. To create apps using techBASIC App Builder, you'll need a copy of techBASIC running on your iOS device along with a free copy of Xcode on your Macintosh.

If you've ever wanted to create your own iOS apps but didn't want to learn the complexity of Objective-C and Xcode, then techBASIC App Builder might just be what you're looking for. Finally, you can write BASIC programs on your iOS device and sell your apps to others. For most people, techBASIC App Builder has just made iOS programming possible as a simpler solution for building apps that doesn't involve learning the complexities of Objective-C.

Future Products From Apple

While Apple continues to offer incremental improvements to their existing products, such as adding the Retina

display to more Macintosh models and eventually to the iPad mini as well, everyone's waiting for Apple to offer another product that critics will initially dismiss as useless right up until overwhelming evidence proves that the product has redefined a new market. Then such critics will dismiss Apple and gravitate towards a rival product that closely mimics Apple's design while claiming that Apple did nothing innovative at all.

The biggest rumored product coming from Apple has always been AppleTV. While Apple currently sells an AppleTV product that lets you purchase and view TV shows and movies, the rumored AppleTV set will somehow revolutionize TV watching altogether. The first solution would be to simplify the remote control and eliminate those armies of buttons with a much simpler and more intuitive interface.

Next, AppleTV supposedly will offer an inexpensive way to watch only what you want to watch without all those bundling offers that cable TV providers force on subscribers so they have to buy two or three bundles just to get all the channels they really want to watch. How Apple will manage to get all the networks to agree on this remains a mystery.

While rumors claim an AppleTV won't appear until late 2013 or even 2014, a more likely product Apple will introduce before the AppleTV is a wearable computer. Currently dubbed the iWatch, this product supposedly will resemble a wristwatch strapped to your arm. Now you'll be able to see information at a glance and possibly even make phone calls through the device as well.

Google is also pushing the wearable computer idea with their Google Glass concept. With both Apple and Google experimenting with wearable computers, you can expect that to be the next evolution in the mobile computing market. In the meantime, Microsoft will likely play catch up to both Apple and Google once more.

Perhaps the strangest Apple invention involves a recently filed patent for capturing energy ([inhabitat.com/apple-files-patent-for-wind-turbine-that-can-generate-energy-even-when-theres-no-wind/](http://inhabitat.com/apple-files-patent-for-wind-turbine-that-can-generate-energy-even-when-theres-no-wind/)) from wind turbines when there's no wind. The idea is to store energy as heat and then use that heat to generate electricity when the wind stops blowing.

Whatever Apple innovates, you can be certain critics will claim that it's totally useless while they rush to embrace copycat products that do the exact same thing as the Apple product they claim is absolutely pointless. Why critics embrace such convoluted thinking remains a mystery, but at least you can use their vocal criticism as evidence that Apple might be offering something new and innovative after all.

## Gravity Falls and the Future of Television

In the early days of movies, cartoons were often shown before the main feature. Then cartoons got pushed aside to Saturday morning children's shows and got stuck with a second class status until studios started making feature-length cartoons all over again. When Disney's "Beauty and the Beast" got nominated for a Best Picture Academy Award and "The Simpsons" took over the prime time television air waves, cartoons soon became a respected form of story telling once more.

If you want a glimpse of what the future of TV might be like, download and watch an episode of the latest Disney television cartoon dubbed *Gravity Falls* ([itunes.apple.com/us/tv-season/gravity-falls-vol.-1/id530179161](http://itunes.apple.com/us/tv-season/gravity-falls-vol.-1/id530179161)), which has been gathering acclaim from critics and the public alike.

The cartoon itself is a combination of the *X-Files* with the quirkiness of *Twin Peaks*. The basic storyline is that twins from the city are sent to spend a summer with their uncle, who runs a tourist trap called the Mystery Shack, in a small town called Gravity Falls. Each episode, the twin children run across some supernatural element from gnomes and time travelers to minotaurs and Halloween monsters.



Figure 2. The main characters of "Gravity Falls."

The cartoon itself isn't the glimpse of the future of television, but the way that it's available for purchase through iTunes. In the old days, people had to rearrange their schedules to watch a specific TV show. If a show aired at 8:00pm on Tuesday night and you weren't sitting in front of your television set exactly at 8:00pm, you missed the show.

VCRs and DVRs helped eliminate this problem by letting us record shows and watch them at our convenience. The problem was that if you forgot to record a show, you couldn't see that show.

The future of television lies in providing shows available when we want to view them on the device we want to watch them on. Instead of being a slave to your TV set and the network's fixed programming schedule, you can choose to watch TV shows on your smartphone, tablet, or ordinary desktop computer on your schedule. Now there's no reason to ever miss seeing your favorite show again.

As more people stop watching TV when shows are originally air and start watching TV whenever they feel like watching a show, the idea of programming schedules becomes pointless. The future of television takes control away from the networks and puts it in the hands of the consumer.

Perhaps that's why the traditional networks are resisting the rumor of AppleTV so strongly. When people aren't tied to network schedules, the power of networks diminishes. When people can create their own shows independently from the networks, that's when the power of the networks will disappear altogether.

If you want to see an interesting cartoon series, you may find *Gravity Falls* a funny and well-written show. By watching any show through iTunes, you'll also help bring the future of television to computers and away from dumb TV sets once and for all.

In the meantime, you can watch the continuing demise of Blockbuster Video ([www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2414550,00.asp](http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2414550,00.asp)), which plans on shutting down 300 more stores. The idea of driving to a retail store, searching through their limited selection of videos, and taking it home to watch is completely obsolete. Instead, you can turn on your smartphone, tablet, or computer, pick out the exact video you want to watch, pay for it, and start enjoying your chosen show right away. If Blockbuster Video can go from a leader in the video industry to a forgotten relic within a few short years, does anyone believe other leaders in the market can't

suffer that same fate?

\* \* \*

Reading can get tiring after a while, so you might want your Macintosh to read text to you instead. To make this easy, just click the Apple menu and choose System Preferences. When the System Preferences window appears, click the Dictation & Speech icon. Now click the Text to Speech tab.



Figure 3. Turning on a hotkey combination for reading text aloud.

Select the "Speak the selected text when the key is pressed" check box. The default keystroke combination is Option+Esc, which means if you highlight text in a document or Web page and press Option+Esc, your Macintosh's synthesized computer voice will read your selected text out loud.

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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468))  
*Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon and Gerald Fisher* ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894))  
*How to Live with a Cat (When You Really Don't Want To)* ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006DJYL70/ref=as\\_li\\_tf\\_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=B006DJYL70](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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/](http://www.15minutemoviemethod.com/))" Wally can be reached at [wally@computoredge.com](mailto:wally@computoredge.com).

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## Beyond Personal Computing

"Zombies" by Marilyn K. Martin

From Movie Monsters to Government Training Projects

We all like to watch a good creature-feature movie now and then, hoping for a scary Computer Generated (CGI) Monster at least worth the price of our popcorn. Being surprised or shocked delivers a jolt of adrenaline, and is a natural "high." But somewhere along the line in our Connected Age, zombies leapt off the screen, and otherwise normal people in horrible makeup started staggering down our streets "for fun." (Participatory Monsterdom?)

### Zombies in Voodoo History

Black slaves brought their African folk religions, like Voodoo, with them to the Caribbean. Starting in Haiti in the 1700s, secret Voodoo societies called Bizango ([www.monstropedia.org/index.php?title=Bizango](http://www.monstropedia.org/index.php?title=Bizango)) were incorporated into the slaves' resistance against their French masters. In Voodoo, zombies are the undead, or the dead reanimated by priests employing unnatural means. A zombie is just an empty shell with neither a soul nor free will, and the belief is heavily influenced by the dehumanizing aspects of slavery.

Later researchers discovered that a living person could be "zombie-fied" by ingesting several powders that induced a death-like state. Other researchers insisted that zombies ([www.monstropedia.org/index.php?title=Zombie](http://www.monstropedia.org/index.php?title=Zombie)) were created through a person's own belief-system, creating a quasi-hysterical amnesiac or catatonic state in a living person, for compliance with the zombie-maker's will.

### Arising-Dead in Worldwide Folklore

In the Middle Ages, superstitions from Europe to Asia spoke of human souls of the dead returning to haunt the living. Occasionally accompanied by their decaying, skeletal bodies, they were said to arise on their own or through Black Magic to avenge a horrible misdeed—like their own murder. The concept of the "returning dead" was a popular one in many cultures, from frightening children to stay in bed at night, to warning-myths to keep people away from certain locations and/or to protect the darkest of family secrets.

But everyone likes a good ghost or monster story around the fireplace, and soon there were arising-dead, or half-dead cursed creatures appearing in literature. Vampires—based on very real sadistic rulers and blood-cults—were thinking-undead who appeared whole (not skeletal), craving human blood for sustenance and avoiding sunlight. Werewolves were also cursed-but-alive beings who changed form by nightfall—which was a common theme in medieval mythologies.

Mary Shelley's literary monster, Frankenstein, was sewn-together from multiple dead bodies. Jewish folklore spoke of a Golem, an animated human created from inanimate matter, such as mud. Volatile, strong and unpredictable, but capable of thought and compassion, these "monsters" could wreck havoc 24/7. They also

represented everything from fearful products of incest, to little-understood primitive peoples whose semi-nudity was a counterpoint to the repressed sexuality of "proper society" at the time.

## Zombies in American Media

The first movie monsters in the 1920s—even before sound—were vampires, werewolves and mummies. But in the US by the 1950s, WWII was over and science fiction B-movies were cranking out stories of the horrors created by nuclear radiation. Suddenly, gigantic and destructive creatures created by radiation were the homegrown New Monsters, as they stomped mindlessly across the landscape and could only be stopped by military-grade weaponry.

In 1954, Richard Matheson wrote a science fiction story about a future Los Angeles overrun by undead cannibals as survivors of a pandemic that caused vampirism. The idea of mindless cannibals, more dead than alive, passing on their "condition" through a scratch or a bite (like vampires) continued to mutate. It was only a matter of time until undead cannibals morphed into Voodoo zombies, as the closest matching mythology.

In 1968, George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* set up the template for zombies as the staggering, flesh-eating undead, trying to claw their way into a farmhouse of grouped survivors. The zombies couldn't be reasoned with; it was just kill or be killed/bitten and then enlarge the zombie ranks. The survivors scrambled to destroy the zombies, which could only be accomplished by destroying the zombies' heads. Dan O'Bannon's 1985 movie, *Return of the Living Dead*, introduced zombies that hungered specifically for brains. And an American horror movie genre and pop cultural phenomenon was born.

## The American Evolution of Zombies

A few years ago, that great iconic medium for our deepest undead-dread—*Cracked Magazine*—took it upon themselves to deconstruct the Zombie Mythology ([www.cracked.com/funny-38-zombies/](http://www.cracked.com/funny-38-zombies/)). They chronicled the evolution of actual zombie movement, from the shambling, stiff-walkers in Romero movies, through the hip dance routines of Michael Jackson's "Thriller," up to the running/sprinting zombies around the year 2000. When the video game *Resident Evil* came to Playstation in 1996, it was the first "survival horror game," and introduced a dog zombie and plant zombie. It was followed by a *Resident Evil* movie in 2002, with later sequels. 2004 introduced that great zombie parody and undead romantic comedy, *Shaun of the Dead*.

By 2009, we are informed by *Cracked*, zombies in movies and games had learned to "downshift and operate complex machinery." Zombies in games were then vastly smarter and strangely muscular, possibly because (as in *Resident Evil 5*) they were created by being infected with an anabolic steroids virus. They could now ride motorcycles, tote machine guns, use heavy artillery and drive big semi trucks. And, as happens frequently in real life, destroying a game zombie turns its body into gold or ammo. Decisions, decisions, decisions.

Movie zombies were mostly played out by 2012, and only lingered in parodies, sequels of sequels—and foreign Nazi movies. They had also degenerated into the formula teen-scream flick, like the 2009 Norwegian movie, *Dead Snow*. Laughing teenagers trek through the snow up to an old cabin and find an even older man. Stories of Treasure set the plot in motion. Suddenly Nazi zombies come back to life, arising from the snow in full uniform. Arguments, screaming, chainsaws, lots of blood, and eventually the teenagers re-defeat the Third Reich.

## Helpful Articles about Zombies

With all the psycho-babble comparing zombies to teenagers (who seldom speak, shamble around staring longingly, but who love to eat and go to the mall), *Cracked Magazine* took it upon their crumbling shoulders to educate us even more about zombies. One helpful article was titled "6 Signs You Are About to Be Attacked By Zombies ([www.cracked.com/article\\_16717\\_6-signs-youre-about-to-be-attacked-by-zombies.html](http://www.cracked.com/article_16717_6-signs-youre-about-to-be-attacked-by-zombies.html))." Strange cravings to suddenly go to a mall (even at 3am), saying something that invites/foreshadows a zombie attack, or waking up in an abandoned hospital are all sure signs the hungry-undead are just around the corner and stumbling jerkily right toward you, through some kind of hormonal radar.

Another helpful *Cracked* article judges how your favorite movie hero would do in a zombie attack ([www.cracked.com/article/163\\_how-7-iconic-movie-characters-would-do-in-zombie-attack/](http://www.cracked.com/article/163_how-7-iconic-movie-characters-would-do-in-zombie-attack/)). John McClane (*Die Hard* movies) is tough and resourceful enough to do-in the zombies and survive, especially if he's in a framework of a sky-rise with lots of McGyver-like doodads to quickly construct a flame thrower. Pint-sized Kevin (*Home Alone* movies) could only survive if he retreats to his tree-house, since zombies can't climb, although he might slowly die from thirst and starvation.

Tony Montana (*Scarface*) is coke-numbed tough and mean to the bone, but in charging the zombie hoard head-on he'd get attacked and bitten, and undoubtedly end up a zombie himself. (Hard to tell if that would be an improvement.) Another kid hero, Harry (*Harry Potter* movies) would probably survive with the magic of flying away on a broom, since zombies can't fly. But he'd lose points with kiddies for abandoning his broom-less friends to the hungry undead.

## The Dreaded Zombie Apocalypse

The maturation of the American zombie mythology has seen it move beyond movies and video games, into semi-realistic "what if" scenarios. People are writing serious books, from how to survive a flat-out Zombie Apocalypse ("Tight clothes and short hair" to "Blades don't need reloading," in *The Zombie Survival Guide* by Max Brooks) to imaginary tales and travels during/after a ZA. There are anti-zombie prepper supplies, and even a Web site ([www.zombieprepnetwork.com/](http://www.zombieprepnetwork.com/)) that moves cheerfully from reviews of zombie TV shows, to real news items about the face-chewing insane.

So what are the current theories about how a Zombie Apocalypse could start? Most ZAers point to science-run-amok, a popular theme since those nuclear-madness movies in the '50s. Some think that an ambitious but soul-less scientist will create or discover a life-altering substance, similar to Dr. Frankenstein. And he'll keep testing it on various almost-humans until an almost-human breaks out of captivity and infects the world ([theoatmeal.com/comics/zombie\\_how](http://theoatmeal.com/comics/zombie_how)).

Others think that, like the face-chewers, there are plenty of biological organisms or inhaled bath products that can affect or infect human brains and cause cannibalistic behavior ([www.zombieprepnetwork.com/zombie-science-2/zombie-virus/](http://www.zombieprepnetwork.com/zombie-science-2/zombie-virus/)). So in a Classic Sense, reanimating the dead may not only be entirely possible, but there are plenty of infectious agents and crazy face-chewers who, if organized and unionized, have the potential to turn into a zombie hoard after everyone else's flesh and brains.

*Cracked* had another relevant if questionably accurate take on "5 Scientific Reasons A Zombie Apocalypse Could Actually Happen ([www.cracked.com/article\\_15643\\_5-scientific-reasons-zombie-apocalypse-could-actually-happen.html](http://www.cracked.com/article_15643_5-scientific-reasons-zombie-apocalypse-could-actually-happen.html))." Brain parasites like toxoplasma gondii already infect half the human population of Earth, and if triggered could possibly turn half the planet nutso. Which, as any ZAer knows, may prompt them to chew off the faces of random strangers and then think, what the heck, why not keep munching into the brain?

Neurotoxins are also popular as potential zombie-creators, as well as Rage Viruses, like a human version of Mad Cow Disease. Neurogenesis, or regrowing dead brain tissue, might be a candidate, and don't forget those upcoming scientific marvels, Nanobots Or micro-teensy robots hurtling through your blood vessels someday soon, taking secret orders from Skynet. And if you really want to scare yourself into never sleeping soundly again, consider any of these as "militarily weaponized" or sprayed over your town by that notorious CIA front company, "NFM" (Need Fresh Meat).

## Serious Role-playing with Zombies as the Enemy

More than a few of us were a tad surprised to hear that our Center for Disease Control (CDC) had started something called a Zombie Preparedness program ([www.cdc.gov/phpr/zombies.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/zombies.htm)), which quickly—no pun intended—took on a life of its own. Their message? "If you are generally well equipped to deal with a Zombie Apocalypse, you will be prepared for a hurricane, pandemic, earthquake, or terrorist attack."

Oh really? Shows how little government types know about zombies, as understood in popular culture. Can you

go after a hurricane with a chainsaw? Is beheading really an effective way to deal with a pandemic? And how can moldy, staggering, mostly-dead zombies lusting for "Brains!" teach us anything about post-apocalyptic food sources?

Or Are Zombies Just Training Tools For an Alien Invasion?

Economist Paul Krugman thinks an Alien Invasion ([zombies.monstrous.com/](http://zombies.monstrous.com/)) (with real extraterrestrials—not zombie stand-ins) could solve our economic problems. Just like World War II pulled the US out of the Great Depression, he thinks an ET Invasion and Subsequent War would be terrific for a primo "fiscal stimulus and then economic recovery."

However, if the invading ETs have significantly superior technology and weaponry, and won't conveniently keel over dead when it rains or they catch a virus, we could be in a lot of trouble. Then our only defense might be to pretend we're all zombies, and shamle around acting half-dead and brainless. This might give the invading aliens a false sense of security, as us faux-blood zombies squat in basements and drainage ditches to plot our revenge.

Or maybe we can at least buy time if the confused ETs are pounding on their hand-helds for a better translation of "Brains! I need brains!", needing better cultural references than "Audio/Visual renditions of mixed-message mythologies, coupled with desires for no responsibility, amid the stress of unfulfilled sexual tension caused by a lack of dating services for the undead."

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Marilyn is a freelance writer and humorist, with a special interest (besides computers and technology) in Science Fiction. She has had short stories appear in the following 2011-2012 publications: *Deadman's Tome* ([www.demonictome.com/](http://www.demonictome.com/)) online magazine; *Strange Valentines* anthology; *Cosmic Crime* anthology; *PerihelionSF* online magazine; and *The Fifth Dimension* online magazine. She has also sold a short story to appear in the March 2012 anthology, *Universe Horribilis*. She is also writing a Young Adult SF series, *Chronicles of Mathias* ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/1598249002/ref=as\\_li\\_ss\\_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1598249002&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1598249002/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1598249002&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20)), and contributes weekly articles or humor columns to *ComputerEdge*.

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

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

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## Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"Netflix Browser Vs. Windows 8 App," "Touchscreen Apps," "Windows 8 and Free Stuff," "Locking Down Wi-Fi"

### Netflix Browser Vs. Windows 8 App

[Regarding Jack Dunning's January 11 article, "Windows 8 and Free Stuff":]

I don't understand your reference to slow scrolling left to right in the Web based Netflix pages. I see no left/right, only vertical, filling my widescreen 23" monitor. And they scroll up and down just fine, even on my fairly old system. Frankly, I find the new "icon" based Netflix page a pain. I find it much easier to read the title in text, with short summary already listed, vs. having to put my cursor over each "tile" just to know what it's about.

-Rich Ernst, San Diego, CA

### Touchscreen Apps

How about an article on touchscreen apps that run on Win7. I have an ASUS tablet with touchscreen. Regular programs don't work worth a damn unless I use a pen.

-Frank Holland, Denver, CO

*It seems that you have hit the nail on the head. I did a little investigating and the news for Windows 7 touchscreen apps is not good—so far.*

*-Jack Dunning*

### Windows 8 and Free Stuff

[Regarding Jack Dunning's January 11 article, "Windows 8 and Free Stuff":]

Two comments:

First, I would like to share that the word "app" for me is equal to lite. There are so many times when I am using an app that I say, "Oh I cannot do that with this app, I'll have to wait til I get on the computer." Do you know what I mean? Until these apps replace the full function of what you can do on a computer, there will be a need to use a laptop/desktop with fully functioning programs.

Second, I am wondering when MS is going to learn that when you have a system that works, and then you change it, you are going to frustrate and lose your customers. A great example is when I go from using Office '03 and try to navigate the latest version of Office I am thoroughly confused and frustrated. I am trying to do the same thing on each one, however the way the feature is accessed is two different things. So now I have to learn a whole new way of formatting a cell, or inserting a graphic or positioning that graphic? And sometimes they split up the available subsets of options so that now I have to look in two different places to do the operation? And what did we gain? I have no idea. It is just a loss of productivity and a source of frustration that further increases MS market share. Get a clue MS!

So as a conclusion, if the app isn't fully functional, then it will not ever replace its computer counterpart, and if it works don't fix it.

Thank you for listening.

-Paul Anthony, San Diego, CA

Oh boy, free apps to replace the apps that already were free and existed for the desktop! I've used a tape showing apps for many, many years that still works fine in Windows 8 that originally came from *PC Magazine*. Similarly still available for free via Software Informer ([tapecalc.software.informer.com/download/](http://tapecalc.software.informer.com/download/)).

-Rich Ernst, San Diego, CA

Locking Down Wi-Fi

[Regarding the January 11 Digital Dave column:]

This is for Michael from Boulder, CO:

I have a friend who lives in the sleepy village of Laguna Beach, CA, that also subscribed to, "I live in a residential area; no one will use my Wi-Fi signal." *until* one evening he noticed that his browser was running waaaaaay slow, which it never did at that time of the day before.

After doing a few pings with no real definitive results, he checked his router to see if that was the culprit. Lo and behold, the thing was active and lit up like a Christmas tree. What happened, was that the guys living upstairs from him (all engineers, one with a PHD) were using his signal. When my friend asked them why, their answer was that in doing this, they didn't have to pay for service. How sweet of them to be so meek and honest. Who knows what they were downloading and/or uploading? My friend immediately encrypted his router, pronto. So far, he hasn't gotten any late-night knocks at the door from men wearing dark suits.

-Andrew Kliss, San Marcos, CA

Digital Dave,

Thanks for that last statement... "Isolating your Wi-Fi connection is not always just about security. It's about bandwidth as well as security."

That is probably the biggest reason right there IMHO.

-Paul Anthony, San Diego, CA

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*ComputerEdge* always wants to hear from you, our readers. If you have specific comments about one of our articles, please click the "Tell us what you think about this article!" link at the top or bottom of the specific article/column at ComputerEdge.com ([webserver.computoredge.com/online.mvc?src=ebook](http://webserver.computoredge.com/online.mvc?src=ebook)). Your comments will be attached to the column and may appear at a later time in the "Editor's Letters" section. If you want to submit a short "ComputerQuick Review", or yell at us, please e-mail us at [ceeditor@computoredge.com](mailto:ceeditor@computoredge.com). If you would like to review our recent e-books, please visit ComputerEdge E-Books ([www.computoredgebooks.com/](http://www.computoredgebooks.com/)).

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