

ComputerEdge™ Online — 05/10/13

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 and More!



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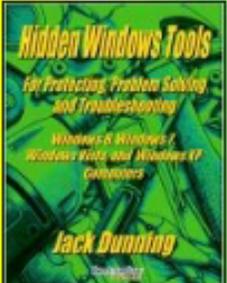
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Digital Dave

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

E-mail Address Too Long; External USB HDD for Backup; Internet Explorer 10 Stops.

Dear Digital Dave,

On many occasions I have to enter my e-mail address in documents, information request, etc. As you can see it is 19 characters long. What is the best or easiest way to insert my e-mail address into documents without typing it each time? I have been looking at hotkeys and macros, but that may be above my capabilities.

Thanks,

*Bob Todd
Conifer, CO*

Dear Bob,

I suppose the simplest way to insert an e-mail address (or any long text) in Windows is to select the text and use CTRL+C to copy it, then CTRL+V to paste it into the appropriate spot. However, this requires a number of keystrokes each time you need to update the address in the Windows Clipboard. I looked for a simple batch file which would add the e-mail address to the Clipboard for later pasting, but I kept running into problems with it. (It doesn't work the same for all versions of Windows.) I found an article (www.yourtechtamer.com/blog/2011/08/can-you-create-a-shortcut-to-auto-paste-your-email-address-onto-the-clipboard/) which covers the topic, but after a cursory look I decided that it was more complicated than I wanted to pursue.

Quite frankly, the simplest way I've seen to solve the problem is with AutoHotkey. If you can create a text file and type one line of simple code (`:*d@::digitaldave@mymailserver.com`), then you can quickly insert your e-mail address into any program or Web page. (In this case typing "d@" would immediately convert to "digitaldave@mymailserver.com" in any text editing field.) An AutoHotkey column by Jack Dunning, "Beginner's AutoHotkey Tip for Long E-Mail Addresses", gives an explanation of how to do it. You do need to install the AutoHotkey program first, but you can get details for downloading and installing from the *ComputerEdge* AutoHotkey Web page (www.computoredge.com/misc/Installing_AutoHotkey_and_writing_your_first_script.html).

Many people are put off by anything that smacks of a little programming, but I think most would find it surprisingly simple. It is certainly less difficult than trying to do the same thing with batch files. Once you have your e-mail address in a script which loads whenever you log on, anytime you type your two or three letter code, the e-mail address will automatically replace the letter combination. Give it a try. It's all free.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

About three years ago, I bought a Maxtor external HDD I use for monthly backup. Their software calls it a Safety Drill. Used it to restore 2X.

My PC has 160GB HDD, I'm using about 45+GB. The backup HDD will hold about three sessions. About a month ago it said "Backup completed with errors." Since then it only backs up 2-3 GB, then stops. I tried reformatting the external drive, but didn't help. Do you think the problem is the external HDD, the system HDD, a virus, or something else?

*James Adair
San Diego, CA*

Dear James,

Since the problem only occurs when you are trying to run a backup, it is likely that the external drive is becoming flaky. After all, it is three years old. It sounds like your backup software is doing a complete backup rather than an incremental changed file backup. If you're doing regular backups, then that drive could be doing many more writes than the main drive which only writes as needed.

You don't say what version PC you're using so I'm not sure which Backup and Restore utilities you have available. If you use the utilities that came with your computer, you could get a different result—if the drive is still good.

In any case, external USB drives (www.amazon.com/External-Hard-Drives-Storage-Add-Ons/b/?_encoding=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&linkCode=ur2&node=595048&tag=comput0b9-20) are relatively inexpensive—many for as little as \$50. I would get another backup drive. Then, if the new backup drive works, you know that the first drive was the problem. If not, then you know that you need to dig deeper into the computer and the main hard drive. The beauty of external USB drives is that they are easy to replace and can be used almost anywhere. If your backup is important to you, then this is no place to scrimp for the sake of a few dollars.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I had or have Internet Explorer 10 on two different computers. The problem I'm having is that various Web sites don't seem to recognize it. Two examples are, first, trying to download a purchased copy of Adobe Acrobat XI, it insisted that I had browser older than Internet Explorer 4 and wouldn't go any further; second on a golf tee time site, to confirm the tee time I need to copy a five letter gibberish word and after I do that and try to send it, IE 10 just sits there. I can go back, but going forward gets the same result. My solution so far is to use Chrome, but a couple of sites are better viewed in Internet Explorer. I've also uninstalled 10 and gone back to IE 9 on one computer, but I don't like that solution either. Help!

*John Smith
Denver, CO*

Dear John,

I wish that there were quick and easy answers to the problems with Internet Explorer. Microsoft has always ignored standards and gone its own way. This works out fine when Web sites are designed specifically for Internet Explorer, but both Firefox and Chrome are more reliable for most sites. I keep all three programs on all of my computers and switch when circumstances dictate. None of them work every time for all possible situations.

A few weeks ago I addressed a couple of questions from readers using Internet Explorer 10. You should look over those answers. It's possible that the response which shows you how to set Internet Explorer 10 to earlier versions will help. At the very least, you should not need to revert to Internet Explorer 9 since that is one of the settings.

Is it any wonder that so many people are sticking with older software (Windows XP)? New versions of programs are often not improvements. *"The more things change, the more they stay the same."* —*Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr*

Note for XP Users: Upgrading from XP does make sense if you insist on using Internet Explorer, as XP limits you to Internet Explorer 8 which is much worse than either 9 or 10.

Digital Dave

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Medical Tech and Bio-Science Updates

Robotic surgery has been around for awhile, and although less invasive, multiple incisions are still required for the tiny camera and cutting tools. *The New York Times* reported in November 2012 that even less invasive robotic surgery (www.nytimes.com/2012/11/18/business/single-incision-surgery-via-new-robotic-systems.html?ref=technology) systems are either on the market or in development. The new systems require only one small incision through which the robotic arms and camera can enter. The hope is that the wound can heal faster and with less scarring.



In early February 2013, AP reported through the *Denver Post* that IBM's Watson (of *Jeopardy* TV fame) has graduated from medical programming, and is being offered commercially (www.denverpost.com/technology/ci_22549470/watsons-medical-expertise-offered-commercially) to doctors and health insurance companies. Two Watson applications are now available, one to help assess treatments for lung cancer and the other to help manage health insurance decisions and claims.

For medical professionals accessing Watson through a tablet or other computer, Watson will compare a patient's medical records against its learned database, and make several

"I don't know why I was suspended from doing surgery! I'm not the one who loaded the Appendix app rather than the GallBladder app!"

recommendations in decreasing order of confidence. For physicians, Watson will also recommend the treatment most likely to succeed. While for insurers, Watson will consider what treatment should be authorized for payment.

The New York Times also ran a story in February 2013, that the Food and Drug Administration had approved the first bionic eye (www.nytimes.com/2013/02/15/health/fda-approves-technology-to-give-limited-vision-to-blind-people.html) for the blind. Called Argus II, it involves an artificial retina with a sheet of electrodes implanted in the eye, teamed with glasses with an attached camera and portable video processor. The system will let some blind people detect outlines and boundaries, like people or vehicles nearby, as well as crosswalks and even large numbers or letters.

Zero-TV Households Growing

Yahoo ran a story in April 2013 that TV companies are becoming alarmed over a growing number of viewers turning off their TVs (news.yahoo.com/broadcasters-worry-zero-tv-homes-154357339.html) altogether. The Nielsen Co. TV-watcher pollster has dubbed this group "Zero TV" households, since they've stopped paying for cable or satellite TV. Instead they are watching movies and shows on the Internet, sometimes via smartphone connections. Nielsen counts 5 million "Zero TV" viewers now, up from 2 million in 2007.

In response, TV companies and networks are in a push to get broadcast shows on everything from tablet computers to backseats of cars. But most Zero-TV households are happy with online video subscriptions from Netflix and Amazon, unfazed by watching hit TV shows a year after broadcast. So as the traditional TV industry mourns the loss of these "cord-cutters," business is booming for companies selling antennas capable of accepting free digital signals.

Did the idiocy of "scripted" reality shows and too many commercials start this exodus? A 2009 article in *NBC-Today* said that most reality shows, even then, existed in a middle ground of not being fully scripted—but not being completely truthful either. Since then, more danger-and-drama have been noticeably added to many reality shows, as they tend even more toward a "manipulated format," or "artificially enhanced" situations.

A 2009 article in *Bloomberg* questioned the wisdom of networks "running as many ads as viewers will tolerate," tested on recruited audiences and focus groups in Las Vegas. The trend in 2009 was to run 16, 30-second ads every half hour, up from only 6 such ads in the 1950s-60s. And more commercials per half hour were being plotted even then, since networks were armed with survey data that said people remembered online commercials better than TV set commercials.

Start-up Funding Evolves—More Crowdfunding and Seed-Money

In January 2013, *Xconomy* reported that crowdfunding was coming (www.xconomy.com/national/2013/01/28/crowdfunding-is-coming-to-biotech-so-get-ready-for-a-wild-ride/) to biotech. While most biotech needs \$50-\$100 Million to develop a new drug or device, there are questions about whether crowdfunding—with pay-what-you-want from individuals—is a good fit for biotech. But companies like Health Tech Hatch (www.healthtechhatch.com/), MedStartr (signup.medstartr.com/) and Poliwoog (www.poliwoog.com/) are having some success with crowdfunding for bio-medical research and development (R&D). With venture capital contracting in an uncertain economy, the JOBS Act passed last year now enables private companies to stay private with up to 2,000 investors, which should help bio-medical crowdfunding efforts.

The Seattle Times ran a story in February 2013 about how Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen is awarding millions to cellular-level bio-medical research (seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2020449487_allengrantsxml.html). The \$7.5 Million in grants come from the Allen Distinguished Investigators family foundation (www.pgafoundations.com/TemplateMain.aspx?contentId=53), aimed at research projects too risky for other investors. Allen and his foundation (created in 2010) have recently revamped to "focus on young scientists with big ideas." Of this latest group of grants, not one is led by tenured professors. A recent trend to fund innovative scientists earlier in their careers—when funds used to be hard to come by—will help provide a career boost for "scientists with the potential to make major discoveries."

In March 2013, *Xconomy* reported that Seattle venture capital firm Maveron (maveron.com/) is also following this recent trend, to make more early investments (www.xconomy.com/seattle/2013/03/27/why-maveron-plans-more-venture-investments-in-consumer-startups/) in tech-enabled consumer businesses. This "seed strategy" has Maveron zeroing in on offering \$100,000 to \$250,000 to entrepreneurs with "big ideas for remaking commerce, education, health and wellness." With \$800 Million of capital under management, Maveron aims to make one investment a month in "early stage consumer-oriented companies," from anywhere in the country.

Updates on Start-ups: From Liability Backgrounds to Craftsy and Apps

The Seattle Times (from the *NY Times*) reported in January 2013 that despite more financiers jumping into tech start-ups, their Wall Street backgrounds are proving to be liabilities (seattletimes.com/html/business/2020223465_financetechxml.html) as they hunt for start-up funds. Some don't know how to write computer code, others' "novel ideas" have already been done, while others burn out too early with "the penny-pinching and frustration of start-up life." So Silicon Valley investors are skeptical of people from financial backgrounds, especially since big investors are becoming very picky in these bad economic times.

Also in January 2013, the *Denver Post* reported on a 3-year-old Denver start-up called Sympoz Inc. (www.sympoz.com/about/) that lets crafters take lessons (www.denverpost.com/business/ci_22469688?source=pop) on their own individual schedules from experts. Through their Craftsy Web site (www.craftsy.com/), they offer craft classes and supplies in everything from cake decorating to quilting, offering online classes from worldwide experts. The students can access any of the 140 classes for \$15-\$50 for a four-hour class, anytime and from any device. "These (craft) enthusiast communities are small, but willing to pay for quality," says Jason Mendelson, whose Foundry Group (foundrygroup.com/) had invested in Sympoz. This is a successful niche-type start-up that addressed an unmet need for people with the means and willingness to pay.

In March 2013, *Forbes* ran a story on how a small group of apps can help start-up Office Managers (www.forbes.com/sites/yec/2013/03/05/9-awesome-apps-for-your-startup-office-manager/) in their pressure-cooker world of keeping everyone motivated and on schedule. The apps listed are for everything from travel (www.hipmunk.com/about/), to note-taking (evernote.com/), as well as Team Calendars (support.google.com/calendar/answer/2465776?hl=en) and Team Meals like www.zerocater.com (www.zerocater.com) and www.myeatclub.com (www.myeatclub.com).

Law Enforcement Tech Updates

The New York Times ran a story in early April 2013 that a new policing system (www.nytimes.com/2013/04/04/nyregion/new-york-citys-police-surveillance-technology-could-bring-in-money.html?emc=tnt&tntemail1=y&_r=0) using algorithms is both making New York safer, and making money for the City by marketing it to other jurisdictions. Microsoft designed a system with the New York Police Department called the Domain Awareness System. In the six months since its implementation, Microsoft has been surprised by the response and is actively negotiating with prospective buyers, from small towns

up to major cities, while overseas law enforcement and large sporting events are also interested. When Buyers pay to access the software, New York City will get 30% of the gross revenue, as well as access to any innovations developed for new customers.

Also in April 2013, Elawsuit ran an informative article on the latest law enforcement technology (www.elawsuit.com/2013/04/01/law-enforcement-technology-of-2013-drones-license-plate-readers-and-gps-pursuit-darts.html). Police Drones are on the horizon, but some cities have banned them, and other cities/states are passing laws requiring warrants before a drone can spy on anyone. Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPR) are getting better and faster, with patrol car mounted devices now able to read up to 10,000 plates per shift, even in poor weather and at speeds of 130 mph.

GPS Dart Systems are also being used to avoid dangerous high speed pursuits by allowing police to "dart" a fleeing vehicle, then safely follow and catch the suspect. A launcher is mounted on the grill of a police car, which can fire a GPS locator as a projectile that sticks to the fleeing car. The Supreme Court has ruled against attaching GPS darts to vehicles for long periods, but it is unclear if this also applies to short-term vehicle pursuit darts.

Also becoming an important tool for big city police are Gunshot Detection Systems. Since the culprits are usually gone by the time police respond to a "shots fired!" 911 call, companies like ShotSpotter (www.shotspotter.com/) utilize mounted electronic sensors around a city. These can pinpoint the location of the shots-fired faster than relying on questioning 911 callers, who may not know exactly where the shots were fired.

More on Google's Ultra High-Speed Fiber Network

The Seattle Times (from the *Washington Post*) ran a story in February 2013 on how Google's high-speed fiber network experiment in Kansas City is drawing young entrepreneurs from other states to form start-ups in Silicon Prairie (seattletimes.com/html/business/technology/2020275960_kansascitybroadbandxml.html). Google's fiber network is also proving to be a catalyst for other Kansas City businesses unused to "disruptive technology." Local cable companies now have to compete for consumers who prefer Google's faster Internet speeds, while bidding against Google to wire firms and city buildings. A dozen start-ups have already launched in Kansas City, and even if the city's economic growth is yet to be impacted, start-ups have taken over the city's Startup Village in Hanover Heights "fiberhood."

In early April 2013, CNNMoney Tech announced that Google's high-speed fiber network is headed to Austin (money.cnn.com/2013/04/09/technology/innovation/google-fiber-austin/index.html), Texas next. City officials had lobbied Google hard, and finally won. Most Austin homes will be connected by mid-2014. This time, however, Google will have some competition. AT&T, with their Project VIP (www.att.com/gen/press-room?pid=23971) (or Project Velocity IP) will also be offering 1 gigabit connections in Austin. Neither company has settled on pricing yet.

Also in mid-April 2013, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Google is also hoping to provide its high-speed Internet service to Provo (www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-google-fiber-internet-provo-utah-20130417,0,7883619.story), Utah. Google is waiting on the Provo City Council to approve an acquisition agreement between Google and iProvo, a fiber optic network the city began building in 2004, but which stalled. They have been looking for a partner since 2011 to finish building the network.

The *MotleyFool* reported in April 2013 that they think Google Fiber is really a "strategic weapon" for Google to control everything (beta.fool.com/mrcanadian1/2013/04/13/fiber-is-a-strategic-weapon-and-google-knows-it/30219/?source=eogyholnk0000001) from the Internet connection in your home—from your search engine to the ads you see. "Google wants a bigger piece of the branding pie, and this is one of the major reasons it bought YouTube," they charge. Google also wants to move into TV production, and their Fiber network would allow Google to completely cut out middlemen like Comcast.

High Tech Talent—Recruiting to Retention

According to a Brier Dudley column in the *Seattle Times* in March 2013, start-up founders are getting creative to recruit the top talent (seattletimes.com/html/businessstechnology/2020474623_briercolumn04.xml.html) they want. With schools lagging in teaching computer programming, and more California start-ups setting up branches in Seattle to try and snag local talent, tech recruiters in Seattle are now focusing on building the right culture in their start-ups, and looking for the right mix of people. To sort through the avalanche of applicants, some start-ups use online tests, while others hire interns as potential new employees. One company bought their office building to show candidates their company is established and profitable, while many give company shares to employees to help motivate employees to bond with their start-up.

Seattle Times' Brier Dudley did a follow-up column in March 2013 about what high tech companies are doing to retain their employees (seattletimes.com/html/businessstechnology/2020584775_briercolumn18.xml.html) after laboriously finding and recruiting them. The CEO of Seattle's WhitePages (www.whitepages.com/), Alex Algard, is giving his company's 100 employees new MacBook Pros with retina-displays, \$700 chairs, and \$1,500 hydraulic desks that can rise with the push of a button, if the employee prefers to work standing up.

That is all in addition to upgrading and expanding their office space, giving employees a four-day family getaway in January, and \$2 Million in special bonuses paid out last September. Algard is focusing on retention since, as a mature start-up with employees handling "big data" and running a major Web site, they are particularly vulnerable to poaching by flashy newcomers. But even the Tech Giants have to work on retention. Microsoft employees were aggressively recruited by Google and Facebook a few years ago, so CEO Steve Ballmer then announced the biggest-ever boost in compensation, from raises to bonuses and stock awards.

Kitchen Tech

According to an April 2013 article in *USA Today*, smart kitchen appliances are now becoming available (www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/04/08/high-tech-home-improvement-kitchens/2043807/). Samsung has a few refrigerators (www.samsung.com/us/appliances/) with built-in touchscreens to keep track of the food in your fridge, and find recipes to match that inventory. LG now offers kitchen appliances with Smart Diagnosis (www.lg.com/global/press-release/article/lg-unveils-total-home-appliance-solution-empowering-consumers-to-smartly-manage-their-homes.jsp), where a diagnostic code can be audibly passed on to LG Customer Service. And GE's newest washing machines and dryers offer SmartDispense and CleanSpeak (www.geappliances.com/appliances/washer/top-load-washer-dryer/features.htm), where washers inform their companion dryers how long the drying cycle should be, based on the dampness of the washed clothing.

Hhprime reported in March 2013 that smaller kitchen gadgets and devices are getting smart too (hhprime.com/2013/03/cool-high-tech-kitchen-accessories-for-your-home/). Built-in programmers can turn off small cooking appliances automatically when the food is cooked, like the newest rice cookers and microwave ovens. New gadgets like soda-making machines and coffee-makers are becoming Wi-Fi enabled, so that smartphones can remotely turn them off or on. And for quick and tasty barbecuing, hand-held smokers might be the way to go. The Smoking Gun (rcm.amazon.com/e/cm?lt1=_blank&bc1=000000&IS2=1&bg1=FFFFFF&fc1=000000&lc1=0000FF&t=comput0b9-20&o=1&p=8&l=as4&m=amazon&f=ifr&ref=ss_til&asins=B0082DNCHU) runs about \$100, but Emeril's Smoker Bags (www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000ME8IB2/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B000ME8IB2&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20) (grill or oven) can be had for up to \$33.

Silicon Valley Secrets

According to the *Seattle Times* (through the *San Jose Mercury News*), Silicon Valley's lavish perks are reportedly under IRS scrutiny (seattletimes.com/html/business/technology/2020768941_nofreelunchtechsxml.html). The government-suits, free meals, free shuttles to work and other lavish perks are being investigated to see if these perks qualify as "fringe benefits," which would mean the employees may have to pay more in taxes. This naturally ignited a firestorm of controversy in Silicon Valley, and even the IRS is arguing over whether the perks are really "non-compensatory" and thus non-taxable. Stay tuned...

A bizarre story (from CNNMoney) ran in Yahoo!Finance in April 2013 about how female prostitutes are flocking to Silicon Valley (finance.yahoo.com/news/everything-know-social-media-marketing-131714687.html) to "engage" the interest of the young, rich and smart tech entrepreneurs. They even consider themselves as entrepreneurs too, using card-swipe technology like Square for payments, and search through social networks and blogs to connect with potential customers. The women charge from \$350 to \$500 an hour for everything from sexual massages to dominatrix work. Even with prostitution still illegal in California, it is a low priority for law enforcement already overloaded by budget-cuts, so they generally don't go after prostitutes unless minors are involved.

Another Yahoo!Finance article in April 2013 said that more and more Apple employees and even executives are putting out resumes to look for new jobs (finance.yahoo.com/news/apple-executives-suddenly-more-willing-144420769.html). Reasons given are that the Apple Culture has changed for the worse with new leadership at the top, and start-ups are paying more. Apple fans and reporters have been sounding the alarm for over a month that Apple is facing retention problems. But no one at the company seems to be addressing the steady departure of Apple employees, who are already in high demand.

A quick check of Apple's Job Applications site (www.apple.com/jobs/us/index.html) in April 2013 shows they currently have global openings for 507 hardware engineers and 600 software engineers. These numbers probably represent the rank-and-file employees said to be leaving the quickest for other companies.

Hiring Hackers?

In January 2013, *Huffington Post* ran a story on how the Pentagon has gone on a massive recruitment drive to hire computer hackers (www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/28/pentagon-cyber-force_n_2567564.html) to boost the country's cybersecurity forces. No longer content to just recruit from the annual DefCon hacker conference, the DoD is launching cyber camps, competitions, scholarships and internships that even reach into high schools. As well as introducing cybersecurity programs for military veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The government doesn't pay as much as private industry for code-crackers, and the Pentagon is also competing with other government agencies for a limited pool of talent. But, for cyber-warriors more into the challenge, they could work for the Pentagon reverse-engineering malware and "penetration testing" computer systems for vulnerabilities. Russia and China are already ahead of the US in hiring their cyber armies, while we graduate less than 200 people each year with the needed cybersecurity skills.

A November 2012 article in *Security Magazine* and aimed at private industry called hiring a hacker "A 2013 Security Imperative" (www.securitymagazine.com/articles/83745-hire-a-hacker-a-2013-security-imperative?WT.rss_f=Cyber+Security&WT.rss_a=Hire+a+Hacker%3A+A+2013+Security+Imperative&WT.rss_ev=a). The goal is for businesses to find ethical hackers who can think like unethical hackers, to dig deep into IT environments to find and address security holes—before the unethical hackers (Black Hats) find the flaws. It recommends seeding private cybersecurity staff with ethical hackers "certified" through the International EC-Council (www.eccouncil.org/), or budgeting to contract for such ethical hacker

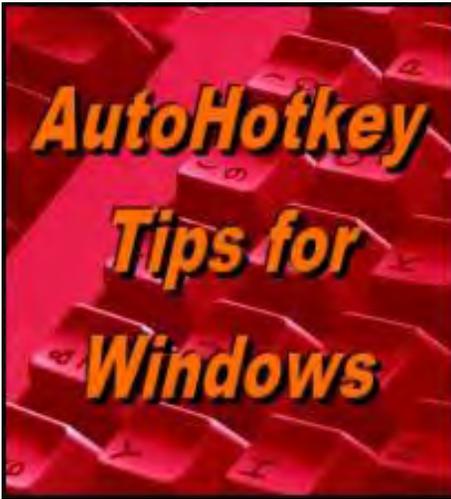
services at least once a year.

Marilyn is a freelance writer and humorist, with a special interest (besides computers and technology) in Science Fiction. Besides short stories published in various magazines, she also has some new e-books available on Amazon Kindle: *Hunting Monster Aliens* (www.amazon.com/s/?_encoding=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&field-keywords=Hunting%20Monster%20Aliens%20martin&linkCode=ur2&rh=n%3A133140011%2Ck%3AHunting%20Monster%20Aliens%20martin&tag=comput0b9-20&url=search-alias%3Ddigital-text) is an on-going series of novellas, about a wise-cracking team of ghost investigators who occasionally turn into alien-monster hunters. *Culture Crash! A California Yankee Transplanted to Texas* (www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00CKXF8GQ/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00CKXF8GQ&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20) is a collection of humor essays chronicling her adventures in her new home-state.

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

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

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

Ellen Gets Help Centering Windows

“Getting Help with a Useful AutoHotkey Technique” by Jack Dunning

Even when already on the right track, sometimes all a person needs is a little push in the right direction.

It's hard for me to know what people don't know. I've worked with various programming languages for so long that I often assume that "everyone knows that!" Obviously, this is not the case and I can only be brought back to reality when I get real questions. This is such a case with Ellen who's fearlessly digging into AutoHotkey scripting.

Hi Jack,

I'm trying to create a script that will center the active window using a hotkey. I tried to use your code below, but I couldn't get it to run; I got an error message to add a { in the last line (see bottom; it's added in bold). So I added it, and it ran, but it wouldn't work with the hotkey. The window in question would be on the small side, so the two "if" sections would not really be necessary. I tried removing those but it didn't change anything. Could you please help me? I hope I'm not asking you too many questions lately.

*Thanks,
Ellen*

```
WinGetPos,X1,Y1,W1,H1,Program Manager
X2 := (W1 - Width)/2 ;Center the window width
Y2 := (H1 - Height)/2 ;Center the windows height
```

```
If (Width >= W1){ ;If the window is too wide for the screen
X2 := 1
Width := W1
}
```

```
If (Height >= H1){ ;If the windows is too high for the screen
Y2 := 1
Height := H1
}
```

```
WinMove,A,,%X2%,%Y2%,%Width%,%Height%
}
```

Ellen-

I certainly don't mind you asking questions. I'm in the process of compiling another e-book with over thirty more chapters and your questions help me to see what issues people are facing when learning AutoHotkey. Plus, you give me more ideas.

I think the problem you're seeing is that when you pulled the code from the function [found in the beginner's e-book], the last curly brace was associated with that function and is not needed for your purpose. Rather than adding the one in bold, remove the matching brace.

Now to make it a hotkey, add the key combination with the double colon at the beginning (::), which I'm sure you did, and place the RETURN command at the end. The RETURN encloses and binds the code to the hotkey combination.

Hope this helps.

-Jack

Additional Notes:

When writing If-Then-Else conditionals, loops, and functions, it is common to use sets of curly braces, "{" and "}", to mark the beginning and end of code. These will always be in matching pairs. When AutoHotkey runs a script it tries to match all the braces in pairs of one open brace and one closed brace. If they don't match, then an error will result. It's not always easy to find the error. Sometimes it's caused by a missing brace, sometimes an extra brace (as in this situation), and sometimes it is the wrong brace (open rather than closed, or the reverse). This is why programmers will often indent their code to show the matching braces:

```
If (Width >= W1)           ;If the window is too wide for the screen
{
    X2 := 1
    Width := W1
}
```

While the first brace can be on the same line as the IF statement, it's harder to see and easy to miss. By indenting and aligning them, it's much easier to see the sets of braces. If adding a set within a set, indent again:

```
If (Width >= W1)           ;If the window is too wide for the screen
{
    X2 := 1
    Width := W1
    If (Height >= H1)      ;If the window is to high for the screen
        {
            Y2 := 1
            Height := H1
        }
}
```

While this formatting will make no difference in how it runs, it will be much easier to debug scripts.

Next, Ellen is absolutely right that the two conditionals are not needed for her application. Their only purpose is to deal with windows which may be too wide or high for the main screen. It's best to remove unused code since it will tend to confuse anyone looking at the code.

My next e-mail to Ellen:

Was this only part of the code? I note that a value for Width and Height are required, but you don't supply

it.

Oh, I didn't know I was supposed to supply it; that would be variable. I want this to be for any active window that I choose to apply it to.

Note: In the original function Width and Height were passed to the function from the main routine. The key to understanding how a script works is knowing what each piece does. While I could see where the variables X1, Y1, W1, and H1 got their value (the WinGetPos command (www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/WinGetPos.htm) which was pulling the dimensions from the main screen, Program Manager), there was no source or definition for the variables Width and Height. Unless they are built in AutoHotkey variables such as A_Now for the current time, which they are not, then they must be supplied.

I responded: You can use WinGetPos for the active window to get the height and width of the window.

But if I have to get and enter variables for every window, that defeats my purpose.

Note: I immediately saw my error. What was obvious to me was not at all obvious. If I referenced using the WinGetPos command for the active window I thought Ellen would see the answer. However, while she seemed to understand how to get the width and height of an active window, she saw it as a two-step process (which it is) of first getting the dimensions, then entering those dimension into the script. This is a perfectly reasonable assumption which didn't occur to me. For me it highlights the dual nature of many of the AutoHotkey commands.

The WinGetPos command both captures the location and dimensions of a window *and* simultaneously creates the variables to store those values. By using the terms *Width* and *Height* in the WinGetPos command in the appropriate place, the problem is solved.

```
WinGetPos,,,Width,Height,A
```

The "A" designates the active window.

Even more important, this is how many AutoHotkey commands work. They combine what could be considered separate programming steps (obtaining data and creating variables) into one command for more power. If you can take the time to play with a command with different parameters, you will better understand what it can do for you.

I finally responded to Ellen with: If all you want to do is center a window on your screen, then this should do it.

```
^#M: :
```

```
WinGetPos,,,Width,Height,A
```

```
WinGetPos,X1,Y1,W1,H1,Program Manager
```

```
X2 := (W1 - Width)/2
```

```
Y2 := (H1 - Height)/2
```

```
WinMove,A,,%X2%,%Y2%,%Width%,%Height%
```

```
Return
```

Yay! That's it. Thanks!

Sometimes I make things too complicated. I might put that short script in the book when I do an update.

Thanks,

-Jack

Note: The hotkey combination for centering any active window is CTRL++M in the above script, although it can be any combination you choose.

For my part, a tutorial couldn't be too simple. I'm finding that much of the online AutoHotkey tutorials assume a certain degree of knowledge that I don't have. Much of what I have done with AutoHotkey is based on copying and adapting little bits of code that I find that suit my needs, without necessarily understanding what I'm doing. Although, gradually, I am learning anyway.

No ... thank you, Ellen!

I told you that your questions spark more ideas. I plan to use the short centering routine next week.

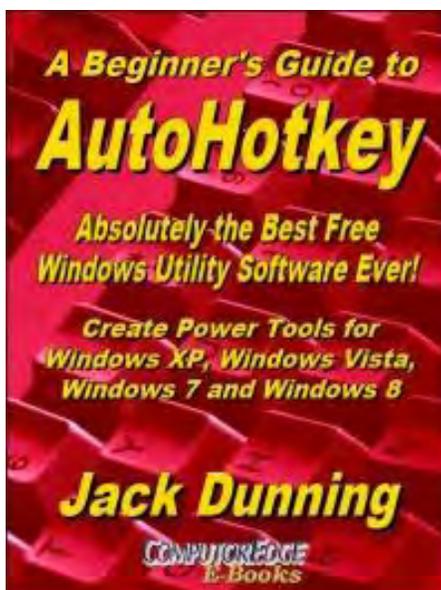
Your comment about how you learn AutoHotkey is important. The only way anyone really learns how the commands work is by trying them and seeing what they do. That's how I do it, although my experience with other languages probably makes it a little easier. I wouldn't hesitate to copy and modify code if it's not too complicated and does what I want to do.

-Jack

Final Comments:

As can be seen, I've included the entire dialogue between myself and Ellen. I did this because different people learn in different ways. Some people avoid scripting because they think they need to know how to do it before they start. When Ellen says, "Although, gradually, I am learning anyway," she is merely pointing out what is true for most people. Sometimes you just need to dig in regardless of how obscure everything looks. It may take a little time, but eventually you get a result and say to yourself, "Oh, so, that's how it works!" These small lessons can be applied to the next task.

* * *



Now available in e-book format from 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).

Building Power Tools for Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7 and Windows 8, AutoHotkey is the most powerful, flexible, *free* Windows utility software available. Anyone can instantly add more of the functions that they want in all of their Windows programs, whether installed on their computer or while working on the Web. AutoHotkey has a universality not found in any other Windows utility—free or paid.

Based upon the series of articles in *ComputerEdge*, Jack takes you through his learning experience as he explores writing simple AutoHotkey scripts for adding repetitive text in any program or on the Web, running programs with special hotkeys or gadgets, manipulating the size and screen location of windows, making any window always-on-top, copying and moving files, and much more. Each chapter builds on the previous chapters.

For an EPUB (iPad, NOOK, etc.) version of *A Beginner's Guide to AutoHotkey* click here!
(computoredgebooks.com/A-Beginners-Guide-to-AutoHotkey-EPUB-format-iPad-Nook-etc-AUTOHOTKEY-1.htm)

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

Just Released! *Hidden Windows Tools for Protecting, Problem Solving and Troubleshooting Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, and Windows XP Computers* ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00B8Z2ASG/ref=as_li_ss_tl?](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00B8Z2ASG/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00B8Z2ASG&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20)

[ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00B8Z2ASG&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00B8Z2ASG/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00B8Z2ASG&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20)).

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[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?](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)

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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?](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008BLUZRS/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20)

[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)!

Also available at Barnes and Noble (www.barnesandnoble.com/w/misunderstanding-windows-8-jack-dunning/1109995715?ean=2940014229463) and ComputerEdge E-Books (www.computoredgebooks.com/Windows-Tips-and-Tricks_c4.htm?sourceCode=writer).

Available exclusively from Amazon, *Windows 7 Secrets Four-in-One E-Book Bundle* (www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00801M5GS/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20), *Getting Started with Windows 7: An Introduction, Orientation, and How-to for Using Windows 7* (www.computoredgebooks.com/Getting-Started-with-Windows-7).

amazon.com/gp/product/B007AL672M/?&tag=comput0b9-20),
Sticking with Windows XP—or Not? Why You Should or Why You Should Not Upgrade to Windows 7
(www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00758J4L6/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20),
and *That Does Not Compute!* (www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0052MMUX6/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=comput0b9-20), brilliantly drawn cartoons by Jim Whiting for really stupid gags by Jack about computers and the people who use them.

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“The Poor Predictions of CEOs” by Wally Wang

The Poor Predictions of CEOs; The Woes of Windows 8; Maine Schools Switch to PCs; Learning Programming; App for Amputees; First on the Mac; Battery Information.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

In any job, there will always be a handful of superior performers, a larger group of competent people, and a small group of totally incompetent people. In most cases, the totally incompetent people often get stuck at a certain level and can never rise beyond. However if incompetent people become CEOs, not only do they get paid millions before they even do anything, but they often display their incompetence for everyone to see while driving the company into the ground through their lack of vision.

Blackberry CEO, Thorstein Heins, recently said (/news.cnet.com/8301-1035_3-57582120-94/tech-ceos-say-the-darndest-things/) "In five years I don't think there'll be a reason to have a tablet anymore."

First of all, Thorstein Heins omits Blackberry's failed attempts to create a tablet known as the Playbook. Second, stating that people won't have a reason to use tablets could make sense if Thorstein Heins clarified why he doesn't think tablets have a future. For example, when Apple introduced the iPad, many people claimed that netbooks were superior. Yet within a few years, netbooks have largely disappeared while iPad and tablet sales in general keep growing. Until the iPad arrived, netbooks were the most popular portable computing alternative. Ultimately, everything fails if you wait long enough.

If Thorstein Heins specifies why he thinks some new technology will displace tablets, then his statement might make sense. Just to say that tablets won't have a future in five years without giving a reason simply makes him look silly, especially in the wake of Blackberry's own recent tablet failure. Most likely Blackberry won't have a future in five years given their late response to the iPhone and their failure to crack the tablet market with their Playbook tablet.

Digital Equipment's founder, Ken Olsen, once dismissed personal computers in 1977 as "toys" that were only good for playing video games. Olsen said he saw "no reason for any individual to have a personal computer." Doesn't this sound remarkably similar to critics claiming that the iPad and other tablets are just "toys" that are only good for playing video games?

Robert Metcalfe, the founder of 3Com once said "Almost all of the many predictions now being made about 1996 hinge on the Internet's continuing exponential growth. But I predict the Internet will soon go spectacularly supernova and in 1996 catastrophically collapse." Yet the Internet continued to grow and thrive far beyond 1996.

Back in 1997, Michael Dell, the CEO of Dell Computers, once said what he would do if he were in charge of the then-struggling Apple Computers. "What would I do? I'd shut it down and give the money back to

the shareholders."

Now Dell Computers is losing sales and talking about going private while Apple is worth far more than Dell Computers. More importantly, Apple has defined the mobile computing market with the iPhone and iPad while Dell Computers has failed to crack either market with their Streak smartphone/tablets.

In 2004, Bill Gates told attendees at the World Economic Forum in Davos that spam would be solved within two years. Today, spam is just as annoying and prevalent. Bill Gates also predicted that tablet computers were the future, and he was right. Unfortunately for Bill Gates, Microsoft had a ten year head start with tablet computers and never got it right with clunky Tablet PCs that cost too much, weighed too much, and failed to offer any unique software to take advantage of their mobile uses.

To justify why the Microsoft Surface tablets use a physical keyboard, Bill Gates recently claimed (www.cnbc.com/id/100710622) that iPad users are frustrated because "They can't type. They can't create documents." Apparently Bill Gates hasn't seen iWork apps like Pages, Numbers, and Keynote that let you create word processor documents, spreadsheets, and presentations, not to mention other apps like Final Draft Writer that lets you write entire screenplays on an iPad.

For someone like Bill Gates to claim that iPad users can't create documents on an iPad would be like Steve Jobs claiming that it's impossible to create documents on a Windows PC using Microsoft Office. Whether you like Microsoft or Apple, even pro-Windows fanatics should be complaining about this blatant inaccuracy of Bill Gates' statement. What does it say when someone has to rely on an outright lie to criticize a product?

Bill Gates can take solace that in 2007, he didn't say what Microsoft CEO, Steve Ballmer, said. When Steve Ballmer first saw the iPhone, he said, "There's no chance that the iPhone is going to get any significant market share. No chance." Today, the iPhone alone makes more money than all of Microsoft's products combined.

Watch this video clip (www.youtube.com/watch?v=eywi0h_Y5_U) where Steve Ballmer dismisses the iPhone because "it doesn't even have a keyboard." Then you can watch this video clip (www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTX1e-pMN6E) where Steve Ballmer dismisses Android by claiming that you need to be a computer scientist to use Android, which completely ignores the complexity many people face when dealing with a Windows PC. Finally, you can watch this 2008 video clip (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ar_r2kE9Ej4) where Steve Ballmer makes fun of the MacBook Air because it doesn't have a DVD drive. Of course, four years later, Microsoft would introduce the Surface tablet that doesn't have a DVD drive either.

Predicting the future is always risky, but what makes such predictions even more ridiculous is when people boldly proclaim something without providing any facts to support their case. With tablet sales skyrocketing and no alternative technology available to derail tablet sales, it's likely that people will still find tablets useful until something better comes along.

Eventually people will find tablets aren't as useful just as many people are now finding that traditional desktop and laptop PCs aren't as useful as before. The desktop and laptop PC market didn't collapse because people simply got tired of using them, but because alternatives like smartphones and tablets took their place. Likewise, tablets will continue to be popular until something new takes their place.

For CEOs to make bold predictions about the future that turn out to be blatantly wrong makes you wonder why these CEOs still manage to get paid so much despite being so wrong so often. If you don't mind publicly embarrassing yourself making completely inaccurate predictions, then you have what it takes to be a CEO today.

The Woes of Windows 8

ReadWrite.com offers an interesting article claiming that businesses are switching to Windows 7 and avoiding Windows 8 (readwrite.com/2013/05/01/microsoft-windows-8-enterprises-windows-7). "Of the 273 IT professionals who said that they're upgrading from Windows XP, just 2% said they're choosing Windows 8. The vast majority—69%—said that they're choosing Windows 7 instead."

If 71% of IT professionals are upgrading from Windows XP to Windows 7/8, that means the remaining 29% of IT professionals must be switching to something else. (Perhaps Linux or OS X?) For businesses, avoiding Windows 8 makes sense since Windows 8 forces users to learn new ways of working so they can accomplish the exact same tasks they can do right now using their current software and training.

If you look at the comments for that particular ReadWrite.com article, you'll find a comment by Bruce Kiacz who complains about the following differences between Windows XP and Office 2003 and Windows 7/8 and Office 2007/2010:

"At my office, I usually scan objects several times a day for inclusion in a Word documents. We recently switched from Office 2003 under Windows XP to Office 2007 under Windows 7. The process to scan an image into a Word document in Office 2003 under Windows XP is:

1. Put the item that you want to scan in the scanner.
2. Place your cursor where you want the image to be inserted.
3. Click Insert, point to Picture, and then click From Scanner or Camera.
4. Follow your scanner software procedure for scanning images.

The process to do this under Windows 7 (or 8) and Office 2007 (or 10) is:

1. Put the item that you want to scan in the scanner.
2. Magically know that you must click on Clip Art on the "ribbon bar" to scan an image.
3. Magically know that on the right side of the screen you must choose Organize Clips.
4. In the Clip Organizer screen that pops up, choose File, From My Scanner or Camera.
5. Click Custom Insert in the dialog box (make sure your scanner is listed).
6. When the scanner finishes, search in the Clip Organizer to find your image.
7. Right click on the image to copy image to clipboard.
8. Return to your document and right click to insert image."

Besides showing that Microsoft's latest software doubles the number of steps to accomplish the exact same task, Bruce Kiacz points out a second problem. Microsoft's latest software also assumes that you'll know what commands to use and where to find them. If you don't know this ahead of time (and you won't as a novice with the software), the user interface will simply confuse and defeat you. How many people want to upgrade to something new that will make their work harder and more confusing? If you think working less efficiently and taking longer to do it is an improvement, then you can cheerfully upgrade to the latest Microsoft software and advocate others to do the same while loudly dismissing alternatives as unacceptable.

If multiple people complain about the same problems, how come Microsoft doesn't focus on making their software easier and more intuitive to use? Windows 8 is a perfect example of a strange user interface with a Charm Bar that remains hidden unless you know how to make it appear by moving the mouse along the right edge of the screen. Where shutting down Windows 7 took two steps (click the Windows 7 start icon to display the Start menu, then click Shut Down), shutting down Windows 8 takes four steps (magically know how to open the Charm Bar, click the Settings icon, click the Power icon, then click Shut Down).

Technically, Windows 8 is faster, uses less memory, and is more secure and reliable than previous versions of Windows. Yet none of that matters if the user interface frustrates people right from the start. To force yourself to master the cryptic Windows 8 interface just so you can do the same tasks you can

currently do with Windows 7 makes no sense at all. Perhaps with the rumored "Windows Blue" update, we can see what Microsoft will change to make Windows 8 more acceptable. Then again, you may have to keep waiting over and over again for Microsoft to fix something that wasn't even broken in the first place.

Maine Schools Switch to PCs

After sticking with Apple products for years, the Maine Department of Education recently decided to switch from Apple products (www.electronista.com/articles/13/04/30/long.term.exclusive.deal.with.apple.nixed.by.new.deal/) to Hewlett-Packard to save money. Maine Governor Paul R. LePage said that it was "important that our students are using technology that they will see and use in the workplace. The laptops use an operating system that is commonly used in the workplace in Maine. This is the lowest-priced proposal, and these laptops will provide students with the opportunity to enhance their learning and give them experience on the same technology and software they will see in their future careers."

Of course, Paul R. LePage neglects to mention that Hewlett-Packard will be providing laptops running Windows 8, which is definitely not the technology that is commonly used in the workplace in Maine or anywhere else in the world. Paul R. LePage also seems to ignore that other school districts, which switched away from Apple solutions, "have reported dramatic increases in service and repair costs, which in most cases, exceed any cost savings from shifting hardware providers."

By switching from Apple products to Hewlett-Packard, Maine public schools will save money initially, but risk spending more money in the long-term for maintenance and service, which defeats the goal of saving money. Students in Maine will also be introduced to Windows 8 despite the fact that the majority of corporations are sticking with Windows 7 instead, so they actually won't be learning technology necessary for the future.

What's actually more important than using any specific technology is learning to think and back up your reasoning with facts, which is something that too many people fail to do on a consistent basis regardless of the technology they may use. Apparently critical thinking skills is something that the Maine Department of Education hasn't figured out for themselves, so it's no surprise that they'll look at Windows 8 computers as lower cost solutions for embracing the future when the evidence indicates that they won't be lower cost (due to higher service costs) and they won't be part of the future (due to the lack of widespread Windows 8 adoption in the corporate world).

If the Maine Department of Education really wanted to save money, they should switch to Linux. If they really wanted to teach students future technology, they should expose students to a variety of user interfaces such as Windows 7/8 along with OS X and Linux. That way students could learn the basics to using any computer without getting trapped into only knowing the specifics of one particular operating system, especially an unpopular one like Windows 8.

When a department of education can't make logical decisions, it should come as no surprise that students won't learn much more either. If you really want to learn anything in life, you can't rely on some "authority" to teach you. You have to take responsibility for your own education and continue learning from every source possible.

Learning Programming

Michael Zamansky used to work on Wall Street but left to teach computer science at New York's Stuyvesant High School. When Zamansky first joined Stuyvesant, the school had no computer science program. Today the school has eight dedicated computer science teachers and requires each student to complete a full year of courses on the subject.

"Computer science is really fundamental," says Zamansky. "It's a way of thinking and problem solving that's always existed. Just like you shouldn't leave school without being able to think like a poet in certain

ways, you should be able to think like a computer scientist in certain ways."

Zamansky once proposed a new high school that would specialize in computer engineering. However, the New York City Board of Education turned the school into a vocational academy instead. "The board of education refuses to engage us," Zamansky lamented.

School officials who can't see the need for teaching the basics of computer science to high school students are simply not looking at the future. Just as schools should teach the basics of math and writing, they should also teach the basics of programming so people can understand how computers work. By understanding programming, people will be better able to make decisions on computer-related topics such as the pros and cons of computerized voting machines. Without a basic knowledge of computer programming, students risk being forced to make decisions in the future on topics they know nothing about, which is pretty much how political elections already work anyway.

If you're interested in learning programming, you'll have to teach yourself. For a non-traditional approach, start with the free LiveCode (runrev.com) programming tool that uses more English-like syntax than traditional programming languages. If you prefer traditional programming languages, start with C/C++ with gcc (gcc.gnu.org).

To learn about object-oriented programming, you could wrestle with C++, but the cryptic syntax might confuse you. That's when you might prefer to use Squeak (www.squeak.org/Smalltalk/), a dialect of the object-oriented SmallTalk programming language. Unlike C++, SmallTalk code is more readable and thus more understandable such as:

```
EllipseMorph new color: Color blue; openInWorld.
```

To learn about object-oriented programming using animation, try learning Alice (www.alice.org/index.php). Like Squeak, Alice is free and runs on Linux, Windows, and OS X.

Since too many school officials can't understand the need for learning computer programming, you'll have to take the initiative and learn on your own. In fact, that attitude will probably help you excel both in school and outside of school as well, so you might as well get used to taking the initiative and taking responsibility for your own life as soon as possible.

App for Amputees

In the past, double-amputee, Jason Koger, had to fly hundreds of miles to visit a clinician to adjust the grips on his bionic hands. Now he uses an iPhone app called biosim (www.wral.com/app-lets-amputees-program-their-own-bionic-hands/12409168/) to adjust the grips himself.

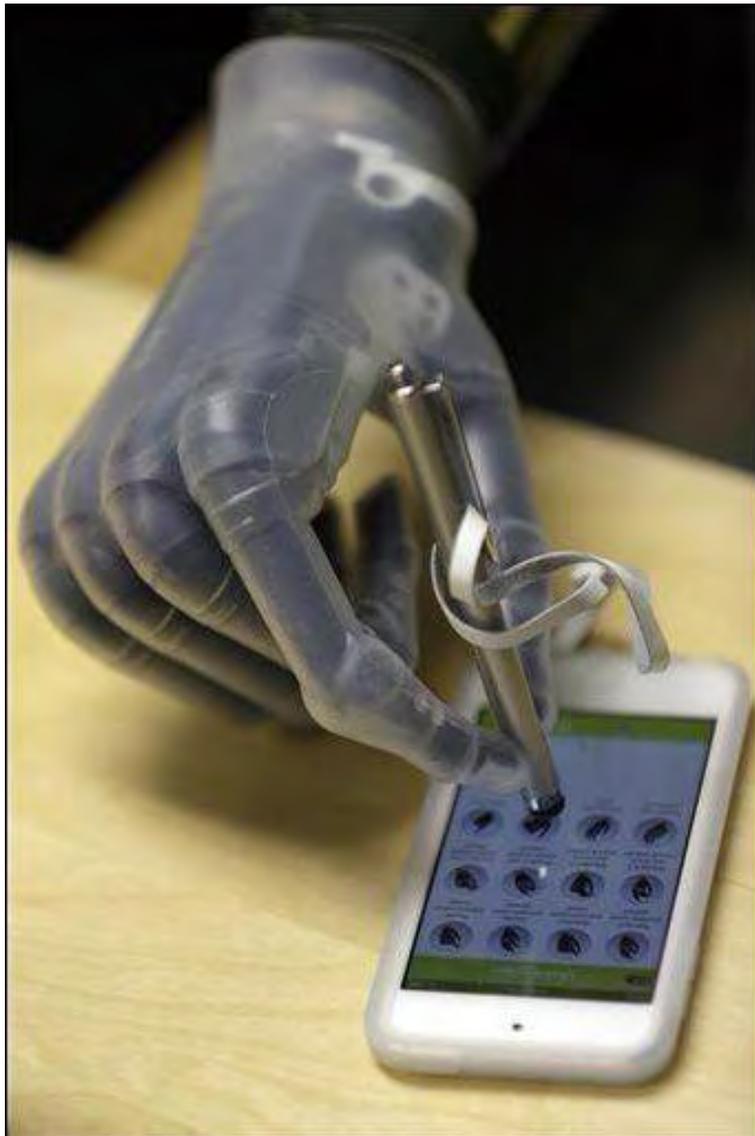


Figure 1. Amputees can use an iPhone app to modify their artificial hands.

Using a stylus and an iPhone, Koger can choose any of 24 grip patterns that best suit his needs. With the freedom to modify the gripping action, he now has the freedom to modify the grip for various activities such as drawing or picking up and moving objects around.

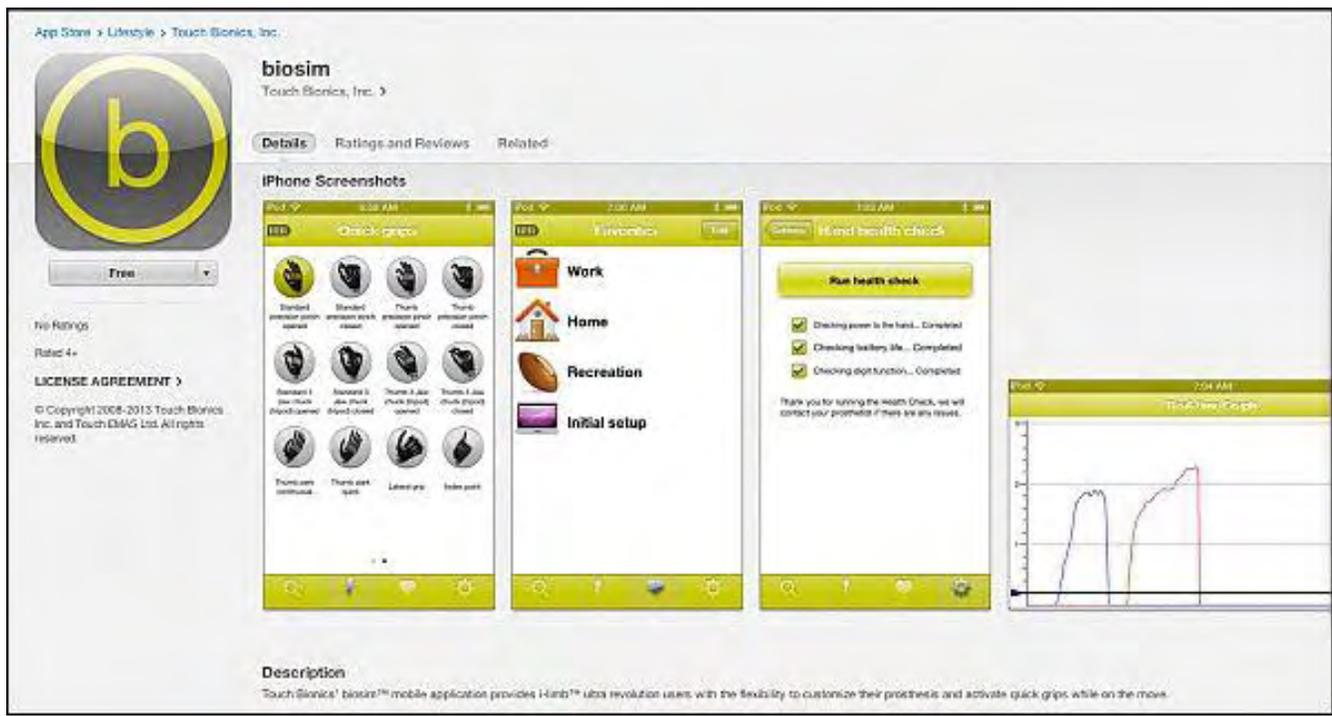


Figure 2. The biosim app gives you multiple options for modifying the grip of an artificial hand.

For anyone who still believes that mobile computing has no purpose, just ask Jason Koger how much his iPhone app has changed his life and given him more freedom. Then try to argue that an ordinary desktop or laptop PC is just as versatile as an iPhone in every possible application, and someone like Jason Koger might use his iPhone to program his artificial hand to punch you in the mouth.

First on the Mac

For those who might be curious how the Macintosh's graphical user interface inspired software design, you can browse through this list of popular Windows programs (www.macworld.com/article/2036743/born-apple-six-famous-windows-apps-that-debuted-on-the-mac.html) that were first developed on the Macintosh.

Two popular Microsoft products that originally began on the Macintosh include Excel and PowerPoint. Two other groundbreaking programs that later migrated to Windows were Photoshop and PageMaker. Photoshop dominates the graphics editing market while PageMaker helped usher in the desktop publishing revolution.

If you do heavy HTML editing and Web page design, you should be familiar with Dreamweaver. If you need an easy to use, but flexible database, you should look at FileMaker.

The reason why these six programs originated on the Macintosh was because the graphical user interface made new types of applications possible. Could you edit a picture using a command-line interface with a program like Photoshop? How about designing a book or magazine with a program like PageMaker if you were shackled by the limitations of a command-line interface?

As you can see, the graphical user interface of the Macintosh helped define a whole generation of programs that people still use to this day. Of course back when the Macintosh first appeared, critics probably dismissed graphical user interfaces as pointless that served no useful purpose, just like these same critics continue to dismiss the touchscreen interface of mobile computing devices. No matter how remarkable innovation can be, you can be certain there will always be someone who thinks it's the most worthless invention around, until they're proven wrong shortly afterwards over and over again.

* * *

If you use a laptop Macintosh, you can click on the battery icon to see how much power remains. However, if you hold down the Option key while clicking the battery icon, you can also get a status report on the condition of your battery.

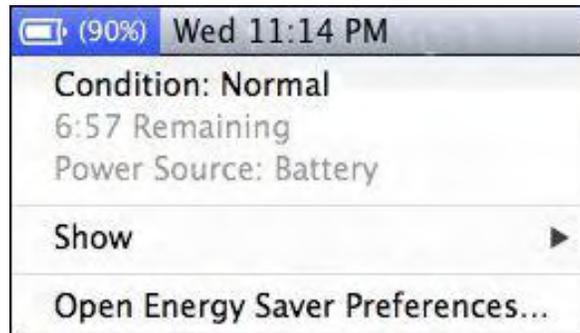


Figure 3. Holding down the Option key while clicking on the battery icon displays detailed information about the battery's condition.

If your battery is fine, you'll see Normal as its condition. If your battery is starting to lose its charge, you'll see Replace Soon. If your battery can't hold a charge at all, you'll see the message Replace Now or Service Battery.

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=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-](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)

[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-](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)

[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-](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1430233362?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1430233362)

[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-](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)

[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-](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)

[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-](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)

[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-](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)

[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/)" Wally can be reached at wally@computoredge.com.

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Worldwide & Product news reviews

Worldwide News & Product Reviews

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



\$100 Billion to Apple Shareholders; Do Apple Workers Get a Bite?; Mobile Customer Loyalty at New Lows; IOGEAR Wireless HD Digital Kit; Touchfire Gets Physical with iPad's Virtual Keyboard.

\$100 Billion to Apple Shareholders; Do Apple Workers Get a Bite?



The Economic Policy Institute (news@epi.org), an independent, nonprofit think tank that researches the impact of economic trends and policies on working people in the United States, writes in this week. (It would be fair to note that many of the below criticisms of Apple could be leveled at other large companies as well.):

In conjunction with its April 23 quarterly earnings report, Apple issued a separate announcement that it is doubling its "capital return program" and will return \$100 billion to shareholders by the end of 2015. This decision reflects the enormous size of the company's existing cash reserve and, according to Apple's chief financial officer, the fact that "We [Apple] continue to generate cash in excess of our needs. ..."

Missing from [the] announcement, as well as from the last few months of discussion over what Apple should do with its cash reserve, was how those resources could also be deployed to make necessary improvements in the compensation and treatment of the workers making Apple's products abroad, or selling its products in the United States. This neglect is unfortunate. These workers contribute directly to Apple's enviable financial position, even though they frequently live and work under harsh conditions for meager pay.

Apple could also use its cash reserve to:

- Fulfill its promise to retroactively pay the factory workers making its products for previously uncompensated work time.
- Boost the pay of the factory workers making its products to offset the reductions in excessive overtime Apple has (appropriately) helped spur.
- Ensure that all the workers making its products are paid a livable wage, a step Apple is theoretically obliged to take as a member of the Fair Labor Association.
- Reduce health and safety threats at the factories making its products.
- Provide compensation for the labor rights violations the workers making its products have endured.
- Narrow the gap between the pay of the workers at Apple stores and comparable college graduates.

Apple can easily afford to dedicate tens of billions of dollars to such efforts, even when the new capital return program is taken into account. Apple's current cash reserve is \$145 billion and, according to Moody's, is twice the size of any other company's. Apple generated net income of \$9.5 billion just in the

last quarter. The capital return program amounts to about \$30 billion per year, or somewhat less than the amount of income it is expected to earn annually.

In other words, even with the implementation of the new capital program, Apple's cash reserve will amount to around \$145 billion, or perhaps more, in future years. In all likelihood, its cash reserve will still be far larger than the cash reserve of any other company in the world.

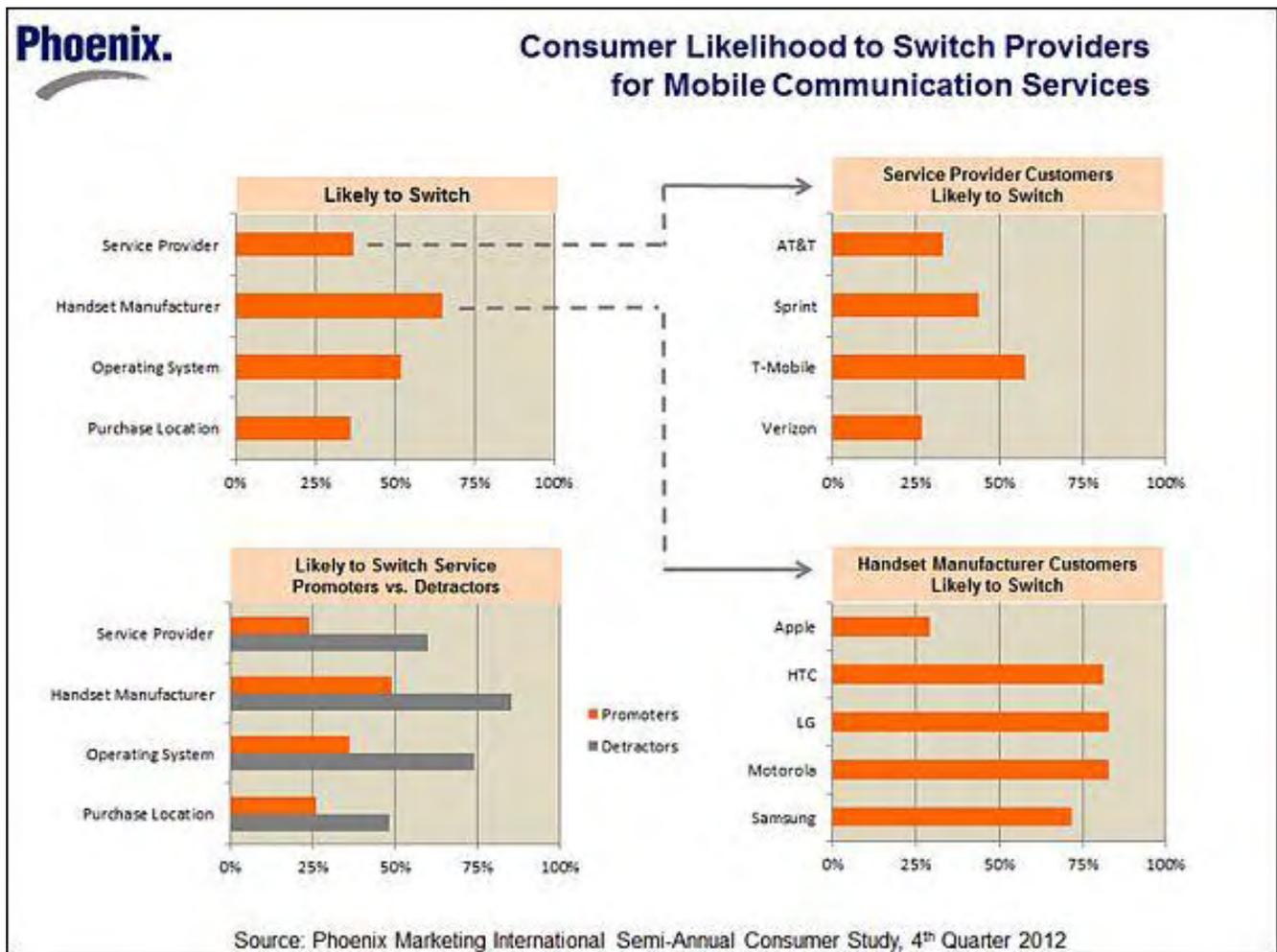
Apple has the resources and the responsibility to take significant steps towards improving the pay and other working conditions of those making and selling its products. Apple's new capital return program should not end discussion of what the company should do with its excess cash. Instead, the discussion should shift towards another consideration: how Apple's cash reserve should be used to help its workers.

Mobile Customer Loyalty at New Lows

John Schiela, president Converged Technology and Media Practice at Phoenix Marketing International (www.phoenixmi.com), reports his company's findings from two studies conducted among mobile phone users:

While the Mobile Phone Market has grown to near saturation level, customer loyalty to service providers, mobile devices and operating systems has shrunk to new lows, even among those customers that are considered "promoters" of the brand.

Semi-annual and monthly research conducted by Phoenix Marketing International among wireless users indicates that over 1/3 of current wireless customers intend on switching service providers in the next year and nearly 2/3 plan on replacing their current mobile device with one from a different manufacturer. A startling 25% of so called service provider "promoters" plan on switching providers in the next year.



While results vary significantly by brand, overall findings show that the often used Net Promoter Score customer metric needs to be enhanced by other information in order to develop an actionable understanding of brand health and direction.

Of those that are considered promoters (highly likely to recommend a brand), 24% are still planning to switch service providers, 49% will change their device brand, 36% will switch device operating systems, and 26% will purchase their device at a different location.

Surprisingly, 40% of those that are classified as "service provider detractors" (would not recommend their provider) report that they will continue to use the same provider at the time of their next purchase.

IOGEAR Wireless HD Digital Kit

Product name: Wireless HD Digital Kit

Model: GW3DHDKIT

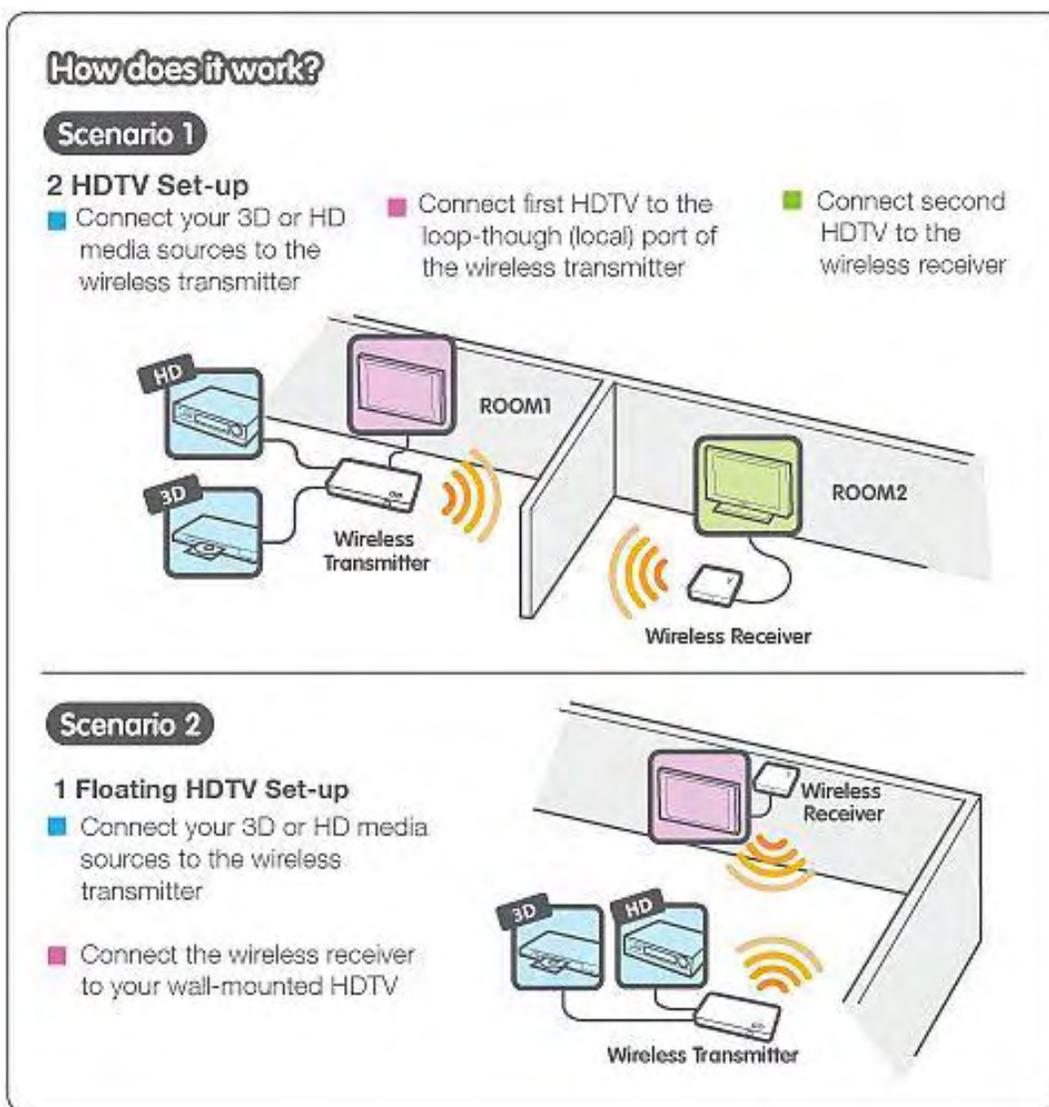
Manufacturer: IOGEAR

Web site: www.iogear.com (www.iogear.com/product/GW3DHDKIT/)

Price: \$249.95 list (you can find it for a lot less)

IOGEAR's Wireless HD Digital Kit (www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00630WKG1/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00630WKG1&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20) is a pretty neat little gadget. Basically, the package, which consists of a wireless HD transmitter, HD receiver, and a remote control, allows you to stream uncompressed HD (1080p) and 5.1 digital surround sound audio wirelessly as much as 100 feet away (depending on how much it has to pass through: walls,

ceilings, children).



Take a look at the "How Does it Work?" pic. The idea is to consolidate your A/V setup by creating a two-port switch to connect DVRs, Blu-ray and DVD players, cable boxes, computers—just about anything with an HDMI output. The kit incorporates a built-in loop-through (local) HDMI port so you can essentially make a TV in another room a wireless HD TV. Of course, both TVs will show the same picture.



I found setup to be extremely simple. I was up and running in less than 20 minutes. No software or drivers needed to be installed anywhere. Pretty much plug the main unit in a wall outlet, connect devices and you're streaming to the kids' room, the bedroom, whatever. Sound is excellent.

A couple of things to keep in mind: 100 feet is a little optimistic. Maybe if you live outdoors on a prairie but, in the real world of walls, floors, electrical

interference, and whatnot, think more like

25-50 feet, which is still plenty for most homes. Also note that the IR blaster can occasionally become erratic or unresponsive, requiring a restart of the transmitter to get it working correctly again.

Generally, though. I was very pleased with picture and sound quality on both the local and remote sets. In the right situation, this thing could save you the cost of another set top box and monthly fee.



Features (from IOMEGA):

- *Wireless HD audio / video streaming up to 100 ft. away through standard home walls. (Distances may vary depending on environment; solid objects such as steel, concrete and brick may view shorter distances.)*
- *2 HDTV set-up - Share your HD content in a second location at the same time.*
- *Living room HDTV can connect to transmitter's loop-through (local) port directly.*
- *Bedroom HDTV can receive content from wireless receiver.*
- *Connect and transmit wireless video content from your Blu-ray / DVD player and DVR / Cable box turning your HDTV into a wireless TV.*
- *Wireless 3D support.*
- *Wireless HD in Full 1080p and 5.1 channel digital audio.*
- *Video Resolutions: 480p, 720p, 1080i and 1080p (24 / 30 / 60fps).*
- *HDMI Inputs/Outputs: Transmitter: 2 x HDMI in, 1 x HDMI out (loop-through local port) Receiver: 1 x HDMI output.*
- *Create the floating HDTV in almost any location such as bedroom, bathroom, family room, living room, den, loft, kitchen or patio.*
- *Keep home theater electronic devices neatly out-of-sight.*
- *Built-in IR allows the user control over their source devices that are hidden away in a different location.*
- *HDCP Compliant.*
- *Based on WHDI Technology - Low latency <1ms.*
- *1 year warranty.*

The kit includes:

- *1 x Wireless HD Transmitter*
- *1 x Wireless HD Receiver*
- *1 x Remote Control*
- *1 x IR Blaster Cable*
- *2 x Power Adapter*
- *2 x Battery (AAA)*
- *1 x HDMI Cable*
- *1 x Quick Start Guide*



Review contributed by Sandy Dreshinski

Touchfire Gets Physical with iPad's Virtual Keyboard

Product name: Touchfire

Manufacturer: Touchfire, Inc.

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

Price: \$49.99

Apple's iPad tablets are more portable than notebook computers due to various design features. One such feature is the presence of a virtual (on-screen) keyboard instead of a physical one. Although the virtual keyboard improves iPads' portability, it also could present challenges for fat-fingered users and/or users who strongly prefer a physical keyboard (e.g., touch typists). For iPad users who prefer the size and/or tactile characteristics of physical keyboards over a virtual one, Touchfire is a low tech keyboard accessory that could be an effective solution.

Touchfire, Inc.'s namesake product comes in a cardboard box measuring ~10 by 4.75 by 1 inches which, on the front and back, has color photographs of the virtual keyboard accessory in use. The photographs on the back are accompanied by text describing Touchfire's features, benefits, and dimensions (Figure 1). The back also provides a list of supported keyboard languages and iPad cases. One of the box's sides shows an illustrated list of supported iPad models.

Touchfire
Screen-Top Keyboard for iPad

The Touchfire Experience

Now you can feel the keys on your iPad, rest your fingers on the home row, and even type without looking.

Touchfire Keys

Our patented keys have just the right amount of resistance and springback to make typing quick, accurate and comfortable.

35 of 45

springback to make typing quick, accurate and comfortable.

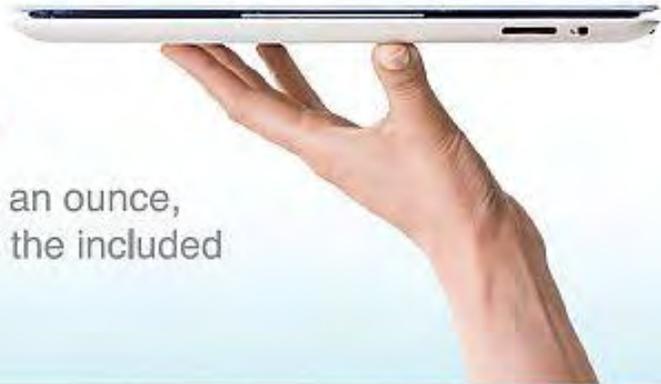


Quick Change Artist

Attaches magnetically to stay securely in place, can be quickly retracted for full screen access.

Always With You

Incredibly thin, weighs less than an ounce, can be stored on your iPad or in the included storage case.



But Never in the Way

Rolls up in the iPad's cover, completely out of the way when not in use.

Figure 1. The back of Touchfire's packaging has pictures and text explaining the product's virtues.

Inside the cardboard box is a black plastic tray (for lack of a better word) with a molded indentation that holds a black plastic rectangular box (Figure 2). This box functions as a storage case and its contents include the Touchfire, which is a silicone rubber strip measuring 8.9 by 3.4 by 0.1 inches (essentially the same size/dimensions as the iPad's virtual keyboard and tipping the scale at a scan 0.625 oz.) plus a trifold paper sheet (4.25 by 8.75 inches) with illustrated usage instructions in English only.



Figure 2. Touchfire is a silicone rubber strip that ships in a handy black plastic storage/carrying case.

How does Touchfire work (www.touchfire.com/how-it-works/)? This product is shaped and sized almost exactly the same as the iPad's virtual keyboard, with its silicone rubber divided into rectangles essentially the same size and positions as the virtual keyboard's keys. Consequently, with an iPad in landscape orientation and home button on the user's left, you simply place Touchfire on top of the portion of the tablet's screen where the virtual keyboard displays (Figure 3) and voilà! If the iPad is a first generation model, gravity holds the Touchfire in place. If the iPad instead is a second generation or newer model, small magnets in Touchfire's black plastic pieces adhere to the ones in the iPad's bezel and hold the Touchfire in place.



Figure 3. Small magnets in the black plastic pieces on Touchfire's sides (blue arrows) adhere to the magnetized bezel of the second generation and newer iPad models.

What if you have a protective cover such as Apple's Smart Cover for your iPad? Touchfire is specifically designed for compatibility with the Smart Cover. It comes with two additional small magnets that adhere the Touchfire to the cover's inside surface, keeping this accessory at the ready (Figure 4). Touchfire, Inc. states that their product also works other protective cases that have sufficient space on the iPad's surface to accommodate the Touchfire. This statement was not evaluated during testing, hence your mileage may vary.



Figure 4. Two small cover magnets included with Touchfire adhere this product to the inner surface of Apple's

Smart Cover for iPad to maximize portability and convenience.

What if you use a different language than English on an iPad's virtual keyboard? Touchfire, Inc. says that their product supports multiple languages, including Catalan, Cherokee, Chinese Simple and Traditional Pinyin, Chinese Traditional Cangjie, Croatian, Czech, Dutch, English, Estonian, French, German, Hawaiian, Hungarian, Icelandic, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese Romaji, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Malay, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian Latin, Slovak, Tibetan, Turkish and Vietnamese.

How is the user's experience with Touchfire? According to the product's marketing literature, it is soft and supple yet sufficiently stiff for a touch typist's fingers to rest in the proper position without needlessly activating the underlying virtual keys. While typing, the silicone provides just enough resistance and tactile feedback to give the user an experience approximating a physical keyboard's.

My experience with Touchfire during testing confirmed the marketing literature's statements. Although the product was easy to install, user friendly, and made no clicking noise typical of physical keyboards, however, it did have a few notable drawbacks. One drawback was that I experienced some difficulty seeing underlying keys' characters due to glare on the Firetouch while it was on my first generation iPad's virtual keyboard and the iPad was flat on my lap (note that this iPad model has a conventional display rather than a Retina one). An additional drawback was that I made many typos due to my having touched characters without pressing firmly enough to "register"; the letter "c" was the most frequent victim of this issue. Another user who is a touch typist (75 wpm, 1 typo per minute) gave Touchfire a test drive on the same iPad. This user preferred Touchfire's tactile feedback over the iPad's virtual keyboard, but uncharacteristically committed 10 typing errors in fewer than 10 lines of text. Your mileage might vary.

What about durability—how long will Touchfire last before showing signs of aging, wear, and/or tears? Testing was conducted over too short a period to address this issue. However, the company's literature indicates that the silicone rubber used to manufacture this product is durable and high-performance, thus it should not become misshapen or damaged with ordinary usage. Your mileage again might vary.

In conclusion, Touchfire is a clever and highly convenient accessory that could make an iPad's virtual keyboard more user friendly for touch typists and/or people with fat fingers. It is more convenient and portable than an external physical keyboard, does not require batteries or Bluetooth, and has essentially no learning curve. Worthy of serious consideration with the caveat that it might require some acclimation before achieving fast typing speeds with few typos.



Review contributed by Barry Fass-Holmes

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

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

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

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

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

He has won many writing accolades, including Press Club awards for Best Column Writing, Consumer Writing and Best Arts and Entertainment, and has repeatedly taken top honors in San Diego Songwriter's Guild competitions for his original musical compositions.

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

Learn more at www.charlescarr.com.

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Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"Help Is No Help," "50 Pound Jobsian Monkey"

Help Is No Help

[Regarding the April 26 Editors Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers column:]

Amen to Wayne Ford's comments. Sometimes the only answer is to just dump the offending program and go to something else, if it exists. OpenOffice might help here. At any rate the "Renter's Rule" seems to apply here. "If you ain't gonna fix it, I'm leaving."

P.S. Digital Dave Rules.

-PM Train, Santee, CA

You said "So, I Google the server, program provider, etc. (you know—the experts in the area of my dilemma) with my problem." I find it's better to Google the problem itself. If it's a common problem, you'll find many hits and many potential solutions.

-Ronc, San Diego, CA

I think the frustration Wayne is experiencing (being unable to get help with problematic software-related tools from various entities who make and distribute them) results from company executives realizing that they could shift the cost of support to the customers themselves. (Remember the great customer service from WordPerfect in the 1980s and 1990s? Those days are long gone).

Of course, as with most things, the general public goes along with whatever corporate America says to do. So people contribute to "help" forums, and developers/distributors of products simply point customers to those sources and effectively say, "Good luck, sucker".

I've got nothing against people helping one another. But it annoys me that companies have relinquished their responsibilities at our expense. I have had terrible experiences with HP, Compaq, and Microsoft in this regard. Their so-called "customer service" is no service at all. Of course, when you basically own a market, as Microsoft does, then you can get away with this kind of abuse.

(Note: Please do not refer me to OpenOffice. For anything other than very simple documents, it is insufficiently compatible with Microsoft Office products in my experience).

-Jay, San Diego, CA

50 Pound Jobsian Monkey

[Regarding the April 26 Wally Wang's Apple Farm column:]

Wally:

I own some MS products, some products associated with the MS world, and some Apple products. And it's a shame that I need to start out a letter with an attempt to show my impartiality.

Wally, you got a 50 pound Jobsian monkey on your back, hiding behind that foot-high chip on your shoulder. I can always tell a Wally column, because somewhere buried in the text will be a snarky pro-Apple comment or an equally snarky anti-everything not Apple comment. This week's dose:

"...a powerful spreadsheet like Excel (which was first developed for the Macintosh, so all those anti-Apple critics out there who hate anything that remotely involves Apple can now cheerfully wipe Excel off their Windows PCs)..."

IIRC, MS had marketed Excel for CPM users under the name of Multiplan, because I bought a copy to run in CPM on my Commodore C-128, and this was back around 1986 or 1987 and the Multiplan had been around for a few years even then. Did I miss something, or were Apple II's or Classic Mac's running CPM? MS changed the name of their spreadsheet from Multiplan to Excel somewhere around 1985, when they began selling it to the Apple market, so maybe that's why you think Excel started on Apples.

Once you spike a reader with this attitude, they start seeing it everywhere. You start another topic "One of the persistent lies that critics continue to perpetuate about the iPad..." and I'm on guard again. But it's not a true rant, just a little more pro-active Apple than reasonable. "In the past, you could only practice programming on a computer, not an iPad, but techBASIC changes all that. With techBASIC, you can write, edit, debug, and run BASIC programs completely on your iPad (or iPhone)" Well hell, Wally, I would hate to write even PIC code on my iPhone. I mean, I've cooked code in BASIC through a 110 baud teletype terminal and Fortran through punched cards, but I sure wouldn't want to go back to it. Geez Wally, do you really write your column using that teensy iPhone keypad? And this isn't anti-Apple; it would be as bad as doing it on an Android. It's simply the right tool for the job, oh Wally of the Apple hammer.

-Ed Price, Chula Vista, CA

Hello Ed,

First, let me be clear. I'm not pro-Apple or anti-Microsoft. What I am is pro-facts and anti-ignorance where I define ignorance as deliberately avoiding facts to maintain a certain point of view where acknowledging all the facts would severely weaken or demolish that point of view.

So with that in mind, let's look at the facts you overlooked.

1. MultiPlan was a completely different spreadsheet than Excel. Microsoft at one time marketed MultiPlan for CP/M, MS-DOS and the Macintosh, and Excel for the Macintosh. Start with Wikipedia and search around the Internet for old stories about both MultiPlan and Excel.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microsoft_Excel

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiplan

Given that Microsoft sold both MultiPlan for the Macintosh and Excel for the Macintosh, it seems that they are two different products although Excel may have evolved from the MultiPlan source code, but Excel is definitely not just a renamed version of MultiPlan.

2. In reference to your question, "Did I miss something or were Apple II's or Classic Mac's running CP/M?" The answer is yes, you did miss something. First, you missed that MultiPlan and Excel are not the same product. Excel may have evolved from MultiPlan but it's far more than a simple port of MultiPlan. Microsoft once marketed MultiPlan for the Macintosh but dropped that product later in favor of Excel.

You can look at what Adobe did with PageMaker and InDesign. InDesign is Adobe's latest desktop

publishing program and likely evolved from what Adobe learned from PageMaker but InDesign is a completely different product from PageMaker and not just a renamed version. Likewise, Excel for the Macintosh is likely a different program than MultiPlan for the Macintosh.

When Microsoft introduced Excel for the Macintosh, it took full advantage of the graphical user interface of the Macintosh that made using a spreadsheet far easier than using an MS-DOS or CP/M spreadsheet that lacked a graphical user interface. After the success of Excel for the Macintosh, Microsoft ported Excel over to Windows.

Second, you missed the fact that Apple II's did indeed run CP/M-80 through the use of expansion cards.

vintageware.orconhosting.net.nz/apple2/cpm.html

So yes, Apple II's did run CP/M-80 and no the classic Macintosh did not run CP/M-80 because it was capable of running Excel for the Macintosh, which was not the same as MultiPlan for the Macintosh, and it was capable of running MultiPlan for the Macintosh so it didn't need to run CP/M just to run MultiPlan.

3. You mention you would hate to write PIC code on your iPhone. Yet the existence of techBASIC and its growing community seems to indicate that not everyone on the planet shares your opinion that writing code on an iPhone or iPad is something to be avoided at all costs. In fact as that O'Reilly book Building iPhone and iPad Electronics Projects book demonstrates, there's clearly a large enough market of people who find the idea of typing code on an iPhone or iPad appealing and are willing to buy and support a book that tells them how to do it.

So just because you personally would never want to write code on an iPhone or iPad screen doesn't mean that it should never be done. As you mention, "it's the right tool for the job," and an iPhone or iPad is the right tool if you need to program something and you can't drag a laptop or desktop computer out in the field where you might need to be for days at a time. So in some cases, writing a program on the iPhone or iPad using techBASIC really IS the right tool for the job. Dismissing techBASIC and the idea of programming on the iPad and iPhone screen because you don't personally like the idea is like banning the color purple from the planet because you may personally dislike the color purple. Just because you don't like the idea of something, does that mean that idea must be invalid for everyone on the planet as well?

To recap, MultiPlan is not the same product as Excel, Apple II's were capable of running CP/M-80, and writing programs with techBASIC on an iPhone or iPad is something you may not want to do, but many other people are willing to write programs on the iPhone and iPad.

These are easily verifiable facts that you could have looked up before being so sure of yourself and accusing me of having a "50 pound Jobsian monkey on your back, hiding behind that foot-high chip on your shoulder." As I mentioned in the beginning, I'm simply anti-ignorance where people are willing to push their heated opinion on others without bothering to verify the facts that make up the basis of their opinion first.

It's okay to be wrong and it's okay to change your mind after you see facts that you may not be aware of. What's not okay is to consistently ignore facts to support a belief that is simply not accurate.

-Wally Wang

Wally:

Consistency Is Some Kind of Virtue

OK, you don't specially insert snarky comments into your columns; you're that way all the time. Perhaps consistency is some kind of virtue.

I'll accede to your detailed description of Multiplan; I know I sure didn't get much use out of the copy I had, but that was more of a problem with uncomfortable usage of CPM on the C-128. (My C-128 was fun to mess around with, but to get anything done seriously, I had to move on to a Mac or PC. At the time, I was painfully using a Mac Classic at work, where the little screen was torture for doing page-sized graphics and the WYSIWYG wasn't quite true. Contemporary Macs were a good deal more expensive at the time, so I moved into a PC for serious graphics and word processing. That's not to say that PC's were better than a Mac, just that they did the job I needed at a lower price.)

I only speak for myself. I have enough trouble keying in my nice, secure password for my mobile banking app on my iPhone, so when I say I can't imagine anybody wanting to use a tiny touch sensitive virtual keyboard to enter hundreds or thousands of characters, well, I'm speaking for myself. I never said others should never try it; maybe they are much younger than me and have tiny, pointed fingertips.

-Ed Price, Chula Vista, CA

No I'm not consistently snarky. I'm just pointing out facts. Perhaps if you looked at the tone of your own comments, that might give you a clue on who is really consistently snarky.

-Wally Wang

Wally:

Great, common ground at last.

I'm snarky and often sarcastic, while you just point out the facts. I fully understand now.

I eagerly await your next column.

-Ed Price, Chula Vista, CA

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