ComputorEdge™ Online — 05/17/13

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Tiny Single-Board Computers for Innovation

The high-tech inventor has new, inexpensive tools for garage creativity and entrepreneurship.

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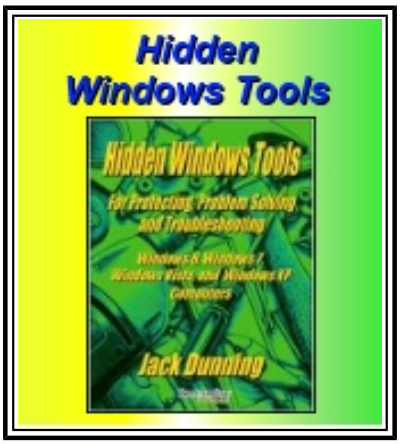

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Digital Dave

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

FrontPage and Chrome; ISP in North County San Diego; USB Thumb Drive Does Not Showing up.

Dear Digital Dave,

When I'm in Internet Explorer and start FrontPage (to do some real-time Web editing) all runs smoothly (if not slow*). However, when I try the same sequence of steps in Chrome, I can't even find a button to open Web editing, let alone the use of FrontPage. Suggestions?*

Larry Foster
San Diego, CA

Dear Larry,

I'm guessing that your only option is to use Internet Explorer since both Frontpage and Internet Explorer are from Microsoft. Google Chrome has no incentive to add a button for Frontpage. I believe that you can load Frontpage independently of Internet Explorer, then view your results in Chrome. (It's been a long time since I've used Frontpage.)

The problem with using Frontpage is that it needs special extensions on the Web server for many of its features. Microsoft discontinued Frontpage in 2006 and one by one the Web support ISPs have dropped support for its extensions. It may be time that you consider a different Web editor which will work with any server whether Linux or Windows. I recommend that you check out the free KompoZer (*www.kompozer.net/*) software. There may be a little bit of a learning curve, but it is better to start converting your pages now—before your provider tells you the end is near.

Digital Dave

Dave:

I'm relatively new in North County. The company I work for is located in the Palomar Airport area. We're looking for ISPs, but we only found AT&T DSL service which is too slow for our needs, and Time Warner.

Aren't there any companies in the T-1 field that services this area?

Please help. I've exhausted my search and literally struck out!

Thanks, Dave!

John Nistico
San Diego, CA

Dear John,

It seems odd that you can't find a T-1 line provider in that area. That is a big business area, so there must be other people who need the service. T-1 lines often come from one primary source, such as AT&T, then are resold by others. Maybe talking to one of your neighbors would help find a provider or possibly another reader could help.

If there is cable Internet in your area, it's questionable whether you really need or want a T-1 line. The main advantage to T-1 is it gives you the same bandwidth (1.544 megabit) in both the upload and download direction. Cable normally has slower upload speeds than download speeds (say three megabits up to 15 megabits down), but even with that it could be faster than a T-1 line in either direction. You may find that you have better options.

You might even be surprised by the DSL in your area. DSL speeds have increased significantly over the past number of years. While there is still the problem with the slower upload speed, do you really do that much uploading? (Maybe you do.) In any case, business should not automatically assume that it needs a T-1 line which is based on old telephone technology. What was once the obvious choice for the connected business now has more options.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I have been trying to clean up a stack of old hard drives that have various items on them. I have a 128GB thumb drive that I moved about 40GB of music and pictures to. Now, the thumb drive will not show up on my laptop (XP), netbook (Win 8), work laptop (XP), or friend's laptop (Win 7) to be able to retrieve the information and continue to sort it out.

Is there a new driver that I need for large USB devices or is there some way to recover the data?

Mark Martin
San Diego, CA

Dear Mark,

A few years ago there were a load of fake 128MB thumb drive coming in from China and being sold on eBay at a really low price. They would work a couple of times, then go dead. I don't know the source of your drive, so I couldn't speculate about the problem. If the drive worked before and doesn't work now (in any of your computers), then you have a bad drive.

If you have a good sourced drive from a quality manufacturer, then it is possible that there is a way to recover the data. I don't know of any special drivers to do the job though. (Maybe someone else out there does and will make a comment.) But, my guess is that it's over for that copy. Most people who manage to continue to use a thumb drive after read problems have been able to reformat them. Of course that would cause the loss of all the data anyway.

I think that if I were retrieving and sorting data from multiple hard drives, I would probably use a USB hard drive as the working tool. Flash drives are notoriously slow when writing. Once I had everything the way I want it, I would use flash drives to backup the data from the USB hard drive. I may be paranoid, but I'm always a little nervous about using thumb drives when there is a lot of reading and writing going on.

Digital Dave

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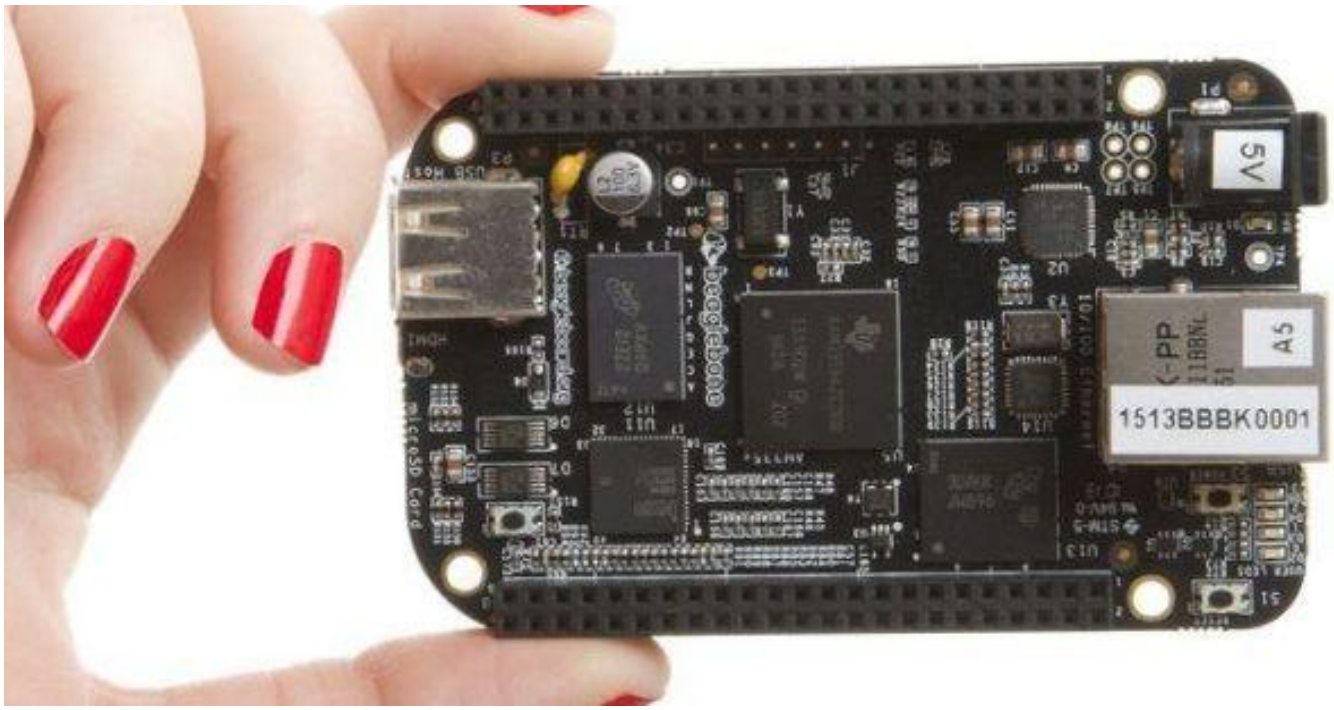


Tiny Single-Board Computers

“Open Source Hardware Computers Are Starting a New Do-It-Yourself Drive” by Jack Dunning

New technological markets are created by hardware triggers. Are the tiny inexpensive single-board computers the next spark?

A few weeks back I dropped in to visit Chips and Memory, a San Diego computer store. I was intrigued by what they showed me. They had started working with a couple of little computer boards, one of them the Raspberry Pi, checking out their potential for future applications. The proprietor had set up one of these inexpensive devices (about $35) to control the operation of his garage door with his smartphone. Admittedly this is a minor application, but it is a hint as to what can be done with tiny easy-to-use inexpensive computers. It got me thinking.

Tiny Single-Board Computers

The innovation of the future will most likely come from creative hobbyists. Why? Because it usually does. Sadly the ultimate hobbyist, Steve Jobs, is no longer with us. Otherwise there would be a decent chance that Apple would continue as a leader in innovation. Without Jobs (or a suitable replacement) to control the lawyers and the bureaucrats at Apple, there will be a slow decline toward mediocrity. We already see the exodus of talent leaving for new horizons. This ebb may take many years, but it's inevitable. However, there is no reason to mourn Apple's fate. That is the way of business.

One of the reasons that the US is the land of innovations is that we are by culture tinkerers. Just as Jobs and Wozniak started in a garage with the Apple I, there are many others who are now playing with their new hardware toys doing the things that they want to do. The latest toys are tiny printed circuit boards which can potentially replace the desktop computer. Built primarily for the education market, enthusiasts are buying these powerful devices to implement their own creative applications. The hardware is so inexpensive ($25 to $50 per processor board running the free Linux or Android operating system), it's easy to set up a computer laboratory. Thousands of people are doing it. These experiments with tiny computers could trigger the next technological boom.

Hardware Triggers

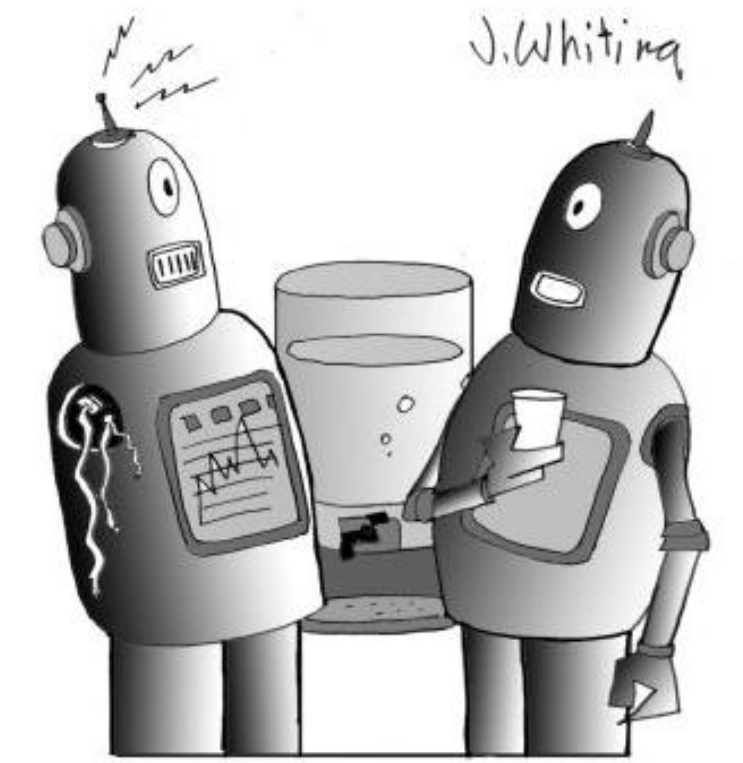
Innovation and new markets are sparked by hardware triggers. Sometimes it is a single device such as the digital camera

which completely changed both the video and photo world. Sometimes the device is a combination of technology such as the laser printer which created the desktop publishing industry. (Ironically, the old paper publishing industry (including desktop) is now in decline being replaced by all digital e-books, PDF files and Web pages.) The tablet computer is cannibalizing a good portion of the low-end PC market. There is no doubt that the iPhone, first, then the iPad, both triggered new technological markets. New hardware brings new opportunities for invention and innovation.

One of the major obstacles to the technological hobbyist/inventor has been the cost of the tools. While software can be developed late at night, hardware design and production is expensive. In order for the next wave of technological creativity to thrive, there needs to be inexpensive flexible tools. Fortunately, those tools may now be available through Open Source Hardware (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open-source_hardware*) used in the latest round of educational credit-card size computers.

Open Source Hardware

The commercial world is bogged down with lawsuits over dubious technological patents. These legal battlegrounds backed by threats from company lawyers stifle innovation. How can an individual inventor possibly know whether an obscure patent is violated? This is where Open Source Hardware might help.



"You're lucky to be built with all Open Source Hardware. They removed my right arm due to a patent dispute."

Open Source Hardware is similar to Open Source Software in that it is freely licensed to the general public. The difference is that while the software has no end-user cost associated with it, the hardware still has production costs. The hardware designs and associated software are available to everyone who wants to use them. That means an Open Source device can be built by anyone who has the capability without paying royalties or license fees. There should be less of fear of lawsuits for patent infringement as long as any technology contributed to an open source project is original. (I say "should be" because under our legal system, anyone who wants to sue, can, and probably will, sue.) This might create an environment which is much more accommodating to the individual innovator.

However more importantly, there are now low-cost development tools available under this Open Source Hardware concept. These devices come in the form of tiny single-board computers originally built for educational purposes. They are now affordable enough for anyone to build their own special purpose devices, even if only for their personal use. While most of these innovations may never see the light of the commercial market, there will be enough inventions sprouting from these hardware triggers to have a tremendous impact on future products.

Compared to its software counterpart, the Open Source Hardware movement is relatively new. It is only in recent years that it has organized to "promote the creation and sharing of hardware or electronic designs" ("Open-source Hardware Movement Seeks Legitimacy (*www.pcworld.com/article/253969/opensource_hardware_movement_seeks_legitimacy.html*)"). The success of the tiny Arduino single board controller (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arduino*) as a source for prototyping and development is a testament to the possibilities. The Arduino project was started in Italy in 2005 to build a small inexpensive device for student design prototyping. Since that time it has been used extensively as the controlling device in many new applications. See "Top 40 Arduino Projects of the Web (*hacknmod.com/hack/top-40-arduino-projects-of-*

the-web/)." The Arduino is a do-it-yourself (DIY) tool for innovation. It is a microprocessor on a credit card size circuit board with the connections needed to hook up other devices. The latest model, Arduino Due (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00A6C3JN2/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00A6C3JN2&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*) (see Figure 1), is available for less than $50.

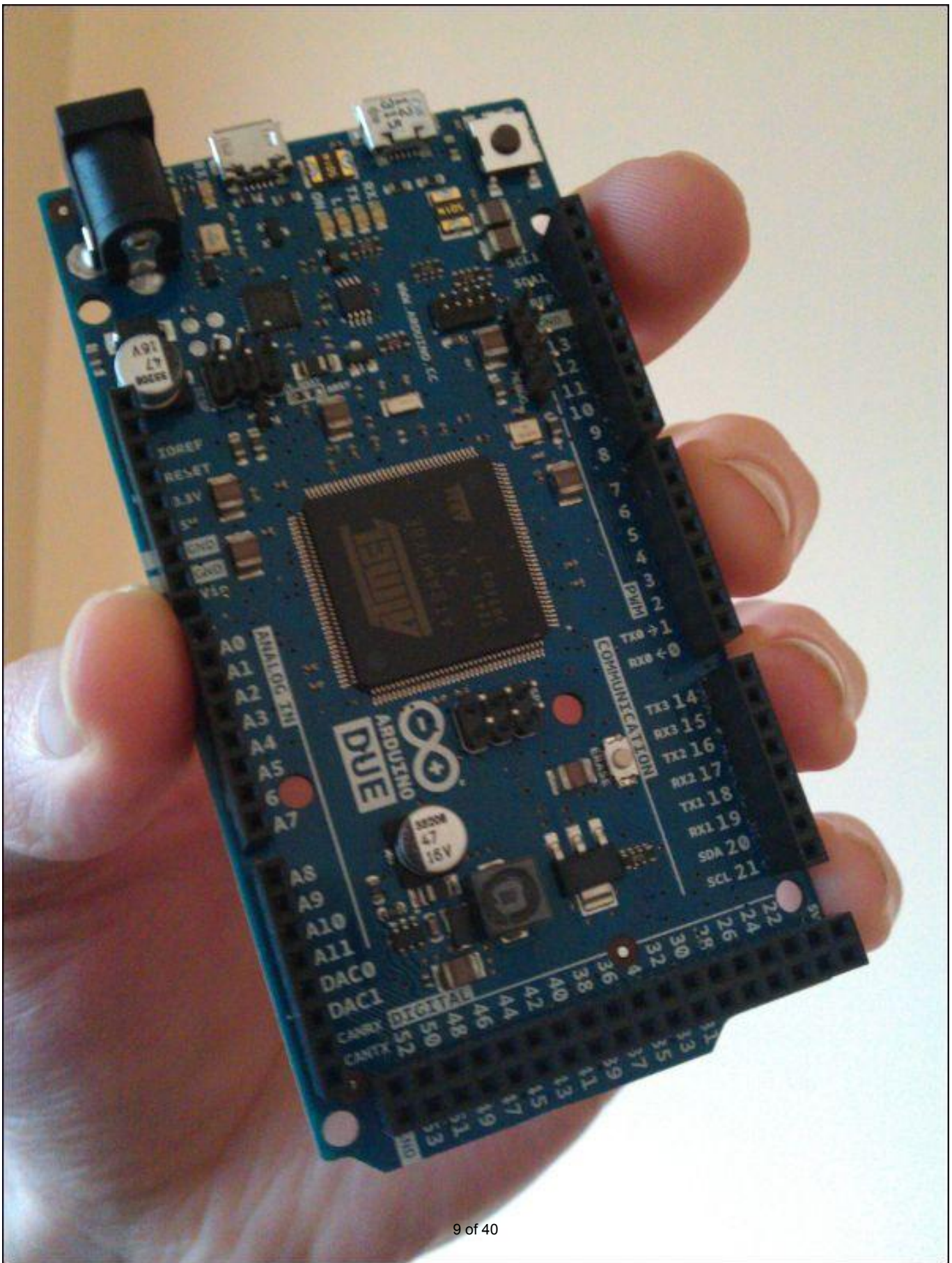


Figure 1. Arduino Due is used as a controller in many devices.

As good as the Arduino is for its purposes, it still requires a little higher level of technical competence. It is not the stand alone computer that many hobbyists may want. The Arduino doesn't have the usual computer connectors onboard that you might find on most computing devices. To program the board it must be plugged into a computer via the USB port. (Although, if you know a 12-year old budding computer whiz, an Arduino Inventor's Kit (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B004G2KTU4/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B004G2KTU4&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*) could be an excellent gift.)

While the Arduino is the forerunner for the current crop of tiny single-board computers, the hardware trigger for the next round of innovation needs to be a tool available and usable by a greater number of people—yet still at a reasonable price. This calls for a device that's as easy to hook up as a desktop computer. Enter the Raspberry Pi.

The Raspberry Pi

"The Raspberry Pi (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raspberry_Pi*) is a credit-card-sized single-board computer developed in the UK by the Raspberry Pi Foundation with the intention of promoting the teaching of basic computer science in schools." What distinguishes this tiny computer is that it features the minimum that you would expect in any reasonable computer (see Figure 2). Its current version includes 512MB RAM, uses an SD card for startup and storage and runs on various versions of Linux and FreeBSD. The original version includes two USB ports and a 10/100 Ethernet controller. Regular USB keyboards and mice can be plugged right in. The Raspberry Pi has Composite and HDMI video output for hooking up monitors. It includes a separate audio output jack along with the HDMI audio. Power can be provided with a five volt MicroUSB source. The target price for the most expensive Raspberry Pi (Model B) described here is $35.

Figure 2. "Raspberry Pi" computer, Model B.

If you get a Raspberry Pi with Linux installed on an SD card (many for sale (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009SQQF9C/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009SQQF9C&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*) do not include the SD card), then you should be able to use your current monitor (or one lying around the garage), keyboard and mouse to boot it up. It's a simple five step process (*www.raspberrypi.org/quick-start-guide*) (see Figure 3). (Note: It looks pretty straightforward to download "Raspian Squeezy," the version of Linux, from the Raspberry Pi Web site (*www.raspberrypi.org/downloads*) for loading on an SD card.) This type of cheap computer is what makes the possibilities for innovation virtually unlimited. It's as simple as setting up your desktop computer. That means many people who are not digital engineers can start inventing new applications with their own Raspberry Pi.

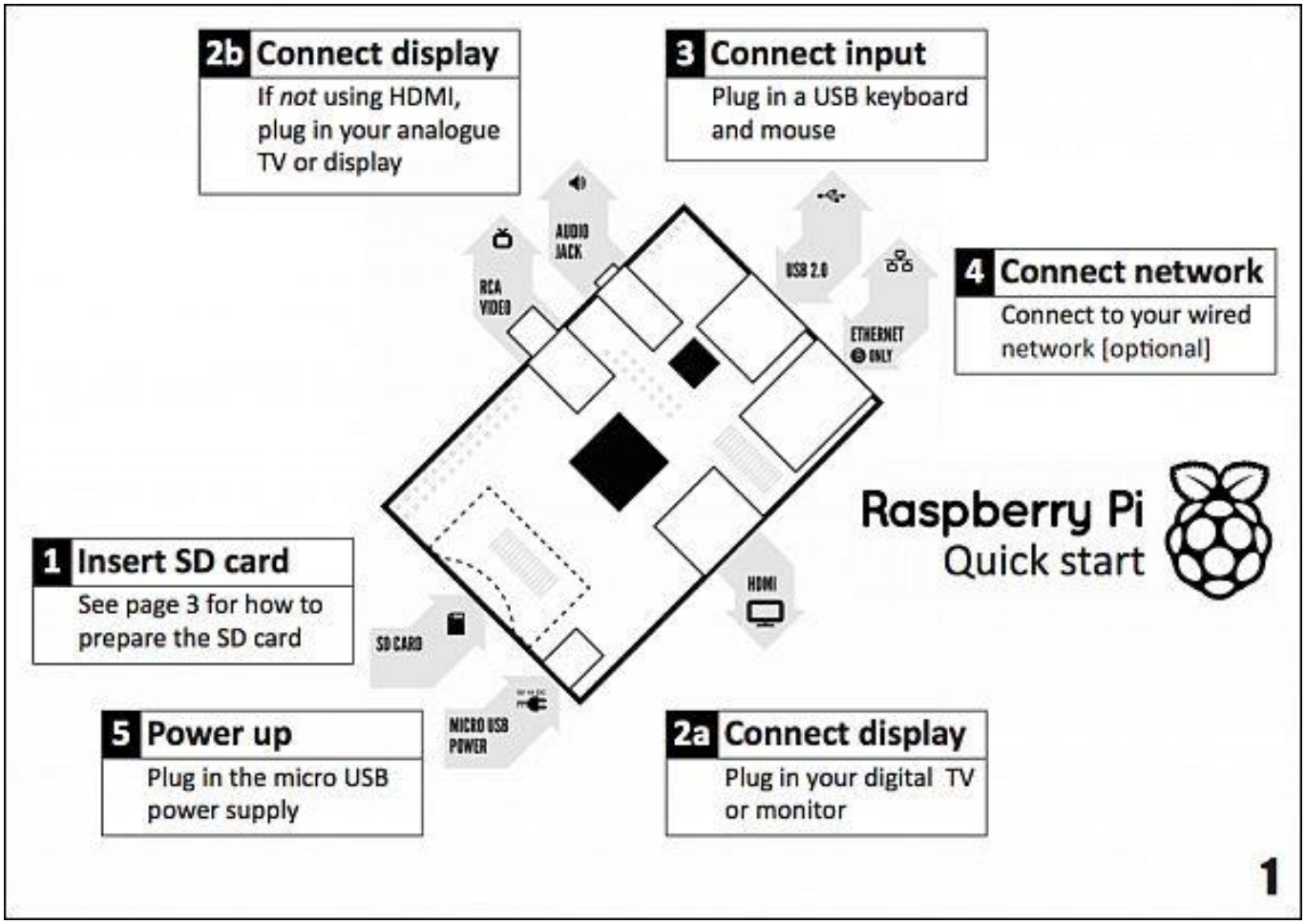


Figure 3. Raspberry Pi set up.

Note: As can be seen in the image above, the Raspberry Pi does not include a case. Cases are readily available or they may be part of a more complete Raspberry Pi Kit (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008XVAVAW/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B008XVAVAW&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*) which may also include a SD card with Linux pre-installed and various cables.

There are a number of expansion cards available for the Raspberry Pi including an add-on camera. A few of the uses I noted on the Web site were a Wii controller car, a motion detection camera, and a RaspBMC toddler in-car entertainment system. The possibilities are only limited by the imagination.

Some people reviewing the Raspberry Pi have noted that it is quite limited as a replacement for a desktop computer—which was never intended. (See "Can a $50 mini PC replace your desktop? (*www.digitaltrends.com/computing/can-a-50-*

mini-pc-replace-your-desktop/") Since it was designed as an educational device and works well for that purpose, there isn't great motivation for the foundation to increase its capabilities. There are certainly few economic incentives, although the Raspberry Pi is not yet totally Open Source Hardware.

Innovators are looking for more power at the same price.

The BeagleBoard Computer

Raspberry is not alone in producing tiny low-cost computers. The BeagleBoard (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BeagleBoard*) is another computer board designed for the education market. Produced by Texas Instruments in association with Digi-Key, it will run Linux, RISC OC, or Symbian. Recently announced BeagleBone (*www.pcworld.com/article/2036244/tiny-single-board-beaglebone-computer-arrives-at-45.html*) is offering more power than Raspberry Pi at a competitive price, $45.

Figure 4. The latest BeagleBone computer produced by Texas Instruments.

"You can run things like Ubuntu," Jason Kridner co-founder of BeagleBoard.org (*beagleboard.org/*) told PCWorld. "You can't do things like that on older architectures, like you'd see on a Raspberry Pi." Because it ships with a Linux distribution on it, Kridner said, "You can start developing in under a minute."

Another entry in the fray is Cubieboard (*cubieboard.org/*). Comparably priced, the small computer board has many of the same features as the other tiny single-board computers. It runs Android, Ubuntu and other Linux distributions.

Now another group of educators wants to up the ante with a single-board computer with two processors—one of them a quadcore.

Doubling Down on Single-Board Computers

Another group has gone to KickStarter (*www.kickstarter.com/projects/435742530/udoo-android-linux-arduino-in-a-tiny-single-board*) to raise funds to produce an even more powerful single-board computer called UDOO (pronounced "you do") (see Figure 5).

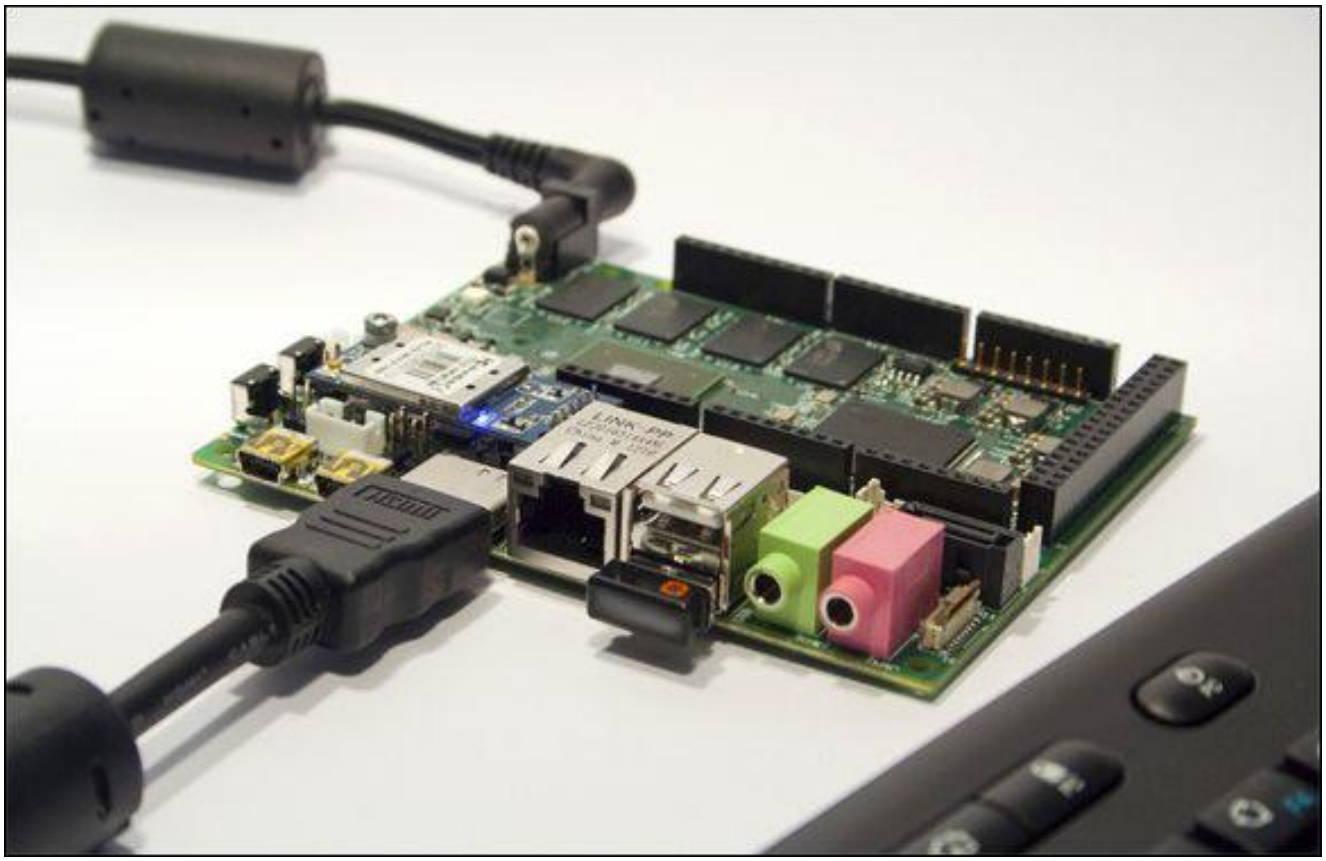


Figure 5. The UDOO board which boast two processors (one is an ARM i.MX6 Freescale quadcore processor).

"UDOO is an open hardware, low-cost computer equipped with an ARM i.MX6 Freescale processor for Android and Linux, alongside Arduino DUE's ARM SAM3X, both CPU integrated on the same board!"

The UDOO is 4.33 inches by 3.35 inches with low power consumption. The bet is that a much more powerful single-board computer will spark innovation. So far it looks like the demand is there. Their initial KickStarter goal was $27,000. That was quickly reached and they appear to be well on their way to the $500,000 extended goal.

People are paying for a product that only exists as a prototype right now. The only way to buy one is through KickStarter contributions—$99 for the lowest priced model. $100 and hope will get you a powerful single-board computer—maybe.

If successful, the UDOO may be the tool for the garage entrepreneur. See "Can $109 UDOO computer trump the Raspberry Pi? (*gcn.com/blogs/emerging-tech/2013/04/can-udoo-computer-trump-raspberry-pi.aspx*)"

"One group wants to add a little bit of power over the Pi. A joint effort of Seco USA, Aidilab and a team of researchers, they're creating a naked computer on a board, like the Pi, but with a quad-core processor. They've combined that design with an Arduino board, which has been around for years, mostly used in sensor applications."

The Mini PC

One device which isn't Open Source, but should be mentioned, is the Mini PC (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00BCJXUEQ/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00BCJXUEQ&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*). It looks like a flash drive (see Figure 6), but it is a computer. Its primary purpose is to plug into an HDTV or other entertainment device to deliver Internet services (e.g. Netflix) and play games.

Figure 6. The TBS 8240 Android 4.0.4 Mini PC for Android Games, Netflix, Youtube, Facebook, Gmail, etc.

When tested as a desktop computer, most of the devices came up short (*www.digitaltrends.com/computing/can-a-50-*

mini-pc-replace-your-desktop/). The more power the better. It's difficult to tell whether these devices will trigger new innovation or if they are a passing fad. Time will tell.

The Mini PC doesn't have all the connectors that you find on most of the other single-board computers. It's designed to plug directly into the HDTV (or monitor) with its USB port. Therefore, it is not a ready candidate for the garage shop entrepreneur.

A Cry for Innovation

When looking at one of those naked single-board computers, I can't help but feel it's crying out, "Make me into something new!" There is no pretense, just connectors waiting for input (and output). The price is reasonable—almost free. I know that I would like to get one these devices just to see what it can do. My problem is I don't have the time to dream and experiment. Nor do I currently have a compelling vision of what I would do with it. But, there are plenty in the world who do have a vision and will make the time. It's going to be fun to see what comes out of garages around the world in the next few years.

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

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?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00B8Z2ASG&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*).*

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

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

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

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

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

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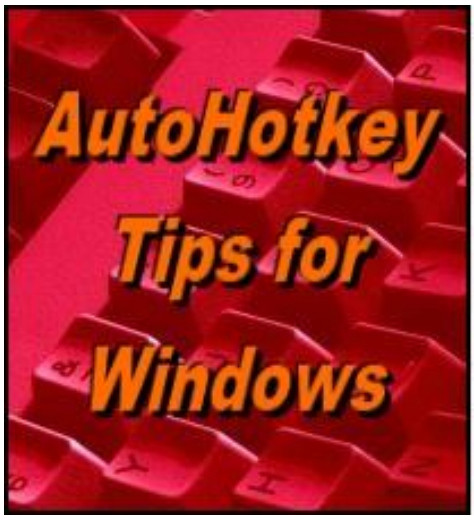


Running Scripts in the Background and a New AutoHotkey Book

"How to Run a Program in Background with AutoHotkey, Plus a New Book" by Jack Dunning

AutoHotkey scripts naturally run in the background, but AutoHotkey can also be used to run other programs invisibly. Plus, the new AutoHotkey compilation book for novice and intermediate users is now available.

I received the following AutoHotkey question last week:

Can you please pass on info on how to execute the [AutoHotkey] script in background?

Most AutoHotkey scripts already run in the background (no window tab in the taskbar nor any appearance in the Applications tab of Windows Task Manager—CTRL+SHIFT+ESC). The only sign of the running script is the icon in the System Tray portion of the Taskbar. One of the primary reasons for existence of this AutoHotkey icon (little green box with white H inside) is to give you an easy way to exit the running script. Otherwise, it's necessary to open Windows Task Manager (CTRL+SHIFT+ESC), select the script under the Processes tab, then click End Process to close the background process.

Hiding the AutoHotkey System Tray Icon

If you want to remove all signs of the icon the #NoTrayIcon AutoHotkey command (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/_NoTrayIcon.htm*) at the beginning of the script will eliminate it. (You can also use the *menu (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/Menu.htm*), tray, Icon* or *menu, tray, NoIcon* commands to show and hide the System Tray icon.) If you plan to hide the icon, then you should add a command to your script for exiting the routine. Otherwise, you will need to end the process in Windows Task Manager.

For example, suppose you have a routine similar to the following which hides the System Tray icon:

```
#NoTrayIcon
^#H::
    MsgBox, I'm here!
Return
```

In this case the key combination CTRL+ +H (*^#H*) is used to display a message box which says, "I'm here!"

When running the AHK script, there will be no System Tray icon (the little green box with a white H inside), but the process will appear in Windows Task Manager (CTRL+SHIFT+ESC) under the Processes tab as the generic AutoHotkey.exe process (see Figure 1). If you have more than one such process then it will be difficult to distinguish between them.

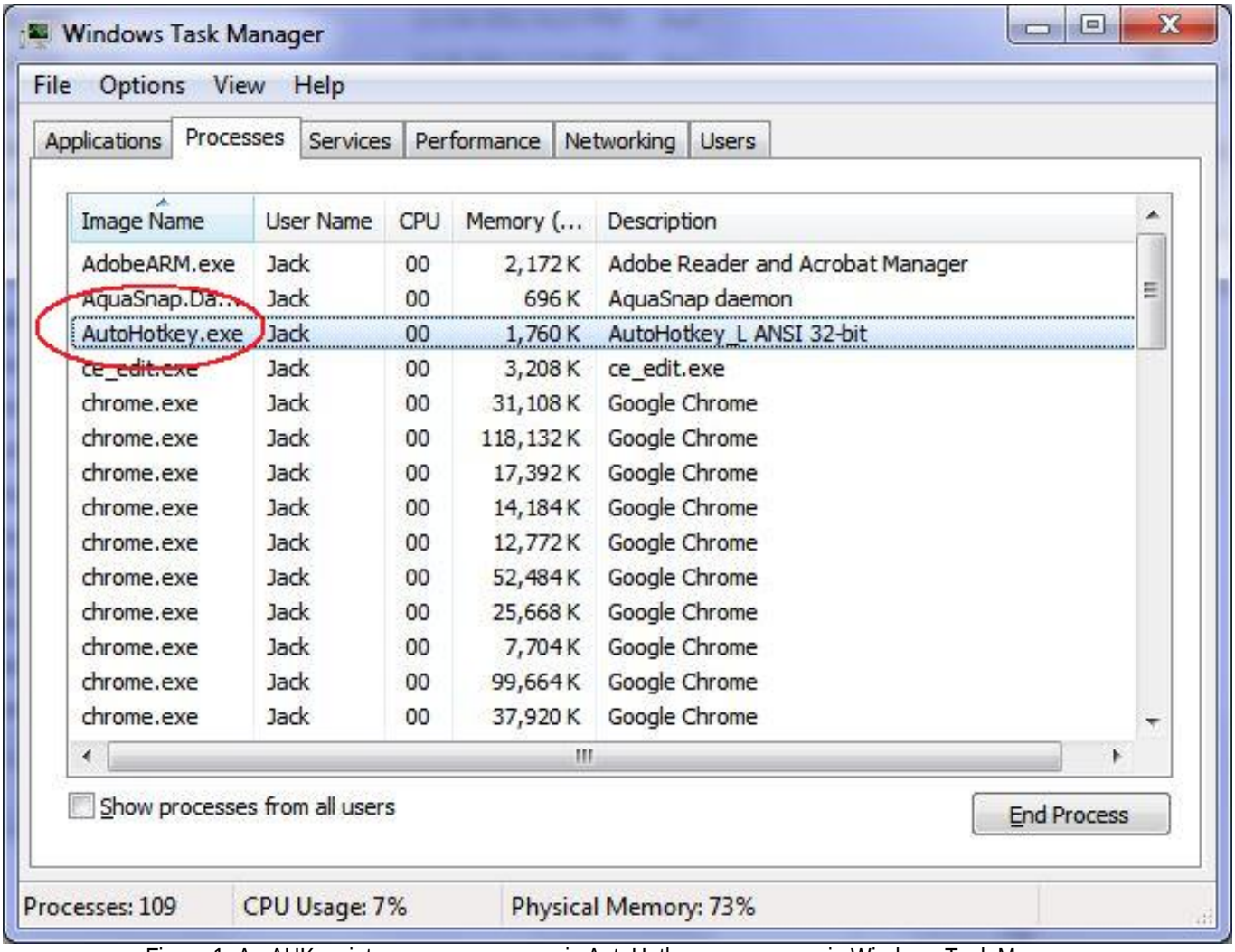


Figure 1. An AHK script appears as a generic AutoHotkey.exe process in Windows Task Manager.

However, if you compile the script into an EXE file, then the running process will appear under its unique filename (see Figure 2). This makes it a little easier to find and terminate the right process.

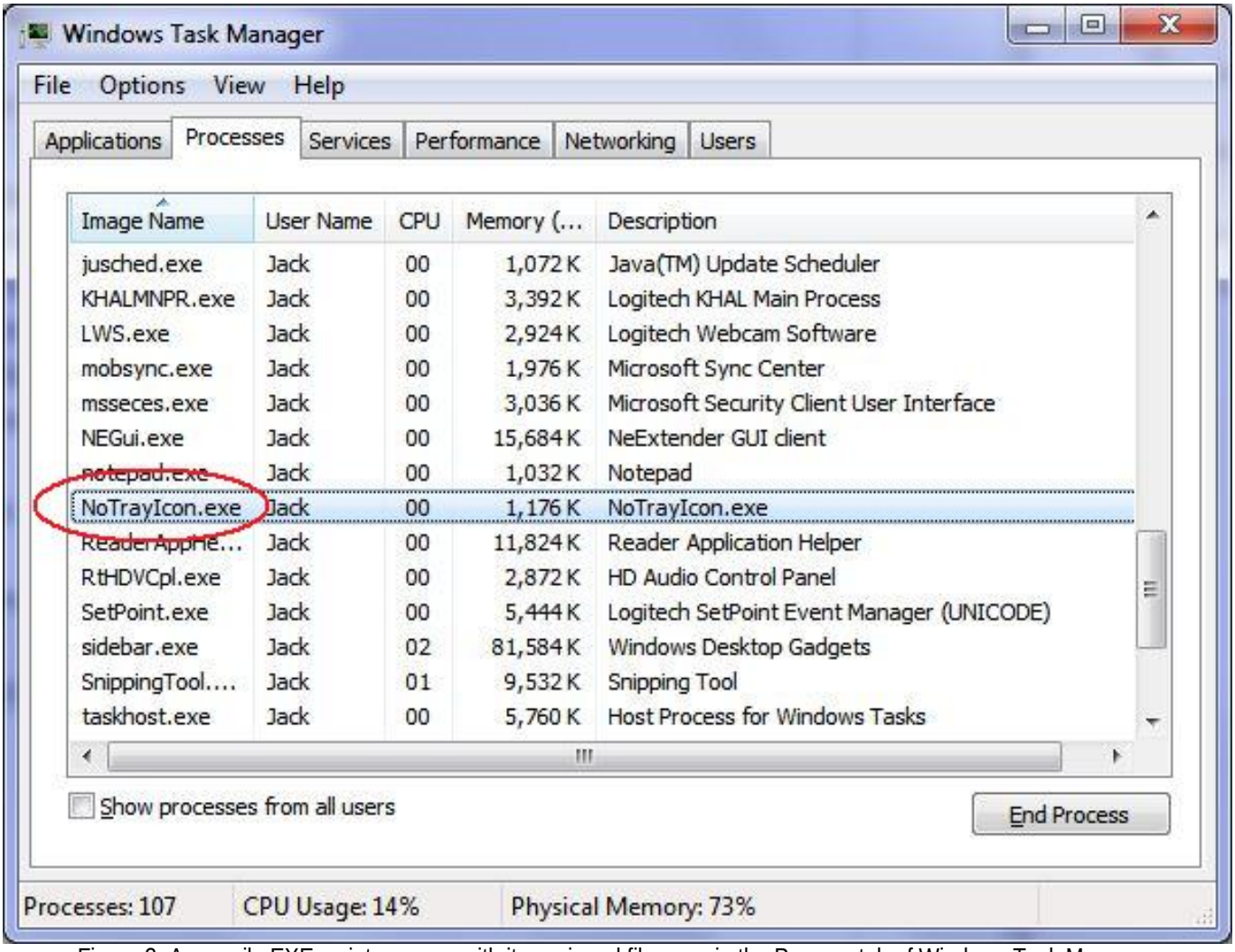


Figure 2. A compile EXE script appears with its assigned filename in the Process tab of Windows Task Manager.

Ideally, if there is no System Tray icon, a method for exiting is built into the script.

Running Other Programs in the Background with AutoHotkey

All programs in Windows run in a window. The difference between running a program in normal mode and in the background is the window is hidden for the background program. To launch a program in the background with AutoHotkey use the Hide option of the Run command (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/Run.htm*). When the Hide option is used the program will not appear in the Taskbar as a program tab, as an Application in Windows Task Manager, nor as a window on the desktop.

The following example found on the AutoHotkey Forum (*www.autohotkey.com/board/topic/71838-solved-run-a-script-for-a-program-in-the-background/*) opens a hidden Notepad window, writes "Some text" to Notepad, then shows the window with the text written in it:

```
DetectHiddenWindows, on
Run Notepad,, Hide, npPid
WinWait % "ahk_pid " npPid
ControlSetText, Edit1, Some text, % "ahk_pid " npPid
MsgBox "Some text" was written to Notepad in background.`nPress OK to show.
WinShow, % "ahk_pid " npPid
```

The DetectHiddenWindows command (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/DetectHiddenWindows.htm*) is used to allow AutoHotkey to access the hidden (background) windows. Otherwise, the new Notepad window would not be available for use (AutoHotkey would not see it) until the WinShow command (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/WinShow.htm*) is executed at the end of the script. The reason that AutoHotkey defaults to *DetectHiddenWindows, off* is because there are numerous hidden system windows which could cause ambiguous situations when running scripts. In most cases, it is best to leave those windows hidden (undetected) unless there is a specific reason for revealing them.

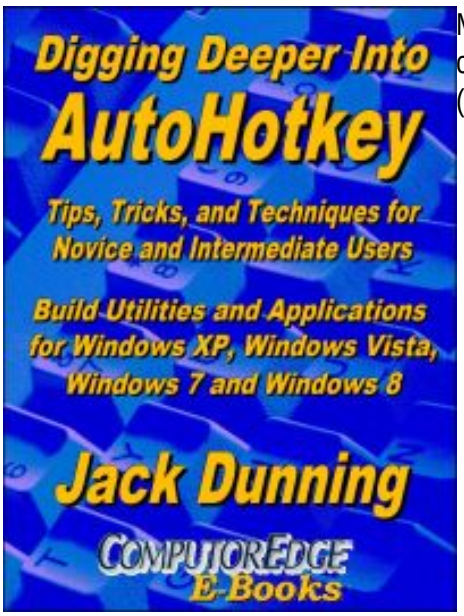
The Run command (*Run Notepad,, Hide, npPid*) launches Notepad as a hidden window—in the background. The Process ID is saved to the variable *npPid*. This variable is how this instance of Notepad is identified in the remainder of the script. Using the Process ID rather than the title (or part of the title) of a window is more reliable since the Process ID is unique to the window. The WinWait command (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/WinWait.htm*) pauses the script until the new Notepad window exists.

Next the ControlSetText command (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/commands/ControlSetText.htm*) (*ControlSetText, Edit1, Some text, % "ahk_pid " npPid*) is used to send the text "Some text" to the Notepad window.

The purpose of the MsgBox command is solely to pause the script so you can check the various places you might find Notepad running. Before clicking OK the only sign of the Notepad instance will be found in the Processes tab of Windows Task Manager. The AutoHotkey tab on the Taskbar is for the message box on the screen and there is an AutoHotkey icon in the System Tray, but these don't directly relate to the hidden Notepad window. If you exit the script before closing the message box by right clicking on the System Tray icon and selecting Exit, then the Hidden Notepad window continues running in the background (no visible window) until you either closed the process in Windows Task Manager or log off.

The WinShow command makes the Notepad (with added text) visible for closing. It will then appear in all of the expected locations.

New AutoHotkey Book for Novice and Intermediate Users



My new AutoHotkey book which is comprised of updated, reorganized and indexed columns from the last six months is now available at Amazon for Kindle hardware (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00CTACUMK/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00CTACUMK&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*) (or free software) users. Since the columns were not all written in a linear fashion, the book has been reorganized and broken up into parts by topic. The book is not for the complete beginner since it builds on the information in *A Beginner's Guide to AutoHotkey (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009SI3F52/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B009SI3F52&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*).* However, if a person is reasonably computer literate, they could go directly to this book for ideas and techniques without the first book.

If you've been following along with my AutoHotkey columns, then there is little new information in the book (although I have

added more clarification for techniques I felt were either confusing or wrong). The only reason I can see to buy it would be as a handy reference. The AutoHotkey commands used are included in a special index to the chapters in which they appear. Even I can't remember everything I wrote.

The first part of the book, "A Few Quick Tricks in AutoHotkey and Window Spy," includes a number of tips and short apps for the novice AutoHotkey script writer. Each chapter shows specific AutoHotkey techniques while offering tricks which can be put to use immediately.

Part II, "The Zen of Writing AutoHotkey Scripts," is about the holistic process of script writing while developing an app which uses an AutoHotkey dropdown menu to snap and resize windows on the Windows Desktop. Each AutoHotkey command used is explained in detail. Plus, an app to bring lost windows into view is analyzed. (Surprisingly, I actually used this app to find a window that had been thrown to a remote location.)

Not every Windows program has built in backup. In Part III, "AutoHotkey for Quick Backup of Your Work, Anywhere, Anytime!," there are AutoHotkey techniques which can be used to protect your work—even when editing on the Web.

Do you use Web browsers to do research? Make the data and URL collection process easier with the ideas found in Part IV, "Collect Data in One Pot." A free Scratchpad app (by another script writer) is discussed for its learning points.

Who needs the Start Menu in Windows 8? Or in Windows 7, or XP, for that matter? In Part V, "Quick Launch Links and Menus," there are two different approaches to creating Start Menu-like pop-ups. I regularly use my AutoHotkey QuickLinks app which quickly navigates my favorite programs and Web pages rather than the Taskbar, Desktop, or Start Menu. It's easy to set up and modify the QuickLinks menu structure with Windows Explorer. There are even tips for adding the QuickLinks menu to the Windows Taskbar System Tray.

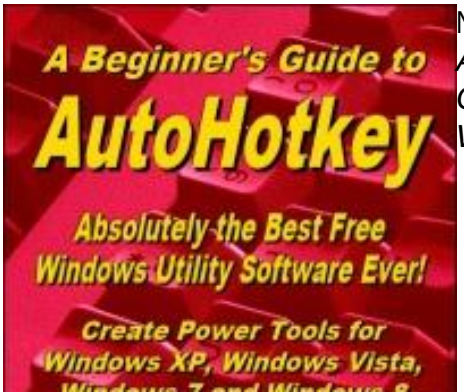
Microsoft Word has some pretty good autocorrection for commonly misspelled words. Now, with the AutoHotkey scripts found in Part VI, "AutoCorrect for All Windows Apps and AutoUpdating AutoHotkey on Multiple Computers," you can add all the same autocorrection (and much more) to all of your Windows programs and Web pages. Plus, learn how to automatically update all of your AutoHotkey script on all of your computers with Dropbox.

The Reminder app discussed in Part VII, "Building the Reminder App Step by Step," started as a quick pop-up for an appointment later in the same day. The script writing process added a speaking voice reading the message and ultimately saves the reminder to disk. While the app is not quite finished in this book (when is an app ever finished?), it is certainly functional enough for use. (I have it set right now to remind me to put out the trash cans this evening for pickup tomorrow.)

In the last few chapters of the book, Part VIII, "Introduction to Databases, Calculating Ages, and Formatting Problems," it is shown how an INI file can be used as a database. Plus, a comprehensive age calculation function is introduced. The peculiarities of the formatting and placement options for the controls in a GUI object is explained graphically.

Now that the book is out, I plan to continue work on the Reminder app and the GrandKids app adding more advanced features. I also plan to take a closer look at using AutoHotkey to work with the Windows Registry and Windows Messages (*www.autohotkey.com/docs/misc/SendMessageList.htm*). If you follow this column, then you won't miss a thing.

* * *



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

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?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00B8Z2ASG&linkCode=as2&tag=comput0b9-20*).*

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

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

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

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

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

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“3D Printers Becoming Mainstream” by Wally Wang

3D Printers Becoming Mainstream; Blindsided in Business; Computers on the International Space Station; Timer for the Macintosh; Financial Analysis at a Glance; Bye, Bye Nook?; View Total RAM.

Staples will now sell 3D printers (*www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2418523,00.asp*) for $1,300. If that sounds expensive, just remember when laser printers first appeared, they cost $3,000 or more. Now you can get a basic laser printer for less than $100.

In case you don't know about 3D printers, these printers create three-dimensional objects using plastic, metal, and other materials, although the cheapest 3D printers use spools of plastic that they use to create objects one layer at a time. In comparison to 3D printing, most products are created by taking a chunk of material and stripping away material until you have what you want, which is wasteful and time-consuming.

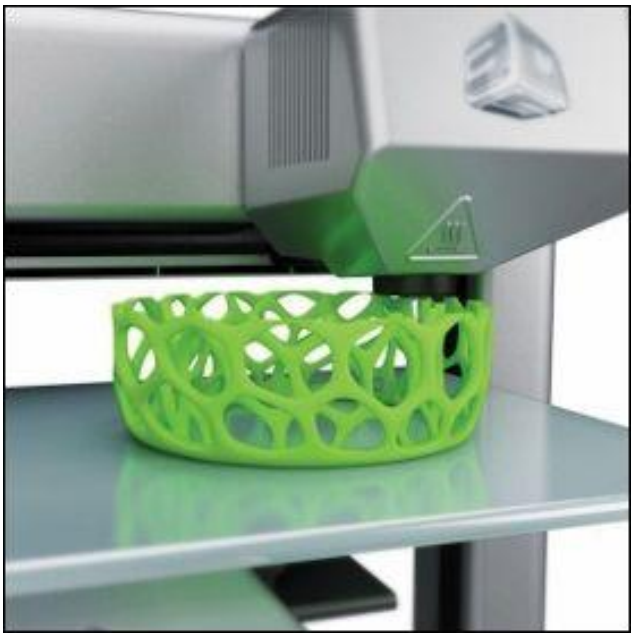

Figure 1. 3D printers can create custom designs and products.

Most likely, the first major uses for 3D printing will be toys and simple items like iPhone plastic cases. However, 3D printing will only improve as the cost drops while the capabilities improve. Eventually you can expect 3D printers to combine multiple materials such as plastic, metal, and wood so you could create your own doors, containers, or car parts.

An organization called Defense Distributed has even created plans for the world's first, workable 3D printed handgun (*www.*

geek.com/news/pirate-bay-distributes-government-censored-3d-printed-gun-schematics-1554738/). The U.S. State Department has already ordered the company to remove the 3D gun blueprints from their site, but supporters have flooded the Internet with copies so people will always be able to find them.

Within a few years, expect 3D printing to be fairly common, which will hurt cheap, overseas manufacturers. Why buy lots of one item from overseas when you can create your own custom items in your own home with a 3D printer?

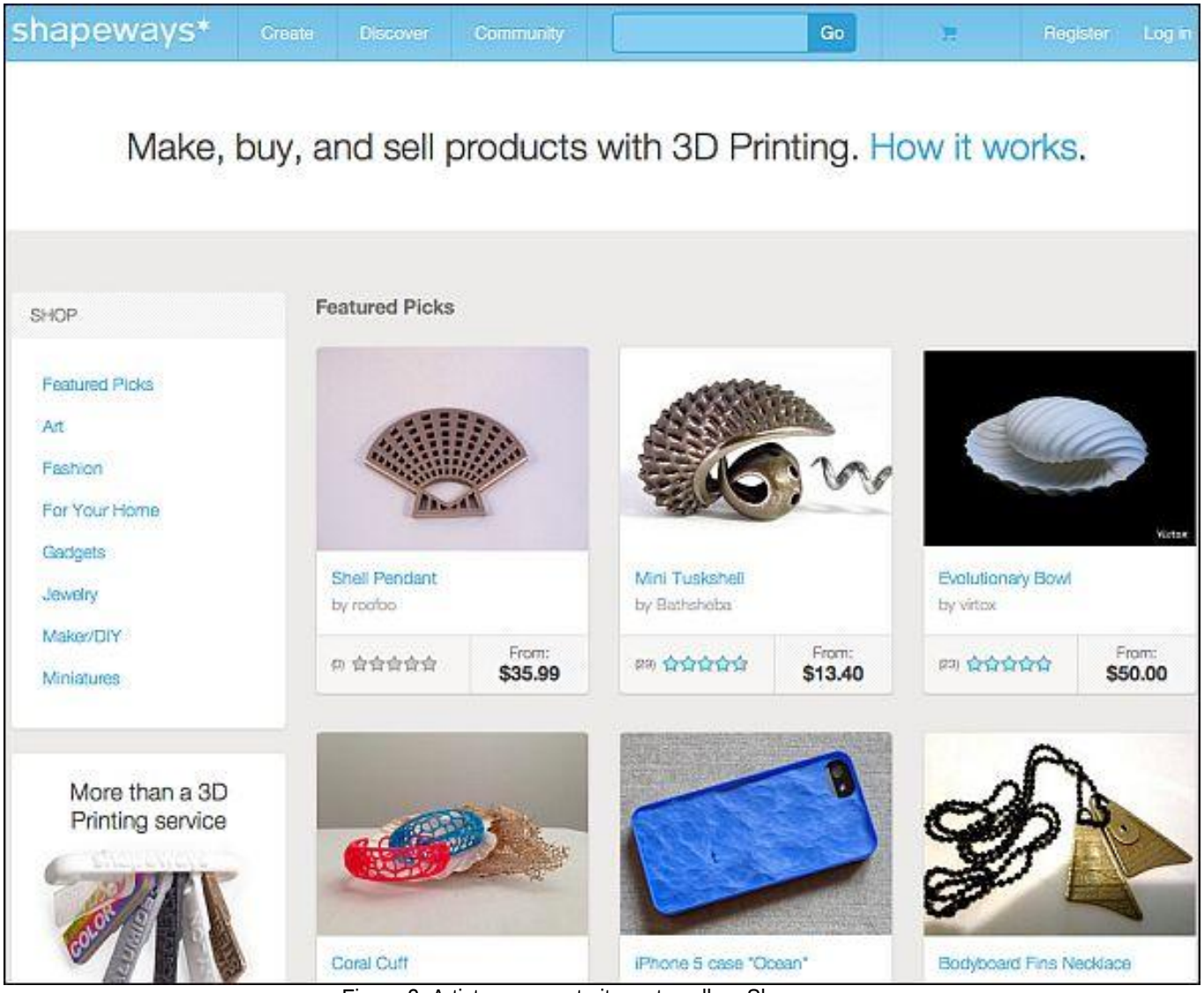

Figure 2. Artists can create items to sell on Shapeways.

For artists, what better way to sell your designs than through 3D printing? Create a unique design and then let customers purchase custom designs that a company like Shapeways (*www.shapeways.com*) can deliver. Now artists can get paid for their work without the hassle of spending time trying to sell their work, which often takes time away from their artistic endeavors.

3D printing has numerous medical applications (*individual.troweprice.com/public/Retail/Planning-&-Research/Connections/3D-Printing/Printing-a-Medical-Revolution*) as well. False teeth need to be customized for each patient and can't be mass produced, which makes them a perfect candidate for 3D printers. Even artificial limbs can't be mass-produced, but need to be customized for each person, which makes creating prosthetics another perfect use for 3D printers.

Perhaps the most exciting application for 3D printing is called bioprinting, which involves printing actual organs using a patient's cells. Bioprinting can create skin, livers, and even hearts with virtually no risk of rejection since the items can be created from the patient's own cells.

The capabilities of 3D printers can't get better fast enough. When 3D printers can make virtually any physical item that you want, what will happen to retail stores, shopping malls, and delivery services like Federal Express and UPS? Just ask Borders Books what happens when you can see the future coming and you do nothing about it, and that will help you visualize the future of physical distribution and storage businesses as well.

Blindsided in Business

Most businesses think their greatest competition comes from their rivals. That seems natural because if you're running a restaurant, you might think that other restaurants are your biggest competition. However, if you only focus on your rivals, you'll likely overlook your unseen competition, and that unseen competition is what can really kill you and your rivals.

Borders Books thought their competition were other bookstores like Barnes & Noble. Borders didn't realize that their real competition was Amazon and e-books along with easy accessibility to information through the Internet.

Kodak used to think that their main competitor was FujiFilms and Polaroid. They didn't realize that their real competition were digital cameras embedded (*finance.fortune.cnn.com/2013/05/03/apple-kodak/*) in mobile phones. If you have a mobile phone, you always have a camera with you, which makes it far more convenient to capture pictures than by lugging around a separate camera with you at all times.

In any business, the real threats are never your direct rivals. Windows PCs were never really threatened by Macintosh computers or Linux. However, Windows is completely threatened by smartphones and tablets. How can any business compete against an unknown enemy? The answer is simple.

First, take your eyes off your direct competitors and look for any type of business that could blindside you, even if it sounds completely outrageous. Nobody at Kodak would have ever guessed that mobile phones with digital cameras would help wipe them out, but that's why so many established businesses fail. You have to imagine the seemingly absurd, and that requires creativity, which few business executives have.

Second, look for ways to disrupt somebody else's business. Somebody is going to wipe out your business eventually. If you're lucky, that won't happen to you before the end of your life, but most likely it will happen, so be ready. If you run a restaurant, don't think of yourself in the restaurant business but think of yourself in the entertainment business or the social gathering business, or the office-on-the-go business like how so many people use Starbucks as an office away from their real office.

Of course, looking for indirect competitors and ways to disrupt other businesses requires imagination, which explains why so many big companies (Montgomery Wards, Polaroid, Kodak, Borders Books, etc.) go bankrupt year after year. With the warning signs all around them, too many people prefer to vehemently deny the obvious until it's too late. Then the next time innovation threatens to upturn their lives, they repeat the same mistakes of their past with heated emotions and added bitterness only to be proven wrong once more. When you see certain people making the same mistakes over and over again, you have to question how humans can actually believe they're the smartest creatures on the planet.

Computers on the International Space Station

When working in outer space, it's important to have a reliable computer. That's why NASA recently said, "We migrated key functions from Windows to Linux because we needed an operating system that was stable and reliable."

In addition to using Linux on laptops, astronauts on the International Space Station are also running Linux to control Robonaut (R2), the first humanoid robot in space. R2 is meant to carry out tasks too dangerous or tedious for astronauts to perform.

Figure 3. R2 is a humanoid robot designed to perform human-like tasks.

It's no surprise that NASA uses Linux (*www.linux-magazine.com/w3/issue/12/Linux_on_the_International_Space_Station.pdf%20*) for many of their mission-critical tasks. Linux has the reputation for stability and reliability while more dominant operating systems do not. As the London Stock Exchange discovered in 2008 (*www.imsig.ca/news/london-stock-exchange-dumps-windows-for-linux*), "When performance and stability matters, as they do in business, Linux is the positive choice."

If you're really concerned about saving money, then you should use Linux. If you really want freedom of choice, you should use Linux. Arguing that another operating system is superior just because it has more users is like arguing that Chinese is the best language for communication just because more people on the planet speak it than any other language in the world.

If you're not willing to learn to read, write, and speak in Chinese just because it's the most dominant human language on the planet, then you shouldn't argue the superiority of an operating system just because so many people happen to use it. If you don't want to fiddle around with Linux and prefer a more guided computing solution, then you might prefer iOS on mobile devices and OS X on computers. In either case, both Linux and OS X are valid and viable choices based on their actual performance and reputation.

Figure 4. NASA used plenty of Macintosh computers while tracking the landing of the Mars Curiosity Rover.

Scientists at NASA use Linux and OS X because they want to, not because they have to. When given a choice, it's clear what many people choose when reliability and usability are the prime criteria. When people don't objectively evaluate their choices, they'll often make decisions out of fear, ignorance, or inertia instead, and then justify their decision using irrationality and anger in lieu of actual logic.

Timer for the Macintosh

Every iPhone and iPad comes with a Clock app that includes a timer so you can see how much time has passed or when a specific time interval has passed such as 15 minutes. If you wished you had a similar Clock program for the Macintosh, you can download a free copy of Timer for Mac (*www.apimac.com/mac/timer/*).

You can try the free version and if you want more features, upgrade to the paid version. The free version lets you set a time to make your Macintosh do something such as play a song in iTunes. This can be a handy way to turn your Macintosh into a simple alarm clock or to remind you to take a break after a specific time interval such as every two hours.

Figure 5. Timer for the Mac.

With Timer for the Mac, you can now keep track of time just as conveniently as you can do with your iPhone or iPad. Now you no longer have an excuse for being late unless you simply don't care about your appointments any more.

Financial Analysis at a Glance

Look at the financial listings of *The Wall Street Journal* and you'll see a mass of numbers that mean virtually nothing by themselves. What makes stock exchange information useful is seeing how prices change over time. To help you visualize price changes, financial analysts have used various types of charts such as candlestick charts that identify the open, close, high, and low of a stock in a given time period. However, if you want a more graphical analysis of financial information, take a look at Stock Touch for iOS (*stocktouch.com*).

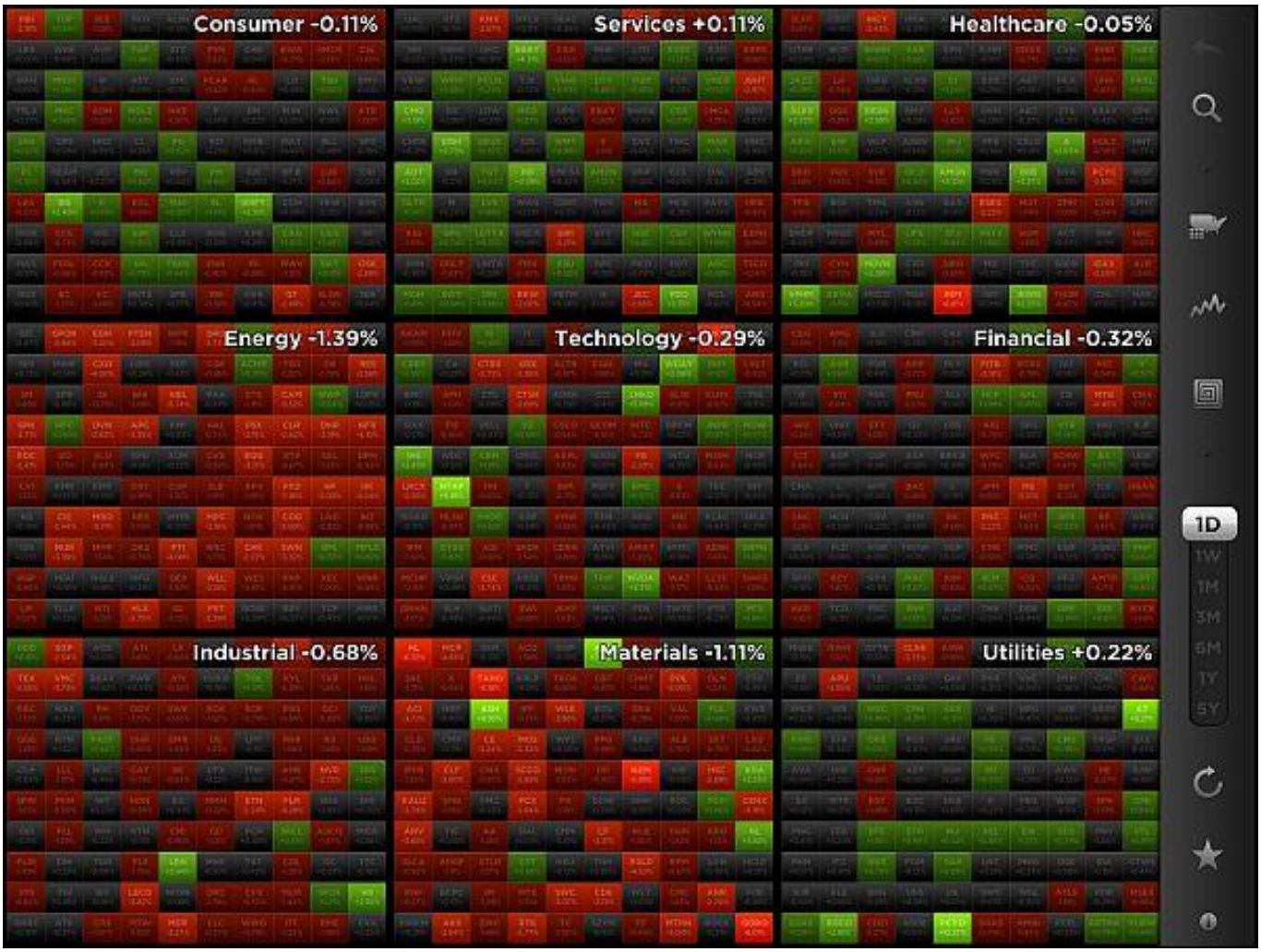

Figure 6. Stock Touch lets you view groups of stocks in entire sectors using color codes.

Green means a stock has gone up while red means a stock has gone down. By displaying various shades of green and red, you can quickly identify which stocks have gone up or down a great deal or a just a little bit. Tap on a specific stock and you can see a typical chart displaying that stock's history.

Figure 7. Stock Touch lets you view data for a single stock.

By using Stock Touch, you can quickly see the condition of the stock market and each sector on a given day. The unique graphics of Stock Touch makes stock analysis faster, easier, and more understandable so you can make better decisions about the stock market (hopefully).

Bye, Bye Nook?

Microsoft may be interested in buying Barnes & Noble's Nook (*techcrunch.com/2013/05/08/microsoft-mulling-nook-media-llc-purchase-for-1-billion/*) division for $1 billion dollars. According to the latest rumors, Microsoft may kill the Nook tablet (since Nook sales pale compared to Amazon Kindle Fire tablet sales) and focus exclusively on the Nook digital e-book library along with Barnes & Noble's college textbook division.

Whether Microsoft buys Nook or not, the real question is why? Nook e-books will still be competing against Amazon and coming in second best due to Amazon's greater popularity. Even worse, Nook e-books are completely missing the point of interactivity that Apple's iBooks Author provides so people can create more engaging e-books than e-books that resemble ordinary PDF files.

Then Microsoft could take over Barnes & Noble's college textbook division just in time for the college textbook market to evaporate under the growing threat of interactive e-books inspired by Apple's iBooks Author. By using iBooks Author, teachers can create their own electronic, interactive textbooks that will be far cheaper, more engaging, and less expensive to distribute than printed textbooks.

Whoever ultimately buys the Nook and Barnes & Noble's college textbook division will essentially be buying two losing

businesses that have a dim future. If this looks like the kind of business decision that makes sense for $1 billion dollars, then you might have what it takes to make major corporate decisions today, just as long as you won't accept any responsibility for the aftermath.

* * *

If your Macintosh seems to run sluggishly, you may not have enough RAM. You can check your RAM by clicking the Apple menu and choosing About This Mac to see the total RAM in your Macintosh. To see how your Mac actually uses its RAM, dig into the Applications folder and open the Utilities folder. Then click on Activity Monitor.

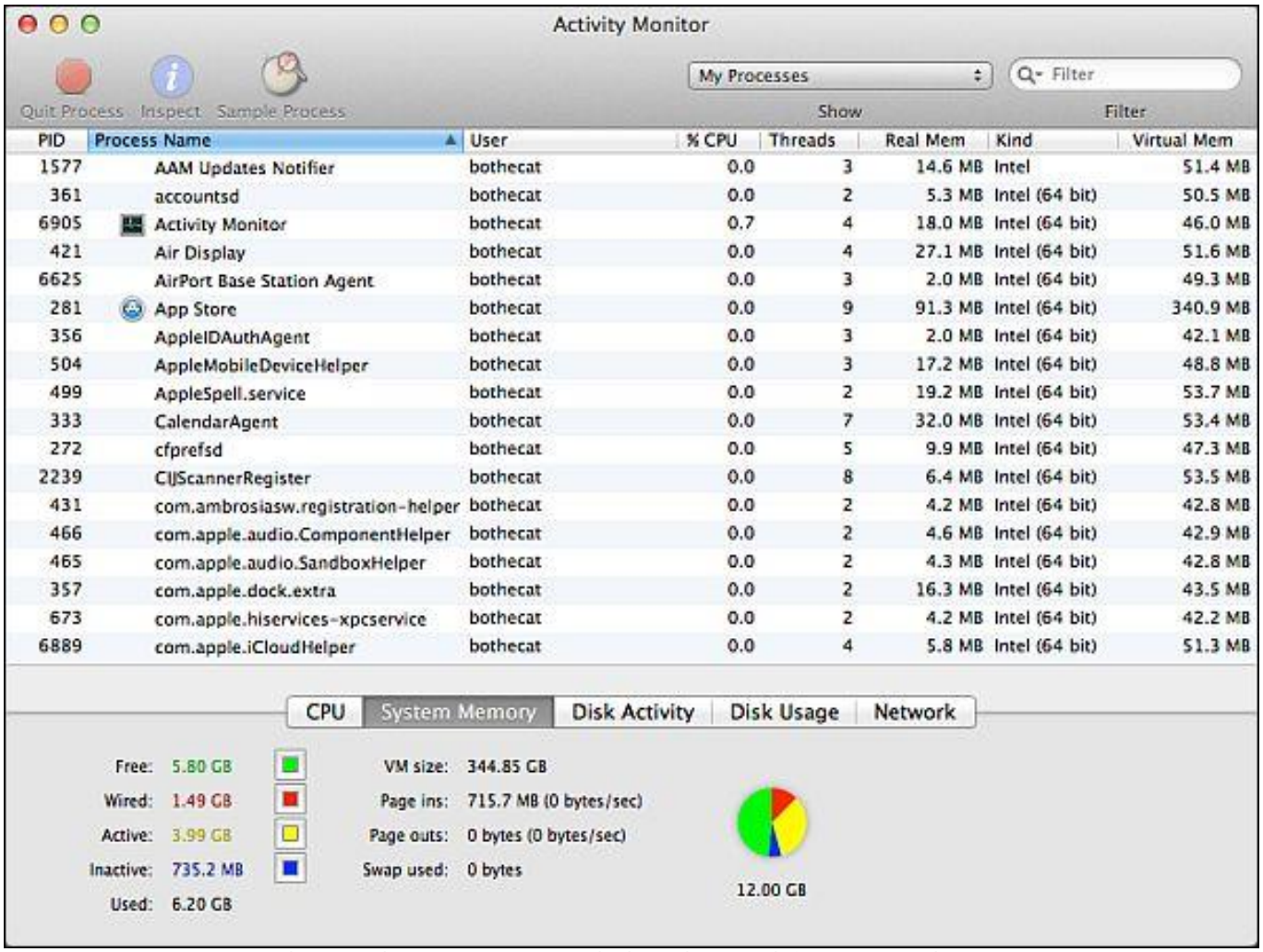

Figure 8. The System Memory tab shows how much free RAM you have.

Click on the System Memory tab near the bottom of the Activity Monitor window and look how much Free and Inactive RAM your Mac is currently using. If you don't have any Free or Inactive RAM available, then you may want to add more RAM to speed up your computer.

In the early days, before Wally became an Internationally renowned comedian, computer book writer, and generally cool guy, Wally Wang used to hang around The Byte Buyer dangling participles with Jack Dunning and go to the gym to pump iron with Dan Gookin.

Wally is responsible for the following books:

*My New Mac, Lion Edition (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593273908/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-

20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=1593273908*)*
*My New iPad 2 (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/159327386X/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=159327386X*)*
*Steal This Computer Book (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050*)*
*Microsoft Office 2010 For Dummies (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470489987?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470489987*)*
*Beginning Programming for Dummies (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702*)*
*Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470108541?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470108541*)*
*Breaking Into Acting for Dummies with Larry Garrison (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468*)*
*Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon and Gerald Fisher (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=159079189*)*
*How to Live with a Cat (When You Really Don't Want To) (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006DJYL70/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=B006DJYL70*)*
*The Secrets of the Wall Street Stock Traders (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006DGCH4M/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399373&creativeASIN=B006DGCH4M*)*
*Mac Programming For Absolute Beginners (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/1430233362?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1430233362*)*
*Republican Fairy Tales (Children's Stories the 1% Tell About the Rest of Us) (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006QSKM3A/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B006QSKM3A*)*
*The Zen of Effortless Selling with Moe Abdou (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006PUFPGI/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B006PUFPGI*)*
*The 15-Minute Movie Method (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B004TMD9K8/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B004TMD9K8*)*
*Erotophobia (A novel) (*www.amazon.com/gp/product/B009POEAJO/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B009POEAJO&linkCode=as2&tag=the15minmovme-20*)*

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

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Beyond Personal Computing

"Amusing Anecdotes about eBay"

by Marilyn K. Martin

> eBay—You can buy/sell stuff no one would touch if not intrigued by a fuzzy photo and shockingly strange detail.

eBay was one of the rare success stories out of the dot-com bubble at the end of the last century. Formed in September 1995 by Pierre Omidyar, "AuctionWeb" went on to become an international online auction and shopping Web site. Renamed "eBay" in September 1997, the San Jose (California) company today does a multi-billion dollar business in over thirty countries.

The Psychology of eBayers Explained

One of the first items sold on eBay in 1995 was a "broken laser pointer for $14.82." The astonished founder of the site, Pierre Omidyar, contacted the winning bidder to make sure he fully understood that he was buying a B.r.o.k.e.n! laser pointer. The buyer responded simply, "I'm a collector of broken laser pointers."

Since eBay allows people to sell "services and intangibles," controversy invariably erupts from time to time. A man in 1999 tried to sell one of his kidneys. On other occasions, people and even entire towns have been listed for sale, mostly as jokes or for free publicity.

There was an episode on the popular TV show ***Big Bang Theory*** a few years ago where someone threw a cell phone out a multi-story window. The character "Raj" (Kunal Nayyar) walks in a minute later with the trashed cell phone, elated at the find. When another character asks him what he's going to do with it he replies, "What else? Sell it on eBay as 'slightly used'."

Quick & Dirty: How to Sell on eBay

(Thanks to The TheValvePage.com (*www.theValvePage.com*))

1) Once you join, you need to sell some stuff quick to get a rating.

2) Buy a box of cheap parts, say, and list each one individually.

3) Sell the parts cheap, since postage-and-packing will still get you a profit.

4) Get a friend to bid on your items that aren't selling, since you need that almighty large rating.

5) Head to an estate auction or garage sale and buy up a bunch of old stuff you can sell as "Antiques" or "Retro Treasures."

6) Learn how to spice up your descriptions. A course on being a Life Coach or Real Estate Agent can help.

7) After getting some snazzy, maybe-true descriptions going, be sure and cover yourself with a "believed to be ..." escape clause.

8) No one expects a bargain from a professional. So act like an amateur who hasn't got a clue about the value of what he's selling.

9) Have some fun! Post a fuzzy photo of something, and list it as "sold as seen."

The Real Glossary of Terms for eBay Products

Art Deco: Practically any item sold on eBay. Might help to post an odd-angle photo with a red arrow pointing to the "art" part.

Like New: Buncha scratches, some rattling parts, my pet tried to have sex with it.

Slightly Used: See Like New
Works: It makes a sound, something lights up. Expect to spend a bundle to make it work like it once did.

In Working Condition: Occasionally works. A few buttons don't work. Batteries never included.

Use With Caution: Lock the kids out of the house, plug every appliance into a power-strip, and only turn it on in an empty garage while wearing an enviro-suit rated for maximum-radiation-exposure.

Sold As Is: A gift from a teacher who washed this keyboard in soap and water.

Doesn't Work: It hasn't worked since 1956. But has some seriously outdated parts that you'll never see again.

Retro: Something old that used to be cool. Or was made before your target audience was born, and they won't know the difference. Like gluing on clock parts and calling it Classic Steampunk.

Rare: Not more than three of them for sale on eBay at any one time.

Very Rare: Only one currently for sale on eBay that actually works.

Unique: Cleaned it up, and haven't got a clue what it really is. But it looks important.

For Challenge Enthusiasts: A small dusty box of used and unknown parts from a deceased relative's attic.

Medical Miracle!: Any item that was accidentally left inside you or a relative after surgery.

Hard To Find: They don't make these anymore, after Lemon Laws took effect.

Serious Collectors Only: To weed out the jokesters who add comments like "Didn't the FBI post a reward for this a year ago?"

Advertisements for Products and Services to Definitely Avoid

• Software to hack any drone!

• My new e-book no publisher will touch: "I Lost an Eye - The Dark Side of Biometrics"

• Partner for Patent-infringement Game. I supply the stolen patents - you make the product!

• Invisible map of sure-fire Time Travel vortices in our solar system. (This *is* ringy Saturn system, correctly positive?)

• Knock-off Vodka. Cheap. Can use as radiator fluid if not drinking. Rubles or gold only.

• Recently Acquired Bags of *un* Emergency Food in Palace Coup. Dated 2003. Some issues with insects and mold. Cannot sell inside this transitional country. But willing to ship international.

Does eBay Sell "Haunted/Cursed" Items?

Heck Yeah! And leave it to our slacker sages at *Cracked Magazine* to find them. Although the motives of the seller (believer or huckster?) are more suspicious than the actual object, they do make for interesting reading. Although any actual buyers are probably overdue for a brain scan.

A doll with nail-polish blood and painted-black eyes has the astonishing come-on "Most Haunted Magic Baby Girl Doll - Murdered By Her Own Mother." She had the not-so-surprising price of $46.66, with free shipping.

Or how about a "Very Old White Witch Handcrafted Item To Rid Insomnia." Although your first hint should be the term "handcrafted": It's a pinecone with glued-on eyes. Probably another child's school crafts project, whose huckster older brother made up a snazzy faux-story to try and sell it on eBay. (Older brother is now working on Wall Street—or in prison for Fraud.)

Other "haunted/cursed/possessed" items that have been for sale on eBay included a supposedly spirit-possessed doll described as a "Haunted Doll 'Arson' Ironacally (sp) Died In A Fire." It's accompanied by a strange tale of a man who named his (eventually deceased) daughter Arson. How ironacal.

Or maybe you'd go for a dirty, has-been stuffed animal described as "Haunted Childs Old Toy Lamb Seeks Dead Girl." (Hey, maybe it was easier to get it away from a toddler than trying to wash it and have it disintegrate. Then mom would have had to cope with a screaming kid holding damp stuffing with one plastic eye. This way, mom can make a little money to buy another stuffed animal, possessed or not.)

What You Can Not Sell on eBay

• No Human Organs. (There goes Raffle Night in death row cells all over the Third World!)

• No Military Weapons. (But they do sell "Survivalist Knives" that can chop down a tree, or cut into a concrete bunker.)

• Although *no* Knives can be sold/bought through the UK eBay, unless they are dining cutlery or letter openers.

"Cracked Magazine"'s List of Oddest eBay Products

How about a CB-6000 Male Chastity Belt for about $190? The seller even threw in a "free pair of Italian-designed sunglasses." (So...was this Male Chastity Belt developed in Italy? Maybe Rome? Maybe a little side business for the Vatican, after they paid out all those millions to settle those abuse claims?)

Or if you've got a cool $15,000 lying around in some hedge fund, why not buy "The World's Largest Lite-Brite of DaVinci's 'Last Supper'"? The detail is Pop Culture Solid: "A Guinness World Record AND a Ripley's Oddity!"

So who didn't love Steven Spielberg's iconic movie, "E.T"? You may want to recheck your warm-and-fuzzy memories if you buy this plastic E.T. head "Bicycle Siren with Light Up Eyes!" Looking somewhat like a severed baby chimp's head with a lazy eye, it was only $9.99 - and had zero bids. Can't imagine why...

The rest of the offerings are even more lost in Bad Taste Land, from Used Breast Implants to an American Raccoon Penis Bone. You can check out the rest of these dubious offerings (*www.cracked.com/article_15836_the-12-most-awesomely-ridiculous-ebay-auctions.html*) yourself.

"Everything Else"

This is the last category on eBay. And if you have a lazy afternoon between projects, or your new supervisor has removed your

Push Pin Army and Morphin' Monster programs, you can "look busy" going through this everything-but-the-kitchen-sink category. Some of the sub-categories are Genealogy, Metaphysical, Adults Only, Special Promotions, Test Auctions and Personal Development.

There are even three sub-categories under "Weird Stuff": Slightly Unusual, Really Weird and Totally Bizarre. For the first two categories think gag gifts, bondage hardware, cuff-links and Thinking Putty. For the last category (Totally Bizarre) you get vintage porn, Nazi coin replicas, fart and poop gag gifts. (However, if you've ever wanted a Pyrolytic Graphite Levitator, 'Area 51' Car Pass or a Genuine Kangaroo Scrotum, this is the category for you!)

The "Other" category is tame in comparison, with razors, recipes, rubber dog stamps, bridal veils and even pieces of a motorcycle exhaust with slip-on mufflers. (And I'll just bet you never thought you'd find "slip on motorcycle mufflers" in the same category as a "bridal veil" on eBay!)

(Special thanks to Ebay.com (*Ebay.com*), Wikipedia.org (*Wikipedia.org*), Thevalvepage.com (*Thevalvepage.com*), and Cracked.com (*Cracked.com*).)

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.

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

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

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Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

"Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns." by ComputorEdge Staff

"Getting Fast Help for Your Computer," "Internet Explorer 10 or Not," "Searching Favorites in Windows 8," "The Mobile Wave"

Getting Fast Help for Your Computer

[Regarding the May 3 Digital Dave column:]

Look for a nearby computer club and *join them*. There are still some of them around and S. California has some! They are usually populated by us "seniors" and there are some really knowledgeable ones in those clubs.

I joined the one in OKC about 2003 and while not a techie myself, have learned how to manage and fix many of the problems computers get themselves into <g>. I have several friends from that group that are *real* techies who can build and/or fix just about anything related to computers (and some other electronic gadgets).

My computers haven't seen the inside of a "repair" shop since 2003. I'm happy to say that many of the problems I've incurred since 2003, I've fixed myself with *no help* or with the help/support of these people via phone. (I have four computers running either the XP, Windows 7 or Windows 8 platform and associated peripherals to maintain.)

Also, I've found forums to be really valuable sources for help, usually fast help. Sometimes it takes some real searching to find the good ones, so I join them and/or save their names and URLs for later needs. For instance, the best I've found for computer "bugs" is Bleeping Computers (*www.bleepingcomputer.com/*).

And always, there are good eMagazines like *ComputorEdge*.

-P Jones, Oklahoma City, OK

Internet Explorer 10 or Not

[Regarding the May 3 Editors Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers column:]

The same complaint applies to Acrobat Reader 10 (aka X). Slow startup, long pauses before the first click on the menus or scrollbar takes effect.

-Stewart Levin, Menlo Park, CA

Searching Favorites in Windows 8

[Regarding the May 3 Editors Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers column:]

Besides the global File Explorer search, there is one more way to search for Web sites that you saved to the Favorites folder (the folder that IE uses). It turns out that some time ago Microsoft added a feature to IE that searches for saved Web sites in the Favorites folder as well as your browsing history. Just type a phrase from the title used when you saved it into the box at the top of the IE window (the one which normally displays the address of the page you are on). There is still no way to use the charms bar search to do this. And if you moved the saved favorite to a folder other than Favorites, you will have to revert to the File Explorer search box to find it.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

The Mobile Wave

[Regarding the April 12 Wally Wang's Apple Farm column:]

Well, I guess the main reason that I will buy and use a smartphone in the future is because I'm being forced to. It seems as though *they* (the smartphone manufacturers/providers) are in this "Mobile Wave."

My brother hates computers, and is really illiterate with them. He gets along very well with his smartphone (e-mail, Internet, etc.). However, he is always having me do his "file" (attachments, etc.) chores, printing, scanning, etc. He is one of those businessmen who needs a smartphone to handle his day to day business.

I don't *need* a smartphone. I'm retired. Sure, it would come in handy sometimes when I want to look up something (when I'm away from my home PC) like a map or a product from an online store, but this is really just a luxury for me, *not* a necessity. I don't need a smartphone just to look at my e-mails before I go into a Barnes and Nobles store, or any other store. It can wait until I get home to use my PC.

Why would I want to sit on my sofa, or at the dining room table, trying to look up products on Newegg, or checking (and writing) e-mails in Gmail...on a tiny smartphone screen or a small iPad screen? Even using an iPad with its (largest available) 9-inch screen would be terrible! I prefer my 24-inch LCD (PC) screen (dual screens at that!). My computer hobbies are hardware, operating systems, networking, database programming, and Web site development.

Oh, and I totally disagree with Wang's "dystopian" view of the desktop/PC; that it will be gone in the very near future—like the CRT TV!

-Al Trudeau, Paris, TN

As your story with your brother proves, someone can be completely illiterate with a computer but feel completely comfortable using a smartphone to send e-mail or browse the Internet. Without a mobile computer, your brother would be stuck using a traditional PC and most likely not use e-mail or the Internet at all.

Many people seem to think that if they personally cannot find a use for something like using a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet, then no one else could possibly find a use for those devices either so they must be useless. Obviously that's not true and in many cases, people who say they don't have a use for mobile computing devices would also have claimed they had no use for PCs earlier or telephones or TVs even earlier, or electricity going back even further. Whenever there's a new technology, there will always be someone who claims it's useless based on their own beliefs and needs without realizing that others don't share their views and can find uses for such new technology. Also such a narrow range of thinking also indicates a possible lack of imagination on the part of the person who claims that new technology is useless.

In the old days, mainframe computer people thought PCs were toys. Then they were shocked to find that PCs eventually made most mainframe computers obsolete. The same is happening with mobile computers vs. PCs. Just wait a year and see how far and fast mobile computing will have advanced, and see if your old arguments against mobile computers still seem valid in the future.

-Wally Wang

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