ComputorEdge™ Online — 06/14/13

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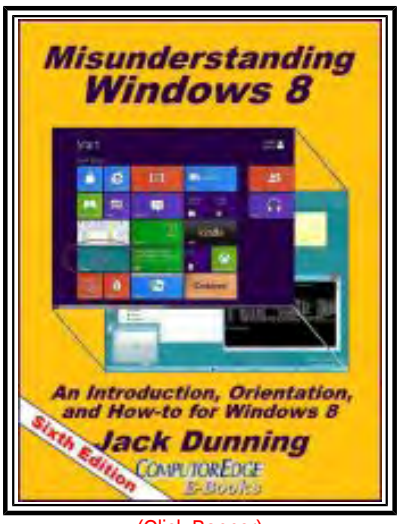

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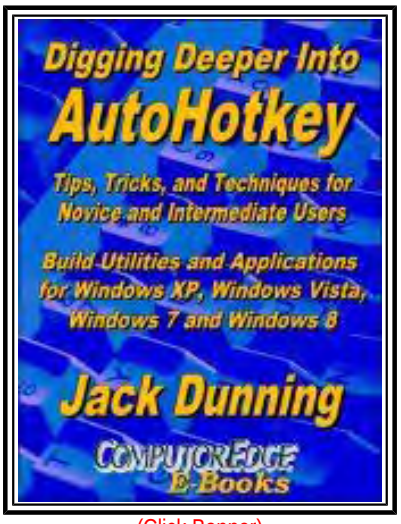

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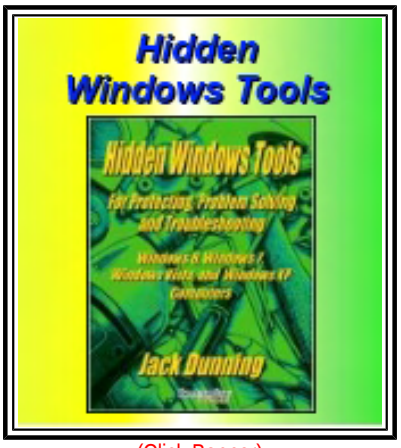

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Digital Dave

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

Finding Old Favorite Sites; Getting Rid of Cloudfront.net Browser Hijacker; Windows 8 Admin Account and Locked Files.

Dear Digital Dave,

You're my only option. My computer crashed. It's back to normal. I have a backup DVD and I need you to help me out please. I need to recover all my favorites sites and I don't know where to start.

I use Internet explorer 8 and Safari.

Thank you for all your great help to all the community.

God bless you,

Jorge
San Diego, CA

Dear Jorge,

There is a feature in Internet Explorer called "Import and export..." You can find it either through the File menu (press ALT if you don't see the File menu). Or, you can use the hotkey combination ALT+Z to open the favorites utility menu which also includes the import and export link. When the Import/Export Settings window opens, click "Import from file" then Next. Check the Favorites box and Next. The default file path should appear in the next window. It should be something similar to C:\Users\[User Name]\Documents\bookmark.htm. Note this location because it should be found at the same location on your DVD backup.

If you don't find a bookmark.htm file, it could be because you never exported from your old browser to create it. In that case you need to find the folder where your favorites are stored on your computer. That varies depending upon which version of Windows you're using. The easiest way to find that folder is to open the Run window (WIN+R or +R) and enter "shell: favorites" (without the quotes) and click OK. The Favorites window will open (see Figure 1). Click the folder icon on the left side of the address field to display the path to the Favorites folder for your version of Windows.

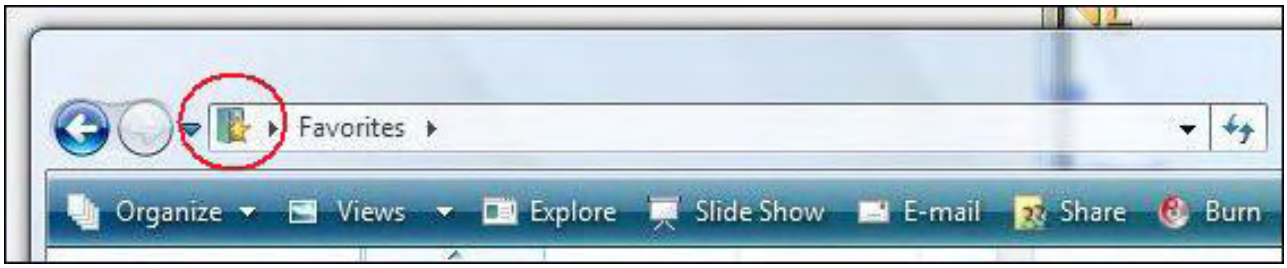

Figure 1. Click the folder icon in the left-hand corner of the address bar to reveal the full path of the Favorites folder.

After clicking the icon, note the address. This is where you should find the shortcuts for your favorites on your backup DVD. Depending upon how you saved the backup for your version of Windows, you will either be able to drag the files from the DVD to the appropriate folder on your computer or you will need to "Restore files" with Windows Backup and Restore.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

It seems like every Web site that I go to now is redirected to a cloudfront.net site. I searched the Internet for ways to get rid of it, and thought I was successful. But after being free of it for a couple days it is now back. I even added cloudfront.net to my list of blocked sites, but came back anyway. Any ideas?

Dave
San Diego, CA

Dear Dave,

Cloudfront.net is a browser highjacker which directs your browser to dubious Web sites. It sounds like it is particularly difficult to remove. Another problem is that when you search for a solution on the Web, you get sites which are trying to sell you services.

At one point, people believed that the problem was caused by a malicious browser extension with names such as Google TV, Coupon Companion, and PDF to Word. If you have anything like this, then you should remove it. However, since it returns, it is likely embedded more deeply.

The best prospect to remove cloudfront.net (*blog.teesupport.com/how-to-remove-cloudfront-net-hijacker-cloudfront-net-manual-removal/*) is probably this linked site. While this site also offers services, the instructions for removal are detailed enough to look promising. In particular, there are details for removing the registry entries which could be causing it to reinstall. The term [random] used in the instructions applies to the set of random characters used in a filename seen in messages. I have no way of verifying this procedure since I don't have the problem, but if you're careful, it's worth a shot. If I had the infection, I would at least follow the steps to look at what's there.

If none of this works, then another option is to update your antivirus software and run new scans. You might also try different antivirus programs. If anyone else has experienced cloudfront.net and has a solution, please leave a comment.

If you have a System Restore point prior to when this problem started, then you may be able to resolve the issue without all the other steps.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

*When I set up my desktop PC I set my User Account to Administrator. On my C drive there is a temp folder, C:\Windows\Temp, that has several zero byte size files *.tmp files many of which begin with avg-, which looks suspiciously like residual junk from my Grisoft AVG Internet Security 2013 program.*

When I try to delete these files I get the message "File Access Denied" you require permission from the computer's administrator to make changes to this file. I am properly logged in, my account is set to administrator, but no joy. Is there a "super administrator" level or some other explanation that prevents me from deleting these files? Please note that not all the zero byte files are from AVG, but there were over 5,000 at one time. I have narrowed that list down to a dozen that just won't go away no matter

what little utility I try. I would love any insight and advice you have on this situation.

Joe
Pinole, CA

Dear Joe,

I'm not sure what the problem is with having temporary files on your computer—especially if they take up virtually no space. However, in most cases there is no problem deleting them. They will be recreated when needed.

Having said that, the number one reason you can't delete files, even though you are running as administrator, is because the file is in use by either the system or a running software application. When a file is in use many programs will lock the file preventing the alteration or deletion of the file. This is a safety feature. If you sorely need to remove the file, you will need to stop the program or system feature which is locking the file. This may not be something that you want to do. Sometimes it's better to let sleeping files lie.

Digital Dave

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Hi Tech Patent Wars

"Protecting Originality or Trolling for Cash?" by Jack Dunning

Some people claim that hi tech patents strangle creativity. Others what to get their due for original invention. War rages on, but there is an expiration date.

Apple recently lost a ruling to Samsung in a patent infringement case (*online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323469804578525723885896616.html?mod=WSJ_hpp_LEFTTopStories*) before the U.S. International Trade Commission. Last year, Samsung lost a patent case to Apple which won a billion dollar award. These were for two different sets of patent violations. It appears that everybody is violating everyone else's patents. Of course, all will be appealed. The number of lawsuits involving patent infringement has exploded. And it looks like it's not going to end anytime soon.

One of the reasons for the explosion in patent litigation is the corresponding growth in the number of patents issued. There are so many pieces to any electronic equipment that it is virtually impossible to build anything without using numerous patented parts or ideas. People who develop a new device in their garage often give up on the idea of marketing that product after doing patents searches which uncover literally thousands of patent applications for similar devices.

The U. S. Patent and Trademark Office (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Patent_and_Trademark_Office*) is overwhelmed. In 2005 the patent backlog was 600,000 largely due to high-tech. While that number has stabilized and appears to be dropping—due largely to the effects of the 2011 America Invents Act, the system is straining.

(Some claim that the effort to reduce the patent backlog

has actually reduced the quality (*arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2013/04/study-suggests-patent-office-lowered-standards-to-cope-with-backlog/*) of the patents granted.) It takes about three years to process a patent application.

However, the number of patent infringement court cases has exploded in the last couple of years. Ironically, that same 2011 act may have perversely contributed to the increased number of cases since patent holders are now required to file suit against violators individually rather than naming a group of defendants in one action. This certainly creates havoc in the marketplace. Small business people always have a fear of being sued, even if a case is without merit.

Many patents granted are said to be overly broad. One patent claims rights on any type of online commercial checkout system. Another claims a patent on scanning and e-mailing any document. Still another claims a patent on using Wi-Fi—anywhere. If in fact these claims turn out to be valid, then the impact could be enormous.

To be granted a patent, the innovation needs to be "inventive and non-obvious (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inventive_step_and_non-obviousness*)." If five thousand people come up with the same idea at approximately the same time, it was probably an "obvious" conclusion. Yet, there have been numerous such questionable patents issued. Also, when a patent is too broad it can include almost everything.

In the 1854 case O'Reilly v. Morse (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O'Reilly_v._Morse*), the court found that although there was no doubt that Samuel Morse was the inventor of the telegraph, his patent was too broad. Morse had included any "method of communicating intelligible information to any distance by means of exploiting the electro-magnetic force." This was an abstract idea for which even Morse couldn't possibly conceive all the different applications. Most of the iunnovations covered by Morse's claim came about long after his death and the expiration of any such patent. There are numerous such patents based on abstract ideas which probably won't hold up in court. (It is interesting to note that if his patent on exploiting "electro-magnetic force" had been upheld, many of today's claimed patents may have been ruled invalid since the broad Morse patent would have expired over a century ago.)

Protection for Inventors

The purpose of patents is to protect the original work of people and companies from theft by the unscrupulous idea thief. When someone builds an innovative product, they deserve the credit and the rewards. However, the system seems to have gotten out of hand. Not only is the patent process cumbersome and slow, it can get expensive for the individual inventor. Big companies have an army of attorneys just to deal with patent issues. But a sole innovator, even if he or she gets a patent, has trouble protecting it. That takes more money and more attorneys.

That's one reason that Patent Assertion Entities (PAE) came into existence. PAEs buy patents from the holders for a fee and often a percentage of future revenues from licensing. They have the financial resources to enforce the patents, even when they are infringed upon by huge deep-pocket corporations. Businesses that get attacked by PAEs derisively refer to them as Patent Trolls (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patent_troll*).

Patent Trolls

The term patent troll came about because many critics see these patent holding companies as adding no value to the market. They consider PAEs parasites. They don't produce anything except licensing agreements, lawsuits, and letters threatening to sue you. While they are seen as the enemy by many companies (large and small), they do enforce the rights of the patent holders—who just happen to be them. Yet, the negative view of patent trolls may not be unfounded. It comes from the tactics PAEs employ and the shakiness of many of the patents to which they hold claim.

Usually these patent holding companies go after the big targets with deep pockets. They may wait for the technology to become popular (and financially rewarding) to press their claim, because then it's easier for them to get their due from companies that have more to lose. For example, NPR broadcasted a story about a patent infringement case involving a patent for online backup services. The holding company threatened to take a number of large companies—including Carbonite—to court. (See: How Carbonite, EMC Beat a Patent Troll Tied to Intellectual Ventures (*www.npr.org/blogs/*

money/2013/06/07/188370495/when-patents-attack-part-two)." While most of the targets relented and signed confidential licensing agreement, Carbonite decided to fight the patent—rather than enter a licensing agreement which would cost half of its cash plus a percentage of future earnings. Ultimately, the patent was invalidated, but not because the jury found the patent too vague or too broad. Carbonite won on a technicality. One of the original inventors was left off the patent application by the person who had submitted it as his sole invention. (There were actually four individuals involved in the creation of the concept, but it could only be proved that one should have been listed on the application.)

Many people may not think that patent trolls suing big companies is a huge deal. After all, corporations often infringe on other people's ideas. Note the ongoing battles between Apple and Samsung, Microsoft and Google, anyone and everyone, etc. However, lately the trolls have started going after small businesses. In one case a number of small hotels and coffee shops have received demand letters after offering Wi-Fi (*gizmodo.com/5846419/patent-troll-is-suing-small-hotels-and-coffee-shops-for-offering-wiFi*) to their patrons. Another patent troll is going after offices for scanning and e-mailing documents (*www.eff.org/deeplinks/2013/01/scanning-documents-patent-trolls-want-you-pay*). I can tell you from personal experience that it can be terrifying for a small business person to be threatened with a lawsuit—even if it's frivolous. The trolls generally ask for a few thousand dollars hoping that a number of the threat letter recipients will pay up rather than face the prospect of going to court. Many do. It's a numbers game for this type of patent troll and borders on outright extortion.

Presidential Action

Recently executive orders and proposed new legislation to fight patent trolls (*www.forbes.com/sites/netapp/2013/06/05/obama-patent-troll-fight/*) were announced in Washington. The problem is recognized, but it is questionable how much effect these steps will have.

The executive orders include measures directly targeted at the trolls (*www.rawstory.com/rs/2013/06/04/white-house-issues-executive-orders-to-curb-patent-trolls/*). "One of the signed orders calls for patent holders to by default have a 'real party-in-interest' in a patent. This is aimed at creating more transparency to prevent the use of secretive "shell companies" holding patents … The president also signed measures aimed at ensuring 'overall patent quality' to reduce the number of vague or broad patents which can be used to sue inventors." The past two decades is consider by many an excessively lenient period for issuing unwarranted patents.

Time Is Running Out

Time is running out. Not for the business community in general, but for the patent trolls. Why? Because an expiration date is built into the system. A patent is valid for only 20 years from the date of application (or priority date). That means that there is a limited time to milk the system. Many of contested patents were either issued (or have a priority date) in the 1990s. That means they will expire in the next few years if they are not already dead. (Interestingly, while many patents are now being contested as too vague or broad, if they expire as valid patents, they could prevent a whole host of new patents in the same area.) In any case, once these patents lose their effectiveness, the market is thrown wide open.

This is one reason the patent trolls are resorting to desperate measures. For example, one recent controversy is caused by US patent 8,112,504 (*www.google.com/patents/US8112504?dq=8112504&hl=en&sa=X&ei=te-nUaaQNsrPqgGOpYEQ&ved=0CDQQ6AEwAA*) which protects a "system for disseminating media content representing episodes in a serialized sequence." The owners, who themselves failed to build such a system in the nineties, now hold this patent which they claim applies to all podcasts (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcast*). They have started sending the standard "Why don't you license this patent" letters to podcast companies. If they did in fact invent this concept then they may be due some recognition. However, they may not have much time left to take advantage of the situation.

While the application filing date is only March 4, 2009 with the patent issued on February 7, 2012, the priority date is October 2, 1996. If I read patent law (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Term_of_patent_in_the_United_States*) right, the patent will expire in October of 2016. The applicants needed the earlier effective priority date in order to claim originality, but by doing so, they lost a number of years off the patent's useful life. Even if the patent is upheld, it's only a little over three years before

podcast companies can no longer be intimidated.

The podcast companies have organized to fight (*www.eff.org/deeplinks/2013/05/help-save-podcasting*) the patent. Who can blame them? Right or wrong someone is trying to take a piece of their pie. For many little guys, there just isn't that much in the pie. At this point they want to prove that it wasn't an original idea in 1996. Yet, what if it *was* your idea—and you could prove it?

Who hasn't occasionally seen a new product on the market and said, "Hey, I thought of that way back in … !"? What if you had conceived of such a product and attempted to build it? Yes, the product might have failed at the time, but maybe the market wasn't quite ready or you just ran out of money. Do you deserve credit (and money) for the original idea? I have no idea what was involved in the conception of the product involved in this "disseminating media content" patent. It's specific enough that there are probably a number of ways around it. That will be hammered out in the patent office and the courts. It will be messy, but after three and one half years, everyone may be able to more on. The patent expires.

One way companies holding patents have extended the life of patents is by bundling them in licensing deals. For example, MP3 audio involves a number of patents which are licensed as a bundle. They started expiring in 2007, yet today each audio device which licenses the bundle pays for all the patents. About half of the patents have expired with the last scheduled to expire in 2017. Even though some of the patents in a bundle expire, the licensing fee rarely goes down. That means every consumer is paying a higher cost through the devices they buy for a number of expired patents.

The Patent Quagmire

The patent battles are a mess and probably always will be. Patent law is an area natural for conflict. There is inevitably someone who says, "Hey! I thought of it first!" Then the response, "Oh yeah! Prove it!" That's why we have patents and that's why there are limits on patents. When a patent stands in your way, it's easy to call it overly broad or obvious and accuse the holder of being a troll. When someone tries to steal your idea, it's nice to have a patent in your pocket. In either case, the battle is temporary. Eventually, the patent will expire.

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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Windows Tips and Tricks

A Free Quick and Dirty Windows App for Playing Music and Videos

"Sometimes All You Need Is a Barebones Media Player" by Jack Dunning

> If you just want to quickly play a few songs in the background on your computer, here is a free, easy way to do it.

Have you ever wished that you could quickly play an audio or video file on your Windows computer without the hassle of opening Windows Media Player, iTunes, or another player loaded with features? This week I'm offering a quick and dirty app which makes it easy to play one, two, or all of the files in a single folder. I call it QuikPlay. You can download it free from the *ComputorEdge* AutoHotkey Dropbox site (*www.dropbox.com/sh/4qu48lyqtixdg7t/QdMY1dNuy7*).

If you download the file *QuikPlay.exe* or the *QuikPlay.zip* file which includes the EXE file, it's merely a matter of double-clicking on the filename in Windows Explorer and the program will load. The only thing you may notice is the little green icon (with an H inside) in the System Tray. (Yes, it's another AutoHotkey app that I put together.) The program doesn't activate until you use the key combination WIN+ALT+P (for Play, +ALT+P). Then a selection window opens (see Figure 1). Navigate to the folder which contains your music or video files.

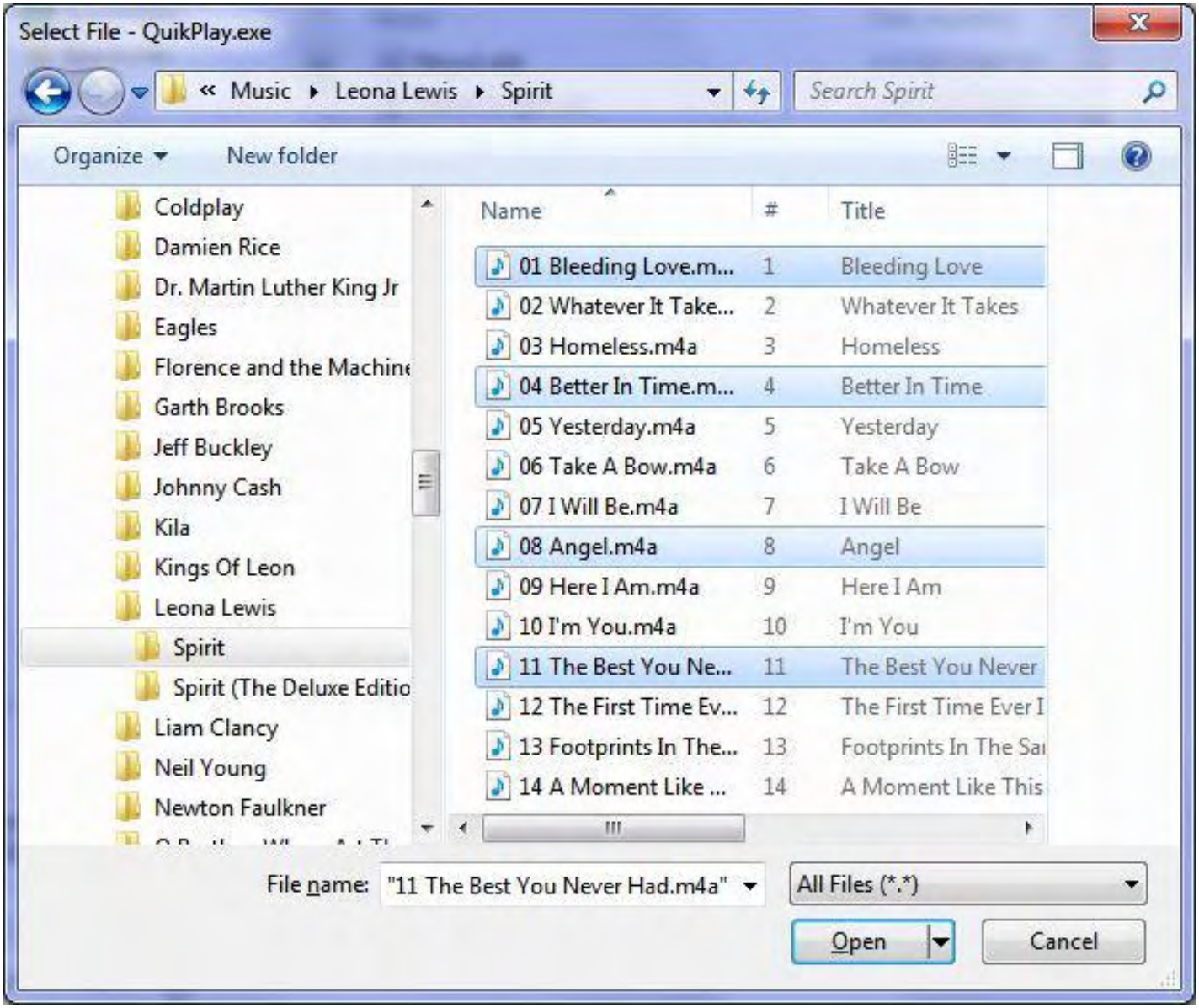

Figure 1. The selection window opens when activating the WIN+ALT+P hotkey combination to pick the songs or videos you want to play.

If you want to play multiple files in order, CTRL+A will select all the files in the folder, or hold down the SHIFT key and click the left mouse buttons to select a range, or, for individual multiple selections, hold down the CTRL key while clicking individual files. Once you've made your selection from the window, click Open. A message box will open displaying the path to the folder on the first line of data and the selected files in order on the following lines (see Figure 2). Click OK and the files will start playing. That's all there is to it. The play will continue until the last file is completed.

Figure 2. The selected files are listed in a message box. Click OK to start the playing.

Once the files have finished playing, use +ALT+P to select a new list of files.

Some files may not play—in which case they will be skipped. This is usually caused by the system missing the proper codecs or the right features are not installed in your Windows machine for the particular file type. There should be no problem playing any wave or Windows Media files. If you're computer already plays MP3 files, then they should be no problem for QuikPlay.

I added a couple of minor features QuikPlay to make things a little easier. (Note that that while files are playing the activation hotkeys +ALT+P will not work. To change the selection, you must first stop (use +ALT+S) the current list, then the original hotkey combination +ALT+P will reactivate. If you want to skip to the next file on the list use +ALT+N. The current play will stop and the next will begin. If it was the last song in the list, the +ALT+P combination will reactivate.

If you want to see the name of a file while it's playing use +ALT+W (for What's Playing) (see Figure 3).

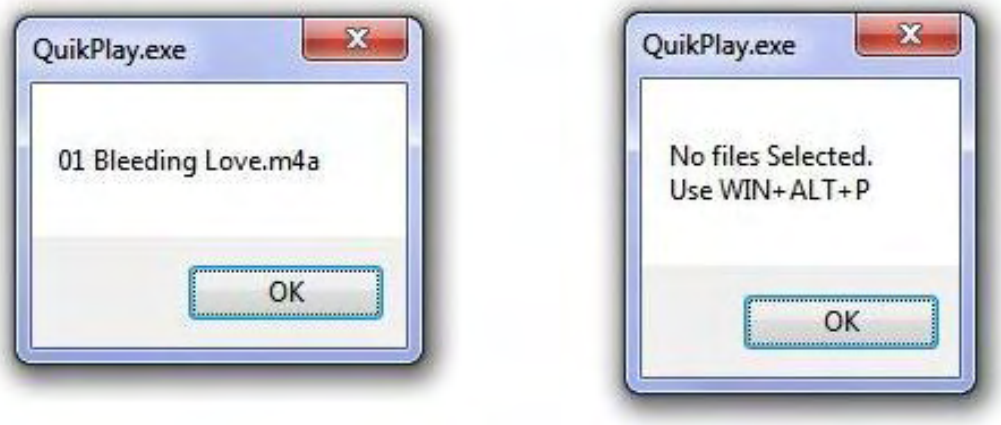

Figure 3. The key combination WIN+ALT+W pops up a message box (left) with the name of the file currently playing. If the app is not running the message (right) confirms it.

To end the QuikPlay app completely, right-click on the green AutoHotkey icon in the System Tray and select Exit. You will need to double-click on the filename again to restart QuikPlay. If you want to remove QuikPlay from your computer, simply delete it. There are no registry entries or other files to worry about.

If you want QuikPlay to launch automatically when you log on to your computer, create a shortcut (right-click on QuikPlay.exe

and select "Create shortcut"), then move the shortcut into the Startup folder (+R, enter *shell:startup*, then OK to open the Startup folder).

While there could be more features, that would have complicated the AutoHotkey script, the details of which are covered in this week's AutoHotkey column. As it is QuikPlay is a barebones way to play a few songs in background or watch a Windows compatible video file (without any built-in controls). (Again, the files that QuikPlay will play depends upon the features and codecs installed on your Windows computer.) It's not a replacement for other more capable media players. If you have a little knowledge of AutoHotkey, you may want to edit the code to play particular songs on Windows startup by placing an edited file (or a shortcut to the file) in the Startup folder.

*If you've never heard of AutoHotkey and wonder what all the mumbo jumbo is about, then here is a short "Introduction to AutoHotkey (*www.computoredge.com/AutoHotkey/Introduction_AutoHotkey_Review_and_Guide_for_Beginners.html*)" for newcomers.*

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*).*

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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*),*
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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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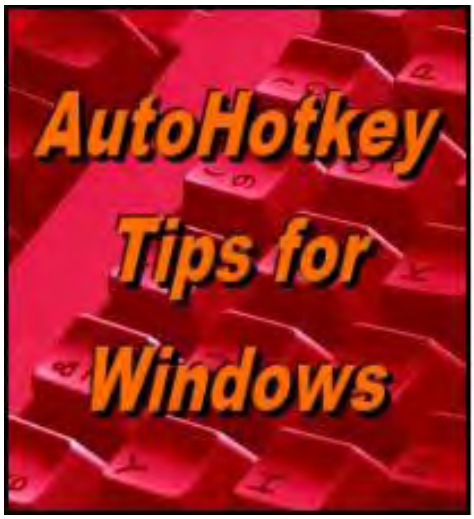


The QuikPlay App Plays Music

"Two AutoHotkey Commands Are Highlighted for Background Entertainment" by Jack Dunning

SoundPlay and FileSelectFile are the only two AutoHotkey commands you need to play media files. But add a little more for more utility. Here is how it's done!

*If you've never heard of AutoHotkey and wonder what all the rigmarole is about, then here is a short "Introduction to AutoHotkey (*www.computoredge.com/AutoHotkey/Introduction_AutoHotkey_Review_and_Guide_for_Beginners.html*)" for newcomers.*

I recently received the following comments and question from Ellen:

Hi Jack,

What I wanted to say is that what's been most helpful to me with AutoHotkey, and maybe you've covered this before, is tailoring hotkeys to different programs with #ifWinActive *and a few other commands that go along with that. I have a separate script for each of my most-used programs, and it's made my computing life much more pleasant.*

Sort of apropos of your latest article, I was wondering if it's possible to have a script play an MP3 or WAV file without having to open up a media player, kind of like the way your computer plays a WAV file when it starts up or signs off. That would open up some fun possibilities.

Thanks,
Ellen

Ellen, you've certainly made good use of AutoHotkey. Using #IfWinActive (*l.autohotkey.net/docs/commands/_IfWinActive.htm*) to tailor your hotkeys is a good way to prevent conflicts between programs. I should probably expound on that a little more in a future AutoHotkey column. Sometimes merely introducing a command doesn't make all the possibilities clear.

Your question on playing audio files with AutoHotkey has sparked another idea. I don't regularly play music on my computer so I wasn't looking for a method in AutoHotkey. As it turns out the SoundPlay command is ideal for the purpose of playing audio and video files. It uses the built-in capabilities of Windows without all the bells and whistles. I added the FileSelectFile command to make a quick and dirty media player. (It was so easy that I made it the theme of this column.)

```
!#P::
FileSelectFile, OutPutVar
SoundPlay, %OutPutVar%, Wait
Return
```

Thanks for making me take a closer look.

—Jack

An AutoHotkey Script for a Quick and Dirty Media Player (QuikPlay)

As outlined in this week's "Windows Tips and Tricks" column and based on the e-mail from Ellen (above), I took the time to throw together a media player for Windows (see Figure 1). Getting the commands functional only took a few minutes, but (as usual) adding the other bits (skip to next file, stop playing, etc.) took a little longer. However, I thought it was cool enough to compile and make it available to anyone, regardless of whether they have any interest in AutoHotkey.

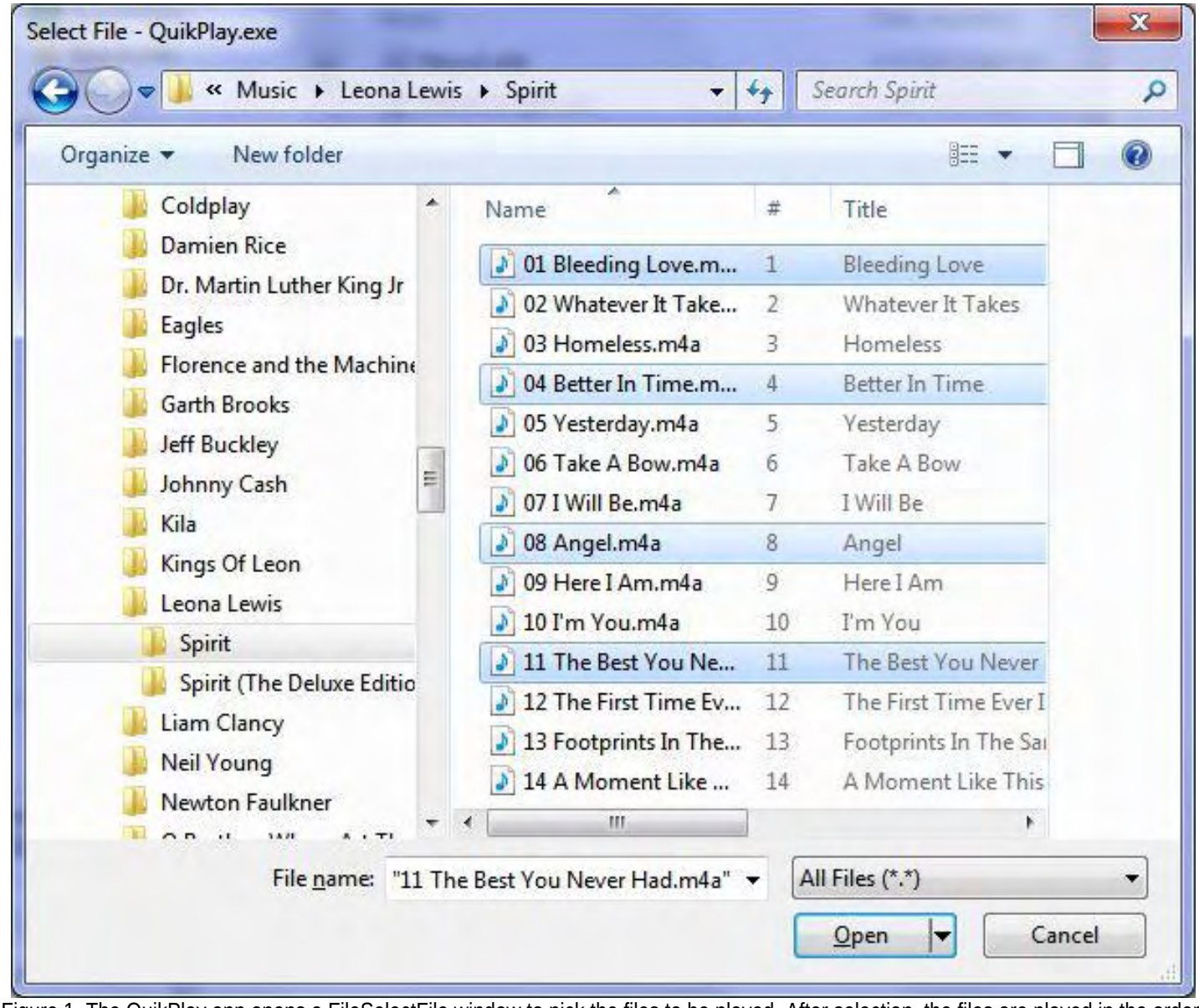


Figure 1. The QuikPlay app opens a FileSelectFile window to pick the files to be played. After selection, the files are played in the order they are found in the folder.

I expect that regular readers of this column will only want to use the script in the *QuikPlay.ahk* file as a starting point for tailoring their own media player for their particular uses. There are a number of important learning points in this script.

Building an AutoHotkey Media Player

The heart of the QuikPlay script is centered around two AutoHotkey commands. The first is the SoundPlay command (*I.*

autohotkey.net/docs/commands/SoundPlay.htm) which actually plays the audio or video files. The second is the FileSelectFile command (*l.autohotkey.net/docs/commands/FileSelectFile.htm*) which is used to open a window for picking the files to play. Here is a quick two-line AutoHotkey script:

```
FileSelectFile, OutPutVar
SoundPlay, %OutPutVar%, Wait
```

If you only use these two commands, you can produce a rudimentary player which will play one selected file. That's all you need.

The first line (*FileSelectFile*) opens the selection window and waits until the user clicks Open. The name of the file with its full path is stored in the variable *OutPutVar*.

The second line (*SoundPlay*) uses the content of *OutPutVar* to start playing the file. If the file is not found or is not of the right type (or the proper codec is not installed on the Windows computer) nothing will happen. If the path is not included, then *SoundPlay* looks for the file in the AutoHotkey working folder. If it is the right type of file, it will immediately start playing. (If it is a video file, a barebones window from Windows Media Player will open with no controls. Can't pause this one.)

It's important to add the *Wait* option to the *SoundPlay* command. Otherwise, the script will continue and immediately exit, cutting off the playing of the file. Any file will continue playing with the *Wait* parameter until the end of the file is reached or another *SoundPlay* command is issued. Exiting or reloading the script also terminates any play.

That's all there is to it. But what if you want to play more than one file?

Selecting Multiple Media Files

It is easy to enable multiple file selection in the *FileSelectFile* command. Add the letter M as an option:

```
FileSelectFile, OutputVar, M
```

This makes the selection window respond to Select All (CTRL+A), block selection (SHIFT+Click), and multiple individual selections (CTRL+Click). When the Open button is clicked, the path to the folder and the entire list of files is stored in *OutPutVar*. The text in *OutPutVar* is separated with the return character (`n). The first line is the path with the subsequent lines each being a selected filename in order.

To view the selected filenames the following line of code is added to the script:

```
MsgBox, The selected files to play are all contained in`n %OutPutVar%
```

This view is important to understanding how the data is stored and the remaining steps required to implement the playing of each file in order. See Figure 2 for an example of *OutPutVar* contents.

Figure 2. The contents in the OutPutVar consist of the folder path (the first line of text) and the names of the files in order. Each value is separated by a new line (`r).

The MsgBox (*l.autohotkey.net/docs/commands/MsgBox.htm*) automatically interprets the new lines rather than displaying the escape character (`r). Note that the first line is the folder path and name. When writing the remainder of the script the first part of *OutPutVar* (the path to the folder) needs to be treated differently.

To parse the data in OutPutVar the Loop, Parse command (*l.autohotkey.net/docs/commands/LoopParse.htm*) is used. The *Loop, Parse* command is used to incrementally step through variables or files with delimiters. In this case the return or newline (`n) is the delimiter marking the end of one piece of data and the beginning of the next. In this case the following code was added:

```
Loop, Parse, OutPutVar, `n
{
    if A_Index = 1
    {
        MainPath := A_LoopField
    }
    else
    {
       SoundPlay, %MainPath%\%A_LoopField%, Wait
    }
}
```

This loop takes the contents of *OutPutVar* and cuts it up into pieces. As it loops the value of the built-in variable *A_Index* starts at 1 and increments by 1 for each loop. When *A_Index* is 1, the contents of the built-in variable *A_LoopField* is the folder path. This folder path is needed by the *SoundPlay* command to find the files. *A_LoopField* is saved to the variable *MainPath* for later use.

The following loops (*A_Index = 2*, *A_Index = 3*, etc.) each value of *A_LoopField* correspond to a filename. This is the point at which the file is played. To locate the file both *MainPath* and *A_LoopField* (the filename) must be used. Note that a backslash (\) is placed between the two variables to complete the path. This looping will continue until the end of *OutPutVar* is reached. The script and loop halts while each file is playing. The main hotkey combination (ALT+ +P) does not respond during this time.

The only way to stop the script is to exit via the right-click menu in the System Tray or reload the script. However, it is also possible to stop the playing of a file (thus restarting the loop) by issuing a new *SoundPlay* command in the same script. In order to skip to the next file, the following hotkey code is added:

```
!#N::
 SoundPlay, next.mp3
Return
```

The hotkey combination ALT+ +N (for next) sends a fictitious filename to SoundPlay. (The filename can be anything that won't be found.) The current play stops and the loop continues to the next file on the list. However, if there is a long list of files, the hotkey combination ALT+ +N will need to be used for each file until reaching the end.

One of the best ways to stop the processing of the script without exiting is to reload the script. Therefore, to stop a particular set without skipping through queued files the following hotkey is added:

```
!#S::
 Reload
Return
```

If the hotkey combination ALT+ +S (for stop) is used, the script reloads causing the execution of the script and the playing of files to cease.

The last issue that concerned me was the fact that even though you could hear which song was playing, you didn't necessarily know its name. I didn't want a MsgBox to pop up with each song because dismissing each message would prevent automatic continuous play. I added another hotkey combination to display the filename of the current play. The following code was added:

```
…    else
     {
         Playing := A_LoopField                ; added new line
         HotKey, !#W, WhatsPlaying             ; added new line
         SoundPlay, %MainPath%\%A_LoopField%, Wait
     }
}
Return
WhatsPlaying:           ;added new label
   MsgBox %Playing%
Return
```

The idea is to display the playing title in a *MsgBox* whenever the hotkey combination ALT+ +W (for "What's playing!"). I had to first store the value of *A_LoopField* (the name of the current play file to a new variable, *Playing*. This is because *A_LoopField* would not display directly by the subroutine called in the next line of code—probably because it is local and only available within the loop. Each time the loop increments the new value of *A_LoopField* is saved to *Playing* which is available to the hotkey label *WhatsPlaying*.

Next, the HotKey command (*l.autohotkey.net/docs/commands/Hotkey.htm*) is used to set the hotkey combination ! #W (ALT+ +W) to run the label (subroutine) *WhatsPlaying:* found below in the script. The label (subroutine) *WhatsPlaying:* displays the playing filename (*Playing*) in a message box.

This technique worked well, however it continued to display the last filename played even after the script loop was completed. Plus, when the script was first launched there was no message at all for the ALT+ +W combination. I only knew the script

was running by the AutoHotkey icon in the System Tray. This was resolved by adding:

```
HotKey, !#W, NotRunning
NotRunning:
   MsgBox No files Selected!`nUse WIN+ALT+P
Return
```

The first line of code (*HotKey, !#W, NotRunning*), which was added at both the beginning of the script and after the loop ended, calls the label (subroutine) *NotRunning:*. This Hotkey command changes the key combination to open a message box stating "No files Selected!`nUse WIN+ALT+P." The two message box windows are shown in Figure 3. (As before `n starts a new line when displaying text.)

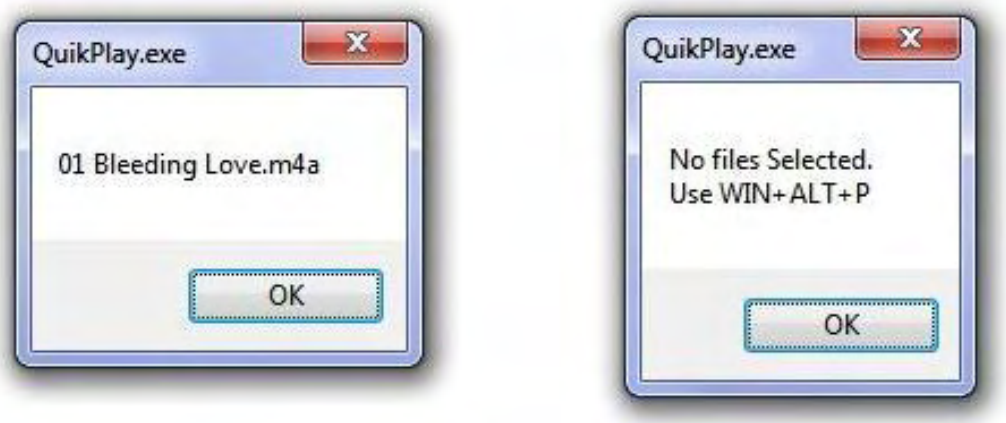


Figure 3. When the ALT+WIN+W hotkey combination is used either the playing filename (left) or a message of inactivity (right) is displayed.

This way the hotkey combination ALT+ +W always gives status while the script is running. If nothing happens, QuikPlay isn't loaded.

The Final QuikPlay.ahk Script

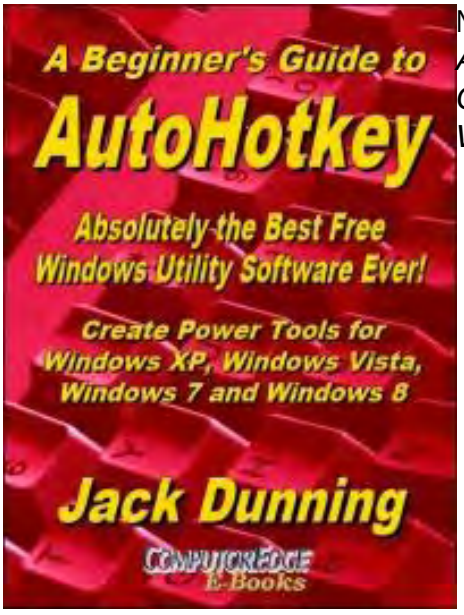
After putting all the pieces together, the following is the QuikPlay.ahk script which can be found at the *ComputorEdge* AutoHotkey Dropbox download page (*www.dropbox.com/sh/4qu48lyqtixdg7t/QdMY1dNuy7*):

```
HotKey, !#W, NotRunning
!#P::
FileSelectFile, OutputVar, M
If OutPutVar =
{
    MsgBox, No selections to play.
    Return
}
Loop, Parse, OutPutVar, `n
{
    if A_Index = 1
    {
        MsgBox, The selected files to play are all contained in`n %OutPutVar%
        MainPath := A_LoopField
    }
```

```
    else
    {
        Playing := A_LoopField
        HotKey, !#W, WhatsPlaying
        SoundPlay, %MainPath%\%A_LoopField%, Wait
    }
}
HotKey, !#W, NotRunning
Return
!#N::
 SoundPlay, next.mp3
Return
!#S::
 Reload
Return
WhatsPlaying:
   MsgBox %Playing%
Return
NotRunning:
   MsgBox No files Selected!`nUse WIN+ALT+P
Return
```

Feel free to copy-and-paste this code into a new AutoHotkey script to use and/or modify any way you like.

* * *



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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.

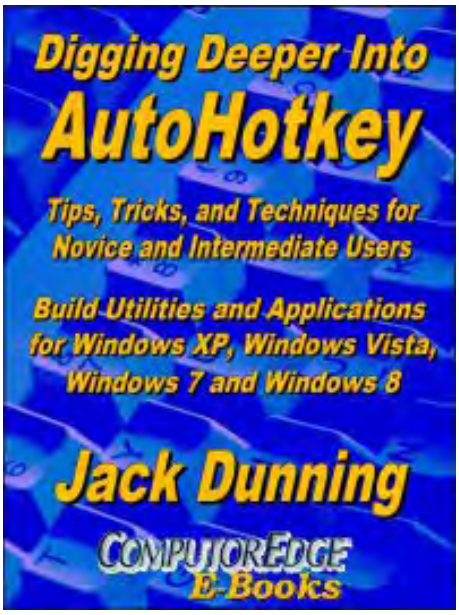
Based upon the series of articles in *ComputorEdge*, Jack takes you through his learning experience as he explores writing simple AutoHotkey scripts for adding repetitive text in any program or on the Web, running programs with special hotkeys or

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*)

* * *

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.

For an EPUB (iPad, NOOK, etc.) version of Digging Deeper into AutoHotkey click here! (*computoredgebooks.com/Digging-Deeper-into-AutoHotkey-EPUB-format-iPad-Nook-etc-AUTOHOTKEY-2.htm*)

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*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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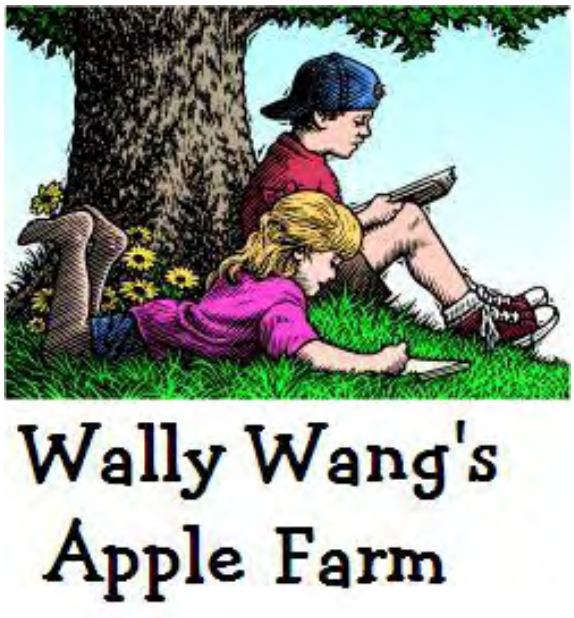


Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Apple's Worldwide Developer's Conference" by Wally Wang

Apple's Worldwide Developer's Conference; Artificial Intelligence; Visual Basic Redefined; The Reach of Amazon; Opening Files with a Different Program.

On Monday, Apple introduced a flood of news about iOS 7, the next version of OS X, and iWork. One comment that went largely unnoticed was the announcement that Apple's voice recognition assistant, Siri, will now incorporate search results from Microsoft's Bing (*stream.wsj.com/story/latest-headlines/SS-2-63399/SS-2-250821/*) search engine.

As Apple continues severing ties with Google in response to Google's Android, it's likely that Apple and Microsoft could possibly work together on future projects. It's highly unlikely that Apple will work with Google again in the near future, which leaves Microsoft as a potential partner instead. Given that Apple and Microsoft still compete against each other in other areas, this partnership between Apple and Bing could be as tenuous as Apple's previous relationship with Google. As a distant second in the search engine market, Bing represents a chance to lessen Apple's dependence on Google, although Safari still retains Google as the default search engine.

To boost Siri's appeal, Apple announced new male and female voices for Siri that sound more natural, along with improving Siri's ability to understand more questions. What makes Siri particularly useful could be its incorporation in Apple's push to incorporate iOS in cars.

Ford currently relies on Microsoft's MyFord Touch system, but car companies such as KIA, Honda, Jaguar, and Nissan (among others) have opted to go with Apple's vision of offering hands-free controls for playing music, responding to messages, or getting driving directions using iOS. If Apple's iOS in the car technology works better than MyFord Touch, then you can expect iOS in the car to become a standard feature in everyone's cars in the near future, although Ford may stick with their MyFord Touch until iOS in the car proves itself to the public. Given how many car companies are going with iOS, it's likely that Ford will have to offer it as an alternative to their own MyFord Touch. Unless other car companies adopt MyFord Touch, it's likely to remain a niche product that will gradually get displaced by iOS.

Two interesting features of the latest OS X (dubbed "Mavericks") improve the Finder. For many people, storing and finding files can be extremely troublesome as every program stores files in their own default folder, or people store files in a folder buried inside of another folder and then can't remember where they put it.

To solve the problem of finding a file, OS X Mavericks will let you tag a file just like tagging a photograph with a descriptive label such as "Tax Info" or "Project X." Now you'll be able to simply click on your different tags and the Finder will display all files that contain your tag.

Figure 1. The Finder can tag files with descriptive labels and colors.

Another feature OS X Mavericks adds is tabs. In most browsers, you can open multiple Web pages in tabs. Now you can open multiple tabs in the Finder (instead of opening multiple Finder windows) to make it easy to view different folders scattered on your hard disk.

Figure 2. Tabs display multiple views of your computer in a single Finder window.

Besides making the Finder easier to use, OS X also introduces iBooks to the Macintosh. Previously, you could only read iBooks on an iPad and to a limited extent on an iPhone. Now you'll be able to read interactive iBooks on a Macintosh (running OS X Mavericks or later), and an iPad, which should increase the appeal the market for interactive iBooks. Although Amazon currently dominates the e-book market, they're completely overlooking the future market for interactive e-books, which will eventually dominate the digital book market. Comparing an interactive e-book with an e-book that can only display static text and graphics is like comparing a movie to a caveman's drawing scratched on a wall.

More importantly, OS X offers features to increase battery life. If OS X detects that you've covered up a window of a program, the operating system is smart enough to stop wasting processing cycles updating the contents of that hidden window. By not updating information you can't see (called App Nap), OS X helps improve battery life (*www.apple.com/osx/preview/advanced-technologies.html*) by consuming less power.

OS X Mavericks also uses another feature called Timer Coalescing, which groups low-level processes together so your processor can spend longer periods idle, thereby conserving power. With both App Nap and Timer Coalescing, you can expect dramatic power savings so your laptop can run on its batteries longer.

Another feature involves something called Compressed Memory, which is where OS X Mavericks compresses unused memory from idle programs so your Macintosh can use its total memory more efficiently. While this won't speed up your Macintosh as much as getting more RAM in the first place, it will keep your Macintosh running more efficiently with the amount of RAM it does have.

On the hardware side, Apple introduced new MacBook Air models that come with twice as much flash storage space as before, 64GB vs. 128GB for the least expensive model. Besides boosting the storage capabilities, the latest MacBook Airs also increase their battery length from 5 hours up to 9 hours for the 11-inch MacBook Air, to 7 hours up to 12 hours for the 13-inch MacBook Air. Combine the power efficiency of the MacBook Air with the power saving features of OS X Mavericks and you should be able to use a MacBook Air all day without worrying about recharging it.

For those people who like using an iPad all day without worrying about its power running low, but don't like typing on its tiny screen, a MacBook Air might be a better alternative. Not only will you get a physical keyboard, but you'll also get the ability to run OS X programs along with Windows and Linux programs if you install them as virtual machines.

One interesting announcement included iWork. Promised for later in the fall, iWork will not only be a native OS X program, but also a cloud-based solution that will let you create Pages, Numbers, or Keynote files from any browser, including Windows and Linux PCs. Presumably this will also allow iPad users to edit iWork documents stored on iCloud as well. If you've ever used Google Docs or Microsoft Office 365 to create or edit documents in a browser, you'll see that iWork for iCloud works the same way.

Perhaps the oddest announcement involved the high-end Mac Pro (*www.apple.com/osx/preview/advanced-technologies.html*), which will be available later this year. Besides its unusual cylindrical shape, the new Mac Pro also takes up approximately 1/8th the amount of space as the previous Mac Pro model, yet is almost twice as fast. Instead of internal expansion slots, the latest Mac Pro relies on Thunderbolt 2 ports that allow up to six devices to daisy-chain from a single Thunderbolt port, which means you can have up to 36 external devices connected to a Mac Pro at once.

Figure 3. The new Mac Pro takes up far less space than the previous Mac Pro while being faster.

For people who do high-end video editing, music editing, or graphics design, the new Mac Pro will be appreciated. For the rest of us, the Mac Pro's price (unannounced) will likely turn casual users towards the iMac, Mac mini, or a laptop Macintosh instead.

Apple also announced iRadio, a streaming audio service supported by ads along with dozens of new features (*www.apple.com/ios/ios7/features/*) to improve iOS, including automatic app updates when connected to a Wi-Fi network (to avoid draining your battery or incurring connection charges through a cellular network). To view multiple open Web pages, Safari displays Web pages like paper files tilted at an angle so you can scroll through them until you find the Web page you want to view.

Figure 4. Visually flipping through open Web pages in Safari on iOS is easy and intuitive.

Since Apple devices are often targeted by thieves, the latest iOS 7 offers an Activation Lock feature that stops someone from using a stolen iPhone if they don't also know the owner's Apple ID and password. This essentially makes stolen iPhones useless bricks that can't be used by anyone else (although this feature will likely be hacked by technically skilled thieves).

Right now, all of these upcoming features will appear in the fall, so you can safely assume new iPhone and iPad models (along with the Mac Pro) will arrive before the Christmas shopping season but not any earlier than the end of summer. To watch the entire Apple keynote, visit this link (*www.apple.com/apple-events/june-2013/*). Even people who hate Apple should watch this keynote so they can see which features will likely start appearing in rival products soon afterwards.

Artificial Intelligence

One interesting product announced at Apple's WWDC keynote wasn't an Apple product at all but an artificial intelligence/robotics toy company called Anki (*anki.com*) that demonstrated a seemingly simple collection of toy cars. These toy cars drove themselves around a track on the floor, but they were actually controlled by an iOS device. By programming each car, you could create a simple automated driving toy car.

While a toy might seem trivial, the technology could be applied to real-life examples of automatic driving cars. In the toy car demonstration, Anki's founders demonstrated how cars could be reprogrammed to behave in certain ways such as blocking another car from passing them. If you watch the YouTube video (*www.youtube.com/watch?v=o38DpmXnZn8*), you can see this seemingly simple demonstration and use your imagination to guess how this could be used in the future.

Of course if you lack any imagination whatsoever, you can bitterly criticize the toy car demonstration as pointless and refuse to see anything positive about the idea of using artificial intelligence to program moving objects. Then you can watch the technology flourish over time and eventually wonder what you missed when you initially saw this technology in action.

Visual Basic Redefined

During the 90s, I wrote several editions of "Visual Basic for Dummies" covering versions 3-6. With each version of Visual Basic, Microsoft made Visual Basic more powerful while retaining its original ease of programming. As older programmers remember, Visual Basic revolutionized graphical user interface designing by letting you visually design a user interface that created a consistent appearance while also being bug-free.

The reason I stopped supporting and using Visual Basic was because Microsoft mutated the simple, clean BASIC syntax of Visual Basic 6 into the monstrosity known as VB.NET. While I understand the technical reasons for making Visual Basic adhere to the .NET framework, Microsoft essentially took a fun, easy to use development tool like Visual Basic 6, and mangled it into a complex, C++ like syntax that was no longer easy to use or even faster to develop.

At one time, C++ developers even used Visual Basic to rapidly create their user interface, and then they compiled their C++ code into .DLL files to make the program actually do something useful. While it made sense for Microsoft to create C# to give C ++ developers their own Visual Basic-like rapid development tool, it didn't make sense to make VB.NET harder to use, essentially destroying the reason for using Visual Basic in the first place.

Even worse, all your old Visual Basic 6 code couldn't be translated into the new VB.NET language, which meant you had to rewrite all your old Visual Basic 6 programs from scratch for little benefit in return. Needless to say, hordes of Visual Basic 6 programmers simply abandoned VB.NET and switched to the more complicated C# or other programming languages instead.

However, that should all change now that Xojo (*www.xojo.com*) has appeared. Xojo runs on Windows, Linux, and OS X and can create cross-platform programs for all three operating systems using a single code base. Best of all, you can use Xojo absolutely free. When you're ready to compile your programs to sell or give them away to others, that's when you need to buy a license, which costs $300 if you want to create Windows/Linux/OS X programs.

Although Xojo looks and performs slightly differently than Visual Basic 6, Xojo looks like what the original Visual Basic might have evolved into if Microsoft had continued improving Visual Basic instead of abandoning it in favor of VB.NET. For that reason, Visual Basic programmers should download a free copy of Xojo and see if they can convert their Visual Basic programs into cross-platform programs with Xojo instead. While Xojo isn't 100 percent identical to Visual Basic's syntax, it's far closer than VB.NET's convoluted syntax.

In the near future, Xojo will even let you create iOS apps so you can create iPhone and iPad apps using the simplicity of the Visual Basic programming. Like the original Visual Basic, Xojo is designed for absolute beginners all the way up to complete power users. Novices will appreciate Xojo's simpler language syntax while experienced programmers will appreciate Xojo's object-oriented programming language that's easier to use than C++ but just as powerful.

If you've always wanted to write your own Windows/Linux/OS X programs but felt intimidated by C++ or other traditional programming languages, give Xojo a try. You might find that Xojo can turn your ideas into working programs far faster and easier than you might think.

The Reach of Amazon

Amazon didn't just kill off Borders Books, but is also helping wipe out multiple businesses at the same time. MSN recently listed five brands that are likely to disappear soon (*money.msn.com/investing/5-disappearing-american-brands*), and Amazon has had an indirect hand at driving a stake through two of them.

First, there's JC Penny, a retailer that's getting hurt by Amazon's online business capable of selling everything from books and electronics to shoes and clothes. Why waste time rummaging through a retail store when you can just order online and get exactly what you want and have it shipped to your front door? Retail stores still give you instant gratification along with the joy of discovering and exploring merchandise, but JC Penny is also struggling against other retailers like Walmart and Target, and losing.

The second business that MSN predicts will disappear soon is none other than Barnes & Noble, which relies on printed books with their retail stores, and digital books with their Nook tablet. In both cases, Barnes & Noble is losing. Amazon offers far more printed books while also offering a better known Kindle Fire tablet. Trying to compete against Amazon is simply bleeding Barnes & Noble dry, giving them almost zero chance of competing successfully in both printed and digital books.

MSN identifies Martha Stewart's magazines as another casualty of change. If printed books are obsolete, printed magazines aren't far behind. Magazines rely on advertising, yet it's more cost efficient to advertise online so you can track the viewing habits of prospects and optimize your ads for maximum effectiveness, which isn't as easy to do with a printed ad in a magazine.

MSN also identifies LivingSocial as a fourth company likely to disappear soon. Since LivingSocial follows the Groupon model of extracting steep discounts for products and services in exchange for driving customers to a merchant, LivingSocial's business model is just as unsustainable as Groupon's since anyone can drop prices to attract customers temporarily.

The last company that MSN predicts will disappear is Volvo. Volvo simply doesn't have broad appeal with their line of cars to sustain their operations indefinitely. While other companies are getting wiped out by the Internet, Volvo is getting wiped out the old fashion way through rivals stealing market share from them and Volvo's own incompetence in coming up with an effective strategy to survive.

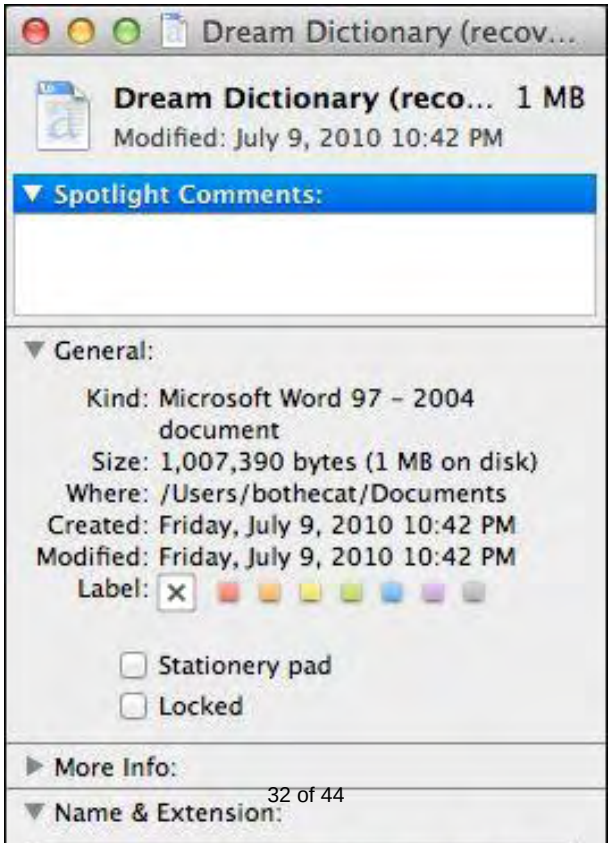
A year from now we can check back and see which of these companies are still around and thriving, which are still struggling and dying, and which are gone for good. Change is inevitable. When you recognize this obvious fact, you can change with the times rather than get run over by them.

* * *

Normally if you double-click on a file, that file will open under the program that you used to create it. However, you can tell OS X to open a file using a different program every time you double-click on it.

To change which program you want to use when double-clicking on a file, open the Finder window and right-click on the file you want to modify. When a pop-up menu appears, choose Get Info.

When the Info window appears, click in the Open with pop-up menu and choose the program you want to use to open the file.



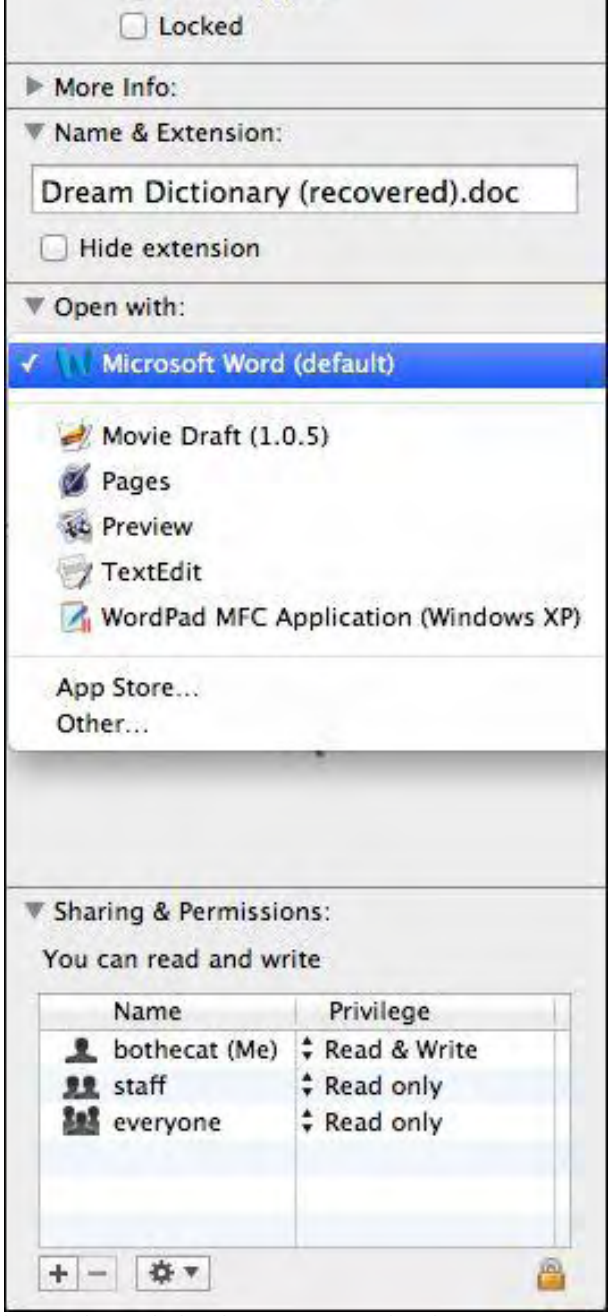


Figure 5. The Show View Options window lets you customize the appearance of your Finder window.

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

"Cubicle Culture: Your Life on Display"

by Marilyn K. Martin

Jokes and anecdotes all about working in a cubicle.

Sometime in the last fifty years businesses discovered that they could cram more peons into a floor space by erecting cubicles. These almost-walls offered a modicum of privacy and could be reconfigured overnight. This eliminated that one big room of desks with employees wearing cardboard blinders to minimize visual distractions. But cubicle people soon discovered that they still had little privacy, on top of having to learn a whole new office culture.

Your First Cubicle

Those Slacker Sages at *Cracked Magazine* advise that first-job newbies need to understand that a cubicle is probably smaller than their last dorm room, and not nearly as comfortable. So no bean bag chairs, stereo speakers or gladiators. (But *do* be prepared for others your age, who are also gladiator wanna-bes from role playing games, to show up at some point with plastic and tinfoil swords and shields, and attempt to lay siege to your moat-less cubicle.)

Next, *Cracked* agrees that yes, your initial puzzlement is correct. This small space with short walls is indeed "missing something crucial." Like a ceiling. This can give you a serious disadvantage in water balloon fights, or being under-siege by tinfoil bow and arrow shooting warriors (who I guess are promoted gladiators). So, if you can, put up some wooden planks or camo tenting for a ceiling, and call it a fort. This will turn your sterile cubicle into a fond "comfort zone" of childhood memories. And also give you a little more visual privacy.

Regardless of your cleanliness-history at home or in your dorm rooms, the corporate world expects you to keep your cubicle clean and tidy, as a reflection of how your mind works. Or to justify your salary and "availability" for promotions. And yes, there's a way to make a game out of this too. So immediately requisition a medium-to-large waste basket, and keep it full.

Soon after you start your new cubicle job, you will discover at least one jerk within thirty feet who is secretly an anonymous Internet troll, with a proto-personality dedicated to making everyone he comes in contact with hate him with a passion. So, when he goes to the little boy's room, empty your trash into a corner pile in his strangely fastidious cubicle that smells like a cross between musk ox incense and dandruff-b-gone shampoo. Encourage others to do the same.

Life in a Cubicle—No Privacy

1) You are "virtually existing" with 50 other people in a little faux-village. You can hear their sneezes, farts, coughs, laughter, hiccups and crying.

2) You always have the feeling that someone is watching you, but by the time you spin around to your doorless opening no

one's there.

3) If you mutter something to yourself, expect surrounding cubicle inhabitants to pop their heads over the partition and say "I heard that! And Yeah, I agree, half-an-hour for lunch sucks."

4) You can't even open e-mail attachments without first spinning around to see if anyone's behind you.

Not Even a Door

A cubicle also doesn't have a door, just an opening. Which is advantageous for fast in and out. But not so great for nosy neighbors who linger while going past to see what's on your monitor. (TIP: Get a small mirror and angle it to see the "lingerers.")

If you get mad or upset, you don't even have a door to slam to "make a statement"—even if you quit and walk out. Some people make their own little cardboard doors, with a felt-tip circle for a doorknob. While some of the looser companies indulge in cubicle door contests, your lone cardboard door will probably just invite graffiti. Or "You still owe me for lunch last week" messages.

Cubicle Security Concerns

• Most cubicles have 23 power cords, and *one* outlet. Requisition surge-protectors for your surge-protectors

• Fabric cubicle walls do not offer much protection from gunfire. Although, *Cracked Magazine* comes through yet again with LC Armored Panels (*www.lcenterprises.com/armoredpanels.htm*) which are bullet-resistant cubicle walls.

• *Cracked* also offers other gadgets for your DIY cubicle security (*www.cracked.com/article_19340_6-pieces-office-equipment-for-incredibly-paranoid_p2.html*), like hidden cameras and even hidden camera detectors.

• If someone near your cubicle is a little off, like constantly talking about himself in the third person, be especially nice to him. That way, when he comes back after getting fired to shoot up the place, and your Armored Cubicle Panels are still on back-order, maybe he'll spare you.

Cubicle Confusion?

If you've ever wondered how new employees and visitors can find their way through a maze of cubicles, there is a company called Cubiclesigns.com (*Cubiclesigns.com*). They've designed something called "Cubicle Wayfinding Signs." From the photos, these are little plastic signs that tell you that you are on Floor 7 (great place to start), then list "Cubicles" and "Offices" by numbers with chubby little blue arrows.

The Wayfinding Sign they have in their advertising has 3 out of 6 arrows pointing down, along with the expected left/right arrows. Which apparently means continuing forward in that semi-hallway. Although more than one confused visitor has probably gone back to the elevators and gone down to Floor 6. They also offer color coding, for signage groupings and badges. Although the modular cubicle walls are still Boringly Grey Tufty-Stuff.

Reminders Tacked On Cubicle Walls

"There are two kinds of people in life: People who like their jobs, and people who don't work here anymore."

"If you do a good job and work hard, you may get a better job someday with a much better company."

"Never quit—until you have another job."

"I am a real live person, not a cubicle animal on exhibit." (Post this just outside your cubicle opening.)

Cubicles Versus Prison

• In Prison you spend a majority of your time in an 8x10 cell. At work you spend most of your time in a 6x8 cubicle.

• Prison cells are not only bigger, but they also have beds and toilets.

• In prison all expenses are paid by taxpayers with no work required. At work you get to pay all expenses to go to work—then deduct taxes from your salary to pay for prisons and prisoners.

• In prison there are sadistic guards who call you by a number. At work you have managers who never pronounce your name right.

Cubicle Etiquette: Meals And Snacks

• Eating smelly food, no matter how delicious, can ruin diets and friendships. And cause an inordinate amount of PB&J sandwiches to be dumped into the trash that day.

• Don't assemble your meal at your desk. Assemble before you come to work, so you don't look like a fast-food reject. And cause someone to alert Personnel to check that you *did* graduate from that college on your resume.

• Try to keep track of your snacks and leftovers. If the half-eaten muffin at the end of your desk has turned to stone, or your extra-sugar coffee is now growing extra-life, toss them. Same with leftovers in the department refrigerator. If that restaurant has changed names and management three times since you ate there, your leftovers are now a toxic mold colony.

Big Don'ts about Working in a Cubicle

• Never use a speakerphone, since the whole floor will be more annoyed than impressed by your "important conference call."

• Don't talk too loud, on the phone or not, since voices carry in an open air cubicle-village.

• Never walk into someone's cubicle unannounced, and then just stand there. It's none of your business what they have on their monitor. And that cubicle occupant may have a mild heart attack—or come after you with a letter opener from a Survivalist store—when they finally notice you stealthily hanging-out behind them.

• Resist the temptation to see how your eBay products are selling, go looking for vacation deals, or check your babysitter-cam on company time. Some companies monitor their workers non-work computer usage. And there are always tattlers looking forward to "promotion by default"—meaning they're still around when they've gotten everyone else fired or demoted.

• Avoid swearing. Think up alternate phrases to get your point across, and be perceived as clever instead of gross. ("I think that's the stuff that comes out from under the bull's tail!")

Cubicle Etiquette: Decorations

• A zillion family photos and Caribbean vacation posters plastered all over your cubicle screams out that you'd rather be elsewhere and aren't very interested in your job.

• Don't overdo the holiday decorations either, like a Halloween cauldron hissing green steam with a menacing cackle, or the musical snow globe that loudly plays "Jingle Bells" whenever someone walks by.

• There's also a Web site called cubicledecorationhq.com (*cubicledecorationhq.com*) for tips like getting a Cubicle (stuffed) Petzzz that can double as a comfort-pet while crying. And even bounce harmlessly off that supervisor bugging you for your overdue part of a project.

Do's and Don'ts about "Hot Desking"

So you landed a great permanent job, but you don't have a desk or cubicle. Yet. You are sent to a different desk/cubicle every day.

• Carry a bag, backpack or briefcase with you, with everything from your own pens and sticky-notes, to packaged snacks and a few personal items, like framed photos.

• Resist the urge to change anything in your "borrowed" cubicle. What you see as clutter may be another case of "But I know where everything is in that mess!"

• Don't change the computer monitor's opening screen or wallpaper, and don't rearrange the icons. If you get confused, use small sticky-notes on the screen to remind you where things are.

Cubicle Etiquette: Personal Hygiene

• Don't kick off those new, pinching shoes—unless you immediately put on your comfy-cubicle shoes. Foot odor, like body odor, is not appreciated if it is so strong it wafts over the cubicle walls, and your neighbors start loudly asking who didn't wash their gym clothes.

• Having disgusting conversations, on the phone or in person, about your mole biopsy or bunion surgery will not win you friends in cubicle-land.

• Making body-repair sounds, like clipping your nails, flossing, shaving, or applying powder or deodorant, will also alienate the people trying to work in nearby cubicles. And totally gross-out whoever is passing by.

• If you are clearly sick—go home! People in nearby cubicles applying hand sanitizer to their faces should be your cue to exit.

• Unless bed pillows are assigned to your cubicle, try not to fall asleep. Even if you stayed up all night playing video games with your Every Thursday D&D group, your supervisor will misread your snoozing as a total lack of interest in productivity.

• Expect passers-by to stop and stare if you are a female who needs to adjust a bra, or a male who—for whatever reason—needs to take his pants off. Save the intimate clothing adjustments for the restroom.

Cubicle Etiquette: Relationships and Romance

• Even if you are convinced that the tight-bod, single snowboarder a few cubicles away is just your type, avoid the love-struck, anonymous e-mails or notes. Or little gifts you think his/her cubicle needs, which always seem to be heart-shaped. Ask them out to lunch, and then keep your infatuation—or stinging rejection—out of cubicle-land.

• Avoid romantic arguments or break-ups while at work, even if you use your personal cell phone. Rumor-mongers will be off and running. And soon you'll have that Mailroom Person or Copier Intern you can't stand hanging around you with "So... I hear you're available again. Do you like calamari pizza?"

• Talking in code will also alert the floor gossips, while everyone around you drops whatever they're doing to wonder what you meant by "Yes, my part-time evening job is going great. Just set up an off-shore...washing machine. I just gotta get a note from my doctor before I show up next time, if you know what I mean."

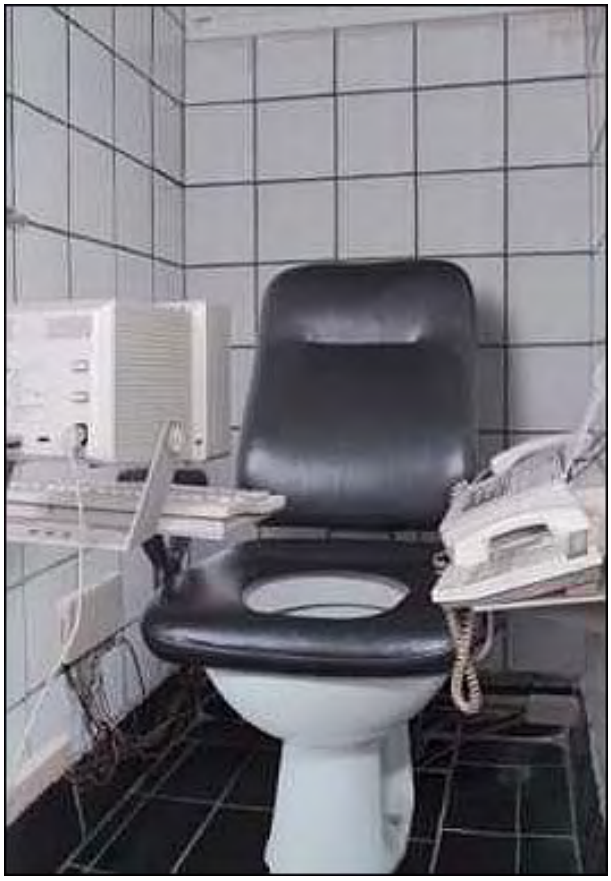
• And if you end up in an office romance, keep everything professional on the job. Meaning, skip the quick kisses and giggly hugs, or watch cell phone videos go viral just when you're up for a promotion.

Practical Jokes for Cubicle Workers

They are all over the Internet, and most seem to require enormous time and energy to decorate or repurpose a cubicle. Here are some visual representations of some of the better cubicle pranks (*curiousphotos.blogspot.com/2010/07/awesome-office-cubicle-pranks.html*).

And Remember, Working in a Cubicle Could Always Be Worse

(Courtesy of Tosh.O's blog at Comedy Central, and Comedy-zone.net (*Comedy-zone.net*).)



(Many of these jokes and anecdotes are found all over the Internet, but special thanks to Basicjokes.com (*Basicjokes.com*), Inflection-point.com (*Inflection-point.com/jokes.php*), Govcareers.about.com (*Govcareers.about.com*), Salary.com (*Salary.com*), Tosh.comedycentral.com (*Tosh.comedycentral.com*), Kyuboria.com (*Kyuboria.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

"Running AutoHotkey Scripts," "My Wish List," "Windows Live Mail Limitations," "Support for Independent Music," "Declining PC Market," "The Fall of the Tech Titans"

Running AutoHotkey Scripts...

[Regarding the May 17 Running Scripts in the Background and a New AutoHotkey Book column:]

In the May 17th AutoHotKey article, you said "...you can add all the same autocorrection (and much more) to all of your Windows programs and Web pages..." in which "same" refers to Microsoft Word. However, after reviewing the autocorrect script you previously provided, I noticed that it doesn't correct all misspellings, only the specific misspellings listed within the script. This makes me wonder how Microsoft Word does it. That is, does it also use a list of common misspellings, or does it rely on a full dictionary of correct spellings.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

With regards to your question, there is a difference between spell checkers which use a comprehensive dictionary and make recommendations for changes and AutoCorrect which only corrects unambiguous errors on the fly. While there are a great number of common misspellings which can be instantly corrected, a lot of spelling cannot be changed without the approval (review) of the writer. Therefore, AutoCorrect is severely limited in scope when compared to spell check—obvious errors only. However, when it works (which is quite often in my case) it saves a great deal of time.

-Jack Dunning

My Wish List

[Regarding the May 3 Beyond Personal Computing column:]

First and foremost, I would like an inexpensive way to control fluorescent and *LED lighting*.

Second, I want an easy way to auto-light and temperature control my fireplace.

Third, I want an automated storage bin with capacity that exceeds a garage and that has automatic inventory and search find. Also I want the same inventory system for my closet.

-Paul Anthony, San Diego, CA

Windows Live Mail Limitations

[Regarding the May 24 Editors Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers column:]

I've been a Web based enthusiast for 5+ years now, have converted many of my friends to it and all have absolutely *loved* the idea that they can get and receive all their e-mails (from many accounts) in one place, but not limited to one computer, but any computer or device that has access to the Web!

Add to that, no worries about backups of e-mail, transferring to new computers, etc.!

I don't care if you use Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo, Live.com, they're all fantastic for standalone/individual e-mail client replacement.

(While I loved Gmail when it came out and for many years, I'm concerned about their forcing folks to use the same name/password for other Google owned properties. Picasa, a photo managing app they bought, then rolled into and forced you to use your Google account with it. Ditto YouTube now. And, unless you have a fairly new computer, they keep "improving" things (why, no one seems to know, I assume they do studies, but *never* let anyone know *why* they're making the changes) to the point of making them unusable.

Google docs was excellent, now with Google "Drive", I can't even use it for simple text files (no option for that anymore), and when a large text file I kept there and edited just fine became so unresponsive (typing half a line before text would appear), I gave up on it. Now just use Dropbox for that and many other files.

/rant off... :)

-Rich Ernst, San Diego, CA

Rich said "they keep 'improving' things (why, no one seems to know, I assume they do studies, but never let anyone know why they're making the changes) to the point of making them unusable." Judging from the popularity of Web mail, I agree it's not unusable and has the benefit of not having to be backed up. However, I still find Web mail usability much poorer due to response times and lack of powerful and fast searching. At least Windows Essentials (Live) Mail allows you to save contacts on the Web while keeping the advantages of a local client program.

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

Support for Independent Music

[Regarding the May 24 Without Digital Music, Life Would Be an Error column:]

BTW, Jane Woodman created a "low profile support page" at Bandcamp (*janewoodman.bandcamp.com/merch/support*) that has a similar structure to her Indiegogo campaign. Prost.

-Matthew W. Beale, Interzone

Declining PC Market

[Regarding the May 24 Wally Wang's Apple Farm column:]

The desktop PC market is certainly declining, and the tablet market is soaring, but I think it will be some time before the tablet replaces the desktop. I agree that tablets are replacing PCs for some tasks, but I don't think that they are going to completely replace PCs for quite a while. Tablets definitely are better at doing some PC tasks, especially while out and about, but there are many tasks that are still not as efficient, if not impossible to do on a tablet. Until the development of more efficient interface for tablets, PCs will be around for a while. I think there will be more of a morphing than a replacement.

I got my first computer in 1980. It was portable, had 64k ram and two 92k floppy drives. There is no tablet today that can do the work I used that computer for as efficiently.

Today, I use both PCs and tablets. I use Apples, Windows, Linux and Android. All have their advantages. I use the most efficient for the task at hand. One of my computers is a notebook running a Linux host with OSX, Win7, and Android running in virtual machines. I can switch between OSs quickly without rebooting. Now if I could just get it to fit in my pocket.

-Dennis, San Diego, CA

"The Fall of the Tech Titans"

[Regarding the May 24 Wally Wang's Apple Farm column:]

I think Wally is confusing a niche with the market when he suggests that Microsoft is falling titan.

"Perhaps the greatest collection of tech titans stumbling has been Gateway, Hewlett-Packard, Dell, and Microsoft. All of these companies pinned their fortunes on the Windows empire, but as soon as people started to shift away from PCs to smartphones and tablets, their business started to shrink at the same time."

According to a May 17th article at Bloomberg.com, "Microsoft shares have surged 28 percent this year, buoyed by cost controls and sales of business and server software amid weak demand for personal computers running the new Windows 8 operating system."

Bill Gates fortune is valued at $72.7 billion, up 16 percent year-to-date, regaining his title as world's riches person. It appears, to paraphrase Dr. Science, "He knows more than we do."

-Dennis, San Diego, CA

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