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Not Just A Mouse!

April 11, 2014

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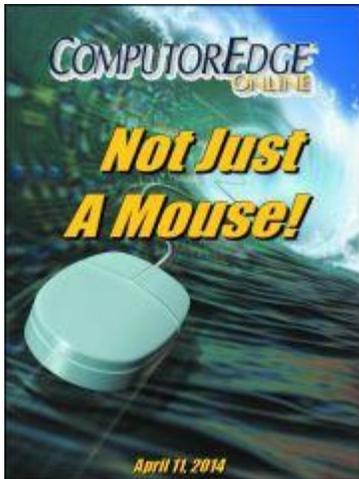
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Not Just A Mouse!

Alternatives to the standard three-button mouse.

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Digital Dave

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

Closing Apps in Windows 8; MKV Extension File; A Tip for Windows XP, Vista, and 7 (But Not 8), Plus the End of XP, Alert! Heartbleed Security Flaw!

Closing Apps in Windows 8

Dear Digital Dave,

I recently acquired a new desktop with Windows 8.1 and I'm trying to work with it. But I have a question. I can either start programs using the screen that looks something like the Windows 7 start screen or I can start them by clicking on the tablet-like Windows 8 screen. I find they're easier to close if I open them on the Windows 7 start screen. Is there any difference between the two methods?

Thanks,

John Smith
Englewood, CO

Dear John,

There is more than a difference between the two closing methods in Windows 8. They are actually two different types of programs. The ones that you are currently launching from the Windows 8 Desktop (what you call the "Windows 7 start screen" and Jack Dunning calls "real Windows") are regular Windows programs that function in the way that you're accustomed. These programs are different from the Modern apps which run only in the Modern interface (what you call the "tablet-like Windows 8 screen"). That's why it's less confusing when you open programs on the Desktop. They are what you know and you can only open "real Windows" programs through the Desktop (at least until you get the latest Windows 8.1 update which was released this week).

When using the Modern interface both Modern apps and Windows programs can be opened—although the system will jump to the Desktop whenever you load a Windows program. The launch tiles for both are mixed together on the Modern Start screen which adds to the

confusion.

On a PC it's important to understand that there are two worlds in Windows 8—the "real Windows" world of Desktop programs where you can run your old Windows programs and the other world of Modern tablet-like apps that you can only get from the Microsoft Store. While you can jump between the two worlds by hitting the ⊞ key, you are either in one or the other, not both. For more information on Windows 8 split personality, see Jack Dunning's e-book *Misunderstand Windows 8.1*.

Since the Modern apps were designed for a tablet-like interface they are a little more awkward to close with a mouse. Currently there are two methods for closing a Modern app with a mouse. First, move the cursor to the top of the screen until it turns into a hand icon (see Figure 2). Drag (press and hold the left mouse button while moving the mouse) the hand to the bottom of the screen and release. This simulates the touch motion of dragging the app down off the screen from top to bottom.

Figure 2. Move the mouse to the top of the screen until you see the hand icon, then drag to the bottom of the screen to close the app.

The second method is to move the mouse to the upper left-hand corner until the running Modern app thumbnails appear (see Figure 3). (CTRL+⊞+TAB also opens the app thumbnails.) Right-click on the app thumbnail and select close.
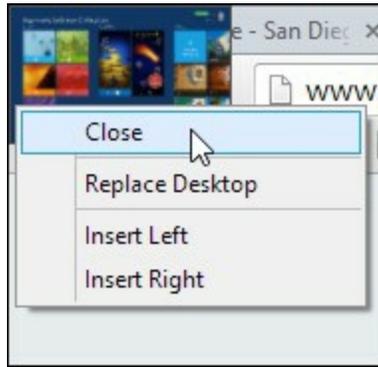
Figure 3. Move the mouse to the upper left-hand corner of the screen (or CTRL+WIN+TAB) to expose the Modern app thumbnails, then right-click on the app to select Close.

When you upgrade to Windows 8.1 Update 1, then a more familiar method for closing Modern apps will be added to your system—the X in the upper right-hand corner. You just move the cursor to the top of the screen to expose the option. The new 8.1 update is now available, although it is being rolled out in stages. If you go to Windows Update and click Check Now, then the update should be made available to you. You may need to click View Details and check the box before it will install. (Another benefit of Windows 8.1 Update 1 is that you can pop up the Desktop Taskbar from a Modern app (any screen) by moving your cursor to the bottom of the screen. Plus, now all running apps, whether Windows or Modern, will show up on the Taskbar. Jack tells me he will be reviewing Windows 8.1 Update 1 next week.)

If you are still running Windows 8 (and half the Windows 8 users are), you need to upgrade to Windows 8.1 through the Windows Store before you can get this latest update. The primary goal of the latest Windows 8.1 update is to make Windows 8 more like older versions of Windows—PC and mouse friendly.

Digital Dave

MKV Extension File

Dear Digital Dave,

Like always you are the only hope for people like me—not really savvy in computers. Anyway my question is this: how can I get some videos to work in my computer? This video has the extension .MKV and my guess is I'm missing this file extension. Where I can get it so I can play this type of video on my computer?

Thank You,

Noe Villegas

Chula Vista CA

Dear Noe,

The file extension .MKV is for videos in the [Matroska](#) format. It is not commonly used for commercial projects, but since it is freely available, individuals may use them for their videos.

What you need is a set of Codecs (Compression/Decompression) for your computer which will allow you to view the .MKV videos. All videos use some type of compression format and need to be decompressed for viewing. The Codecs come in packs that usually include the proper software for a wide range of formats. They are available from multiple sources.

CNET has a list of [free Codec packs](#) from which to choose. Make sure that the one you pick supports .MKV files. To help you pick, look at the number of other people who have downloaded each pack plus the user ratings and comments. Although CNET checks the software for safety, when installing any download watch the process carefully. Many installation programs will attempt to add special browser toolbars and other junkware. Often you need to opt out during the installation process.

On CNET's Download.com, the clean (no extras) download links are located below the big green download button. Use the "Direct Download" link shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Use the "Direct Download Link" below the big green button.

Other sites considered safe, but with less complaints about the addition of junkware are [FileHippo](#), [Major Geeks](#), and [Softpedia](#). You still need to watch the installation process for unwanted extras. On any download site, beware of other ads that look like the download link. You may think that you're downloading one file when you actually get another.

Once you install the Codec pack, the .MKV file extension should be recognized by your computer and play the video.

Digital Dave

April 11, 2014

A Tip for Windows XP, Vista, and 7 (But Not 8), Plus the End of XP and Alert! Heartbleed Security Flaw!

A Tip for Windows XP, Vista, and 7 (But Not 8), Plus the End of XP and Alert! Heartbleed Security Flaw!

You might think that I would be hesitant to offer this Windows tip since it doesn't apply to Windows 8, but about 75% of the computers in use are either Windows XP or Windows 7 which means there are still a ton of people who might find this useful. This is one of those hidden features of Windows that can make working with the Desktop just a little bit easier.

Windows Task Manager includes a little known Desktop organizing feature for when you have a number of programs running and you would like to display certain ones side-by-side or stacked. Open Task Manager (CTRL+SHIFT+ESC). Select the application you want to organize on the Desktop (see Figure 4). (Hold CTRL while clicking the application name to make multiple selections.) Right-click on one of the selections.
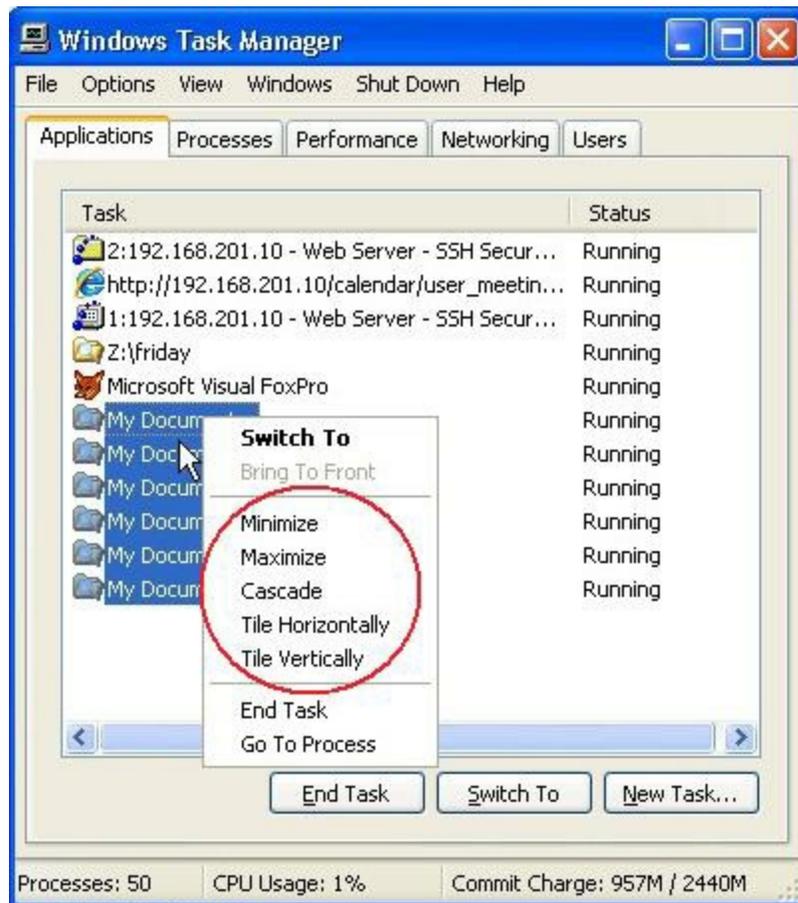

Figure 4. Select the applications you want to organize and right-click on one of them.

Options for controlling the selected windows will pop up, including Cascade, Tile Horizontally, and Tile Vertically. By selecting one of the options all of the selected windows will be affected. If you select tile horizontally, the window will be organized with the maximum space for the
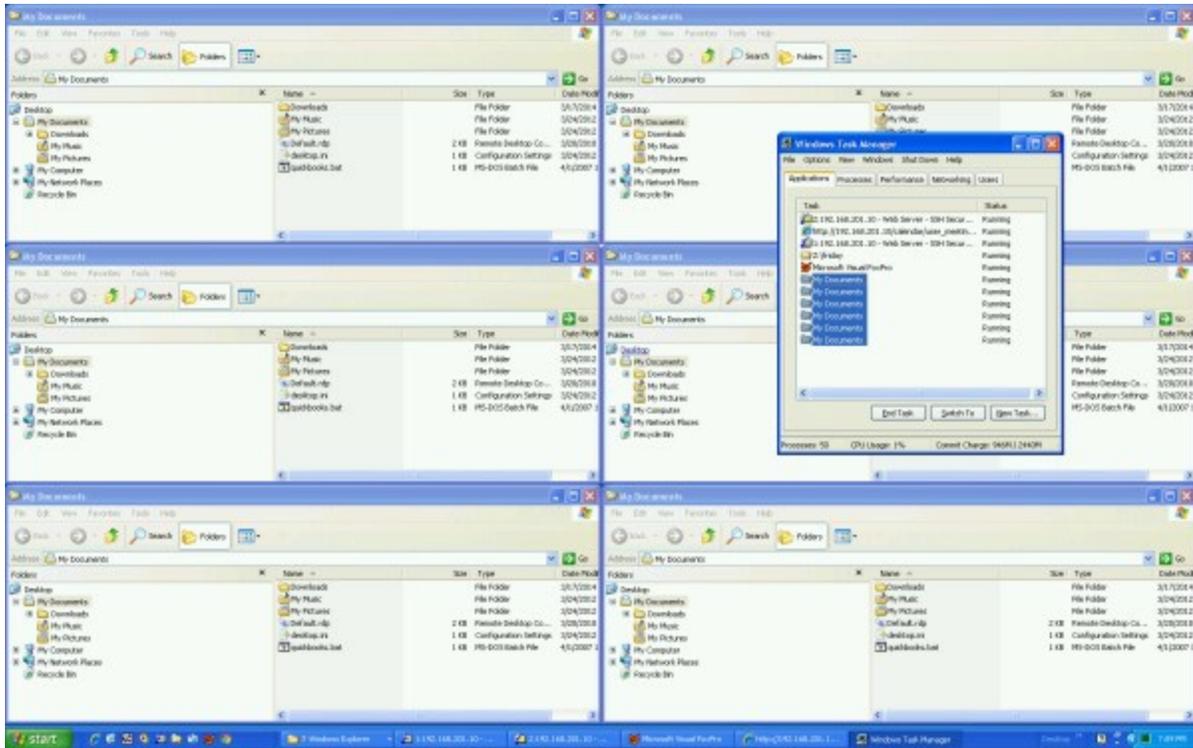
window width, (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Six windows tiled horizontally on the Window Desktop.

If you select Tile Vertically, then the windows will be given maximum height (see Figure 6).
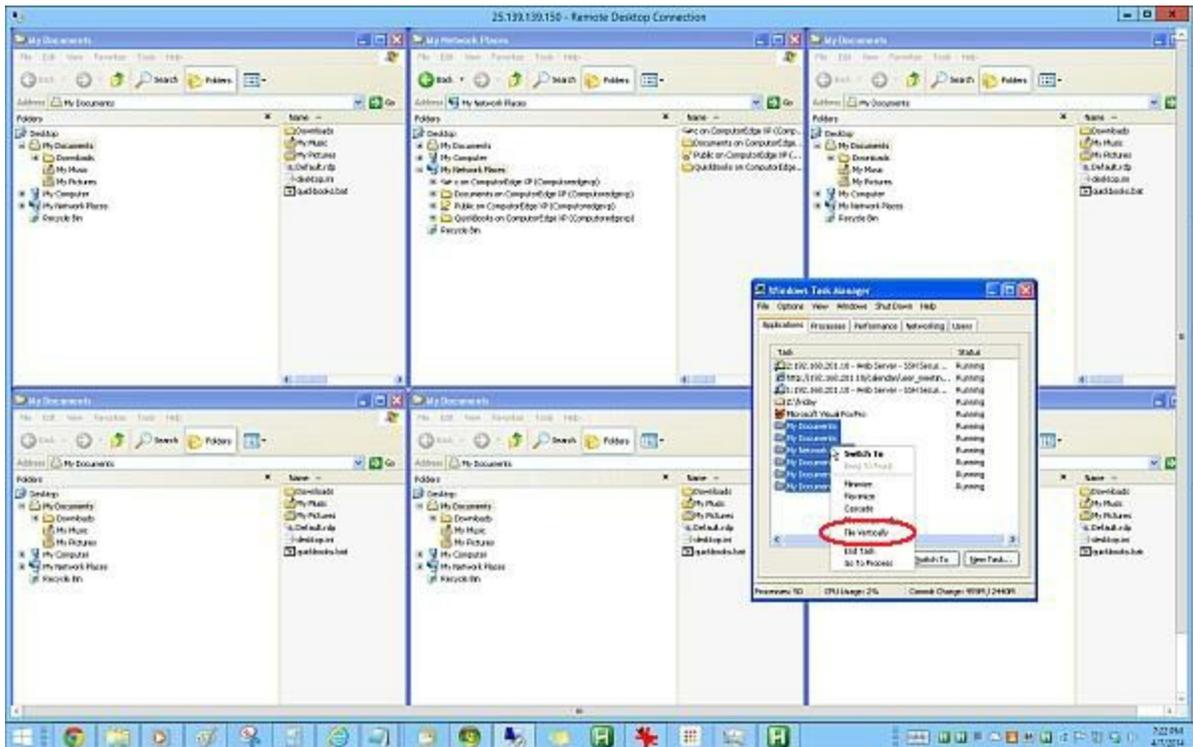

Figure 6. Six windows tiled vertically on the Windows Desktop.

It is likely that this feature has gone the way of Windows Aero in Windows 8 because most people just don't use—that's if they ever knew it was there. However, if you like to maintain numerous open windows, then you may have occasion to use it—plus it works in Windows XP, Windows Vista, and Windows 7.

The End of Windows XP

By the way, Microsoft has ended support for Windows XP—which means nothing has really changed. There are plenty of really scary stories about hordes of hackers just waiting for this moment so they can ravage the XP world. Give me a break. After all these years, I think that XP is pretty well debugged—at least as much as can be expected. I think that Microsoft is behind the spreading of many of these ominous scenarios.

It's been noted that the British government has ponied up big money to Microsoft for another year of Windows XP support. I suppose you could get it too if you're willing to pay the bucks. What will they get for that? Probably nothing. My guess is that support for XP ended a long time ago. Most of the recent security updates were probably fake ones just acting like they were updating something. Of course, I'm probably wrong.

The line is that since Microsoft will no longer be offering security updates. This will automatically start the degradation of Windows XP systems. While it's possible that someone will find a new hole in Windows XP, most problems people encounter will be self-inflicted—as is the case with all computers. No security software has ever caught everything and Microsoft has not had a stellar record in testing. Whether your Windows XP computer is safe or not depends mostly upon how you use it. Carelessly download and run unknown files and you are at great risk—with or without support.

I wouldn't be surprised if the Windows XP computers quickly fall into the Apple Mac security category. The question is, "Why don't more hackers break into Macs?" "Because they don't feel like it." I'm not sure how motivated the hackers will be if they think that Windows XP is a dead operating system. While it is conceivable, I can't see many malevolent cyber criminals rubbing their hands in glee at the prospect of breaking into XP computers.

It's just hard for me to take all these claims of impending doom too seriously. I do think that people should upgrade to Windows 7 or Windows 8 (or some other type of computer), but not because Microsoft has dropped support for Windows XP. The upgrading should be done because they will get a better computer and a better operating system. Even if I like Window 7 (and occasionally Windows 8) better, XPs will continue to be around for a long time.

However, if you're still using Internet Explorer 6 (some of you are), get rid of it. It is a far worse security risk than Windows XP.

Alert! Heartbleed Security Flaw!

It seems that a security flaw has been found in the OpenSSL protocol used by many Web sites. It's been given the name Heartbleed. While it has only just been discovered, it's existed for about two years. It is unknown if any evil doers were aware of it. Most businesses affected have already taken steps to patch their sites.

The glitch could have allowed listening in on secure traffic which might capture passwords and other sensitive information. All sites are casually advising people to change their passwords as it's a good idea to do that on a regular basis anyway. That means you should change your "12345678" to "abcdefgh" just to be safe. (You know that I'm kidding about those two passwords.)

This is a problem for the Web sites to fix. All you can do is change your password.

For more complete information see this Mashable Heartbleed. For sites where you want to change passwords see this Heartbleed Hit List. While changing password is always a good idea, I wouldn't panic. If the bad guys even knew about this flaw (there is no evidence that they did), they probably couldn't find you in all the chaff. It's easier to steal credit card numbers from a company like Target. If you want to check out the safety of a Web site run this Heartbleed Test.

Digital Dave

Alternatives to Your Boring Mouse

"Sometimes We Need More Than Just a Pointing Device" by Jack Dunning

While most people are happy with a standard three button mouse, special tasks and health concerns may force us to look at these alternatives.

A few weeks ago I wrote about some of the interesting and useful computer keyboards on the market. It's only fitting that I give some attention to the computer mouse. While much less complicated than keyboards, they are usually just as essential. They may be cable connected or wireless, but most of them conform to the same shape and size. People who have a small amount of desk space or limited hand movement may prefer a trackball or a touchpad. But the

most used computer pointing device is the mouse. On the downside, the mouse and repetitive clicking gets the blame for being a major cause of carpal tunnel syndrome.

Many mouses (or is it mice?) have extra buttons beyond the now usual two buttons and a scroll wheel/button for a variety of tasks. I have a mouse that has one extra button on each side which occasionally causes me problems by jumping forward or back when on a Web page. I avoid those buttons because I haven't taken the time to load the proper drivers for disabling them. (I'll surprise myself and demonstrate in this week's AutoHotkey column how to use those extra mouse buttons to run AutoHotkey apps. That will eliminate my problem.) They also come in many funky shapes and colors. Plus, they take weird forms including a hand grenade and a mouse mouse (a mouse made from a stuffed mouse). I did see one with a hidden microphone and/or camera, but they don't seem to be available through normal channels—probably for legal reasons. For me those are all novelties and I don't have any use for them. This time I look at computer mouse pointing devices that are both a little novel and may be particularly useful in specific situations.

Wow Pen Joy Vertical Ergonomic Optical Mouse

The Wow Pen Joy Vertical Ergonomic Optical Mouse is designed to work in a manner much more natural for humans than the mouse which sits flat on a desk or table. To use a regular mouse requires that the hand be turned in flat which may contribute to carpal tunnel syndrome. (I don't know if this is true, but if I was having any problems with my wrists then I would certainly give this one, or the next one, a try.)

Figure 1. Wow Pen Joy Vertical Ergonomic Optical Mouse.

The Wow Pen simulates the hand position and movement as if you're using a pen. I wonder if this would make it easier to draw on a computer screen. I know that a regular mouse isn't very good for drawing—at least not for me. One of the best things about this one is the price at $25.

Evoluent VerticalMouse (Wireless)

Operating under a similar theory as the Wow Pen mouse, the Evoluent VerticalMouse is more expensive at $110, but it does get better user reviews. While it is bulkier than most, it looks pretty comfortable to handle. Rather holding a pen, using this mouse is more like shaking hands—possibly a little more natural.

Figure 2. Evoluent VerticalMouse/Vertical Mouse (Wireless).

On a side note, I have mixed feelings about a wireless versus wired mouse. I have both and notice little difference between the two. As long as I'm confined to a desk or table while using my computer, they are practically interchangeable. A wired mouse can become tangled in its cable, but a wireless mouse needs its batteries replaced.

HDE Sleek Form-Fitting Ergonomic Curved Wireless 2.4 GHz Optical Slim Mouse

Even the name of the [HDE Sleek Form-Fitting Ergonomic Curved Wireless 2.4 GHz Optical Slim Mouse](#) sounds elegant. It looks like it would easily fit into a shirt pocket.

Figure 3. HDE Sleek Form-Fitting Ergonomic Curved Wireless 2.4 GHz Optical Slim Mouse (Wireless).

At $7.50 it is almost disposable. "Would you like to sit down and use my mouse?" "No thank you. I brought my own." Who knows where that other mouse has been?

Gyration Wireless Air Mouse GO Plus

Now here is a reason to be wireless. The Gyration Wireless Air Mouse GO Plus is designed to operate at a distance. This type of mouse is ideal for operating a computer while giving a presentation or running your media center from across the room. It has a vibrating structure gyroscope inside using the motion of the hand in space to move the cursor on the screen. I would expect this mouse to be a little more expensive at $79.49.
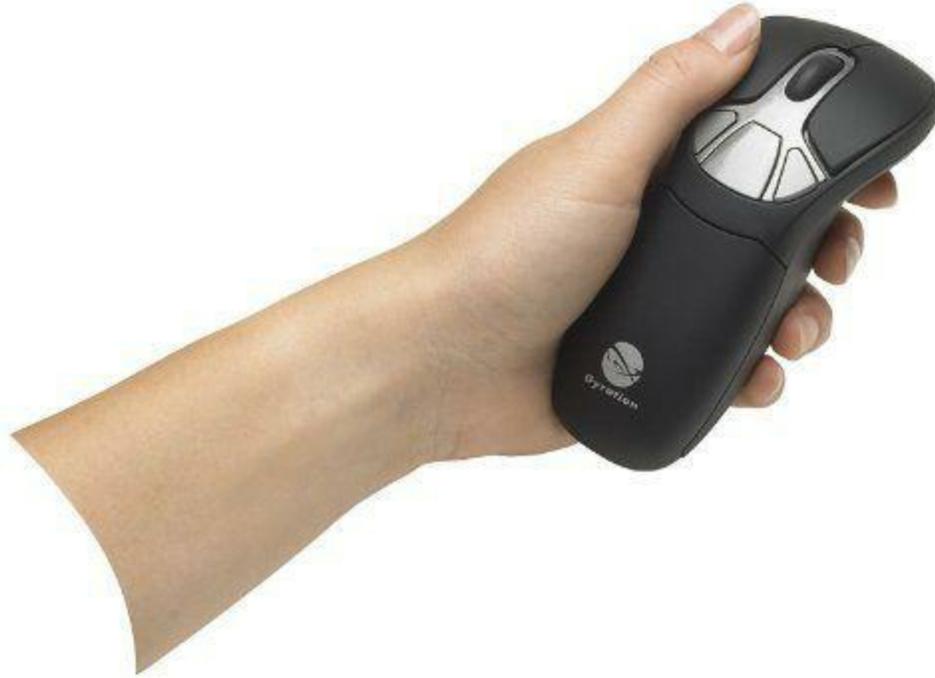
Figure 4. Gyration Wireless Air Mouse GO Plus.

It would be even more impressive if it had a spinning gyroscope inside, although I guess that would be impractical and run through too many batteries. There are other air mouse products which include a laser pointer (and possibly a gamma ray blaster?—guess not).

Genius Ring Mouse 2

The Genius Ring Mouse ($39.76) looks like it would be useful in tight spots where a regular mouse would be impractical. For example, on an airplane where there is no room on the tray or in an airport where using a mouse on your leg is awkward. Although it appears to operate in a fashion similar to a mouse pad (all actions are operated with the thumb), I'm not sure if it is any easier.

Figure 5. Genius Ring Mouse 2.

It is certainly portable and would probably be good in situations where the computer is a little distance away—or your hand is in your jacket pocket.

Footime Foot Mouse

I like the idea of the Footime Foot Mouse. It completely frees up your hands for other activities. If you had one of these, you could use the Maltron One-Handed Keyboard with one hand and drink a cup of coffee with the other.

Figure 6. Footime Foot Mouse.

It's a steal at $129.99. It's good alternative for those cold winter nights in your non-insulated cabin when you must wear your mittens.

iOne Scorpius-N4 Numerical Keypad Mouse

The accountant's dream mouse, iOne Scorpius-N4 Numerical Keypad Mouse, builds an expanded numeric keypad into the mouse. At $39.15, it a good substitute for small computer keyboards with no number pad keys.

Figure 7. iOne Scorpius-N4 Numerical Keypad Mouse.

Look! It has a "000" key! Its owner is someone who's doing some high powered computing.

I also saw a mouse which doubles as a Skype phone. It just seems a little strange to be starting a Skype call, them picking up your mouse to talk. What if you need to mouse about during the call?

I'm not recommending any of these products because, quite frankly, I've never used them and I know very little about them. Read the reviews from users and make your own decision. I would be interested in hearing about any other mousing devices that people have found particularly useful. Or if you happen to own one of these, how did it work out?

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:

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and *[That Does Not Compute!](#)*, brilliantly drawn cartoons by Jim Whiting for really stupid gags by Jack about computers and the people who use them.

Easy Beginner AutoHotkey Tricks to Use Extra Mouse Buttons and the Wasted Insert Key

"If You Do Nothing Else, Use AutoHotkey to Power Extra Mouse Buttons and Vestigial Keys Like Insert" by Jack Dunning

> *Tips on how use AutoHotkey to take advantage of extra mouse buttons, and the annoying Insert and CapsLock keys, plus, for the hardcore AutoHotkey user, a more advanced technique for adding color to AutoHotkey ListView rows.*

New to AutoHotkey? See this [Overview and Guide for Beginners](#).

*   *   *

For me a mouse is just a mouse. I use it to move the cursor around the screen, left-click to select, and right-click for the context menu. On most of my computers I have a standard three-button mouse: left button, right button, and the clickable scroll wheel in the center. That's all I really need…that is until I wrote this week's mouse article about [computer mousing devices](#).

On my Windows 7/Windows 8 computer (the operating systems are installed on separate hard drives in the same computer which I select from the BIOS setup when booting), I have a five-button mouse. I didn't plan this. It came with the wireless keyboard I picked up at Costco a few years ago. I've always looked upon the two extra mouse buttons (one on the left side and one on the right) as benign extras like your navel or appendix. However, I would occasionally hit the fourth button on the left side with my thumb accidentally causing a Web page to jump Back. What the heck?

If I hadn't realize what just happened, I could have lost whatever I had been working on. (Tip: If you're working on a Blog and you accidentally go Back or Forward, you can most likely reverse the process and get to your unsaved typing by doing the antithetical (opposite) operation. Right-click and select either Forward or Back as appropriate. If you accidentally close the window (F4), I'm afraid you're out of luck.) I decided it was time to disable these

annoying extra mouse button features by putting them to good use with AutoHotkey. (I know that I could have used the mouse drivers that came with the keyboard mouse set, but I had only installed them on the Windows 7 drive and was too lazy to install them on the Windows 8 drive.)

Make Use of Extra Buttons on Your Mouse with AutoHotkey

One of the great things about AutoHotkey is that you can make better use of extra mouse buttons and normally (or nearly) useless keys such as the Insert and CapsLock keys. I decided to make use of the fourth mouse button on the left side which has easy thumb access. (If you're left-handed, then the fifth button would have easy thumb access.) It's a bit more natural than trying to use the fifth button on the right side with one of my other fingers. My goal was to eliminate the need to use any hotkey combination when activating the pop-up menu for my QuickLinks AutoHotkey app, (see Figure 1). (The QuickLinks script is also discussed in the e-book *Digging Deeper Into AutoHotkey*.)
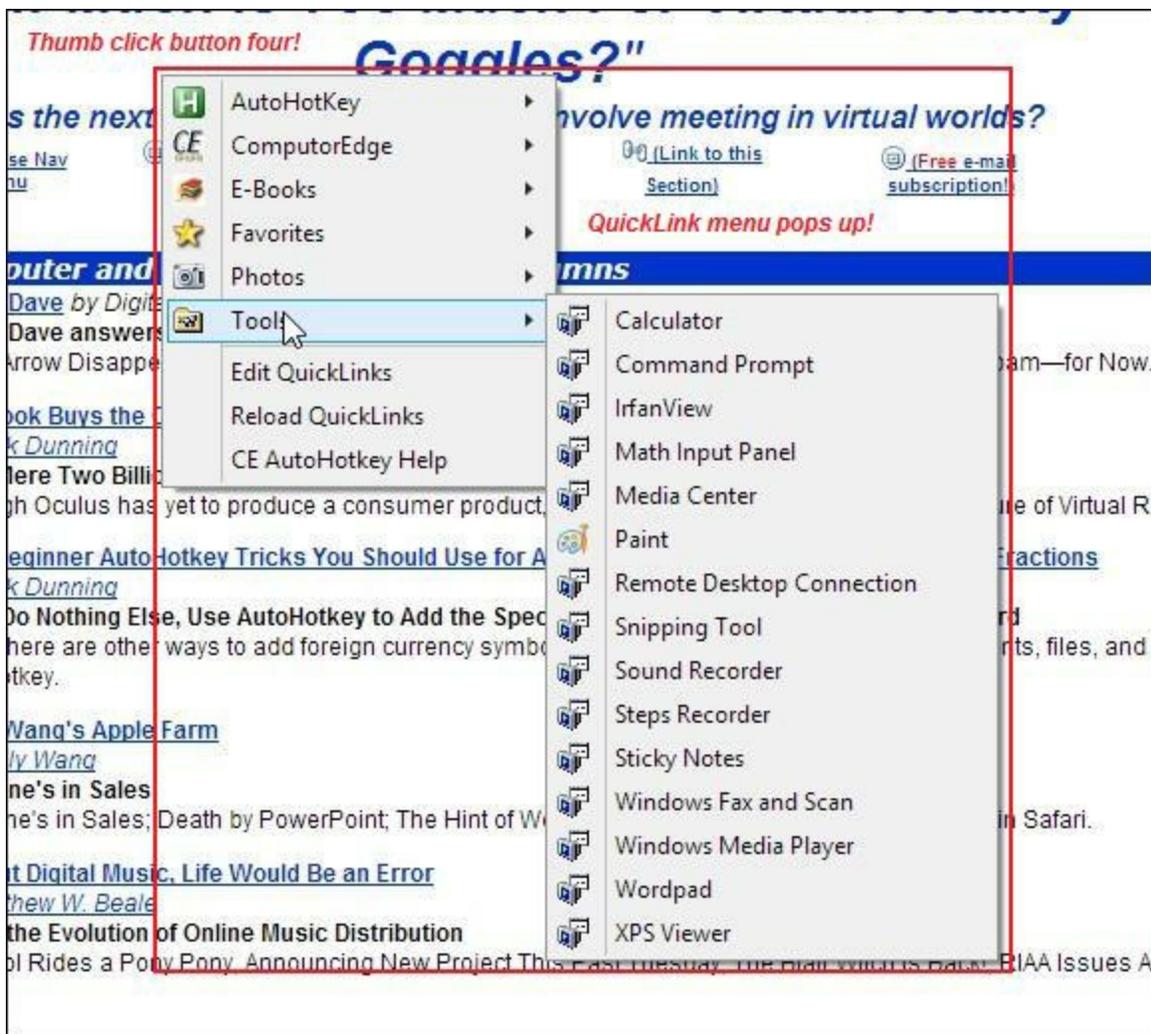
Figure 1. Using the extra mouse button gives me alternative way to open QuickLinks without using the hotkeys.

In my personal combined AutoHotkey script that loads automatically on bootup, I have two hotkey combinations that activate the QuickLinks menu: ⊞+Z on the left side of the keyboard and ALT+, (hold down the ALT key and press the comma) on the right side. I wanted to write a one-line script that would activate the QuickLinks menu with a click of that extra fourth mouse button. I thought that I could use either hotkey, but I ended up using the *ALT,* combination because whenever I tried to use the ⊞ key, it just wouldn't work properly. I'm not sure why. (There are so many ⊞ key combinations in Windows 8 that it's probably best to avoid using ⊞ in AutoHotkey hotkeys anyway.) All I needed was one line of code to make it work:

```
XButton1::SendInput, !,
```

The term for the fourth button is *XButton1* with *XButton2* designating the fifth mouse button. If you have more than five mouse buttons, then you will need to consult the AutoHotkey documentation's Special Keys section on the [KeyList page](#) to uncover how to reach them for reassignment.

If I'm adding the capability directly to the QuickLinks script, then I can put the [Menu command](#) for popping up the menu directly into the script:

```
XButton1::Menu, QuickLinks, Show
```

For good measure, I assigned opening the main *ComputorEdge* Web page to the fifth mouse button:

```
XButton2::Run, http://www.computoredge.com
```

Now when I click the extra button on the right side, the *ComputorEdge* Web site opens in the default browser. Note that you can use this technique to activate any AutoHotkey command. If you want to run a longer routine, start the code on the next line after the *XButton2::* and enclose it with a *Return* on the last line.

Making Better Use of the Insert and CapsLock Keys

Most people have no use for the Insert key. The only time it's noticed is when it is accidentally pressed thereby causing volumes of characters to be inadvertently overwritten. Very annoying! This can be prevented by putting the key to good use with AutoHotkey. In the example here, the Insert key is turned into a hotkey which opens the Documents folder in Windows Explorer (File Explorer for Windows 8 users):

```
Insert::Run, %A_MyDocuments%
```

Add that one line to the end of any AutoHotkey script (or run it in a standalone script) and

you're done. Now whenever you press the Insert key, Windows Explorer will open located at your Documents folder. If you want it to be a different folder, substitute the full folder path including the drive letter (e.g. C:\) for *%A_MyDocuments%.*

Suppose you want the CapsLock key to open the Command Prompt:

```
CapsLock::Run, cmd
```

or the Windows Calculator::

```
CapsLock::Run, calc
```

The only problem with this approach is that the CapsLock key is unavailable for when you really need it. To resolve this occasional problem add another line of code with a modifier, such as the Shift key, and the CapsLock key:

```
+CapsLock::Capslock
```

Now when you use SHIFT+CAPSLOCK, capitalization will toggle on and off. It's there when you need it, but won't accidentally turn on caps when you inadvertently hit it. However, that slip on the CapsLock key will still activate your AutoHotkey command.

There are a huge variety of things that you can do with extra buttons or unneeded keys, but if all you want to do is disable a button or key, merely add one line similar to this:

```
XButton1::
```

You will never accidentally go Back again by hitting that fourth mouse button with your thumb.

That concludes the beginner's AutoHotkey tip for this week. What follows is a more advanced technique which applies to the [To-Do List app](#)—discussed in my soon to be released e-book about AutoHotkey applications. I'm including it here because I want to be sure to get it into the book. If you're a beginner you may want to leave the rest of this column until some time when you're more comfortable with AutoHotkey. (I don't want to frustrate you.) This second part builds on the information provided in earlier columns. Quite frankly, some of what is offered below is even beyond me. However, I have managed to get it working and feel it's worth introducing for those who are looking for special AutoHotkey techniques.

Adding Color to ListView Rows

If you remember from the To-Do List app (about eight months ago), I put in a method for adding checkboxes to the list. It was more of a training exercise than anything else because the checkboxes didn't really do anything except save the checkmark. I recently came across some

code for changing the background and font color for individual rows of the ListView control. I made just enough modifications the script that I can now use the checkboxes to change the color of the checked rows, (see Figure 2). Suddenly the checkboxes have a function. When a row is checked, it is highlighted and looks important. Uncheck the row and it returns to normal color. This is important to me since now I can highlight my "must-do" tasks.
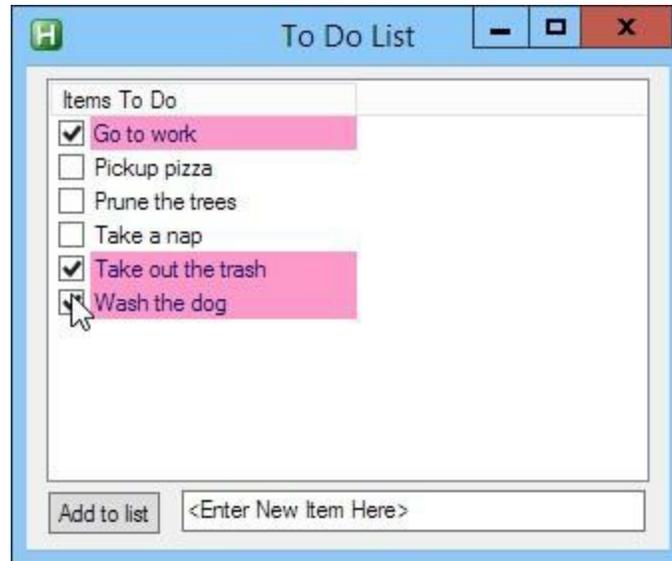

Figure 2. Checking the box next to an item in the To-Do List app highlights the row making it stand out.

Some of the functions that make this row color changing technique work are fairly complex and I haven't taken the time to completely decipher them myself. They do involve AutoHotkey commands and functions such as DllCall(), SendMessage, and OnMessage, all of which are more advanced techniques that access built-in Windows features. (There is also a SendMessage tutorial available at the AutoHotkey site.) While I'm not currently far enough along to explain how all of it works (maybe in a year or two), I can show you what I did to make it work in the To-Do List app. For the original ListView highlighting script (which I stole) check out this AutoHotkey Forum post by evl.

The following discussion does not cover the entire To-Do List script which can be found at the *ComputorEdge* AutoHotkey Dropbox download site, but only those changes that were necessary to make it work.

First, the *LV_ColorInitiate()* function was added to the auto-execute section of the script:

```
LV_ColorInitiate() ; (Gui_Number, Control) - defaults to: (1, SysListView321)
```

I won't attempt to explain what it does, but it must be run before anything else will work. I made no changes to the function itself. I thought that I would only need to run it once, but I later discovered that if I closed the window and reopened it from the System Tray menu, I had to run the *LV_ColorInitiate()* function again:

```
ShowTodo:
```

```
  Gui, Show,, To Do List
  LV_ColorInitiate()
  SetColor()
Return
```

The purpose of the ShowTodo: label is to reopen the window if it has either been minimized or closed. This could be called from the right-click menu for the icon in the Notification Tray to open the hidden window. The two functions, *LV_ColorInitiate()* and *SetColor()*, are needed to reactivate the row colors.

The second function I added was one of my own making. After running the initiating function, a loop is needed to cycle through the rows and set the colors based upon whether each row was checked or not:

```
SetColor() {
  Loop, % LV_GetCount()
  {
      SendMessage, 4140, A_Index - 1, 0xF000, SysListView321
      IsChecked := (ErrorLevel >> 12) - 1
      If IsChecked
        LV_ColorChange(A_Index, "0x660000", "0xCC99FF")
      Else
        LV_ColorChange(A_Index, "0x000000", "0xFFFFFF")
  }
}
```

This code uses another technique involving *SendMessage* (explained in an [earlier column](#)) as it loops through all of the rows to determine if a row is checked. If a row is checked, the *LV_ColorChange()* function from the borrowed script is used to set each checked row to the highlight color. The reason for placing this *SetColor* code in a new function is that every time there is an addition, deletion, or reactivation of the window, the entire *ListView* needs to be reset with the individual row colors. *SetColor()* is placed at appropriate locations throughout the script. (Check the *ToDoList.ahk* in the *ToDoList Color.zip* file posted at the download site.)

The key change I made to the original functions was in the *WM_NOTIFY(p_w, p_l, p_m)* function:

```
WM_NOTIFY( p_w, p_l, p_m )
{
  local  draw_stage, Current_Line, Index
  if ( DecodeInteger( "uint4", p_l, 0 ) = hw_LV_ColorChange ) {
      if ( DecodeInteger( "int4", p_l, 8 ) = -12 ) {                                        ; NM_(
          draw_stage := DecodeInteger( "uint4", p_l, 12 )
          if ( draw_stage = 1 )                                                             ; CDD:
              return, 0x20                                                                  ; CDRl
          else if ( draw_stage = 0x10000|1 ){                                               ; CDD:
              Current_Line := DecodeInteger( "uint4", p_l, 36 )+1
;             LV_GetText(Index, Current_Line, 1)
              If (Line_Color_%Current_Line%_Text != ""){
```

```
            EncodeInteger( Line_Color_%Current_Line%_Text, 4, p_l, 48 )   ; fore
            EncodeInteger( Line_Color_%Current_Line%_Back, 4, p_l, 52 )   ; bacl
        }
      }
    }
  }
}
```

The original function uses the *LV_GetText(Index, Current_Line, 1)* function (commented out with the semicolon ;) to get the row number which was in embedded in the first column of the ListView. I only have one column and used the check marks to designate the color rows, so I was able to use the *Current_Line* value directly, bypassing the need for a redundant column with the row number. Otherwise, I would have been forced to add another column to the ListView. (Initially, I did add another column until I realized that it wasn't needed for my script.) This is the only change that I made to the original functions.

Changing Colors with the Checkbox

The challenge was getting each row to change color as I checked and unchecked the checkbox. For this I turned to the *A_GuiEvent* variable which fires whenever certain actions are triggered. It was previously used in the *MyListView* label (subroutine) to detect when a row is edited. By adding the *AltSubmit* option to the *Gui, Add, ListView* line:

```
Gui, Add, ListView, sort r10 checked -readonly vMyListView gMyListView AltSubmit, Iter
```

additional values for *A_GuiEvent* are available. In this case, when *A_GuiEvent* equals "I" and the variable *ErrorLevel* contains the "C" or "c", the **I**tem has just been **C**hecked or un**c**hecked respectively. The variable *A_EventInfo* captures the current row number. That's all that's needed to create the interactive checking that toggles the color:

```
MyListView:
  HighlightRow := A_EventInfo
  If A_GuiEvent = e
    UpdateFile()
  If (A_GuiEvent = "I") and (InStr(ErrorLevel, "C", true))
      LV_ColorChange(HighlightRow, "0x660000", "0xCC99FF")
  If (A_GuiEvent = "I") and (InStr(ErrorLevel, "c", true))
      LV_ColorChange(HighlightRow, "0x000000", "0xFFFFFF")
Return
```

Since the *ErrorLevel* variable may contain a string of characters, the [InStr() function](#) is used to determine whether the box has been checked or unchecked. You can experiment with the various colors by changing the hexadecimal values in the *LV_ColorChange()* function.

As long as one row at a time was checked or unchecked, it seemed to work fine. However, adding or deleting a row causes a misalignment problem with the colors. In those situations it seems that all the rows need to be updated. That's the purpose of the *SetColor()* function discussed above.

This can get fairly complicated. I barely understand it myself. I will leave the functions below for others to peruse. The point is that even though I don't completely understand the available code, I can still use it for a practical application.

To see the entire To-Do List script with the changes in context, download *ToDoList Color.zip* (includes both *ToDoList.ahk* and *ToDoList.exe*) from the *ComputorEdge* AutoHotkey [Dropbox download site](#).

The Color Functions

```
LV_ColorInitiate(Gui_Number=1, Control="") ; initiate listview color change procedure
{
  global hw_LV_ColorChange
  If Control =
    Control =SysListView321
  Gui, %Gui_Number%:+Lastfound
  Gui_ID := WinExist()
  ControlGet, hw_LV_ColorChange, HWND,, %Control%, ahk_id %Gui_ID%
  OnMessage( 0x4E, "WM_NOTIFY" )
}

LV_ColorChange(Index="", TextColor="", BackColor="") ; change specific line's color o:
{
  global
  If Index =
      Loop, % LV_GetCount()
      LV_ColorChange(A_Index)
  Else
    {
      Line_Color_%Index%_Text := TextColor
      Line_Color_%Index%_Back := BackColor
      WinSet, Redraw,, ahk_id %hw_LV_ColorChange%
    }
}



WM_NOTIFY( p_w, p_l, p_m )
{
  local  draw_stage, Current_Line, Index
  if ( DecodeInteger( "uint4", p_l, 0 ) = hw_LV_ColorChange ) {
      if ( DecodeInteger( "int4", p_l, 8 ) = -12 ) {                          ; NM_(
          draw_stage := DecodeInteger( "uint4", p_l, 12 )
          if ( draw_stage = 1 )                                               ; CDD:
              return, 0x20                                                    ; CDRI
          else if ( draw_stage = 0x10000|1 ){                                 ; CDD:
              Current_Line := DecodeInteger( "uint4", p_l, 36 )+1
;             LV_GetText(Index, Current_Line, 2)
              If (Line_Color_%Current_Line%_Text != ""){
                  EncodeInteger( Line_Color_%Current_Line%_Text, 4, p_l, 48 )   ; fore
```

```
                    EncodeInteger( Line_Color_%Current_Line%_Back, 4, p_l, 52 )   ; bacl
                }
            }
        }
    }
}

DecodeInteger( p_type, p_address, p_offset, p_hex=true )
{
  old_FormatInteger := A_FormatInteger
  ifEqual, p_hex, 1, SetFormat, Integer, hex
  else, SetFormat, Integer, dec
  StringRight, size, p_type, 1
  loop, %size%
      value += *( ( p_address+p_offset )+( A_Index-1 ) ) << ( 8*( A_Index-1 ) )
  if ( size <= 4 and InStr( p_type, "u" ) != 1 and *( p_address+p_offset+( size-1 ) )
      value := -( ( ~value+1 ) & ( ( 2**( 8*size ) )-1 ) )
  SetFormat, Integer, %old_FormatInteger%
  return, value
}

EncodeInteger( p_value, p_size, p_address, p_offset )
{
  loop, %p_size%
    DllCall( "RtlFillMemory", "uint", p_address+p_offset+A_Index-1, "uint", 1, "uchar'
}
```

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

Find more AutoHotkey scripts at our [AutoHotkey Scripts page](#)!

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The new second edition with more chapters and an index to the AutoHotkey commands found in the book is available in e-book format from Amazon (and other formats—EPUB and PDF— at the ComputorEdgeBooks Web site linked below). 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](#)* offers a gentle approach to learning AutoHotkey.

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!](#)

[For a PDF version for printing on letter size paper for inclusion in a standard notebook of A Beginner's Guide to AutoHotkey click here!](#)

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Jack's latest AutoHotkey book which is comprised of updated, reorganized and indexed columns from *ComputorEdge* is now available at [Amazon for Kindle hardware](#) (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](#)*. However, if a person is reasonably computer literate, they could go directly to this book for ideas and techniques without the first book.
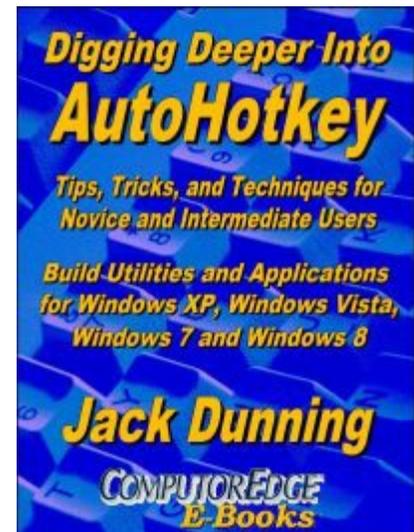
[For an EPUB (iPad, NOOK, etc.) version of Digging Deeper into AutoHotkey click here!](#)

[For a PDF version for printing on letter size paper for inclusion in a standard notebook of Digging Deeper into AutoHotkey click here!](#)

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:

[Hidden Windows Tools for Protecting, Problem Solving and Troubleshooting Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, and Windows XP Computers](#).

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](#)* and *[Digging Deeper Into AutoHotkey](#)*.

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:](#)*

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Sticking with Windows XP—or Not? Why You Should or Why You Should Not Upgrade to Windows 7,
and *That Does Not Compute!,* brilliantly drawn cartoons by Jim Whiting for really stupid gags by Jack about computers and the people who use them.

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Microsoft Office Alternatives" by Wally Wang

Microsoft Office Alternatives; Simulated Land Mines; Star Gazing; Programming Cockroaches; Moving On From Windows XP; Android Scam; Hiding a Program Window.

If you share documents with others, it's best to use the same software to avoid file format incompatibilities. That's why most companies have standardized around Microsoft Office. Yet even different versions of Microsoft Office risk file incompatibility problems with older versions of Microsoft Office. Generally, if you're a heavy spreadsheet user, Excel is considered the best spreadsheet around. If you share word processor documents regularly, Word offers collaboration features that most people already know how to use so it's easier just to use Word. Although Keynote is considered superior to PowerPoint, both are similar enough to use that there's little difference between using one or the other.

So the three main advantages of Microsoft Office are that most people know how to use it, file format compatibilities are minimized (but not completely eliminated among different versions of Microsoft Office), and that Excel, Word, and PowerPoint offer collaboration features that allow others to share files with minimal problems.

If you rely on Microsoft Office for work, your simplest solution is to get Microsoft Office for Windows, OS X, and the iPad. While Microsoft Office for the iPad is free, the free version only lets you view but not edit any documents. If you want to edit documents, you'll need to pay for an annual $100 subscription.

For anyone who heavily relies on Microsoft Office, that $100 annual fee may be worth it. For others who don't absolutely need Microsoft Office, paying $100 a year to use Microsoft Office on your iPad may be too much. If you want three free iPad alternatives to Microsoft Office, you can start with Apple's own iWork office suite, Google's QuickOffice, or Kingsoft Office.
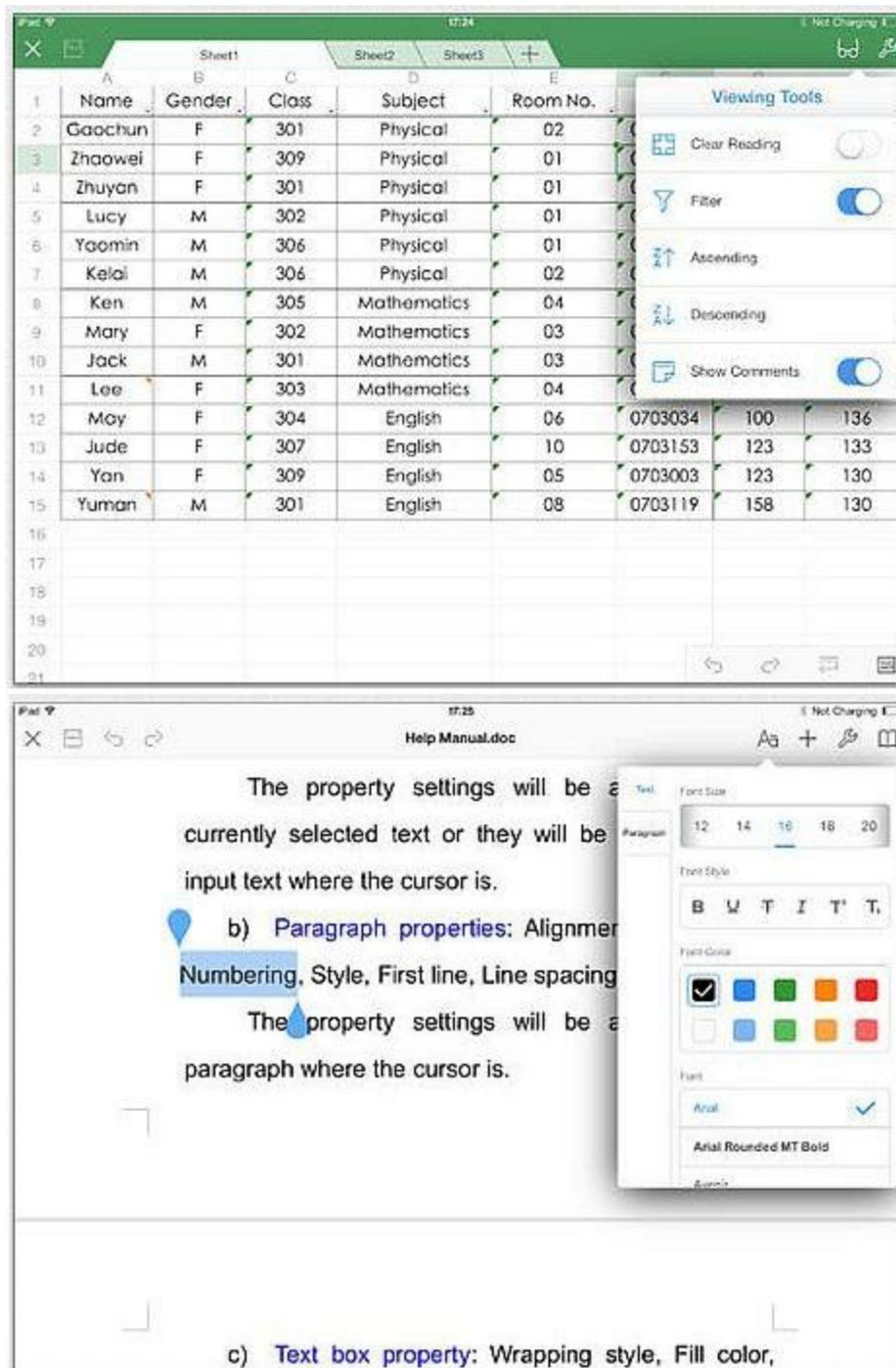
Figure 1. Kingsoft Office closely mimics Microsoft Office.

All three office suites offer a word processor, spreadsheet, and presentation program. Since they're all free, you might as well try them to see if they can meet your needs. Take your most complicated Word, Excel, and PowerPoint files and load them in iWork, QuickOffice, or Kingsoft Office on your iPad. Then see which apps retain the formatting of your most common files the best and see which office suite you like best. You might still prefer Microsoft Office since it retains the familiar tab interface used in the Windows version of Microsoft Office, but these three free alternatives give you a no-risk option to try something that might

be easier and less expensive to use.

For your Macintosh, you can use Apple's free iWork office suite, [OpenOffice](#), or [LibreOffice](#). If you use both a Macintosh and an iPad, you might prefer iWork since you can easily share and edit files on your Macintosh and iPad.

Microsoft Office may be a standard in the workplace, but for many people, free alternatives may be just as good. Of course, you'll never know for sure unless you're willing to try something other than Microsoft Office. Just remember that it's always easier to stick to what you already know and claim that familiarity equals superiority, which is why a handful of people still rely on WordStar for word processing and Lotus 1-2-3 for spreadsheets.

Simulated Land Mines

The best technology can be applied to multiple uses that even the original designers may never have foreseen. When Apple introduced the iPhone, the idea of smartphone apps had been around for years. What made the iPhone different was how they created the App Store as a curated source for finding ways to expand the functionality of your iPhone.

In comparison, Samsung introduced technology that allowed two Galaxy smartphones to share data by bumping one another. While interesting, this type of technology hasn't spawned any additional uses. On the other hand, Apple's iBeacon provides short-range tracking. Apple uses iBeacon in their own stores to advertise products while ball parks use iBeacon to help visitors navigate their way around the stadium.

For another unique use for iBeacon, you can visit the United Nations Mine Action Service, which created a [virtual minefield](#) in a New York museum. By downloading the [Sweeper app](#), you can walk around the museum exhibit that's been laced with virtual land mines. Each time you step on a virtual land mine, the Sweeper app tells you what type of mine you stepped on and what damage it would have caused such as blowing off your legs and leaving you bleeding to death on the ground.
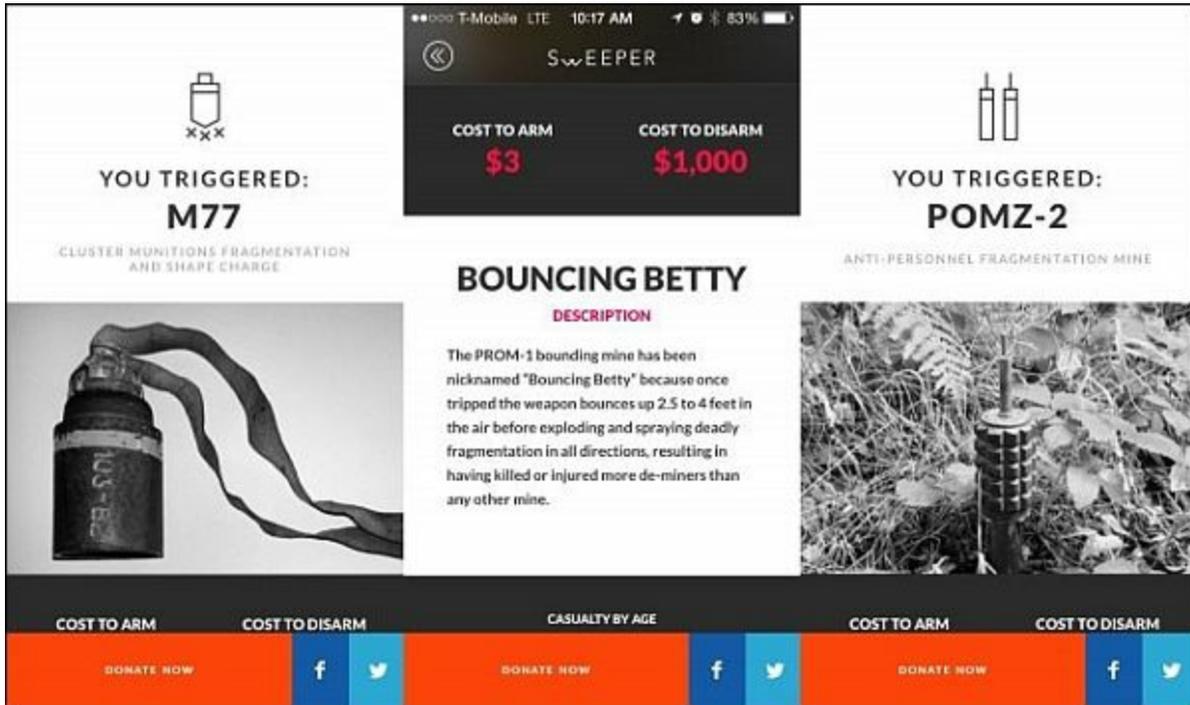
Figure 2. The Sweeper app lets you simulate walking through a virtual mine field.

By letting people actually experience the threat of walking through a mine field without the physical danger, the United Nations hopes to make people more aware of the dangers of land mines that kill ten people every day. Detecting and removing land mines is expensive and time-consuming, which means thousands of land mines around the world remain ready to kill innocent people at any moment.

Technology such as iBeacon makes virtual mine fields and ball park navigation aids possible. When you see so many people finding creative uses for iBeacon, that should tell you that with a little bit of imagination (which critics seem to lack), you might be able to find a creative use for iBeacon in your life too.

Star Gazing

In the old days, you had to point your telescope at the sky and hope you found something interesting to look at. For casual astronomers, star gazing was often too difficult. Even worse, if clouds obscured your view, you couldn't see anything anyway.
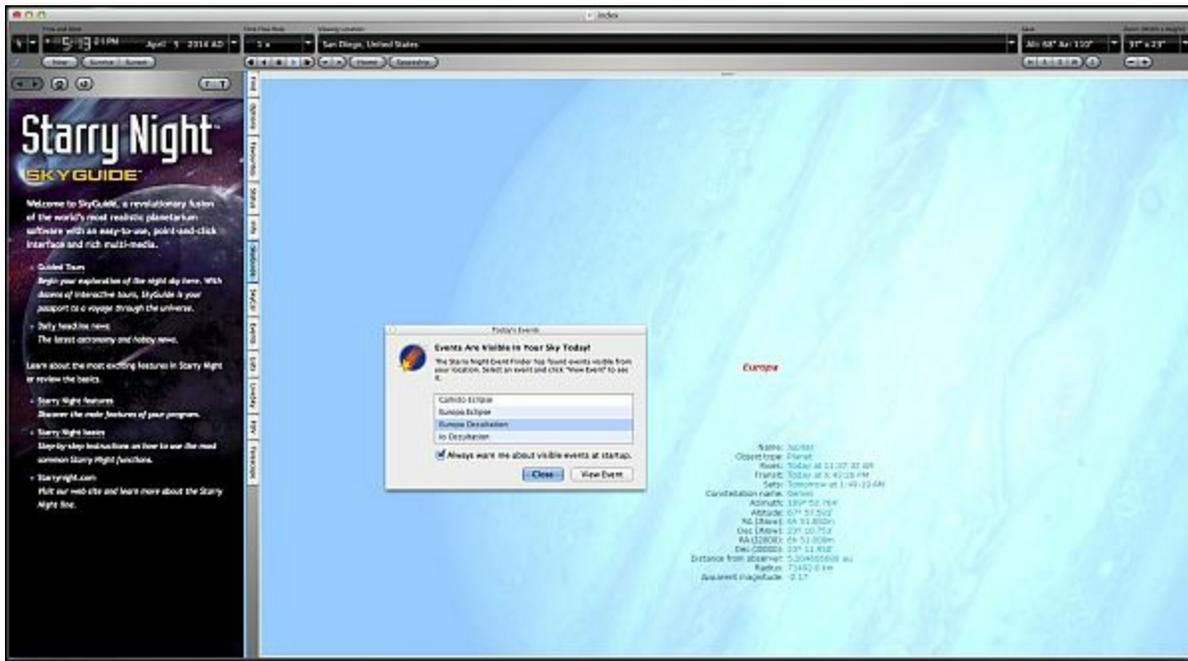
Figure 3. Starry Night Pro lets you view the sky without a telescope.

To avoid these problems, consider getting Starry Night Pro, an interesting program that that lets you view stars and planets based on your current location. Now even if you don't have a telescope, you can view the stars or planets overhead by manipulating the view in Starry Night Pro.

If you're curious to see what various space probes might have seen, you can use Starry Night Pro to view the path taken by a space probe. Now you can see what it's like to travel through the galaxy without actually floating in space to do it.
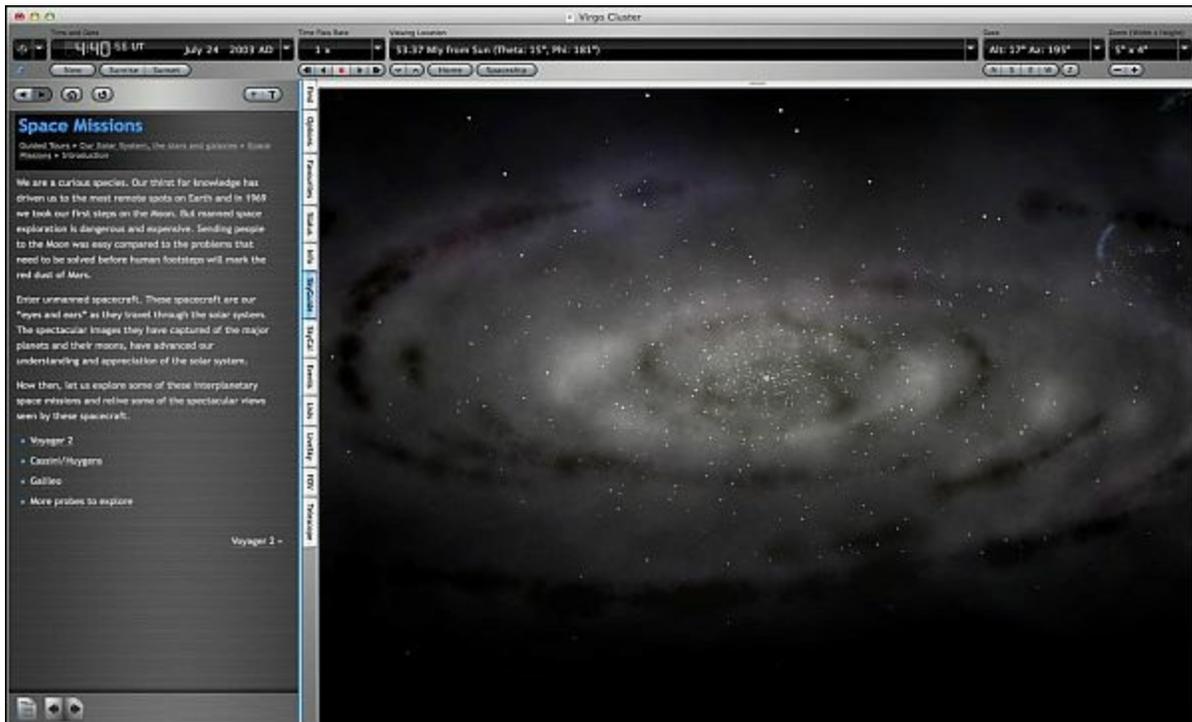
Figure 4. Starry Night Pro can let you explore the stars without flying there yourself.

For anyone interested in exploring space but can't afford a ticket to the International Space Station, consider buying Starry Night Pro instead and seeing the stars from the comfort of your computer. A program like Starry Night Pro can pique your interest in the mysteries of the universe each time you look up in the sky and see stars.

Programming Cockroaches

For people who find programming computers a bit too tame, visit [Backyard Brains](#) and learn to program the brain of a cockroach. Backyard Brains sells kits to teach anyone the basic principles of neuroscience. In the past, experimenting with neuroscience meant working in a university setting, but with Backyard Brains' kits, you can experiment with neuroscience at home.
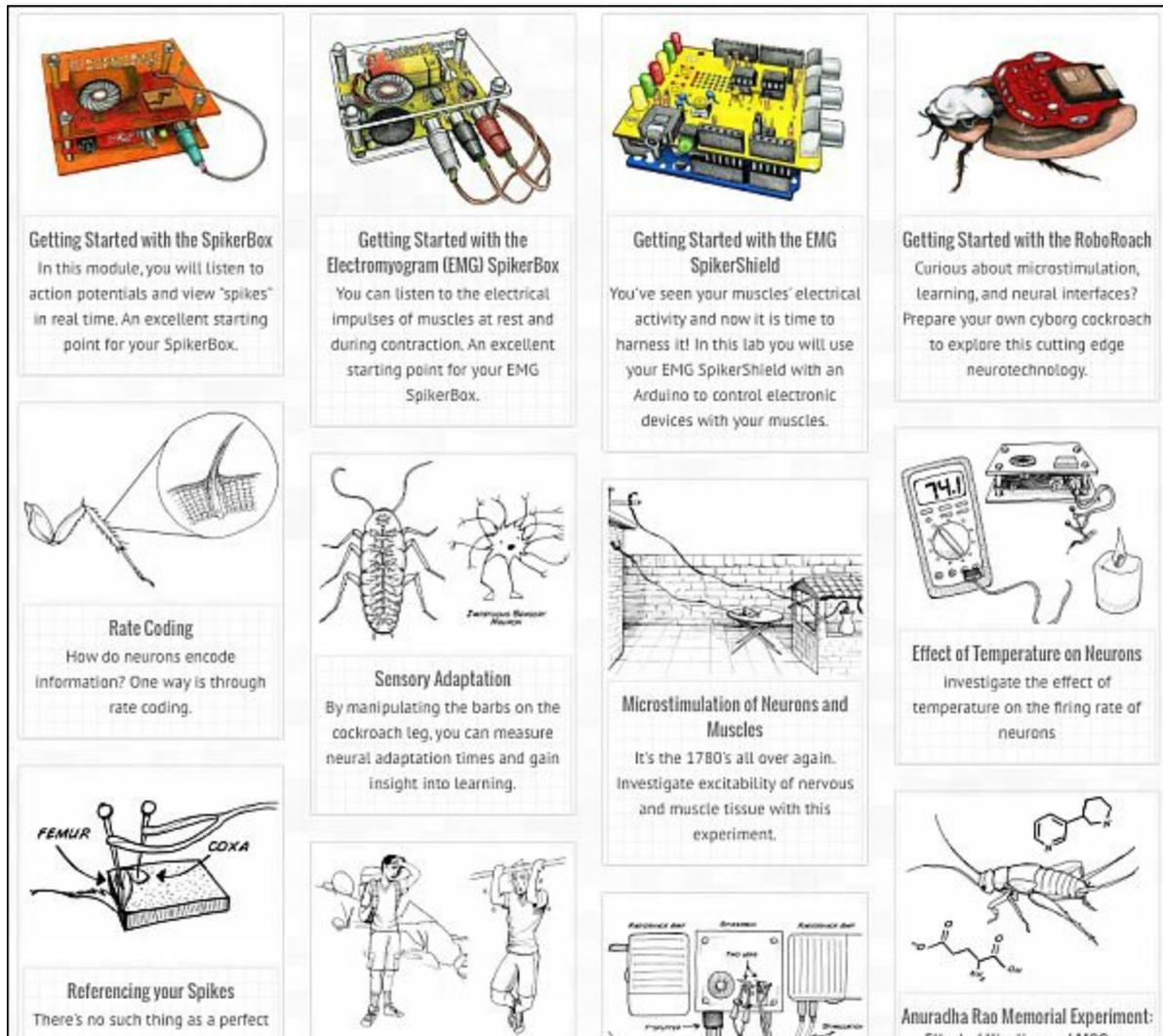
Figure 5. Backyard Brains provides kits to help you program a cockroach.

One of the more interesting neuroscience kits lets you control a cockroach. By wiring electrodes to a cockroach, you can control a cockroach's movements like controlling a remote control car. If you thought cockroaches have no purpose, then you can experiment on a cockroach's brain to see the basics of controlling animals electronically.

The military wants to control insects as spies that can slip inside secure buildings without being detected. Other researchers are wiring up cockroaches and rats so they can control them to hunt out victims trapped in collapsed buildings caused by earthquakes or other disasters. By exploring neuroscience at home, you can learn how this new field has both pros and cons.

Best of all, programming a cockroach brings a new meaning to having a bug in your program that you can flush down the toilet when you no longer need it any more.

Moving On From Windows XP

After thirteen years, Microsoft has finally stopped official support for Windows XP. If you're still using Windows XP, you have several options. First, you can still use Windows XP but just be aware that Microsoft will no longer provide security patches. If your Windows XP computer never connects to the Internet, then feel free to keep using Windows XP forever.

A second option is to get a new computer. Most Windows XP PCs probably aren't powerful enough to run Windows 7/8 so you'll be better off getting a new computer rather than upgrading your current PC. The problem with this solution is that it costs money and gives you basically the same features as your Windows XP computer but with fewer security risks. If you want to spend more money so you can keep doing exactly what you can do with Windows XP, this option will work but may seem pointless. After all, why pay more money to get the same capabilities you already have with Windows XP?

A third option is to wipe out Windows XP and install Linux on your existing PC. This will let you preserve your hardware but force you to learn to use Linux and get new programs that match your current Windows programs. For tech-savvy users, Linux is a free option. For everyone else, Linux will probably be too complicated and troublesome to use.

A fourth option is to keep Windows XP on your hard disk and create a virtual machine to run Linux. Then run Linux as a virtual machine using a free program like [VirtualBox](). By accessing the Internet only through your Linux virtual machine, you'll greatly reduce the risk of infecting Windows XP with malware.

A fifth option is to switch to a Macintosh. In the old days, people argued against switching to a Macintosh because they claimed learning the Macintosh user interface would be too difficult for Windows XP users. Nowadays they can use that same argument to claim that learning the Windows 8 user interface is too difficult for a Windows XP user while learning the Macintosh user interface would be much easier.

The drawback with a Macintosh is that it will cost money and will require time and more money to buy programs similar to what you already use on a Windows XP PC. While you can clone your current Windows XP PC to run as a virtual machine on a Macintosh, it's much cheaper to do that with Linux running on your existing Windows XP PC.

The main advantage of switching to a Macintosh is that it gives you the ability to run Windows as a virtual machine so you can gradually ease into using OS X. Then you can take advantage of OS X features and eventually switch from Windows to the Macintosh as your main computer.

Windows XP is now officially dead so there's no reason to hope Microsoft might suddenly change their mind. If you have the money, you might as well buy a new computer. If you don't have the money, then keep your Windows XP PC but switch to Linux. You can either install Linux and run Windows XP as a virtual machine, or run Linux as a virtual machine. In either case, only access the Internet through Linux for maximum security.

So many people still rely on Windows XP because Vista, Windows 7, and now Windows 8 have never offered a compelling reason to upgrade. When using Windows XP is just as productive as using Vista, Windows 7, or Windows 8 (and maybe more so), why bother upgrading to any version of Windows?

By relying on Linux, you'll always have free upgrades for the rest of your life and deal with far fewer risks of malware at the same time. The alternative is to keep spending money buying new operating system upgrades that give you no increase in productivity. Given a choice between spending money to get no gain in productivity and not spending money to get free operating system upgrades for life, it's hard to imagine why anyone would still insist that paying money to stay with Windows is the only choice you could make.

Android Scam

If you're using Android, beware of scams like an app called Virus Shield. At one time, the $3.99 Virus Shield became the number one selling app on Google's app store. The only problem with Virus Shield was that it didn't do anything.

Once you downloaded and ran Virus Shield, the app would claim it was protecting your Android device but all it did was display an all clear message. If any real viruses were infecting your Android device, Virus Shield would never know and neither would you. Paying $3.99 for a completely useless and deceptive app certainly doesn't create trust in Google's app store.

Perhaps the biggest problem with Android is that device makers have zero incentive to provide upgrades. Once a company sells you an Android device, any additional support will cost them money, so they have no incentive to support their devices ever again.

Most people don't care about the operating system running on their device. Yet choosing the wrong operating system can cause problems that you may not know about until it's too late. In the Windows world, many people fear learning a new operating system because they feel that learning Windows was so difficult, therefore learning any other operating system must be equally difficult to master.

Of course, these people never consider that learning other operating systems could actually be easier than learning Windows. In the same way, once someone starts using Android, they may assume that any other phone operating system will be just as chaotic so why bother switching to another headache?

When you see how assumptions can restrict your options, you can be more willing to investigate alternatives. If you never open your eyes to other options, you'll never know what you could be missing. Naturally that won't stop some people from insisting that their choice is the only valid one, even if they know absolutely nothing about other options at all.

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If you're working with multiple program windows, you can quickly hide the currently active program window by pressing Command+H. So if you have three windows open in Safari, pressing Command+H will hide all Safari windows.

Once you've hidden a program window, you can make them appear again by clicking on the program icon on the Dock.

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:

[Microsoft Office 2013 For Dummies](#)

[Beginning Programming for Dummies](#)

[Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies](#)

[Breaking Into Acting for Dummies with Larry Garrison](#)

[Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon and Gerald Fisher](#)

[How to Live with a Cat (When You Really Don't Want To)](#)

[The Secrets of the Wall Street Stock Traders](#)

[Mac Programming For Absolute Beginners](#)

[Republican Fairy Tales (Children's Stories the 1% Tell About the Rest of Us)](#)

[The Zen of Effortless Selling with Moe Abdou](#)

[The 15-Minute Movie Method](#)

[Erotophobia (A novel)](#)

[Math for the Zombie Apocalypse](#)

[How to Write a Great Script with Final Draft 9](#)

[How to Write a Great Script with Fade In](#)

In his spare time, Wally likes blogging about movies and writing screenplays at his site "[The 15](#)

Minute Movie Method," finding interesting news stories about cats at his site "Cat Daily News," giving advice to authors who want to self-publish e-books at his site "The Electronic Author," and providing the type of advice he wishes someone would have told him when he was much younger at his personal Web site. Wally can be reached at *wally@computoredge.com* or you can follow him on Twitter @wallacewang_com.

Worldwide News & Product Reviews

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

Afraid Your Date is Lying? There's an App for That; 3D Digitizing the Earliest Recorded Form of the Irish Language; Marshall Electronics M-CT6-AA Camera Top Monitor.

Afraid Your Date is Lying? There's an App for That

Ana Tackett, representing DirtSearch.org, writes in this week:

Each year, thousands of American's are the victims of petty crimes committed by people they thought were legitimate; from babysitters to housemaids, to workout partners and online dates, new people can be dangerous. In addition, a worsening economy has seen people doing things they probably would never have done before. The DirtSearch app is a new tool for people to be vigilant about those whose sense of right and wrong may have been compromised.

DirtSearch has launched a free app (ad-supported) available on iOS and Android platforms. Unlike similar apps that allow for limited free searches and require payments for results, the DirtSearch app allows users to conduct unlimited free searches of individuals throughout the United States and hold a history of their searches on their phones. The DirtSearch app accesses thousands of public records delivering instant results. Users simply enter first name, last name and choose a state from a drop down menu. A second feature includes the ability to do deep searches by simply selecting a box under the above-referenced fields. The deep search option is the difference between pulling the data that is cached in the DirtSearch.org database versus going out to the world and checking all the data in all of the sources in real-time. Results include criminal records, sex offenders, property ownership, social media profiles and more.

‹ ☰ Home
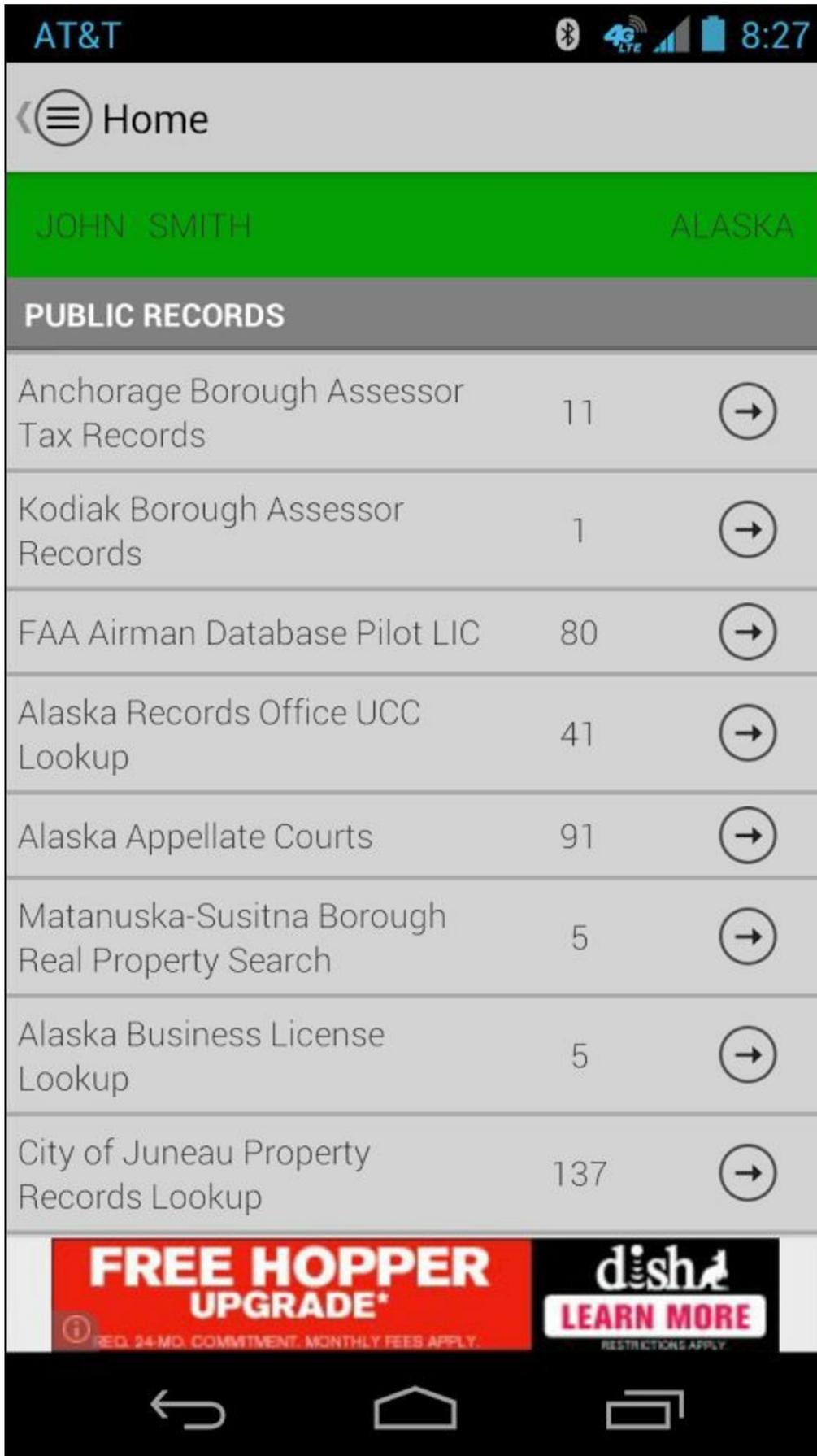
First Name

John

Last Name

Smith

State

Alaska ▲

☐ Perform Deep Search

Search

DirtSearch conducts 130,000 searches a month and has grown by 10 percent every quarter since its inception six years ago. Launching the new app is in line with the company's growth strategy for 2014 and it expects the amount of searches on its platforms to double by 2015.

The app developer Erik Knight, creator of DirtSearch.org, saw the importance of access to information and created the Web site to present an easy to use platform that allows one to search online public records to find out how "dirty" friends, family or others are. While searching for results, DirtSearch also calculates a "dirty score," counting the number of times an individual's name pops up in a search.

AT&T   8:27

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JOHN SMITH   ALASKA

PUBLIC RECORDS

Anchorage Borough Assessor Tax Records	11	→
Kodiak Borough Assessor Records	1	→
FAA Airman Database Pilot LIC	80	→
Alaska Records Office UCC Lookup	41	→
Alaska Appellate Courts	91	→
Matanuska-Susitna Borough Real Property Search	5	→
Alaska Business License Lookup	5	→
City of Juneau Property Records Lookup	137	→

"In today's world, it is more important than ever to do your research, know the people around you and ensure that your friends, colleagues and the people you surround yourself with are trustworthy," said Knight. According to the latest identity theft victim statistics, approximately 15 million U.S. residents have their identities used fraudulently each year with a financial loss totaling upwards of $50 billion. Fraudsters can steal an identity by obtaining different pieces of information about a person and putting them together like a jigsaw puzzle, including information such as a person's zip code, maiden name or date of birth. So while DirtSearch is valuable in identifying dirty people, it can also reveal a person's vulnerability online. By searching one's own name, those vulnerable sources can be identified fast and action can be deployed.

DirtSearch looks up information by state and searches thousands sites. Results include criminal records, sex offenders, property ownership and more. "Many big companies have had security breaches, eroding consumer confidence. That coupled with the fact that there might be erroneous information about you floating around the Internet are good reasons to do a background search," said Knight.

3D Digitizing the Earliest Recorded Form of the Irish Language

John Reed writes about the efforts of manufacturer and developer of professional 3D hardware and software Artec to capture the earliest recorded form of the Irish language dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries:

Dotted around the rugged landscape of Western Ireland and the Irish Sea are individual stones standing three or more feet out of the ground marked with symbols, mini-memorials that tell the stories of prominent people and tribes in the first language of the Irish more than 1,500 years ago.

Ogham stones are among Ireland's most remarkable national treasures. These perpendicular-cut stones bear inscriptions in the unique Irish Ogham alphabet, use a system of notches and horizontal or diagonal lines/scores to represent the sounds of an early form of the Irish language. The stones are inscribed with the names of prominent people and sometimes tribal affiliation or geographical areas. These inscriptions constitute the earliest recorded form of the Irish language and, as the earliest written records dating back at least as far as the 5th century AD, are a significant resource for historians, as well as linguists and archaeologists.

Recently, many of the stones, in the ground in their many locations, were individually scanned for the sake of research and language preservation using an Artec, Eva hand-held scanner. Climbing mountains and walking through valleys, researchers carried their scanning equipment to advance the study of the Irish language; a heritage project supported by The Discovery Programme and the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

According to Wikipedia: "There are roughly 400 known Ogham inscriptions on stone monuments scattered around the Irish Sea, the bulk of them dating to the 5th and 6th centuries. Their language is predominantly Primitive Irish, but a few examples record fragments of the Pictish language. Ogham itself is an Early Medieval form of alphabet or cypher, sometimes known as the Celtic Tree Alphabet."

Over the centuries the stones continue to weather, slowly losing their inscriptions as the elements erode the carved language and symbols. Preserving these remnants of an ancient language—and capturing the physical depth of the writing and the shape of each stone—was a perfect application for advanced, portable, hand-held 3D scanning.

Scanning the stones The stones vary in size, with an average height of approximately 1.5m. They are often located in remote and exposed parts of Ireland which adds to the challenge of getting to them and recording their inscriptions and physical shapes in a high resolution. A small forensics tent enclosed each stone, creating a mini, controlled lighting environment and to ensure measurements could proceed whatever the weather. To ensure sufficient power for the scanner and a laptop, a portable generator was often used. Most sites are rugged and remote and a long way from a source of electricity.

Scan settings/Resolution Technically, the scanning was undertaken with the fastest speed setting and with a minimum of 400 mm depth of field. The data from the Artec Eva scanner was recorded with sufficient overlap between scans to ensure easy registration.

Stone Models & Outputs Post-processing was done in Artec Studio 9 software. Individual scans were edited and aligned before the final surface was generated using global registration, fusion, and a small objects filter algorithm. If required, a textured surface could also be created. To complete the project the model was exported from Artec Studio 9 as an .obj file. For the purposes of information sharing and dissemination a 3D pdf of the model is generated (using Geomagic Studio 2012) and is available to download from the project website.

3D Scanning Results 3D scanning was deemed the best method for this recording because, after 15 centuries the Ogham inscriptions have become quite subtle due to weathering. 3D data also allows for the removal of color data which could perhaps reveal inscriptions which were previously unknown or hard to decipher. The geometry of the stone is likewise important and the data will allow desktop users to take measurements of the stones while they pursue their research into the first, ancient language of the people of Ireland.

More info at www.artec3d.com

Marshall Electronics M-CT6-AA Camera Top Monitor

Product category: Camera top monitor
Manufacturer: Marshall Electronics
Model: M-CT6-AA
Web site: www.marshallmonitors.com
Price: $328 list, about $275 street

Marshall Electronics recently sent us their M-CT6-AA 6.2" 800 x 480 LCD camera top monitor and it's a pretty neat little device.

In most cases, you would want to mount the unit directly on the standard accessory shoe found on top of almost every DSLR or HD video camera in existence (where a flash unit is most often seen) and that's what we did. The M-CT6-AA can be powered with an external power supply or six AA batteries. It also comes with a Canon LP-E6 style battery adapter, so you may be able to power it with many existing DSLR batteries.

For testing, we plugged our unit into the mini-HDMI output jack of a Canon T4i DSLR with excellent results, but you can also connect a computer, projector, etc. using the monitor's VGA 15-pin jack input (see pic) or either of two composite inputs. There's also an audio input, a 3.5 mm stereo headphone jack, a rear speaker, an auto aspect ratio detect, zoom control, image flip/flop, color adjustment, and a battery conservation switch.

So, why, if your camera already has an LCD display—as most cameras and video cams do nowadays—would you want an external unit like the M-CT6-AA?

For one, it's much easier to focus with a bigger image. DSLRs are infamous for having autofocus issues. There's nothing more frustrating than getting back to your video editing suite and realizing a shot is just slightly off.

Also, if you connect the monitor by a cord rather than mounted in the shoe, you can put the camera in otherwise impossible to reach places and watch what you're shooting in relative safety.

And, of course, there's the cool factor. Setting up your rig with a monitor looks extremely awesome and has the added option of making it manifestly clear to even the most casual observer that you're shooting video, not stills (although you can use the monitor for shooting stills as well).

So, what's better than a monitor like the M-CT6-AA? Maybe a dedicated tablet like a Google Nexus 7 tablet which gives you a monitor and full touch control of almost every function your

DSLR offers. But, if you're happy controlling the action from the camera itself, you won't be disappointed with the quality and features offered by the Marshall M-CT6-AA.

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Multiple award-winning author Charles Carr has written more than two thousand newspaper articles, magazine stories, and columns for many publications including the San Diego Union Tribune, The Californian, The North County Times, Parent Magazine, ComputerScene, and ComputorEdge Magazine where he has been an editor for more than two decades. He is also a television producer/director with shows both currently airing and in production on Cox Cable and elsewhere.

In the 1990s, Charles wrote 3DHouse, a complete inside-and-out virtual reality tour of his family's log home in Southern California. One of the first virtual reality programs ever created, 3DHouse enjoyed tens of thousands of shareware downloads on all major portals. He also sold the rights to Radio Shack and Egghead Software. 3DHouse has since been featured in many books and articles about VR.

Carr has also been commissioned to write and/or directed many of his own stage plays. Several years ago, Carr and others looking for ways to help organizations struggling in difficult economic times, founded Art Animates Life (*www.artanimateslife.org*).

To date, Art Animates Life, a CA incorporated, federal non-profit, has raised tens-of-thousands of dollars for San Diego area disaster relief, an arts non-profit and municipal gallery, a community outreach center, and several struggling community theaters.

Several years ago Carr was commissioned to adapt and direct the beloved Dickens classic, A Christmas Carol. The play, titled "Mr. Scrooge & Mr. Dickens," has sold out So Cal theaters for the past several years. Six shows will take place Dec. 2013 to benefit the San Marcos Historical Society.

Another original play, "All the Time in the World," has been performed many times and garnered broad acclaim from audiences and critics alike. Carr is working on a brand new adaptation of the classic Hitchcock thriller, "The Lady Vanished," to be performed spring 2014.

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

Carr is also a noted producer, director, and videographer. Several of his documentaries can currently be seen on So Cal's Cox Cable. Since its inception he has produced the Fallbrook International Film Festival's red carpet event and panel discussions.

Charles receives dozens of requests each year to appear on Southern California television and radio stations to talk about important tech events. He also speaks from time-to-time to high schools and organizations about his eclectic life in the arts.

Learn more at *www.charlescarr.com*.

Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"Chrome Remote Desktop, Google Owning the World," "ATT/Yahoo Address Book Missing Names," "Office/Suite Compatibility/LibreOffice," "Synchronizing Files"

This Week: Rich Ernst's Tips and Tricks

Yes, this week letters include a volume of thoughts from Rich. We certainly appreciate his knowledge and insight.

Chrome Remote Desktop, Google Owning the World

[Regarding Jack Dunning's March 21 article, "Chrome Remote Desktop for Sharing and Connecting from Anywhere":]

While I was an early adopter of Gmail and heartily endorsed its motto "do no harm" or something like that, lately, I've come to fear them, vs. LogMeIn, etc. *Too* much of their terms of service gives them rights I'm not willing to give away. That's why I don't use Chrome as a regular browser, I still use Firefox. But I load Chrome and Opera on my system so I have alternatives, using Opera for a secondary Google account since their required Google+ connection for YouTube comments.

Since I used to use LogMeIn free for helping my friends with their computers, but now no longer available for free, I've moved to TeamViewer. No connection to Google and my (paranoia?) about their collecting even more data about me than before, and works very similarly to Chrome's remote desktop. Yup, software to install, but don't need Chrome or a Google (and therefore horrible Google+) account to use, and it's free as well. Works great.

-Rich Ernst, San Diego

ATT/Yahoo Address Book Missing Names

[Regarding the March 21 Digital Dave column:]

First, with XP's support going away in < 2 weeks, I'd say you've gotten your money's worth out of this 10 year old computer and look into a replacement. *Or*, make and boot up a small Linux version like Puppy Linux.

OK, now for help. You don't say if you're just using Yahoo's Web site to access your e-mail or if a separate e-mail program like Outlook/Express, Thunderbird, etc. If separate program, try restoring your *pst* file from backup. You can open it via OE, don't just replace or you'll lose e-mail you've received since then.

If you're using the Yahoo Web site, it's much more likely that your Yahoo account was hacked and someone messed up your contacts. This is fairly common for Yahoo and Hotmail accounts. If this is the case, *immediately* change your password for your e-mail/Yahoo. If you use the same password (bad, bad, bad) for anything else, also change those passwords as well. Unfortunately, you're now out of luck for recovering your contacts in this case. Sorry.

-Rich Ernst, San Diego

Office/Suite Compatibility/LibreOffice

[Regarding the March 21 Digital Dave column:]

I'm not sure what problems you've been having with LibreOffice, but coming from MS Office 2003, it's a very simple switch. And unless you or your clients are using complex Word or Excel documents, they *are* compatible, you can open and save LibreOffice documents in .doc or .xls formats quite easily.

I'm not sure why you're using the portable version on standard computers, however. Portable apps are designed to carry with you, on a thumb drive, so you can run them on any(one's) computer, not just your own. Perhaps that's the part that's cumbersome? Or is it the old standard pull down menus, like Office 2003 and earlier had?

Or, go with your plan of the 2010 version of MS Office that includes license to up to three computers if the above doesn't work out. I *do* recommend 2010 over 2013 as well, regardless of the "touch" parts.

While Win8 is designed to be usable via touch, and I don't like the removal of traditional XP/Vista/W7 start button and arrangement, with a few pointers, Win8 works just the same, skipping all the touch and tileworld interface stuff. And it has quite a few improvements over W7, including the power handling when the system goes to sleep. I'm avoiding 8.1 until MS

requires it to get further patches, however, too many things under the hood, some options actually removed, with it. And, if still unhappy with 8, there are tons of free or very low cost programs to make it work like 7 again.

Oh, I hope you have regular, reliable backups, including version history, as using RAID 0 to combine more than one drive into a single drive letter makes the system more likely for failure as, if either drive fails, you lose all the data. Personally, with drives very cheap these days, I prefer the same SSD idea for boot/OS, but mirror (RAID 1) a couple of drives, 2TB in my case. If either fails (and one just did, under 5 year warranty), no problem, keep working, replace drive and you're back in business and protected.

When you said you have a netbook and it's connected to a NAS as a server (why?), what do you use the server *for*, backups? Or are/were you trying to use the portable LibreOffice via that? If the latter, just install LibreOffice on each machine instead. Sharing software via other computers/servers is a headache unless the software is specifically designed to run from a server.

Or, are they two different things (NAS would generally *not* be directly connected to a computer, it has one built in), netbook, and NAS?

Hope all this helps.

-Rich Ernst, San Diego

Synchronizing Files

[Regarding the March 21 [Digital Dave column](#):]

Forgot to mention, if you want to sync files to your computers, but not use the Cloud for storage, I've been using the [BitTorrent sync utility](#) and it works *great*! It's supposedly still in beta testing, but I've been using it for over a year now and nary an issue.

You install it on each computer and you specify a folder or folders for syncing. You give it or it generates a key that you have to enter on the other computer when you want it synced. That's it. All automagical. When on local LAN, it goes straight from computer to computer. But if elsewhere and connected to the Internet, it works over the Internet. *No* cloud storage.

However, I will echo Dave's comments that Dropbox, and similar are excellent uses for Cloud storage of non-personal (passwords, etc.) files. It just works. I use Google Drive, but, again, for only items I wouldn't care if they were published all over the world.

LogMeIn's Cubby is very slick as you don't have to have a special Dropbox folder and subfolders, as you can make any specific folder you already have, stored in their cloud as well as locally to any computer with Cubby installed. Free for some size now, but with their abrupt

discontinuation of LogMeIn free with *no* advance notice (ok, maybe 24 hours), I'm wary of using their products in the future.

-Rich Ernst, San Diego

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