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"Free Software I Actually Use!"

July 25, 2014

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"Free Software I Actually Use"

There's a ton of free software available, but very little that Jack uses regularly. These are his most used packages.

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by Digital Dave

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Digital Dave

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

Firefox Updates Loses Auto Login on Update; OpenOffice Versus LibreOffice?; Windows 8.1 Drive Backup Error.

Firefox Updates Loses Auto Login on Update

Dear Digital Dave,

I have a question about the Firefox browser update which we all get every month or so. After an update downloads most or all of my sites that require a password, etc. need to be reloaded again. The site states you're using a different computer. Is there anyway around this or should I not update every new revision?

Thanks,
Tom Waleska
San Diego, CA

Dear Tom,

As long as you're not resetting Firefox each time you do an update, you should not lose all of your settings. It sounds like the Web sites are not able to recognize your computer due to a missing or deleted Cookie.

There are a couple of ways that Firefox tracks Web site data. The first is through the use of Cookies for individual sites. Check your Cookie settings through Tools => Options => Privacy Tab. Be sure that you're set up to accept cookies. You can even view the Firefox Cookies by clicking the "Show Cookies…" button. If you have "Clear history when Firefox closes" enabled, make sure it doesn't delete Active Logins, Browsing and Download History, Cookies, Search and Form History, and Saved Passwords.

Firefox will also save your password if properly configured. Open Tools => Options => Security Tab. Remember Passwords should be Enabled. You can check your list of "Saved Passwords…"

If all of your settings look right, then I'm not sure why you're losing the auto login data. The

update process should not cause this problem. Maybe others who have experienced the problem can point us in the right direction.

Digital Dave

OpenOffice Versus LibreOffice?

Dear Digital Dave,

I know that OpenOffice and LibreOffice both come from the same original source and work in pretty much the same manner, but there has to be some difference. Which is better?
James

Dear James,

Both OpenOffice and LibreOffice are suites of free software programs which include word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, graphics, and database packages. You're right that they come from the same root and operate in a very similar manner. They are the free alternatives to Microsoft Office.

While on the surface they look very similar, under the hood there could much more variance. Since they split apart a few years ago, the two have not received an equal amount of support. OpenOffice which is now under the Apache umbrella, has a smaller group supporting it (maybe 20 people) while I've heard that LibreOffice support consists of over 300 people. This can make for better support for LibreOffice year over year.

The number one complaint about using either of these free office suites has been formatting issues when moving files between Microsoft Office and the ODT format used by OpenOffice and LibreOffice. But the most significant difference is LibreOffice reads and writes the most recent Microsoft DOCX format, whereas the current version of OpenOffice does not support DOCX. Momentum seems to be on the side of LibreOffice, although I would like to hear from other users.

Digital Dave

Windows 8.1 Drive Backup Error

Dear Digital Dave,

When I attempt to create a system image backup using Windows 8.1 from my C: drive to my external hard drive, I get an error message: "system image backup failed—not enough disk

space to create volume shadow copy on the storage." The message then states that 50MB minimum free space is required. My external hard drive has 204GB free and backs up correctly when I use it on another laptop using WIN 7.1. Please suggest some solutions, thanks!
Mike
Cardiff, CA

Dear Mike,

A system image is something that's nice to have for restoring a system to a particular configuration, but since it is an exact copy of your system, it can take a great deal of space on a hard drive. While there is a certain minimum space required to even start the process, how much is actually needed is dependent upon the ultimate size of the system's image. System images are useful in emergencies, but they are not practical for regular backup. In Windows 8.1, routine backup should be done through File History which will incrementally backup your personal files and make versions easy to restore.

There are quite a few people who have run into the same problem as you for creating a system image. It took some searching to find someone who had an answer that worked for them. Check out "Fix the 0x80780119 error when creating a System Image in Windows 7 and 8." It seems that it is important to follow all of the steps in this article. People who skipped a few did not have success.

I have not done this myself, so I can't guarantee this article will resolve your problem.

Digital Dave

Free Software I Actually Use

"What Free Software Do You Use Everyday?" by Jack Dunning

There's a ton of free software available, but very little that Jack uses regularly. These are his most used packages.

The world is drowning in free software. There are so many programs that you can pick up at no cost, you'd wonder if anyone buys software anymore. The truth is that in spite of the massive number of applications available, people only use a few favorites—whether paid or not. That's why I have to laugh when people tout that the iTunes store (or any other software delivery platform) has 1.2 million apps. It makes no difference how many apps are available if they are not the ones you want.

If I find a truly useful program, I hang onto it. In the beginning I may load a newly recommended application, but the real test is whether I continue using it in the long term. There are many programs that I've taken for a test drive, but most fall into disuse.

I've used Windows 8.1 for a couple of months now on my new laptop. I've slowly converted everything over from my old laptop making the new one my workhorse. I still have the old laptop in the network just in case I need to access it. (One of the great things about Google's Chrome Remote Desktop (free) is that it can access any computer (Windows, Mac, Linux) including the Home Premium version of Windows—which cannot be accessed with Microsoft's own Remote Desktop software).

One interesting note is that since I've started using Windows 8.1 on a regular basis, I don't use the Modern user interface or any of its installed apps at all. It's wasted on me. It may be useful

to many other people, but I find that in my work I have no reason to access the tablet-like interface. The closest I come is when I need to do a search (⊞+Q and the sidebar with the Everywhere field pops up).

Other than the low value Modern UI, I like Windows 8.1. It's fast and all of my programs run well on the Windows Desktop. I use my QuickLinks AutoHotkey app (also free to anyone who wants it, see Figure 1) to replace the missing Windows 8 Start Menu. Even when I eventually upgrade to Windows 9 next year and the Start Menu returns (supposedly), I will continue to use QuickLinks as I do now on all my Windows computers.
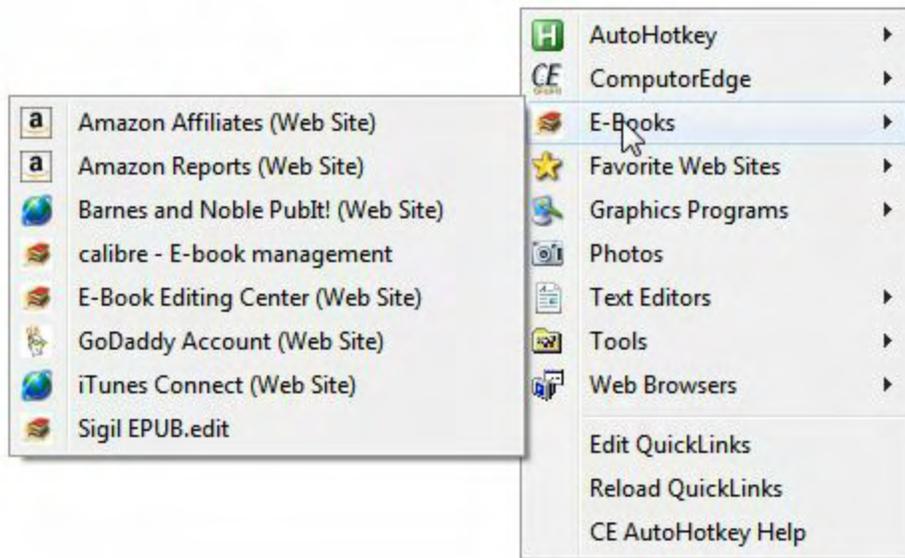

Figure 1. Jack's AutoHotkey QuickLinks app for favorite Web sites and programs in a pop-up menu.

I've installed all of the following free programs on my Windows 8.1 laptop because they are part of my regular routine. Many of these applications have been improved since I first wrote about them (and quite a few more) in *Jack's Favorite Free Windows Programs*. The only one missing from the book is AutoHotkey which is now my number one favorite free software. However, AutoHotkey is more like a complete toolbox full of all types of tools (hammers, screwdrivers, saws, etc.) for various uses, while these other programs are individual power tools (drill presses, chain saws, lathes, etc.) for specific types of work. AutoHotkey will never replace these software packages, but it can certainly enhance them with added features. (The e-book *Jack's Favorite Free Windows Programs* is available *free* at ComputorEdge E-Books in both EPUB format for computers and tablets and MOBI format for Amazon Kindle.)

IrfanView Graphics Viewer

What's notable about my most used free programs is that they either appear pinned to the Windows Taskbar or I've added them to QuickLinks. One that I must put near the top of the list of best free programs is the IrfanView graphics viewer (see Figure 2). I use IrfanView on a regular basis and have it pinned to my Taskbar. While I do use other graphics programs, this one is the best for manipulating images. Every week I need to capture, crop and resize images for *ComputorEdge*. I have found nothing easier or quicker than IrfanView. It has even replaced Windows Snipping Tool for screen capture because it has so many more options and is much easier to use.

Figure 2. IrfanView is the number one free graphics manipulation tool for features and ease of use.

I can understand how IrfanView may not be at the top of everyone's list. Most people don't need to work with images nearly as much as I do. This is why most lists of best free software will vary from person to person.

Windows Paint

I'm forced to admit that I use Windows Paint (free with Windows) on a regular basis (see Figure 3). It's not the most capable graphics editing program and I wouldn't use it to create more professional looking artwork such as book covers, but it's great for adding text labels to images and other quick notes.
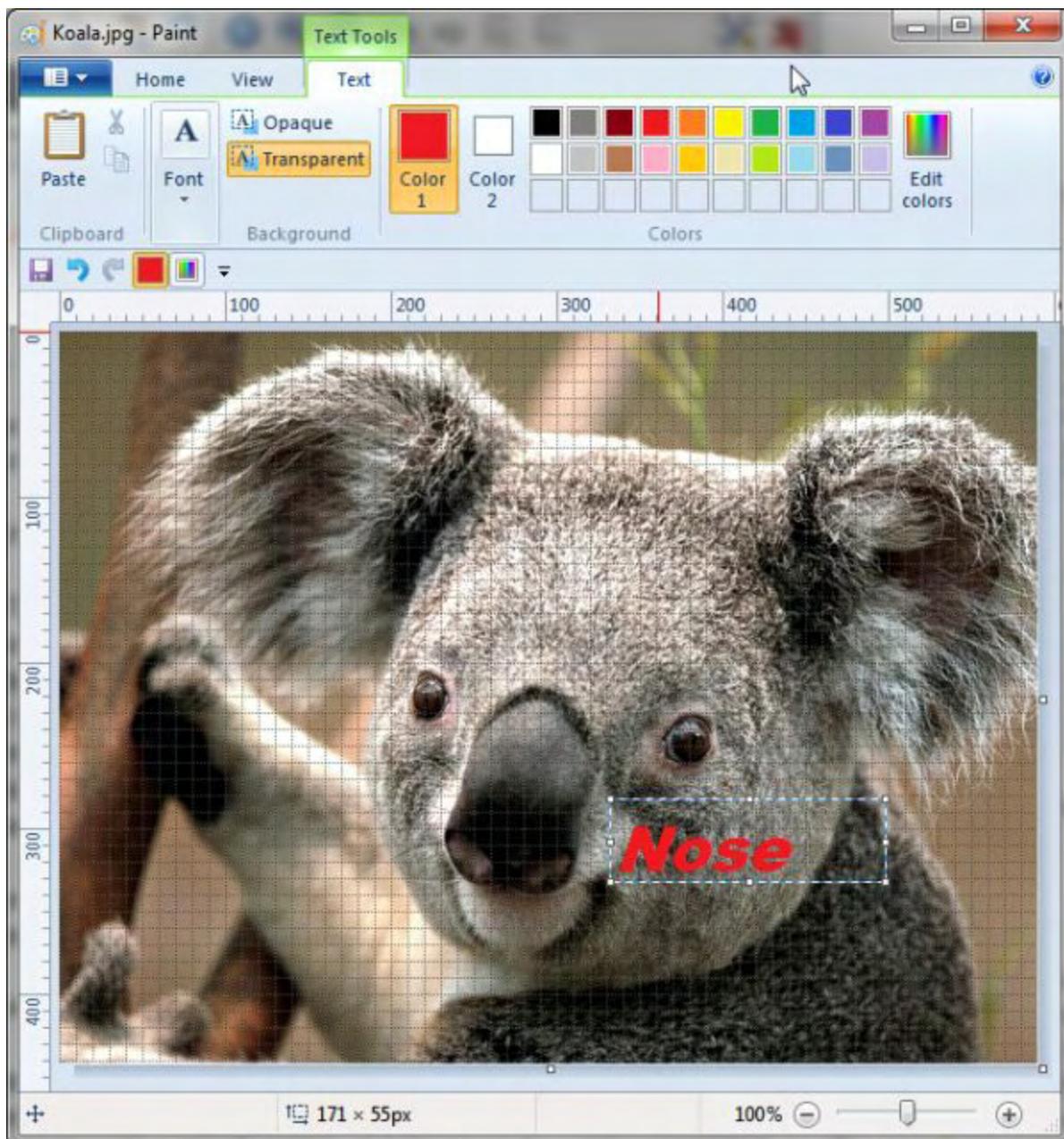
Figure 3. Windows Paint is great for quick jobs such as adding text labels or notes.

For processing photos before sending them off to Costco for printing, I use the editing feature in Windows Photo Gallery. It has all the basics for the amateur touchup, such as, red eye removal, color and exposure adjustment, and the latest version even has a retouch mode for removing blemishes. (Try removing someone's nose with retouch. It makes them look like Lord Voldemort from Harry Potter.)

For other more complex work such as book and magazine covers, I need more than either IrfanView or Windows Paint can offer.

Paint.Net for More Power

I've tried other free graphic programs such as GIMP, but Paint.Net was the easiest to learn and use for the available power and features (see Figure 4). I use it for creating covers for *ComputorEdge* and the e-books.
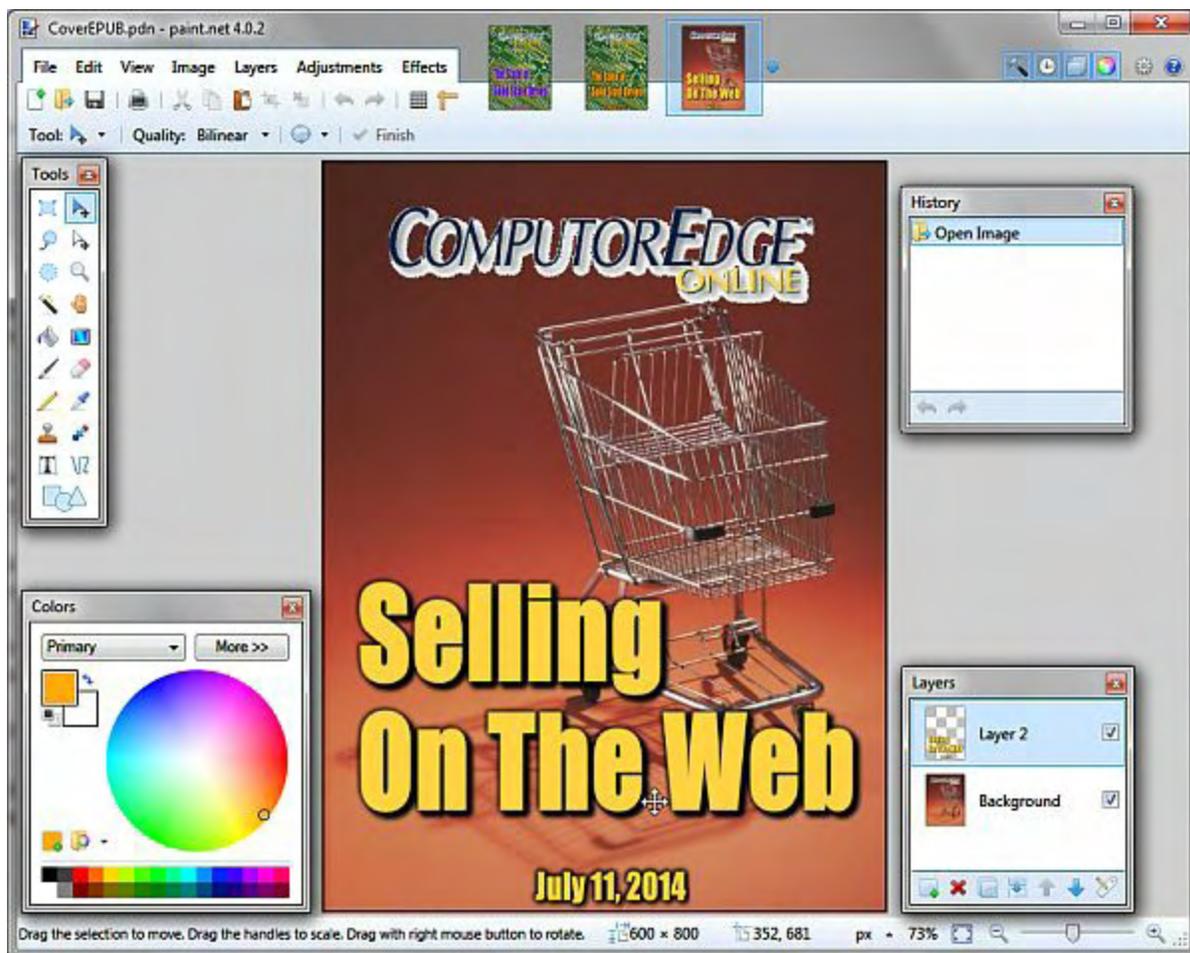

Figure 4. Paint.Net is one of the simpler free graphics layout and editing programs available. It can give a professional look to any artwork.

I will generally use IrfanView and Paint to preprocess images used in the covers, but when putting it all together I use Paint.Net. One of its best features is the use of layers for placing images and text on top of each other.

OpenOffice/LibreOffice

I do most of my writing directly on the Web in the software I wrote for *ComputorEdge* and the e-books. You could say that I was doing Cloud computing before I knew it was Cloud computing. All the programs run on a Web server and are accessible by anyone with the proper credentials and passwords. That means the apps are available through most browsers, but I find they work best in Google Chrome. Over the years I've noticed that Google has added pretty good spelling and grammar checking to the text editing boxes in Chrome. (I need all the help I can get.)

I could do my writing in the word processing package from [Apache OpenOffice](#) or [LibreOffice](#) (I have both), then cut and paste into the Web, but I find it easier to just write (and format) directly on the Web page. It's a simple process with very little formatting needed. For this reason, I rarely use the word processing in OpenOffice/LibreOffice. However, if I need to write a letter or quickly produce a document for printing, I do use one of these programs.

For example, I wanted to quickly print some pictures to enclose with a birthday card. I used OpenOffice Writer to insert some images and add captions (see Figure 5). I could have done this with other programs such as Paint.Net or even Windows Paint, but this was quick and easy to do while being oriented toward the printed page.
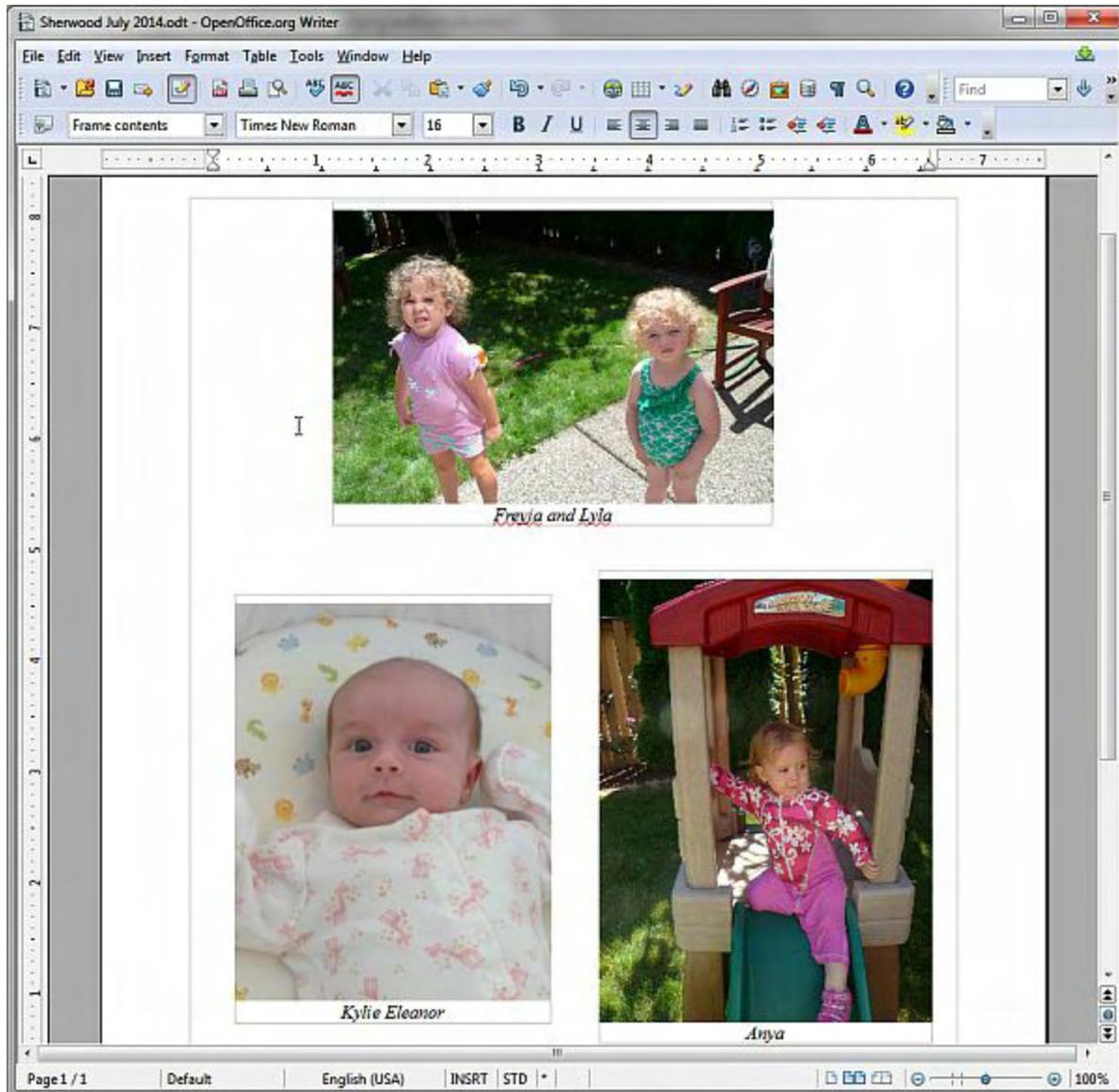
Figure 5. While any amount of writing can be done in OpenOffice Writer, the fact that it is text and printed page oriented makes it particularly useful for short quick jobs.

Both OpenOffice and LibreOffice include word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, graphics, and database software. I regularly use the spreadsheet package (Calc), but have had little reason to use the other programs. But, if you're looking for a free replacement for Microsoft Office (which won't overhaul the user interface every other year), then you may want to consider either (or both) of these packages. (OpenOffice and LibreOffice have grown from the same roots, although there may be a little divergence in the last few years. Yet, they use the same file formats and should be 99% compatible. For more information about the how the packages work see Getting Started with OpenOffice (LibreOffice).)

(I just noticed that Digital Dave is giving the edge to LibreOffice in his column this week.)

Notepad++ for Programming

I use Windows Notepad a lot. It's quick and easy when all I want is a text editor. I don't need to worry about formatting because, other than turning wordwrap on and off, there's none. Most of my short AutoHotkey scripts are written with Notepad. If I want a white background for a screen capture, I open Notepad and maximize the window. Notepad is the hammer and nail of text editing.

But if I'm doing more complex programming, such as that for the Web site and/or the e-book publishing program, then I turn to the free Notepad++ (see Figure 6). I can align program modules side-by-side moving code back and forth. I can open a number of snippet tabs simultaneously in the same window.
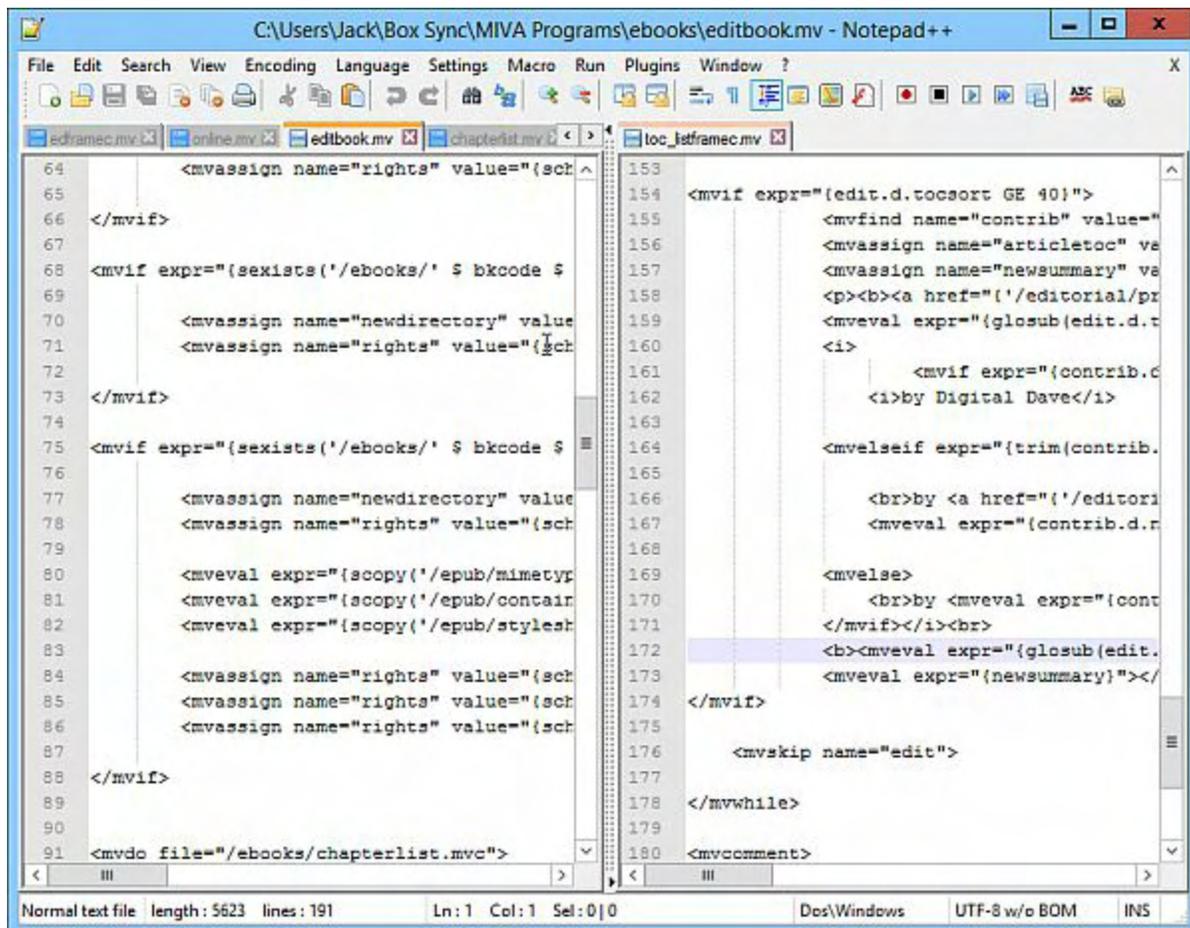

Figure 6. Notepad++ is designed for programmers offering many features that make coding easier.

E-Book Publishing

I'm sure that everyone has specialized programs they use which would not be for general consumption. To some degree the graphics programs I use fall into that category since most people may have no reason to take screenshots, manipulate them and put them into a Web site. Since I produce e-books on a regular basis, I also use [Sigil EPUB Editor](#) and [Calibre E-Book Management](#) for converting e-books into various formats. If you don't use or produce e-books, you may have no interest in these free programs.

We use [Skype](#) to see the grandkids who are out of town. But that has dropped off a little since the kids quickly get bored and start acting up with each other. It can be dizzying to watch children flying around the room.

Many Little AutoHotkey Apps

I have a ton of little AutoHotkey apps that automatically load every time I boot up. Over the last few years my feeling that *AutoHotkey is absolutely the best free Windows utility software ever* has only been reinforced. It can be remarkably simple to use or a script can get quite complex, but I believe that every Windows user, no matter their level (novice or advanced), has many reasons to want AutoHotkey—they just may not know it yet.

I use enough of these little apps that I had to make an AutoHotkey pop-up to list most of them as a reminder (see Figure 7). These scripts are tailored to my needs, but that's the point. AutoHotkey will make your Windows computer truly your computer.

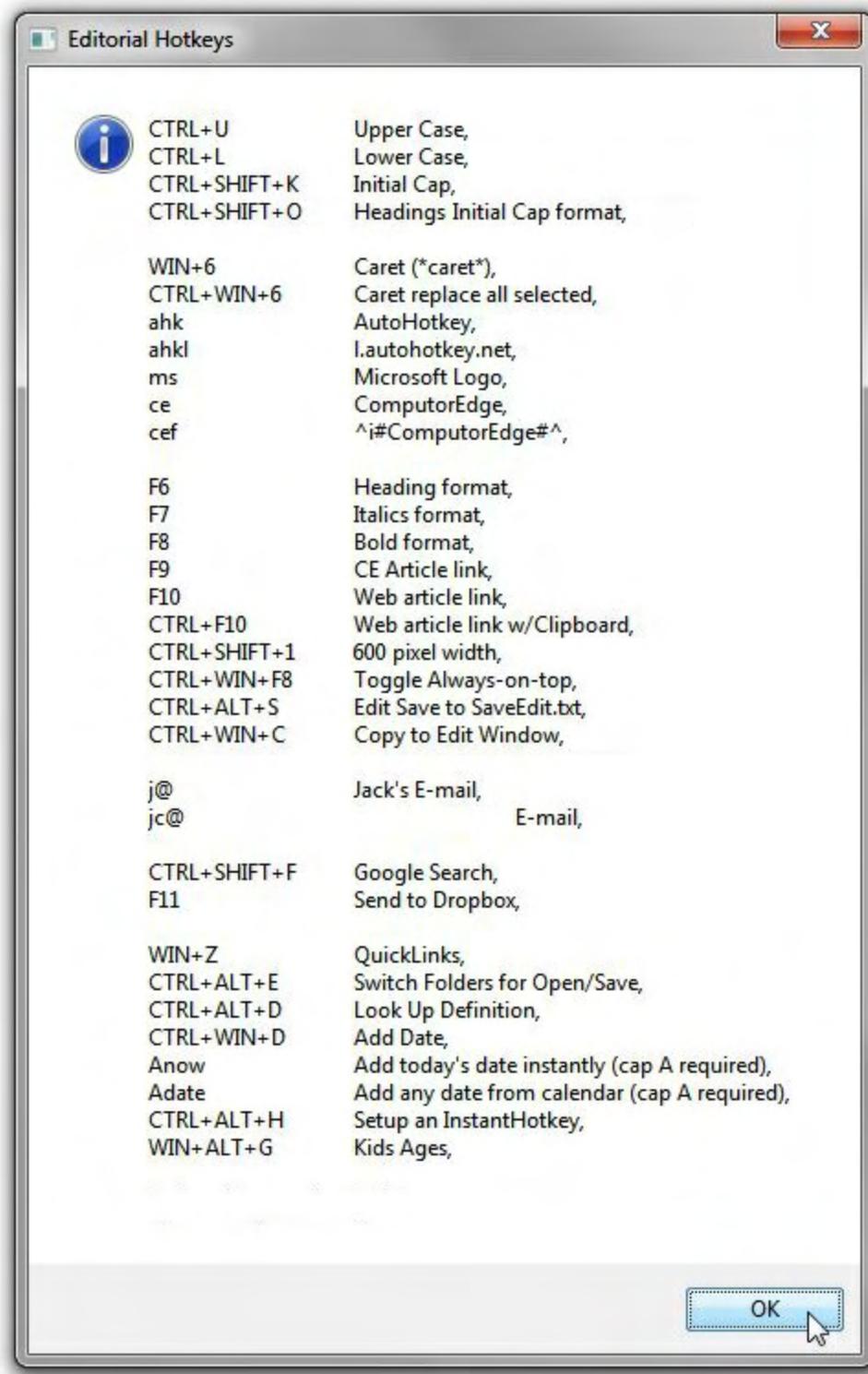|		
CTRL+U	Upper Case,
CTRL+L	Lower Case,
CTRL+SHIFT+K	Initial Cap,
CTRL+SHIFT+O	Headings Initial Cap format,
WIN+6	Caret (*caret*),
CTRL+WIN+6	Caret replace all selected,
ahk	AutoHotkey,
ahkl	l.autohotkey.net,
ms	Microsoft Logo,
ce	ComputorEdge,
cef	^i#ComputorEdge#^,
F6	Heading format,
F7	Italics format,
F8	Bold format,
F9	CE Article link,
F10	Web article link,
CTRL+F10	Web article link w/Clipboard,
CTRL+SHIFT+1	600 pixel width,
CTRL+WIN+F8	Toggle Always-on-top,
CTRL+ALT+S	Edit Save to SaveEdit.txt,
CTRL+WIN+C	Copy to Edit Window,
j@	Jack's E-mail,
jc@	E-mail,
CTRL+SHIFT+F	Google Search,
F11	Send to Dropbox,
WIN+Z	QuickLinks,
CTRL+ALT+E	Switch Folders for Open/Save,
CTRL+ALT+D	Look Up Definition,
CTRL+WIN+D	Add Date,
Anow	Add today's date instantly (cap A required),
Adate	Add any date from calendar (cap A required),
CTRL+ALT+H	Setup an InstantHotkey,
WIN+ALT+G	Kids Ages,

Figure 7. A list of some of Jack's AutoHotkey features automatically loaded on boot up.

I have a number of other short AutoHotkey scripts which don't appear on the list because no reminder is necessary. For example, I use the AutoCorrect script for the most commonly misspelled words and special characters, such as the ¢ and £, which don't appear on the keyboard. These are hotstring replacements that correct errors the instant I misspell one of the words. I can't tell you how many times AutoCorrect has helped me, plus there's no need to

18

remember hotkey combinations.

Am I trying to push everyone to use AutoHotkey? You bet! It is not a replacement for all the other free programs that I use regularly, but AutoHotkey can even make those free programs easier to operate. The only downside it that AutoHotkey does require a little script writing. But learning to write a little bit of code will make your brain nimble by stimulating new neural connections and expand your employment possibilities. (Want a taste of AutoHotkey? See our [Introduction to AutoHotkey](#)!)

Free Software for Every Purpose

I've only listed the free programs which are important to me. If you have a particular favorite software package, then I would love to hear about it. There might be many other readers who share your interest. Leave a comment by clicking the "Tell us what you think About This Article!" link located at the top and bottom of this article. If there are enough programs recommended then we may turn it into an article on "Free Software Favored by *ComputorEdge* Readers." If you prefer to use e-mail, then send your thoughts to [My Favorite Free Software](#).

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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ComputorEdge E-books offering is his [AutoHotkey Applications,](#) an idea-generating intermediate level e-book about using the AutoHotkey Graphical User Interface (GUI) command to write practical pop-up apps for your Windows computer. (It's not as hard as it sounds.)

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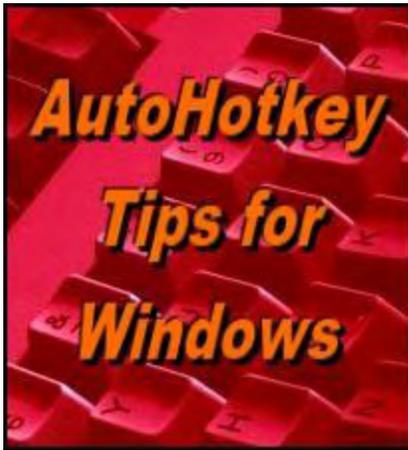*Misunderstanding Windows 8: An Introduction, Orientation, and How-to for Windows 8 (Seventh Edition)*!

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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.

When Not to Use AutoHotkey

"As Powerful as AutoHotkey Is, There Are Times When You Shouldn't Use it" by Jack Dunning

AutoHotkey can do almost anything—if you want to take the time to write the app. However, there are many free alternative programs that would be difficult to replicate with AutoHotkey. Don't try to make AutoHotkey do everything.

There are a multitude of things that we can do with AutoHotkey, but sometimes it's more productive to just use other (free) tools that do a better job while not requiring us to write a script. For example, I've seen questions in the AutoHotkey forum where someone wanted to something with AutoHotkey where there was already an easy method available in Windows for doing the exact same thing. People sometimes get so focused on using AutoHotkey that they fail to investigate the features which already exist in Windows.

AutoHotkey is the best for many tasks—especially if there are no other reasonable options, but sometimes we get carried away with doing everything possible with AutoHotkey—even when there are easy alternatives. This is what I discovered while reviewing the many free AutoHotkey scripts found on the Web.

I started looking at screen capture scripts written in AutoHotkey. Many people may not know that AutoHotkey is even capable of taking screen shots, but that is just one of the possibilities. There are many scripts for taking quick screen images, but one of the better ones is Extreme Clipper (see Figure 1) by Avi Aryan who also gave us the very capable Clipjump Clipboard manager—also written in AutoHotkey. One of the best features of Extreme Clipper is that it saves the image directly to a file. It's quick and allows you to resize the image before it is saved.
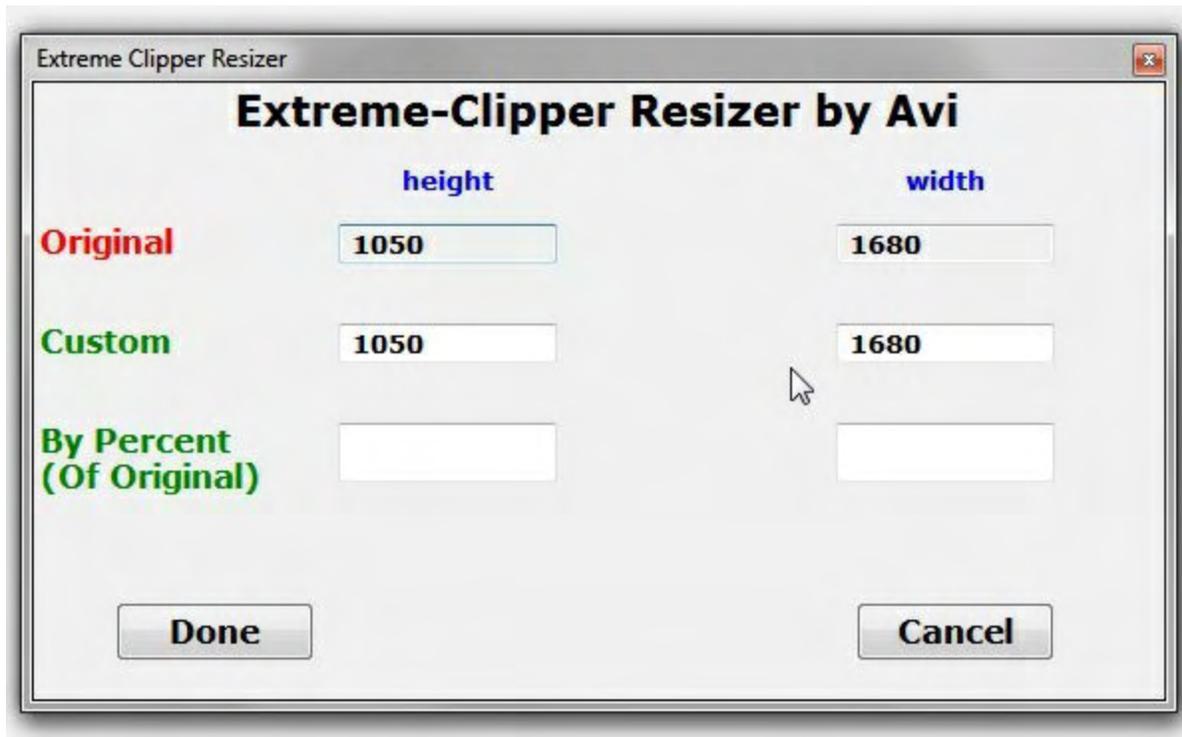
Figure 1. Extreme Clipper pops open a window allowing a screen capture to be resized before saving it to a file.

Extreme Clipper also allows a portion of the screen to be selected before saving. The only extra I would like to see would be a check box to "Maintain Aspect Ratio" for keeping the sides of an image proportional after entering only one new dimension. It's rare when I don't need this. It can be done by using the same percentage for each dimension, but it would be nice to be able to enter just one number.

Having said that I would probably stick with the free IrfanView for my screen captures. While it may not be quite as quick as the Extreme Clip script and does not automatically save to a file after resizing (there is a save to file option), it has many more capabilities which would make a similar AutoHotkey script much more complex (see Figure 2).
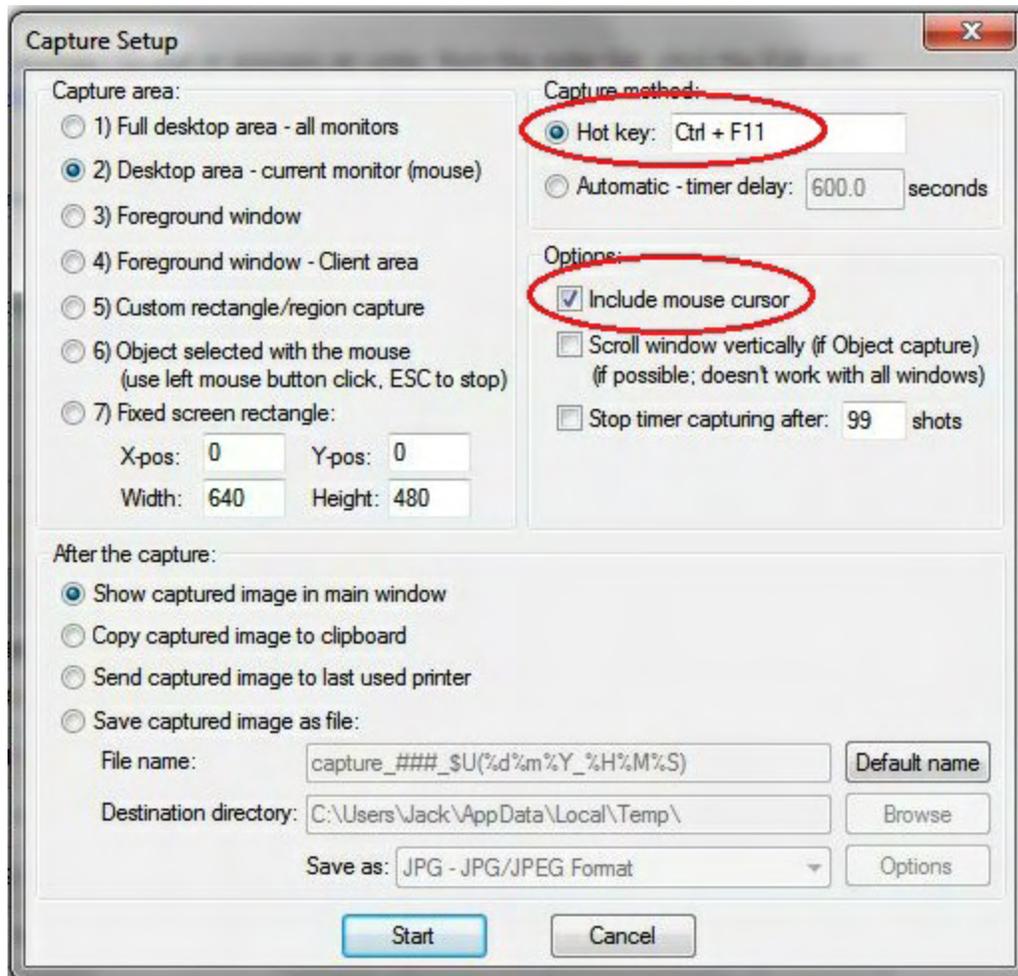
Figure 2. IrfanView has a versatile screen capture tools which can be assigned to a hotkey combination.

IrfanView is certainly better than the Snipping Tool which comes with Windows (Vista and above). It does take a few more steps than the Extreme Clip AutoHotkey script, but it has options for including the cursor, clipping only a windows, and even scrolling down long object which have move off the screen (handy for long text or code snippets).

I'm guessing that most people don't do nearly as many screenshots as I do—or need to proportionally resize them. In that situation, Extreme Clipper would certainly do the job.

What's important is using the right tool for the right job. I would never tell someone to use AutoHotkey just because you can. Often it might not be worth the effort. Having said that I think that virtually everyone has some reason they should be using AutoHotkey.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

New to AutoHotkey? See our Introduction to AutoHotkey!

Free e-book! *AutoHotkey Tricks You Ought To Do With Windows!* This e-book includes both

those tips and the reference material (Table of Contents and indexes) from the other three AutoHotkey books. Pick up a copy free and share it with your friends.

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

"Microsoft's Woes" by Wally Wang

Microsoft's Woes; Getting "Real" Work Done; Small Windows Tablets in Trouble; Migrating From Windows XP to Linux; Customize Programs.

When Microsoft bought out Nokia, the company paid Nokia's CEO and former Microsoft executive, Stephen Elop, $25 million dollars. When Nokia's board of directors asked Stephen Elop to take less money, he refused, citing he needed the money because he was getting divorced. In the meantime, Nokia laid off thousands of people while Stephen Elop was Nokia's CEO. If you want to read Stephen Elop's rambling, jargon-filled letter informing employees of impending layoffs, you can read how not to write a layoff letter here

Why do executives get all the bonus money for doing a great job while ordinary workers get laid off because the company isn't making enough money? If the company isn't making enough money, then obviously the CEO and other executives didn't do a great job and don't deserve any type of bonus. It's this type of backwards thinking that allows executives to plunder corporations while the ordinary workers suffer from their poor decisions.

Now Microsoft has announced that they're cutting 18,000 jobs with the bulk of those jobs being cut belonging to Microsoft's purchase of Nokia. So once again Nokia's workers suffer while Stephen Elop gets paid millions for his "leadership" that kills other people's jobs.

Of course Stephen Elop isn't to blame for Nokia's problems. When Apple introduced the iPhone and Google introduced Android, Nokia's entire market for smartphones dried up in an instant. Stephen Elop also isn't to blame for Microsoft shutting down their Xbox Entertainment Division that was meant to create original content for the Xbox. Stephen Elop also didn't have a hand in designing Windows 8, which has alienated practically everyone except for hard-core Windows enthusiasts who still insist that Windows is great despite using add-ons to make Windows 8 look and behave more like Windows 7, which undermines their argument that Windows 8 is a great operating system.

It's no surprise that Microsoft has to lay off so many people after acquiring Nokia. The first question is why bother acquiring Nokia for $7.2 billion to get their smartphone business that's

struggling? That purchase makes as much sense as buying Blockbuster Video, Kodak, or Blackberry. Why buy a dying company and wind up pouring more money into an increasingly hopeless cause?

Windows Phone is actually a decent smartphone operating system. Its biggest flaw is that it doesn't do anything much better than iOS or Android, so why should anyone switch? A second major flaw of Windows Phone is the lack of apps. Even Microsoft hasn't created many apps for their own smartphone operating system.

When Apple released iWork for the iPad, they also launched an iPhone version too. Microsoft still hasn't launched a touch gesture version of Microsoft Office for Windows RT or Windows 8, but they have released Microsoft Office for the iPad.

When Apple introduced the iPod, Microsoft quickly copied it with the Zune, which they released just in time to target the dying digital music player market when Apple introduced the iPhone. When Microsoft responded to the iPhone with Windows Phone, they were just in time to miss the tablet revolution when Apple introduced the iPad. Just as Microsoft released their Surface tablets to compete against the iPad, the market shifted to smaller tablets so Apple responded with the iPad mini.

While Apple makes it easy for developers to use the same tools to create both iPhone and iPad apps, Microsoft initially promoted their Adobe Flash clone, Silverlight, as the main programming tool for creating Windows Phone apps. When the plug-in market started dying and took Adobe Flash down with it, Silverlight also died. Now Microsoft hopes to allow developers to create Universal Apps where you can create one program that can run across multiple Microsoft platforms.

Yet shouldn't Microsoft have thought of this before they came up with Windows Phone, Windows RT, and Windows 8? Wouldn't they have more apps for their platforms if they had simply planned ahead and not created Windows Phone solely for smartphones and Windows RT solely for tablets and made apps for both incompatible with each other?

It's no surprise that Microsoft plans to lay off 18,000 people. The bulk of those layoffs come from Microsoft eliminating duplicate positions from Nokia. Still several thousand Microsoft employees will lose their jobs too. Even worse, many of Microsoft's workers don't know who will be laid off within the next six months, so you can bet productivity will drop as fast as morale.

Strangely, Microsoft's CEO, Satya Nadella, wrote a letter emphasizing that Microsoft is now about productivity. The real question is when did Microsoft stop being about productivity? Did anyone feel that Vista made them more productive over Windows XP? Or did Microsoft release Vista just to make money selling upgrades, even though their own executives couldn't get Vista to work, but agreed to let the company sell it to unsuspecting customers anyway?

If Microsoft's own executives couldn't get Vista to work, why did they think it was perfectly

acceptable to sell to customers? Does that sound like Microsoft was focused on increasing productivity for people, or that Microsoft simply wanted to sell a product to make money despite knowing its glaring flaws?

Anyone feel that Windows 8 was about making them more productive? Or do they feel that Microsoft felt the need to ship a touch gesture operating system in a hurry, regardless of whether it made people more productive or not?

Former Microsoft CEO, Steve Ballmer, missed major shifts in the computer market and now Satya Nadella has to clean up his mess. In the meantime, Steve Ballmer got a hefty bonus for "leading" Microsoft in the same way that Stephen Elop got a hefty bonus for "leading" Nokia.

Microsoft's employees are now suffering from their leader's mistakes, and anyone who solely makes their living relying on Microsoft products will be next. Rather than search for new opportunities, a large majority of people dependent on Microsoft will simply double down and rely more on Microsoft. Their thinking is that Microsoft made them a lot of money in the past, so it should continue making them more money in the future, even when it's clear that it won't anymore.

Rather than learn something new (Linux, iOS, or OS X), far too many people prefer to cling to their beliefs that Microsoft Windows will never go away. At one time, Windows ran on 90 percent of all computers. Including smartphones and tablets, Windows now runs on only 14 percent of all computers. Windows still runs on 90 percent of PCs, but that's like saying that OS X runs on 90 percent of Macintosh computers.

The PC market is no longer the focus of the computer market, so winning the majority of a dying market is no consolation and no future. Kodak probably still dominates the film market, but how many people care about film anymore?

Microsoft's woes stem from their short-sighted policies that could plod along for decades when PCs dominated the computer market. As soon as the market shifted, Microsoft didn't, and neither did the majority of their supporters. Rather than face facts and shift with the times, far too many people simply chose to deny facts right in front of their face and cling to fantasies that the future would continue being an extension of the past. Just ask all the executives at Borders Books, Blockbuster Video, and Blackberry how well that strategy worked out for them.

If you're an ordinary user, then stick with whatever device makes your life easier. Just keep in mind that alternatives always exist and those alternatives might actually make your life easier than your current technology if you'd only open your mind and consider that your current technology may not be the best that will ever exist.

For developers and other tech-savvy users, the future is clear. You can cling to the confused strategies of Microsoft that changes every time they see another company dominating a market (Google in search; Apple in digital music players, tablets, and smartphones; Sony in video

game consoles; Adobe in plug-ins, etc.), or you can look for growing opportunities in other fields that don't involve Microsoft (iOS, OS X, Linux, Android, etc.)

Microsoft is no longer the only opportunity available, and recent trends suggest that Microsoft is often not an opportunity at all. Ask all those Windows Phone app developers if learning Silverlight to create apps was worth it, now that Microsoft is abandoning Silverlight?

The future is still bright for people willing to look for opportunities. For everyone else still clinging to the belief that only Microsoft has a future, good luck. There are now 18,000 former Microsoft employees who can no longer agree with you.

Getting "Real" Work Done

While Microsoft looks to lower expenses by trimming employees, Apple and IBM recently reached a deal where IBM would promote Apple products in the enterprise market.

Remember the old argument that people gave for not using Apple products by claiming they were "toys" and unsuitable for business because you had to use Microsoft products to do any "real" work? Oddly enough, Apple uses their own products to do "real" work and Google relies mostly on Linux and OS X. The reason Google engineers gave for using Linux or OS X was because "We're always working to improve the efficiency of our business…"

If Google thinks Linux and OS X are more efficient than Windows and Google is one of the largest technology companies in the world, certainly that should blow a hole in the myth that corporations can only get "real" work done with Microsoft products. Then again if you want to deny reality, no amount of facts will ever change your mind.

Google's Linux users said they preferred Linux because "It was faster, more secure, and more stable than Windows." Google's Macintosh users said "They preferred its interface and applications to those of either Linux or Windows."

If one of the largest and most powerful companies in the world (Google) sees Linux as faster and more stable than Windows and prefers the OS X interface over both Linux and Windows, it's hard to argue that neither Linux nor OS X are ready for "real" work.

The main reason businesses still stick with Windows is that at one time, Windows was the best option available just as typewriters were once better options than pencil and paper. Eventually better technologies comes along so you can either believe your current technology will always be superior for the rest of eternity (anyone want to claim that typewriters are always better than PCs because at one time typewriters dominated the business world and PCs did not?), or you can evaluate competing technology to see if it might offer a dramatic improvement in productivity, efficiency, and flexibility.

IBM sees a future for Apple products in the enterprise market, so does anyone want to argue

that IBM doesn't know what it takes to satisfy the business needs of corporations?

Small Windows Tablets in Trouble

Just as Microsoft introduced their Surface tablets, smaller tablets surged in popularity, which meant another market Microsoft missed again. As people snapped up smaller Android tablets and iPad minis, Microsoft tried to encourage Windows tablet manufacturers to sell smaller Windows tablets by granting them royalty-free licenses for running Windows on devices smaller than 9-inches.

With low sales of Windows tablets, even giving Windows away might not help. Microsoft hopes to get more people using Windows on tablets, but with Android tablets so cheap that require far less maintenance (you don't need to worry about Windows Registry errors on Android), few people want to use Windows on small tablets especially when Android and iOS offer so many compelling apps designed for touchscreens.

As Windows struggles on tablets, Microsoft is also lowering the licensing fees so Windows can run on low-cost laptops to compete against ChromeBooks. Microsoft's goal is to get the price of Windows laptops low enough so people won't buy a ChromeBook.

Figure 1. Microsoft lists the advantages of using Windows.

Of course, if people are happy using Windows on a cheap laptop, why would they ever buy a more expensive computer running Windows?

So Windows has to compete against ChromeOS for low-end laptops, against iOS and Android on tablets and smartphones, and against OS X on high-end computers. Can Satya Nadella turn Microsoft around after a decade of bungling by Steve Ballmer (who walked away with a hefty bonus for his "leadership")?

Probably no one can turn Microsoft around, but Satya Nadella can at least guide Microsoft to a new future that doesn't rely entirely on Windows and Office. Of course, that's like telling AT&T to create a new future that doesn't rely on telephones or Pizza Hut to create a new future that doesn't rely on food, so the chances that Microsoft can regain their former glory look dimmer every day.

Migrating From Windows XP to Linux

Given Windows 8's tepid acceptance, many people are still clinging to Windows XP despite Microsoft's lack of support. For those people who can't justify spending money to upgrade to Windows 7 or Windows 8, consider using RoboLinux instead.

Figure 2. RoboLinux comes pre-configured to allow running Windows as a virtual machine.

Unlike most other Linux distributions, RoboLinux comes pre-configured to make it easy for you to run Windows as a virtual machine. Now if malware or anything else wipes out your Windows virtual machine, just delete the virtual machine file, copy a backup of your virtual machine file, and you'll be back using Windows in minutes.

If you plan to access the Internet, use RoboLinux's browser and e-mail program to protect you from Windows malware. Now you can run Windows safely within RoboLinux as a virtual machine. Since RoboLinux is free, you have no reason to spend money upgrading to any version of Windows.

Without Microsoft patches to keep Windows XP secure, you need to wean yourself away from Windows XP as soon as possible. RoboLinux can breathe new life into your current PC and preserve your investment in Windows XP at the same time, all without spending any extra money whatsoever. With options like RoboLinux, what are the advantages of spending money buying a Windows upgrade anymore?

*   *   *

To customize most programs, you click on the program name menu (such as Safari or Pages) and when a pull-down menu appears, choose Preferences. You can also open the Preferences window in most programs by pressing the Command key and the comma key (,).

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

The Elements of a Great Script: Star Wars

The Elements of a Great Script: Die Hard

The Element of a Great Script: Back to the Future

The Elements of a Great Script: Rocky

The Elements of a Great Script: It's a Wonderful Life

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.

Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

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

"Thanks, Jack, for the AutoHotkey Tip and Closing the ComputorEdge Nav Panel," "Accepting Credit Cards"

Thanks, Jack, for the AutoHotkey Tip and Closing the ComputorEdge Nav Panel

[Regarding the July 4 Automate Any Program in Windows: Part II column:]

That bit where you find the state of the checkbox was quite clever.

-Paul Anthony, San Diego, CA

Thanks for the valuable Autohotkey programs. I currently have about six of them starting up with Windows 8, some customized to my needs. Speaking of automating programs, I'd like to automate an action to take when going to a specific Web site's homepage in IE. Specifically, in the case of *ComputorEdge.com*, I'd like the browser to immediately go to the view I see after clicking "Close Nav Menu."

-Ron Cerrato, San Diego, CA

Thanks, Ron, for getting me moving to fix a problem that shouldn't need AutoHotkey. I corrected and covered this in this column.

-Jack

Accepting Credit Cards

[Regarding Jack Dunning's July 11 article, "Selling Stuff on the Web":]

Jack,

I respect your opinion and admire your ability to research, and then weigh out if the work needed is actually worth it to you.

Would you be willing to look at how the "Stripe" method compares to your costs using Intuit?

For an explanation of "Stripe", I've taken an excerpt from this article.

> Without Stripe, accepting credit cards on a website is a massive undertaking. First, you need to open a "merchant account", which is like a regular bank account, but with more fees. Then, you need a "payment gateway" - because credit card processing apparently takes place in a separate dimension where bankers rule with an iron fist and Lindsey Lohan has a successful acting career. And then come the leeches: $25 monthly fee. $99 setup fee. $50 annual fee. $0.35 failed transaction fee (YOU pay when your customer's card fails to go through!). $0.25 + 2.0% successful transaction fee. $2.00 batch fee. $5.00 daddy-needs-a-new-porsche fee. It's ridiculous. The most popular card processor is Authorize.net, and the folks at that company (and its many resellers) spend every day thinking of new, ridiculous ways to take your money.
>
> Enter Stripe
>
> Set up takes about five minutes.
>
> Unfortunately, it is illegal to kidnap the CEO of Authorize.net, slather him in barbecue sauce and drop him into a pit of honey badgers. But, you can do the next best thing: don't use his service. Switch to Stripe. You won't need a merchant account or payment gateway. Stripe will deposit money into any bank account you like. There are zero fees. Setup takes about five minutes. (Yes, seriously.) And you pay exactly one thing: 2.9% + $0.30 on each successful card transaction. (So, if you're selling something for $30, you keep $28.83, and Stripe gets $1.17.) The Web site is simple and intuitive and the staff is super helpful. The only drawback is that Stripe is currently unavailable outside of the United States.

-Paul Anthony, San Diego, CA

Thanks for the question, Paul.

A quick look at Stripe tells me that it's not necessarily that much different from many other services. I notice that Intuit does have a no monthly fee package. The rates vary, but Stripe does have a chargeback fee. I've found that the merchant credit card account business has become very competitive.

The main problem with Stripe is that you must build your own interface. If you're a Web programmer that's not an issue, but many of the canned shopping cart services only support a select group of credit card processors (see Figure 1), but no programming is required. My guess is Stripe is not supported by many of the shopping cart services.
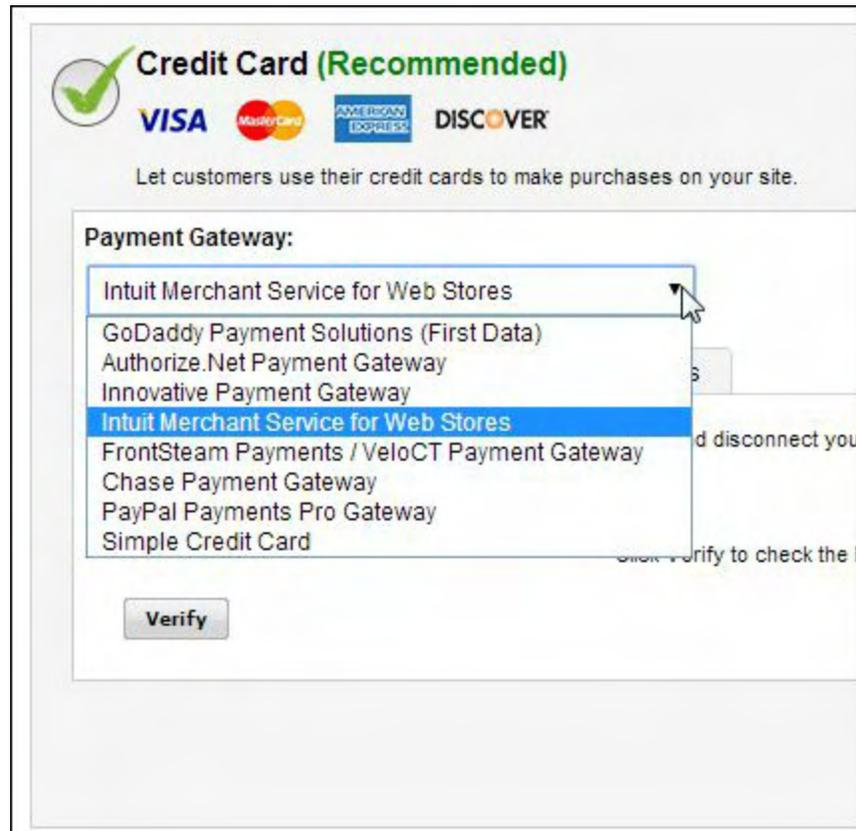
Figure 1. GoDaddy's Quick Shopping Cart only supports a limited number of credit card processors.

An additional issue for me would be the limited territory covered by Stripe. Many of my sales on ComputorEdge E-Books come from overseas. This may not be an issue for many businesses.

-Jack Dunning, ComputorEdge

ComputorEdge always wants to hear from you, our readers. If you have specific comments about one of our articles, please click the "Tell us what you think about this article!" link at the top or bottom of the specific article/column at ComputorEdge.com. *Your comments will be attached to the column and may appear at a later time in the "Editor's Letters" section.If you want to submit a short "ComputorQuick Review", or yell at us, please e-mail us at* ceeditor@computoredge.com. *If you would like to review our recent e-books, please visit* ComputorEdge E-Books.

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