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Big Screen TV Decisions

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Big Screen TV Decisions

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Digital Dave

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

Chromecast with Wired Network; VPNs and Public Wi-Fi.

Chromecast with Wired Network

Dear Digital Dave,

My desktop computer is connected to my router via Ethernet. My operating system is Windows 8.1. Router is an AirlinkAR675W. I want to broadcast video from the computer to my Chromecast device, which is on my Wi-Fi network, but the Chromecast app won't recognize the Chromecast device.

I suspect it is because the device is Wi-Fi and the computer is Ethernet. Troubleshooting info from Google appears to expect the computer to be connected to the network via Wi-Fi. Any suggestions on how to accomplish what I want to accomplish without changing the desktop to Wi-Fi?

*John Sandgren
Colorado Springs, CO*

Dear John,

As I understand it, while you need Wi-Fi to do the initial setup of the Chromecast device, you can use an Ethernet connected computer to broadcast to Chromecast. You must have Google Chrome and the [Chromecast extension](#).

Most importantly all the computers and devices need to be on the same network. Generally, if they are all connected to the same router, then they will be on the same network—wired or wireless. A quick check is to open File Explorer (🌈+E) in your Windows 8.1 computer and click on Network at the bottom of the navigation pane on the left. If it's on the same network, the Chromecast device should appear under the Other Devices category.

I don't have the Chromecast device, but I would guess that when you install the Chrome extension it will search for active Chromecast devices. I found [this forum page](#) which

addresses your specific problem. It's worth a shot.

Digital Dave

VPNs and Public Wi-Fi

Dear Digital Dave,

First, thanks for your in-depth response to a [previous questions](#) on using VPN's on Public Wi-Fi connections. However, for me and maybe a lot of other people who may use Public Wi-Fi, I'd like to ask for a little clarification:

Am I correct in saying that:

(A) One is safe when using any Public Wi-Fi (with or without a VPN) if they are logging-into an SSL ("https") account?

(B) If I were using a VPN through any Public Wi-Fi, and was logging into an SSL account—no one, even the VPN Host, could read the information I was sending to an SSL Web site, since a separate encryption with the SSL Web site would exist (apart from the VPN's encryption to me). True?

(C) Now, to the part I'm less sure of: You warned against using bogus "hacker Public Wi-Fi" connections. If I was using VPN, I believe that the hackers could not get any sensitive log-in/other information from my SSL connection to a bank, etc. which uses "https." True?

(D) Finally, even if I inadvertently did use a bogus "hacker Public Wi-Fi" while not using a VPN, I'd think that the 'hacker' could not get any sensitive information from me, if I was signing into an SSL ("https") Web site. I'd think 'hackers' could only get information, if I was logging into a non-SSL Web site, without VPN. Yes?

So, in Summary about using Public Wi-Fi's (if I am correct above): -

(1) If I am using a VPN, no one, including the VPN Host, could access the information I sent to an SSL Web site.

(2) If I am not using a VPN and logging into an SSL Web site, there is no way a "hacker" could attack it either (i.e. the hacker Wi-Fi could only get information I may send to a non-SSL Web site).

So I gather that there is little risk on any Public Wi-Fi (legitimate or hacker), if using a VPN or if I am logging into an SSL Web site. Am I correct?

*AJ Dalton
Bonsall, CA*

Dear AJ,

It sounds about right to me with only a couple of cautions.

First, people need to understand that even if a VPN is installed all traffic is not necessarily routed through the VPN server. This protection is a feature of the specific VPN provider. It sounds like the VPN you're looking at does offer this because one of its purposes when activated is to secure all your communications. But many VPNs merely secure the traffic between computers on the private network and have no impact on external communications which continue as it would if you're on your computer at home without a VPN.

For example LogMeIn Hamachi does set up a secure peer-to-peer VPN, but if you're browsing the Internet, it has no affect on that traffic. Only the communications with the other computers will be encrypted—nothing else. If you looking for that all encompassing protection, then the traffic will be routed through a proxy server belonging to the VPN provider.

The other caution is never say, "Never!" If in fact a hacker managed to get spyware such as a keylogger on your computer, then they could intercept your keystrokes before they were encrypted. This would be unusual, but has happened—normally when someone malicious managed to install malware on your computer.

It's good to be aware of your environment. I always feel a little antsy when using public Wi-Fi and generally stick with innocuous activities. I don't check my bank balance at the airport, because money rarely magically appears in it.

The VPN question is veering naturally toward other dangers of public networks besides interception of unencrypted packets i.e. being on the same network as who knows who and making sure your PC is protected against who knows what. It's not the same as your home network, even with a VPN. Also, at an airport, observant people can see you type your username and password. No keylogger necessary. Other than staying off public Wi-Fi, there is no such thing as 100% protection. However, if you do the things you covered in your letter, then you're probably 99% protected.

Digital Dave



The State of Big Screen TVs

“Is It Really Worth the Extra Dollars to Buy the Latest Technology?” by Jack Dunning
With football dominating the season, what makes more sense in big screen televisions: LED, 4K, or OLED?

Big screen TVs are at a crossroads. Most of the affordable models are LED 1080p televisions priced between \$500 and \$1000. Plasma HDTVs are still available, but manufacturers are pulling back on their production. They are almost all [phasing out the older plasma technology](#).

The next step in screen resolution is the 4K television (discussed in "[Forget 3D, Now It's 4k Televisions](#)"), but most are priced between \$1000 and \$2000. The 4K Ultra HD television is considered the future, but there is currently a severe lack of content delivery that takes advantage of 4K. (It's estimated that approximately 80% of new movies are currently being recorded in 4K, so the content will be coming. However, most television shows are still in 1080p.) With the lack of 4K content, there is little reason to buy a 4K television today. Plus, there [isn't much improvement](#) (if any) when viewing 1080p programs on 4Ks. The 1080p shows may even look a little more blurry on a 4K set than when viewing the same program on a 1080p HDTV.

For now, there is little reason to buy a 4K UHD TV over the current standard HD televisions. You may think that you're hedging against the future by purchasing a 4K set now, but there is another factor that may make you regret that decision. It's called OLED (Organic Light Emitting Diode) technology which is stumbling into the market. You should wait to buy 4K not

because OLED will replace it, but because it will complement it.

OLED (Organic Light Emitting Diode) Technology

The current 4K technology, which is no doubt the future of television screen resolution, is not a competing technology for OLED screens. The 4K UHD ups the current standard screen resolution, 1920 x 1080 to 4096 x 2160 pixels—four times the number of pixels. Ultimately the greater resolution screens will provide much sharper pictures, especially in the big screen televisions. But OLED, which should ultimately replace the current LED technology, is independent of screen resolution. The benefits it can provide go beyond screen resolution.

First, OLED provides a brighter image with blacker blacks than LED (see Figure 1). Admittedly it is a little difficult to compare the technologies from photos, but people who have seen OLED in person say the difference is startling. You can [view more comparisons](#) for yourself.

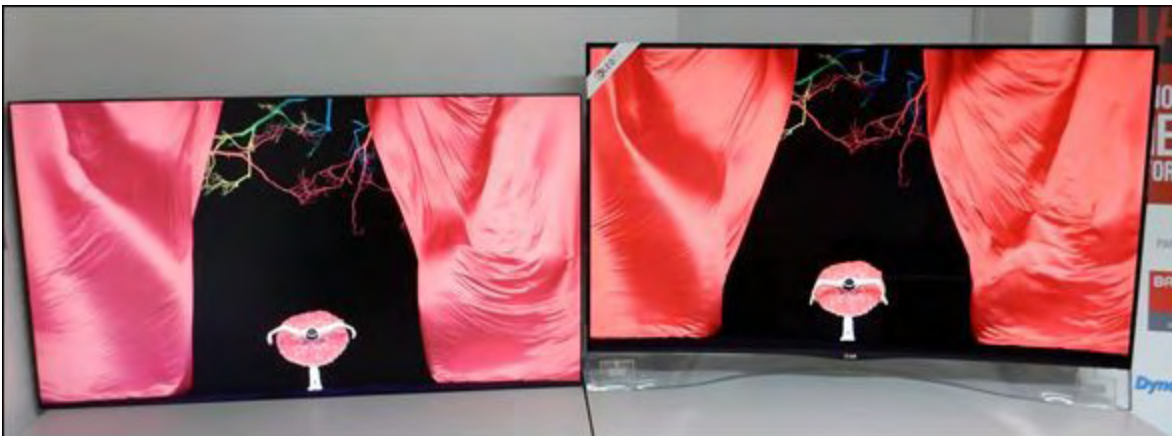


Figure 1. The OLED screen (right) shows brighter colors than the LED television (left). (55EA9709 55 inch curved OLED from LG vs. Direct LED LCD-TV)

OLED Advantages

The [advantages to OLED](#) over LED are numerous:

- First, OLED consumes considerably less power than LED. OLED is made from an organic material which is the source of the light and each pixel can be turned off and on directly. An LED television uses a backplane of LEDs which are always on, then shutter them on and off and filter them for colors.
- Since each pixel of OLED operates independently, it is easier to produce a better quality picture. The blacks are blacker because the pixels can be turned completely off (black) rather than shuttering a white LED. The colors appear brighter although there are limits to how much

you can crank it up, so it still works best in a dark room. OLED can produce a significantly wider range of colors making richer tones possible.

- OLED is faster theoretically boosting the cycle speed from 480 Hz to 100,000 Hz. That means no more ghosting of images when the television responds too slowly to rapid changes in the image.
- The OLED is thinner and flexible, making it more durable and lighter than LED technology.
- Since LED technology is based upon blocking light, the viewing angle is somewhat restricted. This is not the case with OLED as each pixel is a light emitter. It's odd that many of the current OLED televisions are curved. This cuts down on the viewing angle.

OLED Disadvantages

On the downside, there are a couple of disadvantages, the number one being cost.

- OLED is a difficult manufacturing process to master. The yield rates have not yet been improved enough to bring the price down. In fact, most manufacturers other than LG have put [OLED on the back burner](#) or have dropped their programs for now. They realize that the match with 4K UHD TV is ideal, but the investments in OLED are slow to produce results. It could be that [LG has the edge](#), "Samsung uses an expensive Low Temperature Poly Silicon LTPS backplane for their R,G,B OLED TVs, while LG uses an IGZO backplane with all white OLEDs with R,G,B,W color filters, so their costs are lower."

I suspect that Samsung and others haven't given up on OLED, but rather are considering their options and possibly some new directions. I first wrote about [OLED five years ago](#). It may be another five years before it's truly ready for the consumer market.

- While LED is not susceptible to burn-in, as we saw in the old CRT televisions, OLED might fall victim to this problem if too many stationary images sit on the screen. Over time, the individual pixels do degenerate—particularly the blues. This also means that lifespan could be an issue—although there is not enough known about this issue at this time.

Current OLED HDTVs

LG seems to be the only company producing OLED TVs today and they are not cheap. The [LG Electronics 55EC9300 55-Inch 1080p 3D Curved OLED TV](#) is one of the least expensive at \$3499 (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. The LG Electronics 55EC9300 55-Inch 1080p 3D Curved OLED TV sells for \$3499.

Notice that LG is making no attempt to combine the technology with 4K UHD, but it has thrown in the gimmicky 3D capability. If you read the reviews on Amazon, buyers are raving—and they should be...having just spent over \$3000. Many people say that it's better than the current 4K—which could be true for a number of reasons. But as I stated previously, these are not actually competing technologies. Once 4K (with 4K content) is put together with an OLED screen, the results should be astounding.

The OLED technology is not good enough unless you have big bucks to spend on a television. (If you do have the cash, then the LG is probably the best big screen you can get.) The 4K technology is not ready because there is very little to watch which takes advantage of the greater resolution—plus it's usually the same LED screen. When OLED and 4K is combined then you will have the best of all worlds—but right now you're going to pay through the nose. The [LG Electronics 65EC9700 65-Inch 4k Ultra HD 3D Curved OLED TV](#) is both 4K and OLED at a mere \$10,000 (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. The LG Electronics 65EC9700 65-Inch 4k Ultra HD 3D Curved OLED TV sells for \$9999.

The price will come down for OLED and eventually there will be plenty of content for 4K (although streaming 4K video might be a problem due to the huge bandwidths needed). But that is not today. If you're in the market for a big screen television, then the best compromise for price and performance is one of the current LED HDTVs found at any electronics store. I will wait for the time when the OLED/4K combinations to come down to say...\$499—although I would definitely consider OLED alone with a big enough price drop.

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

Recently released is Jack's FREE AutoHotkey book, [AutoHotkey Tricks You Ought to Do with Window](#), available exclusively at ComputerEdge E-Books in the EPUB for e-readers and tablets, MOBI for Kindle, and PDF for printing formats.

ComputerEdge E-books is offering 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.)

[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 *ComputerEdge* cartoons from 2011 and 2012 is now available at Amazon! [That Does Not Compute, Too! ComputerEdge Cartoons, Volume II: "Do You Like Windows 8 or Would You Prefer an Apple?"](#)

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[Getting Started with Windows 7: An Introduction, Orientation, and How-to for Using Windows 7.](#)

[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.



Yet, One More Reason to Use AutoHotkey Free Software!

Free Virtual Numeric KeyPad App, Plus Stripping HTML Tags

“A Quick Little App for Small Laptops with No KeyPad, Plus How Get the Text from a Web Page” by Jack Dunning

Ever want a numeric keypad on you Windows computer screen? Here's an easy one. Plus, learn how to strip HTML tags from Web pages with AutoHotkey RegEx.

If you have a Windows laptop computer without a number keypad or want to use the click of a mouse rather than your fingers to punch numbers, then you're going to like this one. A person who goes by the forum name *sveco* has produced a short AutoHotkey script which places a [number keypad](#) on a Windows computer screen (see Figure below left). The beauty of this app is that it never takes the focus away from your working document. When you click on the keypad, it does not become active and will send the input to your last active window.



You can use it with any active window to input numbers or use the cursor keys. For the right person, this could be just the ticket. The only issues was that the keypad on a keyboard doesn't necessary sync with the pop-up, but if you don't have a keyboard numeric keypad, it's no problem.

You don't need to know AutoHotkey to use this app. I've compiled it and posted both the *KeyPad.ahk* and the *KeyPad.exe* files in a ZIP file at the [ComputerEdge AutoHotkey download site](#). Download the compresses ZIP file, *KeyPad.zip* and extract the EXE file. Double-click and the app loads. Click the little x in the upper right-hand corner to close the app.

For people who want to learn more about AutoHotkey see our [Introduction to AutoHotkey for Beginners!](#)

AutoHotkey Notes for KeyPad

For people who are learning AutoHotkey (and you should be learning if you don't already know AutoHotkey), there are a couple of features of note in this short script. The fact that the keypad is never active, yet is clickable has implications for other AutoHotkey scripts acting as control panels. The controls can innocuously sit on the screen until they are needed, yet even then they won't interfere with the active window. Let's look at how it's done.

The first line of code needed to produce this effect is:

```
Gui, +LastFound +AlwaysOnTop +ToolWindow +Border +E0x08000000
```

With the exception of *+AlwaysOnTop* and *+E0x08000000* most of these parameters are cosmetic and can be found in the [GUI Options section](#) of the online documentation. Naturally, the keypad must be always-on-top since it would be ridiculous for it to disappear behind other windows every time another window is clicked.

The second option *+E0x08000000* is a little more cryptic. This parameter is part of the Extended Window Styles ([WS_EX_NOACTIVATE 0x08000000L](#)) built into Windows. It is called as an option in AutoHotkey GUIs by placing *+E* in front of the number. The *+E0x08000000* option calls `WS_EX_NOACTIVATE` which prevents the window from activating when the user clicks on it. Yet, the window still intercepts the click.

The next line of interest is:

```
Gui, Show, x1350 y87 h260 w215 NoActivate
```

The *NoActivate* option prevents the window from becoming the active window when initially displayed. Between the two parameters (*+E0x08000000* in the *Gui* command line and *NoActivate* in the *Gui, Show* command line), the window is now clickable, always available and never active.

This little script could easily be made into a hotkey by adding the *Gui, Show* line of code to a hotkey combination somewhere after the [auto-execute](#) section of the script:

```
^!k::Gui, Show, x1350 y87 h260 w215 NoActivate
```

But you will want to remove the *GuiClose:* subroutine, otherwise the script will exit (*ExitApp*) anytime you close the window and the hotkey combination will be useless. (I added CTRL+ALT+K as a line in the AHK file, but the semicolon, which turns the line into a comment, must be removed. Don't forget to comment out the *GuiClose* label with a semicolon in front of each line.)

If you want a transparent keypad, then there are two lines in the code which merely need to be un-commented (remove the `;` before each line).

This KeyPad app is yet another cool way to use AutoHotkey.

Stripping Out HTML Code from a Web Page

If you look underneath the hood of a Web page, you will find numerous codes (called tags) from the HTML language. HTML is what makes the page display properly in a Web browser. But what if you wanted to save all the text in a Web page without the code?

A simple way to do that is highlight the entire page, copy, then paste it into a program such as Notepad. This may be the most common technique used and easiest if that's all you want. However, there may be other uses for the plain text from a Web page such as extracting links or finding e-mail addresses.

This week I start looking at using Regular Expressions (RegEx) in AutoHotkey to work with Web pages. First, a short script is developed for stripping all HTML from a Web page's source code.

In this example, I use the HTML file of one of Wally Wang's columns. (Most people may not realize that every *ComputerEdge* article and column has an HTML file on the server which bypasses all of the usual chaff that surrounds the article. I just realized...I should add a link to the main page since this would be an ideal view for a smartphone.) In this case I'm using webserver.computoredge.com/editorial/3235/wallysaf.htm (see Figure 2) to demonstrate how to remove HTML code.

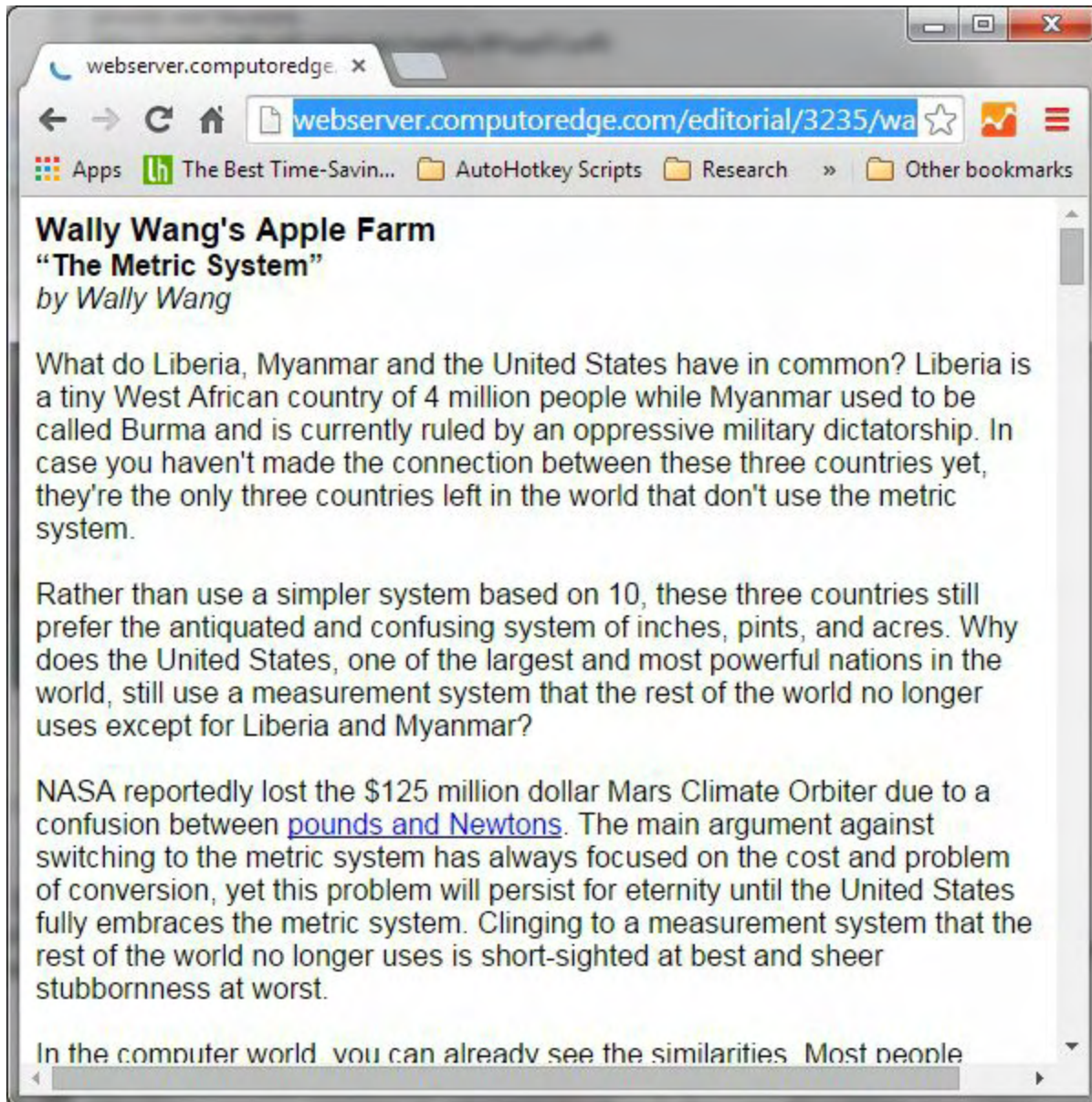


Figure 2. A Web page is loaded to get access to the HTML code.

What you see in Figure 2 is the browser interpreted view. To see the source HTML code right-click on the page a select "View source" or "View page source"—depending upon which browser you're using. A new window or tab will open displaying the underlying page with the HTML tags (see Figure 3). When working with Web pages, this is what the page really looks like. What you see in the Web browser is always an interpretation of this text document. To make a Web page more readable in a text file, it's helpful to remove the HTML tags.

```

1 <style type="text/css"><!-- BODY {color: black; background-color:
2 white; font-family: Arial, Helvetica, Sans-serif;} H1,H3,H4 {margin-
3 bottom: 0} div {margin-bottom: 1px;margin-top: 1px} --></style> <body>
4 <b><font size="4">Wally Wang's Apple Farm</font></b><br>
5 <b>The Metric System</b><br>
6 <i>By Wally Wang</i><br><br>
7 What do Liberia, Myanmar and the United States have in common? Liberia is
8 a tiny West African country of 4 million people while Myanmar used to be
9 called Burma and is currently ruled by an oppressive military
10 dictatorship. In case you haven't made the connection between these three
11 countries yet, they're the only three countries left in the world that
12 don't use the metric system.<br><br>Rather than use a simpler system
13 based on 10, these three countries still prefer the antiquated and
14 confusing system of inches, pints, and acres. Why does the United States,
15 one of the largest and most powerful nations in the world, still use a
16 measurement system that the rest of the world no longer uses except for
17 Liberia and Myanmar?<br><br>NASA reportedly lost the $125 million dollar
18 Mars Climate Orbiter due to a confusion between <a
19 href="http://spacemath.gsfc.nasa.gov/weekly/6Page53.pdf"
20 target="blank">pounds and Newtons</a>. The main argument against
21 switching to the metric system has always focused on the cost and problem
22 of conversion, yet this problem will persist for eternity until the
23 United States fully embraces the metric system. Clinging to a measurement
24 system that the rest of the world no longer uses is short-sighted at best
25 and sheer stubbornness at worst.<br><br>In the computer world, you can
26 already see the similarities. Most people simply stick to what they know
27 and avoid learning anything different. As long as what you're using works
28 for you, then there's no reason to change. However, you won't know if
29 something could actually be better for you unless you're willing to look
30 at alternatives.<br><br>More people use Windows XP than Vista or Windows
31 8. The reason is that Windows XP still does what they need. Peek at the
32 computers used in restaurants or airport terminals and chances are good
33 you'll still see the Windows XP logo on the screen.<br><br>Will switching

```

Figure 3. When viewing the source code the HTML tags are seen.

Notice that all of the HTML tags start with the left pointing arrow (<) and end with the right pointing arrow (>). These delimiters will be the keys used to remove the tags from the remaining text. The final result will look like the text file opened in Notepad shown in Figure 4.

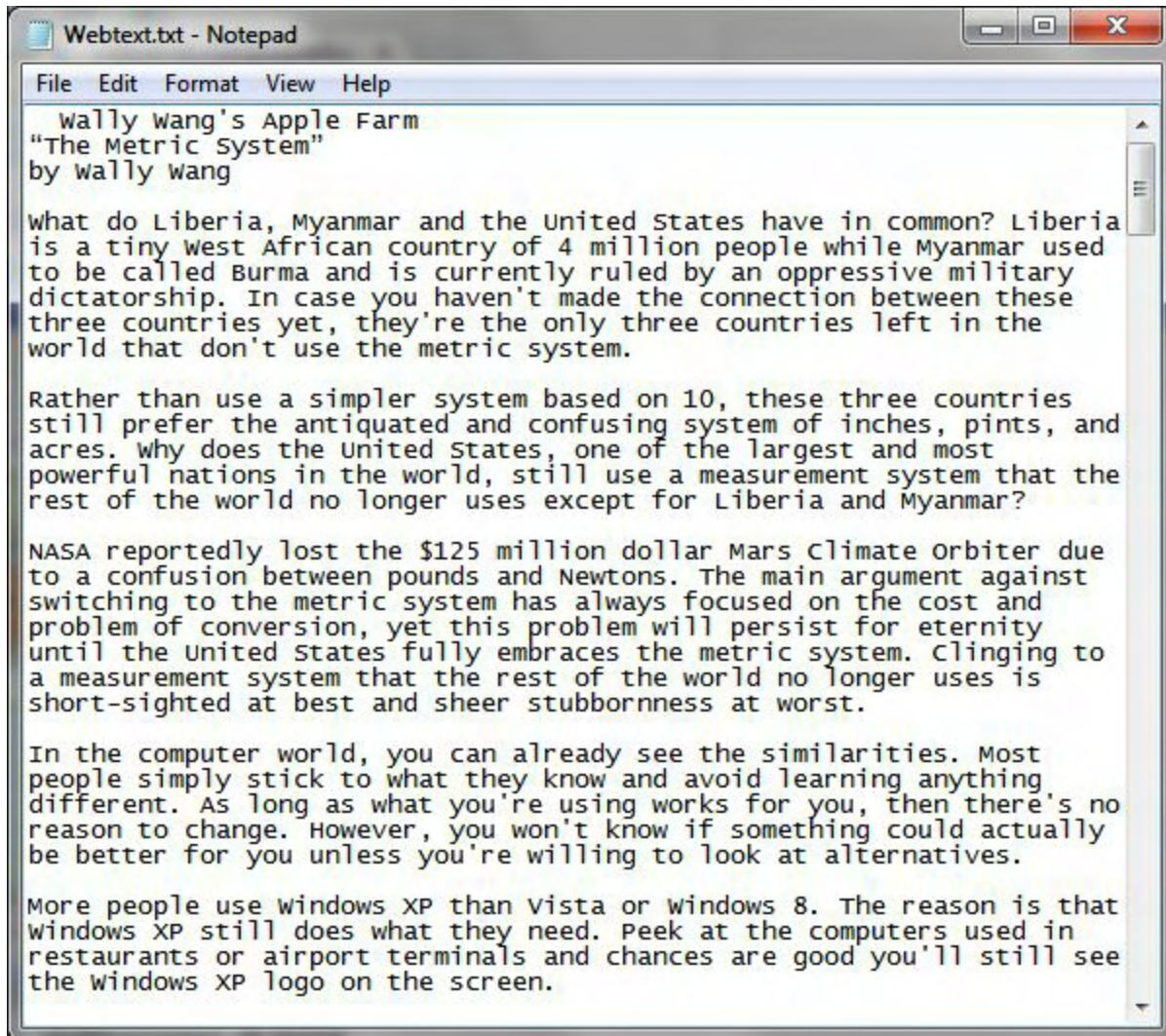


Figure 4. The final result is a text file with no HTML code.

Two features of AutoHotkey are used in this example to first download the Web page ([UrlDownloadToFile](#)), then remove all of the HTML tags ([RegExReplace\(\)](#)). The *UrlDownloadToFile* command is included to show how it works, but the download to variable technique [used last week](#) would have worked just as well. The *UrlDownloadToFile* command is more straightforward than last week's alternative.

I must confess that I struggled a little with this week's Regular Expression. Although the solution was not obvious to me, when the light finally turned on, it was remarkably simple. It's a cool technique which requires a little negative thinking. I'll explain more about my ordeal below.

The script I put together requires first selecting the URL (usually in the address bar of a Web browser—although it could be in any document). After hitting the hotkey combination (*CTRL+ALT+Q*), that address is automatically copied to the Clipboard for downloading the Web page to a file (*UrlDownloadToFile*). The file is then read ([FileRead command](#)) into a variable for parsing out the HTML tags with a RegEx ([RegExReplace\(\)](#)). The final result is

saved to a file ([FileAppend command](#)) and opened in Notepad ([Run command](#)):

```
^!q:
Clipboard =
SendInput, ^c
ClipWait
UrlDownloadToFile, %Clipboard%, URLtemp
FileRead, URLtemp, URLtemp
StringReplace, URLtemp, URLtemp, <br>, `r`n, , All
NoHTML := RegExReplace(URLtemp, "<[^>]+>")
FileDelete, Webtext.txt
FileAppend, %NoHTML%, Webtext.txt
Run, NotePad Webtext.txt
Return
```

This script uses the same Clipboard technique for copying the selected text discussed in [last week's column](#) about looking up IP address locations. This time the Clipboard contents is the URL of the Web page used in the *UrlDownloadToFile, %Clipboard%, URLtemp* line of code. *URLtemp* is the name assigned to the new downloaded file.

Once the file is downloaded, it is read into the variable *URLtemp* (*FileRead, URLtemp, URLtemp*). (Note: Both the filename and the variable name are the same *URLtemp*. This is not a problem as long as one is a file and the other is a variable. However, if you use the same name for two different files or two different variables, then you're likely to encounter problems. In most cases it is better to use separate, more descriptive names to prevent conflicts and make the script easier to understand.)

The HTML tag *
* is used to place a new line (break) in a Web page. If all the tags are removed without first substituting regular new lines in the text, then the entire file will become one huge paragraph with no breaks. To deal with this problem, the [StringReplace command](#) is used to replace all of the *
* tags with a carriage return *`r`* and linefeed *`n`* (new line). In most cases the *StringReplace* command is preferable to using a RegEx. It is faster. However, you must know what you're looking for with *StringReplace* as in the case of the *
* tag. There are so many possible HTML tags that it would be unwieldy to use *StringReplace*—although it could be done by searching for the occurrences of the *<* and *>* keys.

The HTML Tag RegEx

As I mentioned above, I had a tough time with this one. For quite a while I was attempting to capture all of characters after the first *<* sign with the wildcard *.** which adds any character encountered. However, this would plow through the entire file until it encountered the last *>* sign, thereby deleting almost everything else, as well as any HTML tags. I needed to force the RegEx to stop when it encountered the next *>* sign. It turned out to be quite simple.

By including all of the characters which are *not* the *>* sign (*[^>]+*), the RegEx continues until

it encounters the > sign. RegEx stops, but *voilà* the next character is the > sign completing the match. Don't forget that the ^ when placed within inside a range negates the characters in that range. Rather than looking for a match, RegEx looks for characters which *don't match*. Sometimes it's more important to know what it's not, than what it is. (The ^ is also the anchor for the beginning of a line, but when used within a range, square brackets [], it means *not*.)

The line of code `NoHTML := RegExReplace(URLtemp, "<[^>]+>")` strips any remaining HTML tags out of `URLtemp`. The new variable with the HTML tags removed by `RegExReplace()` is called `NoHTML`.

You may wonder about what happens if the greater than > or less than < sign are used within the text of the Web page...say for a mathematical formula? That's not a problem because within the HTML source code those signs are represented by > and <, respectively and would never cause a match by the RegEx.

The remainder of the script deletes the old file (`FileDelete, Webtext.txt`), saves the new file (`FileAppend, %NoHTML%, Webtext.txt`), then opens the new file in Notepad (Run, NotePad Webtext.txt). Use the stripped data however you like.

There is more to do with RegEx and HTML tags, such as finding the matching tags (open and close) and extracting data. Next week, we'll look at extracting links from HTML tags.

* * *

Find all of Jack's AutoHotkey books at [ComputerEdge E-Books](#) and at [Amazon.com](#).

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

Recently released is Jack's FREE AutoHotkey book, [AutoHotkey Tricks You Ought to Do with Window](#), available exclusively at ComputerEdge E-Books in the EPUB for e-readers and tablets, MOBI for Kindle, and PDF for printing formats.

ComputerEdge E-books is offering 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.)

[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 *ComputerEdge* cartoons from 2011 and 2012 is now available at Amazon! [*That Does Not Compute, Too! ComputerEdge Cartoons, Volume II: "Do You Like Windows 8 or Would You Prefer an Apple?"*](#)

Special Free Offer at ComputerEdge E-Books! [*Jack's Favorite Free Windows Programs: What They Are, What They Do, and How to Get Started!*](#)

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

[*Windows 7 Secrets Four-in-One E-Book Bundle,*](#)

[*Getting Started with Windows 7: An Introduction, Orientation, and How-to for Using Windows 7,*](#)

[*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

“Empowerment Instead of Complexity” by Wally Wang

Wally Wang's Apple Farm

Empowerment Instead of Complexity; A Low-Cost Adobe Illustrator Alternative; Religious Operating Systems; Thinking Different; Target Disk Mode.

One of the biggest mistakes Apple ever made was stopping development of HyperCard. When Apple introduced HyperCard, they made it possible for non-programmers to create their own programs by dragging and dropping objects on a window (called "cards" in HyperCard), linking cards together into stacks and hyperlinks (a precursor to the World Wide Web), and making buttons and other user interface objects work through a simplified programming language called HyperTalk.

Stupidly, Apple's executives at the time didn't realize that many people bought Macintosh computers just to use HyperCard. These short-sighted executives couldn't see how pouring money into developing HyperCard and giving it away for free could possibly increase profits. Initially they tried to stop development altogether or charge for HyperCard, but they compromised by giving away a diluted version of HyperCard for people to run HyperCard stacks while charging for the real version of HyperCard that would let you create your own programs.

Needless to say, such short-sighted perspective helped sink sales of the Macintosh while crippling development of HyperCard. HyperCard's greatest appeal was its ability to eliminate complexity in programming, and Apple's short-sighted executives fumbled away the future.

When Apple ignored the potential of HyperCard, other companies quickly developed HyperCard clones. One of the best HyperCard clones is [LiveCode](#), which lets you create iOS and Android apps along with Windows, Linux, and OS X programs. Best of all, LiveCode is free to use but if you want to sell and distribute your programs without giving away your source code, you'll need to buy an annual license starting at \$299.

To see how easy LiveCode makes programming, you might be interested to know how not to learn how to program. Traditional programming courses bombard students with cryptic programming languages and meaningless exercises that too often discourage a large majority of

students. After slamming their heads into such a wall of complexity, far too many of these students falsely conclude that programming is too difficult so they never bother trying again.

The truth is that learning anything can be fun or frustrating, depending on how the subject is taught. When it comes to computers, too many people get discouraged by needless complexity that tech-savvy users embrace like a hazing process. Rather than make computers easier, tech-savvy users expect others to devote as much time as they have to learn the complexity of a computer.

To avoid the pointlessness of traditional methods of programming, an organization called [Digital Pomegranate](#) wanted to find a better way to learn programming. As part of their goal, they wanted to boost economic development in Armenia so Digital Pomegranate decided that one of the least resource-intensive businesses to start would be developing software.

Rather than torture people into learning cryptic languages like C++ or Java, Digital Pomegranate chose LiveCode because its programming language closely resembles English commands. Modeled after HyperTalk, LiveCode's programming language makes programming easy and accessible.

Besides using the much simpler LiveCode programming language, Digital Pomegranate also chose to teach programming differently. Instead of focusing on theory and hoping students would find a way to apply their knowledge, they taught students how to create the iOS apps they already knew how to use.

Not only did this give students greater confidence, but it made learning more relevant when they could put together iOS apps in LiveCode that performed common features like viewing map information or connecting to the Internet. By the end of the class, not only did 93 percent of the students succeed in building their own iOS apps, but the students also entered and won a [Hackathon programming contest](#). What's more amazing is that these programming novices defeated more seasoned programming teams because they used the much simpler and more versatile programming features of LiveCode.



Figure 1. Novice programmers from Armenia won the Hackathon programming contest.

If you're interested in building your own iOS apps, you can torture yourself to learn the hard way, or you can make life easier by using LiveCode instead. If you purchase LiveCode now, you take [LiveCode's course](#), adopted from Digital Pomegranate, that will show you how to create all the standard iOS apps that come with an iPhone, but using LiveCode to make it.

If you've ever wanted to create your own iOS app but thought it was too hard and would require years of training, just get LiveCode and you'll likely create your iOS app far faster than you might have thought possible. Given a choice between creating an app and getting frustrated through needless complexity with other programming languages, it's easy to see how LiveCode can simplify your life and help you achieve your dreams, which is what software and computers should really be about.

A Low-Cost Adobe Illustrator Alternative

One reason why computers prove so frustrating is because too many believe they need to use professional tools. Although the corporate world has settled on Microsoft Office, there's no reason for casual users to deal with the complexity of Microsoft Office when all they want to do is write a letter or balance a budget. Using professional tools to do ordinary tasks is like investing thousands of dollars and countless hours of time learning to use professional chef

equipment when you just want to boil an egg.

In the graphics world, Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator represent top of the line professional tools. If you don't need such professional tools, it's pointless to spend \$495 along with endless hours learning to use Photoshop and Illustrator. For those who want a simpler version of Photoshop, Adobe sells [Photoshop Elements](#) for \$99. For those who want a simpler version of Illustrator, they had no similar software they could turn to until the introduction of [Affinity Designer](#) for \$49.99.

For such a low-cost program, you might think Affinity Designer can't match Adobe Illustrator, and it won't in terms of complexity. However, Affinity Designer still contains all the basic tools that Illustrator offers while providing a comprehensive set of vector drawing tools.

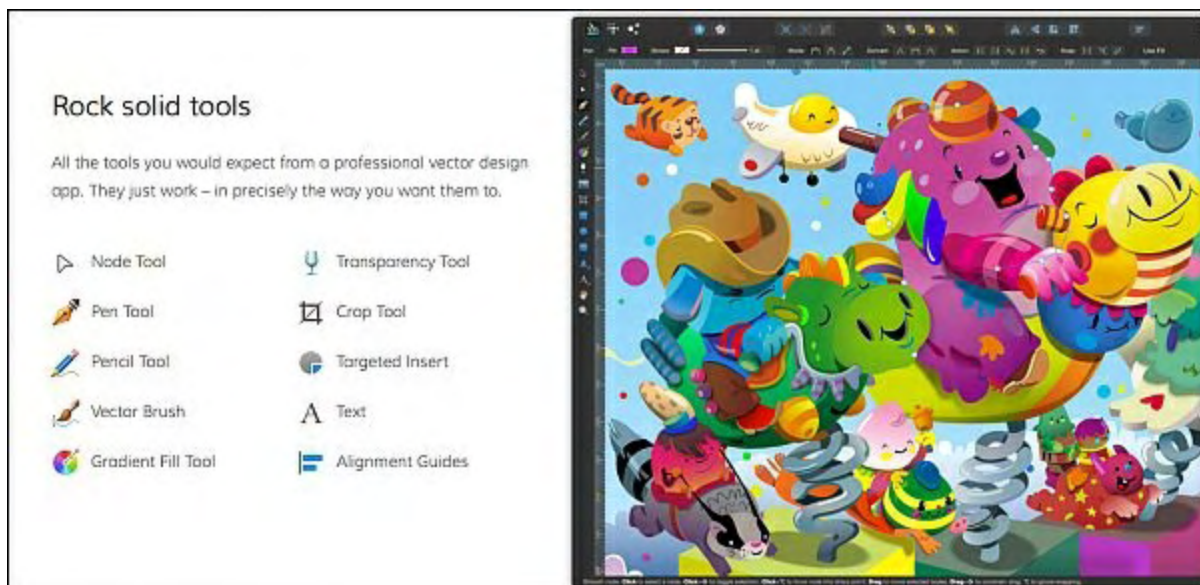


Figure 2. Affinity Designer offers the full range of standard vector drawing tools.

For those unfamiliar with vector drawing, Affinity Designer lets you draw free hand using a brush or pencil tool so you can create images just as if you were holding a real paintbrush or pencil. The difference is that after you draw a line, you can easily edit that line by dragging points on that line or changing its thickness. In comparison, once you draw a line in a painting programs (like Photoshop), you can only modify that line by editing the individual pixels that make up that line. That makes moving, resizing, reshaping, or changing the appearance of that line extremely difficult.

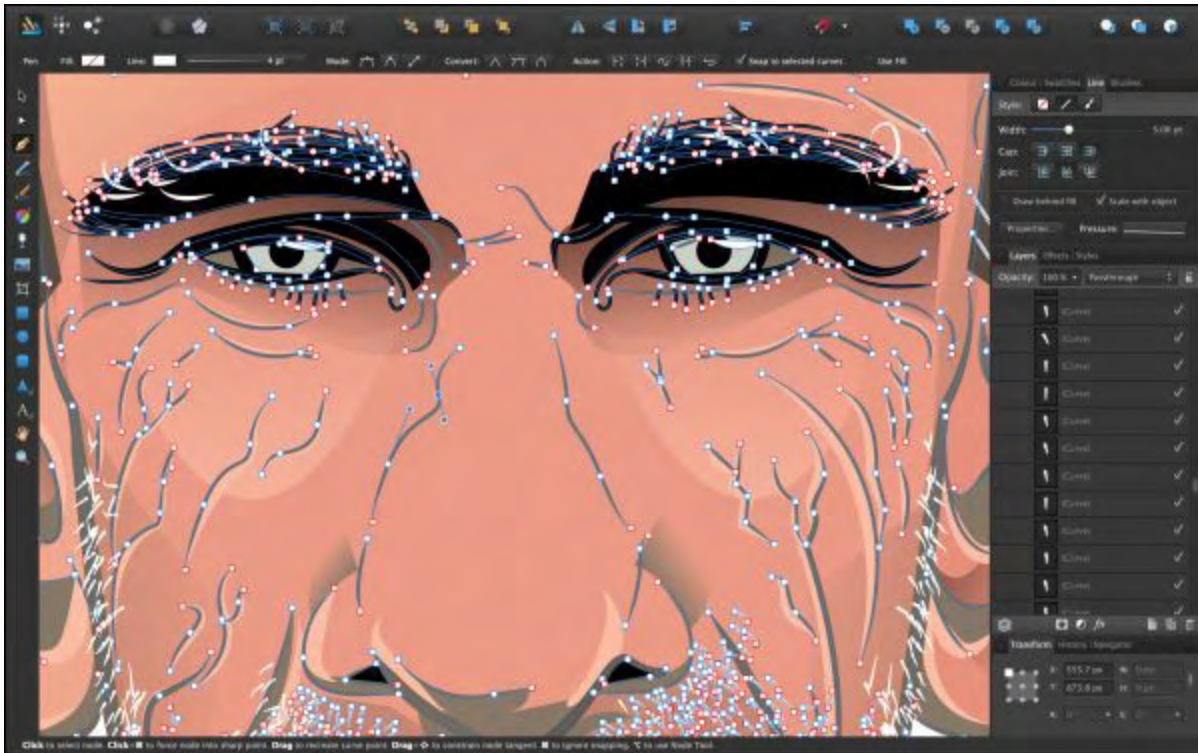


Figure 3. Vector drawings let you modify line points.

In the past, vector drawings tended to look artificial because the drawn lines appeared too perfect. To overcome this problem, Affinity Designer lets you adjust the width and variance of a line. By adjusting the pressure of your line strokes, you can further create natural-looking lines that still have the advantage of vector editing individual line points. For additional editing, you can also use the transparency tool to selectively fade away part of an image to create an interesting visual effect.

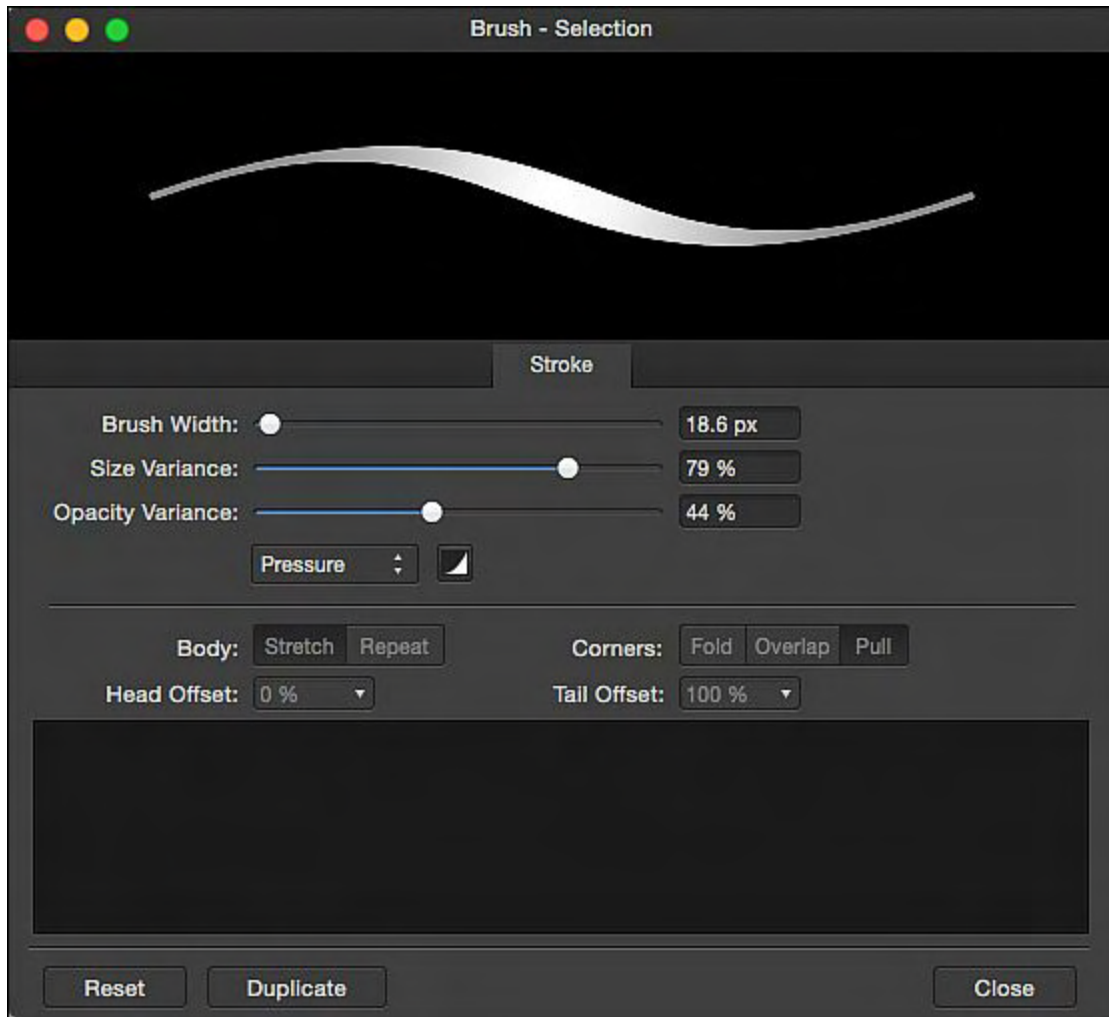


Figure 4. Affinity Designer can adjust variance and width of lines to mimic natural brush strokes.

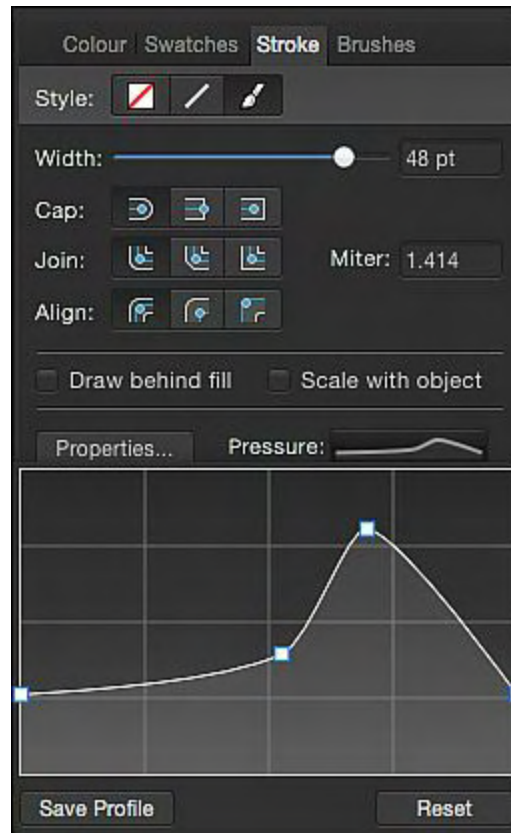


Figure 5. By adjusting the pressure of a line stroke, Affinity Designer can create lines of varying appearance.

Since vector drawings can't always duplicate the natural visual effects of a paint program, Affinity Designer lets you edit rasterize a line so you can edit its individual pixels. Now you can have the best of both the vector and raster graphics world. Vector graphics let you quickly create and easily edit lines and shapes. Raster graphics let you modify individual pixels and paint pixels for further natural looking images.

Pixel perfect control

With real-time pixel preview in standard or retina resolution available with a single click, you can always see what you're going to get. Can't achieve the perfect result purely in vector? Just edit the pixels – Affinity Designer has a full suite of raster tools too.

Lasso Tool	Dodge
Selection Brush	Burn
Pixel Brush	Smudge
Paint Brush	Blur
Eraser	Sharpen

Figure 6. Affinity Designer offers raster graphics editing.

Affinity Designer can export images as SVG (Scalable Vector Graphics) or PSD (Photoshop document) files so you can share your images with Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop users. While other people struggle to learn the features of Illustrator and Photoshop, you can start being creative right away with Affinity Designer and stay compatible with others at the same time.

A particularly useful feature of Affinity Designer is the ability to customize its user interface. Now you can make Affinity Designer work the way you want instead of simply accepting the program as is.

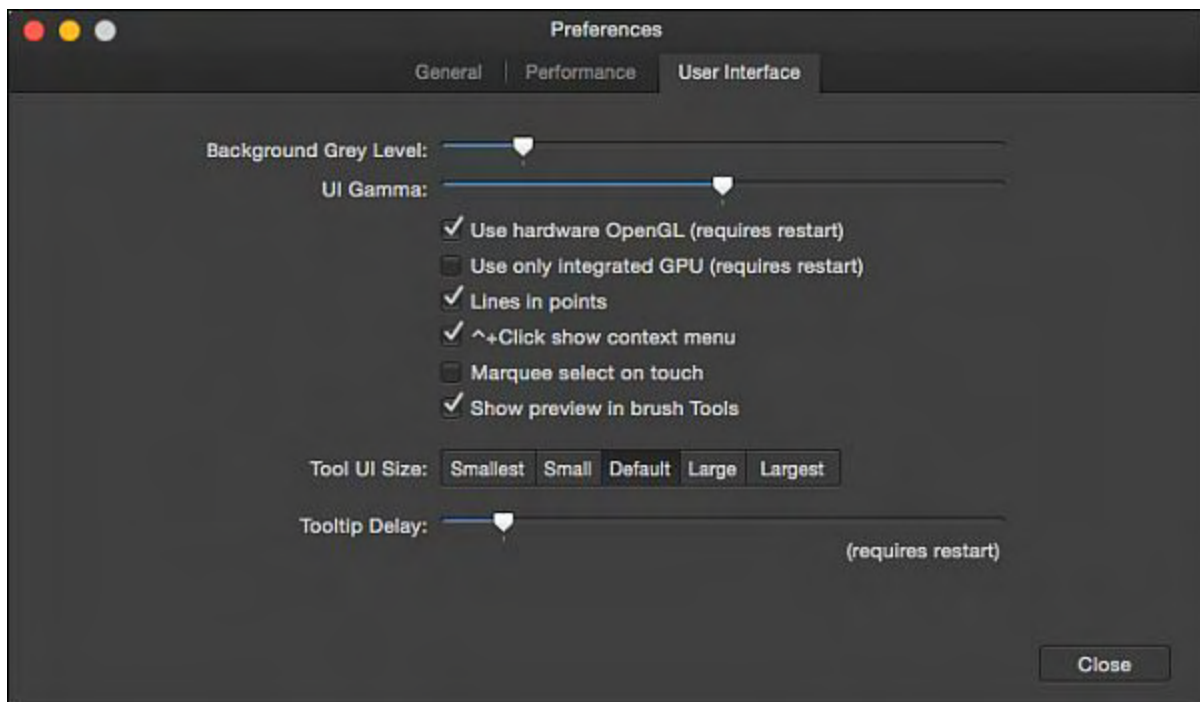


Figure 7. You can customize the Affinity Designer user interface.

Can Affinity Designer replace Adobe Illustrator? If you need high-powered features, then you'll probably still need Adobe Illustrator. However for the vast majority of aspiring graphic artists, you can save a huge amount of cash and a lot of frustration by using Affinity Designer instead of Adobe Illustrator.

With the most common vector drawing tools and the addition of pixel editing tools, Affinity Designer is far more powerful than its low price tag suggests. Novices won't be overwhelmed by features and graphics artists will find Affinity Designer easier on their budget. If you don't want to be held hostage to a cloud subscription that Adobe Illustrator now requires, you'll find Affinity Designer a powerful vector drawing program that's always available on your hard disk while taking up less than 400MB of space.

If you're still not convinced, download a [free trial version](#) of Affinity Designer and see for

yourself. With a little bit of creativity, you'll find that Affinity Designer can help you create sophisticated images without expensive software.

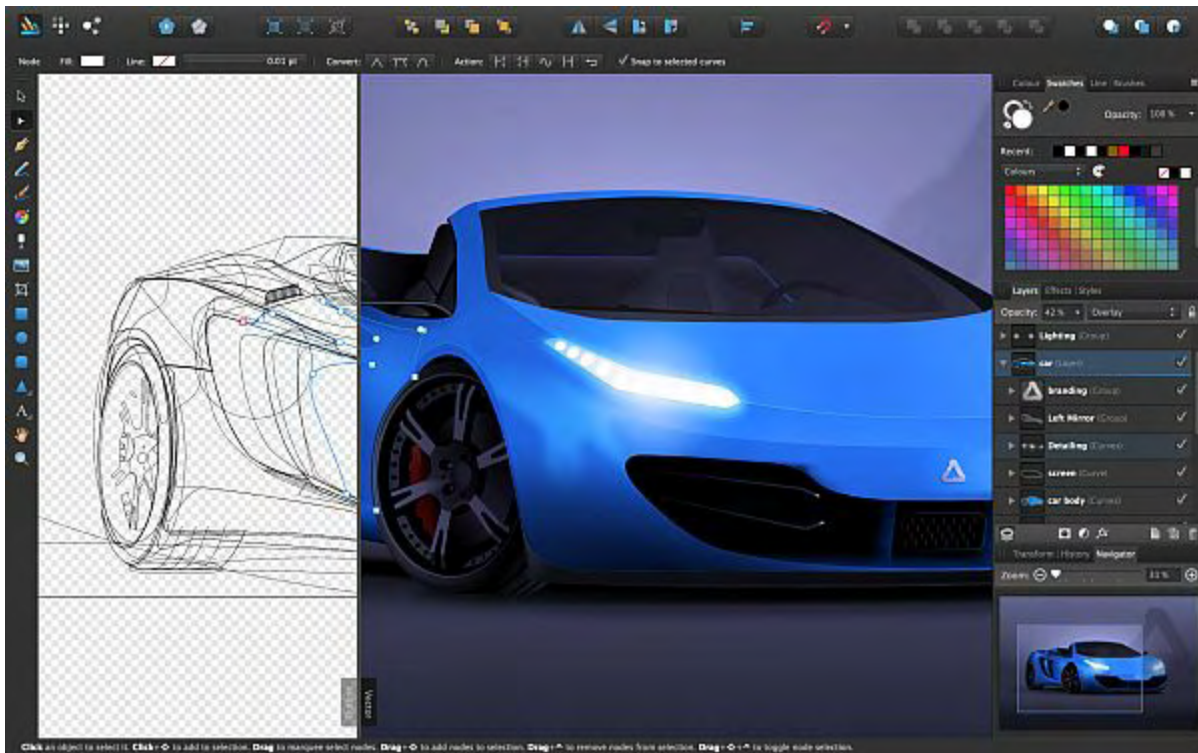


Figure 8. Affinity Designer is limited only by your imagination.

Religious Operating Systems

While many people insist that their operating system is superior without knowing anything about rival operating systems, a unique niche has sprung up among religious users. Since operating systems can be so personal, why not use an operating system custom designed for your particular religious faith?

That's the idea behind [Sabily](#), an Ubuntu-based Linux operating system geared specifically for Muslim computer users. While Sabily contains typical free software like OpenOffice and FireFox, it also includes Zekr and Mus-haf Othman (Quran study tools), Minbar and Firefox-praytimes (prayer times applications), Monajat (an application that popups prayers every predetermined time), and Hijra (islamic calendar) along with Arabic language support.



Figure 9. Sabily includes software to remind Muslims when it's time to pray.

If you're not a Muslim but a Christian, you might be interested in [Ubuntu Christian Edition](#). Besides parental control software that allows you to block objectionable content, Ubuntu Christian Edition also includes software to help you search, read, and memorize passages from the Bible.

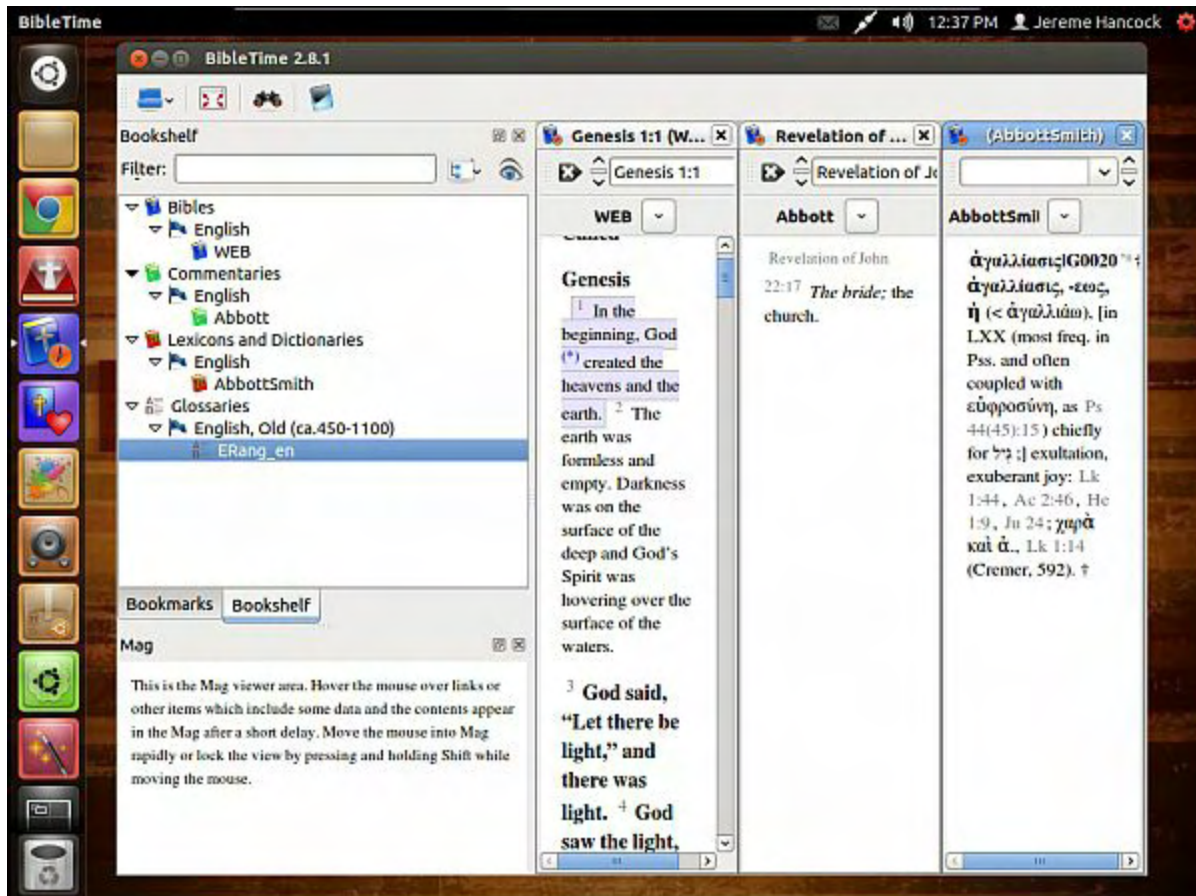


Figure 10. Ubuntu Christian Edition includes Bible software.

If you have a sense of humor about religion, you can also choose [Ubuntu Satanic Edition](#), which is yet another version of Ubuntu layered with Satanic images and jokes such as giving each new edition an alliterative code name like Lucifer's Legion or Microsoft Massacre.



Figure 11. Ubuntu Satanic Edition pokes fun at the devil.

If you're going to be unreasonable and illogical when criticizing rival operating systems, you might as well use religion to justify your hatred. That way you won't be any different from the twisted minds that ignore their own religious teachings emphasizing the sanctity of life while they run groups like ISIS, al-Qaeda, or the Pentagon.

Thinking Different

At one time, VisiCalc ruled the spreadsheet market and VisiCalc users thought it would dominate the spreadsheet forever. Then Lotus 1-2-3 arrived and brought integrated charts to spreadsheets, which caused everyone to abandon VisiCalc and believe Lotus 1-2-3 would dominate the spreadsheet market forever. Finally, Excel arrived on the Macintosh and then Windows, and showed how a spreadsheet could work with a graphical user interface. As a result, Excel soon dominated the spreadsheet market.

Despite the shift in the spreadsheet market, the basic idea of a spreadsheet has remained the same with rows and columns divided into cells where each cell can contain data or a formula. Apple's Numbers spreadsheet broke from the massive row and column metaphor of spreadsheets and lets you create individual tables with different column widths. However, if you really want to try something different, use the free [Matrex](#) program instead.

Unlike traditional spreadsheets (Excel, Lotus 1-2-3, and VisiCalc), Matrex doesn't calculate individual cells but entire rows, columns, or tables called matrices. By calculating blocks of data, Matrex can run faster and automatically adjust when data gets added or deleted from a matrix.

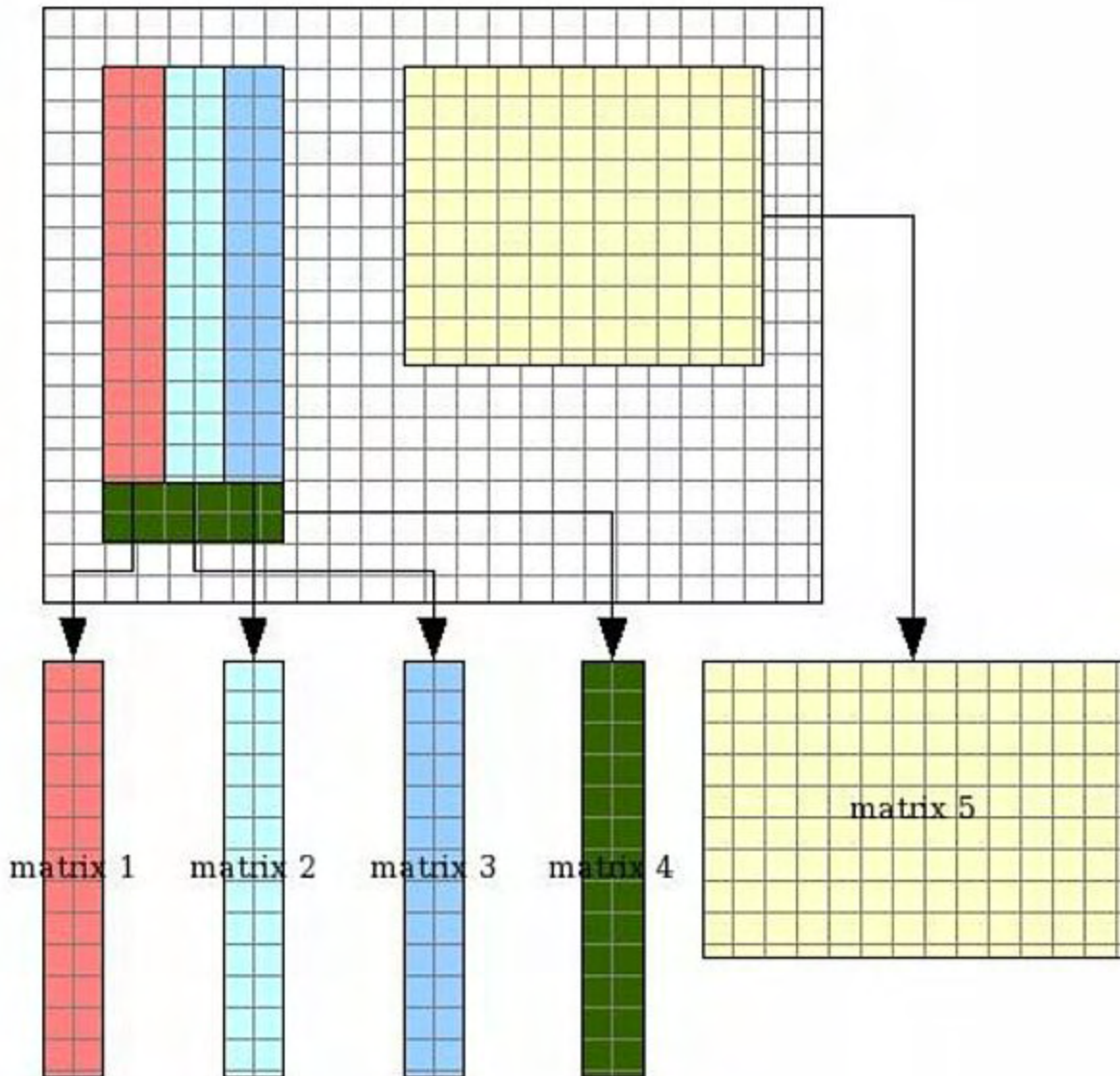


Figure 12. Matrex operates on matrices, not individual cells.

Calculating on matrices instead of individual cells also eliminates duplication of formulas, making the logic behind your spreadsheet calculations easier to understand for large and complex data. If you just need to manipulate a small amount of data, a traditional spreadsheet like Excel will be much easier to use. If you need to manipulate a large amount of data, Matrex might be faster and easier.

There's plenty of innovation in the computer world if you're willing to look for it, experiment with alternative solutions, and temporarily suspend belief that whatever you're using right now will always be superior to everything until the end of time. When you can keep an open mind,

you may be surprised at what you'll find.

If you try Matrex, you might suddenly see the limitations of spreadsheets like Excel and recognize the advantages of programs like Matrex instead. For heavy duty number crunching, Matrex could actually be superior in some ways, but you'll never know for sure unless you try it.

* * *

Hard disks never last forever. Although Apple provides a Disk Utility program buried inside the Utilities folder (inside the Applications folder), the Disk Utility program often can't fix problems on the same hard disk that you boot the operating system on.

One solution is to restart your Macintosh and hold down Command+R until you see a limited menu of options that will let you run Disk Utility. A second solution is to connect two Macintosh computers through a Firewire or Thunderbolt cable, then on the Macintosh containing the hard disk you want to diagnose, click the Apple menu, choose System Preferences, and when a Preferences window appears, click the Startup Disk icon.

Now click the Target Disk Mode button and restart your Macintosh. At this point you can access the target disk mode Macintosh as if it were an external hard disk, allowing you to perform repairs on that hard disk.



Figure 13. Target Disk Mode lets you reboot a Macintosh without the interference of OS X.

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](#)

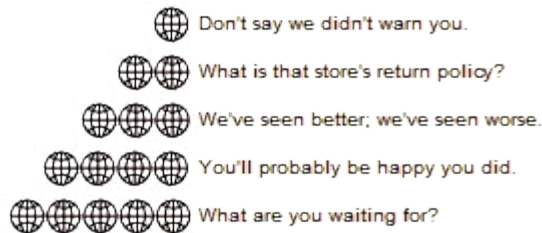
[The 15-Minute Movie Method](#)

[Math for the Zombie Apocalypse](#)

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

[Making a Scene: The Science of Scene Structure](#)

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, News and Reviews Editor

Hunger Games Symbol Catches Fire in Support of Fair Pay; BUSTED: T-Mobile Forced to Stop Hiding Slow Speeds from Throttled Customers; Is Facebook About to Commit a Huge Mistake?; JBL Charge 2 Bluetooth Speaker; Haptic Headphones for Bass Lovers.

Hunger Games Symbol Catches Fire in Support of Fair Pay

PC users have been making the so-called "three finger salute" (ctrl-alt-delete) since the days of DOS, but the Harry Potter Alliance sent us this info this week about an entirely different gesture with the same name, a symbol of resistance seen in the new Hunger Games movie that has been co-opted by advocates fighting real-world economic inequality:

The Harry Potter Alliance, a nonprofit organization inspired by the power of story to create social change, is working with organizations fighting for fair pay to use the Hunger Games three-finger salute as a symbol of solidarity against a broken system that sees a growing gap between low-wage workers and the wealthiest Americans.



"The new Hunger Games movie is now out, and it has inspired an amazing conversation over social media around our very real economic struggles." says Andrew Slack, President of the Harry Potter Alliance. "Next, we will be taking things up a notch, going from the virtual streets to the actual streets to push for fair pay so that the odds are in everyone's favor."

Members of the Harry Potter Alliance will act in solidarity with rallies targeting Walmart and McDonalds to raise their minimum pay rates for low-wage workers.

The Harry Potter Alliance's larger Odds in Our Favor campaign has generated widespread cultural activism against inequality and is inspired by the example of class struggle in the Hunger Games. Last year the AFL-CIO drew parallels to the story and had union leaders across the country (including President Richard Trumka) joining thousands of fan activists (and Senator Elizabeth Warren) doing three-finger salutes. Recently, the movement was cited by Van Jones in an op-ed for CNN and Andrew Slack, president of Harry Potter Alliance, was interviewed by MTV. Follow the latest activities of the campaign by following its official hashtag #myhungergames.

T-Mobile Forced to Stop Hiding Slow Speeds from Throttled Customers

Art Technica has an interesting article about the practice of bandwidth throttling:



When T-Mobile US customers exceed their monthly data caps, they aren't cut off from the Internet entirely. Instead, T-Mobile throttles their connections to 128Kbps or 64Kbps, depending on which plan they have, for the rest of the month.

But T-Mobile has made it difficult for those customers to figure out just how slow their connections are, with a system that exempts speed test applications from the

throttling. After complaints from consumer advocates, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) investigated the issue and has forced T-Mobile to be more honest about its network's throttled speeds.

[The] agreement between T-Mobile and the FCC ensures that customers will be able to accurately gauge their throttled speeds.

"As part of the agreement, T-Mobile will send text messages to customers that will enable them to more easily get accurate speed information, place direct links to accurate speed tests on customer handsets, and revamp its website disclosures to provide clearer information about the speeds customers actually experience," The FCC said.

"Currently, customers who have their speeds reduced after exceeding their monthly high-speed data cap cannot easily understand the results of exempted speed tests," the agency also said. "When these customers run speed tests that T-Mobile has exempted from data caps, they receive information about T-Mobile's full network speed and not the actual reduced speed available to these customers at that time."

Read the entire story [here](#).

Is Facebook About to Commit a Huge Mistake?

That's the question asked by the [Federation of International Employers](#) in reference to Facebook's recently announcement that it intends to launch "Facebook At Work":



"Facebook At Work" is an attempt to respond to the growing membership of LinkedIn and the popularity of file sharing and other office products offered by Microsoft and Google, but in doing so it could overstretch itself, invite retaliation, and further lose credibility.

Growing fears about the security of personal data on social networking sites has been fueled by privacy breaches in recent years. But it is one thing to compromise data posted by individuals on sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, but quite another if breaches take place when their employer has posted the data or personal data is viewed in the workplace. The EU's Data Protection Directive, for instance, places strict constraints on the exchange of personal data by companies—especially if this means transmission of such data to locations outside the European Union.

The launch of "Facebook at Work" is a clear challenge to Facebook's principal networking rivals and also companies providing a wide range of file-sharing and team working software—including Google and Microsoft. Meeting such rivals head on in an increasingly mature market could weaken everyone concerned., especially if it further sensitizes employers to the issues of workplace confidentiality and the costly distractions of social networking ♦ which can have such a big impact on productivity.

Robin Chater, Founder of the new online business networking community ButN welcomes this development. "It will be interesting to see the heavyweights in the social networking market fighting it out for business users. Facebook can see how quickly LinkedIn is growing—in spite of its many critics—and think it can do better. But I am afraid neither organization really understands the business market like we do. ButN has just completed its beta testing and we have extensively analyzed current offerings, so that we can provide something radically different. We also originate from the world's leading employer organization—so we are insiders in the business networking market."

The writing could be on the wall for Facebook if it ventures too far. For proof of this it is only necessary to look at "We Chat", the Chinese social networking App launched in 2010 which claims to have over 600 million users (mainly in China). Although its owner Tencent Holdings wants it to become the largest networking site in the world recent reports suggest that it has overextended and is now losing members.

JBL Charge 2 Bluetooth Speaker

Product category: Bluetooth speaker

Manufacturer: JBL

Model: Charge 2

Web site: www.jbl.com

Price: about \$150

The JBL Charge 2 is JBL's newest wireless Bluetooth speaker on the block... and they seemed to have done everything right with this rendition. From passive woofers that get loud enough to actually move to a center channel that covers everything with a crisp warm tone that's all packed into the size of a soup can. JBL definitely hit the mark and designed a legitimate can of whoop... err... a legitimate heavyweight contender for its class.

One thing that has always soured me to the idea of portable speakers, is the lack of depth that devices in this classification are able to deliver. Usually they produce extremely one sided audio, they either are able to deliver extremely deep and responsive bass or they can give a mid to high section of sounds that will have you feeling like angels are serenading you. In my experience with these devices in the past, however, trying to listen to music that combines these two things makes for an extremely unpleasant listening experience. Usually you get something that sounds like the equivalent of a high school PA system being flipped on and off repeatedly. Due to the formula never being correct with the sound balance, a lot of speakers were marketed towards specific listening preferences... and if you're anything like me, that adds up to quite a few speakers in order to get through your daily needs. The whole scene of this created the perfect storm, and up until a little while ago I lost all faith in the quality of these electronics; but then I was able to get my hands on the JBL Charge 2.



I never was able to hear or play around with the original Charge, so I'm not going to be able to tell you whether or not the upgrade is going to be worth it; but for anyone out there looking for

a great experience regardless of your listening preferences is surely in for a treat. The Charge 2 comes delivered in a very sleek looking tube design, features two bass drivers and a fully featured center channel, which is all accessible through Bluetooth, auxiliary input (2.5mm) or a USB connection. Included with the device is a USB cable, wall outlet, and all the information to get you off and running in a few minutes. Regardless of how you choose to connect to the Charge 2 you're going to be extremely pleased with the sound that you get out of this bad boy. One thing that supremely surprised me, was how loud the speaker can actually get. It's hard to fully explain through the meaning of writing... but it is extremely impressive. It's able to cover the conversation in a room of 10 people, and still have power to get louder; all the while losing no clarity or depth of music. This is one aspect of the device that I absolutely loved, and that is that no matter what you're listening to or how loud it is... you will never experience distortion or choppiness, something that I was definitely not expecting from a speaker of this class.

In terms of actually delivering your music to the device, there is the trio of methods that I mentioned previously; all of which deliver sound equally as pleasant. The full featured Bluetooth driver allows you to connect any capable device wirelessly and stream your music. One neat quirk that comes in the feature list that I haven't seen around the market is the 'Social Mode' that comes with the device. This allows you to connect up to 3 Bluetooth devices simultaneously, and take turns playing music from each individual device. This comes in very handy at gatherings or parties, because we all have that one friend who has 'the song' of the night they just need to show everyone. Integrating that in with seamless transitions, and you're able to shift between jams without killing the groove.

The life of the battery is extremely impressive as well. On a full charge you get around 12 hours of playback, and as long as you keep it turned off when not in use the charge retains itself for weeks at a time. There is a very nifty battery meter near the controls, so you will always be able to tell whether you need to have it charging or not.

One quirk that I did notice over my time with the Charge 2, is a strange static/rumbling that shows up when the speaker is turned just a few notches above its lowest volume. It's not enough to destroy the experience, but it is definitely enough for you to know that something isn't right. As long as you don't have to keep the speaker turned down that low you won't need to worry about any playback issues.

All in all, this speaker is definitely worth the investment for anyone looking for a portable sound system. The battery life, sound quality, and connectivity available deliver a package that is unbeatable when compared to the devices and prices available in this category. If there was ever an interest in something like this and you were waiting for the right time to get into the scene, the JBL Charge 2 is your no-regrets shoe in to the experience. For around \$150, this bad boy can be yours.



Review contributed by Jeremy Halligan

Haptic Headphones for Bass Lovers

Product name: BackBeat PRO wireless, noise canceling headphones + mic

Manufacturer: Plantronics

Web site: www.plantronics.com

Price: \$249.99 MSRP

Once upon a time, stereo was a big deal. Although stereo music inevitably became a standard, only some stereo albums took truly creative advantage of channel separations (for instance, the Beatles' "A Day In the Life"). Fast forward to the 21st century, and haptic audio is the new stereo. "Haptic" refers to the "thumpa thumpa" vibrations you might have experienced while stopped at a traffic light next to a vehicle with its sound system amped up. Because haptic bass recordings are becoming a standard, music lovers who want to feel their favorite tunes might ask Santa for Plantronics' BackBeat PRO headphones (Figure 1).



Figure 1. BackBeat PRO headphones are designed to satisfy music lovers who fancy bass instruments and want to feel their favorite tunes. These well-padded, over-ear headphones have several differentiating features of convenience; they include, but are not limited to, wireless connectivity, user-friendly controls, active noise cancellation, and a long-lasting battery.

This product ships in a distinctive package that consists of an outer cardboard sleeve and an inner box with transparent plastic sides and cardboard top and bottom (Figure 2). The former consists of a top, bottom, front and back; it comes without sides so that the buyer can readily slide the inner box out. The sleeve's front has a purple background with a picture of the headphone and white text that says "BackBeat Pro" in small font, "Wireless Noise

Cancellation" in a thin larger font. The sleeve's back, top, and bottom are black with white text; text on the back lists the product's features, specs, package contents, and logos indicating native support for Bluetooth, apt X, made for iPod, iPhone, and iPad, and "Compatible with Android."



Figure 2. BackBeat PRO headphones come in a package consisting of an outer sleeve which contains an inner box made of cardboard lid and bottom plus a clear plastic sides. The inner box, in turn, contains a molded styrofoam insert which holds the headphones and its accessories.

The package's inner box measures about 9 by 9 by 4.5 inches. It consists of a black cardboard lid and bottom with clear plastic sides. Inside is a dark grey molded styrofoam insert which holds the headphones firmly in place until their unboxing.

In addition to the headphones, the package also includes the following accessories: a black nylon travel pouch, micro USB charging cable, 3.5 mm inline cable, and printed documentation.

The travel pouch is handy for storing or transporting the headphones when not in use. It measures 9.25 by 11 inches and weighs 3.4 oz. This pouch is made of black nylon on the outside with an incredibly soft fleece on the inside (warning: touch the fleece and you might never let go of it) and velcro strips at the top for sealing.

The included inline cable with 3.5 mm plug is about 4 feet 9 inches long (excluding the plugs at either end). It is colored purple and has a mic/play-pause-volume control unit ~2.5 inches from

the headphones plug (thus, this unit will be situated near the user's face while wearing the headphones). The 3.5 mm plug is at a right angle and reinforced with a thick black coating for extra protection. As discussed later in this review, the inline cable is not recommended for ordinary usage due to a noticeable degradation of audio quality.

The included micro USB charging cable is about 3 feet long excluding the reinforced plugs at either end. It also is colored purple.

Plantronics' documentation for this product includes two Get Started pamphlets—one in English, the other in Spanish—which consists of a high gloss accordion-folded paper sheet measuring 3.25 inches square and about 26.5 inches long when unfolded. This pamphlet includes instructional sections entitled "Get paired," "Take control," "Charge," "Adjust the Fit," "Pair second device," "Use sensors," "Airplane mode," "Advanced open mic," and "Customize." Additional documentation includes a For Your Safety pamphlet in English, Spanish, and French, plus a warranty pamphlet.

Last but not least, this package includes the BackBeat Pro headphones. These over-ear headphones have several noteworthy physical features which differentiate them from similarly or lesser priced competitors.

First is construction. These headphones' materials include sturdy but lightweight plastic ear pieces, an adjustable aluminum band connecting the two rotatable ear pieces, and abundant padding on the band and ear pieces (Figure 1) to maximize comfort.

Next is design. These headphones' design emphasizes function and user friendliness over appearance. For instance, the ear pieces are matte black without any logos or other identifiers. Users who prefer listening to music without attracting attention will prefer BackBeat PRO's design over competitors'.

Lastly, this product's attention to user-friendly details is exceptional. One detail is the letter labeling of the left and right ear pieces. Unlike competing products which have minuscule or otherwise difficult to find labels, BackBeat PRO has large (~72 point font) "L" and "R" on the interior face of the respective ear piece. Each of the functionality controls (on-off switch, volume, play/pause, etc.) is readily locatable and manipulable on the ear pieces without looking (during testing, I was up to speed on using these controls in no time).

BackBeat PRO's specifications, as listed in the documentation and on the package's sleeve, include the following.

listening time—up to 24 hours Bluetooth wireless streaming

standby time—up to 21 days

deep sleep mode—up to 180 days

operating distance (range)—up to 100 meters/330 feet from music playing device with Class 1 Bluetooth

weight—340 grams (0.75 lb.)

audio—aptX® low latency codec2AAC codec2, 40mm dynamic drivers, frequency response—20Hz-20kHz
 noise canceling—controllable Active Noise Canceling (ANC) plus Digital Signal Processing (DSP) and dual microphones
 multipoint—simultaneously connect two Bluetooth devices (2H2S)
 status alerts—spoken alerts in 14 language options, which vary by region (US and UK English, Cantonese, Danish, EU-French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Norwegian, Russian, EU-Spanish and Swedish)
 battery type—rechargeable, non-replaceable lithium-ion
 charge time (maximum)—up to 3 hours
 Bluetooth v4.0 + EDR—A2DP for audio streaming, AVRCP for music controls, hands-free v1.6 for wideband, and Headset v1.2

BackBeat PRO's convenience-oriented features, as listed in the documentation and on the package's sleeve, include the following.

- up to 24 hours continuous wireless streaming
- on-demand Active Noise Canceling
- up to 330ft/100m range using Class 1 Bluetooth device
- OpenMic feature "plays" the user's surrounding sounds
- automatic music play/pause when headphones are put on/removed
- five battery level LED indicators

This product's most outstanding feature is its support for Bluetooth wireless streaming. Being able to don these headphones, flip the on switch, and immediately begin listening to tunes without having to deal with a tangled mess of spaghetti-like cables is a sheer delight. More time listening, less time fussing. A close second most outstanding feature for this reviewer is the rechargeable battery's longevity. During testing, I listened to tunes for varying amounts of time over several days before the battery level alert changed from "Battery high" to "Battery medium." The first time that the headphones stopped functioning due to needing a recharge happened well into week 2 of usage. The combination of a long-lasting battery and wirelessness translates into more time spent listening to music and less time recharging and fussing with cables.

How does music sound when played wirelessly through BackBeat PROs? As mentioned previously, these headphones are truly great for haptic tunes (ones in which the listener can feel vibrations). Such tunes in my music library include (but are not limited to) Trent Reznor's and Atticus Ross' "Carbon Prevails" ("The Social Network" soundtrack); Lana Del Rey's "Off to the Races" and "Carmen"; "The Lion King" soundtrack; and Mike Oldfield's "Amarok." Note that you will not necessarily feel all tunes that prominently feature bass instruments (guitar; percussion). For example, John McVie's bass guitar in Fleetwood Mac's "Smile At You" sounds pretty ordinary to me when using the BackBeat PROs.

This product's audio signature does have a notable down side, however. To my ears (your mileage may vary), their primary weakness is that bass instruments sound less sharp, detailed, and/or crisp than they do when listening with other ear devices. This weakness actually was applicable to other instruments as well; during testing, strings and/or brass which I know to be present in certain tunes were either muffled or missing (to my ears) when listening with the BackBeat PROs.

An additional, unrelated weakness worth keeping in mind when making a purchase decision is comfort. If you search the web for other reviews of the BackBeat PRO headphones, they generally rave about this product's high degree of comfort. My experience disappointingly was the opposite; within an hour of listening, I repeatedly feel compelled to reposition the ear pieces due to considerable discomfort. Regardless of how I repositioned the ear pieces during testing, the discomfort persisted. Although many prospective buyers likely will experience the same comfort that other reviewers have reported, the potential does exist that BackBeat PROs could be uncomfortable for at least some users.

Another noteworthy weakness is that BackBeat PRO headphones' rechargeable battery is not replaceable (as clearly stated in the product's documentation). Whenever the battery reaches the end of its lifespan (which is not defined in the product's documentation), the user has several options—continue using these headphones in "airplane mode" (i.e., with the 3.5 mm inline cable), sell or give them away, or send them to the landfill. Each of these options is sub-optimal, but especially using the inline cable. It results in a readily noticeable degradation of audio quality, so much so that I tested it once for this review and then set the cable aside. Audiophiles most likely will be disappointed by airplane mode, as will haptic tunes lovers.

One other weakness to mention is the active noise canceling feature. As mentioned, Plantronics emphasizes this particular feature on the front of the package's sleeve. During testing, my impression of this feature was less enthusiastic. Although it does reduce (actually "muffles" might be a more appropriate word) ambient noises (e.g., the sound of a bus' engine), my impression during testing was that this feature also reduces (muffles) the music as well. My preference is to rely on the more-than-adequate passive noise canceling afforded by the ear pieces' abundant padding.

In conclusion, music lovers with a strong preference for bass instruments and/or haptic feedback while listening to their tunes most likely would be delighted by the BackBeat PRO headphones. This product is delivers an entertaining experience while listening wirelessly to music tracks with haptic support. Additional important strengths include a long-lasting rechargeable battery, user-friendly controls, and attention to details in construction and functions that maximize time spent listening to music. On the flip side, price-sensitive customers who are averse to the "thumpa thumpa" experience might do well to look at other wireless products.

Review contributed by Barry Fass-Holmes

* * *

BTW, So Cal area readers might want to check out ComputerEdge News and Reviews Editor Charles Carr's newest stage play, an adaptation of "A Christmas Carol" titled "Mr. Scrooge & Mr. Dickens" taking place in San Marcos, CA in just a couple of weeks. Last year's shows sold out fast — demand even crashed the theater's Web site for two days, so ... you know, just sayin'.

He's back!

SCROOGE

Last year's hit production of *A Christmas Carol (Mr. Scrooge & Mr. Dickens)* returns to San Marcos' beautiful Walnut Grove Park. This faithful adaptation of Charles Dickens' beloved classic features carolers, dancers, period costumes, computer-controlled lighting, thrilling music and sound effects, and a surprise visit by Santa at the end of the show!

Last year's shows (cast pictured here) sold out!

\$12.50 general, \$7.50 children under 12

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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 ComputerEdge 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 ComputerEdge Staff

"My Experiences with Kickstarter," "Foxit PDF Reader is Fantastic," "VPN Service," "Windows 8.1 Autologon"

My Experiences with Kickstarter

[Regarding Jack Dunning's November 21 [article](#), "Kickstarter Realities: What Buyer and Sellers Should Know":]

Based on your previous article about Kickstarter, I decided to try a campaign to fund an iBook project. As you indicated in this article, it wasn't so much that I needed the money as much as I wanted to see what kind of interest there would be in the project.

When I created the campaign, I found that the site was a bit tedious to complete, requiring that I think through a lot of the pieces needed to improve chance of success (a good thing), but also requiring that I set up a funding account, which took about a week to complete because of some problems they had matching me to the account. This impacted my schedule of trying to complete things by the end of September (starting on Labor Day) since I had one less week to get funding.

What did I learn? Not sure, but maybe I needed to extend it for a few weeks to get it funded. Maybe I needed a better title than Build your own Office/macros/VBA. Maybe the timing was not right or maybe there's just not much interest in that topic. I told the supporters I'd try again in January and see if things change. If not, on to the next topic.

Thanks for the inspiration to try it out.

-Rob the ComputerTutor, San Diego

Foxit PDF Reader is Fantastic

[Regarding the November 28 [Digital Dave column](#):]

In the comment about using Chrome as a PDF reader substitute rather than Adobe or a "scaled

down reader", I would suggest that Foxit is anything but a scaled down reader. Considering it's free along with the host of capabilities built into it I can't imagine not having it on my computer(s).

-John H, Encinitas, CA

I can't echo more strongly to try Foxit's Free PDF Reader. Yup, extra features, faster and smaller than Adobe's Acrobat Reader, with many very slick additional features. My favorite, the typewriter tool that allows you to add text (also can add pix through another tool) to any pdf (*not just form fill enabled ones*) and save/print, etc.

-Rich Ernst, San Diego

VPN Service

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

SoftEther VPN is one of the most powerful and easiest VPN software in the world. It is freeware, developed as an academic research project in University of Tsukuba, Japan. I have been using it for about a year. Read about it here. <http://www.softether.org/>

-Kay Katz, San Diego, CA

Windows 8.1 Autologon

[Regarding the November 28 [Digital Dave column](#):]

My wife just replaced her laptop with a windows 8.1 version. Although there is a bit of a learning curve associated with it, it's certainly doable. However, having to use a login every time the laptop is turned on is really frustrating and so far I haven't found a way around that. Do you know of one?

Thanks.

-John H, Encinitas, CA

Hi, John. You might try [Autologon for Windows](#) from Microsoft's Sysinternals.

-Jack Dunning , *ComputerEdge*

ComputerEdge 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 ComputerEdge.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 "ComputerQuick 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 [ComputerEdge E-Books](#).

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