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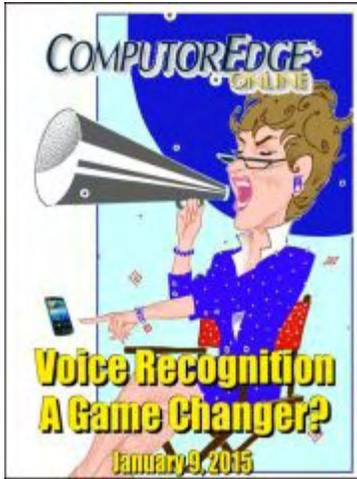
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Voice Recognition: A Game Changer?

Amazingly, after years of shoddy performance, voice recognition is starting to work.

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by Digital Dave

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Digital Dave

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

Copying iTunes Music to an SD Card; Laptop Too Slow.

Copying iTunes Music to an SD Card

Dear Digital Dave,

I have other devices (my car and phone) besides my Apple iPad and iPod that I want to use for my music. They use SD cards.

With rare exceptions I can successfully copy the music files to the SD card from the iTunes folder on my Windows 7 machine, but most of the album artwork does not come with it.

The music file copy problem I run into is the album sequence number will copy a part of the song name. This is not consistent though.

Thank you for your help, I love reading your column weekly.

*Rich DiSanto
Denver, CO*

Dear Richard,

The problem may be that iTunes maintains the cover artwork in a separate folder. Even if you copy it all, the software used by your car and/or phone may not be compatible with using the iTunes cover artwork system. It sounds like whatever method you're using for copying the music might be truncating long song names.

Some of the resources I checked indicated that cover artwork is often not copied when transferring from iTunes, but I need to defer to readers who may know much more than I do about both iTunes and other possible players. You might need to manually reorganize. Apple software is not designed to play well with non-Apple software or devices.

From my perspective, if I'm able to get the music to play in my car or on the phone (with or without the cover images), I will be happy with the audio experience. But that's just me. If

anyone has encountered this particular problem and has a solution, I'm sure Rich would like to hear it.

Digital Dave

Laptop Too Slow

Dear Digital Dave,

I have had a problem with my laptop since day one, it's running too slow and I don't know what to do. I also don't know if Compaq computers are the best option. I download different software to see if will make a difference, but I'm still having the same issues.

Can you please help me out?

Thanks,

*Jorge
Bonita, CA*

Dear Jorge,

I'm assuming that you recently purchased your computer since you say that you've had problems since day one. Compaq has been owned by HP for over a decade and, at this point, essentially any Compaq you find is built by HP. (I thought that the Compaq name had been phased out but I found a couple of machines out there.) There is nothing inherently wrong with the computer, but if it's still possible to return it, I would. A computer should not be running slow when you first buy it.

One of the problems with new computers is the manufacturers have incentives to load a lot of extra trial software on new computers. I always recommend that as one of the first steps this software be removed. These programs are often set to load into ready-to-sell mode whenever you boot up. Go to Programs and Features and uninstall any software you don't need or want.

However, if you have a severely slow computer, then I would suspect that it is more than just a trial software problem. I might even suspect that someone else after having purchased the computer loaded a bunch of stuff (including possible viruses), then returned it to the dealer—who in turn resold it to you.

It could also be a bad hard drive. They're most likely to fail either early or late, so it's not too unusual. If it doesn't outright fail, it can slow things down. If you have the option definitely get the laptop replaced.

If you bought a used computer, then you certainly have your work cut out for you. You will want to run complete scans with [Malwarebytes](#) free software and run [CCleaner](#) through its paces. Check Task Manager (CTRL+SHIFT+ESC) for rogue processes and make sure there are not too many programs loading at startup.

Generally, the reason that computers slowdown is because they are running too many things (or are infected with malware). Other than cleaning software as mention above, adding more programs will not help. If nothing seems to work, then I hope you have system disks (and registration code) for reinstalling the operating system, because the only surefire way to get a clean start is to reinstall the operating system.

Digital Dave



Voice Texting with Your Smartphone

“Jack Experiences a Surprising Change of Mind” by Jack Dunning

All my early tests of voice recognition were tedious failures. Now, using Google voice recognition, texting is amazingly easy.

It's not often that I have an epiphany and get a glimpse into the future. It's the type of rare insight that only occasionally comes while using new technology. It's easy to sit back and snipe at others using high tech in ways you'd never dream of, but until you actually try it it's impossible to see the whole picture.

In the past I've always been adamantly opposed to cellphone text messages. I dropped Twitter because it was too much of a hassle to think to things to say. I get super annoyed when someone on television uses the term "hashtag" (e.g. *#idiots*). Before I ever thought of signing up for a smartphone, I let everyone in the family know that "I don't text!" I didn't have a text package and would be charged something like 60¢ for each one received. I considered that a rip-off since the cost to the cell company was about zero cents per message. In fact, I never planned to get any kind of texting plan.

That changed when I switched to a smartphone with a data share plan. Since it included unlimited text messaging, I could no longer use the excuse that it was too expensive. It was available whether I wanted it or not. First, knowing that I had a new smartphone, one of my daughters-in-laws started sending me texts while my wife and I were babysitting the grand kids saying that they would be late. Humph! I begrudgingly read the message. It's not that I minded receiving the message, I just didn't want to respond. Typing out messages on a smartphone

continues to be a pain and I didn't want to encourage her. I've often talked about fat finger syndrome in relation to tablet computers and the problem is magnified on a smartphone—I don't care how big the phone is.

A couple of months ago I was waiting for a plane at the airline terminal. I watched a woman sending some messages with her smartphone—don't know if they were texts or e-mail. I was in awe of her thumbs flying across the virtual keyboard while typing in volumes of data. I could see that she was sending more than one messages because she would occasionally hit what appeared to be a Send key and go through motions which could only be interpreted as starting another message. She could have been writing a book, but the chapters would have been relatively short. She was probably running a multi-billion corporation from her smartphone.

As I'm sure many people do, the woman was using the two thumb approach to inputting her words. The smartphone was cupped in her two hands while her thumbs rapidly targeted the keys in succession. Both her thumbs were slender and lithe enough to accurately find and activate exactly the right key. It certainly beat my one finger poking approach to any smartphone keying.

The problem is that I could never achieve those blazing speeds with the two-thumb technique. My thumbs are even bigger than my fingers. They each will cover two or three keys on the virtual key board. If I try to use thumbs, the result will be almost random. The smartphone did not increase my incentive to use text messaging. That is until...

Who Are You Talking To?

One day while struggling with a smartphone text message (or e-mail—it doesn't really matter which) I noticed the little microphone on the keyboard. I knew what it was because a similar icon shows up on the iPad. I pressed the button and the smartphone went into the listening mode. I stated my messages and waited for the software to garble my words. I was shocked to see that it replicated my spoken words exactly. I had tried voice recognition many times in the past, but this was the first time it was easy—and accurate. Previously, a newly activated voice recognition engine would need repetitious training, but this one didn't. It worked great! It even discerned the word "AutoHotkey" the first time I spoke it.

Suddenly, I was no longer bound by the virtual keyboard and fat fingers. It completely changed my outlook toward texting...at least while I was in the privacy of my own home. Doing it in public is a different matter. I don't particularly want to draw attention when I randomly talk into my phone in a stilted robotic voice. Yes, the better you enunciate, the better it works—which tends to make someone talk more like Data from Star Trek. Fortunately, I haven't had to deal with public texting very much.

Using voice recognition isn't perfect, but it's a heck of a lot better than thumbing on a tiny

keyboard. It works much better for short messages than long blocks of text. As a test, I read into my smartphone that old article from a 1983 issue of *The Byte Buyer* [republished last week](#). I did not have a digital version anymore and the hard copy was not suitable for scanning with optical character recognition (OCR) software. The results were mixed.

Using Voice Recognition

While I found that speaking a short text message is usually very successful, attempts to read to the smartphone are more problematic. This was probably due to my inadequate out loud reading ability. If I fumbled—while it did its best—the software often made more mistakes. For example, "a few" became "if you", "arrives" became "arise", and "information leaks" became "information lakes." My guess is that with practice I would do a better job of enunciating and the overall product would be better.

In order to insert punctuation the characters must be voiced. To add a dot for a period, the word "period" with a pause is required. The word following the dot is always capitalized. Once I got used to doing this, it was quite easy to do. However, it is problematic to use the word "period" as in a "*period* of time."

After a search of the Web, I noted that some people felt they had solved the "period" problem by switching the primary voice recognition language to UK English in the smartphone language settings. Then, rather than using "period" to end a sentence, "full stop" would do the job. Unless you're in the Navy driving ships, you're not likely to be using the term "full stop" for anything other than punctuation at the end of a sentence. The down side to this approach is the all of the idiosyncrasies of the British language such as the spelling of "organise" and "colour"—not that there is anything wrong with that.

A better solution is to manually correct the inadvertent dots with the built in options dropdown menu. What I had to do was poke the location of the dot (not always easy with fat fingers) and select "period" from the pop-up menu (see Figure 1). While this technique worked, I resolved to eliminate the word "period" from any voice recognition dictation, period!

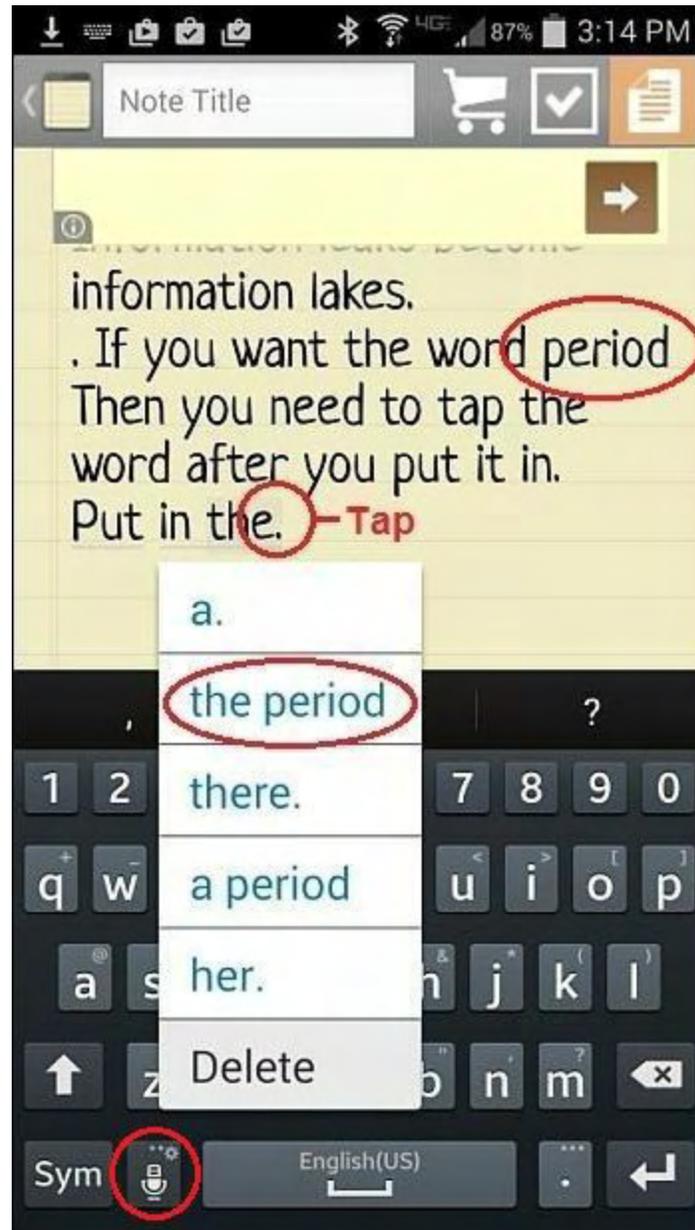


Figure 1. Tapping the microphone icon on the bottom row of the virtual keyboard activates the voice recognition on an Android smartphone. To replace the dot with the word "period" tap the location of the dot and select from the pop-up menu.

Other punctuation, such as a comma, question mark, or exclamation point, is inserted by saying "comma", "question mark" and "exclamation point" respectively. The first word of the next sentence is automatically capitalized. The commands "new line" and "paragraph" would add either one or two carriage returns to either jump to the next line or add a double space between paragraphs.

Smartphone Voice Recognition Software

The Apple iPhone and Android smartphones dominate the market. For voice recognition Apple

has the Siri technology with the competition using Google's voice recognition—especially on Android devices. While the accuracy of both have improved significantly in the last few years (if you haven't tried voice recognition lately, you really should), most reviewers give the edge to Google's smartphone voice recognition. It seems to do a better job of figuring out what you wanted to say based on the context of the sentence. (A number of times, I watch while Google displayed a couple of different possible words before it settled on the correct one.) Apple does have some advantages, particularly in Siri requests. Fortunately, if you're an iPhone (or iPad) users, you're not stuck with just Apple voice recognition. There are many iPhone apps available which use Google voice recognition—particular in the search category.

Voice Recognition Makes Texting Worthwhile

It immediately became clear to me that dictating a text message is a game changer. It makes texting much more viable for everyone. No longer is it necessary to fumble with a smartphone keyboard, just to send a quick note. Something that I've spent my cell phone life trying to avoid—texting—now has become a desirable alternative. It has helped me to see the use of the smartphone in a different light and may seriously encroach on social media such as Facebook.

Breaking down the typing barrier to text messaging opens this world of communication to many more people. Not only does it help people with disabilities, but it's great for people like me who have never wanted to mess with a tiny keyboard. Plus, since it's just as easy to send photos and videos (especially when Wi-Fi connected), texting does everything that Facebook does—except without exposing yourself and your thoughts to the entire world—or at least all the people you were forced to friend because you didn't want to hurt their feelings.) Receiving a texted photo is much more intimate than viewing that same image on a social networking site. Someone must take the time to send the private photo (or conversation) directly to you. It is much more intimate. Viewing Facebook is about as personal as looking at billboards as you drive down the freeway. Texting is private while Facebook is out there for all the world to see.

Texting has a specific private purpose while Facebook is a way of telling everyone that you're still alive and doing your duty by posting something. In fact, some people feel that in this day and age a Facebook posting is all that's needed to fulfill their social obligations. Mentioning on a social media site that you're now married does not substitute for sending out an announcement to close friends and family. Many people either don't use their Facebook account anymore or rarely check it. At least with a text there is a personal connection. Texting could be equated with e-mail, except you know that it is being sent to a device which addressees are most likely carrying with them. While text messages will patiently wait until they are read, they are not going to be sent to the Spam folder.

There will probably always be a place for general posting sites such as Facebook. It's unlikely that smartphone messages systems will ever replace the personal Web page. But now that voice recognition has improved enough for universal use it's likely to change the way many people communicate.

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.)

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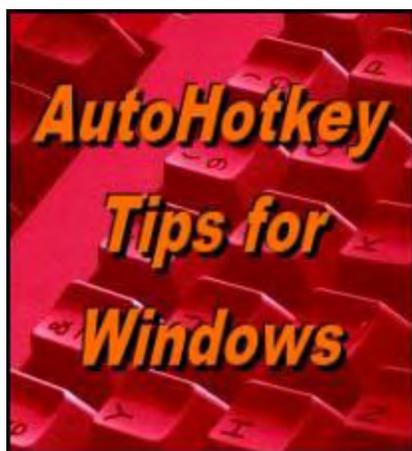
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and [*That Does Not Compute!*](#), brilliantly drawn cartoons by Jim Whiting for really stupid gags by Jack about computers and the people who use them.



**Yet, One More
Reason to Use
AutoHotkey
Free Software!**

**Writing
AutoHotkey
Code Fast
with
SmartGUI**

Creator

“A Powertool for Fast Design and Code Writing for Pop-up Windows” by Jack Dunning

While it's great to build pop-up windows with the AutoHotkey GUI command, writing all that code can be tedious. Use SmartGUI Creator 4.0 to quickly generate lines for your scripts.

This column talks about an easy-to-use AutoHotkey code generator which helps to build app windows. If you're familiar with the Gui, Add command, then this column will be no problem. If not then you will find the GUI (Graphical User Interface) is introduced in [A Beginner's Guide to AutoHotkey](#), discussed in the [Digging Deeper into AutoHotkey](#) e-book, and covered in some depth in [AutoHotkey Applications](#).

If you own a Windows computer and you're not familiar with AutoHotkey, you should be! See this [Introduction to AutoHotkey!](#)

* * *

In almost all of the previous columns I have done things the hard way—line of code by line of code. This was to promote a deeper understanding of how AutoHotkey works. However, there are some powerful free tools which can save you a lot of time while helping you to build your apps. One of the most impressive is SmartGUI Creator 4.0 by Rajat. The final version (4.0) was released in 2006. The general opinion is that it doesn't need any more revisions since it is now time tested and just plain works.

When building AutoHotkey apps one of the most tedious (and often confusing) tasks is writing the [Gui, Add command](#) statements which place the controls in the pop-up window. The placement options are not particularly intuitive and often require a great deal of testing before the window will look right. There is a means to the madness and the GUI control formatting options are addressed in both the [Digging Deeper into AutoHotkey](#) e-book and [AutoHotkey Applications](#), but if all you need is code which will place the controls where you want them and size them as you planned, then SmartGUI Creator is one of the best for doing just that. You

can quickly create a GUI window with this WYSIWYG app and generate the AutoHotkey code.

Note: SmartGUI Creator generates code which uses the absolute coordinate system for placing the controls. Therefore, the other GUI formatting options using relative placement are bypassed and unavailable. In most cases, you may not need or want to use the other options, but there are times when you may want those capabilities. In those latter situations, you could initially use SmartGUI Creator to initially create the GUI code, but once you edit the *Gui*, *Add* statements with other formatting options, you will no longer be able to use SmartGUI Creator for modifications.

There are a number of locations where SmartGUI Creator can be downloaded, but I wasn't sure which was the best. So once I had it downloaded I decided to provide it on the *ComputerEdge* [AutoHotkey download site](#). The ZIP file (*SmartGUI.zip*) contains three files: *SmartGUI.exe* (the main program—no installation required), *Manual.htm* (a short tutorial), and *calc.ahk* (a sample AHK file). After downloading the ZIP, these files should be extracted to your folder of choice.

Loading SmartGUI Creator is as simple as double-clicking on the EXE filename (*SmartGUI.exe*). After loading SmartGUI the first time, the file *SmartGUI.ini* is created and appears in the same folder.

Using SmartGUI Creator

There is a short tutorial that comes with SmartGUI Creator (*Manual.htm*), but the program is remarkably intuitive. Initially, I made a point of not reading the manual and was quickly up and running. There are still a few things I need to figure out, but I intend to continue talking about SmartGUI Creator in this column until I've exhausted the topic.

When SmartGUI Creator is loaded, three windows open (see Figure 1). The main parent window includes the menu bar (File, Options, and Help) across the top, plus there is an icon for each one of the controls just below the menu bar. The Workspace (layout) window is a child of the main screen and moves independently anywhere on the screen—although it minimizes with the main window. (This is similar to some paint programs which have separate floating palette and tool windows.) The third window which also floats provides information such as coordinates and control names.

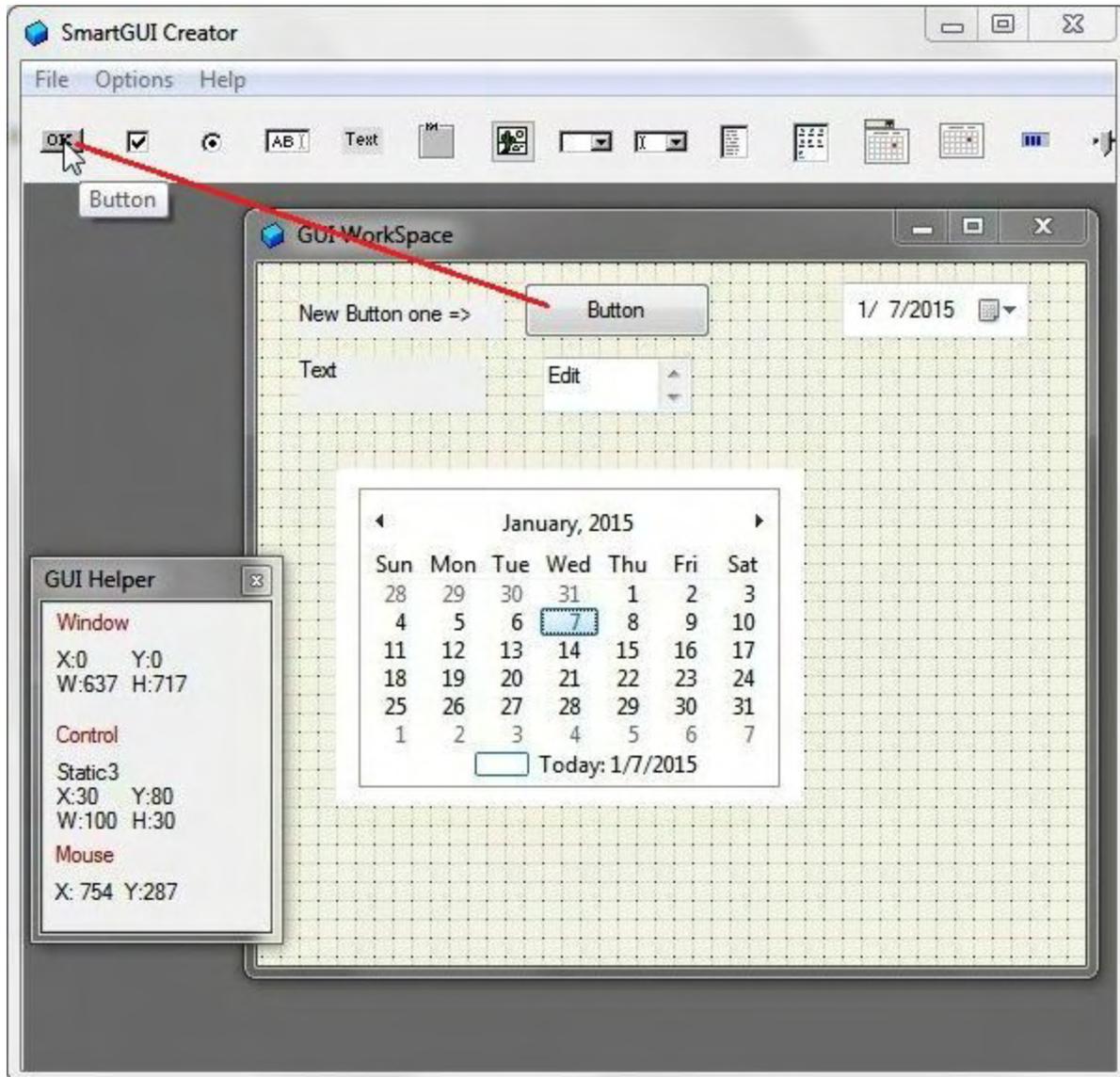


Figure 1. SmartGUI Creator uses three windows: the main parent window with a menu bar and the GUI control selection buttons across the top, the layout window where new controls are placed, and the GUI Helper window which provides information such as coordinates, control names and mouse locations.

Adding a control to the layout windows is easy. Click on the desired control icon, then move the mouse over the layout window. The control will appear as a tooltip attached to the cursor. As you move the cursor the control follows. Left-click once to place the control and the cursor jumps to the lower right-hand corner of the control for sizing. When the control is the right size, left-click again to release the grip. The control is placed.

Once the control is in place there are several options available in the right-click context menu (see Figure 2). Most of the items, such as Move Control, are self-explanatory. (Move Control restarts the placement/sizing feature explained above.) The option Change Label has more scripting implications than just adding different text to a control. It also conforms to AutoHotkey's use of the term Label for the name of a subroutine. (More on that in later columns.)

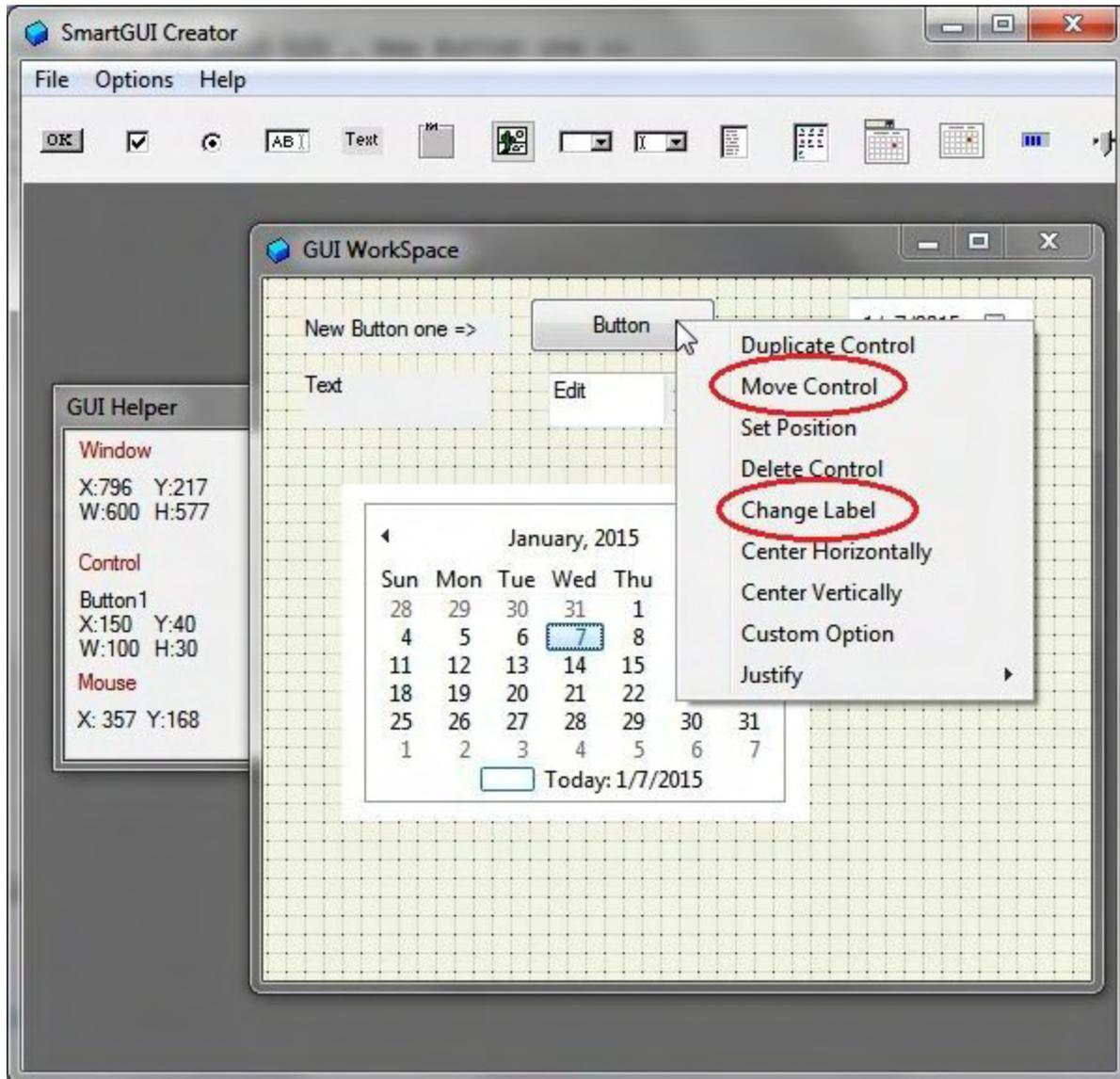


Figure 2. Right-click on a control in the layout window to open a context menu. This is how the controls can be relocated or the text label may be changed.

At this point the goal is to place all the necessary controls where you want them. It's easy to make adjustments until the GUI layout looks the way you want. To see how the window will work in action, click on *File => Test Script* (see Figure 3).

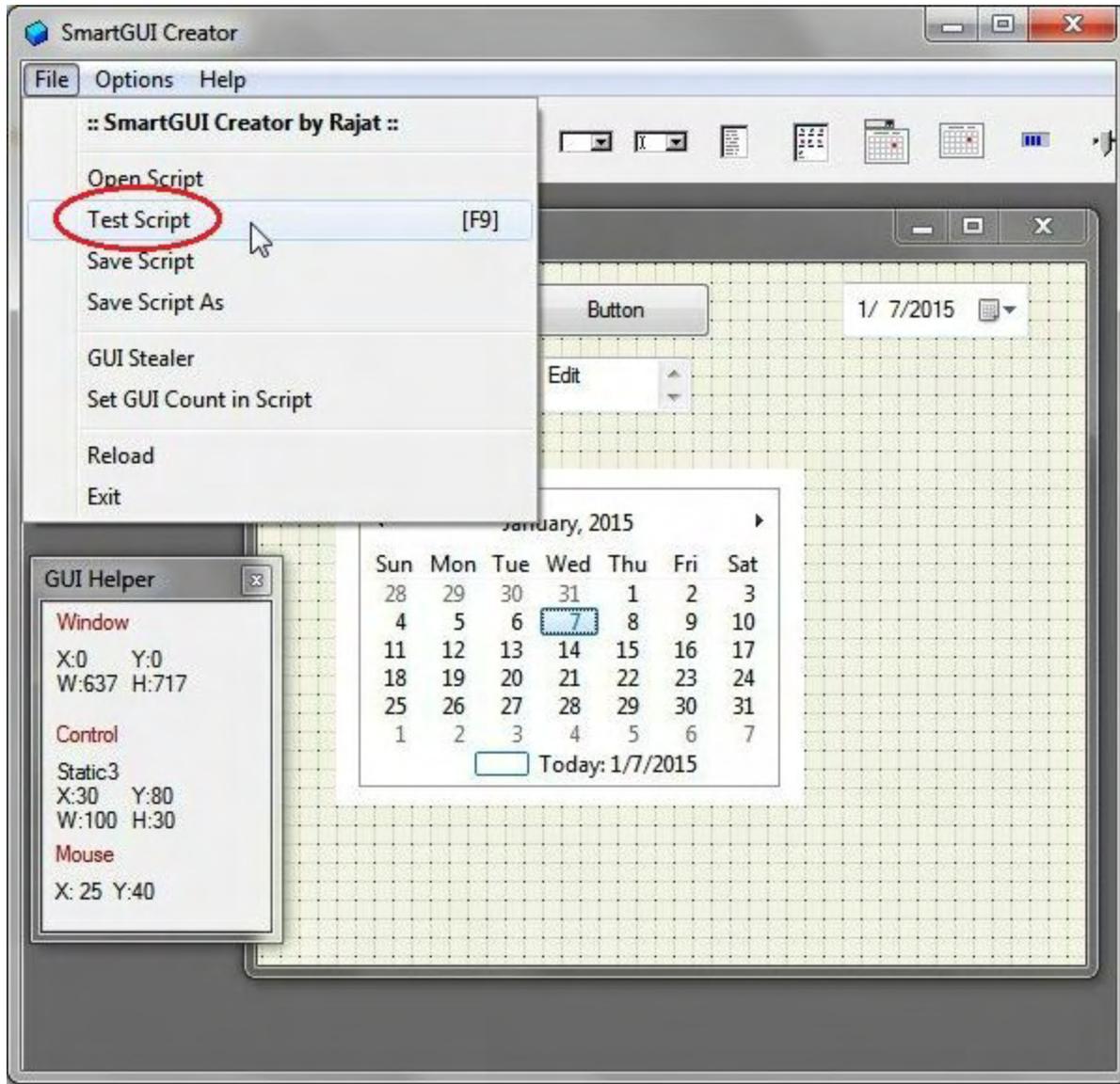


Figure 3. Use the Test Script option to open a window generated by the SmartGUI Creator code.

Notice the other options which give us opportunities for further exploration next time. The test GUI opens (see Figure 4). Once the code is generated and added to a script (or becomes the beginning of a new script), this is what the window will look like.

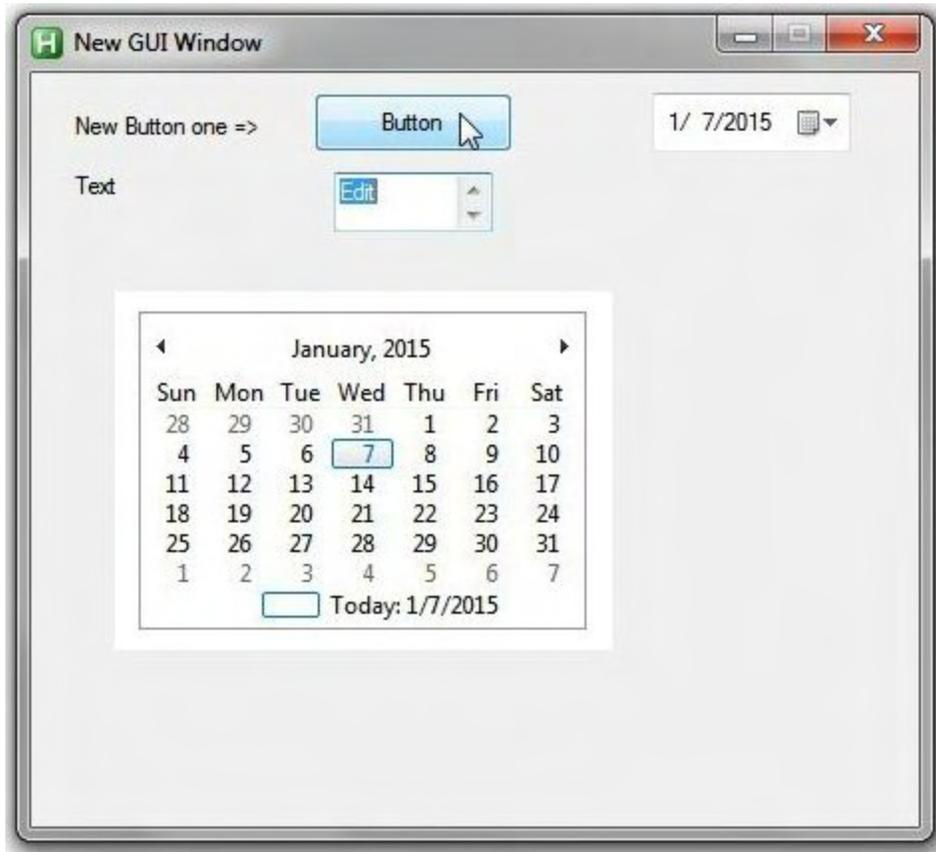


Figure 4. A test GUI window of the code to be generated by the layout window.

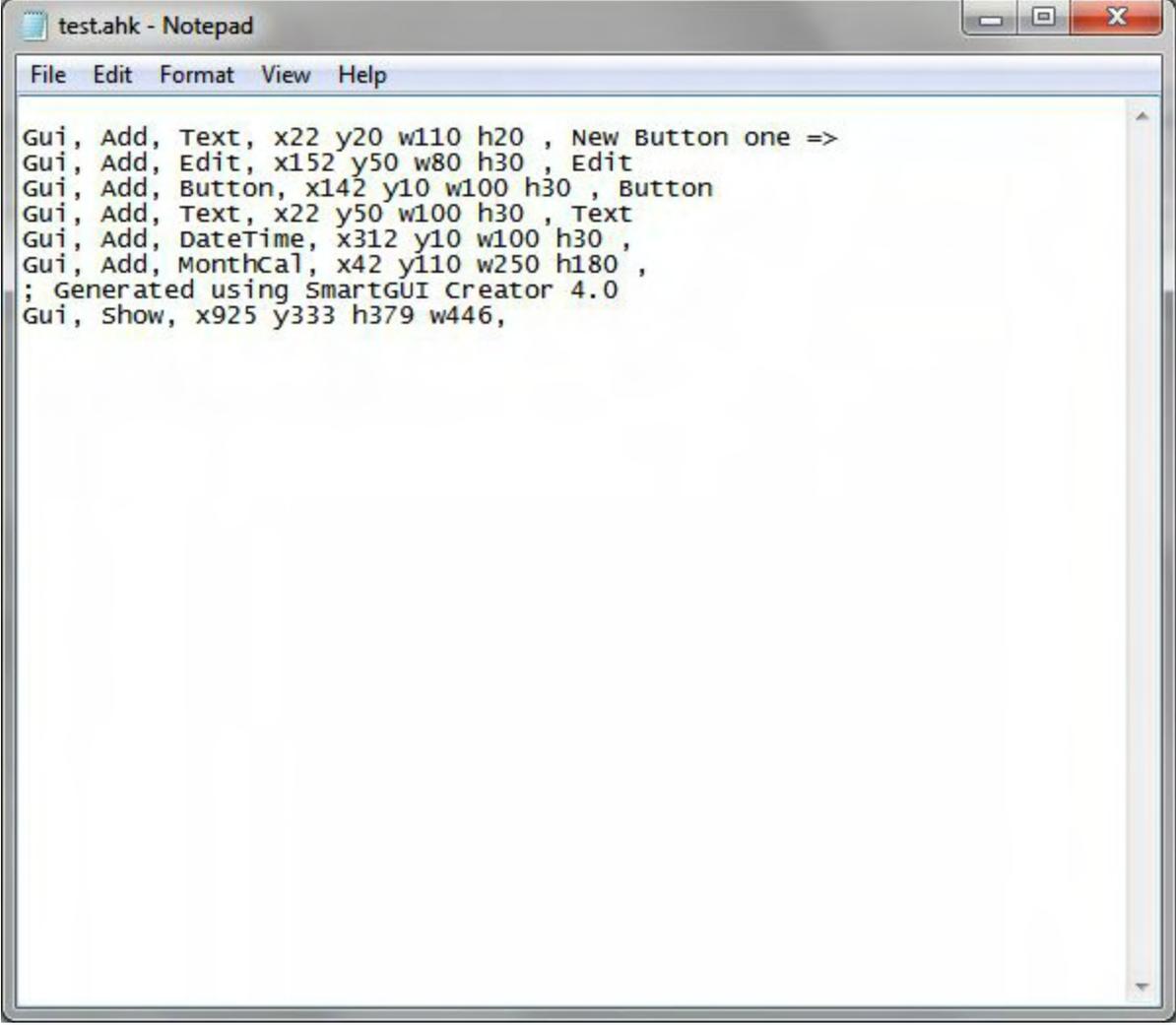
Once the layout is ready, select *Save Script As* from the same File menu to create the AutoHotkey code. There are three options: *Save New GUI to Clipboard*, *Save New GUI to File*, and *Save Modified GUI Info to File* (see Figure 5). After selection and *Yes*, the Save dialogue window will open to allow the selection of a filename.



Figure 5. The GUI code can be saved to the Clipboard, a new file, or a modified file.

If all you want to do is paste the code in an existing script, then the save to Clipboard option may be best. Otherwise, save the code to a file. Once the AHK script file is created, it can be opened by right-clicking on the filename in Windows Explorer (File Explorer in Windows 8.1)

and selecting Edit Script. The code will be displayed in the default editor ready for adjustments (see Figure 6). (The main AutoHotkey programs needs to be [installed](#).)



```

Gui, Add, Text, x22 y20 w110 h20 , New Button one =>
Gui, Add, Edit, x152 y50 w80 h30 , Edit
Gui, Add, Button, x142 y10 w100 h30 , Button
Gui, Add, Text, x22 y50 w100 h30 , Text
Gui, Add, DateTime, x312 y10 w100 h30 ,
Gui, Add, MonthCal, x42 y110 w250 h180 ,
; Generated using SmartGUI Creator 4.0
Gui, Show, x925 y333 h379 w446,

```

Figure 6. When Save Script As is used the code is generated and saved in an AHK file.

In this quick introduction it's easy to see how useful SmartGUI Creator can be. Rather than tediously working with the GUI positioning option codes or constantly adjusting and testing your script, in a matter of minutes many GUI controls can be added to a window. I intend to continue exploring the capabilities and limitations of SmartGUI Creator next week.

* * *

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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:

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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“Looking to the Past Instead of Looking for Results”
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Wally Wang's Apple Farm

Looking to the Past Instead of Looking for Results; Studying the Guidelines of Good User Interface Design; The Tao of Statistics; Apple and 3D Printing; Modifying the Finder Window.

One reason why so many people willingly dig themselves deeply in debt to get a college degree is because they hope a college degree will give them greater income and opportunities in the future. The problem with this logic is that it assumes that college somehow turns out more valuable people than someone who doesn't go to college, which isn't always true.

Marissa Mayer, Yahoo's CEO, reportedly refuses to promote or work with people who haven't been to college or who attended colleges she personally doesn't respect. [Business Insider reports](#) "Even though the actress Gwyneth Paltrow had created a best-selling cookbook and popular lifestyle blog, Mayer, who habitually asked deputies where they attended college, balked at hiring her as a contributing editor for Yahoo Food. According to one executive, Mayer disapproved of the fact that Paltrow did not graduate college."

Such thinking shows both the value of a college degree and the stupidity of people who use a college degree as the sole metric for determining a person's worth. Walk on any college campus and you'll find plenty of idiots, many of whom are even college professors with Ph.D's. A college degree simply shows what someone has done in the past, but doesn't show what that same person can do in the present and the future.

To judge someone solely on what college they attended decades ago is like granting a \$40 million dollar NBA contract to someone who once made five half court shots in a row when they were in high school. That person may have done something admirable in the past, but that doesn't automatically mean that person can be useful or even competent in the present or the future.

Unimaginative people use college degrees as a way to measure someone's value because they lack the intelligence to use real measurements of a person's worth. What matters isn't what someone did years ago and what college they did it in, but what they can do now. In other words, you want to look for actions and results, not the past as your criteria for judging

anyone or anything.

Steve Jobs and Bill Gates dropped out of college along with Mark Zuckerberg who developed Facebook. So according to Marissa Mayer, she wouldn't hire these people in favor of someone who just attended a college she respects. That type of thinking right there tells you the future of Yahoo under her misguided leadership.

Bill Gates, who built up Microsoft, never graduated from college. Steve Ballmer (who did graduate from college), helped bring Microsoft down. Who was the more valuable person? According to Marissa Mayer's criteria, Steve Ballmer was the better CEO since he graduated from Harvard and Bill Gates did not.

This illogical obsession with college degrees blinds people to the real purpose of a college degree, which is to give someone the necessary skills and knowledge to produce useful results. Ultimately, if you can't produce useful results, it doesn't matter how much education or college degrees you have. Just visit any homeless shelter and you'll find plenty of homeless people doing nothing with their college degrees. Maybe Marissa Mayer can hire them to do nothing at Yahoo just as long as they went to a college she respects.

The technology world isn't any different. Products should produce useful results regardless of which company makes it or whether that product was once the best in the past. Back in the 90's, few people would argue that Windows was the best option for most people. Nowadays, Windows is no longer the only valid option with Linux, OS X, Android, and iOS available. What matters less is the operating system you use and what matters more is how easy it can be to produce a useful result.

[The Tianhe-2](#) may be the most powerful supercomputer in the world, but an Xbox is better if you just want to play multiplayer games, despite the far lower technological features that an Xbox offers compared to a supercomputer. Based on technical features alone, the supercomputer should be the superior gaming machine despite the fact that it won't let you play the same sophisticated multiplayer games as an Xbox. Judging products solely on technical features is just as foolish as judging people solely on the college they attended.

People who don't want to think readily grasp simplistic ways to measure the superiority of anything whether it's based on the sheer number of technical features or the college degree someone earned. Thinking takes effort, which means looking for results in the present and the future, not for irrelevant accomplishments in the past. When people can stop using the past to measure the present, progress can finally move forward for everyone.

Studying the Guidelines of Good User Interface Design

To help developers create iOS apps, Apple offers their free [iOS Human Interface Guidelines](#)

that you can read as a series of Web pages or in an iBook. Besides learning the principles of good user interface design, you can also learn the principles of effective communication by watching the embedded videos included.

Apple Inc.

to the next or by choosing a page in the table of contents; in a game, navigation is often an important part of the experience.

IOS Human Interface Guidelines

In an app with a flat information structure, users can navigate directly from one primary category to another because all primary categories are accessible from the main screen. Music and App Store are good examples of apps that use a flat structure.

In some cases, it works well to combine more than one navigation style in an app. For example, the items in one category of a flat information structure might best be displayed in a hierarchy.

Users should always know where they are in your app and how to get to their next destination. Regardless of the navigation style that suits the structure of your app, the most important thing is that a user's path through the content is logical, predictable, and easy to follow.

UIKit defines some standard UI elements that make it easy to implement hierarchical and flat navigation styles,

It's no surprise that in an app that uses a content- or experience-driven information structure, navigation is also defined by the content or experience. For example, users navigate through a book by moving from one page

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Figure 1. Embedded videos let you watch principles in action.

The key to using videos in books or Web pages is to keep videos short and simple. You don't want a long video because it takes up space and reduces the chance that anyone will actually watch the whole thing. If people don't watch the whole video, then it's pointless to include it in the first place.

The videos in the iOS Human Interface Guidelines demonstrate a single point by letting you see a feature in action that's also described by the text. You could learn everything you need to know just by reading the text alone, but the embedded videos make learning easier and more enjoyable.

If you plan to include videos on your Web pages or iBooks, keep them short and focused on a single topic. You want to make videos inviting and short enough to watch while still providing useful information to the reader.

As always, the key is to stay focused on your user. Just as a good user interface makes tasks easy for the user, so does embedded video makes learning simple and enjoyable no matter

what the topic might be.

By studying the iOS Human Interface Guidelines, you'll quickly learn why poor user interfaces fail and frustrate people. Think of Vista's annoying security feature that kept interrupting users as one example of poor user interface design. Think of Windows 8's bizarre tile interface that violates the iOS Human Interface Guidelines suggestion that "People...don't appreciate being expected to learn different ways to do the same thing."

Windows 8 forced users to learn new ways to work that was different from how Windows 7 worked. Yet these new ways of working in Windows 8 didn't give anyone new productivity benefits in return. For that reason, Windows 8's tile interface is a complete failure for desktop PC users. User interfaces should make it easier to do tasks, not harder.

When you compare the user interfaces of Windows 7 with Windows 8, you can see why so many people are avoiding Windows 8. Windows XP users can easily use Windows 7 with little retraining. Windows XP users cannot easily use Windows 8 without more time-consuming retraining. Windows 8.1 fixes many of the problems of Windows 8, but there was no reason for Windows 8's tile interface to force such a drastic change on users in the first place.

User interface design can be a fascinating field to study so you can better understand why some programs are a joy to use and other programs are a pain in the neck. For another perspective on user interface design, read [Designing with the Mind in Mind](#). For developers, understanding user interface design can spell the difference between success and failure. Even Microsoft learned that harsh lesson unnecessarily with Windows 8.

The Tao of Statistics

One huge problem with education is that it often kills enthusiasm for learning. With fields like math, schools often teach students complicated math principles without explaining what these math equations even do. Students are forced into learning mind-numbing math equations without ever knowing why they're learning them in the first place.

To fix this problem, read [The Tao of Statistics](#), which teaches statistics without displaying a single mathematical equation anywhere in its pages. Instead of bombarding users with cryptic equations and expecting students to magically understand the significance, *The Tao of Statistics* uses ordinary words with a Zen-like attitude to explain what statistics even does.

For example, statistics isn't about collecting and analyzing data but answering questions such as how many people own a smartphone in Dallas or how many cars in Paris are more than two years old. Once you know what question you're trying to answer, then you can go out and collect data to deduce an answer.

Ideally, you'd want to collect all the data you need to determine an answer, but collecting all the data on how many people own smartphones in Dallas can be time-consuming. To save

time, statistics collects a much smaller collection of data known as a sample. The larger the sample, the more accurate the conclusions you can make on that data, but ultimately statistics is nothing more than the art of intelligent guessing.

The more data you have, the better your guesses will be, but statistics can never be certain of anything. Statistics simply suggests probabilities that something is true. All those fancy mathematical equations are nothing more than ways to analyze numerical data such as how many people own cars in Paris that are more than two years old.

When you understand the rationale behind statistics, then you can worry about manipulating mathematical equations. Until you fully understand what you're trying to do with statistics, knowing how to manipulate mathematical equations is simply a hindrance to learning and understanding. Knowing how to manipulate mathematical equations doesn't always mean you know how to use those mathematical equations correctly.

Strip away the details and learning any topic can be fascinating and enlightening. Bury even the most interesting topic with jargon and even pornography can seem tedious, dull, and completely uninteresting.

The real problem with learning isn't buying more technological gadgets like ChromeBooks or iPads and shoving them in the hands of reluctant teachers and bored students. Schools need to teach topics with true understanding and worry about the details of that topic later. Instead, schools focus on teaching the details first and often ignore the meaning altogether. The result is bored students who can parrot their way past tests and homework but who graduate with no clear understanding how to use the skills they supposedly learned in the first place.

The problem of education isn't a technological problem, so there can never be a technological solution. Likewise, the problem of education is never a monetary problem so increasing budgets and throwing more money into the educational system is never the answer either. Schools need to teach understanding first and details later. Only then can people truly see the excitement of learning and realize that anyone can learn anything with the proper motivation and teaching methods.

Apple and 3D Printing

In 1985, the Macintosh combined with PageMaker and laser printers started the whole desktop publishing revolution. By letting you visually design pages using the graphical user interface of the Macintosh, PageMaker made it easy for anyone to create menus, signs, and newsletters. Then the laser printer made printing graphics easy, which dot-matrix printers could do poorly and daisy-wheel printers couldn't do at all. Thanks to PageMaker, laser printers, and the Macintosh, desktop publishing became a reality for everyone.

With 3D printing on the horizon, it's likely that Apple will dive into the world of 3D printing as

well. While companies like Stratsys and Hewlett-Packard focus on refining the capabilities of 3D printers, Apple may be working on a way to [model images using lasers](#) built-in to an iPhone.

The idea behind Apple's latest patent would let you use lasers to measure shapes and objects. Then you can capture that data in an iPhone, transmit it back to a 3D printer, and create a 3D solid object of the object you just measured with lasers such as a car, a person, or a building.

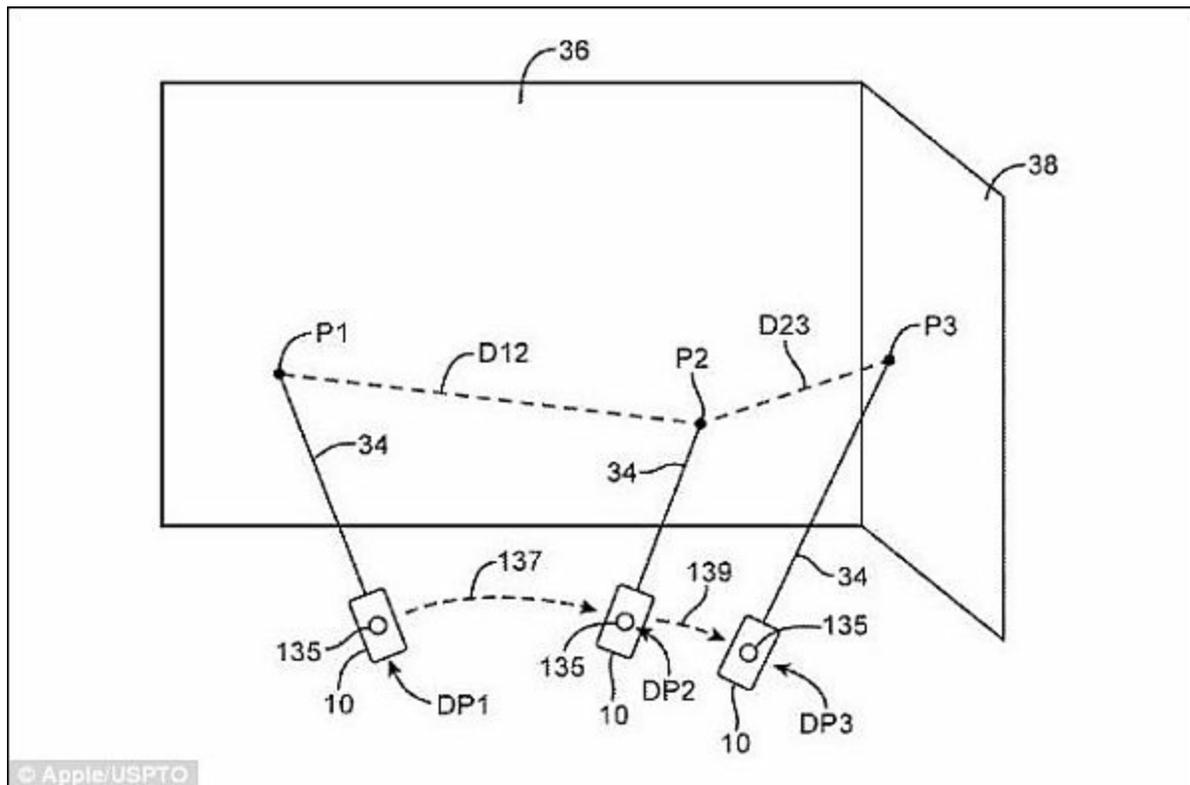


Figure 2. Lasers can measure the distance of objects to create a 3D model of that object.

The key to 3D printing isn't just making 3D objects but capturing images to print and using software to make it easy to modify 3D images before printing. Apple's laser patent can take care of 3D modeling, other companies can take care of the actual 3D printer, and Apple (or another company) can develop the software to make 3D printing easy for anyone to do.

With Apple providing free programs like iMovie and GarageBand to make it easy to edit movies and audio on a Macintosh, it's likely Apple will also develop software to make it easy for anyone to capture and modify 3D images as well. When you combine 3D printing with 3D modeling, 3D printing will be within the possibility for everyone, or at least everyone willing to use an Apple product.

* * *

Normally the Finder displays files and folders in alphabetical order. While that makes it easy to find something (as long as you know the name of what you want), you can also rearrange files

and folders so you can see the most recently opened items.

Click the Finder icon on the Dock and click on the Arrange icon in the Finder window to display a pull-down menu. From this menu, choose Date Last Opened. Now the Finder window will show the dates when you last accessed certain files or folders.

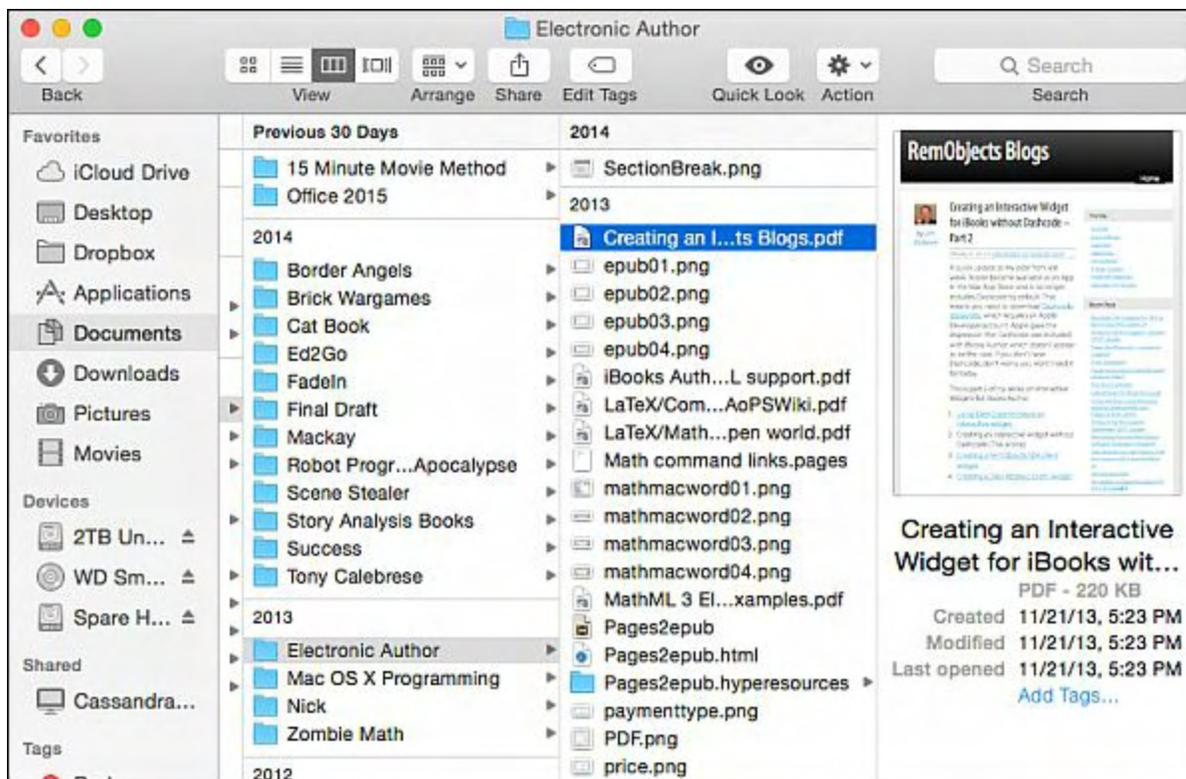


Figure 3. Modifying the Finder window to show recently opened files and folders.

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](#).



Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

“Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns.” by ComputerEdge Staff

"Wearable Prediction," "Time Synchronization," "VPN and Secure Public Wi-Fi Communications," "Switching to Web-based E-mail," "Real Key to Security"

Wearable Prediction

[Regarding Jack Dunning's December 26 [article](#), "Predictions 2015":]

I predict that a wearable watch will eliminate the need for a companion phone. With the use of a Bluetooth headset and a navigable face, the effective use of voice commands and gestures, and a screen (mounted on any pair of glasses) for a heads up display, it will be effective enough to replace the smartphone.

-Paul Anthony, San Carlos, CA

Time Synchronization

[Regarding the December 26 [Digital Dave column](#):]

Dave, I have been using NetTime (available from www.timesynctool.com) for many years (including my Windows 98 machine!) to handle network time synchronization at boot up and periodically while online.

-Stewart Levin, Menlo Park, CA

VPN and Secure Public Wi-Fi Communications

[Regarding the December 26 [Digital Dave column](#):]

Hi AJ, One solution may be switching cellular providers. I currently use Republic Wireless. They offer plans with unlimited calling/data on smartphone (Moto X, G, E) starting at \$25 per month. The phone primarily uses Wi-Fi for calling/data then goes on the Sprint network for mobile calling/data. I've been with them about 7 to 8 months and find them to be quite reliable.

Much cheaper than my old dumb phone with limited minutes and no data.

Best of Luck.

-Patrick B, Fallbrook, CA

Switching to Web-based E-mail

[Regarding the December 26 [Editors Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers column:](#)]

I agree with the recommendation to make this switch [to Web-based e-mail]. However, be aware that the Web e-mail provider may have default settings to delete e-mails. When I started using Comcast Web e-mail for board and committee work I found that Comcast deleted anything I sent after six months, not good when I wanted to refer back to what I had sent earlier! I changed the settings to never delete e-mail. Years later I still have plenty of storage space left on Comcast.

-Jim Amos, Denver, CO

Real Key To Security

[Regarding the December 26 [Wally Wang's Apple Farm column:](#)]

"By confronting hackers with computers running Linux, Windows, and OS X, the mix of different operating systems makes it harder for hackers to compromise every computer on a network."

Although this is true, corporate information is usually stored on shared networks rather than individual PCs. And by opening up new ways for hackers to get into a system (hacking Windows or hacking Mac or hacking Linux) you've actually expanded *your vulnerability to the sensitive information stored on the servers since every access point is likely to get to the same information. The real key to security is to limit access to the information and to make those few access points as secure as possible (which is where most corporations fail.)*

-Rob Spahitz, San Diego, CA

Real Key to Security

Thanks for the interesting comment. Limiting access to a network will definitely increase security. My point about a mix of operating systems was to limit the spread of malware such as Trojan horses, worms, and viruses since malware is typically coded to run on specific operating systems. Strip away a hacker's ability to use automated tools to open doors

throughout a network and you force a hacker to manually crack a system, which is more time consuming, but not impossible.

Many networks use Linux firewalls to block Windows malware such as worms or Trojan horses looking to crack holes in a network. So the trade-off between multiple operating systems is both a risk of increased vulnerability and increased security by blocking automated tools. It's hard to decide which is best, but the point about standardization without consideration for the true needs of workers is still valid.

-Wally Wang, *ComputerEdge*

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