TC/PC Exists to Facilitate and Encourage the Cooperative Exchange of PC Knowledge and Information Across All Levels of Experience

July 2011

General Meeting:
Tuesday, July 12, 7 PM

General Meeting

Tuesday, July 12 2011
at 7:00 PM

Your 10 Minutes of Fame!!

Location: Summit Place
8505 Flying Cloud Drive
Eden Prairie, MN 55344

The race is on to see who can convince the panel of judges (Jack Ungerleider, Curt Trout, and Sharon Walbran) that you have uncovered the best software, utility, gadget, or tip that will have members chomping at the bit to add it to their toolbag. Jack has contributed a giant countdown clock that will ensure that the presenter will have no more than ten minutes to sell us.

The show started at the June meeting and proved to be a fun and enlightening event. The competition will be stiff but the prize(s) will make it worth the effort. Come to the meeting and learn about new gadgets and programs.

☑**Next month's meeting will be at the Staples Store in Bloomington at 4200 W 78th St. Take 494 to France. Exit and take the north frontage road west (past Perkins toward Hwy 100) a few blocks to Staples. We will get a tour of all their computer products and services. Meet there at 7PM, Aug. 9.**

Last Month's Meeting: Show Us Your Gadget-Your 10 Minutes of Fame
By Sharon Walbran, SQWalbran(at)yahoo.com

The June meeting started off with an extended Random Access session led by Jack Ungerleider. One member was having a problem with a prompt for a Windows password (which had always been blank), after updating some files for his Comcast anti-virus service. Some suggestions were to go to Comcast's and Norton's websites for answers or try running Malwarebytes in case the change was caused by malware. Another member had a problem with a KVM switch no longer switching between computers. Jack suggested trying a different USB port on the errant computer. Another member was finding Excel slow as molasses in performing every Paste operation after copying a small amount of data. Suggestions were to look for complicated or problem formulas in the spreadsheet or try the Detect and Repair Excel function on the Help menu in Excel2003 or Office button, Excel Options, Resources, Diagnostics in Excel 2007.

Then we had presentations by the first entrants in the "Your 10 Minutes of Fame" contest.

Richard Seng introduced his latest gadget, the Verizon HotSpot. This device, which would fit in your pocket, can connect up to 5 WiFi enabled devices to access the Internet from any location where your cell phone gets service. The particular Verizon HotSpot that Richard bought and demonstrated costs around $100 at Best Buy and then requires a monthly service fee of about $50 per month based on a 2-year contract. The contract covers 5 gigabytes of downloads in a month, with additional charges beyond 5 gigabytes. The device will use 4G service where available or will use 3G when not and Richard can see on his screen which level of service is running. At 4G Richard gets great reception and can watch movies on the go and gets speedy downloads and uploads. At 3G he says there is definitely a step down in speed and reception quality. Richard showed us he is able to view cable TV on his laptop because one of the devices he has connected is a slingbox in his condo at Summit Place. The battery in the HotSpot is good for about 2 hours, but for additional cash you can add a battery pack to extend that battery life considerably. Richard's goal is to ultimately use this device and service as his main Internet and phone service and eliminate the service he now has with Comcast. Very impressive and maybe the wave of the future. Put this gadget on your wish list.

George Coklas introduced Hott Notes, a free program available for downloading on the Web. Hott Notes gives users with Windows XP systems the ability to create post-it notes and display them on the screen. The program goes above and beyond the standard colors available in similar programs by providing an almost limitless range of colors so you can customize your message groups by color. But wait, there's more. Hott Notes also allows levels of transparency in the color background so you can see through to your Desktop or program data beneath the note. Hott Notes text can be the traditional left-aligned or can be centered or you can create a checklist built in to the program or scribble your note freehand and draw smiley faces if you wish. The notes can be enlarged to fit the amount of text and can be moved, saved, edited, deleted, etc. An especially nice feature is the ability to run the Hott Notes program from a thumb drive, which George demonstrated to us. Windows XP users, take a look at this program to add to your organizational tools.

So the show started off with two very worthy entrants. If you have a gadget, program, utility, book, or tip you want to share at the next meeting, please send some basic information—your full name, the name of the item, a short description and what makes it a winner—to me: Sharon Walbran at SQWalbran(at)yahoo.com, so I can summarize the information in the next newsletter.

Also, at the meeting we had a drawing for the prize from Wells Fargo from the May meeting— a very nice collapsible beach chair. The winner? Lee Kaphingst!! Congratulations, Lee.

Microsoft's New Standalone System Sweeper
by Ira Wilsker, iwilsker@sbcglobal.net

WEBSITES:
http://connect.microsoft.com/systemsweeper
https://connect.microsoft.com/systemsweeper/content/content.aspx?ContentID=24894
http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ee460911.aspx
http://www.techsupportalert.com/create-bootable-rescue-cd.htm
http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/probably-best-free-security-list-world.htm

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, it seems impossible to remove the spyware and other malware from our computers. Despite their efficacy, there are just some times that the traditional and well proven malware killers will not be able to neutralize the malware on our computers. While some of the so-called "experts" simply give up and reformat the hard drive resulting in the loss of any programs and files on the computer (unless properly backed up), this is not an appropriate step in trying to restore the computer.

There are a variety of utilities, both free and commercial, that can create a bootable CD or USB drive that contain the necessary files to boot the computer, and then detect and remove any malware from the infected computer. The reason for booting from a special CD or bootable USB flash drive rather than Windows is that the substitute bootable media does not load the full version of Windows, but instead loads a substitute for Windows. Because this clean substitute for Windows is not loading any drivers or other files from the infected computer (including a possibly infected Windows itself), there are no malware files loaded into memory (RAM) that interfere with the cleaning process, or otherwise protect themselves from detection and destruction. A variety of security software companies, including Kaspersky, Avira, F-Secure, Panda, BitDefender, DrWeb, AVG, and Spybot Search & Destroy have published free utilities that can create bootable media that will run and remove malware, without the need to load Windows. When I am called to clean badly infected systems, I routinely create at least a pair of updated bootable CDs from a variety of the above companies, such that if I encounter a difficult to clean computer, one or both of the bootable CDs will likely be able to detect and remove the offending malware. Just recently Microsoft has joined this august group of software publishers that have released a free utility to create a bootable CD or flash drive that can detect and remove malware from a badly infected computer. This new utility is the Microsoft Standalone System Sweeper Beta (Beta means that it is functional, but not a final release).

Microsoft Standalone System Sweeper Beta (connect.microsoft.com/systemsweeper), like the other utilities mentioned above, can be used to boot an infected computer and perform a malware scan that can identify and remove malware and rootkits. This is especially useful when the malware on a computer prevents the installed security software from running, as many of the contemporary malware titles explicitly destroy the legitimate security software installed on the computer. Many of the current crop of malware infections also make it impossible to run already installed detection and removal utilities, as well as prohibit web access to online services that may be capable of detecting and removing the controlling malware. Some malware also prevents the infected computer from booting, making it nearly impossible to run any of the traditional scanning utilities. For this reason, it is sometimes necessary to be able to boot the computer into some operating system other than the full Windows, and run a scan utility. This is explicitly what Microsoft Standalone System Sweeper Beta (and the other bootable scan utilities) is intended to do.

Microsoft Standalone System Sweeper Beta is available in both 32 and 64 bit versions, and the proper version for the compromised system should be downloaded to another uninfected computer

from connect.microsoft.com/systemsweeper. Using that clean computer (not the infected machine!), the user needs a blank CD, DVD, or USB flash drive (with at least 250 megs of free space) to create the bootable media. According to Microsoft, " The architecture of Microsoft Standalone System Sweeper Beta does not have to be the same as the Windows operating system of the computer used to create the bootable media. It does need to be the same architecture (32-bit or the 64-bit) as the Windows operating system of the computer infected with a virus or malware."

The initial download is a small installer (576 kb for the 64 bit version), which is used to start the media creation process. This small installer file is run, and a series of windows appear that walk the user through the media creation process. The first window informs the user that he needs some appropriate media and internet access to create the bootable media, followed by the EULA (End User License Agreement). The third screen gives the user the option to use a blank CD, DVD, USB flash drive, or to create an ISO image that can later be burned to a CD using an ISO file burner to create the bootable CD. I chose to use a blank CD, but any of the appropriate options would be adequate choices. Since virtually all Windows XP SP3, Vista, and Windows 7 computers can be booted with a CD and run the System Sweeper, regardless of the operating system that was on the computer that was used to create the bootable media, I prefer the bootable CD media. Many computers, especially older ones, cannot easily boot from a USB flash drive, which is why I create a CD. Just be sure to create the media with the correct 32 or 64-bit version; you need the setup file that matches the infected computer's architecture, not the architecture of the clean computer. If the infected computer is 64 bit, you will need the 64 bit installer, regardless of the version on the clean computer. Likewise, if the infected computer is 32 bit, use the 32 bit installer on the clean computer to create 32 bit bootable media.

The actual file that was downloaded from Microsoft by the small installer was 206mb, which took a few minutes to download. Once downloaded, it only took a few more minutes to create a bootable CD containing the Microsoft Standalone System Sweeper Beta, as well as its latest malware signature database. While there are some methods that can be used to update the malware signatures, I prefer to create a fresh CD with the latest signatures prior to each use.

After the bootable CD, DVD, or USB drive is created on the clean machine, the media is used to boot the infected computer.   Once booted, the interface looks very similar to the established Microsoft Security Essentials, and uses a similar scan engine to detect and remove malware. I would suggest that the user selects a full scan, and allows the software to neutralize whatever it finds. Once the scan and clean function has been completed, remove the bootable media, and reboot the computer into Windows. If the computer still will not function properly, as it appears that it is still infected after running the System Sweeper, one of the other bootable scan utilities listed above may be necessary to remove the infection. If it does boot successfully, I choose to perform a redundant scan with a third party utility such as Malwarebytes (malwarebytes.org) or SuperAntispyware (superantispyware.com). Since much of the malware in circulation destroys the installed security software, it may be appropriate to reinstall the real-time security software of your choice.

The Microsoft Standalone System Sweeper Beta is only intended to boot and clean a badly infected system, and provides no permanent protection, which is why it should not be used as a substitute for a good security suite. Since blank CDs are cheap, it would be a worthwhile precaution to frequently create a bootable CD using Microsoft Standalone System Sweeper or one of the other bootable utilities, label it with the date, and keep it on hand just in case it is needed. 🖳
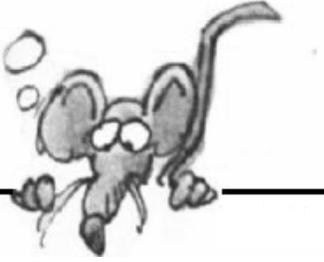
NIBBLERS

By Jeannine Sloan

Laptop Apps, Downloads, and Services

Get the most out of your laptop and stay secure while on the go, here are 31 applications and services that are particularly laptop-friendly. http://tinyurl.com/3kxzzmd (Editors note: Be cautious and create a restore point before installing downloaded software. No guarantee but it may help if something goes wrong.)

Adventures in Invention: Printing Objects

Individual inventors, as well as small and large manufacturers are using 3D printers, which use a wide range of technologies to produce actual objects from digital files,, and they are revolutionizing what it means to conceive of, design and make things. http://www.technewsworld.com/rsstory/72575.html

Beatles & Bliss

http://www.sonnyradio.com/chrisbliss.htm

Groupon

Groupon offers 50 to 90 per cent discounts. The catch is that you have to buy the Groupon ("group coupon") online that same day and a minimum number of Groupons must be purchased or the deal is off. If the minimum is not met, your credit card is not charged.
Read more: http://askbobrankin.com/got_your_groupon.html#ixzz1OnVI0mVx

Sell Your Used Equipment

Under Kodak's new Trade-In and Recycling Program effort announced Wednesday, people can go to www.trade-in-center.com/kodak/ and gauge demand for their old printers, digital still and video cameras, digital picture frames and camera accessories — including products made by companies other than Kodak.

Restore Previous Versions

Introduced in some versions of Vista and now present in all editions of Windows 7, *previous versions* are local backups of *every data file and folder* that changes on your system. The backups are created automatically and are instantly accessible. Previous versions do for your standard documents (text files, spreadsheets, photos, whatever) what Windows System Restore does for system files. Read about it here: http://tinyurl.com/3dq2sac
From Windows Secrets ezine

Online Photo Editing

Sumo Paint is not only free, but also entirely browser based. There's nothing to install (except for Adobe AIR, which is the platform on which the software was built); you just head to the Sumo Paint site and sign in to your account. Sumo Paint's features include everything from 3D filters to clone stamps to blur and smudge tools. Anything Photoshop can do, Sumo Paint can probably do.
From Hassle-free Pc ezine

Hotspot Connectivity Issues

You may experience random connectivity issues when you connect a Windows7 or Windows Vista-based mobile PC to certain Wi-Fi "hot spots."

To fix the problem plug the PC into a power source or **Use the "High performance" power plan.**

To manually change the power plan to **High performance**, follow these steps:

1. Click **Start**, type **Power Options** in the **Start Search** box, then click **Power Options** in the list.
2. Click **High performance**.

Complete article is here: http://support.microsoft.com/kb/928152

Clipboard in Office 2010

The Office Clipboard holds up to 24 items at a time. Go to the Home tab, find the Clipboard panel at the far left and click on the dialog launcher (the diagonal arrow at the lower right of the panel). The Office Clipboard pane opens and anything you copy to the clipboard gets saved in the pane.

From PC Product Wire ezine

Recently Used Documents in 2010

The 'recently-used' documents feature isn't turned on by default in Office 2010, but you can activate it by entering the Backstage view (click on the 'File' tab to enter Backstage view), selecting Recent, and adding a checkbox next to "Quickly access this number of recent documents." Change the number to whatever number of documents you want to see on the list. In the Recent Documents list, you can "pin" a document to the list so that it will always appear, even if you haven't opened it recently. A nifty new feature lets you "pin" entire folders to the list of Recent Places in the right-hand column on the menu.

From PC Product Wire ezine

Renew Your IP Address

Renewing your IP address is simple and takes just a few seconds, if everything else is working as it should be. Here are step by step instructions to renew your IP address:

1. Open a command prompt. Click Start and enter "cmd" in the Search window (Windows 7) or in the Run window (XP).
2. Enter on the command line "ipconfig /release" to release/erase your current IP address. Note that there is a space between "ipconfig" and "/release".
3. Enter "ipconfig /renew" to renew your IP address (don't forget the space). After a few seconds, a message should confirm that your IP address has been renewed.
4. Enter "exit" to close the command line window.

Read more:

http://askbobrankin.com/renew_your_ip_address.html#ixzz1PvSNJ8S4

IE9 and Tracking Protection: Microsoft Disrupts Online Ads

Microsoft has just launched a remarkably effective tool to protect your privacy on the web. Using IE9 it takes exactly two clicks to begin blocking cookies, web beacons, and other third-party tools that track your movements and activities on the web.

http://tinyurl.com/6gccvay

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youSENDit - A Program to Send Large Files

By Corinne Goeke, Computer Club of Green Valley, AZ, *Green Bytes***, Summer 2011,**
http://ccgv.apcug.org, cmgoeke (at) yahoo.com

Have you ever had a large file you wanted to send someone? For example, you are a proud new grandparent and want to share the digital video of the baby with all your family and friends. You could try attaching the file to an email and send it that way. But most email programs have a limit on how many megabytes of files you can send in a single email message (typically ten megabytes).

This is where the website, youSENDit comes in handy. You can upload the large file to their website, and they will send an email to the lucky recipient(s) with a download link. The recipient downloads the file, and you receive accolades of how the new grandchild looks just like you. Here's how to navigate the program the first time.

Open your favorite web browser and go to http://www.yousendit.com. Go to "Compare Plans" and select the "Lite" account. This type of account is free. It limits you to uploading one file at a time, and the file size is limited to 100 megabytes. Hey, it's a free account, you have to accept some limitations. Sign on up.

You will have to confirm your new account via a confirmation email sent to the email address you used. Click on the link in the email, and your new account will be verified.

Once your free account has been created, locate that large file you want to send someone. If you have multiple files to send, zip them into a single big zip file. Go to the "Overview" tab in the youSENDit browser window. Click on the green "Send It Now" button.

Type in the email address of the person to whom you wish to send the large file. Fill in the subject and include a message telling the recipient what you are sending them.

Now click on the "Select File" button, and pick the file you want to upload. It's your choice. I just click on "No thanks." You can also click on "Don't show this message again."

At this point you have three choices. You can 1) Set an expiration date for the file (one week is the default); 2) Set the file to be downloaded a certain number of times, or 3) Never have the file expire and always be available to download. Pick your option and click on the green "Send it" button at the bottom.

Again, you get another pop-up window—hey, they need to make a living! You are being asked if you want your files tracked (free 14-day trial). Just click on "No Thanks" and "Don't Show This Message Again."

Now, your file will be uploaded. When uploading is finished, the recipient will get an email telling him or her there is a file waiting. The recipient can click on the link in the email and download the file.

Finally, you get a "File Sent Successfully" message. You can also share the download link on Facebook or on Twitter by clicking on the appropriate button. Then all the world could see that beautiful grandchild!

A few caveats—never click on an unknown link in an email. You may want to warn your recipients that you are sending them a large file via youSENDit. Also, sharing copyrighted music and movies is illegal. But I am sure you all knew that! Back to Page 1

Paragon Drive Copy 11 Professional

Reviewed by Terry Currier, President of the WINNERS WINdows usERS group, Fountain Valley, CA, June 2011 issue, The Notepad, www.windowsusers.org. winnersug (at) aol.com

Paragon Drive Copy 11 Professional is sort of a do-all utility for anyone wanting to copy a hard drive. What I used it for was to clone my hard drive to an external drive connected via USB. I have a 1.5TB drive in my computer and right now I'm using about 450GB of that space. There are other programs that will clone the drive, but you have to have the same size drive to copy it to. The Paragon Drive Copy did great copying it to the 500GB drive with no problem.

I set it up to Migrate Hard Disk. I started it before going to bed and expected the process to still need some time in the morning. But, it was done when I checked it in the morning. When I first backed up the drive with Rebit it took much longer. To be fair, though, Rebit creates a database and saves the files in a special way.

Using Paragon Drive Copy is the ideal way to migrate to a larger drive, or to an SSD drive. Another use is, as they call it, migrate hard drive to container. It creates an image file of your drive making it so you can create a copy onto another computer. This is what many companies will do in setting up new computers so they all match.

One thing we should all have is a recovery disc. Their Recovery Media Builder can help you:

- Prepare the Linux/DOS recovery environment (included in the installation package) on external media (CD, DVD, or flash memory) to boot and run utilities under Linux or PTS DOS, and that way to get access to your hard disk for maintenance or recovery purposes.
- Create from the master CD the Linux/DOS or WinPE (Windows Pre-installation Environment) recovery environment on a CD/DVD disc, or flash memory.
- Prepare a bootable recovery environment from any ISO image, including their WinPE 3.0 image

Paragon Drive Copy Key benefits:

- Ultra high-capacity HD support (>2.2TB) migrates existing system from Master Boot Record (MBR) to modern Retained GPT (GUID Partition Table also known as Hybrid GPT) HDD and gain access to complete HDD capacity
- All partitioning (resize, move, creation) and copy with resize operations now take partition alignment problems into account with all volumes being automatically aligned by sector
- Dissimilar hardware support allows migration of existing system and makes it bootable in a new environment
- Copy features – copy a full hard disk or a separate partition, and resize a partition while copying
- Supports all major virtual machines: MS Virtual PC, VMware Workstation, Oracle Virtual Box, VMware Fusion;
- Basic partitioning features
- Refined User Interface – improved two-level user interface (Easy/Advanced) to satisfy needs of every customer
- Boot Corrector
- Empowered data safety and disaster recovery tools for both physical and virtual Windows environments.
- Updated wiping technologies can efficiently dispose of data on any HDD, SSD, flash-drives and laptops.
- USB 3.0 ready: New USB 3.0 port grants the possibility to access to external HDD and Flash drives on the new high-speed version of the traditional serial port

Drive Copy 11′s interface is good and easy-to-understand. The help that comes with it is very good with illustrated instructions to help the user.

Paragon Drive Copy 11 Professional is available for $39.95 via download from http://www.paragon-software.com/home/dc-professional/

System Requirements

- Operating systems: Windows XP/Vista/7 and XP SP2/Vista/7 64-bit
- Internet Explorer 5.0 or higher
- Intel Pentium CPU or its equivalent, with 300 MHz processor clock speed
- 128 MB of RAM (256+ recommended)
- Hard disk drive with 100 MB of available space
- SVGA video adapter and monitor
- Keyboard
- Mouse

Additional requirements: External USB hard drive to store data.

Meetings start at 7:00 PM (9:00 AM on Saturday) unless otherwise noted. *Meets at Edina Executive Plaza.

July

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Linux on Saturday* 9:00-Noon
10	11	12 General Mtg 7:00 PM 10 Minutes of Fame At Summit Place 6:30 Board Mtg	13	14	15	16 MS Office (including Access) on Saturday* 9:00—Noon
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

August

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9 General Mtg 7:00 PM Staples Store At Staples—4200 W. 78th, Blmgtn	10	11	12	13 Linux on Saturday* 9:00-Noon
14	15	16	17	18	19	20 MS Office (including Access) on Saturday* 9:00—Noon
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
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Good Fences Make Good Desktops (Apologies to Robert Frost)
By Joe Asling, Columnist, Monterey Bay Users Group – PC, California
June 2011 issue, mbug-pc newsletter, www.mbug.org, Jhasling (at) comcast.net

I like a neat desktop. In XP, I would right-click on the desktop to get a context menu, then click New/Folder and name it "Internet" or "Utilities" or whatever. I would open it and fill it with shortcuts to all the applicable programs. This way, any program (or other file) I needed was two double-clicks away. But in Windows 7, when you create a new folder, it is a nasty double-columned Windows Explorer folder, and if you accidentally click in the left column, you lose all your nice shortcuts (you can get them back with the left arrow in the upper corner, but...). So I needed another way to organize icons.

Now, the Start Menu in W7 is an improvement. You can right-click on any program icon and select "pin to Start Menu" or "pin to toolbar."

The programs you use all the time (Internet browser, mail client) can sit on the toolbar and be up in one click, and programs you use frequently are a click of the Start button (the circle with the windows flag in the lower left-hand corner) away. You can customize how the Start menu and the toolbar look by right clicking on the toolbar or Start button and clicking on "Properties."

The best thing about the W7 Start Menu is that each program you have used has a little right-pointing arrow at the right side; hover the mouse arrow over it and you will see, and can open, the files you have recently opened with that program–admirable!

OK, now to the fences. There are files I don't use all the time (backup program, scanner software, manuals for hardware I haven't played with a lot yet) but don't want to go digging for in Windows Explorer. Stardock makes a free program called "Fences" http://www.stardock.com/products/fences/).

Essentially, it creates shaded areas on the desktop into which you can drag shortcuts, just like with XP's folders. When you first install it, there are some wizards you can use to configure your fenced areas, or you can just go freeform. You can name them, resize them, and move them. You cannot minimize them as you could folders in XP, but–almost as good–just double-click on the desktop, and voilà, they disappear. Double-click again and, voilà, they come back. (Curiously, other desktop icons, such as the Recycle Bin, disappear also, but you can right-click on the icon and select "Exclude this Item from Fences' quick-hide.") You can do a lot of other stuff, like resize icons, from the context menu when you right-click on the desktop. So, happy fencing in Windows 7!

Keep iPads and Tablets Clean With SideKick™ from LensPen®
By Terry Currier, President of the WINNERS WINdows usERS group, CA
June 2011 issue, Winners Notepad, www.windowsusers.org, winnersug@aol.com

I saw this company at CES and was impressed with their product. iPads and tablets are great, stylish products. But the touch-screen action leaves a trail of oily fingerprints that soon cover the whole surface. A cloth isn't effective and some sprays and tissues can make the fingerprint mess even worse. In reality you should not use a glass cleaner on your monitor or tablets, because they have a special coating on them. While I did find a wet paper towel works pretty good on the iPad the SideKick works the best.

SideKick's carbon compound is similar to the one found in printer's ink; why newspapers have been an effective way to clean windows for generations.

The cost for SideKick is $19.95. A package of two replacement cleaning pads is $14.95. Each pad gives 150 cleanings. www.lenspen.com

Microsoft Software Updates
**By Dick Maybach, June 2011 issue, BCUG Bytes, Brookdale Computer Users Group, NJ
www.bcug.com, n2nd (at) charter.net**

If you use MS Windows, it's important that you keep all your Microsoft software up-to-date. Most PCs use MS software, and this makes them the most attractive targets for attack. Don't think that installing an anti-virus program and a firewall provides sufficient safety. Some attackers exploit flaws in your operating system or its applications, and the only defense is to correct the flaws. You must rely on your software vendors to do this, and the most important of these is Microsoft.

The two most common programs to keep MS software updated are *Windows Update* and the newer *Microsoft Update*. I prefer the latter, since it maintains all Microsoft software, not just Windows. (If your PC has just Windows Update, read carefully when you run it and you will find a link to install the newer utility.) With both Microsoft Update and Windows Update it is important to use the correct update strategy. You can find what your PC is using by going to the Control Panel, then to Security (the exact title varies with the particular version of Windows), and finally to Updates (again the exact title varies). You will see several options, among them are (1) install automatically at a fixed time every day, (2) download automatically, but not install, and (3) neither download nor install, but just notify you that updates are available. The problem with (1) is the fixed time. If you choose something like 2 a.m., it is unlikely that your PC will be on, and updates will never be installed. If you choose a time when you usually are using your PC, the update process will slow it down, perhaps for an extended time. Option (2) is less intrusive, but you must remember to install the downloaded updates. I prefer (3), because I can see what the updates are before they happen and can choose a time to do them. If you also take this approach, don't put off the updates, because your PC is vulnerable until they are complete.

Be careful not to turn off your PC during the update process. Windows is supposed to survive this, but a friend had to reinstall Windows from scratch, because she became impatient. This is easy to do; a recent update for XP required two hours to complete. I am even reluctant to do any other computing while a patch is in progress. This is probably being over-cautious, but the consequences of a problem here are ugly. This hazard is also a good reason to do your updates manually; that way you know when they take place. If they happen automatically, you may not realize they are in progress. Finally, if you patch manually, you can make a system backup prior to each one, which lets you recover with minimum fuss if disaster strikes.

Microsoft usually releases security patches on the second Tuesday of each month, with the result that this is called "Patch Tuesday." Some people immediately analyze the patches so they can develop malware to exploit the flaws they correct on PCs that haven't yet been patched. Their goal is to release this malware within a day, so "Exploit Wednesday" follows Patch Tuesday. This makes it important that you apply patches as soon as possible. Sometimes the bad guys find a flaw before Microsoft releases a patch. If they develop a program to exploit it, it's called a "Zero day exploit," and you have to rely on your anti-malware software, your firewall, and luck for defense.

While most operating systems are updated by replacing entire modules, Microsoft appears to attach patches to the existing modules. When the module is executed, your PC jumps to the patch and then back to the module. As a result, as these patches accumulate, you slowly lose disk space and your computer becomes slower. I still use XP, which now has about ten years of patches, and it's slowed to a stately tectonic speed. I've also had to remove a substantial amount of software to free disk space. (What was a huge disk ten years ago is quite cramped today.) For this reason, when you review the available downloads from Microsoft, or course install the essential patches, but be reluctant to download any new software unless you are really sure you will use it.

After hearing about the potential problems associated with updates, you might prefer to avoid them, but this would be a big mistake. So long as you are careful, the risks are minimal. Back to Page 1

Excel Tips: Ages in Years and Months

Many times in early childhood education, a child's age in Years.Months format is needed for reporting, admitting, and evaluation. Basically, this format shows the number of elapsed years and months since birth, separated by a period.

There are several ways you can go about getting the desired age. The formula you choose to do the work depends, quite literally, on your preference in formulas.

Assuming that you have the birth date in cell A1, you might think you could use some math on the date to determine the proper information. For instance, you might think that you could use this formula:

`=NOW() - A1`

This produces a value that is the difference between the two dates, but if you then apply a custom format ("yy.mm") to the result, you'll find out that it doesn't give the sought-after Years.Months. You get something close; the years are right, but the months vary from 1 to 12 when they should vary from 0 to 11. (Somebody can be 12 years and 0 months old, but it is not proper to say 12 years and 12 months old.)

This means that you need to start casting about for a formulaic approach. A simple formula would be the following:

`=YEAR(NOW())-YEAR(A1) & "." & MONTH(NOW())-MONTH(A1)`

There are many variations on the above, but the problem is that they all only look at the month of today compared to the month of the birthdate; they don't take the day of the month into account. Why is that important? Because the number of elapsed months since birth is dependent on how the day of the birth month compares to the day of the present month, and the formula doesn't allow for that distinction.

So, you might consider a more complex formula that actually tries to calculate elapsed years and months, such as the following one:

`=TEXT(INT((NOW() – A1)/365.25),"##0")&"."&TEXT(INT(MOD(NOW – A1,365.25)/31),"00")`

This comes much closer to what is needed, but it is still possible to be off by a day or two right around the time of the month when the birth day is approached. Closer still is a formula which uses the YEARFRAC function:

`=ROUNDDOWN(YEARFRAC(A1,TODAY()),0)&"."&ROUNDDOWN((YEARFRAC(A1,TODAY())-ROUNDDOWN(YEARFRAC(A1,TODAY()),`

The best (and simplest) formulaic approach, however, is this one:

`=DATEDIF(A1,NOW(),"y") & "." & DATEDIF(A1,NOW(),"ym")`

The formula relies on the DATEDIF function, which determines the difference between two dates. The value returned by the function depends on the third parameter passed to the function. In this case, the first invocation of DATEDIF returns the number of elapsed years and the second returns the number of elapsed months. It provides the most accurate results of any of the formulas discussed so far. Back to Page 1