

ACPCUG Newsletter

December 2009

A K R O N - C A N T O N P C U S E R S G R O U P

Main Program:
Wireless Routing
by Gerry Schaefer

6:00 pm

December Meeting

December 7th, 2009,
6 pm
John Torok
Community Center
4224 Massillon Rd
Green, Ohio 44720

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ACPCUG Yahoo group

To ease in distribution of the newsletter and other important club communications, a Yahoo group has been created for all paid members of the Akron-Canton PC Users Group.

Important points to remember about the group:

- 1) Do not Reply to the message welcoming you to the group as it will delete you from the list.
- 2) The list is meant only for newsletter distribution and other news from the officers, it is not for member discussions.
- 3) It may be used to send meeting reminders.
- 4) The address should be added to any white list so it is not interpreted as spam.
- 5) Use of the list does not permit anyone to see their address so their privacy is protected.
- 6) The list is private; it cannot be seen by non-members of ACP-

ACPCUG Web site

A new web site for ACPCUG will go live sometime before the Jan 2010 meeting. Positive feedback is encouraged.

.From The DealsGuy for January 2010 by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

***Problems Never Cease**

A while back, I mentioned my lightning strike and replacing my damaged router with a new one by D-Link. I'm told that D-Link has many glowing reviews, but my experience has been just the opposite. It stops working whenever it feels like it and if I switch the Ethernet cable from the router directly into the modem without rebooting either the modem or the computer, the computer accesses the Internet OK, and faster than it did before. When I get the router running again, my network connected printer no longer prints and I have to get Ricoh's help to reconfigure the IP addresses so my printer works. The Ricoh techs have been great. I've tried reconfiguring the printer using the printer's manual, but have not mastered working with IP addresses so far. The D-Link router tech support also leaves a lot to be desired; in fact, they sometimes brush you off whether they get the router working or not, and they're sometimes hard to understand. Once they advised me to upgrade the firmware and quickly got rid of me. Updating the firmware didn't help.

Last week that router quit working twice and I decided I'd had enough of that piece of junk, so I bought another router on sale, but this one is a Netgear, as was my last one, which worked great for a couple of years, until the lightning strike. The Netgear has a disk to help set it up (so did the D-Link) and this Netgear is working fine, but my printer again had to be reconfigured. I'll see if D-Link will let me return the router for them to check, but at this point, it doesn't matter to me. I've had enough of D-Link.

***Gotta Keep Those Costs Down**

How many people do you know who have been let go by their employer lately, even though they might have been with them for years and have an excellent attendance and work record? Lately, I know quite a few of those people. They go to work one day only to be told that a cut is being made, and it is them. Usually the employee has likely been with the company the longest. I believe that's the corporate way of keeping the bonus up by getting rid of employees who are paid the most. Disregard the knowledge, dependability, and experience they have for taking good care of customers. All those years of being a responsible and prudent employee meant nothing. Most of the ones I know had to immediately collect their personal items and were escorted off the property like some kind of criminal, which doesn't make them feel very good. An older person has a difficult task finding a job, unless you get lucky, and older can mean over 35 these days.

***Time To Help Pay Back The Stimulus Loans**

I'm sure there will be several articles soon about doing your income tax return free, but I'll add my two cents worth on that topic now. There are several ways to do your income tax at no cost, but my favorite is "Tax Act," <<http://www.taxact.com>> which has a free version and a pay version. The free version does your tax return just fine, except that it pesters you frequently about the advantages of their pay version. I used the free version the first year I tried it and it did what I needed just fine. I had already taken my data to a free preparation service and just wanted to compare the results. Tax Act actually found a mistake in the one I just had done for free.

The following year I decided to use the deluxe version (right now they are offering it to me for \$12.95) because that one brings forward all of the information from your previous year's return, saving a lot of typing and possible errors. I also called their tech support a couple years ago for help with my "green" credits and had good response with it.

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Also, don't forget AARP's free tax help for seniors. We really need to pay our taxes so we can repay the Chinese and keep them from repossessing the USA for nonpayment of our loan. I doubt I could learn to speak Chinese.

***This One Can Improve Your Photos**

AMS Software announced the release of Home Photo Studio, a new program for photo editing, creating original greeting cards, and decorating ordinary pictures. It offers plenty of frames, tools, masks, filters, and effects (such as 3D and plastic effects). The number of effects may be confusing at first, but it offers opportunities for making every photo special. Greeting card templates can be colorful, darkish, funny, or romantic, and will help the user create a proper greeting card for any occasion. Home Photo Studio offers all necessary functions for uncomplicated photo editing.

The most popular feature, besides greeting card templates, is probably Effects&Filters that allows adding natural phenomena (such as stars, clouds, rain, snow and lightning). You can also add noise and blur, stylize a picture (ancient photo effect, pencil drawing, lithograph, etc.), adjust brightness and saturation; and make complex combinations. The user can adjust the transparency of the effects and set the area to be processed (the top, bottom, center, borders, etc.). There are a variety of picture frames.

Home Photo Studio Deluxe edition costs a bit more than Standard Edition, but is rich with extra features. It is the right variant for those who want to create 3D compositions, get automatically created collages, use plastic effects, and import PNG/Photoshop™ templates. Deluxe edition is also remarkable for its over 100 professionally designed frames and greeting card templates.

Working with Home Photo Studio is usually trouble-free thanks to the intuitive interface. But if the user still faces a problem while mastering the program, the detailed Help system is ready to explain how to deal with it.

Features: (Some features are only in the Deluxe Edition)

- Support of more than 20 graphics formats;
- Convenient image explorer;
- Hundreds of filters, effects and masks;
- Fast photo enhancement and retouch;
- Creation of slideshows with smooth transition effects;
- Greeting card templates and picture frames;
- Automatic creation of collages and 3D compositions;
- Auto enhancement and red eye removal.

Home Photo Studio runs under Windows 2000/XP/Vista and 7. The Standard edition costs \$39.00 USD and the Deluxe edition costs \$59.00 USD. Here's a special offer for user group members. Order the Standard Edition, and then write to <support@ams-soft.com>. The message must include the order ID and the text "DealsGuy Special Offer." AMS Software will then ship the "Deluxe" Edition with 100 extra templates and extended functions. Further product information, as well as its free trial version, is available at <<http://home-photo-studio.com/>>.

Download link: <<http://home-photo-studio.com/PhotoStudio.zip>>

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Company website: <<http://ams-soft.com/>>

***Some Popular Sites With Low Prices**

Some of you probably know about these, but some may not. Here are some URLs for great deals that are popular with the local user group members, and something I check frequently. One is <<http://www.1saleaday.com/>> where the sale is good for 24 hours only. The price might even be FREE with the only cost being the shipping. I've bought a few items there and some were fantastic deals while others were good, but the item wasn't quite as I expected.

Another very popular one is <<http://www.giveawayoftheday.com/>> where the item is absolutely free by download for just 24 hours. Some of these free items are reputable ones that normally have a retail price and are rated good software. When it's free, I sometimes download it even though I have no use for it at the time, but I take the attitude that "you never know." I think that men can change their minds too.

<<http://www.software-dod.com/>> is another interesting site where you might find a bargain, but I've only found one I wanted so far, and I'm not sure I really needed it.

If you find something that interests you, I suggest you read it thoroughly because I had something I thought I wanted on 1saleaday, but ended up not getting what I thought I was ordering. Read the description over thoroughly to avoid that.

That's it for this month. I'll soon have more new product announcements on my Web site that didn't offer discounts. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click <bobclick at bellsouth dot net>. Visit my Web site at <<http://www.dealsguy.com/>>.

Online Backup Services

There Are Pros & Cons But They Are Up & Coming

Written by Ira Brickman, President, ICON PC User Group, Inc., New York

From The ICON Graphic, Newsletter of ICONPCUG, October 2008 Edition

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The changing face of how we use our computers includes the latest concept: using programs and services directly from the Internet. Many of us, for example, have found it

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more convenient to access our email using a Web browser (a.k.a. “Webmail”) instead of a dedicated client like Outlook Express. The Internet’s evermore ubiquitous nature means that receiving email is as simple as finding an available computer with browser software. Backing up your hard drive using an online service is one of the up and coming online services. The advantages are:

- No need to buy backup software or purchase external USB drives or optical media to backup to.
- Not storing backups where the computer is located secures against fire, theft, and other risks.
- Like Webmail, the backups are available from any computer with an Internet connection & a browser.

As good as that sounds, some of the other considerations are:

- There are some costs usually involved.
- Backup privacy and security is dependent on a third party and transmitting your data over the Internet adds privacy and security risks.
- You become dependent the backup service staying in business. If not, you are out of luck.
- It takes a lot longer to backup or restore than using a local hard drive.
- There is no imaging which means you are not backing up a picture of your hard drive, including your operating system installation. Rather you are backing up folders and files.

All in all, the pros certainly make trying online backup worthwhile. The cons, however, mean you have to judge how private the files are and how large your backups will be. And the risk of a service folding means you should be wary of using smaller, totally free backup services for anything very critical to you.

There are some well-known, reliable services which can be free to use, within certain limitations. Or for a small monthly fee, you can get all the pros and limit your risks.

If you want to use an online backup services, there are three commercial services you can explore and consider to start with. They are: Amazon S3/Jungle Disk, Mozy, and Carbonite. All three have similarities:

- They require that you download and install a desktop client to configure backups, manage restores.
- Once your first backup is created, the client program then works in the background to backup of new and altered files.
- All three encrypt your data before transmission and store it in encrypted form on remote servers.
- None require you to restore from the original computer.

You can also restore your data to a different computer.

If you search the Web, you will find an abundance of reviews about each of these services. There is much that has been positively written about Jungle Disk and Amazon’s Simple Storage Service (Amazon S3). The S3 service is part of a package of Amazon services meant to be accessed through third party software. Jungle Disk is

the leading program to do that. It “mounts” the online storage so that it seamlessly appears as another drive in your Windows Explorer. Jungle Disk can schedule automatic backups, but the mounted drive means you can drag and drop to manually backup files and folders And it allows for incremental backups.

This last is important because there are costs involved. Amazon currently charges 10 cents per Gigabyte per month for storage and another 17 cents per GB for the data transfer . Incremental backups mean the transfer costs are kept to a minimum after your initial backup.

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JungleDisk costs \$20 after a 30-day free trial. Amazon S3: <http://tinyurl.com/qx87a>

Jungle Disk: <http://www.jungledisk.com>

Mozy, at <http://mozy.com/>, on the other hand, can be free if you use the “MozyHome” alternative, limited to 2Gb of storage. But for \$4.95 per month, Mozy offers unlimited backup of a single home computer. Though not as convenient as Jungle Disk, the MozyHome software makes backing up easy and has many backup options..

Carbonite, <http://www.carbonite.com/>, offers a yearly subscription for unlimited backup of a hard drive, starting at \$49.95 per year, with lower costs for upfront payment of multi-year subscriptions. This makes it a little less expensive than Mozy per year. The Carbonite software might be a little easier to use than Mozy. Some reviewers found Carbonite to be slower and the Carbonite Web site does contain a caution about speed.

With costs potentially less than the upfront cost of a hard drive, these backup services are at least worth a look for their convenience for computer users.

DesktopZoom

A review by Bonnie Snyder, member of P*PCompAS (Pikes Peak Computer Application Society), CO

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One evening while surfing the Web, I stumbled across a free screen magnifier called DesktopZoom. I downloaded it and put it through its paces. And, I was quite impressed with it. There are those freeware programs that “you get what you pay for,” and then there are those that give you a whole lot more value. DesktopZoom is definitely in the latter category.

When you first load DesktopZoom, it comes up with a settings screen, with two tab areas; in the top area, the default is 3) Entire desktop and in the bottom tab area, the Mouse is the default tab. You can type in a numerical size for the mouse pointer and then select a shape and color for the mouse pointer. The “Big Mouse” option is selected by default (if you unselect it, you don’t get a mouse pointer at all ... not good). Other options on the Mouse tab include selecting a Crosshair, selecting a thin red Rectangle which helps you focus on the working area of your application (don’t use the Crosshair and the Rectangle together because the Rectangle won’t move if you do), and another default selection: Hide real mouse (recommended).

Moving from left to right on the tabs, the first tab is for Zoom. The Zoom selection area has two input boxes for the size of the magnification. Default is 3000/1000. You’ll have to fiddle around with the numbers to find the best for you. There are three checkboxes, the first is to hide the configuration screen when the program is running (it is not checked, but I would recommend that you check it). The second is for No screen changes when not zoomed (it is not checked, but I would recommend that you check it). The third is Stop zoom if mouse in right bottom corner (I checked it because I find it a convenient option).

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The next lower tab is for Keys. These key combinations are for increasing or decreasing the magnification on the fly. By default, the Mouse Wheel option, a radio button, With Ctrl-key, in a combo box, is checked. There are three other key combinations you can select from. If you prefer to use the arrow keys instead of the mouse, you can select the Arrows radio button with Without Key selected in the combo box (there are three other key combinations to select from in the combo box). Finally, the Alt-Keys are selected by default in a checkbox with six possible settings for on the fly changes (Zoom in and out; Zoom on or off; tracking and crosshair – each option has a character to press with the Alt-Key to accomplish its task).

The Mouse tab comes next (we've already covered that); then comes the Color tab. There are three checkboxes: the first is for Grey shades (it has a combo box/edit box with seven choices of shades of grey including an option to type in a number of your preference); the second is for Invert Colors, and the third (checked by default) is for Smoothing. You can have all three boxes checked if you wish. Finally, it has an edit box for Show original screen (you can type in a numeric percentage ... 0 is the default). This one makes me crazy ... what it does is show the original screen as a kind of background of the magnified screen. But, it was probably included because somebody needed that feature!

Then we move on to the Tracking tab. The first Tracking option has a combo box from which you can choose three tracking items: None, Caret, Caret + Menu; the default being Caret + Menu. Next addresses specifically Track MsWord Caret (checkbox checked by default). Then you get to select the Tracking delay time by typing a number in an edit box (30 is the default). Another check box comes next for allowing display of a Thumbnail with your choice of ratio (in an edit box). The Thumbnail is similar to a histogram in an art program; it displays the entire screen in miniature in the bottom right area of the screen. Finally, there is a combo box for choosing View. The options in this combo box include Follow the mouse, Static – changes when hitting the border and Static – Jump to mouse. The default is Static – changes when hitting the border. You'll just have to check these out yourself to see which works best for you. For the present, I am using the default. And



then, the final lower tab is for Speech. I have noticed that people with low vision will experience visual fatigue with long documents to read. The addition of speech in DesktopZoom is an excellent option when the eyes are ready to give out (or put you to sleep). The Speech option picks up on any SAPI5.0 voices you might already have on your computer as well as any premium voices you have acquired. You can turn the speech on only when you want it and you can control volume and speed in this tab.

There is more, but I really ought to leave some of the mystery so you can enjoy setting the program up. DesktopZoom has many really good features. My biggest complaint is

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that it does slow down movement on the screen. Ah well, nothing is perfect. Give DesktopZoom a try if you feel the need for some screen enlargement to help you read your computer monitor. Just Google DesktopZoom and you'll be taken to a site for download.

Computer Speed, RAM and Virtual Memory

Written by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., a member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL

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One of the more frequent questions raised is: "will adding more physical memory (RAM), speed up my computer"? The answer is a qualified "maybe". The first thing you need to be aware of are the built-in bottlenecks that can slow down your computer. Programs and data move through your computer at different speeds in different locations. The central processor (CPU) is usually the fastest data handler in the system. The hard drive is the slowest and everything else, including the RAM, is intermediate in data handling speed. The speed of processing data in RAM is measured in billionths of a second, or nanoseconds, and the speed of accessing data on the hard disk is measured in thousandths of a second, or milliseconds. So, ideally, you want all the processing to go from RAM to the CPU and back to RAM. Unfortunately, that's not always possible even if your system has the maximum amount of RAM installed.

Every computer running Windows, from several generations back, uses "virtual memory" in addition to RAM. The definition of "virtual memory" is based on redefining the address space to "trick" programs into thinking they are using large blocks of contiguous memory. Virtual memory is a space on the hard drive, frequently called a "swap file" or "page file". This is a block that is mapped for temporary storage of programs, data, and operating system essentials. This technique gives an application program the impression that it has contiguous working memory (address space), while in fact it may be physically fragmented.

Virtual memory was designed at a time when RAM was much more expensive than space on a hard drive. Even though RAM is now much less expensive, the latest versions of Windows (XP & Vista) still depend on virtual memory. In fact, much of the operating system kernel ends up in virtual memory. This kernel memory also controls the allocation of data to virtual memory. Consequently, it is not really possible to eliminate virtual memory when you are running Windows XP or Vista. If you do disable virtual memory, Windows becomes unstable.

In a 32 bit computer running Windows, the maximum memory that can be accessed by the CPU is 4 gigabytes (2³²). It can not access addresses beyond 4 gigabytes (GB). (A gigabyte is a billion bytes.) Not every computer can accept 4 GB of RAM. Some older computers are limited to 512 megabytes (MB) and still run Windows XP quite successfully. However, if you have a newer computer whose motherboard can accept 4 GB of RAM, you may not be able to fully access all of that RAM. In some cases, RAM is shared with the graphics system. This is usually referred to as an "integrated graphics card". In such a case, up to 1 GB of your RAM may be used by the graphics leaving only 3 GB for the rest of the system. Then Windows takes 2 GB of space leaving only 1 GB for user space (programs and data). Even if some of this is placed in Virtual memory, the CPU still has only 4 GB of addresses. If you have a graphics card with its own memory, Windows will allocate 2 GB to kernel memory and 2 GB to user memory. Since some of the kernel memory will be in virtual memory, your total memory will be a combination of physical memory (RAM) and virtual memory (hard drive),

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but the total will not exceed 4 GB in a 32 bit computer. Remember, the 4 GB limit applies to the number of addresses that can be accessed by the CPU. Those addresses can be on the graphics card, the hard drive or in physical memory (RAM).

Windows sets up the memory system by dividing memory into pages. The most recently accessed pages are in RAM. Any pages that have not been referenced in a while are written to the file on the hard drive. According to Microsoft the paging file in a 32 bit system can be a maximum of 16 terabytes (one terabyte equals 1000 gigabytes). So the total virtual memory pagefile system can exceed the 4 GB limit by a considerable amount. However, no more than the 4 GB can be actively handled at time. The inactive pages are stored on the hard drive.

Virtual memory not only operates at the speed of the hard disk data access, it also requires special handling before it can be used by the CPU or sent to the video screen. Pages on the hard disk have to be read into RAM to be used. That also means that the space they will take in RAM must be vacated. If there was data there, it must be written to the hard drive, before the new pages can be read into RAM. This paging process must also be managed. Some memory is used just to keep track of which pages are in RAM and which are in virtual memory. This is the role of the Virtual Memory Manager. All of these processes of reading and writing to and from RAM require time. As a result, virtual memory use does slow the computer more than the amount that is just due to the slower speed of disk access.

Before you decide that you need 4 GB of RAM to solve your speed problem, you need to determine how much RAM your computer is designed to accept. Computers in today's market are sold with anywhere from 1- 4 GB of RAM. However, only a few years ago, computers were designed to accept a maximum of 1 GB of RAM or less. So you need to check your owners manual to see what the maximum RAM is for your computer. Then, if you don't know how much is installed in your computer, bring up the the device manager window from the control panel. The first page will tell you how much physical memory you have in your system. You can also see the distribution of physical memory and virtual memory by bringing up the task manager (Ctrl-Alt-Del) and clicking on the Performance tab.

There are several other possible solutions to this problem. One is to look at your hard drive. If you have an older computer with an IDE drive, replacing it with a drive that has a SATA interface will speed up the data handling in virtual memory. Another change would be to purchase a graphics card with 256 – 512 MB of RAM and install it in place of the integrated video. That would release the RAM that was being shared with the video card.

The best, and most expensive, alternative for speeding up your computer is to replace your 32 bit computer with a 64 bit system. The 64 bit computers can access 16 exabytes of RAM (264). That is 16 million GB of RAM. Most of the 64 bit computers in todays market do limit physical RAM to anywhere from 8 to 256 terabytes. Not that we're getting into any really large numbers here, but the amount of RAM in a 64 bit machine is more than adequate to reduce virtual memory to a bare minimum. The catch is that 64 bit machines have other problems, especially with the limited availability of 64 bit software and drivers for peripheral devices. So before you decide to switch to 64 bit computing you need to check out whether or not drivers are available for your peripherals.

Finally, if your hard drive is heavily fragmented, this will also slow down data reading and writing. Simply defragmenting your drive will speed up the drive input and output. It may also improve the computer's boot time. As you can see, there are a number of things to consider if you need to speed up your computer.

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Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor of physiology. He has been working with personal computers for over thirty years, developing software and assembling systems.

Computer Basics

Written by Hilton Kaufman, a member of the Chicago Computer Society, IL

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A computer is nothing but a bunch of wires and parts sitting in a box. Programming makes it work. Over the years computers have become smaller and more powerful, while programming became more sophisticated.

Years ago memory was expensive and the programming was relatively cheap. Now, memory is quite cheap. For many purposes the necessary programming either comes with the machine or can be purchased in a box or online.

For most people, a commonly available operating system and an office suite meet their needs. The operating system helps direct commands through the parts and wires, although there is a chip with some very low level programming on it that is part of the machine. The office suite has the programs or applications that allow business-type things to be done.

The most common operating systems are those in the Microsoft® Windows® line of products. These come with some useful applications and games. WordPad®, which comes with the Microsoft® Windows® operating systems, is sufficient for the word processing needs of many people who do not need a complicated office suite.

When you buy a computer, the operating system and its included applications are usually pre-loaded into the machine. Depending on the package that is purchased, other programs may come with the machine. There is likely to be a minimal office suite, such as Microsoft® Works®, a web browser and an e-mail program. These will be inexpensive, low end products, which may be adequate.

A business class office suite may cost a few hundred dollars depending upon what is included. A powerful database program will approximately double the cost of the office suite.

The required power and cost of the machine depends on how it will be used. Computer games with life-like graphics require powerful machines. Text only e-mail messaging can use inexpensive machines.

Many computers are connected together through something known as the Internet. Several services, such as the World Wide Web and e-mail, are delivered through the Internet. The Internet works through a complex addressing system so that messages can go where they are supposed to go. Any computer may or may not be connected to the Internet at any given time.

Connections to other than local computers, such as to the Internet, usually go through a commercial Internet

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Service Provider, or ISP, which connects to the Internet trunk lines. This connection could be through a school, government agency, business, or other organization instead. ISPs can be small neighborhood operations, large International concerns, or in between.

One should be a bit careful when using the Internet. While there is a lot of useful information available, there is also significant bad stuff. Attempts are made to scam people in various ways or to harm computers.

Hilton Kaufman serves as an Internet content provider and unit technical support person in the Illinois Department of Employment Security. Among his other duties, he designs interactive forms and assists people with the use of computer programs.

He is old enough to have seen room size computers that were programmed by inserting boards with plug in wiring. Yet he is familiar with much of the modern technology. For several years he has been writing articles for beginners on the use of computers, which have been published in computer user group newsletters.

Dropbox

Written by Ed Richard, Leader of the Open Source SIG, Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA

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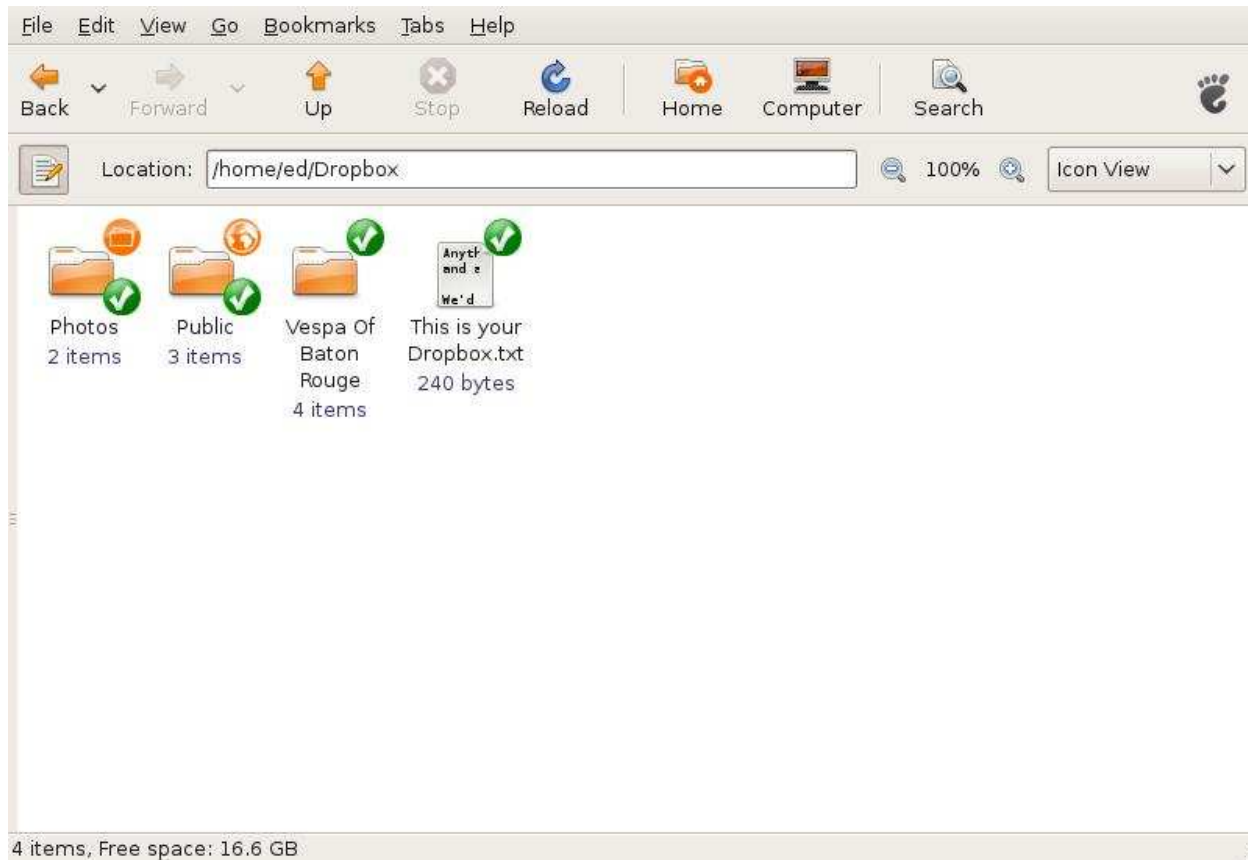
(PULL QUOTE An awesomely simple and elegant online storage solution and so much more!)

So just exactly what is Dropbox, you might ask? Have you ever needed to sync files between two or more machines? Have you wanted to also have an off-site copy of those files? Have you needed to sync files between Windows, Linux and Macintosh machines?

Have you wanted to have a public photo album to share pictures with your friends and family? Have you needed a shared on-line file repository for collaborating with co-workers? Are you tired of carrying around a pocket full of thumb drives? Dropbox is all of these and even more. It is cross platform so it runs on Linux, Windows and Mac computers.

After installing the Dropbox application on one machine, you create an account and link that machine to the account. Then, any file that is placed in the My Dropbox folder (which in Windows lives inside the My Documents folder, and in Linux lives in your user folder, the Linux equivalent of My Documents) gets automatically synced with your Dropbox folder on all other linked machines. This is what my Dropbox looks like on my Ubuntu Linux machine:

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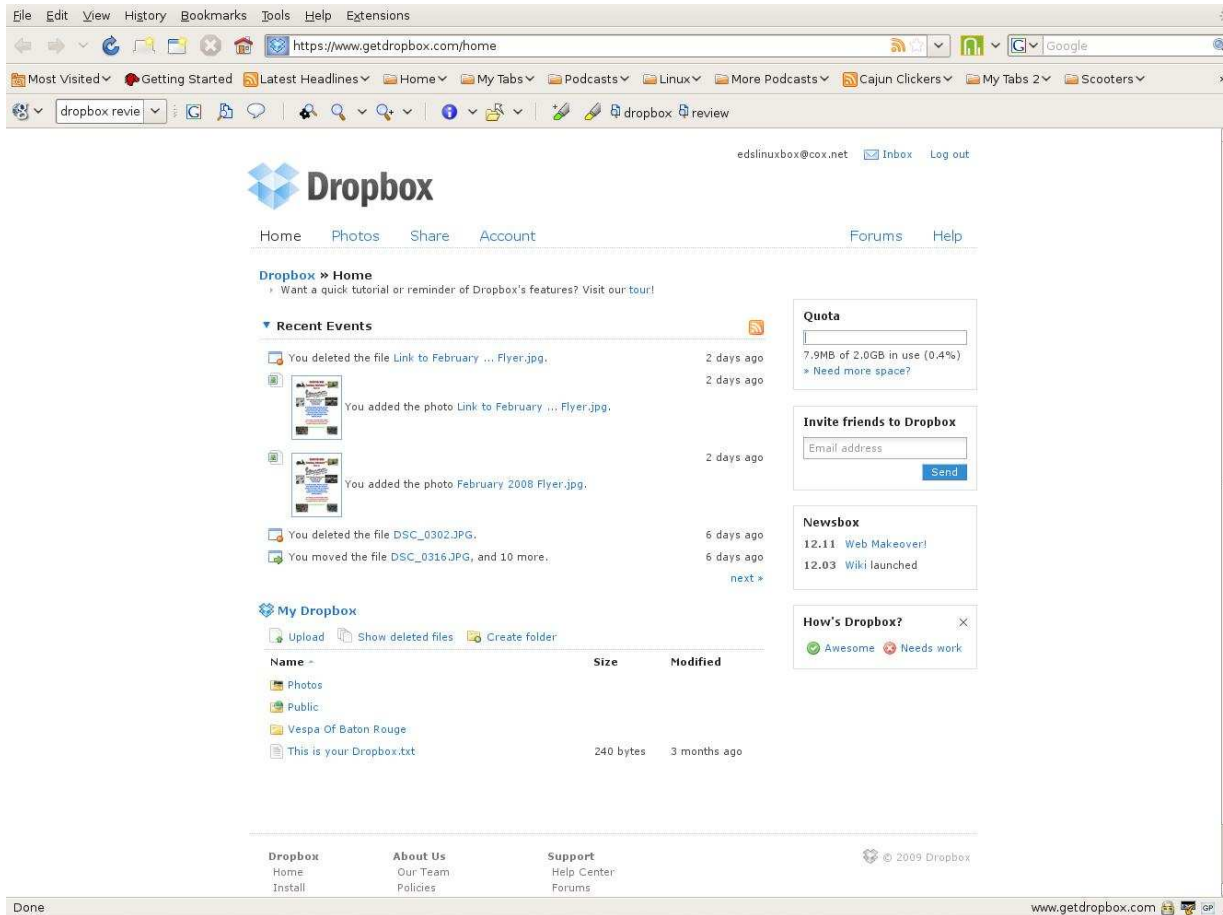


If you only have Dropbox installed on one machine, it becomes an off-site backup service. Dropbox uses Amazon's S3 service behind the scenes to house your data. So files placed in your Dropbox folder are automatically uploaded to the Dropbox servers. Should you delete them on your local machine or suffer data loss, they can easily be retrieved from the Dropbox servers by installing Dropbox on a replacement machine, or Directly from the Dropbox website.

Dropbox also supports shared folders that allow anyone you invite to the folder to have access to the files in that folder. This is a great way to collaborate and share files with coworkers. There's also a folder specifically configured to hold photos. Any images placed there are automatically turned into a photo album with a publicly accessible URL you can give out. Go here to see a photo album of pictures in my pictures folder: <http://tinyurl.com/cafvh>

There is also a Public folder that is accessible to anyone and a web interface that allows you to access files on machines that don't have Dropbox installed. Here's what my Dropbox homepage looks like:

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You can also access previous versions of files from the web interface. So if you foul up that file and need to go back to last week's version, you can.

To learn more about Dropbox go to: <https://www.getdropbox.com/screencast#screencast> and watch the video.

Reinstalling Windows

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No matter how diligent you are at computer housecleaning and tuning your system, at some point you will need to reinstall Windows. One of the most infuriating things about the process occurs after the installation when you realize you have forgotten something important like exporting your Favorites folder. Several weeks ago I reinstalled Vista on my laptop and almost forgot to do something elementary. So perhaps it's time to re-view the basics.

There are many reasons to reinstall windows. Perhaps the registry has gotten corrupted or it could be an accu-

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mulation of little things that are driving you nuts. Whatever is annoying you, a clean install is always the best option. Before doing anything, careful planning will keep you out of trouble.

The detailed procedures outlined here apply specifically to Vista, but the general concepts apply to any version of Windows and even other operating systems. There are three main areas to a reinstall. You need proper preparation, the install itself, and the aftermath to clean up any mess you may have inadvertently created. That means you don't schedule a reinstall the night before any deadlines.

Start by documenting any critical login identifications and passwords. If you pay bills online, access financial information, eBay, PayPal or anything else important to you., now is the time to write it all down. Some folks use a password protected spreadsheet file. Others use some kind of encrypted application to store the data. I prefer good old reliable pen and paper stored in a safe place, not taped to my monitor.

Do you have your Windows product key available? You need it to reinstall Vista. Are there any other applications you will reinstall that require product keys, like Microsoft Office? Gather them all, including any drivers you may need to reinstall hardware, like a printer or mobile smart phone.

A clean install requires that you backup your data files. This is especially important if you're planning to reformat your hard drive. Backup email contacts, calendar entries, and anything you consider important. Don't forget anything special you may have saved on your desktop. That's an easy one to overlook.

Have you installed new hardware recently? Any new devices, except physical memory, require some kind of driver software to work properly. You can get the most up-to-date drivers by visiting the manufacturer's web site and downloading them. Go to the Device Manager for a list of installed hardware or use Belarc Advisor for a more detailed description.

Do some housecleaning. Search your drive for files that are obsolete or otherwise unnecessary. It's amazing how much digital detritus can accumulate over time. Perform a full deep virus scan so your new setup can get off to a clean start. Use Disk Cleanup if you want to reduce the number of unnecessary files on your hard disk to free up disk space and help your computer run faster. It removes temporary files, empties the Recycle Bin, and deletes a variety of system files and other items that you no longer need.

Back up the My Documents folder and any sub-folders that may exist. Backup Links if you use Internet Explorer; Bookmarks if you use Mozilla Firefox. If you're not sure you've backed up everything you need, back up the entire disk. If you've forgotten anything, your data can be recovered.

By now you should have:

Documented all logins and passwords

Backed up all important data including My Documents and any sub-folders

Have all product keys and activation codes handy

Backed up your email contact list, and calendar entries

Backed up Favorites, Links, Bookmarks, etc.

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Collected Driver disks

Check everything at least twice to make sure you haven't overlooked anything essential and you're ready to go. Insert your Windows disk and reinstall the operating system.

After the process is complete, there is still work to do. Use Windows Update to retrieve and install the latest service packs, security updates, and any necessary patches. After bringing your operating system up-to-date, turn your attention to applications and device drivers.

If you reinstalled Vista from the manufacturer's installation or system restore disks, drivers for the original software and hardware that came with the system are likely to be either no longer relevant or out-of-date. You may need to visit several manufacturers' web sites to download and install the most recent drivers. This is part of proper preparation, but if you neglected this step it's not a fatal mistake.

Restore any data you backed up earlier, reconfigure network settings if applicable, and tweak the system to suit your personal preferences. Create a system restore point, and do an image backup of your entire system in case you need to reinstall again.

Don't fool yourself. Reinstalling the operating system, applications, drivers and such is never as simple or as easy as it should be. If you plan carefully however, it doesn't need to be stressful.

A SCUG Review: Adobe InDesign CS4 "one-on-one"

By Gregory West, Editor, Sarnia Computer Users' Group, Canada

SCUG Report, February 2009 issue

www.scug.ca

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Authors: Deke McClelland with David Futato

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Usually, when desktop publishing is mentioned people tense up, and rightly so.

The

programs are so hard to learn. But all that has now changed.

We have all dreamed of being able to produce an award winning document, from a single page newsletter to that 100 plus page glossy magazine. Now we can use this book and the training DVD. You will be amazed how easy it is to learn this desktop publishing program while you follow along, both with the 12 les-



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sons in this book, and with the DVD that is included, free with the book.

Deke McClelland, a 20 year award-winning veteran in the publishing business, and author of 80 books on computer graphics is the best there is. McClelland is the first InDesign book author and has held this distinction ever since. The book is designed for both PC and Mac. The DVD training video is by “lynda.com is an “award winning provider of educational materials, including Hands-On Training™ instructional books, the Online Training Library®, CD- and DVD-based video training, and events for creative designers, instructors, students, and hobbyists” (www.lynda.com).

Many of the “high-end” desktop publishing programs are extremely intensive and hard to master. Deke McClelland and David Futato have produced a full training class, with their “so-easy-to-follow” book. The title is in part: “one-on-one” - they score high points on this concept of training all the way; training sessions that would normally cost you a lot of money.

The book holds the training concept of: read lesson – watch video - do exercises. There are 12 self-paced lessons in this book that follow along with the 4 hour DVD training video that comes free with the book. At the end of each chapter there are quizzes to make sure you are on the right path. The colour graphics in the book are large and easy to see and study. Sidebar notations are everywhere, to keep you on track. If you are slightly familiar with desktop publishing, this book and DVD allows for you to pick topics of your choice to zero in on your specialized training.

I would suggest your very first move, after skimming through the book is to insert the training DVD that comes with the book. The first video sets you up with folders and colour sequencing so that your computer is maximized to allow you to view all your needed files for InDesign. If you have some of the other programs from Adobe Suite such as Photoshop, this will also sync up those programs as well. Next step is to view the second introductory video wherein author, Deke McClelland, explains how this course is setup and how to maximize the lessons, both in the book and on the DVD. McClelland advises to start in the book and read the introduction to the lesson, then play the DVD to watch the “companion video”. All you do here is, as McClelland says, “sit back and relax”, as the videos are extremely well done. When you’re finished the video section, you then return to the book to “work your way through the step-by-step exercises”. You can do the overview to make sure you are getting it with a quiz that follows each lesson.

This book is a must have for any editor who works with a single page newsletter, or a hundred page glossy magazine. I highly recommend this book.

The Disintegration of Service.

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Want to make a free over sea calls to India? Just call for technical support on your computer, Internet service,

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or cable service. You are likely to be routed overseas to India. You then get the pleasure of talking to the “well trained” script readers. About the only thing they are trained for is to tell you: “Yes, very much I can help you”. You hear this phrase whenever you call for tech support. The techs use that phrase to hide the fact that they are spending that time to check their index sheets for key words in what you told them was your problem. They then turn to that page in their script book and start reading off a page that is supposed to match your problem. The key word is “supposed”. Reality is far from tech support fantasy.

Tech support used to mean reaching a person knowledgeable in the problem you were calling about. Now it is a means the manufacturers and utility suppliers use to avoid dealing with customers. There was a time when the support staff knew and understood computers. But then the corporations came up with the idea of making support calls difficult. They figured we would be less likely to complain if doing so was difficult. It is not bad enough instructions are written by non-English speaking people. Now we have to get the instructions interpreted by someone who failed a course in English as a second language. Which is pretty tough to do in India, a country where English, along with Hindi, is the official language. (I won't even go into how all those people in India suddenly have American names like Jack and John when they join tech support.)

I know my patience has a limit. I test it regularly when I call for Tech Support. Thanks to the service quality of my utility, cable, and Internet providers I get to test my patience all too often.

Tech support did get smarter, though not for the better or to the benefit of the consumer. Used to be you could ask for a supervisor and be moved up to someone in the states. Now tech support in India has their own supervisors who are as good as the base level worker at helping. Pretty much no help at all.

If you are lucky enough to be moved up the ladder to what is often called the “corporate escalation department” you will find your anger escalate as well. Corporate only works business hours and Monday through Friday, sometimes. Holidays or any other excuse, means you won't reach corporate help. What will corporate escalation do when you get there? Route you to the technical support staff in the states you needed from the beginning. But first you need to wait 24 hours for a return contact. Oy*

How do I know so well how tech support fails to work? I am my family and business's IT person. That means I am often on the phone with tech support. I recently spent five days without Internet service thanks to Earthlink's outsourcing it's tech support to India. After days of trying to get Earthlink to fix the problem I called the line provider that Earthlink uses and had them fix the problem myself. Total outsourcing.

Is there a way to avoid all this? There are less chances everyday as corporate America outsources its human interface with its customers. Can we do anything about it? Sure. When looking at what to buy, or a service to use, take into consideration how the manufacturer or provider will support its product. Use products and services that support you as a human and not as a joke.

* = For those few unfamiliar with “Oy” please click http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oy_vey