

Orange Coast IBM PC User Group (OCIPUG)



README.DOC

Volume 25 : Issue 6 – June 2009

Monthly General Meeting

Date: June 27, 2009

Agenda:

- 0830-0900 Random Access (general Q & A on IBM-compatible, personal computer hardware and software)
- 0900-0915 User Group Administration and SIG Announcements
- 0915-1015 Featured Presentation

"Home Networks - More Than Just Routers" (Joe Melfi, Associate Director, Business Solutions, and Les Goldberg, APR, Manager, Media Relations for [D-Link Systems](#))

1015-1030 Break

1030-1110 Featured SIG Presentation

TBD (Digital Content, Scanning, and Printing SIG)

1110-1155 Capsule SIG Presentations:

Internet & Networking SIG - TBD

Hardware SIG - New Hardware (a partial recap from the June Hardware SIG meeting)

Windows SIG - TBD

1155-noon Raffle

Raffle tickets are **FREE** - five (5) to each member attendee and one (1) to each adult, non-member attendee. Please pick them up when you sign in. The monthly raffle prize is a \$50 Fry's Electronics gift card.

Location: **FOR GENERAL MEETINGS (only)!!!**

General meeting are held at the Costa Mesa Neighborhood Community Center (Paularino Room), 1845 Park Avenue, Costa Mesa, CA 92627 ([Map](#))

Meetings

General Meetings - next six months:

June 27, 2009 (see cover page for this month's meeting agenda)

July 25, 2009, August 22, 2009, September 26, 2009, October 24, 2009, and November 21, 2009

Executive Board Meetings - follow each General Meeting. OCIPUG members are welcome to attend.

Special Interest Group (SIG) Meetings:

First Tuesday (June 2, 2009) - Internet & Networking SIG

7:00 P.M. - 9:00 P.M.

Featured Topic: "What is www.w3.org" and why would you use this web site, plus Networking Q&A"

SIG Leader: Steve Schiffman

Internet & Networking SIG web site - click the "Internet & Networking" link on the [OCIPUG web site](#)

Second Tuesday (June 9, 2009) - Hardware SIG

7:00 P.M. - 10:00 P.M.

Featured Topic: "The Balance of Computer Components: 2009 Update"

SIG Leader: Ed Leckliter

Hardware SIG web site - click the "Hardware" link on the [OCIPUG web site](#)

Third Tuesday (June 16, 2009) - Windows SIG

7:00 P.M. - 9:00 P.M.

Featured Topic: TBD

SIG Leader: Robert Strader

Windows SIG web site - click the "Windows" link on the [OCIPUG web site](#)

Fourth Tuesday (June 23, 2009) - Digital Content, Scanning, & Printing SIG

7:00 P.M. - 9:00 P.M.

Featured Topic: TBD

SIG Leader: Robert Walker

Digital Content, Scanning, & Printing SIG web site - click the "Digital Content" link on the [OCIPUG web site](#)

SIG meetings are held at the Costa Mesa Senior Center, 695 West 19th Street, Costa Mesa, CA 92627 ([Map](#))

Administration (Team Roster – 2008-09)

President	Ed Leckliter	president.bod@ocipug.org
Vice President	Robert Walker	vicepres.bod@ocipug.org
Secretary	Irwin Haydock	secretary.bod@ocipug.org
CFO/Treasurer	Jack Vincent	treasurer.bod@ocipug.org
Director (2007-09)	Leonard Stein	director1.bod@ocipug.org
Director (2008-10)	Eugenia Frerichs	director2.bod@ocipug.org
Past President/Long Range Planning	Vacant	pastpres.bod@ocipu.org
README.DOC Editor	Ed Leckliter	editor@ocipug.org
Webmaster	Ed Leckliter	webmaster@ocipug.org
Programs Chairperson	Ed Leckliter	programs@ocipug.org
SIG Coordinator	Robert Strader	sigcoordinator@ocipug.org
Membership Chairperson	OPEN (= Opportunity!)	membership@ocipug.org
APCUG Representative	Robert Walker	apcugrep@ocipug.org
SCRUGS Representative	Robert Walker	scrugsrep@ocipug.org

Membership

Members receive a meeting reminder and the monthly newsletter (README.DOC) via e-mail (the online newsletter archive is on a three month delay). Member dues help the group pay its bills (liability insurance, APCUG membership fee, equipment maintenance, web site domain name registration and hosting fees, and raffle prizes). Memberships run from September through August and are prorated for those joining after September. The membership form is available at ([link](#)). The fee schedule follows. Contact the OCIPUG Treasurer for prorated fees.

Individual - 1 year \$30, 2 years \$55, 3 years \$75

Family - 1 year \$35, 2 years \$60, 3 years \$85

Full-time student - \$20/year (see the membership form for more info)

OCIPUG Web Sites

Main web site - see <http://www.ocipug.org/>

SIG web sites - click the associated SIG-name link on the OCIPUG home page (<http://www.ocipug.org/>)

SIG Meeting Reports

Internet & Networking SIG (SIG Leader: Steve Schiffman)

Meeting Date: May 5, 2009

Attendees: unknown, no report received

Topic/Focus: unknown, no report received

Hardware SIG (SIG Leader: Ed Leckliter)

Meeting Date: May 12, 2009

Attendees: 8

Topic/Focus: "Hard Drives and Other 'Drives': 2009 Update"

See presentation [slides](#) (PDF format)

Random Access: none

Hardware Submissions: none

Windows SIG (SIG Leader: Robert Strader)

Meeting Date: no May meeting (SIG leader on vacation)

Attendees: n/a

Topic/Focus: n/a

Digital Content, Scanning, & Printing SIG (SIG Leader: Robert Walker)

Meeting Date: no May meeting (SIG leader on vacation)

Attendees: n/a

Topic/Focus: n/a

Articles

How Can I Capture PC Screen Contents?

Attribution: By Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc., Tiplet@gabegold.com

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It's often desirable or necessary to capture -- that is, record into a file -- what's on your Windows screen. Windows has two basic tools for this: the Print Screen (or PrtScreen or some other variant) key captures the contents of your entire Windows desktop onto the Windows Clipboard; pressing Alt and PrintScreen captures only the active program window. Sometimes one of these choices is exactly what you need.

Remember that the Clipboard only holds one item -- so to collect multiple images, you must save each one before collecting another. A handy way to do this is with the Windows Paint program. Open Paint by clicking Start, All Programs, Accessories, and Paint. After capturing each image, make Paint the active window, press Ctrl-V to paste the image into Paint's work area, then click File/Save and specify the file's name and format (JPEG, or .jpg is compact and usually adequate).

But sadly, these techniques aren't very flexible. If you need just the details in part of a window or you need contents of a scrollable area, tough luck.

Fortunately, many other tools exist. My favorite screen capture tool is CaptureWiz <http://www.pixelmetrics.com/CaptureWiz/indec.html> from PixelMetrics. Modestly priced and described as "quality screen capture software for busy people" it includes options to capture anything, anywhere on your screen.

Two CaptureWiz versions are available: Lite (\$19.95) which handles screen capture options including area, frame, all, scroll, video, and audio; and Pro (\$29.95) which adds flexibility, options, and features, and also captures scrolling areas animation, audio, mouse pointer, and more.

I use CaptureWizPro to create graphics which accompany my Tiplet articles; after each capture it presents a dialogue box for saving the image. I like its feature which retains captured images so I needn't worry about losing them by forgetting to immediately save them.

Many other screen capture utilities; Googling windows "screen capture" finds an abundant shopping list with free and various cost choices.

<http://www.techsmith.com/screen-capture.asp> Snagit by TechSmith is another well-regarded priced product.

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Dozens of PC Utilities Free for the Taking

Attribution: By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Talk Show Host, lwilsker@apcug.net

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WEBSITES:

<http://tinyurl.com/95free-utilities>

<http://openoffice.org>

<http://www.iobit.com>

<http://www.defraggler.com>

<http://www.recuva.com>

I read a lot of online computer magazines. Most of them are American, but some are foreign, including from such diverse places as England, Germany, and Australia. Recently the Australian magazine PCWorld Australia published an article titled (sic) "95 great free sites and downloads you've probably never heard of" (tinyurl.com/95free-utilities). From the feedback I have received from readers of this column, there is great interest in totally free computer utilities, especially in these pressing economic times.

The article categorizes the free software into 12 categories including productivity software, music utilities, security tools, web enhancers, phone utilities, photo and video managers, social networking, PC performance enhancements, file synchronization, and business applications. In the productivity software category, the first recommendation is one of my personal favorites, OpenOffice. OpenOffice (OpenOffice.org), which was reviewed in this column last year, is a full featured free office suite that can read and write Microsoft Office files such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, as well as many other formats. With its frequent updates and enhancements, OpenOffice would be a wise choice for anyone who wants an office suite with "all the bells and whistles" totally free. The menu hierarchy and appearance are nearly identical to Word, Excel, and other Microsoft Office products providing for a "near zero" learning curve for anyone familiar with Microsoft Office products. Other productivity utilities are displayed including: Flowgram, which can create web-based multimedia presentations; Gubb, which is a personal time manager; PrimoOnline, which helps you create PDFs without software; and "Remember the Milk" which helps you to remember to do anything, and integrates many platforms, including BlackBerry, iPhone, Gmail, and Windows Mobile.

The music utilities category has several programs that I am not familiar with, but appear to be very attractive, and since they are totally free, there is no downside risk in trying them. The one rated as a "BEST BET" by the magazine is Songbird, an open-source downloadable media player that's completely customizable and packed with innovative features. Songbird is both a music player and a Web browser that enables the quick downloading of music. Other utilities listed include "SharePod", which enabled iPod users to change, backup, or share music between iPod users.

The security category includes some utilities that I have written about in the past. The one top rated by PCWorld Australia is the excellent and free Avast Antivirus, which utilizes seven different "shields" to protect the computer from attack from different sources and vectors. Avast is one of the most popular free security utilities with tens of millions of devoted users, and would be a good choice for anyone wanting a free antivirus product that is equal to or superior than many of the expensive commercial competitors. Other free security utilities listed are from "a-squared" (previously discussed in this column); "Attack Trace", which can detect if a website is under attack; Comodo EasyVPN Home, which allows the user to create a virtual private network (also recently discussed in my column); a firewall, and a pair of excellent anti-spyware utilities. These utilities would all be worthy of consideration as their quality is generally excellent, and often better than their commercial counterparts.

Most of us use our internet browsers directly as they come from the publisher, unaware that there are tweaks that are available to improve our online experience. There are thousands of plug-ins and add-on's for Firefox, and unknown to many there are also many similar improvements for Internet Explorer. These plug-ins listed in the magazine article include a note taker for Firefox, a news reader which is an improvement over the one integrated with Internet Explorer, a FTP (file transfer) utility for Firefox, a nifty utility "Google Preview" that displays thumbnail images of web pages that appear in Google search results, IE7Pro which adds Firefox-like features to IE7, a mapping utility that automatically displays street maps by clicking on an address, and "Video Download Helper" which is a Firefox plug-in

that I use to download videos from the major video sites such as YouTube. The 11 browser enhancements listed may add a lot of enjoyment to the web browsing experience.

Being a typical geek, I like to try and tweak the best performance that my computer is capable of delivering. PCWorld Australia editors and I think alike as we have both written about some the same free performance enhancement utilities. At the top of the magazine's list is one of my personal favorites that I use regularly, Advanced System Care Free, available from www.iobit.com. This is a full featured performance utility that has dozens of tools to enhance PC performance, including a registry cleaner, anti-spyware, internet speed-up tools, and many others. I routinely put this program on almost every computer that I use. Just a few weeks ago I wrote about free utilities from Piriform, including a unique defragmentation utility called Defraggler (www.defraggler.com). This utility, which is on my computer, can quickly defragment files, folders, or an entire hard drive. Recuva (www.recuva.com), also from Piriform, is a file recovery utility that can undelete files on hard drives, flash drives, and other forms of media. I have personally used Recuva to restore some photos accidentally deleted from my digital camera, and it worked fine!

This article can be read online at tinyurl.com/95free-utilities, where dozens more free utilities can be found. The actual URL of the magazine was much longer (138 characters), so I used the free online utility TinyURL (www.tinyurl.com) to create a much smaller URL that would be easier to enter. I hope that the readers of this column will be more aware that there are some fine free programs out there that are worthy of a chance. I suggest that you try some of them.

Q: How can I keep my PC clean and tidy?

Attribution: By Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc., Tipler@gabegold.com

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Like changing your car's oil or replacing your home's air conditioner filter, a little PC cleaning pays off with a faster, more reliable, and longer-lasting computer.

Although nothing suggested here is either rocket science or inherently dangerous, always follow the medical adage, "First, do no harm". So don't do anything that makes you uncomfortable (perhaps have a more experienced person clean up while you watch and learn), and back up your system and data. Then reboot, to get a clean start, and don't open any programs,

Before starting, to measure what your cleanup deletes, determine how full your hard drive is. Open My Computer, Right Click your hard drive (usually labeled "Local Disk (C:)"), and click Properties. Note how much space is used and free, then close the dialogue box.

Next, use Windows' built-in disk cleaning tool. Click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Cleanup, and the drive to clean, likely C. Choose what to clean; default selections are usually what you need. To be extra thorough, if your system has been running problem free, click the More Options tab and then Clean Up System Restore. Confirm your choice and click OK.

Delete Web browser temporary files. Using Internet Explorer, click Tools on the Menu Bar, Internet Options, and Delete Files under the General tab. Other browsers provide similar functions, sometimes using "cache" to refer to the collection of temporary files.

Delete unneeded personal files, items outdated and no longer used. While most Microsoft Office programs (Word, Excel, etc.) store their files in the My Documents folder, you may have changed this default location. And other apps likely have their own favorite places to stash files. Look around, since cluttered files make Windows work harder to get things done and waste time and resources when they're backed up. If you collect photos, music and such, delete those you no longer want or need, perhaps saving them on CD/DVD or ISB drive. Sorting files by size or date helps find deletion candidates.

If you run PC-based email software, it's worth periodically purging Sent and Trash folders, perhaps pitching material older than a certain date. Then look for a Compact Folders option, sometimes on the File pulldown menu, which squeezes out unused space from email folders.

Weed out software no longer used or useful by uninstalling applications with Window's Control Panel Add/Remove Software tool.

The Recycle Bin, which preserves erased files for recovery until it's emptied, has likely grown during this cleanup process. To empty it, Right Click its Windows desktop icon and click Empty Recycle Bin. Note that programs such as Norton Utilities may offer other cleanup options for the Recycle Bin and other Windows components.

Finally, remember that when writing to your hard drive, Windows places bits of each file in the next available open space on the hard drive.

While Windows can reassemble them, having many files fragmented slows access to them. So, to store all files as single entities, periodically defragment the hard drive. To do this, click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmenter, select a drive, and click Defragment.

When finished, compare the amount of hard drive space used and free to what you saw initially. If this is the first cleanup you've done in a while, the amount of space recovered may surprise you.

Many books give much more detailed instructions for PC cleanups. Search Amazon.com for "degunking windows" and "cleaning windows" to see choices (but don't be distracted by instructions for cleaning house, office, and car windows!).

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Free PC Utilities from Comodo

Attribution: By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Talk Show Host, lwilsker@apcug.net

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WEBSITE:

http://www.comodo.com/products/free_products.html

Last year I wrote in this column about a free suite of excellent security products from a little known company called Comodo (www.comodo.com). Comodo is one of those sleeper companies that quietly provides very good products and services, but just seems to dwell in the background while it adds paying customers and clients. Comodo is an international company with offices in the U.S., the U.K., the Ukraine, and in India. While not visible to the ordinary internet user, Comodo is the exclusive provider of digital security services to the top level internet domain name registrants. Comodo has over 200,000 commercial customers in over 100 countries, and protects over a half-million businesses and private individuals. As is common in the field, Comodo offers some excellent free products available to all users that Comodo hopes will spread its reputation and services, and eventually attract paying clients to its more sophisticated commercial products.

In my earlier column on Comodo, I discussed the individual free Comodo security products, including its antivirus, firewall, antispam, and other security products, all of which can still be downloaded individually, but work together as do many of the competitive commercial security suites. To ease the download process, and even better integrate the

protective functions, Comodo has introduced its free Comodo Internet Security, a fully functional, but basic antivirus, firewall, and proactive security suite. This free suite has been recognized by the media for its quality, by being awarded CNET's highest 5 star rating, and was selected by PC Magazine as its "Editors' Choice". Comodo hopes that users of the free security suite will want to eventually upgrade to its commercial big brother (\$40) that offers additional and enhanced features along with free 24/7 online chat support.

Comodo offers a somewhat unique free product in its "Comodo Memory Firewall Version 2.0". This is an unusual utility in that unlike a conventional firewall (which is also required to maximize security), this Memory Firewall monitors the memory of the computer and the running applications. It is on the lookout for attacks on running programs such as buffer-overflow attacks, a common and damaging threat to our computing security. Attacks such as these, which can be prevented with this Memory Firewall, can cause system crashes or steal confidential information from the targeted computer.

An extremely common threat faced by all web surfers is a form of identity theft through the use of "phishing" or otherwise fraudulent websites. Comodo offers its "Free Forever" Comodo Verification Engine, which notifies the user if a website is legitimate or fraudulent. If a website is known to be legitimate, simply placing the mouse over the website logo will display a green border. This is an excellent tool to prevent some of the more common online forms of identity theft.

Many thousands of computers are lost or stolen each year. It is a known fact that thousands of laptop or notebook computers are stolen in airports and other places annually. One major concern of the owner of a lost or stolen computer is the potential disclosure and abuse of the personal data on the hard drive. Comodo offers a solution to this vexing problem, its free Disk Encryption Software, which can be used to encode the data on a hard drive, preventing its use by unauthorized individuals. This provides continuous protection of the data on the drive, and includes two levels of data authentication. This protects sensitive data without disrupting the ability to legitimately utilize the data, but makes the same data useless to an unauthorized user, such as a thief.

You may have heard commercials on radio and TV about a "VPN" or Virtual Private Network, where selected computers can be connected together over the internet, just as if they would be connected over a wired in-house network. For those who may need to connect distant computers, Comodo offers its free "Comodo EasyVPN". This VPN provides secure encrypted communications over the internet, and allows for the safe transmission and reception of sensitive communications. It also allows for remote access to connected computers, including a "remote desktop" feature that allows one user to access control over another distant computer. For family use, EasyVPN allows for the quick and easy internet exchange of music or photos, and even allows connected users to play multi-user games. This is like having a remote office, where the office computer can be securely accessed from anywhere there is an internet connection. This may be a very useful utility.

I hate spam, that unwanted junk email. Comodo offers a free anti-spam utility that can stop spam, phishing (identity theft), and other fraudulent email from getting into your inbox. The software can import the address book from most popular email clients to create a safe senders' list, and provides for a challenge and response system to verify unknown senders, and adds verified senders to a safe "white list". Using Comodo's Anti Spam utility can significantly reduce the unwanted mail in your inbox.

Sometimes we must send and receive sensitive information via email that we would not want others to be able to access or read. Comodo has a free solution to this problem, its SecureEmail utility. This utility encrypts and digitally signs email such that it cannot be read by anyone except the intended recipient. This utility seamlessly integrates with all major email clients, and has a wizard to help setup the program.

While Comodo offers many other utilities, it is best known for its security products. One such free product offered is its BoClean, which can detect and remove rootkits, hijackers, keyloggers, and Trojans, as it continuously monitors the system for attack. BoClean offers real time protection against online identity theft caused by malware, as well as protection from file damage caused by other varieties of malware.

Regular readers of this column have read the three most important words in computing, “Backup, Backup, and Backup!” Comodo offers a full featured and free backup utility that can automatically backup critical data files to almost any form of media or storage system. Backups may be scheduled automatically, or run at will, and allow for the easy recovery of files in the event of system crash, natural disaster, theft, or other loss of data. With software such as this, and a secure place to store the backed up data, there is no reason why any important data should ever be lost.

Comodo offers its System Cleaner utility to clean computers of useless and wasteful files and registry entries that can adversely impact computer performance, thus improving performance. Comodo System Cleaner is among the fastest and most efficient system cleaner tested, including several of the popular competitors. System Cleaner includes both disk cleaner and registry cleaner tools, as well as other powerful diagnostic tools. System Cleaner claims “100% Safe Cleaning” as it implements proprietary “Registry Protection” and “Safe Delete” features which can automatically restore any files that may have been deleted in error.

Comodo offers an impressive collection of free utilities, and should be commended for offering them. Comodo explicitly states that many of these utilities are free for both personal and business users, making them most cost effective at “free”. For this price, they are most worthy of a try.

How Can I Access Windows Desktop Icons Without Minimizing All Open Apps?

Attribution: By Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc., Tiplet@gabegold.com

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People’s computer desktops vary as much as their physical desktops do. Some have just a few icons while others are crowded landscapes resembling a video game maze.

My PC desktop has the usual software icons plus various files and Web pages I’ve stashed there temporarily. If I accumulated files there I want to save, I’d never find anything in the clutter, so I tidy it every now and then.

In the meantime, I use Desktop icons to launch programs and open files, since I find that easier than navigating Start/AllPrograms to find the right folder, then carefully navigating to find the right program icon (since I’d hate to run an uninstaller when I meant to run a program!).

But even with Windows’ Show Desktop button or a mouse button set to Minimize All, it would be tedious to keep viewing the Desktop to find Desktop icons. So I’ve enabled a standard Windows toolbar which gives me one-click access to everything on the Desktop WITHOUT viewing the Desktop!

To do this, Right Click in an empty part of the Taskbar, pick Toolbars, and click Desktop. The word “Desktop” will appear on the Taskbar, next to the symbol “>>”. When you click the >> you’ll get a vertical pop-up showing all Desktop icons -- program, file, folder, etc. Click what you want and it will open, and the pop-up list will disappear.

So with minimal mouse movement and two clicks, you’re running your app or looking at your file, and all your carefully arranged applications are just as you want them. If you select a folder on the Desktop, you’ll get a fly-out listing of files (or embedded folders) it contains. If the list won’t fit within your screen height, you can scroll down (and back up) with small black arrows at the list’s top/bottom.

Note that unless you’ve tinkered with them, Desktop icons are arranged in two separate alphabetically arranged groups. The first group is items in the All Users Desktop folder; the second group is items in the Desktop folder for the user you’re logged on as. If you’re slightly compulsive, it’s easy to open both folders in Windows Explorer and merge the lists. But it’s equally easy to get used to the two separate lists, since -- especially for launching programs -- you’ll likely click the same few icons most often.

If you like the Desktop toolbar, explore Windows' other standard-but-usually hidden toolbars: Address, Windows Media Player, Links, and Language Bar. QuickLaunch is usually displayed. But enabling more than one or two of them may crowd the task bar so badly that open program buttons are too small to be usable.

If that happens, uncheck Lock the Taskbar (you did notice that option after Right Clicking the Taskbar, didn't you?), grab the Taskbar's top edge (assuming the Taskbar is at screen bottom), and slowly lift it enough so that the Taskbar doubles in height. Lock it while you explore its new shape and components. And don't worry -- everything you've done is easily reversed.

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Free PC Utilities from Piriform Software

Attribution: By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Talk Show Host, lwilsker@apcug.net

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WEBSITES:

<http://www.ccleaner.com>

<http://www.defraggler.com>

<http://www.recuva.com>

There are some excellent free software utilities available that are every bit as good as their commercial counterparts, and sometimes even better. One software publisher, with an almost unknown name, but with very popular products is Piriform Software. Piriform, a British software company located in London, distributes free software that it creates, and is financially supported by the advertising on its websites and donations. While Piriform may not be well known, its software is very well known, with over a quarter-billion copies downloaded! All Piriform utilities are totally free to download and used both by individuals and by corporations, or other organizations.

Piriform's best known software is its CCleaner, available for free download at www.ccleaner.com. Originally released with a filename that many found objectionable, the moniker was shortened to CCleaner which led to explosive popularity, and a very loyal following. CCleaner is arguably one of the most widely used utilities in the cyber-world, with over 260 million copies downloaded. CCleaner is totally freeware and contains no spyware and adware. CCleaner is a system optimizer that can improve system performance, enhance internet privacy, and remove useless and obsolete files from the computer, freeing up disk space. CCleaner is one of the utilities that I carry with me on a flash drive whenever I am asked to checkout a computer, and in some cases has safely removed gigabytes of outdated files from overly cluttered hard drives. CCleaner also includes an effective registry cleaner that can remove obsolete and useless entries from the registry, which may improve performance. (CAUTION: Always use the backup feature in CCleaner, and make a system restore point before running any registry repair utility!). One especially nice feature of CCleaner is its speed, typically scanning a hard drive in a matter of seconds, and rarely more than a few minutes.

Web surfers are often unaware of how many out of date and otherwise temporary files are saved in the cache and other places on the hard drive, often creating an enormous amount of clutter on the hard drive that consumes valuable space, and can also lead to a degradation of performance. CCleaner works with Internet Explorer, Firefox, Google Chrome, Opera, and Safari, and can selectively clean and remove temporary internet files, history, cookies, download history, auto-complete forms, and index.dat files, often freeing up large amounts of hard drive space. By my personal

choice, I only choose to delete my temporary internet files and index.dat files, but that still frees up almost all of the wasted hard drive space, as the remaining items are relatively tiny. Some users who want to maximize their privacy and security may choose to delete all cookies (small text files placed on the hard drive by websites), but many cookies are a convenience item, and not a security or privacy threat.

While controversial in some tech circles, the cleaning of the computer registry of old and obsolete entries may slightly improve performance. To mitigate any possible damage that may result from an erroneous registry deletion, CCleaner integrates a comprehensive registry backup feature which can quickly restore any deleted entries. CCleaner's registry cleaner can remove unused and out-of-date registry entries, including file extensions, ActiveX controls, classIDs, progIDs, uninstallers, shared DLLs, fonts, help files, application paths, icons, invalid shortcuts and other useless entries.

In addition to cleaning browser files and the registry, CCleaner also cleans the residue left behind by many other applications, including Windows Media Player, eMule, KaZaa, Google Toolbar, Netscape, Microsoft Office, Nero, Adobe Acrobat, WinRAR, WinAce, WinZip and many other programs, which will not just save space on the hard drive, but may also improve the performance of those programs.

In the "Tools" section of CCleaner are an uninstall utility and a startup manager. The uninstall utility can be used to initiate the removal of any unwanted software, and the startup manager can be used to stop any unwanted software from loading at boot. Both utilities are useful in improving system performance.

For those who may be reluctant to use CCleaner to maintain their computers, Piriform states, "CCleaner was designed from the ground to be safe and secure to use. It has multiple levels of checks in place to ensure that it cannot delete any useful information or documents you may still need."

CCleaner will run on any PC with Windows 98, ME, NT4, 2000, 2003 and 2008 Server, all versions of XP including 64 bit, and all editions of Vista including 64 bit. Since it is a small program (3 mb download), and utilizes minimal hard drive space when stored, and minimal memory when run, Piriform states that there are no minimum memory or hard drive requirements to run CCleaner. No wonder that all of this power in a small, free program has gained such a large and loyal following.

Piriform also publishes two other useful, excellent, and free utilities, both of which have earned a large and loyal following. Piriform's newest utility is Defraggler (www.defraggler.com), a simple but powerful disk defragging utility that has features lacking in most other defraggers. While Defraggler can do a full drive defrag like other utilities, what makes it unique is the ability to defrag only selected files, without the need to process the entire hard drive. Defraggler is a single exe file less than 1 mb in size that requires no special installation on the hard drive. I carry the Defraggler file on my flash drive, from which it can be run on any compatible computer. Defraggler will run on any Windows PC with Windows 2000, 2003, XP, or Vista, both 32 and 64 bit versions.

Piriform's other free utility is Recuva (www.recuva.com), pronounced "recover", which is a file recovery utility. Recuva can recover and restore files that have been deleted from the computer, digital camera memory cards, MP3 players, and other devices, even if they have been emptied from the recycle bin. It may be possible to recover files that had been lost from program bugs, system crashes, and viruses. I have used Recuva to recover deleted files from my flash drive, and the SD cards from both my digital camera and my GPS. This is another small but very useful utility that I carry on my flash drive, as I will never know when there is an urgent or critical file to recover. As with all other file recovery utilities, deleted files can only be recovered if they have not been overwritten, which is another reason to always have a current and contemporary backup of any important files. Recuva will run on any Windows PC with Windows 98 to Vista.

London based Piriform is to be commended for producing such fine and free utilities as these three above. If you use one or more of them, please seriously consider making a PayPal donation from the link on the respective webpage; that way maybe Piriform can be incentivized to produce more excellent and free software.

How Can I Create User-Friendly Email People Will Be Happy to Read?

Attribution: By Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc., Tiplet@gabegold.com

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What could be simpler than sending email? You type, someone (sometimes many someones!) reads. But aren't there some people whose email you enjoy reading and some whose notes are annoying or even painful to slog through?

Simple tips will make YOU a "favored correspondent" and get your email read sooner rather than later.

High on the list of musts is trimming what you quote when replying. That is, remove (highlight with mouse and press Delete key) all text that isn't essential, isn't related to your reply. Especially remove repeated mailing list information and old sig(nature) files from the bottom of your reply. When this basic housekeeping isn't done, after a few back-and-forth exchanges, notes can grow to hundreds of lines, making it hard to find whatever is added each time. It's especially bad on discussion mailing lists.

Opinions differ on how best to add reply text. I usually put it at the top of my notes, so it's the first thing seen when the note is opened.

But if a discussion is complex, I'll interleave my typing between paragraphs I answer. When done consistently, both these techniques create a log of what's been said, easily reviewed from bottom (oldest material) to top (newest). Some people add replies at bottom but I find that a bit confusing.

When writing to multiple people, distinguish between people receiving the note for action/reply (listed in To field) and those getting it for information only (CC, Courtesy Copy or Carbon Copy).

If you're sending to more than just a few people, especially if they're not a close-knit group, list addressees in the BCC (Blind Courtesy Copy) field. This has important advantages: It hides addressees, keeping them confidential and preventing them from being captured by spammers, and it keeps your note from being bloated and hard to read.

Most email software allows you to specify which field (To, CC, BCC) an addressee should appear in; choices are often in pulldown lists at the top of the email composition window.

If you're one of several addressees (listed in To or CC) think carefully before you Reply All. Be sure that everyone needs to see your reply before sending it. ALWAYS double check To and CC lists before clicking Send.

Before you Reply All, ensure that you ARE on the note's To or CC list. If you're not, you received a blind copy -- so addressees don't know you did. If you Reply All you may embarrass the original sender and yourself.

Don't use ALL capital letters -- that's considered shouting.

Stay calm; out-of-control ranting is called "flaming" and is never popular. If you're responding to something irritating or worrisome, let your note sit overnight before sending it. You may feel calmer the next day. Sometimes it's useful to have someone review such a note for you before it's sent.

Remember that the Internet never forgets -- and once you send an email you never know and can't control where it ends up.

For more tips, Google search "email+etiquette". A top hit <http://www.emailreplies.com> gives 32 concise rules for sending effective email replies.

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Freewaregenius - Evaluates Free PC Software

Attribution: By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Talk Show Host, lwilsker@apcug.net

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WEBSITES:

<http://www.freewaregenius.com>

<http://www.freewaregenius.com/2009/04/07/the-best-free-antivirus-a-comparison>

<http://www.freewaregenius.com/2009/04/13/how-to-uninstall-anything-free-apps-that-get-the-job-done>

<http://www.av-comparatives.org>

<http://free.grisoft.com> (AVG)

<http://free-av.com> (Avira)

http://www.avast.com/eng/free_software.html

<http://www.appremover.com>

<http://www.pcdecrapifier.com>

<http://www.revouninstaller.com>

Reiterating what I wrote in a recent column, I still get a positive response from readers that they like the idea of getting free software for their PCs. From your feedback, these freeware columns are among your favorites, and I will continue to compose them.

I have used a variety of sources to denote which freeware programs would be most beneficial to most users, and have now come across another valuable resource on the subject. Lately I have been reading the listings and evaluations from a site "freewaregenius" (listed as one word in lower case), www.freewaregenius.com, which has been busily locating and testing some of the finest free software available. About once a week, freewaregenius posts its latest recommendations. Two of the recent postings were especially interesting to me, and they are a review of the best free antivirus programs, and a review of software uninstaller utilities.

On almost every radio show, and via a steady stream of emails, I am frequently asked about my recommendations for free antivirus software. Users are either fed up with the poor performance of their commercial antivirus software and are seeking free alternatives, or are seeking to conserve their scarce fiscal resources by utilizing free software rather than buying it. Freewaregenius evaluated the three most popular free antivirus programs in order to bestow the title "best freeware antivirus program". The three contenders for the top spot were the enormously popular programs Avira Antivir, Avast, and AVG. The author of the review summarized his findings with the statement, "My conclusion: all three are very worthy contenders that can hold their own or surpass any heavyweight for-pay antivirus; however Antivir and Avast are definitely in the first tier, while AVG is a close second tier."

In his evaluations, the author used the latest available objective comparisons performed by a third party testing laboratory, AV-comparatives. While there are some other excellent freeware antivirus programs (I have recommended Comodo in the past), for the purpose of evaluation, the author chose to compare the top three free antivirus programs. These three programs, which in their aggregate, arguably represent the large majority of users of free antivirus programs, were also compared to the performance of some of the top performing commercial programs, Kaspersky and Eset Nod32.

In the independent laboratory tests by AV-comparatives, Avast and Antivir both performed extremely well, and were very close in their abilities to detect viruses. In fact, the free Antivir came out at the top of the list in detection, beating out all of the commercial products tested. Antivir was also excellent at detecting new threats that had not yet been added to its virus signature database, using a detection technology known as “heuristics”. AVG, while slightly behind in its detection ability, was ahead of the others by having the lowest rate of false positives. To swing the other way, AVG had a slower scanning speed than the other two.

While top rated in detection, Antivir does have one feature that many users found irritating, and that is that it displays advertisements with each update. Antivir also integrates anti-spyware (as does AVG), but both AVG (the most popular) and Avast are easier to use than Antivir. Personally, I have tried both AVG and Avast, and have recommended them, along with Comodo, for a long time. Cognizant that none of the three are by themselves a comprehensive security suite, but are a vital component in protecting the PC, I would feel comfortable with any of the three.

Another common situation that virtually all PC users eventually face is the occasional difficulty uninstalling no longer needed software. Microsoft’s Add/Remove Programs utility is notorious for its inability to remove all traces of an application when uninstalled. Luckily for us there are several free utilities that are available that typically do a better job removing unwanted software than Microsoft’s utility. Freewaregenius has recently obliged us by reviewing some of the best of the free uninstall utilities, Appremover, PC Decrapifier, and Revo Uninstaller.

Among the most difficult programs to uninstall are security applications, especially those from Symantec/Norton. Appremover (www.appremover.com) is a utility expressly designed to remove those no longer needed security applications. I have used Appremover to uninstall Norton security products that have been difficult to remove, even with the utility available directly from Symantec. Just recently, I tried to uninstall a Norton security suite from a troubled computer, and using Norton’s uninstall utility, there still were large amounts of digital debris left on the hard drive, including now obsolete registry entries; Appremover handled the job much more efficiently and completely than Norton’s own utility. Many other security utilities are almost as difficult to remove, McAfee products being among the most difficult, and Appremover handles them all with ease.

PC Decrapifier (www.pcdecrapifier.com) may have an unpleasant name, but it is a sweet program that I have used numerous times to selectively remove the trial software, demo software, and other useless items installed by computer manufacturers. Much of this factory installed software and services are commission generating or advertising in nature. One major PC maker actually charges the user \$50 to order a computer without such software installed! PC Decrapifier can remove that software from a new or not so new computer for free.

Because I review so much software, I am frequently installing and uninstalling software and my most frequent utility to accomplish that task is Revo Uninstaller (www.revouninstaller.com). Revo Uninstaller displays all of the software installed on the computer, and can quickly and completely remove unwanted software with the click of a mouse. On my computer, Revo shows several times more programs than Add/Remove Programs, and removes them much more completely. Revo Uninstaller is the primary program that I use for this purpose on a regular basis, and I have been very satisfied with it.

At present, freewaregenius has a directory of over 600 free programs that it has reviewed and evaluated, and another listing of the programs that it has rated with its highest 5-star rating. Freewaregenius is a very worthwhile web site to periodically visit, and use as a resource to discover some excellent free PC software.

Q: Is there a quick way to find out how Windows programs work when I can't find the manual?

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Which Beatles song describes an under-used PC resource for solving problems and answering questions? It's not "Ask Me Why?" or "Do You Want to Know a Secret". It's "Help"!

Since Windows' early days, Windows itself and most applications have included information on setting configuration options, usage, and problem determination. Being able to access this material lets you deal with problems whenever they occur, rather than waiting to call an expensive or frustrating support line during working hours. It leads to better productivity, can be faster than Google searching or pestering friends, is available when you're offline, and it can even make PC use more enjoyable by revealing techniques which impress those around you.

Using Help requires just a little knowledge and practice, since it can't -- yet -- read your mind and answer unasked questions. And you do need to know which rocks to look under for the information you need.

Help information in special files -- usually installed with Windows or application programs -- is accessed through built-in software. Fortunately, there's a common look-and-feel across most programs' Help material and interfaces.

The best way to learn Help is to experiment with your own favorite apps to see how they present their material. (And using Help is harmless -- nobody need know you're doing it and you can't break anything!)

There are generally at least three ways to invoke Help: press the F1 key, click the word Help on the menu bar, and press Alt-H (hold the Alt key and press H).

Pressing F1 enters the Help system; the two other actions provide a short pull-down list of app-specific Help options (Users Guide, Reference Manual, About information, check for updates, link to vendor site, report bugs, etc.) which can be clicked.

Most Help systems provides tabs for specifying how to retrieve info; common tabs are Contents, to show main topics and subtopics; Search or Find, to explore Help information; and Index, to list all topics alphabetically. Sometimes equivalent choices are listed in the pull-down menu.

Some applications link to a Web site for Help -- good news because it's always current but bad news because it requires being online. Others, such as some Microsoft Office products -- open a Help task pane within the application window. Microsoft Help sometimes includes an Answer Wizard, replacing searching, allowing entry of questions needing answers.

Some Help systems are task oriented, requiring you to select or enter what you're trying to do. That's helpful when your need matches supplied tasks but it's not as friendly for browsing or when you don't describe a task in Microsoft's terms. When that happens, don't get discouraged, simply rephrase your query or refer to the subject index.

Just as when you explore Web sites, navigating through Help leaves a trail. You can always click Back to revisit a previous display and then click Forward to retrace your path.

Two other helpful Windows facilities are often overlooked:

Dialogue boxes -- sometimes only displaying cryptic buttons and choices -- often contain Help buttons. These can be especially helpful since they display contextual help, describing what the dialogue box can do.

"What's This?" -- clicking the question mark found in the upper right-hand corner of many dialogue boxes turns the cursor into a traveling question mark. Move it to a button or menu and click to display a brief explanation of the item you clicked.

Remember, just as Google is your online friend, answering most searching urges, Help can be a partner, giving clues to your computer's mysterious personality.

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Linkscanner - Free Protection from Web Threats

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WEBSITES:

<http://linkscanner.avg.com>

Many of us have felt secure while surfing the web, safe in the knowledge that our PC security software will protect us from all of the threats out there. Initially, in the early days of PCs, we came to understand that a good antivirus program would give us all of the protection that we needed. Later, we learned the hard way that antivirus software by itself would not protect us from the then-current threats, so we needed a firewall and anti-spyware software. The major publishers of security software obliged us by producing and selling us better, and more comprehensive protective software, culminating in today's typical security suites. Sadly, the miscreants that create the threats to our computing safety are often a step ahead of the security software publishers, and manage to craft new categories of threats that are explicitly designed to penetrate our protective shields, or even bypass them altogether. This makes us vulnerable to attack, even though we blissfully surf the net, oblivious to these new threats, confident in the knowledge that our security software will forever protect us. Regrettably, many of us will find that our personal computing has been compromised by malware from which our security suites provide little or no protection, leaving us open and vulnerable to attack.

According to published reports, as many as 95% of the new online threats are now coming from the websites that we visit, and are often undetected by our existing security software. This means that the blind trust that many of us have in our security software, regardless of the brand, may be unfounded, as our computers may be substantially unprotected from this new vector of attack. According to a recent article on the subject on ZDNET, "The most dangerous page on the web may be the one you are about to click on." As many as 100,000 to 150,000 legitimate websites, often those of national brands and companies, are compromised every day, and are "poisoned" in such a way that innocent visitors to those web pages unknowingly load malware onto their computers, bypassing the antivirus and anti-spyware software installed on the computer to expressly protect against such malware. This malware, when loaded on the victim computer, can open the victim to identity theft or other damages to his privacy or the sanctity of his data. Traditional whitelists (directories of safe sites), and blacklists (directories of dangerous sites), while widely used by conventional protective products are ineffective, as 60% of the poisoned websites are dangerous for less than 24 hours, many of those malignant for only a few hours. This threat is real, and according to security vendor AVG, "One in eight web users will unknowingly come across a poisoned page at least once a month."

The European computer security company AVG (formerly known as Grisoft), has an excellent reputation in the industry, and currently has over 80 million registered users of its software. While the AVG Antivirus software is among the most widely used free antivirus software in the world, AVG also publishes comprehensive commercial security suites that have a loyal following in the millions. AVG has always been considered as a leader in security technology, as demonstrated by a feature included in its top commercial security suite, Linkscanner. The Linkscanner technology has given AVG a strong competitive edge when compared against many of its commercial competitors, as it provides substantial protection from the web borne malware that would possibly slip by competitive products.

Recently, AVG released a free version of its Linkscanner software which I immediately downloaded and installed on several computers. Linkscanner installed smoothly on each computer except one, that one computer having a security

suite that was incompatible with Linkscanner (Trend Micro Internet Security Suite 2009 Pro). According to the AVG webpage, this conflict was unusual, as Linkscanner was tested and found to be compatible with almost all other security suites available.

Linkscanner, available for free download at linkscanner.avg.com, scans each webpage as it is downloaded to your browser, looking for dangerous content, and blocking the loading of the webpage if malware is found. This prevents the web borne malware from being installed on the computer as it is stopped before it is effectively downloaded. Linkscanner does this so quickly, and utilizes minimal system resources, such that there is no noticeable effect on the speed of websites loading and being displayed in the browser. Linkscanner works well with Internet Explorer and Firefox browsers, and will run on most current versions of Windows, including 32 and 64 bit operating systems. Except as mentioned above, Linkscanner will generally not interfere with other security software and runs in addition to it.

There are two components to Linkscanner, Search-Shield and Active Surf-Shield. Search-Shield works with the major search engines, such as Google, Yahoo, and MSN, and displays a safety rating for links displayed during a search. If a website is known as safe, and is free of malware, Search-Shield will display a green star with a checkmark adjacent to the site name. Websites known to harbor malware will be displayed with a red "X", warning the user not to go there. By knowing in advance which websites are safe to go to, or should be avoided, the user can search with a high degree of safety. While not a scientific study, I compared load times with and without Search-Shield running, and I could not notice any difference in the time to load and display Google and Yahoo search results.

The second key feature in Linkscanner is Active Surf-Shield, which scans the webpage behind any link click on, or web address typed into the browser. If Active Surf-Shield detects that the page has been "poisoned", the continued loading of the page is stopped, and a large red warning window is displayed. Again, in my non-scientific tests, I did not notice any difference in the load times of web pages with and without Active Surf-Shield running, and it appeared that the results were displayed almost instantaneously.

Linkscanner (linkscanner.avg.com) is listed as "free forever" when used on individual personal home computers, and provides a valuable and worthwhile adjunct to the security software that we already have on our computers. Since as much as 95% of the contemporary cyber threats are web borne, and Linkscanner explicitly protects against those threats that may slip through our antivirus and anti-spyware software, Linkscanner should be installed and used as appropriate.

How Can I Teach My Windows Mouse New Tricks? (And When Should I Buy a New Mouse?)

Attribution: By Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc., Tiplet@gabegold.com

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For many people, the Windows mouse hasn't evolved much since the dawn of the PC. This is especially true of bottom-bargain gadgets often provided as standard PC purchase accessories: two buttons boringly labeled Left and Right, wired to the computer, and sensing motion through a small rotating sphere in contact with a desk or mousepad. If you're using one of these, a very economical upgrade can greatly improve your mousing game.

Perhaps the most basic mouse-tech enhancement was the scroll wheel, first available a decade or more ago, allowing easy up-and-down motion within most applications' files. If your hand is already on the mouse for file editing, spinning the wheel can be much more convenient than moving the cursor to the scroll bar and then back to the file area.

Since some mouse software only handles basic tasks, more exotic functions may require a simple software install.

(Many manufacturers provide diverse mouse critters and other pointing/tracking devices; if you're not using a Microsoft mouse, check the Web site for whatever gadget you have at hand, since similar capabilities may be available.)

www.loc8tor.com

Googling "intellimouse" takes you to

<http://www.microsoft.com/hardware/mouseandkeyboard/ProductDetails.aspx?pid=003>

Microsoft's Web page where you can click Download Software and navigate to

<http://www.microsoft.com/hardware/download/download.aspx?category=MK>

Download Mouse and Keyboard Software and select/download software for your device.

Many Microsoft mice ("mouses") allow tilting the scroll wheel left/right for horizontal scrolling of files too wide to fully display, providing convenient two-dimensional motion. And some allow the scroll wheel to be a third button to click, providing instant access to your favorite common function.

Even better, many Microsoft mice add another button or two, potentially making available a total of five quick-action functions. Intellimouse software provides great flexibility in defining mouse-button actions, such as Show/Hide Desktop, Forward/Back browser functions, Magnify, Copy/Cut/Paste, etc. Setting a button to Magnify gives one-click access to a tailorable (size/shape and degree of magnification) magnifying glass that's great for viewing small/intricate on-screen details.

Wireless mouse operation avoids tangling the mouse cable in desktop clutter and optical/laser operation is smoother and more reliable than old-style mouseball motion sensing. New mouse shapes are more ergonomic, improving hand positioning, important for people in intimate contact with their mouse for many hours per day.

And Intellimouse software -- free to download -- provides many more mousing capabilities and options including tailorable pointer icons, trails, and speeds. Don't settle for Mickey (mouse) when Mighty (mouse) is available. After buying a new device, check for newer software than came in the package -- you may pick up features or bug fixes.

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Twitter - What You Are Doing Right Now

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WEBSITES:

<http://www.twitter.com>

Several of the readers of this column asked me, "What is Twitter?" following the media reports that senators and congress people were "Twittering" during recent presidential speeches. Twitter (the internet service and the person who does the posting) and Twittering or Tweeting (the posting of personal activities on Twitter) has become one of the most popular ways of communicating one's activities so that others can follow what is going on in the life of a Twitter. The service is self-described as, "Twitter is a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?" According to some of the national media quoted by Twitter.com, "The New York Times calls Twitter "one of the fastest-growing phenomena on the Internet." TIME Magazine says, "Twitter is on its way to becoming the next killer app," and

Newsweek noted that "Suddenly, it seems as though all the world's a-twitter." One may wonder why a Twitter user would post his daily activities as they occur; Twitter explains it this way, "Why? Because even basic updates are meaningful to family members, friends, or colleagues—especially when they're timely."

Just to experience the life of a Twitter, I went to www.twitter.com and signed up for a free account. The signup process was very fast and easy, only asking for me to create my user name, create a secure password, and entering my email address. After creating my account, I was given the opportunity to upload a photo of myself for display to anyone that views my Twitter page, and allow me to customize my page to control the way others view it. I entered my first short message that I was using Twitter, and it appeared on my now personalized webpage. Since messages and other postings are intended to appear as text messages on cell phones as well as on a webpage, individual postings are limited to 140 characters, the maximum length of a text message (SMS) allowed on most cell phone systems. As I was typing this column, I posted a Twitter (message) that I was typing this column; if anyone is following my activities at this instant, he would receive this news as a text message on his cell phone, as an RSS feed on his computer, and email, or by simply viewing my Twitter webpage. On my view of my webpage is a text box where I can type my current activity, as long as I keep it under 140 characters, as shown by the counter adjacent to the text box. Postings can be made or received by computer, cell phone text message, Blackberry, or other communications device. Postings can also be received on any newsreader that uses the RSS format news feed.

Twitter makes it very easy to find friends who also Twitter. By clicking on the "Find People" icon, a window is opened that says "Find people". Follow them". To locate friends on Twitter, I chose to allow Twitter to access my email address book to determine if any of my current correspondents are on Twitter. Twitter can access (but only with your express permission) address books on Yahoo, Gmail, AOL, Hotmail, and MSN. It will quickly scan the online address book, and match any email addresses in the address book against the millions already in the Twitter database. Twitter states that it does not save the email addresses and passwords, and does not send out emails to those located without express permission to do so. I also used the "Find on Twitter" feature to enter my last name to see if any of my relatives are on Twitter, and add them to my friends list. Just as a lark, I entered the names of some of our elected officials, and found that several of them do have Twitter accounts. If I want to invite friends by personal email, I can enter their email addresses in the "Invite by Email" box, and Twitter will send them an invitation.

If I want to add celebrities to my friend's list, I can click on "Suggested Uses", and a list of celebrities who Twitter will be displayed. By checking the box adjacent to their names, we can exchange Twitter posts and monitor each others' activities. Some of the more interesting celebrities and online services that can be added to anyone's Twitter friends list are the Jodrell Bank observatory, the Dell Outlet Store, JetBlue Airways Customer Service (monitors Twitter 24/7), the New York Times, 10 Downing Street (the official residence of the British Prime Minister), rapper M. C. Hammer, CNN Breaking News, Al Gore, John McCain, Whole Foods Market (Fresh organic tweets from Whole Foods Market HQ in Austin), Lance Armstrong, Britney Spears (Yes! This is the real Britney Spears!), George Stephanopoulos (ABC News Chief Washington Correspondent and Host of "This Week"), Women's Wear Daily, the Nightline TV news show, Martha Stewart, comedian and magician Penn Jillette, rapper 50 cent, and many more. The business and news outlets listed post breaking news or special deals to their Twitter friends. One that I added, being the nascent bargain shopper, is Woot.com, which posts one deeply discounted bargain each day in each of its merchandise categories.

Twitter, the company, is headquartered in San Francisco, and was founded in 2006. It is a small company, with only a few dozen employees, but has millions of members. It has a marketing model to generate revenue, but the revenue model has not yet been implemented, leaving all of the posts and web pages currently free of advertising.

I am not sure how much I will be using Twitter on a regular basis by posting my personal activities and short commentaries, but I will check my page occasionally just to see who is following my activities. The main purpose of Twitter is to answer the question, "What are you doing?" For those who want others to be able to know the answer in real time, they can do so with Twitter.

End Piece and Fine Print

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