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All Computers Wait at the Same Speed

by Vinny La Bash,

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I first heard that phrase about ten years ago at a geek conference in Seattle. A decade ago is earlier than the Stone Age in computer years. It was probably meant to make fun of the propeller heads that couldn't live without the fasted CPU on their motherboard. The geeks' concern with processing speed seemed ridiculous to those who understood that computers spend very little of their time processing information. They spend it waiting for us to tell them to do something. You would certainly find your life very boring if you had to spend 99% of your time waiting for other people to act before you could do anything.

What are we talking about? We're talking about keeping your system properly tuned so that you don't have to wait while it tries to do its job. It's no secret that Vista has had performance problems. Microsoft has promised that their upcoming service pack should resolve most if not all performance issues. We've heard similar kinds of promises from Redmond before, but this time they say they really mean it. In fairness, not every performance issue can be laid at Microsoft's doorstep, but it's always fun to blame them because they're such an easy target.

Vista puts great demands on your CPU due to Aero and other assorted graphical gizmos built into the product. They should have named it the Eye Candy OS. Responding to the user community, Microsoft also added security

features and additional functions that were not present in XP. When you ask your CPU to do more, you're adding overhead. This means you need more CPU power or you live with a slower system. If Vista performance has been less than stellar, the good news is that you can do something about it other than buying a new computer. Here are some of the things you can do to make Vista more appealing from a performance standpoint.

You're probably tired of hearing this one. It's like mother telling you to eat your vegetables. You know she's right, but you don't want to hear it. **Add more memory.** Vista is hungrier for RAM than any of its predecessors, and with memory as cheap as it is, it doesn't make sense to keep it on a starvation diet. XP runs great on one gigabyte of RAM. Vista should have two gigabytes as a minimum, and you won't go wrong by installing even four gigabytes.

Even with enough physical memory, Vista can still act like a tired old dog if you have a lightweight video card. Go into the Performance Information and Tools utility in Control Panel, and check out your video card with the Windows Experience Index. You need a video card that's certified for Vista Premium and supports DirectX 10. Use the money you save on RAM to buy a good video card. Don't try to do this one on the cheap.

A real help to good performance is bringing your power settings to the

High Performance option. Do this from the Power Options utility in Control Panel. The default setting is Balanced, which is OK for XP but not Vista. The High Performance setting gives you full access to all the Power in the CPU.

Turn off the sidebar. While this feature is visually appealing, it has few socially redeeming traits. Turning off this feature can sometimes result in significantly faster startups and shutdowns. Disable the sidebar by right-clicking it. Select Properties, and remove the checkmark in the box that starts the sidebar when Vista wakes up.

Fine tune your indexing options. Vista has a great search feature, but it's totally dependent on indexing the files and programs on your hard drive. It's a mixed blessing. You have a fantastic search capability when you index all locations, but you take a performance hit. By indexing fewer areas, performance will improve, but your search feature will be less robust.

Vista won't let you turn off indexing completely, but you can disable indexing for locations that may not be important to you. Do this from the *Performance Information and Tools* utility in Control Panel.

Here's another "eat your veggies" type tip. Empty the Recycle Bin and adjust it so it doesn't take up more than 2% of your hard drive. Right-

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click on the Recycle Bin, select Properties, and make the necessary adjustments in the dialog box. Don't forget to defrag your disk once in a while, and empty the Recycle Bin before you defrag, not after.

Open My Computer from the Desktop. Right click on the C: drive, select Properties and check how much space you have left on your hard drive. If you're approaching 90% or more, you need to take non-essential files and move them to another location. Vista needs free disk space to perform certain housekeeping functions, and if it has to hunt around for room or use virtual memory, your performance hit could be enormous.

Keep your device drivers up-to-date. Device drivers were designed to ensure that programs or hardware peripherals could "talk" to the system without problems and do their jobs properly. Newer drivers can improve 3D performance, fix bugs and other graphical glitches in games and video programs. Device drivers can avoid memory conflicts and prevent programs from squabbling over resources. Newer device drivers can support innovative features within applications, and ensure compatibility among different programs.

These are only some of the things you can do to improve Vista performance. Removing unnecessary startup programs, preventing spyware and virus infections, and updating old software are additional steps you can take. If your system is frequently hanging up or crashing after doing everything you can do to improve performance, then it's time to consider reformatting your hard drive and reinstalling everything, but that's another article.

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Email Responsibilities

by Bob Schwartz, a member of HAL-PC, TX, www.hal-pc.org

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Email is a very valuable method of almost instant communication. However, many people operate under an illusion that it is private. It is not. Once sent, it is effectively broadcast to the world. So one should *never* send anything that they might regret. Once it is sent, it is now in other people's hands. The recipient may or may not care as much about controlling your emails' distribution as you do.

Just suppose you send something clever about someone you know to a friend or acquaintance and they bring it up on the screen. Then, they take a break and go to coffee, leaving it on the screen. Another person passes by, snoops, and sees the email. They also think it is clever, and make a copy of it and send it to someone they know, etc.

Or, the employer records all email traffic passing within their company, which they have every right to do, since the equipment is theirs.

Worse yet, some people send messages that they believe are benign and strictly business, yet some self-anointed "god" thinks otherwise.

Yet even sneakier are viruses that can unknowingly, by you, forward your emails elsewhere; or, police and other snoops tapping your connection. There are innumerable ways by which

your "private" traffic can go public.

So, the bottom line is: compose your messages with care, check the addressees listed, and review the message before pressing the "SEND" key.

Oh, by the way: do not think that once sent and "deleted" that the file is gone from your computer. When you "delete" a file, this *does not erase the file*. All this does is change the first letter of the file name in the directory. The file, in all its glory, remains untouched on the hard drive, which is why it is so easy to recover it. Technology has provided a variety of means to recover and reconstitute "deleted" files.

To conclude, email is a tremendously valuable means of almost instant communication. Just make sure that you use it carefully, thoughtfully and wisely.

Bob Schwartz is a HAL-PC member, retired EE, 14 patents, technical writer, active in civic affairs: President, Brays Bayou Association; Vice President, Marilyn Estates Civic Association; Correspondence Secretary with the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy.

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Binary Floodgates on the Internet Backwaters

b Mike Moore, Newsletter Editor,

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Back in the days before the World Wide Web, when computers connected directly to each other over telephone lines, we had a piece of software called a Bulletin Board System or BBS. BGAMUG operated a BBS from about 1989 through 2001, and aside from being responsible for the marriage of at least one member we know about, we amassed a collection of files that totaled, at last count, some 45 gigabytes in size, which was pretty impressive when you consider that there was not one among them that was copyrighted and marked as non-distributable material. Unlike many "boards" of the day, BGAMUG took special pains to make sure that the material we funneled through our member's modems was all above board and free of distribution issues.

So-called pirate BBSs, where copyrighted software was swapped like recipes at a county fair, were not illegal to visit, but there were a few high profile cases with big fines involved and even jail time for the pirate system operators. For the most part, though, our legal system didn't seem to be effective in prosecuting even the most flagrant cases, and the most that a copyright holder could hope for seemed to be a civil remedy by bringing suit.

Now the stakes have certainly been raised in terms of the volume of material swapped, and the material that is swapped today seems to be music more often than the latest PC game, but the copyright system in this country is still not very clear on the issue of sharing binary information. What is evident is that it's the user's responsibility to determine whether or not a given body of information has a copyright assigned to another individual, and also to figure out how much of it can be used (viewed, listened to,

stored, forwarded, sold, whatever) and still fall under the "fair use" doctrine.

Instead of this turning into a dissertation on copyright law, I will instead offer the foregoing as simply a caution. Please do not download copyright material and don't use it unless you have clear permission or fair use rights. And please don't take any of the following as a cookbook for copyright subversion, because it's not meant that way.

Having got that *caveat* out of the way, let's go somewhere where the World Wide Web doesn't go: USENET! (Pronounced YOOZ-net.)

Usenet is the bulletin board of the Internet, and like a real bulletin board, its information is emblazoned on the Internet like a ten-foot-high plasma billboard on Times Square in New York City. Usenet was conceived by a pair of graduate students, John Ellis and Tom Truscott at Duke University in 1979. Now lurid and lawless, Usenet has been given the unseemly reputation of being the Las Vegas of the Internet because of the terabytes of binary pictures posted minute by minute in an unending stream of first-amendment fodder.

And we can find some dandy files on Usenet. Clip art, genealogical records, MIDI music and classical music, sound libraries, electronic books, recipes, quilting patterns, maps, GPS info, high quality desktop wallpaper, icons, and almost anything you can think of. This material is not usually found on the World Wide Web for several reasons, but primarily because people that put up websites generally want to sell you something, and you can't very well sell what is found on Usenet because it is sometimes difficult to find out if it's under copyright or not. You can usually find someone to charge you for

a collection of postage stamp images (for example) on the web, when in fact the sellers of the collection most likely just downloaded it from Usenet in the first place (probably in violation of a copyright or two)!

Usenet is and always was just text messages posted on Internet machines known as news servers. Old timers still refer to Usenet as "net news" even though most of the posts have nothing to do with news. News servers use a protocol known as NNTP to transmit new messages on to other news servers down the pipe. The effect is that a new message posted to an NNTP server gets copied again and again over the course of hours or days until all of the news servers of the world have the message or file in their database. This copying occurs a little like email, except that there is no way to make a post private. In fact, there is no way to address a Usenet posting to anyone but "ALL." Usenet bears another resemblance to email, and that is there is a *lot* of spam (or pointless messages, ads and porn). But if you know where to look, or just exercise some very patient trial and error, you can find some great repositories of information. If you are looking for *one specific file* though, you had better be really lucky! Trolling for files on Usenet is a bit like fishing on a commercial fishing boat: you're going to pull up just about everything that gets caught in your net!

Even though it's text based, binary files (images or programs, for example) can be uploaded and downloaded to Usenet with ease, thanks to some very clever programming that allows seamless conversion from text to binary and back again. The difference between text and binary is not that important – just think of text as messages you can read, and binary as graphics, video, audio or program files.

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Messages are organized by topic into a system with the following “top level” names:

- **Comp** (computers)
- **Misc** (miscellany)
- **News** (Internet news, such as new groups or new policies about usenet)
- **Rec** (recreation)
- **Sci** (science)
- **Soc** (social and behavior, religion, philosophy)
- **Talk** (just that, talk, mostly of the flapping jaw variety!)

Subgroups are separated by periods—for example, rec.sports.tennis, and this fully formed topic name is called a *newsgroup*. Unfortunately, the process for creating new newsgroups is not overseen very well, and over the years the list of newsgroups available has become truly massive and quite often inane, vulgar or pointless. There is also not a good standard convention for naming newsgroups, and thus we have many more “top level” domains that I’d really rather not see.

The top-level newsgroups can be considered the backbone of Usenet and, with the exception of the advertisements and some dramatic grandstanding in some of these groups, they can be fairly informative. In particular, Usenet news is a good place to obtain an anecdotal history for just about any given industry, profession, product or technology.

But now comes the red-headed step-child of Usenet: **alt**.

ALT is a top-level newsgroup hierarchy that was created to dump whatever didn’t fit in the other, more official newsgroups.

The alt groups carry most of the message traffic on Usenet, and as the tag implies, this is where the alternative thinking comes out in the Usenet crowd! The alt.binaries newsgroups collectively carry thousands of gigabytes of information across the Internet daily. And where do you complain if someone posts something

objectionable? You don’t. There’s no help desk and no complaint center. Usenet runs itself, as there is no news server that has any special authority over any other server. US courts have consistently held that the ISP that houses this information is no more responsible for its content than the owner of your local newsstand would be responsible for the content of the magazines he or she sells.

Most of the files on Usenet are found in the alt.binaries section of newsgroups, and it is from these newsgroups that your news reader software (see below) will automatically process the messages into finished files that are ready to view, listen to or execute on your computer.

This seems like a good time to point out that executing any file obtained from an untrusted source really has to be scanned by a good, up-to-date viral scanner *before you execute it*. The safest policy is to just not run these files unless you do so on a computer on which you won’t lose any sleep over, should it become infected. However, it is difficult to obtain an infection from a document or audiovisual file, so these are probably safe to read or listen to.

You will find some groups on Usenet that end with ‘.d,’ which stands for “discussion.” So for example, we have the alt.binaries.sounds.midi newsgroup, which contains actual MIDI files (Musical Instrument Digital Interface files), whereas alt.binaries.sounds.midi.d would be a group devoted to the text based *discussion* of the material found in the former newsgroup. In this context, the word *discussion* means posting information about a given topic, as opposed to real-time chat in a split-screen “chat room” environment. There is nothing real-time about Usenet because each client computer can be expected to update its Usenet database at different times, quite at random.

There are some groups that are *moderated*, where a real person is charged with the task of vetting everything that’s

posted before you actually see it. This person or group, naturally, is known as a moderator, and they are really the only thing close to an authority on Usenet. As you might expect, some moderated groups have a better track record than others in keeping out the riff-raff and spam.

There is an interesting history of Usenet and how newsgroups came to be named at this link: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usenet.

You can receive and post Usenet articles (or binary files) by employing a *news reader* which is also sometimes referred to as an *NNTP* reader (nntp is the Network News Transfer Protocol).

If you would prefer not to have to download and install a news reader, you can skip the hassle of learning the ins and outs of a new program. Try going to groups.google.com in your browser, and clicking on some of the links. Google Groups is a “front end” or interface to Usenet without the news reader. However, unless things have changed since I last took a look at Google Groups, they don’t support the alt.binaries newsgroups, therefore you won’t find any files on Google Groups.

My favorite news reader is called Xnews, created by a fellow named Luu Tran. There is a user manual posted on the Internet at this link: xnews.newsguy.com/manual.html.

Xnews is a free download, and there is no expectation for you to pay anything to the author of this utility. You can get the program at: xnews.newsguy.com/release/xnews.zip.

The program does not need to be installed, you can just unzip it to a directory somewhere on your computer and run “xnews.exe.” Setting up Xnews is probably more easily accomplished in a workshop setting than a newsletter.

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Benefits of Using a Computer Sandbox

by Gene Barlow, User Group Relations, Copyrighted January 2008

A computer Sandbox is newer technology that is not very well known, but, it can be quite useful in many situations. By using a Sandbox utility, you can place your computer in a protected state where you can try some rather risky things on your computer and not have your computer damaged in the trials. Once you place your computer into Sandbox mode, you can safely run anything on your computer, knowing that all changes to your hard drive will not be permanently made to your computer. While in Sandbox mode, your computer runs as if all changes to the hard drive were actually made to your system. But, at the end of using the Sandbox, you can throw away these changes, putting your computer back exactly the way it was before entering the Sandbox.

Let's take a look at some real-life situations to better understand the benefits of using a Sandbox utility.

Installing New Software

Everyone knows that when you install a new software product on your computer, parts of the product are placed all over your computer's hard drive. Entries are made to the Windows Registry, special supporting files are placed in certain directories of the operating system, and other shortcut and setting files are scattered in various places on your hard drive. These are in addition to the main folder that is installed on your hard drive with the software programs. Most software will uninstall easily, but often pieces of the product are left behind on your hard drive. These leftover pieces of orphaned software can

build up and slow down your computer. Some software products include hidden viruses or other bad programs as you install them. The end result is that installing new software on your computer can be a risky thing to do.

Using a Sandbox to install and test new software is a much better approach. With a Sandbox, you put your computer in Sandbox mode before you download and install the new software. Since the Sandbox lets you use the newly installed software just as if it had been permanently installed on your computer, you can run the new software to try it out and see if you like it. You can also run virus utilities to see if the installation gave you a virus you were not expecting. If you find viruses on your computer or just decide you do not like the newly installed software, you can get out of the Sandbox and throw away all traces of that software product and any hidden virus that came with it.

Letting Others Use Your Computer

Another reason to use a Sandbox is to let others use your computer. Other users may change your computer to match the way they like to use computers. For example, many of us have grandkids that come to visit and want to play on our computer. They may download games they like, change your wallpaper and default font sizes. They may pick up viruses in the process of getting your computer changed to their needs. When they leave, your computer no longer is the same as it was before they arrived. It may take you days to get it working again like you want it to. With a Sandbox, you

can place the computer in Sandbox mode before they arrive and then let them play on your computer to their hearts' content. When they leave, you simply exit the Sandbox and throw away all changes that they made to your computer. It is instantly back the way it was before they started to use it.

Computer Labs and Classrooms

User groups that have computer labs or classrooms have a similar situation. The classroom computers are set up carefully by the instructors before the class begins. Once the students have used the computer throughout the day, the computers are different and modified from what they were in the beginning of the day. This may cause problems for the students that follow them, so the instructors will often restore the computer's hard drives to put them back to normal. With a Sandbox, this long restore process is not needed. Instead, put the computers in Sandbox mode at the beginning of the day before the students arrive. Then at the end of the day, exit the Sandbox and throw away all hard drive changes made by the students. The computers are quickly returned to their normal state as you exit the Sandbox.

Browsing the Internet

Much of the Spyware that you pick up on your computer comes from simply browsing the internet. Some websites are designed so that simply passing your cursor over a part of the screen is enough to activate a download of Spyware to your computer. Not only that, but your privacy is at risk when you browse

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the Internet. Windows automatically saves all of the places you browse to and all of the screens you see on the Internet. Browsing the Internet in a Sandbox is a much better approach. Place your computer in Sandbox mode before you start to browse the internet. Then browse all of the sites you want to. When you are done browsing the Internet, exit out of the Sandbox and throw away all Spyware and traces of websites you may have visited.

We offer three excellent Sandbox products that you may want to use on your computer. Let's look at each of these briefly to help you decide which one would best meet your needs.

StorageCraft ShadowSurfer

The smallest and least expensive Sandbox we offer is ShadowSurfer by StorageCraft Software. This product is the quickest product to install and the easiest product to use of all of our Sandbox products. With ShadowSurfer, all changes to your hard drive are always thrown away when you exit the Sandbox, which is what you want in most cases anyway. This excellent product runs on Win2000 and WinXP systems and is available from us at the discount price of just \$20. This is an excellent beginning Sandbox product for most home users.

Acronis True Image 11 Home Try&Decide

The next step up in ability and price is a feature that Acronis has added

to their new True Image 11 Home backup utility. This feature is called Try&Decide and it is a Sandbox feature built into this award winning backup utility. Try&Decide requires that you create and use the Acronis SecureZone on your hard drive to contain the temporary changes to your hard drive. When you exit the Sandbox with this product, you can choose to keep all changes to your hard drive or throw them all away. This excellent product runs on Win2000, WinXP, and WinVista operating systems and is available from us at the discount price of just \$29 for a download or \$33 on a CD. This is a very good Sandbox feature that comes with an outstanding backup utility.

StorageCraft ShadowUser Pro

The most advanced Sandbox utility we offer is ShadowUser Pro by StorageCraft Software. This is a professional-level Sandbox product that has many options and features to it. With this product, you can password protect the controls of the Sandbox, so that nobody can disable the Sandbox unless they know the password. Perhaps the biggest difference between this product and the other two Sandbox products is that you can pick and choose what files to throw away and what files to keep as you exit the Sandbox. This top-of-the-line Sandbox product runs on Win2000 and WinXP operating systems and is available from us at the discount price of \$47. This is the product you should use if you are running a public computer workstation that needs tight controls.

A Sandbox offers you a new way to protect your computer from damage from the software you install or access on the Internet. It also keeps your hard drive safe from damage caused by others using your computer. The selection of Sandbox products we offer lets you pick and choose which one is right for your needs. To order your Sandbox product, go to www.ugr.com and find the Sandbox product you are interested in. Then click on the Buy Now button on that product page to place your order using our secure web shopping cart. As you complete your order indicate the order code of UGNL0108 to qualify for these excellent discount prices. If you have questions about this new technology or about any of these products send an email to gene@ugr.com and I will try to help you.

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Photoshop Lightroom: a Review

by Tom Ekvall, newsletter editor and "Creative Imaging" columnist, Northeast Wisconsin PCUG, webpages.charter.net/newpcug/

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Do you like to shoot plenty of pictures with your digital camera?

If you are like me, storing and organizing them is always a chore so that you can find the right picture when you need it.

Enter Adobe Photoshop Lightroom—the new kid on the block for handling your digital workflow. Designed specifically for professional photographers, Lightroom is equally fantastic and impressive for any photo enthusiast.

Lightroom is not designed to replace Adobe Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. However, It is the perfect complement to the programs, and for some who do not care for doing layers, may become the only product they need for digital imaging tasks.

While Photoshop is designed as a general-purposed tool to handle a variety of creative digital imaging tasks, Lightroom has only one focus—providing photographers

with an effective, streamlined way to manage their photos, process them, and deliver a final product, whether a print or a web gallery.

The product incorporates many features I enjoy in Photoshop CS3, such as the state-of-the-art black and white adjustment techniques and being able to edit JPEG and TIFF files in a non-destructive manner.

In fact, everything you do in Lightroom is handled in a non-destructive manner, so that .jpg images do not diminish in quality over time as editing changes are made. I like the way Lightroom lays out the photo editing tools on the workspace so that everything is at hand. Edits can be undone in the future and new changes made without having to create separate files for each change. Information is stored in a separate file associated with the image. The information is there in a Managed Photos folder whether you import the images into Lightroom's

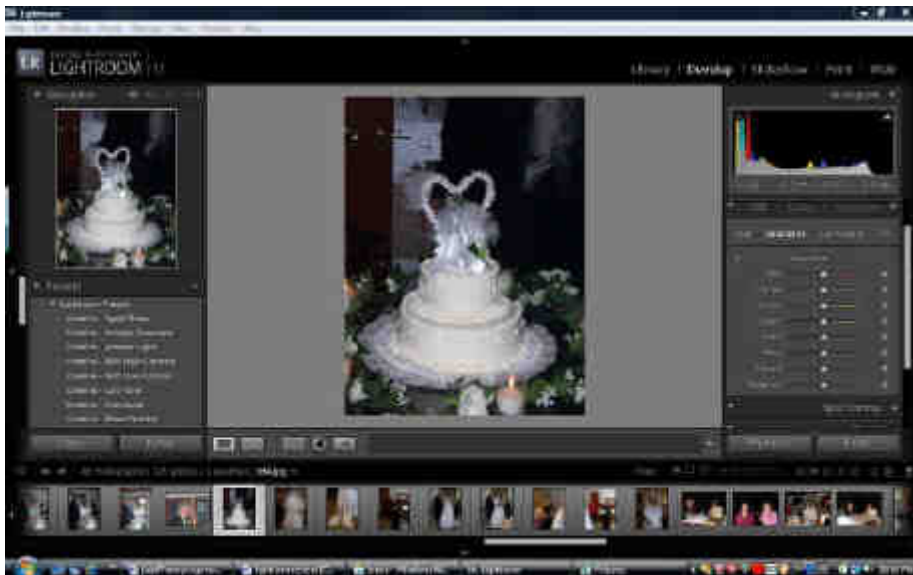
library or leave them in the original location.

Lightroom in fact is a cataloger of your photos, with the user having the choice where to store the images. It will even recognize pictures on removable drives or external hard drives as part of the catalog, something most browsers will not do. I chose to store my pictures in their original location for now.

When you start up Lightroom, you will notice a sleek, black interface with photos in the workspace depicted as slides.

The concept behind Lightroom is to provide a simplified workflow setup from shoot to finish, with five modules identified on the top right hand section of the screen: Library, Develop, Slideshow, Print, and Web. Each module has a set of panels with preset information on the right hand side, task information on the left hand side, photo displays in the center and a filmstrip on the bottom of photos being reviewed. The filmstrip shows all in a particular folder, not just those opened up.

The **Library** is where photos are imported and cataloged with the ability to add keyword information, rate the photo on importance, and even mark it for rejection before a final deletion. It also includes Quick Develop controls that let you make simple edits with push button controls rather than sliders. Photos can be viewed in tandem to facilitate selecting, comparing, and



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(*Lightroom*—continued from page 7) ranking (stars and colors) photos for later processing.

The *Develop* module is where you do the non-destructive processing of photos including those in the .raw format. Whether you are in the library looking at a set of photos or in the Develop module, a histogram of the picture selected is always visible. This helps in evaluating which picture to keep or edit for printing.

The *Slideshow* provides a way to review photos or show them to someone else in an interesting format with the film strip of all the photos still showing on the bottom part of the screen.

The *Print* module provides all the choices for printing, while the *Web* provides a tool for enabling the pictures to be viewed on the web either in html or in flash formats.

I love the way Lightroom is laid out on the screen, as you can see from the accompanying image. Everything is so simple to use and user-friendly.

I also love the Color Adjustment sliders that adjust both the primary and secondary color ranges (all eight colors) with regard to the hue,

saturation and luminance (HSL) characteristics of the image as well as the tonal controls including a new Tone Curve feature. Both allow you to make adjustments directly in the targeted photo.

Lightroom can probably handle most of my image-editing needs. However, there is still definitely a place for Photoshop CS3 for those things which Lightroom cannot do.

What Lightroom cannot do is apply layers, masks, and selective editing to a photo nor will it allow you to do compositing and montages. It is not a “fix it” program when extensive retouching is necessary, nor does it have filters and brushes to create artistic effects, something I love to do. Lightroom also does not work with video, which is no big deal to me.

Lightroom does provide for exporting the photo to Photoshop, Photoshop Elements or other image editing programs so that further work can be done to the photo.

Lightroom sells through Adobe (www.adobe.com) for \$299. A 30-day fully functional tryout version is available for downloading from their website.

Final thought. This is definitely a must-have program for those who want to manage their photos and process them in a non-destructive manner. To me what sets this apart from other organizers/digital asset management programs is the quality and depth of the photo-editing tools. It is obvious the program draws upon the experience of Adobe staff in developing image-editing products such as Photoshop, Bridge and Camera Raw.

The system requirements include Microsoft Vista or Windows XP, 768 MB of RAM (1 GB recommended) and a Pentium 4 processor. I installed the software on an Acer laptop running Vista with Pentium 4 dual-core processors (1.60 GHz speed), and 2 GB of RAM. No installation problems. There are a number of books out on the market to help you learn more about the software. The one I use is *Photoshop Lightroom for Digital Photographers Only* by Ron Sheppard. I like it for its simplicity in presenting information in an easy-to-understand format. There are a number of other great books out there.

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Hasta la Vista

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I'm told the literal meaning of "hasta la vista" in Spanish is "until the seeing." Or maybe a more adequate translation is "see you later."

But in this column, I'm using that phrase to invite you to take a look at Microsoft's latest version of Windows: Vista.

Configuring the Taskbar

The Taskbar works very much like previous versions of Windows, particularly XP.

You can configure some options on how it operates by right clicking an empty area on it and selecting from a popup context menu.

For example, you can decide to:

- Have various toolbars such as the Quick Launch toolbar and a Desktop or Documents toolbar displayed
- Show all open windows "cascaded" like a row of dominoes one behind the other, or show them side by side, or one on top of another to cover the desktop
- Minimize all the windows to show the Desktop
- Start the Task Manager application; or lock the Taskbar so that its settings cannot be modified without unlocking it first.
- If you select Properties from the context menu, you are given further ways of customizing the Taskbar.

As in Windows XP, there are options to:

- auto-hide the Taskbar (it reduces to a very thin line which only becomes visible as a normal Taskbar when you put your mouse over that thin line)
- keep the Taskbar visible over other open windows,
- group similar Taskbar buttons for the same application in a stacked list.

New Option

A new option available in the Taskbar properties page is to determine whether or not hovering your mouse over a Taskbar button shows a live preview of the corresponding window (thumbnail).

Customize the Notification Area

Unlike XP, you now have a separate tab to customize the Notification Area, which is the part of the Taskbar on the right hand side that normally shows the system clock, a volume control for your speakers, a Network icon, a Safely Remove Hardware icon, a Power icon (if you are using a laptop on battery power), and others. You can put a check mark next to Hide Inactive Icons and then click the Customize button, in order to access a list of all icons that have shown up in the Notification Area.

This is broken down into two lists: those icons that are currently showing in the Notification Area, and those that have shown up in

the past but are not currently there now. For each icon, you click to access a drop down list to choose Hide when inactive, Hide, or Show.

System Time

One of the things that you can show on the Taskbar is the system time (and that was in previous versions of Windows also), but this now has some modifications.

Hover your mouse over the system time in the Notification Area, you get a balloon tip telling the system date and day of week, but if you click on the system time instead, up pops a nice looking circular clock and a calendar of the current month, with a link to the Control Panel area where you can change the date and time settings.

In that area of Control Panel, you can now click on a tab for Additional Clocks and configure up to 2 more different system clocks to be active, each with a different time zone and time of day perhaps. If you do that, then hovering your mouse over the system

time in the Notification Area will modify the balloon tip to show all active clocks, whereas clicking on system time will now show all these different clocks side by side, together with the calendar of the current month.

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