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Computer Corner: Spring Clean Your Computer

by Joe Shipley, Treasurer, Phoenix PCUG, Arizona, www.phoenixpcug.org

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While you're cleaning everything else around your home and office at this time of year, don't forget to clean your computer. There is truth to the saying, "A clean computer is a happy computer."

With the time we spend creating and working on our systems, we should do all we can to keep them running smoothly and give them long, healthy lives. So here are some things we can all do to prolong the lives of our systems. As a cautionary note: *back up* all your important items before doing any maintenance on your system. If you don't feel comfortable opening your system or editing the Registry, then don't do it! But what I intend to discuss here is not rocket science. These items are the same ones I perform when I clean my clients' systems.

Blow the Dust Out!

Dust is your computer's enemy! So get rid of it. The electronic components in a system generate heat. Heat is bad for a system. The more dust in a machine, the hotter it will run. When motherboard components get overheated, they "take a powder" and just shut themselves off until they can cool down. By keeping the insides clean, your system will run cooler, thus letting it run longer.

Most generic systems have 4 to 6 screws that hold the case cover on. If you have a Dell, HP, Compaq, Gateway or other major brand system, look in the owner's manual or online to find out how to open your case. By

removing the sides of the computer, you'll gain access to its guts which is where the cleaning can be done. I use a small hand-held vacuum to suck up the dust balls. I use the crevice tool, that's not the one with the brush. You can also use canned air or air from a compressor to blow the dirt out. Be careful not to bump or touch any components on the motherboard while cleaning. Keeping one hand on the metal case while you clean should discharge any static electricity that might have built up.

With the vacuum, don't forget to suck out the dust that has accumulated in the power supply. There are usually vents on the side opposite the circular fan. I vacuum out from both the fan-side and the vent side. Note: if you are blowing rather than vacuuming, don't blow air into the floppy drive or cdrom/dvd units. Unless they are filthy and already don't work, you don't want to risk getting dust on the optics inside. And remember, blowing air into a computer really just moves the dust from the computer to somewhere else! I suggest you do it outside, if possible.

If you have a mouse that has a ball, think about getting a mouse that uses laser light instead. But if you want to clean the mouse, open it up, wash the ball with warm, soapy water, and gently scrape the gunk off the three rollers inside. Your mouse will act like new after a good cleaning.

You can also vacuum your keyboard. You'd be amazed at how

much junk you'll find if you just turn it over and shake it up a bit. I have even gone so far as to wash the keyboard to get rid of spilled soda. An hour or two in the Phoenix sun and the keyboard is ready to go!

Cleaning the Software

Before running software cleaners such as Ad-aware, Spybot Search & Destroy, and a good antivirus program (I like the free AVG), it makes sense to delete unneeded files and programs. Might as well not clean any more than you have to! This might be the time to use System Restore to create a Restore Point before you eliminate something you shouldn't. Better safe than sorry.

In the Documents and Settings area, look for the Local Settings folder for each user. If you can't find it, you may need to turn on the "Show Hidden Files and Folders" option on your system. To do this, open up Explorer, from the menu bar at the top go to *Tools | Folder Options | View | Show Hidden Files and Folders*.

Under Local Settings, I delete everything in the Temp folder. I also delete everything in the Temporary Internet Files folder. Once that's done, I go to the Windows folder, and delete everything in the TEMP folder. Caution: some of you create your own Temp folders into which you may put things you might not want to delete. Check that out before doing a mass deletion.

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Open the Registry

Again, if you're not comfortable editing the Registry, don't. You can back up the Registry (entirely or just specific keys) before proceeding. I mention this item in order to delete the "Compress Old Files" key before proceeding to the next step. You can either search for this key using the Find feature, or go to:

HKEY_Local_Machine\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\VolumeCaches.

The second key down should be the *CompressOldFiles* key, if it hasn't already been removed. If it's there, RIGHT click on it and delete it. You don't need it. Close the Registry and proceed.

Clean Up Drive

To clean up your drive further, go to My Computer. For each hard drive, RIGHT click on the drive, left click on Properties, and then click on Disk Cleanup. If you didn't remove the *CompressOldFiles* key earlier, it may take a long time before the system responds. If you did, shortly you'll see files which may be deleted from your system so you can recover space. After cleaning these up you may see an increase in available disk space.

Clean Up Internet Explorer & Firefox

One of the easiest things you can do to keep your computer clean is to get rid of Temporary Internet Files that are stored on your computer. Here's how to do this for immediate relief:

Internet Explorer—delete Temporary Internet Files:

- 1 Open Internet Explorer.
- 2 Select the Tools menu.
- 3 Select Internet Options.
- 4 Select the General tab.
- 5 In the Temporary Internet Files section, click the Delete Files button.
- 6 Do not check the clear Offline Content box. Click Ok.
- 7 Click Ok to close the Tools window.

Firefox (Mozilla)—clear browser cache

- 1 Open Firefox (Mozilla).
- 2 Click the Tools menu.
- 3 Click Options.
- 4 Click Privacy.
- 5 Click the Clear button for Cache.

If you use Internet Explorer, go to *Tools | Internet Options | Advanced* and almost at the end, put a check mark in the box that says "Empty Temporary Internet Files folder when Browser is closed" and IE will automatically delete the files when you close the browser.

Add/Remove Programs

In the Control Panel, you can add and remove programs you no longer need or use. If you are not sure, Google the program in question and then decide. You might want to opt to leave in any program you are not sure about. But if you still have games or programs you have not used in years, toolbars you don't want or need, or other items of no significance to you, clear them out. As I've said before, Google first, then if you're still not sure, leave them in. Often programs will have their own Uninstall feature. If you decide to remove a program, first go to *Start | Programs* and find the menu item of the program you want to delete. If it is there, check to see if there is an Uninstall menu choice and if so, I'd start with that before using the Add/Remove programs feature.

Spybot Search & Destroy & Ad-Aware

These are two *free* programs that do a great job cleaning up malware, spies, and other things that slow your system down. You can find them on the Internet at www.download.com, or just Google them. After installing them, make sure you use the update feature before doing a scan. These programs are updated almost daily, so it pays to take advantage of the latest updates.

Get Rid of the Language Bar
Control Panel, Regional Settings, Languages, Details, Languages,

Uncheck the "Show Language Bar" box to get rid of the Language Bar at the bottom of your screen. If you use the Language Bar, by all means don't get rid of it.

Keep Your Antivirus Updated!

Whichever AV program you use, if it is not updated, you're not getting full protection! *Security suites slow systems down!* I don't use them. Google "AVG Free" to get a free antivirus that does a good job, and then configure it to have it updated and run it daily.

Task Manager

Quite often slow performance is directly related to the programs that are running. Right-click on the Taskbar to open and look at duplicate program entries under Processes—click on the title of the Processes tab to sort alphabetically. If you see multiple instances of the same program running, for example, outlook.exe, odds are you're having some kind of problem. If you're not sure about what a process is, Google it to find out or leave it alone. If you click on the CPU tab twice, you'll see which programs are using the most memory. Find the memory hogs, check them at Google, and then begin to end processes you don't need. If a process is critical, Windows won't let you close it.

MSCONFIG

Go to *Start | Run* and type in "msconfig" (don't type the quotes) and click on "OK" and look in the Startup and Services areas to check to see what programs might not need to start. If you know they are not needed, uncheck them. If you have a problem after restarting, then re-check them. If you're uncertain, Google the file names and learn about them.

Defrag Your System Regularly

Go to www.auslogics.com/en/ software to find free software to defrag your hard drives. I recommend defragging at least monthly to keep your

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Hasta la Vista: Customize Your Data Locations

by Lee Reynolds, a member of the Broward Personal Computer Association, Florida. www.bpca.com

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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.

If you take a look at the new Vista Start Menu, one change from Windows XP you will see is that there is a link at the top of it which is your account name. If you click on that, you will open up a Windows Explorer window, which shows all your user folders, such as: Documents, Music, Pictures, Desktop, Favorites, Etc.

In Details view, this is handy since one column shows the Folder path

(Clean—continued from page 2)

system running smoothly. This is a nice program, free, and it's pleasant to watch. Keeping your hard drives defragmented will add life to your system and speed up performance when saving and retrieving files.

The suggestions above are based upon a system running Windows XP Pro. With Vista things may be in different places. The operation should be very similar, however, so doing a search in the Help & Support area may provide the answers you're looking for.

For a PowerPoint slide presentation with screen shots of locations referred to in this article, please visit www.phoenixpcug.org/articles and look for the link.

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for each of these. Most of the folders will be on your boot drive (normally, C:) in this path: C:\Users\<<AccountName>, where <AccountName>, of course, is your account name.

There are several entries in this list which have the little "shortcut" arrow in their icons, for example: Application Data, Cookies, Local Settings, My Documents, Recent, Send To, Start Menu, Templates.

If you click on any of these shortcuts except Recent, you will immediately be presented with an error message: "<folder path> is not accessible Access is denied," then you have to click the OK button to dismiss the message.

All of those shortcuts are there for compatibility reasons, in order for the system to be able to access certain locations that were used in Windows XP. The actual path of each of those locations has changed in Windows Vista. For example, the folder that was accessed in this way in Windows XP: C:\Documents and Settings\<<AccountName>\My Documents, is now here in Vista: C:\Users\<<AccountName>\Documents.

Backup and Partitioning

I like to backup my entire system periodically with a drive image program from Acronis called True Image. However, I also like to try and keep most of my data separate from the program files and Windows system files making up the boot drive.

I took advantage of the built-in drive partitioning software of Vista (more about this in another article), in order

to create several other partitions on my C: drive, and one of these is reserved for storing the contents of such folders as Documents, Favorites, Music, and Pictures. (I did something similar for an old computer using Windows XP.)

This not only reduces the size of the backup image of my boot drive, it also makes it much easier to backup my rapidly changing data to CD-RWs or DVD-RWs.

In Windows XP, in order to move the data locations to another partition, I was forced, in some cases, to edit the registry. In Windows Vista, this is no longer necessary. There is a Windows user interface to change folder locations of your user account profile. Just right click on your Documents folder, for example: Select Properties from the context menu, and then you will see a new tab in the folder properties windows called Location.

Click on that tab, and you will now see this message: You can change where files in this folder are stored to another place on this hard drive, another drive, or even another computer on your network.

All you have to do is type in the new location, and click OK. You will then be presented with a message, asking if you want to move all of the files from the old location to the new location, and recommending that you do so, or else you will see two of the designated folders in your profile.

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Photodex ProShow Review

by Tom Ekvall, Northeast Wisconsin PC User Group newsletter editor, www.newpcug.org

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

I love creating—and watching—photo slideshows, also known as photo montages or video montages.

They are exciting, as photos and video clips are set to music with special effects and sounds added to the production. Memories no longer need to be kept in photo albums or shoeboxes. The slideshows can also be burned onto a DVD or CD, shared by email or uploaded to a website, or even kept as a screen saver.

I remember many years ago my dad used to take plenty of slides with his Nikon camera and would put together slide shows (real slides) of his trips, camping outings, and other occasions that all of us would watch. He even did travelogues that he showed to senior groups and others of his trips complete with two slide projectors, a dissolve unit, tape recorder and all the equipment to put on a first class production. He did slideshows of Civil War battlefields, the Smoky Mountains and other popular sites.

Slideshows must have become a family interest as my sister who lives near Denver also enjoys putting together photo montages on DVD of her vacation trips for others using a Macintosh computer. ProShow will not work, though, with the Mac Operating System; however, it can be used with success on those newer Intel-based Macintosh computers with a program such as Boot Camp that allows Macs to run Windows-based products.

Today there is plenty of software on the market for producing slide shows, ranging from free ones

through Microsoft with simple effects to ProShow by Photodex Corporation of Austin, Texas, that represents to me the “tops in class” of anything available.

Slideshows can be done as part of photo editing programs, created through video editing software that allows adding photos to a video production, or as a stand-alone product.

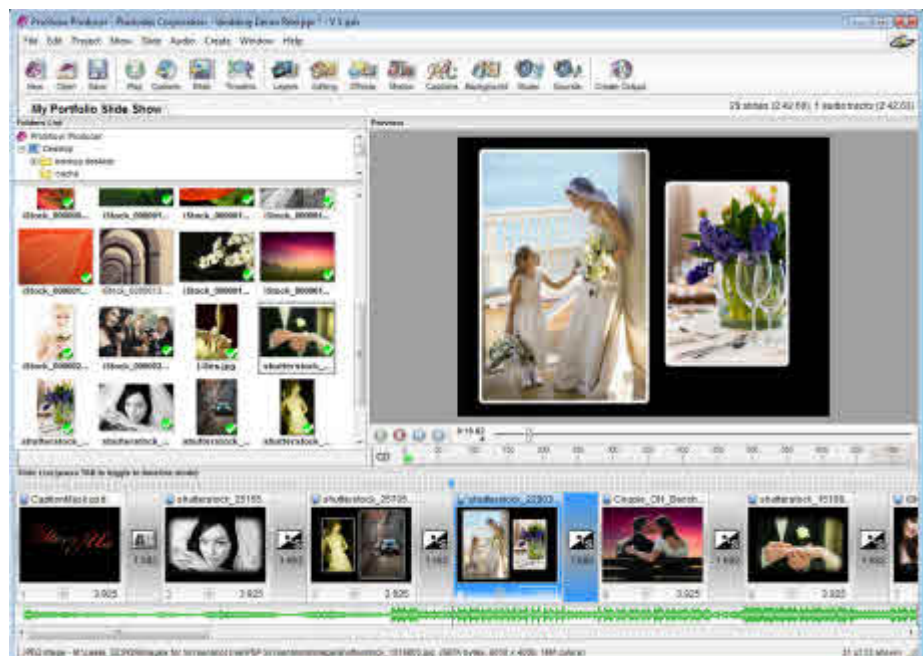
I've tried out a number of slideshow products, and feature for feature, nothing can compare with ProShow, especially the Producer version targeted at professionals who want the ultimate in what a slideshow can deliver (\$249.95). The company also offers a ProShow Gold version (\$69.95) aimed at photo enthusiasts that packs a wallop in creating simply amazing shows. The price is for download versions; add \$20 for download plus box version of Producer and \$10 for Gold.

The Gold version offers many of the features of the Producer model, and both outshine any other product I have seen. There is also a Standard Version for under \$29.95, but I would opt for no less than the Gold version. The latest version is 3.2 with upgrades available free for 12 months.

What the ProShow products offer is the ability to fully customize any aspect of the production from beginning to end.

The product is available only through Photodex, either as a download or as a box version. The company also has a first-class support service for unlimited free help, including that for a trial version good for 15 days that you can download. I called in with a question that was immediately resolved. The company is dedicated to providing the highest quality service. I cannot think of many other

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sites that provide free technical support to trial version customers. My only complaint about the trial versions is that while fully functional, the output bears a strip across the middle of the slides noting that the photo show was created on trial software. By purchasing the product you receive a registration code that will eliminate the strip. Support help is available seven days a week by phone or by email.

I installed the Producer version of the product on a HP laptop computer running Windows Vista Home Premium with an AMD Turion 64 dual core processor and 1 gigabyte of RAM. No problems with the installation and everything set up perfectly. I was able to produce my first slideshow without reading instructions, attesting to the simplicity of the product while offering many customization tools that add a “WOW” factor to the production. The product will also run on Windows XP. The Producer version requires at least 1 gigabyte of RAM and a 1 gigahertz processor. The Gold version will run on Windows ME or 98 and can get by with 512 megabytes of RAM.

My first show was one featuring the college liaison for the Northeast

Wisconsin PC User Group which meets at the Fox Valley Technical College. He has been a longtime member and is also an avid balloonist and attends the computer and electronic shows in Las Vegas. We collected pictures of him and of the user group over the years, which I then used to create a DVD show. I had most of the presentation done early, and had brought my camera to our January meeting, at which time I took pictures of him talking about the Consumer Electronics Shows. Within minutes, the pictures were downloaded into the show, set to music and a DVD created in a manner of minutes was presented to him as a surprise.

I found the rendering speed of the final product to be very fast to create the final product.

There are numerous features about the program (both Producer and Gold versions) I like which make it a must have. These include:

- The ability to add background music simply playing an audio CD on the computer and importing a track directly into the program; a show can also be created whereby the photos will automatically sync with the

length of the music or link specific photos to specific tracks. I did a wedding show in which the wedding music began as the bride walked down the aisle (my wife). There were 150 photos and four sound tracks in the 15-minute production. I also did a one-click audio sync to a family Christmas show timing the photos (and transitions) to the length of a Christmas song recorded by my wife’s cousin, who records children’s music.

- Over 280 transition effects (much more than I could ever want), although it does not pay to put too many in a show without it becoming a distraction. The transitions can be set as to time length or set automatically for the show duration.
- Probably the best I have seen in motion effects (the pan and zoom or “Ken Burns” effect) for a slideshow program with the ability to do precise controls modifying many different aspects of each slide.
- Layering capabilities that allow unlimited layers on any slide that can create amazing effects. With the Producer version, you can add video clips onto a still photo slide.
- Masking and keyframing opportunities with layer opacity control on the Producer version only that enhance the layering effects as to motion with the slides with precise control.
- Supports more than 100 input file types and can output to ipods, cell phones, Zunes, YouTube, and other portable devices; Producer version also supports RAW photos.
- DVD burner support included with both Gold and Producer.

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The New, The Best, and The Worst

Collected by Pim Borman, Webmaster, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc. swipcug.apcug.org

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Good, Bad, or Who-Needs-It?

Penryn

With the introduction of Intel's Penryn Core 2 Duo and Extreme CPUs, Moore's Law stays right on track. Thanks to further miniaturization to 45-nanometer elements, the chips have significantly lower power consumption, a feature that will be even more desirable in the five new Penryn-based CPUs for laptops that have now been released. The new Penryn-based systems are not significantly faster than systems with Intel's previous-generation processors, but outstrip those with the currently fastest AMD chip, the 2.2 GHz 9500 quad core Phenom CPU. Intel has introduced a new instruction set for the Penryns, called SSE4, that can greatly speed up applications written to work with it. That may take a while yet. Adobe is updating its next version of Premiere Pro video editing with SSE4 support. (*PC World*, March 2008)

Only two years ago, I bought a new desktop screamer using the then-tops AMD Athlon 64 X2 Dual-Core processor. My pride in the new system didn't last long, as usual, as the AMD CPU was left in the dust by new Intel processors. Nevertheless, I doubt that even now my run-of-the-mill programs make use of all the special capabilities of the dual-core CPU. Photo editing with Adobe Photoshop Elements or The Gimp happens instantly, faster than I can think of what to do next. So who needs any more power?

PC World's 25th anniversary issue (March 2008) quotes from the March 1991 issue: "These five screamers are amongst the fastest—

and the costliest—systems you can buy. We pick the best of the lot and answer the obvious question: Who needs this much power?—*We reviewed four blazing 486 PCs in the March 1991 issue, starting at \$8300, and decided that they were simply too fast for most people.*"

Famous last words!

False Firefox Fix

Usually I don't pay attention to application software tips, such as keyboard shortcuts for common actions. The most important ones I already know, and the obscure ones are not worth the effort remembering. Therefore I would normally not have paid much attention to an article in the January issue of *PC World* by Lincoln Spector about undocumented Firefox tips. What caught my eye was that, according to the author, Firefox is optimized for dial-up connections, and one of the tips concerned changing its settings for broadband.

Firefox has dozens of hidden configuration settings that are not readily available to the ordinary user, for obvious good reasons. They are stored in HTML documents that can be accessed by typing *about: config* in the address bar of the browser. The article suggests that you back up the configuration file before you fiddle with it, and shows how to do that.

Following the instructions, I turned network pipelining and network proxy pipelining on (set their values to "true"), increased the network pipelining "maxrequests" to 15 (up from 4), and entered a value of 0 for

a new integer *nglayout.initialpaint.delay*. After restarting Firefox I tried it out. It seemed to perform with alacrity, although I couldn't have sworn that it was faster than before.

Looking for background information on Firefox configuration, I found a June 2006 article on the *PC World* Web site by the ever knowledgeable Scott Spanbauer on the *about:* command to access hidden information. Specifically he mentions *about: cache* that gives access to an enormous file listing the URLs accessed in the past. Handy to find some old data or revisit a website without logging on.

Anyway, Spanbauer's article provided a link to Mozilla's *about:config* FAQ site (find.pcworld.com/53066). I took it from there and found out that the suggested settings to optimize Firefox for broadband were either irrelevant or actually retarding downloads. Turning pipelining on is not always supported by all servers and may therefore cause crashes. The value "maxrequests" has a maximum value of 8; higher values than that default to 8. Setting the delay value too low actually slows down the download; its preferred value is the default 250 milliseconds (about the blink of an eye). So much for helpful tips. I reset the parameters to their original values and left it at that. Don't believe everything you read!

Fatalyzer

Wondering if your dieting and exercising is doing any good? Fret no more! Soon you'll be able to take a

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- Video clips can be added to the show with both versions, while video can be added as a layer in the Producer version.

Other features of note include unlimited undos, photo editing capabilities, multiple captions and text that can be animated to one or more slides, real time preview, drag and drop rearranging of slides, the ability to customize the background, built-in audio and video trimmers.

Tutorials are available through the company's website (photodex.com) as well as three DVDs through the company that cover layering, keyframing and audio controls (\$49.95 each). There are several users groups that I joined through Yahoo groups dealing with Proshow and the Producer version, where users offer comments about the product and its features, and upload shows for others to critique. I get numerous posts each day from group members.

For photo professionals and others in the corporate world, the Producer version offers the ability to allow viewers to interact with the presentation on a computer, such as enabling the person to access a particular website or other information, pause the presentation, or interact in other ways. A great tool for real estate professionals who may want to showcase their properties or lead them to links of places and information of interest. The Producer version also allows optional watermarking to protect the photos in the show.

The one thing the product does not have that I could determine is the ability to print pictures from the produced show, which may be an issue for someone wanting to share pictures with others for them to print out if desired.

In summary, this is a fantastic program. Either the Gold or Producer version will provide a professional tool to create exciting slideshows that you and others can enjoy. Producing a

slideshow takes only a short time and the wide variety of control options enhances the creativity you can put into the show. If you are hooked on creating slideshows, I would opt for the Producer version even if you are only a photo enthusiast based on the added features, such as keyframing, masking, and timing controls. Settings can also be saved for creating future shows.

The slideshows so far produced were simple and basic, but very entertaining. Next month I will review in the newsletter the more dramatic effects that can be created such as keyframing, layering, and masking and training tutorials available from the company to create these effects. After watching videos produced by others on the ProShow user group sites, I can attest to the amazing things that can be done with a collection of photos.

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(*The New—continued from page 6*)

fatalyzer test to see how fast you are burning off fat. Based on technology developed by Dow Chemical, and under development by a start-up company Kemeta (kemeta.com), a hand-held breathalyzer detects acetone in your breath that results from metabolizing body fat. This is a more accurate measure of how effective your dieting and exercising efforts are, eliminating the influence of fluid and muscle fluctuations (*Chemical and Engineering News*, 1/28/2008, snipurl.com/fatalyzer). The results are shown in terms of pounds of body fat lost per week.

It might motivate dieters stronger if the unit also indicated how much fat was added to their hips by that pizza they just ate. And with the run-away popularity at the recent Toy Expo

of digital doggies that can sit up and beg or fart on command, maybe the next product ought to be a doggy robot with a nose capable of detecting drugs, explosives, lost children and misplaced car keys. That should be a bestseller for sure!

All a-Twitter?

“Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that allows users to send ‘updates’ (or ‘tweets,’ text-based posts, up to 140 characters long) to the Twitter website, via short message service (e.g. on a cell phone), instant messaging, or a third-party application such as Twiterrific or Facebook.”

That's how Wikipedia describes the latest rage in digital jabbering (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter). Presidential candidates use the service constantly, undoubtedly hoping to reach younger voters. Find out what

Barack Obama (twitter.com/BarackObama), Hillary Clinton (twitter.com/HillaryClinton), up to Ron Paul (twitter.com/RonPaul2008)—the only Republican who twitters. John McCain is noted by his absence.

As the Twitter site (twitter.com) puts it, “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?”

Indeed.

Thanks to *The Economist* (Feb. 2, 2008) for enlightening us about this service.

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Zune 8 Review

by **Ash Nallawalla, APCUG Director**
and member of the Melbourne PCUG, Australia, www.melbpc.org.au

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups

Thanks to good friends in the Microsoft Windows group in Redmond, I received a shiny new, red 8 GB Zune during CES. It has a beautifully engraved

“www.zuneusergroup.com” (my site) on the back. Here is my assessment.

Packaging

The compact packaging of the 4/8 GB Zune does not contain a software CD like the original Zune. You get a manual, a USB cable and a set of earphones. The box comes in a soft pouch and could be mistaken for a perfume box.

Setting Up

You first set up the Zune software on the PC by going to www.zune.net/setup. You get to choose between the “full Zune experience” and simply downloading the software. I already had the latest software on account of my old Zune 30, so I explored the Zune.net site.

There you set up a Zune account, if you don't have one. This enables you to give your Zune a name and buy music from the Zune Marketplace, an online music store. You can customize your Zune at zuneoriginals.net.

The Zune 8 refuses to work until you have installed the Zune software on the PC and connected the player at least once. When you connect the device to the PC, it proceeds to update the firmware. This was painless.

Software

The Zune software is easy to use and is intuitive. It was able to find all my music, video and images and sync them to the player. I can also sync

my podcast subscriptions automatically. Unless it was a coincidence, the software showed both my Zunes in their correct colors—a nice touch.

Controls

The main input on the player is the Zune Pad, a rounded rectangular touch-sensitive button. You change the volume and select options by rubbing your thumb from top to bottom or left to right. The default touch sensitivity was fine for me, unlike the over-sensitive controls of the original Creative Zen, which tended to overshoot the desired selection.

Display

The tiny 4.5 cm (1.8-inch) scratch-resistant, glass-covered screen is watchable for short music videos that have close-ups of performers but it would not be fun to watch a full-length movie on this model. During music playback, the backlight disappears and helps to conserve battery life.



The USB cable acts as the media conduit to and from the PC and also charges the battery. There is a small, recessed set of holes to take a wrist strap, which is not supplied.

FM Radio

The FM radio displays RBDS data, so you can see the name of the radio station and the song being played. You cannot record a radio program, as you can on some Creative units. The tuner picked up all my local stations.

Sound Quality

The sound quality is fine too, just like the original Zune 30. There is a good selection of pre-loaded media. The supplied earphones do a basic job, but as with all players, you need to buy high-quality headphones to get optimum sound. There isn't an equalizer (EQ) control or preset, so you cannot customize the sound to your liking. This option is present on the old Zune 30, so its omission seems to be a deliberate decision. Why hobble sound quality?

Sharing

The latest 2.3 (1145) firmware is common to all models and renames “Community” to “Social.” You can share a song by sending it to a nearby Zune (that is turned on and has wireless enabled). The other Zune has to accept it and will get three plays (the three days limitation has been removed).

Other Zune models

There is a new 80 GB model (only black) that works just like the 4/8 GB versions except that it contains a hard drive, not Flash memory, and has a larger screen. The 4/8 GB models come in pink, red, green and black.

Conclusion

The Zune 8 is light, easy-to-use, has a good battery life, feature set, and great sound quality. The software is a testimonial to Microsoft as a leading software company. In conclusion, the 8 GB Zune is a fine multimedia player and you will not regret buying it (about \$185 online). Well done, Microsoft.

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AutoMatting™: Unique Digital Matts

by Neil Longmuir, a member of the Winnipeg PC User Group Inc., Canada, www.wpcusrgrp.org

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“AutoMatting automatically creates a unique matt for each image which is designed to make the photographer’s work more attractive and appealing to the customer in a slide show or viewing mode.” AutoMatting is a digital matting software program that creates a unique matt for each image. The traditional way to display photographs was to mount the photograph to a matt board, and fit that mounted photograph into a matt opening cut to the size of the photograph. Matting a photograph helps separate the photograph from the surrounding background. Matting a photograph gives each photograph its own visual unique and attractive look.

The way images are shown to customers, friends or family tends to be a bit boring. A set of prints is made from a roll of film or digital images. The pictures are taken out of the photo lab envelope and passed around to customers, friends and family to look at.

This approach is fine if there are only a few pictures, but what if there are a large number of images? One solution is to create a slide show. Creating a slide show takes time to create. One major problem with a

typical computer monitor or TV display is that the *aspect ratio* of the monitor or TV is *not* the same as the standard typical 3×2 aspect ratio of the images. Then, when we mix portrait (vertical) images with landscape (horizontal) images the images are not the same size. Portrait images are smaller than landscape images and have vertical black bars on each side. Landscape images have smaller black bars on the top and bottom. The bottom line is that you want your images to be visually more attractive to the viewer.

The solution to making the images more attractive is to use AutoMatting to create a unique matte for each image in a folder and resize that image to the aspect ratio of *any monitor or TV screen*.

Also, if there are subfolders under the main folder, those subfolders can be included by checking the included subfolders in the upper left corner. Once the images to be processed are selected, press Process Images at the bottom of the screen.

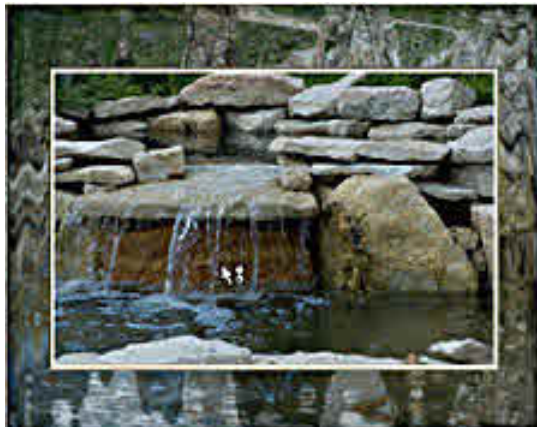
AutoMatting operates in a batch mode and creates a subfolder of images using the colors and patterns in the

original image plus a unique beveled edge border. The final result is an image that looks great on the display medium with no black bars appearing on the display. Figure 1 shows basic AutoMatting screen. Figure 2 shows the unique matting of a landscape image while Figure 3 shows the unique matting of a portrait image. Note in both cases there are *no* black bars around either image.

Conclusions

Automatting is a perfect example of a software application that was “thinking outside the box.” This “New Wave” thinking application has given *all* end users, whether they are professional photographers or ordinary every day photographers, a great way to show their images to everyone on whatever display medium.

This is a terrific product. AutoMatting is available for a free “try before you buy” download. Visit www.imagetrendsinc.com and download the trial version for yourself. The cost to purchase this program is \$49.95 and is available for both the Windows and MAC platforms. This is a very impressive innovative product that works great for a new look to your images. Neil’s rating: ★★★★★.



I would also like to thank the kind folks at Image Trends Inc. for providing me with a copy of the AutoMatting for review.

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Shortcuts

**by Mike Moore, Editor, Bowling Green Area
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Why do some icons on your desktop have a little white arrow embedded in the picture?

These are shortcuts (sometimes called links). They are small files that represent and “point to” the real thing. When you double-click on a shortcut icon, Windows reads the location of the file to open from within the shortcut file, then opens the target file. Shortcuts are, in the lingo of computer programmers, symbolic links to actual files. They don't contain any of the file's information—they just point to it. In real terms: if Peoria, Illinois were a file, then its shortcut would be the map telling you how to get there.

Why do we use shortcuts? Why not just put the real, actual file on your desktop? There are several reasons. First, since a shortcut does not contain any of the target file's information, it can be deleted without damaging the file it points to. Therefore, placing

shortcuts on the desktop (or in any directory) is safer. Accidental deletion of these links will not affect anything other than you may lose track of where your file was!

The other reason is that you can have many shortcuts and place them anywhere you might need quick access to your file. For example, when we give away computers, we organize the software links in various folders on the desktop. There's a folder for Educational software and one for Game software. For the software that is both Educational and Fun, we put links to the same program in both the Educational and Game folders. You can rename shortcuts to anything you want, and it won't affect the real name of the file they point to.

Shortcuts are also portable! If I know for sure that a program will be in a certain place on nearly every PC, I can email a link to someone and tell them to place it on their desktop. Double-clicking on it

should open that file on my recipient's PC! Emailing a link is much more of a sure bet than emailing an executable file—because most email servers just won't allow executables (files ending in .EXE) to be sent!

How does one create a link? The best way is to find the file you want the link to refer to, then right-click on it. This brings up a context menu where you can create the shortcut. Once the shortcut is created, you can move it to any directory or to the desktop.

For creating desktop links, Windows provides a shortcut wizard that allows you to create a shortcut for any file type including a web page or another folder. From anywhere on the desktop, right click and select 'New' and then 'Shortcut' to activate this wizard.

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