



MUG Monitor

Macon Users Group—Serving Southwestern North Carolina and Northeastern Georgia

Volume 16, Issue 7

www.maconusersgroup.org

July 2009

Next Meeting:

Lizz Russell
presents

“How to Protect Yourself from the Changing Threats on the Internet”

Macon Community
Facilities Building
July 14th, 7 PM

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Freewaregenius Evaluates Free PC Software

by Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Talk Show Host

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

(see Freeware on page 2)

Lizz Russell
7 PM, July 14th

Macon Users Group Franklin, NC

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Monthly Meetings

MUG meets the second Tuesday of every month at 7 P.M. in the Macon County Community Facilities Building on Georgia Road (US 441 South).

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Website

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(Freeware—continued from page 1)

“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

(see Freeware on page 11)

Treasurer’s Report

Phyllis Minnich

Balance forward.....	748.16
Income: interest, dues, 50/50.....	1096.91
Expense.....	(1386.91)
Balance*	
(including equipment fund).....	\$741.71
*Equipment Fund (50/50, auction).....	31.00
Investment Fund.....	1572.27

Linux SIG

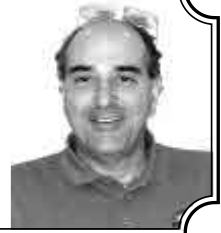
with Jim Swanson, Mentor

The Linux SIG is scheduled for Tuesday, July 28th at 7 p.m. in the large meeting room of the Macon County Public Library. Linux users, wannabe Linux users, or those just curious about Linux are invited to attend. There’s no fee.

Lou's Views!

Good News

by Louis Vitale (aka 44RAILGUY)



At the end of a difficult week and month of bad news, I went looking for a couple of good news stories on the Internet. Not easy to find, but here is what I came up with.

For fans of *MythBusters*, there was a victory for our side in the latest tech headlines. “When the host of the Discovery Channel’s *MythBusters* learned he had rung up \$11,000 in charges from AT&T while in Canada, he headed straight for Twitter. The culprit, he tweeted, was the USB modem plugged into his laptop that was running on a wireless plan suitable for the U.S., but not for Canada. ‘AT&T is attempting to charge me 11k for a few hours of web surfing in Canada.’ Still later, he added, ‘They’re claiming I uploaded/downloaded 9 million kilobytes (9 gigs) while in Canada. Frakking impossible.’ Before too long, thanks to many of his 50,000 followers, ‘AT&T’ became a top Twitter trending topic, and by later Friday afternoon, the tweeting became too intense for even AT&T to ignore.”

Adam Savage used the power of Twitter to cower AT&T into dropping the charges. But his case is not unusual. Alberto got a \$62,000 bill for downloading the movie *Wall-E*. Wayne got a \$27,000 bill for watching a football game on his laptop. 13-year-old Dean got a \$4,800 text messaging bill for one month. Piotr, an oil field worker in Canada, got an \$85,000 one month bill for using his cell phone as a modem for his laptop. All these folks did not read their cell phone contracts and paid the price. Be careful.

Bing—you know like in “bingo”—is the new search engine from Microsoft. It is actually pretty good. It came as the default search engine with Explorer 8. I decided to give it a try. I have not found any real differences so far, but that is saying a lot. There has been surprising little criticism of Microsoft’s latest attempt to combat the Google juggernaut. Bing presents the results rather clearer than Google, and it has an easier navigation system on the left-hand side to drill down on queries.

Of course Google is much more than a search engine; that is the challenge Microsoft is concerned about. Actually this is good news on two fronts—first, it is great to have a second search engine that we can trust, and second, it is going to keep Google on its toes. It has a chance to take over the Internet world, and this challenge will only spur it on to even greater achievements. Here is a site that lets you compare both sites on the same page:
www.blackdog.ie/google-bing/.

Real solar-powered flight. After a six-year effort, the prototype of a new solar-powered aircraft was unveiled on a Swiss airfield last week. The “Solar Impulse” is designed to fly both day and night with out any fuel other than the sun. With the wingspan of a 747 and the weight of an average car, the 12,000 solar cells will keep it in the air with

the use of LiPo batteries. These are the same kind of batteries I use in my RC model planes. Its first flight is scheduled for later this year, and the plan is to fly it around the world. The point of the project is to prove the viability of alternate energy; after all if you can fly a plane on solar power, why not a car?



Net neutrality finally gets a boost. The Obama administration will require that all companies winning grants for new broadband infrastructure must be net neutral. That means that a company cannot block or slow down competing websites, or impose higher fees to prevent completion or criticism. So, for instance, your cell phone provider—you know, the ones that charge \$.10 a minute for a text message that cost them \$.0001—can’t stop you from using a political website that promotes more regulation. This is not a theoretical possibility, it has already happened. Net neutrality will keep every player on the web on an equal footing. This is a complete change from the last administration.

There you go—4 good news stories. Feel better now.

Tech Talk

by Lizz Russell

The threats on the Internet have become *much* more sophisticated over the past couple of years. It used to be if you did not open unknown email attachments and took a few other simple precautions such as scanning disks prior to using them, you pretty much ensured that you would not get a virus. That is *absolutely* no longer the case.

In 2007, there were less than 20,000 known threats. Now, antivirus programs are looking at around 16 million different malware signatures, and that number is growing quickly.

Viruses are now coming in directly from web pages. Around 1 in every 1000 web pages is infected.

Around 11 million computers worldwide are running as part of a BOT network. BOT is short for roBOT. In other words, somebody other than the owner is controlling and using the computer. This large cluster of computers is being used to deliver viruses, spyware, and spam, spam, spam, spam on a daily basis. It is very profitable for the people in control. A person that takes control of 1,000 computers is called a BOT rancher. Many people do not even have a clue that their computer is being used as a BOT. All that they know is their computer has suddenly slowed down or is acting strangely. When I am fixing computers and find that a computer is a BOT, I tell the owner. The owner is generally shocked to find this out.

Years ago, many of the viruses were pranks or political statements, but

now it's all about money and greed. There are many organized criminal organizations out there who want your money, and it's much easier and safer to steal money with a computer than with face-to-face encounters. Why rob a bank in person when you can do it online?

Another threat that has emerged is the rootkit virus. One of the earmarks of a rootkit virus is that it makes itself an integral part of the operating system (such as Windows), and it can then run completely stealth. Antivirus programs generally do not detect rootkits when they have a grip on the system because they are masters at eluding detection.

Hackers abound on the Internet. There are thousands of people worldwide who spend their days

trying to get into your computer, and they often succeed. These hackers include thieves, other governments (over 100 countries have their specialized hackers), and political activists.

And then there's *scareware*. Suddenly a screen comes up, usually with a Microsoft Logo, and tells you that your computer is infected or that you have thousands of errors on your computer. For only \$69.95 (used to be \$34.95), you can buy a virus that will further trash your computer.

This is only a sampling of the things that I will be showing to you and explaining at my presentation *How to Protect Yourself from the Changing Threats on the Internet* next Tuesday. Hope to see you there.

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Exploring Microsoft Windows 7 Beta 1, Part 1

A Little Background on My Early (Mis)Adventures with Windows 7

by Lee Reynolds, a member of the Boca Raton Computer Society, FL, www.brsc.org

Probably most of you know Windows 7 is Microsoft's latest and greatest offering in terms of operating systems. A public beta download was made available on January 9th, intended for testing purposes. This beta version will stop working on August 1st.

The official final version is planned for introduction late this year or early next year (depending upon who is making the prediction; nobody knows for sure.)

Beta Download

A couple of days before Microsoft made available its public download of the next version of Windows, I downloaded a version available through MSDN (the Microsoft Developers Network), intending to install it as a virtual machine on my Windows Vista desktop computer. With my slow DSL connection, I had to wait over 5 hours to get it loaded onto my hard drive. (It is about a 2.5 gigabyte file.)

Virtual PC Installation

Then I installed it as a virtual OS, using a copy of Microsoft's free program Virtual PC 2007, that I have been using for the past two years to get access to and test other operating systems.

The installation process itself for Windows 7 took over two and half hours! Next, when I tried it out, the load was extremely unstable. I kept getting a popup message saying that Windows Search Indexer had stopped working; this message would appear just about every couple of minutes.

When trying out the new beta Internet Explorer 8 built into the operating system, it seems just about every web page I looked at would

crash, and Internet Explorer would restart, and try to recover the web page. In addition, I couldn't download an anti-virus program so as to get rid of the security message popup from the taskbar complaining about no anti-virus program being present.

Stability Problem

What was wrong? I had previously read a number of articles about Windows 7 that raved about the unparalleled stability of the Windows 7 beta.

This didn't seem to be true in my case! I recalled that the computer had lost power during my 5 hour download about halfway through, when Florida Plunder and Loot

(sorry, I mean Florida Power and Light, of course) had one of its all-too-frequent blackouts.

The download had appeared to resume okay when I restarted the computer, but maybe there was something wrong with the file when it completed. So I downloaded the public beta (another 5 hours of twiddling my thumbs and cursing) and then tried again.

Before I started installing the new load in Virtual PC 2007, I researched the problem I had with the previous load; by Googling the net, I found the answer.

The problem was that I had used the initial version of Virtual PC 2007 (which worked perfectly well with all my other virtual OSes, including XP Home, XP Pro and Vista Home Premium), but the article I found said installing Windows 7 as a guest OS required the version with its

Service Pack 1 built in. I was gratified to see that after I upgraded my version of VPC 2007, the installation of Windows 7 Beta went very smoothly and only took half an hour. All the crashes of Windows 7 disappeared, too.

About Microsoft Virtual PC 2007

Microsoft Virtual PC 2007 is a free download available from Microsoft; it is the first version of this program that is compatible with Windows Vista as well as Windows XP. An overview of its features is presented here: tinyurl.com/c28fmm.

MS Virtual PC 2007 is available in both 32-bit and 64-bit versions, and works with Windows Vista Business, Enterprise and Ultimate editions, as well as Windows Server 2003, Windows XP Professional and Windows XP Tablet Edition.

(When you try to install VPC 2007 on a Vista Home Premium PC, it will give you a warning about not being compatible, but I have seen web pages on the Internet from people who have said it works perfectly well with that version of Vista, and I also have a friend in our computer club who has done it successfully.)

With Virtual PC 2007, you have the program installed in your main OS (Operating System), called the "host OS," and as many virtual machines (each with possibly a different OS) as you can comfortably handle with your amount of memory and disk storage.

Each virtual machine is called a "guest OS." You can pause any guest OS virtual machine so that it doesn't use CPU cycles, and you

(see Windows 7 on page 11)

Things You Can Do With a Flash Drive

by **Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director:**
Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Talk Show Host

With the demise of the floppy disk, and the approaching demise of the CD disc for data purposes, the USB flash drive has become the de facto method of saving and transporting files between computers. These small USB drives are known by a variety of monikers, such as flash drive, pen drive, pin drive, and thumb drive. Since their introduction a few years ago, their capacity has increased, and their prices have plunged. They are readily available in the big box stores, discount stores, club stores, and online. The most recent ones I purchased for the holidays were 8 gig size (almost the equivalent of the data stored on 2 standard DVD discs, about a dozen CD discs, or about 5700 floppy disks), and cost under \$15 each. In the after-Christmas sales, some 8 gig flash drives were advertised for \$9 each (after rebate). This amount of non-volatile storage for the price was inconceivable just a few years ago. I thought I was getting a bargain a few years ago when I bought my first flash drive, a 64mb Lexar, for \$49, and now a drive with about 64 times that capacity is about one-fourth the price! I have co-workers and students who wear their flash drives on cords around their necks, where they are referred to as "geek beads."

Most of us use the drive simply for portable storage, the ability to carry files around with us, but in reality these flash drives can do much more than to be used simply for storage. Most of the USB flash drives on the market today comply with the USB 2.0 standard for high speed transfer, while there still are a few inexpensive, low capacity drives that are of the slower USB 1.1 speed standard, or only about 3% of the speed of the USB 2.0 drives. From a practical

viewpoint, the user will not notice any significant difference in speed if small files are saved and read, but will notice a difference if large files are used.

There are some other standards for USB flash drives that many users may find beneficial, if their flash drives have the capabilities. Users of Microsoft Vista (Home Basic, Home Premium, Business, and Ultimate versions) may find it advantageous to purchase flash drives that are labeled as "ReadyBoost." According to Microsoft, "Windows Vista introduces Windows ReadyBoost, a new concept in adding memory to a system. You can use non-volatile flash memory, such as that on a universal serial bus (USB) flash drive, to improve performance without having to add additional memory 'under the hood.'" If the drive is compatible with the ReadyBoost standard, some of the flash memory in the drive can effectively

and temporarily be added to the RAM (memory) installed in the computer, with an improvement on performance. If the Vista user with a compatible flash drive right clicks on the flash drive letter displayed under My Computer or Windows Explorer, and then left clicks on Properties—ReadyBoost, Vista will recommend how much of the available memory on the drive can be effectively and safely utilized by Vista. Other data stored on the ReadyBoost drive is protected from damage, and will not be harmed if the drive is used as a ReadyBoost drive. Because of the higher performance requirements, ReadyBoost compatible flash drives are slightly more expensive than standard drives, but are often the least expensive way to add memory to a Vista computer.

Another useful feature often found on a USB flash drive is known as "U3."

(see Flash Drive on page 7)



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The Deals Guy

by Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users Group



Consider This!

Bob Elgines, President and Editor of Colorado River Computer Club, writes an interesting monthly column that is carried by many editors in their newsletters. I loved his comment about the \$29.97 he paid for 1.42 ounces of black ink. He says that in comparison to gas, it works out to \$2700 per gallon and that perhaps somebody should start drilling for ink. If that wasn't in your newsletter, now you know about a possible new business venture. With this economy, I'd try anything.

Help With Data Disk Cataloging

Nowadays, people may own hundreds of CD and DVD data disks. How do you find the necessary information on disks without endless inserting and ejecting disks? Search-

MyDiscs is a handy software application that helps people quickly find the disk that has a needed file.

First, insert every CD or DVD that needs to be indexed into your PC and the program will automatically scan the disk, cataloging its contents. The program will store the file structure of the disk, thumbnail images for photos and movies, EXIF tags for digital photographs, ID3 tags for MP3 tracks and many other file properties (video codec information, textual documents' content, etc.). The program is then ready for use. Next time you need to find a certain program or photograph, simply enter the name of the file or other search parameter, like the name of a song, performer or album, digital camera model, etc., and SearchMy-

Discs will show exactly what CD or DVD contains the desired data.

The new version 4.0 includes a powerful report generator that can export reports on files to many popular file formats: PDF, XLS, RTF, HTML, Open Office, CSV, etc.

SearchMyDiscs 4.0 is available at www.searchmydiscs.com for a free 30-day trial download. The cost of registering it is \$29.95, but user group members get a 25% discount with coupon code "DKLS-TRG2".

System Requirements: A PC with Windows 95/98/ME/NT4/2000/XP

That's it for this month. I'll have more new product announcements on my website (most not offering a discount). www.dealsguy.com. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click, bobclick@bellsouth.net. Editor's note: This column has been edited for space and content considerations.

(Flash Drive—continued from page 6)

Drives that are U3 compatible are labeled as such. A U3 powered flash drive allows the user to carry special versions of hundreds of programs on the flash drive that can be run directly from the flash drive without being installed on the computer. This is an effective way to carry the actual software the user is familiar with, and run it on other computers. When unplugged from the computer, U3 leaves no data or other information on the computer that was used. Some of the popular programs that come in U3 formats are the Firefox browser, Skype telephone, McAfee Antivirus (about \$15), RoboForm Password Manager, OpenOffice (the comprehensive suite of office software including a Microsoft-compatible word processor, spreadsheet, presentation program, database, and more, free), Thunderbird email client, and dozens of games. Most U3 drives

come preinstalled with password protection and a "U3 Launchpad" which is a menu driven directory of the software on the U3 drive.

For those of us who have standard non-U3 drives, there is now an alternative that provides the same functionality. This alternative to U3 that will run on almost all contemporary flash drives is called "PortableApps," and can be found online at portableapps.com. According to the PortableApp website, "A portable app is a computer program that you can carry around with you on a portable device and use on any Windows computer. When your USB flash drive, portable hard drive, iPod or other portable device is plugged in, you have access to your software and personal data just as you would on your own PC. And when you unplug the device, none of your personal data is left behind." Dozens of portable apps are available, including the Firefox

browser, OpenOffice office suite, anti-virus software, games, password managers, and many other pieces of software. The PortableApp Suite is totally free, and does not contain any spyware or adware. In addition to the bundled suite, there are many other programs available, almost all free, which will run as portable apps. The PortableApp website keeps a running tally of new software that is available, including new releases and versions, as well as beta (pre-release) software. A simple click will install the selected software on the flash drive.

Now that many of us are routinely carrying flash drives, it is nice to know that they may be capable of doing much more for us than just transport data.

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Dozens of PC Utilities Free for the Taking

by Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director:
Columnist, *The Examiner*, Beaumont, TX; Radio Talk Show Host

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 “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 enables 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-ons 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, an 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.

(see *Utilities* on page 9)

(Utilities—continued from page 8)

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.

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Uh oh—I've Lost the Manual for a Gadget/Device

by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.

Unless you're a compulsive packrat—and can prove it with multiple neatly organized file cabinets—you'll eventually find that a gadget or appliance has separated from its operating instructions. And unless it's something brick-simple with just On/Off buttons, or you've memorized its every esoteric function, you'll be baffled and frustrated.

Even worse, many products now come with one-page pictures-only *Quick Start* instructions showing how to plug them in or insert batteries, turn them on, and not much else. Perhaps a real manual was delivered on a now-missing CD or a now-forgotten web URL was given as a clue for help.

Don't despair! Many manufacturers offer full manuals on their websites, easily located and perused online or downloaded for printing or offline reference.

Start your quest by guessing or Googling the manufacturer's website. For example, Googling "Oceanus"—my watch manufacturer—finds the correct website (www.oceanus-us.com) first out of 3,400,000 hits! Clicking *Support* and then *Manual Information* takes me to a selection page for watch models. Of course, Googling "oceanus manuals" would have taken me directly to the same selection page, and including the specific watch model would have further refined search results. And as a bonus, the manual downloaded from the website is much more convenient to read printed on 8.5"x11" paper than the nasty

included-in-watch-box version with more than a hundred 3.5"x2" pages!

Similarly, instructions for operating my bargain-basement digital voice recorder are instantly found by Googling "olympus VN-1000se," as is the manual for my recently acquired external hard drive, by simply Googling model number wd5000ml-00 (which also finds the Quick Install Guide, Product Specifications, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)).

Happily, manufacturers often put online manuals for older products sold before web research was common. And don't give up if you can't find what you need—click a Support or Contact Us link and politely ask about documentation availability. Material is often available by special request—sometimes free, sometimes for a minimal fee. Don't begrudge paying for a manual—if it lets you continue using something, it's a bargain compared to buying a replacement!

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Tiplets

by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.

Q: How can I keep from losing gadgets like remote controls?

Eyeglasses case, TV remote control, car keys, cat. Where is it? Things we have—animate or inanimate—sometimes take on a life of their own and do NOT cooperate by appearing when they're wanted.

We can't tie strings to them all, and blaming one's spouse for their disappearance is only briefly satisfying. So Loc8tor (www.loc8tor.com), a small gadget that finds what's missing, is handy to have around.

Loc8tor provides two kinds of small homing tags and two handheld locating devices which work like modern-day dowsing rods. The tags, attached to valuables, signal the devices from up to 600 feet away. The fancier device (pocket-sized Loc8tor Plus) has a small radar screen which displays lines pointing towards a missing tag; it can handle up to 24 tags. The lesser device (credit card-sized Loc8tor Lite, handles four tags) uses a row of lights and a beeping tone to signal when it's pointed towards the tag; more lights lit and faster beeps shows the device's excitement at pointing in the correct direction. Using either device, when you get close, the tag's blinking light and chirping brings you in for the finish.

The Mini-Homing Tag can be found by either Loc8tor; the Loc8tor Plus can sound an alert if a tag goes beyond a settable distance away—useful for keeping children or pets within a comfortable range. The Panic Homing Tag includes a button which sounds an alert on the Loc8tor Plus—giving parent and child, or caregiver and patient, a simple and fast way to communicate an urgent message.

The tags are just a bit too large to mount on eyeglasses. That would

require a rice-grain size item and the manufacturer simply can't—yet—fit battery, antenna, radio, light, and beeper into something that small. And I've not yet convinced my wife that wearing a tag as an earring would be a pleasant fashion accessory, while letting me locate her in our house and yard.

But aside from those minor limitations, it's a great tool for avoiding tedious searches. True story: Such a device once found my keys in the pocket of a heavy winter coat I was wearing, saving me the trouble of wandering all over the house and THEN looking in my pockets. Depending on construction material, the signal works through walls and floors and can locate a car in a parking garage—though likely only on the correct level. Testimonials describe use with pets, model airplanes, toys, and even for construction and running cables.

Loc8tor Plus Pack (locating device, three Mini-Homing Tags, one Panic Homing Tag) costs \$170; Loc8tor Lite costs \$80 (locating device, two Mini-Homing Tags).

How can I Read Office (Word, Excel, etc.) Files Without Buying Expensive Office?

While Microsoft's Office applications suite dominates the Windows landscape, it's expensive and not universally used. And if you only need occasional access to Office-format files, you surely don't want to spend hundreds of dollars to buy software you'll rarely use, and even then only in limited fashion.

Fortunately, several free alternatives let you read these files!

First, if you only receive occasional Office-format files and just need to read or print them but not to

change/update them, ask senders if they can convert the files to PDF (Portable Document Format). That's an industry-standard format, easily created by many free alternatives to Adobe Acrobat, and easily read by Adobe's free Acrobat Reader (get.adobe.com/reader/).

Second, if you only need to read and print Office files, Google the program name (e.g., Word, Excel, PowerPoint) with the word "viewer" to install the free Microsoft file viewer for the type of files you have. If the files were created by Office 2003 or earlier versions, you're done. If someone inflicts Office 2007 format files on you (file extension docx for Word, xlsx for Excel, pptx for PowerPoint, etc.) you'll also need Microsoft's free Office Compatibility Pack for Word, Excel, and PowerPoint 2007 File Formats (tinyurl.com/ykums3).

Third, if you'll need to change Office files, consider Open Office (www.openoffice.org), a free and reasonably compatible alternative to Microsoft's Office. It may not handle intricately formatted Word documents or convoluted Excel spreadsheets, but it's usually adequate for the sorts of documents, spreadsheets, and presentations mere mortals create and use.

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can save and restore the configuration file at any time.

With the Virtual Machine Additions installed, you can copy and paste, and drag and drop between the host and guest OS.

Each guest OS will be able to handle any CD or DVD drive on the computer, and you can set it up to be able to access other hard drive partitions. The guest OS can also access the Internet through a web browser. With the current version of VPC, the guest unfortunately cannot access any USB devices like printers, flash drives, or external USB drives. (It does handle keyboards and mice connected by USB, however.)

I decided two years ago I would download MS Virtual PC 2007 and try using it to choose between Vista and XP Pro. This is much more convenient than dual booting the two Windows versions, because they are run simultaneously on my computer, and only need to click on an icon in the Notification Area (formerly called the System Tray) of Vista, to switch to XP.

This allows instantaneous switching, rather than what multi-booting requires, which is to restart the computer and wait for the several minutes necessary to boot to another operating system.

The current version of Virtual PC 2007 with SP1, can be downloaded for free here: tinyurl.com/6cwwoq.

Sound Problem

My next problem was that the sound didn't work in the Windows 7 guest OS. I turned to my old friend Google and found that a person calling himself Hermes had encountered my problem and found a solution which he detailed in a comment he posted in the Virtual PC Guy's weblog January 17. I tried his solution, and it worked.

Graphics Problem

I was happily exploring the new features of Windows 7 for several days. Then...A new problem developed from the fact that Microsoft hasn't upgraded its graphics driver for Virtual PC 2007 since introduction of the program two years ago. Of course, the guest operating system actually uses your host machine's real CRT or LCD screen for display, but it emulates a driver for a graphics card described as S3 Trio 32/64 PCI with 8 MB Video RAM.

This is a very old graphics adaptor. It barely supports some of the "Aero" effects of Vista and Windows 7, and it doesn't support the requirements of Windows Media Center or Windows Media Player.

Virtual PCV 2007 to Dual Boot

I really wanted to explore those aspects of the new OS. So I decided I would quit using Windows 7 as a virtual machine and instead install it as a real operating system on another partition of my hard drive.

Since I had all my virtual machines stored already on a separate partition, and had previously backed them up to an external USB hard drive, I wiped this out and used my Windows 7 Beta installation DVD to install it there.

Then I could dual boot with Vista and Windows 7, which was nowhere near as convenient as running them simultaneously, but apparently was necessary in order to continue my investigations of the new OS.

Future articles regarding the Windows 7 Beta will contain explanations of what I have discovered about Windows 7, including some screenshot illustrations.

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(Freeware—continued from page 2)

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](http://freewaregenius.com) 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](http://freewaregenius.com) is a very worthwhile web site to periodically visit, and use as a resource to discover some excellent free PC software.

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June's Door Prize Winners



Joe Loewy won
June's 50-50 jackpot!

