



MUG Monitor

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Next Meeting:

Skype & Web Design

by Tom Murphy

Macon Community Facilities Building
October 13th, 7 PM

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Speed Demons

by Bill Roman, Advisor to the Board of Directors, The PC Users Group of Connecticut, www.tpcug.org

There is an issue that I feel must be addressed, since the issue continues to come up on a regular basis. As a PC technician, I constantly get asked why the client's computer has become so slow, and if there is anything wrong with it.

The first thing I tell the client is that there are two main culprits that contribute to a PC becoming very sluggish. The first being lack of RAM memory. This answer usually elicits a quick response from the user that they "only do email, Internet and word processing" or some similar response. I then go into a discussion with the user that there are two kinds of memory in a computer: hard drive storage, which holds all their music, pictures, documents, etc., and RAM, or working memory. A user could have plenty of hard drive space to store all of their documents and stuff, but when they don't have enough RAM, the computer will, over time, become slower and slower.

Why you ask? When the computer was originally purchased (usually somewhere between 2 and 5 years ago) Windows XP, in this case, required about 512MB of RAM to run properly. As Windows critical security updates and service packs are installed, as well as upgrades and updates to all sorts of programs used on a daily basis (antivirus, Internet Explorer, AOL, Adobe Reader and Flash Player, printer updates, etc), the programs *never* get smaller, always bigger.

Now, several years later and the programs being used are double or triple in size, but the computer is the

same one with the same specs as when it was purchased. Adding more RAM memory is a quick, cheap way to improve performance to an aging computer, and extend life before a replacement is in order. Windows XP should have at least 1024 MB (1GB) of RAM to run properly, and Windows Vista (32-bit) needs 3GB of RAM. More is not better in the case of Vista for technical reasons I will not go into in this article.

This is only half the battle. The other half is to beat down what I will call the "moochers." Years ago when I would inspect a computer for sluggish performance, it was usually because of a rogue game that was installed. Back then quite a few games adopted the theory that the only reason you owned your \$3000 or \$4000 computer (yes, it was that much back then, even more depending on how far back you go) was to play some ridiculous \$49 game. The game would change many settings that allowed the game to work properly, but made it miserable to perform simple tasks like type a letter.

(see *Speed* on page 2)

Our First Virtual Meeting

7 PM, October 13th

Tom Murphy of Murcon will pay us a "virtual" visit through the magic of Skype video to demonstrate both the Skype interactive live-meeting technology and webpage design.

Macon Users Group Franklin, NC

Please see the printed edition
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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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(Speed—continued from page 1)

Now in 2009, every program under the sun assumes that they are the main focus, and must be given priority at all times. What does this mean to you, the end user? Each time an upgraded revision of Adobe Reader comes out, it always wants to include the new MSN Toolbar, or Yahoo Toolbar, etc. This adds unnecessary junk to your browser, which slows down getting online. In addition, many of these programs load an additional program when Windows starts to speed it up when starting it. This is just a lousy practice that is a very poor substitute for tight efficient programming. If the program was small and lean, there would be no need for *speed loaders*, which make your computer take an exorbitant amount of time for Windows to start.

Not to pick on, but a classic example of this is how much Apple's iTunes has grown through the years. iTunes 6, which was released in January 2006, was about 35MB in size. iTunes 7.5 was 52MB, and iTunes 8.1 (the current release) is now up to 70MB. The program is twice as large only three years later, and loads a number of programs when Windows starts to aid loading this memory hog.

What to do about this? In short, be mindful when installing updated programs to unselect add-on toolbars and, if available, to kick them out of starting up when Windows loads. I have discussed at our local computer club meetings to do your best to keep running processes to a minimum. Clicking control+alt+delete once (with no programs active) will bring up the task manager and show how many processes are running. A good number for Windows XP is less than 35, and for Vista it's about 45.

Startup Cop and the free CCleaner utilities have the ability to disable or remove programs from starting, but I would check online in a Google search before disabling anything unless certain. I do hope this article sheds some light on the subject of pokey computers. Remember, it's not so much the hardware as it is software that kills a computer! Until next time!

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Linux SIG

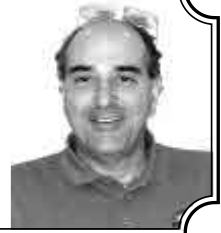
with Jim Swanson, Mentor

The Linux SIG will not meet, until further notice.

Lou's Views!

Total Recall

by Louis Vitale (aka 44RAILGUY)



With apologies to Arnold, I saw a flash of the future, and his famous movie came to mind. In that movie, he goes to a purveyor of “memories” to have implanted in his mind a memory of a vacation on Mars. He can’t afford the real thing. The salesman asks what kind of adventure he would like and what kind of “heron” he would like to accompany him on this mental adventure. He is then hooked up to a very fancy computer that creates the memory and implants it.

The idea that a computer can store all your memories is not new. In another recent movie, *Final Cut*, “Robin Williams plays a cutter, someone with the power of final edit over people’s recorded histories.” In this SciFi thriller, everybody is implanted at birth with a recording chip that records their whole life. At death, a “cutter” is hired to edit all the data on the chip and produce an hour vid to be played at the funeral. Great movie.

Now for real life, enter Gordon Bell, a researcher for Microsoft. For the past decade, he has been recording all the details of his life on a computer. “Bell, who is 75 years old, takes the idea of digital memory to a sci-fi-esque extreme. He carries around video equipment, cameras and audio recorders to capture his conversations, commutes, trips and experiences. Microsoft is working on a *SenseCam* that would hang around a person’s neck and automatically capture every detail of life in photo form. Bell has given that a whirl. He



also saves everything—from restaurant receipts (he takes pictures of them) to correspondence, bills and medical records. He makes PDF files out of every Web page he views.” So far he has accumulated over 350 gigabytes of data.

Bell has written a new book, called, what else, *Total Recall*. In it, he explores the pros and cons of a recorded life. In the interview by CNN for his new book, he is quite candid about the down side of this process. One of the worst possibilities is the legal implications. If there is a recording of your conversation when you signed that contract, will it be required evidence? Will police have access to the data, and will any of the info be public?

Will you change the way you interact with anyone because you are being recorded? Probably. Will you feel compelled to make self-serving statements just to cover your behind? I would. Just what would the word “private” mean? Would there be a way to turn it off, and if you did, would someone in the future think you were trying to hide something?

But let’s look at the positive possibilities. For those of us who are becoming memory challenged, this

would be a godsend. It would be like Google for your brain. All those phone numbers and names which have disappeared would now be accessible. I assume that the future would provide a computer that would always be available, so this treasure trove of memories would be at our fingertips at all times.

So what is the possibility of a “backup brain” becoming a reality? Like every other technological advancement, the question is not if, but when. I thought this was some way-out flight of fancy until I started to look into the possibilities. There are serious companies creating the hardware to do the recording, and many companies are now working on the software needed to manage the terabytes of data that will be generated. No one is working on an implantable chip, at least not yet.

Go to Google and type in “Gordon Bell Total Recall” and be amazed.

Directory Updates

See the printed edition.

Wolverine F2D Slide Scanner

by Joe Nuvolini, Pikes Peak Computer Application Society, Colorado, ppcompas.apcug.org

Over the years, I have amassed about 3,000 color slides. I have been wanting to scan them into my computer, but up to now, had not seen a scanning product that would allow me to get the job done in a reasonable time. One day I came across the Wolverine F2D 35mm Film to Digital Scanner while surfing the Internet. It looked like the answer I was looking for.

I read a number of reviews and found a wide variety of opinions. People seemed to love it or hate it but the positives were greater than the negatives so I decided to try it. I was not disappointed. The unit is self-contained, though you can connect it to a computer USB port for power. However, no computer is required to use it. In fact, I am using it on an island in my kitchen. The unit comes with two film holders; one for slides and one for color or black and white negatives. The unit saves the images to an SD card in JPG format. Before saving the images, they can be mirrored or rotated, if necessary.

The package includes the unit, the two film holders, an AC adapter you can plug the USB connector into for power, a brush to clean the internal screen, a 1-GB SD card, and a 19-page manual. The first thing I did was go to the Wolverine Website (wolverinedata.com/f2d). I downloaded a PDF copy of the manual so these tired old eyes could better read it. I also downloaded the latest firmware update and installed it. I then started my project. I can scan 125 slides in about 30-35 minutes. The more images that need to be rotated before saving, the longer it takes. They advertise 5-MP images and I

found the file sizes ran from 900 KB to just over 1 MB.

There are a couple of things to watch out for. The most important is to make sure your slides (up to 4) are properly seated in the tray. If they are not, the tray will bind up in the scanner. I have had a couple of close calls on this one. Also, I have found that for no good reason the image on the screen of the unit will shift to black and white or have some goofy colors. I have found in most cases pressing the mirror button twice will fix the problem. If not, turning the power off and back on will do the trick for sure. There is one other item the manual warns about, and that is not to tip the unit backward to better view an image on the unit's screen.



The reason is that the connector on the USB power cable plugs in near the bottom on the back of the unit. The connection is a small USB connector, like the one on your camera. Repeated tipping can place stress on the connector causing it to fail.

Pricing varies. A Google search for "Wolverine F2D" brought a range of prices from \$119 at the Wolverine site to \$99.99 on the Costco site. I am quite satisfied with the product. If you take care in using it, you will be too.

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

I enjoy reading. I find that reading is intellectually stimulating, broadens my horizons, and provides vicarious experiences. My daughters grew up in a home full of books where they all became avid readers; this substantially contributed to their academic and professional achievements.

My students at LIT should be reading more, but the cost of books is a deterrent, and a trip to the college or public library is often an inconvenience. Many of today's students have grown up in the era of online information, email, Twitter, Facebook, Yahoo!, and Google, and to them "online" is their primary information resource. Now there are internet resources where anyone can read literature of any genre, including hundreds of current textbooks, for free. Depending on the rules of the respective websites, these complete books can be read online in a browser window, or downloaded in a variety of formats, often including the popular and universal PDF format.

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I teach economics every semester at LIT and try to instill in my students some of the history, culture, and philosophy that created our economic system. While he is briefly recognized in our economics books, Adam Smith is believed by many to be the father of classical economic philosophy. The full unabridged version of his most recognized tome, "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations," better known as the "Wealth of Nations," is on my recommended reading list. In the past, the students had to compete for the limited number of copies available in the library, or purchase a copy, an often difficult task for a cash-strapped college student. Today's college student, or anyone for that matter, can simply go online and read it on his monitor, or download a copy for future reference. This is but one example of how technology can be

positively used to expand the minds of society, and provoke inspired thought and discussion. The book "Wealth of Nations" is but one of many thousands available for free online at Project Gutenberg.

While not as extensive as Project Gutenberg, one of my favorite free eBook websites is Feedbooks at www.feedbooks.com. Feedbooks are almost all in PDF format, and can be read unabridged online or downloaded for reading at the individual's convenience. Feedbooks has books in four languages, English, French, German, and Spanish, and from hundreds of authors. Feedbooks' selection is exemplary in having what may be the complete works of many authors, including Arthur Conan Doyle, 32 titles; Charles Dickens, 45 titles; Edgar Rice Burroughs, 68 books; Washington Irving; Henry David Thoreau; Jonathan Swift; and hundreds of other authors. Feedbooks is totally searchable, but I enjoy browsing my favorite categories, such as Novels (1382 books), History (111 books), Politics (32 books), Humor (68 books), and Non-Fiction (83 books). There is an extensive "Young Readers" selection composed of over 100 titles that would be good for parents to read to their children, or as a reading experience for the kids themselves. Titles include such classics as Grimm's Fairy Tales, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Peter Pan, American Fairy Tales, Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen, Black Beauty, and over a hundred other age-appropriate titles.

Many of us are all too aware of the high cost of textbooks. There is currently a move on to publish current textbooks online for free. While this

(see eBooks on page 11)

Glary Utilities

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

One of the common themes in this column is improving computer performance. I still hear on a regular basis about slow performance and other PC problems that may have an easy and possibly free solution. I emphasize free not just because of today's trying economic times, but also because an acquaintance of mine recently paid a big box store \$300 to clean up his hard drive in order to improve his PC's performance. There are many utilities available at varying prices from free to many dollars, and like anything else in society, they vary in quality from mediocre or worse, to excellent. The trite cliché "You get what you pay for" does not always apply when it comes to computer software, as there is some excellent quality free software available.

I have worked on several decrepit computers in recent weeks, and had the opportunity to try software utilities from several publishers, and found some that I really liked. Some of the titles that I found that worked very well were freeware utilities from Glarysoft, www.glarysoft.com.

The first Glarysoft utility that I tried on an older XP machine that was in desperate need of some software maintenance was its flagship product Glary Utilities. Available in 23 languages from www.glaryutilities.com, Glarysoft claims that this product is, "...the #1 free, powerful and all-in-one utility in the world market! It offers numerous powerful and easy-to-use system tools and utilities to fix, speed up, maintain and protect your PC." I cannot vouch for the #1 status, but I did find it a capable utility that does all that it claims, and it does it very well. Available in two flavors, the free

version, and a \$40 commercial version, Glary Utilities PRO, either will have enough features to likely improve the performance of any dragging PC. Obviously the PRO version offers more features than the free version, such as automatic care in background; enhanced system fixing, optimizing and more; free 24x7 technical support, and may be used commercially. Both versions will run well on most modern PCs, and are compatible with Windows 2000, XP 32/64bit and Vista 32/64bit. I ran Glary Utilities on the old XP, as well as a new Vista 64 machine, and it ran flawlessly on both.

Glary Utilities has a clean and intuitive front end, and is easy to use. The opening window gives the version and status, and a link to download any updates. The "1-Click Maintenance," which can be scheduled or run on demand, offers six automated clean-up functions which can be run together or

individually. The "Registry Cleaner," which can fix invalid or incorrect registry entries, is one of the best in the business, and may reduce the number of conflicts and "blue screens of death" that antagonize many of us. The "Shortcuts Fixer" identifies and cleans any invalid shortcuts that may have been left over when deleting old programs. The "Startup Manager" may be one of the keys to improved PC performance by stopping useless and unnecessary programs from automatically loading when the computer is booted. These unnecessary programs often get inserted in the startup when their software is installed, and may be a terrible resource hog, degrade performance, cause slow boots and shutdowns, and create software conflicts. By easily managing the startup process, the user has better control of the computer as well as better perfor-

(see *Glary* on page 7)



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(Glary—continued from page 6)

mance. Massive amounts of hard drive capacity are often wasted by having thousands of temporary files from various sources eating up the capacity of the drive; a “Temporary Files Cleaner” cleans up these temporary files, and recovers the wasted hard drive space; one computer I recently cleaned had over 4 gigs of useless temporary files, which this program detected and deleted. Our personal privacy may be jeopardized by leaving internet tracks and traces on our hard drive, and the integral “Tracks Eraser” detects and removes these items, helping to maintain the users’ privacy. The final “1-Click” utility is a “Spyware Remover,” which can detect and remove much of the spyware which may infest the computer. These six tasks, all of which can be run with a single mouse click, can do much to improve PC performance.

Those users who want even more power and control coupled with additional performance improvements should choose the “Modules” tab. Five modules, each consisting of several system tools, provide an excellent selection of resources designed to provide the maximum improvement of performance, short of hardware upgrades. The “Clean Up & Repair” button connects to the disk cleaner, the registry cleaner, shortcuts fixer, and an uninstall manager. While two of these utilities are automatically invoked when selecting the 1-Click option, the disk cleaner detects and removes far more clutter on the hard drive than the simple temp files remover. The uninstall manager allows the user to completely remove any unwanted programs more thoroughly than Microsoft’s “Add/Remove” feature.

The second module contains four utilities to optimize and improve performance, including the startup manager, a memory optimizer, a context menu manager (a tool for techies and geeks), and a registry defragmentation utility. Besides the already described benefits

of the startup manager, the registry defrag feature would probably be the most beneficial utility in this group. Since the registry is constantly being written to and modified, gaps appear in its structure which can slow its reading, waste processing power, as well as take up extra space on the hard drive; the registry defrag function resolves this problem.

Next is a privacy and security selection which includes the already mentioned tracks eraser, as well as three other utilities. Sometimes it is necessary to permanently delete files and data, such that they are unrecoverable; the integral file shredder erases files such that they are gone forever. Unless a file has been shredded or overwritten on the hard drive, it may very likely be recoverable. We all have accidentally deleted files, or changed our minds after deleting files, and wished that we could get them back; the file undelete utility can quickly and effectively recover files that had been accidentally deleted. Some other files that we have may also be personally sensitive, and made safe from prying eyes. The “File Encrypter and Decrypter” protects files from unauthorized access and use.

The “Files & Folders” group includes utilities to analyze and the hard disk structure, detect and delete duplicate files, find and remove empty file folders, and a neat utility that can split large files into smaller ones and then rejoin them when needed.

The final module is the “System Tools” selection where the running processes on the computer can be monitored and stopped as desired,



freeing up computing power. Another system tool manages Internet Explorer add-ons, tool bars, and other functions, and can recover from a hijacked browser. The final utility opens Window’s own secretive tools utility, providing user access to dozens of Window’s settings, allowing the user to tweak the operating system as desired.

I found Glary Utilities, both the free version and the more comprehensive PRO version, to be useful and effective in improving PC performance, and maintaining that enhanced functionality. I would recommend that users download the PRO version, as it offers a fully functional 30-day free trial, and see how well it performs. If satisfied, then the \$40 purchase price may be well worth it. For those who prefer free software, the free version would be very satisfactory, as it also is a very capable product. For those who want the functionality of the individual modules as free standing products, many of them are available for free download from www.glarysoft.com. Glarysoft has some fine products, and would be a worthwhile addition to the stable of utilities that we all should have and utilize.

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Windows 7 XP Mode

by Ash Nallawalla, APCUG Director, Review Editor,
Melbourne PCUG, Australia, www.melbpc.org.au

I will be writing a review of Windows 7 in due course, but here is a preview of a key feature that will interest many readers.

Windows XP Mode

Windows XP Mode is aimed at small business users who wish to run their Windows XP-era applications on their Windows 7 desktop. They might have avoided upgrading to Windows Vista owing to an incompatibility with their old programs or the simple reason of “Windows XP does the job.” However, as they buy new computers later this year or by January 2010, they might find a copy of Windows 7 included with the purchase, or they may have other compelling reasons to upgrade.

An exciting optional feature that was kept under wraps until recently was Windows XP Mode (XPM). This feature will work in certain editions, but is an additional download.

Key Facts

- Windows XPM is included with Windows 7 Professional, Windows 7 Ultimate and Windows 7 Enterprise versions.
- Windows XPM combines Windows Virtual PC and a pre-installed virtual Windows XP environment to enable users to run many older applications.
- Windows Virtual PC enables users to launch virtual applications from the Windows 7 Start menu.
- Windows Virtual PC includes support for USB devices and is based on a new code base that includes multi-threading support.
- Windows XPM is pre-configured with the Windows XP firewall and can apply updates automatically from Windows Update. It is

not pre-configured with anti-virus or anti-malware software, which need to be sourced separately.

IT Professionals

Windows XPM is not recommended for corporate deployments. Wait for Microsoft Enterprise Desktop Virtualization (MED-V) Version 2.0, which will be released as a beta 90 days after the general availability of Windows 7.

- MED-V v1 is currently available for Windows Vista, and it enables Virtual PC deployment in larger organizations. It provides centralized management, policy-based provisioning and virtual image delivery.
- MED-V v1 builds on Microsoft Virtual PC 2007 to help enterprises with their upgrade to Windows Vista when applications are not yet compatible.
- MED-V v2 will add support for Windows 7 (both 32- and 64-bit) and Windows Virtual PC.

Windows XPM is for SMBs

Windows XPM standalone is intended for small and medium business (SMB) users who can install their XP applications themselves and who might not have IT Professional staff. Each PC has its own virtual Windows XP environment that is controlled and managed by the user.

Windows XPM is best suited for older business and productivity applications, such as accounting, inventory and similar software. These applications tend to conform to the basic Windows Application Programming Interface (API).

Windows XPM not for Consumers

Windows XP Mode does not have 100 percent compatibility with all Windows XP software. It is not

aimed at home users, because many consumer programs require extensive use of hardware interfaces such as 3-D graphics, audio and TV tuners that do not work well under virtualization today.

In Use

Windows XPM is available from the Windows 7 Start menu. It displays a regular Windows XP desktop and you can install your old software from there just as you would on a Windows XP machine. Thereafter, those programs appear just below the Windows XPM menu item.

Requirements

Of course, there's always a catch. Not all CPUs will support Windows XPM. You need hardware-based virtualization (go and check your CPU specs now). Intel and AMD have CPUs that have this feature but don't assume all recently purchased CPUs support hardware virtualization. See these sites for more information.

- Intel: www.intel.com/technology/virtualization/
- AMD: www.amd.com/us-en/0,,3715_15781,00.html

My PC is about six months old and has a Core 2 Quad processor—the Q6600 chip. I checked this Intel page to confirm that I'll be able to test this feature when I get my hands on it:

- ark.intel.com/cpu.aspx?groupId=29765

The next thing to check is for BIOS support on your motherboard. I have an Asus P5K SE/EPU and its user guide mentions Vanderpool support is enabled by default (you can turn it off). Vanderpool was the code name for Intel Virtualization.

(see *XP Mode* on page 11)

Clean Up Your Room/Desktop

by Ron Hirsch, Contributing Editor, Boca Raton Computer Society, FL, www.brcs.org

So, does that line ring any bells? If you're a youngster, you've heard your elders tell you to clean up your room very often. And if you're not a youngster, then you use the line yourself on your kids or grandchildren. Well, I have no young kids around anymore, but I often use that line (with a slight change.) I'm constantly telling people to "Clean up your desktop," with "desktop" being their computer screen after the machine has booted up, and before any programs are run.

There are some desktop differences between the different Windows versions. And, some companies such as Dell and Compaq very often install a "special" arrangement on the desktop, mostly to keep their name in front of you. Also, there are programs which generate their own desktop arrangement. But, they all generally respond to the procedures presented below. Once you become an expert in this area, you'll have no problems with the finer points and variations.

Remember what I have been preaching for years in my articles. As you become more conversant with using your computer, you will gain more confidence in expanding your horizons with the most amazing machine that mankind has produced. But, it is only a "machine," and you should be in charge of it, even though Microsoft tends to try and make it in charge of you. You are the boss, and the sooner you let your computer know that, the sooner you will stop feeling intimidated by it.

Since most of you are using Windows XP, and since I use XP on all my machines, all the activities discussed are based on XP. I have not used Vista, but I would assume it's the same there. One thing I do remember however, is that in Windows 95, desktop icons did

not automatically line up in rows and columns. In XP, when you move an icon, it automatically snaps to the nearest position which keeps the rows and columns aligned.

The average computer user, even those who should know better, generally have disaster zones for the desktops. There are icons all over the place, not in any order and not lined up. And, there are many, that when I ask what they are, I'm told "I don't know." And, when I ask to have Windows Explorer or Notepad opened, there's usually a lot of scrambling, to find out where the icon is located.

Many programs, when installed, will place an icon on your desktop. Sometimes they ask you during the install if you want this - and sometimes they don't ask. There is always a tendency for software companies to grab real estate so that they can prominently keep themselves in front of you. Some newer computers running Windows XP/VISTA may even start off with almost nothing on the desktop. If you want to go back to a more conventional appearing desktop, right click on the desktop, and view the various options you have. There is probably a choice to revert to an "old-fashioned" desktop, which I personally prefer. Most people keep their medications in a medicine cabinet, canned goods in the pantry, garden tools in the garage, etc. But when it comes to their computer, they are as disorganized as is humanly possible. They feel intimidated by their computers, and don't wish to antagonize it. So, the thrust of this article is to go back to real basics again, and give you some information on organizing and cleaning up your desktop. If you're already super organized, you can skip this article, accept

my apologies, and move on. But 99 out of 100 of you probably don't qualify to get the gold star for desktop organization. Once you do the tasks presented, you'll probably wonder why you didn't do it sooner. It not only is much easier to work with a good functional desktop, it looks prettier also, and will impress those who see it.

Why Have Icons On The Desktop?

Most users are familiar with the primary way to run a program. Click on Start > Programs, and one can navigate to all the programs that are installed on the machine. But, most users generally have several programs that they use often. Having an icon for these programs on the desktop makes it easier to access that program. Just double click on that icon, and the program opens.

Why Should I Bother?

Let's take an extreme analogy. How would you like to have a dictionary where the words were randomly listed, not in any order? It would take lots of time to look up a word. By organizing things, and getting important icons at your fingertips, you can make your life much easier. And, your friends will be asking you to help them, when they see your desktop. Consider the desktop as a presentation area for icons that you often use. Count the icons on your desktop that you really use, and those you don't use. Then list the icons that you use which are not readily available on the desktop and you have to do lots of clicking to reach. You will see why it's a good idea to improve things. Now let's get down to business and fix things up.

Operating On Icons

The following activities are easy to perform on icons, wherever they may

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 be. There are a few icons that Microsoft does put in places where they take control away from you - you can't readily rename them, or move them off the desktop, although you can always reposition them on the desktop. You may discover some of these in your travels. When you do, you'll just have to skip those icons. While they can be operated on using special protocols, that's outside of the scope of activities for these lessons.

What Is An Icon

An icon is a representation of a program, or file, or just about anything you want. The icons on your desktop are usually shortcuts to running a program, be it a word processor, spreadsheet, Internet connection, etc. All icons have properties, which define the nature of the icon, and details of what it does when used. Right clicking on an icon will bring up a window with the bottom item in the list being Properties. Left click on Properties, and you'll get a window with lots of information about the icon. Try it, and browse around to get a feel for things. The more familiar you become with things on your computer, the more comfortable you'll feel using them.

Move An Icon

Left click on and drag an icon and you can move it manually anywhere you want on your desktop, or into another open folder. The ability to drag an icon around is tied into the choice that was made on how icons are positioned. Before you can engage in changing locations on your desktop, you must first check to see how things are set. Right click on the desktop, and in XP you will bring up a small box with a list of items in it. The contents of this box will vary, depending upon which version of Windows you are using. The top item is "arrange icons by," and it has a little arrowhead to the left. Click on that arrowhead, and you'll see a variety of items related to arranging icons. Some of these may be checked. The best way to learn what does what is to play around with the checking and

unchecking. After a few trials, you will get a good feel for what they all do.

Copy An Icon

Copying an icon is similar to moving an icon. As with the standard Windows protocol, do exactly as you would to move, but hold down the Ctrl key while you are doing the click and drag operation. If you copy it into the same area, you'll probably see a (2) following the text in the copy. You can't have two icons in the same place with the same name. So, Windows adds the "(2)" for you. If you move it to another folder, the "(2)" will stay, but you can edit the text as you'd like. See "Rename an Icon" below. Dragging an icon to any folder on your desktop will move the icon into that folder.

Delete An Icon

Click once on an icon to highlight it, and then hit the Delete key. Remember, the icons here are generally shortcut icons with the little curly arrow on the lower left corner. Deleting these does not delete anything from your system except the shortcut icon. No programs or data will be deleted, just the icon.

Rename An Icon

Click once on an icon and then hit the F2 key. This puts you in "edit" mode, and you can type a new name by using the keyboard. If you type in a very long name, all the text you entered may not display when the icon is not selected. But, when you click once on the icon, the extra lines of text should be visible. In general, try to keep the text to a maximum of two lines under the icon. Remember the F2 key. It is the "edit" key for folder names, filenames, icons, and other elements in Windows.

Desktop

In the latest Windows XP and Vista, MS has made a lot of changes, including the default desktop displayed. I personally don't like it, but that's a matter of my taste. However, MS did leave the door open to go back to the older style of desktop, which you may prefer. If you right click on

the desktop, there should be a choice to have a classic Windows desktop. Try selecting this and see which you'd rather have. You can always revert back to the new style if you choose.

Arrange The Icons

Right click on an empty space on the desktop and a menu will come up. The first item on the XP listing is "Arrange Icons by." Put the focus on "Arrange Icons by," and you will get a list with lots of choices on how you want them arranged. If you have carefully positioned all your desktop icons in the various areas where you want them and you use the "Arrange" feature, they will all line up like soldiers, starting at the upper left part of your screen. Then you will have to manually reposition them to where they were before you started. Again, this is a good area in which to experiment.

Auto Arrange

In the window that pops up when you click on "Arrange Icons by," you will see an entry named "Auto Arrange." If you check this, your icons will always stay arranged, but not in any groups that you have established. They will all line up like soldiers and stay that way even if you move them. They will jump right back into line. I personally don't like using this. But, you can try it to see if you'd like it. "Auto arrange" is the equivalent of constantly invoking the "Arrange" command.

Align To Grid

I personally use the "Align to Grid," which auto aligns all icons so that rows and columns are straight. With this checked, sometimes when you move an icon, it snaps to a different point on the grid. It will always snap to the nearest point. When this happens, just click and drag it to where you want.

In the early days of XP, when one had temporarily booted into safe mode and then returned to normal mode, the desktop layout was totally garbled up. Microsoft apparently improved things in recent times; the original desktop layout does return now.

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project is in its infancy, there are already many recently published e-textbooks available online at www.flatworldknowledge.com. It is worth noting that hundreds of college faculty have already adopted these free titles. Students typically have the option of reading the chapters online for free, or printing individual chapters for a nominal fee (about \$2 per chapter), printing the entire book, or purchasing a bound copy of the book. Faculty may request a free bound copy, as well as support materials such as test banks, PowerPoint slides, instructors' manuals, and other supplementary materials, just like the existing

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Icon Arranging Utilities

There are also a variety of simple programs available free on the Internet to save and then restore your desktop layout. This can come in handy when something/someone has messed up your desktop layout. The one I used is called "iconlayout.zip," but the page for this appears to be gone now. This link appears to have a similar free program at ZDNET: tinyurl.com/lcpz kf.

What these utilities generally do is add two items into the dropdown list when you right-click on your desktop: "Save desktop icon layout" and "Restore desktop icon Layout." Browse around for something similar, if you'd like to have this handy utility, or try the ZDNET link.

Changing Icons

Except for a few icons of which Windows is very possessive, the icon images that display for the shortcuts on your desktop can be changed to suit your desires. When you right click on an icon and select Properties from the window which shows, a small window will come up; near the bottom right of that window is a button marked "Change Icon." If you click on it, another window will open, with other Windows-supplied icons which are

available. The selection is somewhat limited, but there is a "Browse" button.

If you have any icon library files on your computer, click on "browse" and navigate around to find these libraries. When you find one, double click on it, and a whole bunch of icons will appear, find one you like, then double click on it, click OK, then when you close the window, you'll have a new icon for that shortcut.

Icon Libraries

If you'd like to get some icon libraries, one of the best places to go is www.zdnet.com. Once you get there, just navigate around to their download area, and then do a search for "icons." You should get lots of results. These are generally free files and there are lots available, so have fun. Google is also a good hunting ground for icons. Do a search for "icons for Windows XP." You'll get lots of hits, most of which are free downloads. The spacing of icons, color, and many other properties of the desktop layout can also be changed. But, that's outside of this area for now.

Starting Programs

Left click on the Start button on the lower left of your desktop. On the menu which comes up, left click on "All Programs." This should bring up a large window that lists all the

programs installed on your computer. This is probably where you have been to run a specific program. You move the cursor over the desired program and click; the program then runs.

Some of these items are links to start the program, and others are folders, which you must click to display the links that are within the folder. How about making copies of the startup links for the programs you use often. Doing this is simple. Put your cursor on a program shortcut, and then right click. There should be a listed item "Create Shortcut." Clicking on this will create another shortcut, with a (2) showing that it is a duplicate of the original shortcut. Drag this onto the desktop. You can now edit the name to remove the (2), or make it any name you would like.

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While Windows XPM isn't for everyone, it will certainly address the need of some businesses that need to run legacy applications.

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