The NCTCUG Journal

www.nctcug.org

August/September 2009 Volume 32 Issue 5

Keeping Up

By Paul Howard (NCTCUG)

It's hard to believe, but the agreement between the NCTCUG and WACUG user groups sharing a computer projector is now in its sixth year. The groups split the cost of the projector, initial maintenance agreement, and a spare lamp, and continue to share the cost of insurance coverage. Having a projector that allows "big screen" presentations has made a major difference to dozens of user group meetings since we obtained the projector in 2004. The only hitch has come when some guy named Howard gets custody of the projector, and forgets to bring it to the meetings ...

That spirit of inter-group cooperation has continued, most recently when Roger Fujii and Nick Wenri of NCTCUG came to May's PC Clinic held by WACUG and the new (formed in January) computer club of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at George Mason University, known as OPCUG. Roger and Nick joined WAC's Bill Walsh and Scott Hannak in cleaning out the software gunk in three computers for OLLI members. At the same time, Gabe Goldberg, Region 2 representative of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), presented "A Little PC Cleaning Pays Off" to help the assembled members of WACUG and OPCUG avoid those kinds of problems in the future.

More TV Follies

NCTCUG member Mark Gladstone took me to task for not using my computer to record TV shows. Touche'—but there's always a reason, or three. The Hauppauge card in my PC doesn't recognize any DTV stations, despite supposedly having ATSC as well as NTSC capability (not that the NTSC—read old analog, no longer broadcast—will do me much good now!) Then there's the PC itself, which has been complaining for months that it's got a RAID 0 drive catastrophe about to happen - and I've been too busy to get a new drive in place and start from scratch with operating system and software installation. Then there's my lack of networking sophistication and appropriate toys to get anything recorded on the PC to play on the TV. While I've watched TV shows on my computer monitor, it's just not as much fun as sitting on the couch and watching the regular old TV.

(Continued on page 14)

Exploring Microsoft Windows 7 Beta 1, Part II: What I've Discovered About Windows 7 (A)

By Lee Reynolds, a member of the Boca Raton Computer Society, FL
www.brcs.or leetutor (at) earthlink.net

Lee continues an overview of what the new operating system might look like, as well as what it is likely to have for features.

System Requirements

For those who are wondering, these are what Microsoft says are the system requirements for Windows 7:

- a 1 GHz or faster processor (for both the 32-bit and 64-bit version)
- at least 1 GB of main memory (RAM)
- • at least 16 GB of available disk space to install the operating system
- • a graphics adaptor that supports DX9 graphics with at least 128 MB of memory (in order for Aero to work)
- • a DVD-R/W drive

Main Improvements

Windows 7 is essentially a much improved Windows Vista. It has these main improvements over Vista, among many others:

- easier home networking through a new facility called HomeGroups
- a much more capable Windows Backup tool
- a redesigned and more functional Taskbar
- a new concept for organizing files and folders called Libraries
- the ability to use Windows Instant Search over other pcs in a network
- improved support for multimedia using Windows Media Player and Windows Media Center
- a much friendlier version of Vista's User Account Control
- some new capabilities of the Aero interface, notably "Aero Peek" and "Aero Shake" and "Aero Snap"

Main Features

Let's start taking a look at the Windows 7 Beta in an organized travelog through all the main features, complete with screen captures. First, we take a look at the Desktop.

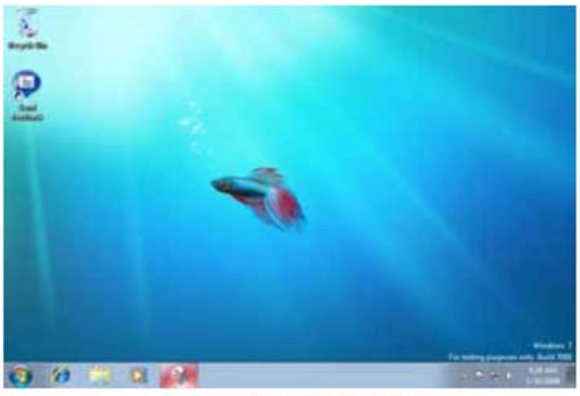


Figure 1 Windows 7 Desktop

Figure 2 Windows 7 Taskbar

The Desktop

When you look at the Windows 7 Beta Desktop (Figure 1), you will not see many differences from Vista's.

One difference you will see immediately, is that there is a little message etched into the lower right hand corner of the screen reading: "Windows 7 For testing purposes only. Build 7000".

Also, there is a shortcut on the Windows 7 Desktop labeled "Send Feedback". This is your mechanism for telling Microsoft about what you like and dislike, what bugs you found, etc. It will only send the report to Microsoft if you have a Windows Live ID number. The facility for sending feedback is also present in every window you open, at the top right near the Minimize, Maximize and Close buttons.

As in Windows Vista, the Start button of Windows XP and previous versions of Windows has been replaced by a small round "orb", which only tells you it is related to "Start" if you hover the mouse over it for a second or two, and then a tooltip pops up briefly.

Notice that Microsoft decided to eliminate the famous Sidebar of Vista. You can still have "gadgets" located on your Desktop, but more about that later.

The Taskbar

Let's take a look at the new Windows 7 Taskbar. Note that the icons are a bit larger and therefore the Taskbar is wider than what you may be used to from previous versions of Windows.

You can adjust these smaller by using Taskbar Properties, but then you may lose some of the neat "Aero" effects. When you first install Windows 7, you see icons for Internet Explorer, Windows Explorer and Windows Media Player.

This is similar to what was present on what was called the "Quick Launch Toolbar" in earlier Windows.

The line at the right end of this group of icons separating them from the Taskbar proper — does this mean the Quick Launch Toolbar is now gone in Windows 7? Yes, it does.

The entire Taskbar in Windows 7 is now a mixture of pseudo Quick Launch icons and the ordinary buttons present for running programs.

You can distinguish a button on the new Taskbar as being one for a running program by the fact that the button appears to have a square surrounding the icon. (Thus, the rightmost icon in the screenshot (Figure 2), which is for the built-in Snipping Tool, has a square around it because the program is running – that was what I used to take the screenshot.)

Also, if the button is a pseudo Quick Launch button, then you can right click it and select Unpin from Taskbar on the context menu to remove it. The screenshot below shows this right click menu for the Windows Explorer icon.

If you right click one of the pseudo Quick Launch icons on the Taskbar, you get what is called a "Jump Menu". The screenshot shows a Jump Menu for Windows Media Player.

(Continued on page 4)

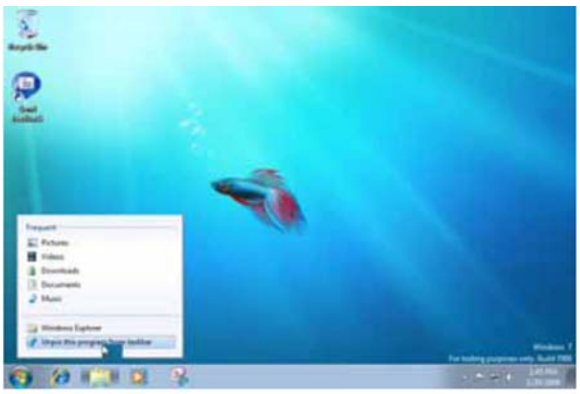


Figure 3 Windows 7 Unpin

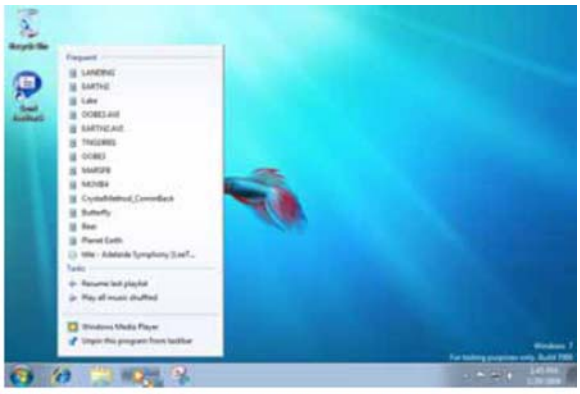


Figure 4 Windows 7 Jump Menu

(Continued from page 3)

All of the icons are moveable on the Taskbar. Just click and drag any icon left or right anywhere you want.

The next screenshot shows the "Notification Area" of the Windows 7 Taskbar. (This is what was called the "System Tray" prior to Windows XP.)

Notice that there are only a few icons present in the Windows 7 Notification Area. One is normally the "Action Center" icon, which will notify you of important actions you need to take, like downloading a Windows update or turning on the Windows Firewall.

All of the Notification Area icons can be individually adjusted to determine whether or not they appear there and whether or not notification messages will be displayed.

More about that later.

If there are hidden icons in the Notification Area, you will see a little upward pointing arrow on the left which when clicked gives you a display of the ones not shown. Notice that now the Taskbar is wide enough to show the date as well as the time at the right end in the Notification Area.

There are other properties of the new Taskbar, which will be described further in the Aero Effects section.

Next Time

That is all for now, come back next month for Part 3, which will cover the New Aero Effects:

- ✓ Aero Shake
- ✓ Aero Peek
- ✓ Aero Snap

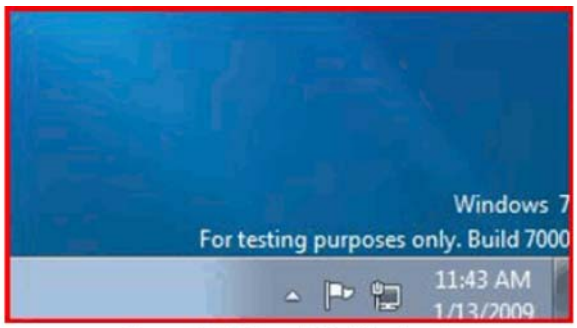


Figure 5 Windows 7 Notification Area

Let's Never Forget The First King: DOS

By Rick Smith, member of the Channel Islands PC Users Group, CA
www.cipcug.or / vccomputers.com
Rants (at) vcmail.net

Oh where, oh where has my little DOS gone?
Oh where, oh where can it be?
With its life cut short and windows cut long
Oh where, oh where can it be?

Some might say that I'm losing it, but you cannot lose what you never had.

Where has DOS gone? Some might say it's still around in the various forms of Linux. Others might say it's buried deep in Microsoft operating systems waiting to be called out by a powerful wizard to cast potent spells with a command prompt. But most of us just believe that it's just lost, never to found again. Like a lost pet that you once had affection for, once it's gone you seem to remember only the good times and seem to forget all the problems that it caused you.

DOS does that to people. There are still a few of you "old-timers," and you know who you are! Those who sit at the doughnut table at club meetings and reminisce about the "good ol' days" when all you needed was a Northgate keyboard and a monochrome screen to have absolute power over your world. You know what I'm talking about. Way back when people spoke about computers with fear and awe. They were things better left to experts and shady government entities. The quickest way to kill a conversation in those days was to talk command line technobabble. It always made everyone in the room feel uncomfortable that they couldn't understand you, like you were speaking a different language.

On the flip side, though, it gave you an incredible feeling of power, that you, and you alone, could master the savage beast and control your own destiny.

Neh Ahh Ahh Yahh. (Sometimes I think all those comic books I read have permanently warped my thinking.) But really, didn't you feel special? That you and you alone, could master something that would make others wince and shirk away. You didn't have to be popular at school. You didn't have to be good looking. You didn't have to be wealthy. You did not have to have any of those things that everyone else needed to be important. You had knowledge.

And knowing the secrets of the PC universe, did you use that knowledge to gain wisdom or for greed? I think most of you, unfortunately, like me, used it for personal greed. We gave ourselves over to the dark side of the force and used our skill to enrich ourselves financially. But eventually as we all grew older, and some of us wiser, we started using or skills to teach and help others, which led you to me, to read these words and words of others in this tome. You all became a band of brothers forming the fellowship of the DOS.

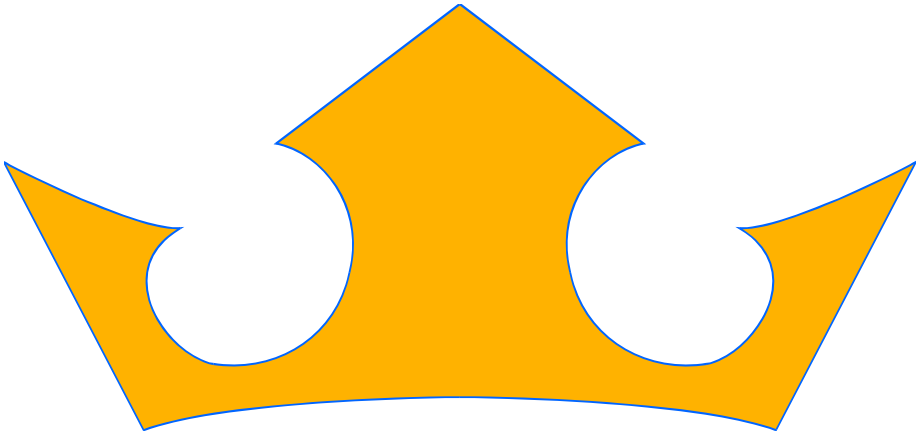
And just! And just as your powers were at their peak, everything came crashing down like the Jedi of old. A new power rose in the universe to supplant the old ways. Windows came rushing down like a wind from heaven with trumpets blazing and fire and smoke billowing up in great clouds. And when this behemoth came to rest. its great weight crushed the last vestiges of DOS underneath its feet.

A new group came forth to rule the PC world. A group of men, and, yes, women, too. who knew nothing of the old ways but were formed from clay in the new ways. These new acolytes grew up in the ways of the PC, each having their own since they were young.

Gone was command prompt. In was the mouse. The wizards of old became legend. And after time they have become forgotten to be remembered by only a few at computer club meetings. There are still a few prophets preaching to us not to forget the old ways. I saw one at last month's meeting giving a history lesson at the club meeting. But they are old and feeble now with most of their words echoing on deaf ears.

So I say to all today! Remember the DOS! Don't let the old ways die, as you never know when you will be called upon as I have this week to use my skills again. Fortunately. I have not been found wanting as I was able to vanquish the beast with my skill at the command prompt. I have beaten down one enemy, but more are waiting to attack.

So be on your guard, be ready, and be faithful to the cause. Put away your mice as they are no use against such foes. Operate you PC only with the keyboard and keep yourself ready for the fight. For it shall come. It shall come.



Hacking 101

By Marjie Tucker, Editor, Macon Computer User Group, North Carolina www.mcug.or mcug (at) dnet.net

We are being bombarded with warnings about securing our data and the entry to our computers. Do you ever wonder what the big fuss is all about? How can a hacker possibly get into your data? And, what would he be looking for? Let's spend some time answering those questions.

How Does A Hacker Get In To Your Computer?

When you give your computer access to the Internet, you need an IP (Internet Protocol) address. The IP addresses that we are currently using have 4 octets with periods between them. They will be something like 192.168.100.1. When you access the Internet, that address is read by the router, modem, whatever that links you to your Internet Service Provider. Then it is read by the routers that route all the data through the Internet. This address makes it possible for you to send data, such as e-mail or requests for web pages. And, in turn, that same address is used to direct incoming e-mail and web pages into your computer. There are several websites and programs available that will translate these IP addresses into the name of the company that purchased them. In many cases, like our residential usages, the company name will be the ISP. For commercial use, it will be the name of the company that rents the block of IP addresses. Hackers use this IP address information to find their targets much like we use a physical address to find a house or office.

Once a hacker finds out your IP address it's relatively simple to send your computer a Trojan horse program, spyware, or a virus that will open a port that you usually don't use. Once that port has been opened, he can freely enter into your operating system and browse around just like he was there in person. He would look for programs that store valuable data like social security numbers and credit card account numbers. (Do you have that information entered into your Quicken or Money program?) He would look through your My Documents folder for password lists and search your Internet Explorer favorites for financial sites where you saved the username and password. And, before he leaves he usually plants another Trojan horse that will give him the ability to take control of your computer in the future.

Commercial Websites

The most common way to hack into a company's website through the Internet is by using a Denial of Service attack. These DoS attacks use multiple computers to overload a website with bogus requests for information. The hacker usually creates a Trojan horse program that he sends into the computers of unsuspecting people (remember that program that was left behind when your computer was invaded above?) The message that he creates usually contains a header saying that it comes from an IP address that doesn't exist. When he is ready to attack, he calls up all the computers that he infected with his Trojan horse and tells them to contact a specific IP address. Those computers follow his instructions and send his preprogrammed message to that website. Servers that control websites always check to verify that IP addresses requesting information or webpage downloads are legitimate addresses. When a server is hit by a bombardment of these false address requests, it tries to track down every one of the fake addresses. Before long the server becomes overwhelmed by the fruitless process and crashes. When it crashes, the website will vanish and the hacker will be given access to a prompt for the server. He can then use Linux or DOS commands to request and view information on that server other servers.

How About Wireless?

Let's put this hacker into an airport where hundreds of people are sharing a wireless network. It's like leaving a child alone in a candy store. In this case the airport's wireless system usually provides the IP addresses

(Continued on page 7)

through DHCP and he can easily look at the list of addresses that have been supplied. He can test each of the addresses for available ports and it's quick work to access the most vulnerable. The same principles apply in hotels and restaurants that provide wireless Internet access. If you have a wireless network in your home, our hacker can drive down your street using a laptop or PDA to search for wireless networks. This process is called Wardriving. If he finds one that has not been secured at all, he doesn't even have a challenge. If you have added a password, he simply has to crack the password.

What Tools Do They Use?

It's very easy for a potential hacker to find the tools of his trade. There are many websites that offer program tools and tutorials for using them. Here are some of the popular:

Anonymizers and Remailers—Anonymizers are online services that eliminate the trail of information that is left behind. These sites use anonymous proxies that a hacker can use to access computers and servers without leaving his IP address on any log. Remailers strip the header off a message and replace it with a meaningless header that can't be traced.

Command.com—When this command is typed into a server it will basically give you administrative rights. You can then see all the folders and files. It's also very easy for the hacker to create a new administrative account that he can re-use in the future.

Password Crackers—These programs try random passwords at lightening speeds. They are usually very successful.

Key Loggers—Hackers frequently install these on computers, especially public PCs. The programs actually record every stroke that you make. Hence, when you type in a username and password, it has been captured.

Port Knocking—This is a method of externally opening ports on a firewall by mimicking the process you normally use to add a port to your firewall.

Wireshark—This popular program captures and analyzes the data on a network. It's used by hackers to find information they want and it's also used by network administrators to manage networks.

Aircrack—This program is used to crack wireless WEP and WPA passwords.

Metasploit Framework—This is a tool that can be used by hackers to search the Internet for sites that have dubious code. These are the sites that are the easiest to hack—especially when this program does the searching for you.

Networks identifying the types of data and the internal addresses of this data. It's a valuable tool for administrators, but can save a great deal of time for a hacker.

NMAP—This is a port scanner. Since a hacker knows that he needs to use a port to access your computer or network, he can use this program to see which ports you have open.

NetStumbler—This program finds any wireless networks that are in range.

Wardrivers drive through residential neighborhoods using NetStumbler to search for available wireless networks.

Kismet—This program takes NetStumbler one step farther. It searches for wireless networks that are not broadcasting their SSID.

NSLookup—If you type a domain name into this program, it will give you the company's IP address

Traceroute—This is a very valuable troubleshooting tool for technicians. It will trace a packet on its route through the Internet. It shows every IP address it visits along the way.

Snort—This is an open-source intrusion detection system. It shows traffic analysis and packet logging on networks.

TCPdump—This is the most widely used network sniffer/analyzer for UNIX networks.

Net Cat—This has been called the Swiss army program for hackers. It performs many sniffing and cracking tasks.

This was really just some of the basics. But, if we know why security is so important, we may remember to take the right precautions. Hope your web surfing stays secure.

Clean Up Your Room/Desktop - Part I

By Ron Hirsch, Contributing Editor, Boca Raton Computer Society, FL
www.brcs.or ronhirsch1439 (at) comcast.com

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.

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 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 et al 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 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.

Next month, we'll continue from this point to get a more streamlined desktop for you to work with. But, you must know the various icon manipulation procedures presented above. I won't be repeating the explanation for each step. I'll just say delete, copy, move,

(Continued on page 10)

How To Switch Internet Browsers

By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS www.compukiss.co sandy (at) compukiss.com

Microsoft's Internet Explorer is a software program that comes on all computers that use the Windows Operating System. Internet Explorer is called an Internet browser since it is the software that allows you to view Web pages and surf the Internet. In fact, at least 80% of you reading this Web page right now are using Internet Explorer. You don't, however, have to use Internet Explorer. There are several other Internet browsers available.

Due to recent critical security glitches in Internet Explorer, other browsers are looking more attractive. Also, while Internet Explorer has stagnated over the past several years, several other Internet browsers have overtaken it with useful new features and advanced functionality. Features like a tabbed interface that lets you quickly move from page to page and voice-activated menu systems have put alternative browsers like Firefox and Opera ahead of Internet Explorer.

Using an alterative browser is easy. You simply download the browser from the Web site of the manufacturer and install it on your computer. Firefox, Opera, and Chrome are all alternative browsers that are free downloads. Just follow the Web site instructions to download and install the new browser. During installation the program will see Internet Explorer and will ask you if you want to transfer your Favorites and other information from Internet Explorer to the new program. Most alternative browsers will help you make the switch from Internet Explorer to their browser program. When you install Opera, Netscape, or Firefox you will be given the option importing your Internet information. Opera can import bookmarks and favorites. Firefox allows you to import options, bookmarks, history, passwords, cookies, and other data from Internet Explorer. This works for many different browsers. Fox example, if you switch from Internet Explorer to Netscape and decide that you would then like to switch to Opera, you can move your information from Internet Explorer to Netscape and then to Opera by simply following the instructions given during installation.

To use a different Internet browser, you don't have to uninstall Internet Explorer. In fact, it is best to leave Internet Explorer on your hard drive. Not only is Internet Explorer difficult to uninstall: you may need to use it in the future. Internet Explorer is the only browser that you can use to access the Windows Update Web site. Also, since it is the most popular Web browser, many Web sites are optimized for Internet Explorer. If you use an alternative Web browser, in your surfing you may find an occasional Web site that does not work properly in the browser that you have chosen. If that is the case, you can simply switch to Internet Explorer to access that Web site and switch back to your alternative browser for your main surfing. You see, there is no problem with using several different browsers. In fact, you can actually use two or three different browsers at the same time with no interference.

(Continued from page 9)

(etc.) the icon. So if you've forgotten how to do it, you'll need a copy of this article handy to remind you.

Remember, you will learn by experimenting and exploring - so don't be afraid to do so.

If you find this material useful, you may want to download this article in PDF format, from our web site www.brcs.or. This allows readers to keep the material either as a PDF file, and/or print it out, and place it in a loose leaf notebook for future reference.

When you start using your new browser you will be asked if you want to set the new software as your default Web browser. Whatever browser is set as your default browser will be the browser that will appear when you click on a link in an e-mail or other document. If you want to use your new browser all the time, you will want to set it as the default. If you say no to setting the new program as your default, the program will continue to ask you this question every time you start it. Look for a notice with a check box in front of it to tell the program that you don't want to see that question again. For instance in Opera you will click to put a checkmark into the box in front of "Do not show this dialog again." In Firefox click to remove the checkmark in the box that says "Always perform this check when starting Firefox." Then the program will not ask that question again.

If you decide that you don't want to continue to use the new browser, you can switch back to Internet Explorer at any time. Any new favorites or cookies that you have added to the new browser can be transferred back to Internet Explorer by using the export and import settings in the two browsers. You simply export the information from the program you are using and import it into to the program you want to use. Click on File, and choose Import/Export to use these functions. Most browsers have Wizards that will help you through the entire process. Some programs like Firefox make it easy to import information, but make it more difficult to export information. If a Wizard is not available you can use the programs Help menu for detailed instructions.

If you are used to using Internet Explorer, downloading and using a different Web browser is a big step. Although most alternative browsers are similar to Internet Explorer, you will need to invest some time into learning the new interface. Some features may not be obvious. For instance the tabbed browsing in Firefox is not instantly noticeable. So be sure to read the help files and information on the product's Web site to get the full gist of what features are available.

There Is More to Music Than the iPod®

By Mike Morris, Editor, Front Range PC Users Group, CO http://www.frpcug.org twriterext (at) gmail.com

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

There is more to music—and more to life—than the iPod. I think I can prove that statement with the words that follow. Please don't misunderstand me. I admire the iPod as a successful product—a success technically and financially—even though I don't have one. However . . . .

I need to start my "proof" by saying that in previous articles that I have written for this newsletter, I made a claim to being an Old Analog Guy (as a reminder, the acronym = OAG and is pronounced "ogre"). It is with that persona that I bring this subject to your attention.

I just completed a catalog of nearly 300 old LP's that belonged to a family member who died last year. And when I say old, I mean some of those LP's have release dates more than 50 years old. Some of the recordings are much older than that. There are many memorable, and even historic, performances recorded on those albums.

A small part of that music has been re-released on CDs. But there is much of that music—almost all Jazz—that you will not currently find in any digital format. So put down your iPod (or one of its imitators) and please listen to what I have to say.

I decided to create a database for this catalog using Microsoft Access®. One significant issue, as you might expect, is just how much information to include in the database. This database is for family use—not for radio station or other broadcast use. I did, however, want to make a record (no pun intended) of whatever information was necessary to properly document the collection. The most significant decision was related to the track (song) names, sequence and times on each side of each LP. Clearly, if I needed to document that information, both the data entry task and complexity of the database were going to be much higher. If the average number of tracks per side is 4 (it is probably higher), and I wanted to include all that information, then I

(Continued from page 11)

was faced with a data entry task of 4 x 2 x 300 = 2400 entries (plus all the other information I wanted to include).

"No big deal" you say—there are many much much larger databases in the world. You are correct. But remember, I am an OAG (please correctly pronounce that acronym). Therefore I was looking for an "easy" way to complete this task. Credit is due to Ken Campbell of radio station KRFC (more on that in a moment), a local public radio station, for a solution. Ken told me about an online music database called allmusic.com (http://www.allmusic.co) (yes, it is spelled with all lower case letters). It turns out there are many online music databases (a Google® search turned up more than 68,000, using the phrase "online music database"). The allmusic.com database was the best for my catalog project for the following reasons:

1) A successful search for an artist will provide an Overview, a Biography, a Discography (a list of all albums by the artist known to the database, with title, date and label), Songs, Credits, and Charts and Awards.

2) From the discography, one can click on an album and get information (usually) on the album tracks (including times), composer(s), recording date(s), release date, label, format (LP or CD), the label's catalog number, and, for some albums, a review of the album.

3) The search options include artist/group, album, song, classical work.

4) There is substantially more information about the Jazz genre that just a list of names and dates. For example, on the Jazz "home page," there are a number of "Related Essays" on Jazz, including "A Brief History of Jazz."

For a project such as the cataloging of an existing music collection, with LP's that are up to 50 years old, this database is the best choice by far of all of the databases examined or considered. It is the equivalent of an encyclopedia, and the functionality makes searching easy, with related data presented on a single page. The ability to link from a list of albums (discography) to a single album (or CD reissue) provides very efficient searching for a project of this type. That is not to say that it is error free. There are albums not included in the database—the web site makes no claim that it contains every album ever released. There are also tracks missing from some albums (or the track order in the database doesn't match the order on the disk). An album may be in the database, but not in the artist's discography. And, there are numerous problems with release and recording dates. Still, the "pros" far outweigh the "cons."

There is a feature offered by this web site that is unique. Each page (any of the choices listed in item 1 above) has a "Corrections to this entry?" option, allowing the user to submit corrections. Those corrections are then researched for confirmation (if the web site statement is correct) before they are added to the database. That feature was used extensively during the research for this music cataloging project—although not every error or missing item was submitted.

For my project, the search by artist was the most effective. If an album was not listed in the artist's discography, a search by album was the alternate choice. Although the database has many very early jazz albums, there were a few albums in the collection, both old and new—or at least "newer"—by well-known artists that were missing from the allmusic database. So, although not perfect, the allmusic database is an excellent research tool, and you don't need the iTunes media player (or any other media player) to use it.

The database is not limited to research, however. You can listen to short sound bytes from some tracks, and there are links that allow you to buy selected tracks or albums (correction – CDs).

OK, so your iPod and the iTunes media player are great for listening to (and buying) current and even "relatively" old music. But the iTunes media player is not going to help you—to same extent as the allmusic database will—find classic old Jazz perform-

ances (and perhaps classic performances from other genres). And, you must have the iTunes media player installed on your computer before you can do any searching with it.

You may be wondering why I am talking about online databases and why I consider a good online database important to my "proof." Yes, there is a relationship. But before I offer the conclusion, I have several comments on other databases.

Another online database used rarely was Gracenote®, a wholly owned subsidiary of Sony Corporation of America. Gracenote is used "…for digital media recognition of CDs, digital music files, and streaming audio. With the most comprehensive database of music information in the world, the Gracenote Media Database contains information for more than 80 million tracks and 6 million CDs…." This database is normally linked to media players, such as Winamp©, to automatically identify music on a CD or from a download. It provides album title (and, in some cases, an image of the album cover), and track names—if you connect through a media player (or other audio/video equipment with the enabling software installed that is connected to the internet).

If you connect to Gracenote directly from a browser (http://www.gracenote.com), the search options are artists, albums, tracks. A successful search on an artist returns a list of albums (a lot less than the allmusic database) released by that artist that are known to the database. It is important to note that the quantity information in the Gracenote advertisement makes an explicit reference to CDs. The album information is similar to that in the allmusic database, except that there are no track times. There are, however, links to the lyrics of some tracks—for those songs that have them. Also the "Buy" buttons are much more prevalent, and much more obvious in the Gracenote database, compared to the allmusic database.

Another online database examined briefly was Rhapsody®, http://www.rhapsody.com/home.htm, a service provided by RealNetworks.com, better known for its Real® media player. The company claims to provide "Technology and services that help people enjoy digital entertainment whenever and wherever they want."

Connect to the Rhapsody website and the first thing you will notice are the annoying animated ads. Get beyond that and the search options are artist, keyword, track, album, composer, video, lyrics, and playlist. If a search for an album is successful, you can, for most albums, get track information by clicking on the album image—but that track information (no times) is very probably going to be from a more current CD release, not from the original LP, depending on how old that original LP is and how popular the album was. However, there is nowhere near the same level of information available from this database, compared to the allmusic database. The Rhapsody database is organized for listening to (or buying) music that is already known to the user, either by song name or by artist (in my opinion). It is not an effective research tool for finding information on old LP's.

It is not necessary to have the Real player installed in order to search the Rhapsody database.

Now listen up everyone! Here is my reason for talking about music databases:

There is some great old music out there! In all genres. Please don't get so comfortable with your iPod that you ignore that music. Especially when you have a resource such as the allmusic online database to help you identify it, catalog it, find reviews on it and find some history of it.

I suspect that many of you reading this article (I hope there are many readers) have some of that "great old music" sitting on your shelves or in your cabinets. Or perhaps stored away somewhere. If so, "unstore" it. You will, I am certain, enjoy that music, especially with the added information available from the allmusic database.

And <u>that</u> is what I mean when I say "There Is More to Music than the iPod."

Here is the additional information I promised on radio station KRFC:

Front Range PC Users Group (FRPCUG) has a partnership with KRFC, 88.9 FM in Fort Collins, CO. KRFC provides "Community powered music, news and entertainment." For more information, connect to http://krfcfm.org. FRPCUG provides computer maintenance help to KRFC, and, in return, KRFC helps expand the knowledge of FRPCUG activities within the local community. An internet audio stream is available from the KRFC web site.

(Continued from page 1)

Mark's solution for the DTV conversion was to invest about $750 in a new TV antenna, mast and rotor, professionally installed. He noted that the cost was probably less than a year's hit for monthly service from a "cable TV" provider. He's now enjoying great DTV reception from stations located both in the Washington and Baltimore areas, as well as more remotely in Maryland and Virginia. Right On, Mark—Free TV Lives!

FiOS to TiVo

Since subscribing to Verizon's FiOS service in March of 2008, I'd left my TiVo digital video recorder hooked up to my "over the air" antenna system. This allowed me to record shows 'off the air' while we were watching or recording something from the hundreds of available channels on FiOS, using the combination set top box and DVR provided with the FiOS service. As the DTV conversion loomed in June, I decided it was time to hook the TiVo to FiOS, and enjoy the selection of channels available, as well as the superb picture quality from the FiOS fiber system.

In the December/January '09 'Keeping Up' column, I discussed the FiOS digital adapters, a low end set top box for the FiOS service, offering all the channels except VOD (video on demand) and the fancy, interactive program guide available on the higher end (and more costly) boxes. I ran another FiOS connected coax behind my TV, hooked up the digital adapter, and the IR (Infrared) control cable to the TV. The IR control cable terminates in two IR LED emitters on the end of plastic stalks. These are positioned in front of the IR receiver window on the digital adapter. The TiVo sends appropriate signals to the IR emitters to change the channel on the adapter for the program the TiVo wants to record—ugly, but it works!

Setting up the TiVo to find the correct codes for the FiOS digital adapter, and downloading all the new program guide information for the multitude of newly available channels was a lengthy, almost two hour session, but easy thanks to TiVo's reasonably clear, menu driven process. Much of the time is just waiting for the scanning and updating to be completed—catch up on user group newsletter articles while process continues! One last thing awaits—My model TiVo only connects to the Internet thru a USB port, and is very fussy about the USB to RJ45 networking cable adapter that it will work with. I bought one that didn't work—rejected out of hand by my TiVo. Our tech guru, Roger F. thinks he has a source for one that will—fingers crossed! This will allow me to share TV programs across my home network, and allow the TiVo to download program guide information from the net, rather than tying up the telephone line for its "phone home" sessions.

Washington Area Computer User Group

WACUG Meeting will be held August 15, 12:30 to 3:30 pm at the Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA. and September 19, 12:30 to 3:30 pm at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

Starting with the January 17th, 2009 meeting, WACUG will hold joint meetings with OPCUG [www.olligmu.org/~opcug/]

It is anticipated that all meetings, except June, July, and August, will be held at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute [www.olli.gmu.edu/] at George Mason University, 4210 Roberts Road, Fairfax, VA, known as the Tallwood Campus.

Topics: Aug. 15 — topic TBD
Sept. 19: Convergence: TV, Computers, Images

You do not need to be a member to attend. For more information on WAC meetings and events, call the WAC AnswerLine (voice) at (703) 370-7649.
Also see WAC's Web Site at

http://www.wacug.org/

Washington Area User Group PartnersWorking Together For Our Members

NCTCUG.ORG WACUG.ORG OPCUG

Club Election Notice

The NCTCUG Annual Meeting and election of officers and board members will be at the October meeting — October 7, 2009, 7 p.m. at Carlin Hall.

Anyone interested in running for office, please contact any board member. All officers and four board positions are to be voted on.

Creating User-Friendly Email People Will Be Happy to Read

By Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc. Tiplet (at) gabegold.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you're one of several addressees (listed in To or CC) think carefully before you Reply All. Be sure

(Continued on page 16)

NCTCUG Information

NCTCUG, Inc. 201 S. Kensington St. Arlington VA 22204-1141

Club Information call: 301-577-7899 **Web Site: www.nctcug.org**

Officers and Directors

All officer terms expire 2009

President	Jim Rhodes	703-931-7854
1st VP	Ron Schmidt	301-577-7899
2nd VP	Roger Fujii	703-426-5917
Treasurer	Paul Howard	703-860-9246
Secretary	Bill Walsh	703-241-8141

Director:	term expires	
Mel Mikosinski	2010	703-978-9158
John Keys	2010	703-451-0896
Nick Wenri	2010	703-759-3938
Lorrin Garson	2009	703-938-7907
Sy Fishbein	2009	703-536-5894
Dean Mires	2009	301-931-2400

Article Submissions

Articles, helpful hints, and other items of interest to readers of the NCTCUG Journal are always welcome and will be published as soon as possible after submission. Priority is given to members' contributions. Articles may be submitted in MS Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) or plain unformatted text (C/R only at end of paragraphs, no indents preferred) via email to the editor nctcugbj@verizon.net

Membership Policy

The National Capital Technology and Computer Users Group, Inc. is a non-profit [501(c)(3)] organization founded in 1978 to educate users of all Tandy computers and MS-DOS compatible computers. Membership dues are $25.00 (U.S.Funds) per year, with a $5 surcharge for international mail. Membership in NCTCUG includes membership in all SIGs, access to the BBS and software libraries, and subscription to the Journal published 8 times per year. Applications may be obtained at any club meeting, by downloading from the BBS, by calling one of the officers or board members, or by writing to the club. A sample newsletter, membership application and related information may be obtained by enclosing $1 and mailing your request to Jim Rhodes, 201 S. Kensington Street, Arlington VA 22204.

Advertisement Policy

Members' advertisements: Ads are accepted from members for non-commercial purposes at no charge. Copy should be sent to the Editor in the same format as article submissions. Commercial Advertisements: Ads are accepted from commercial advertisers at the rate of $40 per full page, per appearance, with discounts for multiple insertions. Smaller ads are priced accordingly. Payment for ads must be made in advance of appearance. Advertisers must supply a permanent address and telephone number to the editor.

Reprint Policy

Newsletter Staff

Editor
Blair Jones 202-362-7344
nctcugbj@verizon.net
Exchange Newsletter Editor
Ron Schmidt 301-577-7899

COMPUCENTER BBS

Is no longer in operation. It has been replaced by the 'compucenter' mailing list at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/compucenter/

If you are moving

Please send your change of address to the club address as soon as possible to avoid missing issues.

Thank You!

(Continued from page 15)

that everyone needs to see your reply before sending it. ALWAYS double check To and CC lists before clicking Send.

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

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

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

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

For more tips, Google email etiquette: http://www.google.com/search?q=email+etiquett

A top hit http://www.emailreplies.com/mailreplies.co gives 32 concise rules for sending effective email replies.

August/September 2009

1st Wed. (6/3, 7/1)
7 p.m. General Meeting

4th Wed (6/24, 7/22)
7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (7/20, none in June)
7 p.m. Board of Directors

All meetings are at **Carlin Hall**, 5711 S. 4th St., Arlington VA: East off of Carlin Springs Rd, just south of Arlington Blvd/Route 50.

NCTCUG, Inc.
201 S. Kensington St.
Arlington VA 22204-1141

First Class