



SoftTalk

The Official Newsletter of the Roanoke Valley Personal Computer Club

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Serving the Roanoke Valley

May 2010

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Help your newsletter

You are invited to share favorite websites, reviews of software or just general computer experiences. Send your article or notes to editor@rvpcc.org.



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Next Meeting
Saturday, May 8, 2010
9:15 a.m.
Topics:
Internet Video Broadcasting
In 3D
by
Don Thorne

Is the Floppy finally dead?

Does anyone still use floppies? Once a standard feature on computers, we were happy when the floppy shrank from 5.25-inch to 3.5-inch and later amazed when the capacity soared to 1.44 MB. In a few years, however, new software required many floppies for installation.

For a while, Sony used the floppy as the memory media for digital cameras. Now we'd be lucky to fit a single image on a floppy. In today's cameras, a tiny 2 GB flash card holds as much data as 1,388 floppies – that's a stack of floppies 12 feet tall!

Recently Sony announced that it would stop making the 3.5-inch floppy disk because of lack of demand. The only surprise here is that it took so long. Now the floppy joins the cassette tape and the 8-track in fondly remembered obscurity. RIP, floppy friend.

But is the floppy really dead? It may be fading, but it won't really be dead until the big boxes like Wal-Mart, Staples, Office Max, and Best Buy no longer offer them. A quick on-line survey showed that both the disks and their drives are still readily available.

Although Sony announced that they would pull the plug, they will keep the production lines running until March 2011, giving us a chance to stockpile floppies.

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PREZ' NOTES

April 29, 2010

Members, and prospective members



This month's Prez' Notes are an attempt at being useful. On the specific level, consider item (1) below. It can be a helpful tip. At the general level, consider each of the plausible "axioms" of IT usage at item (2). (Following these is a single tip which will help unveil the "true facts.")

(1) To prepare for the transition to Windows 7, you must know the capability of your video card. This can be stickiest issue. Other particulars of Windows 7 requirements are visible from the Control Panel "Systems Info" option, but not your graphics specs. Here's how to find them: Click on START -->RUN in the Taskbar. Enter 'dxdiag' in the command window. (This works if you have DirectX installed.) Hit OK (or Yes), and then go to Display. All of your video card specs will be shown; the kind of card is under Name or Chip Type. Other system specs are also available.

(2) Here's a quiz with a point. Several possible "axioms" of IT wisdom follow. Are they true? Some not so much. What do you think? Knowing the reality on each of these points will stand you in good stead.

- (a)- Once Google "gets wind" of your web page, they've got it forever.
- (b)- Don't leave your plasma TV on pause, or you'll burn the image into the screen.
- (c)- X-rays from TSA will wipe your camera's memory cards.
- (d)- A cell phone by the ear brings cancer within the year.
- (e)- Malware attacks never infect MACs.
- (f)- Combo ink jet cartridges waste more, and so cost more than single color cartridges.
- (g)- When a PC has been hacked, its obvious to the casual observer.
- (h)- By downloading files from a peer-to-peer network, you always tell the MPAA and the RIAA who you are.

(i)- You void your printer warranty when you use third party ink in it.

(j)- Phishing attacks cannot happen if you type web page addresses directly into your browser.

(k)- Disposable batteries actually do cost more than the rechargeable ones.

(l)- Broadband access via 3G cell modems is really "unlimited."

(m)- Partitions and regular defragging are essential to getting the best performance from a large hard drive.

(n)- If you use a high speed flash card in your digital camera, you'll be able to take pictures faster.

At this link are the facts, somewhat scrambled, to the plausible notions above:

http://www.pcworld.com/article/131763/15_tech_myths_busted_and_confirmed.html

John

Meeting space provided by
Roanoke County Schools

Popular Science On-Line

by Earl Abbott

Popular Science magazine, March 2010, page 4, has this paragraph:

The Complete PopSci Archive With our friends at Google, we've scanned all 138 years of Popular Science and made it available to you, for free. Get ready to lose an afternoon {or several} at www.popsci.com/archives

The March issue has an article on military drone aircraft at www.popsci.com/droneguide, an article on American Health Care at www.popsci.com/healthtech, and other articles. Looks like a good places to browse on a rainy afternoon.

Secretary's Report

April 10th, 2010

President John Leary opened the meeting at 9:18 A.M. He stated that he will be reviewing the RVPCC Bylaws and make report at May meeting.

Sandy Johnson said that she sent a sympathy card in behalf of RVPCC to Tim Johnson regarding the loss of his mother-in-law. A card was also sent to the family of Betty Aliff, a member who recently died.

Earl Abbott gave the Treasurer's Report in the absence of Helen Trenor.

Bill Farmer won the right to the first door prize by finding the winning article in the April SoftTalk. The other prizes were won by Bill Scott, Mike Scott, Kay Viskup, and Earl Abbott.

Kay Viskup, secretary, reported that the February 2009 minutes were published in the newsletter. No comments and/or changes made.

Roanoke County Schools: Howard Duff was not in attendance.

Public Relations: Andy McLaughlin was not in attendance.

PROGRAM:

Bill Scott presented the various topics and tips of The "God Mode" in Windows 7. He was assisted by his son, Mike, who clarified a lot of questions and phases of Windows 7.

A question and answer session was held afterwards.

Program for May meeting will be given by Andy McLaughlin . The topic will be announced in the May SoftTalk.

Meeting adjourned by John Leary at 11:35 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Kay Viskup, Secretary

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Windows 7 Accessory Programs

Windows 7 comes with some free programs. The bad news is that there are fewer than in XP or Vista. The good news is that most of the missing programs are available free from Microsoft.

First, what's included with 7: You'll find an improved music player and a DVD burner that will create DVDs that can be played back on a DVD player. There is an upgraded WordPad, but it still doesn't have a spell checker. Also included is a much improved on-screen calculator. Media Center, absent from most versions of Vista, is now in 7 Home Premium and above.

Next, what's missing (or "unbundled"): Windows Mail (the e-mail program), Windows PhotoGallery (the photo editor), Windows Movie maker, and Windows Calendar.

Replacements for most of these missing programs can be downloaded free from www.download.live.com. Here you'll find, among others:

Mail, for e-mail

Writer, for blogging

Message, for instant messaging

Photo Gallery, to straighten, crop, adjust color/contrast, remove red-eye, and share your pictures.

Movie maker, to convert your videos to DVDs. However, one reviewer says that 7's "new stripped-down version works best for creating short videos."

Of course, non-Microsoft programs are also available. For example, Mozilla (the Firefox browser publisher) offers "Thunderbird" as a replacement for Outlook Express, and "Sunbird" as a calendar program.

For a list and discussion of suggested add-ons for Windows 7, go to

<http://www.komando.com/tips/index.aspx?id=7660>.

Templates from HP

Go to www.hp.com/go/ideahouse for templates for a wide variety of printing project. Most are free. The list includes cards, stationery, calendars, gift tags, posters, and announcements.

Programming for Kids

Back in the early days of computers most users knew BASIC. Over the years, the use of BASIC and other programming languages decreased and programming languages were no longer included with a new computer.

In his article “Why Johnny Can’t Code,” David Brin states that in the early days, the kids who got introduced to programming by using BASIC became the professional programmers of today. But with the lack of a programming language on today’s computers, kids no longer get that introduction, and the number of developing programmers is decreasing.

Starting kids off with an “adult” programming language might be a mistake. Better to start them with a language designed for kids. Kim Kommando has recommended three languages. Clicking the links below will take you to her site for more information.

[Alice](#) – creates 3D, interactive animations. The drag-and-drop controls make it easy to experiment.

[Scratch](#) – is focused on interesting children in programming. The program helps them to make

games, applications and animations. They can share games at the Scratch site.

[Kodu Game Lab](#) - creates games for the Xbox 360. A trial version is free; the full version is \$5.

Google can overload you with information on the subject. Just google “kids programming (without the quotes) for a long list of references. Among them are

- “Teaching Your Kids How to Write Computer Programs” at <http://www.marshallbrain.com/kids-programming.htm>, and
- ”Teaching Kids Programming” at <http://baheyeldin.com/technology/teaching-kids-programming.html>.

Additional reading:

▪For an article on the decline of programming, read [Why Johnny can't code](#), written in 2006 by the author David Brin, at <http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2006/09/14/basic/>

▪For a rebuttal to Brin’s article, go to <http://lists.canonical.org/pipermail/kragen-tol/2006-October/000833.html>.

Note: If the links for Brin’s article and the rebuttal articles don’t work, google “why Johnny can’t code”

RVPC Meetings

When: 2nd Saturday of every month

Where: Arnold R. Burton
Tech Center
Room 105
1760 Roanoke Blvd.
Salem, VA 24153

What time: 9:15 am until noon

A Less-Complicated Word Processor

Word processors such as Microsoft’s Word are sometimes too powerful. For less complication, you could use the barebones word processor Notepad that comes with Windows. But Notepad is the extreme opposite of Word – few features and no spell checker.

If you are looking for a compromise, try Notepad++ available free at <http://notepad-plus.sourceforge.net/uk/site.htm>. Many features, but not too many. And, there is a spell checker. Notepad++ runs on Windows XP, Vista, and 7.

If you enjoy coding, Notepad++ supports many programming languages such as HTML, C++, and Java.

Reimbursement for McAfee's Error

A flawed McAfee antivirus update issued on 4/21 crippled a large number of Windows XP computers running SP3.

The update mistakenly identified a Windows system file as a virus. The antivirus program quarantined the system file "svchost.exe" causing Windows to become unstable. The symptoms are constant restarts, or a missing taskbar, or lost Internet connectivity.

McAfee has apologized for the faulty antivirus update and promised to pay for repairs. The reimbursement is aimed at individual consumers. A similar program has not been extended to business customers.

<http://us.mcafee.com/en-us/landingpages/np5959.asp?cid=77220> included the following message: "For impacted home or home office customers who have incurred costs to repair PCs as a result of the security update issue, McAfee will reimburse reasonable expenses, such as a visit to a local tech support specialist. Details of this program, including steps to submit a reimbursement request, will be posted on the McAfee Web site within a few days, so please check back. Additionally, because we value our loyal customers, home or home office users who's PCs were rendered inoperable or severely impaired as a result of the security update will receive a free two-year extension of their current McAfee subscription product **at no charge**. This extension will appear in the "My Account" section of the McAfee Web site within the next 30 days."

McAfee users should go to the McAfee site for repair instructions. McAfee also recommends a manual update even if your computer appears to be OK. Instructions are at <http://service.mcafee.com/FAQDocument.aspx?id=TS100969>.

The bottom line: if you have paid for PC service because of the faulty McAfee update, you may be reimbursed. Watch McAfee's web site for more information.

McAfee isn't the first anti-virus provider to take a hit to the wallet. Trend Micro spent more than \$8

million in 2005 for a similar error. In 2007, Symantec gave free backup software and extended Norton anti-Virus licenses by a year when a buggy update knocked out Chinese computers.

Computer World and InfoWorld have been following this story. Read more about this by searching for "mcafee" at <http://www.computerworld.com> and <http://www.infoworld.com>.

What's New in Hardware?



Jen Bauer sketching on her new Bamboo tablet

Our granddaughter, Jen, had a grand time showing us her new Bamboo FUN Pen & Tablet by Wacom.

The tablet plugs into a USB port. The drawing pen is lightweight, cordless, and battery-free. The heavier the pen pressure on the tablet, the wider the line is drawn. Turned over, the pen operates like an eraser. The tablet and pen system can be used to navigate the screen the same way as you would use a mouse (which is useful for people who cannot easily operate a mouse), as a drawing tablet, or as a way to edit and change photos.

Adobe PhotoShop Elements 7 and Corel Painter Essentials 4 are included with the \$200 tablet.

Getting started is easy. Just plug it in and start drawing. Or you can download a photograph and start making corrections.

Sandy Johnson _____



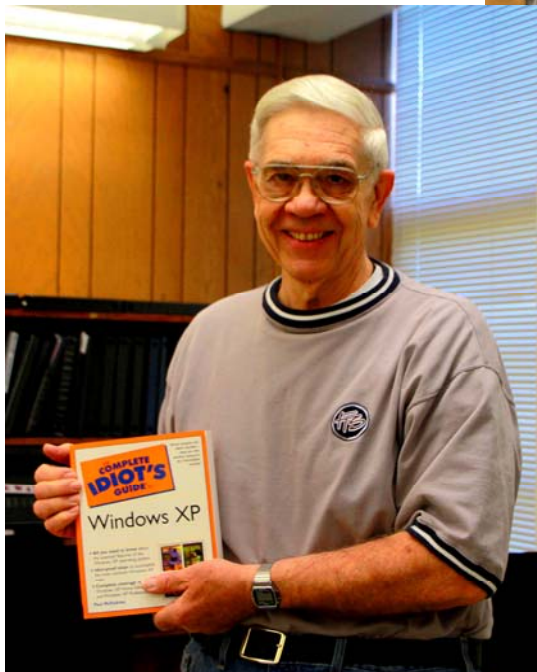
April's Door Prize Winners



Bill Scott & John Leary



Kay Viskup



Earl Abbott



Mike Scott (Bill's son)