

Useful Bits & Pieces

by Lorrin R. Garson

Columnist, Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society

Comparison of Online Backup Services

Interested in backing up your computers and other digital devices to the cloud? See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_online_backup_services for a comparison of 50+ sources that offer such services. There are pros and cons to cloud backup vs. local storage on external disk drives, NAS drives or servers. Pros: (a) better protection against disasters, (b) free for small amounts of data, (c) easy data transfer across multiple devices, and (d) numerous good tools for unattended backup. Cons: (a) glacial file transfer speed; a full restore can take days, (b) potential invasion of privacy, (c) expensive for substantial amounts of data, (d) risk of the provider going out of business and loss of your data. A conservative approach to cloud backup would be for relatively small amounts of non-critical, not sensitive data.

Cloud Storage on Your Desktop

You can have your very own cloud storage in your house and have access anywhere via the Internet. Consider the Western Digital My Cloud. This is an NAS (Network Attached Storage) device (see

<http://www.wdc.com/en/products/products.aspx?id=1140>). This device provides (a) backup for your computer(s), (b) access to data for all the computers on your LAN, (c) good performance, and (d) remote access to PCs, Macs, tablets and smartphones using Western Digital's free apps.

For competing products see D-Link's "ShareCenter Cloud Storage 2000" at <http://www.dlink-cloud.com/solutions.aspx#>, and Seagate's "Seagate Central" at <http://www.seagate.com/solutions/cloud/consumer-cloud/products/>.

The downside to this approach? If your house burns down, thieves steal your computer(s) and the cloud device, or if your computer(s) and cloud storage fail at the same time... your data are gone! In this respect having Cloud storage "out there somewhere" is more secure, but remote Cloud storage has other limitations.

DDR4 Memory Is Coming

DDR3 is the most common memory used currently in most home computers. DDR4 memory should start appearing in servers in early 2014 and in laptops and desktops in 2015. So what? Compared to DDR3 memory, DDR4 should provide a 35% power savings resulting in longer battery life for laptops and tablets and cooler running desktop computers. Also DDR4

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clock speed will top out at 3200MHz as compared to 2400MHz for DDR3 resulting in faster processing speed. The downside is DDR4 is expected to initially cost about 30% more than DDR3 memory.

A Single Store for Microsoft Apps

Supposedly Microsoft is going to create a single apps store for its phone, PCs, and tablets. When this is to occur is uncertain. This move is consistent with Microsoft's move toward a single operating system. A single app store should make things easier for customers.

BlackBerry in Steep Decline

In September last year BlackBerry announced that it had lost nearly \$1 billion and had laid off 4500 employees, about a third of its staff. By the time you read this BlackBerry may be no more. The table below illustrates the sad story. See <http://investorplace.com/2013/01/a-brief-history-of-research-in-motion/> for a short history of BlackBerry, published in January 2012.

Alternatives to Secunia PSI

Many use Secunia PSI to check and update applications on their Windows computers. This utility is very useful for keeping your software

up-to-date. However, there are numerous alternatives and you may want to use more than one program to be sure your computer's software is current. Here are other possibilities.

See <http://www.filehippo.com/updatechecker> for FileHippo.com's Update Checker. This free utility will scan your computer for installed software, check the versions and then send this information to FileHippo.com to see if there are newer releases.

See http://download.cnet.com/CNET-TechTracker/3000-18513_4-10912909.html for CNET TechTracker. This utility is also free.

See <http://www.kcsoftwares.com/index.php?sumo> for SUMo (Software Update Monitor).

For you Mac OS X users, see <http://metaquark.de/appfresh/mac> for AppFresh. Free or \$14.99.

See <https://www.macupdate.com/desktop/> for another Mac-based software checker. Price \$20.

For Linux users, see <http://www.nongnu.org/synaptic/> for Synaptic. Of course, it's free.

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Smartphone OS Shipments Q1 2013

(Units in Millions)					
	1Q 2013	1Q 2013	1Q 2012	1Q 2012	Year-over-
	Shipment	Market	Shipment	Market	Year
Operating System	Volume	Share	Volume	Share	Change
Android	162.1	75.0%	90.3	59.10%	79.5%
iOS	37.4	17.3%	35.1	23%	6.6%
Windows Phone	7.0	3.2%	3.0	2.0%	133.3%
BlackBerry OS	6.3	2.9%	9.7	6.4%	-35.1%
Linux	2.1	1.0%	3.6	2.4%	-41.7%
Symbian	1.2	0.6%	10.4	6.8%	-88.5%
Others	0.1	0.0%	0.6	0.4%	-83.3%
Total	216.2	100%	152.7	100%	41.6%
Source: IDC					

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World's Roundest Object and the Kilogram

Here's a bit of esoteric and amusing trivia for you, but nevertheless very important. The kilogram (kg) is currently defined as the weight of a chunk of platinum-iridium stored in a vault in Paris, France. The kilogram is the only one of seven base units in the metric system (or more precisely the International System of Units, abbreviated SI units) that is defined in terms of a physical object. That's about to change. The kilogram is almost certainly going to be defined in terms of Planck's constant¹, which is an unchanging physical constant. So what, you say, we Americans (along with Liberia and Myanmar) are the only three countries that ignore that pesky metric system. We proudly use the pound as a unit of weight. Not so fast! The pound is legally defined as 0.45359237 kilograms. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ZMByI4s-D-Y for a video on the world's roundest object, that explains the relationship of Planck's constant¹ to weight (mass for you purists), and why a 1-kg sphere of pure silicon-28 was created. Even if you find all this jejune, you may find the video captivating. For you unrepentant geeks, check out http://www.bipm.org/utis/common/pdf/si_brochure_draft_ch2.pdf.

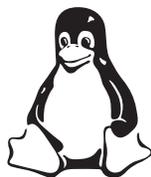


Linux and Open Source News

Marble

by Cal Esneault

Vice President, leader of many Open Source Workshops & SIGS, Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA
December 2012 issue, www.clickers.org
<http://cccclinuxsig.pbwiki.com>
ccnewsletter (at)cox.net



Marble is free educational software from KDE that gives a virtual atlas to help students, educators, or anyone interested in geography.

The most feature-rich version is provided for computers running a KDE 4.x operating system, but satisfactory versions are available for other Linux systems (QT version), Windows OS, or MAC OS. I downloaded it on my Ubuntu 12.04 system directly from the Ubuntu Software Center.

The basic map view (see below) allows you to show the earth as a globe or with Mercator or flat view projections. Simple mouse movements let you quickly change to different locations and to zoom magnification as required.



There are several different types of map views for any selected region: atlas style, OpenStreetMap view, plain map, view at night showing artificial lighting intensity, satellite views, historical map views, temperature contours (July/December averages), and precipitation contours (again for July and December). There is also a feature to determine distance between locations. At right I measured the distance between Houston and Denver (1,422 miles).



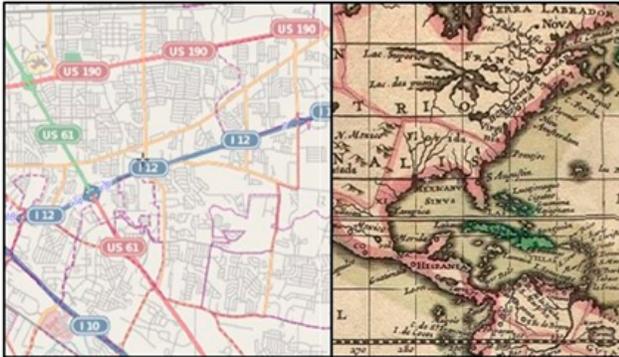
On most views you can modify the type of detail shown (for example, places of interest, political

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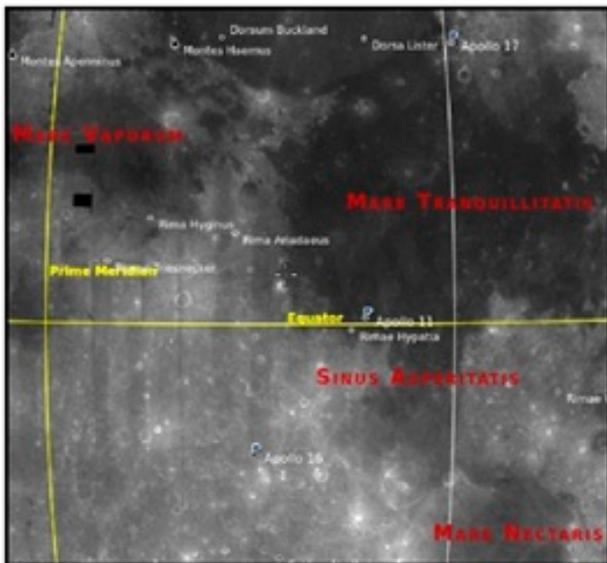
¹Planck's constant is the ratio of the energy of a quantum of radiation to the frequency of the radiation and has a value of $6.62606957 \times 10^{-34}$ joule-second (see <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/462917/Plancks-constant>). Aren't you glad you asked (yawn)? See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planck_constant for details.

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boundaries, bodies of water). Below are examples of other views. On the left is a street map of Baton Rouge, and on the right is a historical map of North America circa 1689.



There was also a map view of our moon. Besides being able to “see” the dark side, you can also see where Apollo landings have been made. In the full KDE version, views of Mars and Venus are also available.



Marble may not rival Google Earth currently, but it is an important effort by the open-source community to provide simple and effective solutions that are not encumbered by DRM or other legal roadblocks. The interface is very easy to learn and is ideally suited for younger users. There is an export function that lets you copy the selected images for use with other software or for use in class assignments. Bottom line, it's fun to use and is a modern substitute for the traditional bulky atlas on the bookshelf.

Go to <http://marble.kde.org/> to get a free download and learn more about the Marble project. Other open-source software of interest in this area would be Stellarium (celestial maps) and OpenStreetMap (worldwide geographic data and mapping).

Featured Open Source Software of the Month: January 2014

by Geof Goodrum
linux(at)patacs.org

The software described below can be downloaded at the links provided or copied onto a USB flash drive at the PATACS Fairfax meeting. However, please check the online package management tool included with your GNU/Linux distribution first, as installation is often just a click away.

BallroomDJ – v1.13. <http://ballroomdj.org/>. Free zlib/libpng license Tcl/Tk script for GNU/Linux, Apple Mac OS X, and Microsoft Windows by bll. BallroomDJ is a ballroom music player. It is designed to let the computer choose the music and to be able to play music the entire evening without intervention. It features flexible playlists, music queue management, requests, seeking in songs, speed with pitch control, and an optional audio file organizer. Playlists can have automatic selections based on your choice of dances and how often those dances should play, stops after some number of songs has been played, stops at a particular time, allowing of songs with certain keywords, sequences, and manual selection. Mix all of these in any order and modify them at any time. Requires the VLC media player, Python 2.x, Tcl 8.5+ and Tk.

Blender – v2.69. <http://www.blender.org/>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executables for GNU/Linux, Apple Mac OS X, and Microsoft Windows by The Blender Foundation. Blender is a free 3D animation studio. It includes tools for modeling, sculpting, texturing (painting, node-based shader materials, or UV mapped), UV mapping, rigging and constraints, weight painting, particle systems, simulation (fluids, physics, and soft body dynamics and an external crowd simulator), rendering, node-based compositing, and non linear video editing,

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as well as an integrated game engine for real-time interactive 3D, and game creation and playback with cross-platform compatibility.

Freemat – v4.2. <http://freemat.sourceforge.net/>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executables for Fedora 17 GNU/Linux, Apple Mac OS X, and Microsoft Windows by the Freemat Team. Freemat is an interpreted, matrix-oriented development environment for engineering and scientific applications, similar to the commercial package MATLAB. It provides visualization, image manipulation, and plotting as well as parallel programming.

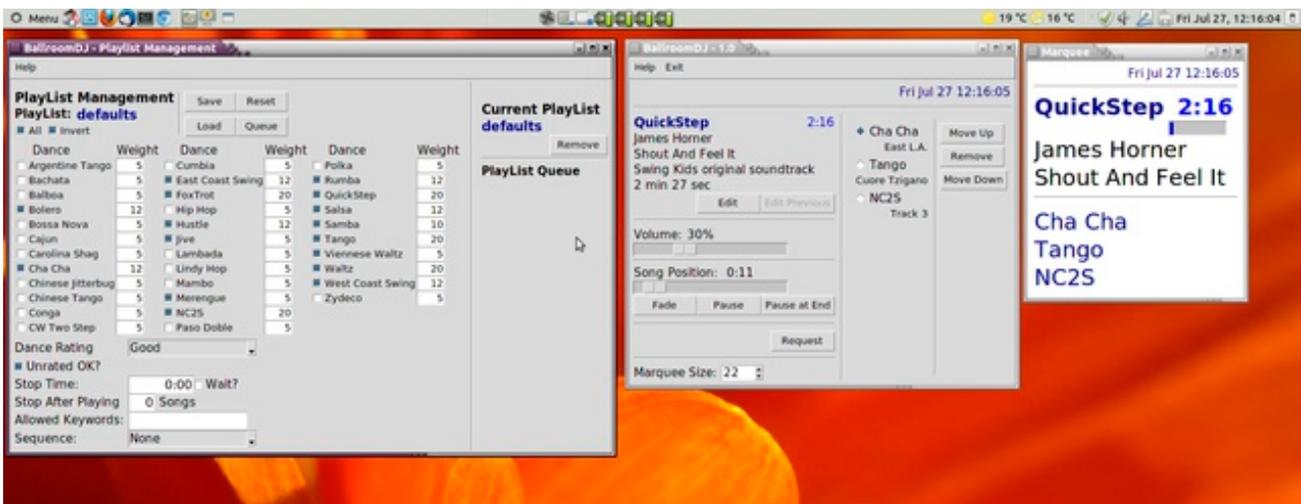
Password Safe – v0.92 BETA (Linux), v3.32 (MS Windows). <http://pwsafe.org/>. Free Artistic License source code and executables for Ubuntu and Debian GNU/Linux and Microsoft Windows by Bruce Schneier and Rony Shapiro. Password Safe allows you to safely and easily create a secured and encrypted user name/password list. With Password Safe all you have to do is create and remember a single “Master Password” of your choice in order to unlock and access your entire user name/password list.

Kernel Source – v3.12.2. <http://www.kernel.org/>. Free GNU General Public License source code for all platforms by the Linux community.



Above: Motion Tracker feature in Blender v2.69 can replace billboards in video footage.

Below: BallroomDJ



Windows 8.1 Update Unveiled

by Rosita Herrick

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August 2013 issue, PC Monitor

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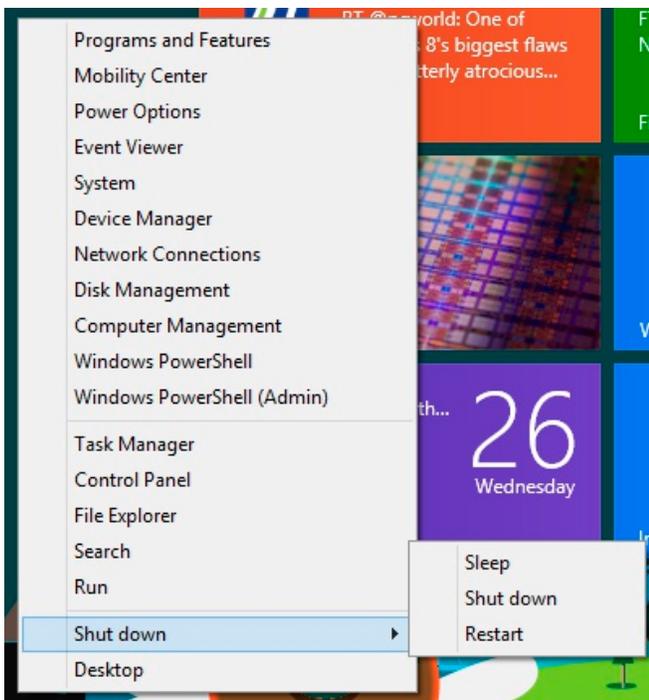
Well, the Web is alive with blogs, videos, and general information about Microsoft's first large update to Windows 8.

Initially called "Blue" and now officially called Windows 8.1, it is a major update with quite a few modifications. The software available now for free download is a "Review" or "Beta" version. It is free to download from the Windows web site. However, unless you like experimenting, have good backups and are willing to possibly restore your old system, I advise to wait until the final version is available.

From what I understand, the final version will be available for free as an update from the Windows Store. You would need a Microsoft ID to download it.

Here are some of the changes:

The "Shut down" option is now available from the Start Screen. Just right click on the lower left corner of the Start Screen. The menu that pops up has the Shutdown command listed toward the end.



There are changes on the Start Screen itself. Two new tile sizes are available. The larger size can be used by the Weather app to show more weather, or smaller sizes can be grouped together. For example: the Microsoft Office's Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Note.

In the screenshot below you can see the new sizes. In the upper right corner are 4 apps grouped together while in the middle is the large weather tile.



Internet Explorer has also been updated. The version downloaded with 8.1 is IE11. And last but not least, the screens can be resized to different sizes, up to four screens instead the only two ways the Windows 8 has.

The Start Button that shows up in lower left corner of the desktop screen just lets you get back to the Start Screen.

I have just successfully installed Windows 8.1 on my lap top as a dual boot so stay tuned for next month's more detailed information and personal experiences.



iPad/iPhone Application - BUMP

Review by Bill Crowe

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July 2013 issue, PC Monitor

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Use Bump™ to share contact information and photos by simply bumping two phones together. Just open Bump; hold your phones, and gently bump your hands together.

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Bump will magically do all the rest.

Bump photos from your phone to your computer! Just go to <http://bu.mp> on your computer web browser.

Use Bump with all your friends! More than 90 million downloads. Bump works cross-platform on iPhone, iPod, iPad, and most other modern mobile phones. It works with PCs and Mac's as well.

Price: Free

For the paid app you get more function, for example you can transfer more pictures at one time.

Pay only ONCE to install this app on your iPhone and iPad (as long as the same iTunes account is used on both devices).

[Ed. The Bump app is also available for Android devices. It does not use nor require Near Field Communications (NFC) or Bluetooth.]



Do Not Fall Prey to the Vicious CryptoLocker Extortion

by Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:

<http://www.dhs.gov/national-cyber-security-awareness-month>

http://www.fbi.gov/news/news_blog/national-cyber-security-awareness-month-2013

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cryptolocker>

<http://blog.emsisoft.com/2013/09/10/cryptolocker-a-new-ransomware-variant/>

<http://www.bleepingcomputer.com/virus-removal/cryptolocker-ransomware-information>

<http://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2013/10/18/cryptolocker-ransomware-see-how-it-works-learn-about-prevention-cleanup-and-recovery/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Key_size

October was the tenth anniversary of National Cyber Security Awareness Month (NCSAM).

According to a statement on the FBI website, "(National Cyber Security Awareness Month) Established by presidential directive in 2004, the initiative—administered by the Department of Homeland Security—raises cyber security awareness across the nation by engaging and educating public and private sector partners through a variety of events and programs. The ultimate goal is to protect the country from cyber incidents and respond to them effectively if they do occur."

Around the country, at K-12 schools, colleges, universities, and private businesses, thousands of seminars and events took place during NCSAM in order to educate computer users at all levels on cyber security. I had the honor and privilege of presenting two citizen awareness sessions for the city of Port Arthur, Texas. I discussed several of the contemporary online threats and how users could effectively protect themselves from those threats. One of the warnings that I repeated several times was to never open email attachments, as they are a common vector used to bypass much of the security software that we (should) have installed on our computers.

Now that the National Cyber Security Awareness Month is behind us, we should not forget the lessons learned about clicking on email attachments. Unlike our New Year's resolutions that many of us make, but quickly forget to implement, cyber security threats are continuing, and in many cases becoming more threatening. One recent example is a new version of an old Russian cybercriminal extortion scam; in the original versions, which took over countless millions of computers worldwide (and still showing up in large numbers), the purloined computer displayed a window after boot that had an official looking logo of the FBI or other law enforcement agency, along with an official looking criminal complaint that child pornography (or other illicit content) was found on the computer. Nothing else could be done on the computer, as it was effectively locked by the "FBI". The computer user was told that if they did not pay the fine, typically \$200, within 24 or 48 hours, he would be subject to arrest, charged

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with a felony, and face 10 years in federal prison, plus a \$10,000 fine. Detailed instructions were provided on where to purchase a specific prepaid debit card, and then entering the cards 16 digit number into the payment box on the warning screen. After payment was received, the 'FBI' would drop the charges and (hopefully) release control of the computer.

The especially nasty new type of ransom ware, also likely from Russia, goes a step further than the other recent ransom ware; the new version contains a version of a vicious piece of malware called "CryptoLocker". Some variants contain a version of the well-know Zeus trojan, which is used to install and run CryptoLocker. Typically spread via an email attachment, often apparently sent from a known acquaintance or company, the attachment appears to contain a ZIP file with a disguised file that looks like an innocent PDF file. I have personally received dozens of these emails, and I will admit that they do look like they are from a legitimate source, but I know not to open email attachments that have any vestige of being suspicious. Once opened, the attachment executes, installing itself in the Documents and Settings folder with a random file name, adding a startup command key to the registry which causes CryptoLocker to load when the computer is booted. CryptoLocker then goes through a series of servers, making it difficult to trace, eventually connecting to a command and control server. This remote server generates a very sophisticated 2048-bit RSA encryption key pair using the public key to encrypt Microsoft Office and Open Document files, as well as some common graphics file formats. CryptoLocker will not just encrypt the computer of the user unfortunate enough to open the email attachment, but can also encrypt those file types on any mapped network drive, including USB drives, network file shares, and even cloud storage folders that are made to appear as a drive letter (like "G:\ " drive), which may effectively shut down a business, school, hospital, or government agency that uses mapped network drives; it only takes one infected computer to possibly compromise the targeted files on an entire network.

Once the files are encrypted using the 2048-bit RSA public encryption key, a warning is displayed on the computer that critical data files have been encrypted, and that the ransom (extortion) payment must be made in a specified time, often 72 or 100 hours, or else private encryption key on the command and control server will be destroyed and "nobody and never [sic] will be able to restore files". The extortion demand is, " ... a payment of either 100 or 300 USD or Euro through an anonymous pre-paid cash voucher (i.e. MoneyPak or Ukash), or 2 Bitcoin in order to decrypt the files." Anecdotaly, some published reports have claimed that some businesses have received cyber extortion demands of \$10,000 or \$20,000 dollars, or equivalent amounts in Euros or Bitcoins (private currency). In order to add a sense of urgency, a countdown timer is displayed indicating the deadline to pay the ransom, or the files will forever become unrecoverable. The 2048-bit encryption keys used by CryptoLocker are considered in the security industry as extremely secure and virtually unbreakable, and can be expected to meet security requirements until the year 2030 (source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Key_size#Asymmetric_algorithm_key_lengths).

Almost all of the common security suites, including Kaspersky, Symantec, Sophos, Emsisoft, and others, can detect and remove the CryptoLocker malware and the Zeus trojan, but no one (yet) has been able to come up with a practical method to crack the encryption key and recover the encrypted files; effectively they are gone forever. Removing the infection is a moot point, as the encrypted files will remain unusable. While some experts claim that paying the extortion prior to the expiration, hoping that the cyber criminal will send the private key necessary to decrypt the files, many others, including most law enforcement agencies do not condone paying ransom under the theory that it will only encourage more criminal behavior. Cited by Wikipedia, "Symantec estimated that 3% of users infected by CryptoLocker chose to pay the ransom." Do some simple arithmetic; if a

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Your personal files are encrypted!

Your important files **encryption** produced on this computer: photos, videos, documents, etc. [Here](#) is a complete list of encrypted files, and you can personally verify this.

Encryption was produced using a **unique** public key **RSA-2048** generated for this computer. To decrypt files you need to obtain the **private key**.

The **single copy** of the private key, which will allow you to decrypt the files, located on a secret server on the Internet; the server will **destroy** the key after a time specified in this window. After that, **nobody and never will be able** to restore files...

To obtain the private key for this computer, which will automatically decrypt files, you need to pay **300 USD / 300 EUR / similar amount** in another currency.

Click «Next» to select the method of payment and the currency.

Any attempt to remove or damage this software will lead to the immediate destruction of the private key by server.

Private key will be destroyed on
9/13/2013
5:27 AM

Time left
71 : 19 : 53

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million computers are hijacked by these criminals, and only 3% pay a \$200 ransom, the crook receives a cool \$6 million in illicit proceeds. Since multiple millions of computers have been held for ransom by CryptoLocker, the proceeds to the criminal enterprise may be staggering.

As is typical, prevention is the best method from being taken over by CryptoLocker or any of the other cyber threats. Sophos, a well respected multinational security company headquartered in the UK has published “Five “top tips” for keeping safe against malware in general, and cyberblackmailers in particular” (nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2013/10/18/).

The first of the five tips is common sense, and a task incumbent on all computer users, “**Keep regular backups of your important files.**”

After cleaning the CryptoLocker and any other malware that infected the computer, the encrypted files can be safely deleted and replaced by their backup copies. One strong warning about the backup copies and the devices that the backups are stored on; do not leave the backup devices, such as external hard drives, attached to the computer or the network, as they will likely have a drive letter that can be identified by CryptoLocker. If CryptoLocker can see it, it will also encrypt the files on those devices, making the backup copies as useless as the encrypted files on the primary hard drive. Good practice is to frequently rotate through multiple backup devices, creating redundant backup copies, and never allowing more than one device to be attached and running at any given time. The other backup devices should be stored securely, and only connected in rotation, never

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having more than one backup device connected at a time. While CryptoLocker may also encrypt the files on an attached backup device, it cannot attack any unattached devices.

The second tip from Sophos is the often stated, **“Use an anti-virus, and keep it up to date.”** I would add to that rule that it should also be required to do frequent and periodic security scans for malware using alternate third-party security software such as Emsisoft, SuperAntiSpyware, and MalwareBytes. My rationale for this secondary scanning by alternative scanning utilities is that prior infections may have either slipped through the primary security software, or rendered itself immune to detection by it. There are documented cases of CryptoLocker being downloaded and installed by Zeus or other malware that was already present on an infected computer, without a user opening an email attachment.

“Keep your operating system and software up to date with patches” is Sophos’ third tip. Software publishers often release patches and updates to close newly detected security vulnerabilities. According to Sophos, “This lessens the chance of malware sneaking onto your computer unnoticed through security holes.”

Number four on the Sophos list of tips is, **“Review the access control settings on any network shares you have, whether at home or at work.** Don’t grant yourself or anyone else write access to files that you only need to read. Don’t grant yourself any access at all to files that you don’t need to see - that stops malware seeing and stealing them, too.”

Sophos concludes its list of five tips with, **“Don’t give administrative privileges to your user accounts.** Privileged accounts can ‘reach out’ much further and more destructively both on your own hard disk and across the network. Malware that runs as administrator can do much more damage, and be much harder to get rid of, than malware running as a regular user.”

Using the lessons learned during National Cyber Security Awareness Month, such as “don’t click on and open email attachments”, being aware of the tremendous threat and damage that the rapidly spreading CryptoLocker Ransomware can wreak, and following the five safety tips recommended by Sophos, our computing safety and security may be much improved. Remember that in computers, as well as in other aspects of life, prevention is far better than the alternatives.



Tech Toys to Make Senior Life Easier

by Les Goldberg,

APR, Contributing Writer

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Once upon a time, as far back as the 1990s, the words “technology, techie, electronic gizmos” and others made mature adults cringe. “I can’t understand them”, or “I’m too old to learn new things”, or “I don’t need all that stuff” were often uttered reactions to the wave of the new silicon chip world.

But, as is the case with new technology today, the speed of progress is limitless.

It is also a fact that “mature adults” now are more in-sync with the gadget world than ever before. One of the primary reasons for this phenomenon is the fact that the gadget-makers are making the products easier to use, easier to understand and more functional for navigating through the aging process.

Here are some examples of what I’m talking about:

Google Wallet



Google’s payment application or “app” replaces a wallet full of credit cards, coupons or cash.

When you check out at one of the retailers signed up for the system you simply tap your smartphone to a special terminal and use any debit or credit card. Your

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phone then sends payment info to the terminal. Google Offers from participating merchants are redeemed automatically.

Currently, you can use the app at many popular stores, including Macy's, Champs, Bloomingdale's, The Container Store, CVS Pharmacy, Jack in the Box and others.

<http://www.google.com/wallet/>

Looxcie Live



Looxcie Live is the first app to make sharing real-time video hands-free. It pulls continuous video from the company's one-ounce, ear-mounted Bluetooth camcorder. Depending on the strength of the network connection, the app adjusts the video resolution for smooth replay. Family and friends can view the video through a browser or the Looxcie app. The camcorders start at \$150.

www.looxcie.com

Misfit Shine



Misfit Wearables has introduced an activity monitor or tracker that is not only useful, but also manages to make a fashion statement. The Misfit Shine tracks steps taken, and distances swum or cycled. It is waterproof and sturdy with a six-month replaceable battery. The \$79 device also allows you to transfer the collected data by holding it close to your smartphone's screen.

<http://www.misfitwearables.com/shine>

iLunar RBX-500



Want to turn your room into one giant stereophonic experience? Now you can with the iLunar RBX-500 Bluetooth/dock music system. Using Sonic Emotion's Absolute 3D sound technology, the iLunar system eliminates "sweet spots" and fills the entire room with top-quality sound no matter where you are situated. Dock your iPod or iPhone into the system and it streams music wirelessly from any Bluetooth-compatible smartphone, tablet or PC. Amazon has it for \$249.

<http://www.intl.onkyo.com/>

y-charge 2.1

Charging your phone, laptop or videoplayer while in your vehicle has always been a one-at-a-time affair. Not anymore. The y-charge 2.1 Dual USB Car Charger allows two devices to be charged simultaneously. It is small, lightweight and has a brightly colored casing. Price: \$99 at www.tylt.com.

YUBZ Retro Handset



Back in the old days people weren't subjected to every phone call made near them – the microphone part of a phone handset was close to the mouth. YUBZ has brought back the old Bell-style handset with a modern twist – it connects to a mobile phone. The company says it also reduces radiation from holding a mobile phone close to your ear. Each handset is shipped with adapters to fit a large variety of phones. Available in solid or customized artwork styles, the YUBZ Retro Handsets are priced at \$45 and \$56, respectively.

<http://www.yubz.com/retro-handsets/>



Apps for Windows 8: What can they do for me?

by Phil Sorrentino

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Apps are what make Mobile devices—tablets and phones—so useful. So, what Apps should I have on my mobile device? Well, Microsoft has provided a starter set of Apps, at least for its tablets and laptops, as part of Windows 8. It is a basic set that allows a (new) user to immediately start taking advantage of their mobile device. Most of these Apps are general in nature, but other Apps, more specific to a task, are available (mostly for free) at the Microsoft Apps store. All of the Apps that you have heard of are there for the taking (downloading): Skype, Netflix, Angry Birds, SugarSync, etc.

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Here is the collection of Apps that come with Windows 8, in a list prioritized by my particular feeling of usefulness. The first three may be all you will ever use.

1. Desktop - This tile, or App, gets you to Windows, as you knew it. All of the Windows 7 capabilities (with the exception of the old "Start" button) that you are comfortable with are here. If this is all you're looking for, click here and never come back.
2. Internet Explorer - A portal to the Internet, though the User Interface is a little different than you are used to. But, if all you want to do is surf the web, this can get the job done.
3. Store - This App connects you to the Microsoft Store where you can download all the Apps (and some other software programs) that can run on Windows 8.

The next few Apps are certainly useful, but you might find other Apps at the "Store" to satisfy your particular needs.

4. Calendar - A very simple calendar App to help you schedule and keep track of events.
5. Maps - A great way to view your surrounding geography. Input an address or point of interest and see it plotted on a map, with turn-by-turn directions, if needed.
6. SkyDrive - An App that connects you to Microsoft's portion of the "cloud." It provides 7GB of free on-line storage. It can be a central location for files you want to access from any of your computers and/or a good place to backup your important files. It can also be used to allow you to share big files with others.
7. Mail - A very basic Mail App that allows you to send and read your mail.
8. Messaging - An App that allows you to chat with your friends. If your friends use a different chat network, you'll probably want to download an App specifically for that network.
9. Photos - An App that helps organize and view all of your pictures. It collects and organizes pictures from folders and from the on-board camera.
10. Music - An App that lets you collect, organize, and listen to your favorite music. Music will also let you stream music for free. It also lets you get to Microsoft's new "Xbox Music" service. ("Xbox", seemingly, has nothing to do with the Xbox gaming system.)
11. Video - This App helps organize, and allows you to view, all your videos. It also provides an entrance to Microsoft's TV and movie stores.
12. Bing - Microsoft's search capability. Try to "Bing" something; if it's out there, Bing can find it. "Bing it on."
13. People - An App that provides a centralized Address Book for all of your cyber social acquaintances. A centralized place to keep all those email addresses, mailing addresses, social media names, phone numbers, and pictures.
14. Weather - This App provides a color weather map, including a five-day or hour-by-hour forecast for your location or a location of your choosing.
15. Finance - A "Finance News" App that includes stock market activity and financial news that can be customized to your own portfolio.
16. News - A News App that includes Sports, Finance, and Travel. This App combines articles from many websites like The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. It scrolls horizontally and feels much like a newspaper.
17. Sports - A Sports magazine App that includes sports articles from many news sources.
18. Travel - A Travel magazine App. Travel articles from many news sources and pictures of Featured Destinations.
19. Games - An App that connects you to Microsoft's "Xbox Games on Windows" store.

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20. Camera - An App to control the onboard camera. Good for video chats and creating photos for sharing.

The 20 Apps that are included can give a new Windows user a good idea of what Apps are, what they can accomplish, and how to basically control them. Smartphone and tablet users are probably more familiar with the whole App concept. Once you are familiar with the idea of Apps, you will probably want to go to the Microsoft App Store and get (install) Apps that might help you take advantage of your mobile device. When you get to the App store you will find that there are many categories and there are many Apps in each of those categories. Because computer software (read that as Desktop) has been around for almost 30 years, there are established standards like Microsoft Office for Office applications, Adobe Photoshop for photo activities, Acronis for backup, and Adobe for PDF readers. The world of Apps is very new and standards are only now being established. So, it is hard to put together a list of App standards, but from my recent experience let me leave you with a short list of some very good, free Apps to add to your collection. You might want to give some of them a try. To get to these Apps, click on the "Store" App on the start screen and you will be greeted by a display of Available Apps. Websites change, frequently, so things might be a little different by the time you read this, but currently, there are suggestions for "Top Paid", "Top Free", and "New Releases". Click on the category of your choice (Games, Entertainment, Photo, Sports, etc.) and see the available Apps.

A click on "Spotlight-Top Free" yields a list of the Spotlitged top 100 free Apps. In the list you will find:

Skype - for video chatting

YouTube player - for watching YouTube videos

Netflix - for Movie streaming (if you have an account)

Yahoo Mail - for Yahoo mail accounts

CNN - for news and weather

Google Search - if you prefer Google to Bing

Microsoft Solitaire Collection - for Solitaire enthusiasts.

In addition to the Apps that are included in the major categories, you can also search for a particular App. This is done using the Search feature that is part of the Charms bar. To get to the Charms bar, click in the lower right corner of the screen. Search is the top icon, the one that looks like the magnifying glass. Click on it, and then type in the name of the App you are looking for. This will result in a search of the "Store" Apps. When, or if, you see the App listed, click on it and it will be available for installation. You might want to try the following Apps:

Evernote - for note taking

IMDB - for movie and TV information and

Dropbox - for an additional storage location in the cloud.

Microsoft's Store is a lot newer than the Google Playstore (Android) or the Apple iTunes store (iOS). If you are familiar with an App from either of those stores, you may find that that App is not available at the Microsoft store, yet. Check back in the future, it might be available then. Microsoft's App developers have had less time to create versions that work on the Windows 8 platform, but I'm sure they are working on them.

As you can see, Apps cover a lot of territory and can help you accomplish many things, from simple note taking to video chatting, and video entertainment. Apps turn your computer into all the things you expect from a modern digital programmable computer- your home PC.



The Smiley Face Turned 22 Years Old September 19th

by Art Gresham

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Scott Fahlman was the first documented person to use the emoticons :-) and :-(, with a specific suggestion that they be used to express emotion. The text of his original proposal, posted to the Carnegie Mellon University computer science general board on 19 September 1982 (11:44), was thought to have been lost, but was recovered 20 years later by Jeff Baird from old backup tapes.

19-Sep-82 11:44 Scott E
Fahlman :-)

From: Scott E Fahlman <Fahlman
at Cmu-20c>

I propose that the following
character sequence for happy:

:-)

Read it sideways. Actually, it
is probably more economical to
mark things that are sad, given
current trends. For this, use

:-(

The information in the paragraph above is
quoted from Wikipedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emoticon#cite_not_e-smiley-1

It is a very abbreviated summary of the story of how the keyboard characters we now call a Smiley Face came into existence. It is part of a much longer story of the inner workings of the earliest forms of computer to computer, and user to user communications, long before the Internet as we know it. These 'Bulletin Boards' were first commonly used among academics. It all began as a rather prankish comment following this post on the Computer Science Bulletin Board System at Carnegie Mellon University.

At around noon on September 16th, 1982, and in response to a similar scenario involving pigeons, Neil

Swartz posted the following hypothetical situation to the CMU CS BBS:

There is a lit candle in an elevator mounted on a bracket attached to the middle of one wall (say, 2" from the wall). A drop of mercury is on the floor. The cable snaps and the elevator falls. What happens to the candle and the mercury?

A very delightful reading of the complete story of the evolution of :-) is at

<http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/mar/13/emoticon1/>

I am sure you will be ROFL when you read it.



Fairfax Meeting: January 18

Services from Cox Communications and Keeping Your Family Safe in the Digital Age
Presented by Victor Watson

Victor Watson will talk about the following topics: Cox's participation in the CableWiFi® consortium partnership arrangement; Cox's new Contour video product, as well as introduce apps for iOS and Android such as TV Connect and Cox Connect. He will also be conducting a workshop on "Keeping Your Family Safe in the Digital Age" which details key benefits of the Cox Security Suite powered by McAfee® and how you may safeguard your family's online experience. The workshop also addresses how parents can get familiar with the TV ratings, parental control and other TV security features with Cox Advanced TV. Through this discussion, participants will also learn how to stay close to friends/family with social media and video chat, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare, and Google Plus, and how to use Video Chat using services like Skype and Google Chat.

Victor Watson is the NOVA Solutions Store Educator for Cox Communications. In this role, he educates consumers and employees on Cox's products and services, as well as the competitive marketplace. Victor has an extensive background in education and sales. He currently holds two degrees, which include Bachelor of Individualized Studies, Behavioral Studies in Special Education, from George Mason University and an Associate of Arts in Psychology from Burlington County Community College.

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4th Wednesday (1/22), 7 p.m. ET

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3rd Monday (1/20), 7 p.m. ET

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(with OLLI PC User Group)

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