



My turn.....

Henry Winokur, Editor, (editor@patacs.org)



Goodness.....it's February already! Winter's almost over...or is it? I'm a DC native, and as I remember things, February was almost always more "wintery" than any other month. But then we're in climate change and so maybe we can't go by what happened "back then". Do you remember what happened in early February, 2012? *Snowmageddon!!!*

I don't pay too much attention to certain types of events, and so I don't even know what Punxsutawney Phil saw on the 2nd of February. But according to this (<https://news.yahoo.com/groundhog-day-2022-prediction-6-020038052.html>) he did see his shadow, so we're in for 6 more weeks of winter.

Next issue: March

I want to find out more about you. So does the "management". There's a questionnaire for all of us on page 14. I hope you'll do your part and respond. Here are my answers:

1. Henry S. Winokur
2. Between 5 & 10 years (I don't remember, but I'm sure Mel could tell me if I asked.)
3. (I'll give my answer next month. I don't want to unduly influence anyone...)
4. Gabe Goldberg kept bugging me... 😊
5. I'd like to see more people participate in its activities rather than just the "regulars".
6. Friendship Heights (aka Chevy Chase), MD
7. Not completely...I still support my clients.
8. Me...I've had my own business since 1990. I work with home-based users of Windows.
9. Since the beginning! 😊
10. Photography, and lots of other stuff too numerous to mention.
11. That's a hard one...I use technology in my business and my hobby and probably everything in-between.
12. That it doesn't always work the way *I* want or expect it to, and the documentation either doesn't exist or it isn't very good.
13. I'm already doing it...
14. I'd love to see others get involved and help shoulder the weight...it's not that hard and you might even have a good time!

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Keeping Records Helps Organize Computer Maintenance

By Gabe Goldberg, Director, Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society

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My background is enterprise computing, having worked in a high-tech company's data center and for a vendor selling software to organizations large/medium/small. So it's second nature to me—a habit developed over my career—to keep records of changes I make to computer hardware and software, even when it's my own PC.

The change log is useful for many reasons, knowing:

- what hardware and software is installed (important for debugging, upgrading, and replacing the PC),
- when I changed something (important for tracking origin of odd behavior),
- how to replicate desired settings in a new computer (to avoid struggling to remember everything I've done to tailor/customize software),
- what I've done from my infinite to-do list (to avoid worrying about what I might have forgotten),
- what's left on the list (this is a separate section of the log),
- what I've spent on the computer,
- how other devices are maintained and configured (such as separate section for router settings and firmware updates information).

It's easiest/best starting such a log when a new PC is bought or built, but it's worth creating one by catching up as much as possible on what's been done, and maintaining it going

forward. Making this a habit means it's simple and quick creating entries and the log will be a useful reference.

Here are sample entries for my Windows 10 system:

05/26/20 Install Firefox 76.0.1

05/26/20 Install Office 2019

05/26/20 Install Kedit 1.6.1

05/26/20 Install Belarc 9.5

05/26/20 Install Sysinternals Process Explorer 16.32

05/26/20 Install Thunderbird 68.8.1

05/26/20 Install Malwarebytes 4.1.0

08/16/20 Install CutePDF 4

08/16/20 Change Computer name to Gabes-Windows10-Deskt

08/16/20 Change User name to Gabe

08/16/20 Install Audacity 2.4.2

08/16/20 Install iCloud 13.3.59.0

09/06/20 Set Firefox browser.search.openintab --> True

09/06/20 Define local HPLJ printer

01/18/22 Set Kedit currbox on/on

01/18/22 Use Kedit Margins 2 72 -3

01/19/22 Install Firefox add-ins InFormEnter+, NoScript, Print Preview

01/19/22 Disable NoScript -- broke too many websites

01/20/22 Set Task bar option to NOT show desktop when cursor moves to lower right corner

01/20/22 Install Firefox add-ons Privacy Badger, Adblock Plus, Ghostery, Don't Track Me
Google

01/20/22 Set Kedit RecentFiles 25

###

“ComfoBuds Pro” True Wireless Headphones by 1More

By George Harding, Treasurer, Tucson Computer Society

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These are really nice earbuds; somewhat better than others I've tested. They are nicely designed and have an appealing appearance.

The product box comes with a very nice case for the earbuds, three sets of pads for one's ears, a charging cable. In addition, there is a very nicely done user's guide.



The earbud case contains the earbuds. The earbuds themselves are of a different design than those I have tested before. Each earbud itself has an extension that hangs down from the ear, providing a microphone and a bit more stability than those earbuds that don't have this feature.

The case has a connection for the charging cable and has a small LED that indicates the status of the battery in the charging case.

The buds themselves have a charge indicator at the tip end of the hanging lobe, which turns blue when that bud is fully charged and is red otherwise. The back of the case has a USB-C charging port.

The earbuds fit in my ears quite comfortably and are a bit more stable because of the extended hanging portion. I've had trouble in the past with other earbuds falling out of my ear when I lean over or move my head side to side.

The earbuds charge automatically when you put them in their place inside the case, and when the case lid is closed, they will be available fully charged for the next time. Likewise, as soon as you take an earbud out of the case, it is powered on and available for use immediately.

This product is Bluetooth enabled, and the first step in using them, as with any other earbuds, is to pair them with a device. Pairing usually works perfectly, but I had difficulty initiating pairing: after some investigation, I found a small piece of plastic inserted in the earbud to prevent the battery from wearing down before the purchaser uses it. Once these pieces of plastic were removed, pairing went uneventfully.

Once the earbuds are inserted in your ear, you can control volume and playback, as needed, by tapping on the hanging lobes. However, it requires a double tap to play or pause.

The earbuds will handle accessing phone calls, as most earbuds do, again requiring a double tap to access the call or end it. One nice feature is that as you are playing a song if you remove the earbud from your ear, playback will stop but continue playing when the earbud is reinserted. Finally, a triple tap accesses your cell phone assistant, e.g., Siri.

The product includes active noise canceling, as many similar products do today. There are three levels of noise-canceling available in the product. You pinch the lobe to cycle through the three levels.

The product also includes a complimentary "1MORE MUSIC" app, which can be used to verify the charge status of the earbuds and the case and provide certain music services.

The company provides a one-year limited warranty.

"ComfoBuds Pro" True Wireless Headphones by 1More

Price \$95 (Ed. as of 2/8/22, the price was \$80!)

<https://usa.1more.com/collections/headphones/products/comfobuds-pro-true-wireless-headphones>

###

Opt Out Of The 2022 Verizon Wireless Tracking Policy

The new Verizon policy tracks your use of every app and every web page. Learn how to opt out.

By John Krout, Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society (www.patacs.org)

Introduction

Corporate tracking the use of your phone and tablet is a legitimate privacy concern for every one of us. In early January 2022, Verizon Wireless (VZW) imposed by default a new and very comprehensive tracking policy on **every Verizon Wireless customer**. The new policy is known by two names: **Verizon Custom Experience** and **Verizon Custom Experience Plus**. VZW says tracking is a way to provide a *more personalized* customer experience.

I received an email from VZW announcing this new policy on January 5, 2022. The VZW email also says my line will be included in the Custom Experience program within 30 days unless I opt out. The email says opting out is possible, but not how to do so.

The VZW email says VZW will not sell any of the info collected from the customer to third parties. I am fairly sure that means VZW will not sell any info including customer names or other customer identification such as phone numbers or email addresses. However, VZW can sell aggregates of information, meaning for instance the number of VZW customers known to visit a specific web site per month.

I suspect that VZW might use aggregate information to solicit ads from third parties, and then deliver the ads from VZW "on behalf of" third parties. The third parties have no access to customer identification info, but get the *benefit* of info collected by VZW, nonetheless. That suspicion may be cynical on my part, but I would rather prepare for the worst and be wrong, than assume the best and be wrong.

Aside from the privacy concerns, such pervasive monitoring could bog down the CPU in the phone or tablet, and use up a good bit of network bandwidth.

On that same day, my daughter sent me a URL that led me to a **Wired** magazine online article about ways to opt out of the new policy. You can read that article at:

www.wired.com/story/verizon-user-privacy-settings



illustration 1

The QR code shown in **illustration 1** contains that Wired Magazine web page address. If you are reading this article in a print publication, then you can use your smart phone or tablet to scan the QR code and open the web page on your device, instead of typing the URL into a web browser.

The first thing I learned by reading the online material was how to find out if VZW had already opted me in. The *short answer is Yes*, VZW had already opted in every one of the VZW lines for me and my children, as of January 5, 2022.

If you too are a VZW customer then, by the time you read this article, chances are all but certain that the policy has been applied to your lines.

How To Check Your VZW Account Status, and Opt Out

One method uses the **My Verizon** app. If you do not have that app installed, you can obtain it for free on the Android app store and the Apple app store.

Here is how to use that method.



illustration 2

1. Open the **My Verizon app**. You can see its icon in **illustration 2**.

2. At the bottom of the screen, tap the **Account** button, which you can see circled in **illustration 3**.

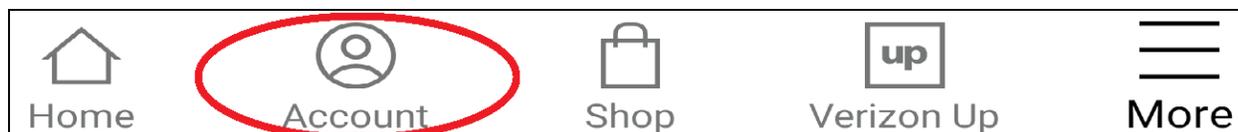


illustration 3

You will be prompted to enter your VZW password. After that, the Account screen appears.

3. In the Account screen, tap the **Gear** icon in the upper right corner.

A screen of **Account Settings** appears.

4. Scroll down the screen to find and tap **Manage Privacy Settings**.

If you have more than one smart phone line, then the next screen shows each line on your account. My account has a few smart phone lines. The additional burden for multi-line accounts is that you must view and adjust the settings for each line individually.

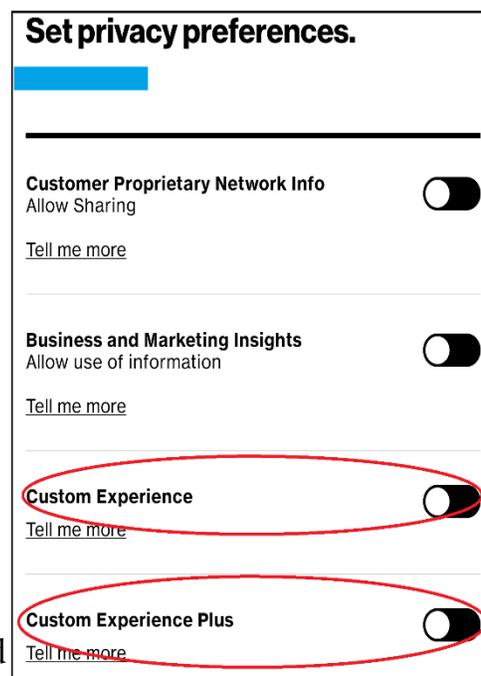


illustration 4

5. Tap one of the lines. A **Set Privacy Preferences** screen appears, as shown in **illustration 4**. (For privacy reasons, I covered up my phone line which appeared just below the screen heading.)

6. In that screen, there are two buttons: one labeled **Custom Experience**, and the other labeled **Custom Experience Plus**. You can see those buttons circled in the illustration.

I found that **both switches were turned on** for my lines.

7. **How To Opt Out:** Turn the two switches OFF (move sliders to the left).

Repeat steps 5 through 7 as needed for each line in your account.

Then you can exit the **My Verizon** app.

The **Wired** magazine article also explains how to use the Verizon Wireless web site to accomplish these tasks. I am not documenting those web site steps.

(Ed: VZW FAQs: <https://www.verizon.com/support/verizon-custom-experience-programs-faqs/>)

John Krout has been writing about creative uses of personal computers since the early 1980s. He worked as a software designer and developer for several federal government contractors in the Washington DC region. Now retired, he has also been writing about smart phones, tablets, and digital photography. He lives in Arlington VA.

###

First Look at GNOME 40 Desktop

By Cal Esneault, Cajun Clickers Past President and leader of many Open-Source Workshops & SIGs

June 2021 issue, CCCC Computer News

www.clickers.org

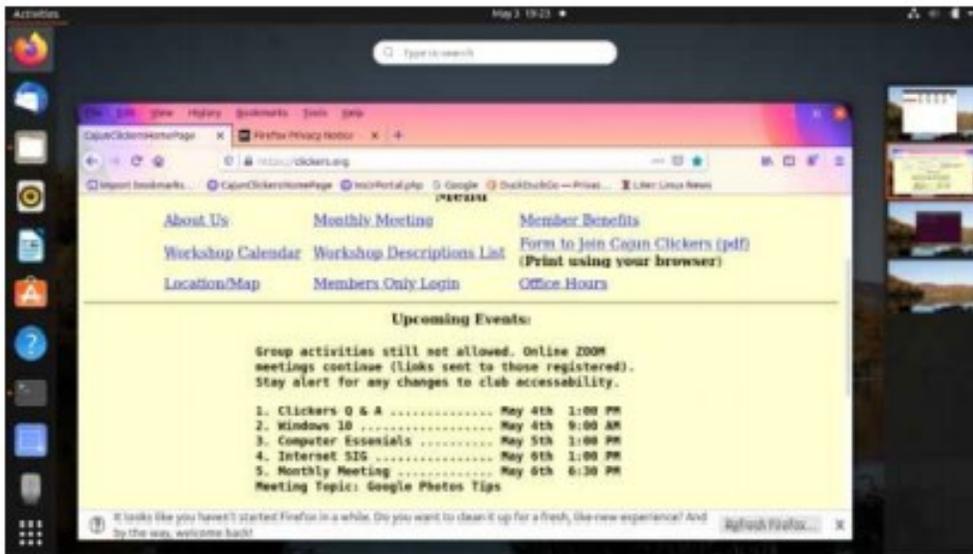


office (at) clickers.org

The GNOME 3.x desktop has been a favorite for many Linux distributions. Recently, the GNOME Project updated its toolkit series from the GTK 3.x family to the new GTK 4.x series. New desktops concurrent with this upgrade will now be numbered differently, starting with GNOME 40 as the initial offering. I made a quick comparison of GNOME 3.36 (from Ubuntu 20.04 LTS) to GNOME 40.0 (from Fedora 34).

(Ed: Some filler that has nothing to do with the article. A panoramic winter-time view of Great Falls by your editor.)





The GNOME 3.x paradigm emphasized panels and virtual workspaces located on the sides of the screen (left). Since most computer monitors are wide (for example, 16:10 ratio), this gives more working area for the actual

application. Because most designs traditionally used horizontal panels (top or bottom), this required some break-in effort, but, overall, it has been effective and accepted by many.



GNOME 40 has reverted to a more horizontal layout (left), with the launcher panel being centered at the bottom (more like the MacOS design). In “Activity” view, the adjacent workspaces are visible and easily scroll left and right in a very natural motion. There are also workspace

thumbnail icons at the top for quick access.

The GNOME 40 program launcher has the same icon grid view as the previous series. However, images for the virtual workspaces are also displayed above the grid (see below).



This allows the user to drag an application to any desired workspace to launch it. My previous approach had always been to go to the desired workspace first and then launch the app. This looks like a fast and intuitive solution to a common action.

Of course, this summary does not do justice to a major desktop upgrade, but I wanted to see the new layout for myself since I had heard it was quite different. It looks interesting, and I will eagerly await the adoption of this change when it arrives for one of the distro's I normally use (note: due to the recency of this desktop, some distro's have not had time to incorporate it at this time).

###

Does Amazon Have Too Much Power? (Opinion)

By David Kretchmar, Computer Technician
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I have been an Amazon Prime member for a couple of years and, like many people, have regularly made small and large purchases through Amazon. I enjoyed the fast, often two-day “free” shipping for a time with Prime, although more recently, this turned into two-week shipping on my sandals from Zappos (an Amazon subsidiary). The protection Amazon gives consumers is second to none in the on- or offline world.



Amazon has become THE dominant online retailer in America, accounting for over 50% of online retail purchases in the United States, despite most formerly 100% brick and mortar operations such as Walmart, Home Depot, Target, and Best Buy moving into online selling.

Amazon's third-party marketplace, made up of millions of merchants, has become a critical part of Amazon's e-commerce business. The marketplace now accounts for more than half of Amazon's overall sales.

With Amazon's massive size comes power. It would be a miracle (and downright un-capitalistic) if Amazon did not take advantage of its enormous size. Sadly, in recent years, Amazon has been using its power to force consumers to pay more for an item than they would otherwise pay if Amazon did not exist.

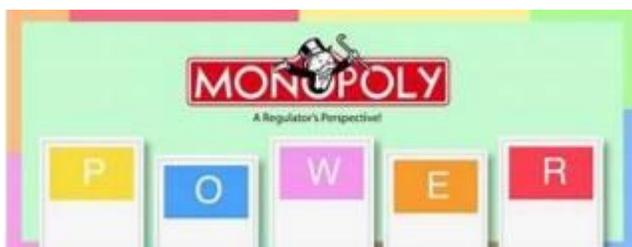
I can anecdotally attest to this as a result of personal experience. I enjoy shopping online, at least much more than I like physically visiting a retail store. Therefore, I search a number of online resellers for each purchase, getting a good idea of who has the best price.

I continued to shop online at Amazon and other sellers for many years, sometimes finding that Amazon had the best price, yet also often finding a better buy elsewhere. Finally, I made a game of it and enjoyed finding a better price (including tax & shipping) on sites other than Amazon. I did this a little out of jealousy (I have never owned Amazon stock) and because of a nagging feeling that Amazon and Jeff Bezos were taking over the world.

I have found it increasingly difficult to find a better price than Amazon's on many popular items in recent years. I did not know how or why, but the rules seemed to have changed.

The Anti-Trust Lawsuit

On May 25, 2021, the Washington, D.C. Attorney General, Karl Racine, announced he was suing Amazon on antitrust grounds, claiming the company's practices have unfairly raised



prices for consumers and blocked innovation. The lawsuit alleges Amazon illegally maintained monopoly power through pricing contracts with third-party sellers. An Amazon spokesperson said Tuesday (Ed: not specified in original article, but probably May 25, 2021): "The D.C. Attorney General has it exactly backward — sellers set

their prices for the products they offer in our store." I believe this is untrue.

Karl Racine seeks to end what he alleges is Amazon's illegal use of price agreements to reduce competition; the lawsuit also asks for damages and penalties to deter future similar conduct. In addition, the suit asks the court to block Amazon's ability to harm competition by imposing a variety of reliefs, up to and including breaking up Amazon.

How Amazon Raises Prices

The lawsuit, filed in D.C. Superior Court, alleges Amazon illegally maintained monopoly power by using contract provisions to prevent third-party sellers on its platform from offering their products for lower prices on other platforms. According to a press release, the attorney general's office claimed the contracts create "an artificially high price floor across the online retail marketplace." In addition, Racine stated that these agreements ultimately harm both consumers and third-party sellers by reducing competition, innovation, and choice.



Amazon requires third-party vendors who want to sell on Amazon to abide by its business agreement. Until 2019, Amazon included a clause in that agreement that prohibited sellers from offering their products on a competitor's online marketplace at a lower price than what their products sold for on Amazon. Amazon removed that rule in March 2019 as it faced growing antitrust scrutiny.

The complaint alleges that even after Amazon removed the "no cheaper" pricing provision from its agreements with third-party sellers, it added an identical policy called its "fair pricing policy." The fair pricing policy enables Amazon to "impose sanctions" on a seller that offers the product for a lower price on a competing online marketplace.

Do Sellers Really Set Their Own Prices?

Yes, they do – but only as long as they follow Amazon's pricing rules. Amazon's pricing agreements were also a topic of scrutiny in the House Judiciary subcommittee. In their final report, lawmakers agreed that Amazon uses its dominant position in e-commerce as leverage with third-party sellers to require they adhere to pricing restrictions.

These clauses are at least anti-competitive, especially when a company like Amazon has virtual monopoly powers.

###

Finding the Correct Keys

Henry S. Winokur, Editor of Posts, the newsletter of the Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society, www.patacs.org, editor (at) patacs.org

For those of us who took typing in high school and who identify as a “touch typist” keyboards may present a problem as we get older. Some of us lose our fine sense of touch in our finger tips and finding the “home keys” in the “home row”, becomes more difficult.

Wait a minute...”home row” ... “home keys”? what’s he talking about or as the Brits would say “is he daft???”. The answer at least from my perspective is, “no, he’s not completely daft...yet!”.

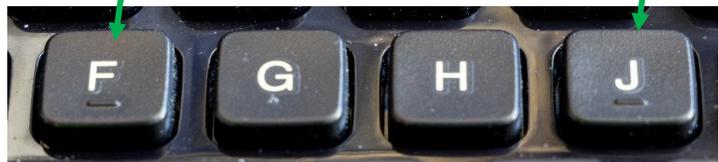
This following is a photo of the typewriter keyboard section of a desktop keyboard.



The **home row** consists of the keys between the caps lock and the enter key.

The **home** keys are the **F** and **J**. The **home** keys typically have a raised bar on the key-top, so that the typist can feel them and know that their fingers are in the right place (aka “home”).

Some people as they age, start to lose feeling in the tips of their fingers, making those slightly raised bars hard to feel.



It seems that raising the bar on the key-top is a non-starter, so in order to fix my situation, I added two small pieces of Velcro to the tops of my **F** and **J** keys and the problems mostly went away.

Any texture change will do as long as you can feel it. I wanted to be able to see the **F** and **J** key tops so I left them uncovered. Shut down the computer before you make the fix. It’s just easier...



Questionnaire:

Your editor has a question for **YOU**...actually, it's a few questions to help PATACS members know each other better. **YOU** certainly needn't answer them all and please supply anything else you care to. I'll start. My answers can be found on page 1 (My Turn...).

1. What's **YOUR** name?
2. How long have **YOU** been a member of PATACS?
3. How do **YOU** pronounce PATACS?
4. Why did **YOU** join and what do **YOU** like about it?
5. Would **YOU** change anything about PATACS?
6. Where do **YOU** live (city/state and country if outside USA)?
7. Are **YOU** retired? From what?
8. If not retired, who do **YOU** work for and what do **YOU** do for a living?
9. How long have **YOU** worked there?
10. What are **YOUR** interests outside of work?
11. What's **YOUR** most important use of technology?
12. What's **YOUR** biggest gripe about technology?
13. What would **YOU** like to do to help PATACS?
14. Anything else **YOU'd** like to share?

Thanks.

Please send **YOUR** answers to editor@patacs.org

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First Class

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The monthly schedule of meetings via Zoom

1 st Wednesday	7:00 - 9 PM	Arlington General Meeting
3 rd Monday	7:00 - 9 PM	Board of Directors Meeting
3 rd Saturday	12:45 - 3:30 PM	General Meeting (Fairfax)
4 th Wednesday	7:00 - 9 PM	Technology & PC Help Desk

Physical Meetings Canceled
Sessions via Zoom – Meeting Access
Will Be Sent Via Email

PATACS Event Information
Call 703-370-7649 for Meeting Announcements
Web site: <https://www.patacs.org>

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