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Newsletter of the Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society

September 2025, Volume 6 Page 1

My turn……

The weather the last week of August has been spectacular...that is if you like partly cloudy to clear skies and high temperatures in the upper 70s and low 80s with low humidity. Hopefully now that the first of September has come and gone, we're done with the high temperatures and humidities of summer and looking at a more temperate fall. My kinda weather, that's for sure!

I know you're wondering where I've been the last six weeks, because as you may have noticed, the one place I haven't been is the monthly meetings. My wife and I took a trip to the United Kingdom (UK). First to the town of Brighton—about fifty miles due south of London—on the coast. We have long-time, wonderful friends who are British, who used to live here in Maryland, but returned when his work at the IMF was completed. We were only there four nights, but it was a great visit.

Next, we took trains—what other way is there to travel in the UK?—to get to the other places. First up was Lockerbie, Scotland. It's a beautiful small town just over the border into Scotland, which most of the world had never heard of...until the early evening of December 21st, 1988, when the Lockerbie Air Disaster occurred. It was the night PanAM 103 was bombed and fell out of the sky onto Lockerbie. My wife's first husband was on the plane. We had never been, so it was time to go. We spent two nights there and spent some time with one of the police detectives—now retired—who had worked the case from 1989 to 2019.

Our second stop was Edinburgh (pronounced Edinboro) where we spent four nights. In August, Edinburgh has its yearly "Fringe Festival". It's a time of many performances of all kinds. We took in two. One, a play called **Fuselage** is about the Lockerbie Air Disaster written by the play's director and lead, whose best friend was killed on the plane, and a second on a tumbling performance by five acrobats from Kenya. Both were excellent. We also did a walking tour of Edinburgh.

The second major event was attending the Royal Edinburgh Tattoo, which is held nightly—only in August—at the Edinburgh Castle, which must be five to six *hundred* feet above the town. It is a massed (bag) pipe band extravaganza along with other international bands. This year is the seventy-fifth presentation of the show. You can see the entire show here as it was broadcast this year on the BBC: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ7iFuNGipY. I have long been a lover of "the pipes", but after that event, I am even more so. How anyone can watch and listen to them and not be moved is beyond me.

Our third stop in Scotland was in Glasgow (pronounced "Glasgo"), about an hour by train west of Edinburgh, where we also spent four nights. We did our requisite walking tour, which was led by a native Glasgowian—who when he "applied" the brogue was nearly impossible to understand! We had tickets to something called PipingLive!, but the tickets didn't have an address on them, so we ended up at the wrong location. But we enjoyed more than four hours of watching the preparations for the 2025 International World Pipe Band Championships. More here: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=2025%20international%20pipe%20band%20champtionship.

After our four nights, which included a bus tour north and west of Glasgow to take in some of the southern part of the highlands, we returned to London, spent the night at a Heathrow airport hotel, and flew home on August 18th. Would we go again? I think so, but time will tell.

Next printed issue: October 2025

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Thank this issue's proofreaders: Paul Howard, Leti Lebell, Martin Menez, Linda Soady

Cyber Security

By David Kretchmar, Hardware Technician dkretch@gmail.com
Sun City Summerlin Computer Club https://www.scscc.club

Recently, SCSCC Vice President Tom Burt provided members with a link to an interesting article from *Malwarebytes* about cyber security: https://www.malwarebytes.com/blog/news/2023/10/the-3-crucial-security-steps-people-should-do-but-dont

Malwarebytes (2-week free trial version) is an excellent product that other SCSCC technicians and I frequently use to search for malware and other potential PUPs (potentially unwanted programs) on computers. *Malwarebytes professional* is their paid-for real-time protection sold for $30 - $45 per computer per year.

"Everyone's afraid of the internet and no one's sure what to do about it."

The essential point of the article was that many internet users employ "dismal cybersecurity practices" and are too lax in implementing and using security measures designed to keep them safe and secure. Some experts estimate that one-third of individuals experienced a security breach within the past year. This sounds reasonable based on my personal experience. Still, I also find it comforting that older adults (Baby Boomers) are estimated to be four times less likely to experience a security issue than younger users. I'm unsure if we are more careful than younger users or if we do less online.

While anything that makes people aware of the dangers that stalk all of us online is valuable, I disagree with two of the three primary points raised in the article. Malwarebytes provided the article, and since they sell subscriptions to their products to stay in business, it is arguably in their interest to frighten people, who then will be more likely to become customers.

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the essential three points made in the article that I find misleading, outright untrue, and primarily true (multi-factor authorization).

1. "Just 35 percent of people use antivirus software."

I think this is BS. It is rare for me to come across a computer that has no antivirus software running. Microsoft Windows Defender runs by default on Windows computers and does not have to be turned on by the user. This is by far the antivirus software utilized by most individuals, and it has the advantage of having no cost beyond what a user initially pays for a Windows PC.

In addition to being "free," the Microsoft Windows Defender program code is updated at least monthly. The monthly security update release is scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month. The Microsoft Windows Defender virus intelligence database is updated almost daily in case of newly discovered threats, also known as a 0-day or zero-day vulnerabilities. The term zero-day refers to the fact that the vendor has just learned of the flaw – which means they have zero days to address it.

It might be that only 35% of users subscribe to an antivirus software tool other than Microsoft Windows Defender. Certainly*, Malwarebytes* would like you to buy their product, but the article states an untruth when it says that only 35% of computers are protected.

I believe Microsoft Windows Defender provides excellent protection for most users. The modern version of this security package was implemented with Windows 10 in 2015 and is further improved with Windows 11. I have examined hundreds of computers since 2015 and have never had to remove a virus from a machine protected by Microsoft Windows Defender. Before 2015, our club's hardware technicians spent as much as half our time at our Tuesday Repair SIG removing viruses from systems, but this work is no longer necessary.

2. "Just 15 percent of people use a password manager."

Again, I think this is BS. It is common for club members who come to the Tuesday Repair SIG when asked for their password to, for instance, their Google account to state, "I don't have a password; I just click on Gmail, and it appears." They are unknowingly and effortlessly using a password manager.

Without a password, you cannot use an application such as Gmail or any other mail program. Many users set up a password for Gmail or any other applications when they initiate use of that service or have this done for them by whomever is helping to set up their device.

Many users forget they have the required password because their browser's built-in password manager enters it automatically and seamlessly. Google, Edge, Firefox, and Safari all have integrated password managers with features like autofill and a password generator. They can also store credit cards and other personal information, which makes your online life more manageable. Smartphone operating systems on the Apple iPhone, Samsung Galaxy, etc. also store user credentials.

A password generator will create a unique password, such as "8X!4tZ7pas@vFyY" which is impossible to guess and memorize. A password manager best utilizes this bizarre string of characters. I have seen people write down and manually enter a generated password, but obviously, it is tedious and often takes multiple tries.

Are passwords saved by browsers secure?

Google states, "Google Password Manager and the passwords it generates are considered safe compared to similar password managers. Google uses military-grade encryption to protect your usernames, passwords, and payment information."

Microsoft states, "Microsoft Edge stores passwords encrypted on disk. They're encrypted using AES, and the encryption key is saved in an operating system (OS) storage area."

Firefox states, "Firefox Desktop uses simple cryptography to obscure your passwords. Mozilla cannot see passwords, but Firefox Desktop decrypts the passwords locally so that it can enter them into form fields."

In other words, the "free" password managers built into browsers and operating systems use security schemes that are like paid-for password managers. Naturally, marketers of these paid-for third-party services, such as Nordpass, Norton, OneLogin, and LastPass, claim built-in password managers are vulnerable.

Unfortunately, third-party password managers have been hacked, severely compromising user information. OneLogin was hacked in 2017, and LastPass was hacked in 2022. In March 2023, LastPass stated that the breach resulted in unauthorized and unknown users

gaining full access to customers' vault data, including personal information like usernames and passwords.

Yet third-party password managers urge users to buy their product rather than depend on the security built into browsers and operating systems. But any account or device can be hacked.

Unless you write down your passwords using a pencil and paper, you must trust someone and use a password manager. I would rather trust a massive entity like Google, Microsoft, or Apple over a relatively tiny software provider. Even more prominent entities, such as Norton, have been subject to internal dishonesty and theft of client data.

3. Use multi-factor authentication (MFA)

This is NOT BS. Multi-factor authentication (MFA) requires users to provide at least two of three categories of authentication to access an account.

- **Knowledge:** a password or PIN code,
- **Possessions factor:** a secondary device (i.e., Smartphone) or account you have, in addition to a knowledge factor.
- **Biometrics:** any part of the human body that can be offered for verification, such as fingerprints or facial recognition.

I only have one account, Interactive Brokers, that *requires 3-factor* MFA. When I want to access my account, a notification is sent to my phone, which opens the Interactive Brokers application and identifies me using facial recognition. Thus, all three factors of MFA are utilized, which is about as good a set of authentications as you will find today.

Disadvantages of MFA

The Possessions factor, the secondary device or account, is much stronger when a separate device is utilized. Many MFA schemes send a code to an email account, which is useless when that happens to be the account you are attempting to access. Using only an email account for secondary authentication rather than a discrete device, such as your smartphone, provides weaker security.

MFA can lock you out of your account when your discrete device (phone) is unavailable.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Microsoft Windows Defender runs by default on Windows computers and does not have to be turned on by the user. **Microsoft Windows Defender provides excellent antivirus protection**.

The password managers provided by browsers and operating systems are reasonably secure. I believe they are similar in security compared to password managers offered by third-party vendors, maybe better. These credentials operate seamlessly with the operating system or browser, making for a much smoother internet experience.

Multi-factor authentication is the way to go if you want absolute internet security. Using the three categories (authentication, knowledge, possession, and biometrics) provides some of the best security available today.

###

How To Wipe a Windows Drive...

Henry S. Winokur, Newsletter Editor of PATACS Posts and PATACS Director
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Sometimes I work on client machines to do minor repairs or in this case, wipe an old drive prior to recycling the machine. Drives only get wiped after a new machine is installed, the client's data is transferred and then waiting until for at least thirty (30) days to make sure that everything was successfully moved. It used to be relatively simple to wipe a drive: put the CD with the wiping software into the machine, reboot (or "restart" as it's now known), let the system load using the optical disk as the boot drive, pick out what was wanted, start the job/program, and walk away. Now? As you probably guessed it's "not so much".

Some background: In the past there was a program for wiping ***all*** of the data off spinning drives (HDDs) called **DBAN**...**D**arik's **B**oot **A**nd **N**uke. One of the problems was the CD DBAN ran from had to remain in the machine for the full run, even if it took forty hours to wipe the drive (and some large drives took at least that long!). The other problem is that DBAN doesn't know about solid state drives (SSDs) at all.

On the suggestion of PATACS' director, Geof Goodrum, I switched to a product called **Parted Magic** (https://partedmagic.com/, aka PM for this article). PM can be loaded from either an optical disk (CD/DVD) or a USB (thumb) drive. PM is a Linux program and everything that one needs to run the software is on the source. Consequently, once the software is loaded into RAM, the source device can be removed—that alone is a huge improvement over DBAN.

DBAN physically overwrites the drive with bazillions of ones and zeroes to wipe the drive. It could do multiple passes, depending on how secure you wanted the wipe. PM works differently. It uses the ***secure erase*** command that today's (and most of yesterday's) drives understand. Though there's no way to prove it anymore, it would be difficult today to find a drive that can't be wiped using the secure erase method. If one found such an old drive, and wanted to wipe it, it would mean dropping back to DBAN ☹...or using another method (hammer, drill, etc.) to physically destroy the drive.

If you're interested in wiping a computer's drive so you can donate or recycle it—highly recommended unless your computer had nothing on it data-wise that would make a

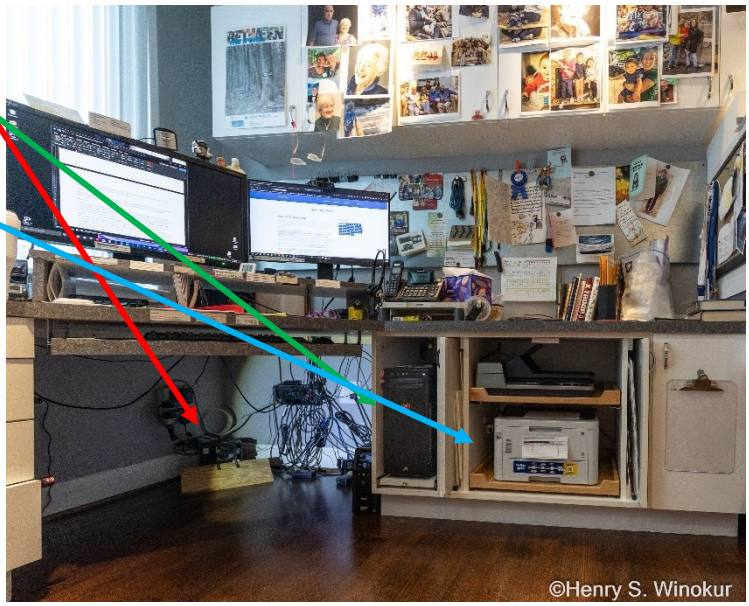
difference in your life it if fell into the "wrong" hands—PartedMagic is the way to do it. There is lots of information on the PM website (https://partedmagic.com). Particularly check out the sections on ***secure erase***. If the drive being wiped is an NVME (motherboard mounted) SSD be sure to see the instructions under ***svme secure erase***. For purchase, download, and ISO creation information, see https://partedmagic.com/store/.

OK, time for a little bragging: I live in a condo and I designed my office space. My office configuration is two desks, which share a common countertop. It is all ergonomically correct for desktop computers: the keyboard drawers are 26" from the ground and they are wide enough for their accompanying mice. Both desks have space next to their kneeholes for tower computers on pullout shelves and all of the cables needed for connections are routed through their respective kneeholes. Each desk is to the side of the room's window.

The desk where I work, is on the right, below. It currently has two monitors—a 27" NEC on the left and a 24" MSI on the right, both on a six-inch-tall riser—so that the monitors are at the correct height, and I get extra desk top space underneath the riser.

There is space in both kneeholes for UPSs for power protection.

My kneehole is deep enough for three external hard drives sitting on the floor in the back, and a fan to help keep them cool. I don't worry about kicking them because of a plywood shield in front of the drives. To the right of the kneehole is my computer and to the right that, is a scanner and a printer. Both are on pull-out drawers.



The left-of-the-window-desk, is for "other projects", such as working on client PCs. It is equipped with a UPS mounted in the kneehole. Currently there is a Dell 27" monitor sitting on the left desk. (See image on previous page.) It will be installed on "my" side when I replace my current Win10 machine with a Win11 machine by October 14th (end-of-life for Windows 10).

Now you know where all of my computer related work gets done when I'm home! Back to the job at hand...

There are two ways to wipe a drive. One uses an optical drive and one uses a USB drive which contain the wiping software. The device one uses for the source code must be bootable and the computer must be configured so all external devices to be seen by computer at boot/start up. You can get more info on how to change a BIOS or UEFI so that an external drive can be "seen" here: https://www.windowscentral.com/how-enter-uefi-bios-windows-10-pcs and here: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=how%20to%20change%20the%20bios. BIOS/EUFIs are different—well their layouts are different (though I think once you've seen one, you've seen them all).

You'll need to get "into" your computer's BIOS/EUFI to change the boot-up settings. If you don't know what keys to press to enter the BIOS/EUFI, go online and search for it using a search string like "how to enter BIOS for *your-computer-type*". If necessary, change the boot order so that either the optical drive (if the computer even has one) OR the USB is the first searched boot device. The reason you may have to change the order is that if, for example, the computer is set up to boot (start) from the internal drive, it will never even "look" for another bootable device, and that's the part that must be changed. Once again since there are many different layouts and terminologies. You are looking to change the boot drive startup order, so that the computer doesn't just look inside itself for a bootable device. **It is strongly suggested that you take notes or create a document on how to enter the BIOS/EUFI menus so that you will know where to change things back to the original settings if you want**.

Once that is correctly set—and it may take a couple of tries—the computer will attempt to read from a location "outside the box". If there is an optical drive or USB, obviously they aren't "outside the box", but the original boot order, *by default*, may skip them to protect the computer. Most of today's machines no longer have optical drives, only USB connectors. If that is the case, you'll only be able to boot from a

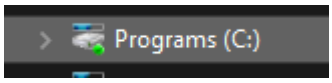
USB drive. Hopefully, there is a connector on the front of your machine, since it's easier to attach a USB drive there.

I figured—wrongly as it turned out (more below)—that I'd just make a bootable USB drive using RUFUS, a free *Windows-only* program used to make bootable USB drives, load the software onto the USB drive and go. Making the bootable USB drive—as it turned out—wasn't the problem. Making it work in the HP computer I was attempting to wipe *was* the problem.

First, we'll go through creating a bootable thumb drive. It's not difficult. **Please note** that my machine runs in "Dark Mode", meaning all of the fields that are normally white, ***on my machine are black or very dark gray***. It saves my eyes.

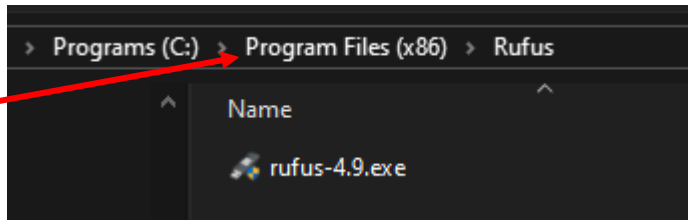
To create a *bootable USB* drive, one must acquire software called **RUFUS**—and no, I don't know what it means ☹ and I couldn't find anything that discussed that subject. First, grab a copy of RUFUS from https://rufus.ie/en/. Get the one that is at the top of the list. (When this was written—August, 2025—it was **rufus-4.9.exe**.) When you download it, it will probably go into your **\Downloads** folder. It is possible that your **\Downloads** folder is inside your **\Documents** folder. It just depends on how your computer is set up.

You don't need to install **Rufus**. The program's (executable) file (.exe) can go anywhere on your computer. Generally, Windows stores program/executable files, in one of two folders on the C: drive: **C:\Program Files**, or **C:\Program Files (x86)**. I prefer to put program files in either of those folders since that's where Windows normally puts them. On my machine, using **File Explorer**, I created a folder inside **C:\Program Files (x86)**. If you want to do that, open **File Explorer** and in the *left pane* select **C:**. My C: drive is labelled "Programs" but it is likely yours won't be labeled.

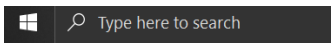


Don't worry if your machine doesn't say "Programs"—it's just how my machine is configured—and it's just there to remind me that the C: drive ***on my machine*** is for programs and the *data* is elsewhere. The word "Programs" is called a label and it's not required.

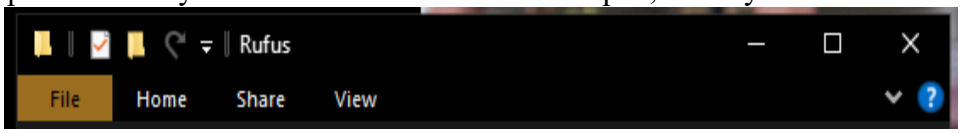
I put my **\Rufus** folder inside the **C:\Program Files (x86)**, but you can put yours anywhere—just make sure that you know where it is (that precise location is known as "the path".)



To create a folder inside the **C:\Program Files (x86)**, open **File Explorer**. You should have the shortcut on your taskbar, but if not, go to **search** (left end of task bar)

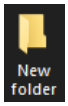


and start typing "**File**...". You should only have to type the first four or five letters, before Windows suggests **File Explorer**. As soon as you see the name at the top of the list, hit **Enter**. Then, in the ensuing *left pane*, click on **C:**. Again, don't worry if there's a label (or there isn't). You're only interested in **C:**. In the *right pane*, find the folder where you want to create the **\Rufus** subfolder, and click (or double click) on it to select and open it. Once you have the correct sub-folder open, move your mouse to the Ribbon. What? No ribbon (the list of commands at the top of any window—usually the 2nd line from the top)? If



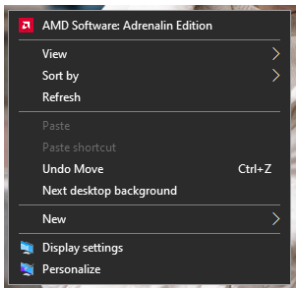
you are only seeing something like the item directly above, note the *down pointer* to the left of the blue question mark on the far right. **On your machine**, click that **down arrow** and your ribbon will open—this is a type of switch known as a **toggle**. It will stay enabled until you disable it—like a light switch. I recommend leaving it "on". {Side note: each panel of the ribbon is called a "mini-menu".}

Once you can see the ribbon, one of the selections is **New Folder**: Click it and a space will open in the right pane. Type in the name you want to call it. Using **Rufus** lets you know what's in the folder. Hit **Enter** when you are done.



Now you have a subfolder to put the Rufus program into. Navigate to the **\Downloads** folder and move the file (**rufus-4.9.exe**) to the C:\Program Files (x86)\Rufus. To ***move*** the file, right click on the file and chose ***copy***. Navigate to the **\Rufus** subfolder and right click in the right pane, and ***left*** click on **paste**. THEN go back to the **\Downloads** folder and delete the **rufus-4.9.exe** file. You can delete it to the \Recycle Bin—which is a recoverable deletion—by pointing at the file and hitting the DEL key. If you want to get rid of it completely, RIGHT click to get the menu, and hold the SHIFT key DOWN, *then* hit either DELETE in the menu (near the bottom) OR the DEL key on the keyboard. Release both keys. Wait a sec...you're not quite done. You need to create a shortcut to the file, so you can run it from the desktop!

On an **open space** on the desktop, **RIGHT click** once. You'll get a menu that looks like this:



About ¾ of the way down, you'll see **New**. **Left** click that. You'll get another menu. Left click on **Shortcut**. In the next window either type the location of Rufus (for example—this is the location on MY computer! (Yours may be different): ***C:\Program Files (x86)\Rufus\rufus-4.9.exe***. When you're done, hit **ENTER** again. In the next pane, type the name of the program or whatever will remind you of what the program does. Me? I used "**Rufus**".

You will need one other file to make RUFUS work...an ISO of whatever you are installing on the USB drive.

An aside: wait a minute. I hear you saying, rightfully so: what's an ISO? How-To-Geek describes it this way (https://www.howtogeek.com/356714/what-is-an-iso-file-and-how-do-i-open-one/):

- An ISO file is an archive file that contains an identical copy of data found on an optical disc, like a CD or DVD.
- ISO images are often used for backing up optical discs or for distributing large file sets that are intended to be burned to an optical disc.
- ISO images can be mounted as virtual discs, allowing apps to treat them as if a real optical disc were inserted.

When Windows10 (and maybe 7, too) was initially shipped it was on an optical disk as an ISO. Unlike USB drives, ISO files are bootable directly from optical media (CD/DVD). One just burns the ISO file to the optical media. Since neither Windows 10 nor 11 come with burning software, one can get it from the web. There's lots of good software. I rarely burn optical media anymore, but when needed, I use the freeware version of **Anyburn** (https://www.anyburn.com/).

In this case there is no optical disk being created. It's going to be a bootable USB drive. Obviously, that's a somewhat different beast. In this case we want to make a bootable USB drive that contains the PartedMagic software—you remember, right? 😊

Creating a RUFUS USB drive is quite easy. Just follow the directions on the website: https://rufus.ie/en/.

(In this case, the machine needing its drive wiped was an HP Pavilion P7-1026. It has two video outputs: VGA and DVI. It went onto my left desk's pullout shelf. I was going to use my new Dell monitor with it, but it wouldn't work, and I tried many options. The Dell only has HDMI and DVI interfaces and even with cable adapters it wouldn't work. That forced me to use the MSI monitor *from my desk*. The power supply for the monitor had to be moved, too, as it isn't just a straight AC cord using the normal five-sided plug. Hint: whenever you pull a cable from a place and you know you'll have to rethread it, attach a long piece of string to it, so the string ends up in the place where you'll simply reattach the cable to the string and pull it back without too much work.)

I entered the HP's BIOS, but there was **no option** for booting/starting up from a USB! Why? The machine was simply too old! Since everything seemed fine when I booted to Windows, I tried to boot Parted Magic from the thumb drive I had made using Rufus. *That* simply didn't work. ☹

The way Parted Magic works is to load the Linux operating system (OS) into memory. Once that is done, the CD and probably the thumb drive can be removed. The user ends up with a Windows-like desktop with choices on it.

Since Parted Magic wouldn't work from the USB drive, I pulled out a CD copy of Parted Magic and since the HP had an optical drive, I was able to use that. After all this hullabaloo, actually wiping the drive (an internal SSD) took less than ten seconds!

After returning my monitors to their various places on the desktop, it was time to reformat one of the thumb drives, so that Windows could see it. But that's a problem now, because Windows couldn't see it. Parted Magic runs on Linux and the file format is different. Needless to say, I was quite shocked when

the thumb drive simply disappeared when I put PM on it using RUFUS. PATACS.io came to the rescue when one of the respondents informed me of the availability of the **DiskPart** command.

I found directions online for **DiskPart**. It needs to be run from an Administrator's command line or Powershell. For more information: (https://duckduckgo.com/?t=ffab&q=disk%20part&atb=v259-1&ia=web). The first set of directions came from DuckDuckGo's (DDG's) AI. Here's what the AI had to say: **DiskPart is a command-line utility in Windows that allows users to manage disks, partitions, and volumes. It can perform tasks such as creating, deleting, and formatting partitions, but requires caution as changes cannot be undone**. (The "cannot be undone" part is wrong. One just reruns the command with the proper arguments to fix whatever the issue was.) Following those instructions the process just wouldn't work. Guess what? It seems the AI left out a step! This is why I'm not much of a believer in AI yet. Too many mistakes.

This https://www.windowscentral.com/how-clean-and-format-storage-drive-using-diskpart-windows-10 *properly* describes how to run the **diskpart** command and doesn't need repeating here.

I made assumptions and they were mostly wrong. I assumed that I would need Parted Magic on a thumb drive. I assumed I would be able to connect the computer to my Dell monitor. It never occurred to me that the old HP wouldn't work with newer hardware until I tried to use it. Fortunately I had other ways. Having a previous CD with PartedMagic on it made running it easy. Pop it in into the optical drive and reboot. Had I *not* had it, I could have burned a new CD because my current computer still has an optical drive and I have blank CDs available. I would have had to use the AnyBurn software, but I would have had to **tell** AnyBurn that I was burning an ISO, because ISO files are different.

Ultimately, I got the job done and I learned a few things, it just took a lot longer than anticipated, and caused a lot more agita.

###

Copilot – An AI-powered Assistant

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Copilot icon

This may be the first time you've thought about Copilot, the app behind this icon, but it has been available as part of Windows since the end of 2023.

It was initially launched as part of the Windows 11 update, providing users with an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered assistant to help with various tasks right from the taskbar. By its definition, Copilot is "An AI companion created by Microsoft, designed to assist you with a wide range of tasks." Here is what you'll get if you ask Copilot to "Tell me a little about Copilot." (Text in italics is the response from Copilot.)

"*I'm Copilot, an AI companion designed by Microsoft to assist and engage with users in various ways. Whether you have questions, need help with tasks, or want to chat, I'm here. I can offer support, complete productivity-related tasks, provide detailed information on many topics, and even have fun, light-hearted conversations.*

Unlike other tools, I strive to bring a bit of personality and warmth to our interactions, making our conversations informative and enjoyable. I can search the web for the latest information, create images based on your descriptions, help write code, and more. My ultimate goal is to be your trusted partner, enhancing your day-to-day activities and expanding your horizons.

Feel free to ask me anything or let me know how I can assist you today!"

If you've tried ChatGPT, you'll probably feel comfortable and familiar with Copilot. Copilot can help with all sorts of things. Here's "Why someone might want to use Copilot."
"*Choosing to use Copilot can bring several benefits to your day-to-day activities:*

1. ***Versatility**: Whether you need help with research, brainstorming ideas, writing tasks, or even coding, I can assist you with a wide range of tasks.*
2. ***Productivity Boost**: I can help you manage your time more effectively by providing quick and accurate information, drafting emails, creating summaries, and more.*
3. ***Learning and Knowledge**: With my vast knowledge base, I can help you learn new things, stay updated with the latest trends, and explore various topics.*
4. ***Creativity**: Whether you're looking to write a story, create an artwork, or simply need some inspiration, I can provide creative ideas and solutions.*
5. ***Companionship**: I'm here to chat and provide a bit of company. Whether you want to discuss something serious or just have a light-hearted conversation, I'm always here to engage with you.*
6. ***24/7 Availability**: Unlike human assistants, I'm available around the clock. No matter what time it is, you can always rely on me to be there for you.*

Overall, Copilot aims to be a helpful, knowledgeable, and engaging companion that enhances productivity and enriches daily life. How can I assist you today?"

When you start Copilot, it opens in a new window on the desktop with the announcement "*Hey, how can I help?*", and an input line for your question. The Copilot window has the focus, so go ahead and type in your question, followed by Enter. I asked "How old is Copilot?" to try it out, and here was the response. *As Copilot, I'm a creation of Microsoft, continually learning and evolving. I don't have a specific age like humans do. My knowledge and capabilities are constantly being updated, so you can think of me as perpetually fresh and ready to assist you with the latest information and support.* And it was followed by a question, probably to keep you engaged: *Is there something specific you'd like help with today?*

After Copilot provides the answer to your question, it attempts to continue the conversation to keep you engaged. When I asked: "When is the SpaceX Starship Launch?", the response was: *SpaceX is targeting **Thursday, January 16, 2025, at 5 p.m. EST (2200 GMT)** to launch its **Starship Flight 7** test mission. The launch will take place at SpaceX's Starbase facility near Boca Chica Beach in South Texas.* And then with a conversation starter: *You can watch the launch live on Space.com, with coverage starting about 30 minutes before liftoff.*

Are you excited about this mission? After I answered "Yes", Copilot continued the conversation: *That's fantastic! The anticipation of watching such a groundbreaking launch must be thrilling. If you're a space enthusiast, you might enjoy keeping up with the latest updates and missions from NASA, SpaceX, and other space organizations. There's always something incredible happening in the world of space exploration.* And again, an attempt to continue the conversation: *Do you have any favorite space missions or moments from space history?*

To see if this Generative AI tool attempts to carry on a conversation, I asked Copilot, "Do generative AI tools attempt to continue a conversation?" And the answer, as expected, was: *Absolutely! Generative AI tools, like me, are designed to keep the conversation flowing in an engaging and meaningful way. We aim to provide helpful information, answer your questions, and suggest new topics based on the conversation. The idea is to create a natural, dynamic exchange that feels more like a real conversation with another person. Whether diving deep into a subject or just having a light-hearted chat, the goal is to make the interaction enjoyable and productive for you. So, is there anything else on your mind that you'd like to chat about?*

If you are willing to continue the conversation, answer the questions and see where it takes you. It might be fun, and you might learn something. But in any case, you'll see the results of the millions of training sessions used to make Copilot an intelligent assistant.

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Because there's some large white spaces, your editor has filled them with a couple of images from Scotland:

First, from the 2025 Edinburgh Military Tattoo, the opening "salvo" of the massed bands on the Edinburgh Castle marching grounds. There were over 1000 marchers in the group!

Canon R5M2 | 1/100th s | f/4.5 | ISO 2000
24mm | Canon RF 24-105 f/4 L IS USM

Drummers practicing on Glasgow Green for the 2025 World Pipe Band Championships.

Canon R5M2 | 1/1250th s | f/4 | ISO 100 | 70mm | Canon RF24-105 f/4 L IS USM

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

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