

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Committee Information</i>	Page 2
<i>Open Newsletter Not Available</i>	Pages 3-6
<i>Computer Security –Who’s Responsible</i>	Pages 3-4
<i>Trouble shooting Email Connections</i>	Pages 5-6
<i>Spread sheet Errors What Happens When They’re Wrong?</i>	Pages 7-8
<i>Newbie Club Tutorials</i>	Pages 9-10
<i>Are Registry Cleaners Helpful</i>	Pages 11-12
<i>Time for a Laff & Pause for Thought</i>	Page 12
<i>Dates in Excel Part 2</i>	Pages 13-15
<i>Things to Ponder (Repeated)</i>	Page 18

Next Meeting

Wednesday 4th April 2007
7 PM Beginners & problems
8 PM SOUND MATTERS
By Julie Hjort

Newstream Articles

Deadline : 10 Days before Meeting

Editors Contacts:

Address: 8 Cadorna Street Mowbray Heights 7248 Phone 6326 5824

email address editor@lcg.org.au

Correspondence

Address all Correspondence to:
Launceston 7250

Launceston Computer Group Inc

PO Box 548

Membership

Single \$10, Family \$15 (Includes Email edition Newstream)

Printed & Posted Newsletter \$20 extra

Disclaimer: The articles in this newsletter may be reprinted as long as credit is given to the original author. Opinions expressed are those of the author & not necessarily the views of the Editor or the Group. Unless otherwise noted material is copyright 2004 for the Launceston Computer Group Inc.

General Information

Position	Name	After Hours / Business	Email
President	Judy Hall	6394 7358	president@lcg.org.au
Vice President			vicepresident@lcg.org.au
Treasurer	Iris Meek	6327 3162	treasurer@lcg.org.au
Secretary	Susan Armes	6395 1130	secretary@lcg.org.au
<u>General Committee</u>			
Library MAC	Ivan Turmine	6327 1825	maclibrary@lcg.org.au
Newstream Editor	Ron Baker	6326 5824	editor@lcg.org.au
Publicity & Promotion	Karia Wicks		publicity@lcg.org.au
Assistant Treasurer	Dennis Murray	6326 5284	Assistanttreasurer@lcg.org.au
PC Library	Julie Hjort	0418 295 058	pclibrary@lcg.org.au
Assistant PC Librarian	Judy Hall	6394 7358	committee@lcg.org.au
Public Officer	Judy Hall	6394 7358	publicofficer@lcg.org.au
OPEN Chair	Janet Headlam		open@lcg.org.au
WebMaster			webmaster@lcg.org.au
Web Editor	Reinhard Von Samorzewski	6327 1552	web@lcg.org.au
General Committee	Michael Armes	6395 1130	committee@lcg.org.au
	Robert Tierney	6344 6328	committee@lcg.org.au
	June Hazzlewood	6327 2562	committee@lcg.org.au

Ron's Ramblings

Another Month another Newsletter!!

I often wake up trying to think of something profound to fill this space.

I tried Windows Vista Release Candidate 1 but took it off my computer.

I was trying it in dual boot mode rather than updating Windows XP SP1. This resulted in not having all the programmes I had loaded not being available in Vista.

I don't think I will race out to buy the new system as XP is working OK on the new box, better than it did on the old 400 Mhz Pentium, so I don't see the necessity at this time.

This is out of Character for me as I have been the fool who rushed in where angels feared to tread.

It helped of course that I have been fortunate enough to have been given the free copy of various Windows OS to try out as Editor. The roll call of Windows I have used is as follows

Windows 3.1 Windows 3.11 for Workgroups Windows 95 A
Windows 95 B Windows 98 Windows 98 SE Windows
Millennium (The less said the better) and finally Windows XP.

There!!! That filled the column nicely

Ron Baker

Computer security: who's responsible?

John O'Fallon Security alert! A vulnerability in Mac OS X HTTP protocol handling makes possible denial of service attacks and arbitrary code execution.

"Oh no," you think. "This sounds bad. Is my Mac unsafe? Worse yet, is my entire network at risk?" The reality is that 'safe' is a relative term, both in the real world and on the Internet. Is it safe to get in your car and drive to the QuickieMart? Modern cars have seat belts (they didn't always), crumple zones, and airbags, but they don't guarantee that you won't be injured in a crash. Over time, the addition of these features has made cars incrementally safer, but their level of safety is still relative. You can't point to one car and say, "That one is absolutely safe, and that one absolutely isn't." The same is true of computers and networks. An online banking site is expected to be more secure than the average Britney Spears fan blog, but the reality is that both are probably reasonably difficult to hack, even for a technically savvy user. But at the same time, both are potentially vulnerable to a malicious cracker.

The problem with security bulletins (well, one of the problems, anyway) is that they tend to redirect our attention to arcane technical details and away from common sense precautions. In most cases, there is greater risk of 'social' security breaches than technical ones. Have you ever written down a password on a Post-it and stuck it to your monitor? Have you ever had users share a user account name and password, or sent passwords via normal email? These are potentially much greater threats to your security than the vast majority of vulnerabilities that could — in theory — be exploited to assault your network.

Another problem is that Internet security advisories can be hard to understand, sometimes even for well trained network and system

administrators. Often this is because the problem being reported is so obscure and technical that only a specialist could understand or respond to it. So, while this fact makes it difficult for many of us to determine the severity of a problem, or whether or not it even applies to our situations, it is more important to realize that more practical, almost intuitive issues generally pose a more significant threat to your network security.

Most of us make the choice to drive cars because the benefit outweighs the risk. We connect our computers to the Internet for the same reason. We do our best to manage the risk, of course, but ultimately the responsibility is ours. Software vendors have a responsibility to provide software that is fundamentally stable and secure, of course, but just like a car, it is up to the end user to use the software responsibly.

If a car accelerates through the back of some poor guy's garage when he hits the brakes, or a gas tank explodes when a Ford Pinto is rear-ended, the public rightly expects the company responsible to correct the problem. But the vast majority of accidents can be attributed to drivers, other cars on the road, or conditions outside of anyone's control, not to fundamental flaws in the engineering of the cars. Again, the analogy applies to computers and networks; most real-world security vulnerabilities could be addressed by users applying basic security measures.

Practical precautions Here are five easy examples of the common-sense precautions I'm talking about:

- 1 Secure physical access to your computers and crucial network devices. The ultimate 'denial of service' attack may just be someone walking in, unplugging your Mac, and stealing it.
- 2 Assign passwords that are non-trivial and difficult to guess, without being hard to remember. Trivial passwords ('abc123', 'admin', 'test', etc.) are commonly guessed by port sniffing robots, and definitely need to be avoided. At the same time, while long sequences of

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

random characters might seem more secure, these passwords essentially force users to write them down for handy reference. [For real world advice on how to maintain a set of memorable and secure passwords, check out Joe Kissell's Take Control of Passwords in Mac OS X. –Adam]

3 When setting up network services, don't share user accounts among users. When more than one person uses the same user account, they not only automatically have access to the same content and services, but your ability to track activity is severely limited. Should you ever need to review activity logs for some reason, there may be no way to tell one user from another.

4 Minimize the number of applications running, and use software only from trusted sources.

Many potential attacks aren't launched against a single application, but rather make use of multiple applications in conjunction with one another. By eliminating unnecessary applications, and avoiding software from dubious sources, you can minimize the chance that a small flaw in one program can be turned into a big hole in your system.

5 When setting up a normal desktop Mac, a server, or your network, turn on and properly configure the firewall (which is built into Mac OS X and most modern routers). While it may take a few extra minutes, this is time well-spent, even when security isn't a primary concern. It is shocking how much malicious traffic is on the Internet. Much of this traffic is more annoying than actually dangerous for Mac users, but your first defense against email harvesting robots, virus-spread port scanners, and worse is a properly deployed firewall.

This list is far from complete, but the general idea is that common sense precautions on both individual Macs, servers, and network devices is far more important to the security of your key systems than the arcane 'vulnerabilities' reported on the Internet.

When cars first began to be used widely, their limited top speed minimized the risk of driving them.

As they have become more powerful, and the roads have become more congested, the risks have increased and drivers have had to exercise more skill and care to get around safely. Similarly, as we increasingly rely on universally available and networked computer systems, and as ever more critical information is kept on these systems, we must be better about basic precautions, spending our time on them, rather than on worrying about the latest possible exploit.

Airbags are a great safety feature, but you still need to pay attention to the road.

[John O'Fallon founded Maxum Development <www.maxum.com/>, makers of Rumpus, a popular FTP and Web file transfer server. He has been developing commercial software for Apple computers for 25 years.] John O'Fallon, TidBITS 865

From Apple Sauce March 2007



@ TROUBLESHOOTING EMAIL CONNECTIONS

See this article online at <http://news.office-watch.com?469>

When you're setting up a new email account in your email program there's lots of little things that can go wrong. One little typo or misunderstanding can break the connection. While the troubleshooting messages have improved, all too often the only thing that you know is that the connection doesn't work but you don't know why. In this issue we'll look at some common problem areas with email account connections and how to trace the fault

@ GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW

Before you begin get all the information you need for POP (aka POP3) and SMTP. If you have a new Internet connection provider this info should be provided with your new account setup documents.

- POP is used to get incoming email
- SMTP is used to send your outgoing messages.

You need both POP and SMTP to get a fully working email connection.

Your ISP or other email host should tell you, Login name, Password, POP server name and SMTP server name.

There's various things you need to know about each of these.

@ LOGIN NAME

The email login name can be either the account name only or both the name and domain. Eg bruceb or bruceb@freddagg.com

Often the instructions are unclear on this point. If you have an authentication problem try the other option.

@ PASSWORD

This may be allocated by your ISP for a new connection and is often the same as the connection dial-up password (at least for the first mailbox as part of your connection).

If it was created by your ISP then you should change it as a security precaution.

The password may be case-sensitive or not – there's no hard rule. It's best to enter the password EXACTLY as you made it or receive from your ISP.

@ POP SERVER NAME

This will be a domain name – the most common ones start with pop , pop3 or mail (eg pop.freddagg.com or mail.freddagg.com).

POP – Post Office Protocol

@ SMTP SERVER NAME

Similar to the POP server, it is domain name – the most common ones start with smtp , mail (eg pop.freddagg.com or mail.freddagg.com).

The POP and SMTP server names can be the same, but not necessarily.

There can be an option to authenticate SMTP connections. In the early days of the internet you could send email through any SMTP connection but spammers took advantage of that. ISP's have to control who sends out email through their computers. Most use IP filtering – in other words it only allows SMTP connections from computers using their internet access services.

As an option, they can also enable password authentication – so you can login (usually with the same details as POP) and send your email from wherever you are. This is very useful because it lets customers keep their same email setup when they are travelling. Not all ISP's allow SMTP authentication but, in our opinion, they should. If it's available we always enable SMTP authentication, especially when on a laptop (which could roam to other connections).

SMTP = Simple Mail Transfer Protocol

@ LIKE MAGIC

Because POP and SMTP server names have common prefixes some email programs and services take your email address and try to guess the server names. It's not magic and it doesn't always work but often does.

For example if you enter bruceb@freddagg.com then the account setup

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

on mail2web.com and Outlook 2007 will try to connect to mail.freddagg.com pop.freddagg.com etc.

@ CHECK YOUR TYPING

A friend once spent a frustrating day trying to get his email setup working, he finally gave up and asked Peter to come around. Imagine his frustration when Peter sat down, stared at the screen for a moment then changed the server name from smpt. to smtp. – that's all it took!

Another mistake is to type a comma instead of a fullstop/period.

The lesson is to carefully check what you've typed – make sure you see what's on the screen not what you know should be there.

@ TROUBLESHOOTING SERVER CONNECTION

If your email program can't connect to the email server, you need to know if you can reach the POP and SMTP servers.

If your email program doesn't tell you, you can check the connection yourself using the PING command. PING is an internet utility which checks if the domain name can be resolved to an IP address (ie is the DNS system working) and then checks if a connection can be made to the IP address.

To start PING go to the command prompt (aka 'DOS Box') in Windows. There are Ping utilities out there but the one in Windows is sufficient.

From the Start menu choose 'Run' then type 'cmd' to open up a window that will be familiar to those of us above a certain age.

Type in ping followed by the name of the POP or SMTP server. If all goes well you'll see a result like this:

```
> Ping mail.freddagg.com
Pinging mail.freddagg.com [264.202.265.92] with 32 bytes
of data:
Reply from 264.202.265.92: bytes=32 time=409ms TTL=107
Reply from 264.202.265.92: bytes=32 time=357ms TTL=107
Reply from 264.202.265.92: bytes=32 time=282ms TTL=107
Reply from 264.202.265.92: bytes=32 time=251ms TTL=107
```

Ping statistics for 264.202.265.92:

Packets: Sent = 4, Received = 4, Lost = 0 (0% loss),
Approximate round trip times in milli-seconds:

Minimum = 251ms, Maximum = 409ms, Average = 324ms

The server name mail.freddagg.com translates to an IP address (by the way, '264.202.265.92' is a fake IP address). The next lines indicate four results from connecting that server. The time for the response, in milliseconds, doesn't matter for our purposes.

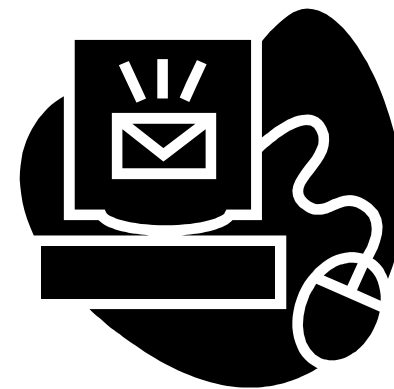
If the server name isn't correct (or your internet connection isn't working) then you'll see something like:

```
> Ping mail.freddagg.com
```

Ping request could not find host mail.freddagg.com.
Please check the name and try again.

If the server name is correct but a connection can't be made then you'll see an IP address but no connection result.

In the next issue of Email Essentials we'll look at testing and troubleshooting your login plus getting email transactions logs for Outlook or Outlook Express to work out more complicated problems.



SPREADSHEET ERRORS.WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY'RE WRONG AND HOW TO GET THEM RIGHT

See this article online at <http://news.office-watch.com?468>

Based on an article by Helen Bradley

What happens when there's an error in a worksheet? The answer is that it depends on what the worksheet is calculating and how bad the error is. Theoretically if an error were to over calculate doses of a highly potent drug then an error could kill, if it were to under calculate a company's cash flow situation, it could harm the financial stability of the company.

Apart from some scandalous horror stories about what spreadsheet errors have cost some organizations, there's an underlying message here that spreadsheet errors exist and they cost money. If you're creating spreadsheets for financial or other important purposes it will pay you to take the approach that your worksheet could (and probably does) contain errors and to do what you can to track and fix them

WHAT ERROR IS THAT?

There are three basic types of errors to look out for; Syntax errors, runtime errors and logic errors. Here's a quick look at the differences between them. Syntax errors result from you misapplying Excel's own language. For example, a syntax error occurs when you use an =MAXIMUM function (instead of =MAX) or you type =MAX() omitting a compulsory argument (the range of cells to apply the function to). Syntax errors are generally easy to track because Excel finds them for you. Try typing =MAXIMUM(A1:A3) and the cell will contain #NAME? indicating a problem with the formula.

A Runtime error occurs when you actually run a program. In Excel terms you'd encounter a runtime error if, for example, a cell containing data which you've used as the divisor in a formula were altered to zero. Try this, type the number 10 in cell A1 and then the formula =200/A1 in cell A2. It all looks fine, until you change the value in cell A1 to zero and you get a runtime error. Runtime errors often occur intermittently and, because it can be hard to predict the exact set of circumstances which will trigger the error, they are often difficult to find and fix until they actually occur.

Logic errors are even harder to find because they don't give off visual clues to the fact that they exist. The worksheet looks ok, but the answers are wrong because of some faulty logic in the design, caused generally by the person

who wrote the formulae. For example, a simple logic error could be created by the formula =2+3*4. Some people intend this to be evaluated as 2 + 3 = 5 and then 5 * 4 = 20. That's not how Excel will evaluate it. If you don't believe me, try it. Excel uses a specific order of precedence to evaluate this (and every other formula) and it performs the multiplication first and then the addition -- the answer is 14. It's a ridiculously simple (and understandable) mistake to make and it's very, very hard to track. It's a logic error! (To learn more about Order of Precedence, type 'order of precedence' into Excel's Answer Wizard).

FINDING ERRORS USING SIMPLE MATH

A simple way to locate errors is to use some math tools you probably learned in High School -- acchh! remember High School... gives me palpitations just to think about it. However one math teacher I had used to get us to perform rough calculations before we could do the accurate ones. So we'd make a quick guess at the result we were going to get before we set about calculating it.

There's no hard and fast rule about how to make rough calculations, except they should be performed quickly and give you a ball park figure for your answer.

Another way to check complex formulae is to use simple figures rather than complex ones and check the results are what you'd expect (simple figures make manual checking easier too). If the simple figures work, there's a good chance more complex ones will too.

You can also check formulae by using known results, i.e. data you know the correct answer for. For example, if I were to use the PMT function to calculate the repayments on a loan, I'd punch in the data from the Excel help topic on PMT functions (it's there, it's free and I don't have to go hunting for it) and see if I got the results the help file suggests I should. If I don't, either the data in the Microsoft's help file is wrong or I made a mistake -- either way I have some more work or research to do before I can trust the formula that I wrote.

In a work situation you may already have some hand calculations you've made or ones that have come from another source. Punch those numbers into your formula to check it and don't do anything else until you get the same result, or until you understand why you're not getting it.

AUDITING TOOLBAR

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Finding your way around a complex worksheet is easier if you put the Formula Auditing toolbar on (right-click on the toolbar and choose Formula Auditing).

This toolbar has many tricks:

Error checking

This will scan the worksheet for problems. It won't pick up maths errors or incorrect cell references.

Tracing

The 'flowchart' looking buttons let you see which cells are required to calculate a particular cell (precedents) or see which cells are affected by a change in the current cell (dependents).

This can help you work out the logic (or lack of) in a worksheet.

Watch Window

Sometimes it can be hard to keep an eye on a cell because it isn't in view. The Watch Window lets you nominate cells to watch the changing values as you tinker with the worksheet.

GOOD DESIGN IS A KEY ERROR PREVENTION TOOL

Another beneficial tool for keeping errors to a minimum is to design your worksheets so that the constant data you use is stored in a highly visible place. For example, if you are making calculations using county tax rates, put the figure (7.5% in my sunny Californian home town) into a cell and, next to it, type County Tax Rate or something equally descriptive.

Then, whenever you need to include the tax rate in a formula include a reference in your formula to where the 7.5% is stored, instead of typing the value 7.5% in the formula itself. So, if the tax rate were stored in cell A2, a formula for calculating tax on an item may read =B6*A2 instead of =B6*7.5%.

There are a few reasons for taking this approach. One is that it's dead easy to check you're using the current tax rate, you only have to check one cell. If the tax rate goes up (or down), ditto, change one cell and all the calculations which use the tax rate will change automatically too.

You can, of course, name the cell if you like and instead of referencing the cell location you can then use the name in your formula.

DOCUMENTATION - DON'T PUT OFF UNTIL TOMORROW WHAT YOU SHOULD DO TODAY!

Often problems in worksheets don't occur when they are first created but occur later on when they're handed off to someone else to maintain, often because the designer has moved up or out of the organization. The person inheriting the worksheet doesn't fully understand the assumptions underlying it and how it has been designed so, when something needs updating, they don't get the changes right or they don't change everything that needs changing, or they simply don't know that changes are even required. You'll know yourself it is often hard to remember your own logic when you're working with your own designs. How much worse will it be when you're trying to reverse engineer someone else's design? Many of these problems could be overcome by producing proper documentation for the worksheet.

Allocate a worksheet or more in each workbook to document your work. Include basics like your name and the date you created the workbook. Outline what its purpose is and how it makes its calculations. Also list any assumptions you've made and anything you can think of now, as you're creating it, that you would want to know in the future if you were charged with the task of updating it.

Documentation is a time for honesty, not whitewashing. If you know there are problems with the worksheet and it fails under certain circumstances or it has only limited use, note this in your documentation. Detail the formulae that you've used and the data that is used to make the calculations.

You can also add a 'To Do' list of things you'd like to add to the worksheet in future. Not only is it a good reference for you, it can help other people work out what the worksheet can and cannot do.

At worst you'll save yourself hours of work if you need to make changes in the future and, at best, your thoroughness may save someone else from a costly mistake. Remember that the time to document a workbook is while you are working on it - not tomorrow!

Newbie Club Tutorials

Tutorial ... "How To Turn A Folder Into A Toolbar"

Here's a very neat trick you can try out. If you experiment with it, you'll find it comes in very handy.

To save cluttering up your Desktop with too many icons, you can save a lot of hunting around for saved stuff by creating a folder and downloading related stuff to it - like all your motoring ebooks, or free marketing ebooks...

RIGHT click on an empty area of your Desktop Select 'New' then 'Folder' A new folder appears on your Desktop. While the name 'New Folder' is still active, type in the name you want - like 'Motoring'.

If your PC won't allow you to do this, then RIGHT click on the folder and select 'Rename' and type in 'Motoring' or whatever.

You can fill this folder with anything already sitting on your Desktop by left clicking on an existing object or folder and while keeping your finger depressed, drag it across into the new folder. Then release the button.

Easy Peasy, but here's the cool part ...

Click your mouse pointer over the new folder and hold the left mouse button down. Now drag the folder to the edge of the screen.

Magically it turns into a taskbar with all the individual folders, ebooks or whatever on display!

Every time you place something into that folder it will appear in your new taskbar.

When you get fed up with it, just RIGHT click anywhere on the toolbar and click the Close toolbar command, or untick the toolbar name.

Tutorial ... "How To Auto Hide Your Desktop Taskbars"

Here's a way to create extra screen space when your working.

When you create a new Desktop Toolbar, as described in Tutorial above , try the auto hide feature to save Desktop space ...

RIGHT click on an empty part of the taskbar.

Select 'Autohide' The taskbar has disappeared!

When you want to use it, just move your mouse cursor to the edge of the screen where it is hiding and it reappears.

You can use the autohide feature to hide any of the toolbars on your desktop.

Just remember which side of the screen they are hiding on!

To create even MORE space ...

When you open your browser to, say, visit a web page, just click on the f11 key on your keyboard to hide the top toolbars.

To return to normal just click on f11 again.

Magic!

Tutorial ... "How To Clear Desktop Clutter"

Have you recently downloaded something to your Desktop, only to find that there's no Icon appearing on your screen?

Maybe there's so many icons on there, that it can't elbow its way into view.

Perhaps your desktop is filled to overflowing with icons so that many of them have disappeared off the screen?

(Continued on page 10)

So how do you create more space?

You can either stop downloading stuff or ...

Reduce the size of your Icons, and reduce the space between them! Like this ...

Right click on an empty space on your Desktop.

Left click 'Properties'.

Left click 'Appearance' tab.

Left click 'Item' drop down box.

Left click 'Icon'.

Reduce the size in the 'Size' box.

Click OK. Done!

If you want even more room you can reduce the amount of space between them and get more icons per inch for your money.

Go to the 'Item' drop down box again, and open it.

Left Click on 'Icon Spacing Horizontal' Reduce the space needed in the 'Size' box Repeat the procedure with 'Icon Spacing Vertical'.

With trial and error you'll be amazed at the amount of space you can save this way.

Now you'll have plenty of room on your desktop for your coffee and sandwiches!

Tutorial What's The ALT Key for?

The ALT key is a special Windows key that activates windows menus. It's

located at the bottom left of your keyboard.

Let's have some fun with just one example of it's use.

Open your Windows Notepad program by clicking Start All Programs Accessories Notepad.

Hit the ALT key once.

The FILE menu option is now depressed (pushed in, not sad) in the menu bar of the program. Or it may look like it's greyed out or highlighted.

Now hit the down arrow on your keyboard and the FILE menu will open.

Hit the down arrow again and you will go to the first item on the sub-menu; again, the second item, and so on.

To move to the other main menu items, press the ALT key, followed by the right arrow key on the keyboard.

If you want to see the complete sub-menu under each main menu, hit the ALT key, the down key once, which opens the FILE menu, then the right key once - in NOTEPAD the EDIT sub-menu items will appear. And so on!

To close an open menu use the Esc key.

From Newbie Club Insider #316 5th March 2007

Are Registry cleaners worthwhile?

For some, Windows Registry cleaning is a waste of time. For others, it's essential!

Here's how to tell if your PC might benefit from a thorough cleaning of its Registry

The whys and hows of Registry cleaners

- reader named Dave asked a question I was happy to answer because it's about one of my favorite topics:

"Would you consider commenting on the value of Registry cleaning programs and, more importantly, making some recommendations?"

First, here's some background: According to Wikipedia, the Windows Registry is "a database which stores settings and options for the operating system for Microsoft Windows 32-bit versions, 64-bit versions and Windows Mobile. It contains information and settings for all the hardware, operating system software, most non-operating system software, users, and preferences of the PC and so on." (For more in-depth information, read the whole article http://WindowsSecrets.com/links/vx17f019h4n0d/84ab75h/?url=en.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FWindows_Registry.)

Some Registry entries are maintained by Windows itself, which does a reasonable job of looking after its own settings. But Windows can't know what third-party software needs to do in the Registry, and so more or less cedes control of those entries to the software that creates them.

Some software is very tidy, even frugal about what it stores in the Registry. This kind of software is also thorough in erasing all traces of itself when it is eventually uninstalled or upgraded.

Other software, however, is notorious not only for spewing data throughout the Registry, but also for leaving behind large amounts of digital debris when the software is removed. In fact, this behavior is sometimes intentional; many time-limited software trials, for example, deliberately leave behind special software "flags" that prevent you from using the software after the trial has expired, even if you remove and reinstall the software afresh.

Software crashes can leave behind messy Registry entries, too, some of which may interfere with your ability to correct the problem. These orphan Registry entries may even prevent you from successfully reinstalling the software later.

Bogus data causes the Registry to grow needlessly in a condition sometimes referred to as "Registry bloat." A bloated Registry slows operation of your PC (because your operating system has to wade through the bad entries while seeking the good ones) and can lead to crashes.

In addition, nothing good can come from Registry entries that point to programs or DLLs that no longer exist on the PC.

If your PC is relatively new and you haven't changed its original configuration much, then Registry bloat isn't likely to be a major issue. But the longer your PC has been in service — especially if you frequently add and remove hardware and software — the more deadwood your Registry is likely to contain.

Software tinkerers, in particular — people like me (and maybe like you!) who regularly try out new programs, experiment with shareware, or explore the more obscure settings of their setups — are likely candidates for significant Registry bloat.

A good Registry cleaning tool will seek out and delete bogus entries. For example, such a tool can check to see that every program and file referenced in the Registry really exists in the location the Registry thinks it does. If the location is incorrect, the tool can update the Registry entry with the correct data. If the referenced program or file doesn't exist, the tool can delete the meaningless Registry entry.

A while ago, I tested and wrote about 10 different Registry cleaning tools in InformationWeek. I found [jv16 PowerTools](#) (there's a full-featured 30-day free trial available), and [EasyCleaner](#) to be the best free tool (though not as good as [jv16 PowerTools](#)). [I've tried other tools in the interim, but I still haven't seen anything that makes me want to change those recommendations. See the full article for information on how I tested the tools, and why I chose those two in particular.](#)

The Registry is the heart of Windows, so it's not something you want to alter on a whim. But, if you use your PC as heavily as I use mine, then regular and routine Registry cleaning can help your system stay as fast and stable as when it was new.

As always, make a backup before altering your PC in any significant way!

When is it safe to delete .log files?

In the Feb. 22 <issue, I wrote about the hundreds of hidden log files that may "grow like weeds in the obscure corners of your PC."

Reader Ed Laborwit writes that he found many log files on his PC, but is worried about the effects of deleting them:

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

"Is there a way to tell us if we actually need the log files? I did the search and found 400 in a computer that I've been running for about three years. I can put them on a disc, but how often would I have to retrieve the files?"

As a general rule of thumb, the older a log file is, the less likely it is that you'll need the information it contains. For example, imagine you're installing a version of, say, CrashOmatic and, true to its name, it crashes halfway through the install. If CrashOmatic created a log file during the install, you can open the file to see how far the installation got, and at what step it failed. If it was trying to do something to your video system, for example, at least you'd have a place to start troubleshooting.

On the other hand, if you search your PC and find a log file from a version of, say, StableSoft that's been running perfectly ever since you first installed it, odds are you won't need that logfile. This sounds more like Ed's case.

So, the potential value of a log file is usually highest when the log file is freshly created or altered. It diminishes over time. If your PC is running fine and you haven't recently changed hardware or software, then you probably can remove all the log files without undue risk. But as I said in the Feb. 22 issue, it pays to make a backup of the log files before deleting them. That way, you can recover the data, in the unlikely event that you do eventually need it.

Time For A Laff

A tour bus driver is driving with a bus load of Seniors when he is tapped on his shoulder by a little old lady.

She offers him a handful of peanuts, which he gratefully munches up.

After about 15 minutes, she taps him on his shoulder again and she hands him another handful of peanuts.

When she is about to hand him yet another batch he asks her:

"Why don't you eat the peanuts yourself?"

"We can't chew them because we've no teeth", she replied.

"But we just LOVE the chocolate around them."

Pause For Thought ...

Legend has it that these words are written on the tomb of a bishop, buried in the crypts of Westminster Abbey in London:

"When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world.

As I grew older and wiser, I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country.

"But it too, seemed immovable.

"As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only my family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it,

"And now as I lie on my deathbed, I suddenly realize, If I had only changed myself first, then by example I would have changed my family.

"From their inspiration and encouragement, I would then have been able to better my country and, who knows, I may have even changed the world."

DATES IN EXCEL, PART 2

See this article online at <http://news.office-watch.com?470> In a previous edition of Office for Mere Mortals <http://news.office-watch.com?467> we looked at the basics of the date and time formats, the different ways they can and should be displayed, and how they are actually stored by Excel.

Working with dates in Excel is a common task:

- * Are you trying to determine the number of days between two dates?
- * Do you need to know the date that is X number of days in the future?
- * Do you want to find out how many work days there are before Christmas, or until you retire?

In this article we use the basic date formulas in Excel as building blocks and combine them to create more powerful date-based functions. You'll be surprised how easily these tasks can be achieved.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TODAY() AND NOW()

The =TODAY() function returns the current date only based on your computer system's calendar.

The =NOW() function returns both the current date _and_ time based on your computer system's calendar and clock.

Try typing them into separate cells in a worksheet and you will see they are displayed differently - one with time and one without.

NOW() = 12 Mar 2007 23:05 TODAY() = 12 Mar 2007 Strictly speaking TODAY() returns the date and the time at midnight eg 12 Mar 2007 12:00 .

The difference may not seem like much, but keep in mind that serial date representations are also used in date and time comparisons, here's what Excel is really storing for the above examples:

NOW() = 39153.96181 TODAY() = 39153 Therefore NOW() does not equal TODAY() because the numbers are not exactly equal - but if you're just looking at the date component that doesn't seem correct.

COMPARING DATES If you want to compare dates, make sure you are using the right formula in the right situation - compare dates with dates and times with times.

For example, you want to compare a date with the current date and you use the formula:

```
=IF(NOW() = DATEVALUE("12-Mar-2007"), TRUE, FALSE)
```

The formula returns FALSE even when today's date is 12-Mar-2007. This is because the NOW() formula returns both date and time, while the DATEVALUE() function returns the date only.

Therefore, it will only return TRUE when the date is 12-Mar-2007 and the time is exactly 12:00:00AM.

Obviously in this case you want to replace the NOW() function with the TODAY() function. Since both the TODAY() function and DATEVALUE() function generate the default time of 12:00:00AM, this will only check the date value of each function against each other and will return TRUE if today's date is 12-Mar-2007. Therefore the right formula is as follows:

```
=IF(TODAY() = DATEVALUE("12-Mar-2007"), TRUE, FALSE)
```

In this example, we used the DATEVALUE() formula to specify that a string was meant to be interpreted in the logical test as a date. For those who are familiar with some computer programming, it is similar to the concept of "type-casting". In this case you are casting a string into a date format.

(Continued on page 14)

If you enter the date 12-Mar-2007 into cell A1, then the formula can reference this cell and no type-casting with the DATEVALUE() formula would be necessary. The formula then becomes:

```
=IF(TODAY() = A1, TRUE, FALSE)
```

YEAR(), MONTH() AND DAY() STRINGS Excel also provides some functions to extract certain information from a date. If you always want to display the current year as part of a Copyright notice in a particular cell of a worksheet, type in the following formula:

```
="Copyright " & YEAR(NOW())
```

The current result is Copyright 2007. Next year it will change to Copyright 2008.

The MONTH() and DAY() functions work in much the same way. They extract the respective month and day portions from a referenced date and produce a string. The formula =MONTH(DATEVALUE("12-Mar-2007")) will produce the string value "3" as March is the third month.

The NOW() and TODAY() functions are interchangeable when placed within a YEAR(), MONTH() and DAY() function, as these functions are solely focused on their respective part of the date. They completely ignore any time value

.YEAR(), MONTH() AND DAY() STRINGS Excel also provides some functions to extract certain information from a date. If you always want to display the current year as part of a Copyright notice in a particular cell of a worksheet, type in the following formula:

```
="Copyright " & YEAR(NOW())
```

The current result is Copyright 2007. Next year it will change to Copyright 2008.

The MONTH() and DAY() functions work in much the same way. They

extract the respective month and day portions from a referenced date and produce a string. The formula =MONTH(DATEVALUE("12-Mar-2007")) will produce the string value "3" as March is the third month.

The NOW() and TODAY() functions are interchangeable when placed within a YEAR(), MONTH() and DAY() function, as these functions are solely focused on their respective part of the date. They completely ignore any time value.

BASIC DATE ARITHMETIC The =DATE(year, month, day) formula creates a date out of the 3 specified parameters. To create a function that specifies the date of the first day of next month, then we can combine this new formula with some of our basic functions as follows:

```
=DATE(YEAR(NOW()), MONTH(NOW()) + 1, 1)
```

This formula provides the DATE() formula with the current year, the next month (current month + 1) and the 1st day.

If you want to find out the date 100 days from today, simply add 100 to the day value of the current date as follows:

```
=DATE(YEAR(NOW()), MONTH(NOW()), DAY(NOW()) + 100)
```

Finally, if you want a basic way of displaying the number of days until a certain project is due (or until a holiday like Christmas day), try using the following type of formula and then changing the cell formatting to "General":

```
=DATEVALUE("25-Dec-2007") - TODAY()
```

If the cell formatting is 'Date' then the number of days will appear as a seemingly incongruous date in the early 1900s - when you change to 'General' you'll see the number of days between today and your next batch

(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

of gifts.

Often a simple calculation of the difference between two dates in days isn't enough - in the next issue of Office for Mere Mortals we'll look at some more useful methods.

MAKING A DATE - TIPS AND TRICKS The DATE() function also has a few tricks that can be useful if you know what you're doing. Some values that you might expect to return an error are accepted, but they can also give you results you might not expect.

The MONTH() value is actually a positive or negative integer representing the month of the year. The traditional values range from 1 to 12 representing January to December. If you supply the DATE() function with a month value greater than 12, it adds that number of months to the first month in the year specified. For example, DATE(2007,15,4) returns the date: 4-Mar-2008.

If you supply the DATE() function with a month value that is less than 1, it subtracts that number of months plus 1 from the first month in the year specified. For example, DATE(2008,-4,15) returns the date: 15-Aug-2007 (five months before 15-Jan-2008).

A month value of 0 gives December in the year before the one specified. A month value of -1 gives November in the year before the one specified.

If you supply the DATE() function with a day value that is greater than the number of days in the month specified, it adds that number of days to the first day in the month. For example, DATE(2008,1,37) returns the serial number representing 6-Feb-2008.

LAST DAY OF THE MONTH The DATE() function that specifies the last day of the current month works by specifying the date as the 0th day of next month as follows:

=DATE(YEAR(NOW()), MONTH(NOW())+1, 0)

For example if NOW() is in March then MONTH(NOW()) + 1 returns April and the full result will be 31 March in the current year.

Changing the final 0 to -1 will give the penultimate (second-last) day (e.g. 30 March). Similarly -10 will return ten days before the end of the previous month (21 March).

In the next edition of Office for Mere Mortals, we'll round off our knowledge of dates in Excel with a look at some more complicated date functions.

From Office for Mere Mortals #8.09



Worth Repeating

Things To Ponder

1. Can you cry under water?
2. When I was young we used to go "skinny dipping," now I just "chunky dunk."
3. How important does a person have to be before they are considered assassinated instead of just murdered?
4. If money doesn't grow on trees then why do banks have branches?
5. Why do you have to "put your two cents in"... but it's only a penny for your thoughts"? Where's that extra penny going to?
6. Once you're in heaven, do you get stuck wearing the clothes you were buried in for eternity?
7. Why does a round pizza come in a square box?
8. How is it that we put man on the moon before we figured out it would be a good idea to put wheels on luggage?
9. Why is it that people say they "slept like a baby" when babies wakeup like every two hours?
10. If a deaf person has to go to court, is it still called a hearing?
11. Why are you IN a movie, but you are ON TV?
12. Why do people pay to go up tall buildings and then put money in binoculars to look at things on the ground?
13. How come we choose from just two people for President

and fifty for Miss America?

14. If a 000 operator has a heart attack, whom does he/she call?
15. I signed up for an exercise class and was told to wear loose-fitting clothing. If I HAD any loose-fitting clothing, I wouldn't have signed up in the first place!
16. Wouldn't it be nice if whenever we messed up our life we could simply press 'Ctrl Alt Delete' and start all over?
17. Stress is when you wake up screaming and then you realize you haven't fallen asleep yet.
18. Just remember...if the world didn't suck, we'd all fall off.
19. Why is it that our children can't read a Bible in school, but they can in prison?
20. If raising children was going to be easy, it never would have started with something called labour!
21. Brain cells come and brain cells go, but fat cells live forever

