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.JUNE MEETINGS

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There won't be an LCG MONTHLY MEETING in June —the next meeting will be on July 3, 2013.

Newstream Articles

Deadline : 10 Days before Meeting

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OPEN Committee 2013/14

O.P.E.N. Co-ordinator: Robert Tierney. *Responsible for the smooth running of the Centre on a daily basis*

O.P.E.N. Chairperson: Laraine Rist. *Chair all meetings of OPEN and ensure that they run smoothly*

O.P.E.N. Vice Chairperson: Robert Tierney. *Chair meeting when the Chairperson is unavailable.*

O.P.E.N. Minute Secretary: Heather Loffel. *Handles all incoming and outgoing communications Responsible for the documentation and distribution of all meeting minutes*

Assistant Secretary: - open -. *Help the Secretary where necessary*

Treasurer: Dennis Murray. *Responsible for all monies and banking*

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Newsletter Editor: Dennis Murray.

Publicity Officer: Iris Meek. *Responsible for all advertising*

Membership Co-ordinator: Eleanor Horder. *Keep Membership database up to date.*

Tutor Co-ordinator: Bruce Dineen. *Keep regular contact with Tutors to bring ideas and concerns to meetings*

Maintenance Co-ordinators: Dennis Murray. *Responsible for the maintenance and repairs to all computer equipment*

"V.I.C.T.O.R." Co-ordinator: Robert Tierney.

Webmaster/Content: Tom Olsen. <<mailto:webmaster@lcg.org.au>>

OPEN Committee: June Hazzlewood, Judy Hall, Janet Headlam, Sandra Viney, Kay Dawson, Karia Wicks.

OPEN NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2013

COORDINATOR'S COLUMN

Hello everyone,

I would like to start of this month's article with a **SCAM warning** which has the potential to catch a lot of people off-guard. This scam has caught one of my neighbours' hip pocket.

My neighbour received an email supposedly from the Australian Tax Office saying that to receive her tax return she had to click on a link on the email and had to give her bank details. If she not she would not receive her tax cheque.

Now a lot of the time these scams can be easily picked if you know what to look for. In this case it was pure coincidence that this scam got her attention because she **was waiting** for a cheque from the tax office. So, dutifully the link was clicked because she was told in the email that if she did not comply she would be in legal trouble. Bank details were entered, and minutes after finishing the online details a call was received from her bank saying that someone had taken most of her money out of her bank account.

When I looked at the email what got my attention was the logo of the tax office. It was a badly photo-copied letterhead—when you go to the ATO web site you can see the vast difference in letterheads.

The one thing that you need to remember is that no financial institution or government organisation will send you an email asking you to give your financial details via an email or over the phone. If you receive anything that seems out of place either via email or phone please call your financial institution immediately. Scammers are continually finding new ways to fleece people.

There is an excellent government website which keeps people alert on what is happening in regard to scams. The web address is www.scamwatch.gov.au

On the 16th of May Laraine Rist and I attended the A.I.R (Association of Independent Retirees) Expo at the Tailrace Centre. We had an overwhelming amount of interest in O.P.E.N with new members joining as a result our participation at the Expo. It was a really great evening and it was so nice to see some familiar faces from O.P.E.N come over and say 'Hi'. There will be a positive flow-on from this Expo for months to come.

O.P.E.N and V.I.C.T.O.R will be hosting **Australia's Biggest Morning tea event on Friday the 28th of June** from 11am-1pm. We would love to see as many people as can attend. It will be a gold coin donation. For everyone who donates before and on the day there are some lovely lucky-door prizes which have been donated to O.P.E.N by West Tamar Woodcrafts. **A big thank you from O.P.E.N!**

- 1st Prize a Lazy Susan valued at \$65.00
- 2nd Prize Cheese board valued at \$27.00
- 3rd Prize Dip Tray valued at \$25.00
- 4th Prize Blackwood Bowl valued at \$18.00

If you can please bring a plate - with some food on it. Also, please mark your plate with your name so we can return it to you after the event if you happen to leave it behind on the day.

Till next time-happy computing ... Rob



DONATIONS

Our on-going thanks is extended to those members who have given OPEN 'first option' when disposing of their surplus computer equipment. Recently we have acquired some very useful items including a scanner, a portable photo printer and some office equipment that has been snapped up by our 'admin' officers. Even if there are items we can't use ourselves we will try and find them a 'good home' before consigning them to e-waste. **Dennis**

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VENUE TELEPHONE NUMBER

Don't forget that the club telephone is available during class hours.

******* 6343 4928 *******

Members and tutors can be contacted at the clubrooms **during class hours** by telephoning the number shown above.

Monday to Friday 10am – 3pm
Tuesday evenings 7pm—9 pm

★ **VICTOR PHONE NUMBER 0408 174 235** ★
★
★

★ **Contact the Coordinator Rob Tierney for assistance with computer problems at home** ★
★
★

★ **(Bookings are subject to availability of tutors.)** ★
★
★

CLARIFYING THE DOWNLOAD PROCESS

From time to time when I am asked to solve a problem on someone's computer I often find that there are multiple copies of an installation file in the Downloads folder.

How do they get there? I have a suspicion that in many cases the computer user doesn't realise that the file has downloaded and, in frustration, repeats the process several times.

That was certainly the case when asked to find out why a friend of one of our tutors was trying to install the paid upgrade version of a graphics program—when you've paid \$80-odd dollars you obviously expect something to happen!

What wasn't clear to that person was that **downloading** and **installation** were two separate processes. When I looked in their Downloads folder I found five (5) copies of the installation file. After making that discovery it was then simply a process of double-clicking one of the installation files and in a short while the program was installed and activated, ready to use.

While I was on the job I removed around 50 other multiple copies of other program installation files from the Downloads folder.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR PASSWORDS

It is a fairly common occurrence for many of us (*me included*) to forget one or more passwords at some stage during our computing adventures.

Many of the web-based programs that we use have some form of password recovery facility but in order to start the password reset process the web-site will need to send a 'link' via email to your Inbox.

If a member asks one of our tutors to assist in password recovery or resetting while they are at OPEN the tutor will usually need to access the member's email via their ISP's Webmail—and that means knowing your e-mail password!

So to help us to help you please make sure you know the passwords we may need. Write them down or have them recorded in a 'secret' file on your computer.

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PLEASE NOTE THAT IN 2013 ALL OF JUDY'S MORNING CLASSES WILL

START AT 10 AM

unless an earlier starting time is advised

FAMILY HISTORY ON-LINE

New information is being added to our resources on an on-going basis to help you trace your family's origins. Contact the club for more information.

Classes limited to 8 people.

Wednesday June 12, 2013

1 pm to 3:00 pm

Wednesday June 26, 2013

10 am to noon

Join Judy, Margaret G and the tutors for these informative sessions.

ANDROID 'OS' WORKSHOP

Wednesday June 19 from 10:00 am to 12 noon

Have you bought an Android tablet computer or smart-phone and have yet to find out it's true potential?

What useful 'apps' are available that weren't included when you bought the device.

Can you make it communicate with your other computers ... or a printer?

Let Bruce Dineen help you solve the mysteries!

BASIC GRAPHICS

Please check the registration sheets at the club to find out if there are places available.

The dates for the next classes are :

Next Month : Graphics Workshop June 5

10 am to 12 noon

Basic Graphics June 12

10 am to 12 noon

The aim of the Basic Graphics course is to equip participants with the skills required to enhance photos and includes transferring the images to a computer through scanning and from portable media devices.

LEVEL 2 & 3 GRAPHICS

With Paint Shop Pro 7 and 8

Wednesday June 19 1:00 to 3.00 pm

Paint Shop Pro XI Advanced Class

Wednesday June 26 1:00 to 3.00 pm

These classes are designed for people who have completed the Basic Graphics classes, and involves more advanced features of the Paint Shop Pro graphics programs.

OPEN Session Times

At Studioworks, 1 Pipeworks Rd, L'ton

Standard Sessions \$6.00

[Some special tutorial materials may incur additional charges]

Monday	10 am –12	General & Beginners
	1 pm – 3 pm	Basics and Beyond
	3:30 pm – 5:30 pm	Beginners Class
Tuesday	10 am –12	O-Learn & Beginners [all day]
	1 pm – 3 pm	Mac [all day]
	7 pm–9 pm	Basics (Night Class)
Wednesday		Special sessions or Meetings
		As for mornings (see rosters)
Thursday	10 am –12	General & Beginners
	1 pm – 3 pm	General & Beginners
Friday	10 am –12	General & Beginners
	1 pm – 3 pm	Beginners Class

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SPECIAL WEDNESDAY SESSIONS

Please register on the sheets – numbers may be limited

Date	Time	Topic	Details
June 5	10 am–12 noon	Basic Graphics	Additional Workshop Session
	1 pm onwards	OPEN monthly meeting	Current Financial Report and General Business. New members are welcome to attend.
	LCG Meeting	NO MEETING IN JUNE	Next LCG Workshop July 3 will discuss Networking and how it may be able to help you at home
June 7 FRIDAY	1:00 pm onwards	TUTORS MEETING No beginners' class this day	A chance for tutors to get together and discuss the best ways to deliver services to members.
June 12	10 am–12 noon	Basic Graphics	A class for members learning Basic Graphics techniques to enhance photos.
	1 pm–3.00 pm	Family History	Use our the considerable range of resources to trace your ancestors.
June 19	10 am–12 noon	Android Devices - Workshop Tablets and Phones	Learn what you can do and what 'apps' are available for your Android tablet or smart-phone
	1 pm–3.00 pm	Level 2 and 3 Graphics Class	Advanced graphics using Paint Shop Pro 7 and 8
June 26	10 am–12 noon	Family History	Use Ancestry.com to aid your research for a small additional fee.
	1 pm–3.00 pm	Advanced Graphics Class	Advanced topics using Paint Shop Pro XI
June 28 FRIDAY	11 am to 1 pm No classes this day	AUSTRALIA'S BIGGEST MORNING TEA AT OPEN	A Social get-together and fund-raising event for the Cancer Council. Lucky door prizes on offer for attendees.
July 3	10 am–12 noon	Basic Graphics	Graphics Workshop in the morning. OPEN Monthly Meeting to follow at 1 pm, LCG Networking Workshop at 7:30

OPEN NEWSLETTER JUNE 2013 WINDOWS 8 PAGE

WINDOWS 8 TABLET COMPUTING COMES TO OPEN

In most of the previous articles that I've written about Windows 8 I will (*quite likely*) have mentioned that the new operating system was designed with touch-screen devices in mind.

So up until now our support classes have focused on how members with Windows 8 computers can find their way around the new OS using traditional keyboard and mouse inputs. We have found that once we have overcome the initial 'shock and confusion' of a **very different user interface** that it has been mostly a case of business as usual when it comes to using the programs we have known and loved (?) over many years.

However, with some of our members having already made the leap into tablet computing via iPads and Android devices in order to have light-weight, portable computing at their finger-tips the committee at OPEN agreed that it was time to evaluate whether the Microsoft tablet was a worthy alternative for our members.

Early in May OPEN purchased an Asus VivoTab ME400C tablet plus a Bluetooth (wireless) keyboard. This tablet has a 10-inch screen and runs the **full Windows 8 Pro** operating system. The choice of the Pro version is an important consideration as it allows users to install many of the programs that you've been using on your previous computers. There is a version of Windows 8 called RT but the software for that OS is only available by downloading from the on-line Windows Store.

I must confess to having my reservations about touch-screen computing not the least being whether my 'fumbling fingers' could accurately find icons and menu options with the same degree of accuracy as a mouse. My early experiences in that regard suggest that **a stylus would**

WINDOWS 8 TABLET COMPUTING COMES TO OPEN *continued*

It may sound frivolous but one of the first tests I performed (*purely for research purposes of course*) was to play a few games. Solitaire and FreeCell worked fine—cards could be moved by tapping, holding, dragging and dropping, but when it came to Crazy Golf it was a different matter as that game relies very much on mouse inputs. For that type of game or mouse-oriented programs the intending user may have to acquire a Bluetooth mouse.

If you're wondering about my references to **add-on Bluetooth devices** it's because tablets at the lower end of the price spectrum aren't exactly bristling with USB ports and other methods of connecting external devices such as keyboards and mice, and printers may need to be wireless models.

On the VivoTab ME400C **everything is 'micro'** - a micro USB connection primarily designed to accommodate the power adaptor that recharges the battery, a micro HDMI port to enable the tablet to be connected to an external monitor and a micro-SD card slot that enables the storage capability to be increased by up to 32 Gigabytes. That card slot is also one of the methods by which software can be transferred to the tablet.

WINDOWS 8 SUPPORT FOR BEGINNERS

A class is being held each Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30 pm to assist owners of Windows 8 computers to find their way around the new operating system and its features.

Tutors who can lend a hand to assist the new users with the basic computer skills needed e.g. word processing, internet access, file management are invited to attend.

USING A WINDOWS 8 TABLET PLUS AND MINUS

While the Asus ME400C is a good little tablet it would be unrealistic to expect it to be a replacement for a full-size PC or laptop.

People who have already entered the world of tablets with iPads or 'Android' tablets have most likely done so because they want a small, lightweight, portable device that enables them to perform certain computer-related tasks while on the move—internet browsing, e-mail facilities, entertainment etc.

The ME400C does those things OK so what advantages and disadvantages does it have when compared (A) to its tablet competitors and (B) to 'conventional' computers.

The most obvious advantage is that it runs a full Windows operating system that will be fairly familiar to the majority of OPEN members. Yes, Windows 8 is quite a change from previous operating systems but once you are using those programs that you are familiar with on your other Windows computers the difference is barely noticeable. And of course, the ability to use the touch-screen facilities overcomes some of the difficulties that we have encountered when using keyboard and mouse inputs to try and tame Windows 8.

On the minus side the lack of an optical drive (CD or DVD) can make the installation of software more difficult but it's surprising how many of the basic programs that we use at OPEN can be installed from a USB flash-drive.

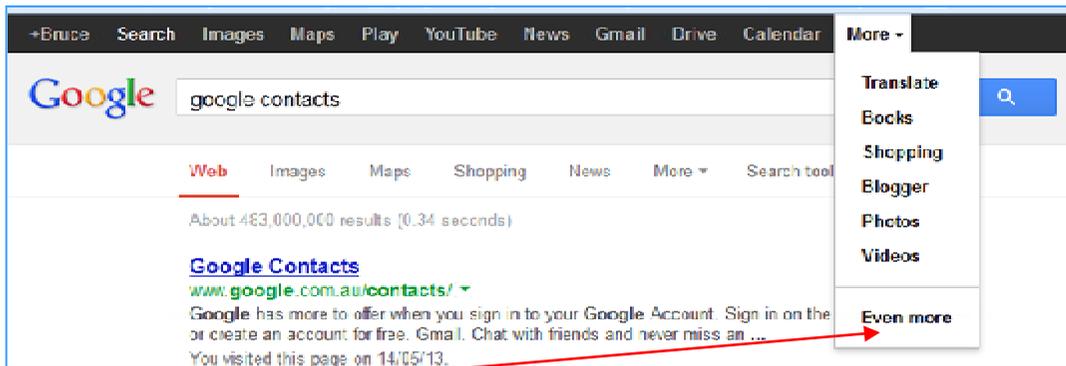
Speaking of flash-drives you may recall that I mentioned in the column to the left that the ME400C is limited in the number of 'ports' it has for communicating with external devices. I have since found a \$5 adapter called an OTG cable that plugs into the tablet's **single micro-USB port** and provides a connection for low-powered USB devices. It works with flash-drives, it works with a cordless mouse, maybe with an external hard—drive or even a self-powered printer.

And there is also a cable available that enables the micro HDMI video port to connect to external monitors.

OPEN NEWSLETTER JUNE 2013 GOOGLE TIPS FROM BRUCE DINEEN

Google Mail

Many people now have a GMAIL account. By using your login and password you can access many other Google applications by just selecting them from the black bar at the top of the Google search screen.

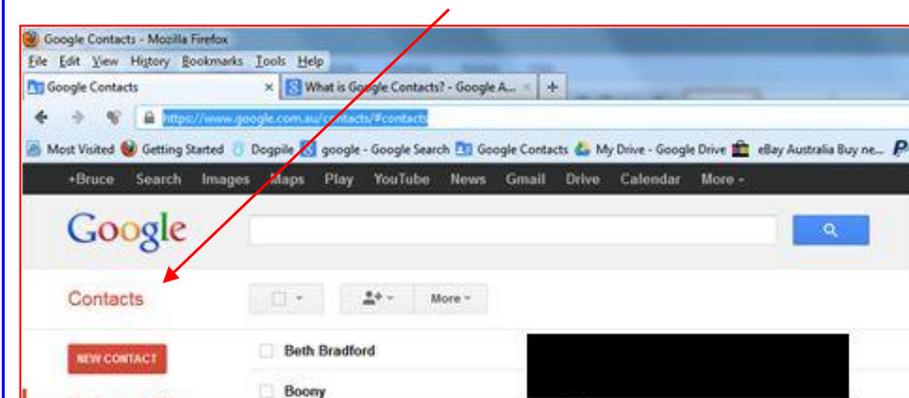


If you select "Even More" at the bottom of the "More" pull down menu it will take you to an apps window detailing all the Google apps in the Search screen.

One app is missing, GOOGLE CONTACTS. If you recall, Gmail does not have an address book but when you start to type a name in a new message, names starting with the first letter appear.

Actually, Gmail does have an address book.

To find a list of people you have email address for in Gmail, open SEARCH and type in GOOGLE CONTACTS [as in above picture] and select Google Contacts at: <https://www.google.com.au/contacts/#contacts>



Once loaded it will go to a CONTACTS PAGE as shown below :

From this screen you can add new contacts and edit existing contacts. If you are using GMAIL in Android, you can get the **CONTACTS+** app from the Google PlayStore and that app will give you most of the same functions as in Windows Contacts.

PARTITIONING—WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Partitioning is a procedure that enables the hard-drive inside a computer to be 'electronically divided' into two or more sections. So even though your computer has only one physical hard-drive installed you may find that your Windows Explorer screen shows that you have a C:drive and a D:drive (or some other letter in certain cases).

Why would someone want to do this?

Perhaps the most frequent users of partitioning are manufacturers of laptop computers. Many of them create a 'Recovery Partition' where they store an image of your computer's operating system. This partition is a way of re-installing your system should something serious go amiss with your OS.

However, it should be remembered that such when this procedure occurs your computer reverts to the factory settings. **Your personal files and programs WILL NOT BE RESTORED!**

Some people use a second partition (e.g. a D-drive) as the storage area for their documents and photos etc. So if something was to go wrong with the operating system on the C:drive there is a good chance that the information on the D:drive will still be intact.

With the extremely high-capacity hard-drives fitted to current computers disk fragmentation is not a common cause of 'computer slow-down'. But consider the case a few years ago when one of our VICTOR volunteers took on the task of 'de-fragging' a 120GB hard-drive. **Sixteen hours** after starting the job process ground to a halt.

Had the hard-disk been partitioned into two 60GB sections the process may have succeeded—or at least it may have only been 8 hours before the problem reared its ugly head.

Bad partitioning can cause problems. One of our members who runs Windows Vista on their laptop has found that the C:drive is almost full and there is not much more that can be moved to the D:drive. For some inexplicable reason the supplier divided the 250 GB disk into 35 GB and 215 GB partitions. With the Vista OS taking up 21 GB on its own that doesn't leave a lot of room for programs and other necessities on the C:drive.

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SIMPLE AND FREE– EXPLORER XP!

The member who is having the partition problems as detailed in the article on the previous page made the comment that it was a mystery as to what was using all the space on the C:drive.

Mystery solved! For more years than I care to think about I have been praising and publicising the free program **ExplorerXP**. That's **F R E E**, no cost is involved ... it takes about a minute to install and 2—3 minutes to give you a detailed on-screen report of how much space each major folder is occupying, and you can do down through the various layers of the folder structure to pinpoint individual files if necessary.

For the case in point ... the Windows Vista OS 21Gigabytes, Program Files 7.5GB, User Data 5.5GB etc. Of the 5.5 GB User Data the Outlook e-mail file was nearly 3 GB. From this information it should be fairly easy to see why the C:drive is nearly full.

NEW WIRELESS NETWORK FACILITY

With the ever-increasing number of members who are bringing their own laptop to classes there have been times when our poor old Linksys **wireless access point** (WAP) has been put under extra pressure. One Monday recently several members were unable to connect to the Internet.

To rectify this problem we have purchased a second WAP. At this stage the new wireless access point is only able to provide Internet access and not network services such as printers and the U:drive on our server.

So, if you only need Internet access please connect to the wireless network called '**wigwam**'.

If you need to connect to either of our network printers or the U:drive use the old wireless network called '**linksys**'.

Our tutors will be able to provide you with the relevant passwords.

TAKING A LOOK AT DROPBOX

Many of you will have heard some mention of the term 'Cloud Computing' but you may not fully understand what it means.

In basic terms it means storing some, or all, of your data in a location other than on one or more of your own computers or USB devices—something similar to storing your furniture in a lock-up facility while you are moving house.

One of the extreme situations where 'cloud storage' has proved beneficial is in a natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina which devastated parts of the Southern USA a few years ago.

Those government agencies that had taken the precaution of backing up their information in the 'cloud' were able to continue many of their day-to-day operations by having their employees access data from the 'cloud' using their personal computers at home.

The Dropbox system was reportedly created by a university student who was prone to leaving his USB flash-drives at home and so would often turn up to classes without his homework and other educational information.

He figured that if he could access the data on his home computers from any location then his troubles would be over. And that's what he was able to achieve.

When you install Dropbox and sign up for an account the program creates a special Dropbox folder on your computer. Anything placed in that folder is then updated to the Dropbox storage servers on the internet and also to any other of your PCs, laptops, tablets etc that have Dropbox installed.

This article that you're reading was started on my net-book computer and completed on my 'tower'.

The process is described in the next column ...

Saving the newsletter file to the Dropbox folder on my net-book meant that the file would automatically be saved to my 'cloud' Dropbox folder the next time that I connected to the Internet.

Then, as soon as I turned my tower PC at home and connected to the 'net the newsletter file was automatically loaded into the PC's Dropbox folder. **Magic!**

I can think of many several situations where Dropbox would be of benefit to OPEN and its members. For instance, instead of Rob and Bruce sending their newsletter contributions to me via e-mail they could access the newsletter file via Dropbox and type their articles directly into the text-boxes provided.

Have you ever turned up for an OPEN or LCG meeting without your copy of last month's minutes? And then had to strain to read the minutes on the projector screen?

But if there was a 'web-format' copy of the minutes in a Dropbox folder on our Admin computer you could access those minutes from any other computer that had Dropbox installed. And with 'web-format' documents you can even choose to view a different part of the document than the person sitting beside you.

With the club now having joined the Windows 8 tablet era one of the considerations is how to install software on to devices that don't have DVD drives and limited USB facilities? How about putting some of the more common program installation files such as Irfanview, Picasa, AVG etc in a Software sub-folder of the Dropbox folder?

Not only would these programs be available to our Windows tablets but also to any of the other club PC's with Dropbox installed.

However there is a 'catch'! Unless you have a very fast and very generous broadband plan you should only place **relatively small files** in your Dropbox. As an example I experimented with a Family History program installation suite that was 232 MB in size. Not only did it take some time to load on the destination computers but the 'cost' in Megabytes is repeated for each of those computers.

The free version of Dropbox provides 2 Gigabytes of 'cloud storage'. For a subscription of around \$10 per month you can store up to 100 Gigabytes in the 'cloud'. **Dennis**

One for the newsletter

A young man named John received a parrot as a gift.

The parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary.

Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, obnoxious and laced with profanity.

John tried and tried to change the bird's attitude, by consistently saying only polite words, playing soft music and anything else he could think of to 'clean up' the bird's vocabulary.

Finally, John was fed up and he yelled at the parrot, and the parrot yelled back.

John shook the parrot and the parrot got angrier and even more rude.

John, in desperation, threw up his hands, grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer, for a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed.

Then suddenly there was total quiet, not a peep was heard for over a minute.

Fearing that he'd hurt the parrot, John quickly opened the door to the freezer, and the parrot calmly stepped out onto John's outstretched arms and said "I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions, I'm sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgivable behavior."

John was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude, and as he was about to ask the parrot what had made such a dramatic change in his behaviour, the bird spoke-up, very softly, "may I ask what the turkey did?"

Tips for travelling with digital devices

By Susan Bradley

Taking a multi-week trip out of the country takes careful planning. Making sure you can use the technology you take with you, even more.

Gone are the days when we vacationed without our phones and portable PCs. Now they're as essential as shorts and sandals.

Planning for overseas communications I do a fair amount of traveling within the U.S. — for business, personal pleasure, and visiting friends. I take it for granted that my digital technology always goes with me. Wherever I am, I can be relatively assured that my smartphone will find a local cell tower and my notebook will find Wi-Fi somewhere nearby.

But this summer, I'm taking an extended trip overseas. I'll be in places where my phone might not work — a problem that must be solved before I leave. My office and my aging father must be able to contact me in an emergency.

A few years ago, it was almost guaranteed that a U.S.-based cellphone wouldn't work overseas. However, newer phones, such as my iPhone, work internationally. In my case, I just need to call my service provider at least one day before travel begins and have an international plan added to my cellphone plan.

Because international calls can be expensive, I'm also adding a personal Skype phone number. At U.S. \$18 for three months or

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(Continued from page 9)

\$60 for a year, it will ensure that, no matter where I am, as long as I can get to Skype on a computer, tablet, or smartphone, my father can reach me relatively inexpensively. And Skype will give me a local number so he doesn't even have to call long-distance.

Of course, Skype-to-Skype calls are a free call, even overseas. So our first mode of regular communication will be at a set time, Skype to Skype, over the Internet.

Make adjustments to your phone before departure I rely heavily on technology and have added various alert and messaging services to my phone over the years. These services will consume bandwidth and roaming charges while I'm overseas. So one of the items on my pre-departure checklist is to disable all push email services. While on the road, email will download only when I request it. Typically, this change is made within the phone's email settings.

On my iPhone, I can also use the Do Not Disturb option under Notifications. Two additional options in Do Not Disturb, Allow Call From and Repeated Calls, give me other choices. The former lets me control who calls me; the latter rings my phone if the same person calls twice within three minutes — a good precaution for emergencies. I'll also adjust the phone's location services so it doesn't waste minutes/data by constantly — and unnecessarily — checking its current location. I'll also need to adjust some of my phone's apps. Some apps can sense when they don't have a full network connection and will wait until

they're on a good network before synching the data back to online web servers. In my case, I'll have to adjust my personal fitness apps (RunKeeper and Jawbone UP) to make them less chatty while I'm on vacation.

I protect my phone with a passcode. If you haven't done so, create a passcode before you leave. Also enable any options for automatically erasing your phone's data if someone enters too many incorrect passcodes. And if your phone supports it, enable remote phone locking and wiping.

I plan to take my phone with me so I can use convenient tools such as Google Maps and translation services. But there is the option of purchasing an inexpensive phone that works only overseas. This temporary phone is no great loss if it's stolen or misplaced, but it will provide another emergency number for my office or my father.

The question is whether to buy this backup phone before or after departure. It's probably going to be cheaper overseas. However, it might make life a bit easier to have it in hand before leaving.

There are stateside phone and Internet companies that will rent international MiFi (or mobile hotspot; more info) devices with unlimited Internet use while abroad. That will give your traveling Wi-Fi-only devices an easy connection to the Internet. A review of many cruise and travel forums will provide recommended vendors. If you do a lot of travelling, purchasing a pay-as-you-go MiFi device would make more sense in the long run.

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Part of my trip will be on a cruise ship. I'll be able to make calls on my phone while aboard — as long as the ship has electricity. (Not a given these days. The ill-fated Carnival cruise-ship passengers lost cellular when the ship lost power.) That said, using your phone aboard ship can come at a high price. Consider leaving the phone mostly off and enjoying the "solitude" — or use the onboard Internet to contact loved ones. (I'll keep my phone on in case of emergency, but I plan to rely on technologies such as Skype to stay connected.)

Back up all devices before leaving home Before departure, fully back up all devices you plan to take with you. If any of the devices has sensitive information, ensure that the data is encrypted. On laptops, use TrueCrypt (site) or Windows' BitLocker to encrypt the hard drive.

That full-backup task includes your phone, in case it's lost or damaged. Tethering my iPhone creates a complete backup on my personal computer. You can also place key documents you might need while travelling — copies of reservations, for example — in a SkyDrive or Dropbox folder, where you can get to them at any time.

Speaking of reservations, there are any number of online applications and services for planning, coordinating, and keeping track of reservations. TripIt (site), for example, will document your itinerary; simply forward the service your confirmation and reservation emails. (If you'd like to know what the site does with your information, check out its posted

privacy policy.)

On the road: Use Internet kiosks with caution Internet kiosks — pay-to-use public computers — can be useful when you want to do some online research on a full-size screen. However, they're also a favorite target for malicious keylogging software used to steal usernames and passwords. Never sign in to a sensitive site, such as your bank, from an Internet kiosk. Even checking your email could leave you exposed, if you use the same password for both email and banking.

If you must contact your bank, ensure it's on a trusted Internet connection. Better yet, simply call the international number on the back of your credit card.

Rutgers University published a helpful security guideline for travelling with technology on its website. Although focused on business travel, its suggestion for taking the bare minimum with you when travelling applies to individuals, too.

One of the Rutgers recommendations is to use a virtual private network (VPN) for transmitting sensitive information. So before you depart, consider whether to sign up short-term with a VPN service such as USA Proxy Server (site). A Google search will give many other VPN solutions.

Be especially cautious using public Wi-Fi Several years ago, an acquaintance travelling overseas had to call his email provider to gain access to his mail. For security reasons, the provider blacklisted ranges of IP addresses for suspect countries. It's still the case that some countries have had their entire IP ranges

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dropped from the international Web presence. If you suspect one or more of the countries you plan to visit might be a problem, call your provider before departure and check whether it blocks email addresses from those locations.

As in the U.S., some hotels include Internet access with their room charges. For others, connecting to the Net is a separate charge. Be sure to ask about Internet charges when you check in.

In the U.S., you can generally assume that every coffee shop has Internet connectivity. That's typically the case overseas, too. Whenever you connect to one of these public nets, always set the connection as "Public profile" to ensure that your firewall is set for maximum protection. (In Windows 7, it's the "park bench" setting in the Network and Sharing Center window.)

Bring along your own portable power source When travelling, evenings are when you have the best opportunity to recharge your digital devices. Most mobile devices can go all day on a charge — if you rarely use them. Turn on services such as mapping, and your phone or tablet power can drop like a rock. I travel with a portable power brick; it lets me fully charge at least one of my devices without connecting to an electrical outlet. Although several are available, I use one from Mophie (site). It's relatively compact and weighs about a pound. If you're driving, take along a small power inverter that will power 110-volt chargers.

Travel carefully with these battery-powered devices. Don't leave

them in hot cars or in trunks where they can overheat and possibly explode.

Posting travel plans on social-networking sites In these days of online social interaction, some of the information we post could be read by people other than just our friends and family — by potential thieves, for example. Among the many such tales on the Web, WBIR.com posted a story about a family that put all the details of their vacation on Facebook — before and during their travels. They returned home to find their house vandalized and burgled.

Never post where, when, and for how long you'll be gone. Law-enforcement authorities recommend posting recaps of your vacations after you get back. If you're traveling in a group, make sure you don't end up tagged in your fellow travelers' photos. An Ehow page gives step-by-step instructions for blocking tagging. Also, don't upload smartphone photos directly to public or social sites; they could contain specific location data in their metadata.

So that's my plan for travelling with my digital devices. I'll let you know how it goes — when I get back. (Following my own advice, I'm not about to say when or where I'm going.) Needless to say, I plan to thoroughly enjoy myself and not be totally off the grid (unlike my editor, who tends to travel to less civilized places). My digital devices will add peace of mind and enhance my vacation.