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Next Meeting
Wednesday 1st September 2010
7.30 PM Workshop

Dennis Murray will demonstrate Power Points to Video and various Video Utilities

LCG Committee 2009/10

President: Barry Symons

Vice President: Janet Headlam

Minutes Secretary: Larraine Rist

Treasurer: Iris Meek

Ass. Treasurers: Karia Wicks

MAC Librarians: Ivan Turmine

PC Librarian: Julie Hjort

Ass. PC Librarian: Judy Hall

Newstream Editor: Ron Baker

Publicity Officer: Iris Meek

Ass. Publicity Officer: - open -

OPEN Co-ordinator: Robert Tierney

Webmaster/Content: Tom Olsen

Auditor: Ron Baker

"VICTOR" Liason: Robert Tierney

General Committee Judy Hall, Ivan Turmine, Glenn Gilpin, Reinhard von Samorzewski,

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OPEN Committee 2010-2011

Chairperson OPEN: Judy Hall *Chair all meetings of OPEN and ensure that they run smoothly*

Vice Chairperson OPEN: June Hazzlewood. *Chair meeting when the Chairperson is unavailable.*

Secretary: Margaret Carrington *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: Iris Meek *Responsible for all monies and banking*

Assistant Treasurer: .Karia Wicks *Help the Treasurer where necessary.*

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

OPEN Co-ordinator: Robert Tierney. *Responsible for the smooth running of Centre on a daily basis*

Membership Co-coordinator: Karia Wicks.:

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

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

Assistant Tutor Co-ordinators: David Renton.

Newsletter Editors Assistant: Iris Meek. *Collates and produces the OPEN Newsletter for inclusion in LCG monthly 'Newstream'*

Maintenance Coordinator Judy Hall Responsible for the maintenance and repairs to all computer equipment

Co-ordinator of "VICTOR": Robert Tieney.

Webmaster/Content: Tom Olsen.

OPEN Committee: Marie Cleaver, David Renton,.Jenny Napier, Larraine Rist, Janet Headlam

LAUNCESTON COMPUTER GROUP INC
Meeting Held at 1/1 Pipeworks Road

Meeting Minutes:

Date: Wednesday 4th August 2010

Meeting:

The Vice-President, Janet Headlam in the chair, welcomed all and opened the meeting at 7:30 pm.

Present:

Janet Headlam, Ron Baker, Harvey Tavener, Glenn Gilpin, Eleanor Horder, Ted Bramich, Ivan Turmine, Laraine Rist.

Apologies:

Barry Symons, Lou Horder, Judy Hall, Dennis Murray, Tom Olsen

Minutes:

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th July were read and confirmed:
Ted Bramich Seconded: Ron Baker

Business arising from the minutes:

> The shelving made and installed by Barry Symons will be a big plus for the club, it is a little disappointing that some minor health problems resulted during the installation process. However, Ted Bramich moved that a thankyou letter be sent to Barry in appreciation. The motion was seconded by Ron Baker.

> The next Sunday market will be on the 15th August with Glenn, Ron and Julie in attendance.

> The MAC Photoshop Elements Programme has been installed .
Adjustments have been made to the projector.

Correspondence:

> An Email from Mike and Sue Ames was read. We wish Mike well as he recovers.

> An Email, addressed to Tutors was received from Dennis, explaining adjustments and updates he has made to many of the computers.

> Eleanor presented a notice from National Seniors Australia inviting those interested to attend a meeting where candidates for the Federal Election will be present to answer questions and concerns relating to the over 50s at The Country Club, Launceston on Monday 9th August.

Financial Report:

Accounts paid up to August 4th 2010

Corporate Express	$36.95
Tas Printer Cartridges	$220.50
Another Computer Store Balance of rent	$1,000.00
Janet Headlam	$50.00
LGC Petty Cash	$136.25
ASSCA	$110.00
LCG Petty Cash	$185.15
Telstra Bigpond	$117.67
Tas Printer Cartridges	$379.45
Carbil Computer Paper, batteries, fan	$32.95
Total	$2,268.92

Accounts to be paid

Rent July 31/07/10	$99.00
Tas Printer Cartridge	$139.45
Corporate Express	$60.48
Total	$1,298.93
Bank Balance	$23,876.98
(including Victor)	$5,568.59

excluding Petty Cash

General Business:

(Continued from page 3)

We have not received a reply from ASCCA re the request for Volunteer Insurance.

Judy has not received a reply from ASCCA re her request for assistance re Ancestry membership and password Ancestry.com.au

A request was made at the Open Meeting to have computers 8 & 9 replaced, however there are still many members who still have XP and wish to learn on these computers. The matter was deferred.

Pauline Hardy, June and Bert Hazzelwood will be attending the ASCCA conference in Sydney in September.

LCG and Open have been invited to submit an article in the School For Seniors term Schedule.

Ron Baker advised that there is no longer a free account available with Intas. Ron will contact and thank them for their service over the years.

Meeting closed at: 8:50 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday 1st September 2010

BLONDE JOKE

Two sisters, one blonde and one brunette, inherit the family ranch. Unfortunately, after just a few years, they are in financial trouble. In order to keep the bank from repossessing the ranch, they need to purchase a bull so that they can breed their own stock. Upon leaving, the brunette tells her sister, 'When I get there, if I decide to buy the bull, I'll contact you to drive out after me and haul it home.' The brunette arrives at the man's ranch, inspects the bull, and decides she wants to buy it. The man tells her that he will sell it for $599, no less. After paying him, she drives to the nearest town to send her Sister a telegram to tell her the news. She walks into the telegraph office, and says, 'I want to send a telegram to my sister telling her that I've bought a bull for our ranch. I need her to hitch the trailer To our pickup truck and drive out here so we can haul it home.' The telegraph operator Explains that he'll be glad to help her, then adds, it will cost 99 cents a word.' Well, after paying for the bull, The brunette realizes that she'll only be able to send her sister one word. After a few minutes of thinking, she nods and says, 'I want you to send her the word 'comfortable.' The operator shakes his head. 'How is she ever going to know that you want her to hitch the trailer to your pickup truck and drive out here to Haul that bull back to your ranch if you send her just the word 'comfortable?' The brunette explains, 'My sister's blonde. The word is big. She'll read it very slowly.... 'com-for-da-bul.'

Coordinators Corner

Hello everyone the first week of October is going to be a busy one at OPEN. From the 1st-7th of October is Seniors Week. We have a busy schedule organised for that week. In the past we have had our regular lessons in one form or another, but with receiving a grant from the government, this year is going to be different.

We will not be having any classes that week, what we will be having are a series of talks and forums on a array of subjects which will be open to both members and public and the great thing is there will be NO CHARGE.

Here is the program for Seniors Week:

Friday the 1st October-10am-12pm –
How to buy a computer-speaker Rob Tierney
1pm-3pm- "PICASA"-speaker Margaret Carrington

Saturday the 2nd -2pm-5pm- Forum where local organisations will be invited to share what they have available to the community (Speakers to be announced before the 2nd)
Monday the 4th-10am-12pm– Skype

(Speakers to be announced before the 2nd)
Monday the 4th-10am-12pm– Skype
Speaker Tom Olsen
1pm-3pm   Mobile Phones
Speaker Robert Tierney

Tuesday the 5th– 10am-12pm-The Internet and you-speaker Rob Tierney
1pm-3pm-MAC's with Ivan Turmine

Wednesday the 6th– 10am-12pm Family History speaker to be advised
1pm-3pm Graphics with Paint Shop Pro Speaker Eleanor Horder.

Thursday the 7th– 10am-12pm– The Internet and you– speaker Rob Tierney
1pm-3pm- "Skype" speaker Tom Olsen.

Bookings are essential, There will be booking sheets available from early September. Also we need helpers for senior's week. If you are able to help, please come or contact me and we can go from there.

So til next time

Dennis Murray has kindly accepted a request to demonstrate Power Points to Video and a potpourri of Video Utilities at the next LCG meeting September 1.

Due to work commitments he cannot do a daytime workshop on the subject at this time, but all OPEN and LCG members who would like to learn something about this interesting subject will be made very welcome if they come along to this

evening meeting.

VENUE TELEPHONE NUMBER

The club telephone is available during class hours**. 6343 4928**

OPEN NEWSLETTER — September 2010

Note Taking

While receiving instruction it is common practice to take notes and draw pictures.

With wide-screen monitors available you can have a program (eg Print Artist) open on one side of the screen and MS Word or Notepad on the other.

With an Excel Workbook or Spreadsheet you can "Insert Comment" by right clicking a cell and selecting the option. A small box similar to a Post-it note appears on the screen and you can type text into it. So if you need a memory jog when trying to work out how you did the "Honolulu Hotels'" absolute reference exercise, you can use "Insert Comment" to provide yourself with the

VICTOR PHONE NUMBER
0408 174 235

WEDNESDAY SPECIALS

September 15
Family History Software and Charting

September 29

OPEN MEETING
September 1

Take an interestand have a say about what you

FAMILY HISTORY ON-LINE

September 8 - 1pm—3 pm
September 22 10am—noon

Judy Hall and the team will guide you through the processes used to research your ancestry.

Contact the club for more information
Classes are limited to 8 people.

Basic AND Graphics
Work shops

Put name on Registration Sheet on cork board as numbers are limited.

The dates for the next classes are :

Graphics Workshop Sept 1- 10 am to 12 .

LEVEL 2 & 3 GRAPHICS
With Paint Shop Pro 7 and 8

Wednesday Sept 15— 1:00 pm to 3.00 pm

Continuation of lessons for those students who have already completed Basic Graphics classes. It involves more advanced features of the Paint Shop Pro graphics programs.

Learn how to fix torn corners, hide cracked surfaces, remove specks and spots and lighten or darken your precious family photos using PSP 7 and 8 in our special Graph-

NEWSTREAM

OPEN Session Times
At Studioworks, 1 Pipeworks Rd, L'ton
Standard Sessions $5.00

Monday	10 am –12	General & Beginners
	1 pm – 3 pm	**Beginners & PC Support**
Tuesday	10 am –12	P C Support & Beginners + Mac
	1 pm – 3 pm	As above
	7 pm—9 pm	PC Support (Night Class)
Wednesday	10 am—noon	Special sessions or Meetings
	1.pm—3 pm	As for mornings (see rosters)
	3.30—5.30	P C Support
Thursday	10 am –12	General & Beginners
	1 pm – 3 pm	General & Beginners
	3.30—5.30	Absolute Beginners
Friday	10 am –12	General & Beginners
	1 pm—3 pm	Beginners

OPEN NEWSLETTER — Sept 2010

SPECIAL WEDNESDAY SESSIONS
Please register on the sheets – numbers may be limited

Date	Time	Topic	Details
Sept 1	10 am—12 noon	Graphics Workshop	Reviewing Basic Graphics.
	1 pm—	**OPEN Monthly Meeting**	**Help keep the club meaningful to all.**
Sept 8	10 am—12 noon	Basic Graphics	A popular session to help understand Graphics
	1:00—3 pm	**Family History**	**Study Family History On line or disk.**
Sept 15	10 am—noon	Family History Software	Using software and Charting
	1 pm— 3.00	**Level 2 and 3 Graphics**	**Advanced graphics techniques using the Paint Shop Pro 7 and 8 programs.**
Sept 22	10 am –noon	Family History	On line or library of resources tracing history.
	1 pm—3.00	**PSP X1**	**Advanced Graphics**
Sept 29	10 am –noon	Free Rip	Ripping music to mp3 and burning to CD
	1 pm—3.pm	**PSP Collages**	**Learn to create a collage for use on calendars cards etc with a collection of your photos.**

Some graphics classes require Tutorials
which incur extra costs for printing.

Remember to bring your favourite photos Sept 29.

AIDA_375

is a small systems analyser program that can provide you with a wealth of information on what is happening inside your computer—the temperature of your CPU, what programs and processes are running, how much memory is being used, the licence number of your operating system and much more

Graphics Workshops

September 1

October 6

If you wish to receive the informative ASCCA newsletter, please let Iris know and it will be emailed to you each month as we receive it.

LCG-OPEN enjoys the privileges membership to ASCCA , along with other Senior IT groups offers, including excellent articles each month.

PRINT SCREEN

A picture is worth a thousand words!
If you need to make notes on which boxes you need to tick when selecting options in a program box, why not use the 'Print Screen' function to make a picture of that box.
Print Screen sends an image of the screen to that magical place called the Clipboard and that image may then be pasted into another document,
Depending on the keyboard, you may need to hold down the Shift key while pressing Print Screen.
By pasting the image into a graphics program such as Irfanview you can crop, add text or draw arrows to explain the steps you need to take.

Thank you
Barry Symons for the new book shelves. The room looks much neater and the books more accessible.

OPEN COMPUTING
INUTES OF MEETING HELD
WED 4TH AUGUST 2010
Meeting Opened 1-03pm

PRESENT:
June Hazzlewood (Acting Chair), Bert Hazzlewood, Rob Tierney, Margaret Carrington, Karia Wicks, Tom Olsen, Harvey Tavener, Eleanor Horder,
Pauline Hardy, Sandra Wing, Janet Headlam

APOLOGIES:
Judy Hall, Iris Meek, Kaye Dawson, Sandra Viney, Laraine Rist, Dennis Murray,
Bev Elmer, Marie Cleaver, Jenny Napier

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING:
Amendments: Tom Olsen was an apology for July meeting

BUSINESS ARISING:

SENIORS WEEK ARRANGEMENTS:
   Rob: Delivered an update of arrangements to date regarding seniors' Week. Between Margaret, Iris (Publicity Officer) and Rob we will organize advertising both free on community diaries etc and an advert for the Examiner .

Margaret: is to obtain quotes from Xerox for the printing of advertising material; namely posters and flyers.

As part of receiving the grant for senior's week we are obliged to invite the Premier to the opening of Seniors Week on the Friday, it was also suggested that we contact the mayor to see if he or a representative would like to come also to the opening. We will be contacting their respective offices.

Rob: Resolved the query regarding the over drawn account at Heritage Isle. The money was deposited the next day.

Janet moved that the minutes, with amendments, be accepted. Seconded by Karia

CORRESPONDENCE IN:

ASCCA membership Renewal.

ASCCA Newsletter

Tasmanian Printer Cartridge Company

L. Clark, Club Membership

Nan Bosler-re enquiry of Ancestry website and Volunteer Insurance

Tracey Pearce-Volunteer Insurance Policy

Another Computer Store receipt

Carbil-Statement

Jenny Napier-letter of complaint re day of installation of book shelves.

June Quinn - letter of complaint re day of installation of

book shelves.

Joan Humphries-letter of complaint re day of installation of book shelves.

Corporate Express

My State Statement

Telstra Invoice

Heritage Isle Statement

Dorothy Soper-receipt for ASCCA membership

Ancestry.com.au-membership information and pass words.

Carbill-receipt

Dennis Murray-printer issues

Janine Hosking-Thank you card

ASCCA Newsletter

CORRESPONDENCE OUT:

Brian Selby-Letter of thanks for donation of computer parts.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Tracey Pearce-QBE has volunteer insurance covering up to the age of 85. Information was passed to Karia and Iris to ascertain whether members as well at tutors would be covered. Also to ask Armitage if they know of this policy and then a decision will be made before renewal in November. Eleanor is to ask School for seniors what cover they have, if any.

Three letters of complaint were received from members and tutors relating to the installation and varnishing of shelves during class on Friday morning of the 23rd July. Namely; Jenny Napier, June Quinn and Joan Humphries. The excessive, high pitched noise of the power drill and the overpowering smell of the varnish caused extreme discomfort and distress to most of those present. Some had to go outside on that freezing morning as they were suffering from breathing difficulties and/or migraines and their symptoms lingered on over the week end. The open door did nothing to dispel the noise or smell but did manage to lower the already very low temperature of the room considerably.

Rob moved that any work in future to be done after hours. Seconded by Tom.

It was agreed that members who were present for that lesson be given three free lessons; value $15 by way of compensation and tutors be given free membership for the coming year; value $15. Moved by Rob, seconded by Tom.

FINANCIAL FREPORT:

Karia moved the report be accepted and it was seconded by Janet.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

Rob: moved we renew VET antivirus cover, Tom seconded.

(Continued from page 10)

Tom said we should see Geoff and find out the results of the plumbers visit recently regarding the fixing of leaking taps in kitchen and toilets. Margaret: is to write a letter to Geoff in this regard.

ASCCA: has given Pauline a sum of money to help pay for accommodation in Sydney for their conference.

Karia: suggested the replacement of computers 8 and 9 and Rob suggested they be 2 boot computers to cater for those members who still have Windows XP.

June: wants something to take to conference depicting our club and it's members and activities. She says also that OMRG (Older Member's Reference Group) meets 1st Monday of the month at Kings Meadows.

We are all concerned to learn of Judy's injury and we wish her a speedy recovery.

Meeting closed at 2.45pm

10 characters not to use in a filename

You may think that naming a file is an easy task. However, there are some important restrictions on the characters that you are allowed to use.

Windows file and folder names may be up to 255 characters long, and Windows prohibits specific characters from appearing in filenames, such as:

$$< (> : " / \ | ? *$$

These characters are all forbidden, while these other ones... .

$$= [ ] .$$

..can only be used with certain restrictions. When browsing through files on Windows, the backslash \ is used to separate the components of a path while the period is used to separate the base file name from the extension example .doc (word document) In addition, the dot (.) is not allowed as the first or final character of a filename. Whenever the user tries to type a forbidden character in a filename, Windows complains with a clear error message. So basically, our top tips when creating a filename on your Windows computer are: include a date reference, an indication of what the file may include, what type of document it is, ensuring that the order of the information follows a logical order, and last but not least remember that you are only allowed to use the characters below!

$$\${\}^[]`=,;`._-$$

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

0123456789

Preparing Windows XP for the long haul

By Fred Langa

Microsoft's support for Windows XP may be fading, but a loyal horde of XP users plans to stick with this venerable **OS for as long as possible**

If that's your long-term goal, there are a number of steps you can take now to ensure a finely tuned XP system for months — possibly years — to come.

Windows XP is almost a decade old, which in both computing and dog years makes it very long in the tooth.

Microsoft has officially dropped support and security updates for all XP versions through Service Pack 2. The only version of 32-bit XP that still qualifies for Microsoft's security patches and major bug-fixes is the Service Pack 3 edition. (The relatively rare 64-bit flavor of XP is a special case. See Microsoft's explanation learn-how-to-install-windows-xp-service-pack-3-sp3

XP has had a long and excellent run, but SP3 is the end of the line.

That said, XP is *not* dead, and it's still the best OS for older hardware designed with XP in mind. (I have XP on several of my older systems.)

If you're still using an XP box by choice (or necessity), there's lots you can do to keep things humming along until you eventually move to new hardware — which will almost assuredly come with the excellent Windows 7 already installed.

ere are some key steps you can take to get — and keep — your XP system running great! And if you move to Windows 7 (or are also running Vista machines), many of these techniques can also help you.

Start with a thorough XP system checkup

► *Check the hardware.* Hardware? Yes! No operating system can be bet-ter than the hardware on which it's installed, and older systems are prone to age-related problems. One often-overlooked problem is dust buildup, which can cause chips and drives to overheat and malfunction. These hardware errors can masquerade as software problems, causing you to waste time troubleshooting the wrong thing.

It's easy to clean your PC. Consult my how-to article "Getting the grunge out of your PC." (It's a few years old, but still completely apt.) While you have your PC's case open, make sure that all plug-in cards and socketed chips are fully seated and all cables firmly connected.

► *Check your hard drive's "physical" health.* Most new and XP-era drives are equipped with Self-Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Technology, also known as SMART reporting. SMART data is stored within the hard drive itself and can often alert you to impending problems before they get serious.

It's easy to check the SMART data. Two tools I like are PassMark's Disk-Checkup and Active@ DiskMonitorFree Both programs are free for personal use and also come in commercial versions for organizations.

► *Check your hard drive's "logical" health.* Run **chkdsk.exe** to check the integrity of your hard drive's files and to repair any errors.

Click Start and Run, then type **chkdsk c: /f** into the Run dialog box. Hit OK.

Chkdsk may tell you that it can't check the drive because the drive is in use. It will then offer to check the drive at reboot. Type **Y** (yes) and hit the Enter key.

Repeat for all drives/partitions on your system.

► *Correct driver errors now, while you can.* Just as Microsoft is providing less support for XP, third-party vendors are withdrawing support for older

hardware. Someday soon, you may discover that the drivers you need are no longer available. Fix problems now!

Boot XP and right-click My Computer. Select Properties, Hardware, then Device Manager. (Or, click Control Panel/System/Hardware/Device Manager.) Click View and select **Show hidden devices** to make sure you're seeing everything.

Correct any problem indicated by a yellow exclamation mark or a red X; in most cases, you should get correct or updated drivers from the hardware vendor's site.

It might also be wise to save copies of any special drivers your systems needs; burn 'em to a CD or DVD, and tuck the disc away in a safe place.

Review and update your PC's security system

► *Patch and update XP and apps.* Starting with Windows Update, make sure your operating system is fully up-to-date with all necessary patches, fixes, and updates. Do the same for all your non-Microsoft software, visiting the vendor sites to download any new updates and patches for your applications and utilities. A tool such as Secunia's outstanding, free-for-home-use Personal Software Inspector (PSI) can make this step a breeze.

► *Verify system security.* Regardless of the antivirus and anti-malware tool(s) you're using, visit a competing vendor's site and run their free *live* or online scan to verify that nothing slipped past your usual defenses.

Next, check that your firewall is providing the protection it should. There are many good, free, online firewall-test sites, such as Hackerwatch Gibson Research ShieldsUP and AuditMyPC

Give your computer a thorough file cleaning

► *Take out the trash — all of it.* Needless file clutter makes a system harder to use and slower to operate. For example, AV scans and Windows' indexing both take longer when they have many junk files to process.

Start by deleting old **$NtUninstall{xxx}$** files from XP's **C:\Windows** folder; these files can occupy a shocking amount of space! You need these files only when a Windows Update fails and you (or the OS) have to roll back your system. If your system is working fine, **$NtUninstall** files serve no purpose.

Next, wade through your hard drive, folder by folder, making sure files are where they're supposed to be and that you're not storing needless duplicates or other useless files.

Next, uninstall obsolete or unused software.

Finally, use a tool such as Piriform's free CCleaner to rid your drive of useless junk files and broken or obsolete Registry data.

► *Rein in XP's three worst space-hogs.* System Restore, the Recycle Bin, and browser caches are like black holes for data, and your system can run better if you limit their voracious appetites.

System Restore is at best a limited recovery tool, so I don't feel it's worthwhile to devote vast amounts of disk space to it. The Kellys-Korner article "System Restore for Windows XP," tells you how to manage it.

Windows' default Recycle Bin can consume hundreds of gigabytes on a large drive. Pare this down to a reasonable size by right-clicking the Recycle Bin and selecting Properties. Reduce the size of the Recycle Bin to a smaller percentage of the total disk space. (Click the disk tab — e.g., Local Disk (C:) — to determine its reserved Recycle Bin space in gigabytes.) I set it to around 500 MB (0.5GB) on large disks and 250MB (0.25GB) on smaller ones.

(Continued from page 13)

To reduce **Internet Explorer's** cache size, click Tools and Internet Options. Then, under the Browsing History section, click Settings and adjust the cache size downward to, say, 50MB.

For **Firefox,** click Tools/Options and then click Advanced. Under the Network tab, look for the settings box in the Offline Storage section.

Chrome's cache-size adjustment uses the command line, as described on a Chrome Help forum page

► **Defrag.** Once your disk is rid of all unnecessary files and is organized the way you want, run your defragmentation tool to reorder your files for optimal performance. If your disk was badly fragmented, it may take several iterations of defragging to achieve maximum benefit. (Paid subscribers can read an in-depth discussion of defragging in my Aug. 5 column

Use disk imaging to preserve your new setup

Once you've worked through all the above, your XP system should be lean, clean, defragged, and fully up-to-date. Wouldn't it be great if you could somehow preserve your PC's current software state so that, should you ever need to in the future, you can bring it back to this nearly perfect condition in just minutes?

You can! Use a **disk imaging tool** to create a perfect, complete, working copy of your current setup. You'll never again have to rebuild your system and reinstall all your software from scratch!

XP requires third-party disk-imaging software (Win7 has it built in) such as Acronis' U.S. $30 True Image, Norton' $70 Ghost (or — my personal favorite for non-Win7 systems — Terabyte Unlimited's geeky-but-powerful $35 BootItNG (

All three programs make disk images and bootable recovery discs that can

be used to restore a complete, everything-installed-and-working setup — even to a raw, unformatted drive.

There's plenty of free disk imaging software available, too. For example, see Freebyte's page titled "Free disk image software;" TheFreeCountry's list of "Free hard disk and partition imaging and backup software;" or OptimizingPC's how-to < "Create free bootable Windows XP image disk."

Run through the above steps once or twice a year to keep your system in tip-top shape, and make a fresh disk image from time to time — especially if you make any significant changes to your hardware or software. Store your disk images in a safe place (off the hard drive), such as on CDs or DVDs stored away from your PC.

With this kind of routine maintenance, your XP system will most likely run well for as long as you need it. And, should the worst (major crash, hard drive failure, etc.) happen, you can use your disk images to rapidly restore your system to the near-perfect state you just created.

You're now set for the long haul!

PASSWORD AUDIT

During a recent company password audit, it was found that a blonde secretary was using the following password:

"MickeyMinniePlutoHueyLouieDeweyDonaldGoofySacramento"

When asked why she had such a long password, she said she was told her password had to be at least 8 characters long and include at least one capital.

Are the benefits of defragmentation overblown?

By Fred Langa

One of the never-ending, always-simmering debates between PC users is whether defragging modern hard drives provides any measurable benefits to PC performance.

Unfortunately, the answer is not an absolute yes or no but instead depends on how you defrag your system.

There's clear logic behind defragmentation

Reader Martin Hack asks a legitimate question regarding some advice given recently in this column: Is the recommendation to "Defrag, defrag, and defrag again" actually founded in fact?

"In his July 22 A-step-by-step-guide-for-improving-boot -times> column, Fred makes the following statement: 'Defrag, defrag, and defrag again. Hard-drive files neatly packaged into long, unbroken chains load faster than those whose segments are scattered all over the drive.'

"I have yet to see this shown to be the case. And if he has any proof, I'd like to see it. Thanks."

It's always good to question conventional wisdom, Martin. Sometimes it's dead wrong! But I can show you the benefits of defragmentation in two ways.

I admit the first is anecdotal and subjective, so you're free to disregard it. That said, I've seen the benefits of defragging many, many times when I've cleaned up PCs crippled by serious performance issues. Such PCs' drives are almost always severely fragmented, and they almost always perform noticeably better after a thorough defrag.

But that's a fuzzy argument, so let me give you the underlying logic:

Files are stored on a hard drive in small chunks called clusters. On an NTFS drive, for example, the default cluster size is 4KB. Large files are stored in a series of 4KB clusters.

Let's look at the example of a common file — excel.exe. It occupies 17.5MB (17,924KB or 18,354,176 bytes) of disk space on my system. Do the math (17,924KB divided by 4KB), and you'll see that this one file occupies approximately 4481 clusters.

Current hard drives have an average nonsequential seek time (the time needed to move the drive heads from one place on the platters to another) of around 7 milliseconds (ms); server drives can be faster, laptop drives slower, but 7ms is a reasonable average.

A little more math (4481 clusters multiplied by the 7ms average seek time) shows you that loading a completely fragmented excel.exe would require over 31 seconds just in mechanical head-movement time. Note that this doesn't count the actual read-in time nor any processing or setting up of Excel — it's 31 seconds lost in just getting the drive's heads in position to read the file's pieces!

Too extreme an example? Maybe. Few files are that badly fragmented, and I'm using Excel only for illustrative purposes. But even if the file is only half-fragmented, it would add at least 16 seconds to the time it takes to launch Excel. And that's just one file. Multiply that by the hundreds of files launched and saved in a typical day, and it adds up to significant time.

For example, my advice about defragging was in reference to a reader question about system startup — when all of Windows and every startup program (hundreds of megabytes in all) must be read from the disk into memory. On a badly fragmented disk, this can add tens of thousands of unnecessary head seeks — needless minutes of purely mechanical work by your hard drive!

Defragmentation eliminates that wasted time by putting all of a file's clusters into a sequential order. A fully defragmented file requires just one nonsequential seek (the one that moves the head to the start of the file).

A good defragger will also go a step further, ordering your startup programs so they, too, are lined up one after the other on the hard drive. That way, your drive's heads can glide through one startup program after another in a long, unbroken read — instead of jittering and jumping all over the disk, gathering tens of thousands of scattered file fragments.

Thorough defragging can eliminate virtually all unnecessary disk-head movements. Good defragging tools are either free or built into Windows, and running them is point-and-click simple. So, why wouldn't you defrag?

Trust me on this. Defragging makes a difference!

DEFINING SHORTCUT KEYS FOR SYMBOLS

When you need to insert a special symbol into a cell, the normal way to do it is by using the Insert Symbol dialog box. If you need to insert the same symbol quite often, you may want a way to assign the symbol to a shortcut key so you can insert it easier.

Some symbols have obvious shortcut keys, defined by the folks in Redmond. One of the lesser-known facts is that every symbol has a "shortcut" key, but using that shortcut may not seem that short. How does this work? By holding down the **ALT** key as you type the ASCII or ANSI code for the symbol.

For instance, let's say you want to enter the cents symbol. If you display the Insert Symbol dialog box and select the cents symbol, at the bottom right of the dialog box you can see the character code for the symbol (it is 00A2). This is a hexadecimal number; you need to convert it to regular decimal notation. You can do this by using the formula =HEX2DEC("00A2"), which returns the value 162. If you remember this code, you can hold down the **ALT** key as you type the code, with a leading zero, on the numeric keypad.

This approach works great if you only need to input a few symbols on a regular basis; it doesn't take much work to remember those few codes you need. However, if you have a lot of symbols you need to work with, then remembering codes becomes more problematic. You could develop your own printed "cheat sheet" for the symbols so that you can refer to it all the time, or you could rely on Excel's AutoCorrect feature to do the remembering for you. Follow these steps:

1. Use the Insert Symbol dialog box to insert the symbol into a cell.
2. Select the cell that contains the symbol.
3. Press **F2** to start editing the cell.
4. Select the symbol, and only the symbol.
5. Press **CTRL**+C to copy the symbol to the Clipboard.
6. Display the AutoCorrect tab of the AutoCorrect dialog box. (In Excel 2010 display the File tab of the ribbon, click Options, click Proofing, and then click AutoCorrect Options. In Excel 2007 click the Office button, click Excel Options, click Proofing, and then click AutoCorrect Options. In older versions of Excel choose AutoCorrect options from the Tools menu.)
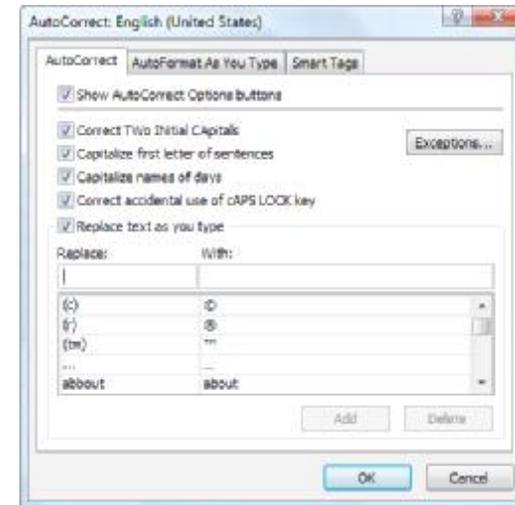
The AutoCorrect tab of the AutoCorrect dialog box.

7. In the Replace field, type a short mnemonic for the symbol. This should be a series of letters that are not a real word, such as *hrt*, which might be the mnemonic for a heart symbol.
8. In the With field press **CTRL**+**V** to paste the symbol from the Clipboard.
9. Make sure the Formatted Text radio button is selected.
10. Click OK.

Now you can just type the mnemonic when you want the symbol to appear. When you type the space bar after the mnemonic, AutoCorrect kicks in and replaces it with the symbol.

SLOWING DOWN MOUSE SELECTION

Have you ever noticed that there are times that text scrolls way too fast on your screen when you are trying to select it using the mouse? There are many ways you can attempt to slow down the speed at which text scrolls when you are using the mouse to select text. Perhaps the easiest is to use the keyboard in conjunction with the mouse. You do this by clicking the insertion point at the position where you want the selection to start, and then hold down the **SHIFT** key while you click where you want the selection to end.

However, if you don't want to use the keyboard, and only rely on the mouse, your options are a bit more limited. Perhaps the best idea is to get a mouse that has a scrolling wheel between the two buttons. Using the wheel you can scroll through a document at the speed you want.

Those who have used Word for a while know that there are actually two mouse-scrolling speeds in Word. To use the slower speed when selecting text, move the mouse down to the horizontal scrollbar area. This scrolls downward at a relatively moderate speed. Moving the mouse below the horizontal scrollbar sends the scrolling into full-speed mode. The "moderate speed" zone for scrolling upward is the ruler bar. The actual differences between these scroll speeds depends on the speed of your computer and how many other tasks your system is running.

The final option to try is to slow down the mouse speed using Windows itself. Display the Control Panel, and then open the Mouse applet. (How you access both the Control Panel and the Mouse applet will vary, depending on your version of Windows.) Within the Mouse applet, make sure the Motion tab is displayed. You can adjust the Pointer Speed setting on this tab so it is more toward the Slow side. When you close the applet by clicking on OK, you should notice that your mouse speed is a bit more manageable.

Curtis & Leroy saw an ad in the Starkville Daily News Newspaper in Starkville, MS.And bought a mule for $100.

The farmer agreed to deliver the mule the next day..

The next morning the farmer drove up and said, "Sorry, fellows, I have some bad news, the mule died last night."

Curtis & Leroy replied, "Well, then just give us our money back."

The farmer said, "Can't do that. I went and spent it already.."

They said, "OK then, just bring us the dead mule.."

The farmer asked, "What in the world ya'll gonna do with a dead mule?"

Curtis said, "We gonna raffle him off."

The farmer said, "You can't raffle off a dead mule!"

Leroy said, "We shore can! Heck, we don't hafta tell nobody he's dead!"

A couple of weeks later, the farmer ran into Curtis &Leroy at the Piggly Wiggly grocery store and asked.

"What'd you fellers ever do with that dead mule?"

They said," We raffled him off like we said we wuz gonna do."

Leroy said," Shucks, we sold 500 tickets fer two dollars apiece and made a profit of $998."

The farmer said," My Lord, didn't anyone complain?"

Curtis said, "Well, the feller who won got upset. So we gave him his two dollars back." Curtis and Leroy now work for the government. They're overseeing the Bailout Program.