

THE NEWS MAGAZINE OF THE ALAMO PC ORGANIZATION

PC Alamode

Alamo PC Organization is South Texas' Premier
PC Club promoting computers for everyone:
from beginner to expert.

www.alamopc.org

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Alamo PC Organization
Regular Meeting is usually held
the 2nd Monday at 7:00 pm
4888 Whirlwind Drive
San Antonio, TX 78217
Loop 410 at I-35
(see map, page 2)

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Novice SIG Coordinator
Lehigh Valley Computer Group, PA
August 2011 issue, LVCG Journal

Templates

A template is a prepared form or pattern within various programs such as document and spreadsheet programs. They allow a user to develop a form that allows for easy entry and automatically formats and calculates data.

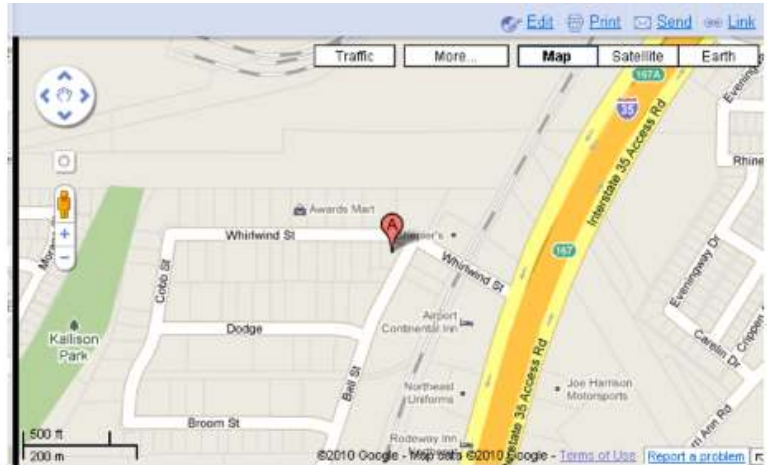
If you are a user of the Microsoft Office suite you are probably aware of them as Microsoft makes mention of templates and even has a folder of them within their suite.

But are you aware that there are literally hundreds located on the internet? But that is not all. There are even templates designed for the free suite put out by Open Office. Just Google open office templates and find body mass calculators, ovulation schedules time cards, shift scheduling and so much more.

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<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/>

Map to Meeting



DISCLAIMER

As most of you know, the Alamo PC Organization has significantly reduced in size. Although the organization has been pretty much dead for the past few months, there are a few key people that have been working behind the scenes to try to resurrect and revive the group. Although it is a slow process, there has been a lot of headway made.

For example, we are happy to be able to again offer our members a chance to download the award winning PC Alamode magazine. Even though it is somewhat reduced in size, it is still packed with great articles and tip and tricks for optimizing your PC's and just plain having fun.

Starting in the 1st quarter of 2011, we will again be having PC-based presentations at our monthly meetings. Some will be live, while others will be "net" meetings. Regardless of the type, they will all prove to be beneficial to the attendees.

So, as you can see, we want to continue the comradery of the user group, and want you back. We are presently charging no dues, and will try to continue this policy as long as we can. However, donations are and will be greatly appreciated.

The rest of the website will remain up and accessible by all visitors, with the caveats below.

Most of the information on the website is "dated" and the accuracy of the information cannot be guaranteed. With these limitations in mind, we hope visitors to the website find what remains to be somewhat informative and helpful.

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Apple, Google, & Microsoft Create Technology

By Sandy Berger, Compu-KISS

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Not only has technology changed over the last few years, but the way we use technology has also changed. There used to be two main camps when it came to technology: PC and Mac. These were built around the two competing computer systems:

Microsoft's Windows PC operating system and Apple's Mac operating system. Software was written specifically for each of these systems, so you couldn't use PC software on a Mac or Mac software on a PC. When you bought a computer, you pretty much bought into one of these two types of computers. The PCs and Apple battled it out for years with PC garnering more than 90% of the market and Apple never getting out of single digits.

Now, however, things have completely changed. With the introduction of the iPhone and the iPad, Apple has soared in popularity. Other large companies have become technology powerhouses. Google with their Android operating system and Amazon have both entered the fray, while Microsoft is struggling to keep up.



Microsoft®

Google™

Previously we were only talking about computers, but now we are talking about smart-phones, tablets, and cloud computing. We are talking about entire ecosystems. The choices are mind-boggling. Each of the above mentioned companies is trying to get you to buy into their ecosystem. Each is pretty much proprietary. That means that for the most part, they are incompatible.

Right now, Apple has the largest ecosystem (I call it an ecosystem because it is an entire network or environment where one thing is dependent on another). Apple's iPhone and iPads run on the iOS operating system. These devices run apps which are like mini software programs that are purchased from the iTunes App store. There are currently more than 500,000 in Apple's App store. Some are free, but many are sold for a fee. These can only be used on Apple devices. If you switch to a Google Android phone or tablet, you cannot use the Apple products that you may have already purchased. You have to repurchase them from the Android Marketplace that has apps similar to those found in the Apple iTunes store.

This ecosystem also extends to storage and services in the cloud (think Internet). Apple has announced a cloud service, called iCloud that lets you store information on Apple's servers and access it from any Internet-connected device. Amazon, Microsoft, and Google also have

cloud storage systems available. Since many of Microsoft's followers use Microsoft Office, Google has also developed a set of programs that are the equivalent of Microsoft Office programs, but that can be stored in the cloud and used from any Internet-connected device.

These companies make money from their hardware and their App sales. They give you a basic amount of cloud storage for free, but if you need more storage, there is a charge. You can see why so many companies are battling for supremacy of their ecosystem. It is very profitable.

Each of the current ecosystems is expanding. Apple not only has the software in its App store, but they also have the hardware in their iPhone, iPad devices and Mac computers. Apple recently announced their new cloud storage system and an App store for their Mac computers. Their new Lion operating system which is used for their Mac computers is so similar to the iOS operating system that you have to wonder just how soon the Mac computer and the Apple iPhone and iPads will share an operating system. When that happens, they will have added another component to their ecosystem.

Microsoft is a slightly different story. They don't manufacture smartphones or tablets, but they have a new mobile operating system called Windows Phone 7, which runs on hardware from other manufacturers. Microsoft has an App Marketplace like Apple and Google. They also have cloud storage. The phones that run the Microsoft operating system shine at running Microsoft office programs like Word and Excel. This is a part of their ecosystem. I expect that when Microsoft comes out with Windows 8, it will also be able to run on tablets, so we will soon see tablets running Microsoft software and apps.

Amazon has developed their own app store filled with Android apps. They also have a cloud storage system called Amazon Cloud Drive. They are already into the hardware business with their Kindle e-reader, and I expect that they will soon release a tablet to compete with the Apple iPad.

Blackberry and HP have both entered this competition with operating systems, hardware, and app stores of their own.

It's not that you cannot mix products. For instance, my husband has an Android phone, while we also own an iPad. He obviously can use both, but to do so, he had to learn two different operating systems. On top of that, if he wants to have a certain app on both his phone and our tablet, we may have to purchase it twice, buying a copy for his phone from the Android Marketplace and buying a copy for our tablet from the iTunes store. So not only is it easier to stay within one ecosystem, it is also more economical.

Knowing about these ecosystems may make purchasing a tablet or a new smartphone a little more complicated because, besides assessing the qualities of the hardware, you also have to stop and think about the ecosystem you are buying into. Yet, the number of large companies involved in this rivalry and the constant changes, additions, and improvements they make to their line-ups makes this a very exciting time in the history of technology.

TrueCrypt

Free open-source data encryption software for Windows 7/Vista/XP, Mac OS X, and Linux

By John Langill, Newsletter Co-editor,
Southern Tier Personal Computing Club, NY
August 2011 issue, Rare Bits, STPCC Newsletter
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The May 2011 issue of *Rare Bits* contained an article by Dick Maybach titled “Cloud Computing” in which he pointed out the necessity of securing your data via encryption when it “...is stored on the same disks, uses the same memory,

and passes through the same processors as everybody else’s.” And I recall Dave Bilcik voicing a similar warning at the May meeting and also mentioning the program TrueCrypt. It just so happens that I am currently using TrueCrypt and I believe it to be very satisfactory solution whether you need relatively modest security or very tight and sophisticated protection.

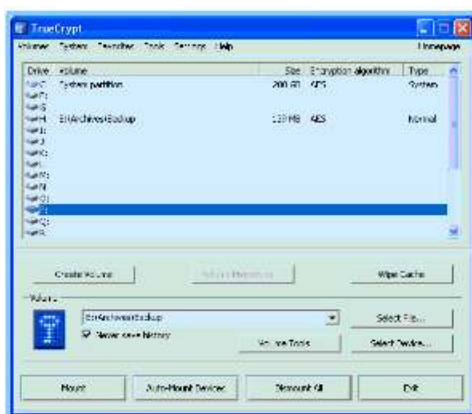
TrueCrypt is a software system for establishing and maintaining an on-the-fly-encrypted volume (data storage device). “On-the-fly” encryption means that data is automatically encrypted or decrypted right before is loaded or saved, without any user intervention. The entire file system is encrypted; e.g., filenames, folder-names, contents of every file, free space, meta-data, etc. No data stored on an encrypted volume can be read (decrypted) without using the correct password and/or key file(s), or correct encryption keys.

I’m not sure how unique TrueCrypt’s approach is but I was nevertheless intrigued by it. The first step is to create a “container;” otherwise known as a TrueCrypt “encrypted volume.” To my mind, this is somewhat like obtaining a safety-deposit box at a bank.

TrueCrypt provides a “wizard” to assist with the task. As at a bank where safety-deposit boxes of various sizes can be rented, the encrypted volume can be created to have as much capacity as you need. For example, it can be a specific portion of a hard-disk, or an entire flash drive or other storage device. Unlike a safety-deposit box, however, you hold the only key... so you need to remember and protect it. And, into the container (the volume) you can store any number of files. If the capacity of the volume is exceeded, you simply create a bigger container.



One of the interesting facets of a TrueCrypt volume is that it has most of the characteristics of an ordinary file. That is, the volume can be moved or copied within the storage areas of a given PC, or to a different PC. The name of the volume can be changed; and the volume can be included in routine backups. It can be transmitted across the Internet; and even into the



wild-blue yonder, if you're so inclined. And, even if you have no intention of salting "the cloud" with your personal data, what about that minuscule 8- or 32GB flash-drive you carry around in your pocket. The smaller they get, the easier they are to lose. Wouldn't it be reassuring to have made it an encrypted volume so that whoever finds it won't have an easy time of it when they try to discover the contents of your personal data?

The downside of the file-like characteristics is that, like any file, an encrypted volume can also be deleted and all its content lost (...thank goodness for the Recycle Bin). That would be very bad if done unwittingly. But that's why we do back-ups! Yes? Once a TrueCrypt volume is mounted, the data files it contains can be copied to and from the volume just like they are copied to or from any normal disk; for example, by simple drag-and-drop operations.

Files are automatically decrypted on-the-fly in RAM (Random Access Memory) while they are being read or copied from an encrypted TrueCrypt volume. Similarly, files that are being written or copied to a TrueCrypt volume are automatically encrypted on-the-fly in RAM right before they are written to the volume. Note, however, this does not mean the whole file that is to be encrypted/decrypted must reside in RAM before it can be encrypted/decrypted. That is, there are no extra RAM requirements for TrueCrypt. The following paragraph explains how this is accomplished.

Let's suppose that there is an .avi video file stored on a TrueCrypt volume; that is, the entire video file is encrypted. The user provides the correct password and/or key file and mounts (opens) the TrueCrypt volume. When the user double-clicks the icon of the video file, the operating system launches the application associated with the file type — typically a media player. The media player then begins loading a small initial portion of the video file from the TrueCrypt-encrypted volume to RAM in order to play it. While the portion is being loaded, TrueCrypt is automatically decrypting it in RAM. The decrypted portion of the video in RAM is then played by the media player. While this portion is being played, the media player begins loading next small portion of the video file from the TrueCrypt-encrypted volume to RAM and the process repeats. This process is called "on-the-fly" encryption/decryption and it works for all file types, not just for video files. The process also ensures minimal impact on processing performance.

Note that TrueCrypt never saves any decrypted data to a disk — it only stores it temporarily in RAM. Even when the volume is mounted, data stored in the volume remains encrypted. When you restart Windows or turn off your computer, the volume will be automatically dismounted and files stored in it will be inaccessible and encrypted. Even when power is suddenly interrupted (i.e., without a proper system shut-down), files stored in the volume are inaccessible and encrypted. To make them accessible again, you have to mount the volume by providing the correct password and/or key file.

Of course, as with any unintended power interruption or shut-down, unsaved changes to files are lost because re-encryption of changes occurs only when files are saved to the volume in a normal fashion.

I've only touched on a few of the main facets of TrueCrypt. In addition, TrueCrypt offers a choice of encryption algorithms from which you can select one that will give the degree of security you feel you need. This and other aspects of TrueCrypt are fully documented in an excellent User Guide. The latest version of the free software, Release 7.0a, can be downloaded from the product's home Website at <http://www.truecrypt.org>, as well as from CNET's <http://www.download.com>, and other sites on the Web. The User Guide PDF and a more detailed description of TrueCrypt can be found at the product's home web-site.

TrueCrypt is one free program that is, in my opinion, an exception to my general perception of the breed. Of course, the developers gratefully accept donations. In this case, I think they are well deserved.

The Tip Corner

By Bill Sheff, Novice SIG Coordinator, Lehigh Valley Computer Group, PA
August 2011 issue, The LVCG Journal
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Windows 7

Just got Windows 7? Notice something missing? Well if you want to see a list of what happened to those programs you liked in XP or Vista here is a simple way to find out. Open Help and Support then type "What happened" in the search box. Windows will give you lots of results for the query, such as: What happened to the NetBEUIprotocol?, What happened to ActiveSync?, What happened to Sticky Notes?, What happened to Windows Calendar?, What happened to the Run as command?, What happened to the Quick Launch toolbar?" and many more.

Say you picked the "What happened to the Run command?" This is what you get: "The Run command no longer appears on the Start menu in this version of Windows. The search box that appears on the Start menu provides much of the same functionality as the Run command. However, the Run command is still available if you prefer to use it. You can even add it to the Start menu for easier access.

To add the Run command to the Start menu Click to open Taskbar and Start Menu Properties. Click the Start Menu tab, and then click Customize. In the list of Start menu options, select the Run command check box, and then click OK. The Run command will be displayed on the right side of the Start menu.

Tip: You can also access the Run command by pressing the Windows logo key +R. Check it out."

Google Images

A while ago Google switched over to a different display method for their images. If you want to turn it off and go back to the original, here's what you do: Scroll to the very bottom of your Google image search and click on Switch to basic version. If you want to go back to the regular way, simply scroll back to the bottom and click Switch to standard version.

System Tools

Just for a little review, there are a bunch of very useful programs in the System Tools folder. To get to them you access the System Tools by going to All Programs | Tools. When you open the folder in XP you can find the following programs:

- ! CHARACTER MAP, which allows you to copy and paste letters and symbols from other fonts into your document without switching fonts.
- ! DISK CLEANUP, which frees up space on your hard drive by eliminating unused and temporary files.
- ! DISK DEFRAGMENTER (Defrag), which speeds up your computer by reassigning or eliminating stray bits of data.
- ! FILES AND SETTINGS TRANSFER WIZARD, for transferring files and data from one drive to another.
- ! INTERNET EXPLORER (NO ADD-ONS), which allows you to access the internet without any Explorer addons interfering with it.
- ! SCHEDULED TASKS, which allows you to schedule a specific time to run updater, defrag, and other system programs.
- ! SYSTEM INFORMATION, which tells you the basic ram, processor, etc., of your system.
- ! SYSTEM RESTORE, which will restore your Windows system to an earlier time.

In Vista and Win 7 you can find all of the above and more. Check it out.

Templates

A template is a prepared form or pattern within various programs such as document and spreadsheet programs. They allow a user to develop a form that allows for easy entry and automatically formats and calculates data.

If you are a user of the Microsoft Office suite you are probably aware of them as Microsoft makes mention of templates and even has a folder of them within their suite.

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to find in a template. But do not lose heart, once downloaded you can continue to tweak the

form until it does what you want the way you want it.

File Types: What are they? And why should we care?

By Phil Sorrentino, President, Sarasota PCUG, FL

August 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor

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Understanding File Types is the key to successfully organizing and using your computer files and folders. The File Type is the extension to the file name (the characters after the period). Unfortunately, File Types are hidden when you first startup your computer Operating System. I've always thought this was odd because knowing the type of a file can help explain what is going on, or at least what can be done with that particular file. (Because the file type can be changed using the Rename option, I suspect this was done to prevent a user from renaming the file type and possibly making that file un-useable.) Without the file type, confusion can arise. Hiding the file type leads to the appearance that there are multiple files in a folder with the same file name. While actually, the file names are different because they have different file types. It is only the file type that shows them as two distinctly different files. File Types can be shown along with the first part of the file name. In XP and Windows 7, this is accomplished in the View tab of the Control Panel's Folder Options Applet. Just uncheck "Hide extensions for known file types".

Let's start with some very basic File Management concepts. Every file in a folder has to have a unique name. (Two files may have the same name, but they must reside in different folders.) The name has two parts, separated by a period. The part after the period is called the file type or file extension. Typically the file type is three or four characters, but it can be longer. The limit is tied into the overall size of the path of the file in question, but practically you will see file types of around three or four or five characters. If you Google "file types," you will be amazed at how many file types have been defined and you will also see some pretty long file types, like the following 8 character file type, ".debuglog." In these lists you will see all the familiar file types like .doc, .docx, .txt, .rtf, .xls, .jpg, .bmp, .gif, .mp3, .wav, .m3u, .wma, .avi, .mov, .mp4, .wmv, and so on.

A few sentences ago I mentioned "path." The path is a unique description of where the file in question is located. Typically we think of a file's location as being in a particular folder, but the path is more general. The path starts out with the computer followed by the drive, then the folders in hierarchical order, leading down to the particular file. So the path to a picture of a group of cousins taken on July 4th, 2009, might look like:

\\Desktop2\D:Photos\Family\2009\FourthOfJulyPicnic\Cousins.jpg where "Cousins.jpg" is a picture (or at least a .jpg file) in the "FourthOfJulyPicnic" folder, which is in the "2009" folder, which is in the "Family" folder, which is in the "Photos" folder on the "D:" drive of the "Desktop2" computer. (Note that the "\" is used to separate components of the path. Similar to the way "/" is used to separate the components of an address on the internet.) So you see the path to every file must be unique, so that the file can be unambiguously found. This also explains why we can have two files, with the same name and extension, exist in different folders. The path would be different, not by the file name and extension, but by one of the

folder components. So, when all is said and done, the file type is part of a file's name that makes that file unique.

But that is only part of the story. The file type is really a definition of all of the data that is held within the file. (It defines in great detail just what every bit and byte in the file means.) And this is where Files and Applications come together, or where they become "associated". File Association links a file type with an Application. An Application knows how to handle a particular file type because of the file type definition. Fortunately, we, the users, don't have to know anything about the details of the file type, only that a particular file type can be used with a particular Application. So if a correct association is made, the Application will handle the file in the expected fashion. If an incorrect association is made, the results will be undetermined.

Many applications can handle many different file types. For example, Windows Media Player can use a whole host of audio and video file types, such as wma, mp3, m3u, aiff, wmv, avi, mpg, mpeg, mpv2. Sometimes when you install a new application, the application will automatically associate with the file types that it knows how to use. This may not be the associations that you originally wanted. Some Applications are much more polite, and ask if you want them to associate with certain file types. If associations happen automatically, you can end up with different applications being used to handle a particular file type. For example, you could end up with "Real Player" playing your music that you originally had Windows Media Player associated with.

The Operating System provides a capability to review and establish the associations. Each operating System is a little different. In XP it is provided in the File Types tab of the Folder Options, Control Panel, as shown in the graphic example that follows. (The example shows the .mp3 file type chosen for a change (on the left) and the Recommended and Other Programs (Applications) selections (on the right.) In Windows 7 (and Vista) it is part of the Default Files Control Panel (Associate a file type or protocol with a program).

Associations can easily be changed, but be very careful. Only use the Recommended Programs. If another program is used, the results may be undetermined and may even damage the file in question. But this is the way you can get things back to the way you want. You can get your music back to being played by your player of choice, or your videos back to being played by Windows Media Player, or your .bmp graphics files back to being displayed with the Paint application.

So, we care about File Types because they help to uniquely define a file's name and location, and their definitions enable applications to determine how to handle the contents of the file. These are two very big jobs for a seemingly very small (and often hidden) aspect of the Windows Operating System.

**When Digital Disaster Strikes, Smile!...
because you will be OK**

By Gregory West, Member of Sarnia Computer Users' Group (scug.ca) and Port

Have you ever deleted photos from a camera or computer by mistake?

A friend of mine called me recently after going through a "catastrophe," as he called his situation. It happened about midway over the Atlantic Ocean, thirty-seven thousand feet up. He was sitting in his seat with not much to do so he decided to check the photos on his digital camera. All these photos were from this trip to Portugal, a trip that involved hiking in the wilderness and visiting old buildings. You can only imagine some of his prized photos.

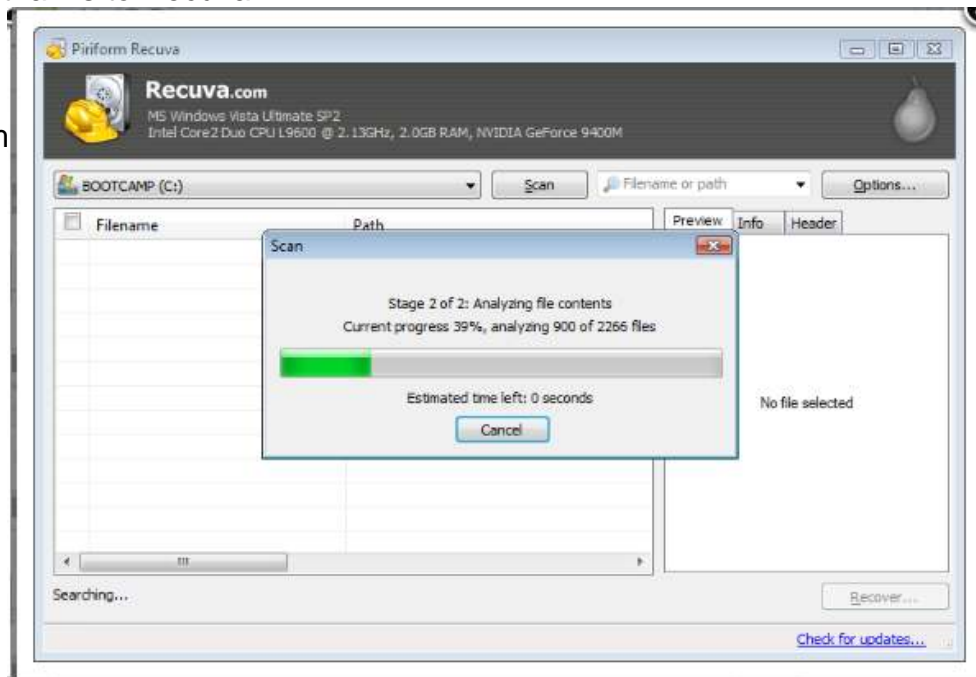
I think you know where I am going with this...Yes, while looking at the photos, clicking from one to the next, he inadvertently deleted not just a couple of photos, every photo from his trip was gone in one simple click. After checking and double checking he knew it was fruitless to look further; the photos vanished.

When he got home he called and told me about this situation.

"That's no problem," I tried to reassure him. I explained that there is a software recovery program that people use in such cases with much success. The voice at the other end of the line was silent. I knew he didn't think this process was possible. After he recovered every single photo from his vacation he couldn't thank me enough.

However, my tale doesn't end there. I had a similar problem where a new SD (photo storage card in camera) failed to produce 250 pictures and some video clips. After taking a deep breath I remembered the advice I had doled out and quickly downloaded a copy of Recuva, a recovery program that is free and works. Within no time I had all my pictures and video clips stored on my computer, thanks to Recuva.

The moral of this story is when you delete photos, music from an MP3 player, or data from your computer, remember that it is possible to recover the data. Don't say it will never happen because you are careful. I am sure it has happened to the best of us. To avoid a similar "catastrophe" you need to have a recovery software program installed on your computer. One of the



best recovery programs around is called: Recuva. As an added bonus this program is free and it comes "highly" recommended.

You can read the reviews here: <http://cnet.co/filehelp>

How does it work? Recuva scans your drives for the files you need and "recovers them in a flash" (www.piriform.com). Even if the files are partially damaged "Recuva will show you a list of files it has found on the drive, and give you an estimate of the likelihood of success of recovering them." You can't ask for much more.

Let's not forget when we delete those important emails. Yes you can recover them too. Recuva says that "The email program doesn't delete the email or emails to the Windows Recycle Bin, but rather empties its own internal trash or Recycle Bin."

I use word processing software every day. And yes I have lost documents that I have spent hours working on and never got them back. That is until I discovered Recuva. They assure us that their software "can intelligently rebuild Word documents from their temporary files."

We all can agree for the most part that weddings, graduations, and other such special events are best remembered with lots of photos. Music downloaded to your MP3 player is a treasure chest to cherish. While those word documents on the hard drive on your computer are from hours of work, you dare not lose them anymore.

To find out more and to get your free copy of Recuva, go to this website:
www.piriform.com/download

Here's a comment Greg received on his blog. Recuva is an excellent program, like most of the software from Piriform. However, there is a caveat. Once you realize that you may have inadvertently deleted data, whether it is on your computer, thumb drive, or flash card, it is imperative NOT to use the device! Recovery IS possible, but if your operating system writes over what has been deleted, you may not be able to "recuva" what's been deleted. 2 PC Geeks Computer Repair, Virginia

SugarSync - Sweet Synchronization Solution
By Vinny LaBash, Regular Columnist, Sarasota PCUG, Florida
August 2011 issue, Sarasota PC Monitor
www.apcug.org / [labash \(at\) spcug.org](mailto:labash@spcug.org)

There was once a time when having a rotary telephone put you in the front lines of innovation. That was long ago and modern communications technology is as far advanced from that day as communicating by smoke signal. If you have any combination of desktop computer, laptop, smart phone, tablet, and whatever, you need some way to coordinate information so that every device you own has the same up-to-date information.

One way to make sure all your files are equally up-to-date is using a popular cloud based utility known as Dropbox. However, there is another lesser known tool that gives you more

for less. We're talking about SugarSync which is constantly evolving into a service similar to Dropbox, but with better mobile support, advanced file control, and superior price performance.



When you open your account at www.sugarsync.com, you supply a user name and password and then install the application. As long as you're connected to the Internet, the files you drag into your local Sugarsync folder magically appear on all PCs, laptops, phones, and iPads that also have Sugarsync installed and are attached to the same Sugarsync account. The files also appear online when you sign into the Sugarsync site and specify the same user name and password.

SugarSync sets up your system to start backing up your data as soon as you initiate the program. Don't worry, it won't do anything without your permission, and there is no need to be concerned about your information getting out of control. The interface is clunky compared to the more intuitive IE browser window which is one of few downsides to SugarSync. The developers are probably still concerned about legacy issues, a fear that will probably disappear over time, but may cost them customers before it's eliminated.

Support for mobile devices is nothing less than outstanding. It supports more mobile devices than any other product. If you're using Windows 7 or Symbian, SugarSync is there for you. These platforms may be relatively unimportant in the grand scheme of things today, but if you happen to use one of them SugarSync should be of interest.

SugarSync has a unique design feature for your Pictures folder. Of course synchronizing and viewing pictures from mobile devices is supported, but the process is treated as much more than a casual concession to photo buffs. It does more than backup your pictures. It creates online galleries to share with colleagues and friends. You don't have to back up your photographs to one location and upload them. If you take a picture with your mobile device it's automatically sent to SugarSync and downloaded to your computer. The gallery layout is superb for a web-based product, and the photo viewers are excellent.

Music lovers will appreciate their MP3 files following them like puppy dogs. The computer does not have to be turned on because music files are being streamed from SugarSync. Audiophiles can listen to music no matter where they are.

SugarSync continuously backs up your files in real time, not just once or twice a day. So if you edit a document in the morning, and accidentally delete it in the afternoon you can restore it quickly with no hassles. The program stores the five latest versions of any backed up file so it's not a quandary if you need an earlier version. The downside to this is that five

versions of multiple files can take up a lot of storage. The upside is that only the most recent version of a file is counted toward your storage quota.

If you are having trouble thinking of some uses for SugarSync here are some suggestions:

- ! Inadvertently overwriting a file is no longer a potential disaster as SugarSync keeps a copy of the older file making restoration easy and painless.
- ! Many people treasure their old photographs. Keeping pictures safely backed up in digital format means storing them as long as necessary with no deterioration in quality.
- ! Roboform users can synchronize passwords safely and securely.
- ! You can retrieve files no matter where you are or what device you happen to be using.
- ! Share folders with family members. Any great vacation pictures, new additions to the family, celebrations, and other memorable events are instantly available.
- ! Listen to music anywhere.
- ! Synchronize documents such invoices across multiple devices. Accountants will love it.

SugarSync can act as an insurance policy against losing important information. Backups are no longer a hassle or a nuisance.

5GB Free

Microsoft Offers Free "Health Vault" for Personal Medical Records

By Ira Wilsker, Member, Golden Triangle PC Club, TX
Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX

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r (at)
sbcglob
al.com
WEBSIT

ES:

<http://www.healthvault.com>

<http://health.google.com>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microsoft_HealthVault

For the past few years I have been using two primary methods for recording personal medical information. One method I have been using to keep track of my personal medical information and records is an 8 gig flash drive attached to my car key chain along with a large, red, aluminum, engraved medic alert logo. This flash drive has three redundant files in different formats (Word doc, RTF, and PDF) containing my medical history, medical imagery, prescription list, emergency contact information, a copy of my health insurance card, allergy information, and other relevant important information that may be useful in a medical emergency. The reason for the triple redundancy using the different file formats is that regardless of the type of computer or operating system used by emergency medical personnel or a hospital emergency room, at least one of the formats will be readable when needed.

The other method I have been using for a few years is the much vaunted Google Health (health.google.com), which I had previously written about in this column. I had been very satisfied with this free service offered by Google, where I tracked my vital signs, prescriptions, office visits, medical history, lab results, and other medical information. While Google securely stored my information, I did set it up such that my family could access it in the event of an emergency and share the information with appropriate health care professionals. When recently updating my Google Health information, I was chagrined to find that Google is discontinuing this service. A large red banner on the Google Health website announced "An important update about Google Health", followed by, "Google Health will be discontinued as a service. The product will continue service through January 1, 2012. After this date, you will no longer be able to view, enter or edit data stored in Google Health. You will be able to download the data you stored in Google Health, in a number of useful formats, through January 1, 2013." Since I have been using Google Health, like the idea of secure online access to personal medical health records, and had a lot of information stored there, I felt that it would be necessary to find an alternative resource, and found Microsoft's competing product, Microsoft Health Vault.

Microsoft is promoting its free Health Vault service (www.healthvault.com) as "A trusted place for people to organize, store, and share health information online." Microsoft is also explicitly targeting Google Health users with the statement, "As Google Health retires their service, you can transfer your information to Microsoft Health Vault." Microsoft has pledged to keep the information secure, and not to use the information for the purposes of creating personalized ads or the marketing of services without the explicit permission of the user. For those using smart phones and other mobile devices, a mobile version of Health Vault is accessible, enhancing access to the system. Many of us consider our health history and records as highly personal, and may have totally valid concerns about the security of our online medical records. Microsoft Health Vault says, "It's your Health Vault record. You decide what goes into it, who can see, use, and share your info, and which health tools have access to it."

Some may wonder why secured online medical records are necessary, or even useful. As federal mandates for electronic medical records become more widely implemented, paper records will become somewhat obsolete. If anyone has ever gone to a new doctor or specialist, you are well aware of the often lengthy medical questionnaire that the new patient is required to fill out. While there may be a medical necessity for the physician to have that information, our personal memories are often inadequate and inaccurate when trying to recall complete and detailed information. Recently, in my primary care physician's office, the nurse asked me when I had my most recent tetanus shot and some other vaccines, as I have used some other resources for periodic vaccines, now that flu shots and other vaccines are given in a multitude of convenient and non-traditional locations. I had a flu shot in the college gym, and another immunization at my local supermarket pharmacy! I had dutifully recorded the injections in my Google Health records, and could rapidly produce accurate information using my smart phone to access my records.



track & manage

organize

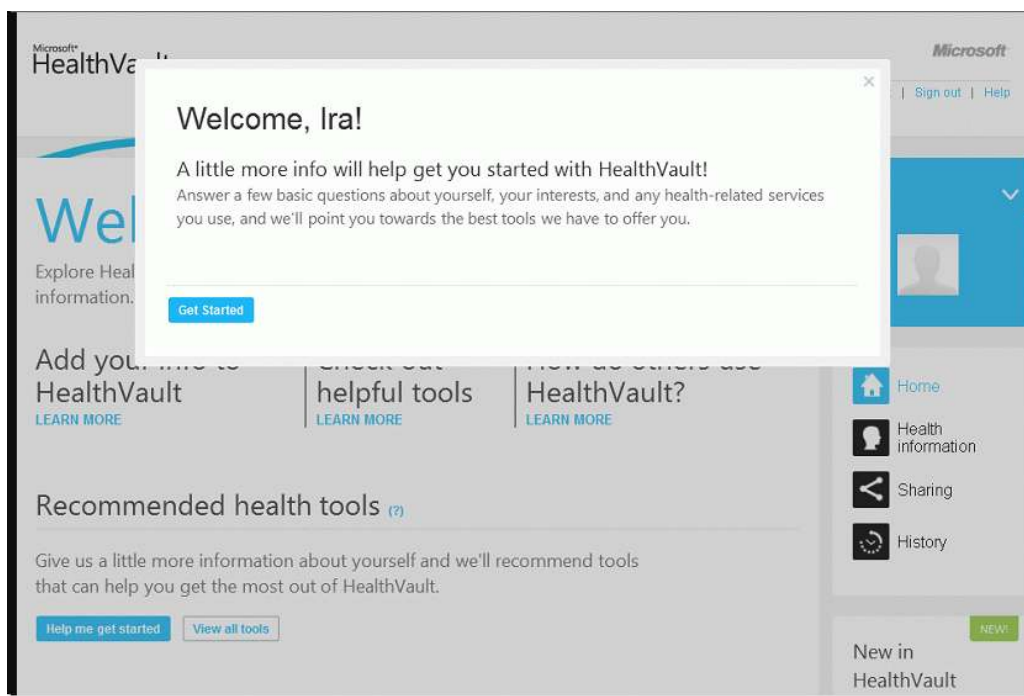
get healthy

tools & devices

Microsoft Health Vault offers a variety of free services to the consumer, as well as commercial services to health care providers. Using Health Vault my prescription information, refills, and changes can be automatically tracked, as several of the major drug store chains (CVS Caremark, CVS Pharmacy, Walgreens) are interconnected with Health Vault. Since many of us may obtain prescriptions from multiple sources, Health Vault can help identify potentially dangerous drug interactions and side effects, as well as make your prescription information available to those of your choice. Health Vault offers a convenient method to share data about chronic conditions, such as blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, and other information with your doctor. It is important to remember that the individual has complete control over who can access the information, and what specific information each can access.

It is easy and free for an individual to open a Health Vault account. If you already have a Windows Live, Hotmail, Xbox or MSN account, you have immediate access to a Health Vault account, as they use the same username and password. Facebook users also have instant access, as Health Vault can be accessed via the users' existing Facebook username and password by clicking on the Facebook icon in Health Vault. For users with none of these existing accounts, creating a new account is a simple process. Once connected, and some personal questions answered, the user is greeted with the main page where a variety of options are displayed. Across the top of the page are five links that lead the user to additional categories of personal information. The "About You" link is where the user can enter and update information on medications (prescription and non-prescription, including vitamins, herbs, supplements, etc.), allergies, and current health conditions. Family medical histories, documents, immunizations, lab test results, blood sugar, blood pressure, weight, emergency contacts, provider listings, and other information can be added or amended through this link. The "Health Tools" link opens a comprehensive listing of health information

resources and agencies that participate in the Health Vault service, as well as medical devices that can upload data into the Health Vault. Among the participants in the "Health Tools" are the American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Association, Aetna, Epilepsy Diary, H1N1 Response Center, American Heart Association, American Stroke Association, iGuard (drug interaction service), Quest Diagnostics (import lab results into Health Vault), Mayo Clinic, CVS, Caremark, Minute Clinic, Walgreens, and dozens of other resources. Medical devices, some of which may be interconnected with Health Vault, include AND (blood pressure machines and other devices), Bayer blood glucose meters, LifeScan (Johnson & Johnson) blood sugar monitoring devices, MicroLife asthma and blood pressure devices, Omron blood pressure devices, and many other devices. The "Family" link can be used to add family members to Health Vault; it is important to note that each family member's information is contained in his own personal record. The "Contact List" can be used to add or edit emergency contacts and health care provider information. "Stories" is where the user can read stories about how others have used Health Vault.



On the right margin of the main page is an icon for "Sharing". This icon leads to a page where, "You control access to your health information. Use Sharing to decide which people or online health tools can access selected types of information in your Health Vault record." Under the heading "Authorized people" is where the user can, "Let family members or others you trust view or

update information in your Health Vault record." This is where I have my wife and my adult children listed as approved family members, such that they can access my information in an emergency situation. The link to share information with your health care provider allows the user to print selected information from Health Vault, utilize the online tools to prepare for an upcoming office visit or hospitalization, or to connect to the users' physician's electronic medical records if his system is compatible with Health Vault.

There is a commercial side to Health Vault as Microsoft is actively marketing compatible software and utilities to physicians, hospitals, and other healthcare providers. For hospitals and clinics, Microsoft states, "Using Health Vault, patients can share their health history and information with your organization or specific physicians. This serves to improve the patient/provider relationship and can also streamline the admissions and discharge

processes." For individual physicians," Microsoft Health Vault means easier access to a broader range of information from patients that can help you provide better service and more efficient, informed care. You can also share information more easily with your patients, enabling patients to make more informed health decisions every day." Other Microsoft applications are available to medical device manufacturers, and other healthcare companies and organizations in order to seamlessly integrate with Health Vault.

While there are a variety of lesser known companies trying to take up the slack in personal medical record keeping, especially with the upcoming demise of Google Health, Microsoft, with its scale and reputation, may become the primary provider of such services.

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Should you worry about image retention on an LCD monitor?

By Linda Gonse, Editor/Webmaster, ORCOPUG (Orange County PCUG), CA
July 2011 issue, Nibbles 'n Bits
www.orcopug.org / editor (at) orcopug.org



I just bought a brand new HP ZR22w LCD flat screen monitor. My understanding always has been that burn-in (also called image retention or image persistence) does not occur on LCD screens. But, an HP help file that came with my monitor dispelled that notion.

"Image retention occurs when the monitor is left ON while displaying the same image for an extended period of time, leaving a 'shadow' of this image on the screen."

I researched the burn-in problem further and About.com, <http://bit.ly/k05clD>, said "Image retention can be corrected in most cases and is easily prevented." That statement was a relief!

The article went on to list methods that could be used to prevent image retention/persistence.

1. "Set the screen to turn off after a few minutes of screen idle time under the Power functions in Windows. Turning the monitor display off will prevent an image from being displayed on the screen for extended periods of time. Of course, this could be annoying to some people as the screen may go off more than they wish."
2. "Use a screen saver that either rotates, has moving graphic images or is blank. This also prevents an image from being displayed in screen for too long."

3. "Rotate any background images on the desktop. Background images are one of the most common causes for image persistence. By switching backgrounds every day or few days, it should reduce the change of persistence."
4. "Turn off the monitor when the system is not in use. This will prevent any problems where the screen saver or power function fails to turn off the screen and result in an image sitting on the screen for long times."

The bottom line is not to be too worried about image burn-in, but keep it in mind when using your LCD monitor and you can easily prevent it from happening.

If somehow it does happen, see <http://bit.ly/k05clD> for instructions on how to correct existing image retention on LCD monitors.

Finally, the HP text helpfully revealed another problem not known to all LCD monitor users, "the fluorescent lights inside the display have a limited lifetime and will gradually degrade." This is reason enough not to leave a monitor on 24/7, even with a screen saver enabled. Use the timed Energy/Power setting to automatically turn the monitor off when your system is idle for a while.

Slide Scanning 2011

By Greg Skalka, President, UCHUG (Under the Computer Hood UG), CA
July 2011 issue, DriveLight
www.uchug.org / president (at) uchug.org

On the morning of October 22, 2007, my family, like many others in northern San Diego County, awoke to the threat of wildfires moving into urban areas. Though we were under mandatory evacuation orders, the need to leave was not urgent, so we were able to pack up our four cars over several hours. All the irreplaceable and important items we could fit were loaded, including photo albums, computer cases, external hard drives and my collection of 35 mm slides. We headed up to Orange County to stay for a few days, and fortunately had a house to return to.

Though our neighborhood was never really threatened, the experience left an impression on me. I've owned a digital camera for 11 years, and all of the 40,000 digital photos I had taken in that time were easily transported with us on a single external hard drive. Because I also kept a backup of these files in another geographic location, I was even less concerned about their safety. My collection of 7300 slides taken over 32 years was a big concern, however, since they occupied two large boxes and were the only copies I had.

Though I already owned three film scanners at the time, I had never gotten around to starting the scanning process, as I was still searching for that elusive perfect scanning method. I spent more time researching scanning options after the fires, bought a fourth scanner (a PrimeFilm 3600u film scanner) and outlined my new scanning plan in the film scanning presentation I gave to our group in 2008.

Three years have passed since then, and I've only scanned a few slides. Unfortunately, I've found dealing with these thousands of slides is a daunting task. I'd found a scanner that provided good results, but with a scan time of 1 to 4 minutes each, I'd need to spend the equivalent of 3 to 12 work weeks (of 40 hours each) to complete the task. I could hire out the job, but even Costco's photo services would charge \$2100 to scan all my slides. Faced with a large cost in either time or money, I wound up doing nothing, and so my slides still sit in film form, vulnerable and degrading over time.



Fortunately my procrastination has managed to be beneficial, as there are now new film scanning devices available with much shorter scan times. One of these is the Wolverine Data F2D300 35mm film to digital converter (www.wolverinedata.com). It appears to contain the guts of a digital camera, so it captures the

image quickly all at once, rather than in a slow scan. It does not even require a computer, storing the photo files in a small internal memory or a removable SD memory card.

The unit is powered from an AC adapter and cable. The cable has a small connector on one end (for the scanner) and a USB connector on the other. The scanner can be powered from AC by plugging the cable USB end into the power adapter, or the unit can be powered from any USB port by using only the cable.

Operation is simple, with only four buttons on the top of the unit. The control menus and the image to be scanned are displayed on a 2.4" LCD display on the front of the device. The scanner can be set to scan slides, negatives and black & white (negatives, I presume).

Two plastic scanning trays are provided. One tray holds up to four slides in their cardstock or plastic mounts; the other holds strip negatives (up to six 35 mm images). The trays have a hinged cover with magnetic latches to hold it closed. The slide tray is easy to load; the negative tray requires more effort to align the film's notches with pegs on the tray's base. A loaded tray is inserted into an opening on the right side on the scanner near the base and then protrudes out the other side. The tray is shifted to allow each slide or negative to be scanned. Detents in the tray help index the tray for each slide or negative, but you can also use the display to make sure the tray is lined up in the scanner correctly.

It is best to place the slide or negative in the tray so that the image in the display has the correct orientation, but there is also a menu selection to flip or mirror the image before scanning. The brightness of the image can be adjusted to some degree before scanning through an adjustment to the internal LED backlight. The brightness can be set to one of seven levels from -3 to +3 (+3 being the brightest, and 0 assumed to be nominal). By some degree, I mean that the "camera" inside the device also appears to have an automatic exposure feature that compensates for the brightness adjustment at times.

This means that a change in the brightness setting does not always result in a visible change to the resulting image.



To scan, the OK/COPY button is pressed once; the scan takes only a couple of seconds. The unit then displays a save/edit menu. A second button press saves the captured image to either the internal 25 MB memory or a memory card in the external SD memory card slot. I have only tried a 2 GB SD card in the slot, though the product's box says it is also compatible with SDHC (though this is the only documentation that indicates SDHC capability). The save/edit menu also allows the image to be rotated 90 degrees in either direction (for portrait vs. landscape orientation), though it appears it only changes to portrait mode on the scanner's display. All of my saved images remained in landscape orientation.

The scanner claims a 7.3 megapixel image, which was confirmed by the 3312 x 2208 (nominal) image files I captured. The files are saved in JPEG format with fairly strong compression; the typical image file size is 1.4 to 1.8 MB. The scans I made were of good resolution, with no noticeable compression artifacts. The unit I tested appeared to crop the slide slightly, so the slide mount was not at all visible. I made scans of slides and color negatives and both came out well.

To copy the photo files to a computer, you can simply remove the SD card. The unit must be connected to a USB port on a computer (through the power/data cable) to copy any files stored in internal memory. The scanner can be set to provide a slide show of stored images on its LCD screen. The unit can also display on a TV with a display cable (which is not included), per the documentation.

Overall, I found the unit I tested worked well, providing a reasonable image very quickly. Even allowing an average of 10 seconds per slide to scan (to allow for tray loading), I could scan my entire slide collection in only 20 hours. This would give me a good quality copy of all my slides in a short period of time. I could then use my high-resolution PrimeFilm scanner on only the select few slides where a better quality scan might be needed in the future.

The only suggestions for changes or improvements to the Wolverine Data F2D300 I found are:

- ! Provide a JPEG compression adjustment, so that images can be saved at higher quality. The high JPEG compression is my main gripe about the unit.
- ! Provide a way to disable the automatic exposure feature, so the brightness adjustment works better.
- ! Provide a way to set the date and time in the JPEG file, so it can be set to reflect when the original photo was taken. The unit currently saves the JPEG files with a timestamp from an internal clock that starts from 1/1/2008 at 12:00 PM each time the device is powered on.

Overall, I found the Wolverine Data F2D300 to be a good value. While I'd prefer it saved images with a lower compression, or ideally with a lossless compression like PNG, its ability to scan so quickly makes it useful when there are a lot of slides or negatives to scan. It may not scan with the highest resolution, but it is definitely among the fastest.

Chapter 2 - When Two is not Better Than One

The Wolverine Data F2D300 unit I used for this review was loaned to me by a member of my user group who won it at the 2011 Southwest Computer Conference (it was donated to the conference by Wolverine Data). After seeing how well it worked and how quickly it could scan slides, I purchased one for myself.

Unfortunately, my unit did not work quite as well as the borrowed one. Instead of cropping the slide image slightly, my scanner had a slightly wider view, so that the rounded inside corners of the slide mount are barely visible. This is not a problem in my estimation; I actually prefer this, so I can crop it myself later if desired. Unfortunately, the images captured are also slightly out of focus. The problem cannot be seen on the scanner display, but is apparent when viewing the images full-screen on a computer display. The files captured by the borrowed scanner are noticeably clearer by comparison.

I called the support number provided with the product (Irvine, CA area code) and was quickly connected to tech support. The person I spoke with confirmed that the focus problem could not be corrected by any adjustment, and that they would provide me with an RMA number to return it. Since I purchased it from Costco (online), I elected to save the return postage that I presumed I would need to pay, and instead returned it to Costco (at a store). I then ordered another F2D300 scanner.

My second slide scanner was a keeper. The image was slightly clearer than even the borrowed scanner. Like the borrowed scanner, the image was slightly cropped, but this new one also had the image shifted down slightly. I am dismayed that this product does not appear to be very consistent between units in image quality, but at least I got one that I am happy with on the second try. I'm not interested in rolling the dice again. Now I can get my slides digitized before the fire season this fall.



The Lighter Side



Smart Computing Tips

www.smartcomputing.com

Excel Date & Time Shortcuts

To enter the date or time based on your PC's current clock setting into an Excel spreadsheet cell, you can use keyboard shortcuts and avoid that embarrassing typo. After you click on the cell you want, press CTRL+; to insert the date or CTRL+: to enter the time.

Find & Replace Formats

You are probably aware that you can use the Find And Replace tool in Microsoft Office to find certain words or phrases and replace them with different ones. You can do the same thing with formats. Open the Find And Replace tool and click More. At the very bottom of the box, click the Formats button. From here you will be able to find and replace fonts, formats, symbols, and more.

Avoid The Recycle Bin

For security or privacy reasons, you may not want a file or folder you delete to be sent to the Recycle Bin. If you hold down the SHIFT key when you press delete in Windows, the files won't go into the Recycle Bin and cannot be restored by Windows.

Scan & Print

Have you lost the scanning software that came with your office scanner or printer/scanner combo? If you use Windows XP/Vista, you can use the Scanner And Camera Wizard to preview, scan, and print. The Scanner And Camera Wizard lets you choose what picture type you want to scan, such as Color Picture or Grayscale Picture, as well as the type of file

format to save the image. To access the Scanner And Camera Wizard, click the Start menu, select All Programs, choose Accessories, and then click Scanner And Camera Wizard.

USB Perils

Before you disconnect a USB device from your PC, you're supposed to "stop" the device using an icon in the system tray, which is the area right next to your clock on the Windows taskbar. If you don't stop the device, Windows will display a message that scolds you and says you might lose data by disconnecting haphazardly. However, unless you are reading or writing data to your USB device, Microsoft says it's generally OK to disconnect without stopping it first.

Unload Startup

By reducing the number of programs that start up each time you boot your computer, you can eek a bit more time out of your notebook's battery. Additional applications that load cause other applications to spill into virtual memory, thereby adding load to the CPU. This requires additional power. Look for options within a program to disable it from starting automatically, or simply close those applications down when you're on the road. You can also prevent programs from starting automatically by removing them from the Startup folder found in the Programs or All Programs listing of the Start menu.

Turn Off Your PC To Save Energy

You don't work 24 hours a day (hopefully), so there's no need to leave your PC on all day. In addition to shutting your computer down at the workday's end, use standby or hibernate settings if you frequently step away from the computer throughout the day. As a rule, set these modes to kick in after 15 or 20 minutes of inactivity. Set the hard drive to hibernate after 30 minutes of nonuse. If you're using a screen saver, turn it off. Designed to lengthen the life of old CRT displays, screen savers aren't necessary with newer flat-panel LCDs. Some screen savers also draw on the graphics card, monitor, processor, and hard drive to function.

Frequently Used Graphics

Inserting a graphic into a Microsoft Word document isn't difficult; just click Insert, point to Picture, and select From File (or another source). However, if you routinely insert the same graphic into documents—such as a company logo—it can get a bit tedious to do it the long way every time. You can make an AutoText entry to make it easier on yourself. First, insert the graphic. Click it to select it, then click Insert, AutoText, and then New. When the dialog box appears, name the image and click OK. Now, whenever you want to insert that image into a document, type its name (whatever you just specified) and then press F3.