

MotherBoard

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This Month At NOPC Troubleshoot and Maintain Windows XP by Ray Paternostro

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RSS Explained

By Phil Shapiro,
member of the Capital PC User Group,
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RSS - really simple syndication -- is a labor-saving tool that allows people to tune into information sources that interest them. The information source could be a blog, a podcast, a videocast or any web site that includes RSS feeds.

The value of RSS accrues when you subscribe to multiple RSS feeds. You can then monitor multiple information streams with a minimum of effort.

There are many different software tools for subscribing to RSS feeds. One of the most popular is a web site named Bloglines. Some web browsers let you subscribe to RSS feeds. Safari 2.x and Firefox are two browsers that do. Firefox lets you to subscribe to RSS feeds using something called Live Bookmarks. You can also use a Firefox extension named Sage to subscribe to RSS feeds.

RSS's primary value is that it brings

information to you without you having to visit multiple web sites. In a knowledge economy, anything that streamlines the flow of information from producer to consumer gives benefit to both producer and consumer. You tune into the information you do want, and tune out the information you don't want.

Some Examples of How RSS Simplifies Peoples' Lives

I asked some technology consultants to explain how RSS brings value to peoples' lives. Curtis Brown at MissionMovers.org, in Seattle, is a strong believer in RSS. He explains, "RSS has invaded every part of our life, but we just don't know it. RSS is an information delivery method that gives added convenience to both senders and receivers of the information."

As an example, RSS feeds can be used by

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Our Vice President and long time member Ray Paternostro will talk about how to perform basic troubleshooting and maintenance in Windows XP. Ray will cover how to use the keyboard to navigate around Windows XP, how to use Safe mode and accessing the built in Administrator account, setting permission levels for user accounts, and using the System Restore function.

Mark your calendars, create an entry in your PDA, update Outlook and join us on Wednesday, June 7, 2006. The monthly meeting of the NOPCC starts at 6:30pm on the first Wednesday of every month. Location of the meeting is the J.D. Meisler school cafeteria at 3700 Cleary Ave. Metairie. Use the entrance through the breezeway on Pharr Street.

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a nonprofit organization to distribute different kinds of information to different people. One RSS feed could be the organization's calendar of events or classes. Another could be a call for volunteers. A third feed might be information for funders. The more feeds an organization offers, the more narrowly tailored the information delivered to people served by that organization or supporting that organization.

Here are some other examples of RSS feeds. A used car dealer can have an RSS feed that details newly arrived used cars. A public library could have an RSS feed of newly purchased books. A police department can have separate RSS feeds for different neighborhoods, giving up-to-date information on safety concerns in each neighborhood.

Curtis Brown explains that information received in an RSS feed can be filtered by keyword and colorized in text. So you have control over the RSS feed. You decide the ways in which that stream of information is going to serve your needs.

Curtis explains that RSS feeds become immensely useful when people work collaboratively in a wiki. (A wiki is a web page that different people can edit.) Changes to the web page can be monitored via an RSS feed. This allows anyone participating in the wiki to have a clear idea of who is adding the most value to the wiki. RSS allows for better monitoring and gives added transparency to the collaborative process.

Curtis goes on to explain that there are two kinds of RSS feeds -- static feeds and dynamic feeds. A static feed might be sports scores or the feed from a single blog. A dynamic feed is a stream of information where there is searching going on to pull out specific pieces of information to add to the stream.

It's also possible to combine several RSS feeds into a single new feed. One web site that let's you do that is rssmix.com. Why would want to do that? Suppose you live in a metropolitan area with several different library systems spanning several counties. Each library system provides an RSS feed of the events happening within their library system. You'd like to keep track of library events in multiple counties. rssmix.com would let you combine RSS feeds in that way.

Another RSS enthusiast, Bruce Roy, in Sydney, Australia explains - "I have found the RSS facility in The Next Generation of Genealogy Sitebuilding (TNG) very useful for the family tree site. It enables people interested in fol-

lowing the family tree to get information about changes to the tree without having to check the website's "What's New?" or wade through the data."

One other advantage of RSS is that it lets you tune out mainstream media and tune into alternative media and personal media. If you find the CBS Evening News a touch thin in how it covers the news, with RSS you have an alternative source of news where news stories don't need to be squeezed into 45 second slots.

Another RSS enthusiast, Winthrop Morgan, in the Washington DC-area had this to add:

"Regarding your request for examples of how RSS brings benefits into peoples' lives, I highly recommend you consider including Join Together Online as a great Win-Win- Win model.

Join Together Online (JTO) (<http://www.jointogether.org>) has long been a pioneer in using the Internet to support people working on substance abuse and gun violence issues. Every month, one million JTO web pages are viewed by over 350,000 people.

JTO uses RSS feeds to not only help their web presence spread, but also to provide vital to support state, municipal, and nonprofit drug treatment and prevention program managers and their audiences. While these programs' web masters might have a modest web presence, they lack the wherewithal to continuously produce new content, or even gather and republish it. Without new content, their audiences lack a reason to come back to their Web site. The JTO RSS service enormously increases both the return visit value of these sites and the presence of authoritative information in this highly charged information space.

To keep the RSS feeds fresh and riveting, JTO employs a small editorial staff who aggregates both online and off-line news on substance abuse funding, policies, and more from authoritative sources. They edit this news down to its essential content, and then republish it via RSS, as well as to users of their site and subscribers to their e-mail news services."

RSS Relieves Cluttered Email Inboxes

If you have traditionally received a lot of your information via email, RSS can provide some relief to your inbox. Would you like to follow a particular email list, but can't stomach subscribing to one more email list? If that list is on Yahoogroups, you can follow the list via the list's RSS feed. An excellent free tool for reading RSS feeds is Bloglines. (<http://www.bloglines.com>)

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RSS feeds are almost always spam-free. The provider of the RSS feed doesn't want you to unsubscribe from the feed -- so they treat you with respect.

Ben Sheldon, in Lowell, Massachusetts, passes along this RSS tip: "Google still only offers email news alerts, but this utility lets you use create an RSS feed out of any Google News search term. [<http://www.justinpfister.com/gnewsfeed.cfm>] I aggregate my name, my projects (DigitalBicycle, ServiceSpeak), and my street and city so that if something happens I should know about, I will."

If you're still with me, I'll pass along a few small tips of my own. I use RSS, Bloglines and my Digg.com account to keep track of what Digg stories my friends are digging (i.e. voting for.) I just copy the RSS feed from the bottom left of <http://digg.com/users/pshapiro/friends> and then paste it into Add Feed in Bloglines.

Between Katie Couric and the 50 friends I have on Digg, which do you think provides the richer quality of information to me? Right. Just for kicks I subscribe to the Associated Press RSS feed, so I'm in the loop with whatever Katie knows.

I also use the free service at Squeet.com to send me an email whenever one of my friends submits a story to Digg.com, so they don't have to let me know about their submissions. That email alert capability might well come to Digg sometime.

I use RSS to keep me posted on new items of interest to me that are posted to Del.icio.us. For example, if anyone submits an item to Del.icio.us with the tag digitalstorytelling, I find out about that really easily in my Bloglines account.

That puts me in touch with anyone doing digital storytelling anywhere on the planet. And I don't even have to subscribe to another email list to be in touch with them. I like that.

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His blog is at <http://philsrssfeed.blogspot.com>

This article -- with associated links-- can be found on the web at <http://rssexplained.blogspot.com>

Online Librarians Never Say Shhh!

By Gabriel Goldberg,
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Libraries have improved since baby boomers attended grade school . Research assistance once only available in person or by telephone is blossoming into diverse online "ask a librarian" services, handling questions ranging from general curiosity and homework-related to business research.

Friendly Online Librarians Never Say Shhh!

Growing up, I was lucky to live just a few blocks from a great neighborhood library. I fondly remember the children's librarian encouraging my love of reading and books. The library was rebuilt while I was in elementary school; I was recently shocked that the "new" library was undergoing renovation and improvement. Then I realized that what seems like yesterday was five decades ago!

The good news for us all -- near libraries or not -- is that libraries have greatly improved in that 50 years. Research assistance once only available in person or by telephone is blossoming into diverse online "ask a librarian" services. These handle all sorts of questions: general curiosity, homework-related, business research, etc. Just don't expect medical or legal advice.

E-mail assistance has been available for some time. Librarians sometimes like it because they can answer questions as they have time, and it avoids people waiting on line or holding on the phone. But it can be slow if a question must be clarified -- that's important, since people often don't ask what they really want answered! And online interaction lacks face-to-face intimacy, voice tone, body language, which all help communication.

In addition to accepting e-mail, libraries use Web forms for submitting queries, take questions via instant messaging, and offer interactive Web chats. Highly interactive instant messaging and Web chats allow quick conversations, often providing answers within a few minutes. Newer technologies such as VoIP (voice over IP, Internet telephony) and MS (cell phone text messaging) may soon increase research availability.

Library policies vary regarding answering non-resident questions; some specialized queries (local history, obitu-

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aries, newspaper clippings, etc.) must be handled by a library near the area of interest. That brings genealogy questions from far away as people research their ancestors.

Most queries are handled at no cost, though some searches incur charges. A library card usually isn't needed. Some libraries currently mail printed research results; e-mailing images will provide faster service and reduce costs.

Behind-the-scenes technology helps librarians manage queries, ensuring that all questions are answered and eliminating duplicate responses. Shortcuts fill in frequently used answers.

The same sorts of questions are asked online as are posed by phone or in person, with addition of sensitive areas such as sexual issues. Queries often deal with homework -- math, science fair challenges, etc. -- and country reports. Librarians enjoy the occasional obscure gem, such as being asked about "modeling the economic infrastructure of railroads in Great Britain".

The geek expression "24x7" means that something is available all day, every day. Since people expect this full-time access to e-mail, the Web, shopping, banking, and other online services, they're enthusiastic about being able to ask questions whenever they occur.

But it's hard for libraries to provide this never-anticipated level of service, especially when off-hours demand may be limited. So they support each other locally/nationally/internationally by sharing round-the-clock assistance chores. Questions are entered locally and routed to on-duty librarians -- who sometimes work from home in pajamas, answering off-hours long-distance queries.

Even librarians sometimes need help -- so their worldwide Stumpers mailing list lets them share baffling questions.

Librarians and the public are learning together to use electronic tools. New technologies facilitate supporting diverse clientele by -- for example -- facilitating non-English services.

Here are a few tips regarding online queries: provide your name/e-mail/phone for answering and clarification; use plain text (not formatted) for easy reading; don't nag, allow time for an answer -- but follow up in a week or so. Finally, contact the correct library. A library in Plymouth, Michigan has received queries about Plymouths

in Massachusetts and England!

Using online library services is easy once you have an Internet connection. Some libraries favor PCs with Windows and the Internet Explorer Web browser, but Linux and Macintosh systems are increasingly supported. There's generally no software download or install. Browser pop-up blockers or firewalls sometimes get in the way but they're easily customized.

Start by finding your library's Web site. For example, I locate my library by submitting "fairfax county" library to Google [www.google.com]. Or I could click from my county government Web site to the library pages. Or Googling library yields many library sites offering answers. Then look for links like Ask-A-Librarian! or "Homework Help!". Links and services will vary; when I click Ask-A-Librarian, I can choose between chatting, e-mailing, or (of course) actually visiting a library.

In researching this article I challenged my library with two questions. I was delighted that they quickly named the obscure British TV show whose name I couldn't remember (The Duchess of Duke Street) and found a science fiction book containing a short story I wanted to reread.

No matter how they evolve, whether as buildings or online, libraries' core mission is everlasting: providing timely information in a customer-friendly format.

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Printing Better Pictures

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When a dot is not a dot

Have you ever tried to print out a picture that looks good on your monitor only to be disappointed with the result? Does it come out way smaller/bigger than you expected or look really grainy?

This is not a random act by your computer. In order to understand why it happens, and more importantly, be able to prevent these problems, you have to understand when a dot is not a dot.

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This is not an easy subject to grasp initially, but if you play with it just a little, the light bulb will light and it will become almost second nature very quickly.

Conventions

There are two types of graphic images: bitmap and vector. This article focuses exclusively on bitmaps. If in doubt about which type your picture is, it's probably bitmap. Bitmap pictures are composed of a series of dots called pixels. While the terms DPI (dots per inch), PPI (pixels per inch), and SPI (samples per inch) technically have different meanings, in practice they are all interchangeable. Only DPI will be used in this article.

Any printer referred to is limited to the inkjet variety unless stated otherwise, although almost everything here applies equally to laser printers. Although this article focuses on examples using the GIMP, all the theory and much of the practice applies to almost all graphic software.

Monitors

Your monitor displays everything as a series of dots, regardless of the picture type. For instance, if your screen size is 800x600, then you are looking at 800 dots by 600 dots. The dots can be almost any color and they do not have a fixed size. A typical 17" monitor can have screen sizes from (at least) 640x480 to 1280x960. Since the physical size of your monitor can't change, the size of the dots must change. The more dots you have making up your screen, the smaller those dots will be. As far as your monitor is concerned, one pixel (see the definition of pixel above) equals one dot. Because the icons (including text) and wallpaper on your desktop are composed of a fixed number of dots, shrink those dots and the icons and wallpaper get smaller. Be aware that most desktops have a scaling feature for the wallpaper, called stretch in Windows, so you may not see the wallpaper actually change size if this feature is turned on. However, the quality of your wallpaper may go down dramatically if the wallpaper's actual size is small and you increase the screen size too much.

The same thing applies to any pictures you may have. A picture with 640x480 pixels will display fully (at 100% resolution) on any screen size at least 640x480. A picture 1600x1200, on the other hand, will require scrolling on any screen smaller than 1600x1200.

Printers

Printers, like monitors, create the printed picture/output image by using a set of dots. But that is where the similarities end. Unlike a monitor, a printer's output isn't a

screen with variable size pixels, but a piece of paper with fixed dimensions. Paper is measured in inches, not pixels.

Printers create the image (and text) by using a grid of dots. The number of dots the printer can make in one inch is what's known as DPI or Dots Per Inch. Obviously, the higher the DPI, the better the output the printer is capable of. A higher DPI means more detail and a lower DPI means less detail. If the DPI is set to low, the picture will look very grainy and poor. For a normal piece of paper, the graininess usually starts to show somewhere below 200 DPI. For things like highway billboards, the DPI used can be from 36 to 72 DPI.

Unlike a monitor, the dots are of a fixed color. A black and white printer cannot actually print gray, but only black. The paper is usually white, so white is just the absence of printing. Grays are simulated by printing dots in a grid. These grids are called halftones. Newspapers use halftones that are very coarse and usually visible even without a magnifier. The more black pixels, the darker the gray. Conversely, the fewer the black dots in the grid, the lighter the gray will be. Thus, one image pixel can require several printer dots. Some printers are capable of varying the size of the printer's dots, but for simplicity's sake, this will be ignored.

The size of the grid and the max DPI of the printer affect how well the printer can reproduce shades of gray (and color). Gray includes the colors black and white. For a 1200 DPI printer:

A 1x1 grid shows 2 shades of gray with an effective DPI of 1200 (1200/1 aka line art).

A 3x3 grid shows 10 shades of gray with an effective DPI of 400 (1200/3).

A 6x6 grid shows 37 shades of gray with an effective DPI of 200 (1200/6).

An 8x8 grid shows 65 shades of gray with an effective DPI of 150 (1200/8).

Thus, the more shades of gray you need, the more image detail you have to give up, or the more detail you want, the fewer shades of gray you will get.

Color printers are similar to black and white printers except they usually have four ink colors (CMYK - Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and black). Instead of orderly grids, color printers use dithering (with error diffusion).

Dithering is the use of somewhat randomized scattered dots. This tends to look smoother than grids, but the theory is similar. One image pixel can require several printer dots.

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In practice, the upper limit for inkjets comes about because the dots of individual color become larger than the grid to hold them. In addition, the ink can bleed, especially on regular paper (photo paper lessens this problem). The practical upper limit is (on good photo paper) between 240 to 300 (maybe 360) DPI. On regular paper, due to ink bleeding, 150 DPI is about as good as it gets. For other than inkjet printers, try not to go much below 200 DPI if you want a good print out.

Converting between the effective DPI (which is the same as the DPI you or the software pick), the printer's max DPI, and picking the colors to use at a given DPI is handled by the printer driver and not something you can really change. Just be aware that using a high DPI may not give you the detail, or color reproduction, you expect.

DPI and Print Size

In addition to affecting the number of colors, DPI also affects the physical size of the printed picture. The print size on paper is determined by two things: the number of pixels in the picture and the DPI setting used by the software for that picture.

Some software and some file formats do not support changing the DPI setting. Some programs do support changing the DPI and just don't mention the term DPI (or PPI or SPI). Some programs such as desktop publishing software and word processing software will show you a WYSIWYG version of your picture at its relative print size. This is usually based on the DPI of the picture.

The physical print size is just the picture size (in pixels) divided by the DPI. For instance, a 400x800 pixel picture printed at:

100 DPI will be 4 (400/100) inches x 8 (800/100) inches
 200 DPI will be 2 (400/200) inches x 4 (800/200) inches
 300 DPI will be 1.33 (400/300) inches x 2.66 (800/300) inches

Print the same picture (640x480) on letter paper using 3 different DPI values. The only thing changed between the three is the DPI. As you can see, the higher the DPI, the smaller the picture. This is another reason that trying to print at your printer's maximum DPI is not the best choice.

Setting the DPI in the GIMP for versions 1.2 is done by right clicking on the picture and choosing "Image" -> "Scale Image" and setting either the DPI or the print size. The DPI is called "X resolution" and "Y resolution". Both the X and Y values should almost always be set to

the same number. As you change one, the other will automatically adjust. As mentioned above, DPI and print size are intertwined and one can not change without the other changing.

The GIMP 1.2 DPI and print size control.

For the GIMP 2.2 (everyone using version 2.0 should upgrade to 2.2) the DPI (or resolution) control is found in "Image" -> "Print Size" (see Fig. 5 and 6). While it is also found under "Image" -> "Scale Image", do not use it there. It is too easy to change your picture size by scaling accidentally.

Conclusion

By understanding DPI and how to control it, you can dramatically improve the quality of your printed pictures. Say "goodbye" to accidentally printing posters and postage stamps. Say "hello" to better printouts.

New Users SIG

Since Katrina, the **New Users SIG** has been looking for a meeting room with Internet access. We have found a location with Wi-Fi internet connections.

For the next meeting, June 15th, we will meet at the **Old Metairie Library on 2350 Metairie Road.**

The meeting room is to your left as you enter the library, past the circulation desk.

There is additional parking for this library at the American Legion Hall on 2431 Metairie Road.

Our meeting date (third Thursday of the month) and hours (6:30PM to 8:30PM) will remain the same.

If you have any questions or problems finding the library, call us at 504-831-1284 or 985-643-3172, or on the day of the meeting at 985-502-5654. You can also email us at donobevo@cox.net or tomford@bellsouth.net.

Cleaning a Flat Panel Monitor (LCD)

by
 Gerry McCann
 McCann Electronics
gmcann@mccann1.com

Tape a dry rag across the bottom of the screen to avoid any moisture dripping and getting under the lower frame. Apply light pressure with a slightly moist rag - light soap if it's really dirty from fingerprints.

Do not spray the screen.

Avoid all chances of dripping any moisture inside.

Avoid all chances of dripping any moisture inside.

Wipe dry with a lint free cloth.

If possible, tilt the screen downwards during the procedure.

CLUB SUPPORTERS

In a Veterinarian's waiting room:
 "Be back in 5 minutes. Sit! Stay!"
At a Propane Filling Station,
 "Thank heaven for little grills."
On a Maternity Room door:
 "Push. Push. Push."



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The Secret Guide is available at every New Orleans Personal Computer Club General Meeting. The latest printing is available for only \$15.00. Or contact Tom Ford either at: secretary@nopc.org or (985) 643-3172.

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June 2006

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3 Living with Home Electronics WIST 690AM 10a-11a
4	5 Computer Programming 6:30p-8:30p	6	7 NOPCC General Meeting J.D. Meisler School 6:30p-8:30p	8	9	10 Living with Home Electronics WIST 690AM 10a-11a
11	12 Computer Programming 6:30p-8:30p	13	14 NOPCC BOD @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	15 New User Sig Old Metairie Library 2350 Metairie Road 6:30p-8:30p	16	17 Living with Home Electronics WIST 690AM 10a-11a
18	19 Computer Programming 6:30p-8:30p	20 Genealogy SIG 7:00 pm Call 887.5746 for meeting location.	21	22	23	24 Living with Home Electronics WIST 690AM 10a-11a
25	26 Computer Programming 6:30p-8:30p	27	28	29	30	

The New Orleans Personal Computer Club (NOPCC) is a private non-profit organization chartered under the State of Louisiana. Its purpose is to provide an open forum for discussion and education of the membership in the use and application of PCs, peripheral equipment and software. The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author (s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the NOPCC, its members or its officers. The club does not verify for accuracy the articles in this newsletter and leaves verification of accuracy to its readers. Articles in this newsletter may be duplicated as long as credit is given to the author (s) and the NOPCC. Annual Dues Schedule: Regular Member, \$40/yr.; Family Membership, \$60/yr.;

NOPCC Directory

Elected Officers

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Director At Large	Mike York	director3@nopc.org	

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New Users	Tom Ford	new-user@nopc.org	985-643-3172
Web Lab	Edward Jahncke	editor@nopc.org	895-2817

Other Important Numbers / Addresses

Club Hotline	Recorded messages. Meeting Information. Open 24 Hours	887-5746
NOPCC Web Site	On the World Wide Web. Our own home page and club information.	www.nopc.org