

# Mother Board

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October 3, 2007

## This Month At NOPC

### Word & Excel Tips and Tricks

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## How To Answer the Question?

by Mike Kerwin, President,  
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OK, I'm not being mysterious but addressing an issue that most Geeks encounter often. I suspect that most of you have been asked The Question many times by friends, relatives, and acquaintances. I refer to the expectant "What do you recommend as the best \_\_\_\_\_?" (Fill in the blank for PC, notebook, PDA, digital camera, camcorder, DVR.) Folks who know me and my penchant for gadgets and gizmos frequently ask me this. Lately the most popular subject is notebook computers. Now I do get a bit of a stroke that I am asked for my opinion about things digital, and I do understand the seemingly overwhelming number of choices being marketed, but I also get frustrated when my response elicits blank stares.

My thinking is that people ask this due to despair at the multitude of choices currently available and the wide range of pricing options. And, of course, the options lead to even more confusion. A few years ago the world seemed to be simpler when the number of manufacturers of notebook PCs diminished to just a handful. Today, despite the consolidation, the remaining firms now offer several complete "lines" of notebooks along this continuum: superlight, ultralight, mobile performance, entertainment, general purpose, budget, desktop replacement... You could probably suggest even more categories. Now

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### Microsoft Office—Word and Excel Tips and Tricks

According to our most recent survey, many of our members use Microsoft Office, specifically Word and Excel. Our October meeting will be devoted to these two products. We will start with some tips and tricks for both products then proceed to your questions. Our focus will be on the 2003 (and prior) versions of Word and Excel.

Bring all your Word and Excel questions for us to (hopefully) answer. This also includes any "how do I" type questions. To insure your question is addressed, let us know in advance what question(s) you would like answered by emailing Tom Ford at [president@nopc.org](mailto:president@nopc.org). Also, please let us know if you have any favorite tips or tricks you would like to share with the membership.

Mark your calendars, create an entry in your Palm Treo 700wx, update Outlook and join us on Wednesday, October 3, 2007. The monthly meeting of the NOPC Club 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. For more information please visit our club's web site at <http://www.nopc.org>.

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too we have designer notebooks in a range of case colors and branded logos (Ferrari, LiveStrong, Hello Kitty). Then there is screen size and the directly linked weight factor; since LCD screens use glass front panels and glass is rather heavy, the larger the screen the heavier the device is to lug about.

### **Answer a Question with a Question**

So what do I have to offer in the way of advice? I've learned to follow the experts on my reply: from the online Buying Guides back to Socrates, the recommendation is to answer with a question. (I don't think Socrates knew about decision trees, but that's what we have here.) Specifically I first ask, "Do you have a price point in mind?" followed by "Do you have a brand preference?" These two questions narrow the choices considerably. I know some individuals and organizations are strictly wedded to one brand, such as Dell, and that becomes a major factor in deciding on what is the "best" in that environment. Price is also a great divider of the pack with budget machines being advertised under \$500 and high-end performance units listed for prices around \$3K - a very wide range.

The next question along this tree is, "What do you intend to do with the computer?" The answer will be very different for a Road Warrior backed by a corporation which can deduct business expenses versus a student heading off to college, or someone who just wants to use it for email at home without being tied to a cable. For example, the weight of a notebook can be a major consideration if you travel frequently, as everything gets heavier at the end of a long flight or stressful day of sales calls. For travelers the features needed can also be important considerations as some of the lightest notebooks don't have built-in optical drives (see Dell) but use optional peripherals which can add to weight, bulk, and extra parts to keep track of recommendation is to have as few pieces as possible for simplicity's sake.)

### **The Fine Print**

Speaking of weight, you must read the fine print of the specifications, as I learned this week looking at the new Toshiba Protégé line of notebooks. This company is making great claims for this "superlight" line. Digging a little further one soon discovers that the quoted weight is for the main clamshell case and internal parts. This is really light at under 2 lbs and is possible through the use of solid state memory in place of a traditional spinning disk HD. But, it won't do much without a battery, which adds at least 0.6

lbs additional for the limited capacity, standard battery; an optional, long-life battery weighs more. And then there is the transformer (aka brick) which weighs in at 0.5 lbs. Then one might look at whether the 68 GB of HD equivalent would be sufficient running Vista which reportedly takes nearly 10 GB just for the OS and then allocates an additional 15% of the HD for Restore points. These can take up lots of the internal HD and then one would have to consider carrying an external drive for storing data, presentations, pictures, etc which could add additional weight. And for all of this one would pay nearly \$3K.

At the other end of the price scale are the budget models which barely have enough onboard memory (or capacity) to run the old WinXP. As more Vista applications become available over the next couple of years, these machines may be left in the dust, unable to accommodate current versions of software. This could lead to early replacement before the expected lifespan of 3-5 years.

Then there are optional/necessary features you might want in a notebook. One feature is an optical drive which most, but not all, units have as a standard feature. Then there are different flavors of CD/DVD readability and writability. Virtually all of these units will read and write CDs and DVDs, but perhaps not all three formats of DVD, plus the capability for dual layer data storage and, in some cases, Light-Scribe technology to burn labels on the back side of special disks. Unfortunately the industry has not settled on a standard technology for a new generation of disks to store HD movies (and eventually data), so if this feature is important to you, you might plan to add the capability externally sometime in the future.

Another common feature is WiFi. This technology has advanced from A to B to G and now to N, but not all notebooks support all of the types so again you have to read the fine print.

For a notebook to be sent off to college, you might look for a built-in webcam to keep in touch and help ward off homesickness by the young adults. You'll also want to look at anti-theft features such as locking adaptors and "phone-home" software. Some of the new anti-theft features are biometric password-type locks such as fingerprint scanners and wireless proximity alarms (if the PC goes one way and the owner with the alarm gets too far away then the alarm sounds).

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Another consideration is the warranty provided. Notebook PCs are very compact so popping the top to add or replace defective parts is not something to be undertaken lightly. I recommend checking to see how long any unit is under warranty and what is covered, such as what is the turnaround for repairs and where are they done (and who is responsible for getting it there).

In the end, I think the process is straightforward, though it may require several decision branches to arrive at the "Best" recommendation for a specific individual. These details always seem nagging pests when searching for instant gratification, but the old adage of "Buy in Haste, Repent at Leisure" can be avoided by taking just a little time up front to make a good choice. I hope this approach might of use to some of you.

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## Update to Vista? Maybe!

By Jim Sanders, Vice President,  
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The old adage never buy version one of any piece of software, is beginning to look like it should be applied to Windows Vista as well. I have read a number of articles from different sources talking about the problems that people have had trying to implement Vista. I have run into a few myself. The latest involved helping a customer move his documents from his existing Windows XP machine to a new HP computer with Vista Home Premium pre-installed. He was using the Windows Office 97 version of Outlook and wanted to transfer his e-mail, address book, and contacts to the new machine. The problem is Office 97 is not compatible with Vista. So the first thought was to go to the store and buy the Student-Teacher Edition of Microsoft Office 2003, which includes Outlook 2003, while I worked on the machine.

So he drives to his local friendly OfficeMax store to find that they no longer have stock on the old 2003 Student-Teacher Edition of Microsoft Office. However, they do have the new Home Office and Student 2007 version. At the same \$150.00 price as the old 2003 version, that seems like a good deal and is still reasonably affordable. Except, the Home

Office and Student 2007 suite does **not** include Outlook and the next version up that does, costs another \$100.00.

A little research found another problem, the 2007 version of Outlook does not know how to import from the 97 version. Seems you can only accomplish that goal by first exporting to Outlook Express. The new computer came bundled with Microsoft Works. Works is not as full featured as Office, but good enough. So in effect, he would be spending \$250 dollars for Outlook. So we looked at the Vista replacement for Outlook Express – Windows Mail. Same problem, it does not know how to import from the Outlook 97 version.

As Eudora knows how to do that import function, and is of course free, I down loaded it to the new machine. It seemed to install OK, and opened when I clicked on the icon. I needed to learn how to do the import, so I clicked on help. A small error window popped up that said "Cannot open file." To keep a long story relatively short, I eventually Googled the fact Vista has deleted support for the .hlp files. I do not know how many thousands of programs use those files, but unless they are a current program that the author is willing to update, you have a problem if you are using one of those programs. After a bit more research, I found a reference that said Microsoft has condescended to allow the proletariat to download a crippled version of those support files.

In a related scenario, if you are a user of Adobe's software, but not the latest version, you will probably have a compatibility problem with Vista and your program. Adobe has a PDF file on their web site that gives the details of this issue. The location of that file is: [www.adobe.com/support/products/pdfs/adobe\\_products\\_and\\_windows\\_vista.pdf](http://www.adobe.com/support/products/pdfs/adobe_products_and_windows_vista.pdf). The way I read that file, new and very current releases of Adobe's software will work or be updated for free. Somewhat older versions of Adobe's software will have Vista updates that you can purchase. Even older versions of Adobe's software will not have updates available at all. As one looks at the up front cost of the Vista OS, the cost of updating one's hardware to meet the decent performance requirements of Vista, and the cost of updating ( if you can ) your existing software, sticking with XP for a while is looking better and better.

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## Vista and the Reliability & Performance Monitor

By Vinny LaBash, a member and regular columnist of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida

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Anyone who has spent time trying to understand the Windows XP Performance Monitor is going to love Vista's Reliability & Performance Monitor. No more will you have to figure out what the various performance procedures are really measuring. All the confusion has been eliminated and a well designed screen utility makes everything vastly simplified. Every time you run a program on your system, performance is affected in some way. The new Vista Performance Monitor allows you to track these operations on a real-time basis or to collect data for analysis at a later time. The utility does this by taking configuration information, performance counters, data specific to program events, and then merging everything into Data Collection sets. Microsoft has prefigured all the important details into a completely revised utility that is not only easy to use, but easy to understand. This new utility provides you with a set of preconfigured elements that you can use to monitor the reliability of your system. This article will give you a detailed overview of the Reliability Monitor, and show how to use its System Stability Chart to track how your system behaves.

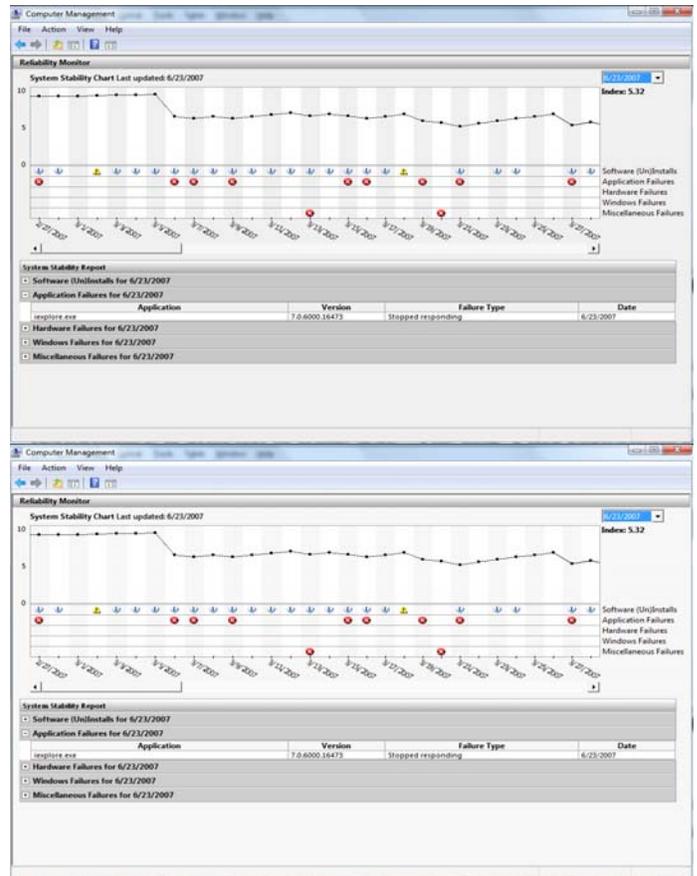
Here's how to get to the **Reliability and Performance Monitor**:

1. Left-click the orb at the left side of the task bar.
2. Right-click the **Computer** button.
3. Select **Manage** from the popup menu.

An alternate selection method is to right-click the orb and type **reliability** in the **Start Search** text box. Either way the **Computer Management** dialog box will appear.

Expand the **Reliability and Performance** branch and the **Monitoring Tools** branch by clicking on the arrows adjacent to their icons. (See illustration)

Click the **Reliability Monitor** icon and it will appear in the center pane. Click both **Show/Hide Console Tree** and the **Show/Hide Action Pane** buttons to fill the screen with the **Reliability Monitor**.



To get the best perspective, maximize the window. Dragging the scroll bar all the way to the left brings the Reliability Monitor back to the beginning of time, that is, to when Vista was installed.

The line diagram in the upper part of the window is the main feature of the utility. This line is called the stability index. Vista starts out with a reliability rating of 10 which is the best you can hope for. Scroll back to the right as far as you can go, and you will see your current rating.

Drag the scroll bar slider back and forth, and you will see the day-to-day flow of the Stability Index as various events play themselves out.

Notice that the middle portion of the window is sprinkled with icons divided into labeled rows. Let's see what they are telling us:

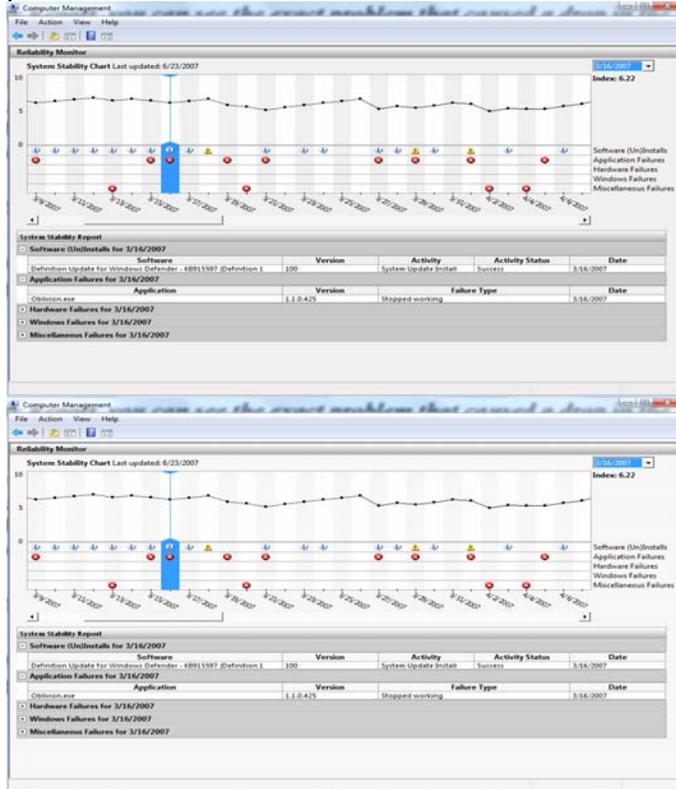
**Software (Un)Installs:** The yellow triangle with question marks and the circles with lower case "i" show the date or dates when:

- an application was either installed or uninstalled.
- a driver or driver update was installed.
- virus definitions were updated.

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Those are the major examples. This can be very useful information when trying to troubleshoot a problem.



**Application Failures:** This is the area that strongly affects your Reliability Index. Any day that has a red circle with an X drops the Reliability Index significantly. This is like a public company announcing a bad earnings report. Its stock can drop dramatically very quickly. The Reliability Index will increase slowly as long as no other application failures occur. If necessary, you can quickly find any application that's trashing your system.

**Hardware Failures and Windows Failures:** There are hardware and Windows failures so severe that you may not be able to access the utility until after the problem is fixed. For less severe troubles, the tool will tell you about a hard drive failure, modem malfunctions, mouse failures, and others.

**Miscellaneous Failures:** This is a catch-all area that reports problems that don't fit neatly into any of the other categories. For example, the utility will report a situation where Windows did not shut down properly as a Disruptive Shutdown.

Vista's Reliability Monitor makes it easy to track events that affect your system. It's a great troubleshooting aid because you can quickly find out what

is causing a problem and when it started. The Monitor's ability to record trend analysis data, with detailed information about specific events, tells you everything you need to know about your computer from the day Vista was installed.

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## Set up Outlook Express YOUR Way

By Dick Maybach,

Member of the Brookdale Computer User Group, New Jersey

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You can greatly improve your e-mail experience by properly configuring Outlook Express, which is the default Windows e-mail client. Outlook, which is included with MS Office, is a completely different program, but it has a similar user interface for e-mail. The two programs are similar enough that you should be able to adapt these procedures to your version.

By default, Outlook Express has five local folders: Inbox, Outbox, Sent Items, Deleted Items, and Drafts. You can add more to make your e-mail messages easier to find in the same way that you organize your file system by using folders. Set up a separate folder for each major category of e-mail that you send and receive. With Outlook running, right-click on "Local Folders", select "New Folder ...", and put the desired name in the "Name:" box. You can now move the messages from your Inbox to the new folder. You will probably find some messages that don't belong in any folder; just leave these in the Inbox.

You can change Outlook to operate as you find convenient by changing its rather intrusive defaults. Click on "Tools" and select "Options ...". Under the General tab, I've unchecked everything, as I prefer not to be interrupted by every incoming e-mail. Under the Read tab, I've unchecked the first box (Mark messages read after 5 seconds. Under the Send tab, I unchecked the "Send messages immediately" item; many times I have second thoughts immediately after writing a response, and this gives me one last chance to make changes. Under the Spelling tab, I checked "Always check spelling before sending". Finally, under the Maintenance tab, I checked, "Empty messages from the 'Deleted Items' folder on exit". This does what it says and erases your deleted items. (Otherwise, why would you have deleted them? If you don't check this item,

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your Deleted Items folder can contain a huge number of unwanted messages.) I left items under the Receipts, Compose, and Signature tabs at their defaults.

#### Deleting spam

You can also use Outlook Express to delete spam. Click on "Tools" and select "Message Rules" then "Mail ...". You can now tell it how to handle certain specific e-mails. For example, if you are tired of the constant stream of forwarded trivia, use the following sequence. In Box 1, check "Where the Subject line contains specific words". In Box 2, check "Delete it". In Box 3, click on "contains specific words" and type "FW:" in the text box. Finally, in Box 4, name the rule "Delete forwarded items". When you now go to "Message rules", you will see this item. You can uncheck it, to disable the rule or edit it, if needed.

Spend some time exploring the Message Rules tool to see what else it can do. For example, you can act on messages based on who sent them or what words they contain. You can select multiple conditions; for example, you can delete forwarded messages only from certain people. You can also select multiple actions; for example, you can move selected messages to a folder and highlight them. Finally, in Box 2 you should select "Stop processing more rules", if the action is something other than delete.

Your last step is to order your rules list. The rules moving the desired e-mail to the correct folders should appear at the top of the list. Since they stop checking other rules after they move a message, they will prevent the spam filter rules from throwing out messages from people with whom you regularly correspond. To do this, in the "Message Rules" window use the "Move Up" and "Move Down" buttons to sort the rules.

You will have to reorder the rules each time you add a new one.

#### Turn off preview panel

Just opening an e-mail can result in your PC becoming infected with a virus. Even worse, Outlook Express's default is that the preview panel opens any message that you select, which means you have no way of deleting a suspect message without opening it. You can disable the preview panel using the following. Click on "View", then "Layout ...", and remove the check from "Show preview pane". While

you are there, also uncheck the "Folder bar" item; you won't miss it.

Outlook Express has only limited capabilities and is the target of many viruses. If its limitations and vulnerabilities concern you, consider Thunderbird, which is a free download, or if you have MS Office, Outlook...

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### September General Meeting



Ray Paternostro's Wireless Router Presentation



Whatever the questions —Tom Ford has the answer in the bag!  
Ray Paternostro is picking away at the answer..

# CLUB SUPPORTERS

## THE SECRET GUIDE TO COMPUTERS

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 Mary Prinz either at: [secretary@nopc.org](mailto:secretary@nopc.org) or (504) 455-1412.

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# October 2007

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3 <b>NOPC Gen Mtg</b> J.D. Meisler School 6:30p-8:30p	4	5	6 <b>Living with Home Electronics</b> WIST 690AM 10a-11a
7	8	9 <b>Genealogy SIG</b> 7:00 pm Call 887.5746 for meeting location	10 <b>NOPC BOD</b> @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	11	12	13 <b>Living with Home Electronics</b> WIST 690AM 10a-11a
14	15	16	17 <b>PMI GNO General Meeting</b>	18 <b>New &amp; Intermediate User SIG</b> Old Metairie Library 6:30p-8:30p	19	20 <b>Living with Home Electronics</b> WIST 690AM 10a-11a
21	22	23	24	25	26	27 <b>Living with Home Electronics</b> WIST 690AM 10a-11a
28	29	30	31			

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