

Mother Board

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This Month Media Convergence in Home Practice by Greg Wilde

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Why security precautions are necessary

By Bob de Violini.

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First off for the holidays, there's a story that illustrates just why you should always enable encryption on your wireless router (for those who use one) AND why you should be leery of any public computer for Web sites you need a password to access. A college student in Kentucky has been charged with identity theft, among other crimes, for planting malware on computers in his school's library. The malware was a keystroke logger that captured user-names and passwords for any pages fellow students logged into. He then used this information to access their e-mail accounts and send out e-mails attempting to extort these same fellow students. He also used an unsecured wireless

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This Month at the NOPCC

Media Convergence in Home Practice

Greg Wilde

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If you like TV commercials you won't mind missing the February meeting of the New Orleans Personal Computer Club. Maybe you don't mind that out of every 60 minutes fully 16 minutes are for commercials -- 27%! And, if you don't mind arranging your life around TV programming schedules, this meeting is not for you.

On the other hand, maybe you will agree: "I can't stand commercials. I can't watch TV at a particular time even if it is Seinfeld."

The February 4 meeting is about making your programming on-demand and eliminating commercials from your life. It is about the technology options that combine computer, Internet service, television, and cable or satellite video to help you "get a life."

Location: Harahan Senior Center

100 Elodie St., Harahan, LA 70123

Social 6:00 p.m.

General Q&A from the audience: 6:30 p.m.

Presentation: 7:00 to 8:00 p.m

Go to Google Maps <<http://tinyurl.com/95ftsa>> for turn-by-turn directions and "street view." directions to the Harahan Senior Center.

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router to access these accounts, making it look as if someone else were actually sending the e-mails. The attempted extortion took the form of a threat to divulge personal information the thief had stolen from the compromised e-mail accounts. That leads me to our next item, WPA encryption.

As of the beginning of November, a pair of computer security researchers in Europe disclosed a technique they'd developed to partially hack WPA encryption used by a great number of wireless routers today. Before anyone thinks the sky is falling, rest assured it isn't. Their hack involves only the traffic being sent from the router to a computer and only a small number of data packets can be cracked before the router resets its encryption. However, it is enough to be able to send just enough rogue data to a computer to compromise it with any number of known vulnerabilities. Specifically, it involves the TKIP protocol that WPA and WPA2 are allowed to use. The specifics of just how this trick is accomplished have been made available to hackers in many areas of the Internet, so it's just a matter of time before it begins spreading. TKIP and AES encryption are selectable by the user in many wireless router configurations, and some have WPA with TKIP selected by default. I strongly recommend you check your wireless router's encryption configuration, and if it's set to use WPA with TKIP, you switch to WPA2 with AES if at all possible. This is especially important if you use a wireless router to run a network for a business. I have my Linksys wireless router set to use WPA2 with AES encryption. AES is significantly harder to crack than the older TKIP protocol. One final note on this, however. For AES encryption to work, both the router and the network adapter in the computer must be able to use it. Some older hardware may not support AES encryption, so an upgrade may be needed. If you'd like some more information, please drop me a line at the email address at the top of this article, and I'll gladly send you a link or two.

Scare of the month department

Even though Halloween has already passed, we have the Scare of the Month Department chiming in with some news. There is a new phishing e-mail making the rounds disguised as a warning from the U.S. Federal Reserve. The message bears the usual dire warning of a scam and contains links for readers to follow to get more information. However, there are a few clues that give the message away as a hoax, the biggest one being poor grammar.

The links in the e-mail lead unsuspecting readers to a fake site that will redirect them to a search page for porn, which will download a PDF file with malware to their computer. The malware comes in various forms, including one that attempts to make your computer a member of a botnet. A brief notice can be had here, courtesy of USCERT: <http://tinyurl.com/66lzv9>. The link does go to the US-CERT site; I just used TinyURL to shorten the URL's length.

Patches Galore Department

As I mentioned above, there have been some exploits on the loose for a bit for Adobe Acrobat, and the full program and the reader have been updated as a result. The latest versions are 8.1.3 and 9.0. Adobe has also updated its Flash player, standard fare in most browser installations, to version 10.0.12.36 to patch publicly reported vulnerabilities last month as well. Not to be outdone, Mozilla has also issued a patch for its Firefox browser and Thunderbird e-mail client. These patches address several bugs that have been brought to light in the past month to month and a half. The latest iterations of Firefox are 2.0.0.18 and 3.0.0.4. The latest version of Thunderbird is 2.0.0.18. I have read reports of some problems with version 3.0.0.4 and 2.0.0.18 of Firefox, with most of the reports being about version 3.0.0.4. The solution for those having problems after upgrading to 3.0.0.4 has been to go back to 3.0.0.3. I have updated my version to 2.0.0.18 and have had no problems. Some patches take longer than others to develop and test, however. One of the patches issued by Microsoft on November's Patch Tuesday took them seven years to develop and test. The bug it patched was first reported by a security researcher in March 2001. Microsoft claims that it tried patching it when it was first reported but wound up killing off most networking applications with the patches when they underwent testing. However, they didn't give up and finally found a way to patch the vulnerability earlier this year.

While we're speaking of Microsoft, it has announced plans to abandon its One Care concept of computer protection service and develop free anti malware applications for release in 2009. The new concept is code named "Morro." As usual, folks are coming down on both sides of pro and con when it comes to this development. Microsoft hasn't given a firm release date for the new software, but has said that One Care will come to an end on June 30.

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Well, that's all for now. Always practice safe computing by keeping your applications and your anti-malware applications fully up to date. **Make sure to run your anti-malware scanner(s) once a week, even if they don't flag anything in between scans.**



Windows 7 is coming soon

By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS

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If you ask 100 people their impressions of the Microsoft Vista operating system, 95 of them will tell you that Vista is no good, even if they have never seen or used it.

It is obvious that public opinion of Vista is in the mud. Microsoft made some major blunders when they introduced Vista. There were not enough drivers ready, so many printers, scanners, and other peripherals were incompatible. There was no noticeable speed increase over Windows XP. Vista requires much additional memory and more hardware, so it was often impossible to upgrade current Windows XP computers. Also, Microsoft did not woo the press as they did when they introduced Windows XP, so Vista got a lot of awful publicity. Vista is not a bad operating system, but Vista has gotten a bad name. Microsoft has lost the battle and they know it. So they are working on a new Windows operating system.

Microsoft hopes to make a clean break with previous Windows operating systems with this new version of Windows. They are especially distancing the new operating system from the "wicked" Vista operating system. This is obvious in the name they have chosen for the new OS. They are not using year names like Windows 2000. They are not using what they refer to as inspirational names, like XP or Vista. Instead, they will go back to their original numerical naming convention. There was a Windows 1, Windows 2, and Windows 3. Now there is to be a new operating system called "Windows 7".

If you have been following the versions of Windows as they have been introduced, you will find it difficult to comprehend that this next version is actually the seventh version of Windows, but Microsoft says that it is, so that is

that. It's Windows 7.

More important than the name, however, is the fact that Microsoft cannot afford another misstep. They must make this operating system faster and better than Vista. Microsoft has already showed off Windows 7 at some developer's conferences and has made some announcements and promises.

Windows 7 will be built on the Vista base, so peripherals that work with Vista, which now includes most printers, scanners, and other devices, will also work with Windows 7.

Windows 7 will have a smaller storage footprint and will use less memory. This will allow it to run on the new small Netbooks that are now running Windows XP or Unix because Windows Vista cannot run on their small solid state drives.

Windows 7 will boot up and shut down faster. It will have improved battery life on laptops. It is also promised to have an easier-to-use interface and to be easier to network in a home environment.

Although Microsoft is officially targeting January 2010 for the launch of Windows 7, logic indicates that they will have Windows 7 ready for next year's holiday selling season.

This holiday season you'll find some great prices on computers running Microsoft Vista. If all goes well, when the holiday season rolls around in 2009, the stores will be filled with computers running the next version of Windows, Windows 7. Microsoft has made mistakes before, but I think they will do everything they possibly can to make Windows 7 a winner. So if you are looking to buy a new PC, this year will be a good time to buy, but, if you can wait, next year may be even better.

Copying Information from Your Screen

By Richard Kennon

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Dick Carricato, member of the Tri County Computer User Group in Florida wrote a good article about copying pictures from your computer screen. Sometimes there are other things you may want to copy from your screen that may not lend themselves to

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the PrtScr method. This is especially true of lists in drop down boxes that require a scroll bar down the right side. PrtScr will only show the portion of the list that shows. For instance, I write a (almost) monthly newsletter on the web and usually include a bunch of pictures. I like to have a hard copy of the picture thumbnails at hand to remind me of things to say. This is always a scrolling window. Often I want a hardcopy of a menu, too.

I have found FastStone Capture to be a perfect answer to my needs. You can try it free by going to <http://www.faststone.org/>. Then, if you like it, as I do, you can purchase a lifetime license for \$19.95.

You can capture and annotate anything on the screen including windows, objects, menus, full screen, rectangular/freehand regions and scrolling windows/web pages. Editing tools include annotating, resizing, cropping, sharpening, watermarking, edge effects and many more. Of course, you can transfer the image to any editor of choice. You can either print the copy or save it in one of eight different formats. I choose JPEG. Further, you can choose the resolution of the saved image. I don't know if it actually improves the resolution or just resizes to more pixels.

Of course, it features a bunch of hot key combinations but, with my memory, this is not useful. Instead I rely on the small box of choices at the bottom right of my screen. I find it extremely useful and use it almost every day.



Music Tagging with ID3

by Mike Moore, Editor,
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MP3 is a compressed music format that can be used to fit a track of music that would normally oc-

cupy hundreds of megabytes on a Compact Disc into four or five megabytes. While some of the data is lost in this compression, it is data that cannot normally be heard in the rendering of the music file. In compressing music files this way, we can fit more music onto our music appliances, such as iPods and other MP3 players.

While the process of compressing music files is interesting for techies, it is not something we normally have to concern ourselves with, because often the music files are already in MP3 format when we acquire them. Double-click on the MP3 file and PRESTO, the song plays.

What is interesting and really required of digital music collectors is that we must keep our music organized. Since there are obviously many ways in which one can name a file of music, this is really not a very good way to keep a library organized, unless you have complete control over how a song is named.

Think of a given song. There are some obvious metrics on which the song could be organized. For starters, we have the name of the piece, the recording artist and label, the name of the band or orchestra, the genre of music, and so forth. There are dozens of less obvious metrics, such as the length of the song, when it was recorded – even who borrowed it from you and when!

These little pieces of information about a given track are known as “meta-data” or “meta-information.” This set of information is literally, data about data, because the music file itself is a kind of digital data.

The music industry has adopted a standard, known as ID3 that provides for meta-information to be included with an MP3 file. You might think of ID3 as the *wrapper* that an MP3 file comes surrounded in.

To view and edit this information, Windows supports ID3 by allowing you to right-click on an MP3 file and see & change all of the meta-information. You can also see a limited set of the metadata about a song by simply hovering your mouse over a music file. Here I have right-clicked on a piano piece called *Impromptu in B Flat*, written by Franz Schubert. Remember when you right-click to get a context menu, it's a *single* right-click, not a double click.

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That gives me the size in Megabytes of the file, its name and where and when it was stored. If I click on the Details tab, I get all of the rest of the meta-data, including the artist and composer:

There are various versions of ID3 that have little relationship to each other. For more detailed information about ID3, read this article in Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ID3>.

The good news is that most modern MP3 players, when encountering ID3, simply ignore it when playing back the music. So we have music data inside of an MP3 file that we hear, and ID3 data that we can see when we right-click on the file.

So, here we have a way in which you can see the meta-data about one particular song. But suppose I wanted to organize and manipulate a large number of songs – even to the extent of pulling this information out of the meta-data fields that we see and using it to construct a meaningful file name? After all, file names are the basis for how Windows stores files, so it would make sense that we might want our music files named in a very particular way. One of the standards I use is to organize music in folders that are named corresponding to the artist that recorded the song.

It turns out that there are many ID3 capturing and editing utility programs out on the internet (many of which actually cost money), and I'm going to mention just one of them: TagScanner.

In tech circles, the ID3 meta-data information that is imbedded at the end of a music file is known commonly as a "tag."

Who would enjoy sitting at their computer typing in album and artist information for each track? With the free TagScanner, you don't have to. This efficient and powerful tag editor lets you edit and collect meta-data automatically as well as by hand, both for individual files and file batches.

The automatic tagging feature is most impressive. Although it can hook up to online databases such as FreeDB, Gracenote, and Amazon like many other auto-tagging applications, it can also generate tags from file and folder names--something many others can't. It works in the opposite direction, too, generating filenames from tags. This is very impor-

tant, because many files come to us virtually unusable from a sorting point of view, because their file names begin with, say, a catalog number that means nothing to our sorting scheme.

TagScanner has an elegant and orderly interface, and lets you preview filenames before applying changes. The only catch is that you'll need to spend some time learning the program's file- and tag-naming language. However, if you have thousands of music tracks crying out for organization, that's a small price to pay.

Get TagScanner (free) at: <http://www.xdlab.ru/en/>

Moving on to Vista

by Neil Stahfest, Librarian,
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Most of us who upgrade to Windows Vista from an older version of Windows encounter compatibility problems. Vista doesn't want to recognize some programs as valid or authorized Windows programs even though they worked with Windows XP. Does this mean that you have to abandon them or upgrade to a new — "Vista" version of your favorite programs?

I wish I could say no but the real answer is maybe not. Microsoft has included something called a Program Compatibility Wizard with Vista. The idea is that, if you have an older program that doesn't work with Vista, you can use this program to automatically make some modifications to make it compatible and make it work.

To access the wizard, go to Start, Control Panel and then click on Programs. Next, under Programs and Features, click on —Use an older program with this version of Windows. This will start the wizard. Now follow the step-by-step, on-screen instructions. When you finish, try to run your program. I'm told that most programs that worked with Windows XP will work after you do this but programs that worked with older versions of Windows may not. You shouldn't try to use the wizard with disk utility pro-

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grams, system programs and anti-virus programs. They usually won't work and may actually cause damage to your computer's system.

While we're on the subject of compatibility and changes, let's look at the Start button, or jelly bean as some call it, in the lower left corner of your screen. Place your mouse the right hand side of the task bar at the bottom of the screen. The box next to Hide Inactive Icons is checked by default. If you click on the Customize button to the right you will see why. You'll probably see dozens of icons listed here. Most are turned off. If you make changes and don't like the results, click on the Default Settings button and then click on OK. We're almost done with the Notification Area box.

The bottom half of the box shows which system icons will show. This is a personal preference (well, so is all of this). If you are using Vista's Clock gadget you can probably uncheck the Clock function because it is redundant. I like to leave Volume checked. Its a convenient place to turn sound on and off and control the volume. I also leave Network checked. It makes it easy to see if my network connection is working. The Power option is useful if you have a laptop computer, otherwise turn it off.

I think we've covered enough for this month. Are you getting comfortable with Windows Vista? I am. For those of you still using Windows XP, don't be in a hurry to change! Wait for Windows 7 if you can (coming in 2010).

Let's Clean "Start-Up"

By Bob Elgines, Editor,
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Does your computer boot-up or run slow? Maybe there are too many programs running in the background. Let us do the following check first.

Hold your CTRL & ALT buttons and press the DELETE button.

Click on the PERFORMANCE tab, is your CPU Usage running more than 10% or is your Physical Memory being in total use?

Go to **START** then RUN, type in "**msconfig**" which stands for Microsoft System Configuration. In Windows VISTA you can find RUN in the ACCESSORY folder under PROGRAMS.

The System Configuration Utility windows will come up.

First go to the upper right tab labeled **STARTUP**, here you will see the list of items that load during startup. Of course some you want, some you don't. In the first column labeled STARTUP ITEM gives a very rough idea to what it is referenced too, but the second column labeled COMMAND, is much more useful. Too read it better, widen the column out by holding your mouse symbol over the vertical line located before the next column label. A double arrow will appear, then hold down left mouse button and move it to the right. This information tells you where it is located and in some cases which program is using it. Uncheck those in question, you can put them back in later if you need too. Do not uncheck you Antivirus or Spyware programs.

Next go to the tab on top labeled **SERVICES**, this show all of the programs running now. You do not what to uncheck those labeled Microsoft under the MANUFACTURER column, so to start off, lets put a check mark in the box below labeled "Hide all Microsoft Services".

Now while you are reviewing the other programs running in the background note the forth column labeled STATUS. If it says STOPPED, then don't worry about it. We just want to stop the strange ones that are RUNNING. You can uncheck those that you are not familiar with, here again you may bring them back in later.

After un-checking all those items under tabs STARTUP & SERVICES, then click on APPLY and CLOSE.

The System Configuration Utility will now ask you to RESTART (or Boot) your computer.

After restarting a window will come up stating System Configuration Utility has been changed, be sure to put a check mark in the bottom left (labeled "Don't show this message or launch") before clicking OK.

If you improved your operation of your computer, you can put back in the items one at a time until you find the program that was slowing you down.

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 Ray Paternostro either at: secretary@nopc.org or (504) 737-9099.



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Servers . Workstations . Networking . Maintenance



Go to Google Maps <<http://tinyurl.com/95ftsa>> for turn-by-turn directions and "street view." directions to the Harahan Senior Center.

Directions: Go south on David/ Hickory until you get to the River Levee. Turn right for two blocks and turn right again.

Plenty of free parking right in front. Beautiful facility. GOOD acoustics.

February 2009

| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|---|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 SUPERBOWL SUNDAY | 2 | 3 | 4 NOPCC General Meeting Harahan Senior Center 6:30pm-8:00pm | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 New & Intermediate User SIG Harahan Senior Center 6:30p-8:30p | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 NOPCC BOD Meeting —Chateau Coffee Shop—Kenner 6:30pm—8:30pm | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |

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

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| Internet | Ray Paternostro | internet-m@nopcc.org | 737-9099 |
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Other Important Numbers / Addresses

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| 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.nopcc.org |