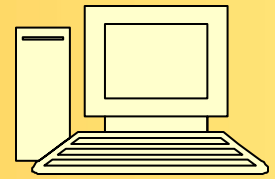


BAY BYTES

Greater Tampa Bay Personal Computer User Group, Inc.



Newsletter

Issue 10

October 2010

23rd Year of People Helping People!



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Don't forget to visit our club's site at:

<http://gtbpcug.org>

Afterglow

*I'd like the memory of me to be a happy one,
I'd like to leave an afterglow of smiles when
the day is gone.*

*I'd like to leave an echo whispering softly
down the ways of happy times and laughing
times and bright and sunny days.*

*I'd like the tears of those who grieve to dry before the sun
of happy memories that I leave when life is done.*



A word from our President Jo Ann Brawner

Don Miller's passing on September 13. has saddened many of us who have worked with him over the many years he has been an active member and officer of our group.

While his last office was that of editor of the group's newsletter, Bay Bytes, and a frequent contributor of helpful information during meetings, most members will also remember that he allowed our group to connect to his remarkable Web site, where he had created and organized many hundreds of links to useful and interesting Web pages and resources on the Internet.

Fortunately, his grandson, DJ Miller, managed to download and save Don's entire Web site, and member Darrell Manns volunteered to incorporate it into his Web site.

In Don's memory, it was also arranged that Don's name would be kept on a link to those pages on the main menu of our group's home page. Clicking on "PC Help" and then on "Don Miller's Web Site" will take you to the wealth of material that Don had accumulated over the years.

Minutes of the meeting September 7. 2010

This has been a long, hot summer and a long time between meetings.

Understandable, this evening's meeting at the Riverview Library did not create a record attendance. Parker gave an extensive report about how the negotiation with the Brandon High School management is progressing and was very confident, that we will be in our old familiar surroundings before long. It will require some help from the membership, which should not be a major obstacle.

The rest of the hour of the "Fundamental SIG" was used up for some fundamental Q & A.

The quick tip:

Never loose a manual again

by Linda Gonse,

<http://www.orcopug.org/>

I just found my old Sharp PDA, discovered it was still working, and decided to put it to use again. The downside was the manual was gone. An Internet search showed the original manual available, but prices ranged from \$20 to \$39! The Sharp device began to look obsolete to me. Then, I discovered [retrevo.com](http://www.retrevo.com). It boasts a library of more than 100,000 downloadable manuals from more than 1,000 brands of consumer electronics for consumer electronics searchable by category and brand at <http://www.retrevo.com/samples/index.html>. My manual was there and it was free. In seconds, I downloaded it. There are more than 100 categories to search for manuals.

Keyboard Letters Made Visible

by Darry D Eggleston

<http://darryd.com>

There is a Tab system that I buy and use on my systems and on the systems of my friends. Although I am not visually impaired, I find these larger-than-life key tabs make typing so much faster and more efficient.

They can be ordered at <http://www.aramedia.com/kbslargeprintyb.htm>

Last time I purchased them at \$20, but they've been on sale as low as \$13.

IF you have visually impaired friends or you just want to be able to see your keyboard more clearly, order a set from that website. Once applied - the instructions are at the bottom of the page linked above - they are permanent.

I selected "regular mail" for the last set I ordered & got them in 3 days.

Advanced personal accounting program

<http://www.komando.com>

In theory, managing your personal finances shouldn't be too hard. You simply track where your money comes from and where it goes. Then you adjust your spending and saving as you need. But in reality, it is never that simple. Your finances are may be very complicated.

Bills aren't the same every month. Emergency expenses pop up unexpectedly.

How can you set a budget and stay on top of it?

[HomeBank is a powerful personal accounting program.](#)

You can manage bank and credit card accounts. Set a budget and track your spending. See trends in your spending over time. Track expenses with multiple payees. And there's quite a bit more. This program gives you granular control over tracking every cent you have. To be honest, it might be too powerful for some. Setting everything up can be intimidating. It'll take some patience. But using it will give you a thorough understanding of your financial life.

Soluto Anti-Frustration Software Improves Boot Time by Ira Wilsker

Websites:

<http://www.soluto.com>

<http://blog.soluto.com>

<http://www.soluto.com/About/Media-Kit>

In several past columns I have written about utilities that can speed up the computer boot process. As cluttered as it was, my old XP machine could take up to five minutes to boot; my newer Windows 7-64 machine boots in under two minutes, considering the multilayered security that is installed on it. Traditionally, the ways of speeding the boot process on a PC was to defrag the hard drive, and clean up the programs in the startup that load when the computer is first turned on. When someone tells me that his computer takes forever to boot, my typical responses are "is your hard drive defragged" (defragmented), and "how many little icons do you have on your task bar adjacent to your clock?" There are several excellent startup managers available (including Windows 'msconfig' feature), both independent utilities and components of utility suites that can easily control what programs load at boot. Simply un-checking unwanted and unnecessary programs at boot is an accepted way of improving boot time. Likewise, there are several excellent defragmentation utilities available, including the simple one built into Windows, that can do a credible job; by defragging the hard drive, it does not have to work as hard when reading files and data, thus providing some improvement in load times.

While these two methods are well accepted and proven to speed up the boot process, a new concept in utilities was recently released that goes an extra step in controlling the boot process using a software "genome" and community experiences to determine what is loading in the computer at boot, how long each item takes to load, displays what is required or optional to load at boot, and gives the user control of what loads and when it loads during the boot process. Wanted, but low priority items, can be set to load after the computer has fully booted, and is sitting idle, thus not degrading the boot process. Unwanted items can be stopped from automatically loading, but set to load upon demand. The process may sound complex, but it is very simple with the information provided by this new utility, "Soluto Anti-Frustration Software (beta)".

Available as a free download from www.soluto.com, this software is a "beta" or pre-release version, which by definition, is not a highly refined final "release" version. My 18-month-old "new" computer booted very quickly when new, but now that I have a lot of security software and other utilities loading at boot, it was taking between a minute and a half, and two minutes to boot. After I downloaded and installed Soluto, and rebooted the computer such that Soluto could measure and analyze my boot process, my first modification of my boot process improved my boot time by almost 25%! Subsequent refinements of my boot process with Soluto, and input from the "community" have helped me to shave off about another 10% of my boot time.

After being installed, Soluto monitors what loads at each boot. During the boot process, the bottom left corner of the desktop turns up like the corner of a page and displays each item as it is loading, while displaying the elapsed time to boot the computer. Information is gathered during the boot process, and added to what has been gathered at previous boots, to provide the data that is analyzed by the program. The data that is collected is anonymously added to the Soluto PC Genome, where the community can input recommendations that will assist the user in determining what can be controlled at boot.

Continued on the next page

According to Soluto, " This anonymous technical data is gathered and sent to Soluto's PC Genome, a one of a kind knowledge base containing statistical insights about PC software and hardware behavior, as well as remedies to alleviate PC usage frustrations. By putting this information into the light, the PC Genome will help consumers and vendors alike. Soluto employs another set of innovative algorithms to determine which remedies will have a positive impact on each Soluto user's unique PC system. These remedies are then shared with other relevant Soluto users." Soluto has found that by pausing when specific items load in the boot process, and reconfiguring some of the applications, boot time and overall behavior of the computer can improve dramatically. Soluto can also determine those programs that degrade computer performance, and provide the "frustrated" user with possible solutions to reduce or eliminate the source of frustration.

Soluto places a small icon on the task bar that looks somewhat like a smiley-face, and opens displaying the Soluto functions. By opening Soluto anytime after the computer has booted, the first screen called the "Boot Page" displays "Potentially Removable" items in an orange font, along with the boot time and sequence for each. By moving the cursor over any of the "Potentially Removable" items, a brief description of the software is displayed (if it is in the Genome). By moving over the "more" on the display, a recommendation may be shown, as well as a pie chart of what other users of that software have done. The user is given the option to "Pause" or "Delay" the item in subsequent boots. "Pause" prevents the item from being loaded at boot, but the program can still be loaded upon demand; "Delay" postpones the selected program from automatically loading until the computer is otherwise idle, which means that it will not slow the initial boot process. Since Soluto (beta) has just been released, the genome is still in its infancy, and does not yet contain a comprehensive database of software. The user can easily click on the pencil icon "edit" and open a Wiki which enables the user to "fill in the blanks" about an item, which will then be verified, and added to the Genome. As more users complete the Wiki, the Genome database will become more complete. As the Genome improves through this community input, all of the users can benefit by the dissemination of the information.

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The gray section of the main screen "Boot Page" in Solutio displays the "Required - cannot be removed" items that load at boot, in their boot sequence and with their boot time displayed. While most of the items shown are valid Windows components, with an explanation of what each does along with its boot time, some of the items are non-Microsoft files, and lack detailed descriptions. When I first used Solutio, the components of my MagicJack VoIP service (internet based telephone service) were listed as "Required", and could not be paused or delayed; I opened the Wiki and explained what they were, and then commented that I thought that these particular components should be moved to the "Potentially removable" section where their boot process could be better managed. As the Genome grows and improves, items like this will be better sorted into the appropriate category.

The blue section on the "Boot Page" shows the items that were "Paused" or "Delayed" at boot, and how much time was saved by not loading those items. Clicking on any blue item gives the user the choice of changing the status to boot, "Pause" or "Delay", which will be implemented the next time the computer is booted.

An interesting choice on the Solutio icon is "My PC just frustrated me", which opens the Solutio window, and analyzes the running processes, and tries to determine which program is causing the slow-down. Any information found during the "frustration" analysis is anonymously added to the Genome where it will be commingled with other data and potential solutions may be determined. If a solution to the "frustration" exists, it looks like it will be displayed to the user. When I clicked on the "Frustration" menu item, Solutio identified the beta version of a new security product that I am testing as the potential source of "frustration" but could not yet show any remedy to my "frustration".

While Solutio is still in the "beta" stage of development, I found it a very useful and worthwhile utility to improve PC performance, particularly in the boot process, and for resolving potential "frustrations". Users should give Solutio Anti-Frustration Software a try. In my limited experience with it, I would give it my recommendation, as well as a rating of "two thumbs up".

Adding Programs to Your StartUp Folder

You might have a program or two that you would like to start up automatically every time you turn on your computer. To add an item to your StartUp folder, find the program file on your hard drive by using Windows Explorer or drilling down through the My Computer icon.

Then drag the program's icon over the Start button while holding down the mouse button.

The Start menu should open. Move the cursor (with the program file's icon still attached) over the Programs and StartUp submenus until each is opened. Next, place the cursor over the open StartUp submenu and release the mouse button. (Win98 might ask whether you want to create a shortcut. If so, click Yes.)

Learning about the StartUp folder can be a helpful adventure, and removing unused programs from your StartUp folder will add a little speed to your computing.

<http://www.smartcomputing.com>

The Great Debate: How Often To Defrag

If defragging your computer results in a performance increase, it would seem that frequently defragmenting your computer would keep it in top form at all times. But exactly how often should defragment your hard drive?

This question is often hotly debated because the answer is relative to what you use your computer for. Any computer use (even simply turning on your computer and turning it off again) creates a degree of file fragmentation. To know how often you should defragment your hard drive, you first need to know what kind of a computer user you are. Most computer users can be sorted into three categories: minimal users, moderate users, and advanced users.

Minimal. A minimal computer user only uses a computer for a certain fixed task, such as typing a letter or playing solitaire. Most often, a minimal user does not use email or the Internet and is on his computer less than a few hours a week. Minimal users should defragment their hard drive once each month at minimum.

While additional defragmentations will not hurt the drive, the performance gained through the process does not justify the time or effort.

Moderate. A moderate user uses his computer on a daily basis for Internet, email, word processing, or other productivity tasks. Digital photography activity, music downloading, and frequently adding and removing programs can lead to significant file fragmentation in a short period of time. A home office user would easily fit into this category. Moderate computer users should defragment their hard drive once each week. The temporary Internet files that are stored and subsequently deleted can lead to significant file fragmentation. In addition, desktop publishing applications or other productivity tools tend to create significantly large temporary files that are frequently modified and then deleted once the application is closed.

The holes left behind by these deleted files are known as free space fragmentation.

Advanced. An advanced user is defined as a computer user who uses his computer for several hours each day for intense activities.

These activities can include high-end video gaming, video- or audio- editing, advanced photo manipulation, and software development.

Advanced users should defragment their hard drive (s) daily or every other day. The typical advanced user activities create enormous temporary files that are almost constantly modified before eventually being deleted. In addition, the massive audio or video files that are created by these users tend to be broken up and stored in every available nook and cranny on the drive.

Advanced users who do not defragment their drives frequently will see rapid and dramatic reductions in performance as a result of file fragmentation.

Is Your Internet Security up to Date?

Antivirus up to date?

Firewall?

Windows up to date?

Spy Ware?

See how to protect your computer at:

<http://www.gtbpcug.org/protect/>



More about Internet Threats

The 120-day Microsoft security suite test drive

By Fred Langa

Frustration with most commercial antivirus suites launched a long-term, real-life test of Microsoft Security Essentials, Microsoft's free anti-malware application.

In one of the rare extended tests outside a lab, Microsoft's software has quietly kept two Windows 7 PCs free of infections, even in dangerous public environments.

I've tried many commercial security suites over the years and eventually grown unhappy with each of them. An anti-malware publisher would layer new features on top of old, and each new version would require more disk space and system resources — eventually making the software too big, too slow, or too hard to customize. Moving on to another publisher's suite only restarted the same pattern.

So four months ago, I decided to look into a new option: the recently released Microsoft Security Essentials (MSE) — the company's first antivirus and anti-malware application. (MSE is available as a free download from the product's [info page](#).)

So far, my real-life test drive indicates that Microsoft may have finally got basic security right.

Go to: WindowsSecrets.com for the complete test results and more information.

Editor

Music-- Capture it, Organize it and Enjoy it

by Phil Sorrentino

Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

<http://www.spcug.org/>

Music in the past was captured and made available on analog sources and played back on analog devices. Those analog sources were tubes (in Thomas Edison's times), record disks (78s, 45s and 33 1/3 vinyl), and finally tapes (reel-to-reel, 8 track, and cassette). And they were played on a phonograph (circa late 1870s), a turntable (spanning the 20th century) or a tape machine (spanning the late 20th century). All those devices were engineered to convert the analog music on the source media to sound that eventually hit our ears. Analog music was the capture of some sort of wiggle, like the wiggle of a turntable needle or stylus, or the wiggle of a magnetic field on a magnetic tape. The quality of the music we experienced improved all along the time that analog music was available, finally culminating in High Fidelity, Stereophonic Sound. Stereophonic because there are two tracks, one for the right and one for the left, to match the hearing mechanisms on our head, one on the right and one on the left. High Fidelity is the property of reproducing all of the music frequencies that were originally produced by the original source, like a singer's voice, or a rock and roll band, or a symphony orchestra. The frequency response of the human ear is about 20 Hz to around 16,000 Hz (although sometimes it is stated as 20 to 20k). These are general ranges and as we age, the lower limit tends to rise and the upper limit tends to be lowered. (By the way, if someone is exposed to very high intensity sounds or noises {measured in decibels}, their hearing range could be affected. In fact, sounds greater than somewhere around 100 decibels {db} can produce permanent damage to ones hearing range.) So, High Fidelity Stereo was developed to deliver two channels, each with about a 20 to 16,000 Hz frequency range. What more could you ask for. (Well, actually now with digital reproduction you can have much more, like 5.1 surround sound, but that is a subject for another time.)

Enough of the past, now on to the digital music age. One of the differences between analog and digital sources of music is the fact that with an analog source, the music quality deteriorates with each play. Each time a record or tape is played, some of the range of the music is lost. But with digital sources (digital files), the quality always remains the same. Go ahead and play away. The reason for this is that the digital representation for music is just a series of ones and zeros (which is reproduced exactly with every Copy). As long as that series is reproduced (and the process that interprets the ones and zeros doesn't change), then the results, the music, will always be the same. So, once we get the music, we have it at that quality, for good. But how is digital music created? What is the source? And what devices are used to reproduce it.

The recording process starts with (analog) microphones which produce a small analog signal. This signal is amplified and then digitized. From this point on everything is digital, therefore perfectly reproducible. Digitization produces a file that has been engineered to contain the complete audible frequency range. This is the .wav file that is on the CD that is purchased. The CD becomes the source for the music. (Today, most music is distributed on CDs, although more and more music is being downloaded to computers for eventual listening.) Typically there are about 15 songs on a CD, but with the capacity of a CD (700 MB) and the average size of a song (35MB), you might get as many as 20 or 21 songs on a CD. So, if CDs are the source of the music, a CD player is the device that is used to reproduce the music. CD players come in two basic varieties, stereo cabinet type to be used with a stereo system maybe in the family room, and portables for use on the go.

Continued on the next page

Some larger stereo cabinet models can hold as many as 400 CDs and provide a place to store all the CDs (without their cases). Now that's how the digital music is produced, distributed, and played, but what about MP3s? Well, an MP3 file is the result of processing a WAV file with an MP3 conversion program, the product of which is much smaller than the original. (WMA is another file type similar to MP3 that has been introduced and used by Microsoft.) MP3 files are typically one tenth the size of the corresponding WAV file. The resultant file size can vary because there are settings used by the MP3 conversion program.

The MP3 conversion process is a "Lossy" conversion, that is, some of the quality can be lost in the conversion. The quality is selected by choosing a bit rate for the conversion. For music this rate typically goes from 128 kbps (considered near CD quality) up to around 320 kbps (for those audiophiles that have very good hearing and reproduction systems). There are also lower qualities for low frequency range (voice only), files which are 32 kbps and 64 kbps. The lower the quality, the smaller the size of the MP3 file, and similarly, the higher the quality, the larger the file size. Some people might be able to detect the difference between a 128 kbps quality and a 320 kbps quality, but if you cannot then the smaller file would be a better choice. (If you're not sure if you can detect the difference, create an MP3 of one of your favorite CDs at two different bit rates and then play each one and see if you can tell the difference. If you can tell the difference, use the higher bit rate as your quality setting.)

So, with that bit of background, we are able to discuss the process of converting songs on a CD to MP3 files. This process is called Ripping a CD. (Don't blame me, I didn't name it.) The process does nothing like its name implies, it simply converts the WAV file on the CD to an MP3 file on the computer, at the chosen quality. Ripping can be done with many programs like Windows Media Player, Musicmatch Jukebox, Audacity, and Winamp. (Windows Media Player (WMP) which comes with all Windows Operating Systems will be used here in examples.) To Rip a CD, place the CD in the CD/DVD reader/writer tray, start WMP, and click Rip on the top Selection Bar. It's that easy.

A list of the files on the CD will be shown with a checked check box for each.

If you don't want one of the songs, uncheck the box. When the conversion is finished you will have an MP3 file for each of the checked songs. Typically, the MP3 files will be in a Folder with the name of the CD Album, within a Folder for the Artist within the folder that was setup as the Rip Folder.

From this folder, you can move or copy the songs to a library folder. Most people will probably use the Music (or My Music) folder that is part of Windows for this.

Next month we'll discuss organizing the Library to take advantage of the fruits of your (possibly) considerable labor in creating the music files. And don't forget: backup all that music regularly, so you don't have to go through that process again.



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