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April in Tampa: Taxes

Meeting

Dave Palmer on Internet Security

Wednesday April 14, 2010

6:30 PM

Pepin Distributing Co.
4121 N 50th Street
Tampa, Florida

Meeting Preview: Dave Palmer from the Hillsborough County Extension Office will present a program on Internet security. Member Bob LaFave will do the usual Windows SIG meeting.

Editor's Comments

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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I suppose this newsletter might not be considered a true computer publication if it didn't have a mention of the iPad this month. There I have mentioned it. Should I say more? Well, I have a bit of space to fill, so I will.

I haven't actually touched one, so I'll just comment on a few things I read on the web using my un-hip desktop Windows PC, or heard on the TV or radio.

While driving, I heard one of the ladies on CNBC predict that the iPad would be a Dell killer. By this she meant that people would no longer need to purchase the type of things Dell Computer sold since they could now turn their computing life over to the iPad. Her logic was that she had typically purchased a couple of Dell computers every year until she got an iPhone. Since the iPhone now did everything thing she needed done computerwise, there was no need to buy anything from Dell. The iPad would just make the case against Dell stronger.

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May Meeting: Drew Smith on Genealogical Software

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Bits of Blue is published by the Tampa PC Users Group, Inc., a State of Florida registered non-profit corporation, to provide educational information about personal computer systems to its members. Our mailing address is P. O. Box 3492, Tampa, FL 33601-3492.

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Technical information found in this publication is not necessarily compatible with your hardware and software, plus other errors or misprints could occur from time to time. Therefore, the use of programs, commands, functions or anything of a technical nature appearing in this publication will be at your own risk.

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Minutes of the March Meeting

*By Jim Purcell, Secretary, Tampa PC Users Group
Edward_J_P@MSN.com*

Bob LaFave opened the meeting with his Windows SIG presentation at approximately 6:35 PM. In response to a member's question about problems with his router, Bob suggested that it might be a firmware problem. He expanded the discussion of firmware for other components. He cautioned anyone having problems with their hardware to explore firmware updates to determine specifically what they will correct or improve and to avoid downloads that are of no benefit to you. He cautioned that some firmware installations can be difficult to execute and can cause serious problems if they are improperly installed. In discussing virus and malware problems, he covered a variety of "uninstall programs" and several free "repair programs" that can be used when problems occur. Bob also covered the process of restoring your computer and went into the details of the process.

President John Witmer opened the business portion of the meeting at approximately 7:10 PM. He announced that all of the Smart Computing subscriptions had been purchased by members and that he has received confirmation that all have been processed by Smart Computing. Blain Barton of Microsoft was scheduled for April but he had to cancel. John announced that the May program will be Genealogy by Drew Smith, and Blain Barton has committed to June. Dave Palmer a member of The Greater Tampa Bay Computer User Group emailed John announcing a presentation on an Internet Computer Security Program. He is giving a presentation at the Hillsborough County Extension Office in Seffner on March 18th. It is a free presentation offered by the county, and John had brochures for anyone desiring to attend. The presentation is the product of a partnership between Hillsborough County and the University of Florida. John announced that we had gotten a large check from Amazon.com (\$200). He encouraged members to continue to go through our website when they purchase merchandise and gift certificates.

John introduced a member, Michelle Burgess, who had volunteered to give a presentation on FaceBook and Twitter. Michelle began with an explanation

Uniting The Internet and Your TV

By Ron Weinberg, Member-At-Large, TPCUG
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The era of obtaining VHS tapes or DVD discs from retail or rental store or by mail is ending. Media will be dispensed by pay-per-view or on demand from cable providers, or via streaming or downloading directly to you via the Internet.

This article involves connecting television sets to the Internet to receive media for viewing with or without a PC. It is not concerned with any methodology for directly viewing television on the personal computer.

There are several distinct ways to connect the Internet to your TV, either with or without using your PC. The benefits of connecting via PC are that, once connected, various types of software will allow functions beyond obtaining and viewing movies and TV shows, such as: Saving downloaded material, displaying photos, listening to music, or merely using the TV as a large display screen. Some devices which do not rely on your PC may still require one for initial installation.

Connecting a Computer to a TV

Connecting a computer to a TV requires establishing some form of physical or wireless connection between the two devices. Possible methods are:

1. Use direct cables such as DVI, S-Video, VGA, HDMI, USB, or Firewire. The available ports on both the TV and the computer will determine which methods are practical. These cables may be costly and may depend upon proper video cards or require some sort of converter. The PC and the TV must be located within cable distance.
2. A new hardware approach has been developed. The NETGEAR Push2TV adapter requires an Intel® Wireless Display software enabled laptop powered by the Intel® Core™ Processor Family.
3. Via your home network, (wired or wireless). This is the more common and perhaps the easiest method. An Ethernet or Wi-Fi port is required. Some new TV sets have a built in Ethernet port, or

can support Wi-Fi. If no port is available, web-enabled consumer electronics (CE) devices described below provide indirect connectivity.

Connecting TV to the Internet without a PC via your home network (wired or wireless)

Of course, a home network will include at least one PC, but it is the router connection to the Internet rather than the PC's hardware that is usually utilized.

Direct connections through your home network

Some new TV sets have a built-in Ethernet port to access the Internet. More new models are expected to include this port. Any required software will either be provided by the media supplier or the TV maker.

Indirect connections through your home network

Through Blu-ray:

Many Blu-ray players have a built in Ethernet port; some have built in Wi-Fi and can support Internet video directly. The connection between the player and the TV delivers the media to the TV.

Through CE Devices:

Web-enabled consumer electronics (CE) are devices which deliver streamed content. to TV, Blu-ray, or standard DVD players that have no Ethernet or Wi-Fi ports. They are usually wired to the TV with component vvideo or HDMI cables.

There are many different and competing devices already available. Prices range from \$100 or less and up. Some have unique features which justify higher costs. Better models should provide perfect 1080p HD and digital surround sound. In time, some will become obsolete as a standard method develops.

Examples of CE media players that relay Internet video to TV are:

- Roku Digital Video Player (requires no PC)
- VUDU - 1080p HD Internet movie player (requires PC for activation only)
- Also may be built into some new TVs
- Apple TV (requires PC or MAC)

Internet and TV.....Continued from page 3

- WD TV Live HD Media Player (requires no PC).
- D-Link Media Center Extender DSM-750 (requires PC).

Downloading vs. Streaming

Downloading and streaming are the prevalent methods used to move media from the Internet to your PC and TV.

Downloading: The file is copied from the web server to your computer.

Progressive Download allows users to watch or listen to media as it is being downloaded from a web server to the hard drive.

The progressive download feature in most media players allows them to begin playing the file as soon as enough data has been downloaded. The playing file will stutter or stop if the rate of play is greater than the rate at which the file is downloaded. The file will begin to play again as the download improves.

Streaming: The media is played but not stored on the computer or TV. The file is played as it downloads, without having to wait for the download to finish.

Streams can come from a live video camera, webcasts, audio radio feed, or a movie on the server. To achieve highest quality a broadband connection is needed. Streaming has advantages. It allows you to skip ahead in a video, or begin playback somewhere in the middle. Video playlists and Search may be options.

Obtaining Media

There are technical differences in the actual transmission methods used for progressive downloads and streaming. However, the method used is usually determined by the source rather than the client end user.

Streaming content comes from special streaming servers. Netflix, Amazon, iTunes, and Blockbuster offer streamed movies. Prices vary. Other online TV programming portals, such as Hulu and YouTube are free.

If the content does not come from a streaming server it will most commonly be a progressive download.

Moving Media from PC to TV

Most streaming would be direct to the TV through one of the connection methods. Media which has been downloaded or otherwise entered into the PC can be transferred from PC to TV by CE media players, DLNA, Media Manager or various other programs which are not in the scope of this article.

CE media player boxes supply their own software.

DLNA is explained by Wikipedia as follows:

DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) is a standard used by manufacturers of consumer electronics to allow entertainment devices within the home to share their content with each other across a home network.

DLNA intends to solve the problems inherent in using digital media between different consumer electronic devices. For example, a DLNA-compliant TV will interoperate with a DLNA-compliant PC to play music or videos and display photos. The specification also includes digital rights management (DRM), a technology to ensure that the “content must be protected from unauthorized copying and use.”

Verizon Media Manager

Media Manager is free PC software available to FIOS TV customers which transmits personal media such as photos, music and videos from your PC over the Internet to the FIOS server, which then forwards it to your FIOS TV. You can connect from cell phone, thumb drive, or portable media player, and even go from camera to TV. A DVR set-top box is required.

Conclusion

The technology and equipment for delivering media is improving and changing constantly. No doubt, in time the process will be simplified.

However, it must be noted that most broadband providers already offer on-demand or pay-per-view ser-

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of Twitter. She went to <http://www.twitter.com> and began tracking people and things. She explained how to sign in and establish an account and demonstrated the various ways you can use Twitter to track both subjects and people. Twitter is a free service that lets you keep in touch with people and subjects through the exchange of quick, frequent input. Entries are limited to 140 characters. The format of the application allows extremely rapid access to information and to the activities of people. Michelle described the various ways the program could be used and the versatility of the structure, such as the ability to attach links.

Michelle demonstrated how to create a FaceBook account and how to locate friends to add to your account. She suggested that when you create the account that you indicate networking when asked what you are looking for. She described some of the reasons that you might want to establish a FaceBook account. Michelle explained uploading and downloading photos, audio, video and events to FaceBook. Her demonstration included many of the applications that can be initiated in FaceBook and she showed the versatility of these applications in response to questions and suggestions from the audience. In both the Twitter and the FaceBook presentations, Michelle used audience participation not only to provide the members with an understanding of how the programs operate but also to make them aware of many of the finite details that allow the user to take advantage of the various tools provided by Twitter and FaceBook.

John closed the meeting at approximately 8:45 PM. ◆

Internet Picture of the Month



HDR Sunset

This sunset photo from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/murtasma/730847627/> is an example of an High Dynamic Range (HDR) photo. I first saw it at the HDR Pictures link in the Interesting Links section below. HDR images are composed of several images of the subject taken at different exposures and then combined in software and further manipulated by adjusting, among other things, the resulting image's tone curve. Adobe Photoshop will do this for you, or there are more specialized programs available.

Go to flickr at <http://www.flickr.com> and do a search for HDR. I just did, and they list 430,938 such photos. Now tell me how flickr makes money off all of this; I see very little advertising.

April's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)	http://www.tpcug.org/
Google News Archive Search	http://news.google.com/archivesearch
Product Reviews and Reports	http://www.consumersearch.com/
EntityCube	http://entitycube.research.microsoft.com/
35 Fantastic HDR Pictures	http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2008/03/10/35-fantastic-hdr-pictures/

Verizon FIOS Battery Backup System

By John Witmer, President, Tampa PC Users Group
jwitmer@pepindist.com

I recently had a situation come up with my FIOS battery backup device, and I thought I would share the experience and information with our Group since I know many of you also have this same service. My system was installed in July 2007 by Verizon and has worked flawlessly since that time. The battery backup system is installed in the garage, close to my electrical panel and the exit door to the outside, so I couldn't help but notice it when the red, replace battery light came on during this past Christmas holiday. After ignoring it for a few days, I was treated to an intermittent beeping alarm also calling my attention to the device and its red light notice to replace the battery.

Being somewhat naive, I thought perhaps this was something that Verizon would take care of, considering I pay them more than \$200 a month, so I called Customer Service inquiring about the battery and the replacement warning I was getting. I learned it obviously was not their problem, and they suggested I go to Batteries Plus to obtain the replacement battery I needed. So on December 31st, during a day off from work, I removed the battery from the device and hauled it down to Batteries Plus for replacement. The employee behind the counter took my old battery and hooked it up to a test unit as the first step. To my surprise, he said the battery was in excellent condition and should last me another few years at least. He then let me know that this problem was common with the Verizon battery backup devices, and although he did not know for sure why the problem existed, he thought it had something to do with the Verizon backup box it was installed in. He said he has had the same experience at three different times so far with his FIOS system.

The solution to determine if the battery truly needs replacing (if you don't want to remove it and have it tested as Batteries Plus would do) is to unplug the battery backup device from the electrical outlet it is plugged into, disconnect one of the wires going to one of the terminals (I chose the negative black connection) and leave it unplugged for ten minutes or so. Then

reconnect the internal wire to the terminal and plug the device back into the electrical outlet. Chances are you will get a green light showing the System Status to be ok and no red light showing at all.

Interestingly enough, two more people showed up at Batteries Plus with Verizon backup batteries in hand while I was there. I know the elderly lady who was waited on next to me was told the same solution I was told. If by chance you do have to replace the battery, the cost with tax is about \$35 at Batteries Plus, or someone said you can get them online for less money (I don't know the web site). There is also the convenience of disposing of the old battery if you go the store route. By the way, my battery and backup system has worked just fine since then, and I have no replace battery warning light coming on at all. In case you wondered, Verizon Customer Service does not furnish this information as a solution, or even alert you to the possibility that the battery is OK. It might lead you to infer that they could have a defect of some sort in their piece of equipment, which would not be good considering the number of units installed in the market. ♦



FIOS Battery and control showing everything is OK

Special Interest Groups

Visual Basic .Net SIG (and sometimes Access SIG)

This SIG meets the third Wednesday of the month at 6:30 PM. For information, contact William LaMartin at lamartin@tampabay.rr.com.

Windows SIG

This SIG occupies the first 30 minutes of our monthly, regular meeting and is devoted to a general Windows and computing discussion. Bob LaFave moderates the discussion.

Comments.....Continued from page 1

What can I say? If the iPhone satisfied all of her computing needs, she didn't really do much with all those Dells she had been stockpiling. And that is fine. Many people really don't do much with their desktop and laptop computers other than browsing the web, using email, taking part in social networking sites like FaceBook and searching for information. And the iPad will give such people a larger screen than the iPhone on which to do all of this.

I will close out this iStuff with the observation that Apple has done a lot of things right. They are also great at marketing their products. And the press gives them so much free coverage. I can't count the number of articles about the iPad that I have seen in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* in the past couple of months. I particularly like articles in the *Journal*, since they always allow comments; sometimes the *Times* does also. It becomes apparent quite soon, as you read the comments, that the audience breaks down into pro-Apple and anti-Apple camps. One of my favorite comments was from the obviously pro side, in which the comment was something to the effect that the individual was so into everything Apple that he would even buy an Apple toilet if they were to produce one.

As for me, though, I will never buy an iPhone because I can't program it as I do my Windows Mobile phone. As I am sure you have read, the iPhone is really locked down in that, even if you have the ability to write a program for it, you cannot install that program on the phone without Apple giving its official seal of approval to the program, which takes time and is not guaranteed to occur. With a Windows Mobile phone, I can write a program and then install it on the phone

one minute later. I can even send it to others who have such phones, and they can install the program.

In fact, I am working on a new program for the phone right now that, at the press of a button, will open the phone's camera so that I can take a photo. Once the photo is taken, if I like what I see and press the OK button, it is automatically uploaded to a folder at my web site. At the same time, data about the photo (its file name, time taken, and longitude and latitude of the location if I have the bluetooth GPS running) are uploaded to a Microsoft SQL database at the site.

For display purposes, the images can then be displayed in two ways. For all the photos, there is a page where thumbnails of the photos are automatically generated and displayed, and a click on the thumbnail displays a full version of the image. For photos with GPS data, a map is displayed with a pushpin at each photo location. A hover of the mouse over a pushpin displays a thumbnail of the image, and a click on the thumbnail displays a full version of the image. This is sort of my own flickr for phone photos application.

You will note that I mentioned a Bluetooth GPS for my phone. My HTC Windows Mobile 6.1 phone is approaching 2.5 years in age and does not have a built -in GPS, hence the need for an external GPS. I thought about replacing it when Windows Mobile 6.5 came out, but decided to not do that, and now I am glad I didn't since Microsoft is supposed to have Windows Mobile 7, also known as Windows Phone 7, available by the end of the year.

I hope the Windows Phone 7 works for Microsoft. They have dropped the ball a bit in the phones and let others like Apple move ahead. ♦

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vices directly to your TV. They require no additional equipment beyond what they already furnish for their premium services.

If these providers were to reduce the prices they charge, most of the methods and equipment described in this article would become less important. ◆

