Bits of Blue

A Monthly Publication of the Tampa PC Users Group, Inc.

Meeting

Chrome Book & Chrome Operating System
by
Kevan Sheridan &
Merle Nicholson

Wednesday, November 9, 2011

6:30 PM

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

Meeting Preview: Kevan Sheridan and Merle Nicholson will introduce us to an inexpensive computing alternative: Chrome Book. Also, as usual, Bob LaFave will conduct the Windows SIG for the f rst half-hour of the meeting.

Editor's Comments

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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What to write about this month? Well, it is supposed to be something at least loosely associated with computing. So that leaves out the two hot topics of today as I write this: The Greek debt crisis and the MF Global meltdown, the f rst having to do with spending more than you have, the second with betting more than you have. Then there is Bank America and other big banks backing down on charging $5 per month to use their debit cards. Anyone with any sense knew that would happen, but the banks had to run the idea up the f ag pole and see if anyone would salute before giving up.

I think most members of our group will be happy to know that HP has decided to stay in the PC business. I certainly am, although I don't plan on purchasing a new PC or laptop in the immediate future.

The Steve Jobs biography is out, I see. Perhaps someone in the group will read it and be kind enough to write a review of it for

December Meeting: Party

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Minutes of the October Meeting

By Merle Nicholson, Secretary,
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The Windows Special Interest Group (SIG) opens our monthly meeting. The meeting began as usual at 6:30 PM. The SIG is devoted to a discussion of all aspects of the Windows operating systems and of computer-related subjects in general. The SIG moderator, Bob LaFave, introduces new or little known products and technological developments for discussion by the group. He accepts questions and requests for help in solving problems from attendees. This session, Bob LaFave was could not attend, so Merle Nicholson stood in his place. This month's SIG concluded at 7:00 PM.

Our speaker this month was Steven Singer, CEO of RDI Distribution Corp, a wholesale computer hardware distributor at http://www.rdi.us, and at http://www.morevalu.com, the end-user division.

Steven and his spouse, Pam, have for many years done our October or November presentation, bringing with them a variety of hardware from their business to show us and talk about each. Steven is very knowledgeable about all things computer-related and is an entertaining speaker, with hardware examples that are passed around for all of us to handle.

One item was a USB adapter that bypasses the 500 mA charging throttle that USB imposes for charging devices. This sounds very useful for devices that don't adequately charge from your computer.

Steve and Pam passed around the $100 HP tablet that went on the market when HP decided to abandon their production. Steven seems knowledgeable about Android and "rooting" Android devices. He brought – and talked about – a mini ITX computer motherboard with an imbedded processor that seemed very inexpensive and capable of building into a very tiny computer.

The discussions sometimes run far af eld and get pretty lively. It was a thoroughly entertaining session. Our heartfelt thanks to Steven and Pam. ◆

Office Products & Multiple Monitors

By Merle Nicholson, Secretary,
Tampa PC Users Group
merle@merlenicholson.com

Office products: LibreOff ce is my #1 choice for a full-featured Off ce suite. The suite consists of Writer, Calc, Draw, Impress and Base. If you can't justify Microsoft Off ce in price or sheer size, LibreOff ce will do the job for 99% of what you need. And it's FREE. You should not encounter f le compatibility problems. I have switched between MS Word and LibreOff ce Writer with the same document and so far have not encountered any page formatting problems. I haven't done much swapping between MS Excel and LO Calc since my spreadsheet needs are pretty simple, but I've never failed to do what I need in Calc. It can use .xls and .xlxs formats as well.

The newest open-source version of this is called Libre-Off ce 3.4 at http://www.libreoff ce.org/. This version comes about because Oracle, the current owner of OpenOff ce (acquired from their acquisition of Sun) is making some content and distribution decisions outside of the Open Source community (according to the Open Source maintainers). So they've broken away and have reversed some of those decisions. Even though I spend good money for Off ce for every version, I still use LibreOff ce for Word Processing and spreadsheets. They have Linux and Mac OSX versions, too.

Another thing about Microsoft Word, Outlook and Excel is that I've given the "ribbon bars" several years of my attention, and I just prefer the simple toolbars of LibreOff ce. It isn't that I can't get used to the ribbon; I can and do. I use the Outlook ribbon constantly throughout my day (but normally hidden). In my opinion, as long as the "old style" toolbar is customizable it's superior. The ribbon takes just too much screen room and too much searching. The versions of ribbons have greatly improved between Off ce 2007 and 2010. The ribbons are now customizable, so I use one of my own ribbons almost exclusively, with all my most-used functions.

I'm currently using: LibreOff ce Writer, LibreOff ce Calc, occasionally Excel 2010 for clients, Outlook 2010 and Access 2003. I've been experimenting with Access 2010. I don't use presentations, so I can't advise on either Impress or PowerPoint.

With Access 2010, I haven't gotten a handle on customizable menus yet, and so far I'm pretty much headed for failure. I have a commercial menu-driven application that just can't be duplicated with ribbon bars. It's very much a shame; I've been a f rm advocate of Access for many years. I'll use Access 2003 as long as the latest operating system will allow.

I very highly recommend LibreOff ce. You can't beat the quality and price, and, with the exceptions of Outlook and Access, there just is no reason to use Microsoft Off ce.

Multiple Monitors: Multiple monitors can offer some unique challenges, many of which I hadn't anticipated at f rst, but I can easily say that they make my life on the computer much more manageable and eff cient when I need several programs and windows at the same time. I run a successful software business from them, and I just can't imagine doing this on one monitor.
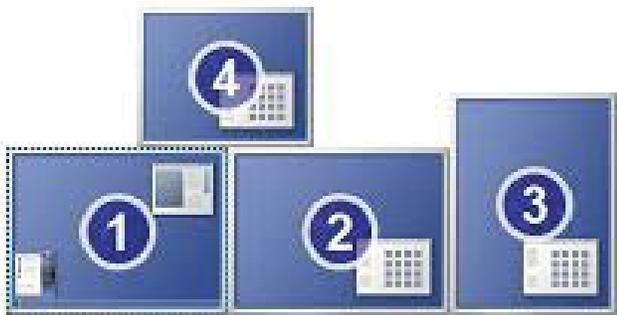
I last wrote about using multiple monitors with Windows in 2004, when I had just gotten a second mismatched monitor and was making pretty effective use of them. I was using Windows XP, of course, and I talked of getting a bargain in a 15" Samsung LCD for $369. Right now I can get a 27" LCD screen for $300!

In 2005, I bought a pair of matched 21" LCD screens, very expensive at nearly $600 each, which I am still using, and I still consider them essential. I purchased a very nice multiple-monitor software program called UltraMon, which I can still recommend, but I bought another program called DisplayFusion Pro a year ago that I am extremely happy with.

My current conf guration is four monitors with two video adapters. The Video cards are both ATI HD 4650 that are adequate but not especially fast under these
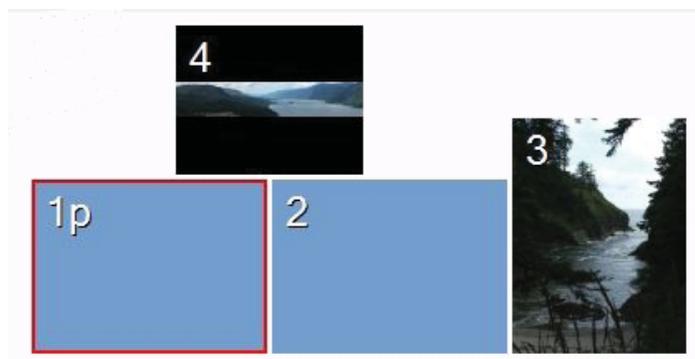
Office......Continued from page 3

circumstances. I added a 21" monitor to my right (a gift from a friend who had it surplus) and swiveled it to portrait for viewing help and reading PDF f les, and recently I put an old 17" on the shelf above me to display my web cameras, weather gadget and to park Outlook for monitoring incoming emails. Here's what they look like in Windows 7:

Windows 7 handles multiple monitors much better than all previous versions, but the customizing choices are still pretty limited. The options are to decide which is your primary monitor, and, for the remaining monitors, whether you want to duplicate another monitor, or extend the desktop to that monitor; the second choice is the only one you'd want, of course. And you can rearrange the relative positioning with the mouse after identifying which monitor is assigned what number. The positioning is critical because you have to move the cursor from one to another, and you can't go outside a monitor. For instance if my cursor is in Monitor three, I can't get to Monitor one or four without going through two.

The primary monitor has the Start Menu and the taskbar; the others have nothing. The wallpaper, and screen saver choices are pretty limited to one, a less than satisfactory situation. I can't speak too much about screen savers, because I don't use them. They're misnamed in any case. They're for entertainment, and perhaps as a rotating picture frame when not in use, and can't really be effective in a multiple monitor situation. Unless you buy good software. Instead of Screen Saver, I set a Windows Power Prof le to turn the monitors off after 20 minutes of non-use. My wallpaper is plain light blue-grey.

I depend on the program DisplayFusion Pro 3.4 by Binary Fortress at http://www.DisplayFusion.com. This program does a great deal to help you manage your desktop, but, for me, the #1 feature is its ability to add additional taskbars on each of the monitors. Mine is conf gured to have a Windows Start Menu and the "Show Desktop" panel each. Additionally, I have some duplicate shortcuts on each and, when a program is minimized to the taskbar, its task icon goes to its respective taskbar. That is, on the monitor where it was minimized from. This is all unique. Native Windows 7 can do none of these. Below is the DisplayFusion rotating wallpaper setup.

The scope of the things this program will do is just too large for an article to cover well; I'd suggest a visit to the website, but I'll try to summarize: Wallpaper Management, Hotkeys, Titlebar Buttons, Monitor Conf guration, Window Snapping, Window Management, Logon Screen and Multi-monitor Screensavers. For one computer, the Pro version is $25, and $35 for all computers in your household. I highly recommend this; I think it's very inexpensive considering its wide-ranging capabilities.

One other thing that I need to do with multiple monitors is to f nd my cursor! I have to admit that sometimes I don't know where it is. I have the standard Windows setting that pops large circles around the cursor, in Control Panel, Mouse, Pointers, "Show Location of pointer when I press the CTRL key", and that does help, but not quite enough. So I wrote my own program that will move the cursor to whatever monitor I want by a hotkey action. When I press the hotkey for Monitor 4, the cursor pops to the center of Monitor 4

Internet Picture of the Month

Kudzu Bugs. From the site http://naturecloseups.com/posts/globular-stink-bug-invasive. Apparently the invasive vine kudzu now has a bug that loves to eat it. Unfortunately this bug, the Megacopta Cribraria, is also an invasive species, recently arrived in Georgia. The bad thing is the bug also likes other plants, including soybeans. And it stinks.

the newsletter. We haven't had a book review in a very long time.

Apparently not all laptop batteries are made the same. My daughter's Sony laptop purchased in 2008 needed a new battery recently. The message she was receiving was, I think, "battery not detected." So the question was: Is it a bad battery or is it something else. If you purchase a battery and that does not f x the problem, can you return the battery for a refund or are you stuck with it? After I decided to purchase a replacement battery, do I go with ones found at sites on the Internet for $40 to $50, or do I purchase

a Sony exact replacement, which I could not readily f nd by searching the Web? My f rst impulse was to go with one of the $45 aftermarket batteries, but the more I read, the more worried I became about doing that. Here is the rub. The replacement batteries also come with a CD that you are supposed to run on the laptop (connected to its AC power adapter) that will change something in the BIOS or somewhere that will reprogram how the computer interacts with the battery so that the aftermarket battery will be recognized and function properly. In my reading, I found people for whom this worked successfully and others for whom it did not. There were also a fair number of individuals

November's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)   http://www.tpcug.org/
What happened in my birth year   http://whathappenedinmybirthyear.com/
Odyssey Marine Exploration   http://www.shipwreck.net/
100 Abandoned Houses   http://www.100abandonedhouses.com/

My Phone Apps

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
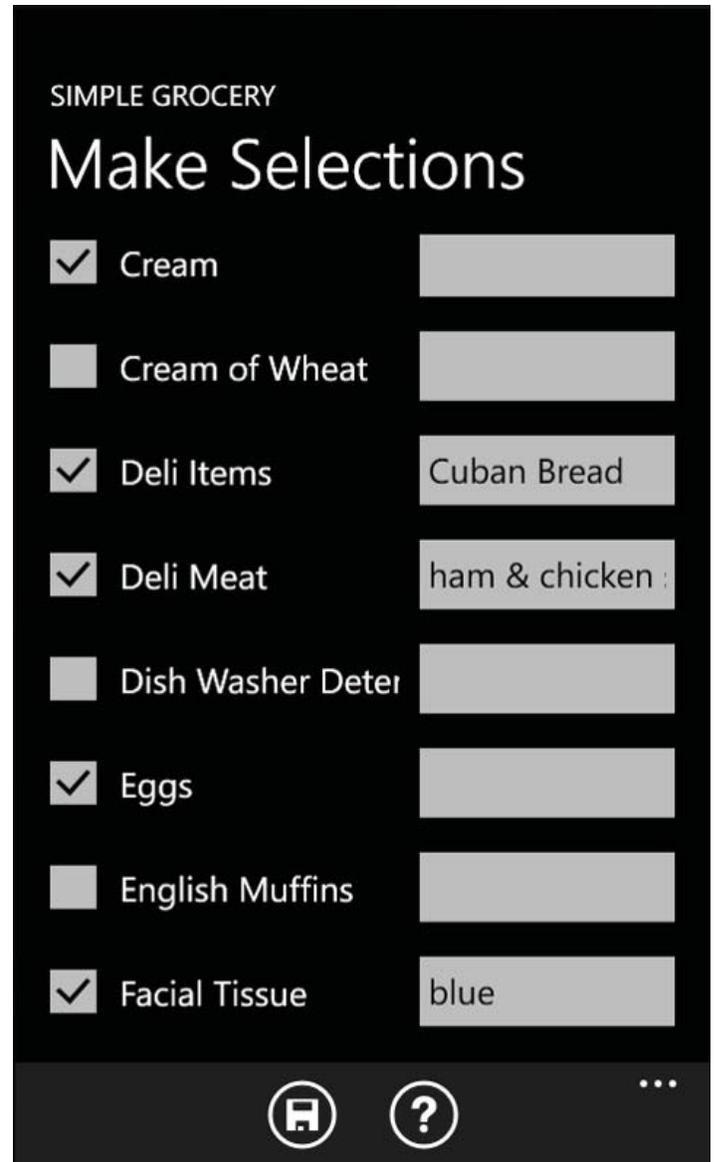william@lamartin.com

I now have f ve apps at the Microsoft Marketplace for Windows 7 Phones. The f rst two I did back in June as sort of practice apps when the WP7 f rst became available from Verizon. One was a tank volume program which calculated for different types of tanks the volume of liquid in the tank at different levels from the bottom. The other was a real-time scheduling app for the San Francisco Bay Area Transit System (BART). These were free apps with no advertising.

With the introduction of Mango, the large update of the WP7 operating system, I decided to get more serious. The last week in October, I put three more apps at the Marketplace, a walking app, a grocery shopping app and a stock market app, hopefully all to bring in a little money via advertising appearing in the bottom 80 pixels of the screen. The little fellow above is the program icon for the walking app, and the screen capture on the right displays the selecting of items for a grocery shopping trip captured from the phone emulator (simulates the phone) running on my computer. This image was done before I added the advertising banner to the program.

Based on what I have seen so far, I don't think I am going to make much from this endeavor. My f rst two apps have been at the Marketplace about three months. The volume app has been download a little more than 200 times, the Bart app, a little under 100 times. As I write this, the walking app has been at the Marketplace for f ve days and been downloaded f ve times.

Here is what I have seen about ad revenue so far. Of course, I don't really have much data, but, with the ads running while I was testing my three new programs over a bit more than a week, I did generate some money. According to the stats, while I was testing the three apps, 1,600 impressions of various ads were

displayed (sounds like a lot to me) at the bottom of the screens. And for that impressive total, my estimated revenue is $.30 (that is cents, not dollars). Viewed another way, it amounts to $.18 per 1000 impressions of an ad.

The message here is pretty obvious. If you want to make any money from apps by displaying advertising, then you need to have your apps running on thousands of phones. I know of at least two people, working as a team, who are supporting themselves entirely with WP7 apps that display advertising. So it can be done. They, the last I heard, had 25 apps, and some had been downloaded thousands of times. They at f rst tried to put, say, $.99 or $1.29 as a price for downloading an

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 Editor William LaMartin at william@lamartin.com.

Windows SIG

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

My Apps........Continued from page 6

app but discovered that almost no one would do that – too much free stuff out there. So they went to the display advertising route. And I took their hard-learned advice and did the same thing. But it appears that my results are gong to fall a good bit short of theirs.

Part of my problem, I think, is going to be that I just don't have the same interests as 95-plus percent of the smart phone users. One way to get a lot of attention is for Microsoft to select one of your apps as a featured app. Perhaps I will get lucky and hit on something that Microsoft will select as a featured app and things will look up. But with so many other apps out there and more coming online everyday, there is little chance of that. I will just keep writing the sort of things that interest me and see if I am fortunate enough to hit on something that is also of interest to others. ◆

Comments........Continued from page 5

who had purchased such a battery which did not work even after the individuals had run the CD. I cannot imagine them running the CD, though, after they had been warned that doing so might damage their computer. Some people, after reading the warning, examined their CDs and could f nd no f les on them. So it seems that many of these batteries are being produced and shipped with essentially no quality control. Additionally, not a small number of the people who had left messages about their experience with the batteries were still waiting for refunds. You pay your money and take your chances.

After thinking about this for a short time, I went to the Sony site to search for their battery but couldn't f nd it. Amazingly, when I entered the model number for

the battery into their parts search, it produced other batteries (not listed as replacements for my battery) and non-battery items such as keyboards. So much for Sony's parts site. A call to the local Sony store informed me that they did not have the battery in stock, but I was given the 800 number to call. I did that, and the lady who answered found the battery I needed for a price of $139 + tax + shipping. I ordered the battery, and when it came the laptop was happy and, thus, I was happy. But that $45 price certainly sounded a lot better than the $139 plus price. And, who knows, the supposedly replacement $45 battery may have worked. I just wasn't willing to take the gamble that using the CD would not damage the laptop, as it had done for others.

Finally, on this battery issue you may ask why spend more than $150 when you can buy a new laptop for under $400. Well, this laptop cost more than $2,000 in 2008, and I am sure that you couldn't f nd an equivalent one now for under $1,000. And if the laptop with the new battery lasts two more years, then I will be happy.

The **Amazon.com link** on our home page has been producing results. We received $27, $15 and $32 for the months of June, July and August; the payments are made each month for the month that was two months previous. Keep up the good work and tell your friends to use the link at http://www.tpcug.org for their Amazon.com holiday shopping.

Looking back at our newsletter for November, 1992 (that is 19 years ago, if you can believe it), I see in the President's column where he is looking forward to the opening of Tampa's f rst CompUSA on Hillsborough at Dale Mabry. Well, a lot has changed in the ensuing

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☐ *Member: Your membership is up for renewal*

Comments........Continued from page 7

19 years. For one, there is no CompUSA at that location, and CompUSA is no longer the same one as then, the original having gone out of business. If you would like to read a bit more history, take the time to peruse these old newsletters either at our web site or on the CD I made. I will try to remember to bring some of the CDs to the next meeting since there may still be some members who want one (for a $5 donation to the group). ◆

Office........Continued from page 4

and pops those concentric, blinking circles so my eye can pick it up quickly. As far as I can tell, this little program is unique. I'd patent it, but I'm sure Apple would then sue me for ten million dollars – a month.

Managing multiple monitors can be a bit challenging, but with the right software it can be, if not fun, at least interesting. ◆

to I-275

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