Bits of Blue

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December in Tampa

Meeting

Holiday Party

Wednesday, December 14, 2011

6:30 PM

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

Meeting Preview: Holiday Party

Editor's Comments

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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Thanks to Mike Hutchison, Jim Purcell and Merle Nicholson for providing content. Jim sent along some images to accompany his article, but there just wasn't any extra room. Usually that is not the case, and, in fact, I often use images to take up space. Of course, such images also provide us with valuable information about the topic of the article. You know, "a picture is worth a thousand words." Well, you will only get words in this edition.

I write about tablet computers this month, when a month ago I had not really used one. Now we have two in the family, and I have played with them enough to write a comparison piece about the iPad and the Kindle Fire. At a Microsoft meeting last month, I also saw a tablet, the brand of which I didn't take note, that was running a pre-alpha version of Windows 8. Windows 8 is supposedly going to be both a tablet operating system and a desktop operating system.

The tablets are in many ways a pleasure to use, but don't throw away that desktop or laptop if you really want to do anything productive. In my opinion, tablets are for web browsing, emailing and entertainment. ◆

January Meeting: To be announced

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.

However, for business concerning this newsletter, Bits of Blue, please contact the Editor, William LaMartin, at 813-251-3817, or william@lamartin.com.

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Minutes of the November 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 gave a PogoPlug demo. It is a device for file sharing that connects to your internal network. He also mentioned his purchase of the Ceton Windows TV/DVR card – or USB device. He made a quick mention of Live Movie Maker for editing commercials out of recorded TV, Media Sharing and the Microsoft Stand-alone System Sweeper which is a recovery tool that can help you start an infected PC and perform an offline scan to detect rootkits and other advanced malware. The URL is http://connect.microsoft.com/systemsweeper.

Our speakers this month were Kevan Sheridan and Merle Nicholson, both long-term TPCUG members. The subjects were ChromeBook (Kevan) and Chrome OS (Merle).

Kevan brought in his ChromeBook – a slim 12.1" laptop-like device with a closed operating system, but optimized to operate in the Chrome browser and interact with all things Google. Google, as we know, is now providing most everything a more-than-casual user may want in "the Cloud" - Gmail, Calendar, Contacts, (Book)Reader, Google Docs (where you can store all your docs online), Picasa (storage and sharing pictures), Google Books, Google Music, Google+ and a wide variety of non-Google apps like MySpace, Facebook and Twitter.

Kevan demonstrated some of this from his own Chrome-Book connected to the projector. There were quite a few questions about this lightweight, slim and fast notebook.

Merle had the Chrome Browser installed on his notebook running under Windows 7, but mostly talked about Linux/Chrome. He explained his process of attempting to install the Chrome Operating System for PCs. That is an open, free Linux variation from SUSE. It's built to be minimal with the Chrome browser as its centerpiece. It also includes non-chromey things like Libre Office Suite, Gimp, and

Purchasing a Camera

By Jim Purcell, Tampa PC Users Group
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[To more easily access the links in this article, view it at our site, http://www.tpcug.org]

My first real interest in photography began in 1946 when I started using my Dad's post-card size Kodak bellows camera and set up a darkroom with a friend of mine in his mother's wash shed. I have bought several cameras before and since the digital revolution. I purchased my first Kodak 35mm camera in 1952. My first high-quality cameras were a Rolleicord ($25) and a Leica IIIF ($165) that I purchased in 1955 while stationed in Germany during the Occupation. Both are still in operating condition. I have had some repair work done on the Leica, but the Rolleicord has required none. I won't go through the list of cameras that I owned since then, but I now own a Cannon 40D single lens reflex camera and a very small but full-featured pocket megazoom Sony DSC-HX5V camera which I use as a "carry around" camera.

Cameras to Consider

Digital Single-Lens Reflex (DSLR) This is the group of cameras most preferred by professionals and serious amateurs. The cameras use a mechanical mirror system and pentaprism to direct light from the lens to an optical viewfinder on the back of the camera. DSLRs allow an accurate preview of framing close to the moment of exposure, and allow the user to choose from a variety of interchangeable lenses. They also have larger sensors compared to most other digital cameras. The sensors are generally the same as, or closer in size to, the traditional 35mm film format that many photographers started out using. These large sensors allow for similar depths of field and picture angle to that of film formats. In general, a larger sensor provides lower noise, higher sensitivity and increased latitude and dynamic range. The downside is that camera bodies and the lenses of DSLRs are very expensive. The bodies and lenses are also large, heavy and cumbersome. For complete information go to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_single-lens_reflex_camera#Comparison_with_digital_point-and-shoot_camera Examples can be found at: http://cameras.bestcovery.com/best-digital-slr-camera-overall?sem=3884548238y&gclid=CPeKsZem7qwCFY1W7AoduGzTIQ

Interchangeable-lens Digital Cameras This group of cameras tries to bring together some of the best features of the DSLRs and those of the compact point-and-shoot cameras. They offer the advantages of an interchangeable-lens system with strong user control features and generally have better than point-and-shoot performance. The absence of the mirror system found in the DSLRs allows a smaller, lighter and less cumbersome design. If you decide to invest in this group of cameras, you should carefully review the specs and determine if the camera in which you are interested fulfills your needs in such areas as video, and the availability, type and cost of interchangeable lenses. Go to review sites such as the link listed below and check reviews by both the site staff and those by individual users. Examples can be found at: http://reviews.cnet.com/best-interchangeable-lens-cameras/

Point-and-Shoot Cameras It is easier to discuss the point-and-shoot cameras if they are divided into four groups.

1. The Megazoom or Pocket Megazoom (compact and pocket high-zoom camera): The Megazoom cameras in some cases are as large as the DSLRs but are the most versatile fixed lens cameras you can find. They offer as much as 20x to 30x optical zoom lenses and usually have impressive wide-angle lens capability. They have manual controls, usually excellent stabilization and a choice of excellent lenses. Examples can be found at: http://www.pcworld.com/reviews/collection/1685/top_rated_megazoom_cameras.html . The pocket megazoom cameras are much smaller than the megazooms discussed above but they have optical zoom ranges from about 10X to 16X. They normally have excellent stabilization features. Examples can be found at: http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/q311travelzoomgrouptest/.

2. Advanced Point-and-Shoot (compact camera with manual controls): The strong point of these cameras is that they have manual controls for shutter speed, aper-

ture and ISO settings, giving you control of the quality of the picture. They are a good "carry around" camera for DSLR owners and a good learning tool for novice shooters. Examples can be found at:

http://www.pcworld.com/reviews/collection/5586/top_point_and_shoots_with_manual_controls.html

3. Basic Point-and-Shoot: These are the real point-and-shoot cameras because you literally point and shoot since you depend on the automatic adjustment capabilities of the camera, which have improved greatly over the years. They have small sensors, so don't pay extra money for a very high megapixel rating since it will probably lead to higher image noise. Many have good wide-angle capability (28mm or less), which is handy for group shots, arms-length self-portraits and landscape shots. They are inexpensive, so it's important to read the reviews to insure that you get what is needed to give you satisfactory results. Examples can be found at: http://reviews.cnet.com/digital-cameras/canon-powershot-a1200-silver/4505-6501_7-34468799.html?tag=rb_content;contentBody.

4. Rugged Point-and-Shoot: These cameras are for the mountaineers, the divers, the hikers, the extreme sports enthusiasts and the clumsy. They are rugged and can be waterproof, freeze proof, drop proof or dustproof but they are not known for their optics or sensors. It is therefore important that you pay as much attention to the quality of the optics and sensor as to the durability of the camera. If it doesn't take a good picture before you drop it off of the Empire State Building, it probably won't take a good picture after you drop it. Examples can be found at: http://www.bhphotovideo.com/indepth/photography/hands-reviews/rugged-point-and-shoot-cameras

Conclusion

I hope that the category discussion above helps you narrow your search. The example links at the end of each section are just samples to give you a visual picture and specifications of some of the best cameras in the categories. There are many more reviews and,

Two Tablets

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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Tablets are all the rage now, and we went from having none in the family to having two, both belonging to my wife. She is now the owner of an Apple iPad 2 and a Kindle Fire. The Fire is quite new, the iPad has been out for some time. There has been some press where the two are compared, usually to the detriment of the Fire. But, in my opinion, comparing the two as if they were meant to do the same thing and for the same audience is not appropriate.

First off, this particular iPad, the less expensive one with the smallest amount of memory, costs $499. The Kindle Fire comes in only one version at $199. You wouldn't expect a $20,000 car to be a good as a $50,000 car, would you? So you shouldn't expect a $200 tablet to perform on the same level as a $500 one. Both cars will get you where you are going, and both of these tablets will perform most of your desired functions, just not with the same ease or speed. The cheaper one will actually do a few things the more expensive one won't. And, as expected, the more expensive one will do some things that the cheaper one won't.

iPad advantages are
- Larger screen
- Faster processor
- Front and back cameras
- Large collection of iPad apps

Kindle Fire adavantages are
- Direct access to all of Amazon Prime video content, movies & TV
- Ability to connect via a USB cable to your Windows computer to load music and image files
- The web browser supports Flash
- Native Kindle book reader

Web and email
Both of these devices require a WiFi connection to access web content. Once on the web, you can do your

Internet Picture of the Month

Prince of Tampa Cigar Box Label From the site http://www.cigarboxlabels.com/. This site has much more than cigar box labels to view and purchase. How about an old oil company stock certificate? But since we are in Tampa, I thought it appropriate to use a Tampa-themed cigar box label.

Tablets.......Continued from page 4

browsing and email just as you would on a computer. Well, the email is not exactly the same, since you don't seem to have the option of HTML-style email, only text based. Both allow you to send images you may have on the device as attachments. The iPad appears to insert the image inside the message, but when it arrives at my computer it is as an attachment. And oddly, in my two tests, it arrived upside down.

Of course you use finger gestures on the screen to navigate instead of using a mouse. And once you master that, you will probably find it preferable. I have noticed that in watching movies with either device or

on the iPad using Skype that the closer you are to your WiFi transmitter, the better the quality.

Skype
Since I just mentioned Skype, let's discuss that for a moment. Of course, you know that Skype allows you to use your computer to make phone calls, and, if you and/or the other party has a video camera, to actually do a video call. Since the Fire does not have a camera, you will not be using it to make a video call. The Fire also does not have a built-in microphone.

During a video call on Skype, you use the front fac-

December's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)   http://www.tpcug.org/
Ars Technia   http://arstechnica.com/
Raspberry Pi   http://www.raspberrypi.org/
Penny Postcards   http://www.usgwarchives.org/special/ppcs/ppcs.html
About Chrome OS Linux   http://getchrome.eu/

ing camera on the iPad to transmit your image to the other party. While in the call, your screen fills with the image of the person being called. There is also a small insert of your image so you can adjust the camera's position to produce the appearance you wish of yourself for the other party to see. You wouldn't want them to see only your belt buckle or the ceiling of the room.

In the several calls made to our son in New York, the quality of both voice and image was excellent. He says that calls between him and others have not been so good. The obvious culprit for that poor quality is a less than optimal wireless connection. Finally, you don't have to use the iPad's front camera during such calls. You can switch to the back camera. Then you could walk around wherever you are showing your phone partner what your surroundings look like. It is really quite powerful technology and doesn't bode well for the phone companies' bottom line. Of course, my phone company is the one providing the broadband connection, so they are still not locked out of the income picture.

Screen
The screen on the iPad is beautiful and measures 19.7 cm x 14.8 cm. That is an area of 291.56 sq cm. The screen on the Fire, is adequate and measures 15.4 cm x 9.0 cm, equaling an area of 138.6 sq cm. So, the iPad2 has a screen area more than twice that of the Fire. But it costs 2.5 times as much as the Fire, and most of that extra cost is probably tied up in the screenF

Web Browsing
Both devices allow you to browse the web as you would on your computer. However, both have some shortcomings. For the iPad, it is the inability to display Flash. The Fire will display flash content, but it and the iPad both will not display Silverlight content (of which I have made extensive use at my personal web site). The iPad reacts more quickly to your finger taps on buttons or links on web pages. In fact, I have found the Fire to sometimes not respond or respond sluggishly to taps not only on buttons or links on web pages but also to buttons on the screen in general.

Particularly bad for me is the fact that the Fire does not like the way I stream the PDF versions of our newsletters at the TPCUG web site. The document is downloaded, but when you try to open it with the Adobe Reader provided with the Fire, you get an error message to the effect that it is not a valid PDF file. On the iPad 2, our PDF newsletters open beautifully inside the Safari browser. Perhaps I need to change the streaming method to simple links to be clicked on, since the Fire downloads the PDF files fine from such a link. Note, however, that the Fire does not display the PDF file from within the browser. It downloads it, and after the download you need to start the Adobe Reader app yourself to view the downloaded file.

Connecting to your computer
For a Windows computer, forget connecting the iPad. It doesn't work. I suppose Windows knows nothing about the file system on the device. When you connect the Fire to your computer using the USB cable that is also used to charge the Fire, you can view a collection a of folders on the Fire with names that include Download, Music and Pictures. To copy some photos from your computer to the Fire, you simply drag them from wherever they are on your Windows computer to the Pictures folder on the Fire. The Fire has an app named Gallery for viewing photos.

For music, or sound, in general, on both devices you can listen through the built-in speakers or through a headset.

Movies
The largest plus for the Fire to me is that viewing movies and TV shows available on Amazon Prime or Amazon Video on Demand is built into the device where you simply click on the Video button. To the best of my knowledge, you cannot access Amazon media from the iPad. Both the iPad and the Fire have Netflix apps.

Apps
No doubt, the iPad has far more apps available. (Of course, the Fire was just released.) So if you want to play games, then I suppose the Fire is not your best choice.

WIDE OPEN SPACES

By Michael Hutchison, Tampa PC Users Group
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Many years ago at a TPCUG meeting held at the old Pepin Hospitality Room (56th St.), I purchased SecureClean put out by White Canyon Software. One of their reps came and gave a presentation and then offered their software to the members at a user group rate. SecureClean came with two other apps on separate CDs. One was WipeDrive, which was to be used to completely erase/clean a drive for situations when you are discarding a computer or donating one to some charity or person. The other was MediaWiper for cleaning floppies, I think. I never used either of these two programs. However, I have gotten a lot of use out of SecureClean.

In recent time, I used SecureClean in a sort of ad hoc conjunction with Windows Disk Cleaner. Whenever I noticed that my hard disk space on the C: drive was getting low, I would run one or the other, Disk Cleaner or SecureClean, first and then the second application, and in a couple of iterations my hard disk space would be back at a reasonable percentage. That worked well enough so that no future problem was on the radar. As time passed, though, it seemed to take more cycles of the two programs to achieve the desired result. Of course, during this time, anti-virus programs were changed from Kaspersky to AVG and back to Kaspersky. Endless updates of virus definitions were done, and digital photos piled up somewhat. Finally it got to a point where my hard disk space was going down, and no amount of running the two programs, Disk Cleaner and SecureClean, in either Quick Clean or Thorough mode, was helping. I called White Canyon and the rep said he would email a coupon for a 50% discount on an update to SecureClean5. I received two emails from them and there was indeed a "coupon" and a link to their support center - http://support.whitecanyon.com/

I figured it was time to update. However, while doing some research online, a Google search came up with Sdelete, which does the same job for free and was released in September of this year. I downloaded the Zip file, scanned it for virus, unzipped the program and ran it. First run retrieved about half a GB.

A couple words about the Sdelete file or utility that I downloaded: It is v1.6 and written by Mark Russinovich from SysIntervals, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Microsoft. Sdelete is a command line utility which takes

several options. I used the -c switch on the first run, which is supposed to clean free space. I noticed that, as I got near to 100%, I started getting a little pop-up from the SysTray area telling me that I was getting very low on hard disk space. Well, that's how we got here in the first place. I also thought it was interesting that I got to 106% disk-space cleaning before it quit.

According to the utility documentation supplied at http://technet.microsoft.com/en us/sysinternals/bb897443, the utility indirectly overwrites free space. This is as opposed to opening the disk for raw access and overwriting files, which runs the risk of collision with other applications' active file operations. I take this to mean Windows internal system operations.

In short, I was pleased to be able to reclaim some of my hard drive space and will now consider uninstalling SecureClean rather than update it. I will also run the little command line Sdelete utility (download was 81 kb) with more passes and different switches to see if it will get me any more room back. ◆

Minutes....Continued from page 2

other things on a regular laptop in which a user might be interested. Unfortunately, that installation was having problems identifying some of the hardware components such as the touchpad and networking, so he abandoned that and installed the latest Ubuntu Linux OS and Chrome, and this was a resounding success. He proved that, if you had an older notebook and an old Windows operating system, the Ubuntu/Chrome combination might be a good way to put some life back into the old notebook. It's fast, operates on very little installed memory – unlike Win 7 – boots quickly and has very few updates/virus problems.

Ultimately it made sense in his case to try doing Chromey things on Windows 7. His notebook runs Windows 7 well, and it proves that the Chrome experience can be about the same. The Chromebook has some advantages like light weight and a simplified experience from a maintenance standpoint and boots very fast.

The Linux/Chrome notebook option might be good if it's something you already own, needs a new life, and the Windows 7/Chrome version has the advantage of versatility along with much more complexity. ◆

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of course, many vendors. Amazon and B&H Photo Video are two that I have used often. (If you buy from Amazon, don't forget to go through our site.) We have many local vendors, including North Tampa Photograph who can provide expert advice. I've included one more link below that I think you will find extremely helpful. It explains things about memory cards, sensors, LCD quality and lots more that you may have not considered. Look in the "Point-and-shoot camera features" paragraph: http://www.macworld.com/article/137117/2011/11/buyingguide_cameras.html. ◆

Conclusion

If money is a concern and if you want Amazon Video, then the Fire is obviously for you. It also has a built-in Kindle reader. However, you can read Kindle content on the iPad, and the iPad has a nicer screen and a better user experience in general, so if you have $500 or more, go for the iPad 2. ◆

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