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Meeting

Blain Barton

on

Windows Azure Backup

Wednesday, August 14, 2013

6:30 PM

Pepin Distributing Co.

4121 N 50th Street

Tampa, Florida

Meeting Preview: Blain Barton of Microsoft will be our speaker, and his topic will be Windows Azure Backup Bob Lafave will have the usual Windows SIG for the first 30 minutes.

Editor's Comments

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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Merle Nicholson and Brian Lance have come through for us again with interesting articles. Otherwise, you would have been left with my ramblings. Those would probably have been about my newest Windows Store application, Drug Data, where I provide easily accessible information about the drugs in the FDA's list of prescription and nonprescription drugs.

Then there is the site I discovered with old newspapers. A number of years back I found a Google site for searching old newspapers and retrieved quite a few articles about the land boom of the 1920s in my home town area of south Florida. But for some reason Google disbanded the site, as they are wont to do with some of their projects. The articles I collected are at <http://www.lamartin.com/OldNewspaperArticles.aspx>.

The new site I have found, <http://www.genealogybank.com>, is not free, but has, I think, a much wider selection of papers

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September Meeting: To be announced

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Minutes of the July Meeting

*By Merle Nicholson, Secretary,
Tampa PC Users Group
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The Windows Special Interest Group (SIG) opens our monthly meeting. 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 month Bob covered a wide variety of PC subjects.

This month the program was presented by myself, Merle Nicholson. It was a continuation of the April 10 meeting where I started a discussion of GPS, the use of time to determine a person's longitude on the planet. This month I expanded the notion of time zones, and how to determine where you are in the time zone, some history of timekeeping. Also throwing in some examples of timepieces, American space travel and animal training.

Our gratitude is extended to Pepin for providing the room, projector and the presentation materials for the meeting. There were no announcements made due to president John Witmer's absence. ◆

Comments.....Continued from page 1

than did the Google archive. Importantly to me in my searching, it has the *Miami Herald*, the *Tampa Tribune*, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* and the *Baton Rouge Advocate*. And the dates covered go quite far back, in some cases, from the 1800s up to the 1980s. The site has all *Tampa Tribune* issues, I think, from 1895 to 1959. The *Times-Picayune* runs from 1837 through 1988.

All of this is a phenomenal resource, and it is at your fingertips for \$70/year. I think there is also a free trial offer. ◆

Building a Portable Office

By Brian Lance, Tampa PC Users Group
master.pc.tech@gmail.com

Have a spare USB drive? Of course you do. Even a 2GB drive can be a useful tool if you ever need to run a program on another computer. This simple guide can show you how. The first place to start is one of the most popular sites for portable applications:

www.portableapps.com The PortableApps platform can get you a fine list of portable applications. You can select all the programs you want upon installation, or add/remove at any time. I list the programs' home pages so you can check what you might want and get more info about them.

www.winpenpack.com Gives three pre-selected lists of applications to install portably.

www.portablefreeware.com Another, more extensive list of portable applications. Portablefreeware even has a complete list of Program Launchers for launching your own list of applications.

There can be the temptation to install every application you find. I don't recommend this. Your list should have two or three of any one type, at most. You'll want your menus simple so you can quickly find just the application you need and get to work.

Some of the more useful applications I've used:

TrueCrypt, www.truecrypt.org In my opinion, the best encryption software available. Its many advantages include open source code, speed optimizations, portability, hidden volume and even hidden operating system capabilities. You can use files or executables from an encrypted volume with almost no lag on modern systems, and the volumes can be located on any writable device.

There is some learning curve to proper use of encryption software, and the site has solid direction on this. It's very important to get an idea of how large a stor-

age area you will need per volume ahead of time, I recommend no more than half of the drive or partition the volume will be stored on. Dynamic ("sparse") volumes that grow as you use them are not recommended.

KeePass, www.keepass.info For password storage (vs. file storage), I recommend KeePass. Also a very solid, open source program. It was recently updated with browser integration and many other improvements.

IrfanView, www.irfanview.com "...one of the most popular viewers worldwide!" There is no doubt about this! Very easy to use, just jump right in and browse a list of your favorite images. Offers many options for file-handling and thumbnail-previewing. Supports dozens of formats. Note there is a separate plug-ins pack if you need the more esoteric camera formats. If you have different types of non-image files in the same folders, I recommend you disable Irfan from previewing audio/video formats. Use MPC for those.

MPC-HC (formerly Media Player Classic), www.mpc-hc.org For all your video and audio needs. Plays back all major formats and will run on anything built in the last decade.

Greenshot, www.getgreenshot.org Better than many commercial programs for screen shots, I found new features while researching this article.

AbiWord, **OpenOffice**, <http://abisource.com/> and <http://www.openoffice.org> Both useful, but keep in mind that if you import MS Office documents, the format may change on import even if you just enter data into a form. This is especially true for office documents edited in Google Drive.

So, jump on the Microsoft bandwagon, get a Live address at www.live.com and edit Word like a pro. One useful Live feature is the ability to log in with a one-time password sent to your cell, avoiding the need to expose your password while on an unknown network or device.

Your own browser can be one of the most useful items

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Random Computer Ramblings

By Merle Nicholson, Secretary,
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I'll summarize my ramblings first, and you can use them to decide if you want to read further:

- Windows 8 and Touchscreens
- Windows 8.1 Preview
- Multi-Tasking – the computer kind
- A new notebook checklist
- Notes on Operating Systems

Windows 8 and Touchscreens

I know, you have heard this before from me, probably monthly. There are many, many new computers on the market without touchscreens. Virtually all have Windows 8. This is a big mistake. I had a call from a friend who bought a new Acer notebook in Indianapolis and had to return it. She said she “hated Windows 8,” and “hated Acer notebooks.” Well, yeah. No touchscreen. She trusted Microsoft, Office Depot and Acer to sell her a functional notebook and found that they have violated her trust. I've noticed even Office Depot, whom I generally trust, is listing some of their notebook models as having “Windows.” Not Windows 7 or Windows 8. That's deceptive. Yes, you can run Windows 8 with a mouse only, but it's so much trouble you'll be looking for a solution. There are free good quality products out there designed to make Windows 8 operate like Windows 7, but it's some work and a lot of experimentation. You'll be looking for an experienced friend to help you. I have done it, I think, pretty satisfactorily, but it was a lot of work and research.

You can order new computers online with Windows 7 for some time to come – directly from the manufacturers. They are usually “Business Computers” or “Home/office”. This is because the corporate world is not about to switch to Windows 8 for many years. They have just barely transitioned from XP to Windows 7.

An alternative is to install Windows 7 over the Windows 8 operating system. This is generally a \$140 “downgrade,” but there's a lot of technical work to be done if you have the ability. The Windows 8 Pro version license can be converted to Windows 7 Pro version at no cost. But you cannot upgrade a Windows 8 Home version to Windows 8 Pro to make that work. Personally, I would not hesitate to downgrade, but first you must find out if all necessary

hardware-specific drivers are available from the manufacturer's website and download them.

Last, there are always people speculating that Microsoft will “fix” Windows 8. But I think most professional industry writers are saying that it won't happen. They may make some improvements over time, but they will stick to the current theme. I think they see themselves as social innovators and are willing to bet that computers will follow the trend of tablets and go to touch and also that users are interested in running only one program at a time. At the same time, their Microsoft Phone, Microsoft Surface and Surface RT devices are just not selling well. Microsoft has the resources to stick it out, and probably will.

Windows 8.1 Preview

If you have Windows 8, you'll want to install 8.1 when it comes out, NOT the 8.1 preview. There are some good reviews out there to read in advance. If you're hoping for a return of the menu system though, it isn't going to happen. There are some important changes like allowing you to window four running applications on each screen at a time, sizeable. The current Version 8 is limited to two apps and is not sizeable. There is a new option to boot to the desktop, but the menu is still the “modern” tile screen. That screen has some real improvements in organization, but if you're like me, you will find it wanting.

Multi-Tasking of the computer kind

It's a popular idea now that a person can claim to be multi-tasking, and of course it's completely delusional if you give it some serious thought. If a human brain can multi-task there wouldn't be vehicle collisions while using a cellphone, or stubbing your toe on the table leg. It isn't lack of attention, it's just more things than you can process. The human brain can, however, TASK-SWITCH fairly well. That is – when the demand appears (an “interrupt” in computer terms), the brain can put the current task aside and switch to one being held in near-term memory. Like remembering to put gas in the car while putting on your pants to go to work. Or watching tennis while writing a newsletter article.

It is interesting, though, that there is a set of redundant pathways from your eye receptors to your brain. The more primitive pathway bypasses that part of the brain that processes images and instead provides a survival alarm. Every driver has been amazed that he had the ability to slam on the brakes to just avoid a collision at the same time knowing his eyes (and his brain) were focused elsewhere.

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Internet Picture of the Month

TAMPA MORNING TRIBUNE, MONDAY, APRIL 19, 1926 PAGE 9-B

Jobbers and Manufacturers of Tampa

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Manufacturers of the "Waterproof" Alligator Motor

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General Electric Company
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Tampa Morning Tribune, April 19, 1926, Page 9B

From the newspaper archive at <http://www.genealogybank.com>.

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August's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

- Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)
- Florida Memory - Collections
- North American Birds Photo Gallery
- Software Protection Initiative
- GenealogyBank.com

- <http://www.tpcug.org/>
- <http://www.floridamemory.com/collections/>
- <http://www.birdphotography.com/>
- <http://www.spi.dod.mil/lipose.htm>
- <http://www.genealogybank.com>

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It wasn't luck and it wasn't experience. It is a primitive physical survival ability. In computer terms, it's task-switching.

A computer has hundreds of processes going on simultaneously. You can find out how many in Windows Task Manager. Look at the number of "threads." A thread is a part of a process, and each is independent. A process can have one or hundreds of threads. A process typically launches threads and allows each either to complete independently or to wait until each is finished because it needs to aggregate the results of many threads. Multi-threaded applications are written so that the operating system decides what processor runs each thread so that the threads can be run simultaneously on several processors.

So if you have one processor in your computer's CPU, it has to do a lot of task-switching because it does only one thing at a time, very fast. Each Task, Process and Thread is held in memory and is serviced in its turn. Obviously if you have more than one processor in your CPU, it can, overall, complete more threads simultaneously. That's mostly true. So if you're comparing computers you would conclude that a quad-core computer is better than a dual-core (probably, maybe), and an Octal-core is better than a Hex-core (possibly, probably not). And an Intel i7 is better than an Intel i5 (probably not). So here's the CPU skinny according

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to Merle.

A dual-core or quad-core processor is about right for most everyone. A single-core CPU may be disappointing because it has to do a few hundred tasks (like antivirus and firewall) while simultaneously paying attention to your needs. Let's throw the single-core processor out.

There are a lot of new computers out there with old processor technology, and those are to be avoided. Specifically Pentium, Duo Core, Core 2 Duo, Athlon, Athlon II, Sempron, Celeron should not be on the market at all, but they are.

An Intel i7, by the way, demands a price premium because it's "hyperthread" capable. A hyperthread in this case means that each processor can do two threads at the same time. So if you have a quad-core i7, look at the Task Manager performance tab and you'll see eight "CPUs." For the most part, as you monitor it, whenever anything significant happens on your computer, you'll see that most of the processors are idle. Worse, if you have an intensive application like Access you'll see only one of the eight processors servicing that demand and the remainder will be idle. This is because Access, like most applications, is "single threaded." So trying to get the maximum performance out of a quad-core i7 CPU, you'll be disappointed to learn that you're restricted to one-eighth of the CPU. That's 12.5%. Yes, antivirus and firewall, keyboard, display and USB devices; all that are running, taking another 4%. In my opinion, skip the i7 and get an i5, save the money. What's more, unless you have software that demands multi-threading (high-end graphics rendering, motion picture processing), let's throw out hex and eight-core processors. I was surprised to find out that AutoCad, a very expensive, high-end 3D complex drawing program that has no peer, costs thousands, is single threaded. I disabled hyperthreading on that client's computer. I'm now expecting my client's AutoCad to use 25% of the computer instead of 12.5%.

Don't be afraid of AMD processors. The "A" series, A4, A6, A8 and A10 all have the GPU (graphics processor) built in (as do Intel I3 and i5), integrated in the CPU – called APU. AMD's APUs though, have superior graphics. In general, if you're looking at notebooks, the Intel processors have better (lower) power requirements, and AMD's better graphics. That's not to say AMD's APUs are especially bad, power usage wise, unless a notebook's battery life is important to you.

When you're considering a computer, get the CPU model number from the specifications and look it up on the Internet. I use a website called Passmark Benchmark. <http://www.cpubenchmark.net/>. It gives you a relative performance number (Passmark) and gives you a cost/performance graph and a comparison to currently popular CPUs. For a notebook computer with normal low demand (Internet, word processing, email) and no need for demanding graphics (games), look for a CPU with two or four processors and an operating frequency of 2.2GHz and higher, not less than 1.8GHz. For Intel that will be an i3 or i5. A desktop processor is different. You can get more processing power for less money. Look for a quad processor with at least 2.5GHz, and compare to those with 3.2GHz. You may find more power for very little extra cost. Why is there a difference between Desktop and Notebook processors? CPU cooling and battery drain. Notebooks are a necessary compromise especially in cooling systems, so they tend to have lower power CPUs. Less cooling and less battery demand.

You have to be careful in comparing benchmark numbers. Usually sites like CNET Reviews will do a series of different benchmarks that may or may be relevant to your own usage. So pick and choose the performance benchmark that aligns to your own usage. The Passmark mentioned above is a good indicator of relative total power. But that benchmark powers all available processors 100% at the same time. This never happens in real life. I use these numbers to determine cost to performance. To decide if the cost of a processor is worth the money or not.

Buying a new notebook – a checklist

If you're in the market for a new notebook and want to make the right selection, you have some real work ahead of you. I hope the checklist I use will be some help to you. In any case, when you have a candidate, be sure to get on the Internet and read all reviews available for that model. Read both the professional reviews and the actual purchaser reviews. I use mostly CNET professional reviews and then the user reviews on Amazon and NewEgg. If there are some low-rated user reviews, be sure to read those. You may find out that it's rated low because it did not meet the user's expectations for delivery or something that does not pertain to you. On the other hand, low ratings sometimes make you consider something important that had not occurred to you.

Here – in my opinion – is the only way to make a well-considered decision when you're buying a new notebook computer. The ORDER of decisions is very important

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because it will save you time.

1) Operating system Choices are - Windows 8, Windows 7, OSX (Apple), ChromeBook and Linux (Ubuntu and Chromium OS). Windows 8 REQUIRES a touch-screen. Chromebook is a very viable option because of its low cost and low power requirements.

2) Screen size 11, 13, 14, 15.3, 16 (rare) and 17 sizes are normal. The screen size is very important. It's a deciding factor in portability, weight and battery life. You should go to a store like Best Buy, ignore the prices and brands and look only at screen size, try out each one and make this decision number 2.

3) Battery rundown time This is at the top because it's so closely tied to the screen size. Generally, the smaller the size, the longer the battery run time. This is because the screen is the biggest power consumer. If it never leaves the desktop or is always near a plug, the decision is easier. Look at the specs on all notebooks under consideration and go to professional reviews.

4) Hard drive Choices are – SSD, SSD/HD combo, Hybrid and HD. Fortunately, traditional mechanical drives are becoming rare except in the cheapest notebooks. SSDs are affordable, especially in the small 128/256GB size. Hybrid SSD/Disk are common now as is the SSD and HD combination that Intel is building into Intel chipsets. Make SURE you know what your actual hard drive size requirements are. It's probably much lower than you think. The Windows 7 notebook computer I'm typing on now uses 53GB out of 119GB SSD total. Obviously I wouldn't spend a dime on a 500GB hard drive. The consumer of hard drive space is music and videos and game software. I have no need for storing videos, and my whole collection of music CD's will fit on a 4G flashdrive. Consider flashdrives. You will never regret buying an SSD system.

5) Features:

Bluetooth There is NO excuse for building a computer with no Bluetooth. It's cheap and makes connections to your phone, cameras, speakers, headsets and remote controls. Yet you'll see many on the market without.

Backlit keyboard This is a very valuable feature unless you're an accomplished touch typist. If you need to watch your fingers, you'll love backlit keys.

Camera Skype & Google hangouts.

Fingerprint reader This technology seems to be not fully developed yet. I've never heard anyone say "I

LOVE my fingerprint reader."

CD/DVD/BD This is becoming less common. My current notebook has none, and I haven't missed it one bit. I still have my household network and flashdrives. But I don't play games and I don't play DVD movies. I did (Once) make an ISO file of a software DVD and put it on a flash drive.

USB 3 The combination of a USB 3 port and a USB 3-speed flashdrive is just amazing. It's faster than a mechanical hard drive and an order of magnitude faster than USB 2.

USB ports I look for at least one USB port on the right hand edge for a USB mouse. My personal preference would be three total including at least one USB 3. The thinner, lighter notebooks may not have three.

SD card port With WiFi and Bluetooth available for camera and phone connections, I've lost interest in card ports. For your particular camera it may be a necessity. But don't forget \$8 USB adapters.

Notes on Operating Systems

By that I mean Windows, MAC or Chromebook. This decision is pretty much independent of the hardware. It's based though on your personal experience with the kind of software you use. If you find you're doing Internet browser, email, IM and word processing, you may want to consider Chromebook for its simplicity and low cost. If you have specific applications in Windows right now, the decision is already made.

I have a relative who became entranced with a MacBook Air, an expensive, beautifully made slim notebook. He took the salesperson's word that his Windows-only case management software will run just fine, and two years later it still would not work and he finally gave it up. He had better than \$2,000 in it by then. A seriously technical person probably could have managed it. The upshot of this was that he had to own two notebooks. This is a good example of a compromise computer that uses a very weak processor because of the room for a CPU cooling system and limited battery space. The battery is actually glued in place and is not owner serviceable. But it's a gorgeous little computer.

Once the OS is selected, and if that OS is Windows, and it is for 91% of all computer users, then you have to decide if it's Windows 7 or Windows 8. ♦

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to take on the road with you, with your own bookmarks, preferences, and saved passwords.

Chrome, Firefox, Opera - whichever browser you like, all portable. There are also more minor variants that are portable, but I recommend you use major recognized ones. Many, but not all of these have been tested under Windows 8.

I recommend grabbing a **Program Launcher** and just having fun with it. Try it out on your own PCs first. I think you'll find many uses for these utilities, some being lighter and more configurable than their standard installed, licensed counterparts.

One last note: The launchers and many of the utilities are open source projects and can certainly use any financial help you care to give. ◆

