Bits of Blue

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Meeting

William LaMartin

on

More Windows 8

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Meeting Preview: William LaMartin will cover the latest in Windows 8 and his applications. 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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Thanks to Merle Nicholson and Ron Weinberg for providing articles this month, but they came short of filling the newsletter, so I suppose I will have to write something. Merle sometimes writes quite long articles, but we can't expect that on a regular basis.

Since no outside speakers were found this month despite the best efforts of Doug Mullis, our program coordinator, I volunteered to talk on Windows 8 and the applications I have written for it. I gave a similar talk to the group in November of 2012. I know a lot more about Windows 8 now than I did then and have more applications, and, besides, you have probably forgotten what I said then anyway.

Windows 8 has turned out to be a controversial operating system with many detractors and few supporters in the computing press. Let me declare myself to be a supporter, but one who understands much of why there are so many detractors.

When I learned I was to do this presentation, I thought there was a good chance that Windows 8.1, the reworked version of Windows 8, would be available to me. But that is not the case. There is a Beta

October Meeting: Steve Singer on new hardware

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Minutes of the August Meeting

By Merle Nicholson, Secretary,
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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 and handled member questions, IE not playing video and ActiveX filtering in IE Tools and compatibility mode. Ransomware and NSA phone monitoring were discussed as well.

This month's program was presented by Microsoft's Blain Barton. Blain is continuing his presentation of Microsoft Azure. The subjects were very wide ranging: Azure recovery services, Certificates, private and public. A private certificate in this case is a pairing of you and Azure and a public certificate is you, Azure and the Internet. Backup Vault was shown. Blain went into "Blain Barton Blogs" using certificate. For Backup there are menu items: Server backup and local backup to server, register server and schedule the backup. There is an Azure simple store for simple file storage.

His advice, when starting up your new account, be sure to create the storage using a friendly name yourself first. It apparently cannot be corrected after storing a file. Blain then showed us Windows Azure Backup, creating a new website and creating a WordPress website. Blain is an entertaining and informative speaker. Our thanks to Blain for a very good presentation.

Our gratitude goes to Pepin Distributors, Inc. for providing the meeting room, projector, coffee and water for the meeting. ◆

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version of Windows 8.1 out there, but not the final release to manufacturing version (RTM) that I would feel comfortable in installing. The RTM version has been given to the hardware makers but not to developers such as myself, unlike when previous new versions of an operating system were made available. So the developers will have to wait until sometime in October just like the general public. But the original release of Windows 8 that I have will prove quite sufficient for me to explain the operating system to you, pointing out why so many tech writers hate it and why I and other users don't really have a problem with it. ◆

Preserve Those Vital Contacts

By Ron Weinberg, Member at Large,
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Those of us who are serious computer users well know the necessity and value of adequate backups. Some of the most common, valuable and essential data we have is our Email Address Book or Contact List.

I often assist others who have malfunctions or other computer problems. Far too many do not have adequate backups. Most do not even know how to backup properly.

Regardless of the complete backups you may have, I recommend that everyone keep a separate backup copy of their contacts by exporting them to a .csv file. However, Microsoft has not provided any way to export email contact Groups (categories). If you export all contacts, Groups are always lost.

Recently, I aided someone whose Vista system was completely dead without any power. Due to the age and quality of the system, over 5 years and only a basic model, they decided to purchase a new computer (iMac) rather than repair the source of the problem, which was probably the power supply. Their backup included only a few personal documents on a flash drive.

I removed the hard drive and was able to reclaim all of their data and photos using my Sabrent USB to SATA/IDE Hard Drive Adapter. I recovered a Contacts file containing email addresses wherein each record has the .contact extension.

A file with the .contact file extension is a Windows Vista or Windows 7 Contact file. These files are not readily utilized by other programs. Unless you have the same program on the new systems as the old (e.g. Vista to Vista or to Windows 7) or you use Windows Easy Transfer Wizard or an equivalent, .contact records are useless. How these were translated is described later in this article.

Of many available formats, the standard for transferring address files or contacts in all email programs is universally to import .csv. Restoring even from the best of backups to a different email program or operating system may present problems if you do not have a copy of your file in .csv format.

It should be noted that online programs like Outlook (Hotmail), Gmail, Yahoo, etc. may also have copies of your addresses which could be recovered only if the addresses have been properly transferred in.

Here is how I made the recovered file of contacts usable in any email program by using Windows Live Mail, without purchasing a third party converter.

1. Save your personal original contacts by exporting to a .csv file.
2. a. Delete all contacts in your Windows Live Mail (must be online to Hotmail online account).
   b. Highlight the first record of the .contacts file and press shift and highlight the last record.
   c. This will select all. Use the delete option from top or by right click. This removes all existing records.
3. Check the properties of the folder containing new contact records for number of records.
4. Open that folder containing the .contact records
5. Highlight the first record, press shift and highlight the last record. This will select all.
6. a. Use Open With command to open Windows Live Mail.
   b. A box will appear with one record. Click OK and box will appear for next record
7. Add one click for each record and the result will be a complete new file with the correct number of records.
8. When complete, export this new file in .csv format.
9. Delete this new file retaining the exported file.
10. Import to reinstall your original saved contacts.

The exported file is now available for any email program. ◆
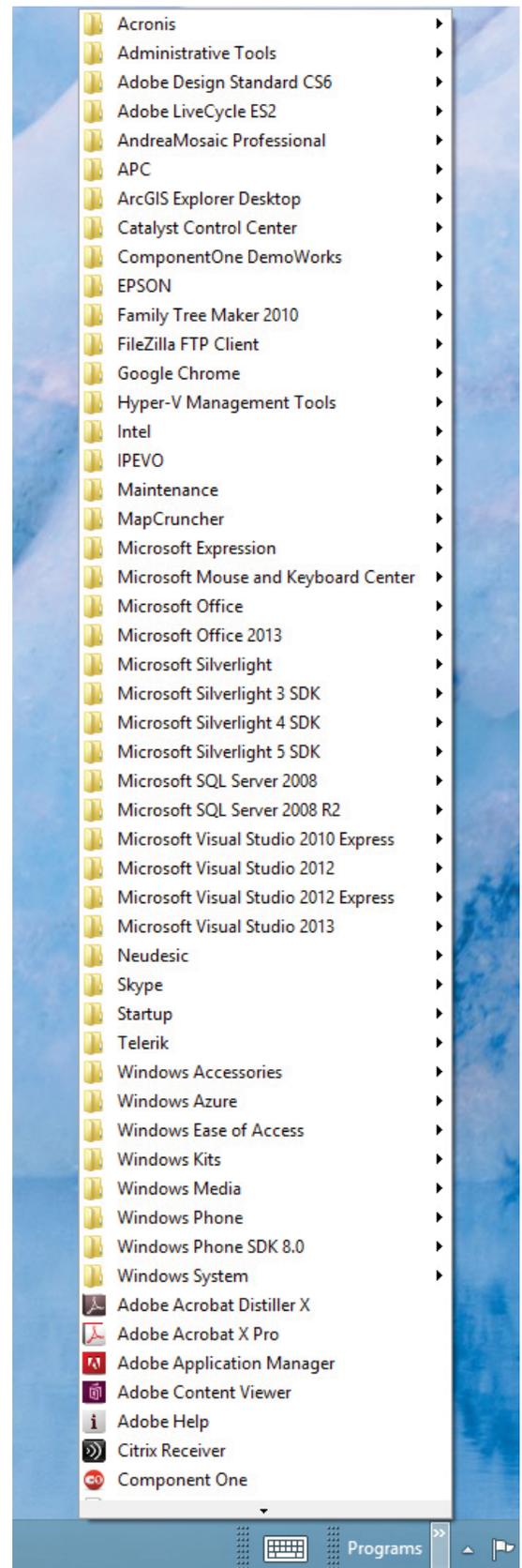
Windows 8 Is Not That Bad

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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I have written about Windows 8 in previous editions of this newsletter. Even though I had not used it, I also wrote about Windows 8.1 in the July 2013 newsletter based on what I had viewed online of the presentations regarding it at Microsoft Build. And there have been various Windows 8 items inside other articles going back into 2012. Since you will be hard pressed to find another positive article on Windows 8 (or Microsoft for that matter), let me have a try at it.

First off, you should realize that professional writers have to write something to make a living – even if they don't really have a firm grasp on the subject at hand. I think that is why there are so many negative articles out there about Windows 8. They take a quick tour of Windows 8, they read other negative articles that resulted from a quick tour, and then they produce their variation on the "Why Windows 8 is a Disaster" theme.

I have used Windows 8 since it first came out, first on my main laptop in a Virtual Machine setup, then in a much better dual boot setup. The laptop does not have a touch screen. I also had Merle Nicholson build me a new desktop computer with a touch screen monitor specifically for Windows 8. I use both my Windows 7 desktop and Windows 8 desktop computer almost every day. I have essentially every program of importance to me that is installed on my Windows 7 desktop computer also installed on my Windows 8 desktop computer. I do not find it any more difficult to use Microsoft Word, Excel or Access in Windows 8 than in Windows 7. The same is true for all my Adobe products: Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign and Acrobat. And I could go down the list of Windows Desktop programs that are installed on both my desktop computers. But there is no need. To the right is a screen capture of the program list on my Windows 8 desktop computer. Looks like a pretty good Start Button-produced list to me, the Start Button being that small rectangle at the bottom to the right of "Programs." It is nothing other than an added Toolbar. Such a Toolbar is easily added, and if that is not enough for you there are all sorts of other ways to add a Start Button for Windows 8 out there. Merle has written about them in previous newsletters.

So what is the problem with Windows 8? I think that fact that

Internet Picture of the Month

The new San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge
From http://www.flickr.com and the photostream of Wayne Tilock, where there are some beautiful photos, http://www.flickr.com/photos/42105057@N02/with/9607125817/

Windows..........Continued from page 4

it is really two operating systems in one. What I have just shown a Start Button list for is the Desktop part which, I believe, is essentially Windows 7. It is where you go to run the traditional Windows Desktop applications like Word, Excel, Photoshop, Quicken and Family Tree Maker. This is not the app world. It

is the world for what we call programs. And most programs there still function better with a mouse and keyboard and have no real need for touch. Of course, you can use touch to manipulate them. It may just be difficult sometimes if the thing you want to touch is not all that large.

September's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)	http://www.tpcug.org/
The Official Microsoft Blog	http://blogs.technet.com/b/microsoft_blog/
The Next Web (Technology News)	http://thenextweb.com/
Nixon White House Tapes Collection	http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/collections.php

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Then there is the other part of the operating system – the app world, or whatever you want to call it. It is the world of colorful tiles that you are supposed to touch with your fingers and which when touched will start a program that does something just as a traditional Windows program would do; however, all aspects of the program can be manipulated by touch. In reality these apps are more appropriate to a tablet situation than a desktop computer or even a laptop with only a keyboard. Think playing games, browsing the web and doing simple email. I cannot imagine composing this newsletter in a Windows Store application (that is what programs than run in the tiled part of Windows 8 are called at present, or simply apps). Or doing anything serious with Excel or even Word.

So, what is so hard about all this. You start up your new Windows 8 device, and you are presented with a Start Screen of tiles representing many of the apps or programs on your device. And to the lower left is a tile that when tapped will bring up the standard Windows desktop (without the beloved Start Button). On the Start Screen, by the appropriate finger gesture, you may also display smaller tiles in alphabetical order for all the apps on your device - including any Windows desktop programs. Apparently in Windows 8.1 this is all going to be made easier. However, from what I have read no one thinks it will be easy enough, and nothing will suffice until Microsoft gives us back our Start Button.

Well, I have news for you. I don't think you are going to see a Start Button any more than you are going to see a DOS prompt when your computer boots. Times change, and if a company does not adapt, they may be left behind. In recent years, Blackberry failed to notice that smart phone users preferred a touch screen phone to one with a keyboard. Blackberry, once the most popular such phone is now an also ran. Going further back, the number one word processing program, WordPerfect, was slow to move from a DOS version to a Windows version. They subsequently essentially disappeared. Microsoft does not have to worry about disappearing from its enterprise products like SQLServer and Azure, but for its consumer products like Windows on desktop computers, where

are they if people continue to migrate to tablets such as the iPad, not using Windows to do their email, web browsing and social media? That is why they need a tablet-oriented operating system. And, fortunately or unfortunately, they chose to offer it in conjunction with a new version of their desktop operating system. Having said what I have, I will concede that Microsoft probably should have made a built-in way for people who cannot tolerate too much change to have a Microsoft-supplied Start Button. I earlier displayed one I made for the Windows desktop programs, but I think the desire is for one that would have both desktop programs and the new apps in one vertical popup list – not the alphabetical collection of small tiles as now exists.

There is also a method in the supposed madness for a tiled interface for everything except the traditional desktop applications. It is to have a standard interface across three types of devices: Windows phones, Windows tablets and Window 8 on a desktop computer (the tiled Windows Store part - not the standard desktop applications part). With this common interface, the programmer can write code that will work on all three platforms by creating something called a Portable Class Library. That does not mean that the programmer can write a Windows Phone app and immediately turn it into an app for a Windows tablet, but it does mean that he or she may create a block of code that does something in a phone application that is easily reused in a Windows tablet or Windows store application by simply importing the code library (DLL) that contains that code. It can be a great time saver.

In summation, I suggest that change is often difficult. I recall many years ago the difficulty for myself in changing from programming in Basic to programming in Visual Basic, then the change to also programming in Delphi, since the syntax was so different. Then I made the change to Visual Basic.Net and finally to C#.Net. All of these changes required an adjustment but all had rewards.

But we must change. Or we would still be using DOS without even a mouse. Of course, there are people who would be completely happy with that. ◆

ChromeCast by Google

By Merle Nicholson, Secretary,
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ChromeCast by Google is a little device that allows you to play Netflix video streaming, YouTube and "Google Play Movies" on your TV. It must use a remote control device; there are no on-screen controls. That remote device, however, is a PC, Phone or Tablet.

The list of video sources is limited. But it's only $35. Google promises to expand the offerings. I'm happy with the limited functions, because it's only $35. My wishlist would be Amazon Prime Movies and ESPN3.

Did I mention that it's only $35, and for what it does, it works very well? In the first picture, it's not real clear, but on the business end there's a standard HDMI connector, and on the other, a power port. You must have a wireless network in range and an outlet for the power cube. It has a built-in wireless network receiver.

TV – must have an unused HDMI input and a means of quickly switching between them. Most flat screen TVs have two or more, but be careful that you have one unused. In my case I use only one, and I have four on my receiver. One is unused, so I am in business. I use a programmable remote, so I added a control item that will switch to that HDMI port.

Wireless Network. The Chromecast has a wireless receiver for 802.11g/n. My Verizon router recently expired, and the replacement router has Wireless-n instead of g. If I had known that, it may have expired sooner.

Power. You must have an available outlet for the power cube. The ChromeCast device does not have a battery, so it works only when powered. There is no on/off switch. I have a UPS next to my media center for things I don't want to drop out, like the set-top box and the media center computer.

Unboxing. So first, unbox it - In the photo on the left, working from left to right; the power cord; an HDMI M/F extension cable; the small power cube and on the right – the ChromeCast.

Connecting is simple. Thanks to the included extension cable I just plugged the ChromeCast into the extension cable, and the cable into the HDMI port on the receiver. Note that the base of the ChromeCast is wide and probably won't insert without the extension cable if there is another port next to it. Then the power cable and the power cube. That's it. Switch on the TV and select that port. There's a screen on the TV that prompts you to use the ChromeCast app to make the wireless connection work. It displays a temporary name for itself. Install the ChromeCast app on your control device. I have only Android devices and Windows PCs in my house, so I can't comment on anything Apple-wise, sorry.

The ChromeCast app is quick and easy and free at the Google Play app store. When you run it, it searches your own network for the ChromeCast device. When found, the same device name as on the screen will appear and ask for the wireless network security password. It remembers this. It also suggests you supply a name that may describe its location in case you want to buy one of these for each room in your house. At pressure times like this my creativity goes away, so I named it "Main". Looking at the picture on page 8, that name is on the screen, as is the SSID of the wireless router.

Now, it's "ready to cast". That symbol before "ready" on the screen is the symbol of the button that appears on some (in my case – my Nexus 7 tablet) apps. When I open the regular Netflix app on my tablet, I can pick a movie or TV episode to play, press that symbol at the top of the Netflix screen on the tablet, and it automatically plays on the TV. It does not play to the tablet and then the TV. It bypasses the tablet and streams directly through the Internet to the ChromeCast device. So far it's that easy, but just for Netflix, YouTube and Google Play Movies. But that's a lot.

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ChromeCast.........Continued from page 7
Experimentally (it's beta) for the PC and Mac, there is an app that is a plug-in to the Chrome browser. You can easily display the browser window through ChromeCast on the TV. I have done this a few times, and it's useful to get an Internet browser to display. But it's laggy, and a little frustrating. It certainly will not play video in any useful manner. But if for some reason you want to display a browser window and it's fairly static so you don't induce vertigo for the viewers, it works. And it's $35. Available at Google - https://play.google.com/store/devices/details?id=chromecast (You do have a Google Login, don't you?) $35.

It is also at Amazon.com. Search for ChromeCast – temporarily out of stock, but when it's available it's $35. ◆

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