

Trails End Computer Club

Bulletin for the month of MAY 2013

MONTHLY MEETINGS
EACH Wednesday
FOLLOWING THE FIRST MONDAY
Library Room
Program or Lesson
9:30 - 10:30
One on One Help
10:30-?

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS:

If you would like to meet in a small group to discuss special computer related subjects or form a Special Interest Group lets discuss it.

Our bulletin is also available on line by visiting tecc.apcug.org and clicking on bulletin.

Our monthly program or lesson is intended to be of interest to all computer users. Following the program an allotment of time will be available for one on one help to those who want a better understanding of something done during the presentation.

Upcoming Events

Wednesday May 8, 2013 Meeting

9:15 AM Set up your computer

9:30 AM Lesson

10:30 AM One on One help



On the Shelves Now - New Technology Replacing Old Standbys

by Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:

<http://www.sfgate.com/business/technology/article/Research-firm-PC-sales-plunge-as-Windows-8-flops-4424529.php>

<http://windowsitpro.com/windows/it-s-official-pc-sales-fell-q4-2012-and-full-year-2012>

<http://www.fool.com/investing/general/2013/04/12/the-pc-is-dead-and-these-2-stocks-may-be-too.aspx>

<https://www.google.com/intl/en/chrome/devices/features-different.html>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ssd>

Recently, I was one of several presenters at the Taylor Career Center's Business and Technology Summit. My topic was on the new computing technologies currently on the market that are making the existing technologies obsolete.

According to published reports, during the first quarter of 2013, PC sales (desktop and laptop) dropped 14%, while tablet and smartphone sales soared. Some of the blame for the decline in PC sales has been the lack of widespread acceptance of Microsoft's new Windows 8 operating system, as well the fact that tablet computers are generally less expensive and more portable than traditional laptops and desktops. With over a billion smartphones expected to be sold this year, along with 200 million tablets, many users have decided to forgo purchasing a new PC. Sales of PCs this year are predicted to be about 300 million, down from 353 million in 2012, and far less

than Microsoft's "hoped for" 400 million PCs sold in 2013. "This is horrific news for PCs," said BGC Financial analyst Colin Gillis. "It's all about mobile computing now. We have definitely reached the tipping point."

Some pundits are predicting the slow demise of such traditional giants as HP, Dell, and Microsoft as smaller upstarts continue to erode their market shares with newer, less expensive technologies that also add enhanced portability. On the hardware side, HP and Dell are far behind the curve when it comes to technological replacements for the traditional desktop and laptop computer, while Microsoft has not captured much market share with its builds of Windows 8 intended for the portable market. As has been typical, Apple, with its successful iPad series of tablets, tends to be a leader in the introduction of new technologies. A growing threat to the established and traditional software operating systems, best represented by Microsoft's Windows and Apple's iOS, is Google's Android operating system, which has garnered a 75% market share of the operating systems of smart devices, including phones and tablets. Even giant chip maker Intel is feeling the sting, as most of the PCs utilize Intel chipsets, and a decline in PC sales ultimately impacts Intel. In terms of the new portable smart devices becoming so popular, Intel is but a bit player, with many feisty small chip makers picking up a growing share of the CPU chip market with their sales to smart device manufacturers.

A visit to any of the local big box stores will clearly show the increasing market share of tablets and other smart devices, as they devote more shelf space to the smart devices, and much less shelf space to the more traditional laptops and PCs.

One feisty new player in the hardware market is none other than powerhouse Google, which has introduced a line of relatively low cost but highly portable devices that combine the portability of a tablet with the convenience of a traditional laptop or notebook PC. As thin as half-inch, and weighing only a few pounds, these new devices are being marketed as "Google Chromebooks", which retail for as little as \$199, and have screens typically larger and more readable than most tablets. Unlike most common tablets, Chromebooks have a traditional keyboard and are in a form similar to a laptop. Using Google's Chrome operating system, these Chromebooks are complete and ready to run out of the box, without the need to purchase additional software. For those who want even more software, thousands of free apps (applications) are available from Google's Chrome Web Store. Included in all Chromebook models are Google Docs, which can create, read, and write office documents (word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, etc.) from and to almost all other major software formats, including Microsoft Office products (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.). Other included apps are a variety of music, voice and video utilities.

Chromebooks include "Google Drive", highly secured data centers with file storage service that stores files safely online, without the need to create backups of critical files. Data files can be accessed from anywhere, and are safe and recoverable even if the Chromebook is lost or damaged.

In terms of security, Chromebooks do not require any additional security software as they use multiple layers of protection providing a "defense in depth" that is generally considered safe from malware, viruses, and other threats. At boot, Chromebooks perform a rapid self-check to verify that the system is secure and free of malware; any necessary security updates are automatically downloaded and installed, meaning that Chromebooks always have the latest security features and updates.

Many users find the boot time of traditional PCs to be somewhat aggravating, often taking several minutes; the typical Chromebook can boot in as little as 10 seconds, making its features and apps almost instantly available. Also, many PC users fail to install operating system upgrades as well as software updates; Chromebook users do not have that problem as Chromebooks automatically update themselves and their installed apps for free; there is never a need to purchase or manually install updates and software upgrades with a Chromebook. All Chromebooks are Wi-Fi equipped, and several models offer optional wireless connections through Verizon, with 100 MB of data per month for free. All Chromebooks include an interesting feature, "Google Cloud Print" which can print to many printers without the need for connecting cables.

Chromebooks are currently manufactured by Acer, HP, and Samsung, with other makers soon to have Chromebooks of their own. At present, Chromebooks are available locally at Best Buy, and online from Amazon, TigerDirect, Newegg, Best Buy Online, and HP's online store.

Another new technology which is being used to make smart devices and laptop computers more rugged as well as extending their battery life is the "SSD" or "Solid State Drive". Now built-in to many newer laptop and desktop computers, as well as available for installation into almost all other laptop and desktop computers, the new SSDs are much smaller in physical size, have no moving parts, require less power to operate, do not emit a lot of heat, are silent in operation, have very fast access times, and are generally far more rugged than more traditional hard drives. A typical SSD is very small and light in weight, typically measuring about 4 inches long, by 2.8 inches wide, by 0.4 inches thick, and weigh about three ounces; some are as small as 1.8 inches wide, while some are about the same package size as a 3.5 inch hard drive. Many newer laptops and desktops incorporate an integral mounting for these SSDs, and inexpensive (about \$7 - \$10) adapters are available to mount SSDs into most other laptop and desktop computers. Some newly manufactured PCs utilize a hybrid system with an SSD drive containing the operating system and other frequently accessed files, and a traditional hard drive for extended storage capacity; these hybrids often boot much faster than similar PCs can boot with a common hard drive.

Even though prices have dropped considerably in the past year, and prices are projected to continue to drop in coming years, they are still generally more expensive than traditional electromechanical hard drives, and offer less storage capacity, even though some SSDs are available with terabytes of capacity.. It is expected that as storage capacity increases, and prices drop on these SSD devices, the common electromechanical hard drives may go the way of floppy discs, and disappear from the marketplace due to obsolescence.

Considering the "gee whiz" factor when 5.25" floppies replaced 8" floppies, which were in turn replaced by 3.5" floppies; when early 10MB hard drives were scarce and terribly expensive; when colorful flat wide-screen monitors replaced older monochrome CRT monitors; when the first smart phones appeared on the market; when laptops first out-sold desktops; Pocket PC's; Palm Pilots; and other technological wonders appeared, they were greeted with vigor, and then disappeared down the trashcan of history. Do not get too attached to your Windows (or Mac) desktop or laptop with your hard drive, as they too may soon be relegated to functional obsolescence as were our Commodore 64, TI 99/4A, Atari 800, Adam, Amiga, VIC-20, TRS-80, and other popular computer types that we loved during yesteryear. Get ready to say hello and welcome new technologies and devices, as the future is already here today.

If you agree, check the square box!

By Ralph Smoyer, Vice President, Lehigh Valley Computer Group, PA

February 2013 issue, The LVCG Journal <http://sites.google.com/site/lvcgsite/> wemiller (at) ptd.net

If you agree to the following list of items please place a check mark in the small square box.

How often have you seen this line before? Well I have seen this line many, many times before, and I have also personally entered that check mark in that box at least one time too often.

You see I downloaded a MacAfee computer virus protection program via the Internet approximately three years ago and dutifully check marked the square box. I thought the MacAfee program worked quite well! However, I have belonged to the Lehigh Valley Computer Group for many and I often use a lot of the knowledge that I get at our meetings. Well about three years ago one of our instructors mentioned that Microsoft offers a free virus protection plan, and I jumped on it. Wow, I could save \$50.00+ bucks a year.

I chose to use my newly gained knowledge from the LVCG, and my present virus, malware and spyware protection is Microsoft Security Essentials (free from Microsoft) and yes I did check mark the square box to have it actuated. It works great.

The bottom line of this article is that sometime in mid-2012 I checked my monthly credit card statement a little more thoroughly than usual, and I found that the \$50.00 bucks that I thought I was saving a year was still being deducted from my credit card by McAfee.

I then e-mailed, talked to them by phone, sent a letter, re-sent the letter via Certified mail! All to no avail. My final realization was that I had to file a civil case with my local magistrate. I filed the paperwork, paid the court fees up front, and waited for my court date. On my court date the defendant, (McAfee, headquartered in California) did not show. The judgment was in my favor and I received the McAfee 2012 credit card cost of \$50.00 + bucks, and all of my court fees.

When talking by phone with a McAfee representative I mentioned that I didn't order their virus protection product this year and she replied, yes you did when you checked the square box. I then noted to her this could go on forever, and she agreed yes it could. I guess I now saved \$50.00 bucks a year, and possibly forever, even for my heirs.

Who's Driving this Bus Anyway?

By Dave Helmer, Past President and Co-Founder, Computer Users' Group of Greeley, CO
March 2013 issue, Random Access

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When is the last time you worried about having the latest drivers for your computer? Ever? Never? Yeah, me too. Most people just don't give it any thought beyond the initial install of a new piece of hardware, but manufacturers tend to release new drivers all the time. Even your motherboard manufacturer sometimes releases updates. Mouse drivers, NIC drivers, USB bus drivers (there's probably a joke there somewhere, but it escapes me), hardware that no one ever thinks of in their computers, that may not be running the most current drivers. And really, why should you care? Mostly because those little outdated drivers might be the cause of some significant computer problems.

For the most part, I'm a firm believer in the old "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" approach to system maintenance, but on more than one occasion, one or another of my systems will BSoD* for no apparent reason. Microsoft's pathetic approach to a diagnostic simply tells you that the problem may have been caused by an outdated driver. Well, duh ... Which one? Yeah, yeah, I know that BSoD's don't exist in the newer operating systems. But when a computer does a hard reset while you're in the middle of an hours-long project, does it really matter what you call it?

Keeping those drivers current is a nightmare, because no one really keeps track of the manufacturers and driver release numbers for everything in every computer they own. No one. Well, no one I know, or would want to know I suspect. I am usually doing good to keep my video and sound card drivers current, and yes, I do use discrete hardware plugins on my desktop systems. Motherboard sound and video is just not good enough for some of the things I use my computers for, although it is getting better all the time.

The good news is that there is a solution to this problem! Why else would I be writing this article? Actually, there have been a number of solutions to this problem over the last decade or so, but I have found none as user-friendly as a little freeware program called SlimDrivers, available at www.slimwareutilities.com. A recent article in MaximumPC magazine introduced me to this cloud-

based utility for keeping drivers current, and it blew me away when I tried it. Download the installer from the website listed above. Note that there are two other free utilities they offer as well, one of which, SlimCleaner, I am currently playing around with. Run the installer and when it's fully loaded, hit the big button labeled Start Scan. It's just about that easy. (Do be careful when accepting the install, as they will try to install AVG Security Toolbar into your browser, not a bad thing, but if you're not into AVG you might not want to have it auto-installed.) SlimDrivers then goes out and uses "Crowd-sourcing to spider and aggregate millions of devices" to find drivers. In English, that means it checks the hardware driver versions on your computer, matches them against the latest versions available online from the manufacturer, and presents you with a list of drivers for which updates are available. For those concerned, SlimWare Utilities is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, which means it should play very well with Windows. I've successfully used it on systems running Win8, Win7, Vista and WinXP, and was very satisfied with its ability to locate updated drivers on all 4 platforms. You are given the option to set Restore points before any new drivers are installed, and you can un-install or restore drivers from within the program.

At this point, the shine wears off a little bit, because you can only select one driver at a time to update. The drivers seem to download very slowly, and to be honest I end up wondering if SlimDrivers is choking my download speed as a way of enticing me to upgrade to their paid version (DriverUpdate, \$29.97/one year license), or if I am just being paranoid. And seriously, for freeware? I can take the wait. I haven't been able to discover whether or not that one license would cover all my systems, or if I need a separate license for each computer. Guess which one I would pay for... After each update, you are advised to restart your computer, and although you probably don't really "have" to do so each time, I certainly recommend it. This of course adds to the frustration of time being consumed.

Has it prevented any more BSoD's on my systems? Too early to tell, but I feel a lot more comfortable knowing that I am running the latest versions of hardware drivers on my computers. This program delivers, with a clean, easy-to-use (and understand!) interface. Learn more about it by visiting their website, www.slimwareutilities.com, and give it a shot.

*Blue Screen of Death. If you don't remember those, you probably have not been using a computer for very long.

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