

# Trails End Computer Club

Bulletin for the month of JULY 2013

**MONTHLY MEETINGS**  
**EACH Wednesday**  
**FOLLOWING THE FIRST MONDAY**  
Library Room  
**Program or Lesson**  
9:30 - 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](http://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 July 3, 2013 Meeting**

9:15 AM Set up your computer

9:30 AM Lesson



### **Multiple Uses for your Webcam - Both the Good and the Bad**

by Ira Wilsker

#### **WEBSITES:**

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/i-bet-you-didnt-know-your-webcam-could-do-this-5-tips-to-help-you-use-its-full-potential>

<https://www.keylemon.com>

<https://flutterapp.com>

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/3-fun-tools-to-get-more-out-of-your-webcam>

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/webcam-home-surveillance-tools>

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/build-baby-monitor>

[http://mika.tanninen.net/Ohjelmat\\_Webcam\\_en.shtml](http://mika.tanninen.net/Ohjelmat_Webcam_en.shtml)

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/fun-youll-day-create-animated-gifs-webcam-images-seconds-si/>

<http://www.zemana.com/LeakTest/webcamlogger-test.aspx>

Virtually all new laptop (notebook) computers, tablets, and smart phones now include some type of webcam (web connected video camera). Some of the newer desktop monitors incorporate an integral webcam, and millions of computer users have an external webcam connected to their computers, typically mounted on the top of the monitor and pointed at the user. For those who may not be familiar with the vernacular, a webcam is a video camera type of device connected to a computer that captures the video (and sometimes the audio or sounds) of whatever is in front of it. External webcams, often only requiring a USB connection, can frequently be purchased for under \$20 for a very basic model. There are many legitimate uses for webcams, as well as some illicit or criminal uses that webcam owners need to be aware of.

Recently, one of the most popular geeky websites, MakeUseOf (makeuseof.com), published a piece "I Bet You Didn't Know Your Webcam Could Do This! 5 Tips To Help You Use Its Full Potential". While some of the content in the article is Mac and Apple OS related, the basic premises of the article apply to Windows and Android devices as well.

One of the more traditional and common uses of a webcam is video conferencing. This can be as simple as a video chat using any one of the many instant messaging programs (Yahoo!, Skype, AIM, and others) or the features built into many laptop computers and smart phones. Just tonight, shortly before typing this column, I was talking to my granddaughter over my smart phone when my daughter asked me to turn on the built-in smart phone camera so my granddaughter could video-chat with grandpa. Several of my college faculty are teaching web enhanced or fully online college classes, and regularly use their webcams such that everyone can see everyone else in the discussions, which may improve the level of communications among the group. With a nearly identical setup, organizations and businesses can hold virtual meetings over the internet without incurring any significant travel and meeting expenses. Now that we are well into the 21st century, webcams are being used for remote job interviews, remote court hearings, reporting on live news features and reports, safe online "match making" (meet a potential date), and other virtual face-to-face meetings. According to MakeUseOf.com in the article above, the capability to view each participant's facial expressions in real-time, "This subtle information adds a lot of depth to conversations."

It should not be much of a surprise to anyone that online video gaming is enormously popular, with millions of gamers online at any given time deeply engrossed in their games. As technology rapidly advances, much of this change is rapidly incorporated into online games; integrating live webcam images into online games makes such gaming more personal, as the images of the players really are the players, and not some digitally created fictitious avatar.

One very simple but very popular free series of online games that utilizes a webcam is "Webcam Mania GamePack 2" available online at [mika.tanninen.net/Ohjelmat\\_Webcam\\_en.shtml](http://mika.tanninen.net/Ohjelmat_Webcam_en.shtml). Once loaded and connected, this Webcam Mania GamePack 2 looks silly, but is really a lot of fun. The software displays the live image of the player, and the player uses his hands to virtually play any of the several games in the pack. The webcam picks up the movement of the player's hands and arms, and translates that movement into movement on the screen; there is no physical contact between the player and the computer while the games are being played. While appearing to be simple, many of the games are quite challenging; in one of the games the player has to pop certain colored bubbles with his hands, being careful not to pop the wrong bubbles. In another game, the player has to defend his castle from a stream of virtual snowballs, batting them down before they can impact the castle. Other games in the series has the player balancing a virtual seesaw by sliding rocks along the board, while other rocks are added to the seesaw. Soccer players might like the virtual soccer goalie who has to use his hands to block penalty shots made on the goal. Several other games are included in the game pack, including a few two-player games; in one deceptively simple looking, but frustratingly difficult two-player game is a modern version of the oldest video game "Pong", but in this version the players use their hands and arms to bounce the virtual ball back and forth.

Another genre' of webcam software is generically referred to as "Control Software". Using control software along with a webcam, the user can control several of the popular software programs and utilities with the wave of a hand and other hand gestures, rather than with a keyboard and mouse. One program that I experimented with was Flutter, available as a free download for both Windows and Mac from [flutterapp.com](http://flutterapp.com). According to the review on MakeUseOf.com, Flutter, " ... presently supports Spotify, iTunes, QuickTime, Windows Media Player, Winamp, VLC, PowerPoint, and Keynote. Additionally, you can control the player functions of YouTube, Pandora, Grooveshark, and Netflix in Chrome." Basically, Flutter works as a remote control using the webcam as the receiver, and your hand as the remote!

Many computer games, blogs, online forums, chat rooms, and other varieties of online communications use avatars (digital images) which are often caricatures used to identify the user.

While some people like the anonymity of a fictional avatar, others find it fun to create their own animated avatars using their own faces, or other digital images. There are several free utilities that can be used to create animated avatars using a webcam; two that were recommended by MakeUseOf are PsykoGif ([psykogif.com](http://psykogif.com)) and WebCam Avatar ([toolson.net/WebcamAvatar/Create](http://toolson.net/WebcamAvatar/Create)). Both of these free utilities are web based and work with most browsers, and can take the frames (images) from a webcam to create animated GIF or Flash files. PsykoGif can morph up to six individually selected video frames into an animated GIF, while WebCam Avatar has no practical limit on the number of frames used to create the animated GIF. WebCam Avatar has an edge in that it also supports better editing of the images, including changing the frame timing, image dimensions, special effects, and other editing tools. With both free web based tools, the completed animated GIF image can be downloaded and used as desired.

Some people find the computer logon process irritating when they have to enter a username and password every time that they want to boot the computer. For those who would like to securely automate the logon process without the use of a username and password, but still maintain significant security and control of the logon process, a variety of facial recognition software products that integrate the webcam with an automated process exist. The access security of the computer is maintained by having the face of the user viewed by the webcam, with the facial image digitally matched to a stored image; if the images substantially match, the computer is connected; the manually entered password is still functional if ever needed. This is how facial recognition works. I tried this on my desktop computer using the free version of the KeyLemon facial recognition software with my webcam ([keylemon.com](http://keylemon.com)). One cute feature of KeyLemon, that may annoy the personal vanity of some users, is that the software tracks and records the facial image at logon that tracks and displays the "face evolution" over time. The free version of KeyLemon runs on any version of Windows since Windows XP and includes Windows 8, and includes the facial recognition feature and the facial evolution. The Bronze version (\$20 for a lifetime license) adds user selectable themes to the logon screen as well as a "Permanent Protection

Auto Lock" feature which automatically locks the computer if the authorized user walks away (the facial image is lost), and reconnects when the user returns. The premium "Gold" version (\$40 lifetime) has several enhanced security features, including recording the images of unauthorized users who try to boot the computer, multiple approved images of the authorized user taken under different lighting conditions, and an anti-spoofing feature that can detect the difference between the live user and a photograph of the user held in front of the webcam. The Mac version is not totally free, but available as a trial download, and runs on MacOS X Snow Leopard, Lion, and Mountain Lion.

Some people have found that a webcam can be used for a variety of home security and surveillance functions. Many people use their webcam to maintain a view of their home for home monitoring or security purposes, while many others use the webcam as a "nanny cam" or "baby cam" to monitor the events with baby sitters or the children themselves. A comprehensive explanation of how to setup a webcam as a security or surveillance tool is online at [makeuseof.com/tag/webcam-home-surveillance-tools/](http://makeuseof.com/tag/webcam-home-surveillance-tools/) and includes reviews of several free and commercial (paid) home surveillance software programs. Depending on the software used, streaming live images may be viewed online, or streamed live to a variety of external devices such as tablets and smart phones.

On the down side, there are some risks of having a webcam connected to a computer or other device; they may possibly be controlled remotely by illicit individuals to snoop on unknowing users. One of the most egregious cases was uncovered in 2010, when the Lower Marion School District in suburban Philadelphia, Pa. was spying on students. In an article on CBS News, "According to Harriton High School student Phil Hayes, officials at the Lower Merion School District used a program called LANRev to manage and track the Macintosh laptops issued to students." It was alleged that the school district illicitly spied on students at home using the laptops checked out

from the school. While this case made the national media, there are also many other cases that did not, and voyeurs are using webcams to spy on unsuspecting individuals. In some cases, this spying has been accomplished by illegitimately installing malware on the target computer, and using this malware to control the webcam, sending the live images to the voyeur. While many of the major security utilities can detect and neutralize this webcam spying, there are still many forms of malware than can penetrate common security software and utilize the webcam to remotely display whatever is in view. One of the security companies, Zemana, offers a free security test that will simulate a webcam hijack, and then disclose to the user if his webcam arrangement is vulnerable to being hijacked. The free simulation is available at [zemana.com/LeakTest/webcamlogger-test.aspx](http://zemana.com/LeakTest/webcamlogger-test.aspx). According to Zemana, "This test program simulates the activities of a webcam logger. If your security software is protecting you proactively, then the simulation should trigger a warning message. No warning means no proactive protection... and probably no protection at all! If the simulation does not trigger a warning, then your current security software does not protect you against webcam loggers."

For those who want total protection from webcam loggers and hijackers, the best choice is to disable the webcam. Most external webcams, typically mounted on the top edge of the monitor, can be effectively stopped by unplugging the connecting USB cable. On a laptop or tablet, some users simply place an obstruction, such as a piece of tape over the tiny lens; be careful not to damage the lens if the tape is removed, and clean the lens to be sure that no "sticky" is left on the lens if the webcam is used at a later date. Several acquaintances use the sticky part of a "Post It Note" to cover the webcam lens on their laptops.

When used properly and safely, webcams can be a lot of fun as well as an effective tool to make virtual meetings a much more personal experience.



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