November 2011

If you are reading this on your computer display, remember that **Acrobat Reader** has a *zoom* feature (under "**View**" in your top tool bar) for enlarging or reducing text and graphics.

Next Computer Club (BVCC) Meeting,   November 14, 2011, 7:30 PM

Norway through the Backdoor – Behind the scenes creating a DVD. Presented by Len Nasman.

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Notes from Kent

Coming in December

Looking beyond November 14th, the December 12, 2011, meeting will mark the one year anniversary of the Club's presentation on e-book readers. Since there have been so many developments in available readers, spread of the readers among village residents, and added sources for acquiring e-books to read (such as public libraries), we will return to the subject with a special guest presenter, Nick Slone, from the Garnet A. Wilson Public Libraries of Pike County, and village residents demonstrating and discussing their various readers (such as the Apple Ipad, the Amazon Kindle, the Barnes and Noble Nook, and others—just what you need to fill your Christmas shopping list.

More Senior Computers

Since the discussion of computers for senior citizenry at the October meeting, our attention has been directed to yet another system targeted at our peers in age: the Kiwi PC. This product is noteworthy in its use the Ubuntu (Linux) operating system and less than extortionate pricing (although still expensive). Its pros and cons are discussed at

http://www.tomshardware.com/news/Linux-Ubuntu-10.10-KiWi-PC-Senior-Citizens,12409.html . At $499, it is cheaper than other models discussed at the October meeting but then it is more of a notepad than a full scale computer (it runs on the Intel "Atom" chip).

BigTrack

Continuing the Club's exploration of helping you more easily use your computer, we have purchased a large trackball called "BigTrack" to test as an alternative to a mouse or the usual trackball. This may be of special interest to members that find a mouse clumsy to use. And it is about twice the size of the usual trackball (of which we have an example or two in the backroom if you are interested).

Although the "BigTrak" takes more space on the desk than a normal mouse, it does not have to be moved around like a mouse. You simply roll the ball to move the mouse cursor. People who are frequently running off the edge of their mouse pad will appreciate this feature.

This "BigTrack" has been installed on the computer in the middle row with the yellow accessibility keyboard. Give it a try and let us know if it is of any use to you.

DVDs for Data Storage

by Len

Many people think of DVDs as a way to watch movies. But in the computer world, DVDs can do much more. DVDs can also be used to store digital data.

When used in data storage mode, a DVD can hold up to 4.7GB. This is nearly 7 times more than the 700MB capacity of a CD and over 3,000 times the capacity of a floppy disk. This extra capacity is why DVDs have replaced CD's for backing up data files. Given that $10 will buy an 8GB flash drive, nearly twice the capacity of a DVD, you can see why floppy disks are obsolete.

When you go off to the the DVD store, you have several DVD options to choose from... DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW, and DVD+RW. You might also see references to DVD-ROM. That designation is used for the disks that have data permanently stamped on them. DVD-ROM disks are used for movies or for distribution software.

The difference between types of disks is that DVD-R and DVD+R can only be written on once, while DVD-RW and DVD+RW can be written on and erased, similar to the old floppy disks.

Keep in mind that the RW type disks can only be used with the same disk drive they were made on (unless they are finalized). Once a DVD is finalized, no new data can be added.

The -R and -RW refer to an older specification, while +R and +RW is a newer specification. Newer players can read both type, while older players cannot read the + type discs. If you want to share DVDs with others, you should stick to the -R type discs.

To add to the confusion, Blu Ray disks (used for HD [High Definition] movies) can hold 10 times more than a conventional DVD. At this point, however, Blu Ray recorders are too expensive for most folks.

The DVD as Archive Storage

A reasonable question is how long the data stored on a DVD will keep. The pressed DVD-ROM disks will probably last as long as DVD players are available. However, the shelf life of DVD-R and DVD-RW is a different story. Manufactures claim a 30 year life, while quality varies and some disks may only last 2 years before becoming unreadable. So, if you are trying to store documents and pictures for future generations, DVD data files are probably not the best answer.

Given the short life spans of earlier data storage technologies, 8 inch floppy, 5 inch floppy, 3 inch floppy, CD, and DVD, the best long term archive may well be pictures and information printed with non organic materials on acid free paper. After all you can still view those 100 plus year old photos, and several-hundred-year old texts. [Kent will have a counterpoint on this next month.]

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Burning DVDs

by Len

Suppose you have a collection of pictures that you would like to put on a DVD to send to a friend or relative, how do you do it? Well, there are a number of options available. The latest versions of **Windows Media Player** provide a way of burning both music and data DVDs.

Windows XP Media Player Example

In **Windows Media Player**, selecting the **Burn** option opens a window for creating a list of files. The trick is to open a second window for **Windows Explorer**. Then you can simply drag files from the **Windows Explorer** to the **Windows Media Player** window. Once you have added the desired files to the **Burn List** you select the **Start Burn** button.
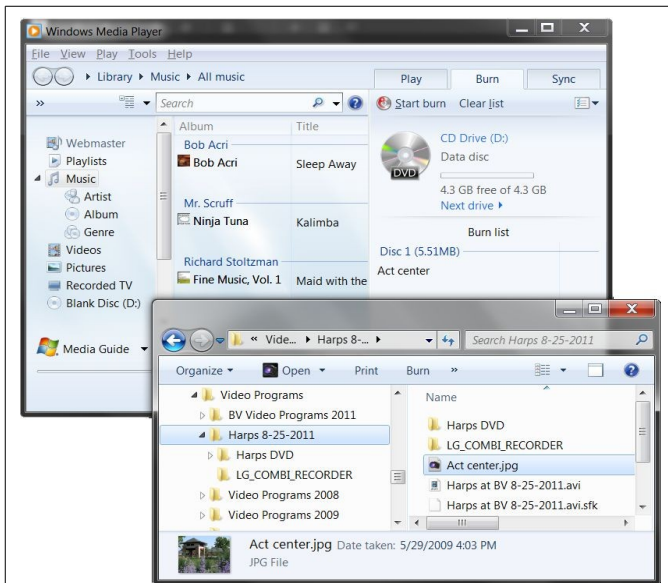
Windows Explorer and Windows Media Player in Windows 7

There are other programs that can be used for burning DVD data disks. Some of these are included with some brands of DVD drives. For creating and burning DVD videos, there are a number of video editing programs (Like Windows Live Movie Maker or Vegas Movie Studio) that include options for burning DVD video disks.

Give it a try and let us know if it is of any use to you.

ABCs of Email
By Kent

ISPs

Although we have discussed much of the following at various meetings, there remains confusion among club members about the various aspects of email.

Let me try to elucidate without adding to the confusion.

In order to use email, you need access to the Internet. This is provided by an Internet Service Provider (ISP). While this can be through a dial-access connection, the most common and practical access is through a broadband link provided by an ISP such as **Time Warner/Roadrunner**, **Frontier**, or **Bright.net**. The ISP will charge for its connection and may offer additional services. But think of the ISP as providing the sidewalk from your front door to the road.

ISPs usually will provide some kind of email (mail box) service, but there is no reason to take advantage of this service. One reason to say 'no thank you' is that your mail box will need to be changed if you decide to change to another ISP. Choosing an email service other than the ISP means that your mail box (**AND YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS**) will remain the same regardless of the ISP that you choose. And that means less trouble for you and for those with whom you correspond.

Accessing Your Mail

There are two main ways to access your mail: client-based and web mail. A client-based system is represented by software such as **Windows Outlook Express**, **Windows Live Mail**, and **Thunderbird**. These client-based systems get their designation because they rely on a central service (server) to receive the mail (24X7) but then download it to your local computer to read, reply, and store.

There are two main protocols governing the interaction between the client and the server: POP3 (Post Office Protocol 3) and IMAP (Internet Message Access Protocol). These handle the communications

that request the mail from the server and tell the server whether to keep a copy of the mail or not. POP3 mainly is used to download all of the mail to one's personal computer. IMAP is used when one wants to work on the same message(s) from a number of places (such as home and office). IMAP synchronizes the messages available locally and on the central server to make this multi-site usage possible. In practical terms, POP3 is probably adequate and preferable for most Villagers' needs.

Mail systems that store your mail on the central server are identified as web-based. To see your mail, you usually rely on your web browser (such as **Firefox**, **Chrome**, or **Internet Explorer**) to take you to the server and then log into your mail. Like discussed under IMAP, having your mail reside on a central server makes it easier to access from wherever you may be. Two major drawbacks to keeping your mail on the server is that it is subject to limitations imposed by the webmail provider as to amount of space or number of messages used and that it may be less safe.

Examples of webmail include **Yahoo Mail**, Google's **Gmail**, and Microsoft's **Hotmail** as well as **mail.roadrunner.com** and **Frontier.com**'s webmail. Having made the distinction between client-based and webmail, in fact, many webmail services are accessible with client-based mail. That is, the mail is stored centrally only until your client program (Thunderbird, Outlook Express, or Windows LIVE Mail) contacts the server and downloads your mail to your local machine.

Using webmail as webmail usually means that you need to login each time you want to see your mail while using your client to retrieve your mail usually automates the mail retrieval process (leaving only the likelihood that you will forget your email password and thus be unable to use your webmail as webmail).

The other threat with webmail is that since your messages and your addressbook are stored centrally, they are more susceptible to being hacked (stolen) than if they are kept on your personal machine. This does not imply that the security on your personal computer is greater than that offered by major webmail providers, only that web mail offers a richer target for a malefactor than going to each individual PC.

What's Best For You?

Having identified the differences between client-based and webmail, the previous section indicated that they are not so separate as the designations imply. Webmail can be used with a client (whether Thunderbird, LIVE Mail, or others. Used in this way, one's webmail site is only a temporary parking site for incoming mail, while the mail and the address book remain on the client (your PC).

A further way to have the best of both worlds is to rely on an account on the Club's **bvres.org**. This is a both a webmail service and easily accessible to your preferred client. And unlike some webmail providers such as Roadrunner, it has no limits as to the number of messages that you can keep on the web server (although using POP3 to download the messages is preferred). One additional way of combining your mail services is to forward your mail from a central server (like Roadrunner or Frontier) to bvres.org. This prevents having messages bounce because you have too large or too many messages. And your client need only look at bvres.org to find and download all of your messages.

Computers and Pianos
by Len

Hardly anyone would buy a piano, sit in front of it once every week or two, and expect to play beautiful music. However, it is surprising how many people buy a computer, sit in front of it once every week or two, and expect to be able to use it successfully.

Computers, like pianos, require time for learning, and more time for practice, before they can be used to good advantage. This is true for computers in general, and is also true for specific application programs.

Most folks can learn how to play chop sticks on a piano with relatively little effort. To get beyond chop sticks requires a bit study and practice. The same is true with word processing using a computer. It is possible to create and print a simple document with word processing software with very little time invested. To get beyond the chop sticks level of word processing, however, requires investing in practice time.

For example, I have seen folks waste time trying to align columns of words and numbers using a word processing program the way they used to use a typewriter... adding spaces between things and double spacing between lines. If they would invest just a little time learning how tables are used to arrange rows and columns of things, they could get better results faster.

The moral of the story is that computers are a lot like pianos. If you want to perform with them, you have to practice.
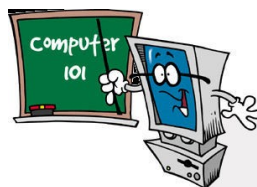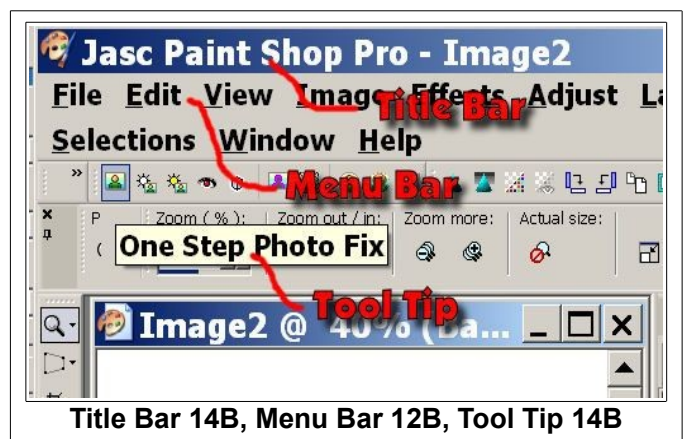
Text Readability
by Len

Some folks find the default font size used by Windows to be too small for easy reading. It is possible to control the font used by various Windows features.

The following illustrations show the same program running in Windows XP with different font settings. The first shows a program window (Paint Shop Pro) with the noted appearance font settings for the Title Bar, Menu Bar and Tool Tip.

The second illustration shows the same program with appearance settings changed to a larger bold font.

Because there are a number of different options for controlling font sizes used by Windows, and because the techniques are slightly different for Windows XP and Windows 7, this topic requires more than a short newsletter article.

Title Bar 12, Menu Bar 10, Tool Tip 8

Title Bar 14B, Menu Bar 12B, Tool Tip 14B

To help folks control text readability, I have created a tutorial and placed it on the BVCC web site.

http://www.bvres.org/BVCCWeb/Tutorials/
SchoolHouse.htm

Happy Computing