



July Newsletter 2009

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At our June 13th meeting Jeff Hunter shared his experience with building and maintaining a free website. He also told us how to use a word processing program (i.e. Microsoft Word) and some extra steps you should take to make sure it posts correctly. He use to develop websites professionally and still uses free ones for his band. The one downside to free sites is that you can loose your contents if the internet provider discontinues this service. Keeping a copy in a file on your computer will prevent loss and help with updating. Jeff' s friend, James Barry presented social networking (i.e. twittering) is a website alternative. Facebook might just be the "advertising" vehicle of the future. It is certainly working well for several savvy winery owners. If you are interested in our 11 page meeting handout, send a "Handout" request as the subject to [bethpick@emailx.net](mailto:bethpick@emailx.net)

Microsoft has finally given up on Vista. At the Southwest Computer Conference they presented Windows 7 and gave everyone who attended a

free copy of the current version. If you are thinking of getting a new computer, Windows 7 will be well worth waiting for.

One of my sources sent me info on a series of articles on basic windows skills written by Ron Hirsch form the Boca Raton Computer Society in Florida. Ron has been writing computer articles for various publications and for Boca Bits for over 20 years. His goal has been to make his articles not only informative, but also easy to read. About 7 years ago, Ron had a series where the articles were all exactly 2 pages - both sides of a single sheet, in Boca Bits. This made it easy for readers to keep a copy of a article - just cut out the page, and put into a loose leaf notebook. Now they give him a section on their website where articles are available as separate PDF files that can be printer out or download. You can read Clean Up Your Room/Desktop – Part 1 in this newsletter. Part 2 will run next month. You will find all of Ron's articles at [www.bracs.org/hirsch.php](http://www.bracs.org/hirsch.php)

—Beth

## Clean Up Your Room/Desktop - Part I

By Ron Hirsch, Boca Raton Computer Society, FL  
[ronhirsch1439 \(at\) comcast.com](mailto:ronhirsch1439@comcast.com)

[www.bracs.org](http://www.bracs.org)



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So, does that line ring any bells? If you're a youngster, you've heard your elders tell you to clean up your room very often. And if you're not a youngster, then you use the line yourself on your kids or grandchildren. Well, I have no young kids around anymore, but I often use that line (with a slight change.) I'm constantly telling people to "Clean up your desktop," with "desktop" being their computer screen after the machine has booted up, and before any programs are run.

There are some desktop differences between the different Windows versions. And, some com-

panies such as Dell and Compaq very often install a "special" arrangement on the desktop, mostly to keep their name in front of you. Also, there are programs which generate their own desktop arrangement. But, they all generally respond to the procedures presented below. Once you become an expert in this area, you'll have no problems with the finer points and variations.

Since most of you are using Windows XP, and since I use XP on all my machines, all the activities discussed are based on XP. I have not used Vista, but I would assume it's the same there. One thing I do remember however, is that in Windows 95, desktop icons did not automatically line up in rows and columns. In XP, when you move an icon, it automatically snaps to the nearest position

which keeps the rows and columns aligned.

The average computer user, even those who should know better, generally have disaster zones for the desktops. There are icons all over the place, not in any order and not lined up. And, there are many, that when I ask what they are, I'm told "I don't know." And, when I ask to have Windows Explorer or Notepad opened, there's usually a lot of scrambling, to find out where the icon is located.

Many programs, when installed, will place an icon on your desktop. Sometimes they ask you during the install if you want this - and sometimes they don't ask. There is always a tendency for software companies to grab real estate so that they can prominently keep themselves in front of you. Some newer computers running Windows XP/VISTA may even start off with almost nothing on the desktop. If you want to go back to a more conventional appearing desktop, right click on the desktop, and view the various options you have. There is probably a choice to revert to an "old-fashioned" desktop, which I personally prefer. Most people keep their medications in a medicine cabinet, canned goods in the pantry, garden tools in the garage, etc. But when it comes to their computer, they are as disorganized as is humanly possible. They feel intimidated by their computers, and don't wish to antagonize it. So, the thrust of this article is to go back to real basics again, and give you some information on organizing and cleaning up your desktop. If you're already super organized, you can skip this article, accept my apologies, and move on. But 99 out of 100 of you probably don't qualify to get the gold star for desktop organization. Once you do the tasks presented, you'll probably wonder why you didn't do it sooner. It not only is much easier to work with a good functional desktop, it looks prettier also, and will impress those who see it.

#### **WHY HAVE ICONS ON THE DESKTOP?**

Most users are familiar with the primary way to run a program. Click on START>PROGRAMS, and one can navigate to all the programs that are installed on the machine. But, most users generally have several programs that they use often. Having an icon for these programs on the desktop makes it easier to access that program. Just double click on that icon, and the program opens.

#### **WHY SHOULD I BOTHER?**

Let's take an extreme analogy. How would you like to have a dictionary where the words were

randomly listed, not in any order? It would take lots of time to look up a word. By organizing things, and getting important icons at your fingertips, you can make your life much easier. And, your friends will be asking you to help them, when they see your desktop. Consider the desktop as a presentation area for icons that you often use. Count the icons on your desktop that you really use, and those you don't use. Then list the icons that you use which are not readily available on the desktop and you have to do lots of clicking to reach. You will see why it's a good idea to improve things. Now let's get down to business and fix things up.

#### **OPERATING ON ICONS**

The following activities are easy to perform on icons, wherever they may be. There are a few icons that Microsoft does put in places where they take control away from you - you can't readily rename them, or move them off the desktop, although you can always reposition them on the desktop. You may discover some of these in your travels. When you do, you'll just have to skip those icons. While they can be operated on using special protocols, that's outside of the scope of activities for these lessons.

#### **WHAT IS AN ICON**

An icon is a representation of a program, or file, or just about anything you want. The icons on your desktop are usually shortcuts to running a program, be it a word processor, spreadsheet, Internet connection, etc. All icons have properties, which define the nature of the icon, and details of what it does when used. Right clicking on an icon will bring up a window with the bottom item in the list being "properties." Left click on "properties," and you'll get a window with lots of information about the icon. Try it, and browse around to get a feel for things. The more familiar you become with things on your computer, the more comfortable you'll feel using them.

#### **MOVE AN ICON**

Left click on and drag an icon and you can move it manually anywhere you want on your desktop, or into another open folder. The ability to drag an icon around is tied into the choice that was made on how icons are positioned. Before you can engage in changing locations et al on your desktop, you must first check to see how things are set. Right click on the desktop and in XP you will bring up a small box with a list of items in it. The contents of this box will vary, depending upon which

version of Windows you are using. The top item is "arrange icons by," and it has a little arrowhead to the left. Click on that arrowhead, and you'll see a variety of items related to arranging icons. Some of these may be checked. The best way to learn what does what is to play around with the checking and unchecking. After a few trials, you will get a good feel for what they all do.

### **COPY AN ICON**

Copying an icon is similar to moving an icon. As with the standard Windows protocol, do exactly as you would to move, but hold down the CTRL key while you are doing the click and drag operation. If you copy it into the same area, you'll probably see a (2) following the text in the copy. You can't have two icons in the same place, with the same name. So, Windows adds the "(2)" for you. If you move it to another folder, the "(2)" will stay, but you can edit the text as you'd like. See "Rename an Icon" below. Dragging an icon to any folder on your desktop will move the icon into that folder.

### **DELETE AN ICON**

Click once on an icon to highlight it, and then hit the Delete key. Remember, the icons here are generally shortcut icons with the little curly arrow on the lower left corner. Deleting these does not delete anything from your system except the shortcut icon. No programs or data will be deleted,

just the icon.

### **RENAME AN ICON**

Click once an icon and then hit the F2 key. This puts you in "edit" mode, and you can type a new name by using the keyboard. If you type in a very long name, all the text you entered may not display when the icon is not selected. But, when you click once on the icon, the extra lines of text should be visible. In general, try to keep the text to a maximum of two lines under the icon. Remember the F2 key. It is the "edit" key for folder names, filenames, icons, and other elements in Windows.

Next month, we'll continue from this point to get a more streamlined desktop for you to work with. But, you must know the various icon manipulation procedures presented above. I won't be repeating the explanation for each step. I'll just say delete, copy, move, (etc.) the icon. So if you've forgotten how to do it, you'll need a copy of this article handy to remind you.

Remember, you will learn by experimenting and exploring - so don't be afraid to do so. If you find this material useful, you may want to download this article in PDF format, from our web site [www.brcs.org](http://www.brcs.org). This allows readers to keep the material either as a PDF file, and/or print it out, and place it in a loose leaf notebook for future reference.

## **Driver Backup Programs -- The Ware Essential to Your Computer**

by Larry Cohen, Member at Large, ICON PCUG, NY  
president (at) iconpcug.org

[www.iconpcug.org](http://www.iconpcug.org)

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### **Driver Backup Programs**

Last month I wrote about traditional backup programs. I will continue the discussion with free driver backup programs.

As you are aware, drivers are small programs that associate your hardware with your operating system. It is particularly useful to have these programs if you have to re-install windows either from the manufacturer's restore disk or a new install of windows. It avoids the hassle of having to go to each manufacturer's website and download one-by-one drivers.

### **Driverback.bat**

This is a batch file from PCWorld magazine to

backup all device drivers. Here are the directions from PCWorld:

Once it's on your system double click the file to create your backup.

The batch file copies the drivers (and a lot of extra files) to a folder called 'driverback inside My Documents. Use your CD authoring software to copy the contents of this folder to a CD.

To reinstall the drivers, use either Device Manager or Control Panel's Add Hardware applet to open Update Wizard. If the Wizard doesn't automatically look for drivers on the CD, point to the CD drive when asked for a location.

It can be downloaded at: <http://www.pcworld.com/49366>

Figures 1, 2, and 3 show the program 'doing its thing'.

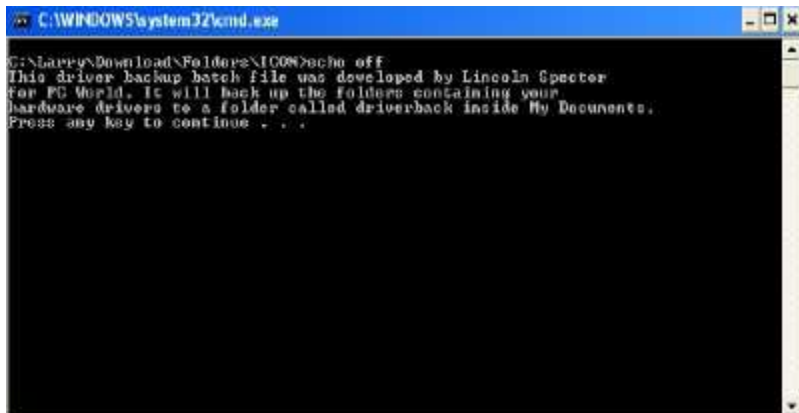


Figure 1 – The Opening Screen

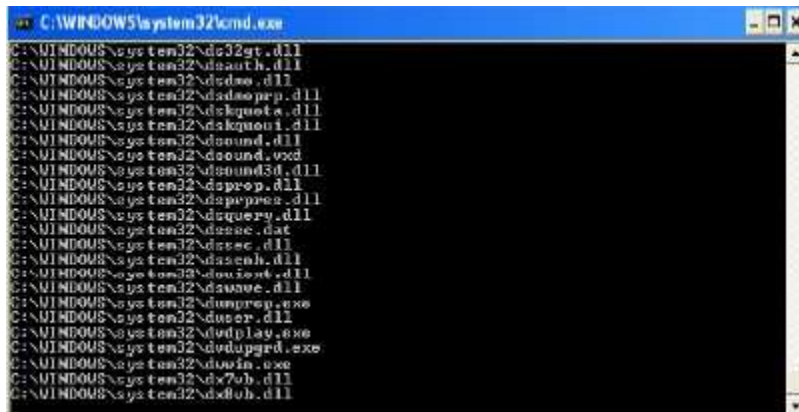


Figure 2 – Scanning

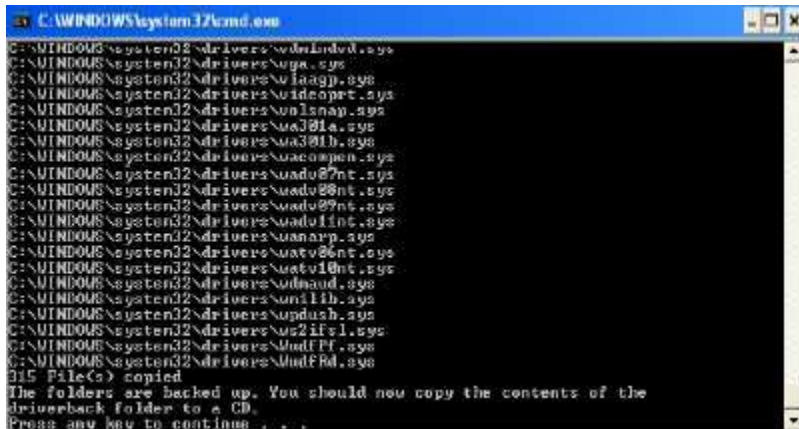


Figure 3 – The Finish

## DriverMax

This is a wonderful easy to use sophisticated backup tool that allows you to either set up a login account to retrieve drivers or export them to a zip file that you would copy to a CD for later installation. Here is a description from the DriverMax website:

“DriverMax is a new tool that allows you to download the latest driver updates for your com-

puter. No more searching for rare drivers on discs or on the web or inserting one installation CD after the other. Just create a free account, log in, and start downloading the updates that you need.

You can also export all your current drivers (or just the ones that work ok) to a folder or a compressed file. After reinstalling Windows you will have everything in one place! [Underlining added] Most of the situations when Windows is running slower are caused by faulty driver installations. Windows stores all versions of older drivers just in case you want to go back; sometimes it messes up older versions with more recent ones. The Export Wizard will only export the drivers you select by copying the needed files to a folder or a compressed ZIP file. After reinstalling Windows all drivers will be back in place in less than 5 minutes - sparing you of searching, inserting disc after disk and losing precious time. The Import Drivers wizard allows you to install all the drivers that you exported earlier. The entire operation might take up to 5-10 minutes.

Just one single computer restart will be required after all drivers are reinstalled!

Note: DriverMax only works on Windows Vista, Windows XP and Windows 2003 (all service packs). Driver downloads are \*only\* available for Windows Vista and Windows XP users.”

Figure 4 (on the next page) illustrates the opening screen that is the gateway to every available sub-program.

It can be found at: <http://www.innovative-sol.com/drivermax/> Note: After starting the program, it does require free registration which is acquired from the above web site.

Larry Cohen is a Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at Nassau Community College and is a Member-At-Large of the ICON Executive Board.

## Make Your Own Wallpaper

By Steve, WorldStart Staff Member

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Would you like to have one of your pictures as a desktop background? It's easier than you think!

1. Figure out your screen resolution. Before you begin, you'll need to figure out what size the final image needs to be. Fortunately, this is really easy. Just right-click a blank area on your desktop and select Properties from the resulting menu. Then, click the Settings tab on the resulting screen. Look at the Screen resolution area and write down the current setting.



2. OK, now you know the size you need, the next step is to pick a photo. So, head to your archives and open the photo you want to use in your favorite imaging program. I'll wait here.
3. Have the photo opened? Cool. Now, adjust anything that needs adjusted (color, saturation, etc). Now, you'll need to resize the image to match your monitor resolution. This setting varies by program, but it's usually found under the **Edit** or **Image** menu in most programs.

Most programs will have an option to "constrain proportions". This keeps the image proportional as you change sizes. Make sure

this option is checked or the image may look distorted. For more on how this works, check out: <http://www.worldstart.com/tips/tips.php/1587>

Now, here's the trick. You may find that when you resize the image with the proportions constrained, the numbers don't work out to match your screen resolution. If the numbers are close (say within 10 pixels), don't worry about it. Any distortion will be minimal. However, if you find the numbers are off by quite a bit, you'll need to either crop the image or put it onto a black background that is proportional to your screen resolution.

For the details on how to do this, check out our Constrain Proportions article (linked above). It will explain in detail how you can turn an image that's not proportional into one that is.

4. Once you have your image resized, cropped, and generally ready to go, save it as a JPEG. I'd put it in the "My Pictures" folder for easy reference, but the choice is yours.
5. Last step! Right-click your desktop, select Properties from the resulting menu, then go the Desktop tab. Click the Browse button and navigate to the image you just saved. Select it, hit OK and you should now have your photo set as your desktop wallpaper!

Happy wallpapering.

## Constrain Proportions article

By Steve, WorldStart Staff Member

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Have you ever noticed when you resize a photo, there's usually an option to "constrain proportions"? When you uncheck that option, you can plop in any height and width dimensions you please. With constrain proportions checked, changing one dimension changes the other. So what's with all the proportion constraining? Read on.

Although the term *Constrain Proportions* sounds like something used in a medieval torture chamber, it's actually pretty simple.

When you shoot an image with your digital camera, it's taken within the aspect ratio of that camera (usually 4:3 or 3:2). For instance, my camera

shoots an image that's 3504 x 2336 - a rectangle that's fairly proportional to a 35mm negative (a 3:2 aspect ratio).

Now, when I go to resize this, I need to keep the image "proportional" or it'll look distorted. When I take pixels away from one dimension (say the width), I need to take a **proportional amount** away from the other dimension (the height). If I don't it will look elongated or squished, depending on how I change the width and height numbers. Constrain Proportions does this automatically. This is easier to demonstrate with an example:

Here's the original photo. I've reduced it for the newsletter and kept the "Constrain Proportions"

checkbox checked:



This time, I unchecked the box and just put in a pixel size of 400 x 400. Photoshop interpolated and squished the image into this (yuck-ola):



Now, if you find that you need, say a 5x7, but when you resize the image with "Constrain Proportions" selected, you get something like 5 x 7.5, you'll know it's because the aspect ratio of a 5x7 doesn't match your image ratio. Not to worry though, Steve to the rescue :-)

All you need to do is a little cropping to make the photo proportional. In this case, crop off the top and bottom of the 5x7 (assuming a vertical photo, otherwise it'd be a 7x5 and you'd hack a little off the sides).

If you're trying an 8x10, you'll find you may need to crop even more in order for it to work. Again, off the top and bottom if the photo is vertical, from the

sides if it's a horizontal shot (10x8).

As you go, crop just a little at a time. Try the resize and see if you're close (within like 5% or so). If you're not, cancel each resize until you are.

**Don't actually do the resize until you see that you have the proper proportions.** It doesn't have to be 100% perfect, but get it as close as you can. Also, always keep a copy of your original uncropped photo, just in case you want to make a different sized photo with different proportions down the road.

As an example of all this, let's say I wanted the sample image to really be a square that's 400 x 400. Here is the image after a correct crop (I cropped in a little too):



No distortion :-)

What do you do if you have a photo you just can't crop? Don't print it :-)

Or...

The first option is to allow it to print at the "strange" size. If it wants to be a 5 x 7.5, who are we to argue? If you're having it custom framed, it doesn't really matter what size it is.

If you can't crop it and you have to have a standard size, there's still hope (at least for users who are a little more advanced). You can create an image with just a black background that's proportional to the size you want (like 5x7). Make sure it is at the same resolution as your original.

Next, resize the original so that the height is 7 inches. This will make the width 4.6 (ish).

Now, drop the photo onto the black background you created. Center it up and you'll have a 5x7 with a black strip down either side, but at least it is proportional and will fit into a standard frame.

Here is our sample photo proportional to 7x5. No cropping of the image, but you have to live with the borders:



Of course, if you prefer a white background, you can do that too. Just set the height to 7 inches, let the width go to 4.6 inches, and print. Now, cut the image down to 5x7, leaving a white border on either side.

There you have it—more than you ever wanted to know about constraining proportions and working with aspect ratios :-)

Happy shooting!

### Smart Computing Tip Of The Day

#### Use a Web page image as wallpaper in Win XP

Wallpaper doesn't necessarily have to be a picture that resides on your computer. Select any graphic you find on the Internet by placing your mouse pointer on the image you want and right-clicking. Select Set As Background from the pop-up menu, and you will have changed your wallpaper. (Be sure you have permission to use the image.)

#### Digital Camera Tip

A high megapixel count in cameras doesn't mean better image quality; a megapixel count tells you the size of high-quality prints you can produce from a digital image.

To email photos or post them on the Web, you'll only need 2 or 3MP; for 5- x 7-inch prints, 4MP is plenty; and for 8- x 10-inch prints, you'll want 7MP. You'll need 10MP or more to print posters.

#### Memory Card Readers

Memory card readers are an excellent alternative to transferring images directly from your digital camera. Card readers don't require an external power supply. They gather all of the power that they need from a PC's USB or FireWire port, so you don't need to worry about the toll that transfers take on your camera's batteries. Also, data corruption is less likely because you don't need to worry about losing battery power during a data transfer.

## Computer & Internet Tips and Tricks

By Gregory West, Editor, Sarnia Computer Users' Group, Canada  
editor (at) scug.ca



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As Editor for the Sarnia Computer Users' Group, I do a lot of online research for interesting websites and also free software. I am also fortunate to have people who send me their online gems. Here I share some of these amazing finds with you.

Remember: The programs you are about to see are FREE and legal and for you to download and use. Try out programs, or simply take a sneak peek at what they can do for you; the choice is

yours. So, happy clicking and email me with what you think about these programs: editor@scug.ca

#### Gimme Back Those Deleted or Lost Files - File Recovery Program

Website: [www.recuva.com](http://www.recuva.com)

Runs on Microsoft Windows 98, 2000, 2003, XP and Vista

We have all done it. You have too, come on, admit it. Yes when you accidentally delete a file from your computer, the Recycle Bin, digital camera memory card, USB stick, or even songs from your MP3 player, this program will help you to recover

those lost files. It is a good program to have on your computer for those times when you least expect it and you DELETE in error.

### **ATTENTION ALL eBay USERS – A Must Have eBay Desktop**

Website: <http://desktop.ebay.com>

Runs on Windows XP/Vista or MacOS X 10.4/10.5

This desktop application puts you in total control of your eBay bargaining with an eagleeye live gatekeeper of your bid or bidders. Never miss an eBay bargain again.

This is WEB 3.0 at its best. "EBay's slick new app does more than simply recreate the auction site on the desktop -- it makes the whole experience thoroughly interactive and much more engaging" (wired.com).

### **Catch Thieves in the Act, Live and Recorded Video Security System Using Your Webcam**

Website: [www.yawcam.com](http://www.yawcam.com)

Works on Windows 2000/XP/Vista

This security webcam software for windows is simple and easy to use and includes most of the usual security camera features such as: Video streaming, Image snapshots, motion detection, and Online Web Forum for help.

The software program is very easy to work with and after a short time you can set your webcam to catch a thief stealing your stuff. The video or pictures are sent immediately to the Internet (where you designate for safe keeping). The program senses motion in a room. You can have the program set so that it will record a video of the thief in action, or email you a photo, or upload (FTP) the live video to a website.

Real nice to be able to hand over a full video of the thieves in your house. If you are away, say in Florida, you can easily email the Police the video

or photo of the live crime scene with full video and photos of the bad guys.

### **Windows Live Family Safety**

Website Download: [get.live.com](http://get.live.com)

Website Information: <http://tinyurl.com/24k8fo>

We are all worried about young children using the Internet these days. This program puts you in control of your computer and Internet browsing experience. You are in charge of your children's online Internet surfing habits. You can also monitor Windows Live Messenger contacts and block who they talk to online. As well, you can also block Internet websites too. This is a must have for any family with a computer connected to the Internet.

*NOTE: "Windows Live Family Safety is a Web service that's free to people who use Microsoft Windows XP. If you use Windows Vista—the operating system installed on many new computers—you can use the built-in family safety tools." (Microsoft.com)*

### **Connect to your Home Computer While Away with Logmein**

Website: [www.logmein.com](http://www.logmein.com)

While away from home, wouldn't it be nice to access files and programs from your home computer. Now you can. You can easily connect to your PC with a software program called logmein. This program is also used by large corporations to connect to offsite PCs. This program will also allow a friend to fix your computer even though they are thousands of miles from your PC. It is easy to set up and easy to operate. Give it a test drive... You will love it.

*NOTE: This article first appeared in First Monday magazine, Sarnia, Ontario Canada. A Huron Printing Publication [www.huronweb.net/first\\_monday.php](http://www.huronweb.net/first_monday.php)*

## **Web Design Workshop: Use Outlook Express to Create a Web Page**

By David, WorldStart Staff Member

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Don't have a web page editing program? Don't know HTML? No sweat. Anyone can write an email—so why not use Outlook Express to design your web page.

Huh?

That's right. If you can make a rich text email you can save it as a web page. It won't be the fanciest site on the net, but at least you'll have some-

thing up.

\*Before we get started, you should create a folder called "Web Page" to save the HTML files and pictures in. Any pictures you will be using should be in there first. Click "Create Mail" just like you do when writing an email. Go to "Format" and make sure it is set to "Rich Text (HTML)".

From here get as creative as you can. Keep in

mind the design principals mentioned in previous articles. (Note: Our June meeting handout or <http://www.worldstart.com/tips/cat-topics.php/24>)

Add a background color by going to "Format", choosing "Background" then "Color". Select one from the list.

Next you can specify the size of your font and select the color. Unfortunately you cannot specify your font—it will open using the viewer's default font (probably Times or Arial). Want the text centered? You can do this too by clicking the "center" text format button on the toolbar.

How about a picture? Just go to "Insert", "Picture" and browse your way to the "Web Page" folder you created on your hard drive and grab the image you want. You could also click the "Insert Picture" button on the toolbar (it looks like a moun-

tain). Highlight and delete all the file information in front of the actual picture file name. When you click "OK" you'll get a box with a red X, but that's fine for now.

Once your page is just the way you want it, you can save it as a web page. Go to **File/Save As** and change the save as type to "HTML Files". Give the file a name—the first page of a web site should always be called "index.htm". Put it in your "Web Page" folder.

Now the page and pictures need to be put on the internet. Follow the uploading instructions for your server—each one is different or I would explain how here. Make sure that you also upload the picture too.

Click Here to see the little page I created using OE. <http://imgsrv.worldstart.com/ct-images/OE-web.htm>

## Word Processing Choices from A-Z (really)

By John White, a member of the ICON PCUG, NY

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Besides the venerable Microsoft Word and WordPerfect, an array of word-processing applications—both cheap and free—is vast and growing rapidly. Some are freestanding singletons to install on the hard disk. Some serve in a suite of apps including a spreadsheet to run live via the Internet. Most online versions I viewed still manifest hurdles to leap before they reach maturity. Two installable versions of MS-Office alternatives, however, rival the Gates products in impressive ways.

**Abiword:** Although Microsoft's "Wordpad" performs at least half of the writing tasks most of us do, Abiword is installed on my four Windows computers. It will do 98% of what I ask of a word wrangler. Placing a tiny icon on the Quick Launch menu just to the right of the Start button provides this fast-loading, capable program in easy reach. The native file format, .abw, works equally in Abi's versions for Linux and Mac OS X, but there is also an easy drop-down option to save in .doc, .rtf, .txt, .html, .xhtml, and other formats. Abi is a favorite alternate of some of ICON's leaders. [Free download: <http://www.abiword.com/>] The latest version is 2.6.2.

**Buzzword:** Adobe's offering, self-described as "The First Real Word Processor for the Web" even

though it's not, requires [1] a sign-up and password [2] and says "We're sorry, JavaScript must be enabled in order to use Buzzword." I'm sorry, too. If a program requires JavaScript, ActiveX, Flash, or Internet Explorer, I can live without it. The world is dangerous enough without them, and my life is already too exciting. Ah, so little time and so many other choices! If someone is willing to deal with it, please try it and give us your reaction to Buzzword. [Free download required: <http://www.buzzword.com>

**Flysuite:** This one promotes itself as an online alternative to Word and Excel that focuses on document collaboration. When I went to their Web site, my Comodo firewall filled the lower right quarter of the screen with warnings about "blocked URLs," an all time record. That sounded too much an attack of potential bad guys and I stopped right there. Any braver soul care to report on Flysuite? [Free: <http://www.flysuite.com>]

**Google Docs beta:** Anew offline version exists but in an even earlier beta stage: Despite my awe for the quality and variety of many offerings from Google, Docs beta online doesn't make the list. It seems to drive a middle lane between "lightweight" and "lame." I see no reason to use it yet instead of Abiword or even Wordpad to create a new file. Any other users care to point out advantages too subtle for me to spot? To get there, enter your Gmail account name and password.

Click on NEW>Document (or spreadsheet, presentation, or folder) and go to work. Don't look for rulers, tabs, or even clues about WordArt, mail merge or even clues how to send the document as an email or attachment. A limited selection of insertable "special characters" offers barebones Wingdings but not Monotype Sorts or any other favorite character sources. You can insert other special characters if you know their Unicode numbers. Oddly enough, the insertable "Asian" character set includes angle brackets, printer dingbats, Western math symbols, plus cm, kg, km, and copyright (c). You may still have to wangle an "invitation" to Gmail if Google is still playing hard-to-get with this powerful email/storage service. Free: <http://docs.google.com>.

**Microsoft Works:** Older versions required hop-skip-and-jump trips through menus to reach an otherwise inviting word processor with usable templates for home and school use. Works 8.5 came on my laptop a year ago, but some Vista machines reportedly include version 9 of Works employing a full version of MSWord although the MS Web site was somewhat vague about this. Version 8.5's word processor looks like Word Lite. It includes the ability to open its own .wps format and its .wpt templates (nice) as well as Word and other formats such as .rtf, .txt, .csv, and .html. Forget about .xml, .odf, or MS-Office 2007's own .docx. Works offers a friendly and capable database, a spreadsheet, calendar, and dictionary as well. Version 8.5 is under \$10 at <http://store.purplus.net/miwo85.html>

**Mindomo:** As a preliminary for individual or group writing, this program calling itself an "Online Mind Mapping Process" offers a free visual organizer to clarify and plan the writing process. Your turn: <http://www.mindomo.com/>

**Notepad:** The built-in Windows plain-text editor makes a type minimalist HTML editor with clean unformatted code. Not all users know there are font and word-wrap options available. To check it those capabilities, go to Start>Accessories>Notepad>Format.

**OpenOffice Writer:** This article is being written with version 2.4. It retains a few minor quirks and inconveniences compared with MS-Word 2000, XP, or 2003 plus some decided advantages. For example, if the squiggly red line under correctly spelled terms (missing from its dictionaries) bothers you, UNclick the ABC button on the top of the screen—the one with a wavy red line. At any

point, click its mate (ABC above a blue check mark) and manually check spelling. However, there is not button for the thesaurus. Call it up instead with Control-F7. You can also check in Czech or Nepali as well as more common tongues. The default language list supplies three flavors of English and three of German but none of French or Spanish. More 79 other language dictionaries are downloadable or under development. I switch between OpenOffice ("Writer" or "switer.exe") and Word, depending on the task. OOW saves keystrokes by remembering recently typed words and inserting them in white letters amid blue bands after one types just a few of the word's letters. To accept its suggestion after starting a word, tap ENTER and keep typing. To ignore it instead, just type on. Users of Excel will recognize and appreciate this option. OpenOffice outdoes Word in WYSIWYG cropping of inserted pictures. For a long time OO has offered in the File menu "Export as PDF" as one choice at file-saving time. A menu button also offers the same feature. It rapidly creates and saves the file directly instead of sending it to a printer menu as Adobe's expensive version requires. Logically enough, page formatting choices are found in the (TA-DA!!!) Format drop-down menu instead of the File menu. I especially like the "E-mail as Microsoft Word" button on my customized toolbar. I'll use that one in a few minutes to send this file to Ira. Although a paid-for version with telephone help is available as StarOffice (from Sun Microsystems) for under \$70, this free version is supported by a worldwide community of volunteer programmers and forumdwellers. The suite includes equivalent programs for Excel and PowerPoint, a capable database, and a drawing program—all accessible from the File>New menu in OpenOffice Writer. In place of Microsoft Publisher in the premium-priced MS-Office suite, the free open-source Scribus may be satisfactory [<http://www.scribus.net/>]. The native OOW file format, .odt, is widely employed around the world, conforming to the standard used in Europe and other ISO countries. This file type crosses platforms to work in Windows, Linux, and Mac OS X. OOW also opens and saves in .doc, .txt, .rtf, .xml, .html, plus several more formats including Microsoft's .psw [for Pocket Word]. I have had better success with OOW opening and editing older Word documents than with MS-Office 2007. [Free download to install: <http://www.openoffice.org/>]

**Thinkfree Online:** To me, it's "ThinkLoser." and forget the "free" part. This is/was supposedly a free online suite with an optional Premium version.

Reputable media mentioned its limited beta offering was as early as December 2006 with cost estimates of \$5 to \$10 a month. Earlier this week (April 15) a Web search at Avant listed Broderbund as #1 among many download sources, but that link seized up both times I tried it. Reaching Broderbund by a different route, I found the installable (not “online?") Windows-only version for \$44.95. After 20 minutes or more trying to download, register, and fire it up the free one elsewhere on the Web, after email verifications, etc., plus two more crashes—amid various notices about what to do if downloading and installing failed in a variety of ways—I admitted failure and uninstalled it. Just before giving up, I had semi-installed and managed to find a Thinkfree screen claiming this to be the best office suite on earth. If so, earth is in trouble besides just growing warmer. Other screens apparently accessed their word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software, but never revealed any way to actually create a file using any of those choices! Two teasers seemed promising at first—“Search” and collaboration. Since I had not yet created a document, it was no surprise that searching for one proved to be a dead end. With nothing yet in production by me or anyone I know, its collaboration had even less utility. Next, I searched in “Templates,” achieving my only Thinkfree success, sort of. I typed “letter” in the template search box and got five letter templates or something. The first didn’t seem to be a letter template at all, but was a document about how to use Haitian expressions. The other four were in Asian languages using characters I cannot read. To be fair to Thinkfree, I’ve copied and pasted below their exact message and boldfacing. Since I never reached the “Sync Cache” folder they describe, I wish you better luck than mine if you care to try it. No date for the new version or demise of the older one was mentioned. If you have purchased TF Premium, store the receipt with your Enron stock certificates. Microsoft needn’t worry about this competitor. “We will be launching 'My Office' and providing a new version of ThinkFree Office. You will no longer be able to use the old version which is called 'ThinkFree Premium' as of that time. You will be using our new integrated ThinkFree Online service after installation. Please remove 'Sync Cache' folder before you proceed installing the new version of ThinkFree Office. Location and Instructions for removing the sync folder.  
For Windows: C:\Documents and Settings\account\MyDocuments\TFSync

For Mac: /Users/account/Documents/TFSync  
For Linux: /home/account/TFSync”

**Wordpad:** This little brother of MS-Word comes free with your Windows installation. It opens and saves in Unicode, .rtf, and the older MS-DOS .txt format but not Word's .doc. It comes with bolding, italics, and underlining of installed Windows fonts in colors, a horizontal ruler with adjustable margins and tabs, and a single bullet style but no numbering button or mail merge. It is a good emergency word processor if the missing features aren't needed for the project at hand.  
[Start>Accessories>Wordpad]

**WordPerfect X3:** One can pay the full “retail” price of several hundred dollars, but at <http://www.royaldiscount.com/corel.html> it is \$82.94. I prefer the “OEM” version for \$18.46 with free shipping for either version. The current X3 suite contains a powerful, customizable word processor compatible with MSOffice. Its Quattro Pro spreadsheet matches Excel quite nicely. A graphics drawing application and Presentations either its native mode or in PowerPoint mode. The word processor offers to work in MS-Word style, native WP X3 style, or older versions back to 5.1. All these apps play nicely with MS formats.

**Zoho:** I admit to saving the best for the last. Zoho wins my prize as winner among online word processors. All the integrated application elements of Zoho's suite employ similar enough interfaces and working styles so that users of Office version through 2003 will either recognize or master them quickly. I wish Microsoft Office 2007 had been designed by Zoho. This suite connects many well presented applications in a style that handles like a nimble sports car instead of a ponderous “featuremobile.” It displays obvious buttons and tools, export/publish options (including PDF), offline options (after one installs Google Gears), a stunning array of accessible and complementary features: spreadsheet, blogger, chat, notebook, planner, mail, database creator and reporter, conferencing, wiki editor, project manager, CRM and contact manager, plus others. Even if “Help” seems a bit elusive, the buttons and menus provide intuitive answers better than traditional, encyclopedia-type help. I found no reference to mail merge, but the other word processing feature set is both complete and readily at hand. Spell check, tables, bulleted lists, tags as folders, comments, and collaboration features seems to be exceptionally friendly. I have just started using this impres-

sive suite, so an in-depth evaluation will have to wait.

About John White: John has taught word processing and spreadsheets for a dozen years at New Horizons (Manhattan), Dowling College, NY Tech, and BOCES

### Smart Computing Tip Of The Day

Smart Computing Magazine sends these tips via e mail. They also have them archived on their website:

[www.smartcomputing.com](http://www.smartcomputing.com)

## Persistent Navigation Pane

By Rupen Sharma, WorldStart Staff Member

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Recently, in Wellington, New Zealand:

A New Zealand mom made some online bids on toys before napping. Then her 3-year-old daughter took over and bought a bigger plaything than expected — a huge earth-moving digger for a cool \$12,300.

For the complete story, go to <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,521120,00.html>

I read the story and thought the designer of the web site from where the 3 year old bought the earth moving equipment should be given an award for web design. You might be wondering why...well, web sites should be so intuitive that anyone can use them with minimal thinking. Otherwise, the audience will most likely leave your web site out of frustration.

One way of ensuring your audience is never lost while browsing is by using a **Persistent Navigation panel**. What this means is there should be a familiar navigation panel on each page of the website. For example, let's look at WorldStart.com.

From the home page, you navigate to the Cool Gadgets subsection in the Software Store section.



Notice the **Persistent Navigation panel** is still there, even though you have navigated to the Cool Gadgets subsection (category). A Persistent Navigation panel gives the audience comfort while searching for information or a product.

While you design your website, ensure there is a Persistent Navigation panel so that your audience knows exactly where to look when then need to navigate. This will leave the audience less frustrated and hopefully increase their stay.

