



NEWSLETTER

*The Best Accessory
for your PC!*

MAIN MEETINGS

West Side.....Tue, February 16

CollegeAmerica, 6533 N Black Canyon Hwy, Phoenix

East Side.....Wed, February 17

University of Advancing Technologies

2625 W Baseline Rd, Tempe

(one block west of Fry's Electronics)

Fountain Hills...Thu, February 18

Fountain Hills Library, 12901 N La Montana Drive,
Fountain Hills

This month's presentations :

Computer Backup - How and Why?

**Check our Website at www.PhoenixPCUG.org
to verify subject matter and time changes .**

ALL meetings!

Phoenix PC Users Group Officers

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Bill Aulepp: Editor@PhoenixPCUG.org
Hank Pearson: Webmaster@PhoenixPCUG.org

Steering Committee:

**Officers and Members who are present
at the 6:00 P.M. West Side meeting.**

Inside this Issue...

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THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Hi Everybody,

Hope you all had a nice Valentine's Day. Following are some topics to discuss at the upcoming meetings:

First on the agenda is to evolve ways to increase membership. If you have a friend that might be interested in our group bring your friend to the next meeting.

Secondly let's discuss what are the most meaningful type of presentations. Should we include hands on demonstrations ?

Next we can discuss making presentations available perhaps via www.dimdim.com or similar remote methods for people who can't make it to the meeting or have limited time. We may be able to 'can' the demo for later viewing with audio & video.

Another item for discussion are the SIGs - at the moment, our special interest groups - photography, video, general interest are all on hiatus. Should we drop regular SIGs and possibly do a topic of interest or workshop from time to time but forego monthly SIGs ?

Please consider these suggestions and feel free to contribute your own ideas. We will discuss them at the Westside meetin during the steering committee segment. We then will give a rundown of what happened at the steering committee to the members attending the other two meetings.

To add to the websites in the webtour article here are an additional two sites.

<http://www.pcmag.com/> - Windows Phone 7 Series formerly Windows Mobile 5, 6, etc. - new developments

<http://www.azcentral.com/business/articles/2010/02/11/20100211biz-smartphonefight0212.html> -

Challengers gain in important phone software fight - very good article.

David Yamamoto

FROM YOUR EDITOR

To confirm David's call for an increase in membership we also need members willing to participate in the Groups activities.

The newsletter would be much more informative if more members would write articles or let us know what subjects are of the greatest interest to them.

This month we feature a webtour conducted by David. We also have a wrap-up on Windows 7 to date.

In March the release candidate version of Windows 7 will start phasing out. We will be doing an article on the problems and techniques of either porting XP to Win 7 or working out a dual system which is my preference with XP on one hard drive and Win 7 on a second hard drive with a dual boot option.

Bill Anlepp

MEETINGS

CALENDAR

For room and time changes,
check your website: phoenixpcug.org .

GENERAL MEETINGS

WEST SIDE: CollegeAmerica (see map page 16)

- Tuesday, Feb 16, 2009
- 6:00 PM Steering Committee
- 6:30 PM - Q and A
- Followed by Presentation. Computer Backup - How and Why?

EAST SIDE: University of Advancing Technology (see map page 16)

- Wednesday, Feb 17, 2009
- 6:30 PM - Q and A
- Followed by Presentation. Computer Backup - How and Why?

FOUNTAIN HILLS: Fountain Hills Library (see map page 16)

- Thursday, Feb 18, 2009
- 6:30 PM - Q and A
- Followed by Presentation. Computer Backup - How and Why?

SIG MEETINGS

WEST SIDE: CollegeAmerica (see map page 16)

- Digital Photography Sig
- Followed by: Digital Video Sig
- On hiatus.

FOUNTAIN HILLS: Library (see map page 16)

- General Sig Meeting is also on hiatus.

WEB TOUR

David travels the web.

Our President, David Yamamoto, knows how to travel the web searching for computer related information. We asked him to give us the itinerary of one of his recent sessions. Here are the sites that he visited and some of his notes regarding the sites. Remember you can go to our website (see below) and on the webtour page you will find all of the sites listed for your convenience. You can click on any site you desire and visit it painlessly. No laborious typing required.

<http://www.phoenixpcug.org/index.php>

Canon revs up Rebel video

http://news.cnet.com/8301-17938_105-10449079-1.html

Microsoft: your battery is the problem, not Windows 7

<http://arstechnica.com/microsoft/news/2010/02/microsoft-your-battery-is-the-problem-not-windows-7-1.ars>

Google Tech News

<http://news.google.com/news/section?pz=1&cf=all&ned=us&topic=t>

Apple Ipad – Book Reader

<http://www.apple.com/ipad>, a bigger ipod? ebook reader, color, surfs the web, virtual keyboard, not true tablet PC.

[iPad Debut Disappoints Potential Buyers](http://portables.about.com/b/2010/02/06/ipad-debut-disappoints-potential-buyers.htm?nl=1)

<http://portables.about.com/b/2010/02/06/ipad-debut-disappoints-potential-buyers.htm?nl=1>

[Apple eBook Pricing Putting Pressure on Amazon](http://www.eweek.com/)

Tech Products Review - eweek

<http://www.eweek.com/>

Linux creator Linus Torvalds has come out and publicly stated that he not only has bought Google's Nexus one smartphone, but likes it. Torvalds' endorsement of Google's device is no small thing, and could swing the support of the full Linux community that is ready and willing to take on Apple's iPhone.

Smart Computing – Computer tech support

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www.smartcomputing.com/techsupport/Default.aspx

Search The Tech Support Center

How To Use This Search:

Are you having trouble importing photos from your digital camera? Just type in digital camera below to see all the resources we have for solving problems with digital cameras. Don't include words like problems or malfunction or type in long phrases. Use one- or two-word searches, but don't type in extremely broad terms like windows or computer. Use "Top Subjects" links whenever possible.

Basic Troubleshooting Articles

Smart Computing has assembled a comprehensive list of articles that start at square one and work you quickly through all fundamental checks and tests.

Sample Articles:

Troubleshooting Email
 Troubleshooting Cable/DSL
 Reinstall Windows

View ALL Basic Troubleshooting Articles

Backups & Data Recovery

Every disk drive in existence will stop working one day; count on it. If a drive failure would be a major disaster in your life—or even just a terrible nuisance—move forward and back up.

Sample Articles:

Backup Basics
 Data Recovery Basics
 Create Emergency Boot Disks

View ALL Backup & Data Recovery Articles

Preventive & Regular Maintenance

It's really pretty easy, it doesn't take very long, and it's a whole lot better than having to buy a whole

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WEB TOUR

(Continued from page 4)

new PC.

Sample Articles:

Maintenance Basics
Clean A Full-Size Keyboard
Leave It On Or Shut It Down

View ALL Preventive & Regular Maintenance Articles

Networking & Communications

Installing and configuring your home network properly in the first place is the surest way to avoid problems. Whether you're considering installing one, about to begin, or if you're experiencing problems now with your home network, this section's for you.

Sample Articles:

Setting Up A Wireless Network
Troubleshooting Wireless Networks
Setting Up Printer Sharing

View ALL Networking & Communications Articles

Articles On How To Install ... Just About Anything

Use these as step-by-step installation guides, or just scan them to see what you'd be getting into if you're considering a hardware or software upgrade or replacement. Whatever the case, life is easier when you do it right the first time.

View ALL How To Install ... Articles

Driver Education

Drivers—they're the little software programs that help your computer manipulate the various devices attached to it. But they can become lost, corrupted, or outdated. Read all about them, including where to find and download all the latest versions.

View ALL Driver Education Articles

Other Helpful Tech Support Tools

Tips For Using Browsers & Email

Computing Dictionary & Encyclopedia

List Of File Extensions With Explanations

Manufacturer Tech Support Index

Join the Microsoft Windows 7 Conversation

Microsoft engineers discuss the new Windows 7 operating system. Join the discussion about the next-generation operating system.

<http://talkingaboutwindows.com/Default.aspx>

Your Guide to Windows 7

http://www.pcmag.com/Windows_7/

http://www.pcmag.com/search_redirect/?qry=windows+7&searchSection=0&site=3

Official TWiT Wiki!

2,312 articles of TWiT goodness so far.

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/Main_Page

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/Windows_Weekly_141

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/Windows_Weekly_140

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/Windows_Weekly_139



[Leo Laporte](#) discusses [Leo's feed](#), [TWiT Conversations](#)

Live now: Windows Weekly 142 with Paul Thurrott and Mary Jo Foley. <http://live.twit.tv>

<http://friendfeed.com/twit-conversations/827f0ae9/live-now-windows-weekly-142-with-paul-thurrott>

<http://friendfeed.com/twit-conversations/dcde2a17/live-now-windows-weekly-141-with-paul-thurrott>

<http://friendfeed.com/twit-conversations/99b2f447/live-now-windows-weekly-140-with-paul-thurrott>

<http://friendfeed.com/twit-conversations/dbc55f68/live-now-windows-weekly-139-with-paul-thurrott>

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/TWiT_234

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/TWiT_233

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/TWiT_232

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http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/TWiT_231

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/TWiT_234/Transcript
pending

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/TWiT_233/Transcript

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/TWiT_232/Transcript

http://wiki.twit.tv/wiki/TWiT_231/Transcript

Great Computer Personalities

[LOL: The Life of Leo](#)

My name is *Leo Laporte*. I am a US-based journalist specializing in technology coverage on radio, TV, and the Internet. This site is home to my blog and ...

<http://leoville.com/>

[Leo Laporte - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

Léo Gordon *Laporte* (born November 29, 1956 in Manhattan, New York City) is an American technology broadcaster, author, and entrepreneur. ...

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Laporte

[The Lab with Leo Laporte - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

The Lab with *Leo Laporte* was a technology-based television program hosted by ...

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
The Lab with Leo Laporte](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lab_with_Leo_Laporte)

[The Tech Guy - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

The Tech Guy is a nationally syndicated radio show, hosted by *Leo Laporte* of ...

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tech_Guy

[John C. Dvorak - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

John C. Dvorak (born April 5, 1952 in Los Angeles, California) is an American columnist and broadcaster in the areas of technology and computing. ...

[Personal life and background](#) - [Writing career](#) - [Controversy](#) - [Awards](#)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Dvorak

[Cranky Geeks](#)

John C. Dvorak, whose crankiness knows no bounds, is a contributing editor of PC Magazine.

<http://www.crankygeeks.com/>

[Kim Komando - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

Kim Komando (born July 1, 1967) is the host of an American talk radio program based on the popularity of personal computers, the use of the Internet, ...

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Komando

<http://www.komando.com/>

Data Doctors, Ken Coburn

<http://www.datadoctors.com/>

Remember you can go to our website (see below) and on the webtour page you will find all of the sites listed for your convenience. You can click on any site you desire and visit it painlessly. No laborious typing required.

<http://www.phoenixpcug.org/index.php>

PPCUG's Ride Sharing Program

Bill Aulepp, long time group member has volunteered to coordinate member communication for those who need rides and those who can provide them.

To join the program for either side, email Bill at bill@aulepp.com Provide your name, your address, a way to contact you, and whether you can give or need a ride. Please do not wait until the last minute to request a ride,

Bill will gather the information from everyone who responds and connect up drivers with riders. It will be the responsibility of the individual members to organize the actual rides, dates, and pick up information.

Able to Provide a Ride?

Are you willing to pick up, transport and drive another member to one meeting a month? As an added bonus, any driver participating will receive one extra raffle ticket each time they drive a member to a meeting.

SMART COMPUTING MAGAZINE - SUPPORT



There is a way you can support your user group. Smart Computing Magazine will give a gift subscription to the Phoenix PC Users Group to be used as a door prize, raffle, etc., for each five subscriptions received from our group. Subscriptions can be applied for with the subscription coupon below or by phone as long as you use our group's unique source code number (8305) when beginning the subscription.

For each paid subscription using the source code 8305, our user group will be credited one credit. Results are calculated each quarter, and credits will accumulate until the group reaches five paid subscriptions, at which time they will contact the PPCUG.

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THE EGG & YOU

The Egg & You: These "eggs" are subversive and fun!

Written by Charles W. Evans, Reviews Editor, HAL-PC Magazine, July 2009
www.hal-pc.org
reviews (at) hal-pc.org

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Crack one open.

Did you ever marvel at the engineering of an egg? What else makes an egg so fascinating, you ask? Enjoy these web sites, from real eggs to man-made eggs, including the "care and feeding" of eggs!

I hope you don't think computer programmers are dry as bones and boring as cactus. The fact is, sometimes they will just outright surprise you. Buried within many software applications are delightful, little, hidden, amusing tidbits called "Easter Eggs". Some are ordinary and others will amaze you. Several seasons of "Lost" have eggs. Learn where to find them at: www.eeggs.com.

Next time you crack a farm fresh egg, think about the road it traveled from the hen pen to your plate and all the stuff along the way, plus egg safety. Surf to: www.aeb.org.

OK, before you read #5 and for those who are chronically egg-chef challenged, the eternal question is now answered here, plus egg selection, separating, poaching (eggs, not deer), etc. Yah, yah, I know, real men don't "separate" eggs, but this site will show you how, for those times when you are alone! Surf to:

www.fabulousfoods.com/school/csingred/eggs.html or www.joyofbaking.com/eggs.html.

And now for something completely different. Magnificent manmade eggs, courtesy of Mr. Faberge of Russia. Surf to: www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/faberge/fmain.html.

The flames of your passion, or whimsy, will explode because there is an egg recipe for all occasions, all tastes and all people. Surf to: www.recipelink.com/rcpeggs.html

I know, I know, enough is enough, but I thought this brief foray would be eggsactly perfect to break the doldrums of working at your computer...and the tedium of thinking about your CY2009 taxes.

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Make checks payable to Phoenix PCUG

(Note: AD PAYMENT MUST ACCOMPANY AD unless credit arrangements have been made).
Commercial advertising rates per issue are shown below. Submit camera-ready black and white copy.

Typesetting service and photographic services provided at additional cost and must be scheduled and paid for IN ADVANCE. Payment must accompany ad. Copy will not be returned unless return postage is prepaid. Single insertion ad rates are as follows:

Full Page (7.5" by 10.0") \$50.00

Half Page (7.5" by 5.0") \$25.00 Ask about multiple insertion discounts!!!

Quarter Page (3.75" by 5.0") \$15.00 Note: Oversized ads are charged to the next higher size rate!!

Business Cards (2.0" by 3.5") \$ 5.00 (minimum of 3 months prepaid)

For questions please contact David Yamamoto 602 418-1249 or write to above.

Submission deadlines are the 25th of each month prior to month of publication. Prices subject to change without notice.

THE WINDOWS 7 STORY

Windows 7 is Here! Part I

Written by Robert Nisbet, a member of the Asbury Computer Club, MD

www.amvresidents.org/computerclub

halmarilyn (at) hotmail.com

This article has been obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups; all other uses require the permission of the author (see e-mail address above).

This first article will answer several basic questions about Windows 7. Future articles will cover aspects of the operating system of interest to most users.

Q: What is Windows 7?

A: Windows 7 is the next generation of operating system for PCs from Microsoft. It will replace Windows Vista – and Windows XP as it is phased out.

Q: Is Windows 7 the official name?

A: Yes. Microsoft considers this version the seventh version of Windows and has dropped the "fancy" (i.e. XP, Vista) names for now.

Q: Is Windows 7 a major change from Windows Vista?

A: Not relative to what you see, though there are some nice new user features which are addressed in future installments. Many improvements are "under the hood." Some pundits have characterized Windows 7 as "Windows Vista the way it should have been."

Q: I have a Windows Vista computer. Can I upgrade to Windows 7?

A: Yes. The upgrade will be easy and preserve all your files and settings. All your hardware that works with Windows Vista will work with Windows 7.

Q: I have a Windows XP computer. Can I upgrade to Windows 7.

A: Possibly, but... This is not so easy. You first have to make sure your computer will run Windows 7. Then, you have to decide if it is worth it. You will have to save all your data files and

then reformat your hard drive and start all over with the Windows 7 installation.

The next installment will cover how to get Windows 7 and the upgrade process for various users in more detail.

Getting Windows 7

There will be both upgrade and full editions of Windows 7. The version that will be available for U.S. use is Windows 7 Home Premium. There will be no "Basic" version of Windows 7 as there was for Vista. The upgrade version will cost about \$120 and the full version will cost about \$200. Most people will be obtaining the upgrade version, if bought in a store. If you buy a new computer between now and October 22, you receive a voucher from the manufacturer for a free upgrade to Windows 7 when it is available. You will have to install the upgrade yourself or obtain assistance. If you buy a new computer after October 22, your new computer will come with Windows 7 Home Premium already installed. It pays to wait if you can.

Upgrading from Windows Vista

If you are a Windows Vista user now and are contemplating upgrading to Windows 7 (I do recommend it), you should download and run the Microsoft Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor (Beta) utility. It will tell you if your computer hardware meets the minimum requirements for running Windows 7 and will identify anything that needs to be uninstalled or upgraded before the upgrade. It is available for download at Web address: tinyurl.com/mnmj8u. The Advisor is simple to use and will give you a printed report. Be aware you must have a DVD drive on your computer and not just a CD drive to install the upgrade. Windows 7 only comes on DVD discs.

Upgrading from Windows XP

If you are a Window XP user, you must now have a "high-end" computer to meet the minimum hardware requirements for Windows 7. If you bought an "inexpensive" XP computer origi-

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THE WINDOWS 7 STORY

(Continued from page 10)

nally, forget about upgrading. If you do upgrade you will have to do a "clean" installation where all your existing files are erased before installation. You will need to back-up all your data files prior to starting and reinstall all your applications afterward. All your peripherals (printer, scanner, etc.) will require new "driver" software, if they are not too old. The windows 7 disc comes with many drivers on it. Usually, a new computer is by far the best route for XP users.

Will I have trouble learning to use Windows 7? If you are a Vista user now, you should catch on to Windows 7 easily. They look very similar. There are some new features, which I will start covering in the next article. If you are a Windows XP user and buy a new Windows 7 computer, you will notice some

So far in this series we have covered some general questions about Windows 7 (May) and obtaining and installing Windows 7 (September.) This month I will start to cover some of the new features of Windows 7.

Caveat for upgrading from Vista

Something I forgot to address in the last issue is for Vista users upgrading to Windows 7. In your upgrade box you will find two DVDs. One is for 32 bit Windows and one is for 64 bit Windows. Choose the 32 bit disc for your upgrade. Don't worry about the difference for basic computing. Now, one of the two choices you have when you start the upgrade disc is the option called Upgrade. This is called an "in place" upgrade where the new operating system replaces the old operating system, but (hopefully) leaves everything else in place – your data files, settings, etc. NEVER, ever, ever start this process without first backing up all your data files to an external medium. Nine hundred ninety eight times out of a thousand everything will go fine, but you don't want to end up among those few where it does not and lose all your data. The Windows 7 DVD contains a Windows Easy Transfer Wizard tool that will backup all your

files and settings for you and put them back on the Windows 7 computer. If you are not computer savvy, you may need technical assistance to accomplish all this. Just to reiterate for XP users, Windows 7 ONLY comes on DVD, so if your XP computer only has a CD drive, forget about investing in the upgrade.

What's New in Windows 7?

There is no way in a few short paragraphs to describe in-depth all the new or improved features in Windows 7. For these articles I will just give you a basic overview of several of the most obvious so you better know what to expect when you see your own desktop and start using your new (or upgraded) computer.

While Windows 7 initially looks and acts a lot like Windows Vista from the user standpoint, there are a number of new and improved features designed to make using the computer easier and to improve productivity. I will cover some in this article and more in the next edition. Some are things you will not use every day, but it is good to know they exist – and understanding them will help you use Windows 7 more effectively.

Windows Aero

Aero is the "glassy" transparent look of windows that was introduced in Windows Vista. Things look even glassier in Windows 7. The idea is to deemphasize the windows itself and bring the focus onto the contents of the windows. The Aero effect also is seen on the taskbar and in several neat window management features carry the Aero label.

Windows 7 Taskbar

One of the first things you notice on the Windows 7 desktop is that the taskbar along the bottom of the screen still is there, but looks different. The icons on it are bigger and there are three icons already on it. Normally, the taskbar has only displayed icons for applications, folders, and files you had "opened." Also, just to the right of the Start button (or orb) there was a small area with a few icons on it. This was called

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THE WINDOWS 7 STORY

(Continued from page 11)

the “Quick Launch Toolbar.” Now, those two areas have been more or less combined. You can have both “shortcuts” to frequently used things on the taskbar (which you can “pin” there) as well as having it reflect the things you have opened. How do you tell one from the other? It can be confusing at first until you note that the “open” items each have a “glassy” box around them whereas the shortcuts do not.

You also notice a new button on the far right end of the toolbar. This is the Aero Peek button. Say you have several open windows covering the desktop and want to see your analog clock or weather bug gadget (described below) on the desktop. Just rest your mouse cursor on the Aero Peek button and the open windows become transparent allowing you to see the desktop. Move away and the windows return. Not the greatest advancement since sliced bread, but pretty neat nonetheless.

You also notice that if you open multiple files using the same application – say, Microsoft Word – there is only one Word icon on the taskbar, not one for each document. Hover your mouse over the Word button and you see live thumbnails of each document over the button, similar to what you see in Windows Vista. However, move the cursor up to one of the thumbnails and a full screen live preview appears. Once you find the file you want to work on, click that thumbnail and the document is on the screen.

Desktop Gadgets

What are gadgets anyway? They are handy little utilities that do something (hopefully) useful for you. There are analog clocks, weather bugs, slide shows, stock monitors, and literally hundreds of others to choose from in all types of categories. Gadgets were introduced in Windows Vista and resided in a reserved area along the right side of the screen called the Sidebar. Users complained that the sidebar ate up too much screen, so in Windows 7 gadgets have been

moved to the desktop. You can place them anywhere you want or not have any at all. It’s up to you. Since they are on the desktop, they often are hidden behind windows, hence Aero Peek described above.

Libraries

I am going to end this edition with another significant change in Windows 7. That is the introduction of the library concept for file management. You will see them, but may never fully use them. Still you need to understand what they are. Since the earliest days of Windows, we have had folders to keep our files in – the Documents folder being a prime example. All these folders resided on our computer. Well, the concept of personal computing has drastically changed over the last few years. Many homes have networks of several computers; some homes have home servers – essentially a basic computer with a huge hard drive to store files you want on it. In business, the file a person may need to use daily could be located on a far distant computer.

This is where libraries come in. Not to get too technical, but libraries do not exist physically. They are just a way to aggregate the folders and files you use and need to access in one handy place. You still have a Documents link on your Start menu just as you did in Vista. Now when you open it you see “Document Library” and the folders and files you have created. You also still have a default folder on your computer where Windows can store the things you create. This is called “My Documents.” (Sound familiar? Déjà vu all over again.) However, you also can “store” – and access in your Documents library – files which exist on another computer on your home network or even in another location over a network or the Web.

Many of you may never find the need to take full advantage of the library concept. However, it is a significant step forward in file access and management that does not tie the user to just one computer any more. Good job Microsoft, for a change.

LAUNCHY

Launchy

Free Windows and Linux Utility

Written by Robert Spotswood, a HAL-PC member, is active in the Linux SIG and a freelance computer professional

HAL-PC Magazine, June 2009

www.hal-pc.org

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I Know It's Here, Somewhere!

Remember when your computer was brand new? You wanted to start a program, you just clicked on the start menu, and within moments, you found the program and were on your way. Then you installed another program and your start menu grew a little. Many program installs later, your start menu takes up your whole screen. Column after column of programs. Sure, you can sort it and eventually find what you want, but not as fast as before.

"Oh well, I'll just put shortcuts to my most used programs on my desktop," you think to yourself. That works, for a little while. But put too many shortcuts and soon you can't see your wallpaper through the forest of shortcuts. On top of which, Windows is known to occasionally randomly rearrange your shortcuts for no apparent reason, so just memorizing locations on the desktop isn't a foolproof scheme.

Before long it takes you a while to find the link to launch the program you want or find the file you want to work on. The recently-used menu helps with files, but it's not infinitely long. There has to be a better, faster way.

Enter Launchy

Launchy is a small utility that can almost completely replace your start menu, desktop shortcuts, recently used file list, and to a lesser extent, your file manager. It runs on Linux, Windows XP, Windows Vista, and with a little tweaking, Windows 2000. The Launchy homepage is www.launchy.net/ and the program is both free and open source.

It works by doing a search of several folders on your hard drive, but not the whole hard drive, and indexing them, including your start menu. Normally, it hides in the background, unseen, until you summon it by simultaneously pressing the Alt key and the space bar (also written as Alt + Space). Then a small window opens up where you can type the name of the program you want to run.

The mouse is a wonderful tool, but for some things it can be slow and clumsy.

Launchy is smart enough that you often only have to type a few letters of the name and Launchy will attempt to guess at what you are typing. If it guesses correctly, just press enter to launch the program. Launchy then returns to the background until summoned again.

If Launchy didn't guess correctly, wait a second and it will show you a list of possible matches and, using the down arrow, you can pick the correct choice, or just continue typing more of the name. Launchy also remembers your choice, and learns from it, so the next time, the list presented will probably be more accurate with fewer letters typed.

The name you type is the name of the shortcut or file, not the full path to the shortcut or file, so you don't have to remember where the shortcut is. As you can see in figure 1, even though the actual name of the shortcut to Firefox is "Mozilla Firefox," you can get away with just typing "firefox."

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If you select a file, rather than a program, then your operating system will automatically launch the program associated with that file type, just as if you found the file in Explorer and double-clicked on it in Windows. With Launchy, you don't have as many steps to get working.

Compare the old way of doing things such as launching your word processor, then doing a file open, then scrolling around to find the file you are looking for, then opening the file. Or you could tap Alt + Space, type in the file name, or more likely only part of the file name, and hit enter. Launchy is faster, simpler, and easier.

Configuring Launchy

Launchy's settings can be accessed by right-clicking on the Launchy window anywhere outside the text box and selecting "Options." Launchy is skinable, and some skins have an option icon on them. In Figure 1, the options icon is circled in red. Regardless of how you access the options, there are five tabs to browse through.



Figure 1: Launchy in action

The General Tab

The General tab has only a few important options. One is the hot key. If you don't like Alt + Space, you can change it here. The portable mode is useful if you don't have administrative rights to your computer and cannot install programs. See the official documentation for more details on how to use the portable mode. The

final important option is how often to update the catalog, or index, of files and programs. The more directories you index, the more this will slow your system down. If there aren't changes to the directories you catalog very often, change this to a higher number.

The Skins Tab

The Skins tab is where you can change the look of Launchy. This is a matter of personal taste. Experiment to find out which skin works best for you. Linux users, be aware that not all skins display correctly under Linux unless you are using compiz or beryl.

The Catalog Tab

The Catalog tab is possibly the most important of the option tabs. Launchy will only work on items that are in its catalog. This is where you tell Launchy where to look and what to look for.

There are two steps to add a new location for Launchy to search. First you must add a directory by clicking on the plus sign circled in red in Figure 2. Then you browse for the directory you want to add. If you want to remove a directory from the catalog, select the directory and click on the minus button to the right of the plus button.

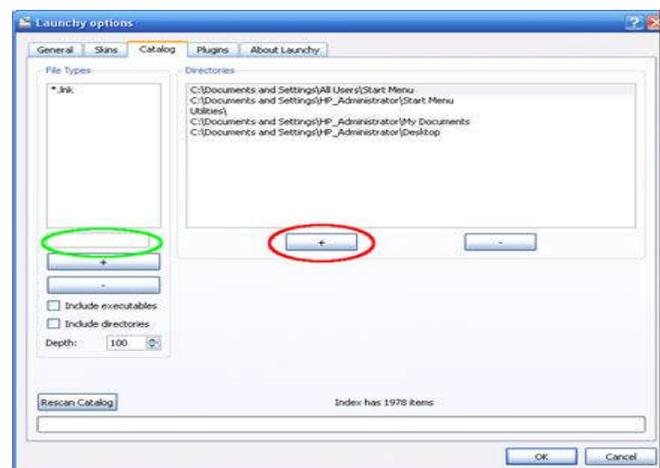


Figure 2: The Catalog Tab

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Step two involves telling Launchy what to look for in that directory. You must add at least one file type for each directory or Launchy won't do anything with the directory. First, you must select a directory on the right. Then type in a file type in the box circled in green in Figure 2 and press the plus sign below it. This adds that file type to the highlighted directory only. If you want every directory in the directory list to include PDFs for example, then you must add "*.pdf" to every directory. A few of the common file types for Windows you might want to add to the appropriate directories are:

- *.doc
- *.xls
- *.odt
- *.ods
- *.ppt
- *.odp
- *.bat

While you can just have Launchy catalog everything with the file type "*", this is usually not a good idea. Larger indices take more system resources, especially when updating. But even more important is the fact that selecting everything tends to pollute the catalog, making it harder for both you and Launchy to find what you are looking for. By all means add what you need, but don't go crazy and add every file on the entire hard drive.

The Catalog tab also has a button to force the rescanning of the catalog. This is useful if you've turned off automatic indexing or just made some changes and don't want to wait for the automatic indexing.

The Plugins Tab

The Plugins tab allows you to enable and disable various plugins. Version 2.1.2 of Launchy comes with four plugins, although the docs mention others. Weby allows you to do some quick searches via the Launchy window. Type in one

of the keywords, press tab, type in your search terms, and press enter. Remember that you must press tab. Do not try to substitute a space. For instance to search for Launchy's homepage with Google, type google, press tab, then type launchy and press enter.

The Calcy and Gcalc plugins do similar things. Calcy is a simple calculator where you type in a math statement, such as 2+2 and you will immediately see the answer. Calcy is limited to addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. It does support parentheses. Gcalc does the same thing, but it queries Google for its answers. The format is a little different, in that you have to type gcalc, press tab, then type in your equation, and finally press enter to see the result. Gcalc supports all operations that Google supports, including unit conversions.

The Runner plugin allows you to set up custom aliases for commands that you would otherwise type in using the Windows command shell. See the forums for more details on this.

Conclusion

The mouse is a wonderful tool, but for some things it can be slow and clumsy. Launchy allows you to access things faster and, in some cases, easier than you could with a mouse. No more searching through the start menu to find the name of the program. No more wallpapering your desktop with shortcuts just to realize you can't find the one you want because there are so many of them. Use Launchy and be done with that headache.

Launchy is one of at least three programs that allow you to launch programs from the keyboard with ease. While it lacks a lot of options, the simplicity gives it an appeal some prefer. It does what it needs to do without a lot of configuring. For those interested in fancier, more options choices, you might want to check out the free program Executor (<http://executor.dk/>) or the not free program Dash (www.trydash.com/home/).

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