

DATA LINE



Published by Santa Clarita Valley Computer Club ... We're User Friendly
Serving the Santa Clarita Valley, CA since 1988

Volume XXIII, Issue 2
Editor: Judy Taylor

Meetings
SCV Senior Center
22900 Market Street
Newhall CA 91321
www.scvpcg.org

Wednesday, February 9, 2011

In This Issue

- 2 Google Labs - A Look at the Future
- 4 What a nasty virus can do to your computer
- 7 Drop it in the Box: Dropbox, what it is, how it works
- 9 IRS Affiliates Again Offer Free Online Filing
- 12 Software Review: System Mechanic v10
- 16 Ask the Computer Tutor
- 17 The Lighter Side
Geez - Gmail
- 19 Words of the Month
Smart Computing Tips & Fun Facts
- 20 December Meeting Recap
- 21 2009/2010 Officers
Membership Application
Membership Discounts
Around Town

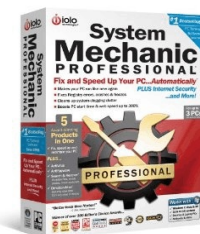
6:00 pm – SmartPhones – The Droid and iPhone. We'll take a look at both of them. Arnie has come up with something that will enable us to see them on the screen. He has an iPhone; Dick Beekman and I have Droids. We'll all share how we use them and what we like about them. How about you? If you have a SmartPhone, please share how you use it, too.

7:00 pm - Take 2, the guest speaker will be Mike Simpson from **iolo Technologies** demonstrating **System Mechanic® 10** – the most advanced approach to maximize PC performance. He'll be showing us the program (v10.5 is about to be released).

Sound familiar?

- Windows takes forever to start up
- Mysterious errors, crashes and restarts
- Sluggish Internet and download speeds
- Trouble loading songs, videos and programs
- Tired of bothering friends and family for help, or worse...hauling your PC to the local repair shop?

Then System Mechanic is for you. Both the Standard and Pro versions will be offered at a discount to attendees.



www.iolo.com

Google Labs - A Look at the Future

Written by Sandy Berger, Compu-KISS

<http://www.compukiss.com> / [sandy\(at\)compukiss.com](mailto:sandy(at)compukiss.com)



If you want to look at the future of technology, you can get a good glimpse at Google Labs. This is the place where Google features their some of the current technology projects that they are working on. Some of these are pretty fantastic. You can see many of them yourselves.

The Labs can be found at www.googlelabs.com. This is the place where Google lets you try out their latest software. These are programs that are still "in the making." So some of the details might not yet be perfect, but they are all very useable. You'll find that some are pretty fantastic. Here are a few currently featured Lab programs that I suggest you try. You can find a link to each one in the Google Labs.



Body Browser

This is a newly developed program and one of Google's most specular offerings. Body Browser gives a detailed 3D model of the human body. If like me, you played with the "Invisible Man" or "Invisible Woman" models when you were a kid, you will love this. You are presented with an on screen body and you can peel back anatomical layers, going from the skin to the bones in anatomical increments. You can zoom into any area and navigate to parts that interest you. You can search for certain muscles, organs, or bones. Everything is accurately labeled. You will be amazed by the human body as well as by the program. To view the Body Browser, you will need a web browser that supports WebGL, which is an up-and-coming feature in web browsers. The latest Beta version of Google's Chrome web browser supports WebGL and will work with the Body Browser. It is free and publicly available at www.google.com/landing/chrome/beta. If you have the time, this one is definitely worth a look.

Google Goggles

Google Goggles lets you search Google using pictures from your camera phones. No words - just pictures. Take a picture with your cell phone camera, put it into Google Goggles and Google will give you search results relating to that picture. For instance, if you take a picture of the Statue of Liberty, Google Goggles will recognize it and will give you web results about the Statue of Liberty. It's pretty amazing. They use object recognition, place matching, OCR, and several other image recognition backends to return relevant search results. If you have a mobile phone with a camera, it's a fun one to try and you may be amazed by its accuracy.



Open Spot

Open Spot is one of the Google Labs programs that will give you a glimpse of the future of mobile phone use. It lets people who use cell phones with the Android operating system, tell the world that they are leaving a good parking spot. This allows those who are looking for a parking spot in the same location zero in on an open parking spot. Using Open Spot is almost a little game of good deeds. You can earn 'karma points' by playing because you are helping others save time, gas and frustration.

Google Transit

This is a way to get step-by-step transit directions on your computer's web browser or mobile phone. It will help you find transit stops in your area and will let you view station information and schedules. It is perfect if you are visiting a new city.

City Tours

The screenshot displays the Google City Tours interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Enter a starting address for your tour" and "new york, new york" entered. Below the search bar, there are links for "View schedule", "Add/Remove sights", and "Change dates". The main content area is divided into two parts: a list of sights on the left and a map on the right. The list of sights includes:

- Whitney Museum of American Art**: 13:33, for 60 minutes, walk about 42 minutes
- Rockefeller Center**: 15:15, for 30 minutes, walk about 4 minutes
- Museum of Modern Art**: 15:49, for 60 minutes, walk about 18 minutes
- New York Public Library**: 17:07, for 45 minutes, walk about 7 minutes
- Grand Central Terminal**: 17:59, for 15 minutes, walk about 13 minutes
- St. Patrick's Cathedral**: 18:27, for 30 minutes, walk about 56 minutes
- A Walk in Central Park**: 19:53, for 45 minutes, walk about 71 minutes
- Times Square**: 21:49, for 30 minutes, walk about 1 minutes

The map on the right shows a blue line connecting these points of interest in a circular path through Manhattan, New York City. The map includes labels for various landmarks and streets, and has a scale bar at the bottom left.

This little program will give you walking tours of major cities. You just give it a starting address and Google will find nearby points of interest and create a path for you to follow. You can even create multi-day walking tours and/or create your own tours of points of interest that you want to see.

Fast Flip

Fast Flip gives you a speedy overview of the day's headlines from top newspapers. If you want to quickly peruse the news, this one is for you.

Google Alerts

This is a service that will send you email updates of the latest relevant Google results based on your choice of topic. I have a Google Alert for "Sandy Berger". So every time my name is mentioned on the web, Google will send me an alert. Unfortunately, I also get alerts about the Sandy Berger from Washington, DC who stuffed classified documents into his pants, but now I really know a lot about him as well. This is a perfect service if you want information on a certain

disease, celebrity, politician, or other topic. You can control the timing of the alerts so that you don't get too many.

Flu Trends

Would you like to see if how much flu is in your current area or an area that you are about to visit? Google Flu Trends will show you exactly the amount of flu activity in that area. It covers both the United States and Mexico.

This is just a brief taste of what the Google Labs has to offer. There are many, many more. All the programs are free and all are easy to use. The Google Labs is constantly changing as Google adds more and more works in progress to their laboratory. If you want to see the latest and the greatest, be sure to check out the Google Labs.

What a nasty virus can do to your computer

By Merle Nicholson, Secretary, Tampa PCUG, Florida

November 2010 issue, Bits of Blue

www.tpcug.org / [merle \(at\) merlenicholson.com](mailto:merle@merlenicholson.com)

I recently was asked to remove a virus from a friend/client's notebook. For all intents and purposes, it rendered the computer completely in-operative. The virus was in a virus category of "Rogue antivirus software." There are many of them out there for the unwary to catch, and this one, called "ThinkPoint," even has the Windows flag on it to further fool you into thinking it is legitimate. The only option you can see is "Safe Startup," and that takes you to a virus scanner and a way to purchase the product. If you close it out, it shows you a blank desktop, no icons, no menus. You can turn the machine off, that's about it. Turn it back on, same situation. I did figure out a way to kill it through the Task Manager's Run command, and then run the desktop. I also found some things written up on the Internet to do something similar, but no help in removing it. I did remove it using some very clever, obscure



skills, several virus scanners, then finding and removing twenty or so copies of it. But the computer really didn't work well enough to use. What I found surprised me, and this is what the article is about and what you can do.

Here's a list of what I found. Some things are by deduction and may not be 100% accurate. But I am 100% certain that these problems existed. All of the things fit into a strategy that prevents you from fixing the computer.

1. The worst thing: The computer will not boot into safe mode. It blue screens every time. I'm speculating that ThinkPoint either corrupted an existing driver or put a new one in that loads and then fails. The way to fix this is to do a system repair or a complete reformat and

installation. I did not want to impose that cost on my customer, and she agreed (it's not a primary computer, and it's rather old). So I left it that way.

2. All the system restore points were unusable. Refused to restore to any point.
3. To run most anything, an official-looking popup would ask to confirm the logon user and give a box for an alternative user account that did not work. This is to make sure that everything you try is run under the current user account which has been modified to prevent circumventing the virus. What you want to run is Explorer.exe giving you your desktop, and every effort is made to prevent you from doing this.
4. Most – perhaps all – items in Control panel will not run. It gave a warning that the administrator account has restricted its use. I did manage to get into the power configuration, but it would not accept any change. The computer would go into sleep mode after about 20 minutes, keeping me from running a full system scan from any antivirus software unless I sat there and wiggled the mouse occasionally for four hours.
5. The Internet articles say that even if you purchase the software to fix a bogus virus, ThinkPoint stays on the computer. The uninstall just errors out.
6. The Internet articles say that it installs other viruses, and I did find a half dozen other viruses, mostly downloaders.
7. It leaves about 20 copies of itself under various random names, and places items in the registry to run each of them. So removing the active virus is just the beginning. I also found a couple of viruses in the System Restore files.
8. It apparently makes changes to the current user account profile that look like group policy changes, even though this was Windows XP Home, which doesn't have group policy capability.
9. Only after all the bad software is cleared from the machine can you then get rid of the modified account by creating a new administrative account, copying all of the user files from the old to the new – except for the profile files, then deleting the old account after locating the email files.

Isn't this scary? It is to me, and I (95%) fixed this one with a lot of work. The idea of having to fix my own machine after something like this gives me nightmares.

What you can do to prevent this: A sizable number of virus infections now are rogue anti-virus'. There's an understandable reason for this. It creates revenue. Old-fashioned viruses are malicious, but have no revenue-producing strategy. In other words, it's now about money. Most all viruses are sent to you via web pages, and most of those are porn sites, either designed that way or hacked from outside. Porn sites are visited so often, they are a very good candidate for this kind of thing. Also, presumably the porn site owners don't have the skill to remove sophisticated hacks. But most any web site is vulnerable. In any case, you must select something on the site – click on it – to give the browser a chance to violate security rules.



The next common way to get a virus is with downloads. And that means just about any download or file transfer. So you have to get any and all files from reputable sites like iTunes or Downloads.com, Amazon etc., which have the resources to check their own content.

But that leaves any and all file-sharing sites absolutely and definitely off the list. So if you're downloading songs for free, you're in trouble. Any file-sharing site's software must be uninstalled from your computer.

And that also goes for any peer-to-peer gaming sites, LimeWire, Kazaa, and any and all IM programs that allow peer-to-peer file exchanges.

And while we're at it, remove – uninstall – anything that says "Toolbar." Right now. Want to know why toolbars are free? Because they're a conduit for pushing advertising to you; and they're easily exploited. Besides you don't need them. They want you to believe you do, of course! But the browser itself and a couple of favorites will do anything a toolbar will do.

An alternative is giving up gaming and IM and to start purchasing songs. So if you have kids who will just die without peer-to-peer gaming or IM and stealing songs, the answer is to live with it with some intelligent prevention.

First, if at all possible, put the kids (and maybe grandpa) on a Windows 7 machine. If you have some internal networking and file sharing, Windows 7 Pro is better because it will back up to a network drive. But so will Acronis Home, or 2010 or 2011, running under Win 7 Home Premium.



Make sure you have a full system backup, and replace it monthly. Use Windows 7 Backup or Acronis. Believe me, restoring the entire system hard drive is way, way better than any alternative that I can think of. Look at what I had to do with ThinkPoint. Want to try it?

I guess it's obvious, but a strong anti-virus program running on your machine is essential. BUT – this is important – make sure you look at the scheduling part of it and make sure it will automatically download new definitions and also run a full system scan at a time of day that the machine will most likely be turned on. Same for Windows Updates. Make certain that all important updates are installed as soon as they are available.

Password protect your main administrative account (this is the one that comes first with the computer) and bury the password paper in the back yard and leave the location with your attorney. Better yet, Win 7 allows you to create a flash drive that will unlock the computer. Hide it under some rubber fake dog poop someplace.

THEN: Create a non-administrative account for yourself – a regular non-privileged account, and a separate one – or one for each kid. A regular account cannot install software. But most importantly, SOFTWARE that is run under this account can't install software. Ah HA!

Then one more step. Set the screensavers to require a sign-in on wake-up, and ALWAYS log off when you leave the computer. That's especially essential when leaving the administrative account.

Skills: There are a few things that would be very helpful to learn. The big one is navigating the computer file system using Windows Explorer. Find out how your files are organized, and more importantly, how to change what files you can view. That's in Windows Explorer, Tools, Folder Options, View tab. Second Important Skill – learn to use the Add, Remove Programs. That's

“Programs and Features” in Vista and Win 7. When you find an installed program that you are not using (say, anything with the word Apple or toolbar), just uninstall it, and see how it goes.

Drop it in the Box: Dropbox, what it is, how it works

By Jo Grazide, Leader, Word Processing Workshop, Brookdale CUG, NJ

February 2011 issue, Bug Bytes

[http://.bcug.org / gio520 \(at\) gmail.com](http://.bcug.org/gio520@gmail.com)

What is Dropbox?

Suppose you were able to save work without using a flash drive, a disk (CD or DVD-R or RW), or an external drive, or even email, and move files between your laptop and desktop? For many years, I, like so many of us, had developed methods and procedures to upload, download, and save documents, music and pictures to a storage device, only to have to rely on memory to locate it afterwards. Another irritating problem for me, especially when I was working, was to identify the “latest” version, so that an older file would not overwrite my work during a “Save As.”

Enter Dropbox, a useful application that eliminates lots of work and uncertainty.

Dropbox

is a free download that offers protection and convenience and is easy to use. There is basically no learning involved. You should, however, be familiar with Drag & Drop and Move vs. Copy. Why not give Dropbox a try and see whether this is for you.

I first heard of Dropbox during a meeting of my camera club. Some members seemed happy with it; there were no negative comments, leading me to investigate. Having a way to store photography files without worrying about loss or corruption seemed an ideal solution to the problem of travel pictures. I got to test this, when I maxed out the Dropbox folder at around 2 GB during a vacation in Boston. There are two ways to increase your storage capacity – you can purchase the program on a monthly or yearly basis, or you can have friends join the service and be rewarded a few more MB’s up to a whopping 8 GB.

Get the App

To acquire Dropbox, you need to go to the website at www.dropbox.com. The download is quick and easy. Just run it, and follow the instructions. There are six initial steps:

1. Take the tour
2. Install Dropbox
3. Put files in your Dropbox folder
4. Install Dropbox on other computers
5. Share a folder with friends or colleagues
6. Invite friends to join

It is necessary to install the program on all computers that you will be using. The setup is done on the website, and the instructions are easy.

In my case, this is my laptop and my desktop. As I move around with the laptop, to meetings or anywhere I use it, I'm able to save files as they are created, directly into the Dropbox folder, which sits in the system tray area. By clicking on its icon, Dropbox will provide easy and helpful commands.

In addition, I know that once I reach home, altered files will be available and updated on my desktop machine. They can be dragged into their proper locations on the storage drives. This has been extremely useful. Instead of dealing with two documents, a newer version and an older version, there is only one synchronized version.

Another nice aspect is that I don't have to worry about misplacing storage disks or flash drives, which does happen. I also would think that it lessens stress, as there is nothing to lose!

On the Website



There is plenty of information on the Dropbox website. There are videos and explanations of the syncing process. Basically, anything that is put into the local folder is also recorded on the Internet. You can also access your files and upload them directly onto the Dropbox server.

It can be compared to using GoogleDocs or Windows Live Mesh. Collaboration, by the way, is possible. I haven't delved into this, because I simply need a way to move data between computers. If you want to learn more, you need to visit the Dropbox website and study this feature.

The Dropbox website has five tabs:

- "Get Started" walks you through several chores before you can earn some extra space. This is simple and easy to understand.
- "Files" is the online list of your current Dropbox inhabitants, their sizes and the dates they were modified. You can sort each column by clicking on its heading. There are buttons here that let you do even more. A basic knowledge of file management is all you need to comprehend this part of the application.
- "Events" is a listing of various edits, deletions, and other information about your files.
- "Sharing" allows you to create a new folder to share, or share an existing folder. By following the prompts, you can identify who you want to share the folder with. In my case, I began typing my husband's email address, and it was prefilled for me. This would make it easier for multiple shares in a business or committee setting. Perhaps our next Board meeting minutes will appear in a Dropbox folder! I also found that once the shared folder appeared in my local Dropbox folder, I could rename it and manage it locally. A refresh caused the change to appear on the website immediately. I like this type of efficiency. There is no lag time, and information can be relayed quickly between computers.
- Finally, "Help" is all the rest. It seems that the Dropbox website is complete; you can spend much time learning about it. I would suggest that you jump in and try out the program; you can learn by doing as well.

There are a couple of things I would warn you about as a new user. If you simply drag and drop the file back and forth, it copies the file. You may want to right-drag and choose move to ensure you have the latest version of your work or photograph. Also, having a comfort level with storage online to some extent, and not adding things like your Social Security number or banking information, goes without saying. Aside from that, there are no problems I can see with using this reliably.

One Last Thing

I do have one favor to ask you if you do join Dropbox; please use the link! It will enable both of us to get some extra space, a great reward and well deserved! The link to join on my behalf is <http://db.tt/sHvgWQp>. I promise I will not waste that space!!!!!!

System Requirements

Hardware: At least 512MB of RAM; free space on your computer equal to your Dropbox storage quota.

Software

- Windows: Windows 2003, Windows XP, Windows Vista, and Windows 7 (32 and 64-bit).
- Mac OS X: Tiger (10.4) or later.
- Linux: Ubuntu 7.10+ and Fedora Core 9+.
- Also iPhone iOS 3.1, Android 1.5 and Blackberry 4.5.

Pricing: Up to 2 gigabytes of free storage space; DropBox 50, up to 50GB storage for \$9.99/month or \$99/year; Dropbox 100, up to 100GB storage for 19.95/month or \$199/year.

For more information: <https://www.dropbox.com/plansproducts/desktop>

IRS Affiliates Again Offer Free Online Filing

By Ira Wilsker, Member, Golden Triangle PC Club, TX;

Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX;

Radio Show Host, Mondays, 6-7pm CT, KLVI.com

[iwilsker \(at\) sbcbglobal.com](mailto:iwilsker@sbcbglobal.com)

WEBSITES:

<http://freefile.irs.gov>

<http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118986,00.html?portlet=6>

<http://www.irs.gov/ita/index.html>

<http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=235215,00.html?portlet=6>

<http://freefile.irs.gov/get-more-information.html> (States that have Free Filing)

It is again that time of year that we are receiving those dreaded W-2 and 1099 forms. This year due to a local holiday in Washington, DC, we actually have until April 18 to file, rather than the

traditional April 15 that we have all come to approach with trepidation. The Sunday newspaper sale books, big box stores, and online retailers are rife with deals on tax preparation software, including big discounts, rebates, gift cards, package deals where the tax software is bundled with other software; one big box store is even offering the major tax software titles with a \$15 gift card and up to \$1200 worth of other non-tax software programs at deep discounts, many of which are "free after rebate" (read the details in the store carefully before the purchase!). The TV and newspaper are loaded with advertisements for commercial tax preparation services, and one local tax preparer has some poor soul standing for long hours on the street corner outside of his temporary store front location, wearing a foam Statue of Liberty costume, and carrying a sign touting the tax service.

Depending on our individual circumstances, we have a lot of options that we can utilize in order to complete this annual event. Many of us still choose to use the traditional pencil and paper method to fill in the blanks on what we hope is the correct tax form. Others have decided to use one of the many independent or franchised tax services that spring up in retail stores or in vacant store fronts every spring, like mushrooms on my lawn after a heavy rain. Some choose to



use the expertise of CPA's to prepare their taxes, while millions of others purchase commercial tax software to prepare their income taxes. Once again there is a free alternative available to millions of people to prepare their federal income taxes, and that is the FreeFile service offered by the 16 participating members of the IRS approved "Free File Alliance". For those who still desire to do their own tax calculations, there is also one additional IRS approved provider who offers simple online forms that can be filled in by the user, calculated by the user, and then e-filed, all for free.

Visitors to the IRS FreeFile website at freefile.irs.gov will find the process easy to navigate and use. According to the IRS, everyone, regardless of income and circumstances, is eligible to use at least some of the free online services. At the FreeFile website, the user follows three simple



steps to prepare, calculate, and files his taxes. First, the IRS suggests that the user gathers last year's tax forms, as well as this year's (2010) W-2, 1099, and other tax statements. The IRS then requests that the user calculates his "AGI" or "Adjusted

Gross Income" to determine which of the free services he is eligible for. Wikipedia defines AGI as the gross income "... less allowances for personal exemptions and itemized deductions. Adjusted gross income is gross income less certain specific items." The reason for this preliminary determination is to determine the individual's eligibility for any or all of the 16 free online tax services. Individuals or families with an AGI of less than \$58,000 may be eligible for the free online tax services, while those with an AGI of more than \$58,000 can still use the free online forms to calculate their own taxes, and then use the free e-file service. According to the IRS, about 70% of all taxpayers are eligible for the free full-service online filing by having an AGI of less than \$58,000

The second step is to either select a FreeFile provider (if eligible), or to use the free online forms. A wizard is available to help the user select a free provider, or the user can select from the list provided by the IRS. The wizard asks a few questions to determine the proper provider, these questions being your age, your AGI, your state of residence, eligibility for an earned Income Credit (if known), and if you or your spouse earned pay from the military. Answering

these few questions will present the eligible user with a list of IRS approved providers who will offer complete online tax calculations and e-filing services. For the eligible user who desires to manually select his provider of free federal tax services, many of the providers will have familiar names. Some of the best known providers of the free online tax service include H&R Block (Free federal online tax return preparation and e-file if your adjusted gross income (AGI) is \$58,000 or less and you are age 51 or younger. This federal

Welcome to H&R Block Free Edition

Returning User

Username

Password

[Unable to access your account?](#)

Remember my username on this computer

[Go To My Account](#)

New User

[Create My Account](#)

[Start Without an Account](#)

offer is valid in all states); TurboTax (Free federal online tax return preparation and e-file if your adjusted gross income (AGI) is \$31,000 or less or if you are active military with an AGI of \$58,000 or less or you qualify




New to TurboTax?

TurboTax Online Federal Free Edition

File your federal taxes, FREE AND get your biggest refund

Here's how it works:

1. Asks simple questions and fills in the right forms for you
2. Helps you get your biggest refund
3. Gets your refund fast with e-file**



offer is valid in all states); and TaxAct (Free federal online tax return preparation and e-file if your adjusted gross income (AGI) is \$58,000 or less and you are age 19 through 55. This federal offer is valid in all states). Other FreeFile providers have specific state residence requirements, military pay, other lower income requirements, or age requirements. All of the free providers use sophisticated tools and strategic online interviews to properly prepare the user's taxes, and perform all of the calculations. As long as the user accurately answers the online questions, and correctly enters the requested information, all 16 of the FreeFile providers will provide accurate results. It should be noted that while all 16 providers will likely do a satisfactory job completing federal tax forms, none of them will complete state tax forms for free; most of them will complete state tax forms for a fee, typically in the \$10 range, but the state fees do vary. The IRS has also compiled a list of the 22 states that have their own free filing services, and this list is available at freefile.irs.gov/get-more-information.html.

The third and final step is e-filing the tax return. All of the listed FreeFile providers will electronically file (e-file) the completed tax return utilizing a secure encrypted system, directly with the IRS. A digital confirmation receipt is generated, and the user can track the progress of his refund, if a refund is due. the user can also print a copy of his completed tax forms for his own records. The user can optionally select to have his refund (if any) direct deposited into his existing bank or credit union account, which will be deposited much faster than waiting for a paper check in the mail. According to the IRS website, users who e-file and have a refund direct deposited can expect the refund to be posted to his account in as little as 10 days. If a balance is

due the IRS, the user can select to pay the IRS directly by check or money order, or for a nominal fee to pay the IRS electronically online.

The IRS has set high standards for safety and security which the Free File Alliance participants are committed to abide by. According to the IRS, the user may want to use the FreeFile service (if eligible) because it is "Fast, Safe, and Free". According to the IRS, over 30 million taxpayers have taken advantage of the FreeFile system since its inception. Available 24 hours a day and seven days a week, the FreeFile system is readily accessible, easy to use, and can provide a valuable service to the taxpayer. An entire federal tax return can be prepared and sent to the IRS from the user's computer, without the need to go elsewhere or buy anything. The system is safe and secure, and can be used by those eligible at their convenience, but remembering the April 18 deadline. For those who are eligible, and about 70% of you are indeed eligible, this FreeFile service provided by the IRS and the 16 members of the FreeFile Alliance may be a very worthwhile way to quickly complete this sometimes troubling annual task.

Ira Wilsker is the Director of the Management Development Program at Lamar Institute of Technology, in Beaumont, TX. He also hosts a weekly radio talk show on computer topics on KLVI News Talk AM560, and writes a weekly technology column for the Examiner newspaper <www.theexaminer.com>. Ira is also a police officer who specializes in cybercrime, and has lectured internationally in computer crime and security.

Software Review: System Mechanic v10
By Mark Mattson, Editor, Computer Users of Erie, PA
January 2011 issue, Horizons, The Official Journal of CUE,
"News and Information to expand your computing Horizons"
www.cuerie.com / [cuerie1 \(at\) verizon.net](mailto:cuerie1@verizon.net)

There's been many reviews done in these pages over the years, but I can't remember seeing one before for a utility suite such as the one covered this time around.

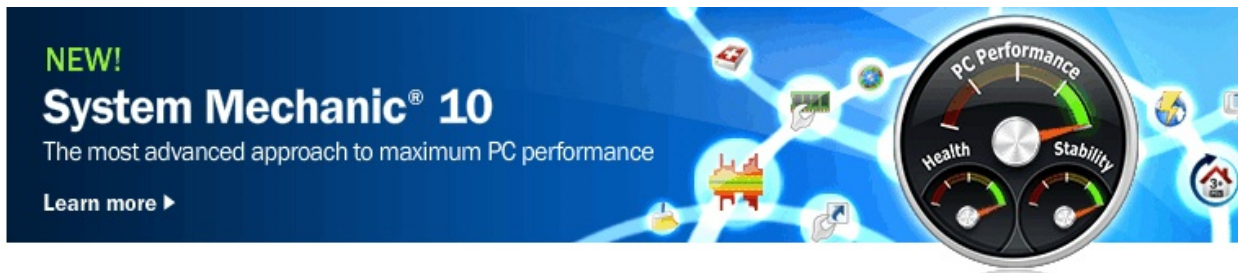
There are several popular ones on the market currently, but this is the most popular one, with a base of 23 million users according to the latest statistics. I am speaking of course, of System Mechanic.

This 12 year-old product is now at version 10, the most current release available, brand new for this year. It's an integrated collection of system tune-up and configuration tools, giving you the ability to repair problems and optimize your entire computer from one central location.

The application is available to those users that run Windows XP, Vista and 7. Support for older versions is not available with this release. You also need Internet Explorer v6 or later, 30Mb of hard drive space for installation, and an Internet connection for license activation. Delivery is via download from the lolo website (a 19Mb file). At the present time, it is on special pricing of \$39.95, a \$10 savings. This allows you to install the product on all your HOME PCs via the

Whole Home licensing concept, using the same license key. However, if any of them are used for business, you need to follow their Business Licensing regulations.

If you'd rather have a boxed product complete with disc, you may purchase the package at Wal-Mart, Best Buy, Target, and several other popular retailers (see their website home page at www.iolo.com for the list).



So what is System Mechanic? It is, as I mentioned above, an integrated suite of utilities and applications that allow you to tune up and repair problems on your computer system that cause slow-downs, crashes, and poor performance.

There are several ways to run the program. The first, which is the way most users (especially novice ones) is to run the system Analyzer, and follow the recommendations for repairs and optimizations that are given. This gives you the most comprehensive and automatic way to scan your system, finding the most problems with the least amount of effort on your part.

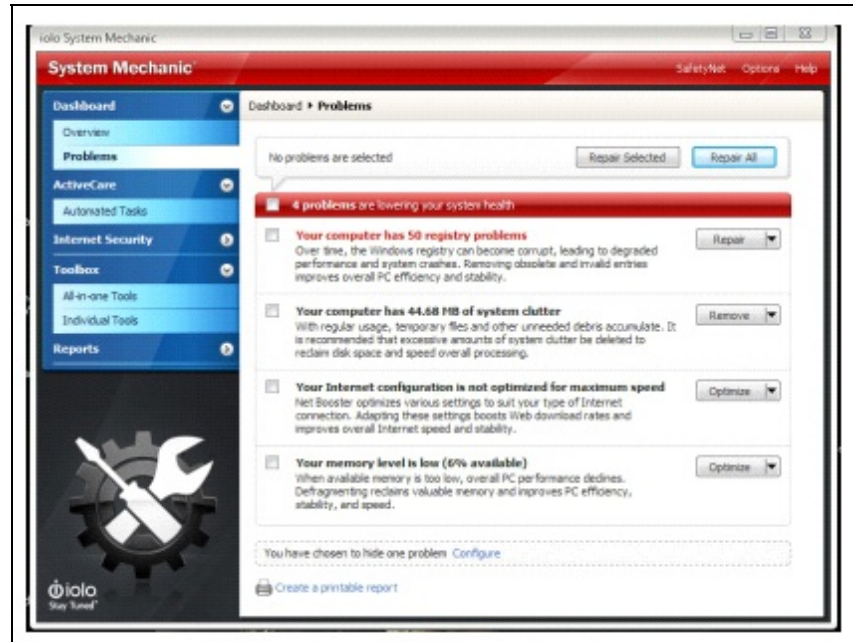
The other way, which more advanced users will find useful, is to run the individual utilities on an as-needed basis, giving you more control over what is performed on your computer.

When you first run the program, you are presented with the Dashboard, which is where you perform all major system operations:



As you can see here, the system I have the software installed on needs some attention...the indicators are in the Yellow zone. When the tasks have been completed and the system is optimized, they are all in the Green area, and the indicator arrows are all to the far right of the dial.

When the Analysis is complete, you are presented with a report of the problems that were found:

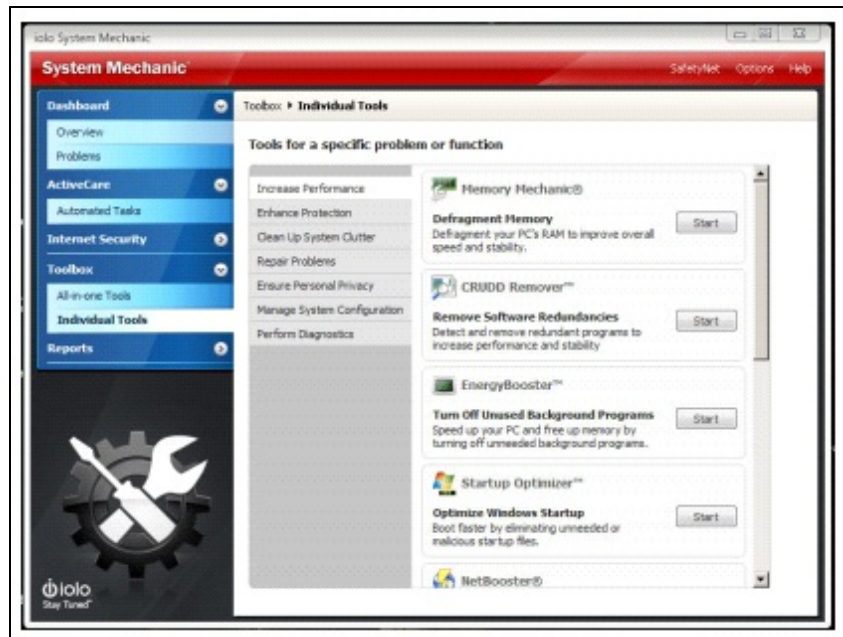


You can then repair individual problems, one at a time, by selecting it with the button to the right of the description. It will give you the choice to automatically repair it, or use a wizard to fine-tune the repair (such as choosing individual registry problems to fix while leaving others alone).

For most users, clicking the Repair All button will give you the optimum repairs needed to return your system to peak performance. Note that some repairs may require a system restart to complete, so be prepared for this...it will prompt you if needed.

Power users and ultimate system tweekers will find the Toolbox entry labeled as Individual Tools the place they hang out the most. Here one will find all the individual utilities that make up System Mechanic in one place.

Pick the category of tool you wish to use, and the components will appear in the list to the right, ready for your use.



Besides the usual cleanup tools, which remove system clutter such as temp files and internet cache files, you'll find those that enhance performance in other ways: defragmenters for the registry and your drives, registry cleaner, program optimization (Defrag the program itself, to keep all parts together on the drive...which is different from the drive defrag utility).

There are tools that analyze your startup and give you the opportunity to disable unneeded programs to conserve memory and resources. There are also utilities that analyze and tune your Internet connection settings, boosting your web surfing and downloading experiences. And for even more powerful tuning and repair options, run the all-in-one tools in the so-named category to further improve your system.

I have been testing and using this suite on my personal systems here at home for the past couple of months, testing and tweaking different areas to improve my systems. So far, everything has worked as it should. With only one exception.

There is a tool called Drive Medic that you find in the toolbox. As part of my testing, I ran it, and was surprised by the results, especially on my wife's machine.

Drive Medic is a tool similar to the Microsoft CHKDSK utility, that checks and repairs errors on your hard drive, such as bad sectors, corrupt files, and so forth.

I had just replaced one of the internal drives in this machine, and was surprised to find Drive Medic reporting bad sectors on it. I ran it, and it kept reporting bad sectors and corrupt files on the drive. Subsequent repairs continued, but eventually the drive became so corrupted, I was forced to do a low level format on it, and reload the system from scratch.

The drive in question was, as I mentioned, a brand-new 500GB Western Digital IDE drive. I ran the WD utilities on it, and it reported absolutely no errors present. But, again, when I got the system rebuilt, Drive Medic again reported bad areas on the disk.

In an effort to give lolo tech support as much information on this problem as possible, I ran Drive Medic on my other two machines here, and had similar results: errors reported on all drives, while the utilities from the drive manufacturers (both WD and Seagate), show nothing wrong at all with the drives.

After contacting support, I was asked to try running Drive Medic from the rescue disk you can create from inside System Mechanic. This disk tests and repairs (if needed) the Master Boot Record and file tables on your drives, in case your system become totally unusable and can't be booted. Running this test showed no problems with the MBR and file table, but did nothing to scan the drive itself for errors...which I found strange.

I am currently waiting for a response from lolo support about this problem, but have heard nothing for over two weeks now. Probably due to the holidays, no doubt.

Overall, System Mechanic v10 is a very useful set of tools for maintaining and tuning your computer. It performs a wide variety of tests, and can increase performance slightly or greatly, depending on your particular machine's circumstances.

Is it worth the price? See for yourself. Download the free trial and give it a whirl on your system. But until the Drive Medic issue is fixed, I strongly advise against using it on your system. Stick with the Microsoft Windows-resident drive check utility to be safe.

For more information on System Mechanic, visit the lolo website at www.iolo.com.

Ask the Computer Tutor

Pamela Tabak receives numerous computer-related questions via e-mail and during classroom presentations. She selects those she feels are of common interest to most computer users and forwards them to us for publication in this newsletter.



QUESTION: When I surf the web on Internet Explorer I have no color on the pages except for the pictures. I am using Windows XP and wonder if there is a way that the background color on the internet can be displayed.

ANSWER: You are certainly missing a more pleasing view of the internet and websites by not being able to view them in color. Follow the steps below to turn the background color on:

- Click on Start
- Click on Control Panel
- Click on Accessibility Options
- Select the Display Tab
- Uncheck the Use High Contrast checkbox

All the background colors will have returned immediately. If they have not, reboot (restart) your computer and try the procedure again.

QUESTION: I am using Windows Vista and would like to know if the PrintScreen function works with this operating system. I cannot seem to make it work like I did with Windows XP.

ANSWER: The PrintScreen function does work with Windows Vista just like it did with Windows XP but Vista has an even better feature called the Snipping Tool that gives you many more options for capturing pictures or to send me error messages that pop up on your screen.

To access this tool:

- Click on the Start Menu and type "snipping" into the search box or open your program list, click on Accessories and then on Snipping Tool.
- When you are ready to capture an image, LEFT click on the Snipping Tool icon; this will create a transparent film over your screen.
- Move your mouse to make your "snip" then hold down the LEFT mouse and draw around the selected area. (You can move the snipping option box out of the way and also select several methods of "snipping" from the "Option Box." You have the option to draw a Free-form Snip, a Rectangular snip, a Window Snip or a Full Screen Snip by clicking on the down arrow next to the "NEW" icon.)
- When you have drawn around the selected object and released the mouse you will be able to save your "snip" to the location of your choice.

QUESTION: I have a letter that I wrote in WordPad that I want to E-Mail, I have windows 7. I tried to click on the letter and drop it into the E-Mail but it does not work is there an easier way to complete this?

ANSWER: In order to add this document to your email you need to save the WordPad letter to your hard drive and then attach it to your email. The way to attach it varies depending on the type of email program you are using. Usually you need to click on Attach then browse your hard drive for the document and when you find it you will have the option to Insert. It will then be attached to your email and you can send your email to your recipient.

QUESTION: After I installed Windows Update my computer is malfunctioning. Is there a way to remove the updates?

ANSWER: You can remove them by uninstalling them from the Windows Update list but the best way would be to perform a System Restore which will remove them entirely from your computer. For future updates or any downloads, that you are intending to make on your computer, I would suggest that you make a Restore Point prior to the download. This will ensure that you go back to the exact time and date that you installed the software and it will be erased from your computer in its entirety.

*Pamela invites you to e-mail computer-based questions to:
<http://tinyurl.com/ask-pamela-computer-tutor>
More often than not you will receive and
answer within 24 hours.*





The Lighter Side



Bucky Milam is a master of the fine arts, with an emphasis on the cool and casual. He is the recipient of numerous awards for his painting and graphic design, which has been displayed at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Modern Art, the Chicago Art Institute, and the London and Tokyo Museums of Fine Art. A trumpet virtuoso, he performs widely in clubs throughout the region and is a recognized composer of jazz and classical music for brass.

Bucky comes to computing as an accidental tourist. His peculiar perspective is of the visual media and the image they project of our civilization and culture. You can find his musings in each monthly issue of dacs.doc. (Danbury Area Computer Society)

In a eureka moment, Rodney reinvents "green computing".

Geez - Gmail

By Abby Stokes, Author, *Is This Thing On?*
www.abbyandme.com / [abbystokes \(at\) yahoo.com](mailto:abbystokes@yahoo.com)



When I'm asked what free web-based e-mail I recommend it is NOT Gmail <www.gmail.google.com/> I know, I know, your kids and grand kids are all over you to use Gmail instead of AOL. I agree that AOL is inconsistent and not as compatible with many handheld devices, but Gmail's design is not particularly "user-friendly" (a misnomer when referring to anything computer). I would suggest Yahoo <<https://login.yahoo.com/>> over Gmail, but I understand that your family has more influence over your decisions than I do.

So, if you're going to take the plunge and use Gmail, let's make it as "friendly" as we can by customizing it to meet your needs.

My first criticism is that e-mails stack on top of one another:

For a newbie what you see above can be conceptually confusing and, for those that have dexterity issues, this format is difficult to manipulate - it requires very good aim.

I hear you daughter snapping back that one could click on Expand All in the right sidebar. The problem with this option is that Google then presents the oldest e-mail on top and the most recent must be scrolled down to - not an optimal choice for someone just learning to scroll or who has memory issues. Rather than debate the good, bad, and ugly of Gmail, let me offer you a way to reformat the Inbox. This stacking is referred to as "conversation view."

To turn conversation view off:

- 1) Click on Settings (top right)
- 2) Scroll down until you see Conversation View:
- 3) Click in the circle (aka radio dial) to the left of Conversation view off
- 4) **MOST IMPORTANT** - Scroll all the way to the bottom and click on Save Changes

I am asked regularly "How can I change the font to be larger on all of my outgoing e-mails?" This is a courtesy to the reader that most older users are more apt to opt for. It is an elusive option with Gmail, but it does exist.

To enable change font style:

- 1) Click Settings (top right)
- 2) Click the Labs tab (far right)
- 3) Scroll down to Default Text Styling
- 4) Click in the circle to the left of Enable
- 5) **MOST IMPORTANT** - Scroll all the way to the bottom and click on Save Changes

While you're visiting Settings or the Lab tab, take a look around and see what else you might want to customize. Make a note of the original setting - in case you don't like the change you've made, you can revert back to what it was.

For those teaching Gmail to a new user, be sure to really hit home that the arrow to the right of Reply is where the most common actions will be hidden - Forward, Print, Reply All, etc. Why did Gmail choose to hide these features? Mine is not to wonder why. Mine is just to show you how.

You're capable of learning anything - well-designed or not. Just keep in mind when you think the problem is you, it's more likely a thoughtless design choice.

Take a deep breath and rise above it!



Words of the Month

Fiber-Optic Cable - This is a cable made up of super-thin filaments of glass or other transparent materials that can carry beams of light. Because a fiber-optic cable is light-based, data can be sent through it at the speed of light. Using a laser transmitter that encodes frequency signals into pulses of light, ones and zeros are sent through the cable. The receiving end of the transmission translates the light signals back into data which can be read by a computer.

Because fiber-optics are based entirely on beams of light, they are less susceptible to noise and interference than other data-transfer mediums such as copper wires or telephone lines. However, the cables are fragile and are usually placed underground, which makes them difficult and expensive to install. Some fiber-optic cables are installed above ground, but if they break, they often need to be completely replaced, which is not cheap. While copper wires can be spliced and mended as many times as needed, it is much harder to fix glass fiber-optic cables.



Smart Computing Tips & Fun Facts

www.smartcomputing.com

Ergonomically Incorrect

Practicality and direct network access aren't the only reasons notebook PC docking stations are a good idea. Laptops were initially meant to satisfy consumers' needs for portable computing, not to serve as full-time desktop replacements. So if you're using an older or an ultra-portable notebook and find your wrists and fingers are hurting because of the smaller keyboard, try using a docking station to connect to a regular keyboard and mouse.

All Value, No Formatting

Excel is particularly adept at handling formulas but if you need to copy a particular result, you just want the value without the equation. If you have a cell that contains a formula, copy the cell with CTRL-C after it computes the value and paste (CTRL-V) it into your target cell. Click the Paste Options smart tag associated with the target cell and click the Values button in the Paste Values section. This will display the value of the copied cell in the target cell.

Protect Your Discs

Because DVD and CD drives use laser light to read data, music, and movies from optical discs, any scratches on the data side of a disc can cause skips or errors. Always store CDs and DVDs in their cases or sleeves, and never set bare discs down on any surface that could scratch them. If you can't commit to these rules of thumbs, try buying discs with special scratch-resistant coatings.

January Meeting Recap

6:00 pm - Thanks to Judy for sharing info on some of the things she found interesting at CES. Have you signed up at CoolHotNot.com? It's the easy way to discover which digital products are used and loved, new and wanted, or lemons -- reviewed by several tech experts including Steve Bass, John Dvorak, Chris Prillo and more. The HP Photosmart all-in-one eStation printer that, among other things, prints from across town, lets you download & prints docs, photos, etc. from the Web, browse the latest eBooks -- all using the durable portable touchscreen. The Eye-fi SD card lets you download your photos when you are within 50' of your computer. One of the cutest products was the world's small record player - a VW bus with a needle in the front and speaker in back that drives around the LP. Judy especially liked the paperclip USB drive from Verbatim; she's still waiting for the one they are going to send her (ha!!). Several people were there looking for new vendors for SW and 5 went together and each bought a clickfree external HD -- still waiting for that, too. Everyone one at the meeting received a free tech support call to the new Tech Support for Dummies (yes, the popular Dummies company is taking on tech support). Everyone was asked to make a call (even if they new the answer) to check out how well they liked the support; she hasn't heard back from anyone yet. She also demoed some Windows 7 tips.

7:00 pm - Arnie showed everyone some nifty things to do with Excel including pivot tables, entering data horizontally or vertically, how to autofill days of the week and more. He took us to the interactive Excel (Word, Powerpoint, etc.) interactive tutorial where you hover your mouse over an Excel 2003 menu or button to learn its new location in Excel 2007. Excel - <http://bit.ly/bARE6O> / Word - <http://bit.ly/9Z18O0> / PowerPoint - <http://bit.ly/cAteSz>

This was a tap-dance meeting since Staples was a no show since the presenter's grandmother died and they couldn't find anyone to take her place.

Just heard from Dick Beekman -- he registered at CoolNotHot.com and won muvee Reveal 8 - their CoolHotNot Featured Product Giveaway last week.



I know we had raffle prizes at the meeting but I can't find the list of winners.....

2009/2010 SCV CC OFFICERS

President	Judy Taylour scvcomputerclub (at)gmail.com
Vice President	Arnie Kazdoy yodzak(at)yahoo.com
Secretary	OPEN
Treasurer	OPEN
Membership	OPEN
Member-at-Large	Dave Melton Dave(at)melton.com
Program Director	OPEN
Information Line	661.513.4612
Snail Mail	18727 Nadal Street Santa Clarita, CA 91351
General Meeting	2 nd Wednesday / month SCV Senior Center 22900 Market Street Newhall CA 91321

Membership Benefits Around Town

Show your Santa Clarita Valley Computer Club Membership Card to receive the below discounts.

Jay's Computer Shop

In-shop and on-site PC repair services
Free phone support for all
SCV Computer Club members
\$10hr off on all on-site service
(regularly \$85hr)
\$5hr off on all shop service (regularly \$50hr)
Open Monday – Saturday
818.362.8015 / Located in Sylmar
jay@jayscomputershop.com
www.jayscomputershop.com

Precision Computers

10% on Service
19188 Soledad Canyon Road
Canyon Country
661.299.2228 (ph)
www.precisionpc.com

Rogers System Specialist

(Various Discounts)
25750 Rye Canyon, Ste. A, Valencia
661.295.5577
Give Judy's telephone number for the discount
661.252.8852

ATS LASER - 25%

661.296.5500 / atshpguy@earthlink.net
www.HpPrinterRepair.net
ATS makes house calls. Printers - Copiers -
Fax Repair + Toner Cartridges .
ATS will beat any super store price.

Membership Application
(Please Print)

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Home Phone

E-mail

Areas of Interest

Level of computer skills (please circle)

Novice Average Expert

Mail to: SCV CC, 18727 Nadal Street
Canyon Country, CA 91351

The information appearing in this newsletter is distributed solely for use by SCV Computer Club members. Permission is enthusiastically granted to reprint all or any part by similar non-commercial publications *provided credit is given to the author of the article and the DATALINE*. The publication of information in this newsletter constitutes no guarantee of accuracy and its use by readers is discretionary. All opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the SCV Computer Club. The SCV Computer Club is dedicated to supporting the needs of its members and to the exchange of information about computers, peripherals, services, hardware and software through meetings, its web page, and the distribution of this newsletter.

**The SCV Computer Club is a proud member of SCRUGS
Southern California Regional User Group Summit**

Annual Membership Dues	\$30.00
Annual Family	\$54.00
Senior	\$27.00



Klassic Specialties
 Quality Ink, Paper, Toner and other Printing Needs
www.klassicspecialties.com
 SCV Computer Club members receive a 5% discount and the club receives 5% of members' purchases.
 Just put SCVPCG in the Fund Raising Discount Field



O'Reilly User Group Program
 35% Discount for SCV
 Computer Club members -
 Print & ebooks
 Discount Code DSUG
www.oreilly.com
 Free Shipping on orders of \$29.95 and up!