

The Byte-Line – a Newsletter

By Michael Van Ert, The Computer Guy!

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What's New in Computers – A brief rundown of what's news in the computer world last month

Last month Apple Corp. discovered some of their manufacturers were using child labour. They have taken steps to correct this problem and to ensure that doesn't happen in the future.

Guess who ordered brand-new computers using Windows XP? Well, it was our own Olympics organizers Vanock, when they ordered over 600 brand-new Acer computers, both desktop and laptop models, loaded with Windows XP. Their reasoning? Windows 7 was "too new" for them to use according to a Vanock spokesperson.

Guess which extremely large company uses Internet Explorer 6 a dinosaur of a browser if there ever was one? Why it's Intel of course. It seems the chipmaker behemoth has so many old legacy programs that require Internet Explorer 6 that they have chosen to bypass IE 7 and 8 and even Windows 7 and keep using XP! For a company this large to use a browser that is so insecure is just unconscionable. Especially when they have more money in the bank than there is sand on a beach.

Eastman Kodak is claiming that Apple computers and Research in Motion, the people that make the iPhone and the Blackberry respectively, are infringing upon their patents. And they're not alone, Nokia filed a similar complaint in December of this past year about the iPhone using their patents. I guess with 50 billion cash in the bank Steve Jobs isn't really too concerned on whose toes or patents he infringes upon.

There's a new rumour out that says Apple is going to put an HDMI port on their least expensive computer, the Mac mini. If the rumour is true, then this will be the second Apple product to receive the new HDMI port. This port allows people to view high-definition multimedia movies, DVDs etc.

What's New in Software –

Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft, on February 15th, introduced at the Mobile World Congress 2010, held in Barcelona, Spain, the newest version of Windows phone software called, what else, the phone 7 series. According to Ballmer Microsoft is offering a fresh view and approach to telephone software, it is said to incorporate a smart design and truly integrated experiences. It will also integrate with Xbox live games. The new software is expected to appear by the 2010 holiday season. Ballmer hopes this will be an iPhone killer, good luck with that Steve!

It seems every month a new software program for editing photos appears. This month Photo Art Studio 2.55 was released and is touted as a brand-new application designed to decorate your photos and apply different effects. For example, you can put a visual frame around your photo, create a postcard or

collage. As well as these effects it has a standard number of controls for adjusting your photos color, hue, and tint.

Favourite Web Sites –

There are couple of websites that I would like to share with you this month that I use from time-to-time. The first one is for those of us who are commonly called geeks. This website is called bootdisk.com and is all about small utilities that are helpful in repairing computers. This website has been around for ages, I've used it for ages. Need a DOS 6 boot disk? This is the place to find it. Need SP2? You'll find it here for Windows XP or Vista. The site also contains a lot of guides for upgrading to Windows 7, how to do a clean install of Vista, as well as guides for formatting and partitioning your hard drive and on and on and on. In exchange for all this information he asked that you offer him a small donation through PayPal. He doesn't specify the amount, it's up to you.

The next one I like to use, totally unrelated to computers, is called allrecipes.com and it has more recipes than you can shake a stick at. One of the things I like about this site is you can change the portion size and the recipes will automatically reflect the changes. So if the recipe calls for dinner serving for 4 people and it's just you and your s.o. you can you change it to two and automatically you are getting the right recipe measurements. Cool!

The other cooking site that I use is called Epicurious.com. This site is full of what I call fancy recipes. And when I want to be challenged this is the site I go to.

Between all recipes.com and epicurious.com I find all the recipes and help I need when cooking anything, try them out, I'm sure you'll like what you see there.

"How-To's" (Software) – Programs you can use to make your life easier

This month I am going to tell you how I use Skype, a software program known to use VoIP (voice over Internet protocol). What this program allows me to do is to make long-distance telephone calls anywhere in North America for about three dollars a month. It also allows me to contact my daughter in Frankfurt, Germany with similarly reduced pricing. When I use Skype I use it mainly as a telephone. It even has an interactive touchpad that allows me to punch out the phone numbers much as you would on any phone. Or, I can copy and paste the number from my Outlook address books. Several members of my family and other friends are also members of Skype and to them I can call directly for free. I can use my video camera too. This is really good when I'm talking to my daughter or son as it allows me to see my grandkids when I can't be there in person.

Skype is also available to be used on mobile phones including the iPhone so that anywhere there is an Internet connection you can use Skype and save a bundle. Skype also has text messaging features and you can forward a call to your mobile phone or even set up an online telephone number for friends and colleagues to use. What this does is allows those friends and colleagues to call what appears to be a normal telephone number and is actually your Skype number. So they may not have Skype or even a computer God forbid, and they can still call you using this Skype telephone number. It has wide

availability to over 25 countries. An example would be if I had a Skype phone number registered in Frankfurt and my daughter wanted to call me and she didn't have a Skype account she could call this local Frankfurt number and it would just be like she was calling locally even though I am actually sitting on the other side of the world. This is a pretty neat feature. The cost for such a number works out to about six dollars a month, less if you purchase a monthly plan.

To learn more about Skype, go to their website Skype.com, better yet, download and try their software. You don't need special equipment, just a microphone and speakers. I switch between a headset with microphone built-in and a Logitech Webcam (or Microsoft Webcam) that have built-in microphones so when using Skype I look into and speak to the Webcam and I can hear the people I'm talking to through the external speakers of the computer. I find it works really well.

You may ask about the quality of the phone calls, you know, how well it sounds, and for the most part say, 9 out of 10 calls; the people on the other end of the call can't tell you are using Skype. However, from time to time, I do have some quality issues with sound and I may have to call back. But it's so darn handy, so easy to use that I'm willing to put up with this occasional irregularity.

If you're not using Skype now and you have relatives that live outside of town I strongly recommend this software.

Freeware Software Review – Recuva 1.36.479

Have you ever lost a favourite file, a photograph? Have you ever had one of those 'oh no' moments? Yeah, me too! This software tool has saved my bacon on those occasions. It has a simple-to-use interface that is relatively quick, and if you use right after you've deleted that important file, you are almost certain to get your file back. Another neat feature is that this program can be installed on a thumb drive so you can plug it into any computer that's lost a file to quickly recover that file. It works on all of the file systems, i.e., fat16, fat32, NTFS, and others. It will also restore files from removable media such as floppy disk, memory sticks, CompactFlash cards, secure digital cards (read camera memory cards). A lot of people lose photographs from their cameras memory cards accidentally and had they known about this program they would have been able to recover these treasured files. Another great feature is that it is a small program, and besides recovering photographs it will recover your office documents, your music, your e-mail anything.

You can download this file from the filehippo.com or from the maker's website, piriform.com. This is the same company that produces another great program called CCleaner.

What's New in Hardware –

Acer this last month announced a whole line of laptop computers, ultrathin and light laptop computers with batteries that last 6 to 8 hours and with prices starting at \$499. These new laptops are expected to hit the shelves in the next couple of months.

Acer is rapidly becoming known for the most value oriented laptops in the world. These new ones will come with 13", 14", 15", and 17" screen sizes.

I've owned quite a number of Acer (I keep selling and upgrading) laptops from 17 inch to the 8.9 inch netbook. I have never had a problem with any of my Acer laptops. I have sold literally hundreds of these laptops. I'm not telling you some of them haven't had problems, there have been a couple, and Acer's warranty department could use some help when it comes to customer service. But their warranties are good around the world. Feature for feature, dollar for dollar, Acer puts out a good product in my opinion.

One of the newest computers they're producing are similar to the netbooks in that they have the same features, and the same small form factor but in a desktop like computer. These things are small, about 8" x 8" x 2". They weigh less than 3 pounds much like the netbook and they are called nettop computers. What I like about them is I can easily attach them to the back of the monitor so my monitor and computer are in essence one and the same. This makes for a very compact computer with as large a screen as you want. These will accept up to 4 GB of RAM and usually can be found with either a 250 or 320 GB hard drive. Acer's net tops can have HDMI well as DVI ports which makes them great little media center computers.

You can check out all of Acer's products by going to Acer.com.

That's it for this month. Send your questions to me at any time to be included in this newsletter.

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