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monthly subscription)

The Digital

VIKING



Twin Cities

PC USER GROUP

NEWSLETTER

Minneapolis & St. Paul, Minnesota USA • Vol. 31 No. 11 • June 2011

*TC/PC Exists to
Facilitate and Encourage
the Cooperative Exchange of
PC Knowledge and
Information Across
All Levels of Experience*

June 2011

**General Meeting:
Tuesday, June 14, 7 PM**

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General Meeting


**Tuesday, June 14, 2011
at 7:00 PM**

**Show Us Your Latest Gadget
And More Random Access**

**Location: Summit Place
8505 Flying Cloud Drive
Eden Prairie, MN 55344**

At the June meeting you get a chance to show us a gadget, software, hardware, or book that you think we should know about and which might make a great Father's Day gift. We'll give you 10 minutes to sell our judges (Jim Grotz, Jack Ungerleider, Curt Trout, and Sharon Walbran) on your choice in hopes of winning some nice prizes. This "show" will continue into the July meeting so if you're not ready for this meeting, you have time to put together your sales pitch.

Because we have not had sufficient time to answer all the questions at Random Access at the last few meetings we will have an extended Random Access session this meeting. Bring your questions and concerns for our experts to answer.

But wait, there's more! Storm threats cut the meeting short in May so there is a very cool prize from Wells Fargo that's looking for a winner. Don't miss your chance to win! 



Mark your calendars! The July TC/PC Meeting will be your chance for "Your 10 Minutes of Fame." Tell us about a gadget, software, hardware, book or tutorial you think are prize-worthy.

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24-Hour Information • www.tcpc.com

Membership info page 19 • Application form inside back cover

Last Month's Meeting: Wells Fargo

By Sharon Walbran, [SQWalbran\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:SQWalbran(at)yahoo.com)

At our May meeting, Liz Skinner, manager, and Jenny Costick, her assistant, of the Vernon Avenue Wells Fargo just off Highway 100 in Edina spoke to our group on ways to protect the cash in your bank accounts safe, especially when using debit cards. They explained that credit cards are protected so that, with most cards, you are only liable for \$50.00 should someone steal your credit card and start charging on it. With a debit card, the cash is drawn from your bank account. So should someone steal your debit card or debit card number and information, it's possible they could drain your account completely and even beyond that if you have overdraft protection. Jim Grotz had enlisted Liz's help in protecting his checking account at her bank since he purchases items frequently on eBay and uses PayPal which is funded through his debit card. Liz helped him set up a separate account for his PayPal account. Setting up another account would normally incur significant fees, but Wells Fargo can eliminate those fees if there is a regular deposit going into that account. A scheduled automatic deposit was set up and the new account maintains a limited amount, just enough to cover some purchases. Of course, that account could be drained by a crook, so there is still a risk but the risk is at a limit the customer can live with.

Jim Grotz also filled us in on the anti-virus software that has become his favorite — and for good reason. Avast! Is a free program so you can download it and install it on your computers. Jim had run it on his computers for a year or so when the company offered him the full-featured version for \$10 per computer per year. He jumped at the chance and has been happy with the choice. Avast! Is well-regarded by reviewers and has a reputation for frequent updates to stay on top of virus threats. Most importantly it offers a Safe Zone option that seems to act like a virtual machine when you are conducting financial business online. This allows the user to log in to his/her account and download bank transactions without leaving a trace of an online presence. Try it out and let us know what you think. [Back to Page 1](#) 

APCUG—Contests—and Convention

After several years on hold, APCUG, our parent organization, is once again hosting a convention, this time July 15-17 and in Cleveland, Ohio. As part of this gathering they are once again organizing a photo contest for individual members of user groups. The description, rules, and form can be found online at <http://www.apcug.org>

The photos can be in one of four categories:

People

Animals

Landscape

Still Life

The deadline for entries is June 17th, so get clicking! There are also contests for the top three user group newsletters and websites.

If you are interested in attending the convention, APCUG has arranged for a special rate of \$79 per night at the Sheraton and entry to the convention is \$50 for three days of meetings and workshops and lots of information.

Need to Find a User Group? If you know someone who would like to join a user group in another area of the country, APCUG now has an easy search utility. Visit

<http://uqls.apcug.net/FindUserGroup.aspx> [Back to Page 1](#) 

SuperTooth Buddy - Can it be too good?

By Terry Currier, President, WINNERS (WINDOWS users Group), CA

January Issue, the Notepad, www.windowsusers.org, [winnersug\(at\)aol.com](mailto:winnersug(at)aol.com)

The SuperTooth Buddy is a hands free Bluetooth speakerphone (bar) for your car. On the back is a strong round magnet, and it comes with a metal clip you put over your sun visor. You simply “attach” the unit to the metal clip. Pairing it to my phone was very easy. It can be paired with two mobile phones simultaneously, if both want to use it at the same time it will default to the last one paired. In fact it will remember and pair up to eight phones.

While driving you are facing the microphone so it picks up your speaking very well. In testing it my wife said I sounded very clear. The microphone is designed to absorb noise and vibrations to enhance outgoing voice quality. It has full duplex audio with echo canceling and a double noise canceller. The speaker produced good sound with plenty of volume. If your phone supports it you can also use call waiting, and voice dialing.



Voice Dialing

I tested it with a Samsung phone. It uses Bluetooth version 2.1; they say it is compatible with all Bluetooth phones, including the iPhone, Blackberry and Smart Phones (Android O.S., Windows Mobile).

You may be tempted to turn it off when not in use, but the SuperTooth Buddy has a standby charge of 40 days (1,000 hours.) Talk time is up to 20 hours. It was easy to just leave it on all the time and have it automatically reconnect with my cell phone when I got into the car. Note: it did take a couple of minutes for the reconnect, it was not instant. When the charge is low it gives a steady red light behind the multi-function button. With the adapter they supply you plug it into the cigarette lighter socket and it will charge in three hours. It can also be charged from a PC via USB Cable.

I really did like the SuperTooth Buddy for its clarity,

So why did I ask can it be too good? Well the strength of the connection is actually too strong. It says it will connect up to 30 feet away from the unit, and it's true. I can have the car parked on my driveway walk in, and in the back of the house hear the phone and read the message on the phone saying Bluetooth was disconnected. That would not be so bad, but I can actually walk to the front of the house and have my cell phone reconnect to the unit on the driveway. And of course the microphone and sound functions are transferred to the SuperTooth Buddy – in the car. I have parked the car and in a straight line get about 50 feet away before it finally disconnects.

www.hypercel.com/Z004088E

Company Website: <http://www.supertoorth.net>

Dial2Do www.dial2do.com

While not exclusive to SuperTooth Buddy a new service was listed on their website since I started this review. Dial2Do allows the subscriber to create reminders, send texts, listen to and send email, and access favorite 3rd party services - all while keeping your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road. They say it will work with any phone, but have extra features on Smartphones.

When you subscribe to the service you are given a number to call. When you call a voice will ask you what you want to do. Some of the other things you can do is check your calendar, Toodledo task list, post to your blog on WordPress, weather, news, and yes you can even use Twitter. You can try a free 30-day trial of their basic service – create and listen to reminders, voice to text transcription, and Smartphone applications. The Basic will cost you \$2.49/month or \$24.99/year. With the pro version you can do all the other neat things at a cost of \$5.99/month or \$59.99/year. [Back to Page 1](#)

Synchronize Your Bookmarks Between Computers

By Sandy Berger, Compu-KISS, www.compukiss.com, [sandy \(at\) compukiss.com](mailto:sandy@compukiss.com)

In today's world, more and more of us are accessing the Internet from several different devices. We may use a computer at work, a tablet PC at home, and a smart phone or a laptop computer when we are on the go. When we bookmark a website at the home, we might like to bring up that bookmarked webpage when we are at the office or when we visit a relative. If we are using the default settings of an Internet browser, we cannot do this. However there is a way to synchronize bookmarks between devices.

Just about every web browser today offers some way to synchronize bookmarks either through an add-in, a toolbar or a setting. Most of these solutions, however, only work if you use the same web browser on each device. For instance, if you use a Firefox add-in called Sync, you can only access your bookmarks from a device that has Firefox installed. So if you use Firefox at home, but Firefox doesn't work on your mobile device or your mother doesn't happen to have Firefox installed on her computer, you can't easily access your bookmarks while at those places. There are several stand-alone programs that solve this problem by allowing you to synchronize bookmarks between browsers, but I have a better answer.

The best and easiest solution for synchronizing bookmarks and favorites is a free service from Google called Google Bookmarks. I have used Google Bookmarks for several years. This service keeps a copy of all your bookmarks securely in the cloud, so you can access them from any Internet-connected computer or tablet and most smart phones.

To use Google Bookmarks, you simply surf over to www.google.com/bookmarks. If you already have a Google account from using Gmail, Google Calendar or another Google service, you can just sign in and add Bookmarks to your account. If you don't have a Google account, you can sign up for the free Google account and activate Google Bookmarks right from this page.

When you add the Google Bookmarks to your Google Account you will be asked if you want to copy your current bookmarks or favorites from your web browser. You will want to do this, unless your bookmarks or favorites have become so unruly that you would like to start with a clean slate.


Once you have the Google Bookmarks set up, the easiest ways to access your new bookmarks is to install the Google Toolbar, which is a free download available at www.google.com/toolbar. You should install this toolbar on the computer that you use most often in the web browser that you usually use. For instance, if you use Internet Explore on your home computer, installing the Google Toolbar there will give you quick access to your Google Bookmarks as well as some additional features.

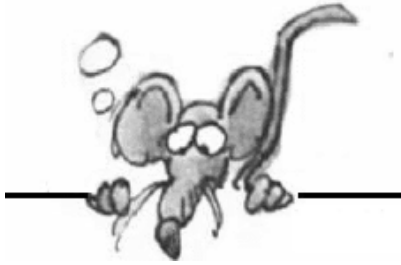
If you are using another computer that has the Google Toolbar installed, you can simply log into your Google account to access your bookmarks on that computer. On computers and mobile devices that don't have the Google Toolbar, you can log into your Google account and access your bookmarks at www.google.com/bookmarks. Google also has a small icon that you can drag to the links bar of any browser to access your Google bookmarks. It is available on the same page. Just click "Add Bookmark" at your Google Bookmarks page and you will see a blue box marked "Google Bookmark" that can be added to your web browser toolbar.

The only difficult part about this whole process is remembering to use the Google toolbar or icon to create your bookmarks rather than using your browser bookmark icon. Once you get in the habit of doing that, you are good to go.

Using the Google Bookmarks offers two additional perks. First, their bookmark page is extremely well organized. If you have ever tried to delete, rename, or rearrange your bookmarks or favorites in Internet Explorer, Firefox, or any other web browser, you know that this can be a trying task. Google Bookmarks, however, makes it easy. Just surf over to the Google Bookmarks page. As long as you are logged in to Google, you will see all of your bookmarks and find that it is easy to work with them.

The second perk is that Google has recently introduced a feature called "Lists" to their bookmarks. This feature lets you create a list of websites that revolve around one topic. It is a great way to research a topic, plan a trip, or organize an event. You can share your lists with selected people if you need to collaborate on any project. Google will also give you suggestions that pertain to the items in your list and sometimes these are very useful. So if you decide to try Google Bookmarks, you may also want to try the list feature.

If you use multiple devices, Google Bookmarks will keep your bookmarks in sync. Although this may only be a small step in keeping your world organized, being in sync can give you a very good feeling. [Back to Page 1](#) 



NIBBLERS

By Jeannine Sloan

Character Map Fun

Insert multiple special characters at once in Windows 7 or Vista directly from the Character Map dialog. Hit Start and type in Character Map in the search box. Now either hit Enter or double-click the Character Map icon that appears in the results. ☺☹☺☹☺☹☺☹

When the map appears, specify your font at the top and locate the special characters you want to insert and double-click them one at a time. All of your selections will appear in the Characters to copy box, hit the copy button when done and then paste (CTRL+V) into a chosen program.

From Computer Tips ezine

Vital Information at a Glance

At the bottom of the Task Manager window--no matter which tab you happen to be viewing--is a sort of dashboard view that displays the current number of running processes, the percentage of the processor capacity being used, and the percentage of physical memory. The information displayed here can instantly let you know if a process or application is consuming all of the CPU or memory resources, which is your first clue for troubleshooting a problem.

See more tips on troubleshooting with the task manager here:

<http://tinyurl.com/3lnqr6g>

Is Windows 7 really necessary? Is it a nice operating system?

The elder geek says: "Absolutely". Read the article to find out why he thinks you should replace XP or Vista. http://www.theeldergeek.com/windows_7/is_windows_7_necessary.htm

Windows 7 Edition Comparison Chart

What's the difference between versions of Windows 7? **Starter Ultimate, Home Basic, Home Premium, Professional, Enterprise** http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windows_7_editions

Making Sure Word Doesn't Capitalize Anything Automatically

1. Display the Word Options dialog box. (In Word 2007 click the Office button and then click Word Options. In Word 2010 display the File tab of the ribbon and then click Options.)
2. At the left side of the dialog box, click Proofing.
3. Click the AutoCorrect Options button. Word displays the AutoCorrect tab of the AutoCorrect dialog box. (Click here to see a related figure.)
4. Clear the Correct Two Initial Capitals check box.
5. Clear the Capitalize First Letter of Sentences check box.
6. Clear the Capitalize Names of Days check box.
7. Look through the list of AutoCorrect entries and modify any entries that result in capitalization of a word. (Alternatively, you can just turn off the AutoCorrect feature, if desired.)
8. Clear the Automatically Use Suggestions from the Spelling Checker check box.
9. Click on OK.

From Allen Wyatt's Word Tips

Browser Info--Display All Your Browser and Connection Information

Follow the link below to see a chart of information about the browser you are currently using. The graphic at the right illustrates the categories of data displayed. <http://www.computerhope.com/cgi-bin/systeminfo.cgi>

NFC

Near Field Communication is one of the coming technologies in phones and other electronic devices. For example: two NFC devices exchange data, virtual business cards or digital photos, simply by being in close proximity. NFC tags contain simple data or elaborate instructions that enable them to perform such functions as unlocking doors, paying for goods, launching phone calls or exchanging data between users. Read the Wikipedia article:

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

Did you Know Windows Has a Soft Keyboard?

Bring up the on-screen keyboard in Windows by opening the Run dialogue box and typing 'osk' (without the quotes). This is useful for people with limited mobility, and bi-lingual users who switch frequently between different character sets.

Submitted by Sallie Northrup

Remove Formatting

CTRL+a (Select all)

CTRL+q (Reset paragraphs to default style formatting)

CTRL+spacebar (Reset text to default style font formatting)

CTRL+Shift+N (Apply Normal style)

or the Edit>Clear>Formats command in Word 2002 and higher.

Quickly Zoom In and Out of a Page

Programs that support the ability to zoom in and out of a page or document also support the shortcut key to quickly zoom in and out. To do this hold down the CTRL key and scroll the wheel on your mouse up to zoom in or down to zoom out. To quickly return to normal sized text use the shortcut keystroke Ctrl+0. More like this: <http://www.computerhope.com/>

What Does DCIM Mean?

DCIM stands for Digital Camera Images. All digital cameras use this acronym to name the folder in which the image files are saved.

From Windows News & Tips ezine

Definition: DECT

Digital Enhanced Cordless Telecommunications is a communication standard that cordless phones (not to be confused with cell phones) use.

FYI

Display resolution of 2,560 by 1,600 pixels translates to 300 dpi,

Your System Info

[IP address](#)

[Hostname](#)

[ISP](#)

[Operating system](#)

[Browser](#)

[Referring site:](#)

[Cookies](#)

[PDF support](#)

[Screen resolution](#)

Plugins

[Plugin](#)

[Adobe Reader](#)

[Flash](#)

[Java](#)

[JavaScript](#)

[QuickTime](#)

[Shockwave](#)

[Silverlight](#)

[Windows Media Player](#)

[VBScript](#)

[DevalVR](#)

[VRML plugins detected:](#)

[X3D plugins detected:](#)

Internet Browser Shortcuts

There are dozens of different shortcut keys that can be used with Internet browsers. Below are a few of our top suggested Internet browser shortcuts.

Pressing **Alt + D** in any major Internet browser will move the cursor into the address bar..

Hold down the **Ctrl key and press the + or -** to increase and decrease the size of text.

Press the **backspace key** or hold down the **Alt key + left arrow** to go back a page.

Press **F5** to refresh or reload a web page.

Press **F11** to make the Internet browser screen full screen.

Press **Ctrl + B** to open your Internet bookmarks.

Press **Ctrl + F** to open the find box in the browser to search for text within the current page

QAT in Word 2007/10

The Quick Access Toolbar lets you add, remove, and reorder icons that represent the commands you use most often. By loading the QAT with the commands you prefer, you make the Word toolbar layout and content exactly what you need. Read thorough instructions here:

<http://windowssecrets.com/2011/02/10/01>

Outlook Keyboard Shortcuts

These will work with any version of Outlook:

Ctrl + N Creates a new item based on the folder you are in. If you're at Inbox it will make a new message. In Calendar it'll make a new appointment.

Ctrl + R Reply to the current message

Ctrl + Shift + R Reply to All for the current message

Ctrl + F Forward the message

Ctrl + Shift + M will start a new message regardless of the folder you are in.

Ctrl + Shift + A will start a new appointment regardless of the folder you are in.

Ctrl + 1 jump to Inbox

Ctrl + 2 jump to Calendar

Ctrl + 3 jump to Contacts

Ctrl + 4 jump to Tasks

Ctrl + 5 jump to Notes

Wiktionary

Wiktionary is a clean, mean defining machine. http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wiktionary:Main_Page

Gmail Message Sneak Peek

This experimental feature lets you read the contents of an e-mail without having to leave your inbox.

Simply right-click the message and presto: a preview window appears. And it's even functional: You can archive, delete, or mark-as-read the selected message.

Sound good? To enable this, head to Gmail in your browser, click the little gear icon in the upper right corner, and then click *Mail settings*. Click the Labs link, then scroll down until you find Message Sneak Peek. Click Enable, then scroll to the bottom of the page and click Save Changes.

From Hassle Free PC ezine

Take a Screen Snapshot

Press 'Print Screen' to take a snapshot of the whole screen or 'ALT' and 'Print Screen' for just the current window, then paste it into an image editor such as **Paint** to save it as a picture file.

Recipe for Cyber Sludge Remover

INGREDIENTS:

1 tbsp Windows Updates
2 cups Virus/Malware remover
3 lbs Software Cleanup powder
2 tbsp Hard Disk Scrubber
1 slice Defrag
1 tsp Startup Weeder
1/2 cup Registry Shavings
2 cups Virtual Memory Sanitizer
1 Extraneous Services Remover

DIRECTIONS

1. Mix all ingredients together in large bowl
2. Sprinkle over monitor, keyboard and system unit
3. Click to restart

Read more: http://askbobrankin.com/make_windows_xp_run_faster.html#ixzz1O2iFaScZ

Open a Command Window Anywhere in Win 7/Vista

If you are used to the command line, you will appreciate this tip. In Windows 7 or Vista, you can use Windows Explorer to navigate to any folder you want and then *Shift-right-click* a folder and select the "Open command window here" option.

From sourcedaddy.com

Files and Folders

Every item stored on your PC, whether it is a document, picture, song, game or whatever, is a **file**. A file can only be activated by a program that understands it.



Thanks, Jeannine. [Back to Page 1](#)

Excel Tips—Inserting Tomorrow's Date


You may want to insert tomorrow's date into a cell in your worksheet. This is easily done by simply creating a formula that includes the function for today's date, as in the following:

```
=TODAY() + 1
```

This formula first determines today's date and then adds 1 to it, resulting in tomorrow's date. You can then use Excel's formatting features to display the resulting date in any manner desired.

Besides displaying tomorrow's date, you can modify the formula to display a date at any time in the future. Simply change the formula so the desired number of days are being added to today's date. For instance, if you wanted to determine a date two weeks in the future, you could use the following:

```
=TODAY() + 14
```

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Meetings start at 7:00 PM (9:00 AM on Saturday) unless otherwise noted. *Meets at Edina Executive Plaza.

June

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11 Linux on Saturday* 9:00-Noon
12	13	14 General Mtg 7:00 PM Show Us Gadgets At Summit Place 6-7 Web SIG 6:30 Board Mtg	15	16	17	18 MS Office (including Access) on Saturday* 9:00—Noon
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Linux on Saturday* 9:00-Noon
10	11	12 General Mtg 7:00 PM 10 Minutes of Fame At Summit Place 6-7 Pic Perf SIG 6:30 Board Mtg	13	14	15	16 MS Office (including Access) on Saturday* 9:00—Noon
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

July

Create PDF Files for Free

by Ira Wilsker, iwilsker@sbcglobal.net

WEBSITES:

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/best-free-pdf-writer.htm>

<http://www.bullzip.com>

<http://www.cutepdf.com>

<http://www.pdfill.com>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PDF>

<http://www.foxitsoftware.com/products/reader>

<http://downloads.ghostscript.com/public>

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator>

<http://www.nitroreader.com>

If you have downloaded many documents from the Internet, you have likely come across many that are in PDF format. Portable Document Format (PDF) has been around for almost 20 years, and has become the de facto standard document format that embeds text, fonts, and graphics into the document, such that it will appear the same regardless of the operating system on the computer. Originally a proprietary format developed by Adobe that had required an expensive utility, Adobe Acrobat, in order to create PDF files, PDF became an open standard in 2008. While Acrobat was an expensive commercial program used to create PDF files, Adobe Reader has been a free staple included on almost all new computers over the past several years to display documents created with Adobe Acrobat. In the past few years, many free PDF readers have become available that claim to offer some advantages over the original Adobe Reader; my personal choice for a PDF reader is Foxit, with over 100 million copies downloaded, and available for free from www.foxitsoftware.com/products/reader.

Until a few years ago, Adobe Acrobat had a virtual monopoly on the ability to create PDF files; over the past several years, several other free and commercial PDF writers have come on the market, and PDF creation is now integrally included in many of the newer office suites, without the need of a separate PDF writer. Recently, Gizmo's [TechSupportAlert.com](http://www.techsupportalert.com) updated its listings and evaluations of free PDF writing software, and corroborated my choices of PDF writers that I have been using for the past few years.

For several years, going back to my obsolescent XP computer, I had happily used a free PDF creator, CutePDF Writer (cutepdf.com). When I first used my Windows 7-64 computer, I had some issues with CutePDF on my Windows 7-64 computer (now resolved with the newer versions), so I tried several competing free PDF writers. As with almost all other PDF creators or writers, CutePDF Writer is installed and used like a printer driver. In order to create a PDF with almost all PDF writers, simply click on PRINT from the program being used to create or display a document, and select the PDF utility instead of a physical printer. The PDF creating software will function somewhat like a printer, but instead of putting the output on paper, it will create the output as a PDF file. The output thus created is "WYSIWYG" (What You See Is What You Get), with the new PDF document being identical in appearance to the one created or viewed. Almost all PDF writers allow the user to save the PDF with a default file name (often the same as the original document but with a PDF

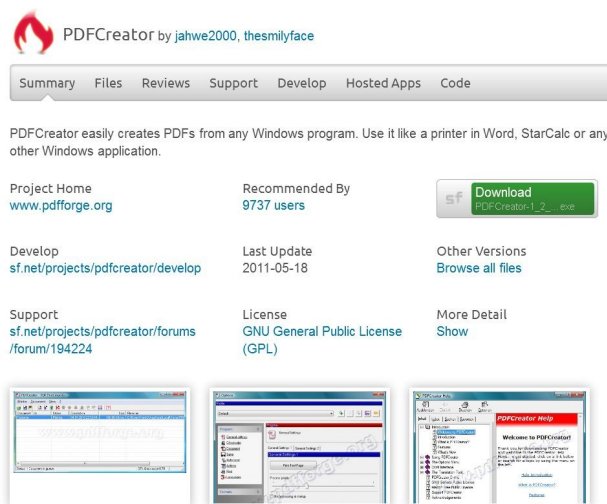
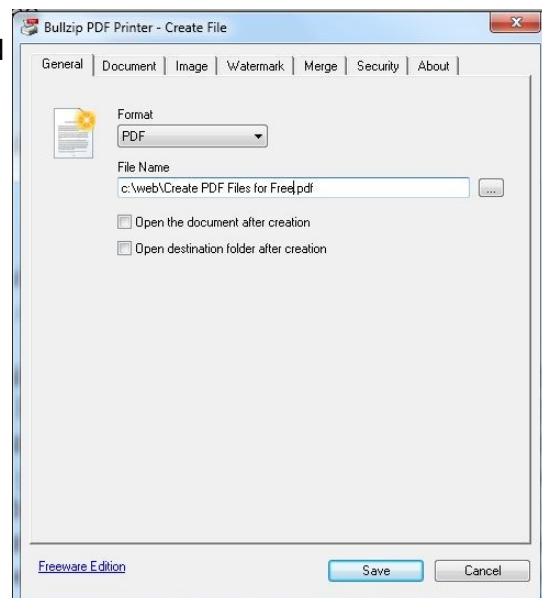
extension), or to manually enter a file name. In addition to being able to print (save) almost all documents as a PDF, I also use my chosen PDF writer to save web pages. From my browser (usually Firefox) I click on FILE - PRINT and select one of my PDF printers; within seconds I have an exact copy of the web page saved as a PDF file. I do precisely this whenever I order anything online, saving both a copy of the webpage displaying the item, and a copy of my itemized receipt. I also frequently save as PDF files (print to PDF) news stories, emails, and other documents that I want to preserve. Basically, anything that can be printed, can also be saved in PDF format precisely preserving color, format, font, and other information from the page.

On all of my computers, I am now predominately using the Bullzip Free PDF Printer (bullzip.com) to create PDF files. Bullzip Free PDF Printer is currently rated by Gizmo's TechSupportAlert.com as the top rated free PDF writer. It can run on any 32 or 64 bit version of Windows from Windows 2000 to Windows 7, including XP and Vista. Bullzip offers as user selected options password protection and encryption of PDF files, quality settings, watermarks, and the ability to create documents in formats other than PDF (BMP, JPEG, PCX, PDF, PNG, and TIFF). For most users, there is no need to change any of the settings as the default settings work fine.

Now that CutePDF Writer has been revised to better support Windows 7-64 (it always worked flawlessly on XP and Vista), it has become my secondary PDF creator. One simple feature that I like about CutePDF Writer (cutepdf.com) is that when a PDF file is created, the traditional Windows "Save As" window opens, allowing the user to easily select the directory (or use the default) where the PDF file should be saved. CutePDF Writer, as well as many other PDF writers, require that some recent version of a PS2PDF converter, such as Ghostscript, be installed on the computer. The necessary Ghostscript file (free) is linked from the download page where the PDF writers are downloaded. "GNU Ghostscript is an open-source interpreter for the PostScript language and the PDF file format. It is distributed under the GNU General Public License."

Being somewhat of a software junkie, I have several PDF writers installed on my computer. Another free PDF writer that I periodically use is PDFCreator, available from sourceforge.net/projects/pdfcreator. PDFCreator is listed as "Unrestricted Freeware" and runs on Windows 98, 2000, XP, Vista, and Windows 7 (32bit and 64bit). While simple to use, and lacking a lot of options (that most people would never use), PDFCreator could be a good choice for those who want a simple PDF writer. Installation is easy as no separate Ghostscript converter is necessary. Another good PDF writer that I have installed on my computer is NitroPDF Reader which includes both a PDF writer and reader. According to its website (www.nitroreader.com), NitroPDF Reader can "Create PDF files, comment and review, save PDF forms, extract text and images, type text directly onto the page, and more." NitroPDF Reader also allows the user to type on an otherwise locked PDF form, entering text as if filling out a form, negating the necessity of printing the form on paper, and then filling the blanks by hand. Since NitroPDF Reader is both a reader and a writer, and includes many other powerful and useful features, it may be an excellent choice for most users.

With these free PDF utilities, all of which can create PDF files as simple as clicking on the print button, there is almost no reason to spend a lot of money purchasing a commercial PDF creator. All of these creators or writers work just fine when creating PDF files from almost any type of document. [Back to Page 1](#)



Cloud Computing

By Dick Maybach, n2nd (at) charter.net

Although you can hardly pick up a computer publication without being assaulted by references to *cloud computing*, the term has been abducted by marketing organizations to the extent that it means almost nothing. Today, “cloud” is to computing as “natural” is to food. Although the term means little, the concept is very valuable, and is something that most computer owners use every day. I define cloud computing as using storage or processing resources on the Internet. Most of us already use cloud computing far more than we realize; for example, every e-mail we receive sits on our ISP's disk until we download it to our PCs, and when we use Google Maps, much the processing and all of the storage occurs on Google's hardware. In the extreme, cloud computing could evolve to the point where our computer would consist of only a keyboard, mouse, display, and perhaps a printer, with just enough processing power and software to support a Web browser. Google foresaw this as the future of home computing and began developing their Chrome operating system to support it.

A simple example of cloud computing is a backup service, which continually backs up all your data whenever you are connected to the Internet. You don't have to think about it, and because your backups are stored at a different location, they are safe even in case of a local catastrophe. A similar use is synchronizing data among several computers, where the data might be files, contacts, and your favorite Web sites and (with care) their passwords. Many people also use the cloud to share information with others, for example by using Facebook for personal information, Flickr for photos, or Google Docs for documents. Cloud storage is both convenient and inexpensive; indeed, many vendors offer up to two gigabytes free.

All the above examples are data storage ones, but there are also cloud processing services, such as Google Docs. Google Docs supports the common office tasks such as word processing, spreadsheets, and presentations, which means you can perform these without purchasing an office suite and having to keep it updated. It also allows on-line collaboration (where, for example, several people edit the same document), although few home users are likely to need this feature. Like cloud storage, cloud processing is inexpensive or even free.

By now, you may be thinking, “What's the Catch?” Somebody has to pay for these services, as providing them requires non-trivial costs for computer hardware, support staff, and communications. In some cases, the free service is a limited sample to entice you to purchase a more versatile one. In others, you are the product being sold. Your habits and preferences are valuable commodities that advertisers will pay to learn about. For many of us this is a fair trade; in return for the convenience of Google's search engine, we tolerate the ads in the sidebar and being directed to sites that want to sell to us.

However, there are some security and safety caveats involved. Security is complex for a cloud vendor; your data are stored on the same disks, the same memory, and pass through the same processors as everybody else's. The process is much like what happens in a commercial laundry or dry cleaner, where everybody's clothes are tagged and thrown together into a large machine. Afterwards, somebody looks at the tags to get them back to their proper owners. Contrast this to a bank deposit vault, where only your key can open the box where you place your documents. Even at such competent vendors as Google, there have been instances of data leaking from one customer to another, and many cloud vendors are start-ups who have much less expertise than Google. This means that you should take responsibility for safeguarding your data. For example, if you back up your disk in the cloud, encrypt any files (such as those containing passwords or on-line banking data) that present security risks. I store my passwords using KeePassX, <http://www.keepassx.org/>. Its file is always encrypted on your PC's disk, and you can safely back it up anywhere. I also use Gnu Privacy Guard (gpg), <http://www.gnupg.org/>, to encrypt files and e-mail. (Both of these programs are available for the Windows, Mac, and Linux platforms.) By the way, when you encrypt a file, be sure that only the encrypted version is ever placed in a directory that is backed up in the cloud.

Safety also is not trivial. Vendors do go out of business and, even if they keep operating, they may find that providing cloud services isn't profitable. Not all of them back up their storage, which means that their hardware failures and software bugs can destroy your data. If you use the service for back-up or synchronization, this isn't a problem because the chances of simultaneous failures in the cloud and on your PC is negligible. However, if you store your only copy of your photograph or music collection in the cloud, you are risking disaster. In the case of cloud processing, you should also be concerned about the format in which your data is stored. It does little good to download the file containing your novel if it's stored in a format that only the (now out of business cloud vendor) could read.

Finally, cloud computing is new, so you should expect some glitches. [Back to Page 1](#) 