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(membership includes monthly subscription)

The Digital

Viking



Twin Cities

PC USER GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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

February 2014

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General Meeting Tuesday, February 11, 2014 7:00 PM

APCUG Webinar

Setting Up a Blog

Presenter: Ron Ippolito

Location:

Summit Place

8505 Flying Cloud Drive

Eden Prairie, MN 55344

At this month's meeting we will be viewing a webinar from APCUG's 2013 Summer Virtual Conference. Ron Ippolito, an educator from California, creates and writes ten online blogs to keep in regular communication with his students and the teachers he trains. He will introduce us to the basics of blogging and how to use Google's Blogger program to create a blog. Blogs can be created with only yourself as the audience to, perhaps, learn a new skill, such as programming in Python and track your progress. Blogs can also be used to keep family and friends updated with a diary and photos as you take a vacation. Or they can be used to gain a worldwide audience for a hobby, products you sell, services you provide, and more. Come and learn what blogging is all about, what makes a good blog, and how it can be used to your advantage. 

6 PM Web SIG—Jack Ungerleider will show us www.archive.org where we can return to those simple games of yesteryear such as Pong, PacMan, etc., and explain how we can run them on today's PCs. 

TC/PC is a Member of



24-Hour Information • www.tcpc.com

Application form inside back cover

TC/PC Business Members

Friendship Village

Metro Sales

Thank You!

The Digital Viking

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Advertising

Full page (7½ x 9½)	\$100.00
Two-thirds page (7½ x 6)	80.00
Half page (7½ x 4¾)	65.00
One-third page (7½ x 3)	50.00
Quarter page (3½ x 4¾)	40.00
Member Bus. Card (2 x 3½)	10.00

Multiple insertion discounts available.

Contact Sharon Walbran at: SQWalbran@yahoo.com

Deadline for ad placement is the 1st of the month prior to publication. All rates are per issue and for digital or camera-ready ads. Typesetting and other services are extra and must be requested in advance of submission deadlines.

Payment must accompany order unless other arrangements are made in advance. Place make checks payable to: **Twin Cities PC User Group**

TC/PC Member Benefits

Product previews
and demonstrations

Special Interest Groups
Monthly Newsletter

Discounts on products
and services

Contests and prizes

Business Member Benefits

All of the above PLUS:

FREE ½ page ad on
payment of each renewal

20% discount on all ads
Placed in the *Digital
Viking* Newsletter

Up to 5 newsletters mailed to
your site
(only a nominal cost for each
additional 5 mailed)

TC/PC 2013-2014 Board of Directors

Meets second Thursday of each month at 7:00 PM. All members welcome to attend.

Call **Ross Held** (612-386-3172) for meeting details.

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February Meeting Prize Drawing

Members attending our February meeting will have a chance to win the book, “Windows 8: The Missing Manual,” (approximate value: \$20). O’Reilly Media has given our club this generous prize. Please visit their website, www.oreilly.com, when you are looking for computer books. 

Upcoming Meetings:

Tuesday, March 11, 7:00 PM. Teen Tech Center at the Minneapolis Central Library. Bernie Farrell, Senior Librarian at Hennepin County Library and Director of the Best Buy Teen Tech Center will explain what technical services, such as music recording, the center offers area teens who could not afford such services in the marketplace.

Tuesday, April 8, 7:00 PM Social Media: The Journey Continues with Jonathan Freed. When Jonathan presented at our October meeting, he just touched the surface of the various social media services available to us. He is coming back to expand on that presentation and guide us through exploring more options.  [Go to Page 1](#)

Programming with Jack—Lesson 2

By Jack Ungerleider, TC/PC Users Group, Twin Cities, MN

Python data structures and Scratch Costumes

The next step in program for most languages is mastering variables and data structures. We will go that direction with Python, but will detour slightly in Scratch. Scratch uses sprites to create its visual appeal. One of the ways to create animation and variety with the sprites is through costumes.

Python Lists, Tuples and Dictionaries

Simple variables in Python are in fact simple. You simply assign a value to a label using an equal sign.

```
a = 25
```

To store more complex data Python has three main structures: the list, the tuple, and the dictionary. A list is a collection of values. If you are familiar with other languages it is similar to an array and a structure. By design lists are one dimensional. But that one dimension can have values of any type. For example: You can use a list to hold the information associated with a book.

```
bookinfo = ['Hacking Raspberry Pi', 'Timothy L Walker', 'Que', 370, 29.99]
```

The list is indicated by square brackets. The values are separated by commas. Accessing the elements of the list is also done via square brackets. The index values are zero based.

```
print bookinfo[0]
Hacking Raspberry Pi
```

```
print bookinfo[3]
370
```

You can change a value in the list by assigning a new value to it.

```
bookinfo[4] = 30.99
```

A tuple is like a list but its values can not be changed after the initial assignment. This is useful when pulling data from a source that is read only. (sensors, databases, etc.)

Strings are also sequences and characters can be accessed using square brackets.

```
s = 'Linux on Saturday'
print s[9]
S
```

Negative index values start at the end of the sequence and work backward. Since zero (0) is a “positive” index indicating the first character, the last character is -1.

```
print bookinfo[-1]
30.99
```

Slicing is the concept of providing a range for the index and it will return the elements indicated. NOTE: The last index listed is not included in the slice. Using the variable s defined above:

```
print s[6:8]
on
```

If you leave out the first index it starts at the beginning of the list or string. If you leave out the second index it goes to the end of the string.

```
print s[:5]
Linux
print s[9:]
Saturday
```

The first example is the equivalent of a Left string function, the second a Right string function. An alternative to s[9:] is s[-8:].

A dictionary is Python’s answer to what in other languages is called an associative array. Instead of a simple numeric index a dictionary uses key:value pairs to allow you identify the data in the dictionary by names. Redoing our bookinfo as a dictionary looks like this:

```
book2 = {'title':'Hacking Raspberry Pi', 'author':'Timothy L Walker', 'publisher':'Que',
'pages':370, 'price':29.99}
```

The curly braces are used to create the dictionary. Square brackets are used for retrieval or reassignment:

```
print book2['author']
Timothy L Walker
```

```
book2['price'] = 30.99
```

Sidebar: Operators

Performing calculations and comparisons in python requires the use of operators. The basic math operators are what you know from spreadsheets, + - * /. Exponents can be calculated using a double asterisk (**). Comparison operators are usually two characters:

```
== equal
!= not equal
>= greater than or equal
<= less than or equal
> greater than
< less than
```

Operators and Strings

You can use the + (concatenation) and the * (duplicate) options with strings. Examples:

```
print bookinfo[0] + bookinfo{1}
Hacking Raspberry PiTimothy L Walker
```

or

```
print bookinfo[0] + ` by ` + bookinfo{1}
Hacking Raspberry Pi by Timothy L Walker
```

An example of the duplicate operator:

```
print `very ` * 9 + `small`
very very very very very very very very small
```

Scratch Sprites and Costumes

In this example we will use two sprite files to create a single sprite with two costumes. Start by deleting **Sprite 1** the Scratch cat. To do this right click on the image in the sprite area below the white stage area. Once you have done that click on the **Choose new sprite from file** icon. It is the center of the three icons above the sprite area. From the folder options provided select **Animals**. Select **bat1-a** and click **Ok**. This will create a new **Sprite 1**. In the center section of the interface select the **Costumes** tab. Click the **Import** button and find **bat1-b**. The image of the bat on the stage will change to bat1-b. Drag the bat to the left side of the stage. Click on the **Scripts** tab to start building the script.

From the **Control** group select **When [Green Flag] Clicked** and drag into the Scripts area. Next select the **Repeat 10 times** block and drag it out so it snaps under the starter block. Change the 10 in the repeat block to **25**. Select the **Looks** group and drag the **Next Costume** block inside the loop block. Select the **Motion** group and drag the **Move 10 Steps** block and place it below the Next Costume block inside the loop. The last block we will need is back in the Control group. Drag the **Wait 1 sec** block and place it after the Move 10 Steps block. Change the 1 to **0.1** in the Wait block.

Once this is done click the green flag. Your bat should fly across the stage.

Variables in Scratch

Scratch has a group where you can create variables and lists. Once created there are code blocks for manipulating the value(s) of the variable or list. There is also a group called **Operators** that contains code blocks for working with the variables that you create.  [Go to Page 1](#)

Windows Media Center – Pictures, Videos and TV, too

By Phil Sorrentino, Past President, Sarasota PCUG, FL, October 2013 Issue, PC Monitor, www.spcug.org, philsorr (at) yahoo.com

Microsoft gave us a gift when they included Media Center in Windows. Windows Media Center (WMC) is a media player (organize and show pictures, slideshows and videos) and a digital video recorder (view and record live TV). Pictures and videos are really no big deal, Windows Media Player, WinAmp and VLC all do a fine job. The real gift is the ability to watch and record TV. It is possible to configure Media Center to handle up to 4 TV signals. Originally WMC was a separate version of Windows XP (Windows XP Media Center Edition), but it was later included in Vista (Home Premium and Ultimate), and finally all versions of Windows 7 (except Starter). Unfortunately, it is not included in Windows 8, but is available for Windows 8 Pro as an add-on for \$9.99. (It was free for Windows 8 Pro early adopters up until January 31, 2013.)

WMC uses TV tuners to record and play back TV from a standard antenna, cable or satellite signal. Digital tuners support TV broadcasts in High Definition or Standard Definition. A TV tuner is a device you use to connect an analog or digital TV signal to your computer. TV tuners come in two basic model types: external TV tuners, which usually plug into a USB port on your computer (the only choice if you are using a laptop),

and internal TV tuner cards, which you must install inside your computer. In order to watch and/or record TV using Media Center, you'll need to physically connect a TV signal to the TV tuner on your computer. This typically involves connecting one end of a coaxial cable to your tuner and the other end to your TV signal source (e.g. over-the-air antenna, cable TV jack in the wall, cable TV set-top box, or satellite TV set-top box).

WMC can record TV programs manually, on a One-Touch-Record basis, or it can schedule recording shows using an included Program guide (that is customized to the local TV broadcaster). Recordings can then be put on to a DVD or portable media player (given that there are no copy restrictions). While watching live TV, WMC buffers the program so that the user can rewind, fast-forward or pause the live show, allowing users to review a spectacular touch-down pass or simply skip the commercials.

The User Interface is a little different than what Windows users are used to. The menus are very large, making them suitable for viewing on a big screen TV from your most comfortable chair. With the addition of a Media Center Remote, the user can control the operation from his/her easy chair without having to go to the computer keyboard (a wireless keyboard also gives the desired result). As expected, the "Close", "Restore Down", and "Minimize" buttons are in the upper right of the display, and note that a "Back" button is a left facing arrow in the upper left side of the display. These buttons appear when the mouse is moved.

You can record a live (currently airing) TV show (the show is recorded from the moment you press the "Record" button). Obviously, if you're halfway through watching a show before you start recording, the first half won't be recorded. (Microsoft has not yet conquered time travel.) To start recording a show, Click the "Start" button, click "All Programs", and then click Windows Media Center.

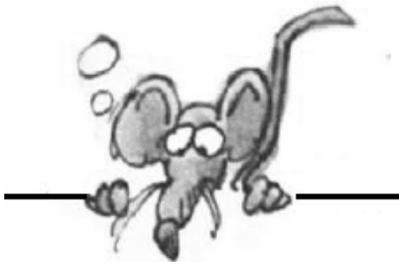
On the Windows Media Center start screen, scroll to TV, and then click "Live TV". Move the mouse so that the playback controls appear, and then click "Record".

WMC provides a Guide that is customized to your own local provider and typically displays a schedule for the next 12 or 13 days. To schedule recordings using the Guide, scroll to TV and then right-click the program that you want to record, and then left-click "Record" to schedule the recording of that program. You can also search to find a TV show or movie that you want to record. On the WMC start screen, scroll to TV, and then click Search. Click the category that you want to search by (such as Title), and then follow the instructions to start the search. On the search results page, click the TV show that you want to record, and then click "Record" to schedule a recording of that program. In order to record your favorite TV show every week, you can automate the process by scheduling the recording of an entire series. On the WMC start screen, scroll to TV, and then click Guide. Locate the TV series that you want to record, click it, and then click "Record Series".

Once you have recorded shows, they can easily be watched. From the WMC start screen, click TV and then click Recorded TV. This will display all the shows that have been recorded in order of "date-recorded", "title", or "original air date". This display is a horizontal scrolling list of thumbnails that represent each of the recorded shows. To move left or right, hover around the end of the list to illuminate the arrow for that direction, then click the arrow to move the list. Select a show to watch by clicking the thumbnail. This will display a summary of the show selected. To watch the show, click "Play", (or click "Delete" to remove the recorded show, or "cancel series" if you've changed your mind about the future recording of this show). When you click "Play", the show will start with playback controls in the lower right hand side of the show. These controls will disappear in time, but to get them back, just move the mouse. Click "Pause" to temporarily stop

. Click the "Volume Increase" button (the plus to the right of speaker) or the "Volume Decrease" button (the minus to the right of speaker) to increase or decrease the volume, or click the "Mute" button (the speaker) to turn the sound on or off. When you've finished watching the show, move the mouse, and then click "Stop".

WMC provides many additional features, many of which allow you more specific control of the recording process. You can set up Media Center to automatically record a specific channel at a specific time. And, you can set up Media Center to automatically record TV shows and movies based on keywords that are associated with a program such as actor's name, director's name, or even a word that appears in the title. (Then in the future, when a TV show or movie airs that matches keywords you specified, the program will automatically record.) But even without these extra features, WMC turns your computer into a very capable Digital Video Recorder that you can use to time-shift TV shows.  [Go to Page 1](#)



NIBBLERS

By Jeannine Sloan

404

Oops! Nobody wants to see the “404: Page Not Found” message. But as Renny Gleeson shows us, while he runs through a slideshow of creative and funny 404 pages, every error is really a chance to build a better relationship.

http://www.ted.com/talks/renny_gleeson_404_the_story_of_a_page_not_found.html

Is The Title I Want Available to Stream?

Can I Stream It? is a nifty if sometimes erratic resource developed by NYC-based Urban Pixels; the Motion Picture Association of America should treat those guys to lunch at some point.

<http://www.canistream.it/>

Online Banking Security

Using a mobile device to access your bank account is **70% less** secure than using a browser installed on a full-fledged computer.

Gleaned from a Sophos Security webcast

Alexander Street Press via HCLib

Sign into HCLib.org. Browse Databases a-z for a music db. Click the link.

The hclib link will take you to Alexander Street. Create an account there.

Signing into your account at hclib.org and then atastreetpress.com will allow you to save and annotate items in a playlist, create and annotate clips in our video products, and edit your profile.

Smart Phone Hint

In a world of intrusive technology, we must engage in a kind of struggle if we wish to sustain moments of solitude. If your phone allows it you can disable the browser on a mobile phone. Use the restrictions feature in phone’s operating system to hide the browser, requiring me to enter a code to expose and enable it. But, for the most part, this setting serves as a reminder to question manufactured desires, to resist unless I have good cause.

Similarly, switch email account from the attention- and battery-consuming “push” setting to the less frenzied manual one. Emails are fetched when requested.

Botnets

Botnets, short for “robot networks”, are more than just malware: they’re the money making machinery of modern cybercriminals. <http://tinyurl.com/l4678as>

Interesting Websites to Waste time at

[Dear Photograph](#), [Stratocam](#), [This Is Why I’m Broke](#), [Is It Normal](#), [Lamebook](#), [Honest Slogans](#), [Timelapse](#), [Reasons My Son Is Crying](#), [LOL My Thesis](#), [Larson+Shindelman](#), [9-Eyes](#),

Restore Blurred Out-Of-Focus Images with Smartdeblur

SmartDeblur is a free and open source image de-blurring utility. With all the important features and a nice

intuitive interface this tool is one of the best image de-blurring tools I have come across. It can completely de-blur your images and can give you better after results of your image. The Windows Club site has a nice review of the product here: <http://tinyurl.com/amx8qte>

Filter Bubbles

As web companies strive to tailor their services (including news and search results) to our personal tastes, there's a dangerous unintended consequence: We get trapped in a "filter bubble" and don't get exposed to information that could challenge or broaden our worldview.

http://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles.html

Wolframalpha

Got a question, any question about anything. Fill it into the field on the

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

site and get your question answered. Impressive!

Fox Tech

How does he do it?

<http://windowssecrets.com/wacky-web-week/fox-makes-making-a-living-look-like-fun/>

Printfriendly

Print web sites without the ads. Fill in the URL at Printfriendly.com and click "print preview" to see how the site would look cleaned up. Then choose to print it or save it as a PDF or simply read it more easily. Bookmark the site for quick access:

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

Disk Cleanup and Update Cleanup Explained

Windows has had a Disk Cleanup feature since the 9x versions. With the introduction of Vista, 7 and 8.x it now contains an Update Cleanup feature as well. Read the article here: <http://tinyurl.com/ld58nsa>

Great Photography Article

Quote from the author: "One reason that I love photography is that it combines many different engaging elements, including some of my favorite aspects of life: curiosity, creativity, math, science and imagination..."

<http://www.bryanhansel.com/2014/photography-curiosity-creativity-math-science/>

Sleep

Studies show that sleep time is used by the lymphatic system to do its work of cleaning out the crud created by an awake brain. Too little sleep appears to be associated with the development of degenerative brain conditions like dementia. Read the article here:

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/12/opinion/sunday/goodnight-sleep-clean.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_th_20140112

The Movie Catalog

Zero Dollar Movies is a collection of 15,000 movies that are available on YouTube for free. The site indexes only full-length films and no trailers, rentals or partial uploads. I browsed the site and saw no movie newer than 1933.

Sort Output By Date in Google Search

1. Search as normal in www.google.com
2. Click on "Show Search Tools" in the left column (or above the results in IE11)
3. Click on "Past 24 hours/Week/Month/Year" in the left column.
4. Click on "Sorted By Date" in the left column (or above the results in IE11)

What is ISO?

An ISO image (International Organization for Standardization) is an archive file (also known as a disc image) of an optical disc,

Computer Tricks, Tips Tutorial

You might learn something from this 10+ minute video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JICsXBIHs94>

Modify Internet Explorer 11's Display in Windows 8.1

If you miss the address bar and tabs in the modern UI version of IE11 here is how to get them back. When you have Internet Explorer 11 running in the modern UI, move your mouse pointer to the upper right corner to display the Charms bar and select Settings, then select Change PC Settings

When you see the Settings bar, select Options

Locate the Appearance section and click the Always Show Address Bar And Tabs to turn it to On.

<http://www.techrepublic.com/article/pro-tip-modify-internet-explorer-11s-display-in-windows-81/#>

Data Privacy Month is January 28–February 28.

We all know that privacy is important, but indulgence is fun! On the other hand, abstinence is drudgery, watchfulness is dull, and doing the Right Thing is a chore.

It requires a bit of compromise and inconvenience to maintain your privacy. Can you do it?

1) Turn off geolocation, and leave it off. 2) Turn off Wi-Fi. Turn it on when you need it.

2) Log out when you have finished. Why do these things? Read the article here:

<http://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2014/01/28/take-the-3-step-privacy-plan-diet/>

Computers and the PII vs FOIA Conflict

Conflict: PII (Personally Identifiable Information) vs. FOIA (Freedom of Information Act)

FOIA makes all the information in Census records, Criminal records, Consumer protection information, Court dockets, Government spending reports, Legislation minutes, Professional and business licenses, Real estate appraisal records, Sex offender registration files, Voter registration data bases available as part of the public record. This is not an exhaustive list. Computers make it simple to compile data from these sources in real time and that ability WILL BE ABUSED!

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

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_records#Types_of_public_records

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Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

w Work phone h Home phone c Cell phone
* Meets at an alternate location

Most SIGs will meet at Edina Executive Plaza, Conference Room #102, 5200 Willson Road, Edina, MN

Confirm with a SIG group if they meet elsewhere.

For more info contact the SIG Leader(s) listed here.

Get SIG announcements!

Link from www.tpc.com

Board of Directors*

All members are welcome! Call for location.

Selected Saturday mornings

Ross Held RHeld83745@aol.com

Community Outreach*

To request services or volunteer to help
Contact:

Ross Held RHeld83745@aol.com

Linux on Saturday

This is for the Linux newbie and those trying to come over from Microsoft to a different operating system.

First Saturday @ 9 AM-Noon

Note: No Meetings June-August

Jack Ungerleider 612/418-3494 c
jack@jacku.com

Picture Perfect

Explore how to use your digital camera and learn how to use a variety of software for editing, organizing, and sharing images and video.

Second Tuesday 6:00—7:00 PM

Every other month

Right before the general meeting

Sharon Walbran SQWalbran@yahoo.com

Microsoft Access

All levels. Presentations by expert developers within the group and by MS reps.

Third Saturday 9:00 AM—Noon

Note: No Meetings June-August

Steve Kuhlmeier 952/934-8492
steve@kuhlmeysystems.com

Microsoft Office

Addresses the use, integration, and nuances of the Microsoft Office applications.

Combined with Systems on Saturday

Third Saturday of the Month

Note: No Meetings June-August

Steve Kuhlmeier 952/934-8492
steve@kuhlmeysystems.com

Web Page Design

Discussion and demonstration of HTML, web publishing software and page design.

Second Tuesday @ 6:00-7:00 PM

Every other month

Right before the general meeting.

Jack Ungerleider 612/418-3494 c
jack@jacku.com

Microsoft Word for PC & Mac

Any level user can be proficient and efficient in basics and advanced features of Word..

Combined with Systems on

Third Saturday 9:00 AM—Noon

Note: No Meetings June-August

Tom Ostertag 612/951-5520 w
651/488-9979 h

Curt Trout 651/484-4569 h
ctrout@troutreach.com

Systems on Saturday

For all levels of computer challenges and any type of computer-related question. Incl. Q&A

Meets 3rd Saturdays 9:00 AM-Noon

Note: No Meetings June-August

Curt Trout 651/484-4569 h
ctrout@troutreach.com

Directions to Summit Place for General Meetings:

Proceed to Eden Prairie Center Flying Cloud Drive . [Flying Cloud Drive runs along the West side of the Eden Prairie Center.] Once you have driven past Eden Prairie Center (on the left) along Flying Cloud Drive you will come to a stop light at Prairie Center Drive. The next intersection with a stop light and left turn lane is Fountain Place. Turn left at Fountain Place and go straight into the parking lot. Turn left again to the first covered entry way of Summit Place. There is plenty of parking in the large parking lot in front of the first Summit Place covered entry way. When you enter the door at the first covered entry way, ask to be directed to the Performance Room for the TC/PC meeting. For a map of more detailed directions and *info on Web SIG and Board meeting*, check the TC/PC website.

Directions to Edina Executive Plaza for Systems on Saturday, Access, Word and Picture Perfect SIGs: Take Highway 100 to the 50th Street/Vernon exit. [If you have come from the north, cross back over Highway 100 to the east side.] Take the first right and go past Perkins [The golf course will be on your left.] and continue on the east frontage road (Willson Road) to the next building—5200 . There is ample parking in the building's lot. Conference Room #102 is on 1st floor.

Help yourself by helping others!

Join the team & share your knowledge with others.

Contact TC/PC at www.tpc.com

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

February

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1 Linux and Open Source on Saturdays 9:00—Noon
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 Gen Mtg: Webinar: Setting Up a Blog 7:00 PM 6:00PM Web SIG	12	13	14	15 Windows & MS Office (including Access) 9:00-Noon
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	1 Linux and Open Source on Saturdays 9:00—Noon
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 Gen Mtg: Library Teen Tech Center 7:00 PM 6:00PM Pic Perf SIG	12	13	14	15 Windows & MS Office (including Access) 9:00-Noon
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23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31				Go to Page 1	

March

Alternative Landline Telephone Services-Part 2

by Ira Wilsker, iwilsker@sbcglobal.net

WEBSITES:

<http://ooma.com>

<http://www.ooma.com/rates>

<http://www.magicJack.com>

<http://www.nettalk.com>

<http://www.skype.com/en/>

<http://www.vonage.com>

<http://obihai.com>

<http://www.basictalk.com>

<http://www.timewarnercable.com/en/residential-home/phone/domestic-international-calling-plans.html>

<http://gigaom.com/2012/12/26/over-half-of-american-homes-dont-have-or-use-their-landline/>

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2012/12/27/more-than-half-homes-without-landline/1793823/>

Part 2 of 2: Last week [Editor's note: Last month in the Viking] I discussed some of the very popular, somewhat portable alternative telephone devices from magicJack and netTALK. This week I will discuss some of the more sophisticated alternative telephone services from Ooma, the cable TV companies, Obihai, Vonage, and Skype.

My latest attempt at a home based VoIP service was an Ooma Telo device. While initially more expensive than netTALK or magicJack, it seems to have better voice quality, and virtually unlimited free local and long distance calling without a monthly or annual subscription fee, making it quickly more cost competitive than a magicJack or netTALK if used for more than two years. Retailing for \$149, it is widely available new for under \$100, and several of the "bargain" websites periodically have the Ooma (refurbished) for around \$69. On Black Friday, I purchased my new Ooma Telo for the same price as others charged for a refurbished model. Installation was very fast and easy, with the online activation an intuitive process. I selected a local phone number, and was able to make and receive phone calls in just a very few minutes. The included AC adapter, Ethernet cable (included), and cord from the telephone connect to the back of the Ooma; as with other VoIP devices, a broadband connection and available router port are required. The device, which is probably the best looking of the devices I considered, is possibly one of the most full featured devices available. I tried its much acclaimed technical support (a weakness with many of its competitors), and it was fast, polite, and effective. Published reviews from trade and technical journals raved about the voice quality of the Ooma over its competitors, and while I did not scientifically test it, I can say that the voice quality was excellent. In order to be fair, the free local and long distance service is not really free, as Ooma is required to collect taxes from its users; according to the Ooma website, "Federal universal service charges, FCC regulatory fee, state and local taxes, fees & surcharges and regulatory and compliance fees are billed monthly and are subject to change." I went to the tax rate calculator on the Ooma website (www.ooma.com/rates), entered my zip code, and found that the total federal and local taxes on my unlimited phone services will be \$3.72 per month, charged monthly to my credit card. Reading the fine print on the websites of some of the competing VoIP services indicates that they also either are now, or may shortly start adding these same taxes and fees to their monthly or annual subscription fees. There are several Ooma devices available, including a WiFi adapter (remote devices can send and receive calls via WiFi), Bluetooth adapter (cell phones and other Bluetooth devices can connect directly to Ooma if in

range), remote handsets, and other devices. There are Ooma devices explicitly for business users that can connect the businesses' phone lines to VoIP, getting the benefits of free (plus taxes) unlimited local and domestic long distance service. Ooma also offers relatively inexpensive international long distance calling, either at a very low "pennies per minute" rate or a monthly flat rate of \$17.99 for unlimited international long distance calling to 61 countries.

WalMart is heavily advertising BasicTalk digital phone service, complete with the most popular services and unlimited local and domestic long distance calling. I tried a BasicTalk and it appeared to work well, with excellent voice quality. While the VoIP device itself is among the lowest cost of any of its competitors at only \$9.99, and has had excellent reviews, BasicTalk also charges a monthly service fee of \$9.99, which, including the taxes and fees, actually would cost (in my zip code) \$12.11 per month. This is far less expensive than the traditional analog phone service, generating considerable savings over just a few years, but quickly becomes more expensive than most of its competitors.

It is almost a "given" that cable broadband providers also offer a digital (VoIP) phone service along with TV and internet services. While quality is often excellent, and feature rich, it is often among the most expensive of the competing services, even though it is common to offer a "teaser" rate for the first 12 months of service, going up to normal price the 13th month and thereafter. Some cable carriers have announced a "new lower monthly rate" of \$19.99 for service, while several other cable companies are charging \$24.95 to \$39.95 per month, with charges for some additional services. These monthly rates do not include the added taxes and fees, which are similar to most of the other carriers. Different cable providers have different fee structures for the equipment necessary to connect the home telephone to the cable service, with some leasing (renting) the VoIP device, some including the cost of the device with the monthly subscription fee, and at least one offering a port directly on the rented cable modem for the phone jack. While still cost effective when compared to the traditional landlines, cable digital phone service is among the most expensive alternative services available.

A very interesting device that has traditionally appealed to "techies" is the Obihai series of VoIP devices. These Obihai devices are intended to utilize other VoIP services, such as the Google Voice (GV) service, providing a very low cost of service from devices that start at \$59.99 retail (often available online for about \$37) for the basic OBi100 single line model, with moderately higher prices for models that support multiple lines, FAX service, and other functions. Obihai also has models that support the multiple phone lines found in office environments. Reviews of the Obihai systems have been excellent, and when used on alternative VoIP services, such as Google Voice, are among the least expensive to operate, while offering free local and domestic long distance calling, ultra low cost international calls, and other services. While slightly more complex to setup, these Obihai systems are among the least expensive to own and operate over a period of a year or two.

Vonage is another heavily advertised VoIP product, emphasizing its international calling. In order to use the Vonage service, the user must purchase a "Vonage Box" which may retail for \$79.99 but is widely available deeply discounted. Vonage offers local and international "teaser" rates of about \$10 per month for a limited number of months, increasing to \$24.99 per month (plus taxes) for unlimited local and domestic calling, a discounted limited plan (400 minutes per month, 5 cents per minute overage) for \$12.99, and international rates of \$26.99 for unlimited calling to the US and over 60 countries. Along with some of the cable plans, Vonage is among the most expensive of the plans over time, but its international calling plan is among the best available.

No comparison of VoIP plans would be complete without mentioning Microsoft's Skype service. Mostly free if used between computers or smart devices, and inexpensive if calling a phone number, Skype utilizes the computer (or smart device) as the "box", along with the speaker and microphone components of the computer. I have used Skype with a set of headphones and a microphone in order to talk to other Skype users (the free calls). Calling off the Skype system, such as to other

telephones, is reasonably priced, with the lowest rates being available on a subscription basis, with subscription rates being based on projected usage. Domestic (US) calling is as low as 2.3 cents per minute on a "pay as you go" basis, or \$2.99 per month for unlimited calling to the US and Canada, \$7.99 per month for most of North America (including landline calls to major cities in Mexico), to \$13.99 per month for unlimited calling to over 60 countries. There are several telephone-looking devices that serve as a dialer, speaker and microphone that work on computers with Skype, effectively making the computer a complete telephone device. Other than the cost of the computer or smart device, Skype is among the least expensive telephone alternatives.

As the technology is changing, services such as these may be the death knell for the old fashioned, traditional telephone services.  [Go to Page 1](#)

strobist.com - Lighting 101

By Mike Lyons, ORCOPUG President, October 2013 issue, Nibbles & Bits
www.orcopug.org, editor (at) orcopug.org

It's been quite a while since I mentioned one of the best photo education sites on the web — Strobist.com.

Started in March 2006, David Hobby created a lighting tutorial to help beginning photo students learn flash photography with a minimum of equipment. What is really cool is he explains in understandable terms and gives you his thoughts behind the instructions.

Between 2006 and 2013, David learned a lot about lighting and how to do things better. In addition, lighting equipment and lighting styles have evolved.

David has just completed a rewrite of Lighting 101, called Lighting 102. If you haven't read Lighting 101, I'd start there and move onto Lighting 102 (although you don't have to).

He also has a bunch of behind the scene shots with his thought process included. It's another great resource on the site.  [Go to Page 1](#)



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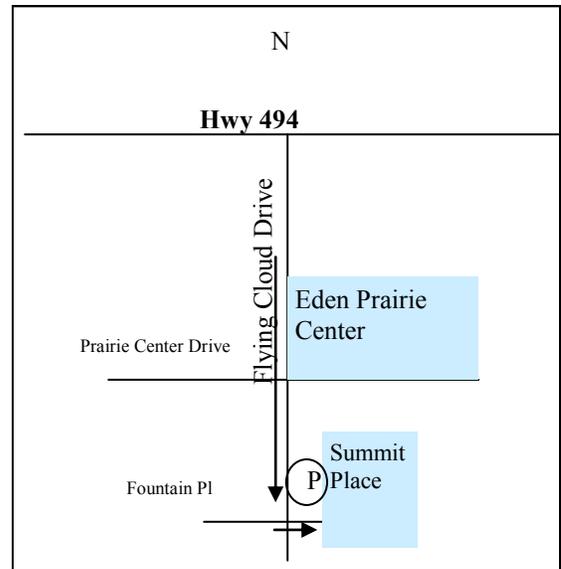
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