



SoftTalk

The Official Newsletter of the Roanoke Valley Personal Computer Club

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Serving the Roanoke Valley

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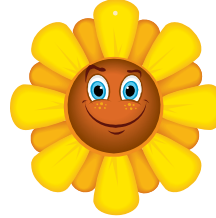
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Help your newsletter

You are invited to share favorite websites, reviews of software or just general computer experiences. Send your article or notes to editor@rvpcc.org.



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Next Meeting
Saturday, July 10, 2010
9:15 a.m.
THERE WILL BE
NO
MEETING IN JUNE

ATTENTION!

There will be no June meeting.

The July and August meetings of RVPCC will be held in the large room at the Roanoke County Headquarters Library on Route 419, regular date (second Saturday) and regular time (9:15 a.m.)

In September we will be back at our regular location at the Arnold Burton Tech Center on Roanoke Boulevard.

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PREZ' NOTES

JUNE 2010

Members, and prospective members....



This month's "Prez Notes" column reflects my continuing interest in being able to weed the bugs out of well-used PC systems.

First, let me recount a problem encountered by a friend, and its solution. My friend is not a novice PC user, and also is quite a skilled EMT, management consultant, and earlier-on a nuclear physicist. (Point of the bio-bit is for context: if this friend can acquire and be stumped by finding and eliminating this bugs, perhaps the rest of us can expect to be similarly stumped.)

Second, to continue with this problem-fix anecdote, allow that you have a Dell Inspiron 1520 laptop, with a couple Gigs of memory and an Intel Core 2 duo CPU - neither old, nor shabby, and running Windows-VISTA Home Premium O/S. Now allow that at some point, your automatic Windows Update service begins to fail. When finally documented, it is clear that updates are simply not downloading. Yet other bits will download. Then allow that you find that your CDROM-RW and DVD-RW are no longer recognized by Windows -- they simply aren't "there" when you want to use them. Your A/V protector, McAfee, has not raised a red flag. Neither has SpyBot-SD which you run regularly.

Question is what to do -- for diagnosis, and for repair ?

The "skinny" on diagnosis was obtained from a MS Technical Support specialist, contacted at Microsoft Windows Update Support, by forwarding the error message that "Windows Update failed with the error 8000FFFF." The process of documenting this failure is another story. Three suggestions follow.

The bottom line diagnosis was that "This issue can be caused by one of the following factors:

1. Some registry keys are corrupt.

2. Corrupted Windows Update Temporary folder."

SYMPTOM REFERENCE: Windows Update failed with the error **8000FFFF**

Before addressing the more common causes of this issue, a key procedural point. After each step we confirm whether the resolution has worked. To do this, we attempt to connect to the Windows Update web site. This prevents repeating troubleshooting steps needlessly.

NOTE: The Windows Update service may be affected by some third party applications such as Spyblocker, Internet or web accelerators (programs designed to boost the speed of the Internet connection), security or anti-virus programs (Norton, McAfee, etc.). These must be disabled or shut down before attempting to make corrections / test working accessibility to the Windows Update site.

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Suggestion 1: Remove the incorrect COMPONENTS key. For detailed info, see Microsoft Knowledge Base article: When in Control Panel, you open Windows Update, error code of 8000FFFF shows. <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/946414>

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STEPS:

1. Backup the registry key first. Do this by (A) Clicking "Start", typing REGEDIT in the Start Search bar, and pressing Enter. (B) Select "My Computer" (the root node) on the left pane, under the "File" menu, click "Export", under Export, choose "All Export" range, and select "Desktop" in the Save in box and type "backup" as the File Name. Click "Save".

Please Note: To restore the registry key simply double-click the backup.reg file. (Following troubleshooting, this file can be deleted.)

2. Still in "Registry Editor", locate the following Registry batches by clicking the PLUS (+) sign

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\COMPONENTS

3. Check if these three values exist under the COMPONENTS key, and if so delete them and Quit:
PendingXmlIdentifier
NextQueueEntryIndex
AdvancedInstallersNeedResolving

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Suggestion 2: Rename the Windows Update Software distribution folder. This issue may occur if the Windows Update, Software distribution folder has been corrupted. Solution is to rename it, permitting it to be recreated on the next visit to the Windows Upgrade site.

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STEPS:

1. Close all the open windows.
2. Click the "Start" Button, click "All programs", and click "Accessories".
3. Right-click "Command Prompt", and choose "Run as administrator".
4. In "Administrator: Command Prompt" window, type in net stop WuAuServ and press Enter.

Note: Please look at the cmd window and make sure it says that it was successfully stopped before we try to rename the folder. However, if it fails, please let me know before performing any further steps and include any error messages you may have received when it failed.

5. Click the "Start" Button, in the "Start Search" box, type %windir% and press Enter.
6. In the opened folder, look for the folder named "SoftwareDistribution".
7. Right-click it, select Rename and type "SDold" (without the quotes) to rename this folder.
8. While still in the "Administrator: Command Prompt" window, type the command net start WuAuServ in the opened window to restart the Windows Updates service. If a look at the CMD window reveals that this service doesn't start, get back to MS technical support immediately.

After completing the above steps, restart the computer and try to run Windows Update again. If this succeeds, the problem is resolved, and this procedure has finished successfully.

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Suggestion 3. If the problem persists, then further document the problem context, and send details to Microsoft.

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Do this by ...

- FIRST:** Collecting the relevant registry key
1. Click "Start", type REGEDIT in Start Search bar & press Enter.
 2. Locate the following Registry batches by ...clicking the PLUS (+) sign HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Components
 3. Please click "Components" on the left pane, then ... right click on the branch name Components and choose "Export".
 4. Save the branch on the Desktop with the name Components.
 5. Go back to the Desktop, right-click the saved file, click "Send To", and click "Compressed (zipped) Folder".
 6. A new file (compressed file) will be generated. Please send it to Microsoft technical support

SECOND: Collecting the WindowsUpdate.log file

1. Click "Start", type "WindowsUpdate.log" (without the quotes) in the Search Bar and Press Enter: and find the file named "WindowsUpdate.log"
2. Now click on the "File" menu and then click "Save As".
3. From the left panel, click "Desktop" and click the "Save" button on your Desktop. Then, send it to Microsoft technical support, for further help.

#####END PROBLEM FIX#####

Programming for Adults

Last month's article on programming for kids leads to the next step, programming for adults. So, what is a programming language, and why do I need it?

Wikipedia defines **programming language** as an artificial [language](#) designed to express [computations](#) that can be performed by a [machine](#), particularly a [computer](#). Programming languages can be used to create [programs](#) that control the behavior of a machine, to express [algorithms](#) precisely, or as a mode of human communication. Read the entire definition at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programming_language.

In another article (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_programming_languages), Wikipedia says that roughly 290 different programming languages have been released with names from A+ to ZZT-ooop. BASIC is just one of those languages, but there are nearly 300 dialects of BASIC. Bottom line: there are plenty of languages to choose from.

Why do I need to program when I can purchase ready-made applications or use programs like Access and Excel? "When you program, you are a creator. You go from a blank text file to a working

program with nothing to limit you but your imagination. Programming is like having access to the absolute best set of Legos in the world in almost unlimited quantities. Even better, you can get all of your building materials completely for free (once you own a computer) on the Internet. Amazing!" Read much more in the article "Why Program" at <http://www.cprogramming.com/whyprogram.html>

Now that we agree that programming is the greatest thing since sliced bread, what language do we use? If you have had experience with a language, then that is the one you should try first. You can find Windows programs that will run BASIC, C, Cobol, Fortran, and others at <http://www.thefreecountry.com/>.

With no previous experience, there are better languages than the older ones. Two to try are Perl and Python. Learn more about these at <http://www.perl.org/> and <http://www.python.org/>. Both are free, have modern structures, and have extensive tutorials and documentation.

As usual, SoftTalk would be happy to pass along comments of members who using a programming language in their work or hobby.

RVPC Meetings

When: 2nd Saturday of every month

Where: See the "Attention" announcement on page 1

What time: 9:15 am until noon

More info: RVPC.org



Vista and 7 Tip: Icon Size

To make desktop icons on your Vista or 7 computer larger or smaller: Right-click any empty space on the desktop, and then select View. You'll be able to select Large, Medium, or Small ("Classic" in Vista).

In Vista, but not in 7: right-click the desktop as above, then hold down the CTRL key while you roll the mouse wheel forward and back to change the icon size.

Leapin' Lizards! Annie's Leavin'

Most of us know who Little Orphan Annie is. Or soon to be "was." After 85 years, the comic strip will cease syndication.

Over the years, the strip was renamed "Annie," and the redhead with the blank saucer eyes was given a more modern haircut and was changed from her red dress to jeans. But readership declined to the point where it didn't pay to draw and distribute it.

Farewell Annie, Punjab, Sandy, and Daddy Warbucks. But wait -- maybe all isn't lost. The company said it "is taking Annie into the internet age by pursuing new audiences for her in digital media."

For more details on the history of the Annie strip, google "annie comic" without the quotes.

Corks

Since the 1600s, wine bottles have used natural cork as stoppers. Over the past 10 years, however, plastic corks have become more popular. Now 20% of wine sold worldwide uses the new synthetic stoppers.

This is just one of the fascinating items one runs across when surfing. The story of the new stoppers is interesting. If nothing else, it shows that any dominant industry can be vulnerable to competition, especially if it grows complacent.

Read the full article in the Wall Street Journal. The link is <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304172404575168120997013394.html?KEYWORDS=how+plastic+popped>. Or, go to www.wsj.com and enter "how plastic popped the cork monopoly" (without the quotes) into the WSJ search box. In the results list, click on the article "Show Stopper: How Plastic Popped the Cork Monopoly."

Meeting space provided by
Roanoke County Schools

What you need in a laptop

Walter Mossberg's article "A Brief Rundown of What You Need in a Laptop" appeared in the April 29 Wall Street Journal. Mossberg discussed, cost, processors, graphics, memory, hard disks, 64 vs. 32 bit, touch screens, and Windows vs. Macs.

Laptops now dominate the market. His tips are for average users doing the most common tasks. Get all the details at his All Things Digital Web site, <http://walt.allthingsd.com/>. Scroll down a bit and look for "Walt's Buyer's Guides" on the far left. Under that heading, click "Laptops." Much of his advice applies to desktops, as well as laptops.

There is a lot of good information on Mossberg's site in addition to the laptop guide. Click on **Home** and look over the many articles available.

On May 31, Kim Komando also published an article on buying a laptop, this time a high-end model. Read it at <http://www.komando.com/tips/index.aspx?id=7776>. Her article includes links to other buying guides on netbooks, budget laptops, and high-performance desktops.



Learn about Cookies

We hear and read a lot about cookies. Usually they are misunderstood and feared. Most cookies are useful, but there are indeed some bad guys out there. A good article on cookies can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTTP_cookie. This article tells us more about cookies than we want to know. Read the article until it gets too deep. You know, read until your brain is full and then quit.

New Drives on the Horizon

A new thing in computerdom is the **solid-state drive**, or **SSD**. (Oh no, another set of initials!) The SSD has no moving parts – it replaces the spinning disks and moving heads with solid-state memory like that used in your camera’s flash card.

There is both good and bad news here. The good: SSDs are fast. Your computer will boot up in seconds. Programs will open faster. Documents will save faster. Also, SSDs are more rugged since they have no moving parts. They are more energy efficient, which can prolong laptops battery life. SSDs are also lighter, again an advantage for laptops.

And now the bad news: SSDs are very expensive compared to the present hard drives. A common drive size is 250 GB. Best Buy lists a 250 GB conventional hard drive for \$50. A similar sized SSD is \$600 on line at New Egg. But 250 GB isn’t enough for a photo or video enthusiast. One-Terabyte (1,000 GB) hard drives are \$100 at Best Buy; a 1-TB SSD is \$3,349 at New Egg.

Like other consumer electronics, these prices will drop over time. But there is a new approach that

combines the high speed of an SSD with the low price of a hard drive -- the **hybrid** drive such as the newly announced Seagate Momentus XT.

Seagate’s hybrid drive combines conventional mechanical hard drive components with 4GB of SSD capacity and 32MB of DDR3 cache memory. The hybrid has software that tracks a person's use trends and then uses the SSD component of the drive to optimize performance.

Seagate released a hybrid drive three years ago with little success. That first model delivered energy savings, but little increase in speed. Their latest model is much faster. Seagate said that their hybrid “blows by” traditional hard-disk drives for read and write speeds, and nearly matches pure-SSD performance. They did not offer specific performance numbers.

The new Momentus XT comes in 250GB, 320GB and 500GB capacities with manufacturer's suggested retail prices of \$113, \$132, and \$156, respectively.

ASUS said it will be the first PC maker to ship systems featuring Seagate's Momentus XT drive. Extreme high-end lines, such as Dell’s Alienware, now offer SSDs but no hybrids. With today’s rapid adoption of new technology, SSDs and hybrids should appear on lower-priced lines soon.



Reminder on Microsoft Support

Support for the following popular Microsoft products will end July 13, 2010:

- Windows 2000 Professional
- Windows Vista with no Service Packs installed
- Windows XP 32-bit without Service Pack 3
- Windows XP 64-bit without Service Pack 2

Users of Windows 2000 should consider upgrading to XP or 7. Users of XP and Vista must download and install the free Service Packs soon. XP (updated) will continue to be supported until April, 2014. Vista (updated) will last longer, perhaps to 2017.

If you aren’t sure what version of Windows you are using: for XP, click Start, click Run, type winver” (without the quotes), and press Enter. For Vista, click Start, type “winver” (without the quotes) into the search box, and press Enter.

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Secretary's Report

May 8, 2010

President John Leary opened the meeting at 9:13 A.M.

Door prizes were won by Don Thorn, Andy McLaughlin, Kay Viskup, Earl Abbott and Bob Johnson.

Program:

Andy McLaughlin introduced our guest speaker, Don Thorn, reporting on Internet Video Broadcasting in 3-D. Mr. Thorn distributed 3-D glasses to members and proceeded to demonstrate all the facets how the 3-D program works.

After Mr. Thorn's departure, the regular meeting continued.

Treasurer: Helen Trenor, presented the Treasurer's Report.

Secretary : Kay Viskup said April 2010 minutes were published in May newsletter.

News Letter: Sandy Johnson mentioned she was going to set up a yearly SoftTalk index, listing main articles and topics. John Leary has suggested that this index be put on a CD and made available to all members.

Roanoke County Schools: Howard Duff reported to members on this summer's school-building schedule. In order to cooperate with the schools, there will be no RVPCC meeting in June. John Leary and other members will look for other venues for the July and August meetings. Members should check the monthly news letters for details on July and August dates and locations.

RVPCC Member Dues: Annual dues will be paid as of July 1st, 2010. Dues paid previously will be prorated to adjust to July date.

John Leary called to adjourn meeting at 11:25 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kay Viskup, Secretary

Update your Ad-Aware program

Ad-Aware is a spyware program, one of those utilities that finds and removes malware like tracking cookies that are threats to your privacy.

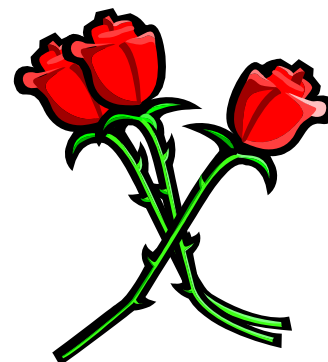
"The experts" say that we should use two spyware programs and run them at least weekly – the theory is that if one program doesn't find a problem, the second one will. The free Ad-Aware is quite popular.

Next time you are in the Windows Task Manager, check out how much RAM your Ad-Aware is using even though the program isn't doing anything. You'll find it is using as much as 80 MB. This is a large amount of RAM for an older computer that may have only 256 MB.

Recently Lavasoft, the publisher of Ad-Aware, announced that their latest version required less RAM. As of this writing, that version is 8.2.3. It appears to occupy 22 MB of RAM while inactive, a significant reduction.

Update your Ad-Aware and reduce the load on your RAM. Just make sure you download the free version. Avoid clicking on the paid versions or the other software offers that Lavasoft offers.

Instead of updating, you can download a new copy of the latest version. This link should take you to a page where you can click directly on "Save file:" http://download.cnet.com/3001-8022_4-10045910.html?spi=545fc0df317c38625b00244dc051aedd&part=dl-ad-aware



May's Program on 3-D Television



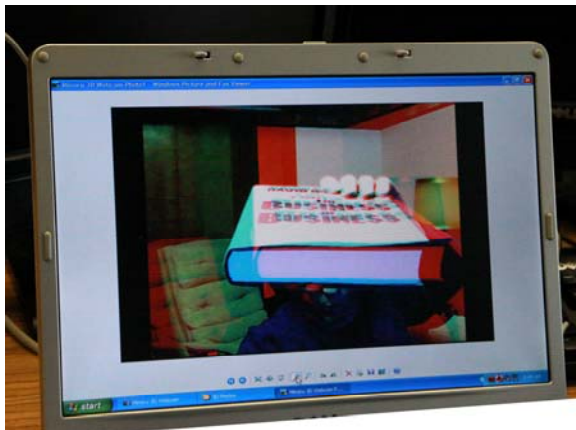
Here we are with our 3-D classes on



The 3-D picture on the screen



What's everyone looking at?



The same picture on the monitor
Notice how much brighter the 'odd' colors are!
(If you have red/blue glasses you can check out the 3-D effect right here.)



Don Thorne and Beryl Middaugh
checking out the monitor's picture