



# SoftTalk

The Official Newsletter of the Roanoke Valley Personal Computer Club

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Serving the Roanoke Valley

January 2012

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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](mailto:editor@rvpcc.org).



# A HAPPY NEW YEAR

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Next Meeting  
 Saturday, January 14, 2012  
 9:15 a.m.  
 Topics:  
 Review of Web Servers  
 by  
 John Leary

## Clean that New PC

Get a new PC for Christmas? Did you know that most new PCs ship with bundled applications, many of which are trial versions? These programs take up a lot of space and often check for updates automatically, compromising performance and even security.

Clean up that new PC with the free PC Decrapifier from <http://pcdecrapifier.com/>.

PC Decrapifier removes unneeded programs. It is portable freeware that can run on any Windows XP, Vista, or 7 machine without having to be installed. It scans your PC for junk programs and other applications and removes them all at once when you're ready.

Decrapifier seems best for removing unneeded software when you first use your new PC. Since it's free, though, you can run it on any PC to see if it has any junk programs and remove them en masse.

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## Secretary's Report

I apologize to Ron Gordon. He submitted the minutes promptly after the December meeting...and I've lost them. You've heard "A dog ate my homework?" Well, a virus ate Ron's email!

In summary, we discussed meeting at the new library after it has been open for a while.

John Leary is to prepare a program to review possible new web hosting sites for the club's web site.

Andy McLaughlin announced that he will be unable to continue in his present office. We are now looking for a replacement for him.

The meeting was adjourned and we all left for Wildwood for our Christmas lunch.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sandy Johnson

The actual minutes will be published in the next newsletter.

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## PREZ' NOTES



There  
are  
no  
Prez Notes  
this  
month.

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## Predictions: Costs in 2012

12 things to cost **less** in 2012 (Source: <http://finances.msn.com/saving-money-ideas/beeaf2ec-fa1d-45a5-9f44-02c6e35ef599>)

Apple iPad 2  
Wine  
Desktop replacement laptops (due to lower cost AMD processors)  
Solid state drives  
Car rentals  
eBook readers  
Apple MacBook Air refurb  
Standalone GPS units with lifetime maps  
Media streamers  
3D HDTVs  
Home prices

11 things to cost **more** in 2012 (Source <http://money.msn.com/shopping-deals/article.aspx?post=ab5e78c3-15e5-4582-a91a-ee8eea95c3cd>)

Airfares  
New digital camera models  
Hard drives (due to Thailand floods)  
Desktop computers (due to integrating monitors into all-in-ones)  
Groceries  
Mobile device data plans  
Municipal fees  
Water  
Gasoline  
Gold  
Shipping (USPS, UPS, FedEx)

### RVPC Meetings

**When:** 2nd Saturday of every month

**Where:** Arnold R. Burton  
Tech Center  
Room 105  
1760 Roanoke Blvd.  
Salem, VA 24153

**What time:** 9:15 am until noon

## Automatic Upgrades of IE6

Beginning in January, Internet Explorer 6 (IE6) users will be automatically updated to the latest version of the browser. Microsoft said it was starting the project to update millions of machines to improve security online.

The updates would be applied without a user's knowledge to help beat scammers tricking people with fake updates. Those who for some reason did not want their browser updated could opt out or uninstall the software, said Microsoft.

There appears to be a significant number of users with older operating systems (XP, Vista) that are not upgrading their browser to the latest versions (IE8 and IE9) due to "update fatigue." They elect to postpone the update when the dialog box comes up. These users are the primary target/beneficiary of Microsoft's new policy.

With the opt-outs that will be available, those users still stubbornly clinging to IE6 will be able to continue to do so for now. They will be forced to give in sooner or later as fewer companies recognize the old browser. Google announced two years ago that they would phase out recognition of IE6.

## The Top 10s

Are you interested in the information published in the Kim Komando newsletters but really don't have the time to wade through 1,150 or so newsletters in a year? Now you can have the best of the newsletters without the wading.

Go to <http://www.komando.com/top10/coolites.asp> to read the top 10 cool sites of 2011. At the bottom of this list will be links to more of her top 10s: tips, money tips, downloads, videos, and apps.

Just think of the hours SoftTalk has saved for you!



## Life with an SSD

By Bob Johnson

Since Sandy and I both dislike waiting for Windows and other programs to load, we had an Intel solid state drive (SSD) included in our newly-built desktop computer. An SSD is quite different from the traditional hard disk drive (HDD), an electromechanical device containing spinning disks and movable read/write heads.

The SSD uses memory chips and has no moving parts. Compared to electromechanical HDDs, SSDs are typically less susceptible to physical shock, are silent, and are much faster, but are considerably more expensive per gigabyte (GB). SSDs use the same interface as hard disk drives and are easy to install in a new machine or as a replacement for an existing HDD. There is a wealth of information on line about installing an SSD in an existing computer.

Our new PC uses the SSD for C:, the boot drive. The Windows operating system is stored there along with large programs like office suites, security suites, PhotoShop, and a CAD program. Loading and starting these programs takes much less time than our previous PC with only HDDs.

Since the SSD is quite expensive per GB, ours is rather small by HDD standards and only the programs that benefit the most from high speed loading are stored there. All other programs, plus all our data files, are stored on D:; a conventional HDD that is 6 times larger than the SSD and cost only 1/3 as much as the SSD back in November. The current shortage and high price of HDDs might make the high price of an SSD a bit easier to swallow in 2012.

As we loaded programs into our new PC, we learned that almost every program tries to install itself on C:. Many programs can be changed to another drive, but sometimes only by searching through the "advanced" or "custom" installation choices. A few can't be persuaded to live anywhere but C:.

Data is stored on our HDD rather than the SSD not only to save space, but to minimize wear. The SSD's memory cells have a finite life measured in numbers of read-write cycles. The newest generations of SSDs have wear-leveling abilities to

spread the wear and extend the life of the drive. The chance of failure is another reason to store all data on another drive -- it is easy to replace Windows and other programs, but not your data.

Some versions of Windows include automatic drive defragmentation. Defragging an HDD is needed to reduce the time required for the heads to search the spinning disks and retrieve fragmented information. However, an SSD has no heads and fragmentation does not slow it down. The unneeded defragging of an SSD will consume part of the drive's life with no benefit.

Windows 7 can usually detect an SSD and shut off the automatic defrag. This should be verified by going to Accessories > System Tools > Disk Defragmenter. The current status of C: should be "Never run."

The SSD certainly reduces the wait for startup. Windows is and ready to run so quickly that the next bottleneck in the startup is the time it takes for our cable modem to come on line. In the interest of full disclosure, not all of our increase in speed is due to the SSD alone. Some credit goes to the UEFI bios and a fast CPU in our new machine.

Is an SSD worth the cost? If you hate waiting for a bootup or for a large program to load, and you cringe when you see the "restart your computer now" message, the answer is yes. If you are more relaxed and really don't mind the waits, then the answer is no -- forget the SSD and give your wallet a break.

With or without the SSD, equip your new PC to support the fastest data transfer rate. Today that is SATA6 at 6 GB per second, twice the rate of the SATA3.

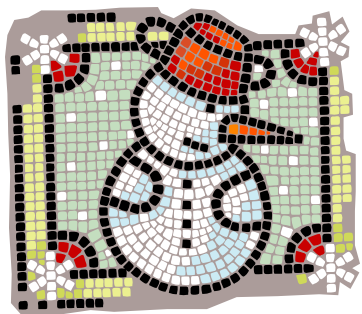


## Browser war: Chrome passes Firefox

On January 3, 2012, the Telegraph's site (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>) announced: "Chrome ... is now the world's second-most popular browser after Internet Explorer, having surpassed Mozilla Firefox in November last year."

Wikipedia says that "**Google Chrome** is a web browser developed by Google... It was first released as a beta version for Microsoft Windows on September 2, 2008, and the public stable release was on December 11, 2008. .... as of December 2011, Chrome is the second most widely used browser, having recently overtaken Mozilla Firefox, with 25.69% worldwide usage share of web browsers and is the most popular browser in South America, according to StatCounter."

If you would like to try the Chrome browser, it is free from Google at <https://www.google.com/chrome>. It will try to make itself your default browser, so uncheck that box if you just want to run a trial.



## New Google images

Did you see the announcement in the January 5 Roanoke times? Google has replaced its 2006 aerial pictures of our area with new pictures taken in October 2011. Enjoy the new images.

Meeting space provided by  
Roanoke County Schools

## Check your Cart

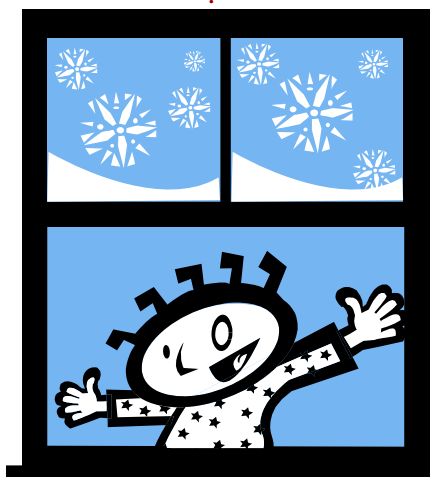
On line shopping is easy and quick. It doesn't take long to place the items in your cart and go to checkout. But don't make it too quick. Before you hit the "buy" button, read through the complete order form to make sure the quantities are right, that the descriptions match the items you want, and that the seller hasn't added items you didn't order and don't want.

Those added items are no joke. Late in 2011 there was a major dust-up about Sears adding accessories and extended appliance warranties without the buyer's consent. An example quoted was a refrigerator for \$1,299.99 to which Sears added a 5-year extended warranty for \$469.99 and a 5-foot water hose for \$4.98.

Sears said that the customer could easily remove the item, but many people do not check their orders and spot the add-ons. Very few customers would think "I'd better check the cart just to make sure they haven't slipped in something that I didn't order."

Sears has reversed its policy of unrequested add-ins and will give customers a choice. But Sears is just one company – who knows how many others slip things into the cart in the hope that the buyer won't notice?

There is an important lesson here for anyone who shops online. Check the cart carefully before you hit the "buy" button.



## Hard Drive Shortages to Linger

In December, Computerworld reported that hard disk drive supply shortages in the wake of Thailand flooding will continue to affect consumers, computer system manufacturers, and corporate IT shops into 2013.

Supplies will increase to the point where it will be possible to meet "immediate demand" in the second half of 2012, but distribution channels, online retail sites, and system manufacturers will continue to feel the effects into 2013.

Thailand, a major supplier of hard drives, was hit with its worst flooding in 50 years. Flooding began in July, 2011, and some areas were still under 6 feet of water as late as December. Flood waters swamped more than two-thirds of the country, submerging rice fields and shutting down hundreds of factories. In December, it was estimated that 12.8 million people were impacted, damages were 45 billion US dollars, and 790 lives were lost.

Western Digital, the largest producer of hard drives, was hit the hardest by the Thailand flooding with up to 75% of its production shut down.

In late November, hard-drive maker Seagate Technology said that the Thailand floods would cause hard disk drive supplies to be significantly constrained for several quarters.

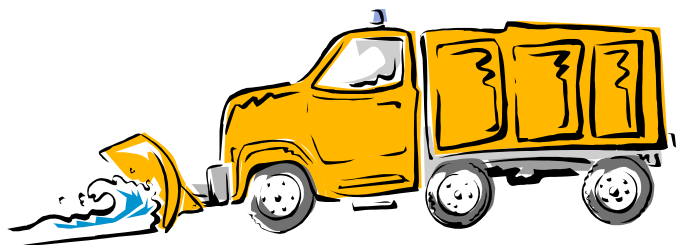
In December, Lenovo told its corporate IT customers that it was out of a number of hard disk drives, including the highly popular 7,200-rpm models. Other computer manufacturers have also reported supply problems.

It is difficult to predict how specific disk drive vendors will allocate supplies to computer system customers, but drive manufacturers are likely to ensure that makers of enterprise systems are taken care of first. Computer system manufacturers will also be high on the list, while consumers who buy disk drives at retail stores will be at the bottom.

Because of the shortages, hard drive prices skyrocketed near the end of 2011, in some cases as much as 100%. Prices are beginning to settle back, but will remain high until the Thailand factories can fully recover. In one example: your editor priced a Western Digital 1 TB hard drive locally for \$99 in November. The same drive was listed by Amazon at \$154 on January 3, recently reduced from \$180..

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## WINTER WEATHER PROCEDURES:



When the weather outside is frightful, check [RVPC.org](http://RVPC.org) to see if the club meeting has been canceled.

A decision should be made by 8:30 a.m. at the latest.

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Pictures from December meeting



Santa joined us for lunch after the business meeting



We even had an elf visit us



Before the food arrived

