

Eastside Coordinator Needed - See Page Three



NEWSLETTER

*The Best Accessory
for your PC!*

MAIN MEETINGS

West Side.....Sat, Nov 13

CollegeAmerica, 6533 N Black Canyon Hwy, Phoenix

East Side.....Wed, Nov 17

University of Advancing Technologies
2625 W Baseline Rd, Tempe
(one block west of Fry's Electronics)

Fountain Hills.....Thu, Nov 18

Fountain Hills Library, 12901 N La Montana Drive,
Fountain Hills

**Presentation this month:
E-BAY TODAY
ALLEN HUNT PRESENTER**

For date and time changes, check our
website: phoenixpcug.org



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Steering Committee:

**Officers and Members who are present
at the 6:00 P.M. West Side meeting.**

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THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Well Thanksgiving is almost upon us and will come much sooner than we expect. We have many things to be thankful for this year and I can recall a few myself. As far as the club is concerned, we are still in business, the newsletter and web site are still healthy thanks to the efforts of Bill Aulepp, Michael Bishop and Hank Pearson. And we're still having meetings in three locations!

Now to this month's newsletter. The topic of solid state drives is featured and from personal experience my drive seems to operate quite well. As described in the article, my SSD is also fast, quiet, reliable, easily installed and low power consumption. I plan to have more information as I have time.

Also featured is Acronis True Image. I am not sure what the author has in mind when he refers to cloning hard drives as being somewhat "sticky" and should be avoided (his words). In my experience, cloning is very straightforward and reliable.

Next month, December, is our usual Gadgets, Games And Gizmos and the end of the year party. Also not to be overlooked is our club election. With the exception of Chuck Lewis, our secretary, our board of directors - Allen Hunt, VP; Lo Hardman, Treasurer and myself, President are still interested in running. If anyone would like to nominate someone or themselves, please contact a board member.

Dues are due in December and when paying them please fill out the form you will find on the last page of this newsletter. It is important we have the up to date information on each member these forms provide.

Happy Thanksgiving!

David

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FROM YOUR EDITOR

It is not necessary to have wrinkles and gray hair to remember the early days of dramatic revolution in the electronics industry. Personal computer buffs will recall when software was stored on magnetic tape, when central processor units had "large" memories in the kilobytes, when increases in computational speeds became routine (100 cycles per second was once considered to be an unachievable goal), when monitors came only in monochrome at a single resolution. And when the Internet arrived, it was only via telephone dial-up, and it was free! Parallel advances have come with television, telephones, microwave ovens, washing machines and dryers, and so on. Even household devices as mundane as a toaster are now controlled by integrated circuits.

But many of these advances have come at a price, sometimes in dollars, sometimes in personal and international behavior, and most of all, in incompatibility. As an example, High Definition television presents, without argument, much better picture quality. Yet it took the heavy hammer of the federal government, (to the great benefit of the cable networks), to provide universal access of HDTV to the general populace.

The invention of the social networks, coupled with the advances in telephone handset capability has generated a set of unforeseen restrictions on personal usage. For instance, many high schools have banned the usage of cellular phones on school grounds in order to combat a wide range of problems, ranging from the simple – interruption of classroom instruction, to the serious – drug dealing during and after school hours. Internationally, several governments in countries with extremely conservative social mores have attempted to restrict or even block the usage of electronic methods of communication in order to prevent transmission of political, social, or other "controversial" information in or out of the country.

But, to many minds, the most serious problem caused by "advances" in electronic technology has been the incompatibility of hardware and software protocols. Manufacturers of both have introduced new products that are not usable with previous devices or codes previously sold by the same company. Whether it has been planned obsolescence or misguided adherence toward providing "upgrades", the result has been the proliferation of worthless hardware and incompatible software. But perhaps there is now a business opportunity for the formation of a company, (using the traditional garage workshop startup), that will invent devices that will remedy these problems. I hope so.

Michael

MEETINGS

CALENDAR

For date and time changes, check our
website: phoenixpcug.org

PRESENTATION:

**E-BAY TODAY
ALLEN HUNT PRESENTER**

GENERAL MEETINGS

WEST SIDE: CollegeAmerica (see map page 16)

- Saturday, November 13, 2010
- 12:00 Noon Steering Committee
- 12:30 PM - Q and A
- Followed by Presentation.

EAST SIDE: University of Advancing Technology (see map page 18)

- Wednesday, November 17, 2010
- 6:30 PM - Q and A
- Followed by Presentation.

FOUNTAIN HILLS: Fountain Hills Library (see map page 18)

- Thursday, November 18, 2010
- 6:30 PM - Q and A
- Followed by Presentation.

EASTSIDE COORDINATOR NEEDED

The eastside meeting will continue but we need a new coordinator.
Our coordinator Marion Smith's work schedule has changed.
If you are willing to volunteer, please contact Lo Hardman.

(treasurer@phoenixpcug.org)

Thank you

ACRONIS TRUE IMAGE HOME 2011

by Dr Herb Goldstein

Nightmares can come in abundant varieties, but the day you turn on your computer and nothing happens you are in for a whole new meaning of the word. As your heart sinks somewhere around the level of your shoes, visions of years of accumulated files, data, and software flash before your eyes as the sudden realization that maybe it's all gone nauseatingly sinks in. Are we talking about a rare occurrence? Unfortunately, it's a lot more common than you might think. Computers and their component hard drives are, after all, man-made electronic devices that are subject to an enormous variety of glitches. Preparing yourself for the inevitable day they visit you is the name of the game called *BACKUP!*

Yes, decent backup software used regularly needs to be the very first thing installed on your computer after its operating system! To do otherwise is an invitation to the disaster that time alone will inevitably visit upon you!

Backup software comes in a variety of types but it is commonly recognized that "imaging" is the most complete and accurate. Only imaging produces a byte-for-byte true reproduction of the contents of your original hard drive. Leading popularity today in the world of imaging backup software today is Acronis True Image Home 2011. My True Image backups have on at least 5 occasions for me over the years restored dead computers/hard drives to full functionality from an otherwise total loss. A veritable electronic lifesaver!

Acronis True Image Home 2011 is currently available for free trial download at acronis.com. You are urged to try it and put it through its paces before purchasing. Some careful reading and using is necessary to employ it properly. In addition, it comes with a "Swiss-army knife" of extra utilities that greatly increase its functionality when properly used. Acronis offers enough trial time for you to familiarize yourself with the software.

To use True Image Home 2011 most effectively you should setup a regular schedule of automatic backups. Personally, I have elected to perform a full backup every 14 days implemented with a regular differential backup daily. Regular scheduled differential or incremental backups take hardly any time at all and can keep your backups current on a daily (or whatever interval you elect) basis. It is essentially a simple "set it and forget it" automatic procedure.

Once your backups have been created, you can easily restore any part or all of it as necessary. Although you can elect to backup only your email or other specific data files, it is highly recommended that you backup your entire hard drive which allows you to restore its entirety or individual files as necessary.

Your backups should be placed on an external USB-connected hard drive of more than adequate size to accommodate them. Such drives are readily available today at relatively modest expense. For safety's sake, you can also easily disconnect and store them at a different location from your computer if you so desire.

If you were to use True Image Home 2011 only for routine backups and restores it would be worth its entire cost, but its passel of new and improved utilities make it an easily worthwhile investment.

There are Predefined Backup Schemes designed for specific user needs - from a disk space-efficient scheme suitable for users with limited backup storage capabilities - to a scheme for those users who need higher security for their data and system. The program offers different backup schemes for disk and file type backups. You just select a scheme and the program automatically manages your backups. In addition, you can create a custom backup scheme which will exactly suit your needs.

Check points - The Acronis Backup Explorer timeline shows Windows and software installation and update dates. Moving your mouse over a check point opens a balloon with information about the update or software. With check points you can check the changes to your system and recover the system to a specific backed up state.

A Non-Stop Backup feature automatically creates incremental backups every five minutes, allowing users to roll back their system, files, and folders to any point in time. In addition, you can now use the Acronis Secure Zone as Nonstop Backup storage. This may be desirable for notebook users with a single hard disk drive, however it defeats the purpose of keeping your backup separate and apart from your current hard drive in case it fails.

A Try-And-Decide feature allows temporary trial installation of new software which permits you to consequently completely eliminate it before any system changes are made.

(Continued on page 5)

ACRONIS TRUE IMAGE HOME 2011

(Continued from page 4)

Online Backup permits offsite continuous backup online to an Internet location.

A new and attractive graphical interface makes for easier program manipulation. Windows 7 is fully supported in all program aspects. A Plus Pack option, which allows you to restore your PC to dissimilar hardware regardless of make, model, or installed components, or to a virtual machine.

While the software contains a "cloning" feature to copy your hard drive contents to a new drive, you are advised instead to restore a backup image of your old drive to a new one. The cloning feature can get somewhat "sticky" and is best avoided.

An Erase feature allows to completely and permanently erase the contents of your hard drive. This is a must for safety sake before disposing of a hard drive.

Automatic Update Notification. By default, True Image Home 2011 will automatically inquire about the availability of a program update at every program start. When an update is available, Acronis True Image Home 2011 will offer to download and install it. You can also check for availability of updates manually through the Help menu. This current highly useful feature makes updating a much easier and more convenient process.

New Backup Explorer. Now you can use the Acronis Backup Explorer's time line for exploring not only Acronis Nonstop Backup and Acronis Online Backup contents, but contents of all other backups as well. Clicking My backups in the main window will show all your backups on the time line. In addition, you can start recovery of disks and partitions right from the time line.

Enhanced Scheduler. The completely redesigned scheduler makes scheduling much easier. In addition, it now allows you to wake up the sleeping/hibernating computer to perform a backup. The "At system shutdown" and "At user logoff" options are now available to users of Windows Vista and Windows 7.

Drag & Drop Functionality. You can recover backed up files by dragging them from Acronis Time Explorer to your Desktop or a folder of your choice. In addition, you can create shortcuts for backups by dragging their boxes from the My backups area on the main screen to your Desktop. This will allow you to run a backup by simply double-clicking on its

shortcut. You can also create shortcuts for frequently used Acronis tools by dragging their icons from the Start menu to the Desktop.

Integration with Windows 7 Control Panel. True Image Home 2011 replaces Windows Backup in the Backup and Restore item. The Backup and Restore window will show the Nonstop Backup and your oldest disk or partition backup. You will be able to recover the backed up data, refresh the backups, and pause/start Nonstop Backup directly from the Control Panel.

Over a period of many years, SPCUG has been served by our backup guru and Acronis representative, Gene Barlow and his wife Linda. They have provided us with backup presentations, advice and assistance and Acronis software at substantial discount. This excellent product is available at about half the normal list price by contacting Gene (www.ugr.com) via his secure web site using order code (UGTI2011).

The author is a member of the Sarasota PC Users Group – www.spcug.org



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WEB TOUR

Most Web Tour readers know I travel the internet and when I find something noteworthy I bring it to this column. While many of you are still using Vista or XP the time will come when you will be using Windows 7. The information below should tweak your interest in Win 7 or if you are using it may provide some new and sometimes hidden applications.

To begin with if you are thinking of upgrading to Windows 7 the Home Premium Family Pack is back again. It allows users to install Windows 7 Home Premium on up to three PCs in a household that already has Windows Vista or Windows XP installed. If you're not running Windows XP or Windows Vista, you'll need to purchase the Full version of Windows 7.

The Windows 7 Home Premium Family Pack is available at many stores for about \$150 but at: <http://www.nextag.com/Microsoft-Corporation-WIN7-HOME-678948294/prices-html> there still may be some stores with a promo price of less than \$150.

This is a limited offer so it may be finished by press time.

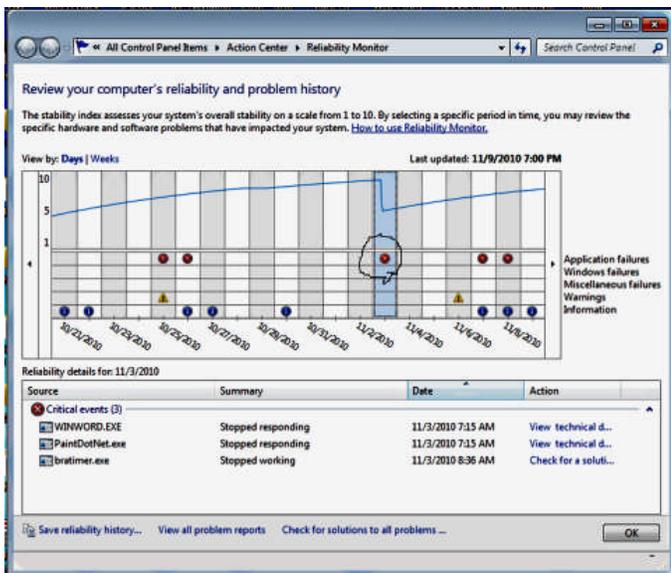
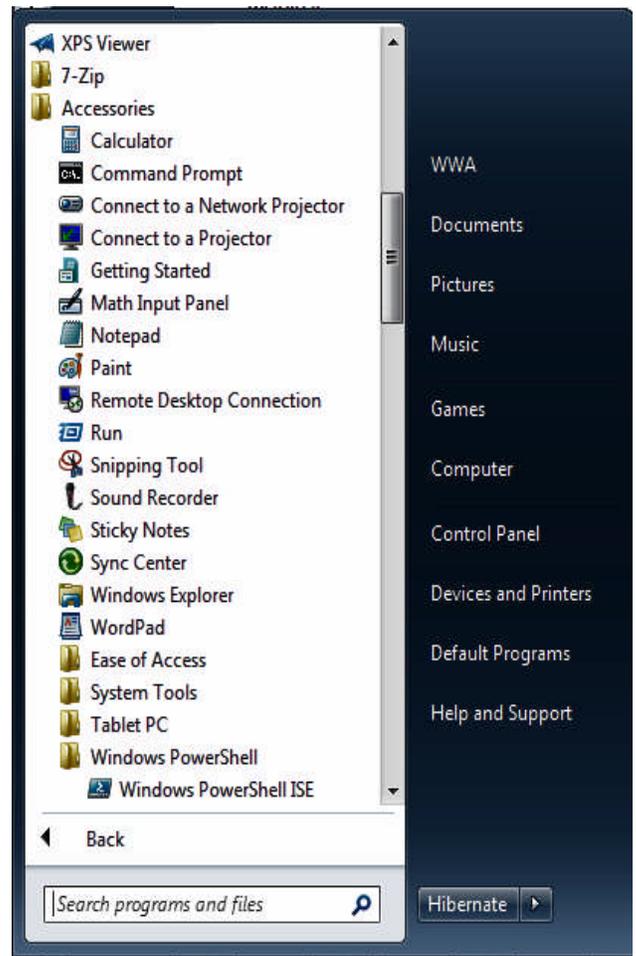
Now to some exclusive Win 7 apps.

If you want to know why your Win 7 PC is not performing properly the answer may be shown on the Reliability Monitor. (See Below)

This Monitor is a running graph of all your PCs problems and reliability failures. Click on one of the failure dots (See Circle) and The information comes up below with the option to check for a solution of the problem.

To find the Reliability Monitor is a little tricky. Click on the start icon and type reliability in the search box. Click on the View Reliability History flag at the top of the search panel and up comes the monitor.

For some new items and the expansion of old items click the start icon and then the All Programs Bar. Click on Accessories and there are many new and old apps.



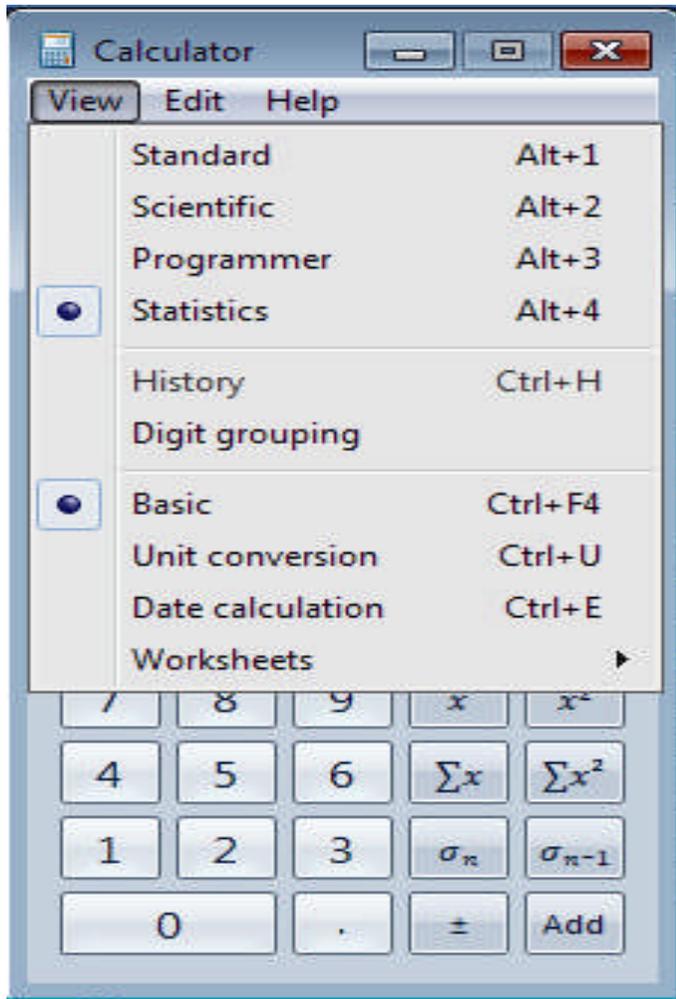
Click on calculator and then on view. You will find at least 10 different calculators are listed. For example Worksheet has Gas Mileage, Home Mortgage and

(Continued on page 7)

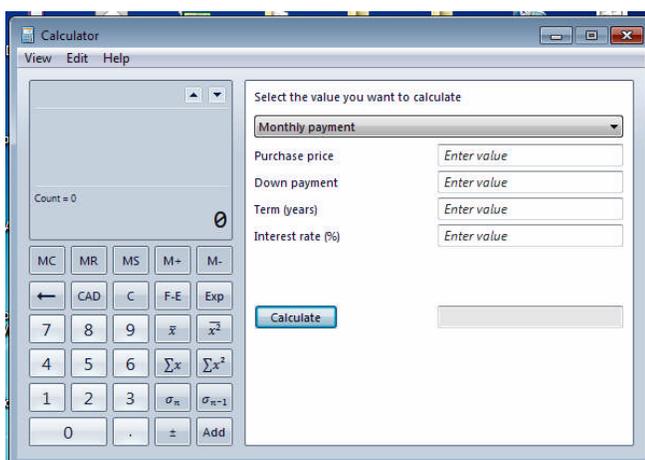
WEB TOUR

(Continued from page 6)

Vehicle lease Worksheets. The accessories area alone has many new Windows 7 features.



Below shows an example of the mortgage worksheet.



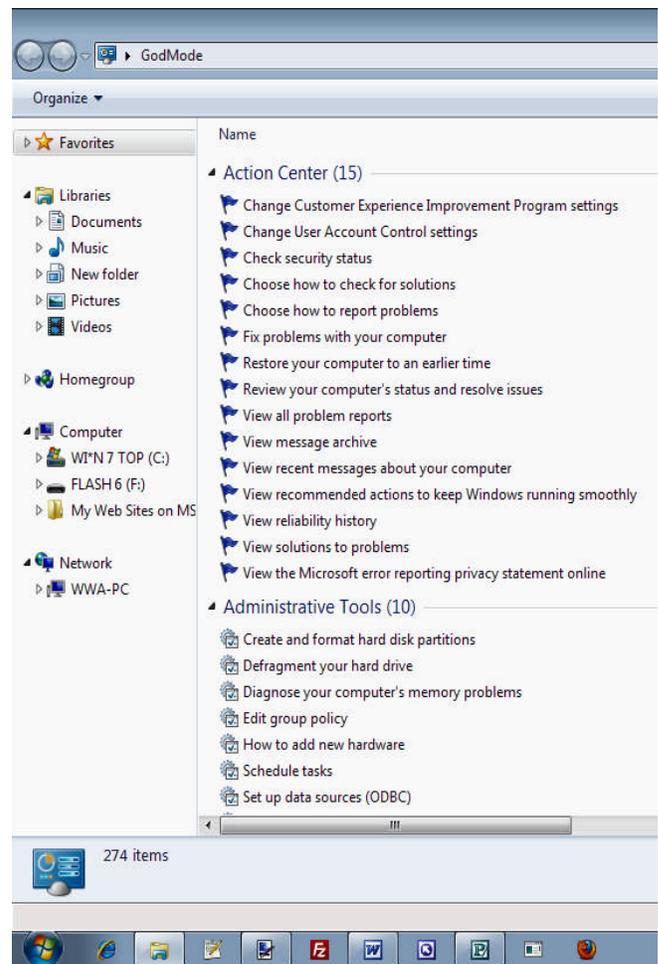
Want to find hundreds of operating system settings in one place? Try this. Rename a new folder on your desktop to:

`{ED7BA470-8E54-465E-825C-99712043E01C}`

Copy the above exactly as shown.

Now click on it.

The new folder changes to an icon named God-Mode. It is magic and this will be covered in more detail in our next months Web Tour.



Remember, all of the Web Tour articles in the newsletter are archived and instantly available on our website. Don't waste time-consuming typing of the site addresses. Just click, and you are there.



By Bill Aulepp Publisher of the Phoenix PC Users Group Newsletter — publisher(at)phoenixpcug.org

SOLID STATE DEVICES (SSD)

by Vinny LaBash

Measuring the effect of SSD technology is more than the numbers game we play with conventional Winchester disk drives. What you experience with SSD drives centers on how certain tasks feel. Loading applications, boot up, shut down, and changing levels in your first person 3D shooter game are prime examples. Everything happens incredibly fast.

Examine the current state of SSD technology and you see a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Concerns about performance, longevity, and outright failure that plagued early solid state drives are fading. These issues are being replaced by how well manufacturers are optimizing the components of SSD technology. NAND chips, controllers, and cache memory are made by multiple suppliers. SSD vendors must take these separate components and merge them into a reliable storage device with good performance at a price that potential customers are willing to pay.

SSD manufacturers select a controller based on the controller's cost and capability, match it with one of several different kinds of cache memory, and marry the combination to either MLC or SLC NAND flash memory chips. Single Level Cell (SLC) holds one data bit per cell. Multi Level Cell (MLC) has greater capacity. Currently MLC data chips hold two data bits per cell.

Experience reveals that the future belongs to MLC based devices. Up until now SLC based technology offered faster writes, lower power consumption, and greater longevity. Still, Intel and other chip makers appear confident that MLC technology will become dominant in the marketplace. That confidence is backed up by the design of current MLC devices where performance measured against SLC based devices is becoming nearly indistinguishable. An examination of technology publications shows that reviewers of SSD drives overwhelmingly prefer MLC gear.

Intel has been and continues to be a leader in this area. In the early days of SSD development, controller problems were so prevalent that Intel assigned a team of development engineers to redesign the controllers. A new generation of controllers came about which rehabilitated the technology. That too is about to change. Earlier this year Intel and Micron announced 25nm NAND flash memory production which means yet another generation of controller technology is imminent.

Why Performance Declines Without TRIM

It is important to understand how SSD devices handle a delete operation. (*Otherwise you may have dif-*

iculty comprehending TRIM, which will be described later). No storage device, whether it is an SSD or traditional drive, has access to the operating system's file structure. Therefore, it does not know what data the OS has marked for deletion and is available for overwriting. Later on, when the OS wants to perform a write operation, this becomes an overwrite operation from the viewpoint of the storage device.

For conventional disks, this is the same as writing to an empty sector, but because of how an SSD must operate at the hardware level, an overwrite operation involves considerable additional overhead which can effectively cripple write performance.

An SSD stores its data in flash memory cells. These cells are organized and grouped into pages. Typical page capacity is 4 KB. These pages are further consolidated into blocks consisting of (typically) 128 pages or 512 KB of data. Early SSD performance slowed down over time because data can be erased only at the block level. An erase operation is theoretically possible at the page level, but because of the physical construction of an SSD device, erase commands won't work except at the block level. This is inherent in the design, and cannot be changed

Note: By design, it is impossible to write to a NAND memory cell unless it is empty.

Any data in the block must be transferred into cache memory where it is then erased and rewritten to flash memory as empty pages. The actual operation is more complex, but a data overwrite is essentially a read, modify, erase, and write cycle. The memory and processor embedded in the controller handles the entire procedure and does not go outside the SSD. The process is commonly referred to as **write amplification**.

Example: You have 8KB of data. In a previous session the OS marked some of the data for deletion, and the OS now wants to overwrite the "deleted" data.

1. The OS sends instructions to the SSD controller to begin the data overwrite.
2. The contents of the entire block are read into cache memory.
3. The memory cache is now updated. Unneeded data is deleted, and the rest undisturbed.
4. The entire block is erased on the SSD.
5. The updated data in the cache memory is now written back to the block.

The longer the SSD has been in use, the greater the performance degradation because of the way data must be stored and modified.

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SOLID STATE DEVICES (SSD)

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TRIM

Without TRIM, performance declines because the operating system doesn't bother to inform the SSD when data is available for re-write, and the operating system doesn't actually delete the data. The TRIM command addresses the situation by working with the operating system to notify the SSD that data marked for deletion should be immediately erased. In other words, the TRIM command tells the SSD to delete data at the same time the user initiates the delete function instead of waiting for the OS to decide when to overwrite the "deleted" data.

When the operating system "deletes" a file, if TRIM is enabled, the operating system updates the file system and notifies the SSD via the TRIM command which pages need to be deleted. Then the SSD reads the block into cache memory, updates the cache, erases the block on the SSD, and then writes back only pages containing data which was not marked for deletion by the OS. The delete is slow, but there is no performance hit for write operations because the affected pages are now empty, and write performance is what's important. TRIM improves performance only when you delete files.

The TRIM command acts as an interface between the OS and the SSD that tells the SSD when data should be erased. The SSD then performs the delete operation immediately after the OS marks the data for deletion. Since TRIM ensures that data is actually deleted immediately after the user deletes a file, traditional file recovery programs will not work on solid state devices with TRIM enabled.

Note: Windows 7, Windows Server 2008 R2, and some versions of Linux support TRIM. **Windows XP and VISTA do not, repeat, do not support TRIM.** However, a few vendors have included utilities that will enable the command with XP or Vista if the SSD supports the command. However, most early SSD devices do not support TRIM. Check with the manufacturer.

Partitioning and Formatting

While the physical structure of solid state devices is considerably different from traditional disk drives, partitioning and formatting operations appear virtually identical from a PC user point of view. What goes on under the covers should be of no concern to most users.

Defrag

In a standard disk drive, information is accessed by a combination of platter rotation and movement of read/write heads. Defragmentation takes all the sec-

tions or fragments of a file and positions them in one contiguous location. This minimizes seek time and speeds up disk operations.

Solid state devices have no moving parts. Performance is the same no matter where data is located. Therefore, nothing can be gained by defragging a solid state device. The additional, unnecessary read/write cycles may actually reduce the SSD's life expectancy. Therefore, defragging SSDs is not only useless, but may be harmful. Don't defrag an SSD.

Wear Leveling

Flash memory chips have a finite life cycle. This cycle is defined by approximately 10,000 write operations before the cell is subject to breakdown and no longer reliably records data. *Wear Leveling* is the process by which no flash memory cell is required to undergo significantly more write operations than any other memory cell on the drive. The process evenly distributes write operations in the available flash memory cells.

Wear Leveling affects the data capacity of solid state drives because some of the disk space must be reserved to carry out the leveling operation. The amount of reserved space varies by manufacturer and is known as **over-provisioning**. The longevity of an SSD appears to be directly proportional to the efficiency of *Wear Leveling*. Most manufacturers reserve around 7% of the SSD. Conservative vendors such as Mushkin reserve up to 13%. This can account for much of the discrepancy between stated total capacity and formatted capacity. The trade off could become an issue to SSD customers who may be unwilling to sacrifice storage space even for potential increased longevity.

Summary and Conclusions

There is no doubt that solid state devices will eventually replace conventional disk drives, but prices of solid state drives will have to decline significantly first. Until that day, expect to see hybrid systems consisting of an SSD boot drive, and traditional drives for bulk storage. Solid state drives have no moving parts. Therefore, they have considerable advantages over traditional drives. Solid state drives:

1. very fast because seek time is reduced
2. less likely to malfunction
3. smaller and lighter
4. generate very little heat
5. completely silent
6. consume far less energy



The author is a member of the Sarasota PC Users Group – www.spcug.org

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GROCERY SHOPPING WITH ONLINE E-COUPONS

by Ira Wilsker

Just like all other families, my family buys a lot of groceries. Between us humans, the dog, and the cats, we easily spend hundreds of dollars a month on groceries and related household needs. Considering the increase in commodity prices that have been driving up grocery prices, as well as tight budgets influenced by prevailing economic conditions, we seem to use more coupons at the supermarket than in the past. Traditionally, our primary sources of grocery coupons have been the coupon supplements in the Sunday paper, and the weekly coupons that arrive in the mail almost every Wednesday. While paper coupons are distributed nationally by the billions, we consumers must clip them, sort them, plan to use them prior to their respective expiration dates, and try to remember to bring them to the store in the first place. What I have found especially convenient and useful are some websites that can digitally load coupons to my store shoppers' card, or even my cell phone, for use at the register without the need to cut and carry a bulging envelope of coupons to the store.

Many, but not all, of the major supermarket chains now use some type of digital shoppers' card which the shopper has scanned during the checkout process. Almost all of the stores that do utilize such a card now have a process in place where digital coupons can be added to the card and automatically credited at the checkout without the need to present a paper coupon, the value of the coupon being automatically credited at the register. Locally, the only supermarket offering this service is Kroger, but in this region other stores that utilize these digital "e-coupons" include Randall's, Tom Thumb, Safeway, and a few others. Around the country, some of the other chains that participate in the e-coupon program are Von's, Ralph's, Fred Meyer, Fry's (the supermarket, not the electronics store), and many others.

To have the e-coupons added to the store card is a very easy process to perform online. The first digital coupon service that I used was AOL's ShortCuts.com (shortcuts.com). Registration was free and very easy, and I registered my shopper's card at the website. As I type this, there are about 50 e-coupons listed that I have not previously selected, most of them in the 50 cent to \$1 range, all for name-brand grocery items. To get any or all of

those coupons added to a card, all one needs to do is click on the "+ ADD" button adjacent to the item, and the coupon is added to the card; this process being repeated until all desired coupons are added to the card. The expiration date of each e-coupon is clearly displayed, and as a reminder a shopping list containing the coupons can be printed. Upon check-out at the store, when the eligible item is scanned, the coupon value is applied. Depending upon the store, the coupon credits are either listed adjacent to the item when scanned, or displayed on a list at the bottom of the receipt. While these e-coupons are extremely convenient, they are usually only good on a single item (unless a quantity purchase is required for redemption), and they are typically not doubled in those stores that multiply low value coupons. ShortCuts.com also offers a selection of printable coupons that can be redeemed wherever coupons are accepted. The printable coupons can be printed individually or in sheets need to be clipped, just like the newspaper coupons. ShortCuts.com utilizes a Java utility to print the coupons, so Java must be installed and active on the computer in order to print the paper coupons. By choice, I elected to receive a weekly email from ShortCuts.com which displays the week's new coupons, which can be easily added to my card. Expired coupons are transparently deleted from the card, such that only valid and current e-coupons are available.

There is another provider of e-coupons that I use regularly, and that is Cellfire at www.cellfire.com. Registration is very simple, but requires the use of a cell phone number as a user name, and the password is the year of birth. On Cellfire, e-coupons can be selected online and added to the registered store card, or can be accessed by cell phone, without the need for a computer. Apps are available for iPhones, Blackberry devices, Android phones, and devices using Windows Mobile. According to Cellfire, "Go to www.cellfire.com from your mobile phone and we'll automatically detect your phone type and provide instructions on how to access our service." With a compatible phone, coupons can be selected and added to the card just as they are from the computer. E-coupons from Cellfire are redeemed exactly the same as e-coupons from other services. What is different about Cellfire is the smart phone apps, as well as the ability to create some merchandise and services digital coupons on

(Continued on page 12)

GROCERY SHOPPING WITH ONLINE E-COUPONS

FREE TEMPLATES-LABELS AND BUSINESS CARDS

(Continued from page 11)

almost any cell phone that can receive digital images as text messages. Unlike e-coupons on a grocery shoppers' card, Cellfire can use any of the smart phone apps listed above, or users can access a mobile version of Cellfire from any internet capable cell phone. In addition to the grocery coupons on the shopper's card, Cellfire can display digital coupons on the phone screen for use at retail stores and service businesses. Right now in my neighborhood, the only participating retailer is Sears Photo Studio, where a variety of coupons can be displayed on the cell phone and scanned by the cashier to get the listed discount.

Several of the supermarket chains now offer their own online e-coupons that can be added to the shopper's card. In my neighborhood, Kroger offers this service on its "Plus Card" from the Kroger.com website, linking to a service called "Softcoin". Kroger will allow up to 150 coupons to be active at any time on its Plus Card. To select an e-coupon, the user simply checks the box adjacent to the coupon, and once all desired e-coupons are selected, the user clicks on "Load Coupons to Card". Clicking on the "My Coupons" link will display all of the selected coupons, and this can be used to produce a "printer friendly" shopping list. While these coupons are not multiplied when redeemed, they are extremely convenient to use, as there is no required user intervention other than having the Plus Card scanned at checkout, and the values are automatically credited.

E-coupons in their several varieties are extremely easy to use, and are more efficient for both the shopper and the store, as there are no paper coupons to clip, carry, sort, and count. One of the e-coupon services above shows that I have redeemed over \$70 in its e-coupons in the past year, many of which I may not have used if they were paper coupons. As more and more businesses use some type of shoppers' card, I would expect to see a wider use of e-coupons.



The author is a director of the APCUG.

WEBSITES:

<http://shortcuts.com>

<http://www.cellfire.com>

<http://www.kroger.com>

By Dave Gerber

Free autofillPDF-Labels 1.0 is a site that's got tons of free, fillable PDF label templates for U.S. letter-size label sheets. Fill your information in one field and watch as your information automatically fills all label fields within that sheet! All you need to do is download and open up a template, fill a label field, and hit the Tab button on your keyboard! Print your labels in an instant.

The site offers a complete collection of basic formatting templates for address, shipping, mailing, and CD labels as well as file folder, round, name badge, business card, and all popular Avery label sizes are available — among many more choices! PDF is an ISO International Standard: ISO 32000-1. PDF Reader Required.

Four types of auto fill basic formatting templates for labels and business cards are available:

1. Autofill all label cells with the same information in seconds.
2. For Shipping/Mailing labels, autofill information for FROM and TO - excellent for multiple shipments to one address.
3. For Shipping/Mailing labels, autofill information for FROM & insert manually different information for TO
4. Autofill image insert and text for popular size labels and business cards

Also, there are templates for manually inserting different information into each label cell. Check it out!
<http://www.worldlabel.com/Pages/autofillpdf-labels.htm>



*The author is an APCUG Director
dgerber@apcug.net*

**HELP INCREASE OUR
MEMBERSHIP.
BRING A GUEST
TO THE
NEXT MEETING**

CREATIVE GRIPING MAKES FRIENDS AND BRINGS REWARDS

By Gabe Goldberg

In a perfect world, there'd be no problems with hardware, software, or services; businesses would be fully staffed with articulate human beings ready to accommodate all requests, and every product would meet or exceed customer expectations.

But that's not how things work on planet Earth in 2010. Instead, things break quickly or are badly designed; customer service is outsourced to far-away lands; and even when they're accessible, company staff often isn't responsive.

So what to do? Nobody I know is cut out for frontier living, self-sufficiency, and subsistence farming. That means we're all making the best of living in our techno-fragile and sometimes irritating culture. So let's have at it.

First, when life's little outrages intrude, avoid the temptation to accept them as unavoidable -- and, worse, unfixable. Just as slick deals tips help you find bargains, a few techniques and some practice can remedy a bad situation or even turn it pleasant.

Stay Calm and Be Convincing

Complaining courteously to the right person with a specific remedy in mind can be rewarding. If a company Web site has a "Contact us" link, start there with an email or telephone connection. Be polite, identify yourself, mention how you're connected to the organization (current or potential customer, etc.), and describe your dissatisfaction.

If you're always happy after your initial dialogue with a company, you're a unique individual, and you can stop reading now! Too frequently, however, a first complaint contact goes nowhere. That's when to escalate. Calling may work but you'll likely deal with a low-level (and low-powered) call center. So writing is better.

No matter how you're communicating -- phone, email, instant message, letter, online support chat -- keep records of contact names and what's said. These are essential for recapping, summarizing, and (especially) escalating. If it's a large company or you expect to have further contact with them, request a case or "ticket" number for tracing your request.

Use company Web sites, Google, and other online resources to identify and locate senior executives.

Check Web site links such as "About us", "Press room", and "Investor relations". Write to the CEO by name and title, briefly describing, with a tone of regret, what went wrong. You certainly won't hear back in person from Ms/Mr. CEO, but most large companies have an Office of the Chairman with staff to calm down and cheer up unhappy customers. Pursuing matters to the top works. After Starbucks' Web staffers were unresponsive to a complaint, escalation to the chairman led to an apology and a \$50 store card.

Remain courteous.

Don't rant or threaten and surely don't overuse CAPITAL letters. That makes your message hard to read and look like a crude ransom note. No matter what you're told, emphasize that you're not angry at whoever you're speaking or emailing with and that you understand they're probably bound by company policies. Staying calm and cheerful sets you apart from most people and improves the odds of your getting satisfaction.

Be brief but complete.

Provide enough history and detail to be clear and compelling but don't ramble or include non-essential details.

Be precise.

Quote error messages, identify people involved, list event sequences so you're believable. When I complained that a Web site didn't use encryption for processing credit card information, the owner at first disagreed but when I proved my assertion, he was outraged -- at his Webmaster, for botching security. He then asked what I'd intended to purchase and sent it to me free, along with other items.

Include good news.

If you're a long-time customer, had a recent pleasant experience with the company, can praise a particular employee, or have ever recommended the company's products or services, say so. If whatever

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CREATIVE GRIPING MAKES FRIENDS AND BRINGS REWARDS

(Continued from page 13)

you're griping about was a mixed picture, begin by describing what you liked.

Let Companies Turn Problems Into Rewards

Raise issues when there's time and flexibility to remedy them. For example, when finalizing a stay at Nemacolin, a luxury Pennsylvania resort, I was unhappy to learn that two signature restaurants would be closed during our planned stay. Instead of suffering in silence or -- with difficulty -- changing our travel dates, I politely contacted the general manager to suggest that guests be informed of such restrictions when initially making reservations. He agreed, and offered to have his Five-Diamond chef prepare a fantasy meal for us including anything we requested. His only advice was, "Challenge the chef." So we did -- and the world-class chef and two assistants spent three hours serving us privately, with Champagne

and cocktails, on a day that the restaurant was indeed closed. And -- as arranged in advance -- one of the most memorable meals of my life cost half the normal price of dining there. So a problem identified early and solved graciously resulted in my being a huge fan of the resort, the general manager, and the chef.

Complaining, even to the top, doesn't always work. I've certainly been ignored -- received no response -- and received dismissive responses offering neither apology nor any gesture of atonement. When this happens, the final option is going public via Twitter, blogs, etc. Many companies monitor their online reputations and respond to credible complaints with remedies. But usually, company management values and responds to customer feedback; I've established cordial relationships with executives by identifying areas needing improvement. Writing letters is easy and inexpensive enough -- and after sending a few you'll have stock phrases that make it simple -- that it's worth doing to remedy all but the smallest problems.

Five minutes and a stamp has been a small price to pay for a \$50 Starbucks card, a unique luxury

meal, Web site merchandise, and many hundreds of dollars' worth of refunds, merchandise, and services.



Gabe Goldberg has developed, worked with, and written about technology for decades. This article originally appeared on the slickdeals.net Web site, <<http://slickdeals.net/>>. (c) Gabriel Goldberg 2010.

PPCUG's Ride Sharing Program

Bill Aulepp, long time group member has volunteered to coordinate member communication for those who need rides and those who can provide them.

To join the program for either side, email Bill at bill@alepp.com Provide your name, your address, a way to contact you, and whether you can give or need a ride. Please do not wait until the last minute to request a ride,

Bill will gather the information from everyone who responds and connect up drivers with riders. It will be the responsibility of the individual members to organize the actual rides, dates, and pick up information.

Able to Provide a Ride?

Are you willing to pick up, transport and drive another member to one meeting a month? As an added bonus, any driver participating will receive one extra raffle ticket each time they drive a member to a meeting.

Short Circuits...zzzt!

Spam it all. There are now about 20 percent fewer spam e-mails hitting your inbox, thanks to efforts from the Russian government. Moscow police said the spam czar, who by now has fled the country, was a central figure in the operations of SpamIt.com, a website that paid spammers to promote online pharmacies. SpamIt.com suddenly stopped operating on September 27. With less financial incentive to send their junk mail, spammers reduced their activity by an estimated 50 billion messages a day. There are still 200 billion unwanted e-mails sent off every day, but cutting the world's spam by one fifth is a great start. Russia has opened a criminal case against the fugitive for flooding the Internet with ads for Viagra, operating a pharmacy without a license, and operating a business without registration.

Emil Protalinski, TechSpot.com 10/28/2010



Oops! An equipment failure disrupted communication between 50 nuclear missiles and the launch control center in Wyoming, although the Air Force never lost the ability to launch the missiles. The break lasted less than one hour. The failure affected one-ninth of the US arsenal. There was no evidence of foul play, officials said. The White House referred questions to the Pentagon.

The Atlantic (website) October, 2010



**"I wanna look more like my picture
On the dating website, so
I'm having some Photoshop work done"**

Fit to drink "Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink." A line from Samuel T. Coleridge's poem, *The Ancient Mariner*, but a reality in much of the world. As much as one-fifth of the world's population suffers from a lack of bacteria-free, unclean water. However, early scientific laboratory experiments have shown that minute traces of silver deposited on nanocarbon fiber filters can kill 98% of the typical bacteria found in contaminated drinking water when a very low voltage is applied to the filter. The quantity of electricity that is required is no greater than that which can be supplied by a small solar panel. The filter itself would be expected to last indefinitely. The next step will be to scale up the size of the filtration apparatus and determine the viability of the system in a real-life demonstration. Success would lead to the general production of potable water in areas of the world where water borne diseases, such as cholera, are endemic.

The Economist, 10/23/2010

Non-fatal attractions The latest metal held to have the ability to lessen aches and pains associated with strenuous athletic activity is magnetic titanium. Yes, the metal has (very) weak magnetic properties, but the federal Food and Drug Administration has ruled that there is no experimental evidence that titanium has any effect on health. So, as with any device that sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

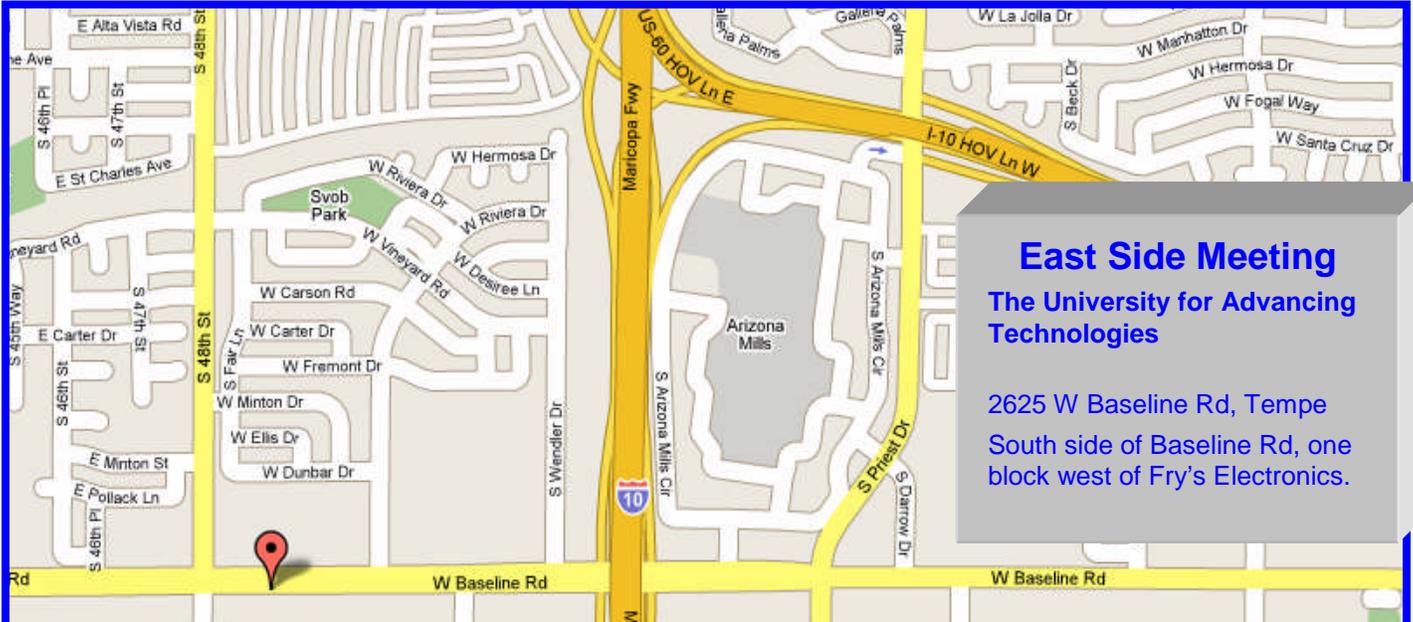
Associated Press 10/31/2010

These items are based on articles from the noted sources and have been adapted by the Editor.

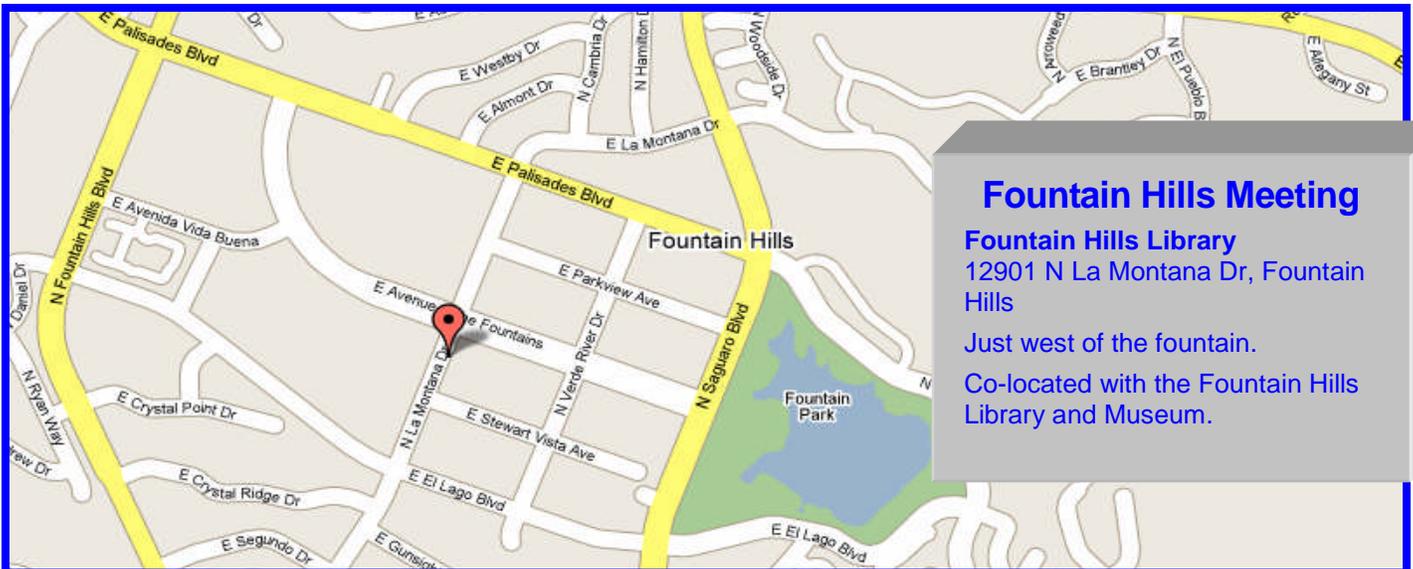
HOW TO GET THERE



West Side Meeting
College America Room 2
 6533 N Black Canyon Hwy
 Phoenix
 Turn right (east) on McLellan Blvd.
 Immediately turn right (south) into parking lot..



East Side Meeting
The University for Advancing Technologies
 2625 W Baseline Rd, Tempe
 South side of Baseline Rd, one block west of Fry's Electronics.



Fountain Hills Meeting
Fountain Hills Library
 12901 N La Montana Dr, Fountain Hills
 Just west of the fountain.
 Co-located with the Fountain Hills Library and Museum.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

The Official Policy of the Phoenix PC Users Group is that we do not condone software piracy in any form.

*DUES \$36 FOR NOV, 2010
THROUGH
DEC 31, 2011*

NEW MEMBERS GET 2 MONTHS FREE

Phoenix PC Users Group Membership Application

First: (Print Legibly) _____ Initial: ___ Last: _____

Address: _____

City, State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____ Ext: _____

Please note: We DO-NOT share phone numbers outside the club, and will generally only use your phone information, if we cannot contact you in timely fashion, via e-mail, or the club web-site

Receive Electronic newsletter in place of printed one: Yes No

E-mail address: _____ (Print Legibly)

Signature _____ Date ___/___/___

Release my address to vendors ? Yes No Note: Phone numbers **will not** be listed.

May the club share your e-mail address with other members only? Yes No

With club approved vendors? Yes No

Please do not share my e-mail address

Mail this completed form with payment to:

Phoenix PC Users Group
PO Box 7127
Phoenix, AZ 85011-7127



*The Best Accessory
for your PC!*

Web address:
phoenixpcug.org

November 2010

The Newsletter of the Phoenix Personal Computer Users Group
"Users helping users to understand computers"

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