

April 2014



The Next General Meeting of CCCGC will be April 1, 2014

Charlotte County Computer Group

30th YEAR Anniversary

1984 - 2014

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Official Publication of the Charlotte County Computer Group Corp.
PROMOTING COMPUTER LITERACY AND EDUCATION IN CHARLOTTE COUNTY

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Charlotte County Computer Group

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The President's Platform by Ron Wallis, President CCCGC

Our 30th Anniversary party was quite a success. We had many compliments and the attendees seemed to be enjoying themselves.

Our thanks to all who attended and all those who helped make it the success it was. Also congratulations to the door prize winners.



We will maybe try it again for our 40th. Hope to see you then.

There is a bit of good news for you diehard XP users.

Although end of life for support from Microsoft for the operating system is April 8, Microsoft has said they will continue to support Security Essentials until July 2015. There will not be any security updates for XP, but if Security Essentials is kept up-to-date it will offer some level of protection, better than we expected.

Even with this new development we are still advising that you upgrade to Windows 7 or 8. XP was a good system but it's day has past. GET OVER IT.

To all you Snowbirds who are leaving for the summer, we wish you a safe trip and a great season!

See you back here in the Fall.

Please note: Our office phone number has changed to 941-585-0356

Ron

Charlotte Bytes

Computer Drawing



Kathy Klause won the computer drawing. She was happy to win it and whisked it away to a new home.

50/50 Winner

Spencer Weiser won the 50/50. As you can see by his broad smile, he was happy to be the winner.

Thank you all for your contributions.
Good luck next time.



Door Prize Winners



Right to Left

Margaret Antalec

Bill Marr

Ken Rouleau

Ken Brandel

John Young

WELCOME

New Members

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Jeannette Brunelle | Linda Campo | Claudette Wink |
| Robert Ash | Janet Ash | James Keller |
| Mike Johnson | Rita Johnson | Diane Unger |
| Rose Mary Craemer | Martin Craemer | William Mount |
| Karen Prosuch | Scott Prosuch | Kathy Caldwell |
| Robert Caldwell | Carolyn Laurenz | Linda Mabie |
| Marge Willis-Ronn | Bob Ronn | John Hunsberger |
| Bill McGavic | Robert Ray | Linda Sash |
| Sarah Ricketts | Claudia Richardson | Terry McCasey |
| Murphy McCasey | Patricia Winters | Arthur Brunelle |
| Joan Cooke | Brian Higgs | Donald McNeil |
| Andrea Chesky | Carl Mobley | Luvretia Mobley |
| Philip G Roy | Jane Pribe | George Haray |
| Susan Haray | Paul Shields | Kathleen Shields |
| Joseph Costa | Kent Hassler | William Mongelli |

The Executive Board and Members of CCCGC welcome each of you to the group. We're Here To Help. Membership Has Its Privileges.

If you have any questions, concerns or need computer help, please contact us at the office. We will endeavor to help you any way we can.

Program High-Lights

Dick Evans was our program speaker for the evening, so sit back and enjoy the highlights from February's meeting.

In most cases, all the e-mail accounts offer the similar type of set up. You need to look under the "covers" to find what you are looking for.

You have all probably heard of "net etiquette". Examples of the most known issues are using UPPER CASE THROUGHOUT THE E-MAIL instead of using upper and lower case letters. Upper case is equivalent of screaming at someone instead of talking. Another misused issue is forwarding an e-mail with all prior contacts attached. If you hit the forward button and put in the contact you want to send the message to, you have now sent every e-mail address including comments that was listed in that specific e-mail. It takes additional space than the actual message you wanted your contact to read and it looks messy. Also can clean out the forwarded message by deleting prior addresses. You can simply press blind carbon copy (bcc) and put all the contacts you want to send the e-mail. That means that they get the e-mail and it doesn't show any other names.

How many times does the e-mail say it was checked by Snoops? Did you check it yourself? If it isn't valid, don't forward it to keep the lie in circulation. Sometimes, I go back to the person that sent it to me and let them know it isn't accurate. Another issue is the right and left arrows that appear in an e-mail that has been forwarded. There is a program called e-mail stripper that will remove all those left and right arrows on a forwarded. Another way of sending multiple e-mails is to establish the contacts in one group.

MailChimp.com is a program that you can send out lots of e-mails at the same time and won't affect your e-mail account like AOL or Gmail.

You can go into your account, read who you sent the e-mail to and also find out how many opened the e-mail. There are just so many issues that we can't cover them all. If you come to Dick Evans classes on Thursday's from 2:00 to 4:00, you will learn all the others. Better yet, bring your own questions.



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Charlotte Bytes



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Computer Group Corporation

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Cloud Computing

At our April 1st meeting **Scott Baty, Jellybeancomputers** will show us the options of where and how to access different drives for storing and accessing files. i.e. SKYDRIVE- ONE DRIVE??? What is it?

1. the practice of using a network of remote servers hosted on the Internet to store, manage, and process data, rather than a local server or a personal computer.

"What's the cloud?" "Where is the cloud?" "Are we in the cloud now?!" These are all questions you've probably heard (and not just from Amy Poehler in Best Buy's Super Bowl ad) or even asked yourself. The term "cloud computing" is everywhere.

In the simplest terms, cloud computing means storing and accessing data and programs over the Internet instead of your computer's hard drive. The cloud is just a metaphor for the Internet. It goes back to the days of flowcharts and presentations that would represent the gigantic server-farm infrastructure of the Internet as nothing but a puffy, white cumulonimbus cloud, accepting connections and doling out information as it floats. Excerpt from PC Digital Magazine





For more information go to www.cccgc.info
View/download Bytes
Please be sure to register online for classes

Charlotte County Computer Group

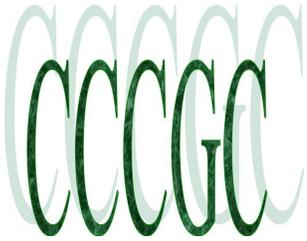


1984 - 2014

Classes & Events Calendar

April 2014		CCCGC Events Calendar				
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 <u>General Meeting</u> 7:15 PM Classes 5:00 PM 6:00 PM	2	3 <u>Back To Basics</u> 2 to 4 PM Dick Evans	4	5
6	7 <u>Libre Office</u> 2 to 4 PM John Palmer	8	9 <u>Maintenance</u> 2 to 4 PM Ron Wallis	10 <u>Back To Basics</u> 2 to 4 PM Dick Evans	11	12
13  Palm Sunday	14 <u>EaseUs Backup</u> 2 to 4 PM Yvette Pilch	15 <u>Windows 8.1</u> 2 to 4 PM Ron Wallis	16 <u>Choosing a Computer</u> 2 to 4 PM Larry Hurley	17 <u>Back To Basics</u> 2 to 4 PM Dick Evans	18  Good Friday	19
20 	21 <u>Libre Office</u> 2 to 4 PM John Palmer	22	23 <u>Maintenance</u> 2 to 4 PM Ron Wallis	24 <u>Back To Basics</u> 2 to 4 PM Dick Evans <u>Board Meeting</u> 6:30 PM	25	26
27	28 <u>Windows 8.1</u> 2 to 4 PM Yvette Pilch	29 <u>Windows 8.1</u> 2 to 4 PM Ron Wallis	30			
NOTICE All Non Meeting Night Classes will be held in Our New CCCGC Office.					Notes: OFFICE HOURS: 10:00 AM-2:00 PM MONDAY -FRIDAY Please sign up for classes ONLINE: http://www.cccgc.info	

PROMOTING COMPUTER LITERACY AND EDUCATION IN CHARLOTTE COUNTY



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The Charlotte County Computer Group Corp.

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Donations, gifts, bequests, legacies, devices and transfers are deductible under federal laws.

Officers and Board of Directors for 2014

President: Ron Wallis

Vice President: A Yvette Pilch

Secretary: Ron Muschong

Treasurer: Larry Hurley

Director: John Hegard

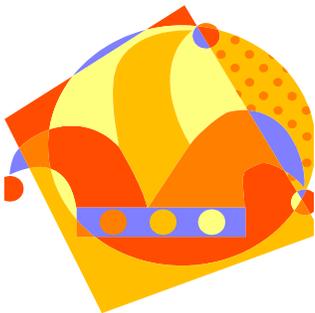
Director: Grover Mudd

Director: Lydia Rist

Director: Frank Messina

Director: Mava Graves

Anniversary Party Pics



We're on the Web
www.cccgc.net



Charlotte Bytes



the How-To Geek
Computer Help from your Friendly How-To Geek

E Ink vs. LCD: Which Screen is Best For Reading?

There are two big choices when it comes to reading eBooks. You can go with either a dedicated eReader, like a Kindle Paperwhite, or a tablet with an LCD screen, like an iPad — but which is best?

The big difference between the two classes of device — eReader and tablet — is the type of screen they have. eReaders have E Ink screens, while tablets have LCD screens. This makes all the difference.

E Ink vs. LCD Screen Technology

E Ink screens are ideal for displaying black and white text. They can't display colors (there are color E Ink screens, but they're rare) and have a slow refresh rate. The big benefit to an E Ink screen, then, is the way text appears on it. E Ink screens are advertised as “electronic paper” — they look more similar to paper than typical LCD screens do.

LCD screen technology is the same type of screen your computer screen, smartphone, and probably even television use. It can display a wider range of colors and has a fast refresh rate, so you can have smooth animations, slick interfaces, and even play games and watch videos. LCD screens are backlit, which means there's a light behind the display.

These are extremely different screen technologies optimized for different use cases, but you'll still have to choose between them if you start shopping for some sort of eReader.

RELATED ARTICLE

HTG Reviews the New Kindle Paperwhite: The King of the Hill Climbs Higher

In September, Amazon released a new version of their best-selling Kindle Paperwhite. We've put our old and new Paperwhites through...

<http://www.howtogeek.com/174534/htg-reviews-the-new-kindle-paperwhite-the-king-of-the-hill-climbs-higher/>

Here's how the screens actually differ in real-world use:

Reading in the Sun: Do you want to read books outside or in direct sunlight? You'll want a device with an E Ink screen. There's no glare with an E Ink screen, so the screen will appear as clear as if you were staring at a printed page when you read outside. If you took a tablet with an LCD screen out into the sun, there would be an extreme amount of glare on the screen and you might not be able to read it at all.

Power Consumption: E Ink screens draw much less power than LCD screens do. You'll have to plug in a tablet every few days to recharge it, while an E Ink reader can go for weeks or even months on end without a recharge. Amazon advertises the Kindle Paperwhite as having “up to 8-week battery life,” while Apple advertises the iPad mini with Retina display as having “up to 10 hours of battery life.” You won't have to worry about recharging an E Ink device as much, and it's also easier to take along if you're going camping out in the wilderness where you don't have a power outlet available.



Conclusion on next page



Charlotte Bytes



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Computer Help from your Friendly How-To Geek

Price: E Ink devices are significantly cheaper — \$119 for a Kindle Paperwhite versus \$400 for an iPad Mini with Retina Display or \$229 for a Nexus 7. Tablets with LCD screens need to have higher-powered hardware inside them so they can play demanding mobile games and do other advanced things, while e-readers just have to turn pages at an acceptable speed.

The Eyestrain Debate

Many people claim that E Ink screens help reduce eye strain. They say that staring at an E Ink screen for long periods of time is easier than staring at an LCD screen. Other people disagree, saying that they stare at an LCD screen all day while using their computers and have no problem reading on a tablet with an LCD screen; they don't notice any eye strain.

A 2012 study named "Reading on LCD vs e-Ink displays: effects on fatigue and visual strain" looked at this exact issue. The researchers concluded that there was no difference between reading on an E Ink versus and LCD screen in terms of fatigue and visual strain. The key here is that the LCD screen has to be a high resolution, which modern tablet LCD screens are. Even if you experience eye strain when reading text on an old, low-resolution LCD computer monitor, you shouldn't experience it when reading on a modern, high-resolution LCD screen.

Bear in mind that this doesn't account for glare — if they replicated this test with participants trying to read in direct sunlight, there would be much more eye strain required for the LCD screens.

Some people do tend to prefer one screen type for aesthetic reasons, so you should try to see both in person to get a better idea which works for you.

What Type of Reading Do You Actually Want to Do?

It seems that E Ink readers absolutely smash the competition! Why would anyone get a tablet with an LCD screen when E Ink devices are cheaper and seem like much better devices for sitting down and reading books? Well, it's probably because many people want to do more than read books.

Devices with LCD screens — even ones ostensibly marketed as eReaders, like the Kindle Fire and Nook HD — are effectively just tablets. They're not just for books. You also have access to a web browser, email app, social media services, movies, music, games, and a whole app store full of other things you can install on your device. You can do your email, post on Facebook, or play Angry Birds on a tablet, but not on an eReader — well, you actually can use a web browser on an E Ink Kindle, but it's so slow that you won't bother.

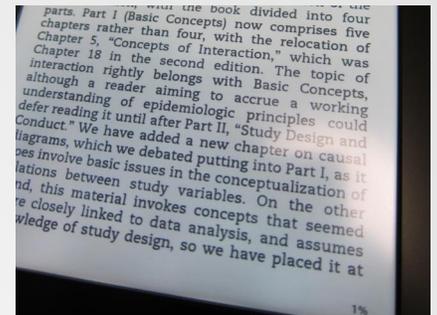


Which device you should get all depends on what you're looking for. Do you want a device that you can use to read books anywhere, in the sun or at night? Get an E Ink screen — it's ideal for reading books and you'll also have fewer distractions, as you won't be tempted to leave the eBook app and check your email.

Do you want a device that lets you read books sometimes, but also lets you browse websites, play games, and do all of the other things you can do on a tablet? Then maybe you really want a tablet with an LCD screen. Bear in mind that you'll be tempted to use the tablet for things besides reading books, so reading will take more self control.

Ultimately, it's all about what you want to use your device for. If you really just want to use it for reading, an eReader is definitely the best option — you can read outside, you have longer battery life, and you won't be distracted. But, if you want a device to use for other things too, a tablet with an LCD screen might be a better option.

Image Credit: John Blyberg on Flickr, Edvvc on Flickr, Yuya Tamai on Flickr, Zhao ! on Flickr, Courtney Boyd Myers on Flickr





Windows Secrets
Everything Microsoft forgot to mention.

Sorting out the revolution in PC backups: Part 1

By Fred Langa

Over the past few years, backup technology has improved so much that you're virtually guaranteed you'll never lose important files or other data.

But with so many good options available, it can be difficult to settle on the backup method — or methods — exactly right for you.

Today's mainstream backup options range from Windows' built-in tools and an internal hard drive to automated applications that archive files to the cloud. In between are old-school backups on optical discs and new-school network-attached drives that let you access your data from anywhere — locally and over the Web.

Each backup option brings its own particular mix of strengths and weaknesses. In this two-part series, I'll sort out the differences — in both use and speed.

In Part 1, I give an overview of the five leading types of backup technology available today for Windows users. These capsule summaries should help you quickly sort through the benefits and limitations of each option.

In an upcoming issue, **Part 2 will provide additional details — plus a Windows Secrets exclusive: real-world timing tests that show how long it takes to back up file sets of various sizes using each of the five backup types. (Look for article in May's Issue of the Bytes)**

Combined, Parts 1 and 2 will help you decide the type of backup technology that best fits your needs.

Five ways to archive Windows and your data

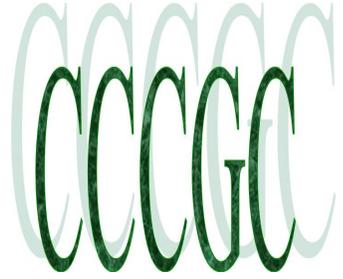
Personal-computer backups are best grouped by where the backup files are stored. The five mainstream options I'll review are these:

1. Internal drives
2. Optical discs (typically DVDs and CDs)
3. **USB-connected external drives (Most favored by CCGC)**
4. Networked drives (such as in another PC or a standalone, network-attached storage device)
5. Cloud-based data-storage services

There are, of course, variations of each type. For example, networked drives can be accessed either via Wi-Fi or by hard-wired Ethernet. Wi-Fi can be more convenient, especially in the home, but a wired connection is typically about 10 times faster than wireless, so there's a huge speed difference.

Some other forms of backup don't warrant coverage here. For example, USB flash drives might be fine for backing up selected files and folders, but most commonly used flash drives are too small to hold a complete, whole-PC backup.

It might be hard to believe, but tape drives and floppies — about as old school as it gets — are still in use. But they're far, far out of the mainstream and are typically not up to the needs of modern personal computers. Optical networks and gigabit Wi-Fi will become more widespread in coming years, but they're still minor players, today.



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PC Backups Part 1 Continued

So, now that we have the context of this backup discussion, here are my capsule summaries of the five commonly used options.

Back up to a secondary, internal hard drive

In this setup, your system files and data reside on the primary (typically, C:) drive; your backups live on a second, physically-separate drive inside the PC.

Pro: Fast, easy, and inexpensive. A secondary internal drive offers the fastest form of backup — and restoration. The backup process is easy to set up; all standard backup programs can read and write to a secondary hard drive. A second internal disk drive is relatively cheap. A 1TB desktop-class drive costs as little as U.S. \$60.

Con: Low data security. Secondary drives share the same physical, electrical, and operating system environment as the primary drive, so anything that compromises the primary drive (malware, mechanical or electrical malfunction, fire, flood, theft, and so on) might also compromise the secondary drive.

Storing backups on a secondary internal drive is a better-than-nothing approach.

Back up to optical discs (DVDs and CDs)

Most desktops and laptops still have optical drives. PCs without an optical drive can be connected to an external DVD/CD drive, but there are few viable reasons to bother.

Pro: Can be highly secure. Once written, optical discs are immune to new malware infections. Optical discs can also be very long lived. If you store optical-disc backups away from the main PC, in a climate-controlled location that's fire- and theft-proof, your backups can last for decades — safe from just about all the misfortunes that can affect a PC and its data. (For more on accessing files over decades, see the Feb. 21, 2013, Best Practices story "Preserving files for the generations.")

Con: Slow, labor intensive, expensive, bulky, and requires careful handling. Backing up files to optical discs is an inherently slow process, often requiring disc changes, labeling, and careful storage, which makes automated backups effectively impossible. A single full-system backup could span large numbers of discs, adding to the cost and complicating the task of storage and eventual disposal.

Without good climate control (i.e., constantly cool, dark, dry storage), optical discs can degrade fairly quickly (see these National Institute of Standards and Technology publications).

Also, to protect them from unintended destruction, such as fire or theft, the discs need to be stored in a fire-proof safe or at another site.

Back up to a USB-connected external drive

The explosive growth of space-consuming media such as digital music, videos, and digital photos has made one or more external drives a must-have addition for many (if not most) Windows PCs.

Pro: Easy to use, good speed, and low to moderate cost. Installing an external, USB-attached drive is usually just a matter of plugging it in. It's hard to imagine a backup medium that's easier to set up.



PC Backups Part 1 Continued

All major Windows-based backup programs can write to USB-attached storage, and Win8's built-in File History can automatically use external drives for near-continuous archiving. (See the July 11, 2013, Top Story, "Understanding Windows 8's File History.")

USB 3.0 drives usually give excellent high-speed data transfers; USB 2.0 drives are slower, but still acceptable for most backup needs. A good 1TB external drive currently costs about \$80 and up).

Con: Mixed data security. Backups to a USB-connected external drive should be highly secure — if, after a backup is made, the drive is disconnected from the PC and stored in a safe location. But USB drives are rarely used that way, and Win8's File History requires that the drive be more or less permanently attached.

When a USB drive is left attached, it's vulnerable to many of the same events that can take down the primary drive, including malware, mechanical or electrical malfunctions, theft, and other disasters.

Back up to a networked drive or second PC

Storage sitting on the local network can make backing up multiple PCs easier. The newest network-attached drives, such as the Western Digital My Book Live (more info), also let you share media and access their contents from the Web.

Pro: Generally easy to set up, acceptable to good speed, moderate cost and complexity, and some resistance to simple malware. Nearly all Windows PCs have networking abilities built in, and almost all homes with PCs have networks with Wi-Fi and/or hard-wired Ethernet. So it's usually not hard to back up files over the network to an attached storage device or a second PC's hard drive. (You can, for example, put an old PC back to use as a sort of poor man's file server.)

Backup speeds over a network can be good — especially with 100Mbps Ethernet, which often yields real-world throughputs about 10 times faster than 802.11g Wi-Fi. If used properly, network backups can also be resistant to some forms of spreading malware (more in the Con, below).

Con: Requires extra steps for good security. Ideally, a networked drive should be far away from the system being backed up. It should have separate physical security and be powered by a separate electrical circuit. Otherwise, the networked drive might be lost along with the backed-up (client) PC, in the event of some accident, theft, or disaster.

Networked drives are usually accessed two ways: drive mapping — assigning a drive letter such as Z: — and Uniform Naming Convention (UNC; more info) — assigning a network name such as **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** of drive or PC}. Drive mapping is less secure because relatively simple malware on the client PC can access the mapped, networked drive as easily as a local drive. To help thwart such malware, it's better to use UNC for accessing networked drives.

Back up to a subscription-based cloud service

Cloud-storage/backup services are now extremely common. Depending on your computing needs, they can be either the primary backup system or supplementary backup.

Pro: High security, low to moderate cost, and easy to set up and use. The primary benefit of cloud backup is offsite storage. Even if your PC and all local backups are lost, you'll still have copies of your files in the cloud.

Most cloud services use reasonable safeguards (password protection and encryption) to prevent unauthorized access to your stored files. But you can make your cloud storage virtually hack-proof through the use of free or low-cost third-party tools. (See the Dec. 12, 2013, Top Story, "Pre-encryption makes cloud-based storage safer.")

Conclusion on page 15





Charlotte Bytes



How To Spot A Dangerous Email Attachment

by Chris Hoffman

Emails can be dangerous. Reading the contents of an email should be safe if you have the latest security patches, but email attachments can be harmful. Any type of file can be attached to an email, including .exe program files. Many email servers will perform virus scanning and remove potentially dangerous attachments, but you can't rely on this. Look for the common warning signs so you can avoid viruses, worms, and Trojans.

So-called "spear-phishing campaigns" that go after high-value corporate and government targets have used email attachments to take advantage of previously unknown security vulnerabilities. Email attachments can be dangerous to anyone.

Dangerous File Extensions

The easiest way to identify whether a file is dangerous is by its file extension, which tells you the type of file it is. For example, a file with the .exe file extension is a Windows program and should not be opened. Many email services will block such attachments.

However, .exe isn't the only type of dangerous file extension. Other potentially dangerous file extensions that can run code include: .msi, .bat, .com, .cmd, .hta, .scr, .pif, .reg, .js, .vbs, .wsf, .cpl, .jar and more. This is not an exhaustive list — there are many different file extensions in Windows that will run code on your computer when executed.

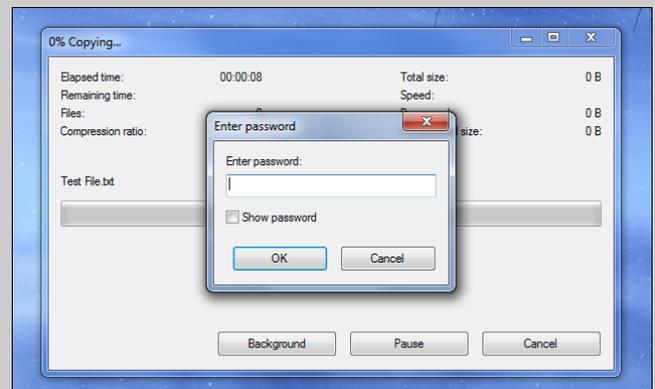
Office files with macros are also potentially dangerous. If an Office document extension ends with an m, it can — and probably does — contain macros. For example, .docx, .xlsx, and .pptx should be safe, while .docm, .xlsm, and .pptm can contain macros and can be harmful. Of course, some businesses use macro-enabled documents. You'll have to exercise your own judgment.

In general, you should only open files with attachments that you know are safe. For example, .jpg and .png are image files and should be safe. .pdf, .docx, .xlsx, and .pptx are document files and should also be safe — although it's important to have the latest security patches so malicious types of these files can't infect you via security holes in Adobe Reader or Microsoft Office.

Archives, Especially Encrypted Ones

In an attempt to make it around email filters, someone may email you malicious file attachments in an archive — especially an encrypted one. For example, you may receive an email with a .zip, .rar, or .7z file and its password. You'd need to download the archive file and extract its contents with the password to access them.

The password-protection — or encryption — on the archive prevents email scanners and antivirus programs from examining it, so it's very possible that the archive could contain malware. Of course, password-protected archives are also an effective way to email sensitive files. You'll have to use your judgment once again.





Charlotte Bytes



Dangerous Email Attachments

Continued

The Sender

Looking at who an email was sent by can help you identify whether an email attachment is malicious or not. Beware: an attachment can be malicious even if you know the sender! If they've become infected, a malware program may send you emails from their email address, disguised as emails they'd send.

If you get an email from someone you don't know with a questionable-looking attachment, it's probably malware. If you receive a macro-enabled Office document from someone you're not expecting one from, exercise extreme caution.

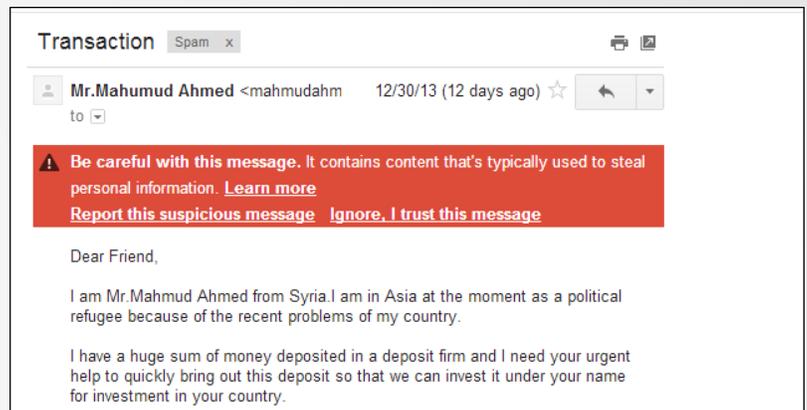
On the other hand, if your boss tells you in person that she'll email you a macro-enabled Excel spreadsheet and you get an email from her with an .xlsm file later that day, the attachment is probably safe.

If you're not sure whether someone sent you a suspicious-looking email attachment, you may want to give them a phone call or ask them in person. If they didn't send the attachment, they'll appreciate the warning that their computer is infected or their email address has been hijacked.

The Email Itself

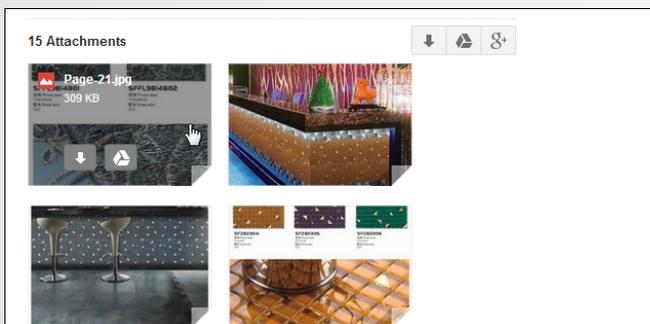
The email's contents can also offer clues. If you get an email from someone you know and something seems a bit off, it may be written by malware or a hijacker. Such emails could also be phishing emails without any dangerous attachments — for example, if you get an email from someone you know saying they're trapped and need you to wire some money with Western Union, this could easily be a phishing scam.

If you get an email from **FedEx or UPS** and it asks you to download an email attachment and run it, that's another red flag. Legitimate businesses will never ask you to download and run programs attached to an email.



Antivirus Alerts

If you're using a webmail service like Gmail, Outlook.com, or Yahoo! Mail, your webmail service will automatically scan incoming attachments for malware and inform you if the attachments are dangerous. Of course, if you see a warning that an attachment is malicious, you should not download it! The text of the email may ask you to ignore any problems and assure you that the attachment is actually fine, but this would likely be a trick.



If you download an email attachment and your desktop antivirus program flags it, stop right there. Don't click through the warning and run it anyway — trust your antivirus program more than the email attachment.

Bear in mind that antivirus programs aren't perfect. They'll miss things occasionally, so you can't only rely on your antivirus. An attachment could be dangerous even if no antivirus flags it.

Have a Healthy Suspicion

When it comes to email attachments, you should exercise extreme caution and assume the worst. Don't actually download or run an attachment unless you have a good reason to do so. If you're not expecting an attachment, treat it with healthy suspicion. If it's an image attachment, that's probably okay. PDFs should be okay if you have the latest security patches, too. But if you're not sure what something is, you shouldn't run it.

Your webmail client's preview features can also help. You can preview PDF files, documents, images, and other types of files in your browser without actually downloading them to your computer.

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Are PCs Dying? Of Course Not, Here's Why

Reports of the PC's demise have been greatly exaggerated. We've all heard that everyone's just buying tablets and throwing out their keyboards and mice. But, if you live in the real world, you see people using PCs every day.

The statistics show that PCs are still selling in large numbers and are used much more than tablets. But we don't need statistics to see this — we all know that huge amounts of people still use and need PCs.



Raw Statistics

PC sales are declining fast. Soon, no one will buy them anymore. Everyone's just buying tablets, and tablet sales are skyrocketing! That's the established wisdom, anyway. But is that what the statistics really say?

Gartner reports that 82.6 million PCs were shipped in the fourth quarter of 2013. That's a 6.9 percent drop from the fourth quarter of 2012 and the seventh quarter in a row of declining shipments. This sounds like bad news, but the decline in PC sales has actually been slowing. Gartner believes that PC sales have "bottomed out" — while PC sales are dropping, it's hardly a market in free fall. But it's not really the sales that are important — it's what people are actually using.

StatCounter's browser usage data for January 2014 shows that desktop browsers accounted for 71.89% of visits, while mobile (smartphones) accounted for 22.42% and tablets accounted for just 5.69%. Most people are clearly using desktop web browsers to access the web. If they're not, they're probably using a smartphone browser — tablet browsers are far behind.

But perhaps we're just looking in reverse. What's really important is the long-term trend. If tablet sales are accelerating, then tablets may just "kill" PCs.

Here's the thing: While more tablets are being sold than ever, the growth of tablet sales is slowing. IDC reports that 76.9 million tablets were shipped in the fourth quarter of 2013. That's a 28.2% growth in shipments over the same quarter in the previous year, but that previous quarter had an 87.1% growth over its previous year. In other words, tablet sales are growing more slowly — sales aren't accelerating, but are slowing down. Many of these tablets are also cheaper, smaller, lower-end tablets that are even less prepared to replace a PC than premium tablets like the iPad. IDC concludes that "markets such as the U.S. are reaching high levels of consumer saturation."

And, did you catch that? In spite of all the doom and gloom, more PCs than tablets were shipped worldwide in the fourth quarter of 2013.

We Don't Need to Replace PCs As Often

IDC used a word — "saturation" — that perfectly describes a big part of what's going on. You don't have to replace your computer as often as you used to. There was a time when each new version of Windows, Office, and even web browsers was heavier than ever. You saw a big speed improvement when you bought a new computer. You needed to keep buying new computers, because Windows Vista definitely wouldn't run very well on that PC you bought when Windows XP came out. Today, Windows 7 and 8 run faster than Windows Vista on the same hardware. Even gaming PCs built years ago can likely still run the latest PC games at high settings.

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Are PC Dying, Of Course Not

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People just don't have to replace their PCs as often, so of course PC sales are falling. PCs have reached a point where they're "good enough." People aren't scrambling to upgrade their PCs every few years — they're replacing them only when they need to. People have more PCs — laptops and even desktops — lying around than ever.

On the other hand, tablets are still a new thing. Many people still don't have tablets, so people are buying them more and more. If you want a new gadget and you're perfectly happy with your laptop, of course you're going to buy a tablet instead. And, like smartphones, tablets are improving faster than ever. Tablets from a few years ago have noticeably worse screens and slower hardware. They're improving fast, just like PCs used to. You'll see more of a benefit from upgrading an iPad that's a few generations old than you will a laptop that's a few generations old. Eventually, tablets will get to that "good enough" point where people won't have to upgrade every few years, too. Tablet sales will slow and people will be saying "tablets are dying" because everyone is buying those new virtual reality headsets instead.

So What's Going On?

Let's analyze this data using some common sense. In the real world, multiple different types of products can coexist for different people.

First, tablets aren't just a fad. In the past, everyone who wanted to browse the web, send some email, watch YouTube, do online banking, and play simple games needed an expensive PC that required regular maintenance. Now, if someone just wants an easy little device that lets them get online, they can get a tablet. Not everyone needs a PC, and even people who need PCs for some reason may want to use a tablet in their downtime instead.

Second, PCs are still useful. They're not an obsolete piece of technology. iPads, Android tablets, and even Windows 8 devices with their half-baked "Store apps" are no substitute for real PCs when it comes to doing many things. Whether you're writing, coding, editing images, doing CAD work, doing other productive work — or even playing PC games — there's a good chance you depend on a mouse and keyboard. You also depend on having a larger screen — maybe even multiple displays — and the ability to have more than one thing on screen at a time.

People are using tablets, but people are also still using PCs. As usual, the answer is somewhere in between "PCs are dying" and "tablets are a fad."

What is a PC? The Lines Are Blurring

But what is a PC, anyway? "PC" really just stands for "personal computer," but it's become synonymous with Windows, Linux, and even Mac OS X desktops and laptops. Really, smartphones and tablets are just as much personal computers as laptops and desktops are. They run software and are much faster than the PCs many of us grew up with.

This isn't just a hand-waving distinction. The lines are blurring. For example, is a Surface 2 tablet running Windows RT a PC? Maybe not — it's just a tablet and can't run typical Windows desktop applications! But what if you connected a keyboard, mouse, and connected it to an external display? What if you spent all your time using Office applications on the desktop on a large monitor? What about those new 8-inch Windows 8.1 tablets with an Intel chip and a full desktop — are they PCs? If they're not because the screen is too small and they don't have a keyboard, what if you connected a keyboard and an external display? Do they stop being PCs when you unplug your peripherals?

It's not all about Windows, either. Would an Ubuntu Phone be a PC? Of course not, it's a phone! But what if you plugged that Ubuntu phone into an HDMI port, connected a mouse and keyboard, and used the full Linux desktop on an external display? It's clearly a PC now — but it's running on a phone.

RELATED ARTICLE

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Windows Secrets
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PC Backups Part 1

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Cloud-storage costs are low to moderate, depending on the size of your data sets. (Most general cloud services offer some small amount of free storage, typically 2–15GB.) Microsoft's SkyDrive (soon to be renamed OneDrive; site) costs about \$0.50 per gigabyte annually, above its free 7GB. So 107GB of storage will run \$50 per year. Google Drive (site) gives you the first 15GB free, then charges about \$0.60 per GB per year (115GB for \$60/yr). Fees for backup-specific services such as Mozy (site) and Carbonite (site) are in the same general ballpark.

Setting up cloud-based backup is usually easy. For example, Microsoft's OneDrive/SkyDrive is built into Win8. Third-party apps such as Mozy and Carbonite install easily and offer a high degree of automation.

Con: Slow, could incur significant secondary costs, and depends on middleman services. As you might expect, cloud backup can be extremely slow — especially when moving large numbers of files. It can take literally days to fully restore a PC from cloud-based backups. Moving large amounts of data via the Web also can choke your local Internet connection. Moreover, if your ISP or cloud-service provider imposes data-transfer limits, backing up your entire system to the cloud can lead to substantial surcharges.

Using a cloud-based service also makes you dependent on middlemen. If your ISP or cloud-service provider goes down for any reason (technical, criminal, financial, or some other cause), you'll lose access to your cloud-stored backups.

Next up: Real-world timing tests — and more

Stay tuned for Part 2 of this series next month.

Are PC's Dying?...Conclusion

Tablets and PCs are growing closer to each other. Tablets are becoming more capable, and many PC laptops are becoming more mobile with better battery life. Microsoft is forcing tablets and PCs together — with mixed success — but Ubuntu is also working on creating a single operating system that can run on your phone and also be your desktop PC with the appropriate peripherals.

In reality, there are more different types of hardware and software than ever. Not everyone is forced to use a beige tower running Windows. But PCs aren't dying just because people have more choice. Some people will always need large screens, multiple windows, mice, keyboards, and all that other good stuff. Not everyone will be done on a 10-inch or smaller touch screen.

If we all end up running powerful software on Android, iOS, or another "mobile operating system" and using devices with large screens, multiple windows, keyboards, and mice — well, then we're just using a different type of PC. PCs are more than Windows and desktop towers. That said, there's still a place for both Windows and desktop PCs in this new order.

So, can we all please stop saying the desktop PC is dying? Thanks!



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