

Keyboard & Mouse

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc

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Issue 3 – September 2006

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Our cover: Spring blossom in the Derwent Valley, Tasmania
Taken by Peter Campbell with a Fujifilm camera

Spring has sprung

Spring has sprung and it's time to dig out that digital camera and go photograph the spring blossom. You may not have to go far; our cover photo was taken looking towards the entrance to Bryn Estyn Court just 100 metres or so from our front door!

Even before the first official day of spring, peach, plum and wattle have all blossomed in the Derwent Valley, daffodils and other spring bulbs are flowering, and it won't be long before other species join them.

If your camera has been in mothballs during the winter, fit fresh (or recharged) batteries, dust off the lens – ask your camera dealer for a suitable blower brush – and away you go. Take a look at the manual (or get a good book on photography) and learn to get in close to photograph individual flower heads. The results can be quite spectacular.



For more hints on digital photography, visit <http://hobartpcgroup.org.au/files/services/hints/hint-index.htm>

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Download manager for Firefox

If you have a large file to download and a slow, last-century, dialup connection with which to do it, you need a download manager or download accelerator.

Download managers and accelerators make multiple connections to the file server, search for faster mirrors from which to download, restart themselves when the line drops out resuming from where they were up to, and can be scheduled to download a list of files during off-peak periods. There are many to choose from, but some of the less reputable ones implant spyware on your computer.

Firefox users can avoid spyware implants, advertising support, and plain old-fashioned payment, by installing a small extension which makes Firefox into download manager.

Go to Tools/Extensions and click on Get More Extensions. This will take you to a website from which you can install DownThemAll. Although a little different in design from most other download managers, dTa, as it is known, can perform all the usual functions and integrates fully into the menus of Firefox.

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Free Download Manager

Free Download Manager (FDM) obtainable from <http://www.freedownloadmanager.org> offers you a number of options to control and schedule your downloads.

FDM can resume your broken download so that you needn't start it from the beginning after casual interruption. By splitting the download into several sections, FDM claims to increase download speeds by up to 600%. It can connect to the Internet at a set time, download the files you want, launch any program, disconnect or shut down your computer when it's done.

The download manager allows you to specify the login and password, maximum number of connections, default group, etc. So you can avoid adjusting these settings every time you need to create new download from the server.

FDM 2.1 gives you a new opportunity - you can now request other users' opinions on the file you are going to download as well as write your comments about the downloaded file - right in the download window. This helps you avoid corrupted and useless files. NB: Needs Internet Explorer 5.5 or later.

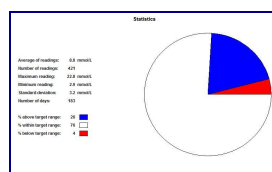
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Precision Link Direct

Diabetics who use Abbott Medisense meters can link them via a special cable to their computers and analyse the stored readings. The software/cable package sells for around \$85 plus GST, but you can save about \$35. Here's how:

Instead of ordering the complete package only order the serial cable which is priced around \$49.95 plus GST. You then download the software from the Internet at no extra charge. If you are a regular customer at your NDSS sub-agent, or a member of DAT, you can probably get the cable for less than RRP, giving you a further saving. If you have a recent laptop computer, you will also need to get a USB to serial port adapter (if there is no serial port on the laptop). It will cost about \$30 - \$35.

To do your analysis you can use the special software – you'll need it to download the data, anyway – or you can export the data after downloading and analyse it with your favourite spreadsheet.



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XP installation stalls

My friend had just bought Windows XP Home and a new hard drive. When we came to install XP it hung with 34 minutes to go. We tried various things, including formatting the hard disk and reinstalling from scratch, but every time we hit the 34 minute mark, the installation stalled.

If this happens to you, run – don't walk – to the nearest Internet-connected computer and look up these two Microsoft documents:

<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us:828267>

<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us:815319>

While both documents are worth reading in their entirety, the salient advice from both of them can be summed up as follows:

- Disconnect all unnecessary hardware – printer, network cable, modem etc. With luck, this will remove the offending piece of hardware and allow the installation to proceed. Once it has completed, you can reconnect the hardware and install the latest device drivers for that hardware.
- Keep trying. Each time you restart Setup and it returns to the 39 minute mark, it will attempt to bypass the hardware that was causing the installation to hang. Eventually, it may succeed.
- Use a serial or PS/2 mouse. There is a bug in the USB driver that may surface if you are using a USB mouse. While the article tells how you can “slipstream” a revised driver into the installation files, using a non-USB mouse – if you can – is a quicker solution.

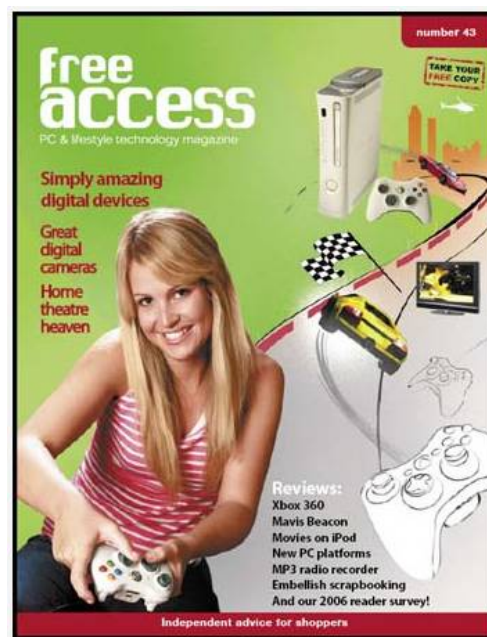
If neither of the above solutions help, then do a Google search using the keywords “XP installation stalls”. This will yield a number of other possible solutions. Also do a Google search if the installation stalls at a point other than the 34 minute mark.

In my friend's case I checked for hardware faults by installing Xandros 3 Linux. It installed and ran flawlessly.

Although I wasn't using a USB mouse, I went into the CMOS and turned off USB support. Then I ran the Windows XP setup and restarted the setup each time it stalled. Eventually, the installation completed. Then I reminded myself, “Next time start with a Google search. After all, Google knows everything (almost)!”

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Online magazines



There was a time when the only cheap way to get *Free Access Magazine* was to hang around computer stores and grab a copy when it came in. That proved a rather erratic way of getting it, so I just stopped bothering. However, as I was browsing the Web the other day, I came across a weblog which also provided access to recent, though not the latest, issues in printable form. Naturally, that meant PDF, which has become the almost universal way that print versions of online magazines are made available.

Other computer and technology magazines available in PDF format that I found (with a Google search) include *Tux* (dedicated to Linux novices), *Home Computer Magazine* (for home computer users), *Computer Pilot Magazine* (for aircraft simulator enthusiasts), *Free Software Magazine* (free as in “speech” - mainly Linux), *Affiliate Classroom* (for people trying to make money running affiliate websites), and many others. Some like *Free Access* and *Home Computer Magazine* are free of charge. Others, like *Tux*, charge a subscription price, although this is usually considerably less than buying the printed version of the magazine.

To download a PDF file, as most of these magazines are, **right-click** on the file, or link, and choose “**Save Target As**”, “**Save Link As**”, or whatever your browser uses. Once the file has downloaded, which may take some time, you can open, read and print the magazine using your PDF reader. Note that some of these files are very large (e.g. 13 MB – more than three times the size of our August issue).

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Creating a PDF document

What is it?



PDF – Portable Document Format – was developed by Adobe. To ensure its rapid spread across the globe, Adobe gave away readers so that, whatever operating system or computer they used, computer users everywhere could read PDF documents. Over time, other companies unravelled the PDF format and produced their own PDF creators, readers and editors.

Like all formats it has its strengths and weaknesses. PDF allows authors to protect copyright material by preventing editing, printing and copying, or any combination of the foregoing. It preserves the layout and look that the author intended and does not require the recipient to have obscure fonts on their computer, as any such fonts can be embedded in the PDF documents. They can be magnified up to 1600% while retaining perfect sharpness.

PDF is now used to online account statements, to distribute newsletters, magazines and legal documents; to provide on-disc software manuals; for archives of documents including magazines, legal, company and government documents (with a new ISO-approved standard specifically for archiving being developed); instead of fax (a PDF attachment to an email); publishing electronic books and educational material; and even for websites.

On the other hand, whilst it is a compact format, the use of large graphics in a PDF document can still result in quite large files. Some non-Adobe PDF creators prevent copying when the author did not intend to protect the document in that way. Most editing software for PDF is expensive.

The dominant format

Although MS Word's .doc may dominate the Windows world, Adobe's PDF dominates the world of computers with readers for MS-DOS (buggy), GEOS (as used in Breadbox Ensemble), OS/2, BeOS, Unix, AIX, HP-UX, Solaris, all distributions of Linux, all versions of Windows, Mac OS and more.

Methods of creating PDF

If you want to create PDF documents, you have two main methods at your disposal. The first is to buy a PDF document creator, such as Adobe's Acrobat, and the second is to create your document in your usual application and then convert it into PDF. The latter ability is built-in to some applications, such as StarOffice, OpenOffice.org and WordPerfect (which even includes an editor).

Most PDF document creators/editors are expensive, none more so than those from Adobe. Unless you need to be able to edit PDF documents created by others,

take the second approach and save money.

Add-on programs

If your application, or application suite, does not have the built-in ability to create or export PDF documents, you will have to add a small program to your computer. This will take the print output from almost any Windows application and convert it into a PDF file.

Some of the free versions of such programs are advertising-supported and may even brand your documents with an advertising message. One that doesn't is PrimoPDF.

PrimoPDF printer

With it, you can convert use the output of any application to produce a PDF document by simply 'printing' to the PrimoPDF printer. Primo PDF printer is not a trial version, it does not inflict pop-ups on you, you do not have to register and it does not brand your documents.

- Create PDF output optimized for print, screen, ebook, or prepress from any printable output
- High-quality, easy to use PDF creator for all users
- Double byte character support
- Enhanced support for Microsoft Windows 98, ME, and NT
- PDF viewing support for non-Windows environments
- Full support for 64-bit machines (requires separate installer)
- Secure PDFs with 40-/128-bit encryption, allowing the highest level of security for your PDF files Settings include
 - password to open
 - password to change
 - disable printing
 - disable text/graphics copying
 - disable commenting
 - disable text editing
 - disable page addition
- Add document information (e.g. title, author, subject, keywords) to converted PDF files, resulting in faster and easier searching of PDF documents

As you can see, PrimoPDF printer produces PDF documents with all the security features that the format makes possible.

Open- StarOffice export

Both OpenOffice.org and StarOffice include an export setting for producing PDF documents. You simply produce your document and save it. You then click the Export button in the menu bar. Name the document and decide where you want it to be saved. It will then be exported using the existing export settings.

If you prefer to have a little more control over the proceedings, choose Export PDF from the File menu. After you have named the document and chosen where to save it, you will be asked what compression to apply to JPEG graphics. You will also have the opportunity to set some other attributes of the document.

The OpenOffice.org export process does not permit you to disable commenting, printing and so on, but for most personal purposes, it produces the PDF documents you need speedily and with a minimum of fuss.



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Picasa 2 for Linux

One of the few disappointments I have had using Linux concerned Picasa 2, Google's excellent photo manager and retoucher. It almost ran using Crossover/Wine, but was unstable. Now Google have reworked the Wine code so that the Windows 2000/XP version of Picasa 2 will run under Linux.

They have packaged up Picasa and the amended Wine code and made the result available in RPM, Debian (.deb), and self-extracting installation packages. Choose the one that is right for your distribution of Linux and then follow the instructions that Google provide for your chosen package.

Instead of using Debian's apt-get, Xandros users have the option of using Xandros Networks to obtain and install Picasa:

- Start Xandros Networks
- Open the Edit menu.
- Choose Set Application Sources
- Click on the Add button
- Add: **deb [http://dl.google.com/linux/deb/stable non-free](http://dl.google.com/linux/deb/stable-non-free)**
- Run a search for Picasa
- Under Search Results, click on Expert.
- Click Install and sit back and watch it happen.

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More Internode content

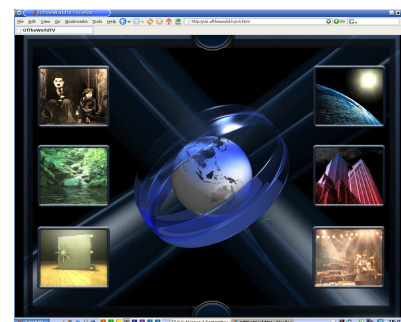
Like BigPond, Internode offers various sorts of unmetered content. Provided that the content comes from their servers, it does not count towards your monthly quota.

One exception to the rule that the content had to come from Internode servers was all ABC content provided at <http://www.abc.net.au>. As Internode puts it: "Just browse to the ABC site and enjoy, without adding to your download total."

Now they have also started to provide access to selected external content on an unmetered basis and recently added a new content source to their external unmetered content portfolio, called 'OfTheWorld.TV'.

OfTheWorld provides a unique on-demand multimedia library, available directly from a web browser.

Spanning art, education, music and comedy, OfTheWorldTV is a home for the best independent media from around the globe. It includes seven broadcast style channels, and six on-demand film libraries, holding a total of more than 500 short films from around the world.



You can access the site at:

<http://viii.oftheworld.tv>

Author, Activist and Social Commentator, Richard Neville, has described OfTheWorld as: "out of this world, the face of the future, an insight into our past, a joy to behold."

OfTheWorld.TV is a source of some unusual, unconventional and often contentious content that may not suit all viewers, and the web site is not controlled or endorsed by Internode.

Access to OfTheWorld.tv is only unmetered for Internode broadband customers. However, if you have a generous or unlimited quota, don't let that deter you.

Even with a 512/128 broadband connection, OfTheWorld.TV may take a few minutes to load. However, bear with it and you will be rewarded with some very interesting content.

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New CPUs

The days of raw speed are long gone. When Intel designed what has become the last of the Pentium series of chips, they built in the theoretical ability to run at 10 GHz. In practice, 4 GHz, or thereabouts, proved to be the limit. After that, cooling and other problems arose. Both Intel and AMD moved away from trying to ramp up speed in old designs and instead are introducing multicore technology.

As AMD says on its website:

“As application performance demands grow, processor designers are facing the issue that it takes more power to drive more computing capability. More power means that dissipation levels also need to be managed. Add to this the demands of the industry for computers to become smaller – more servers in a rack, thin and lighter laptops, and smaller footprint for a desktop system. Multi-core processing will help address these computing challenges. This evolution in technology will allow for increased performance and higher productivity in smaller computers that can simultaneously run multiple complex applications and successfully complete more tasks in a shorter amount of time.”

Intel's Core Duo processors introduced earlier this year have already been acclaimed as offering speeds similar to those achieved by AMD's top-of-the-line processors, at much lower cost, putting Intel firmly back in the lead.

However, AMD have introduced dual core processors and plan multicore ones by next year. Unlike Intel, AMD processors are manufactured on 90 nm lines, whereas Intel have moved to 65 nm.

Multicore processors permit more efficient processing in two ways. Firstly, a task can be split up and more than one part of the overall task can be processed at the same time. This is called “multithreading” and will come into its own as more and more software is designed to run in multiple threads.

The second way to process more efficiently is to multitask, something we all do now, yet which our CPUs can only “pretend” to do. Instead of different tasks running at the same time, single core CPUs divide time up so that, although only one task is proceeding at any given time, several tasks can be juggled. With a multicore processor handling the multitasking, you will really be able to retouch graphics, while printing, downloading and running your antivirus software.

Meanwhile AMD have joined forces with graphics chip designer ATI and are planning even more ways to improve computer performance. Stay tuned!

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Microsoft patches

Microsoft releases new software patches on the second Tuesday of every month, and August's round of patches was the largest in history. Of the 23 patches Microsoft released on Aug 8, nine are rated "critical" and one is rated so critical that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security posted an announcement recommending that everyone immediately install the patch. See:

<http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=5789>

If you have Windows XP or 2000, you can download all 23 patches in one go by running Windows Update or Microsoft Update. In Internet Explorer, go to Tools\ Windows Update and then click the "Express" button.

If you have an older version of Windows, there are no new patches available for your operating system. On July 11th, 2006, Microsoft stopped supporting Windows 98, Windows 98 SE, and Windows ME. However, check out the article that Patrick Crispen of Tourbus wrote on how to protect your legacy Windows operating system from future attacks.

http://www.netsquirrel.com/articles/securing_win9x.html

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Browzar leaves no trace

“I must have been about 14 and was using my Mum’s work computer. For some reason I decided to check what was in her web history. It was mostly benign stuff until the middle where she had: divorce.com, divorce.net, Ask Jeeves, advice about divorce. Yes, I found out that my parents were going to get divorced before my Dad did.”

If you need to avoid that sort of scenario, then Browzar is for you. This browser is not comparing itself with other browsers in terms of extensibility or security. Instead it leaves no trails. There is no history, no cookies and no cache. Hence, the websites you visited are not recorded anywhere.

Other browsers like Firefox and IE record all the history, store the cookies and auto-complete forms. Although they do provide the option to turn these off, most users don't, or else forget to flush the cache. With Browzar there is no installation and no registration. Currently in beta and only available for Windows, it is free to download from <http://browzar.com>. Linux and Mac versions are planned.

While at the Browzar website, check out the other reasons to use it in the FAQ's “What is Browzar useful for?”. You may well find a use for it you hadn't thought of.

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Brush up your pix

Would-be artists in many cases face a steep learning curve, poverty and recognition only after death. If you would rather skip these tedious steps, then take a look at *Photo to Sketch (Standard)*.

Photo to Sketch is a simple freeware tool that transforms your image files into passable sketches. It will accept any JPG or BMP file. (If your photo is in some other format, use a graphics application such as *XnView* to convert it.)

With your photo displayed in the left pane of *Photo to Sketch*, you can then click **Automatic/Convert** to see a sketch version in the right pane. Manipulate the **Precision** and **Line** sliders and click **Convert** again.

When you have a sketch that pleases your eye, click **Freehand** and try **Brush**. Use the **Brush** slider to choose a size, say 4 initially, and paint over the sketch. As you do, you will see the underlying colour coming through giving an approximation of a watercolour. Click **Save** when you have something you like.

Photo to Sketch (Standard) is available from:

<http://www.thinkersoftware.com/photo-to-sketch/index2.htm>

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Software freedom day

Software Freedom Day is a global, grassroots effort to educate the public about the virtues and availability of Free and Open Source Software. This year it falls on 16 September 2006 and a local exhibition will be held in the Wesley Church Hall in Melville St, Hobart.

So far the displays are:

- OpenOfficeorg dedicated display
- Some cool XGL eye-candy
- Linux on low-end hardware (DSL running very nicely on a very old machine)
- A box running "that other OS" showcasing some F/LOSS
- A competition machine (woohoo win prizes!)
- Some cool games running on some machines for people to play on
- MythTV display
- A Distro/software machine for burning CDs
- A CD full of cool f/loss windows games for sale

Pop along and see what's on show. Also tune into ABC local radio from 10.00 a.m. Further details from: <http://www.softwarefreedomday.org/teams/oceania/au>

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