

# Keyboard & Mouse

Electronic Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.



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Singapore Airlines puts a Linux PC in every seat  
Get StarOffice free!  
Acer acquires Gateway and Packard Bell  
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Our cover: Artists impression of Singapore Airlines new Linux-PC-equipped seats.

# Thunderbird customisation

## Signatures

Do you put your phone number and other details at the foot of every email? Such a block of text is called a signature and email programs can generally add that information automatically. Thunderbird is no exception.

With Thunderbird you can have a signature for each of your email accounts and users (known as “identities”). For each signature, you can choose to have it in just plain text or in HTML. If your messages use bold, colours, embedded pictures and the like, then you are using HTML and could use an HTML signature to match. HTML signatures can specify fonts, colours, formatting, images, etc. Each signature is stored in a separate file on your computer, and any signature file can be used by more than one identity.

## Signature files

You can use Thunderbird or a word processor to create your signature files. As Thunderbird does not provide any special place to store signature files, you need to decide where you want to store them. A good place is in your profile folder.

For help in finding the profile folder in your version of Windows, visit <http://tinyurl.com/ywkobm>. Whilst you could

store the signatures somewhere else, storing them with the associated profile ensures that they are backed up when you back up your profile up.

To use a signature file, specify it in Account Settings as the signature for an identity. If you have more than one identity, then you must specify the signature file separately for each of them.

## *Plain text signatures*

You can use a plain text signature in plain text messages and also in HTML messages, but I suggest you use an HTML one in HTML messages for a neater result.

A plain text signature file does not support any special encoding, so it can only contain characters from your operating system's default character set (which might *not* be the default character set that you specify for messages in Thunderbird).

## *Notepad or Wordpad?*

To write a plain text signature for use with Thunderbird, start a text editor such as *Notepad*. Write the details you want to append to each email from that identity. Save and name the file with the extension *.txt*, for example: *peters\_sig.txt*.

If you use *Wordpad*, you will need to make sure that you choose to save the file in text format, rather than the default .doc format. Using *Notepad* instead, avoids the problem.

### *HTML signatures*

You can use an HTML signature in HTML messages and also in plain text messages, but, in a plain text message, the HTML is converted to plain text and some features might be lost if they cannot be represented in plain text. It is therefore better to use HTML signatures when you send HTML formatted messages and plain text when you send plain text messages. That way you know exactly how your signature will look on receipt.

To make an HTML signature, use StarOffice, NVu, an HTML editor, or even Thunderbird to write the signature. When you save it, make sure that you save it as HTML. The HTML signature file only needs to contain an HTML fragment, not a complete HTML document.

An HTML signature file uses your operating system's default character set (which might *not* be the default character set that you specify for messages in Thunderbird). You can encode special characters using HTML in the normal ways— for example, you can encode a euro currency symbol (€) as `&euro;` or as `&#8364.`

**Note:** Some word processors and HTML editors create

HTML documents containing a lot of unnecessary HTML code. You can use a plain text editor to check the file and remove the parts that you do not need.

### *Including an image in your signature*

To include an image in your signature, include the image in the message in the normal way.

If the image file is on your computer, then Thunderbird attaches the file in each message that you send, so that people who receive your message can see the image.

If the image is on a web server, then you can choose not to attach the file. However, in this case people who receive your message might not see the image if they choose to block remote images for privacy reasons.

If you create a signature file using some other program, ensure that the image tag contains the complete URL of the image file, not just the file name. Thunderbird requires a complete URL so that it can attach the image.

### *Extensions for multiple signatures*

Thunderbird is designed to allow one signature for each of your identities. Some extensions provide different ways to manage multiple signatures:

- If you want to have more than one signature per e-mail account or choose from a variety of signatures when composing mail, one option is to use the Signature Switch extension. It will allow you to easily select from multiple signatures in the Compose window by using a toolbar button or via the context menu (right-click).
- The Quicktext extension: adds a menu in the Compose window from which you can select your own pre-defined text to insert at the current cursor location. Moreover, the extension allows you include variables such as sender's/recipient's e-mail address, message subject, and date. See the Quicktext extension homepage for further information.
- The Signature extension: similar to but simpler than the Quicktext extension, the Signature extension lets you insert pre-defined text wherever the cursor is located in the message body. Inserts plain-text only and does not allow variables to be used.
- The Tagzilla extension: can be used to insert "taglines" or signatures in e-mail messages. Note that you must also install the JSLib extension before installing Tagzilla. See <http://tinyurl.com/2zsbwj> for a few comments on Tagzilla limitations with regard to e-mail signatures.

NB: For most users the Signature Switch will probably prove to be the most suitable choice.

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## Acer acquires Gateway

Back in 2004, Gateway (formerly Gateway 2000) purchased e-Machines from Californian investor, Lap Shun Hui. Hui sold e-Machines to help him mount a takeover of Packard Bell. Gateway/e-Machines went on to become the #3 supplier of PCs in the US market, while Packard Bell concentrated on its Chinese and European markets, only becoming #18 in US market share.

Now Acer of Taiwan has moved to acquire Gateway for \$USD710 million, and Gateway will use part of the proceeds to takeover Packard Bell. This will make Acer the global #3 in PC manufacturer, behind HP/Compaq and Dell.

The move by Acer and Gateway has put an end to plans by IBM PC owner, Lenovo, to acquire Packard Bell. Lenovo will now have to look for other avenues to increase its sales in Europe and the US.

Commentators expect that these moves will just about bring to an end the consolidation of PC manufacturers as they say that there are no other major brands to acquire. However, there is always the possibility of two of the majors merging as HP and Compaq did a while back. Stay tuned.



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## Singapore Airlines and Linux PCs

Unlike many other airlines, Singapore Airlines Ltd views in-flight service as a way to attract more passengers and to help it stand out from the competition; not as a cost centre where cutbacks can be made to cut losses. Flying in economy class doesn't have to be a miserable experience, it believes and so, to make flying more enjoyable for its passengers, it is adding bigger screens, more in-flight movies and a PC, running Red Hat Inc.'s distribution of the Linux operating system, in every seat on its newest planes.

Singapore Airlines' in-flight entertainment system is called "KrisWorld" and offers on-demand movies, television shows, games and music. Now, the airline aims to raise the bar, rolling out a new version of KrisWorld that improves significantly on existing systems and hints at what passengers can expect to see on the Airbus S.A.S. A380 and The Boeing Co. 787 Dreamliner, when these aircraft enter service.

"[Video-on-demand and audio-on-demand have] become expected," said Eric Tong, senior manager of inflight entertainment product innovation at Singapore Airlines, during a recent interview. "Carriers have to push the boundaries of what's possible with these systems to stand out from the competition," he said.

The latest version of KrisWorld is based on Panasonic Avionics Corp.'s eX2 in-flight entertainment system and was jointly developed by the two companies. Each economy-class seat is fitted with a 10.6-inch LCD (liquid crystal display) screen that offers resolution of 1,280 pixels by 768 pixels, with larger screens in business and first class.

The system provides a huge amount of content for passengers to choose from: 100 movies, 150 television shows, 700 music CDs, 22 radio stations, and 65 games. Movies and television shows are refreshed on a monthly basis, meaning frequent fliers will always find fresh content. In addition, the system offers Berlitz language lessons, travel guides from Rough Guides, and live text news, among other choices.

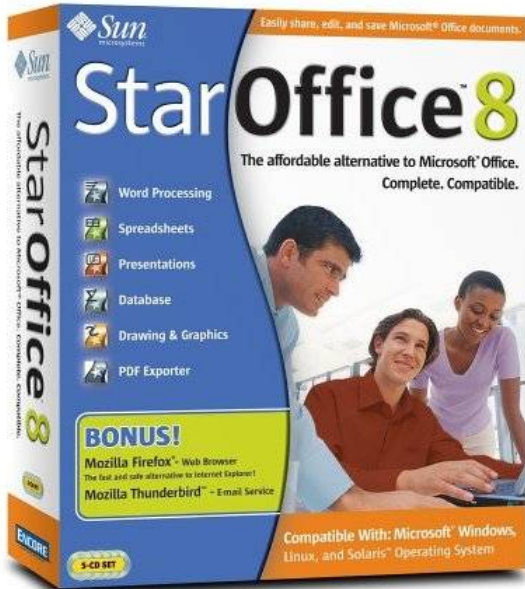
KrisWorld can also be used as a PC and includes Sun Microsystems Inc.'s StarOffice application suite, which offers a word processor, spreadsheet, and a presentation program. Every seat is fitted with a USB (Universal Serial Bus) port that lets passengers access documents carried on a thumb drive or portable hard disk enabling passengers to work without having to unpack their laptops.

Since the demise of the Boeing Connexion service, Internet is not available on Singapore Airlines, but the company is looking at how it could be provided in future.

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## StarOffice free from Google

On 15 August 2007, Google officially began distributing Sun's *StarOffice* as part of the Google Pack. Note: Not



*OpenOffice.org* as one might have expected, but the Sun customised version which it sells, with limited support, for \$USD69.95. The Google version is available only for Windows XP and Vista.

Various Microsoft spokesmen have tried to cast doubt on *StarOffice's* ability to match *Microsoft Office's* capabilities, but I have yet to find anything that *StarOffice Writer* can't do that *Word* can. If anything, I have found *Writer* to either do things *Word* doesn't, or to do them more easily. (This newsletter in its entirety is produced using *StarOffice*, as I find it quicker and easier than using, say, *MS Publisher*.)

*StarOffice's Calc* appears to be a reasonable alternative to *Excel* for most spreadsheet users and *Impress*, although inferior to *PowerPoint*, is sufficient for most purposes. The database in *StarOffice* differs from that in *OpenOffice.org* and can use data from most other databases. *StarOffice* comes with a very good drawing program and can also produce HTML for websites.

Interoperability filters for Microsoft's latest document formats are being developed by both Sun and Microsoft, to allow interchange of *Office 2007* documents between *Microsoft Office* and *StarOffice*.

The one area where *Microsoft Office* differs significantly is in

its new interface. The interface is designed to make the many features of modern *Office* software easier to find, and Microsoft's demonstration of it can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/yjsxwo>. Judging by Microsoft's efforts to get people to try *Office 2007* – with trial copies being offered on the magazine discs of most major magazines – *Office 2007* adoption may not have been all that Microsoft had hoped.

With Google's support, *StarOffice* gains a massive credibility boost and, at the same time, Google's *Google Pack* becomes a much more comprehensive software package. Duncan Riley of *Tech Crunch* even goes so far as to suggest that within twelve months *StarOffice* will have a bigger user base than *OpenOffice* – such is the power of Google marketing.

Now that you have *StarOffice* free of charge, I would suggest to *OpenOffice.org 2.2* users make the switch. *StarOffice* includes more clipart, fonts and templates, as well as a better database and is definitely the more desirable product.

At the time of writing there was no word from Google whether future editions of *StarOffice* would sync with *Google Docs and Spreadsheets*.

<http://tinyurl.com/24uw4u>

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## Printing without a print menu

Recently IslandState and Connect Financial credit unions merged and over the evening of 31 August and during the day on 1 September, a merged website was put in place. When I visited this new website to make a payment I found that the “printable version” window for my receipt had neither a File/Print option, nor a print button. How then was I going to print my receipt?

The answer, I found, was to resort to a “hotkey” combination which has been part of Windows since the early days. I clicked on the receipt window to make sure it was the one that was selected and then pressed CTRL + P. Instantly the computer responded by beginning the printing process, pausing for me to select which printer I wanted and to check its settings.

The fact that I wasn't using Windows, but Linux, and Firefox, not Internet Explorer, made no difference. This shortcut (or hotkey) has long become a de facto standard and works with many applications and across different operating systems.

Have a look beside Print on the File menu of your favourite applications. Chances are you'll see “CTRL + P” or even “Control + P”, just waiting for you to use them.

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## Eudora (Penelope) beta released

A beta version of the new open-source Eudora is now available for download, three months after Qualcomm stopped selling the e-mail client commercially.

Eudora, developed by Steve Dorner in 1988 as a part of his studies at the University of Illinois was the first graphical email client. Qualcomm acquired Eudora in 1991, and during the next 8 years the e-mail client enjoyed a strong following among its loyal user base, although, at times, it seemed Qualcomm weren't sure what they wanted to do with it.

As a result, it gradually lost out to the creeping domination of Microsoft's Outlook Express and Outlook. In October 2006 Qualcomm donated Eudora to the open-source community, namely the Mozilla Foundation.

Qualcomm ceased selling Eudora commercially on May 1 and a beta of the new version and a related extension called "Penelope", were announced earlier this month.

A fully-tested version is probably still some months away. However, if you use Eudora and would like to test the beta, download it from:

<http://tinyurl.com/3368ga>

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## Microsoft stumbles at ISO hurdle

Not only has Microsoft developed its own XML-based document format instead of adopting ODF, but the company has sought ISO approval for its OOXML format. However, it failed to get the necessary votes at the round of voting conducted earlier this month.

Critics of OOXML say that it contains so many Microsoft specific features that only Microsoft could fully utilise it. Others ask why two standards are necessary.

Several of the countries that voted against the proposal to make OOXML an ISO standard did so with reservations, which gives Microsoft the opportunity to address their concerns before the next vote, due early next year.

Microsoft's new Office 2007 suite is among the company's OOXML-based offerings and its wide-spread adoption by business will make OOXML a de facto standard even without ISO endorsement. However, failure to win ISO approval could lock out Microsoft products that use the format from lucrative government markets, given that governments around the world are increasingly turning toward software that is open and standards based.

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## And loses EU appeal

The second highest European Court, based in Luxembourg, recently backed a European Commission ruling that Microsoft, the world's largest software maker, illegally abused its market power to crush competitors.

The Court said that its ruling could lead to a significant drop in Microsoft's 95% market share, causing shares in the US software maker to fall 2.2% in pre-market trading.

While Microsoft can still appeal the ruling the company can only do so points of law and not of fact.

The court said Microsoft was unjustified in tying new applications to its Windows operating system in a way that squeezed out rivals and harmed consumer choice.

The ruling also gives the Competition Commission a green light to pursue other antitrust cases and complaints involving Intel, Qualcomm and Rambus, and to issue draft new antitrust guidelines that were put on ice pending the ruling.

The judges ordered Microsoft to pay the lion's share of the costs of the Commission and of business rivals.

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## Avoiding dementia

*Dementia (from Latin de- "apart, away" + mens (genitive mentis) "mind") is the progressive decline in cognitive function due to damage or disease in the brain beyond what might be expected from normal aging. Particularly affected areas may be memory, attention, language, and problem solving – Wikipedia entry.*

Recent research has shown that some simple measures can prevent or postpone the onset of dementia. A Canadian expert in Hobart recently suggested the following:

- Regular aerobic exercise – e.g. a *brisk* walk for 30 minutes three days per week.
- Load bearing exercise – e.g. weight lifting for 20 minutes twice a week
- Learning something new – Although using a computer, solving crosswords, or doing Sudoku puzzles regularly is helpful, it is the challenge of tackling something **new** that is the **most** helpful.

While there are many new things that you can tackle, you do not need to look further than your computer to find one with sufficient stimulus to help prevent dementia.

Add a new program and learn what it does. Having learnt

about it, write an article explaining how to get started with the program.

You will find such activities doubly rewarding; not only will you be exercising your brain in a way that research shows will reduce the likelihood of dementia, but you will have the satisfaction of helping your fellow computer users through this newsletter, which is in dire need of people who will contribute articles.

Some suggestions:

- Install StarOffice from the Google Pack and study how Writer styles can make jobs like newsletters and brochures easier and at the same time give them a consistent look
- Find out what graphic styles do
- Use the Calc spreadsheet to chart your car's fuel economy and total cost of ownership
- Evaluate the new Eudora.
- Add a game to your computer, learn to play it, and then review it
- Add Linux to your computer and compare it to Windows

Remember the key is do something new and challenging. It is the stimulus from that, which is believed to prevent dementia.

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## IBM backs OpenOffice and ODF

IBM has announced that it will join the OpenOffice.org community and contribute code and resources. To this end, it has assigned 35 developers from its Chinese development centre to work exclusively on OpenOffice.org. Over time they will contribute code to enhance the usability and accessibility features, as well as the overall quality of OpenOffice.org.

IBM has been a major supporter of the Open Document Format (ODF) which originated at OpenOffice.org, but hadn't yet taken the plunge to help out with the development, although it had been working on closer integration with its Lotus Notes.

According to a Press FAQ that accompanied the press release, IBM's move to help develop OpenOffice.org is a natural extension of their informal collaboration with the project. "IBM has seen that the marketplace is beginning to demand ODF in a big way. Approximately 100 million people use the product, and governments everywhere are turning to it. A point has been reached in the popularity of both ODF and OpenOffice.org where IBM and OpenOffice.org believe more can be accomplished by collaborating," the release said.

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## Excel 2007 can't multiply

Over recent years we have come to rely increasingly on “button pushing” – be it on calculators or computers – to perform calculations for us. Still, it sometimes pays to compute a mental approximation just to be sure that the answer is realistic as the following story illustrates.

*PC Magazine* reported this month that Excel 2007 thinks  $850*77.1$  is 100,000 instead of 65,535. After some further testing they came up with 10,000 results all involving calculations that included 65,535.

65,535 is the largest 16-bit binary number, written in binary as the string 111111111111111. In hexadecimal it is written FFFF. Just why this particular number should cause errors in Excel 2007 is unclear, but Microsoft are aware of the problem and will, no doubt, issue a patch to fix it.

In the meantime, beware of any Excel 2007 calculations that involve this particular number.

For the full post from which this item comes, please see:

<http://tinyurl.com/2ksb9o>.

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## OEM XP sales extended

Microsoft has announced that it is extending OEM sales of Windows XP from January 2008 to 30 June 2008. That means that system builders, who have customers wanting XP rather than Vista, can supply the older version of Windows until that date.

The company, however, admits that unlike most of its older operating system, XP was given a shorter period to retire after the introduction of its successor. Mike Nash, a Microsoft corporate vice president told Reuters that “We were a little ambitious to think that we would need to make Windows XP available for only a year after the release of Windows Vista.”

Some customers do not want to buy Vista at this stage. Their reasons are basically due to compatibility issues with their existing software programs and devices. Others believe that they would have to upgrade their hardware to run Vista.

While an SP1 patch for Vista has been rumoured for some weeks, there is no confirmation of its existence and users are advised to continue installing the monthly patches issued by Microsoft.

<http://tinyurl.com/24dy67>

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## Update and repair problems

According to reports doing the rounds on the Internet, Windows Updates (WU) issued during July and August prevent users from reinstalling updates after using the repair facility on installation CDs. The problem does not affect the restore CDs provided with some proprietary brands of computer.

As *Windows Secrets* explains in a recent issue:

*The repair option, which is typically employed when XP for some reason becomes unbootable, rolls many aspects of XP back to a pristine state. It wipes out many updates and patches and sets Internet Explorer back to the version that originally shipped with the operating system.*

*Normally, users who repair XP can easily download and install the latest patches, using the Automatic Updates control panel or navigating directly to Microsoft's Windows Update site.*

*However, after using the repair option from an XP CD-ROM, Windows Update now downloads and installs the new 7.0.600.381 executable files. Some WU executables aren't registered with the operating system, preventing Windows Update from working as intended. This, in turn, prevents*

*Microsoft's 80 latest patches from installing — even if the patches successfully downloaded to the PC.*

If you have struck this particular problem, you need to pop across to the *Windows Secrets* website and read the rest of the article.

<http://tinyurl.com/3cahwn>

Another problem with Windows Updates that has been reported by *Windows Secrets* and others is that, even if you have opted not to install updates without first giving the OK, some files have been installed nonetheless.

This is not the behaviour you would have expected, especially if you try to keep your system free of changes. To counter this silent installation, you need to read the following:

<http://tinyurl.com/yo22r6>

Finally, to check whether your system has been correctly patched and to learn the consequences of not doing so, this recent article in *Windows Secrets* will provide you with all you need to do.

<http://tinyurl.com/2h8yjf>

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## The best information

Here's a list of valuable websites. If you have a Windows problem (and who doesn't!), check out these sites for an answer:

### Windows XP

#### *Kelly's Korner*

Kelly Theriot, a Microsoft-MVP (Most Valuable Professional) has put together a website entitled *Troubleshooting Windows XP*. The information on the site is arranged in an easily accessible form. Many of the articles are by other authors and much of it references *Microsoft's Knowledge Base*, making this an ideal starting point to find that much needed answer. (Thanks to Neil Hutton for suggesting that one.)

<http://tinyurl.com/o8lp>

#### *MS KnowledgeBase*

And talking of *Microsoft's Knowledge Base*, if you want to jump right into Advanced XP Troubleshooting, try this page:

<http://tinyurl.com/yf7ne8>

### *Shutting down and Rebooting Problems*

If your problems are to do with shutting down or restarting XP, then this is the site for you:

<http://tinyurl.com/haebs>

### All versions

#### *Malektips.com*

For more than 3,150 assorted Windows tips, Malek's site is one that is worth looking at. It covers all versions of Windows from 98 on:

<http://malektips.com>

#### *Annoyances.org*

Another site which was devoted to all versions from 98 on: Annoyances.org seems to concentrate principally on the latest versions, but is still worth a look.

<http://www.annoyances.org>

### Your turn

*If you know of a site that belongs on this list, send it in now. It is your contributions during the Editor's illness that will keep this newsletter going. Don't let you fellow members down. Contribute now!*

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