

# Keyboard & Mouse

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

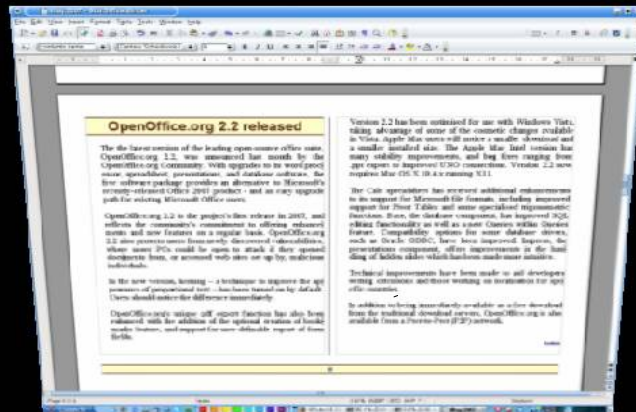
Function keys

Shrinking XP

Printing envelopes with OpenOffice.org

10 dumb things to do with your computer

... and more!



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**Our cover:** Pressing F12 in Xandros 4 displays the virtual desktops. See "Function Keys".

## Function keys

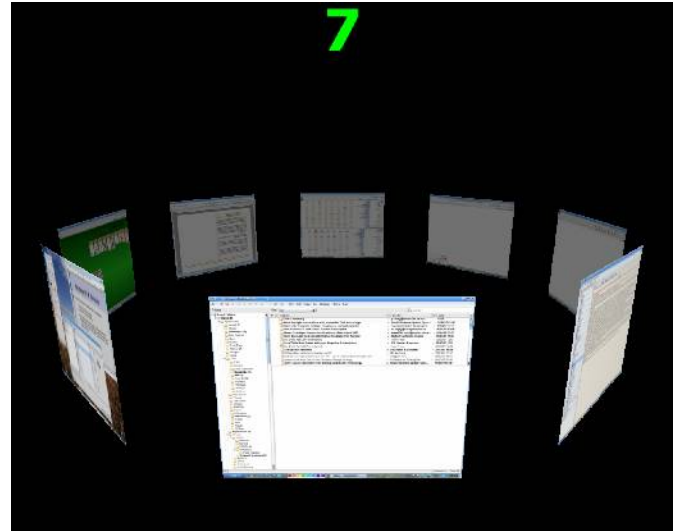
If you are new to computers you will have wondered what are those mysterious keys labelled F1 – F12 along the top of your keyboard. You may have even pressed one or two of them and, perhaps, found that that didn't cause anything to happen.

The 'F' keys are known as 'Function keys' and do not have dedicated uses. Instead they can be used by the programmer, who wrote the application you are using, in any way that he/she sees fit. In some cases you can program them yourself to run a sequence of keystrokes (called a 'macro') or to start a particular program.

Conventionally, only one of the keys has a defined use: F1 is widely used as the Help key.

Programmers can use the Function keys in conjunction with Shift, CTRL, Alt or a combination of those keys and you will need to consult the program's manual or Help to find what the keys have been used for.

Right now I am using StarOffice running under Xandros Linux. If I press F1, I get StarOffice Help. If I press F7 I run the spellchecker. If I press F12, Xandros intervenes and displays my eight virtual desktops (see *Fig. 1*) and I can then rotate through them with the mouse or the arrow keys.



*Fig. 1: Up to 20 Xandros 4 virtual desktops can be rotated after pressing F12*

Other StarOffice shortcut (function) keys are shown in the chart on the next page. As you will see from the chart, F12 should turn numbering on, but as mentioned, Xandros overrides it.

If you like shortcut keys, chances are that the function keys have been used to provide some shortcuts in the program you are using right now. Try and find what they do.

Shortcut keys	Effect
F2	Formula Bar
Ctrl+F2	Insert Fields
F3	Complete AutoText
Ctrl+F3	Edit AutoText
F4	Open Data Source View
Shift+F4	Select next frame
F5	Navigator on/off
Ctrl+Shift+F5	Navigator on, go to page number
F7	Spellcheck
Ctrl+F7	Thesaurus
F8	Extension mode
Ctrl+F8	Field shadings on / off
Shift+F8	Additional Selection
F9	Update fields
Ctrl+F9	Show fields
Shift+F9	Calculate Table
Ctrl+Shift+F9	Update Input Fields and Input Lists
Ctrl+F10	Nonprinting Characters on/off
F11	Styles and Formatting window on/off
Shift+F11	Create Style
Ctrl+Shift+F11	Update Style
F12	Numbering on
Ctrl+F12	Insert or edit Table
Shift+F12	Bullets on
Ctrl+Shift+F12	Numbering / Bullets off

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## Printing envelopes with Writer

The first thing you need is a template. You can download templates for DL and C6 envelopes from our website. You need to place them in the My Templates folder in OpenOffice.org. If you are not sure where that is, go to Tools/Options/General and click on Paths. You will then see exactly which folder is being used. Use Windows Explorer, My Computer, or PowerDesk to open that folder and move the templates into it.

The templates are not designed for mail merging, but can be easily converted by substituting the mail merge fields for the text that appears in them. Their layout has been designed to comply with Australia Post recommendations with regard to the address zone, stamp zone, service zone etc. These recommendations are designed to suit the machines that sort most mail these days and are detailed on the Australia Post website:

<http://geobay.com/b05bc3>

The next task is to work out which way your printer requires the envelopes to be inserted. Some printers will happily feed and print envelopes in landscape format, others prefer them to be fed end on (and may even have a slot for DL envelopes to be so inserted).

Cut some strips of paper the size of the envelopes you wish to use. Draw a “stamp” in the top righthand corner and try printing the unaltered template on to the paper strips. Once you have determined which way to insert your envelopes, write it down. The following article will help you determine which way to insert envelopes into your printer.

<http://geobay.com/f64568>

To address and print an envelope, click on File/New and choose Templates and Documents. Choose the envelope template for the size envelope you are going to use and OpenOffice.org will load an untitled page formatted in accordance with that template.

At this point you can amend the template. Type your return address into the top lefthand corner. Point to Templates on the File menu and click Save. Either overwrite the template you downloaded from our website, or give your modified one a new name. Close the envelope document and use File/New to create another untitled document from your modified template.

Type in the addressee's details and print the result on one of your pieces of paper. Once you have everything working well, print on to an envelope.

If you have a lot of envelopes to address, you may want to

use Mail Merge. To do this, you need to set up a data source. This can be a spreadsheet (Calc) or it could be an address book that you have registered as a mail merge data source. For help with registering an address book as the data source, consult Help (or press F1).

Mail merging can also be used to customise the letters that you are posting, but the process is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice to say, that once you have your database set up, you insert fields in the document where information from the database is to be inserted, display and/or print a test result to check that you have it right, and the printer does the rest. For more on mail merging:

<http://geobay.com/4645a2>

<http://geobay.com/8bae53>

For more information on printing envelopes with OpenOffice.org, please go to:

<http://geobay.com/458b78>

Getting set up to print envelopes can be a little tricky, but once you have worked out how your printer handles the task and have templates for the envelope sizes that you use, it should be quite easy to do. If it isn't, go back and re-read the references given as links above and consult Help.

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## OpenOffice.org 2.2 released

The the latest version of the leading open-source office suite, OpenOffice.org 2.2, was announced last month by the OpenOffice.org Community. With upgrades to its word processor, spreadsheet, presentations, and database software, the free software package provides an alternative to Microsoft's recently-released Office 2007 product - and an easy upgrade path for existing Microsoft Office users.

OpenOffice.org 2.2 is the project's first release in 2007, and reflects the community's commitment to offering enhancements and new features on a regular basis. OpenOffice.org 2.2 also protects users from newly discovered vulnerabilities, where users' PCs could be open to attack if they opened documents from, or accessed web sites set up by, malicious individuals.

In the new version, kerning – a technique to improve the appearance of proportional text – has been turned on by default. Users should notice the difference immediately.

OpenOffice.org's unique pdf export function has also been enhanced with the addition of the optional creation of bookmarks feature, and support for user-definable export of form fields.

Version 2.2 has been optimised for use with Windows Vista, taking advantage of some of the cosmetic changes available in Vista. Apple Mac users will notice a smaller download and a smaller installed size. The Apple Mac Intel version has many stability improvements, and bug fixes ranging from .ppt export to improved UNO connections. Version 2.2 now requires Mac OS X 10.4.x running X11.

The Calc spreadsheet has received additional enhancements to its support for Microsoft file formats, including improved support for Pivot Tables and some specialised trigonometric functions. Base, the database component, has improved SQL editing functionality as well as a new Queries within Queries feature. Compatibility options for some database drivers, such as Oracle ODBC, have been improved. Impress, the presentations component, offers improvements in the handling of hidden slides which has been made more intuitive.

Technical improvements have been made to aid developers writing extensions and those working on localisation for specific countries.

In addition to being immediately available as a free download from the traditional download servers, OpenOffice.org is also available from a Peer-to-Peer (P2P) network. For that you will need BitTorrent, Azureus, BitTornado, BitComet or a similar torrent client.

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## Thunderbird 2 released

Mozilla recently released an updated version of Thunderbird – version 2. By the time you read this, it will have been out for two or three weeks, so any early bugs should have surfaced. If not, you may care to wait until 2.0.0.1 or later is available. However, my early tests have not shown any problems in the Linux version. Claimed improvements are detailed below. Just click on any of the links for more info:

### [Keep Your Vital Information Organized](#)

*Thunderbird 2 features many new enhancements to help you better manage your unruly inbox, and stay informed. Thunderbird 2 scales to the most sophisticated organizational needs while making it easy to find what you need.*

### [Secure and Protect Your Mail](#)

*Thunderbird continues to lead the way in online security, and now includes active protection from online scams to keep you safer.*

### [Get your mail, your way](#)

*Choose from hundreds of useful add-ons that enhance Thunderbird. It's easy to personalize Thunderbird to make it your own.*

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## Shrinking XP

Windows XP tries to be all things to all people. If you don't connect to the Internet, run a network, or play card games, say, there are a lot of components installed by default that you don't need. But what can you do about it?

Recently, I came across a cut-down version of XP which had been named TinyXP. Also on the CD were a number of cut-down applications under the title AppzXP. The whole thing was highly illegal, but showed what could be done if unneeded components were left out.

A more legal way of tailoring XP to your requirements is to use XPLite Professional. You do a fresh install of Windows XP and then run XPLite. This brings up a simple interface where you can choose which components you wish to keep installed of the about 100 that XPLite presents you with. XPLite Professional also allows you to leave something out and then choose to reinstall it – a useful repair technique.

There is a free trial version that, while limited, shows what the Professional version offers for \$USD39.95 (less a 10% discount for mail and fax purchases in Australia).

<http://geobay.com/ec7fb9>

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## Windows eXperiences

### Drop shadows missing

The other day the drop shadows under the icons on my XP desktop disappeared and were replaced with a solid area of colour, which left me wondering why and what I could do about it. A quick Google search came up with the answer. The drop shadows do not show when you lock the items on the desktop from **Display Properties/Desktop Items** tab. Click on **Desktop** and then the **Web** tab and you'll find it. Untick the lock and click **OK**.

If this doesn't immediately restore the drop shadows, go to **Control Panel/System** and click on the **Advanced** tab. You'll find the visual settings under **Performance**. (And you thought they would be in the Display Properties, didn't you?)

Click on **Settings**, scroll down to **Use drop shadows for icon labels on desktop**, and tick the box beside it. Click **OK** to close the **Advanced** dialog box and then click **OK** to close the **System** dialog box.

### Mscconfig not Safe Mode

You are often advised to disable antivirus and other software before carrying out an installation of new software. One way

to do this is to go into **Safe Mode** by pressing **F8** as XP is booting up. However, my printer software won't install in **Safe Mode** because it requires a minimum screen resolution of 800 x 600 dpi. To get around this I used **MSCONFIG**, instead of **Safe Mode**.

If you are required to disable your antivirus when installing software, first make sure that you are disconnected from your modem, or turn the modem off. If you on a network, disconnect from it, too. This prevents any viruses from spreading to your computer from online sources. As a further precaution, you should also scan the installation disks or files.

Using **RUN** on the **START** menu, type in *msconfig* and press **ENTER**. In the configuration utility, click on the **Startup** tab and note what applications are being started from **Startup**. Untick them. Click on the **Services** tab, click on **Hide Microsoft Services**, note what services are left ticked and untick them. Click **OK**. Reboot the computer and proceed to install your software. Reverse the unticking process, reboot the computer and you're done.

The reason this works when **Safe Mode** doesn't, is because most drivers are not loaded when you use **Safe Mode**, but are when you use **MSCONFIG** in the manner described, as you are only stopping applications from loading and services from starting, not stopping drivers.

## Blue screen can prove helpful

Nearly all Windows users have met them, those blue screens filled with technical gibberish. All that many of us can decipher from them is that Windows has crashed, but sometimes they can help you find the culprit.

Recently, my laptop took to throwing up a blue screen announcing that Windows XP had been shut down to prevent damage to the system. It went on to tell me that, if this was the first time I had seen this particular screen, to reboot the computer (in the hope that that would resolve the problem). It didn't.

Reading down the screen I found that Windows XP was, for some reason, objecting to **ar5211.sys**. Armed with that information I went to my desktop computer and did a Google search for **ar5211.sys** and found that it was a common problem with Atheros wireless chipsetted devices. Following some of the links that Google provided, I came to the following advice, which could solve the problem.

<http://geobay.com/eab48b>

However, as the only Atheros chipsetted device I have is a PCMCIA wireless card, I removed it and relied on the (slower) built-in Broadcom wireless link instead. Problem solved.

The so-called “Blue Screen of Death” is an error screen displayed by Microsoft Windows when it encounters a system error from which it cannot recover. Blue screens can be caused by poorly-written device drivers, faulty memory, a corrupt Registry, or incompatible DLLs. For more info:

<http://geobay.com/426875>

Even though you may not understand all the information provided by the blue screen, read it carefully and look for a mention of particular **.sys** or **.dll** files. Try replacing these with fresh installs of the latest version.

Faulty memory may only be loose, be in a faulty or dirty socket, or have tarnished contacts. Working on an antistatic surface, try removing it, cleaning the contacts with a white eraser and/or placing it in a different slot. If that doesn't work, you may need to replace the memory module itself.

If the Registry gets a mention, try replacing it with your backup – if you can get the system running long enough to do that. You do have a backup, don't you? If you don't have a backup, the problem can be solved by installing Windows XP without wiping the drive and then reinstalling all your applications and reconfiguring them. Leave out the applications you don't use and you may well end up with a faster, more stable system.

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## 10 dumb things

Here from TechRepublic are ten things that the writer considers dumb. Of how many of them are you guilty?

### Plug into the wall without surge protection

Anything that interrupts the electrical circuit and then restarts it can cause a surge. This is particularly true of appliances that use large amounts of current. Additionally there is the possibility of lightning strikes on the line, a tree branch touching the power line and earthing it, or even the surge that follows a power outage. If the surge is powerful enough, it can 'fry' the innards of your computer. Surge damage can be minimised or prevented by using a surge suppressor. The cheapest types, however, only deal with one surge and then need replacement (like a fuse).

### Surf the Internet without a firewall

A while back I installed Windows XP on a blank drive and hooked it up to my broadband provider intending to download and install the latest antivirus. I was called away and returned about half an hour later. In that short space of time the computer had been infected with five 'worms'. The risk is real and should not be ignored.

Firewalls are designed to prevent programs and hackers from

accessing your computer without permission. Good firewalls also prevent programs on your computer from accessing the Internet without your permission.

Some broadband modems and routers include a firewall. However, if you use your laptop to connect to the Internet without going through a router – either by wireless or plugging in at your hotel – you should use a software firewall that is loaded on to the computer.

Windows XP and Vista have firewalls included. Good third-party firewalls include Kerio and Zone Alarm, but you must make sure that your firewall, whatever it is, is configured properly and turned on.

### Neglect to run or update antivirus and antispyware

Deb Littlejohn Shinder, MCSE, MVP, who wrote the 10 dumb things article for TechRepublic, says that antivirus programs “can be a royal pain”. She says that they are always blocking something you want to use, have to be disabled when installing software, and need updating almost daily to remain effective. But, she says, “you can’t afford to go without virus protection”.

A couple of years ago, I put a new drive in a computer, installed Windows XP and hooked it up to the Internet. Then I was called away and returned about half an hour later. Next day my Internet Service Provider advised me that judging by

the “unusual activity” shown in their logs, I probably had contracted Sasser worm and they went on to describe how to get rid of it. Meantime, I had cleaned up five worms contracted in that short space of time. According to the experts, an unprotected computer running Windows will, on average, be infected in 20 minutes and my experience is consistent with that.

Spyware is another growing menace. These are programs which install themselves on your computer (often without your knowledge) and “phone home” whenever you are on the Internet, reporting information on your system to the author or vendor of the program. Many antivirus programs still ignore spyware, so you need to run something like *Spybot – Search and Destroy*.

### **Install and uninstall lots of programs, especially betas**

If you like to be on the cutting edge, or you review programs so that you can recommend them (or otherwise) to your friends, you will inevitably install and uninstall software frequently. Some users even install pirated software (warez) or programs they have “borrowed” from a friend.

The more programs you install, especially from dubious sources, the more likely you are to install malicious code or programs that are so poorly written that they clash with other programs you use, or just crash your computer.

Remember, too, that 'beta' is a four-letter word. Unless you intend to test the software and report problems, most beta programs should not be installed on your computer. Never depend on them, even if you do install them and, preferably, don't use them on your main computer.

Deb warns that “Even if you install only licensed, final-release commercial software, too many installations and uninstalls can gunk up the registry.” It is an unfortunate fact of life that on many occasions when you uninstall software, registry entries are left behind and other remnants may also be left that can, over time, slow your computer.

To get the best performance and greatest reliability out of your computer, install only the programs you really need and try to keep uninstalls to a minimum.

### **Keep disks full and fragmented**

Another consequence of installing and uninstalling software is that your hard disk becomes “fragmented”. Disk fragmentation occurs because of the way data is arranged on the disk. On a new, or freshly formatted, disk data is arranged in a contiguous layout that allows it to be read without the drive head having to wait for the platter to spin around or switch from track to track gathering a little here and a little there.

The sections of data are called “clusters”. If you delete a program that occupies, say, six clusters and replace it with one

that takes, say, nine clusters, the drive will use the six deleted clusters and then place the remainder elsewhere on the drive. This is called “fragmentation” and gets worse as more deletions and replacements occur. As the drive becomes both full and fragmented, the drive head will have to travel further to gather the required data, making the process slower.

Another problem with a full drive is a lack of work space. Many programs create temporary files – Internet browsers do it to save having to download the same thing over and over again; word processors do it while you are working on a page; and Windows itself does it when it runs out of RAM to work with. If there is insufficient room to write these temporary files, or if the area where they are written is badly fragmented, work will slow to a crawl.

Windows comes with tools to tackle these problems. You will find them in Windows XP in the Accessories menu, under System Tools. You can also use CCleaner which is reviewed below.

If you have more than one partition, chances are the one with Windows on is where most applications are installed. It will probably contain your documents directory and Windows swap or paging file (also called “virtual memory”). The documents folder and the paging file can be relocated. To find out how, follow these two links:

<http://geobay.com/9b47f0>

<http://geobay.com/e5ab8e>

By locating them on an underused partition, you will free up space on the overused C:\ drive (assuming that is where they are before relocation).

### Open all attachments

Compulsives cannot help themselves. They are driven to open attachments and risk unleashing havoc. The rest of us have no excuse. If the attachment hasn't come from an expected source, or hasn't been screened by your antivirus software, you should not open it.

Software doesn't have to be directly executable – .exe, .com, .pif, .bat, .cmd and others – to cause problems. Macros can be embedded in Word documents to perform a series of steps, and scripts, written in JavaScript, Visual Basic, Flash etc. are run by other programs.

Even things that appear safe - .txt, .gif, .jpg etc. - may not be. The default setting of Windows hides the extension allowing file extensions to be “spoofed”. Why Microsoft chose to do that I have no idea, but I do recommend that you go into **My Computer**, click on **Tools**, choose **Folder Options**, click the **View** tab, and untick **Hide extensions for known file types** if you haven't already changed this ill-chosen default setting.

Deb adds: “*You should open attachments only when they're from trusted sources and only when you're expecting them. Even if the mail with the attachment appears to come from someone you trust, it's possible that someone spoofed their address or that their computer is infected with a virus that sent the attachment to you without their knowledge.*”

I would add that you also need to be running antivirus software that scans incoming attachments and it needs to be updated regularly.

### Click on everything

Opening attachments is not the only way you can get into trouble. One of the most common scams is to send out emails that tell you your bank requires you to update or confirm your account details. Other enticing messages are also used, but the common theme is that you are asked to click on a link in the email. Don't do it.

Let me repeat that. ***DON'T!!!!*** Never click on a link in an email where confidential details are involved. If you want to update your particulars with your bank, say, type into the address box of your browser, the address you normally use – not one contained in an email – and go from there. Banks do not send emails to their customers asking them to follow a link in the email. And, as I said, ***don't click on links in emails that purport to come from a financial institution.***

These emails are known as “phishing” and used to harvest bank and credit card particulars. If you can't install Internet Explorer 7, install Firefox and watch for warnings about scam links. But above all, use common sense and don't click on links you are not sure about.

Clicking on the wrong link, even on a legitimate website, can take you to sites promoting pornography, pirated software and music, or other illegal content. This could get you in trouble with the law, or, on a work computer, into trouble with your employer. Such sites can also infect your computer with viruses, trojans and worms. If you choose to visit them (which you shouldn't) at least be aware of the risks you are running.

### Share and share alike

In some circumstances, sharing files and printing over a network can pose a danger to your computer. If you don't need to share (e.g. You're not connected to a network.) then make sure that file and printer sharing are turned off. You can get instructions on how to do this from:

<http://geobay.com/9ac95d>

### Pick the wrong passwords

If you use your birthday, your dog's name, or something else that people can easily guess, you are exposing your computer

to possible attack or misuse.

If you use a simple dictionary word, hackers using a “dictionary attack” will be able to crack it easily. In choosing a password, therefore, you want one which is a mixture of letters and numbers with some letters in upper case (to make it even harder to break). Something like *IctX4fgs*. However, such a password still needs to be easy for you to recall, as writing it down defeats the efforts you have taken to make it secure. Choose an acronym, which is what the above example is (standing for “*I changed to Xandros 4 for greater security*”), and you should be able to remember it.

For further security, change your password regularly and don't use the same password for websites that require you to register.

### **Ignore the need for a backup plan**

“If you don't back it up, you will lose it.” You may be lucky and get away with it for months, or even years, but, inevitably, the day will come when you lose something you cannot replace, unless you have a backup. Someone may accidentally delete your precious photos, a hard drive may fail taking with it all that research you spent hours doing ... it's happened to me and just about every computer user I know. Don't chance it. Back it up.

These days your CD burning software may come with a

backup program, or you can download one from MajorGeeks. Or you could even use the one supplied as part of your Windows package.

<http://geobay.com/c1dce4>

If you have a USB flash drive, you can even get a portable backup utility that runs from the USB drive. Look for Portable Applications on MajorGeeks or just do a Google search for it.

Remember that the data is the most important thing – the documents you have written, the photos you have taken and downloaded onto the computer, the spreadsheets you have created to manage your investments, the database of your possessions listing them for insurance purposes etc. The operating system and the applications can be reinstalled from the original disks and then customised again. All it takes is time.

To avoid all that extra work, make a disk image of your disk and then make regular backups of your documents. Disk image software also can be downloaded from MajorGeeks. However, you will need a second drive or partition to use it. Once the image is made, you can transfer it to CDs or DVDs. If using CDs, make the image in CD size chunks, if your software allows it. If not, you will need a tool to split the archive into a number of files.

## My take

The foregoing is my take on what Deb wrote. I suggest you also read the original which you will find on CNET's TechRepublic.

<http://geobay.com/a5c6c2>

Deb Shinder is an experienced computer consultant, writer and trainer. She has written a number of books and many short articles. You will find more of them on TechRepublic and they are well worth reading.

I would add two more dumb things to the list. Firstly, not heeding the advice given and secondly, not sharing the information with every computer user you know.

As Deb says: *“Users find plenty of ways to run into trouble, from gunking up their system with shareware, to leaving it exposed to attackers, to forgetting about using surge protectors. Share this list with your own users so they can sidestep preventable problems like these.”*

Never forget that it is the people who don't know any better who spread viruses, gum up your email box and have you tearing your hair out. The more people you can teach good practices to, the fewer problems we will all have.

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## Clean out the c...

Over time Windows collects temporary and other unused files and can begin to slow. According to the makers: *“CCleaner (Crap Cleaner) is a **freeware** system optimization tool that removes these unused and temporary files from your system - allowing Windows to run faster, more efficiently and giving you more hard disk space. The best part is that it's fast! (normally taking less than a second to run) and Free. :)”*

Our speaker at the April meeting, John Thomas, has used CCleaner for some time and recommends that you add it to your system, if you don't already have such a utility.

It is, of course, no use just downloading and installing CCleaner; you need to run it regularly. The makers have provided an automatic way of doing this by having it run when Windows starts.

CCleaner removes temporary files, the contents of caches, chkdsk file fragments and memory dumps, empties the recycle bin, deletes cookies, removes update files that have been loaded (e.g. the .bin file of AVG updates), and clears log files. It also has an advanced section, which John and I suggest you leave alone (the default setting).

CCleaner can also check the integrity of the Windows



## Those short URLs

Throughout this newsletter you will find links to various articles that can be found on websites. These have all been shortened using a Firefox extension to 24-character geobay.com addresses. This makes them easier to cut and paste as they do not wrap around in the column and cannot therefore get broken.

Geobay.com are not the only providers of this service. The first one I heard of was Tiny URL. Tiny URL works like this:

If you have a long URL like this news release: [http://home.xandros.com/news/press\\_releases/Xandros\\_Linux\\_Server\\_First\\_to\\_Receive\\_LSB\\_Certification\\_by\\_Using\\_New\\_Automated\\_Testkit.html](http://home.xandros.com/news/press_releases/Xandros_Linux_Server_First_to_Receive_LSB_Certification_by_Using_New_Automated_Testkit.html), you may well wish to shorten it before putting it in an email to a friend.

- Open a new tab if you're in Firefox, Internet Explorer 7, or Opera, or a new window if you're in an earlier version of Internet Explorer, and navigate to Tiny URL.
- Simply copy and paste your link into the shorten URL field, press submit, and you're done! Your long URL now looks like this: <http://tinyurl.com/3y5eps>, and has been shortened from 135 characters to a mere 24 characters.

An interesting variation on these services is doiop.com. Instead of the generated URL being a random collection of letters and numerals, doiop.com asks you to give a keyword. It then generates a URL based on that keyword, making the result easier to remember. Unfortunately there are no Firefox extensions for doiop.com or tinyurl.com.

However there are five other URL shorteners that are available as Firefox extensions that you can use. Geobay.com is one of them. The advantage of using a Firefox extension is that you do not have to navigate to the URL shortener's website first, making the process quick and easy. Not all of the five are compatible with the latest version of Firefox and, if you install more than one, they may clash. One of them, tiny.pl, as the extension implies, is based in Poland and most of its website is in Polish. If you don't speak the language, you may find one of the other choices easier to use.

I chose geobay.com because it was the first such Firefox extension I came across and it works. Right clicking on a link you want to shorten and choosing **URL Shortener** opens the geobay.com website and gives you the shortened URL. Select it with your mouse, press **CTRL+C** to copy it and paste it into your newsletter or email using **CTRL+V**. Once the site is open, you can copy additional long links and insert them into the dialog box. Click **Make Shorter** and a 24 character geobay.com URL will be generated for you.

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## Your back door is open

Believe it, or not, your bank hasn't sent you an email to verify your details, you haven't won the Microsoft or Spanish lotteries, and that lady in Nigeria won't really pay you a fortune for allowing her to use your bank account.

You and your computer are, however, under constant attack. IT professionals in Hobart are currently having a problem with a nice little beastie called **w32.rbot-ghz**. This creates a “back door” that allows remote access to computers and it also searches for ways that it can spread across networks. For a more detailed description of what it does and how it does it, read this account from the Computer Associates website. It will give you a much better understanding of the lengths virus writers go to in their efforts to break into your machine.

<http://geobay.com/9a5789>

However, viruses, trojans and worms are only one part of the threat you face. Much more subtle are the messages that try to lure you into handing over confidential details or send money in the expectation of receiving a much large sum. Lately I have received at least four emails from “ANZ Bank” that Thunderbird rightly suspected were “scams”. They were not from the ANZ Bank; I don't even have an account with them. In the past I have received similar emails from a

variety of financial institutions and those were scams too. The following website is dedicated to fighting this type of “phishing” scam and will also tell you what to do, if you think you may have been caught by it.

<http://geobay.com/f3d0c8>

Another tactic used by scammers is to offer you a large sum of money – perhaps a lottery win, or a share of some ill-gotten gains. If you are taking in by the lottery win scam, you will soon find that you are asked for a “processing fee”. And, of course, no winnings are ever forthcoming. Here's what Microsoft has to say about the “Microsoft lottery”:

<http://geobay.com/ea99d5>

The other type of scam seeks to get money from you by two means. First the scammer asks for access to your bank account. If there is money in the account, say goodbye to it. The second method is to ask for money to pay legal expenses, bribes, or whatever, to make the transaction possible. Again, if you part with the money, you won't get it back, nor will you receive the promised riches. Go here for more information:

<http://geobay.com/f177bc>

Keep your defences up. Be alert. Be careful. Use common sense.

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