The Hobart Computer Users Group

The next meeting is on the 9th February, and thanks for coming along to support your club

As usual, our meeting will start with a 'problem solving' session where members can help others with advice and suggestions on their day to day problems. Many problems require research to present practical solutions and for this reason you should describe the problem including details of the computer, memory and operating system in an email to editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au Any solutions found will be included in the next newsletter or at the next meeting, particularly if a more visual explanation is needed.

Presidents Message.....

For those of you who had a hard time recognizing your new President from the my picture in last month's newsletter, you will be delighted to see me totally refreshed this month. It was true that when Nigel took the old picture I was on hard times. Fortunately, I managed to hide the 'barrow' in a dark lane.

As mentioned in last month's newsletter, on Tuesday, 8 December, Tristan Rogers, was going to be taking us through the intricacies of Facebook.   See Over page

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THE HOBART COMPUTER USERS CLUB AND IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS

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Unfortunately this was postponed until next year. It is still an area we would like to clarify as some members have expressed concern over safety issues with Facebook. This would be an ideal opportunity for those members to raise those concerns with an expert in such matters, so watch out for the February meeting.

The club's Christmas dinner at the Ming Court restaurant in Sandy Bay was most enjoyable. Good food, lovely venue and great company - what more could you want - and for me, how nice to be able to have a conversation around the table without having to shout over the noise made by other diners!

For those of you unable attend this last general meeting of the year, do enjoy the Christmas holiday period and stay safe.

See you all at our next meeting on **Tuesday, 9 February 2016**

News Bytes

Microsoft will let you keep your free 15GB of OneDrive storage, if you claim it

Mark Hachman | @markhachman Senior Editor, PCWorld

Microsoft has grudgingly agreed to let current OneDrive users keep their 15GB of free cloud storage and 15GB of free Camera Roll "bonus" storage, rather than dropping you to 5GB as previously stated, but only if you're aware of the offer and don't mind a bit of spam.

To take advantage of the offer, visit this Microsoft page. Microsoft representatives said the company does not have a supplementary explanatory blog post or statement to add at the present, but they did supply the webpage address, whose URL lists it as a "preview" at the moment.

You've already navigated the first hurdle: since users have to manually opt in to the offer, OneDrive users who are unaware of the deal won't be able to take advantage of it. And there's a small catch: by selecting the offer, you agree "to receive promotional emails from OneDrive," although Microsoft immediately says that you can unsubscribe as well—how to do that, however, isn't exactly clear.

It appears that unchecking the "promotional email" box, then clicking the "Keep your free storage" button also appears to work. In response to a question from PCWorld, a Microsoft representative said that the wording is being changed to "make it more clear".

Why this matters: Microsoft's reputation has climbed of late, as it's reached out and worked with customers on the development of Windows 10, Office, and even Solitaire. But the end of unlimited OneDrive storage was a real black eye for Microsoft's outreach efforts, and even the latest offer feels a bit half-hearted. If you want your friends to be able to take advantage of the offer, you'll need to share it with them.

The offer will try to sign you up for spam emails, however.

Microsoft launches insider program for... Solitaire?!

Mark Hachman | @markhachman Senior Editor, PCWorld

Did you know that Solitaire was originally conceived as a Windows tutorial?

Microsoft's Insider early-access program worked so well for Windows 10, that it brought it to Windows Mobile. And Office. And now, well, Solitaire. It's not quite the same thing, but Microsoft's Casual Games Inner Circle program will allow fans of Solitaire, Mahjong, Jigsaw, and others to sign up and help contribute to the development of the new games. In a blog post, Microsoft promised

that the new program will offer early access to "new builds," as well as the chance to influence new features and collaborate on the new games themselves.

As part of the new program, Microsoft is offering the chance to vote on what game the company makes next: Microsoft Casino Collection, Microsoft Chess, Microsoft Ultimate Word Games, Microsoft Bubble, or Microsoft Hearts. To do so, visit the Microsoft Web page and scroll down to the bottom, where you'll have a chance to vote for your top three choices. Voting will close Dec. 17, so you'll have to act fast.

"The earlier in the development process we can pinpoint what our players want and don't want, the higher chance we have to exceed their expectations," Kevin Lambert, design director for the Microsoft Casual Games team, and Derek Dutilly, lead producer, wrote in the blog post.

Why this matters: Microsoft has developed a reputation for actively seeking out the feedback of its user base, one that has helped to engender goodwill and a feeling that this iteration isn't necessarily the "M$" of old. It may seem a little silly to ask what longtime Solitaire fans think, but it's not hard to believe that the userbase who plays Microsoft's casual games are really engaged. No word yet on whether Microsoft will take its bizarre Solitaire-as-subscription model and apply it to other casual games, though.

Not surprisingly, Microsoft has launched a Casual Games blog, where anyone can check up and see what Microsoft's up to. Early posts introduced users to the team and the business.

One exception, however, is a fascinating blog post by Lambert which delves into the history of Solitaire, which launched with Windows 3.0. As Lambert explains, there was an ulterior motive for including it.

"How could Microsoft teach users who were primarily familiar with command-line input how to drag and drop files and folders?" Lambert wrote. "If you guessed Solitaire, you're absolutely correct! What better way to teach users how to use a mouse than through the friendly and familiar vehicle of dragging and dropping playing cards similar to how you would on a real table? It was brilliant. And judging by the number of users who are still dragging and dropping files today using a mouse, you could say the plan worked quite well."

Microsoft continued its strategy for Windows 8, building in similarities between the Windows 8 home screen and the Solitaire layout, and redesigning the app so that it was playable in "Snap View," even when resigned to a vertical column on one side of the screen. And for Windows 10, the team wanted to show off how the content will resize and "flow" across different form factors, much like the Continuum features in Windows 10. As the window shrinks, Solitaire will resize elements of the design to make it more accessible.

Text your friends some cash thanks to Google Wallet update

Derek Walter | @derekwalter Greenbot

While Android Pay replaced Wallet for retail payments, Wallet still has some life left as a possible PayPal competitor.

Android Pay may be the new darling of Google's commerce efforts, but Wallet isn't going away just yet.

Google announced you'll be able to use the newest update for the Wallet app on Android and iOS to send money to anyone with a valid U.S. phone number. The recipient will get a text message with a secure link, where they can then enter their debit card to claim the funds.

You could already send money to someone else via email, so this makes the process to settle up the bar tab that much easier. This update follows other recent improvements, like the ability to add a second bank account, a one-touch command to quickly lock the app, and improved autosuggestions based on your contact list.

Look for the update soon to hit Google Wallet in the App Store or Google Play.

Why this matters: With the rise of Android Pay, Google Wallet was recently repurposed for personal money transfers, much like PayPal or Venmo. All transactions are free, which makes Wallet an attractive option for craigslist purchases, splitting a restaurant bill, or paying fantasy league winnings.

For comprehensive coverage of the Android ecosystem, visit Greenbot.com.

'Get Windows 10' prompt adopts malware-like tactics to lure you into upgrading

Brad Chacos | @BradChacos Senior Editor, PCWorld

Do you want to download Windows 10 now or now? That's the question I found myself faced with when I opened an irregularly used Windows 8.1 laptop last night.

Once a small box begging for a reservation in the corner of the screen, the "Get Windows 10" pop-up prompt has morphed to consume the majority of the display, and worse, it only presents users with two clear actionable buttons: Upgrade now, and Start download, upgrade later. There's no immediate "No thanks" option whatsoever.

To be fair, you can still simply close the window using the X in the upper-right corner, and if you click through the itty-bitty inconspicuous chevron on the right-edge of the window there may be a "Nope" prompt somewhere further down the line. (I closed the prompt before exploring the auxiliary pages.) But having the only two large, clearly actionable options on a pop-up page both lead to a Windows 10 download feels inherently icky—like Microsoft's trying to trick less-savvy computer users into downloading the operating system with tactics often used by spammers and malicious websites.

The most annoying behavior has yet to come for people who have chosen to stay pat with Windows 7 or 8.1, however. In 2016, Microsoft plans to push the Windows 10 upgrade through as a Recommended update. If you use the default Windows Update option and automatically install all new Recommended updates (as most home users should), that means Windows 10 will start downloading to your PC once Microsoft flips that switch, rather than asking for your permission. Here's what we said at the time:

"It's a particularly raw deal for people who are on metered Internet connections. Windows 8.1 users aren't in danger there, because that OS won't automatically download updates over a metered connection. But Windows 7 users will have to turn off automatic downloads of all recommended updates in order to avoid downloading multiple gigabytes worth of operating system."

Fortunately, Microsoft says you'll "be clearly prompted to choose whether or not to continue" installing Windows 10 when that automatic download happens. Here's hoping there will be a clear "No" option displayed when that happens, at least. Windows 10 is Microsoft's greatest operating system yet, and a clear upgrade over Windows 8.1—I have it installed on most of my PCs—but strong-arming people with forced downloads and spammer-like no-choice wording on upgrade prompts won't win Microsoft any fans.

Sick of staring at the update prompt every time you boot your Windows 7 or Windows 8.1 PC? Here's how to stop the Windows 10 update offer from appearing—at least until the day it's pushed through as a Recommended update. Go to http://www.pcworld.com/article/2998967/windows/how-to-block-the-windows-10-upgrade.html

Windows 10's "Redstone" update promises a smarter, Office-savvy Cortana

Mark Hachman | @markhachman Senior Editor, PCWorld

Cortana could pop up in your Word document with helpful suggestions.

Windows 10's next major update, code-named "Redstone," promises a smarter Cortana that can work within Office applications.

According to a report from The Verge, Cortana will become a contextual tool that appears within documents. She will facilitate transitioning tasks across the various smartphone platforms. Microsoft will also beef up the Notifications center, the site reports.

Microsoft launched Windows 10 this past summer (and released Windows 10 Mobile recently as well) and continues to beef up the operating system. The Redstone update will reportedly take place next year.

If the Verge is correct, the continued enhancements to Cortana appear to be evolutionary, rather than revolutionary. Cortana, for example, provides contextual information when you highlight a word or phrase in Microsoft Edge. It's not clear how far Microsoft plans to go—although you have to imagine Microsoft has broad ambitions here—but the Cortana improvements could be as minimal as supplying that same sort of context in a Word or PowerPoint document. So far, that context is lacking from Microsoft Office.

Bing has also already launched a contextual search feature that tries to pull out the most interesting topics within a webpage. The Verge implies this will be more fully baked in a subsequent update to Windows 10 Mobile.

Why this matters: Microsoft's Cortana digital assistant is one of Windows 10's signature achievements, along with universal apps. Richness is a critical aspect of how Microsoft competes with Google Now and Apple's Siri—the more sophisticated the digital assistant, the more useful it is. It seems likely that Microsoft will continue to embed Cortana deeply into its core apps—Mail, Calendar, Maps, Edge, and others—with a notable gap on third-party apps like Facebook that it doesn't directly control.

Google Drive supercharges search capabilities across Android, iOS, and web

Derek Walter | @derekwalter Greenbot

You're now able to find files by file owner, email address, and take advantage of tools specific to each mobile platform.

A number of improvements to Google Drive's apps will make it dramatically easier to find all your stuff.

According to the Google Drive blog, you can now search by specific file type to better track down a PDF, document, video, or other content. This new capability is coming to Google Drive on Android, iOS, and the web.

In fact some of the newness is specifically for iOS users: you can search with Spotlight to find a file and use 3D Touch to launch the Drive search bar.

Additionally, Google says you can now find a file by searching for the owner's name or email address.

For all the new search-friendly features, be sure you have the latest version of Google Drive for Android or iOS.

The impact on you: Drive is one of those Google products that the company wants to make excellent on all the major platforms. That's why you see Google working just as hard to make Drive play nicely with iOS as it does with Android. It's excellent for those who use both platforms, making that cheap storage and Google Photos look even more appealing.

For comprehensive coverage of the Android ecosystem, visit Greenbot.com.

Google Photos keeps it simple with shared albums

Jared Newman | @onejarednewman Greenbot

With a shared link, other users can upload photos and add the album to their own collections. Google Photos is trying to streamline group photo albums by allowing anyone with a link to

contribute their own pictures.

With the latest Google Photos update for iOS, Android, and the web, users can create a shared album from any cluster of photos. This generates a link, which can be copied, pasted, or shared to other apps and social networks. Once someone else has that link, they can upload pictures and add the collection to their own Google Photos library.

Compared to other image sharing platforms, Google's is decidedly bare-bones. There's no way to comment or "like" an image, as you can with Facebook or iCloud Photo Sharing, and there are no options for face tagging beyond the automatic (and private) image recognition that Google Photos performs automatically.

But maybe that's the point. Compared to the Google+ version of photo storage that preceded it, Google Photos is not so much a social network as it is a private repository. If people are adding collaborative albums to their own personal photo libraries, the inclusion of likes and comments could make things messy.

To that end, it'd still be nice if Google included more controls over who has access to a given album. Although the owner of an album can toggle off sharing and collaboration at any time, users will still need to be careful about who gets access to shared links in the first place, as someone with the link could then share it with anyone.

Why this matters: Google is hardly the first company to tackle group photo albums, and collaboration is a long-standing feature of Google-owned Picasa. But the interesting thing about Google Photos is how it emphasizes ownership, letting collaborators easily save each others' photos to their personal libraries without having to download anything. It's an attempt to take some long-standing pain points out of cloud photo sharing, though the ability to freely copy and paste a link means it's not quite as private as it could be.

Microsoft website leak hints that Edge browser extensions are approaching release

Ian Paul | @ianpaul Contributor, PCWorld

We've all been waiting patiently for Microsoft to roll out extension support for Edge, because who wants to use a browser without personalized tweaks? Well, it looks like we might get a sneak peek at Edge extensions sooner rather than later, even though they won't officially show up until 2016.

Recently, Microsoft leaker h0x0d revealed a public Microsoft developer site showing a preview of Edge extensions with two sample downloads. The site was clearly published prematurely—a habit Microsoft has been getting into lately. (H0x0d also leaked a preview of some Microsoft Office apps back in May.)

It lacks final copy, such as a reference to which Windows 10 build Edge extensions are compatible with, as well as proper instructions on how developers can add extensions to Edge manually.

The site was taken down almost as soon as h0x0d publicized it—well before this writing. Nevertheless, the site remains in Google's cache. The images won't show up in Google's saved version, so we'll have to rely on h0x0d's screenshot (pictured in this post) to imagine what the original site looked like. If you don't recognize the domain (azurewebsites.net), this is a Microsoft-owned site for hosting Web apps built by Microsoft and users of the company's Azure cloud services.

SHA-1 cutoff could block millions of users from encrypted websites

Lucian Constantin IDG News Service

Tens of millions of users would be unable to access HTTPS websites that only use SHA-2-signed certificates, Facebook and Cloudflare have warned Millions of Web users could be left unable to access websites over the HTTPS protocol if those websites only use digital certificates signed with the SHA-2 hashing algorithm.

The warning comes from Facebook and CloudFlare as browser makers are considering an accelerated retirement of the older and increasingly vulnerable SHA-1 function.

The two companies have put mechanisms in place to serve SHA-1 certificates from their websites to old browsers and operating systems that don't support SHA-2, but are still widely used in some regions of the world.

These include Windows versions older than Windows XP with Service Pack 3, Android versions older than 2.3 (Gingerbread) and any applications that rely on OpenSSL 0.9.8 for encrypted communications.

SHA-1 (Secure Hash Algorithm 1) dates back to 1995 and became the default choice for signing SSL/TLS certificates after researchers proved in 2008 that certificates signed with the older MD5 function could be forged.

SHA-1 itself is also theoretically vulnerable, but the practicability of attacks against it is dependent on the computing power available. In 2012, renowned cryptographer Bruce Schneier estimated that a practical attack against SHA-1 would cost $700,000 using commercial cloud computing services by 2015 and $173,000 by 2018, putting it well within the reach of criminal syndicates.

As a result, the CA/Browser Forum, a group of certificate authorities and browser makers that sets guidelines for the issuance and use of digital certificates, decided that new SHA-1-signed certificates should not be issued after Jan. 1, 2016. Browser makers also decided that existing SHA-1 certificates will no longer be trusted in their software starting Jan. 1, 2017, even if they're technically set to expire after that date.

However, in October, a group of researchers presented a new way to break SHA-1 that is expected to lower the cost of attacks more quickly than previously anticipated. This has caused some browser makers like Mozilla and Microsoft to consider an even earlier cut-off date for SHA-1 certificates in their products.

To avoid users being unable to access their online properties, the owners of HTTPS websites that still use SHA-1 certificates—about a million of them including around a sixth of the top 140,000 by traffic—are under pressure to get new certificates signed with SHA-2.

The problem though, researchers from CloudFlare have pointed out, is that around 1.69 percent of users who currently access HTTPS-enabled services do so from browsers or operating systems that don't support SHA-2.

That might not seem much, percentage-wise, but it's actually over 37 million people and the majority of them are located in some of the "poorest, most repressive, and most war-torn countries in the world," CloudFlare's CEO Matthew Prince said Wednesday in a blog post.

According to CloudFlare's data, the top ten countries with the lowest support for SHA-2 are: China (6.08%), Cameroon (5.39%), Yemen (5.25%), Sudan (4.69%), Egypt (4.85%), Libya (4.83%), Ivory Coast (4.67%), Nepal (4.52%), Ghana (4.42%) and Nigeria (4.32%). The top 25 list includes additional countries from Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Central and South America.

"In other words, after December 31st most of the encrypted web will be cut off from the most vulnerable populations of Internet users who need encryption the most," the CloudFlare researchers said. "And, unfortunately, if we're going to bring the next 2 billion Internet users online, a lot tof them are going to be doing so on secondhand Android phones, so this problem isn't going away any time soon."

Facebook signaled the same problem, estimating that 3 to 7 percent of browsers currently in use don't support SHA-256, also known as SHA-2.

"A disproportionate number of those people reside in developing countries, and the likely outcome

in those counties will be a serious backslide in the deployment of HTTPS by governments, companies and NGOs that wish to reach their target populations," said Alex Stamos, Facebook's chief security officer, in a blog post Wednesday.

Facebook has solved this problem by building a mechanism that allows its certificates to be switched automatically based on the browser used by the visitor. In this way, modern browsers will be served a SHA-2 certificate and older ones will receive a certificate signed with SHA-1.

This allows browser vendors to continue with their plan to cut off support for SHA-1 certificates next year, while allowing websites to serve users with old devices that are unlikely to ever be updated.

Facebook has made the code for its certificate switching mechanism open source under a BSD license, as part of its larger Proxygen HTTP library project. This means that other developers can use it in their own projects and TLS proxies.

CloudFlare, which runs a content delivery network to optimize and protect its customers' websites, has enabled automatic SHA-1 fallback for its paying users. If they wish, business and enterprise customers can turn off the feature, and pro users will be able to do the same by the end of the year.

Facebook and CloudFlare are not the only companies taking such actions. Chinese Internet firm Alibaba uses SHA-1 fallback across many of its websites, which is not surprising givien the large number of users in China who access the Web from browsers that lack SHA-2 support.

Facebook and CloudFlare want to take it one step further. They're urging the CA/B Forum to create a new class of certificates called Legacy Validated (LV) certificates for which SHA-1 signatures would continue to be allowed.

Such certificates could be issued past the existing SHA-1 retirement date to organizations which can prove that they use modern certificates and protocols with modern browsers and fall back to LV certificates only for legacy browsers.

Gadgets

A must have this Christmas!!!!

The first affordable robot servant, Alpha2, is now in development

Lincoln Spector | @LincolnSpector Contributing Editor, TechHive

Don't set your expectations of its capabilities too high.

The fantasy of having your own benign, high-tech, vaguely humanoid robot servant goes back at least to Robby the Robot, the star of the 1956 science-fiction classic Forbidden Planet. Robby could cook, clean, carry several tons of cargo, and whip up anything from diamonds to booze from inside his body. He also followed Asimov's laws of robotics.

UBTECH Robotics is taking one small step toward a real Robby with their Alpha2 domestic robot, "the first ever designed for practical household service and companionship," according to the company. UBTECH promises that the Alpha2 will talk, respond to verbal instructions, take pictures and send them the Facebook, protect your home, and even tell bedtime stories to your children.

The Alpha2 won't be ready for the holidays. In fact, UBTECH has started a crowd-funding campaign on Indiegogo https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/alpha-2-the-first-humanoid-robot-for-the-family#/ to raise money for the Alpha2's development. The company hopes to deliver the robot in the second quarter of 2016, with an anticipated asking price between $1500 and $2000. Early backers, however, will be able to preorder one for just $500.

Alpha2 looks mildly human and, I admit, thoroughly adorable. Twenty servos provide the joints that make it move. It's small, being a little more than 17 inches tall and weighing about five pounds.

Clearly, when it comes to household security, Alpha2 won't have the same effect as an angry Doberman.

So how will it protect your home? According to UBTECH CEO James Chao, whom I interviewed via email, it can "activate the alarm once you leave your home…. It can also time the alarm to set once you go to bed. In addition, Alpha2 is noise activated so [it] will alert you if it hears unusual sounds."

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You may have noticed that both Chao and I are reluctant to give this anthropomorphized device a gender. That's the owner's prerogative. Users "will have options to select the voice of their choice from the user manual."

According to Chao, whatever voice you pick "provides you with a general companion feeling which phones and tablets cannot" match as you talk back and forth with the device. But will the voice sound like a real, emotional person? Chao says it can, but admits there's room for improvement. " A big part of our campaign is attracting the developer community to assist in these areas."

The Alpha2 will run on Android 4.4 (KitKat).

Clearly, the Alpha2 has a long way to go before it can match Robby. But it just might be an important step in the right direction—a step made by its own little feet.

Security

Why you should turn off your PC, laptop, modem, router, and other tech routinely

Lincoln Spector l @LincolnSpector Contributing Editor, PCWorld

Why leave stuff on? Why not? This has been debated since the birth of tech. Rick Klemann bought a new modem/router, and wants to know "whether I will shorten it's lifespan if I keep it on. My son-in-law turns his off every night and I'm wondering if I should do that." My answer covers more than networking gear.

I have yet to see evidence that leaving an electronic device on 24/7 wears it out faster than turning it off at night. On the other hand, I haven't seen any evidence that turning it off at night hurts it, either.

Nevertheless, I vote for turning things off whenever practical.

Leaving something on when you're not using it wastes electricity, and electricity costs money. What's more, if your electricity comes from burning carbon, it damages the planet we depend on. I'm not saying you should move to a cave and give up all of your gadgets (I certainly couldn't do that), but why waste power that you don't need?

Because Rick specifically asked about networking gear, let's look at that. I have a router, a modem, and two network printers plugged into one surge protector. When I researched an article on vampire power earlier this year, I discovered that it would burn 12KWh over a month of absolutely no use. Without the printers, it dropped to 4.8KWh—still a lot to waste.

My wife and I now turn off that surge protector before going to bed, and turn it on in the morning, saving some power. But we couldn't do that if our daughters were still living with us. College kids work and play late.

Computers, of course, can be put into convenient power-saving modes. But shutting them down entirely will save even more. Yes, you'll have to wait while they boot up in the morning, but just as a good night's sleep clears the cobwebs from your brain, a fresh boot can make Windows faster and more stable.

The peripherals around your computer (monitors, speakers, and so on) can best be controlled with a smart surge protector such as the Belkin Conserve Smart AV. Plug your PC into the surge protector's Control outlet, and when your computer shuts down (or goes to sleep), the device cuts power to other outlets.

How To

5 hacks for getting more out of Gmail

Michael Ansaldo PCWorld

Easily unsubscribe to bulk emails, manage an inactive account and more with these tips.

You may think you know all you need to know about Gmail to manage your account, but it's always safe to assume the powerful service has more up its sleeve. In fact, many of its coolest features may slip by you if you don't know where to look. Here are five tips for getting more out of what Gmail has to offer.

1. Easily unsubscribe to bulk emails

As good as Gmail's spam filter is, it can't catch everything, and bulk email messages will inevitably find their way into your inbox. Fortunately, there's an easy way to weed them out.

Just type "unsubscribe" into Gmail's search box and it will respond with a cascade of daily deals, newsletters, and other offers to which you've long since forgotten subscribing. To stop receiving a message, open it an either click the unsubscribe button Gmail places next to the sender's address on promotional emails or look for an unsubscribe link at the bottom.

2. Take advantage of email "aliases"

If you just can't help yourself and know you're going to continue to subscribe to offers and email notifications, use this hack to keep the influx organized.

Gmail doesn't use traditional aliases, but it does let you create alternate addresses by adding a plus sign followed by words or numbers after your email address. You can use this to your advantage to sort your subscriptions. For example, if you wanted to sign up for Groupon, enter your email address as John.Smith+groupon@gmail.com. Then set up a filter to apply a label or star to these messages, have them bypass your inbox, or otherwise redirect them.

3. Supercharge your stars

Gmail uses a yellow star to bookmark or prioritize messages. The problem is if you "star" a lot of email, you can quickly create another disorganized tier within your inbox.

But it's a little-known fact that Gmail actually offers a range of colored stars and even other icons you can use to impose order on your important emails. For example, you can use different colored stars for different priority levels or use a red exclamation point for messages that need an urgent reply.

Just go to Settings > General and scroll down to Stars. Drag the stars or symbols you want to add from the "Not in use" category to "In use." To apply one of the new icons to a message, click the star next to it repeatedly until you see the symbol you want to use.

4. Keep tabs on your account activity

They may not get the headlines like other types of security breaches, but email hacks do happen. You can monitor your own Gmail activity if you know where to look.

Scroll all the way to the bottom of your inbox and look for the "Details" link in the right corner. Click it to see information on the last 10 times your Gmail account was accessed. This log shows you the access type—browser, mobile, POP3, etc.—the location and IP address, and the time of activity. From here, you can also log out of Gmail from another computer by hitting the "Sign out all other web sessions" button.

5. Manage an inactive account

We can't imagine you'd ever want to stop using Gmail, but nonetheless you should decide how you'd want your data handled if that day should come. You can do this with Google's Inactive Account Manager.

This failsafe helps Google determine when your account should be treated as inactive, what to do with your data, and whom to notify. You just need to customize four settings:

> Timeout period—you designate a lengthof time starting from your last login after which your account can be considered inactive.

> Alert me—you provide a mobile number and additional email addresses by which Google can alert you. It will do so one month before your timeout period ends.

> Notify contacts and share data—you can add up to 10 people to be notified when your account is inactive and elect whether or not to share data with them.

> Optionally delete account—toggle this switch to "yes" if you want Google to delete your account and all data associated with it once all the previous steps have been completed.

These measures go into play if you don't access your account for a length of time for any reason, so it's worth taking the time to configure them.

Tell Windows that your browser mail is your default mail

Lincoln Spector | @LincolnSpector Contributing Editor, PCWorld

Windows knows, or should know, what program you use for reading and writing email. That way, when you click on an mailto link in a webpage, or tell an application such as LibreOffice to email a document, Windows takes you where you want to go.

This usually works just fine with a local email client—a mail program that came with Windows or that you installed onto your PC. But if you use a web-based email service, such as Gmail or Outlook.com, Windows won't know where to send you when you need to send a message.

Here are three approaches for fixing this problem. You can use one of them or all three together.
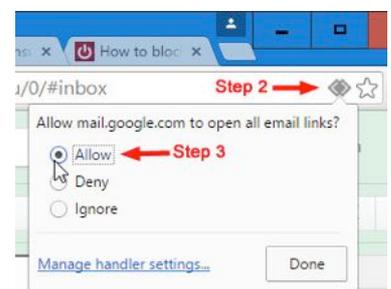
Chrome

If you use Chrome, you can easily tell it where to go when you click a mailto link. But this only works with mailto links displayed in Chrome.

> Go to the site you use for mail (Gmail.com, Outlook.com, or so on).

> Click the double-diamond icon on right part of address bar.

> Select Allow.

Firefox

As with Chrome above, this works only with mailto links displayed inside Firefox.
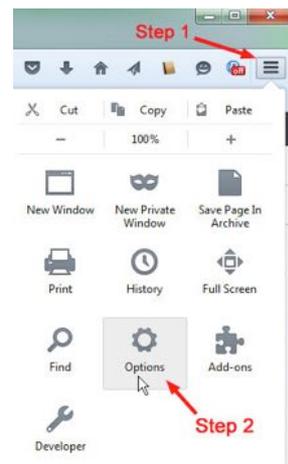
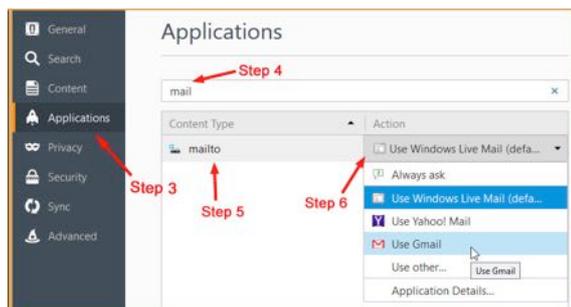Click the menu icon near the upper-right corner.

Select Options.

Click the Applications tab on the left pane.

Type mail in the Search field.

Select mailto.

Pull down the Action menu and make your selection.

The universal solution

When you install Notably Good's Affixa, the program sets itself up as Windows' default mail client. But it's not really a mail client; it simply redirects the mail client instructions to your chosen web-based client.

Affixa is free for personal use. But be sure to choose the desktop version. You don't want to start a subscription. Click https://www.affixa.com/desktop/

When you launch Affixa, what actually comes up is the Tray Application in the notification area. You'll be asked if you want it to load every time you boot; I don't think it's necessary. If you don't want the Attachment Basket feature, uncheck "Alert me when Affixa is not configured to start with Windows."

Then the Options window comes up. On the Accounts tab, click Add to select a service.

So why did I give you Chrome and Firefox semi-solutions when Affixa is a complete one? Because Affixa is more difficult to set up, and once set up, it's much slower than a browser-based solution. If you set your browser to recognize a default email site, you'll save a few seconds by bypassing Affixa.

How to clear clutter and save ink when you print a webpage

Ian Paul l @ianpaul Contributor, PCWorld

Google's working on a new built-in option for Chrome to print only the important parts of a webpage. Here's how you can get that feature today in three of the major browsers.

Google started working on a great new print option for Chrome early in November called "simplify page." This feature will strip out all the superfluous items on a page that you really don't need to print, like ads, logos, and menu options. The result is not only easier to read, but also saves on costly printer ink.

Sadly, simplify page isn't ready for prime time yet and is only available in Chrome beta right now.

But you don't have to wait a few months or weeks for the feature to show up in Chrome to stop wasting printer ink. Here's how to print a simplified page on Chrome, Firefox, and Microsoft Edge.

Chrome

With Chrome cooking up its own print option, the best option right now is to use an extension such as Evernote Clearly. This extension creates a simplified reading page, which you can then print out.

The downside is that Clearly requires an Evernote account. If you don't already use Evernote, you can choose other extensions such as Print Friendly & PDF.

Firefox and Edge

Both of these browsers already have a built-in feature that allows you to view a simplified webpage before printing. Look up at the address bar of either browser and on the far right you'll see a book icon.

Firefox calls this Reader View while Edge calls it Reading View. Whichever one you use, simply click the book icon, wait for the page to simplify, and then print it out.

That's all there is to saving on ink while still getting a physical copy of the information you need.

Fun PC Videos

(Just copy these URLs into your favourite browser)

http://www.pcworld.com/video/60264/googles-most-epic-wins-and-fails-of-2015

http://www.pcworld.com/video/59365/microsofts-surface-pro-4-the-tablet-that-can-finally-replace-your-laptop

http://www.pcworld.com/video/59703/get-to-know-the-ipad-pro

http://www.pcworld.com/video/59584/awesome-gift-ideas-for-android-users

http://www.idg.tv/video/58090/the-next-billion-dollar-startups

http://www.idg.tv/video/58044/bitcoin-and-beyond

http://www.idg.tv/video/57344/how-it-should-tackle-innovation

http://www.idg.tv/video/28841/tech-tip-how-to-build-a-computer-in-two-minutes

http://www.idg.tv/video/24689/changing-your-laptop-ssd

http://www.idg.tv/video/58265/a-robot-walks-into-an-apple-store

http://www.idg.tv/video/58086/the-real-concerns-about-artificial-intelligence

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