

Splish, splash, he was takin' a bath!



My grandson loves his bath, and I couldn't resist this shot of him.

Enjoy the newsletter. This month we discuss:

- [MAGICJACK](#), a low-cost long-distance phone service
 - Last options for getting [Windows XP](#) on a new computer
 - Security programs broken with [VISTA SP1](#)
 - That [Flash Drives](#) can wear out
 - Points about the upcoming Analog-to-Digital [broadcast TV](#) switchover
 - Free Microsoft [web software](#)
- Free [Google Docs](#) online
 - Current [Security Recommendations](#)

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And if you could help me out by forwarding this e-newsletter to a friend that might enjoy it, I'd appreciate it! Thanks.

[Product Reviews](#)

MAGICJACK

How about a small device that connects any USB port on your computer with any ordinary house phone? You can then make unlimited phone calls to anywhere in the US or Canada for only \$20 per year! A YEAR! No monthly charges or taxes, no minute fees, no additional charges! The device costs \$40 to purchase which includes the first full year of calling. After the first year, you only pay \$20 a year. You must have a high-speed internet-connected computer, but whoever you call can use any type of phone. The service includes your own phone number, caller ID, voice mail, etc.

I haven't personally used this device yet, but I have received a couple of recommendations from my customers that love it. The only two caveats I can imagine is that, of course, you'd have to have a High-speed internet-connected computer to make a call; a dial-up connection just won't do it. And, as with any internet-based phone device, you are at the mercy of your internet-provider; if their service goes down so does your phone service.

<http://www.magicjack.com/1/index.asp>

MICROSOFT STOPS SELLING XP ON JUNE 30, 2008

Microsoft's Windows XP operating system had a stay of execution a few months ago, when they announced that it would continue sales of XP through June 30, 2008. Sales had previously been scheduled to end in January 2008. But the new deadline doesn't leave much time for those who don't like Vista, and want XP as their operating system.

If you have a retail version of XP, then your license does allow you to remove the OS from an old machine and install it on a new one, but as hardware manufacturers direct more resources to Windows Vista, it will be harder to find drivers for video, audio, and other computer components that support XP.

Microsoft also stated that buyers of Vista Business and Vista Ultimate can "downgrade" to certain Windows XP versions. The way this works is that when you buy a new computer, participating manufacturers may (a) include a copy of XP in the box, (b) include a special "downgrade disk," or (c) make you buy XP through a completely separate ordering process. It's up to the manufacturer.

So you still have some options if you want XP instead of Vista. You can buy a computer with XP preinstalled or make sure that a Vista computer you buy comes with an XP downgrade disk.

How to buy a system with XP preinstalled:

Some major computer manufacturers still offer systems with XP preinstalled. If XP comes standard on a new machine, you're pretty much guaranteed to have a system with all the necessary XP drivers up and running.

Shopping tips:

- Online shopping offers you a better chance of finding an XP system (or a system that comes with an XP downgrade disk) than trying to buy one at a retail store.
- It's getting harder to find desktop computers that come with XP preinstalled. You'll have a greater variety of choices if you shop for an XP notebook instead.
- In general, a manufacturer's home-user or small-office computers will not offer the best selection of XP machines. You will likely want to shop in the business division of a manufacturer's site.

How to use the 'downgrade disc' option:

This is not the same as a manufacturer simply tossing a copy of Windows XP into the

box a PC comes in. A truly useful XP downgrade disc is a recovery disc of XP, complete with all the necessary drivers. In many cases, a PC with an XP downgrade disc will also include another disc with an image of the Vista operating system, in case you want to switch from XP back to Vista. If a Vista disc isn't included, make an image backup or a Vista recovery disc before downgrading.

Simply having an XP license does not guarantee that drivers are available for all the devices in your new computer. Even if working drivers can be found online, you'll have to go looking for them.

Downgrade discs that include drivers are specific to each computer system or model series. Don't expect a company that has downgrade discs to supply them for just any system they sell.

Some systems — like those from Acer, Fujitsu, HP, and Sony — include a downgrade disc in the box for some qualifying systems. Others, like Lenovo, expect you to order the disc separately for an additional charge.

The following table shows the availability of XP on various machines. Keep in mind that this information will change rapidly as manufacturers deem it necessary. Most manufacturers still have XP options, at least for now. (✓ = Yes)

<i>Manufacturer</i>	<i>Sells XP systems</i>	<i>Downgrade disc</i>	<i>How to find</i>
Acer	✓	✓	XP is an option on most Veriton and AcerPower desktops and Travelmate and Extensa notebooks. A downgrade disc comes with most Travelmate and some Extensa series; call Acer or reseller with model number to be sure.
Fujitsu	✓	✓	On Fujitsu's Notebook Overview page, use your browser to search for XP. See question 2 of the FAQ to find systems that include a downgrade disc.
HP/Compaq	✓	✓	Shop in the small and medium business site for systems with XP preinstalled. For a downgrade disc, look for Vista systems labeled "Smart buy."
Lenovo	✓	✓	XP is an option on several models in the 3000 family of notebooks and desktops, in addition to the ThinkPad family. Downgrade discs are available for Vista Business and Ultimate systems; see the Lenovo downgrade page .
Sony	✓	✓	Avoid looking in SonyStyle.com. Instead, shop in the Sony.com business section . Some systems in the sub-series SZ645, BX740, and BX76 have XP preinstalled. Models beginning with TX2xx and SZ7xx come with downgrade discs in the box.
Alienware	✓		XP is offered on all systems except the M15X and the Area-51 ALX Crossfire.
			Enter 'windows xp' in the Keyword Search box to

Dell	✓	Find systems with XP. To downgrade manually, see Dell's instruction page .
Toshiba	✓	Go to the All Notebooks page and enter xp in the Search for laptops box.
Gateway		Your only option is to buy a Vista computer and, separately, a copy of XP (which is still available from Gateway). You must then manually reformat the hard disk and reinstall the OS. Good luck on the drivers!

Another option if you want both Windows Vista and trusty XP is to set up a dual boot option so that your computer has both Windows versions on it. I'll cover the details in a future article.

VISTA SP1 BROKE A FEW SECURITY PROGRAMS

The recently released Service Pack 1 (SP1) for VISTA had a few unexpected problems, the most critical is that it disabled a few security programs. If you are running VISTA and recently updated with SP1, then review this list to see if you might have one of the programs at risk.

BitDefender AV or Internet Security, version 10
Fujitsu Shock Sensor 2.1.0.0
Jiangmin KV Antivirus 10
Jiangmin KV Antivirus 2008
Trend Micro Internet Security 2008
ZoneAlarm Security Suite 7.1
Rising Personal Firewall 2007

Most of these manufacturers have newer, more compatible versions, or workarounds. Check with them individually.

[Tech Tips](#)

FLASH DRIVES CAN WEAR OUT

Flash drives are also known as thumb drives, USB drives, pen drives, memory sticks, even "dongles". All flash drives have flash memory, so-called because in order to write to it, the memory is loaded, and then a signal is sent to the memory circuitry that says "remember this" - kind of like the flash on a camera. Once the memory has been "flashed", power can be completely removed and the memory will retain whatever was written to it.

The "problem" is that memory can be flashed only so many times. Research says somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 times, though this number will likely increase as technology progresses. When this theoretical limit is reached, some portion of the flash memory may not properly remember what was written to it resulting in

Flash memory may not properly remember what was written to it, resulting in corruption. It may only take a single bit of information to "wear out" for the entire contents of a flash memory chip to be lost.

Some flash memory chips, now include circuitry to avoid "bad bits". Meaning that when a portion of the flash memory finally wears out and goes bad, the chip itself can compensate and make it look like everything is fine. But that only lasts so long ... it doesn't prevent failure, it only postpones it. One of the worst ways to use flash drives is to store active databases or other files that require constant updating. For example, storing a customer list on a flash drive so you can plug it into two or more computers and work on the list.

The best use of USB thumb drives and other flash memory based devices is simply copy-to and copy-from. Copy the information to the flash drive to store it, then copy it from the flash drive to a local hard disk to use it, and then copy it back to the flash drive to store it. Never run disk-intensive applications directly against files stored on the flash drive. If you copy files to and from even 10 times a day, you should be able to get at least three years of usage for the low end of the flash memory lifespan.

If you really need active external storage, a flash drive may simply be the wrong solution to your problem. There are plenty of external hard drives that could do the same job without the write limitations.

ANALOG TV WOES

Regarding the rapidly upcoming transition from analog to digital TV broadcasting, here are several points to consider. Cable broadcasters do not need to switch from analog to digital. Only over-the-air broadcast programming from full-power stations must be digital. Rural stations that broadcast at half power are not required to go all-digital.

Further, cable companies must continue to offer local stations in analog format. That is, as long as the provider offers analog service. This rule will last for at least three years after the transition.

However, many cable providers are going all-digital. In that case, you'll need a digital set-top box. Your provider is free to charge you for the box. Technically, the set-top box is different from a digital-to-analog converter.

Read more details here:

<http://www.komando.com/columns/index.aspx?id=3775>

Freebies

FREE MICROSOFT WEB DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN SOFTWARE

Microsoft is giving away Web development and design tools! What's the catch? The

program, which Microsoft calls DreamSpark, is only open to students. Microsoft will check eligibility before providing the software.

If you meet the requirements, you can download several programs. For example, there's Visual Studio 2008 Professional Edition and Windows Server 2003 Standard Edition. SQL Server 2005 Express Edition, Expression Studio and a couple of other programs are also available.

This is not purely philanthropic. Microsoft hopes the next Web craze will be built with its tools. Plus, it wants feedback from the students on its programs. Do you know a student who would benefit from this software?

<https://downloads.channel8.msdn.com/>

GOOGLE DOCS ONLINE

Need to share a word document or spreadsheet with someone who doesn't have a matching program? Even several people in various locations that all need to make changes to the same files? Need to access certain documents while away from your familiar computer and its programs? Need safe storage for your important files? All this and more is available for free from [Google Docs]. Take a tour and sign up. It could fit a need you didn't know you had!

<http://www.google.com/google-d-s/intl/en/tour1.html>

Current Security Recommendations

KEEP IT SAFE OUT THERE

As always, don't forget to keep your Windows updates current and your computer protected from malware. There are many free, yet excellent programs available so there is no excuse not to stay protected. However, there are many more free programs which are harmful, that will instead of protecting your system, actually infect it. Choose from this list I maintain and you should have no problems of that sort. Most of these free programs are for individual home use, not commercial / business use, but I've noted those restrictions, plus the Windows versions each is compatible with. Here's the latest list of excellent, but free, security programs that I recommend:

ANTI-VIRUS: (*fights viruses, worms & trojans*)

AVG 7.5 Free: (*home only, Win98-Vista*)

AVG has been sending out its semi-annual upgrade offers recently. Just ignore them and continue to use AVG Free

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

AVast! 4 Home Edition: (*home only, Win95-Vista, annual free renewal*)

http://www.avast.com/eng/avast_4_home.html

Comodo 2: *(home or business, XP/2000 only)*

<http://antivirus.comodo.com/>

Clam-Win .91: *(home or business, Win98-XP, manual scanner only)*

<http://www.clamwin.com/>

ANTI-SPYWARE: *(fights spyware & adware)*

SpyBot 1.5: *(home or business, Win95-Vista, manual scanner only)*

<http://www.safer-networking.org/en/mirrors/index.html>

Threatfire 3: *(home or business, WinXP-Vista, manual scanner only)*

<http://www.threatfire.com/download/>

Microsoft Windows Defender: *(home or business, WinXP-2003, requires validation)*

<http://tinyurl.com/c9p2f>

Webroot SpySweeper: *(home only, Win2000-Vista, 30-day free trial)*

<http://tinyurl.com/2bp9xa>

FIREWALL: *(fights keyloggers and hacking)*

Your Router: almost all routers have a hardware firewall built-in, the best type!

ZoneAlarm Free: *(home only, Win2000-Vista)*

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

Comodo Firewall Pro: *(home or business, Win2000-XP)*

<http://tinyurl.com/2o2p6d>

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