

VONTRONICS E-NEWSLETTER - AUGUST 2008

Welcome all my summer readers!

We had a long weekend summer reunion in June with all the immediate family, including my grandson. After that, his parents went on a trip to Maine with him, shown here, enjoying a rocky low-tide shore near a lighthouse. He loves to pick up and collect rocks!



Also, please join me in welcoming VONTRONICS E-Newsletter's first guest tech writer, Lea Lindsay. Lea comes with a long history of working with computers, from "big iron" mainframes to self-built gaming towers. She's been a tech writer for several publications. Her column here is named "Wish I'd Thought Of That" and in her first issue, she explains the difficulty she's had with flash drives and how she solved it.

Enjoy the newsletter. This month we discuss:

- [Optimus Maximus Keyboard](#), who would want one?
- [Goodbye Outlook Express!](#)
- [Fake e-mail greetings](#)
- [How to save paper when printing from Microsoft WORD](#)
- Sign up for [free summer remote services](#) from me
- Another free [PDF file creator](#)
- Free [web-printer collaborator software](#)
- [Free faxing](#)
- Lea Lindsay's [Wish I'd Thought Of That](#)
- Current [Security Recommendations](#)

Remember, as always, if you don't want to be sent these e-newsletters, please check at the bottom of this e-mail to find out how to easily be taken off the list for future e-mailings. And if you are receiving more than one copy, please reply back and let me know your primary e-mail address.

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 & News](#)

OPTIMUS MAXIMUS KEYBOARD

Why would a computer keyboard cost over \$1000? Or better yet, why would anyone pay that much? Well, beyond it having built-in USB ports and camera media slot readers, every key has a tiny LCD screen built into it so that the image of the key's function can change as needed. For a simple example, imagine that as you press the Shift key, all of the alphabet keys change to upper case. Not impressive enough; then load up a high-end game or graphic layout program and all of that program's hot-keys are changed into icons or images reflecting their special use. Or assign special keys to monitor some of your computer's actions, like maybe one key showing the current album cover picture and scrolling song title that's playing in your iTunes player!

ThinkGeek.com has a full description, including a video clip, of it in action. As for those that would buy it, well, of course, it's for those who have everything else already!

<http://www.thinkgeek.com/computing/input/9836/>

OUTLOOK EXPRESS FINALE

Outlook Express has always been a bit of a stepchild e-mail program. Loved by many, but seemingly

not by the very folks who created it, Outlook Express recently got another nail in its coffin when it was announced by Microsoft that as of June 30, you can no longer use Outlook Express to access your Hotmail account.

Hotmail users are being encouraged to upgrade from Outlook Express to Windows Live Mail or Microsoft Outlook (not Outlook Express) or risk losing access to Hotmail.

I use Outlook Express for my business e-mail. It's always frustrating when a vendor decides that it will no longer support a version of a product that you're comfortable with, and it will take effort on your part to replace. Fortunately, I don't use a Hotmail account, but if things change again in the future, I'll let you know how I changed with it.

Outlook Express has never gotten the love it deserves. Now it's getting its last rites. RIP, OE, we hardly knew ye.

Tech Tips

E-MAIL FAKERIES

Fake e-greetings/cards are notoriously being used to spread malware of all types. It's the worst "human engineering" that scammers and spammers prey on: to fool you into thinking how nice and innocent an e-mail appears to be, while stinging you with an unwanted "package".

Many times, spam e-mails are being sent out mimicking the look of e-greeting cards, all the while waiting for you to click on the link and send their malware deep into your computer. How would anyone know, before you click on the link to pick up your "e-card", that you aren't inadvertently, clicking on a malware link?

10 years ago, e-greetings were cute and innocent with little backlash. Five years ago they became over-commercialized e-mail address collectors for spamming. Three years ago they became faked by nefarious types trying to get more than just your e-mail address. I advise staying away from e-greetings altogether. At best, regardless the kind intentions, the sender is merely giving away your valid e-mail address for future spam lists, and the receiver is reinforcing the same. At worst, there was no true sender and the receiver is at the mercy of whatever "load" will be dumped on their computer.

My advice, though it may seem harsh... call the birthday boy or girl on the phone, or send them a traditional greeting card in the mail. It may take more effort, but will be better appreciated, and not likely to be wasted by being identified as junk e-mail.

HOW TO SAVE PAPER WHEN PRINTING FROM WORD

Wasting paper wastes money, and besides that, a document that ends up with only one or two lines on the last page doesn't look very pleasing. There are a number of ways you can squeeze a little more text onto the page to eliminate those "orphan" lines. You could, of course, use a slightly smaller font size. Or you could fiddle with the margin settings. But the easiest way is to let Microsoft WORD do it for you. Here's how in WORD 2003 or 2007:

In WORD 2003, click File, Print Preview. In WORD 2007, click the Microsoft Office logo button, select Print and then Print Preview.

Now, click the Shrink to Fit or Shrink One Page button. WORD will automatically adjust text size and spacing.

If you don't like the results, press CTRL+Z to undo it.

REMOTE ACCESS WORKS FOR MANY

I am still offering free remote-access software repairs to your computer throughout the summer months, but I will be converting to a paid service starting in November. At that time, I expect a basic "remote tune-up" to cost half of what it does on the bench, or \$45. Take advantage now of this free service by sending [me](#) your email address, and I will send you sign-up instructions so you can get this new service. With the high price of gas, I'm surely going to have to raise my on-site prices this coming season, and this service saves both of us the price of fuel.

Freebies

FREE PDF CREATOR

In the last e-newsletter I gave a link to a free PDF creator. In case that wasn't sufficient, here's another free PDF creator. Adobe READER is free but only allows you to read or print PDF files, not create them.

Download and install this free PDF creator. It will let you make PDF files that you can send/attach to outgoing e-mails.

<http://www.dopdf.com/download.php>

FREE WEB PRINTER COLLABORATOR

This free download from Hewlett Packard allow you to combine web content from several web-pages, arrange it to print as you wish, then print the finished results. Sounds like a great tool when doing research on several products or services and you want to print a concise report or summary.

<http://tinyurl.com/58t7qt>

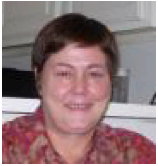
FREE FAXING

As long as you still have a single land-line and an old-fashioned fax machine for sending paper faxes on those rare occasions, then consider a free E-Fax account to receive faxes via e-mail. That way you won't have to remember to turn on your fax machine before expecting a fax. Shamefully, like me, until just recently, I still used my old-fashioned fax machine for incoming and outgoing faxes, shuffling between fax on - fax off. Now I don't have to worry about ink, toner, paper supply, or thermal ink rolls anymore, just fax-receiving-bliss with e-mail convenience, plus hard-copy sending on the rare occasion I still need it!

The only downsides to this free service is that you only get two free trial fax sends (incoming is unlimited), and your new free fax receiving number will not be toll-free, in fact it will be long-distance to most of your local contacts... sorry, folks, but remember that e-mail is still free if you need to send me something. vontronics@familycomputerusa.com. Or e-fax me at 1-603-297-0001.

<https://www.efax.com/en/efax/twa/signupFree>

WISH I'D THOUGHT OF THAT by Lea Lindsay



FLASH DRIVES ARE JUNK – SD CARDS ROCK!!!

A couple of months ago there was an article here on flash drives. I thought... AHHH! someone can tell me how to reformat mine. I had tried Windows Format and it wouldn't do it. I then searched high and low looking for a program that could, to no avail. I saw nothing about them becoming unformatted anywhere I looked. I can't imagine that my flash drives would be unique in this situation.

Here I had two flash drives that became useless the same day due to becoming unformatted and I also lost 750 meg worth of data files. Neither drive was used more than 4 times and never without logically disconnecting it from Windows. I was NOT a happy camper.

Reluctantly, I bought another 1 Gig flash drive for \$10 just because I had planned on using them often in transferring data from my laptop to my desktop and vice versa, especially with music files. I download a CD's worth of music on my laptop and then transfer it to my desktop for storage and to burn to CD. You can bet from now on I will COPY instead of MOVING the data to the flash drive.

Then I had a brainstorm! Unlike with flash drives, there are freeware programs out there that you can [download](#) that will reformat Secure Digital (SD) cards. I have never tried it but I suppose Windows Format might work, too.



So, I bought a USB SD card reader/writer from [Unity Electronics](#) for \$9 and a 2 Gig Kingston SD card from [MeritLine](#) for \$10 and voila, I have a 2 Gig flash drive for \$19 that is reformat-able and will hopefully last much longer than my previously-owned flash drives.

I have [read](#) where SD cards can last 100,000 read/write/erase cycles verses the 1,000 cycles for a regular flash drive. Another benefit is, the cards come with a physical write-protect switch.

The reader/writer and card is not much bigger than the flash drive, but it works just as well as one. I can also use the SD card in my Nikon digital camera. One of the reasons I specifically selected my camera was because it used an SD card for picture storage.



Now, If you really want to be the envy of the neighborhood and go much smaller than a flash drive, go for the [Micro SD card reader/writer](#) and an [SD Micro card](#). After all, what geek wouldn't have to have one of these just to make other geeks envious? Isn't it just too cute for words? You could wear this around your neck and not even notice it was there. The cards come with an adapter to make them the size of a regular SD card so that you can use it in devices that call for one of those.

Personally, I didn't go this small because the card might physically break or get lost and why have to use an adapter on the card so that it fits my camera. Regular SD suits me fine especially since I already have some of them.

So I will NEVER buy another flash drive no matter how cheap or big they get. They are junk and a waste of money as far as I'm concerned and a good way to lose your data.

BTW - I just read an article where SD cards have become the flash memory of choice. They took over the market back in October over Smart Media cards, Compact Flash, Memory Stick, etc. SD cards are becoming cheaper with more capacity with each passing day.

So, for my money, the SD card and an SD reader/writer is the way to go and no longer do I have to worry about my "flash drive" becoming unformatted and suitable only for the "round" file commonly used to hold garbage bags.

Any comments on Lea's article? Please send email to lea@familycomputerusa.com

Current Security Recommendations

What is the leading country in the world responsible for the most spam, and other malicious internet activity? That's right, Made in China. What's interesting though, is that the U.S. is leading the world in computers infected with viruses that try to steal credentials, send spam and try to self-propagate. Maybe there should be an Olympic Virus event!

STOP JUNK MAIL

We're talking regular paper-printed in-your-mailbox old-fashioned junk mail here. This free service allows you remove your name(s) from many mailing lists and other sources of junk mail. If a direct letter, from you, is required to be removed from a particular mailing list, then this service pre-prints it and instructs you on mailing it. You can also use this service to stop previous residents' junk mail from continuing to be delivered to you. Ironically, you can sign up to start receiving other catalogs... hmmm.

<https://secure.proquo.com/beta/login/>

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've provided 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)*

Avira AntiVir Personal: *(home only, Win2K-XP)*
<http://tinyurl.com/25wdah>

AVG 8.0 Free: *(home only, Win98-Vista, recently updated to version 8)*
<http://tinyurl.com/6oro4r>

AVast! 4 Home Edition: *(home only, Win95-Vista, annual free renewal)*
http://www.avast.com/eng/avast_4_home.html

Comodo 2.0: *(home or business, XP/2000 only)*
<http://antivirus.comodo.com/>

PC Tools Anti-Virus Free: *(home or business, Win2K-Vista)*
<http://www.pctools.com/free-antivirus/>

Clam-Win .93: *(home or business, Win98-XP, manual scanner only)*
<http://www.clamwin.com/>

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

MalwareBytes' Anti-Malware: *(home or business, Win NT-2003, manual scanner only)*
This is my current favorite free anti-malware remover. It will eliminate many of the new-wave malware/spyware. Try it first when fighting a new foe.
<http://tinyurl.com/69dkea>

SpyBot 1.6: *(home or business, Win95-Vista, manual scanner only)*
<http://tinyurl.com/69dkea>

<http://tinyurl.com/0013az>

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>

F-Secure Black-Light RootKit Eliminator: *(home or business, Windows XP-Vista)*
Detects and removes the most hidden of spyware: the dreaded Rootkit, which loads even before Windows loads, and remains undetectable by most standards.
<http://www.f-secure.com/blacklight/blacklight.html>

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>

Online Armor Personal Firewall: *(home or business, Windows 2000-XP)*
<http://tinyurl.com/5dfe74>

Comodo Firewall Pro 3: *(home or business, Win2000-XP)*
<http://tinyurl.com/2o2p6d>

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