

(Approx. 1,193 words)

The Tip Corner – January 2014
Bill Sheff, Lehigh Valley Computer Group, Pennsylvania
January 2014 issue, The LVCG Journal
www.lvcg.org
nsheff (at) aol.com

Let's start off by wishing you and your computers a healthy and happy New Year.

Keep Updates Current

Make sure you install the latest updates for Windows (or whatever your operating system you use), your programs and applications and device drivers. This can ensure a smoother experience. Windows allows you to receive updates automatically. Just go to the Control Panel and click on Windows Updates. You can set up updates to be downloaded whenever it is most convenient to you. And since most of their updates are usually related to security, let Windows take care of it for you. Some programs will advise when there is an update or a new version. As a precaution, do not click on the recommended method, but use the custom button instead. Now-a-days they are adding tool bars and other programs that you might not want. By using the custom update you have the ability to unselect or decline these add-ons. In many cases drivers do get updated, but go into your device manager and check on the date of the drivers. In some cases you can search for updates from the vendors or Microsoft. If a driver does not seem to be working like you feel it should, you can delete or uninstall the driver, close your machine and restart it, and the device manager will reinstall the driver.

Backup

If you do not usually back up your system now would be a good time to do it. You can never go wrong with backing up; this is something you should do often even when you are not making major changes to your computer. Windows has made it very easy to backup your computer. The built in system imaging and backup and restore center makes it convenient to back up the operating system and all your critical data. However there are a few commercial and free backup systems available for you. You want to make a complete image of your hard drive about once a month (or more frequently if you do have critical information). Most of these systems create a compressed version of the hard drive as a bit to bit copy. But try and get a program that allows you to a) look at the backup as in Windows explorer, and b) get into the backup and withdraw and expand a file. Very helpful. Of course the best place to put a backup is on an external drive – not the same drive as your data. Hard drives can crash making it impossible to restore any data.

Filing

So whets next? Try not to keep putting files into your document or download folder. Set up a system of folders – much like a filing cabinet. Within each major folder you can have multiple sub-folders, and within them sub-sub-folders. You can set them up by subject and then by date and then by further breakdown. I use this a lot and every year I set up a new year within many of my folders. But this is just one idea of many possible methods. Think it through and come up with something that fits what you do.

A Fun Project: How to make Photos Look like Pencil Drawings

As I am wont to do, I search the net looking for tips and help articles. I came across a site: “HowToGeek.com” and there are lots of interesting things hidden there. One that I liked was How to Make a Photo Look Like a Pencil Drawing. There is a lengthy tutorial with lots of pictures that take you step by step into this fascinating procedure. There are also stand alone programs that do the same thing, such as: Photo Funia and \$1.99 apps like My sketch HD and Pic Sketch for iPhones. Go read the tutorial and see if you want to play at being an “artist.”

What Happens If I Keep Using Windows XP?

Microsoft support for Windows XP goes away on April 8, 2014. Now XP isn't going to suddenly stop working, but without official Microsoft support, there will be no new security updates or bug fixes for Windows XP systems. Some third-party security software will continue to defend against known bugs, but without Microsoft support, they will not guarantee protection against new threats. Symantec, the company behind Norton Security said, “After the official End of Support date from Microsoft goes into effect, Symantec Support may not be able to provide full threat resolution on XP systems due to a lack of Microsoft security patches. It has always been Symantec's stance that proper network and workstation security begins at having the most recent security patches from the OS Vendor. Depending on the nature of the threats involved, Windows XP may be susceptible to viruses and risks that more recent iterations of Windows are immune to.”

McAfee made a similar statement. “If a McAfee product requires Microsoft to provide a fix and Microsoft does not provide the fix, then McAfee cannot support the product any longer.”

Without current security support, XP systems will be prime targets for people with malicious intent. They will be looking for ways to get into your system and steal your data. More so than usual. Between July 2012 and July 2013, Windows XP was an affected product in 45 Microsoft security updates. Without official support from Microsoft, those issues will not be addressed. With XP being completely vulnerable, you can expect to see a lot more threats than that in a year after April 2014.

Time to consider biting the bullet and get a new system. But the good news is With Window's 8.1 out there you can be assured that your operating system will be as good as it can be.

Making a hyperlink in Gmail

Typing in a web site in Gmail does not indicate a “hyperlink” or any indication that it would be an active link. It was necessary to go down to the bottom of the email toolbar, highlight the address, and then click on the link button so it showed up as working. Okay. But there is an easier way. Do nothing!

When you are typing the link, it will not show up as an active link. However, as soon as you send it (or preview it!), you will see that it is a working link.

Print Out Part of A PDF Document

In the old days if you were reading a magazine and wanted part of an article, you simply scanned it into your computer, saved it in a word document, edited it and printed it out. As usual, times have changed. Today everything is on-line and usually in PDF format. Fortunately most PDF readers will allow you to select exactly what you want to print. Be it the whole document (but why?) a few pages or a specific page.

You click on the print icon or select print, depending on the reader, and then elect to print the entire document, only the page you are looking at or select a range of pages.