

Issue 174

ISLE OF WIGHT PC USER GROUP

JULY 2011



HOT KEY

SUMMER 2011

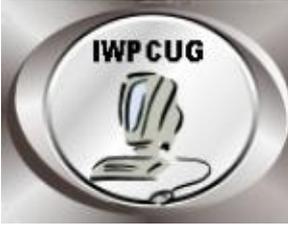


Steve Sutters was talking about his music and technology activities

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The Isle of Wight Personal Computer User Group

We welcome all owners and users of IBM compatible Personal Computers.
We are a group which seeks to exchange ideas and new information.

Membership is £10 per annum

Our meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month at
The Riverside Centre, Newport from 7.30 to 9.30 pm

Visitors are welcome

**A charge of £1 is made per meeting, which includes tea or
coffee during the break.**

**If you would like to know more about us, you are most welcome to come
along to one of our meetings, or you can contact one of our
Committee Members as listed on page 3.**

The Club Website Address is **www.iwpcug.org**

We also have an e-group discussion area on Yahoo groups.

iwpcusers@yahoogroups.com

See page 7 for how to join

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
Aug 3	Summer Barbecue	
Sept 7	Biography	Len Brett
Oct 5	(not yet arranged)	
Nov 2	Mini Talks	Various Members

ISLE OF WIGHT PC USER GROUP COMMITTEE

Chairman: David Groom

Treasurer: Phil Rogers

Secretary: Susanne Bone

Membership & Database Secretary : Ray Boote

Committee Member : Roger Skidmore

Committee Member : Steve Sutters

Committee Member : Soren Johanson

HotKey Editor : Bob Groom

Note : contact details have been removed
prior to publishing on the internet

Suggestions for new events, topics or speakers for talks
are always welcome.
Please contact any committee member with your ideas.
if necessary we may be able to find a seaker for your subject.

Cover Disk

With four completely new programs, and major updates to two more, I hope you find something on the CD of use.

Speccy

New to the cover disk this month is Speccy, from the same organisation that provides CCCleaner. Speccy is an advanced System Information tool for your PC. Need to find out what's inside your computer? Speccy will give you all the information you need (and probably a lot more besides).

Unit Converter

Inventive Design have created a practical unit converter with more than 32 different categories to choose from. Want to convert miles to kilometers? US gallons to UK gallons, Bits to Bytes? For these and many other conversions, this program is for you.

Stellarium

With a visit to Vectis Astronomical Society observatory in March, and a talk on the impact of PC on the amateur astronomer in June, it seemed fitting to include Stellarium. Stellarium is a free open source planetarium for your computer. It shows a realistic sky in 3D, just like what you see with the naked eye, binoculars or a telescope.

Solar System 3D

Continuing with the astronomical theme, Solar System 3D Simulator is a free software application that generates a realistic solar system model and planets in 3 dimensions on the PC using advanced physics formulas. It can display the planets and their orbits, the sun and the moon. The nine planets including planet earth and their detailed physical & chemical information and image pictures is also displayed including solar power, solar energy and solar eclipse details.

Scribus

A fully featured free desktop publishing solution. Scribus is designed for flexible layout and typesetting and the ability to prepare files for professional quality image setting equipment. It can also create animated and interactive PDF presentations and forms. Example uses include writing small newspapers,

brochures, newsletters, posters and books.

Firefox

On the last cover disk I gave you version 4 of Firefox. On June 21 Mozilla released Firefox 5, and that version is now on this months CD.

LibreOffice

Included for the first time last issue was version 3.3.2 of LibreOffice, this month I've included the latest version 3.3.3.

Adobe Reader

Although Adobe Reader 10 has been available for months, this is the first time I have been able to offer it on the cover disk.

Other

Also included are the latest versions of AVG, SpyBot, AdAware, CCCleaner, ImgBurn etc. Full details are included on the cover disk.

David Groom

The Annual Club BBQ on Wednesday 3 August

This will be held again at Bembridge Lodge, 114 High St, Bembridge.
Starting at 7:00pm

It would assist catering for the event if you could let me know if you are planning to come, no definite commitment needed, I just need some idea of the numbers expected. It would be appreciated if you could either call on 873853, or email david@vectis-webdesign.com before 1 August.

As usual the invite is extend to members' wives / husbands / etc.

David Groom

What is reCAPTCHA ?

I am sure all of us are familiar with so-called "captchas" on website forms which are used to tell if the form is being completed by a human rather than an automated computer. If you're not familiar with captchas, basically a series of letters or numbers are displayed as an image and you are asked to retype them, often the numbers are often distorted so that they cannot be recognised by automated character recognition systems.

In a standard version of a captcha, a sequence of numbers and letters would be randomly selected by the computer, and therefore it knows which letters a user would type to match it (eg the computer chooses the letters "AD3c", and unless those letters are retyped it won't let you submit a form).

Over the past few years it has become more and more common to see the system known as "reCAPTCHA" which is an interesting variant on the original theme. Typically you will have seen something like the following on the web page.



In the above, the displayed letters are not a random sequence but in fact two separate words, where it is the words which are chosen at random to be displayed, rather than individual letters. These words are in fact parts of scanned copies of books, which have been digitised as part of the Google Books project. Although in general the degree of character recognition is quite high, there are occasions when words cannot be recognised, and it was decided to harness millions of individual website actions to assist with word recognition. By putting up one of the unknown words and waiting to see how a number of individuals guess at the letters of that word, the computer would be able, in fairly short time, to see the consensus of what the word is meant to be.

For instance in the example image, one user may type the first word as "nuageni", and other user type it as "nu3genl", and a third type it as "riuagenl". By comparing these three (and in reality probably five) versions the computer would come to the best estimate of the word as "nuagenl". So we can see how this aids the digitisation of the books.

There is however a problem with using this as a method of detecting if the user is human or not. In the captcha version I described in the first paragraph, the computer knows what the letters should be, and can compare this to the users response. However with the reCaptcha system initially the computer does not know what the letters making up the word "nuagenl" are, so as a method of telling if a user has typed the right letters, and proved themselves as human there is a problem. This is solved by asking them to complete the text for two words, one of which is known in advance. In the above example the computer would know the second word was "Toni", and if that was typed correctly it assumes the entry has been made a human, allows the form to be submitted, and adds the letters for the word "nuagenl" to its database to be compared against the other responses. Once it is certain of the accuracy it then moves the word to the "known" list.

David Groom

Photo Competition

The winning entry is shown on the back cover, and is from Alan Ash. Entries for the next competition should be sent to me by 6 September, and should be on the theme "The Sea"

David Groom

Joining the Email Group

Send an e-mail to: iwpcusers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
with " join " in the subject line

All members are encouraged to join this group (which costs nothing and is private to club members) in order to keep in touch with events and to join in with the discussions

You can also keep in touch by regularly visiting www.iwpcug.org

20 Years of Linux

In an industry with a wealth of quirks, eccentricities, and oddities, Linux (pronounced LIN-uhks in American English) is right at home. This computer operating system is celebrating its 20th anniversary in August 2011.

It was created in 1991 by Linus Torvalds, a software engineer and hacker from Finland, which is a country perhaps best known in high-tech circles for its cell phone expertise, with Nokia headquartered there.

Today Linux's still tiny worldwide market share belies its influence and allure, especially among geeks and other information technology experts.

For desktop PCs, laptops, and other computerized devices, the various versions of Microsoft Windows control about 82 percent of the market, Apple Mac OS X about 7 percent, and Apple iOS and Linux each about 2 percent, according to StatCounter (gs.statcounter.com).

One of the idiosyncrasies of Linux is that it's not controlled by a single company. More than six hundred different Linux "distributions," based on the same Linux kernel, are available for machines ranging from game consoles to the fastest supercomputers in the world.

Linux distributions, or "distros," typically bundle application software with the operating system, including mainstream business programs such as word processors, spreadsheets, and database programs as well as games, graphics programs, and utilities.

Much more so than on "desktop" PCs for individual users, Linux has a presence on "servers," which include the computers that make Web sites available over the Internet. Among these are the most popular sites on the entire Web, including Google, Facebook, and Twitter. Linux is also an increasingly popular server operating system for private local and wide area networks of various types of organizations.

For individual desktop or laptop users, one of the main attractions of Linux is price, particularly compared to what's available from Microsoft and Apple. Some Linux distros are free, others are payed for, typically low cost. The most popular free Linux distros include Ubuntu (www.ubuntu.com), OpenSuse

(www.opensuse.org/en), and Fedora (fedoraproject.org).

Other benefits to Linux include security and stability. Mostly because of the ubiquity of Windows, the bad guys who develop and distribute malware primarily target Windows PCs. Linux users also report greater reliability and less downtime.

Linux has a reputation for being strictly for technies, and this accounts in part for its small user base compared to Windows and Mac OS. But for years the ease of use differential has been shrinking, and today it's virtually nonexistent, particular for such major distros as Ubuntu. One important area, however, in which Linux suffers on the desktop is DVD playback and video streaming over the Internet, particular with popular services as Netflix.

You can download the major Linux distros over the Internet. But easier still is buying a PC desktop or laptop computer preinstalled with Linux, which can save you the money that Microsoft charges PC makers to include Windows on their machines.

Dell (www.dell.com) is the major PC maker that has been most active with Linux-based products. As of the time of this writing, it was offering an Ubuntu Linux-based laptop PC and netbook PC. Hewlett-Packard recently made a major commitment to Linux, announcing in March that it would be preinstalling its own Linux-based operating system, webOS, as an option along with Windows on all of its desktop and laptop PCs by 2012.

Linux's main claim to fame these days, however, is with Android-based mobile devices such as smartphones, tablet computers, and e-readers. Android is Google's mobile operating system based on the Linux kernel. It's a direct competitor to Apple's iOS mobile operating system, which runs on Apple's iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch.

Android devices include smartphones from Acer, Dell, Lenovo, LG, Motorola, Samsung, and Sony Ericsson; tablet computers from Acer, Dell, Motorola, Samsung, and Toshiba; and e-readers from Barnes & Noble.

All of these devices, as with all Linux distros, share a lineage back to Linus Torvalds. Born in Helsinki, Finland, in 1969, Torvalds has attained geek status on par with Tim Berners-Lee, creator of the World Wide Web, and Vint Cerf, one of the inventors the Internet.

While still a computer-science graduate student, Torvalds made his first public announcement about Linux with a post to the Usenet discussion group comp.os.minix in 1991. Unlike other operating systems based on Unix, an older operating system that predated PCs, Linux could run on inexpensive off-the-shelf PCs.

Linux, also, was free, deliberately distributed to allow for the contributions of others. Over the past 20 years, thousands of programmers have contributed code to the Linux kernel. Today, Torvalds works for the Linux Foundation and lives in Portland, Oregon.

Reid Goldsborough

Reid Goldsborough is a syndicated columnist and author of the book Straight Talk About the Information Superhighway. He can be reached at reidgold@comcast.net or www.reidgoldsborough.com.

Chairmans' Report

We have had a good attendance at our meetings recently, the last four meetings all being presented by external (ie not club members) speakers. It was good to meet owners of two computer stores in Newport, hopefully they will gain some business from our members, and we will benefit from their experience.

Next month is the annual Club BBQ, more details are on page 5. Hopefully we will see a high attendance like last year, fingers crossed for good weather.

Forthcoming meetings are listed on page 2, we have not yet finalised details for October & December, though I am confident something will be taking place. Thanks go to Roger Skidmore for the effort he has put in to obtaining speakers for us.

The clubs' Yahoo group saw a flurry of activity in May, but has since become a little quieter.

Why I don't like iPads

How impressive an iPad looks to someone who knows nothing about computers. The way the mere movement of a finger can magically bring up web pages and no messy wires or buttons in sight. What minimalism, what style! It wasn't till I used one that I realised what an impractical gimmicky piece of overpriced hype they are. I will list some of its many faults.

Holding one is awkward as being so slim it can easily slip out of ones fingers. Could have done with a handle! The case being made of aluminium is strong but also an excellent conductor of heat. That will be your hands heat and I would not want to hold one outside on a winters day!

Has tiny hard to find buttons.

The keyboard has to be constantly brought back to the screen by swiping it and you need to keep swapping between a qwerty keyboard and one with numbers and symbols on it. Even the simple task of typing an email address is made awkward because you need to keep swapping between the 2 keyboards. It is easy to press the wrong key or get 2 characters coming up with only one keystroke.

Another reason I dislike touch screens as they get grease and dirt on them with any use and what an exposed screen it is too. Unlike the clam shell design of a laptop it needs to be put in a case to protect it. Of course you can buy a case so more money spent.

There is no multitasking, which means the iPad cannot possibly hope to compete with laptops or even netbooks. There is no camera (on the mark1), meaning no Skype or video chat. There is no Flash support, meaning casual games, video sites, and graphic-heavy Web sites are going to be unobtainable. Like the iPhone, the iPad will not have support for Adobe Flash, the technology that drives YouTube and most other web videos. Non-optimized iPhone apps look terrible on the iPad.

Lack of connectivity - There are no USB ports, no video ports, and no GPS.

Poor value for money - You could buy a higher spec. netbook for the same money (it only has a 1 GHz single core processor) and it would work better in every way. My favourite definition of an iPad (from Sue Bone) is an oversized smartphone you can't make phone calls with.

Free vs. Fee in the Digital Age

One of the most interesting dynamics in the digital world is the interplay between goods and services that you pay for and those you get for free. We've seen free PCs, free software, free Internet access, and free Web sites.

As the maxim goes, you get what you pay for, and almost always there's some price to pay for something that ostensibly is free. That price typically takes the form of substandard quality, more or less intrusive advertising, or compromised privacy.

Still, the ethos of free has a strong tradition and moral underpinning among users of personal computers, other digital devices, and the Internet, and whenever something that was once free starts to cost, a hue and cry can be heard across the land.

The recent announcement that Microsoft was acquiring Skype (www.skype.com) has some of Skype's millions of users worldwide preemptively complaining about the possibility that the software giant may eventually start charging users to make voice and video calls to one another using their PCs, which currently is free (Skype calls to landline and mobile phones carry a small fee).

On one hand, these worries have some basis. Microsoft is paying a whopping \$8.5 billion for Skype, making this its most expensive acquisition. Microsoft has more than enough cash for the acquisition, but Skype lost money last year, more than \$7 million.

On the other hand, Microsoft has kept other acquisitions free to users, leveraging them to help support the prices of its core products, its Windows operating system and its Office suite of software programs. Here's predicting that Skype will continue to be available separately, for free, while also being integrated into existing Microsoft products.

Another interesting development in the free vs. fee arena is the emergence of pay social networking services that give users more than what they get for free from giants such as Facebook and Twitter. One such service is Ning (www.ning.com), which lets people and organizations create their own social networking site.

Users can customize the look of their site, accept or reject particular types of members based upon profile questionnaires, control what's shared among members, and even optionally charge member fees and incorporate advertising. Fees for setting up a Ning site range from \$2.95/month for a "mini" site to \$49.95/month for a "pro" site with

unlimited members and premium add-ons.

The rolling world of publishing is another area where feathers are being ruffled by change and money. In March the largest metropolitan newspaper in the U.S., the New York Times, starting charging fees to frequent visitors of its Web site (www.nytimes.com) who aren't also subscribers of the paper's print version.

Anyone will still be able to read up to 20 articles per month for free. More than that will cost, beginning at \$15 per month. Not all visits are included in the 20-article limit. If you access an article through search sites such as Google or social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, that's a freebie, though Google searchers are limited to five articles per day.

The New York Times like many companies on the Web is trying to come up with creative solutions that retain visitors while increasing revenue. In explaining its change, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., chairman of the New York Times Co., said, "The challenge now is to put a price on our work without walling ourselves off from the global network, to make sure we continue to engage with the widest possible audience."

Hard numbers aren't yet publicly available, but one dedicated New York Times reader said that the number of online reader comments about Times articles seems to be down, likely indicating fewer online readers.

As much and as loudly as some users complain about any movement from free to fee, others argue that it benefits society as a whole. In a recent blog post at Open Forum (www.openforum.com), run by American Express, one participant spelled out various reasons he felt that "free is hurting us all."

Free content isn't valued by readers the same as paid content, says John Jantsch, founder of Duct Tape Marketing (www.ducttapemarketing.com), a small business market consulting firm. When content is free, it's more likely that content producers will "simply slap something together." When users pay for content, Jantsch feels there's a better chance for building a loyal community around it.

It's likely that in the future, some digital offerings will remain free. Some, to the delight of many, will become free. But an increasing percentage, it seems likely, will cost.

Karen Hammond

Compiling Hot Key in LINUX

This edition of Hot Key could go down in history as the first one to be put together entirely in LINUX (with the help of a few drops of wine ! But more about that later).

Since I have been responsible for the production of this magazine, I have been using a Desktop Publishing programme by Serif called PagePlus, an open-source Word Processing programme called Open Office and a simple image editing programme called ArcSoft Photo Studio and another Image editing programme called Photo Brush.

Open Office has primarily been used to format the various articles that have been sent to me by e-mail and converting them into a text format that PagePlus can use (usually RTF).

The image editing has only been necessary to “tweak” the pictures for the front and back covers to give a suitable file size, aspect ratio, colour etc.,and occasionally to get the Audience and Projected Image both in reasonable brightness, contrast, saturation and sharpness.

All the various “ components ” that go to make the magazine have been “assembled ” by Page Plus into a single PDF file that Island Printers use to produce the final article.

All this has been done using Windows XP, so how have we done it in LINUX ?

Now, Open Office is what is called an open-source program (actually is a suite of programs) in which, in addition to the Word Processor “Writer”, it also has Open Office “ Draw “, which is a very versatile drawing programme and, being open-source, there is also a LINUX version.

Using “ Writer” and “ Draw ” it would have been possible to produce HotKey in more or less the current form using LINUX. Unfortunately it would not have been possible to put the whole magazine on a single PDF and it would have been necessary to put each page into a separate PDF and the printer would have to assemble these in the correct order into his final file for the printing machine. Some time ago I asked him if this would be OK and he could see no obvious problem but I never pursued this venture.

There was also the difficulty that LINUX had no simple, efficient Image Editor and any adjustments to the images would have to be done in Windows.

This was a couple of years ago and since then there have been 2 developments in LINUX which have, for me, improved the situation.

One is that there is now a “ fully usable ” Desktop Publishing Program called SCRIBUS and this has the necessary “ booklet ” format available and can produce a single PDF for the complete magazine. This program has only recently become a “ stable ” edition and I get the impression that it really needs a faster computer or more RAM than I have

and some functions are rather slow. It is also not the easiest of programs to understand and there is currently no “ Help File ” or “ User Manual ” available, so it is very much a trial and error situation !

Unfortunately, and this is only my opinion, I get the impression that the writers of LINUX programs tend to make an effort to get their products to be as different from Windows as possible. Anyone who has tried the Image Editing program GIMP will know what I mean !

In this connection, the second development in in LINUX has been a great improvement in a function that goes by the name of WINE and as I understand it, this program program creates some sort of “ layer ” over the LINUX system that causes a program to “ think that it is running in Windows ”. This allows a whole host of Windows programs to run in LINUX. I have 4 quite complicated Amateur Radio programs on my LINUX machine that work precisely as they would if they were actually running in Windows. Apparently, WINE does not necessarily work with all Windows programs and quite what separates the Go and NoGo programs is not clear. It seems to be a case of “ suck it and see ”. However, WINE has allowed me to put the 2 simple Windows Image Editing programs into my UBUNTU LINUX system and that particular difficulty is eliminated.

So, for this edition of Hot Key I have been able to use simply the UBUNTU 10.10 version of LINUX (with WINE installed) running SCRIBUS 1.3.3.13 svn, and since this has turned out to be an extremely comprehensive Desk Top Publishing programme, Open Office has only been really necessary for converting .txt and .doc files into the .odt format that Scribus uses. (And for writing this article !)

I started out with the intention of, as far as possible, maintaining the whole appearance of Hot Key, and I think this has worked out quite well !

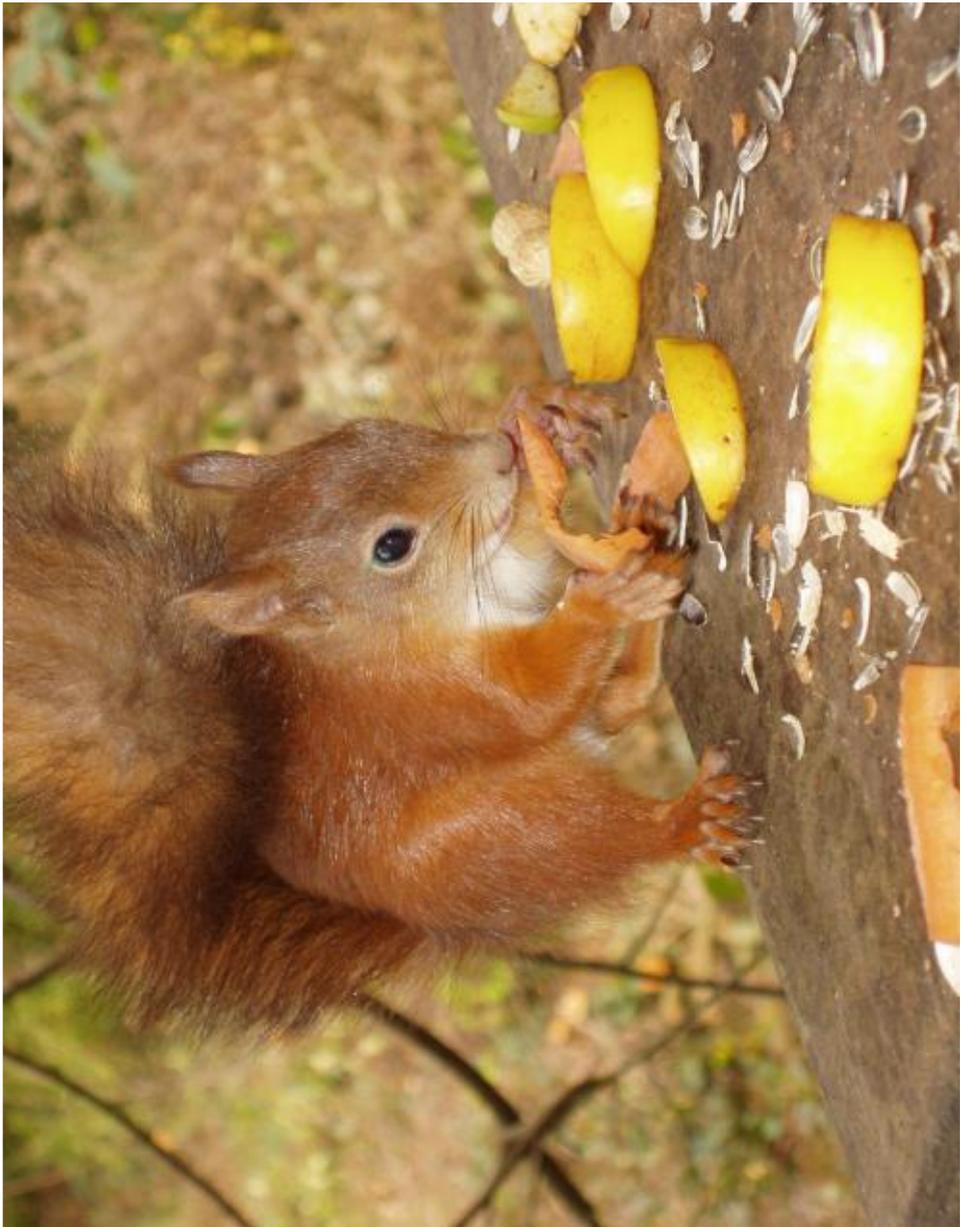
Scribus, having no help file or user manual has been a real challenge, as, of course, PagePlus was originally.

The editing and formatting of text in Scribus is very different and somewhat complicated but when the method becomes clear it works extremely well.

Colours for backgrounds for instance are also extremely complicated to manage. There is an enormous range of colours and they are listed alphabetically, so all the “ Dark ” shades of whatever colour come under “ D ” which also includes one called “ Dodger Blue ” and one would need to know, for example, what colours “ Burlywood 1, 2, 3, or 4 ” were before looking for them under “ B ”.

However, I must say that it has been a very interesting project and it has turned out better than I had expected. If any of you are interested in another challenge, you will find the Windows version of Scribus on the cover disk.

Editor



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No responsibility can be accepted with respect to any advice or suggestions made in this journal.