

Issue 209

SPRING 2020

ISLE OF WIGHT PC USER GROUP



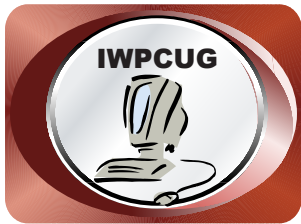
HOT KEY

APRIL 2020



At our March meeting Mike Cox from Open Sauce Systems gave a very good talk entitled “Adventures and experiences of an open source world”

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The Isle of Wight Personal Computer User Group

We welcome anyone who has an interest in computers and related technology and what you can do with them.

We are a group which seeks to exchange ideas and new information.

Membership is £12 per annum

Our meetings are normally held on the first Wednesday of each month at

The Riverside Centre, Newport from 7.00 to 9.00 pm

Visitors are always welcome.

A charge of £2 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 listed on page 3.

The Club web site address is **www.iwpcug.org**

We also have an e-group discussion area on
Yahoo groups: **iwpcusers@yahoo.com**

Details of how to join are on page 15.



FUTURE MEETINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
6 May	Mini talks	David Groom & Mike Hoar
3 June	TBC	Jonathan Thornton (PC Consultants)
1 July	TBC	Jonathan Burt
5 August	Summer BBQ	

ISLE OF WIGHT PC USER GROUP COMMITTEE

Chairman : David Groom

Secretary : Susanne Bone

Treasurer : Mike Hoar

Membership and Database Secretary : Roger Skidmore

Committee Member : Steve Sutters

Treasury Supervisor : Phil Rogers

Note: Contact details removed
prior to publishing on the internet.

Suggestions for new events, topics or speakers for talks are always
welcome.

Please contact Steve Sutters, or any committee member, with your ideas.
If necessary we may be able to find a speaker for your subject.

Chairmans Report

For obvious reasons we had to cancel this months meeting, and although we have put a calendar on page 2 of this edition I suspect we will be cancelling further meetings. The web site will continue to be updated with the latest information, and we will also send details via the E-group.

Remember our E-group is there if you want to ask any computing related queries, we normally get some sort of answer to most queries.

On pages 9-10 of last months HotKey I wrote about some podcasts which might be of interest, with us not being able to go outside so much it is perhaps worth revisiting that article.

In February we held our AGM, reports on the past years activities were given, the previous committee was re-elected, and members voted to keep subscriptions unchanged. We were due to consider and approve those minutes at this months meeting, this will be postponed until our next meeting, but draft minutes are available in the members section of the web site should you wish to review them.

Apologies for the late delivery of this issue, partly down to me not completing it on time, and also our printer is currently operating with reduced hours.

Lastly I hope the social distancing regulations are not too restrictive for you, your computing experience helps you to find things to occupy your time, and that we all remain healthy during the coming months.

David Groom

Affinity Products – Free Trial

A while ago I demonstrated Affinity Photo, the photo editing software from Serif, and last edition I wrote about Affinity Publisher, which I now use to put together the HotKey editions.

In mid March Serif announced that they were offering free 90 day trials on all products in their range, and a 50% discount for anyone who wanted to buy. Currently they say these offers will be available until 20 April, and if you are interested I'd recommend you take them up on it. Details can be found at www.affin.co

David Groom

How to make LibreOffice Templates to Save Time

LibreOffice templates save you time by making it easy to open a blank copy of documents you use often, such as letterheads, budgets, form letters, and slideshow presentations. This not only serves as a quick and easy starting point for repetitive work, but it can also ensure consistency when working in groups or in a large organisation. LibreOffice ships with some templates already available, but you can also create your own.

Create a template file in LibreOffice

First, you need a file that you want to serve as a template. Whether it's a budget, the layout for a newsletter or flyer, or just some letterhead, you must generate a document that you want to build upon later. Once you've got that, save it as a template by selecting File > Templates > Save as Template.

In the Save As Template dialog box that appears, give your template a name. Select a template category from the menu, and then press Save.

This saves a version of the file as a .ots file in the LibreOffice template folder.

Use a template

Opening a template always creates a copy of the template file which you can change without affecting the original template. To use a template, select File > New > Templates.

Select the desired template and click Open.

Change a template

Things change. Sometimes you need to make adjustments to an existing template. To change the template file itself, select File > Templates > Open Templates.

This opens a file chooser showing all your .ots template files. Select the one you want to change and click Open.

Make any desired changes, and then save to update the original template.

Templates make your life easier

Templates are good not only at reducing repetitive setup tasks, but also at

reducing user error. When you get something the way you need it to be, whether it's a letterhead, slide deck theme, or a complex spreadsheet, take advantage of your computer's ability to repeat that success for you later. One of the ideas behind open source is to work more efficiently instead of working harder. LibreOffice does a great job at making that possible, so take advantage of it whenever you can.

Jess Weichler
published on opensource.com under a CC-BY-SA licence
<https://opensource.com/article/20/3/libreoffice-templates>

A Rave About Media Portal (free)

I like watching TV on my PC which I used to be able to do with a DVB/Sky tuner card and Windows 7 using Windows Media Center. This has gone with Windows 10 so after reading many reviews Media Portal (www.team-mediaportal.com) stood out as probably the best TV player. Installing it is not as complicated as it first looks. I started off with Media Portal 2 which is supposed to be more advanced but I found it useless. The channels would freeze and pixilate frequently. A youtube broadcaster said that Media Portal 1 was more reliable and I have found the picture quality superb. Displays all the HD channels in perfect clarity too. Also does more than playing TV channels. Below is a review of Media Portal I found from the web.

Unfortunately, Windows Media Center is gone for good as Microsoft isn't planning to reintegrate it during future updates or to add similar features within the Windows 10 core system. So after reading many reviews Media Portal stood out as probably the best

Basically, the only way in which you can still use your Windows 10 PC as a TV tuner will be by using a dedicated third-party app.

Windows 10 Media Portal is maybe the best replacement for the classic Windows Media Center platform. This is an open source media center from where you can play and record your favourite TV programs.

The software will extend the classic TV tuner capability and will transform your Windows 10 computer into a complex and complete media solution.

The software is light so it can run even on low-end configurations without major problems such as hangs or screen freezes.

It is also an open source media center which means that you can download, install and run the app without spending money although donations are accepted. I donated £10.

The the basic features are:

- Watch, schedule and record live TV - like a TiVo, but more, and for free!
- Play videos, movies, DVDs and Blu-ray discs
- Listen to music and radio
- Enjoy pictures, home videos or create a slideshow
- Stream media, radio and TV to any HTPC / PC connected to your network
- Use a remote to control your HTPC from your couch
- Check the weather, news, and more
- Access MediaPortal from the web or mobile device

By using the hundreds of plugins and skins available, you can do almost anything—like monitor your HTPC; view sports scores or local movie show times; stream or download web TV, Apple Trailers, YouTube videos or internet radio; even start up MediaPortal playing music from a predefined playlist.

Stephen Sutters

Video Conferencing Software

With the current lockdown in progress I, like many others, have been investigating ways of videoconferencing (where two or more participants can chat and see each other in real time) as a means of keeping in touch, not only on a one-to-one basis, but also within groups.

Perhaps the best known software for making video calls is Skype. In general to use the service you need to register an account with Skype. Windows 10 comes with a Skype client and there are dedicated apps for Android and iPhones. With the feature known as Skype for Web you can also access Skype at web.skype.com using either Microsoft Edge or the Google Chrome browser. Group calls are possible with Skype, it appears that this can only be done once you have actually established a one-to-one call with someone, and then you add other participants to the call. The online help says that guests can join in via Skype for Web without the need for a Skype account, but the documentation is sparse. My feeling is that Skype may be fine for smaller meetings, but probably doesn't work too well for larger groups.

I next tried Zoom, it seemed to have a lot of options, and I felt I was looking for something simpler which is when I came across Jitsi.

Jitsi is an open source project, and it has its own hosted version called Jitsi Meet. This is an easy to use, free video conferencing system. On a desktop / laptop open the Chrome web browser and go to <https://meet.jit.si>, to start a videoconference type in the name you want your meeting to be called (eg IWPCUG), or accept the random room name which is supplied, you can then let other users connect to the meeting if they go to the URL <https://meet.jit.si/IWPCUG>. Each participant is shown with a small thumbnail of their video, so you can see who is attending, and as each participant starts to speak their video stream is given prominence. As well as video and sound you have the ability to type messages which everyone can see. It appears you can set a password to restrict room access, but I have not tried this. If you have an Android or Apple phone / tablet there are dedicated apps which must be downloaded to use Jitsi Meet. It certainly is easy to use, the one downside I have found is that if your computer does not have a web camera then you can't even join the meeting and watch / listen to the other participants.

It was partly because of that downside to Jitsi that I revisited Zoom, a product which seems to have got a lot of publicity in the last few weeks. If you visit <http://zoom.us> you are required to set up an account, then you can click "Host a meeting", the next thing which happens is the Zoom software is downloaded to your computer (future meetings can be started/joined by clicking the zoom icon on your desktop). To start a meeting you click the "new meeting" icon, you can then either invite new participants by email, or if you look in the top window bar you will see the meeting ID, which if you give that ID to anyone they can use to join the meeting. In many ways the experience from now on is just like Jitsi, though its more obvious to find advanced options such as screen sharing and message chat. Zoom does also have the advantage that you can join the meeting and watch / listen to the other participants even if you have no webcam. You can host a meeting for up to 100 participants with a 40 minute limit for free.

To conclude, Jitsi is simple to set up and use, but Zoom is more fully featured.

I will also be investigating ways to undertake a webinar, the essential difference to this and videoconferencing is that whereas with a videoconference one would normally expect all the people who join the meeting to participate (ie show their webcam and talk) with a webinar it is more usual for one or two "presenters" to broadcast to everyone else in the meeting.

David Groom

Automatically Colour Black & White Photos

A few months ago I came across an interesting web site which claims it will automatically add colour to black and white photos (technically greyscale as what we traditionally refer to as “black and white” photos do not simply contain the two colours black and white, but a range of grey between the two extremes of “black” and “white”. The web site address for the colouriser is <https://demos.algorithmia.com/colorize-photos>, where you can upload your own black and white photo and have colour automatically added to it.

The web site uses an implementation of the Colorful Image Colorization algorithm created by Richard Zhang, Phillip Isola, and Alexei A. Efros. And the approach taken to adding colour is detailed at <http://richzhang.github.io/colorization/>). There is a detailed (29 page) paper outlining the methodology linked from the menu item [Paper] on this latter web site, a lot of which I don’t understand, but I shall try and condense down as much of it as I can for the purposes of this article.

To obtain the actual colour is probably a near a impossible task, as that information simply does not exist in a greyscale image. It is important to state at the outset that what the algorithm attempts to produce is a *plausible* colour version of the photograph. They do not claim that it will exactly reproduce the actual colour that was in the scene that the photograph was of, but that they will attempt to colour the greyscale image so that if you looked at the coloured result it would appear to be real. Or to use the programmers words: *“our goal is not necessarily to recover the actual ground truth color, but rather to produce a plausible colorization that could potentially fool a human observer.”*

Given the above goal they go on to say that the task becomes much more achievable: to model enough of the statistical dependencies between the semantics and the textures of greyscale images and their colour versions in order to produce visually compelling results.

When they talk about “the semantics” I believe they refer to analysing the content of the original (grey) image to identify the elements within that scene. Such elements might be sky, a car, grass, a face, a ladybird etc. For many of these elements initial predictions can be made about the colour of the object, grass is typically green, sky is typically blue, and a ladybird is typically red. Indeed I think if we were looking at the “black and white” image ourselves we would probably make many of these assumptions.

The algorithm has been trained on 1.3 million images in order to help it predict what colours might be represented by a greyscale object. However even with such a large database of test images it is not always going to be possible to predict what the actual colour should be, typically problems occur with certain animals / birds where different classes of the same species may have different actual colours, and problems also occur bizarrely with busses / coaches, which are often coloured yellow (probably resulting from a large number of American yellow school busses in the original 1.3 million images leading the algorithm, to believe that most busses are yellow).

When they refer to “the textures” I believe they are referring to the shading of colour within a scene or individual object, so for instance they may know that grass is green, and then by analysing the lightness of the various parts of the scene identified as grass they can determine what shade of green should be applied to the coloured image. I have to say that having read their research paper a number of times all I can say it seems very complicated, and I am afraid that no summary I could make would be accurate or do justice to their work.

To test the algorithm I took two near identical photos on my camera, one using the standard settings, and one simulating black and white film (I used a tripod to try and get as close an identical composition in these two shots as possible). I then uploaded the “black & white” image to the colouriser and let it work its magic. I then repeated this for a different scene.

On the back page are my results, the first image in each set is the greyscale image I uploaded to the colouriser, the second image is the colourised image which was returned, and the third image is the photo which I took in colour. When looking at these first try to image the last of these images in each set was not there, and see how realistic the colourisation is, does the second image look real to you? Then compare the second and third images to see how the colourised image compares to reality.

As you can see the results are variable, in the case of the left hand set of images the colourisation is done, I think, spectacularly well, the automatically coloured image (the middle one) almost looks more realistic than the actual image below it. However the second set of images shows that the colourisation did not work so well, probably because it was a much more difficult scene for the colouriser to interpret.

David Groom

Why Developers Like to Code at Night

A nocturnal work schedule is the key to creativity and productivity for many open source programmers. If you ask most developers when they prefer to work, many will say their most productive hours are at night. This may be especially true for open source contributors who are contributing to projects outside of their day job (though hopefully within healthy limits to avoid burnout).

Some like to start in the evening and work till the early hours while others get up super early—say, 4 a.m.—to get most of the programming work done before the daily grind kicks in.

This work habit may make many developers seem like oddballs and misfits. However, there are quite a few reasons why so many programmers prefer to work during the odd hours:

The maker's schedule

According to Paul Graham, people who "produce stuff" tend to adhere to the maker's schedule—they prefer to use time in units of a half-day or longer. In fact, most developers have the same preference.

For one thing, developers work on large abstract systems and need the mental space to process a model in its entirety. Having their schedules sliced into 15- or 30-minute chunks for emails, meetings, phone calls, and interruptions from co-workers is simply counterproductive.

For another, it's often not possible to program effectively in units of an hour; that's barely enough time to wrap your head around the task at hand and get started.

Programming is also adversely affected by context-switching. By working at night, developers can avoid as many distractions as possible. Without the constant barrage of interruptions, they can spend a few solid hours focusing on the task at hand and be as productive as possible.

The peaceful quiet

With the background noise of various activities (e.g., office chatter, traffic on the street) mostly absent at night or in the early hours, many programmers experience a sense of relaxation. This allows them to be more creative and productive—especially when tackling mentally stimulating tasks such as coding.

The solitude and peacefulness, plus knowing that they'll have a few uninterrupted hours, often take the stress and time pressure associated with a

daytime work schedule off their shoulders, allowing them to produce higher quality work.

Not to mention, there's nothing like indulging in your favorite midnight snacks when you have solved a thorny problem!

Communication

Developers working on open source projects can have a different communication cadence than a programmer working in-house at a company. Most open source communication is done asynchronously through channels like mailing lists or GitHub comments. A lot of times, other programmers are in different countries and time zones, so communicating in real-time often requires developers to be night owls.

The sleepy brain

This may sound counterintuitive, but as the day wears on, the brain gets tired enough so it can only focus on a single task. This essentially eliminates multitasking, which is a major hurdle to staying focused and productive. But with a sleepy brain, you can't afford not to stay focused!

Also, many developers often make the most significant progress when they go to sleep thinking about the problem they're trying to solve. The subconscious mind goes to work, and the answers often come to them in the early hours when they're still half asleep.

This is not surprising since sleep boosts brain functions, helping us make sense of new information and think more creatively. When the solutions present themselves in the wee hours, these developers just get up and hit the ground running without missing a beat.

Flexible and creative thinking

Many programmers experience an upswing in creativity at night. The prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain associated with the ability to concentrate, gets tired at the end of the day. This seems to clear the way for more flexible and creative thinking for some people.

According to Brant Hasler, assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, "with less of that top-down control and 'cognitive inhibition,' the brain might be freed up for more divergent thinking, allowing one to make new associations between different concepts more easily." Combined with the positive mood made possible by a more relaxed environment, developers can come up with innovative ideas more easily.

Also, without distractions and having the space to concentrate for several hours, you can "get in the zone." This helps you better focus on a project and get in the flow without worrying about things happening around you.

Bright computer screens

The sleep cycle of many programmers is delayed because they look at bright screens all day. The blue light from computer screens disrupts our circadian rhythm by delaying the release of sleep-inducing melatonin, increasing alertness, and resetting the body's internal clock to a later schedule. As a result, developers tend to go to bed later and later.

Influence from the past

In the past, most developers worked at night out of necessity because shared servers didn't have the computing power to support programming work while everyone else in the company is using the servers during the day. Developers needed to wait until late at night to perform tasks that weren't feasible during the day, such as testing projects, running extensive code-compile-run-debug cycles, and deploying new codes. Even though servers are more powerful now and most can support the demand, the trend to work at night continues as part of the culture.

Final thoughts

While there are many reasons why developers prefer to work at night, keep in mind that being a night owl doesn't mean you should skimp on sleep. Lack of sleep leads to stress and anxiety and, ultimately, burnout.

Getting enough quality sleep is the key to maintaining good physical health and brain functions. For example, it helps you integrate new information, cement memories, think creatively, remove accumulated toxins, regulate your appetite, and prevent premature aging.

No matter what your schedule is, make sure to give your brain the rest it needs so you can be on your game and as productive as possible—all day, every day!

Matt Shealy
published on opensource.com under a **CC-BY-SA** licence
<https://opensource.com/article/20/2/why-developers-code-night>

On Hi Tech Equipment

Greetings to all members. I hope and pray we all make it through this difficult time. At least thanks to modern IT we have many ways to keep in touch without personally meeting. I have recently used Skype and Zoom for video chatting and found Skype easier to set up and use.

With so many of us self isolating and with time on our hands we now have the opportunity to do a house clutter clear and digital spring clean. How about going through your email boxes and deleting unwanted messages. Also selling or giving away unused items including hi tech equipment. The box of ancient computer parts that I took along to one of our meetings was left outside my house with FREE written on. A young chap was pleased to take it all away. As with all sorts of clutter if I label it free it seems to sprout legs and walk away.

A few months ago I decided to concentrate on selling my old mobile phones, band equipment and cameras. Not only were they cluttering up the house but they tend to go down in value with time as well. Yesterdays tech rarely goes up in value! To my horror half of it had developed faults. The most heart breaking was a £400 Moog synthesizer that worked fine a few years ago but now does not make any sound now. Wish I'd stored it in my lounge rather than an unheated bedroom or better still sold it after I had bought two others! Was hoping it would go up in value with age but second hand prices have dropped instead since I bought it. Was told it would cost anywhere from £50 to £400 to fix.

Below is an article I shortened from the web.

Backup everything with memory. Electronic devices are not designed to sit unused and without power for days, weeks and months on end. With so many delicate moving parts, it's not uncommon to find hard drives seized as solid as a brick.

So if you want to ensure your data is safe and secure in storage, backup absolutely everything and store it off-site or online.

Batteries are generally pretty bad at lying around when they aren't in use. Leaving batteries connected to an electronic device risks damaging the battery container and can result in your devices turning into a mess of battery acid. As well as potentially damaging your device, battery acid is a nightmare to clean and harmful if you get it on your skin.

While you might get away with decent integrated batteries — laptop batteries, camera batteries, etc. — cheap AA batteries will burst if left for any extended period of time.

When it comes to long-term storage, the original box and internal supports were specifically designed to hold and protect that particular device. Also means a better resale value if you can add 'comes in makers box' and as far as a buyer is concerned there is less chance the item was nicked.

Static-free bubble wrap isn't really required for storing most electronics. Laptops, games consoles and phones are designed to cope with everyday static shocks so will usually survive without it.

However, if you're storing delicate electronics like internal computer parts, you might want to invest in a roll of specialist bubble wrap to ensure nothing gets fried.

While it might seem intuitive to wrap your electronics up in something waterproof like plastic sheeting, this is the last thing you should do. Yes, plastics will keep water out but they'll also hold moisture in. Moisture is one of the biggest threats to electronics in storage, capable of turning a glistening circuit board into a corroded mess in a couple of months. Silica gel will help soak up excess humidity.

Unplug Cables. When you're storing devices for long periods of time, cables can seize in their sockets. That's fine if it's one of eight USB ports on a laptop but less ideal if it's your one and only video output port.

Stephen Sutters

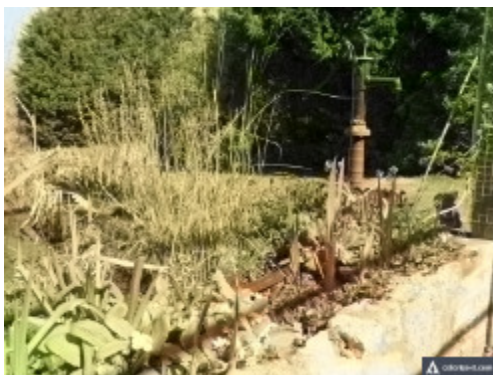
Joining the Yahoo Group

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

All members are encouraged to join this group (it's free and private to club members) so you can keep in touch with events and join in with the discussions.

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

See pages 9 -10 for an explanation of these photos.



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