

Bytes & Pieces

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

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In this issue

<u>First beta of Windows Vista</u>	
What do we know so far?	1
<u>Toxic computers</u>	
Poisoning the environment	3
<u>Obituary: Dr Frederick H Berenstein</u>	
Xandros co-founder dies	3
<u>Software reviews</u>	
Gregg reviews some software for us	4
<u>Keyboard & Mouse still coming</u>	
It's taking longer than originally planned	5
<u>Next meeting</u>	
Your queries tackled	5
<u>Another Linux installation warning</u>	
Run Live CDs from the disc - don't install	5
<u>Security Watch</u>	
The latest alerts and patches	6

First beta of Windows Vista

From an editorial by *PCPlus* Editor, Ian Robertson, in Issue 234, September 2005:

I couldn't remember when Microsoft last released a new version of Windows. Someone reminded me that it was way back in late 2001 when XP reared its shiny blue and green head. Since then we've seen wars, famines, tsunamis, a new Pope, the last commercial flight of the Concorde and mind-boggling leaps in technology. Worldwide Internet use has grown by 160 per cent, the web's sprouted wings and gone wireless, viruses and malware have multiplied with the advance of 'always on' broadband, and online gaming and music download – both embryonic in 2001 – have become two of the fastest growing markets today. Servers and mobile devices are ever more Linux in flavour, while Mac OS X has gone through numerous revisions. A lot has happened since 2001.

That's exactly why a new version of Windows is needed. However, this first beta of what was codenamed 'Longhorn' does not include all the features that Microsoft once touted as coming in this next version of the world's most used operating system. Instead industry professionals are now saying it may be as late as 2010 before all the features are delivered. What then do we get? Robertson continues:

Vista is easy on the eye. This is more pastel impressionist than the bright primary Cubist hues of XP. Mac fans must be livid. The transparent, slipping and sliding windows, the green progress bars, the robust user account system and the new Spotlight-style searches are not original, they are overdue.

In many areas of design Microsoft is still years behind Apple. You can almost see the slogan at the entrance to Microsoft's Redmond office: "If you can't beat it, copy it."

Luckily there is more to look forward to than a rough clone of OS X. Installation and start-up are massively improved over XP; search is faster and ubiquitous throughout the interface; there's much greater security; icons and document thumbnails are more detailed than ever; and a new edition of Internet Explorer comes complete with all the trimmings of Mozilla Firefox.

You've got Virtual Folders too. Essentially these are little more than folders of file shortcuts. But now the shortcuts are dynamic, automatically updating themselves when you move or rename target files. ...

Speech recognition is included for the first time. Voice control is said to be the next great application for PCs. It's flaky,

but Vista can be controlled by voice commands. It's another step in the right direction.

In short, Vista is long overdue. ...

[W]hat Vista will do brilliantly is make finding, organising and navigating files far quicker. ... [!]n fairness we haven't seen the half of it yet. We haven't seen the new Outlook or Media Player and other 'digital media enhancements', for instance. More will be revealed in Beta 2, due later this year. ...

My first impression with Vista is that it has caught up with the world in 2005. But nothing more.

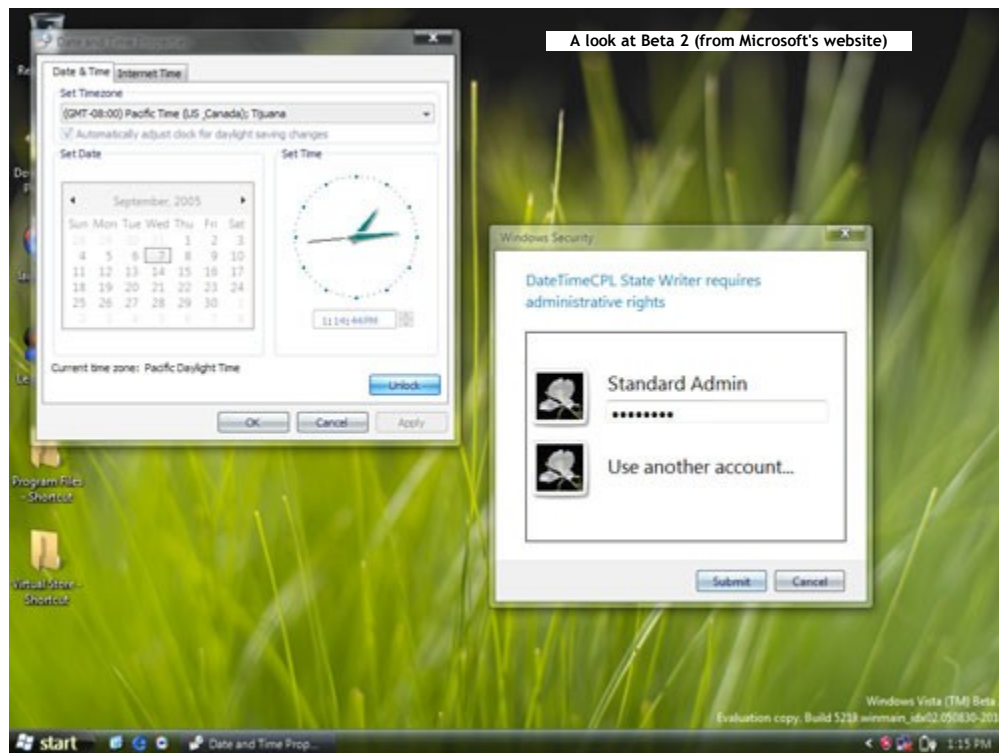
PCPlus reviewer, Mary Branscombe, adds:

Beta one doesn't have the full Aero interface ... nor does it have the sidebar ... And it doesn't have a new version of Windows Media Player, photo management features, the new Tablet PC tools or many other goodies Microsoft has talked about for Vista.

In fact Jim Allchin, the Microsoft VP responsible for Windows, doesn't expect beta one to interest most people, not even tech enthusiasts, because all it really has is the plumbing. It's designed to let developers and IT pros kick the tyres and see whether their applications and drivers will run on it.

So don't run out and buy six magazines claiming to bring you the latest on Windows Vista. Wait until they get to review Beta two. That will give you a much better idea of what delights Microsoft will include in the next Windows. Meantime, check out this link to see what Microsoft has to say about it:

<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/default.mspx>



There is even a possibility that the name 'Vista' will be challenged in court. It has certainly upset a number of organisations that have prior claims to it:

For over two decades, Vista has been used on a daily basis by the VA's 193,000 healthcare professionals to provide healthcare to millions of veterans in 163 hospitals, 135 nursing homes, and 850 clinics. The Vista Software Alliance and WorldVista provide services to hospitals, medical practices, and other healthcare organizations that use Vista.

"The confusion created by Microsoft and its choice of the word 'Vista' is an affront to the people who take care of our nation's veterans," said Barbara Boykin, Chairman of the Vista Software Alliance. (News Archive – Vista Software Alliance)

The founder of a Redmond, Washington-based custom application and services provider is considering taking action to challenge Microsoft over the naming of the next version of the Windows operating system.

John Wall, chief executive officer of Vista, says his company is "considering all of its options" for a potential case against Microsoft because of the company's choice of the name "Windows Vista" for the version previously code-named Longhorn.

Wall says the naming of Windows may violate a trademark his company has, and potentially create confusion over the software and services Vista provides. Vista is headquartered just down the road from Microsoft and provides small

businesses with online information systems, including custom applications, as well as with consulting services.

"If people call it 'Windows Vista', that's not a problem," he says. "If people call it 'Vista,' that confuses it with our business and what we do. (Reported by *IDG News Service*)

To many, such an action would be an ironic turning of the tables, since Microsoft has been notorious in its own defense of its intellectual property, including its various trademarks and especially the Windows name.

Microsoft had a long spat with a Linux software maker that eventually agreed to change its name from Lindows to Linspire after Microsoft reportedly agreed to pay the smaller first a US\$20 million settlement.

Microsoft also got a black eye from a publicity standpoint when it targeted a Canadian teenager after he established a Web site based on his last name. The software company claimed the site, MikeRoweSoft.com, infringed on its trademark.

In addition, Microsoft has liked names enough to buy them from their owners in the past. That happened when it purchased the rights to the name "Internet Explorer" for its new browser, paying \$5 million to a regional Internet service provider for the rights to the trademark. (Comment from *CRMBuyer News*)

Though not everyone is upset. Steve Nerby, founder and president of *Vista Software*, was recently quoted in an article that discusses Microsoft's new '*Windows Vista*' name. Mr. Nerby was interviewed by various news agencies due to the fact that *Vista* has already been trademarked for over 10 years.

"Fortunately for our small company, all of our products are targeting the Windows platform, so I'm anticipating that the new 'Windows Vista' name will have a positive effect for us," said Steve Nerby, president of Tucson, Arizona-based Vista Software, which provides automated productivity tools for Windows. "It allows our products to be automatically associated with the world's most popular operating system. As long as we don't get misdirected technical support e-mails asking how to configure someone's printer, it should work to our benefit." (Quoted in *PCWorld*)

[Index](#)

Toxic computers

That old desktop computer with its CRT monitor that you are planning to take to the tip probably contains around 6 kg of lead. It's in the solder used to connect the components and in the glass used to make the monitor's tube. LCD screens contain mercury. Yet most computers, once they are no longer considered useful by their owners, are not recycled, but dumped. It is estimated that as many computers are disposed of each year now, as are manufactured. In the USA alone, that's 210 million tons of solid waste annually.

The computer's impact on the environment doesn't end there. The latest dual core Pentium D 840 has been measured as requiring 147 watts out of a theoretical 175 watts. Compare that with the i486 of a few years ago, which only needed a few watts.

But power to run the beasts is only part of the story. To make a six-inch silicon wafer – the source of electronic chips for your computer – takes 2,275 gallons of deionised water, 285 KWh of energy, and 3200 cubic feet of bulk gases. To build a single desktop computer requires 240 kg of fossil fuels, 22 kg of chemicals and 1500 kg of water.

Meanwhile in the Congo they are cutting down gorilla habitat to mine columbite-tantalite for the tantalum used to make capacitors.

Look out for Issue 234, September 2005 of UK magazine, *PCPlus*, for much more on the impact of computers and what you personally can do to minimise that impact. Watch for other magazines to pick up the subject. They usually follow in *PCPlus*' footsteps.

In the meantime, try reading these articles:

<http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2002/02/25/computer-waste.htm>

<http://lowendmac.com/archive/02/0503.html>

<http://www.wired.com/news/technology/0,1282,57151,00.html>

<http://www.engineering.uiowa.edu/computing-libraries/power-security-guidelines.htm>

[Index](#)

Obituary: Dr. Frederick H. Berenstein

From Xandros PR department:

"I have the sad duty to announce that Dr. Frederick H. Berenstein, our co-founder and Chairman, died on September 6,

2005, after a courageous battle over many years," Xandros CEO, Andreas Typaldos, announced today. "Beyond Rick's vision, inspiration, and leadership, which our industry, our company, and all of us will miss, I will personally miss his example of quiet courage, and his indomitable will, and determination. It is that courage and will, which enabled him to fight his illness, that also inspired Rick to push Linux forward, ahead of most other people, through visionary investments in companies such as Ximian, CodeWeavers, and finally Xandros. His belief in the inevitability of Linux, from the days when I first met Rick in 1999 as one of his founding group of investors in Linux Global Partners, the Linux incubator that he had co-founded with his friend Wm. Jay Roseman, was infectious and hard to argue with," Typaldos continued. "There simply will not be another like him."

Dr. Berenstein was a familiar figure in the Linux community as the culmination of a proud career in both computing as well as science, beginning with his involvement with computers in 1965, when he started programming in Fortran on an IBM 1620 mainframe computer. From 1978 to 1982, Dr. Berenstein was responsible for the international banking operations of the Israeli-based Independence Mortgage and Development Bank. In 1985 he designed and programmed the airline reservation system for California's TWA Express Carrier. Subsequently, from 1988 to 1990, Dr. Berenstein was CEO of Progressive Solutions, a software firm specializing in DOS task-switching technology, which was sold to Symantec Corporation in 1990. Dr. Berenstein was also an investor and director of Personics Corporation, the first-to-market company with a mainframe-to-PC data program, and was instrumental in that company's merger with DataWatch Corporation, a NASDAQ-traded company, in 1992.



In his youth Rick studied under master pianist Anatole Kitain while living in Mexico City, where he performed several solo performances to critical acclaim. Arthur Rubinstein heard Rick at age 17 and invited him on concert tour of the US, but his mother told him "That's no way to earn a living" so he didn't go. Rick is noted in David Dubail's new book "The Art of the Piano: Its Performers, Literature and Recordings."

Dr. Berenstein was a practicing psychoanalyst from 1971 to 2000. He was also an accomplished writer. His book "Lost Boys" was widely acclaimed for its insight into male adolescent behavior and his publication was often referred to by peers when analyzing troubled youth. Dr. Berenstein also wrote the "Family" column for the Ladies Home Journal for fifteen years and was a consultant for the movie "Analyze This" with Billy Crystal and Robert De Niro.

Dr. Berenstein lived in New York City and is survived by his wife, Robin, and by his three daughters and three granddaughters.

<http://www.xandros.com>

[Index](#)

Software reviews

Gregg Jorgenson took a look at some of the recent software we have been asked to evaluate. Here's what he found:

The PR Release said of *PC TimeWatch*:

Designed for the Windows platforms, the application enables its owner to set limits on the time computer users spend on particular software programs. You can specify an individual time budget for each person who uses the computer and schedule time slots within which she can run programs. Based on these settings, *PC TimeWatch* locks and unlocks programs. Along with programs, *PC TimeWatch* gives you the ability to limit Windows logon hours and set the maximum duration of all Windows sessions for a day or a week. As distinct from other software, *PC TimeWatch* makes use of the Windows security features. Therefore unauthorized users have no chance to disable the program or tamper with its settings.

Gregg has some reservations about those claims:

If you are a parent and have young children this program may be of benefit. To allow parents to access programs Windows login and separate accounts will need to be set up. XP and Windows 2000 have this built in by default and information is supplied about how to do this with Windows 98. If the children have computers for their exclusive use, rights can be limited for the machine. Nothing, however, replaces the bond and trust between parents and children. Ultimately if parents can talk to their children, help them with the homework, supervise access of the internet and encourage them to be responsible and aware of the dangers of the internet the children will grow up to be better and more adjusted people. Once children become young adults, they often have more knowledge of computers than their parents and pick up ways of "beating the system" from their friends. A friend may give them a password cracker or bootable Linux CD with admin rights. Once they know the admin password they can log on as an administrator and do what they want. With a bootable CD they can reboot the machine, play games or surf the net and then reboot the machine normally and the parents would be none the wiser.

If you have young children and want to limit the times they can access games etc. this program is worth installing and seeing if meets your needs. But be aware they said that CSS stopped DVDs being copied and audio cd protection stopped cds from being copied but both these measures were cracked very quickly. Remember a school student wrote the blaster virus. Also Windows key validation was cracked hours after being released. So do not have blind faith in any program to be substitute for parental supervision and communication in the family unit.

The PR Release said of *Desktop Macros*:

Every day we perform chains of repetitive clicks and keystrokes when logging on to websites, receiving emails, filling in various forms and reports or working with complex applications. Now you can trust all these recurring operations to Desktop Macros. A click on the desktop shortcut will do away with manual operations, making your computer operations more productive. While Desktop Macros performs all monotonous tasks, you can gain some time for more creative things. and a coffee break.

The unique macro technology used in Desktop Macros guarantees the accuracy of recording and playback. You can start recording or playback from any application by pressing a specific hotkey combination. Macros can be customized to include specific information such as passwords, filenames and dates. A pause made when recording the macro will be replicated in the playback. Here you can add specific information. Then the macro is resumed. You can apply macros to a wide range of operations and protect vulnerable information from unnecessary exposure.

Gregg tried it and found:

This program suffered from a common problem that anyone who has tried to record a macro in Excel will be aware of: Windows does not always pop up a dialog box in exactly the same place each time. If a mouse is used to record a macro that involves invoking a dialog box it will not work, as the dialog box will appear in a different place on the screen each time. When it runs you can see the mouse move to a place on the screen, but the tab button or the OK button is not there this time, so the macro fails. As with Excel, if you use keyboard commands, the macro works each time. If you can determine the keyboard commands of a common repetitive task that you need to repeat many times, this program may be of benefit.

I'd like to thank Gregg for reviewing these applications. His help is much appreciated.

Reviewing applications is easy. Just try the application and then jot down your impressions. Does it work as claimed in the PR Release? Could it be improved? What shortcomings does it have?

We regularly receive opportunities to evaluate applications from the smaller software companies and we need more reviewers. Contact the Editor (editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au) and I'll tell you what we have available for review right now or in the near future.

[Index](#)

Keyboard & Mouse still coming

The promised series of *K & M Guides* is off to a slow start. The first one, dealing with the defences you need to run on your computer is about half done. If I hadn't gone off on vacation for a week or so, I might have got more done. Anyway, stay tuned. It will get finished shortly (I hope!).

[Index](#)

Next meeting

At our last meeting President Paul circulated a sheet requesting topics that members would like to see discussed. And some of those suggested topics will be tackled on 11 October 2005 at 8.00 pm at the G. A. Wood Hall, 29 Bathurst Street, Hobart. If you haven't been to one of our meetings before, see our website for a map showing how to get there. If you need transport, post a message to hug-mailing-list@hobartpcgroup.org.au a few days before the meeting and we'll see what we can arrange.

[Index](#)

Another Linux installation warning

Sid Davis has passed on a warning from an unnamed 'TasLUG' representative, given to one of our members, at the Free Software Day display at the Derwent Regional Library, Glenorchy, last month. It concerns Linux Live CDs, which are frequently found on magazine discs these days.

There are predominantly two types of these 'Live CDs'. The first will allow you to boot into Linux from the CD and run only from there. It does not allow you to install Linux on your hard drive. These are quite safe and a good way to look at what Linux has to offer.

However, the second type provides options which allow you to install Linux on your hard drive. This is where you need to be careful. One of the options for installing Linux involves replacing everything on your hard drive. If you are a Windows user, you don't want to choose this.

If you do so accidentally and end up wiping out your Windows installation, contact the Editor for advice. Do not try to reinstall Windows. The less you do to the drive, the better chance there is of recovering your documents, pictures, music and so on.

Provided you have room on your hard drive, this second type of Live CD (or normal Linux distribution discs) can be used to create a dual boot, allowing you to have both Linux and Windows on your computer and to choose between them when booting up. If you want to do this, and have not installed Linux before, seek some guidance from a more experienced person. The Group has members with some experience in installing Linux and I am sure that they would be willing to assist you. If you need even more help, then we can put you in touch with TasLUG, an organisation with many experienced Linux users, devoted to promoting Linux and helping newcomers get started.

As a footnote to the above warning: One of the reasons that I like the Xandros distribution of Linux is that it provides a 'Browse' button that allows you to check what is on the partition that you are about to convert to Xandros. If you have chosen to wrong partition, you can back out at this point without doing any damage to your Windows installation. Even then, I know someone who managed to overwrite their Windows partition, so be careful and don't hesitate to seek help.

[Index](#)

Security watch

The top threat that security company Sophos list this week is the greeting card notification that tries to install a trojan on your computer. Avoid clicking on the link in messages such as, "Hello. You got a greeting card. Click on the below link to collect your card." Scrutinise the message carefully and contact the claimed sender if you have any doubts.

F-Secure reports that older, established viruses still predominate on the Internet. That suggests that there are still a lot of users not running up-to-date antivirus software. Another factor that keeps the old 'favourites' circulating is the new strains that are often written by 'script kiddies'. Incapable of writing a virus from scratch, these people modify an existing virus and release it as a new strain. That's why you should update your antivirus signatures every few days – not leaving it for weeks or months, as too many people do.

EBay and PayPal phishes are kind of old hat, but they continue to appear in new guises and fool some people. I received one the other day, looking like it had come from PayPal and telling me I had successfully set up another email address. I only needed to 'click here' to complete the process. As I haven't used PayPal in years, I didn't click. If you get an email that purports to be from eBay or PayPal asking you to sign-in and validate or verify your account information, it is always best to go directly to their site and sign in there. Always use a page with the company's URL and not one that contains a raw IP number.

Mozilla and Firefox users should update to the latest versions (1.7.12 and 1.0.7 respectively) to fix some security and regression issues. Whatever browser you use, keep up with patches. As security weaknesses are found, the makers fix them, but the announcement of the weaknesses and the fixes often triggers malicious activity as malware writers try to exploit the weakness before users get around to applying the patches. It is in this period that you are most at risk.

[Index](#)

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