

Bytes & Pieces

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Webshots conversion

There are millions of photos in the Webshots collection. Members download their selection into a special viewer/database, which uses one of four exclusive Webshots formats. They can also store and share their photos by way of Webshots. But what happens if your original is destroyed and the only remaining copy is the one on Webshots? You cannot load the Webshots format into current versions of IrfanView, XnView, Photoshop, Picasa 2, PaintShop Pro, or most other graphics manipulation programs.

However, all is not lost. Get hold of XnView 1.74 and you will find that, not only can you view your photos and perform some manipulation, you can also convert them to formats suitable for use with your favourite photo graphics program. You will still be able to do this after you update version 1.74 to the current version, provided you install the later version into the same folder as you used for version 1.74.

If you cannot get the aforementioned version of XnView, try downloading Ultimate Webshots Converter (UWC) from <http://uwc.apinc.org/index.php?lang=en>. Version 1.6.2 appears to be the latest. This tool only converts Webshots to JPEGs, while XnView 1.74 can convert them into dozens of different formats.

Why can't you load them into most graphics programs? Probably to protect the various photographers' copyrights by only allowing limited use. If you do decide to use XnView to convert Webshots from their proprietary format to something you can work with, please respect any copyrights that apply.

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Folder tasks won't go away

Your friend was fiddling around on his computer – a good way to learn – when suddenly a broad, white band appeared on his desktop headed 'Folder tasks'. Nothing he, nor you, tried would make it go away.

(If you don't recognise this scenario, just wait a while. It will happen one day.)

When you have stopped tearing your hair out in frustration, pop over to this website:

http://www.dougknox.com/xp/scripts_desc/xp_commtask_desktop.htm

and download his little utility that will correct it. Read the directions, unzip it, run it, delete it and reboot your computer. Problem solved.

What activates the Common Tasks panel, no-one seems to know. At least, I haven't been able to find a clear explanation. However, the solution involves correcting a deeply buried and obscure Registry entry. While you could attempt to find and edit it, the little utility referred to above will do the finding and correcting for you. When you run it, it will show you an invalid Windows Registry entry – in the case I met recently, the entry was totally blank. After you OK the proposed correction, it will show you a valid entry and inform you that it does not need correction. Close the utility. There is no uninstall with this program; just delete it to remove it from your computer.

Hint: If it is your friend's computer, and not yours, that needs treatment, the program will run from a USB memory key, without having to be installed on his/her computer. Unzip it on to a memory key, plug it into your friend's computer and run it as described above.

Note: A Google search will yield other similar utilities with slightly different usage, but the same end result.

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Do you want tabs with that?

Paul Horne, with an occasional interruption from the Editor, endeavoured to explain why the tabbed browsing in Firefox, Opera, Crazy Browser and others, is so useful that all the main browsers will soon incorporate the idea, Internet Explorer 7.0 included. You can already get a number of revised front ends for Microsoft's browser that add tabs and other features. Examples are Crazy Browser, Avant and Maxthon. Microgarden WebTools will add a tab toolbar to your existing Internet Explorer installation.

Tabbed browsing lets the user select a folder of bookmarks (favorites to you Internet Explorer users) and open all of them, each in a separate tab. You can also open individual bookmarked pages by right-clicking and choosing Open in a New Tab. Firefox, if online, will then download all the selected pages and you can switch between them by simply clicking the tab in the tab toolbar, just below the URL title bar.

Opening too many tabs may crash the browser. It will also take a long time if you are using dialup Internet access and you will have difficulty reading what page a tab represents. Thus Paul recommends that you indulge in some good housekeeping and divide your bookmarks into small related groups, instead of having them all lumped together. For example, if you pay your bills online, you might group electricity, gas and similar expenditure together. You might create another folder for the financial institutions that you have dealing with. Organising your bookmarks in this manner makes it easier to find a particular bookmark, as well as allowing you to open a group with a single click on 'Open in Tabs' – the last line in any open folder of bookmarks. Organising your bookmarks is easy. Just click on Bookmarks and choose Manage Bookmarks. An interface resembling Windows Explorer will open. There you can create new folders and then drag and drop your bookmarks into the folder.

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Did you know?

Outline, Shadow, Underline & Strikethrough

Outline, shadow, underline and strikethrough are tpestyles which are usually used at a large point size, for a special effect. They're not recommended for body text as they can seriously hinder legibility. As studies carried out in the 1980s showed, anything which hinders legibility also hinders comprehension and should be avoided if you want people to understand your message.

Outline and shadow work best with bold typefaces or typefaces with thick strokes (e.g. Arial Black), and can be used for page headings. The two effects can be combined. The use of a dark colour, or a dark grey, will often be more effective than black, when they are combined, as this may permit the use of a black shadow, instead of pale grey one (see example):

Outline **Shadow** Outline-shadow

Underlined type is often seen as annoying and dated, but is great if you need to achieve a distinct, typewritten feel. It's also used in websites, emails and this newsletter to indicate the presence of a hyperlink.

The example below is a style perfect for a printed direct marketing letter that needs to achieve a very personal feel. It uses a typeface called Bitstream Vera Serif, similar to the Courier typeface used by many typewriters, and the underlining adds emphasis to the subheading.

Respond within 24 hours and we'll send you the
complete malware-removing kit.
And you'll never look back!

Strikethrough can only really be used for giving a definite "crossed-out" effect ~~like this~~. Its use is not widely encouraged (for obvious reasons). It can be used effectively, however, in an advertisement showing that prices have been 'slashed' and in similar ways.

Adapted from an item in Serif Newsletter October 2005

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Another Microsoft settlement

In 2003, RealNetworks filed a lawsuit against Microsoft alleging that Microsoft had illegally used its Windows monopoly to promote Windows Media Player, thereby excluding RealPlayer from gaining a greater market share. It is this sort of allegation that is at the heart of the European Commission vs Microsoft case, that has produced an interim ruling that Microsoft must offer a version of Windows that does not include Media Player.

Now Microsoft has settled its antitrust dispute with RealNetworks and entered into a partnership between the two companies with Microsoft agreeing to pay RealNetworks \$USD761 million, \$USD460 million of which will go towards a settlement fee in the antitrust battle.

As part of the settlement, RealNetworks has agreed to end its direct involvement with ongoing antitrust investigations against Microsoft, including the action brought by the EU Competition Commission. This must surely move Microsoft closer to a settlement with that body.

The remaining \$USD301 million of the \$USD761 million settlement is set aside for services that RealNetworks will provide to Microsoft over the next 18 months. Microsoft will receive credits for each customer it signs up for RealNetworks' Rhapsody subscription music service. RealNetworks said it will provide users of MSN Search with access to full-length versions of songs. The service is limited to users in the US and is capped at 25 songs per month.

Users of Rhapsody will be able to share and play music through MSN Messenger. RealNetworks will also provide

Microsoft with access to some of its online games through the MSN Games portal and the Xbox Live arcade on the Xbox 360. The two companies also agreed to work together on the Windows Digital Rights Management technology, allowing Rhapsody content to be played on Windows Media Player.

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Next computer auction

The Auction Centre, Cambridge, has advised that their next auction of ex-government and ex-lease computers will be on 23 November 2005. If you were thinking of a second computer for Christmas, the timing couldn't be better. Keep an eye on <http://www.theauctioncentre.com.au> nearer that date for details of what is being offered. At their October auction, they had Pentium 4, 1.8 GHz Compaqs, Celeron 1.7 GHz with Windows XP Pro and other goodies.

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Legend fires up Singapore plant

Adelaide-based Legend Corporation (ASX:LGD) announced last month that it has commenced production at its company's new Singapore manufacturing facility. Legend's Singapore operation will focus on the production of flash media for digital cameras and mobile phones and will produce some popular models of Legend's traditional DRAM memory module server, desktop, notebook and printer product range. This facility will service growing customer demand and enable shorter delivery times in the Asian region.

Legend's South Australian facility will continue with production to meet growing demand from the Australian and New Zealand markets. The South Australian facility will also continue as Legend's research and development headquarters focusing on new product and process development.

"Over the last twelve months Legend has experienced tremendous growth in the Asian region and production from the Singapore facility will ensure that we can keep our delivery time in this region down, says Legend CEO, Bradley Dowe. Our just-in-time delivery model has been extremely successful in Australia and New Zealand and this new facility will ensure that our Asian customers can also depend on the same level of service."

The Singapore operation will also cut delivery times to Legend's expanding customer base in Europe, South Africa and Greater China. "We will be able to reduce delivery times to Europe by two or three days and to South Africa by one or two days. Legend is always globally competitive on price, the launch of this facility will ensure our customers across the globe have access to our products more quickly", says Dowe.

Initially the Singapore production line will equal the output of the Adelaide facility although it has been built to accommodate a production increase of three times these levels. This facility incorporates the very latest production technology providing support for Legend's future product roadmap.

From Legend Technology press release
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Lynda's training videos

If you've been browsing through the computer books at your favourite bookstore you've probably found several written by Lynda Weinman. She's the graphics guru who invented the 'Browser-Safe Palette', widely used by website designers during the early days of the Worldwide Web. She's also the successful author of a range of 'Hands-On Training' books that teach you how to use Photoshop, Flash, Acrobat, Director, Dreamweaver, Fireworks, QuickTime and many other applications.

On Lynda's website (<http://www.lynda.com>), you will find free access to over 1065 movie tutorials from more than 150 training titles. That's over 99 hours of total content available at no cost to you.

If you would like full access to the wealth of training movies on Lynda's site, you can subscribe to the Online Training Library, starting for as little as \$USD25.00 per month, with no long term commitment required. Those of you who are particularly interested in one, or more, of the applications listed, should look for the 'Hands-On Training' books on those applications. They come complete with CDs of the video tutorials.

Note: The tutorials on the website use Apple's QuickTime Player or QuickTime with iTunes player. Apple's website currently only offers QuickTime 7 for Windows 2000/XP and Mac OS X operating systems. For older operating system versions follow the Version Availability link and look for a further link to AppleCare.

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Too many licences?

Although I haven't personally counted them, I believe there are around 55 open source licences with differing conditions. The most common is the GPL, the GNU Public Licence. It applies to software for both Linux and Windows. Excellent software, such as The GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program), comes with this licence. OpenOffice.org, however, uses the GNU Lesser General Public Licence (LGPL), while Sun's Solaris uses the Common Development and Distribution License (CDDL). Yet all of the many differing open source licences are approved by the Open Source Initiative (OSI).

As Microsoft recently pointed out, this proliferation of licences could lead to conflict when developers combine code licensed under different open source arrangements. Learning from the open source community, Microsoft has unveiled three newly drafted template licences for its so-called Shared Source Initiative, which is designed to give developers, customers and partners access to the source code for Windows and other software.

The Microsoft Permissive Licence is the least restrictive of the Microsoft source code licences. It allows developers to view, modify and redistribute the source code for either commercial or non-commercial purposes. Under the Permissive Licence, developers may change the source code and share it with others, and can charge a licensing fee for modified work.

The Microsoft Community Licence is designed for use on collaborative development projects. This type of licence is commonly referred to as a reciprocal source code licence and carries specific requirements if software engineers choose to combine Community Licence code with their own code. It allows for both commercial and non-commercial modification and redistribution of licensed software.

The final licence unveiled today is the Microsoft Reference Licence which only allows licensees to view source code. It does not allow for modification or redistribution.

Jason Matusow, director of Microsoft's Shared Source Initiative, said that Microsoft has made some code and some projects available, many via open source-like licences and some via other means. The firm pointed out that it has more than 80 source code offerings that span the Windows and Office platforms and include projects that the open source community is helping to develop, such as the Windows Installer XML project.

However, Matusow went on to deny that Microsoft has been forced to open up access to its code because of the fast growing popularity of open source offerings.

<http://www.microsoft.com/sharedsource>

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Wireless broadband comes to Hobart

Telstra has introduced two forms of wireless broadband in the Hobart area. In the inner city, you can get their Wireless Broadband (1xEV-DO) coverage, while further out they offer their CDMA1X network. Between the two wireless broadband access is available, or will be shortly, in most areas of Hobart. However, as those of you with a mobile phone will know, with any wireless network there will be pockets where the signal simply isn't strong enough. Telstra nominates the following as likely to degrade the signal: basements, lifts, underground car parks and large buildings. Reception can also be affected by mountains and tunnels.

Assuming that you can get a signal, the minimum cost in the inner city area, is \$34.95 per month for 200 MB usage on a 12 month contract, plus \$199 for a wireless modem. For CDMA1X, you need a wireless mobile card for your laptop at a RRP of \$299 and your 200 MB usage will cost you \$69.95 a month on a 12 month contract. Not exactly bargain priced.

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Next meeting

8.00 pm, Tuesday, 8 November 2005. The topic is *Word and Excel Revisited ...* Here's your chance to pick up some hints about working with Microsoft's Word word processor and Excel spreadsheet.

Don't forget, though, that there are lots of publishing, word processing and spreadsheet hints on our website, as well as links to tutorials on Word, Excel and other popular applications. If you are looking for hints and tutorials, a good starting point on our (revised) website is:

<http://http://hobartpcgroup.org.au/files/links/resources.htm>

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Broadband over Power Lines

EFTel's parent company, Datafast, has recently announced the launch in Tasmania of what it describes as 'the world's first large-scale commercial trial of Broadband over Power Line (BPL) technology' in conjunction with Aurora Energy and Mitsubishi Electric. However, there have been overseas trials and at least one commercial contract was signed as early as 2003.

But what is BPL?

BPL enables users to access the Internet through the existing power network. Customer convenience is made easier with Internet access available via every electrical power outlet in connected premises. Just plug into the power socket and you're away!

How does BPL work?

BPL works on a similar principle to how ADSL works through your phone line. The power network is an interconnected series of cables that are connected to a power station to enable AC (alternating current) electricity to reach your home or workplace. BPL technology allows RF (radio-frequency) signals to piggy-back on the power cables and be transferred to the power socket. As the Internet signal (RF signal) vibrates at a different frequency than the electric current, the two don't interfere with each other.

BPL speeds

With BPL Internet speeds can be vastly quicker than with current DSL technology. BPL delivers ultraband Internet access at up to 200 Mbps, dwarfing efforts to coax 24 Mbps out of existing telephone lines with ADSL 2 and ADSL 2+.

What comes next?

The commercial trial is the first step in linking Aurora Energy's extensive electricity network throughout Tasmania – nearly 25,000 kilometres reaching 250,000 homes and businesses – with leading edge technology from Japan's Mitsubishi Electric.

Datafast anticipates excellent results from the commercial trial and believes that the partners in this project have a three year head-start on other Internet providers. The project is not a technical trial – Datafast claims the technology works and that this is the first stage of a commercial roll-out in Tasmania.

BPL technology is relatively new, and is still not available in the rest of Australia. EFTel and Datafast aim to be at the forefront of BPL technology in Australia and hope to build on our success in Tasmania.

Were they first?

According to reports from few.com, a small Virginia city has apparently become the first in the US to deploy commercial high-speed Internet service via a municipality's power grid. The initial contract for this was signed in October 2003.

About 12,500 Manassas households and 2,500 businesses now have the capability to use broadband-over-power-line (BPL) technology. Communication Technologies, a Chantilly, Virginia-based telecommunications company, deployed the technology and acts as the city's Internet service provider. According to a press release, the company has signed up 700

customers and has 500 requests for the service.

Meanwhile, in rural Central Virginia, deployment of BPL was well under way according to a report on <http://www.newsadvance.com>, dated 11 December 2004.

Is it suitable for rural areas?

According to critics, BPL could prove too expensive for rural areas as it requires repeaters along the electrical conduit roughly every two hundred metres so that the service isn't degraded. These repeaters have also been targeted by amateur wireless operators who believe that they will add considerably to the radio frequency interference they claim BPL generates.

However, remote rural communities could install a satellite and then use BPL to distribute the service to the community. Only low emission power need be used for the BPL feed, minimising interference, according to a report on <http://www.physorg.com>. Improving technology should reduce emissions and, according to various reports, it is possible to exclude particular frequencies to avoid interference with essential services.

Does it cause interference to existing services?

The Wireless Institute of Australia certainly thinks so and details its concerns in this submission to the Australian Communications Authority: http://www.wia.org.au/BPL/BPL_WIA_Response_to_ACA.pdf

One letter in the 'Mercury' queried why trials were being done here in Tasmania when it was 'banned in Japan'. Whilst it is true that at present, using BPL in Japan is prohibited under the Radio Law, Sumitomo Electric, together with the power companies, telecommunications companies and modem makers, is currently conducting tests on BPL, mainly to confirm reduction of electromagnetic leakage. It is expected that after commercial use is approved in Japan, the BPL technology (or Powerline Communication – PLC – as it called in some countries) will become a fundamental technology that can be applied in a wide range of fields including broadband service, automatic meter reading system for watt-hour meters, security system, surveillance, measurement, and remote control, and will spread all over the world as a cost-saving and easy-to-use means of communication. Or so Sumitomo Electric Industries (http://www.sei.co.jp/plc_e/outline/) claim on their website.

Fear, uncertainty and doubt

If you want to oppose something, or delay its implementation, FUD (Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt) is always an effective tactic. By scaring the hell out of the general public, you can create opposition before the public knows the facts. Once facts emerge, you dismiss them as 'government propaganda' or 'that's what you would expect them to say', thereby keeping the FUD going. Given the use of FUD in the past, one suspects that vested interests may well be partly responsible for the present cloud of uncertainty surrounding BPL.

I certainly don't want to rain on Aurora and Datafast's parade, but nevertheless the criticism of overseas trials of BPL is far from encouraging. We can but hope that Aurora/Datafast/Mitsubishi Electric have found some answers to the problems and that the trials will prove that interference from BPL won't prevent it from being extended to large areas of Tasmania.

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Fifty years of song

For almost as long as Australia has had television, Europe has had its Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). Having just celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, the contest is one of the longest running musical variety programs in television history.

Even though Terry Wogan delights in taking the mickey out of it with a voice-over, the ESC attracts hundreds of millions of viewers in Europe and has launched, or boosted, the careers of many famous artists: Celine Dion, Cliff Richard, Johnny Logan, Sandy Shaw, ABBA, The New Seekers, Brotherhood of Man, Kathy Kirby, Lulu, Julio Iglesias, Olivia Newton-John, The Shadows, Bucks Fizz, Michael Ball, James Fox, Helena Paparizou, the Latvian Shouting Choir (well, perhaps not the choir, but Helena is well-known in Europe) ... to name some you may be familiar with. Some of the hit songs these and other artists made famous are equally impressive: *Congratulations*, *Hold Me Now*, *Volare*, *Waterloo*, *Puppet on a String*, *What's Another Year*, *Save Your Kisses for Me*, *Eres Tú (Touch the Wind)*, *Beg Steal or Borrow*, *Boom Bang-a-Bang*, *All Kinds of Everything*, *Long Live Love*, *Let Me Be The One*, *My Number One*, *Hold on to Your Love* ...

As Sir Cliff Richard said on the anniversary show, you don't have to win. If only one million of the hundreds of millions of viewers buy your record, you have a million seller. Cliff Richard's career had been going for ten years when he appeared on the ESC and *Congratulations* went on to sell well over a million copies.

To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary, the ESC had a vote to see which was the most popular song in the history of the contest. If you don't know which song won, pop over to <http://www.eurovision.tv> and have a listen to it with your trusty Windows Media Player. There you will also find a detailed history of the contest, the artists and the songs. You can also buy CDs and DVDs of the fifty winning songs.

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From our hints collection

Word 2002 has a format painter. Look for an icon depicting a yellow paintbrush. You may not see the button. In which case, click on the arrow at the end of the toolbar and choose it from there. It will be added to your available buttons. If you select a section of text, click this brush, and then select another portion of text, the formatting of the first section will be transferred to the second. Double click the button and the painter will stay selected. You can then apply the formatting to several parts of your document.

There seems to be little on this in the Help in Word 2002, and referring the query to the Microsoft help site, produced only a brief article, giving the use of the double click. However, for some useful tips on using Word, including getting the best out of the format painter, try this URL: <http://training.tccs.tufts.edu/pdftips/wadvtips.pdf>

StarOffice 8.0/OpenOffice 2.0 has a format paintbrush. It works in a similar manner to Word's format painter. StarOffice 8.0's help describes how to use it. It then gives a table describing the formatting attributes that the paintbrush can copy.

You can use the Format Paintbrush tool to copy formatting from a text selection or object and apply the formatting to another text selection or object.

- *Select the text or object whose formatting you want to copy.*
- *On the **Standard Bar**, click the **Format Paintbrush** icon.*
 - *The cursor changes to a paint bucket.*
- *If you want to apply the formatting to more than one selection, double-click the **Format Paintbrush** icon.*
 - *After you apply all the formatting, click the icon again.*
- *Select or click the text or object that you want to apply the formatting to.*
 - *To exclude paragraph formatting, hold down Ctrl when you click.*
 - *To exclude character formatting, hold down Ctrl+Shift when you click.*

Earlier versions of StarOffice/OpenOffice.org do not have a format paintbrush. Instead, open the Stylist, select the text with the formatting you wish to reuse and drag it to the Stylist. Name the newly created style and you can then apply that style anywhere in your document in the normal manner. You can also import the style into another document. This technique works equally well in the latest version.

For more hints, see our Group website <http://hobartpcgroup.org.au/files/services/hints/hint-index.htm>.

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