



DWPC Technology Newsletter

Technology news from David W. Potts Consulting

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Welcome to the eighth edition of the David W. Potts Consulting *DWPC Technology Newsletter*. I hope you find this information helpful. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please send me an email, indicating such. If you received this newsletter from a friend and wish to be added to the mailing list, please email me at the address above and indicate your desire to receive the newsletter.

I REALLY want my Start Menu back! So, you've made the jump to Windows 8 . . . but would still like to have a Start Menu to access common items while you learn the new Metro User Interface. There are a number of ways to simulate the Start Menu to some degree . . . and there are a number of utilities that can produce a Start Menu in Windows 8. Microsoft will allow users to preview the Windows 8.1 update, which will add a "Start button" with "tips" to Windows 8, June 28, but that lacks the actual "Start Menu". One utility that seems to do a good job of bringing back a realistic "Start menu" is called Classic Shell, available at <http://www.classicshell.net>. Classic Shell provides a number of configuration options (such as the type of Start menu (Windows XP, Windows 8, etc.)). Classic Shell is funded on a donation basis . . . and is free, if you choose to not donate (although the donations help the authors keep the product updated).

Windows 8.1 preview is on its way . . . The article above, "I REALLY want my Start Menu back!" references the upcoming Microsoft Windows 8.1 preview, slated for release the end of June, 2013. The actual production release of the update is slated for late this year. The Windows 8.1 update will be free [for Windows 8 users, and will be available through the Windows Store]. Reportedly, the PC Settings section has been expanded, Windows Store has been redesigned (and items installed from the Windows Store will now be automatically updated), enhancements have been made to the touchscreen functionality and direct synchronization with Microsoft SkyDrive is built in. The Start Screen will also include two additional tile sizes (one larger and one smaller than the current sizes), doubling the current offerings, as well as including other enhancements to the User Interface. You will also be able to configure Windows 8.1 to boot straight to the Desktop (bypassing the Start Screen). A new Start Button is included . . . but includes "tips" rather than the "Start Menu" functionality. Ways to mimic the Start Menu are discussed in the article above, "I REALLY want my Start Menu back!". You will also be able to use your Windows 8.1 computer as an expensive digital picture frame.

Do I really need multiple passwords? Unfortunately, one thing is clear with our digital lives . . . people have access to more information about us than ever before . . . and this continues to increase as we use tools such as social networking. In these difficult times, scammers and cybercriminals are trying, harder than ever, to steal our money or sell our information. One of the ways to protect ourselves is by using passwords. Contrary to *way* too many people's apparent opinion, abc123 is not a password. More and more sites are requiring "complex" passwords (passwords that are at least 8 characters in length and require at least one upper and one lower case letter and at least one number or special character). I strongly suggest using a "complex" password for any email or financial site, or any site that stores your credit card information. I further suggest using a different "complex" password for every site that deals with your financial information. Many people understand the need for multiple passwords and use them, but write them down and place them somewhere convenient. This is great for a thief who breaks into the house to use the computer there with the passwords stored under the keyboard! There are utilities that can store your passwords, securely, on your computer, but many of them won't stop someone from using the passwords if they have access to your computer . . . and they generally don't help when you need your password on another computer. There are techniques to create and use "complex" passwords, and even place clues to the actual password in plain sight, that only you can decipher. If you are interested in learning techniques to help you secure your digital life, please let David W. Potts Consulting help!

How else can I protect my computer? In addition to using "complex" passwords (please see "Do I really need multiple passwords?", above), you can help keep your computer safe by ensuring you have (and run) current and updated antivirus and antimalware programs. Microsoft's (FREE!) Security Essentials antivirus program does a good job against viruses. So do many paid products. Although many antivirus products try to make you believe they are the "be all and end all" for ALL your security concerns, I have found products specifically made for malware (other than viruses)

tend to do a better job, in general, against items other than viruses (and some can help with viruses, too). **You must be diligent to ensure you do not install a security utility that can compromise your system.** Many downloads that pose as helpful security utilities are actually malware, themselves. **Before installing any software, ensure you have researched it to ensure it is legitimate!** There are many good antimalware products . . . and many of them are free for personal (non-commercial) use (such as Spybot Search and Destroy, Malwarebytes' AntiMalware or SpySweeper) although many of them require licenses for commercial users. Although many of the paid subscriptions for antimalware utilities offer real-time protection and automated updates and scans, many of the free products are reactive . . . requiring the user to manually update the product and run scans. This is fine, as long as you do it. Installing updates to Windows and other items (such as Java, Flash Player, Adobe Reader, etc.) can patch vulnerabilities, helping to keep you safe. Of course, the best thing is to never get infected. As malware infections are often contracted by visiting a malicious Web site, ensuring you don't visit questionable Web sites is crucial. Windows Vista and above includes User Account Control, which, according to Microsoft, can decrease your chance of an infection by 30% (by allowing the user to stop the installation of the malicious software). *If you are infected with a virus or malware, it is important to address the issue immediately. Please allow David W. Potts Consulting to help you with the eradication of malicious software on your computer.*

Java Security Alert! I hate to sound (write?) like a broken record, but Oracle's Java continues to be a security risk. The Department of Homeland Security has warned that Oracle Java, a method to run programs on your computer [mainly through your Web browser(s)], contains vulnerabilities that could be exploited to compromise the security of your computer. They strongly suggest disabling Sun Java, unless it is necessary for programs used on the computer. The issues with Java are present in Microsoft Windows, Apple Mac OS X.x and the Linux operating systems. One recent article stated Kaspersky Labs indicated half the exploit-based attacks in 2012 were targeted at Oracle Java. Although Oracle recently released security updates to help thwart attacks through Java, the Department of Homeland Security warns there are still Java vulnerabilities that could allow a computer to be compromised. Many users do not need Java. Oracle has published a Web page that details how to disable the Java program. Please visit the page at: http://www.java.com/en/download/help/disable_browser.xml. If you do need to run Java, ensure you are using the latest release and remove any old versions. If you have any questions about this or other security issues (or any other computer questions), please feel free to contact us and we will be happy to help you.

Windows XP End-of-Life Countdown! Again . . . sorry to continue to repeat myself . . . but I know many people who are still using their Windows XP computer(s). If you are still using a computer that is running Microsoft Windows XP, you will need to stop using that operating system by April 8, 2014, when Microsoft stops supporting Windows XP. After April 8, 2014, Microsoft will stop delivering updates to Windows XP, causing it to be more vulnerable. In many cases, it is most cost-effective to replace Windows XP computers with new computers (Microsoft provides no direct upgrade path from Windows XP to Windows 7 or Windows 8). The good news is that a new computer can cost under \$400 (you can get a great computer for \$500 or so). If you are still using computers running Microsoft Windows XP and would like assistance migrating to Microsoft Windows 7 or Microsoft Windows 8, or new computers, please allow David W. Potts Consulting to assist you with your transition.

How do I . . . Please submit questions to me via email to the address at the top of page 1. Questions may be answered in future issues of this newsletter, or may be addressed individually. I often have clients who exclaim, after my correcting their issue, how they have been frustrated by working on an issue for weeks before calling me. Often the problem takes less than an hour to correct. Many mention how, next time, they will call me first to avoid the frustration! I have helped people do things from selecting and programming a high-tech remote control to setting up a company's network infrastructure.

David W. Potts Consulting will be happy to assist you with your hardware, software and network selection, purchase, integration, troubleshooting and training. We specialize in Microsoft Windows computers and networking and can also assist you with home theatre and other electronics consulting.

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