



DWPC Technology Newsletter

Technology news from David W. Potts Consulting

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Welcome to the tenth edition of the David W. Potts Consulting *DWPC Technology Newsletter*. This is the second holiday edition of my 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.

MALWARE WARNING! A very destructive piece of "ransomware", called CryptoLocker, has been discovered. "Ransomware" is malware that uses techniques to hold the user's computer or data hostage, pending payment of the ransom. Although there are many pieces of ransomware that warn they have encrypted your files and you must pay them for decryption (so you can access the data, again), most do not actually encrypt your files, but CryptoLocker actually *does* what it says. According to reports, CryptoLocker encrypts over 60 file types (including Microsoft Word documents and Microsoft Excel workbooks) and there is no way to decrypt the files, other than paying the ransom. It appears that, when this malware was released, they requested a \$50 ransom. When the authors found how well their malware was doing, they upped the price to \$100 . . . and it is now at \$300! The malware gives 3 days to pay, after which point the "private key" (needed to decrypt the files) is deleted and the contents of your precious files is lost, forever. The only way to recover is by paying the ransom (before the private key is deleted) or restore from backup (after removing the CryptoLocker malware). As I have warned, your best defense is practicing "safe computing" . . . by not opening unsolicited email attachments (without first verifying with the sender that they did send you the email) and only visiting more mainstream Web sites. Once you receive the CryptoLocker ransom message, it is already too late . . . your files have been encrypted. A good backup strategy is also key to your protection. Microsoft Windows 7 and Microsoft Windows 8 both include an "image backup" utility that will create a backup with your programs, settings and data. At this point, only Microsoft Windows computers appear to be vulnerable to this attack.

Blu-Ray or DVD? So, you've got a DVD player and everything looks great on your TV. Why would you upgrade to a Blu-Ray player? DVDs generally use 720x480 resolution (WxH), where Blu-Rays generally use (up to) 1920x1080 resolution. Some DVD players "upscale" your DVD data to make it "look" like 1920x1080 on your HDTV (a feature included in new Blu-Ray players, as well). If you have a 7.1 (or more) channel audio system, you need HDMI and Blu-Ray to provide you with the data to decode the "discrete signals" for the side channels. Many Blu-Rays also include multiple endings (an option on some DVDs), multiple vantage points, more languages and other options. Most new Blu-Ray players also include streaming services, such as NetFlix or HuLu Plus (both being subscription services, although both offer a free trial) and many provide WiFi connectivity.

Microsoft Windows V. 8.1 is here! Microsoft released its newest rendition of Windows, Version 8.1, October 17, 2013. The Windows 8.1 update will be free [for Windows 8 users, and will be available through Microsoft Update or the Windows Store]. 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 touchscreen functionality and direct synchronization with Microsoft SkyDrive is built in. The Start Screen also includes 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 use your Windows 8.1 computer as an expensive digital picture frame. 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 traditional "Start Menu" functionality. Ways to mimic the Start Menu are discussed in the article "I REALLY want my Start Menu back!", from my July-August, 2013 newsletter. A free Windows 8.1 update will be available for Windows 8 RT computers, as well.

What the heck is Windows 8[.1] RT? Not all Microsoft Windows 8 types are the same! Along with Windows 8, Microsoft released an operating system called Windows 8 RT, designed for smaller, portable, devices, such as tablets (The original Microsoft Surface Tablet runs Windows 8 RT, where the later Microsoft Surface Pro Tablet runs the standard Windows 8). Windows 8 RT runs on ARM RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computer) processors (rather than the more conventional Intel 32 bit (AKA x86) or 64 bit (AKA x64) CISC (Complex Instruction Set Computer) processors). The ARM processors have lower power consumption than the CISC processors, lending themselves to devices that require long battery life, such as smart phones and tablets. Why should you care? The biggest reason is that Windows 8 RT (and Windows 8.1 RT) machines can only run apps that are available on the Windows Store (you can't simply attach a CD or DVD drive and install your favorite software). Windows 8 RT computers do come with Microsoft Office Home and Student 2013 RT; a "touch-optimized" version of Microsoft Office. Many of the features included in Microsoft Windows 8 are not included in Windows 8 RT. Along with the incompatibility with standard Windows software, Windows 8 RT has much less support for hardware, such as printers, mice and keyboards.

It's Christmastime, again! Santa has lots of options, this year. Nearly anyone would love a new tablet . . . and there is a great variety out there . . . from 7" Android tablets for under \$100 to convertible computer/tablets, such as the Microsoft Surface Pro or Dell XPS 18 (the latter with an 18" screen, at nearly \$1,000), running Microsoft Windows 8. In the middle are the Microsoft Windows 8 RT tablets, iPad Mini and faster, larger, Android tablets. How about a new MFP (Multifunction Peripheral; print/scan/copy, and sometimes, fax) for the family? Many new MFPs support wireless printing from tablets . . . and can be purchased for under \$100 (you can get a great, feature-rich, wireless, MFP for under \$200). An intelligent, programmable, universal remote control is a welcome gift for those with AV systems who juggle multiple remote controls (I like the Logitech Harmony series). Blu-Ray players with built-in apps (so you can stream NetFlix, etc., with the appropriate subscription) have really dropped in price. LED televisions are also getting much more economical. Bluetooth gadgets like headsets, headphones, keyboards, mice, etc., are great stocking stuffers for kids and geeks. Do you want to blow your family away? Let David W. Potts Consulting set your family up with a projection system with surround sound. Do you know someone who has issues with their technology (or needs to know how to use their gadgets)? Consider a gift certificate for a visit from David W. Potts Consulting. Have *you* been good, this year? Maybe *you* deserve some of the items, above . . .

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 (*less than 6 months away!*). 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 8/8.1). 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 and technology consulting.

David W. Potts Consulting wishes you and yours a very happy and safe holiday season and a very healthy and prosperous New Year!

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