

# COMPUTER HELP!

## NEWSLETTER 2009

By Ed Siemion, Computer Consultant

Greetings!

Thank you for requesting services. In this newsletter, are topics of which address growing issues with computing needs at home and business into 2009.

- 1.) **Securing Information at Home: Photos, Video, Music and Personal Information.**
- 2.) **Mobile Phones or Hand Held Computers?**
- 3.) **Internet Phone/Video: Skype Hype.**
- 4.) **E-mail and Microsoft Outlook Bogging Down.**
- 5.) **Google Vs. Microsoft—Aerial Photos of Land, Buildings, City Streets and...You.**
- 6.) **Mac vs. PC.**
- 7.) **Recycling of Old Electronics**



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## Securing Information at Home: Photos, Music, Video and Personal Information

### Photos

Most of us have digital cameras and/or a collection of family photos as negatives or prints.

To secure, have negatives, slides or prints scanned and burned to multiple DVD disks and distribute to friends and family.

If photo collection at computer to be protected, establish automated backup to external hard disk drive or to online services (such as "MobileMe" from Apple) or both. A dedicated hard disk drive or "file server" will allow for tighter control of larger volumes of information over saving to the C: drive.

The use of Adobe PhotoElements has become popular for management and editing of photos as is often preloaded onto a new PC by Dell and other PC makers. A user can experience problems with this software when restoring operating system and attempting to move photos to new drive letter where work associated collections (tags) can be problematic to recover.

If uploading photos from camera to computer year after year--- upload to hard drive volume having plenty of capacity and is dedicated for managing photos and other data.

The free program called "Picassa" from Google is currently recommended over Adobe PhotoElements for tracking photos at a PC as Picassa provides improved dynamics when handling photo collections with respect to thumbnails, timeline, resizing while clearly reporting folder locations of all photos at PC by year automatically.

### Music

There is a problem with securing a purchased iTunes music collection from Apple where the collection has been copied to new computer or alternate hard drive. It is possible to copy an iTunes music purchase to a total of 5 different drive locations only. After which the music purchase can no longer be played unless purchase did not include copyright protection. Again, a dedicated hard drive is best to avoid issue when drives fill to capacity or data needs to be moved to a new computer.

What is becoming popular is either a paid or free subscription to an online music provider. One example is the free music playback from [www.pandora.com](http://www.pandora.com). With online music—there no need to download files and no need to worry about securing music files. Plays nicely with the new touch screen iPods (iTouch) and iPhones.



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## Video

If saving video tapes and wish to secure---send to digital video lab such as [www.sparkdubs.com](http://www.sparkdubs.com) also advertised as [www.sparkworksmedia.com](http://www.sparkworksmedia.com) near Seattle Center and let them quickly transfer to DVD and/or disk or encode for publishing on a website. Attempting transfer of video to computer and to convert file format on your own can result in poor quality and heart ache unless digital video is a passionate hobby and you have hours of spare time to fuss with the video format conversion and editing processes. Instead—consider sending to Spark Works.

It is best to have video stored onto a dedicated hard drive volume. In some instances, multiple hard drives operating together are required to efficiently handle transfer of video files and editing.

The “TiVo” or Microsoft’s “MediaCenter” PC can record television programming and manage video in ways to provide a home theatre arrangement with ability to record a movie and skip over commercials and playback high definition movies. If a MediaCenter system, an additional hard drive dedicated for video is recommended when recording television programming.

The “AppleTV” is well engineered yet has no television tuner and is designed to push high definition movie sales from the iTunes store to your home. Worth it if willing to purchase and then manage movies on hard disk.

The more information you wish to store and protect, the more cost and management involved. A fully loaded home office for recording television, video editing, digital camera library, documents, E-mail repository can require 3 or 4 hard drives and additional computers. Keep costs down by keeping it simple and downsizing what you do at a computer. If in the budget---Go for it! Can end up with a home office packed with equipment requiring two or three separate 110-VAC circuits to power it all. Certainly not for everyone although some home or business offices gradually fall into this.

Give me a call when in need of help securing and converting digital video and consultation with professional lab such as Spark Works Media to get job done quickly and correctly.

## Personal Information

Username, passwords, credit card accounts, online bill pay, online banking, medical records, online shopping, eBay, PayPal---all packed onto home computers where we wish to keep secure from identity/credit criminals....With such activities, recommend working with a Mac and establishing a backup to external hard drive.



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Can work with all of the above at a PC and possibly be safe, yet not as safe when at a Mac. There is currently no intensive need to install security software at a Mac---at a PC it is a requirement when working as discussed.

What has been a dark avenue for security issues at a PC is the use of Internet Explorer, its "ActiveX" and other dynamically embedded programs. The Microsoft programming is currently too open, loose and not proprietary enough to adequately subdue hackers without help of additional security software (McAfee, Norton, AVG, SpyBot, etc.). Currently recommend AVG 8.0 free edition over McAfee or Norton Internet Security. Why attempt the rocket science to properly install and update this software? Get a Mac and ditch the rocket science entirely and toss the need to continually pay for support and updates with such security software.

Give me a call if in need of help with securing information at computer and managing security software at PC or migrating to a new Mac.

## **Mobile Phones or Hand Held Computers?**

The iPhone and new BlackBerry "mobile phones" or possibly better termed "hand held computers" have improved ability to run programs as would be at a Mac or PC.

What these hand held devices can do and what is becoming more powerful and popular:

- 1.) Remote control of home lighting and HVAC system via WiFi network in home
- 2.) Security systems where live video is fed directly to hand held—anywhere there is a connection to Internet or over home network.
- 3.) Television and stereo system remote control via WiFi network in home...no need to point remote directly at TV display and remote control is not as easily lost since it is also the phone in your pocket and is back lit so is easy to see in dark.
- 4.) Virtual street level walking via the new features from Google maps (iPhone) and GPS.
- 5.) Remotely control a PC.

Notably are the remote control applications associated with the iPhone over the Internet or home WiFi network.

The new "App Store" by Apple has promoted an acceleration of this technology via input from vast range of brilliant independent developers keeping the iPhone ahead of other hand holds.



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## Internet Phone/Video: Skype Hype

Popularity of a program called "Skype" appeared strong throughout 2008 and will grow into 2009. Allows for free long distance calls to any computer on Internet and includes a live video feed.

The use of Skype on the day time TV program "Oprah" has been a significant marketing event for Skype boosting exposure to the masses. Skype increases in popularity globally as the language/cultural adaptations are built in and relatively easy to use over other programs.

To use Skype, purchase a quality WebCam having a built-in microphone and visit [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com). If own a newer Mac, a camera and microphone is likely already present.

If stuck and need help with Skype, give me a call.

## E-mail and Microsoft Outlook Boggling Down

Have found Outlook begins to bog down as storage of mailbox approaches 1 GB--- Boggling down meaning the program stalls, does not open quickly, searches through inbox slowly or not at all in a practical sense.

Microsoft addressed this performance problem with respect to larger offices and not a home office with the release of Microsoft Small Business Server 2008. This server operating system provides Outlook with a robust mailbox capable of handling volume yet at price requiring a relatively powerful office server computer and a support person such as myself (been supporting this server arrangement since 1998).

At home, using Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express can become impractical over "web mail applications" as the volume and size of an E-mail box with Outlook grows over time.

A downside to the web mail application is backing up and securing mail messages. How does one copy an entire Gmail Inbox to the desktop PC or Mac as a single file? Currently is not possible although mail can be downloaded message by message of which is timely and problematic with a growing repository of E-mail.

When securing messages are an issue, go with both a program such as Outlook to download and secure messages to PC and a web application such as Gmail for backup and high performance alternative when sending/receiving/searching/filtering messages.



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Another nice feature with Gmail is its ability to work with hand helds...what is sent and received at the iPhone is in fact shown as sent and received under the Gmail account in real time---no sync event between hand held and computer required.

## **Google Vs. Microsoft—Aerial Photos of Land, Buildings, City Streets and...You.**

Visit [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), click Maps, search address of your home, then use icon of the yellow person to pin-point the virtual street level view and behold---potentially a photo of yourself walking out the front door. Click and drag the image to begin working with a 360 degree spherical view having depth (up/down, left/right, forward/backward). Almost seems as if one has control of a live camera placed everywhere at street level.

These images are not live photos as some folks I have encountered are fooled to believe. Throughout 2008, Google established a street level photographic image gathering crusade across the United States and parts of Europe.

Vehicles loaded with digital cameras explored most neighborhood streets and some back roads where a massive photo repository has been established by Google.

In comparison, Microsoft has not done this yet does provide nice “bird’s eye” views of buildings, land and city streets from many angles and in some respects slightly better than Google where the “Google Earth 3D” application competes with Microsoft’s Live 3D application.

## **Mac vs. PC**

We wish for a computing experience to be as stress free, secure, simple and “human” as possible...this means a Mac for basic home computing and a few advanced multimedia needs.

When we want more than basic and desire programs and hardware which can only run on a PC and be cost effective over the short term---this means a PC, yet also means introducing an increased level of risk with respect to hackers as discussed above and---stability where a Mac will not stall, freeze or “crash” as frequently as a PC requiring a shut down and restart.

Why is this? Apple works to engineer the operating system software and the computer hardware together as one package....a well orchestrated symphony of software and hardware together quality controlled from a single entity of brilliant technicians sweating the details within the confines of a single organization.



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In contrast, Microsoft for the past 20 years has chosen not to do this with exceptions such as the Xbox video game console. Instead, Microsoft attempts to patch a computer operating system together across thousands of different PC manufacturers with none of them getting as right with the operating system as Apple does....Apple gets it right and has been establishing a growing market share over Microsoft's forever sour marriage with the neurotic PC. Accelerating this growth is supported by the iPod, iTunes and iPhone and hand shaking relationships with web industry leaders such as Google.

Please give a call when in need of help with purchasing, setting up, upgrading or repairing either a new Mac or PC to include pick-up and delivery service.

## **Recycling of Old Electronics**

The state of Washington through the department of ecology has established a new recycling program starting January 1, 2009. There are now more convenient places to drop off old computers, TVs, VCRs and other electronics at no charge.

Visit <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/recycle/> and search database to find one near you.

Many Goodwill locations now accept old TVs and computers (working or not) as of 1/1/2009. When recycling an old computer, be sure to remove or destroy the hard disk drive(s) and that no CDs are left in drives so as not to expose personal information to public.

Will continue to support your home or business office via remote desktop, on-site visit, pick-up/delivery, repair and upgrade services as licensed business since 1996.

Have a wonderful 2009 and please give a call (206) 235-7911 or E-mail [edsiemion@apexinformationservices.com](mailto:edsiemion@apexinformationservices.com) when in need of computer help.



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