

## **Computer Owners' Group Magazine Notes: May - August 2022**

All the computer magazines reviewed below are held in the SeniorNet office or at the Wellington Public Library, and are available for borrowing. We do not review every magazine we receive.

R M D Munro

### **TECHlife Australia (May 2022)**

#### **Cheaper but still good**

Not everybody at SeniorNet wants to pay a huge amount for their smartphone. As usual in these magazine reviews, we're interested in high quality at a reasonable price. Tech magazines often concentrate on the glamour items: for example, on smartphones with an incredible range of features but costing an incredible amount of money. But this issue usefully reports on a budget smartphone to which it gives its coveted "Editor Approved" award. It is the Xiaomi Redmi Note 11. (See p. 46.) The article says that this company "consistently puts out low-price handsets that give you more than you might expect for your money". In this case, it says that this phone "comes with decent battery life, an excellent screen, and a build quality that's impressive". It notes that the phone doesn't have 5G, and the rear camera isn't outstanding; but, for \$A399, who's complaining?

## **Never say never**

The flagship article in this issue is “Never get tracked on line” (pp.54 – 61). This is a significant article, and it could reduce online exposure. It describes a number of tools which it says will help you to: “block ads and cookies that follow you around the web; stop sites identifying your browser’s unique ‘fingerprint’; force websites to always use encrypted connections; browse anonymously on your phone and tablet; switch your browser to a private search engine; and, tell websites not to collect or sell your personal data.” Needless to say, though, there’s a lot of work in setting all this up. And even if you did everything suggested, the essential point remains: nothing done on any computer is private. And there are stories virtually every week in our newspapers which underline that.

## **Australian Personal Computer (June 2022)**

### **Look out**

If you were already sick of the speed of change, there’s an article here that will send you straight to bed. It states bluntly that “quantum computers have the potential to change the world” (p. 26). Because of their extraordinary computational power, these computers can break ordinary passwords and encryption systems. For starters, think

banking; and then move on to diplomatic and military communications. Those governments which can afford to are taking action. Let us hope that our banks are also.

### **Getting rid of it**

When you uninstall a programme, you want to be sure that it's all gone. But some uninstallers leave traces of the programme (essentially junk) on your computer. This issue favourably reviews Wise Program UnInstaller (see p. 44). Among other favourable features, it's free.

### **Let me count the ways**

The feature article in this issue is from a genre with which we're quite familiar. On this occasion, the article's called "30 ways to make your PC better" (pp. 62 – 68). If you're tempted to read it, you'll find that it has a good range of sensible suggestions which include: don't update to Windows 11; replace any spinning discs; if you can, encrypt your PC; run diagnostic tests; dump old software; and, tighten your laptop's screws.

## **TECHlife Australia (June 2022)**

### **Gold standard**

There are articles which more than justify subscriptions. They are a joy to find, and a joy to refer you to. This issue

contains one. What it does, and that very well, is to alert readers to familiar programmes that are now “slow, unsafe and past their best” – and to tell us what to replace them with. Slightly awkwardly titled, it is called “Stop Using Terrible Software” (pp. 48 – 55). Now to illustrate the article’s value: in the past many SeniorNet members swore by CCleaner. Some still do. Indeed, in its heyday CCleaner was a very valuable, free utility programme. However, because of its popularity and efficiency, it was bought by Avast. And, as often happens, that seems to have killed the goose. Since then, CCleaner has reportedly been adulterated, and is said to have been blacklisted by Microsoft “for bundling potentially unwanted programmes”. Further, Avast is well-known for using CCleaner as a marketing tool for other Avast programmes. So, as you can see, this article names programmes which are popular and which many of us use - and it explains in adequate detail why we should no longer use them, and, most helpfully, tells us what it thinks we should replace them with, outlining their features. Twenty programmes are listed, along with their suggested replacements. I mention below some of the better-known programmes, and the proposed free alternatives. The full list even includes some phone and tablet apps. (One point to note: if you’re going to download any of these programmes, you should only do so from the manufacturer’s own site. Otherwise, you could, unsuspectingly, catch unpleasant PUPs from alternative providers.)

<b>Task</b>	<b>Programme often used</b>	<b>Proposed free alternative</b>
<b>System cleaner</b>	CCleaner	Bleachbit
<b>Data wiper</b>	Eraser	Permadelete
<b>Driver updater</b>	IObit Driver Booster	Snappy Driver
<b>Disc fragmenter</b>	Auslogics Disk Defrag	Windows 10 & 11 own equivalents
<b>System information tool</b>	Speccy	CPU-Z
<b>Program uninstaller</b>	Revo Uninstaller	BCUninstaller
<b>Password manager</b>	LastPass	Bitwarden
<b>VPN</b>	TunnelBear	Windscribe
<b>Office Suite</b>	Microsoft Office	OnlyOffice, or LibreOffice

## **Free – but only for Apple users**

Another rewarding article in this issue is for Apple users (who don't always get as much attention as they would like in computer magazines). This article is confidently named "The best free apps for your Mac, iPhone, iPad & Watch" (pp. 64 – 75). There's a huge range here, and they are well-described. Apple users actually have no reason to feel neglected when one sees the number and quality of the free apps available to them. Further, a number of apps which Windows users might claim ownership of are actually also prominent in the Apple universe. See, for example, Audacity, Pocket, GIMP, and OneDrive.

## **Windows 11 Security Upgrade – Free but at a high price**

Microsoft is looking after you. It has announced a free feature for Windows 11 to help protect users from malicious downloads. This is good news. But what is not good news is that if you have already installed Windows 11, then, to get access to this feature, you will have to install the whole operating system again. The article says (see p.10) that, among other things, this would require wiping your entire PC - and how many of us would happily, let alone confidently, do that? Once again, the old truism resurfaces: don't be an early adopter.

## **Solid State Drives - Forward March**

There is a major article in this issue on solid state drives (SSDs). It is “Your complete guide to SSDs” (pp. 56 – 63), and it is comprehensive. After first pointing out the delicacy, and hence the likely limited longevity, of my present mechanical hard drive, it notes in heavy, bold print five reasons why SSDs are better. For the record those reasons are: “SSDs are much faster; SSDs are more robust; SSDs last longer; SSDs use less power, and SSDs are quieter”. George Barna (among other things our SeniorNet database administrator) has told us that for years, and as usual he is right. But the article goes on to tell us how to choose and install an SSD. I’m confident that all the necessary information is contained therein. But having read this material, I’m equally sure that only somebody very competent should reach for the screwdriver.

## **Incidental intelligence**

The world’s most popular Internet browser is Google Chrome. Second used to be Mozilla’s Firefox. It is a very good browser - but never underestimate the power of the big battalions. Microsoft is a tough competitor, and its current browser, Edge, has now secured nearly 10% of personal computer users, and so has edged in front of Firefox. (See p.10.)

## **Australian Personal Computer (July 2022)**

### **Dux and Proxime Accessit**

The “A-List” (see pp.28 – 29) is a regular feature in this magazine. And a good thing too. It records “the best products on the market, as picked by our editors”. So, if you’re in the market for, say, a new laptop, Chromebook, tablet, monitor or printer, this is an excellent place to start. And, just to show we’re fair, you should also look at the regular feature in Techlife Australia which also reports on “the best of the best”. However, Techlife Australia has a rather different focus from its competitor, and it concentrates on TVs, projectors, games consoles, sound bars, watches and smartphones.

## **TECHlife Australia (July 2022)**

### **It’s free but it’s good**

If you have Windows 10 or 11, you have a free antivirus programme on your computer. But free often means that the programme is not worth much. However, that’s certainly not the case with Microsoft’s Windows Security. In a major article, “Don’t pay for antivirus” (pp. 46 – 53), the point is made that this programme is now very good indeed, and



with its bundled companion, Microsoft Defender (anti-malware), you have top-rated protection against attack. So, you don't need to buy third-party security software to guard the walls, or check the dungeons. In hard times, that's reassuring.

## **Australian Personal Computer (August 2022)**

### **From bad to worse**

We can have some confidence in this magazine. It calls it as it sees it. If something is good, it says so. If something is not good, it does not pull its punches. Now there is a review here of the D-Link EaglePro AI AX1500 4G router. (See p.40.) The introduction to the review says that the "D-Link EaglePro Wi-Fi mesh system was one of the worst products we'd ever tested". The reviewer then analyses the present router in telling detail, summing up the \$A300 device by commenting that "sadly, it's another half-baked product from D-Link".

### **Birthday greetings**

The flagship article is entitled "Windows 11; make it perfect" (pp. 68 – 73). A significant box in it is by the respected computer writer, Jon Honeyball. That box is headed "Windows 11 is one. Happy birthday?" The question-mark says it all. Honeyball is unimpressed with Windows 11.

By contrast, he seems well satisfied with Windows 10, and says that corporate users “will run Windows 10 for years to come, as they try to wrap their heads around the whole 11 debacle”. The message for SeniorNet members is then, I think, don’t rush to upgrade from Windows 10. It’s a pretty good operating system and Microsoft still has quite a lot of work to do to polish up its successor.

### **Quiz night**

Imagine you’re doing your social duty, and despite a dark and stormy night, you’ve gone to the Johnsonville pub for a quiz evening. It’s for a good cause. They’re raising money for more computers at a local primary school. You think you’ve been put into quite a reasonable team. The first question comes: “What was the world’s first computer?” But too quickly, one of your people says confidently, “the Apple II”. He’s swiftly contradicted by another who more hesitantly advances “the Commodore 64”. “Colossus”, says another firmly. Then a dark-haired woman stuns the table into silence by saying it was “Babbage’s Analytical Engine”. The table all nod wisely. But a teen-ager with a team further down the room disagrees. He shocks everybody present with his answer. “It’s the Antikythera computer built by the ancient Greeks”, he says. People start looking at each other.

Well, he was right. He’d read the fascinating article in this issue, “Decoding the world’s first analogue computer” (pp. 110 – 113). This reported that the encrusted mechanism

of this machine (with key parts missing and looking like nothing more than a piece of old rock) had been discovered in a shipwreck off the Greek island of Antikythera in 1900. Since then it has slowly been recognised as one of the most remarkable achievements of the Ancient World. Through superb academic analysis, it has been proved that this machine with its intricate gears and dials could forecast the cycles of not just the Moon, but of each of the five planets known at the time (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn). Said one of the key researchers, Professor Tony Freeth of University College, London: “It’s quite remarkable how the device works – astonishing, extremely clever, breathtaking actually”. This was an analogue computer, and it reveals the extraordinary quality of the Greek mathematicians, astronomers, metallurgists and engineers involved. The tragedy is that this work, probably done about 200 BC, was not the foundation for a major scientific and computational breakthrough, which could have greatly assisted mankind’s development. Instead, we must see it as simply an amazing civilisational anomaly.

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