

Computer Owners' Group Magazine Notes: September – December 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.

Now I should add to the familiar introduction above that we do not review every magazine that we would like to. You will note below that there is no review herein of any TECHlife Australia issue. We would greatly like to be reviewing this publication. But I regret having to tell you that it is no longer being produced. Perhaps a sign of the present hard times, it has been folded into its sister publication, Australian Personal Computer. The loss of TECHlife Australia is considerable. Of the two magazines, I regarded it as having had the broader range and more insightful commentary; in a word, as being of greater value than its sister. As you would expect, the editor of Australian Personal Computer has promised (see the September 2022 issue, p.3) that we would see the effects of the integration on the survivor. So far, however, they have not been apparent to me. The outcome of all this is that we are now left with only one computer magazine to review. Even so, we look forward to finding in it interesting material to put before you. So see below – in a slightly different layout from the usual.

R M D Munro

Australian Personal Computer

September 2022

- Ripping CDs

This is not as destructive as it sounds. What this jargon means is taking your CDs and copying them on to your computer's hard drive where you can organise your digital music, create playlists, rate it, and so on. Very useful. However, for some time now it's not been possible to do this using Windows

Media Player. But a new update for this app has changed that. An article here, “Windows 11 update brings back ripping CDs” (p. 10), says that you can “once again ... rip a CD into MP3, AAC, FLAC and ALAC” using Media Player. A point worth making is that many laptops these days don’t have a built-in CD player. But it is possible to buy external CD players and they’re not particularly expensive.

- **Good cheap phones**

At Christmas time attention may turn to the seductive delights of thinking about the difficult combination of high quality, and inexpensive, smartphones. In highly polished glass sales cabinets, they cry out for liberation. But SeniorNet members know the importance of checking reviews before purchase. Fortunately, there are reviews in this issue of two popular phones. They are the Samsung Galaxy A53 (p. 42) and the Motorola Moto G22 (p.43). In their context they are both pretty reasonable phones, though of course built to a price. But if you didn’t read the reviews, you wouldn’t know what been left out. Or whether that matters.

- **Wi-Fi blues**

The lead article in this issue is “Why is your Wi-Fi still slow? And how to make it faster!”, (pp.48 - 54). There’s plenty of good practical advice here. Subjects covered include: “Covering your Wi-Fi router”; “Placing your router in the wrong place”; “Using a congested Wi-Fi channel”; “Using the wrong Wi-Fi band”; “Connecting too many devices at once”; “Not updating or upgrading your router”; “Never rebooting your router”; and so on. There’s a helpful discussion on the best new devices to boost your Wi-Fi, including commentary and recommendations on mesh router systems and on Wi-Fi extenders. There is a useful section on the best apps for analysing your home Wi-Fi. With these apps you can move from room to room around the house, and check out precisely where problems appear. Then, if necessary, you can shift your router and see what difference that makes. The gold award is given to WIFIMAN. It is available in both Android and iOS from www.snipca.com, and it’s free.

- **Living in an electronic jungle**

A feature article in this issue is “The best way to build a smart home” (pp. 56 – 61). This article reveals the astonishing way some technical enthusiasts wish to live, not to mention the difficulties they may face in getting all their electronic devices to work together as they have hoped. SeniorNet members will probably agree with the author’s well-buried but accurate comment that “the reality is that for most people, smart home tech is simply too complicated”.

- **Safe and secure?**

There is an excellent article here, “Delete your files for ever” (pp. 82 – 85). This is a model of good, clear, practical exposition. If you have sensitive material on your hard disk, this will tell you how you may get rid of it, as well as the degree of trust you can put in the methods available. A key judgement is that “if you’re passing on a computer to someone else, the safest approach is to destroy or securely wipe the entire drive”.

- **Getting rid of duplicates**

Hardcore enthusiasts could well enjoy the comprehensive article, “Clean out Windows 11” (pp. 92 – 95). But for many SeniorNet members, the most useful part of the article will be that which deals with removing duplicates. The point is made that the formerly popular app, CCleaner, has such a function - but it is not highly recommended. The app that is recommended is Duplicate Files Fixer. It’s said to do a great job weeding music, photos and videos, thus potentially saving considerable space. However, it is

very expensive (\$US 40). Nevertheless, the article notes that there is a well-regarded free app which primarily targets photos. It is Awesome Duplicate Photo Finder, available at www.duplicate-finder.com/photo.html. (The article advises that if you're using this programme, you should avoid the option to bypass the Recycle Bin.)

- **Incidental intelligence**

Seagate has recently announced that it expects to be producing 50TB hard drives by 2026. (See p. 74.)

October 2022

- **Books unlimited**

A number of SeniorNet members have large collections of e-books on their laptops and/or their phones. Often they are tied to a single service provider such as Amazon's Kindle, or Cobo. There is a review here of Calibre 6.1 (p.46) which describes this open-source programme as "brilliant". Two new features of the updated programme are highlighted. The first is a full-text search tool. Most usefully, it indexes all the e-books on a device "so you can quickly find mentions of specific names, words and phrases". You activate this function by clicking the FT icon on the left-hand side of the search bar. The second feature is a "read-aloud" function. This makes it possible to turn your e-books into audio-books. Cleverly, you can even "slow down, speed up and pause playback" (not to mention change the voice). The review goes on to say "you can transfer books between devices, either wirelessly or using a cable". But the programme insists on at least Windows 10 and a 64-bit system.

- **Don't be exclusive**

The lead article is entitled "25 Apps for Geeks" (pp.50 – 55). Despite not being a geek, I bravely made my way through this article and, to my surprise, found three apps which could be of interest to more normal people. In alphabetical order, they are:

Everything (free - from voidtools.com)

Windows doesn't have a good search facility. This alternative comes as "APC highly recommended".

FING (free, with premium available – from fing.com)

This programme is a highly effective Wi-Fi network analyser. The premium version will check your router for vulnerabilities and "alert you to any hidden cameras on the network".

Microsoft Math Solver (free from math.microsoft.com)

Described as a "Godsend", this app not only solves maths problems, but takes you through the process, one step at a time. Quite brilliant.

- **Is your phone safe?**

We rely on our phones so much. But can we trust this companion who goes everywhere with us, is possibly our chief communications tool, can be a banking assistant and who, everything else aside, knows far too much about us? An article here builds on our reasonable fears and asks "Has your phone been hacked?" (pp. 92 – 93). Worth reading, the article refers you to a range of tools which will help tell you how loyal your phone has been. One such is the app Privacy Dashboard (tinyurl.co/APC511PRI). Interestingly, the author says that Apple has organised things so well that iPhones don't need anti-virus apps. Would that the same could be said for Android! But it can't be. The article says that most free anti-virus Android apps "are useless and full of trackers", and that if you really want peace of mind in this context, you'll need to pay for it. Avast, Bitdefender and Norton are recommended.

November 2022

- **Do-It-Yourself**

We are realising, a lot of us reluctantly, that we, our children and our grandchildren, are going to live in a very different world from that in which we grew up. In the laptop area, two growing areas of concern are waste and excess profits. There is an article here, “The D.I.Y future” (pp.56 – 57), which deals with these points. It starts with laptop batteries. It says that, if used every day, a laptop battery has a usable life of only 2 to 3 years. Then, because the battery is deliberately made very difficult to remove, the whole laptop may have to be thrown away, and a new one purchased. Of course, this suits the usual manufacturers, but this model of production is, by definition, wasteful and expensive. Worse, it’s entirely unnecessary. It *is* possible to make laptops with easily removable batteries and other removable parts so that the whole device can easily be upgraded.

The article reports on a new laptop firm called Framework, which is now producing upgradable laptops. These are available in Australia. But while they are of high quality and eminently practical, the writer is not hugely confident that this business model will work. To be successful, it would perhaps need a powerful entity like the European Community backing it. Even so, if as a result of making laptops upgradeable sufficient momentum developed, then it’s not hard to see the makers of phones and other devices coming under similar pressure.

Leave no tracks

The lead article in this issue is “Wipe Your Digital Footprint” (pp.58 – 64). It would be an ideal gift for your student grandson before he goes off to Otago. It’s comprehensive. Topics covered include: “Disconnect forgotten tools from your accounts”; “Close online accounts you no longer use”; “Check if your accounts have been hacked”; “Remove your phone number and address from Google”; “Wipe your Facebook footprint”; “Delete your Instagram data and account”; “Remove location data from photo apps”; “Clean up multiple social accounts in one place”; and more. There, that’s all he has to do.

Tepid bath

An admirable feature of computing is the industry's characteristically constant search for improvements. In support of that judgement, I draw to your attention a major article, "Windows 11: what's coming next" (pp. 70 – 77). This is a well-written, detailed, article on the latest upgrade for Windows 11. Now if you are fascinated by this sort of thing, then I expect this article will be rewarding. But for those of us looking for great leaps forward, or, as people say these days - big hits – there will be disappointment. The current computer industry appears to have plateaued. The improvements achieved are generally minor, to say the least. And, to his credit, the writer is upfront about this. Thus, in his second paragraph, he admits that "there is no single new feature in Windows 11 that's going to blow your mind or make any of the Windows 10 holdouts suffer enormous pangs of regret". I've read his article closely and, regrettably, have to agree. We are suspended, waiting for the quantum revolution.

December 2022

- Under the hood

Sadly, I have to begin by saying that this issue would probably not be particularly appealing to most SeniorNet members. At least in this instance its target audience seems much younger people and, amongst them, those who are fascinated by the latest in hot computer technology. There's lots of good stuff for people wanting to upgrade their motherboards, and for gamers panting to purchase an ultrawide curved gaming monitor: thus "when using an Nvidia RTX 3080 GPU we were able to get *Destiny 2* in 4K HDR to run at up to 80fps with G-sync keeping everything in check". (See p.40.) In the light of the above, the article which I thought would be of most interest to SeniorNet members was "Fix PC problems with Windows 11" (pp. 88 – 91). Well focussed and practical, it provides a valuable overview of some of the tools available in Windows for getting under the hood and trying to diagnose what's wrong. A great place to start is the "Reliability Monitor". You find this by typing in "reliability" into the Search Box which is found in the Task Bar at the bottom of your Desktop. The result can be pretty informative. Even so, let's hope, over

the holiday season, that all we need to do to get things going well again, is to switch the machine off, wait five minutes, and then turn it on again. Happily, that's more than once worked.
