

## **Computer Owners' Group Magazine Notes: Christmas - March 2023**

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 concerning Consumer magazine mentioned below, it is not of course a computer magazine, having a general focus which is much wider than just some occasional computer coverage. However, one of our members subscribes to Consumer, and drew relevant reviews in it to our attention. We do not hold Consumer but the Public Library does.

R M D Munro

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

#### **Perennial debates**

Part of the value of SeniorNet is the ongoing debates between knowledgeable members on such matters as whether it's better to buy Android or Apple smartphones, or Windows or Apple computers, and so on. Why are these debates worthwhile? Because we can learn of the actual experience of members using these devices, and we all profit thereby. Well now, in this issue there's an article "Head-to-Head: Gmail vs. Outlook" (pp.32 – 33). Given the discussion on this subject at SeniorNet, this piece will give supporters of both positions useful ammunition. The article's assessment is that "Over the last few years, Gmail has gotten (sic) worse thanks to its reduced free storage policy, while Outlook has improved its mobile apps and Windows integration. However, Gmail remains the top dog, thanks to its beautiful design, wealth of features, and integration into the wider Google suite." This reader's assessment is equally measured:

given time, we can be confident that the tilt between these two will shift again.

## **Improvements**

Some people like to go under the bonnet. There's an article here for them. It is "Upgrade your PC for free" (pp. 73 – 77). Some of the points it covers are: "increase the amount of available memory on your PC; stop your browser hogging system resources; boost the performance of your graphics card; free up space by compressing your hard drive; optimise your monitor screen settings; and, improve the audio quality of the sound card". Though "PC" is a generic term, the way it's used in this article seems to focus on desktops. However, a lot of us have given up our desktops in favour of laptops. (After all, they're much easier to bring into SeniorNet's Help Centre). Fortunately, there is a section in this article which is highly relevant to *all* computer owners. It's headed "Clean the inside of your PC without damaging it" (see p.77). It points out how damaging dust is to our machines, with laptops particularly being at risk. But, despite the guidance in this article, actually opening up a laptop to clear vents is tricky for the uninitiated, and this is an area for a possible SeniorNet workshop.

## **Australian Personal Computer (January 2023)**

### **Wake up**

Improvements are not supposed to create problems – but computer owners know that sometimes they do. An impressive recent example is described in this issue. In an article entitled "Intel Evo issue has users pining for MacOS" (p.15), it's explained that one feature of Windows 11 (when used on Intel computers) is that "when

you put your laptop to sleep fully charged, there's no guarantee it'll have any battery left when you next open it up." Imagine that. Some possible workarounds are described, but the knowledgeable author is not confident they'll work for all the computers so affected.

### **Posting large boxes**

How do you transfer large files? In days gone by, people used USB sticks, and then it became possible to send large files via the Internet by using Google Drive. Now it is the nature of capitalism to encourage competition; and we can be grateful that intense competition is one of the defining features of the computer industry. In the field of transferring large files, Google Drive has a challenger in WeTransfer. This is discussed in another useful Head-to-Head article in which this magazine pits these programmes against each other (pp.30 -31). There's detailed analysis leading to the assessment that "we were impressed with the fluidity, effectiveness, and efficiency of both platforms, but more so with WeTransfer ... WeTransfer works as a quicker alternative for single files, while Google Drive has the benefit of allowing you to organise your files better. It also makes more sense if you are using other Google productivity services ..."

### **Dead spots**

In the early days of Wi-Fi, households were so grateful for it that they were content to huddle in the one room that had a router in it, just to be able to access the internet. Now though, they want to be able to access screamingly fast Wi-Fi from the furthest part of their extensive gardens. In this context then it's not surprising that we're getting enquiries at SeniorNet about mesh networks. However, there are a range of them on the market, and it's not necessarily easy to sort out which of the different features one needs to improve things in one's home – or garden. [Australian Personal Computer](#) has a

regular feature called “The Problem Solvers” in which queries from readers are answered. In this issue there’s an exchange entitled “Confusion over mesh” (p. 90) which provides essential advice.

### **Stop the clocks**

Owners of Macs will tell you that their machines are almost wholly intuitive and that one doesn’t need articles in magazines to explain their many delightful apps. Now – it’s possibly a time for a confession - they are often right. But the editor of this magazine thought that a small tutorial, “MacOS: Master the Clock app” (pp. 94 – 95), could be helpful. This particular app has been a feature of iPhone and iPad for many years, but it’s only very recently come to the Mac. Though from a Windows/Android background, I must acknowledge that the Apple clock app is beautifully designed and has useful features. The article itself is clearly written and well-illustrated.

### **Making things better**

At SeniorNet one gets the impression that most members use Microsoft Office. However, among the respected alternatives to it, like LibreOffice, is Google Docs. There’s a relevant article in this issue called “Secrets of the Google Office Apps” (pp.80 – 84). The overall message is that Google’s online word processor, and its spreadsheet, are more powerful than is often realised. Useful tips are given, with perhaps the most valuable of these being that, if you are accessing Google Docs through Google Chrome, you can dictate your piece onto the computer screen. I say this with a degree of envy as I’m typing this review in a no Wi-Fi zone at Kuratau. None of the other “secrets” seemed as significant.

### **Australian Personal Computer (February 2023)**

## **Honeytrap**

John Honeyball is a highly respected, long-standing computer journalist who is the last person you would expect almost to fall into a scam. However, in a revealing article entitled “Scamming the scammers” (p.19), he admits that he was nearly taken in by a clever ploy that used an actual PayPal address – “service@paypal.com”. Suspicious, he checked that the unusual message did in fact come from the PayPal site, and then he followed up, talking to PayPal. The outcome was, Honeyball says, that it seems “possible for PayPal users to generate estimates within the PayPal site, and issue them to random email addresses. And the PayPal representative I spoke to said there is nothing PayPal can do about this”. Honeyball then went deeper, asking PayPal for a more detailed comment on this - but did not get a response. His conclusion is relevant to SeniorNet members: “just remind your family and friends, especially elderly relatives, that there are some very nasty people out there who will try the most appalling financial scams on the unwary”.

## **New mail?**

The lead article in this issue is “Stop using Gmail & Outlook” (pp.71 – 77). Now why would you want to do that? Well, the answer given is that both services spy on your emails, and “their high-profile nature makes their accounts prime targets for hackers”. If this resonates with you, then the article provides helpful detail on which alternative email providers it considers are the best to sign up with. The “Editor’s Choice Award” goes to Proton Mail. But Thunderbird is named as a good alternative way to access Gmail or Outlook messages. Using it would, it’s claimed, give you “a cleaner inbox that’s free of adverts, tracking and spam, and saves you opening your

browser each time you want to check your mail ... It also supports end-to-end encryption for your emails”.

## **Australian Personal Computer (March 2023)**

### **Chattering classes**

ChatGPT is now, surprisingly quickly, well-embedded in the public consciousness. It's discussed at morning coffees and evening barbecues. If it's featured in The Dominion Post (and it is), it should be analysed in computer magazines, and I'm happy to say that it's highlighted in the present issue. Two articles are of interest. The first is “ChatGPT will probably change journalism for ever – but hasn't it already changed?” (p.14). And the second is “Are writers and teachers about to be replaced by AI?” (p.15). What emerges from these articles? Key points are that the rise of apps such as ChatGPT has in fact benefitted a number of industries, including journalism. (Spoiler alert: I have not used ChatGPT in this report.) But there are potential dangers all the same. Certainly, education is a field at risk. In addition, the comment was made that “ChatGPT will be used to replace troll farms and bot operations that operate to sway diplomatic (sic) elections, editorial content and other legislative decisions that affect how our world runs”. That's useful as far as it goes, but I think that we're all still waiting for a really comprehensive and well-considered analysis of how ChatGPT is going to affect key aspects of our lives, politics, societies and economies. Bill Gates, who has had some relevant experience, forecasts that ChatGPT will be a disrupter on the scale of the internet itself. He may be right. But we have yet to see the depth of analysis that would substantiate such a portentous assessment.

### **Carved in stone**

Tablets are in. And in this context you might consider how fashions change: first, people bought desktop computers, then many moved to laptops, now a fair number of those people are shifting to tablets. (And more than a few of our members employ all three.) But as ever, the question raised at SeniorNet is, if one is going to get a tablet, which one is it sensible to buy? What specifications are important? How much do you need to spend to land a good one? A lead article here is “Tablets: from \$99 to \$1,799” (pp.64 – 81). Disregard the Australian dollars: there’s good advice here, plenty of detailed comparisons, and reviews of leading devices. If you’re in our market, this is a very good starting point.

### **Roll up, roll up**

Editors love any article highlighting good, free programmes. There is of course one here, “Best Free Downloads for 2023” (pp.52 – 57). It names 18. All deserve more space below than I can give them. The details in the article are important, and include advice on how best to install. Some of these programmes are available now; others will be released during the year.

<b>Programme/ App/Other</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Microsoft PC Manager</b>	Replaces CCleaner and BleachBit	Currently tricky to install
<b>H a s i e o Backup Suite 3</b>	Replaces Macrium Reflect	Paragon and AMEIO are also available
<b>Paint.Net 5</b>	Image editor	A useful upgrade
<b>C h r o m e O S Flex</b>	Gives old laptops new life	You need at least 4 GB RAM, 16 GB storage, and a 64 bit processor

<b>Bitwarden Free</b>	Password manager	LastPass was good but had an accident
<b>Thunderbird For Android</b>	Email provider	Looking beyond Gmail and Outlook
<b>Amazon Photos</b>	Online image storage	5 GB limit
<b>Libby, by OverDrive</b>	Borrow e-books and audio books from local library	OverDrive is being replaced by Libby
<b>Mapillary</b>	Street view app	Google's scrapping its standalone app
<b>Weather Underground</b>	Weather forecaster for iOS & Android	Apple has discontinued its Dark Sky weather app
<b>Global Grey</b>	Free e-books	Has PDF, EPUB and MOBI formats
<b>LibriVox</b>	Free audiobooks	Can be streamed to Bluetooth speakers or a Chromecast device
<b>Snipica.com</b>	Download classic movies	A reputable site
<b>Creator Music</b>	Free music from YouTube	This apparently will allow "creators" not to have to share their revenue with license holders
<b>Dreamstime</b>	Download royalty-free images	A huge range but requires an Adobe ID
<b>Artvee</b>	Over 6000 works from notable artists	No worries about copyright



<b>FlightGear</b>	Open source flight simulator	Fly various aircraft to and from 40,000 airports. (Landings at Rongotai?)
<b>The Sims 4</b>	Life simulation game	But requires nearly 20 GB space on your hard drive

I want to discuss here only one of the above. It is Hasleo Backup Suite 3. You need to know that Macrium Reflect, which is used by many SeniorNet members, is unfortunately being retired at the end of this year. We are being advised to start thinking now about possible alternatives. As well as Hasleo, these would include programmes from the Paragon and AOMEI stables. Although without any rank ordering, this article indicates we should pay close attention to Hasleo.

### **Hard of Hearing**

A number of SeniorNet members have difficulty with hearing. They know how astonishingly expensive hearing aids are. Is relief at hand? It's impossible to say but there are indications overseas that the hearing aid industry is under increasingly close governmental scrutiny. But well before any possible Commerce Commission-type reactions, there may be technical advances which will help us. This issue of the magazine contains a useful, short article entitled "Apple AirPods can help you hear conversations clearly" (p.114). It says that if you have both an iPhone, and AirPods, you could have someone talk into the iPhone's microphone and the sound would immediately be transferred to your AirPods (or, it is claimed, to your Beats Headphones). This could make a conversation with your littlest granddaughter at a crowded, noisy Christmas dinner even more of a pleasure.

## Consumer (Autumn 2023)

There's something of interest for everyone in this bumper issue of Consumer (120 pages of honest, hard-hitting reviews). However, of particular interest to SeniorNet members are the buyer's guides to mobile phones (pp.94 - 96), laptops (pp.98 - 99), and printers (pp.100 - 101). The results are worth reading. In our society we have a rule of thumb that the more you pay for something, the better that something will be – compared to a similar, lower-priced, item. This is generally true; but it is not absolute. And one of the most valuable things that the Consumer organisation does is to find out exceptions. Consumer also tells you, among other things, when a device is actually good enough (in other words, when spending extra money on a similar item won't result in appreciable benefit). All this is greatly to Consumer readers' advantage, so that when they make purchases, they do so in the light of considerable research, and that far beyond what any of us could undertake on our own. Now to illustrate the main point: in the mobile phone category of \$600 - \$1000, Consumer's tests gave the One Plus Nord 2 5G, which costs \$689, an overall score of 78. This is significantly above the much better publicised, and undoubted crowd favourite, iPhone SE 2022. This device costs \$824; but its overall score was only 68. So, if you're in the market ....

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