

Computer Magazine Notes: March – June 2024

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 has drawn relevant reviews in it to our attention. We do not hold Consumer but the Public Library does.

R M D Munro

Australian Personal Computer (March 2024)

Voicing doubts

We live in a strange new world. In “Chatbots that sound just like us” (p. 10), the author writes about a new program called “OpenVoice”. It is a new artificial intelligence tool that, it is claimed, can clone *any* voice after only a few seconds of reference audio. The implications of this are extraordinary.

Getting rid of duplicates

Let’s imagine that you have 320 GB of music files. You are as a result short of space, and know that quite a number of your files are duplicates. A tidy person, you will be looking for a reputable duplicate cleaner programme. There is a review in this issue of AllDup 4.5.58 (p. 45). As you can see, it’s not just confined to music files. And it works with Windows 7, 8.1, 10, or 11.

Eyes have not seen

Tech journalists are a cynical bunch. But they're always hoping to find a new piece of technology that is really, really outstanding (pp.46 - 49). And I must say that readers like us are also hoping for genuine breakthroughs (certainly for "killer apps"). But we have to admit that, by definition, these are very rare. Well now, there's an article here on the Apple Vision Pro. The reviewer comments: "in my 10 years as a technology journalist, nothing has rendered me speechless quite like this device did ...". What is he talking about? This device is a virtual reality headset. The early ones weren't too impressive, but, as usual, Apple has studied this line of equipment and has reportedly now brought out a superlative performer. When will we see one at SeniorNet?

Artificial intelligence

It's becoming increasingly obvious that we've entered a new age - the Age of AI. But how do we make AI work for us, older people? Now there's a major article here, "ChatGPT masterclass: make AI work for you" (pp.64 - 70). It's a clever, highly instructive article, but maybe not for many of us at SeniorNet. The reason for that is that it concentrates on the *advanced* features – very powerful – of ChatGPT Plus. By contrast, what most of us are looking for in this context is a very basic introduction to AI, carefully tailored to our age and stage of life. Unfortunately, this isn't it.

Polishing the lens

With a paucity of rewarding viewing currently available on free-to-air TV, YouTube is a major resource for many people. Revealingly, YouTube is the world's second most popular website. But its business model has made it more difficult for most of us to enjoy. Significant features are now hidden behind the YouTube Premium paywall. There's a major article here, "What you must change on YouTube" (pp.72–79). The article teaches how to "1. Block annoying adverts; 2. Skip sponsored messages; 3. Stop videos also playing; 4. Turnoff recommendations; 5. Hide YouTube shorts videos; 6. Play only the audio from videos; 7. Bookmark specific moments in videos; 8. Download YouTube videos for free; 9. Capture screenshots of videos; 10 Summarise videos using AI; 11 Adjust the playback speed; 12. Improve the picture quality; 13. Enhance the audio quality; and 14. Prevent videos from buffering". But be cautious about following all of these suggestions. As the article hints, a few of them may be of dubious legality.

Australian Personal Computer (April 2024)

Miseducation

We used to regard programming is a significant skill, and would be pretty proud if one of our children was employed as a programmer. Well now, in a striking reversal of that, the CEO of Nvidia, one of the world's largest companies, has said that programming is no longer a vital skill. (See "Jensen Huang says kids

shouldn't learn to code", p. 9.) With AI, he said, "everybody in the world is now a programmer. This is the miracle of artificial intelligence." What then should they be studying? He suggested such subjects as biology, education, manufacturing and farming. AI will of course undoubtedly assist in these fields, but you won't have to be a professional programmer to be able to utilise it.

What you've been waiting for

Almost certainly the most popular articles on PC magazines (and the ones that sell them) are those featuring the best free programmes available for our devices. In this issue we have "The best free apps for Windows, Android, Mac, smartphones, watches and tablets" (pp. 62 – 75). The author's choice is though somewhat eccentric; and any list that doesn't include LibreOffice is to my mind a little unusual. That said, there are of course some suggestions that could be rewarding. Among them I would mention:

Pluto TV - works on Android, iPad, iPhone, and online, and provides a large number of channels for you to explore.

Speedtest by Ookla - works on Android, iPad, iPhone, Android and online, and tests your Internet connection. Is your ISP giving you what it promised?

Easy audio recorder from digipom.com - works on Android, iPad, iPhone, and you can save your recordings to your device, or the cloud. You can even get them transcribed into text, but that requires a small IAP (in app purchase) which then provides unlimited transcriptions.

Australian Personal Computer (May 2024)

Hacking cough

We all know sensible people in SeniorNet who've been hacked. Just like getting Covid, it can happen to anyone. It's hard to understand but even if you don't see a large flashing sign saying "You've Been Hacked", you still could have been. There is a major article on precisely this point: "How do you know if you've been hacked" (pp 54–57). While the main concern of the article is to assist businesses, there are some useful hints for home owners. Red flags one should look for include: "1. Suddenly sluggish performance; 2. An unusual spike in network traffic; 3. Non-functioning passwords; 4. Odd pop-ups; and 5. Unexpected search results or web content."

Blocking ransomware

Most of us who have Windows machines rely on Windows Defender to keep us safe. It's easy to do so. This programme comes with Windows and is seamlessly integrated into that operating system. It works efficiently and is well-regarded. An article in this issue is "Boost Window's defences" (pp.58–61). Perhaps the most helpful part of it deals with ransomware, with the article explaining that Windows security can completely protect any personal folders that you have so designated, and showing how to do this.

Keeping up-to-date on security

At least once a year you can expect a computer magazine to have a major article on security suites. This year's APC one is entitled "Security suites vs free antivirus" (pp.63-78). It's a very thorough piece of work. Its conclusion is that Windows Defender is pretty good, but that if you actually pay for a security suite you'll get more bells and whistles. Frankly speaking, no surprises there. The article nominates Avast Ultimate is the best paid-for suite. The article also issues a stern warning to be very careful of the trick that some paid-for suite producers play when one is signing up for their product. For

example, McAfee+ Advanced is quoted at costing \$A139.95 at sign-up. But renewing it is much more expensive at \$A279.95. Worse, many manufacturers have built into their websites *automatic* renewal; and it is very hard to find where they have incorporated this gratuitous provision, let alone where to turn it off.

As usual, Malwarebytes's free scanner receives high praise. Those members who are unsure about using Malwarebytes will find an informative article in this issue. It is "Malwarebytes 5" (p. 46), and discusses the latest version of the programme which has some worthwhile new features.

Australian Personal Computer (June 2024)

Starting off with AI

We have of course all read a great deal about AI, but many of our members have yet to try it. They're not sure about downloading ChatGPT, and are cautious generally about opening new doors into their laptops. Now as you'd expect, there is a major article in this issue on AI. It is "AI PCs: what you need to know" (pp.50-55). Our enthusiasts will read it. But emerging from it, the rest of us only need to know one thing. And that is that you don't need to buy a new PC, with a special Copilot key on its keyboard, to use AI. In fact, if you have Windows 11 on your present computer, all you need to do is to press the Windows key and then the C key. That, the article said, will take you straight to Copilot. This tool is the Microsoft version of ChatGPT. There you can ask any question you like – and, lo and behold, without complications you're using AI. You have joined the new world.

Now a quibble. What the article didn't say was whether this use of the Windows key and the C key was backwardly compatible. In other words, could you use it to open Copilot in older versions of Windows?

I didn't know so I did the sensible thing. I pressed the Windows key and the C key, asked my question, and got the following:

Me: *If you press the Windows key and the C key in Windows 11, you get Copilot. Does that work with older versions of Windows?*

Copilot: *The function of the Windows key + C shortcut has changed over different versions of Windows:*

- *In Windows 8, this keyboard shortcut opened the Charms.*
- *In Windows 10, it opened Cortana¹.*
- *In some versions of Windows, it opens Microsoft Teams¹.*

However, in older versions of Windows, the Windows key + C shortcut didn't have a default function. If you want to use this shortcut to open a specific feature or application in older versions of Windows, you can do so with custom keyboard remappers like Microsoft's own Keyboard Manager PowerToy. Please note that the exact functionality can vary based on the specific situation and settings.

In other words, no, you can't get access to Copilot using the Windows plus C key combination on older Windows machines. (Those members interested in getting access to Copilot on such computers will find useful information available at our excellent Q&A sessions.)

Although pretty specialised, there's further information in this issue on the extensive Copilot stable, including Copilot Pro and

Copilot for Microsoft 365. See “Copilot Pro & Copilot for Microsoft 365: why Copilot is great, when it’s awful and which version you should buy (pp. 56 – 63.)

Good though it is, Microsoft’s Copilot is not of course the only free AI programme available. This issue recommends readers also consider ChatGPT, Google’s Gemini, and Writesonic. (See “Free and paid-for Copilot alternatives”, p. 59.)

Boring, Boring

Yes, backups may be boring, but ask any member who has had a hard drive failure – they’re essential. There is a useful article here, “Backup your files hassle-free” (pp.72 -75). The article covers not only Windows files, but also MAC OS, Linux machines, and phones and tablets. It’s worth photocopying.

It’s coming

For many people these days their camera of choice is their Android phone. But they’d much prefer to edit their photos thus taken on their PC. Microsoft is developing a way to easily transfer photos (and screenshots) from Android devices to the Windows PC. Doing this is currently being field-tested. An article here explains how to go about it. (See “Windows 11 Insider: Edit photos and screenshots from your phone”, p.90.) We hope that we’ll be told when this technique is rolled out for everyone to use.

Australian Personal Computer (July 2024)

The lead article in this issue is “Run clean & quick: remove all PC junk safely” (pp.74–81). The big question is though – do you actually need to do this? Now many of us will remember the days when space was at a premium on our computers. Then we were always looking for programmes, or data, that we could delete. It was

like having a neat and tidy kitchen; and if we were a little obsessive about recovering bytes, there was a reason for it. Nowadays though, most of us have large hard drives and we are not getting urgent messages saying that we are about to run out of space and must immediately do something about it. Nevertheless, there will be some members who still are worried about not having enough room on their hard drives, and they will find this article very helpful. In this context though, the article usefully reminds us that, before we start playing around on our computers, we should create a System Restore point, back the drives up, and, it suggests, we should send “junk items to the Recycle Bin before deleting them permanently”.

Australian Personal Computer (November 2024)

Future imperfect

Jon Honeyball is a distinguished commentator on the computer industry. In an article called “Being there” (p.15), he worries about the world his newborn grandniece is entering. Realistically, he thinks it will be dystopian. As evidence he advances a number of points, including that “Ford recently filed a patent application that would allow it to listen to every conversation you have in the car and use this to drive targeted advertising to you”. Such a device could of course be used for other purposes as well.

Making progress

In our brave new world, AI is going to play a major role. Those people who know how to use it well will have a major advantage. The lead article in this issue is well focused. It is “Make AI your partner for success: stop thinking of AI as a threat and start using it for work: Barry Collins reveals how AI is being used in a variety of

industries” (pp.54-60). The article gives practical advice on using AI in teaching; legal and human relations; customer support; skilled trades; market research; and marketing.

Dishing duplicates

Many of our members enjoy digital photography. Unlike the old days of film, we can now snap away happily (and at no cost) at whatever takes our eye. A valuable technique we’ve learned is to always take a few photos of the scene we want to capture. After all we can always get rid of the ones we don’t want later. But do we in fact? Now if you suspect you’ve got a pile of duplicates in your photo gallery, this is where we all hope technology could come to our aid. And it does. There’s an article in the help section (pp.86–87) that describes how to use a valuable free app called Awesome Duplicate Photo Finder (www.duplicate-finder.com). Worth a try.

Australian Personal Computer (December 2024)

Oh dear, what should I do?

Many of us are still running Windows 10. But Microsoft has warned that it will cease support for that operating system on 14 October, 2025. That means Microsoft will thereafter not provide relevant security updates and bug fixes. Saying it as simply as possible, that means that, after the date indicated, people using Windows 10 could be exposed to serious difficulties. Now there is a well-focused article here: it is “Windows 10 is doomed” (pp.68–75). As well as providing general information on the problem, the article describes what you can do to get round it. Key suggestions discussed in detail are: “Option 1: Upgrade to Windows 11 now; Option 2: Upgrade to Windows 11 later; Option 3: Buy a new Windows 11 PC;

Option 4: Ditch Windows for Chromeos Flex; Option 5: Switch from Windows to Linux; Option 6: Keep using Windows 10 safely". Further, as well as this helpful information, there's a useful box on how to copy files from Windows 10 to Windows 11 machines.

Flying high

Imagine that your granddaughter is flying home for Christmas. She's been temping in London, not earning very much, and you've generously decided to give her some money towards her fare back. Friends in Earls Court have told her about London bucket shops and she's been working hard to get the cheapest fare possible. She succeeded but in doing so has had to choose a rather unusual route. It is London-Dakar; Dakar-Nairobi; Nairobi-Amman; Amman-Ulan Bator¹; Ulan Bator-Beijing; (and then closer to home) Beijing-Port Moresby; Port Moresby-Nadi; and Nadi-Auckland. As she explains over WhatsApp, it's going to be quite a trip. Ever so slightly concerned that she is not taking a more normal route, and not to mention that she's dealing with some very unusual airlines, you've decided you want to track her flight. But how? Well, there's an article here called "Flightradar24 Flight Tracker" (p.99) which describes a free app which will track her uneasy progress on your phone. Find the app at Android tinyurl.com/APCflight, or, if you're using Apple, at iOS tinyurl.com/APC539flightio. Brace for landing.

Consumer (Winter issue 2024)

¹ Conscious of your age, your granddaughter didn't think you'd be aware of the latest version of its name – which is Ulaanbaatar.

As usual, there are a number of items that will be of interest to SeniorNet members in this issue. One is “Wi-Fi wisdoms” (pp.72 – 75). Key points were: 1) Choose 5GHz over 2.4GHz - with very few exceptions; 2) For the clearest signal, try to remove as many obstacles as possible between your router and your device; 3) Get a mesh system - range extenders and Wi-Fi boosters have had their day; and 4) For the best signal possible, use ethernet cables.

From time to time we get questions at our Q&A sessions about what are the best television sets and smart watches to buy. Consumer comes to the rescue: there’s a detailed test on televisions in this issue (pp.110-112), and, if you think clock-work passé, smart watches also receive good coverage (see pp.113-115).
