

## SeniorNet: Magazine Notes for February - March 2017

All the magazines reviewed below are held in the SeniorNet office and the Public Library, and are available for borrowing.

### PC & Tech Authority (February)

We are constantly being exhorted to buy another television. Why? Well, at its most simple, those who make television sets will lose their jobs unless more people buy TVs. But, because most people have all the TVs they need, TVs are becoming harder to sell. This helps explain why TVs are becoming more differentiated. For example, one of the latest TV trends is a curved screen. Now is throwing a curve in this way a good thing? This issue of PC & Tech Authority says no: it says "curved TVs simply bring no benefit whatsoever". The reason given is that the curve really benefits only the person exactly opposite the centre of the screen. So if there's more than one of you watching a curved TV, the rules of physics dictate a problem. Interestingly, that problem does not occur if you're using a curved computer monitor. But that is because when you are using a monitor, under normal circumstances, you are the only person using the screen. Hence, you are at the centre; and the view from that point is of course great.

Keeping up with technology generally is getting harder and harder. For example, wearing a device on one's wrist used to be for telling the time. But that is so passé. Now, anyone who is with it and who has unleashed the credit card knows one's heart rate, can track the various stages of one's sleep, the distance one has walked, receive calendar notifications, and much more. It's astonishing. If you are drawn to this sort of thing, then the article, "Fitness Tracker's Shootout", is essential reading (pp. 60 – 61).

But if you simply want to boost your Wi-Fi, then "Boost Your Wi-Fi 2017" is just what you need (pp. 70 – 79). Getting a better range from one's router is a matter that comes up quite often in SeniorNet circles. The article, "Seven Steps to the Perfect Extender" (pp. 72 – 73), is very useful. Key headings include: "Understand What an Extender Does; Be Realistic about Network Speeds; Repeaters Versus Powerline Kits; Single Versus Dual-Band Wi-Fi; 802.11N and Other Standards; and Ethernet Ports". Good reading. There's even advice on how to "Use your old router as an extender". The article makes it clear, however, that doing so is not as easy as one might hope.

Have you written your will? Would you regard it as something to be kept private? If that applies to your will and any other documents, then you may be interested in one of the programs on this issue's DVD. It's called "Steganos Privacy Suite 17". The note about this programme says that it "stores confidential files in a secure password-protected vault. It's able to encrypt data on your hard drive, USB keys, even cloud files (Dropbox, OneDrive and Google drive are supported)".

Among the many nightmares hovering round the beds of small business owners is the possibility of having one's computer locked up by Ransomware. This article is focused on these people's vulnerability – but the information in it is relevant to any of us who have a computer with internet access. The article tells you what to do if you get hit (pp. 108 – 109).

A discussion which never ends in SeniorNet circles is about which smartphone to buy. Of interest then will be an oddly titled article here, "There are a few turkeys out there, but the chance of stumbling across one accidentally is really quite low" (pp. 103 – 105), which nevertheless gives some good practical advice about buying smartphones - including naming names. In particular, it draws out price points, and lets you know what you can expect to get at the various levels.

### **PC and Tech Authority (March)**

Perhaps the most useful article in this issue is "Stop the PC Invaders: ... How to keep persistent PC pests at bay" (pp.24-29). There is good advice here under the following headings: "Axe Auto-Playing Ads; Stop Pop-Ups and Overlays; Avoid Unwanted Audio; Cut the YouTube Clutter; Untick the Wrong Boxes; Keep Spyware and Adware at Bay; Battle Noisy Bloatware; Drop [Microsoft] Suggestions; Cover Your Webcam; Cutting [Microsoft] Edge out of the Picture; and [Avoid] Sudden [Microsoft] Restarts". If you are finding these sorts of problems annoying, then this is the article for you. Many of us use YouTube, and the article about avoiding YouTube clutter (pop-ups, ads and so on) could be of considerable assistance. Rather strangely, the editor has put an article which covers some of the same points as in "Stop the PC Invaders ..." immediately after it. The latter article is entitled "Take control of Windows 10 update (sic)". Whatever its positioning, the advice given therein is sensible and practical.

I was happily surprised when Spark offered a year's free connection to Netflix - under certain conditions - as they say. We fulfilled those conditions and are now, from time to time, enjoying being part of the post-modern world. But some people who are using Netflix and other streaming services are experiencing buffering and connection problems. These are discussed in another oddly entitled article, "We are watching a box set in one go – the only box a takeaway pizza vital to sustain such a viewing marathon" (103-105). However, once you've deconstructed your way past this title, some interesting information emerges. The article argues that buffering and related quality problems can occur because some TV sets emit a serious amount of RF noise. So, if one is using a dongle (Chromecast or another Android stick), this RF noise could be interfering with your Wi-Fi signal. By the same token, if the dongle is around the back of the TV, the set itself could be screening the dongle from a good Wi-Fi connection. The solution suggested may be obvious to you, but it's worth

repeating. It is to “simply buy a good-quality HDMI extension cable, and plug the dongle into the end of that... An extension lead about 1 m long is ideal.” Very well, but what is a good-quality HDMI cable? The article says that these days one can probably be bought from any reputable retail firm, and that you don’t need to outlay a fortune to buy it. It doesn’t need to be gold-plated or to come in Technicolor packaging. As long as it can accurately transmit zeros and ones, it will be doing its job.

## **TECHLife Australia (March)**

This issue beats a familiar drum. The cover proclaims “Don’t Delay: Backup Today; Don’t Wait for Disaster to Strike; Get Your PC Backups and Storage Sorted Now with Our Annual Super Guide” (pp. 59 – 83). Well, if you’ve heard this sort of thing before, it’s all rolled out here again. Some people will be bored by it: they know it all. Others will find all this very useful. In any case, the latest portable hard drives are discussed, and some are impressive. There’s also advice on making your hard drive more manageable, and on dual-plug expansion drives which will work with both your laptop and your smart phone. Now valuable points turn up in unexpected places and, particularly in the super guide’s article about making your hard drive more manageable, there’s information which will be relevant to many of us. Noteworthy is the outline of how – safely – to get rid of duplicate photos (pp. 72 – 73). It’s worth photocopying.

If you need a new monitor, there’s an article here, “Pocket-Money Monitors” (pp. 26 – 29), which will repay close reading. The headings in its low-cost monitors’ buyers guide are: “Resolution; Imports; Stand; Panel Type; Size; Response Time; Refresh Rate; and Gaming”. There’s valuable advice here.

The reach of modern technology never fails to amaze. For example, did you know that you needed an electronic device to clean your teeth? Yes, there are now smart toothbrushes. The Oral-B Genius 9000 is one such. Unfortunately it does not yet play music - the present model lacks both speakers and a 3.5mm jack for an earphone connection - but it does have Bluetooth capacity and can connect to an app “to track brushing statistics, as well as how often you floss, brush your tongue and/or rinse with mouthwash”. There is a detailed review of this device here, if you can bear to read it.

A number of us have Android phones. We come to SeniorNet’s Android meetings to learn more about them. Many of us would find the article, “Troubleshooting Android Bugs” (pp. 96 – 97) of value. And whether you have an Android or an Apple phone, the article, “Minimising mobile data usage” (pp. 98 – 99), is sensible and cost-saving.

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