

COG Magazine Notes for April – May 2017

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

TECHLife Australia (April)

We are increasingly realising that we live in a dangerous world. Reading TECHLife Australia underlines that. But the magazine does provide some guidance as to technological self-defence. In this issue, for example, there's an article, "How to secure your Android phone or tablet" (pp. 100 – 101). The advice given is well focused and not too arcane.

There's another warning. Imagine that you're at Wellington airport, waiting to catch your flight to sunny Brisbane. You've remembered that your phone has only 20% power left in its battery. No problem, you think. There will be a public phone charging station somewhere in the waiting area. But this magazine points out that can be a problem, warning that some public phone chargers have been illegally rewired in order to gain access to data stored on the phone when the device is plugged in. How can you protect yourself? Well, the best solution is to carry a battery power pack. This is powerful electrical insurance, and would keep your phone buzzing, as it were, all the way across the Tasman.

This issue also considers home security. If from time to time you go away on holiday, you may think it'd be nice to be able to look at the garage door to check that, say, no tools have been taken. That would require setting up a reliable home surveillance system. These things are not impossible. But, done by contractors, they are expensive. There's a well-focussed article here. It's "Set up your own home surveillance system: Create your own home surveillance system using affordable IP cameras and free software" (pp. 102 – 103). It's not more than a fairly sketchy introduction, but it would provide a good basis for a SeniorNet hands-on workshop – if any potential tutor were so inclined.

Many of our members have Kindles: some have more than one. The point of having a Kindle is to keep books on it. And if the Kindle comes to resemble a library, then isn't that wonderful? There's a very useful article here entitled "Fantastic free e-book's and where to find them: there are more freebies available than anyone could read in the lifetime: you just have to know where to look" (pp.18-23). And this article tells you all about them. A number of us will be photocopying it.

There's also a helpful guide as to what to look for when buying an e-reader. The relevant headings are: dots per inch; lighting; touchscreen; battery; waterproof; e-book formats; memory size; and covers. In addition, major e-book readers are reviewed.

Are you trying to squeeze the last ounce of pleasure out of your music? One way to do this is to shut out extraneous noise by enclosing your ears in a pair of high quality headphones. There are a number on the market. How to choose? Well, the article, "Music to (and on) your ears", contains reviews and good advice (pp. 58 – 62). There's also a specific guide to buying a pair of headphones. The relevant headings are: comfort and fit; sound signature; controls; active noise cancelling; durability; connection; extras; and style.

As we get older, keeping in touch with our children and grandchildren - in the realm of ideas - becomes more difficult. For example, are yours talking about augmented reality? They will be. But consider: you don't have to wait for them. You could be leading the pack. There's an eponymous article here (pp. 76 – 79) that will make you a dinner table expert. Your children, if not your grandchildren, will be amazed.

People who own Macs don't always feel that they get a fair deal from computer magazines. But this issue of TECHLife Australia does not give them anything to complain about. The article "Essential Mac OS Timesavers" is full of helpful information (pp. 80 – 91). By the same token, some Mac users will be grateful for the article, "Edit and format text in pages for iOS" (pp. 98 – 99).

People who own Macs don't always feel fully sympathetic when their friends with Windows talk about their Windows crashes. Alive to this, the present issue has a valuable article predictably entitled "Stop Windows from crashing" (pp. 95 – 97). There's plenty of good advice here, including how to establish a close relationship with your Reliability Monitor. It's worth reading.

Australian Personal Computer (March 2017)

Windows 10 is bread-and-butter for SeniorNet members. For most of us then, the key article in this issue will be "100 Tips and Tricks for Windows 10" (pp. 60 – 66). Old hands will be very familiar with this sort of article, and may turn these pages rather rapidly. Nevertheless,

amongst the hundred suggestions are many of interest, and I for one will be photocopying this article.

Losing the data on one's hard drive is the stuff of nightmares. There's an article here which explains why such nightmares have sound foundations, but how, if you're lucky, your data could perhaps be recovered without going to recovery experts. The article is "Recover your data: nothing is lost until you look for it ..." (pp. 67 – 71). It's full of robust good sense, but that doesn't mean that the do-it-yourself recovery process is easy. It's best to have a series of comprehensive backups lying neatly at the ready in the top drawer.

Home security seems in fashion. There's an article here "Cloud-Connected Security Cameras" which, if one is going down the home security path, could be useful to glance at. There's detailed comparative analysis and a selection of security camera reviews (pp 54 – 59).

Mac users may find benefit in the article, "Lockdown your Mac's security" (pp. 81). Headings include: turn off automatic login; obfuscate login details; restrict your abilities; request password to wake; tighten keychain security; lock the keychain; an unplugged hole; and p*55wrđ tip.

PC & Tech Authority (April 2017)

Our phones need protection. Android phones have a number of security apps available. As always, the question is which one to choose. An article here, "Android security apps shoot out" (pp. 62 – 63), considers the following: Avast Mobile Security*; AVG Antivirus Free*; Bitdefender Mobile Security and Anti-Virus; Kaspersky Antivirus and Security*; McAfee Security and Power Booster*; and Norton Security and Antivirus. (Those with an asterisk are free.) The scoring system used to compare these apps is not particularly informative. But, rather to my surprise, the McAfee is the one the magazine recommends. Even so, all the others come through their examination pretty well. Comments worth noting are that the Avast app "provides excellent protection"; and that the AVG app is pretty good, but shows advertisements on the Android lock screen.

In the interesting-but-hardly-relevant-to-us department, there is a mention that Seagate is now producing 6 TB, 8 TB and 10 TB hard drives. The last of these is the largest drive capacity available for desktop computers. That may be passably interesting, but what is more so, is

Seagate's announcement that, on its most expensive hard drives, it is providing a no-questions-asked free data recovery service. (As you may be aware, data recovery is normally an extremely expensive undertaking.) So, in this new system, you send the damaged drive to Seagate and its experts will attempt to recover your data. These experts are said to have a 95% customer satisfaction rating. When they have recovered the data, they send it back to you on another Seagate hard drive. Sounds tremendous. The only omission from the article was what these new hard drives cost. Upon being informed, expect a sharp intake of breath.

TECHLife Australia (May)

The flagship article in this issue is "Invisible Online: Get Your Privacy Back and Protect Yourself from Hacks: Complete 2017 Internet Security Guide" (pp. 52 – 73). This is an informative, detailed piece of work. Key subjects pursued are: "How to Make a Windows PC Secure and Private"; "How to Secure an Android Device"; Had Become Anonymous Online; and "Windows Security Suites Compared". The TECHLife Editor's Choice Award goes to Bitdefender Internet Security 2017; Kaspersky Internet Security 2017; Symantec Norton Security Premium; and Trend Micro Internet Security 2017.

SeniorNet members are increasingly looking at cloud storage. It's a safety thing. But it's a confusing world out there and there are a number of cloud storage sites. For most of us, the free sites are where we are looking. But which one to choose? There's a useful article here, "App showdown: the best cloud storage: there are more than a few feasible alternatives to Dropbox, you know" (pp. 30 – 31). The article focuses on Google Drive, but also mentions Amazon Cloud Drive, Box, and OneDrive.

This issue mentions MetaDefender. It's described as "an initial safety probe before downloading any files that could potentially be harmful ... [it cross references] an array of on-premise and cloud-based malware detection software". So, when you're downloading from an unfamiliar site, this program will run the rule over it (see p. 36).

There are some people who experience a degree of irritation when their computers are not working. If their minds are humming, they reason, so should be their computers. Laziness will not be tolerated. One way to ensure the computer is working for its living is to deep clean it. And there's an article here, "Deep Clean your Windows PC" (pp. 79 – 87).

There are techniques here for keeping your hard drives spinning, zeros and ones dancing, and for polishing all the panes on your Windows. In this context SeniorNet members' old friend, CCleaner, is warmly described, and there's a full page description on how to get the best out of it (p. 82). Getting rid of duplicates is an ongoing problem for many SeniorNet members. There's excellent advice here (pp. 84 – 85).

If you enjoy talking to your other Apple devices, why shouldn't you talk to your Mac? After all, Siri is just waiting to be useful. If this is your sort of thing, there's an article here, "Voice control your Mac with Siri: give commands to and ask questions of Apple's voice-controlled assistant, Siri" just waiting for you (pp. 94 – 95).

As a helpful grandfather you are watching your teenage granddaughter enjoy the almost new Samsung phone your son has cast off because his firm has given him the latest S8. "My phone is my life", she says revealingly. Well, this is probably true, but the question then is – has she backed it up? Does she know how to? If you photocopy the article "How to Backup Your Android's Data" (pp. 98-99), you could, without going near the surf, be a lifesaver.

As indicated above, TECHLife Australia is keeping a close eye on e-books. There's a valuable article here, "What You Need to Know about E-Book Formats: If You're Downloading E-Books from Nonofficial Stores or Other Locations, There Are A Few Things You Need to Know". Paragraph headings include: e-book file formats; e-book reader apps; and converting e-books (pp. 102 – 103).

Have you ever had a friend send you a DVD, only for you to find that you couldn't play it? When this happens the usual explanation is that it's region-locked. This issue offers two sensible workarounds. One is to install DFDFab Passkey Lite "which can bypass region encoding and allow you to play most region-locked DVDs for any DVD player, including VLC Media Player". But if for any reason that doesn't work, there is a hardware solution: the advice is to purchase a slim external DVD drive and set it to the region you want (see p.88).

There's so much good stuff in this issue: you may want to buy it.

Australian Personal Computer (May 2017)

SeniorNet members are well aware of ransomware. To have one's computer endangered by this highly destructive malware would be devastating. But what is being increasingly realised is that ransomware

doesn't just affect computers. A report in this issue says that smart TVs, for example, can fall victim to ransomware. In the instance quoted (p.11), the smart TV infected use the Android operating system. The owner who, as it happened is a software engineer, tried to factory reset his TV to solve the problem, but that didn't work. So the warning is that any Android-powered devices can be infected, and easy workarounds are hard to find.

Having kept a reasonably close eye on the local computer magazines for a few years, I've found that one or two journalists stand out. John Honeyball is one, and Darren Yates is another. The latter's latest article is "10 ways to improve your Android's audio" (pp. 100 – 103). It's thorough, wide-ranging and practical; and if I had better audio receiving equipment I would be photocopying his advice.

Your PC has died. The household is in mourning. But then somebody says that if there are no boot messages, that could mean the drives inside could be transplanted. Life could go on – though in a different body. There's a note here telling you what to do (p. 77). It's practical and persuasive.

Modern living is being En garde. We can take nothing for granted. It's tiring but necessary. We are always having to think about negative possibilities. Now computer magazine editors love this. For example, there is an article in this issue which begins "Ever wonder just how secure your data is when you upload it to the cloud?" The article suggests that you should so wonder, and, having wondered, that you should encrypt your data. How? Well, if you want to go further down this track, do read "Secure your Windows backups with enCrypted Cloud": there are four good pages about it (pp. 78 – 81).

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