

## ***COG Magazine Notes for November 2017 – June 2018***

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

### ***Australian Personal Computer (November 2017)***

#### **Android operating system updates**

Many SeniorNet members own Android Smartphones. However, many of these phones have never had an Android update. The responsibility for this appears to lie with the manufacturers who have not made it easy for their products to install new system updates. So, while the Android operating system has been improved, many phone owners have not been able to take advantage of it. One result is that a quarter of all Android devices are still running Android 4.4, including my own Samsung phone. But the latest Android iteration is Android 8 (known as Android Oreo). There is an article in this issue entitled "Why Android Oreo is a game-changer" (pp.100-102). The hope is that devices sold with Android Oreo will be able to receive future Android system updates without difficulty. As usual, there are no guarantees but when it comes to buying your next Android Smartphone, it would be prudent to check its Oreo status.

#### **Streaming**

For the normal SeniorNet member, streaming ability is really knowing how to connect to Netflix. Most of us don't want or need to know much more than that. But there is an article in this issue, "Stream everything" (pp.66-70), which highlights how much more there is to get out of this new tool. The article is somewhat daunting, rather like the difference between Form Three and Form Seven. But it is highly informative, and could be fascinating for some of our GPs.

#### **For Apple users**

If music is your thing, you will be looking for the best reproduction possible from your iMac or MacBook. There is a new app called Boom 3D. A highly favourable review (p. 29) says that it makes sound "brighter, wider – and on headphones, give[s] virtual surround sound. It works ...". It costs \$A19.99. Other Apple-focused articles are "12 hidden features of macOS" (pp. 84 – 87), and "Master Pages for iOS's new features" (pp. 88 – 89). The feature in the penultimate article which most interested me was "Enhanced dictation" (p.87). It says that to use the macOS dictation program, you must be connected to the net because the hard job of transferring speech to text is done overseas on Apple's computers, and the result, it admits, "can be very slow".

#### **Incidental intelligence**

SanDisk is well-known for its microSD cards. Ubiquitous, they're used in cameras and Smartphones. Many of us will remember when an 8GB microSD card was a big one. However, such is the speed of change that SanDisk has recently announced it is producing a 400GB model. Current thinking is it will probably cost around \$A400. (By contrast, the largest flash drive so far has 2TB, and costs \$A1650.)

## **TECHLife Australia (Dec 2017)**

### **Avoiding disaster**

The lead articles in this issue are on gaming laptops. Such articles are not, in my experience, of particular interest to the SeniorNet members. But there are other articles here which could – and in this case, should – have general appeal. For example, "Create an emergency rescue disk to keep your data safe" (pp. 100 – 101). The concept behind this article is simple. It is that sooner or later your PC (it doesn't matter whether it's a laptop or desktop) is going to fail. Very well; a virus or whatever is preventing the machine starting. What to do? The advice given here is to have earlier created a bootable flash drive, or a so configured CD-ROM, so that, when disaster strikes, you can get the machine operable again. The article here describes the Avira Rescue system. It takes you step-by-step through what you need to do to create, and then use, this notably useful tool. I think it is worth photocopying and I have followed my own advice.

### **Android battery life**

One of our favourite subjects discussed at SeniorNet fora is well covered in this issue. That topic, and the relevant article is, "How to improve your Android's battery life" (pp. 96 – 97). The article begins with an important reassurance: "It's okay to charge your phone at any level, not just when it's flat. It's also perfectly fine to leave it plugged in to the charger, even when full charged". There is also good advice on how to minimise battery drawdown when the devices in use. The best preventative is of course to have a power bank (and the appropriate cord) in your pocket. Power banks have come down in price and there are quite a few now on the market. But what to look for when you buy one? There are helpful pointers in this article.

### **Portable Bluetooth speakers**

We have recently had some demonstrations at the COG and Q&A of portable Bluetooth speakers. In this context, we have been looking at the lower end of quite a broad spectrum. But what, you might have asked yourself, would you buy in this context if you came into an inheritance and decided to go some distance upmarket? There's an article here which is determined to help you to spend your money. It is "Bluetooth beats take to the streets: big or small, or under your roof or the great outdoors, we test 10 Bluetooth speakers that you can take with you" (pp.64 – 67). By "take with you" they mean "portable", nothing more adventurous - let alone spooky. The box entitled "Bluetooth Speaker Buyer's Checklist" is very helpful. Discussion is organised under the following headings: "stereo or party mode; fitness for purpose; physical size; imports; battery life; waterproof; speakerphone; and ruggedness".

### **Outwitting smart granddaughters**

Now it is not unknown for people to say that maths is not their thing. If that is their experience, then Sudoku may have little appeal. But it is perfectly possible, say, to have a granddaughter for whom Sudoku is one of life's great gifts, and who would like all around her to appreciate it similarly. So imagine that it is 2:00 pm, and that she and her parents are arriving for afternoon tea at three. She wants to discuss the Sudoku puzzle in that day's Dominion Post with you. You've frantically found the right page, but haven't a clue what to do with the puzzle. In such situations it is often the case that people turn to their computers for help, and this issue has the answer. It is ingenious and though essentially dishonest, it could save your face. What you must do as quickly as possible is to download a free app called "Magic Sudoku" (p.33). You then point your Smartphone's camera at any printed

Sudoku problem, and, hey presto, it gives you the answer. You can now breathe a sigh of relief, put on the kettle and search for the orange juice. If perchance you are thinking about the moral dimension of all this (and want to be prepared with a well-thought answer when she finds the app on your phone), one approach would be to smile and say that you're using the app to learn to solve Sudoku problems more easily. And in a way that would be true.

## **Instagram**

Some of our members use Instagram. They could well value the article, 'Social Pro Guide: Instagram' (pp. 26 – 28).

## **For Apple users**

Despite the heroic efforts of Steve Jobs and Tim Cook, Apple users often feel discriminated against. And, it's true, computer magazines often don't give their devices much space. But this issue is an exception. As evidence I give you "iOS11: 75 essential tips and tricks for the new iOS" (pp. 68 – 79). And as if that were not sufficient atonement for past sins, there is another major Apple-oriented article, "What you need to know about macOS's new file system" (pp. 94 – 95). So, no more complaints about limited Apple coverage until the next issue.

## **PC&Tech Authority (December 2017)**

### **Which tablet?**

The leading section of this issue deals with tablets (pp.70-82). The buyer's guide has the following headings: "Apple or Android; it's all about the screen; which processor; how much storage?; accessories; connecting; [and] Wi-Fi and 4G". But there's more, with a useful overview and detailed comments and a comparative analysis of 10 popular tablets. The assessment is that the Apple iPad is the winner; while the Apple iPad Pro 10.5 inch, its 12.9 inch variant, and the Samsung Galaxy Tab S3 are all recommended.

### **Home Wi-Fi**

At SeniorNet we get a pretty constant stream of questions about home Wi-Fi systems. I know from experience that dealing with routers and Wi-Fi connections can be complex and demanding. But there is a significant article in this issue, "Speed up your connection" (pp.36 - 40) which is very helpful. It should, however, have been called something more inclusive, plain and simple like "What you need to know to get your home Wi-Fi system working well" - because that's what it is. Naturally I've photocopied it. A particular problem which is well discussed is finding the strength of the Wi-Fi signal in various rooms in the house. There are apps for doing this and they are noted herein. Also considered are methods for reducing potential interference from neighbours' Wi-Fi systems, and for routing network traffic over your domestic mains circuit.

## Up the creek

New Zealanders have derived great benefit from hydro electricity. Think great turbines. But this issue highlights a very small turbine (p.16). It is designed to be put in your camping backpack, and then of course dunked into a local stream. It doesn't charge directly but, according to this article, in about 4 1/2 hours it will fully charge its 6400 mAh battery. Then you will be in business. It's called the "Estream Portable Hydroelectric Generator" and could soften going bush.

## Incidental intelligence

You will have noticed the trend towards curved televisions. Is it a good thing or not? This issue comments that "we are not huge fans of curved TVs here at APC – we find that they generally are too far away for the screen-curvature to have any practical value" (p.28). And, Windows 7 will no longer be supported sometime in 2020.

## **TECHLife Australia (Xmas 2017)**

### Loosen your pockets

I think it would be fair to say that this issue was conceived of as a stocking stuffer. It would have fulfilled that role perfectly well. It would also have given people hunting for Christmas gifts plenty of ideas as to how to go about spending rather more on presents than had been planned. In that context it has an excellent survey entitled "Gear of the year awards ... The best products, apps and games of 2017 - great for Xmas [sic] gift ideas with over 200 expert recommendations: Find awesome tech gifts for any budget!" (pp.53-80). As a monument to rampant consumerism at Christmas time, it's hard to beat.

### Inserting a stent

Unfortunately, the only article likely to be of interest to most SeniorNet members is entitled "Purge New PC of Crapware" (pp.106-107). (Even then, for most of us the interest in this theme is likely to be pretty slight.) The article goes into detail about how to get rid of junkware, to fix the Windows settings to turn off "some of the more egregious [Microsoft] spying systems", and tells you how to reinstall your favourite apps without downloading adware or spyware in the process. What are the programmes the article recommends to do all this? They are PC Decrapifier; Slimware SlimCleaner; Should I remove it; Ninite; and Unchecky. They are all available on the web, but the first one you should download is Unchecky, because it will help ensure that you don't, in immediate following moves, unintentionally download programmes that could be, at the least a nuisance, and possibly malevolent.

## **Australian Personal Computer (Xmas 2017)**

### **Exhausting credit**

The leading article in this issue is "Gear of the Year" (pp.45-63). It's another impressive list of high-quality equipment.

### **Heads up**

In a bit of a beat-up, there's an article entitled, "Head to Head: Hard Drive Technologies" (pp.18-19). The idea was to pit the latest magnetic hard drives against their rivals, the solid-state drives. But the result was entirely what you'd expect. The conclusion of the article was that "... the final verdict on which storage medium is best really has to come down to your own personal usage model. If you want to maximise sheer capacity, for instance, a conventional hard drive is an absolute no-brainer... on the other hand, if performance is your exclusive priority", then go for solid-state. No surprises there.

### **For Apple users**

Apple users could will find the article, "Recover files on Mac with Time Machine" (pp.76 – 77) of value.

## **PC&TECH Authority (January 2018)**

### **Security**

The flagship article in this issue is "Block all new threats: how do you keep all of your computers and phones secure in 2018? A high-quality Security Suite won't solve all your problems, but it's a key first step" (pp. 68 – 85). There is a lot of useful material here. Key section headings are: "Do I really need security software?; Is free security software worth it?; Antivirus or security suite?; Do I need a 2018 Suite?; be a smart shopper; is a firewall necessary anymore?; the truth about safe browsing; password managers; and Parental controls". Now we know that many SeniorNet members rely on Windows Defender. It's an easy choice because it comes as part of Windows 10, and as such it is free. And it has had good reviews: but not in this issue. In a major comparative test of 13 security suites, Windows Defender did not do well. It was 12<sup>th</sup> (only McAfee Total Protection was behind it). The assessment was that "this simple tool blocks the most common threats, but ... it's not as effective as third-party security software. It's a good idea to consider upgrading to something smarter and more effective". Very well, I hear you say, is there a free alternative? There are such, and from them the magazine nominates Avast Free Antivirus, saying that it offers better protection than you'd get from Windows Defender, although it does include occasional, potentially annoying, pop-ups. But that is of course the price of its being free.

## Security Suite

For those people who are paying for a security suite, the article contains an interesting piece of advice. It suggests that "once your initial subscription is up, your Security Suite will almost invariably offer you a nice, easy way to extend it for another year – for a much steeper price". The advice is not to automatically renew, but rather to buy a new licence. Doing things that way is usually demonstrably cheaper.

## Kaspersky in the gun

One of the security suites recommended in the article is Kaspersky Internet Security 2018. It costs \$A89.95 to protect three devices and is a powerful application. But another article in this issue points out that the United States government has banned Kaspersky products from being used for official purposes. In this context it has been suggested that the Kaspersky company may have untoward ties with Russian security organisations (p.109).

## Incidental intelligence

Free cloud storage: where and how much data can you store on the cloud? This issue says it looks like this:

Mega	50 GB
Google Drive	15 GB
Box	10 GB
Amazon	5 GB
OneDrive	5 GB
Dropbox	2 GB

## Windows 10

As you might expect, there is a major article on Windows 10. This one is called "Windows 10: Fall Creators Update" (pp. 42 – 44). The major assessment the article makes is that "at first glance, the Windows 10 Fall Creators Update looks something of a let-down. There's nothing very creative about it, the promised Timeline feature – a chronological view of recent documents that you could click on to jump back to - is missing, and many of the visible changes feel more like cosmetic tweaks than solid upgrades ... yet there are some very positive features here to discover ....". The article suggests that two of these would be power throttling and controlled folder access. With power throttling the idea is that if you are using battery power and if your profile is set on Balanced or Battery Saver, then to prolong battery life Windows will slow down apps running in the background. Controlled folder access is designed to defeat ransomware attacks. This Windows 10 feature will alert you if some unwanted computer process tries to change files in your personal folders.

## **TECHLife Australia (February 2018)**

### **Clicking away**

The cover story of this issue is "Smartphone Photography Masterclass" (pp.59-79). This is an impressive coverage of an area of Smartphone ownership relevant to many SeniorNet members. Topics highlighted are: "boost your Smartphone photography skills - go from random snapper to top-end photographer with these tips and tricks; Smartphone photography apps - from apps to revolutionise the way you take photos to those that enhance your images and share them, we show you how to make the most of your Smartphone camera's capabilities; best Smartphone photography accessories - boost your phone's shooting capabilities well beyond its limits to set your photos apart; [and] Prints charming - today's dedicated photo printers can give you pro results at home. We test eight models priced from \$120 up to \$999".

### **Trying and buying**

Buying a new computer is hard work. There's so much to think about and good advice is essential. (Among other things, come to SeniorNet.) This issue has a useful article entitled "Back-to-school laptops and Chromebooks" (pp. 24 – 30). The "Laptops and Chromebook's Buyers Checklist" has the following headings: "CPU; RAM; resolution; storage; 2-in-1; portability; get tough; and battery life". There is a detailed analysis on 10 of these machines, and ratings are given.

### **Bells and whistles**

It is a fault of some computer magazines that they are, shall we say, unrealistic. They tend to review only the most expensive equipment; equipment that most of the magazine's readers are highly unlikely to purchase. But, to its credit, TECHLife Australia is not so disposed. The article mentioned immediately above is proof of that, and so is "Best bargain headphones that actually sound great: these sub-\$100 in-ears will keep you in-pocket and in the zone" (pp. 48 – 53). Here are detailed reviews of 15 pairs of headphones and, typically, a helpful Buyer's Checklist. Its headings are: "seal and fit; frequency, bells and whistles; and wired or wireless". What is the meaning of "seal and fit"? Well, the advice is that "with headphones that create a seal with your ear canal, this seal is the most significant factor affecting sound quality ... so be sure to test out the different ear tip sizes to get the right fit."

### **In the swim**

For many SeniorNet members streaming has been a bridge too far. But that's changing as grandchildren talk about how easy it all is, and SeniorNet itself runs workshops on the topic. But it's one thing to have learned, real-time, to stream information through your TV; it's another to have learned to "Listen to music and view videos off-line on mobile" (pp.96-97). So why would you want to do this? Parents will tell you: give children an iPad or an Android tablet – and a reasonable movie – and tedious, often grumpy, hours in the back of the SUV are changed to a good trip, enjoyed by all. But to hone in, why would grandparents be interested? Well, quite apart from long car trips with seven year-olds, imagine a long weekend at a friend's bach at Ekatahuna, where, in proud pioneering fashion, there's no TV. No problem: as Grandchildren's Entertainment Manager you have thought ahead and loaded up your device with some appropriate movies. Your partner is impressed. For your part, you're deeply grateful you read this article. (Helpfully, it covers not only Netflix, Stan and YouTube, but also Spotify. What an age we live in.)

### **Mr Fix-it**

Now despite our reluctance to acknowledge it, we know that the unexpected, not to mention the undesirable, can happen without warning. Is it being pessimistic to say that your phone is not immune from this law of life? Whatever, a practical approach is, as far as possible, to be prepared. The insurance industry recognises this, and so does the article in this issue, "The complete guide to DIY Smartphone repair: save money by repairing a drop or drowned Smartphone yourself – it is often easier than you might think!" (pp.22-23). The article deals with broken screens and water damage. Frankly, replacing a broken screen is beyond most of us, no matter how good the step-by-step instructions are. But water damage can be dealt with, and this article gives some very practical advice on what to do if your phone has unexpectedly joined the soap in the bathtub.

## **PC&TECH Authority (February 2018)**

### **More Windows 10**

There's a lot of very useful material in this issue. There are major articles on Windows 10, making backups, and protecting your data. Now these are familiar themes: so what is different this time? In a word, clarity and focus: these articles are practical, and normal SeniorNet members could derive real benefit from reading them and applying some of the suggestions therein. We'll start with "Windows 10 Hacks" (pp. 64 – 71). The section headings include: "stop Microsoft spying on you [including pausing automatic updates]; disable P2P downloads; the Hidden start menu; create a God folder; ditch Cortana; remove apps; get the classic start menu; remove discretionary apps; speed up your PC; lock your PC; install the LINUX subsystem; fine-tune notifications; and login automatically". There is only space for me to mention one of these topics in any detail. So I note that the "Create a God folder" could be of interest to many SeniorNet readers. This section tells you how to gain entry to the Windows Master Control Panel which, in one place, allows you to control over 200 settings: very useful.

### **Boring**

Backing-up is boring, which is why so many SeniorNet members don't do it. But the article, "Your backups aren't safe" (pp. 72 – 75), is not. The reason is that it is clearly written and eminently practical. Its headings include: "Sync versus backup; the 3-2-1 strategy; backup and disk imaging; scheduling backup; using Windows built-in backup tools; backup your cloud files; back up your website; backing up your files with Paragon backup and recovery". If you have ever lost data, you may feel a powerful stimulus to read this article. And even if you have not been so unfortunate, you may want to know what the 3-2-1 strategy is. So then the article says that "When it comes to backup, the standard advice is that you should keep three copies of any thing that matters, in two different formats, with at least one of them off-site. The last point is very important: no matter how diligently you backup your system, if you store your media right next to your PC and it will be equally susceptible to fire, flood and theft ..." Now Windows has an important tool to help with backups. It's called File History, but most of us don't know how to use it. This article explains what to do.

### **Hackers' Nightmare**

Part of protecting your data is to "Beat the hackers" (pp.76 – 87). This article so named is certainly worth the cost of the magazine. It's full of detail and practical advice. Its headings include: "create manage secure passwords and security questions; use two-factor authentication; stop phishing

scams; [how to] stop theft; avoid insecure networks and devices; protect your smart devices; protect against Ransomware; and recover from a hack attack".

## **Annoying Windows 10**

Experience at the Clinic underlines the difficulties some SeniorNet members are finding with Windows 10. In the light of that, the article "Stop Windows 10 being annoying" is certainly helpful. The article deals with the following issues:

Windows won't stay asleep

Windows forces updates on you

Windows installed its own drivers for your hardware

[You] can't sign in with a local account

Edge keeps acting as the default browser

Windows 10 has pre-installed junk and ads

Microsoft tries to force you to use OneDrive

Navigating the start menu is hard

Windows doesn't remember default programs.

## **TECHLife Australia (March 2018)**

### **Back-ups forever**

For good reason, TECHLife Australia thumps the back-up drum again and again. The lead article is "Backups Made Easy: Keep Your Digital Memory Safe and Secure with Our Comprehensive Super Guide" (pp. 58 – 84). A super guide it is. Look at the range of subjects covered: "fully backup Windows; backup your Mac with Time Machine; how to use iCloud to backup your iPhone; what you need to store your photos and how; super-fast storage roundup; top five wireless drives; USB hard drives roundup; dedicated cloud backup services; cloud storage compared; [and] best budget NAS boxes". There's an amazing amount of useful material here. One interesting idea was to "check with the maker of your drive for a monitoring tool ... to keep an eye on your drives' health, giving you time to replace failing drives before they disappear with your data".

### **Pssst – budget smartphones ...**

We are often asked at SeniorNet to name some good cheap smartphones. Usually a member responds by saying "I got this particular model and it's been good to me". Fair enough, but in the article "Your guide to the best budget smartphones" (pp. 26 – 29), you have a real consumers' guide as to what to look for in making such a purchase, and a detailed comparison of 10 phones. The article is highly informative and stresses that while most expensive smartphones "are flashy, the reality is you

don't need all of the features – and there are plenty of phones available that do a lot more for far less with a more affordable pricetag". Worth knowing.

## **PC&TECH Authority (March 2018)**

### ***Thinking homes***

The lead article in this issue is "Make your home smarter" (pp. 26 – 35). To be frank, I know of no one in our age group who wishes to transform his/her home in the way described herein. Certainly the article itself is well written, informative and detailed. Its only difficulty is that it will have no intrinsic appeal for almost all SeniorNet members. (But if, against the tide, you really want to know how some homes will be run in, say, 2030, then this article is a door opener.)

### **In small packages**

Every now and again somebody brings into a SeniorNet meeting a mini-PC. These are, typically, a little box containing a CPU and all the associated parts of computer – minus a keyboard and a screen. People crowd around them, amazed by how small they are, what they can do, and, customarily, by how cheap they are. The cry goes up: "Where can I get one of these?" Well, helpfully, the article, "Small talk Mini PCs" (pp.60-69) will answer almost every question one might have (except where to get them in New Zealand). Eight mini PCs are reviewed, including the Intel Compute Stick and the redoubtable Raspberry Pi. If you are into general downsizing (and at this stage of life many of our members are) this article is for you.

### **Dropbox**

Let us imagine that one of your ambitions is to run a workshop at SeniorNet. But you are conscious that you don't know enough about any particular subject to put yourself in front of an audience. There is an article in this issue which would, at a stroke, solve that problem. It is "Become a Dropbox master" (pp. 70 – 73). In recent years Dropbox has become a valued backing up tool. It is powerful and efficient, as well as being relatively straightforward. So even if you don't want to be a SeniorNet workshop guru, but instead simply want to be able to be able to back up key files, this article is worth a place in your computer advice folder.

### **Mesh it up**

Keeping up with computer jargon is hard work. For most of us it can only really be justified if it enables us to communicate about technology which may have relevance to us. In this context, we need to learn about "mesh wi-fi". To explain: the problem with normal wi-fi is often coverage. In the simplest of terms, your guests in the spare bedroom can't get their emails without going into your home office. You can put the usual wi-fi extenders in, but they may not prove the most efficient solution. Enter mesh

wi-fi. As the rather oddly-titled article, "Asus Aimesh: Is Mesh Wi-Fi the Clever Way" (pp.52-53) notes, "... the basics are simple. Each ... router becomes a node in a mesh network, which is spread across your home in areas that need improved Wi-Fi coverage. [The system] intelligently chooses the best possible way for each node to communicate with each other and provide connectivity. If one node in your mesh network goes down, [the system] can "self-heal" and keep your network operational at all times, despite the error." The article, which despite appearing an advertorial for an Asus Mesh Wi-Fi system called "AiMesh", is useful.

### **Australian Personal Computer (March 2018)**

#### **Enmeshed**

The lead article is "Build a bullet-proof Wi-Fi network" (pp. 42 –65). This is an important subject and we've seen these sorts of articles before. There's no doubt this is a good one, comprehensive and detailed, telling you a lot about a difficult subject. A useful point is noted in connection with Powerline kits. The writer is an electrician: he explains that a problem occurs "when the two power outlets concerned are on separate circuit breakers in the main box. The signal will not connect through the breaker and RCD from one circuit to other. Fitting a new outlet, so both devices are on the same circuit, will set things right." (p.16).

### **Australian Personal Computer (April 2018)**

#### **Speed Wobbles**

It is an unfortunate truth but, over time, computers slow down. The flagship article in this issue is "Speed up Windows 10" (pp. 41 – 51). If you care about the sort of thing, the article is reasonably helpful. Its particular value to SeniorNet members could be the descriptions of a number of apps that would help your PC to run better. One symptom we come across at the Clinic is frozen PCs. They simply won't respond to the mouse or the key-board. Now the present article (p.44) mentions a program called "Process Lasso" from bitsum.com. It monitors computer processors – "and when it detects one making runaway demands, it reins it in by temporarily lowering its priority to ensure your PC keeps running smoothly". There is a free version and it could be useful. Other potentially helpful programs are mentioned.

#### **25 Best Windows apps**

Even though we are very familiar with this sort of article, this one is certainly worth reading (pp.62-71). I'm going to mention some of the apps that could be of interest to our members. The headings are the magazines':

<b>Plan your next trip –</b>	TripAdvisor
<b>Faster, easier web browsing –</b>	Opera
<b>Listen to audiobooks –</b>	Audible

<b>Image-editing for experts –</b>	Paint.Net
<b>Improve your Wi-Fi signal –</b>	Wi-Fi Analyser
<b>Get useful system info –</b>	Speccy
<b>Learn new languages –</b>	Duolingo
<b>Make stunning presentations –</b>	Microsoft Sway
<b>Project-manage with ease –</b>	Wunderlist
<b>Play any video –</b>	VLC for Windows
<b>Keep apps up-to-date –</b>	Personal Software Inspector
<b>Remove programs thoroughly –</b>	IObit Uninstaller
<b>Record and edit audio</b>	Audacity
<b>Detailed battery stats –</b>	Save battery
<b>Take a failsafe backup –</b>	Macrium Reflect
<b>Rip and convert video –</b>	Handbrake
<b>Clean out your PC –</b>	CCleaner
<b>View and create PDFs –</b>	FoxIt Reader
<b>Super-powered note-taking –</b>	Microsoft OneNote

## **TECHLife Australia (May 2018)**

### **Cheap Reads**

Anyone whose idea of a good holiday includes taking a load of books in a strongly banded suitcase knows the value of an e-reader. (The descriptor, “Weighty tomes”, can be redefined – and substantial books don’t have to cost too much). Now, as good fortune would have it, there’s a useful article here: “How to find e-books on the cheap” (pp. 24 – 25). The section headings are indicative: “Kindle”; “borrow e-books from a public library”; “check out the free e-book’s on each platform” [Apple iBooks, Google Play books, Kobo and Kindle]; and “free and discounted books”. There’s also other interesting advice. Thus, if you sign up for Kindle Unlimited at a cost of \$A 13.99 a month, you can get out 10 books at a time from a list of more than 1 million. Further, if you’re using a Samsung device, you’re able to get one free Kindle e-book a month: the article outlines the procedure for this. All-in-all, there are more free Kindle books around than you might suspect. The article mentions that OzBargain (not surprisingly a cross-Tasman bargain hunting website) regularly lists them. So, if you have a Kindle, you’ll find the following site useful: <https://www.ozbargain.com.au/tag/kindle>.

## Move over Timothy Leary

Computers should be mind-expanding. At our age, however, we may be a bit jaded by them. But there are still, dare I say it, exciting developments going on. This issue highlights the Chrome Music Lab (p.45). Even if you're not into music, this high quality music programme is not merely educational - but it's fun. To illustrate: go to <https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Spectrogram/> - and listen to and view the wine glass: then hear *and* see your own voice; and, if you have ever paused to wonder at the richness and depth of tone evident in every note produced by the trombone, then you will discover an effective illustration of that here. Synaesthesia anyone?

## What Newton missed

Mathematician Edward Frenkel has said, "mathematics directs the flow of the universe, lurks behind its shapes and curves, holds the reins of everything from tiny atoms to the biggest stars." But it is also intensely useful in our every-day lives. So, deservedly given attention (on the same page as the Chrome Music Lab) is the Omnicalculator. This is a "one-stop-shop ... providing some severely useful tools in an array of relevant categories". It's worth more than a glance, so enjoy <https://www.omnicalculator.com/>.

## Getting ship-shape

One of this issue's flagship articles is "Make your PC more secure" (pp.86-88). This covers ground that will be familiar to tyros, but most of us will still value the well-focussed, "this-is-how-you-do-it", advice given here. Headings are: "Make sure you're up to date"; "Configure Windows defender"; "Make use of smart screen"; "Using third-party antivirus software"; "Bolster your sign-in"; "Check your privacy settings"; "Secure your Microsoft account"; "Protect your files with BitLocker"; " Use a VPN – Part One"; and "Use a VPN – Part Two".

## **PC&TECH Authority (May 2018)**

### Don't look ahead

One of the flagship articles in this issue is "The pessimists guide to the future" (pp.80 – 85). The article's focus is on computing and its application to technology. The areas considered include: virtual reality; bitcoin and blockchain; artificial intelligence and employment; and the inevitable driverless cars. As you would expect, it offers a useful corrective to any unsophisticated faith that such technology promises smooth highways into the future. This is a thoughtful, well-argued piece that would provide significant input for debates around the dinner table about the shape of what's to come - and the height of relevant speed bumps.

### Short on space?

Another major article in this issue is "An in-depth guide to upgrading your hard disk" (pp. 76 – 79). This is a comprehensive, practical article on how to do this job. If this is something you're about to embark on, it's a very good starting place.

## **Erase that drive**

How do you ensure that the old hard drive you give away has no sensitive data on it? We were asked this recently at the Clinic. There are in fact a number of free disk erase programs (see [www.techsupportalert.com/best-free-hard-drive-eraser.htm](http://www.techsupportalert.com/best-free-hard-drive-eraser.htm)). But the question always is – how good are they? And another, don't-go-there-type question is – why are they free? An article in this issue, "O&O SafeErase 11 Professional" (p. 99) describes the eponymous programme here. The reviewer states that the programme "is designed to give you an option for ensuring data you want deleted really does get deleted beyond the point of no return". The programme is a free app in this issue of the magazine. To get the programme you have to register: The details of how to do this are on p.98.

## **Australian Personal Computer (May 2018)**

### **Build your own computer**

The focus of this issue is on computer construction: how to build your own machine. The lead article is "The PC Builder's Bible: the Complete Guide" (pp.48-57). It's well-written and clearly illustrated. Those - I believe relatively few - of our members who look forward to spending long winter afternoons hovering over motherboards and screwdrivers, will want to read this. But most of us I think would now admit that we will happily pass by on the other side.

### **Buy Now Advice**

It's not often that reviewers exult. But the article, "PhotoPills: a Must-Have for Photographers" (p.31) is hard proof of one outburst of unrestrained praise. The reviewer insists that "if you're any kind of photographer, ignore the price [\$A 14.99] and buy this app now. PhotoPills is like a Swiss army knife for photographers, giving committed snappers a whole array of tools to help plan, visualise, and execute images." There you go.

## **PC&TECH Authority (June 2018)**

### **Dump Microsoft Office?**

The article in this issue of interest likely to be of most SeniorNet members will be "Time to dump Office?" (pp. 35 – 41). Most of us will be familiar with Microsoft's flagship software package. Many of us will own a version of it. So why, it could reasonably be asked, would any of us want to dump it? Well, reading the article makes it clear that the author is really thinking not so much about the old standalone Microsoft office packages that people bought, say, in 2003, 2007 and 2010, but rather the subscriptions that people bought when they purchased Microsoft Office 365. As the article notes, Microsoft "has [recently] done everything in its power to make Office 365 the standard way to buy Office." So, from the point of view of the normal SeniorNet member – who happens to be paying a Microsoft Office 365 subscription – the question is: are there reasonable alternatives? Now the article is fair. It points out the power and flexibility of Office 365, and the way in which it is constantly being improved. But it is also fair in noting that many of these improvements are little relevance or value to

the needs of most Office 365 users. The article acknowledges alternatives. It says of the "Google G Suite", that this "online office suite has become a credible alternative to Office, with well-integrated components and the kind of slick, consistent interface that Google has pursued across Chrome OS and Android". Now if you use the Google Apps suite, it's free. But it looks as though Google are trying to phase out this app, and to push people from it to the Google G Suite. The latter is only free for a two-week trial period. Then it's \$US5 per month per user. There is good compatibility with Office documents.

But this is where we need the US 7th cavalry. And it charges forth, sabres glinting, in the form of LibreOffice 6.01. The article says that its "big draw has been the promise of a free alternative to Office, based on open standards and open-source code, but with equivalent power to Microsoft's suite". Certainly there is good compatibility with Office documents but, as the article sees it, the Achilles heel is, however, "a dated, clunky look and feel – it's easier to see LibreOffice as a rival to Office 2003 than Office 2016". Now this is the point. If you don't need all the bells and whistles associated with the latest Microsoft Office product, and you don't want to pay a monthly subscription to anybody, then you really do have a great alternative in LibreOffice - and should be grateful it exists.

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