SeniorNet: Magazine Notes for September - November 2016

All of the following issues of the magazines reviewed here are held in the SeniorNet office, whence they may be borrowed. They should also be available for borrowing from the Wellington Public Library. (We do not review every issue of the magazines mentioned. Some, for reasons not known, just do not turn up on our newsagent's shelves.)

<u>Australian Personal Computer</u> (September)

The feature article is "Storage Megaguide". Subjects covered include how to make <u>flawless Windows backups</u> (pp. 32 – 36); how to encrypt important data for free (pp. 38 – 39); and how to maintain your Mac's storage (pp. 40 – 43). Further, there are detailed reviews on budget SSDs, portable hard drives, desktop external HDDs, and wireless hard drives. If you're in this market....

When the app called Shazam came out, it was a stunning indicator of the power of technology. At the press of a button, it could identify the <u>song/work</u> you were listening to. Now I have a friend with a remarkable memory who can do this with classical music: but this program can do it with any music (even music that one mightn't call music). But, as you might expect, you had to have your device turned on so that it could hear what's coming at it. And it is the way of the world that a tune might have come and gone before you'd been able to find your phone. Now, however, an able programmer has understood this problem and developed a solution to it. When you think you might be in a position to hear music whose name you don't know (when all-night clubbing for instance, or, say, listening to the YC programme in the bath), you can have earlier turned Shazam on to its auto function, and it will keep a list of all the music it then hears. Magical.

Many of us have bought <u>portable hard drives</u>. They are essential for backup. Many of them have software bundled with them: very useful – perhaps. The immediate question is - how do you get a reliable guide as to the quality of the software you're getting? The article "Storage on the go" (pp. 66 – 67) looks to fill this gap. It covers many of the hard drives we'd be interested in. How does it rate the software? The article notes that there are some strong contenders in this context, but it gives best in class to the Seagate software suite. Next comes the Western Digital, while the ADATA, LaCie and Toshiba suites all received honourable mentions. In hardware terms the external drive which this issue currently favours is the WD My Passport Ultra 3 TB. It is described as "An (sic) surprisingly affordable premium drive with good hardware and software".

PC & Tech Authority (September)

It's one year since <u>Windows 10</u> was launched. Microsoft had hoped it would sweep the pool. How has it done? It is reported that while Windows 10 has taken 22.5 % of the general desktop market, a massive 48.3 % remain with Windows 7 and 8.4% have stayed with Windows 8.1. Not quite what Microsoft wanted.

This issue has a particularly insightful article – "Windows 10 at one: what's to celebrate?" This is by Jon Honeyball, who is not known for pulling his punches. Honeyball has never been particularly impressed by Windows 10 and notes that "many corporates have decided that they still like Windows 7 64-bit and that Windows 10 brought them no real benefit". So Honeyball believes that, for this and many other reasons, <u>Microsoft is in trouble</u>. He says that "you will know the board of Microsoft has really woken up to the issues on the day that a third of the staff is laid off, and Microsoft comes up with a clear vision about what it wants to do and how".

Now if your knees and ankles are still in reasonable shape, and you love to run, you may have thought of a <u>fitness tracker</u>. And even if running is the furthest thing from your mind, you may have thought of a fitness tracker as a fashion item, not to mention something that might suggest to those around you that you are much fitter than you really are. Either way there is a very useful review article here on these increasingly popular devices.

There are many <u>phones on the market.</u> This is no secret: just go in to Noel Leeming and look at the choice there. (Expect a SeniorNet discount.) But the question rings out – "which is the best? " Well, this issue has a strong recommendation. Go for the OnePlus 3, it says, describing it as "quick, beautiful, long-lasting and an incredible price; you won't find a better phone for the money". (But the sting in the tail of this article is that, for obvious reasons, they are very hard to find. In any case - ask Noel Leeming.)

There are two programmes on this issue's <u>DVD</u> which could be of genuine value to some SeniorNet members. The first is "SSD Fresh 2016". This programme helps extend the life of a solid-state drive (SSD). Windows has a programme which, by default, defragments drives. This is very useful for normal hard drives, but shortens the life of SSDs. So, for these drives, this programme turns that feature off.

The second program is "Softorbits Flash Recovery". Imagine that you have <u>deleted some important files or photos</u> on USB sticks, or SD or other memory cards. You need to regain access: this program is designed to do that for you.

TECHLife Australia (October)

The main focus of this issue is <u>wireless networking</u>. If you are setting up a system, then reading the material here about this subject may convince you to employ a specialist to get the job done for you. By contrast, if you are at home in this field, you will find the article on current developments interesting. Perhaps the most useful article in the clutch here on networking is one that would help anybody who needed to expand their network in order to get rid of blank spots around the house. Predictably this is called "Expand and extend your network", and the bulk of it is an in-depth look at 21 wired and wireless network extenders (pp. 70 – 79).

With Christmas in mind and the possibility of long days spent reading, the owners of <u>e-books</u> will be stocking their shelves. There is a useful review article here: "Showdown: the best apps for reading e-books: book yourself in for a more convenient and polished e-book reading experience" (pp. 30 – 31).

In a recent COG meeting there was some discussion about finding what, on one's <u>hard drive</u>, is taking up too much space. An article here is "Clear up disk space in Windows" and features a programme called "TreeSizeFree" which reportedly does a great job quickly showing you the size of folders and their subfolders. There is a detailed step-by-step guide on how to use this new app (pp. 86 – 87).

People using <u>Apple devices</u> could be interested in the article "Manage your iCloud drive on iOS and Mac" (pp. 92-93); and in "Give your Mac a health check: quickly test your hardware and diagnose errors with MacCheck" (pp. 88 – 89).

Australian Personal Computer (October)

The focus of this issue is <u>virtual reality</u> (pp. 41-84). This is described as "the next great frontier in computing". There are some top-flight articles here about this phenomenon. But the problem is that reading about it is not seeing it – not experiencing it. I do not know anyone at SeniorNet who has yet bought a significant virtual reality device. Indeed most of us, including myself, have no personal experience of virtual reality. Accordingly, we are not gripped by the great enthusiasm of much younger people for this aspect of computing. Now if we wanted to know a little about what excites them, then this issue of APC provides all the briefing one could imagine. But I don't think that most of us are looking to escape from our present reality – in any of the many ways possible to us – yet.

Of more practical use to many SeniorNet members would be <u>Geek Uninstaller</u>. It's free and the article about it makes the point that "most programs come with their own uninstallers, but these often don't do a particularly thorough job, leaving superfluous registry entries and system files in their wake." But Geek Uninstaller is described as being able to remove "even the most stubborn unwanted programs". Could be good.

For internet browsing most of us use Google Chrome and/or Mozilla Firefox. A Johnny-come-lately in this context is <u>Microsoft's Edge browser</u>: it's part of the Windows 10 operating system. It's probably already on your laptop. There's an article here, "Master Windows updated Edge browser" (pp. 88 – 90) which would get you up and running with it – if you weren't happy with what you already have.

Technology myth department. Imagine having bought a large screen TV only to find after a few months that one or more <u>pixels are unresponsive.</u> What can you do? APC says "we have seen lots of guides that promise to fix dead pixels, but we've never seen it succeed ourselves and we have never been persuaded there is a plausible mechanism either". Specifically, APC regards software solutions as "snake oil". They don't work, and neither, APC says, did the so-called pencil eraser solution. (Under these circumstances the only thing that does seem to work would taking the screen back to the store where you bought it and asking for a replacement.)

PC & Tech Authority (October)

<u>Could a tablet replace your laptop</u>? That is the question of the moment for this issue.   The answer is that the hardware manufacturers certainly hope so. They would like to see a new burst of consumer spending aimed at 2-in-i detachable hybrids, like the exciting Microsoft Surface. To help you get in the mood to buy (after all Christmas is coming), there is a feature article on this topic, and reviews of eight top hybrids (pp. 60-75).

Just after Christmas is New Year, when resolutions demand to be made. If yours include <u>tidying up</u> your email, music, photos and social media accounts and data, then you are in luck. This issue has a major article called "Take the Digital Diet" which provides useful advice on how best to achieve your objective (pp.76-85).

TECHLife Australia (November)

The lead article in this issue is "Best Free Apps and Games". There's a lot of useful material here (pp.51-75), with sections on iPhone and iPad; Android; Windows; Mac – and, generically, on how to find more good quality <u>free apps and games</u>.   Some of these apps we're already familiar with: that's

to be expected. But the pleasure in reading these sorts of article lies in the joy of discovering something new. Take, for example, Call Recorder ACR. To understand it, imagine that you are making an important call to your insurance company. You are giving them information about your holiday arrangements, and you want there to be a record of that. They say, as they should, that they are recording the call. Fair enough. But because the call is important, you need your own copy of it. After all, the company could lose or otherwise misplace their recording of what you'd said, and you could then be in, shall we say, a difficult position. So, with Call Recorder ACR installed on your Android phone, you also record the call – and of course tell them you're doing that. Most companies think these matters only work one way, but technology can level up a previously significantly tilted playing field.

What about <u>Windows</u>? The article, "Best Free Windows Apps", is an example of what this magazine does so well, and why it is a top seller. The following list illustrates:

Best free firewall: Windows 10 firewall control

Best free file encryptor: Veracrypt

Best free email client: Mozilla Thunderbird

Best free crapware protection: Unchecky

Best free antivirus: Panda free antivirus

Best free anti-malware suite: Malwarebytes anti-malware

Best free backup solution: Macrium Reflect Free

Best free remote desktop app: TeamViewer

Best free media player: VLC

Best free photo editor: Paint.Net

Best free screenshot app: PicPick

Best free office suite: LibreOffice

Best free driver updater: IOBit Driver Booster

Best free file search tool: Listary

Best free file copy engine: Copy Handler

Best free disc burner: IMGBurn

Best free zipping utility: 7–Zip

Best free Windows tweak utility: Ultimate Windows Tweaker

Best free drive partitioning tool: Minitool Partition Wizard

Best free tool for fixing Windows: Tweaking.com Windows Repair tool

Best free junk cleaner: CCleaner

Now you won't necessarily agree with all of these assessments. But each of them is backed by a thoughtful review, which also tells you where to get the app in question, and how to get the best out of it. This is a superb article.

Coming up to Christmas, people will be thinking about Christmas presents for the family, not to mention items that are more egotistically directed. Either way this issue offers useful advice. Among other things, there's a useful article on portable backup batteries, along with helpful reviews. The article gives a detailed buyer's guide under the following headings: Capacity; USB Ports; Fast Charge; QUALCOMM Quick Charge; Passthrough Charging; Input Charge Rate; Charger Not Included; and Form Factor and Weight. Just as useful is the article "Portable storage in flash". Again there are reviews, and a detailed buyer's guide using the following headings: Interface; Connection; SSD Versus Flash USB; and Size.

Now you will have noticed a new fashion in town: more than a few people are going around wearing a new form of earmuff - actually, they are headphones. While some of these headphones are quite large, the more discreet amongst these people wear what are called in-ear headphones. TECHLife Australia has noticed this trend and there's an article here, "Best buds under $100", which contains many useful reviews designed to help us join the in-crowd. But what should we look for? The article gives detailed advice under the following headings: Ear Style; In-Line Controller; Noise Cancellation; Water Resistance; Headset Mode; Sizes; Android Vs IOS; and Specs. Listen up?

Australian Personal Computer (November)

Hacking is becoming an increasing problem, and the main focus of this issue is on how to protect yourself (see "Thwart hackers and lock down your digital identity", pp. 43 – 65). There's lots of good advice here, including very helpful instructions on how to deal with Ransomware.

At a recent COG meeting we discussed password managers. There is an excellent article here about them. It compares three notable ones, and advises how to get started with a password manager (pp. 52 – 53). The most prominent Windows security suites are also reviewed, with APC selecting BitDefender as the best. (But note, BitDefender is not free.)

APC's ethos tends to be rather hands-on security – if you can do it yourself, then why don't you? Reflecting this approach is an article, a "DIY free security toolkit" (pp. 62 – 63). It says install a selection of the following, and you'll be reasonably well covered:

Anti-malware: Avast Free Antivirus
Firewall: Glasswire Free
Anti-Tracking: Disconnect Basic
Password Manager: LastPass
Backup: Code42 CrashPlan
Parental Controls: Norton Family Basic
Secure Browser: Epic Privacy Browser
Mobile Security: Avast Mobile Security and Antivirus

There's also a significant review article on the <u>best Android security suites</u>. While Avast Mobile Security and Avira Antivirus Security came out well, top of the heap was Sophos Free Antivirus and Security.

<u>PC & Tech Authority</u> (November)

The best thing in this issue is the <u>annual group test on security software</u> (pp. 62-77).   There's valuable advice here, but some of the assessments are surprising. For example, that concerning Microsoft Windows Defender said that "if you are using Defender right now, we strongly suggest you switch to something else". Now that will raise eyebrows, but the question then is – what to? The answer given is "Avast Free Antivirus would be a better bet, delivering malware protection that ranks near the top of the class rather than the bottom". Avast receives high praise in this article.

While some of our members pay a lot of attention to protecting their computers, not so many are concerned about their <u>smartphone and tablet security</u>. To help remedy that there is a significant article here – "10 ways to harden Android security" (pp. 78 – 81). The headings in this article are:

1. don't sideload Apps
2. encrypt, encrypt, encrypt
3. go granular over permissions
4. use a VPN
5. install a security app
6. don't rely on the default four-digit pin
7. make use of screen pinning
8. welcome guests
9. back it up; and
10. Wipe your data before disposing of your phone.

There's much to think about here, but the question which will immediately come to mind is - <u>which security app</u> is recommended for these devices? The article says that "our pick of the Android security apps is Avast Mobile Security: it's free but fully featured". There you go.

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