

October 2011 Newsletter

More about Hewlett-Packard, Amazon, and more Favorite Programs

Hewlett-Packard Corporation made some more waves since my last newsletter. Amazon did indeed jump into the Tablet market, and I have a reader suggestion for a favorite program, plus one of my own.

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HP Dumps Leo

As if Hewlett-Packard dumping the PC division wasn't enough of a bombshell, the HP Board of Directors made another one – they dumped the CEO, Leo Apotheker, and hired Meg Whitman as the new CEO. Now the backpedaling has begun. HP released several statements that it was not really going to dump the PC division, stating that they were only “exploring options”.

We'll see what transpires, but my opinion HP will sell out and others like Dell are not far behind. Dell has quietly started down the same path of acquiring or creating more corporate level services. The glory days of mega-sized computer manufacturers may be drawing to a close, and a new crop of smaller, nimbler manufacturers will emerge. IBM led the way in 2003, HP saw the light in 2011, and more are sure to follow.

Amazon really puts “the cloud” into The Cloud

Amazon released its new tablet, the Kindle Fire. It has most of the stuff people want in a tablet, and at a starting price of \$199, it appears to hit a price point at which an entirely new market appears – the lowest of low cost tablets. Apple's iPad has been very popular, but the price point has prevented many folks from jumping into a purchasing mood. At \$199, the whole equation changes. Even HP learned that lesson: when HP dumped their Tablet PCs, the price on the discontinued item was... \$199, and the entire inventory sold out in a day. Think of it this way: if you had the cheapest i-Pad, and it was lost or stolen, that would kind of hurt financially to get the second one. You could have four Kindle Fires for the same total cash outlay.

Amazon has taken a calculated risk –the Kindle Fire does not have a camera or broadband cellular capability. At first glance, that seems to be a glaring mistake. However, Amazon is betting that consumers who can't afford an iPad are willing to make that tradeoff. The Kindle Fire does have Wireless capability, so you could browse the internet at home or in any public WiFi spot. And, as Amazon clearly hopes, you will buy lots of stuff from Amazon's online store, like movies and music. Hmm, that sounds like... Apple's strategy.

Anyway, regardless whether Amazon is copying Apple's marketing strategy, they clearly have taken a step that no one else has done – they really put “The Cloud” into this device. Kindle Fire is fairly low-powered, and the built-in “Amazon Silk” web browser uses cloud processing to surf the Web. We could spend a week debating what “The Cloud” is, but my definition of Cloud Computing is that the less software or computational power the device has, the more it is a “Cloud” device. By that definition, the Kindle Fire is the first truly Cloud-based device.

More Favorite Programs

Google Earth

Art Holecek - a good friend, longtime newsletter reader, and Apple Mac expert, suggested Google Earth as a favorite program. Google Earth, for those who have not tried it, is an amazing map program that covers most of the Earth with both traditional line maps, aerial photos, and ground-level photographs. Art pointed out something I had never heard of: the 3-D fly-by feature. How could I have missed that? I have used Google Earth since it came out, and had never heard of or tried the feature. Amazing!

Of course, being an airplane geek I tried the F-16 fighter plane version first. It was hard to handle and I crashed about 7 seconds into my first flight. I recommend the SR-22 propeller plane, it goes much slower and is easier to handle. I did much better with the propeller plane, crashing after a far longer 15 seconds into my first flight. Very entertaining nonetheless. Once I got the hang of it, the "flight" through the Grand Canyon was AWESOME! Try it!

SyncToy

Despite the frivolous name, this is a serious piece of software. SyncToy can keep two folders in sync - this comes in handy if you use a flash disk to move files to and from your PC. It seems like when I do that, I always end up with some newer files on the PC and some newer files on the Flash Disk. Then you have a mess – it is tedious to compare files between two devices, and you run the risk of blowing away a new file with an old one. SyncToy to the rescue! It's a free download from Microsoft's website.

Once you set it up to synchronize folders, it does the magic of comparing files by size and file date to determine which is newer, then only copies those files that are newer. For example, let's say I have two folders I want to sync: C:\DATA and a Flash Disk F:\DATA and I want the two to be exactly the same. I set up a "Folder Pair" (as SyncToy calls it) of C:\DATA on the left side and F: on the right side of the pair. Below is a summary of the sync options:

- Synchronize:** -New files are moved in either direction [C:\DATA] → ← [F:]
-Deleted or Renamed files are deleted or renamed on both sides [C:\DATA] → ← [F:]
- Echo:** -New Files are moved only from to the left from the right... [C:\DATA] ← [F:]
-Deleted or Renamed files on the right are repeated on the left... [C:\DATA] ← [F:]
- Contribute:** -New Files are moved only from right to left... [C:\DATA] → [F:]
-NO Deletes or Renames

The "Synchronize" option is best for most purposes. You will also want to choose carefully which folder should be "Left" and which should be "Right". The general rule of thumb is the folder with more files should be "Left". If you need to use Echo, put the folder with the most files on the "Right".

As always, I welcome comments or suggestions!

-John Becker