

More Computer Hints and Tips

Introduction

This document covers in a little more detail the topics introduced at the Carefree Computer Club meeting held on 15 Dec 2008. The principal subjects included:

- What is a Blog?
- Get Computer Help Using Remote Assistance
- Drive-by Downloads

What is a Blog?

See also: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>

A blog (a contraction of the term "Web log") is a Web site, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (artlog), photographs (photoblog), sketches (sketchblog), videos (vlog), music (MP3 blog), audio (podcasting), which are part of a wider network of social media. Micro-blogging is another type of blogging, one that consists of blogs with very short posts. As of December 2007, blog search engine Technorati was tracking more

than 112 million blogs. With the advent of video blogging, the word blog has taken on an even looser meaning - that of any bit of media wherein the subject expresses his opinion or simply talks about something.

For an interesting tour of creating your own blog Website, click here:

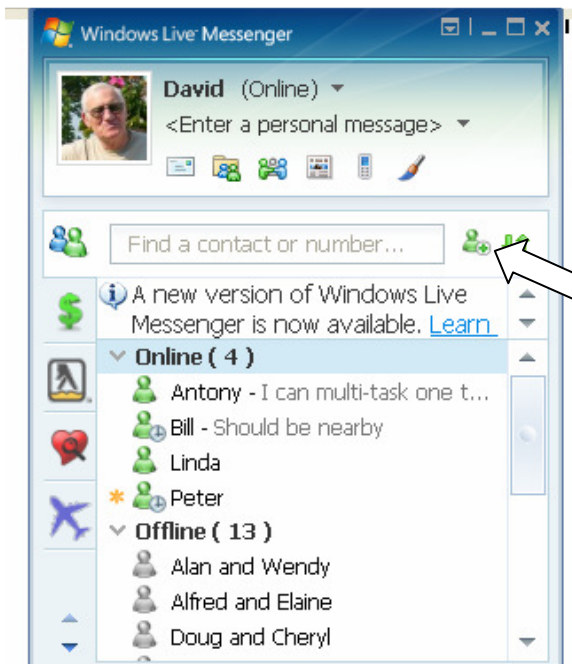
<https://www.blogger.com/start>

Get Computer Help Using Remote Assistance

If there is nobody to turn to for help when you have a computer problem, there is a way to get long-distance assistance. As a service to Carefree residents, whether at your summer home or in Winter Haven, I will be happy to try and help you. All you need is to have MSN Messenger (or Windows Live Messenger) installed on your computer, and a high-speed Internet connection. Most computer owners use Messenger for 'Instant Messaging' between family and friends. With this program you can chat using text, or make an audio call, or even a video call. You can also use it to ask for remote assistance. If you would like to take advantage of this procedure it would be best if you call me beforehand to discuss the problem and the remote assistance. Here's how it works:

Make sure you are signed in to Messenger. There should be a little green man in your notification area (a.k.a. the sys-tray, in the bottom, right corner of your monitor screen).

Double-click on the green man so that you can see who is online. You will need to add my 'Instant Messaging' address by creating a new contact.



This screen shot shows my main page when using Windows Live Messenger. The layout may vary according to the operating system you have, and the version of Messenger. Click here to add a contact.

In the 'Add a contact' page, enter my Instant Messaging Address, as follows:
davec43bv@hotmail.com

In the Nickname box, enter Dave Clark. No other information is necessary on that page.

A message will automatically be sent to me, asking if I agree to you adding me to your contact list. Naturally, I will agree, and you will then see my name listed among your online contacts.

If you have a firewall installed (and you should), it will help speed up the connection process if you turn it off before the next step. You can turn it back on immediately after the remote assistance ends.

The next step is to ask for help. Click on the Menu button on the main Messenger page. Depending on the version, it is usually to be found somewhere near the top, right of the page.

In the drop-down menu, click on 'Actions', then on 'Request remote assistance'. (I must appear 'online' for you to ask for my help.)

Click on my name and then click OK. That will send a message to me that you are requesting remote assistance, which I will accept.

Once you have allowed me to see your screen, I will require control of your computer. You will receive a message asking if you agree to me doing this. As soon as you agree, I will have control of your computer and you will see me moving your mouse pointer. You can disconnect and regain control at any time you want.

An Instant Messaging dialog box is available at the side of your screen for you to type in any comments during the procedure. If you are not local, this will avoid staying on the telephone with me, incurring long-distance charges.

I hope that I can be useful to all Carefree friends by providing this service. I have tried it successfully several times, both as the 'novice' and the 'expert'. Hopefully I will be able to fix your problem, too!

Drive-by downloads

The number of poisoned Web sites is increasing. 1 in 1000 Web pages are infected with malicious drive-by downloads. What is a drive-by download? A drive-by download is a program that is automatically downloaded to your computer without your consent or even your knowledge. Unlike a pop-up download, which asks for assent (albeit in a calculated manner likely to lead to a "yes"), a drive-by download can be initiated by simply visiting a Web site or viewing an e-mail message. If your computer's security settings are lax, it may be possible for drive-by downloads to occur without any further action on your part.

Frequently, a drive-by download is installed along with a user-requested application. For example, a file-sharing program might include a spyware program that tracks and reports user information for targeted marketing

purposes. An associated adware program can then generate pop-up advertisements using that information.

Xupiter, an Internet Explorer toolbar program, was frequently installed as a drive-by download in the early 2000s. The program replaced a user's home page, changed browser settings, and used a redirect to take all searches to the Xupiter Web site. In some versions, the program initiated drive-by downloads of other programs. Furthermore, although it came with an uninstall utility, Xupiter was quite challenging for the average computer user to remove.

Drive-by downloads continue to be a major security issue online. In April 2007, researchers at Google discovered hundreds of thousands of Web pages that initiated drive-by downloads. One in ten pages was found to be suspect. Sophos researchers in 2008 reported that they were discovering more than 6,000 new infected Web pages every day, or about one every 14 seconds. Many of these infections are connected to 'botnets'. This is a group of computers infected with the malicious kind of robot software, the bots, which present a security threat to the computer owner. Once the robot software (also known as malicious software or malware) has been successfully installed in a computer, this computer becomes a zombie or a drone, unable to resist the commands of the bot commander. They may then be directed to further malicious activity, like spam or DDoS (Distributed Denial-of-Service) attacks. On the Internet, a distributed denial-of-service attack is one in which a multitude of compromised systems attack a single target, thereby causing denial of service for users of the targeted system. The flood of incoming messages to the target system essentially forces it to shut down, thereby denying service to the system to legitimate users

What can you do to minimize drive-by downloads?

- Always have a firewall running on your computer, whether it's the Windows firewall or a free firewall, like Zone Alarm. (For Windows XP

users, Zone Alarm is preferred over the Windows firewall, as it guards against incoming and outgoing traffic. Windows only protects against incoming threats. Vista users can safely use the improved Windows firewall.)

- Install anti-spyware and anti-adware programs and run them frequently to keep your computer infection-free.
- It goes without saying that computer users should have an anti-virus program running at all times, and it should be configured to do a regular scan of the whole computer. Make sure that the anti-virus definition database is updated before each scan, and whenever it prompts you to update.

The majority of computer fixes that I encounter at Carefree are problems caused by unwanted viruses, spyware and adware on the computer. If you get into the habit of doing weekly maintenance on your machine, you can avoid these problems for the most part. You can never do too much 'cleaning' on your computer which, like your car, will run all the better for a little regular care and attention.