

Technology Tips from the MCCGJA Communications Technology Committee

This document provides the communications technology tips (the *CommTech Tips of the Month*), or in some cases elaborations on them, that were published in the MCCGJA monthly NewsPage beginning in December 2010. The MCCGJA Communications Technology Committee will be happy to assist Chapter Members or current Marin County Civil Grand Jurors with these or other communications technology issues.

--- Sterling Harwell, Chair MCCGJA Communications Technology Committee

Contents	Page
E-mail Scams	1
E-mail Etiquette	2
Fighting Malware/Spyware	2
Protecting Your Home Wireless Network	4
Free/Cheap Computer Training	4
Tips to Avoid Computer Damage	6
Why to Use Only One Space at the End of Each Sentence	6
Internet Password Protection	7

To go to a particular article, press and hold down the Ctrl key and then click on the title of the article you want to go to.

E-mail Scams

Be careful of e-mail scams. There are a lot of them out there.

An interesting example happened to me: I received an e-mail seemingly from a friend of mine, saying he was stranded in London after being robbed of his cash and credit cards. Would I be willing to provide some financial support so he could get home? Well, of course I would if it was legitimate, but I had just talked to him at his home in San Francisco!

I was the sixth friend to call him and tell him about the scam being operated in his name. He was understandably concerned. He thought his computer had been hacked and would have to cancel his e-mail service. I called our committee member Irwin Taranto, who explained how these scams worked and that such drastic action was not required.

Be careful of e-mail scams. There are a lot of them out there. Consider phishing.

Technology Tips from the MCCGJA Communications Technology Committee

One of the more insidious forms of scamming is phishing. Per Microsoft, "Phishing email messages are designed to steal your identity. They ask for personal data, or direct you to websites or phone numbers to call where they ask you to provide personal data. A few clues can help you spot fraudulent email messages or links within them."

- To see Microsoft's guidance, [click here](#).
- If you want even more information on phishing, check out Wikipedia's extensive discussion by [clicking here](#).

E-mail Etiquette

Much has been written about how to make e-mail friendlier and more effective, e-mail etiquette. While much of that has been written for the business environment, some Web sites are more oriented to the more social environment we live in. One such site, NetM@nners.com, provides some very useful guidance in its Email Etiquette 101.

Here are some of my favorites:

- "Do not type in all caps. Typing in all caps is considered yelling, screaming or at the very least adding emphasis to the word you type."
- "Start your email with brief and concise Subject: which accurately portrays the content of your email."
- "Always spell check your email, proofread for errors, capitalize your sentences and use appropriate punctuation and grammar."

To read more about these and many other courtesies, go to <http://www.netmanners.com/email-etiquette/email-etiquette-101/>.

Fighting Malware/Spyware

According to Wikipedia, "**Malware, short for malicious software**, consists of programming (code, scripts, active content, and other software) designed to disrupt or deny operation, gather information that leads to loss of privacy or exploitation, gain unauthorized access to system resources, and other abusive behavior.

"Software is considered to be malware based on the perceived intent of the creator rather than any particular features. Malware includes computer viruses, worms, trojan horses, spyware, dishonest adware, scareware, crimeware, most rootkits, and other malicious and unwanted software or program."

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Also according to Wikipedia, “**Spyware is a type of malware** that can be installed on computers, and which collects small pieces of information about users without their knowledge. The presence of spyware is typically hidden from the user, and can be difficult to detect. ...

“While the term spyware suggests software that secretly monitors the user's computing, the functions of spyware extend well beyond simple monitoring. Spyware programs can collect various types of personal information, such as Internet surfing habits and sites that have been visited, but can also interfere with user control of the computer in other ways, such as installing additional software and redirecting Web browser activity. Spyware is known to change computer settings, resulting in slow connection speeds, different home pages, and/or loss of Internet connection or functionality of other programs. In an attempt to increase the understanding of spyware, a more formal classification of its included software types is provided by the term privacy-invasive software.

“In response to the emergence of spyware, a small industry has sprung up dealing in anti-spyware software. Running anti-spyware software has become a widely recognized element of computer security practices for computers, especially those running Microsoft Windows.”

Clearly, we all need to know how to keep malware/spyware out of our computers. Here are two sources of advice on how to go about that.

- Anti Spyware Software Review – Find the Best Anti Malware Programs
<http://ezinearticles.com/?Anti-Spyware-Software-Review---Find-the-Best-Anti-Malware-Programs&id=3571471>
- One or two AntiMalware Programs? <http://www.networkworld.com/news/2010/022510-one-or-two-anti-malware.html>

In addition, the Golden Gate Computer Society, courtesy of Gene Dyer, offers the following tips:

- **Microsoft Safety Scanner** -- new freebie from Microsoft

Do you think your PC has a virus?

The Microsoft Safety Scanner is a free downloadable security tool that provides on-demand scanning and helps remove viruses, spyware, and other malicious software. It works with your existing antivirus software.

Link: <http://www.microsoft.com/security/scanner>.

- **Free Antivirus programs rated by Consumer Reports**

In the June 2011 Consumer Report, they looked at four free antivirus programs, one from Microsoft (Security Essentials) and "the three A's", Avast, AVG, and Avira.

Avira scored best, but "persistently tries to sell you its \$27 pay version, which you don't need". AVG came in second, and Avast and Security Essentials were close behind, tied for third place.

Protecting Your Home Wireless Network

A Computerworld article on the Internet begins “Bad guys don't target just big, corporate networks. If you have a Wi-Fi network at home or in a small office, intruders may be after you, such as casual "war drivers" who troll city streets, looking for unprotected wireless networks.

“It may not just be malicious attackers who cause problems. If you don't change the defaults of your wireless network, a neighbor with the same router make and model might accidentally connect to your network, stealing your bandwidth or reconfiguring your router and network without your knowledge.

“Fear not, though. There's plenty you can do to protect yourself. In this article, I'll show you how.”

The article then describes detailed procedures for the following:

- Change the administrator password on your router.
- Stop broadcasting your network's SSID -- and change its name
- Use encryption
- Protect yourself using Media Access Control (MAC) addresses
- Turn off your network when you're not using it
- Check for wireless intruders

To read the article, [click here.](#)

Some other articles on the Internet that may also be of help:

- eHow article, *How to Protect Your home Wireless Network*: “Like most people, you have a wireless network at your home. If you don't take some simple steps to secure it, though, you may be offering up free access to the internet and your personal information! Learn how to easily secure your network.” [Click here.](#)
- Appolicious article: *Five ways to protect your Wi-Fi network from hackers.* [Click here.](#)
- msnbc article: *How to protect your home network.* [Click here.](#)
- USAToday article: *Protect your wireless network.* [Click here.](#)
- About.com article: *10 Tips for Wireless Home Network Security.* [Click here.](#)

Free/Cheap Computer Training

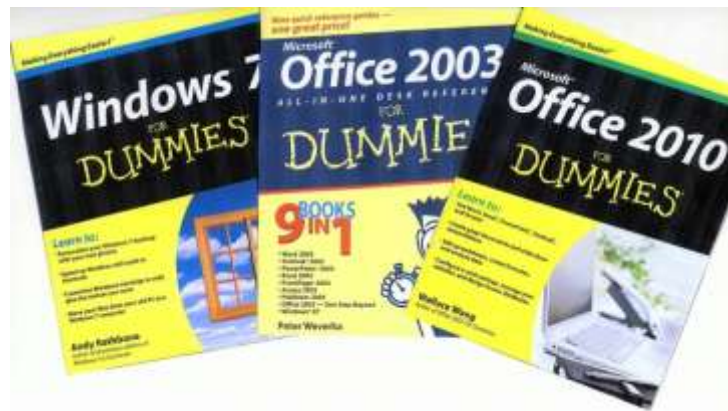
There is a lot of help available in how to use digital technologies, including computers, digital cameras, scanners, etc. While much of it is in the form of paid courses, everything you need to know is also available for little or no cost.

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Self Help.

One of the first approaches to consider is right at your fingertips: your computer. Each program you have generally has a “Support” or “Help” function associated with it that will describe its features and procedures for using them, some of these in video tutorials. All you have to do is find them, general on the Start menu of your computer or at the top right of the page of the application you have open. Just click and ask how to do whatever you need to know how to do. The Web sites for the program you want to use also generally have “Support” or “Help” functions. Just search the Web for Microsoft Word or whatever else you want to learn about.

Another good source of help for some of us is manuals, available at libraries and book stores. Just be sure to get ones that apply to the version of Windows, Word, etc. that you have on your computer. (I tend to like the for Dummies books.)



A nice thing about manuals is that you can keep them near your desk for ready reference at any time.

Any of our Communications Technology Committee members will be happy to help you get organized with self-help tools.

Free/cheap computer coaching.

There is also a lot of free or inexpensive coaching available in Marin County. Here are the ones we know about.

MCCGJA Communications Technology Committee. We are happy to provide in-home (yours or ours) in a variety of subjects, including e-mail, Web searching, Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, digital photography, document scanning, and others. Contact any of our members or any of the Chapter officers and we will be happy to tell you what we can do to help you.

Whistlestop Computer School, in central San Rafael provides free courses in:

- Beginning computers for adults and computer lab

Technology Tips from the MCCGJA Communications Technology Committee

- Working with your digital photos on your computer (taught by our own Gene Dyer)
- Facebook
- [Click here to see if there is something of interest to you.](#)

Golden Gate Computer Society

(<http://www.ggcs.org/index.htm>) sponsors numerous classes, which are live demonstrations of the GGCS motto “users helping users”. GGCS members and their families may attend without charge. Non-members are invited to sample any meeting one time without charge; a \$5 fee is charged non-members thereafter. Classes are held at their classroom in San Anselmo and at the site of their monthly meetings (Check back to the main menu to determine the meeting site.). Subjects include:

- Computers for beginners and more advanced users
- Internet
- Digital cameras
- Mac
- Quicken (personal finance software)

[Click here to see if there is something of interest to you.](#)

San Rafael Library provides a few computer classes and Lunchtime Computer Chats. [Click here to see if there is something of interest to you.](#)

Other local public libraries also provide computer training. Check the Web site of your local library to see if there is something of interest to you.

Marin County Free Library offers computer training at the Civic Center and several other locations. [Click here to see if there is something of interest to you.](#)

Tips to Avoid Computer Damage

From the New York Times: "Tips to Avoid Computer Damage from Clueless Use." [To see the article, click here.](#)

Why to Use Only One Space at the End of Each Sentence

Many computer users continue the time-honored practice of putting two spaces between sentences when only one should be used. To read why you should only use one space, [click here.](#)

Internet Password Protection

Internet passwords protect your privacy, your identity, and your finances. Unfortunately, there are many hackers “out there” on the Internet trying to get them in order to steal from you. There is advice from many sources on how to create “safer” passwords.

The April issue of AARP Bulletin has identified the 25 worst passwords people use. To read their advice, [click here](#).

To gauge your own password protection, go to microsoft.com/security and select “Create Strong Passwords.”