

> PC Update

August 2021



From The Editor August 2021 _____	2
Monthly Meeting August 2021 _____	3
Forty years of the IBM PC _____	5
Smart Home, Smarter Home _____	9
Curious Kids: how does music get onto a cassette tape? _____	12
How one simple rule change could curb online retailers' snooping on you _____	16
Member Short Stories: Elephobia _____	19
DOTW Winners July 2021 _____	20
East SIG Report July 2021 _____	21
Yammer Highlights July 2021 _____	27
A Change to PC Update Subscriptions _____	29

From The Editor August 2021

Hello and welcome to another edition of PC Update.

On the club front our activities have been back online this month. We had an interesting monthly meeting where two speakers, Jacky Barker and Zach Morris discussed their experiences of setting up and working in tool libraries. The tool library or the library of things is an interesting concept that the club is looking to introduce a version of. You'll be able to borrow any kind of IT related tool (for example a camera drone) for a one-off project or a one-off bit of fun, rather than having to purchase something and maybe only end up using it once. Watch this space, as the concept begins to come to fruition.

On the wider industry front, the big news this month is the fortieth anniversary of the introduction of the IBM PC. Some members have shared their reflections on what their first experiences of it were, and what they've thought was the most significant technological introduction of the last twenty years. So look out for that.

Enjoy your reading, and have a good month!

Monthly Meeting August 2021

The August 2021 Monthly Meeting was held online on Wednesday 4th August 2021, with about 70 members in attendance via Zoom. This was the program for the evening:

Guests : Jacky Barker, Co-Founder, The Sydney Library of Things Zack Morris, Tool Room Manager, Brunswick Tool Library

Topic: Library of Things

Jacky's passion for the Sydney Library of Things came as a direct consequence of running a local media organisation that published numerous articles on sustainability and how we can work towards reducing our carbon footprint. As well as running a local news and media website they administer a local community facebook group where members can ask each other questions on neighbourhood issues.

Since she started ITC Lane Cove Chat, Jacky has seen members ask to borrow numerous things. Members have requested to borrow crutches, water pressure cleaners, small projectors, bunny ears for a TV, jigsaw puzzles and heck even a Collingwood Jersey (don't worry it was for a community theatre event). This led her to think that we needed an organised system where people could borrow everyday items. As luck would have it another two community minded people wanted to do the same, so they banded together using their different skills to get it up and running. They only just launched before lockdown but had a community day to promote the library and the support and interest was amazing.

Jacky is an ex lawyer who has worked in government, private practice and for large multinationals. She is a citizen journalist who loves the whole idea of the circular economy.

Zack is a professional Audio-Visual technician originally from the USA. He mostly work in large corporate events. Zack has been a member at the Brunswick Tool Library since 2017 and has been volunteering as the Tool Room Manager since January 2020.

He is also a passionate computer nerd and tinkerer, so the Tool Library has given him a lot of opportunities to improve the library while also feeding his creative nature and connecting with like-minded people.

Meeting Agenda

Meeting begins at 7pm. MC is Peter Bacon.

Guest speakers: Jacky Barker and Zack Morris

Q & A: Jacky Barker and Zack Morris with David Stonier-Gibson

Interval: Music

Kirsten Greed: Call for What's New speakers

Presidents Report: David Stonier-Gibson

iHelp Online with Mike Allison. Please submit questions to ihelp-questions@melbpc.org.au before the segment.

Meeting concludes at 9pm. Informal iHelp Online will continue after the meeting.

If you missed out the first time and would like to view any of these presentations, you can do so at <http://services.melbpc.org.au/videos/>

The username is videos and the password is drum286.

Forty years of the IBM PC

Hugh Macdonald

The twelfth of August 2021 marks forty years since the IBM Personal Computer was first released onto the market. It is widely regarded as a seminal moment in computing history because it spurred on many other companies to make IBM compatible personal computers and very quickly became the dominant computing platform, with close to 90 percent market share. And it continues today largely unchanged, as far as the desktop computer market goes.

It was the impetus for the formation of Melbourne PC User Group, and other similar organisations around Australia and around the world. People needed and wanted to learn how to use their new computers, and so computer user groups provided support for that, as they continue to do so.

From a personal point of view, I wasn't born until nearly two years after the introduction of the IBM PC. My father brought one home in about 1987 and I was definitely extremely interested in the collection of grey boxes (monitor, computer, keyboard and printer) that made up his computer. I enjoyed using a program to make greeting cards on the dot matrix printer and playing various games that taught maths and spelling. A few years later when we got our first mouse and the version of Paint that accompanied it, that quickly became a favourite program.

But the IBM PC was just the first computer I knew, and I knew of nothing that came before it, so I couldn't judge how it advanced the industry like I later could with things like the iPhone and the iPad.

So I turned again to the good members of Melbourne PC User Group on Yammer, to provide me with their recollections of the introduction of the IBM PC and what they think have been the most momentous piece of technology introduced in the last twenty years.

Recollections of the introduction of the IBM PC

John Hall

My earliest knowledge of the IBM PC was when I became the Manager of the Myer Stores Information Centre in 1983. I had a small staff of seven people who used the latest Mainframe Operating System - VM - (yes, IBM had "Virtual Machines" back that long ago) to produce management reports for the Head Office Buyers and Stores Operation Managers. We had started to use the IBM PC. in some larger stores for staff rostering using spreadsheets (Visicalc, Multimate and the like) and I could see the capabilities of the IBM PC long before many of my mainframe based colleagues.

To cut a long story short - I started my own business in 1989 - "Advanced Software Engineering" - which used PC-based software (Micro Focus Cobol) to offload the software development compiling and testing etc. from the mainframe (thereby reducing the need to keep upgrading the capacity of the mainframe).

This technology really came into its own when "Rapid Application Development" methodologies started being adopted by large corporations such as the banks, insurance companies, and telcos in order to deal with the Y2K coding problems (which were real by the way - as calculations of anniversary dates for renewal statements etc. were giving wrong results).

By this time, the PC had evolved to be able to run complete mainframe environments such as IMS-DB/DC and CICS/DB2 on a reasonably affordable PC and as a result the company that I founded in 1983 is still in business today selling PC-based software for mainframe development (albeit under a different name and owner).

Peter Shute

I think the first time I'd heard of an IBM PC was at a presentation about the forthcoming machine at Melbourne Uni, probably around the time of the announcement, maybe 1981. There was great interest because something from a mainframe company was going to be cheap enough for us to own ourselves.

But they weren't cheap, and I don't think I saw one till about 1987, when my boss asked me to find something to replace our dying Unix system. I think it was in Dick Smith in the city, and it was running Windows 1.0 (that's 1.0, not 10). We bought some PCs, but didn't bother with Windows 1.0.

I don't think I actually owned one for about another 10 years. I took that dying Unix system home and kept it alive for myself instead.

Dennis Parsons

The first time I came across an IBM compatible PC was at work in 1990. All my previous dealings with computers had been VAX/VMS & Unix based mainframes, glorified calculators & assorted non-PC microcomputers. I bought a 286 in 1991 from memory.

Russell Cooper

I was on my second PC when the IBM PC was released. About a year later one turned up at work, provided by our head office, twin floppies and no hard drive. The boss wasn't interested and parked it away in a corner where we were allowed to 'play' with it at lunchtimes. I bought my first IBM compatible in September 1986 for \$1350.

Dave Simpson

From memory I bought an XT turbo (8088) to interface with my Telex interface and an AT (80286) for my desk (both IBM Clones) from Bluechip Computers in the late 1980s. Both were running DOS 3.0. I put Powermenu on both so I didn't have to remember the different batch files I'd written to start the various programs I used, like: Crosstalk, Wordstar etc.

Bill Metzenthien

I can recall reading about the IBM PC in magazines when it was announced. Then the IBM PCjr. And of course the clones, until finally in 1986 I decided that I could afford to buy one of these clones (640k, twin diskettes) for \$1350 (about \$3,456 in today's money, yikes!).

Kevin Martin

I have here an old Electronics Australia magazine for 1986 October.

Rod Irving was advertising a 'Baby AT' compatible computer from \$2,295. It came with all the normal features, such as.

- Final assembly & testing in Australia
- 1 M/byte main board
- switchable 8/10/12Mhz
- 1.2 Mbyte Floppy Drive
- 80286 CPU
- colour graphics display card
- 8 slots
- Floppy & Hard Disc Controller
- Printer Card & RS232
- Keyboard
- 200Watt Power Supply
- Manual
- 6 Months Warranty Short Baby AT*512K RAM Standard Baby AT*640K RAM, Hard Disc Drive& 20M HDD \$3295& 40M HDD \$3795& 80M HDD \$4695 That people explains why I hadn't bought a PC yet!

Greg Eden

I bought a RIE XT for \$1175 and it came with one floppy drive and 256kb of RAM. They had failed to configure it properly and strange things were happening because the switches on the motherboard were set for two drives. I was going to take it back but had a look to see what was wrong and quickly worked it out. I then added a second floppy drive and increased the RAM

to 512, then 640kb. Once I started tinkering I did all sorts of things. I replaced the CPU with a NEC V20 and a faster serial port chip. Swap meets came along. Woo hoo! I then went on an overseas holiday in 1987 and purchased a 20MB Seagate hard drive duty free from the Funan Centre in Singapore. My original green screen composite monitor was replaced with a Hercules card and much sharper green screen (hmm, might have been amber). The next step was a VGA monitor and a 386sx move to the world of the AT.

You could say my current desktop is the same computer, it has just had a dozen or so new cases and motherboards and drives!!

David Stonier-Gibson

I developed a security alarm base station for the department of education on an original IBM BC in GW BASIC. It must have been very, very early in the PC piece because I left that company I worked for (SEPAC in Frankston) in 1981 or 1982.

Jan Whitaker

I recollect IBM PCs being grey and expensive. We had them at work, but I couldn't afford one of the 'real' IBMs for myself. So I bought a TRS-80, a Commodore 64 (all built into the keyboard and connected to my TV) and a Kaypro luggable (which was stolen - I was so angry! Was working on a book on that machine).

The most momentous piece of technology to be introduced in the last twenty years

Greg Eden

The answer is the mobile smartphone.

The knowledge of the world in your hand. GPS and real time directions. Instant banking and payments. Instant communications wherever you are for both voice and data. And a camera in every pocket, not just for happy snaps but photos on the news taken by passers by so wrongdoers have a struggle to hide. Phones are used by most of the population all the time. Boarding Pass? In your phone. Covid check in? Phone. Covid Vaccination Passport? In your phone. Myki? In your phone (Android). Answering machine? Phone.

Modern phone plans have unlimited calls and SMS, even the cheapest plans. And the data requirements for apps has massively reduced over time. Remember people getting \$1000 bills for using Google maps? History. A couple of gigs is plenty for general usage but even the heavy user can thrive on a \$25 plan.

A smartphone is just a computer and a perfectly fine area for Melbourne PC to cover as an area of interest.

Most other members agreed with Greg Eden that the most momentous piece of technology to be introduced in the last twenty years has been the mobile smartphone. However a few members did have some other nominations.

Peter Shute

Most momentous piece of technology? There are so many, but Covid vaccines might turn out pretty important for most of us.

Not as much fun as mobile phones, but internet viruses are a fairly momentous development. They could be seen as a continuation of floppy viruses, but for the first time our computers could be in danger while they were just sitting there. How much have they cost us since then in lost time protecting, disinfecting, and battling incompatibilities?

A few more developments from the last 20 years:

Wi-Fi - we probably underestimate the usability this adds to devices around the home.

Flash drives - computers don't even come with a CD/DVD drive now, let alone a floppy drive. It's easy to forget how painful it was to move files from computer to computer until relatively recently.

USB - remember serial and parallel ports?

USB charging - after USB Mini and then Micro, we're at last heading towards a standard type of charger with USB C that can do everything from phones to laptops. Apple's Lightning is a horrible variation, but at least it can go in either way up.

Open source software - it's given us free OSs and a large proportion of the software most people need.

Smart Home, Smarter Home

Greg Skalka, Under The Computer Hood User Group

Everyone wants some control in their lives. Having the ability to control things in our homes can provide added safety, security, and convenience. Technology to enable consumer home automation and control has been around for decades and is constantly improving. It can provide useful assistance to those with disabilities involving hearing or sight loss, or those with reduced mobility. Home automation and smart home technologies can provide benefits as we get older, allowing us to stay in our homes longer. As we spend more of our time at home due to the coronavirus, a smart home can be brilliant.

The desire for home control has been around for a long time. Ever since the early days of TV, when viewers wished they did not have to get up out of their La-Z-Boy recliners to turn the knob on the set to change to the other channel (I was once told by someone that was what children were for), there has been a market for remote control. Remote controls became popular for televisions, entertainment systems, and garage door openers. What many longed for was a remote control for our houses.

One of the first and most popular home automation systems was the X10 line of devices, which was introduced in the late 1970s. X10 products and systems are still available, mainly through the x10.com website. For more information, look up X10 on Wikipedia.

I was interested in home control and so became an early adopter in the early 1980s. The devices were relatively inexpensive and systems could be pieced together, making it easy to get started in this addicting hobby. I bought many devices and controllers over the years, including alarm systems and computer interfaces, many of which I still have.

X10 is a fairly simple system that works reasonably well. Like the Smart Home Wi-Fi devices popular today, X10 has control devices that range from plug-in modules that items to be controlled plug into wired-in house switch replacements. There are many types of controllers, from plug-in boxes and timers to computer interfaces and alarm consoles. Almost everything was compatible with everything else; you could have as many controllers as you wanted and could control up to 256 devices in a house.

X10 was easy to use but did have some significant limitations. The control signals were transmitted by modulating digital data onto the house power wiring, so system setup was as easy as plugging things in. The data rates it used were low (20 bits/second), so control messages were very simple (the device address and basic commands like on and off). It did have problems getting messages through reliably, as the 120 kHz carrier frequency it used often received interference from household devices like televisions and computers. It also didn't handle passing signals between the two 120-volt legs in typical home wiring very well. They sell devices to bridge between the two-house circuits, but even then I often had problems transmitting between certain locations in my house.

At my X10 peak, I had about 16 controlled devices, with ten of them wired-in switch modules. Since X10 was constrained to your house wiring, control was limited to immediate control while in your home, or timers. There were wireless remote controls, but these transmitted a short-range RF signal to a plugged-in receiver module, which then transmitted control signals over the house wiring. I did have a phone controller, which consisted of a base module connected to my phone line and a battery-powered transmitter (about the size of a flip phone). I remember using it in the late 1980s to turn on the power to my garage door opener from my work (I had plugged my opener into an X10 module). I had a timer controller shut off my opener power after I left for work, but because the time I returned home was often variable, I used this phone device to turn the opener back on. At the end of my workday, I could call my home phone from work, and then once my answering machine is picked up, use this hand-held transmitter to send audio signals over the phone to the module in my home. It decoded the sounds and sent signals over the power lines to turn on the opener. It may seem crude by today's standards, but it was pretty

impressive to be able to do that at the time.

Today, of course, all smart home devices can be controlled from almost anywhere in the world through apps on your smartphone. Most smart home components communicate through Wi-Fi so are not tied to house wiring and have more reliable and sophisticated control (a few devices use Bluetooth or Zigbee and need a hub to connect to Wi-Fi).

In addition to your phone, smart speakers like Amazon's Echo (Alexa) or Google's Home Assistant can be used to control your home.

I started buying Wi-Fi smart home devices soon after getting a smartphone. Once again, I was able to buy gradually, building up my new smart home over time. My first device was a Belkin WeMo smart plug; a plug-in module I use to control a table lamp. I now have seven devices installed to control lights; these include smart plugs, smart bulbs, and most recently a smart switch. I retired my X10 plugs some time ago; I'm now starting to replace the wired-in switch modules. Even though the X10 stuff still works, the allure of more sophisticated control through Wi-Fi and Alexa will I'm sure have me replace it all eventually.

That's not to say that there are no downsides to the new Wi-Fi smart home devices. With X10, almost everything worked with everything else. Different parts from different vendors all played together nicely. With Wi-Fi smart home devices, this is only partially true. My seven smart home devices come from three different vendors (Belkin WeMo plugs, TP-Link smart bulbs, and Feit smart bulbs and plugs). Each vendor requires its own app for control on my phone. Each app is different and some are better than others. The one unifying factor is Alexa; almost all devices are compatible with the three voice-operated assistants (Amazon Alexa, Google, and Apple). This app-happy situation also applies to my smart cameras and smart thermostat, which add another five apps to my phone. Fortunately, Alexa can control my thermostat and two of my four brands of cameras.

Another concern I have about Wi-Fi smart home products is security. In my old X10 smart home, it would be hard to hack my home unless someone physically plugged into a power outlet (kind of like the superior security of wired Ethernet compared to Wi-Fi). It might be possible to send or receive the power line signals in an adjacent house, but unlikely. A bigger concern is that the apps or servers of the many product vendors and Amazon might get hacked. As long as I'm only controlling lights (and not my chipper/shredder), the biggest hack risk is probably to my privacy.

One good reason to phase out my X10 stuff is batteries. All of the X10 wireless remotes use batteries. I've had to throw away many remotes over the years because the batteries in them (AAA, AA, or 9V) had leaked. Almost all my new smart home devices use house power. While cords can be a nuisance, corded devices don't die from leaking batteries.

Smart home technology is beneficial if it makes your life better. A prime task my X10 system used to perform was to make our house look occupied when we were away on a trip. Though we travel much less in COVID times, I can do that with my Wi-Fi smart home devices, though I must set it up using three phone apps.

Recently I've been improving my life through light control in the mornings. I normally get up for work at 4:30 AM, while my wife usually sleeps in until after I've left the house. I try to keep quiet and keep lights off so I don't wake her, but have found it can be dangerous to walk around the house (especially down the stairs) in the dark. I have now set a light in my office to come on about 5 minutes before I would come out of the bedroom, so I have at least a little light to guide me. I've programmed another lamp downstairs to come on a little later so that after I've taken my online COVID health assessment for work and checked my emails, I can go downstairs and see the stairs. I could tell Alexa to shut off the lights behind me, but my wife might hear that. Instead, I use the video screen on my new 5" Amazon Echo Show to silently turn off those lights. I can even turn up the heat on the thermostat a bit so my wife will have it a bit warmer when she gets up, and then set the thermostat back down on my smartphone when I get to work.

With X10, my home over the years may have been smarter than most. Now with these improved smart home devices replacing X10, my home has gotten even smarter. With my smartphone, Amazon Echo, and Echo Show, I can control things away from home, or at home by voice or by touch. With voice control and touch control of my home, what can be next? I wonder if Jeff Bezos is working on Amazon Echo Think.

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Curious Kids: how does music get onto a cassette tape?

Christopher Wenn, *The University of Melbourne*

How does music get onto a cassette tape? — Paul, age 9, Adelaide

Hi Paul!

That's a great question. To answer it very briefly, music is recorded onto a cassette tape using electricity and a magnetic field. Now let me explain what I mean by that.

Sound gets turned into electricity

Imagine you're singing into a microphone while playing a guitar. When you sing, you use your vocal cords in your throat, your mouth and your breath to make the air around you vibrate — and these vibrations are what create sound.

Similarly, when you pluck or strum the strings of a guitar, this causes the wooden body of the instrument to vibrate, which also vibrates the air inside the guitar, creating sound.

Both the microphone and the guitar "pickup" (a special kind of microphone for "picking up" sound from an instrument) have tiny magnets that vibrate with the movements of air, and produce an electrical current.

The current flows through the microphone and guitar cables to the tape recorder, through which a plastic tape is slowly moving. The electrical signal creates a magnetic field in the recording head and this is what allows sound to be recorded.

But what happens within the tape recorder itself during this process?

How magnetic tape works

A cassette tape is a plastic shell that surrounds two rotating spools.

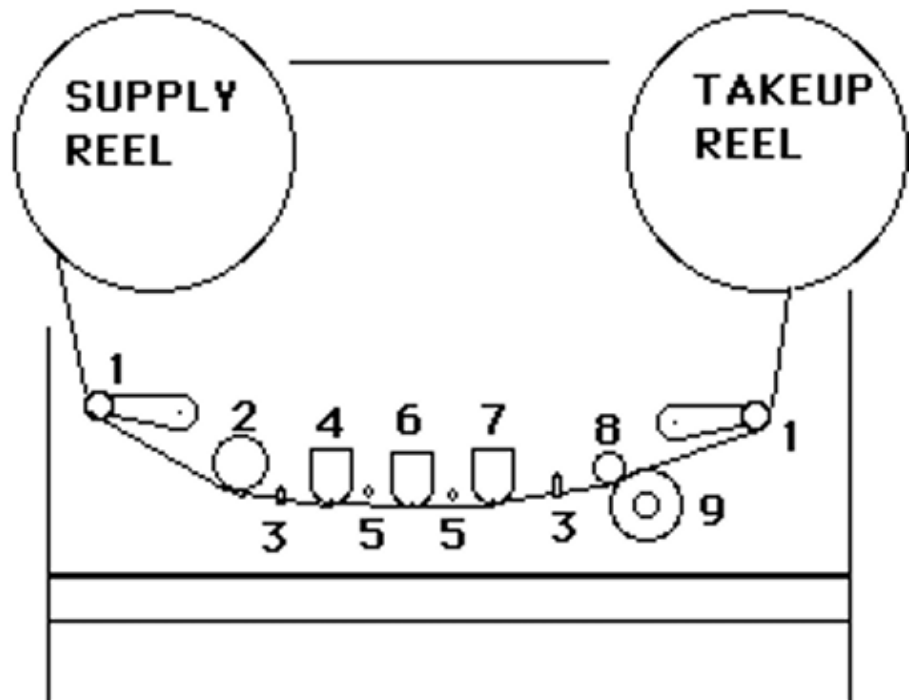


A collection of cassette tapes/
Mike Flamenco/unsplash

Another long, thin piece of plastic is wound around the spools. This is the “magnetic tape” on which the sound is recorded.

This tape is covered with a magnetic material that contains iron, and which reacts when it comes close to a magnetic field. The material could be iron oxide, chromium dioxide, or sometimes barium ferrite.

1. TENSION ARM
2. IDLE ROLLER
3. GUIDE
4. ERASE HEAD
5. TAPE LIFTERS
6. RECORD HEAD
7. PLAY HEAD
8. CAPSTAN
9. PINCH ROLLER



A diagram of a magnetic tape recorder showing the mechanical parts.
University of California Santa Cruz Electronic Music Studio

In the diagram above, we can see the basic parts of a tape recorder. Here’s what happens when an empty cassette tape is used to record sound.

The magnetic tape starts on the *supply reel* and a motor on the *takeup reel* winds the tape past the *heads* (4, 6, 7). Each head contains metal coils. When electricity is sent to the coils in the *record head* (6), it generates a tiny magnetic field.

When the tape enters the magnetic field generated by the record head, the magnetic particles on it align in proportion to the strength of the field. The loudness and pitch of the sound (how high or low it is) make the magnetic particles align in different patterns as the tape passes through.

Later, if we want to play our recording back, we wind the tape past the *play head* (7), where the pattern of the magnetic particles recorded on the tape produces an electrical signal that is converted back to sound.

These particles will stay in the same arrangement unless they are exposed to a new magnetic field — so a tape can be played back many times, until it wears out!

The remaining head is the *erase head* (4). This lets us erase sound from a tape by using a constant electrical charge to “reset” the magnetic material on the tape as it passes through, erasing any previous recordings.

The *capstan*, *rollers* and *arms* all help to keep the tape stretched out as it passes through the heads, so that it moves at the same speed and gets a good-quality recording.

A little history

Cassette tapes were developed by the company Philips in 1963.



An image of the first model of compact cassette tape sold by Philips in the 1960s.
Philips USA

Although recording to tape had been possible since the 1930s, the technology was large, awkward and expensive. The Philips Compact Cassette was cheap, portable (small enough to carry around) and could be used at home or in the office, with basic recording equipment.

But when Masaru Ibuka, the co-founder of the Japanese company Sony, wanted a way to listen to his favourite music on long flights, he sparked an invention that would change the way we listened to music

forever: the Sony Walkman.



The Original Sony Walkman TPS L.
Binarysequence/wikimedia

The Walkman was released in 1979 and brought music into every part of our lives. Not just our homes, or cars — but anywhere at any time! It is more or less a portable cassette player that connects with headphones.

Since then we have seen huge improvements in portable music technology, with MP3 players coming out in 1997 and eventually the Apple iPod's release in 2001.

Today, we don't even need a special device just to record or play music. We can do everything on our phones! But cassette tapes were the first invention that let people easily record and play on the go.

Christopher Wenn, Tutor in Production (Technical), *The University of Melbourne*

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How one simple rule change could curb online retailers' snooping on you

Katharine Kemp, UNSW

I spent last week studying the 26,000 words of privacy terms published by eBay and Amazon, trying to extract some straight answers, and comparing them to the privacy terms of other online marketplaces such as Kogan and Catch (my full summary is [here](#)).

There's bad news and good news.

The bad news is that none of the privacy terms analysed are good. Based on their published policies, there is no major online marketplace operating in Australia that sets a commendable standard for respecting consumers' data privacy.

All the policies contain vague, confusing terms and give consumers no real choice about how their data are collected, used and disclosed when they shop on these websites. Online retailers that operate in both Australia and the European Union give their customers in the EU better privacy terms and defaults than us, because the EU has stronger privacy laws.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is currently collecting submissions as part of an inquiry into online marketplaces in Australia.

The good news is that, as a first step, there is a clear and simple "anti-snooping" rule we could introduce to cut out one unfair and unnecessary, but very common, data practice.

Deep in the fine print of the privacy terms of all the above-named websites, you'll find an unsettling term.

It says these retailers can obtain extra data about you from other companies, for example, data brokers, advertising companies, or suppliers from whom you have previously purchased.

eBay, for example, can take the data about you from a data broker and combine it with the data eBay already has about you, to form a detailed profile of your interests, purchases, behaviour and characteristics.

The problem is the online marketplaces give you no choice in this. There's no privacy setting that lets you opt out of this data collection, and you can't escape by switching to another major marketplace, because they all do it.

An online bookseller doesn't need to collect data about your fast-food preferences to sell you a book. It wants these extra data for its own advertising and business purposes.

You might well be comfortable giving retailers information about yourself, so as to receive targeted ads and aid the retailer's other business purposes. But this preference should not be assumed. If you want retailers to collect data about you from third parties, it should be done only on your explicit instructions, rather than automatically for everyone.

The "bundling" of these uses of a consumer's data is potentially unlawful even under our existing privacy laws, but this needs to be made clear.

Time for an ‘anti-snooping’ rule

Here’s my suggestion, which forms the basis of my own submission to the ACCC inquiry.

Online retailers should be barred from collecting data about a consumer from another company, unless the consumer has clearly and actively requested this.

For example, this could involve clicking on a check-box next to a plainly worded instruction such as:

Please obtain information about my interests, needs, behaviours and/or characteristics from the following data brokers, advertising companies and/or other suppliers.

The third parties should be specifically named. And the default setting should be that third-party data are not collected without the customer’s express request.

This rule would be consistent with what we know from consumer surveys: most Australian consumers are not comfortable with companies unnecessarily sharing their personal information.

There could be reasonable exceptions to this rule, such as for fraud detection, address verification or credit checks. But data obtained for these purposes should not be used for marketing, advertising or generalised “market research”.

Can’t we already opt out of targeted ads?

Online marketplaces do claim to allow choices about “personalised advertising” or marketing communications. Unfortunately, these are worth little in terms of privacy protection.

Amazon says you can opt out of seeing targeted advertising. It does not say you can opt out of all data collection for advertising and marketing purposes.

Similarly, eBay lets you opt out of being shown targeted ads. But the later passages of its Cookie Notice state:

your data may still be collected as described in our User Privacy Notice.

This gives eBay the right to continue to collect data about you from data brokers, and to share them with a range of third parties.

Many retailers and large digital platforms operating in Australia justify their collection of consumer data from third parties on the basis you’ve already given your implied consent to the third parties disclosing it.

That is, there’s some obscure term buried in the thousands of words of privacy policies that supposedly apply to you, which says that Bunnings, for instance, can share data about you with various “related companies”.

Of course, Bunnings didn’t highlight this term, let alone give you a choice in the matter, when you ordered your hedge cutter last year. It only included a “Policies” link at the foot of its website; the term was on another web page, buried in the detail of its Privacy Policy.

Such terms should ideally be eradicated entirely. But in the meantime, we can turn the tap off on this unfair flow of data, by stipulating that online retailers cannot obtain such data about you from a third party without your express, active and unequivocal request.

Who should be bound by an ‘anti-snooping’ rule?

While the focus of this article is on online marketplaces covered by the ACCC inquiry, many other companies have similar third-party data collection terms, including Woolworths, Coles, major banks, and digital platforms such as Google and Facebook.

While some argue users of “free” services like Google and Facebook should expect some surveillance as part of the deal, this should not extend to asking other companies about you without your active consent.

The anti-snooping rule should clearly apply to any website selling a product or service.

With lockdowns barring many of us from visiting physical shops, we should be able to make purchases online without being unwittingly roped into a company’s advertising side hustle.

Katharine Kemp, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Law & Justice, UNSW, *UNSW*

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Member Short Stories: Elephobia

George Wright

My wife loves an Apple. I like apples too, but I like eating mine. My computer is Android. Hers backs-up automatically, several times a day. I've pointed out that backing-up to a drive in the same computer is not safe. She disagrees. Mine backs-up to a hard drive in a docking station on top of the console on my desktop.

We both use the same printer and that's also on my desk, along with a telephone and modem, various trays for papers, bins for paperclips and pins, a sticky tape dispenser, a hole punch and stapler and a locked tin of lollies. I like the console on my desk because I can use magnets to display handy notes reminding me to do essential tasks like swapping disks on certain dates with Jack.

Every morning I rotate the backup disk with a spare locked in the house-safe so there's always a digital image available for retrieval, even if the computer catches fire or we get robbed. And twice a year I swap a hard disk with my mate Jack to ensure that if mayhem does shatter either of our lives we have access to a backup. You never know when a stray elephant may charge through your house.

Her life is orderly. She jogs every morning before churning out reports, week after week. In contrast, I spend a much of my time trying out new programs I find on the net or fine-tuning my operating system to increase my output which I admit is limited and spasmodic. And there's always somebody offering me money to solve business problems, such as advising on external automatic backups. Fancy slavery? I'd rather do interesting things.

As she likes to point out, we've never had an elephant in our house, her computer has always saved her stuff and she likes her desk clean and tidy.

Ah well...let her live her life and let me live mine. Despite our differences, we seem to get along. But it took an animated discussion about elephants before she'd let me include a back-up of her data on the disks I swap with Jack. Apparently, David Attenborough has never said that house demolition is normal elephant behaviour. Nevertheless, she postulates that I do have the capacity to incite bedlam if any stray elephant wants to share our habitat, an industrial area close to a coffee-shop in Fitzroy.

DOTW Winners July 2021

Roger Brown

DOTW is a lighthearted look at some of the sillier events of the week. Don't take it too seriously and do pop over to Chit Chat and vote each week. Thanks to those of our members who occasionally 'feature' for taking the gentle humour in such good part.

July winners were:

- The anti-vaccination protesters who have been subjecting health workers to violent, racist abuse and spitting.
- The pair of bitter brothers who filmed themselves on an excavator destroying their late mother's house amid a feud with their sister over the mother's will.
- Our intrepid Sydney removalists who clearly broke all the rules (eg mask wearing) and who failed to provide contact tracers with accurate information.
- And a local winner for the WORST JOKE of the WEEK! Jon Teeuwsen with "We're all overcoates!"
- The thousands of anti lockdown protesters who marched through Sydney and Melbourne last weekend placing the health of the entire community at risk.

Thanks to all participants, including those who feature in our supplementary LOSER award!!

East SIG Report July 2021

Neil Muller

Host Paul Woolard opened the July meeting, again with all members back at home joining the meeting via Zoom. The first presentation of the night was **George Skarbek** presenting his normal Q&A segment.

Q. I have a question on Dropbox. I installed Dropbox a number of years ago to send large files to someone. Being unfamiliar with how Dropbox works, I selected the sync option, thinking Dropbox was only going to sync the files I downloaded to it. About 12 months later, I started to receive emails from Dropbox warning me that my Dropbox was full. I ignored those emails as I hadn't added any files to Dropbox recently. Sometime later I discovered Dropbox was syncing all my desktop files, documents, downloads, music and video folders. This explained the reason I was receiving the warning emails that my Dropbox was full. When I discovered the extra syncing, I uninstalled Dropbox, but still the emails kept arriving. This made me look at Windows File Explorer and I discovered Dropbox had moved the location to those five folders (i.e. desktop, documents, downloads, music and videos) to a new Dropbox folder shown in Figure 1 in blue.

I would like to remove all traces of Dropbox from my PC and return my system to as it was before I installed Dropbox. I'm not confident I know how to approach this safely and would appreciate your advice. What do you recommend I do?

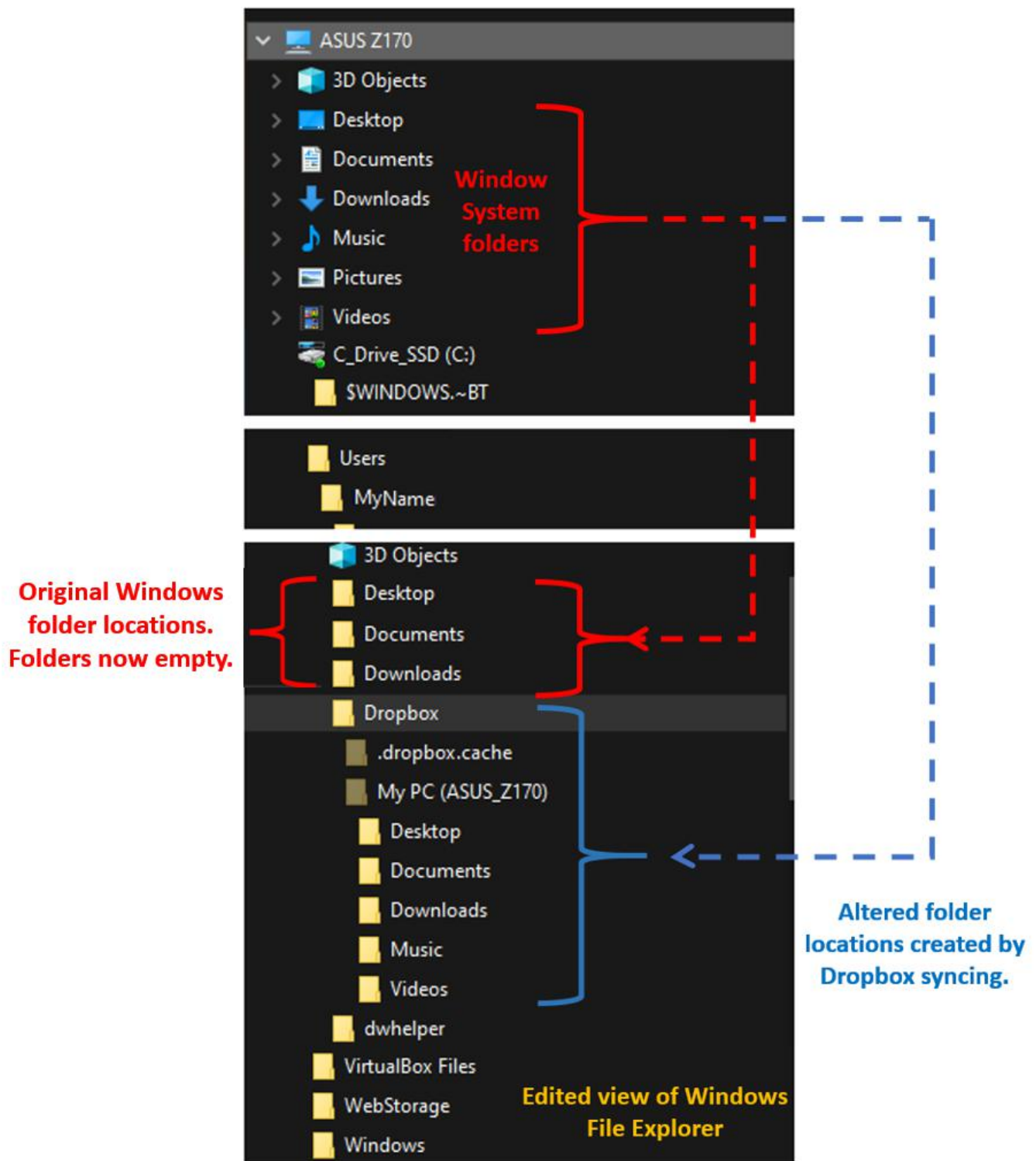


Figure 1 - Dropbox syncing changes to Windows folder structure

- A. I've heard of those problems from other people and I've encountered that myself. I'd used Dropbox in the past to sync photos from my phone so I wouldn't have to use a cable to download them to my PC. Sometime later and without my authorisation, Dropbox started synchronising files like you mentioned. I then made sure Dropbox didn't start, rather than uninstalling it like you did.

For downloads, which are normally through a browser, I would go to the browser settings and direct downloads to C:/Users/MyName/Downloads. For the other programs I don't know. You may have to search Professor Google to see if there is a way to restore the default locations for the other applications.

A word of warning for someone thinking of deleting all the stuff stored in the cloud. "You have to absolutely,

be positively certain, beyond any shadow of doubt whatsoever, that you're not deleting everything from your drive C." I know of people who have lost everything thinking it's only Dropbox, these are all backup, no, they were all originals from drive C. An awful lot of caution, checking and rechecking is needed before you start deleting the contents of a Dropbox.

The solution turned out to be fairly simple. However, all due care was exercised by the user as George suggested. By right clicking on the Windows "Desktop" System Folder (shown in Figure 1), select "Properties" then "Location". Next select "Move" and direct the Desktop folder from the Old Location (i.e. the Dropbox folder) to the correct New Location (Figure 2). After selecting "Yes" all desktop icons and files are moved to their original Windows locations. The same process is then repeated for the remaining System Folders, Documents, Downloads, Music and Videos. Note for this user the Pictures System folder had previously been moved to D:/Pictures.

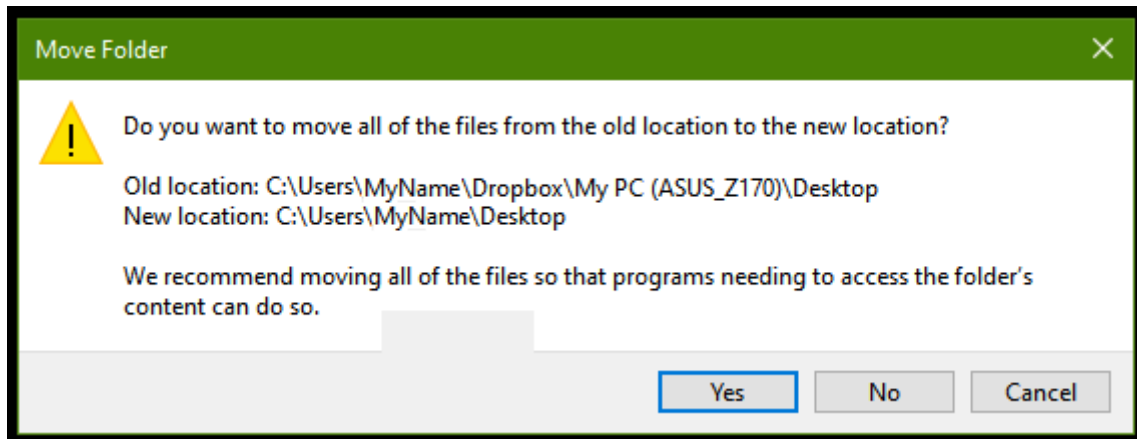


Figure 2 - Returning Dropbox changes to Original Windows folder settings

Following Q&A, **Frank Maher** played a video on smartphone camera setting, that he felt would be of interest to members. Although the video applies to Samsung smartphones, some of the settings mentioned will be relevant to all brands. The YouTube video titled "5 Important Camera settings all Samsung Galaxy Owners need to Change ASAP", can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/cbhjbamx>.

The first setting recommended users change was to turn on "Tracking auto-focus". This feature retains focus on moving objects and is particularly useful when taking videos. "Tracking auto-focus" can also be used for still photography when the subject is moving. This is a feature only available with newer model Samsung phones, but is one many users may have overlooked. When using "Tracking auto focus" it only works on certain resolutions and when the video stabilizer is turned off, as both cannot work simultaneously.

When taking photographs, "Location tags" was another setting the reviewer covered that should be turned on. With both "Location tags" turned on and Samsung's gallery application set to "show info", numerous display options for the meta data were available, when reviewing photographs in the photo Gallery. The video covered this feature in detail, due to the varying options available when displaying photos and their metadata in Photo Gallery. When selecting a photo and scrolling down, in addition to the metadata, a Google map showing where the photo was taken is displayed.

Other settings recommended to change were:

- Enabling "Grid lines" to use for centring a photo, to correctly set the horizon or taking photos using the rule of thirds.
- Turn on "Voice control" for taking photos and videos by using certain voice commands.
- Rearranging the camera's on-screen modes, to suit a user's requirements.

The final presentation of the night was by **Dave Botherway** who looked at the preview edition of the new

Windows 11. First up Dave played a shortened version of the “Microsoft Windows 11 Reveal Event” presentation at <https://tinyurl.com/3k5x7yhw>

Key features of the Windows 11 preview version are:

- A new centre-aligned Taskbar and Start button
- A new design for the Start menu
- New look File Explorer
- Upgraded widgets
- Auto HDR for gaming
- Snap layout options for windows. (Easier to use than Fancy Zones in PowerToys)
- Better connection when using a second display
- A redesigned Settings interface
- A new Windows Store.
- Android apps will run on Windows 11. These will be available in the Microsoft Store via Amazon, but not apps from the Google Play store.
- Hardware requirements:
 - Requires a computer running Intel’s sixth or seventh-generation CPU. At the time of the announcement lower powered CPU’s will not be able to update to Windows 11.
 - Computers will need Trusted Platform Module (TPM) version 2.0
 - Computers will need UEFI, Secure Boot capable.
 - DirectX 12 compatible graphics / WDDM 2.x Graphics card
- Refer to <https://tinyurl.com/yyst6c8a9>



Figure 3 – Windows 11 Start menu

Following the video, Dave discussed some of the criticisms the Windows 11 announcement has received. Moving the Start button to the centre bottom of the screen was one, but the major criticisms were with the hardware requirements. Dave used a Microsoft app called “PC Health check” to determine whether the notebook PC he was presenting on would run Windows 11. However, at the time of his presentation, Microsoft had removed the app. This followed criticism acknowledging the app was ‘not fully prepared’ as it didn’t explain why a PC was unable to run Windows 11, but simply displayed “This PC can’t run Windows 11”.

As a result of Microsoft taking the “PC Health check” app offline, third party developers have produced a program called “WhyNotWin11” which Dave demonstrated on his presentation notebook.

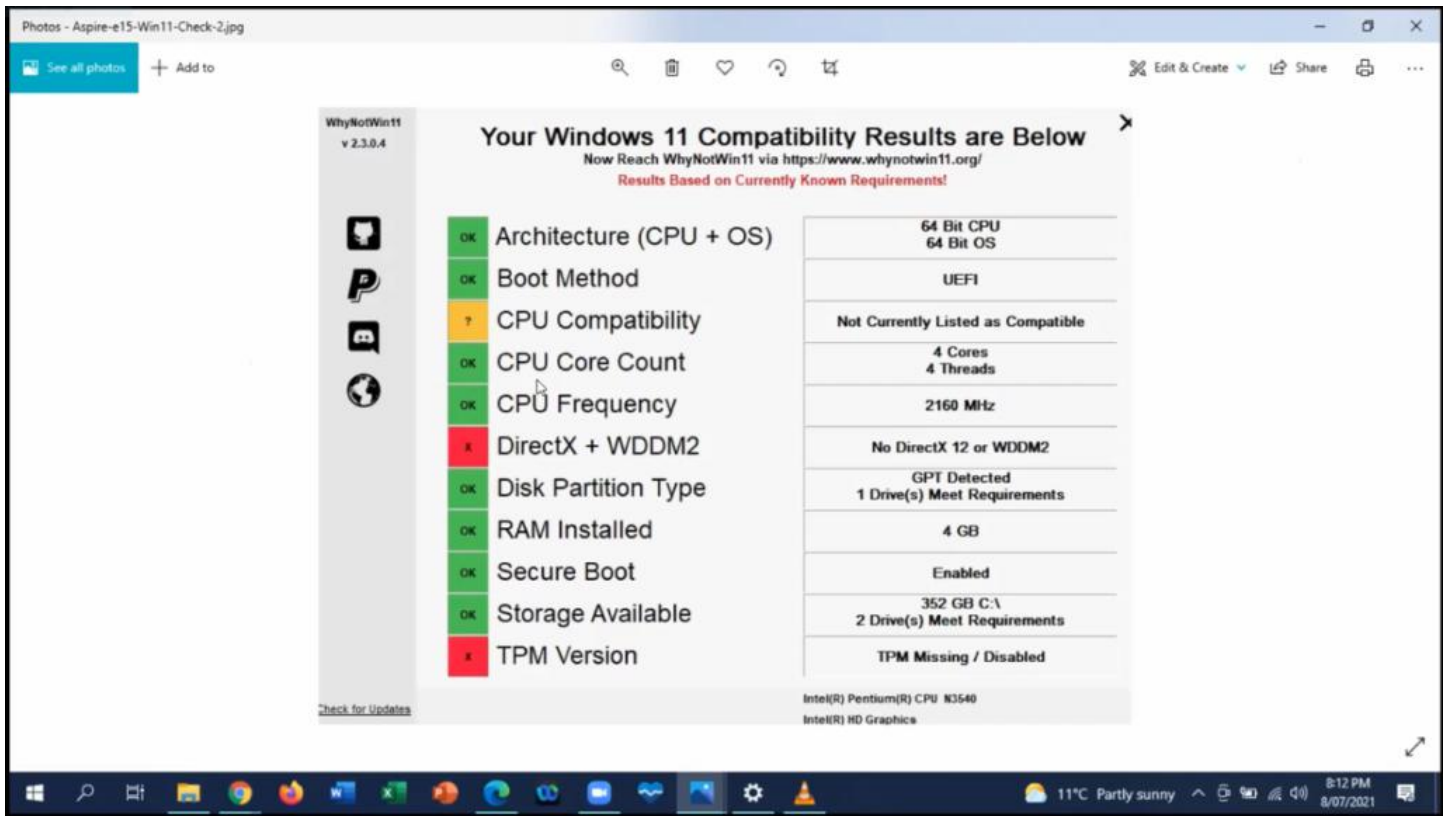


Figure 4 - "WhyNotWin11" Results Window

After running "WhyNotWin11", most users have found that apart from the CPU requirements, they lacked either Secure Boot or the TPM version 2 module. Both Secure Boot and TPM version 2 are the current requirements, but Dave believes these may change as a result of beta testing by members of Windows Insider program.

For those users wishing to run Windows 11, the TPM module is probably the requirement that most current PCs will have problems with. To explain TPM in more detail, Dave played a video titled "TPM 2.0 Support Required for Windows 11". The video at <https://tinyurl.com/h4kxy4tm> explains that TPM is needed to improve security, by providing hardware level encryption. On many PCs TPM will be turned off by default, as its currently unnecessary, but can be turned on in the BIOS.

Dave enlarged on the video noting that if a PC didn't have TPM 2.0 on the motherboard, a module would need to be purchased. If the appropriate slot is available, the modules could be slotted into the motherboard. Before Windows 11 was announced, these modules could be purchased for around US\$15. Now due to demand the price has risen to over US\$100.

Windows 10 will be supported till 2025 and is likely to run concurrently with Windows 11. It's believed the upgrade from Windows 10 to 11 will be free. Dave felt Windows 11's main attraction is increased security, rather than the more modern softer appearance. Dave plans to stick with Windows 10 until he gets a new PC. He also believes the final edition is likely to look different to the preview edition, most likely with different hardware requirements.

The meeting concluded with informal discussions between audience members.

Yammer Highlights July 2021

Dennis Parsons

NBN Questions and Comments

Steve posed the question of whether it was possible to use the 4G fall-back capability of a Telstra Smart Modem to tide his father over for a few days while broadband was connected during his move into a retirement village. The modem was currently in use by his father with Telstra and it was thought Telstra would complain after a few hours and besides, the fine print clearly stated it couldn't be used away from the registered property.

Hotspotting a mobile phone was suggested as an alternative but Steve wasn't keen as that would likely prove too fragile - his Dad would find a way to "break" it and wouldn't be able to reinstate it without assistance.

The next thought was to use a SIM not linked to the active Telstra Internet account. Roger gave this a brief test with the Telstra Smart Modem he still uses with his Aussie Broadband connection and found it worked perfectly, albeit slowly.

<<https://www.yammer.com/melbpc.org.au/#/Threads/show?threadId=1326964751368192>>

Computer Help

Nick reported he was having trouble accessing the Bureau of Met website using Firefox, seemingly the lack of a secure version was causing problems. He'd tried turning off HTTPS-only mode, restarting Firefox and rebooting his computer but none of it helped. The website worked as expected using the Opera browser so the problem likely wasn't network related.

Starting Firefox in safe mode (not Windows safe mode) which disables add-ons was suggested but it also had no effect. We asked for the version number, 91.0 which is the current version, and several of us confirmed the BOM website worked as expected for us using that version.

He advised he'd recently had a problem with his PC involving data corruption so a re-installation of Firefox was suggested. The Firefox installer offered the option to perform a "refresh" of the current installation rather than simply uninstall which Nick opted to take it, and this proved to be the solution. The BOM website was now fully accessible and working as expected.

As an aside another member contacted the BOM to enquire about the lack of a secure version of their website and was advised "there is currently a significant program of work underway to further enhance the Bureau's ICT security and resilience", hopefully including an upgrade to HTTPS access.

<<https://www.yammer.com/melbpc.org.au/#/Threads/show?threadId=1336952033878016>>

Linux Chat

Linux turned 30 this month and a few of us remembered how we started off - Red Hat was the favoured distribution of the late 90s and The Linux Pocketbook published by the APC Magazine was a good guide to get you started and came with a copy of Red Hat 5.2 and later 6.0. Linux really has been an exemplar of members helping each other - Greg encouraged me to take up using Linux (I felt right at home having used Unix on a mainframe) and I've helped out other members get their start with Linux.

<<https://www.yammer.com/melbpc.org.au/#/Threads/show?threadId=1329955431186432>>

Coronavirus Discussions and Comments

There was some discussion of the Service Victoria app used to check in to shops and venues for the purposes of contact tracing – it now shows a 28 day history of your check-ins that can easily be edited to remove entries if you're wishing to conceal your whereabouts. Noting it only affects the list displayed on your phone, with the full listing still available to the contact tracers.

Concern had been expressed about the impact on victims of domestic violence as it could provide an easily accessed trail of visited premises but given the ease with which individual entries can be removed it doesn't seem a show stopper.

<<https://www.yammer.com/melbpc.org.au/#/Threads/show?threadId=1313750302171136>>

Using Google

For anyone using Google's tools such as Gmail, Photos, Drive, etc. this is the group to visit to find tips and ask questions on how to get the most from them.

By default the spam "folder" in Gmail is hidden away and needs to be dug down to if you want to check for misidentified e-mails. I put quotes around "folder" because Google uses a system it calls "labels" to categorise e-mails and arrange how they are displayed. Jan posted this tip on how to display the Spam "folder" at the top level:

The Spam 'filter'/folder is below the More line in the list of folders/labels, so it isn't easily seen. I found a way that is totally unintuitive to change that. Manage Labels.

In the Settings, choose the Labels tab. Then click on Show for the labels/folders you want at the top list and hide for those you don't. If you want to see the Spam 'folder', click show

<<https://www.yammer.com/melbpc.org.au/#/Threads/show?threadId=1332304497631232>>

A Change to PC Update Subscriptions

David Stonier-Gibson

The Committee has decided not to accept any new subscriptions for the printed version of PC Update. Here's why:

The large, fancy colour laser printer we use in the office is costing us well over \$6,000 p.a. on a lease/rental agreement. We tried a couple of years ago to get out of that agreement, but it is watertight. The supplier even increased the monthly charge well beyond CPI last year, in the middle of Covid, when the printer was getting even less use than usual. We asked about a pay-out and were told the payout figure equals the full rental charge for the remainder of the contract. I am pretty sure they are indulging in unfair trade practices, but the chances of getting any resolution through regulatory or legal channels would be vanishingly small.

The contract, finally, expires in September next year. You won't be surprised to know we have no intention of renewing! We will probably just go to OfficeWorks and buy a middle of the range A3 inkjet multifunction centre for well under \$1000.

We have investigated alternative ways of printing PC Update, none of which are remotely economical compared to the current subscription charge. So the decision is to accept no new subscriptions.

For the handful of existing print subscribers we will continue to print and mail for at least the one year from now. Thereafter the next committee can decide what to do. This committee is leaning towards allowing renewals for members over say 75 years of age for another 3 years, then discontinuing entirely. That may combine with ramping up the charge to reflect actual costs, so it will depend on circumstances at the time. For example, I would offer to buy the existing machine for a fair residual price, say \$500, this time next year.

Some fun facts: The agreement actually covers the big A3 colour machine and a smaller A4 mono laser(?) in the back office. As far as I know the latter is never or very seldom used. The big machine is worth about \$6,500 new, plus an inbuilt automatic stapler, which adds maybe \$2000. So we have been charged \$6,500 p.a. for 5 years for maybe \$10,000 worth of equipment. That does include some consumables, but hardly enough to justify the extortionate charges. I should add that the contract was entered into when the club was in deep turmoil over other matters, so to the committee of the day it would have felt more like simply renewing and extending an exiting arrangement.

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