C O M P U T E R

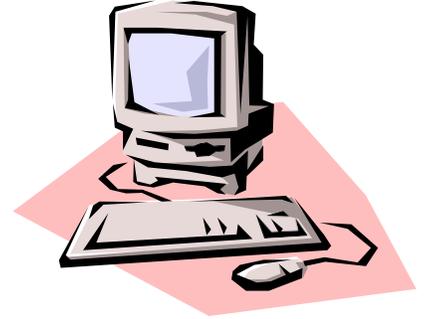C O R N E R

Computer Tips & Techniques

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Today's typical genealogist depends on the power and the finesse of a computer for nearly all aspects of our craft: research; data collection, compilation, comparison, and interpretation; and publication. Our daily interactions with our computers are both rewarding and frustrating. This article explores several techniques which can enhance the productivity and efficiency of our personal computers.

As this column has long proclaimed, computers and genealogy are a match made in Salt Lake City. If we were to sit down and make a short list of today's top tools, i.e., the most useful software for genealogists, at the top of the list we would have to place **software genealogy programs** (e.g., Legacy, RootsMagic, Family Tree Maker). For centuries, genealogists have kept track of their research on paper, and we could still do that today – but we would really be missing out on the power, the efficiency, the usefulness of features inherent in these programs.

But what about our day-to-day interactions with our own personal computers, tablets, and smart phones? We learn skills every day, but often we tend to get so involved in our research and our publishing that we may overlook or never learn simple techniques that can make the time we spend with our computers more efficient and productive. Beyond our genealogy programs, what tips are worthy of learning, re-learning, and using in our everyday lives? Let's start with searching the Internet.

Google: Earlier this year, Google celebrated its 20th birthday. Today it is the most visited web site in the world – and one can argue that it isn't even a destination. Search engines enable us to navigate the maze of information that comprises today's Internet. We're told (**SearchEngineWatch.com**) that 9% of web users search on the dozen or so alternate search engines available (e.g., Bing, DuckDuckGo, Boardreader) but that 9% number emphasizes how "the Big G" dominates our world. The Wiki article on the Google Empire is an impressive compilation. For now, the tip is: if you have a question, and I mean any question (e.g., "What was special about the Army-Navy lacrosse game of 1961?"), you need only type it in and hit the return key. The power of this personal near-instant digital research librarian cannot be over-stated. If our question is not about a fact but invites controversy, probably our question has occurred to others, and we will likely be directed to an online forum of like-minded individuals discussing possibilities for our answer.

YouTube: Yes, YouTube is owned by Google. Hey, if you had a billion dollars sitting around ten years ago, you could have purchased it yourself. YouTube provides that missing Users Manual on almost anything we want to do – from changing a sprinkler head to learning how to

enter sources in RootsMagic. To force a selection of videos in the response, preface your search with **YouTube.**

File Explorer: Previously Windows Explorer, this is the file manager application that is included with whatever Microsoft Windows operating system you are using – yes, that little folder in your Taskbar will launch it. The tip here is that **searching** for that file on church records you saved last year or for that image of Aunt Martha somewhere on your hard drive is really, really fast with File Explorer. You won't spend much time looking, because the search is near instantaneous. Don't know how to do that search? Ask Google (or YouTube).

Passwords: No matter what you do on the Internet, the site will want you to create an account – with a password. Before long, you have a list of passwords as long as your cable. I am not against strong passwords – a strong and hard to crack password is a necessary inconvenience to protect you online. However, I consider there are two or three categories of passwords because there are two or three categories of web sites. Some sites you really don't care if someone gets into your account. Consider Spotify – is it really going to bother you if someone hacks into your free music account? What are they going to do, steal your favorite songs? For these accounts, you might use your 'standard password' – that one you use all the time, like **Johnnie44**. Here is a tip: you can make your favorite password unique to each account by tacking it onto the site name. Thus, if you are creating an account on Spotify, set your password as **SpotifyJohnnie44** – in this way, each account has its own password, and one that you can easily remember.

One has to work to remember strong passwords, as you want some length (12 or more characters) and non-letters (e.g., ! or & or ?). Here is a tip: think of a sentence that is easy for you to remember AND it has some numbers or special characters. Perhaps: Martha & I were married in Santa Fe in June of 1966! Then use this sentence to create your strong password: **M&IwmiSFiJo1966!** You will find you can type in that password about as fast as you can say your key sentence.

There are on-line password storage sites that will securely maintain all your passwords, generate new ones for you, and even fill in forms for you with your standard information, e.g., address, phone number, even your credit card number – but of course, you have to trust those sites. And remember your password to the storage site! **LastPass.com** is one of the most popular, and has a free version.

The Cloud: Protecting your family history of photos, videos and other documents doesn't have to be a hassle. With The Cloud, it's easy to secure your most important files. This subject is so big, we could write a separate Computer Corner article on it. Wait, we did – in fact, three articles. See *Quarterly* 2012 [Nov], as well as 2016 [Aug and Nov] by Genealogist Dick Eastman: *"In the new world of cloud services, my email and all my data are safely and securely stored online, that is, in the cloud. I can get to it by using a web browser from any computer that's connected to the Internet."* The tip for genealogists is not about cloud computing so much as cloud **storage**: you have access to 100% free online storage – no strings attached! Your only consideration is if you want it synced (automatically updated between devices) or archived. As a genealogist, you want both. See *Quarterly* Aug 2017. Your choices include Dropbox [2GB free], OneDrive [5GB], Box [10GB] for synced storage, and Archive.org (unlimited!) and MEGA.nz

(encrypted) for archived. Your genealogy treasures should be on at least one of these cloud services – let them do your backups!

Keyboarding: The Gutenberg press was developed in 1439 and had no keyboard. That didn't stop people from using it, and by the end of the 16th Century, 200 million (yes, million) books had been printed in Europe. Now you can print more variety and quality with your $49 Canon wireless printer in a day than Gutenberg could do in his lifetime.

About 1870, the typewriter was invented, and we've had the Qwerty keyboard ever since. But only 125 years later, the personal computer came along, and with it, some new keys for the old keyboard: **Ctrl**; **Alt**; **Fn**; and the Windows Logo key. By holding down one of these keys and striking another on the keyboard, every key offers more possibilities, combinations that can be quite useful to anyone using a computer. There are well over 100 defined; here are some of the most useful:

- **Ctrl-C** to **Copy** the selected text
- **Ctrl-V** to **Paste** the copied text
- **Ctrl-S** instantly **Save** the document/text file. For me, this is quicker than picking up the mouse and clicking the "Save" button. You can view in the Word 'bar' at the bottom of the screen when a Save is taking place, and judge how long that takes.
- **Ctrl-D**: Create a bookmark of the web page you have opened, i.e., the one you're looking at. Great for genealogists who have an "*I've discovered …*" moment!

And here are a few useful combinations when one is working within Microsoft Word as your word processor – or even typing an email:

- **Ctrl-B bold** the selected text
- **Ctrl-U** <u>underline</u> the selected text
- **Ctrl-I** *italicize* the selected text

The one combo I don't want to live without is **Ctrl-Z** – this will undo whatever you just typed, and several invocations of it will back you up several steps. When I am typing a long email message, and I accidently hit some keys which delete half my message, **Ctrl-Z** to the rescue: it will undo that deletion, and bring back all the text I just deleted. Priceless! On the flip side, **Ctrl-Y** is a 'redo.'

One keyboard combo I use often is **Alt-Tab** (can you find your Tab key? You might just have some left and right arrows on your keyboard to indicate the Tab key). This combo behaves a bit differently according to the 'quickness' with which you hit it: a quick **Alt-Tab** (and release) will take you to your previous window, whereas holding down the **Alt-Tab** combo will display all of your previously open windows, and (by holding the Alt and continually tapping the **Tab**) will allow you to walk through the open windows; when you stop and release the combo, Windows reverts to that specific window. Try it!

How about the Windows Logo key, which can be seen in the accompanying image. There are at least 30 combos with this key, and you can find them all (hint: big G). Here are two:

- **Logo** + **Tab** Display mini-windows of all open windows
- **Logo** + **M** Minimize all windows, leaving a clean desktop. (Note: there is no 'undo' of Logo+M)

Snipping Tool: Do you use this? I only started last year, and it's been a part of Windows since 2002. If you are looking at a web page, and you want just that image, say, of your ancestral home, or that text, not the entire screen (which is what **Ctrl-P**, Print Screen, provides for you), you're going to love the Snipping Tool. To open Snipping Tool under Windows 10: start typing in the search box on your taskbar: **snip**… and very quickly Snipping Tool appears in the results. It was always there, on your computer, just like the calculator – just click on it, and away you go! Sometimes the easiest way to make a copy of something is to take a snapshot of your screen—this is what Snipping Tool does. Use it to save and share a genealogy blog entry, movie reviews, or recipes – anything you see on your internet browser screen. You can capture all or part of your PC screen, add notes, save the snip, or email it from the Snipping Tool window. One of the beauties of these screenshot 'snips' is that they are on the order of 160KB, quite a reasonable size, not a huge JPEG image file. You can capture any of the following types of snips:

- **Free-form snip**. Using your mouse, draw a free-form shape around an object.
- **Rectangular snip**. Like cropping: drag the cursor around an object to form a rectangle.
- **Window snip**. Select a window, such as a browser window or dialog box, that you want to capture.
- **Full-screen snip**. Capture the entire screen, just like Ctrl-P.

After you capture a snip, it's automatically copied to the Snipping Tool window. From there you can annotate, save, or share the snip.

Tagging photos: We've indicated the speed of File Explorer in its search function. However, tagging photos provides much better search capabilities. If you're looking for pictures of Aunt Martha, you can search for **tag: aunt martha**. But that only works if you've set things up ahead of time. Every .jpg file has an editable tag field in its metadata, and you can enter multiple tags in each. Select a photo—or a group of photos—to which you want to assign a tag or tags (separated by semi-colons). You'll find the editable Tags field in the Details pane. If you're using Windows Explorer (Windows 7 or earlier), you'll probably find that pane at the bottom of the window. My own tip is to use the 'near endless' file name capability (Windows 10 has increased max name size from 256 characters to over 32,000! Really, now! I don't write many emails that long!) to add important info into the file name itself – if you know date/place/identification of this photo, make that part of the file name. Then you've got it! And File Explorer will find it quite quickly.

Google Keep: Every genealogist needs a note-taker. If I were writing this Computer Tips column a year or so ago, would have been touting Sticky Notes. No more. A great tool for genealogists is Google Keep. Google Keep is a note-taking service developed by Google and launched in early 2013. Google Keep is available on the web, and has mobile apps for the Android and iOS mobile operating systems. Keep offers a variety of tools for taking notes, including text, lists, images, and audio. Users can set reminders. For genealogists, you should know that text from images can be extracted using optical character recognition, and voice recordings can be transcribed. All these features are well illustrated in several YouTube videos.

There are several articles that compare **Keep** with **Evernote**. [Wiki compares 37 such products, providing their operating systems and whether they are no-cost, commercial, open source software.] I have never warmed to Evernote – but Keep I use, and 'keep' it in my bookmarks. In a January 2016 review, JR Raphael of Computerworld wrote that "Keep is incredibly close to being an ideal tool for me to collect and manage all of my personal and work-related notes," praising what he calls Keep's "killer features," namely simplicity, "easy universal access," and native integration with other Google services.

If you have struggled with Evernote for your genealogy record-keeping, I suggest you search for: google keep vs evernote which will provide several interesting articles to include: three reasons to pick Google Keep over Evernote (and three reasons not to), and note-taking-app-shootout-evernote-vs-google-keep. Keep has been described as an effective if minimalist tool, and I like that. My summary is that Keep is far better than Sticky Notes, but not as sophisticated as Evernote – but for my purposes, Keep rules!

I've seen users type a reference URL into Keep on their [Android] phone app, and when they click on it, the page is there. Others like to jot work notes in their phone's Keep app while at home or in transit, then like magic, it's there waiting for them on their browser at work. Or, conversely, if they are about to head out to an appointment, they'll add info (like addresses or directions) on their laptop to access them on the road. I like it to 'keep' on top of tasks with to-do lists which I can add to or check off from multiple screens. However, understand that Keep is a Google app, thus not on iPhone apps. That doesn't bother me, as I use it on my desktop computers.

Restart: Since the birth of computers, the one tried and true tip is: if it ain't working right, try rebooting. There are so many actions, subroutines, loops going on within any software program that it is amazing that they don't lock/mess up more frequently than they do. When they do, it's time for the ol' Microsoft Salute: **Ctrl-Alt-Delete** to the rescue. And if all else fails, the answer to all computer questions is: ask a grandkid to fix it. If you don't have a grandkid available, ask a neighbor if you can borrow his or hers.

Summary: The more we learn, the more there is to learn. It amazes me that everyday, smart people work to develop great software tools to make your life better. And many of those tools are free to you. However, it takes some effort to keep up with the software, utilities, and techniques that can facilitate your life, both within and without genealogy. For comparison, go to abqgen.org and read the entirely different (yet still relevant) 2014 article on Computer Tips [*Quarterly*, Vol 39, Issue #2]. If you have questions on any of this, send me an email.