East SIG Report – April 2023

After welcoming members to the April meeting of East SIG, host Frank Maher outlined the nights agenda below:

Presentation 1: **Q&A** with George Skarbek
Presentation 2: A selection from the YouTube video **"66 Most Useful Websites Everyone Should Know!"** by Frank Maher
Main presentation: **Most Useful Free Software** by Dave   Botherway

Q&A by George Skarbek.

Question 1: I use Microsoft Outlook as my email client and about once a week I get an email with the heading "photos", from a friend who passed away 3 years ago. I currently just delete these emails, but should I open the emails to see photos of what it's like up there? Is the reason I get these emails at her end or my end?

Answer 1: Someone has to send the emails and normally they don't come from the other side. It's certainly not at your end, but someone else's end. If you want to do some detective work, look at the emails header information to see where the emails are coming from. Look at what server it comes from, that will locate what country and most likely a city. This will require a little bit of technical knowledge but it can be done if you're curious.

If the emails include photos that are jpegs, they are safe to open, as I'm not aware of any executables that can be embedded in a jpeg file.

As the emails are from the same sender and email address, it's possible to set up a rule that any emails from that address go straight to a junk folder.

Question 2: One of our members has a collection of photos (jpegs) and audio and video files (.wma & .wmv) within an application that I believe is called PicMusic Viewer. I believe it's a slideshow or photo album application that has jpegs, audio and video files attached to it. Is that a program you've heard of? If not, is there a program that is easy to use and can combine the file types mention into a photo album for a presentation slide show, similar to PowerPoint?

Answer 2: I've not heard of a program called PicMusic Viewer. However, there are quite a few applications that can put together a good slideshow. ProShow Gold was an excellent program for producing slideshows but I don't think it's still on the market. You may still be able to find an old copy. It was very easy to learn and use, and very versatile for what it does.

There's also PhotoStory, a Microsoft product that is included in Windows. It is easy to use and can also put together an audio-visual slideshow. PhotoStory can add titles, music and transitions between your digital photos, it uses the Ken Burns Effect for pan and zoom and allows adding narration. The slideshow is saved as a Windows Media Video (wmv) movie file.

[Update] PhotoStory is no longer supported by Microsoft but is still available from the Microsoft store and will run in Windows 10. The replacement app can be found under the "Photos" app in Windows 10 and 11. To create a slideshow, you first select the Photos app then click on the "Video Editor" tab then select "New video Project". Refer Figure 1 below.

[Barry Horn] I have used ProShow Gold but as you indicated it is no longer available. Even though I still have ProShow Gold, I now use Adobe Premier Elements to do Slideshows, as I find it easier. Premier Elements is not free but you could use any of the free video editing programs to insert images for a slideshow.
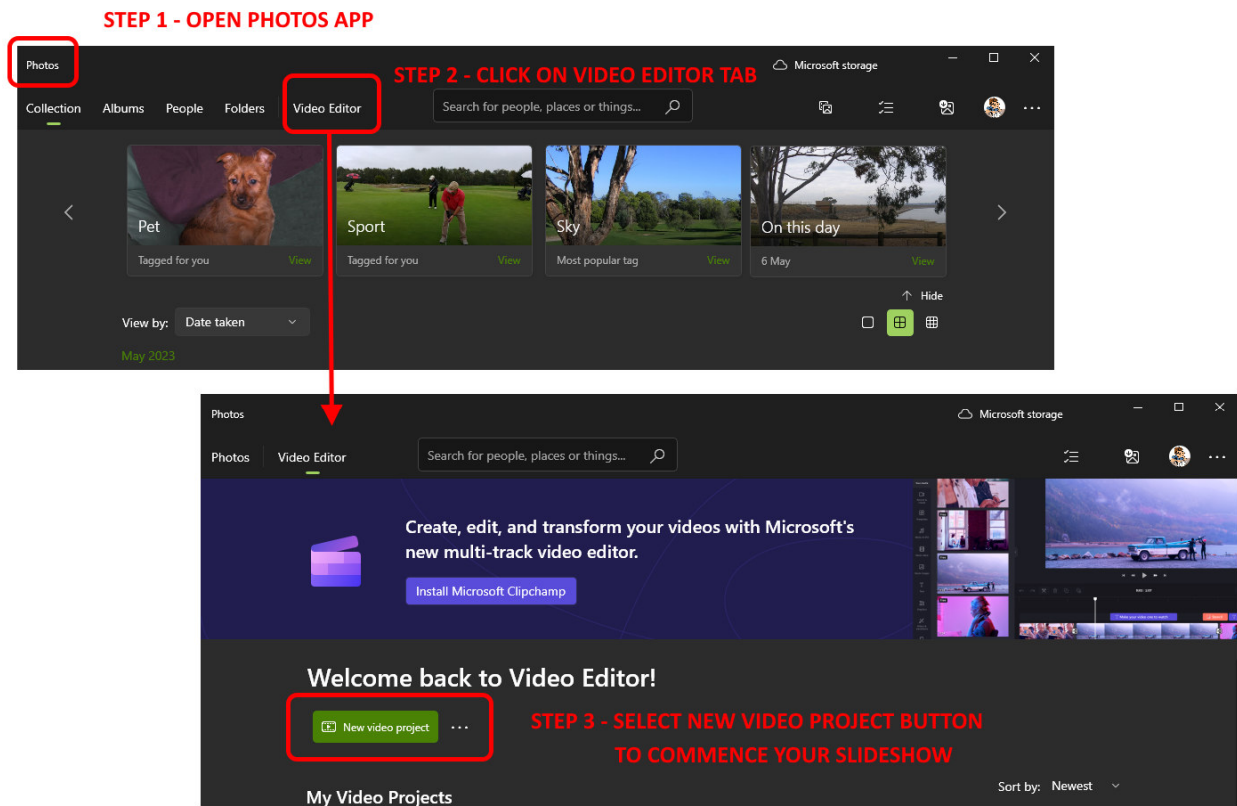

Figure 1 – Windows Photo Slideshow App

Question 3: Is there a way to automatically open Outlook when you boot up your computer, other than writing a batch file? I tried placing a shortcut in the startup folder but that doesn't seem to allow Outlook to run.

Answer 3: You should be able to do that without writing a batch file. I would have thought you could place a shortcut in the startup folder to open Outlook. Alternatively you could use Task scheduler to open Outlook on start-up

Question 4: I've recently listened to a podcast by Steve Gibson the author of SpinRite which mentioned he's soon to release a new version of SpinRite. I wonder whether anyone has used it and what was their experience? [SpinRite is a hard drive recovery program]

Figure 2 – Steve Gibson's SpinRite

Answer 4: I've certainly used SpinRite. It's an absolutely brilliant program that graduated from floppy to hard drives. With large rotating drives it's very slow, as it examines each sector. However, the current version is no longer applicable for solid state drives.

[Phillip Lynch from iHelp replies] I've been using SpinRite for years and like George found the current version very slow on contemporary drives. The longest it took me to recover photos from a hard drive was 37 days. In that time SpinRite recovered all but one photo.

I've tried the latest beta version of SpinRite that's due to be released in a few months, and it whips through large drives in under 2 hours. My reading of some of the forums indicates there's been a good deal of success reading SSDs. The new version doesn't pump the SSDs too hard in terms of rewrites, but does lots of reads for recovery of data. If you have a drive that is not reading correctly, SpinRite will keep going when Windows has given up.

Question 5: I want to build a CCTV system for use on a farm, where most of the time there will be no activity. If the owner is off site for a week and needs to find a section of the video containing movement from an intruder, I wonder how I can go about that? Is there any software that can do a search for activity, rather than a person having to sit down and go through the whole video? I've searched the internet but didn't know what search term to use, so didn't have any success.

Answer 5: If I was building a CCTV system, I'd look for an off the shelf system. These systems come with software that can be set to record only when there is activity.
If you plan a DIY system, I've heard of software that can extract one frame a second from the original video and compile a new video from that. The new video would be much shorter and quicker to search through. Once you find the passage showing movement, use the time stamp from that passage and go back and view that section of the original video. I can't remember the name of the software that can do this, as I haven't looked at this topic recently.
When playing back the original DIY video, play it at fast forward speed or use the play indicator to carefully scroll along the video's timeline.

[Brian Haywood] I have a Swan system which records only when it is triggered by motion. You can set the sensitivity and have it send emails to you when it detects motion. The Swan system is not that expensive and I've found it very good.
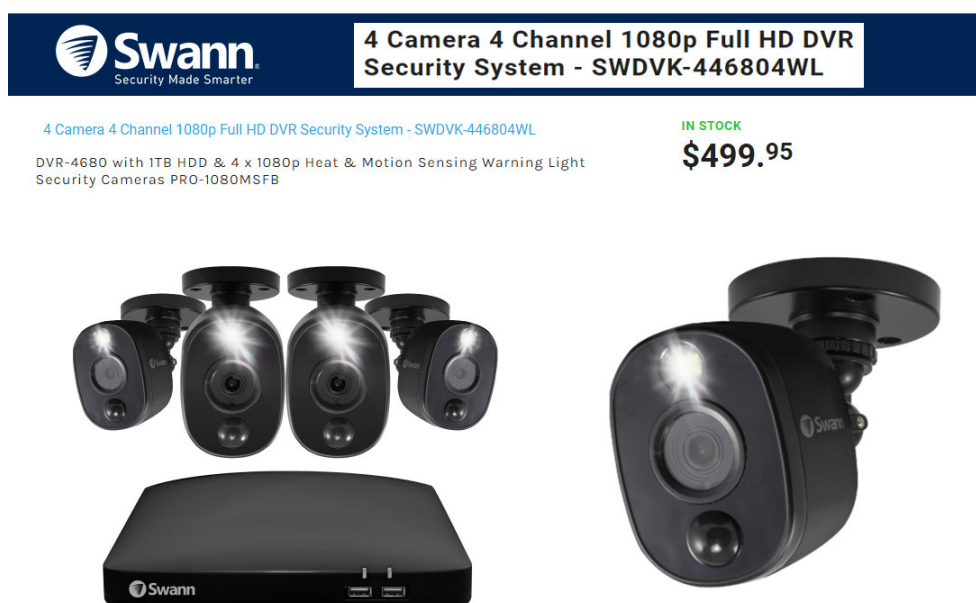

Figure 3 – Swann budget CCTV system

66 Most Useful Websites Everyone Should Know! by Frank Maher

In this presentation, Frank Maher looks at a selection of websites that he thought would be of most interest to members. The websites featured are from the YouTube video by Brett In Tech tit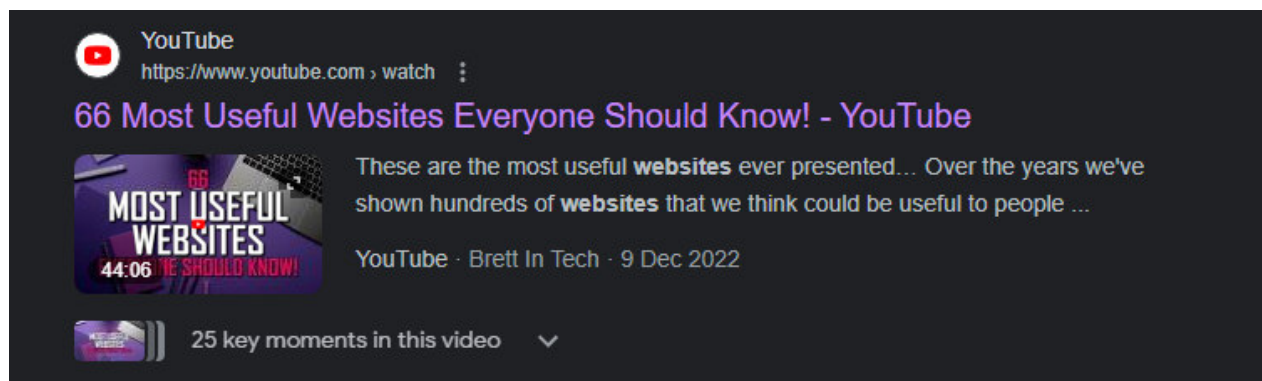led the "66 Most Useful Websites Everyone Should Know!" at https://tinyurl.com/mthp8a7t or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDdeeMCMJ1c

Figure 4 – YouTube banner for "66 Most Useful websites …."

In the YouTube video each website is viewed, briefly described and demonstrated. Most video clips are between 30 seconds and a minute long. The selection Frank played to members is shown in the list below.

- Alternatives to Popular Software at https://alternativeto.net
- Amazon Price Tracker at https://camelcamelcamel.com
- Check If a website is Down at https://downdetector.com.au
- Internet Speed Test at https://fast.com
- Hyperlink Identifier at https://www.getlinkinfo.com
- DIY Electronics Repair Guides at https://www.ifixit.com
- Windows Software Package Manager at https://ninite.com
- File Converter at https://www.online-convert.com
- Free Stock Photos at https://pixabay.com
- Makes Websites Print Friendly at https://www.printfriendly.com
- Road Trip Planner at https://roadtrippers.com
- Temporary Email Address at https://10minutemail.com
- Files/Website Security Checker at https://www.virustotal.com

Following the video, Frank demonstrated some of the above sites that he felt deserved a second look.

AlternativeTo (https://alternativeto.net**)**

AlternativeTo is a site that suggests alternate free software to commercial applications. When Frank entered Microsoft Word the program suggested Libre Writer, Google Docs, WPS Writer, OnlyOffice, Apache OpenOffice Writer, TextMaker, Pages, AbiWord plus others as free alternatives to MS Word.

Downdetector (https://downdetector.com.au)

Downdetector is a website that help when you have a problem loading a website and you're not sure if the problem is at their end or yours. When Frank entered his broadband supplier Aussie Broadband, the site displays a timeline graph that indicates the site did have a problem that lasted over an hour and a map where the outage occurred.

Fast (https://fast.com)

Fast is an Internet Speed Test, that's independent of your broadband supplier. Franks has a 100mbps download and 20mbps upload internet plan with a VPN. When he tested his connection, the speeds recorded were slightly below specification, but reasonable for an 8pm test.

Print Friendly & PDF (https://www.printfriendly.com)

Often when you want to print a webpage, the layout contains ads and the site isn't always suitable for printing. Using "Print Friendly & PDF", you enter the websites URL into a text box and the site generates a new layout that can be printed or saved as a pdf file.

Road Trip Planner (https://roadtrippers.com)

Road Trip Planner lets you plan your road trip and discover points of interest along the way. Although American centric, Frank demonstrated how he would plan a trip from Lorne to Port Campbell. Once selecting his trips start and end destinations, a map displayed the route, which he then zoomed into to show more detail. Selecting places on the map that he wanted to visit, updated the route to include those points. The trip can be saved and then linked to the roadtrippers app for turn-by-turn navigation.

Most Useful free Software by Dave Botherway

Determining the most useful software for a computer user, is a very subjective topic, as each user's requirements and interests are different. This variation is evident from the 2 videos highlighted in Dave's presentation, and also for any search of YouTube on the topic. In this presentation, Dave Botherway looks at 2 YouTube videos on the topic, the first by Kevin Stratvert and the second video by Brett In Tech, both produce very professional quality videos on numerous computer topics.

Best FREE Software for PC (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3QUKwITVcw) or https://tinyurl.com/3revptsm
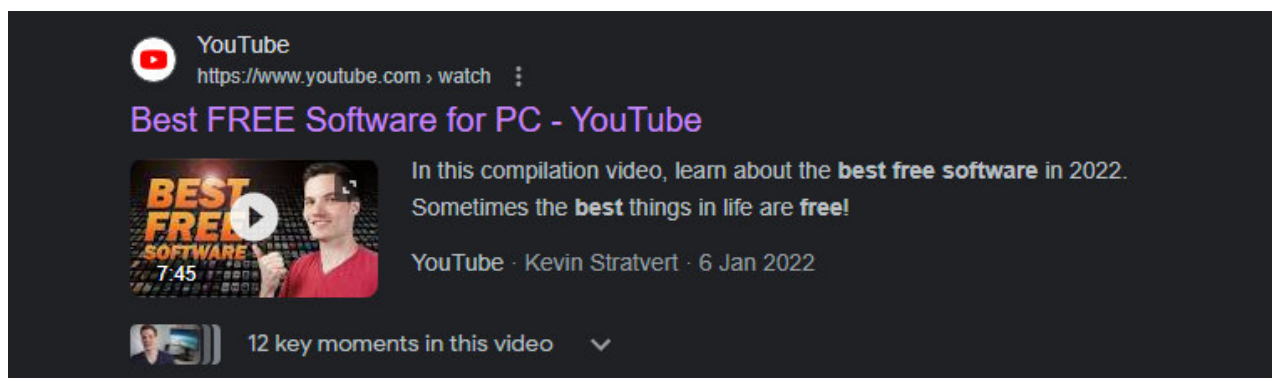

Figure 5 – YouTube banner for "Best free Software for PC"

The first video was by Kevin Stratvert titled the "Best free software for PC". Kevin Stratvert has produced many professional videos on numerous computer topics and this one is no different. Dave played this video in full, being less than 8 minutes long. In the video, Kevin outlines his top 10 best freeware programs which are listed in order and briefly summarised below.

1. **GIMP:** https://www.gimp.org/
   GIMP is a fully functionality image editing program that is comparable to Adobe Photoshop. You can transform images, add effects, adjust colours, and more.

2. **Greenshot:** https://getgreenshot.org/
   Greenshot is a screenshot tool that allows you to capture your screen and annotate your images. This is especially helpful when pulling together documentation. It is far superior to the Windows Snipping tool.

3. **Handbrake**: https://handbrake.fr/
   Handbrake is a video transcoder which will convert a video from numerous formats to mp4 or mkv. It will also reduce the resolution of a video.

4. **Microsoft PowerToys:** https://github.com/microsoft/PowerToys
   PowerToys gives Windows lots of additional utilities, including a colour picker, a mouse highlighter, an app launcher, FancyZones, Awake and much more.

5. **OneNote:** Pre installed in Windows
   OneNote is a digital notetaking app and productivity tool. It provides a single place for keeping all of your notes, research, plans, and information.

6. **Signal:** https://www.signal.org/
   Signal is a free open-source messaging app that puts privacy first with end to end encryption unlike other messaging apps that are owned by large corporations, like What's App and Messenger, which are owned by Facebook, iMessage by Apple and Skype by Microsoft.

7. **Microsoft's To Do:** https://apps.microsoft.com/store/apps
   Microsoft's To Do app has all your standard task tracking capabilities. You can add tasks, add steps to a task, assign tasks to others.

8. **TeamViewer:** https://www.teamviewer.com/
   Team Viewer lets you remotely control another computer. This is especially helpful if you're trying to help someone with their PC. It lets you take control of their PC and you can also transfer files between your computers.

9. **VirtualBox:** https://www.virtualbox.org/
   VirtualBox is a free and open-source virtual machine made by Oracle. It allows users to extend their existing computer to run multiple operating systems including Microsoft Windows, Mac OS X, Linux, and Oracle Solaris, at the same time.

10. **Shotcut:** https://www.shotcut.org/
    Shotcut video editor has several features usually only seen on paid video editors, such as a full-colour grading option. It installs on relatively lightweight computers. Anyone familiar with video editing software will find Shotcut relatively easy to use.

55 Most Useful Free Software Everyone Should Know!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocqvRdcM_pk or https://tinyurl.com/2p8nj4ak

A second video titled the "55 most useful free software everyone should know!" by "Brett In Tech", was referenced by Dave to assist those members looking for quality free programs. Dave found it interesting that this video only includes 5 of the 10 programs mentioned by Kevin Stratvert in his "Best free software for PC" video. This shows how subjective this topic of best software is.

For those interested in watching the video, the video clip for each program is around a minute long, with each program listed and timestamped for easy access. The video is a compilation of previous YouTube videos by Brett In Tech and gives a quick snapshot of each program. Dave did not play this video due to its length at 48 minutes, but recommended it as well worth watching.
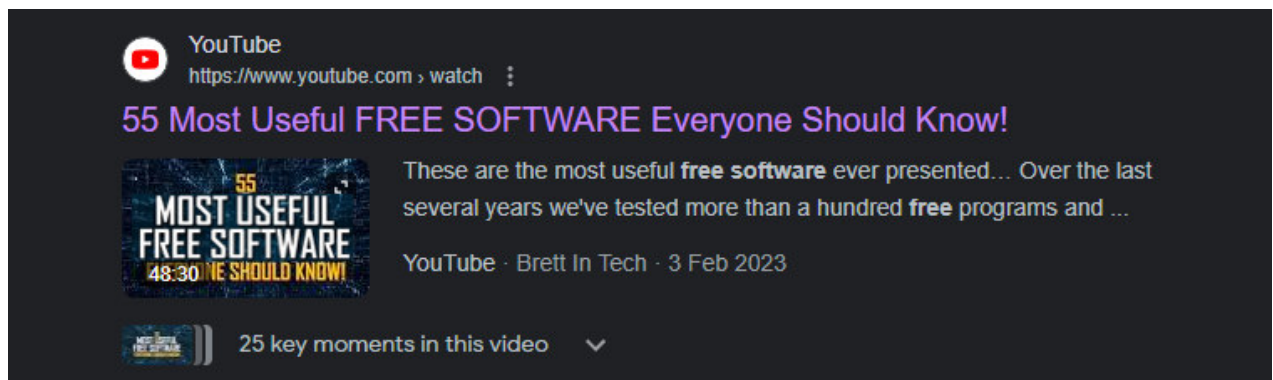

Figure 6 – YouTube banner for "55 Most Useful Free Software ….."

In the video, the presenter lists his 55 most useful programs in alphabetical order. The playlist below the video gives a timestamp for each video and a brief description of the program, but not the programs name. In his presentation, Dave arranged the programs into categories, to make finding software for a certain task easier. Dave's categories are shown below with each program listed with a brief description.

Internet Browsers
- Brave Browser   Privacy Focused Browser
- Chrome   Browser (ex Google)
- Firefox   Browser- with many add-ons
- Tor Browser   Privacy focus, relay function
- Vivaldi   Privacy Focussed Browser
- WaterFox   Browser, No tracking or History

Video Editors and Players
- HandBrake   Convert Video files
- KdenLive   Video Editing (ala Shotcut)
- Kodi   Media Player, Server
- OBS Studio   Editing & Streaming s/w
- Olive   Video Editing (ala FinalCut Pro)
- OpenShot   Video Editing (easy to use)
- Plex Media Server Streaming Services
- PotPlayer   ala VLC, many codecs
- Shotcut   Simple Video Editing
- SMPlayer   alt to VLC

- VLC   Media Player - all OS, ad free

Audio Editors and Players
- Audacity   Audio file editing
- Media Player Classic   Media Player - all OSs
- Mixxx   DJ Mixer/Xfade, Playlists

Image Editors
- Darktable   Photo enhancement (ala DaV Resolve)
- DaVinci Resolve   Photo Enhancement
- FotoSketcher   Modify photos - with effects
- GIMP   Photo Manipulation
- ImageGlass   Image Viewer
- Krita   Vector Graphics editor
- Nomacs   Image Viewer, Slideshows
- XNView MP   Photo Viewer / Editor, Batch conversion

Office programs
- Inkscape   alt to Adobe Illustrator
- Libre Office   alt to MS-Office
- Only Office Free   ala Libre Office
- Scribus   Desktop Publisher
- Sublime Text   Text Editor
- Sumatra PDF   Lightweight PDF, ala Adobe Acrobat
- Thunderbird   Email Client

PC Maintenance
- 7-Zip   Pack/Unpack files (many options)
- BleachBit   Cleanup disk space
- Blender   AV, Modelling (ala CCIeaner)
- CPU-Z   CPU Stats and Benchmark
- DNS Benchmark   DNS checks (ala ftp Gibson)
- Everything   Search Directories
- Glary Utilities   Tools to Boost / Clean PC
- HWiNFO   Details of PC, Performance
- Revo Uninstaller   Clean Un-installer
- Rufus   Create bootable USB Drives

PC Security
- Bitdefender   Anti-Virus (vs MS Defender)
- Bitwarden   PSW Manager (vs LastPass)
- Malwarebytes Free   AV Scanner
- ProtonVPN free   VPN (also Proton eMail)
- qBittorrent   Lightweight Torrent client
- VeraCrypt   Encrypt Files, partitions

Screen Capture
- Greenshot   Capture Screen, Window
- ShareX   Screen Capture (far better than Win)

Sundry Other programs
- Google Earth Pro   Zoom into anywhere on earth (was $299)
- LMMS   Create Music / Design
- Stellarium   Virtual planetarium
- Virtual Box   Virtual O/S protected
- Visual Studio Code   Editing Code s/w

At the conclusion of Dave's presentation members discussed their most useful software that did not make the list.

Neil Muller