

East SIG Report – July 2023

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

Presentation 1: **Q&A** with George Skarbek

Presentation 2: **Use an Email Alias** by Trevor Hudson

Presentation 3: **Using Google’s Bard AI** by John Swale

Presentation 4: **How and Why I use Paint.net** by Neil Muller

Q&A by George Skarbek.

Question: I send out monthly newsletters in blocks of less than a hundred at a time. When the last batch of newsletters were sent out, I got about a dozen that bounced. They were all from Mr. .net.. The refusal message states the email *“has been rejected due to the sending MTA’s poor reputation. If you believe this failure is in error, please contact the intended recipients by alternate means”*. I then sent all the emails that bounced by Gmail and they all were received. Is this my fault or someone else’s?

Answer: I don’t believe it is your fault. You appear to have been put on the spammers list either for excessive volume or subject etc. There are worldwide databases of those people sending out spam emails and these help clean up the internet. By and large they do a reasonable job.

Various organisations have different limits of emails that can be sent out in a block. It used to be 30, but it was soon realised that this number was too small for companies and clubs, so was lifted. There is still a limit, but your strategy of sending the newsletter in blocks of less than 100 is the only way to get around the limit, unless you register as a business where the limits are higher.

[Google search] A 554 "bad reputation" error means that the IP address you're sending from is on a black list used by that receiving mail server. In a "worse case" scenario, your IP is blacklisted by several RBLs, which can impact your ability to send any email, to anyone.

Use an Email Alias by Trevor Hudson

In this presentation, Trevor played a 14-minute YouTube video by Naomi Brockwell: NBTV titled **“Use an Email Alias!”**. This is an excellent video, but one you’ll probably need to watch more than once to fully take in the material presented. The video can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HHdk_GP-Ew

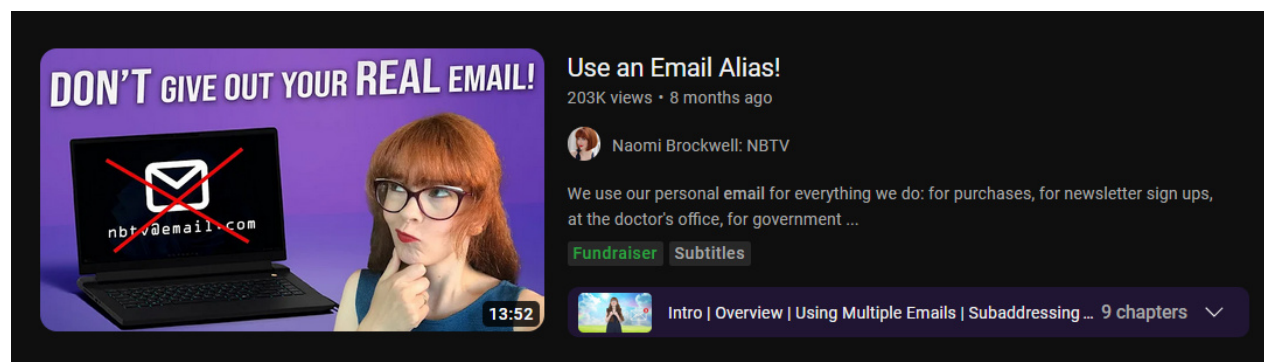


Figure 1 – YouTube banner – Use an Email Alias!

This video discusses how to manage an overflowing email inbox, filled with spam and unsolicited messages caused by the widespread use of personal email addresses for various purposes. It highlights the risks associated with using a single email for everything and proposes two solutions to regain control over one's inbox and digital identity.

The video explains why temporary email services, third party filtering companies and sub-addressing (i.e. adding a plus sign to your email address) are no longer the best solution.



Figure 2 – Email Sub addressing

Using aliases and unique email addresses gives you control over which emails can actually make it to your important inbox, and what information can be learnt about you online. In addition, unique email addresses make it easier to see which sites are sharing or selling your data.

Catch all email addresses

The first solution involves using "catch all" email addresses or a custom domain email address.

1. Catch all email addresses allow users to receive emails sent to any address within a domain, even if the specific address does not exist.
2. A Custom domain email address allows users to use their own domain for their email addresses, providing more control and flexibility over sub addressing or filtering.

Previously once your one personal email was leaked to spammers and scammers, that address was forever targeted. However, with a catch all email address, if you gave Betty's flowers a unique address, and suddenly you start getting of spam to that address, you can just direct any emails sent to that address straight to the trash folder. This effectively shuts it off, and all the rest of your addresses remain fine.

The downside to catch all's, is that they are receiving-only addresses. This means you can receive emails to them, but can't send emails from them. This is fine for most purposes. If you do need to send an email from a specific address, you can always create that address after the fact.

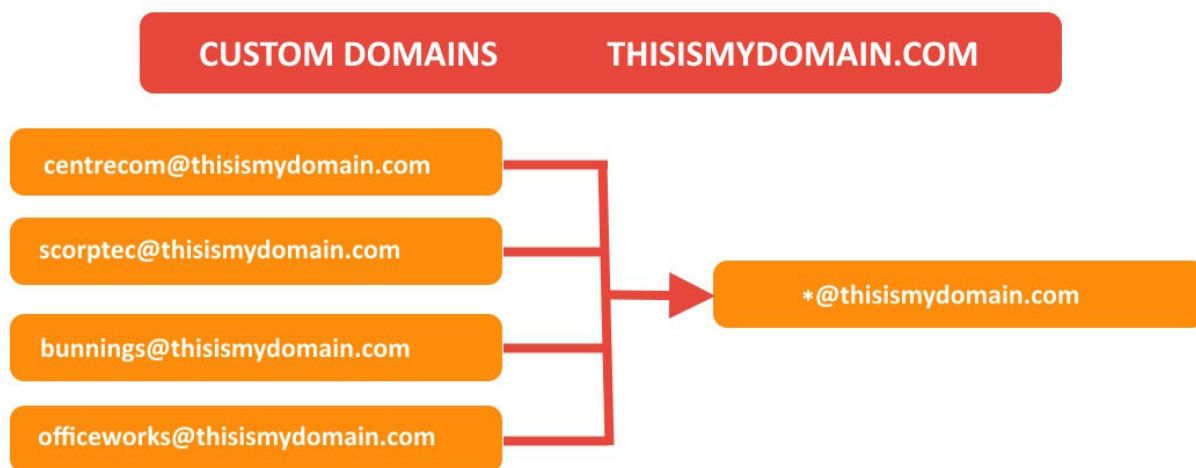


Figure 3 – Emails to a Custom Domain

SimpleLogin

The second solution is an alias service called SimpleLogin. SimpleLogin offers permanent aliases that mask users' real email addresses, allowing them to receive and reply to emails without revealing their personal information. This service enhances privacy and helps manage spam effectively.

SimpleLogin allows you to both receive emails at your alias address, and also send replies from your alias, using what's called a reverse-alias. The video describes how to setup a SimpleLogin account and how it's used.

SimpleLogin redirects emails straight to your inbox and they don't keep a copy. Another benefit of SimpleLogin is that it allows users to easily shut off an address by going to alias and clicking disable. This is better for privacy, but is also convenient because it means you never have to log in to another account to check your email.



Figure 4 – SimpleLogin

Conclusion

The video emphasizes the benefits of using unique email addresses for different purposes, such as controlling spam, protecting against identity theft, and tracking data sharing/selling. It also discusses the risks associated with certain email alias services that store emails or provide temporary addresses.

To conclude, the video highlights that using catch all email addresses and SimpleLogin aliases can be powerful tools for improving email hygiene and digital privacy, allowing users to access all emails within one account while controlling who can reach their inbox.

During questions from members following the video, George Skarbek commented he uses a catch all email address. He has his own domain, skarbek.com.au and when emailing adobe for example, he uses adobe@skarbek.com as his email address. When these emails with unique addresses arrive, he immediately knows who uses that address. If such an email is spam, it's likely adobe in

this example, has had their email system hacked. Occasionally George will get emails with strange names at Skarbek.com. This indicated the spammers are trying random names to reach his inbox, so are easy to pick up as spam. George also suggested using filters or rules to filter out unwanted emails. These are easy to set up and are a very effective tool for controlling emails.

Using Google's Bard AI by John Swale

To even the ledger, following previous presentations on ChatGPT by Dave Botherway, this month John Swale took a look at Google's Bard AI.

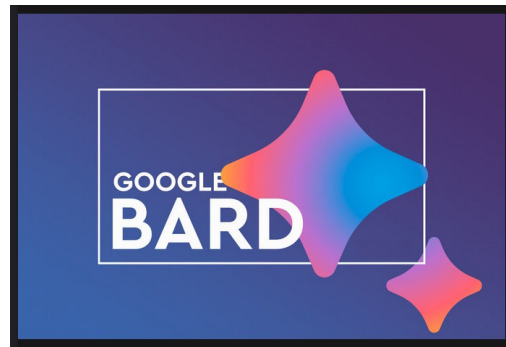


Figure 5 – Google's AI Bard

The obvious place to start a presentation on Bard was to ask Bard to “Develop a 30-minute presentation on using Bard”. John found the reply rather verbose, so refined the question to, “Develop a 30-minute slide presentation on using Bard”. This received a more satisfactory reply and is repeated in full below.

Slide 1: Introduction

- Bard is a large language model from Google AI, trained on a massive dataset of text and code.
- Bard can generate text, translate languages, write different kinds of creative content, and answer your questions in an informative way.
- Bard is still under development, but it has learned to perform many kinds of tasks.

Slide 2: How to use Bard

- To use Bard, you can simply type your request into the textbox.
- Bard will then try its best to fulfill your request.
- You can also provide Bard with additional information to help it complete your request.
- For example, if you want Bard to write a poem, you can provide it with a topic or a theme.

Slide 3: What Bard can do

- Bard can generate text in a variety of styles, including news articles, blog posts, poems, and scripts.
- Bard can translate languages, including English, French, Spanish, German, Chinese, and Japanese.
- Bard can answer your questions in an informative way, even if they are open ended, challenging, or strange.
- Bard can generate different creative text formats of text content, like poems, code, scripts, musical pieces, email, letters, etc.

Slide 4: Examples of Bard's work

Bard has been used to generate a variety of creative text formats, including:

- News articles
- Blog posts
- Poems
- Scripts
- Musical pieces
- Email
- Letters
- Bard has also been used to answer a variety of questions, including:
 - Open ended questions
 - Challenging questions
 - Strange questions

Slide 5: Limitations of Bard

- Bard is still under development, and it is not perfect.
- Bard may sometimes make mistakes, and it may not be able to answer all of your questions.
- However, Bard is constantly learning and improving, and it is becoming more and more capable every day.

Slide 6: Conclusion

- Bard is a powerful tool that can be used for a variety of purposes.
- Bard can be used to generate text, translate languages, answer questions, and create creative content.
- Bard is still under development, but it is becoming more and more capable every day.

Slide 7: Questions?

If you have any questions about Bard, please feel free to ask.

A recurring theme John highlighted in the above response, was the number of times Bard states it is still under development, is constantly improving and should be used with caution.

Export Options

To export the above slide show, the up arrow shown in Figure 6 from John's presentation is selected. Currently the only export options available are "Export to Docs" or "Draft in Gmail". Exporting to Google Slides would have been preferable for a question like the one above, but unfortunately that option is not yet available. John believes exporting to Slides will be available in the near future.

The URL for those wishing to use Bard is <https://bard.google.com>. Users will need to log into their Google account and agree to a number of pages of terms and conditions before being able to use Bard. At the time of the presentation, a melbpc.org.au account is not accepted, even though it's hosted by Google.

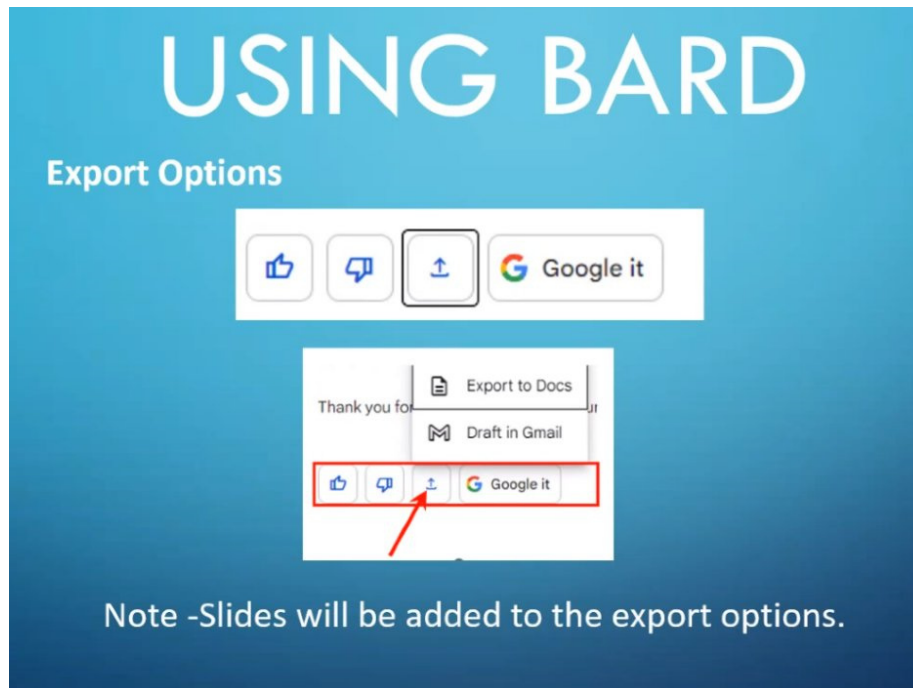


Figure 6 – Current Bard Export options.

How and why I use Paint.net by Neil Muller

The concluding presentation was delivered by Neil Muller, who employs Paint.net to prepare the graphics featured in the East SIG meeting report, published in PCUpdate.

Introduction

Paint.net is a free raster graphics image and photo editing software that runs on Window PC's. It should not be confused with the Microsoft Paint program, being far superior to the latter. It has a familiar user interface to other image editors, which makes it easy to use right from the start. The features that Neil finds particularly useful is the utility windows and the use of layers, which he demonstrated later in his presentation. In addition to the Utility Windows and Layers, Paint.net has unlimited Undo operations, a wide variety of useful and powerful tools and supports community Plug-ins.



Figure 7 – Paint.net Logo

Image Editors Used

Neil employs a selection of five different programs in his image work, with Paint.net being one of them. In his presentation he went on to explain his rationale for favouring these choices over the other alternatives. Each of these five graphic programs excels over the others for its selected task. All the editing software he uses come at no cost, apart from Photoshop Elements.

PhotoShop Elements 2015

Photoshop Elements is Neil's tool for accurate photo editing, and generally used to enhance and repair digital images or scans of photographs. The main tools used are the Spot Healing brush to remove dust specks, and the Clone Stamp, for repairing damaged on scans of photos. Other editing features he uses include layers, the enhance tools to adjust lighting (shadows & highlights), levels adjustment, adjusting colour, cropping, straightening, transforming and resizing of images.

Irfanview

Irfanview is Neil's primary photo viewer. He also utilizes its editor for quick image editing when dealing with straightforward tasks. It's a feature packed lightweight image viewer and editor that offers a wide range of features to handle and manipulate images. Neil's use of Irfanview dates back to Windows 95, initially due to its ability to view and save images in a multitude of file formats.

Irfanview provides basic editing functions like cropping, rotating, and resizing images, as well as adjusting colours, brightness, and contrast. It also supports batch processing for conversion and renaming of files.

As a long-term user of Irfanview, Neil has built up a good knowledge of the program and features it offers. His use of the numerous shortcuts available has significantly enhanced his efficiency for quick edits. Apart from the obvious shortcuts, i.e. Cut, Copy & Paste, shortcuts for Resize, Custom Rotate, Crop, Sharpening, Zoom In & Out & Save are regularly used as time savers.

- *Faststone Image Viewer*

FastStone Image Viewer is used for quick edits of photographs Neil uploads to a website he manages. It has a unique interface that may take time to learn, but when mastered you have access to a wide array of features for viewing, managing, viewing metadata and editing images.

The image editing tools in Faststone Viewer that Neil uses most, are for adjusting lighting (Shadows & Highlights), Cropping & Resizing tools, Straightening and image Borders. Other seldom used tools include batch processing, side by side image comparison, slideshow creation, screen capture, special effects & filters.

- *MicroSoft Image Composite Editor (ICE)*

Image Composite Editor creates seamless panoramic images and photo montages. It has a simple interface and produces excellent seamless panoramas both in horizontal or vertical image formats. Neil finds MS ICE easier to use than the Panorama creation tool in his copy of Photoshop Elements 2015.

On occasions, Neil's has used MS ICE for stitching together a 4 x 4 matrix of "zoomed in" Google earth images. He finds the images stich together exceptionally well, but noted the Google Earth images need to be cropped to avoid text and other symbols.

ICE offers various projections, along with editing tools such as cropping, straightening and rotating, to further adjust the panoramic images. One downside is scanned images will occasionally be placed on an incorrect projection.

- *Paint.net*
Paint.net is a free image and photo editor that runs on Windows. It's Neil's go to software for preparing graphics for the East SIG reports that appear in PCUpdate. Although Photoshop Elements offers all the tools that Paint.net has, Neil finds the latter is more efficient for preparing quick graphics.

Paint.NET is a powerful yet simple tool that offers an intuitive and innovative user interface. It supports layers, has unlimited undo, special effects, and a wide variety of useful and powerful tools. Files are saved in its own format .pdn or can be saved in a number of other common file formats. Plug-ins can be download to add new effects and file types.

The use of graphics in the East SIG reports is to enhance the reports and to make them more interesting. Often a graphic will grab the reader's attention or are often used to explain a concept better than words can.

The History of Paint.net

Paint.net was created by Rick Brewster and released as free software in 2004. It started as a college project at Washington State University with the goal of providing a more advanced and feature-rich alternative to Microsoft Paint. Since then, it has grown into a powerful yet simple image editing tool.

The name Paint.net was derived from the MS .NET Framework from which it was developed. This allowed for the integration of more advanced features and functions than MS Paint.

The major milestone in the development was version 3 which introduced layers, history and plug-ins.

The latest update 5.0.7 improves features and now utilises the Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) to improve speed and performance. However, the latest update no longer supports Windows 7 & 8.



Figure 7 – Paint.net version timeline

Specifications

System Requirements Version 5

- Windows 11 or Windows 10 (version 1809 or newer)
- 64-bit CPU (Intel/AMD x64 or ARM64)
- Paint.NET runs on Microsoft .NET 7, which is included as part of the app so does not need to be installed separately.
- Software installer is 62 MB. After installation 220 MB
- Recommended: A CPU that supports AVX2 (Advanced Vector Extns 2)
- Recommended: A GPU or APU that supports Direct3D 11

Download

- The free version is called “Classic” and has to be downloaded from the [getpaint.net](https://www.getpaint.net) website at <https://www.getpaint.net/download.html>
- Also available from the Microsoft store for \$9.99. The difference between the 2 download options apart from the cost, is the version from the Microsoft Store updates automatically.

Reviews

A number of software reviews for free, non-browser image editors Neil discovered, rated Paint.net highly. One of these reviews, titled the “Top 5 Best Free Photo Editing Software (2023)” by Brett in Tech, for free non-browser-based image editors, placed Paint.net second only to GIMP. The URL to view this video is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxPf8RRS1qk>

The ranking of image editors shown in the video are listed as follows:

1. ***GIMP***
Open-source editor that rivals Photoshop. Versions are available for Windows, Mac OS & Linux
2. ***Paint.Net***
Released in 2004 as a more powerful alternative to Microsoft Paint. Supports Layers and includes a large range of tools and supports Plugins.
3. ***Krita***
Open source with a large range of tools for photo editing. Supports working with layers and can use community created Plugins.
4. ***Photoscape X***
Includes a Large range of tools to enhance images.
5. ***Adobe Photoshop Express***
A quick and easy to use photo editor

Examples

After detailing the image editing software Neil regularly uses, including Paint.net, he displayed nine different graphics he’d prepared using Paint.net. These graphics were for both personal use and some of those used in the East SIG reports that appear in PCUpdate. Readers can flip back through 2023 issues of PCUpdate to see some of the examples shown in the presentation.

Paint.net User Interface

The Paint.NET user interface has a user-friendly design that all users would find easy to navigate and learn. It offers a powerful set of image editing tools for advanced users, as well as beginners. Neil prefers Paint.net over Photoshop Elements for editing graphics as it’s simpler and thus quicker to use.

The Utility Window is the key feature of Paint.net that Neil finds particularly useful. In his live demonstration he had both the floating Tools Window and Layers Window open constantly. These windows were moved around the canvas so that they were closer to the editing area, to speed up the editing of his graphics. Although all the tools available on the floating windows are available from the Menu Bar, the latter were seldom used due to the convenience of having tools available from the floating windows.

The Crop to Selection option was another of Neil's favourite tools which he showed off in the live demonstration that followed later.

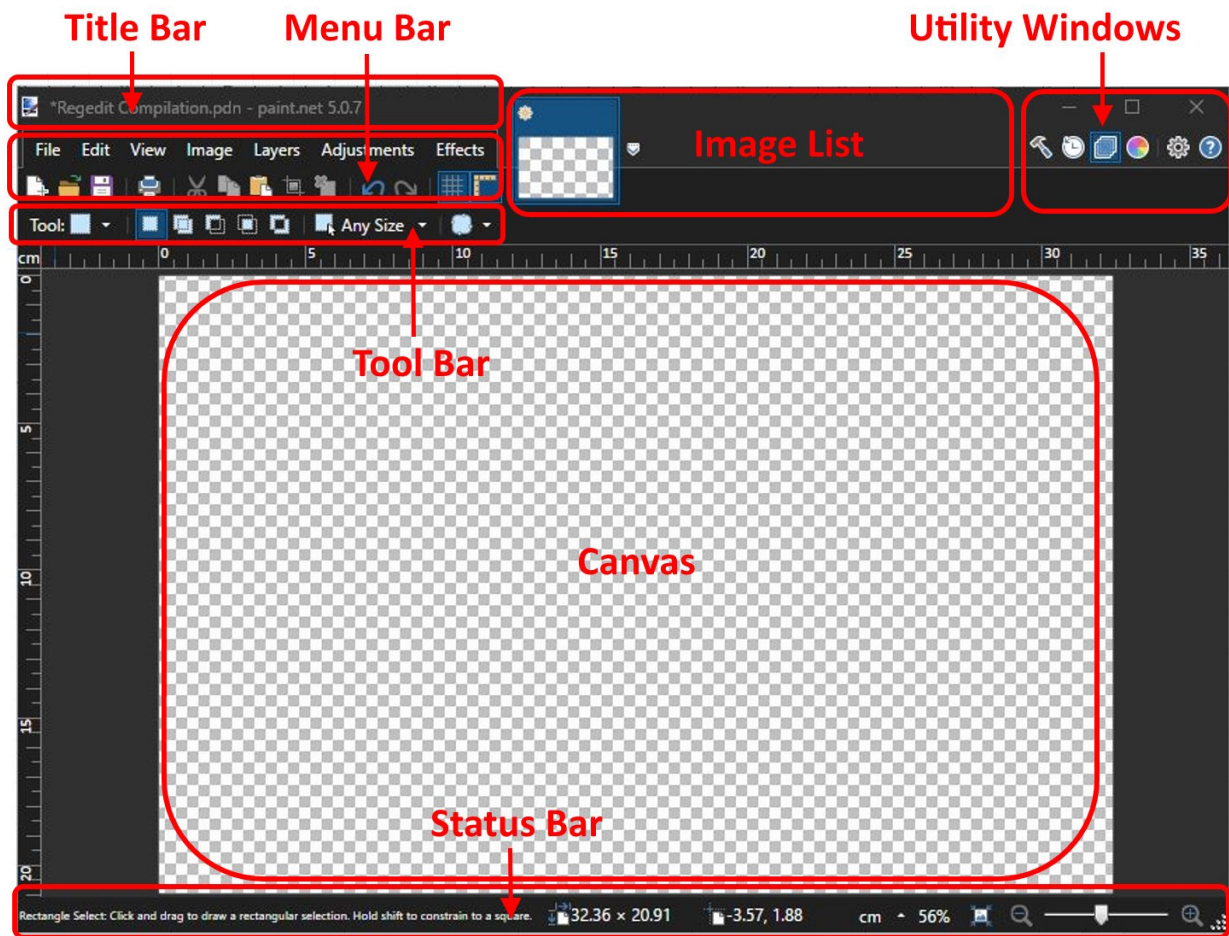


Figure 8 – Paint.net User Interface

Key features of the Utility Windows

1. **Tools Window:** The tools window containing essential tools such as selection, drawing, text, and shapes, allows users to easily access and switch between functions.
2. **History Window:** The history window records the sequence of actions performed on the image. Users can undo or redo actions by navigating through this history, offering flexibility in editing choices.
3. **Layers Window:** This window enables the management of image layers, a fundamental feature for non-destructive editing. Users can add, remove, adjust transparency, and organize layers to build complex compositions.
4. **Colour Window:** Used to select colours either from the image or using the colour wheel.

Other User Interface features

5. **Menu Bar:** Traditional menus provide access to a wide range of functions, including opening and saving files, applying filters, and managing preferences. This area houses seven menus, File, Edit, View, Image, Layers, Adjustment & Effects.
6. **Tool Bar:** This houses several buttons and controls for executing common commands and accessing various paint.net features. On the left of the dropdown Tools icon, are adjustable parameters for the active tool selected.
7. **Image List:** The Each image that is open shows a thumbnail in the image list. These work much like the tabs in a web browser. Click on an image to switch to it. The thumbnail will become highlighted in the Image List and the associated image loaded onto the canvas.
8. **Canvas Area:** The central area serves as the canvas where users can view and manipulate images. It displays the active image and supports zooming and panning for detailed editing.
9. **Status Bar:** The bottom bar offers useful information such as the current zoom level, cursor position, and dimensions of the selected area, aiding precision during editing.

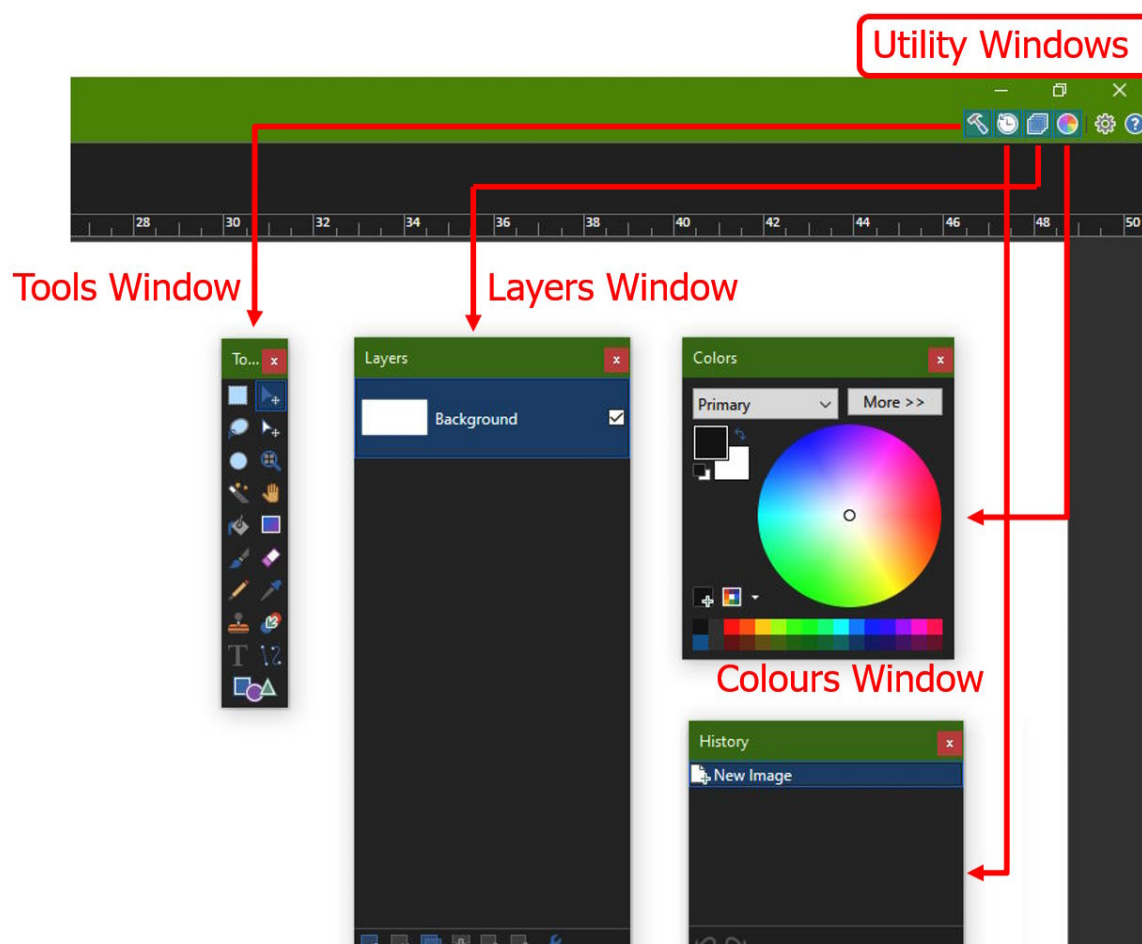


Figure 9 – Paint.net Utility Windows

Live Demonstration

To conclude Neil demonstrated how he created a number of graphics displayed earlier. The demonstration was aimed at showing how he used Layers, the Tool Bar, Image List and most importantly the Utility Windows when preparing his images.

Neil Muller