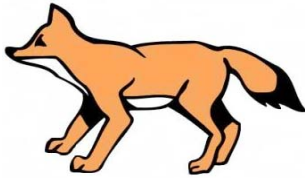


Fox Tales



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Personal Computer User Groups

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Jon Jackman – President ~ FVPCA

It has been an interesting month. We have moved forward with our Live Meeting Project by having a test of Live Meeting at the last Executive Board meeting. Turning on video caused significant bandwidth consumption, so without a faster Internet connection solution we will just proceed with a PowerPoint and audio format. We will be testing another CradlePoint router (MBR-1000) to see if we can be successful creating an access point at our meetings with the Sprint U301 3/4G wireless adapter. That may allow us to get the bandwidth that we will need for video – web cam use. I have written up details about the simulation and may have it included in this newsletter, or linked on our web page. We will be looking at ways to share a live, active desktop. It appears that this might be accomplished using Shared-View and Skype. I discovered how to do this in an interesting article in the March Q-Bits newsletter (Quad Cities Computer Society – www.qcs.org.) It is interesting to see what other clubs are doing, and we will be updating our web links to allow you to explore them as well. I also just got an e-mail that ups the MB limit for the Virgin Mobile \$20 Top Up from 250 MB to 300 MB! I think this is in response to requests for MB carry over.

At last month's general meeting we reviewed the basics of data collection and the results of our recent member survey. That will be posted on our website for review. Thanks to Norm Hoube for his "Windows 7 Secrets" program. For anyone who may be interested, I have converted it to a PDF which will be posted on the website. Another featured program was a review of Garmin GPS tracking on my recent snowmobile trip in Wisconsin. I imported the tracks into Google Earth and could see where we went. Speaking of out of state, it was good to see one of our snowbird members show up from Florida, Gwynne Barba. She was the first member to send correspondence to our new PO Box address! Gerry Cornwall and Kris Simon shared some issues they were having with a Dell 8400. The problem and solution will be during our "Q&A" segment at the next meeting. We gave a warm welcome to a guest, Jerry Thompson. This month Bill Powell will have a program of "My Favorite Utilities", and I will take a look at a utility that is similar to BelArc Advisor, System Information Viewer (2008 DOQ-3). All will be added to the next DOQ for April. (See Page 7)

2010
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THE FOX VALLEY PC ASSOCIATION

The Fox Valley PC Association is dedicated to the task of providing computer information to our fellow members. We are a non-profit organization. The group has been active since January 1985. The dues are \$30 per year. Our meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month (except December.)

Our regular meeting place is in the South Point Center community room located at 810 Preston Lane in Oswego, Illinois. The formal meeting starts at 9:15 A.M.

Non-member visitors are always welcome.

"USERS HELPING USERS"



Tech Tip - 254
**Shorter is Sweeter:
A Look at URL
Shorteners**

Shorter is Sweeter: A Look at URL Shorteners

by Scott Nesbitt - February 7, 2010

Once upon a time, URLs (Uniform Resource Locators, which most of us know as “Web addresses” or “links”) were short and simple. Often, they looked something like `http://www.geeks.com`. If you had a personal Web page, your URL might look something like `http://www.facebook.com/ComputerGeeks`

“...With a couple of URL shorteners I've used, 160 character URLs were whittled down to 14 characters.”

Times change, and URLs have expanded. A lot. Just do a search at the Web site of a large corporation or your favorite online retailer. What often comes back is a long and convoluted URL. And that becomes a problem if you're into microblogging. Services like Twitter limit you to 140 characters. Some long URLs exceed that limit by quite a bit. So, how can you tame those impossibly long URLs? With a Web-based service called a URL shortener.

How they work

Enter your long link or file here:

Share a File | Share on Twitter

As the name implies, a URL shortener shrinks a link – sometimes as much as 90%. With a couple of URL shorteners I've used, 160 character URLs were whittled down to 14 characters.

Obviously, you need to go to the site of a URL shortening service and paste a link in a field. The service checks its database to confirm whether or not that link already exists. If it does, the service gives you the short version that it assigned to the URL.

If the URL is not in the database, the service first adds it to the database. Then, the service runs the URL through a piece of software or a function called either a random alphanumeric generator or a sequential alphanumeric generator. Those are just fancy names for a process that creates a short string of numbers and characters that the service associates with the URL – for example, `http://bit.ly/7xCFKq`. As you can see from the example in the last sentence, the URL of the shortening service appears in the smaller link.

Note: If your inner geek wants to know about this process in more depth, check out this article.

Clicking on a shortened link triggers a short series of events. The shortened URL points to the site of the service that originally shrunk the URL. Using the name assigned to the shortened URL, the service checks its database for the corresponding longer URL. Then, using some back-end Internet trickery called redirection, sends your browser on its way to the site in question. This all happens very quickly, and you don't really notice much (if any) of a delay.

Uses and problems

The most obvious usage is with microblogging sites like Twitter. As I mentioned at the beginning of this TechTip, some long URLs exceed the length of a tweet. A good URL shortener not only lets you add a link to a tweet, but also leaves plenty of room for a comment.

Shortened URLs are just more convenient for sharing in emails, blog posts, messages on social media sites like Facebook, or even when sending a text message from your phone. In fact, shortened URLs can appear anywhere – I saw one in an ad on the Toronto subway!

If you're sharing links with someone who uses screen reading software, a shortened URL makes it easier for the reader to process. And, obviously, it's easier for the person to type into their browser. Of course, there can be problems with shortened URLs. Links on the Web are known to change or disappear. A shortened URL will always point to the original location. And not every URL shortening service allows its users to change URLs.

On top of that, it's not unknown for a shortened URL service to die. When a service dies, the shortened URLs created with it become useless.

Both spammers and malware writers have been known to use shortened URLs to drive traffic to less-than-savory sites. There are ways to avoid the potential problems of following such poisoned URLs. More about this in a few paragraphs.

What's out there?

There are literally hundreds of URL shortening services out there. URL shorteners come and go, but the ones discussed below are quite stable. If you want a list of all of the URL shorteners available on the Web, go here.

First up, one of the more popular and venerable services: TinyURL. This service has few frills. You enter the URL that you want to shrink into a text box at the site, and click the **Make TinyURL!** button.

TinyURL spits back just that. You can even create your own custom URL – instead of `http://www.tinyurl.com/3rE2t` you can name the shortened URL `http://www.tinyurl.com/mySite`.

Part Two of this article will appear in the April issue of Fox Tales.

Disclaimer: Occasionally we miss something, make a mistake, or don't cover everything on the topic but we are trying hard to give you the most unbiased and well-written information that we can.

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LiveMeeting Challenge

Jon Jackman

President - Fox Valley PC Association

As our club began to present programs at meetings that had greater bandwidth demands (remote access, VOIP, video conferencing via Skype, etc.) we also began to consider one of the benefits of our APCUG membership: the option to use LiveMeeting to conduct “webinars” for members who would be unable to attend meetings, and/or the ability to provide a recording of the program for viewing at a convenient time.

During our recent deliberations with the OPD we learned that the contract for the 133 kbps connection would expire in September, 2009. 3G wireless plans from AT&T, Verizon and Sprint were explored. The plans were still expensive and involved long term contracts. At about this time Virgin Mobile came out with a USB 3G device and a “pay as you go” plan. For \$20 we can get 250MB or 30 days of use. (Update: Now 300 MB for \$20) Our meeting location is in a coverage area, and our speed has been better with this arrangement, approaching 700 kbps download and 110 kbps upload. One of our members has a Sprint 3G/4G U301 for his business laptop. That has only been able to access at 3G speeds at our present meeting location, but seems to have better speed than the Virgin Mobile connection. What is also compelling is that we are not tied down to one location, but can conduct a meeting anywhere there is 3G coverage for either device.

Our LiveMeeting project requires some way to share the Internet access for two presenters: one presenter would administer the actual program, and the second would field any questions via a “chat” window. An early attempt to set up Internet Connection Sharing (ICS) via an older XP laptop and a regular wireless router was unsuccessful. I was told by a Virgin Mobile tech person that it was not possible to share the MC760. He said that it had to be connected directly to a computer. Not true!

We purchased a CradlePoint CTR-350 3G wireless router, and using the Virgin Mobile MC760 were able to connect and access to the Internet (via a Wi-Fi connection: “CTR-f39”.) Since the Sprint U301 was not compatible with this device, we have just upgraded to a CradlePoint MBR-1000, and we will be testing that soon.

There was recent success at a recent general meeting with the set up of a Wi-Fi access point for a program on the free remote access application, TeamViewer. There was enough bandwidth on the MC670 for our presentation, and several members were able to access the Internet via the “CTR-f39” access point.

We had read about LiveMeeting being offered to user groups who were members of APCUG. Our goal in the FVPCA LiveMeeting project is to get remote members to join us on the third Saturday each month via “webinars.” We have a rather small membership of about 40, and only 15-20 attend meetings each month. Many live too far away, some may have health problems, it could be bad weather, or any number of other reasons why they do not show up regularly in person. LiveMeeting would offer a chance to attend a virtual meeting and interact, asking questions. There is an option to record a program, and would allow us the capability to post it on our web site. However, that method would allow for viewing only, without the ability to ask questions. To promote LiveMeeting, we encouraged members to participate in the training sessions for “attendees” and then “presenters” that are scheduled on the APCUG web site.

To determine the desirability of having a LiveMeeting (LM) option, we included some questions about LM on a recent survey of our membership. Although there were only 17 respondents, 6 would use LM, 9 preferred downloading a program for viewing at their convenience. Only 2 would not be interested in either (these 2 were regular meeting attendees.) More details of the survey are posted on our web site: www.fvpc.org.

From the survey results we saw that this would be a worthwhile project, so we decided we needed to test our Internet Virgin Mobile connection to see if LM would work. There is a third phase of LM training offered by APCUG, which is to set up a special LM session just for the “movers and shakers” where a test drive can be conducted. We held such a meeting on 2/25/2010 in conjunction with a regular Executive Board meeting. The first step was to contact Don Singleton at APCUG. Don replied promptly and sent an e-mail with the details needed to conduct our scheduled LM which included a list of links and the needed codes. I shared this information with the other board members and encouraged everyone to download the latest LM client onto their laptop and test that it worked before coming to the meeting.

(Continued on Page 6)

We assembled together for the meeting, equipped with 6 laptops. To simulated remote attendee access we used the household Wi-Fi connection: a Netgear access point (WG602 v2) connected via Cat 5 to the switch on the AT&T Residential Gateway (3800HGV-B). The SSID on this connection was "JACKSPACE". Three laptops attempted to use the "JACKSPACE" network and one member used his Sprint 3G connection to connect to LM. Don Singleton connected to LM via his household Wi-Fi connection in Tulsa, OK, and helped with commentary. To simulate the connection for presenters at the general monthly meeting, we attempted to connect two of the laptops to the CradlePoint CTR-350 access point "CTR-f39" which was linked to the Internet via the Virgin Mobile 3G device.

There were some unforeseen issues. As the "JACKSPACE" access point went through the AT&T residential gateway, the laptops brought by some of the members had to navigate through the AT&T firewall. Some special settings were needed to facilitate that. One member was unsuccessful in connecting his laptop to either Wi-Fi connection. As it was his business laptop, and there was some confusion on how to enable the Wi-Fi on it, we removed it from our sampling. For some reason, we were only able to connect one laptop to "CTR-f39". In the interest of moving ahead, we decided to proceed with the one "presenter" on the CTR-350 and connected the other to "JACKSPACE".

All of the members installed NetWorx and started the "Usage Statistics" that displays a summary of sent and received data. We wanted to measure bandwidth consumption as we proceeded through our simulation. It may have been helpful to examine the real time bandwidth consumption via the "Graph" feature, but this was overlooked.

The group worked through various configurations and two PowerPoint programs were sampled. There were housekeeping issues regarding audio and video settings, as well as the previously mentioned Internet connection challenges. Few of the members had brought microphones or web cams, so we were unable to test bandwidth consumption as related to audio or video feeds with everyone.

One presenter (on "CTR-f39") used my Plantronics gaming headset. This worked very well. The second presenter (on "JACKSPACE") used a Logitech Quickcam Pro for Notebooks. The microphone on that worked well, and video was received. However, with the video turned on, the refresh of the slides in the PowerPoint programs was very slow. Once video was turned off, refresh rates were almost immediate. Another issue was the background noise. Since not all members had headsets, there was feedback from the speakers on their laptops. This would likely not be an issue in real remote environments, as they would be isolated from the presenter's voice. Don suggested that we use a policy which would allow only the speaker to have his mike enabled. If someone wanted to speak, they would enable their microphone. (Much like "keying" a mic on a radio.)

(Continued on Page 7)



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We enabled the LM recording feature when the meeting began. After 40 minutes we saved the recording and it was rendered to several files in a folder. Total size was 17 MB. We have yet to explore the process for posting the saved program on the web. Consumption for the 40 minute session was captured:

Attendee on "JACKPLACE" - Dean

65.4 MB Received, 2.23 MB Sent, 67.6 MB Total (some extra surfing suspected.) (Editor's Note: Not Me!)

Attendee on "Sprint 3/4G" - Tom

No data posted (user was doing independent web activity during simulation)

Attendee on Wi-Fi in Tulsa - Don

No data posted (user had not cleared out settings from prior gaming activity)

Presenter on "JACKPLACE" – Jon (used video for a portion of the LM session)

27.2 MB Received, 21.3 MB Sent, 48.5 MB Total

Presenter on "CTR-f39" - Bill

15.8 MB Received, 7.58 MB Sent, 23.3 MB Total

Virgin Mobile Statistics: Approx. 20 MB Total (Start at 212 MB, finishing at 192 MB)

In conclusion, it appears that the Virgin Mobile connection will support the broadcast of a LM session. The \$20 monthly option allows up to 250 MB of bandwidth consumption. This appears to be a one hour program, with the balance available to support a Wi-Fi access point for member Internet use during meetings. The speed test from Speakeasy.net on the Virgin Mobile connection averaged 570/110 kbps (received/sent). According to Jay Ferron, President of APCUG, LM needs 128 kbps with streaming voice for the presenter and attendees can get by with 64 kbps. The "CTR-f39" did meet these minimums. The demand for video has yet to be examined. Additional connection speeds by the Sprint 3G/4G device (U301) have yet to be determined, but may provide the additional bandwidth needed for video, and/or a second presenter. For now we will just use the audio feature for our LM sessions. We look forward to scheduling our first "LiveMeeting"!

President's Column (cont'd)

Looking ahead, I have been inviting other members to step forward to conduct programs on their experiences. Dave Chrestenson is our resident Photoshop guru, and as some members indicated an interest in that topic in our survey, I have asked him to begin to look into that. As Photoshop demands extensive CPU resources, it would need to be run from his desktop. Since it is not very convenient to drag it to a meeting, I suggested that he explore using TeamViewer to allow access from South Point to that machine at his home. That way the desktop would be doing all of the crunching! If anyone else would like to consider that option, we will provide the support via one of our laptops.

Our involvement in community service projects has been continuing. We have provided information for the OLG School to request additional PCs and have examined a grant that was awarded to the First Tee of Aurora & Fox River Valley youth golf program. Hopefully we will have an update at the March meeting.

So we will have an interesting meeting this month. Hope to see you there on March 20th at South Point. If you have any questions that need research, please submit them via the "?" link on our home page.

As always, feel free to bring a guest!

The following members have renewed their membership:

Dr. Anna Eng

Kathryn Farrell

Richard Goid

Allen Hergenbahn

Richard Ramme

Thank You for your continuing support!

Fox Tales

Fox Valley PC Association
P.O. Box 592
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***Please note our new P O Box
Number***



The Fox Valley PC Association Web site is:

www.fvpca.org
Courtesy of APCUG



This Month's Program will be:

My Favorite Utilities
With Bill Powell

System Information Viewer
With Jon Jackman

The Next Meeting Will Be at 9:15 A.M.

March 20, 2010

**Location: South Point Center Community Room
810 Preston Lane Oswego, Illinois**