Carl's Computer Column

Software – Applications

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A Personal Computer (PC) or any other type of general-purpose computer would be absolutely worthless without application software. The computer would sit there waiting for something to do – the Operating System (see last month's column) would be ready to manage the machine, and nothing would happen. Application Software is the stuff that makes the computer's hardware act like a sophisticated typewriter, makes it into an advanced communications tool, into a multimedia center, into a smart book of maps, into a mathematical analysis tool, into a database of information, into an on-ramp for the information superhighway, into almost anything imaginable.

Let us say we want to do a very simple task... to type a letter. We typically sit down at our computer and start any of a number of different word processing applications. The most common one of these on PCs is Microsoft Word. Also popular is Corel WordPerfect. (Historically, there used to be at least 20 different choices, but these two have captured almost the entire market. And, not surprisingly, they have become quite similar.) We type our letter, save it to disk, and print it out.

Maybe part of our letter will include driving directions. We start another piece of software to aid us in describing the trip. There are two very popular mapping software applications: Delorme Street Atlas USA and Microsoft Streets and Trips. (You can also get maps from MapQuest's Internet site.)

After writing the letter we decide it is time to balance our checkbook. We can use a general-purpose spreadsheet such as Microsoft Excel or Corel Quattro, or, more likely, we will use Intuit Quicken (personal finance) or QuickBooks (business finance) or Microsoft Money (personal finance). And, with tax season soon upon us, we might use Intuit Turbo Tax, H & R Block TaxCut, or any number of other products. (Or we could just go to the IRS Internet site for tax forms, rules, and interpretations.)

After working on our taxes of a while we decide it's time to play a game. There are an amazing number of different games that can be purchased or accessed for free. There are even a few that come free with Windows. Games generally come in a few basic flavors: educational games for kids, role playing games (violent and non-violent), arcade games, card games, board games, games of chance, simulation games, word games…

We remember the photographs we took with the digital camera last week. They are still in the camera! We stop the game and upload the pictures from the camera to the computer. (This is often done with specialized software from the camera manufacturer, but may be accomplished using a number of different techniques.) Once the photographs are stored on the computer, we can use software to crop it, get rid of redeye, and balance the color and brightness. We can use software to create a slide show or email a photo to grandma. We can even use software to remove an undesired person from a photo and insert the new beau instead. The most popular software to process photographs is made by Adobe, but, of course, Microsoft has a photo processor too. And there are many different offerings available from many different vendors.

After we finish processing the photographs we decide to write them out to a CD. We use either Roxio EZ CD Creator or Nero Burn (or a number of other packages). We can make one copy or multiple copies of the CD.

Finally, we want to relax and listen to some music. We pop an audio (music) CD into our computer, kick back, and listen to the CD using Microsoft Windows Media Player.

I have only scratched the surface of what software is available for Personal Computers. There are many, many, many more choices!

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"He who every morning plans the transactions of the day, and follows out the plan, carries a thread that will guide him through the labyrinth of the most busy life." *Victor Hugo*