

Radio Days – 2013-02-02

Discussion - The Little Things

During the week I had the privilege of helping an artist who was about to return to the work force and needed to learn some of the little tips which can make life so much easier for those who, like so many of my clients, have been largely self-taught. Watching him learn helped me see, once again, just how many little things people miss out on when they don't have someone to help them learn the smarter way of doing various tasks.

Here is a list of some of the things that I learnt during my time with my artist client.

Using Modifier Keys

There are four modifier keys on the modern computer keyboard. This number has crept up from the one modifier key on the typewriter keyboard of yesteryear. These four modifier keys are, in order:

- Shift
- Ctrl (or Control)
- Windows
- Alt (or Alternate)

I have seen many people vainly try to get a modifier key to work by attempting to press both the modifier key and the key to be modified at exactly the same time so that the modifier key works on the other key. This is exactly the wrong way to go about it.

A more useful way of using these modifier keys is to hold the modifier key and, while keeping the modifier key pressed, press then release the key to be modified, then release the modifier key. This is the fastest and most accurate way of typing commands like *Alt + Tab* to switch between running programs.

The Caps-Lock Key

Many people use the caps-lock key to type a single capital letter. This means that they press the caps-lock key to turn capitals on, press the key for the letter which they need capitalised then press the caps-lock key to turn capitals off.

This, to my way of thinking, is too much.

The more professional way is to hold the shift key down then press and release the letter key. Now you can release the shift key. Also, if you check, you will notice that there are two shift keys, so you can press the shift key on the opposite side to the letter key so that you are using both your hands to type. This, with practice, will help you become a better typist.

Programs on The Taskbar

The taskbar is the bar running along the bottom of your computer's screen. This shows a lot of useful information like the time as well as a list of all your running programs. It is also the place which you can use to hold the programs which you use most often so that you can start them with just one click.

To place a program on the taskbar you start the program then, when it is running, right-click the program's icon on the task bar then left-click on *Pin this program to taskbar*. Removing a program from the taskbar is equally easy: right-click the program's icon again then left-click on *Unpin this program from taskbar*.

Once you have a program pinned on the taskbar you can move their icons around so that they are in the order which suits your needs. I have all my internet programs (browsers and email) next to each other, all my image editing programs next to each other and all my writing programs (Word, Excel and Publisher) next to each other. How you arrange your icons is up to you. This is why they are called *personal computers*.

Sending Bulk Emails

One of the tasks that my client was expected to be able to perform was to send bulk emails. This means that you send the same email to a number of people. This is a task which I do when I travel so that I can send an email containing my latest photographs to all those who want to see what I have been up to.

The easy way is to create a group entry in the address list in your email program, then add to the group entry the names and email addresses of the people to whom you want to send the email. This way you can send the one email to as many people as you want. It is impersonal, and also runs the risk that you can give out everybody's email address to everybody else in the address list unless you use the *BCC* feature of your email program.

To use the *BCC* (Blind Carbon Copy) feature of your email program you will have to send the email to yourself then add the group address to the *BCC* list. This gives each recipient the privacy which most of us would like.

There is, however, a better and more personal way to send the same email to a number of people and that is using the mail (or email) merge feature of your word processing program.

Mail Merge & Email Merge

In Word you start an mail (or email) merge by clicking on the *Mailings* tab then following the steps in the wizard for creating a mail (or email) merge document together with a separate document containing the names and addresses of the recipients.

This way you send a personally-addressed email to each person while only typing the email once. The way to do this is to use the fields containing each person's name in the name and address list rather than adding the names themselves. The final step is to merge the emails, inserting each name (and any other details) into the finished email. This sends a personal email to each of your recipients.

This is much the best way to send personal emails in bulk.

Widening Columns

Many programs have columns containing all sorts of details. Examples of these programs are Excel and your email program. Often the widths of the columns are not what you want so there is an easy way to change the width of each of the columns.

To change the width of a column you place the mouse pointer over the vertical line between the headings of the columns. Which vertical line? The vertical line to the right of the column whose width you want to change. The mouse pointer will change to a vertical line crossed by a double-headed arrow. Then you hold your left mouse button down while you drag your mouse left or right to get the correct column width.

It really is as easy as this!

In many programs you can sort a list by one of the columns. This is easy to do: just click on the name of the column that you want to sort by. For example, if you want your emails sorted with the most recent on top you click on the column heading *Received*. This will sort your emails by the date received. If the oldest ones are on top just click on *Received* again to reverse the sort order.

Accented Letters as in Resumé

To add an accent to a letter as in the heading of this section you type the accent just before the letter which is to display the accent. In this case the acute accent is wanted. To create the accent just hold the control key down then press the accent: so *Ctrl + '* . The next step is to type the wanted letter: so *e*. This produces the required accented letter: *é*.

Like so many things, this is easy when you know how.

The only problem with creating an accented e at the end of resumé is that Word is showing its illiteracy by trying to get you to place an accent on both copies of the letter e: this is not the way that the French write the word so I consider it to be illiterate. The creators of Word should be ashamed of themselves!

Running More Than One Program

There are many people who will not run more than one program at a time. I'm not sure why this is so but I often see my clients closing one program so that they can open another. The event that really amazed me was when a client wanted to copy a paragraph from one Word document to another. These were the steps followed:

- Close Word
- Open Word
- Open the document containing the paragraph to be copied
- Select the paragraph to be copied then copy it to the clipboard
- Close Word
- Open Word
- Open the first document again
- Go to the insertion point for the copied paragraph
- Copy the paragraph

Because you already have Word open, a better way to do this, in fewer steps and taking less time, is:

- Open the document containing the paragraph to be copied
- Select the paragraph to be copied then copy it to the clipboard
- Close the second document
- Go to the insertion point for the copied paragraph
- Copy the paragraph

This takes much less time because you do not have to open and close Word so many times. It is also easier to remember where you are because the main document is open all the time.

Please remember that many programs can have multiple documents open at the same time. This is why there is a special keystroke sequence for switching between the open documents within a single program: *Ctrl + Tab*. This is analogous to the keystrokes for switching between running programs: *Alt + Tab*.

Further Information

Nothing this week.