

THE PRINTER

Chesapeake PC Users Group, Inc.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Spring, Pollen and Rain are in the air...

Now that the weather is warming, and the days are getting longer, folks should be more comfortable making it to a meeting. And there are a lot of great meetings that will be taking place over the next two months, until our break.

May 14 – GPS

We will have a corporate representative from one of the major companies who sell GPS equipment. We will probably start this meeting outside in the parking lot of the school, and then move back inside. This is taking advantage of the longer days, and warmer weather. Kris Johnson will be the host for this meeting, and she will be providing more details as the time draws near.

June 4 – Hard Disc Drives - “Partitioning, Backing Up and Maintaining Your Hard Drive” presented by Dave Mauriello

This is one of the most popular topics for folks with questions. This should be a very interesting topic and a lot of information will be gained by attending this meeting.

September 10 – Linux! Linux! Linux! Presented by Karl Richmond

Karl Richmond will demonstrate the latest Linux system. There will be a raffle at this meeting for a refurbished computer fully equipped with the Linux operating system.

As you can see, there is a lot going on, and these are only the main topics. There will be many short

Michael

The Switch to Digital TV

by

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The switch to digital is on the way. On February 17, 2009, U.S. broadcast stations, who are currently broadcasting in both analog and digital, will turn off their analog signals and will transmit only in digital. What's this mean to you?

Most consumers who get their television from a cable or satellite provider won't notice a difference. Cable and satellite companies are not required to make the transition, so they can continue to broadcast in both analog and digital. Eventually, though, if your cable company moves to all digital,

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Shortcuts

by

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Why do some icons on your desktop have a little white arrow embedded in the picture?

These are shortcuts (sometimes called links). They are small files that represent and "point to" the real thing. When you double-click on a shortcut icon, Windows reads the location of the file to open from within the shortcut file, then opens the target file. Shortcuts are, in the lingo of computer programmers, symbolic links to actual files. They don't contain any of the file's information - they just point to it. In real terms: if Peoria, Illinois was a file, then its shortcut would be the map telling you how to get there.

Why do we use shortcuts? Why not just put the real, actual file on your desktop? There are several reasons. First, since a shortcut does not contain any of the target file's information, it can be deleted without damaging the file it points to. Therefore, placing shortcuts on the desktop (or in any directory) is safer. Accidental deletion of these links will not affect anything other than you may lose track of where your file was!

The other reason is that you can have many shortcuts and place them anywhere you might need quick access to your file. For example, when we give away computers, we organize the software links in various folders on the desktop. There's a folder for Educational software and Game software links, and for the software that is both Educational and Fun, we put links to the same program in both the Educational and Game folders. You can rename shortcuts to anything you want, and it won't affect the real name of the file they point to.

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Zune 8 Review

by

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Thanks to good friends in the Microsoft Windows group in Redmond, I received a shiny new, red 8 GB Zune during CES. It has a beautifully engraved "www.zuneusergroup.com" (my site) on the back. Here is my assessment.

Packaging

The compact packaging of the 4/8 GB Zune does not contain a software CD like the original Zune. You get a manual, a USB cable and a set of earphones. The box comes in a soft pouch and could be mistaken for a perfume box.

Setting Up

You first set up the Zune software on the PC by going to www.zune.net/setup. You get to choose between the "full Zune experience" and simply downloading the software. I already had the latest software on account of my old Zune 30, so I explored the Zune.net site.

There you set up a Zune account, if you don't have one. This enables you to give your Zune a name and buy music from the Zune Marketplace, an online music store. You can customize your Zune at zuneoriginals.net.

The Zune 8 refuses to work until you have installed the Zune software on the PC and connected the player at least once. When you connect the device to the PC, it proceeds to update the firmware. This was painless.

Software

The Zune software is easy to use and is intuitive. It was able to find all my music, video and images

and sync them to the player. I can also sync my podcast subscriptions automatically. Unless it was a coincidence, the software showed both my Zunes in their correct colours - a nice touch.

Controls

The main input on the player is the Zune Pad, a rounded rectangular touch-sensitive button. You change the volume and select options by rubbing your thumb from top to bottom or left to right. The default touch sensitivity was fine for me, unlike the over-sensitive controls of the original Creative Zen, which tended to overshoot the desired selection.

Display

The tiny 4.5 cm (1.8-inch) scratch-resistant, glass-covered screen is watchable for short music videos that have close-ups of performers but it would not be fun to watch a full-length movie on this model. During music playback, the backlight disappears and helps to conserve battery life.

The USB cable acts as the media conduit to and from the PC and also charges the battery. There is a small, recessed set of holes to take a wrist strap, which is not supplied.

FM Radio

The FM radio displays RBDS data, so you can see the name of the radio station and the song being played. You cannot record a radio program, as you can on some Creative units. The tuner picked up all my local stations.

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AutoMatting™ – Unique Digital Matts ... Extraordinaire

From Image Trends Inc. – The Science of Imaging

by

Neil Longmuir, a member of the Winnipeg PC User Group Inc., Canada

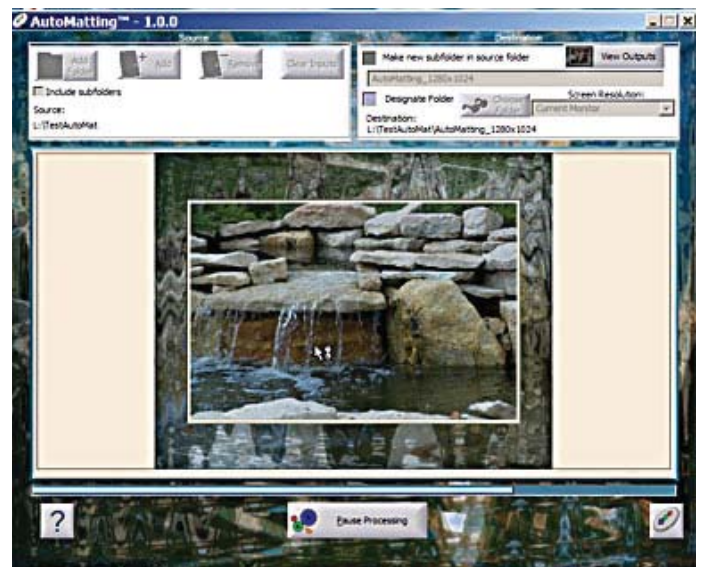
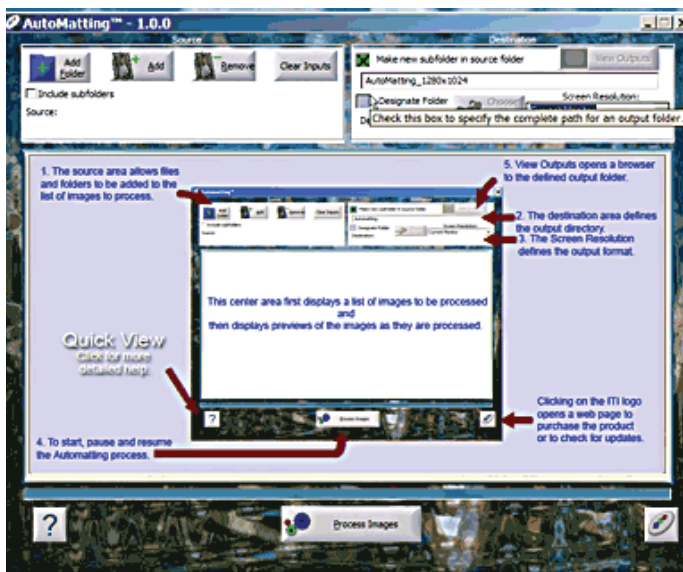
www.wpcusrgrp.org

[longmur\(at\)ms.umanitoba.ca](mailto:longmur(at)ms.umanitoba.ca)

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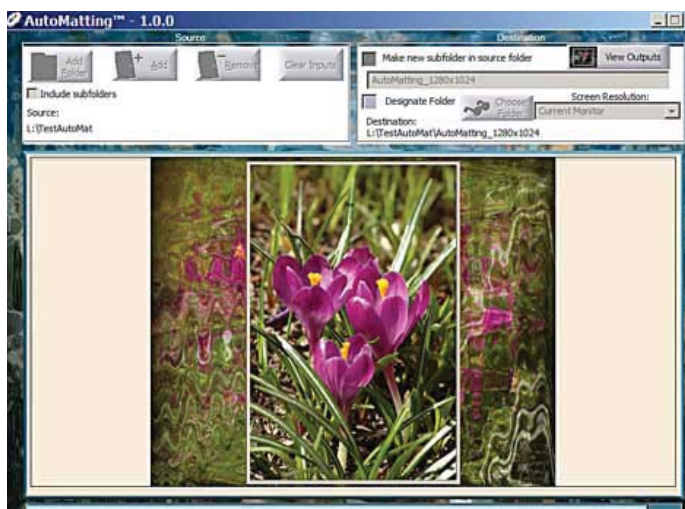
“AutoMatting automatically creates a unique matt for each image which is designed to make the photographer's work more attractive and appealing to the customer in a slide show or viewing mode.” AutoMatting is a digital matting software program that creates a unique matt for each image. The traditional way to display photographs, was to mount the photograph to a matt board, and fit that mounted photograph into a matt opening cut to the size of the photograph. Matting a photograph helps separate the photograph from the surrounding background. Matting a photograph gives each photograph it's own visual unique and attractive look.

This approach is fine if there are only a few pictures, but what if there are a large number of images. One solution is to create a slide show. Creating a slide show takes time to create. One major problem with a typical computer monitor or TV display is that the **aspect ratio** of the monitor or TV is **not** the same as the standard typical 3x2 aspect ratio of the images. Then, when we mix portrait (vertical) images with landscape (horizontal) images the images are not the same size. Portrait images are smaller than landscape images and have vertical black bars on each side. Landscape images have smaller black bars on the top and bottom. The bottom line is that you want your images to be visually more attractive to the viewer.



The way images are shown to customers, friends or family tends to be a bit boring. A set of prints is made from a roll of film or digital images. The pictures would be taken out of the photo lab envelope and passed around to customers, friends and family to look at.

The solution to making the images more attractive is to use AutoMatting to create a unique matte for each image in a folder and resize that image to the aspect ratio of **any monitor or TV screen**.



Conclusions

Automatting is a perfect example of a software application that was “thinking outside the box.” This “New Wave” thinking application has given **all** end users whether they are professional photographers or ordinary every day photographers a great way to show their images to everyone on whatever display medium.

This is a terrific product. AutoMatting is available for a free “try before you buy” download. Visit www.imagetrendsinc.com and download the trial version for yourself. The cost to purchase this program is \$49.95 and is available for both the Windows and MAC platforms. This is a very impressive innovative product that works great for a new look to your images.

Neil's rating (***** – five stars)

I would also like to thank the kind folks at Image Trends Inc. for providing me with a copy of the AutoMatting for review.

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Also, if there are sub-folders under the main folder, those sub-folders can be included by checking the included sub-folders in the upper left corner. Once the images to be processed are selected, press Process Images at the bottom of the screen.

AutoMatting operates in a batch mode and creates a sub-folder of images using the colors and patterns in the original image plus a unique beveled edge border. The final result is an image that looks great on the display medium with no black bars appearing on the display. Figure 1 shows basic AutoMatting screen. Figure 2 shows the unique matting of a landscape image while Figure 3 shows the unique matting of a portrait image. Note in both cases there are **no** black bars around either image.

How to Forward Email

by

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Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

You should be ashamed of yourself. You have just exposed everyone on your mailing list plus any people who received the email ahead of you to unending streams of spam, spyware, viruses, and

other assorted electronic junk and mischief that hackers are prone to these days. What you have done is

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How to Forward Email - cont'd

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prove conclusively that you don't have a clue about the proper way to forward email. Your license to compute should be revoked immediately.

As messages get forwarded in this way they move along the internet, and the list of email addresses embedded in the note gets longer and longer. All it takes is for just one of these folks to get a virus or some other kind of malware, and everyone who has their email address in that list can be infected.

Anyone can take those email addresses, sell them or send out their own junk mail. Assuming you are a mature responsible adult, you most likely would not want to harm anyone, even inadvertently. What does a conscientious person do to stop or better yet, prevent damage?

When you click the "Forward" button you enter the edit mode of your email client. Before you do anything else DELETE all the other email addresses appearing at the top of the message. Let me repeat. DELETE them by highlighting them and THEN pressing the Delete button on your keyboard. It doesn't take long. When you've finished, delete any other junk that isn't actually part of the message, such as information about the original sender. Delete anything that is not part of what you want to send.

If you're sending the message to more than one person, do not use the To: or Cc: fields for adding email addresses. Always, always use the BCC: (blind carbon copy) field for listing the email addresses. The people receiving the message will see only their own address.

Some email clients don't automatically show the blind carbon copy option. If that's the case, click on where it says To: and your address list will appear. Highlight the email address and choose the BCC: option. It's not much effort, and it eliminates the possibility of someone using the email addresses

inappropriately. When you send using the blind carbon copy, everyone receiving the message will see "Undisclosed Recipients" in the heading information.

If your email client requires that something be in the To: field, send the message to yourself and use the BCC: field for everyone else.

Remove any FW in the subject line. Better yet, clean up the subject line completely by fixing any spelling or grammatical mistakes. Why let someone else's errors appear as your own?

Sometimes you will receive an email that is a petition. It states a position and directs you to add your name, address, and sometimes other information. Then you're supposed to send it to as many people as possible. If enough people do this, an email can contain hundreds if not thousands of names and addresses.

The longer the list gets the more valuable it becomes to a spammer or hacker because the names and email addresses are valid. If you really want to support the idea behind the petition, a personal letter to the eventual recipient carries a lot more weight than a piece of paper with a long list of names. When you think about it, lists like these can be generated from telephone books. Do you really think that a member of congress is going to pay attention to something that could be so easily faked?

Sometimes these petitions come with statements or warnings that the emails are being traced. Don't believe it. While technology is constantly improving, there is still no way to trace emails through the internet.

One kind of really annoying email is the one that promises that something wonderful is going to hap-

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How to Forward Email - cont'd

pen, but only if I forward the message to at least ten people in the next ten minutes. However, if I fail to do so, some unspeakable evil will surely befall me. I always fail to do so, and nothing bad has happened yet, but I wonder if this could be the reason I haven't won the lottery.

Before forwarding some version of an Amber Alert, take a little time to check out the story behind the message. Most of these messages have been circulating around the internet for years. Some of them have been around for a decade. Almost all of them are much less than they seem.

Some sites that will help:

www.hoaxbusters.com

http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/internet/a/current_netlore.htm

<http://ciac.llnl.gov/ciac/bulletins/h-05.shtml>

<http://www.snopes.com/snopes.asp>

<http://www.vmyths.com/>

You may not be able to stop this stuff on your own, but you can stop contributing to it.

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Converting CD-based Music to Compressed Audio Files

by

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I spent the equivalent of two or three days in January, working a few minutes at a time, converting all of our CDs to MP3 format. I had been dreading this project, thinking that it would take too much time, but it really was not that bad and the results are going to be worth it.

A few years ago, I purchased a 400-CD jukebox type CD player. This device does have the capability of displaying a short line containing the album's title, using a standard PC keyboard, but the process is complicated with problems. It's easy to get CDs in the wrong slot and of course, you can only play them in the room where you've physically situated the jukebox unit.

In the past few years, we've been getting away from the album and becoming more focused on individual

songs. This lamentable trend has been fueled by the 99 cent price point associated with downloading music by the song. Artists and producers alike have vilified this process, claiming that the artistic sum worth of songs on an album is greater than the tunes taken as individual songs.

I can buy into this sadness, to a point. I remember the smell of vinyl LPs, unwrapping the cellophane outer wrap, and the incredible detail the producers went into in packing artistic value into the finished product, right down to the order the songs appear on the album. These days, you just Google the album or artist title and download the Jpeg, that's about it. For a fee, a program called iTunes will do this for you automatically.

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Converting CD-based Music - cont'd

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So why would a guy spend the time to rip (compress) the tracks of a CD or other ancient audio product to MP3 files? There are a few good reasons to do this.

For one thing, the devices that play music have become decentralized. What I mean by that is if you can imagine your computer as the "record player," then it's not much of a stretch to think of playing music anywhere in the house, car or work-place.

Doing this in the past meant locating the song you want (which may or may not be an easy task), finding the CD (or tape, or LP) it's recorded on, and hoping that it's not damaged.

Then once you've got it, you carry it to where ever you want to hear it. For me, this was often the car, and a car is a great place to scratch or otherwise ruin a CD, and I've also known friends whose entire CD collections have been stolen from vehicles. Physically moving music and other files from player to player is sometimes humorously referred to as "Sneaker Net".

But once you begin to think of your songs and other media in terms of compressed MP3 files, they become at once more searchable, more replaceable, and more portable.

Compressed audio files, though the wonder of a shared internet database called Gracenote (formerly CDDb), contain informational tidbits that can searched. On the other hand, ordinary music tracks on a Compact Disc have no information associated with them at all, not even the name of the song. By converting CD-ROM music to MP3 files, your database can pull up a playlist for you using information encoded in the MP3 file. Most ripping software (such as C-Dex, available at <http://cdexos>.

sourceforge.net/) will query the CDDb so that you won't have to manually type in the names of the songs or the name of the CD.

Compressed audio files can be stored on any hard drive in the house and can be made available on inexpensive MP3 players, iPods, and Multimedia computers that attach directly to your sound system. There is usually no special hardware to buy - you can just feed the stereo output from your computer's sound card to the audio input on your TV or stereo amplifier.

Most of the MP3 player devices out there do not require a lot in the way of software - you generally plug them into a computer, they assign themselves a drive letter, and you can just copy your songs to the devices as if they were another hard drive. There are even self-contained wireless hard drives (see: <http://www.apple.com/airportexpress>) that will broadcast your music wirelessly to any networked computer in the house!

Compressed audio files cannot get scratched like CDs do, and if your iPod or MP3 player is stolen or accidentally formatted (happens all the time!), or even if your entire CD collection is stolen, it's no longer the end of the world. You just re-copy the files back to another device and you're good to go.

Though not exactly small, compressed audio files do lend themselves much better to e-mail. A typical MP3 music file is around 3 to 6 megabytes, which is just under the threshold of being too large to send to someone using dial-up internet. If both ends of the connection have high-speed, it's no problem at all, as this amount of data can be transmitted by most DSL and cable internet services in about 10 or 20 seconds. The MP3 compressed format is "lossy" in the sense that some of the music data is lost during compression, compared to the original recording,

Converting CD-based Music - cont'd

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however I've never been able to tell the difference between a compressed song and a non-compressed track on a CD. The data you lose is not data that manifests as part of the music.

By the way, the songs as recorded on CDs you buy are very large - 50 to 80 megabytes would not be uncommon. For those of you audiophiles who need compression but don't want any data loss, consider using the FLAC mode of compression (See <http://flac.sourceforge.net> for information). FLAC stands for "Free Lossless Audio Codec"

So, there are a host of reasons why we would want to compress our audio collection, but what is the downside? The only problem I can think of is that most automotive and older CD players cannot recognize the MP3 or any computer generated music format. Some of the newer CD players can, but it's not something that people generally know. So, for example, when I transferred an audio book selection to CD for my wife, she found that the CD player in her car refused to play the media, even though her car is not that old. My car, a Chevy Monte Carlo, played the disk without a problem even though it's an older car than hers. So in this situation you may want to take advantage of software that does the reverse of ripping - it would take MP3 files and lay them down on the CD as if they were ordinary Audio CD tracks. iTunes and many CD-writing utilities such as Nero will do this for you.

Now does anyone wanna buy a used 400-CD jukebox player?

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Shortcuts - cont'd

Shortcuts are also portable! If I know for sure that a program will be in a certain place on nearly every PC, I can e-mail a link to someone and tell them to place it on their desktop. Double-clicking on it should open that file on my recipient's PC! E-mailing a link is much more of a sure bet than e-mailing an executable file—because most e-mail servers just won't allow executables (files ending in .EXE) to be sent!

How does one create a link? The best way is to find the file you want the link to refer to, then do a single right-click on it. This brings up a context menu where

you can create the shortcut. Once the shortcut is created you can move it to any directory or to the desktop.

For creating desktop links, Windows provides a shortcut wizard that allows you to create a shortcut for any file type including a web page or another folder. From anywhere on the desktop, right click and select 'New' and then 'Shortcut' to activate this wizard.

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Digital TV - cont'd

you will not be able to get the cable straight from the wall, but will need a box from your cable company. Most cable customers already have a cable television box, anyway. Don't worry about that now, your cable company will notify you, if and when that happens. And it may be years down the road.

The people who will be most affected by the transition to digital are those who get their television "over the air" with rabbit ears or an antenna in the attic or on the roof. Older analog televisions will not be able to pick up the digital signal. You don't, however, have to go out and buy a new TV. You simply will need to add a digital-to-analog converter box to your television. These boxes are already available in stores like Wal-Mart, Best Buy, Circuit City, RadioShack, and Target. They will be priced between \$40 and \$70.

Luckily for those with rabbit ears and old televisions, the government has created a \$1.5 billion coupon program to subsidize the cost of the converter boxes. This program is being overseen by the National Telecommunication and Information Administration agency. Each household, regardless of how they receive their television, is eligible to receive two \$40 coupons. The coupons are available now. As I write this, over 5 million coupons have already been requested.

To get a coupon you can apply online at www.dtv2009.gov or call the 24-hour hot line, 888-DTV-2009 (888-388-2009). You can also mail a coupon application to P.O. Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208-2000. The program itself expires on March 31, 2009. The government is trying to get everyone ready as quickly as possible, so be aware that the coupons expire three months after they are mailed to you. Since many television stations are already broadcasting in digital, you can use the converter box immediately.

If you are still asking why we are doing this, the official government explanation is that switching to digital TV will free up parts of the valuable broadcast spectrum for public safety communications such as police, fire departments, and rescue squads. The bigger reason, though, is that some of the spectrum will be auctioned to companies for advanced wireless services. This, of course, will be very lucrative for the US Government.

It may also be a good thing for consumers, as well. With the digital converter box, even your old analog television may give you a better picture. You will also be able to see more channels as some broadcasters will choose to multicast programs. Multicasting means that a broadcaster can split up its signal into several channels, each with a different set of programs. This type of programming is only available with digital broadcasting.

One thing to remember is that digital television is not high-definition television. Although high-def TVs will display digital television, you do not need a high-def TV just because of this transition. Digital broadcast television includes both Standard Definition (SD) and High Definition (HD) formats. You can watch both standard definition and high definition programming on an analog TV hooked to a digital-to-analog converter box, but the high definition won't give you the full high definition quality that you would receive on a high definition television.

If you have a newer TV that you purchased in the last few years, it may already support digital. Look at the markings on the television to find out if it has a digital tuner built-in. Words like "Digital Tuner or Receiver", "DTV", or "HDTV" indicate that it will display the digital programming. However, if your television says "HDTV Monitor", "Digital

Digital TV - cont'd

Ready” or “HDTV Ready”, you may still need a converter box.

If you need more information on the move to digital television, check out the Federal Communication Commission’s DTV Web site at www.dtv.gov. They have done a good job explaining everything you need to know.

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Zune 8 Review - cont'd

Sound Quality

The sound quality is fine too, just like the original Zune 30. There is a good selection of pre-loaded media. The supplied earphones do a basic job, but as with all players, you need to buy high-quality headphones to get optimum sound. There isn't an equalizer (EQ) control or preset, so you cannot customize the sound to your liking. This option is present on the old Zune 30, so its omission seems to be a deliberate decision. Why hobble sound quality?

Sharing

The latest 2.3 (1145) firmware is common to all models and renames “Community” to “Social”. You can share a song by sending it to a nearby Zune (that is turned on and has wireless enabled). The other Zune has to accept it and will get three plays (the three days limitation has been removed).

Other Zune models

There is a new 80 GB model (only black) that works just like the 4/8 GB versions except that it contains a hard drive, not Flash memory and has a larger screen. The 4/8 GB models come in pink, red, green and black.

Conclusion

The Zune 8 is light, easy-to-use, has a good battery life, feature set, and great sound quality. The software is a testimonial to Microsoft as a leading software company. In conclusion, the 8 GB Zune is a fine multimedia player and you will not regret buying it (about \$185 online). Well done, Microsoft.

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The Next Regular Meeting will be at
The Severn River Middle School

Wednesday
May 14th, 2008

Meeting will be held in the large meeting room.
It starts at 7:00 P.M. with club business
and a short discussion period.

Presentation on GPS Devices

How to Find: Severn River Middle School

SRMS is close to the Arnold, MD campus of the Anne Arundel Community College. From Annapolis and parts south, take Rte 2 (Ritchie Highway) north about 3 miles from the intersection of Rt. 50, **turn right on College Parkway**. At the first light, turn left on Peninsula Farm Road. (Of course, if you are coming from points North, you would turn left on to College Parkway) about a half-mile down the road the large SRMS school building, set back off a large two level parking lot, will be visible on your right. Park here and go to the main entrance. Signs will be posted to direct you to the **Large Group Room** where we will be meeting.

How to find: The Technology SIG, A ChPCUG
Special Interest Group**

The meetings are held at the SRMS in the Library.



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FIRST CLASS

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Note: The date above your name on the mailing label is the expiration date of your membership. Contact the Membership Chairman (page 2, column 2) to update.

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