

Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

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Well, the poor little floppy disk is about to disappear from sight and mind. The computer manufacturers stopped putting floppy disk drives in laptops several years ago and now they're not being installed on desktop systems unless requested. For those of you who have some floppy disks the contain information you need to retain, all is not lost. For \$20 or \$30 you can purchase an external USB floppy drive. If you have Windows XP or Windows Vista, just plug it in and it works. Now you can transfer information from floppy disks to your hard drive and then copy it to a CD or DVD. Your information will be available until advances in technology make the optical drive obsolete. Just as the compact disc, digital camera, and the ability to capture music and movies on the computer made the floppy disk obsolete, new inventions and technologies will make the CD and DVD obsolete. Here's an example that illustrates the inability of the floppy disk to compete in today's digital world. You have a 5 megapixel (MP) camera set to take photos at the highest resolution and highest quality. A floppy disk would probably not hold one photo. The storage capacity of the floppy disk is 1.44 megabytes (MB) and the file size of that 5 MP photo could easily be in the range of 1.5 MB to 1.7 MB. There are a number of nice 10 MP and 12 MP cameras on the market for around \$300. The file size of the photos taken by these cameras could easily exceed 3 MB. The storage capacity of the CD-R disc is 700 MB. If you divide 700 by 3 and subtract a little for disc management you get a ball park figure of 225. That means if you go on vacation and take more than 225 photos with your new 12 MP camera you will not be able to copy all of them to one CD-R disc. It looks like the CD-R disc is about to join the floppy disk, doesn't it? There are a couple of removable storage devices that can be use like the floppy disk. First, there is the USB flash drive (the generis name). Plug this device in any USB port on a Windows XP or Windows Vista computer and it works just like the floppy disk. You can copy information to the drive, you can copy information from the drive. It's great for moving information from one computer to another. Here's something else you can do with the flash drive. Download a program from the Internet using a computer that has a high speed Internet connection. Transfer the program to a flash drive. Use the flash drive to load the program on a computer that does not have access to a high speed Internet connection. USB flash drives can be purchased on the Internet or at any retail store that sells computers. The storage capacity ranges from 512 MB to 16 GB and cost from about \$12 to \$100. The second storage device you might want to consider is that little memory card you use in your digital camera. If your computer has the flash media reader slots (the memory card slots on the front) or you have a USB card reader, you can use any of the memory cards normally used in a digital camera as a

removable storage device. The three most popular types are Secure Digital (SD), XD-Picture Card (xD), and the Memory Stick (MS). They work just like a USB flash drive or the old floppy disk. Some folks claim they're better than a USB flash drive because they're more reliable, more durable, and have longer longevity. A word of caution about the SD card. There is a new generation of SD card called SD HC that is designed to store up to 32 GB of data. In order to use this card your device must adhere to the SD 2.00 specification (the old specification is SD 1.00). There are compatibility issues with some of the other cards, so do your homework before you purchase a memory card for that new camera or to use as a removable storage device on your computer. You might think that archiving your important information to a USB flash drive or one of the little memory cards is a good idea. Consider this, these are electronic devices. As with any electronic device (light bulb, coffee pot, or computer), it worked yesterday but it won't work today. So, we're back to the CD-R and the DVD disc. These are currently your best choice for long term data storage.

Would you like to easily access your favorite web pages when you're on vacation and away from your computer? All you need is a \$10 USB flash drive. Plug the flash drive in to any USB port on a Windows XP or Windows Vista computer and it will be recognized and installed by the operating system. Now, locate your Favorites folder on the hard drive. For Windows Vista, double-click your personal file folder on the desktop. For Windows XP, right-click the Start button and select Explore. In the left panel, find your personal account folder and click it to display the contents in the right panel (your Favorites folder will be there). The remaining procedures are the same for both operating systems. Locate the USB flash drive in the left panel. In the right panel, place your mouse pointer on your Favorites folder, hold down the right mouse button and move the mouse pointer to the USB flash drive entry in the left panel. When you see the USB flash drive entry highlight, release the right mouse button and select, Copy Here. You now have a link for all your favorite web pages on your USB flash drive. You can plug your flash drive in to any Windows XP or Windows Vista computer, open the Favorites folder, and click on the entry for your favorite web page.

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We've scheduled another workshop on Tuesday, January 20th, 10:00 a.m. to noon. This workshop will be on file management and you can use either a Windows XP or Windows Vista computer. The fee is \$6 for club members. If you like the workshop idea let us know what subjects, programs, or tasks you would like to have offered. We will try to schedule a workshop every other month as long as interest remains high, so let us know what you think.

I don't like to endorse computer programs because everyone has their personal criteria regarding what makes a good program. If you're in to multimedia let me suggest you take a look at *Roxio Creator 2009*. This program covers music, digital photos, camcorder video, creating movies, file conversion, transferring media to a portable device, making calendars and greeting cards, and burning CD and DVD discs that can be played on your computer or your DVD player. The retail price is \$99.99 but has been offered on sale plus rebates for \$50.00.

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? Stop by one of the Open House Help Clinics we have at the John Ruehle Center and see if we can solve your problem. These clinics are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of the month. The clinics are open to the public so you can invite a friend or neighbor. There has been a significant increase in the number of people taking advantage of this service. If everyone arrives during the first hour there will probably be a wait.