

User Friendly

LACS
**A Computer and
Technology
User Group**

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Watch your email for APCUG workshops and other upcoming events.



**LACS IS A MEMBER OF
APCUG**

**An International
Association of Technology
and Computer User Groups**

www.apcug2.org

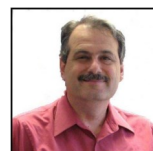
www.facebook.com/APCUG

www.X.com/apcug (Twitter)

APRIL 9, 2024 GENERAL MEETING

Meeting Time: 7:00 to 9:00 PM — via Zoom
Socializing and Questions & Answers: 6:30

Speaker: Mark Schulman, APCUG Speakers Bureau, IT expert, and a member of the Central Florida Computer Society



1. Preserving Digital Photographs: Digital photos ought to last forever. Digital photos don't fade with time and can protect against natural disasters like fire and floods. That's the theory, anyway. And yet, if you're one of the millions of people with a digital camera, the chances of your great-grandchildren ever seeing your digital photos are very slim. Find out why the odds are stacked against you and what you can do to increase the chances that your family historian 200 years from now will be able to enjoy the photos you are taking now.

2. Backup Tips: Eventually every hard drive fails, and often all of your photos, documents, and video — everything! — are lost. Backups are the only defense against serious data loss, yet most people don't bother. So come and discover essential strategies to be sure your data is safe with the least amount of trouble

Meet Our Presenter

Mark Schulman has been a computer instructor, software designer, and small business owner. He did computer consulting for major corporations, worked on large software development projects, and taught computer and programming courses. He wrote or co-wrote seven computer books, all published by Que Corporation.

Mark is the IT manager for a group of family practice physicians. and has been a space enthusiast all his life. He gave us a great program on "Computers to the Moon" in May 2023.

LACS members on the PC groups.IO list will receive the Zoom link to this meeting before or on **April 7**.

Guests may ask for the link by emailing Leah Clark at leahjc@sbcglobal.net before or on **April 7**.

See more information about LACS at www.lacspc.org.



FROM YOUR PRESIDENT / EDITOR



WELCOME NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS TO LACS

Gavin Faught,
LACS Treasurer

New Members: (2)

Margaret Frane

Michael Price

**Members Who Renewed This Month
for 2024: (3)**

Monique Kemp

John Schaefer

Maurice Vickers



LACS LUNCHEON MEETING

17 LACS members and guests had a fun time at the March 21 luncheon. There was a lot of good food with animated conversations. The next luncheon will be in June; watch *User Friendly* and email for the date. Also, let us know if you have any suggestions for a different place or other activity.

H
a



SOME COMPUTER TRIVIA QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- When was the first computer invented?
Answer: 1822.
- What was the name of the first computer invented?
Answer: The Difference Engine.
- Who is known as the father of computers?
Answer: Charles Babbage.
- What was the first computer that used color display?
Answer: Apple II.
- What was the first mass-produced computer?
Answer: IBM 650 in 1954.



GENERAL MEETING REPORT

March 12, 2024

By Leah Clark, LACS President/Editor

Our scheduled presenter could not attend due to unforeseen conflicts and problems, so the attendees discussed various topics.

A member has been having a problem with Facebook notifications, and others suggested solutions. There were concerns about privacy and data collection issues with Facebook.

Someone else asked about Wi-Fi cameras. Some members use Ring Camera and Google Nest. Maybe we could organize a special interest group (SIG) to address problems with Wi-Fi cameras.

We discussed installing an authenticator and setting up a Roku device. A member finds Google authenticator reliable. Some members like Amazon Prime for TV, and they discussed checking movies and audiobooks out of the library. Some like Libby and Cloud Library.

A member finds Libby more informative and easier to use than Cloud Library.

Amazon Audible has a huge library of free books for subscribers.

Participants tried to trouble-shoot a member's microphone problem.

We were reminded to use our Groups.IO email list to ask questions and get help with computer and program issues. Getting the most out of CCleaner was suggested for a program. Members discussed the safety of online vs. post office payments. It was recommended that a Uni-ball 207 Gel Pen be used for writing checks. All gel pens may not be fraud-proof.

During the meeting, attendees also discussed real estate, inflation, taxes, family history, car technology, rare fruit cultivation, the intrusion of technology into everyday life, and the upcoming LACS luncheon meeting.

As you can see, we learned some new things and were exposed to new ideas. LACS members are a diverse group—we learn from each other. ❖



A few of the participants at the Zoom meeting

Top to bottom, Left to right: Jim McKnight, Leah Clark, Howard Krivoy, E. J. Rozek, Larry McDavid, Loling Beckman, Paula Van Berkorn, Ray Crovella, Irv Hershman, Bill Oppenheim, Stephanie Nordlinger, Mark Presky, Lurlean Towns, Donna Benton, and Freda Sanders

IS DATA THE NEW GOLD?

By **David Kretchmar**

Hardware Technician

Sun City Summerlin Computer Club, Nevada

<https://www.scscc.club>

dkretch (at) gmail.com



Just how important has data become to the world today? Is data the new gold?



You've probably heard that phrase in an ad campaign by Salesforce featuring actor

Matthew McConaughey.

Yes, without a doubt, data is the "new gold". Data is the most valuable asset in the world in our digital age, joining the ranks of gold and oil from the past. When businesses collect and analyze data, they can make better decisions, and adapt more quickly to their markets.

However, it's important to note that while data is valuable, it has little value in its raw form. Just like oil and gold, data needs to be refined into a useful form. Data needs to be accumulated, sorted, filtered, and analyzed to extract anything of value. Data becomes infinitely more important when it is massaged by Artificial Intelligence (AI) to extract the most value.

Follow the Money

If you have any doubts as to how data is valued today, let's follow the money. There are a total of seven corporations in the world with a stock value of more than a trillion dollars. Six of the seven are Information Technology companies. The following market capitalization data is current as of February 12, 2024.

Stock market followers will notice the following list closely resembles the so called "Magnificent Seven" (M7) stocks. Tesla, the only member of the M7 missing from the list,

came in at number eleven with a stock value of "only" \$598 Billion. The name Magnificent Seven borrows from the 1960s Western movie with the same name.

Rank	Company	Country	Market Cap (USD billions)
1	MICROSOFT CORPORATION	United States	3056
2	APPLE INC	United States	2870
3	SAUDI ARABIAN OIL COMPANY	Saudi Arabia	2001
4	AMAZON.COM, INC	United States	1785
5	ALPHABET INC.	United States	1777
6	NVIDIA CORPORATION	United States	1634
7	META PLATFORMS, INC.	United States	1211

Source: poetsandquants.com

In 2023, the M7 stocks had an average return of 111%, compared to a 24% return for the broader S&P 500.

Each of the M7 stocks significantly outperformed the S&P 500's 163% return in the past 10 years. Investors who recognized the true value of these businesses have done very well financially in that decade. Their exposure to high growth data technologies, such as software and hardware, cloud computing and artificial intelligence, and position them well to continue to lead their respective markets over time.



The Wall Street Journal

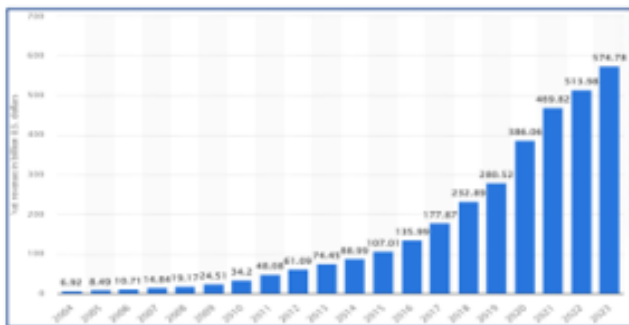
Some might question whether the M7 are really data companies, since each derives substantial revenues from what appear to be

activities not data related. Microsoft sells software, Apple sells phones, and Amazon sells virtually everything.

Look at Amazon

Let's take a closer look at one remarkably successful data company, Amazon. An interesting thing about Amazon is the fact that its core business (the e-commerce platform) has always been, and still is, unprofitable. Then why has the market valued Amazon stock so highly?

Look how Amazon's revenue has soared over the past 20 years (top chart):



source: statista.com



source: statista.com

While Amazon's Net Income (bottom chart) has also soared over the past 20 years, growth has been less even.

Clearly Amazon has been an extremely successful and profitable business over the past 20 years. One thousand dollars invested in Amazon stock 20 years ago years has turned into approximately \$74,000!

Amazon has not derived its lofty valuation

from its money-losing retail operations but from its revenue, much of which comes from those profitless retail sales. Those sales translate directly into data. Every purchase we make from Amazon, plus every question we ask of Amazon Alexa, increases Amazon's precious and ever-growing database. It is worth noting that the bulk of Amazon's profits come from their mostly pure data play, Amazon Web Services (AWS).

Conclusions and Warning

The phrase "Data is the new Gold" signifies the immense value of data in our digital age, especially in the context of AI. As AI continues to evolve and becomes more integrated into our daily lives and helps us make better decisions, the value of data can only increase.

Amazon and other M7 stocks are in the vanguard of sectors such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and digital services, and still have potential for significant growth. But investing in them carries massive risks since these factors are already reflected in their price.

The additional risks of market volatility, regulatory changes, technological disruptions, and global economic conditions will have an impact on their performance. ❖

MICROSOFT COPILOT

From APCUG at <https://apcug2.org>

While overall ChatGPT adoption seems to be high, Copilot doesn't seem to have hit the mass market appeal that ChatGPT has. This difference is likely due to lagging in useful features. Today Microsoft took a step to remedy that. While not as exciting as GPTs in the GPT store for ChatGPT, application plugins for Copilot are a good step in the right direction. For more about the plugins, read this Windows Central article. [Copilot now features plugins for some awesome applications | Windows Central](#) ❖

TAKE THE DMV KNOWLEDGE TEST

Online from Home

By **Leah Clark**, LACS President and Editor

LACS member, Edie Ditmars, sent me this information. She asked if I knew about the **eLearning** option on the DMV website. I did not! She said that after the torture of trying to learn all that stuff in the Handbook, she found that the DMV eLearning option is absolutely amazing. Gentle, stress-free, and even fun!

If you have a testing requirement for your driver's license (DL) renewal, save some time and do it online before visiting a DMV office.

Go to <https://tinyurl.com/4ckh7dyh>

Renewing your driver's license? Take eLearning to satisfy the knowledge test requirement. This pass-only, no-fail, interactive online course has seven short sections

with quizzes after each section. You can take it using a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone, and it takes about 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

New DL application? Take the online test.

The at-home online knowledge test is available online on weekdays, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., except on **state holidays**. The test is supervised remotely, so it requires you to use a webcam and cannot be done on a smartphone or tablet.

Practice Tests

If you are preparing to take a knowledge test to get or renew your driver's license, it can be helpful to see example questions.

Practice with sample tests at <https://tinyurl.com/3xaew25n> for regular, commercial, and motorcycle drivers.

	eLearning Course	At-Home Online Knowledge Test
Which one should I choose?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose when renewing your driver's license 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose when applying for a new driver's license or if instructed by DMV
What is the process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pass only / No fail Interactive / No preparation required Unlimited attempts Not monitored Can be done on any device 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pass/Fail based on # of correct answers Prepare by reviewing handbook 2 attempts to pass online, 3rd attempt must be completed in a DMV office Monitored by a smart computer On a PC with a web camera
What language can I take this in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently offered in English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offered in 35+ languages
When can I take this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any day, any time, 24x7x365 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monday to Friday, 8:00 am – 4:00 pm, except State holidays.
Where can I take this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anywhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At home or any quiet location with a PC, web camera and internet
How much time will it take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 20-30 minutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 1 hour
What devices can I test on?	Any of the following devices with an internet connection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobile device (elearning only) Tablet (elearning only) Laptop Desktop computer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A laptop or desktop computer with an internet connection



CACHE

Definition of the Month

News Journal, January, 2024

Lake County Area Computer Enthusiasts, IL
<https://w.lcace.org/>

A cache is like a super-fast, short-term memory for your devices, whether it's your phone, computer, or even a web server. A cache acts like a kitchen pantry where you keep frequently used ingredients, saving you from frequent trips to the grocery store.

Here's How It Works

- When you access something for the first time, like a website or an app, your device downloads and stores a copy of it in the cache.
- The next time you access the same thing, your device checks the cache first. If it finds the copy, it loads up immediately—much faster than downloading it again from scratch.
- This saves you time and data, making your device run more smoothly.

Here Are Some Different Types of Caches

- **Browser cache:** This stores images, videos, and other website files so your web pages load faster.
- **App cache:** This stores data and files for apps so they can launch and run faster.
- **CPU cache:** This stores frequently used instructions and data for the processor, so it can access them quickly without having to go to main memory.
- **DNS cache:** This stores the location (IP address) of websites you've visited recently, so your device doesn't have to look it up every time.

Overall, caches are essential for making our devices faster and more efficient. They help us save time, data, and battery life, and they make for a smoother user experience.

Here are some additional things to remember about caches.

- Caches are not permanent. They can get full, and old data may be deleted to make room for new data.
- Sometimes, the data in the cache may be outdated. If you're having trouble with a website or app, you may need to clear your cache to get the latest version of the data.
- Clearing your cache can also be a good way to free up space on your device. ❖

UNCHECKY: A REVIEW

Stop installing unwanted software.

By **Jasmine Blue D'Katz**

News Journal, January 2024

Lake County Area Computer Enthusiasts, IL
<https://w.lcace.org/>

I have been using several programs suggested by Bob Gostacha (Tech for Senior) and Judy Taylour (APCUG). Recently, I had to rebuild one of my computers, and the program, Unchecky, gave me lots of help reinstalling software. Unchecky is a free and open-source program that automatically unchecks unwanted pre-selected boxes during software installation. It is a lifesaver for anyone who has ever been frustrated by the sneaky tactics used by some installers to trick users into installing additional software or signing up for unwanted services.

How it Works

Unchecky works by monitoring your computer for software installation processes. When it detects an installer, it automatically scans it for any pre-selected boxes. If it finds any, it unchecks them for you. This way, you can be sure that you are only installing the software you want without any unwanted extras.

(Continued on Page 16)

LACS INFORMATION

PAY DUES BY PAYPAL OR ZELLE

To pay by PayPal, go to this link:

www.paypal.com/paypalme/00001024

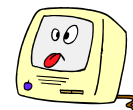
and then click on **Send**. You'll be asked to log in to your PayPal account or sign up for an account so that PayPal will know where to get the money to send. Follow the prompts. Once you have entered your dues amount, click on **Add a note**. Tell us of any updated information: physical address, email address, phone number, and what type of dues you are paying: regular, electronic *User Friendly*, etc. or if you don't want your contact information published in the roster.

To pay by Zelle, log into your bank with your username and password.

Select **Transfer Money > Send Money with Zelle**. Follow the instructions. The name of the recipient is **Los Angeles Computer Society**. Select **Send by email**. The email address is:

lacomputersociety@gmail.com. The wording may be a little different on your bank's site. Email questions to Gavin at gmfaught@gmail.com

FIX YOUR PC FOR FREE?



LACS member and presenter, **Jim McKnight**, has an open offer to LACS members to diagnose, repair, disinfect, or upgrade members' PC's for free. There are certain limitations to Jim's offer, so see the details by clicking the "Fix my PC for Free?" link at www.jimopi.net.

Non-members can wisely invest in a one-year **new regular** LACS membership (\$40.00), and Jim will fix your PC problem, too. Contact Jim for specific considerations.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION

Go to www.lacspc.org. Click on **Member Forms** in the bar under the picture. Under **Membership Update**, select **Click Here** to select either the DOC or PDF form. Fill it out, and email it with your changes to Membership@lacspc.org or snail-mail it to
Los Angeles Computer Society
11664 National Blvd. #343
Los Angeles, CA 90064-3802.

HOW TO JOIN LACS'S MAIL LIST

LACS has an active general email list: PC@LACS.Groups.IO. This email address goes to all members on the list. Use it to ask questions, offer suggestions or help, and to conduct official LACS business.

New LACS members should receive an invitation to join our list with two weeks to accept. Other LACS members who want to join the list should send an email to Stephanie, our Groups.IO Coordinator, at nordlacs@AOL.com and she will send you an invitation to join. If you have any problems or questions about joining, please contact Stephanie.

ATTENDING A ZOOM MEETING

LACS members who are on our PC email list will receive a link, meeting ID, Passcode, and instructions to attend the LACS general meetings a couple of days before the meeting. **Please let Leah Clark know by the morning of the meeting if you don't have it or have any problem.**

You can put an icon to the link on your desktop so it's handy at meeting time.

1. Right-click a blank spot on your desktop.
2. Select **New** from the drop-down menu.
3. Select **Shortcut**.
4. Type or copy and paste the link in the box that says "Type the location of the item."
5. Click **Next**.
6. Type a name for the shortcut.

LACS CALENDAR



LACS Board Meeting, Monday, April 1

Time: 7:00 P.M. (Open from 6:30 P.M.)

Place: Wherever you are via Zoom

LACS General Meeting: Tuesday, April 9

Time: 7:00 P.M. (Open from 6:30 P.M.)

Place: Wherever you are via Zoom

Please log in early so we can start on time. Allow extra time to be sure you have the link, to get or update your Zoom software if you have not used it before or recently, or to solve other issues before the meeting starts.

April 1: LACS Board Meeting, April Fool's Day

April 8: Solar Eclipse

April 9: LACS General Meeting

April 9: Eid al-Fitr Begins

April 15: Tax Day

April 22: Passover Begins

April 22: Earth Day

April 26: Arbor Day



VISIT OTHER APCUG COMPUTER USER GROUPS AND SEE THEIR NEWSLETTERS

LACS heartily welcomes visitors from other user groups, and we are welcome to join other groups' meetings.

Go to www.APCUG2.org. Click on **Member Benefits**, then on **Groups Sharing Meetings** or on **Newsletters Online**.

UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS

April 9: Preserving Digital Photographs and Backup Tips, Mark Schulman

May 14: Touring the Web, J. B. Burke

June 11: Social Media, Judy Taylour

Check your email and *User Friendly* for updates to this schedule.

ZOOM MEETINGS

Members on our PC email list will receive, via email, an invitation to join LACS Zoom general meetings. Click on the URL in the invitation before the meeting and follow the prompts.

If you have any questions or if you don't receive the link by the morning of the meeting day, contact Leah Clark at leahjc@sbcglobal.net

ZOOM RECORDINGS

LACS members and meeting guests will receive links to the recordings of Zoom meetings via email.

HYPERLINKS

Underlined text (blue in the color edition) in *User Friendly* usually means it's a hyperlink to a website. Click on the link in the online version to see the referenced place. You can also copy and paste it into your browser's search or address bar.

USER FRIENDLY BACK ISSUES AND INDEXES

To see back issues of *User Friendly*, go to <http://www.lacspc.org/category/user-friendly/>.

For indexes to past issues, go to <https://www.lacspc.org/category/uf-index/>

To find a specific article or topic, use the search box on the top right.



MEMBERS HELPING MEMBERS

LACS members volunteer to help other members solve hardware and software problems by telephone or during the hours listed below. Select the topic from the list and then contact a person whose number is listed next to it.

Find a helper's email address and phone number on your roster. If you don't have your roster, call 424-261-6251. Only members in good standing may receive a roster. We hope you find this LACS free service useful.

If you are experienced using a particular program or hardware, please volunteer to be a consultant. You don't have to be an expert. To volunteer for this list or to make corrections, please email Leah Clark at leahjc@sbcglobal.net or call her at 424-261-6251.

Adobe Creative Suite: PDF, InDesign, Photoshop, etc. - 10	Hardware - 7	PDF - 8
Android Smartphones - 8	Lotus Word Pro, Approach - 7	Photoshop - 10
Apple devices - 11	Mozilla Firefox - 7	Quicken - 8, 12
Anti Malware and Backup - 7, 8	MS Excel - 8, 11, 12	Thunderbird - 7
Dragon Naturally Speaking - 3	MS Word - 1, 3, 8, 12	Utilities - 7, 8
Genealogy - 8	MS Outlook - 1, 8, 10	Windows - 7, 8
Groups.IO - 8	MS PowerPoint - 8, 11	WordPerfect - 8
	MS Publisher - 2	Zoom - 2, 9

Preferred Time for Phone Calls			
Number	Name	From	To
1	Beckman, Loling	10:00 AM	6:00 PM
2	Clark, Leah	7:00 AM	5:00 PM
3	Hershman, Irv	11:00 AM	11:00 PM
7	McKnight, Jim	8:00 AM	7:00 PM
8	Nordlinger, Stephanie	9:00 AM	5:00 PM
9	Presky, Mark	Any	Any
10	Rozek, E. J.	Noon	8:00 PM
11	Van Berkomp, Paula	9:00 AM	5:00 PM
12	Wilder, Joan	9:00 AM	9:00 PM

Note: Times are Pacific Times

OFFICERS, DIRECTORS AND LEADERS

TITLE	NAME	TERM
President	Leah Clark	2024
Vice President	Stephanie Nordlinger	2024
Secretary	Marcia Jacobs	2024
Treasurer	Gavin Faught	2024
Director	Loling Beckman	2025
Director	Donna Benton	2025
Director	Mark Presky	2025
Director	Irv Hershman	2024
Director	E. J. Rozek	2024
Director	Annette Tossounian	2024
Director	Paula Van Berkomp	2024
APCUG Representative	Leah Clark	
Corporate Counsel	Stephanie Nordlinger	
Database Manager	Loling Beckman	
Groups.IO Email Lists	Stephanie Nordlinger	
Newsletter Editor	Leah Clark	
Program Chair	Stephanie Nordlinger	
Publicity – Press	Mark Presky	
Publicity – Online Media	Open	
Quick Consultants	Leah Clark	
Webmaster	Paula Van Berkomp	

Mailing Address: 11664 National Blvd., #343, Los Angeles, CA 90064-3802

Website: www.lacspc.org

Contact the President/Editor at 424-261-6251. Follow the prompts. This is a Google Voice number.

Please use your roster for **email addresses and phone numbers** to contact any officer, board member or other member, or you may leave a message at the above number. If you don't have your roster, please contact Leah Clark at leahjc@sbcglobal.net and she will mail you a copy. Only LACS members may receive a roster.

Please note: The 2024 roster will be in the middle pages of the May User Friendly. It will be mailed to all LACS members, including those who receive only the electronic version. The roster will not be sent to anyone electronically. Be sure to keep it when you receive it.

FUTURISTS PREDICT A POINT WHERE HUMANS AND MACHINES BECOME ONE.

But, will we see it coming?

Published in *PC Update*

Melbourne PC User Group

By **John Kendall Hawkins**, Philosopher,
University of New England

Sandy Boucher, Lecturer in the Philosophy
of Science, University of New England

Most people are familiar with the deluge of artificial intelligence (AI) apps that seem designed to make us more efficient and creative. We've got apps that take text prompts and generate art, and the controversial ChatGPT raises serious questions about originality, misinformation, and plagiarism.

Despite these concerns, AI is becoming ever more pervasive and intrusive. It's the latest technology that will irreversibly change our lives.

The internet and smartphones are other examples. But unlike those technologies, many philosophers and scientists think AI could one day reach (or even surpass) human-style "thinking." This possibility, coupled with our increasing dependence on AI, is at the root of a concept in futurism called

Technological Singularity

This term has been around for a while, popularized by the U.S. science fiction writer, Vernor Vinge, a few decades ago. Today, "singularity" refers to a hypothetical point in time at which the development of artificial general intelligence (AGI) – that is, AI with human-level abilities – becomes so advanced that it will irreversibly change human civilization.

It would mark the dawn of our inseparability from machines. From then on, we won't be able to live without them without ceasing to function as human beings. But if the singularity comes, will we even notice it?

Brain Implants As the First Stage

To understand why this isn't the stuff of fairy tales, we need only look at recent developments in brain-computer interfaces (BCIs). BCIs are a natural beginning to singularity in the eyes of many futurists because they meld mind and machine in a way no other technology so far can.

Elon Musk's company, Neuralink, is seeking permission from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to begin human trials for its BCI technology. These trials would involve implanting neural connectors into volunteers' brains so they can communicate instructions by thinking them.

Neuralink hopes to help paraplegic people walk, and blind people see again. But beyond these goals are other ambitions.

Musk has said he believes brain implants will allow telepathic communication and lead to the co-evolution of humans and machines. He argues that unless we use such technology to augment our intellects, we risk being wiped out by super-intelligent AI.

Musk is understandably not everyone's go-to for tech expertise. But he's not alone in predicting a massive growth in AI's capabilities. Surveys show AI researchers overwhelmingly agree AI will achieve human-level "thinking" within this century. What they disagree on is whether this implies consciousness or not, or whether this necessarily means AI will do us harm once it reaches this level.

A Patient Demonstrates the Capabilities of Synchron's Interface.

Another BCI technology company, *Synchron*, has created a minimally invasive implant that allowed a patient with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) to send emails and browse the internet using his thoughts.

Synchron's chief executive, Tom Oxley, believes brain implants could ultimately go

beyond prosthetic rehabilitation and completely transform how humans communicate. Speaking to a TED¹ audience, he said they might one day allow users to “throw” their emotions so others can feel what they’re feeling, and “the full potential of the brain would then be unlocked.”

Early achievements in BCIs could arguably be considered the first stages of a tumbling toward the postulated singularity, in which humans and machines become one. This need not imply machines will become “sentient” or control us. But the integration itself, and our ensuing dependency on it, could change us irrevocably.

It’s also worth mentioning that Synchron’s start-up funding partly came from DARPA, the research and development arm of the U.S. Department of Defense that helped give the world the internet. It’s probably wise to be concerned about where DARPA invests its money.

Would AGI Be a Friend or Foe?

According to Ray Kurzweil, a futurist and former Google innovations engineer, humans with AI-augmented minds could be thrown onto the autobahn of evolution – hurtling forward without speed limits.

In his 2012 book *How to Create a Mind*, he theorizes that the neocortex—the part of the brain thought to be responsible for higher order brain functions such as sensory perception, emotion, and cognition—is a hierarchical system of pattern recognizers that, if emulated in a machine, could lead to artificial superintelligence.

He predicts the singularity will be with us by 2045, and he thinks it might bring about a world of super-intelligent humans, perhaps even the Nietzschean “Übermensch”: someone who surpasses all worldly constraints to realize their full potential.

But not everyone sees AGI as a good thing. The late, great theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking, warned super-intelligent AI could result in the apocalypse. In 2014, Hawking told the BBC:

The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race. It would take off on its own and redesign itself at an ever-increasing rate. Humans, who are limited by slow biological evolution, couldn’t compete, and would be superseded.

Hawking was, however, an advocate for BCIs. He ‘spoke’ using a computer and voice synthesizer. As a patient of ALS (also called Lou Gehrig’s disease and motor neuron disease), he lost his voice during a tracheostomy in 1985.

Connected in a Hive Mind

Another idea that relates to the singularity is that of the AI-enabled “hive mind”.

Merriam-Webster defines a hive mind as:

The collective mental activity expressed in the complex, coordinated behavior of a colony of social insects (such as bees or ants) regarded as comparable to a single mind controlling the behavior of an individual organism.

Neuroscientist, Giulio Tononi, has developed a theory called Integrated Information Theory (IIT) around this phenomenon. It suggests we are all heading toward a merger of all minds and all data.

Philosopher, Philip Goff, does a good job of explaining the implications of Tononi’s concept in his book *Galileo’s Error*:

IIT predicts that if the growth of internet-based connectivity

ever resulted in the amount of integrated information in society surpassing the amount of integrated information in a human brain, then not only would society become conscious but human brains would be 'absorbed' into that higher form of consciousness. Brains would cease to be conscious in their own right and would instead become mere cogs in the mega-conscious entity that is the society including its internet-based connectivity.

It's worth noting that there's little evidence such a thing could ever come to fruition. But the theory raises important ideas about not only the rapid acceleration of technology (not to mention how quantum computing might propel this) – but about the nature of consciousness itself.

Hypothetically, if a hive mind were to emerge, one could imagine it would mark the end of individuality and the institutions that rely on it, including democracy.

The final frontier is between our ears.

Recently, OpenAI (the company that developed ChatGPT) released a blog post reaffirming its commitment to achieving AGI. Others will doubtless follow.

Our lives are becoming algorithmically driven in ways we often can't discern and, therefore, can't avoid. Many features of technological singularity promise amazing enhancements to our lives, but it's a worry that these AIs are the products of private industry.

They are virtually unregulated and mainly at the whims of impulsive "technopreneurs" who have more money than most of us combined. Regardless of whether we consider them crazy, naïve, or visionaries, we have a right to know their plans (and be able to refute them).

If the past few decades are any indication, new technologies will affect everyone.

(Reproduced from The Conversation with permission.)

Footnote

¹ *TED is a nonprofit dedicated to discovering and spreading ideas that spark conversation, deepen understanding and drive meaningful change. The organization is devoted to curiosity, reason, wonder and the pursuit of knowledge — without an agenda. ❖*

WHAT IS A PIG-BUTCHERING SCAM?

No actual pigs are harmed.

by [Leo A. Notenboom](#)

Ask Leo! <https://askleo.com>



Pig-butchering is a nasty term for a particularly painful type of scam. It's a distasteful name for a distasteful practice.

Here's how to protect yourself.



Image: DALL-E 3

Pig-butchering scams are commonplace and seem to be increasing in frequency. I don't want you to fall victim to it.

Pig-butchering scams are long-term cons in which scammers build trust over time before defrauding victims with significant financial loss. These scams have increased with the use of technology. Key red flags include moving conversations to private channels, refusing to meet, and requests for money, often under emotional pretense. Always be

cautious with money, especially with people you've never met.

It's a Long Con

As its name implies, a “long con” (long confidence) game or scam takes place over a lengthy period of time. The scammers sometimes go to great lengths to build trust before finally scamming the unsuspecting victim.

It's common for thousands of dollars to be lost. Long cons aren't anything new, but the widespread use of technology in its various forms has increased their frequency. In addition, the complexity of some technologies, coupled with our innate desire to be nice to people¹, puts more and more people at risk every day.

The term's relevance is simple: the scammers spend some time “fattening the pig” before “butchering” it as they run off with the money at the end of the scam.

Example: the Romance Scam

You sign up for a dating site. Eventually, you're contacted by someone expressing an interest in getting to know more about you.

They suggest you move your conversation to somewhere more private — perhaps one of the more secure chat services hosted outside the dating platform.

They point you at their social media and perhaps other places where they and their work are visible for you to examine.

Of course, you'd like to meet in person at some point. They're eager to do so, but their lives are complicated, so scheduling something is difficult. You continue your online conversation and seem to be hitting it off! You really, really like one another.

But life keeps getting in the way of meeting. Then, your wanna-be paramour has a life event of some sort—something they can't afford. Could you possibly help them out? Of course! What else could you do? This could be The One, and you don't want to disappoint them.

So, you send them some money—perhaps multiple times, perhaps quite a bit of money—until your suspicions are raised to a point where you start to object—at which point they ghost you. They—and your money—are gone.

Writing it up like that makes it seem obvious, yet it isn't while it's happening. Particularly when emotions are involved and time and effort have been invested, it's difficult to admit to yourself that perhaps you've fallen for something.

Red Flags

In the scenario above, some red flags should always raise concern.

- **Moving to private channels:** They'll say it's for your security, but, in reality, it's for the scammer's benefit. It removes them from whatever platform or technique they're using to ensnare their victims, which is typically easier to track and trace.
- **Never being able to meet in person:** Life can be busy, but never that busy if someone's truly interested in a real relationship.
- **Unexpected expenses:** They usually start small — something simple — but as your confidence and investment in the relationship grows, requests begin to increase. They often rely on a heavy dose of guilt should you begin to object.

There are other red flags that aren't included above. Any mention of cryptocurrency or gift cards is of concern. Relationships that begin when a person completely unknown to you shows up out of the blue should also be seen as suspect (i.e., an unknown person begins texting, emailing, or using social media platforms to contact you).²

Of course, it occurs in more than in romance situations. The scenario above is just an example. These types of long cons come in a variety of situations designed to take advantage of the unsuspecting.

If there's one specific takeaway, I would have it be this: Always be extremely cautious when giving money to someone you've never met.

If that breaks up a potential romance, it was never meant to be anyway.

Footnotes

¹ Well mostly

² I report and block all unexpected texts from people I don't recognize, as well as all political texts, regardless of their source. ❖

Unchecky: A Review

Continued from page 7

Benefits of Using Unchecky

There are many benefits to using Unchecky. Here are just a few.

- **Saves time:** Unchecky can save you a lot of time by automatically unchecking unwanted boxes. No more clicking through endless installation screens!
- **Saves money:** Unchecky can help you save money by preventing you from installing unwanted software that you might have to pay for.
- **Protects your privacy:** Unchecky can help protect your privacy by preventing you from installing software that tracks your activity or collects your personal information.
- **Easy to use:** Unchecky is extremely easy to use. There are no settings to configure, and it runs silently in the background.

Is Unchecky Safe?

Unchecky is completely safe to use. It is a reputable program with a large and active

community of users. It is also open-source, so you can be sure that its code is clean and free of malware.

Overall

Unchecky is an essential tool for anyone who wants to take control of their software installations. It is free and easy to use, and it can save you a lot of time, money, and frustration. I highly recommend it to everyone.

Here are some additional things to keep in mind about Unchecky.

- Unchecky does not work with all installers. Some installers are designed to bypass Unchecky and other similar programs.
- Unchecky may not always be able to detect all unwanted boxes. It is always a clever idea to double-check the installation screens yourself before clicking "Install."
- Unchecky is not a replacement for common sense. It is important to be careful about what software you install, even if Unchecky is able to uncheck the unwanted boxes.

I would also like to add that Unchecky is a great program for anyone who is concerned about their privacy. By preventing you from installing unwanted software, Unchecky can help to protect your personal information from being collected and used by third parties. ❖

ADOBE FIREFLY

Open up your art creativity with AI and have fun!

By **Jasmine Blue D'Katz**

News Journal, February 2024

Lake County Area Computer Enthusiasts, IL

<https://www.lcace.org/>

Over the past several months, I've been experimenting with several AI art-generating programs, and Adobe Photoshop has incorporated AI into its features, offering powerful tools for both creative exploration and workflow efficiency.

And with the recent release of Adobe Firefly, AI allows you to create images with just a few strokes of your imagination, offering new ways to ideate, create, and communicate while significantly improving creative work using generative AI.

Adobe Firefly is a free, experimental web app powered by generative AI that helps you explore creative possibilities and streamline your workflow. It acts as a creative playground where you can experiment with different ideas and bring them to life quickly and easily.

Here's a breakdown of what it is, what it's for, and how you can use it.

What Is It?

- A standalone web app available at <https://www.adobe.com/products/firefly.html>
- Offers new ways to ideate, create, and communicate using generative AI.

Features Include

- **Image generation:** Create unique images based on text prompts, styles, and emotions.
- **Text effects:** Apply artistic text styles and effects to any text.
- **Color palettes:** Generate custom color palettes based on keywords or images.
- **Mood boards:** Build mood boards by searching for and adding images based on themes or keywords.

What Is It For?

- Brainstorming and generating ideas for creative projects.
- Quickly creating mockups and prototypes.
- Adding unique and artistic touches to your designs.
- Exploring different creative directions without starting from scratch ❖

MORE MALWARE TARGETS LINUX

From APCUG at <https://apcug2.org>

The Linux open-source operating system is free, offers a lot of customization, and is very stable. It also has a reputation for being safe from malware attacks.

While it's true that Linux is free, flexible, and stable, it is not immune to malware attacks. Security experts say attacks against Linux systems have increased by 60% in recent years.

Malware can infect Linux systems through various means, including email attachments, software downloads, and malicious websites.

Here are a few tips to help protect your Linux system:

1. Update your software regularly. Install the latest updates and security patches. This will help prevent vulnerabilities from being exploited by malware.
2. Use a firewall: A firewall can help block unauthorized access to your system and prevent malware from communicating with its command and control server.
3. Install antivirus software. Although Linux is less susceptible to viruses than other operating systems, installing antivirus software is still a good idea. This will help detect and remove any malware that may have infected your system.
4. Only download software from trusted sources. Verify the authenticity of the software before downloading and installing it on your system.

By taking the necessary precautions and implementing security measures, you can protect your Linux system from malware and enjoy a safe and secure computing experience.

Cyn Mackley, *Cyn's Tech Tips*

<https://tinyurl.com/yf2zecd9> ❖

FOR MANY HELPFUL TIPS AND TRICKS

Go to <https://www.apcug2.org> for all aspects of computing and operating systems.

SPECIAL OFFERS

Go to the APCUG website at <https://apcug2.org/discounts-special-offers-for-user-groups/> for discounts and special offers for Members of User Groups. Avast Anti-virus and Acronis True Image, and several book, media and training sites offer discounts including the two mentioned below.

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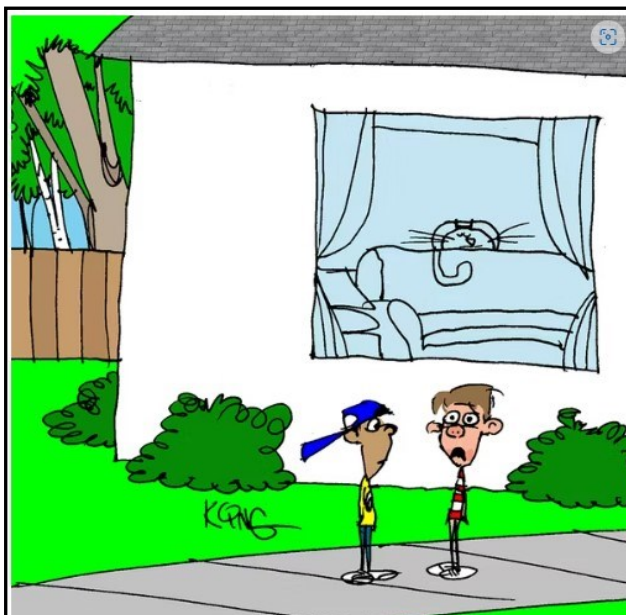
- <https://TechBoomers.com>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2-bwYIYu1I>

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LAUGHING OUT LOUD

"Our new robot vacuum has a feature that cleans all the spam out of my inbox. There's so much I have to empty it every 5 minutes."



"I just wasted a perfectly good tantrum to get my way. My mom was wearing her noise-cancelling earbuds."

Cartoons from How-To Geek

NOTICE

The columns, reviews and other expressions of opinion in *User Friendly* are the opinions of the writers and not necessarily those of the Los Angeles Computer Society. LACS became a California non-profit corporation on July 17, 1991. Its predecessor was the UCLA PC Users Group.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION and BENEFITS of MEMBERSHIP

Annual Membership Dues:

Regular New and Renewal,	
Printed Newsletter	\$ 40
Electronic Newsletter	30
Family-Associate	12
Students	18
Contributor	50
Supporter	75
Benefactor	100
Gift Membership	20

A subscription to *User Friendly* is included with membership.

Associate members use the same mailing as a regular member; they do not receive their own subscriptions to *User Friendly*, but may read it on the LACS website. **Students** must prove full-time status. A member may give a 1-year, 1-time gift to a non-member.

Monthly general meetings

are via Zoom. In-person or hybrid meetings may take place in the future.

Members also enjoy these special benefits:

— **Monthly Newsletter**
User Friendly. We publish your article submissions or free classified ads to buy or sell your computer items.

— **Get FREE help** by phone or email (See your roster) from knowledgeable members who are Quick Consultants listed in *User Friendly*.

— **Get help by email** by using our group email list. Send your questions to PC@LACS.Groups.IO

— **Receive important news** and announcements via *User Friendly* and LACS's email list.

— **Free APCUG** (International Association of Technology and Computer User Groups) **Webinars, virtual conferences, programs, and technical information.** Check *User Friendly* and your email to see what's offered.

— Occasional **free software and computer books**, if you review them for *User Friendly*.

— **Annual Holiday Party**

— **Social Interacting** with others who have like interests in computers and technology.

— **Special Interest Groups** (SIGs) on various topics may be created by members.

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All renewals are due in January. New members will pay the annual amount when they join.

Date: _____

LACS

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Check # _____ Dues may be paid by PayPal, Zelle, or check. If paying by check, make the check out to "Los Angeles Computer Society", and mail it with this form to:

Los Angeles Computer Society, 11664 NATIONAL BLVD. #343, LOS ANGELES CA 90064-3802

Please PRINT Clearly

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Editor..... Leah Clark
IndexerLeah Clark
ProofreadersIrv Hershman,
Jim McKnight, Stephanie Nordlinger,
and Charlotte Semple

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GENERAL MEETINGS ARE ON ZOOM.

Before each meeting, members and invited guests will receive an email with the URL link to the meeting. If you haven't received it by the morning of the meeting, let Leah Clark know. When you click on the link, you will enter a waiting room. Then the host or a co-host will admit you to the meeting.

Please try to arrive at least a few minutes before the meeting start-time so you don't interrupt the meeting and any technical problems can be solved. If you need to take a break during a meeting, do not click on Leave or End. If you do, the meeting will be interrupted for someone to re-admit you from the waiting room. You may turn off your video when you are gone.