

This column includes computer information for IBM compatible computers in the form of hints, helps, suggestions and news. Please submit your questions to Stan Palen, 8283 Oakwood Drive, King George, VA 22485 or via email to spalen@crosslink.net. Stan also has a web page located at www.stanpalen.com (Please note that this column is often submitted for publication 30 to 60 days before publication.) My phone number is 540 775-7027.

Some folks have been having problems getting wifi all over their house or office. There are now power line wifi systems that will use the wires in your house to spread the signal. They have been around for a while, but they were not very fast. The ones coming on the market now have solved that problem. They are a little more expensive, but if they solve your problem, it will be worth it.

A friend was having trouble getting his laptop to print over his wireless network. It had been working fine for a while. This problem is probably beyond what your Internet provider will help you with. Sometimes a router can become corrupted somehow. The solution is to unplug the power from your cable modem (or whatever connects you to the Internet) and your router (it could be the same box). Then turn off your computer(s). Wait for at least 1 minute and then plug in your cable modem, wait again until it has 4 green lights or whatever shows that it is operating. Then power up your router and then turn on your computer(s). Hopefully everything is okay. Communications problems on your network in any form that were working and are not now may be solved this way.

I have had a Pocket PC for years from Dell. It got so I could no longer charge it. I keep a copy my treasurer files and several others on it. I replaced it with a new Ipaq computer. It is also a pocket PC. It is not a phone. It works with wifi or blue tooth. It also can be synchronized with the files on my computer while it is recharging, but it insists on having a recent copy of Microsoft's Outlook to handle the interface. I do not have that yet. I can still write files to or from it. I mentioned a way to get almost all of Microsoft's programs for a relatively low cost. I am considering doing that soon. The program allows up to 10 licenses for each program so I can upgrade all of the software on my computers. (I would then have Outlook too.) When I did this on my first pocket PC, it came with Outlook on a CD. All that quit working when I upgraded to Windows7.

I found a bunch of programs called portable apps. The source is portable.apps.com. They have all kinds of programs that can be used anywhere. I was hoping to use them on my iPAC, but they were not designed to do this. It is actually a suite of programs that can be put on a thumb drive and then used on any computer. This allows you to use any computer and leave no trace that you were there. All of your files are on the drive.

Is your smart phone allowing you to be tracked any where while the phone is on? The answer is probably yes. Do they store all this information? I suspect that they do not want to waste the storage space. The phones are set up to know where they are so they can tell you where the nearest gas station or restaurant is located.

Snipit is a program that comes with Windows7 that allows you to grab anything you can see on your screen and save it or print it. It works great, but has some limitations. Sometimes you cannot see the whole letter or document on the screen at one time. Snagit is a program that solves these problems. It will grab the whole file for you. After you select what you want to edit, the program puts into an image editor where you can add text, arrows and other effects. You can then do almost anything with the completed file. The program has a 30 day free trial to see if you want to keep it.

Do you use your computer in one of these free wifi spots like McDonalds? Are you safe? The answer is NO! If you do anything that requires you to use a password, it can be seen. Even if you use something like Yahoo that you have already entered your password in an earlier session. When you connect to Yahoo your password will be sent in automatically without any input from you. If you check your email with Outlook or whatever, your password can be compromised. There are easily available programs on the Internet to snoop out what the people around you are doing. I was using a hotel wifi recently, but I used the hard wire option that is a little safer, but not 100%. The laptop I travel with does have my email passwords and a few select others, but none of my banking or anything else of similar importance. The best way to do secure communications over public wifi networks is with a Virtual Private Network (VPN). It takes a bit of doing to set one up. Most are not free. There is a hazard that a free one would compromise your information themselves. I probably should do this myself, but there are a number of things that I need to check out first.

While I was looking at wifi and VPN network software. I found a bunch of programs that claimed they could break the common encryption protocols that folks are using on their home networks.

There are a lot of competitors for the iPad coming out with new products. Some look pretty neat. Most are also phones and some are wifi only. If you are in the market for one, please be careful. There are so many choices and variables to look at and compare.

New iMacs are out. Apple updated its iMac all-in-one desktops on May 3, adding Intel's second-generation quad-core Core i5 and Core i7 CPUs and Thunderbolt data ports. Along with the updated CPUs and the new high-speed ports, the new iMacs sport faster Advanced Micro Devices' graphics processors than their predecessors and integrated FaceTime HD video cameras.