

Interface

Lorain County Computer Users Group
LCCUG.com (or) info@LCCUG.com
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2023

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**Thursday
January 12, 2023**

QR Codes 101

Everything You Need to Know



This Meeting will be Zoom Only; not in person

Our links can be found at:

LCCUG.com/links, There you will find many interesting places to visit. Check them out and see what you can find interesting

NOTICE: THIS MEETING WILL BE A ZOOM MEETING ONLY

At our new time: from 10 am. - noon

The Problem Solving Workshop has been cancelled this month

Please Email: info@lccug.com if you have any questions or concerns!

A Word From Our President



Welcome to 2023 in the world of Technology! If you're like me, you spend a lot of time keeping up with new technology and understanding what is coming next.

These are some of the things that caught my attention:

Security issues. There are more and more things occurring that are trying to trick us. We think we are being so careful, and suddenly find we were almost tricked into believing something that sounded so routine but wasn't! The tricksters are getting more and more sophisticated. It takes the fun out of being online! We want to explore ways to stay safe again this year.

What are the best ways to make the right technology choices? Can we save more money on our TV viewing options? Do we have the most economical phone option? Are there other choices for Internet at home?

Nothing stays the same! Keeping up with the websites and apps that are constantly coming on the horizon is difficult. Which ones will make life easier or more interesting? What changes are coming that we need to keep up with? How to find the answers we need.

What about things like Electric Cars? Will we need to make that choice during our lifetime? What are the issues? Do you take full advantage of GPS services built into your car or on your phone? GPS is the best thing ever. I'm learning more about subscription services to activate features that we have come to take for granted. Not Fair! Did you know that a further nail in the coffin of AM radio is it's ability to interfere with 5G communications and electric cars?

Another thing that has my attention is AI. Wow! I think this would make a very interesting meeting topic in the near future.

I asked the newly released ChatGTP app what were 3 questions about AI and within 1 minute "she" came back with these answers:

There are many useful things about artificial intelligence (AI). Here are three examples:

1. *Automation: AI can be used to automate tasks that would be time-consuming or difficult for humans to do. This can include tasks like data entry, sorting through large amounts of information, or analyzing data to find patterns or trends.*

2. *Improved decision-making: AI can be used to analyze large amounts of data and make decisions based on that data. This can be useful in a variety of fields, such as finance, healthcare, and marketing.*

3. *Enhanced productivity: AI can help people work more efficiently by taking on tasks that would otherwise require a lot of time and effort. For example, a virtual assistant AI can handle scheduling and other administrative tasks, freeing up time for more important tasks.*

Overall, AI has the potential to greatly improve efficiency

LCCUG Officers For 2023

President	Sandee Ruth president@lccug.com
Vice President	Vacant vp-programs@lccug.com
Secretary	Don Hall secretary@lccug.com
Treasurer	Micky Knickman treasurer@lccug.com
Newsletter Editor	Pam Rihel newsletter@lccug.com
Web Page Editor	Richard Barnett webpage@lccug.com
Statutory Agent	Sandra Ruth statutory_agent@lccug.com
Director of Membership	Vacant membership@lccug.com
Director of Advertising	Richard Barnett advertising@lccug.com
Director of Education	Neil Higgins education@lccug.com

and productivity, and can be used in a wide range of industries and applications.

There are many potential applications for artificial intelligence (AI) for individuals, including:

1. *Personal assistants: AI can be used to create personal assistants that can help individuals manage their schedules, send emails, and perform other tasks.*

2. *Health and fitness: AI can be used to track and analyze personal health data, such as heart rate and activity levels, to help individuals optimize their physical and mental well-being.*

3. *Education: AI can be used to create personalized learning experiences that adapt to the individual student's needs and goals, helping them to learn more effectively.*

4. *Gaming: AI can be used to create more realistic and engaging gaming experiences, such as non-player characters (NPCs) that can adapt to the player's actions and make decisions on their own.*

5. *Customer service: AI can be used to create chatbots that can assist customers with queries and help them resolve*

(Continued on page 3)

**Thursday
January 12, 2023**



QR Codes 101

Everything You Need to Know



Our January meeting will take place exclusively on **Zoom on Thursday, January 12th at 10 am.**

We will be watching a recorded presentation on the use of QR codes, including how to create them and their various applications. This is a very interesting presentation. **Hope to see you on ZOOM,**



(Continued from page 2) Presidents Column

issues, reducing the need for human intervention.

Financial planning: AI can be used to help individuals make informed financial decisions by analyzing their past spending and investment patterns and providing recommendations for future actions.

Here are three potential concerns related to artificial intelligence (AI):

- 1. Unemployment: Automation and the use of AI may lead to job loss as machines are able to perform certain tasks more efficiently than humans.*
- 2. Lack of accountability: It can be difficult to determine who is responsible for the actions of an AI system.*
- 3. Ethical concerns: The use of AI may raise ethical concerns, such as the potential for the development of autonomous weapons.*

Thanks to AI for writing the end of the article. See you next month.

2023 Meetings

The December meeting and holiday lunch at Golden Corral was a success, despite some members being unable to attend due to health concerns. Those who were present and their guests seemed to have a good time, and we even held a raffle that raised \$75, which was matched by the LCCUG and \$150 was donated to the Second Harvest Food Bank.

Our January meeting will take place exclusively on Zoom on **Thursday, January 12 at 10 am.** We will be watching a recorded presentation on the use of QR codes, including how to create them and their various applications: **"QR Code 101: What You Need to Know."**

In February, March, and April, we will continue to meet on Thursdays at 10 am, both in person and on Zoom to accommodate Mickey's schedule. We hope you can join us during this transitional period.

**Sandra Ruth
LCCUG President**

Woohoo!

Your renewal dues have been changed from \$15.00, To 3 years for \$15.00. When everyone else is raising their prices our Computer Club is lowering their dues, so tell your friends to come and Join in the fun and learn computer information.

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Executive Board Meeting Minutes

DECEMBER 5, 2022

The December board Zoom meeting was attended by Sandee Ruth, Don Hall, Micky Knickman, Pam Rihel and Neil Higgins.

The December 12 lunch meeting prizes were discussed. Tickets for the 50/50 Raffle will sell for \$1 each or 6 for \$5. Proceeds will go to Second Harvest with the club contribution making it \$150 total donation.

Purchasing \$10 in tickets or more will qualify each club member to one \$10 Amazon gift card.

Big prizes will be the 50/50 money and an external hard drive courtesy of Royal Business Equipment.

Micky volunteers Income Tax help January thru April on Tuesdays so the board decided to hold the members meetings on the **second Thursday January thru April of 2023.**

Neil moved Pam seconded the meeting be adjourned.



Member of Association of Personal Computer Users Groups

Computer Club News

**Don't Bring
in Your Used Ink Cartridges
LCCUG is not collecting them
Anymore.
Thank you to all who have
supported us in collecting the
ink cartridges.**



General Meeting Minutes

DECEMBER 12, 2022

President Sandee Ruth called the meeting to order. A motion to accept the minutes as shown in the December issue of the **INTERFACE** was made by Cliff Salisbury, seconded by Richard Long, Motion passed by voice vote.

Sandee brought up election of officers. There were no nominations from the floor including the empty Vice President and Director of Membership. Sandee moved the existing slate be approved by unanimous ballot. Motion approved by voice vote.

Sandee announced the meeting day for January thru April 2023 will be the second Thursday of the month in place of Tuesday.

Sandee won the 50/50 raffle prize of \$75 and Elaine D'Andrea won the external hard drive.

Newsletter Editor: Pam Rihel using Microsoft Publisher, 2016

This Month's contributors: Micky Knickman, Sandra Ruth, Pam Rihel, Don Hall, Neil Higgins, Michael John Neill, Scambusters, Ask Leo, Steve Costello, Joel Ewing, APCUG, Google images, Microsoft Office art online,

Newsletter is now
Online at:

lccug.com/newsletters or lccug.com

MEMBERSHIP WITH LCCUG:

Yearly dues are now \$15.00 For 3 years. For more information contact:

LCCUG
Director of Membership,
membership@lccug.com.

Meeting Location:
At a new time: from 10 am. - noon
in a new location: LCCC facility at
[201 W. Erie, Lorain](http://201W.Erie.Lorain)

Our meeting space is on the first floor – easily accessible – larger – refreshments available! Please email info@lccug.com if you have any questions.

Lorain County Computer Users Group

2023 Calendar of Events

<http://lccug.com>
email: info@lccug.com

Using Zoom & In Person

Meeting & program starts at 10 am



*2nd Thursday of each month. Changes are announced on the webpage and the newsletter.
All meetings are open to the public*

January 11, 2023 - QR Code 101 **ZOOM ONLY**

February 8, 2023 -

March 8, 2023 -

April 12, 2023 -

May 10, 2023-

June 14, 2023 -

July 12, 2023-

August 09, 2023 -

September 13, 2023 -

October 11, 2023 -

November 8, 2023 -

December 15, 2023—Please check our website LCCUG.com for more updates. If you have anything you would like to know about, PLEASE let up know. We would really like your input.

LCCUG



amazonsmile
You shop. Amazon gives.

Thinking of shopping with Amazon? Well you can now go to our lccug.com website and just click on the [amazon](#)smile link and start shopping.

Our club gets rewarded for any items purchased from our website. So the more you buy the better it is for our club. SO START SHOPPING.

Interesting Internet Finds

August 2022



by Steve Costello
scostello@sefcug.com

What Do VPNs Mean By Simultaneous Connections?

<https://www.howtogeek.com/825787/what-do-vpns-mean-by-simultaneous-connections/>

A lot of commercial VPNs restrict the number of simultaneous connections. Check out this post to find out what that means, and how it will affect you.

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See more on Page 14

NEED HELP?



Here's Who to Contact:

Neil Higgins

440-985-8507 - higgins.neil@gmail.com

Evenings 6 p.m. -10 p.m. + Weekends

Hardware, Linux & Windows Operating Systems,

Chromebooks, Tweaking your system

Micky Knickman

440-967-3118 - micky@knickman.com

Daily 5:00 am to 3:00 pm. Leave message if no answer.

General Software Configuration, Hardware Installation, Basic to Advanced Windows

Richard Barnett

440-365-9442 - Richard216@aol.com

Evenings & Weekends

General Software Configuration, Hardware Installation, Basic to Advanced Windows & Web Page Design

Sandee Ruth

440-984-2692 - sandee29@gmail.com

Basic Word Processing, Windows, & Web Design

Advanced Internet

Pam Casper Rihel

440-277-6076 or 440-308-8196

6:00 p.m. to 9:00 pm Monday thru Thursday
Genealogy help

prihel1947@gmail.com

Denny Smith Unavailable at this time

440-355-6218 - dennis.smith@windstream.net

Microsoft EXCEL

Leave message on machine if no answer

If any of our members are interested in helping other users with what programs you are adept at, please contact any of our officers with you name, what program or programs you would be willing to give help with, you email address and or phone number and when you would like to have them call you. Thanks



LCCUG ONGOING WORKSHOPS

ALL ARE FREE AND SOME ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Problem Solving Workshop

Date: Thursday- January 12, 2023

Time: 12PM -Please show up by 12:00 Instructor: Micky Knickman

Place: LCCC @ 201 W. Erie Ave., Lorain, OH

Learn how to repair and update your computer by changing hard drives, memory, CD ROMs, etc.

This workshop is limited to LCCUG members in good standing.

The Problem Solving Workshop is being held at our new building, LCCC, 201 W. Erie Ave. Lorain, Ohio

You are asked to bring in your computer, laptop and other electronics that you need help with unless the problem/question can be replicated on any device.

Learning About Electronics

Date: Thursday - January 12, 2023

Time: 12PM -Please show up by 12:00

Instructor: Sandee Ruth

Place: LCCC @ 201 W. Erie Ave., Lorain, OH

Learn how use various electronic devices.

Members are encouraged to bring their tablets, iPod, kindles, etc. for assistance from Sandee and any other knowledgeable members. The public is welcome to sit in on these sessions.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Changes to the day of our meetings

Our meetings will now be held on the
2nd Thursday of the month

From January 2023 through April
2023. The times will be the same.

Workshop is also on Thursday after
the meeting.

Elected Officers 2023

Elections to be held at the December 8th Meeting

President Sandee Ruth president@lccug.com

Vice President: Vacant
vp-programs@lccug.com

Secretary Don Hall
Secretary@lccug.com

Treasurer Micky Knickman
treasurer@lccug.com

Newsletter Editor Pam Rihel
newsletter@lccug.com

Webpage Editor Richard Barnett
webpage@lccug.com

Statutory Agent Sandra Ruth
statutory_agent@lccug.com

Director of Membership: Vacant
membership@lccug.com

Director of Advertising Richard Barnett
advertising@lccug.com

Director of Education Neil Higgins
education@lccug.com

The Lorain County Chapter of OGS

is having its next meeting online:

Check our webpage for the next program.

<http://loraincoogs.org/events.html>



We are having our meetings virtually using bluejeans.com.

To join the meeting on a computer or mobile phone:

<https://bluejeans.com/5006724159?src=calendarLink>

Also a link will be sent to you before the meeting.

North Ridgeville Library, 35700 Bainbridge Rd. North Ridgeville, Ohio. Meetings are free and open to the public. Social time is at 6:30 PM and the program begins at 7:00 PM. **Canceled Until further notice due to Covid-19**

John Kolb
secretary@loraincoogs.org

LCCUG is on Facebook

Come and visit our Facebook page for interesting facts and ideas. You can get a lot of computer information from our Facebook page. Have a question ask it on Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/lccug>

Genealogy Tip of the Day

michaeljohnneill,
Rootdig.com mjnrootdig@gmail.com

Cold Weather Memories?

michaeljohnneill, 22 Dec 10:19 AM

If you are looking for things to "jog memories" of either yourself or relatives, think about how really cold or really warm temperatures were dealt with "back in the day."

Thinking about how you kept warm could get a whole flood of memories started. Speaking of floods, if your family survived one of those that is something to ask about as well.

Genealogy Tip of the Day

michaeljohnneill,
Rootdig.com mjnrootdig@gmail.com

Cleaned Out the Old Search?

michaeljohnneill, 23 Dec 10:36 AM

If you've been experimenting with a database search in order to finally locate that elusive ancestor, have you made certain that there is not something from a previous search hiding in a box? If there is an option to clear out previous searches, that's often a good idea if you've been looking for multiple people in multiple ways in the same database.

HOW DOCTORED PHOTOS HELP SOCIAL SECURITY SCAMMERS

How much is your Social Security number worth? Actually, it only costs \$4 to buy a stolen SSN on the dark web. Or it's free to them if they steal it. But the cost to the victim could be astronomical.

Your number is actually one of the most valuable pieces of information for identity thieves. If they get ahold of it, they can use it to take out loans in your name, damaging your credit reputation, and potentially costing you a lot more.

They might also use it to access your banking and other confidential information, which require the last 4 digits of the SSN, to steal health records and passwords or commit several other crimes by passing themselves off as you.

And then there's the terrible stress of trying to sort out the mess that usually follows in the wake of identity theft. It's almost unbearable to think about.

Over the holiday season, the US Social Security Administration (SSA) issued a new alert about imposter scams - people claiming to be from the organization both to find out that precious number or frighten victims into paying money they don't owe.

They're particularly worried because crooks have stepped up their game by using fake identity evidence aimed at convincing victims - especially elders - that they're the real thing.

They're emailing and texting doctored photos of genuine government employees and forged official documents to hoodwink their targets.

Many of the scams originate overseas and the situation is so worrying that the Department of Justice recently announced it was beefing up its Transnational Elder Fraud Strike Force to help tackle Social Security imposter scams from abroad.

The villains usually call victims using a spoofed phone number or send forged documents, making them appear to come from the SSA. Sometimes they even turn up at your front door. And if you challenge them, they present fake photo IDs using images of real government employees.

They may say the individual's SSN has been suspended because of suspicious activity or that there's some other problem. Or they claim the victim has been overpaid or otherwise owes them money, which

must be paid immediately.

In some cases, they've been known to tell the victim that the security problem could give someone access to their bank account and recommend that it's moved into a supposed "safe" account from which the scammer draws down.

Most recently, security experts say scammers have been pretending to be from the "customer service" department within the SSA to sell products or services. For instance, they say a victim's number has "expired" and that they need to pay for a new card. They may claim there's a new enrollment program for other family members, which again has to be paid for, or demand a fee for an individual to access their own Social Security records.

In most cases, these services either don't exist or they're already available free of charge from the SSA.

In another recently reported scam, crooks have been sending out letters that appear to come from the SSA, complete with logos and other official-looking information. The letters - sometimes also emails - tell recipients they're entitled to a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to their monthly payments but have to phone a toll-free number to activate it.

Once more, they'll be told they have to pay a fee for this service. In reality, these adjustments happen automatically. They don't have to be activated.

HOW TO AVOID SOCIAL SECURITY SCAMS

Often, the scammers threaten to freeze benefits, seize your bank account, take court action, impose fines or even jail time if the victim doesn't pay up - scare tactics that are especially effective against older folk.

The Social Security Administration says it "will never threaten, scare or pressure you to take immediate action," so if a call or message uses this approach, you'll know it's a scam.

Nor does the department request payments using untraceable methods such as mailing cash, cryptocurrencies, gift cards or money-wiring services.

Simply never give your full SSN over the phone or in response to unsolicited messages or requests for you to "confirm" it, though it's not uncommon for genuine organizations to ask for the last four digits.

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8) *How Doctored Photos Help Social Security Scammers*

Keep your card safe and protect your password if you use the SSA's website.

Moreover, never assume that just because someone already has your number, or they provide photos credentials, that they are genuinely from Social Security or any other organization they claim to work for.

If you do think you've been scammed, tell the SSA. There's an easy-to-complete [reporting form](#) on their site.

Finally, if you're worried or uncertain about any approach you've had from someone claiming to be from Social Security, or any other government department, contact the department via their real phone number or discuss the issue with someone you trust.

THIS WEEK'S SCAM ALERTS

2023 outlook: The Internet Theft Resource Center (ITRC) warns that impersonation will be the big mover to drive growth of scams in the coming year, along with social media account takeovers and romance/dating scams. Other experts have said they expect to see a further sharp rise in the use of ransomware.

The Center also predicts an increase in con tricks and fraud targeting immigrants and ethnic minorities who don't have good command of English.

USPS trick: Ignore any text message you receive saying the United States Postal Service can't deliver a package because your address is incomplete. For instance, it may say they don't have your house number. Victims are told to call a toll-free number where they're asked to pay a \$3 fee to update records, using a credit card. USPS doesn't operate this way and the crooks not only get your \$3 but also your card number.

Pet threat: If you're a pet owner, beware of crooks claiming to be from your county or city animal service department claiming you owe them money from a past due fine. It's just the latest version of a longstanding scam in which crooks pretend to be from local courts or police to demand supposedly overdue payments.

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ScamBusters at
<http://www.scambusters.org>*



Why Are There Sites in My History I've Never Been To?

Just because you've never been to them doesn't mean you've never been to them.

by [Leo A. Notenboom](#)

Occasionally, sites appear in your browser history that you never visited. I'll examine some possible causes.

Browsing history. (Screenshot: [askleo.com](#))



I periodically clean my browser history, but after a while website entries begin to appear in it that I've never actually been to. Some of these sites look quite disturbing and are not sites that I would ever go to. Why would these entries appear? Do I have spyware or a virus?

It's usually nothing to worry about. Certainly, [malware](#) is a possibility. I'll also call out "foistware" or Potentially Unwanted Programs ([PUPs](#)) — software that appears on your system unexpectedly after installing something else.

However, there are many more benign scenarios. It's possible your browser may simply be doing a good job protecting you.

Sites in my history I've never been to

Sites can appear in your browsing history due to malware, blocked pop-ups and pop-unders, webpages built from other webpages, and browser pre-fetch features. With the exception of malware, most are benign.

Malware

Malware sometimes works by forcing your browser to go places you would never go. Potentially Unwanted Programs (PUPs) in particular can add toolbars and other software to your system that intercept what you're doing and just rudely take over, sending you to bogus search sites or worse.

These days, my first recommendation when you run into unexpected history entries is to make sure your machine

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

has no malware. In particular, I suggest you run the tools outlined in [How Do I Remove PUPs, Foistware, Drive-bys, Toolbars, and Other Annoying Things I Never Wanted?](#)

Pop-ups and pop-unders

Many websites employ [pop-ups](#): additional browser windows that open when you visit the site. These often contain ads for which the site owner gets paid.

Pop-unders are similar, though they've fallen out of favor in recent years. They are additional browser windows created when you visit a site that are placed behind your current browser window so they'll be visible when you minimize or exit the browser.

Pop-up blockers — now built into most browsers — keep pop-up and pop-under windows from displaying. The blockers intercept the requests to create new browser windows and prevent them from opening.

My theory is that the URLs behind blocked pop-ups sometimes still appear in your history **because they were added to the list before the pop-up was blocked**. You've never seen the site, but it's there in the list.

One page, many sources

Some webpages look like a single page but are actually a composite of more than one page or page fragments. What you see as a single [URL](#) may have fetched content from several different sites.¹

Depending on how your browser handles these requests, **it's possible that these page elements appear as individual entries in your history**. You wouldn't recognize them because they're not pages you explicitly visited, but they're present because they were part of some page you did go to.

Browser pre-fetch

Many web browsers now include a feature where they begin fetching the pages linked to in the page you're currently viewing.

When you click a link on the page, if all or even some of it has already been downloaded, it comes up much more quickly. That there's downloading going on you didn't explicitly ask for is typically not an issue because you're busy reading the page you originally requested.

Once again, **whether these pages appear in the browser history depends on the browser**. In theory, I'd only expect the links you actually clicked or pages you actually viewed to appear, but browser designers could decide otherwise.

Most of the time, this pre-load feature is something you can turn off in the options for the browser you use.

Do this

Ultimately, unless someone else is using your computer when you're not looking — which is also something worth checking for — this issue is typically harmless and benign.

However, that shouldn't stop you from taking appropriate precautions to [keep your computer safe](#).

Put me in your history! [Subscribe to Confident Computing](#): less frustration and more confidence, solutions, answers, and tips in your inbox every week.

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Genealogy Tip of the Day

michaeljohnneill,

[Rootdig.com](#) mjnrootdig@gmail.com

Are You Certain?

michaeljohnneill, 02 Jan 12:54 PM

I've been [going through and scanning my grandparents' slides](#) and identifying the individuals in them.

This needs to be done carefully and not hastily.

I saw a picture of my Mom talking to a cousin of my grandmother and made the identification after his name popped into my head. It turned out that the name was wrong. I was right about the family the guy was from but it was not the person I originally thought it was—it was his brother.

Comparing it to another picture I have of this man—around the same time fortunately—confirmed who it was. Slightly longer reflection caused me to remember that my grandparents saw the “correct name” cousin more than the cousin whose name initially came to mind.

Take a minute before you jump to any conclusion. Think before you attach a name to an image or a photograph. Once an error gets out it can be difficult to pull it back if it has spread.



APCUG article November 2022

A Cautionary Tale of Cloud-Based Apps

By Joel Ewing, President, Bella Vista Computer Club
president@bvcomputerclub.org

Insteon Home Automation

Around 2014 I started using Insteon home automation devices to control some plug-in electrical devices around my house. Insteon produced several different modules using a proprietary peer-to-peer communication protocol to communicate with an Insteon hub in your house, which used an Ethernet connection to your router and your home LAN to connect to Insteon-owned cloud servers on the Internet.

The Insteon devices and hub use a unique combination of wireless RF (not Wi-Fi) and powerline signaling. Each device module acts as a repeater to ensure all modules can communicate with the hub. In addition, there was a smartphone/smartpad Insteon app that, in concert with the Insteon cloud service, allowed you to schedule state changes (turn-on, turn-off, dim) for the individual Insteon modules, manually change the module state remotely, or monitor the condition of modules in the case of sensor modules.

The smartphone Insteon app allowed you to monitor the state of the various modules while away from your house as long as you had Internet access on your smart device. Manual remote control of lights from outside the house was not that useful to me but could, I suppose, be used to add some randomness to simulate people in an empty house or turn off a light unintentionally left on. On the other hand, remotely controlling lights or other plug-in devices while in your house from the comfort of an easy chair or bed was very convenient, as was the scheduling of lights that should always go on and off at regular times.

The peer-to-peer communication between the modules and the hub made the system very reliable. Over the years, I've only had one module fail -- after one of our cats marked it as his territory in the usual cat fashion. Unfortunately,

I've also had two hubs die on me in four years. After the 2nd one failed, I did some research and found that I shouldn't have plugged the hub into a UPS, as some of the high-frequency components of the AC output of a typical home UPS unit running on the battery tends to stress the hub power supply and cause early failure. Since then, I've plugged the hub into an outlet with only surge protection and have had no other hardware failures.

The modules I found most helpful were those that would plug into a regular outlet and provide a module-controlled outlet for the controlled light or other device. The most useful aspect of these modules was that they could be easily moved and redeployed for a different use. Over the years, we acquired three different varieties: an un-grounded dimmer (which could be used as a switch), an un-grounded switch, and a grounded switch rated for outdoor use. We also acquired a water-leak sensor, which was deployed in a storage area under the house near the water heater.

Over the years, we have made good use of the Insteon system. For example, we have used Insteon to control several table lamps in several rooms, indoor and outdoor Christmas lights, and heating devices in the cats' outdoor houses. Until April 13 of this year, we had never (outside of testing) gotten a warning from the water-leak sensor, but it proved its worth when torrential rain and a drainage problem outside resulted in water under the house. The leak sensor did its job and made it possible to resolve the issue before damage could be done.

The Demise of Insteon

After the water-leak detector saved the day (talk about fortunate timing), our Insteon automation stopped working. Trying to use the Insteon iPhone app to manually control the lights also failed with the app's inability to log on to Insteon. The Insteon hub's normal green LED was red. It was unclear whether there was some failure in our hub or what. After some research, some people had been concerned about the long-term prospects of Insteon in 2021, that others were now reporting

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similar failures like ours, and that the Insteon forum for discussing device problems also seemed to be down. One of the possibilities for a red hub light was an inability to communicate on the Internet, but Internet access was otherwise working. Power cycling the hub produced no change. The conclusion at the time was there was some problem with the Insteon Internet service, but no indication the problem was permanent.

After being down for a day, speculation continued to increase, but no official word. By April 16, the consensus finally became that "Insteon is dead." The only semi-official notification received was an email finally sent to my Insteon account email on April 21 from SmartLabs Inc. (the parent company of Insteon) revealing "Insteon Users: Important Notice to Creditors": a notice dated April 12, indicating that SmartLabs Inc. had on March 22 assigned its assets for liquidation. A week after the initial April 14 failure, the insteon.com website now has a general notice that "the company was assigned to a financial services firm in March to optimize the assets of the company," which I guess is legalese for "expect an end of all service on some arbitrary date after March 22". It's beyond me why they couldn't just spend the same amount of effort and have the website clearly state that all Insteon cloud services for support of Insteon hubs have been discontinued as of April 14, 2022, so people wouldn't have to guess what's going on.

I was a little ticked off that Insteon gave no heads-up on what was about to happen. Even notification as they pulled the plug would have been an improvement to avoid wasting time diagnosing a problem that couldn't be fixed. But, unfortunately, in retrospect, Insteon's business model probably doomed them: they provided a free Internet service with an increasing number of users and very little long-term income from those like me once they had all the automation modules they had needed. Add to that the reduced sales from financial and supply chain disruption during the pandemic...

Perhaps the lesson to be learned here is that products that require a free cloud service to function should be regarded as having planned obsolescence -- you don't know what the plan is.

There are alternatives, but for most people that aren't technically savvy, or have access to someone that is, this means that their Insteon hub and device modules have become expensive doorstops.

Finding an Inexpensive Free Alternative

Having to replace all your Insteon modules and hub with a different system and hardware means throwing out hardware that may represent a sizable investment of hundreds of dollars. Unfortunately, there don't appear to be any suitable commercially available solutions that can utilize the Insteon hardware.

A cheaper Open Source alternative can restore the functionality of an Insteon hub and all the Insteon modules. Still, it requires some technical expertise to set up another machine on your home network with a specialized Operating System. That machine could be a Raspberry Pi with 2 GiB RAM, or an older (but not too old) retired machine. On the other hand, if you have a system that runs 24x7 that can support running a Virtual Machine with a UEFI boot and that can be network "bridged" to appear on your local LAN subnet, then it is possible to use a Virtual machine with 1.5 GiB of RAM. on existing hardware.

The Open Source software that will do the job is Home Assistant. The Home Assistant server is available in image downloads of Home Assistant OS (HAOS) for installation on an x86-64bit or Raspberry Pi architecture. In addition, there are corresponding Home Assistant (HA) apps for smartphones that will allow you to configure and control the Home Assistant server, or it can be done using any browser and the exact LAN IP address and port for the HAOS server.

Conceivably you could run Home Assistant OS on an older retired computer, but it would have to be recent enough hardware to support 64-bit architecture and UEFI (non-secure) boot. If you

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use a virtual machine rather than actual hardware, it is required to set up bridged networking so the virtual machine gets its address on your LAN. In the case of my Linux system and KVM virtual machines, bridged networking was the most challenging part of the process. The Home Assistant OS must be on your primary home LAN subnet for the iPhone apps to find the Home Assistant server and for the Home Assistant server to detect your Insteon hub (and other IoT devices in your house that it can support). It would probably also be a good idea to configure your router to assign a fixed LAN IP address to the Home Assistant server machine.

When configuring Home Assistant for your Insteon hub, you will probably need to supply the login name and password on the base label on the hub. Once it connects with the hub, it should go through device discovery and gradually locate all the powered-up Insteon modules, except perhaps for sensor modules. I had to press the reset button on the module to get it to see my leak sensor module. The LED light on the hub will remain red -- apparently, that only turns green if the hub can talk to the Insteon cloud server and no longer exists.

The discovered Insteon modules will initially only be identified in Home Assistant by their Insteon hex ID value of the form hh.hh.hh and by the module type. If you haven't saved documentation that maps the module IDs to their location, you may have to power modules On/Off from Home Assistant one at a time so that you can associate meaningful names with the modules. Where I had only one module of that particular type, the module type was sufficient to know the related module location.

The Insteon scheduling was in the Insteon cloud, which is all lost and will have to be built again on Home Assistant. The approach is different, but I found it more convenient than what Insteon used. In Insteon, a schedule belonged to a device, or you had to define a "scene" of multiple devices if you wanted a schedule to affect multiple devices; you couldn't have more than one schedule set to trigger at the same

minute. In-Home Assistant, you have Automation Entities, which include one or more triggers that initiate the automation and one or more actions that should be performed when the automation is triggered. The actions can change the state of one or more device modules within the same automation definition. If an automation action is triggered while a previous action is still in progress, you can specify if and how you want them to interact. To me, the Home Assistant approach is more natural and more flexible.

If smartphones are running the Home Assistant app, one of the possible automation actions is sending a message to the HA app on that smart device. The connection between the server and the smart device app is by LAN IP address, which can only work while your phone is on your home network. I don't know if a message to a phone not currently on the home LAN is queued to be sent when possible or what. If it is an alert that you need to receive promptly no matter where you are, there is probably some way to do that (email?), I haven't had the time to research that yet.

There are ways to make a Home Assistant server running HAOS at your home accessible from the Internet, but to do this securely on your own is a non-trivial exercise. The native communication for the HA server on HAOS uses an insecure http protocol on port 8123. You wouldn't want to open that port to the HAOS system on your router because your HA login credentials would be sent over the Internet in the clear, potentially exposing your home automation to attack. I don't know how to do it yet, but I know there are ways to create an https secure interface that could be used to either directly or indirectly access the HAOS system. That, in turn, requires that you own (at an annual charge) an Internet domain name that is defined to point to your external Internet IP for your home, and if you don't have a business IP account with a fixed Internet IP address, you also need some process to update the IP address of your domain name if your Internet provider changes your Internet IP address. I see this getting complicated in a hurry. Suppose you only want access to your HA server from the Internet to receive notification alerts from HA on your iPhone

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when you are away from home. In that case, I think it may be less work to find solutions that address the notification issue.

There is another secure and simple option if you must have access to all your Home Assistant automation away from your home over the Internet, but it is not free. You can subscribe to the Home Assistant Cloud service provided by Nabu Casa, Inc. at either \$6.50 monthly or \$65 annually. This service offers a secure Internet interface between your smart device and their service, which in turn uses a secure interface to the Home Assistant machine at your house. Since it is a charged subscription service, it is probably more likely to stay around than Insteon's free cloud service, but that does mean you can again become dependent on a third-party cloud application that is not under your control and become locked into one more continuing payment for the indefinite future.

It took almost a week to get all the bugs out, mostly trying different ways to get a virtual machine properly bridged to my home LAN. Still, I finally got everything I needed working: automation with HAOS running on its own [virtual] machine with remote control over my home Wi-Fi and LAN from the HA app on iPhones, all controlling the Insteon hub and Insteon modules. I have found the HA interfaces and flexibility more convenient than what was originally provided by the Insteon apps and Insteon cloud servers. The best part is that all the pieces required to keep it working within my home are now under my direct control with no added cost but time.

Interesting Internet Finds

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Windows 11 Has A Secret Start Menu — This Is How You Can Access

<https://trendblog.net/windows-11-has-a-secret-start-menu-this-is-how-you-can-access/>

I now have a Windows 11 PC, as my primary desktop completely died so I had to get a new one. My worst problem, so far, has been getting used to the new start menu. This post has been helpful to me,

check it out if you end up going to Windows 11 yourself.

How To Use Google Chromecast Without Wi-Fi <https://www.groovypost.com/howto/use-google-chromecast-without-wi-fi/>

If you have a Chromecast and, for some reason, end up without wi-fi access, this post offers some suggestions for still using the Chromecast. (Note: I have saved this where I know I can access it as I live in Florida and it is hurricane season.

How To Legally Download A Windows Virtual Machine <https://www.maketecheasier.com/legally-download-windows-virtual-machine/>

If you want to check out the Windows operating system, this post is for you. In this post, you find out how and where to download a legal Windows virtual machine and how to secure it for use.

The Write Conversation: Why NOT To Give Away Your Presentation Slides

<https://thewriteconversation.blogspot.com/2022/06/why-not-to-give-away-your-presentation.html>

This article is for those who give presentations to user groups or other gatherings. The author outlines several reasons you should not giveaway your presentation slides and suggestions of what to do instead.

Peppering Your Passwords

<https://firewallsdontstopdragons.com/password-manager-paranoia/>

In this post are some suggestions for creating and keeping track of your passwords. This is not an all-encompassing solution by any means. (Note: I am interested in password security, so this kind of post always gets my interest.)

Stop Using Your Tablet Like An eReader

<https://www.reviewgeek.com/121521/stop-using-your-tablet-like-an-e-reader/>

This post explains, and I agree, why you should stop using your tablet as an ereader, and instead get a dedicated ereader (not necessarily a Kindle) for reading ebooks. (Note: I have both a Kindle and a tablet but, I use the tablet only for reading emagazines not ebooks.)