Computing Tips by Ron Mettler
January 7, 2009

The below are some of my opinions and ideas, offered as alternatives to what may be considered as convention.

Network Printers

Computer users may have noticed that many of the newer printers are equipped with network interface connections. This allows for the printer to be plugged into an Ethernet port on a home router and configured for printing from any home networked computer. The big advantage to networked printers is that the printer can be used without having it directly connected to a computer that must be running in order to print from other computers. If you have a wireless computer (typically a laptop) that you use at home, you can also configure it to print to the Ethernet connected printer by configuring the printer port to be a TCP/IP port. Likewise the Ethernet connected computers on the home network can be configured in the same way. Most printers include a network configuration setup routine that allows you to set the TCP/IP address for the printer. I have detailed another method below for those so interested.

I helped one CUGG member connect an HP C6280 multi-purpose printer/scanner/copier to his home network in a location that did not allow him to run a new Ethernet cable back to his router. The location was close to a networked computer with one connection in the wall for the computer. The simple solution used was to purchase a 5-port switch which was available at local electronic stores for $25. I have seen the same switches on sale for as low as $15. The switch was plugged into the wall Ethernet connection, the computer and the printer were then each connected to the switch with short Ethernet cables.

I often configure the printer port address on each networked computer by installing the printer software drivers with the default port of LPT1. I do not allow the install routine to look for the printer on the network since it will not find it if it is not connected to the LPT1 port on the computer. After the software and drivers are installed, do not attempt to print a test page until the correct port setting is configured. Most printers have a method of finding the Port address that has been assigned to the printer when it was plugged into the Ethernet connection on the network. The HP printers with LCD screens allow for displaying of the network parameters including the TCP/IP address. Write down the address which will be something like 192.168.1.127. Then for each computer that has the drivers installed, go to control panel, printers, and right click on the printer and select properties. Select the Port tab, then Add port, scroll down to Standard TCP/IP Port, click on New Port, Next, then type in the port address that you wrote down. Click Next then finish and close the windows. Be sure to click on Apply when you get back to the Printer Properties page. You should then be able to print a test page from the Printer Properties, General Tab, or from any Windows application.

HP Printer Drivers and Software

Purchasing and installing a new HP printer usually results in the installation of a multitude of programs that you may not want or need. Other printer manufacturers may also do the same thing. What you may end up with are programs for photo editing, photo file management, camera photo transfer, automatic updates for HP software, and a number of other often useless, memory using programs. After the HP software installation, going to Control Panel, Add/Remove (in XP) or Programs and Features (in Vista) you will find up to as many as 8 new programs listed. If you are using and prefer to use other programs for photo editing, scanning, and photo file management, the HP programs just add a very large burden on system resources if they are not needed or used. I have found that often a bare bones printer driver can be found on the hp.com site under Support and Drivers. This allows for an installation that provides basic printing functions without installing what I consider as a lot of crapware. You can use shareware programs for photo editing such as Picassa, Gimp, or whatever you prefer, or purchased products like Adobe Photo Elements or ACDSee. For scanning, there are free or shareware programs or again you can use programs such as Adobe Photo Elements or Adobe Acrobat (not Adobe Reader).

I usually go to the HP Web site and download the latest drivers for the printer being installed in any case rather than use the CD that is included with the printer. You are then assured that the latest updates are being installed. For instance, for the HP C6280 mentioned above, go to hp.com, select Support and Drivers, then select Download Drivers and Software, type in c6280 for a search, pick the operating system that you use, then a list of optional downloads are shown in the window. I picked the one titled HP Photosmart Basic Driver.