focusonTECH

Windows 8, Pinterest, new office suites in the news

By Art Snyder

The sleepy days of summer are no more. At least in the tech universe. How else to explain all the great news, such as Windows 8, Pinterest marketing, supersized monitors, new office suite editions and other freebies? Full details are below.

Windows 8 on the horizon

Microsoft is gearing up for the release of its next operating system, Windows 8. From all indications, the company is likely to have its latest operating system available as the foundation of new personal computers being readied by Dell, Hewlett Packard and other manufacturers for an October debut.

With 95 percent of all computers used by small businesses — such as rinks — based on a Microsoft operating system, news from Microsoft demands attention. For most rinks, however, almost any MS operating system that has met the marketplace in the last 15 years, such as Windows XP, Vista or Windows 7, is still very capable for nearly all rink tasks. Remember this about Windows 8: It'll sport a slick new look and be especially capable at handling graphics, but it's more of an extension of the best, most stable and reliable MS operating systems, Win XP and Win 7.

About the most significant new feature of Win 8 is its built-in touchscreen capability. For most needs that? Those with smart phones, tablets and similar handheld devices. As a rink operator, you can continue with your present computer. But if you're in the market for a newer model, look for a nicely discounted Win 7 toward the end of summer. That's when retailers want to move "old" merchandise and prepare for the hoopla of the buy-buy-buy fall season.

Be advised, and save some capital expenses in the months ahead.

Pinterest

Every business is looking for the latest marketing edge, as with Facebook and its 900+ million users. As the social world of computing and its outreach continues to grow, Pinterest seems to be the most likely candidate to emerge victorious in the social arena. It's showing a lot of energy with corralling new fans and users, and it deserves your rink's attention. Pinterest will help keep you on the cutting edge and maintain a presence with the all-important youth (ages 10 to 30) market.

So, how can you find out more about Pinterest — what it is and what it can do for your rink as a business? Thanks to a free Pinterest booklet from HubSpot.com, you can learn just about all you might want to know about using Pinterest and boosting rink profits. The 44-page booklet How to Use Pinterest for Business can be yours with no hassle.

To get this free booklet emailed

directly from me to you, simply send a request to me anytime at ArtSnyder44@cs.com. That's all there is to it. I hope I can help you.

Free tools to clean old hard drives securely

There may be a good chance that you'll upgrade your office computer system this year — potential bargains are hard to resist — and that calls for one thing first: privacy safety. All used computers are filled (or packed) with the personal data of the owners and operators, naturally. That's what computers and their hard drives are for. But as a business owner, you have to understand that protection of your company and staff data, from tax information to employee records, is essential. And certain facts and their safe-keeping are mandatory by federal law (and some state laws).

That being said, you can't trade in, sell, donate or otherwise get rid of your current computer without erasing and eradicating all the information on your computer's hard drive. (This holds for backup storage disks, as well, unless you keep them safe and secure for archival purposes.) Your obligation is clear: You must properly wipe (remove) old data from a flash drive, hard-disk drive, solid-state drive or other storage medium. After you wipe a disk, you then have to overwrite the same disk with a utility that randomly reconfigures all data and storage space on a disk drive with a nonsense string of digital information — basically, a series of 1s and 0s, which is the essence of recording data to any storage drive or device.

Fortunately, you can do this these days for free. To erase your traditional computer hard drive (a magnetic device), you can use Darik's Boot and Nuke (DBAN), a boot disk utility that randomly overwrites and erases a disk several times. This ensures a high level of security and safety. Get your free copy at dban.org. For additional help, check out a DBAN video on YouTube, at http://x.co/khbr. If you also need to wipe an SSD (solid-state drive), try a copy of the Center for Magnetic Recording Research's free Secure Erase utility.

You can download the software at http://x.co/khad. Another choice for erasing data from your soon-to-be-old computer is File Shredder, a free utility. Get your copy at fileshredder.org. Also, a YouTube video on File Shredder is at http://x.co/khcg. Other than these recommendations, you'll have to put on some safety goggles and have at it with a sledgehammer to whack that storage drive into obliteration (don't laugh; I've done that).

Kingsoft Office Suite, Apache OpenOffice, LibreOffice

Microsoft's acclaimed Word software program has plenty of excellent competition these days, thanks to office suites from Kingsoft Office, Apache OpenOffice and LibreOffice. All three companies have developed full-ranging office suites — they have each introduced new suites this year, packed with more bells and whistles than you'll ever need — and I can attest to the value of them and their levels of refinement, comprehensiveness and competence.

And to make life more interesting, and more profitable for your rink, all three office suites are free downloads. Yes, free, and literally millions of people, small businesses and corporations worldwide have downloaded and used these office suites.

OpenOffice and LibreOffice have been around for years; the well-known Apache software corporation took over OpenOffice last year, to add development muscle to the oldest MS Office competitor, and the former OpenOffice staffers transitioned into a new name, LibreOffice, and globally continued to develop their powerful office suite, also with its new name.

Kingsoft is the newest player. It's based in Hong Kong, a former British colony, where the English language has predominated for a century. I've used all three office suites alongside MS Word, and I can attest to their seeming interchangeability and ease of use. They're also handsomely designed, a big plus with your staff when it puts in a few hours at the computer, working on staff schedules, media releases, invoices and fliers, for example. The designs of the suites are very intuitive, and if you've ever used any word-processing program (which gets the lion's share of suite use), for any length of time, you'll find them naturally appealing with their features and layouts.

To look at the features and designs of Kingsoft Office, Apache OpenOffice and LibreOffice, and to download and test each of them, simply visit them at kingsoftstore.com, libreoffice.org and openoffice.org, respectively.

GIMP 2.8

Right on the heels of my review of GIMP in the last issue, the company has introduced a new generation of its free Photoshop graphics alternative, GIMP v. 2.8. It's power-packed and better than ever, too.

Perhaps the most awaited new feature of the new GIMP software is the ability of its modules being configured in a familiar single-window mode, with tabs for working on more than one image or photo at a time. Now when you're working on new graphics for rink marketing materials, such as school and church handouts, for example, or for online applications, you can do so more quickly.

Another great new feature is "On-Canvas Text Editing." Simply put, you now can do text-editing directly onto any image or photo that you may be tweaking or prepping for use.

To download the new GIMP 2.8, just go to gimp.org.

Art Snyder is a longtime RINKSIDER contributor. He lives in Centerville, Ohio, and has used computers and technology since 1986.