

focus on TECH

Chrome browser, Epson printer, Windows 7, YouTube in the news

By Art Snyder

What a great time this is to depend on technology! That's especially heartening when the consumer dollar really calls for your absolute best marketing to keep your rink first and foremost with all your customers. To that illustrious end is good news about Google's Chrome browser, a new wide-format printer from Epson, the verdict on Windows 7, and free help from the SBA and YouTube. Full details are below.

Chrome Web browser

To run your rink business today, you have to use the Internet — to operate your Web site, to market your rink as a value-laden family destination, to access your rink Facebook page, to manage your finances, to e-mail customers and potential customers, and to do many other tasks that are essential



to success. So to access the Internet, you need a good Web browser, and for many who use the Windows operating system, the default browser is Microsoft's Internet Explorer. It's an OK browser, but if you want a speedy, slick browser, go with Google's Chrome browser. I've been using Chrome for a few months, and I'm impressed big-time. I constantly use and test every browser suitable for Windows, and for a few years I've been partial to browsers from Firefox and Opera (there are about five other top-flight browsers), but the more I use Chrome and get knocked out by its blazing speed, security, freshness and ease of customization, the more I enjoy and recommend Chrome. Download a free copy at google.com/chrome and give it a whirl for a week. It's a keeper.

Epson WorkForce 1100 Wide-format Printer

You need a printer every day. That's a given. But to put a printer to work for you to do better marketing and promotions, you'll find that a wide-format inkjet printer puts the "Oomph!" in your outreach. The Epson

WorkForce 1100 Wide-format Printer is such a printer. The key to its pacesetter impact is its ability to print signage and similar output on paper and cardstock up to 13 by 19 inches. That's far beyond the 8 1/2-by-11-inch norm of most printers. And, the WorkForce 1100 goes about its business of printing gloriously rich color text, images and photos at a very brisk 30 ppm rate.

"Engineered for small business, the WorkForce 1100 delivers high performance, high quality, wide-format prints without compromise. The WorkForce 1100 is two times faster than leading competitive inkjet printers. This printer provides professionals with vibrant prints that are smudge-, fade- and water-resistant, from brochures, everyday projects" and more, said a company spokesman.

The Epson WorkForce 1100 is a fast USB setup on almost any Windows computer made in the past five years, and this includes the new Windows 7 operating system. Naturally, this inkjet prints everyday fare like media announcements, school releases, time sheets, invoices and photos, too. The WorkForce 1100 has a street price of about \$150, an excellent value. For more, visit epson.com.

Windows 7

The newest operating system from Microsoft — Windows 7 — has been officially released, and the verdict is clear and unanimous: a total thumbs-up! And what a relief! The system loads quicker than any other from Microsoft, and it exudes a welcome confidence as it smoothly and briskly goes about its business, as with zippy loading of favorite programs like Word, Firefox, Open Office, Photoshop, Adobe Reader and a host of others. I've given Windows 7 a workout in tests, and I heartily recommend it. I've been very fond of Windows XP for several years, but its first successor, Windows Vista, was a disappointment. We'll give it a not-so-fond farewell and embrace Windows 7. (I'll still use one computer with my trusty XP, as a benchmark with future product and program tests.) Windows 7 pricing and installation details are too voluminous for here, but I suggest several options. One is to go to Microsoft's Web site and look for Windows 7 tutorials, videos and related guidance. PC World's Top 10 How-To Videos offer a boatload of learning with the right video; PC World also has many other helpful features, reviews, tests and blogs on Windows 7. Visit pcworld.com, and do a Windows 7 search. You'll find several videos on Windows 7 at YouTube.com; do a search there to get onto

the learner bandwagon. Also, how about a free book that really spills the details on Windows 7? You can download the fantastic, full-color, 140-page Welcome to Windows 7 Product Guide. It's official, from Microsoft. To download it, visit the Microsoft Download Center, at tinyurl.com/yktp3vn. Or go to the Microsoft.com home and do a search on Welcome to Windows 7 Product Guide.pdf (spelled that way).

YouTube and small businesses

YouTube is no longer solely the repository of nutty videos of some guy stuffing a whole pizza in his mouth, or a team of cheerleaders flipping as they yodel the national anthem. YouTube is now a home for small business — that's what most rinks are — and



the Internet site owes its thanks to the U.S. government Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA has stepped up to fashion a free program to promote entrepreneurship and the vital importance of small businesses across the country to the U.S. economy and financial health. To begin, go online to youtube.com/sba, and check out the introductory SBA videos and other materials on its services and role as a partner to small business. Upcoming videos are to be on government loan programs, counseling and training in the ways of business, contracting opportunities, and other fare. As a business, you pay your taxes, and the YouTube-SBA alliance is a fine way to see a positive return on your tax investment in the country.

LED lighting and signage

As the technology for incandescent light bulbs fades into disuse, the arrival of LED lighting has emerged. LED lighting uses a small fraction of the power that heat- and waste-producing incandescent lighting gobbles, and that's an ever-growing cost you'd like to tame. Further, LED lighting lasts seemingly forever, so your labor and bulb-replacement costs are lowered. All of that is especially great news as you contemplate the massive utility bills that arrive every month. After all, lighting a rink is a core operational cost. For now, LED bulbs that can replace your current incandescent

lighting and all-important signage are admittedly pricey, but that's about to change, just as technology improvements have beaten down the cost of LCD TV and computer screens, for example. Our next column here will have a fuller overview of developments with LED lighting, and you'll read about new signage and other such marketing for your rink that can help your profitability as the year unfolds.

Low-light cameras

Today's rink is the proverbial gold mine of opportunity with digital cameras and photo-quality inkjet printers. School sessions, birthday parties, hockey competitions, day-cares and more are all now a bit brighter in eyes of your customers when you can travel the "instant gratification" route. That is, take photographs to record a rink event, and print them within minutes, to the delight of all. The stumbling block? Low or insufficient lighting, especially when flash photos are not feasible or convenient. That's when you need a digital camera that is designed for such demanding duty. Mere pixel strength is not the answer, as with the bragging in recent years over which camera had the highest megapixel count. Fortunately, camera manufacturers have addressed this lighting problem and designed cameras that can operate under the most difficult of low-light conditions. Look for cameras with large sensors suited to all lighting conditions. That's the key. Among the companies are Panasonic, Olympus, Sony and Fujifilm. Look for new models that highlight their large sensors and state that low-light conditions are not a challenge. Each company has a changing array of models that meet these qualifications. One newer model that welcomes these standards is Canon's PowerShot S90. Prices vary a lot, as well, so do your homework with comparison shopping online and at all your neighborhood shopping emporiums. In the end, you'll help your rink remain topmost in the eyes of your customers and prospective customers alike. And that's at the heart of everyday great marketing and business promotion.

Products mentioned in this column are widely available. Check local office suppliers, computer and technology vendors, mass-merchandise and discount retailers, and mail-order and online sources. With broadband Internet access, software programs are a fast, easy and often cheaper download, saving you staff time and improving efficiency in many ways.

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