

## Welcome!

Welcome to the 23rd issue of the quarterly CyberText newsletter. As usual, there are lots of tips and snippets of information that I hope will make your life easier, and some interesting websites for you to view.

Starting from July 2007, I will be available for more freelance work. For the past five and a half years I've been contracted to BMS Solutions for 25 hours a week. That contract finishes at the end of June when I am replaced by a full-time technical writer.

So, if you have any writing or editing work you need done, or require some AuthorIT assistance (importing, template creation, etc.), please contact me and we'll see how your needs fit with my skills and availability.

My preference is to work from home, but I can travel for short periods of time if required.

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## Word: Accented characters

**Problem:** Jane from Sydney asked: Do you know how to set up shortcuts either in Word or using your keyboard to get accented characters, such as those used in French?



**Solution:** Sure do, Jane! Hold down the ALT key as you press a sequence of keys. For a full list of each special character's key combination, go to: <http://www.forlang.wsu.edu/help/keyboards.asp>

**Example:** ALT+0128 creates the Euro symbol € and ALT+0231 creates ç.

By the way, these key combinations work in any text editor, from Notepad, to Outlook, to Word...

## Food, glorious food

I've recently come across two interesting food and recipe websites. Of the millions of recipe sites out there, these two are special for the very different ways they present the information.

The first site is **Rouxbe** (pron. ruby), which is free for a limited time but will go to a subscription model soon. Why is Rouxbe (<http://www.rouxbe.com>) so interesting?



Well, each recipe is a short, narrated, and beautifully photographed video of the steps and techniques. Take the tour, check out the free recipe videos, and make sure you also look at some of the videos of techniques and unusual ingredients in the 'drilldowns' area. You can print the recipes and even download the videos for viewing at your leisure.

The other site, **Cooking for Engineers** (<http://www.cookingforengineers.com>), is for those with a very analytical mind. What makes this recipe site interesting is the unique way that the recipe is displayed in a table at the end of the steps. Only an engineer could have thought of that!

(Thanks to Karen in Denmark for alerting me to the Cooking for Engineers site)

## Lost windows?

Sometimes an application you've been using disappears off the screen, or the title bar is off the top of the monitor and is no longer visible. This is a particular problem if you're using two or more monitors. You *know* the program is still 'alive' because it's listed in the task bar. You may even be able to maximize it, but you can't position it where you want it. Here's a quick trick to get that window back where it belongs. It should work with all versions of Windows.

1. Press ALT+TAB to display the open windows.
2. Continue holding down the ALT key as you press TAB until you select the icon for your 'missing' program. Release the keys.
3. Press ALT+<spacebar>.
4. Press the **M** key.
5. Press the arrow keys a few times until you see the program's window on screen. Depending on where it's 'hiding', you may have to press the down arrow key, or the left or right arrow keys.
6. Now move your mouse to drag the window back into view and you're done.

## Special offer from SmartDraw

I've been using SmartDraw for drawing diagrams, flowcharts and the like for a few years now. I find that it's easier to use than Microsoft Visio, and has better templates and objects, especially in the latest version - SmartDraw 2007. At \$297 US, it's also substantially cheaper than Visio.

Normally, I wouldn't do a referral type of promotion for a piece of software in this newsletter. However, I got an email from SmartDraw the other day offering a good discount (\$120 US off) to anyone who purchases SmartDraw via the link below - and offering me a free upgrade to the next version of SmartDraw if only one sale is made via this method. I figure that's good for both of us, and as it's software that I use and recommend anyway, I'm happy to disclose the benefit that I get too.

Anyhow, if you're interested, you can download a free, no obligation, 7-day trial of SmartDraw from here: [http://www.smartdraw.com/specials/drawingsoftware\\_ref.asp?refcode=29U](http://www.smartdraw.com/specials/drawingsoftware_ref.asp?refcode=29U). If you decide to buy it, use the same link and go to the top section to get your \$120 discount.

## "Death by PowerPoint"

It's no longer a myth!

Researchers at the University of NSW have shown that "there are limits on the brain's capacity to process and retain information in short-term memory. ...The use of the PowerPoint presentation has been a disaster. ... It should be ditched."

Full article: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/technology/powerpoint-presentations-a-disaster/2007/04/03/1175366240499.html>

## User experience levels

Whenever technical writers have a new product to document, questions that should be asked very early in the process are "Who is the audience for this product? Who will use it, and why?" Often, there's no simple answer because complex products, such as software, may cater to varying levels of user ability. In such cases, the writer typically narrows the audience down to three main groups - beginners, those with some knowledge, and advanced users.

While reading one of my RSS feeds a few weeks ago, I came across a useful classification of user expertise levels from Paul Sherman:

- **The beginner**—The beginning user has never or rarely used an application, device, or product before. For beginners, almost every interaction with a system is exploratory. Their physical movements—and/or the on-screen representations of their movements—are mostly explicit and thoughtful. In this phase, users are trying to figure out what a system does and how they can use it. They are actively creating and modifying their mental models.
- **The novice**—The novice user has ascended the learning curve somewhat. Novice users have committed certain basic operations of a system to memory—cognitive or muscle memory. They are comfortable within a circumscribed area of a system's total functionality. Their mental model of how and why a system behaves as it does is by no means complete—and in fact, might be quite inaccurate. But their limited knowledge has no adverse effects, so long as novice users stay within their comfort zone. If novice users need to learn a new area of functionality, their behavior reverts to that of a beginner while learning.
- **The expert**—The expert user not only has mastery over many aspects of a system, the user's mental model of the system is complete and accurate enough that learning a new area of functionality occurs rapidly and easily. Expert users not only know a system; they know how to learn more about the system.

To read the full article, go to "Envisioning the Future of User Experience" by Paul J Sherman (April 9, 2007: <http://www.uxmatters.com/MT/archives/000184.php>)

## Word: Letterheads

**Problem:** You've received your new logo from the graphic designer and now you want to incorporate it into all the letters and documents that your company sends out.



**Solution 1:** Make sure the brief to the graphic designer also includes creating new Word templates! If it's too late or too expensive to do that, try Solution 2.

**Solution 2:** Follow this quick and easy tutorial to add your new logo to your Word templates: [http://www.creativetechs.com/iq/create\\_letterhead\\_templates\\_in\\_ms\\_word.html](http://www.creativetechs.com/iq/create_letterhead_templates_in_ms_word.html)

## Poor Pluto!

In its 17th annual Words of the Year vote, the American Dialect Society voted *plutoed* as the 2006 word of the year. *To pluto* is to demote or devalue someone or something, which is what happened to Pluto when the General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union decided Pluto no longer met its definition of a planet.

(Ref: [http://www.americandialect.org/index.php/amerdial/plutoed\\_voted\\_2006\\_word\\_of\\_the\\_year/](http://www.americandialect.org/index.php/amerdial/plutoed_voted_2006_word_of_the_year/))

## Interesting websites

Readers have shared some interesting websites with me in the past few months, and I've discovered a few of my own that I'd like to share with you. Enjoy!



- **wikiHow** (<http://www.wikihow.com>) is a collaborative writing project to build the world's largest how-to manual. The site currently contains over 18,000 articles written, edited, and maintained by volunteers - people like you!
- **Popuri** (<http://www.popuri.us>): Want to know how popular your website is? Enter your URL in Popuri to see how many links and trackbacks there are to your site.
- How much does that coffee really cost? Find out how much those gourmet muffins/cigarettes/fancy coffees/bought lunches etc. are REALLY costing you, and be surprised at how much the price of fuel (which we all complain about) is less of a concern than the price of subscription TV/internet (<http://www.hughchou.org/calc/>).
- Think your reaction time is fast? Are you a turbo-charged cheetah, a rocketing rabbit, a bobbing bobcat, an ambling armadillo, or a sluggish snail? Here's a little online fun for testing your reaction time: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/sleep/sheep/reaction\\_version5.swf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/sleep/sheep/reaction_version5.swf)
- **This is Broken** (<http://www.thisisbroken.com>) has all sorts of amusing error messages, bad labelling on packages, etc. And you can contribute those that you find.
- Convert any measurement unit to any other at <http://www.onlineconversion.com>. And for your own converter to carry around on a thumb drive, check out **Converter** from <http://www.snapfiles.com/get/convert.html>

## News

**New client:** Prestologic - website: <http://www.prestologic.com>

**Thanks BMS:** As I stated in the Welcome panel, my contract with BMS Solutions comes to an end at the end of June. It's been great, guys! Thank you for the opportunity, and all the best for even bigger and better things with version 5.

**Availability:** From July 2007, I'll have more time to take on other writing and editing work. For a partial list of services, see <http://www.cybertext.com.au/services.htm>



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