PRODUCT REVIEW

Acer Aspire One   *by Chris Taylor*

In the spring of 2007, I was looking for a new computer. My old desktop computer was getting long in the tooth, Vista had been out for a little while, and I had money burning a hole in my pocket. What better way to spend it than on a new computer. Note that's a statement, not a question!

I decided to go with a laptop in order to gain portability. I thought I could take it with me to OPCUG meetings and have all my programs and data with me. I could carry it out to the living room, connect up to my wireless router, and use the computer while watching TV or movies on the DVD player.

Given that it was to be my only computer, I decided to get the beefiest computer the burning money in my pocket could afford. I ended up with an HP Pavillion DV9000, with 17" screen, twin 120 GB hard drives, and 2 GB RAM. At the time, it was a pretty decently equipped laptop. To round things out and make it easier for me to deal with an external 22" wide-screen LCD monitor, full keyboard and mouse, I bought the docking station designed for it.

And I found that it almost never left the docking station in the computer room. It is too big to haul to OPCUG meetings and it was even awkward to take it out to the living room. My next main computer will be a regular desktop machine. You can still get considerably more power for fewer bucks by going non-portable.

I still wanted a machine for portable computing. But now I realized, for a portable, I really didn't need to have the kitchen sink. *Portability* was key. I could live with under-powered. I could live without *all* my data. I could live without *all* my programs. The main things I needed were a word processor and a web browser.

I started reading about a relatively new class of computer variously dubbed *ultra-portables, subnotebooks* or *netbooks*. One of the first really popular ones to catch people's attention was the ASUS Eee PC, introduced in late 2007. The original had a 7" screen (800x480 pixels), 256MB RAM and a 2GB solid state drive and came with Linux pre-installed. Many models have come out since then and the size and power has grow, with models sporting 10" screens (1024x600 pixels), 20 GB solid state drives or regular hard drives and up to 1 GB of RAM. Windows XP is an option, but to get it you either have to pay more, or get less, such as a smaller solid state drive, to pay for the XP license.

With a confusing array of choices, I began sorting out the best combo for my use. I was weighing storage capacity, memory, screen size and cost.

I was almost ready to take the plunge. I was even set to try out Linux and see how I liked it. After all, I was not looking to have all my favourite Windows programs. The free Open Office is perfectly adequate for me in terms of a

word processor and I am already a Firefox user, so I could use the Linux version of that web browser. And I knew the Linux/Open Source SIG could help me out of any jam I might get myself into. I could just hear an Asus Eee PC calling my name.

And then a most fortunate accident happened – I forgot about it for a while.

In July, 2008, Acer released the Aspire One. Early in the fall, both Future Shop and Best Buy carried a model I could play with. And I was impressed.

If you look at the Acer web site, they list a whole bunch of configurations. I will talk only about the one configuration available at Future Shop and Best Buy – model AOA 150-1283. The one I bought. In October, it was going for $379. Since then the price has jumped to $399. This model comes with Windows XP Home.

Inside this issue:

Next Meeting: WEDNESDAY, February 11th, 2009

Prize Winners

At the January general meeting, both **Morris Turpin** and **Wayne Houston** took home one of our OPCUG digital clock/calculators.

February Raffle

Thanks to the generosity of Microsoft Canada, the raffle prize will be a Microsoft webcam and blue laser cordless mouse.

As always, tickets are only $1 for one, $2 for three, or $5 for ten.

Correction

There was an error in the Prize Winners column last month. The door prize won by Bob Walker at the December meeting was **Windows Live OneCare** (courtesy of Microsoft Canada), not Microsoft OneStep.

Coming Up…

►February 11th, 2009
Speaker: Rick Claus, IT Pro Advisor, Microsoft Canada
Topic: Microsoft PhotoSynth

OPCUG member and Microsoft rep Rick Claus will be demonstrating Photosynth that Microsoft claims will change the way you experience and share photos.

With Photosynth you can share or relive a vacation destination or explore a distant museum or landmark. With nothing more than a digital camera and some inspiration, you can use Photosynth to transform regular digital photos into a three-dimensional, 360-degree experience. Anybody who sees your synth is put right in your shoes, sharing in your experience, with detail, clarity and scope impossible to achieve in conventional photos or videos.

All OPCUG general meetings are free and are open to the general public. The facility is wheelchair accessible.

April 8th
Speaker: Steven Totolo / tvcAutomation, Ottawa
Website: http://www.tvcAutomation.com
Topic: "The Future of Home Automation: What's in-store for 2009"

Steven will present an up-to-date view of the home automation industry. A lot has changed since his last presentation to OPCUG in September 2003, in whole-house audio, intelligent lighting, security systems, home theatre and networks. tvcAutomation specializes in working with homeowners and homebuilders to find personalised home automation solutions.

May 13th
Speaker: Chris Taylor, OPCUG
Topic: "How the Web Works"

June 10th
Pizza night and speaker Roger Wambolt, Corel Corporation
Topic: Video Editing

2009 CALENDAR

Meetings	Date	Time and Venue
OPCUG General Meeting	Wednesday, February 11th	7:30 p.m. Auditorium of the **Canada Museum of Science and Technology**, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd. http://www.science-tech.nmstc.ca/english/index.cfm
Beginners' SIG	Wednesday, February 11th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
Linux SIG	Wednesday, February 11th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
PIG SIG (Wing SIG West)	Wednesday, February 11th	10:00 p.m. (after all other SIGs) at Chances "R" restaurant, Baseline Rd. at Woodroffe Ave. (College Square Shopping Centre)
Beer BOF (Wing SIG East)	Wednesday, February 11th	10:00 p.m. (after all other SIGs) at Liam Maguire's, St. Laurent Blvd. at Innes Rd.

Please note that unless otherwise noted, SIGs meet at 9:00 p.m. (immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting).

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

It is always nice to take the time once a year to reflect upon the activities of the OPCUG and evaluate whether we are still relevant and living up to our motto *Users Helping Users*. If we are not, we might as well fold up the tent and go home.

I am happy to say I don't think it is time to fold up the tent. Consider what the OPCUG delivers.

We have ten meetings a year that not only deliver on a wide variety of topics in the main presentation, but also provide more interactive give and take through the two on-going and successful Special Interest Groups – the Open Source/Linux SIG and the Beginner's SIG.

Brigitte, our hard-working editor, put out ten newsletters with a wealth of information in the form of OPCUG news, software and hardware reviews, and the occasional humour.

The PUB, our on-line presence, continues to provide not only exposure of the OPCUG to the community and the world, but also a place for members to meet and exchange information and help. It also serves us well as a means for the board of directors to get information to the membership.

The raffles have been a big hit and have contributed to keeping membership dues at $25 per year. Did you know the last time there was an increase in membership dues was 19 years ago (February, 1990)? Thanks to the contributions of vendors, we have had some terrific prizes, such as Microsoft Office Ultimate 2007, McAfee Internet Security Suite, Corel Paint Shop Pro Photo X2, and games.

For main presentations, we had a really good line-up thanks to the hard work of our Membership Chair, Bob Gowan. Jean-Pierre Fiset of Ottawa-Gatineau WiFi told us about a free Wifi project in town. Maggie James, a writer for MONiTOR Magazine reviewed tax software (thanks Maggie – you helped me decide to switch tax packages and save some money!) Andrew Clunis let us know all about the One Laptop Per Child program designed to help some of the poorest people on earth gain access to technology and the Internet. We learned about the latest computer made by Eurocom. Jason Tryon from Hewlett-Packard let us know what its like to run a call centre. We had a *Members' Favourites* night where several members showed some neat programs. Gordon Graham from Wrapped Apps Corporation taught us about Software-as-a-Service. Harald Freise gave us a fascinating talk on where storage technology has taken us. Doug Gray of the Ontario Genealogical Society shared with us his passion for his hobby. Last, but *certainly* not least, Harley Bloom from Bloom Microtech came for the tenth year to let us know what is interesting this year in the world of tech. He had so many give-aways, I think there were not too many people who didn't go home with something!

This year, the OPCUG began to reach out more into the community by giving presentations at branches of the Ottawa Public Library. So far, seven presentations have been given on topics of security, operating systems (Linux and Vista), HTML coding, and digital photography.

I would like to extend my thanks to the hard working members of the board of directors and to you the members. It would be really boring if you didn't show up! And thanks to the Canada Science and Technology Museum for making the facilities available for our use.

Chris Taylor
President, OPCUG

Members' Favourites Night *by Chris Taylor*

At the January general meeting, we had presentations from some OPCUG members on some of their favourite hardware and software. The presentation decks have been converted into Adobe Reader format and uploaded to The PUB.

You will need an account on the PUB if you want to access them. If you don't have an account, take a look at the article *Accessing PUB II* in the October, 2003 issue of the newsletter - http://opcug.ca/public/Articles/0310.pdf

Once you have an account on The PUB, you can browse file area 43 – *Text Files – Presentations* or use the links below to access the presentation files.

http://opcug.ca/file/area43/CT-AcerAspire1.pdf
Chris Taylor's presentation on the Acer Aspire One and other netbooks.

http://opcug.ca/file/area43/DC-OO3.pdf
Don Chaisson's presentation on Open Office 3

http://opcug.ca/file/area43/AG-SoftwareGuide.pdf
Alan German's presentation on 8 programs he has picked for the OPCUG Free Software Guide

http://opcug.ca/file/area43/HF-UsefulThings.pdf
Harald Friese's presentation on 8 useful programs he has happened across.

TREASURER'S REPORT 2008

Ottawa PC Users' Group, Inc.
3 Thatcher Street
Ottawa, ON K2G 1S6
Web Site: http://opcug.ca

Balance Sheet, 2008

Assets

Current Assets

1000	Cash Account (TDCT)	945.91
1100	Investment Account (ING)	20,039.01
1200	Membership float	40.00

Total Assets **21,024.92**

Equity

Owner Equity

OPCUG, Capital December 31, 2007	21,469.66
Total revenue	4,659.40
Total expenses	5,104.14
Net income	**-444.74**
OPCUG, Capital December 31, 2008	21,024.92
Total Equity	**21,024.92**

TREASURER'S REPORT 2008

Ottawa PC Users' Group, Inc.
3 Thatcher Street
Ottawa, ON K2G 1S6
Web Site: http://opcug.ca

Income Statement, 2008

Revenue		2008 ($)	2007 ($)
2100	Bank Interest (ING)	615.40	704.03
2200	Membership Income	2,975.00	3,675.00
2300	Raffle Income	979.00	1,388.00
2400	Merchandise Income	90.00	0.00
2500	Workshop Income	0.00	875.00
2900	Miscellaneous Income	0.00	25.00
	Total revenue	**4,659.40**	**6,667.03**

Expenses

3100	PUB II Expense	1,473.89	1,311.01
3200	Newsletter Expense	2,029.50	2,441.12
3300	Office Supplies Expense	194.76	11.02
3400	Bank Charges	60.88	69.44
3500	Barbecue Expense	418.07	2,147.27
3600	Facility Rental	200.00	200.00
3700	Workshop Expense	0.00	719.29
3800	Merchandise Expense	654.72	0.00
3900	Miscellaneous Expense	72.32	68.39
	Total operating expenses	**5,104.14**	**6,967.54**
	Net income	-444.74	-300.51

Acer Aspire One *(Continued from page 1)*

The screen is a very bright, 8.9" WSVGA screen running at 1024x600 pixels. I had two concerns about the screen. First, I know there is some software that expects a minimum of 768 vertical pixels. But so far, I have not had any problems, not even with Microsoft Office 2007, which claims to require 1024x768 minimum. I presume Microsoft states this because of the large amount of space taken up by the *ribbon* (oh Microsoft, please give me back my menus!)

The other screen concern was about the brightness. A bright screen chews through the battery and I wanted the option to turn down the brightness when on battery to maximize the time I could use it before recharging. The keyboard controls only allow a modest reduction in screen brightness. Fortunately, there is a keystroke to immediately blank the screen, so if I am desperate, I can just keep the screen on when absolutely necessary.

The 85-key keyboard is 89% the size of a full keyboard. If you are touch typist you might have to get used to the slightly closer spacing of the keys. Being a three-finger (and two-thumb) typist, I don't have any problems with the keyboard.

The processor is Intel's Centrino Atom 1.6 GHz, single core, with a 533 MHz front-side bus and a 512 KB L2 cache. Main memory is a full 1 GB of DDR2 RAM. The hard disk is a surprisingly big 160 GB.

For input/output ports, the Aspire One come well loaded. There are three USB 2.0 ports, two card readers (one takes only SD, while the other is a 5-in-one, handling SD/MMC/MS/MS Pro/xD), a webcam, and a built-in microphone. There is a mic-in jack and a jack for external speakers/earphones to complement the quite tinny-sounding built-in stereo speakers. The external VGA port will handle just about any resolution external screen or projector you want to plug in.

On the networking side, there is 10/100 Ethernet and 802.11b/g wireless.

The touchpad feels a little cheap but it seems to work just fine.

The whole package is a trim 24.9 cm x 17 cm x 2.9 cm. It weighs in at 0.995 Kg, including the battery.

About that battery … it is a 3-cell, 2,200 mAh battery. The specs say "up to 3 hours". I get about 2.5, so that's not far off spec, but I wanted more. Some models come with a 6-cell, 5,200 mAh battery, but I had a hard time finding a source. I finally found that TigerDirect.ca carries them for $127.70 (taxes and shipping included). Then I found a 6,600 mAh battery. Total cost in Canadian dollars was $125.66. I bought one and am very happy with it. Since then, I have found sources for a 7,200 mAh battery for US$115, shipping included.

The Aspire One is less than half the size of a Compaq CQ-50, which has a 15.4" screen. It is slightly thinner and just 38% of the weight. All this translates into a computer I can easily tuck under my arm when going to a meeting, stuff in the bag that I take to work, and grab when moving from room to room.

Since starting to give presentations at the Ottawa Public Library, this computer is ideal. I can walk in with this tiny laptop, plug into their projector and give my presentation. Very convenient.

And it turns out I really didn't have to give up power to get convenience. This machine is no slouch. It is a peppy little performer. From power on, I get to my Windows XP desktop in under a minute. The Atom processor certainly seems to be a decent performer. One GB of RAM and 160 GB of disk space will be plenty for the life of this computer.

In the month I have been using this wonderful little portable computer, I have been very satisfied with it. If you want to take a look at it, see me at any OPCUG general meeting. It's almost certain to be tucked into my bag.

Perhaps my next computer will be my venture into trying Linux.

Bottom Line:

Acer Aspire One, model AOA 150-1283: $400
http://www.acer.ca

OPCUG Free Software Guide—Part 3 *Compiled by Alan German*

This guide features an annotated list of free computer programs. The software mentioned has not been reviewed (except where noted) nor have any tests necessarily been conducted. Consequently, no guarantees are provided that the individual programs will perform as described. Rather the list of available software is provided for the information of our members who may find one or more of the programs useful. If you try one of the listed items, you are encouraged to share your experience, good or bad, by providing a brief review of the program for a future issue of the newsletter.

Xplorer²

This Windows' file manager sports dual panes (browse two folders in one window) and multiple folder tabs. The developer says "xplorer² is a desktop file manager combining the efficiency of the legendary Norton Commander and the ease of use of Windows file explorer. It is tough as boots, rock solid stable, lightweight in size and system resource use, and fast." A free version is available for private (home) or academic (school & university) use.

Current Release: Version 1.7.1.4 (02-Jul-08)
Web Site: http://zabkat.com/x2lite.htm

Foxit PDF Reader

Are you annoyed by your PDF reader constantly looking for updates, or taking forever to load? You should give the free version of Foxit PDF Reader a try. It has a small download size; launches almost instantly; will let you draw graphics, highlight text, make notes on a PDF document; print an annotated document; and convert a PDF document to a text file.

Current Release: Version 3.0 Build 1222
Web Site: http://www.foxitsoftware.com/
Previous Reviews: FoxReader vs. Adobe Reader,
Doug Poulter, http://opcug.ca/public/Reviews/foxreader.htm

Belarc Advisor - Free Personal PC Audit

The Belarc Advisor runs on Windows Vista, 2003, XP, 2000, NT 4, ME, 98, and 95 and provides a detailed profile of your hardware and software, any missing Microsoft hotfixes, antivirus status, CIS (Center for Internet Security) benchmarks, and displays the results in your web browser.

Current Release: Version 7.2x
Web Site: http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html

DriverMax

This utility, from Innovative Solutions, will display a complete report of all the drivers (versions, release dates) that are installed on your system. You can download the latest driver updates for your computer from a single source. An Export Wizard will save copies of all your current drivers to a folder so that, if you ever have to reinstall Windows, you can have all your drivers back in place in less than five minutes! DriverMax is a free download and is available for Windows Vista, Windows XP and Windows 2003 (all service packs).

Current Release: Version: 4.7
Web Site: http://www.innovative-sol.com/drivermax/

Norton Removal Tool

Some Norton security products can be extremely difficult to remove from your system should the need arise. A special software tool, available as a free download from Symantec makes the process simple. Make a copy of your software's Product Key just in case you need to reinstall it later.

Web Site: http://service1.symantec.com/Support/tsgeninfo.nsf/docid/2005033108162039

McAfee Consumer Products Removal Tool

As with the Norton product mentioned above, McAfee offers a similar tool to help you remove its security software. A complete guide to the McAfee Consumer Products Removal tool, including an on-line how-to video, is available on McAfee's web site.

Web Site: http://service.mcafee.com/FAQDocument.aspx?id=TS100507&lc=1033

Download Accelerator Plus

SpeedBit's patented technology initiates and manages several simultaneous connections, downloading different parts of a requested file simultaneously, from one or more servers, for up to 400% faster downloads. The use of Download Accelerator Plus also avoids the freezing of on-line videos that can occur when buffering of the video stream takes place.

Current Release: DAP 9
Web Site: http://www.speedbit.com/dap/

OTTAWA PC NEWS

Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in July and August. The opinions expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the club or its members.

Member participation is encouraged. If you would like to contribute an article to Ottawa PC News, please submit it to the newsletter editor (contact info below). Deadline for submissions is three Sundays before the next General Meeting.

Group Meetings

OPCUG meets on the second Wednesday in the month, except July and August, at the Canada Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meetings are 7:30–9:00 p.m. and Special Interest Groups go until 10 p.m.

Fees:	OPCUG membership:	$25 per year
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Web address:	**http://opcug.ca**	
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subscribe newslettertxt
(to get the plain text version).

or:

subscribe newsletterpdf
(to get the Adobe Acrobat PDF version).

And if you decide you do not need the printed version mailed to you anymore, simply let Mark Cayer (membership chairman) know. He can be reached at general meetings, as well as by e-mail at **Mark.Cayer@opcug.ca**. You might want to wait until you have successfully received at least one issue electronically before opting out from the printed version.

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