PRODUCT REVIEW

Finding Licence Keys

by Alan German

When you purchased that latest-and-greatest piece of software, did you keep the box and the paperwork? Was the licence key or activation code on a sticker on the back of the box? Did you write it down in the space provided in the user manual? If you have to reinstall that application, will you be able type in the licence information when required?

If you are like many people, and didn't keep careful records of these types of details, you may need a little help from a utility such as Belarc Advisor to locate the software licence keys that are stored on your computer – somewhere!

Once downloaded and installed, running Belarc Advisor will result in the software scanning your computer for details of the installed software, hardware, and networking, and displaying a detailed report (Figure 1) in your web browser.

Figure 1. Belarc Advisor System Report

The report is structured in sections that detail specific aspects of the operating system, the computer and its components, and the installed software. Many pieces of useful information are provided in the report such as the details of the CPU, memory, disk storage, communication systems, and peripherals. One section of the report lists the installed programs and, in many cases, the associated licence keys. For example, on my laptop, Belarc Advisor identified the licence key for the installed version of Microsoft 365 (Figure 2).
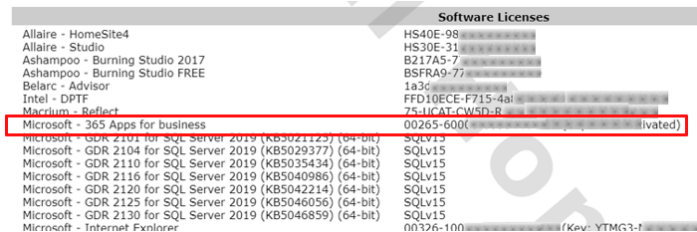

Figure 2. Software Licence Information

It's useful to save the web page as a local HTML file that can easily be accessed for future reference. For example, using *File > Save Page As…* in the Vivaldi browser results in a file named *Belarc Advisor - Computer Profile.html* and an associated folder named *Belarc Advisor - Computer Profile_files* being stored on the hard disk. The folder contains a CSS file and a number of digital images that are loaded automatically in order to display the HTML file as if it were being viewed from the Internet.

The license associated with the free version of Belarc Advisor allows for personal use only and results in watermarks being shown on the displayed report (seen partially in the screenshots). However, these watermarks are semi-transparent and don't interfere with reading any of the important data contained on the page.

The good news is that Belarc Advisor is free to download and use so, if you don't currently have a list of the licence keys for your software products, now would be a really good time to make one and keep it in a safe place until you need it.

Bottom Line

Belarc Advisor (Proprietary) Version 12.1 Belarc, Inc. https:// www.belarc.com/ products/belarc-advisor

(see all OPCUG reviews here)

Inside this issue:

Next Meeting: WEDNESDAY, April 9th, 2025

Next Meeting

Wednesday, April 9th, 2025

CIRA, the phonebook of the internet (for .CA)
Speaker: Arfi Hagi-Yusuf, Canadian Internet Registration Authority

At CIRA we help build Canada's corner of the internet as the registry of .CA domains. But we also do much more than that. By nurturing the development of .CA as a go-to public resource, we push to protect its integrity for .CA domain holders and build a better internet across Canada and around the world. I'll be sharing more about what we do at CIRA and services you can use like our Internet Performance test and Canadian Shield (our free public DNS server double checks to see if websites are malicious and if we know they are, we'll stop you from visiting them.)

About the speaker:
Arfi is the Internet Policy Manager at the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA), where she supports the policy file. A lawyer by trade, her previous role was at Meta, focused on privacy and artificial intelligence policy matters. Prior to this, she worked in academia and the non-profit sector.

This meeting will be via Zoom video conference.

Join us at **https://tinyurl.com/opcug-meeting**. The Zoom link will be live at 7:15 pm. The meeting will begin at 7:30 pm.

Coming Up...

26 Mar
Weekly Q&A session

14 May
Computers to the Moon

11 Jun
Annual Pizza Night *(see next page for details)*

10 Sep
Windows 10 End of Life – What Next?

Visit https://opcug.ca/#upcoming to see all scheduled events.

OPCUG Presentations at the OPL:

Tuesday, 25 Mar, 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm
Macro (close-up) Photography (Lynda Buske)
Orleans Branch

Thursday, 27 Mar, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Basic photo editing – learn easy, stunning techniques (Lynda Buske)
Centennial Branch

Monday, 31 Mar, 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm
Quick PC Tips: Enhancing Capabilities and Performance with Free Tools (Chris Taylor)
Blackburn Hamlet Branch

Monday, 31 Mar, 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm
Armchair travel: Newfoundland (Lynda Buske)
Rosemount Branch

Visit https://opcug.ca/mec-category/opl-presentations/ for the full list of presentations with links to the OPL.

2025 CALENDAR		
Event	**Date**	**Time and Venue**
Next Monthly Meeting	Wednesday, April 9th	7:30 pm via Zoom video conference: **https://tinyurl.com/opcug-meeting** To see all scheduled events, visit https://opcug.ca/#upcoming
Next Q&A Session	Wednesday, March 26th	Until further notice, Q&A sessions are no longer held after regular monthly meetings. Join us on all other Wednesdays at 7:30 pm for weekly Q&A.
Next OPL Presentation	(see Upcoming Events)	Visit https://opcug.ca/mec-category/opl-presentations/ for the full list of OPCUG presentations at the OPL.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Special Hybrid Q&A Session

Wednesday, April 23, <u>7 PM</u>
Ottawa Public Library, **Emerald Plaza, 1547 Merivale Rd.**, Traszha Macdowall Room

The OPCUG has planned a hybrid Q&A session at the Ottawa Public Library (OPL).

You are invited to attend in person (or via Zoom) at **7 PM** at the **Emerald Plaza branch** in Nepean (address above).

You do not have to be an OPCUG or OPL member to attend. There is no charge. Everyone is welcome to join us and ask questions about their specific computer-related problems.

If you cannot attend in person, you can still join us via Zoom at **https://tinyurl.com/opcug-meeting**.

The Zoom link will be live at 6:50 pm. The meeting will begin at 7 pm and end at 8 pm.

Annual Pizza Party

Wednesday, June 11, <u>6 PM</u>
Britannia Park Trolley Station (see event web page for directions)

We are once again approaching the end of an OPCUG season and once again we'll celebrate with pizza, drinks and desserts. This event is free for OPCUG members and their guests.

The event will be on June 11 at **6 PM**. It will be at the **Britannia Park Trolley Station** which is sheltered in case of rain and has free parking in an adjacent lot. Unfortunately, for those who like beer or wine with their pizza, **alcohol is not permitted** in the park. Pop and water will be provided.

To help with planning, we're asking you to **register by email** at **pizzaparty@opcug.ca**. Tell us if you are bringing guests and how many, your pizza preference (e.g. combo, special, vegetarian, gluten free, etc.), and if you need a ride or can offer a ride. OPCUG members in attendance can win one of three flexible keyboards:

🍕 **Pizza, Prizes, and Portable Keyboards!** 🍕

Hey **Ottawa PC Users Group**—get ready to type in style (and maybe with a slice in hand)! We're giving away **three ultra-durable, roll-up keyboards** at the party!

✅ **109 keys**—because who wants a keyboard missing the important ones?
✅ **USB-A connection**—plug it in and start clacking!
✅ **Water & dust resistant**—because spills happen, especially around pizza.
✅ **Rolls up**—take it anywhere... even on those top-secret hacker missions.
🌀 type in the rain, the shower, or during your next kitchen disaster!
💻 **Perfect for tablets, laptops, and computers**—or as a conversation starter with your tech-savvy friends.

Win one and become the proud owner of the most flexible keyboard in town (literally)!

We look forward to seeing you and your guests!

ARTICLE

Trading Up To Linux – Part 7   *by Alan German*

One of the reservations many people have about moving to Linux is that they think learning to use the new operating system will be hard and, in particular, that they will be unable to use the Windows applications to which they have become accustomed over many years. Neither of these scenarios is necessarily true. In recent articles in this series we have seen that modern Linux distros compare very favourably with Windows. Many of the features of the Windows desktop, such as the ability to create on-screen program shortcuts and add quick-launch icons to the taskbar (panel) are present in Linux. The menu system in Linux Mint, with its layout of software categories allowing rapid access to specific applications, is particularly easy to navigate. The Software Manager, with curated applications available from secure repositories, and the Update Manager, offering exceptional user control, give Linux definite advantages for these aspects of computer maintenance.

Linux also has the ability to run many Windows programs, for example by using Wine or PlayonLinux (a graphical front end for Wine). Windows and Linux have very different system software and, while Linux is open-source, the Windows system is proprietary, with its under-the-hood operations not being documented in the public domain. Nevertheless, Linux developers have created a "compatibility layer" that translates Windows Application Program Interface (API) calls to their Portable Operating System Interface (POSIX) standard equivalents. In short, this means that many Windows programs can be run in Linux.

While a large number of Windows programs will work quite satisfactorily on Linux using Wine, some will function better than others, and even different versions of the same program may not function in the same manner. The Wine Application Database (AppDB) lists almost 30,000 applications and assists end users in identifying the ability of Wine to run specific programs. Individual applications are ranked on a five-point scale, from Platinum, for Windows programs that run flawlessly, through to Garbage, where problems are so severe to make the program unusable in Linux.

Microsoft Office is a favourite software package for Windows users and features the Word (word processing), Excel (spreadsheet), and PowerPoint (presentation) modules. These provide an excellent example of the variation of performance for different versions of the same program under Wine. For example, Microsoft Word has rankings across all of the available categories – Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze and Garbage – as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Wine AppDB Ratings for Microsoft Word

Wine is available through the Software Manager so this is the easiest way to install the package. It's a command-line utility so to install a Windows program requires opening a Linux Terminal and typing in some appropriate commands. Fortunately, the structure of the main command is very simple – wine <program-name>.exe. Note that this assumes that the wine command is being run on the folder that contains the Windows executable. If this is not the case, then a change directory (cd) command needs to be added. For example, installation of the Homesite HTML editor from a USB drive to my hard drive on Linux uses the command sequence:

```
cd /media/toaster/KINGSTON/Homesite
wine Setup.EXE
```

Linux *(continued from previous page)*

The setup program loads from the Kingston USB drive and the subsequent installation prompts are exactly the same as those that appear when installing the program in Windows, including the need to enter the activation code when this is requested. A category for Wine-based applications, and an associated entry for Homesite, is automatically created in the Linux Mint menu structure. Homesite can then be run on the Linux system exactly as is done on Windows.

When it comes to software like Microsoft Office, PlayonLinux provides a graphical user interface and also pre-built scripts to install several versions of the office suite. PlayonLinux can be installed through the Software Manager; however, subsequently trying to immediately install Office results in an error message that the Winbind package is also required. Installing both PlayonLinux and Winbind resolves this issue.

PlayonLinux is somewhat restricted in the versions of Microsoft Office that are supported. I have Office 2010 which is one of the versions on the supported list. Starting the installation process in PlayonLinux is simply a matter of searching for "Office" and, in my case, selecting "Microsoft Office 2010". It should be noted that you must own a copy of the software, as a valid 25-character product key is required to be entered as part of the installation process.

As the installation proceeds, a series of dialogue boxes provide information, installation options, and error/warning messages. For example, an initial screen indicates that Office should be installed on the (default) "C: drive" which is effectively a virtual drive in the Linux file system. One interesting "error" that I encountered was a screen that showed a file system check error pointing to the USB drive that was being used to access the installation files for Office. Cancelling and so ignoring this error allowed the installation to proceed normally.

Subsequently, more error screens were displayed, seemingly due to an inability of the installer to locate various WindowsXP-KB files. Asking the installer to retry was ineffective as the same screens immediately reappeared. So, responding negatively to the retry query allowed the installation to proceed. Despite such error messages, a final screen indicated "Microsoft Office 2010 has been installed successfully" (Figure 2).
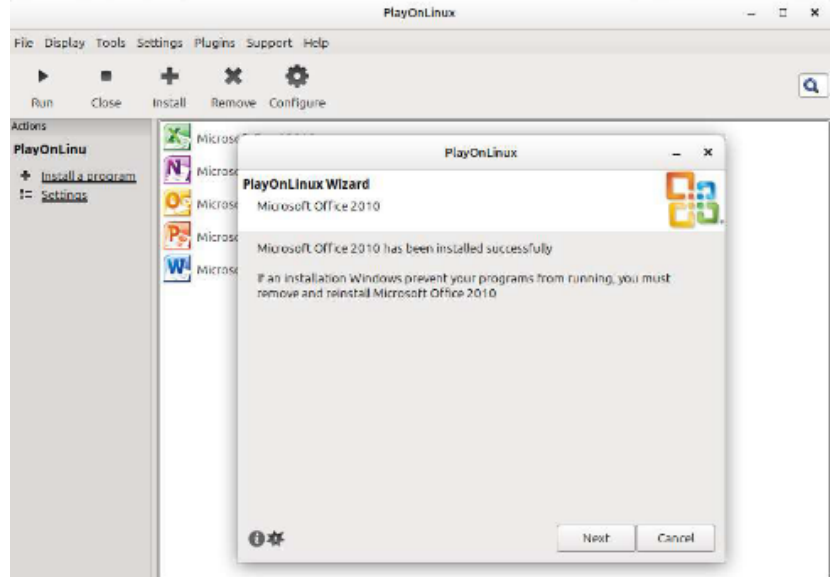

Figure 2. Microsoft Office installed using PlayOnLinux

The installation resulted in on-screen program icons being displayed for each of the Microsoft Office modules, including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, all of which I use regularly, but also for Outlook and OneNote that I never use. However, it was very easy to delete the unwanted icons, and place those that are useful along the top of the screen, which is my preferred location.
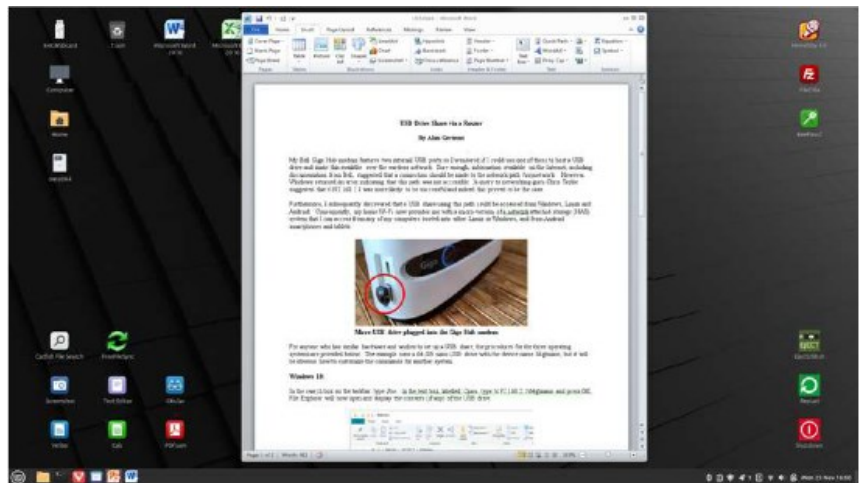

Figure 3. Microsoft Word running on the Linux desktop

THROUGH THE LENS

A guide to digital photography for computer enthusiasts. After the click of your camera, you're only half done!

Cropping your photos
by Lynda Buske

One of the easiest tasks in photo editing is cropping your image. In the days before digital photography, the average person shot film and with no access to a dark room relied instead on the local photo shop or department store to print their images. Since you had no ability to crop the image after (except with scissors), it was important to get close to your subject and to ensure it had a good compositional placement. Life is much easier now and we can shoot with lots of space around our images and decide how best to crop them later. There is of course a limit. For example, if you crop tightly on a small bird, you may run out of resolution and have a very pixelated image. For wildlife photography, usually the old rule of getting in close is the wisest.

So why crop? Probably the most common reason to crop is in order to make a print of your photo. Cameras do not, by default, shoot in the aspect ratio of 4x6 or 8x10. Your camera's sensor may not be the same aspect ratio as the print size you want such as 4x6, 5x7 or 8x10. You may be able to set your camera to that dimension but you are sacrificing pixels on your sensor to do so and hence reducing your resolution. Best to shoot the image and crop to the desired dimension after.

Another strong reason to crop is to emphasize what you were trying to capture or say with your photo. If it is people, it's often the faces that are most important (unless it's someone in their bridal gown). Don't be afraid to even crop the top of a head. See figures 1&2.
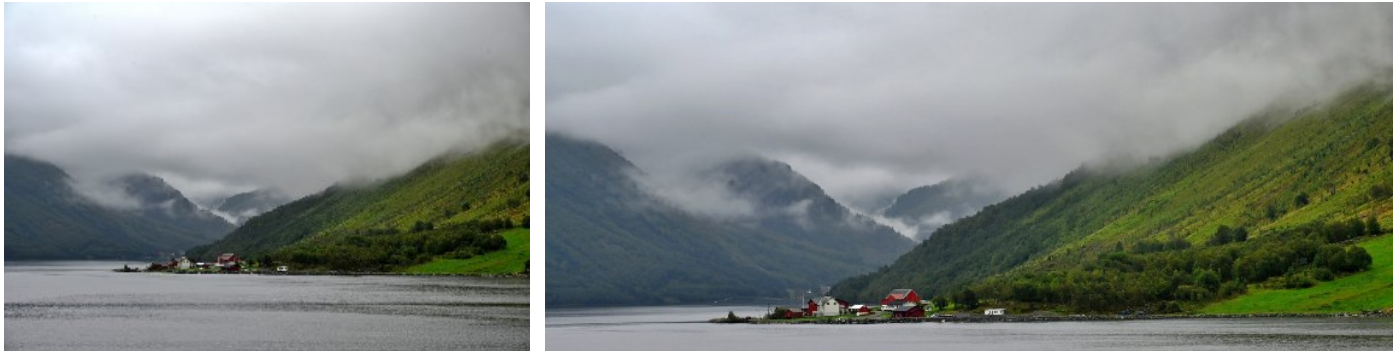
Figure 1

Figure 2

Cropping your photos   *(continued from previous page)*

For landscape images, you may wish to eliminate extra sky and water. If you are not printing, there is no restriction on the aspect ratio and sometimes a long narrow look is effective for scenic vistas. See figure 3.

Figure 3 – extra sky and water

If there is an object of interest in your scene (such as a boat), crop to get the best compositional layout. For instance, moving objects look better with more space in the direction they are heading than behind. Many people use the rule of thirds which automatically overlays onto your image whenever you select the crop function in either your phone or photo editing program. The grid for the rule of thirds allows you to view and adjust your image so the horizon isn't exactly halfway up and any object of interest is near one of the 4 intersection points rather than centred. See figure 4.

 Figure 4 – ship is too centred

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*Read all of Lynda's articles **here**. See her **presentations** at the Ottawa Public Library (select **Lynda Buske** as **Organizer**).*

APCUG

My Smartphone, My Friend

Greg Skalka, President, Under the Computer Hood User Group

https://uchug.org/

I got my first smartphone, a low-cost ($150) Samsung Galaxy J3, in 2017. It was not that powerful and I was a bit apprehensive about this new device, so I used it mostly for phone calls, texts and select apps. I saved web browsing and email for my computers and laptops as the phone screen seemed too small. As I warmed up to the smartphone I found it essential for navigation (with Google Maps). Having a camera handy, as poor as it was compared to my Panasonic Lumix digital camera, became another feature I used constantly. As time passed, I added more apps but was selective about what I chose to install. I had no time for games and no use for social media, but I used several smart home apps to control the various devices I bought. I refused to do banking or conduct any financial transactions on the phone, preferring the relative security of a computer for any online banking or shopping.

Every business seemed to have a smartphone app to promote, but I only installed a few that I thought were safe and offered compelling benefits worth the risks. One of the riskiest apps I use is Google Maps, as I have found over the years that it has been tracking me, even when the app is not running.

However, its benefits are so compelling that I've made that bargain with the Google devil and accept being tracked in exchange for its navigation capabilities. Having every store and sandwich shop app seems like a foolish risk that is usually not worth it. I don't want Google to also know what I'm going to do in the future and whom I associate with, so I refuse to use a calendar app on my phone or computer.

One app I do accept is the Southwest Airlines app, as it is so much handier than checking in for flights online with a computer. The Southwest app finally drove me in 2022 to buy a new smartphone, as their app developer stopped supporting my old phone. I bought a Samsung Galaxy S22 and am hopefully spending real money ($700) to buy more performance and tech longevity.

As with my first Samsung, I bought myself a very rugged case for my S22 to allay my fears of damaging the phone. With the belt clip front, the phone is fully enclosed when I carry it. I use magnetic USB adapters and charging cables to protect the phone's USB type C connector from excessive wear. I mostly charge my phone from a battery pack in a fast-charge mode and now use settings in the phone to limit charging to 85% of capacity most of the time, to extend battery life.

Over time I've found my use of the phone has only increased. With a higher resolution camera in my S22, I find I'm using it much more and my dedicated digital cameras much less often. Last fall the number of prescription drugs I needed to take increased and some came with restrictions I had to follow; I found the smart phone to be very useful in medication management. One medication required it be taken at least two hours after eating and at least one hour before eating; I found the best time to take it was immediately upon waking (I don't believe I do any sleep-eating). The problem is that I normally get up early and leave the house for work in less than an hour; this meant I often had to wait around a bit before eating breakfast and going to work.

I found my smartphone could be very useful in helping me manage this. The first thing I do when I get up is take this particular medication. I then immediately note the time on my phone and write that time into a document on the phone (for reference, should I get confused). I then set an alarm on the phone to melodically go off in an hour, indicating when I may eat breakfast. I often have to wait a little, but even though the time I get up can vary, this system keeps me from eating too soon after the meds. I have another medication I must take with food at dinner; another alarm set for a nominal dinner time each day helps remind me. I also take another medication once a week on a specific day, so another alarm on my phone reminds me of that.

The breakfast alarm could also be done using Alexa, but my talking to set it could be more disturbing to my sleeping wife. The other alarms on my phone can remind me even if I have gone out for dinner.

I used to wake up to a plug-in, battery-backed-up alarm clock at my bedside. It is more a wake-up alarm of last resort, as I typically wake up before it goes off. I always kept my phone in another room at night as I didn't want to be awakened by late-night spam calls. When we remodeled our bathroom last fall, we had to temporarily move into our guest bedroom. I didn't want to change my alarm clock, so I just used my smartphone alarm (which I do when I travel). I got used to it, and since there were no overnight spam calls, I've kept using my phone as my alarm clock since moving back into our bedroom.

My phone is also a convenient memory aid; I keep many lists on it in the Samsung Notes app. In addition to shopping lists, it has many pieces of information that I don't want to have to keep looking up. Printer cartridge part numbers, oil filters, and oil types for cars are easy to look up on my phone when I'm in the store.

Sometimes, when I get an idea for a newsletter column, I write down a few notes on my phone. I can keep an inventory of my mom's supplies on my phone, which can be easily updated when I visit her assisted living facility, and then needed items can be ordered when I get home.

Text messages are also a convenient way to keep track of information and events that can be referenced later.

My Smartphone *(continued from previous page)*

My siblings have a text chain that we have used over the last few years to disseminate information about our elderly parents. It is easy to look in that text chain to see the events significant to my dad's passing, when my mom had medical issues, and how things have changed over time. Now that I'm overseeing my mom's care, my text reports to my siblings are a good record to keep.

Communication is a primary function of the smartphone, though how well it works often depends on the capabilities at the other end of the link. My mom has a "senior-oriented" smartphone but only uses it for phone calls. She can't send or receive text messages or photos connected to them. My other siblings live out of the area, limiting.

My wife found a great gift for my mom this last Christmas. It is a photo frame with an added capability. Its display cycles through the photos in its memory, but its Wi-Fi connection can add pictures to the frame. My siblings and other relatives can send photos to the frame from anywhere using a smartphone app. My brother even wrote a short note, took a picture of it, and sent it as a kind of text message.

I'm constantly finding new ways to use my smartphone. With new ways to use it being developed all the time, it continues to become a closer friend.

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Linux *(continued from page 5)*

The screenshot in Figure 3 shows a newsletter article being prepared in Microsoft Word running in Linux. We can also see the program icons for Word and Excel along the top-left edge of the screen. The icon for PowerPoint is covered by the Word program window. Also, note the Homesite icon in the top-right corner of the Linux desktop. All of these Windows programs are available for use in Linux by simply double-clicking!

Bottom Line

Wine (Open Source)
Version 10.0
https://www.winehq.org

PlayonLinux (Open Source)
Version 4.4
https://www.playonlinux.com/en/

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**Quick Tip 72: Recycle Bin in File Explorer**
by Chris Taylor

When you want to recover deleted files in Windows, it is surprisingly difficult to get to the *Recycle Bin*.

You can go to the desktop, which can mean minimizing open windows, and double-click the *Recycle Bin* icon on the desktop. You can press Win+R to bring up the *Run* dialogue box and type in **explorer.exe shell:RecycleBinFolder** (yes, really) and press Enter. You can also open File Explorer, click in the address bar, type in **Recycle Bin**, and press Enter.

An easier way is to pin the *Recycle Bin* to the *Quick Access* panel in File Explorer.

Minimize all open windows so you can see your desktop. Open File Explorer and place it so you can see the *Recycle Bin* icon on the desktop. Click on the *Recycle Bin* icon on the desktop and drag it to the *Quick Access* panel in File Explorer. When you see the horizontal line appear, drop it there.
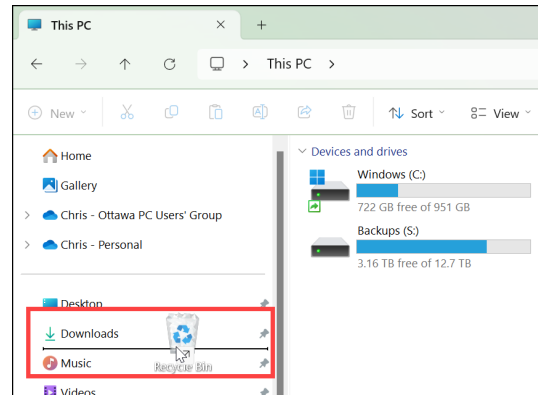
The *Recycle Bin* will appear in your *Quick Access* list and you can access it any time by clicking the icon.
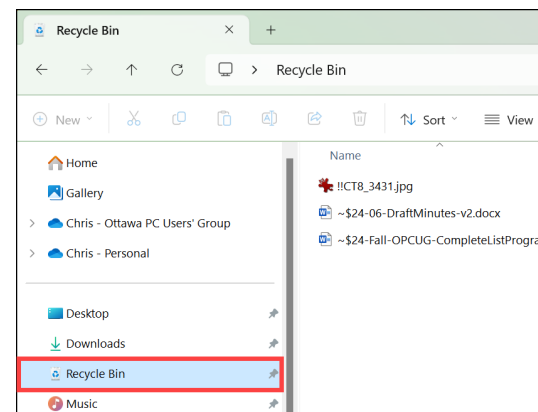
Be careful when dragging and dropping the *Recycle Bin* from the desktop. Make sure a horizontal line appears *between* two existing entries in *Quick Access*. Don't drop it directly on a folder or a shortcut to the *Recycle Bin* will be created within that folder.

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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).

To receive the monthly newsletter by email, send an email to:
opcug-newsletter+subscribe@googlegroups.com (leave subject and body fields blank)
You do **not** need to create a Gmail or Google Groups account.

To subscribe to other OPCUG Google Groups member services, go to:
https://opcug.ca/google-groups-how-to/

Group Meetings

OPCUG meets on the second Wednesday in the month, except July and August, at the Riverside United Church, 3191 Riverside Drive, Ottawa. Parking is free at the church. OCTranspo bus #90 stops nearby. Details at https://opcug.ca/venue/.

NOTE: Until further notice, all our events are via video conference. Details at https://opcug.ca/venue/ .

OPCUG Membership Fees:	$20 per year
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Q&A IS ON-LINE!
Weekly!

Since the pandemic, the OPCUG has been holding weekly Q&A sessions in Zoom video-conferences.

Join us every Wednesday (except on regular monthly meeting nights) at 7:30 pm to discuss computer issues. Questions (and answers) on any computer-related issue are welcome. Or, do you have a favourite computer program or topic that you would like to share with the group? Send your questions, answers, or the details of what you would like to share to: SuggestionBox@opcug.ca

Everyone is welcome to attend Q&A sessions and to ask questions about their specific computer-related problems. Join us at: https://tinyurl.com/opcug-meeting (if you use the Zoom client, the meeting ID is **924 9556 0898** and the password is **opcug**).

OPCUG

Users helping users
for over 40 years