

MC³ Newsletter

December 2018

VOLUME 35 NUMBER 11

The December meeting of the McHenry County Computer Club is **December 8, 2018 at Senior Services Associates 110 W. Woodstock Street, Crystal Lake, IL.**

NOTE: *Park across the street and enter at the south door, or enter at the west side and park along the side or rear of the building.*

Meeting Agenda

- Introductions & Reports
- Q & A
- Libre Office - John Katkus
- A brief overview of databases - Bob Wagner

Upcoming Demos - Subject to Change

November 2018 - Libre Office Pivot Tables & More

December 2018 - John Katkus Shows Off Special Raffle Prize

An Apology

Your editor found herself inundated with unexpected work in November and by the time I realized it was the newsletter deadline, you were halfway through the November meeting.

Hopefully, I'll be better prepared in 2019!

An Article Submitted by Lyle

The biggest data slurp on your PC ... is not Windows! - *Sven Krumrey | 27.11.2018 | ashampoo*

Sometimes, it takes government pressure to spur a company into action. For years, there have been rumors that Microsoft Office is a telemetry data hog with little to no transparency as to what is collected and when. The Dutch government had finally had it and prompted an extensive investigation. The result: 91 pages of unfettered and unabated data collection frenzy along with a lack of organizational structure that borders on chaos - enough to shake up even the most consummate of business professionals.

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Our membership is \$26.00 a year.

NOTE: This fee offsets the running of the club; membership benefits include help with computer problems. Please pay Lyle Giese, our treasurer, or the designated Board Member in his absence.

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The now public study was carried out by Privacy Company, a large Dutch-based privacy consulting firm. Its findings are alarming and show that Microsoft collect huge amounts of data through their Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook applications - personalized, unregulated data sets, and there is nothing users can do about it! If you thought the telemetry transmissions only included crash reports, the study will definitely teach you otherwise. The numbers are staggering. Data processing itself is triggered by “events” as defined by Microsoft developers. This includes malfunctions but also operations like running a spellchecker or simply using the program in general. While Windows 10 tracks 1,000 events, backed by a team of 10 analysts at Microsoft, MS Office takes the cake with anywhere between 23,000 and 25,000 events and 30 data analysts. Surprised? So am I!



Though Privacy Company were unable to find out precisely what information is sent to Redmond, thanks to encryption, even Microsoft seem to be in the dark about the exact scope of their data collection. Apparently, developers have free reign and there’s no expiration date after which data sets are deleted. No binding standards, no documentation! Once a team member deems a program aspect interesting enough, they are able to query the corresponding data through a separate

program (“telemetry agent”) that comes bundled with each Office installation. And while Windows 10 includes privacy settings, with no shortage of third-party apps to this effect, MS Office phones home unfetteredly, unsolicitedly and in an uncontrollable manner. Naturally, all data (including personal information) ends up on US servers fully accessible by US law enforcement agencies. Not only is this a violation of user privacy, but also a violation of European laws.

At least investigators were able to identify a few of the events. Translations offered through MS Office and email subject lines are affected. Microsoft also collect information on how long we use Word or PowerPoint. Part of this data is necessary to provide the related services, however, Microsoft were unable to clarify why it’s stored indefinitely. There are storage periods in place ranging from 30 days to 18 months in most cases but information considered particularly valuable is never deleted. Data collection is especially rampant in current MS Office versions like 2016 MSI and Office 365 that feature extensive internet-based capabilities. The scope varies, with crash reports being collected from all users while information on other events is limited to small sample sets that roughly affect 2% of users. There is currently no way to object to these practices. If you use MS Office, you’re a willing



participant.

That’s already enough to feel uneasy, but there’s more. Initially denied, Microsoft now admit to collecting personal data. With the help of audit logs (originally intended for admins), they can easily ob-

tain email addresses, user ids, subject lines and much more. Time for data protection officers to get that rope ready and brush up on their hangman skills! Sure, Microsoft should (and must) collect data to improve their software or web-based services, but, this time, they've crossed the line. It seems they've completely forgotten that data collection must be governed by transparency and purpose.

Change is coming, thanks to the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security, who took action not primarily to protect end users but the 300,000 civil servants who are avid MS Office users, many of them dealing with classified material. To save their reputation, their dominance on business PCs, and to avoid costly lawsuits, Microsoft caved and promised to better themselves. Procedures are said to become documented and more transparent, thanks to a soon to be developed review tool, and admins (and private users?) will receive more control over the extent of the data collection. But there's no definitive schedule for the implementation of these measures yet. It seems, Microsoft were caught slightly off guard. Until a solution is found, privacy-wary users are advised to stay away from SharePoint and OneDrive, refrain from using the web-based version of Office 365, disable all "Help us improve" requests or rely on local user accounts. Rather unsatisfactory, if you just need to drop a few lines in Word. Here's my tip for you: Use a different Office suite!

[Google's Santa Village is now live with more than 20 games - Star Online](#)

In the mood for Christmas? Check out the [Google Santa Tracker](#), an interactive website that has more than 20 Christmas-themed games like Elf Maker, Present Drop, Santa search game, Gumball Tilt and Penguin Dash. *Great for grandkids!*

It doesn't have to be just fun and games – you can also pick up coding by playing a navigational game called Code Lab or Santa Postcards where you learn how to make snowflakes and code at the same time.

There is also Holiday Traditions, which tells you about Christmas traditions in other countries, and a feature that lets you say Merry Christmas in other languages, including Japanese and Thai.

The Santa Tracker will go live on Christmas Eve – you will be able to see where Santa is going after he takes off from the North Pole to deliver presents.

Santa will share his locations on Google Maps. At each stop, he will share an interesting trivia and give you an update on the number of presents he has delivered so far.

Apparently, Santa can deliver up to seven million gifts in one night. If you didn't get one, maybe he has bumped you off his Nice list.

Google Assistant is also part of the Santa Tracker experience. Ask Google "Where is Santa?" and you will get an address of Santa's main post office in the Arctic Circle. Try that again on Dec 24 for clues on Santa's whereabouts.

*You can also download a Google Santa Tracker app to check out the games and keep track of Santa, but it's only available for **Android phones**.*

Google gains power over web as Microsoft rebuilds Edge browser on Chrome tech - CNet, 12/6/18

Microsoft will rebuild its Edge browser on Google's Chromium, the company said Thursday, a move that gives the search giant even more dominance over the web.

Microsoft confirmed it will be using the Google's open-source project at the heart of Chrome in a blog post, saying the shift will take place over the next year. The company billed the change, which had been reported earlier this week, as an improvement for web developers and Windows users alike. Developers will deal with less complexity, Microsoft said, while Windows users will run into fewer websites that don't work correctly.

Chromium, the foundation of Chrome, is an open-source project which anybody is free to copy, use and contribute to -- though there's no guarantee Google will accept those changes into its own browser. At the heart of Chromium is an engine called Blink which handles the browser's core work of digesting website programming instructions and presenting the pages to us.

The move also means there's one less independent player setting web standards and improving core browser technology. Mozilla's Firefox and Apple's Safari, which once shared the same core software as Chrome, remain independent. Microsoft, though, joins Opera in its decision to cede control over the core browser software.

"People using Microsoft Edge (and potentially other browsers) will experience improved compatibility with all web sites, while getting the best-possible battery life and hardware integration on all kinds of Windows devices. Web developers will have a less-fragmented web platform to test their sites against, ensuring that there are fewer problems and increased satisfaction for users of their sites," Joe Belfiore, Microsoft's corporate vice president for Windows, said in the blog post.

Microsoft launched Edge three years ago, trying for a fresh start after years of watching its once-dominant Internet Explorer lose its luster. Now, 10 years after its public launch, Chrome now dominates the web, in part because it's the default browser on hundreds of millions of Android phones. Google Chrome accounts for 62 percent of web usage, according to analytics firm StatCounter.

The Chromium move also will mean Microsoft will speed up its browser release cycle, unshackling Edge updates from Windows releases and matching the swift cadence of improvements and fixes championed by Chrome and Firefox. And it'll let Microsoft bring Edge to MacOS, something that's not likely to attract a large fraction of users but that could reassure corporate IT managers. And it'll mean people sticking with Windows 7 and Windows 8 will get a modern browser, too, since today's Edge doesn't work there.

Jumping on the Chromium bandwagon

Microsoft joins Opera, Samsung, Brave, Yandex, Baidu and Vivaldi in building their browsers built on Chrome technology. Most of those started on the Chromium foundation, but Opera largely abandoned its own Presto browser engine in its 2013 switch to the Chrome technology.

Given Edge's low usage -- not even high enough to surpass the Internet Explorer browser it was intended to replace -- left some observers unsurprised about Microsoft's move but not any more optimistic about its prospects.

“Edge is doomed,” said web developer Ferdy Christant in a blog post. “Switching to Chromium makes no difference in market share, as the only way to compete now is through the browser’s UI [user interface], not via the engine. Which isn’t a competition at all, since browser UI is a commodity.”

For its part, Google said the Microsoft move will help, not hurt, the open web philosophy that pushes for a technology foundation that’s independent, not controlled by a corporate entity the way Apple controls iOS or Microsoft controls Windows.

Google: we still value the open web

“Chrome has been a champion of the open web since inception and we welcome Microsoft to the community of Chromium contributors,” Google said in a statement. “We look forward to working with Microsoft and the web standards community to advance the open web, support user choice and deliver great browsing experiences.”

Microsoft’s browser gained dominance in the first browser battles with ruthless competition against Netscape Communications’ browser, Netscape Navigator. But when it largely won that war with Internet Explorer, it effectively stopped developing IE. It took years for Firefox and then other rivals like Safari to challenge IE, but Microsoft never regained its former clout despite being able to ship a default browser on every Windows-powered laptop.

Chrome now is dominant, but unlike IE in the early 2000s, Google has been aggressively developing and pushing for new web standards to improve the web overall. One major thrust right now is toward “progressive web apps” (PWAs) that better match native apps, initially on phones but increasingly on MacOS and Windows computers, too.

And Google insists its browser philosophy won’t result in the stagnant web that Internet Explorer 6 helped build for years.

“We will not be shy about making breaking changes that make the web better / less quirky. We haven’t been to date,” tweeted Darin Fisher, the Chrome engineering leader who helped write the first secret prototype of the Google browser in 2006.

Microsoft: we’ll remain active in browser development

Microsoft won’t just passively take whatever Google releases in the Chromium project, Belfiore said, but will contribute directly to Chromium through its open-source process. “We recognize that making the web better on Windows is good for our customers, partners and our business -- and we intend to actively contribute to that end,” he said.

When Opera switched to Chromium, “It did not stop Opera making web browsers,” tweeted former Opera developer Rich Tibbett about Microsoft’s change on Wednesday.

But there’s plenty of teeth-gnashing about the future of the web. Chrome bugs just become a part of the web, tweeted former Mozilla programmer Robert O’Callahan, and big changes like Firefox’s Stylo project become very difficult.

To accommodate all the new Chromium participants, Tibbett proposed a Chromium Foundation with an “open governance model like the Linux Foundation.” With that approach, “we could all converge (and compete) around one unified engine,” he said.

Microsoft's long-term commitment to Chromium

Moving to Google's browser could be seen as a cost-cutting move, but Microsoft's Edge team is actually hiring, team member Sean Lyndersay tweeted.

In a developer-focused post, Microsoft said the Chromium shift is a long-term commitment.

"We expect our engineers to learn and over time become experts in the Chromium project and grow into active and responsible members of the community. We are eager to increase our contributions to the Chromium project and will continue to maintain any contributions we make," Edge team members said in a the blog post.

That includes work on supporting touch interfaces, bringing Chromium to the 64-bit ARM processor family that's core to Microsoft's attempt to push Windows beyond Intel chips, support for Microsoft accessibility technologies such as Narrator and improving browser security.

But even if Chrome and Chromium remain vital and Microsoft actively helps, there's no question the web is moving closer to a Chrome-only monoculture.

"I remember living through years of IE6 stagnation," tweeted Mozilla website security leader April King," and I think in ten or twenty years that we will look back on this loss of ecosystem diversity in the same way."