

# MC<sup>3</sup> Newsletter

April 2019

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The March meeting of the McHenry County Computer Club is **April 13, 2019 at Salvation Army Building 290 W. Crystal Lake Ave., in Crystal Lake, IL.**

**NOTE:** *Enter the building on the parking lot level under the awning.*

## Meeting Agenda

- Introductions & Reports
- Q & A
- Digital Photography Topix, Part 1 - Al Edlund

## Upcoming Demos - Subject to Change

May - APCUG Video "Libre Office Word Processing"  
October - Digital Photography Topix, Part 2

Please let a board member know if you have any ideas for upcoming demos.

## Suggestions Requested

Suggestions are needed for the next special raffle and the annual raffle. Bring your suggestions to the meeting!

## In the Internet Age, it Pays to Be Skeptical - Jefferson Graham, USA TODAY

In these digital times, it comes down to this: Trust no one. .  
And verify everything.

Three events in one week that we should all pay attention to: a thumb drive, a hacked phone and a fatal outcome from hopping in an unconfirmed Uber. Welcome to today's Internet Age.

Consider:

—A woman strolls onto President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort, with four cellphones and a thumb drive authorities say was full of malware. Who knows just how extreme the malware was. But let's face it, it wasn't good. After she got past Secret Service checkpoints, she was stopped by the hotel's

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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.

## **MC<sup>3</sup> OFFICIALS**

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Jack Luff, Al Edlund,  
Ken Schuring

reception staff before it was too late.

—Jeff Bezos, often characterized as the world's richest person thanks to the billions earned from his Amazon.com, also had people, but his phone, they allege, got hacked by the Saudis. Security experts we spoke to think it was either a phishing link that got clicked and enabled malware or malicious code put on a website he visited. Bezos says personal information was stolen from his phone.

—A University of South Carolina student ordered an Uber over the weekend and stepped into a car she assumed was the driver. It wasn't. She was killed later that night, police announced Monday.

For the millions of us who use ride-hailing apps like Uber and Lyft, remember this: The name of the driver and the license plate for the car are labeled in the app. Double check it before you get into any car and have the driver announce his or her name.

Adam Levin, the author of *Swiped: How to Protect Yourself in a World Full of Scammers, Phishers and Identity Thieves*, says people who haven't taken security seriously need to stop and do a re-think.

Internet woes are "not something we can prevent," he says. "But we can be more careful."

### **What to do in the internet age? Begin by assuming the worst.**

When the phones rings, is it really a friend calling to speak to you or is it a hacker?

Levin tells a story about the rogue asking if it's you when you answer the call, you say "Yes," and, if recorded, that word then gives him the license to bill you for things you never ordered because they have you on tape saying "Yes."

His solution: Answer the phone only when you can prove, through Caller ID, that it is one of your contacts.

In the case of the malware-infested thumb drive that made it onto Trump's resort property, Levin says that had it been inserted into a networked computer, it could have picked up passwords, e-mail accounts and other privileged information. "Once malware is into a system, it's like a disease and virus," he says. "It just gets in and spreads."

With a phone belonging to Bezos or you and me, "no phone is impregnable," he says. "People have to understand this. The phone you use could be a weapon of mass destruction. People look at cell-phone as communication tool, it's really a mini data storage device."

Once again, class, remember:

—Don't put important personal information on your phone, unless you wish it to be in others' hands.

—Have different passwords for every website you go to, and use two-factor authentication, using a code as a secondary method of logging in, to beef up your credentials. If you get hacked, change all your passwords.

—When using public Wi-fi, assume that everything you're typing can be read by others. If you don't want it reprinted, don't type it. Better yet, subscribe to a virtual private network app to use while in public wifi, like NordVPN or SaferVPN, which will help secure your signal.

"No one is too unimportant, too small, too irrelevant to be of interest to a hacker," says Levin. "Assume we're all as hot as Kim Kardashian. We all have information they'd like to have."

## **Amazon Workers Eavesdrop on Your Talks with Alexa - cNet**

The Alexa smart assistant answers your questions on your Amazon smart speaker. But she has a team of humans helping her improve her skills.

That's according to a report from Bloomberg, which says the company has human reviewers in locations including Boston, Costa Rica, India and Romania who listen to hundreds of Alexa recordings every day. The workers, some of whom spoke anonymously with Bloomberg, annotate the recordings to help Alexa get better at what she does.

It's the latest example of a cloud-based service that purports to use an algorithm that actually has a team of humans behind it. In December, The Information reported that video taken from Ring cameras was reviewed by workers in Ukraine. Ring is also owned by Amazon. It's a reminder that artificial intelligence, a technology that lets computer programs learn, is often improved by human intervention.

The workers who review Alexa clips are searching for terms like "Taylor Swift," hoping to help Alexa get better at understanding that users are referring to the singer, according to the Bloomberg report. But they also sometimes hear private or even disturbing audio, as well as recordings that weren't triggered by Alexa's wake word.

In response to the report, an Amazon spokesperson said in an email that the company takes user privacy seriously. "We only annotate an extremely small sample of Alexa voice recordings in order to improve the customer experience. For example, this information helps us train our speech recognition and natural language understanding systems, so Alexa can better understand your requests, and ensure the service works well for everyone," the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson added that employees can't directly access identifying information about the people or accounts associated with the recordings, among other protections for the data, and "zero tolerance" for any abuse. "All information is treated with high confidentiality and we use multi-factor authentication to restrict access, service encryption, and audits of our control environment to protect it," the spokesperson said.

## **Disney confirms it will 'likely' bundle Disney+, ESPN+, and Hulu for one price**

To kick off its Investor Day presentation this afternoon, Disney laid out its direct-to-consumer strategy, going over the many assets that put the company in a strong position as it prepares for a major face-off with Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and other video streaming services. Kevin Mayer, chairman of Disney's direct-to-consumer division, didn't waste time stating the obvious: Disney will "likely" sell its standalone, paid subscription services — Disney+, ESPN+, and Hulu — as a bundle for an appealing price. (Disney took a controlling stake in Hulu with the completion of its acquisition of 21st Century Fox assets.)

Mayer said Disney "will likely bundle at a discounted price to offer more value for consumers." Hulu's monthly subscription recently dropped to a starting price of \$5.99. It also offers an \$11.99 "no commercials" plan and Hulu with Live TV, which is \$44.99 / month. ESPN+ costs \$4.99 per month or \$49.99 annually. The big open question is how much Disney+ will be; that's definitely something we're hoping to learn as today's event continues on.

Tying all of these things together is an obvious move if Disney wants to make things easier for consumers. Executives at ESPN have previously hinted that a bundle could be in the cards.

Pairing its services together will create a formidable challenge to Netflix, yes, but could also eat into the cable industry and internet TV services like Sling TV and YouTube TV. It's likely that some consumers won't need a traditional cable package if they've got on-demand TV episodes, sports programming, and Disney's vault of classics and Marvel films in one bundle for a single, straightforward price.

The specifics here will prove interesting: will there be a bundle including Hulu's live TV service? Because that will look expensive next to the standard combo, but it's what you'll need if you want to watch ESPN the cable channel in addition to ESPN+.

## **SpaceX's Falcon Heavy Rocket has 1st Paying Customer**

SpaceX's Falcon Heavy rocket, the most powerful vehicle flying today, just passed a key milestone by launching its first-ever mission for a paying customer.

The rocket took off Thursday from Kennedy Space Center in Florida just after 6 pm ET. It delivered a pricey communications satellite into orbit for Saudi Arabia-based firm Arabsat.

For the first time ever, all three Falcon Heavy rocket boosters returned to Earth after launch: The two side boosters landed simultaneously on ground pads in Florida, while the center core landed on a remote-controlled platform in the ocean a short time later.

Reusable hardware is part of Falcon Heavy's appeal. The boosters are guided back to Earth so they can be refurbished and used again, which SpaceX says drastically reduces the cost of spaceflight.

During Falcon Heavy's widely watched debut flight in February 2018, only the two side boosters were recovered.

### **Why Falcon Heavy matters**

This rocket is by far the most powerful operational launch vehicle in the world. And with a sticker price of \$90 million, it is also about a third of the price of its closest competitor, United Launch Alliance's Delta IV Heavy.

Introducing a new ultra-powerful rocket has allowed SpaceX to compete directly with arch rival United Launch Alliance, a joint venture between Lockheed Martin and Boeing, for lucrative government contracts that require heavy-lift launch vehicles. The California-based company was founded by Elon Musk in 2002.

Falcon Heavy has already been chosen for a few contracts, including a \$130 million contract to launch a US Air Force satellite, which was awarded just four months after its inaugural flight in February 2018.

The rocket is expected to be used primarily for US military missions, and to launch spy satellites and hefty commercial telecom satellites.

The version of the Falcon Heavy that SpaceX flew this week was not the same as what the company used on previous mission: Its rocket cores were more powerful, making use of upgrades to SpaceX's smaller workhorse rocket, the Falcon 9.

Falcon Heavy is not expected to fly nearly as often as its smaller counterpart, which has completed more than 20 missions since last February. Falcon Heavy only has five missions on its manifest so far.