LMUG SoundByte

London Mac User Group

The meeting on Monday 11th April 2016 will be at Covent Garden's Sun Tavern
66 Long Acre London

Newsbyte   Paul Foster
Software Snapshot   Chris Mahon to demonstrate the new iPad Pro
Announcements
Main Topic   AGM
Raffle Prize   Sphero BB8 Droid

1.   Apologies for absence
2.   Minutes of 2015 AGM (tabled)
3.   Chairman's Report
4.   Treasurer's Report
5.   Election of Committee Members
6.   Any Other Business
            6.1   A proposal that we do not charge for memberships.
            6.2   A proposal that we change the format for the meeting and have more SIGs groups.

Questions from the floor
In addition to hearing reports on progress in the last year, there is an opportunity for you to express your views on any matter relating to how LMUG can best serve members. There are several areas about which the Committee will need guidance:
•   Has the meeting programme over 2015 been acceptable?
•   Has enough attention been paid to the needs of novice Mac Users or those using older hardware?
•   Are the channels of communication with Apple users and members adequate?
•   Is lmug-talk still viable in its present form?
•   Is the accommodation for the monthly meetings adequate?
You may have questions of your own. Whether you have or not, it is hoped that you will attend the AGM to make your views known. It is important because LMUG belongs to you!

Near-by Cycle Stands

Drury Lane 16

Tavistock St 22

High Holborn 16

Wellington St 5

Southampton St 5

William IV St 5
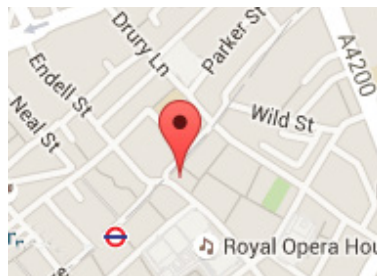
The following nominations have been received:

Post   Nomination
Chairman   Chris Mahon
Vice-Chairman and assistant secretary   Paul Foster
Secretary   Tina Jacobs
Treasurer   Pietro Falcone
Membership Secretary   Pietro Falcone
Webmaster Pietro Falcone
Newsletter Maurice Baker
Technical Officer   Vacant
Communications and Social Media   Vacant
Committee member   Craig
Committee member   Martin Kelly
Should you wish to volunteer for the committee please forward your name to the secretary.
New committee members are always welcome. We welcome new ideas and new people.
Tina Jacobs
Secretary

Make Sure You're Getting OS X Security Data

A few weeks ago, Josh Centers wrote about an update to OS X 10.11 El Capitan's System Integrity Protection that broke Ethernet for many Mac users briefly, before Apple pushed out a second update to resolve the problem (see "El Capitan System Integrity Protection Update Breaks Ethernet," 29 February 2016 in TidBits). Josh's article confused me for a bit, because the problem revolved around El Capitan's Incompatible Kernel Extension Configuration Data file, but I could find no evidence of it being installed on either my iMac or MacBook Air.

Discussion in the comments on that article and on TidBITS Talk revealed the answer: I had not selected the "Install system data files and security updates" checkbox in the App Store pane of System Preferences.

(No time to read more of this article right now? Just make sure that checkbox is selected and get on with your life. We now return the rest of you to the regularly scheduled explanation of what's going on.)

Why had I avoided such an important-sounding checkbox? Because Apple messed up the interface here in a big way. The top enclosing checkbox is clear: "Automatically check for updates." Everyone should have that checked. The next one isn't as simple: "Download newly available updates in the background." That's fine in most cases, but if you give network-connected presentations or are in bandwidth-constrained situations where Internet use without your knowledge might be problematic, turn it off. However, note what the interface says next: "You will be notified when the updates are ready to be installed." Great! That's exactly what I want to have happen — updates will be downloaded in the background and then I'll be notified and get to choose when to install.

It would seem that the next three checkboxes are related, but that's where Apple messed up. The next two — "Install app updates" and "Install OS X updates" — sound like "Install system data files and security updates," but they work differently. When selected, those first two checkboxes tell the App Store app to install app and OS X updates automatically; if you leave them deselected, you're instead notified of updates and given the opportunity install to them manually at a convenient time.

In contrast, if you fail to select "Install system data files and security updates," you won't be notified of these critical background security-related updates. These are not the same as Apple's foreground updates with names like "Security Update 2016-002" — they fall into the "OS X updates" category.

So what are they? TidBITS Talk member Al Varnell, who works in the security community, shared what he knows in the discussions there, but warns that the information is incomplete because Apple has avoided documenting these systems due to the security implications. These critical background updates include at least the following:

Core Suggestions Configuration Data
CoreLSKD Configuration Data
Gatekeeper Configuration Data
Incompatible Kernel Extension Configuration Data
MRT Configuration Data
XProtectPlistConfigData

I assume some of these files contain information used by security processes, as outlined in this Apple support article. Gatekeeper enables OS X to avoid opening applications that aren't signed. MRT likely stands for "Malware Removal Tool" since it appeared around the time of the MacDefender malware (see "Apple Responds to Increasingly


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Webpage: http://appleusergroupresources.com/special-offers-with-codes/

Please do not share this with non-members

Apple Notes: A notable exception as I return to Evernote, tail between legs
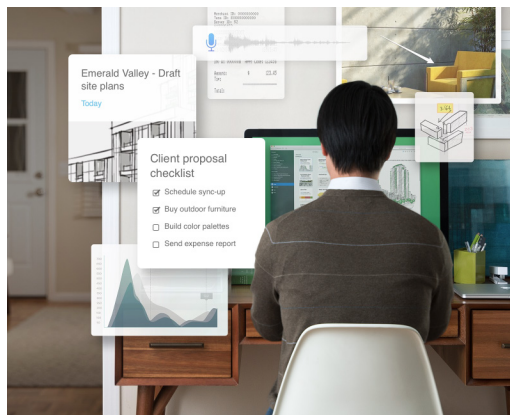
Twice in the past few months I've written about Apple Notes. First, I recounted how I had successful transferred all my Evernote files over to Notes and that all had gone well. Well, it went downhill from there. First I noticed some slowness in Notes. Then I realised that every time I opened the application on the iPhone there would be a delay of over a minute before I could start a new note or search for an existing item.

On the Mac it is possible to start entering a note almost immediately after opening the application, although it is not possible to search the database until sync finishes. Synchronisation seems just as slow as on the phone. Indeed, I noticed that when my MacBook has not been used for a few days the sync of Notes goes on for minutes, something that I find unacceptable.

The problem, presumably, was the size of my Evernote database. All told, there were nearly 2,900 items imported into Notes app. As I've discovered, this is a lot. David Sparks of MacSparky has written glowingly about Notes; in fact it was his recommendation that encouraged me to

say goodbye (or, at least, bye-bye for now) to Evernote. I checked back and saw David had mentioned he had some 700 notes in his database, so I sent an email outlining my misfortunes. Unfortunately there has been no reply. I suspect my approach was snagged in his spam guard or something like that.

It isn't so much the synchronisation speed, if only it could operate in the background without locking the app. The main problem is in not being able to start typing a note immediately. By the time the new note screen opens I've forgotten what I was thinking about.

This has been festering now for a couple of weeks, so I was delighted to read that in the new iOS 9.3 there was an promising mention of "improvement to the Notes application".

I was pretty confident that when I clicked on the iPhone's Notes icon I would have super-speed synchronisation and would be able to read or add new notes in a trice. Sadly, this is not so. My 2,900 database of notes opens just as slowly as it did last week. The New Note button and search facility are dead until the sync routine has finished, usually about a minute or so.

Notes is not fit for purpose and I am really surprised that Apple has not dealt with the problem. I cannot believe the problem is restricted to me; this is now less likely because the new installation of iOS 9.3 should have cleared any local issues.

My patience has worn thin and I have returned to Evernote, tail between my legs. Clearly at the moment Notes works best with a small number of items, perhaps up to 500 or 700, but isn't capable of the heavy lifting job that Evernote tackles as a matter of routine. I will still keep an eye on Notes but for the time being it doesn't work for me.

Serious MacDefender Situation," 25 May 2011) — Apple's Security Update 2011-003 could detect and remove MacDefender. And XProtect is part of OS X's File Quarantine feature, which scans downloaded files for malware and blocks Web plug-ins with known vulnerabilities like Flash and Java. Incompatible Kernel Extension Configuration Data helps OS X disable old kernel extensions that may cause crashes, but it's unclear what Core Suggestions Configuration Data and CoreLSKD Configuration Data contain. (You might also see Chinese Word List Update; I presume that's not security-related.)

Apple needs to push out updates to these files based on new threats — if Apple's engineers become aware of a new piece of malware, OS X's security systems need to know about it as soon as possible to protect Mac users around the world. Disabling the "Install system data files and security updates" checkbox is, frankly, a terrible idea — it's not installing code, and barring a mistake like Apple made in accidentally adding the Ethernet kernel extension to the Incompatible Kernel Extension Configuration Data file, it's unlikely that allowing this security-related data to be updated could cause many problems.

So if you've deselected "Install system data files and security updates," turn it back on and wait a day or two for Software Update to notice and update everything.

If you don't want to wait, select that checkbox and then issue this command in Terminal.

sudo softwareupdate --background-critical

To verify that the updates have taken place, look in the Software > Installations category in System Information (as explained in "El Capitan System Integrity Protection Update Breaks Ethernet") — click the Date Installed column header twice to sort with the newest installations at the top.

For those who are constitutionally opposed to automatic updates, this is how you can get these critical background updates manually: select the checkbox, run the softwareupdate command above, verify that the updates have taken place, and then deselect the checkbox again.

It's worth noting that, despite Apple's policy of releasing security updates only for the current version of OS X and two versions prior, the company continues to update these security data files all the way back to 10.6 Snow Leopard, when the File Quarantine feature made its debut.

Regardless, Apple should clarify the importance of this checkbox by rewording it to something like "Install critical anti-malware definitions and system data." Having it selected is presumably already the default, but wording like that should prevent unwitting users from disabling it. Plus, if that checkbox is not selected, Software Update should notify the user about each individual update, just like any other OS X update.

All this page taken from an article in TidBits