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From the Chairman

Hello, members

It is about 35 years since I bought my first PC. It had two 5.25 inch floppy drives. I later upgraded one drive to a 20MB hard disk (1 millionth the size of the hard drive in my current PC). Over the years I have had many devices, and currently have a PC with dual monitors, a laptop, a smartphone and an ageing Samsung S2 tablet. I like and use all of them, but I have to say that the tablet is the one I use most. Here are just some of the things I might use it for in a typical day.

- Check my calendar for any events that day, and add any coming events.
- Check the weather forecast and maybe the rain radar.
- Read local, national and international news.
- Do online quizzes and of recent months, do the daily Wordle puzzle.
- Listen to Radio NZ Live or an earlier interview from their archive.
- Do Google, Google Maps, Google Earth or Streetview searches for issues and places.
- Do online shopping or check availability of items in Rotorua shops.
- Read and send emails.
- Through Google Photos, view photos taken on my phone.
- Read free online books available through our local library.
- Check Facebook pages that interest me.
- Do online banking and bill payments.
- Watch YouTube videos, using Bluetooth headphones.
- Check streaming sites for new offerings and add programmes to my favourites lists.
- Via my Chromecast, watch Netflix, Neon, TVNZ on Demand and Curiosity Stream on my TV.

Of course, all this can also happen on my smartphone. However, for use in the house I find the larger display and larger on-screen keyboard of the tablet suits me well as my eyes get weaker and my fingers get shakier.

Regards
Keith Garratt
Chair

Rotorua SeniorNet is just one of 75 local groups in the New Zealand Federation. If you would like to know more about what goes on elsewhere, OR what discounts or services are available to members, go to the Federation website.

www.rotoruasenior.net

Next members' forum
Monday 9 May 2022
2 pm

Our monthly members' forums are at Parksyde Centre, Tarewa Place, on the second Monday of each month at 2 pm, with interesting talks followed by afternoon tea. Visitors are welcome.

Reminder – we are back at the library Community Room on Monday mornings from 2 May, 9-12.



Why I like SeniorNet Hangouts

- Alan Armstrong

Some of you may remember I retired from SeniorNet 5 years ago with health and mobility issues that kept me mostly housebound. That stabilised after a while and I now spend much of my time on-line running a Blog that's getting 80,000 views a week. I keep in touch with our Committee through its regular Tuesday evening Zoom sessions (you're also invited, remember?), and I was recently co-opted back as a committee member.

When COVID lockdowns disrupted everything the SeniorNet Federation responded with daily half-hour Hangout presentations on Zoom, and that connected me with SeniorNet tutors from all over the country and the Special Interest Groups they've been setting up. That's working extremely well and I'm kept busy with 5 or 6 on-line COVID-free meetings every week. Always plenty to do and new people to connect with.

Most users of Hangouts so far have been tutors and we're worried so few ordinary members are using it. My guess is there are two reasons. First, many seniors now have smart phones and are still busy figuring those out. Remember they're designed to be addictive! I had one but gave it away as I got older for two reasons. Finger tremor meant increasing touch-screen errors, and worsening vision meant difficulty reading a small screen. My back problems require a comfortable chair in front of a larger screen with a separate keyboard, and of course that has to be a PC!

As you get older it's likely to happen to you too - if you're lucky.

The other reason is that new users may need help to set up Zoom and our tutors are always there if you need that, but also if you're buying a new PC you could try asking your retailer to install the free Zoom App (they'll need your email address and a password you can change later) and to make sure your camera and microphone are working properly. If they know their stuff that should take less than 10 minutes. After that most of our tutors can help you get started with everything else over the phone.

I'm happy to run evening Zoom practice sessions (beginner or advanced) for anyone who wants to upskill (I'm already doing that for other Learning Centres) and my email address is still mirihika@orcon.net.nz

The bonus from knowing Zoom is you can set up your own sessions with family and friends, and many of them will already know how to use it. Surprisingly about half my cousins my own age do! The free version is fine except its sessions only last 40 minutes, but you can easily reopen another.

Why not try it? Zoom is easy to use once you know how. About as easy as email.

From Bert, Activities Co-ordinator

For many of us, travelling has been somewhat restricted in the past two years. It is now possible to travel throughout New Zealand without any obvious restrictions, particularly if you are travelling using your own or a hired vehicle. During the past couple of years many of the things we took for granted have changed. This is particularly the case in the hospitality industry. Some places are working with reduced accommodation or reduced dining facilities or limited staff. Some places, unfortunately, are no longer in business.

We have been travelling in our motorvan for the past ten days in some pretty remote parts of the North Island. Our mobile phones have been vital in our ability to navigate and to gather information about the places we intended to visit. The first and most important thing to be aware of is that cell phone coverage in NZ is quite poor when you leave the main highways and get into the more remote areas. The lesson from this is to do as much research as you can on your intended destination while you are in an area with good signal. It is best to do as much planning as you can before you leave home and keep an eye on the signal strength bars on your screen when you get away from main roads.

Google Maps are a great help, particularly if you plan your itinerary before leaving, and load everything into a trip planner on your home screen. This means that all the maps are preloaded into your phone and if you lose your signal all that information is stored away in the phone's memory.

We were travelling in a group of four motorvans and we found that the location share app in Google maps was a convenient way of knowing where everyone was during each journey. In the event that anyone had a problem we knew where they were. We were able to phone each other should there be a need to change the destination or a way point.

We visited an arboretum just a few km out of New Plymouth on Mount Taranaki. I wanted to know how far we had travelled vertically from sea level. It was very easy to say "Hey google, what is the altitude of my present location?" The instant reply was 438 metres. Another useful feature was to have the weather forecast for our location set automatically. This gives a forecast for where you are from the time you requested it. This is very useful in NZ as the weather can change suddenly as you move into different terrain.

Everyone took lots of photos which they were able to share with friends and family on various social media apps. I managed to check my emails most mornings and read the news whilst eating breakfast. The whole trip was most enjoyable and made much easier than would have been possible even a very few years ago.

SeniorNet Rotorua is about to resume holding our “Drop-in Sessions” at Rotorua Library. Our team will be available to show you how to set up your phone to make travelling easier or indeed to solve any problems you may have struck in the day-to-day use of your mobile phone.

FYI/FYE (For Your Information/From Your Editor)

Reading our contributors’ columns this month made me think back over the computing years. And, by the way, it would be interesting to hear other people’s experiences in this area!

My own first experience with computers was around 1984/1985. I had trained as a shorthand-typing teacher and was lucky enough to work in a school with a progressive principal. We had made progress from the heavy, clunky manual typewriters (remember typing to ‘Carmen’?) and had moved on to using word processing machines – electronic typewriters with a small, editable screen attached.

One day, the principal came into the typing room and told me to have the machines tidied up and ready to ship out on Friday afternoon. Computers were being delivered and I could take one home over the weekend to learn how to use it! Welcome to the wonderful, whacky world of computers.

These were truly wonderful machines. No network, no Internet, no email, printing happened by saving to the floppy disk (yes, 5¼”), taking the disk to the printer-connected PC and working from there. The printer was a large, dot matrix machine that made impressive noises as it buzzed back and forth across the paper. Paper was a roll, perforated at the sides for the pins that held and fed it through, and the width depended on the width of the printer bed. Some years later, when most home and office printers were being manufactured for A4 paper, I spent a few months at AirNZ Engineering Base. One specialised printer was nearly as wide as a double bed!

Now, many of us work from our laptops (like our Chair, I prefer the laptop to the phone, for visibility) and my latest printer doesn’t need a physical connection to the laptop – I just have to remember to keep my coffee cup out of the way so that the wireless can actually connect. My last teaching position had a schoolwide network, many of the students were using their own laptops (that’s where a really good technician is invaluable!), each building had an industrial size copier/printer in the common areas and teachers were even allowed to have their cellphones on during class. Sometimes a very good idea!

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