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## Year-End News Wrap



We all want 2020 to be long gone. May we live interesting times, indeed. Overall, the computer tech industry and the vaccine companies have both dug in and worked miracles. Before the pandemic, predictions of remote worker counts were expected to take about 3 years to reach the levels achieved during March. And while some workers have returned to their workplaces with masks and plexiglass, still more now have remote work ready-to-use for exposure isolation and the upcoming blizzard, because, you know, it's 2020. Maybe the next consequence of Covid-19 will be that there are fewer rush-hour car accidents during the next snowstorm. Just stay home.

So the tech companies stepped up. Many of you swiveled your businesses and adapted. I added no-touch drop-off and pickup of computers here, and a secondary open-air workshop. Real Estate agents are now creating walk-through videos of properties. And more of you learned to work remotely than I ever expected. Moves towards paperless offices weren't big, but most offices still don't understand that it's easier not to print something than to file it.

The computer parts vendors have somewhat caught up now. Every category is now available, even if not every item has returned to in-stock status. In every

normal year, computer parts drop in price or increase in speed and capacity; we took a year off from that, but most item prices have stayed stable.

So here's to a normal 2021, or at least one where we can see a gradual return to normal.

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## New Year Resolution: Backups & Archives

Remember to keep a year-end archive copy of data. If you've split your documents over home and office systems this year, put files in their proper places first. Years from now, we won't want to continue blaming 'that year' for not having all the proper records for tracking ownership and comparing annual results because some of the files were backed up on a home system, and not archived.

An archive isn't a backup; it's a snapshot of your data as of a specific date, a historical reference. For an archive, I recommend just copying your document set to both a portable backup drive, and a set of writable DVDs (usually 4.5 Gb each) or Blu-ray disks (usually 25 Gb each), and locking them up in two different places, one off-site. Or you could use cloud storage for the off-site set. Don't use thumb drives for long-term storage; they're not reliable enough.

Again, that's two different types of media, and you need to check that they haven't gone bad at least once a year. I've seen loads of bad hard drives, and many bad DVDs; all of them worked perfectly when they were new. Keep more than just one copy.

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## The IRS Changes Their Minds, Again



Some years back, the IRS was setting ID protection codes, OK, passwords, on logins to the IRS web site. Those were supposed to prevent refund fraud. Maybe they slowed the criminals down, but mine was a 5-digit integer, which is

not an adequate password, ever.

Those disappeared later on, and those of us who wanted to do anything requiring a login were asked to “Type in the number from this line on your old tax return, you can choose which year.” It would be slightly better security for the IRS to pick the year. Enough pages of Donald Trump’s tax returns have now been published to make that method of login laughable for the rare individuals who thought it would be “secure.” (It never was.)

But now, IRS pin numbers are available again. Get yours, lock down your account, don’t be a victim. The usual IRS scare stories will hit local news in a few months; don’t wait to be an example. It’s still a pin, so it is inadequate security, but in this case, it’s the available level of due diligence.

There’s more on IRS Pins here, and the link to set them, on the Krebs on Security site:

<https://krebsonsecurity.com/2020/12/irs-to-make-id-protection-pin-open-to-all/>

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## Google Inactive Account Manager

Wow, nice label. The “Google Inactive Account Manager” is for choosing whom Google will contact if they have not heard from you for 2 years. You can turn on options to notify a third party, and give them access to all your stuff stored on Google, including photos, mail, drive, and so on, after as little as three months. It’s not quite an electronic estate plan, but it is tidier than the alternative ways your family would have to convince Google to give them access.

<https://support.google.com/accounts/answer/3036546>

This is not a new Google service related to Covid; it has been around for a few years, but was recently updated.



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