THE COMPUTER CONNECTION
SAUK COMPUTER USER GROUP

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Club Information

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An International Association of Technology & Computer User Groups

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We met at the WCSC for our Christmas meeting on December 11th with 37 people in attendance. Food included Candlelight Chicken George, sweet potato fries & onion rings; salads from Arthur's and pies from Sterling Farmer's market. There was plenty of chicken sorry that we ran out of onion rings, but I believe everyone got enough to eat and many were sent home with extra chicken. Santa Joe had his game which was too easy, one group got everything right, wait for next year. Lot of prizes and fun which was the main objective.
Joe Fornero

December
SCUG BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
DATE 12/15/2021

Meeting was called to order by: Neal

Attending the meeting were: Art Bendick, Cheryl Johnson, Neal Shipley, Joe Schmitt, Janice Maves,, Joe Fornero, Tom and Nancy Rich.

Treasurer's report was presented by: Joe F.

Discussion Highlights:

1): Christmas Party was a big success. Many thanks to Santa Joe for organizing & running the event.

2): SCUG will try to include Zoom for future in-person monthly meetings

Future Programs:

Detective Tanner Wilhelm from the Sterling PD to give program on Security & Scams at our January meeting.

Adjournment

Respectfully submitted: secretary Nancy Rich

Hello All
Neal here. Just wanted to update everyone for my Friday night Zoom meetings.
We will be available for Dec. 31 and Jan. 7 at 7:30 pm as usual.
Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3975898877?pwd=RjF5ZTM3R25qNXhHRjdWRVAzQ1M2Zz09

Meeting ID: 397 589 8877
Passcode: 4ukxAh

Do You *Pay* for a Product? If Not, YOU are the Product.
By David Kretchmar

Maybe not always, but hopefully, we know there is no such thing as a free lunch by this point in our lives. Advertising is something we have come to accept or at least ignore for most of our lives. We expect commercials on television, the radio, newspapers, magazines, and movies and accept this advertising knowing that the revenue generated pays for or subsidizes the entertainment and information we want.

The Internet takes advertising to a new, more personal level. We see ads directed to us as individuals rather than generic advertising. The first time we see ads based on a recent search, we know advertising has reached a new level of personalization. The entity selling ads is obviously using information about us to direct advertising to our eyes.

FACEBOOK

In early April, yet another personal data breach was recently disclosed. Since some time in 2019, the personal data of over 533 million Facebook users was compromised via their phone number. In this case, Facebook users became more of a "product" than most users had ever anticipated. Many Facebook users only recently realized that Facebook is an advertising entity that collects a lot of data on each user.

Free (with advertising) has been a successful business model for a long time. However, the recent Facebook disclosure (along with other accidental and deliberate data breaches) causes some to wonder if this is evidence that consumers have been treated poorly by this business model.

AREN'T YOU ALWAYS THE PRODUCT?

And just because you pay doesn't mean you're not the product. Cable and satellite television companies take our money PLUS sell us (via advertising) to the various sponsors. Magazines take our money and still sell ads; banks and credit cards can charge us money for the service of having and helping us manage our money.

Any business that has a "loyalty card" takes our money for products, services, and entertainment but gives us a discount or other benefit in exchange for the ability to monitor what we are doing. In other words, we routinely become "the product" even when we're already paying.

All businesses treat their customers with varying levels of respect and provide different levels of value to us. There is often no direct correlation between how much money we pay and the value of the service we receive.

For example, someone might pay a couple of dollars a week for online, or a little more for delivered paper subscriptions, to *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* or the local newspaper, or some other publication. Yet this same information is available to people who read these papers at their local library or coffee shop at no charge. So, in effect, we are not paying for the product; we pay for getting the product in a way we find much more convenient.

This example is much more complicated than the black and white "you're the product" logic allows. For instance, some users get the service virtually for "free" in an airplane, using accumulated points or a "bump" coupon. Other travelers pay big bucks for the benefit of being transported to the same destination! So,

who or what is the product?

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Many entities whose services you pay for treat their users well, and others treat users poorly. There are all sorts of business models online. Some work in some cases, others work in other cases. But to argue that "free" services mean you're "the product" and thus not treated as well isn't true. In the online world, each of us must decide if the value of the product we receive is worth the inevitable compromise in our privacy that takes place.

Suppose we accept the privacy compromise inherent in most online experiences. In that case, it is incumbent on each of us to understand, compromise, and share only as much information as necessary.

By David Kretchmar, Hardware Technician
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Complete Robocall Deterrence Part 2
By John Krout

INTRODUCTION

In Part 1 of this series, you learned how to configure your smartphone so that only your Contacts will ring your phone, a Whitelist strategy.

That Whitelist solution is not complete because robocaller systems can still find out that your phone is live simply by recognizing that the call went to your voicemail. And you continue to suffer the frequent voicemail inbox overload syndrome since many robocallers leave voicemails.

This part 2 article introduces the concept of including the Special Information Tones (SIT). The three tones beginning phone network messages, such as the number you dialed, are disconnected at the start of your voicemail greeting. After SIT, you can include your voice telling your Contacts that your number is indeed live, not disconnected, and they can leave a message.

WHY SIT?

Robocaller systems, like any valuable asset, are focused on the efficient use of system time. So each robocaller system maintains an internal list of phone numbers known to be valid.

How can robocaller systems determine that a called number is not valid? When the phone number is disconnected, i.e., the system hears SIT. When robocaller systems hear SIT, the systems remove the number from their internal list of numbers known to be valid. Then, they don't call again.

The proof is in the pudding, as some say. In September 2019, I was receiving about 25 robocalls per week and roughly ten robocall voicemails per week. I implemented this SIT voicemail greeting strategy in July 2020. Between that time and March 2021, when I wrote this article, I typically received only two robocalls per week in Missed Calls, and my weekly robocall voicemails dropped to **zero**.

Why do I still receive *any* robocalls? First, because there are hundreds or perhaps thousands of robocall systems, some systems have yet to call and hear SIT.

CARRIER OPTIONS FOR VOICEMAIL GREETINGS

Typically, phone carrier companies, such as Verizon Wireless, AT&T, and T Mobil, offer three different ways to create a voicemail greeting.

Automatically state your phone number, for instance: You have reached 703-555-1111. Please leave a message after the beep.

Play a recording of you pronouncing your name, for instance: You have reached the phone of John Krout. Please leave a message after the beep.

Play a recording of whatever you want to say for your greeting.

So, our strategy will be to use the third option, a recording, to make robocaller systems think your phone line is disconnected. Most phones expect you to use the phone's microphone and your own voice to record that voicemail greeting.

Below, I will show you how to combine SIT and your greeting on your computer. Then, in Part 3 of this article series, I will show you three ways to transfer that combined audio into your phone for use as a voicemail greeting.

HOW TO GET SIT

There are websites that curate phone network messages. I downloaded a couple of those messages and used the free Audacity sound editor to isolate SIT and remove audio noise.

I have posted that cleaned-up SIT online as a monophonic WAV file on the Web. You can download it from:

https://tinyurl.com/6n5hyb6d

MAKE YOUR GREETING SCRIPT

Before recording, I suggest you type your voicemail greeting script in a document in a large font, so you can read it easily while recording.

Here's what I used as a script:

Hi, this is John. No, my number is not disconnected. Those tones were just meant to convince robocallers not to call me again. You can leave a message after the beep. Thanks.

RECORDING YOUR VOICE

No matter how you record, the phone carriers require that your custom voicemail greeting has to be **monophonic, not stereo.** You can either record monophonic or use Audacity to reduce the recording from stereo to monophonic.
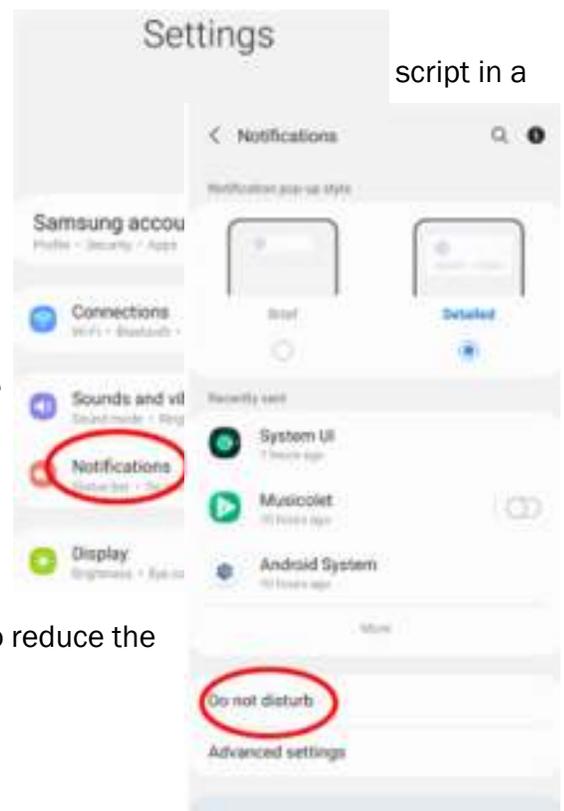
One convenient way to record your voice is to use a voice recording app on your phone and then transfer that digital greeting audio file to the computer. **Android** users can download any of several voice recording apps from the Google Play Store. Ensure the app documents the phone folder in which you can find the digital audio recording file for transfer to your computer. For example, **iPhone users** can find the Voice Memos app in the Accessories folder. Recordings can be transferred to the computer using iTunes sync.

Alternatively, if you obtained a computer microphone for virtual online meetings during the pandemic, or your laptop has a built-in microphone, you can record your voice directly to your computer using an application such as the frees Audacity audio editor.

COMBINE SIT AND YOUR VOICE RECORDING

Audacity provides a convenient multi-track method for doing this task.

STEP 1. Open Audacity, pull down the File menu and select **Open**. Then, using the standard Open File dialog box, load the SIT recording. After you do that, the oscilloscope-like depiction of the SIT recording appears in an Audacity track, like that shown in **Illustration 1**.

STEP 2. In Audacity, pull down the File menu and select **Import**. Then, using the standard Open file dialog box, load the voicemail greeting recording.

Audacity places that imported voicemail greeting recording in *a second track*, below the track that contains the SIT recording. You can see an example in **Illustration 2**. Audacity adjusts the time scale so that the longer track is completely visible.

However, *both audio recordings start at the same time*. Therefore, we need to move the voicemail greeting recording to the right to start after SIT ends. Here is how to that happen.
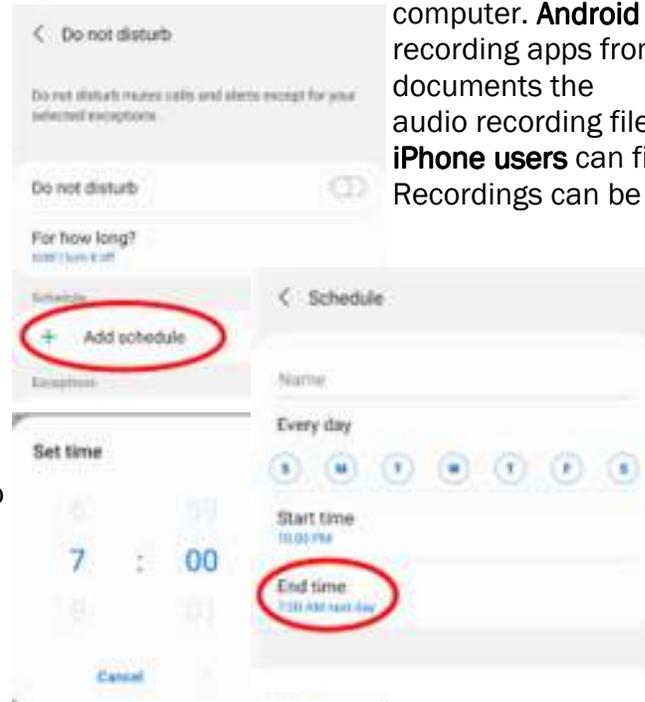
Complete Robocall Deterrence Part 2 (cont.)
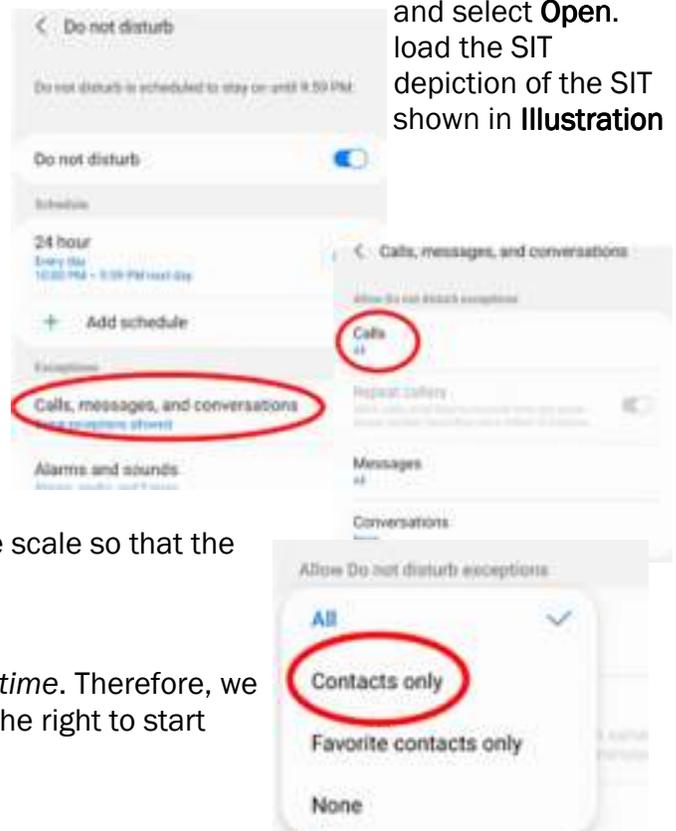
STEP 3. In the second track, click at the time point where SIT ends. A black vertical cursor will appear in the second track. Again, you can see an example in **Illustration 3**. In that illustration, the vertical cursor is circled.

STEP 4. Pull down the Tracks menu. In that menu, select **Align Tracks**.

A sub-menu appears. In that sub-menu select **Start to Cursor/Selection Start**. This choice means that the track in which the cursor appears will be moved to the right so that the audio starts at the cursor.

You can see the menus and choices in **Illustration 4**.

Audacity moves the voicemail greetings in the second track to the right, to the point where you set the cursor. You can see an example in **Illustration 5**.

At this point, your custom ringtone is ready to be *auditioned*. The play controls in Audacity look like CD player or MP3 player controls, including a **Start at Beginning** button, a left-pointing black triangle with a vertical black bar, and a green triangular **Play button**. Those buttons appear in Illustration 5, just below the Audacity main menu bar where File and Tracks appear.

Click **Start at Beginning** and then **Play**. If you like the result, I strongly suggest you pull down the File menu and Export the result to a WAV file as a backup.

If you do not already have Audacity installed on your computer, here is the download link:

https://www.audacityteam.org/download/

NEXT UP

In part 3 of this article series, you will learn how to transfer that combined greeting audio to your phone for recording as a voicemail greeting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Krout has been writing about creative uses of personal computers since the early 1980s, and more recently, about creative uses of smartphones. He finished a long career as a software engineer with 14 years as a technical writer for a federal contractor. He lives in Arlington, Virginia, with his son, many computers and cameras, and too many cats.

By John Krout, Presenter & Newsletter Contributor
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H E L P I N G   O T H E R S   I N T E R G R A T E   T E C H N O L O G Y   I N   T H E I R   D A I L Y   L I V E S
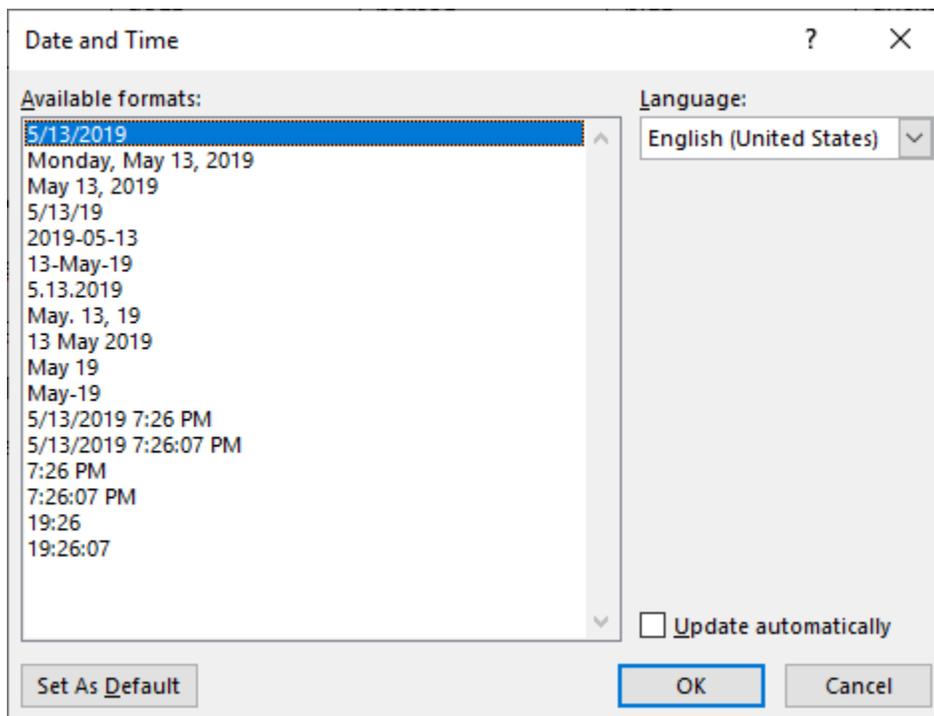
Inserting the Date and Time
By Allen Wyatt

Undoubtedly, the time will arise when you need to insert the current date or time in your document. This may be in the introduction of a letter or in a header or footer. Word allows you to quickly insert the date or time in several different formats. This information is inserted as a field which can be updated manually or is updated automatically when you print the document.

To insert the date or time into your document, follow these steps:

1. Position the insertion point where you want the date or time inserted.
2. Display the Insert tab of the ribbon.
3. Click Date & Time in the Text group. Word displays the Date and Time dialog box. (See Figure 1.)

1 **Figure 1.** The Date and Time dialog box.

1. Select a format for the date or time.
2. Select the check box at the bottom of the dialog box if you want the selected date or time to always reflect whatever is current. If you choose this, it means that Word inserts the date or time as a field so that it always represents the current date or time.

Click on OK. The date or time, as specified, is inserted in your document.

Word Tips
By Allen Wyatt
(last updated October 30, 2021)

HELPING OTHERS INTERGRATE TECHNOLOGY IN THEIR DAILY LIVES

There will be a Question &
Answer. Bring any questions you
have about your computer or
problems you may be having.
It will be conducted by:
Neal Shipley

The next meeting of the Sauk
Computer User Group will be

January 8, 2021

Question & Answer : 1 PM

Business Meeting : 2 PM

Presentation: 2:30 PM

Place: **Whiteside Senior Center**
1207 West 9th Street
Sterling, Illinois 61081

JANUARY PRESENTATION WILL BE: SECURITY & SCAMS BY DETECTIVE TANNER WILHELM

Refreshments will be provided.