

Top Ten Tips & Tricks *by mike@blackledge.com*

Everyone that has used a computer and the Internet for more than a few months has probably developed some preferences relating to shortcuts, web sites, hardware and software. This column summarizes ten of my favorites, a few of which have been featured in previous columns. You should learn something useful here!

1. **Gmail** – Gmail does so many good things for the computer user we dedicated an entire column to it [February 2012]. I hear you saying, “but I’ve had my email address for over ten years, all my friends know it, I don’t want to change it!” That’s



part of the beauty of Gmail – if you like your email address, you can keep your email address! For example, I keep my mike@blackledge.com yet I am using gmail as the exclusive email engine. How? Gmail **imports** all my email from mike@blackledge.com every few minutes, so I work entirely within gmail. Here are three unique features of gmail:

- a) **conversations** – when you have many messages going back and forth, all with the same subject line such as “Irish Group Meets Thursday”, Gmail collects them together, as this is a **conversation**. And the most current entry is what determines how ‘new’ the conversation appears in your email list. No new responses, then it slides on down with other old email.
- b) **folders** – you can stick a label on an email to ‘place’ it in a folder – there is only one ‘real’ email message, but it can be “placed” in several folders if you apply several labels, such as: Irish Group, or AGS, or Smith Family – or all three! Later you can search for: label:Smith Family
- c) **stars** – in your list of email, you can mark any message as desired with a star (or an exclamation point, or a question mark) to indicate you need to do something about this email. Click on the folder “Starred” to display (only) all your starred messages.

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2. **FindAGrave:** a resource so good we spent an entire CC column on it [August 2012]. When we wrote that column, there were 90 million entries – today there are 115 million! Consider this: what is the legacy you want to leave behind – no, I don't mean your kids, I mean your genealogy research! If your ancestors don't have a **FindAGrave.com** entry, you are the genealogist and you should create one for them – it may last longer than their grave marker – and it's free!

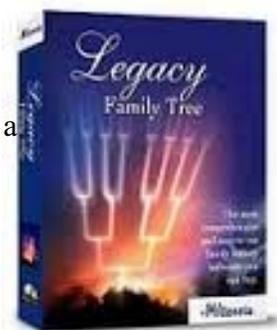
FIND A GRAVE



3. **Flash Drives:** Flash drives, sometimes called thumb drives, are inexpensive walk-around-with-one-in-your-pocket little hard drives that work in any USB drive – and yes, you have a USB drive on your computer, as do the computers in the Genealogy Lab at our downtown library ... and most libraries you visit anywhere in the country. You can get great deals on flash drives, like 4 GB (gigabytes of space) for \$10. Check the Sunday paper for the ads by Office Max/Office Depot.



4. **Back Up:** You can back up your entire computer data (you don't need to back up all the application packages, those can be reproduced easily) on a Flash Drive, no problem. Better yet, buy a 100 GB external hard drive for \$60. Even better, publish!
5. **External Hard Drive:** Didn't we just mention this? I recommend this as just a way to sleep better at night, knowing you have copied all your computer data over to an external hard drive sometime within the last – what – three months? Not too much trouble to back up at least once whenever *The Quarterly* appears in your mailbox. For about \$80 you can get a Terabyte of external hard drive space – more than you will ever use, even with all those photos you are keeping.
6. **Genealogy Software:** This is the greatest thing for genealogists and genealogy research since sliced GEDCOMs. Didn't exist 40 years ago, and you can get a great product for \$40 today.



Try the latest for free from many sites like **RootsMagic.com** and **LegacyFamilyTree.com**



t Hallmark (the cable place on Cutler) that connects your computer (laptop or desktop) to your new flat screen TV that has a PC connection area. Now you have a really big monitor! Great for editing that family history, or working on your scans – or showing off to your former friends.

8. **Scanner:** A genealogist without a scanner is like a carpenter without a laser distance measurer. You can live without it – but why? It is well worth your while to get a scanner of some kind. A new printer that touts itself as “All-in-One” or Four-in-One will include a scanner, and it is to your benefit to learn how to use it. Almost anything can be scanned, including the writings in the family bible or even a family heirloom like a spoon or a pocket watch.



9. **Browsers:** Just because your personal computer came with Internet Explorer (IE), don't feel obligated to use it! If you are still running Windows XP as your operating system, IE version 8 is the latest browser you can use – yet there are far newer IE versions. There is some evidence that much in the way of malware for computers is introduced via extensions to Internet Explorer. My favorite browser is Google's



Chrome – for one thing, Google has integrated its calendar, its email (gmail), and other applications into Chrome, making it a pleasure to work

with. Chrome has a beautiful “auto-fill” capability, so when you start entering your name and address in an on-line form, Chrome suggests it can do it for you. My second favorite browser is Firefox. These are free to you, just search and download.

10. [bonus] **Drop-Down Menus:** Even Chrome can't select drop-down menu choices for you, such as NM in a list of state abbreviations. Here's a tip: on any drop-down menu, you can type N until New Mexico comes up, then hit the Enter key to enter it. You will type N five times, to get past Nebraska, etc. (Mac does it better: you can enter CO to get to Colorado, whereas in Windows the C takes you to California, the O to Ohio – just a first letter selector!)

Summary: Tips and tricks can make computer usage fun and productive. You probably have some of your own – if so, send them in to mike@blackledge.com and with enough response, we'll do another column on this subject in the future. Meanwhile, never be too proud to make notes on how you learned to do things today – this will save you much time and trouble re-learning those tricks in the future!