The Luddite Lounge

Episode 1 Transcript, 09/16/15

www.techforluddites.com/episode1

You're listening to The Luddite Lounge where we're serving up news, views and how-tos for the digital world we've all come to depend on—whether we like it or not!

Hey, there. Glad you could join me today in the Luddite Lounge. I'm Elizabeth Kricfalusi, publisher of the Tech for Luddites blog and Chief Luddite. This is Episode 1 of the Lounge, the first full episode of the show, so I don't mind telling you I'm actually a little bit nervous. I think the best thing is to just keep going and tell you what's coming up today. I'm going to start with a few news stories, and then I'm going to share a personal story about something that affects everyone at one point or another. Unfortunately, not in a good sense. Then, I've got a quick tech tip about Gmail, and finally, a movie recommendation. Of course, you can find related links to all these stories in the show notes at LudditeLounge.com for Episode 1.

Let's start with the newsy stuff. The biggest news story this past week that's related to things that I write about a lot is the upcoming release of an updated version of the Apple TV streaming media player. I wasn't able to watch the Apple event live unfortunately. Looking at the coverage of it, it looks like most of the early rumors were accurate. The biggies are there's a new touchscreen remote that will also have motion detection capabilities like a Wii, so that you can use it to play games; the integration with Siri, Apple's voice-based assistant; and a new store that's going to have a whole bunch of apps for the Apple TV with a heavy focus on casual gaming.

I'm not actually going to go into a lot more detail right now about the new player. I'm actually planning to do a separate podcast hopefully fairly soon devoted specifically to streaming players because there's stuff happening with some of the other ones as well, and then I'll talk more about the new Apple TV at that time as well. I'm also hoping to have a guest on that show who can provide even more details because they follow that market even more closely than I do, so stay tuned.

Next story falls under the "What the F were you thinking, Microsoft?" category. Now, you may have seen on the blog that I upgraded to Windows 10 a couple of weeks after it was released, and I've posted a few how-tos since then including one that explained how to get the files if you hadn't reserved the right to upgrade in advance, which I hadn't done and which was necessary. Apparently, that's not an issue anymore because the company is now downloading the files to people's computers even when they haven't asked for it. So if you have Windows 7, or 8, or 8.1, they're now treating the upgrade files as part of their standard Windows update downloads, which most people have set to On by default because they want to make sure they get the latest security patches and bug fixes. Not because they want to get a huge honking set of files that will eat up all their Internet bandwidth and a good chunk of their hard drive space.

Honestly, this is one of the most egregious things I've ever seen from any tech company at any time, and that's saying something. I am a pro-Windows person. I'm not a Microsoft basher at all, but I don't know what they're thinking here. I guess they think that because the upgrade is free, it's okay to just force it on everybody. But no, it sure isn't. Frankly, I'm not even sure how it's legal. To me, it's like if you had a 40-inch TV and the manufacturer was offering a free upgrade to a 50-inch, so they get someone to come and break into your house, put the TV somewhere where it's in your way, and then charge you for the delivery. Honestly, I'm really amazed that this isn't blowing up even bigger than what I've already seen about it. But if you do go to the show notes, I will have links there to show you how to prevent the files from being downloaded if you haven't already gotten them, and if you have, how to delete them.

Okay, the next news story. This is actually something I have mixed feelings about. Now, as someone who visits a lot of websites on a daily basis, I get as frustrated as anybody else when I get to a site and I can't find what I want to read because there's just so many ads on it. I always say The Huffington Post has become the poster child for maximum unusability, but there are plenty of other sites that are giving it a run for its money. When I hear that the application Adblocker is releasing a new app that will work on iOS and Android devices, and that Apple's new iOS 9 mobile operating system will also have built-in capabilities to cut back on these intrusive ads, as a regular person, I'm happy to hear it.

[CORRECTION: I accidentally referred to the product brand name as Adblocker; it's AdBlock Plus. And Apple's iOS doesn't have a built-in ad blocker. It's just supporting the creation of apps to block ads in the mobile Safari browser.]

On the other hand, because I'm also an online publisher myself and I do rely on ad revenue to be able to spend time writing articles on Tech for Luddites, I do worry what effect these tools will have on me, especially now that more than 50% of the visitors to T4L are using a mobile device. I'll be honest. I do use ads, but I do try to limit them to a reasonable number, and I do avoid the ones that I consider the most obnoxious. Things like videos that auto-play. You will never see one of those on my site by my hand, and if you do ever see one, let me know about it because I will take care of it. Or those horrible ones that you'll see at the end of an article, and it will be like, "Hey, check out the worst celebrity plastic surgery you've ever seen." If you do decide to click through, which I will admit I have done once or twice, you really just end up on a page that is nothing but ads that just wants you to keep clicking through to see more and more ads.

I don't use those either. I use your basic banner ads that don't take a lot of time to download or don't get too in the way of what you're trying to do on the page. I'm going to have to see what's going to happen now with all these new ad-blocker tools available. I can't blame anybody for using them, but if they do have a big impact on the revenue that I take in, which is not that much to begin with, but it's enough that at least I can afford to spend some time writing the kinds of articles I write. If that gets seriously affected, I'm going to have to look at what my other options are. If you do use Adblocker or other similar tools, usually, there's an option for you to whitelist specific sites where it won't kick in, so if you do go to Tech for Luddites and you don't actually think the ads there are that big of a deal, you

could consider adding it to your whitelist, and then that would help support the work that I do. So that's just a thought.

That's it for today's news stories, and now, I'm going to go on to sharing the story of how twice in the past week, I lost big chunks of work. In one case, it was totally my mistake, and in the other one, the original problem wasn't my fault, but when I tried to fix it, I made it worse. I have a feeling there's a lot of you listening to this who could relate to this story.

The first thing is actually the website for the Luddite Lounge. I had spent a fair bit of time setting it up and was just about finished with it, but I was adding a feature to it. Now, if you've been to the site, you may have seen that I've added a page where people can leave an audio message for me, and then hopefully, if I get some messages, I can include them in future episodes of the show.

I did this with a software product called "Audior" which is a pretty cool product, and I'm pleased with it. But when I first installed it, it wasn't working properly, so I contacted the company's support team for help, and they responded very quickly. The person who got back to me, he wasn't sure offhand what the problem was, so he asked me to give him access to my server so he could look at the files directly. This is a very common request when you're working with developers, and so I went and set him up with an account. He did discover what the problem was—Yay!—fixed it, and everything was great until I went to remove his access from the site. I got a prompt that asked me whether I wanted to just delete his account or his account and the associated files. I wasn't thinking, and I clicked the latter, which meant I had just told my server to delete all the files for the Luddite Lounge. Oops.

Now, before I go into how I fixed that, the second thing that happened was just a couple days later. I noticed something on Tech for Luddites wasn't working the way it was supposed to, and it was a fairly important feature, so I needed to fix it as quickly as possible and I did a quick Google search. What I found said that the most likely culprit was some sort of conflict with one of my WordPress plug-ins. Now, since I just installed a couple over the past couple of days, that actually made sense. The standard advice when this happens is that you should deactivate all your plug-ins, see if that fixes the problem, and then if so, turn them back on one by one until you find out which one is causing the problem. It normally happens when you install a new plug-in and you can't get it to work.

Now, I've always avoided doing that whole thing because I actually have a fair number of plug-ins, all of which I need, and any that I'm adding now are usually for some sort of optional extra functionality. If I'm finding that it doesn't play well with others, then I usually just delete that plug-in and move on. But this time, that wasn't an option because the problem wasn't with a plug-in. it was some basic functionality, so I went ahead, I deactivated all the plug-ins, and it didn't fix the problem. So I reactivated them, then I … This was happening in the evening, so I went to bed, and in the morning, I had an epiphany, and I was able to fix the original problem. Woohoo, right? Yeah, not exactly. Because it turned out that after I deactivated and reactivated a couple of plug-ins, the content that they normally displayed had disappeared from the site, and there was a ton of it.

At this point, you're probably wondering why I'm not curled up in a corner sobbing somewhere. Fortunately, I have a service that backs up all my files and databases for my blog, and so nothing was

actually lost. In fact, rebuilding the Luddite Lounge was pretty quick and painless. All I had to do was request the back-up files, re-upload them onto the server, and I was at the exact same state I was at before I deleted them. The other problem was a bit more of a pain because while all the data still existed, it was in the database, and so I had to spend a few hours copying and pasting it back into certain places on the site. It was a bit of a nuisance, but compared to what would have been involved if I had to recreate all the content from scratch, from memory, I got off pretty easy.

Why am I telling you this story? For a few reasons actually.

First, I just want everybody to know that this can happen to anybody. In fact, I'll go even further and say it has happened to everybody. I guarantee you that even Steve Jobs at some point lost the design specs for the Macintosh computer at least once, and then had to redo them from scratch. That can be the only explanation I can come up with why it took them so many years to finally get a right mouse button, which by the way, on a tangent was probably the biggest reason I could never stand to use a Mac. (Yeah, I do realize it's hard for me to be in my normal Windows defender corner given my earlier story, but so be it.)

Anyway, the point is I think that people tend to add even more stress to themselves in these situations because they're embarrassed about it. They're either embarrassed that they caused the problem in the first place like I did in my first situation or even if they didn't cause it, they're embarrassed because they didn't make a back-up, and I'm actually willing to bet that's probably the case more often than not. So no, you're not the only one who this has happened to, and it's not because you're tech-clueless. I'm pretty tech-savvy, and I managed to do it twice in one week, and that's hardly the only time I've ever done mistakes like this. So first of all, understand you're not the only one.

Now, second, I want to tell you that when it does happen to you, don't panic. I know that's easier said than done, but here are some things that might help. First, realize that the consequences may not be as bad as you initially think. I once had an entire computer hard drive completely die on me, and I hadn't actually backed it up in a few months. Now, one thing you need to know about me is that I am what you would call a "digital hoarder." I have a copy of virtually every email I've ever received or sent since 1995. Not to mention, I have dozens of versions of files for projects I completed years ago and will never need again, so I was pretty freaked out when I realized I may have lost weeks of data. A friend of mine even tried to retrieve the data from the fried drive, but she wasn't able to.

And you know what? I honestly can't think of a single instance after that where I needed anything that was actually lost, so you might be surprised that it's … What you think you were going to need, maybe you won't. Also, depending on the situation, you may actually have a back-up, and you might not be aware of it. For example. Microsoft Office products like Word have default settings that auto-save your documents every 10 minutes. If you never changed the default, then you probably have a back-up somewhere. At least up to 10 minutes before the crash.

If you were working and Word crashes on you, or you accidentally did that thing where you say yes about closing it without saving it—because we've all done that as well—there's a good chance you can retrieve an earlier version of the product. Sometimes, you've probably seen when you open Word

again, it will even come up and say, "Hey, look. Here's an older version of the product. Do you want us to recover it?" Even if that doesn't happen, you may be able to find it.

The first thing you should do is you go into the File > Option > Save settings. This is for Word, but a lot of programs are going to have something very similar in the settings, and you can even change the period between auto-saves, and you can find out where the files are being saved on your computer. If you've already lost something, you can look there to see what the most recent auto-save was, and you can also change it to save it somewhere else, which I'm actually going to get back to in a minute. Like I said, that was Word, but this will happen with a lot of programs, so just go into the settings area for the programs that you use the most often, and you'll probably find something there that can help you find lost work.

The other thing that you can do is you can do a complete search of your entire computer, and just try and think of some keywords that are in the document that might be unique because you don't want to … You're not going to type in "the" because every single document you've ever created is going to show up, but either think of something in the title or maybe some expression. Then, if you sort it on most recent, you may be able to find it that way as well, so there are possibilities that work that you think you've lost, you haven't.

Then, the other reason not to panic is because if you are freaked out, that's probably the time you're most likely to make additional errors that compound the original problem. For example, if I had waited a bit before trying to fix my second problem that I mentioned earlier with the missing content, and I'd come back to it maybe with fresher eyes and a fresher mind, I might have had my epiphany a little earlier and been able to make the fix without causing the additional problem in the first place.

Sometimes, just taking a breath, walking away from your computer, having something to eat or drink if you haven't in a while, this kind of thing, when you go back to it, you may be able to solve the problem, or you may find an answer to something more clearly. So try and do those things if you can. I understand that that's not always the case. Sometimes, you're working on something, and it's like you're on a tight deadline, and it's hard not to freak out, but just try and keep these things in mind.

Then, the other thing I really want to take away from these stories is how important it is to back up your work. Now, everybody says that, and so few people do it, and I'm guilty as the next person again of not backing up as regularly as I should, like I mentioned before when my hard drive crashed. I know how easy it is to skip over that, and part of the reason is that a lot of the official back-up solutions that are out there, like the software or even some of the cloud services, they don't make it all that easy to do. It can take forever to do the back-ups, which makes you resistant to wanting to do it very often. Sometimes, they just take up a huge amount of space, and maybe you're paying for the space if it's a cloud solution, so it's really easy to skip over that backing up thing.

Also, especially, I just want to make a quick note about those cloud solutions. I know a lot of people love them and will basically back up their entire computer, and it will just automatically keep backing it up as you're working with it. There's nothing wrong with doing that if you want to do that. I personally don't go that route because I think when you put everything on your computer up on the

cloud, that's just like a privacy nightmare waiting to happen, and second, because I know somebody who did that. Paid really good money for one of those cloud-based back-up solutions for a long time, and then when she actually did have a crash, they couldn't come through. She got part of her data back eventually, but they certainly didn't live up to any of the guarantees they had. So I don't trust them as much either. I like having my back-up nearby me, in which case …

So that's a little bit of what I want to talk about now because the next thing you need to do is you need to figure out what your back-up priorities are. You don't necessarily have to back up every single thing you have. If you're working on a project right now, and it's an important work project or even an important personal project, and maybe you have a deadline or it's just something that you just really can't afford to lose, okay, then you want to make sure that's being backed up regularly. Emails from 6 months ago? Maybe not so much. Don't always think it has to be an all-or-nothing, back up your entire computer. Pick the things that you really need to protect.

Then, once you've figured out what the priorities are, there are a variety of things you can do to provide a decent level of protection. For example, even just getting into the habit of hitting control-S after every paragraph or after every page. I think it's probably command-S on Macs—I'm not really a Mac person as I mentioned. But before you do that, you'll want to go back into your settings for that program and see if there's such a thing as an option to undo actions after you saved something because that's been known to cause problems for people, for … They save something, and then they can't undo it, and they've … They end up losing work that way. But most, no I won't say most, but a lot of programs now have an option, so you can still undo after you've saved, and then usually, even gives you an option to set how many steps you want to allow yourself to undo. Often, it will be set to something like 10 or 20 steps. I just go in, and I immediately set it to whatever the highest number is, which is usually like 99 because that means I can just undo, undo, undo.

One of my favorite back-up options actually is just to get an SD card like a memory card that you put in a camera if your computer has a slot for it, and most modern computers will. And then just keep that card in there constantly and go into those programs like Word, and change your auto-save settings, so that that's where it's saving your documents too It's saving it to the SD card, not to another place on your hard drive. Because if your entire hard drive fails, having a second copy of your work on it is not going to be a big help. But if you have it on the SD card, that's easy to access. You can move it to another computer easily.

I just think that's a nice easy way to do it because you can get SD cards now that hold a lot of memory. You can get 128 gigabyte ones. I think maybe even … I don't know if you can get 256GB in an SD card yet, and they're not that expensive, so that's a good route to go for work that you're working on currently and you really want to make sure that there's something convenient if something goes wrong.

Another option, you can just email yourself a copy of your documents at the end of every day. That way, not only are you going to have a copy in your own email client, there's also going to be a copy on your email server. Now this is similar to having something up on the cloud, so I guess when I say do that, there's still privacy issues, but it's another option.

Now, whatever option you have, the important thing is that you do it, and I think that's the hardest part of the whole thing. It's that people just forget to make back-ups, so something you can do is just add it to your calendar because if you have a window popping up once or twice a day to remind you to back up your documents, that might be just what you need to remember that you just spent the entire day writing 20 pages worth of stuff, maybe haven't saved it in a while, and so maybe, just maybe backing that up would be a good idea.

Anyway, those are few of the ideas I have that can help prevent something happening like what happened to me the other day. Now, mine wasn't on my computer. It was on a server, and I do have a back-up service, but I think probably most people when it happens, it's they're working on their computer, so those are some ideas in those cases. If you have other ideas that you use to either prevent things like this happening in the first place or to recover from them after it happens, why not go over to the show notes? Add a comment, so other people can learn from it, including me. And you can even go to the page on LudditeLounge.com where you could leave me an audio message, and then maybe I'll be able to share that on a future episode, so people can learn from it.

Okay. Technically, there were a few tech tips in that last section, but I do have another one I want to share, and this one is related to Gmail. One of the more popular posts I've ever written on Tech for Luddites is one that provides instructions on how to turn off the conversation view or what you might think of as threaded messages in various email clients including Gmail. And I get a lot of people who read it and say, "Oh, thank God. You just helped me so much. This is driving me crazy."

Recently, I actually received a comment from a reader, and it made me think that for some people the problem actually isn't threading. The problem is that, somehow, their Inbox got reversed, the sorting got reversed, so now, when they get new messages, instead of coming to the top of the list, they go to the bottom of the list. And they don't realize necessarily that you can change that mainly because Google does not make that easy to find at all. You would think it would be in the settings under Inbox, but no.

If you ever find that's the case that you want to change it, what you need to do is you need to hover over the text that's right above your list of messages in the inbox, and it's the text that tells you the number of messages that is currently showing on your screen, so it will say something like, "1 to 100 of 5,000." When you mouse over that, a menu will pop up that lets you switch between showing the newest messages first or the oldest ones first. Because there may be cases where you actually do want to see them in chronological order from previously to now. Unfortunately, they still don't offer an easy way to sort messages by sender or by subject like you can do with other email clients, but I will post a link in the show notes to an article that does provide instructions for how you can do that even though it's not that straightforward. But you'll have it if you ever need it.

And so that's our tech tip for today.

Finally, I'm going to move on to this movie recommendation, which probably won't be a common part of the podcast, but the other night, I finally got around to watching The Imitation Game, which I have been wanting to watch forever. I just didn't get around to it. Anyway, this is the movie

about Alan Turing who is the … or who was the British mathematician who invented one of the earliest working versions of a computer. He did this during World War 2, and he did it as part of a project to break Enigma, which was the code that the Germans used for sending their messages, and that had been seen as being unbreakable.

Now, I had first heard about Alan Turing probably a couple of decades ago when I actually saw a play about him called "Breaking the Code." Also excellent if you ever get a chance to see it. It's called "Breaking the Code," it's a double meaning because in addition to him being this genius who helped basically win the war, the other big aspect of his life was that he was gay at a time when engaging in homosexual activities was illegal, and there were some pretty dire consequences as a result of that.

The movie, The Imitation Game, does talk about that aspect of his life because you can't not talk about it. But in general, the movie is much more focused on the actual project, the Enigma project, and it's really fascinating. I didn't know a lot of those details. For example, it was the first time I had ever heard about Joan Clarke. She was a woman who worked on the project, which again, in those days, women didn't work as cryptographers. They were secretaries, or teachers, or nurses. All great professions, but not necessarily what everybody wants to do. Hearing about her was also very, very interesting.

The movie was really well done, had amazing performances by everyone. Benedict Cumberbatch played Alan Turing. Keira Knightley was Joan Clarke. If you haven't seen it, I really recommend you add it to your watch list because it's just a great movie on a lot of different levels, and good to honor somebody who made such a contribution to the world in general and to the field of computing specifically.

That's it for Episode 1 of the Luddite Lounge. You can find links related to everything I've talked about in the show notes. You'll also find links there to subscribe to the podcast on iTunes or elsewhere. Now, if you are enjoying the show, please consider rating it and/or reviewing it on iTunes. Besides being good for my ego—assuming you're rating it or reviewing it well ☺—it will help get the show in front of more people, and it will also make it easier for me to find great guests to come on future episodes if they see that this is a popular show. If you could do that, that'd be great.

I guess I'll close out now. Thanks for listening! Until next time…