

WELCOME TO MY NEW PUBLICATION AVENUE

By John Krout

When I attended a PATACS meeting in July 2025, a member whose tech expertise I respect asked me why my byline in PATACS Posts had been absent during most 2025 editions. That questions showed me some bright members of PATACS are paying attention, which made me happy.

The answer, long and convoluted, is probably of no interest to you. I did not firmly know the answer myself until early July 2025. The bottom line is that, in 2025, I am no longer able to deliver my educational articles to you in the PATACS Posts newsletter.

Paul Howard, PATACS president, generously offered me this alternative publication avenue.

In my view, this new avenue, and any electronic media avenue, has one disadvantage. As of July 2025, about 32% of PATACS members receive the PATACS Posts newsletter in print. Those members pay a surcharge for that printed form of Posts. All PATACS members continue to receive email notice that each new edition of Posts in PDF file form can be downloaded.

I regret that these articles will not reach that sub-group of members in print form. As far as I can tell, an announcement of this new avenue during a PATACS meeting will be heard by less than half of the PATACS members.

Fortunately, PATACS meetings are not the only way to publicize this new avenue. Paul Howard permits me to announce each new article of mine via the PATACS groups.io email list. When you choose to subscribe to that list, each of my new articles will be announced via email.

To subscribe to the groups.io PATACS mailing list, send an email containing your full name to patacs+subscribe@groups.io. Your name helps the group moderator confirm that you are a PATACS member.

I will not change how I write. I will continue to provide step-by-step guidance on how to accomplish useful things with personal tech.

Why do I write?

When I run into tech problem, I research solutions. Often, I find and try one or two solutions that seem most practical and easy to explain. Because a lot of the info provided on the Web is either out of date or simply does not provide how-to details, often I use my knowledge and do experiments and flesh out details.

A good example of that lack of detail occurred several years ago when I searched the Web for ways to discourage robocalling systems. Paul Broadus, a columnist for Marketwatch on the Web, asked his readers to send in solutions, and he published a brief summary of some. One of those, involving a modified voicemail greeting, struck me as ideal. The contributing reader may or may not have provided how-to details, and Broadus did not provide that to the public.

I figured out the details on my own. That modified voicemail greeting became a subject of a PATACS presentation and has been on my smartphone voice line ever since.

I write, first of all, for me. I am a senior citizen. Some say I do not look or act it, but I know the truth. Especially for tech problems that are intermittent or involve tech infrequently used, my own brain no longer consistently allows me to recall every detail of every solution I last used months or years ago. So I write to be able to keep myself informed and refreshed.

An example of my limited recall happened at our Tallwood meeting room just 20 or so minutes prior to the July 19 PATACS+OPCUG meeting. Bob Heyer demonstrated a problem on his Windows 10 laptop that I diagnosed quickly, but I could not remember the details for preventing it. The next day, I found the details in my article the December 2024 edition of PATACS Posts, and last edition in which my byline appeared. I wrote to Bob and asked him to read the article. He wrote back after reading the article. He told me that the article gave him all the knowledge needed to prevent the problem from recurring.

Second, my assumption is that, if a need or a problem affects me, then it likely affects at least a few others. I write to help PATACS member and member of other user groups that may experience the same problem or need, just like my article helped Bob. Paul Howard encourages PATACS authors to send their articles to APCUG for distribution to the fifty or so other groups that are, like PATACS and OPCUG, affiliated with APCUG.

I started doing writing how-to-articles in 1983 when I first joined a predecessor of PATACS called the Washington Area Commodore User Group (WAC). In those days, every writer and every meeting presenter explained problem solution details, because computers were new to everyone, commercial software was rare and expensive, and the Web was decades in the future.

When I joined PATACS almost ten years ago, after decades focused on a career and raising a family, I was disappointed that so many of the newsletter articles and meeting presentations discussed what is possible to be done with tech, but did not provide the tech details to make a solution happen. So I set out to show that there is an audience eager for precise how-to solutions.

Compared to the 1980s, modern digital photos, recordings and keystrokes to capture and save screen images, are time-saving miracles for describing problems and solutions clearly.

It is fair to say that my how-to approach is welcome by the readers and the meeting audiences.

Article or presentation?

PATACS leadership continuously looks for both newsletter articles and meeting presentations. Both are central to the mission of PATACS.

My technique is to write an article and then decide if the topic is both of appropriate length and arguably of interest to non-experts. If it can be explained clearly to beginners, then I think it should be a presentation.

PATACS offers a Saturday meeting each month featuring two presentations, one of which is confined to 30 minutes, and is described as a Learn in 30. That short time frame seems to be a challenge for many people. Paul Howard is constantly looking for presenters for that 30 minute time frame.

How can a presentation topic be useful and brief?

I use this rule of thumb. If the article is no more than about 4 pages long (single-spaced, Arial 12 point font, with 1 inch margins, which is the APCUG standard), and the topic is of use to beginners, then it can be a Learn in 30 presentation. I try to develop a slide deck that is no longer than 30 slides.

As it happens, in the first seven months of 2025, I wrote and submitted eleven articles. I also delivered six presentations for PATACS meetings in that time frame. That is what any user group would describe as an embarrassment of riches.

If all eleven of the articles became presentations, then PATACS meetings and perhaps even APCUG meetings would become the **John Krout show**. The group leaders do not want that to happen, and I don't either.

When many different people provide a public explanation of their interests, expertise and problem solutions, we all benefit. Some writers and presenters do a great job of finding and explaining tech to address needs or interests. Sometimes those needs or interests never before occurred to me or you. Those surprises make the articles and presentations especially valuable.

Follow-ups

Several of the articles I wrote in that part of 2025 are **follow-ups**, additional developments in a topic area that I initially explained in a prior article or presentation. My most recently submitted article, and one still in draft, follow up on the theme of extending the life of your lithium-ion battery, a topic realm that I have already tackled repeatedly in articles and presentations.

Four other submitted follow-up articles explain how to use apps for text-to-speech on smart phones and especially for text tones, a follow up to presentations I delivered recently on using voice announcements for text tones and a second on on using Windows Narrator to record voice announcements. Four of the submitted articles are in that group. I also have two in draft on the related subject of voice announcements for Clock app alarms.

Some might call follow-ups beating a dead horse, but not me. I think of follow-ups as new additional info that give you useful options and can make your tech life easier. In some cases I was not even aware of the follow-up topics when I provided the original article or presentation.

In the follow-up articles appearing in this avenue, I will include links to the prior presentations or newsletter articles on the PATACS Web pages. Sometimes, that extra information makes the difference between useless and useful.

Why not write for commercial print media?

I tried that, in the 8-bit days of the 1980s. That was= decades before the Web and its instant research arm called Google became a utility in American homes.

I got published a few times by a small niche magazine that paid a pittance. Two of those were articles that involved custom hardware, a very unusual topic for a software engineer like me. The magazine team, the two magazine founders, did every job involved with creating and publishing that magazine. They were not advertising sales experts. I cannot recall if the magazine carried advertisements.

I sent two other articles I wrote to Run magazine, a widely-circulated publication of that era that carried many advertisements. Both of my articles were rejected. The editors of Run seemed uninterested in publishing exact do-it-yourself solutions.

At the time, I wondered if the editorial team at Run thought publishing do-it-yourself solutions might not be in the best interests of the commercial advertisers in the magazine. Advertisers want you to buy their solutions, not do it yourself.

There is a second argument for **not** publishing exact solutions. Some problem solutions have a short life. They may be overcome by time and events. That has happened during my years as a PATACS member. An operating system update incorporates an alternative solution, or changes how users can opt to apply a solution, or the publisher of a critical zero-cost or low-cost application that solves the problem raises the app price or ceases to exist.

My response to the solution short life argument is that I, and at least some of the readers, want a solution now. Pronto. Personal tech never stops evolving. Waiting for that evolution to stop is pointless.

About my copyright of articles in this avenue

My goal is to make PATACS grow because it is a good place to learn about personal tech. I hope you agree that a growing group will survive, and group survival is important to you.

I hold the copyright to my written works, both those posted here and those prior articles that were published in PATACS Posts. I continue to send articles to APCUG for distribution to other user groups, as encouraged by Paul Howard.

As a member of PATACS and/or OPCUG, I permit you to download these PDF files, and print them for your personal use.

There are limits to that permission.

This is an honor system. I will not make your life miserable if you violate the bounds of the honor system; life is too short. All I can do is describe those bounds and ask you to live within them.

Personal use of my PDF articles does not mean sending one of my PDF files to your relatives or friends scattered across the US or the world. If they are eager to learn about such personal tech, then they should visit the PATACS Web site to see the amazing scope of what the group offers.

The Internet is almost universal on this planet. No matter where a person interested in personal tech lives, they can join PATACS, download the PATACS Posts Newsletter, read my PDF articles via the PATACS.org web site, and use Zoom to enjoy PATACS meetings.