# MC³ Newsletter

## January 2020

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The January meeting of the McHenry County Computer Club will be **January 11, 2020 at Salvation Army Building 290 W. Crystal Lake Ave., in Crystal Lake, IL.**

NOTE: *Enter the building on the parking lot level under the awning.*

## Meeting Agenda

- Introductions & Reports
- Demo: Google Tips for Chrome - John Luff

## Upcoming Demos - Subject to Change

To be determined.

Please let a board member know if you have any ideas for upcoming demos.

## Voiceitt Aims to Help Stroke Survivors Talk to Smart Homes - Nicole Wetsman, The Verge

Smart home tech could someday be updated with software that makes it easier for people with speech-related medical conditions to communicate with their devices. At CES, the Israeli startup Voiceitt said that it was incorporating its non-standard speech recognition program into voice-activated devices. The addition could allow people who struggle to communicate to direct and use those systems.

"All indicators are pointing towards voice technology continuing to grow, so the accessibility component would not just be nice to have, but really important," Sara Smolley, Voiceitt co-founder, told The Verge.

Voiceitt's smart home system can't understand everything people with nonstandard speech say. Users train the system with their own voice and with key phrases like "turn the light on," which lets it learn each person's specific vocal patterns.

Our membership is $26.00 a year.

NOTE: This fee offsets the running of the club; membership benefits include help with computer problems. Please pay Lyle Giese, our treasurer, or the designated Board Member in his absence.

### MC³ OFFICIALS

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Dozens of medical conditions, including cerebral palsy, Parkinson's disease, and stroke, cause people to have trouble communicating: although they know what they want to say, they don't have as much control over the muscles used to talk, making their speech hard to understand.

Many people who have these medical conditions also have motor challenges, and can't move around on their own. They would benefit from voice-activated technologies like smart homes, but standard systems often can't understand their speech. Improving popular smart devices' accuracy with nonstandard speech is an important goal to help bring technology to people who may benefit most.

Voiceitt started with a translator application, currently in beta testing, that is designed to help people with nonstandard speech communicate with their friends, family, and caregivers. Users record themselves saying a variety of phrases. Then, the application uses the recordings and information gathered from its database of nonstandard speech samples to learn to interpret how they speak. When they speak into the app, it provides a synthesized audio translation as well as text on-screen.
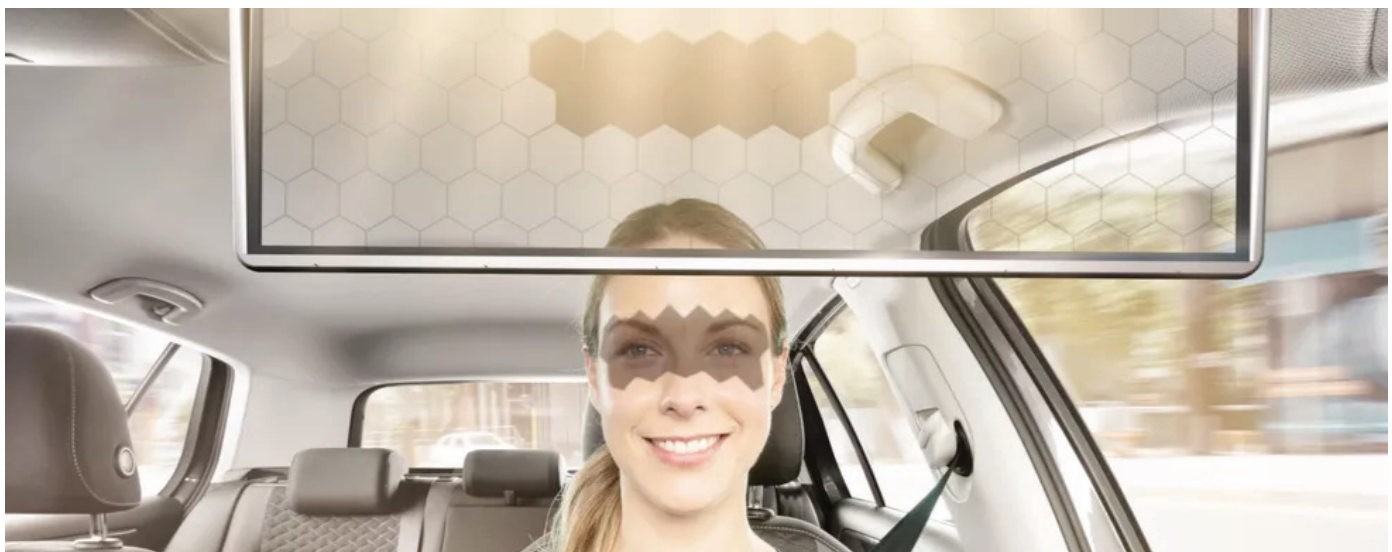
Smolley says that Voiceitt has one of the largest existing databases of nonstandard voices. They started building it during an initial crowdsourcing campaign that asked people to donate their voices. The company plans to continue to add voices to the database as people use the app.

While the personal translator application is still in a beta version, the company wanted to expand the applications of their technology, Smolley says. "We learned that in addition to in person communication, we could do a lot more for people: we could help them talk to their machines," she says.

Voiceitt has received funding from the Alexa Fund, Amazon's venture capital fund for voice technology innovation, and has participated in accelerator programs with both Google and Amazon.

## Bosch Virtual Visor - Clifford Colby, Cnet

Since the dawn of driving, there's been an annoying constant: sun glare. Early motorists squinted and used gloved hands to block the sun's blinding rays, at least until around 95 years ago, when some genius came up with the first sun visor. Almost a century later, modern cars are orders of magnitude more complex and capable, yet we still use that basic primitive board-on-a-hinge invention to avoid being blinded by the light. German supplier Bosch's Virtual Visor may just be the high-tech solution that modern drivers need to cut through the glare.

Debuting at CES this week, the Bosch Virtual Visor features a transparent LCD screen paired with a small in-cabin RGB camera used to track the sun shining on the driver's face. The system employs artificial intelligence to locate facial features (including eyes, mouth and nose) in order to track shadows as they move across the driver's face. A patented algorithm is then used to pinpoint where the driver's eyes are and selectively block and unblock (darken) sections of the Virtual Visor in real time to prevent blindness. The key benefit? 90% of the visor remains transparent at all times, so the driver can still see out far more effectively than she or he otherwise would with a conventional fabric-covered visor.

Beyond being uncomfortable, sun glare is a major safety issue: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says temporary blindness is a contributing factor in over twice as many car accidents as other weather-related phenomenon, including rain, fog and snow. Plus, fiddling with sun visors means that you have to take your hands off the wheel, however momentarily. In other words, finding a remedy to this issue could dramatically increase vehicle safety.

Samsung Debuts Sleek Galaxy Chromebook - Jack M Germain, TechNewsWorld

Samsung on Monday introduced a high-end Galaxy Chromebook at CES 2020 in Las Vegas. The new model could serve as an extension of the company's smartphone lineup and spawn a premium device demand in the category.

Samsung aims to position it as the company's flagship Chromebook to meet potential demand for a more useful and powerful multipurpose premium mobile device.



That could amount to little more than wishful thinking, suggested Charles King, principal analyst at Pund-IT. Demand for ultra powerful Chromebooks has yet to develop much traction.

"Every couple of years, some vendor rolls the dice in hopes that the healthy business for Chromebooks in education and other markets will result in demand for premium products," he told Tech-NewsWorld. "So far, that has not panned out. See the modest commercial success of Google's Pixelbooks for proof points."

**Adding Name Recognition**

Samsung has used the "Galaxy" brand name for a variety of top-end and discount phone and tablet offerings. Marketing a pricey new Chromebook under the Galaxy umbrella might be a winning option

to separate this computer from in an already-crowded field of cheaper Chromebooks.

This is an interesting move, noted Arle Lommel, senior analyst at CSA Research. Chromebooks long have suffered from a reputation as bargain-basement machines with lackluster performance.

"Google has been steadily pushing up the enterprise chain, and this seems to be an enterprise-level notebook, he told TechNewsWorld. "The marketing seems to be aimed at professionals who want a single machine for both work and personal use that has enough power for more than basic office use."

Demand issues aside, Lommel said, the marketing suggests Samsung wants to create a new presence in a market segment Apple traditionally has dominated: hip urban professionals. "The inclusion of a 4K screen at this price point will be attractive to those who want to work with higher-res video."

**Meet the Galaxy Chromebook**

The Galaxy Chromebook is an ultra premium 2-in-1 laptop running Google's Chrome OS. It ships with a durable aluminum body, the latest 10th Gen Intel Core i5 processor, and a 13.3-inch 4K UHD (3840 x 2160) touchscreen.

The Samsung Galaxy Chromebook will be available in the first quarter at a starting price of US$999. Expect to pay much more if you fully upgrade its RAM and storage.

Available in two colors -- a brilliant Fiesta Red or more subdued Mercury Gray -- it will ship in an unspecified number of variants with up to 16 GB of RAM and 1 TB of SSD storage. Standard configuration starts with 8 GB of RAM and a 256-GB SSD.

The premium 2-in-1 Chromebook combines sleek design and next-generation productivity features with a seamless user experience. Built from durable aluminum, the Galaxy Chromebook is made to withstand the everyday wear and tear of life on the move.

**Notable High-End Features**

Samsung's Galaxy Chromebook has a near-infinite screen and slim 0.15-inch bezel that offers true-to-life visuals for immersive gaming as well as sharp photo viewing and editing. It soon will gain an additional high-end feature other manufacturers will find hard to beat.

HDR400 will deliver high-contrast graphics, along with Ambient EQ capabilities for a viewing experience that is vivid while easy on the eyes to reduce eye strain. Samsung will add this feature later through a software update.

The Galaxy Chromebook sets a higher standard in mobile computing, redefining what a Chromebook can be, the company maintained. The new device offers users new ways to take advantage of a Chrome OS experience that is simple, fast and seamless.

"The notion that we do everything stationary at a desk is a thing of the past, and people need premium devices built for our new reality," said Alanna Cotton, general manager of Samsung Electronics America. "By offering a seamless, premium user experience, Galaxy Chromebook helps you effortlessly switch between streaming, creative projects, word processing and more."

**More Good Stuff**

The Galaxy Chromebook comes packed with productivity tools to rival what is available on mobile devices running other operating systems. For instance, the built-in pen lets you write, draw and navigate Galaxy Chromebook quickly and efficiently, much like the user experience with the Samsung Note smartphone.

The flip screen and attached full keyboard are secured with a hinge that allows 360-degree movement. This provides multiple options: traditional clam shell laptop, tent-stand viewing platform, and tablet mode with vertical and horizontal viewing angles.

The Galaxy Chromebook is co-engineered with Intel as part of the Project Athena innovation program. The Galaxy device passed rigorous testing to achieve the program's experience targets and hardware specifications, according to Samsung. This ensures that the Galaxy Chromebook consistently delivers reliable responsiveness, instant wake and long battery life.

"For years, students have come to love Chrome OS in classrooms around the world -- but today, Chromebooks are being used for so much more, by the younger generation and working-professionals alike," said Kan Liu, senior director of product management at Google. "As we see the demand for premium Chromebook experiences rise, we are investing more and more with partners like Samsung to build the next generation of flagship Chromebook product innovations and offerings."

**Other Notable Features**

The Galaxy Chromebook comes with support for Wi-Fi 6, fingerprint security verification, and a built-in stylus pen stored in the edge of the device. It also supports Google Assistant, rather than Samsung's own Bixby virtual assistant software.

The new Chromebook is ready to work in conjunction with Samsung's own smartphones as well as phones made by other manufacturers. For example, with instant tethering support the Galaxy Chromebook can connect automatically to a user's mobile device to maintain connectivity where WiFi is not available.

Another example is click-to-call support, which lets users tap a hyperlinked phone number on their Chromebook to place a call on their Android phone.

**Impressive Specs**

The Galaxy Chromebook measures 11.9 inches x 8 inches x 0.39 inches. It has the security fingerprint feature and keyboard backlighting.

It has an 8-megapixel webcam on the top left corner of the keyboard that functions as a rear camera when the device is held in tablet mode. A 1-megapixel camera above the screen is handy for conference calls.

Battery capacity tops off at 49.2Wh. The outer edges of the keyboard contain numerous ports for external connectivity, including two USB Type-C ports, a 3.5mm headphone/mic jack and a MicroSD/UFS combination port.

Given the Chromebook computer's design around the Chrome OS operating system and its ability to run Android and Linux applications, models with this higher-level performance capability and higher price could attract more than just a niche base of users who opt for high-end performance.

However, without aggressive marketing, it is doubtful that will happen, observed Rob Enderle, principal analyst at the Enderle Group.

"Android apps are mostly designed for smartphones, and they don't play well on larger screens. Nor are they designed for the larger form factor," he told TechNewsWorld.

This edition of Chrome is reminiscent of the old OS/2 effort with a Windows compatibility layer, Enderle said.

Such dual-mode efforts historically have not done well, he noted, adding that Steve Jobs killed Apple's similar effort before it was released.

## Twitter Will Soon Let Us Choose Who Can Reply to Our Tweets

At a press briefing today, executives from Twitter outlined policy changes that'll affect the social network's over 330 million users in the months to come. Twitter product lead Kayvon Beykpour focused on three core tenets in his presentation: Health, conversations, and interest. From a report:

"Public conversation is only valuable if it's healthy enough that people would want to participate in the first place," he said. "[We need to] ensure the integrity of the information that people are consuming on the platform is high." On the conversations side of the equation, Twitter plans to take different parts of conversations and stick them in a sleeker, slicker global view. It'll pull out pieces like users' names, their verified statuses, and more within tweet details in a Reddit-style tree layout, making it easier to follow threads. Perhaps more significantly, Twitter intends to roll out controls over conversation dynamics, which in the coming year will allow users to choose who's able to reply to a given tweet: (1) Anyone on Twitter, (2) a group of people you follow and mention, (3) people you know, or (3) no one. Twitter calls this last option a "statement," and they'll be denoted by an icon in the lower right corner indicating that the tweet can't be replied to.

## Astronomers Discover Huge Gaseous Wave Holding Milky Way's Newest Stars

Astronomers have discovered a gigantic, undulating wave of dust and gas where newborn stars are forged over a 50 million billion mile stretch of the Milky Way. The Guardian reports:

The gaseous structure, which holds more mass than 3 million suns, runs directly behind our solar system as viewed from the heart of the galaxy, but has eluded observation until now. The spectacular string of stellar nurseries forms the largest known wave in the Milky Way and was announced, appropriately, at a scientific conference a stone's throw from the surf mecca of Waikiki beach in Hawaii.

Measurements of the wave show that it stretches over 9,000 light years and makes up what is known as the "local arm" of the Milky Way. Looking down on the flat disc of the galaxy, the wave appears as a straight line about 400 light years wide. But from the side, it rises and falls 500 light years above and below the plane of the galaxy. For comparison, the width of the solar system is about half a light day -- the distance light travels in 12 hours. The discovery has thrown up a raft of questions, not least around how the wave formed. One idea is that a much smaller galaxy clattered into that part of the Milky Way in the far-flung past, setting off ripples that spread like those from a stone tossed into a pond. A more exotic hypothesis sees a role for the mysterious dark matter that lurks unseen around galaxies.