Review

Quicken 2001

home & business

by Joe Pia

Rochester Computer Society

Quicken is a program that allows people to keep information about their bank and other accounts on their computers. It is sometimes known as a book keeping program. This particular version is being reviewed the day after Quicken 2002 came out.

If you are already an experienced Quicken user, you will be looking for information about how the program handles this or that problem. You need in that case to look elsewhere. This review is written by someone for whom the whole business of this kind of book keeping is still new. My experience has been with large fund accounting systems used for university departments.

The kind of book keeping Quicken represents has not been customary for me over the years. In fact I tried for some time to learn to use Quicken 2000, the previous year's version, and found it too obscure. I even bought an expensive book to help me learn, but it didn't work.

It turns out that the main function of the program is to keep a register like that found in our checkbooks. That should be simple enough, but it isn't really. The problem is that the people at Intuit, the program's publisher, assume that everyone knows how to use the program since it has been on the market now for better than a decade in one form or another. Their expectation isn't correct, though.

Like so many programs we deal with everyday, this one has some modestly quirky ways of dealing with the data. Those ways are not obvious. Once a user discovers them, however, they are easily and quickly learned. Thereafter, the work is much easier.

It would be impossible, I suspect, to overstate the power of the program as an aid to keeping one's books. Once you learn the picky little details of how to find information and apply it in the program, its generally marvelous character becomes clear. Of course its magnificence is lost on people for whom keeping close tabs on their money is more than they are willing to do.

Let me give an example of what one of the problems is.

It's necessary to find the screen which lets you enter data just as you would in the check register in your check book. Finding it is not too hard, but the way to get there isn't immediately obvious. But let's say you find it.

Now, let's say that you want to enter into Quicken the checks you have written over the past little while. So, you open your paper checkbook register and copy all those entries from it into the Quicken register. Copying such entries and making sure you get them right is tedious, to say the least. For some people, though, maintaining a paper register and copying it into Quicken is the only thing to do. I find it's worth going to some effort to avoid that kind of work. I make too many copying mistakes for it to be tolerable.

One of my friends has found it so tedious that he uses only his Quicken check register to enter his transactions. Of course, if he is someplace away from home and has to write a check, he makes a quick note in his paper checkbook register. But the minute he arrives home he makes a bee line for his computer, punches up Quicken and makes the entry. Then he crosses out the note he made in his paper checkbook register. Most of his checks he prints at home directly from Quicken.

So, while using a program like Quicken can be a great help, it also requires that you think about the way you spend your money a little differently. For some folks making that mental shift is simply not worth the effort.

Getting back to Quicken's check register: The problem we're considering should be simple enough: Enter the transaction and move on to the next one. The clinker is that Quicken wants you to decide what account you want to charge a particular transaction to. For some folks, that's a show stopper right there. "Whadya mean what account do I want to charge it to? Ain't it obvious?"

Well, yes and no. As we shall see below, you really do have to make a decision.

Of course, if you use the short form for your taxes, using this aspect of Quicken may be overkill. On the other hand, it may very well help you keep track of your money in a way that gives you a much better handle on it.

The other problem is learning how to get to the list of accounts that Quicken comes with. It turns out that there's a little spot at the bottom of the check register where such information is kept. If you get a long form of the register on your screen, one that extends below the bottom, the spot where you click to find the list of accounts isn't even visible. So, you have to know to look there, but no book I have encountered ever gave me that information. I had to ask somebody. She, too, thought it was obvious. But like learning any software program, it's not obvious until you know.

Returning to the wars: The advantage of assigning every transaction to a particular account is designed to make your life a whole lot easier in April. But of course you have to get the list of accounts right. That is, you must have the right categories in it. Then you have to make correct assignments to each such account. You do that each time you enter a check or make an income entry. With that info in the Quicken register, you can use that information at tax time.

You will be able to ask Quicken for the totals of each category in which you spent money. For example, if you're an academic, as I was for so many years, all the scholarly books you buy over a

year count as "professional tools" just like a brick layer's trowels and such. You could have easily totaled up all those scholarly books and entered that number in the correct schedule on the tax forms.

Maybe you make contributions of significant amounts over a year. You will have indicated on the check register what that contribution was, e.g., cash or goods, as well, of course, as how much. And voila, you can tote them all up in April and ask Quicken to put the number in the correct spot on the tax form.

If you receive checks from an employer, each one contains information about the gross amount you received, the taxes you paid in each pay period and any other expenses you incurred. For example, let's say you pay for health insurance each pay period. Maybe you put something away in a savings account, etc. All those amounts should be entered into Quicken's register and assigned to the correct accounts. Then you simply ask Quicken to tote them up at tax time and enter the totals on the tax forms.

So, it's the usual: The total amount of pain is always the same, but you can divvy it up into tiny little amounts at each pay period or when you write checks. Then when tax time comes, you are not overwhelmed. And the tax forms look a lot better and the ink of your entries doesn't run if you can avoid all those puddles of tears.

Can you master all this stuff? Yes, you can. Further, when you start to acquire a little experience with the program, your questions will get more sophisticated. The program allows for that. You have to ask for the information — it's called Product Support, on the drop down menu from Help, but you can do that fairly easily. The program gives you options but, if you require it to do so, it will take you to the Web and to Intuit's site where the truth, and also tutorials which are simply a little different form of truth, reside and are available for you. You need never be lost again.

Internet Security

by Charles Evans
Houston Area League of PC Users, Inc.

Part I: Was "Chicken Little" Right?

Personal Firewalls and
Internet Security Reviews

Preface

1
The World Wide Web is fascinating, informative, enlightening... and dangerous, if you don't take precautions. If you have an "always open" cable or DSL line connection, you have a special vulnerability. The companion article and the following reviews can help you mitigate this vulnerability. Home connections are not immune.

2. Even if you have a typical, as I do, dialup modem type connection, a hacker can still "scan" for your system. Not likely, but it does happen every day. Precautions are simple and easy to install for your protection.

3. Read Eb Gunther's companion article twice, then look over the following reviews and find the firewall with which you feel most comfortable. One is free, some are shareware (not freeware!), and others are commercial programs in a retail box at your local store. For more information visit one of the SIGs that have additional information and can respond to your questions.

4. Firewalls do not function as antivirus protection.

5. The usual admonition: check with the vendor's web site for the latest updates to your software.

6. The July Internet SIG has a special presentation on firewalls. The date is perfect: Friday, the 13th!

PS: Firewall reviews are listed in ascending order of street price.

TINY Firewall

by Ginny Craig

Y ou'd have thought "Tiny" went out with CB radios in the '70s, but this firewall software belies its name. There is a lot of punch in this small package. I have installed a DSL connection and "asked" TINY to help protect me. Installation is about as hard as making a cup of coffee, only faster. Setup is another matter. Setup actually involves instructing TINY just whom you wish to let into your system without further notice and whom you never want to see again. Does it take a bit of time? Yes. But every other firewall will make the same demands for your preferences – some are easier than others. It is so compact, there is no setup wizard.

Once you have instructed it which web sites or email sources or "ports" to allow/not allow in ("permissions" or "filters"), it is now set up. You'll find a small icon on your lower right taskbar. Click on this icon and you bring up a deceptively simple looking menu with two tabs: Firewall and Miscellaneous, plus an "Ask me first" slide bar that can be adjusted from any "permissions" level from minimum to maximum and an Advanced button. Really simple and user friendly. You don't have to set up everything at once. Actually, as you surf to a web site, you can then let TINY know what you'd like to do.

Miscellaneous tab is a password protection menu. If you are using this software on a single, home or SOHO computer, I'd forget this menu. The real business of protection starts with the Advanced button. You'll first see a "Filter Rules" menu and this is simply to do exactly as the name suggests: rules that you determine to filter what goes out and what comes into your system.

For instance, for HALNet, whose address is 204 etc., you can allow unlimited, or unfiltered, access. Use this for any site you absolutely trust...for all others there's TINY. These are on a list under the third tab – just couldn't be simpler. Under the Filter Rules tab are several entries already in place when I clicked the tab. Click on any one of them and an easy to understand menu appears requesting how you want it to respond. Some entries I didn't understand. For instance, there is an

"Outgoing PING" using an "ICPM Echo protocol." (If you know, don't tell me, since in this case, ignorance is bliss!)

Does it work? Yes. I logged onto Steve Gibson's site: grc.com and then clicked on "Shield's Up." Very quickly TINY said I had an intruder and provided basic info as to the site, its address, etc. TINY simply asked: "Permit" or "Deny" permission to come into my computer.

I'm completely satisfied that TINY will provide basic protection and it is especially easy for a novice like me. There is no printed manual, but the on-line help is quite adequate. What would I like to change? A small criticism: instead of a scroll bar on the Firewall Configuration menu, make an expandable menu instead. And it would be very helpful to include a setup wizard. Otherwise, go get it at www.download.com - the price is right (free).

Ginny Craig is a HAL-PC family member who can be contacted at jccraig@hal-pc.org.

Sygate Personal Firewall
by A. M. Schaer

Sygate Personal Firewall keeps intruders from accessing and using your computer while it is connected to the Internet. The program should be easy for a novice to set up and use, since it basically configures itself. The installation went flawlessly; the only thing I had to do was choose a folder in which to install the software. After you reboot, the program runs in the background until you begin using programs over your Internet connection. It does, however, have a popup nag screen that keeps reminding you to register, even though the program is free for personal use.

The default security setting, referred to as "Normal", causes the firewall to ask you whether you want to grant Internet access to each program as you begin using that program. The program displays a list containing each application that requests Internet access. From the list you can choose whether you want individual applications to always be allowed to access your connection, to ask before accessing it, or to be prevented from using the Internet. The firewall also blocks and warns you of attempts to connect to your computer from the other side of the connection.

It found and cooperated with both browsers, my newsreader (Free Agent), and my Internet server, but not my mail program, Pegasus 3.12. I couldn't pick up mail unless I checked "Allow All" under Security. To prove the issue was only related to Pegasus, I set the firewall back to "Normal" and tried picking up mail with Netscape Messenger-no problems.

The program has a built-in test button that connects you to scan.sygatetech.com from where you can select several tests, including a scan of all 65,000+ ports in your computer. Of course it passed its own tests, so I decided to run several tests available from a competitor, Gibson Research. I used Gibson Research's Leaktest.exe to test for unauthorized outgoing connections.

Sygate's product proved impenetrable. The firewall stood up equally well against Gibson Research's "Shields Up!" and "Probe My Ports!" on-line tests that check to see if various ports in your PC are visible and vulnerable to incoming attacks.

One of the features I liked most about the program was the extensive set of logs it provides for attack analysis and system troubleshooting. The on-line help contains good descriptions of each, so I'll quote:

"The Security Log records potentially threatening activity directed towards your computer, such as port scanning, or denial of service attacks. The System Log records all operational changes, such as the starting and stopping of services, detection of network applications, software configuration modifications, and software execution errors." The Traffic Log and Packet Log "record and capture every packet of information that enters or leaves a port on your computer."

The firewall can be downloaded from www.sygate.com. It runs on Windows 95, 98, ME, 2000 and NT 4.0. For this review it was installed on an NT 4.0 system.

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McAfee Personal Firewall
by Harold G. Spangler

For a few dollars, this Personal Firewall provides significant protection and is feature-rich. McAfee got it right this time. Use it on an always-on or modem /dial-up connection to protect yourself from the outside world! This program, like others, installs with a whole set of default values. A good start, but you will want to customize your firewall setup to the unique requirements of your operating environment. McAfee's Firewall initial menu — Firewall Configuration — is simple and initially allows three options:

Block everything, Block nothing or "filter" all traffic. Obviously, the first two are not typical, so click on the "filter" option and you will see succeeding menus with three or more options from which you can choose the level of info/activity and detail you want. Choose the Summary on the second menu unless you are fascinated by details.

Accept the defaults based on an easy installation. As you connect to or need an application (such as RealAudio or a Java applet or a program that is called into use in the background by your browser) to run or to receive e-mail, a menu will pop up. It is time to make some decisions. There are sites you just don't want to interface with. So click on NO and the firewall will forever block it. You might consider using this as a rudimentary blocking method to preclude kids from accessing pre-selected sites. (Firewall settings can be password protected.) At this point you should note which of your programs include an "auto update" feature. You'll need to "tell" your firewall it is OK for this program to access the Internet.

I was most impressed with the main Firewall menu or "directory" list of defaults and my custom info. On the left (as in your regular folder listing) are the various default functional values, the Activity Log, etc. This Log includes all the "traffic" to/from your computer and the Internet. This is one of the more interesting and useful features: almost all listing of files or programs for which there is some type of configuration option is considered "dynamic." If you use it or there is activity, you'll see it in the list.

When no longer active, it is dropped from the list. Although these logs contain info on your traffic, they also include info on which applications are being used, remote ports, duration, applications involved, traffic volume, etc.

Be very careful in changing the Firewall "system" defaults. Some are benign while others, if improperly configured and/or filtered, can do much harm or at least make you more vulnerable. There are various bells and whistles such as animated graphs to indicate activity and color coded alarms or settings violations.

You aren't through yet. You'll still need to enter your system settings; e.g., your adapter or whatever other protocols you have installed. There are sets of menus, but they only pop up when you have need of them. The handiest feature is a brief explanation for each setting (though not all tabs have comments) and they are sufficient to provide guidance in completing your selections.

Take a little extra time and read the directions. Take a little more time and give careful consideration to how you want your firewall configured. Initially, this program would not install. After removing active background programs, it did. The thin "Getting Started" booklet will explain a few basics and system settings, but I'd rely on the on-line documentation. This program was tested by Gibson's Shields Up program and stopped it cold.

For more information and help on this $29 program (estimated street price about $24), go to www.mcafee.com or download from software.mcafee.com or www.nai.com. Supports Win 9.x and NT – later for Win XP.

Harold G. Spangler is a HAL-PC member, a part of NASA's "Skylab" team who can be contacted at hgsbu54@hal-pc.org. SPECIAL NOTE: This program will be replaced with an updated version compatible with Windows XP.

ZoneAlarm Pro
by Lloyd Mabry

was about to tell you how "user friendly" this program is, and it is just that, but it is more accurate to say it is "helpful." There are few "default" values that are set at installation. It is helpful in that it does not require an extensive initial configuration. In fact the first question is: Do you want to allow your browser access, which is typically, yes. Only when you go to a web site or use a particular application are you asked if you want to allow this site access and to what degree, etc. via a very useful, pop-up menu and extensive context sensitive help. In addition, the alerts are specific and often color coded as to severity. All of this is done in real time and each alert includes good advice about the intrusion.

One of the real time examples is that you can set what type of event you should be alerted to and the potential danger. Basically, you have full control over the window between you and the Internet, including unknown threats and attempts to enter your system. In most cases, when ZA alerts you, it is a direct yes or no response, although you can customize a response, limit the amount of time or access, specific applications and e-mail, etc.

You can also manually configure this program. Either way, a user can allow only those applications they explicitly approve to communicate over the Internet while ZoneAlarm Pro alerts them to all traffic in and out of their computer. Additionally, ZA Pro provides customizable Alerts and Logging, as well as complete control of any e-mail attachment with MailSafe Email Attachment Protection. To ensure a user's security settings are not tampered with, ZA Pro can be Password Protected.

Experienced users note: ZA Pro's advanced Application Control gives you the option to decide which applications can access the local network or the Internet and which applications can be servers. And you can control which ports their applications utilize.

Local and Internet "zones" give you the convenience of sharing documents with people you trust and deny access to everyone else. ZA now works with ICS and NAT networks. Installed on both the gateway computer and all connected PCs, any network can obtain the full feature set of ZA.

Network administrator tools let ZA be pre-configured to automatically upload settings from a designated server. With ZA more advanced users may define their own custom security levels, tailoring security according to their unique requirements.

Many viruses are spread via email. ZA's MailSafe, an email attachment protection, safeguards users from inadvertently opening unsafe attachments. Although there are a number of default extensions, users can define the extensions they regard as most suspect.

There is an especially useful feature in dealing with a rogue program or Trojan horse operating inside the firewall.

For example, using the configuration menu it takes security to the next step and identifies exactly which application is trying to access which port, alerts the user to the activity, immediately prevents invasion and provides the user with detailed feedback. This is good detective work!

ZoneAlarm Pro is most useful for an organization but is also useful for individual or SOHO applications. I was bothered by its attempt to be "helpful."

Sometimes the pop-up menus get in the way. I know it is trying to help, but at times it seems a bit frantic! The first two times I installed/uninstalled the program, it corrupted some of my communications files.

You'll need to reinstall Windows in this case. Still cannot understand why uninstalling it would corrupt or delete files. ZA, work on this.

For more info on this $39.95 package or to download it, go to www.zonelabs.com as well as for tech support. A ZA Personal Firewall is also available on their site for $19.95 (free, for personal use only). Operates on Windows® 2000 Pro/NT WS/Me/98/95B.

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Norton Internet Security Firewall

by Andy West

The Norton Internet Security Personal Firewall is designed to protect your computer from unauthorized access. It does this through monitoring both incoming and outgoing data. It blocks applications from making connections to the Internet until you allow access. You can choose to automatically configure access for the most common applications. This package includes both a firewall and antivirus protection programs.

Installation is very straightforward. The various prompts are explained well and the default choices are sufficient for a standard installation. The first time the installation ran it made some behind-the-scene setting change and forced a reboot. It then required a manual restart of the installation process. Once restarted, the installation progressed rather smoothly. Electronic registration and software updates can be done during the installation making the program setup rather easy.

The Personal Firewall has several default levels of security, but you may configure a custom level. At the High level the firewall only allows access specifically granted either through application access settings or direct prompts. Unused connection points called ports do not respond to requests for connections. This makes them invisible to port scans. ActiveX Control and Java Applet Security is set to Medium prompting each time one of these is encountered. The only change from High to Medium is that ActiveX Control and Java Applet Security is set to none. In the Minimal level only known hostile applications such as Trojan horse programs are blocked. The ports respond normally to the connection requests.

If you encounter any problem, free support is available on-line at service .symantec.com. Here you will find a knowledge database and the new interactive troubleshooter. The interactive troubleshooter goes step-by-step through the website to find out the possible solution to the problem. The knowledge database is searchable by keyword or phrase. If you cannot solve your
problem on-line Symantec offers several pay options for support. You can use a pay-per-call service or one of several levels of contracted service.
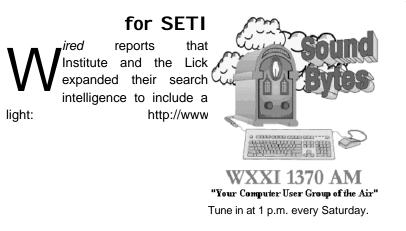
The firewall requires Windows 95B (OSR-2) or later, operating on at least 150 MHz CPU with 48 MB of RAM. You'll also need Internet Explorer 4.01 with IE Service Pack 1 or later. The entire Norton Internet Security package (both firewall and antivirus protection) will require about 85 MB of hard disk space. It also operates on Windows® 2000 Pro/NT WS/Me/98.

The personal firewall also protects your personal information. It will block personal information from insecure websites and hides your browsing from websites. This information is stored in cookies. The personal firewall monitors cookie activity and blocks unauthorized retrieval of these cookies. This feature adds to the significance of the program. The firewall only program is about $50 with occasional coupon for $20. The total Internet Security package is about $70 with occasional coupon for $20. For more info go to www.symantec.com.

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E-mail me at mfoster@hal-pc.org with any comments you have and tell me what you want to see here.

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Spreading the Search for SETI

WXXI 1370 AM
"Your Computer User Group of the Air"
Tune in at 1 p.m. every Saturday.

Wired reports that Institute and the Lick expanded their search intelligence to include a light: http://www scientists at the SETI Observatory have for extraterrestrial hunt for flashes of laser

.wired.com/news/business/0,1367,45559,00 .html Don't miss O'Reilly's book *Beyond Contact: A Guide to SETI and Communicating with Alien Civilizations* http://www .oreilly.com/catalog/alien/

Help from Readers re:
Computer Viruses

When I wrote recently that you can't get a computer virus by simply reading an email, I got feedback from some technically-savvy readers saying that it's possible to get a "worm" under certain circumstances; particularly if one's computer is connected to a network, DSL or cable system.

The readers' letters contained links to a number of Internet sites that had numerous pages of documentation with advice about installing a variety of antivirus programs, along with "firewalls" such as those used in network environments.

Rather than try to list all these links here, I'll be posting some of them on my website at www.pcdon.com, and will just mention here parts of a letter from Tom Inglesby, a professional writer and editor on Internet issues:

Tom points out that many users of Outlook and Outlook Express configure their screen with the "preview" pane open. This opens the email as you scroll the list of incoming messages, but does NOT open any attachments.

However, one type of virus/worm propagation is via HTML documents which connect to their Internet source for any graphics that are displayed. This is also passive, assuming the reader is online at the time of the message coming into the preview or read window.

Those with cable or DSL connections are most vulnerable in this case. While this is, literally, a variation of "a file attached to a letter" it doesn't require the reader to do anything to open the file. The HTML coding opens the carrier (the connection to the Internet source) automatically. In other words, if you see the graphics, they were not "attached" to the e-mail but came from a remote location, over which the reader has no control.

One solution is to set your email client to "text only" so there is no HTML connecting going on behind the scenes. "Personally," says Tom, "I run a firewall, two antivirus programs in resident mode, to scan all incoming everything, plus two 'worm hunter-killer' programs that also scan all incoming mail. I update everything at first boot in the morning."

Tom continues, "I recently got hit with Win32.Champ.5495.int, a virus that is a mutation of one that's been around since 1999. My antivirus program, Computer Associates' eTrust, said it had infected seven files in three programs. Why didn't the antivirus stop it? I found out later, after deleting the three programs, that it was 'a false alarm that will be corrected in the next database.' That hurts!"

In any case, Tom continues, defenses are made to be overcome. That's the virus-builders' mantra. Updates for antivirus programs are after-the-fact, by nature. Patches for vulnerabilities come after those vulnerabilities are publicized, and after damage may have already been done.

Tom has much more of a technical nature to say about this. The above was just part of his email. The rest will be posted on www.pcdon.com.

Several readers wrote to say that they found Norton's antivirus much easier to install and to keep updated than that of McAffee, whom they say is much less responsive to requests for support.

Several readers wrote to say that an antivirus program called Panda seems to be giving them very good service. Panda can be freely downloaded from www.pandasecurity .com or a CD can be purchased for about $30 at any computer store.

Paul Scandlyn says he is very pleased with a free antivirus program called AVG which can be downloaded from www .grisoft.com. For those needing network firewall protection, ZoneAlarm is a popular program that can be freely downloaded from www.cnet.com.

Review

Easy CD Creator 5:
A Software Smorgasbord

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

New software suite from Roxio includes improvements over version 4

The new Easy CD Creator 5 Platinum software suite from Roxio is a fine first product from this Adaptec spin-off. Improvements over version 4 include a slicker, more intuitive interface; the ability to encode MP3s (with playlist creation); and support for Windows Media Audio. To coin a word: unimprovements include a rather clunky install procedure that requires you to remove all vestiges of any previous EZCD installation. I mean all! I not only used Window's Install/Remove programs, but I had to scour the registry of any mention of "Adaptec and/or EZCD Creator" before Roxio's install program would even get past the first screen.

At the heart of version 5 are the Project Selector, which helps you move between programs in the suite, and the new SoundStream app that makes creating audio CDs easy and intuitive. SoundStream incorporates version 4's Spin Doctor audio restoration program (record from vinyl, remove hiss and scratches, then save to digital format), and its equalizer and normalizer (to process songs to uniform volume). It also adds a realizer (for boomier bass and brighter highs) and an MP3 encoder. You get just about everything you need to process and record audio material.

A few gripes: You can see only the first 30 or so characters of song names, and you can't drag and drop files from Explorer windows to the playlist — instead, you have to work from a folder.

Welcome additions on my $100 (a $20 mail in rebate coupon is included) shipping copy included a disc-recovery and disc-repair utility; a simple video editor; MPEG-1 video encoding; and DirectCD packet writing sup-port for Hitachi and Toshiba DVD-RAM drives.

A few annoyances from earlier versions persist. The user interface isn't the same for all programs in the suite.

Overwriting with DirectCD can take three or more times longer than the original write. You cannot test a hard drive for transfer speed — critical to proper writing of a CD — if it doesn't hold the right number of files. There's no batch function for testing multiple hard drives or partitions.

Easy CD Creator 5 Platinum is still the most comprehensive CD authoring package available. But it's a must-have upgrade only if you're unhappy with version 4, or another package — in which case, a $50 competitive upgrade offer sweetens the deal.

Reprinted from the August 2001 issue of *The Umbrella Online* <www.exis.net/umbrella>.

Start Here to Transform the Windows Start Menu

Customizing the

Start Menu is a snap

by Steve Bass
Pasadena IBM Users Group

I was sitting on the back deck, a Sierra Nevada Pale Ale in hand, and leafing through Microsoft's Windows XP Reviewer's Guide.

I was describing to my wife how XP made better use of the Start button than Win 98, when she casually said she hated it. "I never use the thing," she went on, not realizing I was under a moral obligation to make sure she was using the Start Button correctly. "I can get to all the programs I regularly use," she continued, "by clicking an icon on my desktop." Oy vey, I thought, the 293 icons-on-the-desktop syndrome. I had my work cut out for me. (Needless to say, she's never seen my collection of 70 Desktop icons, but that's another story altogether.)

"I'm a computing professional," I said empathically, hoping she wouldn't challenge me, "so tell me all about it."

"Besides," she was on a roll and there was no stopping her, "when I open the menu and click Programs, another menu slides out, then another, and half of them aren't even programs I have anymore. To get to the program I want takes, I dunno, 20 minutes."

Was that in real or computer time, I wondered, grabbing my beer, trying to decide if I should start the barbecue or plunge deeper into the abyss.

"The Start Menu," I said, easing back into the conversation, "is fully customizable. Give me ten minutes and I can show you how to make it look, feel, and act just the way you want it to."

Step into my wife's office and I'll show you what I did to her PC. I'm basing my tips on Windows 98 so while some will work in Win95 (and certainly in Win ME), you'll need to do some fiddling on your own.

STARTing to Understand

The first thing to be aware of is that the Start Menu is built upon directories (folders, if you're new to this sport) and shortcuts. If you'd like to make a sub-menu, just add a new folder. Don't forget, a shortcut simply points to the program and can be safely renamed, moved, or even deleted.

You might also think of your old program groups (hello? Win 3.1?) as the folders on the Programs menu.

The Structure of Start

When you click on the Start Button and the menu pops open, you'll see three sections. Depending on your PC, the lowermost part has Shut Down and Log Off. The middle section includes Run, Help, Find, Programs, and other entries.

Folder Fodder

The top section is the most troublesome and may have tons of stuff.

What happens when you install a new application is that the program, in collusion with Windows, adds a folder either to the top portion, the Programs area (again, just a folder), or worse, both spots. In my case, at least before I made the Start Menu my own, I had 12 entries (and few that I used often) because of the proprietary way these arbitrary, capricious, and dumb programs install themselves.

Making the Change

To reorganize items on the Start menu, just keep in mind they're all menus or shortcuts, and all your moves can be unmoved.

If you're a novice and want to experiment, try this: Close all your applications so you're at the Desktop. Open the Start Menu and slide any item from the upper portion onto the Desktop.

Don't like it there? Two remedies to try: Right mouse click on the Desktop and select and click Undo Move. Or just slide the entry back onto the Start Menu by dragging it to the Start Button, waiting for the menu to appear, and dropping it where you want to see it. Cool (and easy), eh?

Now open Start, Select programs, wait for the menu to pop out to the side, and try the same thing. Move, delete, and rename items by dragging and dropping, or using the right mouse button to copy and paste.

Win Explorer Meets Start

If you want to be a power user (or pretend to be one), open Windows Explorer and head for \Windows\Start Menu. Both of those files are shortcuts and correspond to the upper portion of your Start Menu. Try this: Rename any item (press F2, a shortcut). Then open the Start Menu. The change is effective immediately.

Now click on the Programs folder and take a few minutes examining the contents. Each folder matches what's in your Start Menu, right? Begin rearranging items in a logical way. For example, I created a folder named "tools" and moved every system tool, utility, and applet into it. Another folder? Multimedia for all of my music programs. Ditto for security, photos, and games.

Now move programs you use often to the upper portion of the start menu.

Here's a trick: I take frequently used programs, ones I use daily-PowerDesk, Eudora, IE, Word's Open Doc, Snagit (a screen capture tool)--and stick a shortcut for each one in the Quick Launch part of my taskbar. Do it by right clicking on an empty area on your taskbar, click Toolbars, and make sure that Quick Launch is selected.

Then from Win Explorer or PowerDesk (or even your Desktop), drag a program onto the Quick Launch bar. It will add a shortcut (that's done automatically) and you can slide it along the Quick Launch area to suit your needs.

A Clean Start

As you poke around the Start Menu, my guess is you'll find more than a few dead links, programs that you've uninstalled but are still in the Start menu. Instead of hassling with it, use Start Menu Cleaner, a freeware utility which cleans the start menu by removing unneeded shortcuts and folders. It's available at http://www.mithril.d.se.

If you want to fiddle with other settings on your PC besides the Start Menu, say, changing icons or editing the Add/Remove Programs list, grab a copy of More Properties 2.0. It's free to try and a dollar if you continue using it. http://home.global.co.za /~olivierd/imaginary/mp20lite.zip Hey, I've gotta go. My wife's wondering if I can show her how to modify Word's Toolbar.

Portal Pizzazz
*Customize your browser's home page
and increase your productivity*
by Steve Bass
Pasadena IBM Users Group

I was at a buddy's house recently and spotted something alarming. His home page — the screen his browser automatically opens with — was MSN.

Yeah, you heard me. Not only hadn't he switched to another home page, he wasn't even aware that he could modify the page and get rid of much of the useless junk. With an ad-blocking program, he could also avoid all of Microsoft's blaring, shameless self-aggrandizements.

My hand started twitching. I was about to lunge towards his mouse and try to single-handedly change his home page, when his wife shouted "barbecue's ready."

I was on my third beer when two things struck me. I'd had enough to drink and I had to help this guy out.

Dumping the Ads

You can decide for yourself whether blocking ads is ethical. As far as I'm concerned, ads that are deceptive (the one that looks like a download gauge and says "click here"), pop up boxes (or worse, those damn X-10 camera pop-under boxes), and blinking Flash animations are all fair game.

My favorite ad jamming utility is WebWasher (www.webwasher.com). It's free for personal use and if you accept the defaults, easy to use. Of course you can tweak WebWasher in dozens of ways, fine-tuning it to, say, allow some cookies to be released while withholding others.

Point Me Home

Changing your Home page is a five minute operation. It's straightforward in Internet Explorer (IE). Go to the Web site you want to use as your Home page. Then from the Tools menu, choose Internet Options and click Use Current.

In Netscape, go to the Web site you want to use as your Home page. From the Edit menu, choose Preferences. (I'm using version 6.01; your Netscape version may have slightly different menu settings.) You'll need to find the Navigator category or a dialog area that shows the Home Page option. Click the Use Current Page button and you're done. But while you're there, examine the Toolbars section of the Options area. Uncheck the buttons Netscape automatically adds, things you might not need or want.

Presto Chango

You may encounter a sleazy web site that changes your Home page without permission. It's happened to me and it threw me for a loop. Not only couldn't I figure out how they did it, I couldn't change it back to my original Home page. First try the previous instructions. If that doesn't fix it, you'll need to change a setting in your Registry. Fred Langa has a way to do it and he explains the process here: http://www.langa.com /newsletters/2000/2000-07-10.htm#2

Playing Around with Portals

I think of my browser — and Home page — as the center of my online activity, sort of a control panel that gets me to other places quickly and efficiently. I've never counted the hours but I'm guessing my browser's on screen about 40 percent of the time. (Probably another 40 percent is with Eudora and the balance in Word and PowerDesk.)

By the way, a portal isn't something mysterious or esoteric. It's simply a single integrated point for access to information, people, and other Web sites; a personalized and customized user interface.

While I'm not happy with Yahoo's emulation of Microsoft (they bought eGroups only to make it a complicated chamber of horrors), their portal is terrific. My bias towards using Yahoo is twofold: Yahoo provides a variety of information, more than most portals, and it's blessedly easy to customize a page. Better, I have five separate Yahoo pages, each serving a different need. For instance, my main page includes the following:

* **News, Technology**: local, science, world, and others.

* **Calendar**: A quick view of my upcoming events with access to my calendar.

* **E-mail and messaging**: I get to see my Yahoo mail account and who's online for an instant message.

* **Local area events**.

* **Bookmarks**: I use this handy category to jump to sites that I want access to but aren't important enough to add to IE's Links bar.

* **Weather**.

* **Financial portfolio**: A small, password-protected box that lets me see my daily losses.

* **Mapping**: Similar to MapBlast.com but with a pull-down history.

* **News clipper**: Yahoo automatically searches its news database to find articles that I'm tracking.

I have other Yahoo pages, each accessible from my Home page.

* **Entertainment**: with a listing of movie show times for theaters in Pasadena and an evening's worth of TV listings.

* **Yahoo Search Tools**: I have all my lookups here — Yellow Pages, E-mail and phone searches, as well as bookmarks that link me to people and reverse phone directory pages.

Yahoo's a Flex Champ

Page layouts are simple to design. Most Yahoo modules — Calendar, Maps, E-mail, Weather, for instance — can be placed on either side of the Home page. Bookmarks Portfolio, News, and other modules can be removed from the page to become a separate, temporary floating boxes. And the content can be set into either two medium sized columns or two narrow and one wide column.

Creating a Home page Portal is a fun project, has the potential to let you navigate the Web faster, and unlike installing a new operating system, is guaranteed not to hose your PC.

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with *PC World* and runs the Pasadena IBM Users Group. Write to him at steve_bass@pcworld.com. Check PCW's current edition at www.pcworld.com resource/toc/index.asp and sign up for the Steve Bass online newsletter at www.pcworld.com /bass_letter.

Don Edrington's PC Chat

Microsoft Gets Tough on Software Piracy

Microsoft is getting tough about keeping its software from being pirated. I have a friend who's been beta-testing Windows XP, which is due out in October, and he's been telling me of the headaches he's been having with the testing.   He said that in order to install the program on his computer he had to phone Microsoft for a 60-digit code, which then had to be typed in. He went on to say that he misheard one or two digits, and had to call back. They wouldn't give him the same 60 digits, for fear he might be putting the operating system onto a second computer.

He succeeded in getting the program installed with the second set of digits, but later had a system crash. He called Microsoft and again had to convince them that this was all going on just one computer. So they gave him a third set of 60 digits.

My friend, Carl Von Papp, who is a computer instructor at Bellevue Community College near Seattle, also told me he is leaning more and more towards LINUX, the free operating system that many predict will someday be as omnipresent as Windows. I'll be writing more about LINUX in future columns. You can buy the program on CD, with prices varying, depending on what version you choose, but it can be downloaded from the Internet at no charge.

In fact, Carl says he is now boycotting Microsoft products since he can get free equivalents of most of their programs, to be used with LINUX. Such a program is StarOffice 5.2 which has equivalents to most of features of Microsoft Office. Well, I've been using Star, and find it to be a very comprehensive office suite, considering that it's entirely free; but I still find Microsoft Word to be the easiest word processor I've ever used.

I've been beta-testing Office XP, which they let me install by just typing in the serial number that came on the package. Anyway, I must confess that I prefer Office 2000, and would be just as happy with Office 97. However, they claim that Office XP was designed for use in a networking environment, and that individual users may not see much of an advantage to it.

One thing I really do like about Word XP is that if you click on Insert/Symbol you'll see a display of special characters quite a bit larger than the one Word has used right along. This is very helpful for those of us with less than perfect vision.

However, if you intend to buy MS Office, XP is what you're going to get. Try to find a copy of Office 2000 anywhere. The stores have apparently been told to return any unsold copies, so that the only choice is now XP.

However, I have found Office 2000 to be still available on a few websites; so if that's what you want I'll be putting the links on my website at www.pcdon.com. In any case, I hear that installing Office XP will also require phoning for a serial number. I'll tell you more after I've bought my own copy.

I continue to get questions about how to send "blind carbon copies" (BCCs) so the email sent to multiple recipients will display only the name of each individual recipient. Well, most email programs have a BCC box, where addresses can be entered. The usual procedure is to have each name, except the final one, to be followed by a comma and blank space.

Users of AOL and CompuServe, however, have no BCC box, although they do have a "Blind Copy To:" option in their address books. So how do they enter BCCs of names that are not in the Address Book? Well, they should put the names in the "Copy To:" box in any of the following manners:

They can place each e-mail address in parentheses, and separate each one by a comma followed by a blank space. An easier alternative is to enter all the email addresses, again, followed by a comma and blank space, and then to put a beginning parenthesis at the beginning of the list, and a closing parenthesis at the end of list.

My favorite method, however, is to enter all the email addresses with each on a separate line. This is accomplished by hitting Enter after each entry, meaning the commas and blank spaces are not needed. However, a beginning parenthesis is required at the head of the list, with a closing one at the end.

However, if either of the parentheses is omitted, all the names will show on each recipient's letter. Another peculiarity of all this is that the very first name on the BCC list will get to see all the names. For this reason I always put my own screen name first on the list.

All of this year's and last year's PC Chats can be found at www.pcdon.com.

Can Spam

by Brian Backman
Tulsa Computer Society

Anyone who has had an e-mail account for more than twenty three and a quarter milliseconds has received Spam, so there's no need for a lengthy description of it.

Basically, Spam is unsolicited advertising e-mail messages. It is also a really tasty meat product that goes great with pineapples and sliced jalapenos, but that's not the kind we're dealing with here.

My goal for this article is to give you a few pointers on how to reduce the amount of Spam you receive or possibly eliminate it, and some ways to deal with it when you do get it. Before we get started, you should understand that there are two kinds of e-mail advertising.

Opt-in and Opt-out

Opt-out is Spam. Opt-in is any sort of commercial mail, such as newsletters, catalogs and sales flyers that you have agreed to accept. Usually, you agree to accept these as a condition, reward or benefit of registering with an online service (remember PriceLine?). Be careful about the difference. If you get a message that you believe is Spam, think first about any agreements you may have made recently. It would be really poor form to report a legitimate, sweet, loving, angelic e-mailer as a putrid tool of the Devil, Spammer. With that in mind, to the ramparts!

Attempt to Eliminate

I don't believe that you can totally eliminate Spam, but this is as close as you can get: Filter out mail from any sender whose address is not in your address book. This is the anti-social method, but absolutely the most effective. Set up your mail system so that it will compare the sender's address to those in your address book. If the sender's address does not match anything in your address book, the mail will be rejected or redirected away from your inbox. This is fairly simple to set up, though not all mail systems offer this feature. Using Hotmail as an example, go to Options, then Inbox Protector under Mail Handling. For Level of Protection select Custom, and then check only--The senders address is in your Hotmail address book. If you really don't want to be bothered, you can also select the trash can as your discard folder.

While this method seems foolproof, I have heard anecdotal evidence that some Spam has slipped through, so I can't guarantee it. Also, remember that this will not protect you from any virus that an "approved" sender might mail you.

You should also keep in mind that this will prevent you from receiving any mail you have requested, such as newsletters you sign up for, unless you can get their address into your address book first.

This can be very annoying as when your Uncle Finster's lawyer sends you a message that the old boy is about to croak and you'll not get a dime of the inheritance unless you show up at his bedside pronto.

Anti-Spam Mail Accounts

This one usually incurs a fee, so move on if you're a cheapskate.

There are mail systems out there whose main claim to fame is the near total elimination of Spam, as well as aggressively reporting Spammers. These services use a combination of methods to prevent Spam. I'll give a quick description of the most famous one, SpamCop (URL listed at end). When you sign up with SpamCop, give them a list of approved sender addresses. Mail from these senders will pass through unimpeded, exactly as in the Hotmail example previously mentioned. Now things get complicated. Any mail from a service provider that is on SpamCop's approved list, or that

SpamCop has never heard of, will be passed through as well. Any mail from a service provider whose name is on the Evil Children of Satan list will be placed into a "holding area." The sender will receive an automated reply explaining that they've been blocked because their service provider is in league with the minions of Hades. The sender can then fire back a reply that he or she is not a spammer and this was a legitimate message. The mail will then be sent on to you.

If you do receive Spam, you report it to the mail service and they'll take care of reporting it. If a provider causes a lot of complaints from members, then that provider will be considered scum of the earth and placed on the bad list.

You don't totally eliminate the Spam, but you do cut it way down and get the satisfaction that providers who generate a lot of Spam will be inconvenienced.

Try to Fight Back

Ah, you valiant fool. Do not go quietly. Rage, Rage!

Fighting back is OK as long as you understand that you will ultimately lose. At best, you may close down a few Spammer's accounts, but they will just open new ones. At worst, your mail account may become unusable. But if you want to try...

When you open a message that turns out to be Spam, there will almost certainly be a link at the bottom that you can click on to cancel further messages. This seems pretty easy, just click and end the torment. Right? Don't you believe it!

What you're really doing is proving to the Spammer that your e-mail account is valid and that you read Spam. The vicious little insect will then sell your address to others of its species and you will be inundated.

You could try reporting the Spammer. This may give you some personal satisfaction, but don't think for a minute that it'll accomplish much.

First off, you'll need to set your email system to "display full header information." What you're doing here is inserting all of the available routing history into the message when it's displayed, rather than just who sent it to you and the date of transmission.

This will, hopefully, give enough information to the Spammer's provider that they can track down the weasel.

The downside is that the full display option takes up more space. It'll also insert a mountain of text into your mail when you forward messages. You can delete it, but it's extra work to do so. Sooo, the question is, are you willing to put up with all the extra gobbeldygook just to report a Spammer?

Your email service provider's Help should tell you where to report Spammers, but usually it will be "abuse@" followed by the provider's name. For example, abuse@ yahoo.com.

You need to forward the Spam message to the "abuse@" address, making sure that you have the full header showing. Now the problem with that is that you had to open the Spam to forward it. Guess what? The Spammer may now know that you read the message and you will again be inundated.

Maybe it's worth it to you just to report. However, I have reported Spammers numerous times and all it got me was some very nice automatic responses and an increase in Spam mail.

Now, you can use certain tools to try and trace the Spammers yourself and report them.

For example, Whois (http://www.cix.co .uk/~net-services/spam/whois.htm) from Net Services is supposed to show information on the originator of the mail. You can then send a complaint to their provider.

Another program from Net Services is Spam Hater (http://www.cix.co.uk /~net-services/spam/spam_hater.htm). This program is supposed to help you trace and report Spammers as well.

I haven't tried either (Whois is freeware by the way), but they may be worth a look.

Accept Fate, But Reduce the Pain

As you may have noticed by now, I'm a bit of a fatalist. Then too, I don't have time to go chasing Spammers and I'll bet you don't either. Of course, if you're truly committed to going after the vermin, I applaud you. If I were retired or even just single, I would certainly take a shot at them now and then.

All I do is delete any and all messages that I do not recognize. That's it. The whole Tamale.

Spammers have a way to get notices that you opened their mail. I'll say it again, whenever you open a Spam message, the Spammer knows it. Now you have just verified that your address is valid. Your address will be sold. You will get more Spam. End of story.

Whenever I forwarded Spam from Hotmail accounts to abuse@hotmail to report them, I got replies that there was nothing that could be done because the addresses in the message were fake. Within days, I was flooded with Spam from hotmail addresses. The same results from Yahoo and Netscape. On and on.

When I started simply deleting the Spam, the volume slowly decreased.

Well, on my Hotmail account there is one other thing I do; perhaps your account has a similar feature. In Options go to Inbox Protector under Mail Handling. In the Level of Protection, select Custom and then check only — Your address appears on the "To:" or "Cc" line and The sender's address is in your Hotmail Address Book. This seems to have cut down on my Spam somewhat, but it's not certain.

Well, that's it. The sites listed next can give you much more information. If you really want to fight, check them out.

More Info and Help

Here are links to some sites that will give you more information and help on fighting Spam

JMHO on Spam (http://home.att.net /~marjie1/index.htm): Great information site.

Spam Cop (http://spamcop.net/): Spam free e-mail and reporting assistance along with more info.

Fight Spam on the Internet (http://spam .abuse.net/): More info and some tools!

Spam FAQ (www.mall-net.com /spamfaq.html): Some good resources, redundant info, a stirring call to arms!

Brian has worked in Tech Writing, Training, Quality Testing and Help Desk, as well as some Web Development. From the August 2001 issue of *I/O Port*, newsletter of the Tulsa Computer Society.

From The DealsGuy

by Bob Click
Greater Orlando
Computer Users Group

My Profound Apologies

When putting the finishing touches on this month's column, I received e-mail from Rich Gray of the Dayton Microcomputer Association letting me know I had done my readers a disservice in the July column concerning the company offering free closeout software just for the price of shipping. He suggested I make my readers aware of the facts. Here is an excerpt from Rich's e-mail:

"Unbeknownst to you, I'm sure (I HOPE!), the g7ps (name in the ordering URL) folks are [questionable] netizens who have been spamming me, and presumably countless others, incessantly over the last few months. I administer a local community network (freenet). They snarfed two of our addresses from the list at www.ofcn.org and so I see their garbage multiple times! They've also recently discovered an old version of my work e-mail address from a listserv post that made it to the Web. So I'm getting their crap in triplicate!"

Rich included much more and also suggested a way for me run a check for companies that spam, but I'll have to become more knowledgeable on that one. It is so easy to get in trouble trying to do this column, as you may have noticed in the past. Please forgive me for another blunder as I was completely oblivious to the intent of the free stuff.

How 'Bout Your Very Own Lapdog?

I received this from Shawn Jackson Design. Dave Gerber, from the Sarasota, FL user group, who also has a TV show about computers, also forwarded the announcement to make sure I knew about it. I have inquired about similar products, and in comparison, Lapdog offers a better price. Announcement below:

"We are the designers and manufactures of the award wining Lapdog. The Lapdog is an elegant solution to the problem of using a laptop computer on your lap. Lapdog is a padded carrying case for your computer that unfolds in seconds for use on your lap, on an airline tray, or on any work surface and becomes a completely functional mobile office or work station. At the most recent Comdex Chicago, many reviewers flattered us by suggesting that we were "best of show." You may learn more about this and our other products at [http://www .laptopoffice.com].

"The Lapdog's street price is $139.95, and we will offer them to your users group for $79.95. You will need to enter the code "ugspecial" on our site when prompted in order to receive the discount. Feel free to post this on your site. You may capture any images you like from our own site. Please let me know if you have any questions/com-ments.

I hope this can help your group out!

"Sincerely, Mark Zadvinskis, Shaun Jackson Design Inc. PO Box 130500, Ann Arbor MI 48113-0500, phone 734.975.7500, fax 734.975.7501."

Sick of Getting Knocked Off?

I found this in the Northwest Arkansas PC UG newsletter and e-mailed Inkline Global about their special offer. Here is the description and their response:

"Tired of being disconnected when you are reading a long article or writing an e-mail? Frustrated with those AOL pop-up windows? Use Stay Connected! and never get disconnected again. Stay Connected! resumes broken connections for all dial-up networking ISPs and AOL. As seen on ZD TV and *PC World*, with more than two million downloads and 19 releases, Stay Connected! has the widest compatibility with major ISPs like AOL 6.0, CompuServe2000, NetZero, MSN, Prodigy and AT&T WorldNet. Supports NetZero Z4, AT&T WorldNet i495 service and handles MSN disconnection dialogs. Download: [http://www .inklineglobal.com /download/sc]

"We are most pleased to offer DealsGuy readers 15% off 'Stay Connected!' (usually $19.95) in your September column and will offer another product for your October column. For the Stay Connected! promotion in September, simply mention 'SC- DEALSGUY-0901' in the COMMENTS field of the order form [http://www .inklineglobal .com/register] when purchasing 'Stay Connected!.' The offer is valid until 31st October 2001. The promotional code identifies your readers so they are not billed the full license price."

System Requirements: Pentium processor, 8MB of RAM, 4MB of free space
Operating System: Windows 95/98/ME/ NT/2000
Filesize: 1.61 MB/ 1650 KB/ 1,688,946 Bytes

Upgrade Your Mouse Bungee to the Pro Version

Jim Packard e-mailed me to announce a new product from the Mouse Bungee Company: a Mouse Bungee attached to a frame-type base. You can lay your favorite picture in the frame, then lay the glass provided into the frame for your mouse to roll around on. I was pleased to find glass instead of plastic that might become clouded and scratched. To see it rather than visualize it, go to [http://www.mousebungee.com] and click on the "Pro" version. MSRP is $29.95, but your special price is discounted by 33% to about $19.95. I believe S&H is $3.95.

You must order it on their Web site's order page. Type the special ordering code "Click" into the "promotional code" panel and you receive a 33% discount on any of their products. They have other nice products on the drawing board and I hope to help introduce them.

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of products, no matter how enthusiastic I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [Bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at http://www.dealsguy .com] for past columns. Also, I keep adding interesting articles (taken from user group newsletters) to my "Articles of Interest" page for viewing or downloading.

Society News

New User Group Notes

John McMillan

Since there was no New User Meeting in July, attendees brought their accumulated questions to the August 7th meeting at the Monroe Developmental Center, 630 Westfall Rd.

Even before the entire group had assembled, questions started about shortcuts that appear on the desk top. Many programs put an icon on the desktop during installation. Shortcuts are the icons with a small arrow in the lower left corner pointing up and to the right. They are just pointers that provide a fast way of getting to programs and or files. Shortcut icons can be deleted without affecting the program or folder they point to. Care must be taken because deleting other icons, those without the arrow, will remove the program or folder they represent. When a program or folder is removed from the machine, it's shortcuts may not be removed resulting in shortcut icons that do not go anywhere or do anything. It was pointed out that right clicking on any icon opens a window that allows the properties to be checked to determine if the icon can be deleted safely.

One member had seen an item in the paper about giving computers to less experienced users. The donor was concerned about a number of minor problems he experienced with the computer. The news item recommended using a good utilities program such as Norton's System Works, to clean up the registry by finding and correcting problems and removing orphaned .DLL files. Another alternative would be to reformat the hard drive and reinstall everything. While that sounds like a lot of work, the new user probably would not need all of the packages the donor had used. Before scrubbing the hard disk, make sure you have valid copies of the operating system on other media from which to begin an installation.

When Gregg Sayre arrived with his laptop the group adjourned to another room where the club's projector was hooked up to show screens and actions to resolve some of the problems. Changing the display characteristics to 640 x 480, did much to help the readability. Gregg immediately launched a news group to demonstrate a topic which was discussed at the June Meeting. This is perhaps one of the best sources of information on a wide variety of subjects available from the Internet since much of the information represents questions and answers rather than sales pitches. Be aware however that there are many millions of items so you need to have a well defined focus unless you plan to browse.

Some care should also be exercised because news items might contain viruses. Gregg has his machine set to not execute files that are downloaded. Then he checks the file with a text editor.

A user wondered what sources of music files were available now that Napster is restricted. It was pointed out that most music files are in .MP3 format because, although compressed, it is near CD quality. For most dial up connections this equates to about three minutes of download time per minute of music.

It was suggested that the user go to Napster.com and download Napster. Then go to Napigator.com which are private servers that use Napster software. There are about 100 of these servers to choose from, each of which will show the number of people on the server; the number of songs they have; and the speed of their connection. Bill Statt prefers Server 5, a T3 line with 1 or 2 million files on it. Using the Napster software, you click on search and insert the name of the song or the name of the artist and start the search. This will bring up the first 100 sources of the music or 100 titles by the artist. Double click any one of these and it downloads. There is no charge for this service which pops up advertisements at frequent intervals.

Another user asked what programs files from one format to another, for example a .CDA file to and .MP3 file or from .MP3 to a .WAV file. Top of the line CD Creator5 has this ability but costs about $60. Click and Burn is another tool available in the $10-20 dollar range. Checking the CD burner software was also suggested. Music Magic Juke Box will do it but the free version is very slow and they recommend an update which is not free. When deleting .TMP files, a user found .TMP folders and wondered if they could or should be deleted also. Gregg was able to illustrate this condition on his laptop and found that the folder was created by live update, apparently from Norton's Antivirus or Microsoft. Since it was dated Dec. 2000. it appeared safe to delete.

A question was raised on how to recover an unzip utility for dealing with programs in zipped format. It was recommended that the user go to www.zdnet.com/downloads and search on Zip to get a list of shareware and freeware zip file manipulators. Gregg was able to demonstrate this via the computer/projector. Users were cautioned that some of the freeware programs put ads on your machine and others may report your usage to some organization. Winzip, the granddaddy of them all, which is free, and does neither of these is up around version 8.0. Real Player and Netscape Navigator were also cited as sources of an unzip utility.

Internet Explorer 6.0 is in final beta testing and Nick Francesco has recom-mended it as much more robust than 5.5. It can be downloaded free from Microsoft.com. People with Windows 98 can just go to Windows updates, the same location where critical updates, recommended updates, and other updates are available. Internet Explorer 6.0 Beta (which is a long download) is included with the other updates. Gozilla was mentioned as a tool to assist with long downloads. It tracks where you are in the download so that if interrupted, you can restart at that point instead of starting over.

The topic of faxes opened with a question from a Dell owner. Many of the attendees do not receive faxes because the machine would have to be on all of the time. It was pointed out that sending attachments via E-mail can accomplish the same thing without requiring a fax number or special software, and more people have E-mail service.

A wheel mouse user asked about the arrows which sometimes appear. These allow automatic page scrolling with movement of the mouse after the wheel has been depressed. The speed of scrolling is variable depending upon distance from the icon so a little practice is necessary to master this facility.

The need for constant updating of virus checkers arose when Bill Statt reported a Roadrunner warning to their Windows NT and 2000 users of the need for a patch to eliminate virus's. It was pointed out that because new viruses are generated so frequently virus definitions should be updated weekly. Attachments, whether from friends or other sources should not be opened without being first checked. Gregg cited a case where his wife received a virus from a genealogy friend titled "Here is a file I would like you to look at." Like many of the newer viruses this one uses your address books to seek new targets with what seem to be messages from friends. Fortunately, when his wife double clicked the incoming E-mail, his up to date Norton's interceded with a message "You appear to be opening the Circam virus, What do you want to do?" As a result, their machine remained virus free and they did not forward the virus to anyone else.

A user installed McAfee Clinic, which claims to stop hackers; protect personal information; provide secure Internet connections; and provide PC's with an extra layer of protection. He had not installed the privacy package which blocks specific users and websites; checks specific cookies that collect information; and blocks ads; which he thought would interfere with Juno thereby stopping his service. Others agreed that this package would stop people who are trying to get into the machine through an open Internet connection and might prevent Juno from operating.

ZoneAlarm, available free from ZoneLabs.com, does allow Juno to work without affecting E-mail processing. How-ever when June is used to access the web, it requests verification that this is what you want and that some rogue program is not trying to use your machine to get to the web. ZoneAlarm reports any attempt to get into the machine through an open Internet connection so it can be prevented. I have been using it for more than a year and have been pleased with the results. Black Ice ($39.00) is another popular firewall program that offers more tools for tracking break-ins and taking action against repeater offenders.

An Internet user asked the meaning of the letters HTTP that precede www in Internet addresses. This is part of the universal resource locator (URL) that identifies the protocol to the browser or server. HTTP means hyper text transfer protocol. HTPPS means hyper text transfer protocol secure. FTP means file transfer protocol. There are several others that were not readily brought to mind. HTTP is assumed when an URL starts with WWW (world wide web). Bill Statt suggested that if you get an invalid URL address message when starting with www, try again after inserting the letters HTTP first.

Another user asked if he could take the earphone output of a tape recorder and use it as input to his sound card. There were concerns that, since a microphone only takes milliamps while the tape output would be in watts, the differences in line voltage might blow the sound card

Despite starting slightly before 6:30, the questions were still coming strong at 7:45. It was impossible to track the several parallel conversations so note taking stopped. Why not join us at the Monroe Developmental Center, 630 Westfall Rd. for our next session, Sept. 4^{h}, and get complete exposure rather than a limited summary.

Planning Meeting Minutes

Charles Grover, Secretary

The Board of the Rochester Computer Society Inc. met August 21, 2001, at 7 p.m., in the Study Center Room of the Brighton Memorial Library. Present were Joe Varga, President; Steve Staub, Treasurer; Ron Matteson; Larilyn Bauer; and Charles Grover, Secretary. A new regular meeting place for the Board will be needed. Sally had made an offer and we'll have to check with her. Joe Varga will be moving and his new place may be okay. For now, we will plan to meet its Sally's if that meets with her approval.

Application has been submitted for the Brighton Memorial Library meeting room for the September meeting. The Rochester City School District is rethinking its policy on public use of school space. We do not yet know whether we will be allowed to continue the use of a room at East High School. Other possibilities were mentioned for a regular place for program meetings.

It was reported that the picnic went well. The net cost to the club was only $20.

We have a speaker for the September meeting. A representative of the Sheriff's Office (Joe Henneke) will be with us. He is in charge of the technology part of the Forensics Department. Joe is working on further meetings. Jim McGrath arrived at 7:30 p.m.

This September *Monitor* will be copied by Esther, as other recent issues have been. She cannot do the October issue at the end of September. She expects to be able to resume helping us for the November issue.

Joe suggested we begin considering an increase of dues from $30 to $32 per year. That would give us a little more maneuvering room. An actual proposal to increase dues would require prior announcement and approval at a general meeting.

Our Web Page may be moved to another host service.

There is expected to be a computer show this month. If they have tables available weekly for the show we are offered one free of charge, other than the ad we carry in *Monitor*.

Our meeting was adjourned at a 10 PM.

If Operating Systems
Ran Airlines

UNIX Airways: Everyone brings one piece of the plane along when they come to the airport. They all go out on the runway and put the plane together piece by piece, arguing non-stop about what kind of plane they are supposed to be building.

Air DOS: Everybody pushes the airplane until it glides, then they jump on and let the plane coast until it hits the ground again. Then they push again, jump on again, and so on. . .

Mac Airlines: All the stewards, captains, baggage handlers, and ticket agents look neat and act exactly the same. Every time you ask questions about details, you are gently but firmly told that you don't need to know, that you really don't want to know, and that everything will be done for you without your ever having to know, so just shut up.

Windows Air: The terminal is pretty and colorful, with friendly stewards, easy baggage check and boarding, and a smooth take-off. After about 10 minutes in the air, the plane explodes with no warning whatsoever.

Windows NT Air: Just like Windows Air, but costs more, uses much bigger planes, and takes out all the other aircraft within a 40-mile radius when it explodes.

Linux Air: Disgruntled employees of all the other OS airlines decide to start their own airline. They build the planes, ticket counters, and pave the runways themselves. They charge a small fee to cover the cost of printing the ticket, but you can also download and print the ticket yourself. When you board the plane, you are given a seat, four bolts, a wrench, and a copy of seatHOWTO.html. You take the seat to a location of your choice and bolt it into the deck per the instructions. Once settled, the fully adjustable seat is very comfortable, the plane leaves and arrives on time without a single problem, and the in-flight meal is wonderful.

You try to tell customers of the other airlines about the great trip, but all they can say is, "Good grief, you had to do *what* with the seat?"