A Scam: Theme and Variations

by J. Joseph Pia
Rochester Computer Society, Inc.

Scams are big business these days. Internet scams seem even more prevalent. This piece tells the story of my encounter with an Internet scam, a variation, and compares it with another that is quite well known and documented, the theme.

A set of conventions helps us keep personalities straight. The person executing the scam is henceforth the "scammer." The victim is the "scamee."

The piece starts with a report of my experience with a scam, a variation, and continues with a look at the Nigeria 4-1-9 scam, the Theme, with a capital T. The article concludes with a summary of scam features. Knowing them means that you will be always forewarned against these kinds of efforts to scam you. The piece ends with Nick Francesco's suggestions of some web sites that deal with scams and finally concludes with some words of warning and warmth.

My Scam, the Variation

It all started when one day there appeared in my e-mail a letter from Mrs. Blessing Kante who announced that she was the "wife of the late Mr. Joseph Kante of blessed memory." You will notice that in places the English is a bit off.

"Before my husband was killed by forces loyal to MAJOR JOHNNY PAUL KOROMA [sender's caps], he was the Director-General of Gold and Diamond Mining Corporation (GDMC) of Sierra Leone. My husband targeted by the rebel forces in the course of the revolution.

"Two days before his death, he managed to sneak a written message to us, explaining his condition and concerning one trunk box of valuables containing money, which he deposited with a private Security & Finance Company in South Africa. He instructed me to take our two sons and move out of Sierra Leone immediately to South Africa before the Peace Keeping Forces . . . I became a widow overnight, helpless situation without partner

. . . .

". . . Now as a refugee, we have very limited financial rights here, we intend to leave this country immediately with the whole money for investment in your country . . . We have since applied for political asylum. The cash involved inside the box is US$ 18.5 million. . .

"I want you to assist us to claim the box from the Security Company. . .

"Concerning the money, we are prepared to give you a reasonable percentage of 25% of the total sum proceeds. . . .

"No other person knows about this money apart from my two sons and I. We await your most urgent response. Thanks for your co-operation and God bless you."

There it is, the trap well laid out and polished.

What the writer does not know is that as an Africanist linguist I know a good many Africans. I'm aware that a number of my friends have been pushed from one country to another and have lost all their possessions and money. So, I was willing to take a look. It soon became clear, though, that these folks are scammers of the first water.

While she was not entirely clear what the problem was, Blessing was very insistent that they needed someone like me to help out with the problem. After a number of messages back and forth with her son, Clement, the difficulty seemed to be that they needed someone with enough cash to bail out the money from the "Security Company" and get it to the US where they could open the box and get to the money.

My Questions

As you might imagine, I had some questions.

First, why me? How did they get my name? They had two answers. (1) My name was given them by the people at the South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry. (2) My name came from the Chamber but was given to them by the people at the bank they want to use for the transaction. But I knew that no one in the South African Chamber knows me or of me.

My impression, as the relationship continued over a week or so, is that they had bought a list of names and were simply going through them, one by one, offering each name an opportunity to participate in their own fleecing.

Second, I know there are lots of people in Johannesburg who could help out these folks, none I know personally, however. Offering a relatively small piece of the US$ 4.25 million, maybe only US$25K, would secure some good help from people who know the system and the people involved. Such statements from me were ignored and the pleas resumed.

The main task, retrieving the strong box, seems like a fairly simple job. Putting the money into an account which would allow the money to be transferred to a bank in New York also seems quite simple. So, why all the fuss?

All my objections were either ignored or answered in some way, usually unsatisfactorily from my perspective. But the push to get me to Johannesburg continued unabated. Finally I sent a message agreeing to go to South Africa just to see what would happen. Clement, the scammer, wanted to know when I would arrive and should he make a hotel reservation for me or would I stay with the family?

I never responded further. After a couple of days of messages asking me if I was all right, there were no more messages from Clement.

Only a Sample

These pleas are only a sample of the kind of things written to people in the US in an effort to get them to the scammer's country. Lots of other approaches have been taken. But this is certainly one. The business of the strong box full of dollars is a nice twist. So is the claim that the money came from the husband/father who served as Director-General of a mining company. Nothing is said about he got it. Or how it got from Sierra Leone to South Africa.

These declarations are not as strong or compelling as some have been. But they are typical of the kinds of things used by other scammers.

The Nigerian 4-1-9 Scam, the Theme

The Nigerian 4-1-9 Scam is perhaps the ultimate art form of the scam. It is named after the section of the Nigerian penal code that deals with matters of this sort. It has been in use for nearly a decade, and it seems to work enough times to keep it in use. It goes like this.

You, the "scamee," receive an e-mail message telling you that a large sum of money, usually in the millions of US dollars, is resting quietly and apparently almost forgotten in a Nigerian bank account. Some Nigerian or other, often someone purporting to be a Nigerian government official, though

a low level one, recognizes that the money is available if the right combination of people and connections can be put together. And you, upstanding scamee that you are, are just the person to aid the writer of the message in securing the money. That person will turn out to be the scammer. For your services, the scammer offers the scamee a full 25% of the amount waiting to be acquired.

Any number of reasons is offered to explain why the writer of the letter cannot get the money. One explanation is that government employees, of whom the writer is one, are forbidden to touch such accounts. Another is that the money is available to a certain class of person, for example, relatives of persons involved in large and expensive government projects. Or any number of additional reasons may be offered. They all add up to the same thing, namely, that the writer of the letter cannot get to the money alone. Help is needed.

This is the one fixed element in all these scams: Somehow the writer of the letter to you cannot him- or herself get to the money. A foreigner is needed for that part of the transaction.

The money itself is said often to consist of cost overruns or overpayments to the government on contracts or projects. The point is that the money itself is clean and pure, unencumbered and untainted by any malfeasance. But somehow it has been forgotten by the powers that be and therefore left to accumulate interest in the bank for years.

The scammer tries to convince the scamee that he or she can really help out here. The scamee has a bank account in the US and can in a trice create an account in a New York City bank that is, as they say in "bankese," in correspondence with a bank in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria. Opening another account in Nigeria is one proposal often made. Sometimes the scammers suggest that the money can be wired directly to the scamee's account in New York. There the money can be got at freely and legally. And, of course, the scammer is willing to provide perhaps as much as 25% of the total amount of the funds to the scamee for his or her trouble.

Find Sound Bytes every Saturday on
WHAM 1180 from 12:20 to 2 pm

Most folks are overwhelmed by the prospect of so much money. Some of them see it as a way finally to get rich and get over the money problems that have plagued them, just like everybody else, for so many years. So, the contacted person who gives in to his or her fancies buys a ticket and flies to Lagos.

While some folks, smelling the money, decide to fly first class, other, more sober types, figure they can fly tourist to Lagos. They know they can upgrade to first class at

the airport on the way home.

When the scamee arrives, he or she is met at the airport by the scammer and squired through Customs and Immigration. The scammer takes the scamee under his or her wing and shows him or her around town. Then the scammer proceeds to ask the scamee to put up the cash needed at each stage of the process in retrieving the funds.

Within his or her own head, the scamee compares the amounts being asked for with the millions of US dollars held in the account the scammer wants freed. In such comparison the requests for a few thousand here and another few thousand there seem quite reasonable. So, the scamee comes up with the money, sometimes wiring his or her bank at home for more money. The scamee may even live it up a little in beautiful downtown Lagos in anticipation of the wonders and comforts the new riches will bring.

Any US national is accustomed to government fees required to do almost anything, even buy something as simple as a fishing license. So, the demands for payment at various stages of the process in Nigeria are not all that surprising.

The claim is that when the money is recovered, the scammer will reimburse the scamee. In the meantime the scammer wants the scamee to put the freshly recovered money into a bank account opened in Nigeria — when it is finally recovered. That way the money will be "safe" from the other local people who have in the meantime discovered the money and are making efforts to retrieve it for themselves.

The talk about other people going after the money is new to the scamee and probably rather upsetting. Suddenly the scamee's team is in competition with other people going after the same wad of money. But, returning to the main story line . . .

With the money in a bank account opened by the scamee it can be transferred to the scamee's bank in the US from whence the balance due the scammer partner can be paid. Opening such an account is just one more expense.

So, the scamee pays. The Nigerian scammer will now and then inquire how much money remains in the scamee's account at home. If there is any left, more bribes and fees will turn up. Sometimes the scammer will sympathize with the scamee, even appearing to become angry at all the additional fees and such that keep appearing. But the scamee, remembering the millions of US dollars waiting in the embargoed bank account, is willing to spring for more bucks still stored in the account at home.

The Sad End

After the scamee has exhausted the bank account at home, the scammer will show up and be all unhappy and sad. The scammer will explain that despite everything the two of you have done and all the money the two of you have spent, that that big wad of money has slipped out of your collective grasp and into the hot hands of someone else. Further, the other claimant's hold on the money is so tight that there is really no way to fight it or otherwise retrieve those funds.

So, the scamee should probably just go home rather than spend another day running up expenses in Nigeria, expenses that cannot now be reimbursed after all out of that big wad of money that the scamee went to Nigeria to help retrieve.

The Light Dawns.

Some people figure out in the course of the many transactions that there is really no big wad of money sitting and waiting for redemption. All that's happening is that they are being fleeced clean by some quite smooth con artists. All those expenses paid for have in fact gone into the pockets of the scammer, who, it turns out, is working with a whole range of people each of whom get a piece of what the by now impoverished scamee has paid out.

If the scamee protests and threatens to go to the police, he or she learns something else that escaped earlier notice. Upon arrival at the airport the scamee gave his or her passport to the scammer to help with Immigration. It turns out that the scamee was slipped by Immigration and is in fact in the country illegally. Of course, the scamee has no visa. In some instances the scammer explains to the scamee, "You are in the country illegally. So, do as I say unless you would like to spend some time in a Nigerian jail."

In at least one case in 1995 the scamee who figured it all out was murdered. These guys play for keeps.

So, instead of going home with a lot of money, the scamee goes home much poorer, having spent thousands of US dollars to recover funds that will never become his or hers. In fact those funds never existed at all.

Clearly a variation of this scheme is what Clement in Johannesburg had in mind for me. I escaped by not buying into it in the first place.

Characteristics of the Scam

It's important to identify the elements of such a scam and so be able to recognize one when it is waved in front of you. Briefly, they are as follows:
1. In a foreign country
2. A large sum of money is waiting for your magical touch to release it
3. Into the hands of you and your foreign friend who is in reality a scammer.
4. In order to perform this magical trick, you must go to the country
5. Where your scammer friend will guide you through the process of recovering the money.
6. You will need to put up the money to pay all the fees and, yes, bribes required.
7. When, finally, the cat is let out of the bag and you are told that your efforts did not succeed,
8. You go home impoverished, cleaned by some of the finest scam artists in the world.

So the tale ends as a saddened person from America or Europe goes home almost flat broke.

Web Sites

When I asked Nick Francesco if he knew a site I might go to in order to verify the authenticity of the messages from Clement, he sent me the following list of Web sites where some scams are listed:

All are www. ...
- scambusters.com
- ftc.gov/ftc/consumer.htm
- theguardianangel.com
- seniorcrimewatch.com
- quatloos.com
- scamwatch.com
- inetscams.hypermart.net
- magnet.state.ma.us/msp/scans.htm
- itiltd.com/scams.html

Finally

It's clearly possible to avoid scams such as these. Just don't respond to the first message sent to you. But it is kind of nice to get your heart beating as fast as it does when you think that millions of dollars are somehow within reach. Even when you know it's all just electrons zipping around

the world. When the truth finally dawns, you're glad to get your heart beat back to normal, but it was fun while it lasted.

Vinyl LP to Audio CD or MP3 Files

by Bruce Fries
author of *The MP3 and Internet Audio Handbook*

With a good sound recording and editing program you can take those old scratchy LPs and 78s record them through your sound card, filter out all those clicks and pops, and then burn the music to an audio CD or store it as an MP3 file. The following process also works for recording audio from other external sources, such as cassette tapes and microphones.

Use a program like CoolEdit 2000 (www .cooledit.com) for the PC or Peak (www .bias-inc.com) for the Mac. Demo versions of both programs can be downloaded for free.

Connect Your PC to Your Stereo:

The first step is to connect an adapter cable from the tape out (or record) jack of your stereo receiver to the line input of your sound card. These cables can be purchased from most consumer electronics stores, such as Radio Shack, Best Buy and Fry's Electronics. Newer turntables with line-out jacks can be connected directly to the sound card.

Set the Sampling Rate and Resolution:

The next step is to create a new file in the sound editing program. If you intend to create an audio CD, you must choose a sample rate of 44,100, two channels (stereo) and a resolution of 16 bits. This will create a file that takes up approximately 10MB of space for every minute recorded, so you will need plenty of free disk space. For voice or music to be embedded in a Web page, you can use a lower sample rate, a single channel and 8 bit resolution to create a much smaller file.

Set the Recording Level:

Now play part of the track and use the Volume Control program to set your recording levels. In Windows, the first screen of the Volume Control program is for playback levels. To get to the Recording Level screen, choose Properties from the Options menu and select the checkbox for Recording. Make sure the checkbox for the Line-In volume control is also selected. Click OK and the Record Level screen will appear.

Set the Monitor Record Level option in your recording program to On, and, as the track plays, adjust the adjust the slider for Line-In so the level meter shows a strong signal, but not so strong as any peaks cause the meter to go into the red area.

Record the Audio:

Lift the stylus and queue up the beginning of the track. Click the Record button in your recording program and then lower the needle. Make sure no other programs are running while you record. When the track is finished, click the Stop button and lift the stylus.

Remove Clicks, Pops or Hiss:

Play back the track to hear how it sounds. Trim off any silence at the beginning and ends of the track. If you have an audio clean-up plug, use it to automatically remove any clicks, pops and hiss. If you don't have an audio clean-up plug-in, you can zoom in to each click or pop, select an adjacent cycle of the waveform at the zero crossing points, copy it to the clipboard, and then paste it over the cycle that contains the click. Listen to the track again and run the hiss removal if necessary.

Normalize the Volume:

Normalize the track to adjust the volume up or down so that all tracks will play at a similar level. A value of 97% usually works well if your software normalizes by peak level. More advanced programs, such as CoolEdit Pro, can normalize by average levels, which is much more accurate. At this point, you may want to add a fade-in or fade-out. Some CD recording programs, such as Nero (www.nero.com) can auto-matically crossfade tracks as the CD is recorded.

Save to a WAV or MP3 File:

If you intend to record the track to an audio CD, save it to a PCM format WAV file (PC) or an AIFF file (Mac). Save the file to MP3 format if you want to play it from your computer or on a portable player.

Record an Audio CD:

Now you can use a CD-Recordable drive to create a Red Book audio CD that can be played in most CD players. Avoid using CD-RW media because it will not be compatible with most CD players.

It pays to experiment with a short clip before you record and clean-up an entire album. Find out which settings work best for different types of recordings and write these down for future reference.

Many of these old 78s and LPs are irreplaceable, so it pays to preserve them in a digital format. If you ever have recorded a cassette or reel-to-reel tape, you should be comfortable with this process and delighted with the ability to improve the quality of the audio.

For more information on recording from vinyl LPs to audio CDs or MP3 files, pick up a copy of *The MP3 and Internet Audio Handbook* ($19.95) from www .TeamComBooks.com or read it online for free at www.MP3Handbook.com.

Bruce Fries is a writer, technology consultant and entrepreneur who lives in Silver Spring, Maryland. He is an associate of the Audio Engineering Society and the founder of TeamCom Books, a customer-focused publishing company that combines the best of traditional print publishing with new media, such as e-books and the Internet.

My Floppy Died And I Don't Feel So Good Myself

by Susan Ives
Alamo PC, San Antonio, TX

John has a picture of his great-great grandmother. When she died in 1929 she was one of the oldest residents of Fredericksburg, Texas, so we know the photo is at least 72 years old.

When John's mother turned 80 this past July I took dozens of snapshots with my digital camera. What will her great-great grandchildren have in the year 2074 to remember this occasion by? In an ideal world, they will be able to print fresh digital photos of breathtaking clarity. In reality, they may inherit a pitted and scarred CD that contains mystery files that no contem-porary computer is capable of reading.

Take the example of my friend Phil. He wanted to look at the file containing his master's thesis. It was on a 5 ¼"
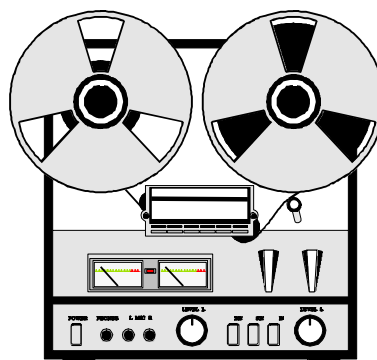
DOS-formatted floppy disk. Oops. He doesn't have that computer any more. And what was it typed in? WordStar? Ami Pro? After a few weeks spent finding a compatible machine, he discovered that the disk was damaged. His experience is unfortunately typical: Damaged disk. Extinct operating system. Defunct software. Obsolete medium. And all that happened to him in the space of about five years.

Archival librarians have long been wrestling with the implications of storing important historical documents on digital media. As genealogists, you face the same problem on a more intimate scale. Will your electronic family histories stand the test of time? The truth is, we don't know.

Electronic archivists face two hurdles. First is the stability of the media themselves. How long will a floppy disk last? A CD-R? A zip disk? Hard drive? Tests by the National Media Lab show that the best quality CD-ROMs stored under ideal conditions are expected to last from between 50 and 100 years. Most zip drive owners have experienced the "click of death," signaling last throes of a damaged disk or drive.

- ‣ Floppy disks are not certified for long-term archival storage, which is defined as more than three years. If your records are stored on floppies:
- ‣ Never allow anything to touch the magnetic surfaces of a disk. A fingerprint will leave an oil residue and tiny scratches that cause permanent damage.
- ‣ Always store 5.25" floppy disks in their disk jacket, and avoid squishing them together in overloaded diskette boxes.
- ‣ Avoid high humidity environments and choose a location at room temperature, which is free from fumes, dust and vibration.

- ‣ Avoid leaving disks in high heat, such as parked cars or mail boxes.
- ‣ With 5.25" floppy disks, fill out the label before attaching it to the disk. If the label is attached, use a felt tipped pen. Avoid using liquid paper on disk labels, as loose particles can cause surface scratches. Paper clips can cause magnetic corruption, or come loose and wiggle their way into the disk jacket.
- ‣ Floppy disks are rated for temperatures within the range 10 to 45°C. Continual temperature fluctuations should also be avoided.
- ‣ Magnets can destroy data. Sources of magnetic fields include battery chargers and power packs, electric clocks, computer monitors, modems, printers, computer speakers, telephones, radios, electric typewriters, magnetized hand tools and keys.
- ‣ Disk drives collect dust and foreign matter, which can cause surface scratches on disks. Clean them.

These tips will serve you well for almost any medium. Keep your digital archives at a stable temperature and humidity, handle them at a minimum, keep them clean, don't shove them into dirty drives, don't moosh them together and keep them away from magnets.

To add another level of insurance, keep all of your important records in duplicate in case a disk or tape fails. Even better, keep them stored in two different media, for example, on a zip drive and on a CD-ROM.

Archivists sometimes "refresh" their media. Every year or two, pull out all your archived material and copy them onto fresh disks. And, even though it might not be apparent to the naked eye, technology does improve. Modern floppies have better

anti-static shielding. Newer CD-Rs are less vulnerable to corrosion.

After archiving your data, check out the new disk to make sure it works. Quickly check to make sure the old and new disk contain the same number of bytes, but also open a few files to make sure they are not corrupted.

Although these aren't physical problems, make sure that your disks are clearly labeled so that you do not accidentally overwrite them. Label them for future generations so that your descendants will know that they contain important genealogical documents and don't sell them off in a yard sale. And make sure you virus-check your material!

Another solution is to print your material. Be wary. Ink jet printed materials can deteriorate, too. I have had the ink lift right off documents that were stored in non-archival quality plastic document protectors. At best, ink jet printed photographs are predicted to last one generation, 20-26 years, if printed using highest quality photo inks on best quality matte photo paper. Worst case is less than one year before deterioration sets in. Consider sending a sampler of your best digital images to a professional photo lab. They use a different printing process that can make your digital prints last as long as those made from 35mm film.

Finally, consider storing a complete digital archive in another location, such as a safe deposit box or a distant family member's house. If you do suffer a catastrophe, such as fire or flood, your family history will be protected.

You've done your best to physically safeguard your disks, but that's just half the

problem. The other challenge you face is technological obsolescence.

Think back on Phil's master's thesis. It was stored on a 5-¼" floppy. Do you have one on your current computer? Probably not. Some new computers that come bundled with CD-ROM burners do not include floppy drives at all. There are many new storage technologies hitting the market, such as flash memory, smart cards, Orbs, Jaz, LS-120, Read-Write DVD, magneto-optical drives and pocket hard drives that plug into a USB port. Will these technologies still exist 50 or 100 years from now? Probably not.

One solution is to "migrate" your archives to new media every time you upgrade or replace your computer. If you're like most people, that's every 18 months to 3 years.

Pause for a moment and pay attention to the newest computers and how they are configured.

If you notice a trend, such as new systems shipping without floppy drives, it's probably time to consider a different archival medium. Your floppies, zip disks, or whatever could be ready for the great computer museum in the sky. This is also the time to inventory every archival disk you own to make sure it survives the migration.

Also consider remote file storage. World Wide Web sites such as FreeDrive and Yahoo Communities allow you to store files, for free, on a remote server. This is not a long-term solution. Will these sites still exist 50 or 100 years from now? Probably not. But they can get you over a hump. You probably have some free Web space thrown in with your Internet account – in some cases, as much as 100MB of storage.
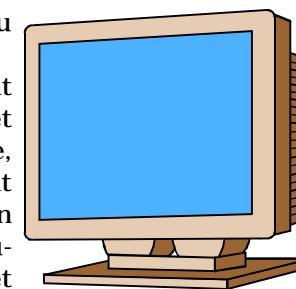
Your ISP can tell you how to upload, or FTP, your files to this space for remote storage. Storing files on the Internet bypasses the entire issue of selecting viable storage media.

As insurance, consider having an old-style drive installed on your new system, just in case an errant disk didn't make the conversion. A local PC builder can even transfer your old drive to a new computer. I kept putting 5 ¼" drives on my new systems long after I stopped using those disks for storage, on the off chance I might stumble across a critical document that didn't migrate to the new medium.

If your descendants can put your disk into their computer's drive (assuming there are computers, disks and drives in the next century) the next hurdle they have to face is the operating system. Remember, Phil's disk was formatted for DOS. My old grad school papers were typed using a KayPro 4, which used the CP/M operating system. Will Windows 98, ME or XP be running 50 years from now? Probably not. Microsoft introduced Windows 3.1 in 1992, the same year IBM debuted OS/2. 'Nuf said. Try reading an OS/2 disk today.

The easiest time to migrate your storage media to a new operating system is when both the old and the new system are alive and kicking. Translating floppies from DOS to Windows was fairly easy in 1994. Today, it's a major project. You can figure that software companies upgrade their operating systems on an average of every 18 months, and kill off support to the OS introduced two changes ago. That means, at a minimum, you need to take a close look at your operating system every four years or so to make sure you don't get stuck with an orphaned OS. The longer you wait, the harder it gets.

Archivists sometimes "pickle," or preserve, old computers. This is a last resort, usually reserved for unique and rare operating systems. It's not just a matter of stuffing an old computer in a closet. Batteries can corrode or die, which could involve reconfiguring a system or having to boot from a disk. Other mechanical things can go blooey when you're not looking. If there is a way to migrate your files to a current operating system, do it.

I've save the best for last. You may be using genealogy software, such as Family Tree Maker. You are probably using a word processing program. Maybe a database and spreadsheet. Graphics and photo- enhancement software? Page layout software, such as Microsoft Publisher. Presentation software such as Powerpoint. Face it. None of this will be for sale at CompUSA 100 years from now.

To get around this hurdle, keep a copy of your software in the same place you keep your archived files. Include the disks, manual, passwords, and everything else you need to crank up the program.

And I mean all of your software! John has a copy of Sierra Generations Family Tree Grand Suite. In addition to the basic genealogy software, the configuration process asks you to point to your word processing program, your Internet browser, and makes use of Zip compression to create archives across multiple floppies. Save the font files that you might have used in word processing documents. Times New Roman may not survive into the next century! Save your graphics program. If you gather genealogical information from e-mail and news groups, save your mail and news reader programs.

Continue to migrate your data to new

software. Your old DOS program may work just fine for you today but you won't be able to run the program if you can't get a DOS machine. Ten years from now Windows 98 users will be in the same boat. Although it's troublesome, in the long run it pays to keep your software current. Don't fall more than a version or two behind.

Make sure that the disks are well marked, to include the program needed to access them. You could do this on each disk but it would also be a kindness to make a master list of all the file formats you use and the programs needed to open them. Your great-great granddaughter might not realize that .wpd is a WordPerfect document or that she needs WinZip to decompress a zip file.

Experts recommend saving a copy of your files in the least-processed file format. Each program has its own native format. For example, Family Tree Maker for Windows has a file extension of .FTW. These files can only be opened in that program. Most genealogy programs also allow you to save as a GEDCOM file and as ASCII comma delimited text. GEDCOM files often lose some of their integrity when imported into other programs. ASCII text can be opened in any word processor, database or spreadsheet. Save your files in both of these formats. Odds are both will survive into the next century. Text files can be saved as ASCII text. Cut and paste important e-mails, newsgroup postings and Web-based data into Wordpad and save them in ASCII format.

Save photographs in the uncompressed TIFF file format. At the very least, save stand-alone copies of your photos rather than integrating them into another program such as your genealogy, word processing or presentation software. Integrating photos with another program will force your descendants

to grapple with two file formats instead of one, decreasing their chances of success.

Overwhelmed? You're not the only one. The U.S. government almost lost the 1960 census data when they couldn't find a computer to run custom-built software. The resulting kerfuffle sparked the current interest in digital archiving. You can benefit from the mistakes others

have made. Refresh your media. Migrate your software. Think ahead 100 years. Children yet unborn will thank you.

Reprinted from the Sept, 2001 issue of *PC Alamode*. Susan Ives, a past president of Alamo PC, leaves the genealogy in her family to her brother. He posts the family data at www.konschak.org.

Windows Problem–solving Tools

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.
Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

How familiar are you with the tools that Microsoft includes with Windows 98 and Windows ME? I suspect that many of you have used both Scandisk and Defrag. However, what do you know about the Registry Checker, Dr. Watson, System File Checker and other tools that are included in your Windows software package? Have you ever looked at the information on your system that is provided by the Microsoft System Information tool? This one tool provides an amazing amount of information on the hardware and software on your computer. It also provides a base for analyzing problems that you might be having with your computer.

To bring up the System Information (SI) window click on Start, Programs, Accesso-

ries, System Tools, and then, System Information. The primary window will show you the current version of Windows that you are using, the Internet Explorer version installed, the length of time the system has been turned on, the maximum RAM, and the amount of free resources. It will also show you the location of the swap file and the drive space available for it. The two important pieces of information are the space for the swap file and the amount of free resources. If either of these two components is low, you need to make some corrections. For example, if the swap file space is under 100 mb, then you need to clean out some space on your hard drive. When was the last time you removed the temporary internet files or the Windows Temp files? Have you emptied your recycle bin lately? If you have a single drive system, have you run ScanDisk and Defrag recently? This will increase the contiguous space available for the swap file that requires consecutive sectors for optimum operation. Also, do you have files with a CHK or _DD extension in the root directory of your hard drive? They usually have names such as FILE0000, FILE0001, etc. If you do, then delete them from your drive and from your recycle bin. They are most likely file fragments that have been found and saved by Scandisk and Norton Utilities. Since they can't be used, they are just taking up space on your hard drive.

In the left-hand pane of the SI window, if you click on the plus sign by Hardware Resources, you will see a list that includes Conflicts/Sharing and Forced Hardware. Select Conflicts/Sharing and you will see a list of IRQs. Any IRQs from 9 and above that are listed more than once are not a problem. In the newer computers running Win98 and WinME these IRQs are designed to be shared. If one of the lower IRQs shows the phrase "IRQ Holder for PCI steering", then you can ignore that IRQ. However, if you show two COM ports assigned to one IRQ, then you may have a potential conflict. I have both COM 1 and COM 3 using IRQ 4. However, since there is nothing connected to COM 1 and my PDA uses COM 3 only about once a day, there is no problem. Therefore, you can't assume that one IRQ assigned two functions is automatically going to be a problem. It depends on what the functions are, and how they are used.

I have yet to see anything listed under Forced Hardware, so we'll ignore that for the time being. The next category to look at is the Components Section. Here you can select Problem Devices. On my system there is one problem device, an Iomega Parallel Port device. This is the setup for an external Zip Drive that is not currently connected. If I were to connect the drive and restart the system, this problem would disappear. I have seen some systems where the problem device was an HP printer. In each case the printer appeared to be working correctly, but Windows was reporting a problem. This was usually related to the software installation. In most cases, as long as the printer was working, we just ignored the message. Here again, you should read the message with care.

The next category is the Software Environment. This will show you the Running tasks and Startup programs. If you want to know what is running in RAM when you start your computer check out these categories. You might be surprised to learn how much is running in the background. If you are having trouble with some software not having enough RAM or resources, this list will give you some ideas on what you should remove. The startup list also shows you where the program is loading from, the start-up folder or the Registry. The Running Tasks, in some cases but not all, indicates to what program the file belongs.

However, this is just the beginning of the helpful tools that are available when you run the SI program. On the Menu, there is a Tools category. Clicking on this gives you a list of diagnostic and repair tools. Of those tools on the list the ones I have found to be the most useful are the System File Checker, Registry Checker, Automatic Skip Driver Agent and the System Configuration Utility. Although Dr. Watson is also on this list, it has limited usefulness. If you are running Dr. Watson and the system hangs, then no report is written to the log file. If the program creates an error that doesn't hang the system, Dr. Watson may be able to recommend a solution. However, it most cases this program is more useful to Programmers trying to debug a new program than it is to the average user. I would not recommend running Dr. Watson all the time. I know some people have this program included in their startup folder. It can slow your system as well as using RAM and resource memory.

If you are having trouble trying to boot your computer into regular mode, but can get to Safe mode, then the Automatic Skip Driver Agent (ASD) may be useful. Run this program from the Tools menu in the SI program. Then restart your computer. The ASD will find and disable any device that is preventing Windows from starting. The Details report will tell you which device(s) have been disabled and will suggest possible solutions. If no devices are causing any problems then the program will advise you of this as well.

The System File Checker (SFC) tool will check for damaged or replaced system files.

When you run this program you should first click the settings button and check the "changed files" box. Then when you run the program all of your system files will be checked. If any files have been damaged, you will be given the option to restore the file from your Windows CD-ROM or the CAB files on your hard drive. The program will also advise you of any system files that have been replaced with different versions. Since many DLLs are changed by non-Microsoft applications, you may wish to keep newer versions. However, some applications install older versions of these library files. In that case, it is better to replace the older version with the one that came with your Windows version. You can also run the SFC from the Start - Run menu by typing "sfc", without the quotes.

The Registry Checker is another valuable tool. When Windows 98 starts, the Registry Checker utility runs in the background. It scans the registry for any damage and, if no problem is detected, creates a backup copy of your registry. If a problem is detected, the utility reboots your computer and launches an MS-DOS version of itself. This program automatically restores the most recent backup of your registry. If no backup is available, the program will attempt to correct the error it has detected. Although it does run every time the computer boots, if your system runs for many days with being re-booted, then you might need to run this application if you seem to have a problem.

The last item I want to consider is the System Configuration Utility (SCU). This is an excellent trouble-shooting tool for finding startup problems. This tool allows you to select or deselect every startup option. In Win98, you will find tabs for the Config.sys

file, Autoexec.bat, System.ini, Win.ini and the Startup folder. (WinME does not use either the Config.sys or the Autoexec.bat file.) You can disable the startup of individual items in each of these folders or you can disable the complete file. Disabling the loading of a file allows you to determine the file that contains the problem. Then you can selectively disable the startup options in that file to determine which application or driver is causing the problem. To do this same analysis in Win95 you would have to edit each file and selectively add "REM" statements to prevent applications from running or drivers from being loaded. The SCU greatly simplifies this process.

I would suggest that you look at each of these tools and all the information that is available in your SI list. The time may come when some experience with each of these tools will be invaluable in helping you solve an operating problem. There are other tools available, such as the WinME System Restore. I'll save them for another article.

*Dr. Lewis, a former university & medical school professor, is a computer consultant doing instruction, hardware/software services and system upgrades. He is available to help you with your home or business computer problems. Reprinted from the January 2001 issue of the Sarasota PC *Monitor*, the official monthly publication of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

Practicing the Black Art Preview Enhanced

by Vinny La Bash
Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

Windows lets you preview many kinds of graphic files as long as you have as Web Page selected in a Folder's View Menu.

This can be useful because you don't have to open an application and then load the images in one-by-one to find what you need. Most graphic images are static. There is no motion associated with them so they don't behave like movie or animation files. Because of this, the preview function does nothing for you if you want to take a quick look at a movie clip, listen to part of a sound bite or glance at an animation file.

Microsoft, however, has given us a way to extend the capabilities of the as Web Page option. For whatever reason, they buried this information deep within their Knowledge Base. You just have to wonder why they seem to go to so much trouble to hide useful things from the people who buy their products. Let's reveal what they conceal.

1. Open Windows Explorer.
2. Navigate your way to the C:\Windows\Web folder.
3. From the View menu, select Customize this Folder.
4. Select Create or edit an HTML document and click Next twice.

At this point, Windows opens a Notepad document containing the controlling HTML code. Don't be intimidated by its appearance. We are interested in only one line of this mysterious looking document.

5. From the Search menu choose Find.
6. In the Find dialog box type wantmedia and click on Find Next.

The search function should locate a line that begins with "var wantMedia = false". There will be some extra spaces for formatting and there may be additional text in this line. Pay no attention. The extra information is for Geeks.

7. Change the word 'false' to true. It doesn't matter if you type upper, lower or mixed case.
8. From the File menu, select Save. The File menu closes.
9. Open the File menu again and select Exit. Notepad closes.

If you have any Explorer windows open, you need to close them before the change will take effect. From now on anytime you have a multimedia file in a folder, you can watch or listen to it before opening it.

Find a folder with a movie file in it. That's a file that ends with AVI, MOV, MPEG or MPG. Highlight the file and press the Play button that appears under the thumbnail image. You can also preview sound files, those that end in AU, WAV, or MID.

Vinny La Bash (Sarasota Personal Computer User Group President 1996-97-98) is a retired IBM'er and teaches computer part time at the Sarasota Vocational Technical Institute. Vinny is also the host of a local TV show "Computers & You!" Email: labash@spcug.org

From a FidoNet Conversation

by Brad Reddekopp
in British Columbia

I use Win98 SE. I had come to hate it completely until I learned to tame it somewhat (without too much effort) and I've decided that I can live with it. My machine became a lot more stable this week because I finally learned about something that MickeySoft really ought to go out of its way to tell people about.

I don't really know a lot about Windoze, but I'm learning. I used to be excited about how quickly a faster computer would boot up. However, MickeySoft figured out how to make. my 266 MHZ system boot up about as fast as — and less reliably than — the XT I started with all those years ago. I've been learning how to do something about that.

I often got the BSOD on boot and I had a lot of freeze-ups because I had a lot of useless silly stuff running on boot. I knew that but I didn't know what to do about it.

Then, I stumbled across http://www.pacs-portal.co.uk/startup_index.htm. It contains a lot of good information about how to stop silly stuff from starting up on boot. Near the bottom of the page, there are links to an alphabetical list of programs that may be starting up along with what looks like good advice about which ones you need and which ones are silly stuff (sillier stuff than the silly stuff you need to keep, that is).

Of course, you may want to boot to command prompt from time to time and type "scanreg / fix" (sans quotes, of course) to fix up your registry a bit.

There's a very nice freeware utility that you might want to try: Regcleaner (it's not MS's regclean). It will clean your registry (when you uninstall something, it hasn't necessarily removed all traces of itself from the registry) and help you manage .dlls and silly startup stuff. Visit http://www.jv16.org/ for that one.

And, of course, Windows memory management leaves a lot to be desired. "Windows is an excellent memory manager; it manages to use all of it." I use a shareware thingy called "Release RAM" which makes sure

you've always got a certain amount of RAM free (you specify the amount in the config). It's $15 U.S. from http://www.releaseram.com (30-day full-featured free trial, extendable to 45 days on request). Using Release RAM seems to have done away with almost all of freeze-ups. Stopping silly stuff from starting on boot seems have done away with my BSOD on boot and has made the boot-up process a lot faster.

Re-booting no longer makes my stomach hurt. Praise the geeks for sharing good information.

Lindows.com

by Bill Petitt
Southeast Virginia Computer Group

A new company founded by MP3.com founder and former Chief Executive Officer Michael Robertson is looking to bridge the gap between applications available for the open-source Linux operating system and Microsoft's Windows--a gap many Linux advocates blame for slow uptake of the OS on desktop computers.

The new company, called Lindows.com, (www.lindows.com/) will offer a Preview Release of a Linux-based OS, dubbed LindowsOS, in the fourth quarter of 2001, that can run both Linux and Windows applications.

Linux is a open-source operating system, which means that its source code, and that of the vast majority of its programs, is freely available for inspection and modification. The operating system is also bound by looser legal restrictions than many other operating systems and is available for free by download or for a fee on CD-ROM.

LindowsOS will be built around a Linux core, but will have the ability to run many Windows applications out of the box, just as

if they'd been written for the OS, the company says in a statement. Previously, Linux users had to rely on WINE, a program that allows Windows applications to run, albeit not speedily or perfectly, on Linux systems. Windows programs running under LindowsOS will perform at speeds equivalent to the speed the same programs would see under Windows, the company says.

With the Preview Release, the company hopes to generate feedback that will help it improve the operating system before its official release, Lindows.com says.

Skeptics Speak Out

Some skeptical feedback on Lindows.com's initial announcement came from Dan Kusnetzky, vice president of systems software research for IDC, a market research firm based in Framingham, Massachusetts, who doubts that the LindowsOS will see significant adoption.

"I believe that technically it can be made to work. I also believe that it will be difficult to convince people [to use it]," he says.

Companies and end users will likely take the simpler of the two options and run Windows applications on Windows, he says.

There are a host of companies--such as Citrix Systems--that offer Linux users the ability to employ Windows applications, but those companies run Windows programs on Windows computers and provide a way for Linux users to open them in a separate space on the desktop, thus making the whole process simpler, Kusnetzky says.

"It's just easier if I'm going to run Windows applications. Why not run it in Windows?" he says. "It's applications that consumers want, not an operating system."

Lindows.com will also have to figure out a way to document all the Windows interfaces, information that Microsoft has not

completely released, he says. Without these interfaces, software cannot be guaranteed to function properly, he says. Though work in this area is being done by WINE, it is far from complete, he adds.

Technical Support

Because Windows programs will not necessarily run perfectly under LindowsOS, Lindows.com customers will require technical support. That support may not be provided, he says. If, for instance, Microsoft Office does run properly under LindowsOS, Microsoft might not provide users with technical support as Office is only supported to run under Windows and the MacOS, he says.

"Is this company [Lindows.com] claiming that it will support any Windows application that comes along?" Kusnetzky asks.

If not, "people will take the simpler of the two options--Windows," he says.

Lindows.com officials were not immediately available to comment. Robertson founded MP3.com in 1998, which fueled the popularity of the MP3 digital music file format by providing users access to a host of music services. Robertson continues to work for MP3.com, which was acquired by Vivendi Universal SA earlier his year, in an advisory capacity.

The final version of the LindowsOS will cost less than $100 and, like all Linux OSes, a single copy of the operating system will be able to be legally installed on multiple computers, Lindows.com says. The LindowsOS will require an Intel Pentium or Advanced Micro Devices processor, 64MB of RAM, and a 1GB hard drive.

From the December 2001 issue of *The Umbrella Online*, the journal of the Hampton Roads, VA, computing community.

Back to Basics
Pictures on Computers
~ Part III
Image Manipulation
The Digital Darkroom
by Alex Dumestre

This is the third and last article in a series that attempts to give an overview of the software and techniques involved in the use of your computer in acquiring, organizing, manipulating, archiving and sharing photographs. All of these except manipulating were covered in the first two parts of the series. Part III will cover editing and image manipulation in general. This whole subject of computers and photography is so broad that it would take a book, not just a few pages in a magazine, to cover it in any detail.

Definition

I will use the term image manipulation to cover a wide range of operations that affect the contents of the image files. The types of operations that fit my definition of image manipulation include:

- Exposure adjustments - image is too light, too dark or lacks sufficient contrast
- Color adjustments - tint and color saturation are off
- Composition adjustments - rotation and cropping are needed
- Format/Size adjustments - optimizing files for storing, printing, Web and/or e-mail use
- Enhancements and beyond - the possibilities are too numerous to list, see examples below

A photography enthusiast who works

with film would have to have a darkroom in order to do these various adjustments and corrections but a user of digital images on a computer has access to a digital darkroom, AKA image editing software.

Difficulty

The software mentioned in parts I and II, while possibly complex, is usually straightforward to learn, certainly less challenging then word processors or spreadsheets. The software covered in this part can range from mildly challenging all the way up to extremely difficult. How far you choose to go is up to you and is mainly dependant upon your interests and dedication. Don't let this scare you away from starting — you can start simple and progress as far as your interests carry you and you can do this in controlled stages.

For example, there are dozens of photo editing programs available that attempt to do everything that has been mentioned in this series so far - from acquiring and organizing through editing and sharing. Most scanners or digital cameras will have these beginner level programs bundled with them for free. These programs are an excellent place to start. You should become familiar with them before you even consider buying more specialized or more powerful programs. Let your interests be your guide. Programs in this class include PhotoDeluxe, PictureIt, and other well know names. When bought at retail, they are usually in the $20 to $50 range. Comparable programs are also available as shareware and can be downloaded and tried before buying. If any of these do all that you care to do than there is no need to go any further. If you find, after using them for a while, that they lack capabilities that you really would like to have then you are in a much better position to select your next

level editor or some specialized program. Without going into too many details, let's take a closer look a the items given in the above list.

Exposure & Color

Even with automatic-everything cameras (whether film or digital) we often get photos that are just not correctly exposed. Conditions such as deep shadows, back-lighting, beach or snow scenes, fluorescent lights, etc. can fool your automatic exposure control and lead to pictures that are too dark or washed out, or have poor color accuracy. Careful editing may allow you to salvage many of these photos. Even the more basic editors can handle all but the most difficult cases. That family group photo that has everyone looking a little green may be salvageable. Old prints or slides that were beautiful twenty years ago may now be faded or off color. Restore them to health.

Digital "sharpening" can improve your pictures but note that poorly focused pictures usually cannot be corrected in the digital darkroom nor can pictures that are blurred because of camera jiggle, or ones that are so far off of ideal exposure that they look all black or totally washed out, so don't get the idea that you can salvage every bad picture that you take.

Composition

Perhaps in your rush to catch a candid shot you were not able to do a good job of picture composition through the viewfinder. Your picture is tilted or isn't centered nicely on the main point of interest or there are distracting objects in the background or off to one side. Rotating and cropping are among the easiest things to do in the digital darkroom. Terrible backgrounds and/or distracting foreground objects are among the things that can be handled with a bit more

effort (and practice) but major rescues are for the more advanced programs and more dedicated users.

Size and Format Decisions and Adjustments

Megapixel digital cameras are all the rage. If we blow the family nest egg on a 3 megapixel camera then, by golly, we're going to use every one of those pixels all the time! Right? Wrong. But isn't it like hard-drive capacity or installed RAM - the more the better? Not quite. It is always nice to have the capability of taking a huge multi-megapixel picture but it is not always nice to use that capability in some situations. The problem is in the way that megapixel images translate into huge file sizes. I see ads all the time for 2.1 megapixel cameras that come with 8 MB memory cards!

Remember that a pixel is the elementary picture element. Each pixel has to record the color of that particular tiny spot on the picture. In several previous articles I've written about color on computers. In particular I've mentioned that "TrueColor" on the computer requires 24 bits (3 bytes) of memory for each pixel. Let's do some math (groan!). My example 2.1 megapixel camera can turn out a 1600 x 1200 pixel picture. If we multiply those numbers we find that we have a 1.92 million pixels.

Without even considering the fact that mega is not a million (even though we often speak as if it is) but slightly larger, this doesn't add up. It's not false advertising but rather that some of the pixels on the camera's CCD (the device that captures the image) are used for other necessary functions in the imaging process. Still, if we multiply 1.92 million pixels by 3 (the number of bytes each pixel uses to store the TrueColor information) we have 5.7 million bytes. Add in the over-

head that goes along with the file format and we have a very large file. How many of these would fit on an 8 MB card? ONE! Not very practical. How do we live with this? We have about three options:

1. Reduce the number of pixels (most cameras allow selection of image sizes less than their maximum capability). Do this only if you have no other practical option OR if your pictures are destined only for the Web.
2. Compress the image using a format such as JPEG (reduces file size by a factor of 10 or 20 but lowers the quality of the image). Most cameras give this ability. This is usually an acceptable option.
3. Buy a higher capacity memory card (these can run from $30 to $200 but are rapidly dropping in price but still represents an expensive way to fight the problem).
4. Offload the pictures frequently as you take them, either to a computer or to some other media.

While all of the foregoing applies mainly to digital cameras, we have comparable considerations when dealing with scanned images - the higher the resolution (read the more pixels) the bigger the file. File size is a consideration not only in storing pictures but also in sending pictures via e-mail or other Internet uses. Big is another name for slow.

So what do we do if we want to capture the highest possible quality picture but also want to e-mail it to a friend? The answer is that we capture and store the 5MB file but then use software on our computer to make a lower resolution copy which we can attach to our e-mail to grandma without choking her dial-up connection. What size image should be used? Again there is no hard and

fast rule, only the perpetual tradeoff between size and quality. My choice is to convert my high resolution images to 640 x 480 pixels and output them as JPEG (.jpg) format. This often leads to image files that are somewhere between 40 and 90 KB - not too big a load even for dial-up connections. Of course you still have to resist attaching 25 of these to a single e-mail. Many ISP's impose a limit on the total size of attachments that can sent and sometimes this limit is as low as 500 KB. This limit may apply at your ISP or your addressee's ISP.

My personal recommendations concerning resolution and formats can be summarized as follows:

▸ If you buy a digital camera, buy as large a camera memory card as you can afford and take high resolution images. Only if you will be out of touch with a computer for an extended trip should you cut back to low res pictures.

▸ Scan prints at a minimum or 150 or 200 ppi (higher if you intend to make prints that are larger than the original).

▸ Capture your images (digital camera or scanner) in either TIF or high quality (low-compression) JPG.

▸ When editing is done, output the image in a lossless format (the editor native format or TIF) unless you know that there will be no more editing, else output in TIF or high quality JPG. The intent here is to avoid repeated editing and rewriting of JPG files because the loss of quality is cumulative with each JPG write.

▸ Hard drives have become huge and cheap. If you don't have enough space to store lots of big image files, buy more.

▸ Archive unneeded pictures off onto CD-R, in fact, it's a good idea to store copies of all of your precious pictures off onto CD-R

in case of disk crash. Consider making your standard storage format TIF. (This recommendation may change once JPG2000 becomes common.)

▸ Keep unedited originals of images that you do considerable editing on. You may later regret some of your changes and want to return to the original. In particular, if you purposely reduce the resolution of a favorite picture in order to e-mail it, make sure you are working on a copy, not the original.

There are many more such rules but we have limited space here.

Enhancements and Beyond

All of the above discussion has been aimed at the beginner and it may be sufficient to satisfy all of your digital picture needs and desires. However, as with any hobby, you may feel compelled to go further.

Examples include the restoration of antique photos, the frauding up of fun pictures (e.g., showing cousin Nancy with her arm around Richard Gear's waist), the major enhancement of photos by removing clutter (the old family home without the phone pole and the neighbor's junk car blocking part of the view). The possibilities are endless and you can ease into it as far and as slowly as you wish. It's comforting to know that your attempts to remove scratches from the only picture of Great Grandpa Otto in existence can't possible damage the original.

Other things that you can do with some editors or with specialized software include:

▸ Stitch multiple overlapping photos together into panoramas. Some of these can be awesome. See the Web site www .panoramafactory.com for some examples and a source of the shareware software.

The same site will also show you how to

make 360 degree panoramas that can be put on your Web pages as an interactive virtual reality view of the scene.

▸ Make animated sequences from a series of your own photographs. A program that comes bundled with Paint Shop Pro called Animation Shop is one example but there are numerous others out there.

▸ Morph one image into another. You've seen commercials on TV where one person's face slowly changes into a completely different face. You can do the same thing.

▸ Virtual reality terrain rendering software can turn a digitized topography map into a photo-realistic image of the area. Have a topo map of Mt. St. Helens and want to see what the north face looks like since the volcano exploded and blew it off in 1980? Indicate on the map where you want to place your "camera" and what direction your want to face and what zoom setting you want to use and, viola, there is a "photograph" of it complete with snow line, trees, rock color and sky! One such program is Vistapro. See Fig. 2 for one example. Visit the site www .andromedasoftware \.com/cd213.htm. See their home page for a wide selection of unique scientific and educational and fun software.

As my long-time bio that accompanies these articles says, I am "a bit of a nut about graphics." This article series should have convinced you of the truth of that statement.

From the September 2001 issue of *PC News.* Alex Dumestre has been associated with computers since the mid '60's, most of the time developing geophysical applications for use on mainframes, minicomputers, and work stations. He is a bit of a nut about graphics but is a perpetual novice on PC's. He is a member of the 1960 PC Users Group and can be contacted by e-mail at

DumestreA @PDQ.net.

Society News

Program Meeting Minutes

December 11, 2001
Charles Grover, Secretary

We began at 630 PM at Element K in Brighton, with Helps Half Hour led by Bill Statt.

Having to be at work prevented President Joe Varga from attending, so the meeting was convened by Treasurer Steve Staub. He introduced our speaker, Joe Hennekey of the Monroe County Sheriff's Department. The program was entitled "Computer Crime and Forensics." He included a list of favorite web sites. He said he could furnish the list to Joe Varga so it could be distributed or put in Monitor. Joe Hennekey gave us a terrific talk with plenty of information about clues for our own protection and the powerful tools available to law enforcement. Questions and discussion kept us engaged until 8:40.

We adjourned at 8:45 after Steve conducted the customary drawings.

Planning Meeting

December 18, 2001
by Charles Grover, Secretary

We began our December 18, 2001, meeting at the home of Sally Springett at 7:15 p.m. Steve Staub, Treasurer, informed us that Joe Varga, President, was at work that evening. In addition to Sally and Steve, Jim McGrath, Ron Matteson, and Charles Grover, Secretary, were present. Steve commented that we seem to have lost our Vice President; his membership renewal is overdue and he has attended only one meeting.

Our web site still cannot be updated, due to problems in switching over to a new

hosting service.

We agreed to release Joe Varga from his intended ongoing financial support of our leased equipment for Monitor production. His help enabled us to get started, and we can now maintain it.

Steve wants to get the tale at the Market Pro computer show staffed regularly. We have missed some shows. Ron can help out once in a while. Jim is also interested in helping.

Ron will supply a write up of the next photography SIG to Sally for Monitor.

We talked about the next program meeting. Perhaps Joe will do his presentation on Windows XP. Previous Windows Tips and Tricks programs have been well received, and another would be a good idea.

Joe Pia plans to submit a Monitor article about a scam.

Steve suggested asking if any members use their computers in a special way, and if so, would they be wiling to do a demonstration at a program meeting.

We still do not get reviews from everyone who wins software as door prizes. This is one of the problems in not having a functioning software chairperson.

I raised the matter of an Annexa field trip, offered by our November program presenters. I will raise the question at the next program meeting and then set something up with Annexa. We have three alternatives to put before the members:

Steve will check the speakers and program resource listing at a library after New Year's to see if there are any possibilities for us.

I told the board that I will not be available to run for office after my term as Secretary is up this summer. Steve said we will need to fill the President and Vice President positions also.

We ended our business meeting at 8:30 but then lingered a while for conversation and refreshments.

Members

You enjoyed the recent Linux programs by people from Annexa, and expressed interest in a follow up program or a field trip to Annexa. We need your answer, which of the following do you prefer?
1.   Visit Annexa as a program meeting.
2.   Visit Annexa as a special field trip (on another date).
3.   Invite the presenters back to another program meeting at Element K.

A poll will be taken at January 8 program meeting — OR — you may e-mail your preference to the Secretary through noon January 15, 2002, at clgrover @frontiernet.net.

December New Users Notes
by John McMillan

The New User's Group met at the Monroe Developmental Center on Tuesday, the 2nd of December at 630. Bill Statt mentioned that the Digital Photography Users Group would meet at the Developmental Center on Thursday Dec. 4th from 700 until 900. It was also noted that since January 1st 2002 is the first Tuesday, the next New User's meeting will be Feb. 5th.

A user who had acquired a MAC formatted 3.5 floppy disk wondered if it could be reformatted for an IBM Compatible. It was suggested that he find a MAC owner who could use the disk or try reformatting to see if it worked.

A user who was trying to compose a song had separate files with words and music which he wanted to merge and write as an MP3 file. He wondered what his sister would need to have to be able to listen to the song. Bill Statt mentioned that most E-mail providers have of size limitations, that might prevent the file from being sent. As part of this discussion, Bill used his laptop to demonstrate getting music from the internet using Winmx previously downloaded from Winmx .com. When investigating software for downloading, Bill recommended going to Cnet.com which, in addition to downloading, provides both positive and negative reader reviews, which could be helpful in deciding what to download. He also cited CDnow.com, a web site that allows downloading single songs for a fee. For burning cd's, Bill preferred Music Match and Hotburn to several other burners he has tried.

A user with Norton's Anti Virus on one machine asked whether he could copy it onto his 2nd machine which used McAffee. This cannot be done legally and if tried, Symantec would recognize the copy when It was registered. Without registration, new virus definitions could not be downloaded for continuing protection. Also before installing Norton's, McAffee should be uninstalled since they conflict with one another. Another user questioned an occasional message asking if he would like to update McAffee. Clicking on yes presents a note to log onto his IPS, which brings up his AOL screen. He wondered what happened to the McAffee screen. It was suggested that before clicking yes, he open AOL, and minimize that screen which should then show the original McAffee, to which he could answer yes. He has gotten messages that he is no longer a subscriber but can download .dat files which he did not recognize as necessary. He was not sure what version of McAffee he was using but it is not new so he may no longer be a registered user. Bill Statt used his laptop to explore McAffee registration and found that a 2 year subscription would cost $39 for virus scan on line and allow people to download the current virus engine as well as the latest .dat files. One difficulty of this is that if you have a virus you are not likely to be able to get on line. Another user who had just renewed registration wondered how to check the status of his account. Right clicking on the McAffee icon in the task bar opens a box which includes a review my account choice.

This led to a question about a message similar to "You are about to send information from the local Intranet zone. It might be possible for other people to see what you are sending. Do you want to continue?" This is a warning against non encrypted sites and should not be ignored if you plan to submit credit card numbers, or other crucial data. This message can be ignored if all you are doing is searching for information. You should not check the box that offers to suppress this message. The discussion jumped to Zone Alarm questions about whether to go to the internet or not. It was pointed out that this is not questioning your desire but aimed at preventing unauthorized attempts that might be made by spy ware. Spyware may be embedded in free disks or cd's and its purpose is to report your habits and profile to data gathering organizations that sell the information to businesses. Bill Statt mentioned a program Addaware that searches your machine and identifies any spyware it finds.

Someone asked how often a hard drive should be defragged. Bill pointed out that Defrag is very hard on the disk drive and should not be run unless the drive is over

10% fragmented. He said the percentage is indicated when defrag first starts up. Windows 98 and above let you open My Computer, select the hard drive and under the File menu, Properties to bring up a multi tabbed screen. The general tab window gives the disk name, type, file system, capacity plus available space in both digital and graphic form. There is a box labeled cleanup which if pressed will calculate the amount of space used by temporary Internet files; downloaded program files; the recycle bin; temporary files and the total space to be gained by removing them. Pressing ok in the calculation windows will activate the procedure to remove all of the files. Bill demonstrated this on his laptop and then went on to show how to access Windows updates via the start list. This requires that you go on line so your machine can be analyzed and a list presented of available updates not yet installed. Bill recommended that people update all those in the Critical group and evaluate the others depending upon their usage of Windows. Downloading may result in a need to reboot the machine. He also suggested not updating to Internet Explorer 6. This same process can be activated by going to Windowsupdate.com.

Another user who asked how to determine which programs that were running needed to be shut down when installing something new. Everything except explorer and systray should be shut down. This can be done by simultaneously hitting ctl-alt-dlt which brings up a listing of all active programs. Pressing end task causes any selected program to close. When closing a program, care should be taken not to simultaneously hit ctl-alt-dlt again because that causes the machine to shut down and when it is restarted, all of the programs have been restored to the list..

When there was a question about a Logitech optical mouse. Optical mice have no moving parts which is an advantage over the ball types in that they do not accumulate dust or other foreign material on the rollers which causes conventional mice to skip and move erratically. A user said the cursor sometimes changed from an arrow to another shape like an I-beam. This was thought to be a corrupted driver so it was recommended that he go to Add/remove programs in the Control Panel and remove the mouse driver; then shut down the machine and restart so the mouse would be recognized and the drivers reloaded. Going to the mouse icon in the Control Panel presents a multitabbed window. The pointers tab gives a picture and brief description of the various cursor shapes available.

If you have questions on these or similar subjects, why not join us at The Monroe Developmental Center, 630 Westfall Rd. for our next session, Feb. 4th, 2002 to participate in lively and enlightening discussions.

Treasurer's Report

Steve Staub, Treasurer

Balance as of 11-20-2001 . . . . . . $1,610.81

Income

Dues $192.00

Expenses

St. Stephens (2 months) $20.00
Copy paper 57.04
Sam's club 113.40
Lease on folding machine 86.72
Total $277.16
Balance as of 12-23-2001 . . . . . . $1,344.84
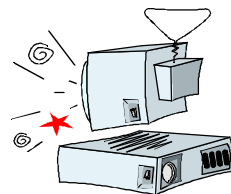
What Were They Thinking...?

Products that never saw the light of day

by Steve Bass
Pasadena IBM Users Group

Ever wonder about the stuff we never write about? I write for PC World and I'm on the inside. I get to see all junky software, bizarre gadgets, and wacky hardware. Here are a few that ended up in the trash can.

Do It Yourself Receipts

Do you cut those rebate coupons out of the newspaper? You know the kind: Send in the product's UPC code, fill out the form, and include the store's original receipt. Do you always fall for it? Don't feel bad, it happens to all of us, In fact, it's a well-thought out marketing scam, because you never, ever save the store receipt, and never send anything, saving the company plenty of bucks.

Fortunately, there's BoguStub, a hot solution developed by a cool programmer with too much time on his hands. From an easy to use Windows interface, type in the name of the store, the date purchased, and the price and name of the purchased items. And Voila!, out pops an authentic receipt from your laser printer, complete with accurate sales tax added to the total.

BoguStub's features include a handy pull-down menu of local stores, the ability to change tax tables, and even a friendly "Thanks for shopping with us!" tag at the bottom of the receipt. BoguStub is also useful when you've lost a receipt and need to return an item. Future releases will let you print a color watermark on the receipt, add store names to a look-up table, and print realistic perforations. List price: Free. Last Minute Productions, http://www. bogusystem.com/

Just Expense It!

Face it: no one likes the hassle of filling in expense accounts. But there's no getting around it, especially if you want to get reimbursed. Fortunately, there's FillUp 2.0, a handy macro for getting your spreadsheet up to speed, quickly and easily. All you need to do is give FillUp a starting range, say, $150. Within seconds, FillUp works backwards, breaking the amount into your spreadsheet categories, including travel and entertainment, transportation, and lodging, to name just a few.

The program's smart, using odd numbers, such as $5.21, $16.63, and $35.17, and the total is never an even number. Don't have a spreadsheet with categories? No problem because FillUp will do it for you, in over seven professional categories including sales rep, attorney, and journalist. What's more, FillUp even prints receipts, from taxi and airline tickets to restaurant stubs and itemized hotel portfolios. Macros available for Excel, Quattro Pro, and Paradox. List Price: $75. FillerUp Corp, (212) 555-fill, www .fillerup.com

Lickity Split Replies

It's a fact of life: In today's economy, many people are out of work. At the same time, busy executives barely have time to read, never mind answer, their electronic mail. But with QuickReply, there's a quick solution for everyone. QuickReply is a remote communication package that actually pays you to log onto an executive's e-mail service, read the messages and respond with bright, business-like repartee. There's more free time for the executive and you get a couple of bucks in your pocket.

QuickReply comes complete with a built-in spell checker, thesaurus, and grammar checker, and includes plenty of sample responses. Don't know an executive? It's easy. Just choose from a list of high quality execs

supplied by QuickReply. Price includes payment of $1 per message processed. List price: $149. Total Solutions, (415) 555-quik. www.quickreply.com

Give me an A+

Want to help your child get into college? Forget about Encarta. Ignore Comptons. What you need is Make the Grade, an extraordinary CD-ROM based program that actually writes your child's reports and term papers. Here's how it works: From an easy to use menu, you--or your child--answer some simple questions. Start with "What grade do you want?" Then, "What's the subject or topic of the report?" One more. "What grade of school are you in?" Choose from writing styles including casual, terse, convoluted, and scientific, to name just a few. Finally, decide how many pages you'll need.

Make the Grade searches through the CD-ROM's 200 gigabytes of highly indexed, compressed data. The program quickly finds the facts and details about the chosen subject, keeping your child's profile in mind. In no time flat, your child has a polished report ready to go. What's more, Make the Grade discovers items even the professor probably doesn't know. The professional version creates theses, dissertations, and newspaper and magazine articles. List price: $79; Professional $249. MG Systems, (213) 555-grad. www.makethegrade.com

Tell Me About It

Do you need to get some work done? Tired of hassling with Windows and exhausted from installing all those upgrades? Try The Couch, a hot new product from the cool streets of Beverly Hills. Within six hours of using The Couch, you'll be ready to give up your computer and get a life. Features include WAVs with appropriate and supportive responses, dynamic help screens so you can determine your weekly progress, and a handy dialer for those late night crises.

Helpful Wizards are also available to guide you — step by step — through those times when you're nagged with insecurities and doubts. And if that's not enough, you get valuable look-up tables with the most common computing neuroses: Writers Block Disorder, Computeritus Confusidis, and the deadly (and often life-threatening) GPF Deficit Disorder, to name just a few. The list price for The Couch is $150 an hour but I've seen interns and psych assistants working for as little as $50. The Couch, Psyche International, (800) LAY-DOWN, www.psyintl.com

Play it Safe

You've seen them on everything from old-fashioned floppy disks and Zip drives to hard drives. AVOID EXPOSURE TO ALL MAGNETIC FIELDS. DO NOT BEND OR FOLD. Unfortunately, most people don't pay close attention to the warning, resulting in damage to untold thousands of disks and drives. Millions of dollars and more than thirty thousand jobs are lost each year because of this carelessness. Luckily, GayGezunt's got a hot answer: bright fluorescent BeSafe Tags that will be noticed and remembered! Self-adhesive and tough to remove, BeSafe Tags carry the important warning all end-users should heed.

Available in over thirty colors, such as Hot Pfunk, Sizzling Scatado, and Cool Culumber, the tags use standard fonts as well as Algarian, Zonk and Bondini. Try BeSafe Tags on other items, such as your morning newspaper, your car, your spouse, and your children. List price: $3/roll. GayGezunt Int'l. (714) 555-safe. www.gaygezunt.com

Yes, before you send me a zillion e-mails, all of these products are entirely fictional. Except, strangely enough, BoguStub, which is a legitimate product, available on the author's web site.

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with *PC World* and runs the Pasadena IBM Users Group. He's also a founding member of APCUG. 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.