From The DealsGuy
by Bob Click
Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

I enjoy all the feedback from my personal comments in the column. When I wrote about my experience with spyware on a friend's computer, I was surprised at how many people e-mailed to say how many spies they found on their own machine when they installed Ad-Aware, and many had over a hundred. Some even asked me where to get Ad- Aware and I thought that was pretty common knowledge. People must not be paying enough attention because I read about Ad-aware in many newsletters.

Last month's item about who are the doctors and who are not brought some interesting e-mail from people who found they were in the same situation, and didn't know it. They agreed with me. Some said they were satisfied with the PA they were seeing. I only had one person who took the doctor's side (a PA who says he is honest with his patients, and I salute him for that). The doctor I see now does not have any PAs in his office, but that's not why I chose him.

Heard about Turbo Tax lately? It looks like Intuit took lessons from Microsoft with their "product activation" scheme, but Intuit uses a third party software called SafeCast (by Macrovision) to keep track of the computer it is installed on, although it continuously works in the background. It sounds like there have been problems, but their tech support doesn't have much patience. I read about a guy who had hard drive problems. He replaced his HD and that one also became defective. He really got an attitude from their tech support. If you want to know more, go to [http://www.extremetech.com] and you'll see lots of information about it if you do a search. The article I read was "TurboTax, So What Should I Do Now?" It also had a list of other products that use the same product activation scheme. In my case, AARP volun-teers did my tax return free.

An Old Deal Resurfaced
A few months ago, I wrote about "Drive Rescue," but by the time the column was published, that freeware product was pulled. I believe a new pay version replaces it now. However, Ken Marple told me he found his original download and will send it to me. If anybody still wants it, let me know. A friend says it is also available at [http://www.absolutefreesoftware.co.uk /freeware_general_utilities .htm] as I write this. He says the author states it has bugs, so beware. Ken Marple said he accidentally found his HD problem anyway when he took off a virus detection software and the problem disappeared. He had been running two AVs, not a good plan.

There's not much in deals this month because I'm in the middle of company time, meaning lots of family visiting. Vendors didn't respond and I didn't have time (or ambition) to do any follow-up. The LensPen item is good until April 30, 03. [http://www .lenspen.com] Also, the Man-Machine "Cool One" Keyboard is still good. 301-341-4900. I hope you got your machine "fixed" with [http://www.bigfix.com] if you were having problems. Here is what I liked this month.

Zap Those Telemarketers
I read this one in the Dayton Microcomputer Association's newsletter, the DataBuss, by Jerry Wonderly and thought you'd like it.

He found this on Clark Howard's Web site [http://www.clarkhoward.com]. "Tele-marketers (and bill collectors) often use Predictive Dialers to dial outgoing calls. These are computers that keep dialing phone numbers on a list until they reach a live person. The Predictive Dialer then transfers that call to the first live operator. That's why you sometimes hear silence for a while before someone gets on the line when you answer the phone. Some of them are bold enough to play a little recording asking you to "Please hold on for an important call!" (Yea, Right!) Telemarketers and bill collectors don't want to pay their operators for dialing and listening to busy signals and answering machines, so they have a computer do it for them.

'The Predictive Dialer is programmed to hang up if it hears a Special Information Tone. (SIT), since it knows the line is disconnected. It doesn't listen to what's said after the SIT tone since it doesn't understand words. Here's how that information helps you. If you download a file of these tones, and then record it to the beginning of your answering machine message before your real message, the automated dialer will be tricked into thinking your phone is disconnected

and you'll be removed from their calling list. No more calls from them! In no time at all, you should be receiving far fewer telemarketing calls.

'You could always spend around $40 to buy one of those popular zapping machines, but I'll take the freebie. Readers can find this free, small (44 KB) sound file, sit _disconnected.wav, at [http://www.telephonetribute.com/tribute /signal_and_ circuit_conditions.htm]." Thanks for tracking that down, Jerry.

Backup Solutions For You Are On Sale

This one is running out fast. In fact, I don't even understand what all it is about, so check it carefully at the Web site. [http://www .centuriantech.com] Centurian Technology is having a winter sale that will end March 31, 2003. This product is unique for your backup and they have another product for hard drive protection.

Here is a brief description of Centurian Guard: The Centurion Guard(r) Hard Drive Protection Device protects your system by write protecting the hard drive at the physical level, similar to the way that you write protect your floppy disks by setting the write protect tab.

And this is a brief description of Drive Shield: DriveShield(r) is a new software based laptop/PC hard drive protection. DriveShield allows anyone who manages laptops/PC's to reset a system to its original configuration with a simple reboot.

Be sure to take advantage of this deal if you need the protection. I have not used either product so I cannot speak from experience. However, when I saw it demonstrated at a show, I was impressed, but a show presentation is designed to make you really want a product. You can also call them at 800-224-7977 and they say prices start at $58.00 a unit.

Everything You Wanted To Know, and Also Things You Never Wanted To Know

Ever wonder what your computer was really made of? There are plenty of ways to find that out, but Paul Witheridge of Sarnia Computer Users Group gave me this little program that will capture your interest. Best part of all, it can run from a floppy. Download it at [http://www.aida32.hu/aida- download.php]. Also see [http://www.aida32.hu/aida-features .php?bit=32] (left column) for a description. Then unzip it to put it to the test. In fact, I did put it on a floppy and, although it runs a bit slow, it works gathering so much information about your machine that you will be astounded. When

browsing the information, it even takes you to the Web sites. Best of all, its freeware. Be prepared to spend a lot of time to interpret stuff the first time you run it. Actually, I understood little of the information, but you might.

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 enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheap-skate) 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.

The User Interface

by Ron Fenley
Houston Area League of PC Users

The user interface is any input/output device and an operating system that enables a user to interact with their computing device, whether it be the desktop, laptop, PDA or other mobile device. Not a lot of thought is given to the present day interface, except perhaps for the operating system, primarily because the hardware devices used today have become somewhat static and have not significantly changed over the last 20 or so years. Let's face it, there really isn't a whole lot that can be done with a keyboard or mouse; there have been some creative configurations and physical geometries that have occurred in the last couple of years that are interesting and may prove to be successful. But research-in- progress may very well change how we interact with our computing devices in the future.

So where is the user interface headed? How can we interact more efficiently and effectively with these devices? What kind of interface can we expect to see in the near future? How will we interact with computing devices in a more distant future?

To understand where the computer interface is headed, it may be beneficial to see where it has come from and to review where it is today. From there we can look at current research and see where the user interface might go in the future.

We all should be glad that we do not have to interface with the earliest computing devices like sliding sticks, abacus, rotary calculator, slide

rules and early 4 function electronic calculators to compute an amor-tization schedule for a loan. However, trying to do the same type of work on the first personal computers like the Kenbak-1 or the Altair 8800 was basically the same. These first machines had a very primitive interface when compared to today's standards. The interface for these devices required the user to know how to convert regular numbers into binary and then input the binary equivalent into the machine with a set of on/off toggle switches for each calculation. The output was primitive as well, displaying the calcu-lated results in a sequence of small lights representing the binary numeric value. There was no need for an operating system because there was no disk drive, no monitor, no keyboard and no saved programs that could be loaded into the device. So the user interface for data input and output of these early computers was you, binary code and the toggle switch.

A couple of years later, in 1977, Apple Computer, Commodore, and Radio Shack introduced mass-market computers. The interface for this next generation of computers had greatly improved over their predecessors, as the user was able to interface with the computer via a keyboard and TV screen. Hence, we see the beginning of the user interface pretty much as we see it today. Although this hardware provided a simpler interface for data input and output, the operating system was still lacking. The user of these systems could only interact with the computer using Basic programming language. A tape storage system came along a little bit later; programs and data could be stored and loaded from tape. Even with the shortcomings, the introduction of the key-board, TV screen and tape system was a significant step forward for the user input /output interface.

The input/output side of the user interface saw a steady stream of improvements with the introduction of the 5 1/4" floppy disk. The 3 1/2" floppy disk, introduced later, had a slightly different format with a significant improvement in data storage capacity. Later came the Zip disks, thereby increasing the capacity almost 100 fold. Currently, systems have almost moved away from the floppy disk media, preferring the higher capacity CD-ROMs and DVDs. Clearly, higher capacity drives have greatly improved the input/output side of the user interface.

With the ability to load larger programs and save higher volumes of data, we entered into the age of the graphical user interface (GUI). Apple first introduced the GUI operating system for public use with its Prodos for the Apple II. The first IBM PCs were loaded with the text-based DOS operating system, but later, they too, entered the GUI arena and would load their computers with Microsoft's Windows. At first, GUI drove the demand for better graphics. So there began a spiral of improved video systems and then better GUI operating system to take advantage of the improved graphics. Thus better displays and GUI operating systems were driving the improvements in the user interface for a few of years.

Although not formally considered part of the user interface, improvement in applications set the stage for the next round of interface improvements. Applications were becoming standardized in their look and feel, but more importantly, data could easily be transported between applications and into the application from external sources. This transport functionality opened up new avenues for data input for the user interface.

One of the best sources for external data is the Internet. Here the user can connect to a public wide area network and download reams of data like stock price histories into a spreadsheet. Or the user can download a program into the computer, install and run the program, and never touch a floppy disk or CD. And the user can even keep the hardware and software completely up to date by downloading updates and yet never leave the house. Entertainment also entered the scene where the user can download music and soon movies. Clearly the Internet provided a wealth of information that can be directly imported into the computer.

Automation provides another frontier for data input into the computer. Currently, several businesses utilize automation to import data directly into the computer and accounting system. A couple of examples would be automation sensors at oil wells, pipelines, refineries keep tally of product and processing operations. Phone lines and satellites help merchants make transactions in real time. Some businesses are now tracking sales and inventory in real time because automation can directly interface with their computer system. As you can see, getting data into the computer has gotten as fast as when the transaction or event occurs.

So how can the human interactivity achieve these levels of performance? One step in this

direction would be full development and implementation of a voice recognition system. There are programs that have been available for years, but they have been limited in one fashion or other. If anyone has looked at a voice wave pattern, then they would know that voice recognition is a very difficult science. However, with increased processing power and continued research, these limitations should be overcome in the near future.

Parallel in the development of voice recognition and computer control will be developments in AI and 3D Graphics. As graphics continue to advance and processing power becomes cheaper, we will see broader utilization of Avatars, the graphical representation of a human. These systems will demonstrate self learning, adaptive and predictive responsive behaviors to the user's needs. These types of interfaces will reduce the effort the user spends in interacting with the computer. Currently there are a limited number of Avatars in service, but that number is expected to grow.

There is going to come a time when the hand movements in typing or mouse movements are going to be too slow, and the users are going to be looking for faster way to interact with their computers. Voice recognition will bridge the gap for a while, but even speech will have inadequate speed. An area that will pick up where voice recognition stops is the eye tracking system. Eye movements are very quick and these systems will track the eye movements and perform the desired function at a much greater speed than any previous interface system. A Google search indicates that Europe has done a lot of research in this area and we may see commercial hardware in the near future. The following link takes you to a BBC article addressing this subject news .bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/2098030.stm. And more information can be found by performing an advanced Google search using the specific keyword "Eye Tracking."

The advancements in technology always yield interesting products never before contemplated. For example—the current research in human organ supplements has computer interface ramification in the more distant future. Presently, medical scientists and doctors are routinely performing cochlear ear implants. www.acs.ohio-state.edu/researchnews /archive/midear1.htm. With continued miniaturization of analog and digital circuits, it is not hard to believe that we could interface the audio directly to the implant. And with ID chip technology (www.wired.com/news/privacy /0,1848,50187 ,00 .html) we could discreetly receive specific information programmed just for the user.

There are other implant programs underway. One of the more promising is the retina eye implant. Here doctors place a photosensitive silicon chip on the damaged part of the retina. Although it is in the early stages of development, patients who have received the implant are able to distinguish objects that they could not see before. With continued research and development this technology could be adapted to a user interface in the distant future. For more information, the following link is a brief but objective review of the retina implant research. www.cheme.cornell.edu/~saltzman /Classes/ENGRI_120/Research_Papers /paper15.PDF

The last interface to be described sounds a bit like science fiction. But then 25 years ago voice recognition would have seemed like science fiction if you were entering data into your Altair 8800 by flipping the on/off toggle switches. So keeping an open perspective is always helpful. The fastest possible interface to a computer would be a brain implant. Sounds bizarre. but researchers have implanted hundreds of miniature electrodes on the surface of the brain of a monkey. And with a little training, the monkey was able to control the actions of a robot simply by thinking about it. Can you imagine the ramifications if humans had this ability to interface with their computer with just their mind? The first link is an article that describes the research and test subject. www.sciam.com/article.cfm?articleID=00065FE A-DAEA-1D80-90FB809EC5880000& catID=2. The second link is to the ABC news report on brain implants and computer control.abcnews.go .com/sections/scitech/DailyNews /mindcontrol020313.html With the convergence of various technologies, we are starting to see an evolution in various user interface systems. A point mentioned in "The Future of the Micro-processor" article in the February 2003 issue of *HAL PC Magazine* indicated that in the next 20 years, it is very probable that a single processor would have the computational power of a human brain. It should not be hard to believe that as the advancement of technology quickens. we can expect the flow of information to overwhelm the

human brain. Philosophers have debated what mankind can do to keep up, and many have suggested human augmentation. So today we may be switching the on/off toggle switches of our computer when compared to what the computer interface may look like in the future.

From the March 2003 issue of HAL-PC *Magazine. All 'Baby Steps to our Future' articles are archived at www.hal-pc.org /~seeker/future. Ron worked as an engineer/analyst and retired in 1999. Ron moved to the country and now pursues his interest in computers, basic science and technology. Ron has been a computer enthusiast for 20 years and has been a HAL-PC member for about half that time. Ron can be reached at future@hal-pc.org.*

USE YOUR CD-RW DRIVE MORE PRODUCTIVELY
by Ira Wilsker
APCUG

Almost all newer computers come with a CD-RW drive, a CD drive that can write and rewrite compatible CD discs. For older computers, with a standard CD reader (play only, not write), the addition of a CD "burner" is a very popular and fairly inexpensive upgrade. A simple review of the Sunday sale books for the major electronics and office supply stores shows an abundance of CD-RW drives for between $30 and $100, often after rebate.

These drives are typically easy to install, and may possibly be installed in addition to the existing CD reader (good for copying CDs), or as a simple replacement. If internal installation is not desired, there are several external CD-RW drives, advertised weekly, that connect to an available USB or firewire port. The external drives, typically the USB models, are also often a good choice for older notebook computers where internal instal-lation is difficult or impossible. The Sunday ads often show the external USB drives for under $100, after rebates.

Almost all CD-RW drives, whether factory installed, or after-market add-on, come with some CD burning software. The most widely distributed CD software provided with the drives is from Adaptec, or Adaptec's successor (Adaptec sold their CD writing software division), Roxio. Another common software package included with some drives is from Nero, while other drives come with a variety of lesser-known software titles. As the price of blank CD discs plunges,

often "free after rebate", burning (writing to) CDs has become very popular. Still, many PC (and Mac) users are not using their equipment to its potential; large number of users still only use their CD-RW drives in read mode to install other software, and not to burn discs.

As had been stated many times here in previous columns, the three most important words in computing are "Backup, Backup, and Backup". Remember that "Murphy's First law of Computing" states that "A properly backed-up hard drive will never fail; a hard drive that has not been recently backed up will always fail at the most inopportune time." All too many users who have ready access to CD-RW drives have lost all of their important files to viruses or hard drive failures, despite the ease and low expense of copying important files to CD discs.

The common blank discs hold from 660 to 700 megabytes of data, and are very inexpensive. Other than some time, there is no great investment to back up critical files at a minimum, or even better, entire hard drives.

There are a variety of excellent utilities available to backup hard drives. Some CD-RW drives come with a "lite" or "limited" version of popular backup programs. While minimally functional, these "lite" versions often lack useful functions such as compression (getting more data on a CD disc than its native capacity), or incremental backup (only backing up new files or files modified since the previous backup). I have been using "BackUp MyPC" from Stomp Software (www .stompinc.com), which was formerly known as Backup Exec, by Veritas (Seagate). This program is probably one of the most full featured backup programs, and easy to use. BackUp MyPC can backup to almost any type of device from CD-RW drives, tape drives, Jazz and Zip drives, and other devices.

Some competing products are Roxio's Go Back, Norton's Ghost, and NTI's BackUp Now (which I have also used). Since almost all computers can utilize some form of CD writer, and blank discs are cheap, there is absolutely no reason NOT to have at least critical data files backed up. The cliché "ounce of prevention…" is most apropos here. With over one in five PCs currently infected with at least one variety of the Klez worm, several versions of which are capable of destroying critical files on a hard drive, backups are imperative. The appearance and rapid spread of other destructive worms and viruses, such as the new "Hunch" worm which

explicitly destroys the files in the Windows, My Programs, and My Documents directories, emphasizes the need for backing up hard drives. Still, probably the most damage is done by the old-fashioned hard drive crash. Remember Murphy's law, and always have a reasonably current backup of critical files. For long-term archival purposes, better quality CD discs are advertised as having a 100-year archival life.

There are other popular uses of CD burners. One of the most popular and most controversial uses is burning music to blank CD discs. Often in the popular MP3 format, or in native commercial music CD format, studies show that this is the most popular use of CD burners. Provided that copyright laws are rigidly obeyed, and we all know that they always are (snicker), homemade music CDs are very widely created and used. Online music or swap services, ranging from the now defunct Napster, to the very much alive and controversial KazAa and Mor-pheus, as well as the legitimate commercial music sites such as Sony, are popular sources of such music.

Another popular use is copying entire CD discs. Generally, it is considered "ok" to make a single archival backup of commercial CDs, provided that the copy is only used as a backup, and properly disposed of (destroyed) when the original software is no longer needed. With some software CDs, and an increasing number of commercial music CDs, this archival backup is becoming more difficult to create as sophisticated copy protection is being utilized more commonly.

Many use their CD drive, often with rewriteable CD-RW discs, as an additional, but removable adjunct to their hard drive. This allows archival and portable storage of massive amounts of data, at minimal expense. CDs are often ideal for moving large files between computers.

There are several other uses for the CD-RW drives now so common in our machines. Many other CD drive utilities are readily available for download, such as from http://tucows.exp.net /system/cdrutil95.html or htpt://tucows.exp.net /mmedia.html.

Use the drives as they can be used, but make absolutely sure that critical data is frequently backed up.

Ira Wilsker is a member of the Golden Triangle PC Club (Beaumont, TX) and the APCUG Board of Advisors

Media Notes
by Bill Petitt
Southeast Virginia Computer User Group

Look what our friends at Microsoft have put together for us this summer. So far, I haven't find out if this means just Windows 98 or does it include Windows 98 Second Edition and possibly, Windows ME. Customer service certainly is going downhill these days.

Microsoft is ending free support for Windows 98 on June 30. It will continue to offer paid incident support through next Jan. 16. Microsoft will consider program changes for security issues on a case-by-case basis. Also, there will still be much information on Microsoft's site.

Windows 95 has not been actively supported for some time, but the company maintains data on it. Windows 98 has been out for years. My guess? Most people have figured Windows 98 out by now. But if you have a problem, you can still get information and help from Microsoft and other sites.

Mobile Computing Tips: Bluetooth vs. Wi-Fi FAQ—Short-range vs. local area networking—Bluetooth and Wi-Fi

Mobile computing is a big name for a bunch of small gadgets, portable devices, and wireless technologies that enable you to polish your PowerPoint presentation about volcanoes while flying over Mount St. Helens, or to e-mail your attorney an update to your will from the back seat of a careening taxicab.

In this article, you'll learn that Bluetooth isn't something you get from eating too much licorice and Wi-Fi has nothing to do with your stereo system (at least not yet).

Q: What's the Difference Between Bluetooth and Wi-Fi?

A: Bluetooth and Wi-Fi are both wireless networking standards that provide connectivity via radio waves. The main difference: Bluetooth's primary use is to replace cables, while Wi-Fi is largely used to provide wireless, high-speed access to the Internet or a local area network.

Bluetooth

First developed in 1994, Bluetooth is a low-power, short-range (30 feet) networking specification with moderately fast transmission speeds of 800 kilobits per second. Bluetooth provides a wireless, point-to-point, "personal area network" for PDAs, notebooks, printers, mobile phones, audio components, and other devices. The wireless technology can be used anywhere

you have two or more devices that are Bluetooth enabled. For example, you could send files from a notebook to a printer without having to physically connect the two devices with a cable.

A few notebooks, such as the IBM ThinkPad T30, now include built-in Bluetooth connectivity. And $129 will buy you a Bluetooth card for expansion-slot Palm PDAs, allowing you to connect to printers, notebooks, mobile phones, and other devices without cables.

Despite the promises of Bluetooth, however, hardware makers have been slow to incorporate it into their products. Some experts believe it could be eight years before Bluetooth is commonly used. They attribute the technology's lagging adoption rate to poor usability and confusion about what Bluetooth is and does. For more on that topic, read "Why We're Still Waiting for Bluetooth."

Wi-Fi

Short for Wireless Fidelity, Wi-Fi is a user-friendly name for devices that have been certified by the Wireless Ethernet Com-patibility Alliance to conform to the industry-standard wireless networking specification IEEE 802.11b. Wi-Fi began appearing in products in late 1998. The standard currently provides access to Ethernet networks such as a corporate LAN or the Internet at super-fast speeds of up to 11 megabits per second.

Wi-Fi connections can be made up to about 300 feet away from a "hot spot" (slang for a Wi-Fi networking node). When your notebook or PDA has a Wi-Fi networking card or built-in chip, you can surf the Internet at broadband speeds wirelessly. Wi-Fi networking nodes are proliferating globally; many Starbucks locations, for instance, offer access to Wi-Fi hot spots for a fee. (See the Notebooks section in this newsletter for information on finding Wi-Fi hot spots.)

Many notebooks today have IEEE 802.11b built-in; those that don't can be adapted via Wi-Fi connectivity PC Cards. Wi-Fi is also the basis for some home networking products, allowing you to share high-speed Internet connections without cabling. Late last year, products featuring a newer wire-less networking specification, IEEE 802.11a (called Wi-Fi5 by WECA), debuted. This standard provides transmission speeds of up to 54 mbps. Wireless networking is expected to grow in popularity as a practical, flexible way to replace some LANs. With wireless networking, for instance, workers can carry their notebooks from cubicle to conference room and stay connected to the corporate network.

Tip: Looking for a Hot Spot?

Wi-Fi networking nodes, or hot spots, are proliferating around the globe. But how do you find them? One useful resource is www .80211hotspots.com, which lets you browse among 1400 Wi-Fi nodes in the United States and Canada. You can search by city, state, or country but not, unfortunately, by zip code.

The Specs

802.11g is the name given by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers to a new high-speed wireless local-area networking specification. 802.11g is an extension of 802.11b, which is the basis of many WLANs today such as the T-Mobile Hot Spots found in Starbucks locations.

While 802.11b delivers data transfer rates of up to 11 megabits per second, 802.11g promises speeds up to 54 mbps. Both specifications operate on the 2.4-GHz radio frequency band.

And then there's 802.11a, also known as Wi-Fi5. This wireless standard is also designed to deliver speeds of up to 54 mbps. But 802.11a uses the 5-GHZ radio frequency band and isn't compatible with 802.11b- or 802.11g-enabled devices.

The Good News

Because 802.11g is an extension of 802.11b, equipment based on these technologies is compatible. That means an 802.11g- equipped notebook (such as one of the new PowerBooks) or other device can still access the Internet via a Wi-Fi hot spot--although at the older standard's 11 mbps speed. Conversely, a 802.11b-equipped notebook can connect to an 802.11g hot spot, but only at the lower speed. In theory, then, purchasing 802.11g equipment seems a good idea because you'll get fast speeds (when interfacing with 802.11g access points) as well as compatibility with the ubiquitous Wi-Fi standard.

The Bad News

Alas, it's not quite that simple. At the moment, 802.11g is a specification—not an accepted, industry-wide standard like 802 .11a and 802.11b. In fact, 802.11g isn't even expected to be certified as a standard until later this year, according to C. Brian Grimm, communications director for the Wi-Fi Alliance, a nonprofit wireless industry association in Mountain View, California.

Standardization will come when consensus is reached among networking industry players regarding 802.11g's technology speci-fications, Grimm says. While 802.11g as it exists today is unlikely to change, he points out, it's possible that it could. If it does change, however, equipment purchased to-day could most likely be upgraded.

Nonetheless, there are risks in buying prestandard products, Grimm points out. You shouldn't have problems if you go to one company for all your 802.11g products, for example a 802.11g home networking setup from D-Link that includes a router and a PC Card adapter. But prestandard devices from one vendor may not be compatible with those from another, Grimm warns. And there are potential downsides to 802.11g. While Wi-Fi devices can talk to one another within about 300 feet, 802.11g's range is about 10 percent less, Grimm says. "Generally speaking," he adds, "the faster you go, the lower the range." The result: To compensate for the shorter range, a company seeking to upgrade may have to buy more 802.11g network access points than the Wi-Fi points it is replacing.

As with Wi-Fi, 802.11g devices share the same radio spectrum as 2.4-GHz portable phones, so home users may experience some interference, Grimm says. If you're wirelessly transmitting multimedia, such as MP3 files, from your computer to your stereo set, you could notice some dropped notes here and there. But if you're transferring data — by surfing the Web wirelessly, for instance — you're less likely to notice interference from portable phones.

The Bottom Line

"Ultimately, I'd stick with Wi-Fi for now," Grimm concludes. "It will work anywhere there's a wireless hot spot." Once the 802.11g specification is standardized, consider buying a network card for your notebook or PDA that supports both the "g" and "a" standards. Because 802.11g and 802.11b are compatible, dual-band cards will give you access to all three wireless standards.

"Dual-band cards may be expensive at first," Grimm says, "but like everything else, their prices will soon drop."

News: Wi-Fi Hot Spot Finder

The Wi-Fi Alliance, a nonprofit trade organization for the wireless networking industry, will soon offer an online "Yellow Pages of Wi-Fi hot spots around the globe," according to C. Brian Grimm, communications director. The Web database will allow users to search for libraries, universities, coffee houses, and other establishments offering Wi-Fi Internet access points. Unlike some other Wi-Fi hot spot finders on the Web, this database will be maintained by the Wi-Fi service providers themselves, Grimm says, which should result in more accurate, frequently updated information. For more details, go to: http://www.wi-fizone.org

You Still Can't Keep Your Cell Phone Number

When it comes to mobile phone numbers, you still can't take it with you. The FCC recently extended by one year the deadline for wireless networks to allow customers to keep their phone numbers when they switch providers. First set in 1996, the deadline has been pushed back for the third time and is now November 24, 2003.

Donate the Power of Your PC
to Fight Smallpox

The Department of Defense and IBM are using grid computing to search for a cure to the smallpox virus and you can help.

The U.S. Department of Defense has turned to grid computing specialist United Devices for a new project that will help scientists search for a cure for the smallpox virus, according to a Wednesday announcement. The DoD along with IBM have funded the project, which will link millions of computers together to form a kind of decentralized supercomputer. The organizations are looking for both businesses and individuals to donate their computer's idle time to the protein analysis that is the thrust of the project, said Michael R. Nelson, director of Internet technology and strategy at IBM.

The groups hope to find a cure for smallpox that will be used after a person has been infected by the virus, as opposed to a vaccine against the virus, which already exists.

"United Devices has already recruited millions of people to donate their compute cycles," Nelson said. "We are really showing that you can solve real world problems with our technology."

Processing Power

United Devices, based in Austin, Texas, has created a large Web or grid of computers by asking users to download a small program that will be used to send out research problems and then return the data to United Devices, and eventually to the DoD. This process allows researchers to tap into spare processing power

from the vast number of PCs and servers that sit idle for much of the day. It also helps divvy up workloads among a number of systems, which means the research can be done faster, Nelson said.

United Devices has already completed a similar project for the DoD in which the company used the grid computing method for anthrax research. In addition, the company uses its grid for cancer research. United Devices plans to give people the option of using their PC for either cancer research, smallpox research, or both, according to a company spokesperson.

IBM has donated servers, storage systems, and software to help the project along. The company's DB2 database also sits at the heart of United Devices' Global MetaProcessor Platform, which is used for the grid efforts.

Researchers at Oxford and Essex Universities in the U.K. and smallpox experts at the Robarts Research Institute, Sloan- Kettering Cancer Center, and The University of Western Ontario will be able to use the compute power to identify new anti-viral drugs. Results from the Smallpox Research Grid Project will be delivered to the United States Department of Defense's Office of the Secretary of Defense, Nelson said.

Users who want to participate in the project can download the screensaver used to set up the grid from Grid.org.

Sam's Club dons budget Red Hat PC

Sam's Club, the members-only branch of retail giant Wal-Mart, has entered the budget PC race with a $299 system running Red Hat's version of the Linux operating system.

The Sam's Club PCs are built by www.CPUBuilders .com, a division of Wichita, Kan.-based hardware maker Stratitec specializing in budget PCs. The Sam's Club offerings, sold only through the retailer's Web site (www.samsclub.com) , mirror similar moves by Wal-Mart, which offers a number of low-cost Linux PCs through its Web site.

The $299 "starter system" sold by Sam's Club runs on a 1.1GHz Duron processor from Advanced Micro Devices and includes a 20GB hard drive, built-in Ethernet and modem, and an integrated graphics processor. The current version has 128MB of memory, but CPUBuilders plans to upgrade the configuration soon to 256MB. A 17-inch monitor is available for another $100.

A $399 version will use AMD's 1.67GHz Athlon XP processor. CPUBuilders expects to offer several other configurations through the discount retailer.

The Wal-Mart PCs have used Linux distributions from Lindows and Lycoris, designed to look and act like Windows and thus be less intimidating to consumers. But David Ginskey, vice president of engineering for CPUBuilders, said the company prefers to stick with Linux leader Red Hat.

"The real reason we like Red Hat is it's really robust, and there's a lot of depth to it," he said. "It makes our systems more flexible, because you've got the tools for more complex stuff down the road." The Sam's Club PCs will include a wealth of open-source software ready to run, including the OpenOffice productivity package, Mozilla Web browser, and Evolution personal information manager.

Robert Barger, president of CPUBuilders, said he expects the PCs to appeal to consumers and small businesses looking to control costs. "It gives small business a way to easily afford a reliable, functional PC," he said. "People will really start to think, 'Do I really need that $99 Windows license and $400 for (Microsoft) Office?'"

When Pasting from the Web Goes Bad

Formatting can be a real problem in stuff you copy from the Web. When you're ready to paste it into a Word document, select Edit. Rather than selecting Paste, pick Paste Special. Click Unformatted Text and OK. You can get rid of this formatting in an existing Word document, too. From Word's Format menu select Styles and Formatting and then, Clear Formatting. It's that easy.

Five Questions to Answer Now about Your PC

Someday, your computer will refuse to start. Would you be in big trouble? The answer usually is "Yes!" But just how much anguish, time and money would this cause you? Ask yourself these five questions:

1. Do you know exactly what is inside your computer? Your computer setup consists of various hardware components and software programs. If something goes wrong, it could be for a number of reasons. That's why you should know what is inside the casing. The time to get this information is now, when all is working properly.

Windows 98, Windows ME and Windows XP include a tool called "System Information" made precisely for this job. It captures a wealth of diagnostic information about your entire system. From the Start menu, open Programs, Accessories, and then the System Tools folder. Double-click System Information. To get a printout of the details, select Print off the File menu.

2. Do you have a printout of all your passwords?

Odds are, you have passwords for Web sites, confidential files and maybe even one to access your system. Make a list of your passwords and store it in a secure place. Don't store the list on your computer. If the hard drive is gone and you don't remember your passwords, that list isn't any good.

It's not a happy thought, but someday, a family member may need access to your computer's accounts and files when you are gone. I have received many calls from people trying to break into a deceased loved one's computer files. While tools exist for this task, it not as easy as looking it up on a piece of paper.

3. Do you have a backup?

Backups are like insurance. You may never need one, but when you do, you are sure glad it's there. You don't have to back up everything on your hard drive. Just copy your personal files. If a disaster occurs, you can reinstall your programs on the replacement hard drive.

Traditionally, backups have been done to tape drives. But tape drives are expensive and slow. And tapes are costly, too. Instead, consider adding a second hard drive to your system. You could also use an external hard drive (more expensive), a Zip drive, or a CD or DVD burner. Forget floppies; they're too small.

To really be safe, the backup medium (tape, CD or DVD, etc.) should be removed from your site. If you are backing up to tape, for instance, and you leave the tape cartridge in the machine, you'll be protected if the hard drive fails. But if the equipment is stolen, or your house burns to the ground, the backup will be lost.

4. Do you have all your software product keys?

These are the alphanumeric numbers you must enter when installing software. If your hard drive dies, you'll probably need to reinstall the software. Without those keys, you might have to buy new software. Make a record of those numbers. They're probably on your installation disk cases.

5. Do you know where all your software is located?

Find a storage place for your software installation discs. Be sure they're all there. I can't tell you how many sad stories I've heard about missing discs. It's bad enough to lose your hard drive. Having to buy a new copy of Microsoft Office would really be rubbing salt into the wound.

OK, let's see how you did. Quite simply, you failed if you answered "No" to any question. Better get those answers now, before it's too late.

What Happened to the Back Button?

Ever visit a Web site, and find that the browser's Back button was disabled? Some Web sites disable your back button to keep you on their site. If this happens, right click on the back button. You'll see a list of pages that you have visited. Click something on that list to move back. This works for the Forward button, too.

From the March 2003 issue of The Umbrella Online*, the journal of the associated PC users groups of southeastern Virginia.*

Computer Law:

Uncommonly Creative Legal Website
by Bill Wood
AlamoPC Organization, Inc.

I admit it, we lawyers tend to be resistant to change. We rely on the past. We are trained to compare the present to the past. In our profession we provide advice to clients based upon reported court decisions which deal with similar fact situations. There is even a Latin name for all of this. "Stare decisis" is the fancy legal term for our system that builds upon the results of previous cases.

That is why it is so refreshing when I see a truly innovative use of the Web by a foundation associated with the Stanford Law School and one of its prominent professors, Larry Lessig. What makes the Creative Commons Website so different? There are several unique aspects. Surf to creativecommons and follow along. Now, some of you may recognize his name as the lawyer that argued the Eldridge v. Ashcroft case before the US Supreme Court. That is the case that is challenging the Fairness in Music Licensing Act of 1998, which is better known as the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act. That law

extended the term of existing copyright protections by about twenty years. A chief point of contest is that Congress went beyond the intent of the drafters of the Constitution. The first copyright protections only lasted for fourteen years and provided for the possibility of one extension for another fourteen years. By comparison, after adoption of the most recent extension, a copyright may easily last for the remainder of the author's life plus seventy years.

First, its whole reason for being is to promote the availability of information on the Internet. It encourages authors and artists to make their material available for licensing. No big deal you say. Did I mention that it provides a way to draft your own license for free? Did you notice that it also encourages you to make the material available for free?

The following is taken from a statement of its mission.

Our aim is not only to increase the sum of raw source material online, but also to make access to that material cheaper and easier. To this end, we have also developed metadata that can be used to associate creative works with their public domain or license status in a machine- readable way. We hope this will enable people to use . . . our search application and other online applications to find, for example, photographs that are free to use provided that the original photographer is credited, or songs that may be copied, distributed, or sampled with no restrictions whatsoever. We hope that the ease of use fostered by machine-readable licenses will further reduce barriers to creativity.

By answering three simple questions the user is presented with a pretty good license that allows use of your work on certain terms you set. The three variables are: does it require the user to give you attribution, can they make commercial use of your work and can they modify it?

I tested it and then reviewed a five page license that combined the choices I entered. Frankly, I only have one major criticism and it is similar to one I included when I did a review of Quicken's Family Lawyer program many months ago. The program and the resulting license ought to include a clear warning that the user should consult with a lawyer experienced in the area of practice if the user either does not understand the document in any way or if they have any

doubt about its appropriateness for the user's needs.

Other than that one technical criticism, I found the license to be complete and very professional. It is readable and should be easily understood by anyone with an interest in this area.

Creative Commons feels the 'feel free to make derivative works based upon my work' concept is rooted in the actual words of our Constitution. That document does not directly mention making money from protected works but rather justifies copyright protections as necessary, to promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries. (Article I, Section 8, Clause 8 of the US Constitution.)

The thrust of Prof. Lessig's argument before the Supreme Court was that Congress has added so much time to the copyrights that it has gone past what the founders meant when they wrote, "for a limited time." Many observers were amazed when the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case because Lessig's theory was not well received in the lower courts. However, the Supreme Court seemed much more receptive during oral arguments and it will be very interesting to read its opinion, which is expected sometime before this Court term expires in June.

While Creative Commons is working to make more information freely available on-line, other efforts are continuing to make sure we don't copy and share their protected works. In coming months we will examine the arguments and results of several recent cases that attempt to prosecute persons who bypass anti-copying measures.

From the Jan. 2003 issue of PC Alamode, *journal of the Alamo PC Organization, Inc. of San Antonio, TX.*

The Truth About Mail-in Rebates
by Roger A. Poverny
TUGNET

Mail-in rebates are a bonanza for retail corner stores. They can advertise a very low sales price (or even a free price, after mail-in rebates). and then charge buyers of these so-called bargains a higher-than-normal sales price. It brings in the customers who are looking for good deals, and who may purchase other

items while they are in the store. It means higher sales figures for the retailer since these mail-in rebates are underwritten by the manufacturers. and they cost the retailers nothing. It also creates a cadre of unhappy customers.

Why? Consider this: according to *The Wall Street Journal*, up to 95% of people forget to claim the rebate. They end up paying more for the product then they would have without a rebate. For those who make the claim, there are a variety of reasons why the claims go unpaid. Some of these reasons are detailed below.

The premise: manufacturers don't want to rebate money to you, so they put a number of obstacles in your way. Sometimes the rebate forms are hidden in the store or you have to ask the cashier for a copy. The rebate form lists the submittal requirements in great complicated detail so that a simple non-compliance error on your part will void your claim. You must include a copy of your purchase receipt (sometimes with the purchased item circled or underlined) along with the original UPC code from the package. Be careful here, as some packages have multiple UPC codes with different numbers. Then you must mail the completed rebate form, with inclusions, to a specified address (usually a fulfillment house hired to handle the rebate). There is always a window of opportunity: i.e. an "offer expiration date" and a "postmark before" date. Most mail-in forms tell you to expect your rebate in eight to ten weeks.

Very seldom will a rebate check arrive by the promised waiting period: you are forced to call their 800 number (although some don't have a toll-free number) to find out what the holdup is. The manufacturer is counting on you to forget that a rebate promise date has passed. If you do remember to call them, this is generally when the excuses start. Typical excuses are: "We didn't receive your UPC code or register receipt," "We never received your letter," "You didn't complete your rebate form properly." "The offer has expired ... or is no longer funded by the manufacturer." The fulfillment houses are experts at not paying, and, as a matter of fact, are hired by some manufacturers just because they are so tough. Many times you will get a postcard, not a letter, saying you were denied a rebate. Postcards are easy to lose or throw away in the trash, which is why many rebate checks are mailed in the form of a postcard. They don't even look like checks! Most people will stop trying once they have been rejected. The manufacturers count on

this. At a FRY's the other day a customer relations representative pointed at two 4-drawer filing cabinets and said they were full of customer complaints about rebates. That's eight drawers of unhappy customers, and they represent only that five percent (according to *The Wall Street Journal)* who actually sent in their rebate forms. After all is said and done, probably 2% of the customers receive a rebate check.

Manufacturers and retailers make more money from us when the items they are selling have mail-in rebates, so it doesn't seem likely that the practice will end any time soon. The number of items using rebates appears to be rising exponentially, and the customer is the loser. It is just plain unfair. How can we fight back?

There are two ways to fight back: (1) Politically, through our Legislatures, Better Business Bureaus, Federal Trade Commission, Retail Store Managers, etc. We can write letters or call and complain; (2) The second method is to make it so costly for the manufacturers to offer these rebates that they will abandon the practice. We can do this by making sure we get every one of the offered rebates. If you follow the directions outlined below, you will get every one.

1. Make sure you have the rebate form before you leave the store. Check the Form to be sure you fall within the offering's dates. Be sure to ask the cashier for a second copy of the purchase receipt.

2. As soon as you get home, remove the UPC code from the container or wrapping before you throw the packaging away. If you intend to try out the product first to make sure you want to keep it, and don't want to remove the UPC code yet in case you want to return it, see #7 below.

3. Read the form carefully so that you will comply exactly with their requirements. Read it a second time before you fill it in. Don't forget to circle or underline the item on the receipt if required to do so.

4. Make copies of every thing you send, including the UPC code. This is where most people falter since they don't have copy machines. They set it aside to take to work or to a copy store and forget about it. But, most of us have scanners! Use them to make your copies. Even most fax machines will work.

5. Staple together all the pieces: receipt, UPC code, rebate form. Then they can't say they were not with your submittal, or must have fallen out of the envelope.

6. Mark the mailing date on your copy. Also mark the date when the waiting period ends, eight to ten weeks later.

7. This next step will help you to remember. Go to www.memotome.com (memo to me) and sign up for their free e-mail reminder service. Have them to send you an e-mail when the rebate cheek was promised. If you are trying out a product prior to sending in the rebate form, ask for a reminder in a couple of weeks.

8. If you haven't gotten your check after the promised time, call the telephone number listed on your copy of the rebate form. Try to talk to a live person. Tell them the waiting period has passed and insist that you be paid. Keep on insisting if you get the brush-off. Ask to speak to a supervisor. Mark the names of those you talked to, the dates, and excuses on your rebate copy. If necessary, send another copy of your submittal in case they deny receipt of all submitted items.

9. If all else fails, go to the retail store where you purchased the item. Bring your paperwork and insist that they do whatever is necessary to get you the rebate check.

Roger A. Poverny is on the Board of Directors of The Users' Group Network (TUGNET) in Granada Hills, California.

Society News

Presidents Message
by Ron Matteson

I have to eat a little crow here. In the February issue in this column, I struck out at the Microsoft activation process. Well, in spite of what I said then, I now have Windows XP, and sure enough, I activated it with Microsoft. How did this happen?

As you know, we have been advertising a Build Your Own PC Workshop for the last few months, and it was held on March 8. We had a fairly small group, but that was probably fortunate. We each had a table at Bryant & Stratton, and Jeff Leist from Microworx brought our kits at 9:00 am. We had the room until 3:00, and needed all of that time. Within a few minutes after 9:00, all the tables were full of boxes and parts, larger boxes covered the floor, packaging materials were all over, and tools were ready to go. Jeff and Paul, one of his chief computer builders at Microworx, led us through the steps of populating the motherboard with memory, installing the motherboard in the case, inserting other adapter boards, and connecting all the cables. Three RCSi members also came to help

and offer guidance- Warren Ganter, Jim McGrath, and Charlie Grover. A couple other RCSi members popped in to kibitz off and on.

The moment of truth came when we turned on the machines. Lo and behold, they came on! We then had to set up the BIOS, and insert the Windows XP CD, and set that up. Then we had to load the drivers for the various adapter boards, and set them up. Since we didn't have an Internet connection at B & S, we couldn't go much farther than that. I think most of us felt fairly fortunate that we had gotten that far.

I don't know exactly what the others did, but when I got my PC home, I had to set up my Internet connection, and see if I could get on line. The dialog boxes have changed, and I didn't fill in the boxes correctly, so I had to call AT&T in order to get that straightened out. Using my dial-up connection, I eventually succeeded in getting on line, and went to the Microsoft web site to activate my copy of Windows XP. Much to my surprise, it was very fast, easy, and painless. I just pushed the Activate Now button, and things happened so fast I didn't think it worked. However, I found a message that said my copy of Windows XP had been activated!

Next I tried to update the copy of Norton's AntiVirus that came with my software. The virus definitions on the CD were too old, however, that there were several megabytes of updates that were required. My ISP didn't like that, and it kept disconnecting me. I gave up and waited until late evening, and tried again, that time with success.

I then went back to the Microsoft website, by clicking on Windows Update. I discovered that there were 14 Critical Updates, amounting to over 20 MB. My ISP cut me off again, but the updates were in packages, and if a complete packages was received, it installed, and the next time I connected I didn't have to re-load the installed portions.

Next I bought an Office XP package at Staples, and tried to install it. When the installation program asked me for the 25-character code off the CD case, I couldn't find it. My wife is always finding things for me that I can't find, so I asked her to find it for me, but eve she couldn't find it. I went back to Staples, and sure enough, it was a manufacturing defect; the 25-character code was missing. They gave me another copy, and it installed OK.

I installed a few more things, like PhotoShop Elements 2.0, Acrobat Reader 5.0, Quicken 2003,

etc., without problems. I transferred the Quicken data from my old computer, but still have to do my address book for e-mail, FrontPage Editor, MailWasher, etc. At least I think I am over the hump.

If you are used to Windows 98, etc. Windows XP takes a little getting used to. You can convert to the "classic" (older) versions of Windows, but I thought I would try the new format for a while. There must have been a reason for them to change it, so I'll go along with them for a while. Who knows, maybe I'll like it. I guess the bottom line is that I'm stuck with Microsoft for another generation of PC's, and so far I think I'm going to like it. The new PC is six times faster at the CPU, has eight times as much storage on the hard drive, has four USB 2.0 ports which are 48 times faster than USB1.0, and all of those things help.

Treasurers Report
by Steve Staub

Balance as of 02/13/03	$833.28
Income	
Class registration	$233.00
Dues	239.00
Total	$472.00
Expenses	
St. Stephens	$75.00
Copy paper	42.28
Web	95.00
Food for Monitor assemblers	14.08
Cover paper/mailing labels	88.52
Lease folding machine	86.72
Total	$401.60
Balance as of 03/26/03	$903.68

Planning Meeting Minutes
March 18, 2003
by Larilyn E. Bauer, Secretary

The Board of the Rochester Computer Society, Inc. met Tuesday, March 18, 2003, at Sally Springett's home, 335 Wilmot Road, at 7:00 pm. In attendance were Ron Matteson (President), Arpad Kovacs (Vice President), Steve Staub (Treasurer), Bob Avery (Webmaster), Sally Springett (Monitor Editor), Dan Rothfuss and Warren Ganter (Members at Large) and Larilyn Bauer (Secretary).

Following the President's agenda, we began with old business. Last program meeting, a Tablet PC presentation was well attended, and suggestions were made for how it may have been better.

Financial status: Steve called Bookletmaker Leasing company for clarification as to how the final payment (for our ownership) would be handled, and we are still solvent. We had many guests (some new members) attended this program meeting.

Bob Avery reported the website is still being updated regularly.

Ron Matteson mentioned our April program meeting is scheduled for the Webster Library. Access our RCSI website for directions. Our members and guests should go to our website each month in case there is a change in location of our regular program meeting, and other news.

We need to find an insurance carrier for "Liability Coverage." We have been told that at some locations, we need to have this coverage. If anyone knows of such a carrier, please notify one of our board members.

The MarketPro is scheduled for April 13 and RCSI will have two tables to display and sell our cables, books and other wares.

New Users Notes
March 4, 2003
by John McMillan

After we welcomed a new member, Bill Statt described running Ad Aware 6.0 at home using a free, down loadable program called Screen Print to capture screen views that illustrated a variety of Ad Aware's functions. At the meeting he used Jasc Aftershot, an inexpensive but easy to use photo editing program, to assemble a slide show from the previously captured pictures. In this way he was able to demonstrate a number of Ad Aware's functions. Ad Aware Personal is free but there is a Pro version offers that has additional capabilities that Bill did not think were worth the price.

Both programs identify spyware, programs that report Internet browsing to interested parties. These are often cookies which are sometimes attached to a desirable program. Some programs such as Kazaa, Media Player, or Morpheus, containing tracking software, will not work if the parasite is deleted. Bill recommended quarantining spyware which compresses the file so it won't work but does not remove it from your system. Quarantined programs can be reinstalled if they effect desirable programs or if no other programs have been crippled the quarantined spyware can be deleted after several weeks.

Ad Aware personal can be downloaded from LavaSoft.de.com but Bill recommended getting it from Download.com which can be used for many software downloads and often provides user evaluations of products. Bill also commented on Web Washer, a free pop up add stopper that operates on Windows 95, 98, ME and XP, using Netscape or Internet Explorer, where other add stoppers only work on Internet Explorer. Like so many other freebies there is a paid version that offers more capability such as cookie and spam filters.

Bill has downloaded Mozilla as an Internet browser. This is the basic Netscape engine but is faster because there are fewer frills. Under preferences, Mozilla allows you to check "Do not display any unrequested boxes" which prevents pop ups from getting through, negating the need for a pop up stopper. Later in the meeting Bill checked Download.com for pop up stoppers and found Pop Up Stopper 3.1, a free program that works in Windows 98, 2000, ME and XP. This 425 kilobytes program eliminates pop ups in Internet Explorer and Netscape without adjusting proxy settings.

Our newest attendee's computer runs Windows XP Pro, and when she experienced problems, she tried to do a system restore but can't access a restore point prior to the system slowing down. Window washer is run several times a week to clean up temporary Internet files. Black Ice and Norton's Anti virus 2003 are running but there is no conflict between Norton, Black Ice and XP firewalls. It was suggested that she turn off Norton's to see if that made a difference which would indicate the problem was with the virus checker settings. Also she should be sure to update the virus definitions on Wednesdays and then run a system scan.

If that did not cure the problem, then pressing Control/ Alt/Delete simultaneously would show what programs are running. Except for Explorer and Systray, tasks could be ended, one at a time, and the system tested until the program causing the problem is isolated. Care should be taken not to press Control - Alt - Delete twice without an intervening action or the machine will restart and the process must be repeated. Windows XP contains a system monitoring program that displays charts of CPU usage that might indicate where the problem lies.

A Road Runner user mentioned getting an E-mail through Outlook Express but had problems when he wanted to switch to Microsoft Outlook which he understood Road Runner was not supporting. Gregg Wolfe said that Road Runner supports both but might be trying to simplify their system by picking the more popular Express which has fewer features and is faster than Outlook. It is possible that the user had an older version of Outlook for which support was dropped. Opening Outlook and clicking Help, would show what version he was using and he should upgrade to 5.5 or higher. Bill Statt mentioned that Road Runner has a help page to walk users through the settings needed for an E-mail client.

Another user mentioned using Hot Mail through Netscape which has far fewer security risks than Outlook Express. Bill was able to demonstrate Netscape's account setup, account name, individual name, server settings and other essentials using his laptop. Another user stated that Outlook took his addresses away and then required that he update to a later version. He had looked in the Outlook tool settings but could not find an upgrade. Bill went to the Start button, then Windows update, (Windows Update.Microsoft.com) to search for specific products. He also suggested posing a question by going to soundbytes.org and clicking on Sound Bytes Forums partway down the left side of the page. This is a free service but requires that you register a name (possibly made up); a password (definitely made up) and a profile before you can access the forums. The profile lets you request an E-mail whenever there is an answer to your question which is very handy. After logging in, you can browse any of the topics and see the answers people have received. Several New Users have used this service personally and consider it a very valuable resource.

When a user asked why he got error messages in Norton's scan, Bill thought it might be a virus that attacks the virus checker software. He suggested going to Norton's for a product called Spike that will do a quick clean of the computer if one of these types of virus is active. After more discussion it appeared that the user was running AVG 6.0 and Norton's simultaneously. Two virus checkers should never be run at the same time. A new virus called C-Nile was mentioned which reportedly attacks elder users making them forget what they are doing and how they got where ever they are.

The meeting closed when some benefits of being Rochester Computer Society members were listed. Meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of

the month beginning at 6:30 PM with "Helps Half Hour," 30 minutes of questions and answers. Then there is a short business meeting followed by a speaker and usually ending with drawings for software or other door prizes before 9:00. Membership also includes monthly mailings of the Club Newsletter, Monitor, that often contains a summary of the New Users Meeting, plus articles from other user groups around the country. Personal contacts with other people with similar interests are of inestimable value. Bill promised to bring in application blanks next month for anyone interested in joining. Everyone was invited to be with us at the next New Users session at 6:30 pm, Tuesday April 1st when the only foolish question will be the one that isn't asked. We will be meeting at the Monroe Developmental Center, 620 Westfall Road as usual.

The Lighter Side

(2003-11-22)Seattle–Microsoft Corp. today disclosed another security flaw of `critical' severity in most versions of its popular Windows operating system.

In its 66th security bulletin of the year, Microsoft urged users to download a software patch from the company's Web site. The latest flaw could allow the owner of a PC to control his own computer. It might also prevent access by a hacker to the user's hard drive. "In some ways, this is the most shocking flaw we've discovered," said Microsoft founder Bill Gates. "Without this patch, a Windows user will lose that traditional feeling that someone else is in control. It's always been a comfort to our users to know that a highly-intelligent being was out there, knowing what you're thinking, feeling, and doing. We want our Windows customers to know that even when you're all alone with your computer, you are never *really* alone."

The Great Windows Sales Tax Refund

FARGO, ND – The Windows End-Luser License Agreement states quite clearly, "The *software product* is licensed, not sold." If this is true, however, then how come computer stores charge sales tax on software purchases?

That was the question posed by the group of about 100 protestors in front of what they thought was the North Dakota state capitol building earlier this week — until they realized the state's capital is in Bismarck, not Fargo.

Fake news written by Ann Oneemuss, Unpaid Intern Reporter from the Microsoft-Bashing-Never-Gets-Old Dept.