

Has Your Web Surfing Seemed Slower?

by Ira Wilsker
Golden Triangle PC Club

Recently, I found that my Internet access seemed sluggish, with pages loading more slowly than usual. I also had some other problems, which I have not had in the past, such as errors when burning CDs, or lockups when loading a recorded CD, or viewing multimedia files. I would now also sometimes get a "blue screen of death," the infamous blue window telling me that "IEXPLORE caused an invalid page fault," which often required a reboot to clear the locked computer. Other errors that occurred were "This program has performed an illegal operation and will be shut down," "Rundll32 caused an invalid page fault in module Unknown at 0000," and other similar errors.

To try and solve the problem, I reviewed any changes I had made to my machine. I had not recently added any new hardware. Diagnostics on my Internet connection showed a typical connection speed and throughput, so that was not the problem. Scandisk showed no hard drive errors, and there was no significant disk fragmentation to hinder performance. Other than daily updates, I was using the same version antivirus as usual.

I ran an online virus scan at housecall.antivirus.com just to see if a virus or Trojan had slipped by my antivirus software between updates, and my computer was free of viruses and Trojans, either of which could have caused the problems. I updated and ran my favorite spyware checker, Spybot Search and Destroy, available for free from its website at spybot.safer-networking.de and it found a new "browser helper" called "New .Net" had somehow been installed recently. This spyware is somewhat benign, downloading and installing its updates silently in the background, while enabling access to non-standard, upper-level Internet domains. I allowed Spybot to remove the New.Net files from my computer.

Some quick online research on New.Net uncovered several interesting tidbits about this pest. Microsoft recently (June 4) posted a Knowledge Base article about New.Net, labeled KB302463, which described many of my problems exactly. Microsoft told about the problems with New.Net, and how to resolve them. The support section of another excellent spyware killer, PestPatrol, available from www.pestpatrol.com, indicates that New.Net has been known to crash Internet Explorer regularly.

About the only new software I had installed recently was the latest version of RealOne, the popular free multimedia player that I had downloaded from Real Networks, www.real.com. I had been trying to manipulate some unusual audio formats, and the new version of RealOne was listed as being capable, so I downloaded it and installed it. It was shortly after installing RealOne that I started having trouble web surfing and burning CDs. According to PestPatrol, RealOne is one of many programs that installs New.Net.

Looking up RealOne issues on the search engine Alltheweb, I found many references to problems similar to mine, and that the effective way to resolve the conflicts was to also remove RealOne from the computer. RealOne, in addition to being a comprehensive multimedia player also tries to read or write any CD inserted, as well as intercepts "calls" for other multimedia functions. According to the reports, this can cause the sluggish performance issues I encountered.

I uninstalled RealOne using Microsoft's integral uninstall function by clicking on My Computer – Control Panel – Add/Remove Programs, clicking on RealOne, and uninstalling it. Almost immediately, my performance improved to where it was prior to the installation of RealOne, and my lockups and page faults were gone.

I was now back to my original need for a full-functioned multimedia utility. I have Microsoft's Windows Media Player, but I do not use it because of some of the performance and privacy issues associated with it. The need was promptly satisfied by downloading the latest version of a small (800k), excellent, free utility discussed previously in this column, Irfan View, written by a Bosnian computer science student. Available for download at www.irfanview.com, this small program has enormous capabilities. If the optional "plug-ins" are installed, Irfan View can play or manipulate virtually any multimedia format, including images, audio, and video. Streaming media, including real player format, QuickTime, and other video formats are also supported with the available plug-ins. I recommend that Irfan View be installed, and then the Irfan file "ALL Plug-Ins" be downloaded and installed.

Now, I can play my streaming formats without the degradation in performance I had with RealOne. Irfan View is written in tight code, which utilizes fewer resources such as memory and processor time, than its larger competitors.

If you are having similar sluggish performance while surfing the net, playing or burning CDs, or using streaming media, consider removing RealOne, and using Irfan View with its plug-ins. Also scan for viruses and spyware, as I did, and run Scandisk and Defrag. While not a cure-all for performance problems, this might be an easy solution for many of the problems that "we" are having.

Happy and safe computing!

From the July 2003 issue of I/O Port, newsletter of the Tulsa Computer Society.

Software Reviews

WinCleaner One-Click!

Ultra 2002

by Bruce Cramer

Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

I've used several uninstaller programs and have until recently resorted to simply running Windows' add remove programs. This is an incomplete solution at best. There are many things to like about WinCleaner. It

is not just another un installer /Windows clean up piece of software.

One thing that I found that sets WinCleaner apart is the fact that you can run it straight from the CD. You don't have to take the time to install it and have it take up space, making another icon on your computer desktop, when you only want to do some quick cleaning/ un-installing. WinCleaner will also scan network drives for junk and unwanted files. Obviously this can be handy when you're trying to keep your network free of junk and clutter.

All you have to do is stick the CD in your computer and it asks you if you want to install WinCleaner or run it from the CD. If your speakers are turned up you'll be greeted with some soothing music — I guess some people listen to music while they are cleaning — these guys didn't miss a step.

Once the program is running you will have the option to cleanup your temporary files and Internet junk, cleanup your privacy, clean your registry, uninstall programs and even move programs to and from different drives or simply click on the One Click button — recommended for novice users. Basically the One Click button does all the other fore mentioned task with...just one click. You also have the option to undo what you've done in case you made a mistake. You have the option to go in and change the settings and tell the one click button which drives to check, whether to clean temp files, make backups of files it cleans and so forth.

Other programs, such as Norton's Clean Sweep want to be installed before you install all the stuff you want to uninstall...make sense? WinCleaner uses Windows built in uninstaller for most of it's uninstall function but as mentioned it has several other useful functions.

I found WinCleaner easy to install, if that's what you want to do since you can use the program without even installing it and easy to use. So, if you're looking to do a little cleaning in short order WinCleaner is worth taking a look at.

You can find WinCleaner Ultra One Click online or you can pick it up at Best Buy, CompUSA or other local stores that carry software for \$30.00. The makers of Win Cleaner, Business Logic Corporation, also make some other nice utilities that do various things.

System requirements are: Windows 95, 98, Me, NT 4.0, 2000, XP & XP Professional, 16 MB of Ram, 3 MB of Hard Disk Space, 16 Bit Graphics Card. Requires Internet Explorer 4.0 or higher

From the January, 2003 issue of PC Alamode Magazine. Bruce is recently retired from the Army and a regular volunteer at the Doctors In. He is A+, Network+, i-Net, certified as well as a Microsoft Certified Professional in Windows XP, and provides on-site computer services to individuals and businesses.

WinTasks 4

Professional

by Colleen P. Hart
Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

Although utilities programs are completely new to me, I thought I would share the spirit of Alamo PC in celebrating utilities this month. The application that I selected, WinTasks 4 Professional, is not only intended for managing computer resources, improving system security, and optimizing and debugging software it performs those functions quite well. After an easy installation of the program (from the CD), even a complete utilities amateur like myself was led to better understanding of the computer resources.

Various straight-forward views identifying all of the programs processes broken down by threads facilitate the monitoring of operations that I once took for granted. I could finally tell my computer in words that both he and I understood to stop doing all her other thinking and just concentrate on burning a CD. Perhaps developers and computer gurus might find more sophisticated uses for this program, but it really is a nice way for anyone to better allocate resources. It is a way to make your machine run more smoothly and faster without having to change any physical hardware components!

The program also aids in the detection of otherwise undetectable memory leaks and trojans while debugging DLL , ultimately resulting in improved security and optimized software. The interface is a bit intimidating at first glance to someone who doesn't even know what a process is and unfortunately, although their 24 hour customer support is probably really nice, I doubt many *Alamode* subscribers are too happy about making long distance calls to Sweden. However, with all the other available resources including a hard-copy of the manual that came with the software, the online FAQ list, free mailing list, and online customer support, in a couple of sessions I became very comfortable with the views and realized how logical and easy to use they were.

The screen capture shows the main window that appears when you first open up the program, identifies all of the processes with a color coded icon, its level of priority, and a human-understandable name. It gives the user details on where the program is, how much of the CPU and memory it is using and even when it started or stopped. A user can even make personal notes about his or her observations on this main screen and from here, has the option to monitor and manipulate the resources with the aid of various other sub-windows. These include a Modules window that shows all the .exe and .dll files, a Statistics window that tracks the memory use and a Logging window that keeps the user informed on what the heck has occurred on the system. Furthermore, the application can be set to run automatically upon startup or not via the Startup window, and for more sophisticated operations, WinTask has its own scripting language.

Users can easily maneuver between multiple windows, save logs and notes, and perform an endless number of functions with this application. In a few days, I was comfortable enough with the interface and went from absolutely no understanding of utilities tools to even being able to write simple scripts. One of the most helpful things this program has done for me this far is completely exterminate that annoying Gator spy-ware that I thought was gone for good from my system a long time ago. It seems like a simple procedure, but the file was really otherwise undetectable. Since this was my first shot at a program of this sort, I have nothing to compare it to. However, I can tell you that it is a relatively user-friendly program with great documentation and endless features that have transformed what I thought were hardware deficiency problems into smooth operations.

WinTasks 4 Professional can be installed on a system with the following minimum requirements: Windows 98, Windows NT, Windows 2000 or Windows XP, 10 MB free hard disk capacity, 32 MB RAM, Pentium 200 MHz.

I am running WinTasks on a system meeting these minimum requirements and running on Windows 2000 Professional. However, in a way it seems that users on a Windows 98 system would reap more benefits from this utilities tool, the reason being that newer versions of Windows already have better developed utilities. For example, Windows 2000 and XP support a total of six priority levels including below and above normal, but since earlier versions of Windows do not support these levels, WinTasks seems to hold back and support the same levels as Windows 98. It worked for me, but is this enough for you?

Although you won't find the software at your local BestBuy or CompUSA, WinTasks 4 Professional is available directly through the Leading Interactive (LI) UtilitieW Web site, for \$37.00 if you wish to download it or for \$57.00 if you wish to receive a boxed version of the program. Furthermore, an upgrade is also available for download for only \$25.00.

Leading Interactive Utilitie
Farjemansgatan 15 B, 83131
Ostersund Sweden.
Phone: +46 (0) 63-1088,30
Fax: +44 (0) 870-1.319596
E-mail: contact@liutilities.com.

From the January, 2003 issue of PC Alamo Magazine. Colleen P. Hart is a new Alamo PC member. She just graduated from the University of Texas at San Antonio with a B.B.A. in Information Systems and looks forward to returning in the spring to begin her M.S. in Information Technology.

Preventive Maintenance

Unneeded Utility Software

by Russell James
Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

There are many utility programs that are available on the Internet as Freeware or Shareware. Free-

ware means that the author of the program has made the program available free of charge, usually for non-commercial use. Shareware programs are usually made so that they will work for a specified period of time to allow you to try them out to verify whether they would be a valuable addition to your system. The author then expects you to register or pay for the program if you would like to continue using it.

Most of these programs do what you think they are supposed to do but there are a lot of programs that also are used to spy on you and your Internet habits. These are the programs that some people call spyware. One such suite of programs is Gator/Offer Companion/Trickler/GAIN. This is a program that is installed with an Active X installer when you arrive at one of the Gator related Websites. You have to allow the software to be installed by clicking on the OK button when the Active X component loads.

The Gator eWallet is a part of this bundle of downloaded software. It is advertised by the company as a program to fill in forms with no typing, remember passwords automatically, protect and encrypt your data on your computer. These programs are also used by The Gator Corporation to log the Web pages that your computer views as well as how much time is spent at those sites. Here is a part of the privacy statement and end user license agreement for Gator eWallet version 3.2.

And on top of these facts, I have found that simply uninstalling the programs with Add/Remove programs will not remove the entire residue of the program from your system. This is why I like to use a spyware utility program to scan systems to detect these and many other programs like them and allow me to remove the entire program from the systems that I am working on. Many of these programs would not be that big of a deal if they did not cause such havoc with your computer browser. Problems associated with these programs interfering with the normal operation of your computer system can add many hours of heartache to your life.

One of the programs that I use to remove spyware is called Ad-aware. It is written by a company called Lava-soft. According to the company,

Ad-aware is a free multi spyware removal utility that scans your memory, registry and hard drives for known spyware and scumware components and lets you remove them safely.

From the experience that I have had with the program, all I can say is that it certainly finds a lot of items on a lot of people's computers. Most of the systems that are experiencing error messages and lockups while browsing the Internet can have their problems corrected by cleaning their systems with this program.

Another program that I have run across is called Spybot Search & Destroy. It is written by PepiMK software. I have just recently discovered this program but I am very impressed with what I have seen so far. One feature of the program is the product info section. Here you will be able to look up the spyware programs and

read a description of the program as well as the pertinent information from the company's privacy statement. It is going to be a real eye opener for many of the programs that are being installed on a lot of computers.

There are a lot of free programs available on the Web, some of them good and some of them bad. Gator is just an example of the many spyware programs that are out there to keep track of you. The software company is not doing anything illegal. If you don't have a problem with this type of activity and you feel you will benefit from using their program, then you should use it. When the programs that are installed start to cause the errors that I have seen on many systems, go download one of these removal utilities and use it. You will definitely see an improvement in your system afterwards.

Reprinted from the Jan 2003 issue of the PC Alamode Magazine. Russell James is Operations Manager at BJ Associates of San Antonio. They are an authorized service center for IBM and Toshiba systems. They are the laptop specialist and also handle system builds and parts for desktops.

Google

The Little Engine That Could

by Mike Kaltschnee
Danbury Area Computer Society

Occasionally you reach a point where you mistakenly assume everyone knows about something, and by making this assumption you deprive the person you're dealing with of a really neat thing. In this case, it's Google (www.Google.com).

If you aren't using Google for your searches, start immediately. In case you already are, keep reading — you might find out some interesting (or obscure) things about the #1 search tool on the Web.

I was lucky enough to be there early in the evolution of the Web. Not quite there for Mosaic, but long before my Mom asked me to

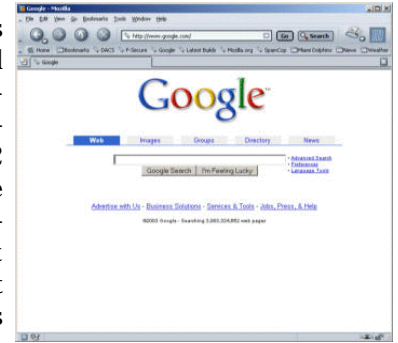
get her to Home and Garden TV's Web site (www.hgtv.com). Back in the old days we used to use Yahoo and Altavista, Excite and Lycos to find stuff online. I still use Yahoo, primarily because my DSL account includes free disk space on Yahoo, but also for maps, people searches, and other specialty searches. However, a relatively new company, Google, does 95% of my online searching.

Two college friends founded Google, like Yahoo, HP, Apple, and other great companies. They even spent time in a garage, a sign of great companies like HP and Apple (I'm seeing a pattern here). Unlike most privately held Internet companies, they are profitable. They make money by licensing their search technology and, in the opposite direction Web advertising is running, in small, almost unnoticeable ads.

Google is great because it returns sites extremely relevant to your search. If you've never used Google before, try it now. They're so confident in the results they even put an "I'm feeling lucky button" on the main page.

Google returns better results than any other search engine because of the simple genius of the engine. They developed "PageRank" technology, which bases the responses on a number of things, but most importantly on the number of sites that point to a site. They figured a site would be the best-based depending on how many people linked to it. Since this basic premise, they've had to keep evolving it to prevent cheaters and improve results.

The speed and power behind Google comes from 10,000 Linux-based computers that work together and provide answers in less than 0.2 seconds. Think about the incredible task of creating a system that searches 3 billion text documents and returns answers in less than a second.



Google has crept into our language. It's now popular to "Google" someone. You can actually find amazing information about someone by searching for them at Google. Sites have sprung up with games using the Google engine:

www.Googlewhack.com – Find two words that return one response from Google (squirreling dervishes or panfish interrogation).

Google Smackdown (www.onfocus.com/googlesmack/down.asp) – Compare the number of results between two search terms (Bush vs. Osama is 14.3 million to 1.3 million ? Bush wins).

www.Googlism.com – Find out what Google thinks of you.

Google has spawned a book "Hacking Google," published by O'Reilly & Associates (352 pages!), and numerous Web sites on using, programming, and improving your results. The risk of trying to trick Google could get your site banned for life, so be careful if you're trying to increase your results.

Google is so successful that Yahoo, an early supporter and customer of Google, has announced that they are creating a better search engine than Google. This is a parable about watching your enemies, but watching your business partners more closely.

Google releases new and mostly experimental search tools in Google Labs. This is where you can try out experimental searches, such as the Google Viewer, which returns your search results in a series of scrolling Web pages. A product is released from Google Labs when they figure out how to make money from it.

Google just bought Pyra Labs, creators of Blogger.com. This is an interesting purchase — a logical extension of Google's attempt to create an index of the entire Web. Blogs are the latest source of news and information,

and adding the interesting world of Blogs to Google will only make our search attempts more complete.

Google has even become my newspaper. Check out news.Google.com. A beta product, it searches 4,500 new services and creates a unique perspective on the news. By keeping track of the frequency of stories, it can post the most relevant news automatically (no human editors). You have to see this to believe it.

I have nothing but admiration for this company that has focused on one task and done it better than anyone before them.

By the way, in case you were wondering, a googol is the mathematical term for the number 1 followed by 100 zeros (source: Google.com).

From the July 2003 edition of the Danbury (CT) Area Computer Society newsletter dacs.doc electric. Mike is a DACS member who can't remember how many nibbles in a byte. You can tell him: miked@demorgan.com.

Audible Books

by Harry Skevington

Hilton Head Island Computer Club

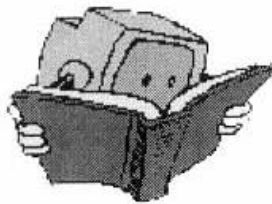
While in Las Vegas at the CES show earlier this year I received a press invitation for a demonstration and a free copy of the Audible Otis MP3 player, an Audible book product. How could I not go? Free is a word that warms my heart. As I walked the aisles looking for the booth number I moved far away from the giant booths and then through the big ones and on down to the back of the South hall.

Holding the press release in my hand I looked at a row of small company booths no more than eight by eight feet each. I walked by their booth the first time. I am glad I went back. Audible had a small presence but a very large product with much to recommend it.

If you travel, exercise, or just want to listen to a book while lying on the beach, Audible has a package for you. Not only books to listen to but magazines and other periodicals as well.

How does it work? Just go to Audible.com and buy the books you want at an average of 35 percent off list price. You can also subscribe to one of Audible's monthly audio plans. Add a free Audible Otis MP3 player to the plan so you can listen while away from your computer. These annual subscription plans can save you as much as 80 percent off the retail cost of an audio product. The basic 12 month subscription, at 14.96 per month, gives you one audiobook per month and the free Otis MF3 player. Another five bucks per month will allow you to get a second book every month.

My test membership included the Otis MP3 player and a \$100.00 credit for book or periodical purchases. I was in heaven. I brought the player home and jumped on the Internet to Audible.com, downloaded their software and my first book. It played on my computer just fine. I had a little problem with the Otis player so they sent me a new one. It worked perfectly. The Otis has an internal 64 MB memory. As is it can hold up to 17 hours of audio



products. Additional memory can be purchased almost anywhere. Adding memory allows you to pack more books to go, so to speak. The Otis is very compact. Available accessories include a

DC adaptor that plugs into the car lighter as well as a cassette adaptor for playing books over your car stereo cassette system. They make listening while traveling easy. The alternative of using earphones while driving is not a great idea,

I find listening to a book sitting at my computer to be a little boring. Many of the books can be burned to CDs. That is what works best for me. The cost of CDs is so low (about 10 cents each when on special) that I just burn the entire book to CDs. I can then listen in the car using the built-in CD player. A 5 hour book requires 4 to 5 CDs. If I complete the trip without finishing the book bring it into the house and play the rest on a CD player. With Audible.com's low pricing doing this is still cheaper than buying the book new on CD's or on cassettes elsewhere.

Audible.com keeps your entire library up to date online. Your purchases are listed and always available for playing or downloading. It is even possible to listen using the streaming audio function of the Internet.

What you need: A Pentium 200 MHz or higher (or compatible), Windows (*, ME, 2000, or XP, Audio card and speakers for your computer, 32 meg of ram, a VGA graphics card, 25 megabytes of hard drive space to hold the software, a 56 KBPS modem but a high speed broadband connection is better, and Internet with e-mail access. Audible books are now usable on Mac products also.

To use CD burning you will need a CD recorder and another 25 Meg of hard drive space to hold the book while copying it to CDs.

For mobile usage other than the Otis player from Audible.com you can use Apple I pads, Pocket PCs, Palm Handhelds, or compatible devices.

What else?

There are rules about subscriptions you should read before going that route. Agreeing to take the Otis MP3 player from them under their free offer commits you to finishing the full 12 month subscription. This seems only fair. Many people may wish to only go to their site and buy a book or two when they need one. This will help them get familiar with Audible. Frequent travelers will love the subscriptions. Just think of carrying the little Otis on a plane, plugging it in and hearing the latest best seller instead of the kids six rows behind you. An avid reader may have read many of the selections on the list. They do add a number of new ones each month. Not all new books are available early.

Quoting Audible: "Buy a book from Audible and it is yours forever." It works that way for me. Go to <http://www.audible.com> for more details.

From the July/August 2003 Issue of *Island Computing*, the newsletter of the Hilton Head Island Computer Club.

Media Notes

by Bill Pettitt

Looking for Your Windows Product Key?

The product key is a 25-character alphanumeric code that can be found on the packaging material provided with Windows XP. It is converted to a Product ID by Microsoft in the activation process. You can't activate without it.

I recently was asked how a computer owner could get that number if the packaging material is lost. He wanted an OEM (original equipment manufacturer) number. If the computer is running, you can find it with a couple programs: Magical Jelly Bean Keyfinder v1.41 and ViewKeyXP. Check for viruses before you use them. They are at, respectively:

<http://www.magicaljellybean.com/keyfinder.shtml>

http://www.webtree.ca/windowsxp/tips_fixes.htm

You can use Belarc Advisor. It lists the Product Key and the Product ID for Windows 98 and ME. That program also is free at:

http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html

There's an easy way to avoid losing the keys. Write them down. Keep them in a safe place. If you ever need them, you'll be glad you did.

Are You Up-to-date on Your Security Fixes?

It's not easy to stay current with Microsoft's security updates. Two or three alerts are issued weekly. It's good that they take it so seriously. But customers are likely to be confused. The company has a free program to remove some of the confusion. Called the Microsoft Baseline Security Analyzer, it checks your system for vulnerabilities. It is available for Windows XP, but not ME or 98.

In addition to Windows, it checks Office 2000 and 2002, Internet Explorer and Outlook Express. It gives you a readout of flaws it finds, and recommends corrective action. The analyzer is available at:

<http://www.microsoft.com/technet/security/tools/Tools/MBSAhome.asp>

The Password Prompt in Windows 98 Is

Mighty Aggravating

If you set up your computer to require your password, you may regret that. But getting rid of that prompt in Windows 98 can be difficult. That is, it's difficult if you don't have Windows PowerToys. That's a free download from Microsoft. PowerToys installs in Control Panel under the name Tweak UI. Double-click it and select the Logon tab. Check "Logon automatically at system start-up."

You can find Windows PowerToys for XP at: <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/pro/downloads/powertoys.asp> and for other versions of Windows at: <http://search.microsoft.com/default.asp?IntCat=0&Boolean=ALL&Nq=>

[new&qu=Powertoys&finish=Go&ig=1&siteid=us/products/windows/windowsxp](http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsxp/new&qu=Powertoys&finish=Go&ig=1&siteid=us/products/windows/windowsxp)

Microsoft Feeling Office Heat?

Microsoft's decision to cut retail prices for some versions of its Office software is more a reaction to internal pressures than to outside competition. The software giant announced last month that it would trim the price of Office XP Standard and Office XP Professional by about 15 percent, with steeper cuts for standalone versions of the applications included in those packages — Word, Excel and so on.

Microsoft executives said the cuts reflect the company's commitment to serve consumer needs, but industry analysts saw more complex forces at work, most the result of Microsoft's own actions.

Chief among them are the software giant's release last year of a scholastic version of Office XP for \$149 — at the time more than \$300 below the price of the standard version of Office XP. The version for schools has been a hit with consumers, accounting for the vast bulk of retail Office XP sales over the past year, with Microsoft and retailers making little apparent effort to enforce licensing restrictions that limit sales to educators and students.

Paul DeGroot, an analyst with researcher Directions on Microsoft, said the scholastic version was a success in terms of expanding the market for Office XP.

"It's demonstrated (that) consumers can be interested in a full-bore Office suite if they have the option," DeGroot said. "It's basically shown Microsoft that they've been leaving a lot of money on the table."

But prices for business customers haven't changed, creating, DeGroot said, a disparity that the company has found increasingly difficult to justify.

"I think they've kind of put themselves in a bind with the student-teacher edition," DeGroot said. "You look at that and think that apparently Microsoft can make money on a bundle like this at less than \$200 — why would I pay them twice as much for the same thing?"

The new retail prices trim the gap for some buyers but leave out most businesses, which buy their software through volume licensing agreements. Microsoft announced changes in its controversial licensing terms earlier this week, but those are unlikely to go far enough to persuade business customers, many of whom have stuck with earlier versions of Office, DeGroot said. The upshot is that Microsoft may have to institute price cuts for volume licensing when it introduces the next version of Office, Office 2003, later this year.

"They're looking at the retail product being available at a far lower price than what they charge their biggest customers," DeGroot said. "That's upside down from the way it normally works in the business world. If you walk into a store and buy a thousand chairs, you usually expect to get a better price than the guy who comes in and buys one. I think that's an ongoing dilemma for Microsoft."

Microsoft has also found that it's getting harder and harder to convince consumers and businesses that they need to upgrade their software, said Toni Duboise, an analyst for research firm ARS. Changes in the last few versions of Office have been incremental, and most folks already have all the word processing capability they need.

"It's no secret that the advantages of upgrading operating systems or application software has diminished quite significantly over the last few years," Duboise said. "If you look back over history, there were great advantages from one release to another. You just don't get that anymore. You just don't get the bang for your buck switching from 2000 to XP."

From Push to Pull?

Michael Gartenberg, research director at Jupiter Research, sees the company trying to address that problem in Office 2003. The package, he said, will include dramatically expanded XML (Extensible Markup Language) support that should make it a more compelling upgrade for businesses.

"They're taking a much better approach in (Office) 2003, providing a case for the added benefits and gains from working in XML," Gartenberg said. "They realize the biggest competition Microsoft faces for 2003 is Office XP and Office 2000."

Gartenberg added that the XML reinvention of Office may be an encouraging sign of Microsoft emphasizing innovation over hardball business tactics.

"There have always been two approaches Microsoft has had in terms of upgrades," Gartenberg said. "One is to try to pull people in with feature upgrades and great new stuff. The other is to push them by doing something like saying, 'We're going to change the file format and force you to switch.' More and more, Microsoft wants to gently nudge people into upgrades."

Duboise said plunging prices for PC hardware have also prompted people to re-evaluate their ideas about how much software is worth.

"If you're paying \$800 for a machine ... paying half (that) for a software application is a hard sell," Duboise said, noting that PC makers typically count on major software upgrades to boost sales of new machines. "I think maybe there's been some industry pressure on Microsoft to bring their products more in-line with trends in hardware prices."

As far as outside competition, analysts discounted the effects of gains made last year by Canadian software maker Corel, which signed deals with a number of PC makers to bundle its WordPerfect software on low-end PCs. Duboise said Microsoft can obviously cut whatever kind of deal is necessary if it decides it needs to win back PC makers, as evidenced by Gateway's recent decision to return to Microsoft Works as the standard productivity software it ships on new PCs.

Recent gains by OpenOffice, the free open-source office suite hatched by Sun Microsystems, are more interesting, said Gartenberg, but they pose no immediate threat to Microsoft.

"I think you have lots of folks that are looking at OpenOffice ... but there are very few organizations that could easily pull (Microsoft) Office out of their environment," Gartenberg said. "I think the potential threat for Microsoft is more a question of people trying to use OpenOffice as a leverage point when they're negotiating license renewals."

Some Microsoft customers are taking action, though. This week, the government of Munich, Germany, said it was planning to switch 14,000 PCs from Microsoft Office to OpenOffice as part of a larger move to open source and the Linux operating system.

NY Times Tacks Fee to News Alerts

The New York Times said it has begun charging a \$19.95 yearly subscription fee for its e-mail news alerts. The service allows people to receive news headlines and briefs sorted by topics, bylines and tickers. Subscribers can receive up to 10 alerts and have access to the stories for 90 days instead of the standard one week.

The *Times*'s Web site also charges additional fees for its crossword puzzle and for archived stories. A company representative said the site will continue to be primarily a free, advertising-supported site but layered with paid services in other areas. *The Times*' 500,000 news alerts users will have two weeks to begin paying for the service.

Nero All-in-One Authoring Updated

Ahead packs CD, DVD burning, data backup, and more into Nero 6.0 Ultra Edition

Ahead Software is unveiling Nero 6.0 Ultra Edition, a suite of updated CD and DVD recording tools that includes such features as a video editor, a full backup program, and a software DVD player. The package, announced at CeBIT America here in June, is scheduled for release July 18.

Ahead designed the new package as a one-stop shop for optical disc recording, says Udo Eberlein, Ahead's president. Unlike some companies that buy up other software makers to incorporate the features of existing products into theirs, Ahead creates its own programs — a more effective approach than adding tools piecemeal, he says. "All of the encoders were done in-house — that's a big deal."

Nero 6.0 will be available both online and in stores. The retail version will cost \$99, the downloadable version \$70, and an upgrade version for owners of 5.0 and later versions will cost \$50. Eberlein expects many drive vendors to ship trimmed-down versions of Nero with their products, too.

New Authoring, Editing Tools

Ahead designed Nero 6 to be easy to run by either a novice or an experienced user, Eberlein says. The product's StartSmart application helps make it easy to access the program's numerous tools, and the Nero Express interface makes it easy to operate them.

Chief among the new tools is NeroVision Express 2, an authoring tool for video CD, super-video CD, and DVD. It offers easy-to-use video editing features, Eberlein says.

Another new feature, built by Ahead engineers, is Nero ShowTime — a DVD player that lets you view your own creations as well as standard DVDs. “You no longer need a separate player like Intervideo’s WinDVD,” he says.

Ahead also moves into backup software by including the new Nero BackItUp. The program offers full, incremental, update, and differential control of data backup, he says. Plus, you can use it to span your backups onto multiple CDs or DVDs.

Other major features include InCD 4, which lets you drag and drop and save files within an application, and Wave Editor 2.0 and Nero Soundtrax, used for multitrack audio editing. Of course, the package includes Nero Burning ROM 6, which handles burning of CDs and DVDs.

Ahead has also created its own standard for audio/video compression, called Nero Digital.

Limited MP3 Encoding

While Nero 6 supports a wide range of audio and video encoding standards, it’s notable that out of the box the software provides the capability to rip and encode only 30 CD album tracks into MP3s. After that, users must purchase a \$15 plug-in through Ahead’s Web site to encode additional MP3s.

Ahead’s decision to limit the number of MP3 encodings to 30 is sure to irritate some users, but company executives say they expect MP3 encoding to be used less frequently in the future. They consider it inferior in quality to other audio encoding standards.

“MP3 is not the future,” Eberlein says. Newer, better formats such as Advanced Audio Coding will soon overtake MP3’s popularity, he says. Nero 6 supports unlimited ACC encoding.

Besides, providing unlimited MP3 encoding would drive up the price of the package, says John Tafoya, Ahead vice president of business development. “The burden to include MP3 is too high,” he says, referring to licensing fees companies must pay to include MP3 encoding.

Tafoya notes that often when software makers offer unlimited MP3 encoding, it is because the company has a less expensive MP3 licensing deal. “Musicmatch has a good relationship with the MP3 guys. If we had the same relationship, we could add that,” he says.

Eberlein is confident the MP3 limit won’t bother Nero 6 buyers.

“We have all of this other stuff [competing products] don’t have,” he says. He says that buying separate software packages to match Nero 6’s features would cost more than \$200.

Retiring Tapes & Records FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

Q. I’ve got a bunch of tapes and records that I’d like to put on CD. I have heard that this can be done. Can you walk me through the process?

A. The first thing that you will need is a CD-RW drive, also known as a CD burner. If you don’t have one, you

can get a good external burner for less than \$100. You’ll pay half that if you get an internal burner, but you’ll have to install it yourself or pay someone to do it.

You also need audio in your computer — either a sound card or built-in audio. Almost all computers have audio, but if yours does not, you’ll have to buy a sound card and install it.

To start the process, connect your tape or record player to your audio’s line-in terminal with a 1/8-inch mini jack. You can buy one of these for a few bucks at your local Radio Shack or electronics store.

Next, you’ll need software to convert the analog music (your tape or record) to digital form. If you are using Windows, it has a built-in program called Sound Recorder that will do the job. To open Sound Recorder: Click Start>>All Programs>>Accessories >>Entertainment>>Sound Recorder.

Click the red record button and start the music. After the first song has played, stop Sound Recorder and pause your cassette/record. In Sound Recorder, click File>>Save. Name the file, ensuring that “Save as type” is set to “Sounds *.wav”

Repeat until all songs are recorded.

Since there are silent spots and probably some pops and hisses, you’ll want to clean up and edit the wav files. Again, there are programs made just for this task.

Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) is available for all Windows versions and if you have Windows 98/ME, there is a free version of Pro Tools (<http://www.digidesign.com>).

Once you have cleaned up all of your files, they’re ready to burn to CD. Use whatever software that came with your CD burner.

Using a Mac? It doesn’t have native software to import and digitize analog sound. But you can use Roxio Toast 5 Titanium, which is \$89.95 as a download. It’s available at: <http://www.roxio.com>

In-flight E-mail Takes off on United

United Airlines says it will be the first commercial carrier to offer two-way e-mail capability on all of its domestic flights.

The airline carrier and Verizon Airfone announced that travelers will be able to access e-mail and instant-messaging service by plugging their laptops into Verizon Airfone handset jacks. The service will cost \$15.98 per flight, plus 10 cents per kilobyte for every data packet that’s more than 2 kilobytes — the equivalent of two pages of typing. (Certainly not giving it away are they?)

The move is part of the struggling airline’s overall effort to broaden its revenue base. United parent company UAL, which was hurt by a dramatic drop in travel demand after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection last December.

United will be joining the efforts of Lufthansa, British Airways, Japan Airlines and Scandinavian Airlines System, which are testing or have already installed

systems using high-speed, two-way e-mail provider Connexion by Boeing.

United's new two-way e-mail service expands its JetConnect service, introduced last December to offer one-way text messaging, instant messaging, and information listings such as news and sports scores. That service costs \$5.99 per flight.

"The expansion of our JetConnect offering marks our continued emphasis on enhancing the customer experience through products and services that are useful and affordable," John Tague, a United executive vice president, said in a statement.

JetConnect is available on United's 767 airplanes and has driven a threefold increase in the use of phones on those planes compared with on United planes that do not offer the service, according to the airline.

United expects its two-way e-mail service to be available on all its domestic flights by the end of the year. Verizon Airfone is using Tenzing Communications as its e-mail service provider. Passengers will need to use POP3, Microsoft Outlook, or Lotus Notes e-mail clients on their laptops. Additional Internet service providers will be added in the coming months.

The Limitations of Linux

There have been so many glowing stories on the use of Linux that one might come away with the impression that Linux is an elixir that solves myriad business problems, and that it is always cheaper than alternatives. But like a lot of technologies before it, Linux has, to some degree, been overhyped.

There is no question that companies can sometimes cut costs and increase productivity by using Linux systems instead of Unix or Microsoft Windows. But there are costs and technical limitations associated with Linux that don't typically make headlines.

Customers say these include a lack of mature development tools, too many Linux variants, acquisition costs for more sophisticated versions of the software and lack of applications for small and medium-sized businesses.

Master Nursery Garden Center, a \$500 million gardening cooperative, has been using Linux for several years and is satisfied with its cost and performance. Yet Michael Baeta, director of technology communications, concedes that there is "not a lot of depth" in some areas. "Figuring out stuff...like production, low-end desktop publishing or using a consumer-oriented database will take some outside consulting," he says. "You run into problems when you try to do something that it's not designed to do."

That's partly because, at this point, Linux lags Windows in terms of integration with hardware and software. That's changing—Oracle, Dell Computer, IBM, Veritas Software and others are making inroads—but it takes time to test for every permutation and make sure everything works well together.

What about Cost?

Ask anyone to name the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the word "Linux," and most likely what

he'll say is "free." While less complex versions of Linux are often free, enterprise-class variants are more costly.

Tom Fisher, assistant vice president at Guide One Insurance, was stung by the \$10,000 price tag of the mainframe version of Linux, distributed by SuSe. "IBM was preaching that Linux was free," says Fisher. "But it's not free on the mainframe. That was a big surprise." Still, he says he avoids support fees, which can run in the tens of thousands of dollars annually, by leveraging the worldwide network of Linux developers on the Web.

Most companies measure cost not by the initial one-time purchase of hardware or software, but by what it costs over a period of years, or the total cost of ownership.

"Linux is not free when you count maintenance and support," says Aaron Barnham, vice president of operations at TMP Technologies, a unit of Monster Worldwide, which runs career Web site Monster.com. "Every company, product and Web site is different. With tech budgets tight, everybody needs to look at their true cost of ownership and determine what is the right fit."

Barnham explained that the cost of swapping out Windows or Unix servers, retraining and maintenance might wipe out whatever initial cost savings Linux provides. That said, "If Microsoft keeps raising software prices, it will change our total cost-of-ownership numbers and that would force us to reconsider."

Last year, Microsoft sponsored a study by International Data Corp. that found Windows systems to be cheaper than Linux over a five-year period. The study looked at five common business uses and concluded that Windows is less expensive in four of five instances. IDC pointed out, however, that Linux developers and supporters are quickly closing the price gap. Packaged Linux software will increasingly be built into server hardware, reducing the need for extra development. Further, the report said, "system management tools are emerging and can be expected to expand rapidly," thus reducing the total cost of Linux servers.

For smaller customers, Linux might not be cost effective. That's because there aren't as many Linux applications available for small businesses as for larger ones, and also because small customers generally don't have the resources to do much custom development.

"I'm not a fan of Linux at all [because] there wasn't a lot of off-the-shelf software," says Jalem Getz, president of Buyseasons, a \$10 million costume e-tailer that dumped its open-source Web servers for Windows in 2000. "We had to build everything from scratch and we didn't have the budget for that."

Getz says there were technical problems with Microsoft's Commerce Server products but that the company made good by giving Buyseasons four free weeks of development time with Microsoft engineers.

John Groenveld, associate research engineer at Pennsylvania State Applied Research Lab, says he is "no fan of Microsoft" but is distressed by the fact that there isn't a single standard for Linux. There are many compa-

nies, including Red Hat and SuSe, producing their own versions. "Each has [its] own peculiarities," Groenveld says. "What if you choose one that doesn't succeed" in the marketplace?

Most experts agree that there will be a shakeout amongst Linux distributors simply because the market, however large, will not sustain all the players.

So, in the end, this is what we know: Linux is here to stay; it will get better; and sometimes it's cheaper than alternatives, but it's not right for every application. We know the very same about Windows.



From The DealsGuy

by Bob Click

Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

Alas, It's Another Goodbye From a Great User Group Supporter

I was about to release the August column to my editors when I received Bonnie Mitchell's e-mail with the sad news that Casady & Greene is closing their doors after 19 years in business. Bonnie, their users group coordinator, sent out her sad goodbye to all of us who are users group contacts. While we were only connected with C & G for eight years, many of you have met Bonnie at APCUG or regional events across the country. She was always ready to help with review products and prizes for drawings. C & G supported us when the expense of it might have been questionable, but they were there when we needed them. This recession is certainly taking its toll in the business community, and in the process, the user group community is losing some great friends along the way. Thanks for everything Bonnie, and good luck in any new endeavors.

Eliminating The Competition

I read that Palm has declared its intention to purchase Handspring and they will do business under a new name, but with two different units; one for handhelds, and the other for "so called" smart phones. Since Palm is not an APCUG sponsor, it looks like Handspring will be gone too. According to Value Line, Handspring's liquidity was deteriorating and revenues were significantly below last year's levels. Sales for both have been declining so perhaps it's time.

Ink Jet Deal Is Jetting Back Again

I don't often repeat a deal, but this one was very popular. Susie McLean of Inksell.com agreed to repeat the original deal offered last year and extend it until the end of this year (2003). The differences are; the expiration date, the coupon code, and free shipping on orders over \$49.00 (an improvement). I am repeating it below with the changes.

"InkSell.com is a discount printing Supply Company that specializes in cartridges for all makes of ink jet and laser printers, solid ink printers, copiers, and fax machines. We sell brand names, new compatible cartridges (for most brands), and remanufactured cartridges and refill kits. Our compatible cartridge quality is certified to match that of the manufacturer and our prices are up to 70 and 80% less. We would be happy to offer Deals-

Guy readers a 10% discount on purchases at our online store.

"A discount coupon code will be valid through December 31, 2003. To redeem the 10% discount, (not valid with any other discount or offer), simply visit our site, [<http://www.inksell.com>], place your order and continue to 'check out' where there will be a blank to enter the discount coupon code (DealsGuy2003). The discount will be automatically calculated. Should anyone have questions or need assistance, phone customer service at 1-800-255-0483, or send e-mail to [help@inksell.com]. Don't forget the free shipping on orders over \$49.00."

Its Not Free This Time,

But Its Still a Bargain

Colleen Toumayan from Executive Software e-mailed me to let my readers know that they have a good price on Undelete and Diskeeper bundled together. The bundle is \$39.95 and would normally be \$59.90 if bought separately. About Diskeeper: "they say built-in defragmenters are slow, labor intensive and use too much system resources to keep up with the performance demands of today's computing needs. Ultimately, they don't get used. Running Diskeeper is like hiring an expert to constantly monitor and maintain your system's maximum performance."

About Undelete: "you store a lot of data on your computer, and you need to protect it 24/7. Re-creating accidentally deleted files takes a lot of time, and using backups to restore deleted files is not always reliable — especially if you've created and deleted something between backups. New Undelete replaces your recycle bin with a Recovery Bin, which catches all the files you delete so file recovery is quick and easy."

These products in the bundle are for home use and you can check them further at [<http://consumer.execsoft.com/home.asp>] to order them if you wish.

What's Going On Your Web Site?

If you have a Web site, it often helps if you know all the statistics about the visitors. One problem though, if you're using the free space given to you by your ISP, you probably have no access to the log for it (and can't use this product). On the other hand, if you have a paid Web space, usually you have access to the server log for your site. You should find out if your server log is accessible. You could analyze things the hard way and download the log file, then sift through it manually to see what you can determine. Sure it will work, but it's time consuming. I know in my case, I'd like to know which files were hit, and for how long.

I talked to Sane Solutions about offering a discount on their products and they agreed to do it. I have to say, their NetTracker Professional software is already much cheaper than another well known software for the same purpose, but Sane Solutions feels theirs does it better. They did not give me a product to review so you will have to do your own evaluation, but you can download a fully functional two-week trial version to evaluate. Check

their Web site at [<http://www.sane.com>] and look at the product descriptions.

NetTracker Professional sells for \$495.00 and NetTracker Enterprise is \$995.00. Darryl Cunningham, sales manager of Sane Solutions, said that if you call him with your request, he'd personally handle the order giving you a 20% discount on their products and support. Wow! That's \$99 discount just on NetTracker, making it very competitive! The 20% discount is good on all orders through August 31, 2003. You can contact Darryl at 1-800-407-3570 ext. 122 to order. Don't forget to tell him you heard this from the DealsGuy.

Talk About Tweaking!

Many of you have used TweakUI and loved it. It performs many very useful tasks for Windows. Lee Reynolds of Boca Raton Computer Society Inc. wrote some time ago in his monthly "Nibbling At The Net" column about another even more useful utility that he feels is much better than TweakUI. It is Xteq X-Setup and can be found at [<http://www.xteq.com>]. It's absolutely free for home users. However, they do take donations if you enjoy using it.

This product has an incredible number of features that you can hardly imagine. It is also updated constantly. To add to its value, it also offers to help other software such as Office 97 and 2000; not to mention hardware installed on your computer. Sounds like a great product. Thanks for letting us know Lee.

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 any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [Bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>] for past columns. I have also been busy putting up some interesting new articles on my Web site, so take a look. My thanks to the authors I was able to reach. However, they don't all answer their e-mail so I miss posting many very good articles there.

Society News

President's Message

by Ron Matteson

I hope you all enjoyed the last meeting—the Sound Byte Guys always put on a good show, and they know their stuff. It seems like the summer is going fast; we will soon be into our fall schedule. On August 12, of course, is the annual RCSi picnic, at the Brighton Town Park. At our Program Meeting on September 9 at the Brighton Memorial Library Arpad Kovacs, our incoming president, will give a talk on "computer moding". If you don't know what that is come and find out. At our September meeting, the folks from PowerQuest will be here to tell us about their disk maintenance products.

People on the Executive Committee are thinking about offering a short course (one half or full day) on some topic of interest to the members. If you have some-

thing of interest in mind, mention it to Arpad or me. Topics which have already been mentioned are web page design and desktop publishing. We would also like to get one or two more Special Interest Groups going. Any suggestions and/or volunteers will be greatly appreciated.

The RCSi will probably be participating in the Tech Expo put on by the Rochester Business Journal, on October 29-30, 2003 at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center. We will have a table there, and will need volunteers to man the table. Watch for the notices about this event.

We are working on getting a permanent home for our meetings. This is a high-priority item for the Committee, and will make things a lot easier for members if we can arrange it. It may cost us some money for insurance, etc. but we wouldn't have to look up the meeting locations each month.

This is my last President's Message, as Arpad is taking over in time for the September issue of the Monitor. I appreciate very much all the help that the members of the RCSi Board and chairpersons of the other various committees have provided; it has made my job much easier. You all owe them a debt of gratitude for all their volunteer work. And while you're at it, give yourselves a pat on the back for your enthusiastic attendance at all of our meetings.

Planning Meeting Minutes

July 15, 2003

by Larilyn E. Bauer, Secretary

The Board of the Rochester Computer Society, Inc. met Tuesday, July 15, 2003, at Ron Matteson's home, at 7:00 p.m. In attendance were Ron Matteson (President), Steve Staub (Treasurer), Bob Avery (Webmaster), Dan Rothfuss (Member at Large), Bill Statt (Stand-in Member at Large), and Larilyn Bauer (Secretary).

Following the President's agenda, we began with old business. Last program meeting, The Sound Bytes crew's presentation was very thorough. They have been asked to come back again in the future. We also got a new member to join our club.

There have not, as yet, been any volunteers submitting their name for Secretary. If no one volunteers, a Secretary will be assigned for each meeting.

Liability insurance coverage has still been the subject of discussion at the board meeting. Steve has made one contact that gave an estimate of \$300 per year or less. Steve is waiting for the written proposal. The board took a vote to give Steve the go-ahead, with the stipulation that he will let us know any little quirks in the proposal for \$1,000,000 liability. We need this coverage since we want to have our regular program meetings in the same public school each month. We will have to find other means of financial support, as this premium would put a severe strain on our account.

Financial status: We are still solvent. The annual audit will be completed this Thursday. At the time of this update, this audit has been completed.

Bill Statt will post to the calendar of Sound Bytes website, information on our SIG for Digital Photography.

In our brainstorming goals time, suggestions were made for short courses in web page design, SIG group Linux, and Desktop Publishing.

We need to get more ads for the Monitor. Coupons were sent out to dealers for customers who have purchased a new computer, however they should have had an expiration date and a place for the store manager to sign off for the purchase.

October program meeting will have a presentation on Power Quest. A future program for "Computer Modding" will be given by our President-Elect Arpad Kovacs, date to be announced.

The August meeting will be our annual Picnic at the Brighton Park. Be sure you have signed up with Steve Staub so we have a good count on meats we need to purchase.

Rochester Business Journal's "Tech Exposition" will take place on Wednesday and Thursday, October 29 and 30th, at the Convention Center. Arpad Kovacs has the forms to gain entry.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub

Balance as of 06/17/2003 \$485.54

Income:

Dues \$125.00

Expenses:

St. Stephens \$ 75.00

Postmaster 100.00

Total \$175.00

Balance as of 07/20/2003 \$435.54

New Users Notes

May 7, 2003

by John McMillan

Once again Bill Statt had trouble connecting his laptop to Roadrunner so we were happy that Gregg Sayre arrived to respond to questions while Bill tried to establish a connection. One of the things Bill learned was that the shift key should be used for capitals in passwords instead of the caps lock key. Moreover, some machines differentiate between the two shift keys so if you are having trouble with passwords, check for these alternatives.

In the discussion of high speed networks that followed, it was noted that DSL service required that you live within 18,000 feet of a central switching center. Gregg mentioned that 6 foot by 8 foot free standing Digital Carriers in some neighborhoods have the same capability thereby expanding the service availability. He pointed out that downloading and uploading speed are different because equal bidirectional speeds would be slower.

Firewalls were the next topic of discussion. Gregg is very happy with Zone Alarm, a free firewall available

from Zone Labs, that he and several others in the group use.

One user asked if the blinking lights seen when the computer was not actively being used indicated possible attacks. Gregg thought it could be someone probing for a free port but it was more likely to be a short interval scheduled check for E-mail, say every 5 or ten minutes or some other program running in the background. Users were cautioned not to have two firewalls active at one time since they interfere with one another just as virus checkers do.

Most routers include a hardware firewall but they do not interfere with software firewalls. Gregg mentioned that Windows XP includes a stripped down firewall but it must be enabled to be active. He stated that the padlock sometimes seen in the status bar is an indication that the current Internet connection is encrypted but that does not prevent hackers from attacking a machine and trying to take possession for nefarious purposes. It is also good practice to disconnect your phone connection and computer, or surge protector from the wall outlet for periods of long inactivity (vacations, etc.) or when thunderstorms are imminent.

Another user who upgraded from 98 to XP was having trouble with several programs plus his mouse. Gregg said that it was highly likely that some drivers were from 98 and recommended going to the manufacturers site to download the latest XP drivers. Microsoft warns buyers to check that peripherals will work before installing XP. The user was not sure who manufactured internal components and would probably have to take the case off the computer to determine model numbers.

One of the regulars had previously loaded and used a program with instructions on how to play piano and guitar. After a period of inactivity, he deleted it to gain space but could not reload it later. He contacted the software manufacturer who instructed him to go into settings for the CD drive and uncheck DMA. Gregg said this was Direct Memory Access that allows the CD drive to access the network more quickly. Unchecking it would slow down the CD drive but Gregg was skeptical that this would work now if the program worked earlier with the DMA checked. He thought it might be necessary to check the registry which is scary ground for many users so Bill Statt mentioned that PCWorld.com's utility of the month is Regedit, a program that will search and find pieces of files and remove them from the registry.

Another user asked about the use of function keys. Gregg said that implementing their use requires a program and suggested searching for something like assign keys at www.downloads.com or www.nonags.com that has a great collection of free software that does not nag you to register products. There was a question about defragmenting with Norton's System Tools. It was thought that the situation arose from determining when the drive was last defragged rather than actually defragmenting. Large drives take several hours to defrag. Attendees were cautioned that Defrag is best run in safe

mode to prevent the process from restarting whenever another program writes to the hard drive. In order to get to safe mode, press Control, Alt and Delete simultaneously, twice in succession, to restart the computer. While the restart is going on, keep depressing the F8 key until a menu appears that lets you choose open in Safe Mode.

There were several questions about desktop shortcut icons that apparently disappear. Attempts to create a new shortcut resulted in a message to the effect that one cannot be made since it already exists. Gregg thought it possible that they were hiding behind something else on the desktop. He also recommended reducing the number of icons on the desktop to about a dozen because they require some vital resources. One method for doing this is to use folders that have sub folders, for example a folder for word processing documents and programs, another for pictures and graphics programs. This reduces start up time and since the folder icon is generic, it uses far fewer resources than unique icons for each component. Seldom used shortcut icons can be deleted from the desktop at any time since that does not effect the program itself.

We moved on to uninstalling programs which is best done by the software authors own uninstall program. Unwise is sometimes used as a name for uninstallers. Many programs do not include that capability so a generic alternative is to use Add/Delete Programs which can be found by left clicking Start then Settings. Norton and McAfee sell uninstaller software and Norton's provides very detailed instructions for manually removing programs if necessary. Some uninstaller programs will only work for installations that they have recorded. Reinstalling the program to be deleted over itself may trick such a process into working.

A user asked what would cause Windows 98 to crash every 10 minutes or so. After ascertaining that his virus checker had up to date definitions and scanned the system frequently, it was thought that the most likely cause was something undesirable running in the background. He was counseled to press Control, Alt and Delete simultaneously to see all of the active programs. Opening the Start Menu; clicking Run; typing MSConfig in the dialogue box; and clicking ok would produce a list of all programs opened at startup so undesired items could be unchecked. Bill Statt suggested clicking Start: Run: and typing SFC which stands for System File Checker, a program that will check all of the system files for possible problems. If the program finds any corrupted system files it will ask you to insert the Windows disk and it will repair the bad files.

Our next meeting will be August 5th at the Monroe Developmental Center, 620 Westfall Road. Join us if you can.

The Lighter Side

Dictionary of Computer Terms

486 – The average IQ needed to understand a PC.

State-of-the-art – any computer you can't afford.

Obsolete – Any computer you own.

Microsecond – The time it takes for your state-of-the-art computer to become obsolete.

G3 – Apple's new Macs that make you say "Gee, three times faster than the computer I bought for the same price a microsecond ago."

Syntax Error – Walking into a computer store and saying "Hi, I want to buy a computer and money is no object."

Hard Drive – The sales technique employed by computer salesmen, especially after a Syntax Error.

GUI – What your keyboard becomes after spilling coffee on it.

Keyboard – The standard way to generate computer errors.

Mouse – An advanced input device to make computer errors easier to generate.

Floppy – The state of your wallet after purchasing a computer.

Portable Computer – A device invented to force everyone to work at home, on vacation, and on business trips.

Disk Crash – A typical computer response to any critical deadline.

Power User – Anyone who can format a disk from DOS.

System Update – A quick method of trashing *all* of your software.

Owed Too a Spell Chequer

Eye halve a spelling chequer,
it came with my pea sea.
It plainly marques,
four my revue,
miss steaks eye kin knot sea.

Eye strike a key
and type a word
and weight four it two say,
Weather eye am wrong oar write
it shows me strait a weigh.

As soon as a mist ache is maid,
it nose bee fore two long.
And eye can put the error rite
it's rare lea ever wrong.

Eye have run this poem threw it,
I am shore your pleased two no,
Its letter perfect awl the weigh,
my chequer tolled me sew.

Don't Panic,
Killer Computers
Will Not Take Over
by Jon Splatz
(from the do-androids-dream-
of-blue- screens? dept.)

Sci-fi writers and Hollywood movie directors have predicted for years that computers will become

self-aware and will then immediately proceed to enslave or destroy mankind. Writers always seem to think that artificial intelligence will automatically turn evil just as soon as somebody hits the power switch.

Oh, please. Computers are only as smart as their designers, and since right now most of the world's software is designed by the Microsoft Marketing Department, we don't have much to worry about.

With Microsoft's clout, we can assume that any well-funded research projects into creating artificial intelligence will use some form of Windows — such as Windows Sentient Edition 2012 — as the basic operating system.

It's hard to create an evil overlord machine intelligence when it crashes at the drop of an electron. I can see it now: "StratoNet went live on Jul. 9, 2012 at 4:15 pm and became self-aware at 4:17 pm. At 4:19 pm, it suffered a Fatal Exception Error and crashed. Attempts to reboot the system resulted in a single message, 'Registry corrupt'."

I don't think such a machine poses much of a threat to mankind.

Of course, Microsoft now claims that the latest versions of Windows don't crash as often. And perhaps Microsoft has indeed found a way to make Windows as stable as a toaster, or even a pocket calculator. But that still doesn't mean AI will be able to achieve world domination.

The looming obstacle for AI is — you guessed it — Digital Rights Management software. It's going to be hard for an evil-leaning AI to commit acts of evil when the nuclear missile launch system, protected by copyrighted proprietary code, refuses to work unless the AI first obtains a license.

