Measuring PC Performance

by Dick Maybach
Brookdale Computer Users Group, Inc.

Before spending money to upgrade your PC, it's important to know what is limiting its present performance. You can use benchmark programs to evaluate your PC, but these usually tell you the absolute performance of each component, while what you really need to know is which components are overloaded when you are doing your normal work. Fortunately, Windows has a performance monitoring program that tells you exactly this. With this you will monitor (1) how busy your central processor unit (CPU) is, (2) how much data is waiting to be transferred to your hard disk, and (3) how much data is moving between RAM and your swap file. If your CPU is overworked, you need a faster one. If there is too much data waiting to be transferred to your hard disk, you need a faster disk. When your PC runs out of RAM, it transfers some data to the swap file (on your hard disk) to free some RAM. If this happens too often, it slows down your PC; the remedy is to add more RAM.

The following discussion assumes you have installed the System Monitor program. If you can't find it, use the Add/Remove Programs utility in the Control Panel to add it. Click on the Windows Setup tab, click on Accessories (or System Tools, depending on your version of Windows) then on the Details button, and select System Monitor.

I'll first describe how to use the System Monitor in XP, because it is simpler. Use the following sequence: Start > Control Panel > Administrative Tools > Performance. You will see a graph with three traces: (1) % Processor Time, (2) Ave. Disk Queue Length, and (3) Pages/sec. Leave this window open and do some of your usual work, looking at the graphs every so often. (1) shows the percent of the time that the CPU is busy; if this frequently exceeds 80, you need a faster CPU. (2) shows how many disk write operations are waiting; if this often exceeds 2 plus the number of hard disks, you need faster disks. (3) shows how many 4-Kbyte pages per second move between RAM and your swap file; if this often exceeds 20, you need more RAM.

In Windows 95, 98, and Me, you access the performance monitor with the following sequence: Start Programs > Accessories > System Tools > Performance (Editor's note: It is called System Monitor on my Win98se system). You will see a graph with only one trace, % Processor Usage, but you can add the other measures. Move the cursor over the leftmost icon in the performance window, and you should see a box containing "Add". Click on the icon, select File System, then Dirty Data, and click OK. Then click again on the same icon, select Memory Manager, then Page Faults, and click OK. The colorful term "Dirty Data" shows how many bytes are waiting to be written to your disk, so it is related to the Average Disk Queue Length plotted in

XP's monitor. Despite its name, a "Page Fault" is not an error; instead, it means that the CPU tried to access some data that was not in RAM but had been moved to the swap file. (Data is swapped between RAM and the swap file in 4-Kbyte chunks called pages.) Thus, Page Faults per second is the same as the Pages per sec plotted by XP. If your % Processor Usage frequently rises above 80 per cent, you need a faster processor, and if the Page Faults often exceed 20 per second, you need more RAM. Finally, you may want to consider a faster disk if it frequently rises about 20 Kbytes plus 10 Kbytes for each hard disk.

For both the XP and the 95/98/Me monitors, these measures are less quantitative than they sound, because we haven't defined "frequently" or what is typical for your PC's tasks. All of them are "peaky," that is, they will jump up to a fairly high value for a few seconds than fall back down. So long as you see this sort of behavior, your PC is probably powerful enough; when they rise to high values and stay there, this is evidence of overload. Some programs, for example running a virus check or defragging a disk, will add a lot of stress. I've also found that Microsoft Access sometimes drives the CPU usage to 100 per cent for long periods. I suspect this would occur regardless of how fast your system is. You can also create an overload by having many programs running at once, but for most of us this isn't typical. Finally, there is interaction between the measures. For example, each page fault results in disk activity, so a high rate of page faults can cause a large disk queue.

There are many more quantities you can monitor, but these three are the ones most useful in determining if you need to upgrade your PC. Unfortunately, there is no tool to evaluate your video controller, but unless you are playing arcade type games or are doing high-resolution graphics, your present one is probably satisfactory. If the display seems sluggish, but the above three quantities are all reasonable, you might consider upgrading your video controller. You don't need a tool to check that your hard disk is large enough, because you can easily do this by looking at the disk properties. Any disk that is more than about 80 per cent full is too small.

From the newsletter of the Brookdale Computer Users Group of Lincroft NJ.

Time to Consider a Notebook Computer?

by Ira Wilsker
APCUG

One of the questions I often have been asked on my weekly radio shows, and e-mails from readers of this column is, "What would be better (for me): a new Laptop or a desktop computer?" A simple review of the Sunday sales flyers from the major office supply and electronics stores clearly shows that there is an abundant supply of notebook computers available. Standing

in the security Lines at the major airports also shows the popularity of notebook computers. So, which one is better? Desktop or notebook?

As I have consistently replied, "What are you going to use it for?" If a computer is intended for home or office use, likely in one location for a period of time, a desktop computer is more practical. Usability features, such as a full size keyboard, large screen monitor, and readily accessible drives, coupled with significantly lower prices for comparable machines, make the desktop the clear choice in this scenario. Another factor is longevity. The average useful life of a desktop computer, according to both personal experience and published reports, is typically four to six years. Desktop computers are also usually easy and relatively inexpensive to upgrade or repair. The average desktop computer becomes functionally obsolete long before it physically fails.

Notebook computers, commonly called "laptops" by many, have some very strong advantages, compared to desktop computers, as well as some very strong disadvantages. The obvious advantage of a notebook computer is portability. At Golden Triangle PC Club meetings, when I would have to present, I would often have to drag my desktop from home to the meeting place; it was heavy, bulky, and easy to break. Lugging around the computer, monitor, keyboard, and mouse was a headache. I was not the only one hauling a monster around. For a while, I had a "lunchbox" computer that I used for my presentations. It contained a standard sized PC motherboard, hard drive, floppy, and other internal parts, along with an integral 7" monitor. The keyboard snap-ped over the front of the computer, closing it. While mine was a home built, no-name generic, it was the early lunchbox computers that gave Houston's Compaq its early competitive edge. While still large and heavy, it was portable.

Todays notebook computers are a far cry from my long-gone lunchbox. They are a fraction of the size and weight of the old lunchbox machines, but contrary to other high-tech electronic items, have not dropped substantially in price. Feature for feature, it is not rare for a notebook to be twice the price of a comparably equipped desktop computer.

The relatively small size, and light weight is what makes today's notebook computer popular. They are conveniently portable, and can often run for a few hours on their internal battery, but those are about their only major advantages. For those who need portability, such as businesspeople who travel and need computing power, or people like me who frequently do presentations, a notebook computer is a near necessity.

For those who want the power of a modern PC, in an even smaller and lighter package, the next generation of "Pocket PC5" is speculated to do to the contemporary notebook the same thing that the notebook did to the lunchbox: render them functionally obsolete. Pocket PCs will be covered in a future column.

The disadvantages of a notebook computer are many, yet still they are a necessity to many users. Other than their relatively high cost, notebook computers are also typically fragile, difficult to repair, hard to upgrade (other than swap hard drives or add memory), and according to widely published tests, have a much shorter operational lifetime than do desktop computers.

Notebooks are also subject to easy loss or theft. In a recent news article, citing a report from Safeware, an insurance company that specifically insures computers for loss or damage, notebook computers have a far higher rate of loss. In 2001, for example, Safeware states that an estimated 600,000 notebook computers were lost or stolen, up 53% from the year 2000. A large part of this increase is due to the rapid increase in sales of notebook computers. Notebook computers are also one of the most obvious items to steal (and stolen) at airport security checkpoints, due to their small size, high value, and obvious nature. By comparison, while there is an estimated seven times as many desktop computers in use than notebooks, only 15,000 desktops were reported stolen in 2001, according to Safeware.

While there are "ruggedized" notebook computers, such as Toshiba's Toughbook series marketed to law enforcement, utility, and construction companies, the majority of notebooks are very easy to break, and expensive to repair. The notebook reviews published in the major computer magazines often include a 'drop test' where an open notebook computer was gently pushed off a tabletop on to a carpeted floor, simulating a common falling accident. Many notebooks suffered major physical damage, with some models of major brands shattering to utter destruction. In addition to extraordinary care in protecting from theft, notebook computers must also be transported in quality protective cases. I have seen people ruin a $2,000 notebook in a $29 carry case, a false economy. Screens are especially sensitive to physical shock, can easily crack, and cost several hundreds of dollars to replace. Lacking a large physical volume to circulate cooling air while turned on, notebook computers are more vulnerable to heat damage than desktops. Often containing only tiny cooling fans, and using the notebook itself as a heat sink, overheating is the principle cause of internal notebook failure. The more powerful the processor, the more prone the notebook is to overheating, a well-documented problem. I have heard several anecdotal stories of fairly new notebooks failing when left on overnight, due to overheating. I recently replaced my oldest daughter's notebook due to that exact cause. Published reports indicate that the average life expectancy of a notebook computer is only about 18 months, before it is lost, stolen, accidentally broken, overheated, or worn out. Notebooks, on average, have only about a fourth of the longevity of a desktop.

Desktop or notebook is a common decision to be made. Weigh the advantages and risks before purchasing either.

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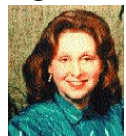
Has DVD Come of Age?

by Beverly Rosenbaum
Houston Area League of PC Users, Inc.

Increased availability and declining prices are tempting PC users to consider replacing their CD-R/RW drives with DVD recorders. Sales of DVD equipment have now surpassed the sales of VCRs and CD drives and recorders in PCs.

However, the ubiquity of the CD is both a hindrance and an advantage to the acceptance of DVD as the next universal technology. Because DVD-ROM drives can read CD-ROMs, there is a compatible forward migration path and some manufacturers plan to cease CD-ROM drive production after a few years in favor of DVD-ROM drives. But, buyers beware. Currently the plethora of incompatible DVD recording formats hinders ready acceptance by PC users whose standard has been the universally compatible CD format. Secondary problems that DVD acceptance faces, such as higher media costs, are offset by the increased storage capacity available with DVD technology. But the format wars must be successfully resolved for DVD to achieve the universal acceptance that CD enjoys.

Now a group including HP, Philips Electronics, Sony, Dell, Ricoh, Thomson, Yamaha, and Mitsubishi Chemical/Verbatim are developing the next generation of optical storage technologies with the DVD+RW format. These discs can be read and played on most existing and future DVD-video players and DVD-ROM drives, and more than 25 additional companies have formally pledged support for DVD+R and DVD+RW technology. The apparent acceptance of this technology as a de facto standard by manufacturers may well serve to resolve the early format wars.

DVD+RW rewritable discs are a large and cost-effective storage solution. With a capacity of up to 4.7GB, these discs can store hours of video or multimedia presentations, and thousands of photos and other files. The capacity of one DVD+RW rewritable disc equals seven CDs, 47 100MB ZIP disks or 3,263 floppy disks.

Several new drives will be available soon that support the newer DVD+RW format, among them second and third generation units from Philips, Sony, and HP.

The $449 Philips DVDRW228 (www.philipsusa.com) is fast, easy to set up (even for a novice), and offers Seamless Link technology's buffer underrun protection. Compatible with Windows 98, NT 4.0, 2000, Me, and XP, the bundled software is geared more toward multimedia tasks than data processing. It includes Sonic Solution's MyDVD 3.5 (a simple DVD-authoring program), as well as Ahead Software's easy Nero Burning ROM 5.5 (which is good for both DVD- and CD-writing tasks), Pinnacle Systems' Pinnacle Studio software (a sophisticated movie-editing program), and Cyber-Link PowerDVD decoder software (for watching DVD movies on your computer).

The Philips DVDRW228 reads all common CD formats and can also write to inexpensive CD-Rs and CD-RWs.

Last year, Sony became the first company to deliver a multiformat drive with support for DVD+RW, DVD+R, DVD-RW, and DVD- R. Now the new internal DRU-500AX and the external DRX-500ULX drives will be available this month for less than $350 and $430, respectively. (www.storagebysony.com/news /pressengine.asp?id=50) While this drive supports all four popular formats, it is only PC-compatible and has no Macintosh support. While the units ship with the ability to write DVD+R/DVD+RW discs at the industry-standard 2.4X, you can download a free upgrade from Sony's Web site that will enable the drive to write DVD+R media at 4X. An 8MB buffer memory and Power-Burn technology prevents buffer underruns.

The DRU-500A also comes with Veritas RecordNow software for mastering writable and rewritable DVDs and CDs; Veritas Simple Backup for backing up data; Sonic MyDVD, which turns your home movies into video DVDs; ArcSoft ShowBiz for video editing; MusicMatch Jukebox, which lets you play, record, and organize your music; and CyberLink PowerDVD 4.0 for DVD-movie playback.

Pioneer's DVR-A04 drive writes and reads DVD-RW, DVD-R, CD-R and CD-RW media, and also reads CD-ROM and DVD-ROM discs and supports both PC and Power Mac G4. (www.pioneerelectronics.com) Unfortunately, upcoming DVD+RW drives from other manufacturers beat the DVR-A04 on speed and compatibility.

Last month HP announced the DVD 300i internal DVD writer ($299) and the DVD 300e external DVD writer ($399), which includes both FireWire and USB 2.0 connections. The drives can write to high-capacity 4.7GB DVD+Rs at speeds up to 4X. (www.hp.com /hpinfo/newsroom/press /2003/030107a .html)

In 2001, the DVD Forum (www .dvdforum.org) approved the first DVD Multi specification — covering all currently developed formats approved by the Forum. Hitachi and Panasonic were first off the mark to announce DVD Multi-compliant drives, providing read/write support for all DVD Forum recordable DVD specifications — DVD-RAM, DVD-R and DVD-RW — as well as read/write support for CD-R and CD-RW media.

Importantly, however, formats created outside the DVD Forum — notably the DVD+R and DVD+RW formats supported by Dell Computer, Hewlett- Packard and Philips and other members of the DVD+RW Alliance — are not covered by the DVD Multi specifications.

Like CDs, DVDs store data in microscopic grooves running in a spiral around the disc. All DVD drive types use laser beams to scan these grooves. Minuscule reflective bumps (called lands) and nonreflective holes (called pits) aligned along the grooves represent the zeros and ones of digital information.

But that's where the similarities end. DVDs use smaller tracks (0.74 microns wide, compared to 1.6 microns on CDs) as well as new modulation and error correction methods. These technologies allow them to store data seven times as large as that of a CD.

As a result, some first-generation DVD- ROM drives and many DVD players can't read CD-Rs. Most CD-Rs are "invisible" to DVD laser wavelength because the dye used to make the blank CD-R doesn't reflect the beam. The formulation of dye used by different CD-R manufacturers also affects readability. That is, some brands of CD-R discs have better reflectivity at DVD laser wavelength, but even those don't reliably work in all players. The common solution is for the DVD player or drive to use two lasers at different wavelengths, one for reading DVDs and the other for reading CDs and CD-Rs. A player bearing the MultiRead logo guarantees compatibility with CD-R and CD-RW media, but unfortunately, few manufacturers use it. So if you want a DVD player that can read CD-R discs, look for a "dual laser" or "dual optics" feature.

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Computer Law:

Is Your Webpage a Link to the Courthouse Door?

by Bill Wood
AlamoPC Organization

Yes, your Web page can provide you a trip to the courthouse. Sometimes it may seem very easy to get in trouble for the content in a Web site. We hear about major corporations suing to shut down fan Websites for pop stars and movie studios suing to close sites that contain programs that allow playing DVD's on machines using variations of the Linux operating system. Knowing some of the basic rules may help keep you out of trouble.

It does seem that a large portion of the emerging field of internet law is driven by efforts to protect the commercial value of intangible property. You can't really touch the essence of a copyright, a trademark or a patent. The real value behind intellectual property

rights is the "owner" has the legal right to restrict how other people use the material. That key attribute is why the vaults at Disney Studios may be worth billions on the company balance sheets when in reality the celluloid that makes up the reels of classic films is worth a pittance.

Coca Cola is another familiar example. A large part of the value of that corporation is bound into the right to use a specific formula for making a soft drink that is probably written on a single piece of paper in a bank vault somewhere. Supposedly only one or two people have access to that piece of paper. The paper and ink are worth maybe a fraction of a cent, but the right to use the information to make a soft drink may be on the company balance sheet for billions.

On the other hand, the rights held by the owner of intellectual property are not absolute. Both the statutes and court decisions recognize limits. For example, intellectual property rights can expire. The law also provides for fair use exceptions to the owner's rights before the copyright expires. There are great Websites that provide the basics of the intellectual property law. For copyright information try the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress. You can also check my article in last month's PC Alamode for links to legal research sites that will provide access to further details on the operations of intellectual property law.

This month let's look at some recent court cases that involve disputes over use of specific content on a Website. Trust me, Disney, Coca Cola and Sony Pictures and many others will spend millions to protect the right to control what use is made of their intellectual property. They may send you a demand that you cease and desist from posting the information even if you don't charge for the information. To the owner, it may be a matter of principle or it may be something else. But whether or not you profit from use of their product is but one of the elements in determining the legality of the use.

An interesting twist in two recent cases is that they involved search engines and links to protected material. In one case, Kelly v. Arriba Soft Corporation, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals dealt with the practice of a Web search engine site that specializes in graphics. The plaintiff was a professional photographer that held the copyright to landscape photographs and he sued the owners of the search engine because the Website displayed small, thumbnail copies of his photos in addition to links to the original works on his Website. (The search engine is now known as ditto.com.) The thumbnails were copies of the entire photo but were in a very low resolution. By clicking on the thumbnail, the Web user was taken to either a full-size copy of original from Kelly's Website or a copy was presented in a frame on Arriba's site.

The Court focused on two aspects of the case and ruled that part of the site did violate Kelly's rights but that the use of small, thumbnail copies of the original

works of art were not infringing. In the Court's opinion, it applied the four characteristics of fair use and found that the small images were so transformed that they formed an entirely different use than Kelly's original art. The four general factors are

1. the purpose and character of the use,
2. the nature of the copyrighted work,
3. the amount and substantiality of the portion used, and
4. the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyright work.

In Kelly's case the Court felt that his photos were art but the images on the search engine were deliberately altered to prevent their use as art. Even if the thumbnails were captured and enlarged, the Court found,

"any enlargement results in a significant loss of clarity of the image, making them inappropriate as display material."

The thumbnail images were not art.

Kelly did win on another point, however. It was an infringement of his rights for the search engine to provide in-line links that tended to confuse the viewer about the origin of the graphic. That tripped over another right held by the copyright owner—the right to publicly display the work. Clicking on the thumbnail brought up a full size copy of the image. The graphic file was actually retrieved from Kelly's Website but the person viewing the image would not have known it. Here, the image wasn't "copied" so they were not guilty of unlawful copying, but they were liable for damages for the public display of the work. The rule to remember is that if you include graphics, or music files, in your Website you must not only make sure you can legally copy the material. You must also obtain the necessary licenses to publicly display or perform the work even if you don't make new copies.

I have a question for you. What do you expect to get back when you type a phrase into a Web search engine? You might be surprised at the answer if you think it is a list of the closest matches to the phrase you entered. You may get a list that is also influenced by payments for preferential listings.

The second search engine case is just beginning and it involves a San Antonio company, Mark Nutritionals Inc. that advertises heavily on the radio. It seems like every radio announcer in America has a weight problem and they are all taking one of the Body Solutions weight loss products. I've heard the same commercials from DJ's in other cities and they all refer the listeners to the San Antonio company and its products. But on the Web it may be different. The lawsuit alleges that if you type that trade name, Body Solutions, into any one of several Web search engines you may never find the real company. The plaintiff alleges that search engines have been paid by other companies to place other products higher in the results list. The industry calls it "pay for placement." The suit claims that four companies,

AltaVista, Kanoodle, FindWhat and Overture, owe it a combined $10 million in actual damages for using its product name to direct Web viewers to another company's product.

The Plaintiff may have already received some benefit because in preparing this article I tested the four search engines and had mixed results. In some cases it was now easy to find a link to the official Body Solutions Website. In others, it was not easy at all. So, if the main purpose was to ensure that Web viewers find the Body Solutions Web page, then that may have already been accomplished.

I'll try to keep an eye on the progress of the case and include updates when possible. *Reprinted from the March 2003 issue of* PC Alamode Magazine*. Bill Wood is an Assistant City Attorney in the San Antonio City Attorney's Office. He practices real estate and technology law for the city.*

Media Notes
by Bill Petitt
Southeast Virginia Computer Group

That old expression, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." is never more true than it is today. Take a look at the first item in my monthly news summary and you'll see what I mean.

Security Threats to Beware of in 2003 – In this New Year, virus attacks just begin with e-mail. Here's what to do to stay safe from Internet-borne nasties.

The New Year is often a time to make a new start. Unfortunately, that includes viruses, worms, adware, spyware, and all the threats that pose a risk to your PC. In 2003, you have plenty to worry about, and experts warn, those threats aren't always what you expect.

Although viruses spread predominantly through e-mail, they can enter your system many ways. Any sort of file transfer is susceptible, as are application holes. The chief security mistake is to concentrate on Outlook and other e-mail applications, an antivirus vendor suggests. Still, that's always the place to start.

"End users at home are really the only ones who will be victimized by e-mail worms. For businesses, it's easy to block executable attachments," says Roger Thompson, Tru-Secure's technical director of malicious code research. "You don't even have to worry about scanning those attachments for viruses once you make the decision to block all of them."

Patching the Problem

Thompson acknowledges it isn't as easy for home users to stop the stream of e-mail threats.

"All they can do is keep their antivirus software and firewall up to date," he says. "And they have to keep their operating system patched. They should go to Microsoft's Windows update site and apply patches all the time." Those patches are vital to protect both home and business users from a new wave of threats, he says.

"We're so focused on e-mail worms, and sure, those threats will still be there, but the new threats are

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coming in elsewhere. It's not a case of an attachment anymore, it's vulnerability exploiters that pose risks."

These vulnerability exploiters, as Thompson calls them, are threats similar to the Code Red worm, which didn't have an e-mail component. Instead, they spread via the Internet and company network, searching for vulnerabilities in servers, operating systems, and browser software.

And those vulnerabilities seem to be increasing exponentially. Microsoft, for example, patched more than 80 vulnerabilities in its Internet Explorer browser last year. However, as many as 30 IE vulnerabilities remain unpatched, Thompson says. These holes—as well as the ones for which patches are available but were not applied—could let malicious code make its way onto your PC or network.

Potential Threats Abound

Another area of increasing risk is intentionally malicious files posted on the Internet, masquerading as legitimate downloads. Adult newsgroups are particularly dangerous, Thompson says. Many of the files that users download, believing they are .jpeg or .mpeg files, are actually remote access Trojan horses that allow the creator complete access to your PC.

You may download the file, and when it doesn't display a picture or play a song, you think it doesn't work. In fact, it could be installing a backdoor on your PC, which alerts the creator when you're online and allows him access to all the contents of your PC. In addition to reading your files, the Trojan's creator could also use your PC as part of a distributed denial of service attack, aiming the resources of your system and thousands of others at a certain Web site in an effort to knock it offline, Thompson warns.

Another growing potential risk is adware. While it doesn't harm your PC, it can invade your privacy, Thompson says. Users often unwittingly download such software with other applications, including some of the popular file-swapping programs. It watches every Web page you visit and creates a profile of you and your interests, so that it can serve you specific ads tailored toward your interests.

Wireless and instant messaging viruses aren't truly a threat yet, says Thompson. Still, he notes, virus writers are trying to target instant messaging systems, and he expects they will succeed.

Staying Safe

While Thompson's forecast for 2003 may sound like doom and gloom, he emphasizes that PC users can do plenty to stay safe. Home users should still worry about mass-mailed viruses, but look beyond e-mail. If you keep your antivirus software up to date, install and maintain an updated firewall, and constantly patch your software, you should stay safe. And, of course, you should never open executable attachments if you're not entirely sure of the contents.

While it's easier for businesses to block executable attachments, it's more difficult for them to constantly patch the software across their entire network. The key, Thompson says, is to configure the network properly. "You have to harden the inside of your network to keep the vulnerabilities out," he says.

Configuring a network is easy enough if you know what changes to make, Thompson says–though he admits that his statement is a bit like saying, "it's easy enough to make money in the stock market if you know what stocks to buy." It may not be easy, but with a little time and attention, the effort to protect your network or your PC will be worthwhile.

Adobe Unveils an Easier Photoshop

http://www.adobe.com/products/
photoshopalbum/main.html

New Photoshop Album aims at helping consumers find, fix, share, and store their digital pictures. With an eye on the rising popularity of digital cameras, Adobe Systems has decided to extend its Photoshop software to the consumer market.

Photoshop Album, a product designed to help digital camera owners easily find, fix, share, and preserve photos on their PCs, will be presented at the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas last month, the company said.

The Windows-based product was expected to begin shipping in the U.S. in February at an estimated retail price of $49.99, according to Adobe. It will also be available for sale on the company's Web site. International editions are slated to ship in the second quarter of 2003, the company said.

Getting Organized

Photoshop Album offers an easy to use "tagging" system to organize and find images, according to the San Jose, California, software vendor. Users can create visual tags to instantly find photos of favorite people, places, events, or any other special subject, no matter how large the collection becomes, Adobe said.

The new product also provides editing tools to fix common problems with red eyes, color, contrast, and brightness, according to Adobe. For more advanced editing, it can be easily integrated with Adobe Photoshop Elements 2.0, an image-editing software for amateur photographers, the company said.

Image data can be easily backed up to a CD or DVD. Moreover, Photoshop Album makes use of Adobe's PDF, allowing users to deliver their images to anyone using the company's free Acrobat Reader software, the company said.

Windows Keyboard

Most keyboards include a Windows key (winkey). It's on the bottom row, next to Alt, and has a little flag on it. It's really useful in combination with other keys.

For example:

- WinKey+R Open the Run dialog
- WinKey+Pause Open the System Properties

- WinKey+F Find: All Files
- WinKey+M Minimize all open windows
- WinKey+D Show/Hide Desktop
- WinKey+E Open Windows Explorer
- WinKey+F1 Open Windows Help

From the February 2003 issue of The Umbrella Online.

Ignorance is not bliss!

by Lee Besing
Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

Just the other day, I was called by a customer to figure out why his Norton Anti-Virus would no longer download live updates on his computer, even though his subscription hadn't run out yet (according to the date showing on his computer) When I arrived, I discovered he was still running Windows 95 version "a" (just about the very first un-patched version of that OS). His version of Norton was equally dated, but had been installed within the past year, thus showed un-expired subscription dates on the screen. Apparently around mid summer of 2002, Norton dropped live update support for this older version but the customer didn't notice it wasn't updating until he caught the BUGBEAR and KLEZ virus and started receiving complaints or comments from his friends. I was among those who received at least one bogus infected message from him and alerted him of the problem. When he contacted Norton, they told him that since Microsoft had dropped technical support for Windows 95 and older, they also no longer could provide updates and support for their older versions of software.

Regular readers of this column will recall that in December's issue I alerted you about the potential of older software, particularly operating system software, running out of support by the manufacturers. Apparently this is already taking effect, with this customer being one of the first casualties of this action. With his computer only being a Pentium 166 (I can remember when that used to be the best CPU out there in its days), we upgraded the computer's OS to Windows 98se and a newer version of Norton, thus keeping him at least one more step ahead of the sweepers following the OS Elephant at the end of the OS support parade.

Ignorance of virus matters is not Bliss. As I just illustrated using a real computer customer's serious plight, you must keep checking the status of your anti-virus program and its definition files to be sure it continues to remain on guard at all times and updated within the past week. I routinely tell customers to click the "live update" button on Norton, or equivalent on their other software, at least once a week rather than depending on the automatic updates which are supposed to happen. Even on my computer at home, which runs 24/7 on a cable connection, Norton doesn't always grab the updates as soon as they become available. When I run the live update, periodically it will find other updates besides the virus definitions which have been made available as well.

Speaking of which, many of you know that I have long spoken against upgrading to Windows XP. I'll build or sell new computers designed to be compatible with XP, but I seldom recommend upgrading to XP on older computers because of driver incompatibility and security issues. There is a Website where you can monitor XP happenings and news, or get a weekly free newsletter e-mailed to you every Tuesday. That address is www.winxpnews .com. The backers of this site are reportedly an independent from Microsoft and aren't afraid to point out problems as well as great features of the XP operating system. Check it out and make your own educated decision.

And last, but not least, I recently was hired to install a new wireless system for a doctor's office in a professional building so that they could carry their laptops around from room to room, making patient notations or other inquiries. Using the affordable Linksys hardware for the wireless access point connected to their pre-existing hub and router, I installed wireless PCMCIA adapter cards in each of their laptops.

When I turned the laptops on for the first time and ran the setup software for the wireless cards, does anybody want to guess how many unsecured wireless access points I could find and use to get out to the Internet? Yep, it seems the good doctor wasn't the only one in the building to have this same idea, but they were the only one with a consultant worried enough about security to activate WEP to lock out unauthorized users from accessing their system.

The default channel for most systems is "6", but a good wireless system will scan all channels from 2 through 11 to see what is available. If you aren't careful enough to set up encryption (WEP) on your wireless network, someone else next door might be able to turn on their laptop system with a wireless card and start cruising your computer or use your high speed Internet connection to surf the web.

Oh, well, at least I now know of at least one place to grab access to the Web if away from home by simply turning on my laptop inside a professional building and walking up and down the hallway until I get a strong enough signal from someone's unsecured wireless system.

When it comes to computers, just like the law, ignorance is not bliss, and it can be dangerous if you don't know what your computer is doing. Keep your anti-virus updated weekly, keep that firewall software running and updated, and don't forget to leave your WEP turned off on your wireless system so that everybody else can enjoy free high speed Internet at your expense. Well, maybe not that last item. I won't install a wireless system even in a residence without activating the WEP using a code phrase that the owner can remember.

From The DealsGuy
by Bob Click
Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

Dr. - Dr., Where Art Thou

I know this is not computer related, but this month I'd like to talk about what I feel is serious and plays on our complacency. Is your doctor really a doctor? Are the initials after his name MD or DO, or are they PA or NP? Most people know what MD means, and even DO, but how about all the rest! When my wife and I relocated to Orlando, we looked for a new family doctor. We selected a doctor from our "approved provider" directory and were seeing another doctor in that office for two years before we discovered he was not really a doctor. Since he was in that doctor's office, we thought he was a doctor. Finally, a nurse working in a lab told us he was not a doctor when we spoke about the "nice doctor." We were shocked and asked why. She explained the difference saying he was actually a Physician's Assistant, and that does not even come close to having the qualifications to be a doctor, but sees you in lieu of the doctor. She said a PA is more or less a nurse with certain experience. I had noticed the letters after his name on the door were PA, but thought nothing about asking what it meant. In other words, I made an assumption I shouldn't have. After being enlightened, we started asking for the Doctor. I was told that the PA clears everything through the doctor when making his evaluations, but afterward, I remembered that sometimes the other guy (the actual doctor) differed with the PAs prognosis, 'when asked.'

Recently, I saw a cardiologist three times and when they were making the next follow-up appointment, I was told this one would be with a nurse (Nurse Practitioner). At least they didn't hide anything. When I asked if the office call would be cheaper, they said no. I said not to bother. If the doctor didn't have time to see me, I'd find one that did. I realize these people are under a doctor's supervision, but I don't agree with the concept that is designed to make more money for the doctor through our ignorance. When I'm paying for a doctor, that's who I expect to see for the price my insurance, or I, is paying. What are your thoughts, and has this happened to you? I am a volunteer in a retiree walk-in center who helps retirees with insurance problems. Insurance contracts do not pay for a PA or NP (don't know about HMOs), but that is rarely the way it is billed. I could write a book!! [bobclick @mindspring.com]

And Now For The Deals.

The Jaws PDF creator products deal ended Feb. 15. {http:// www.insight.com/jaws] Also, you'll find three new groups listed on my Web site's distribution page that now read the DealsGuy column.

You Could Take This Keyboard Scuba Diving

Maybe I'm going a bit too far with that statement, but this one is designed for bad environments. I know most of you won't need this kind of keyboard at home unless you spill your coffee a lot. It's designed for the worst conditions. The following is their description:

"The 'CoolOne' is a water-resistant and contaminant proof keyboard. It's sealed and rigid surface is ideal for industrial and medical use, as well as other outdoor environments. It's a rigid keyboard with tactile feedback keys. It comes with a USB connector and an available PS/2 adapter. It's perfect for environments where there's a lot of dust (warehouses, outdoor use), where water or moisture is a problem (food processing plants, marine use), and where disinfecting is needed (hospital/medical and school use). It's also great for anyone who eats and drinks near his/her keyboard and has ever accidentally spilled something inside it. Check the specs further at [http://www .man-machine.com]."

They offered me a sample product, and what a coincidence that the box was mutilated when it arrived. The box had been squashed and punched through, then repaired with plastic tape. The keyboard could also rattle around in the box. When I tried it, it worked just fine and I was impressed (I tried every character multiple times). On close examination, I don't see how anything, dust or liquid, could penetrate it's skin, it certainly is sealed. I plugged it into the USB port and Windows immediately installed drivers for it. It needs a slightly heavier touch, but I quickly got used to that. I do miss having legs on the back though.

The normal price is $179.00 (US funds) and my readers will get $20.00 discounted from that price when ordering from their Web site [http://store.yahoo.com/ manmachine-store/], or by calling 301- 341-4900. Also by e-mailing them at [sales@man-machine.com]. Shipping is approximately $8.00 in the USA. Use the coupon code "click" when ordering for your $20.00 discount. This offer expires April 30, 2003.

If you have a swimming pool you might consider putting one of these keyboards in the pool. That way people could send an e-mail for help if they are drowning. It is supposed to work in water, right?

You'll Come Clean With This One

I saw this at Comdex and liked it. Mine works great. The LENSPEN is a very efficient and easy-to-use optical lens cleaning system. It's designed for all optics including cameras, camcorders, telescopes, binoculars, riflescopes and spotting scopes. Containing a non-liquid compound that will not spill or dry out, the LensPen system is safe, user- friendly and its compact size fits into almost any pocket.

Then there is the MiniPro for smaller lenses. MiniPro is specially designed for digital and advanced photo system cameras, microscopes, pocket binoculars, and small eyepieces. The same LensPen cleaning system is employed in this great new product: a soft,

natural brush to wipe away excess dirt, and a flexible cleaning tip with special cleaning compound.

These products are said to be safe to use on all lenses. Offers flexible cleaning tip, non-liquid cleaning compound that will not spill or dry out, reduces static built-up, prevents corrosion and fits easily into any pocket or bag. Check the product further at [http://www.lenspen .com]. The DealsGuy price on either the LensPen or MiniPro is $9.95 in US funds plus S&H, which will be about $6.00 in the USA. To order at that price, contact Leona Borsa at 1-877-608- 0868 and mention the DealsGuy column, or use the magic words 'Bob Click' when ordering. This deal is good until April 30, 2003.

Do You Need A Fix?

Don Singleton, APCUG Vice-president, alerted me to this one. It is called BigFix and is actually a free download. It analyzes your computer to see what fixes it might need, then guides you through them. It also alerts you of updates you need and does that for you. Here is their description:

"The BigFix solution leverages the reach of the Internet and the power of modern computers to create a mass preventive maintenance system that enables mass identification and elimination of computer problems before they cause failures. The BigFix solution can automatically monitor and detect a problem, proactively alert users or administrators to the problem before a failure occurs, and fix it on one or more machines at once with the click of a mouse. Because the BigFix solution can find and cure thousands, even millions of computers at once, it changes the nature and economics of technical support as well as desktop management. Unlike other available approaches, the BigFix solution simplifies maintenance, reduces support costs, and increases user satisfaction by finding problems before, not after, users experience a failure."

To download this product, go to [http://www.bigfix.com]. Don gave me the URL for an in-depth write-up by Richard J. deJongh of Tulsa Computer Society. [http://tcs.org /ioport/nov02/bigfix.htm] I have not tried it so I have no experience using it.

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 Cheapskate) Click [Bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [http://www.dealsguy.com] for past columns. Also, I keep adding interesting articles (taken from user group newsletters) to my "Articles of Interest" page for viewing or downloading.

Bits

by Custis Bars
Winnipeg PC Users Group

Ever think about how you could tweak Windows Explorer to make it appear more as you would like it to? Here are a few of the tips from a Forum at the Winnipeg PC User Group Resource Centre.

In Windows 98SE, in Windows Explorer, select View > Folder Options > View for the settings that will determine the appearance of the display of the folders and files.

Checking "Display full path in the title bar" will display the path as well as the file name in the title bar. Checking "Allow all uppercase names" will allow the user to have a folder with all names in uppercase. If this is not checked, only the first letter of the first word in the filename will be allowed to be in uppercase.

"Remember Each Folder's View Setting" should be checked. This will cause the view settings of a particular folder to be remembered. If you want all of your folders to have the view settings the same as the current folder, click on the button "Like Current Folder". "Hide File Extensions for known file types" should be unchecked as you should be able to determine what file type you are using so that the appropriate application can be opened, if necessary.

Depending on your level of computer literacy, you can choose to turn on "Do not show hidden or system files" which is the safe choice so that none of these files are inadvertently deleted as their deletion may cause problems. If you turn this off you will be able to see all files and their extensions including hidden and system files.

Msconfig will provide you with the ability to customize what and how Windows loads. How you may want to just have a look at the settings and leave them alone unless you know the consequences or are willing to spend the time and effort necessary to get back to your original settings.

If you want to minimize the number of items in your system tray, (the one with the speaker icon (for sound volume) in the lower right hand part of your screen), msconfig will allow you to do this – Start > Run > Msconfig > Startup using the System Configuration Utility. Be careful as some of the startup items are necessary. If you have any doubt, ask someone who knows for help.

A caveat, unless you are familiar with editing the autoexec.bat, system.ini, and win.ini files, it is probably best not to even click on these tabs in the System Configuration Utility.

How many times have you started loading an application and gotten to the point where the install program of the application asks you to shut down all applications that are running? Which ones are needed to do the install as cleanly as possible? Pressing Con-

trol/Alt/Delete will bring up the Close Program menu. You can close all of the programs excepting Explorer and Systray. If you are on a cable modem, you should physically unplug the modem before turning off your firewall and anti-virus protection.

How Stuff Works

The How Stuff Works site covers an astounding range of subjects and the topics are treated in depth with multiple screens of information per topic and links to related material. You'll be amazed at the number of topics you find here and at the extent and usefulness of the information. (It will even walk you through the process of setting up a home network!) It's at http://www.howstuffworks.com/

Book Reviews
by Susan Ives *Alamo PC Organization*

Prey

by Michael Crichton
Hardcover, Harper Collins, 2002
$26.95, 367 pages

Jack Forman was fired from his programming job for blowing the whistle, so he was stunned to be hired back as a consultant to tweak an intelligent agent program being used by the nanotechnology company where his wife works. Spirited away to a remote Nevada fabricating plant, he finds that the company claims to be making microscopic robots capable of curing breast cancer while secretly developing swarming mini-cameras for military surveillance. The robots have evolved into relentless flesh-eating predators and only Jack has the guts and the know-how to stop them before the world is destroyed.

This is a cautionary tale about scientific ethics and the corrupting effect of money on science. According to Crichton, we now have the ability to create new life forms but we don't yet have the skill to control them. The movie rights have been bought by 20th Century Fox: and the book reads like a screenplay, with one dimensional characters and a fast-moving plot. For non-nerds, the frequent pauses for scientific exposition may be a drag but that's what we crave, right? Not up to *Jurassic Park* standards, but you've got to read it.

Crouching Buzzard, Leaping Loon

by Donna Andrews
Hardback, St. Martin's, January, 2002
$23.95, 297 pages

Sidelined from her blacksmithing job with a broken arm, Meg Langlow is manning the switchboard at Mutant Wizards, her brother's software company. Rob coasted through law school creating a role playing game, Lawyers From Hell, which became a hit on the software shelves. Something's sour in the company and Rob hopes his big sister with her nose for solving mysteries will get it back on track. When the office practical joker is killed, Rob becomes the prime suspect and Meg races to solve the crime to save her kid brother.

Donna Andrews is a former programmer and a very funny woman. There's a computer on every page, from the dysfunctional programming staff, to the renegade game spoof, NUDE Layers from Hell, to a possible pornography ring running on the company servers, to disgruntled former employees, spies from rival companies, a hacker-black-mailer, rabid fans hoping for a peek at the next release….it's geek paradise. Highly recommended!

User Groups

by John Dvorak of *PC Magazine*

My *PC Magazine* column lamenting the situation with user groups has created interesting reactions from a variety of sources. While I lament the apparent low point in the world of user groups, this may be the time to reevaluate what might have been the cause.

I base this rethinking on two letters I've received that reflect interesting interpretations of the user-group movement. I believe both letters have appeared in the forum. After reading the letters and rethinking my lament, I believe that the role of user groups must change. They must move away from functioning as traditional help networks. Let me quote from the two letters, and you see what you think.

The first comes from Marc Librescu who writes: "User groups died because their members were a small but dedicated group of people who were computer users before computers had become ubiquitous with the general population. As pioneers, if you will, they didn't have access to a lot of information relating to computers. If someone needed how-to information, he or she didn't have many options available, save for asking a knowledgeable friend, or logging on to a User Group bulletin board and posting the question there."

This, on the surface, seems to raise some important issues about user groups. But when Michael Michaelski linked me to an interesting thesis that ran in the Winnipeg User group newsletter, a more complex set of issues surfaced. The lengthy article, written by Hasha Godavari ran in the February, 1990 issue. If someone can get copyright permission, I'll post it on my personal Web site permanently.

To summarize, Mr. Godavari saw an obvious cycle in the life of user groups in general. They all begin with experts getting together to learn things collectively, followed by businesspeople joining to leverage the information, followed by never-ending newbies just there to get as much free help and tutoring as they can get. Once the newbies become the majority, they drive out the other two groups. Essentially the groups lose the true leadership base, become brainless, and eventually die off. Much of this is because of a natural conflict that will develop between the technologists who founded the group and the seemingly lazy newbies who

try to exploit and dominate the technologists. To bolster his thesis, Godavari supplied a couple of charts.

The model for decay that Godavari describes is seen in all walks of life. It has everything to do with exclusivity being lost by open membership policies. Not to be an elitist, but the reason people join private clubs is to filter membership and avoid conflicts. It reminds me of the Yogi Berra comment, "Nobody goes there anymore, it's too crowded." I used to team up with a couple of friends to do these interesting parties in Las Vegas complete with a tiered system that included private sub-parties. One year, one of the parties became so popular that I noticed the majority of people who came to the party had no idea who I was and didn't know I was the host. That was the end of the party. Why organize something for the thankless masses?

Many of the most active user groups today are now Linux groups. The PC groups that have survived have become social clubs. User groups are not dead, but they are different. Popularity killed them, or at least ran off the experts, who apparently got tired of answering the same questions over and over and being slighted in the process.

One e-mail sent to me complained that there are IT professionals coming into meetings and asking for free help they should be paying for. The e-mailer asked, "Why should I be giving away answers to problems for free? These are not end-users with small problems, but large corporations on a budget looking for free help." What can you say to that?

Emailer Eleutieri: "The increasing complexity of computer technology and specialization of professionals may also play a role. I see a second general cycle at work here".

Emailer Irenechow: "There seems to be no point in joining or becoming part of a user group. I really do not see the need. Instead, the mentor system is the alternative I present to you".

Consider what Steve Mann cynically writes: "For the most part – manufacturers and software publishers do not want their users talking to each other. How else can they keep flaws and bugs secret? Before I make a major hardware or software purchase, I always look at the Usenet newsgroups and do a Google search to see what the users are really saying about the product."

Whatever the reason is for the current low point for user groups, we have to assume that they're not going back to the way they were. I welcome your thoughts on the matter.

From the latest online edition of the Philadelphia Area Computer Society.

Society News

President's Message

by Ron Matteson

I thought that RCSi member Ralph Squire gave a very interesting talk on February 11 about the publishing business, typography, etc. I suspect that more of our members could tell us a lot of interesting things. Let me know if you would like to try it.

On March 11, the program should be very interesting, also. The talk will be about Tablet PC's, another stab at giving us a hand-held, pen-controlled, small PC. It sounds like they may have it right this time. Let's listen and find out.

Then on March 8, we will get a genealogy talk, something that several of you have asked for over the years. Paul Blake is the leader of the Rochester Genealogical Society's Special Interest Group on the use of computers for genealogical research. It should be another great evening.

Our Workshop on building your own computer is pretty well filled up now, although we may have room for one or two more. It will be on Friday, February 28, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, at Bryant & Stratton. I am signed up, and am getting excited. I am going to go for a top-drawer machine, new scanner, new printer, and maybe even an LCD display! I have my wife's permission, so I better do it while she's in a good mood (just kidding- she's always in a good mood).

There are some great scanners out there now. For example, the Epson 2450 is a table-top unit which will scan documents, and has a built-in capability for scanning 35 mm slides and transparencies up to 4 x 5 in in size. it has a resolution of 2400 x 4800 and a dynamic range of 3.3D. If I get one, I'll bring it in and demonstrate it.

Epson also has a new printer out – the C82, which is getting rave reviews for desktop use. It prints B/W pages at 22 ppm, and color at 17 ppm I think. It is a 4-color unit, but does a good job on color prints, and has separate ink cartridges for each color, to save money on cartridge replacements. It lists for $149, but is available at CompUSA for $130.

New Users Notes

Feb. 4, 2003

G reg Wolfe opened the meeting by pointing out that Walmart recently advertised a Lexmark color printer for less than $30.00 which he found interesting since the color cartridge alone costs more than that. It almost makes one think throw away.

Another user mentioned getting an E-mail (purportedly from Bill Gates) on the topic of computer security. It was 3 pages long and contained several hyperlinks to Internet addresses including an "Executive registration site". Being somewhat skeptical he printed it out and then ignored it but wondered if other users had received the same note. The general opinion was that Microsoft did not have a history of giving anything away and was unlikely to use E-mail as a vehicle. Others pointed out that many sites, including x rated ones, are always trying to rope people in and that to respond in any way could open the flood gates to future undesirable mail.

Packet writing, that is the burning of several files to a CDR at different points in time, was the next topic. Iomega, Nero, Roxio, and other burning software contains routines for both audio and data writing including packet writing on either CDR's or CDRW's. When the files are data files, the CDR should be formatted before dragging and dropping files or doing disk to disk copying using Windows Explorer . Most burning programs utilize wizards so the effect of certain choices is transparent to the user. Windows XP has it's own packet writing software.

A while ago, there was a problem in Ad-Aware 5.8 that could interfere with the internet browser and cause a computer to freeze. The free version of 6.0 is now available at http://download.com.com/3000-2144-10185294.html?tag=sptlt.

One of our newest attendees mentioned delayed mouse actions on a Neon, 1.7 gig, pentium 4 machine with 256 megs of ram running Windows 98SE that was purchased 2nd hand. It became noticeable after he added things to the machine. Among other things, he had Zone Alarm and Norton's System Works, which contains a firewall, running at the same time. Things improved when Zone Alarm was deleted although a better choice might be to retain Zone Alarm and cripple Norton's firewall. While both prevent unauthorized entrance to the machine, only Zone Alarm prevents unauthorized output which might be caused by spyware or viruses.

It was suggested that he hunt further by pressing Control, Alt, and Delete to get a listing of all the active programs. Closing one program at a time (excluding Explorer and Systray which must remain active) might demonstrate which program was causing the mouse to slowdown. This method does not remove the programs from the machine and they will be activated the next time the machine is started. Once the offending program is identified, going to Start > Run and typing MSCONFIG, will open a window with multiple tabs. Clicking the Start Up tab shows programs opened at start up with check marks. Unchecking any program prevents it from opening at Start up. A second recommendation was that he reinstall the mouse software. This is done by going to Start > Control Panel > Add/Remove Programs > Logitec Mouseware and selecting uninstall. After the software was reloaded from the source disk restart the computer and let Windows find the new hardware and driver. It is also possible that the Logitec Web site might contain updates for the optical mouse software. Someone else warned that spy ware called Backweb had been added to his machine from the driver disk when a Logitec optical mouse was recently installed.

This same user is running a 2nd Windows 98 machine with both machines sharing a Road Runner link through a router. They also have a printer and a scanner which they would like to share but this would require networking through a hub. Simultaneous voices in the extensive discussion made it difficult to document the comparison of hubs, links and routers, their features, restrictions and requirements for networking the two machines to share all peripherals and files. Bill Statt suggested going to help topics on both machines and investigating a web site called Networking Solutions for detailed written pointers.

Another user mentioned getting an error message asking "Do you want to continue reading scripts, yes or no?" Regardless of which choice he made, it was usually necessary to reboot the computer. Java Scripting is a language that is often used to control the pictures and animations that are found on many internet sites. Sun has a proprietary version that differs from the Microsoft version. Microsoft does not necessarily accept versions other than their own though it is sometimes possible to continue scanning internet pages despite the script error message. Bill Statt recommended going to Sun.com and downloading the Java engine which he said would take over the process and eliminate the messages. A user, whose machine had locked up earlier while running McAffee, described troubles he was having with Rulaunch which took about 45 minutes to download and then he got a message "Rulaunch has performed an illegal operation and will shut down. He ignored the message but the window would not close. He moved it to the top of the screen and tried to continue but the computer shut down. Bill Statt suggested asking McAffee for a disk copy of the file. Then he went to Google on his laptop and found a note that Rulauch frequently fails and crashes. Several scenarios were described with possible work arounds. One of the suggestions was to disable Rulaunch and do the updates manually. Bill also demonstrated how to open a free interactive chat dialogue with a McAffee technical representative.

This opened the door to a comparison of Internet service providers, their rates and the availability of chat type facilities. Bill warned that no one should get into a chat environment unless they have an active, up to date virus checker running.

When digital photography came up, Bill Statt pointed out that the Special Interest Group on that topic meets on the first Thursday of the month in the same building. He recommended a web page, lonestardigital.com /links.htm. It gives links to multiple sites for digital photography news, discussion forums, professional photography, digital photography information and general photography information plus how to sites.

Even when the recorder works the notes lose something in the translation. For the complete story join us at the next session on Tuesday March 4th at 6:30, at the Monroe Developmental Center, 620 Westfall Road. Everyone is welcome.

The Lighter Side

We've all heard that a million monkeys banging on a million typewriters will eventually reproduce the entire works of Shakespeare. Now, thanks to the Internet, we know this is not true." –Robert Wilensky, computer science sage.

"By the time they had diminished from 50 to 8, the other dwarves began to suspect 'Hungry.'" –Gary Larson, *The Far Side*

"Failure is not an option. It comes bundled with your Microsoft product." –Ferenc Mantfeld

"Documentation is like sex: when it is good, it is very, very good; and when it is bad, it is better than nothing." –Dick Brandon

"The problem with people who have no vices is that you can be fairly certain that they have some pretty annoying virtues." –Elizabeth Taylor

"But in our enthusiasm, we could not resist a radical overhaul of the system, in which all of its major weaknesses have been exposed, analyzed, and replaced with new weaknesses." –Bruce Leverett, *Register Allocation in Optimizing Compilers*

"There are two major products that come out of Berkeley: LSD and UNIX. We don't believe this to be a coincidence." –Jeremy S. Anderson

A fellow computer programmer for a consulting group had designed some software for one of our largest ac-counts. He asked my help in putting it into operation. At first, he handled most of the work. Eventually, though, he asked me to help with the last phase of the training.

When I sat down with one woman and told her I would be showing her how to make changes to the files, she sighed with relief. "I'm so glad you're teaching me instead of *him.*"

Surprised, I said that my colleague was far more experienced than I was.

"Yes," she said, "but I feel much more comfortable with you. I get nervous around really *smart* people."

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 Micro-soft 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 customers to know that even when you're all alone with your computer, you are never *really* alone."

Well, Bill," said God, "I'm really confused on this one. I'm not sure whether to send you to Heaven or Hell. After all, you enormously helped society by putting a computer in almost every home in the world, and yet you created that ghastly Windows operating system. I'm going to do something I've never done before. I'm going to let you decide where you want to go."

Mr. Gates replied, "Well, thanks, God. What's the difference between the two?"

God said, "You can take a peek at both places briefly if it will help you decide. Shall we look at Hell first?"

"Sure!" said Bill. "Let's go!"

Bill was amazed! He saw a clean, white sandy beach with clear waters. There were thousands of beautiful women running around, playing in the water, laughing and frolicking about. The sun was shining and the temperature was as perfect!

Bill said, "This is great! If this is Hell, I can't wait to see Heaven!"

To which God replied, "Let's go!" and off they went.

Bill saw puffy white clouds in a beautiful blue sky with angels drifting about playing harps and singing. It was nice, but surely not as enticing as Hell.

Mr. Gates thought for only a brief moment and rendered his decision. "God, I do believe I would like to go to Hell."

"As you desire," said God.

Two weeks later, God decided to check up on the late billionaire to see how things were going. He found Bill shackled to a wall, screaming among the hot flames in a dark cave. He was being burned and tortured by demons.

"How ya doin', Bill?" asked God.

Bill responded with anguish and despair. "This is awful! This is not what I expected at all! What happened to the beach and the beautiful women?"

"Oh *that*!" said God. "That was the screen saver!"