



Lawsuits Pop-up Around the Country Over Ads that Pop-up On Your Computer

by Bill Wood

Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

Sometimes strange things happen when you are surfing on the World Wide Web. Did you ever wonder why ads pop-up on your screen when you go to certain sites? Sometimes, that ad doesn't even belong to the company whose site you are visiting. It might even be for a direct competitor. If you were looking to rent a trailer and visited the U-haul Web site why were you treated to an ad from one of its competitors? Well, U-haul certainly wasn't happy that you were being treated to ads for a competitor and it sued the company that sent you that ad.

Recent news stories on the *New York Times* online site and News.com have dealt with the pop-up battles. The *Times* reported that it and various online content companies and retailers such as U-haul have filed various suits against Web advertisers Gator Corporation and WhenU.com over the use of pop-up ads that change what you see on the screen. What may seem like a clear-cut case may not be so easy to decide. To date, two sets of cases have reached different conclusions. The authors of the pesky pop-up software have presented an interesting argument. They claim that you, the computer user, gave them permission to do it. And, they argued, you, not the originator of the Website, have the ultimate control over the display on the computer screen.

How, you might ask, did you give them that permission? Software such as KaZaA, eWallet or Weatherscope carries the Gator code. Did you read the fine print in the license agreement when you downloaded that 'free' software? Probably not if you are like most of us. If you had you might not have fully appreciated the permissions you were giving. "Free" may not be quite what you thought it was.

The Gator Website puts it this way,

In return for receiving FREE software (often valued at up to \$30), consumers agree to receive targeted promotions/ads from Gator advertisers through the Gator Advertising and Information Network. GAIN occasionally displays various forms of pop-up ads in a separate window on users' computer screens. These GAIN ads are displayed based on the interests of the computer user as reflected by their Web surfing behavior and are not sponsored or endorsed by the Web pages being viewed. The GAIN name and/or [its logo] distinguishes GAIN ads from other ads.

At least I now know what that little alligator logo means.

Anyway, the Courts have not been consistent in the rulings on the early suits. Even two federal judges from

the same district seem to disagree. One issued a preliminary injunction against the practice in an early round in a suit filed last year by the *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and others against Gator. That ruling by Judge Hilton of the US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia became essentially moot when the cases were settled earlier this year.

In June, Judge Lee who is a colleague in the same district issued what appears to be a contradictory ruling in favor of similar actions by WhenU. That case involved the U-haul Website and the WhenU software automatically displayed an ad from a U-haul competitor.

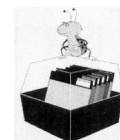
You may have realized that the software you wanted was only free to the extent that you paid for it with information about you and your Web viewing habits rather than cash. (Did you tell them the truth about your age, family income and whether or not you owned or rented your primary dwelling? There is an interesting ethical question about whether or not they are entitled to know the truth. . .)

Anyway, buried in the Gator license agreement is the permission. The companies then argue that, because you gave them permission to watch your browsing and bring you targeted ads, you are the one modifying your screen and that it is not liable for either copyright or trademark infringement. One of their arguments is that the very essence of the Windows program is the ability for the user to have multiple screens showing at the same time. So, they ask, why can't you give someone else permission to open one of those windows? At least that is what they argued.

Until there are final judgments, and not sealed settlements, the exact law on this topic will remain unsettled. It is no secret that the content owners are being very aggressive in protecting investments in music, movies and now, Web pages. For the full stories and later updates on pop-ups you can visit the *New York Times* Online Website and the News.com site.

On the other side of the country, the California Supreme Court has issued an opinion in a case in which Intel, the computer chip maker, tried to stop a former employee from sending thousands of e-mails to company workers. Intel claimed that it was a trespass to its computers but that isn't how the California court saw it. I'll have more on the opinion in a future column but you can read the opinion.

From the August 2003 issue of PC Alamode, newsletter of the Alamo PC Organization, Inc. of San Antonio, TX. 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 .





From The DealsGuy

by Bob Click
Greater Orlando Computer
Users Group

I have been working hard to post various articles on my Web site that I think are interesting and well written items I found in the newsletters I receive. I've had no feedback from anybody on how many are using them and I have no Web log on that site. I don't know if it was all for naught, or if my readers and some editors are actually getting some good stuff from it. Please let me know if I am getting things you like, or if you want something else. I need input.

I also find many other useful items, such as tips, in the newsletters I receive and try to save many of them for future reference, not to mention all the interesting and useful urls I have saved. It sure makes large files. The reviews I post are mostly for novel things, or items many might be buying now, such as cameras and color laser printers. That's because most UG newsletters are full of reviews for books and popular software.

I've also noticed something else. Many of the authors I ask for their articles have been around computers for some time. When I get the file from them, it is often written in older software. Looks like I am not the only person who is not buying new software because what I already have is working fine. If some vendors have their way, your software would only run for one year and would then have to be renewed.

Reminders:

Russ Walter's book *The Secret Guide To Computers* [<http://www.secretfun.com>] was not a special, but user groups can always use it as a fundraiser by purchasing at the volume discounts and reselling them to members. Masque Publishing's "A Computerized One Armed Bandit," [<http://www.masque.com>] game for the discounted price of \$19.95 is still good this month. They might even give us a special on another of their games next month. I'll ask

Our Friend Dave is Baaaack

Dave Whittle was kind enough to remember the DealsGuy and his readers. He sent this message the other day that I will include. Many of you know Dave very well since he has presented to your users groups.

"I seem to have been fortunate enough to survive the high-tech downturn. My current clients (replacing MGI) are Intel, iSeeMedia, 3D Album, muvee, and Alpha Software. Each of my client software companies has agreed to let me offer some great deals to user group members, and, as always, we limit our offerings to those products that are of almost universal appeal and adhere to our high standards of quality and usability. We've earned your trust over many years of helping user group members find the best software from hot new categories, just as you've earned their trust by ferreting

out great deals. Here are some great deals on great software you can offer your readers:

"3D Album PLUS DVD Converter (Animation Capture) [www.3d-album.com]. Create beautiful, eye-popping 3D slide shows from your digital photos. Share by saving the show and music as an executable file or a folder containing everything you need to burn an auto-run CD. You can also convert the slide shows to movie formats for use with a DVD authoring program such as VideoWave 5. Low Internet Price: \$39.95 + \$24.95 + \$7.70 S&H = \$72.60. User Group Price: *Only \$35!*

"muvee autoProducer DVD Edition [www.muvee.com]. Process any raw video footage (such as your home movies) quickly and easily, converting it into a fascinating movie or music video in one of over a dozen different styles, automatically! Save it as an .AVI, .MPEG, .MPG2, or a variety of other formats. This software is the perfect complement to any video editor or DVD authoring software. Includes manual and CD not available when you order direct from the muvee web site. Low Internet Price: \$59.95 + \$14.95 for CD + S&H = \$74.90. User Group Price: *Only \$35!*

"iSeeMedia PhotoVista Panorama 3.0 [www.iseemedia.com]. Create fully immersive, interactive, 3D panoramas automatically from a series of digital photos. Upgrade to Version 3.0 to get improved workflow and the ability to stitch an additional layer vertically. Low Internet Price: \$59.95 + \$9.95 S&H = \$69.90. User Group Price: *Only \$35!*

"All Three of the Above: *Only \$95!* Including *free* Shipping and Handling if your readers say they saw the offer in your Deals Guy column. Save over \$114! Offer expires October 30, 2003.

"To order, simply provide us with the following:

- Name
- Shipping address (and billing address if different)
- Credit card # and expiration date (VISA or MasterCard only)
- Which product(s) you want

"You can e-mail the above information to [orders@webworkingservices.com] or mail it with a check to Webworking Services Corporation, 653 N 600 E, Springville, UT 84663, or fax it to (801) 489-0609."

DealsGuy note: While I have not heard of any problems, be aware that sending a credit card number by e-mail may not be the most secure method. If you are unsure about any pricing or S&H, contact Dave for clarification.

Do Much Long Distance Calling?

A long time ago I wrote about [<http://www.bigzoo.com>], which I thought was a good deal, and it still is. The rate is 2.9 and 3.9 cents for calls in the US with various rates for other countries, all very good. It's also good in motels etc. when you are away from home. Just go on line and sign up by using your CC to put some money into an account. I don't normally find dialing Bigzoo a problem unless it was busy and I have to keep

trying. I simply use a speed dialer for the access number and the pin number. According to Kiplinger, here are some other options.

[<http://www.onesuite.com>] has two versions. Dialing one of its local access numbers gives you domestic long distance calling for 24/7 at just 2.5 cents per minute. If you prefer toll-free access numbers, the price goes to 2.9 cents per minute.

If you prefer the convenience of just dialing 1 (doing it the old fashioned way), try [<http://www.gtctelecom.com>] and LD calling will cost you just 5 cents per minute 24/7, and no monthly charges. For that, they require you be billed online and use a credit card. This one won't include Alaska or Hawaii at that price. A paper bill would cost \$1.95 per month. (If you check your phone bill now, you are probably already paying a hefty fee for having your long distance calls included on your phone bill). In the article I read they also included some URLs for doing comparisons. [<http://www.tollchaser.com>], [<http://www.SaveOnPhone.com>] and [<http://www.getconnected.com>] which also includes wireless.

This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies 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 often must give up on many good articles for lack of response.

Media Notes

by Bill Pettit

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

In the computer world, the summer doldrums seem to have set in — everyone seems to be waiting for the holiday shopping season to start before any new hardware is released. Microsoft is supposed to release Office 2003 this month. Can't find one reason for an individual to buy it. Oh well, onward and upward.

Golden Benefits

Finding the medical and financial programs to which you are entitled can be a hassle. If you are over 55 or know someone who is and are curious about eligibility for government programs, today is your lucky day.

This site can help you look up local, state and federal programs based on a survey you complete. It takes only minutes, and you can ensure that you have covered all the bases to help cover your expenses. To visit this site, go here: <http://benefitscheckup.org/>

Swappers Get 'Heads Up' on Subpoenas
New tool shows file sharers if they're on RIAA watch list.

Internet file swappers worried about being sued by the Recording Industry Association of America, RIAA, can now find out whether the industry association has their number—their IP number, that is.

A new web-based tool (<http://www.eff.org/IP/P2P/riaasubpoenas/>) provided by the Electronic Frontier Foundation, EFF, enables file swappers to check their home IP address or file-sharing service user name against a list of addresses and names disclosed in hundreds of subpoenas filed by the RIAA to Internet service providers.

Unveiled in late July, the tool consists of a web page with a field into which visitors can type a user name from file-sharing services such as Kazaa and Grokster, or the IP address of a system used to swap files. That page is linked to a database containing file swapper information culled from RIAA subpoenas, according to Fred von Lohmann, senior intellectual property attorney at the EFF.

Visitors who enter a name or address that is on the list receive a link to an electronic copy of the actual subpoena, he said.

Growing List

The new tool gives file sharers who are being targeted a head start on challenging the subpoenas, von Lohmann said.

Those whose names are not in the list receive “peace of mind” that they are not being pursued, the EFF said. Still, because of delays in processing the large volume of subpoenas generated by the RIAA, there is a lag between the number of subpoenas submitted by the RIAA and the number disclosed to the public and in the EFF database, von Lohmann said.

The EFF believes that the RIAA has subpoenaed ISPs for information on almost 1000 file swappers so far, but only around 300 names of targeted swappers are accessible to the public, he said.

In addition, the RIAA is adding new subpoenas each day, so file swappers should take small comfort if their user name or IP address doesn't match any of those in the database, von Lohmann said.

Gillette shrugs off Radio Frequency

Identification (RFID) tracking fears

Gillette has dismissed assertions by privacy groups that the company plans to use smart tags in its products to track and photograph shoppers.

The Boston-based consumer products company is one of the first to start trials of the controversial RFID tags in its Mach 3 razor blade packets. U.K. supermarket chain Tesco has been testing the tagged products in a store in Cambridge, England.

But privacy groups started protesting outside the Tesco store when it emerged that the supermarket was

automatically taking photographs of shoppers when they picked the blades off the shelf and when they left the shop with any tagged product.

U.S.-based group Consumers Against Supermarket Privacy Invasion and Numbering (CASPIAN) is urging a worldwide boycott against Gillette over the tagging concerns.

“We want to send a clear message to Gillette and other companies that consumers will not tolerate being spied on through the products they buy,” said Katherine Albrecht, director of Caspian.

But Gillette has hit back at the “misleading” claims, saying it only wants to use the RFID tags to improve the efficiency of its supply chain. The chips, when inserted into products, emit radio signals that allow them to be tracked.

“Our intention is very much pallet and case application within our supply chain,” Paul Fox, a Gillette spokesman, told Silicon.com. “We have never, nor do we have, any intention to track, photograph or videotape consumers.”

Tesco’s Cambridge trial finished at the end of July, and it is now running a pilot with RFID tags in DVDs at its store in Sandhurst, England.

A Tesco representative said the photographing of consumers was just part of a range of uses the supermarket chain is looking at for the tags.

“We are just looking at the benefits,” the representative said. “It is blue sky stuff. The camera use was a side project to look at the security benefit.”

WalMart undertook a similar trial in a Boston-area store but recently decided to cancel the test. Italian clothier Benetton is studying how it could use RFID chips.

Drag ‘N’ Drop To CD-RW Easily

New technology promises simple file transfers, near-zero formatting time.

Creating and sharing CD-RWs just got easier. Thanks to a new technology, users have a simple and consistent way to transfer files through Windows Explorer, or save a file to CD-RW from an app—with confidence that other new CD drives will be able to read the disc. More important, CD-RW formatting time is cut to practically nothing because you can start copying files before formatting is done.

The new standard is code-named Mt. Rainier (aka EasyWrite), and some 40X-rated CD-R/RW drives from vendors such as Philips and Teac already support it (you may need a firmware upgrade to make it work, so check with vendors). Nearly all the forthcoming 48X-rated CD-R/RW drives should offer built-in Mt. Rainier support, and the whole market will eventually follow. Even some rewritable-DVD drives, such as next-generation DVD+RW models, will include Mt. Rainier.

A key benefit of Mt. Rainier drives: no need for a CD-RW packet-writing program to let you drag and drop files to disc—that is, once operating system support

is built in. And that’s the catch. You can buy software that lets you take advantage of Mt. Rainier, but native OS support — which makes the process seamless — lags. (Today, only the Linux 2.4.19 kernel offers support.) Microsoft promised support in Windows XP but did not include it; a company spokesperson said a reader driver is on the way, and the next Windows, code-named Longhorn, should include full support.

Work It Now

You don’t have to wait for Microsoft. With Software Architects’, version 3 (\$70; \$40 for an upgrade), you can use most of Mt. Rainier’s nifty features now. (Roxio Easy CD Creator 5.2 also supports Mt. Rainier.)

WriteCD-RW Pro has three utilities to let you write a Mt. Rainier disc, read it in a non-Mt. Rainier drive, and recover lost files or repair discs of various formats. It works with Windows 98, Me, NT, 2000, and XP, and Mac 8.6 and 9.x.

I still had to format discs, but it took less than 5 minutes, compared with an average of 20 minutes or more for most packet-writing utilities. And I had no trouble copying files as the disc formatted. You can even interrupt formatting — it resumes at your next session with no data loss.

Copying and saving files was a breeze. And after I installed SAI’s read utility on another PC, both a CD-RW and a DVD-ROM drive that had no Mt. Rainier support or other UDF (Universal Disc Format) software read my new disc.

The full promise of Mt. Rainier is still that — a promise. But SAI’s utilities offer many of the technology’s benefits now, and may also soon ship with drives as part of the software bundle—a plus for users and their wallets.

A P2P outpost in a Refugee Camp

Deep in the tense Jenin refugee camp in the Palestinian West Bank, a new file-swapping service is daring record labels and movie studios to turn their piracy-hunting into an international incident.

Dubbed Earthstation 5, the new file-swapping network is openly flouting international copyright norms at a time when many older peer-to-peer companies are trying to establish themselves as legitimate technology companies. One of the brashest of a new generation of file-trading networks, it is serving as a new test case for the ability of high-tech security measures and international borders to preserve privacy on the Net.

As the deadline looms this month for what will likely be thousands of copyright lawsuits filed by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) against individual computer users, anxious file swappers are turning to this and other new services in hopes of avoiding legal consequences. In EarthStation 5’s case, it is returning industry legal threats with bravado.

“We’re in Palestine, in a refugee camp,” said Ras Kabir, the service’s co-founder. “There aren’t too many

process servers that are going to be coming into the Jenin refugee camp. We'll welcome them if they do."

On its face, Earthstation 5 appears to be at the leading edge of the movie and music industry's next nightmare—copyright-flouting networks based in a territory without strong intellectual property laws, with security built in that protects users from scrutiny. Indeed, the company is confident enough in its territorial immunity that it even streams and offers downloads of full albums and first-run movies like "Terminator 3" and "Tomb Raider" directly from its own servers, an activity that has previously resulted in lawsuits and the prompt disappearance of predecessors.

As an unabashed advocate of unrestricted file swapping, the company may also serve to undermine recent conciliatory efforts of older peer-to-peer companies. Companies such as Kazaa parent Sharman Networks have tried to open negotiations with the recording and film industries in hopes of ultimately reaching a legal compromise. Several groups of peer-to-peer companies have opened trade associations and lobbying branches in Washington, D.C., aiming to show they are legitimate parts of the technology economy.

Like others in a new generation of file-sharing networks such as Blubster and Filetopia, Earthstation 5 bills itself primarily as an anonymous service. That's helped all of them draw computer users anxious to escape the high-profile recording industry campaign to find, identify and ultimately sue thousands of individuals trading music on networks such as Kazaa and Morpheus.

Trouble is, the claims to anonymity are as highly controversial as the services themselves. "We have yet to see a P2P network where we have not been able to target individuals who are infringers," said Matt Oppenheim, senior vice president of the RIAA. "This is marketing hype of the worst kind. It is playing on the fears of others, encouraging them to engage in behavior that will get them into a boatload of trouble."

Out of the West Bank

According to Earthstation 5 founder Kabir, the company was formed after a conversation with his brother Nasser in Ramallah two years ago, as Napster was circling toward its nadir. Over time, they won the financial backing of investors in Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Russia, who have asked to remain anonymous. Those funds were used in part to pay contract programmers, largely in Russia, to help build the basic software.

The 35-year-old Kabir, who speaks fluent English, says he is Palestinian but spent much of his childhood in Manchester, England, with his mother. He now has homes in Jenin and elsewhere in Palestine, where Earthstation 5 is based, he said.

He's not worried about legal attacks from the RIAA or the Motion Picture Association (MPA), groups that have successfully shut down many of the most blatant copyright violators online, he said. In the West Bank

and Gaza, the Israeli government has ceded civil law enforcement to the Palestinian Authority. That body has propagated copyright rules that protect Palestinian copyrights but don't have strong protections for foreign works, he said.

He's now making sweeping claims for the success of the service: that it has been translated into more than a dozen languages, ranging from Turkish to Chinese, which has helped it be downloaded more than 22 million times — a number that would put it on track to rival the reach of file-swapping giant Kazaa.

Like much else in the gray areas of Internet file swapping, much of this is hard to confirm in detail. Nor are claims always genuine in this industry. In April, a Netherlands-based company that calls itself "The Honest Thief," which similarly advertised file sharing beyond the reach of American law, turned out to be a hoax.

Internet addresses Earthstation 5 uses point to Israeli hosting company SpeedNet, which did not return requests for comment. The file-swapping company's domain name itself is registered to an address in "Jenin refugee Camp #23," although that does not prove its actual location there.

The company's Web site gives an address in Gaza, as does the contact information for another Net address used by the service.

According to Download.com, a popular software aggregation site News.com publisher CNET Networks operates, the English version of Earthstation 5 has been downloaded just 25,500 times, with far fewer instances of other languages. Kabir said most of his downloads come from other sites or from the company's own site. The software itself does not include a way to verify the number of people online at any given time.

Is secure really secure?

If the story of a refugee camp-based network that's flying in the face of international copyright norms is compelling, it is ultimately the strength of the technology itself that will determine the success of the service or of any of its new generation of rivals.

By comparison to more established services, Earthstation 5 is difficult to use and buggy. It claims to use a series of different technologies — most of which are similar to nascent efforts by rivals—in order to keep its users' identities safe. [This program suggests turning off firewalls to further enable downloads—that should be a flag!...Ed.]

First, it uses a different Web protocol, called UDP (for User Datagram Protocol), to transmit much of its information. This is harder to detect and track to a single computer than is TCP (Transmission Control Protocol), which is used by most file-swapping services and Web functions.

The company adds SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) encryption—the same technology that prevents hackers

from seeing password or credit card numbers being sent to e-commerce sites — to protect data in transit.

And finally, it encourages users to search and even transfer files through proxy servers, the electronic equivalent of using a middleman to exchange goods. That way, anybody who tries to download files will see only the Net address of the proxy server doing the relaying, not the person originally sharing files, according to the company.

None of these methods is a perfect guarantor of anonymity. Nor does the company provide enough real detail on its security to satisfy others in the privacy business.

“If I’m going to lay my anonymity on the line, I would want to see all the details about how a system works,” said Ian Clarke, founder of Freenet, a years-long project dedicated to producing a genuinely anonymous file-swapping and Net publishing system. “This is an issue we think about a lot. When we have people in China who could go to jail or worse for using Freenet, we want to make sure that we’re not exaggerating those claims and what level (of anonymity) they afford.”

Companies dedicated to scouring file-swapping networks for infringements say proxy servers could help people be temporarily anonymous, but they have flaws as well. A server could, for example, be a “honey pot,” a trap set up by a group like the RIAA or MPA that will in fact do nothing to preserve privacy.

Kabir said his company runs several of its own proxy servers and encourages people to swap files through these. But if the service becomes extremely popular, with hundreds of gigabytes going through the service every day, running anonymous proxies would likely become prohibitively expensive and impractical.

“Right now, the proxy features in just about every P2P client don’t work well. They end up slowing downloads and aren’t highly utilized,” said Travis Hill, director of engineering for BayTSP, a company that works for record companies and movie studios to find copyright infringements online. “But if and when they do start being used effectively — if proxy operators are allowing their machines to distribute copyrighted material — copyright owners will start notifying them and pursuing them also.”

The U.S. copyright community has previously shown some restraint in dealing with infringing issues in the Middle East. File-swapping firm iMesh, based in Israel, is one of the oldest and most popular of the post-Napster networks and has thus far escaped lawsuits altogether.

Even if the RIAA and MPA can’t go to Israel or the Palestinian territories to have the company’s servers shut down, they do have options inside the United States. They’ve previously filed lawsuits against major U.S. backbone Internet service providers to block access to Web addresses that offer copyrighted material online and have said they are willing to do so again.

For now, Kabir and his brother are worrying just as much about maintaining a functioning technology operation in an area where suicide bombings and military reprisals are still a way of life. The company has talked to militant Palestinians as well as Israelis and has gotten the go-ahead to operate without being drawn into the ongoing conflict as much as possible, he says.

“We have met with the organizations on our side, met with the leadership, and we said we just want to support ourselves and support Palestinians,” Kabir said. “Everyone thought we were nuts. But we all came to agreement. We’re entitled to eat, too.”

Wireless Broadband Leaves Wi-Fi Behind
IPWireless is offering high-speed access that goes mobile — without hot spots.

Sensing an opportunity and a challenge, wide-area mobile broadband service providers and equipment makers are positioning their wireless data technologies as an alternative to Wi-Fi hot spots, with the promise to users of wider coverage and lower cost.

Though Wi-Fi technology has limits it has spurred general interest in wireless connectivity and spawned a growing population of multitasking laptop users who can be seen in cafes, airports, and hotels around the world, sipping coffee, having business discussions, and using some downtime to catch up on e-mail. But now that Wi-Fi has piqued user interest in wireless connectivity, it may provide opportunities for alternatives.

“If consumers are given a choice between a service for which they have to find the nearest point, and a service that is everywhere, we think the everywhere service will win every time,” said Chris Gilbert, chief executive officer of IPWireless in San Bruno, California. IPWireless sells equipment for mobile broadband services, built around a packet data implementation of UMTS (Universal Mobile Telecommunication System). “The best analogy I have heard is to pay phones versus cell phones.”

Cost Concerns

Wi-Fi was designed as a local area technology and is not equipped to cover wide areas, support mobility, or scale as a carrier-grade network, according to Gilbert. “In urban areas Wi-Fi covers a few hundred feet, while IPWireless covers about two and a half miles,” Gilbert said.

The largest cost with Wi-Fi is not upfront capital expenditure but the ongoing operating expenditure to backhaul all the access points, according to Gilbert.

Wi-Fi operators have to set up more access points to match broadband wireless coverage, and incur large backhaul costs since each access point has to be connected to T1 or DSL lines. To break even, then, Wi-Fi operators have to generate more revenue from each user than do operators of wide-area, mobile broadband technologies, he said.

Going Mobile

Now, IPWireless' technology is getting a boost as service providers in New Zealand, Germany, Malaysia, and the U.S. have announced plans to deploy networks using its products. Other equipment makers for wide-area mobile broadband include New Jersey-based Flarion Technologies, Navini Networks in Richardson, Texas, ArrayComm in San Jose, California, and Broadstorm in Bellevue, Washington.

"The benefit of these [wide-area mobile broadband] technologies over Wi-Fi is that you do not have to hunt for a hot spot, and you can get service where there is not a hot spot," said Tole Hart, principal analyst for mobile and wireless at Stamford, Connecticut-based research firm, Gartner.

While it is true that the burgeoning number of Wi-Fi hot spots may reduce the relative advantage wide-area services, the wide-area technology can offer mobile voice and push-to-talk that will not be possible with Wi-Fi, according to Hart. Push-to-talk is a walkie-talkie kind of feature that creates an instant connection between cell phones, removing the need to dial a number or wait for a network connection.

Though speeds can be faster with Wi-Fi depending on the number of people in the network, it may not show up to the end user due to other bottlenecks in the network, Hart added.

Similar Services

Vendors of wide-area wireless technology that competes with UMTS are also jumping into the act. For example, Qualcomm, is positioning its CDMA (code division multiple access) technology as a wide-area alternative to Wi-Fi. While its CDMA2000 1X technology supports both voice and data services over a standard (1X) CDMA channel, Qualcomm in San Diego, California, has also introduced a data-optimized version of CDMA 2000, called 1xEV-DO (evolution data only) for fast data transfer comparable to cable modems and DSL connections.

Qualcomm's pitch is that without regional or national coverage and limited hot spot availability, Wi-Fi falls short of providing a true enterprise mobility solution. With ubiquitous coverage, 3G (third-generation) CDMA helps users stay connected to their offices, without having to worry whether they are covered by Wi-Fi. "CDMA and Wi-Fi are two different technologies," said Hart. "CDMA 1x EV-DO can be an alternative to Wi-Fi, provided coverage is good. With Wi-Fi you know you are going to get good bandwidth, and you just have to find the right hot spot." Qualcomm's other technology, CDMA 1X, is too slow to be a good alternative to Wi-Fi, according to Hart.

Although mobile broadband wireless has some technical advantages over Wi-Fi, the ground realities are quite different, particularly with Intel throwing its weight behind Wi-Fi with an eye to selling more of its

Wi-Fi enabled Centrino processors and chipsets, according to analysts.

Intel's Approach

Intel's aggressive push of Centrino on the client side and the emergence of wireless switching on the infrastructure side are the two major forces transforming the business Wi-Fi market in 2003, according to In-Stat/MDR, a technology market research firm in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Wireless switching architectures shift the management, configuration, and security functions of a Wi-Fi network from the access points (APs) upstream to a centralized switch. About 16 million notebook PCs with embedded Wi-Fi will ship to businesses this year, and by 2005, Wi-Fi will be included in 95 percent of notebooks as a standard feature, according to In-Stat/MDR.

However, the growing acceptance of Wi-Fi may be a good situation for all types of wireless technologies. Intel's strong backing for Wi-Fi is expected to help boost acceptance of broadband wireless services in general, according to Gilbert.

"We believe that Intel's huge push behind Wi-Fi is probably the best thing that could happen for IPWireless," added Gilbert. "The more that users are enticed to buy laptops and look to start using their laptops outside the office, the more they will want a true wide area mobile solution." For now, however, wide-area mobile broadband service providers have to accommodate Wi-Fi users in their deployments.

"We see Wi-Fi as an important complementary technology in the LAN market," said Bob Smith, chief executive officer of Walker Wireless in Auckland, which is using IPWireless' technology to set up a wireless broadband network across New Zealand over the next three years.

"We are looking to integrate Wi-Fi into the local hub so in that instance customers would locally be connected to the hub by a Wi-Fi connection and IPWireless would be the wide area connection from a fixed point." Down the line, Walker Wireless is looking at having one PCMCIA (Personal Computer Memory Card International Association) card that would have roaming between 802.11 and IPWireless on the card, according to Smith.

Choosing Between a Palm and a Pocket PC

So what's it going to be?

If you work for a business that has standardized on a particular PDA, you've got no choice. If you're resolutely anti-Microsoft (and I know many who are), it's a no-brainer. But for the rest of us, deciding between a Palm and Pocket PC isn't so easy. In fact, the choice has become more difficult, as the two competing platforms share more similarities now than ever.

I'll present the top reasons to buy a Palm OS PDA or a Pocket PC, with an eye toward helping you choose the platform that's right for you. This isn't an exhaus-

tive list of comparisons, however — my goal is to touch on the main differentiators.

Also, I'll focus on the differences between Palm OS and Pocket PC devices as PDAs, not as combination PDA/cell phone devices. That's because I'm assuming most people in the market for a combo device would decide on the PDA platform they need first, then choose a device that supports it.

Reasons to Buy a Palm

* More third-party software. The Palm OS has 72 percent of the worldwide PDA market, according to IDC. As a result, there are thousands more applications available for Palm devices than for Pocket PCs. So if you want lots of programs to choose from, such as Iambic Software's TimeReporter time-tracking software (available for Palms but not Pocket PCs), your best bet is a Palm OS PDA.

Logging Travel Expenses

ExpenseLog Pro 1.0 from TrajectoryLabs .com makes it easy to track your travel expenses like bar bills, airport shoe shines, pay-per-view movies, and so on. (Then again, maybe you shouldn't track those expenses.) You can create expense categories, then enter, view, and calculate expenses in each category, or all expenses combined. Expense-Log Pro lets you record automobile mileage and per-mile reimbursement rates. There's also a currency converter, but you have to enter the exchange rates manually; other programs (such as WorldMate, reviewed below) do that work for you. ExpenseLog Pro data is backed up to your PC when you HotSync and can be converted into text files for viewing in Microsoft Word, Excel, and the like, but the conversion requires a separate, free utility. ExpenseLog Pro 1.0, for Palm only, can be found for \$30 at Handango.

Hunting Down Area Codes

Seems like new area codes pop up more frequently these days than Michael Jackson exposés on TV. For instance, where the heck does area code 337 come from, anyway? (Answer: Lafayette, Louisiana) Pocket Codes 2.0 is a handy utility from Neohand that lets you enter U.S. and Canadian area codes to determine their geographical location and time zone. Conversely, you can enter a location to find its area code. You can also look up country codes, as well as international Internet domain extensions. Pocket Codes 2.0 is easy to use, does well what it purports to do, and has color icons, too. Pocket Codes 2.0 costs \$8 and is available in Palm and Pocket PC versions.

Converting When Abroad

One of my all-time favorite Palm apps, WorldMate takes some of the confusion out of a trip abroad—which is good news for those of you still traveling abroad nowadays. The program includes seven highly useful, integrated utilities.

WorldMap displays your location on a color map, with light and dark areas to indicate day and night. It

shows the time and day for any selected location as well as a five-day weather forecast that's as up-to-date as your last HotSync. (You must have an Internet connection active when you HotSync for this to work.) Weather data is supplied by The Weather Channel.

The Clocks screen allows you to view the date and time of five different locations at once, as well as get easy access to weather forecasts for those cities.

WorldMate automatically retrieves the latest exchange rates when you HotSync and updates the program's currency converter. You can convert one currency (such as the euro) into two different currencies at once, too. There's also a converter for lengths, distances, temperatures, and other measurements; a list of country dialing codes; and a utility that converts men's, women's, and baby's clothing sizes. The most recent WorldMate version includes a packing list feature that lets you add categories and descriptions to packed items (you can also check a box to indicate if an item has been packed). WorldMate 9.1.2 for the Palm OS costs \$25 (and is worth every cent). WorldMate 3.0.2 for Pocket PCs is \$20.

Tracking Your Time

Because I'm self-employed, I track all of my working hours—even the time spent on projects for which I receive a flat, rather than an hourly, rate. In fact, I strongly recommend that all professionals track their time whenever possible. If for no other reason, knowing how many hours you spent on that last PowerPoint presentation can help you more accurately estimate the time required to put together your next one. Several years ago I researched time tracking programs, and the one that best suited my needs then — and now — is Iambic Software's TimeReporter, which runs on Windows and Palm OS. You can easily track time spent away from the office on your handheld using the Palm utility. Then, when you HotSync, the Palm entries are added to the master TimeReporter database on your Windows machine.

Time entries are easy to create and sort, and you can use them to build reports. TimeReporter could stand some improvement; I wish you could create reports directly in the program rather than having to export the data to Excel, for instance. And the program is a bit pricey. But in my experience, this time tracker is the best I've tested.

The Standard Edition of TimeReporter 4.0.2 includes the Palm and Windows apps and costs \$150; the Professional Edition, which adds support for Microsoft SQL Servers, is \$200. No Pocket PC version is currently available. Go to the Iambic TimeReporter site to purchase the software or download a free trial version.

* Lower prices. The least expensive new Palm OS device is the Zire, which lists for \$99. By comparison, the least expensive new Pocket PC models (such as Dell's Axim X5) retail for about \$200. The Zire lacks some features of low-end Pocket PCs, namely a color

screen. But when you're on a tight bud-get, the price tag may appeal more to you than a fancy display.

* Needs fewer resources. The no-frills Palm OS doesn't require a speedy processor and tons of memory to run efficiently. On the other hand, Pocket PCs, with an operating system based on Windows, are more resource intensive and thus require faster processors and more memory (which drives up hardware costs).

* Easier to use. This is a judgment call, which I suspect will cause my in-box to overflow with fervently expressed disagreements. But I've used both platforms, and in my humble opinion, the Palm OS and the applications that run on it are more straightforward and simply designed than their equivalents on Pocket PCs, yet are powerful enough to get the job done.

* Better integration with Microsoft Office. This could be the subject of an article by itself (as well as another heated argument). In my experience, DataViz Documents To Go 5.0, included on most Palm models, provides tools and integration with Microsoft Office files that surpass the versions of Office on Pocket PCs. For instance, unlike Documents To Go on Palms, the pocket Office applications don't include PowerPoint (though third-party applications are available that provide access to PowerPoint files).

* Smaller size. In general, Palm devices tend to be more compact than Pocket PCs. This differentiator is diminishing as larger, more robust Palms and smaller, more streamlined Pocket PCs come to market.

Reasons to Buy a Pocket PC

* More models and vendors. Pocket PC vendors include Asus, Casio, Dell, Gateway, Hewlett-Packard, Toshiba, and ViewSonic. By comparison, the majority of Palm OS PDA models in the U.S. come from Sony and Palm/Handspring — the two companies plan to merge. (I'm not including specialty devices based on the Palm OS, such as the AlphaSmart Dana notebook alternative.)

* Better screens. Until recently, the most Pocket PC color displays were crisper and offered more resolution than most Palm OS displays. This, too, is changing, however, as Palm OS devices — particularly multimedia handhels from Sony — are aggressively catching up with Pocket PC models.

* Better Web browser. Pocket Internet Explorer, the "mini-me" to the Windows version, is the best Web browser I've used on a PDA, partly because it's so similar to what I use on my Windows machine.

* Easier multitasking. Pocket PC can open more than one application at a time, unlike Palm devices — though only one Pocket PC app can appear on screen at a time. This makes it a bit easier and faster to jump between applications, but it also consumes more memory.

* MP3 player. Pocket PCs come standard with Windows Media Player for MP3 and other multimedia files, while only newer, high-end multimedia Palm OS devices come with media-playing software.

* Built-in speaker. Speakers are standard on Pocket PCs but are only found on some Palms, such as high-end Sony multimedia devices. This isn't a huge advantage, because even the best Pocket PC speaker is sounds tinny. Still, if you want to create and play back voice recordings or add GPS/mapping software systems with audible driving directions to your PDA, the Pocket PC is your best bet.

Pocket Streets

As far as Palm and Pocket PC mapping programs go, Microsoft Pocket Streets is by far the easiest to use. Pocket Streets puts interactive, color maps for U.S. and foreign metro areas within easy reach. You can download free maps for the U.S. and major European countries from Microsoft's Web site. If you have Microsoft's Streets & Trips 2003 (or earlier versions), a mapping program that runs on Windows computers, you can create your own maps on your PC and copy them to your Pocket PC. Streets & Trips covers the U.S. and Canada only, however.

Arrow icons make map navigation a cinch, while a zoom tool lets you quickly move in or out for a better view. You can search for addresses or places, find points of interest, and add pushpins to map locations. When you tap on any point on a street, Pocket Streets gives you the corresponding address. Unlike Streets & Trips, you can't get directions — but that's what gas station attendants are for. Pocket Streets costs \$25 and can be downloaded from Handango. However, Streets & Trips 2003 includes Pocket Streets and goes for about \$35, making it the better value. (Microsoft also offers a \$10 rebate on Streets & Trips 2003 when purchased in retail stores.)

Battery Pack 2003

A consistently popular download at Handango, Battery Pack 2003 from Omega One Software transforms the Pocket PC's Today screen from useless to useful by endowing it with interactive icons. At only \$12, this software is a must-have for Pocket PC users. Battery Pack 2003 is actually a bundle of utilities that includes a Battery Bar and a Program Bar. The Battery Bar shows how much time the current battery charge has left (such as 3 hours, 36 minutes), the available amount of file storage space in main memory and on your storage card, and so on. Having this information right on the Today screen keeps you from having to dig for it through menus and helps you plan your PDA usage accordingly.

The Program Bar, another handy time-saver, places shortcut icons to frequently used programs and files on the Today screen. The bar can display up to five lines of shortcuts to scroll through.

Journal Bar

Another top-seller at Handango, Journal Bar is a cool little utility that feeds the latest headlines, stock quotes, weather forecasts, movie reviews and show

times, TV listings, and sports scores directly to your Pocket PC's Today screen.

For all it delivers, Journal Bar takes up only a small piece of the screen. Using arrows, you scroll through the content line by line then click an item you want to explore. Selecting a headline, for instance, opens the related news article in Internet Explorer. The content is automatically updated when you synchronize your Pocket PC and have an active Internet connection. As far as I can tell, this doesn't noticeably slow down the synchronization process.

Journal Bar (from Omega One Software, maker of Battery Pack 2003) is an excellent way to have current news, weather, and other data on your Pocket PC — especially for those without wireless PDA connections. And it's only \$12.

And a Few More

The following programs are available for Palm OS devices as well as Pocket PCs and have been reviewed in earlier newsletters.

Vindigo 2.0 (\$25 annual subscription fee) is an indispensable guide to what's happening in dozens of cities, including info on restaurants, movies, bars, and so on." WorldMate 3.0 (\$20) is a must-have for international travelers. It's a suite of utilities for figuring out what the heck time it is in Bangkok, getting updated weather conditions, easily converting currencies and measurements, and lots more.

Pocket Codes 2.0 (\$8) is a cool little utility that lets you quickly look up U.S. and international area codes and time zones.

Shopping tips for buying a basic organizer:

Go with the Palm OS. If you simply need to maintain an up-to-date appointment calendar, contact list, and to-do list when you are away from your PC, your best bet is to stick with lower-end Palm OS devices. They will also handle other applications (which can come in handy), but their easy-to-use data synchronization stands out. The higher-end Palms extend the no-brainer simplicity of the OS to other functions, such as color screen display and wireless e-mail and messaging.

Get at least 8MB of memory. If you don't plan to store MP3 files or digital pictures or video, you won't need any more. If you think you'll be using a slew of third-party applications, you should get 16MB of memory needed for viewing calendars and contact information, and you'll save hundreds of dollars. Extend your PDA's abilities with third-party software. Thousands of applications have been written for Palm PDAs and are available for downloading at sites like Tucows and PalmGear.com. One of the most popular titles, DataViz's Documents to Go, allows you to edit Word and Excel documents and view PowerPoint files on your Palm-based PDA. Overall, you'll find much more third-party software written for the Palm OS than for Pocket PC devices.

Shopping tips for buying a PDA with advanced features:

Turn to the Pocket PC system. Because of their familial relationship with Windows, Pocket PC devices handle PC-like apps better while still offering conventional scheduling and contact synchronization functions. Pocket PC devices can play—and in some cases, record—audio files. They can also show video clips and display digital photographs. HP, Compaq, Casio, and Toshiba all make Pocket PC devices. But remember: Buying a Pocket PC instead of a Palm entails two tradeoffs: Pocket PCs cost at least \$100 more than the most basic Palm unit, and some users find the Pocket PC OS overly complicated.

Get at least 32MB of memory. Better yet, get 64MB. If you plan to store music, photo, or video files, you'll need it. Buy a device with auxiliary memory. CompactFlash, MultiMediaCard, and Secure Digital cards allow you to swap out music or other large files quickly. Secure Digital is the newest type of memory and costs about the same as a MultiMediaCard; CompactFlash is cheaper. Consider opting for a color screen. Color means big bucks in PDAs, but it's great for games and video. Look for rechargeable batteries. Pocket PCs generally eat up more power, and color screens demand rechargeable batteries.

When to consider a RIM Blackberry system. If you're buying a PDA to get real-time e-mail communication with enterprise connections, the RIM Blackberry device is best. For individual instant e-mail, a wireless Palm OS device is the way to go. Whichever you choose, you'll have to pay an additional monthly wireless communications charge.

And the Winner Is...

If you are primarily need a compact, reasonably priced, easy-to-use PDA for calendaring, contacts, to-do lists, and possibly a few multimedia perks, shop for a Palm OS device. On the other hand, if the familiarity of the Windows OS interface appeals to you, if you want to carry around what is essentially a tiny version of your PC, and if you want multimedia to be the rule and not the exception, then go for a Pocket PC.

From the September 2003 issue of The Umbrella Online.

The Lazy Webmaster

Free Data Feeds

by Susan Ives

Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

Content is the drab name for the exciting stuff that you find on a Web site. Some content you can and will create yourself. Lazy Webmasters have no scruples about using free content provided by others.

The free content I am touting here is, for the most part, data-driven. Lurking behind each of these stickers is a sophisticated database that feeds information onto your site. Even if you had the programming skills to

create the database and interface, you wouldn't have access to the data feeds. Let's look at some options:

Add a weather sticker:

You can include a forecast on your Web page. The free weather sticker is at Weather Underground First, type in the zip code or city name of the place you want to provide the forecast for. Then, look for the link that says "Add this sticker to your home page." Follow the on-screen instructions.

Poll your visitors:

Create A Poll offers free polling software. Put an opinion poll on your Website with immediate feedback to your users. Polls can either be radio buttons (as pictured) or a dropdown box. This poll doesn't screen out multiple voting.

Add a link to Congress:

Congress.Org offers a free sticker that lets people track down and write to their Federal elected officials just by typing in a zip code. An expanded sticker, also free, includes media and issue links. Go to congress.org to download.

Gas Buddy:

Looking for low gas prices? Gas Buddy will add sticker to your page that lists the high and low prices for any area in the US and Canada. In Texas, prices are listed for Austin, Houston, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth and San Antonio. Clicking on the sticker takes you to the Gas Buddy site to get a list of the stations.

Computer virus warnings:

Trend MicroVirus has several customizable stickers. You can list top viruses, virus advisories and alerts.

News Ticker:

newsindex.com and 7am.com are both news tickers. The first one lets you select a topic, and feeds in news headlines just on that topic. 7am.com feeds generic news headlines. The most sophisticated is *New York Times* headlines. You can select the categories — arts, books, technology, front page, international, sports, etc. — the number of headlines and the color and fonts. All you do is cut and paste the code.

Looking for more free content?

Sticky Web lists hundreds of sites that offer free content, from games to lottery number pickers. Stickiness is a Web marketing term that means people "stick" to your Web site — stay on it for a long time, or keep coming back to it, day after day or week after week.

So what's the catch?

First, you're going to get advertising from the supplier. All of these stickers have a link back to the sponsor. If people click on a sticker and go to the sponsor's page they may never return to your site.

Second, the sticker might not fit aesthetically with your site. Some are downright ugly. A red, white and blue sticker will stand out like a sore thumb on your purple and orange site. It might be too big, dominating your other, more important content. Some sponsors let

you customize the look and feel of their stickers, some don't.

Third, as with any data that you are sucking in from another site, you lose control. If the sponsor's site is down, you're the one that has a void, and probably a broken graphics link, smack dab in the middle of your home page. Finally, some Webmasters get a bad case of sticker-mania. Stickers pop up all over the site, like measles. Practice restraint.

On the plus side, you are getting high quality content. All you ever have to do is paste in a few lines of HTML, and then never worry about it again. There are enough choices that you can be prudent in matching the data feed to your site.

From the August 2003 issue of PC Alamode. Susan Ives is a past-president and past-webmaster of Alamo PC.

Ponderings

Supersized Combo

Just in Time

by Meredith Poor

Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

Once upon a couple of times I worked in medical clinics as a programmer, database administrator, network tech, help desk operator, technical writer, trainer, and systems analyst. You can imagine that these were small clinics. Not mentioned are my role as stock clerk, brass polisher, and laser printer cleaner-outer.

One of these clinics was run by an Air Force type, and the whole operation was a "tight ship," to mix metaphors. The other was run by an agent of Kaos, the nemesis of Maxwell Smart both in name and in general resemblance to the 60's generation. Both clinics had formalized purchasing systems for supplies and equipment. Someone recently asked me to set up a medical supplies "storefront" Website, triggering a retrospective on my days in the medical community. Presumably this site was going to compete on price, a scary thought to me since competition in the medical supply field is about like Wal-Mart vs. Smith's and Sons Main Street General Store.

At any rate, "Major Healy" kept his supply room stocked with bulk supplies purchased well in advance in quantities designed to assure the lowest price. I ran reports every six weeks showing projected understocks and estimates of cash flow required to replenish them. Purchasing was done every three weeks, and some items were stocked for six month contingencies.

"Dr. Feelgood," in comparison, bought stuff when he ran out. Sometimes the same van from the same medical supply operation would grace his parking lot three times in one day. The only other truck that showed up more was the roach coach. A credit card was dedicated to supplies purchases; reconciling this statement was our exercise in cost accounting.

I remember that Maj. Healy and his staff spent about \$50,000 a year on supplies. One other thing I remember was the time we had to empty out the stock room to make space for a newly added physical therapist. We had to move a bunch of this stuff to an unimproved area of the building, which took up about 250 square feet. This means we spent \$250 a month on the supply closet, or about \$3,000 a year.

Feelgood, by comparison, bought "just in time" and paid dearly for it. For some strange reason, however, I remember that his credit card statements didn't come out to any more than \$3,500. This would have annualized to \$40,000 or so. Since he didn't really inventory his supplies, he didn't pay for any space, so he hadn't tied up \$3,000 a year in real estate. These clinics were more or less the same size, so they should have had the same costs. Healy should have been cheaper, since his was well managed, but I retrospect I realized this wasn't true. For awhile, I didn't get it.

Both of the doctors tended to pursue the "state-of-the-art," which was changing pretty rapidly, and something finally began to penetrate my thick skull. Healy bought in advance, and then had to throw out stuff that was obsolete. This got even worse. . . Healy spent a lot of time designing and maintaining inventory control, which meant he lost \$200 an hour in revenue opportunity for every hour he spent "managing" clinic inventory. This was laughable for Feelgood, all he managed to do was show up.

I had this recollection in particular of a cart with a plastic bin on it, where we were emptying some items off a shelf to dispose of. Maybe it was a hundred here or a hundred there, but it added up.

Feelgood, in essence, used his supplier's warehouse space and inventory management skills, which he paid a premium for in same-day, small quantity deliveries. Therein is a lesson for any Internet based supply house: Speed Saves. Competition on price is a disastrous mistake, since it forces planning and management into the hands of people who have better things to do with their time. In retrospect, the supply house should have opened a "carry out" at the end of our professional building. Or maybe a vending machine behind the gift shop. Whatever.

Our Web "storefront," then, would be able to capture orders from the local MDs, but the genius in our business would have been getting the stuff there in an hour. How much we invested in Web development would be less important than what we invested in fulfillment. The more I thought about this, the less I, as a participant in it, mattered in the ultimate outcome. People who know me know I like to matter a lot.

The Japanese taught us a crucial lesson about inventory, which was that excesses could hide problems on the factory floor. As inventories of semi-finished goods become smaller (and are thus used up more quickly), over- or under-capacity is identified in various

parts of the factory. As these distortions are corrected, fewer resources are tied up in inventory, lowering costs and (hopefully) raising profits. Technology innovations can be brought to bear with greater speed, since there are no "leftovers" that have to be consumed with outdated processes, or written off.

Some service businesses have similar issues. While the local taco house looks to you like goods, it is a service, since they cook the food and clean up afterwards and even in some cases entertain you, even if it's just a TV perched in the corner.

America is a "just-in-time" economy, unless you live in West Texas and have to drive 200 miles to the grocery store. The Internet will, over time, make it more so, perhaps in combination with a "tube" or pipeline running into every household. My idea is ordering a Super-sized Combo to go, without me or anyone else having to get in a vehicle to get it or deliver it.

From the August 2003 issue of PC Alamode, newsletter of the Alamo PC Organization, Inc. Meredith Poor started programming in high school on 8K Datapoint 2200s around 1971. Most of his work now is focused on business applications software, typically using SQL-Server, MS Office, and IIS.

Pittsford Company Offers

Inexpensive Conversions

Advanced Computer Innovations, Inc., has expanded its unique Internet-based "instant online conversion" service to include many spreadsheet file formats as well. It now converts users' files between most word processor, spreadsheet, and graphics file formats, as well as some data base formats. It also performs letter-perfect conversion of almost any such file to PDF (Adobe Portable Document Format).

This service is available 24/7. There is no software to purchase, nor any subscription fee or commitment. Users just pay as and when they need to convert files. Converting a small set of files costs as little as \$9.

This is an easy-to-use and reliable conversion service. From the service's web page (<http://www.acii.com/online.htm>), the user clicks a "Convert" button, drags files to be converted into a dialog box that appears, and enters payment information. The files are then automatically uploaded to a conversion server, and in a couple of minutes the converted files are downloaded back to the user. All communication (data files and transaction information) is encrypted so there is no security compromise.

Additional details are available on their website.

Random Notes

Weather Screen

U.K. Calls on PC Users to Help
With Global Climate Experiment

Concerned about the world's climate and wondering how you can help improve scientific understanding of it? Wonder no more. If you own a PC, you

can become part of what's being billed as the world's largest climate-prediction experiment. Organized by a coalition of British universities and corporations, the experiment is expected to produce "the world's most comprehensive probability-based forecast of 21st century climate." How? Individual computer-users who join the experiment will download a unique version of a climate model developed by the Hadley Centre, one of the world's most important headquarters for climate science. The model will run when the computer is on but no other applications are in use, and the results will be sent back to the organizers via the Internet when the experiment is complete. "Together, participants' results will give us an overall picture of how much human influence has contributed to recent climate change, and of the range of possible changes in the future," said Oxford University's Myles Allen. Source: BBC News, Alex Kirby, 12 Sep 2003

[http://www.gristmagazine.com/forward.pl?forward_id=1492] join the experiment: Help predict the effects of global climate change, right there on your personal computer [http://www.gristmagazine.com/forward.pl?forward_id=1493]

What Should You Be Earning?

Are you underpaid? Wonder how much you might be making if you changed careers? Thanks to the wonder of the Internet, the answer is a mere click or two (OK, maybe three) away.

You can check out the typical pay for your job at Salary.com (<http://www.salary.com>). Just enter your career field and ZIP code. Most likely, you'll get a range. Lots of things go into salary decisions, so this is just a guide.

Another salary consideration is how far that money will stretch. Depending on where you live, the difference can be considerable. Homestore (<http://www.homestore.com/Moving/Tools/SalaryCalc.asp>) has a nifty calculator that tells what salary you need in your new city to match a change in cost of living.

And finally, speaking of salaries, is your paycheck right? Check with one of the calculators at PaycheckCity (<http://www.paycheckcity.com>).

Society News

Planning Meeting Minutes

Present: Arpad Kovacs, president, Steve Staub, treasurer, Bob Avery, Dan Rothfuss, Bill Statt, and Sally Springett.

There was a consensus that the last program meeting was very well received.

There was discussion of the idea that the RCSi design a business card to hand out at things like the Market-Pro show.

Because our treasury is so low it was decided to shorten the grace period for continuing to receive the *Monitor* when the membership period has elapsed from three to two months.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub

Balance as of 9/20/03 \$412.89

Income

Dues and gift \$167.00

Expenses

St. Stephens \$75.00

Web host (annual cost) 120.00

Paper for Monitor 54.47

\$249.47

Balance as of 9/16/03

\$330.00

The Lighter Side

Abbott & Costello and the
Ultimate Computer Store

Hello, this is Bud at the Ultimate Computer Store. Can I help you?

Yes, this is Lou and I'm setting up a home office in the den, and I'm thinking of buying a computer.

Mac?

No, the name is Lou.

Your computer?

I don't own a computer. I want to buy one.

Mac?

I told you, my name is Lou.

What about Windows?

Why? Does it get stuffy?

Do you want a computer with Windows?

I don't know. What do I see when I look out the windows?

Wallpaper.

Never mind the windows. I need a computer and software.

Software that runs on Windows?

No, on the computer! I need something I can use to write proposals, track expenses. You know, run a business. What have you got?

Office.

Yeah, for my office. Can you recommend anything?

I just did.

You just did what?

Recommended something.

You recommended something?

Yes.

For my office?

Yes.

Okay, what did you recommend for my office?

Office.

Yes, for my office.

Office for Windows.

I already have an office and it already has windows!

Let's say I'm sitting at my computer, and I want to type a proposal. What do I need?

Word.

If I'm writing a proposal, I'm going to need lots of words.

But what program do I load?

Word.

What word?

The Word in Office.

The only word in office is office.
The Word in Office for Windows.
Which word in "office for windows?"
The Word you get when you click the blue W.
I'm going to click your big W if you don't give me a straight answer. Let's forget about words for a minute. What do I need if I want to watch a movie over the Internet? RealOne.
Maybe a real movie, maybe a cartoon. What I watch is none of your business. But what do I need to watch it? RealOne.
If it's a long movie I'll also want to watch reels two, three and four. Can I watch reel four?
Of course.
Great! With what?
RealOne.
Okay, so I'm sitting at my computer and I want to watch a movie. What do I do?
You click the blue 1.
I click the blue one what?
The blue 1.
Is that different from the blue W?
Of course it is. The blue 1 is RealOne. The blue W is Word. What word?
The Word in Office for Windows.
But there's three words in "office for windows!"
No, just one. But it's the most popular Word in the world. It is?
Yes.
And that word is the real one?
No. RealOne has nothing to do with Word. RealOne isn't even part of Office.
Never mind; I don't want to get started with that again. But I also need something for bank accounts, loans, and so on. What do you have to help me track my money?
Money.
That's right. What do you have?
Money.
I need money to track my money?
No, not really. It comes bundled with your computer. What comes bundled with my computer?
Money.
Money comes bundled with my computer?
Exactly. No extra charge.
I get a bundle of money with my computer at no extra charge? How much money do I get?
Just one copy.
I get a copy of money. Isn't that illegal?
No. We have a license from Microsoft to make copies of Money.
Microsoft can license you to make money?
Why not? They own it.
Well, it's great that I'm going to get free money, but I'll still need to track it. Do you have anything for managing your money?
Managing Your Money? That program disappeared years ago.

Well, what do you sell in its place?
Money.
You sell money?
Of course. But if you buy a computer from us, you get it for free.
Do you have any software for, you know, accounting?
Simply Accounting.
Probably, but it might get a little complicated.
If you don't want Simply Accounting, you might try M.Y.O.B. M.Y.O.B.? What does that stand for?
Mind Your Own Business.
I beg your pardon?
No, that would be I.B.Y.P. I said M.Y.O.B.
Look, I just need to do some accounting for my home business. You know—accounting? You do it with money. Of course you can do accounting with Money. But you may need more.
More money?
More than Money. Money can't do everything.
I don't need a sermon! Okay, let's forget about money for the moment. I'm worried that my computer might...what's the word? Crash. And if my computer crashes, what can I use to restore my data?
GoBack.
Okay. I'm worried about my computer smashing and I need something to restore my data. What do you recommend?
GoBack.
How many times do I have to repeat myself?
I've never asked you to repeat yourself. All I said was GoBack.
How can I go back if I haven't even been anywhere?
Okay, I'll go back. What do I need to write a proposal?
Word.
But I'll need lots of words to write a proposal.
No, you only need one Word, the Word in Office for Windows. But there are three words in...Oh, never mind. (CLICK)
Hello? Hello? Lou? Why do they always hang up on me?