

PC Owners

Top-Five Essentials

by Arpad Kovaks

President, Rochester Computer Society, Inc.

Over the years of using a PC (and a Mac now and then in between) I have battled many computer troubles for others and myself. I have found through my experiences that there exists a fundamental issue plaguing every computer user large and small: control. Viruses, hardware failure, system crashes, annoyances, incompatibilities, all of it has to do with control. We all want control over our computer, our machine, just as we want control in our lives. I probably sound like someone from the Matrix but I am not trying to be overly philosophical. Instead, I am pointing to the solution, regain control of the computer. Aside from switching to UNIX and typing bash commands, there are things you can do to maintain his/her windows machine. I have done many web searches and tested out numerous handy little apps and have come up with a list of my top five freeware programs. I use every one of these almost every day. Best of all they are free downloads off the net.

1. Startup

I always get frustrated when I install software and things unbeknown to me are put in my startup routine. Some are easy to get rid of but some embed themselves in the windows registry and are a bit more stubborn. Windows has a built in program called msconfig.exe to help control startup items, but this can be difficult to understand and does not permanently delete items (it can only disable). StartupCPL by Mike Lin is a simple program that gives you the ability to add, remove, disable and delete any startup program. It is actually a small control applet, which means it sits in your control panel as a system resource. It looks/acts much like the device manager and uses no memory. Startup-CPL works for all versions of Windows. You can find StartupCPL v2.8 at <http://www.mlin.net/StartupCPL.shtml>.

2. Privacy

I know that since Windows 95 and the Internet explosion there has been data mining software built into the Windows platform. This software collects information about all activities done on the computer and sends that information over the Internet back to Microsoft. The data collected is most often for consumer research but it can be misused. To combat this I use a neat little program called MRU-Blaster by Javacool Software. It scans for and removes MRU (Most Recently Used) files from the registry. By removing these files, you delete all records of documents and programs that

were accessed. MRU-Blaster can be setup to scan once at startup to remove all records from the previous session or you can schedule to run at timed intervals. It supports plug-ins and can scan and remove cookies and IE lists. You can designate cookies as 'friendly' so MRU-Blaster doesn't delete them. MRU-Blaster works with all versions of Windows. You can find MRU-Blaster v1.5 at <http://www.wilderssecurity.net/mrublaster.html>.

3. Spyware

Like MRU lists, Spyware is data mining software that collects information about computer usage and sends it back to the author. Spyware is especially bad because it can work in reverse. Pops, spam, banner ads, and unwanted IE favorites are most often the result of spyware hidden somewhere on your computer. Not only that, Spyware can be used by hackers to remotely access your computer files or use your computer as a node for hacking other computers. The most popular program out there and one I use regularly is Ad-aware by Lavasoft. This wonderful piece of software scans your computer for spyware files, programs, registry keys, embedded web pages and IE favorites and removes them. It works much like anti-virus programs such as Norton, and has similar options for dealing with target files. Ad-aware can be scheduled to run at startup or at regular intervals and can quarantine any items found before deleting them in the event that one is not spyware. Updates to the reference file are posted weekly on the Lavasoft website. Ad-aware works with all versions of Windows. You can find Ad-aware v6.181 at <http://www.lavasoftusa.com/>.

4. Internet

Antivirus checkers, firewalls, and software backups deal with many of the problems people face. These programs, however effective they may be, only fix problems in hindsight. Many troubles are avoidable by simply using alternative software to Windows default programs. Almost all viruses are carried through e-mail and the most targeted program for virus makers is Outlook Express due to the programs design. Spyware is most easily transmitted through Internet Explorer simply because of its high integration with Windows itself. Now, later versions of Windows (2k/XP) have updates to allow third party software to become the default application for specific tasks. To fill the position of both browser and e-mail client I use Mozilla, an Open source project founded by the creators of Netscape.

Now some would ask "So why should I switch if I already use Netscape?" or "Why Mozilla when you could have the more well known Netscape?" Well, for one thing, Netscape, although a stable and robust, is a consumer browser. It is supported by

companies that use the browser as a marketing tool just as is the case with IE. Though it can and is used in the business realm, Mozilla is not inherently a commercial product. Secondly, Mozilla is Opensource, which means the code is available to anyone. This sounds like a compromise of security but it's not. Anyone has the right freely to redesign the code to fit whatever need. There are thousands of programmers working to update and enhance the Mozilla project.

Mozilla also uses the Netscape plug-in engine, so standard plug-ins such as QuickTime and Flash are compatible with Mozilla with out the need to reprogram them. There are a plethora of plug-ins that do everything from blocking ads to Internet search toolbars to added security functions. Any Netscape user will find that the interface is identical to Netscape 6 or later. IE users will find menus more intuitive. For the diehard IE and Netscape fans out there, Mozilla has themes that not only give the look of any browser but can also replicate some of their behavior.

In addition, Mozilla can import Netscape and IE accounts and bookmarks so you won't have to start from scratch. Mozilla also comes with a stand-alone E-mail client that works with all types including web-based accounts. Security is well in hand as Mozilla has integrated encryption and basic firewall type blocking of suspicious attachments. I don't have antivirus software running on my computer and so far, I've had no need to. If there is any piece of software you download, even just to try out, it should be this one. Mozilla works with all versions of Windows. You can find Mozilla v1.4 (stable) at <<http://www.mozilla.org>>. Plug-ins for Mozilla can be found at <<http://www.mozdev.org>>.

5. Monitoring

Ever wonder how your computer is running or what its doing at that moment? I find it beneficial to be able to monitor in real time what is going on inside my system. There are many programs out there but the one I've found to be most configurable and robust is Coolmon by Arsware. This program runs in the background, literally, by displaying system information on the desktop as text (active desktop must be enabled). With this, I can keep track of CPU speed, CPU load, CPU temp. and fan speed monitor (if Motherboard /CPU/Fans support it), Memory load, Hard Drive space, Virtual Memory and Page File usage, Processes and Threads running, Network act., uptime, date and time, current user, computer name, and Windows version. Coolmon can also use scripts to add additional functionality. Several scripts are available on the Arsware website. Cool-mon is Opensource and is regularly updated. Unfortunately,

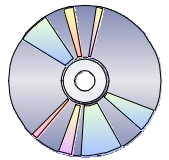
Coolmon only works on NT based systems (NT/2k/XP). You can get Coolmon v1.0 RC2 at <<http://coolmon.arsware.org/>>.

CD-ROMs

by Dick Maybach

Brookdale Computer User Group

CD-ROM (compact disk-read only memory) technology was derived from music CDs. They both have three layers on the surface that stores data. The *substrate* is plastic and is thick enough so that the disk will hold its shape. Data appears in the form of microscopic pits on the surface of the substrate; a pit could indicate a one and no pit a zero. The substrate is coated with a thin *reflective layer*, usually aluminum. A transparent *protective overcoat* covers the reflective layer, which fills in the pits to provide a smooth surface. The label is glued to the protective overcoat, which means that when the CD-ROM is read, the light must pass through the substrate to reach the pits. The disks are manufactured by mechanically stamping the pits into the substrate before adding the reflective layer and overcoat. This is a much faster, and hence cheaper, process than recording data onto diskettes.



The disk is read with a laser light beam, so small that it illuminates only the area of a single pit, and the light reflected from a pit is different than that from an area without one. The data are arranged in a spiral, winding from the inside toward the outside of the disk. Note the difference from hard disks and diskettes, where the data are arranged in concentric tracks. Beginning from the center allows the drive to accommodate any size disk; you don't need to determine its diameter before your read it, as was necessary with phonograph records.

CD players and early CD-ROM drives varied their rotation speeds, turning slower as the laser moved out. Because the data is recorded so that the bits and bytes are always the same length, the data were always read out at the same rate. Clearly, this is required for music, unless you like your songs getting continually faster and higher in pitch. This mode is called *constant linear velocity* (CLV). Hard disks and diskette drives turn at a constant rpm or *constant angular velocity* (CAV). Modern CD-ROM drives use a combination of CLV and CAV, but there is no standard. As a result, a speed rating of 32X means less than what you might think. Toward the outside of the disk, a 32X CD-ROM drive spins 32 times as fast as a CD. At other places it spins at something less than this multiple. However, when playing a music CD, the

CD-ROM drive obviously must spin at the same CLV as a CD drive.

The construction of a CD-R (compact disk - recordable) is more complex. Instead of the three layers of the CD, it has four: a plastic substrate, a layer of organic dye, a reflective metal film (usually gold), and a protective overcoat. The reflective film is gold, because the organic dye reacts chemically with aluminum. A spiral track is stamped into the substrate before the other layers are added. The recorder's laser follows this track when it writes to the disk. The track is not straight, but moves from side to side; this modulates the reflected light at about 22 kHz to help the drive control its speed. The drive's laser operates at two different power levels. The higher level burns the organic dye and makes it opaque. The lower is used to read the recorded information. As in the CD-ROM case, when reading the disk, the light passes through the substrate and reflects from the gold film.

The construction of a CD-RW (compact disk-read-write) is more complex yet. It's similar to the CD-R disk, but the organic dye layer is replaced by a three-layer sandwich, consisting of a layer of insulation (called a dielectric), a layer of phase-change metal alloy, and another dielectric layer. Because there is no organic dye, the reflective film is aluminum. When first manufactured, the phase-change alloy is made up of reflective crystals. If we expose it to high-power laser light, the crystals melt, and when the material cools, it has no crystals (physicists call this an amorphous state) and is less reflective. If the amorphous material is heated to a temperature close to but less than its melting point, crystals again form, effectively erasing the information. Thus, a CD-RW drive laser must have at least three different power levels. The change in reflectivity is not great: the crystalline state is about 25 per cent reflective and the amorphous state about 5 per cent. As a result, older CD-ROM drives may not be able to read CD-RW disks. Most CD-RW drives and media are rated at writing speeds of 4X, but some drives and disks are rated at 10X. You can't reliably write a 10X disk in a 4X drive. You can use a 4X disk in a 10X drive, but only if you limit the writing speed to 4X. Finally, CD-RW disks don't have to be erased. When they are written, the laser is always on; it operates a high power to write a one and at medium power to write a zero.

From the July 2003 issue of BCUG Bytes, newsletter of the Brookdale Computer Users Group of Lincroft, NJ.

The Only Constant is Change

by Dale Swafford

Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

The only constant in the burner world is change. New stuff, to tantalize and separate the early adopters from their coins, constantly flows from our tech journals and magazines. That also means a steady flow of new acronyms to delight the X and Y generations, and now, the Millennials, while making technophobes of us more mature nerds. Concepts like SATA (Serial ATA), WiFi, Centrino, 64-bit computing (X86-64), Blu-ray, and AOD (Advanced Optical Disk) are invading the mainstream. Meanwhile, the labrats are putting the finishing touches on OLED (Organic Light-Emitting Diode) displays and PCI-X 2.0. Microsoft is feverishly polishing Longhorn and Blackcomb, and the ACI (Autonomic Computing Initiative) for servers. Europe is testing the DVB-X (Digital Video Broadcast) for handheld phones, while Scotland is experimenting with broadband Internet delivery over existing power lines. And Sony, the only true innovator, broke the DVD format logjam with the DRU-500A (that supports 4 of the 5 DVD formats), and had to hook-up with LiteOn to try to meet the overwhelming demand. Hitachi/LG has decided to play me-too by offering a red laser DVD recorder (GSA-4040B) that supports all five formats. Some drive makers are actually using Cirrus Logic chips that includes DivX compatibility.

Plasmon is readying a 30 GB blue laser drive for commercial digital storage. Sanyo, always a hotbed of useful ideas, has developed new, more powerful blue lasers and chipsets that will allow dual layer DVD recording in home market recorders (that means 56 GB on one single side, dual layer blue-Ray disc). NEC, LiteOn, Waitec, and BenQ are busy with their new multi-format (AKA dual) drives. Finally, more drive makers are expanding their DVD-ROM drives to read 4 or 5 DVD formats. Most home DVD players have a problem with DVD+RW and DVD-RAM. Keeping your drives firmware up-to-date has become a necessity. Looks like the Christmas 2003 buying season is going to be great for the well-to-do early adopter, with maybe, a few crumbs left over for the rest of us. I just bought an ASUS 52X24X52X burner, on sale at BestBuy, for \$20. after rebate. We certainly know where my gimme-reflex is. Somewhere between \$20 and \$25. Have you noticed, it is now cheaper to buy a CD burner than it is to buy a CD-ROM. Go figure! Is this a great country or what?

Meanderings

While visiting some of my old-standby Internet sites, I ran across a real gem. At Ars Technica! they

have a new "Guide to Video Capture" that you can copy. This is only part 1 of a promised 3 part'r. Clean-up and compression parts to follow. It has great details on capturing video into your computer, and gives some real insight for those of us who haven't made a lot of mistakes (yet!).

CD Freaks is reporting that Elaborate Bytes, the creator of CloneCD, is planning to release their new CloneDVD in mid May. The specs look great and if CloneDVD is as good as CloneCD, they will have a must-have program.

Chalk up another win for the entertainment industry lawyer-storm-troopers. Sonic-Blue says it has to file for bankruptcy due to all the lawsuits over their PVR ReplayTV. It all started years ago when the music industry sued them over Rio, a small portable MP3 player. Their current crime? Why, selling a TV hard disk recorder that will zap commercials. Forget that commercials on TV have gotten longer, louder and more obnoxious, and the FCC has gotten in bed with the networks so they can finance the change-over to HDTV. The TV industry will not tolerate anyone bypassing their irritating, loud commercials, and are seriously considering incorporating the commercials into the program material. Where does that leave the local station commercials?

According to *Brian's Buzz Newsletter*, all it takes to get into a Windows XP system with administrator privileges without a password, is to boot it with a Windows 2000 program disc using recovery console. So much for the most secure version ever. Brian has some funky stuff. Check it out at *Brian's Buzz*. He also has a free newsletter.

If you have an interest in following the Windows party line, might want to visit Paul Thurrott's Windows Information site at Win Info. It's a good site with lot's of explanations, hints and tricks about the latest Windows stuff.

Addonics has really outdone themselves. Their new Pocket DVD-R/W super combo external drive comes in three interfaces (PCMCIA, USB2, or FireWire), but is only 5.6 X 5.3 X 0.87 inches and weighs only 14 ounces. It can be powered by the USB, FireWire cable or PCMCIA card from the computer or a 110/240V AC/DC power adapter. Sounds like just the burner for road warriors with just under \$500 to spend for lots of portable storage.

Looking for an interesting article to read? Edward C. Baig writes the CyberSpeak column for USA Today. He reached down deep and crafted "May the DVD Xcopy lead me not into temptation". This is an adventure in using DVD Xcopy to copy DVD movies and manages a light hearted exploration of the legal and moral implications involved. Check it out! His other articles are also worth.

Adobe Systems is introducing "Encore DVD", a high end (\$549.) DVD editor software. It is supposed to be a companion to Photoshop and Premiere. Its primary strength lies in the ability to edit DVD menus.

If you install SP1 to WindowsXP, some folks are experiencing very slow start-up of installed applications. If you are effected, you can read about it at Microsoft's knowledge base #815411 for the fix, or wait for SP2 which just might be the second edition a lot of us are waiting for. A bootleg copy (150 MB) of SP2 is supposed to be at TechConnect. Wouldn't you think in the land of thousands of millionaires, MS would be able to put out a version of Windows that wasn't full of bugs and frustration before the third try? Learning WinXP is a major investment in time and effort (not to mention coins). Well, there's always hope for the future, just don't bet any money on it.

Macrovision, a leading purveyor of anti-copy technology, says over 100 million CDs have been released in Europe and Japan "shielded against unauthorized computer copying." We can expect this wonderful innovation in the U.S. market this year. And they wonder why music CD sales are going in the toilet. It doesn't take a genius to figure it out — high prices for maybe one good song, and a slow economy equals slower sales. Get it? Even teeny boppers eventually figure that out, but the damage to the music industry reputation may have soured a whole generation. Wouldn't it be something if the Millennium generation all decided it was time for a change and set the music exec's (as these purveyors of trash masquerading as music like to be called) on their keister. It could happen!

SunnComm Technologies (a rival of Macrovision) is reported to be releasing protected music CDs in the U.S. from Arista Records in May or June. Let the good times roll!

Burning Tip of the Month

The question I keep waiting for, but never comes, is "What skills and software are needed to burn most CDs?" I think most folks assume that one burner software package that is plug & play, will do it all. Not in this lifetime, coaster burners! Let me share some of my old favorites. Remember, this is my toolbox and it is constantly changing and growing. You need to gather the ones that meet your needs. First, evaluate your computer and operating system. If you are using Windows 95 on a 5 year old machine with 128 MB of slow memory and an old hard disk drive, don't expect a new fast burner to improve your frustration index.

I use a multi-boot system because I love Windows 98SE. It's stable, easy to use and I need it for the Alternate CD File System to copy wav files to

my huge hard disk drive (ultra ATA 133, 7200 RPM). You have to know how to work with files. That is about all we do in burning CDs, working with files. You need an Internet service provider, a familiar Internet browser, good search engine like Google — and know how to use them. Yes, Alamo PC has free classes to teach you how to use them. You need WinZip to unzip downloaded stuff, and sometimes WinRAR. You need to know about file associations in Windows. You need more than the OEM burner software that was bundled with your drive.

Nero (full version) is excellent and constantly updated. It will burn every kind of CD and now, some kinds of DVDs and doesn't stumble too badly on copy protection. Easy CD Creator 5 Platinum does some things better than Nero, but because it loves to punish you for trying to create your legal Fair Use copy, is basically limited use. You need to decide what packet software you will use, because the different systems are not compatible. I use DirectCD because it was bundled with my first burner. Now my 4 year old DirectCD formatted RW discs are not readable on the new updated DirectCD. Nero uses InCD, but I haven't had any experience with that. The premier copy CD software is CloneCD, but it only works if your burner does raw burning. Nero has a free utility called Info Tool that will show you all your burner capabilities, including if it will do a raw burn. It also will show the real maker of the blank CDs you bought. Check on updates on your burner firmware at least every 3 months, and know how to flash the bios. They are constantly correcting problems and making your burner work better.

Use circular CD labels on all your CDs and keep them dry and out of the sun. For audio CDs, I use Feurio the most. The wav editor is excellent, and it really burns CDs fast. It also has some helpful tools. I use Dart4 for analog copy and because it makes your music CD sound better. I like to use ECDC5 Platinum MP3 to burn MP3 CDs. I like to use Razor Lame MP3 codec because it does dependable variable rate encoding and has a Windows like front end. Did I mention it's free? Before you compile a group of MP3 files to burn an MP3 CD, check them with EncSpot to make sure they are all good. Music converter is a handy tool also. You need a jukebox program to handle all those files. If you use WinXP, start with Windows Media Player 9 if you can set it up right. I just dumped MusicMatch 7.5. It wanted to control everything. Fine if it is your only program, but when you have several, it wouldn't play well with others. Well, I've run out of space on this effort, so I'll revisit it to cover the many more programs you need.

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Fill-in-the-blank Web design

by Susan Ives

Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

Lazy Webmasters never do for themselves what they can sweet talk someone else into doing for free. There are many Web sites that offer online automation. You fill out a form or swish around a few scrollbars and all the hard work is done for you. With all the time you save you can smell the roses. Take a nap. Read a novel. Write a column for this magazine.

Build a Dropdown Menu

DiscoveryVIP's online generator for building dropdown menu creates an attractive sitemap, colored to match your site. discoveryvip.com. How easy is it? Fill out the form and you get four images and the HTML code to place into your page. One thing not made clear in the instructions: the style type code needs to be nested in the <HEAD> tag. The rest of the code is placed where you want the dropdown box to appear. The code itself is simple, and if you want to add or delete links later it's easy to mimic the formatting of the link entries. The menu will expand or contract to fit the size of your categories.

Meta Tag Generator

Meta tags provide administrative information to the Internet. The most important are description and keywords, which give information to search engines to help them find, categorize and prioritize your site. Although only about one in four Websites uses them, they are worth the effort. Submit Corner has an online form that you fill out and then copy and paste the resulting code into your own HTML file. Insert the META tags after your </TITLE> and before your </HEAD> tags.

Create a Color Scheme

Color is subtle. Complementary colors. Analogous colors. Do you have a color wheel? Know how to use it? The color picker makes selecting attractive color combinations easy. Use it at boogiejack.com. Click on a color and the schemer will select 16 colors that look good with it. The RGB and hex codes are provided. The online utility is based on a much more robust program, Color Schemer, available for download. You get a 15 day trial or you can buy it for \$25.

Create New Colors

There are 216 Web safe colors that will always display correctly in a Web browser. You can view the options at visibone.com. They can be boring, or clash with your logo. A work-around is to create a color swatch that contains two or three dithered colors. The eye blends, or dithers, the pixels and displays what looks like could take hours. Color Mix will do it for you. Pick a color from the true

color cube and two or three colors are mixed on the screen. Save your swatch. You can use it as a background tile on your Web site or as a flood fill color in your graphics program. There is also a free software version you can download.

Make Frames

I am ambivalent about frames. They are used on the Alamo PC site and make updates to the navigation bar easy. Make one change and all of the pages instantly get the new information. But people find them confusing. If you save a framed page as a bookmark or favorite place, it saves the container page, not the frame. (I know you can right-click on a frame and bookmark it, but 99% of Web users don't know that trick.) Search engines list frame URLs separately, and people end up viewing it separated from its accompanying frames. If you do want frames, an online utility can create the code for you. The Frame Shop is one of the few online frame makers that lets you make more than a two-frame container.

Generate Tables

Creating the code for complicated tables can be tedious when done by hand. The iWeb Toolkit creates tables using CSS (.Cascading Style Sheets) You will get cut-and-paste tags. All you do is add the content.

Check Screen Resolutions

One of the basic principles of Web design is to check your site at different resolutions to make sure it behaves as well at 640x480 as it does at 1600x1200. Talk about tedious! It involves going to the control panel and changing the screen display at least five times. Do it once for Internet Explorer and again for Netscape Navigator. Size-o-matic is a small (500KB) utility that makes this easy The toolbar floats on your screen. Just drag a resolution onto your site and the data regroups to that resolution. Click and it reverts to normal. This simulation lets you check your site without the hassle of actually changing your screen resolution.

Make Buttons

Attractive navigation buttons can make or break a site. The fancy ones are hard to customize. You can add text to a clipart button but you can't resize it. And getting everything aligned right is a major pain. Cool Archives Button Maker automates buttons. There are 30 buttons to chose from - you can change the color and font, even pick a background color. The button resizes to fit the size of the text.

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

How Secure is Your PC?

by Lee Besing

Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

Just the other day I attended the Computer and Technology Show downtown at the Convention Center. Among the many seminars, were several held in the area next door to my company's booth space (Digital Fortress). As I listened in, I quickly learned that some of what I had internally thought paranoia was reality to others. I learned why my insistence on customers running firewall software, such as Zone Alarm, on their personal computers even if they were on dial-up connection was really needed. I had thought this all along, or I wouldn't have been encouraging folks to install it, but the experts putting on the Hackers and Cyber Attack Seminars confirmed it.

They disabused the listeners of the stereotype most folks had about hackers. Some think that a typical hacker is male, aged 16-20, very hyper (drinks high energy, hi-caffeinated drinks like Red Bull) but they said the truth of the matter was that they come in both male and female persuasions, might be as young as pre-teen up to 50's in age, they usually are very hyper with lots of caffeine, and are usually just looking for knowledge and recognition by their peers (other hackers). One of the latest hacker groups to "go public" was apparently called the "fluffy bunny group" and their symbol to prove they had hacked a site was to install a little pink bunny icon on the Web page.

A lot of computers which get hacked are simply used to redirect an attack against another computer. This is so that when the computer attack gets traced back from the victim, it points to another victim who was usually unaware of this taking place. This happens more to computers who are on the Internet full time with Cable, DSL or other business connections, rather than dial-up computers, but it can happen to a dial-up computer.

I talked last month about "Spam Zombies" where a computer is subverted by a Trojan virus and turned unknowingly into a secret mail server. Another recent virus comes in the form of a pretty wallpaper utility that shows a rose on the screen with shimmering water behind it. While you are admiring the pretty animated picture and sending copies to all your friends, it is snagging your address book and sending it to the author of the virus.

One of the things that I really like about Zone Alarm (Free) is that when you run a program trying to access the Web, it asks you for permission to let the program go outbound. And if you say "Yes, remember this", it takes some sort of hash total or picture of the file and if it gets modified

because of any reason, including an authorized update, it stops the program from going outbound until you have answered the question again. Most folks click "Yes, Remember" so that they don't have to click that darn button every time they run a program to access the Web. But one of the dangers is that once you activate a program like MSN Messenger, it can take on a life of its own and if hacked (MSN Messenger is a common target), unless it modified the signature/hash of that main file, it could easily start running on its own in a way you didn't authorize. Or so said one of the experts.

There is a new virus that came out the end of May, called Magold, which apparently pops up a message about a DirectX error. Users are tricked into clicking the OK button and then the virus is installed. This is a trick that many viruses use to catch unsuspecting users. Some Websites which have been compromised use the same trick. Yes, there are legitimate reasons for some Web sites needing to install some plug-in such as for Flash or Adobe PDF, but be very careful to read the fine print to see exactly what they claim you need to be installing on your computer, and what Website it is coming from. If you have any doubts about the legitimacy of this request to install software on your computer, don't do it. Often some Websites will have plain text messages on them explaining that "you must have Macromedia Flash 5 (or whatever) to view this page".

Last month I found some new customers whose computers started acting "strangely", but in truth had been infected with some of the newer viruses out. In all cases, their anti-virus program had obsolete anti-virus definition files and was thus worthless as far as protecting their computer from outside threats. When your computer tells you that your subscription to whatever brand anti-virus software you are running has expired, believe it and take action. Often times you can order subscriptions from the software vendor over their Website for pennies on the dollar compared to buying a new version on the shelf retail.

I was asked to repeat one URL that I have given out in the past, that of GRISOFT who provides free anti-virus software for personal use. You can download this software from www.grisoft.com. They will e-mail you the access number, so you do have to give them a valid e-mail while registering, but it is free. I tried it once to see how their system worked, and have not seen any increase in SPAM mail as a result of the subscription.

At the risk of repeating myself, remember that if you haven't updated your anti-virus program since last month, you are at risk of catching some

of the newer viruses that have been released this month.

From the July, 2003 issue of PC Alamode. Lee Besing is the owner of Computer Solution Experts, a consulting firm that provides on-site service and support for PC computers and networks in San Antonio TX.

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

Kazaa Version 2.5 Ships

U pdated swapping software offers to pay users.

[You may want to seriously consider the threats that have been publicized over the last few weeks about file sharing (especially music files) before jumping into this stream]

Sharman Networks launched an update to its popular file-swapping Kazaa Media Desktop software Tuesday, promising an improved interface, better search options, plus a new program that rewards users willing to share their PC with the network.

Sharman partner Brilliant Digital Entertainment and its subsidiary Altnet have added a new feature to KMD version 2.5, now available for download, that adds a new peer-to-peer network and a program called Peer Points Manager. The controversial program, announced earlier, offers rewards for participating users.

Industry watchers suggest the latest update is an attempt by Sharman to position Kazaa as a viable music-for-sale service, not a digital music piracy tool.

"The more Kazaa steers its users to buy content rather than download it for free, the more it bolsters Kazaa's argument that it's acting as legitimate service and not a media piracy haven," says Lee Black, senior analyst with Jupiter Research.

Altnet Pushes Content

Most people use Kazaa to share multimedia content for free, but the latest software update also lets Sharman push premium music, video, and software content available for purchase. The software uses special icons to distinguish premium content from the free stuff within standard search results.

The Peer Points system lets you trade hard drive space and Internet bandwidth for points redeemable for premium content, cash, and prizes. Kazaa uses your hard-drive space to store this premium content, and it utilizes your bandwidth to send it to other Kazaa users.

Altnet Chief Executive Officer Kevin Ber-

meister has likened this approach to baiting illegal file swappers into buying legitimate content.

The company's biggest challenge, however, likely won't be in attracting willing users, but in gathering the multimedia content people want.

"The biggest trick for Kazaa is attracting quality content that people want to buy," says Susan Kevorkian, senior analyst with market researcher IDC.

"It's still very much in the air whether Kazaa can win the hearts of content owners with the baggage of running a free peer-to-peer file swapping network at the same time."

New Features

In addition to its new Peer Point System, Kazaa 2.5 also includes new tabbed search results that let you run multiple searches at one time. Each new search you perform opens a new tab, so that you're no longer automatically overwriting your previous search.

You can also search the Web from within Kazaa 2.5 using the Web Search panel powered by Over-ture, says a Sharman spokesperson.

Another new feature is called Participation Level. In an effort to boost file quality and sharing, the software rewards users who consistently offer many high-quality files. Score enough points and you'll get more search results as well as priority over others when vying for the same file to download.

Other improvements include virus scanning of files through Kazaa partner Bullguard and access to the online dating service AmericanSingles.com. The beta preview of the software also introduces eight content channels, which link to various music, games, software, and community destinations.

Buying DVD Burners Gets Easier

More dual-format rewritable drives are coming to market—and lowering prices. A radical shift is underway in the rewritable DVD drive market—and consumers are the winners.

Users can now stop puzzling over competing, incompatible rewritable formats and choose among several drives that support the two most widely compatible ones: DVD-R/RW and DVD+R/RW. And along with competing dual-format drives come lower prices.

Sony led the way last fall with the first drive to combine both main formats. Now several vendors such as Iomega, Memorex, NEC, Plextor, and TDK are offering dual-format drives; all models are just out or will ship later this summer. Market leader Pioneer notably switches to a dual-format drive after being a staunch advocate of the DVD Forum-endorsed DVD-RW format. And LG Electronics is making a drive that supports the -RW and +RW

formats as well as DVD -RAM (favored primarily for backing up and archiving PC data).

No Speed Boost

You won't be buying one of the new drives to get more speed. Sony remains the leader on that count with its DRU-510A. Specs of the Pioneer DVR-A06 and the TDK IndiDVD Dual generally compare well with the DRU-510A's, but both new drives trail Sony's on CD and DVD+RW write speeds.

While the TDK's results are about what you'd expect from a model with those specs, the Pioneer drive took far longer to complete write tests. Why? The DVR-A06 builds in full support for UDF 2.0 defect management both in its hardware and in software via Software Architects' Write DVD packet-writing package. The software automatically initiates a write-verify cycle. But in ensuring data integrity, you trade off performance.

"With 2X media, it should give you the equivalent of a 1X write," says Andy Parsons, senior vice president of Pioneer USA's business solutions division. He adds that after the first pass, the software will reverify the data only once every ten writes.

There is bad media out there, so if you have very sensitive data, this approach may make sense. Almost every DVD burning program that I've tried supports turning the data verifying mechanism on or off — your choice.

Dual-format support is more expensive. At \$329, the DVR-A06 costs about \$80 more (street) than its predecessor. And the \$299 IndiDVD Dual is about \$50 more than TDK's single-format models. But prices on these kinds of drives should drop overall. Both drives are cheaper than the \$350 Sony; as more drives hit the market, the trend will only continue.

Holdouts

Not every vendor is leaping to dual-format. Toshiba's and HP's next drives will stick with one format only. Dean Sanderson, HP's director of product marketing for DVD, says that in the long term, maintaining multiple formats will be tough and will slow the evolution of the technology.

Vendors must eventually decide which formats to support to keep up in the speed race, says IDC analyst Wolfgang Schlichting. But over the long haul, multiformat drives may be most dominant in the aftermarket, he adds.

And right now, no matter which format you prefer, the harvest of new drives makes rewritable DVD a safer and more attractive investment.

Better 802.11 Security

Wi-Fi networks get safer with downloadable firmware.

If you've delayed setting up a wireless network

because of security concerns, help is at hand. Around the time you read this, improved security technology for all variants of 802.11 should be available as free firmware downloads from most equipment vendors.

The new technology—known as Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA)—replaces the existing and largely discredited Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP) security algorithm that is part of the 802.11a, 802.11b, and 802.11g standards. WEP became an obstacle to widespread business adoption of Wi-Fi when security experts showed that hackers equipped with off-the-shelf tools could easily break it. The relatively robust WPA supports user authentication by a dedicated server on a corporate network, while being versatile enough to work well on simple home and small-office networks.

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, which develops 802.11 and other technical standards, was already working on 802.11i, a version with improved security. But that standard probably won't be implemented for a year or more, and it may require hardware upgrades. So the Wi-Fi Alliance—the trade group that certifies the interoperability of its members' products—decided to step in with interim technology that works with existing hardware.

WPA is actually a subset of 802.11i's components. It uses Temporal Key Interchange Protocol (TKIP), a more secure encryption-key technology than WEP's RC4. When ready, 802.11i will incorporate an even stronger hardware-based encryption technology called Advanced Encryption Standard (AES).

If you'd like to beef up the security of your existing Wi-Fi network, check your equipment vendor's site for a WPA firmware download. Make sure upgrades are available for all of your equipment: Some routers may work with WEP clients after the upgrade, but many probably will not. Vendors may not offer WPA software for all older products, but if your vendor does, you should use it. Among other things, this will prepare you for expansion: All new Wi-Fi products certified from September on will have WPA (instead of WEP) built in.

Microsoft Cuts Off

Windows NT Workstation

Tech support, bug-fixing ceases; Windows 98 goes next.

The extended support phase for Microsoft's Windows NT 4.0 Workstation operating system—which will mark its seventh birthday on July 29—officially ended during the first week of July, as the company had said it would. That means corporate users needing assistance will now have

to rely on the company's self-help online option or contract with an outside company for NT 4.0

Workstation-related Problems

What Microsoft refers to as its "mainstream support" phase ended a year ago for Windows NT 4.0 Workstation. Mainstream support includes no-charge incident support, support for warranty claims, "hot fix" support, paid incident support, and support charged on an hourly basis.

Extended support includes only the paid support options, with the exception of security-related hot fixes, which are still provided at no charge. A hot fix is a modification to commercially available product code to address a specific problem.

Cutoff Forecast

Microsoft in October announced a Support Lifecycle policy calling for most products to be supported for a minimum of five years, followed by a two-year extended support phase that customers can purchase. Self-help online support is available for a minimum of eight years after a product is released.

The mainstream support phase for Windows NT 4.0 Workstation lasted nearly a year longer than the minimum five-year period, but the extended support phase ceased about a month shy of the seven-year mark.

By contrast, Microsoft elected to extend pay-per-incident and premier support for Windows NT 4.0 Server—which, like the Workstation edition, was released on July 29, 1996—through December 31, 2004. Nonsecurity hot fixes, however, will no longer be available after December 31, 2003.

At the time Microsoft announced the extension in January, Bob O'Brien, a group product manager in the Windows server division, estimated that between 35 percent and 40 percent of Windows server deployments were NT 4.0. He said "common sense" dictated that the company should extend key support provisions "if you want to have a relationship with these customers for the next seven to ten years."

Not Unexpected

Mike Silver, an analyst at Gartner, says he also thinks Microsoft should have extended support for Windows NT 4.0 Workstation. He notes that a survey of Gartner clients conducted in conjunction with a conference shows 35.4 percent of 850,000 desktops are still running NT 4.0 Workstation. In Europe, the number is even higher, with 57 percent of 505,000 desktops running the aging operating system.

"Every organization needs to come to its own terms about how big an exposure that is," Silver says. He adds that many IT professionals figure that the operating system has been running for

some time without problems, and the desktop applications are working, so they don't need support.

"It's much more than that," Silver says. "If a new security hole is found, Microsoft may not fix it." In fact, in May Microsoft issued patches for a shared flaw in Windows 2000 and XP, but not for Windows NT.

New applications haven't supported Windows NT 4.0 Workstation for some time, he says, "so enterprises really need to move."

Next: Windows 98

No-charge assisted support and extended hot fix support for Windows 98—which was released five years ago—also ended. But Microsoft is providing extended support through January 16, 2004, when the product will be considered obsolete, with no assisted support available.

"What's the point?" says Silver. "For enterprises, since it doesn't include bug fix support, there's still no insurance if some big hole is found that Microsoft will fix it. It doesn't buy enterprises much to extend the assisted support without the hot fix support."

Online self-help support for Windows 98 will be available at least until June 30, 2006, according to Microsoft's Web site.

DVD formats are confusing

An E-Mail question

Q. Please explain DVD formats, especially the difference between DVD-R, DVD+R and DVD-RAM. I have a Hitachi DVD Camcorder that records on 30-minute DVD-R disks (one-sided) or 60-min DVD-RAM disks (two-sided). My home theater plays back DVD-Rs fine. But the DVD-RAM discs only play through the camcorder. Any suggestions?

A. Recording on DVD is pretty cool. While CDs top out at a mere 700 megabytes, most DVDs can handle 4.7 gigabytes of data. In movie-speak, this translates to roughly 130 minutes. Some DVDs are double sided; they can store a whopping 9.4 GB.

But all is not rosy in DVD-land. Make one trip to your favorite computer store and you see not only competing brands. There are competing formats, or standards, too. DVD has been out several years, and it remains a standards disaster. Not only are the various standards hard to understand; if you don't get a grip on them, you might not be able to play the discs you make.

DVD-RAM is an early iteration of DVD. It was developed primarily to store data and be used on computers. If you create a disc using DVD-RAM, you are very likely to run into compatibility problems. DVD players usually work well with DVD-R and DVD+R. Past that, you're on thin ice.

DVD-R is shorthand for DVD recordable. It

means you can record the disc just once. It has a rewritable cousin, DVD-RW. You can erase and rewrite those discs about 1,000 times. The DVD-R/RW standard was introduced by Pioneer in 1997.

DVD+R is similar to DVD-R, in that it is writeable just once. It also has a rewriteable version, DVD+RW. DVD+R/RW was developed by Hewlett-Packard in 2001.

The recordable versions, DVD-R and DVD+R, are most likely to play back in a home DVD player. The rewriteable versions, along with DVD-RAM, are much iffier.

When you become involved in DVDs, a little research is a good thing. Check the instructions for your DVD player. They should tell you which formats can be played back. There may be some way to play DVD-RAM discs. More likely, though, you are stuck with the shorter DVD-Rs.

By the way, I have been getting a lot of mail asking about how to save digital images on a DVD disc. This way, you can show the pictures on your television. If you want to learn more about that, there is a good column about VCDs (Video Compact Disks). You can read it here: http://www.komando.com/kolumns_show.asp?showID=4477

Sizing Up Cheap I ISPs

Is sub-\$6 Internet access really a bargain?

For the price of a McDonald's Value Meal, you can get Internet access for a month. But you get no guarantee it will be indigestion-free. A growing number of access providers offer dial-up Internet access for as little as \$4.75 monthly--a rate that make even budget \$10 ISPs look downright expensive.

Discount ISPs have been attracting a new breed of penny-pinching customers in this weak economy, says Lydia Leong, principal analyst at Gartner, a market research firm. Experts say that new ISP business models and the continued declining cost of underlying bandwidth make it easier for providers to offer dirt-cheap prices.

But with bargain basement deals come trade-offs such as less-than-stellar customer support, no e-mail or newsgroup features, and no storage for posting a home page. Another minus: Your super-cheap ISP may not survive on its razor-thin profit margins and could go out of business without warning.

The Discount Parade

Maybe you've seen these services, with their sub-\$7 monthly, nationwide dial-up rates. Among them are 650Dialup at <http://www.650dialup.com> and 550= Access at <http://www.550access.com> the apparent bargain champ with a promotional rate of \$4.75 monthly. Sometimes their names hint of their wares, as in the case of Access4Less

(<http://www.access4less.net/>) and budget provider Qwick connect (<http://www.qwickconnect.net/>). None of these ISPs require you to download software that displays ads to subsidize their service.

"The question isn't why are we so cheap," says John Smith, senior vice president of sales at 550Access. "The question is, why are other services so expensive?" 550Access regularly charges \$5.50 monthly. However, the service limits you to 150 hours of surfing monthly, does not give you an e-mail address, and offers no Web server space. "Most of our customers just want basic access and don't need expensive bells and whistles," Smith says.

On the other hand, another cut-rate ISP, 650DialUp, includes a surprising number of perks with its service, despite its low fee. For a meager \$6.50 monthly, 650DialUp includes five e-mail addresses, 5MB of server space, and free customer support through a toll-free around-the-clock phone number.

"The last line of defense in ISP competition is offering the best price," says Anthony Minessale, president and founder of the year-old 650DialUp, which he claims has 10,000 subscribers.

How They Stay Cheap

Like a growing number of other virtual ISPs, both 650DialUp and 550Access don't own the physical infrastructure of their business. Instead of operating modem banks for customers to dial into and bandwidth pipes that link customers to the Internet, 650DialUp buys wholesale Internet access and services from ISP turnkey resellers such as DialUpUSA.

DialUpUSA owns the back-end network, and ISPs like 650DialUp find customers, market their services, and handle billing. DialUpUSA charges \$100 in start up fees, giving anyone the basic tools to become a bare-bones ISP.

DialUpUSA is one of many ISP-in-a-box companies hungry to sign on affiliates to resell their Internet access. Other ISP resellers are CISP, CC, Ikano, and StarNet's Megapop. Many of these companies ultimately buy Internet access from Internet backbone providers MCI, Qwest, and Level 3. Megapop says it supplies its own backbone access to the Internet.

The dirt-cheap ISPs play the odds to make money. 650DialUp, for example, charges a flat monthly rate based on an anticipated 150 hours of time online by one user, Minessale says. 650DialUp, in turn, gets billed by DailUpUSA for only the minutes its customers use. Minessale banks on the prospect that his customers will spend less time online than the full 150 hours allotted each month.

That's also why some ISPs put a strict cap on

customers' time online. 650DialUp's terms-of-use policy warns that customers who exceed 200 hours of surfing in a given month could lose their membership.

"ISPs play it pretty close to the bone, but if they get the right formula they can make money," says Jeff DeMonaco, StarNet's president of marketing and sales. Many virtual ISPs have no marketing budget, have tiny staffs, and rarely offer more than e-mail tech support.

ISP Indigestion

Drawbacks to budget ISPs include the usage caps and some not-so-obvious fees. Some ISPs charge extra for online hours that exceed the monthly maximum. Discount ISPs also charge a one-time set-up fee. For example, Qwickconnect charges \$8 for new customers to sign up.

Inexpensive ISPs save money by charging customers for telephone technical support, too, a service that more-expensive ISPs typically offer for free. And budget ISPs typically offer a limited selection of local dial-up numbers around the country.

"It comes down to whether your Internet connection drops and whether you can get in touch with tech support," says Mark Zadell, an Internet analyst with Blaylock and Partners.

In a call to test the reliability of 650DialUp's free tech support, I waited 30 minutes on a recent afternoon before abandoning its efforts to reach a technician. I didn't test 550Access's tech support, which charges \$4 per phone call. Another risk with budget ISPs is their reliability. Brandon Mullenberg, DialUpUSA president, says that about 20 of the startup ISPs that sign on with him annually shutter within a year.

You Get What You Pay For

"You need to figure on what you're getting for the money," says Mark Goldston, United Online chairman, president, and CEO. His two ISPs, Juno (<http://www.juno.com/>) and NetZero (<http://www.netzero.net/>) charge \$10 monthly for unlimited access. NetZero also offers a plan with 10 free hours of Internet access per month if you run its advertising software, which constantly displays ads.

"It's admirable that they are competing with price, but I'm not sure that these guys have viable long-term business plans," Goldston says.

EarthLink says that it will always compete with no-frills ISPs. "There will always be people who prefer to shop at Nordstrom instead of a warehouse club," says Jerry Grasso, EarthLink spokesperson.

For \$22 a month for unlimited access, EarthLink throws in such extras as software to block spam and pop-up ads, 10MB of Web storage space,

and eight e-mail addresses. "We are about giving consumers an optimum online experience, not the cheapest," Grasso says.

Advice for the Frugal

Before abandoning your \$24-a-month America Online dial-up account for a cheaper alternative, it's best to do your homework on your potential future ISP.

Search newsgroups for customer feed-back. Check out the ISP's rating with the Better Business Bureau, and carefully read the ISP's service contract to avoid hidden fees.

If you surf infrequently—perhaps going online primarily to check your Web-based e-mail accounts—a budget ISP may be a great fit. Think of them as the Yugos of ISPs—not pretty, but functional.

Get back in time, maybe

Have you ever upgraded to a new version of software and absolutely hated it? Have an older computer that won't run the latest and greatest? It's so frustrating because you usually can't go back to the old version. Now maybe you can!

This site has over 300 versions of 44 popular programs. Choose from a variety of programs such as AOL Instant Messenger, Internet Explorer, Acrobat Reader and more! But if there is an older program that you like and it's not here, do what I do. Search eBay, the auction site. It's bound to be for sale there!

Older versions software, <http://www.oldversion.com/>

I've rambled on enough for one month. Same place, same channel next month.

From the August 2003 issue of The Umbrella Online.

From the DealsGuy

by Bob Click

Greater Orlando Computer User Group



Has This Kind of Stuff Made You Mad?

Some time ago I noticed \$1.80 on my phone bill for incorporating the long distance charges on it. I called the Phone Company and asked to be billed separately by Sprint, my long distance provider, to save the \$1.80. No postage to pay the LD bill since I do it on the computer. Since my cell phone plan's minutes are local all over the US, I use it for all my long distance calls to the family, thus there are seldom many calls on my Sprint LD bill. This month, I had no LD calls to pay for on my LD bill, but I still owed \$2.36 in taxes and charges. It seems there's now a tax on NOTHING? In September, they say they are levying another .99 tax. HELP!

When is the last time you looked at your phone bill itself and read the many charges on it? It's disgusting since it seems to be well over 100% taxation. I only have basic service, which is \$10.80, but the final bill with no LD charges is \$23.86. I wish somebody would start a movement to stop this blatant money rip-off. TV's Dateline pointed out that some of those larger charges are not a tax, but simply more money for the Phone Company. Not only that, but my DSL bill just went up \$3.21 per month with new taxes and charges, one just for the DSL. I'll miss it, but goodbye DSL since I thought it was already overpriced at \$59.95.

Still Good

I'm reminding you that the Sane Solution's "NetTracker" for analyzing your Web log is good until August 31, '03 with the great discount. Contact Darryl at 1-800- 407-3570, ext. 122, to order. The Inkjet deal will be good until the end of the year. Go to [<http://www.inksell.com>] to order. For assistance call 1-800-255-0483, or send e-mail to [help@inksell.com]. The Executive Software Undelete and Diskeeper bundle is still good. [<http://consumer.execsoft.com/home.asp>].

This Author Is Unusual

I read a review by Larry Grannis in the Central Kentucky Computer Society's newsletter about a great computer book that has been given many accolades by well-known sources. Russ Walter wrote this book called *The Secret Guide To Computers*. He even gives you his phone number and says to give him a call anytime. He wisely publishes the book himself, no publishing company involved. In fact, you can even read some of it right on the Web at [<http://www.secretfun.com>]. This book is good for beginner or advanced users. Russ Walter's phone number is 603-666- 6644. E-mail is [Russ@secretfun.com].

I talked to Russ about a deal and he said that user groups could use the discount on a bulk order as a fundraiser for their group. He has been publishing a help book since 1972 so he certainly goes further back than many of us. In fact, there are very cheap prices if you can use an older book. Standard shipping is free in the US. \$2.00 per book outside the US. Air is \$3.00 per book in the US. Check his Web site for information on quantity discounts and other shipping choices. For example, his latest edition sells for \$17.50 per copy, but buy two and they are just \$14 each.

When I received mine, the first thing I wanted to do is fix my network. Unfortunately, I was unable to find such a chapter so that project is on hold. However, looking through the book certainly shows that just about everything else is covered. While reading through it, I did indeed find a couple of chuckles in the explanations. It looks

great, and after seeing it, if your question is not covered, I would be astounded. However, if it isn't, you can always call him for the answer. I have not seen another book of this type with that offer. It is an 8-1/2" x 11" book with 639 pages.

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 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@mind-spring.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.

Tip from PC Don

Copying Text from a PDF Document

As for highlighting stuff in a PDF document, two "T" (for Text) icons can be seen on the toolbar. The first is a "text-selection" tool and the second is a "column-selection" tool. Use the former to highlight contiguous lines of text, and the latter for selecting columns or tables of text. An entire document can be highlighted with Ctrl+A (or Edit, Select All).

Text thus selected can be copied with Edit, Copy (or Ctrl+C) and pasted into an e-mail or word processing page with Ctrl+V. If you don't have Acrobat Reader, it can be obtained from <www.download.com>

Society News

New Users Notes

by John McMillan

The meeting opened with a question of how long it would take to download Media Player using a conventional modem. The answer was not precise but it was thought to be in the order of five minutes. The user had a CD that he could not play but did not know the file suffix. It was suggested that he put the CD in the reader and right click My Computer; then left click Explorer in the menu that appeared. This would open Windows Explorer so he could select the CD reader and examine the disks table of contents listing showing file names and suffixes.

Media Player plays the following extensions (suffixes) if they were encoded using standard

codecs: .cda (CD Audio Track); .ivf (Intel Video Technology); .aif, .aifc, .aiff (Macintosh AIFF Resource); .asf, .asx, .avi, .wav, .wax, .wma, .wmv, .wvx, .wmp, .wmx (Microsoft); .wmz, .wms (Windows Media Player skin file); .asx, .wax, .wvx, .wmx, .m3u (playlist files); .mpeg, .mpg, .mlv, .mp2, .mp3, .mpa, .mpe, .mpv2, .m3u (Moving Picture Experts Group [MPEG]); .mid, .midi, .rmi, Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI); and .au, .snd (UNIX). If the extension was not one of these, many Windows systems include Real Player that might read other file types, or searching Google or Download.com should offer other players like Real Juke Box.

Bill Statt passed out copies of the August *Computer Link* in which Nick Francesco lauded Audacity, a sound manipulating program from SourceForge. Next, a user described an e-mail that indicated his service was being suspended due to credit card verification problems. This aroused suspicion because the service bill is paid by check so the provider was notified. They responded that this is a scam known as "phishing" that tries to get credit card numbers and supporting data with communications sent to appear as if they come from reputable companies. The Federal Trade Commission has issued a warning about these identity theft scams. They suggest the following: If you get an e-mail that warns you, with little or no notice, that an account of yours will be shut down unless you reconfirm your billing information, do not reply or click on the link in the e-mail. Instead, contact the company cited in the e-mail using a telephone number or Web site address you know to be genuine. They recommended: avoid e-mailing personal and financial information; review credit card and bank account statements as soon as you receive them to determine whether there are any unauthorized charges. If there is unauthorized activity, we strongly urge you to contact your credit card company immediately to determine what action you should take.

The topic of Web purchasing was raised by a user wanting to buy an electronic camera. She checked Pricegrabber and had contacted Buydig, a company with a four star rating. When she looked again the next day, the camera price had changed. Bill said Buydig was an excellent company to do business with but daily price changes are common because quotes are based upon availability. He suggested calling their 800 number and indicating the original contact date and price which might lead to honoring that price if you complete a telephone transaction. He cited a recent transaction of his in which there was to be no shipping and no tax but it was included in the papers he received. When he called to ask why, the

extra charges were reversed without question.

Another user asked why he could not always get his frontiernet.net web mail from other locations, specifically libraries. Gregg Wolfe thought that some libraries do not allow interaction with other e-mail addresses. It was suggested that the user ask the librarian if they were possibly using filters.

A user desirous of changing Internet service providers asked if there was any easy way to replace AOL on his machine. Gregg suggested going to Sound Bytes for a multi-step procedure to effect such a change. He avoided the problem by choosing custom for the Windows installation on his machine and preventing any of the ISP software from Loading. Gregg Sayre was not there to provide details but it was thought that if DSL service was used, Frontier tech reps would talk the user through eliminating AOL. Getting AOL to stop charging a credit card after it has been installed, can be another major battle.

A user had received a program that had to be on the hard drive and could not run from the CD which he would have preferred. The company suggested that he copy the program from memory to a blank CD, then uninstall the program. He did that but it would not work from the CD so he tried reloading the program which was not successful. The case lights keep alternating between hard drive and CD reader operation while trying to execute the program. Bill thought that uninstalling might have left some dead end links in the registry. He recommended downloading a free registry editor from PCMag.com. that would search for and remove dead end links. This program had been listed as *PC Magazine's* choice of the month.

As an alternative, Download.com could also be searched for registry editors. Shutting the computer off was a problem presented by a Windows 98SE user. Bill pointed out that this is a known problem and there is a patch on the Microsoft Web site. He suggested going to Google and typing "Win98se shutdown" which would provide a direct link to the patch without requiring the user to search the Microsoft site. Frequent crashes were questioned by a user. If the crashes only occurred during an Internet session, cleaning the .tmp files might resolve the problem. To do this, first go to the start button in the lower left corner of the screen, then programs, then accessories, then system tools, then disk cleanup. Bill was able to demonstrate this process using his laptop and pointed out that undesired cookies could also be deleted to gain even more memory. Cookies are usually small, but the File Allocation Table process assigns significant amounts of memory to hold

them. My machine had 115,516 bytes of cookies that required 446,464 bytes of memory. If the crashes persisted after following the cleanup instructions, use the internet to go to sound-bytes.org and scroll down looking for a link to "Web sites I've heard on the show." Click on the link and look for something like mem test. Click that to get to a site where a memory test can be downloaded to a floppy disk. Then run the memory test from the floppy disk. The discussion continued to defragging that should be done in Safe Mode to prevent the process from restarting whenever another program writes to the hard drive. In order to get to safe mode, press Control, Alt and Delete simultaneously, twice in succession, to restart the computer. While the restart is going on, keep depressing the F8 key until a menu appears that lets you choose open in Safe Mode. Large drives take several hours to defrag.

Bill discussed searching for spyware that sometimes arrives as part of a cookie. Data Miner is a spyware cookie/program that tracks the web-sites you go to and reports your Internet activity to a marketing company. Bill mentioned Spybot and demonstrated using Ad-aware to search for this type of program. At the end of the search he showed how to eliminate any spy ware programs or cookies that were found. Bill also uses Web Washer to block spam, and pop up advertisements that arrive from the Internet. This is now a \$30 dollar program but using the advance search at Download .com to open only free licenses for your specific operating system when searching for pop up stoppers, would probably display other products that perform similar functions. Several users voiced concerns about Real Player attempting to take over functions on their machines. The last *Monitor* contained an article by Ira Wilsker that reviewed some of these concerns and pointed out alternatives. Bill pointed out that if Real Player was pre-installed on a new machine, it is less likely to be invasive than if it were downloaded or added later. Going to Help, and displaying File Extensions > Associating With Programs will give instructions for changing the program associated with specific file extensions.

Desktop icons surfaced again as a topic. Gregg Wolfe said that even shortcuts, those icons with an arrow in the lower left corner that point up and to the right, take up 1 or 2K out of 64K of vital resources, so adding large numbers of icons to the desktop should be done with care. Too many icons may result in out of resources or memory messages or slow down the start up process. He continued that several shortcuts pointing to the same program may cause systems difficulties. A 486 user of Windows 95 asked why the floppy drive was no

longer recognized. Bill thought it might be a bad driver and suggested opening My Computer, right clicking and clicking properties in the resulting menu. Click the device manager tab, then find and remove the floppy drive. Shut down and restart the computer. If the drive is working, the machine will recognize new hardware and ask if it should be installed. Answering yes will reload the driver thereby reactivating the floppy drive. If the drive is not working, it will not be recognized and the installation question would not appear indicating the drive should be replaced.

Our next meeting will be September 2nd at the Monroe Developmental Center, 620 Westfall Road.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub

Balance as of 08/20/03	\$435.54
Expenses	
St. Stephens	\$75.00
Postmaster	100.00
Paper	36.68
Picnic	<u>67.97</u>
Total Expenses	\$279.65
Income	
Dues	\$125.00
Picnic	<u>132.00</u>
Total Income	\$257.00
Balance as of 08/20/03	\$412.89

The Lighter Side

Imagine if people bought cars the way they buy computers.

Helpline: "General Motors Helpline, how can I help you?"

Customer: "I got in my car, closed the door, and nothing happened!"

Helpline: "Did you put the key in the ignition and start the engine?"

Customer: "Ignition? Engine? How come I have to know all that technical stuff just to use my car?"