



The practical answer is that we have already entrusted significant portions of our personal lives to the web. We use it to purchase things with credit cards and we order refills of prescriptions. We reserve hotel rooms, make appointments and sign contracts with digital signatures that can be as simple as clicking on a box that is labeled “I accept” on a webpage. At one point it looked like the states would pass laws that would recognize contracts “negotiated” by electronic robots. Are we ready to turn over the control of our country to it? Will it SERVE our country well? At the last minute, the Department of Defense said, “not yet.”

We all remember the 2000 Presidential election and weeks of trying to figure out who won. Then there was the chad, not just any chad, but “hanging chad.” Did the voter really mean to punch that block or was that a mistake? If nothing else, the ballot could be re-examined to debate the voter’s intention.

For me one of the most shocking revelations from that election was learning that many jurisdictions never count the absentee ballots submitted by service men and women. They may be ignored unless the election was close enough for the absentee ballots to matter. Something about that offends me. It’s wrong not to count every vote.

SERVE is the acronym for an ambitious program that was supposed to allow American citizens oversees to register and vote using the Internet and any PC running a Windows operating system. (That should be enough to raise the ire of the Mac users.) As I write this article the website for the project still proclaims:

Are you a Uniformed Services member or dependent? Are you a U.S. citizen living overseas? In 2004, you can take part in an exciting new initiative called SERVE (Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment), which will let eligible U.S. citizens vote from any Windows-based computer with Internet access, anywhere in the world! Find out how you can participate by exploring this site <http://www.fvap.gov/>.

How Much Do We Trust the Web?

by Bill Wood

Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

The system was supposed to be available for use in the South Carolina Presidential primary on February 3rd but it flunked the security clearance. At present it has been put on hold by the Defense Department. That means, the old fashioned, paper ballots will also be used by service men and women from the seven states that had agreed to participate in the test. (They are Arkansas, Florida, Hawaii, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah and Washington.)

But is the net ready? Apparently not. Four members of the panel chosen to review the program and its security reported that, “given the current Internet and PC security technology, and the goal of a secure, all-electronic remote voting system, the FVAP (Federal Voting Assistance Program) has taken on an essentially impossible task. There really is no good way to build such a voting system without a radical change in overall architecture of the Internet and the PC, or some unforeseen security breakthrough. The SERVE project is thus too far ahead of its time, and should not be reconsidered until there is a much improved security infrastructure to build upon. The report, A Security Analysis of the Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment (SERVE), is online at <http://www.servesecurityreport.org/>.

What is the difference between trusting the web with your credit card and your vote? The report clearly points out that a vote has one element that a credit transaction does not require. That is anonymity. Your credit card company knows who you are and even sends you a bill listing your purchases. You have the opportunity to review the charges and dispute fraudulent transactions. There are even laws on the books to handle disputed charges and to limit your liability.

The very essence of our secret ballot is that there should be no way for anyone to connect you with your ballot. The fact that you voted, even the fact that you voted in a political party’s primary are public records. But, supposedly no method exists to determine how you actually voted. Pollsters and pundits may think

they know how you voted (or even might vote.) They are guessing, based on “scientific” samples taken from people interviewed after they vote. But, there is no way to know if the people tell the pollsters the truth. Frankly, in Texas, after I get finished wading through the dozens and dozens of races for dog-catcher, assistant dog-catcher and all of the judicial slots, I don’t even remember who ran, much less whether or not I found all of them on the ballot.

We have to be able to trust our election. As the four members of the panel wrote with their own emphasis,

We simply cannot afford to get this wrong. Consequently, voting requires a higher level of security than e-commerce. Though we know how to build electronic commerce systems with acceptable security, e-commerce grade security is not good enough for public elections.

Their conclusion, the current web, Windows based PC world is not ready — yet.

From the March 2004 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.

Media Notes

by Bill Pettit

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

FBI pushes for broadband wiretap powers - All broadband Internet providers, including cable modem and DSL companies, would have to rewire their networks to support easy wiretapping by police, according to a new proposal from the FBI.

The long-awaited proposal, submitted to the Federal Communications Commission in March, has been crafted so broadly that it would outlaw the introduction of new broadband services that did not support ready wiretapping access. Companies currently offering broadband would be given 15 months to comply.

“The importance and the urgency of this task cannot be overstated,” reads the proposal, which is also backed by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Drug Enforcement Administration. “The ability of federal, state and local law enforcement to carry out critical electronic surveillance is being compromised today.”

“It is a very big deal and will be very costly for the Internet and the deployment of new technologies,” said Stewart Baker, a partner at law firm Steptoe & Johnson, who represents Internet providers. “This is a very serious request. Law enforcement is very serious about it.”

The origins of this debate date back nine years, to when the FBI persuaded Congress to enact a controversial law called the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act, or CALEA. Louis Freeh, FBI director at the time, testified in 1994 that emerging technologies such as call forwarding, call waiting and cellular phones had frustrated surveillance efforts.

Congress responded to the FBI’s concern by requiring that telecommunications services rewire their networks to provide police with guaranteed access for wiretaps. Legislators also granted the FCC substantial leeway in defining what types of companies must comply.

Dell Offers New Drivers to Correct Monitor Problem

Some flat-panel monitors sold by Dell have quit working, according to their owners. Dell has a fix--new drivers that can be downloaded. Drivers are programs that tell Windows how to interact with a piece of equipment. Most of the problems appear to involve Nvidia video cards and Dell UltraSharp displays.

The monitors’ extended display identification data also must be reset. Users should contact customer support for that, the company said. According to Dell, the drivers can be downloaded from its site at: <http://www.support.dell.com/>

Getting rid of ZoneAlarm

Q. I wish to uninstall ZoneAlarm. However, there is still part of it on my computer. It keeps closing my browser. How do I get rid of it? I can’t follow the instructions on their site. My screen doesn’t have the things they mention, it asks me to go into safe mode, etc. I am not comfortable with this.

A. It is important that ZoneAlarm, or any other program, be removed properly. If its files are simply deleted, bits and pieces will be left behind, especially in the Registry. These can cause all sorts of problems.

Programs are properly uninstalled by clicking Start>>Control Panel. Double-click Add or Remove Software. Find ZoneAlarm on the list and remove it.

If some of the files have already been deleted, the uninstallation process may not work. In that case, download the program and reinstall it. Once it is reinstalled, you should be able to uninstall it properly. The program is available at: <http://www.zonelabs.com/>

If this procedure does not work, try ZoneAlarm's virtual technical support agent. Also, there is a user's forum available on the ZoneAlarm site. Ask for assistance there. Both are at: <http://www.zonelabs.com/store/content/support/zna1m4Main.jsp>

Should that not work, you can call ZoneAlarm. There is a \$2.95-per-minute fee for assistance. ZoneAlarm has information at: <http://www.zonelabs.com/store/content/support/phoneSupport.jsp>

Optical Drives: Simplified DVD Labeling – HP's invention, due in drives soon, lets users burn labels.

Looking for a way to label your multitude of CDs and DVDs neatly and efficiently? HP has come up with an elegant answer: Use the same laser that already burned the data to make a label on the flip side of the disc.

A technology dubbed LightScribe enables drives to burn a silk screen-like, high-contrast label on the upper side of CD or DVD media bearing a special coating. After completing a data burn, users will be prompted to flip the disc over to burn a label onto the other side. The first LightScribe drives and media are expected to hit the market about six months from now, from leading manufacturers such as Hitachi-LG, MicroVision, Mitsubishi Chemical, Moser Baer India, Sonic Solutions, and Toshiba. HP estimates that a drive that uses LightScribe will carry a premium of about \$10 over the going price today, and that a disc will cost about a dime more than today's discs.

"There are no consumables like ink or ink jet cartridges; the only consumable is the disc itself," says Daryl Anderson, project manager and HP engineer responsible for inventing the technology as part of a joint effort between HP's Imaging and Printing Group and its Personal Systems Group.

HP's technology differs from Yamaha's DiscT@2, introduced a year ago on the CRW-F1 CD-RW drive. DiscT@2 burns a label on the disc's underside, reducing the amount of data the disc can store; and the exposure of the data side renders it more easily

scratched or scuffed. HP notes that LightScribe is likely to show up eventually on such consumer electronics products as stereo-component CD recording decks and set-top DVD recorders.

Rebate Roulette – Still waiting for that check in the mail? Here's the ugly truth about rebates — and how to steer clear of the gotchas.

When Paul Theisen, president of Unlocked Potential, a hiring consulting company in Livonia, Michigan, bought Symantec's Norton AntiVirus 2003 at his local Office-Max, he thought he was getting the software for free — it cost \$70 with \$70 in rebates. So he filled out the forms, clipped the UPC labels, and mailed his claims. After three weeks, a \$30 check arrived for one of the two rebates. Two and a half months later, he received a notice indicating he was ineligible for the second rebate of \$40 because he was missing some paperwork. "But the note didn't specify exactly what was missing," says Theisen.

After making many calls and faxing a copy of the UPC label and the receipt, he was denied again. This time, the rebate fulfillment house for Symantec told him the promotion was over. Theisen felt he was at a dead end. "Talking to the reps is like talking to parrots," he fumes. "No matter what I said, they kept repeating that I didn't send the correct documents." (After a national PC magazine contacted Symantec, the company eventually sent him the \$40 check.)

Theisen's experience is only one example of what can go wrong. Another snag may involve a lack of contact information for disputing a rejection. And some rebate coupons are written in such tiny type that you might need a magnifying glass.

Looking behind the scenes and talking to shoppers who collected rebates and to others who were left empty-handed usually reveals the same old gripes: incomplete data, no or copies of the UPC labels, failure to submit required copies of the receipts. Manufacturers, retailers, and fulfillment houses (which administer rebates) attempt to explain about the pitfalls in the process; companies sometimes point their fingers at each other, leaving buyers in a runaround frenzy. If you've decided to go the rebate route, and you need a bit of help, I would recommend stores (like Costco) that make the filing process a little easier.

Breakdown in the Process

Rebates are a headache for consumers, a tricky situation for retailers, and a major expense for manufacturers. So why are we seeing more rebate offers than ever before? Because stores and product makers want to lure shoppers into buying their products, and they know some people won't collect.

Market research firm Aberdeen Group reports that about 60 percent of buyers who could redeem computer-related rebates don't try. "That's money the store and/or the manufacturer keep," says Aberdeen analyst Peter Kastner. Of the 40 percent who give it a shot, half experience problems or don't get a check at all.

In addition, rebates are evolving beyond the simple \$5-back-on-a-\$50-purchase model. Many software vendors, including Symantec and Pinnacle Systems, offer "net-zero" rebates in which buyers, like Theisen, are promised all of their money back (except, of course, the sales tax). But the burgeoning number of rebate deals in newspaper ads, on store shelves, and on Web sites has resulted in a crescendo of consumer complaints. Chat boards such as those on FatWallet.com <http://www.fatwallet.com/>, a site that offers shopping information and tools for saving money, are overflowing with gripes about denied rebate redemptions.

Part of the problem is that three parties--the product manufacturer, the retailer, and the rebate fulfillment house—are usually involved in the process. Each company ends up relying on the others to ensure that things go smoothly.

Rather than process thousands of redemptions themselves, manufacturers and retailers frequently contract with a fulfillment house to open and sort mail, log in consumer data, and, if all requirements have been met, issue rebate checks. But those fulfillment houses can't cut any checks until the sponsoring manufacturer or retail store hands over the rebate money, which can take anywhere from 15 to 90 days after the fulfillment company's invoice date. If the sponsor pays the invoice with a paper check, the fulfillment house must wait several days for that check to clear before it can write any checks to consumers. Sometimes the manufacturer doesn't pay the invoice at all; a few fulfillment houses (which prefer to remain anonymous) told us that they have

quietly gone to the Federal Trade Commission to report such a problem.

Onerous Requirements

Some rebate offers are so aggressive that the products are virtually free. At Outpost .com, for example, Pinnacle Studio 8 video editing software costs \$79.99, but is -\$0.01 after an \$80 mail-in rebate. Such a deal, right? Not necessarily.

The \$80 rebate is actually two offers: a \$50 one that requires proof of upgrading from a competitor's program (a preloaded version on your PC doesn't count); and a \$30 offer that must be sent to the same address — but to a different department. Another requirement: You must send either the title page of the user manual for a full version of the older software or the old installation CD.

How can you find out about the rules before you sink your money into the product? Manufacturers often tuck the details inside the product box, which, once opened, cannot be returned. Retailers don't provide rebate rules until checkout, either, though you can ask a cashier to print out the rules before you buy. The process is a little easier online, where many merchants provide the rules.

Vendors, such as McAfee Security, have tried to be more forthcoming about the details by listing them on a little sticker on the box. Emphasize the word little. The McAfee Personal Firewall Plus coupon I looked at was barely larger than a butterfly, with letters about the size of starving fleas. The label has roughly 700 words of fine print on one side and a cramped form on the other. And if the software is shrink-wrapped, you probably can't peel off the sticker to read the details.

McAfee says its stickers are standard in the software industry, especially now that some programs come in a box about the size of a VHS video tape. "We want to offer the terms and conditions up front, and that requires a small sticker [in the new packaging]," says Michelle Jimenez, McAfee marketing manager.

If you can't read or find the rebate requirements, ask the store or call the manufacturer about the specifics.

Finger-Pointing

Some manufacturers say that they offer rebates partly because retailers want them to. "A retailer might say, 'We're having this sale and we want to hit

a certain price with this product in our ad. See what you can do,” says Lewis Lustman, marketing director of Iogear, which makes input devices, networking hardware, and other PC peripherals. “The onus then is on [manufacturers] to come up with something.”

The good news for manufacturers and retailers is that rebates can make their bottom line look good, at least temporarily. “With money in the bank, there is no hurry to pay the rebates,” says Todd Fernandez, a financial analyst at Glass Lewis & Company. “Businesses can sit on consumer money [while it earns interest] for a quarter, or sometimes two—a great way to facilitate working capital.”

However, some retailers aren’t happy about delaying tactics. As a general rule, “if [shoppers] buy a product offering a rebate, [they] should get it, and get it on a timely basis,” says Dave Bennett, vice president of pricing at Office Depot. The retail chain promises its store-sponsored rebates within eight to ten weeks.

Like many retailers, Office Depot has limited control over the company that handles manufacturers’ rebates. Bennett understands shoppers’ frustrations: When they find rebate rules that are unreasonable, their first reaction is to get “mad at the store they bought [the product] from,” he says.

But consumers also get mad at the fulfillment house. For instance, TCA Fulfillment, which handles rebates for Brother, CompUSA, Kingston, Micro Center, Samsung, and many other stores and vendors, is described as one of the worst rebate processing companies by participants on FatWallet.com’s chat boards, and it has had an unsatisfactory rating with metropolitan New York’s Better Business Bureau for most of its history.

Some angry consumers have even accused TCA and other vendors of deliberately losing rebates owed. “That is such urban folklore,” counters TCA founder and CEO Frank Giordano, explaining, “We are a service organization. We get paid for every redemption request we enter in the system. If we don’t put it in the system, we don’t get paid.”

The BBB reports that TCA has exhibited a pattern of not responding to consumers’ complaints. “More than 90 percent of [these complaints] were from irate consumers who’d been denied [a rebate], usually for good reason,” says Giordano. “We thought

it was a waste of time to explain through a middle party, like the BBB, why their rebate was rejected.”

New York BBB spokesperson Ronna Brown says that “if TCA told us that all complaints are related to one manufacturer not paying its invoice in time, we’d take that into consideration. [But even if] the volume of their redemptions is incredibly high, they still need to respond to complaints.” Brown acknowledges that the fulfillment company has resolved hundreds of complaints in the last year.

Watchdogs Step In

If the retailers aren’t trying to scam the consumer and the manufacturers aren’t trying to pull a fast one, and the rebate houses are cranking out checks as fast as they can, who’s at fault when rebate experiences go sour? The company sponsoring the rebate is ultimately responsible. And when you can’t get a rebate dispute resolved, where do you turn? That’s where the FTC and the state attorneys general offices enter the picture.

Matthew Gold, a staff attorney in the San Francisco office of the commission, says that some patterns of deception are spotted when the rebate’s sponsor is in financial trouble. Over the past few years, several cases have been filed against manufacturers. One of these, Prime Peripherals — also known as OKie Electronics — eventually filed for bankruptcy.

“[The FTC] hasn’t seen a lot of outright fraud,” Gold says. More often, he adds, it’s a case of a small company not anticipating the level of response to the offer, or a big company too caught up in its own bureaucracy to deposit funds into the fulfillment house’s bank account. “Typically, once [the FTC] gets involved, the companies are reasonably responsive, meaning they either admit they’re in financial trouble or they try to get the money out to consumers.” It’s rare for the FTC or a state attorney general to file suit against a company for failure to pay rebates.

“We don’t disclose the companies we are investigating, but if we receive a number of complaints [about a specific vendor], we look into the situation,” says Brad Maione, press officer for New York State’s Attorney General. “We may also be able to mediate without taking any formal action.”

Government agencies continue to help consumers learn to, as the FTC puts it, “take the ‘bait’ out of

rebates.” Be sure to read the commission’s assortment of helpful tips. <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/alerts/rebatealrt.htm>

Stores Make Rebates Easier

Some leading retailers, hoping to entice customers to make all of their rebate-eligible purchases in one place, are trying to make redemptions easier. The warehouse club Costco, for example, was among the first to blaze a rebate trail by printing out a separate rebate receipt and cash-register-generated claim form along with the customer’s copy of the receipt. Most rebates redeemed through Costco don’t even require clipping out the UPC, and the bulk of them can be redeemed online, saving even the 37-cent postage stamp. But beware: Wait more than 30 days to file, and you’re out of luck.

Office-supply retailer Staples extended its filing deadline from 30 days to 60 days on most rebates. It also plans to offer online redemptions this year. But like other stores, Staples doesn’t combine all of its vendors’ rebates into its own program, which is processed by Parago. So be sure you understand whether the rebate is through Staples or the manufacturer. Best Buy, Circuit City, CompUSA, OfficeMax, Office Depot, and Walgreens don’t combine all of their vendors’ rebates either, but they do print separate rebate receipts. Some of them, including Best Buy, also print out claim forms at the register as Costco does, and they offer toll-free customer-service phone numbers for reporting problems.

Rebate Tips

Do the math: If a product costs \$50 without a rebate and a competitor is \$60 with a \$20 rebate, consider the \$50 item and skip the hassle of filing a claim.

Check the expiration date: Some rebate offers expire faster than a carton of milk. Always check a rebate’s promotion period. A merchant may have failed to update its ads or may carry leftover inventory from a promotion that has ended.

File promptly: Send the rebate claim right away. Some stores and manufacturers require that you submit a claim within 14 days of purchase—which is often shorter than a shop’s return policy.

Follow all instructions: If the form says to use blue ink, do. Fill out every line.

Keep copies for your records: Copy everything before you send the claim.

Use certified mail: It proves that someone received your rebate request.

Set reminders: Mark your calendar for the check’s estimated arrival, or download the rebate tracking freeware at: (http://www.pcworld.com/downloads/file_description/0,fid,8341,00.asp)

Check the status: For redemption tracking, many rebate houses provide a URL, such as www.wheresmyrebate.com or www.rebatestatus.com.

Get in touch: No sign of a check by the due date? Begin documenting your calls.

File a complaint: Report problems to the BBB (<http://complaints.bbb.org/SelectComplaintLinkFrameSet.asp>) and the FTC ([https://rn.ftc.gov/pls/dod/wsolcq\\$.startup?Z_ORG_CODE=PU01](https://rn.ftc.gov/pls/dod/wsolcq$.startup?Z_ORG_CODE=PU01) — use the site, or call 877/382-4357).

Write to your state attorney general’s office, or to the office in the state where the rebate sponsor is located. Contact your local media (newspaper, TV, and radio); they may have a consumer advocacy department that can mediate on your behalf.

Seven Ways to Make Living With Windows Easier

Get your operating system to look and work the way you prefer.

Every time I set up a new Windows machine, I labor for the better part of an afternoon to get it just the way I like. These tips get the OS up to flank speed.

Reveal Your System Files (2K, XP, 98, Me)

When you open a folder that contains important system files—notably the Program Files, Windows, System, or System32 folder — you’re likely to see a patronizing warning that modifying the contents of the folder could cause your programs to stop working correctly. Duh! In versions of Windows prior to XP, this warning appears only if you use the ‘View, as Web Page’ option (in Windows 98) or if ‘Enable Web content in folders’ is selected under the General tab of the Folder Options dialog box (in Windows 2000). Often this warning requires you to click a ‘Show Files’ link to list the folder’s files. If you find this annoying, you’re not alone. Fortunately, there’s a quick fix.

In Windows Me and XP, just click the text that reads Show the contents of this folder. The contents

will remain visible until you click the text in the left column to hide the contents again. If you don't see this text, close the folder pane (if it's visible), choose Tools, Folder Options, and ensure that Enable Web Content in Folders (in Me) or Show common tasks in folders (in XP) is selected under the General tab. To introduce a permanent fix in Windows 98 and 2000, choose View, Folder Options, View or Tools, Folder Options, View. In Windows 98 select Show all files in the 'Advanced settings' list, and in Windows 2000 check Show hidden files and folders and uncheck Hide protected operating system files. Click Yes to acknowledge the warning (if any) and then click OK. If you think you may someday want to revert to the old warning, create a backup of the folder.htt file that's in each of the folders where the warning appears by first renaming it--call it something like 'folder_old.htt'. Then copy the folder.htt file that's in the Web subfolder of your Windows or Winnt folder (which lacks the 'Show files' warning) to the folders whose warnings you find bothersome. When you want to restore the warning for a given folder, simply delete the folder.htt file from that folder, and then change the name of folder_old.htt back to 'folder.htt'.

Double Up Your Toolbars (2K, XP, 98, Me)

If your toolbars take up too much space in Explorer and in your folder windows, conserve screen real estate by putting two or more toolbars on a single line. First, make sure that your screen resolution is high enough and your folder window large enough to accommodate the extra toolbar buttons. Otherwise, they will be difficult to find when you need them.

Before you merge your toolbars in Windows 98, right-click the standard buttons toolbar (the one that starts with the Back button) and make sure 'Text Labels' is unchecked (the labels make the toolbar buttons huge). In 2000 and XP, right-click the toolbar area and make sure 'Lock the toolbars' is unchecked. In all versions, drag the left edge of each toolbar and drop it where you want it. One toolbar can share space with the menu bar, or you can place two or more toolbars side-by-side. When you're happy with the arrangement in Windows XP, right-click any toolbar and choose Lock the toolbars to set them in place. By clicking the double chevron symbol (>>), you can access any button that's pushed off the right edge.

Windows 2000, Me, and XP give you other ways to abbreviate your toolbars. Right-click the standard toolbar and choose Customize. To put your toolbar on a diet, use the list appearing on the right to select the icons you don't need, and then click Remove. You can rearrange a toolbar's buttons by dragging and dropping them, or by using the Move Up and Move Down buttons to shift items you use less frequently to the right (where they disappear into the >> menu but remain accessible).

To save even more space, choose No text labels from the 'Text options' drop-down list. When you're done, click Close. If you type in the Address bar and press Enter (instead of clicking the Go button), save some space by right-clicking the Address bar and unchecking Go Button.

Relocate My Documents (2K, XP, 98, Me)

The first tenet of good file management is to keep your applications separate from your work documents. Windows even encourages this practice by giving you a folder called My Documents, which is located on your C: drive by default. But you don't have to put your data where Microsoft wants you to put it. To redirect the My Documents folder, right-click the icon and choose Properties. With the Target tab in front, click in the Target box and type the path to the drive and folder where you want to store your files. In Windows 98, you can click Browse, select the folder, and click OK. If the folder name you type doesn't exist, Windows will create it for you. Recent versions of Windows will also offer to move the contents of the existing My Documents folder to the new location; feel free to click No if you want to reassign the My Documents location but don't want to move existing files.

To redirect My Music, My Pictures, My Videos, and other built-in Windows folders, use the right mouse button to drag their shortcuts to a new location and then choose Move Here. Finally, to change the name of any of these folders, simply select its icon, click its name (or press F2), type a new name, and press Enter.

Set Explorer Defaults (2K, XP, 98, Me)

Windows Explorer gives you many ways to view your files—as large icons, small icons, thumbnails, lists, or details (the folder view I prefer). To make Details view the default for all your folders, use the View menu to set up a single folder window the way

you want; then in Windows 98, choose View, Folder Options, View, Like Current Folder. In other versions of Windows, click Tools, Folder Options, View, Like Current Folder. If you change your mind and want to go back to the default folder view, click Reset All Folders. But what if you want some folders to use Details view, others to show thumbnails, and so on? No problem. First, use the preceding steps to set the view you'll use with most of your folders. Then, in the 'Advanced settings' list at the bottom of this dialog box, make sure that Remember each folder's view settings is checked. Click OK. Whenever you subsequently change the view setting or sort order for a particular folder, it will retain that view the next time you open it.

Sort of First Resort (2K, XP, 98, Me)

When you sort Explorer windows by name, folders appear at the top, and other files are listed underneath, each group in alphabetical order. If you'd like to place a file or folder at the top of the list, or if you (like me) want compressed folders and shortcuts to folders at the top near the folder groups—since these items behave just like folders—rename the item and place a special character at the beginning of its name. Select the shortcut, file, or folder, and press F2. Press Home to move the insertion point to the beginning of the name, and type a punctuation character such as !, {, [, or (.

To see the effect, either close and reopen the folder and click Name at the top of the column (in Details view), or choose View, Arrange Icons by, Name. If the folder is already sorted by name, you'll have to follow these steps twice to see the contents in ascending alphabetical order.

Superfast Task Manager (2K, XP)

There are several ways to get fast access to the Task Manager in Windows 2000 and XP. But this may be the fastest method of all: Press Ctrl-Shift-Esc to see Task Manager instantly.

A Fresh Start (Menu) (2K, XP, Me)

Why bother opening a My Documents window, a Control Panel window, and a Printers window (or some other window) just to reach a file or icon you want? With a little tweaking, you can make these and other items appear automatically as submenus off the Start menu. You'll still have to navigate through one or more submenus to get to the item you

want, but at least you won't have to worry about closing the file's folder window later.

To create new Start menu shortcuts, right-click the taskbar and choose Properties. In Windows XP, choose the Start Menu tab and click the Customize button next to the variation of the Start menu you're using. In all versions, click the Advanced tab. In the list of check boxes at the bottom of the dialog box, select the items you want on your Start menu. For example, check Expand Control Panel (in 2000 and Me), or check Display as a menu under the Control Panel category in XP's 'Start menu items' pane. Depending on your version of Windows, you can do the same for My Documents, My Music, My Pictures, My Computer, Printers, and Network and Dial-up Connections. When you're done, click OK to see the result.

Windows Toolbox: MinMaxExtender Gives You New Ways to Tame Your Windows

The makers of the MinMaxExtender ([https://rn.ftc.gov/pls/dod/wsolcq\\$.startup?Z_ORG_CODE=PU01](https://rn.ftc.gov/pls/dod/wsolcq$.startup?Z_ORG_CODE=PU01)) utility believe that three is not enough. I'm referring, of course, to the buttons on the top right of folder and application windows. With this program you can add as many as six new buttons there to maximize windows vertically or horizontally only, hide a window except for its title bar (the window shade effect), hide a window completely, minimize it to the system tray (the taskbar area near the clock), or make it stay on top of all other windows. You can turn off the buttons you don't need and customize them in other ways. Unfortunately, the program's creators don't support the product anymore, so it is now open-source. Still, it works well for me, except in XP's default blue, olive, or silver color schemes, whose large buttons collide with MinMaxExtender's stay-on-top button. So either forget about using that feature in this case, or tweak additional MinMaxExtender settings in the Windows Registry so the buttons accommodate each other. And here's the kicker: The program is free.

From the April issue of Umbrella Online.



From The DealsGuy

by Bob (the cheapskate) Click
Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

Getting My Money's Worth

I decided to give the free AARP tax service another try this year and again my experience was not as expected. They didn't exactly do as promised. After processing our income tax return they said someone would file it electronically in three days at no cost, my purpose for using them. However, three weeks later, it still hadn't been uploaded according to the IRS. When I went back to inquire, they would not give me a phone number for the person who uploads them, but promised to check on it. Later I was told it had been returned (no reason given), but they didn't know it for several days. They had uploaded it a second time two days before I inquired and I should check with the IRS again in two days. That evening I called the IRS again and sure enough, it had been received and I should expect to receive my refund eleven days later. I was relieved. (The refund has since arrived.) After giving it some thought, I decided that since this is the first year of e-filing for this group, they just need to get better organized. I'll give those hard working volunteers the benefit of the doubt.

Again this year, I used Tax Act software to do a comparison and found a difference, although the numbers were the same for my tax and refund. The tax loss carry over was much different. After talking to the AARP volunteer about the variation, I re-checked my entries and found I had made a duplicate entry (as it is in some of the 1099s) where it should have been zero, so I'm not perfect either. I am not all that pleased with Tax Act, but the price is right. Tax Act Deluxe (\$9.95) would import the basic data from my last year's return to save a lot of retyping. I did not find the product very intuitive when I used it and was sometimes unsure if I was doing the right thing. In fact, I had to call their tech support just to find out how to reopen the file to work on it. Nothing I had tried would open it.

Lots Of Interest In Trade Shows

I was surprised at how much feedback I received about working trade shows. Many people are interested and wanted to know more. My wife and I have worked as licensed security guards in trade shows for

over six years now (we keep it part time) and enjoy it immensely. We live in a hotbed of trade show activity. The best part is that we get paid while enjoying them. Other security work is available, but we mostly stick to trade shows. We don't get rich, but it helps improve our lifestyle while living on our pensions.

In February we were asked to work the World of Concrete (WOC) show [<http://www.worldofconcrete.com>], one of our favorites. It is one of the largest shows to be held here and took the entire 1.1 million square ft. of the building's exhibit area as well as about a third of the parking area where many active displays were set up, and all their mega-demos were held. Actually, WOC was combined with the World of Masonry show a few years ago. Those demos included concrete pours and finishing, brick laying contests and decorative work on concrete slabs, among other things. An artist put a beautiful picture of a Mac truck tractor on a concrete slab using acrylics. I was told I could have it, but can you imagine trying to move an 8' x 10' concrete slab home? However, we did get to take home a pickup load of unused bricks that came in handy. There was not much about computers in this show, but it was fascinating to see all the laser electronics involved in finishing a concrete slab and getting it close to perfect. The art of finishing concrete has sure changed. I loved seeing the riding trowel machines working.

World Of Concrete is usually held in Las Vegas. They say it will never be here again because show management doesn't like it here. Not enough bars, according to our newspaper, and they don't like the building either. It was for the trade only and had over 60,000 attendees. With my family's background in the gravel quarry business, it was especially fun seeing all that large equipment, such as the concrete pumping trucks with their 210' unfolding booms arching over, and other equipment that was demonstrated. Our work was crowd control for the parking area mega-demos.

Also in February we worked one day of the International Call Center Management (ICCM) Show [<http://www.iccm.com>] at the Gaylord Palms Resort Hotel. Unfortunately I had to attend classes in Tampa so my time with ICCM was limited. My only work day at the ICCM was the setup day so I had

little chance to talk to vendors. However it is plain that when you make a call for many business purposes, it just might be handled by a National Call Center that might then redirect it, without your knowledge, to wherever it must be handled. It might be redirected to anyplace on the globe or perhaps to an adjacent office.

This show had mostly smaller booths and I counted over fifty exhibitors in about 80,000 square feet of exhibit space. Only a few were names you might know. While much if it was about redirecting calls, there were other functions as well. This show had a keynote speaker and attendees could tour three on-site Call Centers in the area, one of which was the Sprint PCS offices. I was extremely busy during the day and when things slowed down that night, there were few vendors to talk to for information.

Next month, I'll have a small report about a show that you readers would "love" to be able to tour, a home automation show.

Still Good

The MediaFour deal is still good, but expires June 1st so you must be fast if you didn't take advantage of it. Check last month's column for ordering info, but the phone is Phone 605-235-1991 <suenail@cableone.net> [www.mediafour.com]. Also, I believe Aladdin Software's special is for Spam-Catcher is still good so check last month's column for ordering details. [http://www.aladdinsys.com/store] I was unable to get any new deals to come together for this month because of my work schedule and a bad cold.

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@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [http://www.dealsguy.com] for past columns and some interesting articles.

Low Tech Digital Picture Organization

by Dan Butler

They're everywhere. Digital cameras have become a staple in many households. If you are

like me, you take far more pictures with your digital camera than you did when you had to pay for all the developing. The problem comes when it's time to store all those pictures. Sure you could copy them to your hard drive. Or you might try a picture-organizing software package. Al has reviewed a few of these in past issues. I've tried both approaches and find they don't meet my needs.

My hard drive fills up and then I worry about the drive crashing. I back up to CD and that's nice but then I have to organize the CDs!

The software works okay. But then I get lazy and don't add my pictures. Then I worry about my hard drive crashing again. So I looked for a low tech solution. So far I'm happy with the results.

These are the materials I use for my archive:

- Brother MFC-5200C printer
- Sony Mavica FD-92 camera
- CD-Burner software; I use Nero Burning ROM
- 3-Ring binder
- Clear Sheet Protectors

First some details. The Sony Mavica FD-92 is a bit old but has features I needed at the time. I originally bought it since it ran on floppy disks. My work required me to use many different computers and it was easier to stick the floppy disk in a foreign computer rather than trying to rig up the special cables. Well times are changing and I'm not sure I would make the same purchase today. But at the time it was the right choice at the right price. A side result of my Mavica is the hundreds of floppy disks I have with photographs on them.

The Brother printer is an all-in-one machine. I chose it for the price and features. What I needed was a sheet-fed fax/copier/scanner. For this purpose the machine has worked just fine. Street price today is \$200-\$250 on this machine. It doesn't do the best job on photos but I use a different printer for that. I bought it to replace my fax machine and scanner. I also wanted a stand-alone copier I could put a book in. This machine did all of that well. I wanted a sheet feeder for easier copying and it also has a multi-card reader to read the Memory Sticks from my Mavica. We've been happy with the printer and have no trouble with it.

When I'm ready to archive the photographs on my Memory Stick I simply remove it from the camera

and put it in the card reader on my printer. The printer then prints out pages with thumbnail images of all the photos on my Memory Stick.

If your printer doesn't do the thumbnail printing, pick up a free copy of Iomega's Photo Printer: [ftp://ftp.iomega.com/pub/english/photoprinter72web.exe](http://ftp.iomega.com/pub/english/photoprinter72web.exe)

After I have the thumbnails printed I burn two CD-ROMs with the data from the Memory Stick. I burn two in case one goes bad. I also copy the entire directory to my hard drive. Then I label my CD-ROMs and the directory with the current date.

The thumbnail printouts are inserted in clear plastic sheet protectors. Next I drop the two CD-ROMs in the same sheet protectors, one with the first page and one with the last page. Then all the sheet protectors are put in a three-ring binder with previously archived photos.

If I need to print any photo I simply find the picture on the thumbnail printout. The printout has the filename just below it. Then I print it directly off the CD-ROM. I usually use the Iomega Photo Printer for printing.

So far this has proven to be a good solution to what was a growing problem for me.

©2004 Dan Butler. Dan Butler is the Editor-in-Chief of *TNPCnewsletter.com*. He helps people with practical business ideas online and offline. <http://www.dbutler.com/>

Computer Rage

by Elise M. Edgell and Jim Sanders
North Orange County Computer Club, CA

I have heard about road rage for years and have even seen instances of it. For some people just putting them behind a steering wheel gives them an angry feeling toward all other drivers on the road.

I am seeing a similar reaction with some people as soon as they are in front of a computer keyboard. Suddenly they are no longer reasonable, rational people using the computer to make their life better. They react as put-upon individuals that are using a tool, which they would rather not use, can't really see the benefit in using it, would rather be doing anything else other than sitting there in front of their computer, and they do not want to learn anything about their computer other than how to use the applications that they have been forced to use because of outside pressure. They act as if it is an imposition to have to learn anything more about

their computer than how to turn it on. They see no useful value in understanding any of the workings of the computer. They have much more valuable use for their time than to spend any of it learning useless (in their estimation) information.

Unfortunately, not only do we have the "Computer Rage" group that think it is chic to hide behind their rage with an "I would rather work harder, than smarter" attitude, there are others. Some groups that come to mind are the "I am too old to learn this computer stuff" the "I am too dumb to learn this computer stuff," the "I am so computer illiterate that I don't even know how to turn one on, and proud of it," and the "I would probably do something wrong and break it" group.

What could be some of the reasons for these attitudes, reactions or myths to using a computer?

One reason is that computer software and hardware companies have fostered the idea that in today's world computers are so sophisticated that they can be run without any necessity for the user to learn the basics. As an example, the Windows operating system installs with many of its defaults set to "protect" the user from much of the really useful information that is needed for intelligent operation of the computer. The problem with that is, if the information is hidden, the user may be unaware of needed information.

So why should you make the effort to learn more about your computer? Even if you are using a computer under duress (real or perceived) once a computer is an integral part of your personal or business life it is very upsetting for the computer to be unavailable to perform the tasks that you've come to depend on.

When a problem occurs with your program or with your hardware, instead of just feeling abused, put upon, frustrated, helpless, or mad, you will have some options if you learn some of the basics. You will be able to take care of some of the simple and common problems yourself. When you get the "Disk A: is write-protected" error message while trying to save a file to the floppy disk, you will know that all you have to do is take the floppy out of the drive, slide over the write-protect tab to cover the hole, and reinsert it in the drive. The problem was solved in ten seconds, no rage, no anger, no anxiety, actually, no

real problem. It was just one of those things that happen and have to be dealt with.

Even if you can't solve the situation on your own, you will be able to communicate the problem in understandable terms. This makes it possible for you to ask for help over the telephone, or even on the Internet. You'll also need to know when you really need help and to know if the "help" you are getting is valid. Last, and far from least, most windows have a "Help" menu, and there is always the "START" button and general "HELP" option. But once again, if, for whatever reason, you have not bothered to learn some of the basic concepts and terminology, you won't be able to ask the right question, or understand the answer if you stumble across it.

I have also heard people say. "I watch TV but I don't have to learn how it works, why should I have to learn how to use my computer?" My response is that today's computers place an unbelievable amount of access to information, knowledge, and creative programs at your fingertips. For chump change (don't know what that means — look it up on Google.com) you can buy a nice computer and access to the Internet. As soon as you buy that combination you have an almost unimaginable power sitting on your desk. Power that just a few years ago only governments and large corporations could afford. Once you are on the Internet, most of the information, a lot of the knowledge, and quite a few of the applications are free! You may have seen the TV ad showing a one man garage shop company that looks like a large company because of what the computer can do. This is a true story, not an advertiser's pipe dream. Information is power and the Internet makes information available on about any subject. Aside from the "chump change" what does all this power cost? The willingness to spend the time to learn how to use it!

I am no longer envious of people who live near a large library. I use the Internet to answer many of the questions which I think about but forget before I get to a dictionary, encyclopedia, or other paper research material. Now I can get an almost instantaneous answer and can ask to be notified by e-mail when a certain topic comes up in the news. For example I used this recently after I read a murder mystery based on a deadly chemical named sodium azide. I had never heard of it before. I searched the

Internet using Google and found many articles about it and its deadly properties. This chemical is readily available and widely used. I was concerned enough to use a feature of Google to send me an e-mail when sodium azide is in a news story.

Wouldn't you be willing to invest some of your time to be able to really use this type of power? What about really learning some of the abilities of the software that is probably sitting on your computer? Have you ever really looked at the features of WordPad in Windows XP? Have you ever clicked on help in WordPad? Did you know that the "Help Menu" in WordPad contains a "Help on how to use Help" section? Are you taking digital photos? Are you in sales? Do you have a disability? Of course you can find use for some of the more advanced features of your software. The problem is you won't ever know what these may be, unless you expend some effort to learn what is possible.

Once you decide that learning more about the potential of your computer is a benefit to you, it makes it a lot easier to find the time and energy to accomplish this.

Understanding goes a long way toward the feeling of being in control. When you feel in control of your computing experience, the irrational feelings of rage will probably go away or at least be minimized. This doesn't mean that you will no longer get mad or upset with your computer, far from it, just that you will be more likely do it for a real cause.

How do you acquire the information and skills you need to feel in control of your computer? One good way is to go to a computer user's group. Unfortunately, if you are the person this article is about you are probably not getting this newsletter. My suggestion is that those of you who are getting this newsletter give a copy of this article to your friends that have computer rage.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

The Lazy Webmaster

by Susan Ives

Alamo PC Organization, Inc.

Glossaries

A Mini Case Study

I had a client who wanted an elegant way of providing definitions for medical terms on their site. This mini case study will not only introduce you to the design process but also give you fresh ideas that you can apply to your own site. To get the full benefit, make sure to view the examples on the Lazy Webmaster site.

Link to a glossary page:

A popular way of providing definitions is with a glossary. By using the name tag on the definition list and a target attribute in the word's link, the click takes the user right to the word's definition on a separate page.

In text:

```
<A HREF="glossary.html#hardword">
hardword</A>
```

In glossary:

```
<A NAME="hardword">hard word</A>: blah
blah blah
```

The Pros:

This is easy to maintain – you just need one glossary, and changes are easy. The glossary can be used for multiple definitions, multiple pages and even multiple sites. The name-target code is unadorned HTML and will work in every browser.

The Cons:

Going to another page breaks the reading flow. Some inexperienced Web surfers may not understand how to get back to their original place in the text.

Frames:

Using frames, or multiple HTML files displayed on the same screen, a glossary could be included on the same page as the article. I'm not usually a fan of frames, but this seems to be a sensible implementation of the technique. The same name-target convention described above would be used to include the entire glossary in the frame (although a huge glossary might need to be broken down into smaller files to load more quickly.)

The Pros:

The definition shows up on the same screen as the defined word, not breaking the reading flow. You are working with one dictionary document – easy to create and maintain. You can use full HTML in the frame, including a graphics and links. The same format can be re-used for multiple pages.

The Cons:

Some people get confused by frames, although this is fairly straightforward. The dictionary takes up quite a bit of screen real estate.

Tool tip:

This is a little-known piece of HTML code. You can use the <TITLE> tag in a link, like this:

```
<A HREF="#" TITLE="this is a tool tip">hard
word</A>
```

When the mouse hovers over the word a yellow tool tip box will pop up containing the definition. The # in the link anchor is a null link – it won't take you anywhere, since the purpose of linking here is to activate the tooltip and not to take you to another page.

The Pros:

The definition is contextual – it shows up right where the word does and the reading flow isn't interrupted. It is moderately easy to maintain. It is straight HTML and will work in all browsers.

The Cons:

Each tip needs to be coded for each instance of the word. The tooltip box only stay open for about five seconds – not long enough to read a long definition. Many people will be confused by an underlined word that looks like a link and smells like a link but is really a definition. You can't use HTML within the tip – no line breaks, bold, etc. – which makes the text dense to read.

Dynamic HTML Tooltip:

DHTML is a generic name for client-side scripting, often JavaScript. You can see examples of DHTML tooltips at

- dyn-web.com
- help4web.net

The second example includes a generator that creates custom code for you.

The Pros:

The definition is contextual – it shows up right where the word does and the reading flow isn't interrupted. The tooltip can contain custom colors and graphics.

The Cons:

The coding is a nightmare, although using a page template would ease the burden. DHTML will not work with older browsers, or for those who turn their scripting off.

Popup Window:

Easy Audio Editor

Version 2.7.1

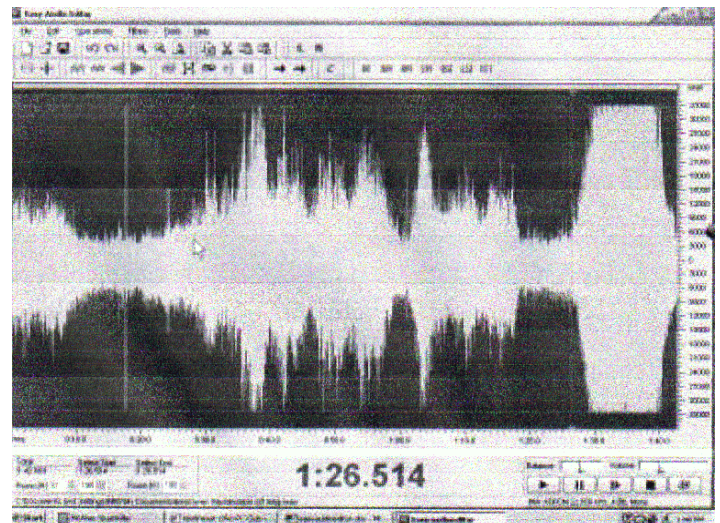
by Marshall Straight

Northeast Ohio PC Club

\$39.00 Download

Easy Audio Editor is a visual audio file editor. Very quickly you are able to edit all major audio format files. It downloaded very quickly as one executable that is 6,422,528 bytes. Installation was very fast and clean. Executing the .exe file installed the program with an icon. I ran it on a Windows XP, Pentium III 933 MHz, and 384MB of ram machine The authors' only system requirement is Windows 95 or higher.

There is only one version of Easy Audio Editor. Easy Audio Editor supports all major audio formats including .WAV, .WMA, .MP2, and .MP3. Output formats also include all major audio formats. My tested version of Easy Audio Editor was released on February 8, 2004.



Easy Audio Editor is an easy to use program once you get past the sound wave graph and audio engineering icons and commands. It is intuitive enough that if you know where you are trying to go it is easy to get there. My first objective was to shorten a .WAV file. All that I had to do was open the file, highlight the parts of the file that I didn't need, cut, and save the file as the new name. The "help" files are non-existent. The Index contains zero listings. Every command in every menu option is included in a glossary, but it only tells you what it is, not how to

We discussed the code for popup windows at length in the October, 2003 Lazy Webmaster. A link to a word activates a mini-screen containing the definition.

The Pros:

The definition shows up on the same screen as the defined word, not breaking the reading flow. Once a definition popup is created it can be used for multiple instances of the hard word. You can use full HTML in the popup, including a graphic. It is moderately easy to create and maintain.

The Cons:

Popups use JavaScript, and some people might disable Java in their browsers. Many people get confused by popup windows. Each definition has to be coded in a separate HTML document.

Link to an outside dictionary:

Finally, we looked at linking to an outside dictionary, Merriam-Webster. They permit Webmasters to use their search box. You can download the code. Another one is Look Way Up at <http://lookwayup.com/free/webmaster.htm>

The Pros:

Coding is simple, maintenance is nonexistent. The definitions are outstanding and even include sound files to help with pronunciation.

The Cons:

It requires more action by the user — he or she has to type the word needing definition. The search box takes you away from your site and onto the Merriam-Webster site. The red, white and blue search box may clash with your site.

There are, I am sure, other solutions. For example, a programmer could link a glossary from your own database. And these solutions could also have other uses: tooltips could be used for footnotes. The key is in finding the best possible solution for your challenge, one that balances ease of use and cross-browser compatibility with your design and maintenance considerations.

From the March 2004 issue of PC Alamode, newsletter of the Alamo PC Organization of San Antonio, TX.

do it. There is a glossary of audio file formats that helps.

Easy Audio Editor does several tasks. You may open an existing audio file, record a new audio file, edit an audio file, apply effects, apply filters, insert noise or silence, and save the file to a different audio file format. The editing commands include cut, copy, paste, and mix. The editing set is rather complex. I call it an audio engineer's screen of commands. There are dozens of icons to use and the possible combinations are in the thousands. You may even edit the left and right tracks if your file was recorded in stereo. The "undo" and "redo" commands in the Edit menu have true Windows functionality.

The screen layout of Easy Audio Editor is clean, but may be intimidating if you aren't an audio engineer. The entire screen, except for three toolbars on the top and three toolbars on the bottom, is the graphical view of the file that you have open. It may be shown in sound wave form view or spectral view. The sound wave form view is my choice while editing the file. The top row toolbar is the traditional Windows choices of file, edit, operations, filters, tools, and help. The second row toolbar is the icons for the "file" and "edit" options. The third row toolbar is the icons for the "operations" and "filters" options. The toolbars on the bottom are icons for the "tools" options. All of the options are easy to find via menu choices or icons. The options will be confusing if you aren't a sound engineer.

My need for an audio file editor is that I wish to edit .WAV files made by my digital sound recorder. I have dozens of recordings of ducks, birds, boats, airplanes, etc that need to be cleaned up and shortened. I use them in PowerPoint presentations, screen savers, embed them in digital pictures, and use them for Windows system sounds. Easy Audio Editor very quickly and easily cleaned up and shortened my .WAV files. The default settings worked very well and the "undo" command worked well when requested. I used the "save as" option to create new files.

Easy Audio Editor's strength is that it edits most major audio file formats simply and easily. Easy Audio Editor's weakness is that it probably will overwhelm most users.

In conclusion, is Easy Audio Editor worth \$39? Yes, if all that you need is basic audio file auditing.

Company: DanDans Software

<http://www.dandans.com/>

From the March 2004 issue of Nybbles and Bytes, the newsletter of the Northeast Ohio PC Club.

Confession of a Wanna-Be Geek

by Mike Hutchison

Tampa PC Users Group

Confession may be good for the soul; this one does the ego of this wanna-be geek boy none. I tried to open a .pif which was attached to an email which I recieved on March 2nd. There were some minor extenuating circumstances, but we shall not dwell on them now. A .pif file is, as even I knew prior to this misadventure, a Program Information File. They hail from the Windows 3.1 days. They were used to store settings and options which told Windows how to operate the DOS program that a specific PIF was associated with. Nowadays, in XP time, the PIF has faded from the spotlight.

There is, however, one use for them that has been demonstrated recently. Namely, as a vehicle for the Netsky worm. There are at least 4 varieties of this worm. According to the Norton Support site, the other types are descendants of the W32.Netsky.C@mm. I managed to get D flavor. When I tried to open the PIF, my computer began trying to send email messages. Lots of email messages. Norton was scanning as many as 15 at one point. I had to do a Ctrl-Alt-Del to get out of Outlook Express. The W32.Netsky.D@mm is a recent variation to arrive on the scene (again, according to the Norton site it was discovered on March 1st). I had just updated my virus definitions two days previous to the day my problem occurred; in other words, the day before Norton discovered the thing. Nevertheless, this was acting like a virus, so I ran a full system scan of the affected computer. It came up clean.

I deleted the email and attachment and got Outlook Express calmed down. Thought that perhaps I had lucked out. When I ran Outlook Express the next morning, it was soon clear that I had not lucked out. Soon I had Norton scanning 30 outgoing messages. This was before I had even received my messages, let alone sent any. I have well below 30 contacts in the address book. Anyhow, next I called up tech support at my ISP to see if they were hearing anything about PIFs. They were and had been

deleting them at a rapid pace. Next I described the situation to William LaMartin. Sounds like a virus, said he, and I had best get myself hither to the Norton Live Update site, which I did. The Virus Definitions part of the update was small, but Netsky must have been in there. When I did another full system scan of the computer after the Live update download, it found 41 files infected with W32.Netsky.D@mm.

These files were all PIFs but were created by the worm after the payload trigger. Then I went back to the Norton Support site and downloaded a Netsky removal tool. The Norton instructions said, among other things, to run the removal tool twice after disabling the System Restore check box which is found in the System Restore tab when you right click My Computer and then click Properties. Norton says in the instructions for running the removal tool do not skip this step. They then recommend running Live Update for latest definitions. The removal tool can be downloaded at <http://securityresponse.symantec.com/avcenter/venc/data/w32.netsky.u@mm.html>.

Some background information on the Netsky D worm (once again courtesy of Norton Support): It is a mass mailing worm that scans drives C through Z on the computer, and it then uses its own SMTP engine to email itself to the email addresses that it finds. The size of the attachment is 17,424 bytes. Systems which are affected by the worm: Win 2000, Win 95, Win 98, Win ME, and Windows XP. Systems not affected by the worm: Linux, Mac, Unix and Win 3.x. One of the messages in the body of the email which brings this worm to your machine that is listed by Norton matched the one I got. To Wit: See the attached file for details. I have a customer who has people whom I have no prior knowledge of sending me email with ads for a publication attached to the email. I have no other excuse. I won't even try to claim that I thought it was a .pdf instead of a .pif. Like they say; Just don't do it. If you don't know who it is — delete it.

Addendum: March 9th, 2004- I was still having trouble sending email normally, so I went back into Outlook Express under Tools > Options, then clicked the Connections tab and removed the check mark from the Hang Up after Sending and Receiving check box. I think I had this checked while I was trying to

get Outlook Express to stop sending all the spurious messages. Then sort of as a whim, I ran a full system scan of the machine with Norton Anti-Virus. It showed 39 files infected with Netsky. Back to Norton Live Update for the latest virus definitions. This time I had Norton AntiVirus quarantine and then delete all infected files. Then back to Symantec support site for some reading about the Netsky K variation and a download of the latest Netsky Removal tool. This was Version 1.0.4 as of the morning of the 9th. It was Version 1.0.3 the first go-around. I then ran the removal tool twice with System Restore disabled as before. So far all seems right in my email world. A full system scan reports no infected files.

Tech support at my ISP mentioned in response to a question from me that one does have to do something to something in a received email message to get into trouble. Still, they say it is a good idea to keep the right side of your Outlook Express workspace as one pane, stay away from the Preview pane on the bottom.

From the April 2004 issue of Bits of Blue, newsletter of the Tampa PC Users Group.

RCSi Member Publishes Scanner Book

Ron Matteson, author and computer engineer living in Walworth, Wayne County, NY has published a book titled *Scanning for the SOHO – Small Office and Home Office*. The book is designed to instruct people how to optimize the use of a scanner in the small office environment. It tells about the proper size, resolution, mode etc. in which to set the scanner for scanning different types of input documents. The different types of documents include text, line art, photographs, halftones, and transparent media such as slides and film negatives. The processing of the scanned images is also discussed — how to resize, enhance, sharpen and improve the color.

Optimizing the scanned image for printing, copying, faxing, e-mailing and sending to a web page is also covered. OCR, color management techniques, file formats etc. are also discussed in detail. The book is 286 pages in length, with 121 figures and more than a dozen tables to help users see the options available in scanning equipment.

The book is available at www.VirtualBookworm.com and other major on-line bookstores. Search for

the title or the author. It is available in soft cover at a price of \$14.95. It is also available in e-book format (*.pdf).

Matteson, Ron, *Scanning for the SOHO*, Virtual Bookworm Publishing, 2004.
ISBN # 1-58939-554-9

Ron has been an author in the field of document image processing, professor of computer engineering at RIT, inventor of document scanning systems, professional engineer in the State of New York, past president of the RCSi and practicing electrical engineer. He is a Senior Life member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers. He currently advises individuals and businesses on the use of scanners, digital photography and image editing in the small office and home office.

E-mail: Ron_Matteson@att.net

Society News

Program Meeting Minutes
Brighton Library
Tuesday, April 13, 2004
by Jan Rothfuss

Helps Half Hour

Led by: Bill Statt

Q: Has anyone using Internet Explorer had their homepage hijacked?

A: Took a couple of hours to find the best way to restore. Start Page Guard prevents the hijack process. Atlas DMT makes software that makes tracking cookie software. Cmos Pwd software that allows access to your software. URLs: <http://pjwalczak.com/sguard/> <http://spywareinfo.com>

Q: My 13 inch monitor does not allow me to see the full page – has to scroll web pages.

A: Try to adjust the settings for the browser.

Q: I have a laser printer that continually adds a 'new printer' after each reboot as printer-2. A USB connection with no conflicts.

A: Try connecting it to another port. Be sure you have the latest drivers.

Q: Usually is running 4-5 programs at one time. A residual image from the previous screen remains when switching/starting up.

A: May need to reinstall video drivers. There is a repair process to run against XP-home. Suspicious about the ATI card.

Q: Windows 98 using MSN internet. An email sent once keeps sending itself each day.

A: Call to MSN but ask to speak with manager for clearer.

Q: I keep getting an error message that an email delivery has failed. I am not sending anything!

A: Your email address is in someone else's address list. A virus is sending out e-mails using you as the initiator.

Q: I continually get virus found messages from McAfee. Why?

A: Some viruses disable the updating of your protection software.

Business Meeting

Led by Dan Rothfuss

Steve needs volunteers for the nominating Committee.

We have been having a summer picnic on our regular meeting night on Tuesdays. Brighton Park cabin is not available this year. Only a shelter there. Perinton Park has a cabin available for \$70. Route 31F. All present agreed to 'grab the cabin'. August 10th is the date.

Please report address changes to any Board member.

The club thanks the following for bringing cookies and drinks to our general meeting: Ron Matteson (coffee), Dan Rothfuss (second coffee pot), Dick & Beverly Cronkite, Tony Dellelo, Bill Statt (cookies), Steve Staub (pop).

Computer Show volunteers: Arpad Kovacs, Steve Staub, Tony Dellelo, John Nicastro, and Ron Matteson.

The club welcomes new members Ronald Gouger, Renee Holt, John Kiley, and Timothy McBride. We also thank the following members for renewing: John Baly, John Nicastro, Mike DeSteffano Jr., Iris Schwartz-baum, Richard and Beverly Cronkite, Dick Comegys, Donald Nichols, Tony Dellelo, and John Utz.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub

Balance as of 03/11/2004	\$689.63
Income	
Dues	\$290.00
Raffle	40.00
Food	<u>12.60</u>

Total Income	\$342.60
Expenses	
St. Stephens	\$75.00
Postmaster	50.00
Park Permit	<u>70.00</u>
Total expenses	\$195.00
Balance as of 04/14/2004	\$837.23

Gullibility Virus Spreading

Over the Internet!

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Institute for the Investigation of Irregular Internet Phenomena announced today that many Internet users are becoming infected by a new virus that causes them to believe without question every groundless story, legend, and dire warning that shows up in their inbox or on their browser. The Gullibility Virus, as it is called, apparently makes people believe and forward copies of silly hoaxes relating to cookie recipes, email viruses, taxes on modems, and get-rich-quick schemes [perhaps conspiracy theories should be included here].

“These are not just readers of tabloids or people who buy lottery tickets based on fortune cookie numbers,” a spokesman said. “Most are otherwise normal people, who would laugh at the same stories if told to them by a stranger on a street corner.” However, once these same people become infected with the Gullibility Virus, they believe anything they read on the Internet.

“My immunity to tall tales and bizarre claims is all gone,” reported one weeping victim. “I believe every warning message and sick child story my friends forward to me, even though most of the messages are anonymous.”

Another victim, now in remission, added, “When I first heard Bill Gates was giving away money I just accepted it without question. After all, there were dozens of other recipients on the mail header, so I thought the virus must be true.” It was a long time, the victim said, before she could stand up at a Hoaxees Anonymous meeting and state, “My name is Jane, and I’ve been hoaxed.” Now, however, she is spreading the word. “Challenge and check whatever you read,” she says.

Program

Photography BC and AD
(Before Computers and After Digital)
by Gordon Brown

Gordon provided the group with an informative walk through the world of photography. He included a great mix of history, current options and even a look into the future. He included some good information as he compared film to silicone. He was able to highlight advantages and disadvantages of both media. Anything that you ‘master’ today will be outdated in six to nine months as the technology refreshes itself very frequently. Printing of digital photos is now possible at the corner drug store – who would have thought that would be possible ten years ago?

After the PowerPoint presentation he gave the group a demo of Kodak’s Photo Desk that allows you to manipulate the raw files.

We all left the meeting with a better sense of what digital photography is all about.

The Lighter Side

A systems engineer, a mechanical engineer, and a software engineer are in a car careening down a mountainous road without brakes. The driver is furiously pumping the pedal while he steers the speeding car around the treacherous turns — stones flying and passengers gasping. Finally he finds an upward incline and the car coasts to a stop. All three get out and, thanking their lucky stars, begin to assess the situation.

“Oh, oh,” says the mechanical engineer, “the brake lines are leaking — lets patch the hole, bleed the brakes, and be on our way!”

The systems engineer says, “Maybe we should consult with the manufacturer and the dealer to ensure that’s really the problem.”

The software engineer says, “Why don’t we get back in and see if it happens again?”

