

Locked Out of Your Computer?

by Vinny LaBash

Sarasota PC Users Group, Florida

Some time ago one of my students came to me with what appeared to be an insurmountable problem. She had lent her laptop to a relative who changed the password allowing her access to the hard drive. A dispute developed between the two, and the relative refused to disclose the new password. Upon boot-up, a message appeared that the hard drive was now password protected. She asked me, "How can I break this password and access my computer"?

I had mixed feelings. Most people ask me how to protect their data and equipment, and prevent unauthorized access. I was now being asked to break into a machine. Even though the woman was the legitimate owner of the laptop and the data recorded on it, it felt strange to be on the other side of the fence. After dusting off my notes, we tackled the problem.

Before revealing what actually worked, let's examine what you can do if you are ever locked out of your own computer.

We started with the presumption that the password was embedded in the BIOS, which stands for Basic Input/Output System. Your BIOS is a set of instructions that tells the computer who it is and what it has. Imagine that every morning you woke up with total amnesia and someone had to tell you not only who you were but how to walk, talk, read, and how to use your brain. The BIOS is like that.

To make things more obtuse, the settings in the BIOS are dynamic. They need some kind of electric power to work. If you take out the battery on your motherboard or let it drain, the BIOS settings are lost. What saves you is that the BIOS resides in ROM (Read Only Memory), which is not battery dependent.

Try resetting the BIOS to its defaults. This can be done by removing the CMOS battery after turning the computer off. The CMOS battery is about the size of a five cent piece, and you'll find it on the motherboard. Some motherboards will let you reset the BIOS by using jumpers. Your owner's manual may be helpful. If you don't have an owner's manual, go to the manufacturer's web site, and look for an online version. Some sites list the default BIOS password. Don't hesitate to call the manufacturer and ask for help. Sometimes the company will have a master password, but you will need to provide the serial number of the machine. If you're dealing with a laptop, the manufacturer may have more stringent requirements for proof of ownership since theft is a serious issue with these machines.

Many people use dumb passwords like their pet's name, child's birthday, anniversary or birth dates, employer's name, brand of car, etc. Generic passwords like these examples can be easily defeated. Don't forget to try "password". I never cease to be amazed at how often this works. The other two most common passwords are God and love.

BIOS manufacturers have their own list of passwords. This website may be helpful. <http://www.elfqrin.com/docs/biospw.html>.

There are cracking programs that will reveal passwords in many cases. If you decide to go this route, make sure you check for viruses. You can find free programs at the following sites:

<http://www.cgsecurity.org/>

<http://www.11a.nu/>

<http://natan.zejn.si/rempass.html>

Before accusing me of giving lessons on how to hijack computers, keep in mind that the bad guys already know these tricks and a lot more. There is nothing immoral or illegal about trying to retrieve your own data.

More drastic steps would be to take your machine to a computer repair shop and have the BIOS replaced. You

could also have the hard drive replaced, but this would mean losing all information on the disk, and you would need to reinstall your operating system and applications.

What finally worked? The woman baked her cousin's favorite pie and sent her daughter to deliver it as

peace offering. The password was shortly forthcoming. Go figure.



Speedup Your Computer Clean Your "Startup"

by Ira Wilsker

*APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX;
radio & TV show host*

I recently received several questions on my weekly radio show (KLVI 560AM, Saturdays 1-3pm) and my TV show (KEBQ-TV22, cable 99, Saturdays 4-5pm) about computers that were slow to boot, and had obvious performance degradation. While there are many causes of this inadequate performance, such as a fragmented hard drive, and other problems, one of the most common causes of slow booting and poor performance is having too many programs automatically load when the computer is booting.

Fortunately, there are several good solutions and resources that can speed the boot problem and improve performance. The manual solution, available on most but not all versions of Windows from Windows 98 to XP is to utilize the integrated command MSCONFIG. If available, MSCONFIG can be accessed by clicking on START > RUN and then typing "MSCONFIG" (no quotes, and it is not case sensitive) in the box, and then click on "OK." A window will open showing several tabs, one of which will be labeled "Start" or "Startup." This will typically be a white window with black print, showing a checkbox followed by a program name or path. Boxes that are

checked indicate a program that will load when the computer is booted. Unfortunately, as the computer is used, and more software is installed, many programs like to have themselves unnecessarily load at boot time, and many viruses and Trojans also utilize this method to load each time the computer is turned on.

While there are countless thousands of legitimate and illicit Windows programs which want to load at boot, there are several resources, some of them free, which can identify programs as necessary or unnecessary at boot. Once identified, unchecking the appropriate box on the MSCONFIG > STARTUP list may stop that program from loading. An excellent and fairly up-to-date website which lists most of the items that may show up in the startup box, is Paul Collins (a.k.a. "Pacman") startup list available at www.sysinfo.org. The user of this website can enter either a program name from the startup list (without the path; `c:\directory\program.exe` would only use "program.exe"). Once the item is found on the web list, it is clearly described, and labeled as: "Y" – Necessary, leave it alone; "N" – not required and could be started manually if needed; "U" – Users' choice; "X" – definitely not required, a resource hog, virus, spyware, or other item that should not be loaded at boot; "?" – Unknown, not listed. If the file listed adjacent to the checkbox is listed as a "Y," leave it checked, and if listed as "X," then uncheck the box. Items marked as "N" should be unchecked, unless they are frequently used shortly after the computer is booted.

Many users are not comfortable performing such tasks manually, but there are several utilities available that contain a startup manager to ease the process of deciding what to allow to run, and what to stop. One free utility that actually is intended for another function, but contains an easy to use startup manager is the popular anti-spyware product Spybot Search and Destroy (www.safer-networking.org). Since many spyware products install themselves in the startup list, Spybot allows the user to control those malware programs as well as all other startup programs at boot. Download the Spybot, install and update it, and then open it. Click on "Mode" on the menu bar, and select "Advanced." On the left side of the window will be a choice of utilities. Go to "Tools" and click on "System Startup." This will load a list of programs loaded at boot, along with their corresponding checkboxes. The right edge of the window has a narrow gray bar with two triangular arrows, one right (close) and one left (open); click on this bar and the data from Paul Collins' startup list (mentioned above) will be shown as each listed item is clicked on. Necessary items are highlighted in green, and users' choice items are highlighted yellow. Dangerous and unnecessary items are highlighted in red, and white items are unknown to "Pacman." Unwanted items can have their corresponding "check" removed by clicking on the checkbox; this will stop the item from loading at boot. Items can also be deleted using the red "X" at the top of the window. When Spybot is exited, the changes to the startup will be saved, and should not load at the next boot.

A reasonably priced (\$20) commercial program that offers greater power and flexibility to control what loads when the computer boots is a British program "The Ultimate Trouble Shooter" available at www.answerthatwork.com. Open the program and click "Startups." Initially, startup programs will be labeled in the traditional red (remove), yellow (personal choice), green (leave it alone), and white (not listed). Upon clicking on any startup item a detailed description is displayed on the bottom half of the window. Unchecking a box will stop the item from loading at the next boot.

There are several other utilities that contain startup managers, and most will do a satisfactory job. By cleaning the files that load at boot, the computer will boot faster, have fewer software conflicts, run faster, shutdown faster, and increase your computing satisfaction.

Websites:

<http://www.sysinfo.org>

<http://www.safer-networking.org>

<http://www.answerthatwork.com>

Tips for Locating Misplaced Files

by Dave Gerber

*APCUG Advisor, Region 5; Dave's Bits & Bytes, A Periodic Newsletter for the Members of the Sarasota PC User Group
Director, Sarasota PCUG, Florida*

Losing files on your PC is a lot like misplacing your car keys in a cluttered apartment. You know the things you're looking for are close by, but actually finding and using them can be a challenge.

Unlike your apartment, though, Windows has a helpful feature that can locate wayward items and save you a good deal of frustration. In Windows 95/98 (Win9x), this feature is called Find. In Windows XP and Windows Me, it's called Search. There are also third-party programs that can ensure that you never have to endure the loss of an important file again.

In this article, we'll show you one of the more popular ways to find lost files and some techniques to keep you from losing files in the future. We'll start by covering the Find feature in Win9x. The WinMe and WinXP version of this feature is significantly different and warrants a separate explanation. Note, however, that many of the tips included in the Win9x section apply to later versions, so don't skip ahead.

Find It In Windows 95 & Windows 98

There are two fast ways to access the Find feature in Win9x. One method is to click Start, point to Find, and click Files or Folders. Shortcut keys also work for this feature; press Windows-F to display the search program instantly. If you're certain a file is in a specific folder, don't use the Find feature from the Start menu; a faster way is to press the F3 key in Win9x (or CTRL-F in WinMe) when you're already at the right folder window or have the folder displayed in Windows Explorer. This will display the search window already set to search the current folder.

Whatever technique you use to launch the Find utility, you end up with a dialog box named Find All Files. It has five menu options: File, Edit, View, Options, and Help. The Name & Location tab is the most commonly used area of the Find command, as it includes the Named and Look In text boxes. Win98 also has a Containing Text text box listed here. (In Win95 this option is on the Advanced tab.) If you know the name of the file you want to locate, just type it in the Named text box, make sure the Look In path is directed at the correct drive location, and click Find Now. You'll know the search has started because the magnifying glass icon begins to move in circles. When the search is complete, matches appear in the results window. This window shows all relevant information about the file, such as file name, type, size, location, and date modified. Remember that you don't have to let a search complete its examination; click the Stop button to bring things to an immediate halt. This is especially useful when you accidentally start a search over a gargantuan hard drive that takes several minutes to inspect.

There are many variables that can help you narrow your searches and save time. If you're fairly certain of the folder in which a file is hiding, click Browse on the Name & Location tab and specify the correct folder. On the other hand, you might not have a clue as to which folder to look in; in that case click the Include Subfolders checkbox to investigate a folder hierarchy from top to bottom. In all Windows versions, there are some other options that let you control the search. The Date and Advanced tabs in Win9x let you find files by type and size. The Containing Text text box lets you constrain results to those with specific phrases in them. In Win9x an Include Subfolders option lets you widen your search. (In WinMe click Advanced Options, which lets you Search Subfolders or look for file names using the Case Sensitive option.)

Search Windows Me & Windows XP

WinMe and WinXP have their own version of the Find command, called Search. To get started click Start, point to Search and click For Files Or Folders, or press Windows-F. You will see a Search Results dialog box that's laid out like a Web browser, complete with Back and Forward buttons.

In WinMe type the name of the file you need in the Search For Files or Folders Named text box. The Containing Text option is listed just below, as are the various search options, such as Date, Type, Size, and Advanced Options, all of which work similarly to Win9x.

In WinXP you will need to select the type of file you are looking for before you can begin a search. We recommend selecting the All Files And Folders option because it will search your entire hard drive for the file. If that takes too long, the other options, such as Pictures, Music, or Video, will narrow the search parameters and likely make the search more efficient.

Once you've outlined the parameters of your search, click Search Now or Search. After Windows completes a search, you can press F3 or CTRL-F to alternately shrink

and enlarge the Search Results window, providing more (or less) information about selected files on the left side of the screen.

Both operating systems have useful extras on the left side the Search Results window, including image file preview. In the past when you wanted to know what was in a mysterious graphics file (usually with a file name extension such as .JPG, .BMP, or .TIF), you had to open the file with a separate program, which takes time. With WinXP and WinMe, you can use the Preview function instead. Just click the file, and a tiny version of the image appears in the Search Results area. To see thumbnails in WinXP, from the View menu, click Thumbnails to make image thumbnails appear.

If it takes too much time to complete searches, you may want to streamline the search process in WinXP by using the Indexing Service feature. With this feature, your computer will maintain an up-to-date list of the files on your hard drive, which makes subsequent filename searches much faster.

To use the Indexing Service, in the Search Results window, click Change Preferences in the left pane. Click With Indexing Service and then click the Yes, Enable Indexing Service radio button. Click OK, and your PC will run the service when the computer is sitting idle.

Find files with dates. If you don't find your files with an initial search or WinXP index searches, you might want to search for files by date. In Win9x from the Start menu, point to Find and then click Files Or Folders. In the Named Or text box, type *.xls (or *.doc, or whatever file type you most often use). Click the Date Or Date Modified tab and click Find All Files Created Or Modified. Click the During The Previous option and then adjust the number of days you'd like this search to work for. (A week is probably a good starting point.)

You can do this in WinMe by clicking the Date checkbox. Select Files Modified, Files Created, or Files Last Accessed from the drop-down menu. Then click the In The Last option, followed by the number of days you want the search to cover.

In WinXP after you click All Files And Folders, you can enter part of the file name and then click When Was It Modified? to narrow your search to a range of dates. You can also use What Size Is It? and More Advanced Options to make searches more specific; you can even include hidden files in the search if you prefer. After you set the parameters in your OS, run the search by clicking Find Now, Search Now, or Search.

Windows Me's Search feature works like the Find option in previous Windows versions but has some extra power under the hood.

Saving a Search

Once your PC completes its file hunt, you may want to save your search settings to reduce the amount of data entry you have to complete for your next complex search. After a search ends, from the File menu, click Save Search. This saves a shortcut on the Windows Desktop or a folder

of your choice with a name that refers to the search. When you want to do a speedy search for commonly accessed documents, just double-click the shortcut and the search parameters will load automatically.

Win9x will also let you keep the results of searches, plus the parameters that created those results. From the Options menu, click Save Results. To create a shortcut to these results, click Save Search from the File menu.

More search options. More archaic computer skills also sometimes come in handy for searches, the best example of which is the use of older DOS commands to aid your search. The easiest to use is probably the asterisk symbol. It acts like a wildcard, standing in for at least one character in the name of the file or folder you want. For instance, if you know you want to find a file that ends in .INF but aren't sure what the first part of the file name is, you'd type *.INF, which instructs the search utility to display every file ending in .INF.

The question mark is also useful; unlike the asterisk, it replaces only one character in a name. For example, entering Sysfile?.DOC would find every file with one character following the Sysfile name that ends with .DOC. The search variable can also be used together in flexible combinations. For example, enter *dos?.* to locate file names with any filename extension and that start with any number of characters, following by "dos," and then any single character.

Searching by file type is another useful parameter. Select this option, and you'll see dozens of file types from which to choose. The best thing about this option is that file types aren't displayed with cryptic extensions. Instead, there's a short description of the type (an AOL email, for instance).

USB Flash Drives

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.
Sarasota PCUG, Florida

You may already be familiar with the small USB flash drives that plug into a USB port. However, you may know them by another name. Flash drives, JumpDrives™, Pocket drives™, Pen drives™, and Thumb drives™ are all names for the same thing. They are a solid-state medium for storing data, music, photos, and/or applications. Now there is also a new version, the U3 smart-computing platform, which allows the user to carry applications and data from one computer to another and to launch the applications on any USB equipped computer. Many flash drive manufacturers are already jumping on this bandwagon and producing U3 based drives. Since flash drives are growing in capacity, functions and speed, they will probably be important in your computing future. So let's take a closer look at them.

A flash drive consists of a solid-state circuit board inside a plastic casing. Most of these casings are strong enough to stand some substantial abuse. My one gigabyte (GB) drive has managed to fall on the floor several times and it "still keeps on ticking," as the saying goes. It tolerates this kind of abuse because it has no moving parts. Imagine if

this had been a magnetic hard drive with several spinning platters and a movable read/write head. Just one fall could knock it completely out of alignment and cause it to fail. So that is one advantage of the flash drive. Another is its portability. Flash drives are small and very light weight. Mine measures 2-¾ inches by ¾ inch x ½ inch. They can easily be carried in a pocket or strung on a lanyard or a key chain. The USB A type connector on these drives is frequently covered by a plastic cap that protects the connector.

Flash drives are powered directly from the USB port on the computer. When they are disconnected, the information stored in them is retained, not lost. The silicon chips used in flash drives are referred to as a form of nonvolatile memory. The RAM memory in your computer requires constant electrical input to retain information. The same is true of the BIOS chip. But flash drives retain information for greatly extended periods of time without any electrical input. Some estimates indicate data can be retained for periods of up to ten years, possibly longer.

Flash drives also have low power requirements, needing only the five volts and 100-500 milli-amps provided by the USB port. However, their power demands are such that they generally will not run when plugged into a non-powered hub. You are always better off to directly connect the drive to the computer's USB port.

Flash memory was originally developed in 1988 and has seen considerable use in storage for digital cameras. (For the technically minded, flash memory is based on NAND gates where the transistors have two inputs and one output.) Some smart phones and PDA's are now using nonvolatile flash memory to retain information when the device is turned off. This reduces the drain on the device's battery. Flash drives are believed to work for up to 10,000 write/erase operations. However, some sources indicate that flash drives can survive for up to ten million operational or write/erase cycles. Even so, all this indicates that flash drives have a finite life span. To me, this life span seems to exceed that of a standard hard drive which is supposed to operate for up to half a million hours. In practice we know that hard drives generally fail much sooner than that. So a flash drive having a finite life span is really no different than a hard drive.

Flash drives now on the market have capacities of 3-4 gigabytes. Samsung has also announced a flash chip capable of storing 16 gigabits. (Note that this is bits, not bytes.) It would take 16 of these chips to make a 32 gigabyte drive. As an indication of what is coming, BitMicro has announced a 155 gigabyte flash drive!

Obviously, the flash drive has many advantages over other removable media such as floppy disks, CD-ROMs, ZIP disks and others. Unlike Zip disks, floppies and CDs, flash memory lacks moving parts, making it ideal as a simple solution, requiring only a port to interact with a system. It doesn't require any special hardware, it is smaller, more portable and it is not as likely to develop storage errors. Flash storage devices, compared to other storage media, are fast, high capacity, durable, and compact. Some computers

can already boot from a flash drive that makes them an ideal replacement for bootable floppies or CDs.

Floppy drives are not even included in many new computers. As flash drives already exceed the capacity of CD's; they are becoming a replacement for them. Certainly they are more portable than a CD or a DVD and only require a USB port to run on any computer running Windows XP. They can be run on Windows 98 providing the manufacturer's specific driver is installed. Additionally, flash drives are not subject to scratches, dust, coffee or other liquid spills. In fact some have survived being passed through a washing machine! However, this is not recommended treatment for them. The popularity of flash storage devices may be attributed to their compact size, operating system compatibility, and their use of the standard USB interface.

With all of their capabilities, it is possible to foresee some applications for flash drives that may show up in a reasonable period of time. For example, if the read/write speeds can be increased to a level comparable to that of current RAM memory, flash memory could then replace RAM chips. If the cost of flash memory is also reduced then it could be used to replace the current computer hard drives. Think about what this would do to the size of computers and their power requirements. Think about replacing that 10,000 rpm hard drive and it's casing with a flash drive that can be connected to any computer's USB port. Certainly if we can produce 155 GB drives now, what will the capacity be in a few more years?

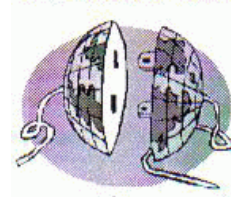
Earlier, I mentioned the new U3 (smart drive) specification for flash drives. This allows applications to be developed that can be stored and run from a flash drive. Software is already available for such drives. One such example is Mozilla's Firefox browser and their Thunderbird e-mail software. There are other applications that synchronize office files, folders and Outlook e-mail between a computer and a U3 flash drive. There is a version of Pass2Go that securely stores passwords, banking and credit card information on these USB smart drives. Also announced are photo management software and instant-messaging programs. Skype, a VoIP provider has announced a U3 version of their software that would permit voice calls over any computer with a U3 flash drive. The U3 flash drives and the associated software will run only on computers using Windows XP and Windows 2000. A Linux version is expected to be announced shortly.

The U3 smart drive contains software that functions as a "launchpad" to provide a menu of applications on the flash drive. It also has options for drive management and a link that leads users to a web site where they can obtain additional U3-compliant software. When the drive is removed from the USB port, the system software automatically shuts down any applications running on the USB drive and cleans out data fragments so no personal information is left behind on the computer. This U3 system software uses about 6 MB of the drive's capacity and loads within 30 seconds after the drive is plugged into the USB port. One result of this capability is that the U3 compatible

flash drive can become your "personal" computer. Certainly it is even more portable than any laptop computer.

The day may come when your computer will be not much more than a motherboard, sound cards, wireless ethernet, and USB ports. This reduces the moving parts to not more than a cooling fan, if that. All of the software and data will be on your flash drive. The face of computing is continuing to change. Fascinating isn't it?

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor who has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail: bwsail at yahoo.com.



What Comes After You Have Your Pictures in Tip Top Shape?

by Donald Cummins

APCUG Representative, *Fresno Personal Computer Users Group*, California

Paper and ink are a team—one without the other is just paper or ink. Paper is one of the least understood or overlooked items.

Paper should be used with care. A wedding picture may be a total loss if you put it on the incorrect type of paper. If the picture is taken on the soft side (not very sharp) and printed on very glossy paper, it will make it look out of focus. It would be much better if it is printed on less glossy paper or, even better, on a matte-finish paper. Many of the wedding photos may need to be printed on a number of different types of paper to find the best results. At the same time, the ink cartridges may need to be changed from one group of photos to another.

Some people feel you should use only one brand of paper that is made for your brand of printer; e.g. Epson printer should only use Epson paper and Epson original ink cartridges. They say do not "mix and match." Others say stick with one brand of paper or ink and know everything about them. This can be a huge effort at the beginning but may pay off later. Each photo should be and must be looked upon as being unique unto itself.

Now this is where ink comes into play. There are two types of ink dye and pigment. Dye inks produce somewhat brighter colors and are prone to fading. They now may last 10 years or longer. Pigment inks are less bright and last longer than dye ink on photos.

Some feel that the larger number of dots per inch is one of the biggest things that will enhance the finished photo. The other side says 1440 dpi is all you really need. The droplet size may be the finishing touch to the photo if your printer can put down a droplet size of four picoliters and/or

smaller; this is too small for our eyes to see. Some printers are even putting down droplets as small as 1.5 picoliters.

Does the ink bleed through or run or take forever to dry and cause the paper to cup up? Some will lay down the ink in a number of passes and others may lay the ink down in one pass. One may require the paper to move through a number of rollers and others will pass straight through.

One item which can affect the finished photo is how thick the paper is. You need to check how the paper moves through the printer because the way it moves will control how thick the paper can be.

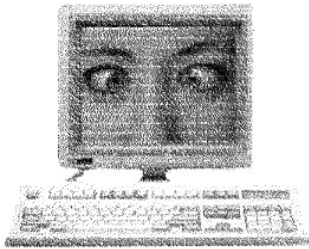
Printers now have many more capabilities than four or five years ago. They have more ink colors, ink placement size, and speed than ever before.

For detailed printer information, check the following websites for their information on printers, ink and paper information:

Epson: www.epson.com

Canon: www.canon.com

Hewlett-Packard: www.hp.com



Windows Recovery or Restore Disks: Problems and Alternatives

by Vic Laurie
Princeton PCUG, New Jersey

Once upon a time you received a copy of a full Windows installation disk when you bought a computer. This allowed you to reinstall individual system files or Windows components if anything went wrong. But no longer. These days the best you can hope for from many vendors is a so-called “recovery” or “restore” disk”. And many major vendors do not even provide that much. Instead they put stuff on a hidden partition on the hard drive. This is all the backup that you get, and if the hard drive crashes, the hidden partition goes too. Then you have no way of reinstalling Windows on a replacement hard drive without getting a disk from the original PC vendor. From what I read on the Web, this last process can take some time and effort, if you succeed at all. If you are out of the warrantee period, you may be completely out of luck.

Some vendors may provide a Windows disk when you buy a PC if they are prodded hard enough. However, there may be some kind of “handling and shipping” fee. Note that, if you do finally get a disk, it will probably be an OEM (original equipment manufacturer) version and may

lack some features of a full-fledged version. Also OEM versions of Windows are often not eligible for upgrades.

The failure to provide an actual Windows installation disk with new computers is convenient for Microsoft and the computer vendors but can be a real problem for the PC user. There are many problems that can be fixed by copying a single system file or reinstalling small portions of the Windows operating system. Without an installation disk, PC users need to have some other source for these files. If you put a recovery disk into your CD drive, it will want to reformat your hard drive and reinstall an image of your computer that is a replica of the way your system was on the day you bought it. Any changes that you have made will be wiped out. All those programs you installed, all those Microsoft patches, XP SP2, all of it will be gone. The same thing applies when you restore from one of those hidden partitions.

Therefore, an alternative is needed. At the very least, a source of files for adding and removing Windows components and restoring corrupted files should be available. Sometimes the vendor will have put the Windows installation files in the root of your hard drive or in the Windows folder. In Windows XP look for a folder named “I386” (without the quotes). If you do have one of these folders, burn a copy to a CD for backup. This CD will not have all the functions of an installation CD since it will not auto-run nor will it boot. However, reinstallation can be initiated by clicking the file Winnt32.exe (assuming that you can get your system to boot). If you have a FAT32 disk and can use DOS, Winnt.exe is the appropriate file to access from a DOS boot disk.

A problem is that you will have a disk that lacks any of the multitudes of patches and updates that will have come out since you bought your computer. Therefore, you need to “slipstream” with the XP SP2 update. Slipstreaming is a way of merging updates with the original files so that everything is updated. This is not a quick job but it is worth doing. An excellent detailed step-by-step procedure is given at the Elder Geek site. If you can borrow a Windows XP installation disk (almost any version will do) you can extract the image that is needed to make the CD bootable and add that to the disk. Details for using common CD burning software to do all this is given at the reference cited above.

One more problem can be getting the Windows XP product key for your system. It may be pasted or written somewhere in the documentation that came with your computer. Be sure to make a permanent record of it. If you cannot find the product key, there are several free applications that will retrieve it from your system. One is ViewKeyXp and is available here. Another is Keyfinder, which is available here. Also, system information applications like Belarc Adviser can reveal the key.

At the end, you will still have something that provides backup only for the Windows operating system. Since I want to be able to restore everything, including software that I have installed, I prefer to spend a few dollars and use disk imaging software. It makes keeping up-to-date back-

ups on CDs or other external media very easy. Norton Ghost, BootIt Next Generation or Acronis True Image are all reasonable choices.

Legal Bytes: What is CALEA and Will It Affect My Life?

by John Brewer

Computer Club of Oklahoma City eMonitor

In 1994, Congress passed a law known as the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The purpose of CALEA is to define the existing statutory obligation of telecommunications carriers to assist law enforcement in executing electronic surveillance pursuant to court order or other lawful authorization and requires carriers to design or modify their systems to ensure that lawfully-authorized electronic surveillance can be performed. That is a mouthful.

In simple terms, the focus is electronic surveillance of telephone calls. A bit of history preceding the enactment of CALEA is helpful.

Electronic surveillance consists of either the interception of call content (commonly referred to as wiretaps) and/or the interception of call-identifying information (commonly referred to as dialed-number extraction) through the use of pen registers and/or trap and trace devices. Lawfully-authorized electronic surveillance is considered to be an invaluable tool for law enforcement in its fight against crime and terrorism.

In 1968, Congress passed the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, which laid out the meticulous procedures law enforcement must follow to obtain the necessary judicial authorization to conduct electronic surveillance. The law was enacted after Congress debated issues concerning law enforcement's need to effectively address serious criminal activity and an individual's right to privacy.

In 1970, Congress amended the federal wiretap statute to make clear the duty of service providers and others to provide law enforcement with the technical and other assistance necessary to accomplish the intercept.

In 1978, Congress passed the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) to safeguard national security by authorizing select government agencies to conduct electronic surveillance of a foreign power or an agent of a foreign power for the purpose of obtaining foreign intelligence information.

In 1986, as a result of developments in telecommunications and computer technologies, Congress enacted the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, which amended the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act by broadening its coverage to include electronic communications (including email, data transmissions, faxes, and pagers).

The provisions of Title III of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, as amended, continue to

govern the U.S. procedures for obtaining legal authority for initiating and conducting lawful interceptions of wire, oral, and electronic communications.

CALEA seeks to expand the capabilities of law enforcement agencies to perform electronic surveillance and stay current with changes in technology. The issue that has become a current controversy is the cost of compliance by the private sector. A term that is attached to this sort of compliance issue is "unfunded mandate."

A recent article in the New York Times addresses CALEA and the cost of compliance. "The federal government, vastly extending the reach of an 11-year-old law, is requiring hundreds of universities, online communications companies and cities to overhaul their Internet computer networks to make it easier for law enforcement authorities to monitor e-mail and other online communications. The action, which the government says is intended to help catch terrorists and other criminals, has unleashed protests and the threat of lawsuits from universities, which argue that it will cost them at least \$7 billion while doing little to apprehend lawbreakers. The order, issued by the Federal Communications Commission in August and first published in the Federal Register last week, extends the provisions of a 1994 wiretap law not only to universities, but also to libraries, airports providing wireless service and commercial Internet access providers. It also applies to municipalities that provide Internet access to residents, be they rural towns or cities like Philadelphia and San Francisco, which have plans to build their own Net access networks."

The technology that has created the sudden brouhaha is the ability to make telephone calls over the Internet. Internet traffic is sent in packets of data and they do not necessarily follow each other in a constant stream of traffic. In fact, they are often sent through different Internet routes and assembled at the receiving end.

According to the New York Times article, "technology experts retained by the schools estimated that it could cost universities at least \$7 billion just to buy the Internet switches and routers necessary for compliance. That figure does not include installation or the costs of hiring and training staff to oversee the sophisticated circuitry around the clock, as the law requires, the experts said." Terry Hartle, a senior vice-president of the American Council on Education is quoted as stating, "This is the mother of all unfunded mandates. Even the lowest estimates of compliance costs would, on average, increase annual tuition at most American universities by some \$450, at a time when rising education costs are already a sore point with parents and members of Congress."

On October 25, 2005, a coalition of public interest and business groups asked the federal appeals court for the District of Columbia to overturn the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ruling requiring that broadband Internet and interconnected voice-over Internet Protocol (VOIP) services be designed to make government wiretapping easier.

In the ruling finalized on October 13, the FCC ordered distributors of broadband and certain VOIP services to

comply with the CALEA. CALEA requires telephone companies to design their systems to ensure a baseline level of government wiretapping capability. Some experts opine that when Congress passed CALEA in 1994 it specifically exempted the Internet from its reach.

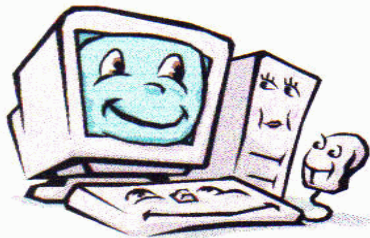
The civil liberties, privacy and high-tech industry advocates opposing the FCC ruling warn that it extends the wiretapping rules to technologies it was never intended to cover, imposes a burdensome government mandate on innovators and threatens the privacy rights of individuals who use the Internet and other new communications technologies.

The appeal was filed by a number of parties that include the Center for Democracy and Technology, COMPTel, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the Electronic Privacy Information Center, Pulver.com and Sun Microsystems.

The merger of the voice telephone system and the Internet has created new challenges that are yet to be resolved.

John Brewer practices law in Oklahoma City, is a member of the Governor's and Legislative Task Force for E-Commerce, and enjoys issues relating to eBusiness and cyberspace. Comments and questions are welcome and can be emailed to johnb@jnbrewer.com.

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The DealsGuy

by Bob (The Cheap skate) Click

Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

Bob Evans, Editorial Director for *Information Week* magazine, wrote about one of the most asinine cases of the law dealing with criminals that you could imagine. I already knew about the arrest, but was unaware of the other circumstances. He wrote about an accused spammer who agreed to settle charges brought against him by the Federal Trade Commission for \$485,000, a small fraction of the \$5.9 million he is alleged to have bilked from trusting consumers. The FTC's problem with prosecution was the generous Florida bankruptcy laws that allow immense asset (homestead) protection. Bankruptcy laws in Florida have long been an attractive shelter for the wealthy to rid themselves of some debt while preserving multimillion dollar homes as a personal asset, although I don't know what changes the



new bankruptcy laws will invoke. Who says that crime (in this case spam) doesn't pay! The article is located at: [<http://www.informationweek.com/showArticle.jhtml;jsessionid=CIB5ZHDNXSEI0QSNDBCSKH0CJUM EKJVN?articleID=164900917>]

Need A New Web Site?

WebBuild Express sounds like a great tool for building your new Web site and Serre Murphy, president of Net Fulfillment Technologies Inc. was a vendor at the spring FACUG conference. I asked him for a deal for my readers. Below is information I have put together from their Web site. He is sending me a review copy so I should have some actual experience soon.

They say you don't have to know how to program or write HTML code to use WebBuild Express. Using it, you can easily organize your site and create menus and links to the other pages, and to other sites. Using the unique "Dashboard" feature, you can include special functions like hit counters and search windows in your pages. Other features enable you to create backup copies of your work and to export data to other WebBuild Express users. WebBuild Express is designed to be intuitive and easy to learn and if you've used a modern Word Processing program, you'll be capable of using this Web design software to start building your own sites immediately.

This product also has plenty of undo/redo options just in case you have a problem making up your mind about the design of your Web site. It has Paste Special capabilities, which can be valuable in the design of your site. WebBuild Express organizes your pages by "Application." An application is the collection of pages, images, and other files for a Web site. You can build as many Applications using WebBuild Express as you want and there is no limit on the number of sites you can have, or the number of pages you can have on each site. A page in WebBuild Express corresponds to each page you will have on the published site. Each page can have a title, which will appear in the browser's tile bar, and other information that is useful for getting the page listed by search engines.

You can preview a page at any time by clicking the Preview Page tool button (or selecting "Page Preview" from the "File" menu). Page Preview will launch your browser and display the page you are working on as it will appear when published. You can also view an entire site by choosing "Site Preview" on the "File" menu. Site preview creates the html code for all pages in your application and is useful for testing links between your pages. You can use the "Send to Server (FTP)" choice on the File menu to send the files you have published (see paragraph above) to a Web server by supplying the Internet address of the server, your user name, and your password.

Check their Web site [<http://www.nfti.net>] for more information. They are offering us a 25% discount from the MSRP of \$29.95 (already a bargain), making the final price just \$22.45 until January of 2006, saving you \$7.50. To download it at [<http://store.esellerate.net/nfti/store>], use

the coupon code CPN8348901136, when it calls for it, to receive your 25% discount. Ordering it on CD-ROM will add \$10.00. All these features and tech support too! On behalf of my readers, I thank Mr. Murphy for this special offer.

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. Be sure to check the new announcement pages on my Web site. 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].

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

I always like to start the day with good news—it puts me in a good mood. So when I read the following bit, I felt mixed emotions. On the one hand, I hate to see a great product developed by a small single minded company being purchased by a large multinational corporation. The other side of the coin is that with enhanced financial resources, the product can improve. We will have to wait and see.

eBay chief foresees free voice calls for all

In a few short years, consumers can expect to make telephone calls for free, with no per-minute charges, as part of a package of services through which carriers make money on advertising or transaction fees, eBay's chief executive said last month.

Seeking to justify eBay's \$4 billion purchase of Web-based communications phenomenon Skype Technologies, Meg Whitman countered criticism by a financial analyst during the company's quarterly conference call by agreeing with some of his points.

"The percentage of users that you can actually charge for (phone services) will actually go down, so I actually agree with that and we understood that when we looked at Skype," Whitman said in responding to the analyst's question.

"In the end, the price that anyone can provide for voice transmission on the 'Net will trend toward zero," eBay's top executive said.

The company is betting that by combining electronic markets, online payment systems and Web-based communications, eBay can emerge as a leader in all three businesses.

Skype, which allows free Web-based calls between members, ended September with more than 57 million registered users. eBay said it expects Skype to produce estimated revenues of \$60 million in 2005, and more than \$200 million in 2006.

Whitman said Skype's explosive success, would—over the next several years—drive the cost of phone calls to nothing.

The chairman and chief executive of the world's largest online auction site said the transition to completely free voice communications will not happen in the next year or two, but that could happen in the next three to six years.

"Our belief is that the winner in this space will be those that have the largest ecosystem," Whitman said. "What I mean by that is: the largest number of registered users, the largest number of voice minutes, the largest number of developers who develop the platform, the best product...that users are willing and want to pay for."

eBay said it had 168.1 million registered users for its online auctions as of the end of September. It had 68 million active users who signed on to bid or sell in its electronic marketplace over the past 12 months. It had 86.6 million current accounts on its PayPal payment service, it said.

Digital image archive

There's nothing like the library. I could spend hours just flipping through the books. Of course, books with pictures are the best kind. But if you want to browse pictures, you don't have to go to the library. The New York Public Library has digitized an astounding number of images. There are over 350,000 and you can view them all online!

You can browse photographs, prints and historical maps. Or perhaps you'd like something more unusual. How about floor plans for New York City apartments? Or cyanotypes of British algae?

You could spend hours perusing the collection. If you're like me, you probably will. Keep in mind the photographs are free for browsing. If you want to reproduce them, you will need to pay a fee. digitalgallery.nypl.org

Hundreds of Camera Models Have

Defective Sensors

Several major camera makers have announced plans to replace faulty CCD sensors in digital cameras and camcorders. CCD sensors capture images. As a result of the defect, images are distorted or nonexistent.

The CCD's were manufactured between October 2002 and March 2004. Sony, Konica Minolta, Canon, Fujifilm and Nikon have sold models that are affected by the problem. More information can be found on their respective sites:

<http://www.css.ap.sony.com/consumer>

<http://tinyurl.com/ckru5>

<http://tinyurl.com/d6lnv>

<http://www.fujifilm.com/JSP/fuji>

[/epartners/ServiceSupportHome.jsp](#)

http://www.nikonusa.com/email_images/nikonusa/service_advisory

Add lenses to your digital camera

Want to take the very best picture of a small coin or the Grand Canyon's panoramic vistas? You don't have to be limited by the lens on your point-and-shoot digital camera. Conversion lenses, as they're called, work with cameras that don't accept interchangeable lenses.

Certainly, photo-editing software allows you to create similar effects after the picture is taken. But editing

software often affects image quality. Resizing and cropping images lowers the resolution.

These lenses typically attach to the camera's existing lens, either directly or with the aid of an adapter. They actually change what the camera records. A zoom lens, for example, will capture a distant object at full resolution. Here are some tips for picking out lenses:

1. Magnificent magnification

Macro, or close-up, lenses let you take phenomenal pictures of flowers or very small objects. Not to be confused with telephoto lenses, macro lenses focus on objects close to the lens.

The magnification of a macro lens is usually expressed as a ratio. With a 1:1 lens, the object appears life-sized in the picture. A 2:1 macro lens doubles an object's natural size.

You may also see macro lenses expressed as a number, such as +10. The higher the number, the greater the magnification.

They're also useful for portrait photography. In this case, choose a lens with a greater magnification. This allows you to put some distance between you and your subject.

When using a macro lens, consider using a tripod. Because of the greater need for light, exposure times are longer. This increases the risk of camera shake.

You can find a macro conversion lens for as little as \$15. Or you may see a set of lenses that can be stacked for around \$40.

2. Expansive landscapes

For breathtaking landscapes or cityscapes choose a wide-angle lens. These allow you to capture more without having to move farther away from the subject.

The focal length defines wide-angle lenses. Anything smaller than 35mm is wide-angle. When expressed as a power, decimals indicate wide-angle—for example, .56X. The smaller the number, the wider the angle.

Perspective distortion is inherent in wide-angle lenses. The edges of the photos curve and part of the image appears abnormally large. Pictures taken with fisheye lenses (extreme wide-angle lenses) exemplify this. The center of the photo is large and the rest of the image falls away.

3. Stunning close-ups

Telephoto lenses are easy to understand. Use them to take pictures of wildlife or close-ups at Junior's soccer game.

Telephoto lenses zoom in on distant objects. It appears that you're close to your subject. This is achieved with an increased focal length. Anything larger than 70mm is considered telephoto. When expressed as a power, anything greater than 1X is telephoto.

Remember that telephoto lenses compress space. The larger the telephoto lens, the closer objects in the image appear to one another.

For telephoto or wide-angle lenses, expect to pay upwards of \$80.

To find the availability of conversion lenses for your digital camera, check the manufacturer's Web site. Manufacturers often make conversion lenses for popular models. Other manufacturers include:

Tiffen: (<http://www.tiffen.com>)

Kenko: (<http://www.kenko-tokina.co.jp/e>)

Raynox: (<http://www.raynox.co.jp/english/egindex.htm>)

Trojan masquerades as Skype—Cybercriminals are spreading a malicious Trojan horse under the guise of an update to Skype

The Trojan horse, a variant of IRCbot, arrives in an e-mail purporting to be an update to Skype, the popular Internet telephony application. Once opened the malicious software displays a phony installation error message. It then blocks access to security updates and installs a back door on computers, MessageLabs said in a statement. The e-mail can have one of five different subject lines, which always refers to Skype. One, for example, reads: "Skype for Windows 1.4 – Have you got the new Skype?" The e-mail body text advertises the Skype voice-over-IP application and urges the user to run the attached file to find out more, MessageLabs said.

The e-mail carrying the Trojan horse isn't widespread; MessageLabs has intercepted 150 copies since Oct. 16th. It is the first such attack that pretends to be from Skype and users should watch out for such "social engineering," the company said. Cybercriminals always try new things to dupe users into running malicious code. They have masked their Trojan horses as porn images, security updates, messages from system administrators, news photos and many other things.

OpenOffice celebrates turning 2.0

Programmers released version 2 of OpenOffice .org in early October, a major overhaul to an open-source software suite that has recently become a more serious rival to Microsoft Office.

OpenOffice.org includes a word processor, spreadsheet, presentation creator and—with version 2.0—a database. Project organizers had hoped to release the upgrade last week, on the fifth anniversary of the creation of the open-source project, but a last-minute bug derailed the plan.

Nearly 50 million copies of OpenOffice have been downloaded, but only recently has the software become a more serious threat to long-dominant Microsoft Office. Version 2.0 brings some significant new features, and Google has pledged to help distribute OpenOffice through a high-profile pact with Sun. But perhaps more significant, OpenOffice.org uses the standardized OpenDocument format that stands in stark contrast to Microsoft's proprietary formats.

Microsoft is adding support for one open file type, Adobe's Portable Document Format, in the upcoming Office 12. But Microsoft Senior Vice President Steven Sinofsky said earlier this month that it would be difficult to add OpenDocument support to Office and that "we've had no demand from our customers for this feature."

OpenOffice runs on Windows, Linux, FreeBSD, and Sun's Solaris. Programmers are working on a version that will use Mac OS X's native user interface as well.

Among the other features in OpenOffice 2.0:

- The user interface has been changed. People can use the software with a multipane view that divides the user interface into tool and work areas, while toolbars can be customized.
- Password-protected Microsoft Office files can be opened, as long as the password is known.
- A mail merge wizard is designed to make it easier to create different versions of the same letter intended for a large number of recipients.
- There are more-sophisticated options for export of files into Portable Document Format.
- The Calc spreadsheet software supports twice as many rows—65,536, the same number as Microsoft Excel.
- The Java-based HSQLDB database is included.
- Documents can include digital signatures.
- WordPerfect files can be imported.
- There's support for different operating systems' native installation formats—MSI files for Windows and RPM files for Linux, for example.

Society News

Help's Half Hour

Recorded by Ron

Submitted by Jan Rothfuss

Q: When building a website, the images were sent to the web but, when viewed there, the size was distorted.

A: You must give the dimensions when the item is created so that the size is then maintained as you set it. Some browsers will automatically resize it. It is best to set the size yourself (like using Photoshop) so that the website size will not change. It is important to resize it and keep it in proportion to the original. You may want to "google" an HTML editor to make it easier.

Q: When a member opens up a webpage, it always seems to be smaller than the full screen. Even if he opens it, the next window is smaller again.

A: It was suggested that the preferences and settings be checked, looking for a setting to use full screen. Also check under Internet+>Options.

Q: Does anyone use Google's Email?

A: Yes and some like it. So far he does not use it very much. Another good, free one is Thunderbird.

Q: A member has Roadrunner and, when using his laptop instead of his PC, he was having trouble using his laptop.

A: He used the Webmail website and then used his Roadrunner login and password. Another choice is webtomail.com.

Q: A new member reported that his XP computer shut down with a message. Efforts to reboot now shows an error.

A: The first response is that he has a virus. During startup, keep hitting F8 so that you can start in safe mode. Then he will be able to use the XP restore feature and set

the machine back to an historical time – one that the computer worked. "SFC" System File Checker may be able to be run from the command line. He may also try reinstalling the operating system. Be aware that this process may wipe out your files so use this as a last resort.

Q: A member uses Mapquest occasionally. What others should he try?

A: "Google Maps" is available if you are running XP. Yahoo Maps is also good.

Meeting Notes

November 2005

by John McMillan

Club business: Arpad Kovacs announced that the Planning Meeting would be held at 7 pm Nov. 15th at Sally's house, and the newsletter assembly would be at 9:30 am Nov. 19th at St. Stephens. He mentioned a suggestion that future planning meetings be held on the first Tuesday of the month. This would allow Monitor assembly to be done the weekend following the society meeting. Future *Monitors* will show the published date and have the time, date, and location of the next month's meeting printed on the back cover so it falls in the category of dated material. The post office has a two week window to complete bulk mailing but installing these changes should insure delivery before the next meeting. Steve Staub will check with the Post Office to see if using a periodical rate would be less expensive than the bulk mail rate. He also stated that Webmaster Bob Avery will continue to send e-mail meeting notices to members in good standing so be sure your dues are paid up.

Next month's meeting will be December 13th at the Penfield Library. Following the business meeting, there will be a Jeopardy like game based upon computer knowledge. Arpad, who will be Alex Trebec, briefly described some of the rules: Members in good standing will get a single door prize ticket when they arrive and have the option of putting it in a container either for potential players or non players. Players are guaranteed a choice of prizes based on how they finish. Among the prizes are a boxed wireless router, a years subscription to *Smart Computing*, a *Smart Computing Encyclopedia of Computers*, and an Epson Color Printer (with ink). Before the game starts, 3 players will be selected from the potential players container and the remaining tickets will be added to the non players container. When the game is over, non player tickets will be used for door prize drawings. We expect that everyone will win by learning something about computers.

The Jeopardy board has five Topics, each with five Statements valued from 100 to 500 points. The Double Jeopardy board has the same format but the values range from 600 to 1000 points. Contestants will choose a Topic and Statement value, like they do in the television game. After Alex reads the Statement, the first one to raise a hand must respond in the form of a question. If the response is correct, the Statement value will be added to their score and they will choose the next Topic/Statement. If they do not answer correctly the value will be subtracted from their

score and the person who made the last choice will choose another Topic/Statement. There will be no daily doubles, lifelines, or Vanna and the decision of the judges is final.

As point values go up so does the degree of difficulty but guru knowledge like understanding hexadecimal: how to correct registry entries; or highly technical topics will not be required.

After the social break, Arpad discussed Gifts and Gadgets for the Holidays starting with computers.

These days, a \$500 dollar investment should buy:

1. An Intel Pentium 4 chip that is rated at 3.0 to 3.8 gigahertz. As an alternative, either an AMD Sempron or Athalon 64 rated at 3200 or higher. The Athalon is a true 64 bit processor which lets you run current Windows applications and migrate to 64 bit in the future.
2. There should be a minimum of 5 megs of DDR RAM. DDR2, a slightly faster, more expensive version is available on some computers.
3. A good name video card like the ATI Express 200 or the Nvidia Force type card is likely to be built onto the mother board rather than being dedicated. Dedicated cards often contain some of their own memory.
4. The hard drive capacity should be between 120 and 160 gigabytes.
5. There should be a DVD burner.
6. A \$500 computer does not include a monitor. CRT's offer higher resolution and truer color for photo editing with a 19 inch monitor costing around \$100 new, or about \$40 used. A 15 inch used CRT is about \$10 while a new 15 inch LCD monitor sells for about \$160, a 17 inch for about \$200, a 19 inch for about \$320, and a 21 inch for about \$500.

Then Arpad discussed what to look for in Digital, Video and Hybrid cameras.

1. Megapixels or more importantly native or sensor resolution. Cheaper cameras will claim to offer 6 megapixels when in reality the image has been blown up with software from a 3 megapixel picture.
2. Optical Zoom is also quite important. Some cameras do not have optical zoom, just digital zoom which uses software to crop the image and reduces the quality of the picture.
3. EVF (electronic viewfinder resolution) determines the quality of the view finder for cameras with digital LCD screens. High resolution is necessary to provide sufficient detail for proper viewing especially when manual focusing is used.
4. Latency or the time between pictures and for camera startup and shut down. This is improving but not all cameras are where they should be. Some take from a half second to 2 seconds to startup which may cause missed shots.
5. Size is very much a matter of personal taste. His personal favorite was a Pana-sonic Lumix which has a Leica 12X optical zoom, the equivalent of a 28mm to 500 mm lens, plus manual controls such as focus and exposure. It has an electronic viewfinder with about 250,000 pixels but is not a true SLR camera.

Arpad showed pictures of pocket sized cameras less than 1 inch thick. Many of them have view screens on the back that are 1.5 to 2.5 inches in size and have optical zoom up to 3X. Some had Zeiss lenses which did not protrude from the camera box. He even showed pictures of sports cameras that might be worn on the head of a climber, surfer or sky diver.

Arpad moved along to important things to consider when buying video cameras.

1. Today many video cameras are digital which range from 360,000 pixels to 3 megapixels. The higher the pixel count, the better the video quality.
2. There are different types of sensors, each with different features and drawbacks. You may recall that Jeremy Sarachan preferred the CCD 3 color sensor.
3. Another important factor to consider is media type. Cameras that record directly to micro DVDs require superior stabilization because they are more sensitive to camera movement or vibration. Tapes are less sensitive to movement and come in digital 8, mini DV, which holds from 30 to 120 minutes of high quality video, and a Sony micro tape for their smaller cameras. Arpad prefers a camera that records directly to internal hard drive which can store up to 40 gigabytes or about 10 hours of video while using less battery power.
4. Optical zoom is just as important with video cameras with some having up to 40X and up to 200X digital zoom.
5. Positioning of the view finder, and placement of recording, zoom, and power controls for one handed operation is critical for comfortable use of the camera.

Arpad showed slides illustrating a wide variety of cameras from pocket sized with automatic controls to digital single lens reflexes with manual control and interchangeable lenses ranging in price from \$700 to \$800.

He talked about hybrids or "all in 1" devices. These are capable of some combination of recording video, sound, and pictures; playing MP3's, videos, and pictures and may include simple PDA functions like calendars and to do lists. Most record in MPG2 or MPG4. Camera prices range from \$100 to \$200 for 3 to 6 megapixels that are not generally native or sensor pixels. They are inexpensive because they have no optical zoom or moving parts. On board memory will hold about 15 seconds of video or they record on solid state memory sticks with a maximum capacity of about 2 gigs, although a 2 gig stick may cost as much as the camera itself. Video records in CIF with a resolution of 320 by 255 pixels at 30 frames per second, which is less than TV Quality. Many that are available are not major brands and are imported from China.

He showed several MP3 players including I-pods. These are getting smaller, cheaper, and hold more information and may include color screens for showing photos or playing games. Some have hard drives with 10-80 gigabyte capacity priced between \$200 and \$600. Some have built in cameras or may take videos. Arpad cited a number of available I-pod accessories like: cigarette lighter battery chargers; broadcasting low level signals to car stereo systems or a special 6 speaker set boom box with amplifier;

and even third party software to use the I-pod as an external computer hard drive.

Several portable game systems came next, starting with Game Boy SP. He compared the Sony PSP to some of the Hybrid devices mentioned earlier because in addition to performing many of those functions, it has an internal web browser. He also mentioned Microsoft's X-Box 360 that is priced at \$300 but recommended holding off on a purchase until spring when Sony releases the PS3. Nintendo will then be offering the Revolution system which promises to be backward compatible with every game Nintendo has ever released.

Arpad mentioned that portable DVD players have fallen in price to the range of shelf machines. One that was pictured had a 5 inch wide screen and played DVD's, audio CD's, and audio MP3's, on internal speakers He went on to describe key drives, so named because they are attached to key rings for maximum portability.

These devices are shrinking in size while capacity grows, for example, he showed one about the size of a Ritz cracker that could hold up to 4 gigabytes. Most use a USB 2 connection and some have security mechanisms like fingerprint scanners. Prices range from \$100 to \$500.

Arpad closed by citing the many sources of data he had summarized into this presentation plus some locally available best buys for wired and wireless routers, USB adaptors, portable and photo printers, and DVD burners. All in all a very informative session that was very well received.

Planning Meeting Notes

November 15, 2005

by John McMillan

The November 15th planning meeting was held at Sally Springett's house. President Arpad Kovacs, joined by Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, Sally Springett, Steve Staub, and Tom Thompson.

The group thought that Arpad's presentation on Gifts and Gadgets for Christmas was very good but could have run a little longer. He was afraid of running over as happened last year. The Next Society meeting is scheduled for December 13th in the Penfield Library. The Brighton Library is not available for the January Meeting and Bob has not yet been able to reserve a room in the new Pittsford Library. We may need a backup in case Pittsford is not available so Sally will continue to explore other possibilities. The *Smart Computing* group is interested in returning, possibly in April, to complete the presentation they started at the ill-fated July meeting in Webster. There was extensive discussion of the possibility of a session on computer upgrading or building. It has been several years since this was last visited.

The group agreed to move the planning meeting from the third Tuesday of the month to the first Tuesday which should help with the timing problems around Monitor printing. The Monitor will be changed slightly by printing a meeting date, e.g. December 13, 2005, on the Front cover

and adding the next meeting date and location on the back cover. Steve will also explore whether changing from bulk mail to a periodical rate would be beneficial without increasing our expense. Other monitor related problems were discussed including the cost of ink cartridges and the possibility that St. Stephens may find other uses for the room that we currently have reserved. Consolidating the printing in some other location might lead to the need for another printer. Arpad and Steve will look into possible printer donations.

Steve reported a treasury balance of \$403.06 down \$296.20 from last month.

Arpad reported progress on the Jeopardy game planned for the December Meeting in the Penfield Library.

1. The game will follow the business meeting and be computer related but will not require guru expertise. There are two sections, Jeopardy and Double Jeopardy, similar to the television game. Both sections consist of five topics, each with five statements. Statements in the Jeopardy segment range in value from 100 to 500 points while those in Double Jeopardy range from 600 to 1000 points. There will also be one Final Jeopardy question for 1000 points. Contestants are competing for choice of prizes, not cash.
2. In order to select contestants, each attending Society member in good standing will receive one pair of door prize tickets good only at that meeting. Members would retain one ticket and have the option of putting the other ticket in a container labeled Non Contestants or one labeled Potential Contestants. Door prize tickets from prior meetings can not be used and will be disqualified.
3. Arpad will be moderator Alex Trebec, assisted by a judge/scorekeeper. The judge is responsible for determining who qualified to respond *after* Alex finishes reading the statement and determining if the response is correct. If the response is correct, the point value of the statement is added to the contestants score or subtracted if the response was wrong or not in the form of a question. The judge will track accumulated points.
4. Before the game starts, the judge shall pick 3 tickets from the Potential Contestant container. All remaining tickets will be added to the Non Contestant container to become eligible for door prize drawings at the conclusion of the game. Contestants are guaranteed a prize and are not eligible for door prize drawings.
5. The contestant with the lowest ticket number starts the game by choosing a topic and value. Thereafter the contestant who responds correctly chooses the next topic and value. If a response is not correct, the contestant who chose the statement chooses another topic and statement value. The contestant with the lowest score makes the first choice in Double Jeopardy.
6. When the game is over, contestants will have their choice of prizes in the order of the final scores. Tickets will be drawn from the Non Contestant container for a number of lesser door prizes. The consolation prize for

those whose tickets are not drawn is an evening of entertainment and education.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub

Balance as of 10/18/05 \$699.26

Income

Dues and donations \$109.50

Ads 30.00

Total income \$139.50

Expenses

Renewal of mailing program 299.00

St Stephens 60.00

Distribution cost 76.70

Total expenses \$435.70

Balance as of 11/15/05 \$403.06

Members Renewing:

Gregg Sayre, David Hassett, Warren Ganter

The Lighter Side

This happened at a Kinko's and beautifully illustrates the art of miscommunication. Imagine how bad it would have been if they had been actually, rather than virtually, speaking different languages.

Customer: "I need to print out my letter here."

Me: "Ok, what program did you use to create it?"

Customer: "Macintosh!"

Me: "No, what actual program did you use. Was it MacWrite? Claris?"

Customer: "Microsoft."

Me: "OK, you used Microsoft Word. We have that here, so go ahead and sit down at one of these Macs."

Customer: "It wasn't Microsoft Word. It was Windows!"

Me: "I need to know what kind of computer you used. Was it a Macintosh or an IBM?"

Customer: "I don't think it was an IBM."

Me: "It could be an IBM compatible. Do you remember anything about what kind of computer it was?"

Customer: "Microsoft!"

Me: "Did the computer have a little apple on the front of it?"

Customer: "I think so."

Me: (What I should have done five minutes ago...) "Give me the disk, and I'll put it in my computer and check it out."

While in art school, where we mostly worked with Amigas and Macs, a Spanish exchange student asked me if I ever worked with MS-2. I thought he meant OS/2 but he didn't know what that was. It took me some time to figure out that he meant MS-DOS. "Dos" in Spanish means "two."

I work for the internal tech support of a company. One day I received an amusing call.

Customer: "I found a bug in my computer."

Tech Support: "How do you know it's really a bug?"

Customer: "I can see it."

Tech Support: "You can physically see a bug in your computer?"

Customer: "Yes."

This was definitely worth a trip to his office. When I got there, I saw an anti-virus warning, which included a graphic of a hand holding a bug. I explained that the anti-virus software had discovered a virus on his system.

Customer: "Well, can you give me another computer so I can let this one rest and recover for a couple of days?"

I cleaned the virus off his system and told him his computer was feeling better now.