Resolutions for Computer Users

by Ira Wilsker
Golden Triangle PC Club

This is the season when we are often asked about our New Year's resolutions. We may want to lose weight, be a better worker, better family member, or other virtuous improvements, but we should also resolve to be better cybercitizens and practice "Safe HEX."

Here are some suggested resolutions:

Update antivirus software at least daily

New viruses, worms, and Trojans are appearing at a rapid pace, with an estimated 12,000 new ones appearing in 2004 alone. New viruses can spread around the world literally in minutes, so antivirus software that has not been updated at least daily may be worse than no antivirus software at all. We may have a false sense of security using non-updated software, believing that we are protected from the current crop of viruses, so we click on any interesting e-mail attachments, and insert that questionable floppy in our computers, a dangerous practice. Considering that there are a variety of free antivirus products available, and commercial antivirus software is reasonably priced (especially after rebates), there is absolutely no reason why not to have current antivirus software that is updated at least daily.

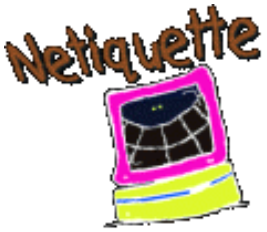
Spam

Delete it without opening it, period. As 2004 came to a close, estimates are that up to 80% of all e-mail is spam. Never purchase anything that is advertised by spam e-mail. Never click on a link in spam e-mail, as many links may load Trojans on your computer, or result in identity theft. Never disclose any personal information such as account numbers, passwords, social security numbers, PIN numbers, etc. in response to an e-mail, even if it says that your account will be threatened if you do not click on the link. This illicit and criminal practice is a method of identity theft called "phishing." Many who market via spam mail are scammers and thieves who make unverifiable claims about their products, sell pirated software, or who will take your hard earned money and send nothing useful back in return.

Never click on a popup ad.

While many are legitimate sellers, many are also scams. As long as we click on them, and sometimes make purchases, the popup purveyors will continue to plague us with their material.

Practice good e-mail etiquette



(also called "netiquette") If forwarding e-mails to others, do not simply hit "forward" and enter names from your address book. Having a lot of headers, those lines of others' e-mail addresses and routing information, as well as a lot of ">" (greater-than) symbols makes e-mail difficult to read. Strip off any useless header by painting and deleting them, and delete the ">."

Another beneficial piece of netiquette is to be sure that attachments are reasonable in size. Since many newer digital cameras can take poster-sized images, users should reduce the size of e-mailed images to a reasonable size, such that they can be easily viewed. It would also be a good idea to save the image in the universal JPG or GIF formats, rather than the sometimes-default BMP format, as the JPG and GIF formats greatly compress the file, making it a much smaller download. I sometimes resent receiving a digital photo taken at 2560x1720 or larger, when trying to view it; recently, someone proudly sent me a 4 megapixel photo of his new grandchild, to view on my 800x600 monitor. When I first loaded the image, all I saw was a huge eye, and with red-eye at that. Not only was the file size huge, and slow to download, but also the image was several times the size of my screen, requiring me to scroll to see it.

Do not forward Hoaxes and Urban Legends

These may be cute, or we may feel that we are really warning others about some perceived threat, but please check out any e-mail which says "forward this to everyone you know" as it will most likely be a hoax or urban legend. Sites such as www.snopes.com and www.scambusters.org are excellent resources to debunk hoaxes and urban legends. Be aware that you can not get rich, or get gift certificates by forwarding e-mails, and that the poor dying kid in Georgia wanting postcards has long since recovered. Save yourself some potential embarrassment and e-mail bandwidth, and refuse to forward these messages without first verifying their authenticity. Smart people can be duped too, so do not automatically trust the sender.

Kill Spyware

According to many cyber security experts, spyware, software that can gather and send information of the users' activities, may be a greater threat than computer viruses. Spyware is used to steal passwords, account numbers, and other personal

information, as well as generate obscene popup ads, redirect purchases and searches, and several other undesirable acts. Also referred to as "malware", spyware is dangerous. Microsoft, never first on the bandwagon, is now in the process of attempting to purchase one of the anti-spyware software companies. While there are several decent commercial anti-spyware products on the market, there are also some excellent free ones, such as Spybot Search and Destroy (www.safer-networking.org) and Ad-Aware SE (www.lavasoftusa.com). Never respond to the scam popup ads that tell you that your computer is infested, and click here … many of those supposed anti-spyware products are scams themselves.

Install legitimate anti spyware software, update it, and run it at least weekly.

All of the resolutions above are necessary, and easier to keep than losing weight.

You Can Help

According to Microsoft estimates, at least 30 million PowerPoint presentations are made every day. The program has about 95% of the presentations-software market. And yet, it drives audiences and presenters crazy! To relieve the stress, O'Reilly is pulling together a new book called "PowerPoint Annoyances" and, once again, we'd like your help! As you might guess, "PowerPoint Annoyances" ponders the problems, snarls, quirks, bugs, and just dumb things about PowerPoint. The annoyances will encompass a range of topics: tables, charts, backgrounds, colors, fonts, animation, sound, video, projectors, and more.

If any members of your group have annoyances they'd like to see solved, have them e-mail marsee@oreilly.com with "Power Point Annoyances" in the subject line. Just note what version of PowerPoint and Windows you're using. Example:

The Annoyance: My boss loves pie charts, and she makes the coolest ones, sometimes even breaking out a slide of a particular portion. When I try to create a pie chart, however, I get weird results and sometimes it's all one color. What's wrong with my recipe?

The Fix: The fault Horatio is not in the stars, but in your datasheet. Remember that a pie chart can only show proportions of one set of relationships. Chances are you need to redefine the data you are selecting in Excel or in PowerPoint's Microsoft Graph for the pie chart.

In PowerPoint, put your cursor into those rows of the datasheet that will not be graphed (is outside the proportions) and click DataExclude row/col. Do this for all rows or columns that are outside the 100% of data you are charting. (Right and wrong figure examples supplied.)

Now when you generate the chart, it should show clearly defined colors of the proportional data units you isolated.

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt
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Help for Google searchers

A googol is the math term for a 1 followed by 100 zeros. Google--spelled with an "le"--is a company that wants to amass the biggest pile of info on the Web. By most accounts, Google has succeeded; it claims to have 880 million images searched by over 81 million folks monthly. Yikes!

To swim in such a deep pool, you'll need help, so here's a life preserver! The Google Help Cheat Sheet helps you to define your searches. By typing specific commands with the word that you're searching, you'll get closer matches. For example, use safe search: to avoid adult sites when searching "party," or "virus -health" to search for computer virus, but not health virus.

To visit this site, go here: www.google.com /help /cheatsheet .html

Rookie Rundown - How to Print What Is on Your Screen

One of the enduring mysteries of computerdom is the Print Screen button. People very logically think that it should print whatever is on the screen. Well, don't be silly! We're talking computers here!

Actually, you can print a picture of what you see on your monitor. And, yes, you use the Print Screen key. But the process is hardly intuitive.

First, press the Print Screen key. It is in the upper right of your keyboard. You'll notice that nothing seems to happen. (It would print if you were using DOS.) But you have actually taken a picture of the screen and stored it in the computer.

Next, open a blank document in a word processor. Or use Wordpad, which is part of Windows (Start>> All Programs>> Accessories>> Wordpad). Press Ctrl+V. That is the paste command. The picture of your screen appears in the word processor. Save the document. E-mail it to your friends. Or put it on the refrigerator.

This process works less well if you have more than one window on your screen. In that case, the result is hard to read. But you can avoid that. Click Alt+Print Screen. Only the active window will be copied.

You can also paste the picture into a graphics program. That allows you to edit the picture. Windows includes a limited graphics program, Paint. To find it, click Start>> All Programs>> Accessories>> Paint.

Those little red Xs

"What are those little white boxes with the red Xs in the center? They look like you should click them to go somewhere. NOT! Nobody can tell me what they are!"

You're not alone. And just to forewarn you, this is going to be a pretty long answer. Here we go...

I assume you are seeing the white boxes and red Xs in Internet Explorer. That's an indication that something that was supposed to appear on that Web page didn't

make it. You probably already figured that out, but I wanted to start from the beginning.

When you go to a Web site, various files that make up the components of that page are downloaded to your computer. So you're getting a main page, graphics files, picture files and some ads, probably.

The empty frames could be pictures that failed to download. In most cases, that would be a problem with an Internet server, not your computer. However, you could have Internet Explorer set up to block pictures. Check that by clicking Tools>>Internet Options. On the Advanced tab, under Multimedia, be sure Show Pictures is selected.

It is also possible, though unlikely, that the graphic is in a form that Internet Explorer cannot read. IE can handle files ending in extensions of .art, .wmf, .emf, .png, .mov, .xbm, .avi, .mpg, .gif, .jpg, .mpeg and .bmp.

To check the missing file's extension, right-click the red X and select Properties. Check the location address under Image Properties. The address will end with the file's extension.

Internet Explorer also needs to be able to read ActiveX controls, Java programs and cookies. To make sure it has this capability, click Tools>>Internet Options. Select the Security tab. Click the Default button if it is enabled. Do the same with the Privacy tab.

You also may need a Java interpreter, called the virtual machine. Java is a language invented by Sun Microsystems. The interpreter converts Java into a form of code that Windows can understand.

This should be pretty easy to fix. Sun Microsystems has a site where you can download the interpreter. You'll find it at: http://www.java.com/en/index.jsp

The Java programs may be integral parts of the site you're viewing. Or they could be ads.

Certain Norton products can be configured to block ActiveX controls, some scripts, Java programs and ads. Symantec, which makes Norton products, has information on changing that at:
http://service1.symantec.com/SUPPORT/nip.nsf/docid/2001021911022836

Be sure Internet Explorer is working in the proper language. Click View>> Encoding. It the page is in English, Western European (Windows) should be selected. If the language you need is not visible, click View>> Encoding>> More.

If setting the browser on Western European (Windows) doesn't help, check the Registry. Before going into the Registry, back it up.

To edit the Registry, click Start>> Run. Enter "regedit" (minus the quotes) in the box. Click OK. In the Registry, drill down to:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Nls\CodePage

On the right side, under Name, search for 28591. Double-click it. If you are using Windows 98 or ME, the Value Data should be Cp_28591.nls. If your version is Windows XP or 2000, it should be C_28591.NLS. Capitalization may vary.

If 28591 is not listed in the name column, add it. Right-click CodePage, mouse to New, and click String Value. In New Value #1, enter 28591. Click outside that box, then double-click 28591. In Value Data, enter the correct nls data, as listed in the previous paragraph.

You'll find character sets for other languages under CodePage at: http://snipurl .com/ayux

The empty box could also be an ad if you are using a custom HOSTS file. Custom HOSTS files block ads, along with spyware, parasites and other unwelcome guests.

The HOSTS file is located on your computer. When Internet Explorer tries to download an ad, it first goes to the HOSTS file for the ad's Internet Protocol number (its address). If it isn't there, it goes to a domain name server on the Internet.

Many people keep ads from appearing in their browsers by downloading and installing a custom HOSTS file. Such a file directs ad requests to your computer, which has the IP number of 127.0.0.1. That kills the requests, and the ads never make it onto your browser. Sometimes, that leaves empty white boxes and a red Xs.

You can download custom HOSTS files on the Internet. The file I use, along with instructions for using it, is located at: http://www.mvps.org/winhelp2002/hosts.htm

If nothing else works, download and install the Firefox browser. It's better than Internet Explorer, in my opinion, and I think it is safer. I use it, and I haven't seen any Java problems.

Here's another take on fixing the "pictures don't show" problem

Bashful Web Pictures – Why is it that some Web pages can't display their pictures?

Quite often one of my computers will show the page's images, but another displays only a white box with an icon in the corner. One possibility is that the pictures reside on an overworked server, causing it to fail frequently but not consistently. Click the browser's Refresh button (or press F5) to give the server another chance. Or try to load the page again in a few minutes (or hours, depending on the quality of the site's servers).

If you still can't get the images to display, and the problem occurs on more than one site, clear your browser's cache: In Internet Explorer, select Tools, Internet Options, General; in the 'Temporary Internet files' section, click Delete Files, check Delete all offline content (if that option exists), and click OK.

You may also want to confirm that IE's Show Pictures option is enabled. To do so, select Tools, Internet Options, Advanced, and make sure that 'Show pictures' is checked in the Multimedia section. If it isn't, check the box next to the entry and click OK.

In Windows XP, the "pictures" you can't see may actually be Java programs. Earlier versions of Windows supported Java; XP does not. (Note that despite their similar names, Java has nothing to do with JavaScript,

which IE does support.) Various free Java runtime environments (which allow Java applets to run) are available for XP.

Odd though it sounds, language encoding can affect image display in browsers. Select View, Encoding, Western European (Windows) to see whether that brightens the image situation. If it doesn't, try View, Encoding, Western European (ISO).

The following link from Kim Komando's weekly newsletter might just come in handy for you if…

"PowerPoint makes sharing photos easy

Want to share holiday photos with family and friends? If you have Microsoft Office, it includes PowerPoint. And that's all you need to create a cool slide show on CD or for the Web."

Check out http://www.komando.com

Microsoft Fixes 'Critical' XP Firewall Issue

Fix prevents users from sharing their files and printers with the entire Internet

Microsoft has quietly released an update to Windows XP to fix a potentially serious configuration problem in the firewall that ships as part of Windows XP Service Pack 2. Users who installed SP2 on their Windows XP machines and also have file and printer sharing enabled may have been sharing their files and printers with the entire Internet, according to Microsoft.

By default, file and printer sharing makes changes to the SP2 firewall to give computers on the "local network" access to shared resources. However, the definition of that local network depends on the Internet service provider. In some cases, especially with dial-up ISPs, it meant the entire Internet, according to Microsoft.

"In the default configuration of Windows XP SP2, that (firewall) setting was probably a bit wider than it should have been," said Gary Schare, director of product management for Windows. "This update narrows the scope of what defines the local network."

Local Not So Local

Still, even with the update, a local network could extend beyond what users may consider a local network, Schare said. To cordon off a network and prevent unwanted access, users should place an additional firewall in front of the network, he said. For example, they could use a router with a firewall.

"If you're turning on file and printer sharing, we want you to be aware that you're sharing your files on the network, and if you are connected to the Internet, that network may be larger than you think," Schare said.

Microsoft first discussed the firewall issue in an article on its Web site in September. A "critical" update for Windows XP SP2 was released on December 13th. However, though issued on the same day, the update was not part of Microsoft's monthly security updates. That's because security updates are only for software vulnerabilities, according to Schare.

"A vulnerability is a software bug that needs to be repaired to avoid a security issue. This is a configuration setting that shipped with Windows XP that was not optimal, but that is not classified as a security vulnerability," he said.

The update to Windows XP SP2 has been pushed out to users with the Automatic Updates feature in Windows. It also may be found at:

http://v5.windowsupdate.microsoft.com /v5consumer/default.aspx?ln=en-us.

Wireless hot spots

Maybe you're a traveler between flights. Or maybe you need to send a last minute e-card to a relative. Whatever the reason, you'll want to bookmark this site.

The Wi-Fi HotSpot List tells you where you can connect your wireless device to the Internet. Enter any address worldwide and discover wireless locations from one to 10 miles away. If you prefer, browse HotSpots in an entire region.

Click a hotspot, and you'll get the address, carrier, protocol and even a map!

Before leaving on your holiday trip, check out potential hotspots. To Visit this Site, Go Here: http://www .wi-fihotspotlist .com/

Moving data to new computer

Q. My new computer is all set up, security-wise. How do I get my data from the old machine to the new one?

A. This is a question that has frustrated computer users since the arrival of desktops. This transfer is easier today, but it still is not the snap it should be.

There are a number of programs made for this purpose. The best known is AlohaBob PC Relocator ($30). AlohaBob picks up your data, settings and individual programs and moves them to the new computer. A $70 version gives you more control over what is moved.

Other programs in this class include Move Me ($35), Desktop DNA Professional, ($39), and IntelliMover ($50). Following are the links to all four, respectively: http://www.eisenworld.com/ProductsHome.asp?Item=2, http://www.spearit.com/, http: //www.miramar.com, and http://www .detto.com

Windows XP also has a transfer utility. It won't move programs, but it will handle your data and system settings.

The utility is called the Files and Settings Transfer Wizard. To find it, click Start>>All Programs>> Accessories>>System Tools. If you use this wizard, and you're not on a network, you can use a null modem serial cable. You should be able to find that at an electronics store for less than $15.

I have used relocation programs successfully in the past. But others have reported bad experiences with them. They generally ended up transferring their data via a CD or DVD.

Most people keep their personal files under my documents. In that case, you can just burn the whole My Documents folder to a disc.

You may have other things, such as saved e-mail, that is not kept in the My Documents folder. In some programs, such as Microsoft Outlook, you can easily

export your archived mail, contacts and other folders to a file. You can then burn the file to a CD or DVD and move it to the new computer. You also could e-mail it to yourself if it isn't too big.

To export files, click File>> Import and Export. Follow the wizard.

Outlook Express is more difficult. You can export the Address Book (File>> Export>> Address Book). You also can export your accumulated messages, but only to Microsoft Outlook or Microsoft Exchange. That's not much help if you don't have those programs.

However, you can copy the mail folders. To find them, open Outlook Express. Click Tools>> Options. Select the Maintenance tab. Click Store Folder. A small box will pop up with the path to your mail folders. Highlight the path and click Ctrl+C to copy it. In Windows Explorer, use Ctrl+V to paste it into the Address Bar. That will open the folder, which will have several files in it, ending in "dbx."

Copy the files. Burn them to a disc or e-mail them to yourself. Use the same process to find the proper folder on the new computer. Paste the files into that folder.

Your Favorites can also be exported from Internet Explorer. Click File>> Import and Export. Follow the wizard.

You can use the same process to save your cookies. If you fail to do that, you'll have to re-enter your passwords on those Web sites that require it. Also, merchants won't be able to fill in credit card fields for you automatically. That's not the end of the world; moving the cookies is a minor convenience.

Bookmarks also can be moved in Firefox. Click Bookmarks>> Manage Bookmarks. In the new window, click File>> Export. Save the file and burn it to a disc. If you still have Internet Explorer on your computer, use it to export cookies to a file. If not, copy the cookies and paste them into the new computer. Find the cookies at these locations in Windows Explorer: Windows 98 and ME–C:\Windows\Cookies

Windows 2000 and XP–C:\Documents and Settings\[your name]\Cookies

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Why Can't I Open This File?

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.

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There are times in every computer user's life when the computer seems to be deliberately trying to increase your level of frustration. One of these little moments is when you receive a file from an associate and no matter what you do, you can't open it. The file can be a document, a picture, a spreadsheet or any number of other types. So why does this happen? And what does it have to do with these things called extensions or suffixes?

Believe it or not, every file name on your computer has a three digit suffix. I know if you have never used any OS other than Windows you may never have seen this suffix or file extension. But they really do exist. If you open "My Computer" or Windows Explorer, select "Tools" from the menu. Then click on "Folder Options" and in that window click on "View." In this list some items are checked and some are not. If there is a check mark in the item "hide extensions for known file types," remove it. Then click on "apply to all folders." You will get a message telling you that the change will occur the next time you open a folder. Now open up any folder and look at the array of file extensions. Go from folder to folder and see how many different extensions you can find.

So now you see that the number of different extensions seems to be limitless. Or at least enough to bring on some confusion. Why is there such a proliferation of these three figure suffixes? Let's look again at the "Tools" menu and "Folder Options." This time click on the tab for "File Types." The upper window lists "Registered file types." Now scroll through the list until you find "Adobe Acrobat Plug-in file." This has an extension of API and in the lower window you find a short explanation as to which program can open this file. In this case, Adobe Acrobat. Keep scrolling down through the list. You will probably find the BMP suffix. This is a picture file and usually opens with Microsoft Paint. However, on my computer it has been associated with IrfanView, a graphics viewer. Keep scrolling to get an idea of all the different file types and their extensions.

If you click on enough different file types you will notice that each type is generally, but not always, associated with an application. When you click on the change button, the preferred application is listed at the top. You can change this to another application but then double-clicking a file of that type may result in a error and it won't open. Applications such as Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, Microsoft Works, Excel, etc., can only open files that were created by them unless they have the appropriate translator for the document. This goes back to the reasons for the file suffixes. The suffix tells Windows what application is needed to open a particular file. Every application capable of creating files uses a different format for the file header and body information. This formatting allows Word, for example, to open a document that has specific margins, type face, printer assignment, etc. The same is true for other applications.

Let's take a look at some of the definitions associated with the file structure of a Word file.

"FIB (File Information Block): The header of a Word file. Begins at offset 0 in the file. Gives the beginning offset and lengths of the document's text stream and subsidiary data structures within the file. Also stores other file status information." "DocFile: A Word docfile consists of a main stream, a summary information stream, a table stream, a data stream, and 0 or more

object streams which contain private data for OLE 2.0 objects embedded within the Word document."

"Document: A named, multi-linked list of data structures, representing an ordered stream of text with properties that was produced by a user of Microsoft Word."

"Datastream: The stream within a Word docfile containing various data that hang off of characters in the main stream. For example, binary data describing in-line pictures and/or form fields."

From these descriptions you can see that a Word document has a very specific structure that has to be read and interpreted in a specific way. Other applications can't read a Word file unless they have a translator for it. Even then, the translation may not accurately reflect the content and format of the original file.

Another file format is that of database files. In a dBASE file, or a FoxPro file, the first byte identifies the version that created the file. Consequently, older versions can't read files created with newer versions of the program. For a number of years Microsoft created similar problems in Word documents by changing the file format every time a new version of Word was released.

Another application that has it's own file formats is Microsoft Works. This application can create text documents, database files and spreadsheets. None of these files can be opened by other programs. The interesting thing is that Works can save files in Word format, WordPerfect format or RTF (rich text file). It can even open most of these formats. But Word and WordPerfect are unable to read files in the native Works format.

Another problem exists with picture (graphic) files. Although your web browser should be able to read the most common formats, they have to be associated with the browser. If they are not, you will get an error when you attempt to open the file. Every graphic format has a different structure and may not always open in your photo software.

The most common formats used on the web are GIF and JPG (jpeg). However, these are two very different formats. GIF is a compressed format that is referred to as a "lossless" compression. In other words, you don't lose any detail in the process of compression/decompression. However, GIF can not use more than 256 colors. That makes it less usable for color photos than other formats. However, for web page logos and other small graphics, GIF is ideal. The file size is small, so transmission time over the Internet is quite short.

Photographs can be sent by e-mail using the JPG format which is very compressible. Jpegs can be compressed to 10% of their original size which greatly reduces transmission time. However, the greater the compression, the greater the loss of detail. Jpegs are a "lossy" format. The detail that is lost by compression can never be recovered. If the picture is important, you should always keep an uncompressed master in a safe location.

Another "lossless" graphic format is TIF or TIFF (tagged image file format). This is the best format for color pictures and should be used to save the master copy of important photographs. The major problem with TIF files is that they are very large. Much larger than jpegs. For example, a file from a digital camera was 526 KB in its native format. When converted to TIF and compressed, it took up over 6 MB on the hard drive. However, not every graphics program can read TIFF files. If yours can't, then you need something like IrfanView, a free file viewer.

So the answer to the original question is: you either don't have the application installed on your computer or you don't have the application associated with the file you are trying to open. Now, if you know the application that created the file and if you have it on your computer, you can solve the problem. You only need to associate the file with application. To do this open "My Computer" and select the "Tools" menu and "File Options." Click on the "File Types" tab and then scroll to the file extension for the file you want to open. Click on "Change" and select the application you want to use to open the file.

All of this discussion assumes that the file has not been corrupted. Even minor damage to the header of file can keep it from being opened. Transmission of files between computers is always subject to possible damage. Now maybe those undamaged files can be opened with a little less frustration.

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Hard Drive HouseKeeping Is Vital

by Dennis Schulman
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For those of you who surf the net on a regular basis – and that includes those who use dial-up access as well as cable or DSL – it is absolutely crucial that you take your hard drive housekeeping more seriously than you ever thought necessary. Many users think that by having a suite of utilities, such as Norton or McAfee, that you are protected. You might be, but I seriously doubt it for so many reasons I won't go into it now except for three:

You use auto update and auto scan. This requires that your computer be online at the time to run the auto update. In the case of cable or DSL, that is possible, but the computer has to be on at the time also. In the case of dial-up, the computer won't go online unless your password is saved and used automatically. That, of course, defeats keeping friends and annoying children from messing up the computer without your knowledge. So, you might want to run your antivirus update manually, just to make certain it worked and there were no errors.

The second reason is based on the fact that if you did not clean house before scanning, you risk the possibility of the antivirus finding a virus it could not delete or quarantine and you did not know it. You also risk the possibility of not knowing if the auto update was not run successfully for one of many reasons (and time and space won't permit that discussion at this time) and consequently your subsequent full system auto scan may not be able to recognize the latest nasties you have managed to acquire.

There is a third, more obtuse, reason. If you don't really know if your system is truly clean and clear of all the bad stuff, how will you know what to do when you get a message that says something to the effect: "It has been determined that your computer has been sending messages infected with the _____ Trojan horse virus to what appears to be the e-mail listing of your address book. If you do not take appropriate action immediately, your e-mail service will be discontinued. If your anti virus program has failed to protect you, please download the following Trojan horse removal tool and run it immediately."

So, here is a housekeeping procedure I use – which is manual – because then I am more certain that I know the status of my files than most of the "suite" programs. And it doesn't use much – if any – of my system resources except when I use it. Just in case you think you have all the utilities you need, let me comment that I am not an expert on your system, but I spend more time now than ever before on systems that have too many over-burdensome utilities that are truly unnecessary and in some cases more dangerous than what they claimed to be designed to do. What I am proposing is basically using three little free utilities that only work when invoked, along with utilities that already come with your computer.

Run Disk Cleanup (under System Tools under Accessories on the Programs menu) and process all options (don't worry about compressed files, but do them at a later time when you have nothing else to do, since it could take quite a while if you haven't done it the first time.)

Clear your browser cache (In Internet Explorer go to Tools, Internet Options. Delete cookies and delete all offline files.) In Netscape Communicator go to Edit, Preferences, Advanced, Clear Memory Cache and Clear Disk Cache)

Open Windows Explorer (right-click on My Computer, select Explore), Select the folders/View option and select show all files except system files (You can leave it this way.) Find any folders called tmp, temp, or cookies. Unless you have a good working knowledge of what cookies you need or do not need, you probably don't need the contents of any of the temp, cookies, or temporary internet folders except the index.dat file (you might want to save the contents of the History folder)

Empty the Recycle Bin

Update and run the latest core version of Adaware SE Personal Edition (currently version 1.05). Once the scan is complete, click on an object found, right-click a lined item and select all, click next and remove all.

Update and run the latest version of Spybot (currently version 1.3.) Before running the scan, run immunize. Then run Look for Problems. Once problems are found, select them all and click on Fix Problems.

Note: Some spyware may be associated with programs you want to use, so read the help section for a further understanding of the features and options on both of these programs. These spyware objects detector utilities can be downloaded from download.com or majorgeeks.com.

There is a third utility, called a hijack remover. There are many available, but I like CWShredder.exe (current version 2.00) (use www.google.com to find the program) Just make certain you are not online and that your browser is not open when you run it. You may be surprised and pleased if it finds something and fixes it (generally really bad stuff).

Now you should be able to update and run your antivirus more successfully than ever before. The only catch is that it takes time. Once you figure out about how much time each step takes, you can determine whether you can walk away and come back later when it is done.

I recommend running HouseKeeping at the end of every day you go online - if you can manage it. (cough! cough!) Otherwise, run it every three days for certain.

Now, if you know your computer is clean and pure, then this is the only condition to justify running the defragmentation utility (once a week or twice a month). Defrag does not "fix" anything. It enhances the performance of a healthy environment. If you attempt to defrag a "sick" system, you could make it worse to the extent that the computer will fail to boot or run. If you have Windows 2000 or Windows XP, you can run defrag directly. If you have Windows Me, 98, or 95, run it in Safe Mode. I prefer running Defrag in Safe Mode as I have a UPS and the computer can complete the defrag, even if the lights go out in the house.

Now that you have successfully learned the housekeeping routine and understand its importance without the need for complex and sometimes dangerous free software utilities that can cause conflicts, you can set up the program scheduler to run your housekeeping routine for you and just check up on it from time to time to see that it is accomplishing your wishes.

Feel free to e-mail me for further details and other fine, free utilities available for keeping your hard drive and system performing at its best.

Dennis Schulman, known as the PC Miracle Man, has been a practicing field consultant in Largo, Florida for over 22 years. He has been a member of the Tampa Bay Computer Society for over 15 years and was the editor of its sometimes 40-page newsletter for five years. He can be contacted at dschulman@myrapidsys.com.

given the author. 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.

From the DealsGuy

by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click
Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

I saw something interesting on the news concerning problems getting a travel visa. Seems it takes months to be granted a visa these days and the Rockwell International Automation Fair (a show I worked and wrote about) lost many foreign attendees who were unable to get their visa in time to attend the show here in Orlando.

I occasionally watch Mythbusters on the Discovery channel. I saw them trying to get a ringing cell phone to cause an explosion, with no success, even exposed directly to some very dangerous fumes. After more suggestions from viewers, they tried again on another show using the suggestions from the viewers along with some new ones of their own, but with no success. I'll still leave mine in the car.

Vacation Comments

Every time I mention taking a cruise, I get lots of feedback. My wife and I decided it was time for another getaway and opted for an eastern Caribbean cruise on Holland America's Zaandam cruise ship. I was very much disappointed with the Zaandam. Sailing on the Zaandam left something to be desired since it tended to roll a lot, even on relatively quiet water. I was told privately by a crew member that one of their stabilizers was broken. While ashore in one port (St. Thomas), we talked to people who arrived there on Holland America's Maasdam who had the same experience. They also said the Maasdam had one engine down so their speed on the water was curbed until it could be fixed. That problem changed their next scheduled stop to Freeport where the ship was to be repaired. St. Thomas was packed the day we were there because there were a total of eight cruise ships docked or anchored with passengers ashore. Tour bus traffic sure added to the traffic congestion.

The only thing we liked better on the Zaandam compared to Celebrity's Summit was the food, although the available times for it should be improved. Thank God for room service when we wanted food in between serving times. To make matters worse, a complaint tended to fall on deaf ears at the Front Desk. They did have good shows though. We had been thoroughly spoiled by our last cruise, which was on Celebrity's Summit last year. That one was surely a cut above all others. That doesn't mean we didn't enjoy this cruise though. We are now considering what and where our next one will be.

Reminder

Don't forget about the Alpha 5 ver.6 special offer that is still good this month. The discount is great and you can order at [brett@alphasoftware.com]. You get it for just $179.00 as compared to MSRP $349.00.

More Announcements Offering Discounts For User Group Members

AdWords Clever Wizard

"Our company, CleverStat, would like to announce the release of AdWords Clever Wizard 1.4 for Windows 98/ME/NT/2000/XP. (Author's note: they included a press release, but because it was lengthy, I did not include it so check the URL) "Note, all users group members will have a 20% discount if purchasing AdWords Clever Wizard 1.4. In order to get the benefit of discount they need to type the following coupon code while ordering: TFBH-R4NT-IHNG."

This one was a bit hard for me to understand so I am passing it on to you with the URL to read up on it. [http://www.cleverstat.com/adwords-analyzer -software .htm].

NotePage's FeedForAll

"To celebrate the launch of FeedForAll, NotePage's new RSS feed creation software, NotePage has created a User Group Power Point Presentation that explains RSS and how it can be used. RSS is becoming increasingly popular and is a hot topic in many user groups. NotePage, Inc. would be interested in making this Power Point presentation available to you, along with FeedForAll discount coupons for your members. The Power Point presentation can be downloaded from: [http://www.feedforall .com/rss.ppt]" To read about this product, go to [http://www .feedforall.com].

Flash File Recovery 1.3

"Our company, PANTERASoft, would like to announce the release of Flash File Recovery 1.2 for Windows 95/98/ME/2000/XP. We'd like to offer your members and subscribers a 15% discount off the regular price. (Author's note: They included a press release, but I didn't include it. Check their Web site) "Flash Fire Recovery is probably Net's oldest and most powerful flash recovery software created specially for digital cameras. The program brings back deleted images and salvages pictures from damaged or corrupted digital media, including the camera's built-in memory. It works with virtually all media types, including SmartMedia, CompactFlash, Memory Stick, MicroDrive, xD Picture Card Flash Card, PC Card, Multimedia Card, and SD Card. While this program does not recover mp3 files, it does recover image files like JPEG, TIFF and such, as well as RAW image files – Canon CRW, Nikon NEF, Kodak DCR, among others. Video files – AVI, MOV, MPG/MPEG are supported as well.

"Flash File Recovery is available at [www.panterasoft.com] for free evaluation. Registering the program is $49.50 US Dollars per copy. Product Page: [http://www .panterasoft.com/file-recovery/index.html]"

I didn't see any code or downloading process in the announcement for getting the discount so I don't know how that works.

What Do You Want?

Joe Bendersky of Computer Club of Palm Shores periodically writes a favorite Web site column and this one took my eye. [http:// www.savvysenior.org] It is said that this site offers everything for seniors including 3,000 free goodies.

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]. I have posted new Web pages with announcements I received in 2004. Sorry they are not well organized, but what is there was a lot of work, as they all have to be edited. I have received some since then and will also post those one of these days.

Gmail

by Dr. Herbert A. Goldstein
Editor, *Sarasota PC Monitor*
Sarasota FL PC Users Group

Gmail is a new, free, web based e-mail service from Google, the people who brought us that remarkable search engine. Gmail, as offered today, is an experiment in a new kind of e-mail. Similar to Hotmail, it has some important differences. Its foundation is the concept that e-mails need never be deleted, and you should always be able to find any message at any time by searching for it.

There are several major reasons why Google's concept of how e-mail should work is suspect. You get one gigabyte of storage space for your Gmails. No other Internet Service Provider offers even one-tenth of this amount. With this quantity of space available, deleting mail seems less urgent.

In Outlook, when you delete an e-mail message, it really isn't deleted. You're simply transferring it to another folder. Deleting it permanently from that folder requires confirmation on your part. Outlook doesn't make you go to the Recycle Bin to finish the job, but some Internet Service Providers aren't so considerate.

With Gmail it seems much easier to let the messages accumulate, and use the search feature to find what you want when you need it. Even if you decide to delete the message, it may not be gone. Google says that deleted messages will remain on the system, and they will be accessible at the company's web site for as long as Google cares to keep the information.

Because of a new law in California, Google was forced to admit that the company will be pooling any information you give them from any of their services. They will keep this information not only as long as they wish, but they reserve the right to give it to whomever they wish. Don't worry, however. Google probably has confidence that its intentions are good. Its corporate motto is "Don't be evil." It says so in their corporate IPO filing to the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Upon close examination, Google's privacy policies aren't any different from Amazon, Microsoft, and others. Their good guy image derives from their unconventional corporate culture coupled with their astonishingly successful search engine.

Most people have no idea what's in the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, and why should they? Most people aren't legal scholars. One of the Act's provisions says that after 180 days, e-mails are no longer protected. Their status reverts to just another record in a database. Any level of government, from local to national, can force Google to release your records armed with nothing more than a subpoena.

Google has never issued any statements about its relationships with other countries, and this should give you cause for concern. Check out the language in the agreement you have to make with Google when you sign up for Gmail. You are giving permission for Google to release your Gmail records to any official from any government, U.S. or otherwise, who requests it for any reason. Would you even want to send an e-mail to someone who has a Gmail account, knowing that your e-mail may be examined by a foreign government?

Google has also stated that your e-mail will be scanned so that you can receive advertising and links to relevant web sites. This applies to both incoming and outgoing e-mail. Nothing in any of Google's policies or public statements applies to those of us who don't have Gmail accounts. There is nothing in Google's privacy policy that would prevent them from storing a list of keywords scanned from incoming e-mail, and associating these keywords with the incoming e-mail address in their database. Google has promised their advertisers won't receive any information that would allow personal identification, but what's to stop Google from keeping this information for some other future use? No one except Google knows if the company has deleted any of the data they've collected since going online. The cookie they dropped on your hard drive doesn't expire until 2038, and it's kept track of every search term you've ever used. How's that for scary?

We don't know for certain if Google will build a colossal database derived from keywords associated with e-mail addresses. If that does turn out to be the case however, there is incredible potential for abuse. The RIAA has sent out thousands of "John Doe" and "Jane Doe" subpoenas to Universities and Internet Service Providers to identify people who download MP3 files illegally. If the RIAA can force AOL to comply, they can do it with Google.

Would an intelligence agency make anything sinister of keywords like "Send us the secret Martha, it's only a recipe, not a nuclear launch code"? Much more ominous would be combinations like jihad coupled with assassina-

tion. All kinds of patterns can be generated from keyword combinations. We're beginning to sound like paranoid conspiracy theorists, but the potential for abuse is real and should not be ignored. What makes Gmail appear so suspicious, sinister, and frightening is the enormous storage capacity that Google offers, combined with its super efficient search engine.

There is also the problem of inappropriate ad matching. Stories abound about online merchants who send themselves e-mail for testing, and discover that something in their e-mails generates ads for their competitors. The "Backspace" section of the October 5, 2004 issue of *PC Magazine* shows a juxtaposition of an advertisement for an all-inclusive vacation in the Caribbean along with an ad that says "Just say no to all-inclusive."

Gmail was launched presumably as a response from Google users complaining about the poor quality of their current e-mail services. Be careful what you wish for.

More Power to You

by Bill Garfield

Houston Area League of PC Users

One cause of computer data loss is the momentary power failure. It's been said the potential for damage to your computer or the data that's on it falls into two general categories; damage that has already happened and damage that will eventually happen. If you've ever considered a backup power supply for your computer and not really understood the lingo, or even wondered what size you need, this article may help.

The technical definition of a "UPS" is an Uninterruptible Power Source. These vary both in size (capacity) as well as in quality and features. Most of the cheapies out there serve only as a minimal barebones backup power source while others provide a filtered, pure sine wave output, over voltage & under voltage (brownout) protection, as well as surge protection. As with most any product, features vary and you get what you pay for.

Choosing the right UPS depends on what you expect your standby power system to provide. Most of us would be satisfied with a small unit around 400-VA, just big enough for our PC and monitor, to save us from those annoying momentary flickers or allow us to perform a quick orderly shutdown if the power happens to stay off for more than a few seconds. Other computer "addicts" might want to be able to continue using their computer for as long as possible. The difference is in the VA ratings, how much load you plan to put on it and of course, your budget. A small unit sufficient to carry you through those brief momentary flickers and keep you going for a couple of minutes during a brief outage can actually be found for less than $50. Expect to pay more for higher capacity and longer run times. There are also 3 general types:

the basic UPS with little or no surge protection and no brownout or over voltage protection which simply switches over and picks up the load in the event of a power interruption;

- an advanced model which adds over voltage protection and
- high-end professional grade systems which provide pure sine wave and constant voltage output (brownout and over voltage protection).

You're apt to find little price difference between the "a" and "b" variety, so when shopping, always look for one that includes surge protection built-in. The good news is they're becoming very affordable. Surge protection is expressed in "Joules" and the more, the better. You'll want at least 800 Joules of surge protection.

The small $50 variety UPS will operate most home computers (CPU and monitor only) for only a couple of minutes. If you plan on including your printer and a small desk lamp, or need a little more time, you'll need something a bit larger than the bare bones model. For the average computer user, a 600 VA (about $100) model will provide around 15 minutes run time (depending on actual load). Just remember, size (capacity) equates to cost. My 1400 VA model cost $400, but it will keep my entire desktop going for over an hour. That includes a small desk lamp, two separate 2 Ghz towers, 19" LCD monitor, flatbed scanner, router, DSL modem, printer, powered speakers and the answering machine. (I really hate having to reprogram my answering machine)

Watts vs. Volt-Amperes (VA), what do the numbers mean? I'm not going to get technical here, buy many years ago everything to do with electrical power was expressed in watts. This made it easy for the layperson to understand because we could all relate to the various wattage appliances and light bulbs in our homes. But then somewhere along the way electrical product manufacturers started playing the numbers game, expressing things in a brand new term, "Volt-Amperes" or just VA. Unfortunately, watts and volt-amperes are not interchangeable terms. You'll need to know the approximate average conversion factor (1.6). What this means is 100 VA equals approximately 60 watts. That's not precisely accurate, as there are other things thrown in to complicate the formula, but still using a conversion of 1.6 should get us inside the ball park.

Complicating things, nowhere on the back of your computer or monitor or desk lamp, etc. will you find a VA rating. All of the appliances, computers, etc. in our homes and businesses are still rated in watts.

A good rule of thumb when selecting a UPS is to buy twice the capacity you actually need. This is for two reasons; First of all, having extra capacity ensures that we're always operating down in the comfort zone, well within the sweet spot of the manufacturer's design curve. Secondly, it gives us that extra margin to allow for plugging in something extra that we overlooked or maybe

adding something later. When sizing your UPS requirements, add up all of the wattage ratings of everything you plan to plug in, then double it and multiply that total by 1.6. This will give you the "VA" rating of an appropriately sized UPS for your application with plenty of reserve. If your math works out to be somewhere between two UPS models, opt for the larger of the two, affordability notwithstanding.

Exercise the battery? No, never. The battery experts say not with a UPS. However, purchasing and installing a UPS doesn't necessarily mean that you'll always have reserve power available. Everyone knows that all batteries eventually fail. However, there's really nothing we can do to extend the life expectancy of our UPS. In my experience I have found that the capacity of my hefty 1400-VA UPS dwindles down gradually over time and loses about 20% of its reserve capacity (run time) per year. In fact, batteries in many UPS systems sometimes fail a lot sooner than expected due to over use. A UPS is not a portable power system like a generator. Rather it's an "emergency" system designed to be used only in brief, intermittent situations. Certain rechargeable batteries like those used in cellular phones need to be exercised. However, this is not the case with the sealed lead-acid (or gel-cell) batteries used in a UPS. The battery in a conventional UPS is very similar to a car battery, which can easily be damaged by deep-cycling (running it all the way down). We also know that our car battery will eventually one day fail to start our car, regardless of how we baby it. Preventing this inconvenience means periodic replacement of the battery before it fails.

Replacing the battery (or batteries) in a UPS system can sometimes be a daunting task. Some models have an access panel on the bottom making it relatively easy. Alas, I've never found one of these easy-access panels on many of the inexpensive models and they're not that common even on the more expensive models. It's obvious that battery replacement wasn't on the top of the manufacturer's design criteria. In fact, in some UPS units it is clear the manufacturer never intended for the battery to be a "user-serviceable item". However, with varying amounts of manual dexterity, muscle and some common sense electrical safety precautions, all UPS batteries can usually be replaced for about 1/4 of the replacement cost of a whole new unit, provided you can do it yourself. By the way, finding a replacement battery isn't always easy. Around Houston, Fry's Electronics and Altex carry them, so does Interstate Battery. Just avoid surplus/salvage stores

In closing, I don't want to recommend any specific brand UPS in this article. If you'd like to e-mail me I'd be happy to point you toward my personal favorite. Actually they're all pretty good and vary mainly in features (and cost). Also, when shopping for a UPS you may notice that none of the stores selling them carry replacement batteries. That's no accident. The reason I'm told is that there is very little market for the batteries. They can sometimes be difficult to replace and the task of replacing batteries brings with it some EPA concerns regarding disposal.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. 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.

Reprinted from the November 2004 HAL-PC Magazine.

Ask The Expert: Bluetooth

by Joe Schmitt

Tampa Bay Computer Society

Q: What is this "Bluetooth" I keep hearing about and do I need it?

A: Whenever something like a mouse or keyboard is connected to your computer, there are protocols and standards in place so that the computer can talk to the keyboard and it operates properly. The same scenario also applies to anything that connects to a computer or other electronics around your home. Your TV needs to know how the cable signal is formatted so that you get the sound and video. Bluetooth is a wireless protocol that allows electronics to communicate. Bluetooth goes beyond your computer to integrate electronics across a wide spectrum. Bluetooth operates on two levels. The first is that all Bluetooth devices operate on the same radio frequency and speak the same language. Secondly they all share the same procedures in exchanging data and verifying the data is received. That is sort of like being able to speak the language and know the customs so no one misunderstands.

Bluetooth a standard developed and employed by close to 1,000 different companies. This protocol would allow you to take a cell phone, get into a car with a Bluetooth radio and transfer the call to the stereo so your hands are left free. Later you could take that same phone and possibly transfer contact information from the phone to a computer. This is just one example. Bluetooth can be found in phones, keyboards, PDA's, and even stereo headphones. It could potentially show up anywhere you have a wire to connect two devices now.

Is this something you need? Just like anything else with computers, the answer depends on whether or not it meets your needs. Do you need a Bluetooth keyboard or mouse? Not if the wires don't bother you. Could you use it to link your PDA or Pocket PC to the computer? Yes and that might be the most likely scenario that Bluetooth would aid you in. If you are the type of person that likes portable gadgets as much as your computer, Bluetooth may be something to take a serious look into. For more information on the standard itself and some of the products that use it, check out the following sites: www.bluetooth.com and www.bluetooth.org

Reprinted from the January 2005 issue of Bits & Bytes*, newsletter of the Tampa Bay Computer Society.*

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Arpad Kovacs
Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: One member gets an error message when starting Outlook Express- an illegal shutdown message. When he responds to it, it does eventually start but it is a bother.
A: It was suggested that he not use the desktop shortcut. There seems to be a bad link assigned. Right click on the program, select create shortcut and then replace the one you are using on the desktop.
Q: When installing a program, he got an error that crashed his system. He cleaned the drive and is now trying to recover dvx files (stored mail files.) He is using Outlook Express.
A: dvc files must be imported. Restore them to a folder on the desktop, then, when prompted, tell it where to put them.
Q: When in e-mail Outlook I get an annoying 'ping' sound and the current window jumps. Can we get rid of this?
A: Sounds like it is encountering an error message and then the screen refreshes. It was suggested to try a google search 'audible Outlook Express errors.'
Q: A question about the fax software found in Windows XP. Cannot make it work on his machine. Has anyone been successful? Seems to be unable to communicate.
A: No one present has used this software. It was suggested to try out one of the freeware fax versions.
Q: One member's computer freezes up when starting up AOL and also when deleting e-mail messages. Win 98 SE and uses AOL 9.0 SE. Sometimes C-A-D will work but often must do a hard reset.
A: AOL uses Webmail e-mail services. This could be caused by a caching problem with Internet Explorer. The cache can be cleared. Can use SpeedXP to set cache settings. Check out www.snapfiles.com <http://www.snapfiles.com>
Q: When using the right mouse menu, can you add other locations to the 'send to' list?
A: Yes, you can add more locations to the list that appears under the application data files tab. May also be found under local settings, depending upon your version of the OS. Be sure to turn on 'hidden folders'.
Q: When using Adaware is there a way to prevent the spyware rather than detecting after it has been placed on your machine?
A: Spyware Blaster and Spyware Guard will prevent the infestation. Remember, do not use Internet Explorer and fewer occurrences will happen.
Q: How can I replace a desktop icon strip?
A: In XP, they disabled the Quicklaunch bar where you should find the ones you want.

January 11, 2005
by Jim Murdock, Secretary

Arpad Kovacs and Steve Staub conducted the business meeting. Several RCSi members owe dues. Members are asked to keep their dues current. Please get in touch with Arpad or Steve if you are interested in conducting Helps Half Hour. If no one is interested then the process will revert to a volunteer basis.

Dave Thompson is the new the Digital Photography and Scanners SIG leader. Dave's first meeting will be at the Penfield library on February 1, 2005 from 1830 to 2030. Dave's presentation is "Basic Digital Editing Work Process" and will be conducted using Adobe Photoshop Elements II. Dave will also be polling the group to learn of individual interests and needs to better tailor future meetings to what attendees would most like to discuss. Dave asks that you jot down your requests so if time does not permit everyone to speak he will have your notes for consideration.

The New Users Group – John McMillan leader – is seeking a new meeting location. Please let Arpad or Steve know if you have any suggested locations.

There is a vacancy on the Executive Board. The remainder of a term expiring in 2006 needs to be filled.

The next monthly RCSi meeting will take place at the Brighton Library. The program will be a presentation on the GPS (global positioning system). Larry Lavery will give the presentation.

Steve reminded everyone that during the break at each monthly meeting 50/50 tickets are on sale. Everyone is encouraged to participate.

Steve said that since fundraising is a continuing need any new ideas on how to raise funds for RCSi are always welcome.

Program

by Jim Murdock

Ken Corpus, owner of Computer Works Pro of Webster, New York gave a presentation on "Installing and Configuring a Wireless Network." Ken's company does work in several computer fields including network installation and configuration so he is well qualified for this presentation.

Ken began with a discussion of the basics of wireless networks. He pointed out that all use radio waves of specific frequencies to communicate. The range of wireless communication varies depending on, among other factors, frequencies used and what transmission inhibitors, if any, are present.

All wireless communication is based on the IEEE 802.11 standard. Wireless 802.11b is limited to a transmission speed of 11 Mbps and operates at a frequency of 2.4 GHz. The more common wireless network now is based on IEEE standard 802.11g, which is backward compatible with 802.11b. It also operates at 2.4 GHz. Not only is 802.11g more secure that 802.11b it is faster, capable of reaching a maximum speed of 54 Mbps. At a

power of 32mW, both 802.11b and 802.11g have a maximum range of 300 to 350 feet again depending on whether any obstacles to transmission are present.

A third standard, 802.11a operates at 5.8 GHz with a maximum range of 150 to 175 feet. It is used mostly in commercial security applications.

The further you are from the wireless antennae, especially as you approach the range limit, the speed of transmission decreases. Signal boosters are available to at least partially overcome this limitation.

Ken pointed out, as he began his discussion of wireless networking components that as you search for components, remember that LinkSys is now owned by Cisco, which may affect component prices as well as warranty specifics. He also pointed out that anyone installing and using a wireless network should bear in mind that a wired network is always more secure than a wireless network. This fact makes it very important that you make your wireless network as secure as possible and that you limit the types of transactions you conduct at "hotspot" locations that are becoming more and more prevalent in coffee shops, restaurants, libraries and even sections of towns and cities. A list of "hotspots" is available in the back of each issue of "Computer Link" magazine. Any time you are on a wireless network where you are not certain of the security it's best to avoid any banking transactions, for example!

The Wireless Access Point (WAP) acts as a hub to wireless PCs and components. Wireless devices use the same networking clients and protocol as wired networks (TCP/IP). Wired networks operate at speeds approaching 100 Mbps. Wireless networks using newer 802.11 standards will no doubt soon approach and possibly exceed that speed.

The software you'll need to setup your home or office network is usually included with the network components. Windows XP has such software included. Ken recommends that you have Windows XP SP 2 installed as this upgrade greatly improved the network installation software.

There are different Wireless Network Modes of configuration. The Ad Hoc mode has each wireless PC in direct contact with every other PC in a decentralized " free-for-all". This configuration is good for a temporary network with a few computers but has defects that make it unsuitable for a permanent and established network. The second mode of configuration is so suitable. The Interactive mode uses WAPs to connect wireless PCs to a wired network. A single WAP is called a Basic Service Set (BSS).

At the conclusion of his presentation, as he had throughout his presentation, Ken emphasized the importance of wireless network security. There are many things you can do to make your network more secure. Some are obvious. Give some thought to the passwords you choose and do not run your network with the default settings as it came out of the box. As Ken noted, many people do and it is all too easy to find wireless networks basically wide open to use by the unauthorized and, in some cases, ill intentioned. Service Set Identifier (SSID), MAC filtering based on each host's MAC address and encryption is all methods you can use to better secure your network. There are others. New security standards are now being developed but until then it behooves anyone setting up a wireless network to do all he or she can to prevent unauthorized access to the network.

Ken gave an interesting, informative, and well thought out presentation. It was obvious to all that his presentation was based on an extensive background in computing and com-puter networks. Based on the high level of audience participation and interest, I'm sure a return engagement would be appreciated!

Planning Meeting

January 18, 2005
by Jim Murdock

Sally Springett hosted the planning meeting that began at 1900. Arpad Kovacs, Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, Sally Springett, Steve Staub, Tom Thompson, and Jim Murdock attended.

Arpad began the discussion with a review of the January monthly meeting and program. Ken Corpus of Computer Works Pro gave the presentation on "Installing and Configuring a Wireless Network." It was agreed that Ken did a good job in covering a complex subject in the relatively short time allowed and that the presentation equipment provided by the Brighton Library worked well.

The next topic was upcoming presentations. Larry Lavery will give a presentation on the Global Positioning System (GPS) at the February meeting. Even though several presentations are scheduled the board remains interested in having at least one presentation on hand to use on short notice if a planned presentation is unable to proceed.

Steve announced that the monthly production of *Monitor*s would be reduced to 400 copies from 500 printed previously. There followed a continuation of earlier discussions regarding the "Monitor" and how it should be printed, if at all. Steve presented a breakdown of the *Monitor* production costs that was reviewed. The board expressed appreciation for Steve's efforts. All agreed that the costs related to the *Monitor* production must be closely scrutinized even if those costs are even partially offset by future revenue increases. Advertising rates in the *Monitor* were discussed as a possible source of additional revenue. Adjusting the advertising rates was considered.

Steve stated that the present printer is not new and might fail leaving no way to print the *Monitor*. Arpad and Tony agreed to set up a small network of printers to test such a configuration to print the *Monitor*. In addition to reducing printing costs the board is interested in improving the print quality and to perhaps printing the *Monitor* in color. Arpad and Tony will report the results of the test at the next meeting.

The meeting ended on a positive note when Steve announced that the RCSi treasury shows a balance of $1,368. Steve noted that dues paid in January and contributions helped considerable to raise the balance.

The meeting adjourned at 2030.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub

Treasurer	
Balance 12/04/04	$1,043.83
Income	
Dues and donations	$451.18
Expenses	
Office Max (paper)	$47.98
Ink	60.37
Total	$108.35
Balance 01/18/05	$1,386.66

The Lighter Side

Software doesn't just appear on the shelves by magic. That program shrink- wrapped inside the box along with the indecipherable manual and 12-paragraph disclaimer notice actually came to you by way of an elaborate path, through the most rigid quality control on the planet.

Here, shared for the first time with the general public, are the inside details of the program development cycle.

1. Programmer produces code he believes is bug-free.
2. Product is tested. 20 bugs are found.
3. Programmer fixes 10 of the bugs and explains to the testing department that the other 10 aren't really bugs.
4. Testing department finds that five of the fixes didn't work and discovers 15 new bugs.
5. See 3.
6. See 4.
7. See 5.
8. See 6.
9. See 7.
10. See 8.
11. Due to marketing pressure and an ex-tremely premature product announcement, based on overly-optimistic programming schedule, the product is released.
12. Users find 137 new bugs.
13. Original programmer, having cashed his royalty check, is nowhere to be found.
14. Newly-assembled programming team fixes almost all of the 137 bugs, but introduce 456 new ones.
15. Original programmer sends underpaid testing department a postcard from Fiji. Entire testing department quits.
16. Company is bought in a hostile takeover by competitor using profits from their latest release, which had 783 bugs.
17. New CEO is brought in by board of directors. He hires programmer to redo program from scratch.
18. Programmer produces code he believes is bug-free....

Suggestions for Your "Out-of-the-Office" Auto-Reply

1. I am currently out at a job interview and will reply if I fail to get the position. Be prepared for my mood.
2. I'm not really out of the office. I'm just ignoring you.
3. You are receiving this automatic notification because I am out of the office. If I was in, chances are you wouldn't have received anything.
4. Sorry to have missed you but I am at the doctor's having my brain removed so that I may be promoted to management.
5. I will be unable to delete all the unread, worthless e-mails you send me until I return from vacation on 4/18. Please be patient and your mail will be deleted in the order it was received.
6. Thank you for your e-mail. Your credit card has been charged $5.99 for the first ten words and $1.99 for each additional word in your message.
7. The e-mail server is unable to verify your server connection and is unable to deliver this message. Please and try sending again. The beauty of it is that when I return, I can see how many people did this over and over.
8. Thank you for your message, which has been added to the queue. You are currently in 352nd place, and can expect to receive a reply in approximately 19 weeks.
9. Please reply to this e-mail so I will know that you got this message.
10. Hi. I'm thinking about what you've just sent me. Please wait by your PC for my response.
11. Hi! I'm busy negotiating the salary for my new job. Don't bother to leave me any messages. I've run away to join a different circus.
12. I will be out of the office for the next two weeks for medical reasons. When I return, please refer to me as Loretta rather than Steve.