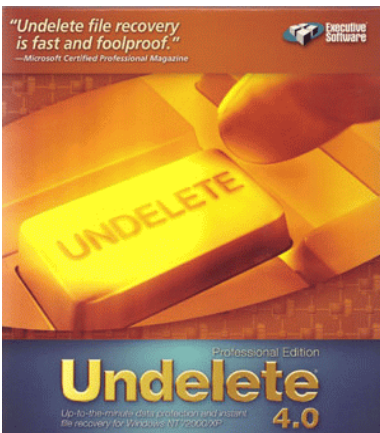# Eliminating the "Oops"

Undelete 4

by Mary T. Jordan
Houston Area League of PC Users

Early on we thought two programs simply worked magic. One, by Peter Norton, was a program to recover deleted files and the other, Partition Magic, enabled us to change the size of individual hard drive partitions at will. But computer life has become more sophisticated and we now need more sophisticated tools. Undelete 4 is one of them and it comes in three flavors: Home Edition, Professional, and Server.

Deleting files can be cumbersome, often requiring us to peruse long lists of deleted files that look the same, trying to remember the first few letters of the file's name. Fortunately, those days are gone. Executive Software has made it more convenient than ever to restore deleted files.

It works with Windows NT, 2000 and XP (not ME or Win9x – but does work with FAT 16/32 files) and Undelete replaces the common Windows Recycle Bin with a Recovery Bin. There are other great file-recovery products but Undelete seems to be a bit less intrusive than most.

Key features include:

1. Recover files that have been deleted from the Windows File Manager, have bypassed the recycle bin or have been deleted using the command prompt.

2. You can recover any file deleted from the Recovery Bin that hasn't been overwritten.

3. Files can be deleted permanently using SecureDelete.

4. Search for files by creation date, the name of the file owner, the account the file was deleted from or files deleted within a specific number of days.

5. Files can be restored remotely over a network. (Did you read this one Network Admins?)

A couple of features I found especially helpful:

First. Undelete's Exclusion List specifies the drives, directories (including subfolders, filenames and file types) you want Undelete to ignore as files are deleted.

Second. The Emergency Undelete from the CD. When you unintentionally delete a file, there's a tendency to continue to use your computer. *Don't*. Place the CD in the player and turn it off immediately. When the system boots up, you'll have a non-intrusive method to recover files that have not been overwritten. Although not a technical term, it's now time to say, yea!

You can install an Undelete recovery bin on all drives or just the ones you pick and define "bin" size for each partition. You can also choose whether to auto purge the bin when it becomes full (older than a certain number of days) and whether to save zero- length files. A few computer users don't know they're supposed to delete files periodically.

Undelete includes a feature that stops computer viruses from truncating and thus damaging the file names of deleted files saved in the recovery bin. Second, for security-conscious users, Undelete can completely erase files using SecureDelete option that overwrites the file with a DoD standard protocol. Then it is deleted. After using SecureDelete there is NO second chance.

Undelete is the most efficient and feature rich program I've come across, plus it is easily navigated. It is light years ahead of the one that comes with Windows. The User's Guide is rather skimpy and not very informative, but the context sensitive help is adequate. Call 800-829-6468 or go to www .execsoft.com for info and updates.

Mary T. Jordan is a HAL-PC family member and computer educator.

The New Bluish DVD Format Battle Begins

by George Margolin
North Orange County Computer Club

Before we get into the DVD wars to come, let's revisit what came before. First there was the battle of the VCRs – Sony was first with its Beta format which provided great quality *but* then came JVC with its VMS format. And although it didn't provide the same quality as Sony's Beta – it gave longer recording time, so a 2 hour TV movie could be captured and played back on one tape.

So VHS won the hearts and dollars of the viewing public. Thus *better* quality, failed and *longer* play time won!

More recently came the battle of the DVD recording formats, (DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD- RW, DVD+RW) with "Plus" and "Minus" [officially "Dash"] persuasions. The Minus (read "-" as Dash) format was off the blocks first. And it worked quite well with a number of limitations as an editing medium – and required a lengthy (as much as an hour) *Pre*-formatting before use and the inability to record and erase randomly for editing.

Those points, coupled with the fact that it could not be universally played on all the then current DVD home players – and because it could only record at IX (normal playback) speed, meant a two hour show took two hours to record. This left the door open for an "improved" approach designed to eliminate these low cost optical recording limitations.

This improved approach for optical data/video recording and playback system was pioneered by Philips, Ricoh, HP Toshiba and many other "heavy hitters." It was called the "plus" (read "+") recording system.

Its "plusses" (pun intended) permitted playablity on a slightly larger percentage of the older (let's call them "legacy) tv-top players and the fact that its recording

speed started out at 2.4 times faster than that of the original "Minus" systems. In addition, it required only a few minutes pre-recording set-up time. So its more than two times recording speed advantage and quick start helped it get off the ground despite the fact that the "Minus" units had a few years marketing advantage.

And while the Plus system used the same CD sized disk – it provided precise positioning indicators throughout the disk, which permitted much more latitude in writing and editing, whether video or computer data. Additionally, the RE-writable Minus disk had to be completely erased before RE-writing, the Plus disks could be RE-written without wasting reformatting time and losing all the material on it.

Please note that the following numbers and percentages are arguable and were provided by the participants and contestants in each side. The "Minus" side claimed compatibility with about 80% of the legacy players and the "Plus" folks claimed that "Minus" was playable on only 70%. They also claimed that "Plus" disks were compatible with "up to 90%." But, it was and is a matter of testing on your own equipment to see if it works with one or the other, because sometimes the Minus disks were readable where the Plus disks were not and vice versa. And, of course, both the Minus and the Plus sides claimed a slight edge in compatibility.

Sony rockets out with a DUAL format DVD burner, forever changing the landscape.
After the initial introduction of the "Plus" format-things changed – *fast*! The "Minus" group upped their recording speed to 2X, then 4X and more. And the "Plus" group upped theirs faster while still retaining the ability to selectively RE-write their re-writeable disk line.

But SONY – always a premier manufacturer – *combined* the two standards into *one* burner – obliterating the competition. Now users could buy whichever type of disk they wanted, or which were most compatible with their DVD players – or which were cheaper to buy.

Sony's clever move forced *all* DVD Burner manufactures to offer Dual format systems. With trivial differences in the price of the single or dual format machines – who, in his or her right mind would buy the single medium machine? Apparently *no one*! So Dual Rules! But the story and the competition continues.

Double Layer Debuts

Philips – a particularly competent and innovative large company – combined the "*Double Layer*" technology used in manufacturing the kind of play-only disks made for marketing of motion pictures, with their latest writeable and re-writeable players. They and their very high class consortium of giant companies (including Sony, HP, Ricoh, Thompson and more) created a line of Double Layer burnable and Re-Writeable disks readable on virtually all current home DVD players. In other words, they designed within the read capabilities of the now-selling players to nearly *double* the capacity of new, Double Layer, burnable DVD disks.

This means that they can now record 8.5 QB on a single sided disk, although this technology – at the moment, works *only* on special and expensive Double Layer "Plus" media ($5 to $12 per disk!) As the late night TV Commercials say – "But that's not all!" These new burners play and burn virtually *all* the current disk types and at the latest speeds! As we write this they are able to write CD-Rs, CD-RWs, DVD+R, DVD+RW, DVD-R, and DVD-RW.

Even better – the prices of these devices have *plummeted*! With ads this week, for Double Layer machines from Sony, Toshiba and the excellent ones from Pioneer and Plextor, at the highest current speeds – are selling close (above/below) $100. Who can resist? Not I!

The Attack of The Killer Blue Laser Disks

The big bad Blue Lasers are ready to attack the winners of the DVD battles.

Another War of the Worlds has already begun, even before the dead bodies of the Plus vs Minus – combined with Double Layer – soldiers, are flushed from the battle field of Optical Storage. But this war is not being fought with flying disk shaped saucer UFOs, but with real optical storage disks for your own computers and set-top DVD players.

Once again there are *two* flavors of technology ready to duke it out in the market place. Their opening salvos have already been shot across the bows of the movie studios that will *need* the kind of storage density that either or both camps can provide – in the short term. (Keep "short term" in mind.)

It is clearly a replay of the Sony Beta vs JVC's VHS format wars. And the two sides are named: Blu-Ray vs HD DVD.

There are great similarities and some serious, serious, differences. Note the two "seriouses."

What they *both* have: Both are based on the short wavelength (405 nm – nanometer) blue/violet laser, rather than the long wave length (650 nm) red laser used for "regular" D VDs – including the new Double Layer versions.

They are *both* capable of recording a full length HDTV film in exquisite quality, plus many of the "normal" add-ons of DVD merchandising, like commentaries and behind-the-scene looks.

They *both* use burning and playing technologies that *exist today* – but with a different take on disk and perhaps burner production.

They would *both* improve the optical disk capabilities for computer data as well.

But their differences are aimed at two approaches to technology. One – the HD DVD school wants to build burners and particularly disks that they can reproduce by the millions using what they call Standard of Current equipment. Even if this means that they can't produce the same capacity or bit rate as the Blu-Ray disks, At this point HD DVD's maximum storage, would be 15 GB on a single layer disk and about 30 GB on a dual layer disk.

The Blu-Ray folks have been able to advance to the next stage of optical recording technology. This provides greater storage -25 GB on a single layer disk and about 50 GB on a double layer disk. This means that they're *starting out* with 66% – two thirds – greater storage than HD DVD. It also means that they are choosing to bypass the older, perhaps obsolete technology, of their competitors.

Remember – I commented about "short term?" Well here it is. The HD DVD approach will "work" for now but can hardly be expected to be adequate in the near future.

## ComparisonBetweenBlu-Rayand HDDVD

To me this looks like a rehash of the Sony Beta/JVC VHS format wars of a dozen years ago.
Their similarities:

Both use blue/violet lasers of 405 nm (nanometers). This alone permits *at least* 4 or 5 times the data density of a current DVD's *red* laser of 620 nm. The numbers indicate smaller wavelength, which equals much closer packing of smaller data dots (bits), which translates into an *instant* advantage in data storage of video or other information.

While the "normal" DVD provides 4.7 GB on a single layer, single sided disk – the Blue Laser provides *three* times the information up to 15 GB for the HD DVD – to *five times* the information content – to 25 GB, for a single sided, single layer Blu-Ray disk. That's a 2/3 greater storage capability for Blu-Ray. Add another layer like the new *double layer* disks discussed above and using what I call a "Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwich" analogy – which gives you two layers on a side – you're looking at 50 GB per side for Blu-Ray vs 30 GB per side for HDDVD.

This means that even though the fight for deliverables has not yet begun – the Blu-Ray side already can provide 166% more bang for the buck. While the HD DVD side is starting out only able to deliver 60% for the same size and dollars once mass production is amortized.
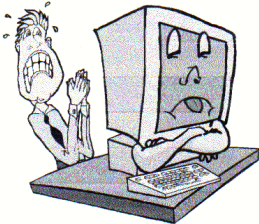
Blu-Ray is also designed to be faster reading and writing than the HDDVD disk.

So I ask the question; If someone were to offer you a choice between two diamonds of equal quality and brilliance – with one being two thirds *larger* – at the same price. Which one would you pick? Nough said?

Or – because I often have need to drive a truck or a van – if someone offered to sell me a truck that carried more than half again as much as another truck – at the same price – and if this stronger truck were the same physical size and weight and got the same gas mileage – would I need to be Einstein, to figure out which to choose? I don't think so!

While it is clear that Blu-Ray and HD DVD are both desirable jewels for our entertainment and data storage – doesn't it seem strange that one is already a superseded

technology and the other is – at the moment – state of the art?

Conclusion

While HD DVD may have enough recording density for most of today's HD Video titles – it is clearly NOT a good choice for our growing archival computer data needs. Please look at the following simple chart.

This is what it would take to fully back up *one* of my many hard drives using old vs new devices.

I have two to four 250 GB drives on each of my two main computers, so let's see just how many of what I need in order to back up *all* the information on just *one* drive:

250gb	1.4 mb Floppy	178,571	Floppies
250gb	700 mb CD	357	CDs
250gb	4.7 gb DVD	53.2	DVDs
250gb	8.5 DL DVD	29.4	DL DVDs
250gb	15 gb HDDVD	16.7	HD DVDs
250gb	25 gb Blu-Ray	10	Blu-Rays
250gb	30 gb DLHD-DVD	8.3	DLHDDVDs
250gb	50 GbDL Blu-ray	5	DL Blu-Ray

RandomActsofLiteracy

by Sherry Zorzi
Cajun Clickers Computer Club

You may find one in your doctor's waiting room or at the hairdresser's. You may spot one in a shopping cart in the parking lot at grocery store, or on a chair at Starbucks. You may come upon one in the break room at work or even on a bench in the park.

A book. It could be paperback or hardback. It could be well-thumbed or brand-new. It sports a stick-on label with a cartoon of a jaunty running book with stick-figure arms and legs. "I'm not lost; I'm traveling. Take me home." the label reads.

Welcome to the BookCrossing phenomenon. It's operating quietly here, it's free, it's as anonymous as you want it to be, and it's great fun.

Thanks to a unique website started in April 2001, the invented term "bookcrossing" has become so mainstream that it made it into the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* by August 2004. "Bookcrossing, n., the practice of leaving a book in a public place to be picked up and read by others, who then do likewise."

Avid reader Ron Hornbaker. a web designer in Kansas City, was intrigued by websites like Where's George, which tracks U.S. currency by serial number, and wondered what else would be fun to track. Thus was born BookCrossing.com and the rest is rapidly becoming history.

The basics of bookcrossing are, appropriately, the "3 R's." Read, register, and release. Read a good book. Register it at Book Crossing.com. When you register the book, you' II get a unique ID number for the book. You can write an online journal entry for the book, a review, if you like. Stick a label on the book with the ID number and the address of the website. Release the book for someone else to find and read. You can give it directly to a friend, mail it to another bookcrosser who has expressed

interest in that book, or (my favorite!) just leave it in a public place for someone else to find.

When you find a released book, visit the website and enter the ID number of the book. You can do this anonymously if you wish. You'll have an opportunity to make your own journal entry, in which you can describe where you found it and even review the book yourself. If you log the book, the releaser will know when and where the book was found and you'll both be able to track future finds as well.

More than 300,000 bookcrossers worldwide have registered almost two million books! Bookcrossers live in 150 different countries. There are almost 500 bookcrossers in the Baton Rouge area, so you just might happen upon one of our releases in a neighborhood near you.

At the BookCrossing.com website, you can click a link to "go hunting" for books released in your area within the last 30 days which have not yet been reported found. As of this writing, there are 39 books in Baton Rouge waiting to be found.

There is also an online community at the website, with discussion forums ranging from general chit-chat to serious talk about books.

Do you really think you'll ever reread your collection of paperback James Lee Burke mysteries? Or all those diet books you've collected? What are you hoarding them for? Why not make someone else's day? If you love your books, set them free!

[There were 73 waiting to be found in Rochester waiting to be found in April.–ed]

Sherry Zorzi is a Director of Cajun Clickers Computer Club (www.cajunclickers.org).

MediaNotes
by Bill Petitt
Southeast Virginia Computer Group

Well, here we are. The first quarter is behind us and spring has arrived with flowers, warmish rains and thoughts of snow, ice and winter behind us. I always think of renewal and rebirth at this time of year and the next couple of articles illustrate this thought perfectly. Enjoy!

It's a Ghost! No! It's Netscape, Back from the Dead!

Netscape, the forgotten pioneer of Internet browsers, has released a new version for testing. And it looks like it has a winner.

The new Netscape, version 8, uses the best qualities of Internet Explorer and Firefox. The latter does not work with ActiveX controls, which are often used by attackers. That makes it safer than IE. But some sites require ActiveX ability. One such is the Windows Update site. Firefox won't work there. However, Netscape does. When it determines that a site is safe, it uses the ActiveX component in Windows to access the site. When going to unknown or unsafe sites, it refuses to download ActiveX controls.

Netscape now belongs to America Online. One review I saw complained that the AOL presence was heavy-handed. It didn't seem that bad to me. So judge for yourself. You can download the free browser at: http://browser.netscape.com/nsb/download/ default.jsp

Windows slow? Try these 4 solutions

Do you think that you need a new Windows computer because the clunker is too slow? You may not. Windows doesn't do a great job of maintaining itself. Before you dump Old Faithful, try these simple solutions:

1. Straighten up the hard drive. Start by scanning your hard drive for problems. Use ScanDisk in Windows 98 and ME; in Windows XP, the tool is Check Disk. These utilities find stray data – called lost allocation units – that wasn't properly handled, generally in a system crash. They also rope off bad spots on the hard drive.

To find ScanDisk, click Start>> Programs>> Accessories>> System Tools>> ScanDisk. In Windows XP, click Start>>My Computer. Right-click your hard drive (probably C:) and click Properties. Select the Tools tab. Click Check Now. Regardless of the system, select options to do as thorough a check as possible.

Next, defragment your drive. Windows scatters file fragments all over creation. When you open a file, the hard drive has to work hard to assemble it. Defragmenting the files puts the pieces in adjacent clusters. That makes reassembly easier and faster.

To defragment, click Start>> Programs (or All Programs)>> Accessories>> System Tools>> Disk Defragmenter.

2. Dump the spies. Spyware tracks your surfing and feeds that information to advertising companies on the Internet. In turn, you receive customized ads. In recent years, spyware has gone from an irritant to a crisis. It can bog down a computer. At its worse, it seizes control. Your choice of search site, or even where you surf, can be severely curtailed.

A number of programs can be downloaded to clean up spyware. These include Ad-aware (http://www.lavasoftusa .com), Spybot-Search & Destroy (http://www .safer-networking.org), and for Windows XP only, Microsoft Anti-Spyware (http://www.microsoft.com/downloads), and Spy Sweeper (http://www .webroot.com). All but Ad-aware also can be used to block further infections. And they all are free, except for Spy Sweeper, which is $30.

3. Turbocharge your surfing. Are you still using dial-up access? People often use the rationalization that "it's good enough for me." But it is glacial compared to broadband.

Broadband simply means that much more data can be downloaded at once. That translates to a much faster Web experience. People are often amazed at the difference. Try it and you'll never go back.

The primary broadband methods are DSL, over telephone lines, and cable, which moves with television signals. DSL is eight to 30 times faster than dial-up. In

some places, cable can be 100 times faster. Either way, this is money well-spent.

4. Replace hardware parts. Undeniably, you can jack up your machine this way. But this can get into serious money.

There is a relatively cheap way to speed things up. If you have, say, 128 megabytes of memory in a Windows 98 or ME machine, you can raise that to 256 MB. Going up to 512 may give you even more of a boost. And memory isn't too expensive.

Beyond that, you're raising economic issues. You could pour money into a new motherboard, chip and video card. You could even upgrade your hard drive. But this will add hundreds of dollars. Why bother?

A new low-end machine can be had, with monitor, for less than $500. It will contain new, reliable parts. And, though it is low end, it will be relatively fast.

So, try cleaning up your old machine. If that doesn't work, think hard about a new computer.

Microsoft to nix some Net product activation

Customers who find themselves reinstalling Windows XP should be ready for a headache: Microsoft will no longer support activating the product over the Internet for PCs which have Windows pre-installed.

Intended to curtail the stealing and selling of certificates of authenticity, the new security measure started at the end of February. At first, it will be limited to the Windows XP software preinstalled on systems shipped by the top 20 PC sellers.

"The main reason (for the change) is to address piracy in this area," a Microsoft representative said on Thursday. "Microsoft has found various people selling the labels of authenticity that they have copied or have pulled off other PCs."

The change is the latest attempt by Microsoft to target software pirates who try to sell stolen copies of Windows XP or the certificates of authenticity that mark the software as legitimate. The company has a plan to check that people's operating systems are properly licensed before allowing them to download certain updates. The plan, known as the Windows Genuine Advantage initiative, was introduced in January.

Starting Feb. 28, Microsoft's product security required that customers who need to reinstall their operating system call a customer service representative to get a code that will reactivate their Windows XP system. New systems shipped from the top 20 PC makers, also known as original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), will be pre-activated, stated a memo posted to the blog Aviran's Place. The Microsoft representative said the memo was authentic.

"To reduce the illegal trafficking of these OEM product keys, Microsoft will 'disable' the ability to activate these direct OEM Product Keys over the Internet," the memo stated. "When a customer or reseller tries to activate using a Product Key found on the list of 'disabled' keys, the online product activation wizard will instruct them to call Microsoft, where a customer service representative can assist them further."

The customer representative will ask several questions, such as where the person bought the Windows XP system, to find out whether the certificate is authentic, the representative said.

Skype goes for the gold

Net phone phenom Skype is preparing to expand its menu of paid services, hastening its efforts to evolve from a free provider of niche services into a profitable company that could give industry giants a run for their money.

The Luxembourg-based upstart has so far signed up 29 million registered users for its free Net phone calling software – a unique version of voice over Internet Protocol, or VoIP – making it one of the fastest-growing services on the Net. Now it's aiming to milk profits from its swelling ranks of freeloaders with paid services that promise to make its Net-only product significantly more useful to consumers--and potentially more lethal to traditional phone providers.

Last July, Skype launched a paid service called SkypeOut that lets subscribers make calls from the Internet to the traditional phone network. It has signed up 1 million customers so far, the company said in March.

Also, Skype quietly unveiled test versions of two new paid products – voice mail and a service dubbed SkypeIn that lets subscribers obtain ordinary telephone numbers. SkypeIn represents a potential watershed, since it will enable Skype subscribers for the first time to receive incoming calls from the hundreds of millions of people who still use traditional phone services.

Finally, Skype is working with equipment makers to develop hardware that will connect conventional phones to its free software and paid services. German giant Siemens, for one, has already released a Skype adapter for cordless phones in Europe. New devices are expected soon in the United States, from companies including Vtech and iMate, that will let people make Skype calls using an ordinary handset, rather than a PC.

Analysts said Skype's efforts to bridge the Internet and the traditional phone network could pose a major headache for traditional phone companies and other VoIP upstarts alike--if it can continue to undercut rivals on price.

"Skype is going from a glorified (instant messaging) client that led VoIP to something that has broader implications, especially when you can do things like get a phone number assigned," said Jupiter Research analyst Michael Gartenberg. "A lot depends on how lean they can keep it, and how low they can keep prices as they expand."

Skype and host of rivals are turning the telecom industry on its head using Internet technology to offer more calling features for less.

In this topsy-turvy world, Skype represents the competitive extreme, wielding a weapon that few others are willing or able to match: Using peer-to-peer architecture, it claims it can offer its software service for free to

tens of millions of people, and still make boatloads of profits by persuading only a fraction of its users to upgrade to paid premium services.

In order to make a big impact, however, Skype needs to get its service off of the Internet and PCs and onto familiar phone equipment via the traditional phone network that most people still use.

Skype's new services bring the company a long way in this direction. Taken together, SkypeIn and SkypeOut will dramatically expand Skype's usefulness and reach, offering users everything they need to talk to people who don't use the service. While that will cost subscribers money, it is considered a key step to making Skype palatable to mainstream users. Skype's core service, while free, requires that both caller and called use Skype's software over a broadband connection. [Skype does work on dial-up connections ... Ed.]

Looking forward to payday

Skype's tests for new paid services throw a spotlight on the company's audacious plans to transform itself from a largely free service into a commercial dynamo. The company, which claims to be among the fastest-growing services on the Web with some 155,000 new registered users each day, may nevertheless be hearing some footsteps coming up behind. Web giant AOL recently jumped into the VoIP race, joining cable powerhouses such as Cablevision, long-distance provider AT&T and a slew of start-ups bent on transforming the once stodgy telephone industry, seemingly overnight.

In an interview with CNET News.com, Skype co-founder Niklas Zennstrom said the company does not plan to charge for its Skype software. Rather, he said, Skype's costs are so low that the company can afford to give its core product away to hundreds of millions of people and still make money selling ancillary services, such as SkypeOut, SkypeIn and voice mail.

"Our business model relies on providing Skype for free, and then upgrading a fraction of our users to some sort of paid service or product," said Zennstrom, speaking from London using Skype over a wireless LAN connection that cut out from time to time. "Once we get a lot of people using Skype for free, some will buy value-added services, some will buy value-added products--cordless phones, headsets and so on. We don't count on all our users being paying customers, we count on only a few being paying customers."

SkypeOut's 1 million paying customers represent a bit less than 4 percent of current registered users for its free Skype service. Customers buy SkypeOut accounts up front, and are assessed per-minute usage charges – generally pennies for most calls. The company does not disclose its take on these deals. SkypeIn reverses the equation. Customers pay a flat fee for phone numbers chosen among available area codes. A 12-month subscription costs 30 euros ($40), and 3 months is 10 euros ($13.40), with a free voice mail account thrown in, according to information posted on Skype's Web site. Normal long-distance charges apply, but calls are free for people who call in from the same area code. Subscribers can choose any area code, regardless of where they live, potentially eliminating some long-distance charges.

Skype has acquired only 10,000 phone numbers so far for test purposes, in the United States, Hong Kong, France and the United Kingdom. Once SkypeIn is ready for prime time, Skype promises to greatly expand its number pool, and eventually offer choices from every area code around the globe.

Rival VoIP providers such as Vonage and Packet8 charge flat monthly fees for unlimited calling within limited geographical regions, and a per-minute charge for most international calls. Rates run from about $15 and up, depending on the plan. That can make them significantly cheaper than some traditional phone plans. But they are still more expensive than Skype.

Skype's voice mail beta is also offered at a flat rate, with 12 months costing 15 euros ($20.11) and 3 months at 5 euros ($6.70). If no one is available to answer the phone, callers can record a message that is stored on Skype's servers and then downloaded when the subscriber logs in, much like e-mail.

Although rates are low, Zennstrom said he's confident Skype will generate huge profits, given its low cost structure and massive user base.

"Typical customer acquisition costs in the phone industry is several hundred dollars," he said. "We believe in zero."

On the cheap

Skype's costs are low because it relies on peer-to-peer network architecture to complete calls over the public Internet, with no need for expensive equipment or infrastructure on the back end, Zennstrom said. That contrasts with the business plans of the phone companies, which rely on owning the network. The "Baby Bell" local phone providers, for one, are building out new fiber and high-speed Internet networks at a cost of billions of dollars each.

Skype's costs are bound up almost entirely in payroll – currently, for about 100 employees – and related expenses such as travel, Zennstrom said.

Ultimately, Zennstrom said, there will be only one network – the Internet – making SkypeIn and SkypeOut superfluous. But that could take years to come, giving Skype plenty of time to develop new paid services. He said the company is working on offering a video-calling feature, but declined to comment on when it would be available, or whether it would be a free or paid service.

"One big growth area in future is on mobile phones," he added. "Mobile phones are changing, becoming more powerful computers with open software, and open to more radio networks, including Wi-Fi."

One area where Skype is facing escalating costs is customer service. The company has been hit recently with an unusually high number of complaints over billing and credit- card- related errors, Zennstrom said. In response, Skype last week ended its contract with an outsourced

customer service provider and moved the function in-house.

"Outsourcing was a mistake," Zennstrom said. "We now have better controls, and tracking to make sure complaints are addressed and followed up...We take customer service very seriously, and I believe we have taken the necessary steps to improve."

Zennstrom said he does not believe customer service costs will create a major drag on margins, thanks in part to availability of online self-help tools.

Jupiter's Gartenberg said Skype's biggest problem may not be escalating costs or customer service issues, but ease of use.

Skype has released versions of its software for phones running Microsoft's PocketPC software, and has announced a deal to put its software on a Motorola phone. But the vast majority of its users remain tethered to the PC, Gartenberg said. Unless Skype can break onto more familiar telephone devices, it could find itself locked in a niche category, he said.

"The mass market wants to use telephones," Gartenberg said. "VoIP has been around for years, but it wasn't until (VoIP pioneer) Vonage plugged it into a regular phone that the service started to take off. The Motorola deal is a good step in the right direction, but the key is continuing that momentum forward to become a mainstream product."

While the following FTC finding isn't a check in your pocket just yet, it might be at a future date.

The Rebate Debate:

Why Were They Late?

FTC Settles Charges Against CompUSA

This action is the first challenging a retailer's promises for third-party rebates. Under the terms of two separate consent agreements announced today, the Federal Trade Commission has settled charges against nationwide computer superstore CompUSA Inc. and the officers of computer peripherals manufacturer Q.P.S. Inc., whose products were marketed and sold by CompUSA, for allegedly failing to pay, in a timely manner, thousands of rebates for products sold under the CompUSA and QPS brands. Under the terms of the settlement with the superstore, CompUSA will pay consumers who purchased QPS products at CompUSA their due or past-due rebates, which ranged from $15 to $100 each.

The order requires CompUSA to pay all valid QPS rebate requests that were received from consumers who bought QPS products at CompUSA, and which are due or past due. CompUSA also is required to send a rebate to any eligible consumer who contacts them within 75 days after the final order is served on the company. Customers wishing to contact Comp USA regarding QPS rebate issues can reach the company by calling 1-800- CompUSA and selecting Option 3.

What if your cell phone worked on a wireless Voice over IP connection as well as on a cellular network?

You'd have the convenience of using the same handset and phone number just about anywhere. And you'd save money.

Here's the deal: When at home or in the office, you could use your cell phone to make calls over a VoIP service running on a Wi-Fi network. Some call this convergence of technologies "VoWiFi."

Theoretically, a VoIP service can be used anywhere there's a fast Internet connection. If you have the right handset, therefore, you could use your VoIP service on your home wireless network as well as with a Starbucks or other commercial Wi-Fi hotspot.

The advantages of VoWiFi: Calls on VoIP services are much less expensive than land-line or cell-phone calls, because they travel cheaply as data packets over the Internet. (Some VoIP services are even free.) At the same time, you'd reduce your cell phone costs, as you'd need to use your plan minutes only when a Wi-Fi hotspot wasn't nearby.

Several companies are developing or have introduced wireless handsets capable of automatically handling calls from either VoIP or cellular services. For example, Motorola's MPx can place calls on cellular networks and VoIP services via Wi-Fi.

Skype Sets Its Sights on Cell Phones

VoIP software will come preinstalled on certain mobile handsets.

Skype Technologies' VoIP (voice over Internet Protocol) software will now come installed on mobile handsets from Carrier Devices' i-mate brand that are equipped with Wi-Fi as well as cellular capability. Newly manufactured i-mate PDA2 and PDA2K Pocket PC phones will come with Skype's software for making calls over the Internet. The handsets will be equipped out of the box for users to start making Skype calls, Skype said in a statement in February.

The phones use Microsoft's Windows Mobile 2003 software for Pocket PCs and have both GSM/GPRS (Global System for Mobile communications/General Packet Radio Service) and Wi-Fi wireless LAN capability. Carrier Devices also plans to put the Skype software in its i-mate JAM, a smaller version of the handset. With the Skype software, users can make calls over a broadband Internet connection through a Wi-Fi network, bypassing the provider of GSM/GPRS service.

Peer-to-Peer Calls

Skype makes peer-to-peer VoIP software that lets users make voice calls to any other Skype user on the Internet for free. Through the Luxembourg-based company's SkypeOut service, users can make calls to fixed-line and mobile phones in countries around the world at a fraction of the cost of conventional international phone calls. Skype's software can be installed on some other Windows-based phones.

Earlier, Skype announced a deal with Hutchison Global Communications, a fixed- line carrier in Hong Kong, for a co-branded VoIP service. Last year Skype joined with Siemens to offer a USB adapter device for some Siemens cordless phones that lets users make Skype calls.

I-mate, based in Dubai, has carrier and distributor partners across the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Russia, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. It is now planning a U.S. launch, according to the statement. I-mate will spotlight its deal with Skype at the 3GSM World Congress in Cannes, France.

From the April 2005 issue of the Umbrella Online, the monthly newsletter of the Hampton Roads Virginia computing community.

TheWindowsWUGNET
SharewareHallofFame

by Bettie Cummings Cook
SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

The Web site of WUGNET is http://www.microsoff.com/windowsxp/downloads/wugnet.mspx. On this site are the Microsoft picks that demonstrate the highest standards available today in shareware for Windows XP. Just for the record, freeware is free and shareware is generally free to try, but you are on your honor to send the compiler a fee or a contribution. Yes, you can use them as long as you please without sending a nickel for them, but I encourage you to support the persons who unselfishly provide good shareware programs. A number of the programs will develop into large, well-known products or become incorporated into new system programs. To cite a few old examples that did so: PKZip, Brother' s Keeper, Checkit, XTree, and TweakUl. I purchased these as shareware programs a number of years ago for $5 each. To the credit of the shareware compilers, their programs have continued to operate from Windows 3.1 through Windows XP. So, for the most part, they are good investments.

Twenty-five of the best picks for Windows XP are featured with links to downloadable sites: everything from utilities to games. 1 was intrigued by one called Ink-Saver. It adjusts the amount of ink flow from cartridge to printer and causes those expensive ink cartridges to last a little longer. Check it out for dependable sources that have MS approval.

Bettie Cummings Cook is Newsletter Editor of the SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc. (SWIPCUG). The above article appeared in the January 2005 issue of the P-See Urgent, SWIPCUG newsletter. Used by permission. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer Users Groups brings this article to you.

GoodbyeFloppies

by Grant Fuller,
Big Blue and Cousins

This is simply an unretouched photo of some cheap CDs that turn into coasters every time I try to burn one. My overhead combination of warm and cool fluorescent tubes are the light source that allows these discs to exhibit their only talent, which is creating a rainbow. The curved type can be done in Adobe InDesign, Illustrator or other advanced drawing programs.

I have had discs on the mind lately because I bought a new computer last month (it's already last year's model) and it does not have a floppy drive. It does have a CD-ROM and a DVD/CD combination burner. This means that I have to burn a CD no matter how small the file I want to transport. Yes, I could buy a flash drive but that doesn't solve the problem of giving a disc to someone to take home. CDs are cheap enough but the cheap ones are not reliable. I think the ones in the picture were fifty for twenty dollars. The ones around a dollar each, with case, seem to be more consistent on my machine. The fact that they are not reusable, unless you buy the rewritable kind, which have never worked for me, is one more aggravation. I have not had success burning DVDs yet but that adventure is still in its infancy and will probably require a separate article.

The floppy was reliable, reusable and affordable. Those are the three most feared words in the marketing industry. Was the technology of the floppy disc antiquated or was it put to death because it was not churning our bank accounts? I think there will always be a need to hand small files back and forth in spite of the fact that we can now exchange enormous file sizes by other means. I suppose when everyone has email, we can send small files that way, but it's hard for me to imagine a world without floppies.

So it is with heavy heart and solemn tone that I wave goodbye to the floppy. I will likely buy a flash drive now because they are very handy and quite affordable. If they prove to be reliable and last a long time, that will be the kiss of death and the floppies will soon disappear in a cloud of mystery.

Grant Fuller is the Publications Director for the Big Blue & Cousins, The greater Victoria Personal Computer Users' Croup, Victoria, BC, Canada, and writer for the newsletter, BB&C *Newsletter, http://www.bbc.org. Grant is also an artist. See his work at http://www.grantfuller.ca.*

Adobe Photoshop Elements 3

by Pete Padilla
1000 Oaks Personal Computer Club

One of the most valued possessions we have are photographs, whether it's of our loved ones, a family get together, or other photos we wish to keep for future viewing, I for one, and I believe, most, of us, wish to view a picture that is clear and pleasing to the eye. I enjoy photography. and try to get the best photo I can at the time I press the shutter button on the camera. There are a lot of us who wish the pictures we take all come out with no problems such as red eye, being too dark, showing blemishes, wrinkles, etc. Well, I think I have the cure for all those problems and countless more by using the new Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0.
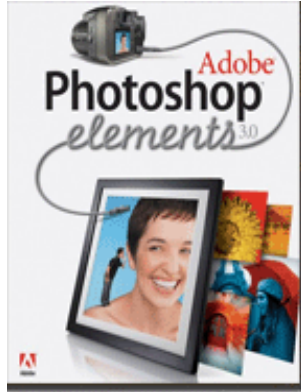
After installing the software, I went right to using the program. I was amazed at the numerous tools and editing functions the program had to offer. I have used many other editing programs. This one for the money stands out far and above any I have used previously. Many of the functions and tools are in other editing programs, but after using the tools in this program I found out that they had a little extra functionality, which made using them easier and much more flexible. One of the tools is the Healing Brush tool that alone is worth the money spent for the program. It not only takes the wrinkles or blemishes out of the faces in your pictures but may be used for countless other problems like helping to restore tears, rips, etc.

Another fantastic tool is one used by photographers is the Shadow/Highlight tool. This tool is one that is found in the much more expensive programs. It is used in those shots that some people would throw away because of the photo has too many dark shadows. Use it by simply going to the top menu and clicking Enhance when the drop down menu appears. You then click on adjust lighting and then Shadows/Highlights. By default this automatically reduces the shadows by 50%, You can then adjust the percentage to your liking by using the slider. When you open the tool, the preview box lets you see the before and after results. I wish Adobe had made it easier to find the too] by having an icon on the side menu where most of the other tools are found.

Digital cameras have come a long way in the last couple of years. One of the newer type files is the RAW file. It is like having a negative. The file contains all the data that the camera has taken. White balance to color tint can be corrected in this file and preserved without loss of resolution. It then can be used to make a different file such as a JPEG. This is a major feature in Adobe Elements for the more serious photographers letting them do corrections with 16-bit images (which are the most lifelike color images). You then can save your picture in another file format and retain the original without loss of resolution to the RAW file.

You have a choice of two editing programs by clicking on one of two icons a! the top menu, either Standard Edit or Quick Fix. It's difficult to give you all the features this program has to offer. I'll give you a short list to provide you with an idea of the value it has to offer. Creation Wizard gives a step by step way that simplifies creating movie style slide shows with voice and music, or creating a calendar or greeting cards. Quick Fix is a tool that lets you make color and lighting corrections with a single click. Noise removal can be performed to correct the grainy photo that you may have taken with a camera or the new low resolution camera phones. The cookie cutter tool gives you the case of having a frame around your picture like a heart, flower, butterfly, star, or many more.

Another part of the Elements 3.0 software program is the Organizer (formerly Adobe Photo Album). This is one fantastic feature that Adobe added to make this software package a super bargain. New in Elements 3.0, it's a separate program all in itself. Organizer gives you a photo album that you can sort and manage your photos making them easy to find. You can group your digital images by name, date, favorites, family, or just create a new category or sub-category. By right clicking an image you have many more options to choose to further your specific needs. A major drawback for Mac Users is that the Organizer is not offered in the Mac version.

Adobe has added many features in Elements 3.0 that Elements 2.0 does not have. They also have added features and tools that are found in the professional software Adobe Photoshop CS. Elements 3.0 has a street price of $99 and if you have a previous version of Elements there is a $20 rebate for the upgrade. If you are interested in a semi professional photo editing program you will be pleased to have this program. Because it is so full of features it takes a while to learn, but the more you use it the easier it becomes. The manual that comes with the program could give more help, but you will find many online tutorials and help forums that will make it fun and rewarding.

Adobe Elements .3.0 is one fantastic value, Anyone who is, serious or even semi- serious about digital photography, will want this product.

System requirements: Pentium 111 or 4 (or compatible) 800MHz or faster processor, Microsoft Windows XP Pro or Home Edition with service Pack I: Windows 2000 with Service Pack 4 or later, 256MB of RAM (51 2MB or more recommended), 800MB of available hard-disk space, Adobe Reader 6,0. 1 and Microsoft DirectX 9.0 software (included on application CD and installed if not already present).

Support: Web site knowledgebase, tutorials, etc are free at www.adobe.com
video tutorials at http://www.photoshop elementsuser.com Otherwise, paid support is available.

Adobe Systems Inc., 345 Park Avenue, San Jose, CA 95110-2704
408-536-6000

RSS Feeds

By Greg Lenihan
P*PCompAS

I believe I am an information junkie. I get more e-mail and subscribe to more newsletters than I can read. And yet I'm still searching for more. A few months ago, around the time of the presidential election, I discovered the world of Blogs (or Weblogs). These are online journals where authors post opinions and commentary and often link to the articles they are discussing. These often track back to more Blogs, and more authors worth reading, and before you know it, you can spend a good deal more time than you can afford searching for obscure opinions and facts.

After collecting a number of these sites as favorites in my browser, it became difficult to keep up with them every day. There are all kinds of subjects to choose from, but my favorites are news sites, political sites, and especially – technology sites. Most of these sites had: XML or RSS icons, which I knew had something to do with "feeds," so I decided to find out how to obtain the reader software necessary to subscribe to these feeds (or "channels").

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary. RSS is a text-based format (XML, actually) that contains various tagged items like a title, summary, and a link to a URL. Instead of you having to continually go from site to site to see if there have been updates posted, these sites are able to "feed" their updates to you. All you need is a news reader or what is called an RSS "aggregator." This is a program that collects and organizes these feeds periodically so you can read them when you want. Then you can subscribe to these sites and automatically get these new postings. It's like creating favorites or bookmarks, except you don' t have to continually go there. They come to you.

I started by going to http://reviews.cnet .com/4520-10088_7-5143460.html to read re-views and to gather recommendations. I found more options and more reviews of readers at http://email.about.com/cs /rssfeedreaders/tp/top_rss_windows.htm. There are many different readers; some free, some not, with different goals. Some are standalone, others work with Internet Explorer, and one worked with Outlook. But the one that caught my eye was free and did not require a software installation. Bloglines (http://www.bloglines.com) is Web-based, which means I can access it from any computer with an Internet connection. I could be at home, at work, on the road, and I could still get my info fix.

The sign up was quick at the Bloglines.com site. I was just asked for a username (e-mail address), password, time zone, and language. A confirmation message is then sent to your e-mail account. You simply click on a link they provide, and you' re confirmed. In addition, the site posts the top Blogs people enjoy, and with the click of a button you can subscribe. Of course, you are not limited to their selections. Any Blog or site with an RSS feed can be added to your aggregator. That is how you can use those XLM icons. If you click on one you'll see a lot of tagged text, much like HTML. But it supplies the link that enables you to subscribe by pasting this link into your aggregator.

Once you have your aggregator and get it running, all that is left is to find sites or Blogs whose content you are interested in. Your aggregator will probably offer you a number to choose from. To get an idea of what is out there, go to search-html and see the number of topics to pick from. I frequently subscribe to something that looks interesting and if it is not what I expected, it only takes a matter of seconds to unsubscribe. But actually right now, I have more feeds than I have time to read.

From the April 2005 issue of Bits Of Bytes, *the newsletter of the Pikes Peak Computer Application Society of Colorado Springs, CO.*

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 Un interruptible 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 & 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 pro-tection 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 email 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

300 Incredible Things

by Jack Fogarty
Central Maryland User Group

This Christmas our daughter gave me a little book (shirt-pocket size!) titled "300 Incredible Things to Do on the Internet." Actually, it's pretty good. The author is one Ken Leebow and he's cataloged umpteen websites and indexed them by subject. I certainly haven't tried anywhere near all, but they do seem useful.

One site mentioned is "How Stuff Works," at www.howstuffworks .com. A couple years back I looked at this same site, which was put up by a teacher named Brain (really). It's now been taken over by the Convex Company under HSW Media Review and expanded. My criticism before was that it played to the middle school crowd. If you knew *nothing* about a device, it gave you a good introduction, but if you needed technical details, they were lacking. This expanded version does much better, e.g. check out "flash memory" and you get a circuit diagram for one cell with a description of the charge path and the voltages used. Better. Not design detail but much better.

Another site Leebow mentions is www .globexplorer .com; I looked at the site and found satellite pictures of anywhere in the world. I zoomed in on my house and got amazing detail. Not aerial photography but you could tell the roof line from the driveway. Of course, the picture had their "watermark" all over it – if you want a clear print, they'll mail it to you for a price.

The book is copyrighted 2004 so I expect most of the websites are still current. I haven't made the time to check out very many, but I recommend this little databank for your enjoyment.

Something Worth Your Effort

Belarc Advisor is a utility that quickly inventories your PC and creates a report listing your installed hardware and software. Belarc Advisor creates a clean alphabetical lining of what is inside your PC without having to remove the case or write anything down. You should save the Belarc report on your machine and printed for reference. If you ever have a problem you may look up your hard drive' s manufacturer, size, and model). It even gives you the S.M.A.R.T. (Self Monitoring Analysis and Reporting Technology) information about your drive, it tells you how much memory you have and how many memory slots remain open. Belarc tells you how much video memory you have and what kind of sound card you have.

Anytime you purchase new software it is a good idea to compare your PC's Belarc report to the new software requirements. Belarc also gives you a complete list of all your installed hardware and software. There is no easy way in Windows to see or capture all of that information.

The Windows run command "msinfo32" is an alternative to Belarc but is a much more technical analysis and report. The msinfo32 report isn't designed to be read on the screen, printed, or saved as a useful file. Belarc Advisor is a free download from www.belarc .com

Society News

April Program Meeting

by Jim Murdock, Secretary

Dave Enright and Rob Linton of "Sound Bytes" treated Rochester Computer Society members and guests, at the Gates Library, to an entertaining and educational presentation. Dave and Rob both answered questions about PC computing but they also provided background on the "Sound Bytes" program; how it evolved, starting over 15 years and 8 months ago, into a "Computer Users Group of the Air" heard in 38 states and Canada.

Dave has been with computing from the beginning. A retired – with 27 years – "Kod-aker," he began with a Radio Shack TRS-80 and has stayed current with the industry ever since. His computer management company, "Enright PC Management" began in 1991 and continues to grow as a computer business presence not only in the Rochester area but also throughout New York State.

Rob Linton, who calls himself "The Reticent Producer" not only produces "Sound Bytes" but also he's the one who answers the calls for the "Sound Bytes" show. The show is on WHAM radio each Sunday from 1100 to 1300. Rob insists he doesn't in any way censor calls but instead selects those questions the answers to which would be most helpful to the most listeners.

Dave and Rob, taking questions from the audience, covered a wide range of topics from how to set up a home or small office wireless network to why is my monitor failing. Along the way, as they answered the questions, Dave and Rob entertained and educated us with bits of opinion and history about how computing evolved in Rochester and what they like and dislike about it. "Spam" and viruses top the latter list!

Giving some background to the issues regarding wireless networking, Dave said that Windows XP Pro, for many users, because of the extra security features it contains, often makes setting up and using a home wireless network unnecessarily difficult. Windows XP Home Edition often works better; also, there have been some instances of Windows XP 2 causing problems. Dave added that there are instances when using a wired instead of a wireless network is preferred. Security is one factor and wireless signal interference another.

In reply to more than one question Dave reminded everyone how important it is to back up your files. More than once! He recommends a program called "Ghost" as a good program for that purpose.

To several questions, Dave said a possible solution to the problem might be lack of current drivers. He

recommends free Driver Zone.com as a good place to start your search for the most up-to-date drivers.

Spam and viruses are a constant threat and as such requires a vigilant defense. Dave encouraged everyone to keep their virus program current and, in addition, to use SpyBot and Ad-Aware. Thunderbird for e-mail and Firefox as your browser will help. Dave uses Netscape 7.2, which he also recommends.

Questions were asked regarding monitors with poor colors and with indications of failure. While it's possible, of course, that the monitor in question is failing first check that all cable pins are correct. A bent pin can cause trouble. Check also that the current to the monitor is good. A separate computer circuit is best. A refrigerator or other such appliance can cause difficulties and false failure indications.

To the question of how to "clear" a hard drive before donating the computer Dave recommended using F disk and then reformatting. Other more aggressive steps are available but this should serve the purpose safely.

In closing Dave reminded everyone that many answers are available at the Sound Bytes Forum. He also invited everyone to a Sound Bytes Road Show program July 11 at the Greece Library. Adam Curry, developer of the iPod program will be the featured speaker.

The audience expressed their appreciation to Dave and Rob for a very entertaining and educational program.

Business Meeting

Arpad, with Steve, conducted the business meeting, in a change from the normal meeting schedule, at the beginning of the evening to allow more time for the featured speakers.

Steve asked that everyone keep his or her dues current. Some members are delinquent.

Arpad and Steve announced that beginning with the May issue, the Monitor will be printed using laser printers and that the cover will be printed in color. Not only will the printing of the Monitor be much improved it will require fewer people to work on the printing process each month.

Ron announced that on May 10, at the Brighton Library, he would give a presentation on Centrino wireless architecture.

Steve reminded everyone that a nominating committee is needed for a new slate of officers for next year. He also asked that people be thinking of new SIGs or special events that would be worthwhile for RCSi to encourage and develop.

The RCSi picnic will be on August 9 at the Perinton Town Park at 1830.

Planning Meeting Notes

April 19, 2005
by Jim Murdock

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

Arpad began the meeting with a request for comments on the last general meeting when Dave Enright and Rob Linton of WHAM's "Sound Bytes" gave a presentation. Everyone enjoyed and appreciated the presentation but Steve and others said that it would have been well if the presentation had been longer. Obviously there was much interest and more questions to ask.

Arpad, with Steve, next discussed the new *Monitor* printing process. The new printers were purchased and all tests are complete. The May issue of the *Monitor* will be printed using the new process i.e. all pages except the cover page will be printed using three duplex laser printers. The cover page will be printed in color on an Epson ink jet printer.

Ron discussed the upcoming presentations. He will give a presentation, in May, at the Brighton library, on Centrino technology and wireless networking. Door prizes will be available to each RCSi member compliments of Intel. Several possible future presentations were next discussed. Ron is working with representatives of *Smart Computing* magazine. They may be available for a presentation. A presentation on Open Office is also being considered.

Arpad has agreed to conduct Help's Half Hour for the foreseeable future.

Steve and Arpad gave details of the RCSi picnic to be held in August at the Perinton Town Park. Several items are needed for the picnic. Steve will ask the membership for help at the next meeting. Arpad noted that the picnic would include a flea market.

Steve proposed a new advertisement rate schedule. A full page on the Monitor would be $50.00 per issue or $500 per year. A half page would be $30 per issue and $300 per year. A one-quarter page would be a flat $15 per issue. The board agreed to these rates. Steve also reported that the RCSi treasury stands at $927.78 and noted that this balance is after having paid for the new printing equipment.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub, Treasurer

Balance as of 3/15/05	$1,609.32
Income	
Dues and donations	$315.00
Expenses	
Park Permit for picnic	$70.00
Postmaster	50.00
RCR&R (3 printers)	550.00
Home Depot (shelving)	197.00
St. Stephens	60.00
Total	$927.78
Balance as of 4/19/05	$996.54

New members:
Phil Mendola

Renewals:

Jack Baly	Bernice Blake
John Nicastro	Ted Zajac

RCSi sends a special thank you to the staff and management of EDI Tech for their donation of a desktop computer. We will be using this computer to print this newsletter.

If you have computer needs or problems please visit one of our friends who distribute our newsletter:

TheLighterSide

It isn't always the customer who's not with it:

Customer: "Hi, I can't seem to connect you guys are you having a problem?"
Tech Support: "Well sir, what dialup software are you using?"
Customer: "The one you provided."
Tech Support: "And what version is it?"
Customer: (says the version number)
Tech Support: "Oh, that's the problem you need the latest version."
Customer: "Ok, how do I get it?"
Tech Support: "Well, just transfer the file via FTP."
Customer: "Well that would be nice, but I can't connect to the Internet."
Tech Support: (sounding exasperated) "I told you just to FTP the file sir."
Customer hung up.

I use a cable modem ISP, one of North America's largest ISPs. During one of their interminable outages, I called to demand what the problem was.
Tech Support: "Is your computer on? Is the modem plugged in?"
Me: "Yes, it's on and working fine. The modem's plugged in, but it isn't getting anything from your end."
Tech Support: "Ok, can you click on the 'Start' button and type 'WINIPCFG'--"
Me: "Yes, I know. My IP is listed as 169 .XXX.XXX.XXX." This IP was the one Windows 98 usually gives when it's supposed to have one assigned to it but doesn't get one.
Tech Support: "Well, sir, that's the problem."
Me: "Yes, I know. I'm getting no IP. I'm not in the network."
Tech Support: "No, sir, the problem is that you're using a Mac."
Me: "I'm sorry?"
Tech Support: "Sir, your IP is a Mac IP. You're not using a PC."
Me: "Uhhh, I am using a PC. It's a Dell with an Intel PII-450 CPU. I'm running Windows 98."
Tech Support: "No, sir. Your IP indicates that your computer is a Mac. IPs that start with those numbers are used by Macs."
Me: "You know, I don't think it works that way. I'm pretty certain IPs are assigned based on where the computer is in a domain and a subdomain and such. I know all your IPs assigned in this area start with XXX. And I'm quite certain my computer is a PC."
Tech Support: "I don't think we use 'domain' here."
Me: "Can I speak to a supervisor, please?"