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Doh! Avoiding Self-Inflicted Computer Disasters

by Alan Luber

Author of *PC Fear Factor*:

The Ultimate PC Disaster Prevention Guide

“We have met the enemy, and he is us” –Walt Kelly

Who among us has not been the victim of a computer disaster at the hands of a virus writer, computer hacker, or some other factor beyond our control? We tend to think of computer disasters as having some external catalyst, but as they often say, most accidents occur in the home.

You are probably familiar with the old joke about the guy who walks into the doctor’s office and says, “Doc, it hurts when I do this.” The doctor’s sage advice is, “Don’t do that.”

And so it is with one of the most common types of computer disaster: the self-inflicted computer disaster, also known as the Homer Simpson computer disaster.

Here are four helpful tips for avoiding self-inflicted computer disasters.

Slow Down!

Haste is a major cause of self-inflicted computer disasters. For example, when installing an application, you may receive a pop-up window asking if you wish to overwrite a file that is present on your computer with a different version of that file. Similarly, when uninstalling an application, you may receive a message asking if you wish to delete a file from your computer that may no longer be needed. For the record, you should never allow an installation program to overwrite an existing file with an older version of that same file, and you should never allow an uninstallation program to delete a file if leaving it on your computer will do no harm. The problem is that, depending on how the question in the pop-up window is phrased, you may need to answer “yes” or “no” to effect the appropriate action. If you proceed hastily with the install or uninstall without carefully reading the question and pondering the response, you are likely to answer incorrectly and precipitate a computer disaster, overwriting or deleting something of vital importance.

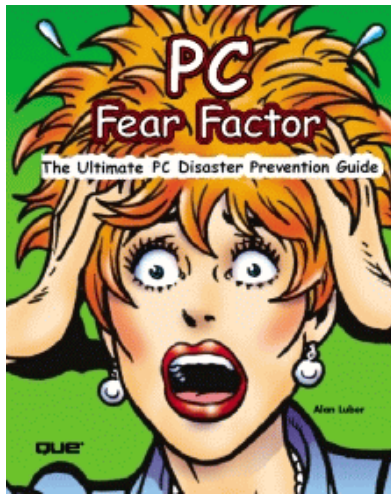
Don't Be Overzealous

In the old days, we had to squeeze every ounce of performance out of our slow computers and every megabyte of space out of our puny hard disks. Although this is no longer necessary in a world of 3Ghz processors and 160Mb hard disks, many have not abandoned this mentality, and it gets them into trouble more often than not. For example, there are dozens of web sites offering thousands of Windows XP tune-up tips. Most of these tips make me shudder because they provide imperceptible gains in performance at enormous risk. My advice here is simple: if it ain't broken, don't fix it.

And while there is nothing wrong with good housekeeping—keeping your hard disk clear of clutter and debris—I run into too many examples of bad housekeeping. (“Alan, I deleted a lot of stuff off of my computer that I didn't need and now my speakers don't work.”) If you are not absolutely certain whether something can be safely deleted from your system, leave it alone. As Dirty Harry said in *Magnum Force*, “A man's got to know his limitations.”

Don't Be Gullible

Every few weeks I receive an email warning me about a new computer virus. These messages tell me that if I have certain files on my computer, my computer has been infected and that I should immediately



delete these files. Such warnings are always virus hoaxes, intended to coax the gullible into deleting critical system files from their computers. Be suspicious of all such warnings. All antivirus software vendors have a section of their web site devoted to virus hoaxes. Before you take any action, verify that the virus warning you received was legitimate. (Hint: I have yet to receive such a warning that was legitimate.)

Unfortunately, antivirus software cannot protect us from ourselves. But wouldn't it be great if Symantec came out with Norton AntiGullible to com-

pliment Norton AntiVirus? I can see it now. A virus hoax from a well intentioned but uninformed friend arrives in my inbox. Norton AntiGullible swings into action, throwing up a warning message:

“Warning: you have just received an email message from an idiot advising you to delete critical files from your computer. This message has been automatically deleted to prevent you from shooting yourself in the foot, and a reply-all response has been automatically generated to help protect others on the message's distribution list.”

Why, the very thought of it brings a smile to my face.

Don't Be Reckless

The easiest way to cause a self-inflicted computer disaster is to make changes to your computing environment with reckless abandon. Computers are unstable equilibriums, and change and stability are mutually exclusive concepts. You may not realize this, but every time you install an application on your computer, you are making four implicit assumptions:

- The application will not conflict with your operating system, other applications, or hardware.
- The application's install program will not cause problems by automatically overwriting or modifying files that are shared by other applications.
- The application is well behaved and won't wreak havoc on your computer.
- The application will uninstall cleanly without leaving any vestiges of any problems it caused on your computer.

Given than any change to your computing environment can disrupt its tenuous, unstable equilibrium, it always amazes me that some people think nothing of downloading, installing, and trying dozens of software packages without regard for the potential disastrous consequences.

Here's a suggestion for how to avoid problems when trying new applications. Suppose you want to download and evaluate trial versions of six different photo management software packages. Before you download and install any of these applications, I urge you to take a complete backup of your hard disk using a disk imaging tool. I recommend Symantec's Norton Ghost for this purpose, and I provide detailed step-by-step instructions for backing up and restoring your hard disk in my book, *PC Fear Factor*.

After you have backed up your hard disk, download and install each of the applications and play with them to your heart's content. Once you are finished, instead of uninstalling the applications, restore your hard disk from your backup. This is the only approach that is absolutely guaranteed to get you back to the same point of equilibrium that existed prior to installing the applications. After you have restored your system, purchase and install the one package you have elected to use.

Alan Luber is an author, journalist, and technology consultant. His book, PC Fear Factor: The Ultimate PC Disaster Prevention Guide, is all about defensive computing. PC Fear Factor teaches non-technical computer users how to prevent most computer disasters, and how to prepare for and recover from unavoidable disasters. For more information about PC Fear Factor, as well as additional disaster prevention and recovery information, visit Alan's web site, <http://www.pcfearfactor.com> or visit <http://www.quepublishing.com>.

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Do Computers Get Tired?

by Bob Rankin

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

Sometimes my computer acts weird when it's been running for several days. I've heard about something called 'electron buildup' but I'm not sure I should take it seriously. Can electronic devices really suffer from fatigue if they're on too long?"

A Silver Bullet?

Until recently, I would have dismissed the notion that electronic gunk can accumulate in a machine and cause it to act erratically. But a few months ago my high-speed Internet connection, which is normally rock solid, started getting flaky. I unplugged my cable modem, plugged it back in and voila ... things were back to normal.

And since then I've repeated the procedure a few times with good results, whenever I noticed a slowdown in my Internet speed. So I started thinking ... maybe electronic devices and appliances really do get tired, clogged with electrons, or whatever. It turns out that there is some good science to support this layman's observation.

Jerrold Foutz is a Scientist with a capital S. There aren't many people alive who know more about how electronic gadgets (especially power supplies) are supposed to work. So you might be surprised to hear that when your computer, microwave, VCR or high-tech coffee pot isn't behaving, his best advice is "just unplug it."

Totally Cosmic, Dude

In a fascinating article on electronics trouble shooting, Foutz talks about something called a Single Event Upset (SEU) that can cause electronic circuitry to malfunction. An SEU can be caused by a power glitch, or a cosmic ray passing through a integrated circuit, and can actually flip the logic state (from 1 to 0 or vice versa) of a circuit. A cascading effect may trigger a hardware lockup or an infinite loop in software.

For lots more technical details, and even some suggestions on how better design can help to prevent this problem, see the full article on *Trouble Shooting Electronics* <http://www.smpstech.com/mtblog/trouble_shooting_electronics.html>.

Of course in the case of computers running complex operating system and application software, other factors may come into play. Sloppy coding practices can result in 'memory leaks' which over time will cause performance to degrade. But from the end user perspective, the problem looks no different than a hardware error caused by cosmic rays.

Fortunately, the solution is the same in both cases: shut it down, turn it back on, and things will be good again ... for a while.

Oodles of Google

by E. H. Black

We all know Google. We know it so well that the word Google is now a verb, as in "I googled you to find your address." There are other features of Google that you might not know about. The first is the calculator. In the Google search area, type "16x53" and the search result is 16x53=848. Or type 15% of 80 and you'll get the answer. The Google calculator can also do hexadecimal, octal, and binary numbers. <http://www.google.com/help/calculator.html>

Looking for a definition?

To see a definition for a word or phrase, simply type the word "define," then a space, and then the

word(s) you want defined. If Google has seen a definition for the word or phrase on the Web, it will retrieve that information and display it at the top of your search results.

PhoneBook

Google has added the convenience of U. S. street address and phone-number lookup. You'll see publicly listed phone numbers and addresses at the top of results pages for searches that contain specific kinds of keywords. To find listings for a U. S. business type the business name into the Google search box, along with the city and state. Or type the business name and zip code. Entering the phone number with area code will also return a complete business listing. To find listings for a U. S. residence type any of the following combinations into the Google search box:

- first name (or first initial), last name, city (state is optional)
- first name (or first initial), last name, state
- first name (or first initial), last name, area code
- first name (or first initial), last name, zip code
- phone number, including area code
- last name, city, state
- last name, zip code

Search by Number

Parcel tracking IDs, patents, and other specialized numbers can be entered into Google's search box for quick access to information about them. For example, typing a FedEx tracking number will return the latest information on your package. Special search by number types include:

- UPS tracking numbers
- FedEx tracking numbers
- USPS tracking numbers
- Vehicle ID (VIN) numbers
- UPC codes
- Telephone area codes
- Patent numbers
- FAA airplane
- FCC equipment Ids

Stock Quotes

You can use Google to get stock and mutual fund information. Just enter one or more NYSE, NASDAQ, AMEX, or mutual fund ticker symbols, or the name of a corporation traded on one of the stock indices. If Google recognizes your query as a stock or mutual fund, it will return a link that leads directly to stock and mutual fund information from high-quality financial information providers.

Travel Information

To see delays and weather conditions at a particular airport, type the airport's three letter code followed by the word "airport." For example, San Francisco

International Airport updates can be found by searching for "sfo airport."

Reverse Link Lookup

Some words, when followed by a colon, have special meanings to Google. One such word for Google is the link: operator. The query link: siteURL shows you all the pages that point to that URL. For example, link: www.Google.com will show you all the pages that point to Google's home page.

All of these features, can be found here: <http://www.google.com/help/features.html#number>

But there's more to check out, including the products that Google is currently working on:

<http://labs.google.com>

<http://www.google.com/options/index.html>

Google tests personalized news feed service

Google launched a test version of a new service on Friday that gathers reports from syndicated news sites and blogs across the web. The program, called Google Reader, lets users subscribe to material from selected sites and create a reading list that they can sort and organize. "Instead of continuously checking your favorite sites for updates, you can let Google Reader do it for you," Google explains. The offering features a search box that finds material based on the news source or the topic. Like other such tools, Google Reader relies on Really Simple Syndication, or RSS, and Atom technology, two popular document formats that alert internet users to the latest articles or postings on various websites.

The move is Google's latest effort around the trend of distributing news and updates via RSS and Atom technology. In August, the company incorporated news feeds into its popular Google News aggregation service but limited it to seven key subject areas designated by Google. http://news.com.com/oogole+tests+personalized+news+feed+service/2100-1038_3-5891166.html



From The DealsGuy

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

Once, during a McDonalds show I was a guard for the largest and most complete dinosaur skeleton ever found. It was discovered by Sue Henderson and McDonalds Corp. sponsored the recovery. I guess they knew better than to let me guard any of the food. I just worked the ASIS (American Society of Industrial Security) [<http://www.asisonline.org>] show. Colin Powell was one of the featured speakers. Exhibits occupied about 700,000 sq. ft. and attendance was 20,000, their best ever. I was assigned to the Videoprotein [<http://www.videoprotein.com>] booth whose owner and founder, Anthony Pugliese, is a collector of many unique items. In 1991

he bought the 38-caliber Colt Special that Jack Ruby used to shoot Lee Harvey Oswald on live TV. Mr. Pugliese purchased it at an auction from Jack Ruby's brother who had acquired it from the FBI 20 years after the shooting and needed money for legal fees. Mr. Pugliese paid \$250,000 and it is now valued at about seven million.

Being stationed there prevented me from browsing the show much, but I did check out some of the biometric lock products. Placing your finger on a pad or scanning your eye iris will open a lock, or initiate other functions if you like. There were also various security gates, special roll up doors and too many unique products to mention here. One company had a stranded steel cable to install around your property that, if breached, will tell you exactly where it happened and can even initiate camera action. Some cameras can detect motion and initiate a camera sequence to follow the action, also notifying the office of the activity. You could easily spend two days or more at that show. One evening the show rented Universal Studios for the attendees and my wife and I worked checking the attendees entering. Since there were drinks inside, we placed wristbands on people under the age of 21 identifying them as minors to bartenders who also checked people. Food and drinks of all kinds were all free inside the park, and attendees enjoyed all the rides free. Too bad you missed that show!

Zio Corp. Is Acquired

I'm sorry that the PDF file with the rebate forms for the Zio Corp. products were not posted on my Web site. It turns out that Zio Corp. was acquired by Smart Disk and I have to assume that everybody was very busy with whatever changes would take place. However, Zio has some of the rebate forms posted on their own Web site and I hope what was there filled your needs.

What's in Your Computer?

Here is another data gatherer that sounds good. Bob Balogh writes a monthly column called "Window Pains" for *Boca Bits*, newsletter of the Boca Raton Computer Society Inc. and it's always very informative. In the May '05 issue, he wrote about Everest Home Edition 1.51 (version 2.20 at this writing) that will collect all the important information about your computer. I won't list all the information it collects here, but you can find that out at [<http://www.lavalys.com>]. Best of all, the home edition is free. Bob is not the only person who authors informative columns each month in *Boca Bits* and you can access their newsletter at [<http://www.brcs.org>]. You'll find it interesting.

Punch Software

I hope some of you took advantage of the rebates for Punch! Software products that offer excellent tools for designing your home or for your remodeling project. Because of updates, I had to pull the ones planned for this month at the last minute, but hope to feature their products again soon.

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>].

Media Notes

by Bill Pettit

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

eBay to Buy Skype for \$2.6 Billion in Cash

StockeBay has agreed to buy the fast-growing Internet start-up Skype in a move to add free Web telephone calls to its online auctions and fuel growth, the companies confirmed.

The auctioneer said it plans to pay \$1.3 billion in cash and \$1.3 billion in stock for the Web communications company. It would make a further payout of up to \$1.5 billion by 2008 or 2009 if financial targets are met, giving the deal a total value of up to \$4.1 billion, executives of the two companies said.

eBay is renowned for an Internet business model linking millions of buyers and sellers, but its core U.S. market is maturing, slowing to annual growth of between 20 percent and 30 percent a year, compared with 50 percent international growth.

Skype, which said it expects revenue of \$60 million this year and more than \$200 million in 2006, has raced to the lead in the booming Net telephony market, which is being aggressively targeted by online powerhouses like Yahoo, Google and Microsoft.

In just two years, Skype has attracted 54 million members to its free Internet-based voice service and is on pace to roughly double in size within a year.

Skype, whose software allows consumers to make free or low-cost phone calls anywhere in the world via the Internet, would be the biggest buy so far for 10-year-old eBay.

In a move to strengthen the bonds between eBay buyers and sellers, the company will also encourage eBay merchant sites to use Skype software to allow customers with last-minute sales questions to click to talk to a customer service agent.

October Was National Cyber Security Awareness Month

by James Katz
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The month of October is designated as National Cyber Security Awareness Month once again this year by the National Cyber Security Alliance (NCSA), a not-for-profit public-private partnership dedicated to promoting awareness and education about computer security. Working with sponsors in the government, such as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), as well as corporate and computer industry partners in the private sector, the NCSA began the initiative of celebrating October as Cyber Security Awareness Month last year to increase the computing public's attention to computer security issues, enhance their recognition of computer threats and vulnerabilities, and motivate them to better prepare for, prevent, and respond to computer security risks.

The goal of the NCSA initiative is to reach millions of users in homes, small businesses, schools, colleges, and universities, as well as those in corporations and government. According to NCSA President, Ken Watson, the mission of the NCSA is "to reach out to all Americans—not just the computer experts," through a campaign of media announcements and national and regional events, such as presentations, workshops, conferences, and fairs, dealing with topics like identity theft, computer scams, safe behavior practices on the Internet, and child safety online. (For information about events in your area, check with your local college or university, look at the listings at www.staysafeonline.info/events/index.html, or go to the Multi-State Information Sharing Analysis Center's Web site at www.cscic.state.ny.us/msisac/ncsa/oct05/index.htm to find out what events your state government may have planned.)

Threats to Security

More and more people are using computers to connect to the Internet to communicate with others, conduct their personal banking, and shop and make purchases online. As computer users spend more time online, and make more use of broadband connections or wireless networks to do so, they become increasingly at risk for harmful attacks if they do not take steps to protect their computers.

And the risk is there and growing. According to the DHS, computers connected to the Internet are scanned to assess their setups and weaknesses an average 17 times a day. Estimates attributed to the FBI suggest that one in four computers will be hacked

this year. Phishing scam attempts have been reported by Symantec, the security software vendor, to now exceed over 33 million each week. At the same time, 49 per cent of people surveyed were not able to recognize such e-mail as a Phishing scam, as indicated by research by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center. A study of home users conducted for NCSA last year by America Online (AOL) found that 63 percent of respondents admitted to ever having a virus on their computers. And, according to the NCSA's Ken Watson, "Industry projections note that by year end, Internet users will have been confronted by an estimated 100,000 forms of malicious code. About 91 percent of PCs today are infected with spyware programs that send information from your PC to an unauthorized third party." He further pointed out that "more than 185 million Americans own computers connected to the Internet—cyber security should become second nature, just like brushing our teeth."

Despite growing threats to the security of information and technology systems, attitudes and practices of computer users have changed little, if at all, even as reliance on computing and information technology is increasing at all levels of use. Even though surveys have found that computer users' concerns about cyber security risks have increased over past years, users have failed to make prevention or response measures a priority.

Perhaps it is due to users perceiving the pervasiveness of cyber threats as far less common than the reality. In a survey of average computer users, the NCSA found that many people fail to grasp the level of risk: over 30 percent reported believing they were more likely to be struck by lightning, win the lottery, or be audited by the IRS than become the victim of a cyber attack or privacy breach. Yet the actual odds of suffering a cyber attack are about 70 percent, while the odds of each of the other events are well under one percent.

The Need for Cyber Security

The risk of an attack is great, and the consequences of failing to prevent the potential damage can be devastating. You may not even realize the full extent of the consequences if your system is hacked or infected with malicious software ("malware"), such as a computer virus, worm, or Trojan horse. Some of the consequences can include:

- **Data loss:** The data you collected and the work you spent so much time producing can be destroyed. If you do get hacked or infected, you need to be able to identify what was damaged, and then restore the data from your backup systems. Computer downtime can cost money as well as time

while files or hardware are fixed, and time and effort must be redirected to restore or redo the original work.

- **Corruption of data:** If your data is not completely lost, it may be corrupted. If the data has been changed, but not destroyed or removed, this may be hard to discover. If you do, you will have to figure out which data is good and which is bad, and this can be difficult and painstaking. If you don't discover there is corrupted data right away, you may be working when you experience a "cascade failure," a problem that occurs when failure in one system takes down adjoining systems in a progressive series. Problems may then spread throughout your systems before the errors are discovered. It can take substantial time and effort to track down the initial problem and restore your computer's systems from backups.
- **Theft of data:** Some kinds of data are more attractive targets than others. Of course, anything associated with money is a prime target, such as credit card numbers and banking account information. Personal data, such as social security numbers, are often sought for identity theft to commit fraud.
- **Misuse of data:** Your work may be stolen by others at your school or business and represented as their own, or your personal photos or information could be taken and made public. If your records, trade secrets, financial data, or other sensitive information wound up in the hands of your company rival, business competitors, or even a stranger seeking to cause embarrassment, could you be at risk for losing the grant, account, promotion, job, or reputation you'd been working hard to achieve?
- **Noncompliance with legal responsibilities:** If your computer is hacked or infected and used to send out pornography or spam e-mail, you may be held legally liable for allowing such unlawful practices. Even if you did not know of it or intend for such e-mail to be sent, you could be judged at fault for failing to prevent or stop it from happening.
- **Becoming part of a larger problem:** Infection of your computer or network with a malware that sends out numerous e-mails can perpetuate the problem of spam and propagate more infections. If your computer is taken over by a hacker and used to take part in an attack on a federal or corporate mainframe computer, then your computer could possibly become an instrument of cyber terrorism intended to disrupt financial or governmental operations.

As this last factor points out, cyber security not only is a concern for each of us individually, it is a concern for us collectively. As Ron Teixeira, NCSA's Executive Director remarked, "The scope and impact of existing and emerging online threats requires an ongoing partnership between government, businesses, schools, and consumers. Working together, we can make the Internet safer for everyone." Making your personal computer secure can play a crucial part in protecting the nation's Internet infrastructure.

Cyber Security Practices

To determine whether you've made the security of your computer system or network a priority, consider the following questions:

- Do you select strong passwords and keep them private?
- Do you use a password protected screen saver?
- Do you keep your computer locked up when not in use?
- Do you make sure important and sensitive personal information is not stored on your system?
- Do you use a software or hardware firewall, or both, and have you configured it properly?
- Do you use anti-virus and anti-spyware software, and do you keep them up to date?
- Do you exercise caution when opening e-mail attachments?
- Do you know where to report spam or fraudulent e-mail?
- Are you aware of the risks in file sharing?
- Do you download and install operating system and application software security patches as they become available?
- Do you back up your important files?

According to a number of cyber security experts, the first step in keeping your computer secure is to limit access to it by unauthorized users. If you use your computer in a setting where others are around, such as in a library or office, this means physically securing the machine. Locking up the computer when not in use, and using password protected access and screen savers keeps strangers from sitting down at your machine and exploring your files.

Passwords should be strong (i.e., difficult to guess or discover), and never shared with others. As Cliff Stoll, an authority on security, suggested, "treat your password like your toothbrush—don't let anyone use it and get a new one every six months." You can use random password generators, such as those found at sites like www.securityawareness.com/files/rpg.exe or www.toad.net/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/spwgroup/lc.pl. If you suspect your password has been learned, change it immediately.

To limit access to your system by way of the Internet be sure to use firewall software or hardware, or both. And be sure it is configured correctly to allow in and out only those communications you want. According to the NCSA survey conducted by AOL, mentioned earlier, only 37 percent of the respondents currently used some sort of firewall on their computer; 87 per cent believed they had set up their firewall correctly, yet 72 percent were found to have an improperly configured firewall on their computer.

Despite using a firewall, sometimes viruses, spyware, and other malware can still get into your computer system, often through e-mail or file sharing.

Security experts say you should make sure you have anti-virus and anti-spyware software installed, and scans are being run (at least on a weekly basis). To avoid having to rebuild your entire system after malware has taken root, it must be detected, quarantined, and deleted before damage is done. And be sure to keep the protective software current by updating it regularly, if not automatically; protective software is useless if it doesn't know what the latest threat is to protect against. A number of different protective software applications are available, either free or at low cost; the National Capital Technology and Computer User's Group has a comprehensive table, with links to sources, comparing various anti-virus and anti-spyware programs on their Web site at www.nctcug.org/protection.html.

To minimize the risk of receiving malware through e-mail, it is best to not respond to any messages, click on any web page links, or open any attachments you have any questions about. Experts recommend that you use encrypted e-mail, and not send confidential or sensitive information via e-mail. If you get questionable or apparently fraudulent e-mail, you should report it to the network administrator, your Internet Services Provider, and the appropriate authorities.

More Precautions

A number of other precautions are recommended to protect your computer from harm and to preserve your data and privacy. If you use a wireless network, be sure to secure it with the appropriate protocols. If you use a broadband connection, turn off your computer or disconnect it when not in use so that unwanted communications cannot be sent or received when its activity is not monitored.

Be careful about what is getting into your computer by other means, as well. Do not use software that has not been obtained from a known source. Do not share files from your computer, and use caution in loading files from others through removable media, such as floppy disks, CDs, zip drives, tape cartridges, and other types of storage. And be sure to keep secure

any of these removable media on which you've stored your data; keep removable data storage media locked up, destroy the material when you're finished with it, and make sure your computer's hard drive is wiped clean when time to dispose of it.

One important cyber security practice that is often overlooked is that of backing up your data and your systems. Consider how secure you'd feel if you couldn't rely on the information you're working with, or depend on your computer to operate properly. If any of your cyber security measures are breached, and your computer files are deleted, corrupted, or intentionally or accidentally falsified, or if your hard drive fails, at least you can reestablish a reliable system if you have your information safely backed up. Make sure that you back up your data on an on-going basis, that what is backed up can be restored, and that you have copies of your operating system and software applications, with all their security patch updates.

Vigilance Rewarded

NCSA's initiative to raise awareness about cyber security nationwide and empower people to improve their security knowledge and preparedness includes a number of events during the month of October, and a variety of resources all year long. You can find out more, and pick up cyber security tips, at the NCSA Web site, www.staysafeonline.info. More cyber security information is available at other sites, such as www.cybercitizenship.org, www.ftc.gov/bcp/conlineedcams/infosecurity, and www.cert.org. An assortment of items about cyber security, as well as links to other articles, is also available at www.microsoft.com/security/default.mspx.

The fact is that no computer connected to a network can be assured of being 100 percent secure 100 per cent of the time. No one security measure is sufficient to protect your computer from all threats at all times. Each measure requires continual care to make sure it is operating, and all necessary updates and security patches are obtained and installed on a regular and timely basis.

Cyber security may seem like a substantial burden, but the effort is an investment that can be greatly rewarded. If you are not interrupted by a security breach, you can focus on moving forward rather than spending your time trying to recover and catch up. Continually seeking the latest information about cyber security, keeping yourself educated about security issues, staying vigilant about computer vulnerabilities, and consistently exercising good protective practices online can make the difference in preventing the hardship of destroyed data, lost time, duplicated effort, and disrupted progress.

Tech News

by Sue Crane
Vice President & Editor
Big Bear Computer Club, CA

Nothing is Ever Really FREE

Linus Torvalds, creator of the Linux OS, has begun protecting his trademark for the term Linux. He's doing so to protect users from unauthorized and confusing use of the name. Torvalds first trademarked Linux several years ago but has rarely defended its use. The licensing fees for Linux are modest. LMI is charging \$200 to \$5,000 for each license; most sublicensees end up paying \$200 to \$500. Most Linux companies have enthusiastically agreed to the licensing terms.

AMD Asks Intel for a duel

Major US newspapers in September showed an AMD processor standing in a boxing ring waiting for Intel to appear for a duel later this year so consumers can see who has the best dual core processor. Dual-core chips have two processor cores on a single piece of silicon, boosting performance and reducing power consumption compared to two single-core processors. AMD released its first dual-core Opteron processors earlier this year. Intel said that it will release its first dual-core server chips later this year, ahead of its original schedule. But regarding the duel, Intel was not available for comment.

PC Has Water-Cooled Radiator

NEC took the wraps off its Valuestar G Type C, a new desktop PC that has a radiator embedded in the water cooler unit built into the back of the chassis. The company said the added refrigeration will let consumers overwork the included Intel Celeron processor but keep the PC running at 30 decibels, which is whisper voice. PC noise is increasingly a concern as more powerful computers require stronger and often louder cooling systems.

New IE 7.0 is for Windows Only!

Sources at Microsoft have announced that IE 7.0 will henceforth be referred to as Windows IE 7.0, highlighting the fact that the browser is integrated with Windows and isn't a standalone product. According to a source at Microsoft, the change signifies that IE will no longer be available for other platforms. Users should simply consider IE 7.0 to be part of Windows.

No More Textbooks?

Students at Empire High School in Vail, AZ started class this year with no textbooks. Instead, the school issued laptop computers to each of its 340 students, becoming one of the first U.S. public schools to turn away from printed textbooks. Empire High,

which opened for the first time this year, was designed specifically to have a textbook-free environment.

TMPs Make E-Commerce Safer

Trusted Platform Modules, if you've never heard of them, are chips that store cryptographic information needed to unlock hard drives, authenticate network log-ons and perform similar tasks. What is exciting about TPMs is their role in electronic transactions because they make sure the money and the product get to their proper destinations, via "anonymous certificates." Hacking such a certificate would not give criminals access to personal information such as credit card numbers, since the transaction is done on your side of the network, not on the server-side.

eBay Rethinks Recycling

Faster, more advanced computers, cell phones and electronics offer endless possibilities for enrichment, learning and entertainment. But as consumers and businesses keep pace with the introduction of exciting new products, we are faced with a mounting challenge: what to do with the products we're upgrading from. The Rethink Initiative brings together industry, government and environmental organizations to offer a fresh perspective and new answers to the challenge of e-waste. On their website you can find information, tools and solutions that make it easy—and even profitable—to find new users for idle computers and electronics, and responsibly recycle unwanted products. <<http://rethink.ebay.com/>>

The Laptop Desk - UltraLite

by Edith Wurster
Tampa Bay Computer Society

Aside from dropping your notebook on a tile floor or drowning it in a spilled latte, the worst enemy of your laptop is heat, which is the number one cause of laptop malfunction.

LapWorks has developed a new Laptop Desk, the Ultralite, which was created for ultra portables and thin, light notebooks that are five pounds and under. The Ultralite has been scientifically proven to cool your laptop computer by 15% to 20%. It only weighs 14.6 ounces; unfolded the size is 22"x11"x 5/16"; folded it is 11 5/16" x 11" x 5/16" and will slip into a pocket in most laptop carrying cases. (LapWorks has an earlier Laptop Desk, version 2.0, for the heavier laptops but that one weighs 1 lb. 6 oz.) When used as a laptop desk, the Ultralite also extends far enough on either the right or left side of the unit for a mouse. As with previous models there are the same heat-reducing ventilation channels. There are also ample no-slip rubberized pads on the top and bottom of the unit to give maximum grip, stability and increased ventilation.



In addition to using the Ultralite as the Laptop Desk, this unit can also be used on a desk or table top. Just fold the unit as if you were closing it, but position the steel support arm into one of the five pre-set incline positions. The rubberized grips hold the laptop firmly in place and the ventilation channels provide air circulation.

The Laptop Desk Ultralite can be ordered directly from the company. The reference material that comes with the unit is great. It explains everything about Ultralite with pictures demonstrating how to use it as well as lists of their companion accessories. Most important, you can reach this company. They have a very informative web page with complete information about their products, how to order, and any combo sales offers. A call to customer service connected me to a live operator right away. The Ultralite sells for \$29.95 plus s/h. If anyone travels and does a lot of work with their laptop, this unit is a must. I highly recommend it.

Web: www.LaptopDesk.net,

Email: customerservice@laptopdesk.net, Phone: 1-877-527-9675.

Reprinted from the October 2005 issue of Bits and Bytes, newsletter of the Tampa Bay Computer Society.

The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman
SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

Hard Drive Too Small?

If you think a 500 GB is still not big enough, help is on the way, in what seems to be an obvious way. If you think of a room filled with people all stretched out on the floor, you can cram in a lot more folks if you

have everybody stand up, right? As it turns out, the magnetic elements on current hard drives are lying down on the job, but now several manufacturers, including Hitachi and Seagate, have figured out a way to make the lazy critters stand up on the disk and squeeze them closer together. It must be easier said than done, considering how long it took to implement this technology, but now Seagate is announcing a new 2.5" minidisk, named Momentus, that will hold 160 GB, 20% more than the highest-capacity 2.5" drives currently available. It sounds like magic, and the name, Momentus, suggests that Harry Potter had something to do with it. The new disks will be shipped early next year. Seagate anticipates that regular hard drive capacity will jump to 2500 GB (2.5 TB) in 3-5 years. (*PC Magazine*, 8/9/05)

How Much Is That Program in the Windows?

In the good old days, when you purchased the latest version of MS-DOS you were free to install it on as many computers as you owned, and many a copy was shared with friends and neighbors as well. That has changed, as we all know, and many expensive programs can now only be installed on a single computer, whether we like it or not.

Large commercial programs used in the business world have usually been licensed per seat, based on the number of computers the program was installed on. Some small engineering companies that obtained a single copy of expensive Autodesk and used it on multiple computers were fined and lost their use of the program when they got caught.

As CPUs have been getting faster, computer productivity has gone up, to the benefit of the users. Although most providers have increased their license fees to some extent as the programs improved, fees have mostly continued to be charged per seat or per CPU.

Now the trend to faster computers is to increase the number of CPUs on a single chip instead of making single ones faster, and some software companies want to charge their fees on a per CPU basis. They are mainly concerned about the many backroom computers used as servers dishing out data over computer networks to employees. Oracle and IBM have been in the forefront of the pricing battles, but seem to be compromising on an individual basis. Microsoft has unexpectedly taken the side of the users and licenses its software at the same cost for single-core or multiple-core processors. That may have something to do with the threat of Linux and its Open Source programming model that is looking more and more attractive to many businesses as the cost of Windows-based software keeps increasing. (*The Economist*, 7/16/05, thanks to Louis Ritz.)

Too much security?

Recently I had occasion to help someone straighten out the connections between their computers and the router. The router had been set up by an expert, using all its available security features. Unfortunately, he left behind a jumble of notes about procedures and passwords that seemed to be incomplete or wrong. In the end all we could do was reset the router and start over again. That made me think about how much security we really need.

Most of us live in homes with maybe two locks on the front and back doors, possibly with an added bolt for extra security at night. That will keep most amateur burglars out, but a determined crook will find a way to get in anyhow. So be it, unless you live in a big city apartment where it is smart to live behind a steel door with multiple locks set in a reinforced frame.

The same goes for routers. To keep occasional snoopers out of your network takes only a few simple changes to be made on the router's access page.

- Replace the default password needed to access the set up screen with a secure one that is easy to remember (an old street address is good, as it contains letters and numbers). Also change the default user name, if your router lets you.
- On the wireless access page change the SSID name to a secure one.
- On the same page uncheck the option to broadcast the SSID name.

Forget about all the other security options, including WEP or WPA encryption, unless someone could have good reason to spend lots of time and talent guessing your setup information and ruin you in doing so. Just because it can be done doesn't mean anyone will actually go to the trouble! Just make sure to write down the user name, password and the SSID. And if you forget anyway, it only takes a few minutes to reset the router all over again.

Recovered Printer Cartridge

The other night I set out to print a first birthday picture of our black-and-white Cocker Spaniel, Bonnie. As the picture emerged from the printer, an older HP-812C, the top half looked OK but the bottom half was faded red. Clearly, one or two of the three colors in the color cartridge were depleted. Just because of such happenings, I always keep an extra cartridge on hand, in the refrigerator to keep it fresh. That may have been a bad idea.

I installed the spare cartridge, aligned it, and printed out the picture. The black snoot of the dog came out looking distinctly bluish. Back in the image editor I darkened the black parts of the image and printed it out again. Same result, distinctly bluish. Continuing the next evening, a test page indicated

that the yellow color of the cyan-magenta-yellow cartridge was not printing. I used the printer's utilities to clean the cartridge and to prime the inks, without luck. I took the cartridge out and carefully cleaned the print head with 90% pure rubbing alcohol, still without success.

I was ready to give up on the cartridge and buy a new one when one more possibility occurred to me. I double-bagged the cartridge in two ZipLoc bags and immersed it for 20 minutes in a pan of hot tap water. That did the trick, Bonnie printed out just fine. From now on no more storing of color cartridges in the refrigerator!

AdSubtract, Good Bye!

For years I have used AdSubtract to block nuisance ads while browsing. These days ads are no longer just nuisances, as some are harmful and require stronger counter-measures. I still have AdSubtract on my older system, but its update button is no longer active. A Google search indicates that Intermute, AdSubtract's parent, has been acquired by Trend Micro. AdSubtract has been combined with Trend-Micro's SpySubtract Pro to form Trend Micro Anti-Spyware 3.0, which is only compatible with Windows XT or 2000.

Expect the Unexpected When Traveling Abroad

by Lynn L. Kauer, Editor
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My wife and I recently went on a river cruise from Vienna, Austria starting with the Danube River. As we continued our trip on the Danube through Germany, we connected with the Main River that allowed us to travel over the mountains and connect with the Rhine River. The trip ended in Amsterdam in the Netherlands (Holland). This trip was for a period of three weeks and was on a boat that only held 150 persons, including the crew. We are more accustomed to the 'big' ships with upwards of 2,400 passengers plus crew containing all the amenities like an onboard shop to download the photos from the digital memory cards onto CD's. I knew that this service would not be available on the riverboat and became a bit concerned with respect to what I would do if I 'filled' all of my digital storage.

My camera is a Sony DSC-F717 and uses "Memory Sticks" for digital storage. (Other cameras may use Secure Digital, Compact Flash Cards or XD cards depending on the manufacturer.)

Although the camera is capable of taking photos at five mega pixels (2,560 x 1,020 JPEG image size), I

adjust the settings downward to (2,048 x 1,536 JPEG image size). I also adjust the setting to 'fine' mode instead of 'standard' mode. This allows me to save approximately 80 photos on a 128MB stick instead of only 50 if I were to shoot at the five-mega pixel setting.

I own ten 128MB plus three 256MB memory sticks. Doing the simple math, they are capable of storing 1,280 photos. While it may seem like a lot, it really is not. I used almost all of their storage capacity on our last two-week trip to the Mediterranean while visiting Italy, Greece, Turkey and Croatia.

On that trip, we sailed miles off the coast and there was no opportunity to take photos until we landed ashore. On the river cruise we would be traveling through the scenic vistas of three countries plus having stops along the way. I was concerned with having enough storage because we would be traveling for three weeks.

After the first day I quickly learned that there are a lot more things that one should worry about than digital storage. Some of the things contained in this article will surprise you and hopefully give you some insight as to what you should think about when traveling abroad whether on ship, train, bus or car.

Resolution

As stated above, I lower the resolution to approximately three mega pixels on my camera. One of the passengers had a camera like mine. As we chatted, he told me that he had recently purchased the camera for the trip and was finding it easy to use. He previously owned a 35-mm film camera. We somehow got on to the subject of storage and I asked him how many 'sticks' he had. His reply, "Just the one that came with the camera. I can get all of the photos on the stick that I expect to take while traveling. I can get almost 800 photos on the stick."

This is when I learned that the salesperson had changed the resolution on his camera to the lowest possible setting. In other words-Internet resolution. When I asked him if he intended to make prints he replied, "Oh yes. But none larger than 8 x 10." He was the type who knew everything about everything so I found a way to let him snap away and disappeared into the crowd.

I also bumped into another poor fellow who really had a problem. He bought his camera real cheap in a pawn shop a week before the trip. The camera stored everything on a permanent chip inside the camera. The salesperson had told him that all he had to do was to go into any photo store and they would be able to transfer his photos to a CD with no problem. At this point, only three days into a sixteen-day cruise, his camera was full. Worse, he could not find a store that could provide the service for him.

Onboard the 'big' ships the service is readily available for a fee. On the riverboat, they had no provisions for this service. The crew attempted to help him by downloading the photos onto their computer but they too bumped into a brick wall. He never received the instructions or the CD that contained the necessary software with which to unload the photos to a computer. His photo shooting days ended early.

Power

As stated earlier, I was concerned with having enough storage space for photos. (Incidentally, I shot almost 1000 photos.) The first option I thought about was to get an adaptor that would allow me to download the photos onto a laptop computer. However, this idea was short lived because carry-on luggage space is limited. International flights limit the passenger to one piece of carry-on luggage and the size is restricted. Secondly, carrying laptops through airport security is a royal pain. Therefore, I decided that I would become a 'selective' photographer and not try to capture every photo opportunity I saw.

When traveling in Europe one must keep in mind that 110-volt power is not available. All of the electrical power in Europe is 240-volt and not all of the plugs are the same from country to country. My first purchase was to buy a transformer to adjust the voltage for a 110-volt external battery charger. It's about the size of a small flashlight, costs less than \$25 and allows me to use it in any country.

This is where I bumped into the first problem. I didn't read all of the instructions that came with the transformer. The first occasion I had to use it was while in the hotel in Vienna. That is where I learned that the voltage was 240-volt and 50-cycle. The instructions clearly stated to not allow it to be plugged into the outlet for more than an hour or it would become overheat and possibly damaged. Therefore, I plugged the transformer into the outlet and let the battery recharge for shorter periods.

When we boarded the ship the only outlet available was in the bathroom. There were two outlets available. One noted for use with an electric razor only-110-volt. The other outlet was for 240-volt appliances. I used the 240-volt outlet with the transformer for one hour time periods to recharge the camera batteries without a problem.

Alas, two of our shipmates were not so lucky. One plugged his charger into the 110-volt outlet and failed to pay attention to the time. Two hours later, when he entered the cabin, he found his charger smoking. The problem is the 50-cycle current. It burned it up. The other shipmate was less fortunate. He plugged the cord into his camera to recharge the battery. It also caused damage to the built-in charger and he now had

a dysfunctional camera. I make it a practice to never use the camera to recharge the battery unless it is absolutely necessary.

Internet Cafés and Keyboards

While in our hotel in Vienna I found a computer, that one could rent for Internet access. The rental rate for Internet access was three euros for fifteen minutes. This means \$4.95 per quarter hour or about twenty bucks an hour.

Because of the committees Crystal and I are involved in, we wanted to know what the latest information was. This is when we learned that attachments do not get transmitted overseas. This was very frustrating because we attempted twice later in different cities with the same result.

The interesting thing I learned on the first attempt was when I tried to send an e-mail to the sender that had the attachment. When I typed the message a lot of the letters were mixed up. For example, the S key would be displayed as a “&,” the “P” key would display as an “X” and the “R” key would come up as a “>”. The keyboard layout doesn’t match that of ours!

When I got it cleaned up and attempted to send it I received an error message that I had been logged off meaning that I had spent five bucks for nothing. This wasn’t unique to the hotel’s computer. It was common at other sites as well. The result was that we were out of contact with anyone online for a month because things just don’t interface as we expect them to.

I had bumped into the keyboard layout problem a couple of years earlier in England but it wasn’t as complex as being in Germany. Imagine what it would be like in China or some other remote country. The connection speeds were a step back in time. While some sites boasted cable and broadband access, the speed was similar to 56KB modems. I should have realized what the speed differences were as almost every home had an antenna on the roof!

How Do You Spell Relief?

What does one do when they get sick in a foreign country? You call your doctor, right? Nope! Our shipmate had quadruple bypass surgery a couple of years earlier. About half way through the trip, he got a sore throat and a severe cold. He failed to bring medication along to take care of this condition. This became a big problem for him.

Since the time differential was six hours, and he got sick on a weekend, he was unable to contact his doctor in the states. He sent a fax to his doctor’s office to learn that the office staff turns off the machines when they leave work. Thus, for us it was noon and his doctor’s office was already closed because it was 6:00pm.

While ashore he tried to make a phone call but his doctor’s answering machine told him to call another number in the event of an emergency. The other number had a message to the effect, “the doctor is not in right now. Please leave a phone number where he can contact you.” Since we were ‘at sea so to speak’ there was no way for the doctor to call back.

After two days, the ship managed to contact his doctor who faxed a prescription to the ship via a satellite link while tied up in port. However, when he took it to the pharmacy, the pharmacist refuse to fill it because it was written in English and not from a doctor recognized as being in Germany. So, what’s the point? When traveling abroad try to anticipate the unexpected for medications that may require a prescription.

In my case, I became ill during the second week having caught the ‘cold’ of the fellow trying to contact his doctor. My only alternative was to talk to a pharmacist for some ‘over the counter’ medication. It didn’t work very well.

When I arrived home and found myself unable to sleep in a bed. The first night was spent dozing on the recliner. The next morning I met with my doctor and took the medication I had purchased with me.

He pulled out the instructions from the package and exclaimed, “Everything is written in German. Why don’t they write in a generic language in English so that we could understand what they are telling us?” I replied, “Doc, we were in Germany. How many ‘over the counter’ medications in our country are written in German.” He looked at me with a sly grin and realized the folly of what he had asked.

From now on, when we travel abroad we will take some of the ‘over the counter’ medications that we use from time to time with us. We found aspirin a bit difficult to find as it was ‘blended’ with other unpronounceable things. The rule to follow is the same as going to a cheap party—BYOB (Bring Your Own Bottle). In this case, BYOM (Bring Your Own Medicine).

Society News

Help’s Half Hour

Tuesday, October 11, 2005

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Total present: 26

Q: My PC is showing an error message ‘mfindexer.exe’ file missing when he boots up when using Win98 SE.

A: He may have to reinstall the OS. You may be able to search the installation CD for the missing program and add it without having to install the whole thing. If you have the SystemFile Checker

program, use it to try to find the missing file. Also try going into Google using the file name. That should tell you that the file is good or bad and tell you if it is related to a virus.

Q: My computer will no longer shut down. It is WinXP. It starts to back things down but freezes without finishing the process. End up having to power down the system all together.

A: Try a complete power down and then a cold start. It may reset what is wrong. Could try to reinstall the Win98 system. But this is the last resort for SP2. You may also want to try going back to an earlier version and restore to see the issue goes away.

Q: I am using WinXP. Is there a way to see what programs are in your startup.

A: Start>Run>msconfig will show all items that are being started.

Q: I have trouble opening Word once I have opened Outlook Express. There is a long delay. Sometimes it hangs up and I have to reboot the whole machine. This is intermittent.

A: Try adding the problem to Google and it will show up related articles on your problem.

Q: Is there a Microsoft area to enter problems and check for their answers?

A: Off of their main site there is a help area. The questions may be a bit incomplete. They also require you to type in the exact search words. Google is more open.

Q: A member is using Firebird and would like to print off her address book.

A: Check the properties. You should be able to find the list of address persons but it will be in the order that you have added them— not alphabetically. To get a sorted list, export the information into a spreadsheet and then sort the results.

Q: Sometimes I have the OpenOffice software opening my Word files.

A: Right click on the text file and select the association and click 'always open/use'.

B:

Minutes

October 2005

by John McMillan

Club business: Steve Staub announced that the Planning Meeting would be held at 7:00 PM Oct19th at Sally's house, and the newsletter would be assembled at 9:30 am Oct. 29th at St. Stephens. Reconciliation of some differences in the software between the editing computer and those used to print the Monitor are expected to reduce future printing and assembly time. The next Society meeting

is scheduled for Nov. 8th at the Brighton Library Where Arpad will discuss Gifts and Gadgets.

The club is still looking for a program chairperson replacement and someone to run Help's Half Hour regularly. Steve solicited suggestions from club members for future programs and requested help with the post meeting clean up. He mentioned that we have a good reputation with the libraries because we restore the rooms to pre meeting condition

Speaker: Our featured speaker was Jeremy Sarachan who teaches Web Design, Photography, and Research Writing in the Communications Department at St. John's Fisher College. He discussed his personal research and experiences in buying a digital video camera and editing the pictures. He admitted a MAC preference by citing a T shirt he had seen that proclaimed "MAC is for graphics, Unix is for administrators and Windows is for solitaire." However he went on to say that the editing could be done on your computer of choice.

Jeremy listed a number of things he considered before buying a 3 chip Panasonic a digital video camera.

1. Digital camera images do not deteriorate with multiple use.
2. Smaller cameras are more convenient to keep at hand and often have just as many features as larger cameras. Controls should be accessible and easily used while filming.
3. Some cameras offer both still and video capability.
4. Internal disks, and Flash memory offer high quality, finite capacity, reusable storage while mini tape cassettes hold up to 90 minutes of digital data and can be easily changed.
5. Most cameras focus automatically but you might want a manual focus option
6. Low light compensation is a good thing to have.
7. TV like view finders use more power but are larger and can be swiveled to facilitate viewing.
8. Battery life is dependent upon the features that are used. As an alternative, power adapters can be used indoors and to recharge batteries. Spare batteries are a good investment.
9. Some cameras have a single chip but others have red, green and blue chips for better quality.
10. Optical zoom is better than digital interpolation that results in increasingly grainy pictures as the image is magnified. Zoom amplifies the effect of camera movement. Bigger is not always best.
11. Image stabilization is good but a tripod is better. Quick release tripods are easier to use.
12. External microphones are convenient if the camera is not close to the subject or to eliminate a camera-man's comments.

13. IEEE1394 (fire wire), is faster than USB 2, and is a better connector for data transfer to a computer.

Next, Jeremy offered some useful tips about shooting home movies:

1. Whenever possible start scenes before the action begins and continuing filming to completion because excess footage can be edited out.
2. Vary the subjects position within 60 percent of the scenes center.
3. Fast or continuous panning and zooming results in poor movies.
4. When changing the shooting angle, move at least 30 degrees.
5. Try to avoid hiding behind the camera, that is get into some of the shots.
6. Many hours of the same subject that do not tell a story will bore most audiences.

Jeremy cited a number of video editing software packages including Windows Movie Maker, Pinnacle, Video Studio, and Video Premier that range in price up to a \$1000.00 or more, depending upon their features. He recommends that Windows users get their feet wet with Windows Movie Maker. He used a laptop to demonstrate the Mac I Movie software that came with a MacIntosh computer.

Secretary's note: Video editing is CPU intensive and requires large amounts of high speed memory and storage for handling huge video files. An AMD Thunderbird 1 gigahertz processor with dual 7200 RPM hard drives and 1.25 gigs of memory dropped frames and gave inconsistent replays. The U-Lead Studio software that came with the fire wire board was not a full feature package with results that did not match the documentation. I have been much happier with a Medion 2.6 gigabyte computer running Adobe Premier.

The editing process starts when video footage, is captured, that is transferred from the camera to the computer. Jeremy shot a short scene of the audience and demonstrated its transfer to the computer using a fire wire connection. His editing package includes camera control that allows fast and single frame forwarding or backup as well as regular playing speed. This is very handy when transferring video from the camera to computer files. Jeremy stated a preference for recording small sections rather than the entire camera tape, but cautioned that some overlap is needed to preserve continuity. It is possible to start editing by not recording undesirable portions of the original footage such as the forgotten lens cap, or sky shots while you search for camera controls.

Editing software windows often consist of several segments. One displays the captured clips which have been imported to the project. Others display a selected clip, or can view the assembled video. Another section of the window called a time line has several independ-

ent video and audio tracks that show the construction but not the content of the assembled video.

Jeremy used files of several previously captured films of his daughter plus the one of the audience to demonstrate how clips are listed when imported to the project. Then he selected a clip which opened in the clip display window where in and out points were set to define a section of the clip. Video, audio, or both tracks of the defined portion can be dragged from the clip window to the time line. It is also possible to drag the entire clip from the clip window or the clip list to the time line. None of these actions change the original clip. To avoid over writing existing parts of the time line, a new track can be used. As each clip is added, the time line shows the cumulative running time of the movie.

Jeremy showed how the assembled video can be reviewed in the sub window mentioned earlier. In response to a question, he stated that some editing packages allow brightness or contrast adjustments; changes in speed; sound level adjustment; or other modifications. If necessary, scale of the time line can be changed for accurate trimming at the frame level to smooth scene changes. He stressed that when editing, one should think continuity to minimize change between scenes. He also added one of a variety of transitions that are available to separate abrupt scene changes. Clips can be easily rearranged to tell a better story. Depending upon the software package, it may be possible to build fixed or rolling titles or comments to be dragged to the time line where they can be entered as a new clip or overlaid on an existing clip. Some packages offer special effects that can change the impact of a scene. Music can be added to replace or supplement the existing audio track. This is particularly effective when carefully timed to scene changes.

When you are finally satisfied with the results, the time line must be exported for preservation. The exported file can be stored as an .AVI file on the computer or sent to video tape or the video camera. It can be sent to the Internet or burned to a DVD for sharing with others. If you choose the DVD alternative, be aware that not all DVD players are compatible. Be sure that your burner can produce a format; (-R, +R -RW, +RW) acceptable to your target audience's player. The burning process will compress and convert files without compromising the quality and the end result can resemble a commercial DVD with chapters and a table of contents for ease of viewing.

We thank Jeremy for an excellent presentation on a new and very exciting computer application.



Planning Meeting Notes

October 17, 2005

by John McMillan

Sally Springett hosted the planning meeting that began at 7 pm. President Arpad Kovacs, was joined by Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, Ron Matteson, John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, Sally Springett, and Steve Staub.

Arpad opened the meeting stating that the October 11th meeting was pretty good. Jeremy set the stage by admitting that this was an area of interest, not expertise, so it was not surprising that he did not have answers for all of questions that arose. Arpad, speaking personally, said he would have preferred more information on editing and less on camera selection.

The November 8th meeting in the Brighton Library will feature Arpad talking about Gifts and Gadgets for Christmas. A Jeopardy like game with computer oriented questions will be the topic of the December meeting to be held at the Penfield Library. Bob Avery will explore the possibility of having the January Meeting in the new Pittsford Library but no speaker has been lined up.

The committee has recognized the desirability of having all meetings at the same venue and continues to search for a suitable location. Libraries don't allow permanent reservations and places with fees or insurance requirements are an expense we can not afford. Members are invited to submit possible alternatives. Before moving to any new location, members would be polled for approval. Bob indicated that the majority of the members have e-mail addresses on file so notification of a potential change could be made by e-mail, meeting announcement, inclusion in the Monitor or by posting to the Web page.

Arpad mentioned that formatting problems which have plagued Monitor production, appear to be resolved. Editing had been done with Word Perfect under Windows 98 but the resulting files were incompatible when printing was done with Windows 2000. The modified process will be tested in this weekends live run. Postal delays were the most visible problem, causing some members to get the last issue after the September meeting.

Steve reported a treasury balance of \$699.26. He also mentioned that Elizabeth Agte became a new member, joining the club this month. John indicated that he had been contacted by an interested party who may attend a meeting or two as a guest. Bob suggested that posting meeting notices on multiple, uncluttered Library Bulletin Boards a week or so before the meeting might attract additional potential members.

There was a discussion of possible ways to help new users. A number of years ago, when many of the

speakers addressed highly technical topics, new people were invited to a parallel session more geared to their needs. This would require an experienced moderator who would have to miss the presentation, and it was felt that some speakers might resent the reduction in audience size.

In 1997 a new user SIG was formed that met on a different night and used a question and answer format like Helps Half Hour. Over time, attendance changed to a more experienced but stable population before the SIG dissolved in 2004. Steve noted similar reasons for the society's membership turnover. As new users join and reach a level of comfort with their computer knowledge they drop out suggesting that we may be doing a very good job. An October *Monitor* article cited social interaction as one of the factors helping sustain some user groups.

The group further explored using a Jeopardy like game for the December meeting. It should be both entertaining and educational with computer related questions. Several alternatives for the methodology and some suggested topics and questions were considered. House rules for the game will be published prior to the meeting. Content will be established in parallel with finalizing the presentation method.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub, Treasurer

Balance as of 09/20/05 \$699.31

Income

Dues and donations \$212.77

Two ads 30.00

Total \$242.77

Expenses

PDF software \$20.00

St. Stephens 60.00

Ink and toner 122.98

Distribution cost 39.84

Total \$242.82

Balance as of 10/18/05 \$699.26

New Member: Elizabeth Agte

Renewals: Bill Gagnier, Bob Avery

The Lighter Side

How to Unsubscribe

Bill wrote: How do you get off this list? I have tried the majordomo and I still get mail even though it says I'm not on the list.

This is what you need to do. Please read these instructions carefully before beginning.

Tools needed: one hammer, one screwdriver, one pair of pliers, one heavy-duty pair of wire cutters, one bucket of saline water, a box of sani-wipes.

Step #1: Stop payment on any checks that you may have sent to your Internet Service Provider (GOD).

Step #2: If GOD is unresponsive and you are still receiving mail from this list, you will need to find the "mailhost." This is a machine usually located in a locked office. Every day around noon, the mailman will deliver a box of diskettes with that day's mail messages, including yours from this list, to this machine. Typically, only a handful of people have keys to the "mailhost." The reason why this machine is locked up is because this is typically the best, fastest, most powerful computer at your facility and the people with keys don't want to share it. If you must, break or pry the door down with one (1) hammer (you did get all the tools needed?).

Step #3: find the ON/OFF switch for this machine. Using the pliers, set the switch to the OFF position by tugging downwards until the disposable plastic switch breaks away from the computer casing. Discard the disposable plastic switch in an environmentally-friendly manner. This will alert the mailman to not deliver the diskettes with the messages to the "mailhost" not unlike the little red flag found on mailboxes. This should resolve your mail problem immediately.

Step #4: You may experience a recurrence of mail within 72 hours. If this should happen, you will need to disable the "mailhost" once again with more forceful measures. Repeat Step #2. Don't be surprised if there is a sturdier door in place than the one you destroyed

previously. This is due to the fact that the "Have Key" clique found out that someone has seen their private stash of computer equipment.

Step #5: After you have once again regained entry into the "mailhost" room, open up the back of the "mailhost." There may be a large tv-like device on top of the "mailhost" You will need to remove this first. Take your wire cutters, and cut any cables binding the tv-like device to the "mailhost." Set the tv-like device to the side. With your screwdriver, remove each and every screw that you can find on the "mailhost." Once this is done, the "mailhost" should break away into two or more pieces.

Step #5: Find a large box with a fan attached to it. It will be clearly marked with the following labels: "Danger," "High Voltage," "Do not open--no user-serviceable parts." Don't worry, these labels are merely in place to satisfy OSHA requirements and you are not in any danger at all. Take the bucket of saline water and pour it into any vents or ports that the large box may have. Any extra water should be poured directly into the computer chassis, be sure to properly soak each and every component.

Step #6: In the event of fire (OSHA has been known to be right on occasion), douse any flames with the sani-wipes.

This solution is provided without warranty. It is not biodegradable or fat-free. In the event of sudden death, contact a physician immediately.