

Accessing Family Accounts in Cases of Emergency

by Gabriel Goldberg

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We know it's important to maintain current wills, powers of attorney, medical directives, and other such documents. With much data now stored electronically, emergency preparedness includes planning for family members, trusted friends, and advisors to access personal information stored online, on computers, and in electronic gadgets.

Access Family Accounts in Emergencies

It's clear how important it is for each of us to maintain current wills, powers of attorney, medical directives, and other such documents. And family members, trusted friends, and advisors such as lawyers need quick access to them. In their absence, at stressful times, important actions and decisions become needlessly difficult.

With much data now stored electronically, emergency preparedness requires that loved ones or advisors can access personal information stored online, on computers, and in electronic gadgets like cell phones and PDAs (personal digital assistants, Palms, and Pocket PCs). This preparation merely adds our electronic lives to a readiness checklist.

It's no more exotic or worrisome than opening joint bank accounts or giving a house key to a trusted neighbor.

Actions we should take are as unique as our legal, medical, and financial profiles. Preparation is especially important because laws and business practices don't match today's technologies.

News stories highlight some of today's challenges and risks. A soldier in Iraq used e-mail and a Web site to communicate with the world. When he was killed, his parents wanted to preserve what he had created. But his ISP refused to allow access or provide the data, citing privacy concerns. Similarly, when a Texas man's wife died, he canceled her cell phone. The company also disconnected his phone, which had been on the same account. He couldn't reactivate it, leaving him isolated at a difficult time.

Where to begin? Many such legal and logistical problems can be avoided by simply including two names on accounts such as online banking and investing, mortgage service, bill paying, email, and Web services. This way either person can deal with

accounts on the other's behalf. But ensure that both names aren't required for routine actions.

Then record account names, passwords, and Web addresses for family members, trusted friends, or a lawyer, accountant, or executor. They needn't have the list until it's to be used so just ensure that they can find it and that it's kept updated.

Those of us in the baby boomer "sandwich generation" may have parents and children to look out for and with whom to share our technology preparation information. Preparation requires replacing the common mindset of independence with one of readiness and collaboration. An estate attorney can be a valuable resource, providing legal documents, objective advice, and what-if scenarios.

Commercial services are arising to help. Denver-based Family Matters USA [www.familymatters.com] claims to have "identified, researched and solved over 120 tasks that an estate executor or family could perform." They believe that while privacy issues affect all sorts of accounts, proper legal forms, a legitimate need, and perseverance (sometimes escalating to a supervisor) will yield the desired information.

While organizations typically handle employees' work information during emergency situations, supervisors and individuals should inventory what they use on the job and how others might need to access it.

At home or at work, the largest obstacle to emergency preparation is the wealth of information we use from memory. You can start an inventory by noting details of online accounts, Web site bookmarks saved, and passwords stored. Then make a list to share with someone who may need to follow in your electronic footsteps. Remember to safeguard your list, whether it's on paper, a PC, or a USB drive [www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/hardware/secure_usb_drives.html]. But don't hide the list itself behind a secret password!

Finally, there's a very tangible step to take. Emergency responders encourage using a high-tech replacement for traditional wallet contact-list cards [www.macmillandictionary.com/New-Words/050808-ICE-number.htm]. They commonly check victims' cell phones or PDA directories for entries filed under "ICE" ("in case of emergency") to determine whom to call.

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Web 2.0 and The Evolution of the Small Office/Home Office (SOHO)

by John Abbott

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Will the evolution of Web 2.0 have any lasting effect on the proprietary software vendors? I believe so to a limited extent. There are a myriad of new Web 2.0 companies springing up hourly. Each offering something unique to attract users. For some, this will prove satisfactory enough that they will no longer purchase proprietary mail programs or word processors, and possibly even spreadsheets.

The advent of Open Office has most certainly put a dent in the profit margins of Microsoft's Office Suite. There is a new look coming from Microsoft Office that adds a lot of eye candy to their existing Suite, but not a lot of additional function. I believe that between Open Source and the Web 2.0 companies the bottom line at Microsoft will feel their presence.

Even though Microsoft is reacting to the popular features of Mozilla's Firefox browser by copying most of them into Internet Explorer 7. IE7 still doesn't have several of the most advanced features of Firefox like ad blocking and several extensions made available for free download. And the folks at Mozilla aren't sitting around waiting for Microsoft to catch up, they are already beta testing Flock, a Web 2.0 oriented browser with blogging and social tagging built into its rich function package. However, if you don't consider yourself a true Web 2.0 Juggernaut then you may not enjoy it as much. It is designed to accommodate the blog grabbing and social bookmarking of web sites.

Google is clearly among the leaders in Web 2.0 features. They offer on line mail, on line calendar, financial portfolio tracking, the best search engine on the planet, news aggregated to your personal interests, image search, even a Linux search engine or a couple of other specialized search engines. And Google was the company that forced the email providers into offering 2 Gigabites of storage for their mail. [<http://www.google.com/intl/en/options/>]

But there are other companies close on the heels of Google. My current favorite is [inbox.com](http://www.inbox.com) inbox offers personalized email, with spell checker, rich text (font control) manageable folders and the absolutely best spam system on the Internet. You can set your Spam to capture any mail not from someone in your address book. Or you can set it to challenge anyone not in your book and then hold that challenged mail in an "Unverified" folder where you can accept or permanently reject it. Along with the email, you are offered 2 Gb of storage with folders containing your various upload/download types: music, documents, pictures, or files. And if that weren't enough, inbox also offers a calendar that emails you up to three reminders on calendared events. [<http://www.inbox.com>]

Another great company is Zoho. Zoho derives its name from SOHO (small office/home office) and it has laid in virtually everything one would need. The Zoho stable contains email, spread sheets, planners, collaborative white boards etc. Their banner program is Zoho Virtual Office and it is complete with reminder calendars, email, a virtual drive (only with XP) Instant Messaging, task management, and all of it can be collaborative for up to 10 users. Not all of the features are available on the free packages, but small version is available for you to try before you buy. [<http://www.zoho.com>]

The only thing missing from a small office/home office would be a telephone. Ah, but you can have that on-line too. From full service phone systems like Packet8 to totally free Gizmo and Skype. The packet8 system will give you an adapter to plug your phone into, or you can buy a Uniden phone system with a base phone and up to 10 wireless handsets for \$79. Or you can use your current phone connected into their free adapter and your up - both systems carry a \$20 a month fee for caller ID, three way calling, and your choice of area code and depending on where you live you can keep your phone number. If you want to get exotic if you buy their VideoPhone and then the same \$20 a month. [<http://www.packet8.net/>]

But for the true Web 2.0 user, Skype or Gizmo reign supreme. Each is totally free, and has adapters for a web camera. Of course, if you are not calling another SIP subscriber you will have to buy an outgoing AND an incoming outside line. I prefer using Gizmo because it has superior audio setup and a test point to call to check for echo suppression or the lack thereof. [<http://www.gizmo-project.com>] [<http://www.skype.com>]

And finally for setting up those conference calls you can always use the services of Gizmo which offers a free conference system. For those using Gizmo, it is entirely free. For those checking into the conference from their cell phones or land line phone they will pay the standard rate to their provider. There is a great company called Live Office that gives you much better control (mute, mute group, roll call etc) and it too is absolutely free and the quality of the connection much improved over Gizmo. And should you need to step up to a toll free call in system, Live Office offers them for a variety of rates.

[<http://freeconferencing.liveoffice.com/>]

And now you are equipped to take your entire home office with you in a USB thumb drive. And depending on the version you use, it can all be automatically encrypted. SOHO has become portable and secure.

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Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

Microsoft has released the Beta 2 version of Vista and everybody around the world is trying to download it. Their servers are barely able to output 500 kbs. Here is a link where you can preview some features and some screen shots: http://blogs.zdnet.com/Bott/?page_id=65&tag=nl.e539 Enjoy!

Microsoft Details Vista Hardware Requirements -New Web site outlines the minimum requirements for running both low-end and high-end versions of the upcoming OS

Microsoft has launched a Web site outlining the minimum hardware requirements for the next version of the Windows OS, Windows Vista.

The move came less than a week before the company hosted its Windows Hardware Engineering Conference (WinHEC) in Seattle. At the show, which kicked off late last month, Microsoft and hardware manufacturers showed how Vista will run on a variety of machines, as well as showcase add-on technology built to enhance the OS.

On the Microsoft "Get Ready" Web site, the company has outlined the requirements for running both low-end versions of Vista or higher-end versions that take advantage of the OS's new Aero graphical user interface capabilities. They also released the Beta 2 version to developers and other beta testers.

The company differentiates between the two by calling the former a "Windows Vista Capable PC" and the latter a "Windows Vista Premium Ready PC."

System Specs

Hardware requirements for a Vista Capable PC are a modern processor with a speed of at least 800 MHz, 512MB of system memory, and a graphics processor that is DirectX 9 capable.

A Windows Vista Premium Ready PC has a good deal more requirements. It must have at least a 1 GHz 32-bit (x86) or 64-bit (x64) processor, 1GB of system memory, 128MB of graphics memory, 40GB of hard drive capacity with 15GB free space, a DVD-ROM drive, audio output capabilities, and Internet access capability.

It also needs a graphics processor that runs Windows Aero, which Microsoft defines as a DirectX 9 class graphics processor that supports a Windows Display Driver Model Driver, Pixel Shader 2.0 in hardware, and 32 bits per pixel.

The graphics processor for Aero also must meet the following requirements for graphics memory: 64MB of graphics memory to support a single monitor less than 1,310,720 pixels; 128MB of graphics memory to support a single monitor at resolutions from 1,310,720 to 2,304,000 pixels; or 256MB of graphics memory to support a single monitor at resolutions higher than 2,304,000 pixels.

Getting Ready

Microsoft began working with hardware partners several months ago to prepare customers for Vista's release. In April, PCs with stickers saying "Windows Vista Capable" became available in stores, letting customers know what hardware can be upgraded to Vista once it is available. Microsoft does not plan to do the same with the Windows Vista Premium Ready designation, recommending customers ask a retailer or manufacturer about PCs that meet those requirements.

On the Get Ready Web site, Microsoft stressed that purchasing a Windows Vista Capable PC does not mean customers will get discount vouchers for Windows Vista. They still must purchase an edition of the OS for full price when Vista is available.

In March, Microsoft said the consumer release of Vista would be delayed until January 2007, though business customers will have access through Microsoft volume licensing to the OS before the end of the year. Since Microsoft is missing the busy Christmas holiday shopping season with Vista's general release—which had been an important target for selling the new OS—analysts are predicting that the company may release Vista even later than January. In fact, Steve Ballmer, at a news conference in Japan on May 25th allowed as how it might be as late as March 2007.

Microsoft Unveils Windows

Vista Beta 2

New beta delivers a host of tweaks, including three interface options

Windows Vista moved a big step closer to completion today as Microsoft formally released Beta 2 of its next-generation flagship operating system.

"I just came from Redmond and I brought something for you," Jim Allchin, co-president of Microsoft's Platforms and Services Division, brandishing a box of Beta 2 DVDs before attendees at the end of a day-long reviewers' workshop in downtown Seattle on Monday. The workshop was held the day before the start of WinHEC—the Windows Hardware Engineering Conference—an annual gathering of hardware developers involved in products that support Windows.

While other recent builds have been labeled Beta 2, Microsoft officials have said those versions were part of the development process leading to today's formal release to between 500,000 and 750,000 developers and IT professionals. Allchin said Vista, which originally was supposed to ship by year's end, remains on track for a planned November release to enterprise customers only, to be followed in early 2007 by its appearance on new PCs and at retail.

Familiar Look

For those who have followed the OS's progression from the days when it was code-named Longhorn through the initial beta release last summer, Beta 2 looks generally familiar. But Microsoft has tweaked a number of features.

For example, Vista will have three faces, depending on both the hardware capabilities of your PC and which of the six core versions of the OS (four for consumers, two for businesses) you're running.

The much vaunted Aero interface, with its semi-transparent frames and glistening progress bars, will only appear on PCs with sufficiently robust

hardware that run either one of the two corporate-focused versions—Vista Business and Vista Enterprise—or one of the top-of-the-line consumer-oriented Vista Home Premium and Vista Home Ultimate. Microsoft also says that Aero will be more reliable than XP's user interface.

Low-end PCs running Vista Home Basic or Vista Starter editions will run a less glamorous Basic interface. But if you're running either of these lower end editions on a PC that is capable of Aero graphics, you'll get what Microsoft calls the Standard interface, which is Basic with some Aero features such as the increased reliability.

Along with its new look, Vista is introducing a new Microsoft document format, XPS (XML Paper Specification). Documents created with XPS can be shared with people who don't have the originating application but do have an XPS viewer; Microsoft showed an XPS document being viewed in Internet Explorer. While not nearly as full featured as Adobe's popular PDF format, XPS is intended primarily to speed up and improve the quality of printing.

Stressing Security

Presentations at the Vista reviewer's workshop focused on several general areas where Microsoft believes the OS will save businesses time and money, most of which it has touted throughout the development process.

Perhaps chief among these are an array of beefed up security measures designed to ward off malware and hacker attacks. Among other things, Microsoft is pushing hard to discourage the widespread practice of having users logged in with administrative privileges, which lets them install software and perform all sorts of other activities that can put a system at risk. The reason IT staffers allow people to log in as administrators is because in Windows XP all other users are barred from performing even some extremely basic tasks, such as changing mouse settings.

Vista will only have two classes of users: administrators and standard users. But standard users will at least be able to make more routine changes—for example, change keyboard settings or install a mouse.

Microsoft officials admit they are still trying to find the right balance between maintaining security and irritating users with too many requests for administrator credentials. For example, some beta testers have criticized the inability of standard users

to delete an icon on the so-called public desktop, one that wasn't put there by that user.

In Vista, Microsoft has changed the user authentication procedures so that users can add third-party alternatives--such as biometric devices--which can cause conflicts in Windows XP. Internet Explorer 7 in Vista sports an array of defenses, including the ability to divert efforts to change the Windows Registry or perform drive-by software installations to temporary folders.

Vista's firewall blocks inbound traffic except where users have specified exceptions; outbound traffic is permitted by default except where rules call for blocking. The OS wards off rootkits —spyware that evades usual means of detection such as showing up as a Windows process—with a feature called kernel patch protection. And the new Windows Defender anti-spyware software included in Vista can scan download for spyware, which standard users are allowed to delete.

Finally, the 64-bit version of Vista will not allow use of unsigned device drivers--drivers that Microsoft has not certified.

Allchin spoke at length of Windows XP's ongoing security problems, telling an anecdote involving Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer forcing him to personally fix a friend's PC that had been crippled by spyware. Of his expectations of how difficult it would be to make XP safer and how hard it turned out to be, he said, "I was naive? I was just humbled."

But he also seemed to maintain that Windows suffered from more successful security attacks than competitors principally because hackers focused their attention on it. "This isn't a Microsoft thing," he said. "Over a period of time, if something gets to a critical mass, it will get attacked."

Seek and Find

Vista's sophisticated search capabilities include enough smarts to take context into account. For example, a search for "wallpaper" returns as a result an offer to help the user change the system's desktop wallpaper. If you navigate to a folder and perform a search, Vista will only return results from that folder.

Vista lets you search files based on attributes such as author, file type, or tags (created either manually or by the authoring application). These search parameters can be saved to what Microsoft now calls search folders (previously they were called virtual folders); when you open a search folder you'll see the updated results of the search.

Another feature that got a new name: Windows Collaboration is now Windows Meeting Space. This feature quickly creates an ad-hoc network between several Vista users who can then easily view a shared desktop and exchange documents.

Windows Meeting Space is one of several features for mobile users. Microsoft says that notebooks running Vista will more reliably go into suspend mode—because the OS will be able to shut down balky drivers—and will snap back to life in two seconds or less. And Tablet PC users will benefit from a more personalized handwriting recognition engine, the company says.

Vista will allow users to access some information on their PCs through the new Windows SideShow feature, which supports auxiliary displays with navigation controls—a small LCD built into the external case of a notebook or a Windows Mobile smartphone, for example. While SideShow demos generally involve accessing Outlook contact or calendar info, Microsoft officials note that third-party developers will be able to create SideShow-aware applications. Similarly, independent developers will be able to write Windows Gadgets, little desktop applications similar to Google's Gadgets or the Mac OS's Widgets.

Microsoft has introduced some performance-enhancing technologies in Vista, including a feature called Windows ReadyBoost, which supports use of a USB 2.0 thumb drive as memory cache (cheaper than adding RAM). The new SuperFetch feature is supposed to speed up data access by intelligent memory management based on your PC usage patterns.

Vista will have some less business-oriented goodies, too, including its own version of Windows Media Player 11 with the new Urge music service and the new Photo Gallery, which lets you build photo montages complete with music and effects.

"We have made some amazing progress," said Allchin, who will be leaving Microsoft at the end of the year. "But this is just the beginning. It's the beginning for security, it's the beginning for storage, it's the beginning for distributed computing."

Canon to Halt Development Of Film Cameras

Japan's Canon on Thursday said that it would halt development of new film cameras to focus resources on digital models, the latest sign of the rapidly fading role of film in photography.

A spokesman at Canon, the world's largest maker of digital cameras, said it made the decision to freeze

development of both compact and single-lens reflex film models because the markets for both are shrinking.

Canon said it would continue to produce and sell existing models and make a final judgement on the business in the future while monitoring market demand.

Canon's decision follows an announcement earlier this year by rival Nikon that it would stop producing most of its film cameras except for a few professional products.

Konica Minolta Holdings, meanwhile, has said it would exit the camera and photo film markets, where it has been losing money amid stiff competition and weak demand.

The photographic film and film camera markets have been shrinking rapidly in the past few years due to the rising popularity of digital cameras, which take and store images without the need for film.

Speeding Up Menu Performance in XP

Windows XP, when it needs to, will sacrifice speed for style. What I mean by that is the fade-in and fade-out look of the menu may look cool, but sometimes looking cool is at the expense of faster opening and closing of the menus.

To skip the visual effect in favor of increasing the speed:

- 1) Right-click the My Computer icon,
- 2) Choose Properties from the context menu,
- 3) Click the Advanced tab,
- 4) Click the Settings button in the Performance area,

Microsoft Advises Switching Word to 'Safe Mode'

The inconvenience is necessary to protect against the latest Trojan horse, company says.

Microsoft is advising people to run its Word application in "safe mode" to help guard against a Trojan horse that surfaced recently, though security experts on Wednesday said there still appears little cause for alarm.

"The good news is that it doesn't seem to be very widespread," said Graham Cluley, a senior technology consultant with United Kingdom antivirus company Sophos PLC. "There have been very, very few reports."

Damage Limited So Far

Researchers at F-Secure and Trend Micro also said the number of reported incidents remained low as of May 25th. Trend Micro rates the Trojan horse as "low risk" because, while the potential for damage is high, the impact so far has been small, said David Sancho, a senior antivirus engineer.

The Trojan horse surfaced May 18th and arrives buried in a Word file attached to an e-mail message. It secretly installs software on a user's PC that could be used to execute remote commands, download other malware, or monitor keystrokes and gather passwords, among other mischief.

For the Trojan horse to do its work, however, users must first be tricked into opening the Word attachment. And the incidents reported so far suggest that hackers are still using the Trojan horse in a very targeted fashion rather than sending it in mass e-mail, said Erkki Mustonen, a security researcher at F-Secure.

The Finnish vendor received reports from a handful of European companies affected last week that were all in the same business area, Mustonen said. He declined to name the industry. The company received a few more reports this week, but "it seems to be pretty calm," he said.

The number of hacker groups using the Trojan horses appears quite small at this point, Mustonen said. "It seems they have been written by expert people," he said.

He advised businesses to monitor any suspicious traffic in their firewall coming from China. The Trojan horse may not have originated there, but it appears at least to be talking to a host server in that country, he said.

Safe Mode Workaround

Microsoft's Security Research Center is analyzing the vulnerability, which affects Microsoft Word XP and Word 2003. The company said it will release a patch with its next regular update, due June 13th, or earlier if necessary.

In the meantime, Word's safe mode won't fix the vulnerability but will prevent the vulnerable code from being exploited, Microsoft said.

In safe mode, Word ignores toolbar customizations, changes to preferences can't be saved, and functions such as AutoCorrect and Smart tags are disabled.

The first step is to disable the Outlook feature that uses Word for editing e-mails. The second involves creating a new desktop shortcut that adds "/safe" to the Word command line. Detailed instruc-

tions are in the Workaround section in Microsoft Security Advisory (919637).

“For the sake of security I’d recommend doing it, even though it’s a bit difficult,” Sancho of Trend Micro said.



Understanding the X, Compatibility Issues of CD-RW Drives, Media

by Andy Marken
representing Verbatim

Quick Review

CD-R’s advantage and disadvantage is that the writing process is permanent. The media can’t be erased or overwritten. This makes it ideal for archiving. Only by leaving a session “open”—that is, not recording on the entire CD—can data be incrementally added to a disc. In so doing there is a risk of the disc not playing on all players. This obviously was not ideal for work-in-progress activities, very temporary projects or using the discs as a reusable backup solution.

On October 22, 1996, an industry consortium that now includes Ricoh, Philips, Sony, Yamaha, Hewlett-Packard, and Verbatim’s parent company, Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation, announced CD-RW (CD-RW) to the world.

CD-RW was the next step on the compact disc road map that started in 1980 with the introduction of compact disc digital audio by Philips and Sony.

The high-capacity, rewritable disc provided serious competition to the superfloppy alternatives that were being introduced and as history has proven the low-cost, single standard product quickly replaced the alternatives.

The CD-RW disc is based on Phase-Change technology, and can store 650-700 MB of computer data or 74-80 minutes of audio or video on a standard CD-size disc. There are no new formats associated with CD-RW; the existing CD formats such as CD-ROM, CD-Audio, PhotoCD, CD-I, etc. can all be used with CD-RW media. The CD-RW disc can be erased and re-written about 1,000 times (called cycleability), making it ideal for applications such as back-up and prototyping.

CD-RW is designed to be played back on most current CD-ROM drives as well as new DVD drives. With its multifunction capability, a CD-RW recorder

can create CD-RW discs that are readable on the new DVD readers, as well as CD-R discs that are fully compatible with the current generation of CD-ROM drives and CD players.

Logo, Performance Specifications To ensure consumers could play CD-RW media in every compliant recorder, player and drive, a new chapter was added to the Orange Book—Part III—that specifically addresses the CD-RW standard. This also incorporated a logical interchange standard—Universal Disc Format (UDF)—was developed to provide a cohesive standard for packet writing. As part of the CD-RW Consortium’s efforts they also initiated a certification program called Multi-Read (MR). This helps CD-ROM drive and player manufacturers produce units that are fully CD-RW and UDF-compatible.

The Orange Book Part III or System Description CD-RW specifies the CD-RW disc format. The CD-RW system gives the opportunity to write, erase, overwrite and read CD information. The CD-RW disc has a lower reflectivity than a “Red Book or Yellow Book compatible” disc, so it must be played back on CD-RW enabled (MultiRead) CD players. A CD-RW enabled CD player can read CD-RW as well as CD-R and conventional CD discs.

As the industry continued to push the technology for higher performance drives and media, the Orange Book Part III specification and logo applications was reviewed and refined to ensure write and read compatibility as well as easy identification by the consumer. Today there are three volumes that precisely spell out the recorder/writer specifications that must be adhered to for optimum and continual write/read performance - Low Speed (1-4X), High Speed (4X-12X) and Ultra Speed (12X-24X).

Volume 1: Low Speed—defines recording speed recorder/writer and media specifications of 1x, 2x and 4x nominal CD speed. (Latest version 2.0, Aug 1998). Because it was the initial specification for CD-RW there was no special logo identification applied to drives or media that met these specifications.

Volume 2: High Speed—defines linear recording speed specifications between 4x and 12x nominal CD speed. (Latest version 1.1, June 2001). Drives and media produced to these specifications are identified with the High Speed CD-RW logo.

Volume 3: Ultra Speed—defines linear recording speed specifications between 12x and 24x nominal CD speed. (Latest version 1.0, Sept 2002). Drives and media produced to these

specifications are identified with the Ultra Speed CD-RW logo.

The User Challenge

When drive design and manufacturing moved from Low Speed to High Speed—and soon to Ultra Speed—a totally new set of control microprocessors and firmware had to be developed for the respective specification. At the same time, more advanced media manufacturing formulas and production techniques had to be developed specifically for these higher performance drives.

Because of the time constants of phase-change recording (explained later), new CD-RW media was developed to meet the write recording needs of the High Speed and Ultra Speed Orange Book Part III specifications. With each major write speed advance—High Speed and Ultra Speed—new subtype settings had to be defined to identify the discs. Some of the lower speed drives do not recognize these subtype settings and will therefore select their own default speed settings specific to their write strategies.

The result is unreadable signals which can result in overwriting or damaging previously recorded data. To prevent such problems, CD-RW Consortium members have developed additional Orange Book Part III protection for consumers which force write-incompatibility when High Speed or Ultra Speed CD-RW discs are used with lower performance drives.

When a few technically advanced drive manufacturers introduced High Speed CD-RW drives the units and media were “tuned” for optimum write reliability. The media was also fully backward compatible for in-specification Low Speed drives. Firms that chose to “stretch” the limits of their Low Speed drives delivered mixed writing performance for users.

Quality High Speed media would often perform properly on the first write pass on a High Speed drive that was merely a Low Speed drive pushed beyond Orange Book Part III specifications. Even if it did, the CD-RW media would quickly not perform properly in subsequent overwrites or edits.

That same situation is arising with some “Ultra Speed” drives. Firms that attempt to “extend” their High-Speed technologies into the Ultra Speed drive category deliver write/overwrite issues for consumers even when in-specification Ultra Speed CD-RW media is used in the drives.

In most instances, if the drive manufacturers upgrade the firmware of the current drives, the

units will at least recognize the new higher speed discs. They will then write to the discs at their designed specification speed using modified write strategies.

As active members of the CD-RW Consortium, Mitsubishi Chemical and Verbatim adhere to the Orange Book Part III specifications in their development and manufacturing processes. Media is carefully produced and identified for its optimum performance rating—Low Speed, High Speed and Ultra Speed.

Phase-Change Technology

CD writers write data to the CD-R disc in a permanent manner. The laser burns the pits (actually bumps) into the organic dye layer of the CD-R disc by heating the spot to be recorded to about 300-400 degrees Celsius (temperature will depend on what speed the disc is recorded at). These recorded bumps have lower reflectivity than the surrounding lands, and are optically very close to the pits found in a stamped CD, having the same light scattering effects. Generally, the reflectivity of a CD-R disc is around 65%, meaning that 65% of the laser beam's light is reflected back to the read head.

In contrast, a Phase-Change recording uses a higher-power laser to change the phase of the recording layer from its highly reflective “crystalline” state to a lower reflective “amorphous” state. This is accomplished by heating the spot to be recorded with a higher-power laser to about 600 degrees Celsius. As the spot cools, it becomes an amorphous “mark” that is very close optically to the pit on a stamped CD. To change the spot back to the crystalline state, the laser uses a lower power setting and heats the amorphous mark to its glass transition temperature (about 200 degrees) and the spot will transform back to the crystalline state. The CD-RW approach is Direct Overwrite-compatible (DOW), which means that new data can be recorded directly over the old, eliminating the need to pre-erase.

Unfortunately, the Phase-Change disc has low reflectivity, around 25%. This is what prevents older CD drives from reading the Phase-Change CD-RW disc, the read heads in these drives cannot compensate for the lower reflectivity. The Red Book (the grandfather CD standard) specifies that discs will have 70% reflectivity. CD-R discs with 65% reflectivity are close enough optically that CD drives and CD players can read them with few exceptions. “Multi-Read” (MR) drives have a simple circuit called Automatic Gain Control (AGC) that boosts the gain of the CD drive's read head to compensate for the

lower reflectivity of the CD-RW Phase-Change disc. DVD drives and players also have this AGC circuit.

The Phase-Change system employed in CD-RW is actually the reverse of other Phase-Change systems in use. Most other systems record a crystalline mark on an amorphous background (called burn bright) as opposed to CD-RW which records an amorphous mark on a crystalline background (burn dark). This is because the burn dark system is optically closer to the higher reflective lands and light scattering effects of pits on a stamped CD.

With CD-RW media, the laser is not only modulated off and on to form the correct size “marks,” it is also modulated between write, erase and bias laser powers. Bias power is the same power used to read the disc and during recording it is modulated to keep the recording layer from absorbing too much heat, which would make distorted marks. The laser is modulated with the erase power because it is capable of directly overwriting old data. This process is called the Write Pulse Train (WPT). Based on the media inserted in the recorder, the firmware will set the correct Write Strategy.

The laser power for recording CD-RW discs is higher than it is for CD-ROMs. For example, a CD-R disc recorded at 48X needs a laser in the 8-10 milliwatt (mw) power range. For recording a CD-RW disc at 24X speed, a laser in the 8-14mw range is required. In the case of CD-R or CD-RW discs, the laser wavelength remains 780nm. In addition, the CD-RW recorders implement the AGC circuit to read back CD-RW compatible discs.

The OPC (Optimum Power Calibration) procedure for CD-RW discs is much like its CD-R cousins. The recommended recording laser power is encoded in the Absolute Time In Pre-groove (ATIP) of the disc and is read by the recorder’s firmware. The recorder then performs a test write of 6 sectors in the PCA (Power Calibration Area) of the CD-R disc with several different laser power values based on the recommended power, then reads the test sectors back and selects the laser power that produced the sector with the best reflectivity.

With CD-RW media, it is much the same, except in addition to the recommended write power being encoded in ATIP, the recommended erase power and bias powers are also encoded and read by the recorder. Running OPC, a technique developed for CD-R that can alter the laser power on the fly to compensate for media irregularities such as dust or fingerprints can also be applied to CD-RW media.

CD-RW Media Functionality The only difference in the construction of a CD-RW disc and a CD-R disc is the recording layer (figure 1, 2). CD-R discs are constructed by injection molding the polycarbonate disc with its wobbled “pre-groove.” Next, the organic dye is applied by spin-coating the dye onto the disc to ensure an even distribution of the dye. A gold reflective layer is then applied, followed by a protective coat of lacquer to protect the gold and dye. The printing on top of the lacquer layer is the last to be applied. When recording, the laser enters the polycarbonate disc and uses the wobbled pre-groove for tracking and rotation control. The recording takes place in the pre-groove on the dye layer.

With CD-RW discs, the disc starts out with the same polycarbonate base with the pre-groove, next comes the recording layer, which actually consists of four layers: the lower dielectric layer, the recording laser, the upper dielectric layer, and the reflective layer. The upper and lower dielectric layers draw away heat from the recording layer to keep heat from building up. Instead of organic dye, the recording layer is made up of a quaternary Phase-Change alloy consisting of silver, indium, antimony, and tellurium (Ag-In-Sb-Te). These elements make the Phase-Change recording possible. The reflective part of the recording layer is an aluminum alloy, just like in stamped discs. Gold was required by CD-R discs to get the reflectivity as high as possible and the organic dye tended to oxidize aluminum. After the recording layer, a layer of lacquer is applied to protect the recording layer “sandwich,” and the printing is applied on top of the lacquer.

As with CD-R, the laser beam from the recorder enters the polycarbonate disc and uses the wobbled pre-groove for tracking and rotation control. The recording takes place in the pre-groove, but the real action takes place in the alloy recording layer of the sandwich where the marks are recorded

Forward/Backward Compatibility

Multi-Read (MR) Program The Multi-Read program was developed to bring CD-RW-compatible drives into the mass market. It is a self-certification that CD-ROM drive manufacturers can use once they are compliant. In short, a MR-compatible CD-ROM drive will be able to:

- Read the lower reflective CD-RW discs
- Read a packet recorded disc

Because of the highly competitive nature of the CD drive market, most manufacturers support Multi-Read. The MR program has also been applied to DVD drives. This provides DVD drive buyers with

the assurance that the drive can read all available CD media.

The MR program does not really apply to CD audio players, although it is logical that some high end CD player manufactures make their products compatible with the lower- reflective CD-RW media. Music professionals will use for CD-RW media to back up sound files, but most will continue to make reference discs on CD-R discs playable at their client's location.

Physical and Logical Standards

Physical Standards: The Color Books CD-RW is fully compatible with the Red Book (CD Audio standard), Yellow Book (CD-ROM standard), Green Book (CD-I standard), White Book (Video CD Standard), Orange Book Part 1I (CD recordable standard) in every way except reflectivity. The CD-RW disc is the same physical size as the other discs, data is stored in the same formats, and is played in the same fashion. However, as previously explained, the reflectivity is lower for the CD-RW disc, about 25%. Orange Book Part III specifically addresses CD-RW technology. Orange Book Part III defines the lower reflective CD-RW disc, and how to record on it.

ISO 9660 Logical File System ISO 9660 is the original file system developed for CD-ROM drives. It provides for cross- platform interchange of discs on PC, Macintosh, Linux and UNIX systems that were ISO 9660-compliant. One of the severe limitations of ISO 9660 is that the file system needs to know about all the files to be recorded in advance so the "Path Tables" and "Primary Volume Descriptor" (PVD) could be generated. These are the logical table of contents of what data is stored on the disc, and where it is located. Other limitations of ISO9660 included:

- File names must be only in capital letters, A-Z
- File names are limited to the DOS 8 + 3 format
- No more than 8 directory levels.

Only legal character besides letters is the underscore () ISO 9660 was fine for creating discs with track-at-once or disc-at-once recording modes where pre-mastering software was used to select all the files in advance of recording, however, with the advent of packet writing, a more flexible file system was needed.

UDF 1.5 Logical File System In 1995, the Optical Storage Technology Association (OSTA) began searching for a new logical file system that would be more flexible than ISO9660. As OSTA is an organization comprised of representatives from the major optical manufacturers, discussions led to the adop-

tion of the Universal Disc Format (UDF). Essentially, UDF version 1.5 is very similar to ISO9660 in that it is capable of being cross platform. It does not, however, have the name and directory restrictions that ISO9660 imposed. With UDF, packet writing is handled in one of two ways:

- Track mode
- Random mode

In track mode UDF, a track on the CD-R/CD-RW disc is opened and the recording must take place sequentially in the track. There are areas in the track where temporary PVD and path tables are kept for updates to files. The track can be closed at any time and a session written around the packet track, using the temporary PVD and path table to build the PVD and path table for the session, or the track can stay in its native state. A device driver would be required to read the disc back on a standard CD-ROM drive today unless the session was closed in ISO 9660 format. UDF track mode can be used with CD-R or CD-RW media.

In Random mode, the disc is "formatted" into logical sectors, and these sectors are similar to those on a hard disk drive or optical drive. They can be randomly be written (and in the case of CD-RW media, randomly rewritten). Random mode UDF also provides for the defect management and can remap bad sectors so data isn't stored in them. This is ideal for CD-RW as the cycleability is currently 1,000 overwrites. If a sector gets worn out, it can be mapped out and not used anymore, and a spare sector can be used. Random mode is clearly the most desirable way to use the disc, but has the most interchange problems, a device driver is definitely required to read this disc.

The good news is that UDF is supported by the various operating systems including MS Windows, Macintosh, Linux, etc. UDF allows packet writing to become a reality and interchangeable on CD-RW systems.



Q. In one of your answers a few months ago, you mentioned a program that sounded interesting, so I went to the Web site referenced to give it a try. When I clicked to download the program, I got a message with words to the effect, "This file can harm your computer if it contains malicious code." Reading

that message frightened me. Is the program safe to download?

A. The message you're seeing is just Windows' way of attempting to protect you, though sometimes it is a bit overzealous. The appearance of that warning does not mean that the file is dangerous or harmful. Think of it as kindly, ever-caring Mr. Gates asking you to think about what you're doing. If I recommend a file or program in this column or in my weekly newsletter, you can rest assured that I've downloaded it, used it, and experienced no difficulties.

Q. I lost my font bar that appeared above the message area of my Outlook Express. I tried everything I can think of to get it back, but I can't figure out how to do that. Can you help, Mr. M?

A. The formatting toolbar (it contains the styles of font, size, bold, italics, etc.) is only visible when you click Reply to a message. So the next time you click Reply, if you don't see it, click View > Toolbars > Formatting Bar to display it.

Q. Sometimes I get email that's nothing but words that are not related to each other. It's not trying to sell me anything; it's just a lot of meaningless words. Can you explain what these types of emails are about?

A. In a word, spam. Those seemingly nonsensical messages come from spammers attempting to circumvent spam filters by trying to trick them, based on the rules used to identify and delete spam.

In essence, certain spam filters look for words most commonly used by spammers (e.g. vitamins, mortgage, prescriptions, Via-gra, etc.), then compute the percentage of known spam words against the total number of words used. So spammers assume—and sometimes this actually works—that if they use a tremendous number of words, they can dilute the percentage of actual spam terms used, and if they can do that, their messages have a better chance of slithering past your (or your ISP's) spam filters in the future.

It's amazing to what lengths spammers will go in order to get you to open an email, so whenever you receive spam, never click any links in the message, never, ever reply, and instead just delete it.

Mr. Modem's DME (Don't Miss 'Em)

Sites of the Month

Consumer Search

Recipient of the coveted Mr. Modem "Squeal of Approval" award, this site provides consumers with fast answers about top-rated products, as well as an

easy-to-use search engine to locate the best articles on any given product or service. The objective here is to reduce to minutes the time it takes to make an informed decision and thus an intelligent purchase. That's the theory, anyway.

www.consumersearch.com

Herbal Safety

While many individuals buy herbal remedies from health food stores, trained herbalists, and even drug stores, it's important to be informed about the potency and potential interactions that natural medicines may have. This site, sponsored by the University of Texas, clarifies the therapeutic benefits attributed to specific herbs, and warns of any possible dangers linked with their use.

www.herbalsafety.utep.edu

Memory Trainer

Exercises created to expand your mind (no, not like in the '60s), enhance your brainpower, develop and strengthen your... your... memory! That's it! A free, seven-day trial membership is available during which you can access a vast assortment of mental exercises and view your cognitive profile. Monthly memberships start at \$12.99. Partners in this site include the Discovery Health Channel, brain.com, and ThirdAge. The exercises are challenging, enlightening, and beneficial. Think of it as a personal trainer for your... your... www.happyneuron.com/gbhappyneuron

Hot off the press! Mr. Modem's new CD-ROM features more than 1400 of the best Web sites! For more information, including how to obtain this treasure-trove of Web sites for *free* (free shipping, too!), visit www.MrModem.com



From The DealsGuy

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

Last month I published an announcement for a product that could copy DVDs. We included what we found about downloading an additional product that was necessary to accomplish certain tasks, and I was accused of encouraging illegal activities. Maybe I should have worded it differently, but the fact is, I simply published the announcement for a free product, along with our findings, and made the information available so an

editor, or reader, could use it, or not use it, however they wished. I had two complaints (from the same UG) and that group chose not to make the column available to their members, which is their choice. This is not an apology because there has been tremendous interest in such products; I simply reported the facts and people are responsible for their own actions. I have read a number of articles in UG newsletters containing opinions concerning the law and the tactics of publishing companies. By the way, since last month's column, ShrinkTo5's product pricing and lineup has changed.

There are also those who would argue that a gun shop encourages murder, and I could use other similar issues that might be said to imply illegal activity. Recently I published an announcement for a product that recovers passwords. That could also be used for an illegal activity if used on a stolen computer. With all the write-ups and notoriety about new and controversial copyright laws, I wouldn't even try to explain the legalities of anything. Is it legal, or illegal to make a backup copy? Do you know for sure? Also, ShrinkTo5 has other uses and we did not include a link for Machinist2.dll. My proof reader suggested that car companies must encourage a long list of illegal activities, including manslaughter, since they sell cars that can do such things.

Actually, I am not a fan of publishing companies' tactics and the UCITA or DCMA laws. If those officials have their way, you would not be able to give, or even lend, anything published after you have read or listened to it. From what I read, they want all used book stores shut down as well as all libraries, and you would even be arrested if you were caught lending, or giving, a book or CD to a friend. Who knows where it all might end when it comes to the pockets of some corporate bigwigs. However, I have no interest in any of this copying stuff. I have no time and have not bought a music CD in years, nor do I rent videos or go to a movie. The performers and executives involved with that industry are grossly overpaid, but they don't make any money from me. I don't watch much TV now, but if they keep adding commercials, I'll shut that off too. While I'm on my soapbox; if I am paying for cable TV, why should I have to put up with all those commercials? People are much too tolerant of being taken advantage of, and about what they are paying for.

Do Your Homework

The announcements below have been edited to shorten them so be sure to check their Web sites for better information. Remember, I have not tried any of these and have no knowledge about their reliability.

Check That Malware, For Free!

Put an end to all types of Malware, at no cost: The a-squared Web Malware Scanner 2.0 hunts undesired Spyware modules and dangerous Trojans, Backdoors, Keyloggers, Worms, Dialers, Rootkits, Hacking Tools, Riskware, and Tracking Cookies; all from within the Web browser and no software must be installed. All users having Internet Explorer and a fast Internet connection, such as DSL, can make optimum use of the scanner.

The a-squared Web Malware Scanner 2.0 uses over 350,000 signatures and an ingenious heuristic algorithm for detecting pests on the local computer, and this scanner can be used directly from the Web browser. The user can choose from four different scan functions depending on the time available for a scan. The quick test provides rapid results, while a detailed analysis of the entire computer can take a while. A Riskware recognition system can also be enabled that informs the user of programs that are usually harmless, but are often used by Malware for specific tasks. There is also a paid version that they recommend as quicker and better with a 30-day free trial.

a-squared Web Malware Scanner 2.0: <<http://malwarescan.emsisoft.com>>

a-squared Anti-Malware: <<http://www.emsisoft.com/en/software/personal>>

Product details Malware-IDS: <<http://www.emsisoft.com/en/software/ids>>

Order a-squared Anti-Malware: <<http://www.emsisoft.com/en/order/homeuser>>

Phone: +43-664-3446068 (German)

Fax: +43-6272-73083

Email: <info@emsisoft.com>

Web: <www.emsisoft.com>

Let's Compare Data

ZsCompare allows users to efficiently synchronize computers, backup data, compare different versions of files, verify that CDs have been copied correctly, manage Zip files, review changes to source code, and more. Users can easily run comparisons on local directories, networked computers, or removable media, such as CDs, DVDs, and flash drives.

ZsCompare 3.0 adds many new file and freeform text comparison features, including the ability to compare text from Microsoft Word documents and PDF documents. Also, zsCompare provides additional control over how the comparison is performed with predefined options for common comparisons. Finally, the new version of zsCompare permits direct editing of the contents of a file from the results. ZsCompare 3.0 operates on Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux. It runs on the Java platform, a copy of which is included with the ZsCompare installation. ZsCompare 3.0 is available in three editions: Professional (\$199.95), Standard (\$99.95), and Lite (\$35.00). For a 20% discount, my readers should enter the coupon code "DealsGuy" when purchasing a license at <<https://www.zisasoft.com/store/order.shtml>>. The Lite Edition contains basic comparison and synchronization functionality. With the Lite Edition, users can compare directories, zip files, text files, and freeform text. All versions include free lifetime upgrades and free technical support.

More information, including a complete list of enhancements and a fully functional 30 day trial version, is available at <<http://www.zisasoft.com/products/zsCompare/index.shtml>>.

Sales: <sales@zisasoft.com>

Telephone: 1 (303) 638-9235

Fax: 1 (720) 862-2089

The Arnold Schwarzenegger of Windows?

Tame Windows with Actual Window Manager 4.01. Microsoft Windows is the most widely used operating system today and its window architecture is a brilliant invention. However, this architecture comes with a bit of baggage and a degree of frustration, especially when you work with several windows simultaneously. With many applications open at once Windows becomes heavily cluttered, which in turn cuts down on your computational productivity. The more windows you open, the more time you spend to manage them and less focus is on the job. Monotonous clicking, window clutter in the taskbar, switching between windows, their positioning and resizing may double and even triple the time you need to concentrate on your job.

Actual Window Manager adds its buttons to each window in your system and allows you to navigate them in new ways. Instead of the taskbar, you will be able to minimize windows to the task tray or to the edge of the desktop, or roll them up or unroll, like blinds. If you need to multitask in several applications at once, you can simply pin all

necessary windows on top without the need to bring up each one several times a day. In fact, you have over 40 other controls to automate routines related to windows. You can apply a predefined level of transparency to any window, automate positioning of windows, resize them and change priority from the title bar menu and more.

Over 450 suggestions were carefully considered and reflected in a more intuitive user interface. The customization of options has become much simpler, and the choice of options wider. In addition to subtle customization abilities, the program has a list of presets for most popular applications that allow you to use Actual Window Manager in the "install-and-go" style.

Read the complete description of features at <<http://www.ActualTools.com/windowmanager/>> Download a no-cost evaluation copy from <<http://www.ActualTools.com/files/aimsetup.exe>>

Pricing and Availability

Actual Window Manager 4.0 runs under all Windows platforms and costs \$39.95 (USD) for a single-user license. Registered customers are entitled to the unlimited functionality, free updates and lifetime technical support. Additional information on Actual Window Manager, a collection of tutorial articles and success stories, as well as a 60-day evaluation copy is available from <<http://www.ActualTools.com/>>. UG members should visit our User Groups Support page <<http://www.actualtools.com/usergroups/>> and click the "Get 20% discount" Link, then follow the instructions.

Email: <info@actualtools.com>

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 enthusiastic I might sound.

Bob (The Cheapskate) Click <bobclick@mindspring.com>. Visit my Web site at <<http://www.dealsguy.com>>

Society News

Planning Meeting Notes

June 27, 2006

by John McMillan, Secretary

Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, John McMillan, Sally Springett, Steve Staub and Tom Thompson attended the July planning meeting led by Arpad Kovacs.

The consensus was that Arpad's presentation on e-Bay buying was quite successful. With 36 attendees, it was among our larger turn outs. Several newcomers are expected for the July meeting where Arpad will talk about e-Bay selling. Arpad plans on demonstrating an actual auction offering. Since the Gates Library is not known to have a projector, it was recommended that the club projector be available.

There will probably be a Planning Meeting at Sally's house Aug. 1 and the Picnic is scheduled for August 8th. We are committed to this because the deposit for the building has already been paid but Steve noted that not many people have signed up and the deadline is August first. We expect to have a flea market for computer related objects at the picnic. The September Planning Meeting is expected to be held Sept. 5 at a location to be determined. For September, we have a speaker whose topic will be announced in the future.

Arpad mentioned a campaign to have members bring in their printer cartridges which the Society could use to offset the cost of ink cartridges or paper used in printing the *Monitor*.

The number of members whose dues are in arrears is shrinking but there are continuing concerns about further improvement. Also lack of address change notifications increase Monitor mailing expense by \$.75 per occurrence.

The planning group continues to explore local vendors for parts supply and supervision plus a location for the build your own computer project. The targeted time frame is late August to early November with additional information to be distributed as soon as it is available. At that time there will be a final survey to see if there are enough interested members to make such a project practical.

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Arpad Kovacs

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: A member has been forwarding emails out and they end up as gibberish. There is a 'message truncated' warning. She brought a sample. She is using Outlook Express.

A: If the items are in HTML and the receiver is in text only mode, it may be the problem. It was recommended that she perform the Security Tango to check for viruses. Perhaps it will help to print off the directions so that you can reference the list.

Q: When running XP about a month or two ago, it began to ask for a password when booting up. It will

continue when he hits 'ENTER' but does pause the startup process and is a pain.

A: One of the later Windows updates includes .NET Framework installation. This requires that you must log in to your computer. It probably was part of a downloaded update file. One member said that this had happened to him but that it eventually stopped. If you take off the login area, the .NET piece may not work properly when needed. Tweak UI is a free download that has a program to turn off the security need. From there you can select 'auto login'.

Q: I have a file in MS Word that I want to send to several others via an email. She attached the file but the receivers cannot open the file.

A: It is suggested that when in Word, perform a 'save as' and select the .rtf or .txt format. That should allow everyone to open it. She could also cut and paste the contents into Notepad. This software strips off all of the Word-specific additives.

Q: Sometimes when I get an attachment, I get a window that asks me which format to use. She generally picks Notepad and it opens.

A: That is the best solution. You are being asked because the file extension is not available for viewing using your current software.

Q: One member switched from Norton to McAfee antivirus. Whenever she opens email, the software starts to scan through all of the items. Can this be disabled?

A: You probably would want to disable the popups but not turn off the process altogether. SpamKiller is important. Try googling to see if the popup can be disabled without turning off the scan.

Program Meeting Notes

by John McMillan

Arpad opened the business meeting with the following announcements. Members whose dues are in arrears should see Steve Staub. The Planning Meeting will be Sally's house at 7 pm on the first Tuesday in August.

Steve Mentioned that Reverend Dick Comegys is confined to intensive care with Parkinson's disease. As the pastor of St. Stephens Church he was very active in the society's earlier years, particularly as Editor of the *Frog Pond*, predecessor of the *Monitor*. I knew him personally as he often came to visit my mother, a former member of the congregation who could no longer attend services.

Help's Half Hour needs a leader for the September meeting. The speaker and topic is yet to be announced. Please pass along any suggestions for

future programs to Mike Lavelle whose phone number and email address are on the inside of the back cover of the *Monitor*. The Digital Photograph SIG will not be meeting during July or August.

People can still sign up to build their own computer. The date has not been established because it is dependent on the location which is still being sought. Alternatives and costs, expected to range between \$500 and \$1,000, will be printed in a future copy of the *Monitor* at which time the candidates can opt out. Price will depend upon individual selection of components and software and must be paid before the assembly date. Non members can also participate but there will be a \$30 surcharge for which they will receive a one year membership. Arpad responded to a question stating that if space was available upgrades to existing computers would also be considered.

Steve mentioned that 21 reservations have been received for the Society picnic to be held August 8th at Buckland Park located on the south side of Westfall Road between Winton Road and South Clinton Avenue. Five dollars per person covers the site cost, beverages, rolls, and your choice of red or white hots, hamburgers, cheeseburgers or Italian sausage. State your choice when you sign up before the August 1st deadline. Participants are asked to provide a dish to pass based upon the first letter of their last name: A-I, snacks; J-R, salads; S-Z, deserts.

Don't forget to bring used computer hardware, software or documentation that needs a new home to display on the Flea Market Table. Donations from the proceeds of sales would be welcome additions to the Society's treasury.

When Jen Clausen made the *Smart Computing* presentation in April, she promised 1 free subscription for every 5 sold. It has been decided that the three freebies earned by the Society will be used as special door prizes at regular meetings. Unique tickets were distributed to attending members with the stipulation that if the winner had already signed up, the door prize would extend their paid subscription for an additional year.

Arpad closed the business meeting by requesting help with room cleanup.

Following the social break Arpad began his presentation of e-Bay selling. A copy of his slides can be seen by going to the RCSi web site programs, scrolling down to July 11, 2006—Program Follow-up and clicking on Presentation Slides. It is best to save

the file to disk to avoid the potential of an internet connection interruption.

He started with slides showing allowable items that culminated with an approved category list. This was followed by a list of items that cannot be sold on e-Bay such as things which are illegal or encourage illegal activity; are racially or ethnically inappropriate; sexual in nature; counterfeit or bootlegged; perishable goods like fruit, vegetables or meats; and beer or liquor. Fine wines are allowed although shipping may not be legal in some states.

Things that are needed include: a valid email address to open an e-Bay account; a credit card; and finally things to sell. Though not required, Arpad recommends a PayPal account that facilitates many transactions.

He went on to describe the functions of PayPal before discussing selling cost elements that span Insertion fees, Final Value fees and PayPal fees. The description was followed by tables showing sliding base scales for each of the three elements. Many of the features that promote the sale such as highlighting or thumbnails are extra cost items that increase the insertion fee above the price scale previously seen. There was also a table of fees for vehicles which are handled as a unique category with separate payment rules.

From there he went on to discuss creating listings. This can be done directly in e-Bay but Arpad recommended Turbo Listing, a free software product distributed by e-Bay. It provides easy to use templates and other tools to formulate listings. Unlike e-Bay, Turbo Listing allows you to build multiple listings and store them until you until you choose to submit them however listings cannot be shared across several computers. Turbo Listing was the basis for a demonstration of submitting an actual offering. Using Create New, Arpad started an auction listing for a used DVD/CD combination reader writer. Before starting, he scanned current e-Bay listings to view the competition and get hints about value and data that might improve the possibility of a successful sale.

Turbo Listing has helpful templates with blocks for item description, photographs, the conditions of sale, payment, and shipping. It can calculate insertion fees based upon the features requested. Many templates have themes designed to further promote the sale but that also increases the Insertion Fee.

Arpad entered an identifying title, and associated the item with a category, in this case Laptop Parts and Accessories. He could have entered a sub title or

a second category but both of those features would have increased the Insertion fee.

The design view, accepts the description in either English or HTML. When typing the description, he added the words "with issues" to indicate limitations to the drives capability. This category's template had a block for condition so he entered used.

If you do not have a photograph of your item, there are several free sources such as PhotoBucket.com. When you upload pictures, you get a URL or image tag which can be inserted into the listing as an embedded picture. Standard listings include one free photograph. Multiple photographs can be used and even displayed as a slide show or you can request thumbnails, but then the insertion fees go up.

It is also possible to enter data that buyers will not see. Arpad uses this to document the items location or other data useful only to the seller.

The final listing is translated into HTML if necessary and is available for preview before being submitted. If the Insertion Fee is higher than warranted by the potential sale value, the listing can be modified before submission.

After an item has been listed, prospective bidders can question the seller by email. Once a bid has been made, changes to the description are subject to stringent restrictions so Arpad suggested making the original listing as honest and complete as possible to avoid future changes. For example if the price is really good, buyers may suspect that the item is damaged or not working. How it was obtained, your experiences and why you are selling may preclude such questions after listing. Similarly stipulating details about sale conditions or payment and shipping methods may also head off questions. Arpad found that audience questions were very helpful in sharpening up the listing. Upon completion, he submitted the listing and then demonstrated looking it up on e-Bay.

Final fees contain both a base amount plus a percentage which declines as the sale value moves up through fixed ranges. Monetary transaction fees for currency exchange or Pay Pal, plus shipping and handling charges are added to the final bid to determine the buyers cost.

In response to a question, Arpad concluded with a discussion of Feedback. After a sale is completed or closed, both the buyer and seller are encouraged to enter information about the quality of the transaction. This is used to construct profiles of the honesty and reliability of both buyers and sellers.

The profiles can and should be used before entering into transactions with individuals.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub, Treasurer

Balance as of 06/16/2006 \$434.61

Expenses

Post Office \$50.00

St. Stephens 60.00

Total \$110.00

Income

Dues \$80.00

Donations 19.00

Picnic 70.00

Total \$169.00

Balance as of 07/12/2006 \$493.61

Members renewing: Robert Panello, Roger Deltony, and Sandra Schaeffer.

The Lighter Side

I was just following directions.

Customer: "I just got your version 5 CD, and I was trying to install it over your version 4 CD, and I am having some problems."

Tech Support: "What kind of problems are you having?"

Customer: "It makes a funny sound and gives me a 'Cannot access drive D:\' error."

Tech Support: "Did you put the new CD in silver side down?"

Customer: "Yes. I am doing as the tech who sent me the CD told me to. I am installing it over the other version."

Tech Support: "Let's see if there are any scratches on your CD."

Customer: "Which one?"

Tech Support: "The one that is in the CD drive that you are installing."

Customer: "Sir, which one? I already told you I am installing over version 4."

Could he have been trying to...? Naw.

Tech Support: "Sir, you must remove the version 4 CD that you have in your drive."

Customer: "I was told to install over it!"



A friend of mine bought a new computer and asked me to show him how to download programs off the web. The poor guy is completely clueless with anything computer related. I showed him a couple of the more popular sites and started a download. While waiting, I made the comment about how slow

dial up can be. He sat there staring at the paper sheet icon move between the world and folder icons for a few moments and then said: "Well if you moved the folder closer to the Earth, the program wouldn't have so far to travel, and it'd download faster."



At the end of the year all the eighth graders at my school had to go to the computer lab to do two things: fill out an anonymous survey detailing all the things we could do with computers (to tell the school how much they had taught us) and to register for high school online. Both were done through a web browser.

Well, I got finished pretty early, but the kid sitting next to me was going a little bit slower. The teachers had told us that once we finished we should exit out of the browser window, get off the Internet, then shut down the computer. When he got to the screen which said that all of his information had been sent and he was done he went to another web site instead.

The head computer teacher had been watching and she freaked out. She started yelling about how all of the information he submitted would be erased, that he could have broken something, and that he was in deep trouble. The assistant computer teacher came over, as did my social studies teacher, and they apparently all believed that, because the kid had surfed to some other web site, all the information he submitted would be sent back or something.

I could have told them it was all fine, but I was laughing so hard I don't think I could have gotten the words out.

