

DVD Xpress

by Del Brown

TUGNET [The Users' Group Network
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I have, as many people have, a lot of old video and VCR tapes just sitting around and not being used because they are bulky to store, or are inconvenient to use because it is necessary to set up a screen and projector.

Now we can make it easier to look at old movies of our kids or grandchildren, vacations, trips, or any memorable occasion by using a program like DVD Xpress to copy our old movies or data to CDs or DVDs as well as edit and make copies for other people and watch on TV. A very important factor is the making of a permanent record instead of the fading quality of tape. Copies can be made from the hard drive without loss of quality or directly to a DVD or CD disc.

The manual that comes with DVD Xpress is very good and takes you step by step through most stages of the operations. It is necessary to download only a few aids. By following the manual and the CD detailed instructions closely, the setup of the hardware is very easy. But note the next paragraph. Having had no experience with this type of program, I had a few problems. Their Tech Support isn't too good. I couldn't get my USB recognized until I upgraded the CAPWIZ from 3.5 to 3.6 via the Internet and used their option to initialize my USB input. I called in a friend and we worked it out together. I didn't get an email answer from tech about this until three days after we had already found it. Then all went well.

One option is to copy direct to disc, but I have saved all of mine to the hard drive for future editing and duplicating. It is now possible to make numerous copies from my hard disk without losing quality. I copied from my USB and from my 8 mm video camera to my hard disk. I found if I were recording "direct to disk" I had to use DVD plus discs but this depends entirely on your 'burner'; some burners require DVD minus discs.

As a whole, DVD Xpress, Capture Wiz and the ADS hardware do a very good job of capturing and encoding the av signals. There is a choice of five quality settings: three for DVD and two for VCR. The best quality setting #3 is for television broadcast or cable. #2 is retail movie quality, and #1 for amateur home movies.

Using the option of "direct to disc," the capture setting must match the settings of the output [record/burn] and media [record time and quality]. For fast copying of personal and unprotected tapes, use the lowest quality DVD or CD settings and your DVD burner. Sometimes you can let the hardware capture at the best quality resolution - for the best results in copying your most valued tapes and old footage, use the capture and save to the hard drive at the highest quality MPEG 2 setting [1 hour]. Then copy this quality recording to your DVD.

You may also save the tapes or video to the hard drive and then use Ulead's software DVD Movie Factory 3se (which is included with the package) to edit and join

scenes and output the finished product to DVD format and record to disc. For your permanent discs you can use either the write or rewrite discs. Both are supported.

Movie Factory will edit and join AVI, MPEG and DVD files into one movie and output to a folder or disc of approved type and size. Just chose your format: DVD,



SVCD, and VCD.

There are many options for editing: making a menu, adding background music, fades, insertions, blends, and just about anything you can imagine and many you can't. You can dub dialog, music, and other sounds.

When I tried DVD Xpress on a computer with Windows 98SE, I found that I had to install a USB 2 card - after which everything installed easily. By following all of the instructions, I found that everything worked as well as on the computer with Windows XP.

It will take time and experience for me to get full value out of this program. I have enjoyed using DVD Xpress and know I will have more pleasure as I learn more of what it is capable of doing.

My main complaint is that "MF3" doesn't indicate how long this recording will take. There is a "progress bar" but no timer. A 105-minutes video took over 4 hours to record to DVD quality on a 2.4 Celeron XP machine with 256 megs of memory. The actual burn process is fast. It is the encode and convert process that are CPU intensive.

Note:

1. I'm told that Win DVD is similar and slightly easier to use, but requires more temp working space on the hard drive and cannot import and edit DVD vob files.
2. Terminology in the menus and messages could be improved. But all told, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend DVD Xpress to anyone with average computer skills.
3. There were several users' reports on the internet which disliked and had no use for this product. Perhaps they were using an earlier model, which I owned and found unsatisfactory but this model has done a fine job, as the reviewer indicated, once he downloaded the latest upgrade

System requirements:

Pentium 800 Mhz or higher
MS Windows 98SE, 2000, ME, or XP
120 MB RAM
500MB for program

4GB hard drive space
CD or DVD recordable drive
USB port
Price: From ADS - \$99.99
On line - \$75-\$90
Contact: ADS TECH
Cerritos, Ca. 90703
PH. 562.926.1928
Support: 562.926.4338
Web Site: www.adstech.com

Are You Infected with Sony-BMG's Rootkit?

From EFF (Electronic Frontier Foundation)

EFF Confirms Secret Software on 19 CDs

San Francisco News that some Sony- BMG music CDs install secret rootkit software on their owners' computers has shocked and angered thousands of music fans in recent days. Among the cause for concern is Sony's refusal to publicly list which CDs contain the infectious software and to provide a way for music fans to remove it. Now, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) has confirmed that the stealth program is deployed on at least 19 CDs in a variety of genres.

The software, created by First 4 Internet and known as XCP2, ostensibly 'protects' the music from illegal copying. But in fact, it blocks a number of legal uses—like listening to songs on your iPod. The software also reportedly slows down your computer and makes it more susceptible to crashes and third-party attacks. And since the program is designed to hide itself, users may have trouble diagnosing the problem.

"Entertainment companies often complain that fans refuse to respect their intellectual property rights. Yet tools like this refuse to respect our own personal property rights," said EFF staff attorney Jason Schultz. "Sony's tactics here are hypocritical, in addition to being a security threat."

If you listened to a CD with the XCP software on your Windows PC, your computer is likely already infected. An EFF investigation confirmed XCP software on 19 titles, but it's far from a complete list. Sony-BMG continues to refuse to make such a list available to consumers.

Consumers can spot CDs with XCP by inspecting a CD closely, checking the left transparent spine on the front of the case for a label that says "Content Protected." The back of these CDs also mention XCP in fine print. You can find pictures of these and other telltale labeling at <http://www.eff.org/IP/DRM/Sony-BMG/>.

"Music fans should protect themselves from this stealth attack on their computer system," said EFF. Senior Staff Attorney Fred von Lohmann.

For EFF's list of CDs with XCP: <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/archives/004144.php>

The "legalese rootkit"— Sony-BMG's EULA: <http://www.eff.org/>

[Note: If you get a message saying the url is not valid when you paste this into your browser try it in Google. The url worked fine for me from there. —ed]

A USB Primer

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

By now most computer users are familiar with the term USB or Universal Serial Bus. This connection port on your computer is designed to replace the older serial, parallel and PS2 ports. Probably within a year you won't find any new computers with these older ports. They will have only USB. There are some things you might find useful about USB ports and hubs which could reduce or eliminate problems in dealing with them. USB ports have a number of advantages over the old system of parallel/serial ports. They do not require I/O memory space or individual IRQ lines. Anyone who has had to work with older computers and operating systems will remember the problems of trying to prevent IRQ conflicts when connecting external devices such as scanners or modems. How many times did the sound card manage to steal IRQ's that you had to have for another device? USB also allows for automatic device configuration and hot-plug capability. The hot-plug or hot-swap function means that you don't have to power down the computer and go through a restart when you want to connect a new device. Instead you simply connect or disconnect the USB cable. The computer will recognize the device and connect to the proper driver. That is assuming this isn't the first time you have used the device and that the driver has already been installed. You commonly have to install drivers for external hard drives, printers, scanners, card readers, etc. You generally don't have to install drivers for mice and keyboards that connect to the USB ports.

Next, consider that USB operates at three possible speeds: low speed or 1.4 megabits/second, full speed or 12 megabits/second, and high speed or 480 megabits/second (mbps). Low speed and high speed can be used with either USB 1. x or USB 2.0 hosts. The high speed can be used only with USB 2.0. The host is the computer that provides the USB connections. For USB 2.0 operation the host computers "root port hubs" must support USB 2.0. That means the computer must have USB 2.0 drivers that are supported by the operating system. Windows XP (service pack 1.0) and Windows 2000 both support USB 2.0. The root port hubs are the USB connectors on your computer and are usually connected to the motherboard. You can also identify them in the Device Manager where they will show under the USB Host Controller.

Although the USB specifications indicate you can daisy-chain up to 127 devices from one port, this is not likely to happen because of the power drop that occurs over long connections. You can get external hubs that allow you to connect 4-7 devices to a single root port hub. The external hubs are repeaters that relay transaction information from the computer to a device connected to

the hub's port. There is a catch to this as well. Some USB 2.0 hubs will decrease their maximum output if you have a USB 1. x device attached to a port. This means that any USB 2.0 device attached to the hub may not function or will function at a lower speed. I learned this the hard way with an external USB 2.0 hard drive. I thought the problem was the drive, but it was the hub. I had a USB 1.0 card reader attached to the hub and as a result the current output to each port was reduced to the point that it was not sufficient to run the drive. This occurred even though the hub and the drive had external power supplies.

An ample power supply is necessary to operate USB devices. Root hub ports can provide 5 volts and up to 500 milli-Amps (mA) of current. The USB power specifications state the USB ports should provide between 100 mA and 500 mA. Devices connected directly to the computer are able to obtain the maximum current. So let's take a situation where we have a hub connected to the computer's root port hub. The hub is receiving 500 mA of current at about 5 volts. If only the current received through the connecting cable powers the hub, the output from each of its four hubs will be only 100 mA. This is referred to as a "bus-powered" hub because it receives its current solely from the USB bus in the host computer. However, if the hub has its own power supply and is receiving at least 1.6 Amps from this supply, then it can provide a 500 mA output at each port. In this case, the hub should be able to support high-speed USB 2.0 devices.

On some computers you will find an icon in the system tray that is a "hardware disconnect". In this instance, you need to double click the icon and wait for it to permit you to disconnect the hardware device. This icon does not appear with all USB devices. Since installing SP2, I haven't seen this icon in my system tray. There are some reports of computers with SATA drives showing this icon. Since the SATA drive is supposed to be hot-swappable like USB devices, I'm not surprised that the icon shows up. However, with my Seagate SATA drive, I still don't see this icon. That may be because my motherboard doesn't support the hot-swap function even though it supports SATA drives.

When you plug in a USB device to either a hub or a computer port, there is an initial identification process referred to as the "configuration" step that occurs. During this configuration process the device can not draw more than 100 mA. If it does, the process will fail and it will appear that the device failed to work. The configuration process identifies the device, its drivers, and its power requirements. Only after this process is complete will the device be able to draw more than 100 mA current. Since this process is not instantaneous, some time must be allowed by the user before attempting to use the device. In addition, this configuration may not occur if the device is plugged into the computer before the computer is turned on and booted. In these cases, it may be better to connect the USB device after the computer is fully

operational. Most of the time, the computer will identify and configure the device during the bootup.

Microsoft has a knowledge base article on troubleshooting USB problems (#310575). Typically the problems relate to drivers or power problems. However, they also point out that high-speed devices should be connected with high-speed cables only. The low speed cables may distort the signal as a result of their reduced amount of shielding. Another really complete source of troubleshooting information can be found at: <http://www.usbman.com/winxpusbguide.htm>. This has re-ferences for Windows ME as well as XP and Windows 2000. However, anyone who hasn't dumped Windows ME should seriously consider doing so as soon as possible. WinXP is such a tremendous improvement over ME and will really make your computing experience much more enjoyable. My computer hasn't locked up or crashed in more than six months, probably longer. I really don't keep track any-more.

So what devices are typically high speed and require USB 2.0? Let's start with external USB hard drives. Seagate has a very interesting technical paper on external hard drives. In this paper they state that most 2 ½" external drives require 1000 - 1100 mA during the start-up cycle and then can function at the 500 mA maximum current available from the USB port. They also state that most USB ports can support up to 700 mA on a continuous basis. This is something I have not found elsewhere. Consequently, my recommendation is that when looking for an external drive, pick one with its own power supply. I wouldn't want to depend on one that drew all its power from the USB bus.

Other high-speed devices include laser printers, scanners, and multi-function printers. All of these should have their own power supply. Other devices that operate at full-speed and don't need external power are blue-tooth adapters and card readers. This is only a partial list of what is available in USB devices. Just remember when you are looking at them that the term full-speed does not 480 mbps, instead it is the slower 12 mbps.

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Online "My Family Health Portrait"

by Ira Wilsker

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Websites:

<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory>

<https://familyhistory.hhs.gov>

<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/download.html>

Recently, a relative in another state was hospitalized via an emergency room admission. His new wife of just a year did not have much information on the family health history, so urgently needed by the physi-

cians in order to diagnose and treat my relative. Urgent phone calls followed, gathering the requisite family medical history to enable the appropriate diagnosis and treatment. Philosophically, what if a comprehensive family medical history could have been immediately available? This circumstance is not unique, but a reasonable solution has been available for free for over a year at www.hhs.gov/familyhistory, courtesy of the U. S. Surgeon General's Office

This site explains the necessity of such data with the statement, "Health care professionals have known for a long time that common diseases—heart disease, cancer, and diabetes—and even rare diseases—like hemophilia, cystic fibrosis, and sickle cell anemia—can run in families. If one generation of a family has high blood pressure, it is not unusual for the next generation to have similarly high blood pressure. Tracing the illnesses suffered by your parents, grandparents, and other blood relatives can help your doctor predict the disorders to which you may be at risk and take action to keep you and your family healthy." In order to accomplish this task, the Surgeon general offers two simple options; one an online web maintained version hosted on a secure server (that is what the "https" means in the internet address) at <https://familyhistory.hhs.gov>, the other a 1.6mb downloadable "Zip" file which may be stored on a home computer, and utilized in the privacy of the home. The files created in either version can easily be exchanged among family members via email or disc.

In the online version, a family history can be newly created, or an existing version can be uploaded from the home computer to the secure Surgeon General website where the data can be managed, and then saved back on the home computer; no personal information is saved or captured by the government computer, protecting the privacy of the user. It should be noted that much effort has gone into the creation of this web based service, in that it explicitly works equally well with almost all known browsers, including Internet Explorer, Firefox, Mac Safari, Netscape, and many other browsers.

The first step in using the online version is to "Create a Family History", or to "Load a Saved Family History" if a file had been previously created. The preliminary step is to create a personal profile, where basic information such as name, gender, height, and weight are entered. The personal profile continues with a simple checklist of major common diseases (such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes), and age of onset, followed by a fill in the blank chart of other diseases. After the personal health history is created, there is then an opportunity to create a family profile. The family profile states "Only add family members that are biological (blood) relatives (not adopted or step-relatives)." Similar fill in charts are presented to complete the information for the other family members. Data can be modified, added, or deleted at any time. Once the user has completed entering the basic family information, a button "Go to My Family" takes the user to the basic "Family Health Portrait" where a family health tree can be displayed or printed;

this family tree contains symbols and abbreviations immediately recognizable by a health care practitioner as a basic family health history. Other family members, such as aunts, uncles, and other blood relatives can be added to the list as well. Other family members listed on the family tree can have their own personalized family tree created at this point, and the entire file can be downloaded to the user's computer, leaving no personal data on the HHS computer.

If for privacy or other reasons, the user does not wish to enter personal family health data to the secured website, the downloadable version is a self-contained version of what is available on the website. Once uncompressed with any zip utility (built in to Windows XP), the file is easily and quickly installed. The software does require the Microsoft ".Net" utility, version 1.1 or later, available for free at windowsupdate.microsoft.com. Once installed, the entire process is completed in the privacy of the home, with no personal data leaving the computer, unless the user desires to send the data files to other family members to complete or use as a basis for their own family health history.

With this information readily available both within a family unit, and shared with other blood relatives as appropriate, family health histories can be easily maintained, and distributed or printed as needed.

Many times we cannot recall family health problems that family members may have had which may give us a predisposition, or otherwise genetically affect us. With this free service and software from the Surgeon General, we may all be better able to provide our health care professionals with the information that may prove so vital to our health care and treatment.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Tired of Voice Mail Hell?

This web-site <www.paulenglish.com/ivr> lists the codes for bypassing the usual "press this, press that" numbers game for 213 companies. —*Wall Street Journal*

Care and Feeding of CD's

by Lynn L. Kauer

Editor Saginaw Valley Computer Association

I read an interesting article in the September 2005 issue of Popular Photography written by David D. Busch titled, "The Truth About Disc Rot." It paralleled some other magazine and news articles I have read on the same subject. The following is what we should know and understand about CD (and DVD) discs as storage devices. For the purposes of this article, CD's and DVD's are

considered the same as far as backup media is concerned. The only difference is that DVD's can hold more data.

We save things that are important to us. Those of us who take digital photos know that simply storing them on the hard drive of our computer is not a wise or safe thing to do as the disc may crash and we will lose everything. Thus, we copy the photos to a CD or DVD disc so that they will be always available for a long period of twenty or more years. However, will they really be there when we look for them?

The media of choice for backup and storage purposes less than ten years ago was tape backup. Some commercial enterprises continue to use digital tape for backup purposes. Tape is rarely used, if at all, for home use anymore. Actually, the backup media of choice for commercial use is moving toward external hard drives. Where does the CD fall into all of this?

There are hosts of backup utilities that utilize the CD for backup purposes. Most CD manufacturers advertise that CD media is good for 20 to 100 years depending on the depth of marketing they are trying to offer. The National Institute of Standards Technology (NIST) tests products for longevity. The catch is that longevity is available if the user adheres to very strict rules and standards. Let us look at some interesting facts.

Handling When a CD is burned, a laser shoots through the bottom of the disc into the dye layer located under the top protective plastic covering on at the top of the CD. This is the layer where the laser burns pits into the dye layer to allow the computer to interpret what is being written by the computer. When the bottom side of the disc becomes scratched or soiled, the laser is diffused and the data is not clearly written.

Secondly, if the top layer becomes damaged, moisture can penetrate the surface and cause the layer to slowly disintegrate and is the beginning of what is called "Disc Rot." How often have you watched someone open a CD case and directly pull on the edges of a CD until it is released from the case? Notice how the CD is bent while it is being removed? This bending is causing tiny cracks to develop in the reflective (protective) layer of the CD. To properly remove a CD from the case, press down on the inside of the retaining plastic that holds the CD in place. This causes the retaining ring to become slightly smaller so that the CD slides off easily without bending forces.

When handling, always pick up or carry the CD by the outer edge. Avoid placing your fingers on the read (bottom) side of the disc as this will cause acid penetration of both protective layers to begin.

Reliability CD-R is a disc that can be written to once while CD-RW are discs that can be written to many times reportedly 1000 times. CD's that the least reliable for archival purposes are the CD-RW's. These discs include a layer that is altered by the CD burner each time it is rewritten. Experience has shown that when these discs are used with another computer, it is a common for the second computer to be unable to read it. I burn a new music CD monthly for each show that I do. (I entertain at nursing and retirement homes.) I burned and placed the

CD-RW into my karaoke player, it would not recognize it. In addition, my second computer would not recognize it either. Only the computer that originally burned the CD was able to read it! Imagine if I had saved all of my music and photo images on a CD-RW. When the computer would eventually be replaced, the disc would likely be unreadable. It is better to save data on CD-R discs, as they are readable with any computer with a CD player.

CD-R's aren't permanent either. The organic dyes layer that the burner works with are similar to dyes in film. When exposed to sunlight, heat, cold and humidity and UV exposure the dye layer changes over time. How often have you watched someone place a CD on the dashboard of a car or keep it in a glove box? Proper storage of CD's is critical to their useful longevity.

Dyes There are many types of dyes used for the production of a CD. To quote the above mentioned author, "Under the NIST's accelerated "stress test," which includes exposure to very bright light, high temperature and humidity, recorded CD discs using phthalocyanine dye combined with a gold/silver reflective layer proved to be considerably more stable than all other types of CD-R media. Discs using azo dye as the data layer had less stability under light, temperature and humidity testing. Media using cyanine dye performed well when exposed to light, but had longevity problems under temperature and humidity stress.

DVD's, which generally use a modified form of a stabilized cyanine dye for the recording layer, are less predictable in terms of longevity. NIST data suggest that, despite lower data capacity, you might be better off in the long run using premium CD-R's instead of DVD+/-R discs."

The author went on to say that it's not always possible to tell what kind of dye was used for the manufacture of the disc because the dyes can be tinted. Cyanine based CD's (most common) have a light green or blue tint on the data side. Phthalocyanine dyes are often light green while the azo dye tends to have a blue color.

While it's possible to tell the dye type by reading the specs from the manufacturer, a better indicator might be the reflective layer. If a gold reflective layer was used then the likelihood of using a good quality dye is increased. Be aware, some cheap discs appearing to have a gold layer may be simply paint. Buyer beware!

Recommended brand discs are Fujifilm, Imation, Kodak, Maxell, TDK, Verbatim and Mitsui/MAM-A.

Protection and Care of CD's Manufacturers recommend storing CD's vertically in a cool, dry area instead of horizontally. The reason is to prevent warping and damage from humidity. Also, never use solvent based pens to write on them similar to permanent felt tipped pens. The solvent can penetrate the protective layer and damage the reflective layer below. The only safe place to write on the top of a CD is in the clear center portion of the hub when using a felt tipped pen.

It is better to apply a label to the top of the disc for identification purposes. Never write on the label with a

ballpoint pen when it is applied to the disc. The tip of the pen can cause stress cracks in the protective layer.

When using CD-RW discs, I use removable labels—www.digitalinnovations.com. They can be written on many times and then removed and replaced as necessary. For discs that I intend to keep for archival purposes I print the contents on the label with an ink jet printer—www.fellowes.com.

When cleaning to remove fingerprints or smudges on the read side on the read side of the disc, always use a CD or lens cloth wiping radially out from the center. Never clean using small circular motions on small portions of the disc as it can cause diffusion of the laser beam. Isopropyl alcohol or clear or soapy water can be used to clean a grimy disc. Never use acetone, anti-static agents or wood based products such as toilet paper or facial tissue to clean a disc.

When applying labels, be sure to center the label on the disc to avoid “off balance” condition when the disc is being used. When the disc is rotated at high speeds, the “off balance” condition can unbalance the disc and cause problems with high speed readers. For this reason I purchased a label applicator that perfectly centers the label each time versus putting the label on the disc “by eye.”

The Future Like the 1.4 MB floppy drive, tape drives, Zip discs and LS 120 disks that are no longer being used, the CD as we know it will likely bite the dust in about ten years. I predict the media of choice for backup and archival purposes will be that of external drive media similar to USB jump drives and flash card burners or other external drive sources. Personally, I use a 160 GB external hard drive to backup my computer data including music and photo files. Because of transportability, I also backup my music and photos on CD's and store them at an offsite location in a safety deposit box.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

Phishers use IRS tax refund as bait

Insufficient programming on a government Web site is helping cybercriminals pose as the Internal Revenue Service in a scam to collect sensitive data, some security experts warn.

A spam e-mail message has been sent around the world telling people they are eligible for a \$571.94 tax refund from the IRS. The e-mail offers a link to a fraudulent IRS Web site, but the link actually goes through a legitimate government Web site that only last month was promoted by President Bush.

“This is more advanced than the typical phish, because the Web link really does—at first—take you to the real tax benefit Web site,” said Graham Cluley, senior

technology consultant for U.K. security vendor Sophos. “Unfortunately the way the government Web site has been configured allows the phishers to bounce the unwary in their direction.”

The link in the phishing e-mail goes to a forged IRS Web site that asks for a Social Security number, tax return filing code and credit card details including security code and PIN.

The scam takes advantage of a so-called open redirect on the GovBenefits.gov Web site. This open redirect lets anyone craft a link that to the untrained eye looks like it goes to the government site, but actually goes elsewhere on the Web. The following link, for example, goes to CNET News.com: <http://www.govbenefits.gov/govbenefits/externalLink.jhtml?url=http://www.news.com>.

The government is aware of the issue and is working to fix it, a representative of the Department of Labor said. The department manages the www.GovBenefits.gov Web site. The site is a collaborative effort of 16 federal agencies to increase access to government information and is part of the president's e-government initiative.

Sophos first spotted the IRS phishing scam several days before this announcement. The company received several hundred copies of the e-mail in its traps located around the world. The actual phishing Web site has now been shut down, according to Cluley. “But, of course, other people could take advantage of this and redirect to other Web sites,” he said.

BCC

Q: It's holiday time, and I want to send group e-mails to family and friends, but some family and friends don't want me to reveal their e-mail addresses to others. How do I send these?

A: Within most e-mail clients (either desktop, such as Outlook, or Web-based, such as Yahoo Mail) is an address line labeled BCC:, which stands for “blind carbon copy.” Instead of putting everyone's address in the To: field (I usually put my own address there for a record of the send), simply use the BCC: field for family and friends.

Firewalls

Do you know the difference between hardware and software firewalls? And, no matter if you know or not, which should you use?

Nearly all routers come with built-in firewalls. So anyone who uses a router to connect their network to the Internet has faced this question.

Unfortunately, router firewalls are mostly inadequate. They do hide the router. But if a malicious program gets into the network, most can't block it from communicating with the Internet.

A good software firewall will hide your computers, and it will block outbound transmissions. So each computer on the network should have a software firewall, such as those you can find here:

<http://www.iopus.com/guides/free-firewall.htm>

You should activate the router firewall, too. It will hide the router from bad guys.

Office Gets an Extreme Makeover

Upcoming version of Microsoft's suite eliminates toolbars, most drop-down menus

Just when you thought Microsoft Office's look was as unchanging as the old Volkswagen's, the folks in Redmond decided to cook up a whole new way to work in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access. Out are toolbars, drop-down menus (with a few noteworthy exceptions), and most dialog boxes (or at least they're harder to find). In as a replacement is the new Ribbon, which aims to put frequently used items one click away. The revamped interface will debut with the new suite (as yet unnamed, but currently called Office 12) in the second half of next year.

Interface Changes

Even before the technical beta's release to 10,000 partners and customers, Microsoft had previewed Office's startling new interface, which all but does away with previous drop-down menus and toolbars.

Instead, we get a set of tabs in what Microsoft calls the "ribbon," an inch-high toolbar that displays key functions relevant to the selected tab. Click on the Write tab in Word, for example, and the ribbon shows font and formatting options as well as the cut, paste, and find/replace functions that used to live in the Edit menu. A number of functions, however, are still accessible only via menus that pop up when you click on down arrows, either in the ribbon or from the File button located to the left of the tabs.

New File Formats

If you're not happy about learning a new interface, you're out of luck: Unlike Windows XP, which allows users to revert to the Start menu and Control Panel of previous versions of Windows, Office 12 doesn't offer a legacy interface option—a design decision that will likely irritate those who've grown accustomed to Office's old face.

But lurking behind the scenes is a change that may ultimately prove even more significant than the interface makeover: Microsoft's replacement of its current proprietary default file formats (.doc, .xls, .ppt, and so on) with new compressed XML-based file formats, denoted by the addition of the letter x to the traditional file extensions. Although at first it seemed odd to be saving Word files with .docx extensions and Excel worksheets as .xlsx files, the new Office Open XML formats improve on their predecessors in several ways.

For starters, they're more compact. When I saved an unchanged Word 2003 file as a .docx file, it was less than half its previous size. And since Office XML formats are based on both XML and ZIP formats, files should be more universally accessible to other applications—even in other operating systems—as developers begin incorporating Microsoft's XML schemas (which provide the programming details for interpreting XML documents) into their software. Microsoft has already published draft versions of these schemas, and it has proposed Office

XML to the Ecma International standards organization as a royalty-free, open standard.

Two-Way Street with Older Versions

Office 12 doesn't force you to use its new default formats: You can still read and write to versions supported by Office 2000-2003. (Another bonus: You can now save files to read-only Acrobat .pdf format.) Conversely, Microsoft says it will make extensions allowing users of Office 2000-2003 to open, edit, and save Office XML files available as free downloads: When users of the legacy versions try to open an Office XML file, they will be directed to the downloads site.

Office XML enables a number of useful new features, including live previews of format changes (more on that capability later). In fact, because each Office XML file is actually a zipped collection of easily accessible component files (text is in one component file, style formats in another, reviewer comments in another), applying changes to these attributes is relatively easy—especially when dealing with a group of related documents.

Simply change the Office XML extension to .zip, open the file using any Zip utility, and remove or change the appropriate component file. For example, you might substitute in a new style subfile (created from scratch by programmers, or simply copied from a different Office XML document created by you or someone else), or strip out the comments file; the underlying text, safe in its own subfile, remains unchanged.

Initial Confusion

How do these changes play out in practice? In my tests with Word, I was initially confused by the way menus and submenus—and the items they contained—have been relocated into the Write, Insert, Page Layout, References, Mailings, and Review tabs. In some cases, I wound up having to do more clicking to get to functions that I previously could have accessed via toolbars. But other new features compensated for the hassle of having to learn the new interface.

Chief among these features is the new live preview capability. As you hover the mouse over a format change—for example, a different font or paragraph style—in the ribbon, you get to see how it will look in your document before you commit to it. It's far more efficient than the previous alternative of applying one style option after another—and it's available for any Office app that offers a gallery of choices such as type fonts, table formats, or picture inserts.

One downside: The ribbon does cut into screen real estate, and its size is not adjustable—the larger your monitor screen, the better. But even though many menu items have shifted, Microsoft has thankfully kept the default keyboard controls (such as Ctrl-S for Save and F12 for Save As).

Another significant interface change in Word: The Status toolbar at the bottom of the window, in addition to showing the number of pages and the current page of a document, now provides a running word count and a

sliding zoom bar that makes it easy to adjust the size of your view from the default 100 percent.

If you've ever sent off a document only to realize that it still contains revision mode comments about the recipient, then you'll appreciate the new Document Inspector (located under File, Finish). It searches the open document for any comments and revisions, properties, personal information (such as the name of the document owner), and other hidden text, and then offers to remove any or all of them before the document is finalized. This feature also appears in Excel and PowerPoint.

Excel Improved

Excel 12 has improved help for new users and beefed up capacity for power users (worksheets can now handle up to 1 million rows and 16,000 columns). Both types of users should benefit from easy-to-apply cell designs.

I particularly liked Excel 12's with formula writing. Past versions required you to know a formula's name and its variations in order to use them; now, as you type the start of a formula such as =sum in a cell, a pop-up menu shows the formulas that begin with the letters you've typed; each formula is explained with a tooltip. As you continue typing, Excel continues to narrow your options.

To jazz up your worksheets, Excel's Sheet Tab ribbon offers a gallery of visualizations you can apply with as few as two clicks. For example, the new conditional formatting visualization lets you create thermometer-like color gradients based on the value in a cell. As with Word, you can use live preview to see how your choices will look in your actual document before committing to them.

Page Layout view finally makes it simple to see exactly how each page of a worksheet will print and where the page breaks are. Adding a column or row to an already formatted and designed worksheet seamlessly applies those style elements to the new column or row—something you must do manually in existing versions of Excel.

PowerPoint's New Powers

Office XML's file-shrinking magic is particularly striking in PowerPoint 12. A single slide with a photo and graphics that took up 5MB in PowerPoint 2003's default format shrank to a modest 610KB (about 0.6MB) in the new .pptx format.

PowerPoint 12's use of the ribbon provides a sense of control lacking in earlier versions. For example, by clicking on Effects in the Design ribbon, you can turn a rudimentary bulleted list into a logical diagram—and then quickly spruce it up with a 3-D or glow effect using other options on the same ribbon. In previous versions of PowerPoint, these options were buried in a labyrinth of multiple menus.



Outlook Update

Office 12's interface consistency breaks down in Outlook. No ribbons here—just the same old drop-down menus. What is different is the new and potentially useful To-Do Bar. Similar to the task pane you find in Word or Excel 2003, it appears on screen right and is supposed to display all pending tasks and upcoming meetings.

Interface 8

Microsoft says that when used on a corporate network, the To-Do Bar will display meetings assigned through other networked Office system applications, such as Access and OneNote. You can adjust the size of the pane, but I didn't find that it made the screen feel cluttered.

Until you mark a task done, Outlook will keep it in the To-Do Bar. To reserve time to complete a To-Do Bar task, you can simply drag it into your calendar (by default the program will schedule a 30-minute appointment).

Outlook 12 lets you exchange calendar information with another user via e-mail; you can even overlay appointments from various users into your calendar (each person's events are color-coded for easy identification).

Searching capability in Outlook seems much improved over past versions. But the lack of ribbons seemed odd; I found myself missing them and their convenience.

An Accessible Access

For many Office users, Microsoft's powerful database program, Access, has always seemed impenetrable—especially compared to the more user-friendly FileMaker Pro. Access 12 adds features that make the software more, well, accessible.

Getting-started templates, presented visually in the ribbon, guide new users through the creation of databases for specific uses—for example, tracking a collection or organizing an address book. Access 12 also makes it easy to reformat database reports on the fly: You can now edit each database field from the report view, a major improvement. And simplified query tools will help you extract the data you need without having to learn any special jargon.

Final Thoughts

Like its predecessors, Office 12 is a mammoth program; most of us are unlikely to ever use most of its features. I would have liked the option to retain the old interface—but the new interface has its advantages, and the move to XML is clearly a good one.

Along with a host of less dramatic but potentially useful new features, these major innovations—at least as introduced in the beta—make for a more powerful and helpful productivity suite.

Windows OneCare Live

Are you tired of spending time trying to protect and maintain your computer? Are you worried that you're still not doing everything you should to keep it safe and running at optimal performance? If your answer is "Yes," then Windows OneCare is for you. Windows OneCare is a comprehensive PC health service that goes beyond

security to take an integrated approach to help protect and care for your computer.

Comprehensive, integrated, automatic computer health service

The Windows OneCare health meter gives you a clear, continuous indication of your computer's overall level of protection and performance. If Windows OneCare detects anything that you can do to improve the health of your computer, the service will automatically show you what action to take and give you a one-click solution.

Antivirus and Firewall help protect your computer from viruses, worms, Trojan horses, hackers, and other threats.

With a click of the mouse, you can directly scan individual files and folders for viruses. You can even check attachments that you receive through MSN Messenger for viruses or worms.

Trustworthy, Reliable Backup and Restore

Windows OneCare Backup allows you to copy your important files and settings to CDs, DVDs, or to an external hard disk. Regular backups can help you protect your important data from loss due to accidental deletion, viruses, or hardware or software failure.

If you use an external hard disk, you can configure Windows OneCare to perform an automatic backup of your important data as part of your regular Tune-up.

Automated Tune-up

for increased performance

Tune-up takes care of routine maintenance and helps improve your computer's performance. This automated service performs the following functions:

- Automatically scans your computer for viruses.

- Defragments your hard disk to help improve computer efficiency.

- Removes unnecessary files from your computer to increase available hard disk space.

- Helps make sure that important security updates from Microsoft are installed efficiently and on time.

- Checks for changes to your important files as well as new files, then sends you a reminder when it's time to run Backup.

- Automatically backs up your files for you if you use an external hard disk.

- Continual updates provide you with the latest technology

- Windows OneCare updates itself automatically to counteract new viruses and other threats, and also works with Microsoft Update to help ensure that your computer is up-to-date with the latest critical security updates from Microsoft.

- Windows OneCare continually updates its firewall policy to keep ahead of hackers and make sure that your legitimate programs have the Internet access they need.

- Windows OneCare provides continuous feature updates to subscribers, providing you with the latest technologies to help protect you from emerging threats. If you're worried about a new virus or other threat, you can check for updates yourself with a single click.

If you are interested in trying this out, go here: <http://www.windowsoncare.com/>

From the January 2006 issue of The Umbrella Online, newsletter of the Hampton Roads Virginia Computing Community.



From The DealsGuy

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

Want some trivia? We worked a trade show called Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation and Education Conference [<http://www.iitsec.org>] which is mostly a military show. Attendees include many high ranking military officers and even congressmen. There were some army vehicles including a training tank on display in the show. I saw a booth with all kinds of concave and warped type mirrors in it, but didn't hear their uses. This was a place to see cutting edge technology, but I don't have enough room here for the most interesting booths and there is probably limited interest in my trade show experiences. Primarily, the widest technology covered was simulation machines of all kinds all over the show floor. Unfortunately, I was unable to find time to try any of them. You name it, there was a simulator.

A reporter for the *Orlando Sentinel* wrote about talking to the CEO of a simulation company (VirTra Systems) with offices in Denver and Phoenix who mentioned that he intended to move his operation to Central Florida in sixty days. [<http://www.virtrasystems.com>] He stated "you've got to be here if you're in the simulation industry." Here is the trivia; the reporter said that central Florida is home to more than 140 simulation companies and they employ, directly or indirectly, over 17,000 people. Who would have thought that since this is assumed to be only an amusement park paradise. Another reporter for the Money section wrote about the competition for skilled employees all over central Florida by companies based here.

I knew there were lots of companies oriented toward all kinds of electronics engineering here including a dozen laser light companies, many companies that provide engineering and manufacturing for the computer industry and many other high tech industries, but not about the simulation industry.

It's All About The Squeaky Wheel

I was in line at Staples early Friday morning after Thanksgiving for some specials, but too far back to get all but one, a 512 meg USB Flash Drive for \$19.95 before a \$10 mail-in rebate. That night, I plugged it into the hub I always use and it gave me an error, but after a couple of minutes, it worked OK. However, soon another message told me there was not enough power from the hub and to plug it into the computer directly. I did that and still got an error message, but it worked after a couple minutes and I could write to it. I have several USB flash drives and have never had that problem using that hub

so I wanted to return it to Staples for an exchange. The manager told me he would not exchange it at that price and that I would have to take the problem up with PNY who made it. When I insisted it was not right since that was the only one I had the problem with, he said I would have to pay the difference between the sale price and the posted price if I wanted another one, so I gave up.

When I got home, I called PNY whose tech support took an indifferent attitude about it and said there was nothing wrong with it if it would eventually work. However, he did finally admit that some might work better than others, not that there would be anything wrong. I then called Staples Corporate office, and was transferred to the President's office of customer relations who was sorry to hear what had happened at the Staples store, and apologized saying "that is not the way we do business" and kept me on the line while calling the store. When he returned, he said the manager was "apologetic" and assured me they would exchange my unit for a new one, which that manager had stated they did not have when I was in the store earlier for an exchange.

Returning to the Staples store for the exchange, nobody seemed to know about it, but after my insistence, a lady went looking for the one they would hold for me. When she finally returned several minutes later, she did indeed have one and the exchange was short and sweet, but cool ("here"). The squeaky wheel syndrome worked. The new flash drive worked just fine, even in the hub, as I thought it would. I have since read that it is not recommended to use Flash drives in a hub, but I have used as many as two at one time in my hub, even with the power for it unplugged, with no problem because it is much easier than plugging them into the computer.

Time To Do Your Taxes

Remember that you can find out where the AARP volunteers are working on income taxes and get yours done there absolutely free, except under certain circumstances. It is admirable that those folks work for free on your behalf when they are actually mostly professional people who are taking time off from their normal job to help us. On the other hand, you can go to [<http://www.taxact.com>] and download Second Story Software's free version of Tax Act for doing your own tax return. It will pester you to upgrade to the paid version while you are inputting data, but it will still do yours free and will now also do the e-file for you free. Personally, I use the Deluxe version because I like the price at \$12.95, and it includes other very helpful features, one of which saves time on data input if you used it last year (important to me).

Judy Taylour from APCUG notified most member user groups that Second Story Software will offer user group members a discount for purchasing Tax Act products. I can't include the procedure here because they don't want it posted on the Web, but I believe the Deluxe version would be just \$9.95. Simply contact your group's APCUG rep for the procedure for downloading Tax Act to the discounted shopping cart. Double check the prices in-

cluding the Ultimate Bundle, depending on whether you need the state version or not.

Build Your Own Web Site for Free!

A friend, who said he had not tried it himself, but that it was well recommended, referred this Web Site freebie for me to try. I have not downloaded it yet, but hope to check it out one of these days. I was a bit skeptical when I was told that one professional Webmaster chose it over the high end product he was already using, but what's to lose when it's free? Check out [<http://www.nvu.com/>] and see if it is anything you might like. They have versions for Windows, Mac and Linux, making it pretty versatile. They say they are supported by Linspire and encourage you to support Linspire products.

Worth a Look

This URL has been sent to me more than once in the last few months, but I didn't feel it fit the criteria of my DealsGuy column. However, since I had room this month, I thought I would include it because of the referrals. [www.infopackets.com/windows+newsletter.htm] You'll find all kind of things there and even a deal every so often, I'm told. I saw one last time I looked although not this time, but I didn't spend a lot of time there. There are all kinds of articles about many things so I hope you get something out of it. Editors might be able to use some of the reviews posted there.

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. Be sure to check the announcement pages on my Web site. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>].

What Your Computer Really Does When It's Idle

by Vinny La Bash

Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

You're sitting at your machine, thinking about what to do next, when your disk drive starts whirring and the light flashes, indicating that something is going on. What is your machine doing? Your hands are nowhere near the keyboard or the mouse, and you can be relatively certain that neither telepathy nor telekinesis is at work.

One possibility is that your system is loading automatic updates from Microsoft.com because you set your system to download updates automatically. The same could be true for anti-virus programs, firewalls or any application software that offers this type of automated service.

The Task Scheduler may be running a background utility. Your automatic backup may be kicking in, or an online subscription service is delivering requested

information as part of a service it provides. Any number of similar operations could be going on. There is a dark side to this. You may be infected by a spyware program reporting back to its master over the internet. Most spyware blabs about your web surfing habits to a commercial entity so that it can tailor ads to your individual tastes. Many people consider this annoying or intrusive. Nevertheless, the designers of these programs have no desire to hurt you. They want only to sell you something.

However, something far less benign could be going on. A program could be attempting to steal your banking information, PIN numbers, credit card records, social security information, and other financial data with the intention of draining your bank account.

A Trojan horse program may be downloading spam to retransmit from your machine, making it look to recipients that you are the spammer. Other programs make your machine a “zombie” or a node in an array of machines designed to launch a Denial of Service (DOS) attack on a web site.

Worst of all, there have been instances reported of stealth programs downloading child pornography and retransmitting it to another machine. These programs make it look like you are the culprit, making you subject to arrest and incarceration. This kind of frighteningly malicious activity has been rare, but the danger is real.

If you are concerned about this, and you should be, Windows XP offers a solution:

Click Start. Click Run. In the text portion of the Run dialog box, type `cmd` and click OK. This brings you to the Command Interpreter, which starts out by displaying the Version of XP that’s running on your machine and some copyright information.

Now enter the command `netstat -o`, which displays network statistics about your current active connections.

There are five columns of information displayed. The Proto column tells you what communication protocol is being used for a particular process. In most instances this will be TCP (Tele-Communications Protocol). This is irrelevant for our purposes. Local Address is your machine.

Foreign Address is the IP address and port number of the machine the process is communicating with.

State informs you if the communication session is sending or receiving, waiting, acknowledging or finished.

PID (Process Identifier) is the piece we need, because it identifies the process (program) that is controlling the communications session from your computer.

Perform the `Ctrl+Alt+Del` keystroke sequence to bring up the Windows Security window.

Click Task Manager.

Click the Processes tab.

Click the PID column. This sorts the information, making it easier to find the program you’re looking for.

Note: If the PID column is not displayed, you can activate it from the View menu.

Examine the PID list until you find the PID number(s) you found with the `netstat` command. If it’s `msnmgr. exe` or `iexplorer. exe`, there is nothing to worry about. These

are normal Windows XP processes and no cause for concern. There are many other legitimate Windows XP processes that are likely to be listed in the Task Manager.

How do you tell the good from the bad? Unfortunately, Windows itself isn’t much help in showing what any given process is doing and you can’t shoot them all and “let God sort them out.” A search of Microsoft’s web site won’t yield useful information.

A great place to find valuable information about common Windows processes is:
<http://www.liutilities.com/products/wintaskspro/processlibrary/>

This site contains information about all common Windows processes, and the site administrators do an excellent job of keeping posted information current.

Knowing what’s going on in your system is good, but the best protection against intruders is to keep your anti-virus, firewall, and other specialized protection programs up-to-date.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Absence Makes the E-Mail Grow Fonder

by Gabe Goldberg

APCUG Advisor; Columnist, AARP Computer and Technology Website

Absence makes the heart grow fonder” is never truer for me than when I’m on the road, away from my wife, four cats, and e-mail. My wife and cats forgive my travels but it’s a challenge e-mailing remotely. Fortunately, technology provides many ways to access e-mail. You’re on your own, however, explaining to people you’re visiting why you need a break from vacation, sightseeing, or family, to check for in-box nuggets.

Aside from pressure to stay in touch (some people are addicted to e-mail), it’s worth thinking about e-mail before traveling, especially for an extended period. Many ISPs (Internet service providers) limit the e-mail they’ll store for you. If you exceed this amount your e-mail may “bounce”—that is, be returned to senders. That frustrates people writing to you and causes problems with lists to which you’re subscribed.

You can suspend list subscriptions to reduce e-mail volume, but that’s a nuisance and won’t help if someone sends you huge notes with vacation pictures.

If you have dial access you can’t do much other than ask correspondents not to send large notes. Always-on cable or DSL users can leave e-mail software enabled, downloading mail as it arrives. But things can still go wrong—power may fail—leaving e-mail stranded at the ISP.

This article describes using remote computers for e-mail; it doesn’t cover traveling with a laptop (which may require reconfiguration for sending e-mail) or using your cell phone or wireless PDA (which should be straightforward).

Facilities for reading e-mail will require your normal e-mail password; if your PC logs in automatically, you

may not remember it! It's a nasty surprise—realizing when you're far away—that you've forgotten your password.

The easiest way to read e-mail when away from home is through your ISP's facility. If you normally read e-mail via a Web interface, your life is simple indeed: find an online computer, enter the ISP's e-mail Web address (URL), and you'll have your familiar interface. This also works for Yahoo!, Google's Gmail, and other national e-mail services.

Even if you usually read e-mail using a PC program such as Outlook Express, Eudora, or Thunderbird (which all use an Internet protocol; called "POP3"), your ISP may provide Web access to e-mail, so ask. If it's available, practice using it before leaving so you can learn the process and have ISP tech support handy instead of a long-distance call away. Again, take your ISP information with you so you can log on, get help, etc.

Some ISPs provide an e-mail interface called Telnet. This text-only (not graphical) interface was developed in the Internet's early days. It's fast, efficient, and accessible from most PCs, but isn't intuitive and best suits technically oriented folks. If you'll use this on the road, practice beforehand is essential.

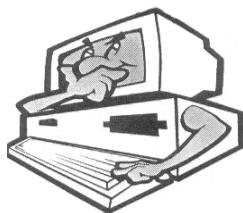
A very simple tool for accessing many ISP's e-mail is Mail2Web [www.mail2web.com]. Enter your e-mail address and password; the Web site fetches and displays your e-mail. Notes you send will appear to be from your normal e-mail address. Yahoo! provides a similar facility for reading POP3 e-mail.

AOL members can visit AOL's Web site [www.aol.com], click the Mail link, and access e-mail.

If you use an always-on Windows XP PC, you can— with technical setup beforehand and assuming no ISP-imposed blockage—use its built-in Remote Desktop feature to operate your home PC remotely as if you were sitting in front of it.

Two final issues: First, keep security in mind when using strange computers. Don't allow passwords to be saved; when finished, clear the browser cache and close applications you've used. Second, be careful setting an "away" message for everyone who e-mails you. Some less-than-clever notification systems annoy people and interfere with mailing lists.

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Anti-Spyware Basics

by Dave Gerber

Dave's Bits & Bytes, A Periodic Newsletter for the Members of the Sarasota PC User Group and the World Director, Sarasota PCUG, Florida

You've just come home with your new computer. How delightful! Now you're ready to surf the web and download some music—legally of course—and send out a few emails to family and friends.

As you're about to plug in the networking cable you remember something the sales associate mentioned.

"Be sure and get some anti-spyware and security stuff".

"Bah," you figure. The guy is just trying to sell you more that you don't want or need, right?

Onward you go, dismissing the comment and salivating as Google pulls up page after page of amazing information about things you never knew existed. Need to know about livestock birthing? No problem! Have a hankering for finding just the right flap settings for your Cessna? Piece of cake!

But wait, what's with these 'extra' windows that keep popping up and obscuring your view? And why is it that your homepage is now set at www.somePornSite.com? "Hmmm," you wonder, thinking back to what the sales associate said...

Welcome to the Net! You have just been hijacked and had your first "drive-by" install. No—not the type of drive-by from the gang downtown, guns a' blazing, tires screeching—it appears to have come from that "friendly" website who just happened to be pushing some 'extra' software onto unsuspecting users such as yourself.

The scenario above is an all too common occurrence—though, more than likely, excluding both of those searches via Google. And if you did actually perform those searches, you are indeed unique to say the least. Just don't write me if you're a farmer transporting a pregnant cow in a Cessna. ;-)

And so, some basic security info is at hand. At least, enough to get you down the road to securely surf the Web with confidence.

Here's a list of things you should do before plugging into the Net:

1. Be sure you have both a firewall and anti-virus protection. Without either, it could be literally only 10 or 15 minutes before your system is compromised. Typically, free products give you bare bones applications, which is fine if you're not going to do any heavy surfing. Going to be online 3, 4, 5 hours a day? Make the investment and get a few extra perks.
2. Now that you have a firewall and anti-virus installed, you can go online. Make sure the operating system that came installed by the reseller has all critical patches from Microsoft installed. This single event, should it be skipped could be the most damaging. You see, malware writers know all the exploits and vulnerabilities in the OS, and write accordingly to take advantage of them to deliver their bundles of joy.

3. Find a dependable source for anti-spyware. Many of the most respected applications on this category are free, with some very nice paid versions as well.

Now doing those three simple basic things will get you started. You still need to read up about tweaking Internet Explorer, to help tighten its out of the box security (kind of like adding extra stuff to a new car). Then deciding what kind of security settings or software to use for email.

Hopefully you're not overwhelmed just yet. My purpose is to inform on a basic level for the new user. Once you're up and running, other subjects delving deeper into technical issues can be addressed.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Society News

Planning Meeting Notes

January 3, 2006

by John McMillan, Secretary

Sally Springett hosted the Planning Meeting that began at 7 pm. Vice President Dan Rothfuss led the meeting in Arpad's absence. Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, John McMillan, Sally, Steve Staub and Tom Thompson were in attendance.

The meeting started with a discussion of the Jeopardy Game that was the highlight of the Society's December meeting. This seemed to be well received by all. Only 3 members chose to participate as contestants but nobody appeared embarrassed by the occasional booboo that added to the joviality of the occasion. The committee agreed that, with different sets of questions, this could be established as a fill in for a speakers cancellation or perhaps used on an annual basis.

It was pointed out that true/false and multiple choice questions would fix the validity of answers but many felt that some of the contestants defense of their answers added to the humor of the game. One suggestion was that if there were enough candidates for contestants, we might try two sets of contestants with the top three scorers participating in final Jeopardy. The idea of daily doubles was rejected as adding unnecessary complications to the process.

An E-mail had been sent to Dave Thompson asking him to bring the projector to the Jan 10 meeting at the Penfield Library. John asked if the Society owned a power strip for use by presenters. He reported that numerous illustrative slides had been assembled for the talk on SoundBytes and RCSi Forums.

After the Planning meeting he and Ron Matteson transferred the slides from a CD to a lap top that Ron provided along with a power strip. After a discussion they opted for an Adobe Pro presentation that offered better options than Power Point.

The current Program plan is to pursue the Search Engine Optimization program for the February meeting with the possibility of the Intel backpack for March and

Smart Computing for April. A Linux presentation has also been considered but contacts made so far have not been fruitful.

John mentioned that he had been contacted by a potential member but Steve felt that we are gradually shrinking in size. Over the past few years, the Treasury has fluctuated between \$400 and \$700 which meets current operating expenses but could not withstand capital expenses such as stapler parts, projector failure, or other one time expenditures. Several ideas for increasing the balance were considered and rejected however this continues to be a concern.

We were saddened to hear of the death of Dick Bauer. Steve attended the funeral home where there were calling hours. His wife, Larilyn, was involved with the Internet SIG in 1997 acting as secretary, and served as Board Member At Large from 1998-2001. She worked with the membership committee and both she and Dick helped with Monitor printing and assembly.

The committee agreed that they should start looking for a picnic spot for August. Brighton, Fairport, Greece (Braddocks Bay), and Henrietta were mentioned as possibilities. Sally volunteered to check out the availability of Brighton Town Park facilities.

Meeting Notes

January 10, 2006

by John McMillan, Secretary

Club business: Steve Staub reminded members to keep their dues current before stating that the February meeting would be at the Brighton Library on February 14. The subject will be on Search Engine Optimization, How to Increase Traffic at Your Web Site. He also requested that members help straighten out the room at the end of the meeting because that is what makes us welcome at the various facilities that we use.

Ron Matteson mentioned that the March meeting is expected to be a presentation from Intel that discusses Building Your Own Computer. The *Smart Computing* group is expected to return in April.

After the coffee break, John McMillan described how to utilize Soundbytes Forums to resolve computer problems. In a talk that was liberally sprinkled with screen shots of Soundbytes. Org web sites, he covered opening the web site; the six basic links on the home page; and then concentrated on the use of Forums and Topics.

There are 14 Forums: "What the Sound Bytes Crew got wrong (again)"; "Windows"; "The Macintosh"; "Linux"; "Hardware"; "Software"; "Geek Toys"; "Why this weeks poll stinks on ice"; "Networks"; "Viruses"; "Digital Media"; "The Internet"; "Current Events"; and "Fun Stuff."

Each Forum is a collection of related Topics that are submitted by any of the over 2300 Registered Users. Topics start with a question or comment that is called a Post. Posts also include responses that may be answers, comments, or requests for more details of a problem. After describing the process, John displayed the sequence of an actual case that was used in the construction of the talk

when unfamiliar software raised several questions. Although only registered members can make posts, anyone can access a Topic to follow the interactive process, without registering as a user.

The system also contains a search/query capability that was illustrated with several slides detailing query statements; search targets and response sequencing plus reporting. In addition, there are several commands appearing on many of the screens that any one can use. John went on to explain what they did with slides displaying their effect.

John described several instances that he found were extremely beneficial in resolving problems. In 3 years of usage there have not been any issues with the process but he cautioned the audience to read the Registration agreement carefully before signing up. That was followed with slides showing the types of information required or requested for registration. He pointed out that many of the members operate under pseudonyms that protect their identity. A question from the audience brought out a major point. The use of this tool does not require any expenditure except your time. Registration is free.

After finishing the discussion of registration, John described operating differences for registered users before opening the floor to questions from the audience. Then he shifted gears to describe the Rochester Computer Society's web site available at <<http://www.rcsi.org/>> The home page contains a number of links so slides were used to display many of the choices.

When John finished the discussion of Forums that operate like the Soundbytes Forums, Bob Avery, the Societies web master, used a live Internet connection to demonstrate some recent changes. The Resource page received close scrutiny. Bob stressed the importance of members alerting him to additions, changes and corrections. His E-mail address is listed on the inside of the back cover of the Monitor.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub, Treasurer

Balance as of 11/15/05 \$405.06

Income

Dues and Donations \$178.60

Expenses

Cartridge World \$128.50

St. Stephen's 60.00

Distribution cost 15.92

Ink 30.98

Total expense \$235.40

Balance 12/13/05 \$446.26

Income

Dues and donations \$306.30

Expenses

Cartridge World \$ 62.49

Staples (paper, cover stock, mailing labels, badge inserts) 147.93

St. Stephen's 60.00

Park Permit 80.00

Total expenses \$350.42

Balance as of 1/10/06 \$871.43

Renewing members: John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, Claud Fedele, Jim Doyle, Sharon Janes, Richard Comegys, Ray Newell, Larry Delahooke, Sally Springett, and Steve Staub.

New members: Al Saia and Richard Billiski.

The Lighter Side

"Think of the Internet as a highway."

There it is again. Some clueless fool talking about the "Information Superhighway." They don't know didley about the net. It's nothing like a superhighway. That's a rotten metaphor.

Suppose the metaphor ran in the other direction. Suppose the highways were like the net. . .

A highway hundreds of lanes wide. Most with pitfalls for potholes. Privately operated bridges and overpasses. No highway patrol. A couple of rent-a-cops on bicycles with broken whistles. 500 member vigilante posses with nuclear weapons. A minimum of 237 on ramps at every intersection. No signs. Wanna get to Ensenada? Holler out the window at a passing truck to ask directions. Ad hoc traffic laws. Some lanes would vote to make use by a single-occupant-vehicle a capital offense on Monday through Friday between 7:00 and 9:00. Other lanes would just shoot you without a trial for talking on a car phone.

AOL would be a giant diesel-smoking bus with hundreds of ebola victims on board throwing dead wombats and rotten cabbage at the other cars, most of which have been assembled at home from kits. Some are built around 2.5 horsepower lawnmower engines with a top speed of nine miles an hour. Others burn nitroglycerin and idle at 120.

No license plates. World War II bomber nose art instead. Terrifying paintings of huge teeth or vampire eagles. Bumper mounted machine guns. Flip somebody the finger on this highway and get a white phosphorus grenade up your tailpipe. Flatbed trucks cruise around with anti-aircraft missile batteries to shoot down the traffic helicopter. Little kids on tricycles with squirtguns filled with hydrochloric acid switch lanes without warning.

NO OFFRAMPS. None.

Now that's the way to run an Interstate Highway system.

—Russell Nelson

"I think computer viruses should count as life. I think it says something about human nature that the only form of life we have created so far is purely destructive. We've created life in our own image." —Stephen Hawking