

MONITOR

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Linux, Really?

by William A. Statt

Rochester Computer Society, Inc.

We have been hearing about Linux for years. It is supposed to be the next “Operating System.” But why hasn’t it gained more of a market share? Well, I have tried 53 different Linux Distributions and/or their upgrades to date. Until today, I have never been able to get a distribution to do everything that I needed in a desktop operating system. There have always been pitfalls. To start with, Linux is not supplied with proprietary software. What is proprietary software? When you purchase a copy of Windows, you are paying money for the product. Included in the price that you are charged, are accessory costs. One of the most important things for a home user is to be able to play encrypted DVDs and listen to MP3 files. To do this, the operating system needs to use codecs.

These are programs to *code* and *decode* the media. There are licensing fees that need to be paid to use these codecs.

Since Linux is a free operating system, they can not include these codecs. If you are in a country that does not have copyright laws you can install these codecs. To install software in many Linux systems, you need to type command lines in a terminal. This

is very similar to the old DOS commands. Many software programs are downloaded in a compressed format such as tar.gz. Often, in Linux, you have to “unzip” these files, then “compile” the file, then “make” the file, and finally “make-install” the file. You need to the development programs to do



this. These programs are often not usually installed with the default packages and you have to look for them on the Internet or on your installation CD, to get them into your Linux distribution. Then you have to search the Internet for the codec that will work, not only for the distribution you're using, but also for the version of that distribution that you are using. Another problem in Linux is getting your 3-D acceleration to work on your video card.

The base of your Linux operating system is the kernel. Every time you update the kernel, you have to recompile the 3-D acceleration on your video card. This can be a most daunting task in Linux. Often you have to reconfigure the base software for the video driver. This can be a horrendous task. I've lost several complete operating systems trying to complete it. Just adding software to a Linux distribution can destroy the system. There are two main systems for installing software. One system uses Debian files which are .deb files. Other systems use .rpm files. These files can usually be found in repositories or in special web sites. Often, the software you need is not in the default repository. Then you have to add extra repositories. When you do this, you run the risk of trying to install software that would not be fully compatible with your system, and will cause the whole system to crash. Just finding the correct repositories to add and then figuring out how to add them properly to the package manager for your system can be confusing. If you can't find the application software you need packaged for your distribution, you have to go to source code. Then you have to "compile" and "make" and "make-install" the source code. Hopefully, this is will not bring up a dependency problem. There are many different package manager's. SuSE has its own package manager called Yast. This does a pretty good job and will warn you if there are "dependencies."

Dependencies are a special problem all on their own. In Windows you have DLL files. These are essentially libraries that programs can borrow from. This way, individual programs do not have to install a separate copy of these libraries. Linux also uses libraries. If an application can not find a library that it needs in order to run, this becomes a dependency. Most of the time, the installing package manager will include the dependencies for you. At

other times you have to search the Internet, and very often, you end up with a tree of dependencies that becomes very frustrating. There are other package manager's. Apt-get is one of the most popular. This can be run from the command line. There is also the Synaptic Package manager which is a graphical user interface for apt-get. Another is the Smart Package Manager. "K" Package Manager is another common program.

There are also alternative Web sites which will prepackage applications for specific distributions and the distribution number. If you are using Linux on a second computer in a home network you'll want to be able to print to the printer that is connected to your Microsoft computer. Different Linux distributions have varying success with this also. All the Linux distributions that I have used will find your ethernet card and give you an Internet connection. Using a wireless connection is again a separate and very difficult problem for Linux.

Another disturbing problem using Microsoft Windows is the amount of viruses, Trojans, and spyware that the program attracts. In Microsoft Windows, their Web browser, Internet Explorer, is bound deep into the operating system. If something infects Internet Explorer, it can infect and crash the entire operating system. In Linux, the Web browser is a separate software application. Also, Linux is a true multi-user operating system. The user interface can not affect the operating system. The code for Linux is open source. There are tens of thousands of programmers and developers around the world who work on Linux daily. If a problem with the operating system is found, it is usually patched within hours. In Windows you have to wait for a weekly update, or even perhaps for several months for known problems to get patched.

So what is this new distribution that I have found that solves 99% of the above problems. It's called PCLinuxos. The repository for its package manager has been carefully crafted for the new Linux user. I have a NVIDIA video card. Until this distribution, I had only been able to get 3-D acceleration in SuSE. NVIDIA has a direct link to the 3-D acceleration drivers on their web page for SuSE. With PCLinuxos, their package manager has three files that will install the NVIDIA 3-D accelerated graphics driver for you and compile the kernel.

SuSE has also disabled their multimedia, and in order to be able to play MP3's or encrypted DVDs, you have to actually un-install the different media players and then reinstall them from an alternate repository. After this, you have to then install the specific codecs. On most other Linux distributions you have to install the missing codecs. Sometimes these can be found in the repository for that distribution, and at other times you have to search for them on the Internet. With PCLinuxos, the codecs are included in their package manager and are a simple one-click install. Printing to a Windows computer is done by simply following steps in a setup program in KDE. KDE is the graphical user environment for running the PCLinuxos computer.

In PCLinuxos, I am able to insert a CD or a DVD and PCLinuxos will open and play the media automatically. In many other Linux distributions, the default audio player would not play an audio CD. You had to browse to another player. Also you had to configure the Mp3 codecs. I like to use Audacity as an audio editor. In almost all the other Linux distributions I have used, I got an Input/Output error in Audacity the second time I tried to use it. I found this was a common problem in Linux by going to the various Forum pages. In PCLinuxos, it just works. If you like to download using Bittorrent files, most Linux distributions offer Bittorrent as a downloader. I have found that this is slow compared to Azureus. But, in order to get Azureus, you have to download and compile Java from source code. With PCLinuxos, Azureus is a one click install from the Synaptic Package Manager, and it installs Java automatically with Azureus. For many of the distributions, I could not find prepackaged software for Flightgear. In PCLinuxos, it was a one-click install. Using the command line can be difficult for the new user.

You have to learn the commands to copy, paste and just to move through the file system. PC-Linuxos offers an Administrator or "Super-User" graphical interface. You can browse like the tree system in Windows and you can copy and paste with the mouse or simple key strokes. Limewire is a popular file sharing program that many people use. It requires a special Java software. This can be very difficult to install properly on most Linux distributions. But, in PCLinuxos, it already comes

installed. Mozilla Thunderbird is a popular mail client. In other Linux distributions, you may have to download and compile it. In PCLinuxos, it is in the packages and is a one-click install.

It sounds like using Linux is very difficult. So what would be the advantage? All of the software applications in Linux are free. If you want to burn CDs or DVDs in Windows you have to buy software. Nero is a popular program for this. The retail price for this program is \$99. In Linux you get a program called K3b, which is free. This will burn CDs and DVDs and allow you to make bootable CDs or DVDs. In Windows, if you want to do high end graphical manipulation, you need to purchase a program such as Adobe's Photoshop. This program can cost \$600-\$700. In Linux, you can use a program called in the Gimp. This program will edit in layers, channels, paths, and do almost all of the graphical editing that Photoshop will do. If you use a digital camera and you want a program for sorting and filing and classifying your images in Windows you would need to spend about \$100. In Linux, there is a free program called Digikam, which will download your images from your camera or flash card, allow you to do most of your photo manipulation, and make albums, sort your pictures, and tag your pictures so they'll be easy to find. If you want to do word processing in Windows you have to purchase a word processing program, or, how about the whole Office Suite?

Microsoft Office is a \$500 program. It includes a word processor, a presentation program, a spreadsheet program, and a calculation program. There are several free office suites for Linux that do the same thing. Open Office is completely backward-compatible with Microsoft Office. What if you want to do audio editing? In Windows, different programs can cost between \$100 and up \$1000. In Linux, there are several audio editing programs. "Audacity" will allow you to mix 16 tracks at once. Also, there are other sound editing programs, which will all allow you to do things like insert drum tracks or other special effects, and all these programs are free. Many people like to keep track of their finances on their computer. A popular program for Windows is called Quicken. This would cost you about \$100. In Linux, there is a free program called Gnu-cash. This is compatible with Quicken. It will

download the financial data from your bank and will print on Quicken approved checks. It has the same features as Quicken. It will allow you to make categories and do splits, keep separate files and folders for your banking and stock portfolios, and provide you a synopsis at the end of the year for taxes.

This article has been written for the new user to Linux. However, since all of the code for Linux programs is open source, people with higher technical skills can reprogram that code for their individual needs.

There is a very easy way to try many of the new Linux distributions. They come on "Live" CDs and DVDs. With these CDs and DVDs, you can boot the entire operating system from the CD or DVD without changing anything on the hard drive of your computer. PCLinuxos is this type of distribution. You can run it entirely from the CD. Then, if you choose to install, there is an installation guide right on the desktop and the install program is also next to it on the desktop. You can either install PCLinuxos as a complete operating system on your hard drive, or the program will allow you to partition your hard drive and have a dual-boot system, where you can choose to boot either Windows, or Linux.

If you go to this web page, <http://www.frozentech.com/content/livecd.php>, you'll find over a hundred Linux distributions that can be run from the CD. The beauty of PCLinuxos is that the programmers have put all the dependencies and all the applications together in their package manager. You do not have to compile any software. You do not have to add questionable repositories. You do not have to look for any dependencies. There are over 4500 software applications in the PCLinuxos repositories. PCLinuxos also has a very complete new user guide which can be found at <http://www.pclinuxonline.com/wiki/HomePage>. You can either download PCLinuxos as a bit torrent, or download it directly from the PCLinuxos homepage <http://pclinuxos.com/page.php?7>. If you have a slow Internet connection, you can order the live CD from PCLinuxos for only a couple of dollars. If you have an old Windows 98 or ME computer that is slowing down and crashing frequently, PCLinuxos would give you a fast running and crashproof replacement. Also, Linux can

run at very good speeds on older and slower processors and it needs less RAM than Windows.

I consider myself a Linux Gnu-B. I have been "playing" with Linux for 8 years but have not felt comfortable with any one distribution yet. But, with PCLinuxos, I have found a distribution that has met all my needs. I even added a second hard drive on my computer just for PCLinuxos. And, guess what, I haven't used that first hard drive in a long time.

From The DealsGuy

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

I worked the National Sign Association show and it was interesting. Most of the outdoor electronic signs were using very bright LEDs that are easily seen, even in bright sunlight. The LED's brightness can be adjusted either auto-matically or manually. The one I saw up close was composed of modules 19 inches square that can be easily changed to repair it. If a hurricane is approaching it is easy to dismantle the modules and safely store them (if your storage survives). It was a large show. There were many types of giant printers, and other machines that would stamp out all kinds of parts for signs.

Memphis PC Users Group Inc. has a great newsletter thanks to the Editor Jin Yang. An interesting article in the January 2006 issue caught my eye called "A Letter from China," by Judith Bogan, working in Shanghai, China. There are other interesting articles, but look for that issue on their newsletter archive page. <<http://www.mpcug.org>>

I have developed other health problems (numbing toes among other things), but I have a lot packed in the column for you this month so you don't need my health problems. I edited much of the wording out so I suggest you check for more product information on the Web sites. Remember I have not tried them and know nothing about these products but thought they were interesting. Be sure to check their privacy statements, if they have one. Also, I need more opinions on my using these announcements in the column.

Games Anyone?

TameStorm Games unveiled the newest version of 'Filler'. The inner structure of the game reveals features of puzzles and strategies combined, so they have a few games to put on the same list.

What you are to do here is to occupy half, or the majority of, the flowers on the field. The field is a meticulously crafted meadow picture, in which flowers are fresh and live and their petals still remember the touch of an artist's brush. You always start a game from the left side. The computer always starts from the right one. You always make the first move. The game field has flowers with coins, which you need to seize. The more coins you have, the more bonuses you can buy. If you have gathered enough money, you can repaint flowers in the color of your zone, randomize unoccupied space, and make your opponent miss one turn and more. Two modes of the game are available: classic puzzle and advanced puzzle. In advanced puzzle mode you will see black flowers that you can't seize.

Filler Features at a Glance (Full Version):

- Unlimited game play time;
- 100 layouts of the field and 100 levels in advanced game;
- 100 levels in classic game;
- 11 special bonuses;
- Interesting game for your children;
- Graphics designed by masters of Russian Khokhloma painting;
- Splendid relaxing game.

Pricing and Availability

Filler 1.2 runs under Windows98/ME /2000/XP and costs \$14.95 (USD). Tame-Storm Games offers user group members 15% discount. Use the coupon code TAME-HQBL-FILL on the order page. Additional information on Filler, as well as its evaluation version with 30 minutes of the game play and several locked levels is available as a free download at: <http://www.tamestorm.com/games/filler_puzzle_game/filler_demo_setup.exe>.

Product page link: <http://www.tamestorm.com/games/filler_puzzle_game> Web: <<http://www.tamestorm.com>>

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Get Rid of Those Duplicate Files

We are the producer of NoClone, a file utility which uncovers true duplicate files and recovers valuable disk space. Reasonable Software House is offering a 20% discount to user group members on NoClone, a file utility which uncovers true duplicate files and recovers valuable disk space. To get the discount, follow this link: <<http://noclone.net/mybuy.asp?promo=HF89AW>>. Don't buy a new

hard drive, buy NoClone. Uncover duplicate files; recover valuable disk space. Information at <<http://noclone.net>>

Reasonable Software House (a Monthly Service)

An online permission-based newsletter management system called Reasonable Spread, also from Reasonable Software House, can help with your newsletter management. By using Reasonable Spread, you can communicate with your members by sending newsletter/latestnews/announcements. Or it can be used as an electronic publishing tool by sending users news and articles written by group president or members. For the free trial: <<http://spread.reasonablesw.com/>> To order at 20% discount: <<http://spread.reasonablesw.com/mypages/discounts-20.aspx>> Phone: +852 35204490 Fax: +852 35204492 Mobile: +852 92276779. Address: Suite 332, InnoCentre, 72 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong

More Product Announcements

Almeza Research has released MultiSet 2.0 and Captain Tray 6.0.

MultiSet is a solution to the problem of automatic program installation. MultiSet has been created to free you from routine work such as program installations. All you have to do is install the application only once on your PC and MultiSet will record all your actions. MultiSet will install all the applications you need automatically, either on your original computer or on a new one; it's ideal for rebuilding your systems quickly!

MultiSet automatically starts the installation procedure, takes care of all necessary buttons, like "Next", "I agree," and "Finish." This installation robot will specify the path for the installation and automatically configure all attending settings. All registration codes and license keys will also be entered in a self-acting mode. Once you have done it, you can playback the whole process and create your installation CD/DVD disc! Website and Info: <<http://www.almeza.com/>> Get 50% discount (MSRP \$44.95, although I am unsure about that MSRP) <https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?item=13741-1&ss_coupon=ALME-XEHN>

Captain Tray Pro:

Turn system tray into your PC central command center.

Captain Tray Pro is a tiny software application that makes a difference when it comes to organizing favorite programs, customizing the system tray and creating shortcuts for instantaneously minimizing windows, changing captions and doing a number of other tasks. Essentially, any user who invests an hour into investigating this tool is likely to completely abandon the traditional way of endless window browsing and using the Start menu to open documents and launch applications.

Many users need several applications running simultaneously. Some of those applications are used quite frequently, others only when they are needed. So the Windows taskbar can get fully packed and everything seems to be necessary, and you have no desire to close any programs. Some applications can be minimized to the system tray, but what shall we do about 'Notepad', 'Calculator', 'Microsoft Word', 'Microsoft Excel' and our other favorite programs? Captain Tray Pro is there to help you. Here are two other products with a discount.

Program: Captain Tray Pro

Website and Info: <<http://www.captaintray.com/>> 50% discount URL: <https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?item=13741-2&ss_coupon=ALME-XEHN> Product: Time Assist Pro (A project manager)
Web: <<http://www.mytimeassist.com>> 50% Discount link: <https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?item=13741-4&ss_coupon=ALME-XEHN>

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. Be sure to check for new 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>>.

Check your download speed

www.bandwidthplace.com/speedtest offers three checks per month for free.

Google Earth

by Joe Schmitt

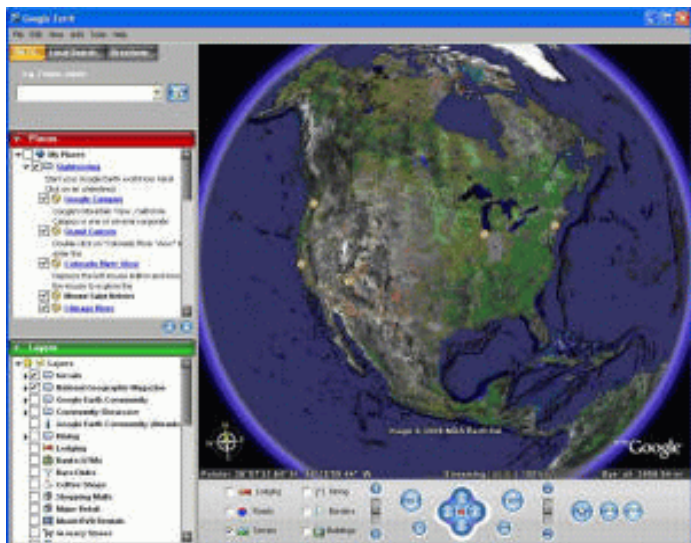
Tampa Bay Computer Society

One of the greatest tools of the internet has always been that of maps. From the early days of the Internet <http://www.mapquest.com/> was a great source for online geography. Now a myriad of new tools is available to home internet

Google Earth is a new offering from Google that offers a unique spin on online cartography. While most mapping services try to offer you a straight forward approach to mapping, Google's newest tool takes quite a different tact. Described by Google as "a globe that sits in your PC," Google Earth offers a new perspective on mapping software. Like all its major competitors, Google Earth will allow you to find addresses, points of interest, or a driving route. What makes Google Earth different is the way in which items are displayed to the user. Google Earth has to install software on your machine, and once installed it needs an internet connection to display its images. Also be advised that Google Earth is resource intensive: it requires a fairly fast machine with 3D graphics capability.

When you first start up Google Earth you see the above image: Google Earth generates an image of the planet taken from a mosaic of satellite and aerial photographs.

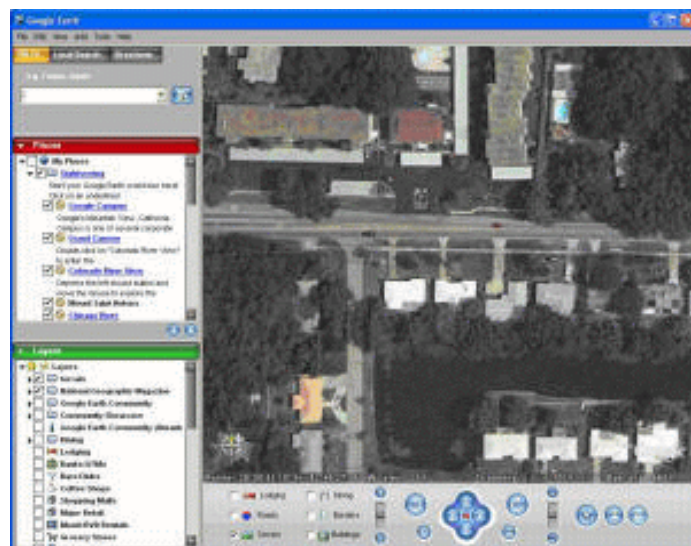
If you enter an address such as your home in the search bar, Google Earth doesn't just pop a map of your neighborhood but actually flies to the location. You see the image of the earth get larger and larger as if you were descending on the location from outer space. All the time as the planet moves closer, the program continually generates more detailed pictures of the surface until you are sitting above the location you are searching for.



user to navigate through the world.

Believe it or not, one of the biggest uses for online maps is not for that big long trip to the Grand Canyon with the kids but for finding local addresses. How many times recently have you used a service such as <http://www.mapquest.com/> or maps.google.com to find that new restaurant or new store? While the online services available can be used to find the next route cross-country they are more often used locally.

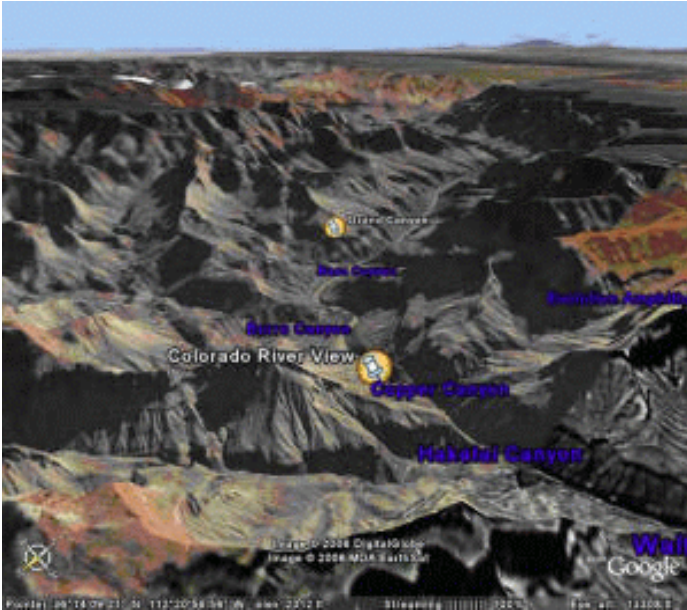
Another popular role that current cartographic sites such as appoint.msn.com serve is where a particular place is in relation to your current location. There are many times when we are watching the news and someplace like Jumbo, WV pops up; there is now a great new tool to let you explore the world virtually.



Another great feature of Google Earth is angular display. Not only are dead top center views available but you can also tilt the plane of the viewing area to see things in the distance. Now this sounds

like I should be able to tilt the image and see the windows on my house, but that just isn't possible. All the images are from satellite or aerial photographs that are also taken from straight overhead.

Topography is another feature that Google Earth incorporates makes the tilting feature quite impressive. Topography is how the terrain rises and falls in any given location. Google earth uses 3D technology to render the rise and fall of the land



based on radar data gathered from multiple space shuttle missions. The images are melded with the topography and you have the impression of seeing mountains rise and canyons fall.

Not only does Google Earth provide these new ways to explore the world but they have also included the ability to include data files of your own. If you choose to upgrade to the "plus" version you can import data from any of the popular GPS (Global Positioning System) receivers currently available. You can import waypoints, routes, and tracks from the unit.

Also, you can import images, such as a topographic map, and orient them as overlays on the satellite images. The application will let you resize and rotate the map until fits. Google Earth will also let you save data in files that can be shared with other users. One interesting aspect is files that can utilize data available on the web for dynamic interaction. Click on this link to see some examples: <http://earth.google.com/tour/thanks-win.html>

For example there is a link to a file that will track flights around the US live. It displays an icon for the plane and shows it in relation to where it is in the air. Google Earth offers some new and interesting ways to explore our world. With thousands of user files, it can be customized to any number of needs to suit your tastes. A great resource for new ideas involving Google Earth is the Google Earth blog at: <http://www.gearthblog.com/> or at the community: <http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/ubbthreads.php/Cat/0>.

The only limits to Google Earth are what your imagination and determination can achieve.

Joe Schmitt is a computer and technology guru, who also has a love for the outdoors. He can often be found tromping around the woods with his GPS and digital camera.

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

To add to your good mood, MS announced last month that they were delaying the release of Vista until after the first of the New Year. Computer manufacturers will get it starting in October so you will still be able to buy a new machine for Christmas with it installed. Take a look at CNET's review of the latest beta build: <http://news.com.com/Microsoft+sees+rapid+Media+Center+sales/2100-1012-6052115.html?part=dht&tag=nl.e433>

Norton update kicks

AOL users offline

An incorrect update to Symantec's Norton security software on March 15th blocked Internet access for some America Online users.

The issue affected AOL customers using recent editions of Norton AntiVirus and Norton Internet Security, Symantec said in a statement sent via e-mail the next day. The culprit was an update to intrusion prevention software that is part of the security software, the company said.

"This update incorrectly detected traffic patterns used as part of the AOL connection as a potential risk," Symantec said in the statement. AOL has about 20 million Internet service subscribers.

As a result of the incorrect update, AOL dial-up customers lost their connection and AOL broadband users were unable to access AOL servers, Symantec

said. The erroneous update was removed from Symantec's servers about seven hours after it was released, and a corrected version was posted, the company said.

The Norton problem is the second high-profile problem with security software within a week. Earlier, an error in McAfee's virus definition file caused the company's consumer and enterprise antivirus products to flag Microsoft's Excel, as well as other applications on users' PCs, as a virus called W95 /CTX.

Norton users who are experiencing problems can contact Symantec customer service at 1-800-927-3991 at no cost or read more on the issue at the company's Web site. Symantec advises users who are unable to go online because of the issue to disable their Norton software, connect to the Internet and immediately download updated definition files.

Your secret PIN may not be so secret

An unprecedented theft of personal identification numbers from thousands of consumers across the country is calling into question the basic safety of paying with debit cards.

The debit card breach, which the trade publication *American Banker* says could have allowed thieves to gain access to as many as 600,000 bank accounts, has raised larger questions about whether merchants are improperly storing customers' personal data.

The problem, according to security experts, is the storage of PINs attached to debit cards. The compromise of so many PINs suggests that a national retailer stockpiled customer information even though such a practice is against rules set down by the major credit card companies. What the breach has revealed, say security analysts, is that safety measures around these numbers could represent an Achilles heel for debit cards.

"The process of authentication for PIN numbers has been perceived for a long time to be very secure," said Edward Kountz, a financial services analyst at Jupiter Research. "These thefts call into question how secure they really are."

The recent debit card crime spree stretched from Seattle to North Carolina. And for the past month,

most of the media attention has focused on which company suffered the security breach. Many of the victims shopped at Office Max, an office-supply chain headquartered in Itasca, Ill., according to law enforcement officials. The company has denied any compromise and said a third-party audit found no problems (though the company is still working with authorities investigating the case).

Law enforcement officials in New Jersey report arresting several people in connection with the case. The suspects, all U.S. citizens, are accused of using stolen credit and debit card information to produce counterfeit cards. These were used to make fraudulent purchases and withdrawals from cardholder accounts, Hudson County Prosecutor Edward DeFazio said. Most of the arrests were made during the past two weeks.

But as FBI and Secret Service agents continue to investigate, security experts are beginning to worry less about where it happened and are turning their attention to whether a similar crime could happen again.

Indeed, the robbery could mark the dawning of a new age in computer crime, said Gartner security analyst Avivah Litan. "The moral of the story is there must be hundreds of companies that store PIN data," Litan said.

Litan pointed out that most retailers use the same technology and follow many of the same procedures.

At most retail stores, registers feed information into a "terminal controller," which acts as a master computer server, Litan said. The terminal controller encrypts the data at each register. At some stores, an encryption "key" is also kept at the terminal controller. This would make it very convenient for electronic intruders who managed to break into the controller. They could slip away with the data as well as the key to unlock the encryption.

Quoting unnamed sources, *American Banker* reported that the leading theory among experts is that hackers likely breached the computer systems of an unknown retailer at possibly 30 U.S. store locations, mainly on the West Coast and Southeast. The thieves made off with the cards' magnetic stripes, PINs and PIN keys.

Still, one theft of PIN codes, even if it involved hundreds of thousands of customers, doesn't mean

the current system is broken, said Mike Urban, a fraud technology operations director ATM networks for counterfeit transactions.

“I’m not sure that this problem is all that widespread,” Urban said. “In this business, it’s all about following procedures and implementing the correct systems. It’s certainly possible that this could happen again. All I’m saying is that it’s not something that we’ve heard much about until now.”

How to read your cell phone bill

So you got your cell phone bill for the month and zipped it open, only to receive a rude shock when you saw the total. What’s this—double the amount it was last time? Is there a mistake? Did you make a three-hour call to Hong Kong? Do identity thieves have your account information in their vile clutches?

Unfortunately, finding the answer in your bill isn’t easy, as I’m sure you’ve discovered. Even those with relatively simple cell plans can wind up with bills that are 5 or 10 pages long, with confusing sections and subsections, arcane terminology, and tricky details. Your billing scenario will change dramatically if you have a regional calling plan vs. a nationwide setup, then there’s the issue of data and text-messaging plans. Do you make any roaming calls or dial up your friends while traveling abroad? It can all add up to a pricey month. To discover how your \$39.99 monthly plan can translate to \$59.99, read on to see a typical wireless carrier bill.

An overview

Calling summary

1. Anytime minutes

Anytime minutes, or calls that can be placed during peak hours (typically, weekdays between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m.), are the basis for any cell phone plan. Your basic monthly plan gives you an allotment of anytime minutes per month—the more the minutes, the more expensive the plan. Be sure to keep an eye on those anytime plan minutes. You’d be surprised how easy it is to stray over your allotted minutes, and you’ll pay dearly for the oversight—anywhere from 20 to 40 cents a minute. Having a hard time cutting your conversations short? Trade in your old plan for one with more minutes. While you might have to sign a new

contract to change plans, you’ll save money in the long term. Also, keep in mind that your carrier counts any fraction of a minute as a whole minute—that means a 5-second check of your home voice-mail counts as an entire minute off your monthly allowance.

2. Off-peak minutes

Off-peak (or nights and weekend) minutes are for calls made outside of peak hours. They can help keep your cell phone bill from going through the roof, but exercise them with caution. Make a note of when your carrier decrees when night or the weekend begins, and remember that if you place a call at, say, 8:59 p.m., you’ll be using your anytime minutes for the entire call. I should also point out that night and weekend minutes start at the appointed hour in the time zone you’re traveling in; for instance, if you’re an East Coaster traveling in California, your night/weekend minutes would begin at 9 p.m. Pacific time, not Eastern time.

3. In-carrier minutes

Otherwise known as mobile-to-mobile or IN (in the case of Cingular) calling minutes, in-carrier can also help cut your monthly mobile bill, especially if your best friends use the same carrier you do. However, there are a couple of caveats: If your in-network buddies stray out of their carrier’s service area and make a roaming call, or if they block their phone number (and, hence, prevent your carrier from identifying your friends as in-network callers), you’ll burn anytime minutes if you take the call at peak hours.

Calling charges

4. Monthly plan fee

Recognize this figure? Back when you were a naive cell phone newbie, you might’ve thought this was all you’d shell out for your monthly bill. Of course, now you know better. Anyway, this number represents the static cost of your monthly plan, including anytime, off-peak, and in-carrier minutes, as well as features such as call waiting, caller ID, conference calling, and voicemail. John Doe, whose bill I’m using as an example, has selected his carrier’s basic Madness Plan, which gives him 300 anytime minutes a month, as well as 1,000 off-peak minutes. But as you can see, he went a bit over his limit.

5. Minutes overage fee

Here's where they get you. Also known as a usage fee, this item typically combines the cost of any minutes you consumed above and beyond those allotted in your monthly plan. (Some carriers also include fees for downloads, data service, and text messages that aren't covered by a data plan.) If you chatted up a storm last month like John did, look for your usage fee—and your entire bill—to skyrocket. Again, the best way to avoid a usage fee is to keep track of your monthly minutes and stay below the limit; or if you're just dying to chat, you can up your allotment of minutes, although you may have to sign a new contract to do so. You can keep track of your minute balance by calling your carrier or going to its Web site. If you have teens bopping around with their own handsets, chances are they're too busy socializing to worry about whether they've used up all their monthly minutes. With prepaid cell phone plans, your kids get only so many minutes a month; after that, their handsets go dead until they're recharged with more cash.

6. Domestic roaming

Those anytime minutes that come with your cell plan aren't quite as anytime as you think. If you have a local or regional calling plan (as opposed to a nationwide plan) like John does and make a call after wandering outside your home area, you might rack up impressive roaming charges on your cell phone bill. The specific charges vary depending on the network, but you can expect to pay as much as 50 cents a minute, plus long-distance fees if you're calling someone outside your home area. If you plan on speed dialing while you're traveling stateside, do yourself a favor and sign up for a nationwide plan with free roaming. At the least, keep track of your calling-area boundaries (many handsets have indicators that warn you when you're roaming) and ease off the phone when you've crossed into a roaming zone. But even with a nationwide plan, you can be charged for analog calls or for calls made out of your carrier's service area while using another provider's network.

7. Domestic long distance

Heads up, local calling-plan subscribers: Roaming isn't the only charge you'll need to track. Long-distance fees apply when you're calling someone outside your home area but still in the domestic

United States. While long-distance charges aren't as deadly as roaming charges, at 10 cents a minute and more (plus the anytime minutes you're burning), they can take a big bite out of your wallet. Again, we recommend dumping your local or regional calling plan for a nationwide plan, which won't charge you extra for domestic long-distance calling.

8. International roaming

Have you been traveling abroad and taking advantage of your GSM handset? Good for you—just prepare to pay up like John is doing. While your jet-setting world phone may let you hop on to foreign networks with the greatest of ease, you'll pay dearly for the privilege. Depending on the carrier and the country you're traveling from, expect to pay anywhere from 69 cents to a whopping \$5 a minute, as well as 10 to 50 cents per outgoing text message. If you're looking to save money while chatting abroad, check out CNET's quick guide to world phones for a detailed list of costs by carrier. Also, check your operator's Web site, as it'll have a chart detailing the roaming charges you'll pay in dozens of countries. Some carriers, such as Cingular, also offer international calling plans for a small monthly fee (about \$4 to \$6 per month) that lower—but don't eliminate—your per-minute roaming fees.

9. 411 service

Dialing 411 to look up an address or a phone number might be tempting when you're on the go, but it isn't cheap. Most carriers charge about \$1.50 per 411 call, plus airtime. If you're averaging a 411 call every day or so, that can add up to about \$45 a month—ouch. Instead of dialing your operator, try using the Web browser on your phone to look up phone numbers and addresses; if you do, that \$6-a-month data plan will quickly pay for itself.

Charges for text and multimedia messaging and data services can add up just as quickly as fees for making calls. And just like in life, there's no getting around taxes when it comes to your cell phone bill. Federal, state, and local taxes, as well as fees and surcharges, can add up to \$10 or more on a monthly bill, and there's not much you can do to avoid it.

1. Text-messaging plan

Like John, did you get a monthly bucket of SMS messages to go with your monthly rate plan? If so,

it's a good idea. For as little as \$4 a month, you can buy a pack of 400 text messages, while most carriers charge about \$15 a month for unlimited messaging. Did you go over your monthly allotment of text messages? Or worse yet, were you texting without a text-messaging plan? While sending and receiving a text message is a relatively cheap proposition—up to 10 cents each to send and receive—all those text messages can add up.

2. Text-messaging surcharges

Messages sent to your friends abroad won't be included in your monthly allotment. They'll cost more too, usually around 15 cents per sent message.

3. Data plan

Your friends at your favorite carrier rub their hands together when it comes to this line item. Did you send lots of multimedia messages without a monthly plan? They can add up quickly, costing around 25 cents per message. Did you download any ring tones, wallpaper, games, or applications last month? Cha-ching. Surf the Web without a data plan? Look for itemized charges, computed by the megabyte. Alternatively, if you signed up for a data plan that lets you surf the Web or check e-mail on your handset, you'll find the monthly charge right here.

Taxes, fees, and surcharges

4. Federal tax

A particularly galling charge on our monthly cell phone bills, the Federal Excise Tax, dates back to the late 1800s and was originally intended to help fund the Spanish-American War. Extended in 1965 to help subsidize long-distance calls (back when Ma Bell was the only game in town), this archaic tax has raised the ire of consumer groups, lawmakers, and even cellular carriers themselves, but for now, it remains firmly in place.

5. FCC universal service charge

Cell carriers are required by the FCC to help fund telecommunications infrastructure for low-income and rural residents, schools, libraries, and outlying health-care services, and these costs are passed along to subscribers.

6. State and local charges

Depending on your locality, your state or local government might impose a sales tax or surcharges for wireless infrastructure, E911 service, or discounted lifeline service for low-income subscribers.

7. Regulatory fees

Here, you'll find costs of federally mandated programs such as wireless-number portability, services for hearing- and speech-impaired subscribers, and technology for enhanced 911 services, which track your location in case of an emergency.

8. Administrative charges

Handling all these regulations and mandates takes paperwork, and your carrier might pass along the cost right here. Also, if you just signed with a new carrier and your first bill packs a bit more punch than you expected, this section is the likely culprit. Carriers typically charge a one-time activation fee of \$35 to \$50 for new customers. Are you irked by the idea of paying an activation fee? Carriers sometimes waive them if you're signing up for a two-year contract. Or you can just call and ask for a break--you might get lucky.

Insurance

9. Handset insurance

This portion of your bill includes such charges as equipment-protection (essentially insurance for your phone in case of loss or theft; \$4 to \$8 a month, plus a deposit of about \$50) and roadside-assistance plans, which provide AAA-type services such as fixing flat tires, towing, and locksmiths, again for about \$4 to \$8 a month. Both are worthwhile investments, considering the price.

Are you still having trouble making heads or tails of your cell phone bill? We can't blame you; each carrier uses a different set of sections, subsections, and terms in its monthly billing summaries. Luckily, you can find help on your carrier's Web site. Each of the major carriers we surveyed had reasonably detailed guides to reading its specific bills, along with glossaries and FAQs.

Feature: Resizing Your Digital Photos

The great thing about that new 6- or 8-megapixel camera you just picked up over holidays is its unparallel image sharpness and the ability to make poster-size prints. But honestly, how often do you get calls from concert promoters asking to turn your latest photos into promotional posters? It's a lot more likely that you'll want to share somewhat smaller versions of your photos.

The Pitfalls of Full Size

Don't get me wrong; there's nothing wrong with taking pictures with your camera set to its maximum resolution, and then simply sharing those images with friends and family. I do that pretty often. But there's a downside. If you try to stuff a few 2MB images in an e-mail message, for instance, you might find yourself drumming your fingers waiting for it to upload, and although most e-mail services allow up to 10MB for attachments these days, you don't know the attachment limitations of all your recipients.

Your recipient might also not want such a large file. A friend of mine complains frequently about how big images are from modern digital cameras. Since he never prints enlargements, he just wants enough resolution to look good on his computer screen, and nothing more.

Finally, you might not want to give away the full-size image. Sharing smaller files means that only you can make large prints, which is a way to keep control over your photos.

Resizing the Manual Way

Virtually all image editors allow you to resize your image. Open a picture in Paint Shop Pro, for example, and choose Image, Resize from the menu. Here, you'll find that there are several ways to resize: You can alter the image by pixel size, percentage of the original, or based on print size.

I'll assume that you'll usually want to resize to a specific pixel size. Make sure the menu is set to Pixels and then type in the size you're interested in. Make sure the "Lock aspect ratio" option at the bottom of the dialog box is checked. That'll keep the image's proportions correct as you enter a number in either width or height. Suppose Uncle Bob tells you that he'd like to make a 5-by-7-inch print of one of your photos. In that case, ignore the Pixel Dimension section of the Resize dialog box and instead set the Print Size section to about 5 by 7 inches. Of course, unless your photo started out at an aspect ratio that was exactly 5 by 7, this resize won't be exactly 5 by 7 either. No matter—just use common sense and choose a size that's approximately the right dimensions. Set the resolution to somewhere between 200 and 300 pixels per inch.

Click OK and use Save As in the File menu to make a copy for Uncle Bob.

Use the Image Resizer PowerToy

If you don't want to open a photo editing program just to resize a few images, you're in luck. Download the Image Resizer (Image Resizer.exe) from Microsoft's PowerToys site:

<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/powertoys/xppowertoys.mspx>

It's free, and it adds a convenient resize command to the context menu when you right-click on a photo icon. To install it, download the file to a convenient location, double-click on it, and follow the installation wizard prompts. Once it's installed, just select one or more photos, right-click, and choose Resize Pictures. You can select from a list of common image sizes or type in custom dimensions, then make a smaller copy; you can also select Advanced and resize the original. If you do a lot of resizing--especially for Web sites or e-mail--this is probably an essential add-on for Windows.

Resize for Outlook E-Mail

Even without adding any new programs to your computer, there's a simple resizing tool built into Windows that you can use in conjunction with Outlook. Select one or more photos, then right-click, choose Send To, and select Mail Recipient. You'll see the Send Pictures via E-mail window, which lets you shrink the picture attachments before they're added to your Outlook e-mail message. To choose from several sizes, click the "Show more options" link at the bottom of the dialog box.

Resize for the Web

The Web is a great place to share photos, but I'm leery of posting the original full-size versions of my images. If I did this, anyone on the planet would have unfettered access to them. And I just don't like the idea of the president of Finland downloading pictures of my cat.

The solution? Resize your photos before you upload. This is easy to do at most online photo sharing services. You will have to look around a little but the capability is there.

From the April 2006 issue of The Umbrella Online, the monthly newsletter of the Hampton Roads Virginia computing community.



Q. Can you explain how to set a password for Windows XP? When I leave my computer, I'd like to be sure that nobody else can access it. Thanks, Mr. Modem.

A. To set a password for Windows XP, click Start > Control Panel or Start > Settings > Control Panel > User Accounts > Change an Account. Click to select your account, then in the next window click "Create a Password." Type in the password you want to use. You can also enter a hint for your password, if you wish. When you're done, click "Create Password" to accept the password.

Q. I received a message in which the sender appears to have used a font that is in his own handwriting. I'd like to be able to do that, too, but I have no idea how to go about it. Can you help, Mr. M.?

A: One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is with Fontifier (www.fontifier.com). Go to the Web site, print out a template in which you'll handwrite all the letters of the alphabet, numerals and some punctuation marks. Then scan the template (if you don't have a scanner, an outfit such as Kinko's or Alphagraphics can scan it for you) and upload the scanned file to Fontifier. You can preview your font for free, and if you like what you see, purchase it for nine dollars. You would then install the new font for use with other programs. Hint: Installing fonts is as simple as going to your Control Panel, double clicking the Fonts icon, then dragging your new font file into the Fonts window.

My handwriting is not something that I would want to inflict on others, but while trying out this service, I discovered that you can also draw graphics on the template sheet, so if you want to insert your own smiley faces, your initials, or other drawings in documents, you can do that, too.

Q. When I'm typing in Microsoft Word and I press Enter to go down another line, like if I'm trying to make a list of items, it automatically capitalizes the first word of every new line. That drives me crazy. I then have to go back and delete the capitalized

letter and retype it in lower case. Is there some way to stop this?

A. There sure is. The feature that's driving you crazy is called "Auto Correct" and it can easily be turned on or off by clicking Tools > Auto Correct > AutoCorrect tab, then remove the check mark to the left of the item, "Capitalize first letter of sentences," followed by OK. That's all there is to it.

**Mr. Modem's DME (Don't Miss 'Em)
Sites of the Month**

Drug Digest

This site is a non-commercial, consumer- information resource where you can check drug interactions using a database of more than 5,000 drugs, vitamins, herbals, and 11,500 potential interactions. Visit the Drug Library to compare drugs, to see top performers, and side effects. You can search by health condition or drug name, plus review symptoms, treatments and risk factors of common conditions. www.drugdigest.org

Worst Case Scenarios

Learn how to rescue someone stuck in a chimney, or how to survive if your parachute fails to open (now *that's* a bad day), or escape a runaway parade balloon. If you can think of anything bad happening, you'll probably find it here, along with things you can't even imagine. www.worstcasescenarios.com

Mr. Modem's Web

If you enjoy these profiles of unique, interesting, and little-known Web sites, you won't want to miss my new CD-ROM, "Mr. Modem's Web." This one-of-a-kind CD will introduce you to more than 1400 of my favorite Web sites, all segregated into 19 topical categories, ranging from Art, Music, Literature and Film to Wining and Dining. The CD is fully searchable for ease of reference and convenient access. For more information, including how to obtain this \$19.95 value for free, visit www.MrModem.com.

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Copying Text and Images in PDF Files

by Ron Ogg

Diablo Valley PC Users Group

DVPC member Anne Kesti sent me an email message with the following question about copying text from Diablo Blue: “I tried to select and copy text, but Acrobat Reader does not allow the “Copy” feature to work. Is there a way to fix that?”

Here’s my reply, which I’m sharing because others may be wondering the same thing:

After you’ve opened an issue of *Diablo Blue* [or the *Monitor*] in Adobe Acrobat Reader, and found the page where you want to copy text or click on a web address, you’ll see the Acrobat Reader toolbar just above the document. There’s an icon labeled “Select”—click it, and the mouse cursor will change from a fist to an I-beam. To select text, position the I-beam where you want to start, click and hold down the left mouse button then drag the I-beam cursor across and down the text until what you want is highlighted. Release the mouse button (the text you selected will have a grey background), right-click anywhere in the selected text, and select “Copy to Clipboard” from the pop-up menu. Now go to where you want to past the text, and press Ctrl-V (or select Paste from that applications toolbar). If you made a mistake in your selection, just press the ESC key and start over.

To copy an image, do as above but right-click on the image instead of dragging across text, everything else is that same.

If you want to click on a link, do as above, but when you point to a link the I-beam will change to a pointing finger, and you can click the left mouse button to go to that web page.

If you don’t have the Select icon on your Adobe Acrobat Reader toolbar, you probably have an old version. On the Reader toolbar click on Help > Check for Updates Now and install the latest version.

When you’re finished copying, press the ESC key to return to normal reading mode.



Organizing the Favorites Menu

by Glenn Richards

Emeritus Member of the Lake-Sumter

Computer Society, Leesburg, FL

This is a follow-up on a tip from *Worldstart*. I have been using the method for years. When you collect shortcuts to web sites like I do the Favorites menu gets difficult to manage without some organizing.

It is easy to add sub-folders to the Favorites main folder, either via the Internet Explorer menu item Favorites, or using Windows Explorer.

The figure shows a main Favorites subfolder I named “Software.” Under that folder I have a subfolder named “A to C,” etc. down to “U to Z.” The right-most column shows some of the contents of the UtoZ subfolder.

I split the alphabetic range of the subfolders so that the height of the contents of any folder does not exceed the vertical space on the Desktop. The figure has squeezed the display horizontally to make more room for these words.

My Software folder is for web sites where I have found worthwhile programs for download. One of its subfolders is “Tudogs,” a web site that has shortcuts to hundreds of free programs. I have acquired many of them for the group’s CDs.

The method of creating the subfolders using Windows Explorer that I use is to have WE in a two-pane mode with the Favorites folder highlighted in the left pane. Right-click in the right pane, New, Folder, and give the folder a name of you’re choosing. This method can be cascaded as far as you want to go.

The above method of organization can also be used to consolidate items in your Start, Programs menu. Use WE to open your Programs folder at C:\Documents and Settings\

My Favorites folder has 1968 files (web addresses) in 136 subfolders occupying 403KB, with no web address more than two clicks away.

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.

On the Road, Again

by Chuck Horowitz

Houston Area League of PC Users, Inc.

Toshiba has developed new technology for the lithium-ion battery. They claim that their new battery will recharge to 80% of capacity in one minute. That's right, in one minute. That's 60 times faster than other lithium-ion batteries currently in use. The new battery uses the latest nano-material technology. Toshiba will market the battery some time this year. Unfortunately, it will be marketed in the automotive and industrial products markets for now. I'll give them two or three minutes to charge it up to 100% of capacity, if they'll put it in my notebook.

Hewlett Packard (www.hp.com) of Palo Alto, CA has the HP Compaq nc6140 notebook. This notebook operates on Verizon Wireless' Evolution Data Optimized (EV-DO) network. This gives users the ability to connect at broadband speed to networks, e-mail, the Internet, etc. while on the road. The nc6140 has integrated dual antennas and pre-installed software to help establish a wireless connection. Also included in the nc6140 are enhanced security features, such as HP Protect Tools Security Manager, which allows you to manage security systems using customizable security layers. The nc6140 has HP Drivelock hard drive protection. It weighs six (6) pounds (with a 15-inch wide-angle display). No price is quoted as yet. Check out their web site for more details. They may have a price posted by now.

Here's an interesting product from FingerGear (www.fingergear.com) of Mountain View, CA. Their Computer-on-a-Stick (COS) is a bootable USB device that lets you transform any notebook (or PC) into a near desktop environment, without installing any software. The COS has Mozilla's Firefox Browser, an e-mail client, the OpenOffice Suite, integrated PDF Creator, ZIP Compression tools, cross-compatible instant messaging, and lots more. It has a write-protected operating system and default 256-bit AES encryption. Boot up takes less than ten (10) seconds; and shut down takes only

three (3) seconds according to FingerGear. I wonder if this device can make my PDA into a notebook.

Anonymizer, Inc. (www.anonymizer.com) of San Diego, CA and SanDisk (www.sandisk.com) of Sunnyvale, CA report that Anonymizer's Anonymous Surfing is now available for SanDisk's Cruzer Micro and Cruzer Titanium USB flash drives using U3 technology. Their software package protects the users identity when surfing the Internet, and insures secure browsing on any computer. It also protects the user from online security threats, such as pharming and phishing scams attacks. U3 is a new platform for smart drives that "provides a private, secure and protected experience on any Microsoft Windows XP or 2000 PCs." The drives are able to launch a variety of U3-compatible, or "U3 Smart," software programs, including the first U3 Smart identity protection system Anonymizer Anonymous Surfing.

Go back and check out the December issue of Computer Shopper for an article edited by Edward N. Albro entitled "Solid \$500 Laptops." He covers notebooks by Acer, Dell, and HP Compaq. Take note though, his under \$500 price is with a rebate. His evaluation has Acer on top because this machine "is faster, it has more memory, a larger hard drive and a screen that is bigger than one of the others and the same size as the other. Without the rebate, the Acer would be \$71 more expensive than one of the machines and \$100 more expensive than the other. As it is, with the rebate it's the same price as the Dell and less than the HP /Compaq. The HP Compaq is \$529 with the rebate and is the one with the same screen size.

Take a look at the eNook Wall-Mounted Charging Workstation at www.anthro.com/eNook. They say "it charges, it stores and it fits where you don't have a lot of room." You mount it on a wall and you flip it up to store your notebook and other gadgets. When it's down, it's a desk. You can choose a color and fabric combination to match your room. You can also contact Anthro at 800-325-3841.

The February issue of *Computer Shopper* has a review of the Lenovo ThinkPad X41 (\$2,199); the Acer TravelMate 3000 (\$1,299); the Fujitsu LifeBook T4020 (\$2,149); the WinBook X512 (\$998); and the Dell Inspiron 710m (\$1,786). Features vary on these machines (they're usually not equal in any

of the reviewed machines). They evaluated the ThinkPad X41 best. Their logic was that the X41 is “lightweight, it offers fair performance and has excellent battery life.”

From the April 2006 issue of HAL-PC Magazine. Chuck Horowitz, a HAL-PC member, can be reached at chuckh@hal-pc.org for questions or comments.

Society News

Planning Meeting Notes

May 2, 2006

by John McMillan

Arpad Kovacs presided over the May planning meeting attended by Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, Sally Springett, Steve Staub and Tom Thompson.

Everyone agreed that Jen Clausen did a great job in presenting the story of Smart Computing. A surprising number of people signed up for subscriptions which were quite a bargain considering all of the features included. Even though they have not been billed, several members of the committee have already received their passwords for web browsing.

We are hoping to find several more potential computer builders to make that effort worthwhile. If you are interested in this project, call any of the officers and make your desires known. When the class is large enough, there will be more information about available alternatives and a group session will be scheduled.

The May *Monitor* was printed on the new printer with minimal problems. It appears as if the projected reduction in ink costs were reasonable. Steve is also trying to arrange an exchange of advertising for cartridge refills. The number of members whose dues are still in arrears is a matter of concern to the officers.

The May meeting will be held in the Penfield Library. Helps half hour will be followed by the business meeting that will include the election of officers. No speaker has been scheduled so Help’s Half Hour will be reopened after the coffee break. In June we will meet in the Brighton Library.

A Program Chairperson would be very helpful in arranging future topics. To paraphrase a current slogan, “It’s your club. Be there.”

Helps Half Hour

Penfield Library

Tuesday, May 9, 2006

Led by: Arpad Kovacs

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Total present: 23

Q: Where are the *Monitors* found at MCC?

A: Arpad reported that they are dropped off at the bookstore.

Q: One member is having trouble getting a printer to work on a Win98. He has added a new video card.

A: Perhaps he needs to uninstall and reinstall the printer. Use the add/remove programs or through the device manager. Be sure to remove references to your old video board as well.

Q: A discovery was made when taking an HP online course on website. There is a PowerPoint program that is useful. Once created, save the file to the web.

A: This will work for any Microsoft program.

Q: When reconfiguring her desktop, the computer seems to have added some of her photos as wallpaper. She would like to remove them as they are not the best choices.

A: XP stores the wallpaper in the ‘my pictures’ folder. You can move them into another folder by a different name and not use them as wallpapers. Arpad demonstrated the wallpaper settings ‘live’. TWEAKUI program allows you to adjust the Microsoft default settings and can be downloaded for free.

Q: Can we discuss Registry Cleaners?

A: Arpad uses RegCleaner that is free from Worldstart.com. He has been using it successfully for quite a while. It also serves other functions. Under tools =>registry cleanup. Request ‘all of them’ and it will review all entries in the registry file. The ones that are found can be removed or quarantined. Another program is CCleaner. This one cleans the registry and also removes temporary files and PC logs. Another one is MRU-Blaster, a good cleaner of the PC files that are not needed like cookies, temp files and Most recently used logs.

Q: What if the entry is written in hexadecimal format?

A: It will not translate the line but will relate to titles, etc.

Q: I often send out an email to 400+ names as blind copies. Just recently, however, her provider is now saying she is over her hourly limit.

A: There is probably a limit to try to prevent spamming. Usually it is 100 but you may be able to verify that with the vendor.

Q: How can all of the names be taken out of an email when you want to forward it?

A: First hit reply, then select all that you want to remove and then delete. You can only make changes to the new email, not the original one that you received.

After the meeting, led by Arpad, Help's Half Hour continued::

Q: I have a mouse that freezes up. It seems to reset itself when unplugged and plugging it in again. Any ideas?

A: Perhaps the computer should be periodically rebooted as it is left running 24 hours a day. You can also check the connection to look for a bent pin. You can also try using some rubbing alcohol and a q-tip to clean the connection. If nothing works, it may be a software problem. There may be some new drivers to download.

Q: One member bought an external hard drive to use for a backup. Will he be able to now transfer the contents to a new fresh machine.

A: It probably would not work well. The new computer would not be a match. You would have to install all new drivers.

Arpad described his program Coolmon - which displays the computer statistics such as RAM usage, CPU% utilization, IP Address and hard-drive usage.

Meeting Notes

May 9, 2006

by John McMillan

It was a day that, despite the dazzling dawn and drenching daylight, developed into drab, dismal deliberations directed darkly at distant discretionary disclosures, in short it was election day and there were no volunteers to take the thankless job of Secretary so alas it would be my duty to cast a single vote for the only candidate, myself. Other similarly afflicted officers were Arpad Kovacs as President; Dan Rothfuss as Vice President; Steve Staub as Treasurer; and Bob Avery as Member at Large (a three year term).

In other club business: Steve Staub would like to see members whose dues are in arrears. The Planning Meeting will be Sally's house at 7 pm on June 6th. Newsletter assembly is scheduled for Saturday May 13th at 9:30 am at St. Stephens. The new printer was used to produce the last issue in a virtually trouble free session. The next Society meeting will be June 13th at the Brighton Library. Arpad will present "Buying on E-bay, the first of a 2 part series. The July meeting will feature selling on E-bay. As usual we need someone to run Help's Half Hour.

The picnic is to be held August 8th from 4 pm til closing (super served around 5:30) at the Brighton Town Park's new pavilion at Buckland Park, which is on the south side of Westfall Road between Winton Road and South Clinton Avenue. Arpad used Google Earth and other software (including Windows Live Local powered by Virtual Earth) to display aerial photos of the area on his laptop. A more detailed map should be published in a future Monitor.

For \$5 per person the club will provide a choice between red or white hots, hamburgers or cheeseburgers and mild Italian sausage plus tea, coffee, and soda. Participants are asked to provide a dish to pass depending upon the first letter of their last name: A-I, munchies; J-R, salad; S-Z, deserts. A sign up list was available or if you are interested you can contact Steve. There was also a signup list at the welcome table for people who would like to build their own computer. A few more are needed before the next step can be scheduled.

No speakers or programs have been established for meetings starting in September. Mike Lavelle has graciously volunteered to help with program work by following through on contacts via e-mail. Possible topics that have been suggested so far include Registry Cleaning; Video Editing; Introduction to Linux; Tips & Tricks; another Jeopardy game or speaker Jeremy Sarachan.

The next scheduled Photography SIG will meet from 6:30 to 8:45, Tuesday, May 23rd in the Penfield Library. There was a social break after the business meeting and in lieu of a speaker, Help's Half Hour was extended.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub

Balance as of 4/17/2006 \$523.35

Income

Dues and donations \$341.00

Picnic 10.00

Total \$351.00

Expenses

Ink \$64.38

Coffee cups & napkins 33.49

Postmaster 50.00

St. Stephens 60.00

Total \$207.87

Balance as of 5/ 9/ 2006 \$666.48

Renewals: Richard and Beverly Cronkite, Tony

Dellelo, Renee Holt, John Killey, Dennis

MacMahon, Tim McBride, Jim McBride

New members: Robert Kreger, Nelson Riveia

The Lighter Side

Tech Support: "I need you to right-click on the Open Desktop."

Customer: "OK."

Tech Support: "Did you get a pop-up menu?"

Customer: "No."

Tech Support: "OK. Right-Click again. Do you see a pop-up menu?"

Customer: "No."

Tech Support: "OK, sir. Can you tell me what you have done up until this point?"

Customer: "Sure. You told me to write 'click' and I wrote 'click.'"



Caller: "I deleted a file from my PC last week and I have just realized that I need it. If I turn my system clock back two weeks will I have my file back again?"



My mother-in-law is a wonderful, loving, caring woman who is about as technologically advanced as a rock. After we spent two hours on the phone trying to explain cutting and pasting to her, my husband and I thought we finally had things "fixed."

Two days later, Mom called, laughing, to tell us that she knew what her problem had been...she couldn't tell right from left. I handed the phone to my husband to let him explain right and left clicks to her. After forty five minutes and an exclamation from my husband, "You could use your nose to click it! It's still a right click!" we discovered the *real* problem Mom was having.

She was clicking the left mouse button for every single thing. It was the *mouse* she was moving! When we told her to "left click," she picked the mouse up and put it on the left side of the keyboard. "Right click" brought the mouse back to its usual position.

I'm flying out in a couple weeks to help her with her computer skills. I think a big bottle of aspirin needs to come along with me. *BoneheadOfTheDayAward.com*



Me: "I was thinking of installing Linux, but I was wondering if you knew if the modem works under Linux."

Tech Support: "Oh, I'm sorry, we only support Windows."

Me: "I know. I was just wondering if you knew if it was possible."

Tech Support: "But we only support Windows."

Me: "I know, but just to save me some time, have you heard of anyone that got Linux to work with the modem?"

Tech Support: (getting annoyed) "Why can't you just use Netscape?"

Me: "Uh, wha? It's not a browser, it's a—never mind. Thanks for your help."