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The Shadow Knows

by Mike Morris

Front Range PC Users Group, Fort Collins, CO

How many readers remember that phrase? Or remember listening to the show on the radio:

"Who knows what evil lurks in the heart of men? The Shadow knows."

Recent headlines have described the availability of TV shows on the internet-at a price. No headlines, however, for The Shadow or other radio programs from the 1930's and 1940's. The copyrights to a large number of the old radio shows have expired, and you can now download (or order) these programs in a variety of formats and listen to them through your computer or other audio equipment.

Whether your interest is historical research, for the nostalgia value, for a hobby, or for the simple entertainment value, the variety of programs and information about these old radio programs is astonishing. I originally searched the internet using Google and the phrase "old radio programs." That search returned over 20,000 hits over 6 months. The correct phrase should have been "old time radio." That search returned over 1 million hits from the past 6 months.

These websites provide an incredible wealth of information. I have checked a very small number of websites, and offer my comments on them. There are episodes of The Shadow, Sam Spade, The Thin Man – as you can see, I like mysteries. There are comedies, westerns, music, and much more.

By the way, how many readers remember the origin of Sam Spade? Do you recall the movie The Maltese Falcon with Humphrey Bogart? The movie was based on the novel of the same name by Dashiell Hammett (originally published in 1929), which introduced the world to

Sam Spade. Another novel by the same author, "The Thin Man," (originally published in 1933) was turned into a movie starring William Powell and Myrna Loy. Here is a trivia question for you: who *really* was the Thin Man?-answer at the end of this article.

As you might expect, the audio quality of these old radio shows varies. Some websites allow you to listen to short samples of selected shows using either RealPlayer™ or Media Player, both of which are bundled with the Win-dows operating system.

"It is Thursday night, July 31, 1930. The time is 9:40 PM. Radio listeners tuned to CBS hear the first appearance of The Shadow. Thus begins the history of The Shadow as provided by the Old-Time Radio Program Guide, <http://www.old-time.com/toc.html>. This website has links to historical information on a number of old time radio programs and to other websites that include soundbites and stories, and to websites that offer programs on cassettes, CDs, DVDs, or direct downloads to your computer.

More history is available at Radio Days: A Soundbite of History, <http://otr.com/index.shtml>. There are links to history by category (Mystery, Private Eyes, Comedy, SciFi) and to histories of selected programs (Captain Midnight, Terry and the Pirates). This website also provides an historical timeline with important dates in radio broadcasting with descriptions of relevant programs. Selected downloads (soundbites) are included. There is a link to a schedule of old time radio on the airwaves (and on the internet).

At "It Seems Like Only Yesterday," <http://www.yesterdayradio.com/>, old radio programs are offered for sale on cassettes. Categories include: World War II and Civil War History, Big Band Music, Comedy, Westerns, Science Fiction, and Sherlock Holmes. The Big Band



category includes Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and other broadcasts from the 1940's.

The "Radio of Yesteryear" website, <http://www.originaloldradio.com/> claims to have 50,000 old time radio programs available on CDs, in various formats. There is a category called "Radio's Best 1000," and "single subject" CDs such as Abbott and Costello, CBS Radio Mystery Theatre, and many more.

Meanwhile, back at ... old-time.com, there is a link to a website called "Radio Showcase," http://www.old-time.com/sponsors/rad_sho.html. This site offers an excellent searchable database, with "actor credits, recording sources, story categories, and program notes...."

In the interest of objectivity, I call your attention to the RadioLovers.com website, [http:// radiolovers.com](http://radiolovers.com). This site claims to offer individual old time radio program downloads. However, I did not pursue the offer. I found the site's use of pop up ads objectionable (the ads appeared despite having the pop up blocker enabled in my Firefox browser). But that is my personal prejudice. For those with greater tolerance to such ads, you may find this site useful.

As I listened to these old radio programs, and read about their history, I realized that there was one program that I wanted to locate above all others: the original radio broadcast of War of the Worlds. This program, created from the 1898 H. G. Wells novel by Orson Welles and broadcast in 1938, is famous (or infamous) for the real panic it created.

A search using Google on the phrase "war of the worlds" provided the result Earth Station1.com, <http://www.earthstation1.com/wotw.html>. Success! I listened to the entire program (slightly less than one hour) using Real Player™. My brain soaked up certain phrases:

"... these creatures have scientific knowledge far in excess of our own"

"... a vanguard of an invading army from Mars"

Okay, so point your finger at me and laugh, while you enjoy the latest movie version with its extraordinary computer generated special effects. I thoroughly enjoyed the hour I spent listening to this classic radio broadcast. Even the 1930's audio quality added to its menace.

While you are watching the movie, I am going to dim the lights, turn off the TV, unplug the phone, and settle into my favorite chair. It is time to listen to *The Shadow*. Even in the 21st century, it is comforting that there is an answer to the question "who knows what evil lurks in the heart of men? *The Shadow knows.*"

[The trivia question answer: No, it is not the detective Nick Charles. The title of *Thin Man* belongs to the extremely eccentric inventor Clyde Wynant, who remains

missing until the last chapter of the novel, when it is revealed that he is the victim of a gruesome crime.

Anti-Spam Programs Do They Really Work?

by Vinny La Bash

Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

Among the most effective anti-spam programs are the ones that use some kind of approval based email management system. They work by constructing a "white list" of permitted email addresses, accepting mail from anyone on the list, and rejecting everything else. The program initially sniffs through your contact list, inbox, and other email folders, organizes the email addresses it finds, asks you if you want to add or change anything, and the list is complete.

From that moment on, any incoming email that is not on the list is considered to be spam, and is automatically exiled to a quarantine folder or wherever you decided it should go during installation. The programs do work as advertised, which is both their greatest strength and their greatest weakness. Here's what you need to know before installing one of these puppies.

Scenario 1: A friend you have lost contact with over the years sends you an email. That friend's email address is not on your white list. Unless you have a quarantine folder where unapproved email is sent without automatically deleting it, you will never see this email. You have to check your quarantine folder, at least occasionally, to see if there are any false positives residing in there with all the junk. How much time will this take? Who knows? None of the programs mention this in their promotional material or specification lists.

Scenario 2: You install a new program or device and run into difficulties. The troubleshooting guide sends you to an email address where you can get a solution to your problem. You remember to add the email address to your white list. You wait for a reply, and wait, and wait. What happened?

Your problem was given to a technical representative who has an email address different from the general support address. You don't see the reply unless you check the quarantine email folder, assuming that in your efforts to rid yourself of all spam you did not specify that anything not on your white list be automatically deleted.

Scenario 3: You order something from an online merchant and before your order is shipped the merchant emails you to ask whether you want the white one or the black one. The query has been rerouted to the quarantine folder because the person trying to contact you has an email address that is not on your white list.

Scenario 4: Your spouse sets up a Yahoo! Email account for the sole purpose of sending you a surprise

Valentine's Day email. For no apparent reason you are getting the silent treatment. You ask, "What's wrong"? Your spouse replies, "Nothing".

Scenario 5: Your granddaughter just got an email address of her own. She sends you a message, and can't understand why you won't answer. She asks her parents "Why doesn't grandpa love me anymore"?

We could go on, but you get the general idea. 99.99% of all real spam will be banished from your sight, but the very few legitimate emails identified as spam will very likely be the ones you most want or need to see. Some anti-spam programs have a "sender confirmation feature" that automatically sends a personalized notification to anyone whose message has been quarantined. Simply replying to the challenge causes the original message to be moved to your inbox, and allows their email address to be added to the white list. Legitimate senders can respond to these challenge messages, but suppose that for whatever reason they don't. Does a seven year old grandchild really understand why she needs a grandparent's permission to send an email?

What you end up with is a time-consuming process of back and forth emails. Why should every email first contact have to be sent twice? What a waste of time. This might be acceptable if your email volume is very low, but who are we kidding. Simply establishing an email account anywhere will get you a boatload of spam. ISP level filters are a joke. How many essays do you want to compose explaining why someone needs "permission" to send you an email? I don't respond to challenge email. Why should anyone respond to mine?

You can check your quarantine folder regularly, but with the huge quantity of genuine spam generated and thrust upon us daily, it's too easy to overlook a legitimate message. When you finally delete the spam, there is a good chance that among the junk a valuable note is lost forever.

After using one of these programs for several months, I decided that I would much rather delete spam manually, rather than run the risk of missing an important legitimate email. No computer program, no matter how expertly crafted or trained, can ultimately determine what emails I do or don't want to read. Even after being married for 38 years, my wife still can't read my mind. How do I expect a dumb computer to do it?

From the February 2006 issue of the Sarasota PC Monitor.

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

New Windows Wi-Fi Threat Emerges

As if you didn't already have enough Wi-Fi security threats to worry about, such as evil twin hotspots and phishing, now comes news that you could be vulnerable

almost any time you use your computer in public, even when you're NOT connected to a hotspot. Windows' built-in Zero-Config software is designed to automatically associate with known SSIDs, such as the common "Linksys" and "Netgear" names used by many home router owners. So if you are sitting in a hotel lobby, an airport lounge, or even an airplane, malicious hackers could use ad-hoc PC-to-PC Wi-Fi connections to connect directly to your machine, and potentially steal data or cause damage. Microsoft has acknowledged the issue, but seems to be in no hurry to plug the hole, instead saying that it will wait for the next Windows Service Pack release to fix it.

Fortunately, there are several easy steps you can take to safeguard your machine in the meantime. First, you can simply turn off wireless when you're not using it. This will also conserve battery life. Second, you can change your wireless connection settings to allow infrastructure connections only, eliminating the possibility of ad-hoc connections. And finally, you can use a third-party wireless configuration tool instead of Microsoft's, such as JiWire SpotLock, which will also protect you against other forms of wireless hacking.

Here's the other side of that coin:

Windows Wi-Fi 'vulnerability' not a vulnerability

The problem is that this is really stretching the definition of a "vulnerability" if it can even be considered a vulnerability at all and Microsoft never acknowledged this as a vulnerability. I checked with a Microsoft spokesperson and they confirmed that Microsoft Security Research Center states that this is not a security vulnerability.

This is what I suspected all along because by definition, a software vulnerability is when software can be made to do something it wasn't designed to do. This "vulnerability" that this story raised is actually a feature designed into every wireless "supplicant" (that's IEEE speak for "client") software in the world because it is a fundamental and critical feature of the IEEE 802.11 protocol. The name of this feature that the story is concerned about is "SSID probe requests", but the feature is critical if a wireless client computer wants to find an access point or ad-hoc wireless peer computer that suppresses its SSID beacons. Someone obviously has to reach out to the other party first if there is to be a wireless LAN connection at all.

For the record, the original report was actually concerned about a behavior in Windows that doesn't distinguish between ad-hoc networks and infrastructure networks if their SSID happens to be the same. The author also found as a recommendation in RFC 3927 section 5 paragraph 3 coauthored by a Microsoft employee that an automatic addressing scheme shouldn't be

used in Wireless LANs so he is criticizing Microsoft for failing to follow this recommendation. For me, restricting the use of automatic IP addressing in any kind of Wireless LANs is silly because it shouldn't be used as a substitution for real protection in the first place. He is also complaining about Windows advertising SSIDs and establishing Wi-Fi connections to these SSIDs without explicit user consent just because the SSID had been used before in an unsecured manner. I still don't have a problem with this because it's a basic usability feature and I don't want Windows bugging me with pop-ups every time just because it's connecting to an unsecured SSID that I've already willingly connected to before. Anyone afraid of unsecured network connections shouldn't make them in the first place or make sure they take the appropriate precautions if they do.

A normal access point will beacon (broadcast) its SSID about 10 times per second to let wireless users know of its presence. When this SSID broadcast feature is disabled because some network administrator thinks it's such a great security feature, the only way a client computer can establish a connection with that access point is if it goes out and probes for that access point by its SSID. It essentially has to shout out to the access point (figuratively speaking) "HEY ARE YOU THERE!" until the access point replies "YES I AM!" before it can continue negotiating a wireless connection session. The story is complaining that by broadcasting this SSID in the probe request to the public airwaves, you are essentially giving away that SSID to hackers who can potentially endanger you with Wi-Fi evil twins that pose as legitimate hotspots or peers so that you will establish a Wireless Ethernet connection to them. The problem with this train of thought is that if you suppressed all SSID broadcasts, you are essentially breaking a fundamental mechanism in 802.11 wireless networking. Taking this to its logical conclusion, we may as well rip out our wireless LAN adapters from our PCs and be done with it.

Just the act of using a wireless hotspot itself will put you in even more danger because the hacker doesn't even need to bother putting up an evil twin because he can attack your computer in that hotspot because he is on the same LAN as you. If the hacker did want to put up an evil twin to perform man-in-the-middle attacks on you, he wouldn't bother with your "vulnerable" probe requests because the hotspot access point will already have been announcing it 10 times a second. If you really think about it, it's even more dangerous to hook up a broadband connection because you're not just vulnerable to hackers within a 150 foot radius but to hackers all over the world!

But is this really the end of the world? Of course not! That's what firewalls are for and just about any firewall

will do, even the free built-in Windows XP firewall. Corporate IT departments can easily enable the Windows XP SP2 firewall on every PC they own by setting firewall policies in Active Directory Group Policy. Once users have a personal firewall enabled, they will be relatively safe when they connect to any public unsecured network whether it was a wireless hotspot or wired broadband connection.

If anyone is paranoid about ad-hoc wireless LAN connections, they can simply set their wireless supplicant software to only connect to "infrastructure networks." The dangers of SSID probe requests that the story describes is nothing new and classifying this feature as a vulnerability on Microsoft or any other wireless supplicant software maker is just plain silly.

Konica Minolta abandons cameras, film

Konica Minolta Holdings will withdraw from the camera and film businesses, marking the end to one of the best known brands in the photography world.

As part of the surprise move, the Tokyo-based company said in mid-January, it will sell a portion of its digital single lens reflex (SLR) camera assets to Sony for an undisclosed sum and cease production of compact cameras by March of this year. The company said it will stop making photographic film and color paper by March 2007, pulling out of a market in rapid decline due to the spread of digital cameras, which store images digitally.

The world's third-largest maker of camera film after Eastman Kodak and Fuji Photo Film had said in November that it would significantly downsize its loss-making camera and film operations, but not completely shut them down.

"I wanted to put a clear end to the matter," Konica Minolta President Fumio Iwai said at a press conference, where the company also announced that Iwai would be replaced by Vice President Yoshikatsu Ota on April 1.

Konica Minolta said in November it expected to post a group net loss of \$407.9 million (47 billion yen) in the fiscal year that ends in March.

But the decision to completely pull the plug on the business caught analysts and archrival Fuji Photo off guard.

Konica Minolta, created in August 2003 through the merger of Konica and Minolta, has a long history in the camera and film markets, producing Japan's first photographic paper in 1903 and the country's first color film in 1940.

Following the news, Fuji Photo issued a press release saying it will continue making traditional camera film.

JP Morgan analyst Hisashi Moriyama called Konica Minolta's move a "positive surprise...I was also not expecting Iwai to step down. This is a bold move rare

among Japanese firms.” He added that the decision could increase pressure on Fuji to downsize its business.

“I think the stock will go up. The traditional camera and film businesses were seen as a barrier to earnings growth and now it will be completely gone.”

By ditching the unprofitable operations, Iwai said the company could focus resources on more promising areas such as color office copiers and LCD materials, medical equipment and optical devices.

Sony and Konica Minolta formed an agreement in July to jointly develop digital SLR cameras, which are generally more expensive and offer better performance than point- and- shoot compact models, and typically use interchangeable lenses.

Konica Minolta said it will continue to produce digital SLR camera bodies and lenses for Sony based on its Maxxum/Dynax mount system, meaning that current owners of those lenses will be able to use them on new digital SLR models to be developed by Sony.

But the Konica Minolta brand will disappear, ending a legacy that started when Konica introduced its first camera in 1903.

F-Secure issues patch for critical flaws

Security vendor F-Secure issued a patch Thursday to deal with critical flaws in a number of its antivirus and Internet security products.

Flaws in the way F-Secure software handles ZIP and RAR data compression archives could allow an attacker to execute remote code on users’ systems and also to bypass F-Secure’s antivirus-scanning capabilities.

Vulnerabilities were found in 19 versions of F-Secure’s antivirus products for Microsoft Windows, as well as in its products for Linux, according to F-Secure’s advisory.

F-Secure was originally advised of the scanning vulnerability by independent researcher Thierry Zoller, said Mikko Hypponen, F-Secure’s chief research officer. In researching the bug, he said, “we found that the vulnerabilities were much more serious. We found it was not just the scanning that could be bypassed but also (that) a malicious attacker could execute code.”

Attackers could create a modified ZIP archive that could lead to a buffer overflow, allowing for the execution of code that could take over a user’s system. The flaws could also allow attackers to create malformed RAR and ZIP archives that couldn’t be properly scanned for malicious software.

The affected software includes F-Secure’s Anti-Virus for Windows Servers versions 5.52 and earlier, Anti-Virus for MS Exchange versions 6.40 and earlier, and Anti-Virus for Linux Workstations versions 4.52 and earlier, as well as 16 other versions of the software.

“We learned of the scanning bug in early December, but because it affected a wide range of our products, we

wanted to release a fix for all (of the affected versions) at once,” Hypponen said.

F-Secure’s “critical” security update is its first in 2006. Last February, the company issued updates for flaws found in its antivirus library.

F-Secure is the latest security vendor to find flaws in its software. Earlier this month, security giant Symantec issued a patch to fix vulnerabilities in its NortonWorks products that could allow an attacker to hide malicious software. And in October, Kaspersky Lab patched vulnerabilities in its antivirus library.

Analysts Claim LCD Oversupply; Consumers to See Deep Price Cuts

With all the major players ramping up production on 6th generation and 7th generation factories, the market is expected to get more LCD panels than it can handle

S-LCD (Samsung/Sony), LG Philips LCD, AUO, CMO and now NEC -- What do the five largest LCD manufacturers have in common? Within a week, all have announced, in January, that 7th generation LCD manufacturing facilities are the name of the game. All five major manufacturers are ramping up production of LCD panels this year and are expected to exceed demand for supply by up to a staggering 15%, according to EETimes.

LCD manufacturing is on high competition as the top four major companies compete with each other for market share. Recently, LCD displays have dropped significantly in price and are now available in prices that are competitive with traditional CRT displays. EETimes predicts that the largest three LCD manufacturers – Samsung, LG and Taiwan’s AU Optics – will be producing a combined total of more than 435,000 panels on a monthly basis at peak.

With more than enough panels to go around, expect to see even deeper price drops this year as LCDs continue their reign as the de facto standard in displays. 2006 is already looking to be a buyer’s market for new displays.

Optimizing Photos for E-mail the Easy Way

There is a really easy way to optimize photos for e-mail. Windows has a built-in feature that resizes your photos.

First, select the photos in Windows Explorer. Right-click the files and select Send To. Click Mail Recipient. Select “Make all my pictures smaller.”

You can click “Show more options” to specify a size. Small is selected by default. When you’re done, click OK. Windows automatically optimizes your photos and attaches them to a new message in your e-mail program. The original pictures are not altered.

If you must sign on to the Internet to send mail, you’ll need to use a program to resize them. I recommend Irfan-View. It is a free, yet powerful, photo editing program.

I’ll bet we see more of these laws soon

Makers start bearing cost of recycling TVs in Maine - Maine became the first state to require manufacturers to pay the entire cost of recycling old televisions and computer monitors when a state law went into effect in January

Under the law, passed in 2004, consumers bring old televisions and monitors to a transfer station, which takes the products to one of five state-approved recycling centers. The devices are then separated by manufacturer and recycled. The center bills the company for the cost.

The law was a response to a debate over how to dispose of electronic waste and who should pay for it. A push for a national law failed a few years ago, and states have since taken the lead. Three, including Maine, have enacted laws.

California places a surcharge of \$6 to \$10 on new products at the time of purchase; the money goes to a state recycling program. In Maryland, manufacturers pay a fee each year to help cover recycling; the money helps provide grants to cities and towns.

Washington state is considering a law similar to Maine's. At least 20 states are exploring the issue.

Before the law went into effect in Maine, consumers paid municipalities \$15 to \$50 to dispose of each TV or monitor. Residents will now pay only a fee of \$2 an item for transportation to the recycling center. The state will ban electronic equipment from landfills starting in July.

"This allows people to get rid of their materials inexpensively and gives them assurance they will be handled and recycled in an environmentally sound manner," said Jon Hinck, staff lawyer for the Natural Resources Council of Maine, which supported the law. It estimates that 100,000 monitors and TV's go unused and unrecycled in Maine each year.

In Maine, Hewlett-Packard supported the state's approach, Hinck said, while other companies preferred a law like California's.

The estimated cost to companies is in the tens of thousands of dollars, Hinck said. Products of companies that no longer exist are recycled by others based on market share.

Companies worry that the state will not be able to enforce the law, giving an advantage to those that do not pay their bills or cannot be found.

"If they're flying under the radar, Maine can't enforce the statute, and they are getting a fairly lucrative advantage in the market," said Rick Goss, director of environmental affairs for the Electronic Industries Alliance, a trade group. "It's far from certain Maine can enforce certain parts of the statute out of state, let alone out of the country."

Notebook News:

Add a High-Gloss Screen to Your Laptop

A number of current notebooks from Hewlett-Packard, Toshiba, and other vendors feature high-gloss LCDs that make graphics pop. But you don't have to buy a new notebook to take advantage of the enhanced screen technology.

Houston-based ScreenTek offers high-gloss, anti-reflective replacement screens, called PixelBright, for many notebooks – including older models. Send Screen Tek your notebook; it replaces the display; and your notebook is returned to you within 48 hours after the company has received it, ScreenTek says. Prices range from \$50 to \$100. For more details, go to the company's site:

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

Error Messages Deciphered

Some common Windows error messages are less intimidating when you have an idea of what the often cryptic message is referring to. The thing to remember is that error messages are rarely if ever displayed because of a mistake you made. So the best thing to do is read the following tips, maintain your composure, and take control of the computer!

The first thing to do when an Error Message presents itself is to read it carefully. You can gain a lot of information from simply reading the message. It might be something as simple as entering a password. It could also be rather cryptic – Let's deal with four of the most common messages right now.

1. Invalid Page Fault.

This occurs when the operating system (Windows) fails to actually access information (data) that was requested by one of your programs. It's as if the butler simply went to sleep on the job. Remedy: Close the offending application that caused the error. Fire the butler. But only temporarily.

2. Fatal Exception Error.

This happens when a program or the system itself tries to work with sickly data, such as a corrupt file. Files get corrupted if all the ducks aren't lined up just so. Everything has to be absolutely precise, or wham! Fatal Exception. Nobody was hurt, were they? I hope not! Remedy: Close the offending application. Sometimes it's Windows.

3. General Protection Fault (GPF).

Your computer has to have enough resources to support everything going on inside. If it runs low, or resources leak into space, you may see a GPF. This may also happen if two applications try to use the same memory location, like two cars attempting the same parking place.

Remedy: Again close the offending application.

4. Runtime Error.

These occur while applications are running. The only way to cure them is to restart the application.

If you encounter a message you really want to figure out, consult the Microsoft Knowledge Base for solutions at <http://search.support.microsoft.com>

5. "The device has been disabled in the hardware. In order to use this device, you must re-enable the hardware. See your hardware documentation for details." The documentation will only tell you how the device should be set up. It won't help you any with the error message.

This Windows error message is caused by hardware components that malfunction or may be configured incorrectly. Check all connections, try reinstalling the device, or try it in another computer. If it still gives the same message, it's probably broken.

6. "Error starting program. There is not enough memory. Quit some programs and try again." There are three possible answers:

a. Your hard drive is too full and can't accommodate more data. Since Windows uses space on your hard drive as virtual memory (in addition to RAM) this could be the cause. Be sure you have at least 10% of your drive free. On a 60 gigabyte hard drive, that would be 6 Gigabyte minimum.

b. The Recycle Bin may have too much space reserved. Try decreasing this amount to a lower percentage. The default is 10%.

c. You may need to upgrade your RAM. Many current computers work just fine with 128 megabytes to run Windows XP, but will benefit if you double that amount.

d. "Cannot find a device file that may be needed to run Windows or a Windows application." Grab the phone and call for help, because this is dial-up networking problem. Reinstall dial-up networking. How? Use the Add/Remove programs utility in the Control Panel. Add the dial-up networking program. It's not as easy as sounds, so I advise you to try and find a techie-type who can help you out if this is your problem.

Summary

Error messages are there to guide you into the light. After passing through the valley of the shadow of possible doom, you'll enter a new land of understanding. Certain events trigger error messages – like starting your computer, or trying to run two applications that fight each other for memory locations (known as conflicting applications).

You may never operate without an error message, but at least you'll start learning to decipher them, and may discover they aren't so bad after all. Especially if you're able to fix the cause!

The best seat in the house

Frequent travelers know all the tricks. They know which planes have the most room, and which ones have plugs for laptops. Above all else, they know how to pick a good seat.

If you're an infrequent traveler, you don't have to put up with a bad seat. You just need to do a little research to help you out.

So, visit SeatGuru before your next trip. Select the airline and the type of plane. You'll get a floor plan showing all the seats on board. They're coded to show you which are best and which are the worst. Plus, you'll get a brief description explaining why.

There's more to SeatGuru than information about the seating. You'll also find details on in-flight entertainment and power ports. But if you're like me, your seat matters the most! www.seatguru.com/index.php

Step Right Up for Free Drivers and DLLs

Have you ever needed a specific device driver? Or maybe a system crash corrupted a DLL you needed to load a mission-critical program.

You could scramble around your collection of original program CDs, or holler for your tech support buddies.

Instead, visit the DllDump for a hefty collection of free DLLs as well as INI and OCX files:

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

If it's a driver you're trying to hunt down, head for Microsoft's free driver site. I'm guessing it's got hundreds of drivers, including printer, video, BIOS, multimedia, CD, and others: <http://www.windowmarketplace.com/results.aspx?bcid=392>

Fearless Forecasts for 2006

by Rick Altman

Altman Digital Communications

I want a piece of the action. I want the opportunity to make embarrassing predictions, be ridiculed by our peers, and live in shame until next January. Here, therefore, is our annual contribution to the landscape of bold, prophetic statements that will surely come back to haunt us...

1. Microsoft has trouble with Office 12 The new version of Microsoft Office will not be plagued with bugs or security vulnerabilities. It will install without incident and run with acceptable or better performance on a majority of Windows boxes. The pundits will laud it and we commentators will speak of how the new interface will greatly improve productivity through all of the applications.

But the public will not embrace it. More set in their ways than any other type of PC user, daily users of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint have spent the past 48 to 60 months likening these apps to their toasters or microwave ovens: not every task is easy, but the mechanics of using the appliance is a no-brainer. That will not be the

case at first with the freshly-designed Office 12, and many will find themselves retreating to Office 03 to get today's project out the door "until I have time to sit and play with it." We all know when that time comes – December 32.

Consequently, Microsoft will consider a compatibility mode to keep the new Office from becoming shelfware.

2. Corel products trade places The Corel Graphics Suite (aka CorelDraw and Photo-Paint) will play to increasingly narrow niche markets, but Paint Shop Pro will hit its stride. It will become the most prominent alternative to Adobe Photoshop and work its way into more and more bundles with digital camera manufacturers.

PhotoPaint will begin to lose its identity and Corel officials will talk seriously about moving PSP into the CGS bundle.

3. Two lenses are better than one The CES show in early January scooped me on this one: cameras with two lenses. Kodak debuted this at CES with a single 5MP sensor being mated to a pair of lenses, one fixed at 23mm and the other a 37-117mm zoom. My prediction was going to be that this would appear in 2006; now we will forecast that it will become commonplace this year.

4. Hand-held movies in high-resolution? iPod devotees already speak of watching movies in their hands, but it is not my contention that you will ever watch feature-length movies on your iPod or mobile phone and actually enjoy it. We're getting closer, though: the digital videos that we create at our PhotosToMemories web site will all play quite well on video-enabled handhelds, only requiring about 30MB apiece.

But that's not the same as watching a two-hour movie on your phone, and we know it. Technology cannot create comfort or compensate for lack of same, but there is no reason why your phone cannot be the movie player. A two-hour movie can be delivered in satisfactory 4:3 resolution in about 2GB and many phones, music players, and Palm devices can routinely accept a file of that size. What we will see in 2006 is the wide-spread support for those devices to connect directly to a television for playback.

5. Batteries ... oy vey ... Whenever Prediction No. 3 becomes a reality, this one will be about six weeks behind: Batteries for handhelds will need to be about twice as good as they are now. Or the entire industry goes to hell!

6. Wither TiVo Perhaps the most painful prediction in multimedia for 2006 will be our beloved TiVo, which will continue to fight to gain traction... and lose the battle. TiVo will become a technology, not a product, and those of us who bought in back in 2000 will be traumatized. For about a day ... read on.

7. Television ... directly to your PC The networks will deliver us from our trauma by offering services whereby you can subscribe to a television show and have it automatically download to your PC, with no restrictions or DRM issues. With relatively simple software, and more notably cooperation from the networks at a level not seen before, entirely new life will be breathed into the Windows Media Edition and to PCs billing themselves as media centers.

Before the year is over, I will walk into a house that I have never been in before, take out my mobile phone and wirelessly play a network broadcast on the television there.

8. Every company will see the light ... and train all of its employees so that nobody delivers obnoxious and annoying presentations and commits Death by PowerPoint ever again.

Well, seven out of eight won't be too bad.

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From The DealsGuy

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

When I wrote about being unable to reboot until I removed the Flash drive I had plugged in, I forgot where I had read the tip indicating that possibility for boot failure. John Pearce of Pikes Peak Computer Application Society in Colorado Springs turned out to be the source of that great tip that kept me from pulling my hair out. He had a similar boot failure problem and wrote about it in their August 2005 newsletter (page 3). A member also had that problem whose comment was published in their September 2005 issue (page 3). You can access the Bits of Bytes newsletters at [<http://pcompas.apcug.org>] from their newsletter archive. Their editor, Greg Lenihan, has been publishing a great newsletter for some time now with several well-qualified technical authors helping their members. You won't be sorry if you browse through a few issues.

Another Disappointing Cruise

Last year I wrote about taking a cruise in December 2004 on Holland America's Zaandam, and my frustrations. I was surprised at the amount of feedback I received, even from folks who had taken the same cruise and agreed with my frustrations. In December 2005, we gave Carnival a try since they had a seven-day cruise



that fit perfectly into a time we had off, and it left from Tampa, only an hour and a half drive to board. We had never tried Carnival and the *Miracle* (ship) was less than two years old. I won't go into much detail, but we will not take another Carnival cruise. The ship was beautiful, and while we didn't have any rough seas, our ride was smooth. However, I could write a book about all the things we were disappointed with compared to other cruises we have taken, although we have no complaints about our cabin attendants or dinner servers. They were great. Don't get me wrong, I doubt we could take any cruise without enjoying ourselves, but many things were disappointing, especially the usually lukewarm food. Also, they kept that ship very cold, including our cabin, and we had to wear sweatshirts or sweaters all the time, or sit on deck in the pool areas. Our complaints fell on deaf ears. We were not the only people who complained and some told us they had even caught colds. There were blow dryers in the rest rooms instead of paper towels and we rarely saw an attendant there. Most of the entertainment used audience participation, and when we boarded, nobody greeted us and showed us to our cabins. We had to find them ourselves. First-time cruisers were really lost when they boarded. They did have two very outstanding song and dance shows that week that were superb, but that was where superb entertainment ended.

One night after a show featuring a hypnotist using about 25 volunteers from the audience, the newsletter listed Country & Western music in one of the clubs so we went there. When the listed time came, somebody went up on stage and plugged in a tape and that was our C & W band, not even a DJ. Best I stop right here as I could fill your newsletter with other complaints. One of the adult comedians was not bad, I guess, but you could hardly hear their sound system.

Read The Fine Print

Have you seen the latest scam in rebates? It was on the news recently that some people had applied for certain rebates and when they did not arrive in a couple of months they found that in the fine print the rebate could take up to four years to be processed. The TV station was working to help those folks.

Say Hello If You're In Town

I'll be working a few days of the Photo Marketing Assn. International Convention here in Orlando at the Orange County Convention Center so if you plan to attend I would like to see you. Let me know ahead of time so I can arrange it when I have time off. You will see all the big names in the computer industry at that show Feb. 26 thru Mar. 1 and it will take you some time to see it. You won't be sorry you attended. More info at [<http://www.pmai.org>].

Here's An Announcement for Home

Bookkeeping Software (Edited)

October 18, 2005 – Keepsoft Software announces the release of the new version of Home Bookkeeping. The main use for Home Bookkeeping is analysis of your accounts, expenses and incomes. First, open one or several accounts, specifying the currency to be used in each case. Then, you can start keeping your expenditure records, noting the category of expenses each time you withdraw money from the accounts. Mark your debtors and creditors and plan your incomes and expenses. It gives you a complete picture of your finances movement. It presents a report containing exhaustive information on your expenditure items.

Transfer money from one account to another. Copy or move from one user to another any data regarding expenditure items. One can clear, synchronize or compress his/her database and export any record to a considerable number of formats. Privacy and security are ensured since every user can protect his/her username with a case sensitive password. A variety of backup option features ensure that information is safe. The built-in handy search engine will get any data on current expenditures.

Pricing and Availability Home Bookkeeping runs under Windows 9. X/Me/2000/XP and costs \$29.95 (USD) for individual users and \$49.95 (USD) for commercial users. We offer all members of your group a 20% discount through April 2006. Registered customers are entitled to free updates and lifetime technical support. A 30-day fully functional evaluation version of Home Bookkeeping is available as a free download at [<http://www.keepsoft.com/download/hbk4.exe>] (3.8 Mb)

Product page URL: [<http://www.keepsoft.com/hbk.htm>] Contact: Pavel Kozlovsky E-mail: [public@keepsoft.com] Web: [<http://www.keepsoft.com>]

WinJukebox Software announces the release of WinJukebox v2.0. The core functionality of an on-demand music player has been extended with play list management and music updates. The program also features automatic volume balancing and a smart track overlap. If you want your tune played, punch its track number and wait your turn. The jukebox window also shows the tracks popularity chart. When the on-demand queue is empty, the auto playback mode switches to a list of new downloads or a top popularity list. Also added is track repeat control, so that most ardent guests don't inflict their tastes on others.

The Jukebox window has an attractive texture skin. It shows the play list queue and the popularity chart. The Manager window shows various available play lists and allows controlling Jukebox playback and changing its settings. The program's settings help customize the interface and manage the music menu and playback. On

entering a tune number, for example, the Jukebox window can show original messages in your native language. The settings allow automatic downloading of new tracks from bookmarked sites with optional traffic limits. As for playback, the program offers the repeat control, volume level normalization, and custom track overlap.

WinJukebox v2.0 runs under Windows 98/2000/2003/ME/XP, and costs \$24.95 USD for a personal user license, and \$49.95 USD for a family license. The company also offers different types of business licensing (commercial \$59.95, noncommercial \$49.95, and educational \$39.95). We will offer all user group members a 10 % discount on the latest version of WinJukebox v2.0 until 8/31/06 as a "special discount from DealsGuy." When ordering, enter the code CPN7798973196 in the coupon field on the shopping cart and checkout page. If necessary, contact [PRContacts @WinJukebox.com]. All registered users are entitled to free lifetime support and minor updates. WinJukebox v2.0 is available at [<http://winjukebox.com/download/winjukebox.exe>].

Product page link: [<http://winjukebox.com>]. Contact: Oleg Filimonov Company: WinJukebox Software E-mail: [support@WinJukebox.com]

Be aware that I have not tried either of these products announced.

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

Legal Bytes: Fair Use Wherefore Art Thou Going?

by John Brewer
eMonitor, Computer Club of Oklahoma City

The news media is reporting the current brouhaha over electronic eavesdropping and surveillance of telephone calls, email, and Internet searches. The US Senate is set to begin debate on whether Judge Samuel Alito is the right person to follow Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Congress is debating how to manage recover in New Orleans, fund wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and address the reality of record deficits in the federal budget. It is a good time for the entertainment industry to make an end run on "fair use."

Fair use is a legal concept that permits the public to use copyrighted content without paying for the use, subject to specific restrictions. The entertainment

industry perceives "fair use" as tantamount to theft by the unwashed and the unsaved. Draft legislation sponsored by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) is being prepared for filing in Congress.

The new legislation is being circulated by Senator Gordon Smith (R-Ore.) and is titled the "Digital Content Protection Act of 2006." The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) reports that "fair use" will be limited to "customary historic use of broadcast content by consumers to the extent such use is consistent with applicable law" under the DCPA. EFF continues, "had that been the law in 1970, there would never have been a VCR. Had it been the law in 1990, no TiVo; in 2000, no iPod. "Fair use" has always been a forward-looking doctrine. It was meant to leave room for new uses, not merely customary historic uses. Sony was entitled to build the VCR first and resolve the fair use questions later."

EFF interprets the proposed legislation as giving regulators (that could be largely staffed by industry types) the power to prohibit new technologies in advance of their introduction to public use. Past practice was to permit the introduction of new technology and then permit the courts to rule whether copyright law was applicable and, if so, whether the use of the technology was an exception under "fair use." As an example, the public is permitted to tape a television program on a VCR and play it back later as a "fair use" exception to copyright law. This practice is called "time shifting."

The new law will permit the device or technology only if it meets the criteria of "customary historic use." New technology will probably not qualify as "customary historic use." EFF predicts a world where technology will be frozen in time because industry lobbyists will have the power to prohibit new technology. Anyone who thinks otherwise is naïve. The federal regulatory agencies have seen "sea changes" in their attitudes under the current administration in the determination of the proper balance between industry and public interests.

The Public Knowledge web site states that the Smith legislation is basically a rework of what is known as the "Hollings Bill" from 2002. Public Knowledge states further "the fact remains that the main issue here is not about piracy, it's about control. The content industry needs a congressional mandate to control the functionality of consumer electronics and PCs, and in turn, what consumers can do with the devices and content they legally obtain.

The Senate has introduced the "Digital Content Protection Act of 2006," a bill that will create "Broadcast Flags" for all digital radio and television, leading to FCC oversight of all new digital media technologies from iPods and PSPs to TVs and DVD recorders."

Another web site, a very interesting web site indeed, is boingboing.net. Boingboing has the following to say about the Smith legislation.

“Under the DCPA proposal, digital media technologies would be restricted to using technologies that had been certified by the FCC as being not unduly disruptive to entertainment industry business-models. There are two things to be certain of this century:

1. Everything that can be expressed as bits [digital content] will be expressed as bits
2. Bits will only get easier to copy

The entertainment companies are convinced that their businesses depend on copy-proof bits. This is ridiculous: there’s no such thing, there never will be.

Governments that try to protect businesses that demand copy-proof bits are like governments that try to protect businesses on the sides of volcanoes, who demand an immediate end to business-disrupting lava.

If the current entertainment companies can’t or won’t adapt to a world of bits, that’s too bad. Let them die, and let new businesses that thrive in the new technological reality take their place. If you can’t stand the heat, get off the volcano.

Back in the mainframe days, IBM made its money by giving away computers below cost and then charging a bundle for keyboards and printers. Hitachi killed the mainframe business by introducing cheap peripherals for IBM mainframes. Killing mainframes didn’t kill computers: it made them better. IBM was forced to get into the minicomputer business, which led to the personal computer.

If computer industry complaints got the same attention as the entertainment crybabies get from lawmakers, there’d be 10,000 computers total in the world, running punchcards, with three companies making modest sums servicing them and shipping a new model every three years.

Hollywood’s crybaby capitalists accuse us of being “communists” with one breath, and in the next, they go begging to Congress to turn the FCC into device czars who keep the market from being disrupted by innovation.

Andy Setos, the Fox executive who invented the Broadcast Flag, once told me that his objective was “a well-mannered marketplace.” The entertainment industry’s version of a planned economy is bad policy.

Send a strong signal to your lawmaker: if you break my TV, radio, and computer, I will campaign tirelessly for anyone who will promise to throw you out of office and undo your deeds.

The author of the new bill to break our televisions, computers, and mp3 players, Senator Gordon Smith of Oregon, has been paid tens of thousands of dollars to do it. The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) has

been lobbying hard for the sole ability to decide how hard it’s going be for us to listen to an mp3. The NAB has thrown nearly \$250,000 at Republican candidates this year alone. NAB’s money stuck to Gordon Smith.”

Sometimes the public has live with the legislation that has been bought by industry. Anyone who is concerned should make their voice heard.

John Brewer practices law in Oklahoma City, is a member of the Governor’s and Legislative Task Force for E-Commerce, and enjoys issues relating to eBusiness and cyberspace. Comments and questions are welcome and can be emailed to johnb @jnbrewer.com.

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An End to Computer Annoyances

by Gabriel Goldberg

APCUG Advisor; Columnist, AARP Computer & Technology Website, www.aarp.org

Many of us have mixed relationships with computers and technology. They enrich our lives but can be maddening at times. Books and magazines often tell us how great they are, but an O’Reilly book series addresses the dark side of the story by describing their annoyances and offers “help for newbies and powerusers alike.”

The format of the books is similar to Q&A dialogues or lists of FAQs (frequently asked questions). They’re not meant to be read from cover to cover but explored based on a particular need or curiosity. This search is assisted by good tables of contents and full indexes. The books are written in conversational English, pairing annoyances with their fixes, and include an abundant amount of clear and helpful screen shots.

While flipping through these books, the handy tips boxes lead to many “aha” moments and I was able to identify many solutions to current and future problems. Some of the content overlaps between books, such as Internet topics being addressed in its own book, *Internet Annoyances*, also being mentioned in both *PC Annoyances* and *Home Networking Annoyances*. You may want to read a general book along with those specific titles that address your main interests. Some books are in their second edition, making it worthwhile to check print dates and edition numbers before purchasing them.

Steve Bass, author of *PC Annoyances*, provides a good introduction, stating that “Many people are now realizing that they’ve been putting up with programs that have downright annoying features and yes, bugs. It’s high time they learned they aren’t alone, it’s not their fault,

and, most important, there are solutions and workarounds.”

Bass’ book isn’t overly technical. It addresses topics such as e-mail, Windows, the Internet, Microsoft Office, Windows Explorer, music, video, CDs, and hardware. Many all-too-common problems are identified and solved, but it’s not all-inclusive. For example, it doesn’t mention Thunderbird e-mail or Firefox browser, both of which I like a lot, but they can be annoying too! Coverage of Windows XP SP2 is localized and not mentioned places where it would be appropriate. Varied software is recommended, free and purchased, downloaded and store-bought, and advice is provided on configuring Windows and applications. And non-annoyance bonus material, such as “IM Netiquette rules,” which was both entertaining and valuable. I was happy to learn how adding a work menu to MS Word gives instant access to frequently-used documents.

Another book in this series, *PC Hardware Annoyances*, covers diverse topics including computer setup, keyboard, mouse, startup, BIOS/CMOS, memory, processor, maintenance, and battery. Some annoyances are offered up as questions, such as “Do I need specialized PC cleaning supplies?” The helpful and short answer is “no”, since common materials, used appropriately, work just fine. Because everyone has unique interests and concerns, even the book’s specialized items are useful and thought provoking.

Other Annoyances titles address computer privacy, home networking, the Internet, the Mac, Windows XP for geeks, and some Microsoft applications (Access, Excel, and Word), all of which are listed on the O’Reilly Annoyances Central Web site. This site also offers additional resources to combat computer-related annoyances with its Experts’ Blogs (a good way to get your unique questions answered before they appear in a book), the Daily Fix (a stream of individual items from the books), and Robert’s Rant (the slow-paced blog of Robert Luhn, the Annoyances series Executive Editor, who addresses topics such as whether Wikis can be trusted and the origin of his book series).

Specifications:

Title: *PC Annoyances*

Author: Steve Bass

Paperback: 252 pages

Publisher: O’Reilly Media

ISBN: 0596008821

Price: \$19.95

Title: *PC Hardware Annoyances*

Author: Stephen J. Bigelow

Paperback: 266 pages

Publisher: O’Reilly Media

ISBN: 0596007159

Price: \$24.95

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Open Source Software Opens Up

Linux is easy to install, the applications are easy to use, but the system administration is different than Windows (some would say it’s still more difficult than it should be). But like other areas of Linux, it’s improving steadily.

by Orv Beach

Principal Member, Simi-Conejo Linux Users Group

Open Source software is programming code that’s generally available at no cost to you. But we should draw a distinction between “freeware” and Open Source programs.

The premise of Open Source (and, hence the name) is that the source code of the program is available to you. That’s not so much so YOU can modify it (although you could and are free to if you knew how). It’s more in order to place the program in “public escrow.” Once a program has been licensed under the GPL (General Public License), it can never be retracted, and thus never orphaned.

That’s an advantage for both individual users and companies; you don’t have to worry about future forced upgrades by your software vendor! This licensing arrangement also encourages community development. Coders add features, fix bugs and document applications, and return those improvements to the users.

Open Source: Party Animal

Open Source software continues to gain in popularity as a result of it being, well, open to coders. The best current examples are probably the Firefox browser, and the OpenOffice office suite (This article was written in OpenOffice.). Both are popular and powerful applications that run equally well on several operating systems.

Firefox is generally faster than Internet Explorer, and arguably more secure. Tabbed browsing and a wide array of theme choices are popular features. Patches are generally provided very quickly to rectify any security

problem that might appear in contrast to the relatively slow pace of fixes for commercial code.

OpenOffice has improved in functionality, and in compatibility with Microsoft Office since its first release about two years ago. It can read from and write to Word, PowerPoint, and Excel formats, compose HTML documents and output to Flash and Acrobat files.

Need more? How about a database? Both applications are frequently updated; current version for Firefox is 1.5, OpenOffice, 2.0.1. Best of all, both are free for the downloading.

Applications Not Just for Linux

Some other good examples of Open Source software available for both Windows and Linux are:

- Blender, a 3D modeling and animation program
- GAIM, the “multi-protocol” instant messaging program
- The GIMP, a great graphics editing program

There are Windows applications with no perfect analog in Linux, but the situation is improving daily, and Linux has matured in all desktop areas. For example, multimedia programs for manipulating graphics or editing video and audio are often on par with their commercial counterparts. In fact, Linux “distributions” either come with all that good stuff, or if not, they can be downloaded separately. The distributions range from completely free via downloaded CD images, or inexpensively purchased, with some customer support and documentation included. Much of the differentiation between these distributions (Fedora, Ubuntu, SuSE) lies in the graphical installer and system tools, driving development of a more user-friendly experience for even a novice.

Of course occurrences of viruses happen about once a decade, thanks to the inherent security in Linux. Spyware, or malware programs aren't a problem because they can't install themselves.

And Linux is stable; it doesn't crash very often. If you leave your Linux box running, several months later you'll realize it's still running, and hasn't had to be rebooted.

It's a Freebie

If you'd like to experiment with Linux, but don't want to commit to loading it on a computer, there are “Live CDs” available. These are bootable Linux CDs – everything runs off the CD rather than from a hard disk. This allows you to “try before you install.” I'd say “try before

you buy,” but the buying is optional! Some examples of bootable Linux CDs are Knoppix and Mepis.

If you're still dependent on some Windows applications, or want to be able to use both Windows and Linux, you can “dual-boot” your computer. That means putting both Windows and Linux on the same hard drive (or separate ones), and when you boot, be able to select which operating system will boot. That gives you a lot of flexibility in what you can do with your computer.

Linux isn't perfect; there are some shortcomings:

- Administration of a Linux system is different (not harder, just different); the methods for installing and upgrading programs have to be learned.
- High end games aren't as widely available for Linux (exceptions include the iD series – Doom & Quake – as well as Unreal Tournament).
- Personal Finance is still weak; there's no direct equivalent for Quicken (although GNUCash is very usable, and of course free to try).

Hardware Requirements

For good results a modern “full house” installation of Linux intended for desktop use should be installed on a computer that has the following characteristics:

800 MHz CPU (faster is better, of course)

6-10 Gigs of disk space

- Minimum 256 Megs of RAM (512 Megs is better if you're going to have more than a couple of large applications open at the same time)
- A video card with 8 Megs of RAM or better (shared RAM is ok, if that's the type of video your computer has.
- A 17" or larger monitor
- audio card & speakers

Note: inexpensive WinModems are not well supported; neither are WinPrinters; the inexpensive ones that require the CPU to do all the formatting.

If you're read about Linux and are interested, your local Linux user group may be doing an Expo. For instance, every year in February, there's an Annual So Cal Linux Expo in southern California. Check <http://www.socallinuxexpo.com> for details.

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Linux puts the “fun” back in computing!

Grab a copy and install it. The only thing you'll spend is some time, and just think of the hardware upgrades you can buy with the money you saved on software!

How Big Is a 300 Gb Hard Disk?

by Jim Sanders

Editor, *Orange Bytes*

North Orange County Computer Club

I recently acquired a 300 GB hard disk for \$110 after rebates. When I look at that 3.5 inch hard drive that is one inch high and easily held in my hand, trying to put those 300 Giga bytes of storage in perspective is a little tough. I thought about the first Z80 CPM system I built in 1977 from a Cromemco kit that I had to solder together. It used 8 inch floppy disks that held 128,000 Bytes.

The diskettes were easy to damage and it was a good idea to keep them in storage boxes. I made some good money selling the SRW Computer Products plastic storage boxes at a great ACP Swap Meet discounted price of \$2.00 each. They were designed to hold 10, but you could get 2 or 3 more in if you were careful! I wondered how many floppies that would be, so I punched the numbers into the calculator. $300,000,000/128,000B = 2,343,750$ diskettes. I don't know how to visualize that, but I did calculate that it would take \$468,750.00 worth of those boxes to store them all. I then remembered that the average price at that time was about \$3.50 a diskette. Again the calculator, $2,343,750 \text{ diskettes} \times \$3.50 = \$8,203,125.00$. Wow! That is a number that I don't want to think about if I am talking about a hobby.

Another way to wrap your mind around huge numbers is to start small, with something that you can relate to, and work your way up. Now we know that one byte equals one character of the alphabet. The common 10 point type has 10 characters per inch. So, if we have 120 characters/bytes in a row, we have one foot. There are 5,280 feet in a mile. So $5,280 \times 120$ gives the number of character or bytes that would be on a mile long ticket tape that was being printed with 10 point type, an answer of 633,600 bytes. Compared to the 300 Giga bytes on the hard disk, 633,600 bytes is not much. To find out how much, we need to take the 300,000,000,000 byte capacity of the hard disk and divide it by 633,600 bytes in a mile. The answer to that math problem is the equivalent of 473,485 miles of ticker tape.

To put that into perspective, let's take the circumference of the earth (nominally 25,000 miles) and divide that into our answer. So, $473,485 / 25,000 = 18.93$. If we could find a big enough roll of ticker tape, printing all the information on that hard disk would wrap around the equator of the earth 18.93 times. That sounds impressive, but how many people can really visualize that. Besides, I don't know anyone who has a big enough ticker tape printer. Another thought, that ticker tape would be 3,000

miles short of stretching from the Earth to the Moon and back.

But let's try it with regular 8.5 inch x 11 inch paper. Again, standard printing would be 10 point type, 10 bytes per inch, and 6 lines per inch. Most people leave at least a half inch margin all the way around the page. So that means each line will be 7.5 inches, or 75 bytes, and there will be 60 lines per page. So each page will use 75 bytes x 60 lines, or 4,500 bytes. First, let's take 1 of the 300,000 megabytes on the disk and see how many pages that represents. $1,000,000 / 4,500 = 222.2$ pages. We still have 299,999 megabytes left and, using them, the total number of pages comes out to 66,660,000 pages.

That is also a little hard to imagine, so let's see how many reams of paper that is. Take 66,660,000 pages, divided by 500 sheets per ream = 133,320 reams of paper. Again, a little hard to visualize.

A lot of things have their volume given in cubic feet. That's 12 inches x 12 inches x 12 inches or 1,728 cubic inches, or 1 cubic foot. I measured one case of paper at 11.25x9x17.5 inches, or 1,771 cubic inches. Let's be generous and round that off to one cubic foot. So at 5,000 sheets, or ten reams per case, we divide the 133,320 reams that we came up with by 10 to get 13,332 cases, or that many cubic feet of space.

Stipulating that an average house is 1,400 square feet with eight foot high ceilings, then the average house has 11,200 cubic feet of space, ignoring the walls. If you filled up your house, wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling, with cases of printed paper, you would still have 2,132 cases left over. If you are in better shape than I am, there is still room to get one car in that two car garage. That's 10'x20'x9' = 1,800 cubic feet, so that still leaves us with 332 cases of paper. We could take all of the junk out of the other half of the garage, lay down a two foot thick layer of paper and put all the junk back in on top of it. That's how much the 300 Gigabyte disk holds! So, unless you are planning on taking out a home improvement loan, don't buy that 400 Giga byte disk.

Society News

Planning Meeting Notes

February 7, 2006

by John McMillan, Secretary

With apologies to Robert Service – "A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon"; (make that Sally's Place) when out of the night, which was pretty cold, strolled Arpad Kovacs to lead Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, Sally, Steve Staub and Tom Thompson in the February planning meeting.

The meeting started with a discussion of printing February's Monitor. Steve said that He, Sally, Mike Lavelle and Mary Ann McCullough worked from 10 am

until 2 pm January 14th. Ink cartridge and stapler problems slowed the process somewhat. He mentioned that while we are currently in good shape with cartridges, we may have lost one of our advertisers, but was optimistic that we might get a couple of others. Arpad and Tony will attempt to find a source of replacement parts or possibly a used stapler to improve the situation.

Arpad asked how the January meeting went and, after several moments of dead silence, Bob cited the attention to detail which gave attendees a clear view of how to use this tool. Steve described a conversation with a new member who claimed to have learned a great deal that evening. I felt it was very dry though hopefully educational for those unfamiliar with this tool.

Arpad asked how the traffic was on the Societies Web pages after the presentation. Bob had verified that someone hacked the site and replaced the forums with something derogatory. He and Arpad will pursue correcting this and trying to prevent future occurrences.

Although Ron Matteson was not there, he had indicated in an E-mail that the following programs had been scheduled: February – Search Engine Optimization; March – Presentation in a Backpack (building your own computer); April – Smart Computing, the group that was cut short in Webster by a power failure will return. All three of these meetings are scheduled for the Brighton Library. The possibility of another Jeopardy game was also mentioned. Steve stated that we have reserved the new Brighton Park Lodge for the August Picnic. More on that in the future.

Meeting Notes

February 2006
by John McMillan

Club business: Steve Staub indicated there was a continuing need for a Help's Half Hour leader and a replacement for Ron Matteson whose original tenure as Program chairperson has been extended several times to an absolute deadline of April. The March meeting about Building Your Own Computer and the Smart Computing Speakers return in April, will be held in the Brighton Library. Beyond that nothing has been established other than the August Picnic which will be held in the Lodge at the new Brighton Town Park. A member suggested rerunning earlier programs. This was thought to be a good idea but would still require a coordinator, a job nobody volunteered for.

Steve reminded members to keep their dues current stating that some members were as much as six months in arrears. He announced that the planning meeting would be held the first Tuesday of March at Sally Springett's house and that the Monitor would be assembled at on February 18th.

Though it is a major financial drain, the Monitor is extremely useful for raising awareness of the Society and it's benefits. An electronic newsletter would be less costly but earlier queries of members indicated 75% of the members prefer a hard copy. In the past, the printing and assembly process alone has required over 16 labor hours a month to complete. Currently, three laser jet printers are used to print the body of the newsletter and 2 ink jet printers are used for the covers. The Society submitted a low E-bay bid for an 8000 series printer which is 3 times as fast as the current printers and will allow us to sell two of the laser jets, retaining one for backup. A source for stapler parts is also being sought to streamline the assembly process.

Steve summed up the bad news. We are in desperate need of help – both financial and workers. The next planning group meeting will consider alternatives to increase the treasury balance which is now about \$71. He cited several existing fund raisers: refreshment donations which are low compared to the cost of coffee, soda or snacks at a concession stand; and 50/50 participation which are shrinking. Another member suggested a meeting attendance fee but this is against Library Policy and could cost us the use of free meeting rooms. Former Vice President Frank Howden made a passionate plea for raising the annual dues pointing out the effect of inflation since the last increase was enacted. He also suggested using electronic news letters for those willing to accept them and using bulk mailing to local stores instead of hand delivery. Another suggestion was having a higher membership fee for those who desire a mailed copy of the Monitor.

Hearing many of these reiterations at almost every meeting makes me think of a bell tolling the death knell of the society. An organization of volunteers will only be successful as long as there are people willing to be of service and support its goals. Continued dependance upon a small group of highly active members will burn them out leading to eventual dissolution of the group.

Webmaster Bob Avery mentioned having added a new link on the Tools and Utilities screen of the Societies Resources Page. It Uploads files as large as 1 GB which will be put on a server, the link to which is then emailed to the recipient. No registration is required nor are there any fees.

Following the social break, Ron Matteson introduced Many Anne Donovan, Vice President of SEO Literacy Consultants who also teaches at St. John Fisher College. Her topic was Search Engine Optimization Strategies. After mentioning that the Internet has passed the "Yellow Pages" as a source of information for many people she stated that there are over twenty billion pages on the web.

Questions showed that most attendees surfed the web and that several people maintained either personal or other web sites. When asked how many pages of results were scanned before giving up, one responded that it depended on his interest in the subject, but most stopped after three or four. Mary Anne pointed out that the desire to appear high on the results list was what drove the need for Search Engine Strategies.

Both Google (46% of the market) and Yahoo (30% of the market), depend on key words for searching so obviously the choice of key words (sometimes called "Pay Per Click") is critical. In effect, site designers need to anticipate the probable search terms used by the average searcher but there are also other techniques for improving the ranking. The use of accurate links, both to and from other web sites was stressed as a way to increase traffic however incorrect links are very detrimental. Reciprocal linking to relevant sites which benefits both sites is an acceptable technique.

Mary Anne described spiders, self replicating programs somewhat like a virus but considered good rather than bad. Spiders crawl through web sites looking at content, keywords, length and site design. They are sophisticated enough to recognize hidden words (typed in the same color as the background e.g. Black on black) and cloaking, that is redirection to another web site than the one shown. The data which is gathered goes into an algorithm to calculate site ranking. In response to a question, she felt that the use of Java script and flash content is problematic and may have a negative effect in the ranking process. She also cautioned against changing the URL which modifies the ranking adversely. Navigation tools which ease the viewers ability to get around the site from one page to another are a positive factor as are bulleted lists, white space and correct grammar. Site changes will not effect the ranking until the next evaluation which may not occur for 3 to 4 weeks.

Mary Anne concluded by discussing measurement: monitoring site performance, customer feedback and web page traffic. She agreed to E-mail a copy of her slides to Bob Avery who will make them available on the Societies web page.

Members renewing this month are: Stan Lochocki, Harvey Nusbaum, James Murdock, and Wallace Pensgen. New member: Emily Carpenter.

The Lighter Side

Me: "DSL is a lot faster. It--"

Friend's Father: "Yeah, but if you have DSL, there are a lot of threats."

Me: "Yes, that's true to a degree, but there are firewalls that--"

Friend's Father: "No, but they can hack into your computer even when it's off and steal your electricity."

Me: "Umm... I'm pretty sure that won't happen."

Friend's Father: "It's all over the news. You mean to tell me they're wrong?"

Me: "... I guess so."



In Win 95 days I worked as a computer tech at a community college. One day, an officer from our security department stopped by to talk to me. His face looked grim. He pulled me quietly aside.

Officer: "We have a new part time person working in our office who uses the computer, and I have to ask you something, but you need to keep this confidential."

Me: "Ok, what's the problem?"

Officer: "Well, over the past two or three days I've glanced over at the new person's computer, and several times I've seen a message that says 'You have performed an illegal operation,' but he keeps clearing it by clicking something. I need to find out what he's doing wrong and if we should call the local police."

He looked so scared and serious, I had a hard time keeping a straight face..



Lament for a Dot Com

Once I built a website, made it sell
Made it sell all the time
Suddenly our startup's not doin' so well
Brother can you spare a dime?

Once we had some partners
Names you'd know
Traffic startin' to climb
Reality upset the status quo
Brother can you spare a dime?

Once we had investors, a full time staff
And a damn good website
Now it's disappeared without a trace
Brother can you spare a dime?

Once I had some options,
I was gonna retire In a couple years time
Now they're worth about three cents a share
Brother can you spare a dime?

