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Getting Unusual Use Out of your Office Applications

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The Great Net Neutrality Debate

by Patrick Douglas Crispin

Back in September 1981, Vint Cerf and Robert Kahn wrote "The internet protocol treats each internet datagram as an independent entity unrelated to any other internet datagram. There are no connections or logical circuits (virtual or otherwise)." Source: <http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc0791.txt>

What does this mean in English? Well, in all deference to Alaska Senator Ted Stevens, the internet is neither like a dump truck nor like a series of tubes. Rather, the internet is a lot like the United States interstate highway system with one major

addition: there are weigh stations at every major junction.

Interstate 101

To travel from point A to point B on the United States Interstate Highway System, you get on the Interstate via an on-ramp and then head in a certain direction until you reach either a junction or your destination's off ramp. For example, if we want to get from Irvine, California [Symbol: Q], to Universal Studios in Hollywood, we'll take the following route:

I-405 north to I-605 north to I-5 north to US-101 north to Universal Studios Blvd exit [See <http://tinyurl.com/jfgw3>]

Now imagine if you had to make that same trip without anyone behind the wheel. You'd hop on I-405 north, put a brick on the gas pedal, and hope

for the best ... much like the way I drive to work each morning. [If you are from the California Department of Motor Vehicles, the California Highway Patrol, or Mercury Insurance, I assure you that I am *kidding!* Please don't arrest me.] Actually, you wouldn't have to hope for the best because at each junction on our pretend Interstate there is a weigh station where each vehicle pulls over, is inspected, and then is automatically put back on the Interstate headed in the right direction [or at least in the direction that has the least amount of traffic.]

So, in reality [or at least in augmented reality], our trip from Irvine to Hollywood will be a little more like:

I-405 north to the first weigh station at the junction of I-405 and CA-55

The weigh station will inspect our car and then put us back on I-405 north headed towards the next weigh station at the junction of I-405 and CA-22.

The next weigh station will inspect our car and ...yadda yadda yadda.

On a really long trip, our car could pass through dozens or even hundreds of weigh stations before it reached its final destination. On a cross-country trip, some of these weigh stations may be owned by California, some by Arizona, some by New Mexico, and so on.

By the way, what are the weigh stations inspecting for? They really only care to see that your car isn't missing a wheel or two and that your car knows its final destination. The weigh stations don't care one bit, though, about what is inside of your car [as long as what's inside of your car isn't damaged beyond all recognition] or who owns your car. In the eyes of the weigh stations, Patrick Crispen's car, Bill Gates' car, and the Popemobile are absolutely identical.

Got it? Now, let's apply this analogy to the internet.

Internet 101

To send an email or a web page or any sort of information from point A to point B on the internet, you connect to the internet through an Internet Service Provider [an "on ramp."] The Internet Service Provider puts the text of your email into an internet packet called a datagram [a "car"] and pushes the datagram onto the internet [the "interstate"] in the correct direction. At the first network junction your datagram encounters, the datagram is pulled off the internet by a router [a "weigh station,"] and inspected. The router doesn't care what your datagram contains or who sent it. It only checks to see that

your datagram isn't broken or improperly addressed. If your datagram passes inspection, it is placed back on the internet headed either in the right direction or in the direction that has the least traffic. At the next router, the process repeats itself ...yadda yadda yadda.

Your datagram passes through dozens of routers along the way, each potentially owned by different companies. Eventually, though, your datagram makes it to its final destination, usually within a few seconds of your sending it. [Did I mention your "car" was fast?]

You can actually see the whole routing process happen right before your eyes. Just point your web browser to <http://visualroute.visualware.com/>

You have to have Sun's free Java tool to be able to use this, but if you type in a web address in the Enter Host/URL box and then click on Start Trace, you'll see the route your datagram[s] takes as it goes from your computer to the final destination. If you are in the United States, try a trace to the Vatican at www.vatican.va just for grins.

Old School Traceroute

By the way, if you don't have Java, you can still run a text-based traceroute on your PC [if your firewall will let you.] In Windows 95, 98, 98 SE or ME,

1. Go to Start Programs DOS Prompt
2. Type TRACERT WWW.VATICAN.VA and then press the Enter key on your keyboard
3. Close the window when you are finished.
In Windows 2000 or XP,
 1. Go to Start Run
 2. In the Open: box key in CMD and click the OK button
 3. Type TRACERT WWW.VATICAN.VA and then press the Enter key on your keyboard
 4. Behold the magic that is traceroute.
 5. Close the window when you are finished.

A Drop In

All this leads up to a pretty significant "problem." Before we get to that, though, I need to drop in one more point.

The interstate is [for the most part] tax supported. Americans pay taxes on every gallon of gas they purchase and they also pay state and federal payroll taxes. A [insert your favorite pejorative adjective here] portion of all of this tax revenue is used to [insert your favorite pejorative adverb here] maintain the interstate highway system. You usually don't have to pay to use the interstate because your tax dollars already paid for your use. [Of

course, there are always exceptions like toll roads—see http://www.fhwa.dot.gov_programadmin_toll_ds.html]

The internet is a little different. While the internet began its life as a US Department of Defense research project, and while the telecommunications companies that maintain the internet backbone have received hundreds of billions of dollars in tax credits and disbursements, the internet is not really tax supported. Instead, you and I pay to connect to the internet. And so does Microsoft and Google and the Vatican and everyone else. The only difference is that consumers usually pay a flat monthly fee while businesses and organizations pay an escalating fee based on the amount of traffic they generate. In other words, Google's monthly internet bill is probably a bit larger than your monthly internet bill...or lifetime earning potential.

The Problem

Earlier we saw a quote from Cerf and Kahn that said that “The internet protocol treats each internet datagram as an independent entity unrelated to any other internet datagram. There are no connections or logical circuits (virtual or otherwise).” Source: <http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc0791.txt>

That first sentence is the cornerstone of what is called “net neutrality.” Each datagram that goes over the internet is treated the same.

Now for the problem. The telecommunications companies—the companies who run the routers in the middle of the path your datagrams take across the internet—have signaled their interest to no longer treat each internet datagram as an independent entity. Instead, the telecommunications companies may be interested in knowing what is inside of each datagram and then either charging more for or slowing down datagrams that contain certain types of content such as video streams, voice over internet protocol telephone calls, and so on.

As you can imagine, this has created a huge debate both online and in the halls of the United States Congress. You can read more about the debate at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Net_neutrality

The question before Congress is should net neutrality—the current state of affairs where all internet datagrams are treated the same—become the law of land. Right now net neutrality is more of a “gentlemen's agreement.” Proponents of network neutrality regulations include the AARP, Amazon, American Library Association, Earthlink, eBay, Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo. Opponents of network

neutrality regulations include the Bell telephone and cable companies. [Source: Wikipedia]

Felten on Net Neutrality

I want to put in a plug for Edward Felten's “Nuts and Bolts of Network Neutrality” paper at http://tpolicy.princeton.edu/pub_neutrality.pdf

This 10 page Adobe Acrobat document is free. Felten is a Professor of Computer Science and Public Affairs at Princeton University, and his “Nuts and Bolts” paper [combined with my internet 101 tutorial] should give you a much clearer understanding of the net neutrality debate...and why it's not as cut and dried as you might think. In fact, Felten makes a strong argument that both sides of the net neutrality debate are wrong.

Anyway, my goal was to give you a better understanding of the whole net neutrality debate so that you can make your own decision. Be looking for the media to focus a great deal of attention on this issue in the weeks and months to come.

From the newsletter Internet Tourbus, <http://www.internettourbus.com/>

Media Notes

by Bill Pettit

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

What follows is some more of my opinions about running the new Vista Beta 2 release and a few tips I've picked along the way. Oh yes, if you are interested, here is Microsoft's website to order/download your very own copy of Vista, either the 32 bit or 64 bit version if you have the right cpu. <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/preview.mspx>

What I love about Windows Vista

In this section, you'll learn about the new features within the Windows Vista operating system that I think you'll like. Since the Windows Vista Aero graphics system, which I like, will work only with certain high-end hardware configurations, I've focused here on features I like within Vista that do not require Aero. At the moment, all of these features are scheduled to be included in the Home Premium and Business editions of Windows Vista. If you're mainly interested in what's wrong with the new operating system, move on to the next section, where you can learn more about glitches I've encountered so far.

1. Search or create virtual files

Forget directories, forget directory trees. Microsoft has integrated search throughout its new operating system, and you'll quickly come to wonder how you lived without it. You can search for all documents

authored by John Doe, then save the search as a virtual file folder for later reference without having to physically relocate or make copies of all those files.

2. Widgets—er, Gadgets

In Windows Vista, Microsoft allows you to drag and drop Gadgets (think Widgets on the Apple OS X desktop) to tell time, calculate currency, or tackle any trivial task you perform regularly that would be handier if it were always on top of your current screen. Presently, you can acquire Gadgets, or Widgets, for your Windows XP machine from online sites such as Windows Live. In the near future, Microsoft says you'll be able to write your own Windows Vista Gadgets, allowing you to really personalize your desktop.

3. Built-in diagnostics

Programs won't run, the operating system crashes—Microsoft says these will be in the past with Vista. So far, I've seen more dialogs, from explaining why an application won't run to warning me that there are driver conflicts that prevent my laptop system from going to sleep. For example, Vista will listen to your hard drive and report pending problems, giving you ample warning to back up your data. There's also a Problems Report and Solutions monitor where you can see what problems Vista has encountered, and then go online to find possible solutions. And, have you ever noticed how Windows computers get slower with age? That's because files get separated from each other on your hard drive and require occasional defragmentation. Most of us never do it, in part because it uses too many system resources. In Vista, the process is automatic and runs in the background, so you won't even notice it.

4. Need more oomph? Vista will find it for you

Need more RAM? How about borrowing some from that 256MB or greater USB drive? In Windows Vista, the new Windows ReadyBoost feature can swap flash memory with any large USB device. If your laptop has a new hybrid hard drive, the Windows ReadyDrive can improve your system's overall performance, battery life, and reliability by taking advantage of the drive's built-in flash capabilities. New Windows SuperFetch can cache on your hard drive frequently used apps based on the frequency of use so that, for example, every Monday morning when you arrive at your desk for work, you can count on Outlook and your Internet browser to launch quickly. Also, finally, there's a new feature called Low-priority Input/Output that should keep

you productive: in Windows Vista, user applications will get higher priority with system resources than antivirus or defragmentation processes.

5. Enhanced help

Help used to be limited to a few pithy sentences about the task you want to perform. Windows Vista changes all that. There are more options available within Help inside Vista. For example, you can initiate a remote-assistance session so that someone you trust can take over your PC remotely and diagnose a problem or perform a task for you. You can also go online and search Microsoft's knowledge base or contact Microsoft's technical support. One really cool feature, however, is labeled Do It Automatically. Here, a task such as checking the version of a driver will be automated, with your desktop going dark as a pointer arrow floats over the screen indicating what to click and where. From time to time, the pointer will stop and a dialog box will require your input before it continues to perform the task. While there are only 15 of these automated help sessions within the current Windows Vista beta 2 release, I hope Microsoft adds more.

What I hate about Windows Vista

In this section, you'll learn about the new features within the Windows Vista operating system that I think you won't like. If you're mainly interested in what's good with the new operating system, move to the previous section where you can learn more about features I can't live without.

1. Your current hardware won't fully run Vista

Get ready for the media blitz. Get ready for the frustration. While many computers in use today will be able to update and run the new operating system, they'll be able to run it only in what Microsoft slyly calls Windows Vista Basic. That means while you'll have the ability to search files, you won't have 3D Aero graphics, live animation along the Taskbar, or smooth streaming graphics on your desktop. Unless you buy a new PC sometime in 2007, or add a high-end video card and some extra memory to your current PC, you probably won't get the full visual Vista experience.

2. Vista's Aero graphics gobble up laptop battery power

If you're used to your laptop lasting on a long, cross-country flight, you might want to reconsider upgrading to Windows Vista—that is, if you want the new Aero graphics features turned on. I've discovered a laptop running Windows Vista Aero had significantly reduced battery life compared to one running in what Microsoft calls Windows Vista

Basic. You'll sacrifice the 3D and smooth streaming of video, but you'll make it to your destination with some battery power to spare. Unfortunately, changing from Aero to Basic is harder than it should be.

3. User Account Protection

The User Account Protection feature has already gotten a ton of negative press. While I understand what Microsoft is trying to do—protect the user from rogue software installs—I don't think the company has figured it out yet. In order to perform basic tasks, such as install or remove an application, even administrator account users must answer a series of pop-up messages, adding time to the process. Worse, whenever you are prompted to respond, the whole Vista desktop goes dark while the pop-up message remains on the screen, preventing you from doing anything else. While this feature can be valuable if rogue spyware attempts to install without your permission, good Internet behavior will do as much. For most of us, the frequent appearance of User Account Protection on common tasks will be security overkill.

4. Missing drivers and incompatible apps

Not having all the necessary drivers or not having software compliant with a new operating system is to be expected in the beta of a new operating system, but even after several months of developer testing, I was surprised to see a number of common drivers still missing from the public beta for Windows Vista. For example, I had to manually import several Nvidia sound drivers from a Windows XP partition on the same drive.

5. Troubled sleep

Microsoft claims that it has addressed the complicated issue of whether to put your laptop to sleep or have it hibernate when it is not in use. Instant Off, a new option on the Start menu, allows Windows Vista to take a quick snapshot of your system, then shut down completely, thus eliminating the occurrence of a hot laptop inside your backpack. After experiencing several false starts—literally, I was unable to resume my Windows Vista session as I'd left it—I discovered through Vista's Performance Ratings and Tools report that several legacy drivers, some installed by Vista during installation, were preventing the new Instant Off feature from performing correctly. Vista politely asked that I find updated drivers to replace those on my machine or remove them. I suspect a lot of people will encounter this problem in the months immediately following Vista's full release.

There you have it. Pros and Cons as it stands now. Remember, there will be lots of changes between now and the release date next year.

Here is a nicely consolidated bunch of information about printers compiled by our friends at *PC World*. http://www.pcworld.com/resource/infocenter/0,ctrid,2,ic,Printers,tk,nl_urxctr,00.asp

Thirteen Easy Ways

To Protect Your Wireless Connection

Using a wireless connection has transformed the way many of us use our computers.

But using your computer while using a wireless local area network (WLAN) may lead to theft of sensitive information and hacker or virus infiltration. Unless proper measures are taken. As WLANs send information over radio waves, someone with a receiver in your area could be picking up the transmission, thus gaining access to your computer.

They could load viruses on to your laptop which could also be transferred to your company's network when you go back to work.

It's been estimated that up to 75 per cent of WLAN users do not have standard security features installed, while 20 per cent are left completely open as default configurations are not secured, but made for the users to have their network up and running ASAP.

1. It is recommended that wireless router /access point setup always be done though a wired connection.

2. Change default administrative password on wireless router access point to a secured password.

3. Enable at least 128-bit WEP encryption on both card and access point. Change your WEP keys periodically. If equipment does not support at least 128-bit WEP encryption, consider replacing it. Although there are security issues with WEP, it represents a minimum level of security, and it should be enabled.

4. Change the default SSID on your router /access point to a difficult to guess name. Setup your computer device to connect to this SSID by default.

5. Setup router/access point not to broadcast the SSID. The same SSID needs to be setup on the client side manually. This feature may not be available on all equipment.

6. Block anonymous Internet requests or pings.

7. On each computer having a wireless network card, network connection properties should be configured to allow connection to Access Point

Networks Only. Computer to Computer (peer to peer) Connection should NOT be allowed.

8. Enable MAC filtering. Deny association to wireless network for unspecified MAC addresses. Mac or Physical addresses are available through your computer device network connection setup and they are physically written on network cards. When adding new wireless cards / computer to the network, their MAC addresses should be registered with the router /access point.

9. Network routers should have firewall features enabled and demilitarized zone (DMZ) feature disabled.

10. All computers should have a properly configured personal firewall in addition to a hardware firewall.

11. Update router/access point firmware when new versions become available.

12. Locate router/access point away from strangers so they cannot reset the router /access point to default settings.

13. Locate router/access point in the middle of the building rather than near windows to limit signal coverage outside the building.

None of these provide full protection because countermeasures exist. But they will act as an initial deterrent against an attacker when other insecure networks represent easier targets.

Some old tips worth repeating:

How to Adjust Email Text Size

If you're like me you may sometimes have trouble reading small fonts on your monitor when reading your email.

If you have a scroll mouse then try this

Open your email.

Click and hold down the Control key (ctrl) on your keyboard

Roll the mouse wheel

Magically the font size will increase or decrease depending on which way you scroll. When you next open your email the font size will have returned to normal.

How to Adjust Your Mouse Settings

As you move the mouse across its pad, the cursor may fly across the screen, or it may crawl. This speed is easily adjusted within the Mouse Properties dialog box. Use the Pointer speed slider to make adjustments.

In XP: Start/ Control Panel/Mouse

98: Start/Settings/Control Panel/Mouse

If the mouse pointer is moving too fast, drag the slider to the slower side. If it's creeping, speed it up by dragging the slider to the right, or faster side.

While you're in there, try some of the dozens of ways to customize your mouse settings. You can't break anything!

How to Reinstall Windows Without Reactivating

Need to format your hard drive and reinstall XP, and don't want to have to go through the product activation process again? You can save the activation status info and then restore it after you reinstall the operating system, as long as you haven't made any changes to the hardware. Here's how:

1. Before reformatting, in My Computer, double click the drive letter on which you installed XP, and navigate to WINDOWS\System32.

2. Click "Show the contents of this folder" if necessary.

3. Copy the following files to a floppy, USB drive, CD/DVD or network location: wpa.dbl and wpa.bak.

4. After reformatting and reinstalling XP, select NO when asked if you want to activate Windows now.

5. Restart in Safe Mode.

6. In My Computer, open the WINDOWS\System32 folder and rename the existing wpa.dbl and wpa.bak files (if you have them).

7. Now copy your old wpa.dbl and wpa.bak files to the System32 folder.

8. Restart and you should not be requested to activate again. This only works when you reinstall Windows on the same computer and the hardware remains the same.

See you next month.

From the July 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.

For personal answers to your questions by email, plus easy-to-understand computer tips and helpful information delivered to you each week, subscribe to Mr. Modem's newsletter. For more information, visit www.MrModem.com.

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From The DealsGuy

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

Thanks for your feedback from my remarks last month. I had no negative responses, but I was assured that there probably were some people out there who didn't bother to write me. Probably so, but I appreciated the responses I did receive.

I read an article in *Information Week* about a disgruntled employee who was alleged to have planted 50 to 70 malicious lines of code, amounting to a "logic bomb," before he left the company.

It disabled about 2,000 servers and brought the company system to a standstill. After four years, they have still not repaired all the damage. It is titled *The Threat Within* and revealed how much damage a dis-gruntled employee in an organization can really cause. The accused perpetrator is in court, but that doesn't change the damages done. Try these URLs to read more about it: <http://www.informationweek.com/security/UBStrial/> and <http://www.informationweek.com/showArticle.jhtml;jsessionid=RQI5JLK20L2XUQSNDLPCCKHSCJUNN2JVN;?articleID=18870344> 7>

I have packed a lot into this column so be sure to check the product Web sites for better information. I cut a lot of description info out to shorten the items. Also, check the Web site's privacy statements. I have not tried any of these. Be sure to check the information closely.

Get Those Drives and Partitions Back!

Disk Internals NFS Recovery can scan any physical drive or virtual image. It doesn't make any changes to the drive itself and can be safely used even on the system volume. While scanning the drive, its recovery wizard shows the progress with the number of found files and folders. When the scanning is over, the user can change some disk properties. You can, for instance set up a new cluster size or proceed with the existing one. The program displays all recoverable files and folders in the explorer-like window. A search engine helps find desired files and moves them to a safe location. With Disk Internals NFS Recovery, you can access files that the system fails to see.

Disk Internals NFS Recovery v1.5 runs under Windows 98/ME/NT/2000/XP/2003 Server platforms. A single user license costs \$99.95 USD. Disk Internals offers a 15% discount using the link <https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?item=11238-8&ss_oupon=NFS-RAJ9-PR>. The coupon code is NFS-RAJ9-PR. Registration entitles all users to free technical support and minor up-grades. A fully functional evaluation version of the program is available for download at <http://www.DiskInternals.com/downloadNTFS_Recovery.zip>. Product page link: <<http://www.DiskInternals.com/nfs-recovery/>>

Web: <<http://www.DiskInternals.com>>

Postal Address: Pacific Business Centre, Disk Internals Research, P.O. Box 34069 #381, Seattle, WA 98124-1069, USA

Fax: 206-984-3919

They did not respond to my message when researching the information so I hope the discount is still good. Also, check close to see if there are any catches with the fully functional downloadable copy.

Monitor What The Kids View

Adult Photo Blanker guards computer users from the ubiquitous expansion of pornography and violence in our life. This program not only prevents your children from accessing unwanted websites, but also controls the content of video files and photos loaded into your computer memory from the hard disk. This smart tool monitors nearly all multimedia content. Adult Photo Blanker uses 11 special criteria

to reveal objectionable films, websites, images and the like. The program combines this built-in artificial intelligence scanner with the keyword filter, which recognizes unwanted content by specified words, and it is concealed from inexperienced users.

Adult Photo Blanker is protected with a password, so if you want to turn it off and watch an adult film, you must use the password you previously specified. It features Block and Safe lists to customize each user settings individually. Each family member can configure options of the program in his/her own way. By the time you read this, a newer version will be introduced.

Adult Photo Blanker runs under Windows 98 (partially) / ME (partially) / 2000 / XP and costs \$49.95 (USD.) Users group members receive a 20% discount. Just enter DEAL- LSFQ-GUY where it calls for a coupon when downloading the paid version. A fully functional trial version of the program is available as a free download at <http://www.oreware.com/download_prog.php?id_prog=25> (4.09 Mb)

Product page URL: <<http://www.oreware.com/viewprogram.php?prog=25>>

Web: <<http://www.oreware.com>>

This Product Claims to Further Improve Your Windows Operation

True Launch Bar gets the best of MS Windows OS and streamlines it for greater comfort of use. Its unique system of switching toolbars and expandable menus gives instant access to files, applications, and settings from the taskbar. In addition, overlay images and skins give the system polish and slick looks. The latest update offers support to Windows Vista. You can also group shortcuts into menus that expand and collapse at a click, or float on top of other windows. The use of Drag-n-Drop helps quickly fill the menus with shortcuts for files and applications, system settings and controls. You can customize its color scheme and add gradients and transparency effects. Its plug-ins will equip your taskbar with a newsreader and the weather forecast. You will be able to monitor resources and network activities, access the address book and control media players.

True Launch Bar v4.0 runs under Windows 98/Me/ 2000/ XP/ 2003/ Vista platforms. A single user license costs \$19.90 (USD). The company also offers a home license for 4 installations priced at \$49 USD. All registered users are entitled to free technical support and program updates. Additional plug-ins

and skinning libraries are on the company web site. A fully functional evaluation version of the program is available for download at <<http://download.truelaunchbar.com/install/tlb4.exe>>. True Launch Bar V4.0 will be available at a 30% discount to user group members on these special links to the order pages: True Launch Bar Personal License: <<http://www.regsoft.net/purchase.php3?productid=51538&pc=7L0L7>> True Launch Bar Home License: <<http://www.regsoft.net/purchase.php3?productid=53346&pc=7U0I4>> Product page link: <<http://www.truelaunchbar.com>>

Let's Improve That Password Protection!

Double Password, a new security manager, creates your security token on your flash drive (or other USB gadget, such as an MP3 player, PDA or even a USB-pluggable mobile handset). This device becomes the key to your OS. Double Password makes sure that no one can interfere with the work of your computer or get access to your data. It encrypts your password, which can accompany your security token. No external spy program can intercept your password. This is attained thanks to a special "double-bottom" password, which Double Password applies to protect your computer. This means that you enter one password, but the program re-members another (it remembers it in a special encrypted way, which cannot be seen from the outside).

Double Password offers security levels in low, medium and high. "Low" means all users can get access to your computer. "Medium" means that a user can log into your OS only with the help of a special security token (total security is guaranteed as you resort to the described "double-bottom" password). "High" is similar to "Medium," however in this case you cannot even work if your security token is out.

Double Password runs under Microsoft Windows NT/2000/XP. Users group members get a 20% discount using the coupon code YTR79G3 where requested. Discount prices are: Personal license, \$29.95; Family license, \$79.95 and Business license \$59.95. Product page link: <<http://www.doublepassword.com/>> Web: <<http://www.refog.com/>>

This Game Is a Blood-chiller

From the creators of "Gunner 2" comes a new breath taker called JetJumper. The plot of the game implies that you become the pilot of an outlandish jumping machine equipped with a powerful jet engine. As soon as the jet engine sets the jumping machine into motion, you will have to jump from one

platform to another. JetJumper helps you to collect a variety of useful items, which you are sure to come across; gems, magnets, green keys and the like. All these items help you to score and eliminate some obstacles on your way and to get new lives.

Magnets help you to collect more gems. Once you have grabbed a magnet, all gems on your way start sticking to you like flies to an adhesive pad. Once you have jumped aside and have fallen from a platform, the game leaves no chance for your JetJumper to survive. During a takeoff, your JetJumper's jet engine exerts a force of thousands of newtons, so only a professional pilot can handle this aircraft.

JetJumper runs under Windows 9x, Me, 2000, XP (DirectX 8.0 or higher required). The game costs \$19.95 (USD) and they offer a 10% discount to all group members by using TAB000BL code and this URL: <<https://secure.bmtmicro.com/servlets/Orders.ShoppingCart?CID=949&RODUCTID=9490005>>

Registered customers are entitled to unlimited game play and a multitude of unlocked levels. Product page link: <<http://www.warlockstudio.com/jetjumper.html>>

A trial version offering 60 minutes of game play, is available as a free download at <<http://www.warlockstudio.com/download/jetjumper-setup.exe>>

For more information about the company or games, please visit <<http://www.warlockstudio.com>>

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

A Quick How-To Make Free Calls on the Internet

from Steve Bass of *PC World*

Here's the quick and dirty:

1. Register with Jajah. It's free and all you do is give them the number for any of your landlines and, if you want, your cell phone. Get the details here: <http://www.jajah.com/content/freecalls.aspx>

2. Any time you want to make a call, open your browser, go to Jajah's home page, and log in. Fill out the "My Friend's Phone Number" section and click the aptly named Call button.

3. Your landline phone rings. Pick it up and you'll hear Jajah announce that it's calling your buddy's number, then you're connected.

4. Talk. If your buddy is registered with Jajah, it's a free call; otherwise, it's 2.5 cents per minute in U.S. and Canada. International calls are slightly more expensive. Here are the details: <http://www.jajah.com/info/rates>

5. Try it: Before you register, the first 5 minutes are free. Even after registering, you can use Jajah without paying: You start off with a credit of \$3.

6. There's no contract or fee—just pay for the calls you make.

7. There's no muss, fuss, or hassle because there's nothing to download or install. You don't need a headset, a microphone, or any extra equipment.

8. You can use smart Microsoft Outlook and Mozilla Firefox plug-ins to call right from those apps.

Here's the Outlook plug-in: <http://www.jajah.com/info/tools/outlook.aspx>

And here's one for Firefox: <http://www.jajah.com/info/tools/firefox.aspx>

Why I Love Jajah

I think this is just the coolest way there is to make long-distance calls. About the only disadvantage is that you need access to a PC and Web browser to make the call. When I'm traveling, I use my cell phone and notebook from, say, the hotel room or a wireless connection at the airport. (I know what you're thinking: What about an unlimited calling plan for my cell phone? Jajah is perfect for me because I'm so cheap, I still pay by the minute.)

If you want to get fancy (and I know you do), you can schedule calls in advance: <http://www.jajah.com/info/help/faq/scheduledcalls.aspx>

I recently mentioned Jajah to Gavin B., a reader from Toronto. Here's what he said: "I'm in Canada (not a complaint, just a fact) and my daughter lives in Australia. I can talk to her for 2-1/2 cents US per minute—over four hours for \$7 US! Astounding! Just last week I was paying roughly 10 cents per minute; thirty years ago I paid \$7 US per minute to call Australia."

More About VoIP

I'm probably the last person at PC World to have discovered how to make free calls using Jajah. Here are two articles to read for more details about Jajah.

"Jajah Announces Free Telephone Service": http://www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,126268,tk,nk_sbxnws,00.asp

"Jajah Enables Instant VoIP": http://blogs.pcworld.com/staffblog/archives/002159.html?tk=nl_sbxblg

"Suddenly..." OR "I didn't do anything!"

Part 2

Or - a month's log of a SCA Computer Club "house call" doctor

by Charles W. Davis
Newsletter editor & webmaster, Sun City Anthem Computer Club, Henderson, NV

These first two paragraphs are a repeat of the introduction to Part 1 of this article. In working to help Club members and others with their computer problems during the Thursday morning Computer Talk sessions, or more often when making "house calls," I often hear strange tales that usually involve acts of some gremlin like creature. However, gremlins are more closely related to mechanical problems in aircraft.

Generally the caller's comments start with "all of a sudden" or "suddenly" and end with "I didn't do anything." I can only surmise that it was probably one of cartoonist Bil Keane's ghostly imps "Not Me." "Nobody" or even "Ida Know."

A very frequent "Suddenly"

Quite frequently, I get a call and the party on the other end is complaining about the fact that suddenly there are small dashes between words accompanied with the backward "P." I kind of like this one, as I can generally "fix" it over the phone. This one is usually caused by the imp "Nobody." "Nobody" placed the pointer on the Show/Hide icon on the Office Word tool bar. In the image below you will note the parenthetical expression (Ctrl+*). Holding Ctrl+Shift+8 will turn them on, do it again to turn them off. Note that "shift + 8" is the *.

Naturally, in MS Office Publisher the keyboard short cut is Ctrl+Shift+Y.

By the way, that backward "P" is called a pilcrow. For a complete rundown of funny dots and arrows, see: <http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/Formatting/NonPrintChars.htm>

"Suddenly" I can't print!

This call came in late in the afternoon. A member had changed his printer cartridge and could no longer print. He could no longer receive e-mail messages. To my surprise, there was no task bar visible on the desktop! He had been without a means of normal shutdown for weeks! After installing 23 critical updates to his Windows 98 SE system, the

task bar was still not visible. However, the printer was now back in working condition.

Now was time to address the e-mail problem. He showed me an article he had clipped from the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* by the syndicated columnist James Coates. The article revolved around a question submitted by a customer of Comcast, an Internet Service Provider. James walked the reader through the steps to properly set up Outlook Express for the Comcast e-mail account. Unfortunately our club member had followed the instructions completely and therefore attempted to access Comcast's e-mail server. "Suddenly" incoming e-mail messages had ceased to arrive. I reset the account to the member's Cox Communications server. Messages were now arriving as desired.

Following a phone call and suggestions from another trouble shooter ("Silly," he said: "Hit the start key!"), the task bar was located hiding off to the right of the screen! I started to drag it to the bottom of the screen and the thing snapped up to the top of the screen. I started to drag it to the bottom, but he didn't want it moved! Suddenly, he is back in the retiree business! "Ida Know" had clearly been involved here. The evening was warm and clear with a view of the sparkling lights of the Las Vegas Strip in the distance as my Miata carried me and the \$20 check home.

My Miata has sat in the sun with the top down for many hours each day for the past six years. One morning I made a trip to a shop to have the interior panels on both doors replaced. While I was gone, two members called and one explained to Vickie that he had four Word files that when opened immediately shut down word. The other told Vickie that he had major computer problems and it was probably ready for burial.

In the first instance "Ida Know" was definitely involved. Big time! Norton Antivirus hadn't been updated since 2002! I downloaded the free AVG Antivirus, uninstalled Norton Antivirus via Control Panel's Add/ Remove function. I installed AVG, after the Roxio update as mentioned earlier, then updated AVG and scanned for viruses. None! I downloaded and installed Ad-Aware SE Personal and scanned. Ad-Aware found 335 malware programs that were removed. Still, it didn't fix Word.

During the scans, which seem to take forever, the lady of the house was distraught over the loss of her Quicken backup data. She thought that she had backed up to a new USB Flash memory drive prior to buying her new computer. I opened the My Com-

puter folder and double clicked on the USB drive and located the Quicken file and double clicked on it. Quicken opened and her checking balances were as expected. I renamed the USB Flash Memory drive to her name. Hoping to avoid future trips to her home, I had her practice the routine several times.

The above scans were now complete.

I returned to his computer and I chose Detect & Repair from Word's Help drop down menu. Following this repair function, things were still the same. I finally opened one of the documents and immediately chose "Save As" from the File drop down menu. I changed the file name by one digit and closed. I reopened the newly saved document and Word remained open. I followed the same procedure on the others with success in each case! Why? "Ida Know."

By this time, I was late to the second appointment. Earlier, I had tried to call, but got an answering machine. I left the message that I was running late and would be there soon. I had called the wrong number, and I have wondered whether the unknown party was still waiting. I collected the \$20 donation check and departed.

On arrival at the second destination, the member had meticulously written down the steps that led to his problem, and more important, the steps that he had attempted to resolve the issue. I listened to all the steps as he read from the sheet of paper. Then he explained that the screen went haywire when Windows XP booted up, and the system crashed. It seemed that the problems started with the installation of eight Windows updates that he had downloaded on a dialup connection. "Ida Know" was definitely involved here, as I have not heard of any Critical update causing this reaction. On rebooting he received several messages that indicated some drivers were back level. He couldn't access the Internet via his Earthlink access. The Earthlink Tech Rep had told him install some drivers from the Dell CD that came with the computer. Big mistake! I looked at the CD and it was for Windows 98! This member was running Windows XP with SP2 installed.

I started the system in Safe mode and went to a System Restore point that preceded the first of the steps that he had outlined.

He was now back in business-well, as much in business as any of us retirees.

His wife wrote the \$20 check and I arrived home on a Friday evening just in time for our cocktail hour.

Desperate Housewife

A desperate housewife called and let me know that she needed some help with her computer. AOL had “Suddenly” gone berserk! What’s new? I thought. My Miata soon delivered me to her driveway in Ridgecrest Village.

AOL was unresponsive. When opening, a message would appear stating that a file was not a Windows image. OK, so what? I finally uninstalled AOL and using the installation disk re-installed it. Same message, but we did manage to open an e-mail message and print a picture taken at her first great-grandson’s first birthday.

I soon found that Norton’s subscription had expired some 14 months before! Next order of business was to uninstall Norton’s Antivirus and then download the free AVG Antivirus. Following the start of the download, I read that it would take approximately three hours on the dial-up connection.

I asked her to install the program upon completion of the download and left. Later that day, a power glitch hit and I lost my next issue of the Anthem Compendium.

There is no auto-save function in FrontPage.

Two days later the desperate one called again and said nothing had worked. Sure enough that power glitch had shut the download off. Further, it was corrupted. Once again I started the download and went home for lunch. On my return, there were still a few minutes to wait. AVG Antivirus was successfully installed.

Now, I had to address her problem with AOL, the same message as before, and it would not respond when one clicked on the mail icon. Yet the Windows Task Manager said it was running. Upon trying to close it using the Task Manager, one discovered an update being applied. Later, I would start to shut it down but, then it was downloading a program update. It had been months (years) while since the CD had been produced so there were several updates to install.

I decided a different tack was needed. I did a search for a file with a .tol file extension and found three. On a subsequent restart of AOL, I noticed the one in trouble was in a “b” version?

I then opened Windows Explorer and plowed down through the C drive folders and located the three files. There were really three different versions of AOL installed. The un-install hadn’t uninstalled a thing! That proved to be the answer, as I simply copied the .tol file from one installation to the “b” folder. All is well in AOL land once again.

She made me take a second \$20 donation to the Club and I was soon back home writing this.

The parking lot approach!

Last week, as I walked from the Computer Club classroom to the parking lot, a lady called to me. She explained that one of our other “house call” volunteers had spent hours attempting to download and install a new version of Norton antivirus at \$59.99. It appeared to him to be a bad download as it kept saying something needed to be “fixed.” After a while he assumed that the download was corrupted and they called Symantec. After several hours with Tech support, they finally ordered a box copy mailed to the house, another \$59.99. She added that she had also bought a router as recommended and that needed to be installed.

The next morning at the Computer Club’s “Computer Talk” session I asked why he had not installed the free AVG Antivirus. He explained that the member was only doing as her late husband had instructed. ‘Nuf said.

The next day, I called and made an appointment for Saturday. Since she lives only two blocks away, I walked. No one answered the bell. So I returned home and about 45 minutes later she called. I had been at the house next to hers! Another mutual time was arranged. On this day the temperature was hovering around 100 degrees, so I drove the Miata. With the top down and the air conditioner on full blast, of course.

When I started her computer, the Norton product indicated a problem with a button to “fix it.” I clicked on it and it started a system scan. After several minutes, that wasn’t going to accomplish anything, so I stopped the scan and re-booted. Same routine! This time though, I decided that the programmers at Symantec, thought the lack of a scan meant something needed “fixing” and Tech support didn’t pick up on the lack of clarity in their message! Sure enough, when the scan was completed, the need for a fix went away.

I easily installed the router and then went online to the URL that Symantec had provided on the receipt and applied for a return of the boxed versions that had been mailed. No problem!

“Suddenly” or “not so suddenly” all of the incidents reported here are of a real concern to the Club members that called for assistance.

When you have a problem, contact your Computer Club’s President.

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Computer Club. All copies are available online at: <http://www.myscacc.org/newsletters.htm>

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.

Choose Your Own "Home Page"

by Ira Wilsker

Iwork on a lot of different computers at a variety of locations, and one factor that consistently astounds me is that many people have blissfully ignorantly never changed their startup "home page" from its default. This is the page that first opens when the user connects to the internet. For example, many Dell computers have the Dell website set for the startup page when the user first accesses the internet, while Windows itself, unless otherwise changed, defaults to Microsoft's MSN home page, making it one of the mostly used startup pages. Many internet service providers (ISP), such as AOL, AT&T, and others changed the users' home page to the ISP's selected home page.

Startup or "home" pages are big business because they are commonly advertiser supported, and the more views (also referred to in the industry as "hits"), the more revenue generated by the host. This on-screen real estate is so valuable that a type of malware or spyware, sometimes known as home-page hijackers, will attempt to change your home-page to its client's home page, for which the miscreant receives compensation for each page such changed.

There are many different services offering home pages, and if the user finds one that he likes, it is very easy to make the selected page the new home page. The process for selecting the default home page is the same for most browsers. Using Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE), which is still the most widely used browser in the world, the process is simple. If the user visits a website that he would like as his homepage, he simply clicks on "Tools" on the menu bar, and then that will open a window where the home page can be selected. If the open page is what is desired, then click on the "Use Current" radio button, and the current page will be displayed each time the browser is loaded. If "Use Default" is selected, the home page will revert back to the Microsoft (or other manufacturer) default start up page. On the new Internet Explorer 7 (Beta), which offers tabbed browsing, a different home or startup page can be selected for each tab.

For those who do not want to connect to any page at all when loading the browser, IE7Beta offers the option of a blank page. All versions of IE also allow for the manual entering of any selected internet address for a home page. To directly go back to the home page at any time, simply click on the little house or "home" icon on the menu bar.

Firefox (www.mozilla.com), one of the most popular browsers behind IE, offers a simple interface to select or change the homepage. Clicking on "Tools" on the menu bar opens a window where "General" can be selected, and then "Home Page." Firefox allows the address to be manually entered, or the current page loaded can be selected. Other options allow for the home page to be selected from a previously saved bookmark (Internet Explorer calls these "Favorites"), or the option for a blank startup page can be selected. Firefox also offers the little house on the menu bar for instant access to the home page.

There are many choices for a home page, which is totally up to the user. Some users use their web mail accounts as a home page, first displaying their email when connecting to the internet, while others may choose retailers, auction sites, employer web pages, search engines (such as Google or Yahoo), newspapers (such as the Examiner at www.theexaminer.com), or any other page of interest. While any page can be selected as a home page, the most popular home pages selected are usually news and information based pages.

My personal favorite, which I use on all of my computers, is "My Yahoo," at my.yahoo.com. I have found My Yahoo to be the most comprehensive and flexible home page. Being an information junkie, I have customized My Yahoo page to include stock and mutual fund listings, news from dozens of sources, weather, lottery results, sports scores, my personal calendar, latest emails received, TV listings, and other information. My Yahoo, which is very easy to configure, directly offers thousands of choices. Many information resources, such as the Examiner, are now using "RSS" or "XML" feeds as a news source, and these can be added to My Yahoo often with a single mouse click. My Yahoo is also customizable with hundreds of backgrounds, color schemes, layouts, or other features to personalize it.

Microsoft is currently testing a new homepage intended to at first supplement its flagship homepage at www.msn.com, and maybe later replace it. This new homepage, currently in beta testing, is currently online at www.live.com. It will be a strong

competitor to My Yahoo, offering news, sports, weather, email, and other resources in columns that are infinitely customizable.

There are countless other “My” homepages available, such as AOL’s my.netscape.com, and other personalized home pages, including Google’s “Personalized Home” link sitting quietly on the top right corner of the popular google.com website. All of these home pages can be easily customized to suit individual needs.

There is no need to continue to use the default startup or home page provided by your operating system or ISP. Investigate some of the alternatives, and increase your enjoyment of the web.

Websites:

<<http://my.yahoo.com>>

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

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

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

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

<<http://my.netscape.com>>

<<http://www.google.com/ig?hl=en>>

Managing Device Drivers

by Vinny La Bash
Sarasota PCUG, Florida

Windows is the most widely used operating system (OS) in the personal computer world.

For each piece of hardware that's connected to a Windows based computer, somebody somewhere has written a piece of software to make the device work with a computer. This piece of software is called a “Device Driver.” One of the most useful features of a well-written device driver is making itself all but invisible to whoever is using the computer. You create a document, send it to your printer, and somehow the document prints. Your device driver takes care of all the little details necessary for the printing operation to occur.

Drivers are one of the three most important broad categories of software in computers. The first is the operating system, the second is whatever applications are installed, including communications, and the third is device drivers. Drivers are important for two reasons. First, your peripherals won't work without them, and second, corrupted or out-of-date device drivers are responsible for most system crashes.

There are other reasons why it's important to keep your device drivers up-to-date. Sometimes a manufacturer will become aware of some kind of defect or glitch in the driver software and issue a fix.

You will need it. A different manufacturer may have a driver for its own device that will cause a conflict with an out-of-date driver on your device. Over time, updates for Windows may eventually cause problems with an out-of-date driver.

Proper device driver management is essential to keeping your computer crash proof. If device driver management is unfamiliar territory, please pay attention. You'll be glad you did. Microsoft introduced the concept of Signed Drivers with Windows 2000 and continued with Windows XP. If a device driver is “signed” by Microsoft, it means that the driver has been subjected to meticulous, painstaking, extensive testing to ensure compatibility with your Windows operating system.

Anytime you install a signed driver, Windows checks it by default and also guarantees it has not been altered or changed in any way. If the driver is not signed, Windows alerts you with a strong message that the driver has not passed Microsoft's rigorous certification tests.

Windows will also ask if you want to install the driver anyway, and will do so if you give it permission. Keeping your computer safe from unstable software is always a good idea. Fortunately, changing the Windows default is relatively easy, but you need Administrator privileges.

Right-click the My Computer icon on the desktop, then select Properties. Click the Hardware tab and then the Driver Signing button. Choose Block to let this be the new default, and you're done. Windows will now block any device drivers that it does not recognize as signed.

Not all manufacturers send their drivers to Microsoft for testing. For small firms this can be an expensive proposition. Does this mean you should never install an unsigned driver? No, but you should do some checking of your own to ensure that the company has a good reputation in the industry. Sometimes a new device driver will prove unstable for various reasons. Windows XP has the ability to delete the driver and install a previous version. Open the Device Manager, and double click the drive that's causing problems. Switch to the Driver tab and Roll Back the driver to the previous version.

What we've discussed so far is fine if you're using relatively new equipment, but suppose you're having trouble with something that's old and the manufacturer has gone out of business. Chances are good that the original installation disk is lost or deteriorated to a point where it is no longer useful. There are many other reasons why you could have diffi-

culty finding a device driver, but these are the most common.

In the past, finding the right device driver or firmware was often a tedious, time consuming, and frequently impossible task. Nowadays, we have web sites such as www.driverguide.com to help us. The site has been around since 1997, and has seen many improvements. It has a unique membership base of thousands who collectively compiled a massive database of drivers, firmware, and support documents that is the largest and most comprehensive on the Web.

Recognizing that most people who use computers are not experts, they have devised an easy step-by-step process that will help you find and install drivers. There is an archive of hundreds of thousands of files containing not only drivers, but voluminous information on manufacturers including links to other sites with driver information. Also useful are the discussion boards where you can chat with others who have the same hardware, and learn from their experience.

After you search for a driver and find it, help doesn't stop. The Driver Summary provides you with a rundown of all the information you're likely to need to make the decision about whether or not to download and install the driver. This information is put together from the original manufacturer, plus ratings and comments from those who have previously downloaded and installed the file. It's nice to have everything in one place.

There are many web sites where you can find information about device drivers, but this is one of the best places to use as your starting point. Managing device drivers does not have to be a search in the dark. Use the tools available to you, and your system will be stable and a lot less prone to crash.

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.

Tweaking Windows' Taskbar

by Gabe Goldberg

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

It's easy to use a key part of Windows' screen real estate, the taskbar, without really noticing it. Like a car's dashboard, taskbar components summarize what's happening on your computer and access running software. But unlike your car's

dashboard, the taskbar can be customized for individual needs and preferences.

www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/howto/tweaking_windows_taskbar.html

Fun with Windows' Taskbar

I've read reports that most people can't accurately draw their car's dashboard, no matter how many hours or years they've stared at it. Similarly, many of us look at and use a key part of Windows' screen real estate—the taskbar—without paying much attention to it.

Like a car's dashboard, taskbar components—Start button at one end, notification area icons at the other, and application buttons in between—summarize what's happening on your PC and give quick access to running software. But the taskbar is more interesting than a car dashboard: you can customize it for your individual needs and preferences.

This article describes Windows XP's taskbar; other Windows versions have mostly similar facilities. People sometimes worry when their taskbar disappears or suddenly looks odd—or moves to an unfamiliar place on the screen. We'll see how such glitches are easily fixed.

Right-clicking a blank taskbar area displays Windows' familiar context menu, showing available options. Clicking Toolbars lets you display or hide built-in toolbars (groups of icons representing programs, folders, or files) or create your own. My favorite toolbars are Desktop (a handy pop-up list which duplicates desktop icons) and Quick Launch (which holds the few key icons I always want immediately available). Other standard toolbars are Address and Links.

Cascade and Tile options specify arrangement of open application windows: fanned like playing cards or arranged in a grid.

A key option—Lock the Taskbar—controls whether you can change the taskbar. When the taskbar is unlocked, you can change its size by dragging its edge away from or towards the screen's edge. You can move individual toolbars by grabbing their handles (perforated line near each one) and move the taskbar by grabbing a blank area.

Clicking Properties brings up a detailed options dialogue box. It's safe to experiment but only change one thing at a time until you learn your way through all the choices.

The Taskbar tab customizes the taskbar itself and its notification area. You can auto-hide the taskbar—handy on small monitors to reclaim space for

application windows. When it hides, moving the mouse near it makes it visible. You can always keep the taskbar on top of other applications, or allow it to be covered. If it's hidden, pressing ctrl-esc displays it.

Similar task bar buttons—for example, representing multiple Word documents—can be grouped to save taskbar space, or spread out. If they're grouped, left-clicking the group displays all open files, and right-clicking lets you manipulate the files simultaneously.

You can add and delete Quick Launch toolbar icons by dragging them on or off the toolbar. I trimmed mine to two icons: Show Desktop and Windows Explorer. From a Windows keyboard, these are available by pressing Win-D and Win-E, respectively.

The notification area (called the “tray” in earlier Windows versions) shows icons for small applications or utilities that are running, plus your clock. Mousing over an icon pops up its name. You can control which icons are displayed and whether inactive icons (representing programs you haven't used for a while) are hidden. Each program running consumes PC resources so it's worth monitoring these icons and pruning any which aren't necessary. Right-click an icon to display options. Closing some applications prevents them from automatically starting at system boot, while others offer an explicit option.

Continuing our tour through taskbar properties, the Start Menu tab lets you specify Start Menu appearance and operation. You can pick large or small icons and determine how many shortcuts are saved in it for recently used programs. Key programs can be “pinned” to the Start menu by right-clicking a desktop icon or dragging an icon to the Start button and placing it in the permanent top area. The Advanced tab determines Start menu behavior and lets you select modern or “classic” Start menu format.

Finally, when the Taskbar is unlocked, three extra toolbar right-click options are available: View, Show text, and Show title, for fine tuning your PC's “dashboard.”

While Windows operates just fine as it's installed, tweaking taskbar settings and other options can make it faster and more pleasant to use. And since there are usually multiple ways to accomplish tasks in Windows, it's worth exploring—for example, right-clicking to explore context menus and clicking various options/customize/advanced buttons to see

what's available. Don't be afraid to tinker, but remember what you change so you can undo it!

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Society News

Planning Meeting Notes

August 1, 2006

by John McMillan

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

Arpad felt the 2nd eBay presentation went better than the previous one, an opinion shared by all. He agreed to review the eBay presentations for the *Monitor* at some future date. Arpad summarized the near future, stating that after the picnic we need to arrange locations for the September planning and society meetings and the October society meeting. For the September society meeting, we have a speaker whose topic is to be announced but nothing has been planned for October. Arpad agreed to talk about Gifts and Gadgets in November to provide clues for Christmas buyers.

Steve announced that 39 people have signed up for the picnic. He ran down a list of purchases that need to be made. There is a refrigerator at the park and several people will bring coolers. As mentioned before there will be tables set up for flea market merchandise.

Arpad had some prices for the Build Your Own Computer Workshop. They include Vista-ready machines based on either AMD or Intel components with low, mid, and high-end capability. A budget PC and a media center computer were also included as were upgrade and discount elements for all but the budget machine. There were several suggested additions or clarifying statements which he will incorporate into a price list/ order form to be included in a future copy of the *Monitor*. Prices are fixed and in the event that they drop, components will be upgraded.

We are considering October 21st as the probable assembly date assuming we can establish a location. Experts will be on hand to help with assembly and software loading operations. If for some reason a participant cannot make the assembly date, there will be no refund but the machine can be built for them at a nominal fee.

Those who are not currently members of RCSi can participate for an additional fee of \$30 which will cover their enrollment in the group. Interested parties should fill out the order form and pay by credit card, cash, money order, or PayPal no later than the 2nd Tuesday in October.

Steve commented on the success of the used printer cartridge program which has already reduced the cost of supplies for printing the *Monitor*.

The Picnic

The building was nice, the food was good, the company was cheerful, and the flea market was popular.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub

Balance as of 07/12/06 \$493.06

Income

Dues \$90.00
 Picnic 68.00
 Donations 192.00
 Total Income \$250.00

Expenses

Ink \$51.00
 Postmaster 50.00
 Paper 26.85
 St. Stephens 60.00
 Picnic Supplies 154.51
 Total Expenses \$342.36
 Balance as of 08/09/06 \$401.25
 Members renewing: Bob Cornell, Clayton Hunt, Mary Ann McCullough

Picnic Report

Expenses

Permit \$80.00
 Food 188.82
 Total Expenses \$268.82

Income

Picnic Fee \$215.00
 Donations 192.00
 Total Income \$407.00
 Picnic profit \$138.18

I thank the 45 members and guests for attending and helping to make our picnic very successful. A

special thanks to Al Saia who spent the whole time cooking our meats.



The food was good.



The flea market was popular.

Pictures by Dan Rothfuss

The Lighter Side

Customer: I have a huge problem. A friend put a screen saver on my computer, but every time I move the mouse, it disappears.



Customer: Hi, good afternoon, this is Martha. I can't print. Every time I try it says "Can't find printer." I've even lifted the printer and placed it in front of the monitor but the computer still says he can't find it.



Tech: Click on the "my computer" icon on the left of the screen.

Customer: Your left or my left?



Caller: "Can you give me the telephone number for Jack?"

Operator: "I'm sorry, I don't understand who you are talking about".

Caller: "On page 1 section 5, of the User Guide it clearly states that I need to unplug the fax machine from the AC wall socket and Telephone Jack before cleaning. Now, can you give me the number for Jack?"



Tech: Okay Bob, let's press the control and escape keys at the same time. That brings up a task list in the middle of the screen. Now type the letter "P" to bring up the Program Manager.

Customer: I don't have a P.

Tech support: On your keyboard, Bob.

Customer: What do you mean?

Tech support: "P" on your keyboard, Bob.

Customer: *I'm not going to do that!*

