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Improving Your Windows Networking Defaults

by Fred Langa

Free online tools can help speed your downloads and Web browsing.

First, use a free connection analyzer to find out exactly what your optimum settings should be. Then, use a free tweaking tool to actually make the changes.

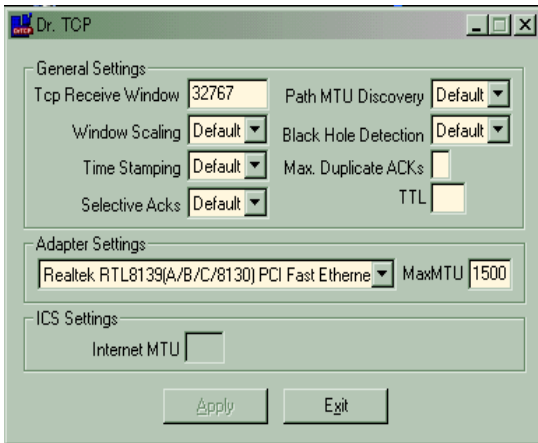
Optimizing your network connections

Windows Secrets reader “abcalvin” wondered about some of the less obvious settings Windows uses for its networking setups:

"Depending on the type of connection—dial-up, broadband, etc.—some communications settings, such as ‘Max transmission unit,’ ‘TCP receiving window,’ ‘selective acks,’ and so on, have to be set for best results. What are these settings and how do we read the present settings, find the

best values for the specific mode, and correctly set them?”

Windows uses generic default settings for its networking setups, and these settings usually work acceptably, but barely. Replacing the generic settings with settings that are custom tailored to your specific needs can yield a huge improvement in your online throughput speeds.



The free Dr. TCP tool makes it easy to change Windows' essential networking parameters.

Several Web sites offer tools that can help you tune your online connections, but the one I use myself is Broad-band Reports (formerly DSLReports) <<http://www.dslreports.com/>>. The site's Tools <<http://www.dslreports.com/tools>> section is a gold mine. The Speed Test <<http://www.dslreports.com/speedtest>> will let you compare your actual upload and download speeds to other users so you can get an idea of how well (or not) your system is doing online. The Tweak Test <<http://www.dslreports.com/tweaks>> analyzes your online connection and makes specific recommendations as to what your ideal settings should be. Then, to implement the recommendations, you can download and use the free Dr. TCP <<http://www.dslreports.com/drtcp>> tool, which provides

an easy-to-use front end for modifying all of Windows' essential networking parameters.

It's a great site.

Highly recommended!

Fred Langa edited the LangaList e-mail newsletter from 1997 to 2006, when it merged with Windows Secrets. Prior to that, he was editor of Byte Magazine and editorial director of CMP Media, overseeing Windows Magazine and others. Windows Secrets Newsletter, 2007-03-15, <<https://windowssecrets.com/info/>>.

Being Online Brings Coincidences

by Gabriel Goldberg

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

A song written by Peter Mayer, a great singer I've just discovered, is titled "Earth Town Square." Describing how technology and travel have shrunk the world, Peter lyrically observes "Now it's feeling like a small town, with six billion people downtown, at a little sidewalk fair, in Earth Town Square." Even though all six billion of us aren't (yet!) online, the Internet as a meeting place is certainly one of the engines making the Earth seem smaller. While it was once exotic—or alarming—to have a long distance telephone conversation, chatting electronically with people half a world away doesn't raise my pulse.

A decade ago, early in my use of the Internet, I was astonished by its ability to create coincidences. This is a true story. I was consulting for an online service that gave me an e-mail address used only for their work. I received a note at that address with the intriguing subject, "I am you" from another Gabriel Goldberg. Nowadays, that's the sort of spoofed e-mail I'd likely delete without reading. He had checked his entry in the service's directory and found my entry next to his. We exchanged pleasantries, described ourselves, shared wonder at having found each other, and he mentioned that he was a music student in Boston.

Later that week, I received another note at my regular e-mail address, from a woman who said that she'd known a Gabe Goldberg years earlier, the last she'd heard from him he was going to Boston to study music, and was I that person. I replied to her, copying the other Gabe, that either

they were playing a joke on me or we had a mighty powerful coincidence. Truth is stranger than joke—they were former high school sweethearts who had drifted apart. In the same week they both found my name and two different e-mail addresses, and for very different reasons, they contacted me. I later heard from her mother, who thanked me for reuniting them! Remarking on the coincidence of names, the other Gabe wondered “how do guys named Jim Smith handle all the coincidences.”

Participating in mailing lists, newsgroups, and Web sites leaves online footprints and makes us visible. The bad news is that’s one of the ways spammers find targets, but the good news is that being visible makes it easier for lost friends to track us down. Soon after 9/11 I heard a voice on the phone I hadn’t heard for nearly 30 years: my college girlfriend. She’d searched Google for me, found me, and called. We’ve stayed in touch since, have gotten together several times, and shared news of our respective families. And just recently I used Google to contact an elementary school friend after hearing of her taking a new job in San Francisco.

Amidst the fun of unanticipated connections and reestablished friendships, there’s a cautionary note: information online has a long memory. Web sites like Google cache (retain) Web pages even after they’re deleted from their original Web locations. Postings to mailing lists, Web forums, newsgroups, and other online venues are usually retained indefinitely. It can be unnerving to discover that items posted in the heat of the moment or as youthful indiscretions can be retrieved years later by potential employers or new acquaintances, or just be someone snooping for unpleasant reasons.

Just as it’s worth checking your credit report periodically, it’s a good idea to occasionally check out what online trails you’ve left. My current favorite surfing tool is Google, so I search for “Gabe Goldberg” and “Gabriel Goldberg.” The quote marks bind the first and last names together so that only Web pages having the exact full name are found. I search on Gabe and Gabriel because I’ve used both names. If your name is closer to Jim Smith’s—offering 56,000 hits rather than the more manageable 182 for my name—you can tighten the search by adding terms such as a middle initial, state of residence, hobby, employer, etc. But don’t make the search too narrow or you may miss genuine references.

It’s tedious to erase tracks from an online history. It requires contacting each site that hosts material you’d like to delete, perhaps following instructions and filling out forms. Some mailing list sites refuse as a matter of policy to delete list postings, reasoning that doing so would distort a list’s historical record. The government has made serious efforts to sanitize the Web by removing content deemed dangerous, such as plans for water and power system. Even when successful, scrubbing data off Web sites often doesn’t really make it unavailable, it just slows people from finding it. It’s much better to avoid saying anything online that might return to haunt you, than try to clear the record after the fact.

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Do a Clean Sweep of Your Computer

How to safely remove software and files from your PC

by Marc Saltzman

Like many mothers, Andrea Grace will sit down at her PC to check e-mail, only to find that her kids, Jason, 8, and Rachel, 10, have installed some new programs. “Between those CD-ROM games found in cereal boxes and downloaded Neopets, there are now icons all over the place,” says Grace. “And of course they don’t play half the games. If I ran out of space I wouldn’t know how to delete them,” she admits.

Grace isn’t alone—it’s not uncommon to fill space on a hard drive with games, productivity programs, or files, such as music, digital photos, and video clips. Some technology analysts believe that we use less than 10 percent of the programs installed on our computer.

So, considering you’re likely to do some spring cleaning in the coming months by removing old and unwanted clutter from your closets and garage, why not tidy up your computer as well?

While deleting programs is relatively easy, many novice computer users believe they can be removed by simply deleting their icon on the desktop. This does not work as it’s only a shortcut to the real program, which consists of many files. And keep in mind that you can do damage to your PC’s performance by deleting an entire program folder that you don’t think you need from your hard drive.

The following is a look at how to safely—and easily—remove old or unused programs from your Microsoft Windows XP-based computer. Much of the advice is also applicable to older versions of Windows.

Decide which programs to purge

The first step is to decide which programs you no longer need. Try to keep only the programs you use regularly as it’s easy to become a digital packrat. If it helps, make a list of programs you want to keep and others you can do away with.

Has it been a year since your child touched that action game? Chances are you still have the original CDs anyway (should you want to reinstall it in the future), so perhaps it’s time to wipe it off the hard drive.

Have your music tastes changed since you went through that Country & Western “stage” in 2002? You can easily delete downloaded MP3 files—or at least burn them to a CD to free up space on your PC.

If you’re unsure about a program that’s on your hard drive, you can always do a search at your favorite search engine (e.g., MSN Search) to see what it is. For example, if you don’t plan on buying a camcorder, remove any prein-stalled video-editing software that may have come bundled on your PC.

Ready, Set, “Start”

The easiest way to remove a program from your hard drive is to look for an uninstall or remove option from within its program group. You will find this by clicking the Start menu, then All Programs (or Program Files), and then choosing the program you want to uninstall.

Once inside this program group, you will usually see an icon to launch the program, a ReadMe file (documentation that tells you how to use the program), and, for our purposes, an option that

enables you to remove or uninstall the program. Click this and follow the onscreen wizard to safely remove the program from your PC. You may be asked to reboot your computer. Only click to do so once you've saved everything that's open at that time.

Quick tip: If you want to free up even more room on your hard drive, go to My Computer or Windows Explorer and right-click on the letter associated with your hard drive (usually C:). Click Properties, then click Disk Cleanup. Check off the desired boxes and it will tell you how much space it can free up.

When uninstalling a program, you may also get a message that says the program can remove a file that may be shared by another program. To be safe, keep these suggested files on your PC (they shouldn't take up much room on your hard drive, anyway). Similarly, when you uninstall a game, the program may ask if you want to keep saved game files (i.e. a bookmark of your progress). If you think that you will reinstall and play this game again, you can choose to keep these files.

Sometimes the program group may be the company's name. Move your mouse over the name and it will reveal which program(s) are inside.

Quick tip: If you download a .zip or .exe file from the Web and then install the program to the hard drive, you can delete the original file once it's successfully installed.

Keep in mind that your PC automatically creates restore points while you're using your computer. That way, if you accidentally delete a program that you want to keep, you can revert your PC back to an earlier time. To do so, click the Start menu, then All Programs (or Program Files), then Accessories, and then System Tools. Click System Restore and the program will guide you through the steps.

Take "Control"

Some programs do not give you the option to uninstall them from a program group. No problem. You'll need to go to the Start menu, select Control Panel, and then Add or Remove Programs.

It may take a few seconds for this page to load but once it is finished, it will display a long alphabetical list of installed programs. Once you see the name of a program you no longer want on your hard drive, click it, then click the tab to the right of it, which will say Remove or Change/Remove, and follow the prompts. A progress bar will show you how long it will take to safely remove the program. When it's finished, you will see the list once again.

Go through the list, but leave those programs that you are unsure of. Remember—you may use Microsoft Word all the time so do not uninstall Microsoft Office as Word is part of it. Some programs may not be familiar to you, but are required for another to run—a rule of thumb is to ignore it, especially if it doesn't take up too much space on your hard drive (you will see how many megabytes on the right-hand side of the program name). If the program is spyware or adware (such as Super-Shopper Toolbar), then you may want to leave this for your spyware/adware program to sniff out and safely remove. Two good free programs are Ad-Aware and SpyBot, both of which are available at Download.com. You can also download the free new Microsoft Windows AntiSpyware (Beta).

Quick tip: This article focuses on unin-stalling entire programs, but it's even easier to delete individual files. Once you're inside My Computer or Windows Explorer, simply highlight the files you no longer want on your hard drive and tap the delete button or right-click and select Delete. This will send all unwanted files to the Recycle Bin for safekeeping—until you're sure that you no longer want them.

Article written by Marc Saltzman and adapted from an original piece from Microsoft Home Magazine. Courtesy of APCUG.

The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman
SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

Rants

It is a dark, dreary, drizzly day in mid-January as I write this, perfect for contesting a will (as they say in my native Holland) or protesting the peccability of PC peddlers.

Rant #1 concerns the software Dell installs on new computers, whether you want it or not. James Derk, computer columnist for Scripps Howard News Service, wrote recently about the effort it required to remove all the extraneous junk from someone's new Dell system: "*Dell is on the list this year for adding so much junk to their new PCs that it takes a trained technician to remove most of them. Their "starter" edition of QuickBooks is the most annoying...even popping up reminders to try the program long after you've deleted it. I know Dell sells 80 percent of its PCs to businesses but there's no reason to have such an invasive product and selling tactic. Most large businesses don't use QuickBooks, most small businesses already have it and consumers don't want it. Editing the Windows Registry should not be needed to remove it. (Dell gets an honorable mention for charging \$25 for a USB cable to connect their "free" printers to their computers.)*" <<http://snipurl.com/derkcolumn2>> Elsewhere he mentions the desirability of removing the pre-installed temporary version of McAfee anti-virus. He wrote: "If you have McAfee preinstalled on your new PC, I would uninstall it immediately and install a free product. It's not just a bias...in my computer repair business I have seen dozens of PCs with McAfee installed that are riddled with viri. Something either about McAfee's online-only product or the configuration just lets viruses pass through" <<http://snipurl.com/derkcolumn>>

As luck would have it, my neighbors asked me soon thereafter for help with the installation of their new Dell computer. The recently retired professional couple had been using a MacIntosh computer for the past eight years and were unfamiliar with MS Windows. Remembering Derk's comment, I suggested we remove the McAfee program and install Norton Internet Security. Tough luck! As I attempted to remove McAfee via the Control Panel's Add/Remove feature, I kept getting error messages that part of the program was running and could not be removed. I did everything I could think of to stop/disable McAfee, but nothing managed to kill it dead. I did a Google search later on and found that usually there is no simple way to get rid of it. A "help" page on the McAfee page provides pages of procedures to "try," all of them obscure and non-intuitive. An unwanted program that can not simply be uninstalled is *malware* in my opinion. If Dell is unwilling to sell computers without all the junk, the best solution may be to reformat the hard drive and reinstall the desired programs only. Or choose another vendor. It is hardly an attractive option for new Windows users.

Rant #2 Sony BMG recently got caught using rootkits to provide copy protection on CDs they sold. Rootkits are programs that hide on your hard drive, out of sight of Windows. They are an open invitation for virus writers to invade your system and are hard to remove without damaging Windows. Sony was forced to apologize for its error, recalled the CDs involved, and published a patch to remove the rootkits from the customers' computers.

According to an article in *eweek.com*, the rootkit trick is being used by other companies also (<http://snipurl.com/lis7>, thanks to Jim Geiser). Norton SystemWorks is specifically mentioned. Symantec explained that they used the rootkit to prevent users from accidentally removing the file,

but offered to relocate it with a program update. According to *eweek.com* there are other instances of rootkits being used, but no specifics were mentioned.

My Norton Internet Security subscription is about to expire. I already had planned to try the ZoneAlarm Security Suite, based on a recommendation in *PC Magazine* (12/27/05) that included it in their list of Best of the Year Products (but that also included McAfee anti-virus!). But then Linda Gonse, editor /webmaster of the Orange County IBM PC Users' Group, wrote that the ZoneAlarm Security Suite interfered with her ftp program and mangled the files she uploaded to her Web site. She had a dickens of a time trying to uninstall the program. However she never had a problem with the plain, free ZoneAlarm firewall. I concluded that my best bet was to use free ZoneAlarm as the firewall.

I chose a separate anti-virus program, f-prot from Frisk software (<http://www.f-prot.com/products/>). I used that program years ago in the DOS days, and more recently I have been using it on my Linux computers. Their technical support is outstanding, as I mentioned in a previous column (*P-See Urgent*, December 2005). F-prot, based in Iceland, was one of the first to spot the rootkits and to provide an uninstallation patch. They update their database as soon as they add new data, usually several times a week. The Windows version costs \$29 per year, but a trial version is available to make sure the product fills your needs.

As expected, replacing Norton Internet Security with ZoneAlarm and f-prot was not without problems. I downloaded the trial version of f-prot without difficulty and stored it, ready for use. Getting the free version of ZoneAlarm was a different story.

Rant #3 If you make a free, limited version of your software available for download, don't play silly games trying to hide the download button hoping that the prospective customer will finally give up, or make an error, and order your paid-for version. It may work sometimes, but you lose every last bit of goodwill you may have worked years to earn. Is that worth it? After struggling with ZoneAlarm for 20 minutes trying to download the free program, I simply copied an older setup version that was still on my other Windows computer and installed that. ZoneAlarm then promptly offered to update that version and I was in business. Installation of f-prot went without a hitch.

Although I had uninstalled Norton Internet Security with the Control Panel- Add/Remove route, it was evidently not quite dead yet. ZoneAlarm started telling me that Norton was still trying to access various parts of my computer, which I blocked. Soon thereafter everything froze and I got the Blue Screen of Death. It took two cold restarts to get everything back up and running, and my first action was to have ZoneAlarm block everything with the Norton label. That seems to work thus far.

As every successful business, from Wal-Mart to General Electric knows, your most important asset is customer goodwill. A happy customer is a return customer. Over the years Dell has built up an excellent reputation for product quality, price, and service. They stand to lose all that for a few bucks they make as "partners" with the likes of McAfee and Quicken Books. It isn't worth it. The same goes for Norton, known since DOS days for its reliability and excellence of technology. Avoid exasperating your customers and they'll keep coming back.

Courtesy of APCUG.



What Does a Cache Do For a Computer?

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.

Member Sarasota PCUG, FL

A cache (pronounced “cash”) is a form of memory storage that generally operates faster than RAM memory or the time required to access a hard drive. The cache is smaller, faster memory that stores copies of the data from the most frequently used memory locations. Computer processors (CPUs) utilize both internal and external caches. You will also find references in the specifications of hard drives, CD & DVD drives to caches of various sizes. In order to see how these caches benefit computer operations we’ll look at the operation of the internal caches on CPUs.

Before looking at the cache function, you need to have some understanding of the architecture of a CPU. Much of the internal structure of a CPU is composed of registers that hold small bits of information and also can be used in manipulating information. As one example, the Intel Pentium 4 processors have 128 registers. Some registers hold instructions, others hold data, others have memory addresses and others are arithmetic manipulators. The instructions are found in the program code and they tell the processor what to do with the data. The processor loads instructions from memory and then loads data that is manipulated based on the instructions. So the registers hold data to be processed, the results of calculations, or addresses pointing to the location of other data. The processor can act on data in registers almost instantaneously. However, the registers are far too small to hold all the data required. Instead, instructions and data have to be read from or written to RAM.

If the program code were always loaded directly from memory and all the data were written directly back to memory and then to the hard drive, the overall process would be quite slow compared to what we normally see. It is the use of caches that greatly speeds up the total process so the processor isn’t stalled waiting for either instructions or data. The fastest cache is the one that is part of the processor and is referred to as the L1 cache. It can operate at the same speed as the processor. So if you have a 30-gigahertz (GHz) CPU, the L1 cache also operates at 30 GHz. Thus data can be accessed in one clock cycle. This cache is generally 128 kilobytes (KB) in size or smaller, although the Pentium 4 has an internal cache of 16 KB plus an internal Trace cache of 150 KB.

The following diagram displays the relative relationship of the RAM memory and the components of the caches in the CPU body:

RAM Memory
L2 Memory Cache
L1 Instruction Cache
Fetch Unit
Decode Unit
Execution Unit
L1 Memory Cache

The components within the box run at the same rate as the internal CPU clock. The next cache in distance from the processor is the L2 cache. In older CPUs this was totally external to the processor. In most cases, the L2 cache is now integrated on the CPU chip. The data path in these processors is 256 bits wide allowing for the transfer of more bits per clock cycle than the older processors that had 64 or 128 bit paths. The data path between the CPU and the external RAM is usually 64 bits or 128 bits wide. In a system with an 800 MHz bus, the real clock rate is 200 MHz,

but transfer occurs in 4 blocks per clock cycle. This gives an effective transfer rate of 800 MHz or 6.4 GB /second. Still considerably slower than the transfer rate within the CPU.

The theory of using caches is that instructions and data in the cache will be the next set of information requested by the CPU for processing. If the requested information is in either the L1 or L2 cache, it will not be necessary to go to RAM. Thus it can be accessed at the internal clock rate. If it is present, it is referred to as a “hit”; otherwise it is a “miss.” (Logical, right?) Now, the bigger the memory cache, the better the chances of finding the data required by the CPU. However, there is a catch to this. The bigger the cache, the more time that is required to find the data. This is referred to as the “latency” time. In an ideal setup you would have a single cache with a high hit rate and a low latency. This is very difficult to achieve in practice. Consequently, we have two caches, a small one with low latency and lower hit rate combined with a large cache with higher hit rate and high latency.

Now that we’ve reviewed the architecture, we need to see how all this works. Let’s start with the Fetch unit that is used to load information from memory on demand from the processor. It first checks the caches to see if the required instructions or data are there. If not, it will load the information from system RAM. This information is then passed to the Decode unit. Note that when I refer to information it can either be instructions or data.

If the information is a program instruction, the Decode unit will figure out what that particular instruction does. It does that by consulting a ROM memory that exists inside the CPU called microcode. Each instruction that a given CPU understands has its own microcode. The microcode will “teach” the CPU what to do. It is like a step-by-step guide to every instruction. If the instruction loaded is, for example, add a+b, its microcode will tell the decode unit that it needs two parameters, a and b. The Decode unit will then request the Fetch unit to grab the data present in the next two memory positions, which fit the values for a and b. After the Decode unit has “translated” the instruction and grabbed all the data required to execute the instruction, it will pass the data and the “step-by-step cookbook” on how to execute that instruction to the Execute unit. There is an exception to this in the newest Pentium 4 processors. In these processors the L1 Instruction Cache has been relocated to after the Decode unit. It now contains the translated instructions and is referred to as the Trace cache.

The Execute unit will finally execute the instruction. On modern CPUs you will find more than one execution unit working in parallel. This is done in order to increase the processor performance. For example, a Pen-tium 4 CPU with six execution units can execute six instructions per clock cycle. In theory it could achieve the same performance as six processors with just one execution unit. After the processing is over, the result is sent to the L1 Memory cache. From there it can be written to RAM or sent elsewhere.

Modern processors have another feature called the “pipeline”. This is the capability of having several different instructions at different stages of processing in the CPU at the same time. On Pentium III processors the pipeline was 11 stages—each a unit of the CPU. The latest Pentium 4 processors have 31 stages. With the greater number of stages, fewer transistors are required per stage, resulting in a higher clock rate. O.K, so what’s the value of stages in the pipeline? After the Fetch unit sends an instruction for decoding, it grabs the next instruction. This can be sent on as soon as the first instruction is sent to the Execution unit. If an instruction has to be processed by all 11 (or 31) stages, it takes the most time, while other instructions might require fewer stages. Only when the first instruction is finished processing can it be sent out, but others that required

processing by fewer stages might immediately follow. The consequence of this is that multiple instructions can be processed simultaneously. This greatly increases the overall processing throughput.

Other caches found in computers are not associated with the processor. One such type of cache that you use frequently, probably without being aware of it, is the web page cache managed by your web browser. When you visit a web page, it is downloaded to your computer. If you visit that same page within a few days, your browser pulls the page from its temporary cache, compares it with the current page on the web server and updates only the changed portions. This speeds up the appearance of the page on your computer. For example, my home page is Yahoo.com. The major part of this page doesn't change from day to day, so the downloading of the page is limited to those parts that have actually changed. This allows the page to appear on my screen quite rapidly.

So in CPU processing, the use of caches has greatly increased the speed of data handling. The same is true of caches used elsewhere in the computer. In all cases they are short-time storage of information. Luckily, you don't have to have a complete understanding of caches to use your computer. Let the computer do the work!

Dr. Lewis is a former university & medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail: bwsail@yahoo.com. 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. Courtesy of APCUG.



Q. I'm confused about the different versions of the new Windows Vista. Could you sort that out for me, Mr. M?

A. Sure. There are five versions of Vista. Though most home users will opt for Vista Premium or Vista Ultimate, the full line-up includes:

Vista Home Basic—Similar to Windows Home Edition, this version does not include Vista's fancier media features, such as DVD burning, HDTV, and TV recording features.

Vista Home Premium—This is Vista Home Basic, but with the media features included. It's primarily for users who watch TV on their PC or who want to create DVDs from camcorder footage.

Vista Business—This version targets the business market, as did XP Professional, with networking and faxing features, but it lacks the media-related features found in Home Premium.

Vista Enterprise—Of little interest to home users, this upgraded business version contains support for additional languages and larger networks.

Vista Ultimate—A combination of Home and Business versions, Ultimate targets the hearts and wallets of power users or individuals who simply want all the bells and whistles. (And yes, I'm running Vista Ultimate. I never met a bell or whistle I didn't like.)

If your current system is meeting your needs, there's really no great urgency to move to Vista.

In that situation, I would suggest waiting until you need a new computer, which will have Vista installed. All versions reside on the Vista installation DVD, so upgrading is a snap. You'll find lots of Windows tips and answers to subscribers' questions in my weekly computer-help newsletter (www.MrModem.com).

Q. I'm thinking of changing from Outlook Express to Outlook, but I occasionally use the Stationery feature in Outlook Express. Can you tell me if that is also a feature in Outlook? Thanks for your help, Mr. M.

A. Yes, it is, but you have to have HTML format selected for your email to use stationery. To do that, click Tools > Options > Mail Format tab. In the "Send in this Message Format" area, select HTML.

Next, click Stationery Picker > New. In the "Enter a Name for Your New Stationery" box, care to guess? That's right, enter a name.

Under "Choose How to Create Your Stationery," select whether to start from scratch or use an existing stationery. To select an existing file, use the Browse button to navigate to your selection, then click Next and select the option you want to use. For Help with any option, click the ? button in the upper right-hand corner, then click the option.

Q. You explained how to check what programs launch automatically when Windows starts, by clicking Start > Run, typing in "msconfig" and going to the Startup tab. I disabled a bunch of programs that were running in the background, but every time I start my computer now, I get a message that says the computer is in the selective start-up mode for troubleshooting. How can I get back to the regular startup mode?

A. That "selective start-up mode" message you're seeing is only a cautionary message, confirming that you disabled one or more of the programs that were automatically loading at startup. The next time that message appears, just click to place a check mark in front of "Don't show this message or launch the System Configuration Utility when Windows Starts," followed by OK. That will prevent the message from appearing again in the future.

Q. I need to install the Adobe Reader, but I'm running short on hard-drive space. Can you recommend a smaller PDF reader that I can use?

A. Yes, the Foxit PDF Reader (<http://tinyurl.com/4a4a6>) is small, loads quickly, and has an integrated search utility. Like the Adobe Reader (<http://tinyurl.com/6ip>) it's also free, but Foxit is a scant 1.5MB compared to Adobe's bloated 27.5MB size.

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

All Things Laptops

View notebook computer reviews and articles about laptops, including brand names such as Acer, Apple, Compaq, Dell, Fujitsu, Gateway, IBM (Lenovo), Sager, Sony and Toshiba. If you're looking for information and user-based opinions about a laptop, this would be an excellent place to start.

www.laptopical.com

Mr. Picassohead

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www.mrpicassohead.com

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<http://laptopmag.jiwire.com>

Mr. Modem provides prompt, personal answers to computer and Internet questions by email, plus easy-to-use PC tips, including Windows Vista, for subscribers of his weekly computer-help newsletter. For more information, to view a sample issue, or to subscribe, visit www.MrModem.com.

Improving PC Performance Without Upgrading Your Hardware

Boosting the performance of your PC doesn't have to be difficult or expensive.

Here's a step-by-step guide on how to do it.

by Kevin J. Vella

Public Relations Manager, Uniblue Systems Ltd

Nine things that Chip Manufacturers and PC retailers don't tell you!

The most common reasons for PC slowdowns are viruses, spyware, too many temporary files, software conflicts, residues from unwanted (and uninstalled) trial downloads and other applications, and, sometimes, just too many applications running at the same time hogging all or most of your computer resources.

The following are nine things that Chip Manufacturers and PC Retailers don't want you to know or how to perform. Following this advice will drastically increase your PC performance and help you regain your sanity while saving loads of money. And, if your PC is three years old and can't afford to upgrade yet, you will be able to squeeze out some more juice out of the old thing!

1. Know What You Are Running:

Sometimes slow downs occur because you have too many programs open at the same time. Shutting down those programs that you are not using will immediately boost performance.

2. Monitor Windows Processes:

If you press CTRL+AL+DEL you will call up Tasks Manager which lists most of the processes that you are actually running.

Although limited, Task Manager will give you a reasonably good overview of what's running. But before ending processes to increase your performance please exercise extreme caution and learn what the processes do. Look at the article [Maximizing PC Security](#) to get a good overview of how you can do this.

You will find that either there is too much running or there is something hogging your CPU and memory. With certain Windows Utilities you can even set-up your computer to run certain system configurations depending upon the type of application/s you are running at the moment. These utilities also give you an insight on resource allocation and, with the help of graphs, can help you identify which application and/or process is most likely to slow or crash your computer.

3. Have a Clean System:

One of the most common reason (probably the most common) for slow downs is viruses and/or spyware. Sometimes even spyware residuals that have escaped your anti-spyware products can plague you for months. I had a problem with MSAA.EXE which was not caught by three spyware scanners—I eventually figured out what I had running because of point #2 above!

Virus and spyware authors just love creating menaces that hog your system resources and the only protection you have is to have everything up-to-date.

Make sure your antivirus software is up to date with current virus definitions. Then scan your computer for viruses. Make sure your Spyware software is up to date with current definitions - because of the way spyware works you should try and use at least two different programs to scan your system (scanners are usually free of charge and Microsoft have a free Anti-Spyware product which you should use). Firewalls are also an important security tool but beware as having an active firewall may slow performance.

What you may do once you are 100% sure that your system is clean is turn off your security only when not connected to the Internet. This should help you increase your performance too. But remember to switch everything on before going online. Otherwise, you will be immediately at risk.

4. Update Your Operating System

Having the latest updates of Windows may not generally increase system performance. However, Microsoft are continually patching up any security loop holes or performance related glitches. So in the long run, your system will be better off with the latest OS updates.

5. Disk Clean-ups

Defragging and disc repairs are also extremely important. Defragging is the process of locating and consolidating your files and folders sitting on your hard drives. This can be done automatically by Windows and as a result your system can access these files and folders (and new ones) more efficiently and quickly. Regular defrags and disk repairs will keep your computer running at optimum levels.

6. Temporary File Management:

Cleansing your temporary files including your Internet history including cookies gives you a larger amount of hard disk space to work with. This, in turn, gives more space for Windows virtual files (Page File memory). I go as far as limiting how much space Windows uses to create temporary files. For example, my setting is 1 Mb. In other words, at any point in time Windows is only allowed 1 Mb of space to store cookies, activeX controls etc..

7. Start-up Management

Next time you start up your PC just time how long it takes to boot and let you start using your applications. If you are lucky, start-up times should be no longer than seconds. In most cases, however, it takes minutes.

The Windows Startup Folder tells you most of the more visible processes that are running in your system. However this is not enough - many installed applications start up processes at boot up that you don't even know about. Not that these are harmful, they're probably useful and required. However, by monitoring what is starting up, you have a good chance of finding out what should and what should not be started. Such utilities as performance optimizers (see #9 below) will automatically identify your start-up files and allow you to disable some or all of them. Again, exercise caution here. Be sure to disable only those start-up processes that are superfluous.

My start-up times (and as a result my CPU and MEM Usage) were very short until I installed a particular program which I needed. However I made the mistake of setting up the server version when I don't really need it—I confess, it wasn't a mistake it was a program that impressed me so much that I decided to install the server version because I thought that I would have more visible functionality. However I was wrong. To cut a long story short, I had some system files installed on

my system which were needed if my PC were actually a server (and not a client). One particular process hogged my system and used a constant 10,820 K of my memory when working in the background. Reinstalling the version I needed improved my performance without my having to spend as much as one penny.

8. Caution: Download in Progress

Be honest, whatever they tell you about security (although very true and serious), you just can't resist downloading and trying out new products and utilities. It's fun! I just love scouring the Internet looking for some new utility to try out.

A few weeks back I needed software that lets me sort out the myriad of documents I have on my PC. Thing is I didn't want to spend too much money so I started looking at Open Source products that are free of charge. Well, I must have downloaded and installed at least 10 different programs. I liked none so in a second round I found the one I wanted. However, when uninstalling all the programs I tried, I had to be very careful. The uninstall operation of most applications or programs almost always leaves residual files or folders in your system. No uninstall operation will leave your system the way it was—dlls, processes such as schedulers that kick in at start-ups, and other legitimate processes that, with the main program being uninstalled have no specific function except to hog your system unnecessarily.

What I usually do after I uninstall and reboot my machine is use a Windows Utility (WinTasks) to help me identify the processes which are unnecessary and just block or delete them. Again exercise caution when doing this—make sure that you have all the program and its sub components uninstalled, then reboot, then try the manual clean up. If you are unsure, it is better to leave them in your system but making sure that they are blocked.

9. Use Performance Optimizers

Finally, if either you don't want to perform many of these things manually or you have exhausted all possible avenues, you may want to consider a Performance Optimizer.

Even the more experienced users cannot manage to fully control and monitor all that is happening within their system without a small toolkit of software utilities that generally includes a sturdy performance optimizer.

If anything these utilities do the work automatically. I use performance optimizers because they can do the job better and in as little time as possible. When I use a computer I am either working or playing some game—just don't want to hassle myself tweaking and looking under the hood of my PC. Performance optimizers have been designed to inch their way into the system and help you boost your PC performance drastically. These utilities usually don't cost more than \$25 to \$30 and give you much more value than investing in RAM simply because they seek and solve slowdown problems rather than mask it.

Sometimes RAM is necessary. But, I believe that following these nine steps and principles you can get much more out of your PC. Plus, performance optimizers go the extra mile because they improve your system's overall operation beyond any level that you can manage on your own steam; simply because operating systems are getting more complex by the upgrade and it is almost humanly impossible to keep track of all that goes on in your computer.

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), brings this article to you.

The following announcements were severely edited so check their Web site for more information. I have not tried any of these products.

T Problem With Your Flash Card?

PANTERASoft is proud to announce the release of version 2.1 of Flash File Recovery, a digital image recovery software tool for flash cards. Flash File Recovery 2.1 efficiently recovers corrupted or lost data from formatted, damaged, unreadable or defective storage media devices. This software recovers image and video files of different types, like JPEG, TIFF and others; RAW Image files, like Canon CRW, Nikon NEF, Kodak DCR and various other video files—AVI, MOV, MPG /MPEG, and many more. It is also capable of recovering pictures from damaged or corrupted flash drives (including a camera's built-in memory) and memory sticks. Flash File Recovery 2.1 supports a wide range of flash cards: Smart edia, CompactFlash, Memory Stick, MicroDrive, xD Picture Card, Flash Card, PC Card, Multimedia Card, Secure Digital Card, and many others.

Flash File Recovery 2.1 requires Microsoft Windows 9x/NT/2000/2003/XP/Vista and costs \$49.50. User Group members get a 15% discount. Additional information on Flash File Recovery 2.1, as well as its fully functional version for evaluation is available for downloading from <<http://www.panterasoft.com>>.

Product page link: <http://www.panterasoft.com/file-recovery/index.html>

E-mail: <alexey@panterasoft.com> with discount ordering questions.

Super DVD Creator Now Available

MasterSoft, Inc. announces the release of Super DVD Creator 9.30. Super DVD Creator lets you jumpstart your creativity and make a personalized disk (DVD, VCD or SVCD) from your own or a downloaded video. Whether you want to create a DVD as a present for your friend or beloved, transfer an old video of a family get-together from VHS to digital form, or create a digital resume, Super DVD Creator is an excellent choice. Select the format (DVD, SVCD, VCD disk), then add video files, include a DVD menu with chapters and subtitles and click 'Start'. That's all! Super DVD Creator will take care of the rest. It'll burn the output to DVD in brilliant quality and much faster than any other DVD authoring software on the market. Another unique option in Super DVD Creator is Super Encode Engine, which is based on MMX-SSE & 3DNow! technology. It delivers an advanced and high speed converting method that lets users create a full 4.2 GB DVD in 60 minutes!

Super DVD Creator 9.30 runs under Microsoft Windows 95, 98, 2000, XP and Vista, and costs \$29.90 (US) for a single-user license. User group members get 20% off its regular price. E-mail <press@alldj.com> for ordering info. Licensed customers are entitled to free lifetime technical support by e-mail and free lifetime upgrades. The software is backed by 30-day money back guarantee. Among the company's premier products, there are Super DVD Creator, Super DVD Player, Super DVD Video Editor, Super IPOD/PSP/iTurn/3GP /PDA Video Converter, Super Clone DVD, DVD To AVI Converter, and DVD To Mpeg Converter. For more information, please visit the Web site.

Product page link: <<http://www.alldj.com/sdvdc/index.htm>>

Download link: <<http://www.alldj.com/sdvdc/download.htm>>

Company website: <<http://www.alldj.com>>

That's it for this month. I have some new product announcements on my Web site page. 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 @mind spring.com>. Visit my Web site at <<http://www.dealsguy.com>>

We've All Done It

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

Tom accidentally deleted photos from his memory card. They were taken at his daughter's third birthday party. His wife is angry. His daughter would be, too, if she knew. He'd really like to get them back.

Do you have a time machine, Tom? Just kidding. I've been in similar situations and was able to recover photos. So maybe we can get you out of the doghouse.

The most important thing: Don't use the card. When files are deleted, they're not actually removed. The space is simply marked available for new files. If you use the card, you might overwrite the missing photos.

If they aren't overwritten, you probably can recover them. If that fails, check with the card's manufacturer. Many offer recovery pro-grams. You may have better luck with these. Otherwise, try a data recovery specialist.

Hack lets intruders sneak into home routers—If you haven't changed the default password on your home router, let this recent threat serve as a reminder.

Attackers could change the configuration of home routers using JavaScript code, security researchers at Indiana University and Symantec have discovered. The researchers first published their work in December, but Symantec publicized the findings on Thursday.

The researchers found that it is possible to change the DNS, or Domain Name System, settings of a router if the owner uses a connected PC to view a Web page with the JavaScript code. This DNS change lets the attacker divert all the Net traffic going through the router. For example, if the victim types in "www.mybank.com," the request could be sent to a similar-looking fake page created to steal sensitive data.

"I have been able to get this to work on Linksys, D-Link and Netgear routers," Symantec researcher Zulfikar Ramzan said. "You can create one Web site that is able to attack all routers. My feeling is that it is just a matter of time before phishers start using this."

After a router's DNS setting is changed, all computers connected to the device will use the DNS server set up by the attacker to find their way on the Internet. DNS functions like the phonebook of the Internet, mapping text-based addresses such as www.news.com to actual numeric Internet Protocol addresses of a Web site.

The attack works on any type of home router, but only if the default router password hasn't been changed, Ramzan said. The malicious JavaScript code embedded on the attacker's Web page logs into the router using the default credentials—often as simple as "admin" and "password"—and changes the settings.

"One of the issues is that the set-up steps in the router don't prompt you to change the

password,” Ramzan said. As a result, many people never properly configure their networking gear, he said.

In crafting their proof-of-concept attack code, Ramzan and researchers at Indiana University built upon earlier research that showed how JavaScript could be used for malicious purposes. Jeremiah Grossman, chief technology officer at WhiteHat Security, demonstrated how JavaScript let outside attackers target internal corporate networks.

Grossman is impressed by the Symantec and Indiana University work. “This is very dangerous stuff and could be highly effective if used in the wild,” he said.

Router makers already know of the problems with default passwords as well as other security concerns, they said. Linksys, for example, recommends that customers change the default password during the installation procedure, said Karen Sohl, a representative for the company, a division of Cisco Systems. “We are aware of this,” she said.

On its Web site, Linksys warns users that miscreants are taking advantage of the default passwords. “Hackers know these defaults and will try them to access your wireless device and change your network settings. To thwart any unauthorized changes, customize the device’s password so it will be hard to guess,” the company states.

Still, although Linksys’ software recommends the password change, consumers can either plug in their router without running the installation disk or bypass the change screen, keeping the defaults. The company offers detailed information on how to change the router password on its Web site. Netgear and D-Link also recommend password changes.

Vista Clean Install with an Upgrade Version

I’ve been reading the breathless reports from other websites all month about the “Vista upgrade loophole.” Most of it is typical echo-chamber stuff, and most of the reports I’ve read so far have gotten the basic facts wrong. The Setup feature they’re describing isn’t a loophole at all. It’s a perfectly legal workaround for an amazingly stupid technical restriction that Microsoft imposes on upgraders. Here’s exactly what’s going on and how you can legally perform a clean install using an upgrade key.

Let’s start with a few essential facts:

- All retail copies of Windows Vista use the exact same media. The DVD contains all editions and can be used to perform a full installation or an upgrade. If you compare a full retail copy of Windows Vista Ultimate and an upgrade copy of Windows Vista Home Basic, you’ll find that the installation media for the two products are virtually identical.
- The product key included with the copy you purchase determines how the Setup program behaves. These behaviors are hard-coded into the Setup program based on the key you enter. Specifically, the Setup program is able to look at your key and use an algorithm to determine the edition it “unlocks.” The same algorithm determines whether you are allowed to use that key for an upgrade or a clean install or both.
- The license agreement for a Vista upgrade copy requires that the machine already be licensed for Windows. This license agreement does not restrict the method of installation in any way. Section 13 of the agreement reads as follows:

UPGRADES. To use upgrade software, you must first be licensed for the software that is eligible for the upgrade. Upon upgrade, this agreement takes the place of the agreement for the software you upgraded from. After you upgrade, you may no longer use the software you upgraded from.

- When you run Setup with an upgrade key, the installer does not check to see whether you're really eligible. In fact, Microsoft's licensing infrastructure—the activation and validation servers it uses to check product keys against hardware hashes— does not (yet) contain any mechanism to match up your upgrade license with a previous license.
- To use an upgrade product key, you must start the Vista Setup program from Windows 2000, Windows XP, or any edition of Windows Vista. Your previous version of Windows doesn't have to be activated. Even an evaluation copy of the edition of Windows Vista you purchased will allow you to run the Setup program with an upgrade key. (Remember that last part.)
Got all that? Good. Now let's put the pieces together.

I'm going to assume that you have a PC that came with Windows XP preinstalled by the PC maker. Any OEM version of Windows XP is eligible to upgrade to any edition of Windows Vista. So you purchase a retail upgrade copy of Vista Ultimate. In the box is a DVD and a 25-character product key.

You don't want to do what Microsoft calls an in-place upgrade, which preserves your installed programs and data files but has a greater risk of migrating your problems as well. Instead, you want to do a clean install. But there's a problem: Microsoft used a crude technique to make clean installs more difficult for upgraders. If you boot from the Vista DVD and enter an upgrade key, you'll see this error message and will not be able to go any further:

Now, this restriction is stupid, because even Microsoft acknowledges that you can be legally entitled to purchase the upgrade version and yet have to do a clean install. (See the notes on Microsoft's official Windows Vista Upgrade Paths from Previous Versions page, for example, which says: "If you are currently using Windows 2000 Professional or Windows XP Professional x64, you are eligible for an upgrade copy to a corresponding or better edition of Windows Vista, but a clean install is required." Ahem.)

This silly technical restriction is not required by the license agreement. It's designed to frustrate anyone who wants to use the upgrade version on a new PC without an operating system and get them to pay more for a full version. But it's easily worked around.

Your easiest option—by far—is to use the PC maker's system recovery media to restore an image of Windows XP as it existed when you first got the computer, and then install Vista. I can hear the complaints now: "That copy is out of date. It's loaded with crummy, obsolete drivers and crapware." Yes, I know. That doesn't matter. Every bit of that junk will be erased soon enough. It will never get mixed with your new Vista setup.

After you finish restoring that original system image, start Windows, insert the Vista DVD, and run Vista's Setup program. This time using your upgrade product key. When you're done, use the Disk Cleanup tool to remove all traces of your old installation. You have a fresh, clean system and you are in perfect compliance with your license agreement.

What if you don't have a restore CD? In that case, you can install an evaluation copy of Windows Vista on the system, specifically to allow you to run Setup. Here's how:

1. Boot from the DVD and click Install Now.
2. Leave the product key box blank. Instead, click Next.
3. Click No in this warning dialog box.
4. From the list of Vista editions, choose the one that matches the upgrade you purchased.
5. Complete the installation, accepting all defaults.

Do whatever minimal steps are required to start your new installation for the first time.

Wouldn't it be nice if you could enter your perfectly legal, fully paid-for product key now and just make the installation complete? Sorry, you can't do that.

Instead, you need to run Setup again, this time from within Windows Vista. Don't choose the Upgrade option unless you want to spend an hour or two migrating your nonperson-alized default Vista settings. Instead, do a nondestructive clean install. When that's done (it should go very quickly), use the Disk Cleanup tool to blow away the redundant installation in Windows.old. You're now good to go.

Now, was that a loophole? No. You satisfied every condition of the license agreement and aren't skating by on a technicality. The fact that you have to use a kludgy workaround to use the license you've purchased and are legally entitled to is Microsoft's fault.

From the March 2007 issue of The Umbrella Online, Monthly Newsletter of the Hampton Roads Virginia Computing Community.

The Future of Broadband Access

by Bob Hewitt

Editor, The Journal of The Computer Club, Inc., Sun City Center, FL

This may end up to be a case of who gets there fastest with the mostest.

The goal is Broadband. Just about all computer owners want it. Many cannot afford it. But every provider wants to get the biggest share of the pie.

The telecommunications industry was in the driver's seat first with dial-up. Then came cable as a carrier and telecom countered with DSL. Up rose Wi-Fi, Broadband Wireless Mesh, and finally BPL (Broadband over Power Line).

Pew Internet and American Life Project released a survey finding that about 55 per cent of internet-using Americans enjoy a broadband connection at home or at work. Since computers have overwhelmed the marketplace, it may be somewhat misleading to lump them together.

The goal of computer mavens is the most speed per dollar expressed in Kbps (Kilobits per second), Mbps (Megabits per second), or preferably MBps (Megabytes per second). The latter conforms to the standard measurement of file size and gives an operator an instant impression of the time involved in achieving a download or a transfer, depending on the speed of his CPU or Internet connection.

Because their infrastructure was already in place, the telephone and cable industries became the leaders in delivering Internet resources to their subscribers at \$10 to \$50 per month depending on speed. But then came the advent of wireless transmission, commonly called Wi-Fi, with its short range signal providing access principally to portable (laptop) PC's—a significant advantage to travelers who were charged a small amount for access.

Almost paralleling the transition from fixed telephone to cell phone, Wi-Fi evolved into wireless mesh Internet which has sparked a huge demand for municipal wireless broadband. Fifty four localities, including major cities, are in the process of establishing or already have established such services.

Tempe, Arizona established a wireless access network last November, covering 40 square miles, with an access cost of \$30 a month per subscriber or \$3.95 per hour.

Manassas, Virginia became the first citywide Broadband-Over-Powerline site last October when it opened a 10 square mile site available to all at \$29 per month.

Philadelphia has contracted with Earthlink to cover its 135 square miles with wireless internet service---the cost to Earthlink an estimated 10-million dollars and a cost to residents an estimated \$20 per month for service. It's assumed that Earthlink will amortize its investment by income from advertising.

The excitement over wireless broadband is heightened by a comparison of download speeds available. The fastest of the three Wi-Fi formats now in use (the 802.11g) is 54 Mbps (megabits per second) or 7 Megabytes per second which is 18 times faster than the cable modems of today. Further is the recent approval of the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) for the new 802.11n Wi-Fi format which may be two years before activation but could achieve data processing speeds of 600 Mbps; an almost incomprehensible 75 Megabytes per second—200 times today's cable modem speed.

At that rate, one could download 80 minutes of music in 10 seconds or an entire opera in 30.

The wired communications industries are not unaware. Witness the fact that they have spent millions of dollars lobbying state legislatures to kill off community Internet. Over the past few years, no less than 14 states have enacted legislation that bans or places limits on municipalities from building community internet projects. Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed a law last June that prevents cities from offering broadband if there are competing private services.

There are anti-competitive issues at the federal level, also. Republican Representative Pete Sessions of Texas introduced an anti-community Internet bill which would prevent any city in the country from providing Internet access if a private company offers Internet services nearby—even if the private company serves as little as 10 per cent of the residents.

Republican Senator John Ensign of Nevada introduced the Broadband Investment and Consumer Choice Act which would severely hamper cities' ability to build and manage wireless networks.

In response to Ensign's bill, Republican Senator John McCain and Democrat Frank Lautenberg introduced legislation that gives municipalities free rein to offer broadband and would overturn state laws banning such activities.

Now that President Bush has lent his support to a broad set of proposals to get every corner of the country access to broadband connectivity by 2007, it will be interesting to watch both sides welcome that goal as supporting their particular positions.

The big question for the public is cost. There have been no definitive publicly-available figures on installation and maintenance of the cutting-edge WiFi mesh application.

Jupiter Research has estimated that the average cost of building and maintaining a wireless network is \$150,000 per square mile over five years. Bert Williams, vice president of marketing for Tropos Networks, which has successfully provided mesh based WiFi hardware in several locations around the world, says, "We usually talk in terms of \$75,000 per square mile for our gear." Adding the ongoing costs for backhaul and system management, he believes the total to be closer to \$100,000 per square mile, while Sky Pilot Networks quotes \$50,000.

A long and vigorous battle is ahead involving the established vs the un-established. But one thing is certain. Everyone is going to end up with a piece of the pie. For this is still early in the digital age and there is plenty to go around.

muniwireless.com	informationweek.com
zdnet.com	vnunet.com
jupitermedia.com	arstechnica.com

eetimes.com
slate.com
mistershape.com
Courtesy of APCUG.

mercurynews.com
eweek.com
S. Derek Turner

Pandora—a Free Music Resource

by Sandy Berger
CompuKISS

The Internet is filled with free resources, but some are better than others. Here is one of the best free music resources on the Web.

Pandora is one of my favorite music websites. Just surf over to www.pandora.com and type in a song or an artist that you like. Pandora analyses your choice and creates a music station with similar-sounding music. It will then play comparable songs that it thinks you will like. You can add more music and/or artists to the station to refine your choices. You can also tell Pandora whether or not you like the song that is playing. It uses your likes and dislikes to refine the songs it chooses. You can create up to 100 different stations with different types of music.

Pandora was created by the Music Genome Project, a group of musicians and music-loving technologists who have broken music into hundreds of music attributes or “genes” such as melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, orchestration, arrangement, lyrics, and harmony. They then use high-tech methodology to analyze the musical qualities of each song and rendition.

The results are uncanny. I created several music stations with different genres that I like and in almost every case I was presented with similar music that I found very pleasing. You can experiment with different combinations. For instance, putting James Taylor and Willie Nelson together gave me an interesting, but likable mix of music.

Pandora is pretty smart. Typing in *The Christmas Song* and choosing Diana Krall as the artist gave me a whole station of mellow Christmas music which is just what I was looking for. Typing in The Nylons and Take 6 gave me a nice selection of *a cappella* and harmonistic music.

Pandora also lets you bookmark songs or artists so you can remember what you liked. You can look up more information about artists and songs right on the site. Two clicks will lead you to iTunes or Amazon where you can purchase the music. You can also share your music by e-mailing your stations to friends.

Pandora is ad-supported so you will see ads for everything from gym shoes to cell service. I found the ads to be unobtrusive, but if you want to get rid of them, you can pay to eliminate them. For \$36, you get 12 months of unlimited use with services exactly the same as the free version, but without the ads.

Since the ads don't bother me, I'll continue to use the free version of Pandora. It's an entertaining website that provides much listening pleasure to keep me company when I am working on the computer.

If you are into music, you may also want to check out two other music resources. MusicIP Mixer and Goombah. Like Pandora, both of these sites provide intriguing music adventures.

Courtesy of APCUG.

Directory Assistance

Calling 411 gets your local service provider, who charges less for this service than national

directories like 555-1212, 0-0 INFO or 10-10- ATT-00.

For free assistance, check out these websites:

www.anywho.com

www.switchboard.com

www.whothere.lycos.com

From the AARP Bulletin.

Turn "My Computer" Into a Menu

One of the things I open frequently as I use Windows is My Computer which shows me all of the drives on my computer: the floppy drive (A:), the Hard Drive (C:), and others that include DVD and CD drives and removable drives. I found a way to change the display that you see when you click on Start and then on My Computer so that a menu of My Computer items appears as your mouse pointer touches your My Computer link. For me, it's certainly quicker and easier. Here's how:

Right-click on the Start button

Click on Properties

Click on the Customize button and then open the Advanced tab

In the Start menu items window scroll down to My Computer

Click next to Display as a menu

Now click on Ok, and again on OK.

That's it—you're finished. Now, when you click on Start and move your mouse pointer over My Computer, a menu of the My Computer contents appears.

From the Thousand Oaks Personal Computer Club.

Society News

Planning Meeting Notes

March 7, 2007

by John McMillan, secretary

Arpad Kovacs, John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, and Sally Springett met the first Wednesday at the planning meeting which was rescheduled to avoid a conflict for our hostess.

The meeting started with comments about the Video editing presentation at the February meeting. There were some problems getting the laptops wide screen to work with the libraries projection system. Arpad was able to make some adjustments that smoothed out the interface allowing the talk to proceed as scheduled. The library suggested that when different laptops are used it might be advantageous to test the environment in advance. The topic appeared to be well received though very product specific. One visitor, who attended specifically to hear about Video Editing, stopped after the talk to mention how much he had learned.

The March meeting is scheduled for the Greece Community and Senior Center on Vince Toffany Blvd where Arpad will discuss Free Hidden Programs from Microsoft. A map is available on the RCSi web page. Future meeting locations and topics were discussed and when resolved, should be identified in the Monitor. Bob Avery, the webmaster lists each meeting place and includes a map on the RCSi web site. He also sends e-mails to the recorded addresses of active members.

Other discussions were deferred until the next meeting when there should be a quorum.

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Bob Avery

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Total present: 29

Q: One member has made a CD with 85 .jpg pictures on it. But the photos do not display after the first 52 photos.

A: There may be a limited number that it can play. Not all players accept all of the formats and this can be an issue. Perhaps you can divide them into folders so that it will break apart the photos. Sometimes the recording has to be finalized to make it readable. There can always be one corrupted photo and no others can be seen. Google has a 'Google Pack' that includes Picassa which may be a useful tool.

Q: One has had trouble using Nero's Slide Show to display the photos on his computer.

A: Nero version 7.0 will need to have the disk finalized to use it. He may need to verify the setup preferences, being sure that American is selected.

Q: Another member has a problem with booting up his PC. After beginning to display the icons on his desktop, the screen goes blank. He is using Win98 SE.

A: Perhaps you can boot off a floppy boot disk. He confirmed that the same result happens in Safe Mode.

Q: One member received an email from PayPal regarding an account in Nevada.

A: Sounds like a scam. Delete it. Don't even respond.

Q: One member reported that his hard disk light is always on.

A: Go into the C drive and open up properties. Look to verify that the 'allow indexing service' box is not checked. This could be what is running. This would apply to Win 2K and XP.

March Meeting Minutes

by John McMillan, Secretary

Steve Staub opened the business portion of the meeting by requesting that people whose dues are in arrears should see him. He reminded people that effective April first, dues would rise \$5 per year, the first increase in over eight years. The newsletter will be assembled at St. Stephens, Saturday, Mar. 17th at 9:30 a.m. and extra help would be appreciated. The planning group will meet at Sally's house at 7 p.m. April 3rd. The next regular meeting will be held at the Pittsford Library April 10, when Nick Francesco is expected to tell us about Linnux.

Dave Thompson stated that the Photo-graphy SIG would meet from 6:30-8:30 April 5th at the St. John's Meadows retirement complex, 1 Johnsarbor Drive West, 1423 Elmwood Ave. If you have questions, e-mail Dave at dthomps1@rochester.rr.com

Steve requested volunteers for the Nominating committee to develop a slate of candidates to be presented at the April meeting. Candidates for President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer should be willing to serve for one year while the Board Member at Large term is for three years, all starting in September. After the slate has been presented at the April meeting, nominations will be accepted from the floor. Members in good standing will vote at the May Meeting.

This was our first meeting in Greece and about 28 people turned out to hear Arpad Kovacs discuss "Free Hidden Programs from Microsoft." He started with several slides that identified web

addresses for free downloads of some little known Microsoft tools. Unfortunately my dictating machine did not record all of the proceedings so I strongly recommend visiting the Society web page to view those important contacts. Although he admitted to not having much time to explore all of offerings in detail, recommended ones were listed on the third slide.

Based upon my memory, which is at best a poor tool, Arpad specifically mentioned Tweak UI and the following:

1. Power Calculator that provides graphic calculations and conversions.
2. USB Flash Drive Manager for backing up and restoring files to/from a USP Flash Drive device
3. Virtual Desk top Manager that lets you manage up to 4 desktops from the Windows taskbar
4. E-books reader that included text to speech conversions in multiple languages
5. System Configuration Utility for dealing with MS Config.
6. Virtual PC for running multiple operating systems
7. Virtual WiFi for simultaneous connection to multiple wireless networks
8. DiskMon to monitor and display all hard drive activity
9. Network Diagnostics for Windows XP
10. Baseline Security Analyzer
11. Office Accounting 2007
12. CD Slide Show Generator
13. Movie Maker

There were probably others that I do not recall and some were demonstrated in a highly technical demonstration that was very well received. I apologize for the lack of greater detail.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub, treasurer

Balance as of 02/15/07	\$404.82
Income	
Dues and donations	\$488.00
Expenses	
Staples—paper, toner, and ink	\$247.34
Cartridge World—toner	99.99
St. Stephens	<u>60.00</u>
Total	\$407.33
Balance as of 3/17/07	\$485.49

Members renewing:

James Doyle	Richard and Beverly Cronkite
Charles Rinehart	Roger Hart
James Davidson	Richard Billiski
Michael DeStefano	Harvey Nusbaum
Mary Ann McCullough	

The Lighter Side

There was once a young man who, in his youth, professed his desire to become a great writer. When asked to define “great” he said, “I want to write stuff that the whole world will read, stuff that people will react to on a truly emotional level, stuff that will make them scream, cry, howl in pain and anger!”

He now works for Microsoft writing error messages.

★

“You see, wire telegraph is a kind of a very, very long cat. You pull his tail in New York and his head is meowing in Los Angeles. Do you understand this? And radio operates exactly the same way: you send signals here, they receive them there. The only difference is that there is no cat.” –Albert Einstein (when asked to describe radio)

★

A buddy of mine works in an office where a computer going down causes quite an inconvenience. Recently, one of the computers not only crashed, it made a noise that sounded like a heart monitor. “This computer has flat-lined!” a co-worker called out in mock horror. “Does anyone here know how to do mouse-to-mouse?”