

# MONITOR

Vol. 24, No. 1

January 2007

**Next Meeting**  
January 9 Pittsford Library  
Video Editing—Part I

## CONTENTS

<b>Great Games for the Holidays</b>	Timothy Everingham	1
<b>Changing Hard Drives</b>	Richard Kennon	4
<b>To Dual-Core or Not to Dual-Core?</b>	Jim Sanders	5
<b>E-Mail: Be Less Annoying</b>	Steve Bass	8
<b>Windows XP: Remote Assistance</b>	Dick Maybach	11
<b>The Changing Face of Digital Photography</b>	Jerry Schneir	13
<b>Review: Snapfire Plus</b>	Robert Du Vernay	14
<b>Ask Mr. Modem</b>		16
<b>The New, the Best, and the Worst</b>	Pim Borman	17
<b>From the DealsGuy</b>	Bob Click	19
<b>Society News</b>		22
<b>The Lighter Side</b>		23

Great  
Games for



## The Holidays Are Here: Changes in Industry and Technology Overcome

by Timothy Everingham  
*The Users Group NETWORK,*  
*San Fernando Valley, CA*

**W**e are now in the time when most of the computer & console games get released, right before the holiday season. This year it even gets more complicated because of Windows Vista coming out in January and we are in the early stages of a transition to the next generation of game consoles. What makes it even worse is the collapse of the computer game industry's major trade show, E3. Game developers have had to revamp their marketing strategies for the future, yet at the same time prepare for this holiday season. This should add to consumer confusion on what to buy and when and hopefully this article will reduce that confusion.

## "increases questions"

Microsoft's new operating system, Windows Vista, increases questions for those uses of 3D oriented applications, especially games. A great part of this is DirectX 10, which is a major rewrite of DirectX and has much higher capability than current and past versions. DirectX 10 will only be available for Windows Vista and can only be used if you have a video card that supports it. (Those cards that do not have DirectX 10 support will be running DirectX 9.0L under Windows Vista). DirectX 10 cards based on Nvidia chips will start to come out in November and those based on ATI chips will start to come out in February. There will be few games with additional enhancements if you are running Vista with a DirectX 10 card when Vista launches, such as Microsoft Flight Simulator X and Crysis. It will probably be at least until mid-2007 when significant numbers of DirectX 10 enhanced or DirectX 10 only titles will arrive. So for giving gifts to 3D gamers who are going to be first adopters of Windows Vista you might want to consider giving gift certificates.

Microsoft's next generation console, the Xbox 360, has been out for about a year. It has been well accepted by the market-place and has a good number of quality game titles. Sony's Playstation 3 is more powerful and will be able to play high definition Blue-Ray disk movies, but it has been delayed by technical problems until November 17 and even then will have limited supply in the US. With the decision to allow Blue Ray Disk movies to the higher level 1080p High Definition TV instead of the former 720p only should help sales. It will also have some very good games available at launch. There will be 2 versions, the standard costing \$499 and the deluxe costing \$599. Nintendo's Wii next generation console will launch on November 19. It is not as powerful as its two rivals, especially in the graphics area (Maximum Video Resolution: Wii-480p, Xbox 360-720P, PS3-1080p). However it has a very unique gyroscopic controller that is shaped like a TV remote control, which could make some very innovative gameplay (actions are evoked by your physical movement of the entire controller). The Wii's retail price will be \$249. The safe bet for buying a console now is the Xbox 360, but I would advise waiting on your decisions until the initial opinions on the PS3 and Wii consoles come out. (These will probably be found online on the video game review websites before the end of November). Remember when buying a console it is like buying a computer. First you determine what games/applications you want to run, and then you see which console has the games /applications you want to run now or in the future.

## "for the holiday season"

Here are some of my game picks for the holiday season:

If you are looking a simulation, Microsoft Flight Simulator X (Windows XP or Vista) is a great visual experience. It is greatly improved from the last version, 2004, with great scenery and other graphics plus good missions. Be aware that to get good frame rates on this you will need a mid to high performance PC by current standards. This is the first game that can take advantage of Windows Vista only features, including DirectX 10 capabilities if you have a Direct X 10 graphics card. Comes in both standard and deluxe versions.

## "spyware"

If you are looking for a first person shooter, Call of Duty 3 (Activision; PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, Wii) is third installment of the extremely successful World War 2 team-based first-person shooter series. This time it centers on the campaign from Normandy to Paris. Additionally the number of concurrent online/network players has been raised to

24. Battlefield 2142 (Electronic Arts, PC) is Battlefield 2 set in the future in the middle of a new ice age. Since Battlefield 2 is such a great multiplayer combat title, this is a good thing. Like the previous members of the Battlefield series, it is usually played team vs. team online or at a LAN Party. Be aware that this game has in-game advertisements and spyware is installed when you install the game that analyses data on your PC to determine which adds to display in the game. So if you don't like such things on your computer you may want to pass on this game.

If you have dreamed of firefights using automatic weapons in the glamorous Las Vegas Casinos this is for you. Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas (Ubisoft; PC, PS3, PSP, Xbox 360) is another in the successful Rainbow Six series about the adventures of a US antiterrorist commando team. This time a large group of terrorists are attacking the Las Vegas Casinos and plan to burn them to the ground and your object is to

stop them. Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent (Ubisoft; PC, Xbox 360, Xbox, PS2, Gamecube) is another in the great Splinter Cell series where you work as a spy/mercenary for the National Security Agency. However, this time you act as a double agent within a terrorist cell, so things get more complicated. This also has a multiplayer mode. This series is great for those who like to sneak up on the bad guys, take them out and steal or blow up their stuff.

### "adventure"

As for adventure games, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion (2K games; PC, Xbox 360) has extremely beautiful and high-level graphics. It is considered an outstanding title and one with which all other adventure games are compared, but you need a high performance PC to play it. Gothic 3 (JoWood, PC) is a single player adventure game in a land where humans have been enslaved by orcs. There is an evil mode where you side with the orcs, but most of the gameplay you are on the human's side. The game is much more open ended than most games, so if you get lost in non-structured game play this title is not for you. For those who enjoyed the fantasy role playing game Neverwinter Nights, there is Never Winter Nights 2 (Atari, PC). Half-Life 2 (Electronic Arts) has moved to an episodic model, and so now has Sam & Max (Lucas Arts). Sam & Max Episode 1: Culture shock is the first of seven episodes to come out on a monthly basis with an estimated 4-6 hours of game play each. Each episode will cost \$8.85, but you can subscribe to the entire set for \$34.95. This is an off the wall humor-ridden adventure game with a dog and rabbit team of freelance police as its heroes.

### "sport games"

As for sport games, try Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07 (Electronic Arts; PC, PS3, PS, Xbox, Xbox 360, Wii). It is extremely similar to the previous two versions, but is still a great game. For those who love golf games this is probably your best bet. Need For Speed Carbon (Electronic Arts; PC, PS3, PS2, PSP, Xbox 360, Xbox, Wii, Gamecube, Gameboy, DS), is the next in the successful Need For Speed street racing series. Its graphics are excellent and smooth, and there is a lot of game play and various options/paths to explore in the way you play the game.

In the good, but not expensive category look at GTR 2 (10tacle Studios, PC). This is a GT car racing game that has gotten good reviews and has a lot to offer and you can find it for less than \$20. It was released on Sept 26; it is a new game too. For sports games, Electronic Arts has most of the best ones. You should look there first.

If you are into building rather than destroying I would recommend Sid Meir's Railroads (2K Games, PC). In this empire -uilding game you have 15 historical and fictional scenarios to chose from. Up to four players can even compete online or over a network. The detailed graphic animation of the environment/world is impressive, but because of this it is recommended that you have a significantly better computer than listed in the minimum requirements.

### "Total War"

If you are looking for a real-time strategy game, look at Company of Heroes (THQ, PC). The detail in both the game play and the graphics makes this World War II game set in France in 1944 superior to other similar titles. You play either as the allies or the axis and control small units on a battlefield to accomplish objectives. You can play against another player or players online. Because of the graphics, low-end PCs are insufficient for this game. Also you need to look at Medieval 2: Total War (Sega, PC), the fourth in the Total War historical combat real-time strategy series. The graphics and animation is so good that the game's engine is used to create animated visualizations of large-scale actual battles for documentaries shown on the History and Discovery channels. The graphics have been updated, making the even more real than in any of the previous versions and what you even saw in the TV documentary visualizations. The game takes place in Medieval Europe and you command one of the historical factions/countries that vie for power. Look at Warhammer: Mark of Chaos (Namco Bandai, PC) too; a real-time strategy game with fantasy creatures and units, part of the excellent Warhammer series.

### "something usual"

If you want something usual you may want to look at Bully (Rockstar Games, PS2). This is a boarding school simulator where you work your way up in this kid-dom. Last year's best unusual was Destroy All Humans, a spoof on the 1950's alien invasion movies. Now Destroy All Humans 2: Make War Not Love

(THQ; PS2, Xbox) has arrived and is set in the 1960's. It is not quite as good as the original; but with the original being so good, especially in the rolling on the floor laughing department, it still makes for a very good game. There are new consoles and a lot of new games for this holiday season, too much to cover here. For additional information go to [www.gamespot.com](http://www.gamespot.com) (part of CNET), [www.ign.com](http://www.ign.com), [www.gamepro.com](http://www.gamepro.com), [www.gamespy.com](http://www.gamespy.com), or [www.gamezone.com](http://www.gamezone.com).

May your games be happy and bright (we don't have to worry much about screen burn-in anymore).

*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.*

## Changing Hard Drives

by Richard Kennon

*Newsletter Editor, Amador  
Computer Users Group, CA*

The time came when the bearings in my hard drive began to sing a little after running all day. So, being the wise person I am, I decided to replace it as a preventative measure. It turns out a job like that requires planning. I am not a planning person. I don't do planning. I am more spontaneous. That is a euphemism for "lazy." My grandmother used to tell me, "Lazy people work the hardest." Oh, how true.

First, I thought I was covered because I had a backup by Acronis True Image 8.0— wrong! I had one main hard drive with one partition, "C:" and I had never dreamed of running with more than one partition. So, I bought a second hard drive to use for the backups. After the new main hard drive was installed by a professional, I brought it home and tried to restore the backup. It was then I learned you can't restore an Acronis backup to the active partition. When I tried, it wiped out everything. Back to the Pro for a new XP reload with two partitions on the new hard drive. It has gigabytes to spare. The two partitions were named "C:" and "F:" for whatever reason. The spare hard drive was renamed "D:" and the CD drive was renamed "E:". Go figure. I was able to restore my old C: drive contents to the new F: drive. So now I have everything on the new F: drive but my machine boots up on the new C: drive and I can't figure out how to utilize the new F: drive. Of course, real men don't ask directions, so I decided to slug it out on my own. I thought I saw a bright side to this as the old C: drive was cluttered with years' accumulation of garbage. I would start afresh!

The first thing to do is get back on the air, the Internet. So, I went to Outlook Express. First I had to call the ISP to find out how to reconnect. A nice lady walked me through the process, no sweat. Then I discovered I had no address book. Of course, it is on the F: drive. How to find it? After some searching on the web, I found out the address book is in files named, \*.wab. Cinch! Just search the F: drive for \*.wab files. Not there. Then I noticed the fine print that says it does not find hidden files. A click on "Advanced" led me to a box that allows finding hidden files. It turns out the hidden files are in a hidden folder so it was doubly challenging. It was relatively easy to copy these files and paste them in the same hidden folder in the new C: drive. Whaddayou know? It worked. The message files are empty but I can't think of a good reason to try to repopulate them.

Now, if I am on the air, it seems the next urgent step is to reestablish some protection. But, first, I downloaded SP-2 and a host of other Microsoft updates. I think I saw a note flash across the screen that said they sent 60 updates. Then came Microsoft Windows Defender (beta). However, apparently all it does is look for spyware. I am not clear on this so, since I subscribe to McAfee firewall and virus protection, I went to their site and downloaded all that. Now, I feel better.

I did do one bit of smart planning Ta-Da! I had simply copied all my Documents and Settings files and sub folders to the backup drive. Copying all this back to the new C: drive was a cinch and it saved all my valuable writings and pictures. Now if I could just find that great picture of Aunt Edith from two Christmases ago. If you ever transfer to a new computer or hard drive, do lots of this copying. Disk space is cheap and copying it back is so easy.

Finding the original software disks that were loaded years ago was not so easy. They were tucked here and there in many different convenient places. That is, convenient until you want to find them. I was mostly lucky and had to purchase a newer version of only one program. You see, I am neither a planner nor an organizer. You wonder how I have survived these many years? I am very lucky.

One other aspect of “afresh” I decided to try was going to Open Office instead of Microsoft Office. This is another ungood idea. Doctors warn against experiencing dual traumas like retiring and immediately moving to a retirement community. Adding this stress to the disk change stress was probably not a good idea. Besides, Outlook Express won’t use the Open Office dictionary. I did find the old MS Office disk but I decided to try this as an experiment. So far so good but there are a number of features I don’t like because I am used to the other features. I will keep with it for a while

In conclusion (this is what our pastor says ten minutes before the end of his sermon), you will be faced with changing computers and/or hard drives. As the weatherman and some politicians are fond of saying, “It is not if but when.” I do not recommend my approach. I have spent many hours on it. Plan, plan, plan. Talk to some knowledgeable people and perhaps even search the Internet for help. Good luck.

PS. I sent a copy of this to Gene Barlow who sold me the Acronis program and this is his reply:

“Acronis True Image has a cloning function that will copy your entire hard drive to the replacement hard drive in one easy step. When you are done, you simply place the new drive in the place of your old C: drive and it becomes your new C: drive. This feature of True Image would have had your old hard drive replaced in just a few minutes and with one easy step. Next time you need to do something with hard drives, send me a note and I’ll try to help you do it quickly and with the least work possible.”

Maybe the next time I will ask before! But, that would have transferred all the garbage, as well.

*Courtesy APCUG.*

## To Dual-Core or Not to Dual-Core?

by Jim Sanders

*Editor, North Orange County Computer Club, CA*

If you have been in that should I or shouldn’t I mode for a while, now is a pretty good time to make the plunge. The prices of dual-core processors has come way down in the last year, at the same time the performance has moved several rungs up the ladder. In May, AMD introduced several new high-end Athlon processors. In July, Intel unveiled it’s long anticipated Core 2 Duo (AKA code name Conroe) chips. These are Intel’s long awaited response to being out-gunned by AMD. They have the new Core micro-architecture that reportedly out-performs similar models of AMD chips

The introduction Core 2 Duo chips by Intel started a price war between AMD and Intel. One sage speculated that this was a strategic move by AMD to make it difficult for Intel to dump a huge inventory of older technology chips without taking a loss on them and lower the profit margin on the new chips. What ever the case, the end users win. The latest and greatest chips from both vendors are a lot less expensive than they were just a short while ago and the older chips are available at bargain basement prices.

The technology that is in the new chips from both AMD and Intel has been significantly improved in the last two years. Intel has upgraded it’s NetBurst architecture with the Core and Core 2 Duo technology. AMD has introduced the new AM2 processor socket which, compared to the older 939/940 socket, effectively doubles the processor-to-memory bandwidth with it’s support of DDR2 RAM.

There are a lot of individual engineering pieces or basic building blocks that make up all X86 processors. For years Intel rode the marketing bandwagon that basically touted the “My processor clock is faster than yours, so I am better than you are” concept and that was, more often than not, true. AMD tried to compensate for the fact that their high speed chip technology lagged behind Intel by building more efficient CPUs. There are lots of ways to do that, and doing more things in parallel (at the same time) is one of the ways to build a more efficient CPU. So if the CPU is doing twice as many things at the same time, the processor clock can be half the speed. To pick a number, lets say the AMD chip actually has a clock of 500MHz but it is marketed as a 1000+ and the fine print explains that it “Performs as well as other CPUs that really do have a 1000MHz clock.” A number of people feel that back a few years, AMD was overly optimistic with their “Performs as well as” ratings. The concept however remains true. Over the years, AMD improved the efficiency of their CPUs as well as the clock speeds and the “Performs as well as” ratings more closely matched reality. Once Intel started making chips in the over 3000MHz clock range, they started tripping over the difficulty of making chips run that fast at all, complicated by the huge amount of heat it

created. Acknowledging the writing on the wall, Intel decided they had to start making more efficient chips as well.

The irony of Intel running into the wall that those irrefutable facts of Physics represent is that Intel had to borrow a page from the AMD marketing manual. They had to convince their followers that these new Intel CPUs with the slow clock speeds were getting just as much or more work done as the older chips with the impressive clock speeds. Both companies had to deal with the problems created by CPUs that generated as much heat as a 100 watt light bulb. Along with other problems, the size of the heatsink /fan assembly was getting obscene. The demand for ever increasing com-pute horsepower, however, was relentless. In addition to improving the efficiencies of their processor cores, both companies decided the next logical step was to build two complete CPUs inside one chip and really approach doing twice as many things in the same amount of time. Because Intel still leads AMD in the ability to build chips with tinier features (65nano meter vs. 90nano meter), they can afford to put twice as much cache in their chips and run a higher clock speed and still have a good power consumption rating. By moving the memory controller inside the CPU, AMD has a better multi-core memory scheme. And the technical details, and the debates about them, go on and on.

I am going to try and give you enough of an over-all picture of who is offering what in today's processor world that you can at least determine if you want to try and play in the major leagues or the minor leagues. That is really a daunting task and I hope I come somewhere close to success. One master list of currently offered X86 chips (all of those chips that trace their ancestry back to the original Intel 8086) had nearly 400 different models listed. Most of those are no longer made and ranged in price from \$7.00 for a 600MHz Celeron to \$954 for a Pentium Core 2 Extreme 3.2GHz and from \$17.00 for a 700MHz Athlon Slot-A to \$769.00 for a dual core Athlon FX-62 socket AM2, 2.8GHz processor.

There are a lot of very fast single core CPUs available at very good prices. If you are not an enthusiast user (mostly that means gamer) or heavy into video editing, you may not need one of the dual core units. Some of the single core units are the best values (read cheapest) available and any of them that are rated as being in the 3.0GHz or more category should even run the Vista operating system when it is released. Visit the MS Vista hardware requirement site at <http://www.microsoft.com/technet/windowsvista/evaluate/hardware/vistarp.msp> and get the official, albeit optimistic, definition of the minimum hardware you will need to run Vista. Based on my experience with the September RC1 release of Vista running on an AMD 2800+ with 1Gig of RAM, I would not be happy with a slower machine.

If you are an enthusiastic gamer or hard core videophile, and live next door to Bob Jones, plan on spending close to a thousand dollars for your CPU. Not to mention the dual \$500 video cards and 4Gig of RAM. The first of the three categories of processors that we are going to list is the one that you enthusiasts are interested in.

Those categories are; the Enthusiast Dual Core Processors, Main Stream Dual Cores, and Single Core Processors. There is some overlap in both the performance and price of the high end single core and the low end of the dual core processors. One thing to keep in mind, all of the Dual Core chips are 64 Bit processors and most of the single core processors are not 64 Bit.

### **Enthusiast Dual Core Processors**

For the AMD processors you have: Athlon 64 FX-62, Athlon X2 5000+.

For the Intel processors you have: Core 2 Extreme X6800, Core 2 Duo E6700, E6600.

Because Intel and AMD are constantly jostling each other to claim title to King Of The Hill, it changes hands. For many months, through June of 2006, it was AMD. Then, in July 2006, Intel reclaimed the title. For almost anyone except the well heeled enthusiast with a social need to be on the Bleeding Edge, any of these processors would make a great system. As has been the case for years, the price curve for the last three to four speed ranges is geometric in nature. The 2.4GHz E6600 is about 40% of the price of X6800 and provides about 60% of the performance. The same is true for the AMD pricing.

### **Main Stream Dual Cores**

For AMD—Athlon 64 X2 AM2 4600, 4200, 4000, 3800, Athlon 64 X2 S939 4800, 4600, 4400, 4200, 3800

For Intel—Core 2 Duo E6400, Pentium Extreme Edition 965 & 955, Pentium D 960, 950, 945, 930, 915, 840, 830, 820, 805

On the AMD line you can easily see just one of the many things that can be confusing about the different designations for AMD's dual core processors. There is an Athlon 64 X2 AM2 4600 and an Athlon 64 X2 S939 4600. The only visible difference is that one says AM2 and the other says S939. As explained above, the AM2 designation is for the new DDR2 RAM CPUs. AMD uses two different speeds of DDR2 RAM. The DDR2-800 is used with the Enthusiast CPUs and the DDR2-667 is used with the Main Stream CPUs. Faster memory will, in general, improve through-put and is most noticeable on memory intensive applications.

Another consideration when trying to decide between the new AM2 socket and the older S939, is the supply and cost of memory. Production of DDR RAM is being reduced while production of DDR2 RAM is being RAMped up. That means that the price of DDR is going up and the price of DDR2 is going down. You may have noticed the price of the older PC100 /133 RAM is almost double the price of PC2700 DDR RAM and I have seen a price for a 1GB DDR2 that was less than the price for the PC3200 1 GB DDR Ram.

Strangely, at the price top of the Intel Main Stream Dual Core line category are the older technology Dual Core models:

D 965 DC Extreme Edition (3.73GHz/775pin PLGA /1066FSB /2X2MB L2 Cache Dual Core) \$1075

D 955 DC Extreme Edition (3.46GHz/775pin PLGA /1066FSB /2X2MB L2 Cache Dual Core) \$995

D 960 DC Standard Edition (3.6GHz/775pin PLGA /800FSB /2X2MB L2 Cache Dual Core) \$349.

The E6400 Core 2 Duo Processor (2.13GHz/775pin LGA 1066FSB 2X1MB L2 Cache) at \$245 is the better buy. This is a good example of the seemingly weird pricing that occurs with bleeding edge CPUs.

The D955 is \$646 more than the D960 which has a faster clock but a slower FSB (Front Side Bus). Even stranger is that the price for the older technology D 955 is more than the fastest Core 2 Duo chip. The oldest technology dual core chips from Intel are the D800 series.

### Single Core Processors

After looking at the long list of single core processors that are clocked at 3GHz or greater, I changed my mind about listing them. Instead, I will just repeat the advice about computing needs and price. If you are not into gaming or a videophile, they can make a fine system. I am still using an Intel 3.1GHz P4 with 512Meg of expensive Rambus RAM to produce the Orange Bytes and it works fine most of the time.

The future of computing is going to be 64 Bits for a long time even though it is just now starting to gain traction. Since that is true, if you are going to upgrade at all, going with a dual core 64 Bit CPU is the only thing that make sense if you take a long term perspective. Same thing is true for DDR2 RAM, PCI-Express video, and SATA2 hard disks. So the sweet spot today is a system based on a Athlon 64 X2 AM2 4200, or an Intel Core 2 Duo E6400 and a good 256Meg PCI Express video card, everything else, your choice.

*Courtesy APCUG.*

**E-Mail: Be Less Annoying  
Everyone—including Bill Gates—  
can use e-mail more efficiently.  
And learn how not to do  
really dumb things.**

by Steve Bass

*PC World; Author, PC Annoyances.*

I've come to the conclusion that everyone needs to take a test before being able to use e-mail. No, I'm serious. You have to take an e-mail test. If you pass, you get an e-mail license. Proudly hang it on the wall. Screw up—send lots of messages with blank subject lines, say—and your license is pulled. You go on probation and attend mandatory remedial e-mail training.

Why am I being so hardnosed? I have a laundry list of ways people drive me wild with e-mail. I wrote about a few in "Get Relief From Annoying E-Mail," my July, 2006 "Hassle-Free PC" column: [http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,125767,tk,nl\\_sbhow,00.asp](http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,125767,tk,nl_sbhow,00.asp) But I ran out of room in the print column, so here are some more tips, including how to stop being obnoxious with your e-mail.

### To Whom Am I Speaking?

Sometimes I have absolutely no idea who's sending me an e-mail, and this is a problem. I mean, I'll say something to another guy that I wouldn't dream of uttering to a lady my mother's age. [Sorry, Mom.]

- Don't share. If you and your live-in (spouse, significant other, whatever) use the same e-mail address, stop it. Extra e-mail addresses are free and consolidating e-mails into one mailbox is confusing the dickens out of me because I never know who I'm writing to.
- Use a signature line. Make life easier for me: Add a signature line with your name and e-mail address using the hot-linked mailto: [steve\\_bass@pcworld.com](mailto:steve_bass@pcworld.com) format. It's easier to reply just to you if your e-mail was sent to many people; it's also great for when I forward your e-mail—the new recipient doesn't have to cut and paste your address.
- Use your real name. Don't get me wrong, I love your [beerbelly49832@yourisp.com](mailto:beerbelly49832@yourisp.com). The problem is, I haven't a clue who you are. Be a champ and add your real name in the signature line. And a favor? Don't use initials.

### Do I Need to Read This Right Now?

Look, I'm a very busy man (or so I tell my wife and editor), and I get tons of e-mail every day. I need to do e-mail triage--you know, scanning the inbox for the hottest messages and reading them first. But honestly, I can't do this with most e-mail I get. So here's what I recommend:

- The subject is... Tell me, clearly and briefly, what your message is about in the subject line. I delete all messages with vague subjects—Hi, Hello, or worse, an empty subject line (oh, do I hate that!). And make sure you don't trigger my spam filter by using all capital letters, exclamation points, and words you typically see in junk e-mail, like “free,” “spam,” “mortgage,” or “Viagra.”
- Exec summary. Give me a one- or a two-sentence overview at the start of your e-mail. “I have a complicated issue,” you might start out, “involving a Dell, memory cards, and SP2. If you have time to help, I've provided details below.”
- Save time. Use [NM] or [EOM] (they stand for “no message” or “end of message”) in the subject line as a shorthand way of responding with a simple “thank you” or an acknowledgment. This helps reduce the number of e-mails I need to open; many of the people at PC World use the trick and it's increased everyone's productivity.

### And Your Point Is?

Once I actually open an e-mail, I need to get the point quickly so I can reply to the sender if necessary, then move on to the next one. But lots of the missives I get are, how to say it?, a mess.

- Use paragraphs. Obvious, right? Nope. I get e-mails with one long paragraph the length of the Gettysburg Address. Break it up into three or four smaller ones. By the way, my limit is three or four paragraphs; after that I start dozing. [Editor's note: I noticed.] And send a test message to a buddy to make sure your e-mail program isn't removing paragraph returns.
- By the numbers. If you have more than one question or point, number them. It makes replying a whole lot easier if I can refer to the numbers.
- Subject shorthand. When you reply or forward an e-mail, it's helpful if you stick one or two descriptive words in front of the original subject so the recipient has an idea of what's in store. For instance, I use tags such as “Update,” “Confirmation,” or “Really Dumb.”

### Miscellaneous Gripes

Think I'm done kvetching? Nope, no such luck.

- Attachment don'ts. Don't attach anything executable—period. If on the off chance I've asked you to send a program, stick it into a zipped file.
- Keep it private. Don't reply to a mailing list with “great idea” or “I agree.” Reply privately instead. Select a small part of the original message for context's sake.
- Stay plain, Jane. Avoid fancy formatting, gaudy colors, and flowery backgrounds. Two reasons: first, what's cool on your monitor looks like hell on mine; and second, that extra coding increases the download time for folks with slower connections.
- Dear [InsertName]. Private note to PR flacks: If you can't use mail merge properly, don't.

### Be Less Annoying, Take 2: Mail Lists

I really struck a nerve with readers of my newsletter when I talking about annoying e-mails. My inbox was flooded with a bucket of e-mail (most of it not very annoying). So I figured I'd follow up with advice on good mail list etiquette. But before I do, here are some e-mail gaffes that drive readers crazy.



“Stop sending chain e-mails to me—no matter what the cause (little Timmy needs your old Christmas cards to live, canola oil is poison, tell someone you love them, whatever...). While I find them annoying in general, they are even worse when they are the only time you contact me. I’d rather be dropped from your little list. Think for a minute: Do I ever send you such drivel, or respond to it?” –Chuck

“Always use the subject line. I automatically delete any e-mail without a subject line.” –Linda

“Check spellings. Don’t mix subjects in one e-mail.” –Arvind

“Phone home. For conversations that require significant two-way dialog and do not require documenting, use a phone or IM. Do not send an e-mail asking me to lunch in 30 minutes.” –Jack

“Stop using those fancy script fonts! They are near impossible to read. And please, no more purple, orange, green font colors. It’s an e-mail, not a work of art!” –Mark

Now, on to some mail list etiquette. If you’re new to mail lists, or even if you’re not, you can learn how to make your messages easier to read, more useful, and definitely less annoying to others.

## When Replying to Messages

1. Don’t hit Reply All for every message.

Avoid responses the entire list won’t find useful. For instance, don’t reply to the entire list with “thanks,” “good idea,” or “I’ll try it!” Instead, reply directly to the person who just helped you.

Unfortunately, on many lists it’s easy to inadvertently reply to everyone instead of an individual. Take a sec and check the return address before hitting Send. The sender’s e-mail address is usually near the top of the message.

Another tip: Insert OFFLIST at the start of your subject line when replying to an individual. That way the recipient will know you’re not replying to the entire list.

2. Remove the extra stuff.

When replying, it takes seconds to snip extraneous junk and leave only essential portions of the previous message. There’s rarely a need to repeat the entire thread, and doing so often discourages people from reading your message.

No matter what you do, get rid of the stuff that’s automatically inserted at the bottom of every message—the “how to unsubscribe” junk—that clutters up every message.

3. Keep the subject line short.

If you’re viewing messages in digest form, the subject is something lengthy, like, “[Computing] Digest 07-13-06, 16 messages.” When you reply to a message, it’s essential (mandatory, really) that you change the subject to the message topic. Then remove everything from the digest message except the topic and your response.

4. Restrain yourself.

It’s not necessary to weigh in on every topic, especially on very busy lists. Consider limiting yourself to one or two messages a day.

## When Starting a New Thread

1. Brevity is the soul of wit.

Just as with e-mail, consider tackling just one topic or issue per message, and keep your messages short. Long messages (more than, say, three or four paragraphs) are difficult to read; long paragraphs are equally difficult to plow through.

2. Use an informative signature line.

Keep your signature line short, say, two or three lines. Usually your name is adequate, though some lists (such as one I’m on about camper vans) want a city and state. The point is to avoid sticking in anything nonessential.

3. Stay on topic.

If it’s a computing list, send messages about computing; ditto for a cooking list, or any other special-interest group. Most importantly, avoid political messages and jokes.

This column originally appeared in Bass’s PC World newsletter, Tips and Tweaks. Copyright 2006 Steve Bass and PC World. Read Bass’s blog at <http://snurl.com/BassBlog> and his previous newsletters and print columns at: <http://snipurl.com/tweaks>. Subscribe to his weekly newsletter at <http://snurl.com/homeoffice>.

*Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World, a 23 year veteran of PIBMUG, and a founding member of APCUG. He's also the author of PC Annoyances: How to Fix the Most Annoying Things about Your Personal Computer, O'Reilly Press. It's available on Amazon at dirt cheap prices. <<http://snurl.com/annoyances>> Courtesy APCUG.*

## Windows XP:

### Remote Assistance

by Dick Maybach  
Member of the Brookdale  
Computer User Group, NJ

**W**ith Remote Assistance a tutor can see a student's Windows desktop and operate his or her computer over the Internet."

Because of BCUG members' interest and experience with PCs, many of us are asked for help by friends and family. Often, those seeking help live across town or across the country, and it is inconvenient to visit them. Fortunately, Windows XP (both the Home and Pro version) provides a solution. Using its Remote Assistance feature, a tutor can see a student's Windows desktop and operate his or her computer over the Internet. This allows you to assist someone almost anywhere in the world. Remote Assistance supports an audio link and live file transfers. During the session, you can speak with the person you are helping, and exchange files between the two PCs as easily as you can move them between directories.

To use Remote Assistance, both parties must be using Windows XP, either Home or Pro. The operation will be smoother if both have high-speed Internet access, but this is not required. Also, both parties should have microphones or combination microphone-earphone headsets, which are available inexpensively from many computer hardware dealers. Without this, you will have to juggle a telephone during the whole session or use text chat, both of which are inconvenient. Finally, Universal plug-and play must be enabled on your hardware router, if you have one. This appears to be the default for those used in homes, but if you are behind your company's, college's, or some other organization's firewall, you may not be able to use Remote Assistance. UPnP does entail a small security risk, which many organizations won't tolerate.

It will also be helpful to use MSN Messenger to set up the session. Without this, you will have to use e-mail, which will slow down the dialog immensely. (As a bonus, Messenger will allow you to make free audio or video calls anywhere in the world.) Both the Messenger software and service are free. You can download the software from Microsoft. (The fastest way to find the correct download page is to do a Google search for "MSN Messenger". During the installation process, you will be led through the process of obtaining a Messenger account.)

XP enables Remote Assistance requests by default; however, check to be sure that this is so. The error message if it isn't is not helpful. (Right-click on My Computer, select Properties, select Remote, check Allow Remote Assistance invitations to be sent ..., select Advanced, check Allow this computer to be controlled ... While you are here, reduce the time that requests are active to something like four hours; the 30-day default is far too long.) Allowing Remote Assistance requests does add a small security risk; I recommend that you disable it when you aren't using it.

Use the following procedure to start a session. (It assumes you use MSN Messenger.)

- Both parties start MSN Messenger and sign in.
- The student requests assistance (Start » Help and Support » Invite a friend to connect to your computer with Remote Assistance » Invite some to help you » select the friend from the Messenger list » select Invite)
- The tutor accepts the request.

Both can now see the student's desktop, but only the student can control it; that is, the tutor's mouse and keyboard do not affect the student's desktop. For many problems, this is all that is needed.

Once the session has begun, you can control the interaction.

- If you are using a high-speed connection, tell the program so. (Click Settings and check High Quality Connection.)
- To start a voice conversation, click Start Talking. Again, one party requests and the other accepts the link. This, of course, requires a microphone or a headset at each PC. You can use instant messaging for conversations, but this is much slower than talking and can be confusing.

- The tutor can request control by clicking Take Control. If the student accepts, both now control the student's desktop. This allows the tutor, for example, to demonstrate the correct procedures and to make changes in the student's configuration.
- Either party can send a file, by clicking Send a File.
- Hitting Esc allows either party to revoke control, kill the voice link, or stop the session.

Remote Assistance provides a very valuable tool that allows PC users to help each other without leaving their homes, but it hasn't received the recognition it deserves.

## The Changing Face of Digital Photography Or, What to Buy in a dSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflex) Camera

by Jerry Schneir

*Los Angeles Computer Society*

When Canon first introduced their dSLR—the Digital Rebel (EOS-300D) in 2003, it was an earthshaking event insofar as digital photography went. They broke the \$1000 barrier and allowed rank amateurs to enjoy (and to be frustrated) by dSLR. Up to that time digital SLRs were priced well above \$1500 and if you wanted something a little bit more advanced, it could easily cost \$3,000 or more, and more was the operative word.

Then along came Nikon, Minolta, Olympus and Pentax with dSLR cameras all priced south of \$1,000. Now, be prepared for dSLR cameras just slightly more than \$500 and with features that rival their semi-professional big brothers, and in some cases features their big brothers do not have, such as image stabilization built into the camera itself and not the lens.

Last year and this we have seen mergers and cooperative efforts between big camera and electronic companies. Look at Sony taking over Konica-Minolta and producing the Alpha 100 (priced at \$999); Olympus and Panasonic merging technologies and producing a whole line of very different cameras at a wide variety of prices (\$699 all the way to \$1999 for the Panasonic). Then Pentax /Samsung introduced a whole range of cameras from \$400 to \$800 (street price with and without lens).

And now, along comes Canon with their new 10MP Digital Rebel XT<sub>i</sub> with a host of interesting features at a very attractive price of \$799. Nikon also announced their new D80. Other lower priced models are sure to follow. If one is to believe all the hoopla, digital SLRs are selling big time and most manufacturers think they will outsell the point and shoot variety (those with 4x or less of optical zoom) within a few years. And now comes the dilemma for those who still have their film SLRs and collections of lenses, what to do, what camera to buy?

Just because you have three or four good lenses for your SLR doesn't justify buying the same brand just so you can use your existing lenses. First off, you may NOT be able to use your existing lenses in a digital camera of the same brand (lens mount). If some of your existing lenses are third party lenses, i.e., lenses made by Sigma, Tamron, Tokina, etc. they may or may not work well or at all with the digital SLR version. Sigma lenses from 5+ years ago have a tendency to produce the dreaded ERR099 message when placed on a Canon digital SLR. These lenses must be updated by Sigma. A new chip has to be installed in the lens. Unfortunately, Sigma may not have the chips needed so you may be out of luck. If you are buying a camera because you have lenses that will fit it, make sure they work. Bring ALL of your lenses to the store and try them in the camera, turn the camera on and go through all the shooting modes.

And then there is the "focal length multiplier" problem. On most Canon cameras the multiplier is 1.6. Thus a 50mm normal film lens becomes an 80mm lens, a 75-200mm zoom lens becomes a 120-320mm lens, and a nice wide-angle 24-50 zoom becomes a not so interesting 38-80mm zoom. On most Pentax and Nikon brands the multiplier is 1.5 while on the Olympus/Panasonic the factor is 2x.

This writer thinks that Panasonic misread the photo market with the \$1999 camera. I think we shall see a much more attractively priced camera from them under \$1000, probably around \$800. Panasonic as well as Sony have a strong vested interest in not producing SLR cameras in the \$500-\$800 range since they already make a number of very nice SLR style cameras with large zooms and real dSLRs would cannibalize that market. Canon and Nikon both make very expensive image stabilized (shake reduction) lenses and may be loath to produce a camera with built in image stabilization such as being done by Sony, Olympus/Panasonic, and Pentax/Samsung.

So, what is a prospective buyer to do? In my case it was easy. I had already sold all my film and dSLR cameras along with their lenses (e-Bay) so I was starting from scratch. I knew that I wanted image stabilization (I.S.). I had tried it on the Canon S2 IS and loved it. I also knew that Pentax/Samsung was bringing out an image stabilization system based upon sensor compensation rather than the lens. The Sony/Minolta system is similar. This meant that all the lenses for those cameras became image stabilized, you could easily get by with far less expensive lenses and the total package would not break the bank.

Then there is the question of overkill. Do you buy a camera with features you will rarely if ever use, or even have occasion to use? Is it really necessary to have a camera shoot 5 frames per second over one that only does 2.5? What about 10MP versus only 6MP? How many shots can you get in a burst, 2.5, 5 or 10, and how many are really needed? There is very little actual difference in the images taken with a \$3,000 and a \$500 camera. Do you need a camera with a 150,000 MTBF (mean time between failure) shutter cycle versus one with only an 80,000? The \$500 to \$800 cameras available today easily rival the \$5,000 cameras used three or four years ago, and in many respects they are better.

In my case, I read the ads and found a Pentax \*1stDL (6.1MP) on sale at Samy's with a boatload of extras, very usable and worthwhile extras, extras I would have bought in any case. The camera was advertised for \$549 (including 18-55 lens) and had a \$100 rebate from Pentax which brought the cost down to \$449. The freebies (SLIK tripod, 1 GB chip, 300 digital photos, and case) were worth about \$150, so my net cost was about \$300. No, the camera doesn't have I.S. but Pentax/Samsung just introduced their K100D /Digimax GX-1S (6.1MP—\$600-\$700 street price) which does have I.S. and will soon have a K10D (10MP) also with I.S. The DL will become my backup camera when I buy the I.S. version. Of course, should I decide to, I could probably sell the DL for close to what I have invested in it, but in the meantime I have had the pleasure (and some minor frustration) of using it, a really nice dSLR.

*Courtesy APCUG.*

## Snapfire Plus—Corel's Image Editor

by Robert Du Vernay

*Houston Area League of PC Users, Inc.*

**S**napfireSnapfire Plus is a new digital image processor based on Paint Shop Pro. It is a Windows XP product and you must have SP2 installed and be current, or you may have problems installing DirectX 9.0c, which is a necessary component. Also, Quick Time 7 or greater, use 1024 x 768 minimum and IE 6 or higher. It will also run on Win 2K. There are two flavors: Snapfire (lite and free) and Snapfire Plus. My install went flawlessly after updating.

Snapfire Plus has some very handsome, interesting and easy to use tools:

1. Blemish removal tool, much like the clone tool of PaintShop Pro, only a bit easier for the average person who wants to fix a teenage problem once in a blue moon; and
2. Red Eye tool, which is virtually fool proof, but you must know the color of the eye; and
3. Teeth Whitener, you can save someone a lot of money and time at the dentist; and
4. Suntan Brush, again you got to know something of the subject!

Very impressed with the engineering of these toys, clean, clear and simple in their application. Please don't misunderstand, this is not the Paint Shop Pro application, but for basic photo clean, crop and fix it; Yes, it is impressive!

You can Re-Size and you can Straighten a photo! If your digital camera supports and codes your photos correctly, Snapfile Plus will automatically rotate to Portrait from Landscape orientation. Quick Print allows you to choose form a variety of automatic layouts.



Picture Organization is weak. But exhibiting the EXIF & IPTC standards is very nice. There is a Picture Finder option, which appears to be an unfinished work! If I want to paint a series of photos, I have to manually search all the folders presented! Not good.

Snapfile Plus does a very nice SlideShow thing, which you can very easily couple with a MP3 selection. It provides transition effects, controllable duration, and Motion effect for the SlideShow project and it Synchronizes with the push of a button, and saves just an easily to FILE but not directly to a CD-R, which I found disappointing. There is an option to save your SlideShow project to a VIDEO (AVI format), but that did not work for me. If you want to send this file; remember that the recipient needs to download and install Snapfire to play the slide show. Referring to the first paragraph on the requirements...Aunt Tilly may not be able to see your slide show, unless she is current.

There are many other features, like Collages, Picture frames and effects, Ordering Photo copies on-line. E-mail your photos or slide show. Please remember most people do not have broadband connection.

Customer support is limited to one free 800 call to a real person There is a Corel Knowledge Base [www.corel.com/knowledgebase](http://www.corel.com/knowledgebase) unlimited. The Help functions in the program are limited.

All this being said, the product does do what it purports to do, with the exception of the AVI video. There are areas where it can be improved. The other thing is the lack of a native and lossless format, especially since this product is based on PaintShop Pro, which has it own. Snapfile Plus.

*Robert Du Vernay is a HAL-PC member and chief instructor for CD Burning for Dummies and the DVD Burning for Dummies classes and ditto for the Digital Imaging class. He can be reached at [rpd@hal-pc.org](mailto:rpd@hal-pc.org). Courtesy APCUG.*



**Q.** Maybe this is a crazy idea, but wouldn't one way to stop spam be to reply to it and sound interested in whatever they're pitching or place a phony order? If enough people did this, the outfits sending spam would be inundated with fake requests and stop spamming. Does that make any sense to you, Mr. M.?

**A.** You may be comforted to know that there is a semi-organized group/subculture of individuals who do respond to spam, an activity known as "spam-baiting." But while the idea sounds good in theory, if you start responding to all the vitamin, Viagra, mortgage, and adult-type spam received, you're going to be the recipient of even more spam. Replying to spam lets the sender know that their message reached a valid email address and it was actually viewed by a "live body." That makes your email address more valuable and it will be sold to other spammers at a premium.

I applaud your creative thinking, but when all is said and done, it's best not to respond to spam in any manner, and that includes not clicking links that say, "Click here to be removed from our mailing list."

**Q.** I want to build a Web site, but I spoke with one company that wanted \$12,000 to build it. I don't have that kind of money, so what would you suggest? I just want a simple Web site, nothing fancy.

**A.** One of easiest ways to construct a Web site is to use a service such as GoDaddy ([www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com)), Depending how sophisticated you want your site to be, prices start as low as \$9.95/month. You can do everything from registering your domain name, to creating your Web site, to gaining exposure for your site through GoDaddy. For starters, I'd suggest visiting the GoDaddy Help Center at <http://tinyurl.com/ce8hd>, and reviewing their Web Site Builder information at <http://tinyurl.com/dnca6>. You'll also find contact information for telephone and email support, both of which are excellent. Other popular build-your-own Web site services are Homestead.com and Build YourSite.com.

**Q.** I have a lot of bookmarked Web sites that I know don't work anymore. Is there any way to find out which sites are working and which ones aren't, without having to visit each site individually?

**A.** AM-DeadLink ([www.aignes.com/deadlink.htm](http://www.aignes.com/deadlink.htm)) is an excellent little utility that does exactly what you want: It not only detects dead links, but it also detects duplicate links. AM-DeadLink is free and works with Internet Explorer, Netscape, Firefox, and Opera.

A Holiday Gift from Mr. Modem! The perfect gift for any computer user has arrived! For the first time in the history of mankind, I have carefully—dare I say lovingly—selected more than 1400 of the most interesting, informative, and entertaining Web sites and included them on my destined-to-become-a-classic,

Mr. Modem's Web CD-ROM. Sites are segregated into 19 categories, ranging from Art, Music, Literature and Film to Wining and Dining. The CD (for Windows PCs) retails for \$19.95, but as a loyal reader of this publication (you are a loyal reader, aren't you?) your price is only \$12.95, including free shipping and handling. To receive this special discount, simply enter "1206" in the Promotional Code field when placing your order online. Within 24 hours, an autographed copy will be on its way to you or your giftee, making this the best holiday yet! (Can there ever be too much hyperbole? I think not.) For more information or to view an excerpt from the CD, visit <http://tinyurl.com/hvnsn>.

## Mr. Modem's DME (Don't Miss 'Em)

### Sites of the Month

#### Brand Names Search Engine

Have you ever tried to locate the "official" Web site for a product and couldn't find it? With this search engine, you can search more than 15,000 company and product Web sites in 11 categories, from Celebrities to Vehicles and Transportation. [www.visiobrand.com](http://www.visiobrand.com)

#### Self Check-Up

Here you'll find 15 online health assessments and health calculators designed to assist you in achieving your health and fitness goals. Features include two body-fat estimators (what, one body-fat estimator wouldn't be distressing enough?), an unintentionally hilarious Ideal Weight Calculator, and the ever-popular Waist-to-Hip Ratio calculator. I'm thinking this site might be a candidate for this year's "Sites-We-Could-Live-Without" award. [www.selfcheckup.com](http://www.selfcheckup.com)

## The New, the Best, and the Worst

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

## Spintronics

No one, fifty years ago, could have foreseen or even imagined how the advent of evermore powerful computers would revolutionize science, technology, commerce, and communications. Vastly improved algorithms and architectural structures have been important, but the crucial factor has been the ability to cram ever smaller and more complex circuits on a semiconductor chip. That ability is now approaching a limit posed by atomic size and increasing influence of quantum effects. We may have to learn how to do more with what we already have if we want to further improve computers so that they'll be able to predict the weather or model the Big Bang, to mention just a few challenges.

From an electro-mechanical standpoint every digital computer, no matter how primitive or advanced, consists of on-off electrical switches connected in a circuit. In semi-conductor-based systems the binary 0's and 1's are represented by electrons that carry a negative charge, and missing electrons, called "holes," with positive charge. That is simple and straightforward enough.

### But wait, there is more...

There can be no electricity without magnetism. They are like heads and tails, yin and yang, up and down. Electrons, the elemental carriers of electricity, also are elementary magnets. You can, very much simplified, think of them as spinning spheres of electricity, tiny electromagnets in other words. Depending on the direction of spin, the magnetism points up or down. Technology making use of the magnetic properties of electrons is often referred to as "spintronics." So far, computers ignore the magnetic state of the electrons, but what if we learned to use it for additional information storage?

About 50 years ago scientists learned how to manipulate and record the magnetic properties of electrons and certain atomic nuclei to examine the composition of substances, using a technique called nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR). Eventually that technique was extended to examine the characteristics of human tissue. The name was changed to Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to avoid the term "nuclear" with its negative connotations, although it has nothing to do with damaging radiation or nuclear energy in this case.

More recently, in the late 90's, scientists at IBM learned how to use spintronics to make very small, highly sensitive read-heads for use with computer hard drives. The sensors consist of a microscopic sliver of semiconductor sandwiched between two thin magnetic layers. The top layer is a permanent, "hard" magnet, but the bottom layer is a soft magnet that changes magnetic orientation easily as it passes over the magnetic regions on the disk. If both magnets in the head are oriented in the same direction, electrons align magnetically in the same direction and move easily through the semiconductor. If the magnetic layers point in opposite directions, the electron spin is reversed as it moves through the semiconductor, affecting its mobility and therefore the amount of current. Clever, isn't it? Practically all newer hard drives use that technology now.

If computers could be designed to use both the electrical charge and the magnetic state of electrons, each unit of information could have four different quaternary values (0,1,2,and 3) instead of the two binary values (0 and 1) currently used, resulting in greatly increased performance. But the semiconductors must be magnetic to recognize the magnetic 'up' or 'down' state of electrons. Magnetic semiconductors are few and far between, and so far none remain magnetic at room temperature.

If the material problems can be solved, we may be looking at future computers that are not only more powerful, but also easier to use. Because magnetic semiconductors retain their logic states without power, systems could be instant-on and use less power. Also, principal functions of a computer, such as logic operations, communication between circuits, and data storage, could be integrated in a single material, resulting in smaller and faster computers with high data-storage capacities and fast performance.

Making spintronic computers possible depends on chemists formulating magnetic semiconductors able to support the technology. Much progress is being made, but it will take a while longer. Not surprisingly, this article was based on an article in Chemical and Engineering News, Aug. 28, 2006.

### **Cookies With Gas?**

Would you believe Internet via the gas meter? A San Diego-area start-up company, Nethercomm, claims to have developed technology to send broadband and TV services through the underground natural gas pipes. A converter box attached to your gas meter receives the signals and sends them to your computer or TV set. The headline of the article in USA Today (9/11/06) says it all: "Gas-line broadband a pipe dream?" (Thanks, Duane Morrow).

### **A Linux Epiphany**

I wasn't going to mention Linux this month, but... James Derk, our local computer guru known for his syndicated weekly computer columns for Scripps-Howard News Service, has been pooh-poohing desktop Linux for years. Guess what. His column in the Evansville Press and Courier of September 18, 2006 is headed "It may be time to give Linux another try." He specifically mentions the Ubuntu Linux distribution which, he writes, is "...painfully easy to get up and running ... without spending a dime." Derk keeps his columns at [www.cyberdads.com/blog.html](http://www.cyberdads.com/blog.html) You can also find them on the Scripps Howard Web site at [www.shns.com/](http://www.shns.com/) under Columns ... Business, Finance, and Technology ... Compute.

### **Reap What You Sow!**

I've been getting bored with being a one-man Linux SIG in the SW Indiana PC Users Group. I suggested to our new Region 6 Advisor of the Association of PC User Groups (APCUG), Jerry Gillette, that APCUG might be able to sponsor a way to exchange news and information between Linux aficionados scattered amongst its member Groups. He passed the word, and the suggestion was accepted with enthusiasm. APCUG now carries a new Conference (section) on its Web Board, APCUG.linux. Of course, the Conference requires a moderator, and who do you think got "volunteered?" Right, "c'est moi" said the fool. Oh well, one must reap what one sows. Access the APCUG Web Board at [webboard.apcug.org](http://webboard.apcug.org) and leave a message!

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.



## From The DealsGuy

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

**M**y wife and I decided to treat ourselves to another cruise and this time we were not disappointed. We chose Holland America's MS Volendam for a ten day southern Caribbean cruise and, unlike our experience on HA's Zaandam, we were happy with the way the Volendam did things. Actually, we chose it mostly for the price, but also because it was Holland America since Carnival had some slightly lower prices for that date. Our only complaint might have been poor table service at our dinner seating, although they improved toward the end of the cruise. While we've had better food on cruise ships, the food on the Volendam was not bad.



I liked the ice cream bar that was open at certain times each day offering four different flavors of hard ice cream, one sherbet and one soft ice cream daily with all the trimmings, and plenty of other deserts. All over the ship were stands holding sterilization cream for your hands. Most of them were used voluntarily, but when you entered the dining room, an attendant squirted it into your hand as you entered. I was impressed with their efforts to prevent sickness, and I washed my hands quite frequently.

The entertainment was top notch each evening, always something to look forward to. There was only one evening without entertainment, but that was the big barbecue party by the pool, complete with the ice sculpturing, and the food was great. Even our cabin was a nice size and had a king sized bed, a nice sofa and chair. That ship had the largest library I have seen, although it was not a really large ship. The captain said the Volendam had been refurbished nine months ago.

I signed up for time at the Internet Café, but working with their machines was a challenge considering the mouse usually didn't work well and the small curser was hard to follow on any computer I tried. They occasionally had discounts on the service. I bought 100 minutes for \$55. I asked if the Internet service would be a freebie when I took enough cruises, using Princess lines as a comparison. I was told no, and that the free Internet service would soon be ending on Princess Lines since this ISP was taking over as their service provider. Some folks found free Internet service at a couple of ports, but I only found out about it on the ship that night.

Something of interest was that Sprint (our Cell phone provider) had told us we would be able to use our cell phone in the Bahamas and the US Virgin Islands if we set it to roam, but we were surprised when our phones found the Sprint Network when we turned them on in St. Thomas (a US Virgin Island). We didn't have to worry about any roaming charges and had a full signal. A friend had asked us to bring him back some duty-free liquor. Since we knew nothing about prices for it, we were able to call our friend while inside the store in St. Thomas to confirm the best prices. Carrying the heavy bottles around while shopping was another story though.

### Deal Reminder

The Medistick deal should still be good this month so don't wait any longer. Click on <http://www.medistick.ch/en/contact/> and mention the DealsGuy column in the 'com-ments' area.

Dave Whittle's discount on the Lenova Laptops may still be good. Simply call Lenovo's user group inside sales rep, Isaac Williams, directly for help in configuring your system, or to get answers to your questions. Call 1-877- 338-4465, Option 1, Extension 6322.

I read an interesting article in Information Week magazine about a sophisticated attack on E-Trade and TD Ameritrade that resulted from identity theft. You might find it interesting. <http://www.informationweek.com/showArticle.jhtml;jsessionid=QHSZ4AFSOS4R4QSNLPCCKHSCJUNN2JVN?articleD=193402954&queryText=Larry+Greenemeier>

I haven't tried the items below and descriptions are in their own words, so do your homework if anything interests you.

### Another Tool For Restoring

#### Your MS Office Files

Smart PC Solutions Inc. announces the release of Smart Data Recovery, the newest freeware utility to restore MS Office documents, photos, music and many other types of files. You just type a path, and Smart



Data Recovery will search for deleted files and folders automatically. Once Smart Data Recovery finds erased files, it shows their name, date, time and attributes.

Smart Data Recovery works with different data storage devices, such as hard disk drives (IDE, ATA, SATA and SCSI), flash cards, multimedia cards, USB drives, PC cards, memory sticks, secure digital cards and floppy disks. It handles zip files and files on your digital camera. It also restores all files and folders on a disk drive that, according to the Windows notifications, can't be accessed. The utility supports FAT, FAT16, FAT32 and NTFS, and is compatible with Microsoft Windows NT/2000/XP/2003. The program can also remove the data related to deleted files by just clicking the "Wipe" button. Therefore, nobody will be able to recover your personal information and use it in their own interests. The program has a multilingual interface that supports English, German, Spanish, French and Italian.

Smart Data Recovery is free at <[http://www.smartpctools.com/data\\_recovery](http://www.smartpctools.com/data_recovery)>, but here is a special offer! Smart PC Solutions, Inc. offers user group members a 50% discount on their other software products. It says FACUG there, but all UG members can order. Check out the other utilities by Smart PC Solutions, Inc. at the company's web site.

<<http://www.smartpctools.com/products>>

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

50% discount URL:

<<http://www.smartpctools.com/FACUG.html>>

Mailing Address: Smart PC Solutions, Inc., 901 N. Pitt Str., Suite 325, Alexandria, VA 22314, USA

## Help For Your PIM

Copy2calendar minimizes the time and effort to create a calendar entry in a personal information manager such as Microsoft Outlook, Lotus Notes or Palm Desktop. When you receive an email with the date and time of an upcoming event, you just highlight the text, press Ctrl+C twice, and that's it! A new calendar entry is created. Copy2calendar recognizes all the myriad of formats of date and time that a human reader understands. It accommodates European (day/month/year) and American (month/day/year) conventions. Copy2calendar is able to find date and time specifications in 13 languages including English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, and Swedish.

You can easily extract date and time from a wide variety of sources: mail software, web browser, office applications, and with Copy2 calendar, you will never forget or confuse the time of an event. Copy2calendar runs under Windows 2000/Windows XP. It is free for noncommercial use, but registration on Loqui Soft is required. Licenses for commercial use are available at \$24.95 (USD). A fully functional 30-day free evaluation version of Copy2 alendar is available from <[http://LoquiSoft.com/copy2calendar\\_setup.exe](http://LoquiSoft.com/copy2calendar_setup.exe)> (1.6Mb)

Product page link:

<<http://loquisoft.com/copy2calendar/>>

E-mail: <[werner.noska@loquisoft.com](mailto:werner.noska@loquisoft.com)>

Company website:

<<http://loquisoft.com/index.php?lang=en& page=&sec>>

## How About A FREE Plugin

### For PhotoShop!

SibCode has released the newest version of Icon Plugin for Photoshop. This plug-in enhances Adobe Photoshop with an ability to export and import Windows icons (.ico). The use of the plug-in eliminates the need for intermediate files and additional icon editors. In addition to Adobe Photoshop, the plug-in can work with Elements (? Maybe Photoshop Elements), AfterEffects, Premiere, Photo Deluxe, Corel PhotoPaint, PaintShop Pro, Painter.

Icon Plugin for Photoshop supports multi-format icons, transparency and semi-transparency, and allows making icons that are compatible with Microsoft Windows XP and Vista. The plug-in also supports non-standard icons of different sizes and color resolutions, including monochrome, 16 colors, 256 colors, 24-bit True Color, and 32-bit True Color with semi-transparency.

Icon Plugin for Photoshop is compatible with all versions of Microsoft Windows and all versions of Adobe Photoshop, including 3.0-7.0, CS, and CS2. The product is absolutely free.

Product page link:

<<http://sibcode.com/icon-plugin/index.htm>>

Screenshot:

<<http://sibcode.com/icon-plugin/scrfl.png>>

Download link:

<<http://www.sibcode.com/downloads/icon-plugin.zip>>

E-mail: <[pr@sibcode.com](mailto:pr@sibcode.com)>

Web: <<http://www.sibcode.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](mailto:bobclick@mindspring.com)>. Visit my Web site at <<http://www.dealsguy.com>>.

## Society News

Pittsford Library  
Tuesday, December 12, 2006

### Helps Half Hour

Led by: Dave Thompson  
Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: When a member tries to run AVG , he gets an error involving his partition.

A: It was suggested that he makes sure he is running 7.5 version. If not, download and install the newest version. This solved Dave 's problem. It needs to be updated by January 15, 2007. He suggested running a clean 7.5 after dumping 7.1.

Q: Another member asked whether there is a copy of Dragon Naturally Speaking. Software available. He knows a person who is legally blind.

A: One member might have a copy.

## Meeting Notes

by John McMillan, Secretary

For the first time, the group met at the Pittsford Library, an impressive facility with plenty of off street parking. Dave Thompson, who led Help's Half Hour, mentioned that Avg Anti Virus users must upgrade to version 7.5 by January 15<sup>th</sup>. He recommended using Add/Remove programs to eliminate any older versions before installing the new download. There were only about twenty attendees and so few questions that this meeting segment could have been renamed Helps Fifteen Minutes. It was followed by the social period that finished about 7:05.

Steve Staub made set the stage for the evenings Jeopardy game by announcing several rules. Every attendee got a ticket. Those willing to participate as contestants would put one half of the ticket in a possible contestant container. All others would use the non-participants container. After 3 contestants were drawn, any surplus tickets would be added to the non-participants container to share in post game door prize drawings.

After the tickets were distributed, Arpad made the following reminders.

1. See Steve if your dues are due.
2. The planning meeting will be at Sally's house January 2nd at 7 pm.
3. The newsletter will be assembled at St. Stephens Saturday, Dec. 16<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 am
4. The January meeting will be at the Pittsford Library on Jan. 9th with Video Editing - Part 1 as the topic.
5. We will need someone to run Help's Half Hour.
6. Any one with ideas for future programs should pass them to Mike Lavelle.

7.50/50 tickets were sold during the social break.

Dave Thompson announced that the next Photography SIG meeting would be January 4th at the Fairport Library for a demonstration of calibrating a monitor and establishing a digital profile.

Before Alex Trebec (Arpad) described some rules variations, Steve requested that Jeopardy contestants exercise care in ringing in because the light buttons are fragile and irreplaceable. Arpad stated that there

would only be one Jeopardy board with 7 categories and five levels of questions. Questions would be True/False or multiple choice and answers did not need to be in the form of a question. All contestants would receive a prize but they were competing for points to establish the order of selection. The one with the most points (or the smallest number of negative points) would have the first choice. Following those awards, there would be two final Jeopardy questions and the highest scorer would get a brand new, legal copy of Windows XP Pro., 64 bit edition. Steve volunteered to be the score keeper.

Liz Agte, Claud Fedele, and Dave Thompson (last years champion) had their names drawn from the 3 tickets in the possible contestant container. The game proceeded with the same degree of hilarity as last year although contestants did not defend the validity of their answers as vehemently, probably because they knew from experience that they could not win. The game was educational as well as entertaining since the correct answers were explained for the benefit of all.

Claud was the winner with Dave coming in second and Liz rounding out the winners. The Final Jeopardy questions were so tough that there was no winner and Arpad got to keep the XP Pro 64 bit edition. I think he was the only one who owned a 64 bit machine that was required for its operation.

The officers wish everyone a Joyous Christmas and a Happy, Prosperous New Year and hope to see more of you at future meetings.

### The Lighter Side

The lady was using a power strip to plug her computer and other devices into. Windows was completely frozen, and she was unable to shut down the machine by using the power button. She mentioned the power strip, so I told her to flip it off. She said, "Ok, I gave it the finger. I feel better."



Tech Support: "Ok, can you see the arrow in the middle of the screen?"

Customer: "Yes."

Tech Support: "Good! Now trying moving the mouse around. Do you see the arrow moving?"

Customer: "No."

Tech Support: "Not even a little?"

Customer: "No, not at all."

I spent several minutes having the user follow the cable from the mouse to the back of the PC. It was plugged in all the way.

Tech Support: "Ok, try moving it again. Up, down, left, right—anything?"

customer: "Nope, still nothing."

Tech Support: "Hmmm, maybe the table is too slippery—why don't you try rolling the mouse on a book or a piece of paper?"

Customer: "Oh!! On the *table!*"



Tech Support: "Please right-click on the icon."

Customer: "But I'm left handed!"

