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Top 10 Firefox Extensions to Improve Your Productivity

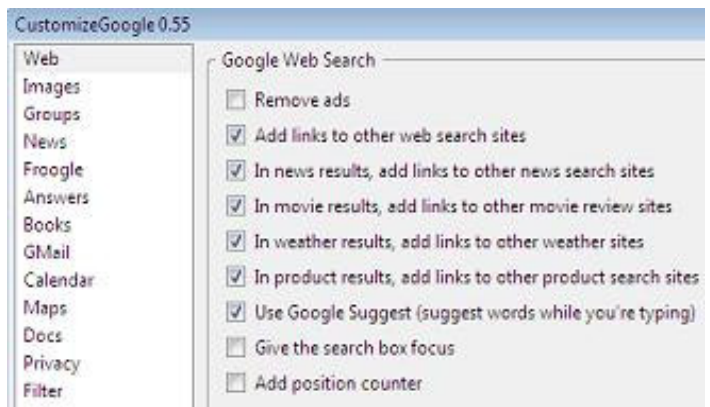
by Kevin Potts

Firefox is the browser of dreams for many people (myself included). One of the great perks of Firefox is that there are tons of extensions that enhance the functionality of the browser. With over 1500 extensions in existence, there are many that can be used to improve your productivity. The following is my take on the top 10 extensions that will keep you focused, reduce distractions, streamline your daily work flow, and improve your productivity.



1. Customize Google

Customize Google is a very robust extension that lets you customize many features of the services provided by Google. Customize Google lets you block advertisements on pretty much any Google page (including Gmail). It remaps Google Images search results to point directly at the images (no longer will you need to click through the originating site). Customize Google lets you add links from other search engines directly into your search results. It can also block Google click tracking and allows you to connect to Google Calendar and Gmail securely (https). Give it a try, you won't be sorry.



2. Gspace

Gspace is a content management extension that lets you turn your Gmail account into an online mass storage device. Gspace integrates nicely into your browser and lets you drag and drop files into Gmail for backup or storage purposes without interrupting your work flow.

If you use Gspace, I recommend adding a tag in Gmail to your files so they can be filtered and accessed quickly. The following is the description of Gspace from its homepage: "Gspace turns the 2GB of your Gmail account into free online storage. With Gspace you can manage unlimited Gmail accounts to store all type of files within its simple, user friendly interface. Listen to your favorite stored music directly from your

Gspace, view your collections of pictures and manage your Gdrive files as well. Download Gspace now and transfer files between your computer and Gspace at anytime, from everywhere!"

3. Flashgot/DownThemAll

The default download manager built into Firefox is very handy; however, there are many occasions that you'll find that you need more flexibility with your downloads. This is where Flashgot or DownThemAll comes in handy. The features of Flashgot and DownThemAll have their differences; however, they generally provide finer-grained control of your downloads. My personal preference is Flashgot. I recommend trying at least one of them.

4. Greasemonkey + Stylish + Ad blocking per Gozer

Greasemonkey is an extension that lets you add scripts that alter the web pages you visit. Using Greasemonkey and Stylish and Ad blocking per Gozer together will block pretty much every advertisement from any Web site you visit.

5. Flashblock

The Flashblock extension by default blocks flash from playing when a Web page is first opened. Most (distracting) advertisements are written using flash. Flashblock is particularly useful because it replaces the flash from a Web site with a "play" button so you can watch the flash if it something useful (like a video at Youtube) and leave it blocked if it is an advertisement.



6. Download Statusbar



Download Statusbar manages your downloads in the status bar instead of the Firefox Download Manager. I find that the download manager that comes with Firefox to be very intrusive. Download manager tucks your download progress bars into the generally unused

status bar of Firefox. This lets you download carefree without the Firefox Download Manager popping up and interrupting you.

7. URL Fixer

URL fixer will replace the common typos you enter when typing a Web site into the URL bar (i.e., <http://www.lifehack.rog>, <http://lifehack.org>). The auto correct feature of URL fixer is very helpful. “[URL Fixer] will correct common misspellings of .com, .net, .org, .edu, .gov, and .mil, as well as the protocol (http:, https:). It will also correct errors in country code TLDS such as .com.XX, .net.XX, and .org.XX.”

8. Tab Mix Plus

Many of the features of Tab Mix Plus were incorporated into the release of Firefox 2. However, Tab Mix Plus allows you to add finer-grained control of your tabs. The following is a description of Tab Mix Plus: “Tab Mix Plus enhances Firefox’s tab browsing capabilities. It includes such features as duplicating tabs, controlling tab focus, tab clicking options, undo closed tabs and windows, plus much more. It also includes a full-featured session manager with crash recovery that can save and restore combinations of opened tabs and windows.”

9. Scrapbook

Scrapbook is extremely useful for researchers and students. Scrapbook saves blurbs from Web pages to your hard drive along with the URL of the originating Web site. It allows you to organize and categorize your blurbs in a format similar to your bookmarks so that when it comes to creating a bibliography or works cited, you won’t waste any time.

10. IE Tab

I find myself using this extension less and less as more Web developers code their Web sites following standards. However, occasionally you will find it necessary to open a Web site using Internet Explorer in order for it to render correctly. Rather than taking the time to launch a separate browser, just choose “View Page in IE tab” and an Internet Explorer tab opens in Firefox. This is very useful if you like to have multiple Gmail accounts open and active on one computer.

That’s my take on the extensions that will improve your productivity. Like I previously mentioned, there are tons of Firefox extensions. What extension didn’t I mention that you can’t live without? Please tell us about your favorite productivity-enhancing Firefox extension in the comments.

Countdown to the Digital Deadline

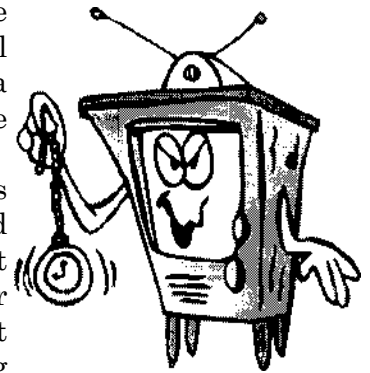
by Jim Sanders

North Orange County Computer Club

Television, as most of us know it, has barely two years of life left in it. Congress has set a deadline of February 17, 2009 for analog broadcasts to end. That means that the faithful television that you have had, for I don’t know how many years, will cease functioning on that date. Well, cease functioning may be too strong of a description, but there will no longer be an over the air broadcast of the analog type of signal that it knows how to interpret.

Starting on that date, all of the over the air television broadcasting stations have been mandated to transmit the digital television format signal only. Old faithful, or maybe not so old, can still be used as long as there is some device that can feed it the analog signal that it knows how to deal with. This could be your VCR or DVD player for instance. Or, it could be one of llic set top boxes that millions of people are going to have to purchase if they wish to continue using their analog television to receive over the air television broadcasts. The purpose of the set top box is to tune in the digital television frequency and convert it to the NTSB analog signal that your television knows how to deal with.

The set top boxes contain an ATSC tuner. This stands for Advanced Television Systems Committee. They are an international organization setting the standards for digital television. In time, they will replace the NTSC, which is an American organization overseeing analog TV transmissions. There is considerable talk



about Congress passing legislation to subsidize, or provide free of charge, set top boxes to low income families. At this time there is no requirement that the recipients be United States citizens.

When you purchase a digital television, ATSC is a term that will be listed on the specifications showing that the television has a built-in digital tuner.

There are eighteen formats in the DTV spectrum. 12 SDTV formats and 6 HDTV formats.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the regulating organization in the United States that controls conversion from analog to digital. The Federal Communications Commission has set deadlines that mandate all manufacturers include digital tuners in their televisions. These are the dates that have been mandated:

July 1, 2005: all TVs with screen sizes over 36 in. must include built-in ATSC tuner.

July 1, 2006: 100% of 25 to 35in. TVs must include ATSC DTV tuner.

July 1, 2007: 100% of 13 to 24in. TVs must include ATSC DTV tuner.

July 1, 2007: 100% of all interface device's must have ATSC DTV tuner. That includes equipment such as VHS VCRs, DVD player /recorders, and DVRs.

These deadlines only apply to new televisions and do not include the huge inventory of existing units. That is why you may see a number of television's larger than 36in. still being sold without built-in digital tuners.

Definition of television: a television is a viewing device that includes a tuner. A device without a tuner is called a monitor. There is a loophole in the FCC regulations that allows manufacturers to build TVs without any tuner which would technically make it a monitor.

Most cable subscribers and all satellite subscribers use their service provider's set top box to receive and decode the digital signals instead of using the television's built-in ATSC tuner. One exception to that rule is a small credit card type of chip that takes the place of the set top box and is called a CableCARD.

Most cable and satellite providers charge in the neighborhood of \$9.95 a month to receive HD channels. Over the air High Definition channels are "free" in the same sense that current analog channels are free, that is you pay the price of watching the commercials but don't actually have to shell out money. So if you spend the extra bucks up front to buy an HD television that includes the ATSC tuner, you are not forced to pay that additional monthly charge. By purchasing an antenna from an electronics store for in the neighborhood of \$25 to \$100, a person that owns a set with a built-in ATSC tuner can enjoy the over the air broadcasts for free.

When the analog signals are turned off and digital becomes the standard, cable and satellite providers will probably provide the local networks for free if they don't do so already. But you will still have to buy or lease the cable box which right now costs in the neighborhood of \$199.00. In addition to that, you'll still have to purchase the programming from the provider.

So if you are a person that currently relies on getting all of your television through a rooftop antenna, in less than two years you will be faced with the choice of spending money for some new equipment or no longer being able to watch television.

One method of dealing with the problem would be to purchase one of the new DVD VCR combos that include the ATSC tuner. A number of VCR manufacturers, including Panasonic, have announced that when the new regulations go into effect, they will simply stop manufacturing that class of equipment. JVC has announced a new DVD/VCR/ATSC tuner model that will be available in May, the DRMV99 at \$329.95. If you already own a good VCR and a good DVD player, it might make more sense to go ahead and purchase just the ATSC set top tuner.

In addition to dealing with all of the high definition signal acquisition problems, a whole lot of people are already trying to deal with the somewhat confusing array of HDTV offerings. The terminology which is frequently observed in the papers can be very confusing. The phrase "HD ready" is usually an indicator that the unit is a monitor that does not include a tuner. A lot of advertisements conveniently do not include what version of high definition a particular offering is. It is simply referred to as HD without saying whether it is 720i, 720p, 1080i or 1080p. The actual pixel resolution is often omitted as well. The 720i or p sets need to have a resolution of 1280 pixels by 720 pixels. The real 1080i or p sets need to have a resolution of 1920 pixels by 1080 pixels. Just like the older VGA computer monitors the 720i refers to an interlaced display and the 720p refers to a progressive scan display. The progressive display is the better quality.

Then you have to decide which display technology you are going to pick. The Plasma flat panel, the LCD flat panel, the rear projection DLP television, the rear projection LCD television, the wall projection unit in either DLP or LCD. What is the brightness level? What is the viewing angle? What is the life expectancy of the projector bulb? What is the cost of the projector bulb? Does the unit have a VGA, a DVI and an 11 DM I video connector?

At the moment. I think the best bang for the buck is to purchase a projector that will do 720p, and if you can afford the extra cost, one that will do 1080p. 11" you have never seen even an older 800x600 projector displaying a movie from a standard DVD on an eight foot diagonal screen, I think you will find it impressive and I think you should do that before you spend money on anything.

Some selected FAQs from your <http://wwwv.dtv.gov/> site.

What is the digital TV transition?

The switch from analog TV (the traditional TV system using magnetic waves to transmit and display TV pictures and sound) to digital television (the new TV system using information transmitted as “data bits”—like a computer—to display movie-quality pictures and sound), is referred to as the digital TV (DTV) transition. In 1996, the U.S. Congress authorized the distribution of an additional broadcast channel to each TV broadcaster so that they could introduce DTV service while simultaneously continuing their analog TV broadcasts. In addition to improved picture and sound quality, an important benefit of DTV is that it will free up parts of the broadcast spectrum for public safety as well as other valuable uses. This is possible because the modern technology of DTV is more efficient than analog TV technology. DTV allows the same number of stations to broadcast using fewer total channels (less of the broadcast spectrum) which will free up scarce and valuable spectrum for public safety and new wireless services.

What is the February 17th, 2009 DTV deadline date?

Congress passed a law on February 1, 2006, setting a final deadline for the DTV transition of February 17, 2009. Most television stations will continue broadcasting both analog and digital programming until February 17, 2009, when all analog broadcasting will stop. Analog TVs receiving over-the-air programming will still work after that date, but owners of these TVs will need to buy converter boxes to change digital broadcasts into analog format. Converter taxes will be available from consumer electronic products retailers at that time. Cable and satellite subscribers with analog TVs should contact their service providers about obtaining converter boxes for the DTV transition.

What is digital television (DTV)?

Digital television (DTV) is a new type of broadcasting technology that will transform television as we now know it. By transmitting the information used to make a TV picture and sound as “data bits” (like a computer), a digital broadcaster can carry more information than is currently possible with analog broadcast technology. For example, the technology allows the transmission of pictures with higher resolution for dramatically better picture and sound quality than currently available—called High Definition Television (HDTV)—or the transmission of several “standard definition” TV programs at once—called “multicasting.” “Standard definition” digital TV pictures would be similar in clarity and detail to the best TV pictures being received and displayed today using the current analog broadcast system and TV receivers. DTV technology can also be used to provide interactive video and data services that are not possible with “analog” technology.

Is HDTV the same thing as DTV?

HDTV is the highest quality of DTV, but it is only one of many formats. In addition to 1080i DTV, the most common formats are Standard Definition Television (SDTV) and Enhanced Definition Television (EDTV).

SDTV is the baseline display and resolution for both analog and digital. Transmission of SDTV may be in either the traditional (4:3) or wide-screen (16:9) format. EDTV is a step up from Analog Television. EDTV comes in widescreen (16:9) or traditional (4:3) format and provides better picture quality than SDTV, but not as high as HDTV.

Jim Sanders is editor for the North Orange County Computer Club, California. This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups.

Secure Your Flash Drive Cap

By Fran Damratowski
*Refurbishing SIG Leader
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Have you ever misplaced your flash drive cap? No need to ever do that again. Secure it with a button. You will need a shirt button, some heavy thread such as carpet thread, double sided self-sticking adhesive mounting foam, double sided sticky tape, and some colorless nail polish.

1. Run the thread diagonally through two of the buttonholes and secure with a square knot.
2. Place the knot on the top of the button not on the flat bottom of the button.
3. Cut the thread long enough to secure it with enough play to remove the cap.
4. Cut a small piece of the double-sided self-sticking adhesive mounting foam about the size of the button.
5. Remove the backing from one side of the double-sided self-sticking adhesive mounting foam and place a small piece of the double-sided sticky tape on the sticky side of the double-sided self-sticking adhesive mounting foam. (The double-sided self-sticking adhesive mounting foam does not hold well without the sticky tape. The tape alone does not hold well either.)
6. Securely attach the flat side of the button to the sticky tape.
7. Trim the excess tape and foam using an x-acto knife.
8. Remove the backing from the other side of the double-sided self-sticking adhesive mounting foam and place another piece of double sided sticky tape on the foam.
9. Securely attach the button foam and tape to the flash drive cap.
10. Secure the other end of the thread to the flash drive or lanyard.
11. Leave enough play to easily remove the cap, but not get tangled.
12. Use the colorless nail polish to secure the knots so they don't become undone.
13. After the nail polish dries trim the thread.



OR

You could go to your local photo shop and buy a \$2+ button size lens cap keeper (or cap retainer) and modify it as needed. Most of them appear to come with elastic bands that are placed around the lens barrel as opposed to a leash that can be attached to another part of the camera.

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Media Notes

by Bill Pettitt
Southeast Virginia Computer Group

Days numbered for tax-free Net sales. The halcyon days of tax-free Internet shopping may be about to end

A powerful alliance of politicians, including key U.S. senators and the National Governors Association, is arguing that out-of-state retailers must be required to charge sales taxes on purchases. At the moment, for instance, companies like Seattle-based Amazon.com are not required to collect sales taxes on shipments to millions of its customers in California.

This is hardly a new debate: officials from the governors' association have been pressing Congress to enact such a law for at least six years. They invoke arguments, which have been unsuccessful so far, like saying that reduced sales tax revenue threatens budgets for schools and police.

What has changed, however, is the political dynamic. While its precise contours are difficult to map, a Democrat-controlled Congress is seen as more likely to agree to the idea than one controlled by Republicans.

“When you have a Democratic majority in Congress, that Congress will be more friendly to imposing new burdens on business if it means additional tax collection,” said Steve DelBianco, executive director of the NetChoice coalition, which counts as members eBay, Yahoo and the Electronic Retailing Association and opposes the sales tax plan.

Another factor that could tip the scales in Washington in favor of the pro-sales tax forces is a concept called the Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement, invented in 2002 by state tax officials hoping to straighten out some of the notorious convolutions of state tax laws. If that happens, they believe, it will be easier to convince Congress to make sales collection mandatory for out-of-state retailers.

“Without any doubt, Congress will eventually approve legislation to give states that comply with the (agreement) mandatory collection authority for out-of-state transactions,” said Neal Osten, federal affairs counsel for the National Conference of State Legislatures. “We expect that the legislation will be introduced shortly in this Congress.”

So far, 22 states have signed onto the project by enacting legislation to simplify their tax codes, Osten said. “We believe that with the system operational, with software and online collection available, sellers volunteering and revenues being collected, Congress will consider the legislation and indeed approve it,” he added in an e-mail message.

Sticky debate over “candy” definition

A simplification effort is key because of the dizzying complexity of state tax laws. One example is the Streamlined Sales Tax Project’s “Proposed Amendment to Definition of ‘Candy’”—which is marked “not for publication” and tries to draw the line between when candy is food (and therefore exempt from tax) and when candy is not (and therefore can be taxed).

Flour as an ingredient became a sticky point. In 2003, a representative of Indiana, James Turner, noted that a proposed definition of candy would have taxed the Milky Way Midnight candy bar but not the original Milky Way bar. But further investigation showed that Turner’s counter-proposal would have treated “certain flavors of Pop Tarts” and Cookies and Twix Crunchy Cookie Bars as candy—but not Cookies and Snickers Crunchy Cookie Bars. Peanut butter Girl Scout cookies would be candy, but Thin Mints or Caramel deLites would be classified as food.

Bizarre distinctions like this, coupled with the existence of more than 7,000 different tax agencies, explain why the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in a 1992 case called *Quill v. North Dakota*, that out-of-state retailers generally couldn’t be obligated to collect sales taxes unless Congress changes the law. The justices noted: “Congress is now free to decide whether, when, and to what extent the States may burden interstate mail order concerns with a duty to collect use taxes.”

One exception to that is a legal concept called “nexus,” which means a company can be forced to collect sales taxes if it has a sufficient business presence. A second exception is cigarette sales, which are covered by the Jenkins Act.

Of course, online purchases from sites like Amazon and eBay only seem to arrive tax-free. Legally speaking, however, purchasers are required to pay their own state’s sales tax rate—the concept is called a “use tax”—and then voluntarily report the amount owed at tax time.

California residents, for instance, are burdened with a sales and use tax of at least 7.25 percent. State law is strict: if Californians travel to a state with a 5 percent tax and shop there, the law requires them to cough up the 2.25 percent difference when they return. Online purchases are taxed as well.

But compliance is spotty at best. California’s Board of Equalization estimates the state lost \$1.34 billion in 2003 because residents aren’t paying use taxes—and attributes \$208 million of that to online purchases.

Pro-sales tax lobbyists say the losses nationally are far higher. A 2004 report from the National Governors Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures puts the figure at \$15.5 billion in lost e-commerce revenue nationwide.

David Quam, director of federal relations for the National Governors Association, says mandatory sales tax collection will help retailers and tax collectors alike by simplifying the system. “It does mean the ability to collect the taxes that are due and owing, and more importantly, it’s a simplification of definitions and your tax base and making more sense out of the tax codes,” he said. “Those are all net positives.”

A rift among business groups

The governors have found allies among large retailers like Staples and Wal-Mart Stores that have physical presence virtually everywhere—and therefore already “must collect sales taxes on online shipments. They tend to support the Streamlined Sales Tax Project because it reduces their competitive disadvantage and simplifies their tax accounting.

What remains unclear is whether the big-business-and-state-politician coalition will be able to muster enough support in a Democratic Congress to enact a law making sales tax compliance mandatory. Osten, from the National Conference of State Legislatures, said: “There will be members of both parties supporting the passage of this legislation.”

While it’s not a traditional left-right issue—the pro-sales tax legislative proposal is being co-authored by Republican Sen. Mike Enzi of Wyoming and Democratic Sen. Byron Dorgan of North Dakota—it does have some partisan overtones.

Statements from members of federal commission on electronic taxation in 2000 indicated that the Republicans tended to be more skeptical of mandatory sales tax collection. James Gilmore, the Republican governor of Virginia at the time, said that “no sales or use taxes should be imposed on interstate business-to-consumer transactions.” Grover Norquist, a Republican insider and operative, blasted fellow panelists for engaging in a stealth campaign to raise taxes on Americans.

They largely took the side of online-only retailers and Silicon Valley companies, which argue that state politicians’ claims of lost revenue are inflated, and say that even a simplified sales tax system will impose additional compliance costs that will be passed on to consumers.

Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk, a Democrat, protested, however, that “small Main Street retailers are severely handicapped by the absence of a level playing field vis-a-vis e-tailers.”

Neither Dorgan and Enzi, who have introduced a mandatory sales tax collection bill in previous years and are drafting a revised version right now, would say when to expect the new version of their legislation.

“As more states continue passing laws securing the collection of this tax and as the amount of revenue being lost by states and municipalities increases, there will naturally be more emphasis on and support for Sen. Enzi’s bill,” said Elly Pickett, Enzi’s deputy press secretary. “When that support will hit critical mass and we will be able to pass the bill is hard to determine, but Sen. Enzi is continuing to work on the issue.”

This is unrelated to the debate over the Internet tax moratorium, which only limits taxes on access charges such as DSL or dialup connections. Congress renewed the ban in 2004, and it expires this November.

What are the warning signs that any PC needs to be replaced?

What are the warning signs that any PC needs to be replaced? Is it when a computer says open me in the safe mode? Is it a computer that cycles through the opening windows but never gets to the desktop screen? Is it when my computer won’t let me print, or it corrupts my Microsoft documents when it tries to save them? Is there anything that can be done to give CPR to my computer and save it from the recycle heap? Or is it really just time to give it up and move on to new PC?

In one form or another, these are some of the questions I get often. Each time, circumstances and symptoms help lead me to my recommendations.

But back to our question of the day:

None of the examples cited are absolute signs that a computer has reached the end of its life and needs to be replaced, but rather that it needs some loving care and maintenance. Actually a few of these symptoms might be easily corrected by running a `chkdsk /r` from the recovery console, performing a virus scan or performing a system restore from safe mode. However, you always run the risk of losing your data whenever you start working on your computer, so backups are always mandatory. A computer is no different than your car, it needs routine maintenance. Thus, the more you drive it or surf the Internet, the more often you need to perform some maintenance. In my experience the number one cause of computer problems has been forgetting to renew antivirus software or ignoring security software expiration warnings. The answer to this question has more to do with your ability to work on your own computer. If you don’t have the time, interest or ability to maintain your own computer, then any of these symptoms could signal the end. I say this because the cost to hire someone to repair your com-puter, depending on who you call, could add up very quickly to nearly the cost of a new computer. Many of the problems you mentioned above could be and are

most likely due to some form of virus, spyware, malware or Windows corruption and could be fixed with a few free programs, some updates and a couple of hours of your time. Probably the worst case scenario would be that your hard drive has or is starting to fail and needs to be replaced. If you replaced the hard drive yourself and reinstalled Windows, you might be out \$100 for the drive. If you had this work performed at a local repair shop, it could cost you \$200 or more. If the computer, when it was working, met your needs and still does, then repairing it may make sense. But you should keep in mind that even though you may have paid \$2000 or more for that old clunker, a new computer can be had for as little as \$500 today.

I find the most common reasons people dump their old computer are:

- They just want a new one. Many people just simply want a new computer even though their old one is working just fine. Maybe they want something a little faster or maybe want to make the switch from a desktop to a laptop. Or they just want to be the first on the block to have the latest technology.
- No longer meets their needs. This could be for any reason including the need for more power to run more advanced games or maybe wanting to tackle something new like video editing.
- Repair Cost too High. Something has gone wrong and the estimated repair cost is fairly high. If the computer is 3 or 4 years old, it may make more sense to just replace the whole thing.
- Complete Failure. Something major has happened such as dropping a laptop or a lightning strike has taken out a motherboard.

Computer hardware today is actually very reliable and rarely fails with maybe the exception of the Hard Drives. There are actually very few moving parts inside a modern computer. You have the Hard Drive, the DVD or CD drive(s) and a couple of fans. Everything else is electronic and unless you have a lightening strike or let them overheat, electronic components should last many years (10 or more). Here is a list of possible hardware failures as well as typical cost of the hardware (not including labor):

1. Hard Drives—\$60-\$200. This is the most common type of failure. Hard drives typically last about 5 years for Desktop computers and about 3-4 years for laptops, but can fail at any time. It is actually surprising that they last as long as they do, spinning at speeds of up to 10,000 RPM.—I don't know if it is just a coincidence or they are not being made as well as they use to, but I am seeing a lot of failed Hard Drives this year.
2. Fans—\$9-\$29. I don't usually see too many fans that have actually stopped working, however they can start making a lot of noise as the bearings or bushings get worn or the blades starts hitting the side of the fan shroud.
3. DVD/CD Drives—\$39-\$69.
4. Power Supplies—\$30-\$70. Many power supplies fail due to a power surge or lightening strike. Dust blocked vents can also lead to overheating related failures.
5. Motherboard/System Board Failure—\$100-\$300. Unless the computer is still under warranty, this kind of failure is usually not worth repairing.
6. Processor Failure—\$100-\$500—Rare. I can think off only a few processor failures that I have run into and most of them where on home-built PC's where the heat sinks were not installed properly.

Aside from the somewhat rare hardware failures I just mentioned, most all computer problems are software related. Assuming that you have backups of your data (you do have a backup, right?), the best way to completely resurrect and breath new life into a computer that is plagued by multiple problems and cannot be easily repaired with a simple virus or spyware scan, is to wipe it clean and start over by reinstalling the operating system. It is not to say that individual problems can not be isolated and repaired, but there becomes a point where nothing beats a complete cleaning and starting from scratch. And if you are experiencing all or many of the problems listed above, this is probably the best way to go. There are several methods to perform a reinstall of Windows depending on your make and model computer:

1. Original Windows Installation CD's. This would be a Microsoft Windows CD and probably some driver CD's from the manufacturer.
2. Recovery CD's that came with your computer. Some computers come with a set of recovery or restoration CD's that will allow you to reset the computer back to the way it was the first day that you brought it home.
3. Recovery CD'S that you created. Many new computers will prompt you to create your own set of recovery CD's or DVD's shortly after you set up your new computer.

4. Recovery Partition. This is a separate recovery partition that the manufacturer placed on your hard drive. It is normally accessed by hit a key combination such as F10 or F11 while the computer starts. Check your computers manual or website for specific information for your exact computer.
5. Image File. If you really planned ahead, you might have an image file that you can restore from. This image contains an exact duplicate of your hard drive at a specific point in time. You would have had to use some program such as Norton Ghost or Acronis Drive Image to get this image but it is a real time saver.

In most all cases, you will have to reinstall all of the software, printers and other items that you use as well as copy your data back to My Documents, favorites and email from your backups. This can be a big job for the faint of heart, especially if you did not plan ahead for this process. But you would have to do much of the same to set up a new computer as well.

Personally, I usually perform this process on every computer I own about once per year or two. It is the perfect time to do some real spring cleaning and remove some old email, dump programs that I no longer use, and just start fresh.

Wow! I've certainly gone on and on this month. I hope you find it interesting. More next month so tune in.

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

Guilty!

by Berry F. Phillips
Computer Club of Oklahoma City

Guilty, the strange judge shouted as he banged the gavel. "The defendant will rise and receive his sentence. You have been found guilty of dirty deeds done to your computer and are sentenced to electrocution!"

I thought to myself, with my knees shaking, there must be some kind of an appeal process since the judge and jury all had heads that looked like monitors and bodies like upright computers and could easily be biased and not in my human favor!

I did find the testimony at my trial to be informative. A clean environment does not require computer cleaning usually more than once a year. Many computer users like to do the cleaning when they are doing their annual spring house cleaning. The dirtier the environment the greater frequency of cleaning needed. A clean computer cuts down on downtime, repair bills, and minimizes health risks. *Do not eat, drink, smoke, or use magnets near your computer after all it is not a fast food joint!*

Here are some tips: (1) shut your computer down properly, (2) run scan disk and defragmenter at least monthly, (3) Delete files and programs you no longer need, (4) use antivirus, anti spyware programs and a good hard drive cleaner like the freeware CCleaner and a registry cleaner like the freeware RegClean to keep your hard drive healthy, (5) *back up your data in case of an emergency!*

When cleaning your computer case, use a damp lint free cloth. *Never spray water on a computer or other electrical devices.* Place liquid on the cloth not directly on the system and normally 100% alcohol which has no water content. Use a pencil eraser on hard to remove marks. The monitor can be cleaned with a commercial glass cleaner using a damp clean lint free cloth. Using an anti static wipe or a dry cloth with anti-static fabric softener will reduce the dust attracted by static discharge. The keyboard can be cleaned by turning the keyboard upside down and shaking the gunk out of it while singing, "There is a whole lot of shaking going on." Clean the keyboard surface with a damp lint free cloth with 100% alcohol. *Do not take the keyboard apart or you might not get it back together again!*

Clean the mouse by taking it apart using a damp lint free cloth and clean the rollers inside of the mouse (be sure to rotate them) with a clean cotton swab with 100% alcohol solution. After the mouse has dried put it back together reversing the steps you did when taking it apart. The inside of your computer is a dust magnet. An annual cleaning in a normal computer environment is a good idea.

You must be very careful if you decide to clean the inside of your computer or you could do damage to your system! Whenever, you go into the case of your computer it is a good idea to wear a grounding strap to reduce the risk of a static discharge. Blow out dust with compressed air or a vacuum cleaner. Avoid touching chips

or electronic components on your system. Electronic components run hotter when covered with dust blankets, and it shortens their normal life span which is why your computer needs to be cleaned internally periodically.

I have to go now to get a human attorney to appeal my case so I can avoid electrical execution so there will be another article in the Computer Hysteria Column for next month. However, I do have one final question for you, “Are you guilty”?

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From The DealsGuy

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

This article about a new operating system to be released later this year might interest you. <http://www.informationweek.com/showArticle.jhtml;jsessionid=VXX3ONZTMMENEQSNDLRSKHSCJUNN2JVN?articleID=197801331&queryText=Thomas+and+Claburn> It's a free XML-based OS that runs inside a Web browser. Free software, especially an OS, might be good news, but we'll see when it is introduced.

Also, here is an article about some amazing technology to “rewire the brain” of stroke victims and perhaps help the patients develop movement. <http://www.informationweek.com/showArticle.jhtml;jsessionid=DGCRR2VULTB4QSNDLRSKH0CJUNN2JVN?articleID=199000976&queryText=K.+C.+Jones>

In the Feb. 5, 2007, issue of *Information Week* was a lengthy article about conflicting opinions inside the open source community that are hindering further development of it; even some of the foremost developers don't agree. <http://www.informationweek.com/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=197002953> There were also some side articles on particular versions.

We worked the 2007 CTIA Wireless show <http://www.ctia.org> that you might have seen news reports on. It was a large show taking the entire West building of the Orange County Convention Center (1.1 million square feet of exhibit space) and I didn't get much chance to tour that show. A couple of editors asked me if I would write up something, but I didn't feel up to going in early to look around. Actually, I don't know enough about that subject to write an intelligent article on the show. Past Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton were the featured keynote speakers. I read about an interesting comment by George H. W. Bush. He said, “This hour I'll be up here (speaking) is about the longest I ever go without using my Blackberry.”

It was unusual that after the keynote speech the presidential entourage entered the show floor to see some exhibits, probably because this show was important for all the new products introduced, especially concerning security. The security company working that show, building security and the Secret Service cleared a 15-foot path for them to caravan from one booth to another for a while. I'll bet a few attendees were thrilled to be that close to those guys regardless of the politics. There may also have been security people watching from the catwalks 40 feet above the show floor. I was working afternoons, and missed all that.

May 2007 will bring the largest trade show ever (in total exhibit area) <http://www.nationalhardwareshow.com> to Orange County Convention Center. It will take both the old and the new cc buildings (over 1.1 million square feet of exhibit space in each building, not including meeting rooms, concourses, lobbies, etc.). Some of the show and its events will be in at least four hotels nearby, and even two tents will be in set up in the parking lot.

Microsoft's Tech Ed 2007 show will also be back here in June, and it's only \$1,995 to attend the full conference <http://go.microsoft.com/?linkid=6643812>. You'll have 440 break-out sessions to choose from if you attend.

Now For The Deals

I have not tried any of the items below so study them well if you are interested. A klutz like myself is not qualified to try out and give opinions on most products. The write-ups are theirs, but edited by me to shorten them, and correct some wording.

Chop Up Your PDF File Without An Ax

A-PDF Solution has announced the immediate availability of A-PDF Size Splitter 1.2, the newest version of a useful and handy tool for splitting any Acrobat PDF file or group of files into smaller-sized PDF files.

A-PDF Size Splitter 1.2 doesn't require Adobe Acrobat and works independently producing PDF documents compatible with Adobe Acrobat Reader 5 and above.

A-PDF Size Splitter 1.2 is a flexible utility letting the user set any size of split files, and supports batch operations. Thanks to the built-in output file name pattern, each of the split PDF files is logically named and can be easily identified later. A-PDF Size Splitter 1.2 works even with password protected PDF files. It keeps the original PDF file encryption. Additionally, the generated split PDF files can be recombined with other PDF files, using A-PDF Merger, another utility developed for forming new composite PDF files.

A-PDF Size Splitter 1.2 runs under Microsoft Windows 98/NT4/Me/2000/XP/Vista and costs \$49 (USD). Users group members get 20% discount on a purchase using coupon code APD-AASX. Click the "Buy now" button, then click the "Add to basket" button and input the code. A free 15-day evaluation version is available to download at http://www.a-pdf.com/size_splitter/a-pdf-ss.exe. For more information, please visit <http://www.a-pdf.com>.

Product page link: http://www.a-pdf.com/size_splitter/

Manipulate Your Files and More

SoftPrime today announces the release of Advanced File Organizer 3.0 that not only features an opportunity to collect all information about drives, files and folders, but developers placed great emphasis on the ability to use this information later. Advanced File Organizer offers several ways to organize your data: add searchable comments for your files and folders; combine disks and folders into groups based on any feature you want; or sort your data by categories. All files can be referred to one or several categories that form a hierarchical tree, making your own virtual file structure. You can restructure your data collection in a minimum of time and effort by just dragging a certain item (file or folder) and dropping it wherever necessary in categories.

The program includes an ability to extract information from ISO and Nero CD/DVD images and import it as a folder, and to import information from DVD-Video thereby getting a comprehensive catalogue of all information on your hard drive, and any other data storage media.

Advanced File Organizer runs under Windows 95/98/ME/NT 4/2000/XP/Vista and costs \$29.95 (USD) or 24.95 (Euro). Users group members get a 10% discount on Advanced File Organizer 3.0 by following this link: <http://www.softprime.com/discount/group.htm> and using the SOFT-6C6F coupon code. The trial version of Advanced File Organizer is available at <http://www.softprime.com/download/aforg.exe> (1.85 Mb) Company website: <http://www.softprime.com>

Translate Everything For FREE

New York, 4/16/07– LingvoSoft www.lingvosoft.com has announced the launch of the newest web-based translation service for anyone needing to work with foreign languages. LingvoSoft Online <http://www.lingvosoftonline.com> provides visitors with an array of indispensable translation utilities. It features a selection of tools that can be used to communicate over the web. LingvoSoft Online not only delivers dictionaries based on its own translation vocabularies, but also an online PhraseBook that is able to translate between 45 of the world's most popular languages, and their FlashCards language learning utility.

The service is available for over 40 languages, and offers voice capabilities. Lingvo-Soft Online provides the voicing of translations out loud using the latest TTS (text-to-speech) technology as well as native-speaker voice narration of the PhraseBook entries. It has an advanced spell-check function that finds misspelled and incorrectly entered words, and a similar word search that provides a list of synonyms for a word.

LingvoSoft offers other website owners the opportunity to put the added functionality of online translation to work for them on their own sites by providing the opportunity to include a LingvoSoft translation module on their pages to increase traffic and keep visitors coming back for more.

A Bonanza Of Freebies From Microsoft

Here is an excerpt from the Microsoft Newsletter if you are not getting it: "Here are 101 fantastic freebies by clicking on <http://go.microsoft.com/?linkid=6626107>. Want to make your PC more productive, secure, informative and entertaining? These downloads and services will do the trick and they don't cost a dime." These goodies were actually selected by *PC World*.

That's it for this month. I'll soon have more new product announcements on my Web site. 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 ATmindspring.com>. Visit my Web site at <<http://www.dealsguy.com>>.

Memorials and Memories

by Charlie Sickels
Chicago Computer Society

In the US, the end of May is a national time for remembering people and events, a time to recall and to honor. Some of it is public; some is personal; it is all profound and deeply felt. It is well and good that we should engage in this process. It is affirming and appropriate that we honor what is worthwhile and often bought at heavy cost. Our lives and society have been affected for good or ill by what has gone before. Some will come again and it is up to us to learn from the past and keep watch on the future.

No less profound, but with less emotional content, is the march of technological progress. This journal is concerned with many aspects of personal computing, what it does and can do, what we believe it will do if properly managed, where it will go. But this may also be a time to consider where it has been, not necessarily how it got here, just what it was like in an earlier era.

Those of us of a certain maturity and extended contact at whatever level with the world of computing can surely recall many steps along the way, glimpses both trivial and meaningful on the decades-long path we have trod. Let us try a hasty and hazy recollection of those steps and share some here. We refer to the earlier and later days of what has become both common in our lives and essential to them. We speak not of the Cray and Lord knows what other supercomputers are now extant, whether acknowledged or secret, but of the early surge in size and power, names like Burroughs, RCA, Honeywell, and the prince destined to be king, IBM.

We may all remember the Big Iron years of heavily air conditioned big rooms of big machines with rows of tape drives the size of refrigerators, all color matched in IBM Blue, IBM Red, or IBM Gray. Spinning inch-wide tape reels were the size of huge dinner plates and gave way in time to the real and early floppy disks. The machines were handled by skillful computer operators and used information digitally coded by intense computer programmers, the new elite career of the time which sheltered nerds and geniuses alike from the world of the commonplace.

Changes came. Evolution brought “distributed processing,” which evolved into microcomputers still with linkage to the heavy hardware and equipped with the arcane language of DOS. Then massive increases in memory capacity enabled the Graphical User Interface, GUI, and the dam began to give way. GUI and Windows fostered independent personal computers, growing from ever increasing memory, speed, and what vendors loved to proclaim, “increased productivity”. Then, being linked to the wondrous Internet made having a home computer as reasonable as having a car. Or two. Fame and fortune has shifted to the little machines spread throughout the land, their developers, their makers, and their users, In our marvels of expanded access to information and communication, this can be a time to pause and honor those who made it all possible by many years of work and logical choices. Most of them are not famous and I do not know their names, but no less do them honor. Those who are famous already have what they deserve, or more.

In honoring ingenuity, I'd like to relate a lesser-known incident from the early days of Big Iron's reign. IBM was establishing new information hubs at major international cities. The Paris center was having mysterious problems with new information tapes and periodic updates. Emergency calls for replacements brought new tapes and similar though slightly different problems. They were undamaged but still faulty. Poughkeepsie sent an international systems engineering team to Paris to discover the problem's cause and find a solution. They carried a fresh set of calibrated tapes proven functional. They watched them disappear into and re-emerge from French Customs, whereupon they too proved faulty.

Careful inspection revealed that the tapes were a bit shorter. Sure enough, the suspicious French Customs officials were routinely clipping several meters from the start of every tape for later analysis. With this deduction, IBM simply moved the initialization instructions some fifty feet deeper preceded by sacrificial random data. Success was immediate. No protestations needed; no excuses received; no announcements made. We also honor enterprise.

Charlie Sickels is managing editor of the Chicago Computer Society's newsletter Hard-Copy.

Live CD-ROMs

by Dick Maybach

Brookdale Computer User Group, NJ

In the early days of PCs, we did much more experimenting than we do now. The only long-term storage was on diskettes, and when we removed the diskette holding the operating system, we also removed any problems that resulted from our experiments. Now, our hard disks hold large, complex operating systems, and if they are damaged by our errors or by malware such as viruses, the recovery process can be long and painful. Those who still like to experiment should consider live CD-ROMs.

A live CD-ROM contains an operating system and applications and can be run without using the hard disk at all. When you remove the CD-ROM, your old operating system (probably Windows) takes over. In fact, since the hard disk was not accessed while the live CD-ROM was running, Windows is no more aware that the PC has been used than if you had never switched on the power.

To use a live CD-ROM, you must set up your PC so that if a CD-ROM is present, it will try to boot from it, rather than the hard disk. Watch carefully as your PC boots, and you should see a message telling you how to start the BIOS set-up program. Often, the procedure is to press the F2 key repeatedly during booting. Don't just hold it down, as the PC will think your keyboard has a stuck key and will refuse to start. Once the set-up program has started, read each screen carefully before changing anything. If you think you've made a mistake, exit without changing anything (often done by pressing the escape key) and start again. You are looking for the screen that lets you change the boot order, which is the order in which the PC checks devices for an operating system. It always includes the hard disk, diskette, and CD-ROM, and (on newer machines) USB devices. In our case we want the CD-ROM checked before the hard disk. Once you are satisfied that everything is ok, save your changes and exit the program, often done by pressing F10.

You can download live CD-ROM programs free from the Internet. However, you will now have what's called an ISO image; this is not a file, and if you write it to a CD-ROM as a file, it won't be bootable. Unfortunately, the free versions of CD-ROM burner programs included with many PCs won't burn ISO images. However, a suitable program, *ISO Recorder*, is available, free over the internet from <http://isorecorder.alexfeinman.com/isorecorder.htm>. Many live CD-ROMs are also available as pre-recorded CD-ROMs; see the referenced Web sites for information.

A good place to start is with the *Ultimate Boot CD*, available at <http://www.ultimatebootcd.com/>. This provides four versions of DOS and five of Linux, plus tools for motherboard, hard disk, and file system maintenance, in addition to four virus scanners.

If you long for the simpler days of DOS, see <http://www.freedos.org/> to obtain an open-source clone of DOS. This will allow you to get reacquainted with the command line, BAT files, BASIC programming, and run those old programs that no longer work under Windows. The full version contains some extras, FreeGEM (a clone of the old Digital Research graphical user interface), BWBasic (Bywater Basic), and several games.

If you would like to experiment with Linux, but aren't ready yet to install it on your hard disk, look at Ubuntu, <http://www.ubuntu.com/>, which provides a Windows-like interface, or Knoppix, <http://www.knoppix.org/>, which is known for being very adaptable to different PC hardware. Several tutorial books are available for each; check your local Barnes & Noble or Borders.

For Linux, Windows, and, to a limited extent, Macintosh maintenance and recovery, my favorite is INSERT, available at http://www.inside-security.de/insert_en.html. This is worth a complete article, and I'll discuss it next month's column.

Security Tools Distribution (STD), <http://s-t-d.org/>, is a variant of Knoppix, customized for those in computer security. It includes tools for encryption and code-breaking, for finding evidence of computer break-ins, for working with firewalls, for building honey pots (traps for ensnaring hackers), for analyzing and breaking passwords, for analyzing network traffic, and for assessing computer vulnerability.

You can see a long list of available live CD-ROMs at <http://www.frozentech.com/content/livecd.php>. Most of these are versions of Linux, because its source code is available and free, and because it's modular. Windows, by comparison, is proprietary and monolithic; at one point, Microsoft claimed that you couldn't remove even its Internet browser without disabling the operating system.

Recovering Files from a Hard Drive

by Vinny La Bash
Sarasota PCUG, FL

Have you deleted a file that you need and you don't know how to get it back? The first step is to make absolutely sure that it has been deleted. Open your Windows Recycle Bin and double-check. Is it in there? If so, simply right-click on the file and choose Restore.

If you have emptied the Recycle Bin the next step is to restore the file from your latest backup. You do back up your data regularly, don't you?

Unfortunately, there is no native "Undelete" command in Windows XP. This is a mystery because Microsoft had a nifty undelete feature in Windows 3.1 which somehow disappeared in Windows 95 and subsequent versions of the operating system. This is abysmal for Windows users, but profitable for third party software developers.

It's important to understand that when a file is deleted it is not actually removed from your system. Windows deletes only the first letter of the file's name and replaces it with a marked for deletion character. This makes the file "invisible" to windows, and if Windows needs the space for something else, it has no qualms about overwriting your valuable data.

What this means is that if you accidentally delete a file, you have a limited amount of time to recover it before windows stores something else over the same space. It may not happen right away, but it will happen eventually.

Since there is no way within XP to recover a lost file, you have to turn to a third party solution. The good news is that there are several excellent programs that will do the job easily. The even better news is that these programs are free. Isn't that nice?

Use Google or your favorite search engine to find FreeUndelet, PC Inspector File Recovery, or Un-delete Plus. All of them work well though you may find one easier to use than another. That's a matter of personal preference.

You need to be cautious about this. If you download the utility directly to your hard drive, you run the risk of storing the undelete program over the very data you are trying to recover. If you have a second hard drive, you can download to that or better yet, download directly to a thumb drive. That avoids all danger of losing important data, and it has the additional advantage of immediate portability.

The programs all work similarly. Direct any of the programs to a specific disk and you will get a list of all deleted recoverable files on the drive. You may also get a description alerting you that the file(s) may be wholly or partially recoverable. That's good to know.

Direct any recovered files to an external hard drive if you have one. Don't save anything to your hard drive until you have recovered everything you need. Use Windows Explorer to manage the recovered files. Group them into categories to sort or group the files so you can easily determine if they are program files, data files or something else. Some files may have data missing if Windows overwrote some of the sectors where it was stored.

If, after all this, you haven't been successful, your best alternative is to consider a data recovery service. These can be a devastating drain on your wallet, so don't use these services to recover saved game files.

Do some comparison shopping as rates can vary considerably. Good luck and watch those sticky fingers when they hover near the delete key.

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Free Copy of Noromis PhotoLab

Either email me or call me, Maurice Hamoy, giving me your name and email address, and mention the Noromis PhotoLab User Group Special Offer. I will arrange for them to immediately receive their *free copy* of Noromis PhotoLab.

All I ask from you is this: if you like our software, please tell some people about it. We know how valuable word-of-mouth is for a new product from a new company, so all I ask is that you (if you *like* Noromis Photo Lab), to spread the word about it. That's all. No "proof" is required that you have spread the word, all I ask is that you honestly share your reactions to our software with your friends.

For your *free copy*, either email me at: mhamoyATnoromis.com or call me at 973-342-7533.

Society News

Help's Half Hour

Tuesday, May 9, 2007

Led by: Arpad Kovacs

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Total present: 30

Q: One member explained that he wants to adjust the speed of his mouse. Is there any way to be able to use two mice and have two speed settings?

A: He should be able to go the mouse speed. He may have to define two desktops with two different mouse setups.

Q: When using Outlook lately, it is freezing up. It is slow to start up and he cannot send out.

A: It was suggested that he check the options and delete the mail server information and then re-enter.

Q: What are third party cookies? Should I block them?

A: It is recommended that you block any cookie that you do not need. Banks need them and they need to be kept. Go into the Internet tools and browse the Internet cookies files. Remove those that you feel you do not need. If you visit the site again, they will let you know if a cookie must be found.

Q: A member has an old email program. Now, whenever she is using an email link from a webpage, it tries to open this old email program. She would like it to use her Win98 IBM ThinkPad using Outlook Express.

A: Under Internet --> Tools set it up. She needs to set up another mail application before uninstalling the old one.

Q: Is there any distinction between deletion and moving to the recycle bin?

A: If you send a file to the recycle bin, the file will be kept and restored if requested. When the bin is emptied the file will be deleted. Once deleted, a file cannot be restored.

Q: Does anyone make a photo player that displays all photo formats? The results seem to vary by each player.

A: Probably not. Some playback depends upon the way the disk was recorded. There may be some DVD player settings that need to be adjusted, too.

Q: One member is getting a lot of junk email—15 per day.

A: Google 'Gizmo' has a site that evaluates anti-spamware and choose one that will work the best for you. Some are easier to set up, some work better, etc. 'Mailwasher' costs \$30. There are also some free ones available. Spam Blocker is free but adds an advertisement. It places suspicious items into a spam folder. You can review those to salvage an email that you want delivered and then delete the rest.

Q: Is there any way to block spam that has large attachments?

A: Perhaps call your ISP to see if they have any blocking software that may help. Beware that sometimes they block ones that you want —such a all of the Yahoo groups.

May Meeting Minutes

by John McMillan

Arpad Kovacs opened our first meeting at St. John's Meadows announcing that the next planning meeting will be at Sally's house the first Tuesday; the Monitor will be assembled May 12th at 9:30 AM; next months Society meeting will be at the Brighton Library; future program ideas should be passed to Mike Lavelle; and at the end of the meeting, the chairs need to be stacked and the room should be picked up.

Steve Staub said that Tony Dellelo found a new source for printer cartridges that should lower that element of cost from \$128 to less than \$50 and increase the life from 15,000 pages to 18,000. He also asked for someone to help with the Picnic sign up list and fee collections at the monthly meetings. Both members and non members can attend for \$5.00 per person. The picnic will be held from 4 til 9, the second Tuesday

in August at Brighton's Buckland Park. Supper will start about 5:30 and the club will provide a choice of red or white hots, cheeseburgers or Italian sausage, all with rolls, plus coffee, tea and soda. Attendees should bring a dish to pass: last names beginning with A to I – munchies; J to R – salads (please specify type); and S to Z – deserts. He stressed that the deadline for reservations and payment is August 1st, with no refunds made after that date. At the June meeting, Arpad will issue some guidelines for the flea market that will be held at the picnic.

Dave Thompson stated that the Digital Photography SIG will meet at St. John's Meadows June 14th for a show and tell of last weeks shoot. There will be no meetings in July and August. Then Arpad continued by presenting the slate of candidates for office. President, Arpad Kovacs; Vice President, Dan Rothfuss; Secretary, John McMillan; Treasurer. Steve Staub; and Member At Large, Sally Springett have agreed to serve again. There were no nominations for the floor s they were unanimously reelected for another term.

After the social break, Steve introduced Bill Statt whose topic was “Dragon, Naturally Speaking.” Bill described this as a voice driven program to not only dictate content, but to control your computer. It is a boon to those with carpal tunnel, dyslexia, tendinitis or other disabilities. Bill gave a brief dissertation on keyboard and monitor placement; seating height and posture; and location of other tools to improve ergonomics and reduce the impact of these kinds of problems.

He pointed out that Windows Vista contains a limited number of Dragon's commands and a similar graphical interface that may eventually drive Dragon out of business. He has already seen the lowest priced version on sale at 60% off. On E-bay you can get a Parrot, talk pro, noise canceling microphone for about \$8. Another Dragon version with a retail price of \$200 contains a better microphone and includes dictation playback, a very desirable feature. It can be found on sale for \$89.

Many people approach speech recognition with preconceived notions about the training it requires to be effective. Bill stated that version 9 will let you start dictating in about 5 minutes but was quick to point out the learning the programs capabilities pays big dividends in ease of use and accuracy. One thing you must learn early is that when the microphone is on, everything you say is taken as dictation or one of the ten thousand commands that require great precision.

Dragon works by interpreting phrases, not words. Spelling errors are a thing of the past. Correcting errors as you work with it can update your history so you can achieve a 99% accuracy rate within about 4 weeks of usage. One of the commands “scratch that” will back you up to the last pause in your dictation or you can say “resume with” and give a word to back up to that point. There are even commands for moving the cursor around the screen. He described how new words are spelled out and added to the extensive dictionary. In this way he used “Bills home” to type his address consisting of house number, street, town, state and zip code. It recognizes “umm,” “uh” and other similar expressions and excludes them from the typed output. It also adjusts for slurred speech and does not require stilted mechanical dictation. There is a facility called Dragon Pad that can be used in lieu of Microsoft Office to build rich text formatted files that can be edited independent of Dragon.

though he did not recognize a gain in speed by having over 1 gig of memory. Dragon, Naturally Speaking can be put on a thumb drive and run as a portable app. Internet Explorer 6 is required but Bill warned against version 7. Firefox, Thunderbird and Opera work equally well. Version 9 has a dictation box that shows whether or not it works with a particular software package. It includes tutorials for getting on the net and other uses including direct translation of materials from hand held recorders like Sony.

He touted a training video that cost \$150 but has been a great learning tool. Unlike many training videos that just give a list of capabilities, this one suggests how to use the features to improve your effectiveness. Through a deal with the video author, he earned a two-volume CD training set which he graciously donated to the club.

Dragon is licensed by user, not computer so an individual can use it on several machines but not simultaneously. Bill runs it on his desktop computer, a laptop and office computers in Rochester and Canandaigua. Up to version 7 it would run with Windows 98 but version 9 requires Windows XP. Although a stated requirement is a 512 mb processor, Bill felt that a gigabyte processor was much better.

At this point, he switched from prepared slides to demonstration mode. Before it was discovered and closed, an unrelated program operating in the background slowed operations. After pointing out that the microphone should be offset at the corner of the mouth to improve effectiveness, Bill demonstrated a variety

of dictation techniques with speeds of up to 160 words per minute compared to the average users typing speed of less than 40 words per minute. He illustrated spreadsheet control by opening Excel, entering column headers and successive descriptors (week 1, week 2, etc.), plus values, and formulas, like column summarization. He then created a graph including titles without touching the mouse except to widen columns where necessary.

Bill showed how to control the computer in a web searching session. He suggested using the International phonetic alphabet when spelling was necessary for inserting new terms in the dictionary. He found that a card with the phonetic alphabet on one side and punctuation references on the other was very handy. Before bringing an excellent and informative presentation to a close by taking a few questions from the floor he recommended saving user files so that in the event of a hard drive crash, they could be used to facilitate retraining. We would welcome Bill back at any time.

Treasurer's Report

by Steve Staub, Treasurer

Balance as of 04/12/07 \$792.33

Income

Dues and Donations \$296.20

Picnic 5.00

Total Income \$301.20

Expenses

Postmaster \$50.00

Mailing CD 250.00

Staples (paper) 37.09

St. Stephens 60.00

Total Expenses \$403.09

Balance as of 05/11/07 \$690.44

New members: Frederick Gary, Robert Reber

Members renewing: Clayton Hunt, Clifford Jacobson, Ray Newell, Robert Parnell, Sally Springett, Ralph Squire

The Lighter Side

Overheard in a nationwide computer retail store:

Customer: "Now what does this 512MB of RAM mean on this PC?"

Salesman: "Umm ... RAM is what slows down your PC, see it rams into your processing power, causing slowdowns, thus why it's called RAM."

Customer: "Are you sure?"

Salesman: "Who's the expert here?"



I'm not the most technical of people, but a few years ago, I got the infamous "blue screen of death." I called in the IT department, and the new guy told me that my monitor just had to be "de-gassed" (degaussed). Needless to say, I rolled around the floor laughing, and someone else was called in to replace my hard drive.

