

MONITOR

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CONTENTS

How to Answer the Question Mike Kerwin	1
Automobile Computers Bob Elgines	3
Help! My Vinyl Is Melting Lou Torraca	4
Media Notes Bill Petitt	8
Ask Mr. Modem	13
The DealsGuy Bob Click	14
Net Neutrality: It's Time for US to Speak Out Linda Gonse	17
Tales from the Kingdom of the Ordinary User—Faxing David Uffer ..	20
Society News	21
The Lighter Side	23



How to Answer the Question

by Mike Kerwin

President, Central Maryland User Group

OK, I'm not being mysterious but addressing an issue that most Geeks encounter often. I suspect that most of you have been asked The Question many times by friends, relatives, and acquaintances. I refer to the expectant "What do you recommend as the best _____?" (Fill in the blank for PC, notebook, PDA, digital camera, camcorder, DVR.) Folks who know me and my penchant for gadgets and gizmos frequently ask me this. Lately the most popular subject is notebook computers. Now I do get a bit of a stroke that I am asked for my opinion about things digital, and I do understand the seemingly overwhelming number of choices being marketed, but I also get frustrated when my response elicits blank stares.

My thinking is that people ask this due to despair at the multitude of choices currently available and the wide range of pricing options. And, of course, the options lead to even more confusion. A few years ago the world seemed to be simpler when the number of manufacturers

of notebook PCs diminished to just a handful. Today, despite the consolidation, the remaining firms now offer several complete “lines” of notebooks along this continuum: superlight, ultralight, mobile performance, entertainment, general purpose, budget, desktop replacement.... You could probably suggest even more categories. Now too we have designer notebooks in a range of case colors and branded logos (Ferrari, LiveStrong, Hello Kitty). Then there is screen size and the directly linked weight factor; since LCD screens use glass front panels and glass is rather heavy, the larger the screen the heavier the device is to lug about.

Answer a Question with a Question

So what do I have to offer in the way of advice? I’ve learned to follow the experts on my reply: from the online Buying Guides back to Socrates, the recommendation is to answer with a question. (I don’t think Socrates knew about decision trees, but that’s what we have here.) Specifically I first ask, “Do you have a price point in mind?” followed by “Do you have a brand preference?” These two questions narrow the choices considerably. I know some individuals and organizations are strictly wedded to one brand, such as Dell, and that becomes a major factor in deciding on what is the “best” in that environment. Price is also a great divider of the pack with budget machines being advertised under \$500 and high-end performance units listed for prices around \$3K—very wide range.

The next question along this tree is, “What do you intend to do with the computer?” The answer will be very different for a Road Warrior backed by a corporation which can deduct business expenses versus a student heading off to college, or someone who just wants to use it for email at home without being tied to a cable. For example, the weight of a notebook can be a major consideration if you travel frequently, as everything gets heavier at the end of a long flight or stressful day of sales calls. For travelers the features needed can also be important considerations as some of the lightest notebooks don’t have built-in optical drives (see Dell) but use optional peripherals which can add to weight, bulk, and extra parts to keep track of recommendation is to have as few pieces as possible for simplicity’s sake.)

The Fine Print

Speaking of weight, you must read the fine print of the specifications, as I learned this week looking at the new Toshiba Protégé line of notebooks. This company is making great claims for this “superlight” line. Digging a little further one soon discovers that the quoted weight is for the main clamshell case and internal parts. This is really light at under 2 lbs and is possible through the use of solid state memory in place of a traditional spinning disk HD. But, it won’t do much without a battery, which adds at least 0.6 lbs additional for the limited capacity, standard battery; an optional, long-life battery weighs more. And then there is the transformer (aka brick) which weighs in at 0.5 lbs. Then one might look at whether the 68 GB of HD equivalent would be sufficient running Vista which reportedly takes nearly 10 GB just for the OS and then allocates an additional 15% of the HD for Restore points. These can take up lots of the internal HD and then one would have to consider carrying an external drive for storing data, presentations, pictures, etc. which could add additional weight. And for all of this one would pay nearly \$3K.

At the other end of the price scale are the budget models which barely have enough onboard memory (or capacity) to run the old WinXP. As more Vista applications become available over the next couple of years, these machines may be left in the dust, unable to accommodate current versions of software. This could lead to early replacement before the expected life span of three to five years.

Then there are optional/necessary features you might want in a notebook. One feature is an optical drive which most, but not all, units have as a standard feature. Then there are different flavors of CD/DVD read ability and write ability. Virtually all of these units will read and write CDs and DVDs, but perhaps not all three formats of DVD, plus the capability for

dual layer data storage and, in some cases, LightScribe technology to burn labels on the back side of special disks. Unfortunately the industry has not settled on a standard technology for a new generation of disks to store HD movies (and eventually data), so if this feature is important to you, you might plan to add the capability externally sometime in the future.

Another common feature is WiFi. This technology has advanced from A to B to G and now to N, but not all notebooks support all of the types so again you have to read the fine print.

For a notebook to be sent off to college, you might look for a built-in webcam to keep in touch and help ward off homesickness by the young adults. You'll also want to look at anti-theft features such as locking adaptors and "phone-home" software. Some of the new anti-theft features are biometric password-type locks such as fingerprint scanners and wireless proximity alarms (if the PC goes one way and the owner with the alarm gets too far away then the alarm sounds).

Another consideration is the warranty provided. Notebook PCs are very compact so popping the top to add or replace defective parts is not something to be undertaken lightly. I recommend checking to see how long any unit is under warranty and what is covered, such as what is the turnaround for repairs and where are they done (and who is responsible for getting it there).

In the end, I think the process is straightforward, though it may require several decision branches to arrive at the "Best" recommendation for a specific individual. These details always seem nagging pests when searching for instant gratification, but the old adage of "Buy in Haste, Repent at Leisure" can be avoided by taking just a little time up front to make a good choice. I hope this approach might of use to some of you.

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Automobile Computers

by Bob Elgines

Editor, Colorado River Computer Club, AZ

Is your Engine Check light on? Do you need a smog test? Is your engine running rough? Is your transmission shifting im-properly? Did you know you can read your automobile computer results with a simple plug in device?

All autos from 1996 and newer have common plugs and codes mandated by the Federal Government. Some late 1995 models are also equipped with this type of computer and will have on the label under the hood "OBD II" listed. Prior to 1995 some Engine Check Lights in the car were on timers or mileage meter, and would come on after 50,000 miles and really had nothing to do with the operation of the engine or computer.

"OBD II" is the model of your Powertrain Control Module (PCM)—terminology for the on-board automobile computer that controls engine and drive train. Some automobile models will use more sensors and controlling devices than others. There are Continuous Monitors, such as Misfire, Fuel System, and Comprehensive Components, and Non-Continuous Monitors, such as EGR System, O2 Sensors, Catalyst, Evap System, Secondary Air, and A/C Systems.

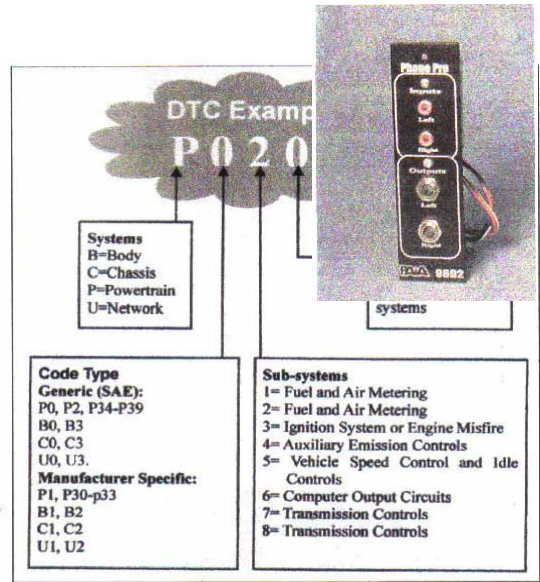


New car dealers charge you \$100 to plug their reader in called a diagnostic test, and guess at what to replace. An example is EVAP codes can appear for several things such as leaky hoses, gas cap, EVAP solenoid, EVAP pump, etc. All these have

to do with the evaporation of fuel from your gas tank. They will replace them one at a time charging you labor and diagnostic charges for each item, that can be \$200 plus parts for each replacement.

Simple code readers start at \$40 at Harbor Freight. The next model up costs \$80 to \$90 and the difference is more readings, memory and allows updates via the web (there have not been any updates since 1999). Top models will cost \$200 to \$250, but allow you to plug the results into your computer via a USB connector giving you much more information and possibly allowing some adjustments.

Most Data Link Connectors (16 pin) are under the dash just left of the steering wheel. Below-right is a basic definition of how to understand the codes that you will read. There are at this time 7000 different codes with several being for Diesel engines only. You have Generic Codes and special Manufacture Codes.



Below-left is an example of a readout on a PC of the more expensive model readers.

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Help! My Vinyl Is Melting...Really!

by Lou Torraca

President MOAA

Computer User Group, HI

If you have the same problem as I do, read on, a solution is available. I have hundreds, yup, hundreds of vinyl records, 78s, 33s, and even a few 45s stashed in my garage which is a pretty hot spot (no, not a WI-FI hotspot) a really hot spot. I've thought about converting them to cassettes (yes, I know, that was a long time ago), then to CDs and now to DVDs. I just attended a techie conference and one of the many presentations was on this very subject, so I paid lots of attention and took notes. The presenter also talked about how to convert other media, e.g. VHS tapes, but I'll save that for another column.

OK, just to be sure we are all on the same page...this is a 78 Vinyl Record and next, this is a bunch of 45s.



Now that we are on the same page, how do you convert all this to a CD or a DVD?

Here is a step-by-step tutorial with some examples of equipment and software, as well as some urls which you may want to take a look at.

This tutorial is designed to provide a few tips to help you get the music from your turntable to computer and ready for burning to CD. It doesn't cover the complex area of audio restoration in which software is used to clean up noisy records. Not to worry...I'll point you in the right direction at the end of the tutorial.

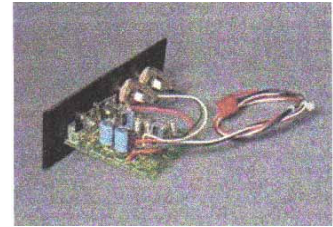
Equipment Needed

The following equipment will be needed to produce a signal capable of driving a typical computer soundcard.





- A turntable fitted with a good quality cartridge and stylus. This is one I found via Google for \$99
- A Pre-Amplifier with RIAA equalization as well as a front panel. Both of these cost only \$35.



However, if you have lots of dough, you can get one for \$1800!



Does look nice, but I can't say whether it does that much better than the small two shown here.

Interconnecting Cables

Turntable Cartridge

The turntable must be positioned on a solid level surface. The cartridge should be adjusted near the maximum recommended playing weight and the anti-skating adjustment checked. For best results you should use a magnetic type cartridge. If you change cartridge type make sure the cartridge matches the arm type. Crystal/ceramic cartridges are not recommended.

Stylus Care

Carefully clean the stylus before playing each side of a record. Always clean from the back of the stylus to the front and use some alcohol if necessary.

Your stylus should be regularly checked for wear as a worn stylus will permanently damage your records. A worn stylus should be replaced.

Record Cleaning

Vinyl records must be as clean as possible so that surface dust does not build up on the stylus. Always use a fine fiber brush to remove dust before each playing.

If playing the record reveals high levels of background noise, or if the stylus becomes repeatedly clogged with dirt after playing, you may need to take additional steps. You could use a mixture of alcohol and distilled water to remove dust and dirt which is deep in the record grooves.

Pre-Amplifier

A pre-amplifier must be used to amplify the low level signal from the pickup to a suitable level for your computer's soundcard. The pre-amplifier must provide RIAA equalization in order to ensure proper frequency response from the record.

Your system may integrate the pre- and power amplifiers into a single unit. In this case, it may be possible to utilize the tape output to send the signal to the soundcard.

If your pre-amplifier has an adjustable output level, use it to ensure that the signal to the soundcard is not too high. If the output level is fixed, then use the gain control in the Windows mixer applet.

Interconnecting Equipment

Most soundcards come with a 3.5mm jack as the line input connector. However, most hi-fi equipment use either phono or DIN connectors. You will therefore need to fabricate or purchase a connecting lead which converts between the two connector types.

Make sure that all connectors are of good quality and that they all are seated correctly. Poorly fitting connectors can produce unwanted noise or hum.

Play the Record

Once you have all of the component equipment set-up, the next step is to play the record and save a digital copy on your computer. It is best to record one entire side of an album at a time. You will end up with two large digital files one for each side of the album. Your software should allow you to separate the music tracks prior to copying to CD.

Test Recordings

You should make a test recording to your hard disk, to verify that the sound card is not being driven too hard and causing distortion. Listen carefully for hum during silent passages between song cuts. It is a good idea to actually burn a CD in order to verify that all is well. For example, this will help ensure that your left and right channels are not reversed.

Setting the Recording Level

It is important that the analog signal is presented at appropriate amplitude if optimum results are to be achieved. You don't want too low or too high a recording volume. Sound recording software will provide a recording level meter which monitors the signal at the A/D converter input.

The sound level should be adjusted so that the loudest sections peak in the -3 to 0 areas of the bar graphs. However, some soundcards will distort at levels somewhat below this. In such cases, it is best to record at a lower level and then to digitally adjust the level after recording. (normalizing).

If your pre-amplifier has an output level control, you should use this to adjust recording levels. In this case, set the applet control to maximum and adjust the recording level using the control on your pre-amplifier.

The Windows applet is located at Start/All Programs/Accessories/Entertainment/Volume Control. Select Options/Properties and then "Adjust Volume For - Recording". Make sure that the 'Line' check box is checked. This will enable a volume control for the soundcard Line Input. Now check the 'select' check box under the 'Line' volume slider. If necessary, you can use the slider to set the recording level.

Next, open your recording program and adjust the recording level using the program's level meters.

Vinyl Record Audio Restoration

Once you have successfully transferred recorded music from turntable to computer, you will probably want to use an audio restoration program to clean up the sound.



Most old vinyl records will have a certain amount of surface damage which will affect the sound. During playback, you may hear some surface noise and a number of click and pops. Particularly annoying are the repeating clicks which occur when the damage has spanned several adjacent record grooves and which consequently repeat once per revolution of the record.

Audio restoration software uses digital filters to help remove the unwanted noise. The one that all the "gurus" seem to like is Audacity and the good news is, it's free!

Here's where to get it: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net>

Burning

Once you have recorded all the required tracks from an LP and removed any clicks, pops, scratches or whatever, it is a straightforward task to write the tracks onto a blank CD/DVD using your CD/DVD writing software.

First decide if you want an audio CD/DVD or would rather make up an MP3 disc. A normal CD should play in any domestic player, but an MP3 CD needs a player that can cope

with this format. They are now more widely available than previously, most domestic DVD players—some in car CD players and some personal CD players will play MP3 discs. The big advantage with MP3 format is that of capacity. A normal audio disc can hold say 20 tracks of average length (80 minutes or thereabouts), while an MP3 format disc can hold between 10 and 20 albums! This is done using data compression techniques which result in much reduced file sizes with very little lost sound quality.



Once you have decided between the two formats, you can use your CD/DVD writing software to assemble a collection of audio tracks to be burned to CD/DVD. Don't forget to separate the tracks before burning.

Now for a few other options for the technically challenged (me included) and for the fiscally unlimited (more dough than u know what to do with.)

For the first category, an all-in-one like TEAC makes may be for you.

For a bit more than \$400, depending on shipping, this little gem will do most of the work for you and of course, for those with no equipment such as a turntable, it provides one. Check it out at: <http://tinyurl.com/22x2jy>

For the second category, here's where you can go to have all the work done for you...at a price of course! <http://tinyurl.com/34w8oj>

BTW, I'd suggest you check the 'net for other possibilities as there are lots of places that feature both hardware and software for just this purpose. One of them is www.dak.com

That's it for now. Remember, be safe out there on the 'net, but have fun with all the consumer electronic goodies.

Aloha, Lou

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Media Notes

by Bill Pettit

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

As you will read a little further down the page Microsoft is getting closer to releasing the much talked about but missing in action Service Pack 3 for Windows XP. I have installed it on one of my machines and honestly don't see anything different except that now my screen saver is reluctant to stop and let me back on the machine. Hmmm?

If you are starting to think about a new computer in the next 6 months, wait until at least the end of the year. Intel has dropped the prices for their current line of CPU's, sometimes by as much as 50%. Lower costs for manufacturers will show up in lower prices to you, too. Additionally, the latest iteration of the Core 2 Duo chips, the Wolfdale, will be released. The following report whets my appetite: "According to a report from HKEPC web-site, Intel Core 2 Duo "Wolfdale" (2.33GHz, 6MB L2 cache, 1333MHz processor system bus) performs from 0.22% to 115% faster compared to Intel Core 2 Duo "Conroe" processor (2.33GHz, 4MB L2 cache, 1333MHz PSB). Typically, the new chip delivers 5% to 15% of additional performance, but there are tests, like video encoding or advanced gaming, where the new micro-architecture skyrockets its performance." PANT, PANT PANT!

Leaked Vista Hotfix Packs Now Official

You may now download two Windows Vista updates that had leaked to the Internet at the end of July. No word on when they reach Windows Update.

Microsoft has released the two Windows Vista updates that had already appeared on the Internet at the end of July, but won't say when it will begin pushing them to users via Windows Update.

Pegged as performance and reliability packs, the pair install a long list of non-security bug fixes, among them speed improvements to wake-from-hibernation, a patch that eliminates the long wait to calculate the time it will take to copy or move large directories, and several that target compatibility glitches with video drivers.

Microsoft even described one of the quashed bugs with the vague but ominous-sounding: "The computer stops responding or restarts unexpectedly when you play video games or perform desktop operations."

All of the fixes, said the company, are new to Vista, and do not replace any existing updates. Users must restart their computer after each update is installed.

The performance update, designated KB938979, weighs in at nearly 10MB, and can be downloaded from the Microsoft Download Center. The accompanying support document is also available.

Vista's reliability update, KB938194, is petite by comparison—just 2.1MB. It's also now available for downloading, and has a KnowledgeBase document that spells out changes.

Previews of the now official updates had been leaked at the end of July, fueling speculation that they were connected to the highly-anticipated Vista Service Pack 1 (SP1), and might even be harbingers of SP1's release. A day later, July 31, a Microsoft spokeswoman confirmed that the hotfix packs would end up in user's hands "in the near future," but declined to answer questions about any link to SP1.

The company did recently confirm, however, that it has released preview code for Vista SP1—as well as the same for the long-delayed Windows XP Service Pack 3 (SP3)—to small invite-only groups of testers. But it would not say when the updates to each operating system will release in final versions.

Vista SP1, which Microsoft has so far committed only to provide in beta "sometime this year," has consistently been downplayed by the company. Many corporations, on the other hand, appear to be waiting for SP1 before deploying the new OS.

Windows XP SP3 has an even longer, and more troubled, history. Last October, Microsoft said that the release of SP3, and pushed it back into the first half of 2008, more than a year after the retail release of Vista and about three-and-a-half years after SP2 appeared. Hints of XP SP3's progress were tucked into a brief filed with the federal judge overseeing the 2002 antitrust settlement struck between U.S. regulators and Microsoft, but details were slim. The report confirmed the existence of SP3 and said some code would be finalized in the summer of 2007, but did not specify either beta or final release dates.

Microsoft did not respond to queries about when the Vista performance and reliability updates would migrate to the company's automatic patching services, including Windows Update. Some bloggers and users have been betting that the hotfix packs will be offered up during the next scheduled "Hot Fix Tuesday," the already-scheduled monthly patch day for Microsoft. But others have discounted that date, saying Microsoft would not overtax users or the automatic update systems with such large downloads.

I think you'll get a kick out of this link provided by CNET Digital Dispatch.

Hey, let's watch a Muppet eat a computer!

Tim Moynihan, Editor

Happy Monday, yet again. Nary a day goes by when I don't think about eating my computer, or at least biting it out of frustration. I hope I'm not alone.

http://crave.cnet.com/8301-1_105-9754766-1.html?tag=nl.e404

Moving Data to a New Computer the Easy Way

Did you just buy a new computer? Do you want to transfer files from your old computer to the new one? Do you also want to copy some of the files to your laptop? All machines are running Windows XP? Looking for an easy way to do the transfer?

Do you have an external hard drive? You could use this to move the files from one computer to another. Then you could move copies of some files to your laptop. Or, if the computers are networked, you can move files over the network.

This is easy enough for moving your data files. You simply make a list of all the locations where you store documents, pictures and music. Then you can drag and drop the files onto the external drive in Windows Explorer.

But there are other things on the computer you'll probably want to move. That can include program settings and Internet cookies. In that case, you might invest in a program that will do all the heavy lifting for you. PC Mover, Copy Commander and Migrate Easy are three programs that will do the trick.

Now, for those switching to Vista, there is a built-in program that will work for you. All you need to do is buy a special cable which you can borrow from our club.

If you're getting rid of the old computer, don't forget to wipe the hard drive.

Extracting Photos from PowerPoint Is a Snap

Do you have a PowerPoint presentation that you would like to extract some of the photos?

Extracting pictures from a PowerPoint presentation is fairly easy. And, there are a few different ways you can do it. First, open the presentation in PowerPoint. Now, there are two types of PowerPoint files: presentations and slide shows. If you have a slide show (PPT), open it from within PowerPoint.

Find the picture you'd like to extract. If it fills the entire slide, right-click the slide. Select Save as Picture. Use the dialog box to select picture type and save location. For smaller pictures, select them and copy them. Paste them into a new file in your photo-editing program. If you don't have one, try IrfanView.

If you don't have PowerPoint on your computer, things are more difficult. Download the free Microsoft PowerPoint Viewer to open the file. You can use the Print Screen button to capture an image. Then, paste the screen capture in to your photo-editing program.

Sending Large Files via the Internet

A number of services capitalize on free- falling storage prices and cheap bandwidth to allow users to send large files instantly through the Internet

Free-falling storage prices and cheap bandwidth have led to a bounty of services that allow users to send large files instantly through the Internet—and threaten to render overnight document-delivery services such as FedEx or DHL obsolete.

Services such as YouSendIt.com, MailBigFile or SendThisfile specialize in transmitting digital images and video clips that are too hefty for e-mail servers.

For instance, the most generous free e-mail service, Gmail, caps e-mails at 20MB in size. Hotmail and Yahoo Mail allow 20MB attachments only to paying users, and 10MB to all others.

In contrast, file transmittal services all let users send files of up to 100MB for free, and many will go higher. Driveway, whose motto is "Size really does matter," lets users send files up to 500MB for free. Pando has a 1GB limit for nonsubscribers, while Civil Netizen is currently the most generous, with a 4GB limit.

Most services let senders drag and drop files into a browser window and enter an e-mail or IM address as a destination. Recipients simply click on a link to start downloading files—a simpler process for most users than FTP transfer, the longtime standard.

"Setting up an FTP server on their home/work computers and providing their intended recipient with log-in information is really beyond the grasp of most computer users," said Brad Linder, a blogger for DownloadSquad who has written about and tested several such services.

Business-Ready Services Emerging

Most services today are run by what appear to be small start-ups, all racing to introduce

Web 2.0-type features and win as many users as possible before the inevitable market shakeout.

For instance, Pando, which is based on peer-to-peer technology, lets users send files from within their Outlook 2003 e-mail program, the Skype Internet telephone service, or using their free software download.

While most services are targeting "prosumers," some services are starting to stake out a niche with business customers.

Take four-year-old LeapFILE. Fremont, Calif.-based LeapFILE lets companies place their brands on the download sites where recipients retrieve their files. That, along with compliance with Sarbanes-Oxley Act and HIPAA security standards, has helped LeapFILE win "hundreds of businesses," according to its Web site. Those businesses include NCR, KB Home, VeriSign and Intuit

Others, such as SendThisFile and DropSend, offer the same branded-site option to business subscribers, as well as encryption on all file transfers. SendThisFile also offers detailed administrative reports, while DropSend offers a separate uploading tool for the desktop.

I've used Pando and it is a very undemanding, easy method to accomplish this type of chore. Until next we meet, be well and don't forget to let me know about anything interesting you've run across in the Computer World.

Put Your Photos on a Diet

Resize your enormous digital image files for easier sharing via e-mail or on the Web

Why would you want to make your image files smaller? Well, high-res, many-megapixel images are great, but sometimes they're just too big.

Suppose you want to post some images to a Web site like Shutterfly, for instance; or maybe you want to e-mail photos to friends and family. A 6-megapixel image, which measures about 3000 by 2000 pixels, is just too big. If you e-mail a half-dozen of those, you might lose friends fast: Such large files tend to clog e-mail pipelines and can take quite a while to download.

What you need to do is shrink your photos to a manageable size that others can appreciate.

Shrinking Photos

Before we start, I should point out that a few digital cameras have the capability to resize images even before they're transferred to the PC. You might want to check your camera manual to see if there's a way to automatically make a duplicate, e-mail-friendly copy of images while they're still in the camera. That way, you can skip this step when you want to e-mail or upload your pictures.

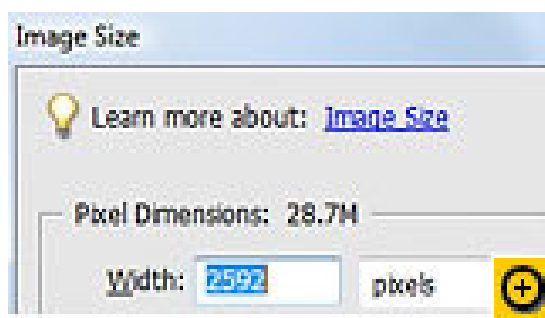
So how small is small enough? I suggest that for Web-based or e-mail images, you shrink the file so its longest dimension—either length or width, depending on the orientation of the image—is no more than 800 pixels. I'll explain how to do it in Adobe Photoshop Elements.

I'll use Photoshop Elements to demonstrate photo editing techniques. As always, you can adapt the steps I present to work with almost any program, but so many folks use Photoshop Elements that I think it's the natural choice for this article. If you have any thoughts about this choice, let me know

Do Your Own Debiggening

Click for full image.

Start Adobe Photoshop Elements and open the file you want to resize. Then choose Image, Resize, Image Size.



Because we want to make the image a specific pixel size, make sure Pixels is selected on the right side of the dialog box. We could also change the photo based on a percentage of the original size, but we don't need that option right now.

Make sure Constrain Proportions is checked—this will maintain the aspect ratio of the photo, so it doesn't end up squished or stretched. Also, make sure that Resample Image is checked and it's set to Bicubic. This generally gives the best results.

Finally, enter the new dimensions for your photo. You only need to enter the height or the width and, because the aspect ratio isn't changing, Photoshop Elements fills in the other number for you automatically. Click OK to resize the image.

You should see the image shrink on the screen. If you click Save now, you'll save your new image over the original. Instead, I suggest that you save it as a new file so you retain the larger original. Choose File, Save As and give the image a new name.

Let Windows do it Automatically

There's another way to resize your photos, and it's especially convenient if you're resizing the photos especially for e-mail. Just select the photos you want to resize in Windows Explorer, right-click, and choose Send To Mail Recipient. Windows displays the Attach Files dialog box, where you can select the new size (I recommend Medium or Large).

After resizing, Windows automatically attaches the new, resized photos to an e-mail message for you; be careful to ensure that the mail program that you use is the one that the "Send To" uses by default is the correct one.



From the September 2007 issue of the Umbrella Online, The Online Journal of the Hampton Roads (VA) Computing Community.



When Bad Things Happen to Good Icons

Q. I don't know what happened, but all the icons on my Desktop disappeared. I can get to my Desktop folder through Windows Explorer, but when I try to drag icons from there to the Desktop, a message pops up that says, "Cannot move icon. Destination folder is the same as the source folder." Can you help me?

A. Yes, I'll be happy to help you get your meandering icons back on your Desktop, though they actually are on your Desktop by virtue of being in the Desktop folder. That's why, when you try to drag them from the Desktop folder to your Desktop, Windows snips at you. It's telling you that you can't move them to your Desktop because they are already there. They're just being shy.

To coax them out of seclusion, right-click a blank area of your Desktop. From the menu that appears, select Arrange Icons By and from the sub-menu, select Show Desktop Icons. Click to place a check mark in front of Show Desktop Icons to turn it back on.

Q. When I try to open a spreadsheet in Excel, I get an error message that says, “Locked for editing.” I created the file, so I don’t know how it could be locked. What can I do to unlock it?

A. Right-click the file and select Properties. In the Attributes section you’ll see that “Read Only” is checked. Remove the check mark, click Apply > OK, and you’ll be able to access and edit the file once again.

Q. I’m looking for a program that will print wallet-size checks. Any suggestions, Mr. M?

A. Check-printer programs are a dime a dozen, but finding one that prints wallet-size checks is the challenge here. Take a look at the cleverly named Check Printer (<http://tinyurl.com/2wr48t>). Unlike other check-printing programs that require you to purchase blank checks, this program prints checks removed from your checkbook—hopefully, with your permission. It allows you to print in a variety of formats, including wallet-size checks. You can try Check Printer for free and it’s only nine dollars to register, if you decide to keep it.

Q. I love your newsletter, Mr. M. Keep up the good work! Lately I’ve been getting email notices that certain emails I supposedly sent were undeliverable, but I know I didn’t send them. What’s going on?

A. Here’s how that generally happens: Your name and email address appear in other peoples’ address books. That’s true for all of us and of course we cannot control who decides to include us in an address book.

Certain forms of virus (worms) will hijack address books and use them to send out messages and infected files that make it appear as if the people in the address book sent them.

If you happen to be in a hijacked address book, mail is going to be sent out that shows your name and address as the sender. If the delivery address on one or more of those messages is no longer valid, it will bounce back to you because you’re shown as the sender. You’ll then exclaim to nobody in particular, “Hey, I don’t know this person and I never sent this message!”

The bottom line is that the undeliverable messages you receive are nothing to be concerned about because they have nothing to do with you. These things tend to run in cycles, so it will probably subside after a few days. It’s just the nature of the Internet beast these days, so whenever you get any of those messages bouncing back to you as undeliverable, just delete them and don’t give ‘em a second thought.

Mr. Modem’s DME (Don’t Miss ‘Em) Sites of the Month Appliance Repair Clinic

Here you’ll find useful information about every major household appliance, including troubleshooting, maintenance tips, answers to common questions, a diagnostic section, and where to find appliance parts.

www.repairclinic.com

My Favorite Word

The perfect site for philologists. Scroll through the submissions of word enthusiasts who share their favorite words. Each word is accompanied by a definition, as well as a little

anecdote about the word, its etiology, or its special meaning to the contributor.

www.myfavoriteword.com

Pandora

Created by the Music Genome Project, you are invited to select your favorite music, then through analysis of the selected melody, harmony, rhythm, and instrumentation, the site will present other music it feels you might also enjoy. Be sure to read the Pandora FAQ (<http://blog.pandora.com/faq>) before participating.

www.pandora.com

Subscribe to Mr. Modem's Weekly Newsletter for plain-English answers by email. For more information, visit www.MrModem.com.

The DealsGuy

by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click

Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

Feedback

I heard from several readers who said they have been successfully traveling with only a "special" flash drive for some time. I hadn't seen a review on this, or read about it as a meeting presentation last year if they were available? I read a lot, especially the UG newsletters I get. I only learned about the USB U3 drives last spring when I purchased a San Disk Flash Drive that I thought was a bargain. When I plugged it into the USB port just to take a look, I thought it was installing something on my HD. I was upset and wanted to know what was going on without my permission. Then I read the enclosed folder about the software pre-installed on that "U3" drive, and other software available on their Web site for it. I was confused and tried unsuccessfully to learn more about it. Around the first of the year was the first I read a review, but without understanding it, I was still confused. Last month I included the article about that topic because I know I'm not the only person behind on new technology knowledge.

Let's Look at the Pluses!

I reviewed Microsoft Money a few years ago and started actually using it when my favorite money program, "Managing Your Money," turned to providing software for banks. I have differences with some Microsoft policies, such as Genuine Advantage, and their product activation process, but when it comes to MS Money; that tech support is the best in the business. Each version I have used came with three years of support via an 800 number. They try hard to answer your questions and do not speak broken English. So far, I've talked to tech support in Newfoundland three times, and they have resolved my questions, followed by an e-mail thanking me for using MS Money and saying that if the issue was still not resolved, they are there to clear it up. The phone waiting time has never been long. What a great value for a product that costs so little. There are things I would like to see improved; such as when I back it up before closing the program, it doesn't limit the number of backups on my external USB flash drive, but that's a minor problem.

Emergency ID and Medical Information

What if you were traveling and became involved in an accident leaving you incapacitated! How would an ambulance medic and ER facility know how to correctly treat you if your medical condition was special, or you had preferences? In my case, I'm diabetic and now take Coumadin (blood thinner) so it would be important for the medic to know that. Identification

Devices L.L.C. offers a compact USB Flash drive to hold vital information that could help a medic make the right decisions. Wear it around your neck, or even put it on your key chain so a medic can see it (the Medical logo is on one side) when examining you, and can then plug it into the USB port on their laptop. Instantly, it gives the default choice to open your information screen. That instantly brings to their computer screen a form with your necessary medical and other information, along with your picture. You simply type in all the necessary information yourself, no complicated instruction to follow, just fill in the labeled blanks.

The company sent me one to try and I was impressed with how easy it was to use and type in the necessary data. The data includes your personal information with emergency phone numbers for whomever you designate, and your doctors, drugs, important medical warnings (if necessary), your insurance companies and also your attorney information. There is a spot for your picture in the upper corner, and even a way to load PDF files for important documents such as a living will, power of attorney, your own personal instructions and other important documents if you want them there. I was impressed that most of the blanks in the form could be expanded to a larger space by double-clicking them to insert additional information, such as additional doctors, medications and other vital information. It can be password protected if you desire, but I wouldn't want that. The MSRP is \$24.95 + \$4.95 S & H.

They are offering DealsGuy readers a \$2.50 discount, but only if you call 1-866-955-0535 to order and mention the DealsGuy column. Larger orders can get a better discount. Ignoring the discount, you can order it on their Web site <<http://www.identificationdevices.net>> using your credit card. I think this product is a great value.

Be Aware

If you are interested in either of the products below, be sure to do your homework and check their Web site for further information because I edited a lot of information out of them to make them fit. I have not tried either product.

Hope My Wife Doesn't Use This Remote Control Stuff On Me!

Anyplace Control Software released version 4.0 of Anyplace Control, an acknowledged remote monitoring solution. The new version extends the frontiers of remote control and now can bypass routers and firewalls, as well as support PCs with dynamic IPs.

Anyplace Control displays the desktop of the remote computer, letting you use your own keyboard and mouse to control it remotely. At any point in time, and to any place in the world that has Internet connection, you can monitor your PC and get data transferred to or from it. The program can be used in a LAN, and it doesn't need a Web connection. Anyplace Control can connect to multiple computers at a time. With Anyplace Control, you will get the smoothest remote connection experience along with full control over the system without an external static IP address. Another good thing is that the program can automatically bypass routers and firewalls that lie between the remote computer and your machine.

You no longer need to spend time sending files via e-mail because it's easier to transfer them directly. The program can transfer any kind of data, and you can be sure that the information you send will be delivered immediately with no response delay. Home users can use the program to get access to their office computers and work from home, or check their own PC while away from home.

Anyplace Control runs under all versions of Microsoft Windows and costs \$22 (USD) for a single-user license. Licensed customers are entitled to free technical support and upgrades. More information on Anyplace Control, as well as a free trial copy is available free of charge

from <<http://www.anyplace-control.com>>.

“I'd like to offer your group a 10% discount. Please contact me at info@anyplace-control.com and name your group to get the discount.” (DealsGuy comment: take a close look at their refund policy and the discount!).

Regards, Goncharuk Yuriy
Chief Executive Officer
yura@anyplace-control.com

Direct download link:

<<http://www.anyplace-control.com/anyplace-control/data/AnyplaceControlInstall.exe>> (2.7 Mb)

A Freebie for Managing Your Downloads

FreeDownloadManager.org announced the release of a new version of their Free Download Manager. The list of FDM features includes accelerating downloads up to 600%, resuming broken downloads, simultaneous downloading from several mirrors, http/https/ftp/bittorrent support, flash video downloads support, video conversion and more. FDM 2.5 is released under the GPL license and is now open-source software.

The new version of Free Download Manager stands out due to its expanded possibilities. Now, FDM works as an upload manager as well, making it easy to share files with other people. FDM now allows downloading files using Bittorrent protocol, as well as downloading video from video sites, such as YouTube, Google Video, MySpace videos, etc. The video can be saved in native .flv format or converted to one of more of the popular video formats. The FDM Team has also added more flexibility to the software providing an opportunity to control FDM remotely, via the Internet. Another new feature, portable mode, will be especially appreciated by users who want to always have the program close at hand. They can easily create FDM portable version and enjoy the software on every computer without another installation.

For more information on FDM, visit the product web site:

<<http://www.freedownloadmanager.org>>

Download link:

<<http://www.freedownloadmanager.org/fdminst.exe>>

That's it for this month. I'll have more new product announcements on my Web site (most not offering a discount). 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@bellsouth.net>. Visit my Web site at <<http://www.dealsguy.com>>.

Net Neutrality: It's Time for Us to Speak Out!

by Linda Gonse

Editor, Orange County IBM PC Users' Group, CA

What Is 'Net Neutrality'?

Briefly, “Net Neutrality” (short for Network Neutrality) is the guiding principle that preserves the free and open Internet. “It means no discrimination. Net Neutrality prevents Internet providers from speeding up or slowing down Web content based on its source, ownership or destination,” according to savetheinternet.com.

“Net Neutrality is the reason why the Internet has driven economic innovation, democratic participation, and free speech online. It protects the consumer's right to use any

equipment, content, application or service on a non-discriminatory basis without interference from the network provider. With Net Neutrality, the network's only job is to move data—not choose which data to privilege with higher quality service.”

Why Is Net Neutrality an Issue?

It's an issue because it involves the transmission of data over broadband networks (e.g. DSL or cable Internet services). As the number of sites on the Internet continues to grow and the quality of data becomes more sophisticated—encompassing video and audio files and other multimedia applications broadband service providers (generally cable and phone companies) are seeking to regulate how material flows to users through their increasingly taxed networks. For most large providers, this has come down to one general desire: They could establish a tiered system of content delivery in which companies with data-heavy content can pay a fee to the providers in return for “special treatment” in transmission. However, advocates project, this also would allow large telecom companies to block or censor things they don't like without consequence.

Moreover, colleges worry that research and distance education could be left behind if broadband companies are allowed to favor certain content. (The implications go far beyond open access.) The Internet-for-hire has profound implications for education, library and publishing services in general. And, for users, there is either a future of poor service, or additional costs, or some combination of the two. Low and fixed income Internet users' would lose their access equality.

What Is Being Done to Preserve Net Neutrality?

In a nutshell, nothing permanent has been done to pass a law to ensure freedom of the Internet. It is still a gigantic struggle of ordinary Internet users, educational institutions, online companies—such as Amazon and Google—non-profit companies, and others, against the massive lobbying efforts of the largest telecommunication companies.

Events that have unfolded since Net Neutrality became a significant issue include:

“This past summer (2006), Congress took up the issue. Following a huge lobbying campaign by both sides, including millions spent by the cable and phone corporations, the House voted down an amendment to the Act that would have made the Federal Communications Commission responsible for enforcing neutrality. In the Senate, a similar amendment was defeated in committee, but net neutrality legislators managed to table a vote on the telecommunications bill indefinitely in hopes that they can somehow force the issue back to the forefront,” Bill Moyers, a respected news commentator and journalist, said on the PBS site at <http://tinyurl.com/yhx7lz>.

In January of this year, a bill was introduced by Senators Olympia Snowe and Byron Dorgan to amend the Communications Act of 1934, which will ensure all content is treated equally and fairly on the Internet. The law also requires providers to offer consumers broadband Internet access that is not bundled with other services like phone, cable or VoIP. The title of their bill is the *Internet Freedom Preservation Act*.

In March, the discussion over Internet governance continued on Capitol Hill. All five FCC commissioners testified in front of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet.

In May, the bill passed the House Judiciary Committee: 20-13.

In a June 2007 report, the Federal Trade Commission urged restraint with respect to the new regulations proposed by network neutrality advocates, noting the “broadband industry

is a relatively young and evolving one,” and given no “significant market failure or demonstrated consumer harm from conduct by broadband providers,” such regulations “may well have adverse effects on consumer welfare, despite the good intentions of their proponents.”

We’ve already had a taste of what can happen if telecommunication companies are handed authority to create tiered service and to have authority over what users can access. Before any decisions have been made, AT&T censored lyrics critical of Bush twice this month during Pearl Jam webcast concerts! <http://tinyurl.com/2gqv4n> This foreshadows what we can expect if Net Neutrality is not made into law permanently.

Pearl Jam appears to feel the same way. “AT&T’s actions strike at the heart of the public’s concerns over the power that corporations have when it comes to determining what the public sees and hears through communications media,” they said. Bill Moyers provides background and details on the subject at: <http://tinyurl.com/hfyb3>. A video segment from *Moyers on America* PBS show, titled “The Net at Risk,” illustrates the remarkable, but unlikely, cross-section of allies on the issue at <http://tinyurl.com/yuylej> There are also links to several articles and videos on the main page of our website: <http://www.orcopug.org>

What Can You Do to Support Net Neutrality?

Internet Neutrality advocates are pushing for people to sign an online petition. One of them is at: <http://action.freepress.net/campaign/savethenet>. The petition says: Congress must preserve a free and open Internet. Please vote for enforceable network neutrality and keep tollbooths, gatekeepers, and discrimination off my Internet.

California Senators Boxer and Feinstein do not accept email from constituents sent through third party sites. So, people should email legislators directly, in addition to adding another name to the online petition so the numbers can be used for clout by Save The Internet.com, FreePress.com, and openinternetcoalition.com, who support the legislation. Boxer and Feinstein are already “believers” but it helps to let them know that the base on this issue is widespread.

The SavetheInternet.com Coalition is more than a million everyday people (partial list of members) who have banded together with thousands of non-profit organizations, businesses and bloggers to protect Internet freedom. The Free Press is a national, non-partisan organization working to reform the media. Through education, organizing and advocacy, it promotes diverse and independent media ownership, strong public media, and universal access to communications. The OpenInternetCoalition represents consumers, grassroots organizations, and businesses working in pursuit of keeping the Internet fast, open, and accessible to all Americans.

You can find contact information for legislators throughout the U.S. at: <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/home/>

People can read Google’s *Guide to Net Neutrality for Google Users* at: <http://www.google.com/help/netneutrality.html> and, they should also sign up to receive updates about Internet Neutrality from one of the sites supporting this legislation, such as <http://www.savetheinternet.com/>.

Once people understand the issue of Internet Neutrality, supporters should inform others about the threat to this essential freedom, and encourage their involvement.

Finally, people who believe in an open Internet need to be aware that organized supporters fighting big telecommunication businesses need money to continue and to win the fight that affects us all. https://secure.freepress.net/05/net_neutrality Even small donations will

help this cause.

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Tales from the Kingdom of the Ordinary User Faxing

by David D. Uffer

Chicago Computer Society, IL

It may be that there are curses saved by the PC minigods for assignment to some PC users, myself among them. Not always, of course, but just often enough to keep us humble and on edge.

Let's review a part of a sea change that led us to where we are now. In mid-August of 1981, IBM released the original IBM PC, an "Entry Level System" in IBMese. Don Estridge was an engineer of some standing in IBM and had wangled their powers to assign him a small group (14) of developers to create a personal-scale computer with substantial backing to outshine the then-current machines like the Commodore. Estridge was himself fired-up on the potential of personal computers and was the right group leader for this special project.

IBM must have viewed his project as less than crucial since they let him depart from their traditional all-internal sourcing for parts and components. The corporate policy was that if a project needed new components or software, they would invent and patent them in due time. Using NIH parts (Not Invented Here) was a no-no. Citing urgency, economy, and ready availability of perfectly good parts, Estridge was able to skirt the NIH ban and produce the prototype that IBM accepted, manufactured, and released to the world, with open architecture so users could make their own adaptations. They did, in droves. Other makers did, in ample numbers. The essential early IBM PC was born and the world changed.

So there we were, messing about with *VisiCalc*, *Lotus 1-2-3*, and various word processors. In those days before a graphical user interface, we assailed the black DOS screens, pecking in our little green characters and watching the results. Sometimes we messed up and lost a lot of work. A hero waited in the wings. The brilliant Peter Norton had developed a relatively easy way to retrieve and resurrect the lost—or most of it. A savior was at hand, idolized and trusted as he developed more aids and tools. We were infused with hope by the prospect of help. Or some were.

My first experience with the Norton salvation was different than expected. It was a farewell to data, by degrees. Step by step, it waved hello and goodbye. The black screen of fate. Redo the work, maybe better the second time. And I did learn the personal salvation: save your work. So for this duffer, Norton developed a tarnish early on. Later, I came to be using only the antivirus application.

The tarnish deepened and developed pits on the firewall firing line. It was near the start of their general acceptance and Norton's *Personal Firewall* seemed a reasonable choice. Not for me, as it turned out, though it did protect my e-mail. It did so by gradually denying me access to mail until I had no access at all. Complete, 100% protection. Subsequently, I was told that the program was not inherently evil and should have offered me, the user, an acceptance/denial option at every point and that I must have missed them all. Maybe I did.

That's what duffers do.

But worse was yet to come. One of the ways *Personal Firewall* had seemed a reasonable choice was that it promised that it could be turned off. I could not determine how or where the secret exit was. OK. I could remove the program from the PC's mind. Or so I thought. But the MS System software removal utility could not find it. Norton, now part of Symantec, had subverted Microsoft. OK. One of my unused Norton utilities was a program scrubber tool. That would do it. It did not, though it did acknowledge its existence. But Norton would not touch Norton. Maybe it was a privacy issue. OK. I found a program that vowed removal of any other program and used it against the firewall. It reduced the PC's functionality to that of a gibbering idiot. OK, off to the lobotomy shop for total wipeout formatting. Some fun? Sort of. With minor satisfaction, I later heard I was not alone in my disgust.

Now to the present, additional interplay with Symantec, and some suggested name modifications.

Just the fax. The first stage I recall of melding personal computers and faxing was enabling PCs to send existing digital files as faxes to recipient fax machines, which printed them out as standard faxes on funny paper which was repellant to the touch. Sort of like sending telegrams on nasty paper. Users could also employ an expensive and touchy scanner and an expensive and variably accurate OCR program to read certain type fonts and convert them into digital files to send either to fax machines or other PCs and their printers using regular paper.

Then, when massive increases in memory arrived, along came the graphical interface and transmitting images was possible. Users could send pictures of any text or handwriting as well as pictures of pictures, using better scanners integrated into better fax transmitters / receivers / printers. Wow. Now, to my shallow understanding, the pre-eminent PC faxing program is *WinFaxPRO*, from Symantec. Mine has worked reasonably well, albeit unreasonably complex, until recently. That brings up the question of a curse again.

Briefly put and in serial order, my *WinFax* would no longer send a fax. It would not reinstall without my uninstalling the existing program. It will not uninstall and has no recognition of itself as an entity. A search for the program under its normal name does not yield the normal icon. Opening the similarly named file folder icon unleashes a confetti burst of scores of petty parts, none of which do anything useful. Trying to install it on a second machine, which does not have any version of it, set off the same hissyfits. I suggest for at least my own usage that *WinFax* should be titled *LoseFax* and Symantec should be SighMatic since it seems to bring an automatic sigh to this duffer, who is currently considering a stand-alone HP fax/ scanner/printer under \$100 or the new trend in e-faxing. May the minigods please be pleased or at least compliant.

Dave Uffer has been a member of the Chicago Computer Society for somewhere near twenty years. He originated in Colorado, never skied there then or since, but came to the Midwest, settling in the Chicago area. In his varied experience he has earned several degrees—none ending in a “D”—and worked in computer-related fields as a cog of various sizes since the 1960s. He considers himself less than expert in many PC specialties but at least functional in several he believes important enough to qualify him as an ordinary user, courted and often slighted by the industry. This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups. All other uses require the permission of the author www.ccs.org.

Q: Using Windows XP on a 4 year old machine, every two hours or so, I get the blue screen of death. The operating system was updated/replaced about four months ago; problem started before the OS change.

A: Check the system backup battery on a machine that old. Replacing the silver oxide battery may be all you need. It could be that simple and cheap.

A: It may be messed up drivers. Check the antivirus and go back a little before the problem started to reload from back up.

Q: I downloaded Linux Ubuntu on a HP 5650 networked with another machine running Windows 98. I'm unable to print from the Ubuntu machine, even though the printer shows up on the Ubuntu machine. The printer won't even run a test print from the Ubuntu machine, but works fine from the Windows 98. I can see files on the Windows 98 from the HP 5650. Linux group has not been much help. According to the HP website, drivers for this printer are installed on Ubuntu by default.

A: Is there a driver (for sure) for the printer showing on the HP machine? Sounds like a driver problem or configuration issue. I recommend hooking the printer directly to the Linux machine. Check the Linux website for drivers. Try to reinstall the driver.

Shameless Promotion: Tonight's door prize may be your answer. It's the book for Ubuntu with a CD included.

A: Send a note to Nick Francesco or call in to his radio show. Try Sound Bytes forum for which there is no fee. Or you can subscribe to Nick's personal answer service.

Website Promotion: There's a new forum on the club's website. You will need a login to post, not to read. There were previous security issues. Contact Bob Avery to set a login.

Q: I got a "free with rebate" copy of a morphing program that has a portion of the set up online. The online message says I must first disable the firewall. I have probably three firewalls, set up a long while ago; AOL, AVG, Road Runner. How should I proceed?

A: Use the Control Panel look under Security for the primary firewall. Several of them give you the option of disabling the firewall for a set period of time so that you don't lose the protection if you forget to go back in and re-arm the firewall.

Q: I've been using an original 60 gig hard drive for quick and easy backup of large files. It's approaching full, so I delete things, and the files disappear, but it doesn't show any space freed up. Even when I delete things to the recycle bin and empty the trash, it goes through the motions, but no space opens up.

A: Usually a drive works on percentage used, you'll get a warning at 90 or 95 % full. Try disk clean up.

What file system do you use? *FAT 32*. You may have a corrupted FAT table. Check other drivers.

A: Take everything off the drive, reformat it, reinstall IF you have a certificate of authenticity for proof that the computer came loaded with that software. You can't boot off the copy for saving the software proof because it is a hidden partition, but certificate of authenticity (logo on the computer) is all you'll need.

A: Try Scandisk then de-frag the disk.

A: Try running tech disk.

Preferred answer: "I keep telling my wife it's a five year old machine, I need a new one, but she's not buying it."

Comment: Spybot has a new version out 1.5 Spybot Search and Destroy It's been out about a month or maybe more. You can use Spybot 1.4 up to Vista with limitations. Spybot 1.5 is specifically for Vista, integrates with Vista's security center.

Q: One of the older machines told me Ad-Aware and Spybot must go.

A: It should work, but could give false positives because a definition of spyware is included in the software.

Comment: Sad news Microsoft is shutting down AutoPatcher, which is a free bundle of all Windows updates all as a single program that can be copied to CD then installed to multiple machines and is much faster than if you had to use dial up for the official download. Softpedia still makes parts of AutoPatcher available but the Vista versions are gone. AutoPatcher was doing Microsoft a service, but it did subvert some genuine Windows checks.

There is an alternate you can use but only through Firefox (and possibly Opera). Go to www.windowsupdate.62nds.com but some of the updates will work for one computer only. It will give you a Java plug-in, which takes five seconds. This is a work around for when your Internet Explorer isn't working.

You have to install MS updates in a specific order. AutoPatcher did it in the proper sequence and did the required reboots, but was a month behind the Microsoft site. This alternative won't corrupt your files to prevent you using the MS site.

Q: Can I use it to update Windows 3.1? (General laughter)

A: Windows 98 and 95 yes. Windows 3.5 if you can find a Firefox that will work with it.

September Program

by John McMillan, Secretary

Steve Staub stated that the Monitor will be assembled at St. Stephens, September 15th. He made a special request for one or more volunteers to evaluate numerous boxes of software and books that have been donated to the Society. In return for this service they would get a choice from those considered useful with others being used for door prizes. Those not deemed useful could then be discarded. The next planning meeting will be at Sally's house October 2nd. We will meet at the Penfield Library on Baird Rd. for the October 9th meeting. Check the web page after October 3rd for the speakers topic.

Dave Thompson mentioned that the digital photography SIG will meet September 13th at St. Johns Meadows, off the south side of Elmwood Ave. between South Clinton and Goodman Street. Steve cited our feature door prize, a book on Linux, that included a Ubuntu distribution

disk. The room should be cleaned up at the end of the meeting but the chairs and table left in place

Speaker Arpad Kovaks presentation, titled “Vista; Good and Bad—Behind the Hype” began with a brief history of computer software, starting with Windows One. There were some comparisons to early Apple operating systems. Unfortunately trouble with the recorder caused me to miss the early part of the presentation but Arpad's slides will be available on the Society's web page.

Vista was released in November 2006 though it did not go on sale until 2007. Arpad referred to its major impact as “eye candy,” different ways of displaying many of the existing windows without necessarily adding new functionality. Beta versions, that automatically reported bugs back to Microsoft, were made available to selected testers. This step probably led to more effective testing of the package than might otherwise have been accomplished.

He pointed out that while Windows XP came in Home and Professional versions, Vista offered four flavors, Home Basic, Home Premium, Business and Ultimate. Home Basic, which is offered on many budget desktops and laptops, does not include Aero, the graphics package that produces much of the “eye candy.” Higher priced machines generally have Home Premium that includes Media Center program components that Arpad found very helpful in organizing music, picture and video files. The Business version includes some networking functionality not included in other versions. Very expensive, high end machines may have Ultimate that, in addition to Aero and Media Center, has special goodies like Texas Hold Em (for those tired of solitaire), and Dream space that adds motion but not sound to the desktop background. Editors note: Some users may find the motion more distracting than beneficial.

Arpad recommends that if you are purchasing a new machine, try to get one with Windows XP. If you must take Vista, get at least the Home Premium version. For Vista machines, get a minimum of one gigabyte of RAM and preferably a dedicated video card. Following the slides, Arpad demonstrated a number of Vistas capabilities starting with a video desktop background.

One difference that he pointed out was the revised Start menu that uses scroll bars to nest things rather than expanding to the right with additional choices. New preview features open a thumbnail showing what is running when the mouse is hovered over a start bar icon. Increased searching capability has been added but at the cost of indexing the hard drive, a resource consuming activity. Microsoft has also instituted a side bar which is similar in function to Apples dock technique. Arpad displayed battery status, memory availability and CPU utilization with small applications Microsoft calls gadgets that are included in the side bar. He finds this more convenient than just running the applications in the background. Running these with Aero, Firefox, and PowerPoint used about 700 megabytes of memory and a minimum of 20% of the capacity of one of the machines dual processors.

Filing nomenclature as been redesigned, with Users replacing XP's Documents and Settings or 98's My Documents. Arrows have replaced the slashes that used to delineate segments in the file path. Many of the changes do not provide new functionality, just a different way to accomplish the same results. The Control Panel also underwent major changes in display methods. However if the new techniques are not to your liking you can revert back to an earlier version.

Among the bad things that he noted was the need to get updated versions of many programs such as Norton's Security, other anti virus or spyware programs, Adaware, and others, that ran under XP but will not run under Vista. If you get Vista, you have to check the compatibility of every other program that you use.

It is often difficult to summarize all of the salient points of such a broad topic. The best way to get the most out of this type of presentation is to attend in person and concentrate on those elements that are important to your personal needs. Why not plan to join us at the next meeting.

The Lighter Side

Customer: "I am going to shoot everyone at your DSL office. Where are you located at, anyways?"

Tech Support: "Uh, for security purposes, just like this, our company states we cannot reveal our call center's location."

Customer: "I am filing a complaint against you with the public utilities commission."

Tech Support: "You do realize DSL is *not* a public utility, right?"



Customer: "I'm no computer whiz, but I was wondering which end of the phone cord goes into the wall and which one goes into the modem."

