

The Rochester Computer Society, Inc.

MONITOR

Vol. 25, No. 4

April 2008

Next Meeting
Tuesday, April 8 Penfield Courtroom A
How to Print a Newsletter

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The New, The Best, and The Worst

Collected by Pim Borman

Webmaster, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

Do You Ubuntu (yet)? A Linux Update

In February of 2002 I wrote:

"It has been said that Windows XP is less buggy than its Windows 95, 98, and Me predecessors; damnation by faint praise. XP is also more expensive, can only be used on a single computer, and presents many incompatibilities with existing hardware and software. It hogs resources. That led me to wonder how Linux is coming along."

Replace "XP" with "Vista" and history repeats itself. Furthermore, add that online security has

dramatically worsened and that the security of Windows Vista is at best only marginally improved.

At the time I got a copy of the Red Hat Linux 7.2 distribution (list price \$60), included in a 1000+ pages "*Linux Bible*" and proceeded to evaluate it. I found that the limited software included in the distribution was nice and useful, but trying to install additional programs from the Internet was a nightmare.

Six years later desktop Linux has matured beyond recognition. Lindows, later renamed Linspire, was the first distribution making it a one-click operation to download and install software from a large online library. Originally the cost of acquiring Linspire and a one-year subscription to the library was \$100, but more recently the service has been available for free. I am still using an older version of

Linspire daily, mostly for Web browsing, accessing email, and playing Freecell, Yukon, or MahJongg.

In 2004 Marc Shuttleworth, a South African by birth, started a free new Linux distribution called Ubuntu (“humanity towards others”). In 1999 he sold Internet security software he had developed to Verisign for about \$575 million. He spent \$20 million of that on an 8-day trip by Soyuz to the Space Station and had plenty left over for a free software project. By now Ubuntu has become the most advanced and popular desktop Linux distribution, with the help of numerous volunteer contributors.

Ubuntu undergoes continuous upgrades as new and improved software is being developed and tested. Twice a year, in April and October, a new version is released. The latest version is numbered 7.10, for October of 2007, and is nicknamed “Gutsy Gibbon.” (The next issue in April, version 8.4, will be named “Hardy Hero.” You get the drift).

I installed Ubuntu side-by-side with Windows XP on my desktop computer, equipped with an AMD Athlon64 X2 4800+ dual core processor, 1 GB of RAM and an nVidia GeForce 7600 graphics card. I put it in a separate Linux partition on my hard drive previously used for Linspire. Before committing to the installation I ran Ubuntu off the CD to verify that it was compatible with my hardware.

Once installed, Ubuntu was ready to go. It automatically set up my connection to the Internet with Firefox, and with my permission downloaded a large number of updates and additions released since October. The OpenOffice.org suite of programs, comparable to MS Office, was ready to go. I already had been using the Windows version of OpenOffice Writer so there was no learning curve whatsoever. The Gimp, an advanced graphics program similar to Adobe Photoshop Elements and with comparable features, came preinstalled. I also found drivers for my HP 812C printer and my Epson Perfection 3490 Photo Scanner. With all the necessary tools at hand I had no difficulty producing the January newsletter, including typing the articles, downloading articles from other user groups, and designing the layout and the new masthead. I printed the newsletter ready for Xeroxing and used OpenOffice Writer to save a separate version (omitting treasury data) to pdf format for distribution on the Internet.

Ubuntu provides many additional Linux programs:

- Thunderbird, well-known program.
- Pidgin, an Messenger graphical multi-protocol instant messaging client, capable of using AIM/ICQ, Yahoo!, MSN, IRC, Jabber, Napster,

Zephyr, Gadu-Gadu, Bonjour, Groupwise, Same-time, SILC, and SIMPLE all at once.

- GRAMPS, genealogy program capable of GED COM files that are used in such programs as FamilyTree Maker for Windows. It can produce reports in various formats, such as text, HTML and PDF.
- GnuCash can track finances in multiple accounts, keeping running and reconciled balances. It has a graphical user interface, double entry, a hierarchy of accounts, expense accounts (categories), and can import Quicken QIF files and OFX files.
- Multiple sound and videoprograms for burning and reading CDs and DVDs, ripping and creating audio CDs, recording sound clips, playing movies, etc.
- Popular games, including aisleriot (anagram of solitaire), a large collection of card games, including Freecell. Also blackjack, glchess, gnome-sudoku, gnometriss (Tetris), gnomine (minesweeper), mahjongg, and many others.

Additional programs can be installed with the Add/Remove function. Some powerful Linux programs that are not (yet) specifically adapted for Ubuntu can be retrieved with the Synaptic package manager, an easy-to-use graphical program to download applications from the Internet. I used it to download and install Scribus, an advanced desktop page layout manager capable of producing commercial grade output in PDF and Postscript.

Difficult to use for a non-professional, but it worked just fine.

Installation

It is easy to install Ubuntu and Windows on the same computer in separate partitions. Previously that required manually repartitioning your computer with a program such as Partition Manager, but the latest Ubuntu version, Gutsy Gibbon, includes its own Linux-based partition manager, GParted, and automatically uses it to scan your computer for available space and to reconfigure that space (with your approval) to install itself. During boot-up the computer displays a menu of startup options, including Windows or Ubuntu.

I evaluated the ease of installation on an old Dell Inspiron 3800 laptop computer, with a 600 MHz Celeron CPU, 320 MB RAM and 880MB free disk space. Installation alongside the existing Windows Me went flawlessly. The computer didn't have a network card, but Ubuntu recognized the PCMCIA wireless network card and connected to the Internet after I provided the router parameters.

"Sounds Great, But Why Bother?"

For the same reasons people move out of the city to the suburbs: security and cost-of-living. To enjoy the best of both worlds, install Ubuntu side-by-side with a basic Windows program. No need for expensive MS Office or Adobe programs. Use Ubuntu for safe online access, and keep Windows for those few occasions where Linux does not (yet) provide the means. As time goes by, it will probably be possible to abandon Windows altogether. Give it a try!

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It's Not Just Entertainment Any More

by Gene Komaromi

Computer Club of Green Valley, AZ

In the past, we've commonly thought of computer games, especially those played on game machine platforms, as pure entertainment. Times have changed and many games have become educational as well as physical training devices.

Learning has become fun for both kids and adults. Here's some information that will keep you ahead of the digital gaming curve.

DS

Handheld Games for Senior Citizens Nintendo has a hot selling hand held video game machine called the "DS" for "Double Screen." The device opens with two visible screens, one is a display screen and the other is a "Touch Screen" which serves as the controller interface. The DS has a series of games designed with "older" users in mind. They are Brain Age, Big Brain Academy and Flash Focus.



All three have been recommended by AARP, and Brain Age has been shown to improve mental performance in independent tests. Brain Age and Big Brain Academy have a series of games, practice exercises and tests that are designed to improve and evaluate cognitive skills, and best of all "they're fun."

They chart and graph improvement and will keep records for several individuals.

Have you ever had a problem with that vision test on your driver's license exam? Then Flash Focus was made for you. It too has games and exercises, but instead of improving your brain they improve your eyes.

Wii Want to Play

The hottest new gaming console is the Wii, another product from Nintendo that has games designed for the older kids, real older kids. The game controller is a little motion sensitive device that straps on the user's wrist. Participants interact with the game by moving their arms.

In the Detroit area, aerobic classes and movies have been replaced by Wii in many senior citizen centers. "Bowling" seems to be one of the most popular games. I've played it, and yes, it's exactly like the real thing. The motion of your arm, as you approach a virtual bowling alley, allows you to curve the ball and add some spin. Wii bowling leagues are springing up all over the country. Nintendo is about to release an exercise program for the Wii that uses a floor pad as a controller.

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New Technology Terms

by Sandy Berger

CompuKISS

Words, words, words...in the fast-moving world of technology, new words and phrases are constantly introduced. In order to keep up with the times, you need to learn about the current terminology. This need not be a drudgery. In fact, it can be fun to see what new words and abbreviations are popular. Check these out and you can wow your friends next time computers and technology become the subject at the 19th hole or the neighborhood cocktail party.

SSD (Solid-State Drive)

This is a type of memory that you will be hearing more and more about in the future. It is a type of flash memory that has no moving parts. Some small laptop computers are appearing using SSDs for storing data instead of hard drives. Because SSDs have no spinning disks like the ordinary hard drives, they offer improved battery life for laptop computers. They also have better data access speeds than hard disks.

404

You may recognize this as a common message on the Internet. It indicates that the requested page

could not be found. This may mean that the page has temporarily or permanently moved and is not currently available. However, recently the term 404 has come to have another meaning. It refers to someone who is totally clueless. From the error message “404 not found,” this has become a slang term meaning that the person’s brain could not be located. If you decide to call your spouse a 404, make sure that he or she has not read this column or you’ll be in big trouble.

Crowdsourcing

Using the skills of a wide variety of people to do a job or perform a task is called crowdsourcing. The people who perform such a function are often found on the Internet. Although these people can be paid, often they are often volunteers.

Geotagging

This is technology built into a digital camera or part of a camera add-on device that is able to tag each photo with the exact location that the picture was taken. Photos can then be sorted based on where they were taken. They can also be plotted on maps.

HDMI (High-definition Multimedia Interface)

This is a newer audio and video interface that is often found on televisions, DVD players, video game consoles, video cameras, and other video equipment. This type of connector replaces older standard connectors like composite video, S-Video, component video, and DVI. HDMI carries both audio and video in one cable. It supports digital rights management systems. HDMI cables can be very expensive in comparison to older audio and video cables.

One Laptop per Child (OLPC)

Led by Nicholas Negroponte, this is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to design, manufacture, and distribute affordable laptop computers to children around the world. The laptops were initially called the “\$100 laptop”, but the final build cost almost \$200 each. In 2007, the One Laptop per Child organization started distributing these laptop computers to children in developing countries. The laptops are bright green and white portable computers with special features like a sealed keyboard. They are called XO computers.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

Search Engine Optimization is the process of tweaking a website to improve the volume of traffic that is produced by search engines. The idea is to give the website a higher ranking in the search engines thereby producing more traffic to the site. SEO includes using keywords and website design to get higher rankings with search engines.

Skype

This is an online service that allows users to make telephone calls over the Internet. The software is free and there is no charge to call the computers of other Skype users. Your computer must have a microphone in order to use Skype. With the addition of a webcam, Skype callers from computer to computer can also place video calls where they can both see and talk to each other. Skype also allows you to call landlines and cell phones for a fee. Skype has other services such as instant messaging and file transfer.

FTW

This stands for “For The Win”. You may remember it being a part of the game show “Hollywood Squares” where a certain square would be selected “For the Win.” It is also used in some online games like World of Warcraft. It is now a popular term that usually projects a boast, as in “I did it FTW.” It is often used ironically and sarcastically.

Bot

A bot computer is one that has been infected with some type of malware that allows the computer to be controlled by an outside entity. Millions of computers are bots that are now under the influence of malware distributors who use these computers to send out spam, attack other computers and websites, and carry out scams and identity theft. The computer owner is usually unaware that their computer has been compromised since this activity is performed in the background.

BotNet

A series of bot computers, sometimes as large as millions of computers is called a BotNet. The BotNet does the bidding of some entity that has compromised the computers and taken control of them by installing some type of malware.

Zombie

This term that means the same thing as a Bot. It is a personal computer that has been infected with a virus that allows an outside force to control it. Such a computer can be used to send out spam or attack other computers without the owner’s knowledge. Millions of computers today are zombie computers. They are part of a Zombie Network of computers that are controlled by hackers.

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64 Bit Computing—Pros and Cons

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D

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In July 2005 I wrote an article for the Monitor on using the 64 bit version of Windows XP. My conclusions at that time were that most users should wait the arrival of Microsoft's next operating system before leaping into 64 bit computing. So Vista's 64 bit version (Vista x64) has now been here for about a year, should you be considering a change from your 32 bit processor to a 64 bit processor? I'll lay out some of the pros and cons of this so you can make a decision.

First, let's consider why 64 bit processing is in the future of computing. To do this we need to consider some very basic information on how computers function. As most of you are well aware, computers process information as either a 0 or a 1. Or in the really old days of computing, these were switches that were either "on" or "off". Each value constitutes one one binary "bit" or instruction. A central processor with a 32 bit instruction set can process 32 bits per clock cycle. Thus if you have a CPU that runs with a 2 GHz (2 billion cycles per second) clock cycle, it is processing 64 billion bits per cycle. That's the theory, in practice there are limitations which may reduce the actual processing speed. Anyway, a 64 bit processor could handle twice the number of bits per second as a 32 bit processor. Again, because of other limitations, the actual processing speed advantage is less.

There is another major advantage to 64 bit computing and that is the size of the address space or the amount of memory that can be used. For a 32 bit processor, working memory is limited to 2 raised to the 32nd power (2^{32}) or 4 GB of memory. A 64 bit processor can address 16 Exabytes of Ram. That's, 2 to the 64th power (2^{64}) or 16 Million Gigabytes! At the present there are no machines that support this much RAM. For one thing the cost of that much memory would be excessive. So manufacturers are generally limiting motherboards and chipsets to 128 GB of RAM or less as Vista x64 can only address up to 128 GB of RAM. The maximum RAM is usually greater than the 4 GB limitation of the motherboards designed for 32 bit processors.

So the question becomes, why do computers need any amount of memory even close to any of these figures? The answer relates to how people use their computers. A lot of users, and I'm one of them, open more than one application at a time. This can have a definite effect on the speed of operation of the computer. When you open an application in either Windows XP or Vista, the operating system sets

aside a 4 GB memory space for the application, drivers and other required information. So each application that is open has its own 4 GB memory space. It is a rare personal computer that has 4GB or more of RAM. In fact, Windows XP can not address more than 4 GB of RAM and it uses almost one GB for its own components. So how is this handled?

The solution to the requirement for very large RAM space for each application is called "Virtual Memory." The computer stores much of the required information for an application on the hard drive. It then moves data back and forth between RAM and the hard drive as it is needed. A paging table is used to track the locations of data on the hard drive and in RAM. So, even when you open only a single application, a large part of it will be stored on the hard drive or in "virtual memory". When information on the hard drive is needed, the paging table remaps it to RAM memory and also moves data from memory to the hard drive. Because read/write access to the hard drive is much slower than read/write access to RAM, the overall processing time is much slower. If you are simply doing word processing or writing e-mail, then the speed difference is not really noticeable. If you were doing calculations using a large spreadsheet while setting up a Power Point presentation with complex graphics, then you would probably notice a slight slow down in the overall operation of your system.

So the primary advantage of 64 bit computing is the tremendous increase in address space. This advantage is also present when running 32 bit software on a true 64 bit machine. Running 32 bit software on Vista x64 is referred to as running on the Windows on Windows64 or WoW64. By utilizing the added address space of x64, the time required for loading, unloading and switching processes can be greatly reduced or eliminated. This can also eliminate the frequent hard drive cycling that is referred to as "thrashing", which can occur in a 32 bit system.

If you decide to move to a 64 bit system, just be sure to add plenty of RAM. Certainly you should have a minimum of 8 GB. The motherboard should also have a system bus designed to work with a 64 bit processor. Otherwise the bus can become a major bottleneck. In fact, you really should not try to upgrade a 32 bit machine by installing Vista x64. To really be successful, you should buy a machine which is designed from the ground up to run Vista x64. Also, the upgrade version of Vista x64 will only upgrade the 64 bit version of Windows XP.

That brings us to the "cons" about Vista x64 and 64 bit computing in general. 64 bit processors have been available for four or five years for desktop

computers. However, when we relate this to machines with Windows operating systems, the big problem is slowness of the adoption of 64 bit hardware and software by manufacturers. One example is the lack of device drivers for peripheral hardware. So just what do you need drivers for? The one that affects most people is the printer driver. Operating systems don't always include a printer driver because of the great variety of makes and models. Although I know that many HP printer drivers are delivered along with the 32 bit Windows OS. However, this is not true for the 64 bit version. If a 64 bit driver is available for your printer you may have to download and install it yourself.

With Windows Vista, you not only must have a 64 bit driver, it must be a "signed" driver or Vista will reject it. A signed driver contains a digital signature or a certificate in the program code which meets Microsoft's requirements and is from a company that has a license (Publishers Identity Certificate) from Microsoft. You may have already encountered an "unsigned driver" message when you tried to install software or drivers. In Windows XP and 32 bit Vista you were able to continue the installation in spite of the lack of the signed driver. In Vista x64 this is not possible. Vista will discontinue the installation after advising you of the lack of the signed certificate. This procedure was implemented to try to stop "rootkit" malware from installing itself in the heart of the operating system – the kernel. Rootkits are able to hide within the computer by altering register keys and processes. By blocking the installation of unsigned device drivers Microsoft is hoping to reduce the rootkit problem.

A driver is also needed for your graphics cards. Both ATI and NVidia released 64 bit drivers for their newest cards in December, 2007. There is considerable doubt that they will produce 64 bit drivers for any of their older cards. Another reason why you have to consider new hardware when you are thinking of transitioning to a 64 bit OS. Other hardware that needs 64 bit drivers include scanners, sound cards, modems, serial ATA (SATA) / RAID and just about any other hardware peripheral. So you may need to update all of your hardware in order to get 64 bit drivers. Also, since the graphics drivers have only appeared almost a year after Vista's debut, other hardware manufacturers may still be working on drivers. You definitely need to do your homework if you are considering the purchase of an x64 system.

Software is another area that is slow to take advantage of the extra processing capacity of Vista x64. Although, as I mentioned earlier, x64 can run 32 bit software it is done in an emulation mode. The

32 bit application can not take advantage of the wider data path that is available in x64. Although there is some advantage due to the added memory in an x64 machine, the software is not using the hardware to full advantage. Just as happened when computers shifted from 16 bit processors to 32 bit processors, there was considerable delay before manufacturers moved solidly into the 32 bit realm.

So what applications are currently most likely to have 64 bit applications that can use the full capacity of x64?

Applications for creating digital content in computer-aided design and digital video editing. Applications that require mathematical precision and floating-point performance.

Applications that involve large, high-performance databases.

Vision acquisition and analysis applications with large amounts of data moving directly into memory at rapid rates.

I suspect it will still be several years before 64 bit computing will be the mainstream for personal computers. So, unless your requirements are similar to the above list, I would suggest you stick with 32 bit systems for a while longer.

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor of physiology. He has been working with personal computers for over thirty years, developing software and assembling systems. He can be reached at bwsail at yahoo.com. This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups.

Photoshop Lightroom: a Review

by Tom Ekvall

*newsletter editor and "Creative Imaging" columnist,
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Do you like to shoot plenty of pictures with your digital camera?

If you are like me, storing and organizing them is always a chore so that you can find the right picture when you need it.

Enter Adobe Photoshop Lightroom—the new kid on the block for handling your digital workflow. Designed specifically for professional photographers, Lightroom is equally fantastic and impressive for any photo enthusiast.

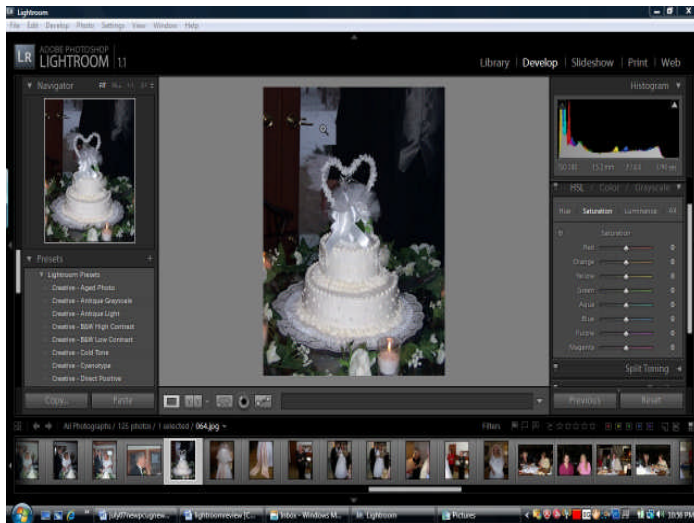
Lightroom is not designed to replace Adobe Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. However, It is the perfect complement to the programs, and for some who do not care for doing layers, may become the only product they need for digital imaging tasks.

While Photoshop is designed as a general-purposed tool to handle a variety of creative digital imaging tasks, Lightroom has only one focus—providing photographers with an effective, streamlined way to manage their photos, process

them, and deliver a final product whether a print or web gallery.

The product incorporates many features I enjoy in Photoshop CS3, such as the state of the art black and white adjustment techniques and being able to edit JPEG and TIFF files in a non-destructive manner.

In fact, everything you do in Lightroom is handled in a non-destructive manner, so that .jpg images do not diminish in quality over time as editing changes are made. I like the way Lightroom



lays out the photo editing tools on the workspace so that everything is at hand. Edits can be undone in the future and new changes made without having to create separate files for each change. Information is stored in a separate file associated with the image. The information is there in a Managed Photos folder whether you import the images into Lightroom's library or leave them in the original location.

Lightroom in fact is a cataloger of your photos, with the user having the choice where to store the images. It will even recognize pictures on removable drives or external hard drives as part of the catalog, something most browsers will not do. I chose to store my pictures in their original location for now.

When you start up Lightroom, you will notice a sleek, black interface with photos in the workspace depicted as slides.

The concept behind Lightroom is to provide a simplified workflow setup from shoot to finish with five modules identified on the top right hand section of the screen: Library, Develop, Slideshow, Print, and Web. Each module has a set of panels with preset information on the right hand side, task information on the left hand side, photo displays in the center and a filmstrip on the bottom of photos being reviewed. The filmstrip shows all in a particular folder, not just those opened up.

The **Library** is where photos are imported and cataloged with the ability to add keyword information, rate the photo on importance, and even mark it for rejection before a final deletion. It also includes Quick Develop controls that let you make simple edits with push button controls rather than sliders. Photos can be viewed in tandem to facilitate selecting, comparing, and ranking (stars and colors) photos for later processing.

The **Develop** module is where you do the non-destructive processing of photos including those in the .raw format. Whether you are in the library looking at a set of photos or in the Develop module, a histogram of the picture selected is always visible. This helps in evaluating which picture to keep or edit for printing.

The **Slideshow** provides a way to review photos or show them to someone else in an interesting format with the film strip of all the photos still showing on the bottom part of the screen.

The **Print** module provides all the choices for printing while the **Web** provides a tool for enabling the pictures to be viewed on the web either in html or in flash formats.

I love the way Lightroom is laid out on the screen as you can see from the accompanying image. Everything is so simple to use and user-friendly.

I also love the Color Adjustment sliders that adjust both the primary and secondary color ranges (all eight colors) with regard to the hue, saturation and luminance (HSL) characteristics of the image as well as the tonal controls including a new Tone Curve feature. Both allow you to make adjustments directly in the targeted photo.

Lightroom can probably handle most of my image-editing needs. However, there is still definitely a place for Photoshop CS3 for those things which Lightroom cannot do.

What Lightroom cannot do is apply layers, masks, and selective editing to a photo nor will it allow you to do compositing and montages. It is not a "fix it" program when extensive retouching is necessary, nor does it have filters and brushes to create artistic effects, something I love to do. Lightroom also does not work with video, which is no big deal to me.

Lightroom does provide for exporting the photo to Photoshop, Photoshop Elements or other image editing programs so that further work can be done to the photo.

Lightroom sells through Adobe (www.adobe.com) for \$299. A 30-day fully functional tryout version is available for downloading from their web site.

Final thought. This is definitely a must-have program for those who want to manage their photos and process them in a non-destructive manner. To me what sets this apart from other organizers/digital asset management programs is the quality and depth of the photo-editing tools. It is obvious the program draws upon the experience of Adobe staff in developing image-editing products such as Photoshop, Bridge, and Camera Raw.

The system requirements include Microsoft Vista or Windows XP, 768 MB of RAM (1 GB recommended) and a Pentium 4 processor. I installed the software on an Acer laptop running Vista with Pentium 4 dual-core processors (1.60 GHz speed), and 2 GB of RAM. No installation problems. There are a number of books out on the market to help you learn more about the software. The one I use is Photoshop Lightroom for Digital Photographers Only by Ron Sheppard. I like it for its simplicity in presenting information in an easy-to-understand format. There are a number of other great books out there.

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E-Mail Responsibilities

by Bob Schwartz
HAL-PC, Houston, TX

E-mail is a very valuable method of almost instant communication. However, many people operate under an illusion that it is private. It is not. Once sent, it is effectively broadcast to the world. So one should *never* send anything that they might regret. Once it is sent, it is now in other people's hands. The recipient may or may not care as much about controlling your e-mails distribution as you do.

Just suppose you send something clever about someone you know to a friend or acquaintance and they bring it up on the screen. Then, they take a break and go to coffee, leaving it on the screen. Another person passes by, snoops, and sees the e-mail. They also think it is clever, and make a copy of it and send it to someone they know, etc.

Or, the employer records all e-mail traffic passing within their company, which they have every right to do, since the equipment is theirs.

Worse yet, some people send messages that they believe are benign and strictly business, yet some self-anointed "god" thinks otherwise.

Yet even sneakier are viruses that can unknowingly, by you, forward your e-mails elsewhere; or, police and other snoops tapping your connection.

There are innumerable ways by which your "private" traffic can go public.

So, the *bottom line* is: compose your messages with care, check the addressees listed, and review the message before pressing the "send" key.

Oh, by the way: do not think that once sent and "deleted", that the file is gone from your computer. When you "delete" a file, this *does not erase the file*. All this does is change the first letter of the file name in the directory. The file, in all its glory, remains untouched on the hard drive, which is why it is so easy to recover it. Technology has provided a variety of means to recover and reconstitute "deleted" files.

To conclude, e-mail is a tremendously valuable means of almost instant communication. Just make sure that you use it carefully, thoughtfully and wisely.

Bob Schwartz is a HAL-PC member, retired EE, 14 patents, technical writer, active in civic affairs: President, Brays Bayou Association; Vice President, Marilyn Estates Civic Association; Correspondence Secretary with the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy. 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 (bobx(at)hal-pc.org).

Benefits of Using a Computer Sandbox

by Gene Barlow
User Group Relations

A computer Sandbox is newer technology that is not very well known, but, it can be quite useful in many situations. By using a Sandbox utility, you can place your computer in a protected state where you can try some rather risky things on your computer and not have your computer damaged in the trials. Once you place your computer into Sandbox mode, you can safely run anything on your computer, knowing that all changes to your hard drive will not be permanently made to your computer. While in Sandbox mode, your computer runs as if all changes to the hard drive were actually made to your system. But, at the end of using the Sandbox, you can throw away these changes, putting your computer back exactly the way it was before entering the Sandbox.

Let's take a look at some real life situations to better understand the benefits of using a Sandbox utility.

Installing New Software

Everyone knows that when you install a new software product on your computer, parts of the product are placed all over your computer's hard drive. Entries are made to the Windows Registry, special supporting files are placed in certain directo-

ries of the operating system, and other shortcut and setting files are scattered in various places on your hard drive. These are in addition to the main folder that is installed on your hard drive with the software programs. Most software will uninstall easily, but often pieces of the product are left behind on your hard drive. These leftover pieces of orphaned software can build up and slow down your computer. Some software products include hidden viruses or other bad programs as you install them. The end result is that installing new software on your computer can be a risky thing to do.

Using a Sandbox to install and test new software is a much better approach. With a Sandbox, you put your computer in Sandbox mode before you download and installed the new software. Since the Sandbox lets you use the newly installed software just as if it had been permanently installed on your computer, you can run the new software to try it out and see if you like it. You can also run virus utilities to see if the installation gave you a virus you were not expecting. If you find viruses on your computer or just decide you do not like the newly installed software, you can get out of the Sandbox and throw away all traces of that software product and any hidden virus that came with it.

Letting Others Use Your Computer

Another reason to use a Sandbox is to let others use your computer. Other users may change your computer to match the way they like to use computers. For example, many of us have grandkids that come to visit and want to play on our computer. They may download games they like, change your wallpaper and default font sizes. They may pick up viruses in the process of getting your computer changed to their needs. When they leave, your computer no longer is the same as it was before they arrived. It may take you days to get it working again like you want it to. With a Sandbox, you can place the computer in Sandbox mode before they arrive and then let them play on your computer to their hearts content. When they leave, you simply exit the Sandbox and throw away all changes that they made to your computer. It is instantly back the way it was before they started to use it.

Computer Labs and Classrooms

User groups that have computer labs or classrooms have a similar situation. The classroom computers are setup carefully by the instructors before the class begins. Once the students have used the computer throughout the day, the computers are different and modified from what they were in the beginning of the day. This may cause problems for the students that follow them, so the instructors will

often restore the computer's hard drives to put them back to normal. With a Sandbox, this long restore process is not needed. Instead, put the computers in Sandbox mode at the beginning of the day before the students arrive. Then at the end of the day, exit the Sandbox and throw away all hard drive changes made by the students. The computers are quickly returned to their normal state as you exit the Sandbox.

Browsing the Internet

Much of the Spyware that you pick up on your computer comes from simply browsing the internet. Some web sites are designed so that simply passing your cursor over a part of the screen is enough to activate a download of Spyware to your computer. Not only that, but your privacy is at risk when you browse the Internet. Windows automatically saves all of the places you browse to and all of the screens you see on the Internet. Browsing the Internet in a Sandbox is a much better approach. Place your computer in Sandbox mode before you start to browse the internet. Then browse all of the sites you want to. When you are done browsing the internet, exit out of the Sandbox and throw away all Spyware and traces of web sites you may have visited.

We offer three excellent Sandbox products that you may want to use on your computer. Let's look at each of these briefly to help you decide which one would best meet your needs.

StorageCraft ShadowSurfer

The smallest and least expensive Sandbox we offer is ShadowSurfer by StorageCraft Software. This product is the quickest product to install and the easiest product to use of all of our Sandbox products. With ShadowSurfer, all changes to your hard drive are always thrown away when you exit the Sandbox, which is what you want in most cases anyway. This excellent product runs on Win2000 and WinXP systems and is available from us at the discount price of just \$20. This is an excellent beginning Sandbox product for most home users.

Acronis True Image 11 Home Try&Decide

The next step up in ability and price is a feature that Acronis has added to their new True Image 11 Home backup utility. This feature is called Try &Decide and it is a Sandbox feature built into this award winning backup utility. Try&Decide requires that you create and use the Acronis SecureZone on your hard drive to contain the temporary changes to your hard drive. When you exit the Sandbox with this product, you can choose to keep all changes to your hard drive or throw them all away. This excellent product runs on Win2000, WinXP, and Win

Vista operating systems and is available from us at the discount price of just \$29 for a download or \$33 on a CD. This is a very good Sandbox feature that comes with an outstanding backup utility.

StorageCraft ShadowUser Pro

The most advanced Sandbox utility we offer is ShadowUser Pro by StorageCraft Software. This is a professional-level Sandbox product that has many options and features to it. With this product, you can password protect the controls of the Sandbox, so that nobody can disable the Sandbox unless they know the password. Perhaps the biggest differences between this product and the other two Sandbox products is that you can pick and choose what files to throw away and what files to keep as you exit the Sandbox. This top of the line Sandbox product runs on Win2000 and WinXP operating systems and is available from us at the discount price of \$47. This is the product you should use if you are running a public computer workstation that needs tight controls.

A Sandbox offers you a new way to protect your computer from damage from the software you install or access on the internet. It also keeps your hard drive safe from damage caused by others using your computer. The selection of Sandbox products we offer lets you pick and choose which one is right for your needs. To order your Sandbox product, go to www.ugr.com and find the Sandbox product you are interested in. Then click on the Buy Now button on that product page to place your order using our secure web shopping cart. As you complete your order indicate the order code of UGNL0108 to qualify for these excellent discount prices. If you have questions about this new technology or about any of these products send an email to gene@ugr.com and I will try to help you.

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This is one of a series of monthly technical articles that I distribute to those that have subscribed to this newsletter. Watch for them and learn more about your computer and its hard drive. You are receiving this newsletter because you subscribed to it or have purchase products from us. To subscribe to this newsletter, send me an e-mail (gene@ugr.com). User group newsletter editors may print this article in their monthly newsletter as long as the article is printed in its entirety and not cut or edited. Please send me a copy of the newsletter containing the article so that I can see what groups are running the articles. Copyright January 2008

All Computers Wait at the Same Speed

by Vinny La Bash

Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL

I first heard that phrase about ten years ago at a geek conference in Seattle. A decade ago is earlier than the Stone Age in computer years. It was probably meant to make fun of the propeller heads that couldn't live without the fasted CPU on their motherboard. The geeks' concern with processing speed seemed ridiculous to those who understood that computers spend very little of their time processing information. They spend it waiting for us to tell them to do something. You would certainly find your life very boring if you had to spend 99% of your time waiting for other people to act before you could do anything.

What are we talking about? We're talking about keeping your system properly tuned so that you don't have to wait while it tries to do its job. It's no secret that Vista has had performance problems. Microsoft has promised that their upcoming service pack should resolve most if not all performance issues. We've heard similar kinds of promises from Redmond before, but this time they say they really mean it. In fairness, not every performance issue can be laid at Microsoft's doorstep, but it's always fun to blame them because they're such an easy target.

Vista puts great demands on your CPU due to Aero and other assorted graphical gizmos built into the product. They should have named it the Eye Candy OS. Responding to the user community, Microsoft also added security features and additional functions that were not present in XP. When you ask your CPU to do more, you're adding overhead. This means you need more CPU power or you live with a slower system. If Vista performance has been less than stellar, the good news is that you can do something about it other than buying a new computer. Here are some of the things you can do to make Vista more appealing from a performance standpoint.

You're probably tired of hearing this one. It's like mother telling you to eat your vegetables. You know she's right, but you don't want to hear it. *Add more memory*. Vista is hungrier for RAM than any of its predecessors, and with memory as cheap as it is, it doesn't make sense to keep it on a starvation diet. XP runs great on one gigabyte of RAM. Vista should have two gigabytes as a minimum, and you won't go wrong by installing even four gigabytes.

Even with enough physical memory, Vista can still act like a tired old dog if you have a lightweight video card. Go into the Performance Information and

Tools utility in Control Panel, and check out your video card with the Windows Experience Index. You need a video card that's certified for Vista Premium and supports Direct X 10. Use the money you save on RAM to buy a good video card. Don't try to do this one on the cheap.

A real help to good performance is bringing your power settings to the High Performance option. Do this from the Power Options utility in Control Panel. The default setting is Balanced which is OK for XP but not Vista. The High Performance setting gives you full access to all the Power in the CPU.

Turn off the sidebar. While this feature is visually appealing, it has few socially redeeming traits. Turning off this feature can sometimes result in significantly faster startups and shutdowns. Disable the sidebar by right-clicking it. Select Properties, and remove the checkmark in the box that starts the sidebar when Vista wakes up.

Fine tune your indexing options. Vista has a great search feature, but it's totally dependent on indexing the files and programs on your hard drive. It's a mixed blessing. You have a fantastic search capability when you index all locations, but you take a performance hit. By indexing fewer areas, performance will improve, but your search feature will be less robust.

Vista won't let you turn off indexing completely, but you can disable indexing for locations that may not be important to you. Do this from the Performance Information and Tools utility in Control Panel.

Here's another "eat your veggies" type tip. Empty the Recycle Bin and adjust it so it doesn't take up more than 2% of your hard drive. Right click on the Recycle Bin, select Properties, and make the necessary adjustments in the dialog box. Don't forget to defrag your disk once in a while, and empty the Recycle Bin before you defrag, not after.

Open My Computer from the Desktop. Right click on the C: drive, select Properties and check how much space you have left on your hard drive. If you're approaching 90% or more, you need to take non-essential files and move them to another location. Vista needs free disk space to perform certain housekeeping functions, and if it has to hunt around for room or use virtual memory, your performance hit could be enormous.

Keep your device drivers up-to-date. Device drivers were designed to ensure that programs or hardware peripherals could "talk" to the system without problems and do their jobs properly. Newer drivers can improve 3D performance, fix bugs and other graphical glitches in games and video pro-

grams. Device drivers can avoid memory conflicts and prevent programs from squabbling over resources. Newer device drivers can support innovative features within applications, and ensure compatibility among different programs.

These are only some of the things you can do to improve Vista performance. Removing unnecessary startup programs, preventing spyware and virus infections, and updating old software are additional steps you can take. If your system is frequently hanging up or crashing after doing everything you can do to improve performance, then it's time to consider reformatting your hard drive and reinstalling everything, but that's another article.

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The DealsGuy

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

Are You Ready To Tax Your Brain?

AlbyMedia has released version 1.1 of PIQE: Chain of Puzzles. It contains different types of challenging puzzles, has three difficulty levels and allows comparing your results with other players. It's a set of engaging puzzles giving you a real challenge. The game has progress check and result comparison features to provide you with detailed information on your development. The game has three difficulties, offering more sophisticated puzzles after you beat the easier ones. Please visit <<http://piqe.albymedia.com>> for a free trial of the product.

PIQE: Chain of Puzzles runs under Microsoft Windows and costs \$14.95 (USD) for a single-user license. AlbyMedia offers user group members 15% discount on the PIQE: Chain of Puzzles. Use the coupon code ALBY-JMGJ at <<https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?item=15534-3>>. Licensed customers get free technical support and free upgrades. Direct download link: <www.albymedia.com/downloads/piqe.setup.exe>

Company web-site: <<http://www.albymedia.com>>

Here's Another Freebie!

DVDVideoSoft, an Internet resource dedicated to free software, multimedia software guides and tutorials has just updated Free Video to Flash Converter. The new version features 30+ player skins and new easy-to-use web integration, just copy and paste html code to the site or blog. Convert video files to flash (SWF and FLV). Convert the whole movie or just a portion. Free Video to Flash Converter is

available at <http://www.dvdvideosoftware.com/products/dvd/Free-Video-to-Flash-Converter.htm> for free download. The program contains no spyware or adware. No activation or registration is required. Just download and use it.

Video to Flash Converter is already the 15th free program developed by DVDVideoSoft and has developed a line of free tools: Free Video Dun, Free YouTube to iPod Converter, Free YouTube to MP3 Converter, Free YouTube to iPhone Converter, Free Video to iPod Converter, Free Video to iPhone Converter, Free Video to MP3 Converter, Free YouTube Uploader, Free Audio Dub, Free YouTube to MP3 Converter, Free 3GP Video Converter, Free Video Flip and Rotate, Free Video to JPG Converter and finally Free YouTube Download <http://www.dvdvideosoftware.com/products/dvd/Free-YouTube-Download.htm>.

All titles are available at <http://www.dvdvideosoftware.com/free-dvd-video-software.htm> for immediate download. Also here are lots of guides and tutorials related to different video tasks like burning and ripping DVDs, making DVD copies, converting between all video formats and more. All our programs run under Windows Vista/XP/2000. We respect our users' privacy and there's no spyware or adware.

Comfort Should Be The Golden Rule!

Comfort Software Group announces Comfort Keys 3.0, a successor to the popular hotkey management tool. The new version supports non-standard keyboard types (Ergonomic and Dell Inspiron 6000); speaks two new languages (Hungarian and simplified Chinese); has adjustable sensitivity for fast input of capital letters, spaces and other characters; has the option of hiding in the system tray and features an enhanced hotkey management window with a full list of hotkeys and new groups.

Comfort Keys is a multifunctional hotkey manager for Windows Vista, XP and 2000. The integrated clipboard manager extends the capabilities of the standard Windows clipboard allowing you to save an unlimited number of copied objects and reuse them as much as you want; and makes sure your clipboard data is saved in case of a power failure or hardware crash. It also features an advanced task switcher, sound control tools and a virtual keyboard that facilitates the choice and configuration of your hotkey combinations. You can quickly switch languages, convert the selected fragment of text into another language (or case), run keystroke macros, easily manage a window and even restart the computer using the keyboard.

Comfort Keys supports Windows Vista/2000/XP operating systems. A personal license costs only \$29.95. A multi-user license ranges from \$21.95 to \$6.95. The company offers a 30-day money back guarantee on all orders. More information on Comfort Keys, as well as its free trial version, is available at <http://www.comfort-software.com/hotkey-manager.html>

Products can be purchased from Plimus, the official reseller of Comfort Software Group products. Major credit cards (VISA, Master Card, Amex and Discover) are accepted. User Group members get 30% discount at: <https://secure.plimus.com/jsp/buynow.jsp?contractId=1711308&couponCode=dealsguy>.

Wow! What a Clock!

ALSEDI Group announces version 2.6 of PerfectClock. It delivers any number of realistic clocks onto the desktop or replaces your wallpaper with clock wallpaper. PerfectClock lets you know the time in the most convenient way by looking at stylish analog or digital clocks. Enjoy having as many clocks on the desktop as you need, each displaying the time for the defined time zone. You can use the wallpaper clock as a screensaver. PerfectClock supports scaling. You can set a label to a clock and customize fonts, color, position and other parameters. The Reminder feature is also customizable. On the official website are dozens of clock and wallpaper clock skins. It allows you to adjust hue, saturation, brightness and contrast to reach optimal appearance of the clock.

You can manually create a unique skin without being a programmer. ALSEDI Group has prepared a special offer for all new customers. Everyone purchasing PerfectClock can order a Personal Family Photo Clock Skin at no cost. It only requires selecting a frame pattern, sending a photo or two, and the skin will be delivered to you in three days. This skin makes a great present for family events. Visit <http://www.perfect-clock.com> to get the trial version of the program.

PerfectClock runs under Windows Vista/XP/2000. The Standard Edition costs \$16.95 (USD) for a single-user license and the Professional Edition, supporting the Wallpaper Clock feature, costs \$23.95 (USD). Licensed customers are entitled to the fully functional version of the product, free technical support and free upgrades. Further information on PerfectClock, as well as a free trial copy is available from <http://www.perfect-clock.com>. Get a 20% discount on the registered Professional version by visiting: <https://www.plimus.com/jsp/buynow.jsp?contractId=1717144&couponCode=GROUP20PERCENT> and 20% discount on the Standard Edition

at: <<https://www.plimus.com/jsp/buynow.jsp?contractId=1695221&couponCode=GROUP20PERCENT>>. Company web-site: <http://www.alsedi.com>

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>>.



Dell's Dilemma

Q. I heard that some Dell laptops have defective batteries that have been recalled. How do I know if I've got one of them in my computer, and if so, what do I do?

A. First of all, though the recall involves more than four million batteries, according to Dell, there have only been six reported cases of "overheating" that resulted in property damage, but no injuries. (I suspect the term "overheating" is being used in the same manner that a physician says, "You may feel some slight discomfort," just before the searing pain begins.)

This battery problem stems from flaws in the production of lithium-ion batteries made by Sony and used in Dell's Latitude, Inspiron, XPS, and Precision mobile workstation notebooks that shipped between April 1, 2004 and July 18, 2006.

To determine if you have one of the batteries in question, other than the ability to toast marshmallows over your keyboard, go to the Dell Battery Return Program Web site (www.dellbatteryprogram.com) and enter the 20-digit ID number located on your battery. If your battery is a candidate for free replacement, you'll be directed to an online request form. You can also call 866-342-0011.

If you do have one of the batteries in question, it is recommended that you remove the battery and use the computer exclusively on AC power until you receive your replacement.

Q. I'm having trouble printing ZIP Codes that begin with a zero in Excel. My spreadsheet displays zeros

in the ZIP Code column, but when printed, it drops the zeros every time. Can you help?

A. Excel is doing what it normally does in this instance, and that's dropping the leading zero because it's assuming that the ZIP Code is an actual number. Since 1 and 01 have the same numerical value, Excel thinks its doing you a big favor by dropping the "unnecessary" zero.

This is easily resolved by instructing Excel that your ZIP Code column is not comprised of arbitrary numerals, but rather that those numbers are ZIP Codes. To do this, first highlight the entire column by clicking the letter at the top of the column, then click Format > Cells > Number tab.

In the Category section, scroll down and select Special, then ZIP Code from the Type section, followed by OK. Your ZIP Codes should now print correctly, with no disappearing digits.

Q. When removing programs and the question appears, "Do you want to remove a shared file?" should I answer "Yes" or "No"?

A: Shared files display the extension .DLL, which means they're Dynamic Linked Library files. That's just a high-falootin' way to let you know that the file in question is possibly being used by one or more other programs. For example, a word processor and spreadsheet may share a .DLL file, so removing a shared file may cause one or more programs to function improperly.

Removing a shared file can also result in an "XYZ file cannot be found" error message. If that appears, it's usually because the missing file was removed when a shared file was deleted as the result of uninstalling another program.

If you're asked if you want to delete a shared file, just say "No." It won't hurt anything to leave the file alone, and it's better to err on the side of caution rather than risk accidentally disabling another application.

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

eLibs.com

Do you remember the wild and wacky Mad Libs books, which invited readers to provide words that were ultimately incorporated into a quasi-amusing story? Think of eLibs.com as the online equivalent of Mad Libs. If you fancy yourself as a writer, you can even try your hand at creating your own eLib, then share or inflict it upon others.

www.elibs.com

Free Information Society

Here you'll find free MP3 downloads of historical speeches, interviews and other significant moments

in audio history. Listen to Spiro Agnew waxing expansive about long-haired hippies, Mahatma Gandhi speaking about peace, Mr. Modem explaining quantum physics, or Amelia Earhart ruminating about flying. The site is divided into topical sections, so it's easy to find just about any voice from the past. <http://tinyurl.com/266scl>

Make Your Own Kaleidoscope

This site reminds me of the Beatles' Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds. Such mind-blowing lyrics. Remember "The girl with colitis goes by"? They don't write 'em like that anymore. Copy and paste the URL to any .jpg file into the Image field, click the Load button, then hold down the left button while moving your mouse to enjoy the groovy kaleidoscopic images. Far out! It makes me feel like I had a hit of tofu. Man, that's good veggie. <http://tinyurl.com/2dywn4>

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

Tips from *Smart Computing*

Another Man's Treasure:

Almost everyone has at least an old cell phone or two lying around the house. Donating these older gadgets will both declutter your home and help someone out. Many organizations, including women's shelters, provide reprogrammed phones to people in high-risk situations. Secure The Call (www.securethecall.com) is a nationwide organization that collects phones and programs them for 911-only purposes. If your old phone is totally kaput, recycle it. Best Buy, for example, has collection bins for cell phones, inkjet cartridges, and rechargeable batteries in the front of each of its stores.

Camera Modes:

Use the Beach/Snow mode on your digital camera when you're in a situation with a lot of glare: the sun reflecting off snow, sand, water, or even shiny metal, for instance. Ordinarily, the camera's light meter would react to this glare by sensing more light than is actually there, thus underexposing the shot. Beach/Snow mode counteracts that tendency. The trouble is, though, these are often the trickiest conditions to shoot under, so the camera may still be fooled. Examine your shot, and if it still looks dim, try another with your exposure compensation set to +1.

Wireless Router Issue:

If your wireless router drops the connection to your home computers, there are some things you can do to try to solve the problem. Your wireless router

assigns an IP (Internet protocol) address to each of the computers on your network. If your computer drops its wireless connection and doesn't produce any error messages, you can probably reinstate the connection by reassigning an IP address via router. Routers generally use DHCP (Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol) to automatically assign IP addresses, so you'll want to release the router's DHCP assignments and then force it to assign new IP addresses.

To force a DHCP release, enter your router's firmware menu and look for a DHCP Release feature. Your router's manual or the firmware's support documentation will help you find the feature. Many routers feature DHCP Release and DHCP Renew buttons that let you quickly complete this task.

Society News

March Planning Meeting

by John McMillan, secretary

Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, Arpad Kovacs, Mike Lavelle, John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, and Steve Staub met at Sally Springett's home March 4th for the planning meeting.

Many in the group felt that David Platt was very interesting and had much to offer in his talk on *Why Software Sucks*. There was regret that we had not asked him to reschedule when the many technical problems in the internet hookup first reared their ugly heads. Sally has notified the Brighton Library of the problems and has suggested some changes that could improve the situation there. Library internet connections will be checked out before setting up any future program of this type.

Bill Statt will talk about Voice Power, an add on for Dragon Speaking Naturally, at the Brighton Library meeting March 11th. April's meeting is expected to be at the Penfield complex on Baird road where Arpad will discuss "How To Build A Newsletter." Other programs under consideration for later presentation include Bill Statt returning to discuss Linux. Carl Schmidtman has scheduled a 2nd meeting of the Linux SIG for Saturday, March 22. The group will meet from 1 to 4 pm at the Greece Library to learn about configurations and file sharing. He expects to set up a LAN for members to try out.

It is the time of year to establish a nominating committee to prepare a slate of officers for the coming year. A slate including candidates for President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer plus one Board Member at Large should be presented at the April meeting and printed in the May *Monitor*. Voting will take place at the May meeting. John McMillan has already indicated that he will not run for, nor serve, as Secretary again. (It's not that the job's so terrible,

it's that he has too much on his plate already. We don't want to scare potential secretaries! —ed.)

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Jack Bailey

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: A member uses RoadRunner using Outlook Express and has recently been getting email that is only one icon, nothing else. He gets 30 or so per day. Is someone stripping off the content?

A: It may be spam or other junk email. Sometimes photos, etc. can be stripped by the service. It can happen Thunderbird, too.

Q: Another member complained about timeouts when using RoadRunner. They have replaced the router but he thinks it is partially Road Runner's service.

A: No one else reported issues.

Q: An IBM desktop using a version of Windows 98. An error message is shown referencing a DLL. A search of the C drive showed that the file is there. Where does it need to be? The message window can be closed with no apparent program loads missing.

A: It is trying to start up a program. It might be a result of a recent upgrade and the program is looking for an updated file. It was suggested to place a copy of the file into windows32 location as well. It was also suggested to perform a google search using the message and you may get a hit.

Q: When trying to uninstall a program, it is looking for the install item.

A: Try reinstalling and then uninstalling again. You may have to simply delete the files manually.

Q: When using an HP printer, it is printing to a file but he cannot find it.

A: It was suggested that he perform a search on that file name in the C drive. Or open it and then do a save as to find the original location. He will then likely find all of his missing files there.

Q: Another member just installed MailWasher but she cannot log in to her email program through it.

A: It was suggested that she try re-installing again.

Q: What is the difference between a DVD +R and -R?

A: Each is a different format. You would need a player that will play the format. Usually the computer will be able to play it. The -R seems to be more compatible across machines.

Q: One member found a program called WinPatrol 2007. It shows all of your cookies and watches for bad things. It is free and seems to work well. IT shows all of the hidden files.

A: It was suggested that this and other helpful programs be added to the meetings notes. Bob agreed to add similar items to the webpage.

Q: Norton Security 2008 is being used. When doing updates, he gets an error message. When posting the error message to the Norton website, he allowed the technical representative to take over his machine. He did not want to do an uninstall!

A: He was able to interrupt the uninstall so that his related programs would not be deleted. He went back to his restore point and then reinstalled Norton. Luckily it worked. Be sure that you watch what is happening.

Q: Does anyone know of a program to convert Real-Time to mp3 files?

A: He may also be able to activate Windows Media-Player to convert it.

Q: Does anyone use Office 2007? This means an entirely new learning process. What about trying to convert an old .dat file?

A: When using the Excel 2007, he was able to read that old format and place it into a spreadsheet. He then saved it as a 2003 file for use. You may also be able to run FILE SNOOP to open and view the contents. It does not translate it but you might be able to copy/paste into another file. OpenOffice would most likely be able to open it as well.

NOTE: If you buy airline tickets on the net, be aware that your presence is noting your use. He suggested that you can check out one or two sites, wait a day or so and then go to the one you really want to use. It is likely that you will get a lower price because they know that you are comparing prices.

March Meeting

by John MacMillan, secretary

Steve Staub kicked off the business meeting with the following announcements:

- People who's dues are due should see him.
- The Planning meeting will be held at Sally Springett's home April first.
- The News letter will be assembled Saturday March 15th.
- Ideas for future programs should be passed along to Mike Lavelle or one of the officers.
- The chairs needed to be stacked at the end of the meeting.
- Volunteers are needed for a nominating committee to present a slate of candidates for office at the April meeting. At the present time the secretary and treasurer have announced that they do not intend to run for office again. There should be an item listing the Candidates and their qualifications in the May Monitor that will be published in April.

- Dave Thompson said the Digital Photography SIG will meet April 3rd at St. John's Meadows to discuss Photo Shop layering.
- Carl Schmidtman will discuss file sharing at a Linux SIG meeting scheduled from 1 to 4 pm March 22 at the Greece Library.

Arpad Kovacs introduced Bill Statt, the evenings speaker. Before starting on "Voice Power," an adjunct for Dragon Speaking Naturally, he talked a little about Linux and the SIG meeting for its installation. He is an avid user of Linux, an operating system that dramatically reduces the probability of virus attacks that can wipe a hard drive; install software and cookies that slow computer operations; or export sensitive data to outside sources; not to mention the high cost of Microsoft Software compared to Linux which is free. He distributed some Linux live CDs that he burned from a variety of sources, including Linux Mint which contained codecs that users would find very helpful. All versions required that your computer bios must allow booting from a CD before going to a hard drive. Included in the group were some Mini versions that would operate on Windows 98 machines with as little as 128 megs of ram.

Bill offered several reasons why Dragon Speaking Naturally is so helpful to many users. Speech conversion is much faster than typing, particularly for handicapped, dyslectic and two fingered typists. Dragon claims to do 160 words per minute at 99% accuracy. There is even a web site, Nuance.com that has a Dragon Demo that challenges you to type a paragraph and compare your time with the voice recognition capability. Care must be used to turn off the microphone or it will add your every word to the document you are working with.

Version 9.0 Preferred starts to accept dictation after 5 to 10 minutes of reading. Although it can confuse sound alike words like two, too and to or their and there, it uses a sequence of up to 9 words to determine logical choices. When a mistake in made in analysis, it can be trained on the fly by saying "add word." That opens a dialogue box for typing the new word which is then spoken to add it to your vocabulary.

Dragon works with these Microsoft programs: Access; Excel; Outlook; Power Point; Word; and Word Perfect. It also works with Act; Adobe Reader; Eudora; Firefox; G-mail; Internet Explorer; Lotus Motes; Quick Books; Snag It; Thunderbird; and Yahoo E-mail. A nice feature of Dragon is a green dot on the Dragon bar if the open program will work with it. If the program does not work with dragon, the dot changes to a dark gray.

Bill began using Dragon with frequent forays to its help system as he taught himself how it worked. He ran a slide show of phenomenal pictures taken from a Hubble Space site that were to the music of Bach's *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring* that was assembled using Dragon and Voice Power. Then he went on to describe how they were helpful in his job. In response to a comment from Tom Thompson, Bill described using boiler plate (pre assembled formats) for much of his work.

Bill admitted that while Dragon offers real productivity gains, it is a hard program to learn because it is so complex. He also said that 50% of the users who do not take training stop using the program within one month. He increased his Dragon skill levels by 80% through diligent use of a \$150, 3 CD set of training videos called "Say I Can" by Dan Newman. He investigated Voice Power with no intention of buying it even at a special rate of \$100 but found his productivity improved by another 80%.

Although he felt that he was a power user of Dragon, even the beginners guide to Voice Power taught him a lot. Bill used a Power Point presentation assembled with Dragon and Voice power to show some of their capabilities. One of the Voice Power's advantages is the simultaneous display of Dragon documents and Voice Power training screens. Voice Power is cheaper than class room training; is available 24/7; and proceeds at your pace not one dictated by a group or instructor. Bill compared it to having a trainer looking over your shoulder while you work.

Voice Power works with Dragon Speaking Naturally Preferred or Professional editions running under Windows 2000, XP or Vista. Hardware requirements are: processor--a Pentium IV 2.6 Gaz. or faster; AMD's equivalent; or a Centrino 1.8 GAZ. or faster. You also need a 7200 RPM hard drive; at least 1 Gb of memory (2 Gb for Vista); and a high quality sound card and microphone. The license allows you to put Dragon on up to 5 laptops or desktop machines as long as they are not used concurrently.

After the Power Point presentation, Bill demonstrated some of the available training slides and how to move around the display with voice commands. In addition, he mentioned that through an agreement with the author, a copy of Voice Power has been made available to RCSI on the condition that *a product review must be written and printed in the Monitor*. The product has up to 5 activation's that Tom Thompson will administer. Members With Dragon Speaking Naturally preferred or professional can test drive it using RCSI as the user code. After 3 or 4 weeks they should deactivate the program and return it to Tom Thompson who will administer the

activation process. Users convinced of its value can purchase a copy for \$200.

For more information, Google www.VoiceSpeech.com. Bill recommended waiting til after April 15th and then watching Best Buy for sale prices on Dragon Speaking Naturally—Preferred Version 9 priced below \$100.

In response to questions Bill said that Dragon use in Open Office is limited. He said comfort should be a primary factor in microphone selection along with quality and noise canceling capability. He uses an Andea NC7100 which is not only comfortable and provides good recognition but has a USB plug and in line USB sound card. The Andrea sells for about \$80 on the internet but Dragon certified partners in Rochester sell the same microphone for \$45. Bill got his on E-bay for \$13. At work he uses a wireless version for greater freedom of movement, but warned against trying Blue Tooth.

He has put Dragon on a thumb drive for portability to widely separated locations and to overcome some bureaucratic restrictions. Bill gave his E-mail address as bstatt1@rochester.rr.com and offered to send out a video CD to help new users overcome some of the intimidation others have experienced. In addition to installing on multiple machines, any machine can have multiple users, each with their own vocabulary. Dragon does allow multiple fonts and sizes.

This was an excellent presentation by a very knowledgeable user who goes beyond just sharing his understanding. I personally gained several beneficial tips plus a world of research direction from this talk and would welcome Bill back at any time.

The Lighter Side

Tech Support: “Hi, this is tech support. I’m returning your support call.”

Customer: “Sorry, we don't sell lobsters to the public.”