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Firefox 3—Hot New Browser

by Ira Wilsker
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After a lengthy wait, Mozilla has released the latest and greatest release of the very popular web browser, Firefox 3. This new release, available for free download from www.getfirefox.com, has many new features, making it a very strong competitor to Microsoft's ubiquitous browser, Internet Explorer.

Firefox evolved from an earlier browser, Mozilla, which in turn grew out of the Netscape browser as AOL announced the cessation of Netscape development. Since its first release several years ago, Firefox in its current and previous versions has developed a wide following, with hundreds of millions of copies downloaded. The newly released version 3 has tentatively set a Guinness world record with over 8 million copies downloaded in its first 24 hours of public release, despite overloaded servers that discouraged countless people from downloading it the first day of issue. According to published reports, the number of copies of Firefox 3 downloaded surpassed 14 million downloads in the first 72 hours. Obviously, many people are using it.

Rhetorically, so why are so many using Firefox 3 rather than Internet Explorer (IE), which is installed

by default on all contemporary Windows computers? There are several other fine browsers in circulation, such as the newly released update to Opera, and Apple's Safari (for both Windows and Mac), but for Windows computers, Firefox is firmly in second place, right behind Internet Explorer. If Internet Explorer was not preinstalled on Windows computers and integrated into the operating system, there is a good chance that Firefox 3 could surpass IE in a fair competitive market. Firefox 3 is faster rendering web pages than IE, has superior tabbed browsing, is written in tighter code taking fewer system resources, and has many advantages over IE. There is no reason why PC users should not download Firefox 3 for Windows (7.8mb download), and install it, as it runs happily on computers that already have IE installed.

On a fresh installation of Firefox on a Windows computer, Firefox will nondestructively import the favorites (bookmarks), cookies, and other information from IE, without making any changes or impeding IE in any way. If Firefox 3 is installed on a computer that has an older version of Firefox installed, it will automatically install it as an upgrade, including all bookmarks, passwords, cookies, and other information. Once installed, many users, such as me, prefer to use Firefox instead of IE. In my case I would say that I use Firefox for 98% of my browsing tasks; it would be 100%, but I have IE setup to access another internet account that I have, but rarely use.

According to the Firefox 3 website at www .mozilla.com/en-US/firefox, over 15,000 improvements were made to version 3 over version 2. The newly released version 3 is claimed to be faster, safer, and smarter than the previous version, and also IE! One of the new features, which I have personally verified, is the fact that web pages do indeed load faster than on IE and previous versions of Firefox. Firefox 3 also consumes less system memory and system resources, leading to improved computer performance when Firefox is loaded and running, compared to the previous version, or even IE. Firefox 3 is also more secure than previous browsers, and incorporates the latest technologies to help prevent phishing (identity theft), and other website forgeries. A neat new feature in Firefox 3 is "Instant Website ID," where clicking on the tiny website icon ("site favicon") at the left of the URL in the menu bar will display site information and identification, which will likely indicate if the site is as intended, or a web forgery. Firefox 3 has also been engineered to work smoothly and compliment Vista's parental controls, as well as most antivirus and other security programs.

Another interesting feature unique to Firefox 3 is the "Smart Location Bar" that shows detailed information on websites recently visited, and is accessed by clicking on the right side of the menu bar. This Smart Location Bar is intelligent, in that it adapts to persona preferences to locate better website matches. Typing a "tag" or keyword in the menu bar opens a detailed list of previously visited websites containing that keyword, making it very fast and easy to locate websites that have previously been visited. Another very useful feature is the integrated spell checker, which underlines any misspelled words typed in a browser window; right clicking on the word opens a list of suggested spellings, which a mouse click will instantly replace the incorrect word with the correctly spelled word.

Malware of various types, including worms, Trojans, viruses, and spyware is a growing menace to internet users. Firefox 3 integrates a sophisticated anti-malware feature that provides some protection if the user either intentionally or erroneously accesses a website that contains attack code. If such a dangerous website is accessed, a full screen (browser window) display will appear as a warning. Firefox, working with other organizations (including Google) maintains a continuously updated list of so called "attack sites," so there is nothing for the user to update or maintain. In the event the user does happen to fall into a suspect site, such as a very freshly created phishing (identity theft) website, the forgery can be quickly reported by simply clicking on HELP – REPORT WEB FORGERY; this will connect to a Google service that collects such information on a real-time basis, verifies the forgery, and automatically adds it to the malware list, as well as forwards the information to groups like Phish Tank (www.phishtank.com) for further action.

Many of us use multiple passwords and user names on countless websites. Firefox 3 has an excellent integrated and secure password manager. When a password is first entered, Firefox 3 asks if you want it to remember that password and logon information, without any annoying pop-ups. Speaking of pop-ups, Firefox 3 incorporates a sophisticated and easily configurable pop-up blocker which can stop pop-ups and pop-unders, speeding and making more enjoyable the surfing experience. In some cases, pop-ups are not irritating advertisements, but instead contain important information; these can be

easily allowed when desired.

Many of us choose to tweak the appearance and features of our browsers, and Firefox 3 happily obliges. Firefox has many themes and "personas" that can be selectively implemented to change the appearance of the browser to meet our individual tastes. For those of us who want additional features, Firefox offers over 5,000 free "add-ons" (addons .mozilla.org/firefox), which are easy to install devices to customize the browser to work as desired. I have installed about a dozen add-ons, including some security add-ons (PhishTank, McAfee SiteAdvisor, and others), as well as an enhanced download manager (the one integrated in Firefox 3 is very adequate for most users). I also have selected to use differently colored tabs on the top of the browser window, an add-on that can make a tab an IE window (for the rare cases when a website is intended for IE only), a PDF manager, and several other add-ons.

Firefox 3 is an outstanding and free product. It is a very worthwhile competitor to Internet Explorer, and users should try it to see if they like it. I like it, and use it almost exclusively on my desktop and notebook computers. That is the best recommendation I can give it.

Your Next Computer Will Be Green

by Marjie Tucker

Editor, Mountain Computer User Group, GA

With Europe leading the way, the computer industry is decidedly becoming "green." The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and the Restriction of Hazardous Substances (ROHS) directives went into effect earlier this year. These two directives state that certain electrical and electronic equipment must cut down on hazardous materials such as lead, mercury, and cadmium. They also give customers the right to return their equipment free of charge. Companies have several years to fully implement these directives, but the leaders have already started to make changes.

Dell, for example, is advertising Energy Smart workstations and notebooks that can reduce power consumption by as much as 78%. The Energy Smart configuration uses a default power setting that is designed to reduce consumption and energy costs right out of the box. In addition, the power supply, fan, and motherboard use significantly less energy to maintain cool internal temperatures.

HP is using 80 Plus power supplies to lower energy bills and AMD technology that reduces heat output and PC power consumption. In addition, they have already introduced an HP recycling program where you can trade-in or donate the products.

Government Initiatives Many U.S. government agencies have implemented standards and regulations to encourage green computing. The Environmental Protection Agency launched an Energy Star program in 1992 and strengthened its requirements in 2006. In 2003 the California State Senate enacted the Electronic Waste Recycling Act and in 2007 President Bush issued Executive Order 13423 requiring all federal agencies to use the Electronic Products Environmental Assessment Tool when purchasing computer systems. In addition, a global consortium called The Green Grid was founded in 2007 by AMD, APC, Dell, HP, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Rackable Systems, SprayCool, Sun and VMware.

Another initiative formed by a group of Global-minded IT executives, the Green Computing Impact Organization (GCIO), was created to be an active participant in transforming the IT community from an environmental liability to an Earth conscious example of responsibility. GCIO is a nonprofit organization that is based on environmental audit programs for consumers and small business homes with respect to general energy-efficiency programs (including lighting, heating, in-sulation, etc.). GCIO's mission is to educate and assist enterprise technology users in the design of environmentally aware and responsible information system operations. They help consumers become more en-vironmentally responsible by reducing energy consumption and electronic waste in an effort to protect the Earth.

GCIO is sponsoring educational programs across the country and participating in a Green Computing Summit that will be held in Washington, DC on May 20th. The summit will address how public sector IT managers, procurement officials, and program managers public sector professionals can transform their IT and data center operations into more environmentally conscious yet efficient solutions. This conference will attract senior government IT professionals and their industry partners tasked with helping agencies become greener in the coming years. Attendees will represent federal, state and local governments, public policy organizations and suppliers to government. You can read more about this event at www.e-gov.com/EventOverview.aspx?Event=SGCS08.

Features of Green Computing

Power management is the most popular method. The operating system of the computer can be set to directly control the power saving aspects of the hardware. It can automatically turn off the monitor or hard drive after a period of inactivity. Or, the entire system may hibernate, turning off most of the components such as even allow the user to manually adjust the voltages supplied to the CPU to reduce the electricity consumption and the amount of heat that is produced. As of July of 2007, all new Energy Star certified desktops must have a power supply that is at least 80% efficient.

Other features include using motherboard video output instead of a video card, hard disks that consume less power, flash based solid state drives that require fewer write cycles, and lower energy monitors. And, manufacturers of networking equipment are developing switches and routers that reduce energy costs.

Recycling Materials

Obsolete computers can be reused for charities, non-profit organizations, and developing countries. Parts from really old systems can be recycled through some recycling centers. Some recycling charges can be passed back to the manufacturers.

Recycling this equipment keeps the lead, mercury, and chromium out of our landfills. In addition, computer supplies such as cartridges, paper, and batteries can be easily recycled.

How Can We Work Greener?

Visit the website for Climate Savers Smart Computing at sww.climatesavers computing.org to view a three step program to go green. Here are the basic steps that they suggest:

Step One

Turn on Power Management. Since the average desktop PC wastes nearly 50% of the energy it consumes as heat, it makes sense to use the power management features that are built into Windows XP and Vista. The benefits? You will reduce your electricity bills and your energy footprint will be lowered as you reduce your greenhouse gas emissions. The Climate Savers organization predicts that the power management features on your computer can save nearly have a ton of CO2 and more than $60 a year in energy costs.

Step Two

Buy an energy efficient computer. Energy Star, the program designed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, specifies the standards that equipment and appliances must meet to wear the Energy Star badge. You can visit their website at www.energystar.org for specifics. Basically an Energy Star compliant PC uses 15 to 25 percent less energy. This program is expected to save U.S. consumers and businesses more than $1.8 billion in energy costs over the next five years and prevent greenhouse gas emission equal to 2.7 million vehicles.

Step Three

Unplug from phantom power. As long as your computer is plugged in it still uses electricity, even while it is turned off or in standby mode. A computer that is turned off, but still plugged in, can use up to 10 watts. The Climate Savers estimate that you can reduce your electricity bills by as much as 10% by unplugging your appliances
and electronics when they're not being used.

Uniblue Registry Booster 2

by Terry Currier
Vice President and Webmaster, WINdows usERS (WINNERS), CA

I've tested a number of programs on my secondary test computer over the years. I've also installed and uninstalled a number of programs. At start up the computer loads up my anti-virus, anti-spyware, firewall, UPS monitor, motherboard monitor, QuickTime, Intel graphics monitor, Maxtor storage monitor, printer software, TV software, and others. It takes a while for it to boot up. I turn it on when I need it, go away to do other things, and come back after it's ready.

Rebooting is even longer with it shutting down everything and restarting. So I thought Uniblue RegistryBooster 2 would be something good to try. Rebooting took 4 minutes 45 seconds. When I first ran RegistryBooster it found 459 Problems /Errors. The vast majority being Missing or Invalid Path.

The Windows Registry in a broad sense is a database of the hardware and software on your computer. It contains all your settings for windows and other software. Whenever you install new software it creates new settings in the registry. When you uninstall software it removes all those registry settings associated with the software, right? Well it does uninstall the programs, removing it from the hard drive. Most really do very little removal

from the registry. So the software is removed, but the settings are still in the registry and you have a bunch of orphan links.

Even before I installed RegistryBooster 2 I did a backup, for safety sake. It also can create a backup of the registry before you have it do any repairs. It can create up to eight backups, keeping the most recent. Before running it my reboot time was 4 minutes 45 seconds. After running and fixing what it said were problems I also used it to defrag the registry. Using RegistryBooster 2 (twice) my reboot time was down to 3 minutes 39 seconds, saving 66 seconds. Okay that's great, but for a program like this you want to make sure there are no problems later. So I've used this for two months now and I can say I've had no problems. I've run it about ten times total. Each time I chose to trust the program with what it said was a problem.

Conclusion

RegistryBooster 2 is very easy to use, and at $29.95 it is a good value.
http://www.liutilities.com/products/registrybooster/
Requirements: Intel Pentium 4 1GHz or Equivalent processor, 512 MB RAM, 200 MB free hard disk space, Graphics mode 1024x768 true color (highest 32-bit), Microsoft Windows 2000/XP/Vista (32-bit). Internet Explorer 6.

Terry Currier is currently Vice-President & Editor of WINNERS – WINdows usERS which meets in Fountain Valley, California. He has been a member of computer user groups since 1984 (months before he even brought a computer.) 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 (Tcurrier(at)aol.com).

E-Mailing Photographs

by Richard Kennon
Editor, Amador Computer Users Group, CA

First, we must understand that photograph (image) size in the camera and in the computer is measured in pixels. These are the basic dots of color that make the picture. Do not pay any attention to anything that says "inches" or "pixels per inch." These terms are meaningless when we are considering a picture either in the camera or in the computer. They may come into play later if we want to print the photo on paper. But, that is another subject for another time. For now, we think only of pixels. Most cameras record too many pixels to e-mail. For instance a 6 megapixel camera will make a picture about 3000 pixels wide by 2000 pixels tall and the file size may be several megabytes. Our screens are usually only about 1000 pixels wide (some are larger and some smaller). So, if we e-mail the native picture, it will be wider than the screen for the recipient *and* the file will be so large, it may take "forever" to download to the recipient's computer. It is possible the service provider will not even accept it.

There are two things we must do to make a photo e-mailable. The first is to *resize* or *resample* the picture. We want to change the picture width from 3000 pixels to 800 pixels, for instance. This process is called resizing or resampling. We have to pick the best 800 pixels out of the 3000 to represent our photo. Well, no, that is not exactly correct but it simplifies things to think of it that way. We don't have to worry about it because a lot of very smart programmers have developed ways (algorithms) to help us. Just remember, you want to resize or resample to get the photo down to a size convenient for e-mailing. I usually use 800 pixels or 900 pixels width for pictures I attach to e-mails.

The second thing to do to make a photo e-mailable is to save it in JPEG format (.jpg). That is a format that reduces file size a lot and picture quality a little so the picture can be downloaded more quickly and still be nice to look at. Some software programs give you choices of compression amount with numbers ranging from 1 to 10. One will result in a very small file but the picture quality will not be good at all. A 10 will give the very best quality but with a very large file size. A reasonable compromise is to use 5 or 6. I usually use 6.

How do you do this? First, I will describe how to do it with a free Microsoft program. Then I will try to look at some other programs.

Microsoft Power Toys for XP has a Resize Pictures toy that is slick and easy but feedback says it only works on XP. It can be downloaded at http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/powertoys/xppowertoys.mspx. Right click on an image name or thumbnail in Explorer or My Computer and choose Resize Pictures. You are limited to four specific sizes but they are good choices. They don't tell us what compression they are using but the results look OK. Unless you tell them under Advanced to replace the image in the file, it will make a copy. That's good. They will add the word, "Large," "Medium," or "Small" to the end of the name you have chosen.

If you are happy with this solution, then read no further. But, if you want to use a picture editing program, maybe this will help.

In Photoshop Elements 5, click on Image> Resize> Image Size and this window will pop up. Note that there is some garbage at the bottom about "inches" but we will ignore that. First we will click the Re-sample Image box. That puts the Pixel Dimensions in play and that is what we want. I selected the Width box and changed the width to 800 pixels. Since the Constrain Proportions box is selected, that is all I have to do.

Note, down at the bottom, that we have several choices of sampling algorithms. This is frosting on the cake. I read somewhere that I should use Bicubic Sharper when downsizing so that is what I do. Most programs don't give us all these choices. Then we should click on File>Save As and give the photo a new name. I often just use the same name and add "_800px" so the next time I will know it is ready to e-mail. Here we can choose the JPEG format and the compression format and the compression amount. Photoshop Elements 6 is out now and sells for about $100. If you are able to spend that much and want one of the best editing programs, I highly recommend it.

Let's look at Picasa2. It is a free program from Google and looks really good but I do not have much experience with it. By all means, try it first because the price is right!

When it comes to e-mailing photographs, it is a little more automated but not any easier to use than Elements. First, click on Tools>Options>E-Mail. Then select the width you want inpixels.There are six choices. Then click on Apply and OK.

The next step is to click on File>E-Mail and you will get three choices of how you want to e-mail your photos. Fortunately, I use Outlook Express so my choice is listed.

When I clicked on Outlook Express, an e-mail page popped up with the photo attached. At this point we can write something else on the e-mail and send it. I recommend this so the recipient will know it is really from you and not something sent out by a virus. When I receive e-mails that only say "Attached," I Delete them without looking at the attachment. This saved me one time when I received a virus from my sister-in-law that she did not know she sent. She spent weeks and dollars getting her computer back up. Oh, I digress. If you want to send more than one picture (and, who doesn't?), you must select the picture and click on the Hold button near the bottom of the screen. Do this for each photo you want to send and they will all be attached to the e-mail. The program automatically chooses JPEG format and a compression ratio but does not tell you. That is OK as the pictures I tried looked good. Picasa2 has considerable capability for editing photos in many respects. Try it!

There are many other editing programs that I haven't mentioned and have no experience with. In all cases you want to change the picture's size in pixels by resizing or resampling. Pay no attention to anything that says "inches" as that will have no meaning for this process. Sometime later we will talk about printing pictures and then we will use inches.

Email Etiquette

by John Roy

President, The PC Users Group of CT

Do you really know how to forward an e-mail? It is estimated that over fifty percent of email users do not know how to do it properly. Do you wonder why you get viruses or junk mail? Email messages get forwarded countless times without concern for the security of the previous sender's addresses.

Every time you forward an e-mail there is information left over from the people who got the message before you, namely their e-mail addresses and names. As the messages get forwarded along the list of addresses builds and builds creating a huge resource for spammers. All it takes is for someone to get a virus and the infected computer can send that virus to every e-mail address that has come across that computer. Even if the address collection doesn't result in a virus it surely will be harvested by spammers or someone looking to make a couple of cents for a listing of good email addresses. How do you stop or at least minimize the propagation of email addresses? There are several easy steps that we should all practice.

1. Before you send out a forwarded e-mail, DELETE all of the other addresses that appear in the body of the message (at the top). That's right, DELETE them. Highlight them and delete them, backspace them, cut them, whatever it is you know how to do. It only takes a second You MUST click the 'Forward' button first and then you will have full editing capabilities against the body and headers of the message. If you don't click on 'Forward' first, you won't be able to edit the message at all.
2. Whenever you send an e-mail to more than one

person, do NOT use the To: or Cc: fields for adding e-mail addresses. Always use the BCC: (blind carbon copy) field for listing the e-mail addresses. This is the way the people you send to will only see their own e-mail address. If you don't see your BCC: option click on where it says To: and your address list will appear. Highlight the address and choose BCC: and that's it, it's that easy. When you send to BCC: your message will automatically say 'Undisclosed Recipients' in the 'TO:' field of the people who receive it.

3. Remove any 'FW:' in the subject line. You can re-name the subject if you wish or even fix spelling.
4. ALWAYS hit your Forward button from the actual e-mail you are reading. Ever get those e-mails that you have to open 10 pages to read the one page with the information on it? By forwarding from the actual page you wish someone to view, you stop them from having to open many e-mails just to see what you sent.
5. Have you ever gotten an email that is a petition? It states a position and asks you to add your name and address and to forward it to 10 or 15 people or your entire address book. The email can be forwarded on and on and can collect thousands of names and email addresses. A FACT: The completed petition is actually worth a couple of bucks to a professional spammer because of the wealth of valid names and email addresses contained therein. If you want to support the petition, send it as your own personal letter to the intended recipient. Your position may carry more weight as a personal letter than a laundry list of names and email address on a petition. (Actually, if you think about it, who's supposed to send the petition in to whatever cause it supports? And don't believe the ones that say that the email is being traced, it just isn't so!)
6. One of the main ones I hate is the ones that say that something like, 'Send this email to 10 people and you'll see something great run across your screen.' Or, sometimes they'll just tease you by saying something really cute will happen IT AIN'T GONNA HAPPEN!!!!! (Trust me; I'm still seeing some of the same ones that I waited on 10 years ago!) I don't let the bad luck ones scare me either, they get trashed. (Could that be why I haven't won the lottery?)
7. Before you forward an Amber Alert, or a Virus Alert, or some of the other ones floating around nowadays, check them out before you forward them. Most of them are junk mail that's been circling the net for years! Just about everything you receive in an email that is in question can be checked out at Snopes. Just go to http://www.snopes.com/. It's really easy to find out if it's real or not. If it's not, please don't pass it on.

So please, in the future, let's stop or at least minimize the junk mail and the viruses by taking the steps outlined above.

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"Help! My PC Won't Start"

Q. I recently moved my desktop computer. When I tried to start it, nothing happened. It won't turn on. Any help would be appreciated, Mr. M.

A. First, remove then plug the power cord into the back of the computer. Make sure it's inserted securely. Likewise, make sure it's plugged into the AC or power strip or whatever your source of power is. Also, be sure that the outlet it is plugged into is functional. Try plugging in a lamp to confirm that it is. Do the same thing if you're using a power strip or surge protector, just to be certain everything is functioning independently.

Next, check the back of the computer in the area where you plugged in the power cord. Look for a switch with a little horizontal line on one end and a little circle on the other. The line means "On," so make sure that it is turned on. It's very easy, when moving a computer, to accidentally toggle that switch to the "Off" position.

If the power switch is on, and everything is plugged in securely, the electric outlet is working, as is any power strip or surge protector, and you still can't start your PC, then it's time to contact a reputable computer repair service and have them check it out. It may require something as simple as replacing the system's power supply unit.

Q. Is there a way to configure Word so it will automatically leave two blank spaces after a period at the end of a sentence?

A. Yes, you can do that, though one space after a period is the standard these days. Years ago, it was two spaces, but for most publications today, one space is preferred.

Microsoft Word does not provide an ATS (auto-

matic two-space) setting, but you can configure Word's grammar checker to note any spacing anomalies. To do that, click Tools > Options > Spelling & Grammar tab > Settings button. Use the "Spaces required between sentences" drop-down list to establish how many spaces you would like between your sentences, followed by OK to close the Grammar Settings dialog box, then OK to close the Options dialog box.

The grammar checker will flag any sentences that do not conform to your spacing preference by displaying a green wavy underline. When you right-click that line, you'll be able to correct the spacing for that occurrence.

Q. I know this is probably a stupid question, but what does "URL" stand for?

A. First and foremost, there are never any stupid or silly questions here in Mr. Modemville. For most of us, Geekspeak is not our native tongue, so if you encounter a word and you're just not sure what it means, "Ask Mr. Modem."

Having said that, depending who you ask, URL stands for either "Uniform Resource Locator" or "Universal Resource Locator." I was always a uniform kind of guy since my days in the Boy Scouts, so I prefer "Uniform Resource Locator." A URL is the unique address of a resource on the Internet. A "www" URL, commonly called a Web address, appears in the Address bar near the top of a Web browser. For example, the full URL or Web address for my Web site is http://www.MrModem .com, though URLs are typically shortened to www .MrModem.com or even MrModem.com.

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

Craftzine

A project-based, online magazine dedicated to do-it-yourself crafts. The Projects section gives crafting a modern makeover, mixing traditional art with modern elements such as technology, recycling, the use of creative materials, and toxic waste (just kidding). Lots of free information is available on the site, though visitors are encouraged to enter a paid subscription.

www.craftzine.com

Historic Tale Construction Kit

Whether you are a history buff or just trying to look busy at work, this site lets you create your own story from the Middle Ages, complete with warriors, beasts, and shamans. When finished, you can submit it to the site so others can view it, or email it to annoy as many friends as possible. The process is a bit like writing your own comic strip in individual frames.

http://tinyurl.com/t3xe

New York Public Library Digital Gallery

You don't have to live in the Big Apple to experience one of the most impressive libraries in the world. The New York Public Library Digital Gallery Web site provides visitors with free access to half a million digitized items from its collection.

http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital

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Botnets

(Keeping Your Computer Safe on the Internet)

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.

Keeping your computer safe while connected to the Internet is becoming more and more difficult. The "attackers" are becoming more sophisticated and are sharing more ways to get their software into your computer. *Business Week* recently ran an article on the major security problems expected in 2008.

Unfortunately, most of them arrived long before the New Year started. We have been warned for years that it was possible to recruit unprotected computers into networks that could be controlled by an external source. This recruitment network problem has gotten much worse over the past few years. It is estimated that 7% of the computers connected to the Internet have been infected with a Botnet program. So what is a "Botnet"?

A robot or "bot" software program allows a computer to be remotely controlled without the knowledge of the computer's owner. When you have a number of "bot" controlled computers it is referred to as a "botnet." All of the computers in the botnet carry out commands issued by the network controller. Just one example of what can be done with a botnet is the sending of spam. The controller can easily have 100,000 computers in its network. So the botmaster will contract to send out one million email messages. The network can then send ten messages from each of the compromised computers. With the constant connection to the Internet using cable or DSL the computer owner will have no idea that his/her computer has been the source for ten spam

messages.

Now you might say that the idea that someone can control 100,000 computers in a botnet is ridiculous. However, as of October 2007 a major Internet security service had the IP addresses of over 12 million computers that were infected with bot software. There is also a newer threat called the Storm Worm botnet that has infected millions of computers just this year. In addition to its computer recruiting ability, it has built-in defenses that are preventing security services from analyzing it. In an *E-Week* article it was noted that "... Storm worm is sending DDoS attacks to not only the researchers looking into it but to anybody on their subnet, within 5 seconds of (their) initiating efforts to fight it or examine it." A DDoS attack is a "distributed denial of service" which can bring down a computer system or network by overwhelming it with messages. A very large volume of messages are sent by the botnet in a very short period of time. It is estimated that the Storm net controls over one million computers. This would make it the most powerful super-computer in the world, exceeding the computing power of all previous computers.

People frequently wonder why anyone would want to produce viruses, worms, and other kinds of Internet attacks. Years ago it was primarily because "they could do it." Today, it has become a real source of financial gain. Let's take a look at one financial resource created by controllers of botnets. On many web pages you find ads of various types that are sponsored by Google. When these ads are clicked, the advertiser pays Google who, in turn, pays the owner of a web page, usually 80% of the fee. So the botmaster sets up a web page and contracts with Google to display ads. Then, using the botnet sends commands to the computers in its net to click on the ads. This results in payments to the botmaster. So even with a small botnet of say 5-10,000 computers, the botmaster can easily obtain $15,000-$20,000 per month in fraudulent payments. When you consider that the known botnets all have more than 100,000 compromised systems, you get a better idea of the scale of the fraud involved. This type of click fraud has been estimated to make up 5-20% of the payments made by search companies.

Another use of large botnets is extortion. The botmaster can send an e-mail to a corporation warning that a DDoS will take place at a specific time unless a payment is made. As I mentioned earlier, spam e-mail contracts are also a source of revenue for botmasters. As these networks proliferate, the sale of the IF addresses of robotically controlled computers is also favored as an income source.

So far it would appear that the only persons affected by botnets would be corporations. However, if your computer is infected, everything you do can be reported to the botmaster. Bots can incorporate "key logger" software. That will record keystrokes, especially any related to passwords, user names or other desirable information. Another function of bot software is screen capture. It can record an entire screen and transmit the data to the botmaster. A compromised computer can also be used as a base for finding other unprotected computers to be recruited into the net. Another consideration is that the largest number of computers is in the hands of private individuals. So you may be a major part of the problem if your computer is infected by a bot.

Once a computer has been compromised, the bot software is usually designed to hide and protect itself. For example, it will search for and disable any other malware located on the computer or its associated network. It may also hide itself by means of a rootkit. It may also block updates of any anti-virus or anti-spyware software. It may even fake the process so the user believes that an update has taken place. One of the most common modifications involves changes to the Windows host file or by changing the location of the host file and altering the registry.

There are also some traps on the Internet that can lead a user to download bot (Trojan) software without realizing it. Phishing email can lead to web pages that have automatic download links for bot software. Web pages can be hijacked and links added to lead the viewer to web sites that contain "free" software links that are actually hidden bot programs. Bot programs are incorporating "social engineering" functions which serve to entice users to unknowingly download malware. People are the weakest link in the security chain. E-mail, web pages, instant messaging, social contact web sites are all used by bot malware as a means of collecting information and linking to compromised computers.

Many times the actions of a computer user are governed by visual clues. An attacker may take advantage of this by providing false visual clues on a web page or a pop-up. If the dialog box or popup is intrusive the user may click inappropriately just to get rid of the intruder This can lead to the download of a bot.

So how do you know if you've been infected? The easiest way to tell is related to how you have been

protecting your computer from infection. Do you have all of the following?

a) Hardware firewalL
b) software firewall that checks both incoming and outgoing messages.
c) anti -virus software that is updated at least daily.
d) anti-spyware software that you either run weekly or that runs in RAM constantly.
e) keep your Windows software patches up to date.

If you don't use any of these safety mechanisms, then your machine is almost 100% guaranteed to be compromised. Even if you have taken all of these precautions, you can still be infected However, the most effective mechanism for dealing with bots is to prevent their getting into your computer So you have to keep the software up to date and you have to use it.

Ideally, your firewall hardware/software combination should keep you invisible on the Internet. Bot programs are constantly searching for unprotected computers with open ports. You may not be aware that your computer has over 64,000 ports that can be used for communication. The most common usages are the ports in the lower range, tmder 1,024.

However, some bots use high end ports (>60,000) for transmission of commands. One place you can check your computers port and its invisibility on the Internet is www.GRC.com. The Gibson Research site provides a free port scan and much good information on interpreting the findings as well as how to protect your system.

Ideally the anti-virus and anti-spyware software would be able to find and remove any bot software that made its way onto your computer However, this software needs to know the "signature" of the malware in order to identify it. So the producers of the malware are always a step ahead of the good guys.

The security services have to find and disassemble the new malware before they can devise the protection against it. So it is up to the user to keep the security software as current as possible to reduce the chances of infection. Like it or not, security on the Internet is a never ending battle.

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. This article was reprinted from the Long Beach Computer Club monthly newsletter.

Mathematical Expectation and Computer Security

by Michael Gemignani
Houston Area League of PC Users, Inc.

Two Fundamental Laws of Computer Security

The Internet contains lot of advice on how to protect your computer from malware, that nasty stuff that can toast your hard drive, steal your credit card numbers and create endless havoc on your monitor. There are some pieces of advice I find almost laughable.

For example, some folks tell you to beware of buying something over the Internet using a credit card. If you are dealing with a reputable site like Amazon.com, or using a legitimate service like PayPal, you are, in my opinion, less likely to have your credit card number stolen than if you give it to a waiter in a restaurant who runs off with it to the back room to ring up your tab. On the Internet, as in real life, if you know who you can trust, you are relatively safe.

There are, however, two fundamental laws that I will give you to help you keep your PC out of the clutches of the bad guys....

Law #1: Malware cannot do anything unless you do something first that enables it to do something.

Law #2: Malware that cannot do anything can be safely ignored.

Let me explain. If malware is to find a home on your PC, you must have done something, or omitted to do something, that allowed it in. Thus, the first line of defense in protecting yourself from malware is to make sure malware can't find your computer; or, if it finds it, entry is barred. That is, the malware cannot install itself or make any changes whatsoever to your machine. It's like preventing a burglar from entering your home by using burglar bars and a guard dog.

If, however, malware is able to install itself on your machine, then the next line of defense is to insure that it cannot carry out any mischief. While the best defense is to remove the malware completely, the next best is to make certain that it will never be allowed to run. And a last line of defense, should the malware find a way to run, is to make sure it cannot do any harm. Here the would-be burglar has been able to enter your home but is immediately set upon by the guard dog and immobilized.

The cat and mouse game between PC users and malware developers is becoming increasingly sophis-

ticated with new strategies being developed almost daily by both sides. But the first line of defense remains you, the computer user. If you visit questionable sites, download pirated files, and click on any link that promises something interesting (yes, I know it is the funniest joke anyone ever heard), you are going to get malware. I guarantee it. Thus, if you are not sure that what you are doing is safe, don't do it.

There are, however, both hardware and software designed to protect you from your weaker nature. In this column I will talk primarily about protecting yourself in ways related to Law #1. We will consider protective mechanisms related to Law #2 in my next column. Your first line of defense, other than your exercising due caution, is generally a firewall.

Firewalls can provide protection in several different ways. One defense is at the application layer (AL). A software firewall using an application layer defense allows Internet traffic to and from only those applications you specify. If you authorized the firewall to allow Firefox to access the Internet, then the firewall will permit traffic to and from Firefox. If you did not give such authorization, then the firewall will block traffic to and from Firefox; that is, you will not be able to use Firefox on the Internet.

Another form of firewall protection uses network address translation (NAT). Your computer identifies itself on the Internet by means of its IP address. Your IP address allows servers on the Internet to identify your particular machine; it is analogous to your home's street address. However, if someone knows your computer's IP address, he can attack it at will, probing it at leisure until he finds some weakness that enables him to compromise its security. In essence, a firewall using this method masks your IP address so that your machine becomes invisible to potential attackers. If your router has a firewall, the chances are that it uses NAT.

A firewall using an AL defense is like a guard dog that allows only the people you have trained it to trust to enter the house. A NAT is akin to making your house invisible so that burglars can't find it.

Other types of software are designed to protect you using the principle stated in Law #1. For example, there is software that identifies potentially dangerous sites. LinkScanner Pro from Exploit Prevent Labs, which also comes in a free Lite version, will examine URLs and warn you if a link is a known threat. It also purports to scan incoming network traffic and warn against known attempts, so-called exploits, to deliver malware to your computer. You can query LinkScanner concerning a specific URL, or, if you get a list of URLs from a search service such as Google, it will scan each URL and warn you if any of the sites listed represent possible threats. This can, however, slow down your searches while you are waiting for LinkScanner to do its thing.

Most browsers also allow you to set your desired level of protection ranging from "Anything goes" to paranoia.

Browsers now generally have pop-up protection – clicking on pop-ups can sometimes download unwanted software. Many also warn against known phishing sites, that is, sites that may appear legitimate but, in reality, are just trying to get you to reveal a credit card number, your social security number, a bank password, etc.

You may also get a warning that a URL is not what it seems to be, in other words, the possibility that someone may be trying to redirect you to a dangerous site by presenting you with a URL that looks legitimate.

In addition, your browser should warn you if a download is being attempted, so that you can decide whether or not to accept it. Do not allow any download to proceed unless you are sure you know what it is. You can always save the download before installing it and test it with your antivirus software or query the Internet to see if the file is a known danger. In other words, your browser already has a number of safeguards built into it to keep malware at bay, provided you activate them or do not disable them.

If malware does slip through your safety net, all is not lost, as we will see in my next column. But learn from your mistakes. It is not those who make mistakes who deserve to be censured. It is those who repeat them.

Dr. Michael Gemignani, an attorney and Episcopal priest, is also a former professor of computer science who has written extensively on legal issues related to computers. Although he is now retired, he enjoys writing and speaking about computer law and security. Send him your questions or comments to mgmign2@hal-pc.org. From the June issue of HAL-PC Magazine*, newsletter of the Houston Area League of PC Users, Inc.*

From The DealsGuy

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

While working the IBM Rational Software Development Show, I visited with the guys maintaining the registration, cyber café and the classroom setup. They told me they were using VMware for the classrooms and one actual machine could support three or four virtual machines. Since each training class was for a different purpose, some virtual machines were set up for different applications. I assume that the best reasons for using virtual machines is the hardware saving, less heat and lower power consumption, which all translates to lower costs.

In another conversation, I had noticed that security people were not scanning the badges of attendees entering the exhibit floor, but there was electronic equipment there. I asked if there were RFID chips in the badges and they confirmed there were. When an attendee passes through the entrance, the RFID chip in his badge is detected and the data is recorded for various purposes. The technician also mentioned that while on the show floor, the attendee could also be tracked when he was near an exhibit. As the RFID chip nears the booth exhibit, a sensor detects it and even would know the time duration the person was at the exhibit. I assume that service would cost the exhibitor.

He told me the attendee could opt out of the RFID chip when filling out the registration form, but only about 1% do that. I wonder how many people who are always in a hurry to fill out the application even noticed that option on the form. I would prefer not to be tracked.

Are You Interested in a Second Life?

At a Central Florida Computer Society meeting <http://www.cfcs.org> Hewie Poplock and Mike Ungerman did a fascinating presentation on having meetings on the Net instead of in person, or even a combination of both. They used two projectors so the audience could see both laptop screens and what each presenter saw on their own screen. The displays sometimes included another member who joined them from his home. The presentation had a few glitches because they had not worked with it a lot, but Hewie and Mike are experts who will work out the bugs and refine the process to make it work.

They also demonstrated Dimdim <http://www.dimdim.com>, a free Web Working conference site, Paltalk <http://www.paltalk.com> where you can video conference with up to 10 people, or voice and type chat to hundreds in public or private rooms, and Microsoft Live Meeting. They said the Association of PC User Groups is presently negotiating with Microsoft to obtain a license for Live Meeting for every APCUG user group and that there are several more applications that facilitate video chatting or conferencing; including a new Adobe site <http://www.acrobat.com> where you can try Connect Now, presently in Beta testing. Here is a comparison Web site. <http://hewiep.googlepages .com/ fcs20080615>.

Along the way, they also threw in a little about Second Life, a Web site that seems to have become a fascination for some folks and perhaps a sort of addiction for others <http://www.secondlife.com>. At Second Life you create a new, but virtual, life of your own, even creating and building just about any virtual item you wish. Second Life seemed limitless and you can buy virtual items, or sell virtual items you have constructed, using Linden dollars. Some "residents" of Second Life have actually been able to earn a lot of real dollars by converting Linden Dollars into U.S. currency at L250=$1. It was all completely new to me and the traffic on that Web site is tremendous. Hewie has a friend who spends up to 10 hours a day on the site.

Just Paste in a Note

How often do you want to write something down for future reference while you're working on a project? Probably more than you realize. Flashnote can be helpful when you work with text and Flashnote is absolutely free software so it's easy to take a look at it. Whether you're recording a telephone number, saving a URL to reuse, or just copying pieces of text for editing, you could use a personal information manager or some other program for creating and saving text, but most of those options are slow. Flashnote is small, quick and convenient so here is a way to save time. <http://softvoile.com/flashnote/?s=news4.5>

Keep Track of Everything with This One!

Remembering all the things that have been planned can be a major nuisance, and when important tasks get neglected it can be really serious so here is a personal information manager. Efficient PIM Software announces the release of EfficientPIM version 1.61, the newest upgrade for its flagship tool, enabling you to maintain and secure personal information, make task lists and schedules, write notes, memos and even diaries to immortalize your memoirs. All this information can be password protected. With the Password Manager, you need to remember

only one password to be able to record and find the others.

The Calendar display, Edit Note and Desktop Note functions have been improved from the previous version. You can literally stick some important notes on the desktop the way you do adhering paper notes to the fridge. EfficientPIM relieves your business life, enabling you to record, not only the information about your contacts, but all the events or appointments connected with them. The patented embedded search engine allows you to perform comprehensive searches, enabling you to find every piece of information you once recorded to the program.

EfficientPIM runs under Windows 98, Me, NT4, 2000, XP, 2003 and Vista and costs $39.95 (USD) for a single-user license. A coupon code "EFFI-OMRW" gives user group members a 20% discount. Enter the coupon code in the EfficientPIM purchase page. This coupon code expires on Oct. 31, 2008. Licensed users are entitled to free updates and priority technical support for 24 months. More information is available at <http://www.efficientpim.com/>.

Direct download link: <http://www.efficientpim .com/download EfficientPIM-Setup.exe>

Sib Icon Editor Goes Freeware

SibCode announces the release of Sib Icon Editor 4.0. The new version of this renowned icon editor is now being offered at no charge, and is available under a freeware license. Sib Icon Editor is a fast and lightweight image-editing tool designed for creating and editing icons, toolbars, navigation buttons, small logotypes and similar graphics. Fitting the niche between simplistic Windows Paint and the almighty Adobe Photoshop, Sib Icon Editor offers small-graphics designers a way to unleash creativity without the steep learning curve.

Sib Icon Editor supports icons, toolbars, logos and other graphics of any size, color depth or aspect ratio. Both 16 and 256-color images are supported while 32-bit graphics gets alpha-channel support for creating images with no edge jaggedness. The alpha-channel comes in handy when adding semi-transparent shadows that look extremely effective on Windows XP and Vista. Sib Icon Editor offers a choice between a number of pens, sprays and paintbrushes. There is the usual bucket tool for filling the void, and there are gradients and chess fills to quickly achieve desired effects.

Only a few clicks will add a translucent or opaque shadow, modify opacity, colors, and gamma. Disabled icons are typically grayscale, so there is a tool for that as well. Tools for smoothing, inverting, and colorizing images are also available. The resulting image can be saved in ICO, ICPR, BMP, JPEG or PNG formats. Sib Icon Editor can also convert Mac icons into Windows format.

Sib Icon Editor is available for free at <http://free-icon-editor.com/>

Beep Beep What??

I had some space left and would normally include some kind of freebie, but here is a tip I found in "Nuggets from Nuvo" by Joe Nuvolini, a great monthly column in the Pikes Peak Computer Application Society newsletter, *Bits Of Bytes* <http://ppcompas.apcug.org>. What's your state of mind when your computer does not come to life, but instead only gives you certain beeps? File this information away where you can lay your hands on it if, some day, that happens instead of booting. What do those beeps mean? Visit <http://networking .ringofsaturn .com/PC/beep php> to get a list of the beeps. I wish my readers could read all the newsletters that I see for the valuable bits of information they contain. Not that I would know what to do with that information, but some of you might.

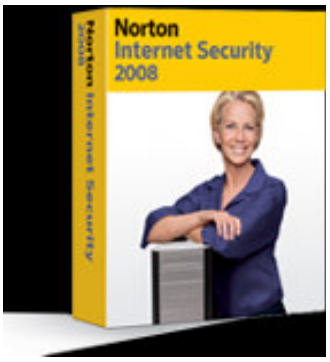
That's it for this month. I'll have some other new product announcements on my Web site. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click <bobclick at BellSouth dot net>. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com>.

Norton Internet Security 2008

by Ted Littman

North Orange County Computer Club

It comes in a large yellow box (unless you download the program from the Internet) that contains one CD, a 34page 4½ x 7 inches User Guide, and a separate card on installing and activating the software that repeats what is in the Guide. The User Guide also covers Getting Started and Responding to Emergencies. But brevity is the theme.



Now don't get me wrong — I like the Symantec

product and have always found that it gives my PCs proper protection. And each subsequent version has been an improvement over the prior ones. But, if you have problems, you may get some help from the electronic Help file, but more than likely you will need to get more guidance from the Symantec web site or other Internet resources. Free technical support is available via email and "live chat" from within the program.

The 2008 suite provides extensive protection including AntiVirus, 2-way Personal Firewall, Antispyware, Antiphishing, and Identity protection plus Rootkit detection. Web site authentication and more. While not included in the program that I received, you can download a free add-on pack that gives you parental control and e-mail antispam protection (for Microsoft's Outlook and Outlook Express). The software can be installed on three computers with XP or Vista operating systems, and comes with a 1-year subscription that will automatically keep the suite's elements updated for maximum protection. With a list price of $70 (currently reduced $10 at http://www.symantec.com/norton/products/overview.jsp?pcid=is&pvid=nis2008) and a street cost of $50 or less (http://www.amazon.com/Norton-Internet-Security-2008-Users/dp/B000T9LUBU), the price is reason-able for a well integrated commercial product.

While not everyone is sold on Norton, *PC Magazine* has again selected Norton Internet Security Suite 2008 as its Editors' Choice security suite: "The unobtrusive firewall is tough as nails, and it actively identifies and blocks exploits and other intrusions. NIS 2008 did a super job of cleaning up malware in testing, and its cleanup is significantly more thorough than most. The new Identity Safe manages your passwords and personal information effectively. And if you have a problem, help is built right in." But, Amazon.com reviewers on average only gave NIS 2 'l2 stars out of a possible 5, with negative comments on "Bloatware" (it slows down your PC and increases boot time), but positive ones on the improvement of 2008 over past years as well as its protection capability, graphic interface, and ease of use. If you need security software and don't opt for the various freeware and shareware programs, you can download an NIS trial program and run it for two weeks before deciding.

There also is a 60-day money-back guarantee if you buy NIS and don't like it. If you want to read more on reviewers' comments, use the aforementioned amazon.com link Whatever you do, don't install multiple antivirus or firewall programs as they are likely to cause major conflicts in your computer.

I installed the NIS 2008 software on three computers, an Acer 64-bit laptop with Vista Ultimate, an old Dell 500 MHz desktop with Windows XP Pro, and a newer Dell 8400 P IV, 3.2 GHz with 1 ME Ram and XP Home Edition. In the 8400 machine, I also installed NIS on a second partition that has Vista Ultimate. In all cases except the Dell 500, I had a previous version of NIS that was automatically removed. The old Dell had several free security programs that had to be removed manually to avoid conflicts with Norton. Needless to say, everything went smoothly during installation and afterwards. During the process, the files on your CD will be updated if newer ones are available from Symantec's web site. And, yes, you do have to "activate" the software after installation—a minor nuisance since Symantec only requires your consent and the process is automatic and fast.

I have been using the NIS program for a long time and, to the best of my knowledge, it has fended off all attacks. For example, I get quite a few emails forwarded to me from several noccc.org accounts and occasionally, they include attachments with viruses and other malware that the Norton AntiVirus program intercepts and removes and then flashes an unobtrusive note on the screen alerting me to its actions.

In the past, I too have been critical of the suite's growth and attendant impact on PC boot and operating speed. The latest version of NIS shows that Symantec is paying attention to customer (and reviewer) complaints. In the past also, I have had problems uninstalling NIS completely when there were PC problems requiring its removal and reinstallation. Now, if the normal Control Panel procedure won't work and you can't remove all of the program files and Registry entries manually, you can download a removal tool from the Symantec web site that does the job nicely.

One final thought. Although a number of reviews indicate that some manufacturers of individual security programs (like antivirus or antispyware) may be superior to those in NIS, I doubt that you will find an integrated suite better than the Symantec product. And the price is reasonable after discounts/rebates; in fact, sources like Fry's regularly have promotions where your final cost is only the sales tax on the product!

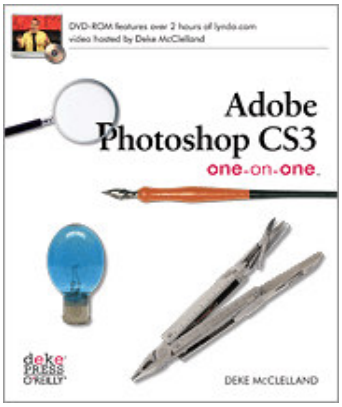
From the June 2008 issue of HAL-PC Magazine,

newsletter of the Houston Area League of PC Users..

Adobe Photoshop CS3 One-on-One

by Mike Yates
North Orange County Computer Club

If you are a beginning to intermediate user of the Photoshop program, Adobe Photoshop CS3 One-on-One by Deke McClelland is a good book for you. Published in 2007, this text addresses the latest raster graphics powerhouse software from Adobe which is available as a standalone program and one of the main elements in the Creative Suite 3 (CS3) clusters of graphics manipulators. I loaded CS3 in the form of the Design Premium package and the Web Premium package, so my version was "Extended 10.0.1." To run only Photoshop, you need at least 512 ME of RAM or 1 GB for the suite (I upgraded to 2 GB), 2 GB of hard disk, DVD Drive, and at least a 1024x768 monitor.



The book is laid out as 12 tutorial lessons, grouping similar topics together. Lesson 9, for example, discusses Layers, a key element in many graphic programs' tool bag, starting with both the benefit and the penalties of using layers and how to manage, arrange, modify, import, transform, mask, blend, warp, and align layers. For the faint of heart, rest assured. You would have already worked your way through the basics. The in-depth lessons start at the beginning with what Photoshop is for, how to open a photo (image), how to organize your images for efficient use and a section that taught me a lot on how to use thumbnails and the "metadata" that is in the image.

Even though the mood is light and easy to read, thanks to a good layout and textbook design, the instructions are detailed, starting with a nice touch: precise steps on setting up the preferences, defaults, shortcuts, and tutorial files on the accompanying DVD to match the textbook photos and screen shots as closely as possible. Developed by professional trainers, half of the 500 pages are photos or illustrations or screen shots so that you can see the text topics in action. "Pearls of Wisdom" add highlights to the reading. The book is focused on basic Photoshop, but McClelland is to be applauded for addressing the Interactions in the Suite versions as well.

The instructional approach is to read the introduction to the lessons for an overview, then go to the DVD video for that lesson, then go back to the text. The DVD provides 10-17 minute demonstrations using high resolution formats designed to make the trainer's action easily viewed on PC displays, using QuickTime. The DVD is a key to the value of this book, providing student files matching the text to read-then-do. At the end of the Lesson are review questions. Those not interested in all program features might read the lesson intro, watch the DVD and skip the parts of the lesson not of interest. I loved the "Extra Credit" sections; some added additional insight, othert:; told you where you could stop this lesson and skip to the next if you had not much interest in that topic.

Some minor gripes: 1) The book covers both MAC and }"" command keystrokes which I found slightly disconcerting and confusing as I moved from textbook to screen and back in detailed operations. (Maybe a font difference would help.) 2) This is so close to traditional textbook layout, why isn't the review followed by "exercises" tasking the avid student into more thought or in combining the topics presented, to ingrain the concepts, based on partially completed files supplied on the DVD? (This gripe might be considered a positive; I left the book wanting more rather than bored.)

Like almost any offering of the O'Reilly Media family, this text DVD combo is worth its price, $49.99 before the user group discount. Advanced users may not find it a suitable reference text, but I suspect they will learn tidbits from it. This neophyte gives a strong "thumbs up" recommendation.

For more information, check out the O'Reilly web site at http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/9780596529758/.

From the June 2008 issue of HAL-PC Magazine, *newsletter of the Houston Area League of PC Users, Inc.*

Price Reduction on a Recent Purchase? Get a Refund!

by Steve Bass

Say you bought something at Best Buy, Costco, Staples, or Sears. A week later, the price drops and you're PO'ed because you paid too much.

Listen to this. My buddy Richard S. [thanks, Richard!] found Price Protectr, a spot that promises to get you a refund if you've overpaid. (And you're reading it right: Protectr isn't a typo.)

"I recently purchased a printer from Costco.com. Two weeks later Price Protectr mailed me a notice

that Costco had dropped the price $50. That was within Costco's price guarantee policy time frame. I could either print that out and take it to a Costco warehouse or e-mail Costco—which I chose to do. Costco e-mailed back and said they had credited me for the $50!

"A few minutes ago, I got a notification that the keyboard I purchased from Fry's dropped $10.

"Life is getting a little cheaper and easier to find price drops—and it sure beats watching ads to see if a vender dropped a price on something you just purchased."

You can set a price on an item you're looking for and when the product reaches the price you want to pay, Price Protectr will ping you. Check the blog <http://www.priceprotectr.com/blog/index.jsp> for details.

Adobe Reader 9

by Roger Radcliffe
The Users Group Netword, La Crescenta, CA

Adobe has just released a new version of its program that displays PDF's (Portable Document Files), Adobe Reader v.9. It has a slick new look and an interface that is much easier to use. Its main improvement is a super quick launch time from a web site click. Significant graphic acceleration now allows fast smooth scrolling, improved 2D graphic display and rotating 3D graphics from within the reader.

Collaboration with other producers is now also possible with version 9 and it supports Internet conferencing features. Documents can now be digitally signed with Adobe Reader. 'Search' and 'Find' features are now faster and more accurate.

You can now annotate the documents you view and save to your own computer without change to the original document on the Web. The IRS uses PDF files for their 'Forms and Publications' and now it lets you fill out their forms on a PDF screen display and then save the file to your hard disk for later revision and printing. The Franchise Tax Board also allows completion on the screen and printing, but not saving-the last things for which I needed a typewriter.

The PDF format allows writers to control the document so that it can be read, but not altered over the Internet without permission. Over 1.5 billion .pdf files are now on the Internet. They include most manuals, user guides, brochures, forms, and other document. Web sites use PDF's when they want to display formatted information, so a PDF reader is a necessity for web users.

Photos placed into the PDF format can be viewed by any Internet user without having to use specific graphic format programs or even a PC. With a large monitor you can read two pages side by side and then print two pages on a sheet and two pages on the back to save paper.

Many software programs (i.e. Word, Paper Port, WordPerfect, PhotoShop) allow you to create your own PDF and now, with Adobe Reader v.9, any program can have its output placed into the PDF format through an Adobe web site, and saved back on your hard disk.

For early upgraders, Adobe Reader v.9 supports Windows Vista and its new visual look as well.

From the July 2008 issue of the newsletter of TUGNET, The Users Group Network, La Crescenta, CA. Their web page can be found at http://www.tugnet.org/

Society News

July Planning Meeting Minutes

by John McMillan

Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, Arpad Kovaks, Mike Lavalle, John McMillan, Sharah Naas, Dan Rothfuss, Steve Staub, and Tom Thompson met at Sally Springett's home for the July planning meeting.

The meeting started with a review of the June Society Meeting where David Wilson did a presentation on Print Management. He stressed the potential savings in environments that have multiple users and/or a variety of printing capabilities. This is more likely to be of interest to commercial enterprises though there was some consideration of selecting printing equipment that might be beneficial to home users.

Steve Staub mentioned that to date, 9 people have signed up for the picnic which will be held at the canal side pavilion in Fairport, August 12th. The deadline for signing up is August first. Chef Al will preside over the grill as he has the past few years with dinner anticipated to start between 5:30 and 6:00. We are still looking for donations for the auction Tom Thompson suggested. Contributions do not have to be computer related and a letter supporting a tax deduction will be available if desired. Auction rules will be explained at the picnic.

In September we will meet at the Brighton Library to hear about the concepts of open source software.

Arpad described several recent problems with printing the Monitor. Six or seven volunteers spend up to 7 hours a month at St. Stephens to print the

Monitor for a cost, including mailing, of about $200. More reliable equipment could reduce that time commitment to 4 hours or less. A small, inde-pendently owned, professional printing organization has offered to print the Monitor for $270 per month. Mailing costs would raise that figure to over $300 and could impact the quality of the newsletter.

Arpad summarized by saying that if the laser jet 8000 should die, we have no current backup and could not print the Monitor. He has been considering possible alternatives. Perhaps with some creative financing, the Society could purchase a new color laser jet printer, similar to the 8000 but with an on site service plan. The price of such an item is estimated to be around $500.

In the short term we will continue to observe the current process, looking for greater consistency while assessing other practical and affordable alternatives. Any proposed change involving a major expendi-ture requires a majority vote of Society officers.

July Meeting Minutes

by John McMillan

Steve opened the business meeting saying anyone whose dues are due should see him. The planning meeting will be held the first Tuesday of the month at Sally's house. Newsletter assembly will take place Saturday July 12th at 9 at St. Stephens Church. The next regular Society meeting will be in September.

Ron Mattison led Help's Half Hour but there is a continuing need for someone to perform this duty. Members who have thoughts about topics for future meetings are asked to share them with Mike Lavelle. This evenings door prize was "Windows Vista, The Missing Manual," a book that requires a review. Dave Thompson said the photography SIG will meet the 1st Thursday in September and Carl Schmidtmann mentioned that the Linux SIG will also meet in September.

The deadline for picnic sign up is August 1st. It will be held August 12th at the Perinton town park beside the canal in Fairport, a place we used several years ago. The fee is $5 per person plus a dish to pass (A-I munchies, J-R salads, S-Z desserts). Gathering time is 5 pm with supper as close to 5:30 as possible. Several items have been pledged for the silent auction but more would be welcomed.

Steve introduced Jim McBride, one of seven club members living in Ohio. He was in Rochester for a visit and made attending our meeting one of his priorities. Russ Cooper, our speaker for the evening, also came from Ohio but he now lives in Rochester.

After a brief biographical history, Russ launched his topic, "Genealogy, Concepts, Software and Comparisons" by distributing a handout of the slides he would be using. They started with some software features newcomers should consider:

1. Ease of Use
2. Interface and Navigation
3. File Management and Organization
4. Charts and Reports
5. Source Documentation (He stressed accurately identifying sources for data validation.)
6. GEDCOM (Genealogy data communication; how data is transferred)
7. Special Features

As each of these was discussed in subsequent slides, Russ described advantages and pitfalls of various approaches. Data sources span birth, marriage and death certificates; census, tax and voter registrations; obituaries; deeds; and mortgages. Many are free like census data (both state and federal), public and military records, church records (including Mormon microfilms from overseas sources) and public libraries (Rochester and Allen County of Fort Wayne Indiana, for example). Other privately funded sources are more expensive.

Data entry should be intuitive with an easy learning curve. Spell checking and chronological displays are very useful benefits as is a complete family view screen showing a person, his or her parents, spouse (s) and children. Pedigree lists going back 5 or 6 generations are beneficial. Other life events such as education, occupations, health data, wars, and even weather abnormalities can be used to construct more complete stories. Some software packages allow GEO/GPS coding for building maps of family events. Throughout the talk, Russ used anecdotes of his personal findings to illustrate some of the surprises that investigators might uncover and tips for circumventing brick walls.

Russ discussed the varying capabilities of PAF/Ancestral Quest; Legacy Family Tree1 and 2; Family Tree Maker; the Master Genealogist; and Roots Magic software before going on to demonstrate some of the data collection and documentation screens plus various reports they can provide. All in all, a very detailed presentation on a topic of wide interest.

See you at the picnic. Here are some things that will be available: 1) Boom Box: Sony CFD-19, FM/AM 2-band digital tuner, easy preset, CD to tape synchronized recording, remote control: manual

enclosed, AC/DC operation. 2) Kodak Personal Picture Maker 100 by Lexmark New, color cartridge, unopened: 12A1980, manual and installation CD: Lexmark Z11, 3) Kodak PhotoDoc Color Scanner handles from 3.5"x2" to 8.5"x14" paper, manual, and software. 4) Casio Ez-label Printer, brand new-never opened!

The Lighter Side

Customer: If I want somebody to send a reply to my email … should I include a self-addressed, stamped envelope with it?