The Rochester Computer Society, Inc.

MONITOR

Contents

http://www.rcsi.org

Significant Bits
by Sean N. Henderson
Danbury Area Computer Society, CT

Coldfusion Is Hot

Many DACS members reading this probably have some experience programming with PhP. Maybe this is a time to remind developers and those making application choices about ColdFusion.

When Allaire first released Cold Fusion (two words then) in 1995, it made some headlines purely because of its name. It was a number of years later when I met a person at my wife's college reunion who was a ColdFusion developer, and she raved about how easy it was to create database-enabled Web pages.

As fate would have it, I too, have become a ColdFusion (CF) developer and have to say CF makes Dynamic HTML (DHTML) and database-enabled sites really easy. Much richer than old-school CGI (Perl or otherwise) and even still more feature rich than PhP.

The neat thing about CF's version of HTML, called CFML, is that if you can write HTML, then it's just a couple of tags and commands more to be writing dynamic websites

with CFML. Some hosting providers provide a version called ColdFusion 4.5 Express. The current "standard" appears to be based on 6.1 MX. The current version is 8 (no MX) and is published by Adobe, and includes support for AJAX.

Hype about Skype

Skype is a VoIP (Voice-over-IP) telephone service. For PC-to-PC users, there is no charge. Charges incur when wanting to have voicemail, call a landline number, call a mobile number, or have a landline number or cell phone reach a Skype account.

PC Magazine recently listed their survey for various technologies, and Skype was down from last year.

My purpose in trying Skype was to see if it was a viable low-cost replacement for a mobile phone. How would that work? There are various scenarios, none of them simple. The barrier is roaming across Wi-Fi networks. My target device is my Palm TX running PalmOS. A recent test of Skype to my brother out west has us talking for over an hour over a very clear connect. I was using a USB LCD phone connected to my laptop, connected to the home router by way of Wi-Fi. My brother similarly connected, except just speaking open air using his laptop mic and/or speakers. The sound quality was clearer than any cell phone call I've had.

Another USB Gizmo

There's an inexpensive USB LCD handset phone available for use with Skype. The UP-730 seems to work as expected and sounds better than expected. The unit was purchased for under $10 on-line. It allows scrolling

through the USB contacts through the handset. Is it really necessary? No. But, it has a longer cord than most headsets and it made using Skype feel more like regular phone service, especially on longer calls.

This And That
by Elizabeth B. Wright
Computer Club of Oklahoma City

Lost and Gone Forever ... or Not

Well, it finally happened. A picture which had taken far too much of my time was finally ready for printing. I sent it online to my favorite photo store. Expecting to see a picture good enough to share with family, it was a great disappointment when I picked up the print to see that parts of it were not up to that standard. A renewed frenzy of "fiddling" with it resulted in losing track of the names used for the changes. When I thought I had everything in order, I chose to eliminate the extra files. And did I do a good job. Not only did I choose the unwanted files, but also included the one version which was half way good. No recycle bin, no delete, but the ultimate "destroy." In other words, probably only the CIA would be able to recover the file from my hard disk.

Starting from scratch with the original image, I tried to retrace my steps to reach the same quality as the lost file. I had the hard copy print, so I knew what I wanted it to look like. But for some reason nothing worked and my renewed efforts to enhance the picture did not give me the results I had previously attained. But there was real improvement in one area that was so lacking in the lost image.

The newest image was then uploaded to the photo store and while doing so I noticed that the original picture was still online. And as in all things ethernet, the image could be reloaded to my computer via a download. It was a little difficult, but the end result was I got my picture

back. Then the problem areas of the picture were corrected and the end result was a very acceptable print. So while a lot of time was spent on a rather insignificant picture, the knowledge obtained as a result made it well worth the effort.

After a recent study group meeting my friend Dorothy asked me if I learned anything. My answer was the same as always. I never attend any kind of meeting that I *don't* learn something. Now maybe it isn't something that will change my life forever, but more often than not it is something that enriches my life, if even in a small way. In addition to that, whenever someone asks me for help, usually we both learn something. The most recent request for help reminded me, once again, when helping someone over the phone with a computer problem, it is important to have them start at the very top of their computer screen and describe exactly what they see all the way down. With that information it is often possible to pinpoint a possible area of trouble and generate ideas for solutions. Many times the description of the problem, while usually understandable, does not contain that one little piece of information that will lead to the answer. So by following the procedure of top to bottom on the screen, we solved the problem and I took away at least as much from the experience as did the recipient of my help.

As humans age time seems to fly ever more swiftly by. But I don't think that is what has been happening in real time when it comes to technology. It looks to me like many things are moving so rapidly that we almost miss them.

Not all that long ago it was hard to imagine a small 8 Gig USB drive that could fit on your keychain. So portable, so useful. Of course they came on the market and were being sold at prices often over the $100 mark. Now they are practically throwaways, good for birthday presents, stocking stuffers for Christmas, Hanukkah and other celebrations as well as any other gift giving occasion. Should this be troubling? Perhaps it signals the end of one technology era and the beginning of another. My crystal ball is a bit cloudy on this one, so I will leave it to the more savvy writers to tell you

the answer. All I know is that for now those handy little USB drives are so useful that it's hard to imagine how we did without them. At the present time we are seeing 16 Gig USB drives with prices over $100. How long before they will be things of the past?

Who uses USB drives? There probably isn't anyone out there who travels with a computer who doesn't keep some information on them. They are somewhat safer than storing everything on the hard drive of a laptop. Thieves target laptops in airports, hotel rooms and any other place people might be careless enough to leave one unattended. If all the information a person needs to do his/her job is on the machine, and if it gets stolen or damaged then the consequences could be disastrous. Even a one or two Gig USB drive will hold a lot of information and can be so much more easily protected. In an emergency situation, a new laptop with enough software already installed on it to do business can be purchased, sometimes even in large airports, and keeping essential files on the USB drive will get a person back up and working almost without missing a stride.

Of course there are other uses for them. My favorite use for the little devices is to transport image files whenever it is necessary. Those occasions usually are to share pictures with family or to use digital images in study groups or classes and also occasionally to get prints from a kiosk in the stores which offer that service. Mostly I do that when I just have a few prints that I need. For large orders I still upload my image files online.

Maybe Santa Claus will put a 16G drive in my stocking this year.

Microsoft Releases Photosynth Panoramic Image Creator

by Ira Wilsker

APCUG Advisor; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; radio and TV show host

Many of us take a lot of digital photographs. I have hundreds of digital photos from two recent weddings; others may have vacation photos, family photos, scenic images, or other content. Would it not be interesting if a collection of photos with some degree of commonality could be seamlessly "stitched" together creating a 3-D panoramic view of the subject? For example, if I took the wedding pictures of my daughter's recent wedding, the images could automatically be merged into a single three dimensional, easily navigable image of the entire wedding ceremony and reception. The panoramic image can be manipulated, rotated, zoomed, and viewed from any direction. If I can do this with wedding pictures, imagine what you can do with landscapes, theme parks, or other images. This new service from Microsoft, known as Photosynth (photosynth. net) is currently free, but does have several provisos, one of which is that all images created will be considered as "public," and can be viewed by anyone on the Photosynth website.

Photosynth is graphics intensive, and may not run on older computers lacking adequate video power and capabilities. It will run on Windows XP (SP 2 or SP3), and on Vista. Mac users can use Photosynth if running Boot Camp. Images are displayed on a browser, and Internet Explorer 7 as well as Firefox 2 and 3 are supported. 256mb of memory is the absolute minimum to run Photosynth, and 1gb is recommended. In order to function, Photosynth installs two programs to the computer. One is a web browser plug-in (both IE and Firefox compatible), and an application aptly named "Photosynth" which is used to create panoramic images. Install of both programs is fast and easy, and is accomplished with a single download. Since the actual processing is done by Microsoft, the images (or parts of them) are uploaded to Microsoft by the Photosynth software, which requires a broadband connection. Microsoft has posted a warning, "All synths are public. Your photos will be visible to everyone on the Internet. In order to create images, it is necessary to sign up online; users who have a Windows Live ID can use it for Photosynth access."

Photosynth performs two material functions; it reconstructs the scene or object from several two-dimensional digital photographs, and then examines the images for similarities, and mathematically use that information to estimate the real shape of the object, and the vantage point the photos were taken from. Using the digital data, the three dimensional space is created, and the merged photos can be easily navigated as if they were a single photograph. Microsoft's new "Seadragon" technology delivers only the required pixels to the browser, making the loading of images that may have included hundreds of individual photos a fast and pleasing experience.

On the main page for Photosynth (photosynth. net) are dozens of samples of the output than can be created. Some of the examples are the Sphinx, composed of 239 photos taken by National Geographic; a walk around Eton College, 427 photos; The Taj Mahal, 179 National Geographic photos; the Space Shuttle, 246 photos; and many others. It is important to note that this computing power and service is available for free to all of us who are willing to make our images public. The "Recently Synthed" link shows the most recently created scenes (many dated today, as I type this), which include street scenes, still life, sunsets, Hawaiian scenery, Nathan's Hotdog Eating Championship—2008, backyards, portraits, kittens (cute), athletic events, and other topics. It is a lot of fun just browsing these synths and seeing what others are doing and what the system can do for digital images.

The potential applications for Photosynth are almost endless. It could be used by real estate agents to easily create an interactive three dimensional view of a house or an apartment; industries could use it for training purposes; products can be promoted via 3D

images that allow the viewer to explore the details of a product; likewise car dealers and manufacturers could easily create interactive views of any cars in inventory. Criminalists (as in CSI) could easily create 3D crime scene images; the potential uses are unimaginable.

If you are willing to release your image to the public (in the current iteration), and would like to create interactive 3D panoramic photos from your digital photos, then Photosynth would be a great place to experiment. At present the service is free, only requiring a Windows Live ID registration. If you have any interesting photos of the same subject, try synthing them.
WEBSITE: http://photosynth.net

Password Protection

by Sandy Berger
Compukiss.com

When technology is good, it is very, very good, but when it is bad it can be truly atrocious. So it is with the hacking of Sarah Palin's Yahoo email account. The bad guys are out there using technology for their own advantage. Whether they are serious hackers who want information for devious purposes or young students who just want to show their technological prowess, this theft shows that everyone is vulnerable.

The recent hijacking of Sarah Palin's email account is also a great example of how a hacker can gain access to an email account and how email accounts need to be better protected against such penetration.

We currently rely on passwords to protect most of our online activity. Professional hackers often use "password crackers" to guess passwords. Anyone can easily find these hacker tools on the Internet. They can even be purchases on CD. There are wordlists for common passwords and dictionary combinations of possible passwords in a variety of different languages. These tools are all aimed at giving a person all the technical tools that they need to guess passwords.

In Sarah Palin's case, however, the perpetrator didn't even have to use tools like this. A hacker identifying himself as "Rubico" claims to have been able to change the password on Sarah Palin's Yahoo Mail account quite easily. All he had to do was use her email name to log into the Yahoo Mail's interface and select the option to reset the password. Yahoo then asked him to provide her birth date and zip code, which have become public knowledge. He then had to answer her self-chosen security question which was where she met her husband. After several television interviews of Sarah and her husband, the answer to that question also became public knowledge.

Sarah Palin was thrown into the public arena quite quickly, but even those of us who are not public figures may find that their passwords and answers to security questions can be easily guessed. Do you use the name of your spouse, children, pet, favorite sport, birthday, or wedding date as your password? Have you entered security questions like place of birth or favorite color that are easy to guess?

Privacy as we knew it before the Internet is now a thing of the past. With the Internet, more of our lives are online than most of us realize. Many people use blogging as a past time and post information on MySpace, Facebook, and other social networking websites. Once posted, all of that information is publicly known. And the Internet is archived, so even when you remove current information, previously posted information can still be found in Internet archives. That information can be used to guess passwords and access personal information.

So here are a few ground rules that may help keep your private information a little safer online:

1. Use passwords that are not easy to guess and cannot be easily cracked. (Look for more on how to choose good passwords in next week's column.)

2. Choose a security question that others will not be able to guess the answer to. Or answer the security question with an answer that you create which is not necessarily the true answer.

3. Use unique passwords, especially for important services and websites like banking sites and email.
4. Keep your passwords private. Don't leave them on a sticky note on your computer screen or keep them in an unencrypted file on your computer.
5. Change your passwords often.
6. Do not change your password by clicking on a link in an email from someone claiming to be a system administrator, bank representative, or other seemingly reputable party. They may not be who they say they are. When you want to change your password, always type in the address yourself so you know you are at the real website rather than a bogus one.
7. Use one credit card for all online purchases. This will limit your financial exposure.
8. Keep your operating system up-to-date.
9. Use a good anti-virus and anti-spyware programs.
10. Consider using an encrypted password manager program.

Check the CompuKISS website at www.compukiss .com for more information on choosing good passwords.

QuickMonth Calendar

by Ken Peters
Hilton Head Island Computer Club, SC

If you're tired of double clicking the clock to get the calendar up, then this program is for you.
http://www.codedawn.com/qmc/quickmonth-calendar-download/

QuickMonth Calendar is a freeware program which displays a small popup calendar on your Windows desktop whenever your mouse hovers over the clock in the system tray. The calendar display may also be toggled on and off by using the Windows+Q keyboard shortcut. The program works with XP and Windows 2000. Click the clock once to make it appear. Vista already has a popup calendar.

Traveling Then and Now "Technically" Speaking

by Gregory West
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In 1974 Richard Nixon was the first US President forced to resign, while gasoline pricing rose to a whopping 55 cents a gallon US (14.5 cents a liter). They claim the reason was that "gasoline shortages and price increases throughout the world help to cause problems in most of the western worlds' economies" (www.thepeoplehistory .com).

Sound familiar? What isn't familiar is the technology that accompanies us on vacations.

I remember in 1974 driving to Fort Wilderness Disney World, Florida in a Volkswagen van built into a homemade camper, all decked out with plywood beds and a Coleman cooler for a fridge with a never-ending request for ice. CAA supplied the triptik maps that marked out the route and the construction sections of the highway. We had the best of the best for navigating the trip. As well, we had a brand new Instamatic camera with 7 rolls of 126 film that cost us a small fortune. Our son, four years old, rode a small tricycle back and forth inside the van to while away the hours and hours of monotonous driving as seatbelt legislation was non-existent.

Today, we still face the gas increase excuses and we are well aware of the price of a liter of gasoline today. In that regard, nothing has really changed, only the numbers and the fact that we are all buckled into our seats. Although, one thing that has changed for travelers in 2008: "tech toys"; they have now become a "must have" for every family that does ground travel on vacations.

Our kids have been replaced by grandkids and the Volkswagen homemade camper van is long gone. People today are now hauling RVs of all sorts that host most of the comforts of home.

The CAA maps and my son's tricycle have been replaced by the latest technical and

computer gadgets. Let's have a peek at how technology has changed road travel, some 34 years later.

Kids today are buckled tightly into the back seats as airbag protection in the front restricts them to the back seats only. While in the back seat they have the option of viewing DVD movies run through a DVD player onto 2 separate monitors that attach to the head rests of both front seats. They listen to the movies via the vehicle stereo system or individual headphones. When they tire of the movies they can play video games by switching over to their PSP or a PS2 that plugs through the inverter. Of course there is always travel bingo if the tech stuff gets boring, but we won't hold our breath on that one.

For the driver and co-pilot there is a GPS display with voice directions, saving the hassle of trying to read the fine print on wrinkled and torn maps. Many travelers bring along laptops while traveling as their uses are many. For example, you can record your trip's information, download pictures and videos from digital cameras. The big thing these days with computers is reading digital books, or listening to audio books that have been previously downloaded from the Internet. Of course, when a live Internet connection becomes available (most RV parks have free Wi-Fi) you can check email, use Skype to call home, and research the places to see, all from your laptop.

The days of praying that there will be a pay phone nearby if we break down are long gone as many people have both a Canadian and American cell phone. For instance, one can purchase a Motorola TracFone that works only in the USA for under $10 and buy a "pay-as-you-go" card, making long distance calls back home cheaper and giving one more security on the highways in the USA.

Don't leave without your MP3 player. Podcasts of your favourite shows and lectures can be easily downloaded from the Internet. All MP3 players come with headphones that make for easy listening and do not disturb the other passengers or driver.

Walkie talkies are not a new item while on vacation, but the price certainly has come down and the range has expanded greatly. A quick stop in the grocery store for supplies will help you utilize your group to ensure precision targeted shopping whereby we all search out different items and meet at the same cashier, thus saving time. The walkie talkie is also used in many other scenarios for security and locating purposes. These units are a must have for anyone traveling with children. The Instamatic camera has been replaced by the digital camera, thus allowing people to take hundreds of pictures during a trip without any real cost. If some of the pictures are not that great they are easily deleted and forgotten without the worry of paying for more film.

An inverter will allow the truck battery to convert power from DC to AC so you can run the laptop while traveling to edit photos, read books, watch movies and connect to Wi-Fi hotspots. This also allows for the use of a PS2 plugged into the truck battery power as if you were at home plugging into a wall outlet. You can even plug in a refrigerated cooler with this inverter, making life just that much easier.

We can only imagine what traveling 34 years from now will be like and what 2042 will offer its road travelers.

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Concepts and Tools
by Elizabeth B. Wright
Computer Club of Oklahoma City

One day in the near future there will be no computer "beginners" at the adult level. The children born into the world as it is today are exposed to computers from conception. After they are born, many have very sophisticated hands on use of the machines from the minute they can reach out from their parent's lap and touch the keyboard. There is no mystery to them.

But while there are still older adults who want computer knowledge, someone has to be available to instruct them. And adults do not learn the same way that babies and children learn. Sometimes, when leading a group or

teaching a class, it is difficult to explain to students why they need to to understand the difference between how a computer or a program works and how to make it actually do something. In my opinion, concepts are far more useful in the long run than specific techniques, especially when dealing with someone using a computer for the first time or who has gone just beyond the basics. But how do you teach a concept?

First, accept the fact that it will take more time in the beginning to teach concepts, but it will save time later on. The real trick is to make the process interesting and easy to understand

The simple fact that a computer is basically thousands of off and on switches, the same as a light switch, seems to be information that many people find irrelevant. But once a student gets some idea of the actual simplicity of the machine, much of the mystery is removed from the learning process.

Second, CONCEPTS, once understood, are usually far easier to remember than techniques. Anyone who "gets the idea" of a computer fundamental can usually find the tools later to accomplish the end result, even if the specific steps are not used often enough to remember them in sequence.

Many first session lesson plans skip computer functionality and plunge straight into using software. As an example, the concept of organizing files on a hard drive seems to be much harder for new users to comprehend than teaching them to open the file manager, aka Windows Explore or some similar program. So many teachers go through the cumbersome task of showing people how to open the file system, only to become bogged down in the steps needed to find a particular file, then later to continually have people complain they have lost a file and firmly believe it has disappeared from their machine. Most new users find it difficult to make the connection between finding a file on the computer and why understanding how to find it is important. It is the instructors job to help them make the connection. The CONCEPT of hard drive storage is not easy to absorb, so the instructor must make it easy. Also many new users find it difficult to transfer keystrokes

learned on a classroom computer to their own computers at home. The reason for this is that no two computers are exactly alike, so the steps learned on one machine may or may not work on another one. But if the student comprehends the idea behind digital file storage, the actual keystrokes will begin to make sense, regardless of what computer they are using. In my opinion, rote learning is not the best way to become even moderately proficient on a computer. Real understanding of basic computing processes is vital.

Since many new users have little idea of what hardware is on their own computers, talking about C:\ drives and other drives in relation to specific files means little to them. But a well developed discussion of what basic hardware CAN be on a computer and how it works is not a waste of time, answering questions along the way. Many new users won't see the value in a technical discussion, so it is important to present hardware demonstrations using common sense terms rather than obscure technical language. It is never necessary to impress new students with what you know, but rather to make the information as easy for them to understand as possible. With practice, a teacher or presenter can develop the dialog necessary to convey essential information and still keep the listeners engaged. Students appreciate being encouraged in the idea that they may not know much to begin with, but they will leave each session armed with useful information and techniques that will build a good basic foundation for them. Biblically we were taught not to build our houses on sand. Why are the pyramids in Egypt still standing? Because underneath all that sand there are foundations built on bedrock. Good computer skills begin the same way.

Nearly all programs are far too comprehensive to be taught in detail to beginners. But if the most basic use of the program (the program's CONCEPT) can be presented in a way that is useful to students, they will get their feet wet. From there they can then be encouraged to not only attend study groups and advanced classes, but to explore their

favorite programs on their own. Again, the difference is between teaching new users the fundamental use of the program itself as opposed to teaching them to use specific program "tools". Obviously some techniques need to be taught in early sessions, but teaching the use of most tools is best done in intermediate and advanced classes. My experience has been that only when people have a need for or enjoy using any computer software will they continue to explore and expand their knowledge of the program.

How long did it take you to figure out that the "d" in d:\ stands for any non-specific "drive" when dealing with program instructions (often installation procedures) and not specifically for the "d" drive on your personal computer? Admit it, there was a time when you didn't know that. Just think how confusing the term is to new users. There is a concept here if you can find it.

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Wherefore Art Thou ScanDisk

Q: I've learned so much from your weekly newsletters, Mr. M., but now I have a question about Windows XP. When I was using Windows 98, I ran ScanDisk and Disk Defragmenter, but I can't find them under XP. Can you help?

A. Windows XP does not include the same ScanDisk function you came to know and love under Windows 98, but you're not out of luck. Under XP, click My Computer then right-click the drive you want to Scan /Defrag (which will usually be the C: drive) and select Properties Tools tab. (Note: In Windows Vista, click Start Computer, right-click the C: drive, select Properties Tools tab.)

In the Error Checking section, click the Check Now button. (Note: ScanDisk was renamed Error Checking in XP. Why? Because

we were all comfortable with its old name, of course.)

A small window will appear with two options: To automatically fix file system errors and to scan for and detect problems with the hard drive. I recommend that you select both. Click the Start button and ScanDisk will run. When it finishes, go back and click the Defragment Now button to defragment your hard drive.

Depending on the condition and size of your drive, it can take several hours to complete these tasks, so I'd suggest running them when you're finished working on your computer for the day, so you're not using your computer for any other purpose at the time. You want Windows to devote its full and undivided attention to the task at hand.

Note: Always run ScanDisk (Error Checking) before Disk Defragmenter, not in the reverse order. It's important to check for and fix drive errors before tidying up the data on your drive, which is Disk Defragmenter's primary function.

Q. Can you tell me how I can view my email in Outlook Express by date received? For some reason new email is scattered throughout and the only way I can view it is by isolating the last seven days. Thanks, Mr. M.

A. In all Windows programs, what appears at the top of each column can be clicked to sort the contents of the column. Column headings in the Outlook Express Inbox include From, Subject, Received, among others, so click the word "Received" as it appears at the top of that column and your messages will be sorted by date. Click it again to sort in reverse order. Try it with the Received column, then the From column and Subject. By using the sorting capabilities of columns, you can speed up the process of finding just about anything, plus it's fun—in a geeky kind of way.

Q. Is there an easy way to delete all the email in my Sent folder at one time, without having to delete messages one at a time?

A. Yes, there sure is, and this method works in all Windows programs for deleting multiple messages or files: Hold down the SHIFT key and click to select the first message, then scroll down

to the last message and click that. This will highlight all messages in between. Note: If the messages you want to delete are not located next to each other, use the CTRL key instead of the SHIFT key, select just the messages you want to delete, then right-click and select Delete. Presto, deleto!

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

It's Your Turn

If you like online games, you won't want to miss this site. Here you'll find chess, backgammon, Jamble (a word game), checkers, and more than 60 other games. All moves are retained on the site's server, so if one game doesn't give you a headache, you can play five or 10 games at once, which will surely make your head explode. You can play solo, compete with others, or play games with friends, each making moves whenever it's convenient. A fast and simple site registration is required. You can play for free or upgrade to an optional paid membership. www.itsyourturn .com

The Complete Review

This is a well-organized, easy-to-search repository of more than 2,100 book reviews. It includes editors' picks and bestseller lists by year. Also covered are new releases, foreign books, and links to related sites. http://tinyurl.com/dr6dh

Photography Initiative

The Smithsonian Photography Initiative provides access to approximately 13 million images housed within the 700 collections that comprise the museum's enormous photography archive. When you arrive on the site, be sure to "Enter the Frame," where you can search for images from 19 different Smithsonian museums using pre-defined keywords or your own, create photo sequences, and even "tag" your favorite photos for future viewing. http://photography.si.edu

Mr. Modem's weekly newsletter delivers helpful computer tips, great Web sites and his personal answers to your questions! Subscribe using Promo Code 4022 and receive TWO free months with your 12-month subscription (58 issues!) To view a sample issue or subscribe, visit www.MrModem.com.

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

Lost In Space

A lot is written about cloud computing lately and I wonder how many of you are as confused about what that really is as I am. It would seem that cloud computing has to do with keeping your data stored on some distant server or storage service where you hope it is safe. To me, that's a new name for an old concept, uploading it to some distant storage service on the Internet. On the other hand, in any offsite concept of storage, things must go right no matter what the concept is. In reality, it's still possible that things could go terribly wrong. Read this short article from Information Week magazine about Nirvanix whose service turned sour because of a third-party vendor assisting in providing their service. A bad experience like that can shatter your confidence in Software as a Service, or Cloud Computing. The article is "Beyond Online Storage" and the crisis description is near the end of the article. <http://www.informationweek.com/news/software/hosted/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=210602537&pgno=4>

Perhaps you could do your own "Cloud Computing." For example, put some servers in grandma's house. She might have a spare bedroom now that the family no longer lives there. <G> Perhaps there are ways to do cloud computing yourself, which would make it as secure as you like, and if something goes wrong, you should still have the data, physically. That might also be an advantage since DNS hijacking is becoming more prevalent these days. (I couldn't resist a tongue-in-cheek comment!)

Don't Trust Anybody!

I'm on my soapbox again this month. We purchased a new microwave oven (above the stove type) from Best Buy after considerable shopping because they were the cheapest at the time. Some of you might remember my lawsuit against Best Buy several years ago. We had written them off for shopping, but decided to try them again since this was a different store. We

bought the unit and when they loaded it into my pickup, I checked the box closely before accepting it, and it was not damaged. That led me to believe that the microwave oven was in good condition. Later on, I had a professional installer over to help me with the installation because of the difficult mounting space over the range. When we opened the box, the microwave's metal case was badly bent and the door alignment was bad. The installer said the unit had obviously been dropped. Needless to say the unit would not work.

When I tried to take it back to Best Buy, they said that once I took possession of the unit, it was my responsibility and they would not replace it since I had probably damaged it myself. However, they sent it to their repair facility for evaluation. Obviously, Best Buy's service facility would not repair the damaged unit under the warranty and said it could not even be repaired. As a last resort, I tried calling Best Buy's corporate headquarters, but to no avail. That conversation lasted about one minute before I got the same response as the store gave me and a quick goodbye, so there went $300. No more dealings with Best Buy by us, although perhaps other stores would have also taken that attitude. I guess it could be said that you should check the contents of the box and not take anything for granted when picking something up yourself.

It was suggested by a friend to also call Samsung, which I did; but they didn't seem to care either. For what it's worth, the metal in the Samsung microwave's case was very thin and flimsy. The installer suggested not replacing it with another Samsung.

A Repair Suite For Your Computer

Want to clean up your computer? I published this product last winter and some liked it. It's been updated so I asked them for a discount on the new release and they agreed. Their description is below:

YL Computing, Inc. announced the new version 6.2 of their WinUtilities software product. Actually, WinUtilities is not a software pro-gram, but is a kind of shell that comprises 20 tools allowing users to tune up the operating system and generally speed up the performance of their computers. This bundle of tools allows you to perform a number of optimization and cleanup operations from disk and registry clean-up to protecting your executable files with a password. It works with any Windows version starting from Windows 98, and including Windows XP SP3 and Windows Vista (for both 32-bit and 64-bit systems).

The tools are grouped into six categories. System Cleaners allow you to clean up your disks, the registry and all kinds of history files. You can view all found files before you go to the last step (that is, removing files, moving them to the Recycle Bin, or to a separate folder), but even if you delete some files you may need, the tool can create a Restore Point for you to get back to the state before erasing files. The same precautions are used when you clean the registry. The operating system stores a lot of history files and logs about your activities both on the computer and on the Net. Deleting these entries and history files not only frees space on your drives, but also takes care of your privacy. A one-click maintenance tool is now available that can be used to clean up everything with one click, without opening each separate tool.

System Optimizers deal with "dead" shortcuts and duplicate files. You can remove the former and analyze the latter. You can optimize your memory usage (the program can do it automatically) and your network connection (if you are not sure about these settings, there are recommended options available).

The tools in the System Control category allow you to actually control your system from editing your system configuration files to allowing you to shut down your computer automatically at a certain time. You can also use this category to remove the browser helper objects and startup items that you don't need.

System Tools provide you with access to tools available in the system. Registry tools allow you to back up either the entire Windows registry or only certain keys (and later restore them). You can simply search the registry for certain keys and values. Simple Search sounds simple, but it actually provides you with more

search options than the standard Windows Registry Editor.

The File Tools: Here you will be able to view deleted files, and if necessary, restore them on NTFS and FAT volumes. Or, you can completely wipe files off with the Shredder tool so that even experts will not be able to restore them. Also, you can split large files into smaller ones (for example, to move them to another computer) and glue them back together. Last, but not least you can protect any executable file with a password or disable this protection, and you can schedule almost any operation available in this suite of tools using the built-in scheduler.

You can download WinUtilities 6.2 for free from the developer's site at <www.ylcomputing .com> and try it for 30 days before making a decision about purchasing it. DealsGuy readers can get a 30% discount using the following URLs. DealsGuy note: These URLs for ordering are mishandled by MS Word when converted to hypertext so you should copy and paste them into your browser's address bar. The entire URL must be on one line in the address bar. I also tried TinyURLs, but they wouldn't work from my document.

WinUtilities Personal License w/30% discount:
<https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_click&business=paypal %40ylcomputing%2ecom&item_name=WinUtilities(Personal License) Special Offer&item_ number=7019-8-1&amount=28&no_ shipping=2&no_note=1&currency_code=USD&lc= US&bn=PP-BuyNowBF&charset=UTF-8>

WinUtilities Family License w/30% discount:
<https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_click&business= paypal%40ylcomputing%2ecom&item_name=WinUtilities(Family License) Special Offer&item_number=7019-8-2&amount=49&no _shipping=2&no_note=1&currency_code=USD&lc= US&bn=PP-BuyNowBF&charset=UTF-8>

WinUtilities Corporate License w/30% discount:
<https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_click &business=paypal%40ylcomputing%2ecom&item_ name=WinUtilities(Corporate License) Special Offer&item_number=7019-8-3&amount= 350&no_shipping=2&no_note=1&currency_code=U SD&lc=US&bn=PP-BuyNow BF&charset=UTF-8>
Product page link:

<http://www.ylcomputing.com/content/view/9/27/>
Direct download link:
<http://www.ylcomputing.com/download/wuinstall. exe>

Do You Have Memory Problems with Your Passwords?

Why not give KeePass a try. Many people try the wrong methods for managing passwords, such as using the same one for everything so it's easy to remember. All the thief has to do is obtain that one password and he can have you hurting. KeePass will help you be better organized and perhaps you will develop better and safer password methods. KeePass is FREE and also open source. Check it out at <http://keepass.info/>

That's it for this month. I'll have some more new product announcements on my Web site that didn't offer discounts. 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>.

Let Me Count the Ways I Like Linux

by Kerry Miller
Front Range PCUG, CO

I used to use Microsoft Windows up to Windows 98. I then switched to Windows NT in a dual boot system with Linux. However, when I went to boot NT one more time and NT gave me a message to the effect "I'm sick, fix me," I said goodbye to Windows and Linux has been my main operating system since. I found Linux applications to match all my user data. I was able to move all that data from the NT file system (NTFS) to the earlier Windows file system (FAT). From there I copied all the data into the ext2 file system, which was used by Linux at the time.

Now let me count the ways I like Linux:

1. Linux resembled the HP-UX operating system (http://en.wikipedia .org/wiki/HP-UX) I was using at work. This made going between work and home easier.

2. The roots of the Linux operating system go back to the late 1980's. By the time I decided to switch to Linux, it was a viable (if little known) multi-user, multi-tasking operating system for Personal Computers. That meant I could establish more than one user for my PC and run multiple programs simultaneously—I was not restricted to either the Windows or MAC operating systems for those PC capabilities. And, of course, Linux was (and still is) free.

3. Linux comes with a distribution of the X windows protocol produced by an international consortium. To understand this capability, think of it as "...providing the basic framework for building Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs), and moving windows on the screen and interacting with a mouse and/or keyboard." (extracted from http://en.wikipedia .org/wiki/X_windows). Because this capability was (and is) not built into the operating system, it provides greatly enhanced flexibility for anyone creating Linux applications.

4. For those familiar with the Windows and MAC operating systems, it is surprising to realize that the software that creates what you see as the "desktop" can actually be a separate application program. I use the GNOME desktop together with X windows. This desktop (one of several that can be used with Linux) allows me to use a number of different screens and switch between them as I wish. This allows me to open an application on one screen and switch to a different screen to open another application. From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNOME: "The GNOME project puts heavy emphasis on simplicity, usability, and making things 'just work....'"

5. There are a wide range of user applications available, as well as tools to write your own applications.

6. Linux has (and has had for some time) a reputation for stability. The operating system doesn't crash unless the user does something to make it crash. Around 1997 (about the time I decided to change to the Linux operating system) I read an article (in a Linux magazine) professing to use two computers as near identical as production processes allow. They loaded one computer with Microsoft Windows and the loaded the second computer with Linux. They ran similar bench mark programs on both computers. The machine loaded with Microsoft operating system crashed in a short time. The machine loaded with Linux continued to run for as long as the comparison experiment was set to run.

7. Many distributions of Linux are as easy, or easier to install than Microsoft Windows.

8. A person can customize and/or build a Linux operating system to meet individual needs.

9. Many distributions of Linux include such primary applications such as the Firefox web browser, OpenOffice, an office suite similar to Micro-soft Office (word processor, spreadsheet, presentations, etc.), and a number of other "name brand" applications.

10. Linux can be cost free. There are hundreds (or more) of applications written for Linux and there is a growing library of applications.

Microsoft Windows was the new kid on the block at the time I switched to Linux from my point of view and it did NOT do many ordinary things well.

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Prepare for Hard Drive Recovery
by Bob Hudak
Greater South Bay User Group Hardware SIG Leader, CA

When you lose control of your computer due to a virus or some sort of malware, or your O.S. becomes corrupted for one reason or another, be ready to fix the problem.

1. Start by setting up your hard drive with 2 partitions at least. Put all programs on C: and all Data on D:.

1. When hard drive is clean and all programs are loaded, it is time to make an image file of C:. Use Acronis *True Image* to do this or whatever program you like. Put it on XD: drive in the root. Name it using date. Remember you do not have a backup till you

have two copies in two different places. So now copy this image file to an external USB drive. The reason is if C: goes bad you can reformat it and start over without losing any data. If your computer will not boot and you did not put all your data on another drive or partition, you will want to save your data before reinstalling your operating system. What can you do?

A. Open computer case and remove drive. Install drive as a slave drive in another computer. Now you can copy and paste your data or burn to a CD. This means opening two computers and moving the drive in and out and resetting the jumpers.

B. Hook up the drive you removed from your computer to a second computer using a USB adapter, like the one we have at the Hardware SIG, to another computer and copy and paste or burn the data you want to keep.

C. Here is my first choice in a case like this. Use a Live Linux CD to boot up. Plug in a USB drive before booting. After booting, mount your XC: drive and your USB drive. Copy your data from XC: drive to the USB drive. With this option there is no case to open and drive to remove.

2. Backup your data as necessary to a CD or another drive. Use a USB drive. This drive can also fail so putting backup on a CD or DVD is better way to go. Also, there is an on-line service at Carbinite.com that will automatically back up your data. This service costs $50.00 a year for unlimited backups. How important is your data?

Here are a few key folders to have on your D: drive:

Data — In this folder make sub folders for each application you use. Include one called Pictures. Under this folder have another sub folders for different events. Like: ChristmasO?, VacationOS, Dog, etc.

D/L — Use this folder for all your downloads. Then you will always know where your downloads are. Set it up so the last thing you downloaded is on top.

E-Mail. If possible you want your mail off the C drive.

My Stuff. Cut and paste from My Documents on C items that were sent there without asking you where to send. Documents that you want to keep.

Using Acronis *True Image*

Use Acronis *True Image* to backup to your USB drive. Make a full backup the first time. This is going to be pretty easy because all your data is in one folder on D: called DATA. If you want to backup your downloaded items, back up the D/L folder. E-Mail is not something I backup but you may want to. Once again it should all be in the XE-MAIL folder.

CD. Do not close the drive. Shut down your computer. Close the CD drive. Wait a minute and then reboot.

If you have your BIOS set to boot from a CD first, you are good to go. If not you will need to enter into your setup screen at boot-up and change the boot order.

After booting up with Acronis, follow the prompts to select what you want backed up. Practice this before you need to use it. Acronis will not do anything until you give it the final OK. Make notes on how to select each step.

You already loaded the Acronis program and made a rescue CD that is bootable. Right? Now open your CD drive and insert the CD. Do not close the drive. Shut down your computer. Close the CD drive. Wait a minute and then reboot.

If you have your BIOS set to boot from a CD first, you are good to go. If not you will need to enter into your setup screen at boot-up and change the boot order.

After booting up with Acronis, follow the prompts to select what you want backed up. Practice this before you need to use it. Acronis will not do anything until you give it the final OK. Make notes on how to select each step.

Texas Fights Identity Theft Online

by Ira Wilsker

Golden Triangle PC Club

Don't let the title of this column fool you. While the information presented may be 'Texas-centric', it applies equally to residents all across the country. While this column will be presenting the new identity theft website of the Texas Attorney General, it is fortunately far from unique, as the Attorneys General of several other states offer similar services and websites. Most of the forms presented in this column can be used by the residents of any state, and are not just limited to Texans.

Identity theft is endemic, with reports of over 10 million victims nationwide annually, and costs to businesses and consumers an estimated $46 billion. In our souring economy, the incidence of identity theft is actually increasing as criminals take even more advantage of a more fiscally vulnerable population.

In order to help protect Texans, and fight the incidence of identity theft in the state, Attorney General Abbott recently announced a new initiative. A key part of this initiative is a new website, www.texasfightsidtheft.gov. The website states, "Identity theft is one of the nation's fastest-growing, most expensive criminal enterprises. Every year more than 25,000 Texans report being victims of identity theft with thousands more unaware that their information and bank accounts have been targeted. Identity thieves use stolen information to obtain new credit cards, open checking accounts, make long distance or collect calls, or make purchases on a stolen credit card. Think it can't happen to you? Think again. Take action! Don't let your good name be ruined by swindlers."

At the heart of this new website are the six steps necessary to prevent and fight identity theft. The six steps, each hyperlinked to a detailed explanation, are:

1. Stop ongoing damage;
2. Report ID theft crime;
3. Fill out ID theft affidavits;
4. Prevent further ID theft abuse;
5. Monitor your credit report;
6. Declare that you are a victim.

In addition to the six numbered hyperlinks is another link to "Download the complete ID theft victim's toolkit," which connects to www.texasfightsidtheft.gov/pdfs/IDTheft_kit.pdf.

Step 1 says, "Close all bank, credit, utility and service accounts that have been fraudulently opened or compromised. Request that a fraud alert or security freeze be placed on your credit report to stop new accounts from being fraudulently opened in your name." Details are presented to explain the proper procedures to close credit accounts, and how to implement fraud alerts from the three major credit reporting agencies. When a fraud alert is placed on your credit listing, you should also be entitled to a copy of your credit report from that credit reporting agency; if you are not offered one, request it. If you desire to monitor your credit report yourself, you can get free annual credit reports from all three credit reporting agencies at www.annualcreditreport.com. Unlike some highly advertised competitors, annualcreditreport .com is legitimately free, and entails no contracts, monthly fees, or other obligations. If any of the victim's checks were compromised or stolen, various check approval services are listed on the left margin of the page. The website states, "If your checks have been misused, contact the check verification companies listed to the left and ask them to alert retailers to your situation. Each check verification company can ask retailers who use their databases to refuse any checks with compromised account numbers."

Step 2 tells you to "Report Identity Theft Crime to Your Local Law Enforcement Agency." In addition to reporting the crime to your local law enforcement agency, you should also ask for a copy of the police report and case number. Unlike in the past, in Texas, a peace officer must take a written identity theft report, and make a copy available to you (Chapter 32.51 of the Penal Code). There are similar laws in most other states.

The third step is to report the crime to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) using the report link on the top edge of its website at www.ftc.gov /idtheft, or by calling its identity theft hotline at (877) ID-THEFT. Once the crime is reported to the FTC, you should fill out the FTC affidavit which is available on the FTC Identity Theft website, or from the Attorney General's Office at www.texasfightsidtheft.gov /pdfs/affidavit.pdf . The affidavit may be accepted by credit bureaus and creditors as a substitute for a police report.

The next step, number four, says, "Prevent Further Identity Theft Abuse by Contacting the Following Agencies:

- Local Texas Department of Public Safety Driver License Office (or state police or drivers' license authority in other states);
- the Social Security Administration (SSA);
- the Internal Revenue Service (IRS);
- the U.S. Postal Inspection Service;
- and the U.S. Passport Agency.

These notifications are necessary, because (according to the website), "An identity thief might use your personal information to fraudulently obtain a driver's license, file for bankruptcy, apply for Social Security benefits, or even get a passport."

Step five says "Monitor Your Credit Report to Thwart Continued Identity Theft Abuses". The Attorney General references the free annual credit reporting service where consumers are entitled to a free credit report from each of the three credit reporting services every year. For these free reports, contact:

Annual Credit Report Request Service
P.O. Box 105283
Atlanta, GA 30348-5283 or phone toll-free (877) 322-8228.

Free credit reports are also available online at www .annualcreditreport .com.

The final step, number 6, says to declare yourself as a victim: "If Necessary, File an Application with Your State District Court Requesting a Court Order Declaring That You are a Victim of Identity Theft." You can obtain an application form from the OAG ID Theft website at www.texasfightsidtheft.gov/pdfs /CourtOrder.pdf . You should file the application with your district court, and request a hearing date. "Appear in court on the specified date and submit evidence proving you are a victim of identity theft.… This is allowed under the Texas Identity Theft Enforcement and Protection Act, found in Chapter 48 of the Texas Business and Commerce Code." The Attorney General also suggests that you keep an accurate and contemporary telephone log of everyone that you have contacted. To facilitate this process, there is a detailed telephone log available at www.texasfightsidtheft .gov /pdfs/call_log.pdf

According to a report commissioned a few years ago by the FTC (the Synovate report), almost 5% of us were victimized in the past year by identity thieves, and about one-eighth of us have been victimized in the past five years, whether we know it or not. This website is a treasure trove of valuable information that we can use to help prevent our victimization, and deal with the effects of being a victim, if we were unfortunate enough to become one. This site is very worthy of review by all.

Websites:

www.texasfightsidtheft.gov
www.texasfightsidtheft.gov/pdfs/IDTheft_kit .pdf
www.annualcreditreport.com
www.texasfightsidtheft.gov/pdfs/affidavit.pdf
www.ftc.gov/idtheft
www.texasfightsidtheft.gov/pdfs/CourtOrder. pdf
www.texasfightsidtheft.gov/pdfs/call_log.pdf

From the November 2008 issue of Bits and Bytes, *newsletter of the Tampa Bay Computer Society.*

Computer Quandaries

by Dale Atchison
Tampa Bay Computer Society

Here are questions from some of my clients and TBCS members, along with the best answers I could give them; most of my answers were arrived at by searching the Internet using Google. In those cases where I say things nice or otherwise about a particular program, please note that I'm expressing only my opinion, and not necessarily that of TBCS, its members, or its board of directors.

Q: Ever since my husband updated the virus protection (Symantec), I've had a problem in shutting down the computer. I have to do the 3-fingered salute several times instead of just the normal clicking on the start button and then going to shut down. Any suggestions?

A: The only suggestion I have is the same one I give everyone who uses Norton AntiVirus by Symantec: uninstall it, then install avast! 4.8 (files.avast.com/iavs4pro/setupeng.exe). It's free for non-profit home use, it's smaller and much less intrusive than Norton, and it stops viruses.

Seriously, I hate Norton; it's a resource hog that pretty much guarantees your computer will run slowly, if at all.

But if you simply HAVE to keep Norton, try using System Restore to roll Windows XP back to the day before you updated Norton:

Start » [All] Programs » Accessories » System Tools » System Restore » Restore My Computer To An Earlier Time » Next » choose a Restore Point prior to the Norton update » Next.

If System Restore doesn't fix the problem, contact Norton and describe the problem to them. Unlike avast!, Norton isn't free; so, if they damage your PC, hold their feet to the fire till they make it right.

Q: Windows Defender has come up with a "medium" alert — it has to do with
C:\Program Files\realvnc\vnc4\log messages.dll
C:\Program Files\realvnc\vnc4\wmvnc4.exe
C:\Program Files\realvnc\vnc4\wm_hooks .dll

Is this something I should worry about or delete?

A: RealVNC is described at some places on the web as a useful utility, and elsewhere as spyware. Its function is to allow access to your computer from anywhere on the planet; sometimes that's good, most of the time not so good. Did you install it on purpose? Or did it sneak onto your PC attached to some other free program? If you didn't install it deliberately, you should uninstall it immediately, then do an online spyware scan at www.housecall .antivirus .com .

Q: I've lost a large number of pictures from my system. I have a back-up disc; now, how do I restore the files?

A: If, by Backup Disc, you mean a disc that was created by some Backup program or other, just run that same program, click on Restore or Restore Backup Set, etc., and follow the on-screen instructions.

If, as is more likely, you mean you copied all your pictures and/or documents to a CD or Zip disc for safekeeping, just open the backup disc in Windows Explorer, highlight the files you wish to restore, right-click any one of the highlighted files, and select Copy. Next, navigate to the place you want the pictures restored to, right-click a blank space in that folder, and select Paste. This will work for individual files, multiple files, or even whole folders — Windows doesn't care.

Remember that the restored files will be read-only if they were stored on a CD, meaning you can't change them in any way. (Unless they were stored in a zip or compressed file on a CD — I know, it gets 'way too complicated to go into all the possible circumstances.) To correct this, once the files have been restored, right-click the destination folder, select Properties, clear the check mark next to Read-Only, and click OK. When asked, say you want to perform the action for this folder, all sub-folders, and files — after a little percolating, Windows will return control to you, and all your picture files will be available for editing.

Q; My printer won't print. Any suggestions?

A: Lots. Check to be sure the USB cable from the computer to the printer is plugged in at both ends. If it is, check to be sure the printer power cord is plugged in at both ends, and the printer is turned on. If the printer still doesn't work properly....

6. Click on Start » Printers and Faxes.
7. Ensure the printer in question is set as the default printer; if it isn't, right-click its icon and left-click Set as Default.
8. If it still doesn't work, right-click the printer that isn't working, and left-click Delete. If the computer asks if you're sure, say Yes.
9. Disconnect the printer from the computer.

10.   Plug in the CD that came with the printer, and reinstall the printer drivers.
11.   Put the cables back and see if it works now.

Q: I read my Yahoo email online, using Internet Explorer. Somehow, I lost the line which has the File, Edit, View, Tools and Help menus on it. What did I do wrong, and how do I undo it?

A: Sounds like you're in "Full-Screen" mode, in which the toolbars at the top of the screen all get hidden to allow more viewable web page per screen. You can toggle it on and off by pressing the F11 key on your keyboard. This applies to Internet Explorer versions 6 and 7.

If you're using IE7, there's a second possibility: the Menu Toolbar isn't selected for display. Test this by pressing the Alt key; if your menu returns, that's the situation. For most folks, that's the best way to leave it set; just toggle the menu on and off with the Alt key when needed. If you want it on all the time, right-click the Home button or anywhere in the surrounding toolbar real estate, and put a check mark next to Menu Bar.

Q: Every time I restart my computer and click on my name, a white box comes on and says to type in a password. When I do, everything is OK, but I don't want to have to do that every time. How do I log on without having to use a password?

A: If you don't want to type in a password every time you log on, remove the password:

Click on Start » Control Panel » User Accounts » click on your username » Remove My Password » type in your old password one last time to verify that you know it » Remove Password.
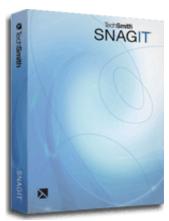
While you're in User Accounts, click on the Asp.Net account; once in it, click on Delete the Account » Delete Files » Delete Account. If you're the only user account left on the computer, Windows XP won't even stop at the Welcome screen when you reboot — it will simply go ahead and load your desktop.

From the September 2008 issue of Bits and Bytes, newsletter of the Tampa Bay (FL) Computer Society

SnagIt

by John Roy

Personal Computer Users Group of Connecticut

So what is SnagIt? It is a screen capture program (Like base level PrintScreen). Every computer user needs the ability to capture information off of the screen. Your basic operating system has always provided rudimentary capability to print or capture a full screen but it is woefully inadequate in today's environment. How many times do you need a screen region or maybe an area that scrolls off the display as many web pages do? How about having the ability to extract only the text or capture screen actions? All of these functions and many more are easily addressed with SnagIt.

SnagIt has been around since 1990. I remember my first exposure to this great utility back in those early years when computer expositions were held at the Javitz Convention Center in New York City. While today's functionality greatly supersedes those early days the neat scroll capture was the cool feature of the times and is still a main-stay tool.

For a screen capture program to be useful it needs flexibility beyond Microsoft's dismal screen and window capture. SnagIt provides every imaginable capture you could ever want with Image Capture, Text Capture, Video Capture, Web Capture, and Printer Capture. Each of these modes has additional control options such as delayed capture, capture the mouse cursor, set a timer, or capture multiple areas, to name a few. Video capture provides a very useful tool for creating instructional clips. You can play back the video or even save individual frames. The ability to capture editable text from dialog boxes and other screens where it ordinarily can't be copied is extremely useful.

To make life easier you have the ability to set up profiles to reflect the way you like to work.

Profiles coupled with a defined hot key can grab and process a clip all the way to the intended application. You can configure input, output, effects and options. Add-ons are automatically and/or optionally installed into several applications such as Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Power Point and Internet Explorer) and other popular products. Wizards and tool-bars are available to simplify setting up profiles.

Having many capture options is only the front end of this versatile utility, there is also an overabundance of tools to annotate, mark up, organize, convert, edit and share captured content. The processing tools suite includes a very powerful editor that will bring your clips to life. No longer are you stuck with a blasé clip. With very little effort you can spruce up your clips by adding effects, borders, stamps, and hotspots to name a few. You can operate on one or many images at the same time. A batch conversion utility allows the user to modify and output a collection of clips into a wide selection of formats. This utility allows you to set up your output to selections such as File, FTP, Email, Printer, etc. The output properties are fully customizable.

Since SnagIt stores every capture you make, a first reaction would be "how does one find the clip of interest"? Well search capability is automatically built into the software and can be further enhanced by the use of tags. Every capture you make saves the time, date, and URL information that will allow you to quickly return to the site of the capture.

To fully appreciate the value of this great program, download the 30 day free trial and/or view some of the extremely informative and clearly illustrated tutorials available on Tech-Smith's website http://www .techsmith.com/. SnagIt lists for $49.95, runs on all newer Windows operating systems including 64-bit Vista. A minimum of 1 GHz processor and 512 MB of Ram is required but double that for smoother operation. TechSmith has developed and improved on SnagIt over the years and has a product that belongs in every computer user's tool box.

Society News

President's Column
by Steve Staub

This month I'm going to thank one of the clubs hardest working members, Sally Springett. Every month for several years she has spent hours on editing our newsletter. Since it is very hard to get software for reviews she has had to rely on getting material from APCUG. After Sally assembles the newsletter she helps print, assemble it. There have been times things had to be hanged at the last minute because of formatting problems. When Sally is not working on the newsletter she allows us to have our planning meeting at her house, and bakes cookies for our snack. She many times makes the necessary arrangements for our general meetings; helps get a cabin for our picnic. Our members from Ohio got started when a guy who lived next door to her when they were children learned about our club from her.

I believe this is just a partial list of things Sally has done for either FROG Computer Society or Rochester Computer Society. Sally thank you somehow just isn't enough but that's all I can do.

November Planning Meeting
by Sharah Naas, Secretary

Steve Staub led the Planning meeting held at the Brighton library November 4th. Others in attendance were Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, Mike Lavelle, John McMillan, Sharah Naas, Dan Rothfuss, and Arpad Kovacs. There was agreement that the October meeting went well, and that the presentation by Mike Lavelle about the history of PC's lead a spirited discussion in which many members were able to participate. The newest member to the group was quite pleased that the RCSi group is not a bunch of "stuffed shirts," but real people.

The December meeting will take place at the Brighton Library, as will the January and February meetings. The December meeting will be the annual holiday Jeopardy game. Any one who wishes to is encouraged to bring goodies. Programs ideas and presenter are

needed for both the January and February meetings. If anyone has a suggestion or is willing to present, please contact Mike Lavelle.

There was discussion about a presentation on Windows 7, that was related to an email Steve received. If Windows 7 becomes available, it would make an interesting presentation for a meeting.

The October newsletter building was highly successful, and those assembling were done by two in the afternoon. There are high hopes that the assembly will continue to run smoothly. There is concern, however about the labeling/barcoding software that is used for the *Monitor*. Steve reports less than stellar performance on the manufacturer's part, and steps are being taken to rectify this situation. The company has been contacted to find out why things are not working. Either the problem will be fixed, or the program will be replaced before the contract is renewed.

Please join us for the Jeopardy Holiday celebration at the Brighton Library on December 9th, 2008, and Happy Thanksgiving to all!

Help's Half Hour
Led by: Carl Schmidtmann
Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: A member's friend has accepted a virus and it is now being sent to everyone on his mail address list. Can this be avoided?
A: It is very common. You must be sure to update your antivirus software frequently.
Q: If you use the text feature in your email program, will this help to save you from viruses?
A: This may help, depending upon your email program. It is also best to turn off the pre-viewer as this will open your system to a virus before you have a chance to delete it.
Q: Should I open emails from people that I do not know?
A: This is a good strategy. Also, if you are going to forward an email to others, be sure to strip off the email addresses used before. If sending to a longer list of people, use the blind copy function.
Q: Did anyone understand the first article in this month's Monitor?
A: This item had many errors. The IP address does not give you an automatic key to your machine. Your firewall, if active, will still keep out unwanted access.
Q: Is it possible to use the password storing option? If not, can it be turned off?
A: This is a feature of Internet Explorer. You can turn off the feature as an Internet Option. Firefox has a password manager, too. Another option is to store the passwords in a separate file, keeping it encrypted and password protected.
Q: Is T-Timer part of Spybot?
A: Yes it is. It will alert you if there is a change requested of your Registry. It can be very annoying. You can disable the T-Timer if you like. The Resident Shield piece of Spybot will block out bad webpages and should be kept active.
Q: With the new digital tv coming in February, will there be an impact on the recording of a VCR while watching another channel?
A: In February, 2009, the signals will be changed from analog to digital. A converter box would be needed if you are using an antenna. Both satellite and cable offer TVO, recording systems. You also can purchase a converter and would need one for your tv and one for your recorder. You do not have to wait until February to buy the converter box. You would benefit from the digital signal right away. There are government coupons available for $40.

The Lighter Side

The Matrix Runs on Windows.
http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=yX8yrOAjfKM