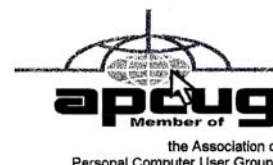


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To Dual-Core or Not to Dual-Core?

by Jim Sanders

Editor, North Orange County Computer Club, CA

If you have been in that should I or shouldn't I mode for a while, now is a pretty good time to make the plunge. The prices of dual-core processors has come way down in the last year, at the same time the performance has moved several rungs up the ladder. In May, AMD introduced several new high-end Athlon processors. In July, Intel unveiled it's long anticipated Core 2 Duo (AKA code name

Conroe) chips. These are Intel's long awaited response to being out-gunned by AMD. They have the new Core micro-architecture that reportedly out-performs similar models of AMD chips.

The introduction Core 2 Duo chips by Intel started a price war between AMD and Intel. One sage speculated that this was a strategic move by AMD to make it difficult for Intel to dump a huge inventory of older technology chips without taking a loss on them and lower the profit margin on the new chips. What ever the case, the end users win. The latest and greatest chips from both vendors are a lot less expensive than they were just a short while ago

and the older chips are available at bargain basement prices.

The technology that is in the new chips from both AMD and Intel has been significantly improved in the last two years. Intel has upgraded its NetBurst architecture with the Core and Core 2 Duo technology. AMD has introduced the new AM2 processor socket which, compared to the older 939/940 socket, effectively doubles the processor-to-memory bandwidth with its support of DDR2 RAM.

There are a lot of individual engineering pieces or basic building blocks that make up all X86 processors. For years Intel rode the marketing bandwagon that basically touted the “My processor clock is faster than yours, so I am better than you are” concept and that was, more often than not, true. AMD tried to compensate for the fact that their high speed chip technology lagged behind Intel by building more efficient CPUs. There are lots of ways to do that, and doing more things in parallel (at the same time) is one of the ways to build a more efficient CPU. So if the CPU is doing twice as many things at the same time, the processor clock can be half the speed. To pick a number, let's say the AMD chip actually has a clock of 500MHz but it is marketed as a 1000+ and the fine print explains that it “Performs as well as other CPUs that really do have a 1000MHz clock.” A number of people feel that back a few years, AMD was overly optimistic with their “Performs as well as” ratings. The concept however remains true. Over the years, AMD improved the efficiency of their CPUs as well as the clock speeds and the “Performs as well as” ratings more closely matched reality. Once Intel started making chips in the over 3000MHz clock range, they started tripping over the difficulty of making chips run that fast at all, complicated by the huge amount of heat it created. Acknowledging the writing on the wall, Intel decided they had to start making more efficient chips as well.

The irony of Intel running into the wall that those irrefutable facts of Physics represent is that Intel had to borrow a page from the AMD marketing manual. They had to convince their followers that these new Intel CPUs with the slow clock speeds were getting just as much or more work done as the older chips with the impressive clock speeds. Both companies had to deal with the problems created by

CPUs that generated as much heat as a 100 watt light bulb. Along with other problems, the size of the heatsink/fan assembly was getting obscene. The demand for ever increasing compute horsepower, however, was relentless. In addition to improving the efficiencies of their processor cores, both companies decided the next logical step was to build two complete CPUs inside one chip and really approach doing twice as many things in the same amount of time. Because Intel still leads AMD in the ability to build chips with tinier features (65nano meter vs. 90nano meter), they can afford to put twice as much cache in their chips and run a higher clock speed and still have a good power consumption rating. By moving the memory controller inside the CPU, AMD has a better multi-core memory scheme. And the technical details, and the debates about them, go on and on.

I am going to try and give you enough of an overall picture of who is offering what in today's processor world that you can at least determine if you want to try and play in the major leagues or the minor leagues. That is really a daunting task and I hope I come somewhere close to success. One master list of currently offered X86 chips (all of those chips that trace their ancestry back to the original Intel 8086) had nearly 400 different models listed. Most of those are no longer made and ranged in price from \$7.00 for a 600MHz Celeron to \$954 for a Pentium Core 2 Extreme 3.2GHz and from \$17.00 for a 700MHz Athlon Slot-A to \$769.00 for a dual core Athlon FX-62 socket AM2, 2.8GHz processor.

There are a lot of very fast single core CPUs available at very good prices. If you are not an enthusiast user (mostly that means gamer) or heavy into video editing, you may not need one of the dual core units. Some of the single core units are the best values (read cheapest) available and any of them that are rated as being in the 3.0GHz or more category should even run the Vista operating system when it is released. Visit the MS Vista hardware requirement site at <http://www.microsoft.com/technet/windowsvista/evaluate/hardware/vistarp.msp> and get the official, albeit optimistic, definition of the minimum hardware you will need to run Vista. Based on my experience with the September RC1 release of Vista running on an AMD 2800+

with 1Gig of RAM, I would not be happy with a slower machine.

If you are an enthusiastic gamer or hard core videophile, and live next door to Bob Jones, plan on spending close to a thousand dollars for your CPU. Not to mention the dual \$500 video cards and 4Gig of RAM. The first of the three categories of processors that we are going to list is the one that you enthusiasts are interested in.

Those categories are; the Enthusiast Dual Core Processors, Main Stream Dual Cores, and Single Core Processors. There is some overlap in both the performance and price of the high end single core and the low end of the dual core processors. One thing to keep in mind, all of the Dual Core chips are 64 Bit processors and most of the single core processors are not 64 Bit.

Enthusiast Dual Core Processors

For the AMD processors you have: Athlon 64 FX-62, Athlon X2 5000+.

For the Intel processors you have: Core 2 Extreme X6800, Core 2 Duo E6700, E6600.

Because Intel and AMD are constantly jostling each other to claim title to King Of The Hill, it changes hands. For many months, through June of 2006, it was AMD. Then, in July 2006, Intel reclaimed the title. For almost anyone except the well heeled enthusiast with a social need to be on the Bleeding Edge, any of these processors would make a great system. As has been the case for years, the price curve for the last three to four speed ranges is geometric in nature. The 2.4GHz E6600 is about 40% of the price of X6800 and provides about 60% of the performance. The same is true for the AMD pricing.

Main Stream Dual Cores

For AMD – Athlon 64 X2 AM2 4600, 4200, 4000, 3800, Athlon 64 X2 S939 4800, 4600, 4400, 4200, 3800

For Intel – Core 2 Duo E6400, Pentium Extreme Edition 965 & 955, Pentium D 960, 950, 945, 930, 915, 840, 830, 820, 805

On the AMD line you can easily see just one of the many things that can be confusing about the different designations for AMD's dual core processors. There is an Athlon 64 X2 AM2 4600 and an Athlon 64 X2 S939 4600. The only visible difference is that

one says AM2 and the other says S939. As explained above, the AM2 designation is for the new DDR2 RAM CPUs. AMD uses two different speeds of DDR2 RAM. The DDR2-800 is used with the Enthusiast CPUs and the DDR2-667 is used with the Main Stream CPUs. Faster memory will, in general, improve through-put and is most noticeable on memory intensive applications. Another consideration when trying to decide between the new AM2 socket and the older S939, is the supply and cost of memory. Production of DDR RAM is being reduced while production of DDR2 RAM is being RAMPed up. That means that the price of DDR is going up and the price of DDR2 is going down. You may have noticed the price of the older PC100/133 RAM is almost double the price of PC2700 DDR RAM and I have seen a price for a 1GB DDR2 that was less than the price for the PC3200 1 GB DDR Ram.

Strangely, at the price top of the Intel Main Stream Dual Core line category are the older technology Dual Core models:

D 965 DC Extreme Edition (3.73GHz/775pin PLGA /1066FSB /2X2MB L2 Cache Dual Core) \$1075

D 955 DC Extreme Edition (3.46GHz/775pin PLGA /1066FSB /2X2MB L2 Cache Dual Core) \$995

D 960 DC Standard Edition (3.6GHz/775pin PLGA /800FSB /2X2MB L2 Cache Dual Core) \$349.

The E6400 Core 2 Duo Processor (2.13GHz /775pin LGA 1066FSB 2X1MB L2 Cache) at \$245 is the better buy. This is a good example of the seemingly weird pricing that occurs with bleeding edge CPUs. The D955 is \$646 more than the D960 which has a faster clock but a slower FSB (Front Side Bus). Even stranger is that the price for the older technology D 955 is more than the fastest Core 2 Duo chip. The oldest technology dual core chips from Intel are the D800 series.

Single Core Processors

After looking at the long list of single core processors that are clocked at 3GHz or greater, I changed my mind about listing them. Instead, I will just repeat the advice about computing needs and price. If you are not into gaming or a videophile, they can make a fine system. I am still using an Intel 3.1GHz P4 with 512Meg of expensive Rambus RAM to produce the Orange Bytes and it works fine most of the time.

The future of computing is going to be 64 Bits for a long time even though it is just now starting to gain traction. Since that is true, if you are going to upgrade at all, going with a dual core 64 Bit CPU is the only thing that make sense if you take a long term perspective. Same thing is true for DDR2 RAM, PCI-Express video, and SATA2 hard disks. So the sweet spot today is a system based on a Athlon 64 X2 AM2 4200, or an Intel Core 2 Duo E6400 and a good 256Meg PCI Express video card, everything else, your choice.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Changing Hard Drives

by Richard Kennon

Newsletter Editor, Amador Computer Users Group, CA

The time came when the bearings in my hard drive began to sing a little after running all day. So, being the wise person I am, I decided to replace it as a preventative measure. It turns out a job like that requires planning. I am not a planning person. I don't do planning. I am more spontaneous. That is a euphemism for "lazy." My grandmother used to tell me, "Lazy people work the hardest." Oh, how true.

First, I thought I was covered because I had a backup by Acronis True Image 8.0 — wrong! I had one main hard drive with one partition, "C:" and I had never dreamed of running with more than one partition. So, I bought a second hard drive to use for the backups. After the new main hard drive was installed by a professional, I brought it home and tried to restore the backup. It was then I learned you can't restore an Acronis backup to the active partition. When I tried, it wiped out everything. Back to the Pro for a new XP reload with two partitions on the new hard drive. It has gigabytes to spare. The two partitions were named "C:" and "F:" for whatever reason. The spare hard drive was renamed "D:" and the CD drive was renamed "E:." Go figure. I was able to restore my old C: drive contents to the new F: drive. So now I have everything on the new F: drive but my machine boots up on the new C: drive and I can't figure out how to

utilize the new F: drive. Of course, real men don't ask directions, so I decided to slug it out on my own. I thought I saw a bright side to this as the old C: drive was cluttered with years' accumulation of garbage. I would start afresh!

The first thing to do is get back on the air, the Internet. So, I went to Outlook Express. First I had to call the ISP to find out how to reconnect. A nice lady walked me through the process, no sweat. Then I discovered I had no address book. Of course, it is on the F: drive. How to find it? After some searching on the web, I found out the address book is in files named, *.wab. Cinch! Just search the F: drive for *.wab files. Not there. Then I noticed the fine print that says it does not find hidden files. A click on "Advanced" led me to a box that allows finding hidden files. It turns out the hidden files are in a hidden folder so it was doubly challenging. It was relatively easy to copy these files and paste them in the same hidden folder in the new C: drive. Whaddayu know? It worked. The message files are empty but I can't think of a good reason to try to repopulate them.

Now, if I am on the air, it seems the next urgent step is to reestablish some protection. But, first, I downloaded SP-2 and a host of other Microsoft updates. I think I saw a note flash across the screen that said they sent 60 updates. Then came Microsoft Windows Defender (beta). However, apparently all it does is look for spyware. I am not clear on this so, since I subscribe to McAfee firewall and virus protection, I went to their site and downloaded all that. Now, I feel better.

I did do one bit of smart planning Ta-Da! I had simply copied all my Documents and Settings files and sub folders to the backup drive. Copying all this back to the new C: drive was a cinch and it saved all my valuable writings and pictures. Now if I could just find that great picture of Aunt Edith from two Christmases ago. If you ever transfer to a new computer or hard drive, do lots of this copying. Disk space is cheap and copying it back is so easy.

Finding the original software disks that were loaded years ago was not so easy. They were tucked here and there in many different convenient places. That is, convenient until you want to find them. I was mostly lucky and had to purchase a newer version of only one program. You see, I am neither

a planner nor an organizer. You wonder how I have survived these many years? I am very lucky.

One other aspect of “afresh” I decided to try was going to Open Office instead of Microsoft Office. This is another ungood idea. Doctors warn against experiencing dual traumas like retiring and immediately moving to a retirement community. Adding this stress to the disk change stress was probably not a good idea. Besides, Outlook Express won't use the Open Office dictionary. I did find the old MS Office disk but I decided to try this as an experiment. So far so good but there are a number of features I don't like because I am used to the other features. I will keep with it for a while.

In conclusion (this is what our pastor says ten minutes before the end of his sermon), you will be faced with changing computers and/or hard drives. As the weatherman and some politicians are fond of saying, “It is not if but when.” I do not recommend my approach. I have spent many hours on it. Plan, plan, plan. Talk to some knowledgeable people and perhaps even search the Internet for help. Good luck.

PS. I sent a copy of this to Gene Barlow who sold me the Acronis program and this is his reply:

“Acronis True Image has a cloning function that will copy your entire hard drive to the replacement hard drive in one easy step. When you are done, you simply place the new drive in the place of your old c: drive and it becomes your new c: drive. This feature of True Image would have had your old hard drive replaced in just a few minutes and with one easy step. Next time you need to do something with hard drives, send me a note and I'll try to help you do it quickly and with the least work possible.”

Maybe the next time I will ask before! But, that would have transferred all the garbage, as well.

Courtesy of APCUG.

Free Up Megabytes of Disk Space

by Vinny La Bash

Sarasota PCUG, FL

Look in your Windows folder and count how many folders you have that start with “\$NtUninstall”. They are all related to various patches, updates and service packs for XP. Those \$NtUninstall folders are created when you install a Microsoft Service Pack, a hot fix, or certain security

updates. Some of these folders could date back almost to the day you first installed your computer.

Their names are in blue, and they are all marked as hidden and read only. If you don't see them in the Windows folder, open the Tools menu, and select Folder Options from the drop down menu. After the Folder Options dialog box appears, activate the View tab, then left-click the Show hidden files and folders radio button. Click OK to close the dialog box and the hidden folders should appear. If nothing happens close down Windows Explorer and restart it. You don't need to restart your computer; simply open Windows Explorer again.

Why should you do this? If you're getting low on disk space and the usual remedies haven't freed up enough space, these folders could be the culprits that are chewing up valuable storage area. If you have had Windows installed for more than a year and you are conscientious about keeping your system up-to-date, these useless folders are probably tying up gigabytes of data. Enough of them can have the unfortunate side effect of noticeably slowing down virus and spyware scans. It also takes longer to defrag your disk drive. An accumulation of unnecessary or extraneous data on your system will eventually affect system performance and in extreme cases cause drive errors.

The files within the \$NtUninstall folder provide instructions on how your computer uninstalls a Windows update. Each folder has a specific name ending in the name of a particular Windows modification. If you were to go to add/remove programs and select a Windows update to uninstall, the information on how to run this process would come from the corresponding \$Ntuninstall folder.

You can safely delete all these folders if you have no plans to uninstall any of the related patches. As updates and patches accumulate, these types of folders will continue to grow and take more disk space.

One solution is to delete only those folders older than three months. Chances are, if you haven't uninstalled a Windows update after three months, you won't ever do it.

Alternatively, once you've made a backup or disk image of any “\$NTUninstall” files, you can delete the files from the hard drive immediately, because

you can always restore them from backups, if you need them.

One thing Microsoft should have done is tuck these folders away in a sub-folder someplace so you don't have to scroll through them every time you want to locate something in the Windows folder. I've seen machines with over one hundred of these folders. Then again, you could always mark them as hidden.

Courtesy of APCUG.

The New, the Best, and the Worst

collected by Pim Borman

Website Editor, Southwest Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

Spintronics

No one, fifty years ago, could have foreseen or even imagined how the advent of evermore powerful computers would revolutionize science, technology, commerce, and communications. Vastly improved algorithms and architectural structures have been important, but the crucial factor has been the ability to cram ever smaller and more complex circuits on a semiconductor chip. That ability is now approaching a limit posed by atomic size and increasing influence of quantum effects. We may have to learn how to do more with what we already have if we want to further improve computers so that they'll be able to predict the weather or model the Big Bang, to mention just a few challenges.

From an electro-mechanical standpoint every digital computer, no matter how primitive or advanced, consists of on-off electrical switches connected in a circuit. In semiconductor-based systems the binary 0's and 1's are represented by electrons that carry a negative charge, and missing electrons, called "holes," with positive charge. That is simple and straightforward enough. But wait, there is more...

There can be no electricity without magnetism. They are like heads and tails, yin and yang, up and down. Electrons, the elemental carriers of electricity, also are elementary magnets. You can, very much simplified, think of them as spinning spheres of electricity, tiny electromagnets in other words. Depending on the direction of spin, the magnetism points up or down. Technology making use of the magnetic properties of electrons is often referred to

as "spintronics." So far, computers ignore the magnetic state of the electrons, but what if we learned to use it for additional information storage?

About 50 years ago scientists learned how to manipulate and record the magnetic properties of electrons and certain atomic nuclei to examine the composition of substances, using a technique called nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR). Eventually that technique was extended to examine the characteristics of human tissue. The name was changed to Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to avoid the term "nuclear" with its negative connotations, although it has nothing to do with damaging radiation or nuclear energy in this case.

More recently, in the late 90's, scientists at IBM learned how to use spintronics to make very small, highly sensitive read-heads for use with computer hard drives. The sensors consist of a microscopic sliver of semiconductor sandwiched between two thin magnetic layers. The top layer is a permanent, "hard" magnet, but the bottom layer is a soft magnet that changes magnetic orientation easily as it passes over the magnetic regions on the disk. If both magnets in the head are oriented in the same direction, electrons align magnetically in the same direction and move easily through the semiconductor. If the magnetic layers point in opposite directions, the electron spin is reversed as it moves through the semiconductor, affecting its mobility and therefore the amount of current. Clever, isn't it? Practically all newer hard drives use that technology now.

If computers could be designed to use both the electrical charge and the magnetic state of electrons, each unit of information could have four different quaternary values (0,1,2,and 3) instead of the two binary values (0 and 1) currently used, resulting in greatly increased performance. But the semiconductors must be magnetic to recognize the magnetic 'up' or 'down' state of electrons. Magnetic semiconductors are few and far between, and so far none remain magnetic at room temperature.

If the material problems can be solved, we may be looking at future computers that are not only more powerful, but also easier to use. Because magnetic semiconductors retain their logic states without power, systems could be instant-on and use less power. Also, principal functions of a computer, such as logic operations, communication between circuits,

and data storage, could be integrated in a single material, resulting in smaller and faster computers with high data-storage capacities and fast performance.

Making spintronic computers possible depends on chemists formulating magnetic semiconductors able to support the technology. Much progress is being made, but it will take a while longer. Not surprisingly, this article was based on an article in *Chemical and Engineering News*, Aug. 28, 2006.

Cookies with Gas?

Would you believe Internet via the gas meter? A San Diego-area start-up company, Nethercomm, claims to have developed technology to send broadband and TV services through the underground natural gas pipes. A converter box attached to your gas meter receives the signals and sends them to your computer or TV set. The headline of the article in *USA Today* (9/11/06) says it all: "Gas-line broadband a pipe dream?" (Thanks, Duane Morrow).

A Linux Epiphany

I wasn't going to mention Linux this month, but... James Derk, our local computer guru known for his syndicated weekly computer columns for Scripps-Howard News Service, has been pooh-poohing desktop Linux for years. Guess what. His column in the *Evansville Press and Courier* of September 18, 2006 is headed "It may be time to give Linux another try." He specifically mentions the Ubuntu Linux distribution which, he writes, is "...painfully easy to get up and running ... without spending a dime." Derk keeps his columns at www.cyberdads.com/blog.html You can also find them on the Scripps Howard Web site at www.shns.com/ under Columns...Business, Finance, and Technology...Compute.

Reap What You Sow!

I've been getting bored with being a one-man Linux SIG in the SW Indiana PC Users Group. I suggested to our new Region 6 Advisor of the Association of PC User Groups (APCUG), Jerry Gillette, that APCUG might be able to sponsor a way to exchange news and information between Linux aficionados scattered amongst its member Groups. He passed the word, and the suggestion was accepted with enthusiasm. APCUG now carries a new Conference (section) on its Web Board, APCUG

.linux. Of course, the Conference requires a moderator, and who do you think got "volunteered?" Right, "c'est moi" said the fool. Oh well, one must reap what one sows. Access the APCUG Web Board at webboard.apcug.org and leave a message!

Courtesy of APCUG.

Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

Don't know if you tune into CNET's various newsletters and reviews but here is one that might interest you—their latest review of anti-virus programs. Take a look: http://reviews.cnet.com/4520-6600_7-6768133-1.html?tag=nl.e724 I am using (on various machines) Alwil Avast 4.7, Norton Internet Security, Norton Corporate Anti-virus, Free AVG, and Cox's Internet Security Suite. I am concerned about performance hits during normal operations like email, web browsing, and downloading files from various places; and how much the program affects boot up time. When you look at the charts you will see that these boys are all over the place so you, too, will have to make compromises when you choose one.

Newest Windows Update Snafu

Puzzles Microsoft

Windows Update again upgrades machines without user permission; Microsoft has no explanation

For the second time in a month, MS has had to defend Windows Update against charges that it upgraded machines without users' permission. So far, it has no explanation for the newest instance of unauthorized updating.

In a post published in mid-October to a company blog, a program manager for Microsoft Update, Nate Clinton, denied that Windows' update mechanism was to blame for reports of settings being changed without user interaction, updates downloading and installing, and systems rebooting.

"We have received some logs from customers, and have so far been able to determine that their AU [Automatic Update] settings were not changed by any changes to the AU client itself and also not changed by any updates installed by AU," Clinton said.

Claims started to trickle in shortly after the usual monthly rollout of multiple security patches that machines running Vista had updated on their own, even though users had set Automatic Update to require their approval before downloading and/or installing patches. Some users also reported that machines had rebooted, which caused data loss in applications that had been left open.

The Windows enthusiast site AeroXperience was the first to notice the wildcat updates, and collected accounts from users. "I had mine set to 'Check for updates but let me choose whether to download and install them,' it's now on 'Install Automatically,'" said Mr. John Abbot on an AeroXperience forum last Wednesday.

Others noted that the mysteriously changed settings resulted in downloaded and installed patches with a reboot to finalize the installation. "Just now I had my computer reboot on me because windows update, without my permission, downloaded and installed updates for my computer and then rebooted," said a member identified as "Zeros and Ones."

According to other messages on the AeroXperience forum, users running Vista Service Pack 1 (SP1) were unaffected. Also, no reports originated from users earlier versions of Windows or Windows Server.

This incident follows the disclosure in September that, contrary to users' instructions, Automatic Update had updated itself. Microsoft tried to deflect criticism by saying that the practice was necessary to keep AU up-to-date, and thus keep users' computers safe. At that time, Clinton said Microsoft would consider changes to make the update process more transparent to customers. "We are now looking at the best way to clarify WU's behavior to customers so that they can more clearly understand how WU works," he said in a post to the same company blog on Sept. 13.

Since then, neither Microsoft nor Clinton has made any additional announcements about changes being considered to Windows Update.

Even Microsoft seems unsure about what caused the Vista-powered systems to mutiny and install updates without orders. "We are still looking into this to see if another application is making this

change during setup with user consent, or if this issue is related to something else," Clinton said.

AeroXperience, which claimed to be working with Microsoft on tracking down the bug, hinted that it might be the fault of OneCare Live, Microsoft's consumer-grade security suite. The site asked members who had experienced the forced update and who also had installed OneCare to forward the program's event logs to a designated e-mail address.

Did you know?

There are built-in diagnostics in Windows Vista for several common types of problems, including those involving hard disks, memory, and networking. This feature is briefly described on this Microsoft web page: [Windows Vista: Features Explained: Built-in Diagnostics](#).

Windows Disk Diagnostics has a new service called Diagnostic Policy Service that uses the S.M.A.R.T. (Self-Monitoring Analysis Reporting Technology) to detect potential disk failures and then, after displaying a message that the hard disk is at risk, guides users through the process of backup of data, replacement of the disk, and restoration of the data.

Windows Memory Diagnostics can analyze for failing memory by scheduling a memory test on the next boot, and then provide guided support. You can access the Memory Diagnostics by going to Control Panel -> Administrative Tools -> Memory Diagnostic Tool. The tool runs a short series of tests to determine the integrity of the RAM modules on your system. It will either find the memory to be functioning properly or alert you to errors it has found.

Another part of the built-in diagnostics of Vista applies to troubleshooting networks. You can read a brief description on this page: [Windows Vista: Features Explained: Network Diagnostics and Trouble-shooting](#).

Unlike in Windows XP, there is a single icon in the Notification Area ("system tray") of the taskbar which summarizes network connectivity of all attached network adaptors. You can view the status of each connected network by hovering the mouse over the icon. The states that this Network System Icon can have are any of these four:

- No Connectivity (no cable is plugged in, and no connection to a wireless access point has been detected)

- Limited (a connectivity problem exists)
- Local Only (the system can communicate with other systems on local and remote subnets but cannot communicate with systems on the Internet)
- Local and Internet (at least one network adapter is connected to the local network and can reach the Internet.)

If you right click the Network System you get this menu of network-related functions:

- Connect to a network
- Turn on activity animation, which causes the Network System Icon to blink when the computer sends or receives packets from the network, indicating network activity
- Turn off notification of new networks
- Diagnose and repair
- Network and Sharing Center

The Windows Network Diagnostics tool in Windows Vista, available from the above menu option of Diagnose and Repair, helps you identify any issues preventing network connectivity and it automatically repairs them if possible, or otherwise gives you steps to take to correct the problem. The Network Diagnostic Framework (NDF) is capable of diagnosing hundreds of different networking issues. If you want to download and read a Word document called VistaNetDiag.doc with probably more details than you would ever want to know about this, go to Network Diagnostics Technologies in Windows Vista.

New Senate Bill Targets Identity Theft

The Identity Theft Enforcement and Restitution Act would provide protection for consumers who fall victim to identity theft

A pair of U.S. senators introduced the Identity Theft Enforcement and Restitution Act of 2007, Oct. 17th, which proposes adding protections for consumers who fall victim to identity theft to the existing bill focused on data privacy and security that passed the Senate Judiciary Committee in May.

Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee Patrick Leahy (D VT) and Ranking Member Arlen Specter (R Penn), based this proposed new bill on their Leahy-Specter Personal Data Privacy and Security Act (S. 495).

Provisions of the bill include:

- Giving victims of identity theft the right to seek restitution for the time and money spent attempting to restore their credit.
- Expanding the jurisdiction of existing federal computer fraud statutes to include small businesses and corporations.
- Removing the requirement that information must have been stolen from another state or country, so that prosecutions can occur when the victim and the thief are located in the same state.
- Making the use of spyware or keyloggers that damage 10 or more computers a felony, regardless of how much resulting damage is caused.
- Eliminating the minimum requirement that \$5,000 worth of loss must be experienced by the victim; this bill classifies incidents resulting in less than \$5,000 worth of loss as misdemeanors.
- Expanding the definition of cybercrime to include threatening to obtain or release information from a protected computer and demanding money in relationship to a protected computer to facilitate extortion.

These provisions expand on the bill that passed the committee in May, which focused on disclosure responsibilities of organizations that suffer a data breach or loss jeopardizing sensitive information.

The senators, who say they worked with the Justice Department to craft this updated bill, quote figures that put the number of identity theft victims at 8.4 million in 2006.

Introduced to the Senate Oct. 17th, the Identity Theft Enforcement and Restitution Act of 2007 was referred to the Judiciary Committee, according to an official in Leahy's office.

Trojan Horse Dupes Skype Users Steals Personal Info

Skype again warns users of its software that malicious code targeting its VoIP and instant messaging service is on the prowl, the second such recent alert

Skype LTD. again warned users in mid-October of its software that malicious code targeting the voice-over-IP (VoIP) and instant messaging service was on the prowl, the second such alert in the past five weeks.

A Trojan horse posing as a Skype add-on is stealing log-on credentials, the company's online

spokesman, Villu Arak, said in a blog posting. Calling itself Skype Defender, the malware installs if users download and run the executable Skype DefenderSetup.exe, then launches to display a mock Skype interface complete with username and password fields. Entering valid information, however, only results in the bogus application claiming, “Your Skype name and password were not recognized. Please check and try again.”

By that time, the log-on information, usernames and passwords remembered by IE have been snatched and sent to the attacker.

The alert came five weeks after Skype acknowledged that the Ramex.a worm was hijacking computers running the VoIP software.

Most security vendors had updated their detection signatures by the next morning to account for the new threat. “The PWS-Pykse Trojan does not spread by itself,” said Pradeep Govindaraju, a McAfee Inc. researcher, on the company’s security blog. “It relies on social engineering techniques to trick the victim into executing it and is usually posted onto dodgy sites or forums.”

Links to sites hosting the Trojan horse have been passed to some Skype users via instant messaging, other security researchers reported.

“An alert Skype user would notice that it looks very different from the normal log-in window,” added Govindaraju, “especially since none of the hyperlinks or options displayed are functional.”

In other security news involving Skype, Websense Inc. warned of a scam that arrives as a spammed instant message and claims that the recipient’s PC is infected with multiple pieces of malware. Coming from a user dubbed “Scan Alert,” the message prompts the user to click on a link to download a patch; naturally, the “patch” is no such thing.

Instead, the Web site displays a dialog asserting that the PC is infected and offers to remove the malicious code if the user pays \$19.95 for something called “Windows Software Patch—Scan & Repair.”

The scam is a triple threat, said Websense in a warning posted to its Web site. “This serves as [an] example of spam propagating on Skype, with malware authors utilizing social engineering to pass their malware off as legitimate software and attempting to collect money directly at the same time.”

That’s it for this month, check back again in December for another installment.

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Q. Maybe this is a crazy idea, but wouldn’t one way to stop spam be to reply to it and sound interested in whatever they’re pitching or place a phony order? If enough people did this, the outfits sending spam would be inundated with fake requests and stop spamming. Does that make any sense to you, Mr. M.?

A. Replying to spam lets the sender know that their message reached a valid email address and it was actually viewed by a “live body.” That makes your email address more valuable and it will be sold to other spammers at a premium.

I applaud your creative thinking, but when all is said and done, it’s best not to respond to spam in any manner, and that includes not clicking links that say, “Click here to be removed from our mailing list.”

Q. I want to build a Web site, but I spoke with one company that wanted \$12,000 to build it. I don’t have that kind of money, so what would you suggest? I just want a simple Web site, nothing fancy.

A. One of easiest ways to construct a Web site is to use a service such as GoDaddy (www.godaddy.com), Depending how sophisticated you want your site to be, prices start as low as \$9.95/month. You can do everything from registering your domain name, to creating your Web site, to gaining exposure for your site through GoDaddy. For starters, I’d suggest visiting the GoDaddy Help Center at <http://tinyurl.com/ce8hd>, and reviewing their Web Site Builder information at <http://tinyurl.com/dnca6>. You’ll also find contact information for telephone and email support, both of which are excellent. Other popular build-your-own Web site services are Homestead.com and BuildYourSite.com.

Q. I have a lot of bookmarked Web sites that I know don’t work anymore. Is there any way to find out

Gadgetry

by Berry F. Phillips

Computer Club of Oklahoma City and regular writer for the CCOKC website and the eMonitor

which sites are working and which ones aren't, without having to visit each site individually?

A. AM-DeadLink (www.aignes.com/deadlink.htm) is an excellent little utility that does exactly what you want: It not only detects dead links, but it also detects duplicate links. AM-DeadLink is free and works with Internet Explorer, Netscape, Firefox, and Opera.

The perfect gift for any computer user has arrived! For the first time in the history of mankind, I have carefully—dare I say lovingly—selected more than 1400 of the most interesting, informative, and entertaining Web sites and included them on my destined-to-become-a-classic, Mr. Modem's Web CD-ROM. Sites are segregated into 19 categories, ranging from Art, Music, Literature & Film to Wining & Dining. The CD (for Windows PCs) retails for \$19.95, but as a loyal reader of this publication (you are a loyal reader, aren't you?) your price is only \$12.95, including free shipping and handling. To receive this special discount, simply enter "1206" in the Promotional Code field when placing your order online. Within 24 hours, an autographed copy will be on its way to you or your giftee! (Can there ever be too much hyperbole? I think not.) For more information or to view an excerpt from the CD, visit <http://tinyurl.com/hvnsn>.

Mr. Modem's DME (Don't Miss 'Em)

Sites of the Month

Brand Names Search Engine

Have you ever tried to locate the "official" Web site for a product and couldn't find it? With this search engine, you can search more than 15,000 company and product Web sites in 11 categories, from Celebrities to Vehicles and Transportation.

www.visiobrand.com

Self Check-Up

Here you'll find 15 online health assessments and health calculators designed to assist you in achieving your health and fitness goals. Features include two body-fat estimators (what, one body-fat estimator wouldn't be distressing enough?), an unintentionally hilarious Ideal Weight Calculator, and the ever-popular Waist-to-Hip Ratio calculator. I'm thinking this site might be a candidate for this year's "Sites-We-Could-Live-Without" award.

www.selfcheckup.com

Have many of us become "gadgetholics?" Do we rush in mass like drunken lemmings annually, especially during the holidays, to rush over the cliff of technology only to fall even deeper in debt as we race to upgrade to own the newest and the coolest gadget? The Associated Press reported that a poll says Americans are showing early signs of addiction to their gadgets.

Fifty percent say they could not get along without computer and mobile telephones, and 40 percent say the same for broadband use. The Associated Press article also quotes a psychologist who is an authority on internet addictions so there must be truth to this new addiction. Those addicted broadband users are fortunate since "they can get help online."

Is gadget addiction generic? You might be a neophiliac if you are constantly upgrading with the latest technical gizmo. Media Life magazine reports neophiliacs are people addicted to the new. A study conducted by Yamagata University School of Medicine in Japan reports some people may be genetically predisposed to wanting the newest things. Their study suggests the cause may be a mitochondrial enzyme called monoamine oxidase. However, a University of York sociology professor disputes the findings of the study pointing out, "people were far more suspicious of change in the past—so the urge to constantly move on is sociological, not a genetic one."

Do you suppose gadgetmania may be gender related? Reality checks suggest Males, far more than females, are gadget addicted to various degrees. This finding has been a boost to wives who often receive the blame for compulsive overspending while shopping. Jean Chatzky, author of "Make Money Not Excuses" gives this advice to spouses of gadgetholics: "They get excited in anticipation of their next purchase. They get a little higher when they are making it. And they feel a huge let down when it is over."

Compulsive shoppers also put their own families at risk by racking up bills they can not pay. If you think he is simply over-shopping, he needs your help. Offer to be his shopping buddy, which may

contain his urge to splurge. And help him find new ways to avoid falling into that new-tech trap by getting off the email and mailing lists that are tempting him or by finding a new hobby to occupy his time.” (I’m sure glad that I’m a single male so nothing will interfere with my gadget shopping during the holidays!)

Why I even understand that Mrs. Claus had problems with Santa last year. Some say that Santa had global navigation installed in his high tech sleigh and no longer relies totally on Rudolph, the lead red-nosed reindeer, for navigation. The elves in Santa’s workshop have been upgraded and some even replaced by robotics as more high tech gifts are being manufactured than ever before for children of all ages. Mrs. Claus is also concerned about Santa’s belly that you recall “shakes like a bowl full of jelly” for fear he will get stuck in a chimney, and his deliveries could not be made on time, disappointing millions globally. Don’t worry Santa worked out daily in his high-tech gym loaded with all kinds of the newest and coolest gadgets. Santa who is male, of course, apparently thinks that today’s addictions are tomorrow’s necessities.

Courtesy of APCUG.

Windows Vista on the Cusp

A Perspective on Vista

by Jan Fagerholm

Assistant Editor, PC Community, Hayward, CA

I have a confession to make. Though I am a confirmed Linux geek, I have been running Windows Vista. While I tell myself that I am preparing myself for what my clients will be running soon, a lot of the time I spend in Vista is because I like learning new stuff. I’ve been through the progression of Betas and have arrived at RC2, two weeks before the Microsoft freezes the code and sends it to the DVD burners.

This is not a “review” of Vista as such—computer publications have been running articles on Vista for months—but rather a collection of likes and dislikes that I have gathered while using it for the last year. Don’t expect objectivity here—I’m



simply going to point to improvements that have stood out or “improvements” that have bit me. These are some of the things you might want to know before plunking down your hard earned plastic for Vista.

On the whole, Vista will swallow the mainstream applications that you are running now. There are exceptions, but these are usually utilities and anti-malware programs that work (as the phrase goes) close to the metal. Corel Graphics Suite X3, WordPerfect X3 and Adobe Creative Suite 2 all run well on Vista (as does the ever reliable OpenOffice). Roxio Easy Media Creator 9 and Nero Burning ROM 7 fail with installer errors. Present versions of Norton SystemWorks and Executive Software Diskeeper refuse to install. McAfee ViruScan installed, but made Vista unbootable, even in Safe Mode. I had to completely reinstall Vista from scratch.

Here's some of the stuff I've learned to love and hate in Vista, up close, personal and arbitrary. Nits and Picks:

Picks:

- System Services and system monitors have been folded into Task Manager. Services are included along with processes, finally putting the running system stuff in one place. Expanded monitoring features give graphical information on these items similar to other operating systems, including who's using which process.
- Removal of some sophomoric terminology, i.e. “My Documents” is replaced with, simply, “Documents”, “My Computer” is replaced with “Computer”, etc.
- The Address line in most windows displays the path, the way Macintosh OSX has done for years. Similarly, progress bars show up as a transparent overlay in the Address line like OSX. The path display is interactive, allowing you to go to any point in the path directly as an alternative to “Browse,” again like OSX.
- The Aero theme. It's pretty, and handles transparency intelligently. By effectively fading the window title bar and frame, it makes the windows contents the focus of what you see. This is one of those small things that have a large psychological



effect on concentration. But see Nits. • Thumbnail previews of programs in the Task Bar when you move the cursor over them. This is particularly useful if you have several instances of a single program running. You can quickly see which one has the content you want.

- Mixed feelings about the changes to Security Center. While various security features are better integrated into Security Center (such as Internet Options) and they have more granularity, User Account Control is pure pain. Vista security (like Windows XP security) is both superficial and intrusive compared to Macintosh OSX or Linux.

Nits:

- They rearranged almost everything. Too little is logical consolidation and too much of it seems serendipitous. After the Start menu (which is also changed) almost everything has been relocated and re-nested. This new organization is supposed to make things easier for the new user, but I don't see how going through more dialogs to get the same thing done is supposed to make things "easier." If you are an experienced user, you can throw away most of what you know about where things are.

- The Aero theme. While esthetically pleasing, it turns itself off when you run certain applications. It doesn't always come back when you exit the application.

- The "Flip 3D" window switcher. It's pretty, but it works just the same as Alt-Tab. You must cycle through every window to get to the one you want. This is in contrast to the XGL/Compiz window switcher in Linux, which beats Flip 3D hands down for usability. Macintosh OSX's Finder is also much more direct. Worse, when Aero breaks, so does Flip 3D.

- Most of the interface windows have replaced menus with simplified toolbars. They are not customizable. Many of the functions I use regularly are invisible. You can get the menus back if you fish around. (Hint—go to Control Panel/Folder Options/View tab and check "Always Show Menus").

- By default, Vista enables User Account Control in the Security Center. Even if you are the only user on the computer (and thus administrator by default), User Account Control will pop up a dialog every time you (or any software you run) tries to access system areas. This results in several warning dialogs

getting in your face while performing many normal actions. Worse, it blocked activation of several programs I installed, stopping the program from running or crippling it into non-activation mode. (Here's your Top Tip of the Day—you can stop this behavior by going to Control Panel/User Accounts, selecting your user account, then clicking the "Turn User Account Control on or off" link (and clicking the "Continue" button on the warning dialog this feature pops up), un-checking the "User Account Control (UAC)..." item, then clicking "OK." A reboot is required. This will make Vista work like old-fashioned Windows XP.

- We are in for a sea change of hardware and software upgrades that we haven't seen since Windows XP came out. Count on upgrading most, if not all, of your anti-virus / anti-malware software, a lot of your PCI cards, and a lot of your peripherals, especially scanners. Many hardware and software manufacturers are using the impending release of Vista to drop support of a lot of their older products.

Vista is almost upon us. While not a compelling upgrade from Windows XP, it is inevitable, because it will be on the next computer you buy. It has some useful and some annoying updates. The revamped interface is clearly aimed at the new user, but it makes the experienced Windows user suffer because it requires relearning of things you already know. Vista security is somewhat improved compared to Windows XP, but the fundamental problem remains that security is tacked on to the surface of the operating system, compared to OSX or Linux where security is architecturally built in. If you are considering upgrading to Vista for security reasons, save your money; spend less and get equivalent protection from security software for the proven and reliable Windows XP you are using now.

Should you upgrade your present computer to Vista? That depends on your hardware and your definition of value. If your computer is more than three years old, you will not enjoy many of the glitzy new features that Vista offers. It wants a lot of CPU and graphical horsepower to run the cool visual stuff. On older hardware, you will get what Microsoft calls an "XP-like experience." Read: you will need to increase your installed RAM and upgrade your video card. While Vista will install in 512 MB of RAM, Microsoft recommends 1 GB minimum for

“the best experience.” You will want to invest in an upgraded video card to get the best out of Vista, though. Video RAM is important; Vista capable video cards with 128 MB of video RAM and moderate performance are available for around \$50, and well worth the cost if you are moving to Vista. You will definitely want this if you are moving to Vista to freshen your desktop experience. You need it to get all the new toys working.

I am not as enthusiastic about Vista as many reviewers are. I have had the benefit of experiencing most of Vista's “new” features, debugged and often better implemented on OSX and Linux. Microsoft rightly imitated these; many of them are useful and compelling. But they are not new.

If you are a casual computer user, you will wind up with Vista on your computer sooner or later just because it will come on a new PC that you will eventually buy. If you are a computer enthusiast, you will have to decide whether it is worth both the cost of hardware upgrades and the purchase price of Vista to move into the latest and greatest that Microsoft can offer. For the short term, this will not be a painless experience; you will have to make many adjustments to the way you work and suffer several incompatibilities in both hardware and software to get into Vista. If you are a casual computer user and not certain if overcoming these problems is worth the effort, I'll offer my standard advice for new Microsoft operating systems: wait until SP1 before you take the plunge. For the adventurous, I say, “Follow me, and dodge the slings and arrows! The pain is slight, and I can endure it!” The challenge of making it work is part of the fun. And on the other end, you may find that you can eventually get some work done on the computer.

Courtesy of APCUG.

Windows XP: Remote Assistance

by Dick Maybach

Brookdale Computer User Group, NJ

Because of BCUG members' interest and experience with PCs, many of us are asked for help by friends and family. Often, those seeking help live across town or across the country, and it is inconvenient to visit them. Fortunately, Windows XP (both the Home and Pro version) provides a solution. Using its Remote Assistance feature, a

tutor can see a student's Windows desktop and operate his or her computer over the Internet. This allows you to assist someone almost anywhere in the world. Remote Assistance supports an audio link and live file transfers. During the session, you can speak with the person you are helping, and exchange files between the two PCs as easily as you can move them between directories.

To use Remote Assistance, both parties must be using Windows XP, either Home or Pro. The operation will be smoother if both have high-speed Internet access, but this is not required. Also, both parties should have microphones or combination microphone-earphone headsets, which are available inexpensively from many computer hardware dealers. Without this, you will have to juggle a telephone during the whole session or use text chat, both of which are inconvenient. Finally, Universal plug-and play must be enabled on your hardware

“With Remote Assistance a tutor can see a student's Windows desktop and operate his or her computer over the Internet.”

router, if you have one. This appears to be the default for those used in homes, but if you are behind your company's, college's, or some other organization's firewall, you may not be able to use Remote Assistance. UPnP does entail a small security risk, which many organizations won't tolerate.

It will also be helpful to use MSN Messenger to set up the session. Without this, you will have to use e-mail, which will slow down the dialog immensely. (As a bonus, Messenger will allow you to make free audio or video calls anywhere in the world.) Both the Messenger software and service are free. You can download the software from Microsoft. (The fastest way to find the correct download page is to do a Google search for “MSN Messenger.” During the installation process, you will be led through the process of obtaining a Messenger account.)

XP enables Remote Assistance requests by default; however, check to be sure that this is so. The error message if it isn't is not helpful. (Right-click on My Computer, select Properties, select Remote, check Allow Remote Assistance invitations to be sent..., select Advanced, check Allow this computer to be controlled.... While you are here, reduce the

time that requests are active to something like four hours; the 30-day default is far too long.) Allowing Remote Assistance requests does add a small security risk; I recommend that you disable it when you aren't using it.

Use the following procedure to start a session. (It assumes you use MSN Messenger.)

- Both parties start MSN Messenger and sign in.
- The student requests assistance (Start » Help and Support » Invite a friend to connect to your computer with Remote Assistance » Invite some to help you » select the friend from the Messenger list » select Invite)
- The tutor accepts the request.

Both can now see the student's desktop, but only the student can control it; that is, the tutor's mouse and keyboard do not affect the student's desktop. For many problems, this is all that is needed.

Once the session has begun, you can control the interaction.

- If you are using a high-speed connection, tell the program so. (Click Settings and check High Quality Connection.)
- To start a voice conversation, click Start Talking. Again, one party requests and the other accepts the link. This, of course, requires a microphone or a headset at each PC. You can use instant messaging for conversations, but this is much slower than talking and can be confusing.
- The tutor can request control by clicking Take Control. If the student accepts, both now control the student's desktop. This allows the tutor, for example, to demonstrate the correct procedures and to make changes in the student's configuration.
- Either party can send a file, by clicking Send a File.
- Hitting Esc allows either party to revoke control, kill the voice link, or stop the session.

Remote Assistance provides a very valuable tool that allows PC users to help each other without leaving their homes, but it hasn't received the recognition it deserves.

Courtesy of APCUG.



From The DealsGuy

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

New Take On Returns

I saw an interesting article about Lowe's new system to handle customer returns. Even if you can't find your receipt, they can help you, but this new system also discovered 8,665 fraudulent return attempts in a six-month period <<http://www.informationweek.com/showArticle.jhtml;jsessionid=GRKIQWOE4P0V2QSNLPSKH0CJUNN2JVN?articleID=201806189>>.

This One Concerns the Rapid Development of Linux

<<http://www.informationweek.com/news/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=202404635>> It had an accompanying article about seven features coming soon, but I couldn't find it on the Information Week Web site.

What a Fraud!

In November I included an announcement for Advanced Windows Care Personal that was supposedly freeware. A reader informed me that after it scans your hard drive, it does not remove the errors it found unless you purchase the paid edition. Sorry about that one.

Below are more announcements that I received, but I have not tried them. Do your homework if you are interested in any of them.

Do You Keep Track Of Your Own Finances?

Try This, and It's Portable

Alzex announces the release of Personal Finances Portable 2.1. When you get a pay raise, you might start considering a major purchase, or perhaps saving money for your child's education, based on the fact that you will have some spare money. But the month with a pay increase comes to an end and you realize that, actually, you've ended up with no extra money because, somehow, you spent it all. In that case, Personal Finances may come to your rescue. It'll record all expenses and help you see where your money goes. It shows the total sum and percentage structure for categories, overall balance and balance on accounts.

Personal Finances has a user-friendly multilingual interface, scheduler, password protection and a

very useful expense addition ability with one click. It can import/export data from/to .txt or .csv files. The application has a multiple database support and allows you to create an unlimited number of databases. Detailed information on all transactions is available for any time period. There is also an unlimited number of sections, subsections, categories, etc. Besides the basic ones, the application allows users to add more currencies upon inserting the exchange rate. Personal Finances allows you to sort by fields and group names, or by transaction. The program has the capability of logging regular transactions automatically.

If you are an active and mobile businessman, or just a globetrotter, why keep a record of expenses in an ordinary notebook and copy those notes into your home PCs after returning home. The features making Personal Finances Portable unique in its category is that you can install and run the application from a USB flash drive; consequently, your “personal accountant” will be portable and always at hand.

Personal Finances Portable 2.1 runs under Windows 98/Me/2000/XP/2003/Vista and costs \$24.95 (USD) for a single-user license. User group members get a 20% discount on the purchase of Personal Finances Portable by using the coupon code “pf43M5G,” valid from now until March 2008. Licensed customers are entitled to priority technical support and a year of free upgrades. Your purchase is secured by a 30-day money-back guarantee. Additional information on Personal Finances Portable 2.1, as well as its evaluation copy with a 30-day trial period, is available at <<http://www.financesoftware.com>>.

Download link: <www.financesoftware.com/downloads/Personal_Finances_v2.1.exe> (2,73 Mb)

Another Portable Application for Road Warriors

Smart PC Solutions, Inc. announced Reach-a-Mail 3.0, a portable flash drive e-mail client which lets you use another computer to send and receive e-mails without leaving any traces behind. There is no need to install any additional software, or fear that someone may steal your login and password if you send an e-mail through the online mailing service at an Internet café. This utility supports 10 languages and includes a collection of artistic smiley

faces. Reach-a-Mail is a small program that you download to your desktop computer and install onto almost any kind of portable memory device, such as a USB flash drive. The program comes with its own default configuration. All you need to get started is to set up your e-mail accounts and import your contact lists.

This program has a straightforward import feature that lets you import, not only accounts from your desktop Outlook Express, but also e-mail messages and contacts so you don't have to tediously copy-and-paste the data or perform extensive typing. You can also import account settings from another Reach-a-Mail installation. Reach-a-Mail allows you to export e-mail messages and contacts, as well as save attachments. Importing takes only a short time depending on the volume of information you are loading.

Once you have everything in the flash drive, you're free to travel around the world! Simply go to an Internet café or some other place where you can find a computer with access to the Internet, plug the flash drive into the USB port to run Reach-a-Mail and go about sending and receiving messages as you normally would. When you're finished, remove the drive and that's it. No traces are left on the computer and your e-mail correspondence is safe.

Reach-a-Mail 3.0 runs under Windows95/98/ME/NT/2000/XP/2003 /Vista. It is freeware and is available immediately from <www.smartpctools.com>. A commercial professional version of Reach-a-Mail with RSS reader functionality, no ad attachments in messages and better speed is also available for \$29.95 USD at <<http://www.smartpctools.com/order.html>>.

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

Adobe Reader 8

by Roger Radcliffe

TUGNET

Adobe has just released a new version of its program that displays PDF's (Portable Document Files), Adobe Reader, v.8. 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 8 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 2 pages side by side and then print 2 pages on a sheet and 2 pages on the back to save paper.

Many software programs (i.e. Word, Paper Port, Word Perfect, Photo Shop) allow you to create your own PDF and now, with Adobe Reader v.8, 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.8 supports Windows Vista and its new visual look as well.

From the December 2007 issue of TUGNET, The Users Group Network, Granada Hills, CA.

Society News

Planning Meeting

by John McMillan, Secretary

Arpad returned from China in time for the December 4th planning meeting with Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, Mike Lavelle, John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, Sally Springett, and Steve Staub at Sally's house. The group felt that despite lacking a large projection screen, Tony did an outstanding job with the Computer Building demonstration at the November meeting. So good in fact that a visitor at the meeting has joined the Society. Tony will be welcome back at any time. The December 11th meeting will be held in the Penfield Library where Arpad will host a repeat of the popular Jeopardy game. As in the past we hope to find three volunteers to compete for prizes by answering questions about computers.

After several months of exploring pro's and con's, the committee has agreed to try printing the January copy of the Monitor in an 8.5 x 5.5 format. Using 8.5 x 11 inch paper will reduce paper and mailing costs. There may be minor changes in presentation but the content is expected to remain similar even though more pages may be needed than for the previous 8.5 by 7 inch Monitor size.

Rescheduling the planning meeting was also considered because of the conflict with New Year's Day.

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Dave Thompson

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: A member is having trouble with a friend who cannot receive her email.

A: It sounds like your incoming mail is being blocked. She may have to contact her ISP and remove the SPAM blocker. Perhaps his address can be added as a safe sender.

Q: Another member asked which photo editor to use for free?

A: It was recommended that GIMP be used. It is free and does a great editing job. There is another option: Raw Therapee. This one contains a complete set of

editing options, especially coloring tools. It also allows simple cropping. However, GIMP may allow the general features needed.

Q: Dave asked whether anyone knows of a free ghosting program, allowing him to not have to run a backup program. He does not need compression. He would like to add incremental.

A: It was suggested that he try Achronis Version 10. available at Staples. It is now only \$14.00. Windows has a backup utility but they wondered whether it is recommended. It will not copy the OS files.

Q: When a member shuts down his computer it says that an update is pending from Microsoft but it does not happen. He ends up shutting it off manually. The updates are not applied.

A: You could try leaving it on overnight, allowing it to install the updates that have been downloaded. You may want to check for an icon in your system tray and click on it to install. Another member suggested that some MS updates are done in 'stealth mode' so that you do not know when updates are performed. You can update your configurations to show the requests, rather than do them automatically. It was suggested that you capture the message and then paste it in as a Google Search.

Q: For those who are losing their hard-drive... Firefox is now locking up. Is this a problem?

A: Yes, be suspicious. Listen for it to 'click.' It can also cause slow startups. It is recommended that you replace it as soon as any of these signs appear.

Q: Another member is using Firefox, placing all downloads into a special folder. He also creates a new folder for installations, making backups easier.

A: This is not a bad idea to check for malware. This is good to do especially if the download is from an unknown site.

Q: One member asked for ideas. His laptop is 14.4 wide screen running Vista. He is having trouble finding a resolution that can be used on his monitor 19 inch wide screen. He gets it to work but things are distorted.

A: There may need an updated driver. It was suggested that he check the monitor's website. Perhaps the video manufacturer of the laptop (Nvidia) can be visited and ask for assistance. Perhaps the manufacturing specs/compatible driver can be provided. The answer may be in the hardware.

December Meeting

by John McMillan

The business portion of the meeting started with a reminder for members to see Steve Staub if their dues are due. The January planning meeting has been canceled because it falls on New Years Day. If there is a real need, to get together, the committee will be informed by e-mail.

The Monitor will be printed and assembled December 15th at St. Stephen's Church. Steve expects to be there by 9:00 am and would appreciate extra help since Sally can only stay an hour. Documentation of the many cases of computer books started in November is expected to continue this Saturday. There are now three areas: those that could be sold on E-bay; those that have been entered into the data base; and the majority which have not yet been checked.

Dave Thompson announced that the Digital Photography SIG will meet the first Thursday of January at St. John's Meadows. He will be sending e-mails to those on his distribution list. There was a sign up list for those who would like to attend a Linux loading meeting Carl Schmidtman set up for Saturday January 19th from 1:30 to 4 00 pm at the Greece Library.

Members were asked to pick up the area after the meeting but the chairs did not need to be stacked. A variety of goodies combined with the Jeopardy game to make the meeting more party like.

Carl volunteered to be a contestant as did Tony Delello before he was disqualified since he had submitted a number of questions for use in the game. Dave Thompson and Bill Squire were cajoled into playing by a devious drawing. There were no light switches available to signify the desire to answer a question so a high tech method of slapping the table with the hand was used. And as in previous years there were several false starts when answers were given before a question was completely read; all of which contributed to the hilarity of the evening.

Arpad started by reading the category headings, Win Dos, Name That Tech, Slash and Burn, Acronymphobia, and Cold and Flu. There were, of course, five questions in each category with values from 100 to 500 points plus a Final Jeopardy where

contestants could choose an amount to wager, not to exceed their cumulative score. And the winner was—Carl Schmidtman plus the attendees who learned a little more about the reason we get together every month.

Join us in January when we expect to be in a Penfield court room. Check the web page to be sure.

Membership Chair

by Steve Staub

New members: Thomas Ross and Don Anderson. Frank Howden died on Dec 9th. Frank was a long-time member and a former vice president. He will be missed.

The Lighter Side

A computer programmer was crossing a road one day when a frog called out to him and said, “If you kiss me, I’ll turn into a beautiful princess.” He bent over, picked up the frog and put it in his pocket.

The frog spoke up again and said, “If you kiss me and turn me back into a beautiful princess, I will tell everyone how smart and brave you are and how you are my hero.” The man took the frog out of his pocket, smiled at it and returned it to his pocket.

The frog spoke up again and said, “If you kiss me and turn me back into a beautiful princess, I will be your loving companion for an entire week.” The man took the frog out of his pocket, smiled at it and returned it to his pocket.

The frog then cried out, “If you kiss me and turn me back into a princess, I’ll stay with you for a year and do anything you want.” Again the man took the frog out, smiled at it, and put it back into his pocket.”

Finally, the frog asked, “What is the matter? I’ve told you I’m a beautiful princess, that I’ll stay with you for a year and do anything you want. Why won’t you kiss me?”

The man said, “Look, I’m a computer programmer. I don’t have time for a girlfriend, but a talking frog is cool.”

A young man went to a fortune teller. Gazing into her crystal ball, the old lady asked, “What is your dream, young man? What do you want to do with your life?”

“I want to become a great writer.”

“How do you define great?” she asked.

“I want to write things that the whole world will read, things that people will react to on a truly emotional level, things that will make them scream, cry, wail, howl in pain, desperation, and anger.”

The fortune teller reassured him, “It will be so.”

He now works for Microsoft, writing error messages.