

MONITOR

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Genealogy

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A "Stress-Free" PC

by Jim McKnight

Director, Los Angeles Computer Society

As you know, there is no such thing as a totally "Stress-Free" PC, but there are many things you can do to reduce the stress and worry of owning one.

As we use our PC's, many of us worry about losing our data files, losing our email, losing our Music, our iTunes, our connectivity to the Internet, losing power in the middle of a critical activity, losing our ability to boot the PC, losing control of our PC to hackers, Spy-ware, etc. Wow, we worry a lot! It's a wonder we dare use our PC's at all.

To help solve and minimize these worries, here is a collection of ideas to help protect your computing environment. These steps are not really that difficult

or expensive. In fact, many are free. There is lots of help available to you from User Groups, Friends, Internet Googling, PC Magazines, etc. to implement these suggestions. Details for implementing many of these suggestions are in the various self-help documents on my website at: www.jrmcknight.net.

Will it take a lot of time and energy to implement these ideas? Yes, at first, but once you have these processes in place, the regular time spent is minimal. Will I see a payback? You will only see a tangible payback for your time and energy if you experience some kind of catastrophic situation. Just like house insurance; if everything keeps running smoothly you will never know if it was worth it. You do get the warm fuzzy feeling of being protected, and you will sleep better at night.

Here are the three main areas of action. First: Protect your PC from bad things happening. Second:

Prepare your environment so you can recover if bad things do happen. Third: Practice Secure Behaviors.

Protect Your PC from Bad Things Happening:

1. Buy yourself Hardware Router (*even if you only have one PC*)
 - a. The Router acts as a hardware Firewall.
 - b. Put it between your PC and your Modem.
 - c. Be sure to change the Admin Log-in password from the default to something private.
 - d. Either disable the Wireless feature and hard-wire your connection, or lock-down the Wireless using WPA Encryption and a password.
2. Make sure the Windows Firewall is active.
3. Make sure Windows "Automatic Updates" feature is active and all your critical/important Windows updates are installed.
4. Install and activate an Anti-virus Program. Set it up to scan incoming e-mails.
5. Install and activate Windows Defender and other free Anti-Spyware programs. Defender will continually scan your PC for harmful activities (Note: Vista comes with Defender built-in).
6. Firefox (free) browser is generally safer than Internet Explorer.
7. Install McAfee Site Advisor (free) on each of your Internet Browsers. It helps identify risky sites. (*Note: It is not related to McAfee's Anti-virus or security suite.*)
8. Buy yourself a Battery Backup Power Unit (unless you use a Laptop), so if you lose power at a critical time, you can gently close the PC down.
9. E-mail:
 - a. The best single thing you can do to secure your e-mail is to pick a good password. Do not use a single word, but a short phrase, and include some numbers. ie: "happy2cu4now" or "my5kidsrgr8." I avoid passwords that include I, l, 1, 0, o, or O. Too easy to confuse my memory. I prefer to stick with all lower case for ease of entry, but if you like finger exercise, you can include UPPER CASE and special characters to make it even more secure. Be creative: "C@@@LDUDE" could work and easy to remember.
 - b. Set up your email program to block images, unless OK'd by you.
 - c. Using "Plain Text" e-mail is safer than using

"HTML" e-mail, but not as pretty.

- d. Note: Your anti-virus program can scan incoming e-mails, but does not fully protect you.
- e. Thunderbird is a more secure e-mail client than Outlook, Outlook express, or Windows Mail.

Prepare Your Environment (so you can recover if bad things do happen.)

1. Restore/install DVD/CD's: Make sure you have your "Windows Install" or "System Restore" DVD/CD's on hand (or kept safe off-site). You need these in case of a catastrophic failure. If you do not have them, many manufacturers have instructions on how to burn your own Restore DVD/CD. Do it!
2. Backup Plans: Put multiple Backup processes in place that include:
 - a. Data Backups: Plan regular backups of all your personal data to CD/DVD's (and kept safe off-site).
 - b. Image Backups: Plan regular "Image" backups of the entire hard-drive, preferably to an external Hard drive. *This is a full image of your main Hard-drive that can be used to completely restore the PC back to normal.*
 - c. Testing: Test your back-up process to make sure it can restore the system. This is less risky if you do it when you first buy a PC, because you have your system restore DVD's (hopefully) to put things back as they were when you bought it.
 - d. Online Backups: If you like, sign up for an on-line automatic backup service like Carbonite, Jungledisk, or Mozy.
 - e. Restore Boot Disk: Create a Boot-Disk (using your Backup Program), so if you need to restore from a backed-up image, you are ready to go. This disk should be tested for "bootability" and then kept off-site.
 - f. Flash Drives: **Warning:** Do not trust Flash Drives as your only means of data backup. They are prone to unexpected catastrophic failures. Having 2 or 3 duplicate Flash Drives would possibly be a reasonable alternative to DVD /CD's for your personal data.
3. Hard Copy BU: Write down or print out all your critical info, passwords, access info, log-in ID's, etc. and save off-site. Print out a hard copy of all your e-mail contacts and save off-site.

4. Password File: If you keep a list of Passwords on your computer, make sure the file is hidden and/or protected by encryption. Name your password file something that only has meaning to you. Do not name your file; “passwords.doc.” Duhh. Use something off-beat, like Recipes.doc or Flowers .doc. Also, there are “Locker” Programs that are free or cheap that will hide, encrypt, and password protect your personal data files.

Practice Secure Behaviors

E-mail:

- ▶ Never open e-mail attachments from strangers.
- ▶ Never click a button or link in an email. If desired, copy & paste the link into your browser and make sure it is going where you think it is going.
- ▶ Be cautious about opening attachments & links from friends and family. Especially if it is something that was forwarded from someone else.

Anti-virus ~ Anti-spyware Scans

- ▶ Run a full Anti-virus Scan at least once a month.
- ▶ For each of your Anti-spyware Programs, run updates and a full scan weekly or at least monthly.

Secunia Scans

Once or twice a month, run a Secunia “Software Inspector” scan to make sure your most common programs are up to date against vulnerabilities. This runs from their website. You do not have to download any programs.

Backup, Backup, Backup

1. Do your planned backups regularly. At least once a month, backup all your personal data files, emails, pictures, etc. to CD/DVD’s, and put them somewhere offsite. (A safe-deposit box or a friend or relative’s house).
2. At least monthly, backup an image of your main Hard Drive to an external or second Hard drive.
3. If possible, physically take the external hard-drive containing your backed up image off-site so you can recover easily in case of fire, flood, theft, etc. (A safe-deposit box is good). *There are now many small cheap external hard drives that will easily fit in a safe-deposit box. Buy two and alternate them.*
4. Periodically printout a hardcopy of your passwords and contacts. Save off-site.

5. Keep your external Hard-drive powered off when not in use.

Hard-drive Surface Analysis Scans

Run a maintenance scan quarterly or semiannually on all your hard drives using a utility like “Spin-Rite.” This helps assure you against a surprise hard drive failure.

References and Recommended Programs:

Mozilla Products:

- ▶ Firefox Browser–Free: www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/
- ▶ Thunderbird E-mail Client–Free: www.mozilla.com/en-US/thunderbird/ See Thunderbird Step-By-Step setup at: www.jrmcknight.net/

Anti-virus ~ Anti-spyware Products

- ▶ McAfee Site Advisor–Free: www.siteadvisor.com/
- ▶ AVG Free Anti-virus–Free: <http://free.grisoft.com/doc/downloads-products/us/frt/0?prd=aff>
- ▶ Defender–Free: www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.aspx#
- ▶ AVG Anti-spyware–Free: <http://free.grisoft.com/doc/downloads-products/us/frt/0?prd=asf>
- ▶ Ad-AWARE 2007–Free: www.lavasoftusa.com/products/ad_aware_free.php
- ▶ SpyBot Search & Destroy–Free: www.safer-networking.org/en/spybotsd/index.html

Software Scans and Backup:

- ▶ Secunia Software Inspector–Free: www.secunia.com/software_inspector/ Requires the latest version of Java to run: www.java.com/en/download/index.jsp
- ▶ Spin-Rite Program: www.grc.com/sr/spinrite.htm The SpinRite Storage Utility Program is not free, but is money well spent.
- ▶ Acronis True Image Backup Utility www.ugr.com/ This program is available at a discount at the above listed site and includes a free Tutorial CD.
- ▶ Automatic Online Data Backup sites: www.carbonite.com/ and www.jungledisk.com/ Carbonite is currently \$50 per year for unlimited storage. Jungledisk is variable priced on usage but cheap.

Battery Backup Power Units

(also called a UPS: Uninterruptible Power Supply):

- ▶ When buying a UPS, I suggest you add up all the power ratings on all the PC equipment you plan to

connect to the unit, then pick a unit about 1.5 times that amount. ie: If your usage is 300 Watts, buy at least a 450 Watt UPS (equal to about a 700 VA unit).

- ▶ The VA rating (Volt-Amps) vs Watts rating is confusing. With PC equipment, 1 Watt is about 1.6 VA. I go by Watts. If the tag on your PC says 2.0A and 120V, then calculate 2.0 Amps x 120 Volts or 240 watts for that device. (VA would be about 400)
- ▶ A UPS that is rated too small will fault when first powering on all your equipment at once. The first 30 seconds or so is when the highest power usage occurs.
- ▶ The most reliable brands seem to be APC and BELKIN. Triplet is OK.

Note: Always check for the latest version of this document at: www.jrmcknight.net

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Why I Like the Ubuntu Operating System

by Phil Vogel

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My interest in alternative operating systems started 20 years ago when I worked for the State of Maryland during a year of computer chaos. We had a good office system using WordPerfect but some high State official(s) made a decision to go with Microsoft Word. At our facility WordPerfect was no longer funded and we were no longer able to use it. Yet our mental facility didn't have the budget to buy all the copies for all of our computers, only a few.

Thus my co-workers and I became interested in alternative sources of software. One of the writing programs that we used was the predecessor of OpenOffice and not very good. And because of the high prices charged for an inferior product (Word compared to WordPerfect) at the time, we looked to finding an alternative Operating System to Microsoft products. I remember investigating Red Hat distribution of Red Hat Linux at the time. But

at the time it was not up to par with Microsoft's Windows 95.

When I joined OMUG, I was delighted to find that there was a Linux SIG. "Linux" is a term for many operating systems (OS) using the Linux "kernel" or "heart" or "engine." The kernel "drives" the system like a car engine powers a car. Conrad Schuler, one of the leaders of the Linux SIG was promoting SUSE, a "distribution" of Linux which originally came from Germany. Paul Braget, another leader, liked Ubuntu. When joined, I found I was totally lost. However, I stuck it out and some of the understanding and data is beginning to stick to the walls of my mind.

I listened, worked on the Linux programs on the computers in the Senior Center and became convinced that I wanted to try it out for myself. I like laptops. I can grab a computer and move it to a room or across the country easily. In this country all computers are Microsoft friendly but only some brands and some models of the other brands such as Dell are Linux-compatible.

I decided after some research to take a chance on a new Toshiba Qosmio. We had difficulty installing SUSE and because of inexperience it became corrupted. However, it was easier to install Ubuntu.

"Ubuntu" is a South African word which means, "I am because you are." I am writing this article because you are here, OMUG. I am using Ubuntu because a lot of people around the world contribute to its innovation, maintenance, and security. By the way, the Toshiba came with Windows Vista Home Edition. I only use it for QuickBooks; that is, I can boot into Vista when I need to, but use Ubuntu most of the time.

I use Ubuntu to surf the web because it has a very secure hard kernel. It is almost impossible to attack a Linux based machine because all the software programs are attached to the outside of the kernel. At most a particular program will become dysfunctional but not the operating system. For this reason about 90 percent of the servers around the world use Linux based software. Some servers are so reliable that service is minimal.

The Linux kernel is simple, clean and fast, allowing me to turn it on and be on the web in a fraction of the time required by my Windows

machine. My web browser is FireFox, an excellent free program.

I am writing this article with OpenOffice because it is another excellent writing program that is on a par with Microsoft Office. And it is a free program also. I must admit that Microsoft's "Access" program is superior to OpenOffice's "Data."

All the above programs are "open source" which means that you can obtain them for free by a download, or on DVD or CD for a nominal charge. However, there are also companies that will supply a person with disks, manuals and service contract just like Microsoft. But everyone is bound by the EULA of the "open source" contract, including companies and also users like me. For instance anyone who comes up with a change or improvement must make it available to any one else for free.

So this is why I like Ubuntu, Firefox, and OpenOffice. I also use other features such as watching movies, burning DVD's, and WiFi—and they work well. Now I want to edit and burn a home made movie. Plus Ubuntu has an extensive Internet support system. New programs and updates are coming out all the time. It is an example of a technology rising up from the grassroots rather than from the top down.

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Product Review:

Roxio Easy Media Creator Suite

(v.10)

by John Roy

President, The PC Users Group of Connecticut

Roxio, a division and brand of Sonic Solutions, has been a leader in burning software for many years. I personally have used the product since it was distributed by Adaptec several years ago. The CD/DVD burning software today far exceeds the basic functions that existed in those early days. Roxio Easy Media Creator (EMC) will accomplish so much more than the basic burning tasks and is now a full featured suite.

Doing this review has allowed me to explore and appreciate the many applications within this suite. Because EMC is so comprehensive I will provide an

overview in this article but follow up with more details in future issues of our newsletter.

Before I start boasting about some of these neat applications I must discuss some installation issues. The product would not install on my primary computer! After trying several times to install under various scenarios I checked for possible solutions using Roxio's web product support and also their user forum. None of those sources provided any clues so I connected with technical phone support. I was quite surprised that the wait time was very small and the technician was professional and extremely competent. Unfortunately after almost two hours of phone support the problem was not solved.

The tech support effort involved major system modifications including deletion of all files associated with my original EMC version 9, my Nero burner software, a complete registry purge line by line of anything remotely associated with or influenced by Roxio software, removal of all anti-virus software and firewalls, elimination of all startup files except system essentials and running registry clean utilities. Nothing worked! A trouble report was left open but I never received any further calls. In their users forum I did find one other person with the exact same problem and no solution.

Fortunately I have a couple of other computers at my house so I tried installing the version 10 on both an older desktop and on my primary laptop system. The install went smoothly on both of those systems. So until I get a chance to rebuild my primary desktop I won't know if I can ever use the latest version on it. On a side note before trying to install EMC version 10 I had version 9 successfully working. After all the system changes I could no longer load my EMC version 9. So now I struggled with that problem for a few days. Once again not finding any online solutions I contacted a phone support tech who was able to direct me to a download utility that cleared the problem and allowed me once again install version 9.

While the above debacle was frustrating don't let it deter you from considering the purchase of this capable applications suite. So let's look at why you should consider owning this product.

Once you get past the install you will see a super clean interface with applications divided into seven primary areas; Audio, Data and Backup, Copy, Media

and Devices, Photo, Video, and Tools. Each application provides another set of choices. Audio has (13), Data and Backup (5), Copy (5) Media and Devices (2), Photo (9), Video (11), and Tools (8). Now that is a huge chest of applications at your disposal. If you were to purchase each primary application separately it would cost you a few hundred dollars. This package sells for about \$100 but if you watch for sales you can buy it for much less.

When you think of Roxio and burning software the primary reason most people purchase the product is for those tools. The Copy and Data and Backup modules take care of those basic requirements along with some other goodies. For anyone familiar with an older version, you will still find the original Creator Classic still there but spruced up. That old standby is quite the workhorse. You select the type and size of disc you want to burn and it will keep you updated on available space as you move files or folders you want to burn into a holding area. Once your files and folders are selected you can burn your CD/DVD directly or make an image for later burning. Of course you have advanced options to define the type of disc, speed, copies, etc. You can also make a bootable or multimedia disc and go directly to creating disc labels of your burn project.

The backup module provides capability to be selective of the files you want backed up or restored and at what frequency. If you want more powerful options then you will be provided an upgrade link. A range of backup devices and media including Blu-ray discs and HD DVD discs are supported. Large files can be automatically spanned across multiple discs as required.

The Audio module provides thirteen selections that cover just about everything you could possibly want to do with audio. All the expected tools are there to rip CD's into MP3 files or create audio CDs from other formats. You can make custom CD's with fades, effects and mixing. Tools are there to edit song information and to do batch conversions to formats of your choice. One module allows you to instantly capture any audio playing on your computer, including streaming radio. There is one utility "Convert LPs and Tapes" that I was especially enthused about. At our meeting we have had the question of how to convert LPs and Tapes asked

many times in the past. While there are several methods to accomplish this, Roxio EMC has made it easy and crystal clear with this application. So for those of you that have a desire to do this you should give Roxio EMC serious consideration.

The Photo application contains a full featured photo suite with powerful editing, effects and touchup tools. It is complete with all the ancillary things you want to do with photos such as creating slideshows, panoramas, albums, greeting cards, calendars and layout templates. You can quickly optimize a group of photos for sending email.

The Video application is another full featured suite for importing, editing, customizing and exporting video into various formats. Included is CinePlayer a full featured video player. The features are similar to those found in Pinnacle Studio or Adobe Premier. While some of Roxio EMC tools are not as robust as the leaders you will find some tools not available in the others. The fact that it may not be as flexible as the stand alone programs it will be easier for the novice. If you are a true video buff then even if you own other video software you would also want to have EMC in your software chest.

The smallest stand alone module is Media Manager that enables users to easily browse, manage, share and protect their media files. The final application module is Tools. This module is used for creating disc labels, obtaining drive information, erasing discs, creating virtual disc drives and a few other assorted utilities. Roxio EMC is Vista compatible and includes gadgets for doing things directly from the desktop.

I'm certain most computer users will find enough applications on Roxio Easy Media Creator to make the investment worthwhile. If this review has captured your interest pay a visit to Roxio's website at <http://www.roxio.com/>. They have some great videos that will demonstrate these neat features

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"Computune-up"

by Berry F. Phillips

Computer Club of Oklahoma City

Do you want your computer to run faster and increase your productivity? Of course; if you

have major problems, you will need to contact your manufacturer and/or professional technical support. Many of those costly major problems can be prevented by doing “computune-ups” yourself. Yes, you can do it even without being a computer geek! My thanks to Microsoft for some of the information in this article.

“Computune-up” (Software)

1. Clean up your desktop! If you have not used a program for a year or one that you never use that came bundled with your system why not delete it. You will get more space on your hard drive in return.
2. Clean up your system tray to the left of time on your Taskbar! When you remove icons from your system tray that you rarely use, it will speed up your system since your computer has to locate those programs whenever you boot up. I love a little freeware program called Code Stuff Starter that shows you what is running and lets you easily turn those programs on or off.
3. Defragment your computer and your registry which will make your system run faster by consolidating fragments on your hard drive and registry. I use freeware programs like Smart Defrag and Aus Logics Registry Defrag and there are others available on the Internet.
4. Check your memory. The more programs you have running the more demand on your system memory (RAM). Adding more memory to your system will increase speed and is very easy to do without paying for expensive technical support. You can do it with minimal instruction or have a technically-oriented friend or club member do it since it only takes a few minutes to replace.
5. Keep your operating system updated and run utilities weekly! I strongly suggest you download needed freeware software for your system from “46 best ever freeware programs” thoroughly tested and rated with commentary.

“Computune-up” (Hardware)

1. Make sure your computer is unplugged before cleaning and not plugged in until your system is dry after cleaning!
2. Make sure you have the following tools available: a screwdriver, can of compressed air (available from a computer store), cotton swabs (not balls),

rubbing alcohol, paper towels or anti-static cloths (available from a computer store), and water.

3. Clean the inside of your computer case! Using a screwdriver remove the side of the case opposite your motherboard. Touch as little as possible inside the computer, keeping fingers away from cards and cords due to static electricity. Blow air around all the components and along the bottom of the case, keeping the nozzle four inches away from your machine. Blow air into the power supply and into the fan from the back of your computer case. Blow air into the floppy disk and CD drives. Wipe the inside cover with a lightly moistened cloth before replacing it using your screwdriver. Clean every three months if your computer is on the floor or an especially dirty environment. Clean approximately every six to eight months in a normal environment.
4. Clean the outside of the case! Run a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol around all the openings on the back of your case giving them one swipe with a dampened swab and one with a dry swab. Clean the remaining outside of your system. Do this whenever you clean the inside of your system.
5. Clean the mouse by taking out the screws and going inside with an alcohol swab. If there is a rubber ball, clean it with water, and let it dry. Then clean the outside of the mouse. Many mouse problems are simply caused by a dirty mouse.
6. Clean the keyboard! Turn it upside down and gently shake it and most of the crumbs and dust will fall out. Blow air in and around the keys. Take an alcohol dampened cotton swab and clean the top and sides of the keys. Do this monthly; your keyboard gets very dirty and can even spread germs. If you have a laptop, follow the same procedure but take extra care with your machine.
7. Clean the monitor with a moistened paper towel or a soft lint-free cloth. (You can purchase monitor cleaning products from a computer store). Don’t spray liquid directly on the screen but spray on the cloth. Wipe the screen gently to remove dust and fingerprints. (Never touch the back of the monitor). I suggest you purchase a special cleaning solution from a computer store for laptop computers.

If you have finished your “computune-up,” you are on your way to being transformed into a computer geek! Do not be alarmed for the “geeks shall inherit the earth”! Bill Gates, chief geek and founder of Microsoft Corporation, has already made it; he is the role model for the rest of us!

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Media Notes

by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

Windows XP Service Pack 3

Windows XP users can now download Windows XP Service Pack 3 (SP3) via Windows Update or the Microsoft Download Center, but don't do it yet.

Windows XP SP3 includes all previously released updates for the operating system, in addition to a small number of new updates. It will not significantly change the Windows XP experience. Let me amend that: unless you are running Symantec's Norton Internet Security Suite or PC Tool's Spyware Doctor or an HP Athlon powered computer. These three segments of computer users are finding a boat-load of problems that started when they installed SP3.

It has taken Microsoft four years to ship another service pack for Windows XP. After all that time, you might think that they'd get it right. However, even as SP3 went to RTM, problems cropped up with SP3, including problems that it caused with Microsoft's own Dynamics line of software.

With the practically unlimited hardware and software combinations that are out there, you can't necessarily blame Microsoft if things break when they ship something as significant as a service pack. Even simple patches and fixes can sometimes break things. That's why it's often a good idea not to configure Automatic Updates on Windows software. You need to have a strategy in place to deal with updates and to test them in advance.

My advice—wait a while. Fixes are on the way. I would even suggest that you don't allow the SP3 automatic update take place. It is scheduled to

happen during Microsoft's Update Tuesday this month. Heads up people!

Microsoft fixes critical holes in Windows, Word, Publisher—May's Update Tuesday revealed that Microsoft issued security patches that plugged critical holes in Microsoft Word and Publisher and a vulnerability in Windows for which a zero-day exploit has been available for weeks.

Zero-day exploits are considered particularly dangerous. While most security holes are plugged before an exploit is released, computers running vulnerable software for which there is a zero-day exploit already released are open to attack until the patch is available.

The critical Windows vulnerability was discovered in Microsoft Jet Database Engine 4.0. It allows an attacker to take complete control of an affected system, including installing malicious programs and modifying data.

Microsoft has acknowledged that people have been taking advantage of this vulnerability to compromise machines, said Amol Sarwate, manager of the vulnerability research lab at Qualys, which offers security as a service to corporations.

The other critical patches Microsoft released plug a hole in Microsoft Word and two holes in Microsoft Publisher that could allow attackers to remotely run code on an affected machine if the user were to open a specially crafted Word or Publisher file.

And Microsoft also fixed two holes rated “moderate” that would allow an attacker to shut down and restart the Microsoft Malware Protection Engine used in the company's security products including Windows Live OneCare and Windows Defender.

Missing from the patches was a fix for a vulnerability in the core Windows operating system for which there has been a zero-day exploit available for nearly a month, said Sarwate. That unpatched vulnerability allows local users to escalate their privileges on a system and gain more access to resources and data. “It may look harmless,” Sarwate says, but it not only gives insiders more control than they should have, but could enable outsiders to use the insider's escalated privileges to do damage.

“We were hoping to see a fix for that zero-day as well,” he said.

HP ships USB sticks with malware—

Hewlett-Packard has released a batch of USB keys for numerous ProLiant server models which contain malware that could allow an attacker to take over an infected system.

The worms contained on the 256KB and 1GB USB drives have been identified as W32.Fakerecy and W32.SillyFDC. The worms spread by copying themselves to removable or mapped drives and affect systems running Windows 98, Windows 95, Windows XP, Windows Me, Windows NT and Windows 2000, according to AusCERT.

HP's Software Security Response Team issued a warning to AusCERT this week after discovering the worms on the USB drives and has also provided a list of affected servers to the security response organization.

To find out whether a drive is infected, HP recommends inserting it into a system with up-to-date antivirus software. Systems with up-to-date antivirus should be protected from the threat, according to HP.

However, the threat risk from the worms is considered to be low. "This is probably not going to escalate into a widespread epidemic," Nishad Herath, senior research scientist at McAfee Avert Labs, told ZDNet.com.au. "But I would most definitely urge users to perform a virus scan of any media—including any new blank drives—you receive from vendors prior to installing/using them as slip-ups like this have been known to happen in the past."

HP claims the worm-infected USBs will have only affected a small number of customers.

"HP takes all quality issues very seriously. Because the keys involved are used to install optional floppy-disk drives, this only affects the USB Floppy Drive Key kit which is a very low volume option and impacts a very small percentage of our ProLiant customer base. We've determined root cause and are fully confident that we have resolved this event. To date, no customers have reported this issue," a spokesperson for HP told ZDNet.com.au.

HP has provided an advisory page for customers with affected USB keys. To find out whether a drive is infected, HP recommends inserting it into a system with up-to-date antivirus software. Systems

with up-to-date antivirus should be protected from the threat, according to HP. John Bambenek, a researcher at the security organization Sans Internet Storm Center, has said that because the infected USBs only affect ProLiant servers, a targeted attack cannot be ruled out.

Don't let startup stuff slow you down

It seems like every program you install these days wants to start along with Windows. These auto-start apps are usually represented by an icon in your system tray (the area near your clock). Even if your system has oodles of memory, these little doodads can slow you down without offering any real value.

An excellent tool for finding what gizmos are starting up each time you log into Windows is Autoruns, available from Microsoft (originally from Sysinternals). Simply uncheck the item to disable it from starting, or select an entry and delete it to effect a more permanent removal.

If you can't figure out what a particular startup app does, right-click its entry in the Autoruns window and choose Search Online. This performs a Google search (rather than a Live search, which you might expect). Scour the results to find out whether the program has a legitimate reason for needing to run all the time.

If the Web search isn't helpful in rooting out a program's purpose, check the list of common startup applications to figure out what's getting started with Windows.

Finally, the free version of WinPatrol can warn you whenever a program attempts to add an item to your startup list.

Keep it clean

It makes no sense to hang onto useless junk files that Windows uses for its own purposes. Fortunately, Windows' own Disk Cleanup tool can clear out this system clutter.

Disk Cleanup also removes the outdated restore points created by System Restore that you no longer need. In the Disk Cleanup window, click the More Options tab. Under System Restore, click Clean up and confirm that you want to delete all but the current restore point.

Unfortunately, Disk Cleanup misses certain temp files. To make a little batch file that clears these folders, open Notepad and type the following:

del /s /q "C:\Documents and Settings\yourname\Local Settings\Temp*.*)"

Replace yourname with the name of the account you've logged into and adjust the drive letter or path as needed. Save the file with a .cmd or .bat extension (for example, killtemp.bat) and put the file or a shortcut to it in your Startup group (Start, All Programs, Startup). This way, it will run each time you log in to your Windows account.

Gates: Windows 7 won't be nearly as bad as Vista

Microsoft must spend some days gazing around in a stupor. The company continues to print money yet its most recent product launch of Vista fell on deaf ears. Microsoft of course wants money, but it also wants to be thought of as a leader in the software world, and with Vista it is definitely following ... but who it's following, nobody knows.

Now Bill Gates has declared that Windows 7, the next release of the operating system, won't be nearly as bad as Vista:

"We're hard at work, I would say, on the next version, which we call Windows 7. I'm very excited about the work being done there ... [which will require] lower power, take less memory [and] be more efficient."

Great! So...why buy Vista in the interim, which is by all accounts a memory and power hog, and is grossly inefficient? Customers seem to get Gates' logic, however, and have been buying Macs in droves which requires less power, less memory, is more efficient, and is a heck of a lot nicer to use. Thanks for the advice, Bill!

Charter's web monitoring draws intervention From capitol hill

Two prominent members of the U.S. Congress are asking Charter Communications to hold off on its plan to monitor its customers' Web browsing and deliver relevant advertisements.

In a letter to Charter chief executive Neil Smit, Reps. Ed Markey and Joe Barton say the monitoring plan may violate federal privacy laws and ask that the company "not move forward" until "we have an opportunity to discuss" it. Markey is the Democratic chairman of a House Internet subcommittee and

Barton is the senior Republican on the House Energy and Commerce committee.

Charter did not immediately respond to questions about whether it would delay its monitoring-and-advertising plans as a result of the letter. Although Markey and Barton have no legal authority to order a halt, they could make life difficult for Charter by convening hearings and lambasting the company for alleged privacy violations.

Charter is planning a trial of what it calls an "anonymized" ad-delivery system for its customers, who are able to opt-out by setting cookies. In an interview with us on Thursday, a Charter executive said hardware from NebuAd would be placed on the company's network and allowed to monitor what URLs its customers visited.

The letter from Markey and Barton says that federal law regulating cable TV providers—Charter is the third-largest in the United States—may restrict its ability to monitor customers' activities with the intent of serving up more relevant advertisements. In other words, they argue that an opt-in mechanism is necessary instead of an opt-out one.

That section of federal law, 47 USC 551, says: "A cable operator shall not use the cable system to collect personally identifiable information concerning any subscriber without the prior written or electronic consent of the subscriber concerned." Charter has sent notices to customers who may be affected once the trial period begins, but a mere notification (that may never be seen) may not amount to actual consent.

Marc Rotenberg, director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center in Washington, D.C., says there's an even better argument that Charter would violate federal wiretapping laws because it wouldn't have obtained legally-valid consent from all customers. "I'm sure Charter will argue consent (was obtained)," Rotenberg said. "But I think they'll run into a very real problem in saying that people can grant consent to open-ended snooping on their communications when Congress has given broad privacy protections."

Real or Fake?

I'm sure most are aware of the fake PayPal\ eBay messages saying click on link to enter security details etc., etc.; a few may of even come across ones from banks claiming similar things. Well here is a tool I

just came across the other day that looks like “a must have” tool in everyone’s arsenal. It works in web mail and in most mail clients that I’m aware of, but being new to me I couldn’t swear there may be something it won’t work with, but for the vast majority it will cover you, and it’s very simple, just like site adviser. It has a traffic light style presentation; it takes no skill to use it so it’s fantastic for beginners as well.

This tool is a must have if you depend on eBay\PayPal not to mention other official bodies who may deal with sensitive details to do with you like banks. It doesn’t cover all of them but it covers what appears to be the main ones that put you at most risk. It will not catch emails from Joe Blogs, so it won’t protect you from the unknown risk, but it will tell you about the ones that can do the most damage, for the main part anyway. My understanding is more company’s are signing up all the time to this so it can only get better, and most importantly for most is the price, well, it comes with everyone’s favorite price tag of free. Yep, totally free to get\use so you have no excuse to not give yourself a very useful piece of protection, especially for the less experienced as it needs no skill to use and will protect them from themselves spotting the fakes when they may not, so get it now.

ICONIX <http://www.iconix.com/index.php>

Look out, Apple TV: The \$100 Netflix Player has arrived.

The Netflix box is finally a reality.

The Netflix Player by Roku is the first product that allows subscribers to have movies and TV shows from the service’s Instant Viewing feature (aka “Watch Now”) to be streamed directly to their TV screen. Previously, Instant Viewing was available only to Windows PC users through the Internet Explorer browser. With the release of the Netflix Player, subscribers need only have a wired or wireless broadband connection to access the entire Instant Viewing catalog through their TV.

Setup is simple, and—if you’ve got a solid broadband connection—picture quality is acceptable and streaming performance was almost entirely lag-free.

Those looking for the HD video quality and polished interface of Apple TV and Vudu will be

disappointed. The Netflix Player is strictly bare-bones—you’re not intended to do anything more than just dive in and watch the movies and TV shows you’ve already queued up via your online Netflix account. The biggest drawback—for now at least—is the dearth of quality content. Thanks to Hollywood’s byzantine licensing system, not even 10% of Netflix’s 100,000-plus library of titles is available for streaming to the Player. That means, for now, that only two of Netflix’s top 100 DVDs are available for streaming: *March of the Penguins* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

That said, the Netflix Player has a major trump card in terms of price: it retails for \$100, and delivers unlimited streaming to any Netflix subscriber on the \$8.95 plan or above. That’s a major departure from Apple TV, Vudu, Xbox Live Marketplace, and Amazon Unbox, all of which offer only pay-per-view options, including download-to-own videos and rentals with tight viewing windows (e.g. rental titles must be completely viewed within 24 hours).

For the time being, Roku’s affordable box is the only Netflix hardware on the market. However, Netflix has reaffirmed that three other hardware partners are scheduled to release competing products by year’s end. (One is confirmed to be LG; the others have yet to be named.) It’s likely that the subsequent players will be more upscale products—such as a Blu-ray or DVD player—that include Netflix playback as a value-added feature rather than the main attraction. In the meantime, the Roku solution offers a quick, easy, and affordable way to watch a limited selection of Netflix videos on your TV.

From the June 2008 issue of The Umbrella Online, The monthly newsletter of the Hampton Roads Virginia computing community.

Bookmarks Page

by Hank Pearson

Treasurer and Webmaster, Arizona Association for Computer Information, inc.

Wouldn’t it be nice if you could view a searchable webpage of bookmarks for your favorite websites? You can, but why?

Find Bookmarks with Forgotten Names

One reason to view your bookmarks as a webpage (as an alternative to looking in a menu) is to be able

to find sites when you can't remember the first word in the name.

Let's say you have a Firefox bookmark named Carbonite Online Backup, and you can't remember Carbonite but you know you are looking for the word Backup. On your Bookmarks page (you will soon learn how to view), you can easily search for Backup.

You are using Firefox, aren't you? If you haven't discovered Firefox, download it from Mozilla (<http://mozilla.com>). It's free, fast, and secure. Make Firefox your default browser.

View Bookmark Descriptions and Tags

Another reason for a bookmarks page is to give you plenty of room to view (and find) descriptions of your bookmarks. You will learn how to add tags to improve your searches.

Zoom In and Out

A third reason to display your bookmarks on a webpage is to allow you to zoom the text in and out so you can see it clearly. To zoom any webpage, press Ctrl+Plus or Ctrl+Minus, using the numeric keypad.

DIY for Fun and Learning

So, how do you display your bookmarks as a webpage? You could download a tool to do the work for you, or download a tool to search bookmarks. But it's easy enough to DIY (Do It Yourself). It's interesting, fun, and educational. Are you just using your computer to perform certain tasks, or do you also enjoy learning by experimenting? If you like to learn, this tip is for you.

Find the Bookmarks File

You don't need to create a bookmarks webpage. It already exists on your own hard drive! The name of the file is simply bookmarks.html. Press Win+F to find it. (While holding down the Windows key (next to Alt), press F, for Find.) In the left window pane, click 'All Files and Folders'. In 'All or part of the file name', type 'bookmarks.html' (without quotes). Click Search.

If you get multiple results, it's easy to determine which bookmarks .html file to use. It's the newest one. In the View menu (of your Search Results window), click Details. In the right window pane, click the Date Modified column header (to sort the list). The file you are interested in has the newest

date and time (for a file with the Type shown as Firefox Document).

Bookmark the Bookmarks File

Double-click that newest bookmarks.html Firefox Document to open it in Firefox. Press Ctrl+D to bookmark the bookmarks.html file. In the Name field, insert a hyphen (-) at the beginning (to name the bookmark '-Bookmarks'), so this new bookmark will appear at the top of the list.

Now, with your Bookmarks page displayed, press F5 to refresh the view. (F5 is a common shortcut key for Refresh.) Surprise? The new -Bookmarks bookmark is at the bottom—not the top. Let's address that. (This is Firefox 2.0.0.11. Future versions might vary.)

Create Another Top Bookmark

First, create another bookmark that will be displayed at the top. For example, open Google.com, press Ctrl+D, and name the bookmark -Google (starting with a hyphen).

Sort Your Bookmarks

Now, in the Bookmarks menu, right click any bookmark, and click Sort by Name. Look in the Bookmarks menu to confirm that the bookmarks are indeed sorted. Note the two bookmarks that begin with hyphen (-) at the top of the menu.

Look at your Bookmarks page again, and press F5 to Refresh. The new bookmarks are still at the bottom.

Rearrange Your Bookmarks

To force Firefox to rearrange your bookmarks page, move a bookmark in the menu. In the Bookmarks menu, drag, for example, either new bookmark that starts with a hyphen up or down to precede or follow the other bookmark that starts with a hyphen. (Having two hyphen-prefixed bookmarks lets you rearrange those two at the top without rearranging the other bookmarks.) Press Escape to close the menu.

Refresh your Bookmarks page with F5. The bookmarks on the webpage are now arranged as shown in the Bookmarks menu. (Do you need to refresh three times? No, we simply demonstrated that the bookmarks.html file is rearranged when you move a bookmark in the menu.)

Finding Bookmarks on the Page

When you are viewing your Bookmarks webpage, press Ctrl+F for Find. Type Backup, for example, and press Escape (to close the Find toolbar). To find the next occurrence of Backup, press F3. (F3 is a common shortcut key for Find Again.) When you find the desired bookmark (link), click it (or Ctrl+click to open the site in a new tab). (Or press Enter, or Ctrl+Enter to open the site in a new tab.)

Add Descriptions and Tags

To add or change descriptions of your bookmarks, in the Bookmarks menu, right-click the bookmark you want to edit, and click Properties. In the Description field, type anything (including your own tags) that might help you find your bookmark and remember what it is for. After clicking OK and pressing F5 (for Refresh), you will see your new Description in the Bookmarks page.

Make Changes through the Menu

Now that you know where bookmarks.html is located, you might be tempted to edit it directly with a text editor. Mozilla warns that it is automatically generated, so do not edit it, as your changes would be lost. Make your changes through the Bookmarks menu.

Displaying your Bookmarks as a webpage is a start in discovering many more tips and tricks related to Firefox.

Hank Pearson is the Treasurer and Webmaster for ASCIi (www.asciigroup.org). He is a long-time member who frequently writes articles for the group's newsletter, and has served as President, Secretary, Newsletter Editor, and Presentations Coordinator. This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups. All other uses require the permission of the author (hank.pearson(at)asciigroup.org).

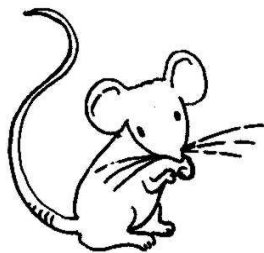
Buying a Mouse

More Important than You Might Think

By Vinny La Bash

Member and Contributing Columnist, Sarasota PCUG, FL

The average computer user recognizes how important the mouse is to getting things done. Mice have been



part of the computer scene for over twenty years and with rare exceptions are simple devices to operate and control. That doesn't mean that people who use them are necessarily familiar with all their features and functions. That's not as bad as it may sound. Most automobile drivers don't have a clue how the internal combustion engine inside their auto engine works. Yet they usually manage to drive from one place to another without incident.

Selecting a mouse is much simpler than choosing an automobile, but there are things you should know before laying out money for a device that if not properly designed, may result not only in poor computer performance, but may cause you injury.

The mouse may be the most common of the tracking technologies used in modern computers, but it is not the only one. There are trackballs, touch pads, and for ThinkPad users, track points. They all have their advantages and drawbacks. We will focus on the mouse.

Mechanical mice, those with the rolling balls on the underside, are obsolete. They have a tendency to gather debris on the underside, and require cleaning. Moving parts are their most serious weak spot because they will break down sooner than devices that rely on other technologies.

Newer optical mice suffer no such defects. They generate a beam of light that combines with an optical sensor providing a screen pointer that is well suited for meticulous graphics or serious game playing. No moving parts mean less maintenance and lighter weight. Optical mice will work on any smooth surface; a mouse pad is unnecessary.

Look for a mouse with a USB connection. It will probably be difficult to buy a mouse that does not have this type of connection today. Make sure it is compatible with USB 2. The mouse is not considered a high speed device so this caution may be unnecessary.

You may want a wireless mouse for no other reason than to reduce desktop clutter. There are many generic wireless mice on the market that will perform adequately, but doing this on the cheap comes with a price. You will have a mouse that requires AAA batteries. Save your pennies and get one with an integrated rechargeable battery. High end wireless mice include receivers that double as

battery chargers, so your mouse will never suddenly expire in the middle of an important project.

Most rodents on the market today feature at least two buttons and a scroll wheel. The right button is used mainly for bringing up menus or lists of options. The left hand button activates functions or commands. The scroll wheel, as its name implies, is used to scroll up and down screens. Sometimes the wheel can function as a third button activating instructions. Advanced scroll wheel functions allow left to right scrolling which can be very useful in wide spreadsheets or large graphics. Used in conjunction with the keyboard, the scroll wheel can zoom in and out of some applications, and can be used to make text appear larger.

Mice do not come in a one-size-fits-all product. Enlightened companies such as Logitech manufacture mice that are specifically contoured to fit a wide variety of hand sizes. Logitech was among the very first companies to recognize that different sized people have different sized hands. Choose a mouse that is ergonomically designed to fit your individual hand size. This will go a long way to reduce the probability of developing carpal tunnel syndrome or some other crippling ailment.

A mouse is a simple device by computer standards, yet it seldom gets the attention it deserves. Take the time to find a good ergonomically designed mouse that suits the physical characteristics of your hand along with suitable options for your personal computing preferences. Productivity and good health are not mutually exclusive.

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Google Offers Free Medical Records Service

by Ira Wilsker

APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio and TV Show Host

Google recently opened for free public access the beta version of its “Google Health” service at www.google.com/health. This service offers users access to a comprehensive user created database where the user can selectively store

medical records. In addition to the storage of personal medical records, Google Health also allows for the importation of medical and prescription records from a variety of services, and the voluntary exportation of medical records to several diagnostic services. Google Health allows user approved physicians, hospitals, pharmacists, and other healthcare services to access the medical records.

To open a free account at Google Health requires registration; users with existing Google accounts may use their existing usernames and passwords for access. Once registered, opening the website at google.com/health offers the users an intuitive menu. The primary links in the center column of the page are:

“Add to this Google Health profile (Learn about your health issues and find helpful resources)”;
“Import medical records (Copy and get automatic updates of your records)”;
“Explore online health services (Find online tools for managing your health)”;
and “Find a doctor (Search by name, location, and specialty).” On the left column of the opening page are hyperlinks to personal profile information, and the right column displays a profile summary.

Clicking on “Add to this Google Health profile” opens a menu with the headings “Conditions,” “Medications,” “Allergies,” “Procedures,” “Test results,” and “Immunizations.” Under “Conditions” a condition or symptom can be entered in the search box, or the user can click on any condition in a lengthy alphabetical list to “Add” that condition to the user’s profile. Many of the conditions have a “Reference” link that will provide more information on the condition, as well as any symptoms and treatments. The “Medications” heading allows the users to enter both prescription and non-prescription medications, vitamins and minerals, as well as herbal products. The search box displays selections as the product name is typed, or an alphabetical directory can be accessed. “Allergies,” “Procedures,” “Test results,” and “Immunizations” are entered in the same manner as “Medications” and “Conditions,” with a search box or alphabetical menu.

The main page selection “Import medical records” allows the user to securely import medical and prescription records from a variety of sources,

including clinics, laboratories, and pharmacies. Included on the currently short list of such resources are Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Cleveland Clinic, CVS Minute Clinics, Quest Diagnostics, Medco, RX America, Longs Drugs, and Walgreen's. It is clear in reading about the service that this small listing is in its infancy, as Google Health is trying to sign up additional partners. To experiment with importing data, I clicked on the link for the prescription manager Medco, which is utilized by my health insurance plan. Clicking on the "Link to profile" icon under the Medco listing opened the secure Medco website where I had to enter the username and password I use at Medco. Seconds after approving the transfer of my prescription history, it appeared on my Google Health profile under "Medications". The information transferred to Google Health by Medco was not just the prescriptions I ordered from Medco, but also recent prescriptions I filled at local pharmacies where insurance was claimed. Medco can automatically update my profile as new prescriptions are entered and filled. Items filled at local pharmacies under their respective \$4 or \$5 generic program, where no insurance was filed, did not appear on the Medco list.

The menu item "Explore online health services" opens a list of over a dozen services that offer online personal health services. These health services which can be linked to Google Health and utilize the information provided to Google Health (but only with the express consent of the user!) include such well known services as the Cleveland Clinic, the American Heart Association "Heart Attack Risk Calculator," "My CareTeam-Diabetes" diabetes management system (requires monthly or annual subscription), and several other services. While several of these personalized services are free, others are fee based. Most of the services listed require some form of registration in order to utilize those services and integrate them with the users' Google health information.

The "Find a doctor" link opens a simple pair of search boxes, the first (left) of which is a directory of specialties, and the second box (on the right) is where the user can enter a zip code, city, or other information in order to generate a listing of

physicians, chiropractors, and specialists that meet the selected criteria. The listings provided included physician or practice name, address, and phone number, as well as links to the practice website (if any), driving directions from Google Maps, and a link to "Save to medical contacts."

Once information is entered, a personal profile is created, and several analyses are made by Google Health. One that may be critically important shows up in the left column on the main page with the label "Drug Interactions" with a red exclamation point if there is a potentially dangerous interaction between prescription and non prescription drugs, vitamins, and herbals. On my personal page there is one advisory about a synergetic effect between two of my medications that says "Discuss with your doctor soon" (this effect is desirable in my case), and another interaction between three of my non-prescription medications that is labeled with a red icon "Requires immediate attention" (I already checked, and it is OK in my case).

In its privacy statement (www.google.com/health/html/privacy.html), Google Health explains the confidentiality of the information entered, and how it will not be released or shared with any third party without the express consent of the user. By my personal choice, I would be willing to allow my personal physician (if he participated), as well as any specialists or hospitals that I visit, to access my information. It could be a great time saver to allow them to access my medical records online, rather than me having to complete hand written forms at each office I visit. Because of its inherent completeness, this online "Personal Health Record" (PHR) can also be a life saver by providing healthcare establishments instant access to medical histories, medications, and allergies. By having a voluntary service, such as Google Health, Microsoft's upcoming competing service "HealthVault," or "Revolution Health" (bankrolled by AOL's co-founder Steve Case), which can be securely accessed by health care providers, it becomes easy to create and maintain an accurate health profile for both the benefit of the user and healthcare providers approved for access by the user.

It should be noted that there are always security and privacy risks of posting sensitive information,

such as health records, online. It is quite conceivable that hackers could penetrate the security of any establishment or server that contains or has access to sensitive personal information. While I know that they are not perfect, I basically trust Google Health with my information.

While there are many other "PHR" systems and services in use, often administered by corporations for their employees, others are offered by health insurance companies, as well as some regional PHR services, Google Health has the reputation and distribution (as well as the deep pockets) to create and securely maintain such a system, and sign up participating partners who are willing to allow the sharing of medical records.

I knowingly volunteered to post my medical records on Google Health. I hope the project succeeds, and more local physicians, pharmacies, labs, and hospitals partner with the service. As more healthcare providers transition to purely digital medical records, it will become easier to securely share this vital information.

Websites:

<http://www.google.com/health>

<https://www.google.com/health/html/privacy.html>

<http://www.keyt.com/news/local/19222464.html>

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Make Your Wireless Network Safe

by Marjie Tucker

Editor, Mountain Computer User Group

Wireless networks are becoming more and more popular, but they do add some additional security risks. You need to spend a little extra time to ensure that your data and your identity are secure.

What are the Risks?

Because wireless networks don't require a cable between the computer and your Internet connection, it's relatively easy for someone else to use your Internet connection for free, to hijack your messages, or to sneak into your computer and view or steal your data.

So What Should I Do?

There are several important steps that you should follow to protect yourself and your computer:

1. Don't use a default password on your wireless equipment. Most networking devices are pre-configured by the manufacturer with a simple password to simplify the setup process. This is the password that allows you to access the router configuration. These "default" passwords are well known by anyone who has used a similar device and they are available online, eroding any protection they might have provided. Check the instructions that came with your device and immediately change the password.

Remember that the best passwords contain both upper and lowercase letters as well as numbers. And, always shy away from passwords that can be easily guessed by your friends—such as the names of your children or your dog.

Experts suggest using a poem to derive a "pass phrase." You merely take a line from a poem or poem title and use the first letter of each word. For example, using the poem "Mary had a little lamb" you would use the letters from the first line—Mary had a little lamb; its fleece was white as snow—mhallifwwas. Add at least one uppercase letter by capitalizing the M for Mary—Mhallifwwas. Next add at least one number by changing some of the letters to numbers, such as making the first letters for little and lamb into 1s. Now we have a phrase (Mha1lifwwas) that is reasonably secure and very easy to remember.

2. Restrict your network to only your computers. Every computer device has an embedded address on it called a media access control (MAC) address. Wireless access points and routers can be configured to exclude all other MAC addresses.
3. Encrypt the data on your network. Encryption prevents outsiders from viewing your transmissions. There are two methods of ensuring that your information is adequately protected, Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP) and Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA). Because WEP has several security issues associated with it, WPA is considered the more effective method, if it is supported by your equipment. However, since this is another area where a secure password is important, you should

- use a passphrase like I described in item #1.
4. Choose a unique SSID. Your equipment may have a default name that identifies your network, called an SSID. Be sure to setup a unique name and, if possible, avoid broadcasting that name. That will make it harder for outsiders to find your network.
 5. Install a firewall for your network. Microsoft Vista and XP both provide a firewall that is designed to protect your computer, but your network itself will be safer with its own firewall. A host based firewall is easy to obtain (some of them are free over the Internet) and can be installed directly onto your wireless device.
 6. Install and regularly update both anti-virus and anti-spyware software. You can keep attackers at bay with these protective programs. However, remember to update both of them on a regular basis. New viruses and spyware attacks are being developed daily; so your software must be updated to be effective.

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Save Data With Proper Windows Shut Down

Q. What is the reason for exiting out of programs before shutting down my computer? What happens if I don't?

A. Unless you enjoy living on the digital edge, exiting out of programs permits each program to shut down in a specifically designated manner, which includes saving your data and tidying up before closing. For example, many programs create temporary files while being used. These files are deleted during the course of the program's shut-down process. Some programs that contain a "Deleted Items" or "Trash" folder will empty these folders upon closing, as well.

If you fail to close programs before shutting down your PC, it may, under certain circumstances, result

in the loss of data, so it's always best to close programs first.

For the most part, Windows will automatically close open programs as part of the overall shut-down process. If Windows isn't shut down properly—for example, if you press the power button on your computer or (gasp!) yank the plug out of the wall—the next time you start your computer, it will run through a series of additional tests to verify the integrity of your data, as well as take a look around to be sure everything is functioning properly.

All things considered, it's best to shut down your system as Mr. Gates requests, via Start > Turn Off Computer. It only takes a couple of seconds, so better safe than sorry.

Q. Is there any maximum length for an email address?

A. A username (the first part of an address, before the @ sign) can be up to 64 characters, which is much less than the domain part, which can be 255 characters. That means the total maximum email address length can be a staggering 320 characters. (Why characters would be staggering is unknown.)

A 320-character email address would (320) be unbelievably annoying to anybody who has to manually type the address. To understand just how lengthy that would be, this question and answer, up to the parenthetical (320) in the previous sentence, is 320 characters.

Realistically, any email address that long is going to continually run into problems with mail servers and email programs. Even the Microsoft Access database only permits a maximum of 50 characters for an email field.

When it comes to Internet protocols, there is always a gap between what is permitted and what is supported. Shorter email addresses are desirable for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that they're easier to remember and use on a daily basis.

Q. How do I show more than one window when viewing Web sites?

A. The specific steps for opening additional windows to view multiple Web sites or pages depends on your browser, but generally, CTRL + N will open a new browser Window. When the new window opens, type in or paste a Web site address and press Enter to navigate to another Web page. You can continue to

press CTRL + N to open as many windows as you wish. If you're using Internet Explorer 7, Opera or the Firefox browser, press CTRL + T to open new tabs, within which you can navigate to additional sites.

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

Analytical Problems and Puzzles

The first thing you'll have to do upon entering this site is choose your challenge: Lateral Thinking or Logic Problems. I was stumped right there. Next, select a level of difficulty ranging from Very Easy to Very Difficult. These are excellent exercises for the brain, though my few remaining neurons didn't find the very easy ones to be particularly easy. Humbling? Yes; Easy? No. Here's an example of a "very easy" question: "How could a baby fall out of a twenty-story building onto the ground and live?" Hint: You'll find the answer in the Lateral Thinking section. www.folj.com

Hard-to-Find 800 Numbers

If you have ever tried to find an 800 number for a product, service or company, you know the meaning of frustration. This site provides a comprehensive and convenient reference for that purpose. Interestingly enough, the most frequently sought 800 numbers, are for Amazon, eBay, PayPal, Yahoo, and Microsoft. (I said it was interesting, not life-altering.) www.hardtofind800numbers.com

Plot-O-Matic

Have you every watched a movie and thought to yourself, "I can write a better movie than this piece of predictable fluff"? Well, you probably can. And it's easier than you might think. Just select the characters and plot elements you want to include in your movie, then click the "Lights! Camera! Action!" button. <http://tinyurl.com/6n42xd>

Mr. Modem's weekly newsletter delivers helpful computer tips, great Web sites and his personal answers to your questions! Trial offer: Subscribe online using Promo Code MODEM and receive one free month with your six-month subscription (28 issues!) To view a sample issue or subscribe, visit www.MrModem.com.



From The DealsGuy

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

Biometric Lock Update

I said I was going to return the Kwikset Biometric (fingerprint) Lock for my door because it was very unreliable, but I really liked it and wanted it to work better. I watched the video on their Web site and tried changing my finger scanning technique. It's working better for me and mostly opens on the first scan, but not always. However, my wife still has poor luck so she always uses her key, or waits for me to unlock it. Kwikset had a booth in a hardware show we worked so I asked a rep how to improve my wife's success getting the lock to work. He told me the lock can hold 50 different fingerprints, so, if I didn't need them all for other people, try scanning her finger several times in different ways with the chance that things might go better with more choices for the lock's computer to compare. He said it actually scans the skin makeup, not the fingerprint. It's worth a try!

For What It's Worth!

When I wrote up the USB Medical flash drive deal, my proof reader told me no medic in his right mind would plug it into their laptop, if they even had a laptop in the ambulance, because an unknown device might cause damage to the computer or entire system. It made sense so I talked to a few medics about that and there seems to be varied opinions. One told me that he only looks to see if the patient has a wallet card or medical necklace, and they would not plug anything unknown into their computer. Another medic told me that if she saw the USB device with the medical logo on it, she would indeed plug it into their laptop to see what it revealed, and that their computer system would not allow any damage. In spite of the varied opinions, most said they would want to see the USB drive's content because the patient's welfare was important. Some said good advice is to post a conspicuous note in your wallet about the device. Would anybody fake a serious injury just to damage computers?

Interesting Business

Bill Shook is the editor of a great newsletter for The Northwest Arkansas PC User Group and I really enjoy reading it each month. He seems to be the

editor for life and doesn't mind. I read a very interesting tidbit in their March issue that had me wondering if it was for real, or just an April fool joke, considering the month. NWA-PCUG's President, Wes Eckles Jr., starts the NL with the *President's Corner*, and in his March *Corner*, he included an item about "cheap broadband service available from Space Data Corporation by way of shoebox sized trans-mitter/receivers carried aloft via ten balloons launched each day by ranchers and dairy farmers." Sound fishy to you?

I surprised Bill with a phone call to inquire and he said he also wondered about that, but later was astonished to read it in their local newspaper. He even sent me an article taken from the *Wall St. Journal* about the company. Here's the URL to read that President's Corner <<http://pcgroup.nwark.com/pres--38.htm>> on their Web site and also the URL <<http://www.spacedata.net/news022008.htm>> to read this interesting article about Space Data Corporation, who also provides data services for truckers and oil companies. You'll find it fascinating.

The Boca Raton users group just lost their long-time ISP so maybe they should consider this method with various members launching the balloons each day. <G> That's another way to beat the big guys.

Anyway, I had a very interesting visit with Bill Shook and you'd be surprised to know he publishes most of his interesting newsletter using a DOS version of Word Perfect (5.1), but does use MS Windows XP every day. How many editors would you find sticking with their favorite DOS program yet today? I assume his philosophy is "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." Sort of like "in with the new," but not necessarily "out with the old." He said that like many other user groups, not many members write articles/reviews for their newsletter any more and is indebted to Judy Taylour for putting the APCUG editor articles together; as well as to APCUG's Ira Wilsker and his articles. He also thanked the "World Renowned DealsGuy."

What a Show!

I worked the Sapphire Show by SAP and it includes the SAP Users Group organization. <<http://www.sap.com/us/sapphire>> It was a large show in the West Concourse of the Orange County

Convention Center. All the SAP partners, along with Microsoft and their partners, were there. There was food set up all over the exhibit floor from the time the show opened in the AM to the close at 5 PM. No food concession stands were open in the building. The dock I worked at was one entry point for the food to be brought in so I managed to get a snack more often than I should have.

I visited the exhibit floor briefly twice and it was interesting. I was really curious about what the "War rooms" were that were associated with the IT section. Eric Clapton was the featured entertainer one evening and Tom Brokaw (Legendary ABC newsman) was the speaker another evening. This show usually comes here each year and is attended by people from around the world.

We also worked an IBM show, held at the Dolphin hotel on Disney property. They recently had a show that I didn't get to see, and now this one, which is their Tivoli Pulse08 show. <<http://www.ibm.com/tivoli/pulse08>> Lance Armstrong was one of the featured speakers and Hootie and the Blowfish entertained on the final evening. They packed a lot of exhibitors on the show floor; many had a "booth on a post" (a post with a shelf for equipment) that took up a very small area and the rest of the booths were still quite small. 4000 attendees were expected. IBM has another show there in two weeks; The IBM Rational Software Development Conference.

No Announcements With Discounts This Month

I did receive a number of announcements, but nothing new offering us a product discount. Those will be posted on my Web site. As you can see, my column is mostly personal items that I thought were of interest and I will include some freebies sent to me by readers. I have also seen these in columns published in a few UG newsletters. There are several good monthly "help" articles and I only get a few newsletters, but some of these columns are reprinted in newsletters I do receive. I hope you get some good from these suggestions.

How About Some Suggestions For Defragging!

This is a freeware defragging utility that was said to be a good product. I have not used it yet, but I'm passing it on to you. It is called SpeedDefrag 5.2.1 and is located at: <<http://www.majorgeeks.com/download4889.html>>. I'm not sure if it's Adware or

Freeware. There is also a free Windows Registry Cleaner there, but I don't know how it compares with cCleaner.

Another Free Defragger

Here is another free Defragging product. Go to <http://www.auslogics.com/en/software>. This item was in an article by Joe Shipley, owner of Smart Ideas, a computer consultant firm.

Auslogics also offers two other free products; Registry Defrag and System Information, which gives you data about your computer. There are also some products you must pay for.

Free Picture Resizer

Resize, shrink and crop your pictures for free. Resize photos before posting them on whatever Web site you choose. <http://www.picresize.com> Since I have not tried it, I can't offer much of a description. However, they do the resizing for you right there.

Analyze Everything in Your PC

Here's a free utility that can be used to analyze and even benchmark your computer. It offers information on hardware, including such things as motherboard, CMOS, processor, memory, the display adaptor, keyboard, mouse and all types of drivers. Also shows any peripheral devices connected (such as printer, multimedia devices) PCI/AGP buses, I/O ports, DMA channels, IRQs, Advanced Power Management, memory, resources, DirectX, Direct Draw, DirectSound and the list goes on.

They say its easy to use and offers an attractive interface. See <http://www.freshdevices.com/freshdiag.html> to download it. Before you decide, look at the pro and con remarks on download.com.

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



Society News

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Arpad Kovacs

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: A member upgraded AVG antivirus software and it seems to take up a lot of resources.

A: The latest version does provide more features and is active scanning. If you don't like it, you can go back to 7.5 as it is still supported. Antivir software is an option.

Q: A member using Roadrunner and Outlook. Outlook tries to send a message that a message is hung up.

A: It should not keep trying to send an error message. Try going into tools=> email accounts and then delete all bad accounts. By resetting the accounts it should work.

Q: When using Godzilla, he gets a message about a script not running. He has tried removing it but it is not really uninstalled.

A: There is a flaw in the uninstall of Godzilla. You must go to folders, unclick the hidden files to show all the files. Then, under documents and settings by your user name, settings, application data folder. Then delete all Godzilla files/folders. Also check under my programs folder. You can perform a search to find any others. Once all folders deleted, you will be able to proceed.

Q: When trying to download and print the club's newsletter, it appears in Photoshop.

A: This happens because he has PhotoShop as the default viewer for PDF files. It was suggested that the member uninstall/reinstall Adobe and then all should be well.

Q: Somehow his DVD and CDs are not appearing when Dragon is installed.

A: He needs to boot up into safe mode and delete the last two DLL files.

Q: He last installed Avent as a browser. When starting the browser, he gets an unwanted home page.

A: Try resetting your home page again. If it does not stay, you will need to clean it for viruses.

Q: Has anyone done the security tango? Is it pretty straight forward?

A: Go to Nick's website, there are precise directions.

Print off the directions and follow them. Dave Enright also has a file of layperson directions.

Q: How about the new iPhone?

A: It is going to be available in about a month.

Q: Has anyone tried out the XP SP3?

A: It takes a while to load. You can select the parts that you want to install. You can skip the automatic update feature. The last bug has been fixed. It does not force IE 7 to install. If it is already installed, and you then install SP3, you will not be able to uninstall IE. So far Arpad has seen no incompatibilities. There seems to be a better memory manager.

June Planning Meeting Notes

by John McMillan

Sally Springett hosted the June 3rd Planning meeting chaired by Arpad Kovacs. Bob Avery, Mike Lavelle, John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, and Steve Staub attended as did Sarah Naas, who will take over the secretarial duties in September.

Everyone agreed that Bill Statt did a great job discussing Linux. This was not a "How To Do It Talk" but rather a comparison of several distributions to give members a better understanding of alternative content, philosophies and target audiences. For more insight into Ubuntu, one of the popular distributions, members should attend Carl Schmidtman's SIG.

The next Society meeting is planned for June 10th to be held at the Brighton Library where Dave Wilson is expected to talk about Print Management. In July, Russ Cooper will talk about Genealogy. Plans are proceeding for the annual picnic scheduled for August 12 at the Canal Side Park in Fairport, a site we used several years ago. After a lengthy discussion, the committee elected to hold the cost to \$5.00 per person. That includes a choice of red or white hots, cheeseburgers or Italian sausage; rolls; condiments; and soda or coffee. Members are allowed to bring guests and attendees are required to bring a dish to pass. Those whose last names begin with A-I should bring snacks; J-R, salads; and S-Z, deserts. There will be a sign up list at the July meeting. To assure variety, members are requested to state what they plan to bring.

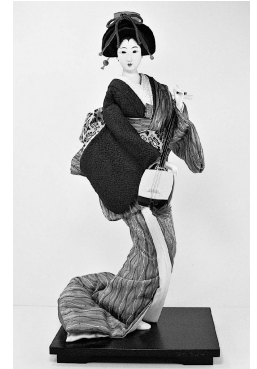
At the May Society meeting, Tom Thompson suggested an auction of non computer related items

instead of the customary flea market. He cited a sample gift that he planned to donate and agreed to accumulate a list of donations if members would call him at 387-8980 with details. Donors will receive a letter of thanks to support a tax deduction.

Here is a sample donation:

Japanese Geisha Presentation Doll

Plastic head and body with painted features, artificial hair wig, dressed in a quilted silk kimono, 17" tall. The doll was a gift (one of four series) from Fuji-Xerox in appreciation of support to launch the Xerox 5014 copier. Each series featured a different doll. There were 50 editions of each doll in the series, dressed with a similar, but unique, colorful kimono on every doll. In effect, each one of the 200 dolls is an original.



There was an extended review of some of the recent problems encountered in printing the Monitor. Arpad will continue to explore alternative hardware, looking for economical combinations that will consistently reduce the printing and assembly process to less than six hours.

It is hoped that the remaining two boxes of donated books can be cataloged on June 14th and that the listing will be available by July.

The Lighter Side

