

# MONITOR

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## Evaluating Your Anti-Spyware Program

by Vinny La Bash

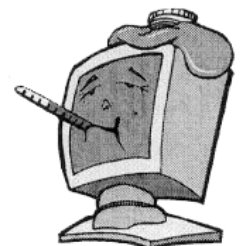
*Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.*

For many years the most acute danger to your computer was some kind of destructive virus. Today the danger has shifted from software that is programmed to destroy files, corrupt programs, and disable systems to something more insidious, and perhaps even more treacherous. This threat comes in two broad categories known as Spyware and Trojan Horses.

Spyware started out as a stealth program surreptitiously installed on your system to track your web surfing

habits. The developers of spyware didn't want to damage your computer. They wanted only to sell you something. That may be annoying, but there is nothing criminal about it.

A Trojan Horse is a program that pretends to be something other than what it really is. For example, a screensaver could be designed to install a program that will take over your system to forward spam to other machines. Trojan Horses have been used to initiate denial of service attacks, where the target such as a bank, credit card service or other high profile web site becomes so



saturated with external requests that it cannot respond to legitimate traffic.

When selecting an anti-spyware program, start out by selecting one with a comprehensive signatures database. The best anti-spyware programs have databases that can recognize more than 750,000 different kinds of spyware and Trojan Horse programs. Read the documentation or call the company. This is important.

The best signatures database won't do you any good if it isn't updated frequently. The bad guys never seem to rest. They release new poison daily. Don't buy any solutions that require manual updates. You have better things to do. Insist on automatic updates.

Another important capability is active monitoring of your system. Wouldn't you rather prevent a malicious program from installing rather than removing it after the damage has been done? Avoid any program that removes infections found only after conducting a manual scan. This probably means avoiding some otherwise adequate free programs. There's an old saying about getting what you pay for. The best anti-spyware programs prevent spyware and Trojan Horses from ever being installed on your system.

Go for a program that allows you to customize your scans. We don't all use our computers in the same way. Some people require more comprehensive scans than others. If you are constantly browsing the internet, you are likely to benefit from a daily scan that checks active memory, system folders, the registry, and all hard drives. If you rarely use the internet or find yourself visiting the same six sites over and over, a weekly scan may be all you need.

You should be able to schedule unattended updates and scans. Your machine should be yours to use as you wish. Any decent anti-spyware program should be able to run in the background unattended, and not require interrupting your activities. The program should work according to your preferences, not the other way around. Choose a program that permits unattended maintenance and administration.

It's also important that an unattended scan can quarantine infections without requiring intervention from you. Why do some anti-spyware programs ask if you want to remove infections? Of course you do! Of all the features in anti-spyware programs, that is the dumbest.

There are innumerable derivations and iterations of spyware being created. This makes it difficult for even the best anti-spyware programs to catch and destroy them. If you open the Processes tab in Windows Task Manager, you will observe the Process Manager in action. You will see a list of objects running on your system. Some of them are applications like word processors. Others are mysterious entities that don't provide a clue as to what they do, but you can't run Windows effectively without them. Among them would be Windows Explorer, Internet Explorer, Media Center, Windows Mobile Control Center, and many others.

Beyond shutting down a process or resetting its

priority, there isn't much a non-specialist can do with this feature. Clever programmers can create spyware that won't show up in the Process Manager. Any decent anti-spyware program has to have its own built-in process manager that will recognize, track down, and eliminate malevolent software that may not even be in the signatures database.

Anti-spyware programs should be able to monitor programs that load when Windows starts up. There are many very sophisticated spyware programs that do not show up in the Process Monitor or in Control Panel's Add/Remove section. If your anti-spyware program lacks this capability, find another one.

Assuming your anti-spyware program has the capabilities mentioned above, it is an excellent choice for individuals. However, businesses or organizations with multiple computers will require even more. Whoever is in charge of PCs will not have time to manually monitor or administrate individual machines. It is simply impractical in a large organization for support staff to visit every workstation, apply updates, schedule scans, and ensure that infestations are removed. If this applies to you, look for a program with a centralized administration console. This capability has the unfortunate drawback of being quite expensive, but the time saved generally justifies the cost.

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## Look Ma, No Hands

by Bruce Jacobs

*Phoenix PCUG newsletter editor*

This article was not typed. I dictated it using the speech recognition feature in Windows Vista Ultimate.

I have been using this feature on and off for certain applications for a while and it has its good points and its bad points.

The intent of the software is to allow the user to speak words into the computer and for the computer to recognize those words, understand that some of them are commands, and also understand that some of them are input to programs. In other words, when I say the words "please save me," the computer must decide whether to add the words to the document I am editing as if I had typed them, or add the word "please" to the document, and then bring up the save dialog box to save the document with the name "me."

The program that is attempting to do this has two major hurdles to conquer. It has to recognize the spoken words correctly. This is helped by the training exercises. But it has its limitations.

It must also understand "in context" which of those words are commands and which of those words are to be part of my document. As time goes on, you learn to pause before speaking a command. So in the above example of "please save me," I would say the words altogether rela-

tively quickly in order to enter them in my document. If I wanted to add the word “please” to my document then save the document, I would speak the word “please,” then pause for a few seconds, then save the word “save.” This would bring up the save dialog box and I could continue as if it was a command.

As far as the good points are concerned: If I’m working off printed list or when I know for sure what I want to say clearly, it can be a much faster way of inputting text than for me to type it. Some of that is due to my typing speed being somewhat slow. I am a faster typist than most hunt and peck folks, but I would never be able to keep a job as a secretary. It is also much better at spelling than I am.

If I don’t know what I’m going to say in advance the program does not facilitate me speaking what I want to say and then recomposing it later. Some of this may be my fault. I find that I can type up an article by hand and maintain enough control so that in the end I have something coherent. When I just speak out what I want it does not always make sense. I spend way too much time revising it.

One of the disadvantages is that you need to spend a little bit of time training the voice recognition system. The system works best when you are running a very simple application such as WordPad or Notepad. It can even be used to some extent in Microsoft Word. However when using an application such as PowerPoint, the program spends so much time trying to figure out what possible commands you might be wanting to perform and not enough time actually realizing that you are trying to enter words.

Another problem is homonyms. These are words that sound the same but they have different meanings in English except for the possibility of some contextual clues. There is no way for the speech recognition software to know whether I want “2,” “two,” “to,” or “too.” During setup the program asks you if they can look at the contents of documents on your hard drive to help you determine what word you used most often and in what context. This does help it guess which homonym you want.

The final problem I wish to discuss is the editing features. Whenever I create a text document I will want to fix mistakes. There are some commands in the software that will help fix mistakes, but they are limited and clumsy. Some of them will even (in theory) help prevent mistakes by the voice recognition software in future. All that being said, I find that editing documents using the voice recognition software is very frustrating. I always resort to using the arrow keys and the mouse to navigate through the document.

Vista speech recognition is a helpful tool when transcribing printed text or when words have been spoken into a tape recorder. However for initial composition of documents or editing I do not find it useful. I do not believe that I could ever learn to use it as a complete 100% substitute for the keyboard and mouse. I would not consider it a replacement if I was disabled.

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## Bot-Nets

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.

**K**eeping your computer safe while connected to the Internet is becoming more and more difficult. The “attackers” are becoming more sophisticated and are sharing more ways to get their software into your computer. Business Week recently ran an article on the major security problems expected in 2008. Unfortunately, most of them arrived long before the new year started. We have been warned for years that it was possible to recruit unprotected computers into networks that could be controlled by an external source. This recruitment network problem has gotten much worse over the past few years. It is estimated that 7% of the computers connected to the Internet have been infected with a Botnet program. So what is a “Botnet”?

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

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

People frequently wonder why anyone would want to produce viruses, worms and other kinds of Internet attacks. Years ago it was primarily because “they could do

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

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

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

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

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

instant messaging, social contact web sites are all used by bot malware as a means of collecting information and linking to compromised computers.

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

So how do you know if you've been infected? The easiest way to tell is related to how you have been protecting your computer from infection. Do you have all of the following?

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

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

Ideally, your firewall hardware/software combination should keep you invisible on the Internet. Bot programs are constantly searching for unprotected computers with open ports. You may not be aware that your computer has over 64,000 port that can be used for communication. The most common usage are the ports in the lower range, under 1,024. However, some bots use high end ports (>60,000) for transmission of commands. One place you can check your computers port and its invisibility on the Internet is [www.GRC.com](http://www.GRC.com). The Gibson Research site provides a free port scan and much good information on interpreting the findings as well as how to protect your system.

Ideally the anti-virus and anti-spyware software would be able to find and remove any bot software that made its way onto your computer. However, this software needs to know the "signature" of the malware in order to identify it. So the producers of the malware are always a step ahead of the good guys. The security services have to find and disassemble the new malware before they can devise the protection against it. So it is up to the user to keep the security software as current as possible to reduce the chances of infection. Like it or not, security on the Internet is a never ending battle.

*Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor of physiology. He has been working with personal computers for over thirty years, developing software and assembling systems. This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups. All other uses require the permission of the author [bwsail at yahoo.com](mailto:bwsail@yahoo.com).*

## Let's Clean "Start-Up"

by Bob Elgines

*Editor, Colorado River Computer Club, AZRCC Editor*

**D**oes your computer boot-up or run slow? Maybe there are too many programs running in the background. Let us do the following check first.

Hold your CTRL & ALT buttons and press the DELETE button.

Click on the PERFORMANCE tab, is your CPU Usage running more than 10% or is your Physical Memory being in total use?

Go to **START** then RUN, type in "**msconfig**" which stands for Microsoft System Configuration. In Windows VISTA you can find RUN in the ACCESSORY folder under PROGRAMS.

The System Configuration Utility windows will come up.

First go to the upper right tab labeled **STARTUP**, here you will see the list of items that load during startup. Of course some you want, some you don't. In the first column labeled STARTUP ITEM gives a very rough idea to what it is referenced too, but the second column labeled COMMAND, is much more useful. To read it better, widen the column out by holding your mouse symbol over the vertical line located before the next column label. A double arrow will appear, then hold down left mouse button and move it to the right. This information tells you where it is located and in some cases which program is using it. Uncheck those in question, you can put them back in later if you need too. Do not uncheck your Antivirus or Spyware programs.

Next go to the tab on top labeled **SERVICES**, this show all of the programs running now. You do not want to uncheck those labeled Microsoft under the MANUFACTURER column, so to start off, let's put a check mark in the box below labeled "Hide all Microsoft Services".

Now while you are reviewing the other programs running in the background note the fourth column labeled STATUS. If it says STOPPED, then don't worry about it. We just want to stop the strange ones that are RUNNING. You can uncheck those that you are not familiar with, here again you may bring them back in later.

After un-checking all those items under tabs STARTUP & SERVICES, then click on APPLY and CLOSE.

The System Configuration Utility will now ask you to RESTART (or Boot) your computer.

After restarting a window will come up stating System Configuration Utility has been changed, be sure to put a check mark in the bottom left (labeled "Don't show this message or launch....") before clicking OK.

If you improved your operation of your computer, you can put back in the items one at a time until you find the program that was slowing you down.

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## New Gadgets for 2008

by Sandy Berger

*CompuKISS.com*

**E**very year my husband and I attend the Consumer Electronic (CES) in Las Vegas to see the latest and greatest high tech gadgets. This year didn't disappoint. We found everything from a Leggett & Platt's \$20,000 Starry Night bed with an HDTV projector, pop-up speakers, snoring sensors, iPod dock, automatic lighting system, and breathing pattern monitor to a General Motors Chevy Tahoe prototype car that drove itself. While I don't expect this GM prototype to make it to market anytime soon, some of the technology that it is built in will evolve and is sure to find its way into our future automobiles.

We also found a few more down-to-earth gadgets and gizmos. In fact, there were several devices that you may want to check out for your own gaggle of high tech products. For instance, if you hate cleaning the gutters, the iRobot Looj has you covered. This robotic gutter cleaner cleans a 60-foot section of gutter in just 10 minutes. Yes, you must use a ladder to place it in position, but you don't have to move the ladder multiple times as you do in regular gutter cleaning. The demos looked marvelous. iRobot also have robotic vacuum cleaners and floor scrubbers.

Although we have been hearing about wireless technologies for what seems to be years, this year some of that wireless technology became mainstream. Wireless speakers, which up to now were feeble and erratic, have finally found their voice. The Griffin Evolve is a great example. It is a compact speaker system for an iPod. It has two wireless speaker cubes that can be placed in any room in the house. It sounds great and is also easy to use. At about \$300, this is a great solution to distribute music from your iPod throughout the house.

While prices of technology gadgets continue to drop, it seems that ink for that inexpensive ink jet printer often costs more than the printer itself. Well, thanks to Kodak, this trend may be coming to an end. The new Kodak printers are said to use 50% less ink and ink cartridges are reasonably priced at \$15 for color and \$10 for black.

Polaroid, another well-known name in photography has also released a breakthrough product. Their new inkless printer is made for printing pictures from a cell phone or digital camera. Not only does the printer use Bluetooth wireless technology, but it uses special paper that is embedded with 100 billion colored dye crystals. The colors appear when the printer applies heat pulses to the paper. This ink-less technology is called Zink, for zero ink. The 2-inch-by-3-inch prints cost about 30 cents each and the printer sells for \$150, which is not bad for cutting-edge technology.

Although computers are not the focus of the CES show, there were many computer manufacturers showing their wares. Lenovo, the Chinese company who bought IBM's PC division three years ago has previously focused on

their ThinkPad business laptops, but this year they introduced a line of consumer laptops called IdeaPads. These include facial recognition technology. Lenovo, Sony, and others will follow Dell's lead with the introduction of laptops in a variety of bright colors.

Bright colors were the norm at the show. There were MP3 players, cell phone, and gadget covers in every color imaginable. There were red and blue ladybug-shaped iPod speakers and speakers that pulsed to the beat in vibrating, changing colors. There was even pink CAT-5 networking cable, whose purchase supports the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

Oh, and you can expect to be even more confused by television display technologies in the future. Sony's \$2500, 11-inch Organic light Emitting Diode (OLED) was small but clearly better than anything else on the market today...and it was only as thick as 3 credit cards. Mitsubishi's laser television was also a dramatic improvement. Samsung and Sharp announced backlit LCD televisions. While these technologies may take awhile to go mainstream, other manufacturer's announced Internet-enabled televisions that are sure to appear quite quickly. For instance, the Sharp Aquos Net television displays small icons called widgets that showed news, weather, and traffic data from the Internet right on the television screen. Also next year, when digital television goes mainstream you will see digital TV broadcasting in a variety of devices including cell phones, cars, buses, and anything else they can possible think of. One car at the show already had TV's in every door and drop-down television screens for every passenger.

While we may not all be interested in watching television all the time, we will find some of these new technologies making our lives just a little more pleasurable in the future.

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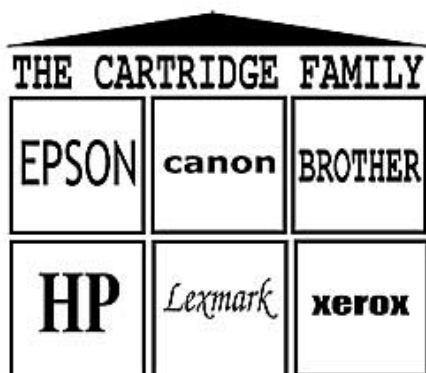
## The Cartridge Family

by Grant Fuller

*Big Blue & Cousins, Vancouver, BC, Canada*

We're beat. I hate to admit it. I come from more innocent times when fairness was something to strive for. Family values were not measured by the Sopranos but by families with more law-abiding objectives.

"I hate to give up without a fight but I do not hold much hope for us. If you have a printer that functions well by refilling cartridges, keep it. Repair it



when it becomes necessary and show it your unconditional love."

I hate to give up without a fight but I do not hold much hope for us. If you have a printer that functions well by refilling cartridges, keep it. Repair it when it becomes necessary and show it your unconditional love. The new printers come with chips on the cartridges that the "dealers" say are for telling us when our ink levels get low. Those chips also tell the printer to stop printing after a certain number of nozzle firings or page counts and I strongly suspect that one of my printers is set to refuse a cartridge that was removed and replaced.

I bought some replacement cartridges that were substitutes at a much better price than the gouging name branders, but the trick to beating the dealers required me to remove the chip from the old cartridge and put it on the new one. This is much easier than it sounds, an exacto knife can pop the chip out of its little plastic holder, and it can then be slipped into the ready and waiting slot on the new cartridge.

I replaced the colour cartridges and the printer began flashing lights in the tank bed as each cartridge was replaced. It took me a while to figure out what it was trying to tell me but I should have known right away. I assumed that my chip replacement skills were not up to par or maybe I had been swindled while attempting to swindle the other swindlers. Out of curiosity, I took one of my black cartridges out (this printer has two blacks) and checked it for ink, still lots. I replaced it and the blinking light began on this slot as well. The same thing happened with the other black.

Apparently, there is more going on with this little chip than meets the eye. Well, actually, nothing meets the eye, it's all too small, but this new aggravation raises the stakes. Now the ink re-filling industry has a chip resetter that we can buy which presumably sets the chip to its original state where it says to the printer, "I am brand new and full." I have not tried this but I would like to hear from anyone who has, preferably, if you have had success. If I can find a way to beat these printers I own, I will keep them in good repair. The price of ink for inkjets is beyond outrageous and some people are getting very rich. I can only try to imagine what wonderful gifts we would find under the tree of the Cartridge Family this year.

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## The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman

*Webmaster, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.*

### Needles, Haystacks and Processing

Finding the needle in a haystack is the proverbial example of an impossible task. Wrongly so. Spread the contents of the haystack out over a large area and get 1000 helpers to each check a small amount of hay. The needle will be found in less than no time. It is a basic

example of parallel processing.

According to Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SETI>), as far back as 1960 astronomers were speculating that any intelligent life forms present in the Universe might be detected by electromagnetic signals reaching us from space. Some astronomers started a Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) on a limited scale that over the years grew to include multiple radio-telescopes searching more and more radio bands for significant signals.

It soon became clear that looking for intelligent signals amongst the enormous volume of recorded data was even worse than finding a needle in a haystack. Parallel processing to the rescue! With an untold number of personal computers worldwide, capable of Internet access and sitting idle most of the time, an enormous amount of potential processing power was going untapped. The University of California at Berkeley (UCB), with sponsorship of The Planetary Society, started project SETI@home in 1999 to put many of those computers to work. They found many volunteers willing to download a small program on their computers, running in the background, to analyze small chunks of radio-telescope data for signs of intelligence and return the results. As of now there are some 3 million contributors, but nary a sign of intelligent life yet. In any case, the enormous amount of computer processing by this project far surpasses what the best supercomputer might be able to do, at least until quantum computers will have been perfected.

The success of SETI@home inspired many other volunteer computing projects supporting worthwhile scientific causes. According to *The Economist* (12-8-2007) these include design of drugs against AIDS, search for new prime numbers, climate modeling and many others. It requires some snappy programming skills to send small chunks of a large problem to thousands of computers, provide them with the means to perform a set task, return the results, and combine the results for final evaluation before sending out a new crop of queries. That task has been made easier with a dedicated program, **BOINC** (Berkeley Open Infrastructure for Network Computing), made available by UCB. Over 40 BOINC projects are in operation, including many life sciences, Help Conquer Cancer, and Discover Dengue Drugs.

Impressive as the computer power may be that is being exerted on these projects, there is still room for significant improvement. The short history of the PC not only includes a dramatic improvement in CPU processing speed, but also in auxiliary components that speed up graphics performance. In response to the extreme image rendition requirements of computer games, fast graphics cards have become available that use special processing chips and hardware to relieve the load on the Central Processing Unit. Rendering the millions of pixels that make up a screen image is perfectly suited to parallel processing, a task for which the graphics chips are optimized. Further adapting these chips to participate in general purpose programming may be a way to increase the parallel

processing power of a desktop computer anywhere from 10- to 50-fold. NVIDIA and AMD, the largest graphics-card manufacturers, are working on it. Nvidia has already set up a product line for non-graphics applications and is developing a specialized programming language to go with it.

Next time you hear complaints that something is like finding a needle in a haystack, tell them it's easy: many hands make light work.

## Foxit Reader for PDF Files

Acrobat Reader is now at version 8 and has been getting more powerful but also more cumbersome with each successive iteration. Steve Bass (*PC World*, January 2008) found a free program, Foxit Reader and Printer, that is compact, fast, and includes some nice extra features. I especially like that it allows searching all the PDF files in a directory for keywords. I tried that on a directory where I keep all the newsletter files since 2000 and got almost instantaneous results. Impressive! The print function works just fine. Foxit also has more sophisticated tools for annotating and writing PDF files and forms, but adds evaluation marks to the output unless you buy the Foxit Pro version (\$39). You may not need that, since there are several other (free) ways to create PDF files, including openoffice.org Writer and MS Office 2007 (with a special download from Microsoft). My Epson scanner can scan images and also output them as PDF files. But at \$39 Foxit is a bargain compared to Acrobat 8 Standard at \$299.

Download Foxit Reader and Printer free from <http://www.foxitsoftware.com/>. Linux versions are also available.

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## What's a Good Computer to Buy?

Some Tips by Doug Fairchild  
Director, Exton PC Council, PA

As a person who is active with a computer user's group and who has had formal training in Windows 2000 and Windows XP, I'm often asked "what computer should I get?"

This is an age old question in terms of computer technology time. Almost any professional that provides unbiased advice will tell you that it is not an easy answer. The first question that comes to mind is, what do you intend to do with it?

Many persons, who are not involved with what's current, do not really know just what's encompassed with their regular routines. A typical answer is, "I don't do that much and don't need an elaborate machine".

It seems to me that as technology advances, more and

more uses will become commonplace requiring more oomph from the computer being bought today. Therefore, my recommendations focus on a machine that is good enough for now, with specifications that would hopefully add enough to carry over for a little time to come.

Any professional who keeps up with technical publications can tell you that ratings change faster than the weather. Also, new machines and technology keep changing.

So how's a person to choose?

Typically, in the past, the common time frame was to hope for a machine that would last 5 years before being outdated. Today, the best equation I can offer is that it's like buying a new car. How much can you live with, before getting something that has great new features?

With that being said, let's look at the core components of a computer with what, in *my opinion* would be the minimum for a *Windows* machine to last for a little while. These choices are based on using equipment with name brand components and include web sites where applicable for further research of these products. I strongly recommend that if you are considering an alternate to name brands, you research that brand.

Some comments about Apple computers follow after the discussion on recommendations for Windows machines.

## Operating System

Windows XP (any version) – Windows VISTA (Home Premium or better)

Since the release of VISTA, many computers are still being offered with Windows XP. VISTA Home basic is considered by most professional reviewers as less desirable than any version of Windows XP. While there has been a lot of VISTA bashing, some of the derogatory statements are not true. For clarification and a better understanding of problems related to VISTA see: <http://blogs.zdnet.com/Ou/?p=785>

It is definitely true that some peripherals like various printers and some other devices do not work with VISTA. However, it needs to be said that at some point, progress needs to preclude older technology. For example, how many people can work on their automobiles like they used to. It takes much more sophisticated and expensive equipment. To see what devices will be affected by VISTA, download and run upgrade advisor. Even though you are not upgrading but considering a new computer this will let you know what devices will be affected by VISTA.

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/buyorupgrade/upgradeadvisor.msp>

## CPU - Processor

Intel® Core™2 Duo or AMD equivalent. <http://www.intel.com/> - <http://www.amd.com/us-en/>

**RAM** (base memory) – Window XP -1GB (or more – consider 2GB) – Vista -2GB(or more)

The type and specifics will be controlled by the computer model you select. One consideration is to allow for expansion at a later date. Check to see if there are open

slots to add additional memory. It can be worthwhile and can save in the long run to pay a little more upfront by having the memory configured to allow for this upgrade. While Windows Vista states 1GB as minimum, you probably will want 2GB.

## VRAM

Video Ram (Memory on your graphics card) – 256MB (or more)

This is frequently ignored by inexperienced shoppers, but can make a world of difference on the performance of a PC. For a detailed explanation see [http://searchstorage.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid5\\_gci213325,00.html](http://searchstorage.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid5_gci213325,00.html)

A few popular graphic card manufacturers: <http://ati.amd.com/products/index.html> <http://pnyc.com/> <http://nvidia.com/>

## Hard Drive

100GB (or more)

Most new hard drives use a newer type of interface referred to as SATA (Serial ATA). Look for this specification unless you have an older hard drive you wish to use in your new computer (which is more likely a PATA (Parallel ATA)). One of the newest technologies is a FLASH Hard Drive. Currently this is primarily for notebooks (laptops). It has some definite advantages but also some drawbacks. It's expensive and has limited capacity. It may be the upcoming future of Hard Drives. See <http://www.pcworld.com/article/id,126833/article.html> for a PC World review.

A couple of popular hard drive manufacturers: <http://seagate.com/> (note that Maxtor has been acquired by Seagate Technology) <http://western.digital.com/>

## Power Supply

Varies with the devices built into the computer. If you believe that you may be adding internal devices, consider a computer with a power supply that has more capacity than needed for preconfigured devices. This can be a little complicated, but should be an answerable question to the person selling the computer (get someone who has technical awareness). For an explanation of the power supply see: <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/power-supply.htm> There is also an excellent video at this site to gain a basic understanding of the core components.

## Motherboard

Normally this will be controlled by the computer model you select unless you are purchasing with the option to customize. Being aware and specifying the other core components listed, the motherboard should be suitable and not normally something you choose independently. If you are buying a desktop, you may want to inquire about available PCI slots or other expansion capabilities. In the past, this has afforded the ability to economically install hardware upgrades which may keep your machine current for a longer period of time. Laptops do not, as a rule, offer the same capability to expand and upgrade other than memory and optical drives.



## Optical Drive and Other Peripherals

There are many choices and most computers today offer a DVD drive with read/write (this is the ability to play and create DVD and CD disks). Ask what it has and what it will do—also compared to other options.

## Notes on Apple Computers

While I do not have firsthand knowledge about Mac (by Apple) computers, the reviews and information I've seen tends to make me believe that the new Mac's are superior to many other brands of PC's. I would emphasize new versus computers manufactured prior to 2007. One of the indicators that this is true, is the fact that while sales of other PC manufactures are falling, Mac's have realized an increase in sales. They are, however, more expensive.

If I had the money I would look seriously at a new Mac with the idea of loading Windows as a second OS (operating system). Mac has a feature called Boot Camp which accommodates adding other OS's. Boot Camp is software included with Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard that lets you run compatible versions of Microsoft Windows on an Intel-based Mac. While they do not offer technical support for other OS's, Mac's will run multiple OS's (including VISTA) as well as other PC OS. You, of course, have to own or buy the additional OS's to be installed.

See: <http://www.apple.com/>

## Notes on Linux OS

Again, I do not have firsthand knowledge about Linux OS's. However, I've been led to believe that they make a lot fewer demands on the computer. From what I've heard, you probably in most cases do not need a new computer to install and run.

For more information see <http://www.linux.org/>

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## Stay Safe Using Public Computers

**Q. When I travel, I use computers at Internet cafes, libraries, and similar places to check email, pay bills, etc. As a security measure, I usually use a USB flash drive for my data, thinking that this is the best and safest way to use public-access computers. Am I doing the right thing and playing it safe?**

A. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but as a general proposition, there is really nothing you can do to make a public computer truly secure. For example, there are hardware- and software-based keystroke loggers that are invisible to any user. Keystroke loggers, as the name

implies, capture every keystroke entered on a computer's keyboard, including passwords, account numbers, credit card numbers, names, addresses, and Social Security numbers.

To play it safe, when using a public computer of the type you describe, try to avoid entering your passwords or login information, or change passwords before your trip, then change them back when you return. When using a public computer, avoid making purchases, conducting any financial transactions online, or anything that will require the use of your credit card number or Social Security number. Generally speaking, I avoid public-access computers if at all possible.

**Q. I know you've covered this before, Mr. M., but I've forgotten how I can determine how much space I have left on my computer's hard drive. As I recall, it's shown in a diagram with pink and blue inside of it. Thanks very much.**

A. You're absolutely correct: Pink for free space, blue for used space. To view this colorful pie chart, double-click your My Computer icon, then right-click the drive you want to check (usually the C: drive) and select Properties. That will display the drive's properties, including free and used space.

Hard drive space is frequently confused with memory or RAM. If you want to determine how much memory your system has, go to your Control Panel > System. Under the Computer section on the General tab, you'll find information about your system's processor and the amount of installed RAM.

**Q. I have approximately 50 CDs of old music that I want to put on an iPod that I plan to purchase. What I'd like to know is how many gigabytes do I need to hold all that music? Thanks for your help, Mr. M.**

A. Apple considers a song to be four minutes in length, so with that in mind, here are the various storage capacities of the iPod: 1GB (gigabyte) will allow you to save approximately 240 songs; 2 GB, 500 songs; 4 GB, 1000 songs; 8GB, 2000 songs, 30 GB, 7500 songs, 60 GB, 15,000 songs, and 160GB, 40,000 songs.

Breaking out my trusty slide rule, if we apply the same iPod "4-minute" standard, that would assume 4.16 SPM (songs per megabyte). Each CD is 650MB, which would equate to 156.25 songs per CD—again, assuming a song is four-minutes in length and assuming the CD is wall-to-wall music.

If you have 50 CDs, let's round it off to 150 songs per CD, so that's a total of 7500 songs, which is what the good folks at Apple estimate for the capacity of their 30GB iPod Classic. I use an 8GB iPod Nano and find that it has more than enough capacity for my musical interests. I've loaded every song I could possibly think of, including recreating almost my entire collection of hundreds of "oldie" 45s, and have thus far only used 3.8GB of its 8GB capacity.

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

### Place Names

A fantastic resource for locating countries, cities, towns, villages, hamlets, ham hocks, hills, rivers, lakes, islands and other geographic locations with latitude, longitude and respective elevations. The "Advanced Search" permits searches to focus on specific sandbars, benches, lava flows, and many other criteria you'll never use.

[www.placenames.com](http://www.placenames.com)

### Rock Wisdom

Wisdom comes in many forms, from authors, poets, philosophers, even rock stars. No, seriously. Check out this list of the top 100 rock quotes of all time, which include pearls of wisdom from Dylan, Lennon, and Simon & Garfunkel. I don't mean to pick nits, but coming in at No. 97 is, "You shake my nerves and you rattle my brain," by renowned philosopher Jerry Lee Lewis. Rock wisdom? I don't think so, but maybe it's just me.

[www.rockwisdom.com/mainpage.htm](http://www.rockwisdom.com/mainpage.htm)

### Typing Test

Here you can take free practice tests, then pay \$6.95 to take a real test and possibly receive a certification. Tests are three or five minutes in length. Test results show gross, uncorrected words-per-minute, your accuracy, and adjusted (corrected) words-per-minute. Certificates are "guaranteed" to be accepted by any employer or your money begrudgingly refunded.

[www.typingcertification.com](http://www.typingcertification.com)

*Mr. Modem's weekly newsletter delivers easy computer tips, great Web sites and personal answers to your questions! Trial offer: Subscribe online using Promo Code 0846 and receive a free month with your 6-month subscription (28 issues!) To view a sample issue or subscribe, visit [www.MrModem.com](http://www.MrModem.com).*

## Recording Audio

by Bart Koslow

*Thousand Oaks Personal Computer Club, Thousand Oaks, CA*

Nowadays it is no problem to record video from a TV broadcast, VCR or other source using a Digital Video Recorder. When I began to look into recording music broadcasts

off the air, I found that there were external Audio recorders, but they were expensive, beginning in the \$250 range and up. This is twice as much as a similar Video Recorder.

Since I wanted to create CDs from the broadcast music and I had DVD/CD burners on my computer I decided that using my computer was a better and cheaper alternative. One possibility was a TV/FM card for my computer which may be purchased for \$30 to \$40 and up. However, I found a cheaper method. My stereo system was only a few feet from my computer, so I connected an audio output from my audio receiver to the line in on my computer sound card. I happened to have a cable with two RCA connectors on one end going to a single stereo connector on the other

end. Just what I needed, I connected the RCA connectors to audio out on my receiver and the stereo connector to the line in on my sound card on the computer.

Now all I needed was a program that could access the sound card and record the input.

I hit the jackpot. Roxio Easy Media Creator has just the program. Not only that, but, once you complete your recording, Roxio has a basic sound editor that enables editing the sound files, and programs to burn the files to a CD or DVD. The Roxio program will access a number of inputs besides the line in. You may access your phone line, CD player, microphone input, and other inputs including Internet Radio broadcasts received on your computer. You may also decide which type of file format to record, WAV, MP3, or WMA, what fidelity to record, and where to save the recorded file. In addition, there is a recording level meter and control.

Once I turned on my stereo receiver and accessed the Roxio recording program, everything went well. I recorded a long broadcast for a few hours and then my computer told me I had a problem and had to close the Roxio program. I lost my whole recording, but now I knew it worked and tried again.

This time I closed all the programs I did not need and disconnected from the Internet to get less interference when I recorded. After editing the recorded audio file, I successfully burned it to two CDs.

If you have music cassettes or even VCRs with music, you may use this technique to transfer music to CDs. If you have cable or satellite TV service with accompanying radio, you may use the above procedure to record from your set top box to your computer. I have satellite service with SIRIUS radio, and am now recording live and historical music broadcasts that interest me.

I next discovered that in many cases I could bypass an external stereo receiver, set top box, or recorder by using Internet Radio which may be played using Windows Media Player, iTunes Player, Real Player or other free media players. All you have to do is find the radio station that is broadcasting the music you wish and then enter the URL for its streaming audio broadcasts in the Player software. I did a search using Google and found there are numerous Internet radio station locators, found the station I wanted and entered the URL. Now I had the music coming in directly to my computer from the Internet with no intermediary device. In order to save the music I again resorted to Roxio's "Capture Audio from Sound Card" program and changed the input from "Line In" to "Stereo Mix," and recorded the broadcast to a file. Edit the audio file and burn it to a CD and I was finished. It all worked like a charm.

Now, I do not need a Stereo Receiver, external recorder or even have to add a TV/ FM card to my computer.

The simple solutions are always the best ones.

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## Recycling Your "Techno-trash"

As you upgrade your technology, you find yourself saddled with outdated items: VHS tapes, game cartridges, digital cameras, MP3 players, cords, cables, cassettes—not to mention bigger items like VCRs and computer monitors. Fortunately, there's a company that will take it all from you and reprocess it in an eco-friendly way: GreenDisk <<http://greendisk.com/>. Mail your "techno-trash" to the company and they'll take care of the disposal. The cost starts at \$6.95 for 20 pounds of equipment—a small price to pay to relieve your conscience (and your closet!).

### Computers

Computers contain a number of harmful chemicals, so it's important to make sure they're properly recycled. Most major computer manufacturers now offer some type of recycling program. Dell will recycle any Dell product for free /[www.dell.com/content/topics/segtopic.aspx/dell\\_recycling?c=us=19=en=dhsl.com/content/topics/segtopic.aspx/dell\\_recycling?c=us&cs=19&l=en&s=dhs](http://www.dell.com/content/topics/segtopic.aspx/dell_recycling?c=us=19=en=dhsl.com/content/topics/segtopic.aspx/dell_recycling?c=us&cs=19&l=en&s=dhs), and if you buy a new Dell, they'll recycle any other brand of computer for free. Hewlett-Packard <<https://warp1.external.hp.com/recycle/>, Gateway <<http://gateway.eztradein.com/gateway/>, Apple <<http://www.apple.com/environment/recycling/national-services/us.html> and Toshiba <<http://toshiba.eztradein.com/toshiba/> also have recycling programs. Check their Web sites for details.

You can also find independent recyclers who meet high standards for eco-friendliness and safe labor conditions through the Computer TakeBack Campaign <[http://www.computertakeback.com/the\\_solutions/recyclers\\_map.cfm](http://www.computertakeback.com/the_solutions/recyclers_map.cfm). The campaign also has a detailed analysis [tp://www.computertakeback.com/docUploads/Using\\_takeback\\_programsv10.pdf](http://www.computertakeback.com/docUploads/Using_takeback_programsv10.pdf) of manufacturers' recycling programs, explaining how all they all work and what the costs are.

### Handheld devices

If you feel the need to get a new gizmo (and remember, an upgrade isn't always necessary), don't just chuck the old one. Small electronics are full of big toxics. Instead, drop off your old cell phones, pagers and PDAs at Staples stores around the country. The company has partnered with nonprofit CollectiveGood <<http://www.collectivegood.com/>, which collects and recycles the phones. When possible, CollectiveGood refurbishes them and puts them to use in developing countries. Otherwise, the phones and other items are broken down in an eco-friendly process and the metals are separated out for reuse or proper disposal. If there's not a Staples store near you, you can mail your phone to the Collective Good—and even get a tax credit for the donation.

*Courtesy of Chip Giller, president of Grist.org <<http://grist.org/>>.*



## From The DealsGuy

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

### Looking Back

Time sure passes quickly. I wrote my first DealsGuy column in November 1994 and have never missed a month since. I am not a journalist by trade, nor do I pretend to be one, but I am flattered that this column has stayed popular as long as it has. Editors sometimes forward complimentary comments from their members about the DealsGuy column. Two groups print only part of it in the newsletters they place around their community to attract new members, and readers must become a member to get the entire column. I am also grateful for the many friends I made over the years through the column. I have been offered places to stay just about anywhere in the US.

Years ago, I received a request from a professional journalist to be added to my e-mail list for the column, and I told him I was honored by the request from him. He told me something that I have thought about a few times since. He said I had blazed a trail with the syndication of my DealsGuy column to user groups and that others would probably follow. At that time, most articles written were from the editor and the group's own members, mostly reviews, but some of the better ones were reprinted selectively in other newsletters. However, the DealsGuy column certainly has its hard-line critics. Some editors strongly dislike my column, and other editors feel I write too much about myself. In fact, I'm still reeling from one editor's strong comments at a conference. People sometimes request they be put on my e-mail list because their editor refuses to carry the DealsGuy column. A few editors only carry the product parts of the column because they say their members have no interest in my personal comments at the beginning, but I sometimes hear from UG members asking how to see the entire DealsGuy column.

In the early days of the column, it was not uncommon for user group people I met at conventions to ask how they could get into writing a monthly column as I was doing. I tried giving them tips, but how can a guy who began writing a column accidentally offer helpful tips when he himself doesn't really know what he is doing. Now days it's great to see so many authors writing interesting monthly columns that help provide a packed newsletter for any editor and there are many user groups with regular material from their own members. I guess that I'll stick with it a while longer since nobody else wants this job.

### Tax Tips

If you haven't done your 2007 income tax yet, don't forget about Tax Act <<http://www.2ndstorysoftware.com>> for computing your income tax for free, although I use the pay version because it brings forward information from last year's tax return (if you used it last year) along with some comparison features. You can even e-file with the free version. If you would rather someone else did the work, check when and where the AARP volunteers are

working to help seniors out. There are other free ways to do your taxes on the Government site.

### **Goodbye FedEx, Good Riddance**

Remember my bad experience with FedEx delivery last month? They refused my claim saying that according to their log the packages were delivered to the address and that's all they were required to do since no signature was requested. Actually, they could simply throw them out the window as they were driving by, throw them away if they were running late and enter "delivered" in the log, or even just set them beside the road, as they would have had to do in our case, at 9:06 PM according to their log. When I was told it wouldn't be delivered after 8 pm my son closed the driveway gate. They don't seem to have my conversation with the Phoenix office in their log, yet they called me back the next morning to offer a delivery time because the packages had been in the truck for two days. No packages were ever found at the address and their letter denying the claim says they hope they can count on my continued business. After another bad experience, not a chance!

### **They Claim To Simplify Launching**

This is designed to replace the standard Quick Launch. The program emulates the standard features of Quick Launch while including lots of grouping and menu options, a many useful plug-ins and some skinning abilities. True Launch Bar helps clear your desktop working space by removing randomly placed shortcuts and organizing them in convenient groups and menus. True Launch Bar provides users with a brand-new functionality enabling ultra-fast access to any of your PC contents!

True Launch Bar stores shortcuts in the same folder as Windows Quick Launch. All the icons installed into Quick Launch are automatically installed for True Launch Bar. True Launch Bar can be docked into the taskbar; you can simply drag your shortcuts onto the toolbar or menu by pressing any of the mouse buttons. Right button dragging activates a Context menu, grouping links into popup menus. The Virtual Folders feature allows you to add any folder as a menu and control it through Windows Explorer-like context menus. It can be any folder on your disk or on a local network (Favorites, Programs, Recent, etc.), as well as file system folders such as My Computer, Control Panel, Printers, etc. Toolbar buttons will not only launch the applications, but also act like small applets. If you add a Media Control plug-in onto the True Launch Bar, the button will become a real control center of the media player with Stop, Play, Pause and volume adjusting options.

True Launch Bar runs under Windows 9x, NT, 2K, XP, 2003 and Windows Vista. 25% discount makes the cost \$14.90 (USD) for a single-user license. Links to purchase with the discount are: Personal License (one person, one or more computers) (\$14.90); <<http://www.regsoft.net/purchase.php3?productid=51538&pc=7L0L7>> and Home license (one copy on multiple computers and multiple users) (\$35); <<http://www.regsoft.net/purchase.php3?>

[productid=53346&pc=7U0I4](http://www.regsoft.net/purchase.php3?productid=53346&pc=7U0I4)>. Licensed customers are entitled to lifetime technical support and free updates. Additional information on True Launch Bar, as well as its fully functional evaluation version with a 30-day trial period is available from <<http://www.truelaunchbar.com>>.

Download link: 32-bit version: <<http://download.true-launchbar.com/install/truelaunchbar42.exe>> (4,30MB) 64-bit version: <<http://download.true-launchbar.com/install64/truelaunchbar64v42.msi>> (4,69MB)

Company website: <http://www.tordex.com> E-mail: [info@tordex.com](mailto:info@tordex.com)

### **Another Free PDF Maker**

Patrick Sullivan reads the DealsGuy column in The DataBus, a great newsletter from The Dayton Micro-computer Association Inc. <<http://www.dma.org>>, and he sent his favorite application for converting a file to PDF. He said a friend needed a free one and his search found PrimoPDF at <<http://www.primopdf.com/>>. He says its PDF file is not as small as Adobe Distiller creates, but he is well satisfied with it and has not found it to implant ads for itself. There is now a new release on their Web site, but he has not tried it because his version works fine.

### **This Product Offers Canned Replies**

IT-Services Thomas Holz announces the release of version 1.0 of Textmodules for Software Support, a set of ready-to-use replies to quickly answer typical software-related questions by e-mails. The product is absolutely free and comes as an add-on to the new version of ReplyButler for Outlook. Enlarge the assortment of reply patterns and make your reply on the fly.

With a proper set of text modules, you can answer your e-mails quickly. In Textmodules for Software Support, you'll find 55 new text modules properly sorted into 18 folders. The modules include typical phrases, answers to common problems, questions for details and more. In addition, there are many reply patterns related to office work and journalism. It uses the correct name and gender in the addressing phrase by itself, securing against any typos in names.

You can get Textmodules for Software Support free of charge, as well as the trial version of ReplyButler for Outlook at <<http://www.replybutler.com/en/produkte/replybutler.php>>.

ReplyButler for Outlook runs under Windows 98/ME/NT/2000/XP/2003/Vista and Outlook 2000/2002/2003/XP/2007, and costs 15.00 (EURO) for a single-user license. The company offers user group members 25% discount on the purchase of ReplyButler Business Edition. Licensed customers get the fully-functional version of the product, free technical support and free upgrades. Further information on ReplyButler for Outlook is available at our Web site. (DealsGuy note: I included this item for the free part of it, but was unable to get through using their e-mail address for information about using the discount on their business version. Try a contact from their Web site.)

Product page: <<http://replybutler.com/en/produkte/replybutler.php>>

Product download link: <[http://replybutler.com/download/getfile.php?file=ReplyButlerE\\_Freeware.exe](http://replybutler.com/download/getfile.php?file=ReplyButlerE_Freeware.exe)>

Free add-on link: <[http://replybutler.com/download/getfile.php?file=ReplyButler\\_TextLib\\_SoftwareSupport.exe](http://replybutler.com/download/getfile.php?file=ReplyButler_TextLib_SoftwareSupport.exe)>

E-mail: <[presscontact@itsth.com](mailto:presscontact@itsth.com)>

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

## Three Tips

by Jason Faulkner

### Encrypting a Windows File

A feature I discovered the other day is the ability to encrypt a file in Windows without using any external tools:

1. Right click on the file to encrypt.
2. Select Properties.
3. Click the Advanced button.
4. Select the option to encrypt the file.
5. When prompted, you can encrypt the entire folder or just the file.
6. Apply your changes.
7. You will see the color of the file has changed in the file listings. By doing this, you restrict who has access to the data. For example, if you share a computer with several people, you can encrypt your files so only you can access them. You could do the same with file security, but your user account may not always allow you to make these changes. To view or set who has access, repeat steps 1-4 above and then click the details button.

You may not use this feature a lot, but it's good to know it is available.

### Make Websites Think Firefox Is IE

As Firefox users are probably aware, not all sites work 100% correctly in Firefox. You can typically get around this in a few ways, so here is another method to add to your toolbox.

The User Agent Switcher Firefox add-on allows you change the way Firefox reports itself to a website. For example, you can set the User Agent Switcher to make Firefox report itself to websites as IE. This way the web page will send information to your browser as though it were IE and not Firefox.

For the most part, this will allow you to easily get around Javascript checks or see how your "IE optimized" HTML is rendered in Firefox. Keep in mind though, this add-on only reports Firefox as a different browser and will still render the page using the native Firefox engine.

## Easily Backup Your Installed Drivers

Have you ever needed to reformat and reinstall your Windows OS only to be burdened with having to find all your various device drivers either on CD's or the Internet? Instead of this, create a backup of your currently installed drivers with DriverMax.

DriverMax is a free program which allows you to archive your currently installed drivers and if you ever need to reinstall them, do the installations all at once. No need to try to find the version you "were" using before you wiped your drive. This is a great program to have if you like to frequently reinstall Windows or tweak your installed drivers.

DriverMax only works on XP/2003/Vista.

Reprinted from <http://www.pcdailytips.com/>.

## Society News

### February Planning Meeting

by John McMillan, Secretary

Arpad Kovacs led the February planning meeting held at St. Johns Meadows and attended by Bob Avery, Tony Dellelo, John McMillan, Dan Rothfuss, Steve Staub, and Tom Thompson.

The group felt that Arpad's talk on Virtual machines was good, though very technical and presented on short notice. This was the groups first visit to the Penfield Courtroom that had adequate space but lacked some of the amenities of several of the Libraries we have used.

Steve reported that the turnout for the Linux loading session on January 19th was a little disappointing. When first mentioned at the November Society meeting, about 30 people expressed interest. Ten people signed up when the time and date were announced at the December meeting but only 5 showed up at the Greece Library. Bill Statt, Scotty Burnett (a former member of RCSI) and two others helped Carl get people started on a new adventure. Downloading the latest version of Ubuntu took time but went very smoothly. Carl will be scheduling future meetings to teach people how to use this new tool.

A speaker phone connection, to Mike Lavelle, was used to discuss details of the upcoming program on "Why Software Sucks." Timing of the presentation which will be beamed online from Boston will be critical so the normal sequence of meeting events may be modified. Be sure to check the web page for up to date information. The March meeting will be held at the Brighton Library and may feature Bill Statt talking about voice power.

Arpad and Tony agreed with Steve that most of the recent problems with printing the Monitor have been resolved. Significant reductions in printing and mailing costs for the *Monitor* have been achieved with the help and cooperation of all involved. It was noted that another table would be helpful to spread things out for smoother operations and that extra hands lessen the load when the printing takes place. RCSI has received recognition from the Association of Personal Computer Users Groups for

Excellence in Participation of small News letters. Cataloging of the book inventory has progressed with perhaps 20% completed. This has turned out to be a much larger project than anticipated.

Tom Thompson, our software chair person, reported trying to acquire donations to be used as door prizes. He pointed out that many donors are looking for public acknowledgment of the donation. In the past, members have not always been faithful about providing reviews, even when one is cited as a condition of accepting a door prize. The executive committee discussed withholding the distribution of door prizes and tickets for them until members who have taken software have submitted required reviews for publication in the Monitor. Members who already owe reviews are requested to submit them as soon as possible. Reestablishing and publishing this policy along with overdue reviews would encourage businesses to consider making future donations.

## Help's Half Hour

Tuesday, January 8, 2008

Led by: Steve Staub

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

**Q: A member with Vista would like to copy a CD.**

A: There is a build-in program to copy. Place the current content onto a folder on the desktop by dragging in there. Then place an empty CD in the drive and drag it over.

**Q: What is a parasite? Is it a virus or a spyware?**

A: It is a virus that comes with a "Pay us \$20.00 to remove it." You should be able to run Stinger and then it will remove it. Google "Stinger" for the website. Follow the steps and it should do it.

**Q: One member has a 930C printer. Does Vista support the cable needed?**

A: It sounds like the printer has a parallel port. It would require an adapter. Perhaps Comp USA will have a USB to serial/parallel. Best Buy may have one or have an on-site HP expert that can help.

**Q: Sally reported a member asked what to do with a Dell laptop that has frozen 'on.'**

A: Try holding the power/reset button, holding it for 30 seconds or until it responds. If that doesn't do anything, take out the battery pack.

**Q: Should a flash drive be used as a back-up?**

A: It is a good idea. They will do the job. Keep it in a separate location than the laptop. If it is put through the washing machine, allow it to dry out before plugging it in. It was shared that the Vista system will allow a flash drive to be used as a "Ready Boost."

**Q: One member has a 1 gig SD card from his Kodak camera. It used to allow it to be loaded, now it does not work. This showed up after an update.**

A: It sounds like the driver has been corrupted. You may have to put in the original disk and then reinstall the software. The Kodak website might have what you need, too. Kodak is known to be its own proprietary software. You may want to just use a card reader.

**Q: Steve reported that a he bought a laptop but the battery has died. The vendor said it did not warranty batteries. A new one is \$119.00. Is there a cheaper location?**

A: Check eBay.

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

Led by: Steve Staub

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

**Q: A member shared that his Outlook Express is having trouble opening gif files. It opens them using an Internet Explorer page.**

A: You need to associate the file type with the program that you want to use instead.

**Q: When printing online, he gets about ½ line of garbage at the bottom.**

A: It was suggested that he check in a print preview mode and ask it to print only the parts that you want. It might be a printer driver issue, too.

**Q: A member got an email with a list of all of the recipients. Can he select out just the body?**

A: There is usually a mail setting that allows you to show just the text.

## Program Meeting

February 12, 2008

by John McMillan, Secretary

The February meeting, held in the Brighton Library, is hardly likely to rate in any ones list of Top Twenty Five Society Meetings. It was planned to be an online internet presentation on *Why Software Sucks and What You Can Do About It*, by David S. Platt, Head Honcho at Rolling Thunder Computing and instructor at Harvard University, University School.

The picture from his web camera was quite clear but was removed from the screen in favor of more space for his slides. One of his first slides said "Know thy user for he is not thee." David went on to cite statistics pointing out age, sexual, educational and other differences between many software builders and the users of their products. These differences often lead to misunderstanding of users "needs" and software capabilities.

Unfortunately we lost touch and had to reestablish the contact. On our end, two different laptops were used, one of which had external speakers for sound amplification. Arpad even tried substituting various software packages with similar capabilities but to no avail. The best combination eliminated the external speakers which made it difficult to hear David. I found he spoke quickly which made it difficult for me to understand him under the best conditions.

The Internet connection broke up with increasing frequency and duration even when Arpad disconnected our web camera and began using text messaging for our responses to his questions. Finally at 8:00 pm we thanked him for his valiant effort and closed the session. I cannot judge how much others got out of the talk but I found it difficult to hear.

Steve announced that the next Planning meeting will be

held March 4th at Sally's house and the Monitor will be assembled at 9:30 am Saturday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, at St. Stephen's church, 350 Chili Ave. He mentioned that only 5 members attended the January 19<sup>th</sup> Linux downloading session at the Greece Town Library although 20 people expressed interest when the SIG was first suggested. Carl, the leader, is out of town but expects to schedule other meetings to discuss how to use Linux.

## The Lighter Side

Honest... these are all true. -Sigh-

It's been a weird day so far today and I thought I'd share. These are all the first words out of several users mouths today.

Me (answering the phone): "Tech support, this is JC, what can I do for you today?"

User 1: "Some stuff works and some stuff doesn't. How can I make the broke stuff fixed."

User 2: "Do we have windows NT or XP? I can never remember all the tech stuff you guys throw at us."

User 3: "My database gave me a message my password expired and made me change it. Now I can only get into the database with the new password the old one don't work."

User 4: "My monitor thinks it's being stolen."

And finally... from an IT Tech testing Vista for our (cringe) upcoming rollout. Drum roll please. . .

Tech: "I just installed Vista and it broke my Outlook. I think we're gonna need to re-image the Exchange server."

It's 5 o'clock somewhere... isn't it?

## Microsoft Finds Solution For Lackluster Vista Sales

Fake News written by James Baughn  
from the supply-and-demand-mean-nothing dept.  
Redmond, WA – Hoping to turn around dismal sales trends for Windows Vista, Microsoft today announced a new edition of the so-called operating system, Windows Vista® Shiny Things Edition™, which will feature a \$3,950 price tag and "lots of shiny things."

According to market research, many Pointy Haired Bosses—the prime target demographic of Microsoft products—were turned off by Vista's seemingly low prices.

"Revolutionary paradigm shifts are supposed to cost more than a few hundred dollars," explained an industry analyst. "At least that's what most corporate drones think. If Microsoft wants to increase sales, it's going to need to convince pointy-hairs that Vista is the best thing since built-in PC cup holders. The easiest way to do that is to increase the price and add even more useless features."

Among those useless features, Vista Shiny Things includes a set of 5 DVDs, each containing 20% more gold than standard discs. The extra gold doesn't add any functionality, but it makes buyers believe that this is a "luxury" operating system.

"It's so simple—developers add granite countertops to a run-down apartment, and suddenly it becomes a 'luxury condominium.' Now Microsoft adds gold plating to its run-down operating system, and suddenly it becomes a luxury must-have software package for elite buyers."

Of course, the new shiny things require an obscene level of hardware support. But that shouldn't stop people from buying it, even if they can't run it on their computers.

"Vista Shiny Things is like a diamond ring or a Hummer—it's strictly for show. Nobody expects you to actually use the darn thing for anything practical," said somebody we found on the street who was willing to talk to us. "The price tag reflects that. This product is strictly for keeping up with the Joneses."

