

MONITOR

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Gifts and Gadgets for the Holidays

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Hacking 101

by Marjie Tucker

Editor, Macon Computer User Group, NC

We are being bombarded with warnings about securing our data and the entry to our computers. Do you ever wonder what the big fuss is all about? How can a hacker possibly get into your data? And, what would he be looking for? Let's spend some time answering those questions.

How Does A Hacker Get Into Your Computer?

When you give your computer access to the Internet, you need an IP (Internet Protocol) address.

The IP addresses that we are currently using have 4 octets with periods between them. They will be something like 192.168.100.1. When you access the Internet, that address is read by the router, modem, whatever that links you to your Internet Service Provider. Then it is read by the routers that route all the data through the Internet. This address makes it possible for you to send data, such as e-mail or requests for web pages. And, in turn, that same address is used to direct incoming e-mail and web pages into your computer. There are several websites and programs available that will translate these IP addresses into the name of the company that purchased them. In many cases, like our residential

usages, the company name will be the ISP. For commercial use, it will be the name of the company that rents the block of IP addresses. Hackers use this IP address information to find their targets much like we use a physical address to find a house or office.

Once a hacker finds out your IP address it's relatively simple to send your computer a Trojan horse program, spyware, or a virus that will open a port that you usually don't use. Once that port has been opened, he can freely enter into your operating system and browse around just like he was there in person. He would look for programs that store valuable data like social security numbers and credit card account numbers. (Do you have that information entered into your Quicken or Money program?)

He would look through your my Documents folder for password lists and search your Internet Explorer favorites for financial sites where you saved the username and password. And, before he leaves he usually plants another Trojan horse that will give him the ability to take control of your computer in the future.

Commercial Websites

The most common way to hack into a company's website through the Internet is by using a Denial of Service attack. These DoS attacks use multiple computers to overload a website with bogus requests for information. The hacker usually creates a Trojan horse program that he sends into the computers of unsuspecting people (remember that program that was left behind when your computer was invaded above?) The message that he creates usually contains a header saying that it comes from an IP address that doesn't exist. When he is ready to attack, he calls up all the computers that he infected with his Trojan horse and tells them to contact a specific IP address. Those computers follow his instructions and send his preprogrammed message to that website. Servers that control websites always check to verify that IP addresses requesting information or webpage downloads are legitimate addresses. When a server is hit by a bombardment of these false address requests, it tries to track down every one of the fake addresses. Before long the server becomes overwhelmed by the fruitless process and crashes. When it crashes, the website will vanish and the hacker will be given access to a prompt for the server. He can then use Linux or DOS commands to request and view information on that server other servers.

How About Wireless?

Let's put this hacker into an airport where hundreds of people are sharing a wireless network. It's like leaving a child alone in a candy store. In this case the airport's wireless system usually provides the IP addresses through DHCP and he can easily look at the list of addresses that have been supplied. He can test each of the addresses for available ports and it's quick work to access the most vulnerable. The same principles apply in hotels and restaurants that provide wireless Internet access. If you have a wireless network in your home, our hacker can drive down your street using a laptop or PDA to search for wireless networks. This process is called Wardriving. If he finds one that has not been secured at all, he doesn't even have a challenge. If you have added a password, he simply has to crack the password.

What Tools Do They Use?

It's very easy for a potential hacker to find the tools of his trade. There are many websites that offer program tools and tutorials for using them. Here are some of the popular:

Anonymizers and Remailers—Anonymizers are online services that eliminate the trail of information that is left behind. These sites use anonymous proxies that a hacker can use to access computers and servers without leaving his IP address on any log. Remailers strip the header off a message and replace it with a meaningless header that can't be traced.

Command.com—When this command is typed into a server it will basically give you administrative rights. You can then see all the folders and files. It's also very easy for the hacker to create a new administrative account that he can re-use in the future.

Password Crackers—These programs try random passwords at lightening speeds. They are usually very successful.

Key Loggers—Hackers frequently install these on computers, especially public PCs. The programs actually record every stroke that you make. Hence, when you type in a username and password, it has been captured.

Port Knocking—This is a method of externally opening ports on a firewall by mimicking the process you normally use to add a port to your firewall.

Wireshark—This popular program captures and analyzes the data on a network. It's used by hackers to find information they want and it's also used by

network administrators to manage networks.

Aircrack—This program is used to crack wireless WEP and WPA passwords.

Metasploit Framework—This is a tool that can be used by hackers to search the Internet for sites that have dubious code. These are the sites that are the easiest to hack—especially when this program does the searching for you.

Networks identifying the types of data and the internal addresses of this data. It's a valuable tool for administrators, but can save a great deal of time for a hacker.

NMAP—This is a port scanner. Since a hacker knows that he needs to use a port to access your computer or network, he can use this program to see which ports you have open.

NetStumbler—This program finds any wireless networks that are in range. Wardrivers drive through residential neighborhoods using NetStumbler to search for available wireless networks.

Kismet — This program takes NetStumbler one step farther. It searches for wireless networks that are not broadcasting their SSID.

NSLookup—If you type a domain name into this program, it will give you the company's IP address

Traceroute—This is a very valuable troubleshooting tool for technicians. It will trace a packet on its route through the Internet. It shows every IP address it visits along the way.

Snort—This is an open-source intrusion detection system. It shows traffic analysis and packet logging on networks.

TCPdump—This is the most widely used network sniffer/analyzer for UNIX networks.

Net Cat—This has been called the Swiss army program for hackers. It performs many sniffing and cracking tasks.

This was really just some of the basics. But, if we know why security is so important, we may remember to take the right precautions. Hope your web surfing stays secure.

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YouTube for Posterity

by Mike Moore

Editor, Bowling Green Computer Users Group, KY

The video sharing websites, such as Google Video and YouTube, are either great resources or the world's biggest time-wasters, depending on your viewpoint. YouTube for example, allows users to view and share video clips with ease, and anyone can upload a video clip on this site without cost, making it a kind of "America's Funniest Videos" of the internet.

In an effort to keep users coming back to their site (and thus generating more ad revenue), YouTube encodes its video files in the Macromedia Flash format (SWF), with Flash video (FLV) data embedded within, which also prevents viewers from downloading files and making digital copies. Instead, the video files are streamed directly to the embedded player in your browser (Internet Explorer or Firefox). There is no obvious download link for users to save the video locally for offline viewing or for transferring to a portable media player. You might think of this in terms of your desktop: you get the link, but not the file.

One of the things I like about the internet is it's a little bit like a dream that you can control. Or, if you like, some kind of software heaven. If you can just imagine a solution for some perceived problem, often times you can look out there, and a solution will have already been created, like magic. In reality, this arises from the very large number of creative folks that use the internet and come across the same difficulties that you and I do, and are actually able to whip up a solution. More often than not, they don't want any money in exchange for the solution, they just want the problem to be fixed.

There are, in fact, multiple solutions for this problem—that YouTube offers no handy download link and no apparent way to put its videos on your iPod or computer for later enjoyment. I will present only one, but I also want to tell you how I found it, because that process is one that will help you with locating future solutions like this.

You can find YouTube video recorders at download.com and a host of other download sites, but I have a problem with programs found on these sites. I look for well behaved programs that only minimally solve the problem and do not try to do too much. And the distinction between well-behaved programs and

ad-ware and spy-ware is getting to be very small indeed. The word “free” on these sites, in reference to someone’s program, usually means anything but free.

It is difficult to find a site that presents only open-source, well-meaning programs that respect my desktop and my time. Such programs are like finely crafted European or Japanese tools. They are understated and unassuming, and behave exactly as expected and are documented well. The closest I have ever come to a site that presents such tools for download is <http://sourceforge.net>.

Sourceforge.net is not perfect. One of the pervasive problems on the site is that you won’t always know if a particular program is for Windows, Linux, Unix, Mac or some other more exotic computer. Another problem is sometimes programmers jump right into the middle of their story when documenting the program and forget to tell us what the heck the program is supposed to do.

Anyway, I browsed to sourceforge.net and typed in two keywords: youtube recording ...and got 45 hits. Try that on Google and you be lucky to get less than 45,000!

Since SourceForge is about teams of programmers communicating towards a solution to a particular problem, we find far less junk on here than we do on one of the more popular download sites. But we also find projects that have only just started, and don’t really have anything for us to download yet. To help me decide which of the 45 solutions to look at, I focus on the last column, which tells me the number of downloads and therefore the relative popularity of the program.

Based on over 35,000 downloads, it looks like “Youtube Downloader” is a good choice. Note: SourceForge is not known for creative program titles either!

Note that the description of this program indicates the program is “platform independent,” meaning that it does not matter whether you have a Mac or PC, this should run on both. Platform Independent usually means that the program runs inside of a browser and uses Java technology to achieve its independence. See Java.com for more information on how Java manages to do this. If you have the latest Internet Explorer or FireFox browser, you probably have Java. If not, it’s easy to download it from Java.com if you have a fast internet connection.

The file comes down as `ytd17.zip`. After I unzip the file to a directory (a good choice would be My Videos), I notice there are two directories, one labeled

YouTubeDownloader and one called simply, bonus. Without even being tempted by the “bonus” directory, I navigate into the other directory and find two more directories, “full” and “opensource,” and I chose full. Inside there is a file called `ytd.jar`. It carries a little blue and orange coffee-cup logo which is another giveaway that this is a java program. I double click on this file and hope for the best. Windows asks me if I want to open it, and I click OK. It opens, but I am also directed to a web site automatically. I hope the programmer just wants me to know something about the program and is not wanting to sell me anything!

Here we see another benefit of Java programs—no installation needed. Just double click and it goes to work for you.

I opened my browser and went to YouTube.com, selected a video and then copied the URL (from the browser address window) using CTRL-C, put my mouse cursor in the space where it says “Enter youtube links separated by a new line” and hit CTRL-V to paste the URL in there. I guess you could type it in too, if you were very accurate. [In Europe, they refer to the ENTER key as a “new line.”]

I clicked on the download button and when the download was complete, the program rather cryptically referred me to the download directory, which turned out to be where I installed YouTube Downloader, My Videos. There was a file in there called `YouTube-Dancing Liquid.flv`, which was indeed my video, but there was a problem—the FLV file extension was not associated with any of my applications! No matter, when I double clicked the FLV file, Windows gave me a choice of what to open it with. I chose my trusty VideoLAN player (on your BGAMUG CD), and it worked just fine.

Happy YouTubing!

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Anti-Virus Virus

by Sandy Berger

CompuKISS

I hate writing about computer viruses. It always reminds me of how many unscrupulous, money-hungry people there are in the world. Yet, there are times when I feel that I must write about a certain virus because it is causing so much havoc for everyday computer users. Unfortunately, that time

has come again. In the past two weeks, my company has removed a very bad group of viruses from six different computers. So I feel it is time to send out a warning.

There are many different variations of this virus and its cousins. They have many different names, including Antivirus 2008, Antivirus 2009, Spyware-Scanner 2008, and AntiVirXP08. Some experts are calling them viruses. Some are calling them malware. Symantec calls them misleading applications. McAfee lists them as a PUPs (potentially unwanted programs). Whatever you call them, they are terribly invasive.

By most accounts, these awful applications piggyback on programs that are downloaded from the Internet. However, some experts are warning that your computer may become infected by simply visiting certain websites, especially if your operating system and/or antivirus software is not up-to-date.

The gist of the matter is that once your computer is infected, you will begin to see pop-up windows that give an exaggerated report of the number of threats that your computer is infected with. The window may say something like "Your computer has become infected with 231 computer viruses and spyware." These pop-ups try to scare you into purchasing their antivirus or antispyware software. If you purchase it, they send you a registry key, but it doesn't work because the program they sell you doesn't exist. These viruses are also being spread by malicious websites that sell fake antispyware software.

On top of that, there are many other viruses or pieces of malware that can piggyback on the main virus. So this malware can dramatically slow down or even stop your computer. The infections being caused by these viruses and malware programs are extremely harmful and can be very difficult to remove. They often require a cleanup by a professional or a complete reformatting of the hard drive and reinstallation of the software.

As an everyday computer user, you need to be very careful about the software that you download from the Internet. Make sure that it is from a source that you know to be reputable or a website that has been recommended by a trustworthy source. You can also use a program like the McAfee Site Advisor to help you assess the validity of the website before you download the program. McAfee's Site Advisor is a small program that is used by your Internet browser to indicate the safety of websites. It is a free down-

load available at www.siteadvisor.com and it is a valuable tool.

Also, as usual, be sure that you update your operating system and antivirus software regularly. Don't fall for any program that pops up on your computer trying to scare you into purchasing anti-virus or antispyware software.

Yes, the bad guys are out there and they have a lot of computer savvy. So we all need to be smart about the software we download and the websites we visit.

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Media Notes

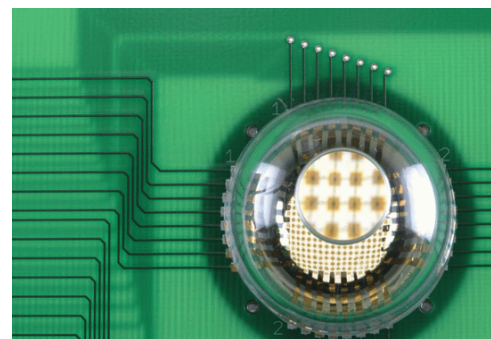
by Bill Petitt

Southeast Virginia Computer Group

Windows 7: To wait or not to wait? That is the question

With Windows 7 poised to begin private testing any time now and to be marketed by late 2009; a number of business users are wondering whether they should simply skip Windows Vista all together and wait for 7 instead. Microsoft, not surprisingly, is advising customers against taking a pass on Vista. It is a goal of the Windows 7 release to minimize application compatibility for customers who have deployed Windows Vista since there was considerable kernel and device level innovation in Windows Vista. The Windows 7 release is expected to have only minor changes in these areas. Customers who are still using Windows XP when Windows 7 releases will have a similar application compatibility experience moving to Windows 7 as exists moving to Windows Vista from Windows XP. The jump between Windows XP and Windows 7 could be a big one, while the one from Vista to Windows 7 should be fairly minor.

Scientists Develop Eye Camera



Researchers at the University of Illinois and Northwestern University have developed a camera with a layout simi-

lar in size and shape to the human eye. The eye camera is based on “single-crystalline silicon detectors and electronics, configured in a stretchable, interconnected mesh,” according to the University of Illinois.

The curved technology will put an entire image in focus, in contrast to today’s cameras, which take images that are sharper in the center than near the edges, according to researchers. Plus, the technology could be a big step toward the creation of a bionic eye similar to the one worn by the “Terminator.”

Troubleshoot Your Boot-Up and Shutdown Problems

Does your PC hang, complain, or flat-out blue-screen when you start it up or shut it down?

You start your workday by booting up your Windows PC. You end the day by shutting it down again. No fuss. No muss. No bother.

Yeah, right.

A problem at boot time can keep you from your work—or your fun. And a shutdown issue takes a lot of the fun out of getting up and leaving your PC.

When something causes a system failure at shutdown, Windows responds by rebooting. Thus, instead of telling you what’s wrong, it gives the impression that it can’t tell the difference between shutting down and restarting.

Fortunately, you can turn off that silly behavior. Select Start, Run (just Start in Vista), type `sysdm.cpl`, and press Enter. Click the Advanced tab, and then click the Settings button under ‘Startup and Recovery’ (as opposed to the other two Settings buttons on that tab). Uncheck Automatically restart.

That will stop the reboots, but it won’t fix the underlying problem: the system failure causing them. Still, it might give you an error message that you can research to find a solution.

Today, the problem is more likely to be caused by a hardware or driver issue. If the problem started soon after you added a new peripheral or updated an old driver, try removing the recent addition. Check vendors’ Web sites for updated drivers for your new hardware, or use Windows’ Device Manager to roll back to older ones if you suspect an update has caused the trouble.

How do I get Windows to stop asking me for a password when I boot my PC?

Windows requires a log-in password for a reason: to protect you. If someone else can log in as you, they may be able to access your encrypted files, send out

e-mail under your name, log in to Web sites as you, and even make purchases using your credit card number.

You can protect yourself from the worst of those offenses without a log-in password—just enter passwords at other times. For instance, you can set up your e-mail system to require a password, and you can keep sensitive files in a TrueCrypt vault. But giving up the log-in password removes a layer of security.

Still, if only trustworthy people have access to your PC, and if you take the right precautions, turning off Windows’ native password protection probably won’t do you harm.

Turning the password feature off is simple: Select Start, Run (just Start in Vista), type `control userpasswords2`, and press Enter. Uncheck Users must enter a user name and password to use this computer.

When you click OK or Apply, a dialog box will ask you which user should be logged on automatically. Entering your name and password this one time will free you from having to type in the info again.

Why does my PC occasionally freeze at Windows’ boot-up screen?

First, you need to figure out if this a Windows problem or a hardware problem. Try to notice at what point the computer hangs (admittedly difficult if the problem doesn’t happen regularly). If Windows starts loading before disaster strikes, that means there’s an issue with a startup file or a Windows component, and you can skip the next five paragraphs. If everything freezes before the PC starts loading Windows from the hard drive, the cause definitely lies somewhere in the hardware.

If you’re unsure where the problem is, try to isolate it by booting from a CD, DVD, or flash drive. Again, the intermittent nature of your problem makes the task difficult; you may have to do this daily for a while before you can be confident that the problem is on the hard drive—either a Windows glitch or something with the hard drive itself.

Of course, the culprit could be a boot device other than the hard drive. If your PC tries to boot from the CD/DVD drive before the hard drive (as most do), a defect in that drive may interfere with the boot even when the drive is empty. This could also be the case with USB ports and floppy drives.

To determine which drive could be the cause, go

into your system setup program and change the boot order. I can't tell you how to do this exactly, since it varies from computer to computer; look for a message soon after the PC boots that says something like 'Press F2 for Setup'. Once in the setup program, search the menus for something like 'Boot Options' or 'Boot Order'. Make your hard drive the first device in the boot order, and then save and exit. If that fixes the problem, experiment with putting different devices before the hard drive, one at a time.

If all of the above tests point to a hard-drive problem, I recommend error-checking and defragging the hard drive. You'll find the tools for both jobs by right-clicking the C: drive in Windows Explorer and selecting Properties, Tools. When you click Check Now under 'Error-checking', make sure that Automatically fix file system errors is checked before you click Start. If Windows reports that it can't perform the check because the disk is in use, select Yes (in XP) or Schedule disk check (in Vista) for the check to run at the next boot.

If that doesn't help, and the PC freezes before the Windows logo appears, open the computer's case (if it's a desktop) and check the cables connecting the hard drive to the motherboard and the power supply. You might even consider replacing them. If you have a laptop, bring it to a shop and have a professional look at it.

If Windows comes up and then freezes, something is wrong with your boot or autoloading sequence. The Event Viewer may tell you what. Select Start, Run, type eventvwr, and press Enter. In the left pane, select System. In the right (XP) or center (Vista) pane, find and double-click an event with a red flag and the word Error. If the resulting dialog box doesn't provide useful information, click the URL in the description box (XP) or click the Event Log Online Help link (Vista).

Finally, you might try fiddling with your auto-loading programs. Windows launches them all at once, and that can cause conflicts. Use R2 Studios' free Startup Delayer to insert delays before some of your autoloading programs.

Microsoft Yanks Money off Retail Shelves

It had become a ritual for Microsoft's consumer unit. Every year it came out with a new version of Microsoft Money and sent new boxes to retail stores.

That tradition is now dead.

Microsoft, via a newsgroup posting from one of its

enthusiasts, announced it will no longer update Money each year and, more importantly, it will stop selling the product at retail stores.

It's the latest indication that Microsoft is seeing a shift in the way people, particularly consumers and small businesses, buy their software.

"More and more retail consumers are going online to shop the endless rows of digital shelves," Microsoft said, according to the newsgroup posting. "In response to our retail partners' needs, consumer behavior and business efficiencies, Microsoft is focusing distribution efforts for Microsoft Money Plus software online via download and discontinuing traditional box sales of the software at retail."

Money is not the first consumer title to see its fortunes change in recent years. Another perennial shelf space occupant, Microsoft Digital Image Suite, was discontinued completely last year.

However, Microsoft added in the posting that it is not abandoning packaged software companywide.

"Microsoft does not see shrink wrapped software going away anytime soon and we are always talking to customers about different ways to price and package our software offerings," it said in the posting. "The company is evolving its strategy and product solutions to meet customer demand and optimize business efficiencies."

Indeed, the company has seen very strong sales of the latest version of Office and its OneCare security software is also sold heavily at retail stores. The company just introduced Equipt, which is a subscription service combining the two, but sold as a packaged product at retail.

The company has been eyeing this shift for some time and looking at options like subscriptions, online services, and even advertising-funded software on the PC. After years of weighing the issue, the company went ahead with Microsoft Works SE, an ad-supported free version of its consumer productivity package.

Intuit, another big name in consumer software, has already seen a huge shift to both online sales as well as selling its personal and small business finance programs as online services, rather than packaged software.

The company already gets more money from its TurboTax online service than it does for the packaged product, with more than 10 million people doing their taxes online. The company also has 128,000 small business customers using its online services, accord-

ing to spokeswoman Heather McLellan.

It has also debuted niche products that are online-only such as a medical account expense manager product.

In the past 12 months, half of the sales for Money Plus, the latest version of Microsoft Money, have come via digital download. That's roughly three times the rate of a year earlier.

Although the company laid the ground work for less-than-annual updates when it renamed the product a year ago, Microsoft's Jolley said that the decisions to go digital and to skip this year's update were made more recently.

A friend of mine sent this website along to me the other day.

Someone has done an awful lot of work setting this up and it certainly is helpful.

<http://www.allmyfaves.com/>

Q. How do I speed up my dragging computer?

A. I'm going to be brutally honest with you, there is really no so-called "easy button" that you can press and magically make your sluggish computer become fast again. And even with simplest solutions, it's always going to be a shot in the dark if it will, in fact, help your system. You see, there are just too many factors involved that can cause a computer to become sluggish—ranging from hardware deficiencies, software conflicts, malicious software (spyware or virus), to just about anything under the sun. If there are technical issues that you just don't quite understand, even with the simplest instructions and step-by-step how-tos, it can be frustrating to get past that barrier. I'm not trying to discourage or scare anyone from attempting these endeavors, as I was once there myself. All I'm stating is that computers are complex machines and if you have a willingness to learn about it, take some risk and learn from trial and error, eventually it will become easier to take on new challenges in solving computer troubles.

If you are looking for the easy way out, well you're probably not going to find the silver bullet that cures all. However, if you don't feel comfortable following any of the solutions, I would suggest you find guidance from a technical friend or family member. However, don't just let them do it, watch how they do it, so you can learn. By the way, there are some great explanations on hardware drivers provided, so check them out.

Here are my recommendations: There are usually 3 things that are major factors—Memory/disk space,

heat (overheating can cause the processor to slow down), and software running in the background. Add more RAM to your system. If you're running 512MB or 1GB of RAM, upgrade to at least 2GB. If your motherboard will accommodate 4GB, you should upgrade to 4GB. RAM is very inexpensive these days. Retail prices are roughly \$50-\$60 per gig. Maybe lower depending on where you source it.

1. If your hard drive is more than 85% of capacity, you should remove unused programs and files. If all these programs/files are critical, I suggest having a local technician install a second hard in your desktop chassis.
2. Windows hard drive properties - One of the easiest ways to boost performance of your PC is to use some of the included Windows utilities. If you right click on you "C" drive, you will see multiple tabs. on the "General" tab, you should do a "Disk Cleanup." The disk cleanup is an automated tool that shows you items on your computer that could safely be removed. After doing the "Disk Cleanup," go to the "Tools" tab. Run a "Defragment." After the defragment, you should check your hard drives for errors by clicking the "Check Now" button. The error checking will require you to immediately reboot your computer before the error checking will start. Once your computer comes back into error checking mode, it takes a long time. Roughly, it will take 45 minutes to an hour. When I have customers that have some program working improperly, this is the first thing I run and it has a pretty high success rate.
3. This last option should be done in lieu of number 3 if you have some time on your hands. Backup up all your data and reinstall everything on your hard drive. Most manufacturers have recovery tools built into your system. Or they supply you with recovery DVDs. It's a lot of work installing everything again, but your machine will run like new.

Is Free Wi-Fi Good Business?

Wi-Fi hotspot service inside fast-food restaurants, coffee shops, book stores-and any other establishment with tables and chairs-has become a standard fare these days. But what isn't so standard is whether customers should pay for the wireless connectivity service or businesses should provide it for free-just like napkins and packets of ketchup.

When looking at four businesses' Wi-Fi business models—Starbucks, McDonald's, Borders, and Panera Bread—one sees a range of connectivity prices, service and payment methods, and underlying customer-relationship strategies.

Wi-Fi, Pay As You Go and Free

Starbucks still charges by the hour via its new provider AT&T, but loyalty-card-toting customers can now get two hours of free service a day. McDonald's charges US\$2.95 for two hours of wireless Internet access through provider Wayport. Borders, via T-Mobile, has varying hourly plans as well as day passes for \$9.99. And Panera Bread, in contrast to others, charges nothing to use its hotspots. (Naturally, most businesses serving up Wi-Fi these days also offer deals, tied in with service providers such as AT&T and T-Mobile, for monthly subscription plans.)

Wi-Fi hotspots aren't just confined to retail and coffee joints, however. Hospitals, airports and hotels are three other classes of businesses that offer wireless connectivity in and around their facilities.

The Business Case for Wi-Fi

The more time customers are sitting at your tables, the more money they are going to spend in your stores. And offering wireless access to the Internet for those customers with a Wi-Fi-enabled laptop or smartphone will add even more sales to the bottom line and make customers more loyal to your brand. That's the theory, anyway.

When asked if Wi-Fi brings more people into businesses and improves customer loyalty, Paula Rosenblum, a managing partner with Retail Systems Research (RSR), says: "Absolutely. Yes. Definitely." Her belief is that "anything that brings customers back to a store" is critical, "whether it's the music, the newspapers or the Wi-Fi—if it's a part of the experience, you'll go there," she says. "Wi-Fi is really a customer-centric practice for businesses."

ABI Research's Schatt is certain that those companies that offer Wi-Fi have completed in-house (and proprietary) consumer studies on whether the service offering is successful or not. ("Everyone would love to have those numbers," he says.) "All you have to do is look at the growth of Wi-Fi at companies like McDonald's, which keep adding Wi-Fi," Schatt says. "Obviously if they felt it was detrimental they would have stopped."

In analyzing the Wi-Fi strategies at Starbucks, McDonald's, Borders and Panera Bread, Rosenblum

draws out a couple of themes: "Obviously, it's a part of Starbucks' strategy because it builds community. It's clearly a part of Borders proposition: The longer you sit there, the more books you'll buy. It's a part of Panera's value proposition because I think they'd like to increase average transaction value and get loyalty at the same time."

Today, McDonald's has Wi-Fi-enabled more than 15,000 of its 30,000 restaurants around the globe. "They are very interested in how to draw in the consumer who may not normally go to a McDonald's who's now going to go because they can use a high-quality Internet service, for relatively inexpensive price," says Kevin McKeand, VP and general manager the hospitality, healthcare and retail divisions at Wayport, the third-party infrastructure and applications provider of McDonald's Wi-Fi service. "And while they're there, they're going to buy something. That's the objective."

So for all those business execs who now see Wi-Fi as a critical piece of the "enriching the customer experience," as is so often said, the next question becomes: Who should pay for it? At McDonald's, for instance, customers pay \$2.95 for two hours of service. And many other restaurants, hotels and airports still charge for Wi-Fi connectivity today.

But that may soon have to change. A recent In-Stat report on global hotspots found that Wi-Fi service has become commonplace and customer "resistance to paying for access remains high. Over the last 12 months hotspot operators have gone through some profound changes to survive in a market where demand increases while willingness to pay for the service decreases," notes the report.

At Panera Bread, CIO Tom Kish says via e-mail that Panera has offered free Wi-Fi in all its bakery-cafes since 2003. "We were the first major concept to offer it free," he says, "and have established one of the largest free Wi-Fi networks in the U.S. with approximately 1,200 cafes providing the service."

To Kish, free Wi-Fi ties into Panera's strategy of enriching the customer experience. "We see it as another amenity for our customers," he says. "Free internet access is one of a series of Panera's innovations designed to engage, connect and support our customers."

Complimentary Wi-Fi, with a Catch

One of business owners' main arguments against offering free Wi-Fi service is simple: "You charge

something so that you don't have people camping out all day and essentially taking up table space," says Schatt.

The Borders bookstore chain charges for Wi-Fi through T-Mobile, which takes care of the backend IT and network management. The amount that customers pay varies according to the length of service they want, notes spokeswoman Mary Davis. Borders customers can pay \$9.99 for a day pass, which offers 24-hour, unlimited access from all T-Mobile hotspots. Hourly rates are also available.

Starbucks offers a number of payment options for its Wi-Fi service. At the base level, two hours will cost customers \$3.99. However, the coffee purveyor has recently announced ways to get "complimentary" Wi-Fi service, taking great pains to not use the word "free."

The most notable method is that customers who registered their Starbucks Rewards card and agreed to receive four marketing e-mails per year from service provider AT&T can receive 2 free consecutive hours of free Wi-Fi access per day. Customers must use their rewards card to make a purchase or load more money on it at least once a month. Also, AT&T's more than 12 million DSL customers can get free Wi-Fi at Starbucks.)

Schatt says that Starbucks' move from a paid Wi-Fi hotspot business model to a "virtually free" one is a bellwether event for the industry. Most significant is that Starbucks' change is emblematic of a phased approach that businesses will mostly likely take in the near future, he says, from charging for Wi-Fi, to almost free with ties to a loyalty program, and then eventually to free for everybody. A big reason hotspot owners will be willing to move toward this business model, Schatt contends, is the recognition that "charging for service is counter-productive in the long run because the real money will be in value-add content downloads." Again, one can see evidence of that at Starbucks: Customers can wirelessly buy and download music to their laptops or iPhones via the iTunes Music Store at Starbucks.

Wayport's McKeand says that when he begins working with a new partner, the executives always ask whether their company should charge customers for the Wi-Fi service. "If the [business] can create some other form of value, we just don't see the need to give it away unnecessarily, but we're also saying they don't necessarily need to charge for it," McKeand says. "We're just saying: Don't give it away for free

without trading off some kind of value because it's not free to the property. We think they should get something in return for it."

Ok, I'm done. See you next month.

Broadsides

by Ron Broadhurst

Space Coast PC Users Group, Inc., FL

These ideas are compiled from years of accumulations from various magazines, books, on-line sites, and my own personal experience. I claim neither originality nor ownership to any of its contents. My only intent is to share the various "tips," "tricks," and "hints" in hopes of helping and maybe enhancing your computing experiences. They are all intended for anyone who uses a PC. It is for beginners as well as advanced users. Enjoy and use as you will.

How to Get Rid of "Send Error Report to Microsoft

Right click My Computer on the desktop or in the Start menu.

Click Properties.

Click the Advanced tab.

Click the Error Reporting button at the bottom.

Click Disable error reporting. You can select the checkbox under it if you still want to be notified when errors occur.

Click OK.

Note that you can disable error reporting for the operating system only, or for programs only, by unchecking the appropriate box under the Enable error reporting option. You can also configure error reporting only for specific programs by clicking the Choose Programs button.

Alphabetize Start Menu Listings

When you install a new program on your system, it will often appear at the end of your Start menu. Reorganizing files alphabetically in the All Programs menu does not affect how they appear in your start menu. In order to alphabetize your start menu, you'll want to click Start and select All Programs. On any file or folder right-click and then select Sort By Name. Now all of your Start menu programs are in alphabetical order. You can also sort subfolders in your Start menu the same way.

Make Your Quick Launch Icons Bigger

Unlock the Toolbar

Right click the QL toolbar

Select the View tab
Select large icons

Pin an Application to Start Menu

The Windows XP Start menu includes an area where two or more Microsoft applications, usually Internet Explorer and Outlook Express, are permanently positioned for easy access. You can add your favorite application to this same convenient location. Open Windows Explorer and locate the executable file for the application. Right-click the file and select Pin To Start Menu. The application will now appear in the Start menu. To remove an application, locate it, right-click it, and select Unpin From Start Menu.

Alternatively, you can right-click the app in the Start menu and click Unpin From Start Menu.

Change System Sounds

Through the Control Panel you can change your system's program event sounds. Click Start and Control Panel. If you're using Category View, click Sounds, Speech, and Audio Devices; and Sounds and Audio Devices. If you are using the Classic View, click Sounds and Audio Devices. This loads the Sounds and Audio Devices Properties dialog box. Choose the Sounds tab. Select the sound you'd like to change in the Program events box, and then select a new sound from the Sounds drop-down menu. Or select a sound you've saved to the hard drive by using the Browse button to navigate to the sound file. Change as many sounds as you like. Save your changes as a sort of theme from the Sound Scheme drop-down menu above the Program events box. (Select the blank line and click Save As.) You can also choose to disable program event sounds. When you're finished click OK.

Saving E-mail Messages

To save e-mail messages highlight the message you want to save, then click on File -Save As. Select where you want to save the message and then save it as a txt file.

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Shrink Photos for Emailing

Q. I've got a math-related question, Mr. M: I have a 1GB external drive with 16 pictures on it. I right-clicked the drive's icon in My Computer, selected Properties, and it shows that there is 752KB of used space and 959MB of free space. How many of the same size photos can I fit in the remaining free space?

A. Mr. Modem had to hose off his trusty, rusty slide rule for this one, so let's break it down: If you have 16 photos that consume 752KB (kilobytes) of space, that's an average of 47KB per photo. (That's right, 752 divided by 16). 959MB (megabytes) equals 959,000KB. So if we divide 959,000KB by 47KB per photo, we learn that 20,404 photos can be placed on the remaining 959MB of free space, give or take. As an added bonus, if you convert 20,000 photos to a slide show presentation and display each slide for five seconds, you'll have 277 hours, or more than 11 days of nonstop, family vacation slides. Be sure to invite your neighbors. I'm sure they'll be thrilled.

Q. How can I shrink photos? Sometimes the pictures people send me are too large and I'd like to reduce them down to something smaller. Thanks, Mr. M.

A. You can easily resize images to make them a more manageable size for emailing, Web posting, or other purposes online, without having to purchase or download any graphic editing programs. Simply go to the cleverly named ShrinkPictures.com Web site. You can reduce the size of images up to 6MB in size, in .jpg, .gif, or .png formats.

Q. Thanks for your wonderfully helpful weekly newsletter, Mr. Modem. Here's my question: I try and use ScanDisk and Defrag regularly. Sometimes I run the defrag first and other times I run ScanDisk first. Is it important to run ScanDisk before defragmenting or does it make any difference?

A. Run ScanDisk first, for this reason: When you run ScanDisk, you are actually scanning the hard drive looking for surface errors or defects. If a bad sector on your hard drive is identified, ScanDisk will attempt to fix it, but in the event it cannot be fixed, that section of the drive will be isolated so that your computer will not attempt to save information to that

defective area.

When you run Disk Defragmenter, your data is rearranged so that it is better organized which allows faster access to it. If you have a bad sector that it has not been isolated, data written to that area could be lost. Running ScanDisk before defrag will prevent this.

Note: ScanDisk is called Error Checking in Windows XP and Vista, and can be located by opening My Computer, then right-clicking the drive you want to check, which will usually be the Local Disk C: drive. Select Properties. On the Tools tab, under "Error-checking," click the "Check Now" button. Under "Check disk options," I always select "Automatically fix file system errors and "Scan for and attempt recovery of bad sectors."

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

Sites of the Month

The Pay Phone Project

Remember the good old days before cell phones, when you carried change in your pocket just in case you needed to stop and use a pay phone? (Yes, kids, there was a time when we didn't have cell phones.) The Pay Phone Project is a quasi-nostalgic site that has photographs, news, personal stories, and phone numbers of telephone booths and pay phones worldwide, just in case you want to place a call. And who can forget Ma Bell's tender words, "Please deposit another .20 for an additional three minutes." www.payphone-project.com

Rminder

With Rminder (somebody apparently forgot the "e"), you can receive voice and text reminders on your phone. A free account allows you to send eight reminders per month, with a weekly limit of two. As you upgrade your account, more reminders are allowed, up to a maximum of 60 reminders for \$9 per month. Creating a reminder is as easy as typing what you want the reminder to say, scheduling the call, then entering the phone number. The phone will ring when scheduled, and you'll hear the reminder that you created, thanks to text-to-speech technology. www.rminder.com

Scopitones

For the scant few who may be unfamiliar with the Scopitone, it is essentially a film jukebox that was invented in France in the early 1960's. Here you'll find information about this TV/jukebox hybrid,

including an interesting NPR article, "The Rise and Fall of the Scopitone Jukebox," at <http://tinyurl.com/pbyj5>. On the site you can watch original Scopitone films and participate in an auction for a fully-functioning Scopitone! (Mrs. Modem doesn't want it in the house, so I won't be bidding.) <http://scopitones.blogspot.com>

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 1146 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

Proper Credit

I wrote about Hewie Poplock and Mike Ungerman of Central Florida Computer Society working on the live meeting technique whereby members could join the meeting on line if they couldn't make it in person. I also gave you the URL to see the video of a meeting. They wanted everybody to know that it was not originally their intention to do this work, but Dave Dockery of Tampa Bay Computer Society <<http://www.tampa-bay.org>> convinced them to give it a try since he has been doing it successfully for some time. They are still trying to get the technique perfected and <<http://www.ustream.tv>> is just one of the URLs they use for a monthly or SIG meeting, but while it's a lot of work, it has its rewards. Check <<http://www.cfcs.org>> for meeting information.

Another Type of Upgrade

As most of you know, I live in a hurricane prone area. In self-defense, I've been installing hurricane protection on my windows and doors that are not already hurricane code rated. Remembering the year we had those three hurricanes one after another pass right over our heads, I recalled the dungeon affect with the plywood on the windows. I decided that Lexan would be a better covering as it would let the light in, and I could also see outside with little problem. It's taken a while, and some dollars, but I'm happy with the results. Even my wife can easily install the panels in just a few minutes to be ready for a storm. It also helps lower the price on my insurance, although my hip roof lowered that the most. A hip roof is a roof slanted on all four sides,

with no gable ends.

Updating the insulation in our attic has helped lower our power bill considerably, although choosing the right company to do that job took a lot of questions for the insulation companies before we chose the right one. We wanted one who would also find and seal other spots where air could leak from the living area into the attic, and they found several important places that needed to be sealed. Our A/C ductwork had already been serviced for leaks a few years ago. Our power bill is now much lower than last year. The next project was new windows with low-E glass filled with argon gas, making them more energy efficient. It won't be long until the power company will be paying us each month. <G> However, I am also looking into a small photovoltaic system in the hopes it will help with our effort. Finding reliable installation and purchase information has been difficult.

A Word of Caution; I have not tried any of the items listed below so do your homework if you're interested.

Share Your Artistry with the World

Acoustica <<http://mixcraftlive.com>> has introduced a free service allowing anyone to upload their music, podcasts or sonic creations to share with the world. The site allows artists to create an account, upload artwork and publish up to 100 megabytes of music. Each artist account has a forum and a blog to help foster a community and fan database. Each song can be ranked and, if popular enough, can appear on the top song charts. Artists can update an event calendar with their "gigs" so that their fans can find out when the next performance is. The service is completely free and can be used by anyone wishing to showcase their sonic creations recorded with Mixcraft.

Mixcraft is a multitrack music recording studio for Windows computers and has recently been awarded the Computer Music Value Award and the Keyboard Magazine Key Buy Award. It is seen as the Windows equivalent of Apple's Garage Band for price and functionality. MixcraftLive.com adds even more value to the software and is intended to showcase the musical skills and talents of artists recording with Mixcraft.

Mixcraft now includes an additional 574 new music loops and over 300 new sound effects which are automatically downloaded on demand. These sounds are free to all Mixcraft customers. The loops include

13 exciting new Song Kits; Breakbeat, Crunk, Drum N Bass, Electro House, Film Score, House DJ, Jungle Drum N Bass, Progressive Euro, Southern Hip Hop, Synth House, Tribal House, Underground Hip Hop, and Urban Street Mix!

Do You Love Games?

MyRealGames has launched a free gaming portal that provides downloadable and online casual games. The portal <[http://www .MyRealGames.com](http://www.MyRealGames.com)> is aimed to ensure a great pastime for audiences of all ages. Arcade, puzzles, shooters, dress-ups, sports and more are all free now. The portal also features free games, which were only available in try-before-you-buy versions before. MyRealGames.com can be recommended to those who are tired of advertisements in games because they don't have disturbances like annoying banners between levels. The only thing obligatory is a visit of the site after a user exits a game. The games are available in both 2D and 3D, and have three working languages.

With more than two hundred games, MyRealGames.com has something in stock for everybody. If you're an arcade game lover, don't forget to check out Space Bubbles. There are extraordinary power-ups and amazing bonuses to discover within every puzzle! Enjoy endless hours of bubble blasting action:

<<http://www.myrealgames.com/files/space-bubbles.exe>>.

Exercise your billiard skills with the help of Billiard Masters or Cool 3D billiards, which you can play against computer or friends. The atmosphere of a comfortable place makes the game even better. Join billiard club at:

<<http://www.myrealgames.com/files/billiard-masters.exe>>.

Try Nuclear Bike. Complete levels as fast as possible to achieve maximum score points. Speed up! Traffic police can't catch you here: <[http://www .myrealgames.com/en/play_online_nuclearbike.html](http://www.myrealgames.com/en/play_online_nuclearbike.html)>.

Here Is Another Free Defragger,

This One Has Rave Reviews!

IObit is proud to announce the release of Smart Defrag. Smart Defrag was in development for 1 ½ years, tested by over one million users, and is now available to all PC users for free. Most users cannot clearly know the current fragmentation status of their hard disk, and have no good control over performing the defragmentation. "We have taken care of

PC users' needs in our free Smart Defrag," says Hugo Dong, president of IObit.

Smart Defrag features include:

An "install it and forget it" feature that works automatically and quietly in the background of the computer.

Besides defragmenting, it also places the frequently used data into the fastest area of the disk.

Smart Defrag has the industry's leading defragmenting engine, specially designed for modern, large hard drives.

Free for home, organization, and business and 100% safe from any spyware, adware, and virus.

Designed for Windows 2000, XP, Vista and future Windows 7.

Smart Defrag is now available in English and other languages. More information and free downloads are available at:

[<http://www.iobit.com/iobitsmartdefrag.html>](http://www.iobit.com/iobitsmartdefrag.html).

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

Review: Media Show 4 by Cyberlink

by Terry Oden

President, Macon Computer User Group, GA

There may be hundreds of ways to gather, store, view, edit and show off your pictures and videos. This is one of the best and easiest I have found so far. Your own operating system will do a fairly good job of getting your pictures and videos into your computer for you. On the net you also have programs that are free like Picassa, Flickr and You Tube which all do a very good job of storing and displaying your own work to family and friends.

One of the things that I liked best about Media Show was ease of operation. There are only 5 buttons to control the whole program. Below you'll find a screen shot of the second screen you'll see select the Pictures button.

Starting with the #1 button, or the Home button here you can see all of your different folders and how many pictures or videos you have in each folder.

For the #2 button you have Create. Here you can do things like make your own Screen Saver, compose a movie or DVD. You can print your own pictures or order prints on line.

Next you have the #3 button or the Share button. Here you can share your pictures with friends and family or up-load them to Flickr. Also, you could upload them to U-tube with a single click of your mouse, if desired.

The next button #4 is the View button, here you can adjust the size of your thumbnails or add any captions to your pictures. You can also change the color of the skin of the program (appearance).

The last button or #5 is the Folder Tools button. Here you edit, sort, locate, delete or hide some pictures if you like.

This Media Show 4 is one of the top programs when it comes to ease of operation, not to mention what the finished product will look like. To create a movie or slideshow with sound and motion, fading or cell you only have to make about three clicks of the mouse. First you have to decide if you want background music or not, next select what format you want to use, and where to save your work in your computer. Yes, you do have to tell it what pictures or videos to use! At last, all you do is click the Burn button and that's it. Zap you're done!

Yes, you do have to tell it what pictures or videos to use! At last, all you do is click the Burn button and that's it. Zap you're done!

To create a DVD it's very easy. First decide a name for your DVD. Then pick out a menu style for your DVD. Now comes the hard part. You must decide which videos you want to use and if you want any still pictures in it or not. Yes, once again you have to tell the program which videos or pictures you want to use.

Next, click on the preview button to see what your work looks like. If you like it, click on the burn button and you're done.

System Requirements:

1. Operating System- Windows Vista / XP (with Direct X 9 or above)
2. Screen Resolution- 800 x 600
3. Printers- All
4. CPU- Intel Pentium D 3.0 GHz, AMD Athlon 64 3500+ or above
5. Sound Card- PCI sound card or on-board audio
6. Memory- 512 MB RAM minimum, 1GB recommended

7. Hard Disk Space- 1 GB required, 20 GB recommended for DVD production
8. Graphics Card- Intel 945GM or above-64 MBVRAM or above
9. Optical Drive- A DVD burner (DVD+R/RW or DVD-R/RW) is required to burn content onto DVD's
10. Import Devices- Cameras via removable disk interface-Cameras support Windows Portable devices interface-Camcorder DV devices via IEEE 1394 (Firewire)
11. Internet Connection- An Internet connection is required for some upload/download features.

As for the overall way the program works, I've not found a program this large at this cost that operates so easily and simply. I have found no shortcomings with this program yet. This is the best program for the money that can be found, under \$50.00.

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Review: FastStone Capture

by Ron Hirsch

Boca Raton Computer Society, FL

The Best Screen Capture Program I've Ever Used

Since it is possible that some of you may not know what a "screen capture program" is, I'll start off by defining that program type.

What Is a Screen Capture?

When you are working on your computer, the material you are working on/looking at, is displayed on your monitor screen, as a bunch of pixels. Often, it is nice to be able to "save" the info onscreen, or parts of it, for further uses.

Windows does offer a "Print Screen" capability, to send info to the clipboard or printer, but as with many of Windows utilities, it's a pretty barren utility, with very few options. Fortunately, there are several 3rd party utilities out there, one of which I consider the best I've ever used.

My History With Faststone

When I started using FastStone Capture in early 2007, it was still freeware, with a request to send in a "contribution," if one liked it. I liked it so much, I sent off a contribution immediately, and received a

very nice "Thank You."

Shortly after my contribution, it became a "paid for" utility. For \$19.95, you get the program, and updates are free forever. There is a 30-day free trial period, during which you can use a fully functional version, to convince yourself that this is indeed a program that you want to keep using.

Links Faststone Main Site

The link to the FastStone site is: <http://www.faststone.org/index.htm>

While here, check out the other excellent programs, all of which are free, or click on the Download button for FastStone Capture to download it.

Faststone Capture Page

The link to page for this program is:

<http://www.faststone.org/FSCaptureDetail.htm>

or just click on the "capture" program when you are on the first link noted above.

Ways to Use Screen Captures

Below, I've included some of the ways I use this screen capture program—which, by the way, I use just about every time I'm on my computer.

Remember, this program can capture a wide variety of areas on your screen—see the listing below in one of the screen captured images.

1. Have you ever installed something where a variety of screens and dialog boxes came up, and had to be filled in with info for various options, etc.? Sometime later on—weeks, months, or even years, you need to know what info and options et al that you filled in. No problem - just save each screen and store the saved screens in a named folder. Then all that info is available at a moments notice. All you have to remember is where you stored it. And you can also print out each of the screens after saving them, and file those pages in a loose leaf notebook.
2. You have some digital photos that you'd like to send to someone in an e-mail. If you just "insert" the pix into the e-mail message as many people do, they may come out to a very large size—much larger than you wanted, or expected. There are of course a variety of ways to "resize" image files, but there is one that is pure simplicity. What I do is to display each picture file in a program such as Windows "Picture and Fax Viewer," or the free Fastone Viewer offered on their site. Then adjust the size of the displayed image on the screen, to what you'd like the size to be in your e-mail. Then

capture the image. When inserted into your e-mail it will be exactly the size that you captured, since it captures pixels, and monitors all have very similar pixels/inch.

3. You're on a web page, and there is something interesting that you want to save, but you don't want to print out the whole page. Just select the desired area using Fastone Capture, and save/print that area only.
4. You're watching a video on your TV, and there was an image of someone/something you wanted to capture. Just pause the video, and select the area you want in Fastone Capture. Your image is captured. Remember, screen captures are just pixels. The capture process doesn't care what created those pixels.

Remember, this capture method saves things as an "image" (I use the jpg choice). It will not save text in editable form. If you want to do that, you must copy and paste into a text editor, such as Notepad. But, if you have a program such as "Omnipage" which is generally included when you buy a flatbed scanner, you can use it to convert a jpg image of text to an editable page of text.

The images below are several of the screens and drop-down menus from Fastone. The choices available to the user are well thought out and very useful. Note all the various options for what can be chosen to get saved, and the hot keys for these choices.

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Society News President's Column

by Steve Staub

Last month I mentioned a goal of mine, to improve the image of our club. I received some comments about two areas and I want the person who took time to mention his concerns I do appreciate him taking time. We discussed it and the parties involved are willing to listen to your ideas and if there feasible we will make the necessary changes.

This month I want to take the remainder of this column to thank a club member for all the good he has done for the club when he was asked to help or volunteered to help in any way he can. The gentleman I'm referring to is John McMillan. Several years

ago John help start our 1st. SIG, the New Users Group. John and a couple other members showed people who just purchased a new computer how to press the on/off switch and that there is more to computer than playing card games. He later became the club secretary. He now has taken on an even larger task. The club was given some books. John and one of his daughters catalogued the entire collection. These books are now on our web page www.rcsi.org. Please feel free to go through the listings. We are selling the books very reasonably and if any are to your liking contact John highlandlt@juno.com. John will have the book(s) at the next general meeting. You give him the money and the books are yours. After the book deal I think we give John a rest before we mention any other areas that need his expertise.

You can find more about the club at our web site www.rcsi.org Our meetings are *free* but there is advantages of being a member. You can always get more information by e-mailing me at srstaub1@rochester.rr.com

September 9, 2008

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Arpad Kovacs

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: Has anyone used Google's online spreadsheet?

A: One member has used it. It is closer to OpenOffice than Excel. Everything works well. GoogleDoc Suite does not have the best PowerPoint solution or the sharing of PDFs.

Q: Has anyone tried the new browser?

A: It is good but it still needs some work. A few bugs have been identified. It is similar to Firefox. Chrome was also reported that updates focus on the specific source without affecting other pieces. Google has also announced that they are going to make their software more anonymous. Even though 'friendly.' it is like a spyware.

Q: A member has been using computers since the 70's. He has two computers that are now losing time.

A: It could be that the time zone settings need to be checked. Another possibility is that the battery needs to be replaced. Perhaps he could link up to a website that would then reset the time for him as he boots. Windows is notorious for having time problems.

Q: When using Firefox, he is having a time lapse when a webpage is viewed and the he tries to save the image.

A: It may relate to the resolution that is presented. It could also be that his settings copy down imbedded, taking all of the hidden materials with it.

Q: When using AVG software, he gets a message that a .dat file cannot be scanned.'

A: This is not unexpected. It was suggested that he sign on as an administrator.

Q: Another member reported that his machine is giving an error on booting up. The file held.dll cannot be found. Does this mean that there was a problem during the installation of SP3?

A: Try windlls.com site where you should be able to download the needed file. He could try a repair but that did not help the lat time.

Q: A member gets a window that an update is available. Later a message is shown that the update of SP3 could not be completed. There are no explanations given

A: There were one or two updates before the SP3 that needed to be uninstalled before SP3 can install. Check the Microsoft website for these conditions. He can also try using a restore point and go from there again.

Q: When using his Kodak EasyShare software, he now gets a message when trying to send a photo to his cell phone. It had worked before.

A: Check the mailer of the message that you are getting. The 'from' field will at least tell you which server rejected it.

Note: Arpad reported that there will be a super-collider run in Europe soon. It is checking the possibility of creating a black hole.

Q: Can you describe a system restore?

A: Windows creates a restore point whenever you are preparing to apply a change to your system. If there are new issues, you can reset your system back to that checkpoint and try again, etc. They are stored by date so you can find earlier ones if needed. You can go as far back as your system has space to store the points. At the maximum setting of 12% utilization that would mean two or three years of points one per week. Accessories=>system tools=> .

Q: A friend of a member is getting a window that says autoadjust. He wants to get rid of it.

A: It is coming from his monitor. If it goes away, it is not a problem. If it stays it needs to be addressed.

[Your editor apologizes for neglecting this feature last month. I know it's popular and I assure

you it was not intentional.]

Tuesday, October 14, 2008

Help's Half Hour

Led by: Carl Schmidtman

Recorded by Jan Rothfuss

Q: When running XP SP2, there are items showing downloads pending. They appear to be SP3. When opened, a message about unable to install is received. Can I get rid of these?

A: If you want them to go away, go ahead and open the update box, expand the choices and, under custom, you will see a 'do not ask again' option.

Q: Another member asked what happens with automatic updates? Where are they stored when the computer is off? What about standby options?

A: If the machine is off, it will search for updates when you next start up the machine. If you have the setting for automatic, it will download and install even when you are not there.

Q: HP Deskjet 600 printer. He wants it to print only black. He has made the settings so that the black only works. But now he cannot get the colors.

A: Perhaps you should remove the printer setting and then reenter, searching for a driver update. Reinstallation may work.

Q: How can you see the update log?

A: Control Panel=> You may be able to find it using a search with ".log."

Q: Microsoft is asking to verify the system. Genuine Advantage.

A: This may be prompted due to a hardware change. You may still need to visit Microsoft and tell them you are still the same one. They will then confirm your license. They are looking for boot leggers.

Q: One member is using a Dell desktop that used to be in her office. The Norton scan now indicates a virus "down loader." It does not automatically remove it.

A: The best choice is to go into safe mode. Go to folder Options, show all hidden folders, sort files by date created. Then use the date that you noticed the virus. When in safe mode run a manual scan of Norton. Go to Norton/Google and enter the virus code. If you decide to install AVG, uninstall/remove Norton and then install AVG.

Q: Sometimes AVG has an update but sometimes she cannot connect to the server.

A: This can happen as it can be a busy site.

Q: When pressing F10, can you lose the content of your computer?

A: It was agreed that that should not be an issue. Perhaps there was a virus that had programmed that key. It might be calling for a restore point but it should prompt you, too.

Q: A member inherited a Gateway computer and sees the splash screen. Is it possible to see the next display?

A: It is hard to capture. Try using the tab key or the pause button. You may also be able access the BIOS and set it to turn off the fastboot – skips memory tests and other basic hardware tests. Usually you can disable the splash and look behind it.

October 7, 2008

Planning Meeting

by Arpad Kovacs
acting secretary

The September presentation was good, leaned toward Linux. We may need microphone for next meeting.

The November presentation will be our annual Gifts and Gadgets for the Holidays at the Pittsford Library. Our December holiday meeting will again be a Computer Jeopardy game. The December meeting will be in the Brighton Library.

Some mail is being returned to sender. Please notify Steve with any address changes. All returned mail coats the club money. If we do not have a current address we won't be able to mail your *Monitor* to you.

If you made a donation to the silent auction at the picnic please send a description of the item to Sally. She'll create a detailed receipt and send it to you. We are a not-for-profit corporation. This is your chance to take advantage of that fact and get a tax deduction for your support of the society.

