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Contents

Stream Movies from Your PC to Your TV

by Steve Bass

Watching Downloaded Movies on Your TV

W atch movies on my PC? No way." I was talking to one of my cousins, not one of the brightest bulbs in the family. It took me a few minutes to explain how he could send downloaded movies — as well as other Internet content, such as TV shows — to the TV in his living room.

For the last few months, I've tried two devices that sit near your TV and grab video content from your PC. Even in this dreadful economy, neither one I tried is terribly expensive — and there are no monthly charges.

Over the next couple of weeks I'll explain how these media streaming devices work. To help you decide if you want one, I'll talk about the pros and cons of how each model works, and some of the setup hurdles. I'll also show you where to get movies and other video content, both legal and — hold onto your seat — illegal.

This week I'll cover the hardware; next week I'll

tell you where to find movies and TV shows on the Internet. I'll also tell you about a MediaGate portable media player.

Making the PC-to-TV Connection

I tried two devices: Sling Media's $200 Sling-Catcher, and MediaGate's MG-800HD, about $240 discounted. I'll have specs and descriptions for you in a minute. Of the two, the MG-800HD is the hands-down winner.

The two are roughly the size of an external hard drive and come with remote controls with the usual array of features; the MediaGate includes bookmarking and fast-forward to speeds of 16X. Each device connects to your TV using component, composite, S-Video, or (if you have a hoity-toity big screen) HDMI inputs, and each supports both standard Pal and high-definition video, up to 1080i.

Audio-out is a typical left-right stereo or (if your TV has it) coaxial or optical digital. Each device has USB and network inputs, and supports Windows XP and Vista.

Connections: Pros and Cons

Understanding the five ways these products—and others like them—push a movie from the PC to your TV will help you understand which one is the best fit for you.

External Hard Drive: Copy the video files onto an external hard drive or Flash drive, and connect it to the device's USB port.

Positives: About the easiest method -- literally plug and play. The movie starts almost immediately. The hard drive can store lots of movies; the size of the Flash drive limits you.

Negatives: You'll need to buy an external drive, or Flash drive, and schlep it to your computer to delete movies you've watched and refill it with new movies; the drive can be noisy.

Internal Hard Drive: Install a hard drive into the device.

Positives: Installing the drive isn't difficult; again, the drive can store lots of movies and the movie starts almost immediately. It's handy to take the device with you to, say, a hotel, or a friend's house, and connect it to their TV to watch movies. (You can do this with an external hard drive, too, but it's not as convenient.)

Negatives: You'll need to buy a hard drive — mine is 40GBs; detaching the device from the TV and bringing it to your PC to load more movies is a hassle; the drive, and small fan in the device, can be noisy.

Hard-wired Network: Movies are sent from your PC or server over your network, hard-wired from your router, using standard network CAT 5 wiring.

Positives: You don't need an extra internal or external hard drive; all file management is done on your PC; with a network connection, and access to the Internet, you watch YouTube and view other content directly from the Internet.

Negatives: You'll need to have a network cable running from your router to the device at the TV. Configuring the device to recognize the network ranges from a five-minute job to being lengthy and challenging. You'll also need to have an available port on your router.

Wireless Network: Movies are on your PC or server and beamed over your wireless network.

Positives: You don't have to crawl under the house to lay cable; as with the wired network, you won't need an internal or external hard drive; all file management is done on your PC; access to Internet content.

Negatives: Like the hard-wired option, setup can be difficult—or surprisingly easy—depending on your computing skills and the complexity of your network. Streaming can sometimes stutter if the distance between your Wi-Fi router and the device is great, or if there are walls blocking the signal.

Screen Capture: Whatever is displayed on the PC's monitor is captured and streamed to the TV.

Positives: The device doesn't need codecs, so you can watch *any* video that displays on your PC's monitor — YouTube, Windows Media Player output, Netflix streaming video, and even PowerPoint presentations. (For details on codecs, read A Fix for "My Video Won't Play!"). Installing the device is straightforward.

Negatives: You'll need to have a network cable running from your router to the device at the TV; Wi-Fi isn't available. Poor-quality video on the PC looks worse when displayed on the TV. The PC has to be turned on and you have to start capture software from the PC; it takes a while to get used to

the interface.

How Well Do They Work?

Media Gate MG-800HD: MediaGate's device gives you lots of ways to get movies, pictures, and music to your TV. Here's the stunner: When you finally get the MG-800HD configured correctly, it works as advertised.

When I first tried the MG-800HD, it found all the PCs on the network — mine, Judy's, and my test notebook—but it couldn't locate my network server. That was essential, because that's where I store everything I want to watch.

Even after five years designing and manufacturing network media adapters, MediaGate sometimes releases products before they're fully tested and ready for consumers. As late as spring 2009 — four months after the MG-800HD was released — MediaGate was still getting user complaints and releasing firmware updates. The help I received on MediaGate's forum was terrific (thanks, guys), but it took a July firmware upgrade to solve my problem.

Nonetheless, the MG-800HD works perfectly and it's a beauty. Accessing the network is fast and pictures are clear and sharp, With its Internet connection, I can scroll around YouTube and watch videos, play music from Live365, and tune in to Internet TV. Of course, now that the novelty of all that has worn off, all I do is watch movies and TV shows. And boy is that fun.

Not everything's perfect. The remote is functional, but designed by the same orangutan who worked on the SlingCatcher's remote (as you'll read about in a sec). The layout isn't smart. For instance, two of the buttons surrounding the Play/Pause button (see red arrows in image below) should control the volume. Instead, the bottoms stop the video and start the next (or previous) video. Unlike previous models MediaGate has released, the remotes allowed bookmarking anywhere within the video. This one automatically bookmarks when I close the file. And previous models allowed fast-forward to speeds of 32X, this one's limited to 16X

MediaGate's remote designers ought to go into another business.

You have lots of ways to connect the MG-800HD to your TV: Composite, S-Video, HD components (Y,

Pb, Pr at 480p, 720p, or 1080i), or HDMI (480p, 720p, 1080i, or 1080p). If you don't have an HDTV, you can get away with the typical composite using an included yellow, white, and red cable. The MG-800HD supports 5.1 surround sound using the SPDIF digital audio output. And here's a surprise: Because it's connected to the Internet, it can also act

as a BitTorrent client.

The delicious thing about the MG-800HD, in addition to being able to play high-definition video, is the number of video formats it supports. The standard ones are no biggie: .avi, .wmv, most versions of .mpg, .mp4, .asf, .m2ts, .mov, DivX, and H264 .avi. It can also play directly from .iso, .vob, .ifo, .tp, and .ts files. New to the 800HD is the ability to play the .mkv format, an alternative to .avi and .mp4, and more commonly seen; MediaGate has also licensed the RMVB codec from RealVideo. What all this gobbledygook means is the MG-800HD

plays nearly everything you throw at it.

The MG-800HD gives you five ways to connect to the outside world. The easiest is to copy the videos onto an external hard drive and bring it into the room where the MG-800HD is connected to your TV. Connect the external drive to the MG-800HD's USB 2.0 port, turn everything on, and start watching.

The MediaGate MG-800HD

If you have an extra internal SATA or IDE drive, install it inside the MG-800HD. Copy movies from your PC to the MG-800HD and connect it to the TV.

If your network's hard-wired, and you have a cable near the TV, you can use it to connect to the

MG-800HD. It can also handle a Wi-Fi signal. My Wi-Fi router is close to the TV -- about 25 feet -- so the wireless signal was as good as when I used the hard-wired connection. Regrettably, the Bass International disclaimer is in effect: Mileage varies, so there's no way to guarantee how your wireless connection will perform.

By the way, the MG-800HD's predecessor, the MG-450HD, may be a cheaper alternative, *if* you can find one for sale. It has fewer codecs, and it doesn't have Wi-Fi capabilities, but it's adequate for most people. And it has a better remote.

Sling Media SlingCatcher: The SlingCatcher, using Sling Media's SlingProjector feature, lets you play whatever's on your PC's monitor on your TV, and control it from the couch. So if you're a Netflix subscriber, for instance, you can use its Play Instantly feature.

Sling Catcher with silly remote control.

On the PC side, Sling Media recommends the maximum video window size (*not* screen resolution) to capture is 1024 by 768, but 800 by 600 is best. You'll need a fast PC: a 1.6-GHz Intel Core Duo CPU or 3-GHz Pentium IV with at least 1 GB RAM. Sling Catcher doesn't capture Blu-ray video and it won't work on 64-bit versions of Vista. It plays on the TV full-screen and the display quality is most times excellent, but depending on the source video, it can be just fair.

The SlingProjector software has to be downloaded because isn't included with the SlingCatcher package. It took me about 20 minutes to configure the software and another 20 to understand how to use it. It really wasn't all that traumatic.

It's clear that the engineer who designed the remote hasn't actually used it, and that was disappointing. The remote is V-shaped and awkward to use; it doesn't sit comfortably in my hand. It functions flawlessly, though, because I can control the playback of the video on my PC just by pointing to the SlingCatcher.

The showstopper for some of you is the device requires a hard-wired network connection and a free port on your router. Silly, but true: It doesn't have Wi-Fi capabilities (which even my next microwave oven probably will).

Another downside is the SlingCatcher uses old technology. It was released early in 2009, but was in development for a couple of years before that, so it's missing the ability to stream videos from your PC or server, as the MediaGate device can. While it can play videos from an external drive or Flash drive (which, amazingly, needs FAT32 formatting), it doesn't have enough built-in video file formats to satisfy technophiles like me. It supports media formats, including WMV, MPEG-2, MPEG-4, H.264 and Xvid, and handles other mainstream files such as .avi, .vob, .mpg, .mov, and .wma. But oddballs -- .mkv, say -- are beyond its capabilities.

Yet for $199 (down from $300, on the Sling site no less, and probably lower through discounters), the SlingCatcher does a great job at streaming video from your PC's screen.

Next week: MediaGate's latest portable media player, where to pick up movies and TV shows.

Steve Bass is the publisher and self-appointed Chief Content Officer at TechBite; he continues to experience the cool feeling of having his own newsletter. Send him your feedback at stevebass@techbite.com. *To sign up for TechBite's free Steve Bass Technology newsletter, head for his signup page at http://www.techbite.com/*

Google Docs 4Everyone

Reviewed by John Krill
North Orange County Computer Club, CA

Confession first: I'm a big Google fan. After two nightmare situations with Yahoo!, I went over to the bright side and got a Gmail account. Now I have four Gmail accounts. The center of my Internet existence is Google's Personal Web portal. I also use Google Blogger for three blogs. Lastly there is Picasa for organizing all my photos and the Picasa's web space for displaying the photos I want to share with others.

The one Google application that I have wanted to use but have put it off is Google Docs. This application is a word processor, spreadsheet, and presentation program in one wrapper. Why use Google Docs when Microsoft Word and Excel are fast and easy to use? The primary reason is Google Docs ability to easily collaborate and share with others.

You can't learn this stuff on your own—can you?

That's where Google Docs 4Everyone comes into play. Let's be honest I really didn't think I needed a manual to learn Google Docs. I was wrong. The first chapter alone gave me information on Google accounts that I've already taken advantage of. If you only read about the collaboration tools (Chapters 5, 8, and 10) in Google Docs you will benefit greatly. The book covers word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, and collaborating and sharing the documents you work with in Google Docs.

Remember the manual you received with your software? Well Google Docs 4Everyone is your manual for Google Docs. It's that simple. Most of you have a wealth of knowledge using word processors, spreadsheets, and presentation software and what you need is a manual that gives the basics of Google Docs, especially its limits. The important subjects are those that make Google Docs special. Primarily its collaboration tools and Google Docs ability to publish to the Web and post to blogs. It's all covered in *Google Docs 4Everyone.*

This book is very much recommended. I'm now a big fan of Google Docs because of Google Docs 4Everyone. The list price for Google Docs 4Everyone is $19.99 and it can be had at Amazon for $13.59. (It also can be ordered from the publisher with a 35% discount if your group is a member of the Pearson User Group program).

Google Docs 4Everyone is authored by Steven Holzner and Nancy Holzner. 251 Pages. Publisher: QUE, 800 East 9th St., Indianapolis, Indiana, 46240. (http://www.informit.com/store/product.aspx ?isbn=0789739364)

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From The DealsGuy

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

A month off makes me lazy and I've wondered if it would even be worth my while to continue the column because I am not getting many new product announcements lately. However, I do have one for this month. I was browsing some items I've saved while reading newsletters I receive; most I've had for ages, but if the product is still a good one, and I've only seen it in two or three newsletters, it should be usable. Perhaps I can keep DealsGuy going a bit longer.

Like many others across the US, I have my own adjustments to make. For me, it's because of the GM bankruptcy. I don't know how many benefits I'll end up losing, but I'm glad my wife and I still have a part-time job to bring in a few extra bucks. However, we get less security work lately because some trade show management officials feel that old grey-haired people don't look good working in their shows, and sometimes our employers must listen to what the customer wants or lose business. Even if discrimination is against the law, employers must please the client to survive.

Also, some of our co-workers are vocal that since we have pensions, we shouldn't be working and taking money away from our younger counterparts who do not have a pension. Those people have not tried to live on a pension, especially a pension rate established 25 years ago when I retired. Most young people don't know that pensions don't grow much over the years. Some of our co-workers also only get a small pension to live on and could not make it without other income. Trade shows are fun to work, but the job doesn't pay much. There aren't many jobs available for seniors, except volunteer work. Right now (August), we have no security work scheduled until at least October. Some jobless people are taking these part-time security jobs with several companies in an effort to make them full-time by running from show to show with various companies.

I Used That Good Tech Support Again!

I seem to get a lightning strike each year and in spite of having adequate protection, I still lose some equipment. It knocked out my favorite toy again, (my weather station), my router and a few other items. It's hard to safeguard the weather station because the wind anemometer sits on the roof, a vulnerable place for lightning. It seems the DSL filters saved my phones because two phones wouldn't work until I replaced the DSL filters in their phone lines. The phone line for my DSL modem was protected through the UPS, but my router no longer worked, so I finally replaced it. The new D-Link router had a disk with a setup wizard on it that

worked fine for the setup, also configuring the security. However, I later found that my Ricoh printer wouldn't print. Other routers I've used sent print jobs just fine without any special configuration. After a lot of "trial and error," I decided my router wasn't talking to the printer, which connects to the network, so I called Ricoh.

A guy named Larry answered immediately and we went to work. He tried many things that included pinging the printer, which worked, but the printer still refused to print, even though the computer was now talking to the printer. He said my new router, a D-Link, didn't like my printer and he would have to keep trying port changes. After an hour, he found the right combination and I was printing. As before, Ricoh tech support answered in Atlanta and was easy to work with. He kept his cool, even when his new settings didn't seem to work, or I made a mistake when instructed to punch certain keys.

I noticed my DSL was running slower than usual, but running the computer directly from the modem worked fine. I was unable to find the D-Link free tech support phone number on the Web site so I e-mailed them for a phone number and finally was able to call their tech support. After some difficult time, they improved it. They said they were based in California, but didn't sound like it. Seems the modem and the router both had the same IP address.

However, I now couldn't print again, but another call to Ricoh fixed that. I told a friend about the good experience with Ricoh and he asked if I had talked to HP's tech support lately. He said he called HP tech support recently and talked to a guy in India. He had problems understanding him and nothing they tried was working. He said the guy finally hung up on him; and still no solution. My friend is quite computer literate so I doubt he was the problem.

All About Charts

This product is said to be for software developers, but I'll pass it on because it has a discount and I don't know how many readers develop software. This had the most confusing write-up so I have edited out the hype and tried to make sense of what's left.

ArtfulBits aiCharts for Android is intended for software developers to use as an easily integrated part of their applications to allow representing and visualizing charts of different kinds. It is developed especially for the Android platform and is compatible with Android version 1.1, Cupcake 1.5 and Android 2.0. Presently, it supports the following chart types: Line, Spline, Point, Bubble, Column, Stack Column, Stack Column 100%, Bar, Stack Bar, Stack bar 100%, Area, Spline Area, Stack Area, Stack Area 100%, Pie, Polar, HiLoCandlestick, Funnel, Pyramid.

aiCharts does not use any low level native libraries and is 100% safe for Android OS users as it runs in a completely safe managed environment of Dalvik Java VM. Online documentation with samples and tutorials gives developers all the necessary information to easily integrate and provide support for applications with aiCharts. Online documentation will be updated frequently.

A subscription guarantees fast feedback, access to the internal bug tracking system and the latest solutions. Any problems that may occur will be reviewed and resolved as soon as possible, and solutions and/or patches will be available before the release of the next version. aiCharts creators assure that all users will get feedback and the ArtfulBits team will do everything possible to meet customers' demands, and to perfect aiCharts.

This opportunity seems more interesting considering the recently announced ADC 2 (Android Developer Challenge 2) launched by Google aiming to support developers in their efforts.

Get a 50% discount by using the code "DealsGuy–Customers-Choice" when ordering. Bonus is an added 1Year Subscription. Limitations are: code works from September 01, 2009 until November 01, 2009. The code works on a Developer License, Bundle 3 and Bundle 5 and does not work on a Subscription only. That would help a lot on the MSRP of $299.

Product page: <http://www.artfulbits.com/products/>
YouTube demo:
 <http://www.youtube.com /watch?v=3ho5wiV-o8g>
Purchase:
<http://www.artfulbits.com/Products/Purchase.aspx>

Someone Sent Me This, but Didn't Want to Be Named

Ever wonder if somebody might have plugged a USB device into your computer for some reason? People sometimes like playing tricks on you (like a surprise midi file you didn't expect), or might browse through your HD and even copy items to, or from, a flash drive or some other media, but this product might provide some details if a flash drive was used. USBDeview finds out what USB devices are currently connected to your computer and also sees which devices were connected before. It tells you the time the device was plugged/unplugged (if the machine hasn't been rebooted). Other information possible is; device name /description, device type, serial number (for mass storage devices), VendorID, ProductID, and more.

USBDeview allows you to uninstall USB devices that you previously used, and disconnect USB devices currently connected to your computer. Unfortunately it can't figure out which files might have been copied from, or to, your machine, or even if that actually happened. Use your best judgments if you suspect that. Check this out at <http://www.nirsoft.net/utils/usb_devices_view.html>. This is a freebie and works on newer Windows systems. The Web site says no need to install it, just run the .exe file. I thought it sounded interesting.

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

dotCrime Manifesto

Reviewed by John Lundgren
North Orange County Computer Club, CA

This is a book review of the above hard cover book, which has a subtitle (in uppercase) of HOW TO STOP INTERNET CRIME. The ISBN-13 is 978-0-321-50358-9; the publisher is Addison-Wesley. The book has four sections: 1. 'People not bits', 2. 'Stopping the cycle', 3. 'Tools of the trade', and 4. 'The accountable web'.

The book is a bit more than 400 pages. MSRP=$24. A 35% discount is available when ordered from the publisher if your user group is a member of the Pearson User Group Program) (http://www.informit.com/store/product.aspx?isbn=0321544714)

The author, Phillip Hallam-Baker, lectures and knows how to keep his audience's attention, at least in print, since I can't speak for his in-person lectures. Although the book's subject seems rather dry, this author kept me entertained with anecdotes such as the Mr. Coffee machine example on P. 62, and good Web historical content. It's not filled with geek speak, it's an excellent Layman's guide, and I think it's a good read. I should point out that although the author is British, I thought it odd that I didn't find the text to have typically British grammar; perhaps that's because his employer is a U.S. company. To help the reader refresh, each chapter is ended with a page of Key Points for revue. Some examples have a reference number and in the back of the book there is a list of reference notes for each chapter.

This book discusses the Internet crime problem with historical examples and in the future what must be changed to reduce this problem. The book describes the crimes on the web, and points out that they are essentially the same crimes that have been going on for eternity, just that they have now been adapted to the web. It's the same old fraud, confidence games, tricksters, liars, cheats and thieves. Hallam then points out that the reason these crimes prosper on the Net is lack of accountability, and how this makes it difficult or impossible for law enforcement to trace down the suspect. He explains his well-thought-out solutions to these problems.

One example he uses is the automobile, and how early on people found license plates, driver's licenses, and traffic laws that made people accountable have helped to make the highways a much safer place.

Hallam then shows how to make the net accountable through the widespread use of public key encryption to make certain that transmissions are really from where they say they're from. Again I should point out that as the author stated in the preface he has deliberately avoided the use of Geek Speak, or jargon. This helps the layman to truly

understand the simple, underlying principles and methods he lays out.

The author is a senior at Verisign, and thus has to speak for his company at times when he puts forth solutions, since his company is involved in this. But the book is not a sales brochure for his company's products. Throughout the book, he stresses the user's experience, and how security and accountability must not negatively impact the user.

I quote one of my favorites: "The user is … bombarded with information he simply doesn't need, such as warning dialogs of the type that lawyers write to dump responsibility for security onto the user." I can speak from my own experience how important this is. I have seen situations where, in the name of security, the password complexity and mandatory change intervals are so onerous that most users have their passwords written on a Post-it on their monitor. This completely defeats the security! Anyone can walk up and sign on as another person.

In one example that Hallam used, you want to know that your child is visiting a chat room that is for children, and that other chatters are not pedophiles posing as children. Some form of authentication must be required so that the chat room users must prove that they are children, yet must not require the child to reveal his or her true identity. Then I had to think about his example of Alice, and her visit to the local bar. He points out that the bartender only needs to know that Alice is of legal drinking age, but Alice does not need to prove that she is Alice—that's none of the bartender's business. And the bartender does not need to know how many times Alice has been there before.

Thus, when Alice shows her driver's license, it is really revealing too much information. These are interesting thoughts, now that he has compared the online world to a situation in the real world I hope you find this book as enjoyable as I did. I just hope that his accountability solutions are soon implemented; they were desperately needed long ago.

A Few Closing Words

I must mention spam, for that is one subject the author discusses. Right now our email statistics show that more than 90 percent of all emails are spam, which means we are continually deluged with a tsunami of junk emails. Of the remaining 10%, some of those emails are spam that managed to sneak through, so the actual percentage is even higher than 90 percent. Statistics from some authoritative sources say it's 92 percent. That small percentage that sneaks through is still enough to make it worthwhile for the spammers. If no one bought any of their fraudulently advertised products, the spammers would have to do something else to make money.

Two wise advisories are: 1. Never buy anything advertised in junk email. 2. Never click on a link that is in a junk email. This is especially true for phishing emails, those that say your bank or Paypal requires you to verify your account. If you have reason to believe that the email might be true, go to your web browser and type in the URL for the bank or www.paypal.com, and log in using this method. If you click on a link in a junk email, it will steal your account and password. My hope is that all the spammers get thrown in jail. I was elated to read recently that a prolific spammer was locked up for 3-1/2 years. The problem is there are many more out there. Will the Net survive? Only time will tell.

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Cyber Crime Fighters: Tales from the Trenches

Reviewed by Steven M. Breitbart
North Orange County Computer Club, CA

I have never wanted one of my book reviews to be on Page 1 of the Orange Bytes before now. The Internet has become an entity where all of the old evils are amplified and expanded, and new evils have been created. As the book says "Once again, computer technology and the Internet is a double-edged sword, providing tools both for those involved in illegal drug activity as well as for those seeking justice." You can just as easily plug in identity theft, child pornography or any other crime that can be committed using the Internet.

This book explores many, if not most of the crimes committed using the Internet. The authors, Felicia Donovan and Kristyn Bernier have "over 25 years of combined law enforcement experience."

They discuss cyber stalking, identity theft, online dating, child pornography, social networks, illegal drugs and peer-to-peer network crimes. The crimes range from bullying, stalking or stealing the victims' identity all the way to murder.

The book is written for the ordinary person who is not an IT professional. They describe an honest, if pessimistic view of the Internet. It appears that someone illegally exchanging songs using a peer-to-peer network is more likely to be sued by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) for music piracy than people who acquire child pornography are to be arrested by law enforcement.

One thing I have learned from this book is that if you have a business with any sort of network and access to the Internet, you must either have an IT person or be the IT person yourself. You must have policies clearly defining acceptable uses of business computers and make sure every employee understands the risks involved of visiting risky web sites. You must have procedures, hardware and software in place to make sure nothing sensitive gets out or nothing dangerous, such as spyware and viruses, get in. Another thing is that you should initiate all actions and not respond to web sites or emails offering any type of get-rich quick scheme or warning.

If you get an email asking you to send money, promising that you'll get back more, it's probably one of many types of scams. If the scam isn't asking to you to send money, it's asking for enough information so they can steal it directly out of your bank accounts—having acquired your name, user identification, and password. The authors describe how pedophiles have posed as children and get information from real children, who give out all sorts of information on Facebook, MySpace or other social networking web sites.Sometimes they get the children to do things in front of their webcams. Once recorded, these videos are circulated among the community of pedophiles. If the pedophiles can get the children to meet them in person, they are often molested or worse.

A great thing about the book is that they include a lot of information on how to protect yourself, your family and your business, but it is scattered all over the book. What we all need is a pamphlet summarizing all the recommended procedures and different web sites we can go to for help.The whole thing reminds me of an episode of the television show Criminal Minds. The victim asks FBI Agent Hotchner "How many of these people are out there?" He replies, "More than you want to know."

While the characters were not talking about *Cyber Crime*, the result is the same. As long as I mentioned a television show, I would like to thank the authors for Appendix B, which describes the incredible differences between television's version of law enforcement and the real thing. It seems to me that animated cartoons resemble reality more.There are seventeen chapters in the book, plus two appendices. Sixteen of the chapters are chock full of case after case of criminal activities committed using the Internet. While it seems repetitive and tedious, one must remember that this is a small sample of what law enforcement and other agencies find.

The book usually describes what happened to the victims and whether the criminals were caught. As one would expect, it doesn't usually cover the techniques that law enforcement uses too much. Law enforcement is apparently at such a disadvantage in terms of funding, personnel and legal requirements that they cannot afford to give away any information .Law enforcement is fighting an uphill battle. A lot of the "evil" is coming in from other countries, the criminals are able to remain anonymous on the Internet, and law enforcement is constantly crippled by a lack of budget or personnel for specialized squads. Add to this the fact that the laws applying to cyber crime vary from state to state, technical challenges and other factors; you get a very pessimistic picture.

The Internet is an almost lawless place and it is up to the user to be vigilant.There are a few small issues I have with the book. The title did not excite me; the word "trenches" is used to mean everything from real world experiences to military operations to undercover investigations; how about "online front line" instead. They repeat various agency names and their acronyms over and over. Either use the full name once along with the acronym, then use just the acronym for, say, the rest of the chapter. The photographs they used for the Internet address line that says "https" and the padlock icon weren't clear enough to see. Also, in the chapter where they describe botnets, they begin with a clear description.

Two pages later, they say they will define botnets "later"—but they already have.

The last chapter is "How We Would Combat Cyber Crime." They have many good ideas and I hope the new Cybersecurity Czar will at least listen to the advice of these authors.I highly recommend this book for anyone who uses the Internet. It will certainly be too simple for people already involved in computer security. However, the rest of us need to understand what can happen if we are unaware of the pitfalls of using the *Internet.Cyber Crime Fighters: Tales from the Trenches*, by Felecia Donovan and Kristyn Bernier; ©2009 Pearson Education, Inc. (part of Addison-Wesley Professional) Boston, MA. ISBN-13: 978-0-7897-3922-3; ISBN-10: 0-7897-3922-4List price is $21.99, but is available for $17.15 at Amazon.com. If your group is a member of the Pearson User Group program, members will receive a 35% discount. Purchase of the book includes a free 45-day online edition through Safari Bookshelf.

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Build It, Fix It, Own It

A Beginner's Guide to Building and Upgrading a PC

Review by Joe Mizer
North Orange County Computer Club, CA

This book, published by QUE, is a good guide to understanding a PC from the inside out. Building a PC is easier than selecting stereo and video entertainment equipment for your home; you decide on the features you want and the performance level desired. In both situations the components inside a PC such as the mother board, memory, disk drives, optical drives, sound cards, and video cards all have standard interfaces and when connected, become a PC inside the case you selected.

This book is targeted for beginners with the desire to build a PC from scratch. The book is laid out in two parts; the first part is about getting to know your PC. The chapters cover in detail the options and decisions to be made when selecting a motherboard, and CPU, memory type and size, drives, audio and video options, networking, parts, and building skills. The author in a step-by-step approach discusses the choices available with each of these components and how to guarantee your selections will operate as a fast and reliable system. This book was an introduction into the technology changes that have occurred since I last built a system from scratch. My understanding of the latest hardware options, are clearly much different from the past. In fact, many of the performance changes make the devices more than just updated versions of those available only a few years ago.

In a careful step-by-step journey, the book explains the technology so you will really understand the choices you need to make when selecting the parts for your new computer and how to get the best deals on the parts you decide on. My favorite chapter in the first section is chapter six which introduces the reader to networking and security without the complex technical discussions which are normally included with networking. The second part of the book puts all of the details discussed in part one into action by designing five computers, each as a project / chapter and aimed at different jobs. Chapter 10 Building a Basic Business PC explains goals and expected requirements as well as how to select components and to overcome problems you will probably encounter. A detailed assembly section answers a lot of the expected questions, and gives a check list procedure to actually use when powering up a new machine for the first time. Chapter 11 is on Building a home theater PC. This project builds a computer which connects to your television either analog or digital, your audio system, cable box, gaming interface, and other digital and analog devices. Chapter 12's project is Building a high performance computer. Chapter 13's project is Building a Killer Gaming PC, and Chapter 14 covers building a Building a Budget PC.

The most important reason for building a new computer is the chance to configure it exactly as you want it — you can have a blazing fast machine or an average business computer. You can have the best audio or the standard small speakers, and the best of all internal components, or not. You also get to select the operating system of you choice, which in my opinion is not any version of Vista. As you can guess I do not like the Vista operating system, and really I do not know whether Vista is the problem or just that I am out of date again. This is why I am

now going to read "Windows Vista" by Steve Johnson and see if I can I learn to do things the Vista way.

Avoiding only one mistake will easily save you more than that amount. I recommend this book because since I last built a system, so much has changed in the hardware available, I was just plain not up to speed on selecting the best stuff. With this book at my side, even though I skipped the chapters on salvaging parts from old computers and renovating old computers because I just don't like to reuse old parts. I now feel I know the questions to ask and where to get advice when making the necessary decisions to build a new system, hopefully it will be faster and live longer.

This book is available from amazon.com, the publisher (http://www.informit.com/store/product.aspx?isbn=0789738279) And, of course, your local book store. The list price is $29.99 USA. ISBN-13 978-0-7897-3827-1

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Cyberspace: What is it?

Q. What does "cyberspace" mean? I see it all the time associated with the Internet.

A. The term "cybernetics" was coined by Norbert Wiener in his 1948 book "Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine." Catchy title. He used the term in reference to the control of complex systems in the animal world and in mechanical networks. Expanding on that 38 years later, author William Gibson, in his 1980 science-fiction thriller "Neuromancer" used the word "cyberspace" to define a Rod Serlingesque dimension of time and space that begins when data is transmitted, and ends when it is received. For example, when you send email, the data leaves your computer then subsequently arrives at a destination mail server. During that brief time in transit, the data exists in an electronic time warp known as cyberspace.

Q. I use Outlook Express for my email. How can I transfer all my messages and mail folders from my old computer to a new computer?

A. The Outlook Express Backup Genie (http://tinyurl.com/6lz9a) is a helpful utility that saves messages, settings, address books, mail accounts, blocked senders lists and signature files to a compressed backup file, which can be easily restored to the same computer or to another computer. You can try the Backup Genie for 15 days and it's $39.95 to purchase.

Though the program's name suggests that its primary focus is Outlook Express, it will also back up and restore data from Outlook, Eudora, IncrediMail, Opera, Netscape Messenger, Netscape Mail, Poco-Mail, and several other applications.

If you only have a few messages that you need to move from one computer to another, instead of copying a message from one computer to another, simply forward the email to yourself, then go online with the second computer and retrieve your email. As ridiculously low-tech as it sounds, I've been using this technique for years and it works like a charm.

Q. I know what an email filter is, but can you explain the difference between a negative email filter and a positive email filter?

A. A negative filter is created to block email based on the sender's name or address, words used in the Subject line or body of the message. In other words, there's a negative connotation associated with the email: You don't want to see it, so you create a filter to block it or route it directly into the trash. Conversely, a positive email filter is created for email addresses of people from whom you do want to receive messages, such as friends, colleagues, family members and, of course, Mr. Modem. Positive filters bring messages to your attention. A filter's action may change the color of the message header, play a jaunty little tune, or transfer the message to a designated mail folder.

Q. A Web site that I need to visit displays a message that says that I have to disable all pop-up blockers first. It says something about a Windows update that enabled a pop-up blocker. Does this make any sense to you, Mr. M?

A. Yes, it sure does, and it's easily resolved. When one of the large Windows Service Pack updates was installed, it enabled Internet Explorer's pop-up

blocker by default. To disable it, click Tools > Pop-up Blocker > Turn Off Pop-up Blocker. That's all there is to it.

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

Birthday Statistics

Type in your birth date and this calculator will tell you how many hours and seconds you have been alive, beginning with the date of conception. Okay, perhaps a little too much information, but it also presents the top songs of the year of your birth, your equivalent age in dog years (Mercy!), and the amount of heat generated by all the candles on your birthday cake. If this won't ruin your birthday, nothing will.

http://tinyurl.com/2f8zg

Blinkx Video

Here you'll find more than 35 million hours (approximately 4,000 years, give or take) of video, in case you have some free time. Search for TV news clips and other video snippets from more than 500 media partners. Lots of humorous content, as well. New video continually arrives, fed by robotic 'spiders' that comb the Web looking for video content. www.blinkx.com

Newser

An online news aggregator that scans Internet news sources and delivers news in concise summaries, together with photos, video, audio and links to original stories. Newser editors select the day's top stories from more than 100 sources, along with items from lesser known sites that are frequently overlooked. News is presented in a nine-square grid pattern for fast and easy reference. If you wish, you can increase the grid to 21 tiny squares that are so difficult to read, it will give you a headache. You can also decide if you want hard or soft news. Registration is free. www.newser.com

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"Mr Watson Come Here, I Want To See You"

by Lou Torraca
The TUG, MOAA User Group, Hawaii

"Mr Watson — Come here — I want to see you." If only Alexander Graham Bell had known about APPS!

I surrender! I have for a very long time been ignoring the smart phone craze. Mostly because I just can't see myself doing everything, and I mean everything on a phone! But I have to admit, the proliferation of "apps" via a bazillion storefronts on the web, has me fascinated, from a business point of view that is, so I have spent a considerable amount of time researching what I call the "app phenom" and consequently, I have at least as many pages of stuff on the topic as there are app storefronts … I think! So, I confessed this to a colleague and he immediately said:" so do a column on it already." After a bit of soul-searching, I decided what the heck, why not and I began to organize the plethora of info I have accumulated. Early on it became obvious I had not been very discriminating in what or how I filed away app stuff and I was about to pick another topic, when my friend, Andy Marken came along with the solution to my problem, so sit back and read a most insightful dissertation on the subject of "apps."

Open for Business — Apple wasn't the first to build a Smartphone or the first to offer apps. They were just the first to make them real, real fun /interesting. Offer the right merchandise, the right mood and most people will take the bait. Source –*Screen Gems*

Guess when you have $56 billion and change in the vault in today's economic environment you must be doing something right. Just wish our kids would quit contributing to the stash Apple is using to buy GPU (graphics processor unit) technology and game designer talent.

A few years ago Apple decided all Smartphones sucked (they're not too hot on netbooks either).

So they announced the step up from the iPod (they didn't like those other MP3 players!)…the iPhone.

Make a Call Too – When Apple introduced the

iPhone it was more than a Smartphone. Actually it was everything else first and then a phone. Good move because the company set its solution way apart from everyone else and the rest of the market scrambled to catch up …still are. Source –Apple

Changing the Game

Then they did something really dumb …gave AT&T a two-year exclusive on the phone.

They decided ecommerce was no longer cool and that iCommerce is so much better.

Goes well with:

- iTunes
- iPod
- iPhone
- iMovies
- iStore
- iApps

Instead of keeping a closed ecosystem as they did with the Mac, they encouraged others to make products they would sell in their store.

Sure it's Apple which means:

- works on their devices (iPhone and iPod Touch), their way
- works in their closed environment
- sold only in their store

It also means:

- ✓ you use their SDK (software development kit) but heck it only costs $99
- ✓ they determine which apps fly and which don't make the cut (sure fire rejection is something that competes with their stuff!)
- ✓ you agree to the 70/30 split (70% for you, 30% for them – seems retail fair)

Developers' Dream –The new Apple developers kit makes it fast, easy for people to produce applications they can make available to iPhone/iPod Touch customers (once Apple gives its stamp of approval). Source—Apple

Cripes it seems to work!

Mega Store

The iPhone apps store looks like a Wal-Mart mega store.

The store has been open less than a year, product is stacked to the rafters, people are mobbing the aisles.

They've got 30,000 (give or take a few thousand) apps to choose from.

Some free …some $1-$5 …some $20-$30 …some heftier ones for businesses.

In less than a year they recorded some kid making the billionth download.

Number 1 Billion — Some kid really racked up the loot after being the one who grabbed the one billionth download from the iTune apps store. Lucky stiff — 10 grand in booty without even trying. The store has been open less than a year and has averaged 3.5 million app downloads a day and the iPhone/iPod Touch users have grabbed an average of 33 apps…each! Source –*GizModo*

That's:

- ✓ 3.5 million downloads a day
- ✓ Average of 33 apps per device

That's an attach rate any company would kill for!

Suddenly they don't look that stupid!

Carriers and other "interested" parties seem to agree.

Little apps stores are popping up all over the iNet.

Stores Everywhere – Big and small there are Smartphone app stores everywhere. Some richly stocked, some sparsely. The challenge for developers is to be found on the shelves. The challenge for users is picking the ones they'll need and/or enjoy the most. Source – *NYTimes*

Google, Microsoft, Nokia, RIM (Research in Motion – Blackberry), all the carriers.

Who did we miss?

Oh yeah...Palm will eventually introduce its Pre counter-punch with powerhouse Sprint.

While everyone else has their app store shelves well stocked visiting Palm's store is...depressing.

Looks a little like a grocery stores in St. Petersburg Russia in WWII.

We can see why OS folks want an app store.

The more apps on the shelves the more device manufacturers they attract, the better they look to carriers, the more app developers they attract and the popularity courting continues. But carriers?

Dialing for Dollars

Selling apps won't really impact their bottom lines.

Lots of the apps are freebies, most sales are $1-$5; they only get 20 or 30% out of the sales.

The developers drink from the same cup.

They'll jump on the iTunes bullet train with their neat app.

The power of Apple will sell their music program, video games, direction/people finder, weather tracking, restaurant/store finding friends tracking (stalking), whatever app and they'll instantly get rich.

Assuming people can figure out how good your thingy is and how much he/she needs it — awful tough without good articles/reviews — the apps dude/dudette will make a whole 70 percent on each of those $1-$5 sales.

But for carriers it's all about selling more connection time, more bandwidth.

Their bucks come from:
- ✓ your data communications over their pipes
- ✓ making sure you stream music, TV, video to your third screen.
- ✓ connecting you with other gamers, friends.

The carrier sells you airtime for days, weeks, months, years on end.

Someone needs to ask the carriers almost the same question Beth asked Derek, "She was naked in your hotel room?"

Then quickly add what Derek told Sharon, "You need help."

It's the money play folks!

Our kids are like the millions of other iPhone, iPod Touch users around the globe.

They love muddling through the Apple iTunes app store … just to see what's new, what's hot, what's fun, what's available.

Apple Apps – 30,000 iPhone/iPod Touch apps and counting. Serious developers, kids in class, techs in their spare time (or at work) are all busy developing business, personal entertainment, game, audio/video applications they hope will rack up big sales on the iTunes site and profits for them. Move them to other platforms and even more money if they look as good on the other devices. Source —Apple

Too bad there aren't any aisle (category) signs or sampling stations along the way.

Since there isn't, they see something they think they'll like and BAM !!! easily download from iTunes (we get billed).

Then they suck up more minutes from AT&T!

Sure Google, MS, Nokia and Blackberry are adding apps as fast as they can but it's just way too easy for folks to buy from iTunes.

Our son – who has an "I can make it better" mind – was thinking about some apps that he knows people are eagerly waiting to buy.

He coughed up the $99 for Apple's SDK.

Next Round

He got real excited when Apple announced the iPhone OS 3.0 SDK …100 new visual features, 1,000 new APIs (Application Programmer Interface), the thinly veiled promise of doing stuff that would run beautifully on three screens – TV, computer, iPhone.

Next Generation – One thing you have to admit is that Apple makes a big deal out of every announcement and the unveiling of the iPhone OS 3.0 software and new SDK was no exception. The event said a lot about the company's three screen plan without saying a lot and opened new doors for more powerful, more graphically intensive iPhone games and applications. Source—Apple

That got his mind racing.

All we saw with the new developer's kit was that Apple had raised the bar again with their closed environment. That means:
- ✓ people will develop more, richer, more intensive, more intrusive apps for Apple to sell so they dig their hooks even deeper into those poor Kool-Aid drinking folks
- ✓ more people will get excited about buying /using/playing with the iPhone and Apple might — just might — become the #1 Smartphone producer (something they totally ****ed up with the all-inclusive Mac)
- ✓ AT&T will sell more 2-year contracts, more on-air minutes

Sure Apple may do an iPhone Lite for Verizon (huge whisper campaign going on) but who wants lite when you can have a real iPhone?

And an overly stuffed/easy to use iTunes store.

Lite just doesn't seem to have the panache!

Suddenly a Smartphone is so much more than an e-wallet (iWallet).

Really smart kids, doodling program developers and idea folks see their road to riches!

First they'll supplement their income making fun, neat, useful, relaxing, whatever apps.

Then they'll rent Steve's grounded jet.

The mobile apps market may reach $214 billion by 2014 but it's a market made up of tens of thousands of inexpensive apps developed by thousands of people.

Herding Cats

It doesn't have the formula to appeal to VCs.

It's tough for them to sell these "businesses" to the public or some other company so they can rack up a huge return.

It's too much like herding cats.

But that's ok.

Can't wait for the kid to release his iPhone apps and starts collecting the dimes and quarters.

Then he plans to modify them for Android, Windows Mobile … maybe even BlackBerry.

Think Man, Think – Apple's enclosed ecosystem has executives at other OS and hardware firms scheming on how they can outdo the fruit company and have the same unfair advantage with carriers and consumers. Individuals with serious and funky application ideas see the locked system as a great opportunity to earn fame and fortune. Source –*Screen Gems*

If we're lucky he may be able to replenish our devastated 401K.

Apple may have gotten it right this time.

Key question is how quickly, how comprehensively, how successfully will the other players – Google, MS, RIM, Nokia/Symbian – get their acts together.

So, the key question for me is, will I now take the leap to the app world and get a smart phone?

Stay tuned and I will let you know what I decide, and remember to have fun with all the new goodies, especially if you already are a smart-phone person. I'd be interested in what you think. Be sure to give me a call!

Aloha, Lou

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Wolverine F2D Slide Scanner

by Joe Nuvolini

Pikes Peak Computer Application Society, CO

Over the years, I have amassed about 3,000 color slides. I have been wanting to scan them into my computer, but up to now, had not seen a scanning product that would allow me to get the job done in a reasonable time. One day I came across the Wolverine F2D 35mm Film to Digital Scanner while surfing the Internet. It looked like the answer I was looking for.

I read a number of reviews and found a wide variety of opinions. People seemed to love it or hate it but the positives were greater than the negatives so I decided to try it. I was not disappointed. The unit is self-contained, though you can connect it to a computer USB port for power. However, no computer is required to use it. In fact, I am using it on an island in my kitchen. The unit comes with two film holders; one for slides and one for color or black and white negatives. The unit saves the images to an SD card in JPG format. Before saving the images, they can be mirrored or rotated, if necessary.

The package includes the unit, the two film holders, an AC adapter you can plug the USB connector into for power, a brush to clean the internal screen, a 1-GB SD card, and a 19-page manual. The first thing I did was go to the Wolverine Website (http://wolverinedata.com/f2d). I downloaded a PDF copy of the manual so these tired old eyes could better read it. I also downloaded the latest firmware update and installed it. I then started my project. I can scan 125 slides in about 30-35 minutes. The more images that need to be rotated before saving, the longer it takes. They advertise 5-MP images and I found the file sizes ran from 900 KB to just over 1 MB.

There are a couple of things to watch out for. The most important is to make sure your slides (up to 4) are properly seated in the tray. If they are not, the tray will bind up in the scanner. I have had a couple of close calls on this one. Also, I have found that for no good reason the image on the screen of the unit will shift to black and white or have some goofy colors. I have found in most cases pressing the mirror button twice will fix the problem. If not, turning the power off and back on will do the trick for sure. There is one other item the manual warns about, and that is not to tip the unit backward to better view an image on the unit's screen. The reason is that the connector on the USB power cable plugs in near the bottom on the back of the unit.

The connection is a small USB connector, like the one on your camera. Repeated tipping can place stress on the connector causing it to fail.

Pricing varies. A Google search for "Wolverine F2D" brought a range of prices from $119 at the Wolverine site to $99.99 on the Costco site. I am quite satisfied with the product. If you take care in using it, you will be too.

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Web Video: Making It Great, Getting It Noticed

by Iris Yoffa
Tucson Computer Society, AZ

We seem to be living during the decade of the rise of video as the media of choice for self-expression. And where better to publish for maximum exposure than the web. In the beginning, just about any online moving picture was considered good and worth the wait, no matter how long it took to load and how poor the quality turned out. It was new, cutting edge and so exciting to be part of. However, the world-wide audience has become more discerning and has come to expect a touch of story, direction, and technical quality in the visual and audio. So, a book with the title of Web Video: Making It Great, Getting It Noticed, would seem to be the ticket to success.

The authors, Jennie Bourne and Dave Burstein, have done an admirable job of putting together an extensive array of basic to quite-involved information, tips, online resources, explanations of relevant technologies, and production techniques, approached in an entertaining format. There is a lot to be learned here for the individual involved in the bare bones to studio quality video. And, being totally new to the subject, I really enjoyed this unique insight into the world of video production. This is a vey different beast than using a video camera to record home and business inventories where no editing is required.

The book's 321 pages are divided into nine chapters. "Making It Great" is the focus of chapters one through seven. Publishing to the web for a world-wide audience of varying technologies and viewing devices presents many issues to consider that film, TV and home movie enthusiasts and professionals don't have to deal with, in addition to the challenges that they do have to take into consideration.

So to start you need to have a plan and a great idea, target an audience and keep it as simple as possible. Because of the heavy compression used in web video, the varying bandwidths for download, and the variety of hardware your viewers will be using to watch your movie, there is a lot that is out of your control for you to consider. You'll learn about the pros and cons when making choices about equipment such as video camera, tripod, microphone, lighting, cables and connectors, recording media and backup options.

There are also a variety of techniques and approaches to consider for videoing events, interviews, how-to's, and news. Editing is a much overlooked and underutilized part of the process, but is essential for refining your focus and message. There's a lot to consider in addition to which video-editing software to use, such as shaping the story, adding transitions, titles, graphics, and sound, working with compression and selecting an encoding format.

"Getting It Noticed" is discussed in the last two chapters. This is a lot trickier than one might think and there is no sure formula to get you there. Going viral is usually the result of inspired marketing. There are a lot of ideas here and vignettes of success stories to get you going.

However, you must first make it great.

This book is packed with excellent ideas and resources to help you make a success of your production. The chapters end with projects for you to work on, based on what you've absorbed so far. Throughout there is a focus on techniques for improving your video skills and methods and to assist you in this are interviews with accomplished video folks which cover a broad range of topics. The information, interviews, and tips are interspersed with vignettes of web video success stories. This insight into a world unto itself was just fascinating to me. About: Web Video: Making It Great, Getting It Noticed
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How to Be a Geek Goddess

Reviewed by Sandy Berger
CompuKISS

I am an old hat when it comes to technology. I was a computer programmer back in the seventies before computers came into the home, and I've kept my hand in the technology arena all these years with my own computer consulting business and my technical writing career. Yet I've never considered myself a "Geek Goddess". As a matter of fact I have often been a little aggravated to hear Kim Komando refer to herself as "The Digital Goddess" — like she is something really special.

But Christina Tynan-Wood in her book, How to Be a Geek Goddess, isn't advocating that a Geek goddess is someone above everyone else. She says that being a Geek Goddess is "a simple matter of embracing the incredible innovation that's going on in our times and harness it for our own purposes".

Oh yes, and Christina understands the differences between how men and women look at, and deal with, technology. She starts the book off with the sentence, "My husband is a pompous ass." Many of us have noticed how men seem to pound their chests and promote themselves as the technology heroes of the day. Women, on the other hand, just want to use and enjoy technology.

Christina's book is filled with good information about technology with everything from how to choose a computer sales person to hooking up with others online. There are tips on everything from controlling your email to trouble-shooting a wireless connection. Chapters include: Getting in Touch with Your Software Side, Where the Stores Never Close, The Wireless Home, Keeping It Safe, Geek Parenting, Groovy Gear and Gadgets, and Your 200 Closest Friends.

The information in this 315 page book is all accurate and informative. Yet, this is not a reference book. It is rather like a free-flowing novel with technical information. If you want a book where you can look up how to do things, you will have to look elsewhere. This is a book for women who want to absorb some pointers here and there while reading about all the things you can do with your computer. If you are already very familiar with computers, you can skip this book. But again, if you want to immerse yourself in technology and pick up some knowledge and useful tidbits on the way, you will love this book. And you may even become a Geek Goddess yourself!

What is the Android Platform?

by Bob Rankin

Android Phone HTC Hero Simply put, Android an operating system, like Windows or Mac OS. It's based upon the Linux operating system and it's designed specifically for mobile phones. Android was the only product of a company called Android, which was acquired by Google in 2005. Google was buying everything in sight back then, but the purchase of Android started an enormous rumor mill churning.

Technology pundits speculated that Google was going into the mobile phone business. That would be a great day for mobile phone users because, as everyone knows, Google offers all of its products for free! The greedy, extortionate phone companies would face competition and the cost of cell phone service would plummet. Hurrah!

Well, that didn't happen. Google does not make a mobile phone or offer mobile phone service, and it doesn't plan to do so. At least they aren't telling anyone, if they do have such plans. Actually, it's very unlikely that making phone hardware and all the hassles of building or operating a phone service network would fit into Google's Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) business model. But just the thought of Google giving away free phones and service got the regular phone players to cooperate in Google's plan.

Android - What's in it for You?

That Android philosophy is to make it easy and free for software developers to write wildly cool

applications that will run on any Android-based phone. The explosion of innovation and creativity will produce better products at lower prices, goes the theory. The benefits of Android-based phones include a much easier to navigate user interface than other operating systems; a relationship with developers that encourages a vast variety of applications instead of putting each one through a corporate profit-wringer (e.g. Apple's App Store) before releasing it to the public; and lower prices.

Another goal of the Android platform is to allow users to fully tailor the phone to their own interests. You can change the phone's homescreen, the style of the dialer, or use an alternate photo viewing application instead of the one that comes with the phone. And the Android Software Development Kit is meant to make it much easier for developers to write software for Android-based phones.

The first Android-powered phone to hit the market was the T-Mobile G1, which features Google Mobile apps such as Search, Gmail, Calendar, Maps, and YouTube. For what it's worth, friends of mine who have the G1 say that they love it. There's also a follow-up device, the MyTouch 3G. If you have an Android phone, you can download over 8000 free and paid applications such as games, productivity tools, and social networking apps at the Android Market.

Android Off To a Slow Start

So why isn't Android everywhere? To a certain degree, the philosophy has run afoul of the inherently greedy, monopolistic mobile phone industry. "By the end of 2009 there will be at least 18 phone models using Android worldwide, according to Google," says Wikipedia. Eighteen phones for an operating system that's been available for four years? Perhaps phone makers and the carriers are not thrilled about an operating system that they don't control completely, because that can limit profit potential.

Case in point: Verizon cripples many of the phones they offer, so they can sell additional services. There is no WiFi on Verizon's Blackberry phones, because they want to sell you an expensive data plan. On an Android platform, this couldn't happen because the operating system is open source software.

Some of the Android phone manufacturers are firms you've never heard of like General Mobile, HighScreen, and Huawei. Some are big phone makers like HTC (T-mobile), Motorola, Sony Ericsson, and Samsung. Dell and Lenovo are two computer makers who are developing phoning platforms for computers using Android. But if those big companies were 100% behind Android, you'd think there would be a lot more phones and you'd see a lot more Android TV commercials. Android has only 3 percent of the mobile phone market as of this writing. The iPhone, by comparison, has 14 percent.

One bright spot for Android is the announcement by Motorola that they will be focusing heavily on Android, hoping to stem the tide of slumping sales. Two new Android phones will be announced by Motorola on September 10th. Sprint also announced their first Android-based phone, the HTC Hero, would be available in October.

From Bob Rankin's Internet Tourbus. *To subscribe go to:* http:// internettourbus.com/tickets.html

Society News

September Planning Meeting

by Sharah Blankenship, Secretary

Steve Staub led the Planning meeting held at Sally Springett's house, September 1st. Others in attendance were Bob Avery, Mike Lavelle, Sharah Blankenship, Sally Springett, and Tony Dellelo.

The August picnic was discussed. It was a general consensus that the food was tasty, atmosphere cheerful, and the cabin, while smaller than in the past, comfortable. There was some surprise that the picnic was so small this year, with attendance around 25 people.

October's presentation will be a presentation in a box from Laptop, Inc. that includes a lot of neat door prizes. If you have ideas for future presentations, or you wish to present, talk to Mike Lavelle.

Both the October and November meetings will take place at the Brighton library; however, the December meeting will not. We don't yet have a spot for December.

Please be sure that your dues are paid. Please see Steve if your membership is due. If you pay your dues online, via the PayPal link on the website, please send Steve Staub an email so that he can

mark you down as paid.

Have a great month! See you in October!

The Lighter Side

I got a call from a woman whose system was displaying hardware errors. She said that this was related to a call they made a month ago. I researched the call she mentioned. Both calls were regarding massive hardware failure, but the error messages were different, and there was nothing else in common. I tried to call her back, but there was no answer. Three hours later, she called me. There were different errors now, and some of the supercomputers weren't working at all. I promised to contact a hardware specialist immediately.

Tech Support: "By the way, why do you think it is related to the other call?"

Customer: "Oh, in both cases, the air conditioning had failed, and the computer room was over 150 degrees."

That's the only time I ever let out a bloodcurdling scream in public. And she still refused to turn off the computers!