

# Computer News

November 2005  
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## DVD Technology to be Discussed at November 16 NVPCUG Meeting

**The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, November 16, 2005, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California.**

**James Manning**, Director of Product Management for the **Roxio Division of Sonic Solutions**, will present a primer on DVD technology, formats, compatibility issues, and myths. DVD – originally named “Digital Video Disc” and more recently dubbed “Digital Versatile Disc” – is one of the hottest electronics technologies of the decade. A DVD optical disc is capable of storing both video and audio information, offers the highest quality recorded video output for consumers, and can hold from 4 to 28 times as much data as a CD (compact disc). However, the technology can be confusing because there are different, competing formats and the disc medium can be of several types. Further confusing the picture, high-definition DVD is arriving with yet another format war, this time between Blu-ray Disc and HD-DVD.



*James Manning*

James will also demonstrate one of Sonic's DVD authoring products and tell us about creating DVDs of our own. Using DVD products, you can archive your photos and videotapes, create movies and custom music discs, and easily search for and play any selection. James is a technical expert, so bring your tough questions and expect an evening of DVD demystification.

James heads the Digital Home team at Sonic Solutions, one of the world's leading suppliers of digital media software. During his eight years at Sonic, he has assumed numerous roles. He designed the *DVDit* and *MyDVD* product line, oversaw the installation of dozens of DVD production facilities at customer sites, and is now intimately involved in planning Sonic's high-definition DVD strategy. Sonic's products range from advanced DVD authoring systems and interactive content delivery technologies used to produce the majority of Hollywood DVD film releases, to award-winning CD and DVD creation, playback, and backup products that have become the premier choice for professionals, businesses, and consumers worldwide.

In the **Computer Tutor** session prior to the main presentation, **Jerry Brown** will show several ways he names and organizes user files on his computer in order to make finding and retrieving files easier, then open the floor for a discussion of ways that others have found helpful. Jerry is a retired computer software engineer who was involved for many years in development and support work for the United States' space shuttle program. He is a past NVPCUG director, has served since 2000 as our Investors SIG leader, and for the last two years has moderated the Random Access sessions at our monthly meetings.

Our meeting will begin with **Random Access**, where you can ask questions about using computer products and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees. □

*The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group has served novice and experienced computer users since 1983. Through its monthly meetings, newsletters, on-line forum, special interest groups, mentor program and community involvement, it has helped educate people of all ages. The NVPCUG provides opportunities for people to find friends who share common interests and experiences. Through its Computers-to-Schools program, members refurbish used computer equipment for donation to local schools. Since January 2003 the NVPCUG has donated 364 computers and 109 printers.*

# Users Helping Users

By Orion E. Hill



Orion Hill

## Elections of Directors and Officers

At the NVPCUG Board of Directors annual business meeting on November 2, our current directors elected ten people to serve as directors during the coming term, which starts in December. Please join me in congratulating these volunteers, without whom our group could not function. An asterisk designates an incumbent.

<b>Susy Ball</b>	<b>Dick Peterson</b>
<b>Ron Dack</b>	<b>John Simcoe*</b>
<b>Orion E. Hill*</b>	<b>Jim Stirling*</b>
<b>Bob Kulas</b>	<b>Roy Wagner*</b>
<b>John Moore</b>	<b>Dean Unruh</b>

We're very fortunate that four of our current directors have agreed and been elected to serve for another year. Among those joining our board of directors, Bob, Dick, and Ron have previously served as directors of our group. Bob, who is a founding NVPCUG member, and Ron have also served multiple terms as president. Susy, who joined our group last April, has served as director and president of the Fresno PC Users Group and as president of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups, of which our group is a member. Dean and John have contributed to our group's success by regularly helping with various projects. The experience of all of these officers will help ensure that we have a strong, productive board during the coming year.

Our new directors will take office at a transitional board meeting scheduled on December 7, 2005. The board will then elect new corporate officers – President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer – and appoint subordinate officers for one-year terms.

Our board is looking for people who are interested in serving as officers. Please review the list of officers published in this newsletter and let one of our directors for the coming term know in which position(s) you are willing to serve.

Please note that I'm not a candidate for President for the coming term. That privilege can be yours. I hope everyone will seriously consider serving in that key leadership role. New leadership can provide an opportunity for introducing new ideas and processes that can reinvigorate our organization.

## Member Needs and Suggestions

At our October 19 general meeting several attendees expressed their needs for specific computer-related knowledge, particularly concerning Windows XP features. Also, a number of suggestions were made about how our group's activities, especially our general meetings, could be improved, including making coffee available, acquiring a wireless microphone, and having open, in-depth discussions of preselected topics in place of speaker presentations at some meetings. Our officers have already begun to review your comments and take steps to fulfill your needs and implement some of your suggestions.

If you missed our last meeting, you don't need to wait for another meeting or for a survey to be conducted to let our officers know about your needs and ideas. Just call or e-mail one of our officers, all of whom would be glad to hear from you. Their phone numbers and e-mail addresses are listed in all of our newsletters, on our Web site ([www.nvpcug.org](http://www.nvpcug.org)), and in our NVPCUG directories.

## EBay SIG

Our new eBay SIG got off to a good start with fourteen people attending the initial meeting on October 26 at the Napa Valley Genealogical Library in Napa. **Kay Nagel**, who gave an excellent presentation on selling and buying on eBay at our general meeting last September, offered more tips, techniques, and strategies for being a successful online buyer and seller. She also briefly introduced and recommended using Craigslist ([www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com)), an online community bulletin board on which items can be bought and sold through free classified ads that attract millions of viewers.

Due to the next regularly scheduled eBay SIG meeting day falling on the day before Thanksgiving Day, the next meeting has been rescheduled to Wednesday, November 30, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., at the Napa Valley Genealogical Library in Napa. For more information, contact SIG leader **Tom Kessler** by calling (707) 258-1884 or sending e-mail to [kesstom@yahoo.com](mailto:kesstom@yahoo.com).

## Annual Holidays Potluck Party

Mark your calendars now for our annual holidays potluck meeting on December 21. Don't miss this great fellowship event. **Dick** and **Sandy Peterson** have invited us again to use the Christmas Tree House at their tree farm on Darms Lane.

## Sound Off!

Got a suggestion for improving an NVPCUG activity? Want to help with an activity? Send e-mail to [OHill@napanet.net](mailto:OHill@napanet.net) or call (707) 252-0637. □

# Come to the NVPCUG General Meetings

We meet on the third Wednesday of each month, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Napa Senior Activities Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa

## NVPCUG Special Interest Groups

In SIG meetings you can learn about a subject in greater detail than is feasible at NVPCUG general meetings. SIG meetings are open to everyone. Meeting times and locations occasionally change. For current meeting information, see our Web site, [www.nvpcug.org](http://www.nvpcug.org), or contact the SIG leaders.

### Digital Photography SIG

Meets: Monthly, second Wednesday  
7:00 to 8:30 p.m.  
Piner's Nursing Home,  
Conference Room  
1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa

Leader: **Susy Ball**  
(707) 337-3998  
[SusyBall@aol.com](mailto:SusyBall@aol.com)

### eBay SIG

Meets: Monthly, fourth Wednesday  
7:00 to 8:30 p.m.  
Napa Valley Genealogical Library  
1701 Menlo Ave., Napa

Leader: **Tom Kessler**  
(707) 258-1884  
[kesstom@yahoo.com](mailto:kesstom@yahoo.com)

### Investors SIG

Meets: Monthly, second Monday  
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.  
Jerry Brown's home,  
23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa

Leader: **Jerry Brown**  
(707) 254-9607  
[bqandjbb@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bqandjbb@sbcglobal.net)

## Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group Officers for 2005

### Board of Directors

<b>President</b>	Orion E. Hill	252-0637*	<a href="mailto:President@nvpcug.org">President@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Vice President</b>	(Volunteer Needed)		<a href="mailto:VicePresident@nvpcug.org">VicePresident@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Secretary</b>	Julie Jerome	224-6620	<a href="mailto:Secretary@nvpcug.org">Secretary@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Treasurer</b>	Roy Wagner	253-2721	<a href="mailto:Treasurer@nvpcug.org">Treasurer@nvpcug.org</a>

**Other Directors:** Dianne Prior, John Simcoe, James Stirling

### Appointed Officers

<b>Computer Recycling Coordinator</b>	Bill Wheadon	224-3901	<a href="mailto:Recycler@nvpcug.org">Recycler@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Computer Tutor Coordinator</b>	Mike Moore	255-1615	<a href="mailto:Tutor@nvpcug.org">Tutor@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Computers-to-Schools Program Coordinator</b>	Orion E. Hill	252-0637	<a href="mailto:CTS@nvpcug.org">CTS@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Facility Arrangements Coordinator</b>	Steve Siegrist		<a href="mailto:Facility@nvpcug.org">Facility@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Greeter Coordinator</b>	Bob Simmerman	259-6113	<a href="mailto:Greeter@nvpcug.org">Greeter@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Librarian</b>	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	<a href="mailto:Librarian@nvpcug.org">Librarian@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Membership Director</b>	Dianne Prior	252-1506	<a href="mailto:Membership@nvpcug.org">Membership@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Mentor Program Coordinator</b>	Hilton Des Roches	224-6170	<a href="mailto:Mentors@nvpcug.org">Mentors@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Newsletter Circulator</b>	Jim Hearn	224-2540	
<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	James Stirling	944-1177	<a href="mailto:Editor@nvpcug.org">Editor@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Product Review Coord.</b>	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	<a href="mailto:Reviews@nvpcug.org">Reviews@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Programs Director</b>	(Volunteer Needed)		<a href="mailto:Programs@nvpcug.org">Programs@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Publicity Director</b>	John Simcoe	258-8233	<a href="mailto:Publicity@nvpcug.org">Publicity@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Random Access Moderator</b>	Jerry Brown	254-9607	<a href="mailto:Questions@nvpcug.org">Questions@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Special Projects Director</b>	(Volunteer Needed)		<a href="mailto:Projects@nvpcug.org">Projects@nvpcug.org</a>
<b>Webmaster</b>	Ron Dack		<a href="mailto:Webmaster@nvpcug.org">Webmaster@nvpcug.org</a>

\*All telephone numbers are in Area Code 707.

For more information about the NVPCUG, visit our Web site:  
<http://www.nvpcug.org>

## NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
November 2	7:00 p.m.
November 9	7:00-8:30 p.m.
November 14	5:30-7:30 p.m.
November 16	7:00-9:00 p.m.
November 30	7:00-8:30 p.m.
December 21	6:30-9:00 p.m.

Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer, contact Orion Hill, (707) 252-0637.  
Board of Directors meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa  
Digital Photography SIG meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa  
Investors SIG meeting, Jerry Brown's home, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa  
General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa  
EBay SIG meeting, Napa Valley Genealogical Library, 1701 Menlo Ave., Napa  
Annual Holidays Party, Peterson Family Christmas Tree Farm, 1120 Darms Lane, Napa

## NVPCUG General Meeting, October 19

At the NVPCUG general meeting held Wednesday, October 19, there was a wide-ranging discussion of problems related to the use of computer programs and the maintenance of equipment. In charge of the Random Access period, **Jerry Brown** fielded questions on Internet connections for AOL and Comcast, sending pictures along with text as e-mail, use of automatic updates (some download before installing, or wait till they have made backups), using *Spybot* for spyware, using a webcam, and even building a computer from assembled parts. **Beth Pickering**, visiting vice-president from the Sonoma Valley Computer Group, urged us to visit the MacWorld convention that meets in San Francisco January 9-13, regardless of which operating system we use. Though not a Mackintosh user, she said she saw a lot of enlightening exhibits and even got some good samples of software and goodies like a webcam. \*

**Mike Moore** followed with a detailed description of ways to protect passwords in *Microsoft Word* and *Excel*. This was then followed by a discussion, led by President **Orion Hill**, of the general conduct of the computer group activities through the past year and the need for volunteers to fill the offices in the coming year.

\*Web site of the Sonoma group is [vom.com/svcg](http://vom.com/svcg). (VOM stands for "Valley of the Moon," their original name.)

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### Comment on Meetings and Newsletter

I appreciate what has been and is being done regarding the format of group meetings and coverage in the newsletter. Members probably represent a very wide scope of interests, and I respect the efforts made to cover those interests.

**Bern Klein, NVPCUG member**

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## Membership News

by Dianne Prior, NVPCUG Membership Director

IT'S TIME TO RENEW for many of us whose memberships expire in December. Your continued support of our users group allows us to bring you our various activities, including the newsletter. It would be very helpful if you would give your dues to me at our meeting or mail it to me (NVPCUG, Membership Director, PO Box 2866, Napa, 94558-0286) as soon as possible. Then I won't have to bug you in person. Annual dues are \$30 for individuals (Regular membership), \$20 for Students (a full-time student not eligible for Associate membership), and \$10 for Associates (a family member in the same household as a Regular member or a family member who is a full-time student in the same household as a Student member).

**CORRECTION:** In the last newsletter it was incorrectly reported that **Bill Lowry** originally joined in 1955. The date should have been 1995. Glad you're back with us, Bill!

### Member of the Year Award Nominations

By Julie Jerome, NVPCUG Secretary

At its next meeting the NVPCUG Board of Directors will choose one of our members as the recipient of the Member of the Year Award. We invite you to submit names for this honor. The winner will be announced at our annual Holidays Party on December 21.

Please e-mail your nomination, along with a brief explanation as to why the person should receive this honor, to: Julie Jerome, [JJerome@napanet.net](mailto:JJerome@napanet.net). We will also provide nomination cards at our general meeting on November 16.

# Moderating a Question and Answer Session

By Bud Bondiotti, Editor, Modesto PC User Group  
[editor@mpcug.org](mailto:editor@mpcug.org)    [www.mpcug.org](http://www.mpcug.org)

There often are a few thankless jobs within a user group, helping setup and takedown a meeting, being a club officer (sometimes) and being a moderator of specific groups. While attending a user group meeting as a guest, I was especially interested in the topics brought forward by the members during their question and answer session. The group was well attended with a wide range of knowledge from novice (I disdain the word “Newbie”) to expert as well as a couple of members who themselves made their living working with computers. The inevitable question popped up, “My computer isn’t working properly, who do you recommend that I get to repair it?” One of the members jumped up, reached into his wallet producing a business card, and handed it to the member. Other members became very silent until the moderator politely said to the member, “There are a number of people that I could recommend, and if you see me after the session, I would be glad to help you out.” Needless to say, I was impressed with the moderators’ tact. After the meeting over coffee, I commented to him as to how well he handled the situation. He laughed a little, then told me the story of this one member. It seems that he was always looking for a free plug of his business and that most of the members overlooked the interruption. I commented that it didn’t seem fair that he be allowed to continue, but the moderator said that he’d been doing it so long it became a “way of the club.”

A little later in our discussion, we got to talking about newsletters. I had not seen any of their newsletters, so I didn’t know what they contained. As we compared notes, I mentioned that we devote one page of our newsletter strictly for member advertising at no cost to the member. Sort of a benefit of membership, I stated. He looked as though the light bulb lit and said, “Maybe that’s the answer to our problem.” Two issues later I noticed a page of advertising for member services. Later on I received an e-mail from him in which he said that the interruptions had ceased and that when those types of questions came from the floor, he referred the person to that page. Problem solved.

A successful moderator, I have found, should practice two qualities:

- 1) The ruse of “Dazzle them with brilliance or baffle them with bull” very seldom works. If anything, it complicates the problem because the person doesn’t get the right answers to solve the problem.
- 2) If you are hit with a question you or anyone in the audience doesn’t have the answer for, politely ask the person to see you after the question and answer session so you can get the question written down for research. Then, follow up. Nothing will turn a member against the club faster than not having their needs met. Be careful not to get bogged down on one question. Time is short and you may miss someone else’s need to have an important question addressed.

The moderator should make it a habit to repeat the question for two reasons:

- 1) It assures that the question is correctly stated.
- 2) It helps those who are hard of hearing know what the question is and the resulting answer.

Utilize a microphone if need be; otherwise talk clearly and slowly. We often rush to get our answers, and people miss the point. If there is more than one “expert” in the group, utilize their talents to help solve questions. Be aware of sideline discussions within the audience, they hamper others from hearing what’s going on and thus create a need to repeat the question and its answer. There is a wealth of knowledge in our groups, even from the novices. Above all, learn that patience is a virtue. When you show patience, more people will ask questions and the session will flow evenly, sometimes past the time to close discussions.

*The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.*

# Indexing the Web: Spiders, Web Crawlers & Bots

By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., *Sarasota PC Monitor*, Sarasota FL, PC Users Group, [www.spcug.org](http://www.spcug.org)

Have you ever wondered how search engines such as *Google* manage to get the answers to your queries so rapidly? How could they search the Web that fast, I mean usually less than one second to find the words you ask for? Well --- They don't. Actually the searching goes on constantly, 24/7. And, the mechanism they use is just a modification of what you use for browsing the Web.

Although you may have heard about spiders, Web crawlers and Web bots, they don't actually traverse the Web any more than does your Web browser (*Internet Explorer* or *Firefox* or whatever browser you use). Instead they download Web pages that are then scanned and the significant words added to an index.

To simplify the terminology, I will refer to all the Web searching programs as "spiders". (It takes less space and is easier to type.) These spiders are programs designed to find Web addresses (URL's) and to download the pages. Some also do the indexing of the words on the page. However, *Google* uses a separate indexing program and stores the downloaded pages for future reference. Now if a single spider were being used to locate and download pages, the task would really be impossible. Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page, the originators of *Google*, published a paper while they were graduate students at Stanford that utilized three spiders. Each spider kept about 300 connections open simultaneously. With four spiders they could download about 600 pages per second. This paper referred to the prototype that became the commercial *Google* enterprise. Even with the prototype system they were able to download and index 24 million pages in a week. Their current methodology is proprietary and so is not public, but it is probably a significant improvement over their prototype system.

We can use the original *Google* system as a model of what could be used by search engines to prepare the index and database of Web pages that you access when you send a query. The first step is to send a list of URLs to the spider to download. This is done by a server that maintains a list of URLs. The spider will download pages and also follow any hyperlinks to other pages. Addresses of pages that were linked to the original search list are also sent back to the server to be checked to see if they were already on the list. If not, they are added to the URL lists. Not every spider uses a URL server. The spider will continue crawling the Web until it reaches a dead end or a page with no further links.

As I mentioned earlier, a spider isn't just working with one page, but has hundreds of connections open to different pages. Given that there are billions of pages on the Web, even with thousands of spiders collecting information, only a small fraction of the entire Web is scanned.

Some Web sites, such as those with news or rapidly changing information, are visited hourly. Every spider has a re-visitation policy that determines how frequently a page will be revisited and checked for changes.

There is another general policy that is usually programmed into these spiders. That is called the "politeness" policy. This is used to prevent the overloading of Web sites. After all, there is a finite limit to bandwidth and it would be possible to overwhelm a Web site with visits from multiple spiders in a short period of time. This policy provides for an interval of time to elapse between accesses by a spider. This time interval seems to vary from 20 seconds to 3-4 minutes. This would be the case where multiple pages need to be downloaded from a single server. Revisiting indexed and stored Web sites occurs at less frequent intervals.

However, even this politeness policy is sometimes inadequate. Frequent visits by spiders may result in complaints being sent back to the owner of the spider. So it is also possible to enter code on a Web page which asks the spider to not access or download a page or pages. This can be done by the addition of meta tags in the page header or by a robots.txt file placed in the root directory for the Web site. This is especially appropriate for game pages. These pages use a dynamic format that changes when pages are viewed or links are followed. When a spider downloads these pages the game program may respond as if a very high-speed player were logged on. This can create problems for the program and may result in crashing the game server. So we now have the robot exclusion protocol being used by owners of Web pages that do not want their pages included in the search engine indexing.

In the original *Google* system the Web pages were sent to another program referred to as the indexer. This program sorts through every word on the page and stores them in a database. The exceptions are the simple words such as a, an, the. However, simply entering the words into a database is not sufficient. They have to be identified to the particular page from which they came, the location on that page and a relative ranking in importance. The frequency with which they appear on the page as well as the position on the page may be used in determining the weight or relative rank. Words in the title or near the top of the page may be ranked as more important. So the storage of the words include the URL, and a calculated weight in an encoded format.

The word database is then indexed to speed the retrieval of the information. This is usually done by the building of a Hash Table. Hashing evens out the alphabetical sections so that it takes no longer to find a "z"

than it does a more popular letter like “m.” It also separates the index from the actual entry for the word. This improves the efficiency of the storage of this information. The indexing and the Hash Table also speed the overall retrieval of the information. The complete Web page is also stored in a separate location. Once the indexing process is completed, the information is available for your query.

Given the size of the Web and the continuing changes to Web pages, the spider's search is never ending. It may also be one where we will never have every page indexed. One other aspect of the size of the Web and the time required for the crawling process is that broken links will always occur. If a page is not re-visited frequently, it may still be in the index and the database long after it has been removed from its server. Another situation may be where the URL has changed and the new location has not yet been crawled. So, the process is not perfect by any means.

The other aspect of searching the Web is the design of the query you want to submit to a search engine. As I'm sure you know, you can simply list a few keywords in the search engine and hope you will get a useful result. Many times you will also get results that have no relationship to the information you are seeking. In some of these cases, you need to try the advanced search or learn to use Boolean operators. Those most frequently used are:

- AND – all the terms joined by “AND” must appear in the pages or documents.
- OR – at least one of the terms joined by “OR” must appear in the pages or documents.
- NOT – the term or terms following “NOT” must not appear.

- Quotation marks – Words between quotation marks must appear as a phrase.
- Followed By – one of the terms must be followed by the other.
- Near – one of the terms must be within a specified number of words of the other.

Generally, search engines can use these Boolean operators to provide results more closely aligned to the topic you are trying to locate.

Like everything else related to computers, Web indexing and searching are not static technologies. The search engine companies are researching “natural language” queries such as those handled by “Ask Jeeves”. Currently, these queries can accommodate only relatively simple phrases. However, there is heavy competition to develop an engine that can work with much more complex queries. Another area that is being pursued is “concept-based” searching. This would use a form of statistical analysis to determine if the page fit your query. And, as you may have read, *Google* has plans to put the content of the world's libraries on the Web.

Just imagine what it would be like if we didn't have these search engines to help us find information on the Web. So good searching, and I hope you find what you are looking for. □

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail: *bwsail at yahoo.com*.

*The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.*

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## Tech Tips from *Smart Computing*

- **Use Safe Mode To Remove Spyware** - The most important point about spyware removal is to do it in Windows Safe Mode. This prevents almost all spyware from loading at startup and makes removal more reliable. At bootup, press F8 after the BIOS screen. Choose the second option, Safe Mode, with networking. You'll need to connect to the Internet to install and update the definitions for the spy checker's **Web Security**.
- **Isolate Your Online Purchases** - Whenever you enter information to register or purchase something at a Web site, the site often keeps quite a bit of that information on file, in case you return later. Sometimes you will have an option for the Web site to remember the credit card number. For security's sake, it's best to enter

your credit card information each time. You've no doubt seen the news stories about the dozens of serious security breaches that have exposed thousands of credit cards for use by criminals. To create a “financial firewall” you may want to consider getting a credit card that you use only for online purchases.

- **Stay Up-To-Date On Microsoft Fixes** - If you're also interested in knowing the latest updates to Microsoft's database, the *KBAAlert.com* site can really help. This site will email you links to any updated pages in categories that you choose. You can also determine whether you want daily or weekly updates. It's an effortless way to keep yourself up-to-date on bugs and fixes. □

# Connecting Your Home or Office Network to the Internet

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; radio & TV show host

On my weekly radio show (KLVI 560AM 1-3 pm Saturdays) I am frequently asked questions about connecting an Internet source to a home network, such that several computers can simultaneously share the Internet connection. This type of home networking is typically only practical if there is a broadband source, and generally impractical if the source is dialup, and a voice phone line is to be shared for Internet access.

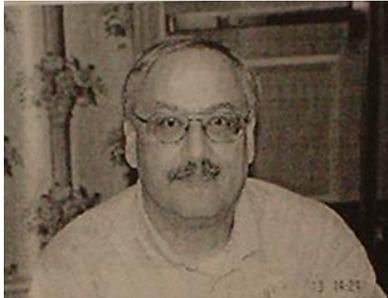
Basically, there are three good options available, and each has its relative advantages and disadvantages, and varies in terms of cost effectiveness based on individual circumstances. The three basic methods or technologies available for home or small office networking are wired, wireless, and "homeplug."

Wired networking is a viable choice if it is practical to run a network cable between computers. The cable, which can be relatively inexpensive if purchased in bulk from electronics or home/hardware stores, but somewhat pricey if purchased in pre-cut sections at retail stores. Cable can be run through an attic, suspended from cup hooks along a ceiling, run along baseboards, or other methods that comply with appropriate safety and electrical codes. Other than running the cable, the installation of the network is fairly simple, and requires readily available and generally inexpensive hardware, manufactured by countless companies. A device called a router is connected to the broadband input, and the computers are connected via network cable to the router. Most wired routers come with a floppy or CD with simple configuration utilities that allow the network to be setup and functioning within minutes of connection. Wired routers can be purchased from discount stores, electronics stores, office supply stores, and a variety of other sources. Since almost all contemporary computers, both desktop and notebook, come with an integral network connector, generally no other hardware is required other than the router and cable. In terms of security, wired is generally the most secure method of networking. Many of the inexpensive wired routers include some type of hardware firewall to protect the network from intrusion, but it is still generally a good idea to have a software firewall on each computer.

One of the most popular methods of home or small office networking is wireless, often referred to with its industry standard designation, 802.11, with a letter suffix, such as an "a", "b", or "g". The suffix indicates which version of the standard hardware complies with in terms of frequency, and bandwidth. Generally, the least expensive and most widely used type is the 802.11b, which

shares the same 2.4 GHz digital frequencies of many cordless phones and other household electronics, which may possibly cause some interference with the wireless connection. Under ideal conditions, 802.11b can transfer data at a rate of up to 11 megabytes per second (Mbps).

The newer 802.11a and 802.11g standards offer higher transmission speeds, and will likely encounter less interference from household appliances, but some interference is always a risk.



*Ira Wilsker*

To connect computers to a wireless network requires a wireless router, and a device called an "access point" for each computer. The main advantage to a wireless network is the ease of installation, and the flexibility of not being connected to a wire while surfing the net.

The wireless router is connected to the broadband input, and an antenna on the router broadcasts the signal to the access points. Range is a function of building construction and interference, but at typical household and small office distances and construction, a single router is typically adequate. Users should be sure to follow the instructions included with the router in terms of placement in order to maximize the signal. Many wireless routers include some form of hardware firewall, but again a software firewall on each computer is generally recommended. "Access Points" are generally small devices that attach to a computer either through a USB port, or to the network input on the computer. As they are radio transceivers, placement will affect performance. It is imperative to note that unless the integral encryption and other security options offered by the router and access points are implemented, there can be some serious security issues with wireless connections, in that it is easy for unauthorized persons to access the network.

Wireless routers and access points are readily available wherever electronics are sold, including discount stores, warehouse clubs, office supply stores, and other retailers. As the technology has been improving, prices have been plunging. Some provisos are in order at this point; first, be sure that whatever wireless hardware is purchased, be sure that it is compatible, in that the suffix "a", "b", or "g" match, although much of the hardware available today will work with any standard, often listed as "a/b/g". A second proviso is the "weakest link" factor, in that a wireless (or any other network) connection is only as fast as the slowest segment. If a broadband connection is running at 2Mbps, a faster wireless connection may be wasted unless files or hardware (such as printers or video) are being shared among the network. It should also be

noted that many of the new home theater devices now coming on the market utilize the same wireless interconnectivity and hardware as computers, and may require the newer and faster standards of connectivity.

There is a third technology available for home and small office networking that is still in its infancy, but holds a promising future, and most of the major networking hardware manufacturers such as Belkin, Linksys, GigaFast, IOGear, Netgear, and others are producing compatible hardware. This technology, called Homeplug™ ([www.homeplug.org](http://www.homeplug.org)), can safely utilize the existing household electrical wiring as an already wired network. Homeplug compatible hardware is priced about the same as wireless, but is not yet as readily available as traditional wired or wireless hardware, but it may be worth the effort to shop for it. The standard, which meets UL and other safety requirements, is possibly the easiest to configure, has a 14Mbps bandwidth, and is more secure than wireless. To connect broadband to Homeplug, the broadband input is plugged into a Homeplug input device (similar to

a router), and that device is then simply plugged into a standard wall electrical outlet. Any computer in the home, as well as many of the newer entertainment devices, are then connected to any other electrical outlet in the house via an adapter that connects to the computer with a traditional USB or network plug. In terms of security, the broadband signal does not typically pass through the household junction box, making it extremely difficult for neighbors and others to access the connection or network. As with all other forms of networking, a software firewall is still necessary on each computer.

If a user is bearing the cost of broadband, and has more than one computer in the home or office, then one of these networking technologies may be a useful method to connect those computers to the Internet. □

Web site: <http://www.homeplug.com>

*The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.*

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## What Your Technology May Be Telling About You

*WXPnews E-Zine* of November 8 had some comments on how the machines we use for our normal home or office activities may contain elements that tell their makers --or others--what we are doing and who we are. Makers of color laser printers may embed tiny yellow dots into the printed documents to make it possible for someone to track the origins of a document. This was done ostensibly to help the Secret Service track down currency counterfeiters. Last month the Electric Frontier Foundation was able to crack the code for Xerox DocuColor printers and discovered that they imprint the serial number of the printer and the date and time when the document was printed. Other printers likely do the same.

*Information Week* carried an article on November 4 about the growing use of RFID (radio frequency identification) chips and the efforts being made by manufacturers of the chips to enhance their image in the eyes of the consuming public. RFID Ltd., one of the producers, is seeking to place several papers with Google to refute the allegations detailed in a recent book called *Spychips*, written by Katherine Albrecht and Liz McIntyre. As the use for RFID chips grows, they may take the place of bar coding in stores. Unlike bar codes, the chips do not have to be close to a reader; they can be “scanned” at a distance of several feet, and the consumer may not even be aware of their presence. Wal-Mart is beginning to mark its merchandise with the tags, which may vary in size from that of a credit card to one as small as a mere dot.

Last spring the Real ID Act was passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Bush. It requires state-issued driver’s licenses and ID cards to have “machine-readable technology” in order for them to be accepted for air travel, banking and entering federal buildings. And in October the U.S. State Department laid out rules for embedding RFID chips in U.S. passports issued after October 2006.

Many cell phones have built-in Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) transceivers that can pinpoint their locations.

New cars contain “black boxes” (Sensing and Diagnostic Modules or SDMs) that record data about travel speed, heading, location and even the number of occupants and whether they’re using seatbelts.

Cameras are watching and recording our actions in stores and office buildings, at red lights and toll booths, and even on public streets. And New York is planning to add cameras to their subway system.

As *WXPnews* points out, any one of these things would seem to be pleasantly harmless. But when they are brought together in a society, privacy becomes an illusion; we can be under constant surveillance. The European Commission is proposing to keep detailed records of phone calls made, e-mails sent and Web sites surfed by all 450 million EU citizens.

Is this the price we must pay for living in high-tech times? RFID Ltd. is trying hard to make us like it. □

# Legal Bytes: Trolling for Wi-Fi -- Is It Legal?

by John Brewer

Computer Club of Oklahoma City *eMonitor*, October 2005

Local area networking has experienced a profound change in recent years. Wired networks are still the norm, but wireless networking is popular at homes and businesses. There are several issues worthy of exploration regarding this topic, and this column will explore these issues in some detail in this and future columns. One issue is the legality of accessing an "open" wireless network, and the other issue is the necessity to protect a wireless network.

## Legality of accessing a WiFi network

Wikipedia states that "wardriving" involves the use of an automobile and a Wi-Fi-equipped computer, such as a laptop or a PDA, to detect Wi-Fi wireless networks. It is also known as "WiLDing" (Wireless Lan Driving), originating in the U.S. with the Bay Area Wireless Users Group (BAWUG). It is similar to using a scanner for radio. Many wardrivers use GPS devices to measure the location of the network, then find and log it on a Web site. For better range, antennas are built or bought, and vary from omnidirectional to highly directional. Software for wardriving is freely available on the Internet, notably, *NetStumbler* for Windows, *KisMac* for Macintosh, and *Kismet* for Linux.

Wardrivers make identification and access of wireless networks a sport, but is the sport legal? Is there a clear-cut answer or does it depend on the facts?

A recent Florida case provides some guidance. A Florida man, sitting in his SUV and using a laptop, was accessing wireless networks in a residential neighborhood. The *St. Petersburg Times* reported the matter and made the observation that "a drive through downtown St. Petersburg shows how porous networks can be. In less than five minutes, a *Times* reporter with a laptop found 14 wireless access points, six of which were wide open. I'll guarantee there are tons of people out there who have their wireless network being exploited but have no idea. And as we see more people utilizing wireless, we'll see more people being victimized." The Florida man was indicted and convicted.

Wireless fidelity, or "Wi-Fi," has enjoyed prolific growth since catching on in the year 2000. More than 10 million U.S. homes are equipped with routers that transmit high-speed Internet to computers using radio signals. The signals can extend 200 feet or more, giving a person the ability to use the Web in the backyard of his Crescent Heights home, but also reaching the house next door, or the street.

The expansion of Wi-Fi hot spots is part of this phenomenon. With a wireless-capable laptop, it is possible to

access the Internet at places called "hot spots," and they are everywhere. Some charge for access, but many provide it free. There is an inherent risk in this technology. The router that provides the wireless access point has an identifiable Internet protocol (IP) address. Anyone accessing the Internet through that router will appear to be authorized to use that IP address. Someone with a nefarious intent can create a possible legal nightmare for the person responsible for that IP address. The ability to look through the IP address and identify the computer behind the DHCP server is more difficult.

A recent case in Michigan involved the unauthorized access of an unsecured Wi-Fi network at a Lowe's home improvement store to steal credit card numbers. A 20-year-old and a friend had stumbled across the network while cruising around in a car in search of wireless Internet connections – wardriving. He was convicted.

An emerging threat is the "evil twin" attack. A person with the proper equipment sets up a local hot spot and overpowers the Wi-Fi network. Any computer user who accesses the bogus Wi-Fi network is then at risk by the evil twin. The *Wall Street Journal* has reported an evil twin setup at a technology conference in London. Hackers set up evil twins that infected other computers with viruses and gathered information on the users.

## Protecting the WiFi network

It is apparent that security is an important issue in a wireless network. The original standard was called WEP (wired equivalent privacy). WEP is a form of encryption, but the level of encryption is relatively weak. An improved form of encryption for wireless networks uses AES (advanced encryption standard). AES is strong encryption.

There are ethical issues in accessing a wireless network unless one has specific authority. Is it similar to a form of electronic trespass? Does it constitute a form of theft from the Internet service provider? One can argue both sides of these questions easily.

The next column will investigate the legal issues of these questions in more depth. In the interim, owners of wireless networks should consider the security of their networks. Improvements can be made to the wireless network fairly easily. A company by the name of Force Field Wireless has some excellent suggestions regarding wireless security. See [www.forcefieldwireless.com](http://www.forcefieldwireless.com). Some of the tips are:

- Enable WEP. Make sure you use the largest WEP key that the equipment supports.

# The Bluetooth Revolution

From *Smart Computing Tidbits*, June 2005

Compiled by David Whittle

- Change the SSID (Service Set Identifier) to something nondescriptive. Do not give a name, address, or any other useful information to potential hackers. Do not use the default SSID.
- Change the default password(s) on the access point. The default passwords of most network equipment are well known and could allow an intruder to gain access to the access point.
- Disable Broadcast SSID. If the access point supports "closed system" or allows one to "disable broadcast SSID," use this feature. This will make the network essentially invisible to almost all scanning methods.
- Update the firmware and drivers on access points and wireless cards. It is always wise to use the latest firmware and drivers on access points and wireless cards. Manufacturers commonly fix known issues, security holes, and enable new features with these updates.
- Enable MAC-based filtering. This feature limits access to unique wireless cards.
- Turn off access points when not in use.
- Try to position access points in the center of the house or building. This will minimize the signal leak outside of its intended range.

Prudent use of security features in a wireless network can prevent misfortune. □

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Bluetooth is a compelling wireless technology that enables the passing of information securely between paired devices within 30 feet of one another. Developed by a consortium of leading high-tech companies, Bluetooth wireless technology is similar to IR (infrared) or Wi-Fi (802.11) in that it eliminates the need for cables to allow communication and data exchange between devices.

Bluetooth, however, fits a niche between IR and Wi-Fi that has triggered a recent explosion in the consumer adoption of Bluetooth-enabled products. Bluetooth devices don't need to be pointed at each other and don't need an uninterrupted line-of-sight. They can be securely paired such that communications are protected by safe 128-bit encryption and can be as far as 11 yards apart. And even though the range and data rate of 1 Mbps (megabit per second) for Bluetooth wireless technology can't begin to match Wi-Fi's range and data rate (802.11a has a range of 100 feet and a data rate of up to 54Mbps, while 802.11b can transmit 300 feet at a speed of 11 Mbps), Bluetooth devices use far less power than Wi-Fi, so they are even more serviceable for basic networking and Internet access.

Given its advantages, then, consider whether any of these more popular uses for Bluetooth technology might help you get more out of your computer. Just look for the Bluetooth logo on each of the devices you'd like to use for exchanging data. □

## Foxfire Becomes Target for Viruses

For a long time Mozilla's *Foxfire* has been chosen by many computer users over virus-targeted *Internet Explorer*, but its growing popularity has now attracted the attention of virus producers. A series of attacks on *Foxfire* has required Mozilla to take note of "holes" in their code and issue patches to remedy them. *Foxfire* users are now warned to look for updates.

# Expect the Unexpected When Traveling Abroad

By Lynn L. Kauer, Editor

Saginaw Valley Computer Association [llkauer@chartermi.net](mailto:llkauer@chartermi.net)

My wife and I recently went on a river cruise from Vienna, Austria, starting with the Danube River. As we continued our trip on the Danube through Germany, we connected with the Main River. That allowed us to travel over the mountains and connect with the Rhine River. The trip ended in Amsterdam in the Netherlands (Holland). This trip was for a period of three weeks and was on a boat that only held 150 persons, including the crew. We are more accustomed to the 'big' ships with upwards of 2,400 passengers, with amenities like an onboard shop to download the photos from the digital memory cards onto CD's. I knew that this service would not be available on the riverboat and became concerned about what I would do if I 'filled' all of my digital storage.

My camera is a Sony DSC-F717 and uses "Memory Sticks" for digital storage. (Other cameras may use Secure Digital, Compact Flash Cards or XD cards, depending on the manufacturer.)

Although the camera is capable of taking photos at 5 megapixels (2,560 x 1,020 JPEG image size), I adjusted the settings downward to 3 (2,048 x 1,536 JPEG image size). I also adjusted the setting to 'fine' mode instead of 'standard' mode. These settings allowed me to save approximately 80 photos on a 128MB stick instead of only the 50 I would have if I were to shoot at the five-megapixel setting.

I own thirteen memory sticks—ten 128MB and three 256MB, capable altogether of storing 1,280 photos. While that may seem like a lot, it really is not. I used almost all of their storage capacity on a previous two-week trip to the Mediterranean while visiting Italy, Greece, Turkey and Croatia.

On that trip, we sailed miles off the coast, and there was no opportunity to take photos until we landed ashore. On the river cruise we would be traveling through the scenic vistas of three countries, plus having stops along the way. I was concerned with having enough storage for the three weeks.

After the first day I quickly learned that there are a lot more things that one should worry about than digital storage. Some of the things contained in this article will surprise you and hopefully give you some insight as to what you should think about when traveling abroad, whether on ship, train, bus or car.

## Camera Resolution

Though my camera was set to three megapixels, a fellow passenger with a camera like mine told me that he had recently purchased the camera with its included stick, and expected to get "almost 800 photos on the

stick." And that was his only stick. This is when I learned that the salesperson had changed the resolution on his camera to the lowest possible setting. In other words, Internet resolution. When I asked him if he intended to make prints he replied, "Oh yes. But none larger than 8 x 10." He was the type who knew everything about everything, so I found a way to leave him while he snapped away with his camera.

I also bumped into another poor fellow who had a real problem. He had bought his camera really cheap in a pawnshop a week before the trip. The camera stored everything on a permanent chip inside the camera. The salesperson had told him that all he had to do was to go into any photo store, and they would be able to transfer his photos to a CD with no problem. At this point, only three days into a sixteen-day cruise, his camera was full. Worse, he could not find a store that could provide the service for him. Onboard the 'big' ships the service is readily available for a fee. On the riverboat, they had no provisions for this service. The crew attempted to help him by downloading the photos onto their computer, but they too bumped into a brick wall. He never received the instructions or the CD that contained the necessary software with which to unload the photos to a computer. His photo shooting days ended early.

## Power

In my concern for storage space on my camera chips (I shot almost 1,000 photos), I thought I would get an adaptor that would allow me to download the photos onto a laptop computer. However, this idea was short-lived because carry-on luggage space is limited. International flights allow the passenger one piece of carry-on luggage, and the size is restricted. Secondly, carrying laptops through airport security is a royal pain. Therefore, I decided that I would become a 'selective' photographer and not try to capture every photo opportunity I saw.

When traveling in Europe one must keep in mind that 110-volt power is not available. All of the electrical power in Europe is 240-volt, and not all of the receptacles are the same from country to country. My first purchase was to buy a transformer to adjust the voltage for a 110-volt external battery charger. It's about the size of a small flashlight, costs less than \$25, and allows me to use it in any country.

This is where I bumped into the first problem. I didn't read all of the instructions that came with the transformer. The first occasion I had to use it was while in the hotel in Vienna. That is where I learned that the voltage was 240-volt and 50-cycle. The instructions clearly stated to not

allow it to be plugged into the outlet for more than an hour, lest it become overheated and possibly damaged. Therefore, I would plug the transformer into the outlet and let the camera battery recharge for shorter periods. When we boarded the ship the only two outlets available were in the bathroom—one for use with an electric razor, with 110 volts, and the other for 240-volt appliances. I used the 240-volt outlet with the transformer for one-hour periods to recharge the camera batteries. No problem.

Alas, two of our shipmates were not so lucky. One plugged his charger into the 110-volt outlet and failed to pay attention to the time. Two hours later, when he entered the cabin, he found his charger smoking. The problem is the 50-cycle current. It burned it up. The other shipmate was less fortunate. He plugged the cord into his camera to recharge the battery. It also caused damage to the built-in charger, and he now had a dysfunctional camera. I make it a practice to never use the camera to recharge the battery unless it is absolutely necessary.

### **Internet Cafes and Keyboards**

While in our hotel in Vienna I found a computer that one could rent for Internet access. The rental rate for this was three euros for fifteen minutes. This means \$4.95 per quarter hour, or about twenty bucks an hour.

Because of the committees Crystal and I are involved in, we wanted to know what the latest information was. This is when we learned that attachments do not get transmitted overseas. This was very frustrating, because we attempted twice later in different cities with the same result.

The interesting thing I learned on the first attempt was when I tried to send an e-mail to the sender that had the attachment. When I typed the message a lot of the letters were mixed up. For example, the S key would be displayed as a “&”, the “P” key would display as an “X” and the “R” key would come up as a “>”. The keyboard layout doesn’t match that of ours!

When I got it cleaned up and attempted to send it I received an error message that I had been logged off, meaning that I had spent five bucks for nothing. This wasn’t unique to the hotel’s computer. It was common at other sites as well. The result was that we were out of contact with anyone online for a month, because things just don’t interface as we expect them to.

I had bumped into the keyboard layout problem a couple of years earlier in England, but it wasn’t as complex as being in Germany. Imagine what it would be like in China or some other remote country.

The connection speeds were a step back in time. While some sites boasted cable and broadband access, the speed was similar to 56KB modems. I should have realized what the differences were, as almost every home had a roof antenna!

### **How Do You Spell Relief?**

What do you do when you get sick in a foreign country? You call your doctor, right? Nope! Our shipmate had had quadruple bypass surgery a couple of years earlier. About halfway through the trip, he got a sore throat and a severe cold. He failed to bring medication along to take care of this condition. This became a big problem for him. Since the time differential was six hours, and he got sick on a weekend, he was unable to contact his doctor in the states. He sent a fax to his doctor’s office, only to learn that the office staff turns off the machines when they leave work. Thus, while for us it was noon, it was 6:00 p.m. at his doctor’s office and it was already closed.

While ashore this same shipmate tried to make a phone call, but his doctor’s answering machine told him to call another number in the event of an emergency. The other number had a message to the effect, “The doctor is not in right now. Please leave a phone number where he can contact you.” Since we were “at sea so to speak” there was no way for the doctor to call back.

After two days, while the ship tied up in port it managed to contact his doctor, who faxed a prescription via a satellite link. However, when the man took it to the pharmacy, the pharmacist refuse to fill it because it was written in English and not by a doctor recognized as being in Germany. So, what’s the point? When traveling abroad try to anticipate the unexpected for medications that may require a prescription.

In my case, I became ill during the second week, having caught the ‘cold’ of the fellow trying to contact his doctor. My only alternative was to talk to a pharmacist for some ‘over the counter’ medication. It didn’t work very well. When I arrived home and found myself unable to sleep in a bed I dozed all night on the recliner. The next morning I met with my doctor and showed him the medication I had bought in Europe. He pulled out the instructions from the package and exclaimed, “Everything is written in German. Why don’t they write in a generic language, in English, so that we could understand what they are telling us?” I replied, “Doc, we were in Germany. How many ‘over the counter’ medications in our country are written in German.? He looked at me with a sly grin and realized the folly of what he had asked.

From now on, when we travel abroad we will take some of the OTC medications that we use from time to time with us. We found aspirin a bit difficult to find, as it was ‘blended’ with other unpronounceable things. The rule to follow is the same as going to a cheap party—BYOB (Bring Your Own Bottle). In this case, BYOM (Bring Your Own Medicine). □

*The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User has provided this article.*

# Netiquette Equals Friendly Online Neighborhoods

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, AARP Computer & Technology Website, [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

Etiquette -- proper behavior in various situations -- has concerned humans through the ages. Google [[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)] turns up references to early telephone manners, proper Medieval-era knightly behavior, and how shells and sharp stones became today's knives and forks (and, of course, which hand to hold them in).

Though the Internet became generally accessible about ten years ago, academics and researchers had used it for decades before that. Just as civilization accommodated sudden widespread automobile and telephone usage, developing common practices (stop for red lights, answer telephones with "Hello"), new online technologies created the need for corresponding innovations in manners.

Called Netiquette ('Net + etiquette), the new discipline really just requires using old manners in a new setting. But since going online is like traveling to another country, a guidebook is useful.

The first and simplest chapter is simply "Follow the golden rule" [[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethic\\_of\\_Reciprocity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethic_of_Reciprocity)]: Treat people online with the same courtesy you expect. Without normal conversational cues such as body language, facial expression, and tone of voice, it's easy to misunderstand someone's meaning. You may remember Emily Litella on classic Saturday Night Live television, mishearing the need to reduce TV violence as "eliminating violins." Even stranger miscommunication occurs online, so give others the benefit of the doubt.

Out-of-control ranting is sometimes called "flaming." Before responding angrily, consider how you'd react to receiving the note you're about to send. Remember that once sent, e-mail and other online communications take on a life of their own, being forever retrievable with your name attached. And asking "Did you mean..." can avoid having to give Emily Litella's trademark "Never mind" if your interpretation was off target. Replying calmly often gets a conversation back on track without anyone suffering a "flame war," an unproductive exchange of angry notes.

E-mail is likely the most commonly addressed Netiquette area. Searching Google for email + netiquette provides an encyclopedia of advice, some general, some for personal use, and much for business settings. Common tips are DON'T USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS (it's hard to read and is considered "shouting"); be brief; use meaningful subject lines; quote just enough from what you're

answering to provide useful context; don't forward to everyone you know jokes, rumors, hoaxes, chain letters, charity appeals, and such, even if an arriving note tells you to do so; don't send "Me too" notes to discussion lists; don't send attachments without getting the recipient's permission; send plain-text e-mail unless all your addressees prefer HTML-format; etc.

Accept and cheerfully answer questions asked by people newly online -- remember that we all started with basics. Interesting e-mail tips are available at places like *Writers Write* [[www.writerswrite.com/journal/dec99/pirillo1.htm](http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/dec99/pirillo1.htm)], *Emailreplies.com* [[www.emailreplies.com/](http://www.emailreplies.com/)], and Yale University Library [[www.library.yale.edu/training/netiquette/](http://www.library.yale.edu/training/netiquette/)].

## Not all tips are "Don't"!

If you receive multiple replies to a question you ask online, it's advisable -- this will make people love you -- to summarize answers for everyone else who saw the question. Be careful with humor: what's obvious and side-splitting to you may baffle or annoy someone else. When appropriate, and sparingly, use "smileys" -- symbols like ;-) -- to show that you're not serious. And if you receive what seems to be an unlikely rumor, do the sender a favor by checking it out at a site like *snopes.com* [[www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com)] and reporting what you find.

The Netiquette Home Page [[www.albion.com/netiquette/](http://www.albion.com/netiquette/)] is an entertaining and informative reference. It notes that Netiquette covers both common courtesy online and informal cyberspace "rules of the road". The site lists and explains rules with friendly illustrations. It's interesting that not only do the rules all agree with that Golden Rule mentioned earlier, they're often different ways of giving the same advice. For example, using the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life is an easy way to make yourself look good online. □

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Make check payable to **Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group**.

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The NVPCUG is an accredited IRC 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Your dues payment may be tax-deductible as a charitable contribution.

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For more information about the NVPCUG, visit our  
Web site: <http://www.nvpcug.org>

# Microsoft is Helping

By Bob Elgines, Colorado Computer Club of Lake Havasu, AZ  
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You may have noticed in your *Windows XP/2000* updates that you have updated the *MS Malicious Software Tool (MSRT)*. Don't bother to look for it on your computer; you won't find it. You will see a window only if you have or had a problem.

What is malicious software? Malicious software (also called "malware") is software that was developed with the intention to cause harm. Malware can include viruses, worms, spyware, and other destructive programs that can hide on your computer and can slow its performance to a crawl. Even more alarming, malware can be used to monitor your browsing habits, steal passwords, and even allow an attacker to gain control of your system. Malicious software either installs on your computer without your knowledge or can be installed with a program you intended to download.

The *MSRT* checks for and helps to remove specific, prevalent malicious software infections. If detection and removal has accrued, a display window indicates which malicious software was picked up.

Each month, after the second Tuesday, Microsoft will provide an updated version of this tool that removes malicious software that is found to be prevalent for that month.

## Getting the *Malicious Software Removal Tool*

There are two ways you can get the *Malicious Software Removal Tool*. Microsoft recommends that home users either turn on the Automatic Updates feature in *Windows XP*, or run the tool online.

1. If your computer is running *Windows XP*, you can get the latest version of the tool online from

Microsoft Update. To have the tool automatically delivered and installed each month on your computer without having to take further action, simply turn on Automatic Updates.

2. If your computer is running either *Windows XP* or *Windows 2000*, you can run the tool directly from an easy-to-use online wizard available at:  
[www.microsoft.com/malwareremove](http://www.microsoft.com/malwareremove)

## How do I verify whether the removal tool has run on a client computer?

There are two ways to check:

1. You can examine the value data for the following registry entry to verify the execution of the tool. You can implement such a check as part of a startup script or a logon script. This will prevent the tool from running multiple times.

Subkey: `HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\RemovalTools\MRT`.

Every time the tool is run, independent of the results of the execution, the tool will record a GUID to the registry to indicate that it has been executed. The following table lists the GUID that corresponds to each release. [Editor's note: Contact the author at *elginesz@rraz.net* for the table.]

2. Using *Windows Explorer*, look for the log entitled "mrt.log" located under your "Document" files or in this folder: `C:\Windows\Debug\mrt.log`.

Another similar tool is written by McAfee called *Stinger*. It is updated approximately every three months and can be downloaded at: <http://vil.nai.com/vil/stinger/> □

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