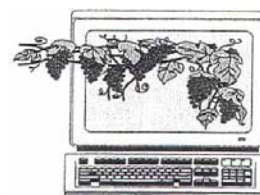


COMPUTER NEWS



Volume 23, No. 11

November, 2006

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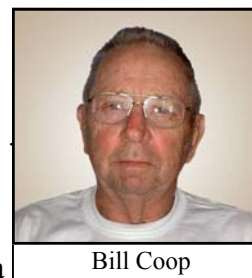
The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group has served novice and experienced computer users since 1983. Through its monthly meetings, newsletters, online forum, special interest groups, mentor program and community involvement, it has helped educate people of all ages. The NVPCUG provides opportunities 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 522 computers and 136 printers. Additional equipment has been given to charitable nonprofit organizations and disadvantaged individuals.

Genealogy Program to Be Presented at November 15 NVPCUG Meeting

By Susy Ball, Programs Director

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, November, 2006, 7:00-9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California.

The main presentation, by **William Coop**, will feature genealogy programs used for locating and entering information about family members, including Web sites for the research of surnames and other items of interest. He started doing genealogy/family history in 1992 after visiting the LDS Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. This gave him an interest in finding his family roots, and he started gathering data about his only living relative from paternal grandparents, his aunt. From there he continued, contacting cousins all over the United States. Prior to 1995 he had to correspond with them by "snail mail," but after moving to Napa he got his first computer with a dial-up Internet connection and thereby expedited his work immensely. He is a member of NVPCUG. Before retirement Bill was a M/Sgt with the US Air Force and then an Automotive Technician with the California Highway Patrol.



Bill Coop

Preceding the main presentation, **Jerry Brown** will lead the **Random Access** portion of our meeting with an open-floor question-and-answer period, during which you can ask questions about specific computer-related issues and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees. Don't forget that you can also e-mail your questions before coming to the meeting (questions@nvpcug.org).

Following this, there will be a **Computer Tutor** session discussing an introduction to ripping music CDs using *Audiograbber*. This is a computer program for reading music CDs and for creating your own CDs from the extracted or "ripped" ones. The Tutor will be Michael Moore, a retired Instructor in Computer Studies at Napa Valley College. Mike is also a member of NVPCUG.

Need practical information that will help you make better use of your computer? Come to this meeting! Guests are welcome; admission is free.

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, so for current meeting information, see our Web site, 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

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

Macintosh SIG

Meets: Monthly, second Thursday
6:30-8:30 p.m.
Napa Senior Activity Center
1500 Jefferson St., Napa
Leader: **Jim Gillespie**
(707) 252-1665
napanerd@pacbell.net

President's Message --

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

RAFFLE: We have an 11-piece toolkit with case to raffle off. It's a handy item to have when you want to upgrade the hardware inside your computer or even for general home applications. If you already have one, use it as a stocking stuffer for Christmas. Tickets may be purchased at the November 15 meeting and you must be present to win. We might also have a couple of copies of CASPER available.

HOLIDAYS PARTY: Our Holidays party is December 20 in lieu of our regular meeting. There will be FOOD and FUN and a chance to visit with members of NVPCUG. The party will again be at the festive Christmas House at Peterson's Christmas Tree Farm. We also are going to have a silent auction. NVPCUG will have a variety of computer-related equipment and software for bidding. You may also bring your own items to auction for yourself (it doesn't have to be computer related). Contact Orion Hill for further information (OHill@napanet.net).

At the meeting on November 15, a signup sheet will be passed around to sign up for the party. If you can't go to the meeting, e-mail me with what potluck dish you wish to bring and the number in your party. (president@nvpcug.org).

MEMBER OF THE YEAR: We are looking for nominations for "Outstanding Member of the Year." This award is not intended to honor the member who has given the most support to our group, but, rather, to give recognition of a member who, based on his or her service activities and other considerations, has provided significant support over the past year or several years. Please e-mail me with your suggestions and reasons. The Member of the Year will be selected at the next Board of Directors meeting on Dec. 6 and announced at the Holidays Party.

ELECTION: The election of a new Board of Directors had to be postponed until December 6 due to the lack of a quorum at the November board meeting. We have 16 people running for the 15 positions on the board, so it looks like 2007 will be a good year for Napa Valley PC Users Group.

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NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
November 15	7:00-9:00 p.m.
December 6	7:00-9:00 p.m.
December 11	5:30-7:30 p.m.
December 13	7:00-8:30 p.m.
December 14	6:30-8:30 p.m.
December 20	7:00-9:00 p.m.

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

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

Officers for 2006

Board of Directors

President	Dianne Prior	252-1506*	President@nvpcug.org
Vice President	Ron Dack		VicePresident@nvpcug.org
Secretary	Julie Jerome	224-6620	Secretary@nvpcug.org
Treasurer	Roy Wagner	253-2721	Treasurer@nvpcug.org

Other Directors: Susy Ball, Orion E. Hill, Jim Gillespie, Bob Kulas, John Moore, Dick Peterson, James Stirling, Dean Unruh

Appointed Officers

Computer Equipment Sales Coordinator	(Volunteer Needed)		
Computer Recycling Coordinator	Bill Wheadon	224-3901	Recycler@nvpcug.org
Computer Tutor Coordinator	Mike Moore	255-1615	Tutor@nvpcug.org
Computers-to-Schools Program Coordinator	Orion E. Hill	252-0637	CTS@nvpcug.org
Facility Arrangements Coordinator	John Moore	252-3418	Facility@nvpcug.org
Greeter Coordinator	Bob Simmerman	259-6113	Greeter@nvpcug.org
Librarian	Dean Unruh	226-9164	Librarian@nvpcug.org
Membership Director	Dianne Prior	252-1506	Membership@nvpcug.org
Mentor Program Coordinator	Dick Peterson	259-1712	Mentors@nvpcug.org
Newsletter Circulator	Jim Hearn	224-2540	
Newsletter Editor	James Stirling	944-1177	Editor@nvpcug.org
Product Review Coord.	Susy Ball	337-3398	Reviews@nvpcug.org
Product Review Coord.	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Reviews2@nvpcug.org
Programs Director	Susy Ball	337-3998	Programs@nvpcug.org
Publicity Director	(Volunteer Needed)		Publicity@nvpcug.org
Random Access Moderator	Jerry Brown	254-9607	Questions@nvpcug.org
Special Projects Director	Bob Kulas	255-9241	Projects@nvpcug.org
Webmaster	Ron Dack		Webmaster@nvpcug.org

*All telephone numbers are in Area Code 707.

Come to the NVPCUG General Meetings

Held the third Wednesday of each month

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Napa Senior Activities Center

1500 Jefferson Street, Napa

NVPCUG Computer News

Computer News (ISS 0897-5744) is published monthly by the Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group, Inc. (NVPCUG), P.O. Box 2866, Napa, CA 94558-0286. Subscriptions: \$30 for one year (12 issues). Editor: **James Stirling**, Editor@nvpcug.org. The material in *Computer News* is intended for noncommercial purposes and may not be reproduced without prior written permission, except that permission for reproducing articles, with authors properly credited, is granted to other computer user groups for their internal, nonprofit use only. The information in this newsletter is believed to be correct. However, the NVPCUG can assume neither responsibility for errors or omissions nor liability for any damages resulting from the use or misuse of any information.

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How to Make Adobe Reader 7.0 Load Faster

By Joathan Hardwick (Dec. 2, 2004)

Like most other techies, whenever I install Adobe's *Acrobat Reader* I also *uninstall* most of the pointless plugins, to speed up its dog-slow startup process. If you want to learn more about speeding up *Adobe Reader 6.0*, just ask Tim or Chris or Greg or Omar or Kevin ("site: *blogs.msdn.com adobe reader*" is a wonderful search term!).

Now that the even-shinier *AdobeReader 7* is out, I thought I'd document my steps for optimizing this new version. So here's what I just did on two of my machines:

1. In Edit-Preferences, do the following:
 - o General tab: turn off "Automatically save document changes"
 - o Internet tab: turn off all three checkboxes
 - o Page Display tab: turn on "CoolType"
 - o Search tab: turn off "Enable fast find"
 - o Startup tab: turn off "Show messages and automatically update"
2. In View-Toolbars, turn off "Rotate view" and "Search the internet." Under "Show button labels," turn them all on so you can figure out what the heck those icons mean.
3. Fire up *Windows Explorer* and do the following:
 - o Navigate to C:\Program Files\Adobe\Acrobat 7.0\Reader\
 - o Right-click to create a new subdirectory, and call it `plugins_uninstalled`.
 - o Move all the `.api` files from the `plug_ins` subdirectory to your new `plugins_unin-`

stalled subdirectory, *except* for `AcroForm.api` (for form-filling) and `EScript.api` (dependency of `AcroForm.api`).

4. Finally, go to Start-Run-All Programs-Startup, and right-click and delete the "Adobe Reader Speed Launch" link that Adobe silently added to your startup process.

What, you wanted to actually know what all those plug-ins did so that you can make up your own mind? Move them back again, launch *Acrobat Reader*, and go to Help-About Adobe Plugins to learn what each plug-in does and what its dependencies are. Oh, and if you sped up *Adobe 6.0* by removing some plugins, the update process will have left some subdirectories under `C:\Program Files\Adobe\Acrobat 6.0\`, so if you're tidy-minded you can delete those too.

Of course, if all this seems like too much hard work, you can just wait. I'm sure the good folks over at *AcroPDF.com* will update their "PDF SpeedUp" freeware utility to work with v7.0 before too long (*Update: Yep, they have.*)

Update: A couple of readers have suggested that most users will also want search functionality, in which case you can keep `Search.api` and `Search5.api` in your plug ins directory.

(Contributed by Orion Hill)

NVPCUG Archives and Handy Free Utility Programs to Be Available on CD at Monthly General Meetings for Just \$10.

Ron Dack has responded to the request of user group members for more of the CDs he has prepared in the past. In addition to archives of the newsletter, he has included handy-dandy free utilities like the latest editions of *Firefox*, *Ad-Aware*, *Adobe Reader*, and *Hijack-This*. Instead of waiting for these programs to be downloaded from the Web, you can have them for immediate access on a CD.

Ron is doing this as a fund-raiser for the group. If you wish to reserve a copy, e-mail him before the meeting at VicePresident@nvpcug.org

The Part of Backup Nobody Mentions

By Vinny LaBash. Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida

<http://www.spcug.org> [labash,\(at\)comcast.net](mailto:labash,(at)comcast.net)

There are dozens if not hundreds of ways to backup your data, but we're not going to talk about that. We're going to discuss the most important part of doing a backup, the part that is hardly ever mentioned. Do you believe that your backup is a sound copy of your data? Would you be at ease if all your files suddenly disappeared from your computer, and all you had was your backup to restore them?

If your confidence fizzled to zero, what's the problem?

You may have developed the most sophisticated and comprehensive backup scheme the computer world has ever seen, but you won't ever know if it's any good unless you test it. Without a valid method of testing, you can have no confidence in your backups. There are many things that can go wrong with a backup, some beyond your control, some not. Perhaps one day you were in too much of a hurry, and you made a backup of one folder instead of your entire system as you planned. Hmm, no wonder that backup completed so fast.

Your backup disk got exposed to a magnetic field and scrambled all your data.

The CD containing your data was left in the car, and excessive heat warped the media, making it unreadable.

You encrypted your backup and lost the password to restore it.

You upgraded your backup software, and now it can't read your old backups.

Your new upgraded backup software program becomes corrupted, and you can't make a new backup or restore your old one.

Your new backup program has a great innovative file compression scheme. However, it turns out that it compresses better than anyone expected.

You upgrade your Windows Operating System and your backup software no longer works. (Rare, but it happens).

Let's stop here before you get too depressed to make another backup. What's important is to un-

derstand that a great many things can go wrong even with the best backup methods.

The only true test of your backup is to do a restore and see if it works. Does this mean you have to erase all your files, and then run a restore from your backup media? No. Fortunately, there are less chancy ways of verifying your backup data.

One thing you can do is install a second hard drive and restore your data files to the second disk. If your original disk has enough capacity, you can partition it into at least two sections, and restore into one of the new partitions. Hard drives have become almost dirt cheap, so this is not particularly expensive.

Another thing you can do is make at least three backups and store them in three different locations for safety. Keep one copy at home, but in a different room than your computer. Store a second copy at your office or a friend's house, and do the same for him or her. The third copy could be in a safe deposit box or similar secure location.

If you feel that such measures are not necessary, ask yourself if you are ready to perform the ultimate test. Would you feel totally at ease erasing your hard disk today and restoring it from your backups? If not, then think again.

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

Correction

Two of the volunteers shown in the NVPCUG computers-to-Schools Program work party photo published on page 4 of our October newsletter were misidentified. The caption should have identified Hal Bunnell, Roger Lewis, and Bill Wheadon (left to right).

Ram & Reason:

Enter the Dragon: Comodo Free Desktop Security Tools

By Rob Rice, A member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City and a computer specialist in Anchorage, Alaska

Every once in a while a company manages to push my button; Symantec is the latest. After having bought out my beloved *Sygate Personal Firewall* they immediately yanked it from the market. Though I had paid for the Pro version, I could no longer install it, since it requires authorization. I am dead in the water.

Still, a nice thing about capitalism is that where there is a void, it will get filled. Enter the Comodo Group, with not only a worthy alternative to *Sygate's Personal Firewall*, but a whole suite of security products for free!

The Comodo Group gets its name from the Komodo dragon, a metaphor for the Internet, with a "C" instead of a "K" to acknowledge a commitment to commerce, communications, and dot com. Comodo is the "second largest Certification Authority for ensuring Identity Trust & Assurance" on the Internet. In other words, they are the folks who make that little yellow padlock on your Web browser work. The Comodo Group is the real deal, with headquarters in Jersey City, USA (Yes, they have a real mailing address unlike some so-called security products offered on the Web). They also with global offices in UK, Norway and India.

So why is Comodo giving away a product? Though the company does more than just issue SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) certificates, apparently they feel the need to build brand identity. According to Melih Abdullayoglu, the President and CEO - Comodo Group: "If we are able to write good software and give such valuable software for free, our name will be known in the marketplace, we will build our Comodo brand and this brand will be associated with security. And this will help us sell more Digital Certificates and other services we have as we will have a big brand!"

Simple enough! So what are they offering? Again from the Comodo Web site, six programs:

Comodo Firewall, Comodo VerificationEngine, Comodo AntiVirus, Comodo AntiSpam, Comodo BackUp, and Comodo iVault.

Here are the details of each product:

Comodo Personal Firewall 2.0, with a FREE lifetime license. Its sleek design gives an at-a-glance overview of your security status.

1. Highlights – it displays the latest Comodo news and information about updates.

2. Traffic – it gives a high visual overview of the

last minute of traffic history in terms of applications and network protocols.

3. System info – it provides information about your system in terms of the hardware and details of all network adapters in your computer.

4. View Alerts – you get in-depth details on the high severity risks that the firewall has detected.

5. Update license – you need only one-click activation of your free-for-a-lifetime Comodo license.

6. Computer security level – you can customize the firewall security by using the slider to quickly move between preset security levels.

7. Vulnerability scanning – you can check the security of your firewall's configuration with Comodo's online vulnerability scanner, *HackerGuardian*.

8. Security Monitoring – you get an immediate heads-up on the status of the firewall's major components.

9. Protection strength - your overall security level can be determined by the settings you choose.

Comodo Firewall, rated by *PC Magazine Online* as an Editor's Choice, constantly monitors and defends your PC from Internet attacks. It's easy to install and use and passes the industry's most stringent firewall "leak" tests. Unlike some other "free" firewalls, this is not a stripped-down version but is the full, completely functional product. This free solution comes complete with continual updates that are also free forever!

System Requirements: Windows 2000 (ALL); Windows XP (ALL); Windows 2003 (ALL); 64 MB available RAM; 32 MB of available free hard disk space

Comodo Verification Engine, also FREE for life.

VerificationEngine anti-phishing and identity assurance tool for *Microsoft Windows* offers an extremely simple way to differentiate legitimate Web sites from fraudulent ones. Place your mouse cursor over a site logo. If it is authentic, a green border will appear around your browser. So if you really wish to be sure you are looking at the real *www.paypal.com* site rather than a clever imitation created to steal your identity, install *VerificationEngine* now!

Comodo AntiVirus, again, a FREE lifetime license. The following is a brief description of the things this program provides. Fuller descriptions are found on

the Web site.

- On Access Scanning - Always on, real-time protection against threats.
- On Demand scanning - Take control by running instant scans on any file, folder or drive.
- Automatic Daily Updates - Up-to-the second protection against the latest threats.
- Email Scanning - Automatic checking and disinfection of incoming and outgoing mail
- Process Monitoring - Continuously scans your PC's memory for viruses.
- Worm Blocker - Monitors and intercepts suspicious mass mailing attempts.
- In-depth Reporting - Comprehensive logs of all scans performed.
- Pro-active virus defense - Submit suspicious files for analysis by the *Comodo AntiVirus* team.
- Easy, User Friendly interface - Sleek design provides fingertip access to all major settings.
- Scan Scheduling - Timetable scans to run when you choose.
- Dedicated Quarantine Facility - Isolate suspected files where they can do no harm.
- Advanced Heuristic detection Engine - Protection against unknown viruses.
- Scan Removable Devices - CD's, DVD's, external drives, USB devices, and digital cameras.
- Scans Network drives – gives protection from any potential threats on your network.
- Scans Compressed Files - there's no hiding place for viruses, even in a .zip file.
- Does not hog system resources – it gives maximum protection with no slowdown of your PC.

System Requirements. Windows XP (SP2) / Windows 2000 (SP4 or later); 50 MB available space on your hard drive; 128 MB RAM; Intel Pentium 300 MHz processor (or equivalent). Note - Not compatible with Windows 9x systems.

Comodo AntiSpam, also with a FREE license.

Install *Comodo AntiSpam* for free and reclaim your inbox. Our powerful challenge-response technology authenticates the sender of every mail – a system that automated spam bots can't get around. This is the full product, not stripped-down “cripple ware,” and it's free forever to the end user. Its features include the following: Provides total spam elimination; has a no-hassle set-up; gives sender-based authentication; thwarts the spam bots; works with your existing setup; automatically authenticates your address book; instantly migrates custom black and white lists; gives one-click bandwidth optimization; provides pro-active spam defense; gives maximum protection

with minimum drain on system resources; has an independent authentication database and quarantine database; and others.

System Requirements: Operating Systems: Windows 2000/XP; Processor: Pentium 100 MHz or higher; System RAM: 32 MB RAM; Hard Drive: 21 MB of HDD free space; Internet Browser: IE 6.0 or above.

Comodo BackUp, also with FREE lifetime license.

Comodo Backup is the straightforward and powerful utility that allows users to quickly and easily create backup copies of critical files. Free of charge, it includes complete file and folder-duplication to local network drives and FTP servers, intelligent incremental backups, e-mail reporting, extensive report logs, real time backups with “synchronization” mode, advanced rule-based filtering, flexible scheduling of backups, space-saving archiving capabilities, and more.

System Requirements: Windows XP (Service Pack 1 or later) or Windows 2K (Service Pack 3 or later); Intel Pentium IV with 133 MHz processor; 64 MB RAM; 12 MB free hard drive space; Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.01 or above.

Comodo iVault. Also with a FREE license.

iVault saves time by providing instantaneous logins to any username/password-secured Web pages such as online banking and e-mail account sites. It also doubles as a 256-bit secure storage for private and confidential information such as credit card details and Social Security numbers and protects against the very latest key-logging Trojan Horse viruses.

Phew! That is a lot of stuff! And I must admit I have yet to test all of these free products. Not for a lack of desire but because we are talking about six programs! I will say that I am about halfway through my testing of the firewall product, and it does seem to perform as advertised. But don't wait around for me, grab these six freebies and let me know what you think of them!

Thanks Comodo!

Comodo - <http://www.comodogroup.com/>
PC Magazine Article on *Comodo Firewall* - <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,1969485,00.a.sp>.

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

How Do I Get My Home Videos Into the Computer?

By Elise Edgell, President, North Orange County Computer Club, California

<http://www.noccc.org> [eliseedgell\(at\)aol.com](mailto:eliseedgell(at)aol.com)

I have stacks of VHS and 8mm tapes that I want to convert to digital format before they are no longer accessible. I know that once I get the analog videos converted to digital format I can preserve them, edit them, back them up, etc. But, what technology is available? When I am making a decision about software, frequently the feature that sounded so good on the box and enticed me to purchase it, is not the feature I really use. It often is something that I was unaware of when I initially got the program but which I use the most and like the best.

When VCRs first came on the market, I wanted one. I heard about the pros and cons of VHS and BETA formats. I had a hard time remembering which was which. I purchased a VHS model and rapidly learned the different recording speeds and how they affected the quality of the image. The next VCR I purchased was a BETA format, and the image quality was much better. Since that time, I have had a VHS camcorder, an 8mm and a Hi8. Again, the quality difference between the three formats is noticeable. I have not purchased a digital camcorder yet so have not learned the differences between types of digital camcorders.

My first analog capture device connected to the computer with a USB1 cable. That did not work well and I put the project aside for a while. I then received an ADS Instant DVD USB 2 capture device as a gift. By this time I had acquired a couple of video editing programs. I had installed them, read the documentation and attempted to capture some video from a Hi8 tape. This did not work well. I found that software programs are very touchy about which video capture device they will talk with. Fortunately, the video capture device came with capture software, so I am able to transfer my analog video to digital. But, not in the way I wanted and I am still learning the terminology.

Other users may experience difficulties like mine. The software programs say that they can “capture” both analog and digital video. They also talk about “capture card” for the digital video. It is necessary to have a “capture card” or “capture device” to take the analog information from your VHS (or other analog input) and convert it to digital information. This is usually accomplished by connecting the video-out and audio-out from your analog device (VHS player, camcorder, etc) to the input section of your capture card (this may be your video card) or external device. When you are in the process of capturing the video, the analog information is converted in the capture device to a digital format (there are several such as MPEG1 and MPEG2) and then stored on your computer. Once stored, they can be used by video editing programs or can be

burned to a disk.

Please note, if you have a digital camcorder, you do not need a conversion device—the information is already in digital format. Depending on the type of camcorder the digital information may be stored on a tape, memory card, hard disk, or even on a DVD. If you cannot remove the storage device and put it into a reader on your computer, then the way to transfer data is through a FireWire or USB2 connection to your computer. If you are using a video editing program to enable the transfer, there are some nice things that the program may be able to do with the data as it is received. It may automatically create chapters and provide other information that is handy when you want to edit the information.

There are programs that let you transfer your converted VHS tape directly to a DVD.

The reason for doing this is to get the analog tapes preserved. I know that I will never have the time to edit all the old tapes I have, but I do want to preserve them. The *CapWiz* program that came with my ADS Instant DVD USB2 capture box has this feature. If you purchase a program that is not bundled with the capture box (or card) be sure that specific version of that program will work with your model of capture device.

Expect to put in some time learning the terminology. Read carefully what the program will do and will not do so that you are realistic in your expectations. Keep in mind that what you are working with, once you have your video in digital format, is a file. The file can be in several different formats with different characteristics. What I mean is that, just like with digital photos, a file format that is really compressed will not look as good as a larger file with more information. When dealing with video information, you need room for a lot of storage on your hard disk, hopefully a fast one.

A fast computer with lots of RAM is also important. It is only recently that video editing has become practical for the home user. Before really large, fast hard disk storage was affordable, the home user was very limited in the size of file that could be edited. With today’s fast computers, inexpensive RAM, large storage disks, and inexpensive DVD writers it should be within the reach of many home users to be able to preserve valuable analog tapes. Plus, They can make home movies from them that friends and family are willing to watch.

If you are planning to buy a new computer in the near future, keep in mind the requirements for video editing as well as the requirements for *Vista*.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG) has provided this article.

Are You a Zombie? How About Your Computer?

by S. Jack Lewtschuk, Monterey Bay Users' Group – Personal Computer (MBUG-PC) California

www.mbug.org [blacklion\(at\)royal.net](mailto:blacklion(at)royal.net)

There are literally hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of “zombie computers” out there. Is your computer one of them?

Creating zombies out of computers used by you and me has become a major tool for computer hackers, unscrupulous marketers, and other malicious evildoers. A computer becomes a zombie when it performs tasks as instructed by someone other than the computer owner. The instructions given to the zombie usually involve distributing information to other computers, which it does without notifying its owner. In every spare moment, a zombie computer sends out data, most of which is spam that tries to get someone to purchase something.

Watch for “Zombie Computer” Warning Signs

- The computer seems sluggish.
- The computer seems to be accessing the hard drive constantly.
- The mouse or keyboard becomes unresponsive.
- Excessive “bounce” notifications from people you never knowingly tried to e-mail.

These warning signs may also be symptoms of other computer problems, but if you see any of them you should investigate. For more information on zombie computers and spam, check out the Federal Trade Commission's Operation Spam Zombies Web site at <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/edcams/spam/zombie/index.htm>.

Protect Your Computer from Becoming a Zombie

- Install a good **antivirus program** and make sure you update it often.
- Install a good **two-way firewall**. It will notify you when information is being sent from your computer. Unfortunately the *WindowsXP* firewall is not adequate for this purpose—it is “one way” only.
- Update your operating system** and other software regularly.
- Use an **anti-spyware program** to eliminate spyware on your system.
- Check your antivirus and firewall** software occasionally to make sure they are running properly—often one of the first instructions given to a zombie computer is to disable the antivirus and firewall software.
- Don't open unknown/unexpected e-mail attachments!**
- Use caution when downloading software**—buy from reputable companies, and be sure to read every

screen as you download and install any software.

NOVICE CORNER

So, you've decided to download a program from the Internet. Are you sure that you really need it? OK, if you can't live without it, are all of your security programs active and updated? If so, click on “download” and cross your fingers.

An Internet download usually comes with a “prompt” from your browser—you'll be asked whether to “Run” (or “Open”) or to “Save” the file. What should you do? Here's the difference:

- If you select “Run”, the download file will go to your “Temporary Internet Files” folder. Then it will run or open automatically.
- If you select “Save”, you have to choose where the file will be stored on your hard drive (creating a “Downloads” folder on your C-drive might be a good idea at this point). The file will sit in this folder until you decide to open it yourself.

So “Run” is convenient, but “Save” gives you more control and it's generally safer. Once the file is saved, you can run a virus scan on it and examine the file. On the other hand, you shouldn't be downloading something of which you are unsure. Downloads from companies you know—for instance, Microsoft, Adobe or Apple—are always OK.

Even if you do choose “Run,” you may still have the option to do some checking. *Internet Explorer* often lets you view digital signatures from the download prompt. After you click “Run,” a digital certificate message will pop up. You can click on the name listed under “Publisher” for more information. Under “Digital Signature Information,” it should say, “This digital signature is OK”. Otherwise, the file is high risk.

Another option you might see is a checkbox labeled something like “Always ask before opening this type of file”. Other browsers might use different phrasing such as “Always perform this action with this type of file”. The phrasing can be tricky—the two examples mentioned here have opposite effects. So be careful with options that include “always,” “never” or “automatically.” Select the setting that will alert you with *every* download. Good luck!

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

Tech News

By Sue Crane, Editor, Big Bear Computer Club <http://www.bigbearcc.org> [scrane5\(at\)socal.rr.com](mailto:scrane5(at)socal.rr.com)

Amazon Reveals Windows Vista Pricing

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,2010150,00.asp>

Preorder prices posted on the Amazon.com Web site, *Windows Vista Home Basic* will retail for \$199, while an upgrade to this version will cost \$99.95, with \$89.95 for an additional upgrade license. *Vista Home Premium* is priced on Amazon.com at

\$239, with an upgrade costing \$159 and an additional upgrade license for \$143.00, while *Vista Business* costs \$299 retail, \$199 for an upgrade and \$179 for an extra upgrade license.

New Skype Phone Doesn't Need PC

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,2010681,00.asp>

Skype announced a new cordless phone on Thursday that sends and receives Skype calls just like a landline, but without the need for a computer. The new Philips VOIP841 plugs into a standard RJ-11 home phone jack, as well as into an RJ-45 broadband connection jack. It can send and receive Skype calls as well as calls from a regular home phone number, but you do have to have a broadband connection.

IRS Sets Refund for Individuals from Phone Tax

<http://www.eweek.com/article2/0,1895,2011151,00.asp?kc=EWNAVEMNL09>

0106EOAD

Long-distance telephone customers can receive refunds of between \$30 and \$60 on their 2006 taxes to reimburse them for a now defunct telephone tax, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service said recently. The U.S. Treasury Department in May announced it would end its legal fight to keep a 3 percent federal excise tax on long-distance telephone service that dates back to 1898, when a luxury tax on wealthy Americans who owned telephones was imposed to help finance the Spanish-American war.

Light Bulbs Going Organic

http://articles.techrepublic.com.com/2100-22_11-6111872.html?tag=nl.e019

The Ewing, N.J., company--along with General Electric, Osram Opto Semiconductors and others--is tinkering with the idea of transforming organic light-

emitting diodes, thin sheets of plastic that emit light, into a source of room lighting. Pioneer and Samsung Electronics already use OLEDs for screens on consumer electronics products. By increasing the size of the sheets and the brightness, researchers think the material could become an energy-efficient substitute for the incandescent light bulb.

Flying-car

http://news.com.com/Flying-car+firm+releases+simulator%2C+takes+deposits/2100-1008_3-6112862.html?tag=nl.e703

The Transition, a plane that can also be driven as a car, won't come out for a few years, but you can try a flight simulator now and put a deposit on a future plane too. Terrafugia, a "roadable aircraft" developer that emerged out of MIT, has devised a flight simulator for its aircraft (which can be downloaded here). The application runs on top of the X-Plane simulator for Laminar Research. Potential buyers can also now plunk down \$7,400, or 5 percent of the anticipated \$148,000 purchase price, for a deposit on a Transition. The planes will come out in late 2009. A fully operational prototype is expected to come out in 2008.

Cars with Depth Perception.

http://articles.techrepublic.com.com/2100-22_11-6117385.html?tag=nl.e019

Honda believes Canesta's chips could help drivers know how close they are to other parked cars, pedestrians, and get other similar, useful information. Automakers are also examining ultrasonics (sound waves) or stereoscopic technologies to give drivers better information about their surroundings.

Fly planes in a 360-degree Virtual Universe.

http://news.com.com/1606-2_3-6118278.html?tag=nl.e703

Take a tour of the Future Flight Central at NASA Ames Research Center in California.

Homemade Car Gets 105 mpg.

http://news.com.com/2061-11200_3-6118875.html?tag=nl.e703

Inventor Jory Squibb combines environmentally friendly products and do-it-yourself gadgetry with the

“Moonbeam,” a DIY car that he claims can get up to 105 miles per gallon. The project took about \$2,500--and 1,000 hours--to complete. Check out the step-by-step instructions on his Web site: <http://mysite.verizon.net/vze6omtd/jorysquibb/id1.html>

Motorola Sells Phones and Accessories in Vending Machines. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/technology/chi-0609210048sep21,1,939120>.

Motorola has begun selling phones and accessories through “Instantmoto” vending machines at well-trafficked locations such as airports and department stores. Under the plan, the machines will stock nearly 12 phones and 18 accessories.

Gas from manure.

<http://news.com.com/Gas+from+manure+Big+plant+to+open/2100-1008-6119213.html?part=dht&tag=nl.e433>

Microgy plans to start operating its first two thermophilic digesters--large, heated vats in which microbes turn large quantities of manure into fuel.

Post-9/11 Anti-terror Technology: A report card by Declan McCullagh, Staff Writer, CNET News.com://articles.techrepublic.com.com/2100-1009_11-6113064.html?tag=nl.e019

A CNN writer examines five useful ways of improving security--and five that should raise eyebrows!

In need of support:

1. Going wireless
2. Better search technology
3. Inspecting cargo containers
4. Smarter translation software
5. Faster chemical detection.

Raising privacy concerns:

1. Omnipresent cameras
2. Registered traveler
3. Backscatter X-ray (privacy advocates say it can show body contours that are so exact it amounts to a “virtual strip search.”)
4. “Brain fingerprinting”
5. DNA dragnets.

Canon to recall copiers that can catch fire.

Japan’s Canon will recall more than 140,000 personal copiers made in Japan between 1987 and 1997 due to a faulty connection involving the power cord. <http://driveragent.com/pcworld.php?PHPSESSID=9241043d076111e037e92e9e1fbab1e8>

FREE Driver Update for PC Magazine Members.

Are your computer’s drivers up to date? Stop wondering and get a free computer scan for instant driver up-

dates. Instant Access to 94,081 Device Driver Updates: http://articles.techrepublic.com.com/2100-10878_11-6114592.html?tag=nl.e019

Windows Vista RC1 Now Downloadable By Anyone.

First, it went to a select group of technical beta testers. Then to those who had tested Beta 2. As of September 14, however, Windows Vista Release Candidate (RC) 1 is now available to anyone interested in testing the product. <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/preview.msp>

Free Music Downloads. *SpiralFrog*, a new music download service, said it will make Vivendi’s Universal Music Group’s catalog available for free legal downloading in the United States and Canada. SpiralFrog’s business model is based on sharing income from advertising with content partners like Universal. <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,2009739,00.asp>

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

The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman, Website Editor, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc. <http://swipcug.apcug.org/>

Backup, Schmackup.

I can't pick up a computer magazine without being harangued about the urgent need to back up my hard drive(s) before the world comes to an end. I have never been able to bring myself to follow that well-meant advice, although not without lingering feelings of guilt. On a few occasions I have used the latest hot backup program to store data folders to a compressed file on a backup drive. Then I wondered if I would be able to retrieve my data from that file if the need arose, and conveniently forgot to update the backup.

Last year I bought a 200 GB external hard drive to store backups. It came with a backup program that I used to back up those data folders I wanted to protect. After I was done I had about 199 GB of external disk space left. It dawned on me that it might be easier to just copy the data folders I wanted to back up directly to the external drive. No big deal and no worry about the integrity of my backup data .

After all, what is there that's irreplaceable? I edit our User Group's Web site, about 12 MB by now. After every update I publish the site to my external hard drive and two locations on the Web. Once or twice a year I also copy the whole thing to a CD-ROM that I give to our president for safekeeping. That's safe enough by any measure.

I keep extra copies of photos and genealogy data on several hard drives, and annually copy them to a backup CD. Current financial and tax data I keep on removable storage with backup to CDs, as well as hard copies in a file cabinet. Personal e-mail correspondence gets backed up occasionally, although I can't remember ever going back to letters from years ago. I might have to borrow a computer from the Smithsonian to recover my earliest correspondence, written in the late eighties with a Textra word processor on floppy disks that actually flopped.

During the past two Christmas seasons, while nostalgia was running high, my son Mike and I dug out some old 8-mm family movies, taken in the 60's, 70's, and 80's, for conversion to digital format. The old projector suffered from a broken drive belt, but thanks to Google I managed to find a replacement on the Web. I still had some splice tapes left to repair the

brittling film as needed. We used a Vivitar UVC-1 All-In-One Universal Video Converter to funnel the images into Mike's digital camcorder. The converter is a rectangular box with an opaque glass projection window in the long side, and a condenser lens in the short side. The camcorder, on a tripod, is focused through the condenser lens and a diagonal internal mirror on the projected image. We needed to adjust the frame rate of the camcorder to obtain a steady picture. Mike then recorded the camcorder copy with a SONY RDR-GX300 DVD Recorder on DVDs for sharing with relatives and archiving. Now THAT is worthwhile backing up! The quality of the old movies is primitive by today's standards, but the contents are invaluable and irreplaceable.

If you run a business I can see the importance of regularly and completely backing up everything, making sure to keep extra copies off-site. But as a private individual, just use common sense and stop worrying. What is there to lose, really? And while you are at it, maybe you should look around the garage, the attic, or the basement for clutter that can safely be thrown away!

TV Tuner Troubles

We live at the edge of the city of Evansville, with a small, wooded area behind our back fence. That provides great privacy and a wide variety of interesting wildlife, from birds, squirrels, and raccoons to occasional deer. Unfortunately, over the past 50 years or so the trees have encroached on the overhead power line, and we suffer frequent power outages whenever a storm passes through the area. Naturally, that happens just when you are glued to the TV screen to follow the progress of the storm on the radar.

I went looking on the Internet for an external TV tuner that I could plug into the USB port of my laptop when the power went off. As it turns out, there are several models available. I first chose a Hauppauge WinTV USB2 unit, about \$90 online. Unfortunately, it didn't work as advertised. The picture was all right, but I could not get the sound to come on, and the software did not manage to activate the remote control. FAQs on the Hauppauge Web site did not help and the latest drivers were identical to those on the CD. I tried the unit on my desktop computer with the same lack

of success. The vendor, J&B Music, readily gave me a Return Authorization number, although I'm still out the shipping charges both ways.

Undaunted, I bought an ATI TV Wonder USB 2.0 tuner at Circuit City, \$80 with a \$20 mail-in rebate. Same features but without remote control. Same problems too, except that this time I received no picture either. Checked their Web site's FAQs, downloaded and installed newly updated drivers. Now I didn't even get the black screen. Called support who referred me to a help file on the FAQ site. No luck. Returned the unit to Circuit City and got all my money back. Oh well... If you know of a reliable external USB2 TV Tuner, please let me know. It better be good this time.

Freespire

For those of you with an interest in the *Linspire Linux* distribution, there is now a free distro called *Freespire*. It is essentially the same as *Linspire 5.1*, without some help files, but with developers utilities. To quote *freespire.org*: "The regular, complete version includes legally-licensed, 3rd party codecs, drivers and software, to offer better hardware, file type, and multimedia support. *Freespire* includes turn-key, out-of-the-box support for MP3, Windows Media, QuickTime, Java, Flash, Real, ATI drivers, nVidia drivers, proprietary WiFi drivers, modem drivers, fonts, and so on."

It has all the functionality of *Linspire 5.1*, in-

cluding some new features forthcoming in *Linspire 6.0*. The expectation is that *Freespire* will function as a core around which volunteer programmers will add new functionality under the Open Source system, similar to other Open Source projects such as *Firefox*, *Thunderbird*, and *OpenOffice.org*. Meanwhile, if you were thinking of giving *Linspire* a try but were unwilling to pay \$40 for the program, you can now use *Freespire* for free and have essentially the same functionality.

Dell DeCrapifier

Dell stock has gone down more than 50 percent during the last several years. Many reasons are given, including the presumed ineptness of its CEO during the last two years, Kevin Rollins. Specifically mentioned are poor customer service and the loss of key personnel (*The Wall Street Journal* 8/22/06). There is no mention of the disgust of many new Dell customers when they find their new computer loaded with unwanted software and spyware that slows everything down and is almost impossible to remove. Jason York to the rescue! He has written a script called the *Dell DeCrapifier* that automatically detects and removes unwanted software from new Dell computers. If you have a new Dell you can find it at www.yorkspace.com. (PCWorld September 2006).

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

Smart Computing Tip—

You May Already Have Web Server Space

If you have an Internet connection, you probably have a free personal Web site waiting for you. Most ISPs (Internet service providers) include a complimentary single or multipage Web site with your subscription. What's more, most ISPs also provide free tools to help you create a basic Web page, without any knowledge of HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). Why would you want a personal Web site? People use them to share photos, links, and hobbies. Some ISPs let you advertise your business, and you can also use them for school projects, sports clubs, and nonprofit groups. Because the service is free, and the Web au-

thoring tools are often merely serviceable (not sophisticated), don't expect a flashy site or an overly professional look. And most ISPs don't let you define or assign a special domain name to your site. Instead, you're stuck with a clunky name supplied by the ISP. But it's free and relatively easy to create a decent site that you can use to share information with friends, family, and customers.

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U3 Drives

By Diane George, Webmaster, PC Community, California

This month's column is half tips and half product review. I recently got interested in U3 drives, partly as a result of some software I saw at the Southwest PC User Group conference in San Diego in July.

What is U3 and why do I want to know? It's not the successor to the rock band U2. U3 is an open-standard platform that allows you to take applications and store and launch them on a flash drive. Several flash drives are offered with pre-loaded U3 applications on them. Verbatim, Memorex, Ativa and SanDisk all offer U3 smart drives. Go to <http://www.u3.com/smartdrives/default.aspx> for a list of U3 drives and more information.

The drives come with software preloaded, such as an application that will allow you to take *Office* documents created on your desktop computer, and work on them on another computer (also with *Office* installed), without a trace of the files being left on the second computer. This means that you can take your work with you without a laptop, use a computer elsewhere, like in an Internet cafe, without having to copy the files to the new computer, including e-mail.

Other applications that come preloaded include antivirus software for the flash drive, password storage and management, *SKYPE*, *Zinio Reader* for digital magazines, *ACDSee* for photo management, and *Migo* (more about that later). In addition, there are other free and commercial applications available at the U3 Central site that are accessed from the drive, including games.

How does this work? The flash drive has a small partition that pretends to be a CD-ROM so that your computer will autorun a launch pad that makes the rest of the drive storage accessible—did I mention that it is password protected and can be encrypted? When you start up, a launchpad for the drive is opened. You can password-protect the flash drive itself so the first thing you see is a login screen. The launch pad is part of the U3 system and is the same on different brands of drive. The launchpad gives you access to the applications on the drive and is required to remove the drive—you must use the launchpad to eject the disk or you risk damaging the drive.

When you plug in the drive, your system recognizes it as a USB drive and you can see it in My Computer, as a very small 3.78 MB CD-ROM drive, that will autoplay. It also appears as a 2 GB removable drive that you can copy files on like any other flash drive. In general the device works, but I have a couple of quibbles. I have had difficulty with installation on one of my two computers and I have not yet been able to determine what the problem is. The first time I put the drive in, it caused my computer to slow to a crawl and it never did recognize the drive. Only when I had the drive inserted at startup did it allow me to use it. I have tried it on two other systems and it worked fine.

One of the software applications allows you to save selected files, *Outlook* e-mail, contacts, tasks and calendar information, and creates a desktop that represents the desktop on a particular computer. You can create two of these desktops. When you take the device to another computer and launch the software, you have the choice of using either desktop. A tab is added to the top of your screen and when you click on it, you see thumbnails. (See Figure 3.) Each picture is the desktop of the other computers. When you click on one of the names or images, your desktop changes—the My Documents folder contains only the items that you brought from the other computer and your e-mail client will show the contents of your inbox and the other shortcuts are different.

I haven't figured out yet why some icons are from the desktop of the computer I am on and some are from the computer on the flash drive. I need more time with the applications and will write a follow-up. In the meantime, these drives present some interesting possibilities and should be fun to explore.

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

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Surprising New Search Engine—Ixquick

By Sandy Berger, Compu-KISS

Google has been my search engine of choice for several years, but recent developments have made me change my alliance to a new search engine.

Perhaps you read about it. A few weeks ago, 20 million of AOL's customers Web search queries appeared on the Web. These included the user's ID, the query they typed into the search engine, and other information.

Newsmakers picked up on the story because of some of the dramatic Web searches performed. For instance, AOL user 2708 searched for "I hate my ex boyfriend," "how to humiliate someone," "free angry stuff to send to an ex lover," and "makehimpay.net". User 17556639 looked for even more vicious information with searches on "how to kill a wife", "photo of dead people," "decapitated photos," "wife killer," and "steak and cheese." (Guess they got hungry.)

After the sensationalism died down, many people realized that the true story was that search engines are keeping a collection of information that can lead to a personal dossier of an individual. AOL's information included user numbers that were identified by cookies, but users can also be identified by Internet addresses, bringing them closer to our true identities.

All of the big search engines keep such information. Recently *Google*, *AOL*, *Microsoft*, and *Yahoo* were subpoenaed to turn over information of this type to the Justice Department. Of the big four, only *Google* refused to release the information.

In response to this story, one search engine, *Ixquick*, immediately issued a press release stating that they are taking steps to provide privacy protection for their users. *Ixquick* stated that after a search, they will immediately and permanently delete all personal search details.

I was impressed by a company who thought that protecting our privacy was more important than gleaning information from our searches and selling data for marketing purposes. I had never heard of *Ixquick*, but I immediately surfed over to www.ixquick.com. I was impressed with what I found.

Ixquick, which is owned by a Dutch company, is a metasearch engine. That means that it searches several databases to get its search results. *Ixquick* uses *Yahoo/Alta Vista*, *Gigablast*, *Ask Jeeves/Teoma*, *Open Directory* and 7 other search engines. It is available in 18 languages.

Ixquick marks the search results with stars, one star for every search engine that chooses that particular Web site as one of the ten best results for your search. This effectively gives you the relevancy of the search results. Also, the *Ixquick* interface is clean and easy to use. It allows you to quickly choose if you want your search to find only one of the words of your search phrase, all of the words, or the exact phrase. There is also a place where you can easily enter words that you may want to eliminate from your search. You don't need to fool around with pluses, minuses, or quotation marks as you do with some popular search engines.

I was extremely impressed with the *Ixquick's* International Phone Directory.

Just type in a name and city or state and you can actually find people. *Ixquick's* Reverse Directory can tell you who's calling when you enter a telephone number. With Bigfoot and most other people directories now charging for people searches, this is an extremely useful free search tool.

Ixquick also has a comparison shopping service and an image search feature. Like *Google* and others, *Ixquick* offers a search toolbar.

After using *Ixquick* for a few weeks, I can honestly say that I have been very happy with the results. Using it in conjunction with *Google* gives you a wonderfully wide selection of search results. If, however, you want to really keep your searches private, then you will want to use *Ixquick* exclusively. After the recent AOL debacle, I feel that *Ixquick* is providing a great service not only as a search engine, but also as a leader on privacy issues.

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

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