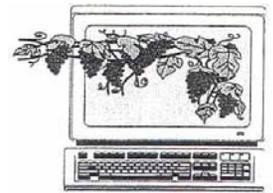


COMPUTER NEWS



Volume 23, No. 12

December, 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 536 computers and 136 printers. Additional equipment has been given to charitable nonprofit organizations and disadvantaged individuals.

NVPCUG Annual Holidays Potluck Party

Wednesday, December 20, 2006, 6:30-9:00 p.m.
Peterson Family Christmas Tree Farm
1120 Darms Lane, Napa, California.

This month the Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will not hold their usual regular meeting, but will gather at **Dick and Sandy Peterson's** Christmas Tree Farm for their annual holidays party—an evening of food, music, festivity, and fellowship. This event is for NVPCUG members, their spouses or partners and guests.

Four special activities will highlight the event: a potluck dinner, the introduction of new officers, an award for the outstanding member of the year, and a silent auction.

The evening will begin at 6:30 p.m. with setting up of tables for food and the silent auction. For the potluck, please bring your favorite hot dish, pasta, salad, appetizer, or dessert to share. Our group will provide soft drinks, coffee, and other nonalcoholic beverages, as well as plates, cups, eating utensils, and ice for cold drinks. If you want alcoholic beverages, you may bring your own. For suggestions on what food to bring, contact **Dianne Prior** by calling (707) 252-1506 or e-mailing membership@nvpcug.org.

For the silent auction, bring whatever you think will be of interest to NVPCUG members and guests. You can either enter items for sale in the auction, or donate them to the group for the auction. Many new and used items will be offered, including computer software, disk drives, printers, speaker sets, modems, and keyboard trays. Bid sheets will be provided. This auction will be an opportunity for you to get rid of your white elephants and buy items you need at bargain prices. For more information about the silent auction, contact Orion Hill by calling (707) 252-0637 or e-mailing cts@nvpcug.org.

The award presentation to the outstanding member of the year, selected by the board of directors, will occur around 7:30 p.m. Immediately after the presentation the new officers will be introduced. Afterward there will be time for more socializing and bidding on the silent auction items. The auction will run until about 8:30 p.m., when each auction item will be sold to the bidder having written the highest amount on the item's bid sheet.

Plan to attend this party; it's your best chance to see old acquaintances and to meet new ones.

President's Message --HAPPY HANUKKAH! MERRY CHRISTMAS! SEASONS GREETINGS!

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

END OF TERM: This is my last message to you as president of Napa Valley P. C. Users Group. It's been a good year. Thank you to the 2006 Directors and all who helped and participated in our group's activities. I want to mention a few people who stand out for their special efforts and contributions this past year. **Susy Ball** has done a tremendous job as Programs Director, lining up speakers well into 2007 and procuring door and raffle prizes; she also facilitated the Photography SIG. **Orion Hill** and the CTS committee have done an outstanding job picking up donations, refurbishing equipment and donating more than 145 computers and 27 printers. **John Moore** was always ready to help out, both with CTS and as facilities coordinator; he updated our inventory list, set up our meeting room and attended outside meetings. **Jim Stirling's** work on the newsletter has made it a valuable resource. **Jerry Brown's** joyful demeanor helped both as Random Access facilitator and as Investors' SIG leader. I couldn't have done anything this year without the help of **Julie Jerome** (Secretary) and **Ron Dack** (Vice President and Web Master); both were always there to lend a hand and help with advice. Ron took over as Publicity Coordinator when **John Simcoe** had his accident and has been invaluable in our connections with the Internet. **Roy Wagner**, as our Treasurer, has an important job – thank you, Roy, for keeping up with the expenses and revenues. Thanks also go to **Bill Wheadon** (Recycling), **Mike Moore** (Computer Tutor), **Bob Simmerman** (Badges & Greeter), **Dean Unruh** (Librarian), **Jim Hearn** (Newsletter Circulator) and **Marcia Waddell** (Product Review). There are a lot of things we would like to have done, but some things take more time than others; maybe next year there will be enough hands to do some of the extras. The new Board of Directors, Officers and Member-of-the-Year will be announced at our Holidays Party on December 20.

DOOR PRIZE: In January the winner of the door prize drawing will be able to choose between a copy of CASPER or ZONE ALARM Internet Security Suite (*Vista ready*). **Only those whose dues are paid up by the January meeting will be eligible for the drawing. Please check your mailing label for your expiration date.** Checks may be sent to NVPCUG Membership, P.O. Box 2866, Napa, CA 94558.

RADIO SHOW: Susy Ball and I were interviewed on "Computer Outlook," an Internet streaming radio talk show (not available on traditional radios) hosted by John Iasiuolo. He praised our Web site and newsletter extensively, and he generously gave us a copy of a digital photography book instead of adding it to his normal Christmas raffle. To listen to the show go to <http://www.computeroutlook.com/>, click on "audio archives," click on "play" for December 4, 2006.



Peace and All Good,
Dianne Prior

NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
December 20	6:30-9:00 p.m.
January 3	7:00-9:00 p.m.
January 8	5:30-7:30 p.m.
January 10	7:00-8:30 p.m.
January 11	6:30-8:30 p.m.

Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer, contact Orion Hill, (707) 252-0637.
NVPCUG Annual Holidays Party, Peterson's Christmas Tree Farm, 1120 Darms Lane, 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

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	337-3998	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

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Practice Good “Netiquette” – Be a Good “Netizen”

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; radio & talk show host Iwilsker(at)apcug.net

There are many unwritten etiquette rules that apply to internet usage. These etiquette rules are commonly referred to as “netiquette”. Likewise, there are rules of being a good online citizen, often given the moniker “netizen”. If more people practiced good netiquette, and were better netizens, we would likely have more online satisfaction, and improve our throughput while on the net.

E-mails are a common source of irritation. While there is little that we as individuals can do to stop the torrent of spam e-mails which typically come from unknown sources, we can ask our known e-mail correspondents to practice good netiquette when sending us e-mails.

Despite repeated protestations from me, I still receive several hoaxes and urban legends daily, all sent by some well-intentioned friends who desire to warn me about some potential pseudo-threat, or to solicit my assistance in forwarding e-mails for some sham charitable purpose or imaginary sick kid. According to the urban-legend-busting Web site, Snopes (www.snopes.com), no one is really putting leaflets on rear windows of cars at the mall parking lot, carjacking the car when the driver stops to remove the paper. The Make-A-Wish Foundation is not paying seven cents for each e-mail forwarded about some terminally ill child. For the thousandth time, Marshall Fields is not charging \$250 for its chocolate chip cookie recipe. A father did not really foil the attempted abduction of his son at a local movie rental store, despite the allegations in the widely circulated e-mail. Hillary Clinton was not named after famed mountain climber Sir Edmund Hillary. The artificial sweetener aspartame was not originally developed as an ant poison. Entering your PIN number in reverse order at the ATM machine will not really summon the police. These and countless other e-mails, all typically containing wording that it is imperative to forward to everyone in your address book, are commonly circulated hoaxes and urban legends.

Good netiquette demands that the potential forwarder of these reports should check them out first by doing a search on any of the major urban legend Web sites, such as Snopes. Avoid the embarrassment of being connected with hoaxes by checking

these things out before sending. By not forwarding hoaxes and urban legends you may also be contributing to public safety, as there are a handful of cases where the urban legend actually incited the act to occur. What might not be such good netiquette, is a practice I have been known to participate in, which is clicking the “reply to all” icon, and sending the sender and his victims the truth about the hoaxes, in a hope to put an end to one tentacle of this spreading mass of lies. Someone has to step in to halt this waste of bandwidth; conserving bandwidth by minimizing the hoaxes and urban legends being forwarded en masse is good netizenship.

Since the topic of the moment includes forwarding e-mails, whether hoaxes and urban legends, or the often more common jokes or prayer requests, good netiquette demands proper behavior in e-mail forwarding. It is a waste of bandwidth and space to receive an e-mail that contains multiple headers. This occurs when multiple senders forward the same e-mail without editing out the headers. This results in an e-mail that may be a spammer’s delight if received by a miscreant, in that it may contain hundreds of valid e-mail addresses. It is also an irritant to have to scroll down pages of useless headers just to get to the message. If forwarding an e-mail, strip off the useless headers by painting them (hold down left mouse button and drag over the useless headers, then “delete” or “cut”). Now if forwarded, just the body of the message will be sent. This is good netiquette. Another common faux pas is the fact that many e-mail programs add the “>” (greater-than) symbol to the first character of each line in a forwarded e-mail. If this e-mail is forwarded, and forwarded again several times, each line will begin with something like “>>>>>” which makes reading the now poorly formatted e-mail difficult. Fortunately, there is a free utility available, *e-mailStripper*, which can be downloaded from www.papercut.biz/e-mailStripper.htm. This small utility is very easy to use. Simply copy the body of the e-mail by painting it (hold down left mouse button and drag over the text), then “copy” it (right click on the painted area and click “copy”, or press CTRL-C); then open *e-mailStripper*, and paste (CTRL-V) the message body in the window. Click on the “Strip it!” button, and all

(continued on page 13)

Think About Those Camera Gadgets at Gift Time

By Susy Ball, Programs Director, NVPCUG

Once upon a time, it was easy to give the photographer on your holiday list a roll of film, but with today's digital cameras film is not an option. If you think of giving a **memory stick**, you must know what kind of stick a particular camera takes. You could give a **USB multi-card reader** and not worry about any one kind. One I got at Fry's for about \$20 reads 53 types of cards. Why have a reader for so many different cards? Well, if you have company and everyone is taking photos, this reader will handle them all right on the spot. The only thing that you might have to do is some photo editing of the originals.

Speaking of photo editing, why not give a **photo editing program** for doing just that? There are programs from simple and inexpensive to very elaborate and costly, there are even free ones to download. Someone on a limited budget might even take the time to download and burn to a CD a program for a friend. Sometimes a free program has an upgrade and so you could even give the free version and a gift certificate to cover the price of the upgrade. An example would be Corel's new *Snapfire*, with an upgrade to *Snapfire plus* for only about \$29.95. Or you could get a mid-ranged product such as *Adobe Photoshop Elements*. For the more advanced photo editor, *Paintshop Pro* and *Photoshop CS2* are available at a little bigger price tag. Or think about purchasing *Corel's Graphic Suite* that includes both a drawing program and photo editing program.

So what are some of your other options? First you have to decide how much to spend. For those with a smaller budget there are things like **mini-tripods**, some even with flexible legs. For more money, one could invest in a **full-size tripod** or even a **monopod**. (but remember when traveling by air, it is not the best idea to carry tripod and monopods in the carry-on luggage.) A **headband flashlight** for photographers who carry a large camera bag and have trouble seeing into it might be a nice thought. One might get rechargeable **batteries**, perhaps with a charger as well. Maybe someone has a camera bag with a narrow strap—why not get them one of those **wide rubber shoulder**

protectors to add to their existing set up? There is a company (Delkin) that makes a universal removable, **pop-up shade for the viewer** for about \$20. I saw several different sizes of the product available both at CompUSA and Radio Shack. What about a case for media storage, a **new camera bag**, or even a **subscription to a photo magazine**? You could even give a new **digital camera** or a **video camera**. And because you can edit video film and even print out one frame at a time, and many digital cameras take small video's, one could give a **video editing program**. Another item is a small **lens cleaner**. I have seen the one that is a combination brush and lens cleaner. Why not give a frame for a picture or a gift certificate to a store to have those holiday memories printed on someone else's paper, or give a new photo cartridge so the budding photo-enthusiast can print their own pictures?

And here is something for both the photo enthusiast and the TV buff. If you that want to invest a little more, you could get a **mobile projector** to show pictures, and guess what, that mobile projector can often be mounted and hooked to the stereo and TV. (I have mine mounted and it acts as our TV, running DVDs as well as the Television and TiVo.) The picture is great, it is 5' x7' and shines directly on the wall, (therefore the 14 ft. room is not dominated by a large screen TV box or even a large screen). You should see it on high definition, and with the right connection wires it could also hook up to the video on a desktop computer or laptop.



Susy Ball is leader of the Digital Photography SIG at the Napa Valley Computer Users Group in Napa, California.

Great Games for the Holidays Are Here: Changes in Industry and Technology Overcome

By Timothy Everingham, member of TUGNET, California

We are now in the time when most of the computer and console games get released, right before the holiday season. This year it even gets more complicated because of *Windows Vista* coming out in January, and we are in the early stages of a transition to the next generation of game consoles. What makes it even worse is the collapse of the computer game industry's major trade show, E3. Game developers have had to revamp their marketing strategies for the future, yet at the same time prepare for this holiday season. This should add to consumer confusion on what to buy and when, and hopefully this article will reduce that confusion.

“Increases questions”

Microsoft's new operating system, *Windows Vista*, increases questions for those uses of 3D-oriented applications, especially games. A great part of this is *DirectX 10*, which is a major rewrite of *DirectX* and has much higher capability than current and past versions. *DirectX 10* will be available only for *Windows Vista* and can be used only if you have a video card that supports it. (Those cards that do not have *DirectX 10* support will be running *DirectX 9.0L* under *Windows Vista*). *DirectX 10* cards based on Nvidia chips will start to come out in November and those based on ATI chips will start to come out in February. There will be few games with additional enhancements if you are running *Vista* with a *DirectX 10* card when *Vista* launches, such as *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* and *Crysis*. It will probably be at least until mid-2007 when significant numbers of *DirectX 10*-enhanced or *DirectX 10*-only titles will arrive. So for giving gifts to 3D gamers who are going to be first adopters of *Windows Vista* you might want to consider giving gift certificates.

Microsoft's next generation console, the Xbox 360, has been out for about a year. It has been well accepted by the marketplace and has a good number of quality game titles. Sony's Playstation 3 is more powerful and will be able to play high definition Blue-Ray disk movies, but it has been delayed by technical problems until November 17, and even then will have limited supply in the US. With the decision to allow Blue Ray Disk movies to the higher level 1080p High Definition TV instead of the former 720p only should help sales. It will also have some very good games available at launch. There will be 2 versions, the standard costing \$499 and the deluxe costing \$599. Nintendo's Wii next generation console will launch on November 19. It is not as powerful as its two rivals, especially in the graphics area (Maximum Video Resolution: Wii-480p, Xbox 360-720P, PS3-1080p). However, it has a

unique gyroscopic controller, shaped like a TV remote control, that could make some very innovative gameplay (actions are evoked by your physical movement of the entire controller). The Wii's retail price will be \$249. The safe bet for buying a console now is the Xbox 360, but I would advise waiting on your decisions until the initial opinions on the PS3 and Wii consoles come out. (These will probably be found online on the video game review Web sites before the end of November). Remember, when buying a console it is like buying a computer. First you determine what games/applications you want to run, and then you see which console has the games/applications you want to run now or in the future.

“For the holiday season”

Here are some of my game picks for the holiday season: If you are looking a simulation, *Microsoft Flight Simulator X (Windows XP or Vista)* is a great visual experience. It is greatly improved from the last version, 2004, with great scenery and other graphics plus good missions. Be aware that to get good frame rates on this you will need a mid to high performance PC by current standards. This is the first game that can take advantage of *Windows Vista*-only features, including *DirectX 10* capabilities if you have a *Direct X 10* graphics card. Comes in both standard and deluxe versions.

“Spyware”

If you are looking for a first-person shooter, *Call of Duty 3* (Activision; PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, Wii) is third installment of the extremely successful World War 2 team-based first-person shooter series. This time it centers on the campaign from Normandy to Paris. Additionally the number of concurrent online/network players has been raised to 24. *Battlefield 2142* (Electronic Arts, PC) is *Battlefield 2* set in the future in the middle of a new ice age. Since *Battlefield 2* is such a great multiplayer combat title, this is a good thing. Like the previous members of the *Battlefield* series, it is usually played team vs. team online or at a LAN Party. Be aware that this game has in-game advertisements, and spyware is installed when you install the game that analyzes data on your PC to determine which ads to display in the game. So if you don't like such things on your computer you may want to pass on this game.

If you have dreamed of firefights using automatic weapons in the glamorous Las Vegas Casinos, this is for you. *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas* (Ubisoft; PC, PS3, PSP, Xbox 360) is another in the successful *Rainbow Six* series about the adventures of a US antiterrorist commando team. This time a large group of terrorists are attacking the

Las Vegas Casinos and plan to burn them to the ground, and your object is to stop them. *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent* (Ubisoft; PC, Xbox 360, Xbox, PS2, Gamecube) is another in the great Splinter Cell series where you work as a spy/mercenary for the National Security Agency. However, this time you act as a double agent within a terrorist cell, so things get more complicated. This also has a multiplayer mode. This series is great for those who like to sneak up on the bad guys, take them out and steal or blow up their stuff.

“Adventure”

As for adventure games, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (2K games; PC, Xbox 360) has extremely beautiful and high-level graphics. It is considered an outstanding title and one with which all other adventure games are compared; but you need a high performance PC to play it. *Gothic 3* (JoWood, PC) is a single-player adventure game in a land where humans have been enslaved by orcs. There is an evil mode where you side with the orcs, but for most of the game play you are on the human's side. The game is much more open-ended than most games, so if you get lost in non-structured game play this title is not for you. For those who enjoyed the fantasy role playing game *Neverwinter Nights*, there is *Never Winter Nights 2* (Atari, PC). *Half-Life 2* (Electronic Arts) has moved to an episodic model, and so now has *Sam & Max* (Lucas Arts). *Sam & Max Episode 1: Culture Shock* is the first of seven episodes to come out on a monthly basis with an estimated 4-6 hours of game play each. Each episode will cost \$8.85, but you can subscribe to the entire set for \$34.95. This is an off-the-wall humor-ridden adventure game with a dog and rabbit team of freelance police as its heroes.

“Sport games”

As for sport games, try *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07* (Electronic Arts; PC, PS3, PS, Xbox, Xbox 360, Wii). It is extremely similar to the previous two versions, but is still a great game. For those who love golf games this is probably your best bet. *Need For Speed Carbon* (Electronic Arts; PC, PS3, PS2, PSP, Xbox 360, Xbox, Wii, Gamecube, Gameboy, DS), is the next in the successful Need For Speed street racing series. Its graphics are excellent and smooth, and there is a lot of game play and various options/paths to explore in the way you play the game.

In the good, but not expensive category look at *GTR 2* (10tacle Studios, PC). This is a GT car racing game that has gotten good reviews and has a lot to offer, and you can find it for less than \$20. It was released on Sept 26; it is a new game too. For sports games, Electronic Arts has most of the best ones.

If you are into building rather than destroying I would recommend *Sid Meir's Railroads* (2K Games, PC). In this empire-building game you have 15 historical and fictional scenarios to choose from. Up to four players can even compete online or over a network. The detailed graphic animation of the environment/world is impressive, but because of this it is recommended that you have a significantly better computer than listed in the minimum requirements.

“Total War”

If you are looking for a real-time strategy game, look at *Company of Heroes* (THQ, PC). The detail in both the game play and the graphics makes this World War II game set in France in 1944 superior to other similar titles. You play either as the allies or the axis and control small units on a battlefield to accomplish objectives. You can play against another player or players online. Because of the graphics, low-end PCs are insufficient for this game. Also you need to look at *Medieval 2: Total War* (Sega, PC), the fourth in the Total War historical combat real-time strategy series. The graphics and animation are so good that the game's engine is used to create animated visualizations of large-scale actual battles for documentaries shown on the History and Discovery channels. The graphics have been updated, making them even more real than in any of the previous versions and in what you even saw in the TV documentary visualizations. The game takes place in Medieval Europe, and you command one of the historical factions/countries that vie for power. Look at *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos* (Namco Bandai, PC) too; a real-time strategy game with fantasy creatures and units, part of the excellent Warhammer series.

“Something usual”

If you want something usual you may want to look at *Bully* (Rockstar Games, PS2). This is a boarding school simulator where you work your way up in this kid-dom. Last year's best unusual was *Destroy All Humans*, a spoof on the 1950's alien invasion movies. Now *Destroy All Humans 2: Make War Not Love* (THQ; PS2, Xbox) has arrived and is set in the 1960's. It is not quite as good as the original; but with the original being so good, especially in the rolling on the floor laughing department, it still makes for a very good game. There are new consoles and a lot of new games for this holiday season, too much to cover here. For additional information go to www.gamespot.com (part of CNET), www.ign.com, www.gamepro.com, www.gamespy.com, or www.gamezone.com.

May your games be happy and bright.

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

E-Mail: Be Less Annoying

by Steve Bass, PC World; Author, *PC Annoyances*.

Everyone -- including Bill Gates -- can use e-mail more efficiently. And learn how not to do really dumb things.

I've come to the conclusion that everyone needs to take a test before being able to use e-mail. No, I'm serious. You have to take an e-mail test. If you pass, you get an e-mail license. Proudly hang it on the wall. Screw up--send lots of messages with blank subject lines, say--and your license is pulled. You go on probation and attend mandatory remedial e-mail training.

Why am I being so hardnosed? I have a laundry list of ways people drive me wild with e-mail. I wrote about a few in "Get Relief From Annoying E-Mail," my July, 2006 "Hassle-Free PC" column: http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,125767,tk,nl_sbxhow,00.asp

But I ran out of room in the print column, so here are some more tips, including how to stop being obnoxious with your e-mail.

- **To Whom Am I Speaking?** Sometimes I have absolutely no idea who's sending me an e-mail, and this is a problem. I mean, I'll say something to another guy that I wouldn't dream of uttering to a lady my mother's age. [Sorry, Mom.]

- * **Don't share.** If you and your live-in (spouse, significant other, whatever) use the same e-mail address, stop it. Extra e-mail addresses are free and consolidating e-mails into one mailbox is confusing the dickens out of me because I never know who I'm writing to.

- **Use a signature line.** Make life easier for me: Add a signature line with your name and e-mail address using the hot-linked `mailto:steve_bass@pcworld.com` format. It's easier to reply just to you if your e-mail was sent to many people; it's also great for when I forward your e-mail--the new recipient doesn't have to cut and paste your address.

- **Use your real name.** Don't get me wrong, I love your beerbelly49832@yourisp.com. The problem is, I haven't a clue who you are. Be a champ and add your real name in the signature line. And a favor? Don't use initials.

- **Do I Need to Read This Right Now?** Look, I'm a very busy man (or so I tell my wife and editor), and I get tons of e-mail every day. I need to do e-mail triage--you know, scanning the inbox for the hottest messages and reading them first. But honestly, I can't do this with most e-mail I get. So here's what I recommend:

- **The subject is...** Tell me, clearly and briefly, what your message is about in the subject line. I delete all messages with vague subjects--Hi, Hello, or worse, an empty subject line (oh, do I hate that!). And make sure you don't trigger my spam filter by using all capital letters, exclamation points, and words you typically see in junk e-mail, like "free," "spam," "mortgage," or "Viagra."

- **Exec summary.** Give me a one- or a two-sentence overview at the start of your e-mail. "I have a complicated issue," you might start out, "involving a Dell, memory cards, and SP2. If you have time to help, I've provided details below.'

- **Save time.** Use [NM] or [EOM] (they stand for "no message" or "end of message") in the subject line as a shorthand way of responding with a simple "thank you" or an acknowledgment. This helps reduce the number of e-mails I need to open; many of the people at *PC World* use the trick and it's increased everyone's productivity.

- **And Your Point Is?** Once I actually open an e-mail, I need to get the point quickly so I can reply to the sender if necessary, then move on to the next one. But lots of the missives I get are, how to say it? a mess.

- **Use paragraphs.** Obvious, right? Nope. I get e-mails with one long paragraph the length of the Gettysburg Address. Break it up into three or four smaller ones. By the way, my limit is three or four paragraphs; after that I start dozing. [Editor's note: I noticed.] And send a test message to a buddy to make sure your e-mail program isn't removing paragraph returns.

- **By the numbers.** If you have more than one question or point, number them. It makes replying a whole lot easier if I can refer to the numbers.

- **Subject shorthand.** When you reply or forward an e-mail, it's helpful if you stick one or two descriptive words in front of the original subject so the recipient has an idea of what's in store. For instance, I use tags such as "Update," "Confirmation," or "Really Dumb."

Miscellaneous Gripes

Think I'm done kvetching? Nope, no such luck.

- **Attachment don'ts.** Don't attach anything executable--period. If on the off chance I've asked you to send a program, stick it into a zipped file.

- **Keep it private.** Don't reply to a mailing list with "great idea" or "I agree." Reply privately instead. Select

a small part of the original message for context's sake.

- **Stay plain, Jane.** Avoid fancy formatting, gaudy colors, and flowery backgrounds. Two reasons: first, what's cool on your monitor looks like hell on mine; and second, that extra coding increases the download time for folks with slower connections.

- **Dear [InsertName].** Private note to PR flacks: If you can't use mail merge properly, don't try.

Be Less Annoying on Mail Lists

I really struck a nerve with readers of my newsletter when I talked about annoying e-mails. My inbox was flooded with a bucket of e-mail (most of it not very annoying). So I figured I'd follow up with advice on good mail list etiquette. But before I do, here are some e-mail gaffes that drive readers crazy.

"Stop sending chain e-mails to me--no matter what the cause (little Timmy needs your old Christmas cards to live, canola oil is poison, tell someone you love them, whatever...). While I find them annoying in general, they are even worse when they are the only time you contact me. I'd rather be dropped from your little list. Think for a minute: Do I ever send you such drivel, or respond to it?" --Chuck

"Always use the subject line. I automatically delete any e-mail without a subject line." --Linda

"Check spellings. Don't mix subjects in one e-mail." --Arvind

"Phone home. For conversations that require significant two-way dialog and do not require documenting, use a phone or IM. Do not send an e-mail asking me to lunch in 30 minutes." --Jack

"Stop using those fancy script fonts! They are near impossible to read. And please, no more purple, orange, green font colors. It's an e-mail, not a work of art!" --Mark

Now, on to some mail list etiquette. If you're new to mail lists, or even if you're not, you can learn how to make your messages easier to read, more useful, and definitely less annoying to others.

When Replying to Messages

1. **Don't hit Reply All** for every message. Avoid responses the entire list won't find useful. For instance, don't reply to the entire list with "thanks," "good idea," or "I'll try it!" Instead, reply directly to the person who just helped you.

Unfortunately, on many lists it's easy to inadvertently reply to everyone instead of an individual. Take a sec and check the return address before hitting Send. The sender's e-mail address is usually near the top of the message.

Another tip: Insert OFFLIST at the start of your subject line when replying to an individual. That way the recipient will know you're not replying to the entire list.

2. **Remove the extra stuff.** When replying, it takes seconds to snip extraneous junk and leave only essential portions of the previous message. There's rarely a need to repeat the entire thread, and doing so often discourages people from reading your message.

No matter what you do, get rid of the stuff that's automatically inserted at the bottom of every message--the "how to unsubscribe" junk--that clutters up every message.

3. **Keep the subject line short.** If you're viewing messages in digest form, the subject is something lengthy, like, "[Computing] Digest 07-13-06, 16 messages." When you reply to a message, it's essential (mandatory, really) that you change the subject to the message topic. Then remove everything from the digest message except the topic and your response.

4. **Restrain yourself.** It's not necessary to weigh in on every topic, especially on very busy lists. Consider limiting yourself to one or two messages a day.

When Starting a New Thread

1. **Brevity is the soul of wit.** Just as with e-mail, consider tackling just one topic or issue per message, and keep your messages short. Long messages (more than, say, three or four paragraphs) are difficult to read; long paragraphs are equally difficult to plow through.

2. **Use an informative signature line.** Keep your signature line short, say, two or three lines. Usually your name is adequate, though some lists (such as one I'm on about camper vans) want a city and state. The point is to avoid sticking in anything nonessential.

3. **Stay on topic.** If it's a computing list, send messages about computing; ditto for a cooking list, or any other special-interest group. Most importantly, avoid political messages and jokes.

This column originally appeared in Bass's *PC World* newsletter, *Tips and Tweaks*. Copyright 2006 Steve Bass and *PC World*. Read Bass's blog at <http://snurl.com/BassBlog> and his previous newsletters and print columns at: <http://snipurl.com/tweaks>. Subscribe to his weekly newsletter at <http://snurl.com/homeoffice>.

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with *PC World*, a 23 year veteran of PIBMUG, and a founding member of APCUG. He's also the author of *PC Annoyances: How to Fix the Most Annoying Things about Your Personal Computer*, O'Reilly Press. It's available on Amazon at dirt cheap prices. <http://snurl.com/annoyances>.

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

Changing Hard Drives

By Richard Kennon, Newsletter Editor, Amador Computer Users Group, California

<http://www.acug.net>, [drtrdguy\(at\)volcano.net](mailto:drtrdguy(at)volcano.net)

The time came when the bearings in my hard drive began to sing a little after running all day. So, being the wise person I am, I decided to replace it as a preventative measure. It turns out a job like that requires planning. I am not a planning person. I don't do planning. I am more spontaneous. That is a euphemism for "lazy." My grandmother used to tell me, "Lazy people work the hardest." Oh, how true.

First, I thought I was covered because I had a backup by *Acronis True Image 8.0* – wrong! I had one main hard drive with one partition, "C:" and I had never dreamed of running with more than one partition. So, I bought a second hard drive to use for the backups. After the new main hard drive was installed by a professional, I brought it home and tried to restore the backup. It was then I learned you can't restore an *Acronis* backup to the active partition. When I tried, it wiped out everything. Back to the Pro for a new XP reload with two partitions on the new hard drive. It has gigabytes to spare. The two partitions were named "C:" and "F:" for whatever reason. The spare hard drive was renamed "D:" and the CD drive was renamed "E:". Go figure. I was able to restore my old C: drive contents to the new F: drive. So now I have everything on the new F: drive but my machine boots up on the new C: drive and I can't figure out how to utilize the new F: drive. Of course, real men don't ask directions, so I decided to slug it out on my own. I thought I saw a bright side to this as the old C: drive was cluttered with years' accumulation of garbage. I would start afresh!

The first thing to do is get back on the air, the Internet. So, I went to *Outlook Express*. First I had to call the ISP to find out how to reconnect. A nice lady walked me through the process, no sweat. Then I discovered I had no address book. Of course, it is on the F: drive. How to find it? After some searching on the web, I found out the address book is in files named, *.wab. Cinch! Just search the F: drive for *.wab files. Not there. Then I noticed the fine print that says it does not find hidden files. A click on "Advanced" led me to a box that allows finding hidden files. It turns out the hidden files are in a hidden folder so it was doubly challenging. It was relatively easy to copy

these files and paste them in the same hidden folder in the new C: drive. Whaddayu know? It worked. The message files are empty, but I can't think of a good reason to try to repopulate them.

Now, if I am on the air, it seems the next urgent step is to reestablish some protection. But, first, I downloaded SP-2 and a host of other Microsoft updates. I think I saw a note flash across the screen that said they sent 60 updates. Then came *Microsoft Windows Defender* (beta). However, apparently all it does is look for spyware. I am not clear on this so, since I subscribe to McAfee firewall and virus protection, I went to their site and downloaded all that. Now, I feel better.

I did do one bit of smart planning, Ta-Da! I had simply copied all my Documents and Settings files and subfolders to the backup drive. Copying all this back to the new C: drive was a cinch and it saved all my valuable writings and pictures. Now if I could just find that great picture of Aunt Edith from two Christmases ago. If you ever transfer to a new computer or hard drive, do lots of this copying. Disk space is cheap and copying it back is so easy.

Finding the original software disks that were loaded years ago was not so easy. They were tucked here and there in many different convenient places. That is, convenient until you want to find them. I was mostly lucky and had to purchase a newer version of only one program. You see, I am neither a planner nor an organizer. You wonder how I have survived these many years? I am very lucky.

One other aspect of "afresh" I decided to try was going to *Open Office* instead of *Microsoft Office*. This is another ungood idea. Doctors warn against experiencing dual traumas like retiring and immediately moving to a retirement community. Adding this stress to the disk change stress was probably not a good idea. Besides, *Outlook Express* won't use the *Open Office* dictionary. I did find the old *MS Office* disk, but I decided to try this as an experiment. So far so good, but there are a number of features I don't like because I am used to the other features. I will keep with it for a while.

In conclusion, you will be faced with changing computers and/or hard drives. As the weatherman and some politicians are fond of saying, "It is not if but when." I do not recommend my approach. I have spent many hours on it. Plan, plan, plan. Talk to some knowledgeable people and perhaps even search the Internet for help. Good luck.

PS. I sent a copy of this to Gene Barlow, who had sold me the *Acronis* program, and this was his reply:

"*Acronis True Image* has a cloning function that will copy your entire hard drive to the replacement hard drive in one easy step. When you are done, you

simply place the new drive in the place of your old c: drive and it becomes your new c: drive. This feature of *True Image* would have had your old hard drive replaced in just a few minutes and with one easy step. Next time you need to do something with hard drives, send me a note and I'll try to help you do it quickly and with the least work possible."

Maybe the next time I will ask before! But, that would have transferred all the garbage, as well.

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

Free Up Megabytes of Disk Space

by Vinny La Bash, member of the Sarasota PCUG, Florida [vlabash\(at\)comcast.net](mailto:vlabash(at)comcast.net)

Look in your *Windows* folder and count how many folders you have that start with "\$NtUninstall". They are all related to various patches, updates and service packs for XP. Those \$NtUninstall folders are created when you install a Microsoft Service Pack, a hot fix, or certain security updates. Some of these folders could date back almost to the day you first installed your computer.

Their names are in blue, and they are all marked as hidden and read only. If you don't see them in the *Windows* folder, open the Tools menu, and select Folder Options from the drop down menu. After the Folder Options dialog box appears, activate the View tab, then left-click the Show hidden files and folders radio button. Click OK to close the dialog box and the hidden folders should appear. If nothing happens, close down *Windows Explorer* and restart it. You don't need to restart your computer; simply open *Windows Explorer* again.

Why should you do this? If you're getting low on disk space and the usual remedies haven't freed up enough space, these folders could be the culprits that are chewing up valuable storage area. If you have had *Windows* installed for more than a year and you are conscientious about keeping your system up-to-date, these useless folders are probably tying up gigabytes of data. Enough of them can have the unfortunate side effect of noticeably slowing down virus and spyware scans. It also takes longer to defrag your disk drive. An accumulation of unnecessary or extraneous data on your system will eventually af-

fect system performance and in extreme cases cause drive errors.

The files within the \$NtUninstall folder provide instructions on how your computer uninstalls a *Windows* update. Each folder has a specific name ending in the name of a particular *Windows* modification. If you were to go to add/remove programs and select a *Windows* update to uninstall, the information on how to run this process would come from the corresponding \$Ntuninstall folder.

You can safely delete all these folders if you have no plans to uninstall any of the related patches. As updates and patches accumulate, these types of folders will continue to grow and take disk space.

One solution is to delete only those folders older than three months. Chances are, if you haven't uninstalled a *Windows* update after three months, you won't ever do it.

Alternatively, once you've made a backup or disk image of any "\$NTUninstall" files, you can delete the files from the hard drive immediately, because you can always restore them from backups. One thing Microsoft should have done is tuck these folders away in a subfolder someplace so you don't have to scroll through them every time you want to locate something in the *Windows* folder. I've seen machines with over a hundred of these folders. Then again, you could always mark them as hidden.

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.

Spintronics

No one, fifty years ago, could have foreseen or even imagined how the advent of ever more powerful computers would revolutionize science, technology, commerce, and communications. Vastly improved algorithms and architectural structures have been important, but the crucial factor has been the ability of manufacturers to cram ever smaller and more complex circuits on a semiconductor chip. That ability is now approaching a limit posed by atomic size and increasing influence of quantum effects. We may have to learn how to do more with what we already have if we want to further improve computers so that they'll be able to predict the weather or model the Big Bang, to mention just a few challenges.

From an electromechanical standpoint every digital computer, no matter how primitive or advanced, consists of on-off electrical switches connected in a circuit. In semiconductor-based systems the binary 0's and 1's are represented by electrons that carry a negative charge, and missing electrons, called "holes," with positive charge. That is simple and straightforward enough. But wait, there is more...

There can be no electricity without magnetism. They are like heads and tails, yin and yang, up and down. Electrons, the elemental carriers of electricity, also are elementary magnets. You can, very much simplified, think of them as spinning spheres of electricity, tiny electromagnets., in other words. Depending on the direction of spin, the magnetism points up or down. Technology making use of the magnetic properties of electrons is often referred to as "spintronics." So far, computers ignore the magnetic state of the electrons, but what if we learned to use it for additional information storage?

About 50 years ago scientists learned how to manipulate and record the magnetic properties of electrons and certain atomic nuclei to examine the composition of substances, using a technique called nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR). Eventually that technique was extended to examine the characteristics of human tissue. The name was changed to Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to avoid the term "nuclear" with its negative connotations, although it has nothing to do with damaging radiation or nuclear energy in this case.

More recently, in the late 90's, scientists at IBM learned how to use spintronics to make very small, highly sensitive read-heads for use with computer hard drives. The sensors consist of a microscopic sliver of semiconductor sandwiched between two thin magnetic layers. The top layer is a permanent, "hard" magnet, but the bottom layer is a soft magnet that changes magnetic orientation easily as it passes over the magnetic regions on the disk. If both magnets in the head are oriented in the same direction, electrons align magnetically in the same direction and move easily through the semiconductor. If the magnetic layers point in opposite directions, the electron spin is reversed as it moves through the semiconductor, affecting its mobility and therefore the amount of current. Clever, isn't it? Practically all newer hard drives use that technology now.

If computers could be designed to use both the electrical charge and the magnetic state of electrons, each unit of information could have four different quaternary values (0,1,2,and 3) instead of the two binary values (0 and 1) currently used, resulting in greatly increased performance. But the semiconductors must be magnetic to recognize the magnetic 'up' or 'down' state of electrons. Magnetic semiconductors are few and far between, and so far none remain magnetic at room temperature.

If the material problems can be solved, we may be looking at future computers that are not only more powerful, but also easier to use. Because magnetic semiconductors retain their logic states without power, systems could be instant-on and use less power. Also, principal functions of a computer, such as logic operations, communication between circuits, and data storage, could be integrated in a single material, resulting in smaller and faster computers with high data-storage capacities and fast performance.

Making spintronic computers possible depends on chemists' formulating magnetic semiconductors able to support the technology. Much progress is being made, but it will take a while longer. Not surprisingly, this article was based on an article in *Chemical and Engineering News*, Aug. 28, 2006.

Cookies With Gas?

Would you believe Internet via the gas meter? A

San Diego-area start-up company, Nethercomm, claims to have developed technology to send broadband and TV services through the underground natural gas pipes. A converter box attached to your gas meter receives the signals and sends them to your computer or TV set. The headline of the article in *USA Today* (9/11/06) says it all: "Gas-line broadband a pipe dream?"

A Linux Epiphany

I wasn't going to mention *Linux* this month, but... James Derk, our local computer guru known for his syndicated weekly computer columns for Scripps-Howard News Service, has been pooh-poohing desktop *Linux* for years. Guess what. His column in the *Evansville Press and Courier* of September 18, 2006 is headed "It may be time to give *Linux* another try." He specifically mentions the *Ubuntu Linux* distribution which, he writes, is "...painfully easy to get up and running ... without spending a dime." Derk keeps his columns at www.cyberdads.com/blog.html You can also find them on the Scripps Howard Web site at www.shns.com/ under Columns...Business, Finance, and Technology...Compute.

Reap What You Sow!

I've been getting bored with being a one-man *Linux* SIG in the SW Indiana PC Users Group. I suggested to our new Region 6 Advisor of the Association of PC User Groups (APCUG), Jerry Gillette, that APCUG might be able to sponsor a way to exchange news and information between *Linux* aficionados scattered amongst its member Groups. He passed the word, and the suggestion was accepted with enthusiasm. APCUG now carries a new Conference (section) on its Web Board, *APCUG.linux*. Of course, the Conference requires a moderator, and who do you think got "volunteered?" Right, "c'est moi" said the fool. Oh well, one must reap what one sows. Access the APCUG Web Board at web-board.apcug.org and leave a message!

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

Practice Good Netiquette

(continued from page 4)

message may then be restored to its original formatting. Finally, click on the "Copy" button, and paste back into the e-mail program for sending, with the "greater-than" symbols all removed. This is good netiquette.

Now that digital cameras are nearly universal, we are taking billions of digital photos. Just because a digital camera has a maximum resolution of several megapixels does not mean that all photos should be taken in that high resolution, unless they are to be printed in a larger than snapshot format. I sometimes appreciate receiving photos of cute kids, cats, dogs, and family photos, but please do not send me photos taken in multi-megapixel resolution that have not been resized, or otherwise cropped and edited to make them smaller. Consider that a one-megapixel digital photo will totally fill the screen on a 1024x768 resolution monitor, and be about a megabyte in file size. A four megapixel image will typically be 2048x1536 pixels in display size, meaning that only a corner of the image, consisting of one-fourth of the image, will appear on my monitor. This means that I have to do a lot of scrolling to view the image, as it is four times the maximum image size that my monitor can display, and be about four megabytes in file size.

Please save me and your other correspondents the download time and inconvenience of trying to view an oversized image by either taking the image in a more reasonable resolution (such as one megapixel), or using imaging editing software to reduce the size of the image, and crop if necessary. Almost all image editing software included with most digital cameras can easily perform the task of resizing the image. Alternatively, use the free image utility *IrfanView*, my personal favorite, available for download from www.irfanview.com. If you do not want to alter the original image, simply save the edited or reduced image under a different file name. The smaller image size will relate to a smaller file size, meaning faster uploads and downloads. This is good netiquette.

These are but a few tips that can contribute much to your being a good netizen. Practice good netiquette.

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

Windows XP: Remote Assistance

By Dick Maybach, Member of the Brookdale Computer User Group, New Jersey

Because of our interest and experience with PCs, many of us in BCUG are asked for help by friends and family. Often, those seeking help live across town or across the country, and it is inconvenient to visit them. Fortunately, *Windows XP* (both the Home and Pro version) provides a solution. Using its Remote Assistance feature, a tutor can see a student's *Windows* desktop and operate his or her computer over the Internet. This allows you to assist someone almost anywhere in the world. Remote Assistance supports an audio link and live file transfers. During the session, you can speak with the person you are helping and exchange files between the two PCs as easily as you can move files between directories.

To use Remote Assistance, both parties must be using *Windows XP*, either Home or Pro. The operation will be smoother if both have high-speed Internet access, but this is not required. Also, both parties should have microphones or combination microphone-earphone headsets, which are available inexpensively from many computer hardware dealers. Without this, you will have to juggle a telephone during the whole session or use text chat, both of which are inconvenient. Finally, Universal plug-and-play must be enabled on your hardware router, if you have one. This appears to be the default for those used in homes, but if you are behind the firewall of your company, college, or some other organization, you may not be able to use Remote Assistance. UPnP does entail a small security risk, which many organizations won't tolerate.

It will also be helpful to use *MSN Messenger* to set up the session. Without this, you will have to use e-mail, which will slow down the dialog immensely. (As a bonus, *Messenger* will allow you to make free audio or video calls anywhere in the world.) Both the *Messenger* software and service are free. You can download the software from Microsoft. (The fastest way to find the correct download page is to do a Google search for "*MSN Messenger*." During the installation process, you will be led through the process of obtaining a *Messenger* account.)

XP enables Remote Assistance requests by default; however, check to be sure that this is so. The error message if it isn't is not helpful. (Right-click on My Computer, select Properties, select Remote, check Allow Remote Assistance invitations to be sent ..., select Advanced, check Allow this computer to be controlled ... While you are here, reduce the time that requests are

active to something like four hours; the 30-day default is far too long.) Allowing Remote Assistance requests does add a small security risk; I recommend that you disable it when you aren't using it.

Use the following procedure to start a session. (It assumes you use *MSN Messenger*.)

- Both parties start *MSN Messenger* and sign in.
- The student requests assistance (Start » Help and Support » Invite a friend to connect to your computer with Remote Assistance » Invite some to help you » select the friend from the *Messenger* list » select Invite)
- The tutor accepts the request.

Both can now see the student's desktop, but only the student can control it; that is, the tutor's mouse and keyboard do not affect the student's desktop. For many problems, this is all that is needed.

Once the session has begun, you can control the interaction.

- If you are using a high-speed connection, tell the program so. (Click Settings and check High Quality Connection.)
- To start a voice conversation, click Start Talking. Again, one party requests and the other accepts the link. This, of course, requires a microphone or a headset at each PC. You can use instant messaging for conversations, but this is much slower than talking and can be confusing.
- The tutor can request control by clicking Take Control. If the student accepts, both now control the student's desktop. This allows the tutor, for example, to demonstrate the correct procedures and to make changes in the student's configuration.
- Either party can send a file, by clicking Send a File.
- Hitting Esc allows either party to revoke control, kill the voice link, or stop the session.

Remote Assistance provides a valuable tool that allows PC users to help each other without leaving their homes, but it hasn't received the recognition it deserves.

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Happy "Gadgetholidays!"

By Berry F. Phillips, Member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City *bfpdata(at)laccess.net*

Have many of us become "gadgetholics"? Do we like drunken lemmings, especially during the holidays, rush en masse over the cliff of technology only to fall even deeper in debt as we race to upgrade or acquire the newest and the coolest gadget? The Associated Press reported that a poll says Americans are showing early signs of addiction to their gadgets.

Fifty percent say they could not get along without a computer and mobile telephones, and 40 percent say the same for broadband use. The Associated Press article also quotes a psychologist who is an authority on Internet Addictions, so there must be truth to this new addiction. Those who are addicted broadband users are fortunate, since "they can get help online."

Is gadget addiction generic? You might be a neophiliac if you are constantly upgrading with the latest technical gizmo. *Media Life* magazine reports neophiliacs are people addicted to the new. A study conducted by Yamagata University School of Medicine in Japan reports some people may be genetically predisposed to wanting the newest things. Their study suggests the cause may be a mitochondrial enzyme called monoamine oxidase. However, a University of York sociology professor disputes the findings of the study, pointing out that "people were far more suspicious of change in the past – so the urge to constantly move on is sociological, not genetic."

Do you suppose gadgetmania may be gender related? Reality checks suggest that males, far more than females, are gadget-addicted to various degrees. This finding has been a boost to wives who often receive the blame for compulsive overspending while shopping. Jean Chatzky, author of "Make Money Not Excuses" gives this advice to spouses of gadgetholics: "They get excited in anticipation of their next purchase. They get a little higher when they are making it. And they feel a

huge letdown when it is over.

"Compulsive shoppers also put their own families at risk by racking up bills they can not pay. If you think he is simply over-shopping, he needs your help. Offer to be his shopping buddy, which may contain his urge to splurge. And help him find new ways to avoid falling into that new-tech trap by getting off the e-mail and mailing lists that are tempting him or by finding a new hobby to occupy his time."

(I am sure glad that I am a single male so nothing will interfere with my gadget shopping during the holidays!)

Why, I even understand that Mrs. Claus is having problems with Santa this year. Some say that Santa has global navigation installed in his high-tech sleigh and no longer relies totally on Rudolph, the lead red-nosed reindeer, for navigation. The elves in Santa's workshop have been upgraded and some even replaced by robotics as more high-tech gifts are being manufactured than ever before for children of all ages. Mrs. Claus is also concerned about Santa's belly that you recall "shakes like a bowlful of jelly," for fear he will get stuck in a chimney and not make his deliveries on time, disappointing millions globally. Don't worry, Santa has been working out daily in his high-tech gym loaded with all kinds of the newest and coolest gadgets. Santa, who is male, of course, apparently seems to think that today's addictions are tomorrow's necessities.

Happy Holidays from the Computer Club of Oklahoma City and the Association of PC User Groups!

Berry Phillips is a regular writer for the CCOKC Web site *www.ccokc.org* and the *eMonitor*.

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

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