

COMPUTER NEWS



Volume 23, No. 2

February, 2006

Tapping Magazine Resources Discussed at February 15 NVPCUG Meeting

By Susy Ball, Programs Coordinator

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, February 15, 2006, 7:00-9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California.

How to get usable information from computer magazines will be discussed by **Susy Ball** at our February meeting. Using a “presentation in a box” supplied by *Smart Computing* magazine, she will demonstrate features of the February issue, which the publishers say is the “Ultimate Computing Resource.” Susy likes it for its readable editorial style and the fact that it can be a revenue source for the user group.

Preceding Susy’s talk will be a **Computer Tutor** session in which **Dianne Prior**, NVPCUG president, will tell how to provide accented letters and special characters and add accent marks to ordinary characters in *Word* and *Excel* documents. As an example, she will show us how to add the accent mark above the >e< in a word such as “fiancé.”

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).



Susy Ball

Inside This Issue:

- 2 President’s Message
- 2 Special Interest Groups
- 2 Calendar
- 3 Officers List
- 5 January Presentation Report
- 6 Anti-Spyware Basics
- 7 When Outlook Express Won’t Start
- 8 Internet Insecurity
- 10 Open Source Software Opens Up
- 11 Tech News
- 12 “The Shadow Knows”
- 14 Fearless Forecasts for 2006
- 16 Web Site Accessibility

What Your Computer Really Does When It's Idle

By Vinny La Bash, Member of the Sarasota PC Users Group, Florida

You’re sitting at your machine, thinking about what to do next, when your disk drive starts whirring and the light flashes, indicating that something is going on. What is your machine doing? Your hands are nowhere near the keyboard or the mouse, and you can be relatively certain that neither telepathy nor telekinesis is at work.

One possibility is that your system is loading automatic updates from *Microsoft.com* because you set your sys-

tem to download updates automatically. The same could be true for anti-virus programs, firewalls or any application software that offers this type of automated service.

The Task Scheduler may be running a background utility. Your automatic backup may be kicking in, or an online subscription service is delivering requested information as part of a service it provides. Any number of simi-

(continued on page 4)

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

eBay SIG

Meets: Monthly, fourth Wednesday
7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
Napa Valley Genealogical Library
1701 Menlo Ave., Napa
Leader: **Tom Kessler**
(707) 258-1884
kesstom@yahoo.com

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 Valentine's Day

by Dianne Prior

We say "Thanks!" to some generous people in our users group. **Susy Ball** donated a nice new screen for our programs. Our thanks also go to the staff at the Senior Center for installing it in our meeting room. **Ron Dack** has donated a copy of *Roberts Rules of Order*; I only hope I (and other officers) can make the time to read it.



Dianne Prior

At our members' door-prize drawing, **David Christensen** won the canned air and keychain watch donated by **Susy Ball**. **Jim Hearn** won the copy of *Turbo Tax 2006* that I had picked up at MacWorld Expo. Congratulations to David and Jim.

The board of directors is considering making a survey of our members. One of the questions will be to explore the feasibility of moving our meeting night to the first Wednesday of each month instead of the third. If we do that,—and I say IF; it wouldn't be for a while—meeting on that night would put our meeting dates in proximity with those of other nearby user groups, so perhaps we could entice more speakers representing software vendors to come for our programs. Please feel free to comment to me at president@napanet.net.

Peace and Good,

Dianne Prior

NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
February 1	7:00-9:00 p.m.
February 8	7:00-8:30 p.m.
February 9	6:30-8:30 p.m.
February 13	5:30-7:30 p.m.
February 15	7:00-9:00 p.m.
February 22	7:00-8:30 p.m.

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

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, Bob Kulas, John Moore, Dick Peterson, John Simcoe, James Stirling, and 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		Librarian@nvpcug.org
Membership Director	Dianne Prior	252-1506	Membership@nvpcug.org
Mentor Program Coordinator	Dick Peterson	224-6170	Mentors@nvpcug.org
Newsletter Circulator	Jim Hearn	224-2540	
Newsletter Editor	James Stirling	944-1177	Editor@nvpcug.org
Product Review Coord.	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Reviews@nvpcug.org
Programs Director	Susy Ball	337-3998	Programs@nvpcug.org
Publicity Director	John Simcoe	258-8233	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,

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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What Your Computer Really Does

(Continued from p. 1)

lar operations could be going on. There is a dark side to this. You may be infected by a spyware program reporting back to its master over the internet. Most spyware blabs about your web surfing habits to a commercial entity so that it can tailor ads to your individual tastes. Many people consider this annoying or intrusive. Nevertheless, the designers of these programs have no desire to hurt you. They want only to sell you something.

However, something far less benign could be going on. A program could be attempting to steal your banking information, PIN numbers, credit card records, social security information, and other financial data with the intention of draining your bank account.

A Trojan horse program may be downloading spam to retransmit from your machine, making it look to recipients that you are the spammer. Other programs make your machine a "zombie" or a node in an array of machines designed to launch a Denial of Service (DOS) attack on a Web site.

Worst of all, there have been instances reported of stealth programs downloading child pornography and retransmitting it to another machine. These programs make it look like you are the culprit, making you subject to arrest and incarceration. This kind of frighteningly malicious activity has been rare, but the danger is real.

If you are concerned about this, and you should be, *Windows XP* offers a solution:

1. Click Start.
2. Click Run.
3. In the text portion of the Run dialog box, type cmd and click OK.

This brings you to the Command Interpreter, which starts out by displaying the Version of *XP* that's running on your machine and some copyright information. Now enter the command netstat -o, which displays network statistics about your current active connections.

There are five columns of information

A Trojan horse program may be downloading spam to retransmit from your machine, making it look to recipients that you are the spammer. Other programs make your machine a "zombie."

displayed. The **Proto** column tells you what communication protocol is being used for a particular process. In most instances this will be TCP (Tele-Communications Protocol). This is irrelevant for our purposes. **Local Address** is your machine.

Foreign Address is the IP address and port number of the machine the process is communicating with.

State informs you if the communication session is sending or receiving, waiting, acknowledging or finished.

PID (Process Identifier) is the piece we need, because it identifies the process (program) that is controlling the communications session from your computer.

4. Perform the Ctrl+Alt+Del keystroke sequence to bring up the Windows Security window.

5. Click Task Manager.

6. Click the Processes tab.

7. Click the PID column. This sorts the information, making it easier to find the program you're looking for.

Note: If the PID column is not displayed, you can activate it from the View menu.

Examine the PID list until you find the PID number(s) you found with the netstat command. If it's *msnmg.exe* or *iexplorer.exe*, there is nothing to worry about. These are normal *Windows XP* processes and no cause for concern. There are many other legitimate *Windows XP* processes that are likely to be listed in the Task Manager.

How do you tell the good from the bad? Unfortunately, *Windows* itself isn't much help in showing what any given process is doing and you can't shoot them all and "let God sort them out." A search of Microsoft's Web site won't yield useful information.

A great place to find valuable information about common *Windows* processes is: <http://www.liutilities.com/products/wintaskspro/processlibrary/>

This site contains information about all common *Windows* processes, and the site administrators do an excellent job of keeping posted information current.

Knowing what's going on in your system is good, but the best protection against intruders is to keep your anti-virus, firewall, and other specialized protection programs up-to-date.

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

Calvin Ross on Web 2.0

By James Stirling

Declaring that “Web 2.0” is a concept, not a place, Calvin Ross described in the January 18 general meeting of the NVPCUG how the World Wide Web is also not just a fad, but a destiny for computer users. Voluminous as the Web seems to be to users now in its range of services, Rock says it is still breaking new ground in putting services online.

Born of competition among Microsoft, Yahoo, and other big players, the Web 2.0 (an imaginary name indicating new things to come), is now driven by Google and a host of “little guys,” using an open source code. Linux is part of this. Rock declares that the day of Microsoft crushing small guys is over.

With the right code you can now have an online word processor that rivals *Microsoft Word*. What the Web can offer online is what the majority of computer users want anyway, Rock says, not the complex behemoths that “can do” everything. Even downloading applications may not be important in the near future; it is becoming more possible to use them directly on the Web, like *Writes.com*. The Web will also make it possible to make free telephone calls anywhere, buy and sell merchandise, send pictures, work with spreadsheets, and even help you search your own desktop for its files.

Ross doesn't use *Outlook*, *Firefox*, or *Thunderbird*—he can use the Web. For getting textbooks students can download a \$65 text for \$15. He says that the Internet will make great changes in the way schools operate. With the aid of the Internet, teachers may become coaches, helping students do their own learning on the Web.

Particularly interesting to Ross was the way Google Maps and Google Earth have made it possible for people to explore the world in its largest panoramas as well as its smallest details.

For example, he was interested in looking for a house to purchase in a nearby state. He found a realtor on the Internet who showed him pictures of a variety of properties. He selected one, got detailed views and relevant information, made an offer on the house, got

Calvin Ross



the seller's confirmation, and completed the sale—all on the Web. Then he showed us a satellite perspective on the earth, then North America, then California and Oregon, then down to his newly purchased home. Then he took us on a panoramic tour of famous sites in the United States, like Washington, D.C. and the Grand Canyon, again still on the Internet.

It was a memorable talk. Though some critics are skeptical of Google's ability to deliver on all it seems to promise, Ross's talk helped the user group members in his audience to get a better view of what is to come.

Bill's Tricks and Tips

Regular article by Fresno PC Users
Group member Bill Myers

Remove Program From Add/Remove Programs

If you have uninstalled a program but it remains on the list in Add/Remove Programs, you can manually remove it by navigating to:

```
HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE> SOFTWARE> Microsoft> Windows> Current-  
Version> Uninstall. You'll see a list of all  
the programs available in your Add/  
Remove Programs Control Panel. You can  
simply select an entry from the list on the  
left, press the Delete key, and confirm to  
remove it. Close the Registry Editor and  
restart Windows; the item will be gone from  
your Add/Remove Programs list.
```

Remotely Control Your Computer

Have you ever needed to operate a PC when you're not sitting in front of that particular computer? You can, using free software called VNC (*Virtual Network Computing*). Once you install the VNC server on a computer, you can control it from any other computer on the LAN (local-area network). If you have a full-time Internet connection, you can even access that PC from any other computer on the Internet. You can use VNC to adjust the computer in the den from your office or to retrieve an important file from your home computer when you're out of town. The two computers don't even need to run the same operating system: You can access your Windows PC from a Mac, Linux PC, or even a PDA. Download the free software from *Real VNC*.

Anti-Spyware Basics

By Dave Gerber, *Dave's Bits & Bytes*, A Periodic Newsletter for the Members of the Sarasota PC User Group and the World!

You've just come home with your new computer. How delightful! Now you're ready to surf the web and download some music — legally of course — and send out a few e-mails to family and friends.

As you're about to plug in the networking cable you remember something the sales associate mentioned.

"Be sure and get some anti-spyware and security stuff."

"Bah," you figure. "The guy is just trying to sell you more that you don't want or need, right?"

Onward you go, dismissing the comment and salivating as Google pulls up page after page of amazing information about things you never knew existed. Need to know about livestock birthing? No problem! Have a hankering for finding just the right flap settings for your Cessna? Piece of cake!

But wait, what's with these 'extra' windows that keep popping up and obscuring your view? And why is it that your homepage is now set at *www.somePornSite.com*?

"Hmmm," you wonder, thinking back to what the sales associate said...

Welcome to the Net! You have just been hijacked and had your first "drive-by" install. No — not the type of drive-by from the gang downtown, guns a' blazing — it appears to have come from that "friendly" Web site who just happened to be pushing some 'extra' software onto unsuspecting users such as yourself.

The scenario above is an all-too-common occurrence -- though, more than likely, excluding both of those searches via Google. And if you did actually perform those searches, you are indeed unique to say the least. Just don't write me if you're a farmer transporting a pregnant cow in a Cessna.

And so, some basic security info is at hand,, enough to get you down the road to securely surf the Web with confidence.

Here's a list of things you should do before plugging into the Net:

1. Be sure you have both a firewall and anti-virus protection. Without either, it could be literally only 10 or 15 minutes before your system is compromised. Typically, free products give you bare bones applications, which is fine if you're not going to do any heavy surfing. Going to be online 3, 4, 5 hours a day? Make the investment and get a few extra perks.

2. Now that you have a firewall and anti-virus installed, you can go online. Make sure the operating system that came installed by the reseller has all critical patches from Microsoft installed. This single event, should it be skipped, could be the most damaging. You see, malware writers know all the exploits and vulnerabilities in the OS, and write accordingly to take advantage of them to deliver their bundles of joy.

3. Find a dependable source for anti-spyware. Many of the most respected applications on this category are free, with some very nice paid versions as well.

Now doing those three simple basic things will get you started. You still need to read up about tweaking *Internet Explorer*, to help tighten its out-of-the-box security (kind of like adding extra stuff to a new car). Then decide what kind of security settings or software to use for e-mail.

Hopefully you're not overwhelmed just yet. My purpose is to inform on a basic level for the new user. Once you're up and running, other subjects delving deeper into technical issues can be addressed.

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

What to Do When — Outlook Express Won't Start

By Jeff Dodd, *Smart Computing Magazine*

Among the most popular applications Microsoft bundles with its Windows OSes is a low-key e-mail client called *Outlook Express*. The program is easy to use and quite dependable, although technical problems do arise from time to time. One such problem involves a corrupted *Messages.ods* or *Folders.dbx* file in *Outlook Express 5.0*.

The Situation

When either of these files becomes damaged or corrupted, as may happen when you attempt to import messages into *Outlook Express*, the e-mail program will generate one of several error messages, including “MSIMN, caused an invalid page fault in module *Directdb.dll*,” “MSIMN caused an exception in module *Directdb.dll*,” or “MSIMN caused an exception c0000006h in module *Directdb.dll*”—and will refuse to start.

The easiest solution is to rename the corrupted file. This tricks *Msimn.exe*, an executable file otherwise known as *Outlook Express*, into believing that the damaged file no longer exists. As a result, it will create a new uncorrupted file to replace the missing one. The uncorrupted file is then able to communicate with *Directdb.dll*, which is a database API (application program interface), without generating an error message or preventing *Outlook Express* from starting.

To rename the file, use the computer's find or search utility to locate the damaged file on your PC. Start by searching the Windows drive (the drive on which Windows is installed) for the *Folders.dbx* file. If you find the file, right-click it in the results pane and select Rename from the pop-up menu. Type *folders.old* and press ENTER. Close the search utility and open *Outlook Express*.

If you receive the error message again, however, you have to take a different approach. The first involves renaming the *Messages.ods* file. Simply reopen the search utility and search for *Messages.ods*, which, like *Folders.dbx*, contains e-mail messages. When you find it, right-click the file and select Rename from the pop-up menu. Type *messages.old* and press the ENTER key.

This approach will resolve the issue, but it also obliterates any e-mail messages contained inside the file. If you cannot bear to lose those messages, you must resort to the second approach, which entails moving the *Messages.ods* file into the folder that

contains the various DBX files associated with *Outlook Express* and then reconfiguring the Registry so that the e-mail client will retain the messages contained in the ODS file.

Open the search utility and type *messages.ods *.dbx*. Identify the folder containing the .DBX files. It probably has an unwieldy name, such as *C:\WINDOWS\APPLICATIONDATA\IDENTITIES\{94EF3400-2A8D-11D9-97C1-0030BD9253C1}\MICROSOFT\Outlook Express*. Locate the *Messages.ods* file in the results, right-click it, and select Copy. Close the search utility, open My Computer, and locate the folder containing the DBX files. Right-click the folder and select Paste from the pop-up menu.

After moving the *Messages.ods* file, open the Smart menu, select Run, type *regedit* in the Open field of the resulting dialog box, and click OK. The Registry Editor will appear on-screen. Open the HKEY_CURRENT_USER\IDENTITIES\{<FOLDER IDENTITY>}\SOFTWARE\MICROSOFT\OUTLOOK EXPRESS\5.0 key (where <FOLDER IDENTITY> refers to the alphanumeric ID that is part of the folder path identified by the search utility, e.g. {94EF3400-2A8D-11D9-97C1-0030BD9253C1} in the above example) and locate the ConvertedToDBX value. Right-click this value, select Delete, and click Yes. Close the Registry Editor and reboot the PC. (Before you make any changes to the Registry, back up your system.)

Update To 6.0

Because this error message is associated with *Outlook Express 5.0*, the final step toward a resolution is to update your PC to a more recent version. Visit Windows Update at windowsupdate.microsoft.com and scan for the latest updates. Select the one labeled *Internet Explorer 6 (Outlook Express is bundled with the browser)* and follow the on-screen instructions to download and install it. Click OK to reboot the PC when the update is complete.

Reprinted with permission from *Smart Computing*, Tech Support, December 2005, Vol. 16, Issue 12, page 96 in print issue.

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

Is the Internet Insecure Because of You?

By Dave Gerber, APCUG Advisor; radio show host

Long gone are the days that we could feel secure and know for certain that we had privacy. With the digital age upon us we can no longer be so sure that our privacy is secure. Recently Google has admitted their organization holds user data indefinitely. This causes concern, as now we know Google has information on us that we do not want anyone to know about.

We can simply blame this all on the big corporate companies; they seem to be a very good scapegoat. However, this is not the case; your privacy is totally up to you. Certificates ensure that all the data that is transferred between you and the Internet is secure and encrypted. Recently in New Zealand there was a short certificate outage on a bank's Web site. During this outage only one out of 300 users took this security warning seriously.

This is a rather large concern, as many users on the Internet have the same belief that their data is safe and secure. By the end of 2005 it is estimated identity fraud will cause up to 5 trillion dollars in losses worldwide. We, the users of the Internet, must keep ourselves safe and secure and pay attention to those security warnings. I have compiled some good tools and tricks that will help keep you much more anonymous and secure.

1) Get rid of the *Internet Explorer*:

First and foremost, *Microsoft Internet Explorer* is the highest risk to your Internet experience. Not only is it the most popular Internet browser, but it is also the most popular for attacks from viruses and spyware. *Internet Explorer* is also too integrated with the *Windows* operating system. Have you ever wondered how a dialer or online casino got onto your desktop?

I personally recommend *Opera*; they have a nice clean browser. The usability is easy and, best of all, it uses tabbed browsing.

2) Protect your connection.

Make sure you have an active fire-

wall operating; Firewalls stop intruders from entering your connection and causing havoc. Hackers can easily gain access to an unprotected network and steal private information.

With the release of *SP2* for *Windows XP*, Microsoft has incorporated a free personal firewall. If you have broadband your router should have an inbuilt firewall, and you should make sure this is enabled. *Zone Alarm* also offer a free firewall. You must always do what you can to protect yourself.

3) Don't share those files:

One of the most common security flaws, besides running *Windows XP*, is having file sharing enabled. To disable file sharing please do the following:

Click Start Menu, select settings.

Click on Network Connections.

Right-click on the Local Area Connection icon and on the menu that appears, choose Properties.

In the General tab under "This connection uses the following items," highlight "File and Printer Sharing for Microsoft Networks." (If File and Printer Sharing is not listed, then file sharing has not been setup). You may skip the rest of these instructions.

Click Uninstall.

When you are asked if you are sure you want to Uninstall File and Printer Sharing, Click Yes.

You may now close the Local Area Connection Properties window.

You must restart for your computer for the effects to work.

4) Hide your IP address:

Your IP address is just like your phone number, it links directly back to you. There are many reasons you may wish to hide your IP address. Preferably you do not want to be tracked around the Web; it's just as bad as having a GPS in your mobile phone.



The Internet is a very insecure environment; you must ensure your data are safe from outside prying eyes..

5) Check those certificates:

Your Internet connection is not secure; the data that travels between you and the site you may be browsing may pass through over 25 other computers. If you are sending very confidential information such as credit card payments, make sure the address starts with an https. Also check that the padlock on your browser is locked and valid for the specific site. This will ensure that you have a 128-bit encrypted connection with the Web site.

If you want secure e-mail, you may also have your e-mails encrypted too. A good free vendor is *Hushmail*. Your e-mail security is more at risk than your Web browsing; you must ensure your e-mails are safe.

6) Kill the spyware

Spyware are little programs that can be inserted easily into your computer when you surf Web sites or download files. Spyware can pick up information from your surfing destinations to your credit card details, and this information then can be sold.

Microsoft has released a beta version of their upcoming anti-spyware removal tool. This too works well, and I highly recommend this tool. Zone Alarm also offer a free online spyware detector.

You should give serious attention to the information I have passed to you. The Internet is a very insecure environment; you must ensure your data are safe from outside prying eyes. Make sure you are careful with any transaction you make. Never fall for any kind of e-mail promotion; anyone who tries to sell to you through spam advertising is not trustworthy. Also make sure to check the links from anything you click on; I have found numerous fake Paypal sites that try to steal login and password information from Internet users.

Remember... it is up to you.

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

Tech News

By Sue Crane, Vice President and Editor,
Big Bear Computer Club,
Sue.crane@charter.ne

SP3 for Win XP

Microsoft has confirmed that there will be a third service pack for *Windows XP*. They declined to release further details, but said that *Windows XP SP 3* will be available after *Windows Vista* ships, scheduled for the end of 2006. Microsoft released the most recent *Windows XP* service pack, *SP2*, in August 2004. The service pack was one of the most significant updates to the *Windows OS* that Microsoft ever produced, and it included features to make *Windows* more secure.

Microsoft Employee Warns Against Downloading From Unofficial Site

A Microsoft employee has warned against downloading an unauthorized version of *Windows XP Service Pack 3 (SP3)* that has surfaced on *Hotfix.net*, a popular Web site that provides software patches. The employee told users that downloading an unofficial version of *Windows XP SP3* provided on *The Hotfix.net* would likely harm their computer and put them "out of support" from Microsoft because it is not an official Microsoft package. Each of these hotfixes can be obtained for free from Microsoft by calling their support lines, the employee said. *SP3* will be released after *Windows Vista* ships later this year.

HP Recalls Laptop Batteries

HP has recalled around 135,000 lithium ion rechargeable battery packs worldwide after several of them melted or charred the plastic cases of laptops. The battery is used with the HP Pavilion, Compaq Presario, HP Compaq and Compaq Evo laptops, company spokesperson Mike Hockey said. The company received 16 reports of batteries overheating, with four cases of damage to the laptops. No injuries have been reported. Consumers can verify if they have the faulty battery pack by going to www.hp.com/support/batteryreplacement.

The Editorial Committee of the APCUG has provided this article.

Open Source Software Opens Up

By Orv Beach, Principal Member, Simi-Conejo Linux

Open Source software is programming code that's generally available at no cost to you. But we should draw a distinction between “freeware” and Open Source programs.

The premise of Open Source (and, hence the name) is that the source code of the program is available to you. That's not so much so *you* can modify it (although you could and are free to if you know how). It's more in order to place the program in “public escrow.” Once a program has been licensed under the GPL (General Public License), it can never be retracted and thus never orphaned.

That's an advantage for both individual users and companies; you don't have to worry about future forced upgrades by your software vendor! This licensing arrangement also encourages community development. Coders add features, fix bugs and document applications, and return those improvements to the users.

Open Source: Party Animal

Open Source software continues to gain in popularity as a result of it being, well, open to coders. The best current examples are probably the *Firefox* browser, and the *OpenOffice* office suite (This article was written in *OpenOffice*.). Both are popular and powerful applications that run equally well on several operating systems.

Firefox is generally faster than *Internet Explorer*, and arguably more secure. Tabbed browsing and a wide array of theme choices are popular features. Patches are generally provided very quickly to rectify any security problem that might appear, in contrast to the relatively slow pace of fixes for commercial code. *OpenOffice* has improved in functionality and in compatibility with *Microsoft Office* since its first release about two years ago. It can read from and write to *Word*, *PowerPoint* and *Excel* formats, compose HTML documents and output to *Flash* and *Acrobat* files.

Need more? How about a database? Both applications are frequently updated; the current version for *Firefox* is 1.5, *OpenOffice*,

2.0.1. Best of all, both are free for the downloading.

Applications Not Just for Linux

Some other good examples of Open Source software available for both *Windows* and *Linux* are:

- * *AIM*, the “multi-protocol” instant messaging program

- * *The GIMP*, a great graphics editing program

- * *Blender*, a 3D modeling and animation program

There are *Windows* applications with no perfect analog in *Linux*, but the situation is improving daily, and *Linux* has matured in all desktop areas. For example, multimedia programs for manipulating graphics or editing video and audio are often on par with their commercial counterparts. In fact, *Linux* “distributions” either come with all that good stuff, or if not, they can be downloaded separately. The distributions range from completely free via downloaded CD images, or inexpensively purchased, with some customer support and documentation included. Much of the differentiation between these distributions (*Fedora*, *Ubuntu*, *SuSE*) lies in the graphical installer and system tools, driving development of a more user-friendly experience for even a novice.

Of course, occurrences of viruses happen only about once a decade, thanks to the inherent security in *Linux*. Spyware or malware programs aren't a problem because they can't install themselves.

And *Linux* is stable; it doesn't crash very often. If you leave your *Linux* box running, several months later you'll realize it's still running, and hasn't had to be rebooted.

It's a Freebie

If you'd like to experiment with *Linux*, but don't want to commit to loading it on a computer, there are “Live CDs” available. These are bootable *Linux* CDs – everything runs off the CD rather than from a hard disk. This allows you to “try before you install.” I'd say “try before you buy,” but the buying is optional! Some examples of bootable *Linux* CDs are *Knoppix* and *Mepis*.

If you're still dependent on some *Windows* applications, or want to be able to use both *Windows* and *Linux*, you can “dual-boot” your computer. That means putting both *Windows* and

Tech News

By Sue Crane, Vice President and Editor, Big Bear Computer Club Sue.crane@charter.net

Linux on the same hard drive (or separate ones), and when you boot, be able to select which operating system will boot. That gives you a lot of flexibility in what you can do with your computer.

Linux isn't perfect; there are some shortcomings:

* Administration of a *Linux* system is different (not harder, just different); the methods for installing and upgrading programs have to be learned.

* High-end games aren't as widely available for *Linux* (exceptions include the iD series - *Doom & Quake* - as well as *Unreal Tournament*).

* Personal Finance is still weak; there's no direct equivalent for *Quicken* (although *GNU-Cash* is very usable, and of course free to try).

Hardware Requirements

For good results a modern "full house" installation of *Linux* intended for desktop use should be installed on a computer that has the following characteristics:

- 800 MHz CPU (faster is better, of course)
- 6-10 GB of disk space
- Minimum 256 Megs of RAM (512 Megs is better if you're going to have more than a couple of large applications open at the same time)
- A video card with 8 Megs of RAM or better (shared RAM is ok, if that's the type of video your computer has)
- A 17" or larger monitor audio card and speakers.

Note: inexpensive WinModems are not well supported; neither are WinPrinters; the inexpensive ones that require the CPU to do all the formatting.

If you've read about *Linux* and are interested, your local *Linux* user group may be doing an Expo. For instance, every year in February, there's an Annual So Cal Linux Expo in southern California. Check <http://www.socallinuxexpo.com> for details.

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Real ID Act

The Real ID Act lays out minimum national standards for [driver's] licenses, which will have to include a digital photo, anti-counterfeiting features and machine-readable technology. States will have to verify all documents presented to support license applications, such as birth certificates, Social Security cards and utility bills, with the issuing agency, and will be required to link their license databases so they can all be accessed as a single network. States will also be required to verify that a person applying for a license is in the country legally. Another Real ID Act requirement is that a person's license and Social Security card must bear the same name—not a nickname or shortened version

New Intel Technology Could Shorten PC Boot-Up Time

With Intel's *Robson*, a PC pulls data and applications off an add-in flash memory card and Intel software, rather than the PC's hard drive. Potentially, notebook users could experience a longer battery life because the hard drive wouldn't have to work as hard. Intel did not provide exact boot-up time comparisons, but a representative said *Robson* will cut the amount of time it takes from when you hit the "on" button to when the PC can operate, the time it takes to go from a sleep state to an active state, and the time it takes to launch an application.

Robotic Cars Make History

The Stanford Racing Team's robotic car, "Stanley," drove autonomously across 131.6 miles in the Mojave Desert in six hours and 53 minutes, finishing about 11 minutes faster than Carnegie Mellon's "Sandstorm." All of the teams made history during the weekend. They were the first autonomous vehicles to travel far within a specific time frame, as well as the first to finish the 2-year-old race (last year no one finished at all). A DARPA spokesman said this likely means the end of the Grand Challenge. DARPA is now hoping to see the technology take off.

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

“The Shadow Knows”

by Mike Morris, Front Range PC Users Group, Fort Collins, Colorado

How many readers remember that phrase? Or remember listening to the show on the radio:

“Who knows what evil lurks in the heart of men? The Shadow knows.”

Recent headlines have described the availability of TV shows on the Internet—at a price. No headlines, however, for “The Shadow” or other radio programs from the 1930s and 1940s. The copyrights to a large number of the old radio shows have expired, and you can now download (or order) these programs in a variety of formats and listen to them through your computer or other audio equipment.

Whether your interest is for historical research, for the nostalgia value, for a hobby, or for the simple entertainment value, the variety of programs and information about these old radio programs is astonishing. I originally searched the Internet using Google and the phrase “old radio programs.” That search returned over 20,000 hits over 6 months. The correct phrase should have been “old time radio.” That search returned over 1 million hits from the past 6 months.

These Web sites provide an incredible wealth of information. I have checked a very small number of Web sites and now offer my comments on them. There are episodes of The Shadow, Sam Spade, The Thin Man—as you can see, I like mysteries. There are comedies, westerns, music, and much more.

By the way, how many readers remember the origin of Sam Spade? Do you recall the movie “The Maltese Falcon” with Humphrey Bogart? The movie was based on the novel of the same name by Dashiell Hammett (originally published in 1929), which introduced the world to Sam Spade. Another novel by the same author, “The Thin Man,” (originally published in 1933) was turned into a movie starring William Powell and Myrna Loy. Here is a trivia question for you: Who *really* was

the Thin Man?—answer at the end of this article.

As you might expect, the audio quality of these old radio shows varies. Some Web sites allow you to listen to short samples of selected shows using either *RealPlayer*™ or *Media Player*, both of which are bundled with the *Windows* operating system.

“It is Thursday night, July 31, 1930. The time is 9:40 p.m.. Radio listeners tuned to CBS hear the first appearance of The Shadow.” Thus begins the history of “The Shadow” as provided by the Old-Time Radio Program Guide, <http://www.old-time.com/toc.html>. This Web site has links to historical information on a number of old-time radio programs and to other Web sites that include sound bites and stories, and to Web sites that offer programs on cassettes, CDs, DVDs, or direct downloads to your computer.

More history is available at Radio Days: A Sound Bite of History, <http://otr.com/index.shtml>. There are links to history by category (Mystery, Private Eyes, Comedy, SciFi) and to histories of selected programs (Captain Midnight, Terry and the Pirates). This Web site also provides a historical timeline with important dates in radio broadcasting with descriptions of relevant programs. Selected downloads (sound bites) are included. There is a link to a schedule of old-time radio on the airwaves (and on the Internet).

At “It Seems Like Only Yesterday,” <http://www.yesterdayradio.com/>, old radio programs are offered for sale on cassettes. Categories include: World War II and Civil War History, Big Band Music, Comedy, Westerns, Science Fiction, and Sherlock Holmes. The Big Band category includes Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and other broadcasts from the 1940s.

The “Radio of Yesteryear” Web site, <http://www.originaloldradio.com/>, claims to have 50,000 old-time radio programs available on CDs, in various formats. There is a category called “Radio’s Best 1000,” and “single subject” CDs such as Abbott and Costello, CBS Radio Mystery Theatre, and many more.

Meanwhile, back at . . . *old-time.com*, there is a link to a Web site called “Radio Showcase,” http://www.OLDIME.COM/sponsors/rad_sho.html. This site offers an excellent searchable database, with “actor credits, recording sources, story categories, and program notes.” Here is a sample of a search:

In the interest of objectivity, I call



your attention to the *RadioLovers.com* Web site, <http://radiolovers.com>. This site claims to offer individual old-time radio program downloads. However, I did not pursue the offer. I found the site’s use of pop-up ads objectionable (the ads appeared despite having the pop-up blocker enabled in my *Firefox* browser). But that is my personal prejudice. For those with greater tolerance to such ads, you may find this site useful.

As I listened to these old radio programs, and read about their history, I realized that there was one program that I wanted to locate above all others: the original radio broadcast of War of the Worlds. This program, created from the 1898 H. G. Wells novel by Orson Welles

and broadcast in 1938, is famous (or infamous) for the real panic it created.

A search using Google on the phrase “war of the worlds” provided the result *EarthStation1.com*, <http://www.earthstation1.com/wotw.html>. Success! I listened to the entire program (slightly less than one hour) using *RealPlayer*™. My brain soaked up certain phrases: “. . . these creatures have scientific knowledge far in excess of our own . . .” “. . . a vanguard of an invading army from Mars . . .”

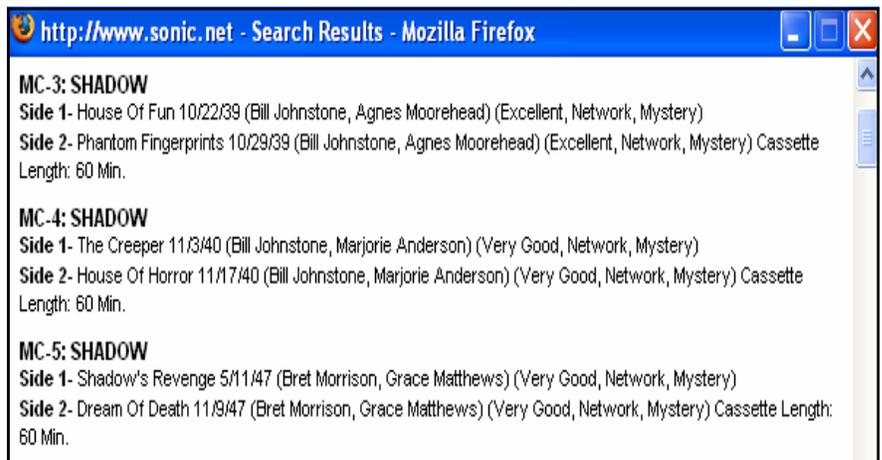
Okay, so point your finger at me and laugh, while you enjoy the latest movie version with its extraordinary computer-generated special effects. I thoroughly enjoyed the hour I spent listening to this classic radio broadcast. Even the 1930s audio quality added to its menace.

While you are watching the movie, I am going to dim the lights, turn off the TV, unplug the phone, and settle into my favorite chair. It is time to listen to *The Shadow*. Even in the 21st century, it is comforting that there is an answer to the question “Who knows what evil lurks in the heart of men?”

The Shadow knows.”

[The trivia question answer: No, it is not the detective Nick Charles. The title of *Thin Man* belongs to the extremely eccentric inventor Clyde Wynant, who remains missing until the last chapter of the novel, when it is revealed that he is the victim of a gruesome crime.]

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



Fearless Forecasts for 2006

By Rick Altman, Altman Digital Communications

I want a piece of the action. I want the opportunity to make embarrassing predictions, be ridiculed by our peers, and live in shame until next January. Here, therefore, is our annual contribution to the landscape of bold, prophetic statements that will surely come back to haunt us.

1. Microsoft has trouble with *Office 12*

The new version of *Microsoft Office* will not be plagued with bugs or security vulnerabilities. It will install without incident and run with acceptable or better performance on a majority of *Windows* boxes. The pundits will laud it and we commentators will speak of how the new interface will greatly improve productivity through all of the applications.

But the public will not embrace it. More set in their ways than any other type of PC user, daily users of *Word*, *Excel*, and *PowerPoint* have spent the past 48 to 60 months likening these applications to their toasters or microwave ovens: not every task is easy, but the mechanics of using the appliance is a no-brainer. That will not be the case at first with the freshly designed *Office 12*, and many will find themselves retreating to *Office 03* to get today's project out the door "until I have time to sit and play with it." We all know when that time comes — December 32.

Consequently, Microsoft will consider a compatibility mode to keep the new *Office* from becoming shelf-ware.

2. Corel products trade places.

The *Corel Graphics Suite* (aka *CorelDraw* and *PhotoPaint*) will play to increasingly narrow niche markets, but *Paint Shop Pro* will hit its stride. It will become the most prominent alternative to *Adobe Photoshop* and work its way into more and more bundles with digital camera manufacturers.

PhotoPaint will begin to lose its identity and Corel officials will talk about moving PSP to the CGS bundle.

3. Two lenses are better than one.

The CES show in early January scooped me on this one: cameras with two lenses. Kodak debuted this at CES with a single 5MP sensor being mated to a pair of lenses, one fixed at 23mm and the other a 37-117mm zoom. My prediction was going to be that this would appear in 2006; now we will forecast that it will become commonplace this year.

4. Hand-held movies in high-resolution?

iPod devotees already speak of watching movies in their hands, but it is not my contention that you will ever

watch feature-length movies on your iPod or mobile phone and actually enjoy it. We're getting closer, though: the digital videos that we create at our *PhotosToMemo-ries* Web site will all play quite well on video-enabled handhelds, only requiring about 30MB apiece.

But that's not the same as watching a two-hour movie on your phone, and we know it. Technology cannot create comfort or compensate for lack of same, but there is no reason why your phone cannot be the movie player. A two-hour movie can be delivered in satisfactory 4:3 resolution in about 2GB, and many phones, music players, and Palm devices can routinely accept a file of that size. What we will see in 2006 is the widespread support for those devices to connect directly to a television for playback.

5. Batteries...oy vey...

Whenever Prediction No. 4 becomes a reality, this one will be about six weeks behind: Batteries for handhelds will need to be about twice as good as they are now. Or the entire industry goes to hell!

6. Whither TiVo?

Perhaps the most painful prediction in multimedia for 2006 will be our beloved TiVo, which will continue to fight to gain traction...and lose the battle. TiVo will become a technology, not a product, and those of us who bought in back in 2000 will be traumatized. For about a day... read on...

7. Television, directly to your PC

The networks will deliver us from our trauma by offering services whereby you can subscribe to a television show and have it automatically download to your PC, with no restrictions or DRM issues. With relatively simple software, and more notably cooperation from the networks at a level not seen before, entirely new life will be breathed into the *Windows Media Edition* and to PCs billing themselves as media centers.

Before the year is over, I will walk into a house that I have never been in before, take out my mobile phone and wirelessly play a network broadcast on the television there.

8. Every company will see the light... and train all of its employees so that nobody delivers obnoxious and annoying presentations and commits Death by PowerPoint ever again.

Well, seven out of eight won't be too bad.

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Web Site Accessibility for Disabled Users: No Mouse Allowed?

by Dorothy Cushway, Member of the Web Enthusiasts of Victoria, Canada

December 2005 Web Edition, *Big Blue & Cousins*

When creating a Web site for your business or personal use, do you ensure that the site is accessible to all? Do you know what accessibility involves for Web site design? There are many tools and evaluation programs available to test your Web site for accessibility.

In June of 1998 the U.S. Congress passed a law (Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act) to ensure that all its Federal Web sites are accessible. Canada hasn't implemented this drastic a policy so far; however, its Federal Government passed an initiative called the "Common Look and Feel," aimed at ensuring all Canadian Government Web sites would be accessible by December 2004.

If you are wondering what Web site accessibility is all about and why this can be an issue, try using only a keyboard to move through a Web site on different links—No Mouse or Clicking Allowed! If you can move through the site reasonably well, then it may be fairly accessible to most users of adaptive/assistive technology. Many people who use the Internet for research, e-mail, information, banking, or chatting, use this technology. There can be many different types of hardware and software, such as JAWS (Job Access with Speech) —www.wikz~edia.org/wiki/Job_Access_Wit/i_Speech,-- used by visually impaired; magnification software such as *Zoom-Text*—ww.synapseadaptive.com/aisquared/zoointext9/zoomteti9_home_page.htm, to enlarge the screen data; or *Dragon Naturally Speakin*—www.nuance.com/naturallyspeaking, to use hands-free. There are many more similar types of software and hardware that people use to view Web sites as well.

Web site Accessibility is supported by most software companies, who provide an accessible area

of the Web site. For example, if you go to Accessibility on Macromedia.com (www.Macromedia.com/help/accessibility.html), or Adobe Accessibility (<http://www.adobe.com/enterprise/accessibility/main.html>) you will find how to move around programs, create accessible documents and Web sites, etc. Also, accessibility is about helping a person to use a computer better, and this also affects the aging population, as discussed at the Hewlett Packard and IBM Web sites.

When you are creating a Web site and are ready to test it for accessibility, you should follow the WAI W3 - Web Accessibility Initiative Guidelines - by ensuring Priority 1 and 2 indicators are fixed. See WAI (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>) and WAI Resources (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/Resources/>). There are also many Web site checkers that you can use to find out how accessible your Web site is. Here are a few such sites: *Watchfire* (<http://webxact.watchfire.com/>) *Hermish* (<http://www.hermish.com/>) or, from Toronto, the program called *A-Prompt* (<http://aprompt.snow.utoronto.ca/>). Also, here are some Section 508 Accessible Tools and Resources (<http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=122>) to help your Web site.

As you may have figured out, I have a passion for Adaptive/Assistive Technology and like to educate and inform people about it. All of my knowledge and learning has been gained through the support of my office, as well as many courses I have taken online (<http://www.rit.edu/~easi/index.htm>).

True Web site accessibility can make the Internet more user friendly for everyone.

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

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