



Computer News

March 2005
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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, on-line forum, special interest groups, mentor program and community involvement, it has helped educate people of all ages. The NVPCUG provides opportunities for people to find friends who share common interests and experiences. Through its Computers-to-Schools program, members refurbish used computer equipment for donation to local schools. Since January 2003 the NVPCUG has donated more than 247 computers and 102 printers.

Using Tables and Columns in Microsoft Word to Be Discussed at March 16 NVPCUG Meeting

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

Our March general meeting will be structured differently than usual. It will consist of only two of our regular meeting segments: **Random Access**, an open-floor question-and-answer period, and **Computer Tutor**, a session in which you can learn how to accomplish specific tasks. Each of these segments will be longer than usual, allowing more time for discussion.

In the Computer Tutor session, **Michael Moore** will continue his series of presentations on *Microsoft Word* special features by discussing the creation and use of tables and columns in documents. Tables allow you to organize information in rows and columns of cells, making data easier to read and showing relationships and trends that cannot be expressed in text. Also, tables are very useful for creating data entry forms. Columns allow you to set up multicolumn page layouts and to control text flow, such as for newsletters, glossaries, and inventory lists. Both features, which are also available in other word processing products, can greatly enhance your presentation of information and the appearance of your documents



Michael Moore

Mike is a Computer Studies instructor at Napa Valley College, where he teaches *Microsoft Word*, *Excel*, and *Access* courses. Prior to teaching, Mike had a varied and long career in industrial computer system design, until he retired early from Westinghouse as the president of one of its high-technology subsidiaries. He is also the NVPCUG's Computer Tutor Coordinator.

During the Random Access period, which will precede the Computer Tutor session, you can ask questions about specific issues you have encountered in using computers and computer-related products and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees. Questions may be submitted in advance of our meeting by e-mailing them to Random Access Moderator **Jerry Brown** at Questions@nvpcug.org.

Need practical information that will enable you to make better use of your computer? Come to this free meeting! Guests are always welcome.

President's Message —

Support: Giving It Gets It

by Orion E. Hill

Volunteers Still Needed!

We still need volunteers to serve as Vice President, Programs Director, and Special Projects Director. I'm sorry that I have to call again for volunteers, but it is necessary. Our group's program is suffering because the duties of those key positions, which have been vacant since December, are not being adequately performed. Our current officers (especially your president) are overburdened trying to handle additional tasks. If you value our group's program, want to continue to enjoy its benefits, and would like to join a winning team and have some fun, now is the time to step forward.

The responsibilities of each of these positions are not as daunting as they may appear. For Program Director, for example, lots of support materials are available and presenters can be readily identified by checking the Web sites of other computer users groups, especially those in Northern California, as well as those of computer product companies. We just need someone interested in arranging presentations for our meetings who can devote a few hours each month to that activity. And we need one or more volunteers to assist the Program Director in performing his or her duties, perhaps by surveying Web sites or preparing presentation announcements.

We also still need volunteers to assist our Membership and Publicity directors, help our Facility Arrangements and Greeter coordinators, and write reviews of our monthly meeting presentations for publication in our newsletters. To volunteer, please contact me.

Special Activity Development Currently On-hold

Pending more help with existing activities, two special activities under development have been put on-hold: the **members discount purchasing program** that was being arranged with several computer-related product vendors and service providers, including CompUSA, and the proposed **computer tune-up workshops** I wrote about last month. Also, member identification cards required for participation in the discount purchasing program will not be issued until that program is again underway. If you would like to help establish either of these activities, however, please let me know. I'm most eager to see both of these activities go forward.



Sound Off!

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

NVPCUG Special Interest Groups

Special interest groups are composed of people who share a specific interest and want to meet regularly to learn about a subject in greater detail than feasible at NVPCUG general meetings. At a typical SIG meeting, ample time is available for discussing issues, answering questions, sharing tips, researching issues on the Internet, and exploring computer applications, services, and equipment. Guest experts may be invited for special discussions and presentations at some meetings. SIGs form, dissolve, and schedule meetings in keeping with the changing needs of their members. SIG membership is open to everyone.

Currently the NVPCUG has two SIGs. Their meeting locations frequently change. For current meeting location information, check our Web site, www.nvpcug.org, or contact the SIG leaders.

Investments SIG

Meets: Second Monday of each month
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Leader: Jerry Brown
(707) 254-9607
bqandjbb@aol.com

Digital Photography SIG

Meets: Second Wednesday of each month
7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Leader: Hilton Des Roches
(707) 224-6170



Editorial

by James Stirling, Editor

When you look over the articles in this issue of *Computer News*, you will find a slightly different mix from before. These articles, drawn for the most part from other publications, point out the dangers faced by the unwary who don't use anti-spyware and spam filters, and give practical guidance for avoiding trouble. In this cat-and-mouse game, the spyware and spam producers are pitted against the "good guys" who try to set up screens to obstruct the sneaky attacks and inform computer users about who is "after them." However, some insidious trends are compromising the interests of the "end users." Linda Gonse, in her piece on "Sounding the Alarm," reveals that some spyware producers are striking deals with anti-spyware makers and advocates to loosen the screens and relabel the bad guys as good. In a somewhat humorous vein (if you like gallows humor), an anonymous wit writing about "A Scary Future" has envisioned the hopeless condition we may face when the most intimate details of our lives become public records, all for "national security."

For those who have wondered about the new Internet phone systems (VoIP), Dr. Brian Lewis gives an illuminating account of how the new systems work and where to find the best providers.

Scattered through the pages are numerous tips to make your com-

puter more enjoyable, or at least less frustrating.

Sherry Zorzi tells of the interesting new practice called "bookcrossing," involving the use of actual printed books that people read and enjoy, then give away or leave in places where others can pick them up. Then the original owners can follow the travels of their books through messages

posted on the Internet at *Book-Crossing.com*. How much more interesting than keeping the old book on your dusty bookcase shelf!

If you find something here that strikes a responsive or discordant chord, send a letter to the editor so others will know how you feel, or how you know better. We're always glad to hear from you. JS

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

Officers for 2005

Board of Directors

President	Orion E. Hill	252-0637	President@nvpcug.org
Vice President	(Volunteer Needed)		VicePresident@nvpcug.org
Secretary	Julie Jerome	224-6620	Secretary@nvpcug.org
Treasurer	Roy Wagner	253-2721	Treasurer@nvpcug.org

Other Directors: Dianne Prior, John Simcoe, James Stirling

Appointed Officers

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	Steve Siegrist		Facility@nvpcug.org
Greeter Coordinator	Bob Simmerman	259-6113	Greeter@nvpcug.org
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Random Access Moderator	Jerry Brown	254-9607	Questions@nvpcug.org
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VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol)

By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

Are you using the Internet for your local and/or long distance service? If not, then maybe you need to read this article to find out how some computer users are saving “mucho dinero” on their telephone calls.

VoIP stands for Voice over Internet Protocol. There are ways to use the Internet for free phone calls, low cost phone calls (2¢ per minute) or a monthly fixed rate for both local and long-distance calls. So how is it possible to transmit your voice over your Internet connection? We’ll look at some of the technical aspects first. Then I can discuss some of the services that are available for you to check out further.

When you use your telephone your voice is converted into electrical impulses and transmitted over copper wires to another phone. There it is converted back to sound waves. These impulses are transmitted via several switches in the telephone network. This system is referred to as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). As long as you are talking on the phone you have a constant circuit connection between the two phones. In the original PSTN system, all calls required a dedicated wire for each call. For the period of time you were on the phone you “owned” a copper wire connection between your phone and the other party. In today’s PSTN, all calls are digitized and can be combined with thousands of others running over fiber optic cable between central stations.

However, the connection between the two phones must remain open for the length of the call.

When computer data is transmitted over phone lines or cable, it is also in digital form. However, the data is sent in packets and does not require a dedicated pathway to reach its destination. In fact, when a computer sends a stream of data packets, they may all arrive at their destination after traveling different routes. There are thousands of possible paths between any origin and any destination. In addition, packets from other origins can use any time spaces between your packets. This is a more efficient system, as a circuit does not need to be kept open. This system is referred to as packet switching.

So if your e-mail is being chopped up into small packets, how does the system know what to do with them? Each packet contains an address that tells the router what its final destination is. The sending computer sends the packet off to a router and then goes on to its next operation. The router selects a path to another router and sends the packet off. This process continues to the destination computer. At the destination, the receiving computer assembles the packets based on the information contained in each packet.

So what does this have to do with Internet phones? Very simple. VoIP uses the packet switching technology to transmit your call. The digitization of your voice oc-

curs either through your sound card or a device known as an analog telephone adapter (ATA). There are also Internet phones which connect directly to a network router and handle the conversion process. The voice packets that result from these various adapters are routed over the Internet in the same way as data packets. When you make a phone call, there is always dead space when no one is talking. With the packet system, other data packets from other sources are being transmitted over the Internet, making maximum use of its capacity.

In the early days of VoIP sound, quality was poor and the method of operation more like using a walkie-talkie. Today’s equipment is vastly improved. Sound quality on many VoIP systems is the equivalent of that found in the PSTN. Depending on the system you are using, you can dial any number and your call will be routed over the Internet. In such a system, you and the party you called won’t see any difference in operation or sound from that of the PSTN.

So why would you be interested in using an Internet phone instead of your current local/long distance PSTN service? One big factor for many people is cost. The cost of Internet service ranges from free to \$25/month (more in some cases) for unlimited calls. In addition, many of the VoIP services offer features that cost you extra through your local company. It is not unusual for a VoIP provider to include caller ID,

NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer contact Orion Hill.
March 2 7:00 p.m.	Board of Directors meeting, Piner’s Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
March 9 7:00 p.m.	Digital Photography SIG, Piner’s Nursing Home, Napa
March 14 5:30-7:30 p.m.	Investment SIG, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
March 16 7:00-9:00 p.m.	General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa
June 3 & 4 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.	NVPCUG Used Computer Equipment Sale (location to be announced)
June 10 & 11 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.	Napa County Computers & Electronics Recycling Event, Napa Valley College

Call waiting, Call transfer, Call forwarding, voicemail and three-way calling as part of the basic price.

Now let's look at some of the providers and their services. Skype (www.skype.com) offers a free service that allows you to connect to other Skype users. The software for this can be downloaded from their Web site. It took just a few minutes to install it on my computer. Once you have installed it, you need to setup a call list of other users. So you have to contact people you call frequently and have them install the Skype software. From that point on, it becomes much like instant messaging. If the person you are calling is on-line, you can connect and talk to them. Otherwise, they have no way to know that you are calling. The reverse is also true if they want to call you. The minimum hardware you need for this are speakers connected to your sound card and a microphone. You can also use a headset with a built-in microphone. It is also advisable that you have a broadband connection, either cable or DSL. In my testing of it, once I had a connection, the call was quite clear, with no background static or other problems.

So what do you do if you have Skype and want to call someone who doesn't have Skype? You can get SkypeOut, which allows you to call any phone number anywhere in the world for about 2¢/minute. After you install the SkypeOut software you buy credit on their Internet site which you can then use for your calls. Some reviewers have had sound problems with SkypeOut. I have not tested it.

There are other free services available as well. One is Free World Dialup (www.freeworlddialup.com). This is a quote from their Web site: "FWD allows you to make free phone calls using any broadband connection using devices that follow Internet standards. This can be a

'regular' telephone connected to a packetizer, an IP Phone or any number of free soft-phones (software for your PC or PDA)." In order to use the system you need to download and install the software. Then you obtain a phone number from FWD. The hardware you need is a SIP compatible ATA adapter that you connect to a network router that connects to your modem. You can then connect any telephone to the jack in the ATA adapter. Now you're ready to dial any FWD user anywhere in the world. However, you can not dial a regular PSTN phone from this system without purchasing time from another VoIP provider. The advantage of FWD over Skype is that your computer doesn't have to be on to receive calls. Your phone will ring just as it did when connected to the PSTN phone system.

There is another advantage to FWD. This system uses the Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) standard. This allows FWD users to call others who are not members of FWD but are connected by a different SIP compatible service. Other free services currently using the SIP standard are *IPTEL.org* and *SIP-Phone.com*. Skype does not adhere to the SIP standard.

Now we get to the services that charge a monthly fee. These providers furnish a SIP-compatible ATA adapter, and in some instances the router for your telephone connection. This list includes companies like AT&T (CallVantage), Verizon (VoiceWing), Packet8, VoicePulse and Vonage. Of these, AT&T and Verizon are the most expensive. Several of these providers are preparing wireless units that will allow you to connect through any WiFi hotspot. Vonage has announced that they expect to have a wireless unit available by mid-summer 2005. That means you could make and receive calls while you are on the road. Also, by

taking your ATA adapter with you when you travel, you can make connections through broadband data ports in many hotels and motels.

Of these providers, Vonage has been in the game longest and has a strong reputation for quality. They have two basic plans: (1) \$24.99 for unlimited calling in the U.S. and Canada, and (2) \$14.99 for 500 long-distance minutes. They also offer virtual phone numbers with any area code you prefer. Dialing other numbers in your area code requires just seven digits. You can add a fax line for \$10 per month or toll-free numbers for \$5 per month. With Vonage and these other providers, you can call any PSTN number or numbers on the FWD network. For more details on the specific services provided by these companies I would suggest you check their Web sites.

So what are the drawbacks to VoIP services? First, if your Internet provider has a service outage, then your phone service is also down. Second, if there is a power outage you lose your phone service, unless your system has a battery backup to keep it running. Another disadvantage is that most of these services can't connect to 911. In some cases, you can call 911 after you have provided the service with location information for their files. They need this information so the system will know where to direct the call. However, the 911 operator can't see your name or address and you have to provide that information when you make the call.

In spite of these disadvantages, VoIP usage is rapidly increasing. If you are interested in testing VoIP, I suggest you start with one of the free services. Try it, you may like it.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Computer User Groups brings this article to you.

Ignore The Bait--Don't Get Hooked By Phishing Scams

by Tracy Baker, from *Smart Computing*

You've become accustomed to deleting ridiculous Nigerian money scams and all those spam messages promising to help you lose 50 pounds in five days, but this message looks different; it has the eBay logo and uses the same fonts as eBay's site. It contains links to eBay pages and is professionally written. It's telling you your account has been associated with fraudulent activity and is about to be suspended unless you can provide some personal details to prove that everything is on the up and up.

As official as an e-mail like this looks, don't take the bait. Millions of consumers rely on the Internet to shop, pay bills, and manage their financial accounts, and a new generation of scam artists is using a combination of social engineering and technological savvy to bilk unwary consumers out of their money or steal their identities. This practice is called 'phishing' (short for password harvesting fishing), and although the techniques used in this type of scam are timeless, the Internet has provided phishers with a vast ocean in which they can cast their nets.

Phishing e-mails differ in their specifics, but they all share a few common traits. First, they appear to come from a legitimate company, using the same graphics you'd expect to see at that company's site. Second, they try to create a sense of urgency, telling recipients that their accounts are about to be suspended or are otherwise experiencing major problems. Third, these e-mails contain forms or links to forms where users are supposed to enter personal information, such as an account password or a credit card number. Once you enter the data in the form and click Submit, it is sent to the scammer's computer and he can use it to steal from you.

Phishing scam artists consistently come up with ever-more-elaborate

schemes to ply their illegal trade; but by following a few simple rules, you can play detective and catch them in the act instead of becoming their next victim.

Rule #1: Pay Attention To URLs

URLs (uniform resource locators) are the characters you enter in a browser's address bar to visit a particular site, and a favorite trick among phishing scammers is to make users think they are going to one URL when they really are visiting another URL.

URLs can tell you a lot about the site you are visiting. The URL for our Web site, for example, is <http://www.smartcomputing.com>. The ".com" portion is the top-level domain (also called the domain extension), telling you what type of site it is. For example, ".com" is mainly used for commercial Web sites, whereas ".edu" is for educational institutions and ".org" is for nonprofit organizations. The companies most commonly targeted by phishing scammers use ".com" top-level domains, so if you see a URL such as <http://www.ebay.org> or "<http://www.citibank.edu>" linked to a spam e-mail, it's likely a site set up by a scam artist.

The most important part of the URL, as far as detecting a phishing site is concerned, is the domain name, which is the text to the left of the top-level domain (such as "smartcomputing" in our example). All content at the *Smart Computing* Web site is accessible via the "smartcomputing.com" domain name, so any additional text between the domain name and the top-level domain name should raise a red flag.

For example, a Web page located at "<http://www.smartcomputing.scammer.com>" is located at the domain name "scammer.com," and a page at "[service.com" is actually located at the domain name "customerservice.com," not at "ebay.com." Any text that appears to the left of the domain name is a subdomain associated with the main domain. In the examples we just provided, "smartcomputing" is a subdomain of "scammer.com," and "ebay" is a subdomain of "customerservice.com." Ignore subdomains and focus on the domain name when determining whether a link or URL is legitimate. Hyphens and symbols such as @ also are used to make a phish site's URL look more legitimate, so watch for those, too.](http://www.ebay.customer-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Unfortunately, some scammers have figured out how to use a sophisticated exploit that displays a fake address bar (containing a legitimate-looking address that doesn't arouse suspicion) in a Web browser window, so other steps are necessary to fully protect yourself.

Rule #2: Watch the Padlock

All popular browsers display padlock icons when users visit secure sites; these icons are generally in the lower-right corner of the browser window. When users visit secure sites, or secure portions of sites after they've logged in, the padlock icon appears and the URL in the address bar begins with "https:" instead of the usual "http:" we see. Knowing this, if you ever see "https:" in the address bar but don't see a padlock icon displayed, the page isn't secure, and it's likely you're visiting a phishing site, so don't fill anything out or click any links.

However, even this method isn't foolproof, as scam artists have figured out ways to forge padlock icons, so be sure to follow the other rules we cover for maximum protection.

Rule # 3: Type, Don't Click

The Internet has conditioned us to click hyperlinks to open new pages,

The Windows WUGNET Shareware Hall of Fame

by Bettie Cummings Cook

SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc. *swipcug.apcug.org*

but don't let that habit get the best of you when a seemingly urgent e-mail arrives. One of the main techniques phishing scammers use to lull users into a false sense of security is to put links in an e-mail that look like they point to a legit company site, when they actually point to a phishing site. This is called link masking, and it's easy to spot and avoid if you know what to look for.

Most e-mail applications let users hover a mouse pointer over a link to see a pop-up window displaying the *actual* link. For example, a scammer might send an e-mail that has a "<http://www.paypal.com>" link, but when you place the pointer over the link, the pop-up window reads "<http://www.paypal.phishsite.com>." Of course, you should avoid clicking that link.

Also, most phishing sites use IP (Internet Protocol) addresses (such as 12.39.144.5) instead of domain names, so if you hover the pointer over a link and see a string of numbers, the link probably points to a phishing site. Instead of clicking links in e-mails, type their URLs into your browser's address bar; but only do so if the links use the proper company domain name.

Rule #4: Notice Login Inconsistencies

Some scammers cover their tracks by sending victims to the legitimate company sites after collecting personal information. Common examples of this are phishing sites that ask users to enter user names and passwords they would use to log in at legitimate sites, and then automatically connect users to those sites after collecting their valuable login information.

If you ever attempt to log in to a legitimate account after following a hyperlink in an e-mail, and the Web site rejects your login information even though you typed it correctly, it's likely you've just been scammed. Contact the legitimate company that the phishing scammer pretended to

The Web site of WUGNET is <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/wugnet.msp>. On this site are the Microsoft picks that demonstrate the highest standards available today in shareware for *Windows XP*. Just for the record, freeware is free and shareware is generally free to try, but you are on

represent to let it know what happened, and change your login password immediately.

Rule #5: Protect Bank Account Data at All Costs

It's bad when scammers gain access to your credit card accounts, but at least these accounts are protected to the point where victims are liable for only a maximum of \$50. Debit card and bank accounts often don't have this level of protection, so never divulge bank account information in response to an email.

Rule #6: Keep Personal Info Personal

If you take nothing else away from this article, remember this: Legitimate companies *never* should ask for personal info via e-mail (and if they do, they're not worth doing business with anyway). Never fill out a form via an e-mail, and never blindly follow links embedded in e-mails—no matter how official they appear to be. Scammers rely on input from you to do their work, so by trusting your instincts and never responding to e-mails that ask for personal information, you can force these jerks to find real jobs and *earn* their own money.

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your honor to send the compiler a fee or a contribution. Yes, you can use them as long as you please without sending a nickel for them, but I encourage you to support the persons who unselfishly provide good shareware programs. A number of the programs will develop into large, well-known products or become incorporated into new system programs. To cite a few old examples that did so: *PKZip*, *Brother's Keeper*, *Checkit*, *XTree*, and *TweakUI*. I purchased these as shareware programs a number of years ago for \$5.00 each. To the credit of the shareware compilers, their programs have continued to operate from *Windows 3.1* through *Windows XP*. So, for the most part, they are good investments.

Twenty-five of the best picks for *Windows XP* are featured with links to downloadable sites: everything from utilities to games. I was intrigued by one called *Ink-Saver*. It adjusts the amount of ink flow from cartridge to printer and causes those expensive ink cartridges to last a little longer. Check it out for dependable sources that have MS approval.

Bettie Cummings Cook is Newsletter Editor of the SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc. (SWIPCUG). The above article appeared in the January 2005 issue of the P-See Urgent, SWIPCUG newsletter. Used by permission.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer Users Groups brings this article to you.

Cyber Security in 2005?

by Pim Borman, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

As more and more computer users gain fast, always-on, broadband access to the Internet via cable or ADSL telephone lines, computer security becomes a critical issue. This was convincingly illustrated in an article in *USA Today* (11-30-2004). The paper teamed up with Avantgarde, a tech marketing and design firm, to see what kind of attacks were attracted by variously equipped computers hooked up to a broadband DSL connection. Relatively unprotected computers, wide open to the Internet, underwent attacks at a sustained rate of 340 per hour, or once every 10 seconds on average. These computers consisted of a Dell Windows XP with Service Pack 1, and an Apple Mac X. Most of the attacks were no more than “door knob rattlers” and did not result in actual penetration. Nevertheless, out of 139 thousand attacks in two weeks nine managed to take over the *Windows XP* computer and started to tie it into a larger network of hijacked systems. Another computer, equipped with Windows Small Business Server, underwent 25 thousand attacks in two weeks, 61 per hour on average, of which one managed to take over the system. The Apple computer was not compromised, probably because it uses an operating system not targeted by most intruders.

Computers protected by an active firewall underwent far fewer attacks, from 2 – 4 per hour, because firewalls hide the presence of a computer on the Internet from casual passers-by. These computers used *Windows XP* with Service Pack 2, *Windows XP* with the *ZoneAlarm* firewall, and a Microtel Linspire (Linux-based) computer with a basic firewall in the operating system.

Note that these “honey pot” systems were totally passive. Attacks did not depend on users’ actions, such as visiting infected Web sites or downloading e-mail attachments that

might cause infiltration by worms and viruses. It is also clear that fairly simple protection measures, such as a firewall, thwarted the vast majority of malicious attackers.

The foremost obstacle to achieving a safer Internet is the ignorance and/or indifference of too many computer users, especially those with a broadband connection; but notice that with an attack rate of once every 10 seconds even Internet browsers using a limited telephone connection can be vulnerable!

Here are important safety measures:

- A firewall, stand-alone as in *ZoneAlarm*, or part of a package as in *ZoneAlarm Plus*, *Windows XP SP2*, or *Norton Internet Security* (combined with anti-virus and more). Optimally also a hardware router, even if you don’t need one for a home network, to add additional firewall protection.
- An anti-virus program, if not already included in the firewall software. Norton is good, or you can use a free program such as *AVG* from www.grisoft.com. It is essential to update the virus data files weekly or more often.
- Regular updates of your operating system and Office programs with newly issued patches from the providers (e.g. Microsoft).
- A spyware blocking/removal program such as *Ad-aware* (free) or *Ad-aware Plus* (extra features), or the free *Spybot Search and Destroy*.
- Disconnect from the Internet when not needed, or turn the computer off altogether when not in use for a longer period (use Hibernate with *Windows XP* for faster start-up).
- Use common sense! Don’t trust e-mail attachments unless you expect them. If you have any doubt whatsoever, ask the sender to confirm that it is OK. Even then, be skeptical. Delete obvious chain mail unread.

Knoppix to the Rescue!

Sooner or later something is likely to go wrong with your computer. A nasty virus or spy program may take over and lock you out, or Windows starts acting weird and refuses to be of service any longer. Maybe the *Knoppix* rescue disk can help you to recover your precious data files, at least, and maybe to remove a virus or restore Windows to good health.

Knoppix is the brainchild of Klaus Knopper, a guy who makes it his business to go around fixing peoples’ computers. In doing so he uses a variety of software tools that he carries around on CDs and floppies for use on the affected systems. He also carries a boot CD to start computers that won’t start up because of a nasty virus or other problems. Knopper eventually added his repair tools to this boot CD, running Linux. The CD includes programs to detect peripherals, including networks, USB ports, Internet connections, sound and graphics cards, as well as Open Source programs such as *OpenOffice* and *The Gimp* to make it possible to access and copy text and graphics data on the infected computer. In the spirit of Open Source programming, he invited others to join in the effort. The resulting CD goes way beyond being a technician’s repair tool; with the addition of numerous utilities, games, emulators, sound and graphics programs, the current CD, called *Knoppix*, is a full-fledged Linux distribution for non-Linux geeks, comparable to *Linspire* and *Xandros*. The difference is that the whole program can run from the CD without using the computer drives. Some 1700 MB of programming is contained in compressed form on a single 700 MB CD. The latest version of the program can be downloaded for free or you can order a CD from a variety of vendors for \$5.00 and S/H. Booting the program takes only a few minutes; as many of the essential features of the program as possible are copied to RAM. As a result, the programs run surprisingly fast. The Linux-based

A Scary Future

An Internet passalong, possibly by Rick Card

Operator: Thank you for calling Pizza Hut. May I have your national ID number?

Customer: Hi, I'd like to place an order.

Operator: I must have your NIDN first, sir.

Customer: My National ID Number, yeah, hold on, eh, it's 6102049998-45-54610.

Operator: Thank you Mr. Sheehan. I see you live at 1742 Meadowland Drive, and the phone number is 494-2366. Your office number over at Lincoln Insurance is 745-2302 and your cell number is 266-2566. Which number are you calling from, sir?

Customer: Huh? I'm at home. Where'd you get all this information?

Operator: We're wired into the HSS, sir.

Customer: The HSS, what is that?

Operator: We're wired into the Homeland Security System, sir. This will add only 15 seconds to your ordering time.

Customer: (sighs) Oh well, I'd like to order a couple of your All-Meat Special pizzas.

Operator: I don't think that's a good idea, sir.

Customer: Whaddya mean?

Operator: Sir, your medical records indicate that you've got very high blood pressure and extremely high cholesterol. Your National Health Care provider won't allow such an unhealthy choice.

Customer: What?!?! What do you recommend, then?

Operator: You might try our low-fat Soybean Pizza. I'm sure you'll like it.

Customer: What makes you think I'd like something like that?

Operator: Well, you checked out 'Gourmet Soybean Recipes' from your local library last week, sir. That's why I suggested it.

Customer: All right, all right. Give me two family-sized ones, then.

Operator: That should be plenty for you, your wife and your four kids. Your total is \$49.99.

Customer: Lemme give you my credit card number.

Operator: I'm sorry sir, but I'm afraid you'll have to pay in cash. Your credit card balance is over its limit.

Customer: I'll run over to the ATM and get some cash before your driver gets here.

Operator: That won't work either, sir. Your checking account is overdrawn also.

Customer: Never mind! Just send the pizzas. I'll have the cash. How long will it take?

Operator: It'll be about 45 minutes, sir. If you're in a hurry you might want to pick'em up while you're out getting the cash, but then, carrying pizzas on a motorcycle can be a little awkward.

Customer: Wait! How do you know I ride a cycle?

Operator: It says here you're in arrears on your car payments, so your car got repo'ed. But your Harley's paid for and you just filled the tank yesterday.

Customer: Well, I'll be a ---

Operator: I'd advise watching your language, sir. You've already got a July 4, 2003, conviction for cussing out a cop and another one I see here, in September for contempt at your hearing for cussing at a judge. Oh yes, I see here that you just got out from a 90-day stay in the State Correctional Facility. Is this your first pizza since your return to society?

Customer: (speechless)

Operator: Will there be anything else, sir?

Customer: Yes, I have a coupon for a free Coke.

Operator: I'm sorry sir, but our ad's exclusionary clause prevents us from offering free soda to diabetics. The New Constitution prohibits this. Thank you for calling Pizza Hut.

KDE windows program is a clone of MS Windows and easy to use by non-Linux users.

Next time your computer suddenly goes on the blink, you might be able to continue some work and copy your data to a safe location simply by booting from the *Knoppix* CD-ROM. I have recently received a

review copy of the book *Knoppix Hacks*, by Kyle Rankin, from its publisher (O'Reilly, ISBN 0-596-00787-6, \$29.95, user group member discount available) and I hope soon to discuss more details of this interesting program.

Pim Borman is Web Site Editor of the SW Indiana PC Users Group,

Inc. (SWIPCUG). The above article appeared in the January 2005 issue of the P-See Urgent, SWIPCUG newsletter. Used by permission. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups brings this article to you.

Tech News

By Sue Crane, VP / Editor, Big Bear Computer Club www.bigbearcc.org

IRS partners Intuit, TaxAct and eSmartTax are offering no-cost services to everyone this year. Two additional companies, FreeTaxUSA.com and FileYourTaxes.com, are extending free services to residents of certain U.S. states. The 10 remaining participating companies, including tax giant H&R Block, have no-cost programs for specific demographics, such as people over the age of 60 or members of the military.

Forty states and the District of Columbia are working on a **national Internet sales tax system**. SSTP (Streamlined Sales Tax Project) has issued two requests for bids for software and Web-based networks to track on-line purchase sales tax payments. As currently envisioned by the states, Web merchants would pay nothing for the services; instead, the vendors would take a cut from tax revenues.

EBay and Intel have developed a "**Rethink Initiative**" which seeks to bring together public and private organizations to promote recycling and reuse of old PCs and consumer electronics products. The announcement comes days after the Electronic Waste Recycling Act of 2003 became active in California, requiring consumers to pay an Electronic Waste Recycling Fee for certain devices, including monitors and laptop computers. EBay president and chief executive officer Meg Whitman said, "I would love to try as an industry to come together with market-based solutions so we won't have to face federal and state regulation."

Vonage, the No. 1 Internet phone company, is offering its subscribers a wireless Wi-Fi phone that can make calls over the Internet at homes or at public Wi-Fi hot spots. The phone will let consumers make VoIP calls from any Wi-Fi hot spot. Wi-Fi calls

are essentially free, in contrast to cell phone calls, and customers will plug a regular phone into an adapter linked to a broadband Internet line. Vonage will then turn the calls into data that travel by Internet before being converted back to voice at the other end. Meanwhile, Comcast Corp., the nation's biggest cable company, said Monday it plans to roll out phone service over the Internet to all 21.5 million of its customers within the next year and a half, bringing the on-line technology into the mainstream.

New technology known as **eICU ("Enhanced Intensive Care")** lets physicians miles away from their patients manage health care via cameras and banks of computer screens. The technology is already in use at at least 18 hospital systems nationwide. Whereas traditional health care systems rely on nurses to notice a problem with a patient and relay the information to a doctor, eICU informs the doctor directly. The doctor can check the patient's ventilator, intravenous medication and anything else in the patient's room, and one physician notes: "The camera is such that I can count eyelashes."

If you've bought a plasma TV, you might get one-upped in two years, when TVs using new carbon technology arrive. The new type of flat-panel display will rely on diamonds or carbon nanotubes--two forms of pure carbon--to produce images. Theoretically, these "**field effect displays**," or FEDs, will consume less energy than plasma or liquid crystal display (LCD) TVs, deliver a better picture and even cost less.

RaySat has developed a satellite antenna that turns a moving vehicle into a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot. In addition to the Internet access service, RaySat has developed an antenna that enables cars to receive satellite TV

broadcasts -- an application that may have broader appeal among consumers. RaySat expects to launch its new product in the third quarter of this year.

For people fed up with pecking out text messages on their mobile phone, Samsung Electronics may have an answer. The South Korean electronics maker has developed what it is calling the world's first mobile phones that can convert spoken words into text messages. Its three handsets will be released in the U.S. sometime during the first quarter.

In Asia, cell phone handset makers are already marketing phones with embedded memory devices (a chip or magnetic strip) that can be swiped against credit or debit card readers in much the same way consumers now use plastic, and trials are underway to bring the technology to the U.S. Details are still being worked on important issues such as security. "The phones are exciting, but it's going to be a long time" before a wide base of U.S. merchants and consumers are equipped to use them, says Visa International VP Sue Gordon-Lathrop.

The U.S. Army is sending 18 remote-controlled robotic soldiers called **SWORDS (Special Weapons Observation Reconnaissance Detection Systems)** to Iraq, but they are not the autonomous killer robots of science fiction: a SWORDS robot shoots only when its human operator presses a button (after identifying a target on video shot by the robot's cameras).

Most Identity Theft Occurs Offline. Despite growing concerns over on-line fraud, a new study conducted by the Better Business Bureau and Javelin Research finds that most cases of identity theft can be traced to a lost or stolen wallet or checkbook, rather than vulnerable on-line financial data. Computer crimes make up just 12% of all ID fraud cases in which the origin is known, and half of those are

Sounding the Alarm over Spyware Threats and Anti-spyware Cooperation

by Linda Gonse, Editor, Orange County IBM PC Users' Group

I was outraged when I first learned that two spyware makers, iSearch and iDownload, had tried to stop anti-spyware makers and advocates in February from listing their names to be removed during routine screening, threatening legal action. See <http://www.windowsecrets.com/050224/>

Several sites have received the letters and now face steep legal fees in fighting this brazen and outrageous threat to consumer rights to share information and protect ourselves from being victimized by spyware. See <http://www.edbott.com/weblog/archives/000491.html>

What these spyware makers are saying is that their products are not spyware, although available studies and articles all show that the products are indeed just that—spyware. See <http://www.dslreports.com/shownews/60608>.

But, wait. It gets stranger. Another spyware company, WhenU, actually struck a deal with Aluria to be delisted as spyware. Aluria develops anti-spyware technology used by AOL and several other ISPs affecting millions of users. Aluria actually agreed to remove WhenU from the definitions it uses for *Spyware Eliminator*. WhenU products are now declared "Spyware SAFE" and are left intact on the systems of users, although WhenU's products did not change! What's more, *Ad-aware* and *Pest Patrol* have also stopped listing WhenU's spyware. See <http://www.dslreports.com/shownews/58023>, and <http://tinyurl.com/6b96j>. (Editor's note: WhenU has just been added back into Ad-aware's detection

attributed to spyware that sneaks onto computers and steals private information.

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database.)

Why is this happening? And, what effect will it have on users?

Apparently, spyware vendors, in anticipation of looming anti-spyware laws, are attempting a public-image makeover that includes buying legitimacy from anti-spyware developers. <http://tinyurl.com/4rj9o> The spyware makers are being driven by money. And, anti-spyware makers who cooperate with them do so for the money, as well.

If we cannot learn who makes spyware from advocacy sites, and we cannot rely on anti-spyware makers to list them for removal, we computer users are the ultimate targets/victims for the sleazy programs that install and run on our computers without our knowledge and approval, that affect the performance of our computers and programs, and invade our homes and our privacy, without fear of litigation or removal.

Isn't this where computer users and user groups must band together and pressure anti-spyware companies to keep these perpetrators in their databases? Shouldn't we lend our support to anti-spyware vendors and tell them not to cave into these demands or we won't buy or use their products? Isn't this a good time to write to your legislator? NOW! Before you lose the right to protest and deny these companies access to your computer and private information.

Names and addresses of your elected state and federal officials are at <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/home/>. Find contacts at anti-spyware companies by clicking on links at <https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/ehowes/www/soft6.htm>.

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Tips and Tricks

From *Smart Computing*

- **Use Any Photo as a Background.** Right-click any blank area of the Desktop and choose Properties. Click the Desktop tab, click the Browse button, find the picture you want to use, and choose Open. From the Position drop-down menu, choose Stretch, Center, or Tile; then click OK.

- **Find That Lost File.** Can't find a file? First, make sure you're looking in the spot where you think you're looking. All those folders look alike, so take a step back and recheck. Next make sure you didn't accidentally delete the file or document. Many deleted files remain in the Recycle Bin until you empty it; double-click the Recycle Bin icon on your Desktop, right-click a file, and click Restore to return the item to its original location. Next, try expanding the range of operations. You or someone else might have saved or moved the file to a different location unintentionally. The Windows Find or Search feature, accessible through the Start menu, might be able to track it down. With Search you can type in information, such as the name of the file, or select options based on other characteristics. Note that you can use an asterisk (*) to stand in for multiple unknown letters in file names, so you can search for ~hous*~ if you can't remember whether the file name included the word house, houses, or housing.

- **Avoid dust on Your PDA Screen** Thanks to static electricity, your PDA screen will attract inordinate amounts of dust in a short time. To reduce the amount of this dust, wipe the screen with a static-cling control sheet that you have already sent through the dryer with a load of laundry.

If Moving Can't Be Fun, at Least Make It Painless

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor and Columnist, AARP Computers and Technology Website

It's said that "two moves equals one fire" in terms of inconvenience and turmoil. Fire victims might disagree, but there's no doubt that moves range from disruptive to agonizing. Having just moved -- and, in the process, reengineered my family's computing and Internet setup -- I'll share tips for recreating or transforming technology when moving.

Some aspects of moving are the same whether the trip is cross-country or down the street: packing boxes, dealing with new quarters, etc. But moving locally allows shuttling between old and new sites, avoiding the long-distance "D-Day" moment when everything must be in transit.

I'll focus on technology: computers, Internet issues (ISP/cable/DSL), system backup, telephone (local, long distance, cellular), and electricity. (Just ensure that someone attends to non-tech services such as gas and newspaper delivery!) And remember, just as insurance needs differ, no single move strategy fits everyone. Decide what to do based on your technical skills and how you'll be affected by problems.

It shouldn't be hard to identify what you've got -- computers, accessories, network connections, etc. But listing local dependencies may be challenging. What do you depend on locally? Just as you know your doctor and plumber -- what's your technology support structure? If you use a local ISP (Internet service provider), will it be available after you move? If you rely on neighbors or a local user group for technical assistance, who will replace them? Remember that AARP's technical community at <http://community.aarp.org/rp-computers/start> is always as near as your Web browser!

Make and update to-do lists; take notes on conversations with vendors to track progress and follow up when (all too often) necessary.

First, inventory your technology and set goals. Balance recreating your current setup against improving it. The first choice reduces change and perhaps stress; the second can offer better computing.

Next, identify what you need. If you generally keep a list -- mental or written -- of technology problems (slow computer, fuzzy monitor, pokey Internet connection), moving may be the time to solve them.

Finally -- and most fun -- think about what you want. If you're moving when retiring, you may take up new hobbies. Dealing with music, digital photography, and movies all require more computer power: CPU speed, RAM, and hard drive space. And losing access to the office computer and network can suddenly make an upgrade essential.

Plan your new place's technology; decide where to place your computer (s). Custom space and furniture are nice but not essential. Make sure there are enough electrical outlets and that circuits can handle the load. Locate other connections you'll need such as telephone and cable (TV/Internet). Draw a floorplan and experiment with placing furniture and equipment -- it's much easier to redraw lines than move heavy objects.

When your move is set, deal with utilities at both ends. You may not care when service is terminated, but there's sometimes a wait to establish telephone and cable service. For local moves I've had good results from visiting utility offices rather than making changes by phone: I could look at current products/services literature, discuss options, and read contracts. Consider new service plans -- for cable TV, ISP, cell phone, long-distance calling. Your post-move needs may be different and plans have likely evolved since you last evaluated them.

My wife thinks—likely correctly --

that my first priority after moving is getting on-line. Even if you've arranged broadband service, there may be problems: wiring or account setup may not be done; your PC configuration may not match the new service; etc. If access is essential, establish and test backup dial-access service before moving -- even if it requires a long-distance phone call.

Keep essential materials such as manuals and software install disks handy. Locate a user group where you're going, perhaps join before moving and introduce yourself to group leaders so you have a welcoming committee ready. Solicit recommendations for consultants or service shops, just in case.

If movers will handle your equipment or you're shipping it, make sure it's adequately insured.

If staying in touch is essential, warn people that you're moving and that you'll be off-line and explain how you can be reached (cell phone, new address, etc.). Auto-responders (sending a canned message to people who e-mail you) can be helpful but should be used with caution so they don't respond inappropriately (e.g., to mailing lists to which you're subscribed).

If you're moving locally, set aside fragile equipment or anything you want to keep in sight, such as financial or medical records, and shuttle it to your new place.

For longer moves, allow extra time to pack electronics carefully in original boxes. (Now you know why you keep boxes!) Consider carrying or shipping boxes containing irreplaceable material (one data backup, software CDs, etc.)

Label cables when you disassemble your PC and network and record where they connect. If you're nervous about disassembling your equipment, a local consultant can likely prepare it for shipping. That's better than having

Hackers Are *Not* Crackers

by Berry F. Phillips

Member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City, www.ccokc.org

(continued from page 12)

movers do it! For extra protection, remove your hard drive and pack it in soft clothing you'll take with you. That will doubly protect you: from damage if the computer is dropped or banged, from losing data if the computer is lost or stolen.

Carry a tested backup (software and data) separate from your PC. If you have desktop and laptop computers, you may be able to back the desktop system up on the laptop hard drive.

Once you arrive, even if you're in a hurry, don't neglect power protection -- using at least a surge protector, preferably a UPS (uninterruptible power supply).

Update anything displaying your address such as Web pages and e-mail signature files. Tell tech-involved organizations such as your ISPs and domain name registrars that you've moved so you receive bills and notices.

Now kick back and relax; enjoy your well-organized technology.

This article appeared originally on AARP's Computers and Technology Web site, www.aarp.org/computers. (c) AARP 2005. Permission is granted for reprinting and distribution by nonprofit organizations with text reproduced unchanged and this paragraph included.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups brings this article to you.

The media loves to publish stories about so-called hackers breaking into computer systems and causing destruction. It is time to set the record straight, based on historical truth.

The hacker culture actually started in the 1950s, when computers were huge to say the least, and programming meant connecting wires to electrodes. They did not call themselves hackers, but they were doing the same thing. A hacker may be defined as a person who enjoys exploring the details of programming systems and trying to stretch their capabilities, as opposed to most computer users who prefer to learn only the minimum necessary.

"Hacker" as a term was first adopted as a badge in the 1960s by the culture surrounding the Tech Model Railroad Club (TMRC) and the MIT AI (Artificial Intelligence) Lab. All computer systems that we use today are based on early hacker research. Much of this research was done by people out of love for the subject and the fame they got within the hacker community. One who is "officially" recognized as a hacker by this community gains a certain ego satisfaction. Several famous hackers from the first computer club, the Home Brew Club, were instrumental in founding major computer companies.

Around 1980, a new breed of computer-fed kids evolved in the United

States and Europe who, with easy access to the Internet, learned that they could break into other people's systems. Unfortunately, the media mistakenly called them hackers, and the name sort of stuck. But real hackers do not identify with such illegal security breakers. They call them "crackers." Hackers build things; crackers break them!

While crackers should be prosecuted for their illegal actions, hackers should be recognized by the media, even given an apology by the press! After all, much of the freeware on the Internet comes from hackers.

While it is true that many hackers possess skills that could be used for cracking, they outgrew any desire to do so except for immediate, benign, practical reasons. Contrary to non-hacker belief, there is no thin line between being a hacker and being a cracker.

Hackers built the Internet, maintain Usenet and work in IT computer security, and all Internet-related businesses owe their origin to hackers. We can demonstrate our respect for their considerable IT achievements by not confusing the terms.

My thanks to Philip Tellis for his assistance in gathering facts for this article.

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Smart Computing Tips

- **Don't move:** According to research at IBM, users cause a large percentage of damage to the hard drives by mishandling computers. The specific culprits are moving notebooks or bumping desktops while the computer is still on. If you need to move a computer, suspend it, put it in hibernate mode, or shut it down, then wait 30 seconds to ensure that the hard drives

have spun down before you move it.

- **How To Use A Search Engine** Most search engine users type two- or three-word phrases, and that can be good enough most of the time. But too often, these simple phrase searches yield thousands and thousands of hits—way too many to effectively sort. So familiarize yourself with the advanced search options of your favorite search engine. Don't let the word

"advanced" scare you off: You can learn your way around these search functions in minutes. Just read the help provided by your search site. For instance, on Google you can search for an exact phrase by putting it in quotes, limit hits to a particular language, or just show pages that have been recently updated. (Details about advanced searching on Google are at www.google.com/advanced_search.)

Picasa

By Pim Borman,
SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.
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Google is rapidly adding additional features, including the recently added Google Desktop that lets you search your system drives for files.

The latest free addition is *Picasa 2* (www.picasa.com), an add-in that searches your hard drives for images and arranges them in easy-to-scan folders arranged by date, name, or size. The pictures can be rearranged, combined in albums, made into slide shows, sent via email, make collages, and other manipulations to sort through your collections.

What especially caught my eye were the intuitive image editing tools. Most photo editors I have used are either too limited, or they offer so many features that they become hard to use. Picasa offers effective automatic contrast and color corrections, and even an "I'm Feeling Lucky" button. A "Fill Light" button serves the highly useful but poorly understood exposure-correction function usually called "gamma." If these buttons don't give the desired effect, there are Tuning and Effects buttons to further optimize your pictures.

Picasa leaves your stored images unchanged. Edited images must be "saved as a copy" or by "exporting" them to another location. I finally found out about that after spending quite some time looking in vain for the usual "save as..." menu item. Some day Google may be the Wal-Mart of desktop programs, offering one-stop universal functionality. Microsoft, Yahoo, and the other software moguls are warily watching its progress.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups brings this article to you.

More Tips from Smart Computing

- **How can I reinstall *Internet Explorer*?** At some point, you may have to reinstall *Internet Explorer* or *Outlook Express* because of damaged or missing files. If there is a newer version of IE available, you are probably better off downloading the latest version from Microsoft. However, if you are already running the most recent version and need to reinstall the software, you can do so in Win2000/XP/Server 2003 using SFC (System File Checker). Open the Start menu, click Run, type `sfc/scannow` in the Open field, and then click OK. Windows will then prompt you to insert the installation CD for your operating system in order to replace certain files. Once you insert the Win XP CD, click Retry to continue.

- **How to Use a Search Engine.** Most search engine users type two- or three-word phrases, and that can be good enough most of the time. But too often, these simple phrase searches yield thousands and thousands of hits—way too many to effectively sort. So familiarize yourself with the advanced search options of your favorite search engine. Don't let the word "advanced" scare you off: You can learn your way around these search functions in minutes. Just read the help provided by your search site. For instance, on Google you can search for an exact phrase by putting it in quotes, limit hits to a particular language, or just show pages that have been recently updated. (Details about advanced searching on Google are at www.google.com/advanced_search.)

- **How Often to Back_Up?** Ask yourself how much information you could bear to lose. That's how often you should back up your data. If you use your computer to create irreplaceable data files (such as lengthy word processing documents), you may want daily backups of these important files. If other members of your household have access to your computer, and your important data files, you may want to increase the frequency of your backups. If you use your PC primarily for cruising the Internet or sending email, or if you use it on an infrequent basis, a weekly or even monthly backup may be sufficient. If you maintain original company data files (client reports, letters, and so on) at home, or you run a small business from your computer, backups are especially important. The UK's Department of Trade and Industry did a study recently in which it found that 70% of companies experiencing a major data loss go out of business within a year. Another consideration is whether you are a paper pusher. If you do such things as print out important email messages or make hard copies of reports often, your paper backups will give you some protection against the loss of important data.

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Remember that the Napa County Computer and Electronics Recycling Event is coming June 10 and 11 at the Napa Valley College Napa Campus. Get ready to clear out the old and make room for the new!

Random Acts of Literacy

by Sherry Zorzi, APCUG Advisor, Director, Cajun Clickers Computer Club www.cajunclickers.org

You may find one in your doctor's waiting room or at the hairdresser's. You may spot one in a shopping cart in the parking lot at Winn Dixie or on a chair at Starbucks. You may come upon one in the break room at work or even on a bench in the park.

A book. It could be paperback or hardback. It could be well-thumbed or brand-new. It sports a stick-on label with a cartoon of a jaunty running book with stick-figure arms and legs. "I'm not lost; I'm traveling. Take me home," the label reads.

Welcome to the **BookCrossing** phenomenon. It's operating quietly here in the Baton Rouge area, it's free, it's as anonymous as you want it to be, and it's great fun.

Thanks to a unique Web site started in April 2001, the invented term "bookcrossing" has become so mainstream that it made it into the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* by August 2004: "*Bookcrossing, n., the practice of leaving a book in a public place to be picked up and read by others, who then do likewise.*"

Avid reader Ron Hornbaker, a Web designer in Kansas City, was intrigued by Web sites like *Where's George*, which tracks U.S. currency by serial number, and wondered

what else would be fun to track. Thus was born *BookCrossing.com* and the rest is rapidly becoming history.

The basics of bookcrossing are, appropriately, the "3 R's." Read, register and release. *Read* a good book. *Register* it at *BookCrossing.com*. When you register the book, you'll get a unique ID number for the book. You can write an online journal entry for the book, a review, if you like. Stick a label on the book with the ID number and the address of the Web site. *Release* the book for someone else to find and read. You can give it directly to a friend, mail it to another bookcrosser who has expressed interest in that book, or (my favorite!) just leave it in a public place for someone else to find.

When you find a released book, visit the Web site and enter the ID number of the book. You can do this anonymously if you wish. You'll have an opportunity to make your own journal entry, in which you can describe where you found it and even review the book yourself. If you log the book, the releaser will know when and where the book was found and you'll both be able to track future finds as well.

More than 300,000 bookcrossers worldwide have registered almost

two million books! Bookcrossers live in 150 different countries. There are almost 500 bookcrossers in the Baton Rouge area, so you just might happen upon one of our releases in a neighborhood near you.

At the *BookCrossing.com* Web site, you can click a link to "go hunting" for books released in your area within the last 30 days that have not yet been reported found. As of this writing, there are 39 books in Baton Rouge waiting to be found!

There is also an on-line community at the Web site, with discussion forums ranging from general chit-chat to serious talk about books.

Do you really think you'll ever reread your collection of paperback James Lee Burke mysteries? Or all those diet books you've collected? What are you hoarding them for? Why not make someone else's day? If you love your books, set them free!

Sherry Zorzi is a Director of Cajun Clickers Computer Club and host of "The Cajun Clickers Computer Show" heard every Saturday morning at 9 a.m. on WJBO Radio in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups brings this article to you.

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