COMPUTER NEWS

Volume 24, No. 6   **June 2007**

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group has served novice and experienced computer users since 1983. Through its monthly meetings, newsletters, online forum, special interest groups, mentor program and community involvement, it has helped educate people of all ages. The NVPCUG provides opportunities for people to find friends who share common interests and experiences. Through its Computers-to-Schools program, members refurbish used computer equipment for donation to local schools. Since January 2003 the NVPCUG has donated 660 computers and 139 printers. Additional equipment has been given to charitable non-profit organizations and to disadvantaged individuals.

At June 20 Meeting, Ergonomics Presentation

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, June 20, 7:00-9:00 P.M., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California

The meeting begins with Random Access , an open-floor question-and-answer period during which attendees can ask questions about computers and computer-related problems and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees. Questions may be submit before the meeting by emailing them to Random Access moderator **Jerry Brown** at **Questions@nvpcug.org**.

During the Computer Tutor session which will follow, **Jeff Solomon** will discuss what Usenet Newsgroups are and demonstrate how to access, view and participate in Usenet Newsgroups using *Windows Outlook Express* and *Mozilla Thunderbird*.

Our main presentation will be given by Ronald Kleist, president of SmartMotion Technology, Inc. He will be talking to us about ergonomics. Ronald comes to us with 35 years experience bringing new technologies to market for market leaders such as *Instapak/SealedAir Corporation, Genzyme, Sprint, OCLI/JDSUniphase*. The last 10 years have been devoted to ergonomics and include development of mechanisms and finished products that support natural human motion such as SwingSeat and Clickit!. He is also involved in a family trading company started more than 65 years ago in Asia and travels there often.

The door prize will be provided by the presenter. He will bring a clamp-on version of the 4-ARM Tray (List Price $129^{00}). **Note:** Members are eligible for the drawing and if you want to be included in the drawing, make it a point to attend this months meeting. Your name might be the one that is drawn!

View his websites at **http://www.swingseat.com/** and **http://www.ergonomixx.com/** for more details. The site even includes a short video demonstrating how easy it is to assemble and use the swingseat.

Could you use some practical information that would help you make better use of your computer? Come to this meeting! Guests are always welcome. Admission is always free.

Intersted in becoming a member? See page 14 for application information.

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.

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

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

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

By Ron Dack, president, **President@nvpcug.org,**
http://www.nvpcug.org/

June already and the waiting goes on. What the h#### is he talking about, you ask? The final ruling from the IRS on our non-profit status is the answer. Our paperwork was submitted at the end of March and all appeared to be in order and it looked like a "slam dunk" to me. We did receive a letter from the IRS saying they had received our documentation and will be getting back to us in the next "120 days". That letter came at the end of April or beginning of May. In the meantime we sit in limbo. Well not quite.

Our public service project **Computers to Schools** continues on with more and more computer systems being donated to schools and other non-profit organizations around the area.

We still are participating in the **Napa City/County Electronics Waste Recycling** event on June 8th and 9th. By the way if you haven't signed up to help and you can help please contact our Recycle Coordinator **Ken Manfree** at **Recycler@nvpcug.org** to help with traffic control and survey taking. Or contact our Computers to Schools Coordinator **Orion E. Hill** at **CTS@nvpcug.org** to help sort through equipment to find needed computers and peripheral devices needed for the CTS program. It is never too late to help out.

I have finally finished setting up the **NVPCUG-DISCOUNT** list on **Yahoo Groups** and the first discount e-mail has been sent to the list. If you received an e-mail from me welcoming you to this list that means you will be receiving discount offers that have been sent to us from venders of software and hardware. To some of you when these e-mails arrive they may seem like the dreaded "SPAM" but these are legitimate offers made through our membership in the **Association** of **Personal Computer User Groups** (**APCUG**). If you choose not to receive these offers you can e-mail me at my **Webmaster@nvpcug.org** address or click on the unsubscribe link included in each message. Only **Susy Ball** & I will be able to post/send messages to this list so no outside spammer can post a message. To be included on this list you must be a current dues paying member of the **NVPCUG.**

Our June general meeting should be a must attend situation for those of you like me that spend way to much time sitting at our computers and paying with aches and pains for doing so. As I get older ergonomics takes on a whole new meaning for me. I hope I am over this bug I have and can attend, so here is hopping to see each of you on June 20th at the **Senior Activity Center** 7PM.

Take care,
Ron

NVPCUG General Meetings
Held the third Wednesday of each month, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.
Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa

NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer, contact Orion Hill, (707) 252-0637
June 20	6:30-9:00 p.m.	NVPCUG General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa
June 6	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Board of Directors meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
June 11	5:30-7:30 p.m.	Investors SIG meeting, Jerry Brown's home, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
June 13	7:00-8:30 p.m.	Digital Photography SIG meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
June 14	6:30-8:30 p.m.	Macintosh SIG meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa
July 18	6:30-9:00 p.m.	NVPCUG General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group
Officers for 2007

Board of Directors

President	Ron Dack		President@nvpcug.org
Vice President	Jerry Brown	254-9607	VicePresident@nvpcug.org
Secretary	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Secretary@nvpcug.org
Treasurer	Roy Wagner	253-2721	Treasurer@nvpcug.org

Other Directors: Susy Ball, Jim Gillespie**,** Bernhard Krevet, Ken Manfree, Dick Peterson, Dianne Prior, Bob Simmerman, Kathy Slavens, Jeff Solomon, Dean Unruh

Appointed Officers

Computer Recycling Coordinator
Ken Manfree 224-3722 Recycler@nvpcug.org

Computer Tutor Coordinator
Jeff Solomon Tutor@nvpcug.org

Computers-to-Schools Program Coordinator
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Facility Arrangements Coordinator
Dianne Prior 252-1506 Facility@nvpcug.org

Greeter Coordinator
Bob Simmerman 259-6113 Greeter@nvpcug.org

Librarian
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Newsletter Editor
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Product Review CoCoordinator
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Programs Director
Susy Ball 337-3998 Programs@nvpcug.org

Publicity Director
Ron Dack Publicity@nvpcug.org

Random Access Moderator
Jerry Brown 254-9607 Questions@nvpcug.org

Special Projects Director
Jeff Solomon Projects@nvpcug.org

Webmaster
Ron Dack Webmaster@nvpcug.org

• All telephone numbers are in Area Code 707.

Backing up a computer -
Cloning VS Imaging

By Al Edmister, member of the NVPCUG, www.nvpcug.org, AEinNapa@aol.com

Backing up your computer has always been an important and sometimes confusing subject. As most people know by now backing up on the same HD only helps when the main file gets corrupted which really doesn't happen very often. It is of no help when an HD fails. I've had two fail. The first failure was soon after I bought the machine; the HD was defective. The manufacturer replaced it and, luckily, files could be copied. But all programs had to be reinstalled. The second time the HD motor quit. That was hard to find; HD motors are really quiet and who would think to put ones head into the box to listen. Anyway all was lost. Well, not all, because I had started keeping all my files backed up on a second internal HD so I had everything but an OS and programs. I bought a new HD and installed an OS and programs again then copied back my files. Very time consuming. There had to be a better way should failure happen again.

At one time I thought CD-RWs & 'READ ONLY' disks would be the answer. In fact, I'm using this method with another computer which doesn't get much action or have big files. And it doesn't have space for a 2nd HD. To clinch it the UBS is a 1 which makes for slow transfers of big files. But, with not many transfers, no music or games, to make, a CD-RW system works fine for us as we only need to up date them occasionally and we keep photos on a remote computer and read only disks anyway.

I heard about RAID and found out that it requires a card on the mother board and two (2) or more HDs depending on the array. RAID has multiple HDs all running containing the same every thing; if one drive fails then, without shutting down, you remove & replace it with a clean drive and RAID recreates from the remaining drives. No downtime is the key advantage here. It can get expensive.
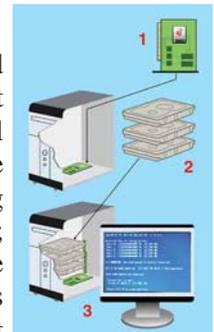
There's all kinds of RAID arrays. One of them is with 2 HDs & is called "striping" where info is written alternately to the disks. Makes for much faster read & write & is really helpful when doing videos.

I also heard about Zip drives. Never used them but I think they came into use before there was UB 2 and before large HDs. A Zip drive is removable and contains compressed files. It is handy not only for same computer back up and additional storage but as a system to transfer files from one computer to another.

But you can't get a 'full' back up.

That's when I heard about cloning and imaging. Cloning of an HD vs Imaging it had not been settled, at least not for me, until recently. The following may not be everybody's take but it works for me. Cloning is making an exact, complete, bootable copy; imaging is making a compressed bootable copy where the files are compressed versions of the original in a dedicated file format. It can then be used to create a working duplicate of the original on a blank HD disk. The clone or image can be externally USB connected or internal. A clone takes up less space on a disk than the original as does an image but more space is need for an image, at least when using True Image ! ver. 10.0 by *Acronis* (http://www.acronis.com/), because each time you do a back up it is what they call an incremental back up or a 'slice' and needs it own space. Programs like True Image can keep you automatically up dated on a scheduled basis or you can do an update when you feel it's necessary and you have the time. Working on imaged files might be possible but I have no idea how. They are "just there" for use in recreating an HD.

But I wanted a duplicate, bootable HD running as a D drive in case my C drive fails. That is, I want a clone of my HD not a image. I already had and keep via "save as" all my files on my D drive. I mean all! But, I did not have the OS or programs on it. Also, I wanted to switch D & C as disk now in D is bigger and better suited to be in the C position where I can put large temporary files. I have no need of partioning, so neither drive is partitioned.

I tried Casper XP by *Future Systems Solutions* (http://www.fssdev.com/), a really good cloning program. Unfortunately for me, there is a conflict with the way Casper works & something in my computer that prevents it from functioning completely. This very likely is an isolated problem; but still, even with Casper's built in history & status utilities I, & their tech, could not find it. I was impressed with their tech guy. I got prompt answers and personal help. He even called me the first morning after I had emailed a help request and I have his direct line number. Emailing the self-generated reports was easy and we were able to remove some old W98 fragments. But the conflict remained. We gave up. I gave my copy of Casper to Diane Prior.

I then went to True Image 10.0, which, at first I thought only did imaging. I gave it a try imaging my C drive to an external USB connected H drive. That took seven hours and I have yet to figure out the restore process works because their restore page doesn't use the terms "source" & destination" but something obscure to me. Anyway I have an image on a removable drive ready if I should need it.

Note: In addition to the three products I used were Casper Xp, Maxtor & the one by Acronis, but you can find several additional back up products by doing a *GOOGLE* search for backup programs. Among the 10,000.000+ entries on the words backup programs, I was reminded that Windows Backup System (part of XP) and Norton Ghost are both backup program available.

For the next part, I wanted a cloned back up running as a second HD as I intend to keep using "save as" as I go along rather than wait for a scheduled time. My work is important to me and even losing a few minutes of effort is not acceptable. I also wanted a bootable 2nd HD fully backed up (OS, all programs, settings as well as files) in case my C drive failed. Tucked away in True Image 10.0 is a button to go to clone, any disk to any disk. True Image 10.0 did the job and in less than an hour I had moved over 30 GB of OS, programs and files to a bootable drive.

I opened up my computer case; switched C & D and turned on the power. The cloned drive (old D) came up as if it were always there as a C drive. Everything was exactly as I had left it even the partially filled Recycle Bin. Great, now for checking out the drive in D, which now held my old C drive. No drive could be found. It just wasn't there. I opened the computer & checked the connections & pining; they were fine. I then went to **www.techguy.com** with the problem. Back came a reply to go to disk manager and send a screen shot. While there I saw that the drive had not been assigned a letter. Which I thought XP did automatically. I entered the letter D and went back to see what had happened. I was in business. All drives function as intended. I was as happy as a mosquito in a blood bank.

The future might be in flash drives already available as thumb or flash gizmos. They are getting bigger, over 2GB ones are available, and are great for transferring files. Hang one around your neck on a lanyard or just stick one in your pocket, these drives are smaller than a disposable cigarette lighter, so they travel well. No moving parts is a huge advantage as there's no mechanism to fail. Internal HDs might eventually be made similar to flash type drives. But before this can happen, they will have to be over 200GB to take the market.

There is a new wrinkle to cloning an HD that I just discovered and used. My 'new' computer, while a definite upgrade in speed, has space for only one HD which was an 80GB. That is actually big enough for my purposes but I wanted a second bootable HD for back up even though I'll have to run it as an external drive in a USB port. Therfore, recently I bought a 160GB Maxtor drive.

It came with the usual installation disk, but it included a feature I wasn't aware of until opening it. I put the drive into my external drive holder, plugged everything in and began with the configure then the disk copy. Forty minutes later, I had a cloned disk which I then put in my computer pinned as master and I am up and running again. This time it is on a 160GB (120GB available) and I have the old 80GB HD as a bootable HD in the external case as back up.

Note: *Additional programs for backup, security, the Internet and disk organization can be purchased by user group members from (http://www.ugr.com/).*
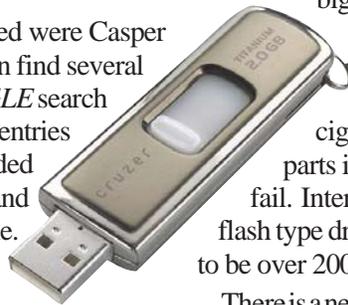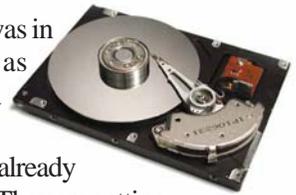
Secure Your PC

An Antispyware How-To Guide

At this very moment, the latest spyware threat may be silently slicing through your computer's security defenses, infecting your PC with pop-up ads or programs designed to steal your passwords and other sensitive information.

With thousands of spyware threats on the Web, it is important that you know how to detect and remove these pests from your PC. Over the past few years, spyware removal has gone from a technical nightmare to a simple, automated process thanks to the multitude of antispyware applications in the marketplace today.

But before you decide to purchase an off-the-shelf product, you might be surprised to know that there are free, easy-to-use programs offered on the Internet that will remove these threats from your computer. While there are many programs available to remove spyware with ease, there are two applications in particular that stand out as safe, secure programs to clean hidden spyware from your PC.

Lavasoft's Ad-Aware (**www.lavasoft.com**) and Patrick M. Kolla's Spybot Search & Destroy (**www.safer-networking.org**) are both excellent, free applications for removing spyware. While each application accomplishes similar goals, they are slightly different in how they update and how they scan for and remove threats. In this article, we'll show you step-by-step how to install each application and use it to remove any spyware that may be sneaking around on your hard drive.

Ad-Aware SE Personal

More than 231 million users have downloaded Lavasoft's Ad-Aware to clean spyware from their PCs. Ad-Aware runs on all versions of Windows from Windows 98 through Windows Vista Ultimate. It is also compatible with all major antivirus applications and can be used in conjunction with other spyware programs.

You can download Ad-Aware by visiting **www.lavasoft.com**. Go to the Products section, select Ad-Aware SE Personal, and click the Download link. You will be redirected to **www.download.com** to obtain the free download.

Once you have downloaded the installation file to your computer, open it to begin the installation process. The installation wizard is fairly straightforward, requiring you to accept the terms of use before you continue. Click the Next button through a series of screens. On the final installation screen, click the Finish button. The Ad-Aware help file will open, an update will automatically occur, and a system scan will begin.

The Ad-Aware Scanning Results screen gives you a summary of the items found on your computer and lets you manually select which items to remove.

The Ad-Aware Scanning Results screen gives you a summary of the items found on your computer and lets you manually select which items to remove.

The time required for the full-system scan will vary based on the size of your hard drive and the number of files stored on it. Once the scan completes, click the Next button to see what Ad-Aware found on your computer.

The Scanning Results screen shows each infection that was found on your computer. You can use the associated checkboxes to select which items to remove. All checkboxes are blank by default, but we recommend selecting every checkbox to remove all existing threats. To do so, you can select each checkbox individually, or you can simply right-click the list of critical objects and choose Select All Objects from the context menu.

Click Next to begin the automated removal process. Ad-Aware will begin removing the infections and will display a progress bar to indicate how much work remains to clean your PC. After the progress bar reaches 100%, you will either be returned to the original Ad-Aware start screen, or you may receive a dialog box informing you that some infections could not be removed. It will ask you if you would like these infections removed the next time your PC is rebooted. We recommend you select Yes and then reboot your PC.

After the reboot, Ad-Aware will load automatically, and you will need to run another full-system scan. The process you went through with the first scan repeats, and a new Scanning Results screen is displayed. After the removal is complete and you exit Ad-Aware, your system will continue to boot normally.

Because an antispyware program is only as good as its latest update, we recommend you regularly check for updates before you start a new scan. To manually check for updates, launch the Ad-Aware program by double-clicking the icon on your Desktop. Once the program is loaded, click the blue Check For Updates Now link. When the WebUpdate box appears, click the Connect button to start the update. (You must be connected to the Internet to perform an update.)

If there are new definitions available, you will see another window with an OK button. Click the OK button to download the updates. After the download completes, click the Finish button. If no updates are available, you will see a window telling you that there are no updated components available. If you see this window, click OK because you already have the most recent updates.

Ad-Aware SE Personal does not offer real-time protection, so spyware threats are removed only when you run a manual scan. Lavasoft has commercial versions of Ad-Aware that offer real-time detection and removal available on its Web site starting at $26.95.

Spybot Search & Destroy

Spybot Search & Destroy is a pioneer in the antispyware field. Although the software has fewer downloads than Ad-Aware, it does have a different interface that some users may find slightly easier to use.

While Spybot S&D runs on all versions of Windows from Win98 through Windows Vista Ultimate, users installing Norton AntiVirus may be asked to remove Spybot S&D, citing compatibility issues. Our tests indicate that reinstalling Spybot S&D after installing Norton AntiVirus has no ill effects on either application.

Spybot S&D also has a wizard interface that makes installing and configuring the application easy for first-time users. After you download and run the installation file from the Spybot S&D Web site, you will click through a series of Next buttons. You will be required to accept the terms of use, and then the installation will continue.

Once the installation completes, Spybot S&D should automatically open to its configuration wizard. This wizard will allow you to back up your Windows Registry and check for and download updates and install them.

After you have backed up your Registry and clicked the Next button, you can click Check For Updates in the configuration wizard. A new Spybot S&D window will appear showing you the latest updates available for download. The Spybot S&D updates interface is more complex than the Ad-Aware interface, so it is important that you select each checkbox to the left of each update to ensure you have

everything you need to complete a scan of your PC. After selecting all of the checkboxes, click Download Updates.

After the updates have downloaded and installed successfully, click the Finish button to automatically launch Spybot S&D. Click the Check For Problems button and the scan will begin. Critical items that are discovered will appear in red in the results window as the scan progresses. You may notice some green items in the list, as well. These items represent usage tracks, and are not spyware by definition. You can remove them to protect your privacy or leave them so Windows and other programs can try to predict what you will want to open next, etc.

Once the scan is complete, you will be able to remove the items that Spybot S&D discovered. Unlike Ad-Aware, items in Spybot S&D are automatically chosen for you, so you do not have to select each item manually for removal. However, if you want to see for yourself what each selected item is, you can click the entry and a pop-up window will display a description of that item. Simply click the Fix Selected Problems button to remove the detected spyware from your PC.

As with Ad-Aware, there will be times that Spybot S&D is unable to remove a particular infection without rebooting first. If you receive a message that says an item needs to be removed after reboot, click Yes and reboot your computer. Spybot S&D will load first and will automatically initiate a scan. When the scan completes, simply click the Fix Selected Problems button to repair the infection.

There is no real-time protection available with Spybot S&D, and there are no commercial versions of Spybot S&D that offer increased functionality. The makers of Spybot S&D accept donations from satisfied customers on their Web site and let you "decide if and how much it is worth to you." (We recommend that, if you like Spybot S&D, you throw a little money in the pot. Your donations help shareware developers to continue providing good software.)

Affordable & Effective

With tens of thousands of existing spyware infections on the Web today and new ones popping up by the hour, it is more important than ever that you take the steps necessary to protect your PC against online assaults.

Luckily, free tools such as Ad-Aware and Spybot S&D offer affordable protection that effectively removes almost all spyware infections with little or no technical knowledge required. ∎

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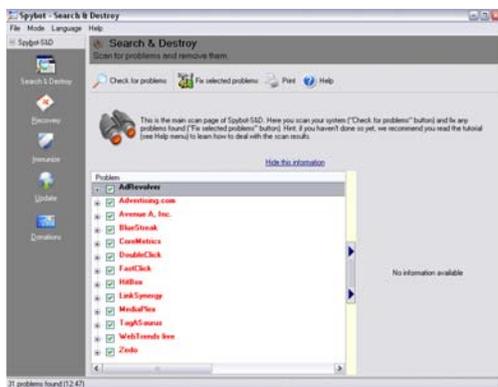
Finding Ghosts In Your Computer

**By Mike Morris, Editor, Front Range PC Users Group, http://www.frpcug.org, twriterext@gmail.com**

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

You think I am kidding? The Microsoft Knowledgebase article on this subject refers to "…"ghosted" devices…" and "Phantom devices…."

Before we get started with an explanation, four facts need to be identified:

1. I owe a thank you to fellow Front Range PC Users Group member Howard Norlin for suggesting this article.

2. This article is based on the Microsoft Knowledgebase Article ID 315539 for Windows XP Home and Professional. Connect to **http://support.microsoft.com/search/** to locate the article. Enter the article number, 315539, into the search field and GO. The article has the long title of: "Device Manager does not display devices that are not connected to the Windows XP-based computer."

3. Under the "STATUS" heading of this article, you will find this statement: "This behavior is by design." *[Note: that means that "(t)his behavior…" is a feature, not a bug].*

4. Yes, I am aware of the famous movie about finding and destroying ghosts. Even I am aware of that movie and I haven't been to a movie in a theater in decades. I decided not to use the movie title in this article in order to avoid any potential copyright conflict.

The Device Manager feature in Windows can be used for several purposes. Perhaps one of the best known uses is troubleshooting. Here is one method of obtaining access to Device Manager, using a series of mouse clicks:
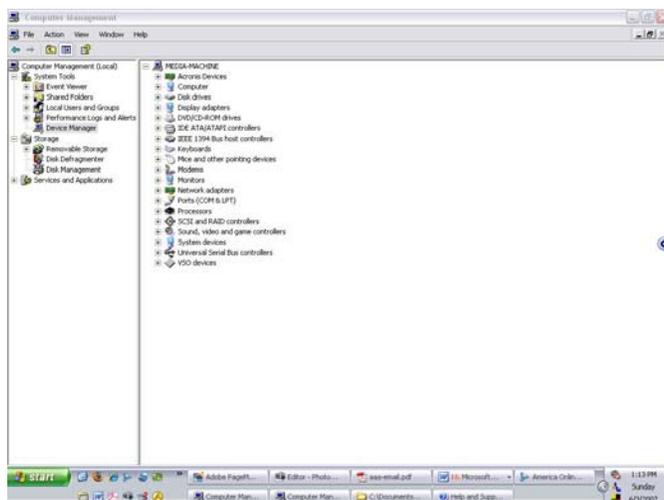
Click on Start/Click on Control Panel/Double click on Administrative Tools/Double click on Computer Management. Then, under System Tools, click on Device Manager. A list of device categories is displayed.

NVPCUG Editor's Note: *If this does not work to get to Computer Management , go to Help and Support and type Administrative Tools, then go to Suggested Topics, Overviews, Articles and Tutorials, and finally Using Computer Management.*

It may not be obvious at first glance, but not everything is displayed that you might expect. On the Computer Management Menu Bar, click on View, then on "Show
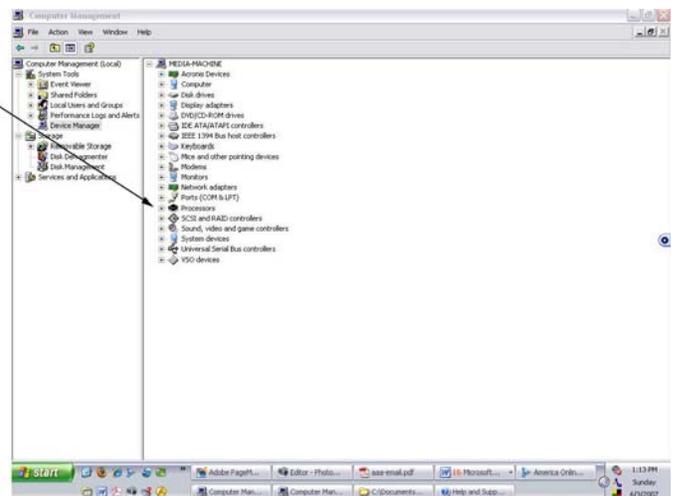
hidden devices." Examine the result:

Look carefully, and you will see the "Printers" category has been added.

One may speculate—and debate—why the printer category is classified as a "hidden" device. The point is, selecting the "Show hidden devices" option still does NOT provide a complete list of hardware or software items that are—or have been—connected to the computer. That result is the origin of the phrase "ghosted devices."

Why should you care?

Perhaps for the majority of users, knowledge of this issue is not critical. However, as mentioned earlier, Device Manager can be used as a troubleshooting aid. For example, if I click on the + sign to the left of Disk Drives listed in the right panel of Device Manager, and then double click on the device displayed, a device-specific window is displayed.

The window offers several options for troubleshooting a malfunctioning device.

There is another type of "ghost' revealed when using the procedure described in the Microsoft article. If you have been using your computer for any reasonable length of time, the probability is high that you have installed/uninstalled hardware and software since the original purchase. Using the "show_non_present_devices" command will reveal leftover drivers that were not (but should have been) removed during the uninstall process—"ghosts" hiding in your computer.

It is time to answer the two questions I am certain everybody has:

- · **Q:** Did I try the procedure?
- · **A:** Yes.
- · **Q:** Did I find any "ghosts"?
- · **A:** Yes. I found a driver from a virus protection software package I uninstalled a long time ago. It was listed under the "Non-Plug and Play Drivers" category.

I wonder if I can now join the ranks of "Ghost B_____." There—I (almost) said it. ∎

If the malfunctioning device is not listed when the "Show hidden devices" option is selected, it is time to use the procedure described in the article 315539. Note that the article makes reference to USB devices and docking stations for laptop computers.

St. Helena School District Grateful for Computer Equipment Donations

The **St. Helena Unified School District Board of Education** at its May 17 meeting formally thanked the Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group for our group's contributions of refurbished computer equipment and funds to the district's schools and recognized **Orion E. Hill**, the coordinator of our group's Computers-to-Schools program, for his leadership. SHUSD Assistant Superintendent **Robert Haley** and SHUSD Network Specialist **Steven McElroy** noted the importance of our donations, which greatly benefit students. Since April 2005 our group has donated 97 multimedia computers — the majority with Intel Pentium 4 processors and only four years old — as well as monitors, printers, and other computer peripherals. Last March our group provided $1,072 to defray the licensing costs of essential application software for some of the computers.

In accepting the school district's certificate of appreciation, Orion highlighted the teamwork of the more than two dozen Computers-to-Schools program volunteers who have devoted thousands of hours to refurbishing reusable computer equipment. The equipment has been given to our group by Napa County businesses, government agencies, and individuals or collected at local computer and electronics recycling events.

Orion E. Hill (left) accepts Robert Haley's thanks while Steven McElroy looks on.

Since the launch of our Computers-to-Schools program in September 2002, the NVPCUG has donated 660 refurbished computers and 139 refurbished printers to public schools throughout Napa County. Additional equipment has been donated to not-for-profit organizations or given to disadvantaged adults and students. More equipment is now being prepared for donation. ∎

The Top 25 Web Hoaxes and Pranks

These online spoofs and shams have made the rounds on Web sites and through e-mail. Perhaps you even believed one or two of them yourself.

By Steve Bass, PC World Columnist and Author, http://www.pcworld.com/, Stevebass(at)earthlink.net

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

Though some of these deceptions originated years ago, the originals—and dozens of variants—continue to make the rounds. If you keep a patient vigil over your e-mail, you too may eventually spot a message urging you to FORWARD THIS TO EVERYONE YOU KNOW!!! And if you haven't had enough when you finish reading this article, take a hoax test at the Museum of Hoaxes, and then hop over to Snopes, the premier myth-dispelling site for coverage of zillions of other falsifications.

Hoaxes 1 Through 5

From the supposed last photo taken at the top of the World Trade Center to the endlessly revised request for assistance from a Nigerian functionary, here are our top five Web and e-mail hoaxes.

1. The Accidental Tourist (2001)

Quite possibly the most famous hoax picture ever, this gruesome idea of a joke traveled around the Web and made a grand tour of e-mail inboxes everywhere soon after the tragedy of September 11. It depicts a tourist standing on the observation deck of one of the World Trade Center towers, unknowingly posing for a picture as an American Airlines plane approaches in the background.

At first glance it appears to be real, but if you examine certain details, you'll see that it's a craftily modified image. For starters, the plane that struck the WTC was a wide-body Boeing 767; the one in the picture is a smaller 757. The approach of the plane in the picture is from the north, yet the building it would have hit—the North tower—didn't have an outdoor observation deck. Furthermore, the South tower's outdoor deck didn't open until 9:30 a.m. on weekdays, more than half an hour after the first plane struck the WTC. The picture is a hoax, through and through—and not a particularly amusing one, under the circumstances.

Image courtesy of Snopes.com

2. Sick Kid Needs Your Help (1989)

This gem had its roots in reality. It all began in 1989, when nine-year-old cancer patient Craig Shergold thought of a way to achieve his dream of getting into the Guinness Book of World Records. Craig asked people to send greeting cards, and boy, did they. By 1991, 33 million greeting cards had been sent, far surpassing the prior record. Ironically, however, the Guinness World Records site doesn't contain any mention of Craig Sherwood or a "most greeting cards received" record, presumably because the fine folks at the site don't want to encourage anyone to try to break his mark. (Astonishingly, Guinness doesn't have an entry for world's stoutest person, either, but it does honor the World's Largest Tankard of Beer.)

Fortunately, doctors succeeded in removing the tumor, and Craig is now a healthy adult, but his appeal for cards has turned into the hoax that won't die. Variations on the theme include a sick girl dying of cancer, and a little boy with leukemia whose dying wish is to start an eternal chain letter. A recent iteration tells a tragic tale of a girl who supposedly was horribly burned in a fire at WalMart, and then claims that AOL will pay all of her medical bills if only if you forward this e-mail to EVERYONE YOU KNOW!!! Okay, enough already.

Image courtesy of Snopes.com

3. Bill Gates Money Giveaway (1997)

No, it's true. I thought it was a scam, but it happened to a buddy of mine. It seems that Microsoft is testing some new program for tracing e-mail, and the company needs volunteers to help try the thing out. He forwarded me an e-mail that he received from Microsoft—and get this, from Bill Gates himself! Two weeks later, as a reward for participating, my pal received a check for thousands of dollars! Sure he did. Another version of this hoax claims that AOL's tracking service is offering a cash reward. Tell you what—when you get your check, send me 10 percent as a finder's fee, okay?

4. Five-Cent E-Mail Tax (1999)

"Dear Internet Subscriber," the e-mail starts. "The Government of the United States is quietly pushing through legislation that will affect your use of the Internet." It goes on to reveal that "Bill 602P" will authorize the U.S. Postal Service to assess a charge of five cents for every e-mail sent. Not a bad way to cut down on the number of dopey e-mail chain letters and lame jokes people let loose on the world. But credulous curse averters and connoisseurs of boffo laffs can relax: This e-mail alert, which popped up in 1999 and comes back for a visit every year or so, just isn't true. Still,

it sounded plausible enough to fool Hillary Clinton during a 2000 debate when she was running for the Senate.

5. Nigerian 419 E-Mail Scam (2000)

"DEAR SIR," the e-mail starts. "FIRSTLY I MUST FIRST SOLICIT YOUR CONFIDENCE IN THIS TRANSACTION; LET ME START BY INTRODUCING MYSELF PROPERLY…" I'm sure you've received one of these—a confidential, urgent e-mail message promising you a reward of mucho dinero for helping this person convey money abroad. All you need do in return is entrust your name and bank account number to the government bureaucrat (or his uncle, aunt, or cousin, the ostensible "credit officer with the union bank of Nigeria plc (uba) Benin branch") who needs your help.

It's the Nigerian con, also known as an Advanced Fee Fraud or 419 scam (so called because of the section number of the Nigerian criminal code that applies to it). Ancestors of these scams appeared in the 1980s, when the media of choice were letters or faxes—and they're still wildly successful at snagging people. In fact, Oprah recently featured a victim of the Nigerian scam on her show. And if you think that smart, educated folks couldn't possibly fall for it, you'll be surprised when you read "The Perfect Mark," a New Yorker magazine article profiling a Massachusetts psychotherapist who was duped—and lost a fortune.

To see how the hoax works, visit Scamorama, a fascinating site that features a progression of e-mail messages stringing along 419 scammers, sometimes for months at a time. Finally, check out the 3rd Annual Nigerian E-Mail Conference, an absolutely perfect spoof.

6. It's Kidney Harvesting Time (1996)

The subject line is laden with exclamation points: "Travelers Beware!!!" If that's not enough to get your attention, the chilling story certainly will. The message warns that an organ-harvesting crime ring is drugging tourists in New Orleans and Las Vegas, snatching their "extra" kidneys, selling the organs to non-Hippocratic hospitals, and leaving the victims to wake up in a bathtub full of ice and find a brief note that explains the situation and conveniently identifies the phone number of the nearest emergency room. Hey, maybe they'll get lucky and the hospital will have a compatible replacement kidney on hand. But travelers, fear not!!! According to the National Kidney Foundation, this scenario has never actually occurred—though it does have the makings of a great horror flick. (Freddy's Last Harvest, anyone?)

7. You've Got Virus! (1999 and on)

There's isn't a Teddy Bear virus. Nor is there a sulfnbk.exe or A Virtual Card for You ("the "WORST VIRUS EVER!!!…CNN ANNOUNCED IT. PLEASE SEND THIS TO EVERYONE YOU KNOW!!!").

The **jdbgmgr.exe** hoax (also known as Teddy Bear because the **jdbgmgr.exe** file is represented by a teddy bear icon) warned recipients of the e-mail message that they were at risk of infection from a virus sent via address books or Microsoft Messenger, and that they should delete the file immediately.

But in reality there was no virus—and unfortunately, jdbgmgr.exe was a necessary Java file. The **sulfnbk.exe** hoax nailed even advanced users with its insistence that the file—a legit one that's used for fixing long file names—was a virus. Lots of people removed it.

Similarly, A Virtual Card for You claimed that McAfee had discovered a virus that, when opened, would destroy the hard drive on an infected system and would automatically send itself to everyone on the user's e-mail contacts list. Of course, it didn't do anything except scare people. So before you forward an e-mail virus warning to anyone (especially to me), look it up on Sophos or Vmyths to make sure it isn't a fraud.

8. Microsoft Buys Firefox (2006)

Talk about scaring the entire open-source community. In October 2006, a previously unknown Web site popped up, announcing Microsoft's acquisition of Firefox and promoting the company's new Microsoft Firefox 2007 Professional. The site talks glowingly about the browser's new features and provides a video advertisement for the product. It was a great prank, and the image of the Microsoft Firefox 2007 box was so elaborate and professional looking that the blood pressure of real Firefox users went sky-high.

9. The Really Big Kitty (2001)

There are big cats and then there are even bigger cats. This one, reportedly tipping the scales at almost 90 pounds, was enormous. The claim seemed plausible and even snookered a lot of e-mail cynics (I'm raising my hand)—until they read the accompanying copy, that is. With nonsense about the owner working at Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, and more balderdash about nuclear reactors, the jig was up. Eventually, the cat's owner fessed up to a creative Photoshop session, though he claimed that he never expected anyone to believe the photo was real.

Image courtesy of Snopes.com

10. $250 Cookie Recipe (1996)

The woman loved the cookie she had just nibbled at a Neiman Marcus cafe in Houston, so she asked her waiter for the recipe. "Two-fifty," he said, and she agreed without hesitation, instructing him to add it to her tab. But when the woman's Visa bill arrived, it read $250, instead of $2.50. Bent on revenge, she proceeded to ask you to blast the recipe to—okay, ready?—EVERYONE YOU KNOW!!! Like many hoaxes, this one predated the Internet, only to resurface in the

electronic age. It appeared in a cookbook in the late 1940s as the $25 fudge cake, popped up in the 1960s as the Waldorf-Astoria red-velvet cake recipe, and re-emerged in the 1970s as the Mrs. Fields cookie recipe.

Hoaxes 11 Through 15
This group of five begins with a phony e-mail message promising money and other prizes from Disney, and ends with the classic deaf-to-reason arguments of the Apollo moon landing deniers.

11. Free Vacation Courtesy of Disney (1998)

Dear Goofy… Forward this e-mail chain letter to everybody under the sun and, once 13,000 people have received it, Walt Disney Jr. will send five grand each to 1,300 lucky people on this list. And "the rest will receive a free trip for two to Disney for one week during the summer of 1999." Is that Disney World, Disneyland—or Walt's house? The "Jr." after Disney, in reference to a nonexistent person, ought to have been the first clue that this was a hoax. And the misspelling of "receive" was the clincher (remember, hoaxters, "i" before "e" except after "c"). Yet people forwarded the message around the world using the time-honored e-mail chain letter adage: I'm sending it to you… just in case it's true.

12. Sunset Over Africa (2003)

Now that's a dazzling photo of Africa and Europe, taken right around sunset from the Space Shuttle Columbia. What makes the image especially amazing is that, while London remains in daylight, night has fallen in Italy (a little to the southeast) and the bright lights of Rome, Naples, and Venice are blazing. Too bad it's a digitally altered photo, most likely layered from multiple satellite images. To see an accurate, computer-generated illustration, check out the World Sunlight Map.

Image courtesy of Snopes.com.

13. Alien Autopsy at Roswell, New Mexico (1995)

Roswell, New Mexico: ground zero of UFO controversy. It's also where the movie of the Roswell alien autopsy was filmed 60 years ago. The story goes that a UFO crashed at this site, and the U.S. government performed a hush-hush autopsy on the dead alien. In the mid-1990s, unnamed individuals "discovered" the secret film and posted it for the edification of a disinformed public. Looks pretty real, right? Now fast-forward to 2006 and a conspiracy-deflating admission: The movie is a hoax created in 1995 by John Humphreys, the animator famous for Max Headroom, in his apartment in north London. …Or was it???

14. Real-Time GPS Cell Phone Tracking (2007)

Have you heard about the Web site that can track the location of your cell phone in real time? It uses satellite GPS in combination with Google Maps, and it's amazingly accurate (not to mention a disturbing invasion of privacy). Go ahead, check it out yourself by going to the SunSat Satellite Solutions site and tracking your own cell phone's location. Select your country, type in your cell phone number, click the Start Searching button, and wait for it. (This is one of the year's best pranks. And I won't give away the ending.)

15. Apollo Moon Landing Hoax (1969)

You're aware that we never landed on the moon, right? It was all just an elaborate hoax designed to score Cold War points for the United States against the Soviet Union in a world of falling dominoes. The whole lunar landing thing? It was a video staged at movie studios and top-secret locations.

Okay, you can stop laughing now, but some sites, such as Apollo Reality and Moon Landing, still insist that the Eagle never landed. Of course, enemies of Flat Earthism will point to the Rocket and Space Technology site, which does an in-depth job of debunking the hoax. But true disbelievers should check out this terrific video spoof, complete with outtakes showing lights and cameras.

Hoaxes 16 Through 20
The world of weird eBay auction items starts off this page, which concludes with a photo hoax purporting to show a 1950s-era vision of the home computer of tomorrow.

16. Sell It on eBay! (1995)

You won't believe what people have sold on eBay—some of the items pranks, some of them for real, and some, well, it's hard to tell. For a sampling of the weird, you need look no further than a haunted tree stump and a pork chop shaped like a grizzly bear. The Internet itself once went on the market at a modest starting bid of a million bucks, as have a dozen spontaneous images of the Virgin Mary (on toast, on windows, and heaven only knows where else). Bidders have also had a shot at someone's soul, a guy's virginity, and a human kidney, with the price of this last item having reached $5.7 million before eBay pulled the plug. (Hey, guys, don't you know that what you lose in Las Vegas is supposed to stay in Las Vegas?)

But my favorite eBay offering involves a tattooed guy who,

as a joke, dressed up in his ex-wife's size 12 wedding gown and put it up for auction. Only, the dress ended up selling for $3850, and the guy got five marriage proposals. Nice.

17. Chinese Newspaper Duped (2002)

Information on the Internet may want to be free—but if it's posted by a for-profit publisher, you'd better take it with a grain of salt. That's the lesson learned by China's Beijing Evening News, which was taken in by the Onion's Capitol Dome spoof. Famous for its authentic-sounding but tongue-in-cheek articles steeped in the language of the Associated Press, the Onion reported that Congress had threatened to leave Washington, D.C., and head for Memphis unless the District agreed to erect a new domed Capitol building with a retractable roof and luxury box seating. Having accepted most of the Onion article at face value, the Chinese newspaper at first stood by its source in the face of international derision and refused to back down. When it finally published a retraction, it blamed the Onion for the confusion: "Some small American newspapers frequently fabricate offbeat news to trick people into noticing them with the aim of making money." Right.

18. The Muppets Have Not Already Won (2001)

In early October 2001, just prior to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, protesters at an anti-American rally in Bangladesh showed their support for Osama bin Laden by marching, chanting, and waving placards. One of the posters captured on film by Reuters News Agency was a photo-montage of the Al-Qaeda leader, and in one of the shots a yellow felt puppet to his right glowers furiously at the camera. It's...Bert of Sesame Street. Originally a Zelig-inspired creation of San Francisco Webmaster Dino Ignacio, the satirical Web site Bert Is Evil depicted Bert hobnobbing with the worst of the worst in history, tormenting his roommate Ernie, and generally reveling in wickedness. After Ignacio retired from active efforts to expose Bert's career of evil, others filled the Photoshop void, capturing the cone-headed miscreant with all the latest baddies-du-jour.

Evidently, the company responsible for printing the pro-Osama poster found the doctored dual portrait irresistible, although (according to the Urban Legends References Pages) its production manager claims to have produced about 2000 copies of the Osama-and-Bert poster without realizing "what they signified." Well, if you can't trust pictures you find on the Internet, what can you trust?

Image courtesy of Snopes.com.

19. Chevrolet's Not-So-Better Idea (2006)

The ad folks at Chevrolet thought they had a winner: Let site visitors create their own 30-second commercial for the company's 2007 Chevy Tahoe SUV. It'll be fun, they probably thought. We'll give them a choice of video clips and soundtracks, and let them add their own text captions. Yep, viral marketing at its best.

Unfortunately for Chevrolet, a few pranksters decided to use the opportunity to express what they thought of the SUV. One commercial said, "Like this snowy wilderness? Better get your fill of it now. Then say hello to global warming." Another lambasted the SUV as a gas guzzler: "Our planet's oil is almost gone. You don't need G.P.S. to see where this road leads."

20. Rand's 1954 Home Computer (2004)

This intriguing image of a room-size computer made the rounds of the Internet, accompanied by a breathless blurb: "This article is from an issue of 1954 'Popular Mechanics' magazine forecasting the possibility of 'home computers' in 50 years." The steering wheel in the picture is the predecessor to today's mouse, and the keyboard looks like those on teletype machines. It even comes complete with a guy right out of the Eisenhower era.

Cool stuff, and easy to believe—but it's not a 1950s Rand Corporation mockup of what a prototype home computer might look like. It's actually a shot that was taken of a submarine display at the Smithsonian Institution and subsequently modified for inclusion in a Fark.com image-manipulation competition.

Hoaxes 21 Through 25

Our final five takes you from the ultimate instance of Microsoft hubris to an ill-conceived experiment in Internet democracy (or is that Internet anarchy?).

21. Microsoft Buys Catholic Church (1994)

More than a decade ago, an e-mail press release—from Vatican City, no less—landed in my inbox. Microsoft was announcing that it was in the process of acquiring the Roman Catholic Church in exchange for an unspecified number of shares of Microsoft common stock. The story was a prank, but it sure looked real, circulating for months and perhaps worrying residents of the Holy See.

Just think: If the press release had been true, it might have stopped the Vatican from using Linux. And no, I'm not kidding about the Linux part. Watch this video interview with the woman who helped build the Vatican's Web site.

22. Hercules, the Enormous Dog (2007)

Wow, that dog's almost as big as the horse. That's what I thought when I first looked at this e-mail. The picture depicts a couple, one walking a horse, the other holding the leash of Hercules, a 282-pound English Mastiff and "The World's Biggest Dog Ever According to Guinness World Records."

Horsepucky. Here's my analysis of the Photoshop modifications. First, take a close look at the grass under the people and the animals. The area has been subtly lightened in order to make all of the shadows match and look authentic. Next, examine the shadows and you'll notice two anomalies: First, the shadows of

the dog and the man start at their feet, but the same doesn't hold true for the horse. Second, the woman's shadow is missing altogether; instead, the man's shadow extends in front of her. Oh and by the way, the Guinness World Records site doesn't have a listing for Hercules or for the world's biggest dog. Okay, okay, so the pictures of the big kitty and the big dog are both fakes—but have you seen the shot of Craig Sherwood riding the world's largest jackelope?

23. Hurricane Lili Waterspouts (2002)

It's weird, it's disturbing, and it's seemingly plausible—all of the elements necessary for a successful e-mail forward. The image shows three dark waterspouts in the distance. The subject is "here comes lili," and the e-mail began appearing in inboxes at about the same time that Hurricane Lili started battering the Louisiana coastline. But three waterspouts, all neatly lined up? According to About.com, the National Weather Service labeled the picture a hoax and said that it was a modification of a genuine photo taken in 2001 by a crew member of the Edison Chouest Offshore supply boat.

24. Lights-Out Gang Member Initiation (1998)

People have a tendency to believe e-mail messages that come from authority figures. In 1998, a message purportedly from a police officer working with the DARE program circulated around the Internet. It warned recipients not to flash their lights to inform oncoming cars that their headlamps were off. According to the message, a recently devised gang initiation ritual involved having new gang members drive at night with their headlights turned off until an oncoming car flashed its lights at them; then, in order to become initiated, they were to shoot everyone in that car. It's just another urban myth—and about as silly as the one claiming that gangs mark off

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Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

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their territory by hanging sneakers from power lines.

25. Pranks Shut Down Los Angeles Times Wiki (2005)

It seemed like a bright idea. The LA Times' "A Wiki for Your Thoughts" fandango asked readers to chime in on the newspaper's editorials via a Wiki. In their explanation of how it would work, the editors even acknowledged that "It sounds nutty." Yet they went ahead with it—and achieved disastrous results. The Wikitorial (the name was nearly as dumb as the scheme) brought out the best and then the worst in readers. On the first day, an editorial about the war in Iraq prompted civil and thoughtful contributions. On day two, pranksters littered the unmoderated Wiki with rude comments, pornography, and profanity. The Webmaster removed the offending entries, but only after they were available for public viewing. By the next morning, the publisher had dismantled the Wiki.

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Internet Addressing

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(This is the third article in a series explaining the Internet. The previous articles provided a general overview and explained how the system is hooked together.)

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Each individual or computer on the Internet has an individual and unique address in the system. Part of this address might reflect how messages to and from this address are routed, but it is possible to buy or rent what is known as a domain name. Within the system, everything is routed by numbers, but there are tables available to many servers that translate the easier for mere humans to understand names to the proper routing numbers.
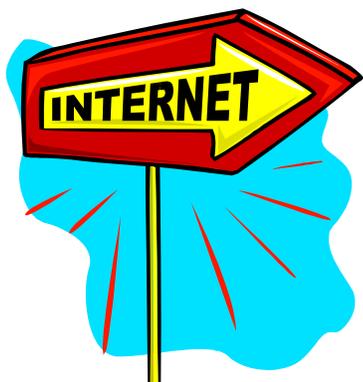
There is a regular hierarchy to how these names work and are assigned. Generally if you control a domain name, you can control the individual names under it. There are individuals who only use one individual name under a domain name. This might be done to advertise a company or service. An ISP might have thousands of names under its domain.

An international agency, called ICANN, that is subject to control by the U.S. Department of Commerce if it gets out of line, assigns the high level domains, such as .com. There are between 100 and 150 of these high level domain names. An authority for each of these high level names registers the specific domain names. Every nation-state has its own high level name, such as .de for Germany (Deutschland). Some are general or for certain types of users, such as .com and .edu.

ICANN also arranges for several high level servers in different locations to have the master list for the system. I believe that there are currently seven of these servers. If one is lost or compromised, the others can still function and quickly correct the data on the other ones. Much of this information is also fed down the line to other name translation servers on a regular basis.

The rules as to how a domain will be issued under a specific high level varies with the issuing authority. They may contract the administration out to a service, such as VeriSign, that does this for a profit. Sometimes the rules are strict and might require an actual presence, type of entity and/or citizenship to use a domain name with a particular national high level name. In other cases, it may simply be whether or not one is willing to pay the required fee. The small pacific island nation of Tuvalu covers much of its government expenses by selling .tv domain names through VeriSign. Tuvalu is not even mentioned in the online advertisement for .tv domain names.

Specific names work a bit different for e-mail than for the World Wide Web. Typically an individual will have an e-mail address, but not a uniform resource locator (URL) for the Web. The e-mail format is a bit easier to explain, so I'll start with it.

In an e-mail address, the individual name is to the left of an at "@" symbol, which separates the two parts of the name. Immediately after the @, the specific part of the domain name follows. A dot, or period, separates this from the high level domain name. An example might be something like `Joe.Individual@example.com.` There may or may not be dots and capitals in the individual part of the name. There is always at least one dot in the domain name.

The individual web site services that go through the consumer ISPs as a free feature are a bit weird looking. Any business would probably have and use its own domain name. With web sites the domain name comes first, followed by a slash and then the individual part of the name. You can control the specific page naming from whatever level you are able to work. It will probably not have names of individuals. It may or may not start with www. If it is directly at the domain name level, it might default to a specific page name, such as index. A technical requirement of the web sort of requires that http:// appear before the actual URL. The frequently seen www is not required. Letters such as httm or htm, to indicate how the site is coded, are at the end. An example might be `http://example.com/index.htm`. ∎

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