

COMPUTER NEWS



Volume 23, No. 8

August, 2006

Inside This Issue:

- 2 President's Message
- 2 Special Interest Groups
- 2 Calendar
- 3 Officers List
- 4 "Suddenly. . ." Part 1
- 6 The New, the Best, the Worst!
- 7 Unruh's Observations
- 8 Do Shield Laws Extend to Bloggers?
- 9 Tips from *Smart Computing*
- 10 Managing Device Drivers
- 11 Your Credit Report
- 12 Windows Vista: a Preview
- 14 Hard Disk Disasters
- 16 Choose Your Own "Home Page"

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 444 computers and 128 printers.

How to Build a Web Site to Be Explained at August 16 NVPCUG Meeting

By Susy Ball, Programs Director

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will hold a general meeting Wednesday, August 16, 2006, 7:00-9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California.

The main presentation will be given by Serre A. Murphy, on "Building a Web site for fun (and profit)." If your ISP offers Web site hosting as part of their basic service, Murphy will show you how to take advantage of it by using the right software. Some people have developed interesting Web sites that have nonobvious benefits and have been able to keep costs to a minimum. He will demonstrate his company's product *WebBuild Express*, an easy-to-use and inexpensive Web design tool, to build compelling sites and "get the word out" about information you want to share with other members of the World Wide Web community. He will even show how to build a modest site for the users group or an individual, taking themes, suggestions, and challenges from the audience.



Serre A. Murphy

Murphy has over 30 years experience as a systems analyst and manager in the IT field, and is now CEO of Net Fulfillment Technologies, Inc.

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

Following this, **Michael Moore**, Computer Tutor coordinator, will discuss computer security using the Kensington PCKey. For laptop computers at risk of theft, this system provides hardware and software protection.

Remember the Summer Potluck Picnic
Saturday, August 12, 1:30 p.m.
Petersons' Christmas Tree Farm, 1120 Darms Lane

Summer Picnic, Member News

NVPCUG Special Interest Groups

In SIG meetings you can learn about a subject in greater detail than is feasible at NVPCUG general meetings. SIG meetings are open to everyone. Meeting times and locations occasionally change, so for current meeting information, see our Web site, www.nvpcug.org, or contact the SIG leaders.

Digital Photography SIG

Meets: Monthly, second Wednesday
7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
Piner's Nursing Home,
Conference Room
1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
Leader: **Susy Ball**
(707) 337-3998
SusyBall@aol.com

Investors SIG

Meets: Monthly, second Monday
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Jerry Brown's home,
23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
Leader: **Jerry Brown**
(707) 254-9607
bqandjbb@sbcglobal.net

Macintosh SIG

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

We have 34 people signed up so far for the members' summer potluck picnic on **Saturday, August 12 at 1:30** at Dick and Sandy Peterson's Christmas Tree Farm. The picnic comes the Saturday before our regular 3rd Wednesday, August 16, meeting, so if you haven't signed up yet e-mail me at prior@napanet.net. Let me know what potluck dish you are bringing and how many will be in your party. NVPCUG will provide soft drinks and water as well as chicken and steak to BBQ. You are welcome to bring beer and wine if you wish. Potluck dishes promised so far include a cheese ball, chips & salsa, 3 other appetizers, 2 kinds of potato salads, 3 other salads, 1 dish of beans, but only one dessert and no vegetables.

Bill Wheadon won the July drawing for the subscription to *Smart Computing*. Congratulations, Bill! The drawing for the second subscription (valued at \$30) will be at our August 16 meeting. Tickets will be \$1 each, six for \$5. You do not need to be present to win and the odds of winning are very good (only 17 tickets were sold for the July drawing).

At the August meeting we will also raffle an unused 2003 version of *Office XP Professional*. It includes *Access* and *MS Publisher* in addition to *Outlook*, *Word*, *Excel* and *PowerPoint*. For this prize, tickets will be \$5 each, or 3 or \$10.

We are still seeking donations to supply other items to be raffled. Please e-mail or phone me if you can help in any way.

John Simcoe is now out of the ICU. His wife Roberta is looking for a rehabilitation hospital and hopes to have him in one within a few weeks. She sends everyone a big THANK YOU for all the prayers, cards and e-mails (flowers are still not allowed). Because of his accident last month, John has had to resign as Publicity Director. We will miss him very much. We need someone else to take over his position. The duties involve notifying the media (usually by e-mail) of our meetings and programs.

If anyone has any problems or questions or suggestions (relating to Group issues, not computer use questions), feel free to contact me at prior@napanet.net or phone me at 252-1506.

Peace and Good,

Dianne Prior



NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
August 2	7:00-9:00 p.m.
August 9	7:00-8:30 p.m.
August 10	6:30-8:30 p.m.
August 12	1:30-3:30 p.m.
August 14	5:30-7:30 p.m.
August 16	7:00-9:00 p.m.

Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer, contact Orion Hill, (707) 252-0637.
Board of Directors meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
Digital Photography SIG meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
Macintosh SIG meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa
Annual summer potluck picnic, Petersons' Christmas Tree Farm, 1120 Darms Lane
Investors SIG meeting, Jerry Brown's home, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

Officers for 2006

Board of Directors

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

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

Appointed Officers

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

*All telephone numbers are in Area Code 707.

Come to the NVPCUG General Meetings

Held the third Wednesday
of each month

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Napa Senior Activities
Center

1500 Jefferson Street,
Napa

NVPCUG Computer News

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

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"Suddenly..." OR "I didn't do anything!" Part 1

Or — a month's log of a Sun City Anthem Computer Club "house call" doctor

By Charles W. Davis, Newsletter Editor & Webmaster, Sun City Anthem Computer Club, Henderson, Nevada

In working to help Club members and others with their computer problems during Computer Talk sessions, or more often when making "house calls," I often hear strange tales that usually involve acts of some gremlin-like creature. Generally the caller's comments start with "all of a sudden" or "suddenly" and end with "I didn't do anything." I can only surmise that it was probably one of cartoonist Bill Keane's ghostly imps "Not Me," "Nobody" or even "Ida Know." Some recent examples:

"Suddenly..."

One morning a couple of weeks ago, I received a call from someone who was obviously very upset. She exclaimed: "Suddenly all of my desktop icons are gone! I didn't do anything! Please help me!"

This situation seemed to be serious. I had never heard of this happening. I didn't have anything on the calendar for another two hours so I hopped in my 1999 Miata for the short drive up the hill to her Tall Mesa Village home. She was right, the icons were indeed missing. A simple right click on the blank desktop, hover over Arrange Icons by: and then click on Show Desktop Icons. This was definitely an act by the "little people." As I said, I hadn't heard of this situation before. Therefore, it must have been "Not Me" wishing to get off the hook by whispering in my ear how I might arrive at the solution. Since the club member was in the back room and the house girl had let me in, I quickly left the scene.

The next day the same lady called and said that her "My Computer" Icon was missing from the desktop. Realizing that it wasn't the normal desktop shortcut icon, I was puzzled. When I arrived on the scene, sure enough, most icons were visible, but the "My Computer" icon was not in its normal position. It wasn't immediately visible. I later noticed the top edge of the icon protruding just above the task bar. Once again, I moved the pointer to a blank spot on the desktop, a right click on the mouse and chose Arrange Icons by and chose Name. The My Desktop icon again assumed its prominence at the upper left. She said that she didn't drag and drop it down there. As I picked up a \$20 donation to the Club, I assumed that it must have been "Nobody" and left for home.

"Suddenly..."

On a recent Monday, the caller sheepishly states that "suddenly I can't access the Internet." I recognized that the person speaking to me is the same one whose 18-year-old granddaughter had placed hundreds of malware programs on his laptop two weeks before. At that time I had suggested a router/firewall so that she could plug her laptop directly to the router with Internet access. He had im-

mediately gone out and purchased and installed one. Oh yes, the granddaughter had been there over the weekend and had brought her own laptop computer.

The blue Miata once again headed up the hill to their home in Arroyo Vista Village. In just a few minutes, I found that the dear child didn't plug the cable into the router as instructed, but had used grandpa's computer. Since she was an AOL user, she attempted to change Gramps' Accounts from Cox Cable to AOL dialup and failed. It would have been so easy for her to have just gone to AOL using *Internet Explorer*. She left for school Sunday evening and didn't mention a thing to Gramps. That way, she didn't have to tell on either "Ida Know" or "Not Me." I picked up the \$20 donation to the club and was soon on my way.

An admonition: Set up a Guest Account without Administrative rights. Place a User name and password on the Administrative (your) account.

"All of a Sudden..."

"All of a sudden" turns up many times a month and in some unusual situations. Last week, I received a call from a member who was using *Microsoft Office Outlook*. It seems that she had been entering information into a new contact when "all of a sudden" she couldn't enter information. She explained that she had been using *Outlook* and contacts for years and had never had this problem. Since this didn't seem that it required immediate attention, I arranged an appointment for the next morning. My Miata and I arrived at her Golf Mesa Village home just as the grandfather clock guarding the entry was announcing that it was 10:00.

She met me at the door and we proceeded to the office, where she took her place in front of her computer to show me what was happening. She began keying in the house number, using the numeric key pad; and just as she had said, nothing worked as expected. I immediately saw why this had happened so "suddenly." Apparently "Nobody" had pressed the Num Lock key, thereby turning it off. So as she would enter a house number, things went wild as the 2,4, 6, and 8 keys acted as direction keys, 7 and 9 were Home and Page Up respectively and 1 and 3 were End and Page down. I asked her to press the Num Lock key and "all of a sudden" the problem was resolved. I collected the \$20 donation check to the club and was homeward bound.

"Suddenly..."

On another Monday, I received a call from a member stating that she had recently upgraded to *MS Office 2003*, but a short time later could no longer access *MS Pub-*

lisher files. This was the result of someone else messing with functions that they should have stayed away from. Support teams at Norton will vow “Not me.” But when the lady was directed to an article titled “How to use Office programs with the Norton Antivirus Office plug-in” she was able to resolve the problem as I watched. This article can help you extricate yourself and may be found at: <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/329820/en-us>.

It is maddening to think that one, nay thousands upon thousands, must jump through hoops because a bunch of programmers at Symantec (Norton) can't get it right.

I have never understood their automatic plug-in installation. At least they should tell the user, including a list of possible problems and their resolution, and let them make a decision as to whether to install the plug in. Who needs viruses when “reputable” software manufacturers can do things like this? A long time ago, in computer time, but actually just over a year ago, I stopped paying the extortion money for antivirus software and have used the free AVG antivirus, which is available from <http://free.grisoft.com/doc/1>

“Suddenly...”

“Suddenly” you can't open Word or most other Microsoft Office products. This happened because you owned a Hewlett Packard multifunction printer with a flash memory card reader. It seems that a security update messed with the logic for these systems and caused much havoc around the world. A follow-on update was released to affected computers during late April. If you are still having that problem, go to Start then Windows Update, download and install all Critical updates. It seems that “Ida Know” visited Microsoft's Redmond campus.

Suddenly...”

Last week, one of our neighbors in the Valley View Village went to his neighbors stating that his phone went “dead.” On investigation, I learned that he had ordered and installed a new Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system. Some of the equipment had arrived, but due to a transposition of digits when he had entered the credit card number, the important “Silver” box did not get shipped. “Ida Know” didn't know how the mix-up occurred. “Who Knows” stated that the customer probably discarded the silver box with the packaging. However, the land line telephone provider had been notified to discontinue the service. “Dead line!”

An admonition: Before installing anything always check the contents of packages to make certain that all components are included! The Federal Communications Commission has a Web site that explains VoIP.

Not so “Suddenly...”

This particular call arrived on a Tuesday, so I was

surprised to hear: “Suddenly I can send e-mail but I can't receive any messages. Everything times out. I've called Cox Communications and since I use Office Outlook 2003, they weren't much help.” This phone call came in at a time that Vickie was out and wouldn't return for a while, so I headed for Ridgecrest Village to see what had happened so “suddenly.”

It took several minutes of attempting to send messages to the owner's e-mail address. Sure enough, the message would be sent, but there were no incoming messages. After some time it would all time out. The first inbound message would never arrive. I found that there was no Internet access using Internet Explorer. I installed Firefox from my USB Flash memory and was then able to access the Internet. At this time clues began to appear one-by-one: Norton Internet Security was warning of Firefox accessing the Internet — twice! ZoneAlarm was warning of Firefox accessing the Internet!

Oops! Only one program firewall at a time is allowed. Since the member's Norton subscription was about to expire, I downloaded AVG antivirus to his desktop (free at <http://free.grisoft.com>), shut off the cable modem, went to uninstall Norton SystemWorks and discovered two versions. I uninstalled both. When I attempted to install AVG antivirus, the program indicated that the version of the Roxio CD Creator contained code that was incompatible with AVG, and it provided a link for an update. I installed the update and then successfully installed the AVG antivirus. Then I turned on the cable modem and downloaded updates. I was grateful to the AVG programmers to make that test and inform the user. Suddenly, I decided that I like the AVG antivirus program and its creators even more than in the past.

Now I felt that I could address the original problem. I opened Office Outlook, and it proceeded to download a monstrous movie clip — 9.87MB! It was able to complete the download due to the fact that Norton wasn't scanning inbound e-mail messages.

“Suddenly” wasn't really all that sudden. The second and third firewall programs were installed over a period of time, but the problem didn't manifest itself until the arrival of the large file. As an aside, it was the story of an autistic youth who had been the go-fer for a high school basketball team and was allowed to play on the last game of his senior year. His team racked up 21 points — all three pointers. I'm not a sports fan, but am a fan of the underdog! \$20 more for the Club's treasury.

This article was originally published in *Bits, PCs & Macs*, the newsletter of the Sun City Anthem Computer Club. All copies are available online at: <http://www.myscacc.org/newsletters.htm>

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

The New, the Best, and the Worst June 2006

Collected by Pim Borman, Web Site Editor, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

Open Document Format

Long-term archiving of documents generated and stored in computer format presents formidable problems. Current storage media, such as magnetic tape, CDs and DVDs, have a limited, ill-defined lifespan. Programs currently used to read their contents sooner or later will become obsolete. And the most-used formats for storing office documents are mostly proprietary, mutually incompatible, and incompletely documented.

The international Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (**OASIS**) has developed an Open Document Format (**ODF**) based upon the XML-based file format originally created by *OpenOffice.org*. It was developed with inputs from a variety of organizations (with the notable exception of Microsoft), and a committee of the United Nations. It is publicly accessible and can be implemented by anyone without restriction. The Open Document Format was recently adopted by the International Standards Organization as ISO/IEC 26300. Many foreign governments are adopting the new format, and it has also been adopted by the US National Archives

Microsoft, meanwhile, is developing its own proprietary, XML-based document format expected to be used in the forthcoming *Office 12* suite. Most likely it won't be compatible with ODF.

The most recent version 2.0 of *OpenOffice.org* uses ODF as its native format, although documents can also be saved in formats that are compatible with the major proprietary Office Suites. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OpenDocument>)

Camera Fingerprints

Jessica Fridrich and coworkers at Binghamton University have developed a technique to extract a characteristic "fingerprint" pattern from pictures taken by a digital camera. It depends on the observation that each original digital picture is overlaid by a weak noise pattern characteristic for the camera used. It is due to background electrical noise in the pixel units of the light-sensing element.

You can see that pattern by taking a picture with a digital camera with the lens covered. The resulting

image is not pure black, as with a film camera, but shows a mottling in many colors, due to electronic noise. The mottling also shows up when a digital picture is underexposed, maybe because the flash did not go off. The mottling pattern is uniquely different for all cameras. It is distinct from pixellation that results from insufficient resolution.

A number of pictures must be taken by the same camera for someone to extract the characteristic pattern. Being able to identify the camera used can be helpful in legal prosecutions of child pornography and such. Study of the background patterns can also give an indication of image tampering.

Astrophotographers habitually take pictures of faint objects in a dark sky with CCD chips similar to those found in digital cameras. In order to eliminate the mottling from their images they take a "dark frame," a picture taken under identical conditions with the lens covered. They then digitally "subtract" the dark frame from the image to remove the mottling. This can be done with Adobe Photoshop, but it doesn't work with inexpensive digital cameras that internally process and compress photos, usually in JPEG format. (<http://urel.binghamton.edu/PressReleases/2006/Jan-Feb%2006/Fridrich.html>)

Linspire Back on Top

The best things in life generally go unnoticed. If you notice your shoes, they probably don't fit right. If everyone notices your new glasses they may not be flattering.

If you own a PDA, do you know what operating system it uses? Never noticed it? How about the operating system of your computer? You've noticed that plenty of times, haven't you?

The ideal operating system works quietly in the background, doing what's expected of it. *Microsoft Windows* has come a long way over the years, to the point where weeks may go by without your noticing anything wrong. But oh boy! when it crashes.

Over the past 15 years *Linux*, "the other operating system," has in the hands of computer professionals grown into a powerful, reliable tool. It has been running many of the largest computer servers in the world, including Google. Early efforts to make it

available as a desktop operating system didn't get very far because users had such a steep learning curve to overcome in mastering it.

To make *Linux* easier to use, a number of *Linux* distributions on CD-ROM have become available. They typically bundle the *Linux* Kernel with drivers for peripherals, sound and video cards, and network connections and include a boot manager to allow side-by-side installation of *Linux* with *MS Windows*. In addition, the self-installing distributions typically include a windows interface, an Office Suite such as *OpenOffice.org*, an Internet browser and e-mail program (Mozilla), a paint program (The Gimp), a variety of card and arcade games, and other useful or entertaining features.

The ideal distribution provides the best off-the-CD support for a wide variety of peripherals, useful programs, and easy access to a broad range of other programs available for the *Linux* operating system. Over the last several years I have reviewed most of the major distributions and concluded that *Linspire* (nee *Lindows*) and *Xandros* came the closest to the ideal.

Last year *Linspire* underwent a major upgrade to version 5.0, including support for the latest version of the Linux Kernel, itself a major upgrade. Unfortunately, I couldn't get the new *Linspire* to run well on my computers, so I reluctantly

switched to *Xandros* on my desktop, and kept the old *Lindows 4.5* on my laptop for everyday Internet access. *Xandros* does not have the same range of software available, including updated versions, as *Linspire*.

Recently *Linspire* issued its greatly improved version 5.1, and I am glad to report that in my opinion they are back on top again. It faultlessly recognizes all my systems, including the recent AMD 64-bit double-core CPU in my new computer. In fact, *Linux* was weaned on 64-bit processors and runs best in that environment. *Linspire* continues to offer its extensive program library (\$20/year) that lets you download programs over the Internet and install them, all with a single mouse click. It doesn't get easier!

Try it sometime. Use the free Live CD version of *Linspire 5.1* to boot your computer. It allows you to experience *Linux* without permanently installing anything on your hard drive, and to determine your system's compatibility. After you turn the system off nothing is left behind. (www.linspire.com)

Maybe someday you'll be running *Linux* without even noticing it!

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

Unruh's Observations

For those of you who are waiting for the Computer Police to pry *Win 9X* out from between your cold, dead fingers, this article/info may be for you: http://blog.eweek.com/blogs/eweek_labs/archive/2006/07/12/11370.aspx?kc=EWEMNL071006EPW1B I've just scanned through the comments, but one that caught my eye appears toward the bottom of the page from JOEL R:

re: Win98 Train Wreck Is Finally Here @ Saturday, July 15, 2006 1:35 AM For a single user who wants basic net access and uses office applications, and wants a machine that can play mp3's, *Windows 98* is all you need. *Windows XP* would be like using a sledge hammer to break a wine glass. Fun to look at, but overkill! My advice is if you

want to keep using *Windows 9x* systems,

1. Get all the critical updates Microsoft has released for it.
2. Use a firewall to protect you from the nasties of the net.
3. Install a good virus scanner.
4. Install a new safer web browser like *Opera* or *Firefox*.
5. Enjoy many more years of fun/productivity from one of the best OS's ever made."

Stay Crisp!

Dean Unruh, NVPCUG member.

Legal Bytes: Do Shield Laws Extend to Bloggers?

By John Brewer, member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City

The first amendment to the US Constitution contains a number of important personal rights. It reads as follows: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Analysis of the amendment confirms why the courts have been given the task of interpreting the language through the years.

One of the important parts of the amendment is freedom of the press. In order to protect the press, approximately 31 States have enacted "shield laws." Journalists are protected by a qualified (limited) First Amendment right to protect their confidential sources. Many of the federal circuits have held that a qualified privilege exists. However, journalists are frequently challenged to reveal their confidential sources. This privilege has received attention recently in the *New York Times Co. v. Gonzales* case that involves the phone records of Judith Miller. An interesting variation to this issue is whether Internet journalists have the same protection as print journalists. A recent case in California has examined this issue. The case involved some Internet Web sites and Apple Computer.

Apple brought an action in California alleging that persons unknown caused the wrongful publication of secret plans on the World Wide Web to release a device that would facilitate the creation of digital live sound recordings on Apple computers. In an effort to identify the source of the disclosures, Apple sought and obtained authority to issue civil subpoenas to the publishers of the Web sites where the information appeared and to the e-mail service provider for one of the publishers. The publishers moved for a protective order to prevent any such discovery. The trial court denied the motion on the ground that the publishers had involved themselves in the unlawful misappropriation of a trade secret. A California Court of Appeals held that this was in error because (1) the subpoena to the e-mail service provider could be enforced consistent with the plain terms of the federal Stored Communications Act (18 U.S.C. §§ 2701-2712); (2) any subpoenas seeking unpublished infor-

mation from petitioners would be unenforceable through contempt proceedings in light of the California reporter's shield [note: California has a shield provision in the State Constitution] and (3) discovery of petitioners' sources is also barred on this record by the conditional constitutional privilege against compulsory disclosure of confidential sources. The Court of Appeals issued a protective order.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation is directly involved in the litigation. The following is extracted from the EFF web site: "The whole mess began in December 2004, when Apple filed suit against 20 unnamed and presumably unknown individuals, referred to in the court filing as "Does," for leaking confidential materials on an Apple product under development to several Web publications. As part of its investigation, Apple subpoenaed Nfox -- for communications and unpublished materials obtained by PowerPage publisher Jason O'Grady. A Santa Clara trial court upheld the subpoena in March of 2005 and the EFF appealed.

"In a 69-page ruling, the 6th District Court of Appeal ruled that bloggers and webmasters are no different in their protections than a reporter and editor for a newspaper. "We can think of no workable test or principle that would distinguish 'legitimate' from 'illegitimate' news," the judges wrote.

"Any attempt by courts to draw such a distinction would imperil a fundamental purpose of the First Amendment, which is to identify the best, most important, and most valuable ideas not by any sociological or economic formula, rule of law, or process of government, but through the rough and tumble competition of the marketplace," they wrote.

"Today's decision is a victory for the rights of journalists, whether online or offline, and for the public at large," said EFF Staff Attorney Kurt Opsahl in a statement. Opsahl argued the case before the appeals court last month. "The court has upheld the strong protections for the free flow of information to the press, and from the press to the public."

"Apple argued its right to trade secrets trumped Constitutional rights, and it had exhausted other sources to determine the source of the information,

even though Apple had not deposed employees who were in a position to know," Kevin Bankston, a staff attorney for the EFF, told *internetnews.com*. The lower court decision agreed and said Apple's trade secrets rights would trump any journalist's rights to source confidentiality.

Bankston said the ruling is a win for anyone who uses e-mail. "A lot of people will hear about this decision and think it doesn't affect them since they are not journalists, but it has a broader impact because of the number of e-mail providers, particularly the number based in this district," he said.

"The court read Federal privacy law to forbid civil litigants like Apple from subpoenaing an individual's e-mail from e-mail providers. Instead, the court said civil litigants must subpoena you directly, and if you are a journalist, you can assert your rights of confidential sources.

"So they have to subpoena you rather than doing an end run around your rights and going straight to your e-mail provider," said Bankston.

If Apple chooses to appeal, the case goes to the

state Supreme Court. Thus far, the sources for the original story have not been revealed, "and hopefully based on this decision they never will," said Bankston.

This is an interesting issue. The California case is far from over, and this issue will continue to be litigated across the country.

John Brewer practices law in Oklahoma City, is a member of the Governor's and Legislative Task Force for E-Commerce, and enjoys issues relating to eBusiness and cyberspace. Comments and questions are welcome and can be e-mailed to [johnb\(at\)jnbrewer.com](mailto:johnb(at)jnbrewer.com).

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

Tips from *Smart Computing*

Sound Card Problems

Right-click My Computer and select Properties. Click the Device Manager tab and select View Devices By Type. First, check for a yellow exclamation point (!) next to the sound card listed under the Sound, Video And Game Controllers entry. If there is a yellow exclamation point, it usually means there's a resource conflict between the sound card and another device. Right-click the entry for the sound card, click Properties, and choose the Resources tab. If possible, uncheck Use Automatic Settings and click the Change Setting button to change the IRQ (interrupt request line) and I/O (input/output) address the sound card is using. Note that this may not be possible, depending on the hardware. If this is the case, you may need to physically move the sound card to another PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect) slot in the computer case or contact the hardware manufacturer for assistance.

Powered or Unpowered USB Hub?

There are two main types of USB hubs: bus-powered and self-powered. A bus-powered hub, also called an unpowered hub, is one that draws its power from the PC. A self-powered hub, also known as a powered hub, is one that draws its power from an external power supply unit. Some devices don't work well with bus-powered hubs. For instance, devices that require a significant amount of power, such as scanners and external hard drives, typically don't run well, if at all, through unpowered USB hubs. In fact, we recommend that you get a powered hub even if you don't think you need it now, simply because you'll likely need one.

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Managing Device Drivers

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

labash(at)spcug.org *www.spcug.org*

Windows is the most widely used operating system (OS) in the personal computer world.

For each piece of hardware that's connected to a *Windows*-based computer, somebody somewhere has written a piece of software to make the device work with a computer. This piece of software is called a "Device Driver." One of the most useful features of a well written device driver is making itself all but invisible to whoever is using the computer. You create a document, send it to your printer, and somehow the document prints. Your device driver takes care of all the little details necessary for the printing operation to occur.

Drivers are one of the three most important broad categories of software in computers, behind the operating system and whatever applications are installed. Drivers are important for two reasons. First, your peripherals won't work without them, and second, corrupted or out-of-date device drivers are responsible for most system crashes.

There are other reasons why it's important to keep your device drivers up-to-date. Sometimes a manufacturer will become aware of some kind of defect or glitch in the driver software and issue a fix. You will need it. A different manufacturer may have a driver for its own device that will cause a conflict with an out-of-date driver on your device. Over time, updates for *Windows* may eventually cause problems with an out-of-date driver.

Proper device-driver management is essential to keeping your computer crash proof. If device driver management is unfamiliar territory, please pay attention. You'll be glad you did. Microsoft introduced the concept of Signed Drivers with *Windows 2000* and continued with *Windows XP*. If a device driver is "signed" by Microsoft, it means that the driver has been subjected to meticulous, painstaking, extensive testing to ensure compatibility with your *Windows* operating system.

Anytime you install a signed driver, *Windows* checks it by default and also guarantees it has not

been altered or changed in any way. If the driver is not signed, *Windows* alerts you with a strong message that the driver has not passed Microsoft's rigorous certification tests.

Windows will also ask if you want to install the driver anyway, and will do so if you give it permission. Keeping your computer safe from unstable software is always a good idea. Fortunately, changing the *Windows* default is relatively easy, but you need administrator privileges.

Right-click the My Computer icon on the desktop, then select Properties. Click the Hardware tab and then the Driver Signing button. Choose Block to let this be the new default, and you're done. *Windows* will now block any device drivers that it does not recognize as signed.

Not all manufacturers send their drivers to Microsoft for testing. For small firms this can be an expensive proposition. Does this mean you should never install an unsigned driver? No, but you should do some checking of your own to ensure that the company has a good reputation in the industry. Sometimes a new device driver will prove unstable for various reasons. *Windows XP* has the ability to delete the driver and install a previous version. Open the Device Manager, and double click the drive that's causing problems. Switch to the Driver tab and Roll Back the driver to the previous version.

What we've discussed so far is fine if you're using relatively new equipment, but suppose you're having trouble with something that's old and the manufacturer has gone out of business. Chances are good that the original installation disk is lost or deteriorated to a point where it is no longer useful. There are many other reasons why you could have difficulty finding a device driver, but these are the most common.

In the past, finding the right device driver or firmware was often a tedious, time-consuming, and frequently impossible task. Nowadays, we have Web sites such as *www.driverguide.com* to help us. The site has been around since 1997 and

has seen many improvements. It has a unique membership base of thousands who collectively compiled a massive database of drivers, firmware, and support documents that is the largest and most comprehensive on the Web.

Recognizing that most people who use computers are not experts, they have devised an easy step-by-step process that will help you find and install drivers. There is an archive of hundreds of thousands of files containing not only drivers but also voluminous information on manufacturers, including links to other sites with driver information. Also useful are the discussion boards where you can chat with others who have the same hardware and learn from their experience.

After you search for a driver and find it, help doesn't stop. The Driver Summary provides you

with a rundown of all the information you're likely to need to make the decision about whether or not to download and install the driver. This information is put together from the original manufacturer, plus ratings and comments from those who have previously downloaded and installed the file. It's nice to have everything in one place.

There are many Web sites where you can find information about device drivers, but this is one of the best places to use as your starting point. Managing device drivers does not have to be a search in the dark. Use the tools available to you, and your system will be stable and a lot less prone to crash.

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

Your Credit Report

By Richard Kennon, Amador Computer Users Group, Jackson, California. Editor of *Bits and Bytes*.

How many of you have taken advantage of your opportunity to obtain a free credit report? There are three companies who maintain your credit information: Equifax, Experian and Transunion. The Fair Credit Reporting Act requires that each one provide you with a free report annually if you request it. There's the first catch—you must request it. That's not bad since the process is easy.

You have the choice of ordering all three at the same time each year or of spreading them out and ordering one from each provider every four months. I am convinced this latter strategy is the best and I try to do just that.

The second catch is a little more sinister. You have and will receive spam offers to obtain your free report for you. These are scams. Avoid them. Do not respond to any such offer. There are only three safe paths to your free reports.

First, and easiest for all you computer savvy people, is to access <http://annualcreditreport.com>. Be very careful to spell it right because there a number of bogus sites that are a close spelling and that look just like this one. At this site you can order one or more reports from any of the three reporting agencies.

The second is to call 1-877-322-8228 and take care of it by phone.

The third way is to order a form from www.ftc.gov/credit. Fill it out and mail it in. I think it is a very good idea to do this on a regular basis. It will give you the opportunity to see if anyone has been accessing your records (an indication that someone is borrowing money using your name) and/or to find any mistakes in your records that might give you a headache if you are applying for credit.

There are ways to get these errors corrected. I did it once to correct my birth date. Not a big deal, but I feel old enough without a boost from them. One last thing, since I have a little space left. The reporting agencies are not required to give you your score that you hear so much about. The agencies will offer you the opportunity to purchase your score. My thought on this is, if the record is clear and all my former debts are marked "paid on time," then my score is probably pretty good and I don't need to know it. Your choice.

Submitted by Charlotte Semple

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

Windows Vista: A Preview

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

As you all probably know by now, *Vista* is the next version of *Windows* that Microsoft will be releasing. It was supposed to be available this November, but its release has been postponed to after January 1, 2007. However, that 2007 release date relates to the nonbusiness versions of *Vista* – in other words, the versions that most of us will be using. The “enterprise” or business versions are expected to be shipped this November, unless something else slips.

There will be more than one “consumer” or Home edition. You should realize that the six versions of *Vista* that are expected are really only two more than are currently available in *Windows XP*. In *XP* you have the *Home* and *Professional* versions plus the *Multimedia* and *Tablet PC* versions. In *Vista* you will have *Vista Starter*, *Vista Home Basic*, *Vista Home Premium* and *Vista Ultimate*. (Please remember that these names may change by the time *Vista* is actually released.) The non-consumer versions will be *Vista Business* and *Vista Enterprise*. I will limit the scope of this article to the consumer versions of *Vista*.

Now for a disclaimer. Although I have a beta copy of *Vista*, I have not yet installed it on my computer. I have a large enough partition that I could install it and dual-boot my machine. However, current antivirus, firewall and anti-Trojan software will not run on *Vista*. There are not yet any new versions of these security programs available for *Vista*. Consequently, I have no intention of installing this *Vista* software on my main working computer. I have just acquired a secondhand system that I intend to use with nothing but *Vista* and will connect it to the Internet only when absolutely necessary. So this article is being written based on the most reliable sources I have been able to find that have been testing the beta version of *Vista*. After I return from my two months road trip, I'll start working with the *Vista* beta. For those not familiar with the term “beta,” this refers to preproduction software or a testing version of software that is not yet ready for the market.

Now, back to the various versions of *Vista*. The *Starter* edition is a very low-end version that will support only 32-bit software. Its exact limitations don't seem to be available yet. So, we'll just have to wait and see what Microsoft does with this version of *Vista*. It is fairly certain that neither this version nor the *Home Basic* will support the new graphics interface called “*Aero*.” However, *Home Basic* will require a minimum of 512MB of RAM. From most reports it appears to me that *Vista* running on less than 1 GB of RAM will be seriously slow, like computers that try to run *XP* on only 128 MB of RAM.

So what does *Aero* offer the average computer user? If you have a 3D graphics card with enough video RAM

(128 MB or more), *Aero* will provide an entirely different appearance on your screen. (Some commentators have compared the *Aero* graphics interface to that of the Apple Macintosh *OS X*!) Graphics designers refer to some of the capabilities as transparency, blurring, window previewing, and graphical rollover indicators. The easiest way to describe some of the effects is to provide some examples. The minimize, maximize and close indicators that you find in the upper right corner of your current window will change color as you pass your mouse over them. And this color will spill out around the edges of the icon. This gives you an additional visual indicator that your mouse is in the right position. Another example is when you place your mouse on the shortcut on the taskbar you will see a thumbnail view of the program. So when you are multi-tasking you can easily see which application you want. Or, you can check on the progress of a video feed or other running processes. Some other advantages of *Aero* are the ability to see “around the edges” of windows to the windows behind. This involves the transparency and blurring referred to earlier. This is advantageous to those who do multi-tasking. This ability is also apparently built in to the new tabbed interface being included in *Internet Explorer 7*. There is also a change to the Alt-Tab function that in earlier versions of *Windows* allowed users to tab through the list of running programs to find the one they wanted to shift to. In *Vista* this function, now called Flip, allows users to see a larger thumbnail view of open programs. There may also be a related 3D view which will show all the open windows twisted to a 45-degree angle. The user can then cycle through the windows by repeatedly pressing the Tab key.

The *Aero* graphics will be incorporated in the *Home Premium* and *Ultimate* versions. However, it requires a minimum of 128 MB of fast video RAM, DX9 3D support and a minimum of 1 GB of system RAM. Some comments have led me to believe that it will not work with motherboards that use shared RAM for the video function. It requires a separate graphics card. Also, I would never recommend trying to run a system with these minimums. They should both be doubled, at the very least. If your PC doesn't have this capacity, then you will still be able to run *Aero*, only in a limited or basic mode. It will not display all the features found in the full *Aero* mode.

There have been a number of articles related to hardware requirements to run *Vista*. In my mind, it's a little early for these specs to be firm. One thing you can be sure of, *Vista* will require more RAM, a large hard drive and a fast central processor. Both Intel and AMD are touting their latest generation of processors as being necessary for running *Vista*. It does appear that current single

core processors will be able to run *Vista* in 32-bit mode. I suspect that at some later date you will need to consider a dual-core 64-bit processor or a 32-bit processor that runs hyperthreading. Naturally, the 64-bit processor will have a definite advantage in running *Vista*.

The other question is, how well will *Vista* run current 32-bit software? Most of the new computers currently being manufactured have 64-bit processors. These are designed to work with both 32-bit and 64-bit operating systems. *Vista* will be a 64-bit OS. There are very few 64-bit software applications available, and most of your current software is, or should be, 32 bit. It is expected that "well behaved" 32-bit software will run on *Vista* without problems. Only those applications that don't install system level drivers or try to take control of the OS are considered well-behaved. You will have to replace your antivirus and firewall software. That is a given. New *Vista* applications should be available when *Vista* comes on the market. The same is true of anti-Trojan/anti-parasite software. Other software that might be a problem would include video games and multimedia applications. Those of you who have been running *Windows* for a few years and have upgraded from earlier versions are already familiar with one of the real roadblocks to getting started with a new OS. That's right – device drivers! Every device driver for your hardware like printers, scanners, external USB drives, etc, will have to be rewritten. Early adopters of *Vista* will have similar problems.

Windows XP runs 16-bit software in "Windows on Windows" (WOW) emulation mode. *Vista* will run 32-bit software in much the same way, using an emulation layer to talk to the software. This converts the 32-bit program calls to 64-bit code. This process should be transparent to the user. Now, if you still have some 16-bit software or DOS software, it really is time to upgrade. These will not run on *Vista* without the use of third-party emulation software. There is no indication that Microsoft will support 16-bit or DOS applications.

Now the next topic that is of primary interest with this *Windows* upgrade is also the one for which the least information is available. That is – Security! *Windows XP* and *Internet Explorer* have developed quite a reputation for being full of security holes. In spite of all of Microsoft's efforts to plug the gaps, new ones keep showing up. Microsoft has indicated that *Vista* will be far more secure than previous versions. The problem is that in trying to tighten the security net, Microsoft seems to be making things more difficult for the average user. With *XP Home*, the user generally operates in an administrator mode so that new applications can be installed and unused ones removed without having to set up additional permissions. With both *XP Home* and *XP Professional*, Microsoft has tried to get individual users to use a limited nonadministrator mode on a regular basis. This has been singularly un-

successful. The reason for running in the limited user mode is to prevent malware from accessing system applications in the *Windows* directory and subdirectories and/or the registry. When the computer is set up so that accessing these functions requires a password, any outside influence can do less damage to the operating system or to the installed applications. However, because the limitations of the user mode are so great, most *Windows* users end up running in the administrator mode to simplify making changes to their computer.

Well, it appears that Microsoft is going to change that. *Vista* will enforce the limited user or user account control (UAC) to prevent the user from having constant access to administrative functions. Microsoft obviously doesn't believe that users can be allowed unlimited access to their own computers. Included in this there may be increased blocking of online software distribution. You may get more pop-up warnings when your installed software tries to access the Internet. Nearly all applications need to access the Internet at one time or another. This gives them the capability to download updates, patches, bug fixes and other security-related information. Many applications also need to hook into the operating system in ways that are similar to those used by malware. If your operating system is constantly popping up warning windows and telling you that your computer is at risk, how would you react? Would you be especially annoyed if responding to these warnings by clicking on "Cancel" closes the program and prevents you from using an application? You may try to go back and run all of your applications as an "administrator" as you did in *XP*. However, *Vista* has various levels of "Administrator" and may still require you to enter a password for non-Microsoft applications. Now for the caveat: *Vista* is not yet in final beta form, therefore there can be many changes, especially in the security setup. It will depend in part on the comments from the testing community. Hopefully not all of them will be system administrators for large corporations. What Microsoft has admitted in one of their own tech articles is that "*Windows* services represent a large percentage of the overall attack surface in *Windows*." That is a direct quotation. So if *Windows* is the problem, why are they trying to solve it by limiting the ability of users to use their computers and their software?

Over the coming months I will continue to provide updates on my own experience with *Vista* as well as information I obtain from other beta testers. We'll see just how much benefit we'll really get from this *Windows* upgrade.

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail: bwsail at yahoo.com.

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

Hard Disk Disasters

By Dick Maybach, member Brookdale Computer User Group, New Jersey

Hard disk failure is the most serious PC problem, because it jeopardizes all your data. Even if everything else in your PC dies, if your hard disk is good you can just move it to a new machine and be back in business as though nothing had happened.

The first problem is to recognize hard disk failure. Look for one or more of the following symptoms.

- A squealing or clicking noise – you will have to open your system case to find where the noise is coming from. Diskette and CD-ROM drives and fans can produce similar noises.
- A longer than usual time to boot up.
- A longer than usual time to open a folder or file.
- Spontaneous file or folder name changes.
- Frequent error messages.
- Missing or corrupted files or folders.
- Frequent “blue screens of death”.

If these begin to appear, immediately copy your data files (most likely your *My Documents* folder) to another device, preferably one with removable media, such as a CD-ROM or a DVD. Do not turn off your PC and do not spend time trying to diagnose the problem before saving your data. Every second you delay increases the likelihood that more data will be lost.

Clearly, the best defense is to back up your data before you have a problem. However, few people do this, and even if you do, it may have been some time since your last backup.

If your hard disk fails before you can save your data, all is not lost. If your data is very valuable, for example if it's customer data, you can send your disk to a commercial firm that specializes in data recovery. This service will cost from several hundred to several thousand dollars, but usually there is no fee unless they are at least partially successful. If you decide to do this, shut off your PC immediately and contact the firm for instructions. If your data is worth less than this amount, there are two things you can try:

- Remove the hard drive from the system unit and give it a light tap by holding a screwdriver by its blade and tapping the unit with the handle. Reinstall the hard drive and reboot.
- Remove the drive and place it in a freezer for several minutes, until it is cold to the touch. Reinstall and reboot.

If either of these works, move your data to a safe place immediately.

If you have only a partial disk failure, save as much data as you can; then try the following.

- Restart your PC, but before Windows boots, get into the BIOS setup utility. If you watch the screen carefully, you should see directions on how to do this. Often you will press F2 or F10. Look for an area called Utilities or something similar and run any drive diagnostics available.
- Run CHKDSK. (Click on *Start*, then on *Run...*, and at the prompt type “chkdsk x: /r”, where x: is the drive in difficulty. If c: is problem drive, you will probably see a message that chkdsk can't check the drive now, but will offer to check it the next time you restart. Answer “y” and reboot.
- Run diagnostics supplied by your drive manufacturer, or if you don't have one, use Western Digital's Data Lifeguard Diagnostics, available free from <http://westerndigital.com>. Versions are available for both Windows and DOS.

You can take some simple steps to prolong the life of all your PC components:

- Keep the system unit clean, especially if it sits on the floor. Once every month or two open the system case and remove any dust and debris with a vacuum. I prefer this to compressed air, which just moves the dirt to a new resting place.
- Don't move your PC while it's operating; especially, don't jar it.
- Use a power surge protector or preferably an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). The latter are widely available for \$100 or so. Besides reducing stress on your components, one of these will save your data if the power fails. I always had a UPS at work, and every so often I would see the lights blink and hear streams of profanity from other offices whose occupants did not have one.

Modern PC components are quite reliable, and the chances are that you will replace your computer before anything fails. However, you should have a plan in case there is a problem. Similarly, the chances are that you will replace your car without ever having an accident yet you still wear a seatbelt, and carry insurance.

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Choose Your Own "Home Page"

By Ira Wilsker

I work on a lot of different computers at a variety of locations, and one factor that consistently astounds me is that many people have blissfully, ignorantly, never changed their startup "home page" from its default. This is the page that first opens when the user connects to the Internet. For example, many Dell computers have the Dell Web site set for the startup page when the user first accesses the Internet, while *Windows* itself, unless otherwise changed, defaults to Microsoft's MSN home page, making it one of the most-used startup pages. Many Internet service providers (ISP), such as AOL, AT&T, and others changed the users' home page to the ISP's selected home page.

Startup or "home" pages are big business, because they are commonly advertiser supported, and the more views they get (also referred to in the industry as "hits"), the more revenue generated by the host. This on-screen real estate is so valuable that a type of malware or spyware, sometimes known as home-page hijackers, will attempt to change your home page to its client's home page, for which the miscreant receives compensation on each page so changed.

There are many different services offering home pages, and if you find one you like, you can easily make it your new one. The process is the same for most browsers. If you use Microsoft's *Internet Explorer (IE)* and visit a Web site you like, simply click on "Tools" on the menu bar, and that will open a window where the home page can be selected. If the open page is what you like, then click on the "Use Current" radio button, and the current page will be displayed each time the browser is loaded. If you choose "Use Default," the home page will revert back to the default start-up page of Microsoft (or other manufacturer). On the new *Internet Explorer 7 (Beta)*, which offers tabbed browsing, you a different home or start-up page can be selected for each tab. For those who do not want to connect to any page at all when loading the browser, *IE7Beta* offers the option of a blank page. All versions of *IE* also allow for the manual entering of any selected internet address for a home page. To directly go back to the home page at any time, simply click on the little house or "home" icon on the menu bar.

Firefox (www.mozilla.com), one of the most popular browsers behind *IE*, offers you a simple interface to select or change the home page. Clicking on "Tools" on the menu bar opens a window where "General" can be selected, and then "Home Page." *Firefox* allows the address to be manually entered, or the current page loaded can be

selected. Other options allow for the home page to be selected from a previously saved bookmark (*Internet Explorer* calls these "Favorites"), or the option for a blank start-up page can be selected. *Firefox* also offers the little house on the menu bar for instant access to the home page.

There are many choices for a home page. Some users use their Web-mail accounts as a home page, first displaying their e-mail when connecting to the Internet, while others may choose retailers, auction sites, employer Web pages, search engines (such as Google or Yahoo), newspapers, or any other page of interest. While any page can be selected as a home page, the most popular home pages are usually news and information-based. My personal favorite, which I use on all of my computers, is "My Yahoo," at my.yahoo.com. I have found My Yahoo to be the most comprehensive and flexible home page. Being an information junkie, I have customized my My Yahoo page to include stock and mutual fund listings, news from dozens of sources, weather, lottery results, sports scores, my personal calendar, latest e-mails received, TV listings, and other information. *My Yahoo*, which is very easy to configure, directly offers thousands of choices. Many information resources, such as the *Examiner*, are now using "RSS" or "XML" feeds as a news source, and these can be added to *My Yahoo*, often with a single mouse click. My Yahoo is also customizable with hundreds of backgrounds, color schemes, layouts, or other features to personalize it.

Microsoft is currently testing a new home page intended to at first supplement its flagship home page at www.msn.com, and maybe later replace it. This new home page, currently in beta testing, is currently online at www.live.com. It will be a strong competitor to *My Yahoo*, offering news, sports, weather, e-mail and other resources in columns that are infinitely customizable.

There are countless other "My" homepages available, such as AOL's my.netscape.com, and other personalized home pages, including Google's "Personalized Home" link sitting quietly on the top right corner of the popular google.com website. All of these home pages can be easily customized to suit individual needs.

There is no need to continue to use the default start-up or home page provided by your operating system or ISP. Investigate some of the alternatives, and increase your enjoyment of the Web.

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

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

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