Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

Computer News

Inside This Issue:

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group has served novice and experienced computer users since 1983. Through its monthly meetings, newsletters, on-line forum, special interest groups, mentor program and community involvement, it has helped educate people of all ages. The NVPCUG provides opportunities for people to find friends who share common interests and experiences. Through its Computers-to-Schools program, members refurbish used computer equipment for donation to local schools. Since January 2003 the NVPCUG has donated 350 computers and 109 printers.
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Learn How to Sell and Buy on eBay at September 21 NVPCUG Meeting

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, September 21, 2005, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California.

Do you have stuff you no longer need that is just taking up space and collecting dust in your home? Have you been looking unsuccessfully in stores for an item? You could dispose of your old stuff and earn a surprising amount of money, or find that item and buy it at a fair price, by using **eBay**. EBay, which is now celebrating its tenth anniversary, is the world's largest online community of buyers and sellers, with more than 157 million registered users, of whom 75 million are in the United States.

At this meeting **Kay Nagel**, a highly experienced eBay user, will present a tutorial on selling and buying on eBay.   She will give an overview of how eBay works and show you how to register as a seller and as a buyer, complete seller forms, and create suitable titles for sale items. She will discuss fees and pricing strategies and outline how to create attention-attracting merchandise descriptions, take photographs that will

Kay Nagel

attract buyers and inspire bids, upload photographs to your seller's listing, and package and ship sold items. Kay will also discuss bidding strategies, finding the selling prices of similar previously sold items, and payment options, including use of **PayPal**, eBay's online payment service. Using Kay's tips, techniques, and strategies, you will find selling and buying on eBay to be fun, fast, and profitable.

Kay, who resides in Napa, has been buying and selling items on eBay for many years. She has been especially active as a seller during the past year. Even as a casual seller, she has often grossed more than $2,000 a month auctioning items on eBay. Kay is the daughter and sister of NVPCUG members **Linda Collison** and **Robert Eads**, respectively. She is a designer/draftsman at Riechers Spence & Associates, a Napa-based consulting civil engineering firm.

In the **Computer Tutor** session prior to the main presentation, **Tom Kessler, Jr.**, will demonstrate Scansoft's *Dragon NaturallySpeaking*, which, when properly set up, allows users to easily dictate and edit documents, complete forms, and control most applications by voice. Tom uses this speech recognition product extensively. The son of NVPCUG members **Tom and Eleanor Kessler**, he is the president of Bel Aire Engineering, a Hayward, California-based designer, fabricator, and installer of custom architectural products for commercial and residential buildings.

Our meeting will begin with **Random Access**, a period in which you can ask questions about specific issues you have encountered while using computer products and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees.

President's Message —

More Opportunities
By Orion E. Hill

September NVPCUG Meeting

I'm really excited about the presentations scheduled for our September 21 general meeting. For a long time I have wanted to sell and buy stuff on eBay, but have been unable to do so, mainly because I haven't had time to read through the instructional materials that are available and learn how to use eBay effectively. If your situation is similar to mine, **Kay Nagel**'s tutorial on eBay may end our predicament.

Similarly, I've wanted to use speech recognition software to reduce the amount of time required to perform various tasks on my computers, but haven't had time to research current products. My first exposure to voice recognition products was in 1984, when I sold the leading package while serving as assistant manager of a ComputerLand store. Even as limited as that early software was, it still showed promise of a great future. Since then computer and voice recognition technology has advanced tremendously. Unfortunately, the CompUSA representative who spoke at our August meeting was unable to demonstrate the capabilities of ScanSoft's *Dragon NaturallySpeaking 8*, which many experts believe to be the current leading product for personal computers, because he had not had time to properly set it up. I'm delighted that **Tom Kessler, Jr.**, who uses DNS extensively, has agreed to demonstrate its power at our meeting this month.

August Door Prize Winner

Congratulations to **Tom Kessler** (Sr.), who won the standard version of *Dragon NaturallySpeaking 8* in the door prize drawing at our August 17 group meeting. Tom is very eager to become as proficient as his son in using DNS. We are grateful to **CompUSA** for donating the package, which has a suggested retail price of $99.99.

Annual Picnic a Great Success

Our annual potluck picnic on August 21 was a great success, with at least 42 members and spouses attending – too many people to easily count as everyone mingled to socialize, fill his or her plate with selections of delicious food, and participate in competitive games. Thank you **Dianne Prior** for coordinating this most enjoyable event. And thank you **Dick** and **Sandy Peterson** for hosting our last eight picnics at your Christmas tree farm.

EBay SIG Initial Meeting

With so many people interested in leaning how to sell and buy on eBay, is it any surprise that an **eBay Special Interest Group** (SIG) would form within the NVPCUG? **Tom Kessler** (Sr.) is coordinating the organizing of the SIG and has already collected some excellent training materials.

The eBay SIG's initial meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 28, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., at Tom's home, which is located at 18 Ridgetop Way, just off Pinewood Drive, in Napa. If you are interested in participating in the eBay SIG or would like more information about it, contact Tom by calling (707) 258-1884 or sending e-mail to *kesstom@yahoo.com.*

"Build Your Own Computer" Workshop

If you are interested in participating in the computer-building workshop being coordinated by **Dick Peterson**, contact him immediately to get the latest information about the three kits that can be ordered from PC Club, a national retailer, and to select a time in mid October for the workshop. Kits need to be ordered by September 24 to ensure that everyone receives his or her kit in time for the workshop. To contact Dick, call (707) 259-1712 or send e-mail to *Winemaker@aol.com*. For kit descriptions and ordering, visit the PC Club's Web site: *www.pcclub.com/promo/byo*.

Refurbished Computer Equipment Donated

The NVPCUG, through our Computers-to-Schools program, has donated 42 multimedia computers, seven laser printers, and one heavy-duty photocopier to Napa County public schools since last July 27. We've also donated two complete computer systems to disadvantaged students.

Nominating Committee Appointed

The selection process for our 2006 officers has begun with my appointment of a nominating committee chaired by **Roy Wagner**. If you would like to serve on the committee or are interested in serving as an officer and would like to learn about the various positions, let Roy know by calling (707) 253-2721 or e-mailing *Treasurer@nvpcug*.org Officer election information will be published in our October newsletter.

Sound Off!

Got a suggestion for improving an NVPCUG activity? Want to help with an activity? Send e-mail to *President@nvpcug.org* or call (707) 252-0637.

ANNUAL PICNIC REPORT—WERE YOU THERE?

By Dianne Prior, Picnic Coordinator

Dianne Prior

A very pleasant time was had by the 42 people who attended this year's potluck picnic on August 20. The setting in the redwood grove next at Dick and Sandy Peterson's Christmas Tree Farm was ideal. Sandy had the tables looking beautiful with tablecloths and flowers. Thanks a million, Dick and Sandy.

Also, thank you to Bob Kulas, who manned the barbecue, cooking our beef and chicken to perfection. The meat, soft drinks and supplies were provided by the club,

Photo by Susy Ball

Photo by Ron Dack

except for the generous donations of chicken by Ron Dack and charcoal by Dick Peterson.

Everyone's delicious potluck dishes made it certain that no one would go away hungry, especially with Susy Ball's rich cake (Happy Birthday, Susy). Susy and Ron also took many photos for our group's photo archive. Much appreciation goes to everyone for pitching in to help set up and then clean up the picnic site.

We had games galore, thanks to Orion Hill. The winners of the various games were:

Cribbage --   John Moore
Dart throw -- Orion Hill
Floppy toss -- Bob Simmerman
Horse shoes -- Mike Ball & Jim Prior (team)
Washer toss -- Jim Hearn

Thank you to the NVPCUG members who donated game and door prizes, including Ron Dack, Orion Hill, Bernhard Krevet, John Pitt and unknown other members.

Many have commented that this was one of the most enjoyable picnics in recent years. It was nice, sitting by the lake and getting to know our fellow members better. We hope to see everyone at our next potluck event, our annual holidays party in December.

Photo by Susy Ball

Photo by Ron Dack

NVPCUG Special Interest Groups

The NVPCUG currently has two special interest groups. By attending SIG meetings, you can learn about a subject in greater detail than is feasible at NVPCUG general meetings and can share your knowledge with other people. SIG meetings are open to everyone. Meeting times and locations occasionally change. For current meeting information, see our Web site, *www.nvpcug.org*, or contact the SIG leaders.

Digital Photography SIG

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

eBay SIG

Meets: Monthly, initial meeting
Wednesday, September 28
7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
Tom Kessler's home
18 Ridgetop Way, Napa
Leader: **Tom Kessler**
(707) 258-1884
kesstom@yahoo.com

Investors SIG

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

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group Officers for 2005

Board of Directors

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

Other Directors: Dianne Prior, John Simcoe, James Stirling

Appointed Officers

Computer Recycling Coordinator	Bill Wheadon	224-3901	Recycler@nvpcug.org
Computer Tutor Coordinator	Mike Moore	255-1615	Tutor@nvpcug.org
Computers-to-Schools Program Coordinator	Orion E. Hill	252-0637	CTS@nvpcug.org
Facility Arrangements Coordinator	Steve Siegrist		Facility@nvpcug.org
Greeter Coordinator	Bob Simmerman	259-6113	Greeter@nvpcug.org
Librarian	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Librarian@nvpcug.org
Membership Director	Dianne Prior	252-1506	Membership@nvpcug.org
Mentor Program Coordinator	Hilton Des Roches	224-6170	Mentors@nvpcug.org
Newsletter Circulator	Jim Hearn	224-2540	Circulation@nvpcug.org
Newsletter Editor	James Stirling	944-1177	Editor@nvpcug.org
Product Review Coord.	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Reviews@nvpcug.org
Programs Director	(Volunteer Needed)		Programs@nvpcug.org
Publicity Director	John Simcoe	258-8233	Publicity@nvpcug.org
Random Access Moderator	Jerry Brown	254-9607	Questions@nvpcug.org
Special Projects Director	(Volunteer Needed)		Projects@nvpcug.org
Webmaster	Ron Dack		Webmaster@nvpcug.org

*All telephone numbers are in Area Code 707.

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

NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer contact Orion Hill, (707) 252-0637.
September 7	7:00 p.m.	Board of Directors meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
September 12	5:30-7:30 p.m.	Investors SIG meeting, Jerry Brown's home, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
September 14	7:00-8:30 p.m.	Digital Photography SIG meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
September 21	7:00-9:00 p.m.	General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa
September 28	7:00-8:30 p.m.	EBay SIG meeting, Tom Kessler's home, 18 Ridgetop Way, Napa

File Conversion—Updating Your Old Documents

By Jennifer Johnson, *Smart Computing Magazine*, PC Project, August 2005

Think for a moment about the memoir you wrote on your computer several years ago. Where is that document today? Perhaps it's on an old floppy diskette in a box in your basement, and maybe you've given up trying to open it, so you decided to just let it rest in peace. Besides, even if you still wanted to work on the document, would you be able to open, read, and modify it? Because most of today's word processors are compatible with many older formats, chances are good you'll be able to open the document using the newest word processor version on your computer.

The first step in converting your old files is to decide which word processor you want to use. The best choice is to use your newest word processor version that still includes all of the old features and has the ability to convert all of the formatting (or at least most of it) you used in your old documents. For this article we'll demonstrate the process of converting files from various formats to *Microsoft Word 2003*. However, the process should be similar no matter which word processor or version you're using.

Because *Word 97, 2000,* and *2002* use the same format structure as *Word 2003*, it's easy to convert old files to the new format. Plus, *Word 2003* supports all of the features of previous *Word* versions. Because of this you shouldn't have a problem converting most files to *Word 2003*.

A New Breath Of Life

To update a document created in a previous version of *Word* or a different word processor than *Word 2003*, launch the *Word 2003* program and click Open from the File menu. If the file doesn't appear in the Open dialog box, you may need to select a different file type from the Files Of Type drop-down menu.

After opening the file, resave it in the *Word 2003* format by using the Save As command from the File menu and selecting Word Document (*.doc) from the Save As Type drop-down menu. If you want to replace the older file with a new one that's compatible with Word 2003, simply click Save from the File menu and let *Word 2003* overwrite the older file. On the other hand, if you'd rather rename the file to preserve a separate version of the older file, click Save As, type a new name in the File Name field, and click the Save button.

If you're curious about which converter *Word* is using to process your older files saved in another format, you can direct *Word 2003* to display the Convert File dialog box whenever it needs to covert a file. To find this feature, click Options from the Tools menu, choose the General tab, select the checkbox next to Confirm Conversion At Open, and click OK.

This method of converting files will suffice if you only have a handful of files to convert, but if you have numerous files you need to convert, it's much easier to use the Batch Conversion Wizard that *Word 2003* provides. This wizard only works if you place all of the files you need to convert in one folder on your hard drive. To find this wizard, open the File menu, click New, and click On My Computer in the Templates area of the New Document task pane. Next, choose the Other Documents tab, double-click Batch Conversion Wizard, and follow the on-screen instructions on how to convert your documents.

If *Word 2003's* built-in converters cannot open your files, you might need to install additional converters, such as those found in the *Microsoft Office Converter Pack (office.microsoft.com/en-us/assistance/HA011513581033.aspx)*.

As an alternative to using one of *Word's* conversion tools, you can open the older file in its native program and resave the document in either the RTF (Rich Text Format) or the TXT (text) format. The RTF format will keep the layout and text formatting information you set up in your document, whereas the TXT file format will not. Open the file, click Save As from the File menu, select the file type you want to use—such as Rich Text Format (*.rtf)—and click Save. Once you've converted your file to RTF or TXT, you can open it in *Word 2003* and resave it in a newer format using the Save As command.

An Organized Solution

Now that you've converted all of your files to one format, it's time to delete all of those older word processors from your computer and free up some space. For best results use Add Or Remove Programs (Add/Remove Programs in older Windows versions) from the Control Panel. And just think: The next time you open a word processor document, you can do it with ease using a single program.

Beware of File Sharing

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; Radio Show Host

Web site: *http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/ speeches/2005/063005operationsitedo wn.htm*

Most of us have heard about the popular "Peer to Peer" or "P2P" file sharing networks. Countless millions of computer users around the world routinely download copyrighted music, software, videos, and games on these computer networks, as well as from "alt.binaries" newsgroups where users upload complete commercial computer programs, and other intellectual property. Ethicists have long bemoaned such behavior, and representatives of intellectual property right owners have long tried to shut down such activities with lawsuits and other forms of pressure. Such pirates are alleged to have deprived the rightful owners of billions of dollars of revenue.

Legal challenges to such practices have met with some success, but the recent US Supreme Court ruling of MGM vs. Grockster has now opened up another avenue. In a statement by US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, "… that those who actively induce or encourage the theft of copyrighted works may be held liable for their actions. … Our objective in this operation was to find and dismantle large-scale criminal enterprises that illegally obtain, copy, distribute, and trade in copyrighted software, music, movies, and video games."

Recently, Attorney General Gonzales announced "Operation Site Down", a coordinated international legal and criminal attack on cyber pirates, with law enforcement agencies from the US (the FBI), Canada, France, Belgium, Israel, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Denmark, the Netherlands, Australia, and Germany participating in raids on computer file sharing networks, and arresting individuals allegedly engaging in such intellectual property theft. It is noteworthy that two countries, reportedly the major centers of piracy, Russia and China, were not participating in the crackdown.

Operation Site Down, in its first series of internationally coordinated raids, shutdown or crippled several of the popular file sharing networks, and websites offering pirated materials referred to in cyber circles as "warez" (pronounced "wares"). Among the networks and sites raided were RiSCISO, Myth, TDA, LND, Goodfellaz, Hoodlum, Vengeance, Centropy, Wasted Time, Paranoid, Corrupt, Gamerz, AdmitONE, Hellbound, KGS, BBX, KHG, NOX, NFR, CDZ, TUN, and BHP. Over 70 search warrants were executed in the US, with several arrests reported, while additional raids and arrests were reported in the other cooperating nations. These services were alleged to have been "first providers" who posted the first copies of pirated works, often cracking any copy protection or registration schemes integral with such products.

Once these services made material available, it tended to show up on warez sites around the world, where millions could then download the material using P2P networks, websites, FTP sites, and other online resources. It is hoped that by raiding these primary sources of illicit intellectual property, that much of the supply of pirated content will be reduced. Attorney General Gonzales stated, "By dismantling these networks, the Department is striking at the top of the copyright piracy supply chain - a distribution chain that provides the vast majority of the illegal digital content now available online."

A variety of online resources have stated that the principles of many of the sites raided were directly behind the cracking and distribution of popular and expensive software such as products from Adobe, AutoCAD, Microsoft and other software publishers, as well as the distribution of recent movies, including "Mr. and Mrs. Smith," and "Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith."

"And by penetrating this illegal world of high-technology and intellectual property theft, we have shown that law enforcement can and will find -- and we will prosecute -- those who try to use the Internet to create piracy networks beyond the reach of law enforcement," so said Attorney General Gonzales.

There is more to file sharing than just the legal, moral, and ethical considerations; P2P file sharing has also been a major source of computer problems, as they also often install spyware, viruses, and Trojans on unsuspecting computers. KaZaA, Morpheus, and Grockster, three of the major P2P file sharing networks (there are actually thousands of such pirate networks), have frequently been cited as the vector utilized to infect computers, both with their requisite software, and by the content downloaded from third party participants. Warez sites are also notorious for installing spyware that includes pop-ups with pornographic content, key loggers that can steal identities, dialers that connect to outrageously expensive international locations, and other forms of threatening malware. Websites offering such content are often loaded with active-x based, Java enabled, or other content capable of installing unwanted software on the victim computer, hijacking browsers, redirecting searches and purchases, and other nasty processes.

Operation Site Down, and the MGM vs. Grockster case should put all of us on notice that behaviors that may have been commonplace in the past should now be halted, lest "we" become civilly and criminally liable for our online actions. I know that many computer users rationalize such actions with excuses such as "(big name software publisher) is rich and won't miss it," or "(big name software

Maintaining Your Downloads

By David Garcia, President, Little Blue PC Club, Northglenn, Colorado

petitbleu@comcast.net

Having trouble keeping track of your downloaded files? Here's a couple of easy procedures to help you maintain, identify, and document your downloads.

1. Create a "Downloads" Folder & Sub-folders

When downloading files, (for example, you buy some software online, and download it instead of having it mailed) it is a good idea to place all your downloads into a specific folder so that you can always find them when you need them. If you don't already have a folder called "Downloads," or "My Downloads," then you should create one on your hard drive (normally the "C:" drive).

To create a folder on the "C:" drive right-click the Start button on the desktop, then click "Explore" in

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publisher) has been ripping us off for so long that it is time for some payback." Just because a file is available in a newsgroup or a Web site to download does not mean that it is a legitimate "shareware" or "freeware" copy. Most downloaders of such software, music, games, and videos are all too aware that the content is pirated, yet they participate in great numbers.

To the pirates reading this column, or to the parents of children illicitly downloading copyrighted music and other intellectual property, you have been warned. The feds may be looking over your shoulder, and may not like what they can see. All Internet users leave an electronic trail that is easy to track; please, do not become a target of a federal investigation and prosecution.

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

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the popup menu. This will open the Windows Explorer. Left-click the "Local Disk (C:)" icon to highlight it. Then click "File" on the Menu Bar and point to "New." When the fly-out menu opens, click "Folder." A "New Folder" is created on the C: drive. Rename it to "Downloads" or "My Downloads" as you prefer. To rename it just right-click it and select Rename from the popup menu.

Prior to downloading a given file it would also be good, for identification and documentation purposes, to create a sub-folder within the "Downloads" folder that identifies the origin of the download. Give the sub-folder a short name that identifies its origin. For example, if you download some anti-virus software from Symantec, you might name the sub-folder "Symantec." Then when you download the file place it into the Symantec sub-folder within the "Downloads" folder. Any subsequent downloads from Symantec should also be placed into this folder.

Creating the sub-folder is similar to creating the "Downloads" folder. To create the sub-folder you left-click the Downloads folder, click "File" on the Menu Bar, point to "New," click "Folder," and rename it. You should now have a sub-folder within the Downloads folder. The hierarchy should look like this:

Local Disc (C:)

    Downloads (or My Downloads)

        Sub-folder (Whatever you name it).

2. Documenting the Download

When a file is downloaded it usually has a cryptic name like "Abc4205.exe" To further document my downloads, I create a text file within the sub-folder that identifies the download. Within the text file I give a description of what the download is, when I downloaded it,

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and when I installed it. I give the text file the same name as the downloaded file except for the extension. For example, if I downloaded a file called "Abc4205.exe" from Symantec using the procedure #1 above, it would be in the "Downloads" folder in the "Symantec" sub-folder. I would then create a text file called "Abc4205.txt," and also place it in the "Symantec" sub-folder. In this example, I would have two files within my "Symantec" sub-folder: Abc4205.exe which is the downloaded file and Abc4205.txt which is my description of the downloaded file.

To create the text file left-click the sub-folder name (e.g. "Symantec") once. Click "File" on the Menu Bar and then point to "New." When the fly-out menu opens, click "Text File." A "New Text Document.txt" file will be placed into the subfolder. Rename the file to the download file name (without the "exe" extension). Now double-click the renamed text file to open it with Notepad. Type in your description of the download and save it.

Using the above two procedures gives you an orderly method of maintaining, identifying, and documenting your downloads.

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Feel The Burn - – DVD Writing: 6 Tips for That Perfect Burn

Tech Tip 39, by Miguel Fernandez

For many computer users, DVD writing (or "burning," as it is commonly called) can end up being an expensive trial and error process, especially when burning video for playback on set-top DVD players. This Tech Tip is intended to eliminate the need to spend that hard-earned money in order to achieve that "perfect burn." Please note, as with many things computer-related, many people hold strong opinions of certain subjects, and this is definitely one of them. This tip simply enumerates what we have found to work for many people. While this Tech Tip deals largely with DVD video playback compatibility, we at Geeks.com encourage you to use your DVD burner responsibly and to observe all copyright laws for the area in which you live.

Tip #1 - It all starts with media…
The bane of the DVD burning enthusiast is "coasters." This is what bad DVD burns are commonly referred to because this is about the only use left for a DVD disc that suffered a bad burn. With high-quality media, you are apt to get fewer "coasters" per pack of media. The consensus of many is that one of the best brands of media available are the discs made by a company called Taiyo Yunden. Many also have success with "major brand" media such as Memorex, Maxell, TDK, Verbatim, etc. They might cost slightly more than standard or "no name" media, but if you are seriously after the highest write quality and playback performance, it pays to at least consider purchasing them. Not only will higher quality media burn better initially, but they will better retain their burn down the road. A note about Taiyo Yunden is that it is frequently blank (that is, it is not branded on the non-writing side as "Taiyo Yunden").

Most manufacturers, "major brand" and "no name" alike, usually do not actually make their own media, but they contract out to third-party manufacturers to make their media and print their brand name on it. This may actually result in your having two spindles of media with the same name printed on them and actually have them made by two completely different companies. Because of this, many prefer to buy their media based on the actual manufacturer of the media (by a method known as "Media ID"). Two recommended ways of checking the media ID, or "manufacturer ID," of your media is to use Nero's *InfoTool* or the excellent third-party tool, *DVDInfoPro.*

Something else to consider, is that many have found that DVD burning drives are quite finicky when it comes to media, particularly cheap, no-name media. What this means in practical terms is that the more inexpensive media may not work in their drive or may burn at a reduced speed. For example, you may find that a spindle of 16x DVD discs that you bought may only write at 4x or 8x on certain 16x drives. Sticking to higher-quality brands helps you to achieving the best possible write speeds while maintaining the highest level of burn quality.

Tip #2 - Check your drive manufacturer's Web site for firmware updates. Many users, especially those who may be more technically challenged, may neglect to upgrade their current DVD drive with newer firmware. Firmware is special instructions written onto a built-in chip on the drive that tells it how fast to burn, how to work with certain media, etc. The nice thing about firmware is that it can be upgraded to newer versions to enhance the features of the drive. Manufacturers commonly release new firmware for many reasons, such as media com-

patibility or better/faster drive performance. As an example, BenQ has released newer firmware for their DW1620 drive to improve the compatibility with certain 16x media (among other things). For newer firmware for your drive, check the manufacturer's Web site. Firmware is generally very easy to apply and can improve your drive's overall performance. Note that if you purchased a system with a DVD burner already installed, it may be an OEM version, and firmware may be difficult to find for this type of drive. There is one caveat on updating your firmware as well: be sure to use the firmware designed for your drive, because if you use the wrong firmware, you can kill the drive and invalidate your warranty.

Tip #3 - If burning video, be sure the format you use is supported by your stand-alone DVD player. Not all stand-alone players support both DVD-R/RW and DVD+R/RW formats. Check your player's manual to see exactly what formats it supports before you spend money on media. Generally, older players have more readability issues then newer players. *Videohelp.com* is an excellent Web site for finding such information as your player's model number, what media to use, what formats your player can use. You will also find many great guides and excellent software. One word of caution: no matter the player, for video you want to generally avoid using a rewritable (DVD-RW/DVD+RW) media. This type of media is best suited for data (although many stand-alone players do support this kind of media, some people have still encountered video playback issues).

Tip #4 – Nero is your friend.
When it comes to DVD media, the consensus is that Taiyo Yunden is the best media to use. Just like me-

dia, the consensus of many is that Nero's (formerly Ahead Software) *Nero Burning ROM* is the best burning software you can currently use for your DVD burner. The good news is that the standard version of Nero is packaged with many burners and is usually fine for most burning needs. Nero also offers a more advanced version called *Nero 6 Ultra Edition*, with features such as video authoring, for users who want to get the most out of their burner. Because of Nero's popularity, many third-party software packages automatically tie into Nero's burning engine for making actual burns on the DVD drive. Other companies also offer excellent software packages as well (such as NTI and Roxio), but Nero has quickly taken the lead in this area in the last couple of years.

Tip #5 – Advanced tip: Bitsetting. This advanced tip is for those who may be having video playback problems with DVD+R/RW media playing properly on a DVD stand-alone player. When a DVD stand-alone player plays back a disc, it looks at a set of "low level" information to tell it what kind of disc it is (for example: DVD-ROM; DVD+R, etc.). Some older stand-alone players will only play back discs marked in this area as DVD-ROM. They may physically have no problems playing back a burned disc with video, but their firmware instructions are telling them not to (because it is not marked as a DVD-ROM in this area). There are two work-arounds for this type of issue. The first is to actually update your stand-alone player's firmware (see the *videohelp.com* Web site we mentioned earlier for information on how to do this and if an update is available). The second is to have the burned disc report that it is a DVD-ROM rather than a DVD+R/RW disc. You can do this with a nifty feature called bitsetting. Many drive manufacturers do support bitsetting or "booktype change" on +R/RW media. The method of changing the booktype

of your media depends on the manufacturer of the drive. Some offer a utility to manually change it, while others will automatically change the booktype to DVD-ROM prior to actually burning your files onto the disc when using the proper burning software. While this tip may be more advanced than what you may be looking for, it does help solve some of those nagging compatibility issues some may still face.

Tip #6 – Advanced tip: **When all else fails, burn your DVD in Nero using UDF 1.02.** This is a tip some have found to help with many playback issues. If the video DVD you burned does not play, or you get a "Disc Error," try burning the disc using UDF (Universal Disc Format) 1.02. If you have a somewhat older stand-alone DVD player, there may be a chance that it cannot properly support the newer versions of UDF (burning software, such as Nero usually use the newer version of UDF when burning DVD video). This "last resort" tip has helped many with seemingly insurmountable DVD video playability issues.

 Final Words
    Following these tips, and taking the initiative to do some research on the subject, will ensure that you'll be quite satisfied with both your DVD writer as well as anything you create with it. While we have found that some people may be quick to blame the DVD drive or the DVD media as the source of a problem, this may not necessarily be the case, as we've seen with tips 5 and 6. It is our hope that these Tech Tips will help you make that "perfect burn."

From Tech Tips, Geeks.com. Used by permission.

Screen Shots

By David Garcia, President, Little Blue PC Club, Northglenn, Colorado
petitbleu@comcast.net

Have you ever wanted to print out what you see on your monitor screen? This is called a "Screenshot," and there are several software packages on the market that allow you to do just that with various degrees of sophistication. If you don't need that sophistication, you can easily use Windows to get a screenshot. Just follow these instructions:

1)   Press the Print Screen Key (PrtScr) on the keyboard.
2)   Click Start, then click Run.
3)   Type "mspaint" (without the quotes) in the Run box and click OK.
4)   In Paint, click Paste in the Edit menu
5)   Click Print Preview in the File menu. If the screenshot is cut off, you may want to change the printer setting to print in Landscape mode.
6)   Click Print and close Paint.

You're done!
    You can also save the file if you like:

1)   Click "Save" in the File menu
2)   Browse to the folder you want to save the file in so that the folder name is in the "Save In" box.
3)   Type a file name for the screenshot; use JPG in the "Save as Type" box and click Save.

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

Letters to "Late Nite" on Passwords

by Marty Shinko, Talk Show Host

Q05VIII.0: I have trouble re-membering passwords, especially those kinds of obscure, arbitrary, random passwords that are recom-mended. Isn't there a way I can use something I already have memo-rized, like my birthdate, telephone number, or Social Security Number for a password?

A: Yes, there is a way, but it in-volves doing some encoding. You can use something like a date or a phone number to create a secure password, but not as plain text. You would still need to remember the scheme you used to do the encoding. Fortunately, you can write down the encoding scheme (*not* the password!) without compromising the security of your chosen password.

Q05VIII.1: So why can't I just use my birth date, telephone num-ber, or Social Security Number di-rectly (as plain text) as my pass-word?

A: You shouldn't use such simple strings as that because they aren't se-cure, they aren't "strong" passwords . The idea of a strong password is that nobody could guess it "in a million years," even if they knew lots about you. In a pinch, you still could use something simple like that, but only for accounts where you don't really care if they get compromised, e.g., that *hotmail.com* account that you give out as your e-mail address on postcards and on contest entry forms, that address you set up as a front for most of the junk e-mail you expect to get from giving out an e-mail address.

Q05VIIl.2: Are there ways I can convert my birthdate or telephone number into a strong password?

A: Yes, you can convert a simple number sequence like a phone number or a date, into a secure password by using a substitution code, substituting a prescribed letter for each digit. There are nearly 20,000 billion ways to substitute ten letters for ten digits; nobody is going to try them all, just to guess your password!

For example, you could use your anniversary date as a password, **ex-cept**: substitute A, B, C, D for 1,2,3,4 and X,Y, Z for 7, 8, 9, and F and S (i.e. Five, Six) for 5 and 6 (and letter O for 0). In this example, the date April 17, 1982, would be converted into OD/ax/19YE, a string which meets all the criteria for a strong pass-word.

As another example, you could use the first letters of the name of the cor-responding month to convert a phone number into a secure password, where the digit "l" becomes "J" (for Janu-ary),"2" becomes "F" (for February), etc., so that, for example, (301) 253-1743 becomes (m0j)fmm-jjam. To make such a scheme more secure, you can toggle between upper case and lower case, e.g. (mOJ)fMmJjAm (it doesn't matter that several digits map into the same letters [January, June and July] — that makes the scheme even more bizarre and hard to guess).

Q05VIII.3: What are some other simple translations of digits to let-ters I might use?

A: There are lots of sequences of names that could be used; for exam-ple, the solar system, the sun and its nine planets (in order of their distance from the sun) make a nice translation table:

0=Su (Sun)	1=Me (Mercury)
2=Ve (Venus)	3=Ea (Earth)
4=Ma (Mars)	5=Ju (Jupiter)
6=Sa (Saturn)	6=Ur Uranus)
8=Ne (Neptune)	9=P1 (Pluto)

(E.g., the first two letters of the name of the planet are substituted for each digit.) If you want to use unique let-ters for each digit, use "r" for Mars and "o" (z=zero or just digit 0) for the sun. Another alternative could be to post the Boy Scout Law ("A Scout Is . . ." near your computer, and then digits become letters according to the first two letters of the corresponding Boy Scout Law:

1=Tr (Trustworthy)	2=Lo (Loyal)
3=He (Helpful)	4=Fr (Friendly)
5=Co (Courteous)	6=Ki (Kind)
7=Ob (Obedient)	8=Ch (Cheerful)
9=Th (Thrifty)	10=Br (Brave)
11=C1 (Clean)	12=Re (Reverent)

Since there are 12 parts to the Boy Scout Law, they form a handy transla-tion table for the month entry in a date being used for a password. Inciden-tally, there are many other ways to translate month numbers into single letters, like using the third letter in the name of the month:

n=January	b=February
r=March	r=April
y=May	n=June
1=July	g=August
p=September	t=October
v=November	c=December

These would be fine for encoding dig-its into a password. However, these are still not unique.

Q05VIII.4: Have you checked about using signs of the Zodiac as a substitute for the name or number of a month? How would that work?

A: When substituting a sign of Zo-diac for the name of a month, keep in mind that three letters are needed — the first letters aren't unique, neither are the second letters or third letters, nor the first two letters. Also, to be precise, note that the sign changes near the end of the month, and it isn't on the same day for the month: from 12/22 on −Capricorn; from 1/21 on − Aquarius; from 2/20 on − Pisces; from 3/21 on − Aries; from 4/21 on − Taurus; from 5/22 on − Gemini; from 6/22 on − Cancer; from 7/24 on − Leo; from 8/24 on − Virgo; from 9/24 on − Libra; from 10/24 on − Scorpio; from 11/23 on − Sagittarius.

Because of that, this isn't a one-to-one mapping; "Can23" could have come from June 23 or July 23 (and there couldn't be any "Cap2l"). That doesn't matter if all you're trying to do is encode a date into a hard-to-guess password, though.

Q05VIII.5: Can you suggest a simple way to encode the digits of the day of the month into unique letters?

A: You can use the Periodic Table, not only to encode the day of the month, but also the last two digits of the year (there are now over 110 named elements); e.g., He/Si/19Th = Feb. 14, 1965, or Mg/N/K-Nb for 12/07/1941. For the "00"in the year 2000, you can use either Fm" (Fermium), or "n" (for the neutron) for zero.

By the way, there are three possible symbols for "1" because there are three different symbols for the element hydrogen: H, D (for deuterium), and T (for Tritium), the only element with unique symbols for its different isotopes.

To help with translating numbers into these code letters, you can post the Periodic Table at your workplace, or use a mouse pad with the Periodic Table on it — how subtle is that! You can purchase a mouse mat with the Periodic Table through the site *www.webelements.com.*

Q05VIII.6: Using a lookup table to do encoding seems like a lot of trouble to me. Is there a device that I could purchase to do that for me?

A: There probably are specialty gadgets like that, but you can use a device you already have, instead:
You can use your keyboard to do simple character substitutions! For example, if you hold down the shift key while keying in your telephone number, you get a really hard-to-guess password, a string of special characters: e.g. 301-253-1743 becomes #)!_@%#_!&$# (and none of those pesky escape characters are located there on that top row). By the way, you don't need to hold down the shift key for the entire telephone number, and you don't need to use the entire phone number (or your entire Social Security Number) in this scheme or any other scheme like these, when creating a password. If fact, if you leave out a digit, or add a spurious

digit, or replace some digits with "XX" (e.g., replacing the middle digits of your Social Security Number), that makes the password more obscure. The trick is, of course, to remember exactly where you dropped out digits or held down the shift key.

If you touch-type, try displacing your fingers a letter to the right or left, or up a row, when you type your name, and use that as a password. For example, "<styu=Djomlp" comes from typing "Marty-Shinko" one character to the right. The keyboard could also be used as a mnemonic for translating digits into letters; e.g., use "R" instead of "4" ("R" appears on the row right below "4," as in: "1234567890" ="QWER-TYUIOP").

Q05VIII.7: I'd rather not bother going through the trouble of encoding a character string. Is there any hope for coming up with a strong password that's easy to remember?

A: You could use a famous date in history, one that you find easy to remember, and one that's relatively easy to look up, in case you forget the exact date. Some possibilities are birthdates of a famous scientist, statesman, movie star, singer, etc. Here are a few examples:
1879Mar14=birthdate of Albert Einstein
1940Jul07=birthdate of Richard Starkey (Ringo Starr)
1945 -v-08=VE Day
1945 -ix-02=VJ Day
1939sep01=beginning of WW2
1941dec07=attack on Pearl Harbor
1941 jun22=Hitler attacks Stalin at dawn
1944jun06=D-Day
l9l8novll=Armistice Day *(WWI)*
1912apr15~Titanic sunk
1986jan28=Challenger exploded
2003feb0l=Columbia destroyed during reentry into earth's atmosphere
1963Nov22=assassination of President Kennedy
1903dec17=first powered flight
1957oct04=launch of Sputnik
1962feb20=John Glenn orbits earth
1969jul20=moonlanding (Apollo 11)

1969JUL16=launch of Apollo 11
1945aug06=Hiroshima
1945aug09=Nagasaki
1683sep12=defeat of Turks at Vienna
1582oct15=Gregorian calendar adopted.

The number of dates in history isn't infinite, but the history of the last 500 years covers some 182,500 guesses. Multiply that by three or five different conventions (and cases) for writing dates, and the number of possibilities approaches a million. In case you're concerned that anyone might guess the date the Titanic sank as a likely password, for example, personalize it with your initials, split before and after; e.g., you could use "Ml9l2aprl5S"

Q05VIIl.8: Once I've created a strong yet easy to remember password, what other steps do I need to take?

A: One of the most difficult but important steps to safeguard your password is this: *Don't go telling* anyone all about it! You may be so overjoyed that you found an unusual date in history to use as the base for your password (e.g., the day Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo), but telling everyone about it defeats the purpose of a password! Learning to keep quiet about something clever you've come up with can be quite challenging!

Marty Shinko has been involved with the CPCUG since the early 1990s, as a volunteer instructor and advocate for beginners. He's used computers for over three decades, from PCs to supercomputers. His interests include sub-atomic physics, astronomy, epistemology, mathematics, engineering simulation and computer modeling and satellites, brain psychology, sailboating amateur radio, and robotics. He can be reached via e-mail at mshinko.cpcug€~juno.com *or via phone at (301) 253-1743, or in person at the "Late Nite" sessions that follow the CPCUG General Meeting Tech Talks.*
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Wi-Fi Wireless Internet and Network Availability

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX: Radio Show Host

WEB SITES:

http://www.jiwire.com
http://intel.jiwire.com
http://www.wi-fihotspotlist.com

Recently, one of my daughters called me from a major city and asked me where she could find some free "hotspots" or wireless "Wi-Fi" locations where she could get free broadband wireless Internet access. She gave me her street address, and within moments I found several nearby locations where she could access the Internet for free using the wireless "802.11b" PCMCIA card she had with her notebook computer. She told me which hotspot she selected, and I gave her the "SSID", or "Service Set Identifier", a simple code, usually a name, that identifies a local hotspot.

I recently purchased a new notebook computer for another daughter, and this computer came with an Intel Centrino chipset, which provided integral wireless Internet access, wherever available, whether at home or on the road. As she travels around town, at school, or away from home, she can likely access the Internet at high speeds.

I travel extensively and always take my notebook computer with me, as I often find it necessary to check my email, find restaurants, or locate other information on the Internet. Through experience, I have found that many hotels, restaurants, airports, and other locations offer wireless broadband Internet access either for a fee, or for free. Now before I leave home, I check a website *www.jwire.com*, or its twin sister site supported by Intel, *intel.jwire.com*, to determine what wireless access is available enroute, or at my destination.

Jwire.com is one of the leading interactive directories of publicly available wireless Internet locations, typically using one of the industry standard 802.11 protocols. Standardization, as well as substantial downward compatibility, has ensured that almost all computers equipped with 802.11 type wireless Internet hardware can effectively communicate at broadband speeds. As I type this, Jwire is listing almost 70,000 public access wireless hotspots around the world. The Intel companion site lists almost 30,000 wireless hotspots in the U.S., and about 40,000 international wireless hotspots. According to the Intel site, the top U.S. cities for public wireless are New York City, with over 550 public access locations, followed by Chicago (434 public wireless locations), San Francisco (412), and Seattle (320). Texas is well represented in the top 10 most "unwired" cities, with 309 public hotspots in Houston, 250 in Austin, and 192 in Dallas. California is listed by Intel as the state with the most public access, with over 5,000 locations; followed by Texas, with almost 2,000 hotspots; Florida, with about 1,800; and New York, with over 1,600 public hotspots.

It should be emphasized that these numbers are only the wireless sites that allow public access, either for free (sometimes with some strings attached) or for a fee, and does not include the millions of sites that are private wireless networks. The listing also does not include many of the hotel chains that offer free wireless access to registered guests.

Many of the free sites listed are local restaurants, some hotels, many airport terminals, RV parks, and other locations. All it takes to access these totally free and public sites is the SSID of the wireless host and appropriate hardware; the Jwire sites list the SSID's of the public sites. When the wireless access on the notebook computer is activated, the wireless networks within range can be identified, and if accessible, the SSID can be entered and connections established. It is important that from a personal security standpoint, these public connections are not often encrypted and can be "sniffed" or picked up by anyone with suitable equipment; sensitive information, passwords, banking, and other critical information should never be sent on an insecure public network.

In addition to the free sites, there are many thousands of publicly accessible but commercial (fee-based) hotspots, often in coffee shops, restaurants, hotels, bookstores, some airport terminal areas, and other locations. These hotspots either require a subscription to a service, such as a cellular phone company or other third party, or a daily or hourly fee for access. Generally, since these pay services require some type of access code, they are slightly more secure than the free public sites, but are still usually accessible to a hacker with commonly available but illicit software. Again, it is a good practice not to type any sensitive personal information while on a publicly accessible wireless network. Some of the commercial hotspots offer "WEP," or wireless encryption protocol, which makes it more difficult for unwelcome third parties to listen in on Internet communications; but the methods for cracking WEP have been widely published and are now only considered to provide marginal security.

One warning about wireless Internet access; it is illegal to access a wireless network without the consent of the owner, despite the fact that studies have indicated that about 80 percent of all private wireless networks, both workplace and home based, are not adequately protected, and can easily be picked up and accessed by anyone who wants access. A popular hacker method of gaining "free" broadband Internet access is driving around town with a notebook computer with 802.11 hardware, and logging the wireless networks found, with those same networks often broadcasting the SSID necessary for

access. This practice is called "wardriving." In major cities, marks are drawn on sidewalks and the outside walls of buildings in a similar escapade, "warchalking" where SSID's and other relevant information is written for all to see and access. Locally, in a security demonstration, a security consultant drove around the business district of town, and logged hundreds of wireless networks, 80 percent of which were easily accessible, as they were not properly secured. These included such sensitive locations as banks, law offices, retail stores, medical facilities, and other choice locations for hackers. Use the Jwire sites to find wireless access, as I do, but be totally aware of the risk and security implications of broadcasting critical information. There are a variety of hardware and software utilities that can be utilized to harden wireless access.

The Editorial Committee of the APCUG has provided this article.

Chasing the Internet

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, AARP Computers & Technology

A long-ago famous and favorite "I Love Lucy" episode *www.tvtome. com/tvtome/servlet/GuidePageServlet/ showid-1038/epid-15119/]* showed Lucille Ball and sidekick Ethel facing an ever-faster conveyor belt delivering chocolates for them to wrap: they couldn't keep up. The Internet sometimes makes me feel as though I'm at the wrong end of that conveyor belt.

I confess that I don't always reduce online interruptions and information coming at me. I'm not yet a recovering info-junkie, so this article is definitely "do what I say, not what I do" advice.

The Internet is like the accelerating candy conveyor belt. There's more content (online newspapers, portals, Web rings, etc.) and more forms of content (e-mail initially, then Web sites, mailing lists, blogs, streaming audio/video, downloadable music, Web cameras, etc.)

But even with today's pace of change, whether we do it deliberately or just let it happen, we create our own online experiences. So we can make it fit our needs and change it when necessary. I've sometimes resisted dropping e-mail lists because I once liked them. That's silly: my and your most precious resource is time.

So I'll share time savers:

Tell people what you're interested in; if they scan online and offline resources for you, you don't have to.

Tell people what you don't want! If you don't want jokes, motivational sayings, political news, etc., cancel your subscriptions by asking people to stop sending it. I like jokes, I like technology, I'm interested in politics. But some people just aren't on my wavelength.

When you send e-mail or reply, don't send unnecessary copies. Encourage people to not copy you unless you need to know or do something about the topic.

When replying, trim what you quote to essential matter and (especially) encourage others to do the same for you. Bloated and repetitive reply-reply-reply notes waste time while you look for what's new!

If you send common replies or send periodic e-mail such as club meeting notices, use templates (stored copies of pre-formatted e-mail) so you can just fill in details but needn't enter text repeatedly.

Use e-mail and spam filtering. Most e-mail software can automatically route spam to a special folder (and, of course, I'd like to route spammers to a special place). Some spam filters learn what's spam based on what you flag, so their accuracy improves over time. My spam is increasingly filtered, and no real e-mail is filtered. You can also set rules for routing e-mail into folders for easier reading and management. Based on rules I've defined (special keywords in e-mail subject and sender fields), my e-mail is put in folders such as AARP, Lists, To-Read, and Travel. This lets me organize e-mail time, prioritize my reading and answering, and sometimes catch up by deleting an e-mail category I don't really need to read. And the best part is that I avoid interruptions of each note arriving, since routing takes place silently and invisibly.

Set discussion mailing list subscriptions to "digest mode." This groups list e-mail into fewer/larger notes, sent occasionally, sometimes once daily. This has two benefits: it eliminates many interruptions, and it greatly reduces the temptation to answer list notes, since by the time you see something someone else has likely already answered it.

Pick times during the day to handle e-mail, read favorite Web sites, use instant messaging, etc.; ignore it all at other times. This allows focusing on tasks at hand, reduces frenzied multitasking (trying to do many things at once), and lets you actually finish things you start!

Don't be trapped by time-wasting habits. Use technology that matches your needs; change it for yourself, not because people urge you to (there's peer pressure at all ages!); adopt changes such as broadband Internet that save you time but be selective in what it brings you.

Recognize that the conveyor belt always wins the race and focus on what really matters -- most of which, after all, isn't even online.

The Editorial Committee of the APCUG has provided this article.

Lessons Learned Too Late – Another Attack of the Killer Worms

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director

You may have recently heard reports in the media about some strange computer worms that attacked thousands of computer networks, effectively shutting them down. In a society that likes to place blame for every negative event, blame has been placed on a variety of places, such as Microsoft for creating vulnerable software, or to the users who had not properly and immediately patched their operating systems or updated their antivirus protection. But very little blame has been placed on the miscreants who created and released these computer worms.

While the financial damage done by these worms, commonly called by the names Zotob, PnP-worm, Rbot, and others, was less than some of the more disastrous worm and virus attacks, it was still substantial. Media reports account for thousands of computer networks and systems shut down while IT staff attempted to identify and repair the damage. Typical of the damage reported, caused by these computer worms, were the 50,000 employees of 13 Daimler-Chrysler assembly plants in Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, Delaware and Michigan, who were idled for nearly an hour while technicians restored the computers that control the plants. Up to fifty thousand lost man-hours of auto production can easily amount to significant production losses.

Other victims of this same series of computer worm attacks, as reported by the national media, were SBC Communications, Associated Press, ABC and CNN networks, the *New York Times*, Caterpillar, U. S. Customs, and many others. SBC reported that the computer utilized by its customer service employees kept rebooting as a result of the worm infections. U. S. Customs Service reported long delays in processing international passengers as its computer

center in Virginia was effectively shut down for about five hours. This resulted in major delays at locations as diverse as Miami and New York as Customs agents utilized printed lists or backup computer systems. The county-wide 911 emergency phone system in Jefferson County, Washington, was disrupted for about 10 hours. These are but a few examples of the damage and inconvenience caused by a recent attack of computer worms.

What these worms all have in common is that they all rely on a recently disclosed vulnerability in several Windows operating systems, and exploit a security hole in Windows' "PnP" or "Plug and Play" service, a feature intended to detect new hardware installed on Windows computers, and automate the configuration process. An August patch (MS05-039) intended to close the vulnerability, which Microsoft labeled as "critical," was released on August 9, shortly before the worm attacks, but the time between the release of the patch and the attacks was so short, that countless organizations had not yet installed the patch on their computer systems. The concept and crude code of a computer worm that could exploit the vulnerability was posted to a security Web site often read by hackers and crackers on a Wednesday evening, and by Saturday morning the first variant of the Zotob worm, named Zotob.A appeared in the wild and started its attack. Within days, several other variants of Zotob have appeared, along with a slew of similar worms, such as the Rbot, and began wreaking their havoc.

Some commercial computer networks using sophisticated antivirus software that depends heavily on "heuristics" or software behavioral patterns, rather than the digital signatures commonly utilized by most of the retail antivirus products intended for home use, escaped damage, be-

cause they work proactively before an attack can take place, rather than reactively, after attacks have been reported. One of the examples of such commercial software that protected companies from attack proactively was Esafe, from Aladdin Software *(www.aladdin.com/esafe)*.

Acknowledging that there are still Windows computers that are infected with the major forms of malware, Microsoft released a free utility that can remove Zotob, along with its variants, and several other major viruses and worms. This utility can be downloaded for free at *www.microsoft. com/malwareremove*. It should be noted that this Microsoft utility will remove only a few dozen of the most common worms and viruses and their variants, such as Bagel, Sober, and Netsky, but is not a substitute for a properly updated antivirus program. The antivirus software publisher McAfee also had a similar free downloadable utility at *vil.nai.com/ vil/stinger*. The free online antivirus scans, such as those from Trend Micro *(housecall.antivirus.com),* BitDefender *(www.bitdefender.com),* Panda *(www.pandasoftware.com),* and others, can detect and remove much more malware than the limited downloadable utilities.

Sadly, pain is an excellent teacher, and hopefully we have learned our lesson. It is now more imperative than ever that security patches be promptly and properly installed both on our home computers as well as distributed throughout our vast commercial computer networks. It is also imperative that appropriate protective software, such as antivirus, firewall, and anti-spyware software be installed and updated constantly.

With proper and timely protection, we can do much to protect our systems from future attacks. □

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Revised 8-19-05

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Tech News

By Sue Crane, Editor, Big Bear Computer Club

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Free services are being used to install malicious code

Cybercriminals are increasingly using blog sites, photo album sites, fan and greeting card sites and other free online services to install and spread software designed to steal personal information or hijack a victim's PC. In the first two weeks of July, security company Websense saw more than 500 incidents of such attacks. The free services are an anonymous and affordable way for attackers to store and spread their malicious code. Be careful what you click on!

Insect "extermination" via mini robots.

Scientists in Lausanne, Switzerland, have successfully infiltrated a colony of roaches with a micro robot according to a report published in the June issue of IEEE Robotics & Automation. Called "InsBot," for "insect-like robot," the mechanical bug mimics the insects' smell and movements so the roaches have accepted it as their own.

Vector Capital purchases WinZip

WinZip is one of the most popular shareware programs on the Web. More than 140 million people have downloaded the program, and it's downloaded for free about 500,000 times a week. Turnaround investor Vector Capital will try to change that by reminding users a little more firmly that the software costs $29 (after a free 30-day trial), as well as likely coming out with new features that only paying customers can download.

Better Eating Through Nanotech

Major food producers are using nanotechnology to improve the quality of their foods, although some warn that the technology may be misunderstood by consumers. At a Nano4food conference food scientists, material scientists and nanotechnicians met to discuss how the technology is being used to improve the consistency of yogurt or cheese, packaging technologies, and even how to "wall off" the most nutritional components of food in favor of tastier alternatives. However, as nanotechnology moves forward, consumers will have to be informed and educated about the possible benefits and hazards of using it.

Microsoft Finalizes Genuine Advantage

Microsoft has gone live with the *Windows Genuine Advantage* program. The program, which has been available in an avoidable pilot version since late 2004, is now mandatory. Microsoft also noted that it has somewhat simplified the *Windows Genuine Advantage* validation process; for example, users are no longer required to enter a 25-character product key to validate their software. Users who try to validate software and discover that they're unwittingly (or otherwise) running illegitimate copies of Windows have a few options. According to Microsoft, qualifying customers who fill out a piracy report, provide proof of purchase, and send in their counterfeit CD-ROMs can receive a genuine copy of *Windows XP Home Edition* or *XP Professional Edition* (depending on which version they're using) at no cost. Customers who submit a piracy report can get *XP Home* for $99 or *XP Pro* for $149.

There is no "Superfetch"

Ed Bott, best-selling author and computer journalist, advises: "The same yokels who insist on spreading the "clean out your Prefetch folder" BS are now spreading the word that there's a super-double-secret registry setting in *Windows XP* called *Super-Fetch* that will reduce boot times dramatically. No, there isn't. And if you see any Web site that tries to insist that there's any benefit to cleaning out your Prefetch folder or enabling this latest bogus tweak, you should assume that any other advice they give you is worthless as well."

The Editorial Committee of the AP-CUG has provided this article.