COMPUTER NEWS

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The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group has served novice and experienced computer users since 1983. Through its monthly meetings, newsletters, 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 488 computers and 132 printers.

Snapfire Photo Software to Be Demonstrated at November 21 NVPCUG Meeting

By Susy Ball, Programs Director

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will hold a general meeting Wednesday, September 20, 2006, 7:00-9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California.

The main presentation at this meeting will be given by Mike Daw, from the Corel Corporation He will demonstrate Corel's Digital Imaging line, including *Snapfire and Snapfire Plus. Snapfire* is a free download, offering easy-to-use tools for organizing, enhancing, and sharing digital photos and video clips. (Download requires Microsoft *Internet Explorer 6* or higher.) Snapfire Plus includes all these features, along with more advanced features such as Makeover Tools, Picture Tubes, frames and edges, and others, and offers more advanced video editing, and more elaborate transitions and effects for *Snapfire* shows, plus the ability to save *Snapfire* shows as standard video files. Daw is considered to be one of Corel's best presenters.

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 coning to the meeting *(questions@nvpcug.org)*.

Following this, in the **Computer Tutor** session, **Bernhard Krevet** will discuss PDF Xchange and PDF Creator.

Need practical information that will help you make better use of your computer? Come to this meeting! Guests are welcome; admission is free.

Election, Picnic, Member News

The **ELECTION** of New Officers will be held at the Board meeting in November. It is important that many people be willing to serve so NVPCUG can serve you. We'd like to have held several computer repair and problem-solving workshops, held a used equipment sale, participated in Napa TV channel 28's November fund-raiser telethon, gotten the Mentor program running, and other actions, but we didn't have the manpower. The nominating committee will be seeking your participation in putting together a new Board of Directors. If you would be willing to serve as a Director and help in any of the categories of activities or would like to nominate someone, please call Roy Wagner (253-2721).

PICNIC: We had 32 attend the summer potluck picnic on August 12. A BIG THANK-YOU to **Dick and Sandy Peterson** for again hosting the event. They had the grounds really nice. Plus the weather co-operated; it was neither too hot nor too windy. Susy and Mike Ball donated tickets for two to ride the Larkspur ferry to AT&T Park and to attend the Giants baseball game (center club seats) on August 24th. Bob Simmerman won that door prize. The games, coordinated by Orion Hill, were fun, as usual. The winners were:

Washer Toss: **Sandy Peterson**

Horse Shoes: **Bob Kulas and Dick Wolff**

Dart Throw: **Orion Hill**

CD Toss: **Bob Kulas**

Bob was the run-away winner of the CD toss. He was the only contestant who was able to toss more than one CD through a window -- and he got all three through.

RAFFLES: Marcia Waddell won the August drawing for the subscription to *Smart Computing*. In the drawing for XP Office Pro 2002, **Roy Wagner** was our big winner and **Bob Simmerman** won a T-shirt. Congratulations, all! The three drawings (including July's *Smart Computing*) added $132 to our coffers.

John Simcoe is in the Spinal Cord Rehab. Center in San Jose. Roberta says he can now talk. They're anticipating that he'll be able to come home on September 19th. She sends everyone a big THANK-YOU for all the prayers, cards and e-mails. John's dedication at getting news of our meetings publicized is missed. That was a major source of getting new members, which brings me to our …

MEMBERSHIP Incentive: Any member who brings in a new (non-associate) member will get an additional five chances at the door prize drawing

See you at the meeting on September 20.

Peace and Good,

Dianne Prior

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 6	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Board of Directors meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
September 11	5:30-7:30 p.m.	Investors SIG meeting, Jerry Brown's home, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
September 13	7:00-8:30 p.m.	Digital Photography SIG meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
September 14	6:30-8:30 p.m.	Macintosh SIG meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa
September 20	7:00-9:00 p.m.	General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa

Jaci Tolman and Dianne Prior playing a table game.
Photo by Susy Ball

Bob Simmerman (from left), Lou Schirm, Julie Jerome, and Dianne Prior watch one of the elimination tournaments. *Photo by Orion E. Hill.*

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Dean Unruh, (from left), Jerry Brown, Vivian Manfree and Bev Brown converse after enjoying a delicious barbecue pot-luck meal. *Photo by Orion E. Hill.*

Marcia Waddell tosses a washer as Jaci Tolman (left), Ken Man-free, and Sandy Peterson watch *Photo by Orion E. Hill.*

Amitabh Bedi moves a chess piece as Jim Prior contemplates a response.
Photo by Orion E. Hill

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

Basic DVD Recording

By Bob Elgines, Editor, Colorado River Computer Club, Arizona

DVDs are like CDs, but with greater capacity; you can record sound, video, or data. The latest CDs allow 700MB of data, or 80 minutes of sound or video (mpeg1 format) whereas the DVDs allow 4.7 GB or 120 minutes of sound or video (mpeg2 format). Then you have Double Layer DVDs which allow 9.6 GB or approximately 3.7 hours of video. As we probe into the basics you will find approximately 10 percent of the room on your disk is used by Titles, Menus, and Directories.

First, for the recording of data and sound we need the following: a computer with a minimum of 1 Ghz, 512 MB of RAM, 40 GB hard drive, CDR optical drive, video with 32 MB RAM for 1024 x 768 screen mode, and recording software such as "NERO" by Ahead Software.

Second, for video we need all the above plus these items: a DVDR optical drive, an input device such as ADS' InstantDVD (USB input) or equivalent for recording from VHS tape, and a VCR. A firewire input card can be used if you are recording from a digital camcorder (DV).

To record data and sound on DVDs is very similar to doing so on CDs; but video is different, only because we use a different format. A CD may be used with this format and would hold approximately 30 minutes of mpeg2 (MP2) video. This CD would be called a "VCD" (Video CD) and would be played on a DVD Player.

There are several different video formats such as WMV, MPE, MPG, MP1, MP2, MP4, etc. MP1 (352x480) is fine for B&W video, but size and quality is too low for color. MP2 (720x480) is the most common format used at this time for doing video DVDs. MP2 can be recorded in low (3382Kbits per sec), medium (5073Kbits per sec), and high (9716Kbits per sec) quality.

Before you start recording video, you may want to shut down all the programs running in the background to gain the maximum amount of System Resources in order to acquire the greatest performance when recording video. You will use 4 to 20 GB of your hard drive for recording a two hour video depending on the format you use.

"NERO" (Version 6 or 7) is the cheapest way to go for software. This program will do just about everything for you (two hours plus on DVD, some editing, excellent recording). I also have used "*MyDVD v4 or 5*" by Sonic (easy to use, some editing, up to 1.9 hours on a DVD), "*MyDVD v6*" by Sonic (up to 3.5 hours on a DVD, but SONY players do not like the recording format), "*Premiere Elements*" by Adobe (easy editing is great, but recording is good for only one hour; it jumps around with movement and going more than one hour really destroys it by also getting choppy), "*Movie Factory2*" by Ulead (not bad, but very time-consuming and hard to use, 1.9 hours on DVD) and "*Studio Plus 10*" by Pinnacle (very demanding, needs more memory and high quality video card; very hard to use!).

I am using an INTEL P4, 3.06 Ghz, 512 MB RAM @ 800 MHz, GeForce FX5200 128 MB RAM video card, and a Digital Research model DDVD116DL (DVD Recorder with NERO software), an ADS Instant DVD VHS input device, which converts the antilog video to digital Mpeg2 format via a USB port, and an IEEE firewire port for my DV Digital Camcorder.

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

A Lot of Assembly Required

by Karen Rhodes, Honorary Member of the Rochester Computer Society, Inc. *waxtadpole(at)comcast.net* *http://www.rcsi.org*

My computer died. It was old, in computer terms, and the motherboard had had it. It wasn't much of a task to get my data files off, as I keep most of my data on Zip disks or USB portable drives. But it was time for me to get a new computer.

It isn't my first choice buy an already assembled machine. First, I want on my computer only the software I will be using, not some techie-nerd's idea of the latest "in" thing. Second, I don't want to have to go round and round with someone on the other end of a telephone about what components are available. The bottom line is that I want what I want when I want it, and nothing more – or less.

My preference for assembling is made much easier by having someone in-house who is experienced at it – my husband, who is a computer specialist. He does everything; he installs hardware, software, LANs, the whole works. He knows enough to be able to put together a computer -- one that works. He's done it before, for himself and for others, on the job and at home.

He did the shopping for me because I get lost when it comes to putting one part of the computer in concert with another, and knowing what is more likely to work with what.

Having done business with *Newegg.com* before, he settled on them. He gave me a list of recommendations. I ordered; the next week, we had all the parts. That next Saturday, after breakfast, the assembly began.

I'll go though the process he used, making what I think are some important points to remember (marked by bullets).

• Don't always settle for the power supply that comes with your case. I ordered a mid-range case, which came with a 350-watt power supply. Probably not enough for my powerful and large genealogy database program. And the motherboard I ordered states in its manual that it requires a minimum of 400 watts in the power supply. I bought 550 watts.

• If you do boost the power supply or you live in a hot climate (both apply to me), buy extra case fans. They're inexpensive, and the extra cooling they provide is crucial to computer health.

The case came with one fan installed. My husband put in the two extra case fans first. Then he put in the power supply (Just PC model JPC-550C-12V). Next he put onto the motherboard (EPOX EP-8 NPA) the CPU (AMD Sempron 64 3100+), the memory (Corsair, 1 GB), and the graphics card (MSI NVidia P317). The sound card – sound chip, really – and the Ethernet card are integrated onto the motherboard.

All during the installation, my husband used his digital camera to take pictures of each component and of the process. In addition, for my own file, I made notes of all the model numbers and serial numbers.

• Document, document, document! You'll be glad you did when a tech support person you're talking to on the phone about your misbehaving computer asks you for the serial number on your hard drive. You'll have the information right in front of you, either in a paper file or in a photograph, and won't have to open up the case to get the serial number!

When my husband installed the motherboard into the case and tried to hook it up to the power supply, we hit a snag.

• Understand that the connector on one part that is supposed to connect to another part may not match up and may need an adapter.

In my case the power supply connector was 20-pin and the motherboard's corresponding connector had 24 pins. No panic yet – there was an adapter in with the motherboard. But when my husband tried to hook it up at the power-supply end, the connector wouldn't connect. It was mismanufactured.

∗ Understand that there are going to be snags and that you just have to accept them when they happen, and come up with solutions.

∗ Understand that nature always sides with the hidden flaw.

The next day, Sunday, my husband and I made a 60-mile round trip into Jacksonville to CompUSA for another adapter. He had been told on the telephone that morning that they had 20 of the item in stock. Fine. We got there, carrying with us the faulty adapter and the case's original 350-watt power supply as a test bed, since it had the same type of connection. Which leads me to:

• Be prepared. If you need to go to the store to replace a faulty component, take the bad one with you! Don't try to remember what type, brand, number or placement of pins… you never will. And telephone ahead, and make sure you talk to someone who knows what he's talking about, or should!

We looked all over the store, ending up at a rack right beside a help station. A young woman came to the counter. We asked her about the adapter. Her first answer was the wrong one: "We don't have those." I informed her curtly we had been told over the phone they had 20 of that item in stock. She then gave some lame routine about not having been there long and something about some boxes just

having come in. She looked to her left, at the rack where we ended up, and said, pointing, "There they are, right there."

• Do not take nonsense from store personnel. Speak plainly and to the point. Go to the next level, if you have to, repeating that subroutine as many times as necessary, until you get satisfaction.

We wanted to open the package and see if the adapter therein would fit the power supply. We didn't want to make another 60-mile round trip. The young woman said we'd have to pay for it first, then take it to Customer Service and talk to them about opening and testing it. Thence we went. Two young men confirmed what we'd been told, then gave us a look that said, "Okay, go away." Not me. I took out my money, plunked it down on the counter, and said, "There's my green." I took the receipt, and then we opened the package, took out the adapter, and tried it. It fit.

• Always ask for what you want. Be firm, even adamant, about it.

I could have ordered another of the adapters from *Newegg.com*, I'm sure. But there would have been several days' wait, and I wasn't willing to do that when we could find one near and in a short time. The thing only cost $7, and I probably would have paid that much just in shipping!

Back home, the assembly proceeded: hard drive (Western Digital Caviar RE 160Gb), DVD-RW (LiteOn SHW-160P6S), DVD/CD-ROM (LiteOn SOHD-6P9SV), card reader (Arrow Micro AICR-01), and the old 3.5" floppy drive from my old computer. He set it all up with the monitor (Samsung Sync-Master 740N), the keyboard (LiteOn SK-1688U), and the mouse (Radio Shack optical mouse 26-592, which I already had), and tested it.

It all worked!

I had followed all of my husband's recommendations except for one.

∗ Even if someone who knows more than you makes recommendations, check them out.

∗ When making my hardware selections, I had gone online to *Newegg.com* and read the reviews and specifications for the components my husband had picked out. I agreed with all except one: the keyboard. The keyboard he selected was criticized in user reviews for sticking keys (which was why I had trashed my old keyboard) and for having too short a cord. I need a longer cord in my setup, so I selected another keyboard, which I'm happy with.

We set up the machine at my desk. We looked at the BIOS and set it up the way I wanted it, which didn't involve many changes. Then it was time to install *Windows XP professional (SP2)*. It seemed to go well, by all appearances. And it wasn't long until we found out we'd hit another snag. Somehow the OS had set itself up to think the C: drive was a removable drive that had no disk in it, and it wanted to call the hard drive "local drive I:." That would not have worked with some software that insists it be placed on Drive C:. This snag also caused the persistent appearance of an error message telling me that there wasn't a disk present in C: when I knew there jolly well was.

• Murphy loves operating systems! Whatever can go wrong, will.

Here I will make a long story short: we used a software program my husband has (*Darik's Boot and Nuke*) to wipe the hard drive and start all over again. It took two more tries installing *Windows XP Professional* before the stupid software decided to give the drives their proper names.

• Be patient, persistent, and courageous when installing software, especially the operating system. It is going to fail a few times before succeeding, trust me!

The computer works well, all things considered. I am not able to play a couple of my games, for evidently they require Intel rather than AMD chips. I haven't yet, but I'll go to the respective Web sites and see if there are any patches for us orphaned AMD users!

• No matter how well the installation goes, no matter how well the computer is working, there will still be problems. They're inevitable; get used to it or go back to the mid 20th century!

The important thing is that it will run my genealogy software (*The Master Genealogist*), word processor (*OpenOffice.org*), e-mail program (*Pegasus*), and browser (*Firefox*), and other things vital to me. As well, it will run some of my games, so I'm happy with that.

• Once you get it going – enjoy it!

Karen Rhodes is not a techie, but she does appreciate a well-put-together computer. She's had many careers, some of them quite brief, and is currently studying genealogy through the distance learning facilities of the University of Toronto. She lives in Florida with her husband, her younger daughter, and a calico cat named Tiger.

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

Quality Freeware

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., Member of the Sarasota PCUG, Florida

I found an article in the July *Monitor* on "Cost-Efficient" software by Joseph Moran to be quite interesting but noticed that much of the software had a price associated with it. So I thought I'd let you in on the absolutely free software I have been using for the past 2-5 years. In every case I have used it as my standard application for the purpose and, in many cases, totally removed any commercial software that carried out the same function. I have also upgraded the free software when the upgrades became available. All of the software in this article can be obtained without charge by downloading from the various Internet sites I have listed. In every case there is no "trial" period involved.

The foremost item on my list is *OpenOffice*. I am currently using version 2.0. This version includes word processing, spreadsheet, drawing, database, and presentation software. All of these applications produce documents that are interchangeable with their equivalents in *Microsoft Office*. *OpenOffice* will also export documents in either PDF or HTML format. You don't need any PDF software to produce documents that are readable by Adobe Reader (formerly known as Acrobat Reader). Unfortunately it can not open or edit PDF documents. It can open and edit documents in over 25 different formats including HTML, *Word Perfect, Word, Adobe PhotoShop*, etc. You can obtain your free copy of this software from http://www.openoffice.org/*www.openoffice.org*.

I also recommend *Firefox* and *Thunderbird* as free replacements for *Internet Explorer* and *Microsoft's Outlook Express.* With the latest versions of *Firefox* I have not run across any Web sites that it cannot render correctly. That's not to say that some may exist, I just haven't found them. *Firefox* will transfer your favorites (bookmarks) from Internet Explorer. As for Thunderbird, it is similar in many ways to *Outlook Express*, but it includes an RSS Reader that I have found useful. It also filters junk mail and places it in a special folder where you can review it if needed. Otherwise it will be automatically deleted at an interval that you can set. It doesn't remove 100% of the spam, but it does detect about 99 percent of what comes into my computer. One of the latest additions to *Thunderbird* is anti-phishing protection. *Thunderbird* warns you if it suspects that the message might be a scam. *Thunderbird* can import your address book from *Outlook Express.* Both *Firefox* and *Thunderbird* can be downloaded from w*ww.download .com* or if you prefer, from *w w w . m o z i l l a . c o m / f i r e f o x /* a n d *www.mozill.com/thunderbird.*

As for antivirus software, you can't beat *Avast* for ease of use and automatic updating. After downloading and installing the software it asks you to register. That simply includes giving up your e-mail address, name and postal address. You receive a license to use the software for a year for personal use. At the end of the year you re-register and get another year's free use. *Avast* is free for personal use, not for businesses or other organizations. However, non-profit organizations can buy *Avast* at a greatly reduced price. I have used *Avast* for several years and have installed it on more than 100 other personal computers. In no case have the users had any problems with this software. In addition, *Avast* does not sell your e-mail or postal address so you get no spam from this registration. *Avast* quietly updates itself frequently in the background while you continue to work. Then it simply reports that an update has taken place. I have seen days when I have had 3-4 updates in the same day. If you use a dial-up connection instead of cable/DSL, *Avast* will attempt to update whenever you go on-line. Since the downloads are usually less than 100 KB, they occur rapidly, even on a dial-up connection. The Home edition of *Avast* can be downloaded from *www.avast.com/eng/avast_4_home.html.* I recommend using this site instead of *download.com* as your anti-virus database will be more current.

For a good, reliable firewall I recommend *ZoneAlarm.* It is also free for personal use. I admit they will try to sell the Pro version when you install it, but the free version is really all you need. That is, assuming you have anti-virus and anti-parasite software installed on your computer. It used to be that dial-up users didn't really have much need for a firewall. However, in today's Internet world, I wouldn't want to connect to the Internet without a good software firewall. While traveling with my laptop, I kept both my anti-virus and firewall updated and running for every connection. *ZoneAlarm* can be downloaded from *www.zonealarm.com.* Click on the download link and then the *ZoneAlarm* tab.

As for anti-parasite software, *Ad-Aware SE* and *Spybot S&D* are two that I keep on both my computers. But that isn't enough. You have to run them regularly to ensure you are not infected. I run mine a minimum of once each week. Both of these can be downloaded from *download.com. Spybot* also has an immunization function that can prevent some parasites from installing themselves on your system. Another immunization application that I use is *Spyware Blaster*. It makes changes to your registry that prevents parasites from installing. At the present their database lists more than 5,000 items. Using these three anti-parasite/anti-Trojan products will certainly upgrade your security, and they are all free. *Spyware Blaster* can be

downloaded from download.com or *www.javacoolsoftware.com.*

For general photo editing I use Google's *Picasa.* It is not just a photo organizer. I use it to download photos from my camera and organize them into folders. It can also be used to edit photos, print photos and e-mail them. You can make CDs, add captions or post photos on Web sites. The advantage of *Picasa* over other photo software is that it is free. It can be downloaded from download.com or *http://picasa.google.com.* It does not have all the bells and whistles of applications like *Photoshop* or ULEAD's *PhotoImpact*, but it is more than adequate for most nonprofessional purposes.

You may not need screen-capture software very often, but when you do, you really need it. I use *MWSnap.* It allows you to capture an entire screen or part of it. What you capture can be saved to a file, printed, or edited. It may take you a little time to get accustomed to the interface. But you can't damage anything by playing with it. Once you are familiar with all the controls, it really does copy any part of your screen. Again, this is freeware and can be downloaded from *www.mirekw.com/winfreeware/index.html.*

Have you ever considered that you might need an inventory of the items in your home for the purposes of making an insurance claim? Considering that we live in Florida where there are many electrical storms, to say nothing of hurricanes, damage to your home could occur at any time. Can you list the contents of every room and the value of each item? Well, the Insurance Information Institute provides free software to assist you in making an inventory and a photographic record of the contents of your house. This software is very easy to use and very important to any homeowner. The software also includes typical lists of things in each type of room. You don't have to use these as you can enter anything you have. You can include place of purchase, date and price, if you have that info. Pictures of items or general pictures of a room can also be added. This software can be downloaded from *www.knowyourstuff.org.*

There is one more significant software package that I use that is freeware. That is *NVu*, Web-authoring software. *Linspire,* the company that produces the *Linspire* Linux software, publishes it. It has a WYSIWYG editor (What You See Is What You Get) as well as direct editing of the HTML language. It includes the tools for publishing the pages to a Web site. You can test the pages against a browser on your computer to insure that everything works properly. It also allows you to add Javascript either directly or in a separate file to your pages. There is a complete tutorial for *NVu* included on the Web that can be downloaded and printed. There is also an *NVu* users forum which can be quite helpful. If you have never created a Web page before, I think you would find *NVu* to be just what you need. If you want to see a Web site created with *NVu,* check out *www.sandpiperchorus.org. NVu* can be downloaded from *download.com.*

There is one other specialized software package that I have used that some may be interested in trying. This is the *Personal Ancestral File* (PAF). This is free genealogy recording software provided by the LDS Church (Church of Latter-day Saints). Their Web site also allows users to search online files from the family history archives in Salt Lake City. Although I am not currently using PAF I did use it for a few years before switching to a commercial package. PAF is certainly quite useful for beginning family historians and it can be expanded by purchasing the PAF Companion. If you are interested in trying PAF, download it from *www.familysearch.org.*

Now that you have all this downloaded freeware, you should make backup copies on either a CD or DVD. Well, for that we have another freeware package, *CDBurnerXP Pro*. This software will burn CD-R, CD-RW, DVD+R/RW and DVD-R/RW. It will burn and create ISO files. It will burn audio discs from mp3, wav, ogg and wma files. It will convert (rip) files on audio discs to wav, mp3, ogg or wma files. It also works with most IDE, USB, Firewire and SCSI burners. It can be downloaded from *download.com or www.cdburnerxp.se/download.php*. This software does not have a trial period. It is yours for however long you wish to use it. I have been using mine for over two years and have obtained several updates, one of which added the DVD burner capability

As you can see from this there is a lot of quality freeware available. If you are interested in finding more, check out the listings at *download.com.* Just be cautious, because many of their listings are trial packages only. You are expected to purchase the total package before the end of your trial period. But there are many "nuggets" on their very extensive Web site. So if you are interested in saving money, try some of these quality freeware items.

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 @ yahoo.com.

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

Are You Concerned About Loss of Personal Data?

By Carlisle Barnes, Newsletter Editor, Bowling Green Area Microcomputer User Group, Kentucky

Newcarlislebarnes(at)insightbb.com   http://www.bgamug.org/

The advanced state of Information Technology is one of the great blessings of modern times. Today it is built into our economy, and it would be hard for both individuals and corporate America to do without it. However, along with the blessings to us have come curses. These curses are going to get considerably worse unless some dramatic changes are made in the way stored information is handled by the majority of organizations.

Computer spam, pfishing/phishing schemes and other e-mail con games, as well as a multitude of ever-changing computer viruses are obvious curses to everyone using a computer online. Great effort is being expended to get these curses under control. Very good and still improving antivirus programs are available. Bill Gates said recently that spam will be completely under control within two years. The point is that something positive is being done to correct those Internet curses.

However, one of the worst of current IT curses is identity theft, and very few positive things are being done to stop it. Identity theft is not associated with the Internet, as are many other IT curses, but it has become very much associated with computers because of the casual way in which CD's, laptop computers, and portable hard drives are often handled. People who would never ever consider leaving a collection of gold coins in the back seat of a car, or leaving a thousand-dollar bill on a table while going to get another cup of coffee, seem to have developed very little concern about leaving a portable computer, a container of CD's, or even a portable hard drive in all sorts of places where they can be easily stolen. (Even at home.)

Unlike sensitive data handled by military or military contractor organizations, the personal data stored in files of civilian government organizations, major universities, insurance companies, credit card companies, etc., are often treated as casually as advertising material.

A recent extreme example is shocking and deserves examination. Not long ago, a Veteran's Administration senior analyst took home electronic data from the office to do after-hours work on his personal computer. He had done this numerous times before. The data included names, Social Security numbers, and dates of birth on 26.5 million veterans. These data list essentially all military personal who have served following the Second World War. The analyst's laptop and a Government-owned external hard drive (along with all the data under discussion on it of course), were stolen in a May 3 burglary of his home. He reported the theft within an hour of discovering it. VA Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson made a public announcement of the theft on May 22.

Jim Nicholson appeared before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs to explain the situation. While accepting a certain amount of personal responsibility for the data breach, Nicholson expressed anger toward the analyst who took the data home "without permission." Further, he said "As a veteran myself, I have to tell you I'm outraged. Frankly, I'm mad as hell." Afterward, he fired the analyst involved. For what appear to be justifiable reasons, the analyst is now suing to be reinstated.

What Nicholson did not report, and later insisted that he did not know, was that the analyst had been taking data home as part of his regular work routine since 2003. Furthermore, existing documents dated September 5, 2002 show that the analyst -- lead programmer within the Policy Analysis Service -- was officially permitted to take the external hard drive home for "work-related projects." Specifically, he had a property pass allowing the laptop and accessories to be removed from the building and also a permit allowing him to access any Social Security numbers on the hard drive. It later turned out that there was yet a third document allowing him to remove various materials from the VA building.

A certain amount of security could have been provided for these "take home" documents, by encrypting them. However, a reasonable up-front cost for the systems, services, processes, and procedures to encrypt 100,000 or more customer records is estimated to be about $500,000. VA working personnel probably couldn't justify that sort of expense to their budget group.

Once files have been stolen, it is difficult to determine if the data have been used illegally. The computer and VA hard disk have now been returned, apparently without data loss, but if it is eventually considered necessary to contact all affected veterans and to provide them with credit-checking services, then there will be an estimated taxpayer cost of at least $100 million.

The fiasco was not quite finished when Nicholson appeared at the congressional hearing. It was revealed at that hearing that Pedeo Cadenas, the VA's chief information security officer, had resigned by e-mail 30 minutes before the proceedings began. Nicholson said he was completely unaware of Cadenas' intentions. Evidently, Nicholson has learned many things rather late.

On June 28th, not quite two months after they were stolen, the computer and external hard drive were turned

in to the FBI Office in Baltimore, Maryland. A tipster, in response to the $50,000 reward being offered, had let a US Park official know that the equipment might be recovered. Quickly then, the stolen items were turned in to the FBI. The tipster was not identified, nor was it clear if either he or anyone else would receive the $50,000 reward. Furthermore, no one has been arrested for stealing the equipment, unless that particular information is being held secret for some reason.

Inspection of the hard drive by the FBI does not indicate access to the data during the time that the drive was in the possession of the thief. Superficially then, no data were compromised and there is perhaps nothing to worry about.

Unfortunately, if the thief was a computer expert, knew what he had, and wanted to make illicit use of the data, then he could have transferred everything on the external hard drive to another hard drive without leaving a record. While that is possible, it seems improbable and it seems unlikely that there is reason for continued concern. However, can we be absolutely sure?

Those of us who served in the military or worked for military contractors are quite well aware of the way in which sensitive intellectual material is handled by these organizations. While current practices are unknown to the author, not very many years ago there were at least five security levels. Restricted meant that the information was not to be given to unauthorized people, was certainly not to be made available to newspapers or to other media, and was not to be left anyplace where it might be stolen. The only people allowed to see the material were those with a need to know about it. Confidential material classification, one step up from Restricted meant that the material was not to be made available to anyone not having appropriate clearance, i.e., clearance by appropriate investigators. Except when being used in a cleared area by cleared personal, the material was to be locked in a desk or file cabinet with a safety bar and a combination lock. All desks and cabinets were to be regularly checked by guards. Secret material was to be handled in somewhat the same way, but clearance was more difficult to obtain, storage was in a secure safe, not in cabinets or desks, and material was to be guarded twenty-four hours a day, and seven days a week. Top-secret material was of course even more closely guarded, and investigations for personal clearance were carried out by FBI personnel; in general, all security was substantially tightened. Then there was "Special Clearance" which need not be discussed here, but which was very tight indeed.

It is absolutely shocking to note that as serious as identity theft can be, hardly anyone handling social security numbers, driver's license numbers, medical history facts, educational information, etc., is required to treat personal information in their possession with a level as high as military Restricted. As this article was being written, yet another security breach occurred at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio. There were several resignations from the school staff as a result, but it is one more case of "locking the barn door after the horse is gone."

If current sloppy handling of private data continues, then it is only a matter of time until identity theft becomes a disaster.

This article by your newsletter editor is as close as you will get to a BGA-Bytes editorial. However, your editor considers the matter to be a lot more serious than it is being treated by many people and particularly by most public officials.

If you would like to encourage your congressmen or other public officials to put some teeth into privacy laws and into laws concerning the handling of private information, then may I encourage you to write and let them know how you feel.

To help you get started in sending letters, here are three addresses of interest. There are numerous others on the Internet.

U. S. Senator Mitch McConnell, 361A Russell Senate Office Building, Washington D.C . 20510.

U. S. Senator Jim Bunning, 316 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510.

U. S. Representative Ron Lewis, 2418 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington D.C. 20515.

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

Tech Tip 94 - Antivirus Software, Protection for Your PC

By Jack M. Germain (from *Smart Computing*)

In previous Tech Tips we covered the steps for building a computer, installing peripherals, and installing the Windows XP operating system. In this Tech Tip we will discuss the need for an antivirus software program, and how to find a good one without going broke.

Installing computer security software is the most important task you can do after getting the operating system up and running. If you bought a computer rather than built it, the same urgency exists. It is *absolutely critical* that you protect your computer from viruses and other harmful attacks before you install any other programs or connect your computer to the Internet.

Let's start with the definition of a computer virus, a harmful program written by hackers to sneak commands into your computer. Trojan horses and worms, though *technically* different, are for all practical purposes the same as a virus. In other words, they install and spread without your knowledge, and do bad things to your PC without your knowledge or permission. These rogue commands perform functions that range from mildly annoying displays on your computer screen to more serious activities. A virus can interfere with how applications on your computer perform. Even worse, viruses can destroy data on your hard drive and even make it easier for hackers to steal your personal information. Some viruses can even turn your computer into a "zombie", controlled remotely by hackers, usually for the purpose of sending spam email. Worried yet? You should be!

A virus can enter an unprotected computer and spread by copying its code to other files. They also can attach to executable files, e-mail, graphics and video files. Viruses can enter your computer while you are connected to Websites. No computer is immune from a potential virus attack, but you can protect yourself. A good antivirus software package will not only block viruses from entering your computer, but will also find and remove viruses already present.

Antivirus Plus Firewall Protection

If you are using a version of *Windows* earlier than *Windows XP,* you also must include a firewall program that blocks unauthorized access to your computer and prevents hackers from taking control of your computer. This is a very real risk if you use high-speed cable or DSL to connect to the Internet. Dial-up access does not keep the computer connected to the Internet all the time, so chances of an unauthorized intrusion are very low. Once you are done accessing the Internet, you should always end your dial-up connection to close the gateway and prevent others from attempting to access your computer.

Windows XP includes a firewall program to protect your computer. You can turn it on by going to the Security Center of the Control Panel. The Microsoft built-in firewall is not as rigorous as third-party firewall products, however, so you should consider one of the free or commercial firewalls for enhanced protection from intrusion.

A firewall by itself will not block or remove viruses. Likewise, antivirus programs by themselves will not prevent unauthorized access to your computer. Having a combination of firewall and antivirus protection is a necessity. Some software security products, known as an Internet security suites, contain both types of protection in a bundled package.

Getting Antivirus Protection

One of the easiest ways to get antivirus protection is from your Internet service provider. Dial-up provider America Online distributes an installation disk with free virus protection software provided by McAfee. Cable television and phone companies that provide Internet connection service also provide free security programs to subscribers. For instance, Comcast allows its subscribers to download free versions of McAfee antivirus programs and other security products directly from the McAfee Web site.

You can download free trial versions of antivirus software from vendor Websites, or purchase a fully functional program online. You can also find reputable antivirus software in the electronic departments of some stores.

When you install an antivirus product, check if the software vendor provides automatic signature updates. Many antivirus programs let you set a time and frequency for automatically checking for new

virus signature updates. Be sure you activate this setting. If the product you use does not automatically check for updates, be sure that you do this task yourself every few days.

Hackers create hundreds of new viruses daily, and antivirus product vendors constantly research identifiable elements in newly discovered viruses so they can add this information to their detection databases. If an antivirus program does not have the latest detection database, known as a signature file, the program will not be able to protect your computer against the newest virus threats.

You can visit vendor Web sites to learn more about antivirus software and download their products. The following are some leading antivirus software vendors. Most of these vendors offer both stand-alone virus protection and security suites: Symantec's Norton Antivirus; McAfee; Panda Software; Sophos Software; F-Secure; Microsoft; EZ AntiVirus by CA Software

Free Antivirus Software

Why pay for antivirus protection when it is available for free? Free virus protection software did not use to measure up to its commercial counterparts. This is no longer true. Many very reputable software manufacturers use free trials or free products as marketing strategies to attract new customers to other security products.

Even with trial software that starts out as a free product, subscription renewals are eventually required to keep the software updates current. Do not make the serious mistake of continuing to use an antivirus product that no longer provides signature updates because you did not pay the annual subscription fee.

Another strategy besides free trial software is to switch to a completely free virus protection product. Many of these free products provide stiff competition to their commercial counterparts and come highly recommended. Here are some free antivirus software vendors: *Bit Defender; Avast!; AVG,* by Grisoft Software*; Avira AntiVirus; Kaspersky Lab*.

Pre-Installed Software on New Computers

New computers often come with more than one antivirus software program pre-installed. *Never run more than one antivirus software product on your computer at a time.* Running more than one software solution can create serious performance conflicts, slowing down the computer and even causing it to lock up.

If your new computer has a pre-installed antivirus software product, make sure you activate it. Some installations require you to click on the program icon to uncompress the program and fully install it. Also remember to configure the settings for automatic signature updates. When the free trial period expires, be sure to pay for a renewal or uninstall the program and replace it with another security product.

Installation Tip for Infected Systems

If you are installing an antivirus product on other than a new computer, check the installation directions for use with a possibly infected computer. Putting an antivirus product on a computer that already has one or more viruses can disrupt the program and render it useless.

Special directions will take you step-by-step through a process of rebooting your computer from the installation disk. This will allow the computer to load in a special way that will avoid running the usual programs that start at boot up. Doing this interferes with the virus and allows the antivirus product to scan the computer for signs of virus infection.

If the virus scan detects an existing infection, the security software can often remove or quarantine the virus and continue with the rest of the installation. If it cannot remove the virus, the installation directions will tell you how to continue manually.

For more information on specific viruses and how to remove them if need be, visit the Symantec and McAfee Websites.

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Windows XP and Speech Recognition

By Vinny La Bash, Member of the Sarasota PCUG, Florida *vlabash@comcast.net*

I used to watch Star Trek in envy as the ship's computer "listened" to the crews' instructions and responded with perfect understanding. Speech recognition is not there yet, but why let lack of perfection stop us from trying?

Speech recognition has come a long way since it was first introduced to personal computers. On a basic level, speech recognition is the process of converting an acoustic signal, captured by a microphone, and transforming it into words on a document. The procedure is highly technical, but you don't have to understand its inner mysteries to use it, any more than you need to know how an automobile is designed in order to drive it.

Many of those who have *Windows XP* installed believe that speech recognition is built into *XP*. That's because many PC vendors install Microsoft's speech recognition software along with *XP* as a convenience to customers. Click on the Start button and go into Control Panel. Locate the Speech icon and open it with your mouse. A dialog box will appear. If it has a Speech Recognition tab, the program is already installed.

If speech recognition is not installed you have several options. You can buy *Microsoft Plus! for Windows XP* for about $30. This is the least expensive option. You get some additional goodies with the package for your money, but they're not important to our discussion.

If you have *Microsoft Word* or *Office* installed, and you don't have the Speech Recognition tab in the above-mentioned dialog box, the program was not installed by default. Fortunately, it's easy to install from *Word*. From the Tools menu open the Speech option. Choose Yes when you're asked if you want to install the program. You will probably need the installation disk.

You didn't think you were finished, did you? The program needs to be trained like a puppy dog. It won't mess your carpet, and you don't need to take it for a walk, but you do have to show it how to speak appropriately. The program will assist you with the proper position of your microphone, and it will help you create a profile.

The profile stores your unique speech patterns and any pronunciation quirks you may have. You can use one of three different voices as your default, Michelle, Michael, or Microsoft Sam. They could all stand some improvement, but I prefer Sam.

All that's left is for you to "train" the program to convert your speech into words on the document. Start the training from the Speech option in the Tools menu. You will be offered a selection of different texts to read, ranging from Bill Gates' book "*The Road Ahead*" to Edgar Allen Poe's "*Fall of the House of Usher.*" The more text you read, the more accurately the program will convert your speech to text. In time, you can experience an accuracy rate better than 98 percent.

Get a high-quality microphone. A noise-canceling headset can be purchased for less than $50. Speak naturally, the same way you would speak to another person in a normal conversation. Don't try training the program as if it were a child or an obstinate pet. That produces very poor results and needless frustration.

Even with all the progress in the last decade, speech recognition is still far from perfect. So why bother using it? It's an excellent tool for creating the first draft of a manuscript of any length. Dictation is a lot easier than using the keyboard and mouse to make text entries. If you take the time to learn how to correct errors through the program's editing utility, you will save time, especially if you fall into the camp of lousy typists, as most of us do.

Speech control allows many people access to computers who could otherwise not use them through the conventional keyboard and mouse interface. Those who suffer from visual impairments, repetitive strain injuries or other physical limitations have found new opportunities through speech recognition. You may be amazed at what you can accomplish when you unleash the power of your voice.

There is no reason why speech recognition has to be confined to computers. This technology is slowly finding its way into homes, automobiles, factories, and wherever the marketplace dictates.

Speech recognition, like video editing, requires a lot of computer power. Have at least one gigabyte of memory and a 2.0 MHz processor as a bare minimum.

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CAPTCHA
(Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart)
By Sandy Berger. Compu-KISS

Have you ever tried to sign up for a message board or Web service and been presented with an image with letters and numbers which you are asked to read and type into the Web form? While the shape, size, and background of the image varies it always has contains a series of letters and numbers, usually on a graphic background.

Often the letters and numbers are distorted and you have to struggle to recognize them, making you wonder why the Web site is making you go through this extra step. Don't blame the Web site. This image-recognition routine is something caused by cousins of the nasty spammers who have permeated our email.

The mechanism that makes you type in this information is called a CAPTCHA. If you know what those letters stand for, you will have a pretty good idea of why this mechanism is being employed. CAPTCHA stands for Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart.

Here's the story. Spammers have completely infiltrated the world of the Internet. In e-mail they try to get you to buy their wares. On message boards they list links to their Viagra and pornographic Web sites so that they get better positioning in the search engines. They overload online opinion polls and they sign up for free e-mail accounts which they use to send out more spam.

For the most part, all of this spam activity is done automatically. The spammers send out what we call "bots." These are actually software programs that search the Internet and imitate the behavior of a human. These bots are smart enough to fill out registration forms, so they can automatically register at a variety of Web sites.

We recently had an attack of these automated bots on our Compu-KISS message boards. After years of being unaffected, we suddenly had hundreds of postings that told off-color jokes and led to pornographic and drug-selling Web sites. We moved the Web site to a new area *(www.happycomputing.com),* but were still inundated by these automated postings. So we installed a CAPTCHA. Now when a new person registers for the message board they must type in the five letters and numbers that they see on the screen to prove that they are human. Since the CAPTCHA is a graphic image, most of the bots cannot read the text like humans can.

The CAPTCHA that we use has letters and numbers that are undistorted, so it is easy to use. If, however, we are attacked by some of the smarter bots that are out there, we will have to distort the letters and numbers slightly to make it even harder for the bots to register.

Although a slight inconvenience to the average user, the CAPTCHA is a real roadblock to vision-impaired Internet users who use screen readers which, like the bots, are unable to read the text on the CAPTCHA.

It is extremely unfortunate that we all have to be inconvenienced because of the activities of Internet spammers. I really hated to have to install this software, but I had no other choice. The same is true of many other Web sites and Web services. So when you encounter a CAPTCHA, don't blame the Web site, blame the spammers!

The Compu-KISS Message Boards can be accessed at *www.compukiss.com* or directly at *www.happycomputing.com.*

Sandy Berger, The Compu-KISS® Lady, nationally respected computer authority, journalist, media guest, speaker, and author is a seasoned 30-year computer expert. Sandy is a consumer advocate promoting simplicity, ease-of-use, and stability in consumer technology products. She works with hardware and software developers to help them make their products more user-friendly.

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