The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

Presidential Bits

December 2007 Meeting

By Paul Howard

WACUG's Annual Meeting of the corporation will take place on January 12th — the second Saturday of the month. Election of officers will be held at this time. If you wish to stand for office, or serve as a member of the board of directors, please advise election commissioner Mel Mikosinski immediately. Announcements of candidates, and ballots will be sent via email to members prior to the January meeting, to allow voting participation even if you are unable to attend the meeting.

November's meeting featured Dave Whittle of Webworking Services, and a Smart Computing author, discussing muvee Autoproducer6, and a unique computer protection and technical support services package from Invisus. Please see the "recent meetings" page of the web site for more details. http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html

Our next meeting will be held on Saturday, December 15th, at the Fairfax County Government Center, Room 4/5. December's meeting will feature our PC Clinic, where we try to help our members with their particular hardware and software problems. A simultaneous learning session, with a video training package on SOHO computer networking will be offered.

At our clinic, WAC experts can help with virus and spyware removal, hardware and software installations, including operating systems. *You must contact us in advance* to discuss your computer's symptoms, or advise what hardware or software you'd like help installing or troubleshooting. In most cases, you must bring your complete system: CPU, monitor, keyboard, mouse and cables. Please refer to the clinic ground rules, linked from the meetings page of the web site which provide an email address for contacting us in advance of the meeting so we can arrange the necessary expertise or special tools to help us help you with your system.

Is Your Membership About to Expire?

Many WACUG folks have annual memberships up for renewal in January. If you're among them, please send your dues to our membership chair, Geof Goodrum soon. Don't forget that WACUG is an IRS recognized non-profit, educational organization, and contributions are

Lloyd's Web Sites of the Month by Lloyd Johnson, WACUG Member

http://www.wacug.org/ is the URL for the Washington Area Computer User Group. Visit it for past issues of Web Sites with hyperlinks

December 2008 Sites

1. Useful Center for Disease Control Links
   Travel Information – www.cdc.gov/travel
   Older Drivers – www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/older.htm
   Emergency preparedness – www.bt.cdc.gov
   Healthy aging – www.cdc.gov/aging
   Fall prevention – www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/adultfalls.htm

2. Want to check-up on a doctor? Cost about $10 – www.DocInfo.org

3. How Dieting Works – http://health.howstuffworks.com/diet.htm

The Atkins Diet, The Cabbage Soup Diet, The Grapefruit Diet, The Hollywood Miracle Diet, The Rice Diet, The Scarsdale Diet, The South Beach Diet, The Zone Diet. You probably recognize many of these names because you hear them all the time. This How Stuff Works site looks first at weight gain and why gaining weight is so easy. Then look at what you can do about weight gain – in the form of diet and exercise – to maintain a consistent weight.

4. Want a take on events other than those of the Washington Post. Look Globally – www.allnewspapers.com

5. Cut down on Catalogs. Sign up for a free account to stop getting catalogs –www.catalogchoice.org

6. Essentials of Music – www.essentialsofmusic.com

Whether you're a casual listener or a serious music student, here's the site for basic information about classical music. Created in cooperation with W.W. Norton & Company,

7. American Writers – www.americanwriters.org

This C-SPAN series examines the lives and works of selected American writers and explores their influence on Americans today.

8. The Encyclopedia of World History – www.bartleby.com/67

Renowned historian Peter N. Stearns and thirty prominent historians have combined their expertise over the past ten years to perfect this comprehensive chronology of more than 20,000 entries that span the millennia from prehistoric times to the year 2000.

9. Free books through E-mail. Sign-up for a free account and you will receive one installment of a book every day. – www.Dailylit.com

10. Brain Food. Cryptograms, riddles, word searches and other puzzles. – www.rinkworks.com/brainfood

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Annual dues - $25 (includes 12 issues of the Cursor via email; certificates for 3 periodic software CDs.)

Printed Cursor Surcharge - $12 for 12 monthly issues, mailed to your home.

GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WAC

Google Phones

On November 5th, 2007, Google Inc announced Android, a software stack for mobile devices that includes an operating system, middleware and key applications. Android is built with Java language applications running on top of a Linux kernel. The software includes a web browser, multimedia applications (common video, audio, and still image formats), 2D and 3D graphics, and supports hardware for camera, GPS, compass, accelerometer, GSM telephony, Bluetooth, EDGE, 3G, and WiFi. The project encourages community code development with a Software Development Kit (SDK) including sample code, documentation, a device emulator, and a plug-in for the Eclipse development environment. The project is also offering $10 million in awards to developers who contribute applications.

Although the project does not provide hardware, the project is supported by the Open Handset Alliance, a group of more than 30 technology and mobile companies that includes LG, Samsung, and other manufacturers. The first Android-based phones are expected in late 2008.

Note that Android is a seperate project but has the same objectives as the OpenMoko project (*http://www.openmoko.org/*).

For more information, see the Android project website at *http://code.google.com/android/*

GNU/Linux Distribution Releases

GNU/Linux distributions are complete GNU/Linux operating system and application software collections. Many are freely downloadable or can be ordered on CDs or DVD at low cost. DistroWatch.com lists the following distribution release announcements for the period November 1-24, 2007.

Distribution
ArtistX 0.4
BLAG Linux And GNU 70000
Bluewhite64 Linux 12.0 "miniLive"
Devil-Linux 1.2.14
dyne:bolic 2.5.1
Fedora 8
Guadalinex 4.1
Linux Mint 4.0
openSUSE 10.3 "Live"
paldo GNU/Linux 1.12
ParallelKnoppix 2.8
Pardus Linux 2007.3
Pie Box Enterprise Linux 4 AS U6
Pioneer Linux 3.0.2
Red Hat Enterprise Linux 4.6
Red Hat Enterprise Linux 5.1
Shift Linux 0.5
sidux 2007-04
StartCom Enterprise Linux 4.0.5
StartCom Enterprise Linux 5.0.1
Zenwalk Linux 4.8 "Live"

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on the monthly CD. In addition to the monthly CD described below, WAC can provide CD-R and DVD±R media for any downloadable GNU/Linux operating system distribution (e.g. Fedora, Mandriva, Ubuntu, Debian, Knoppix). Please note that download versions of commercial distributions do not include official technical support nor printed documentation.

Discs are available **only by pre-order**. Contact Geof Goodrum by e-mail g (*linux@wacug.org*) at least 48 hours before meeting day to order or for more information. Single CD-R discs are available with a $3 donation; GNU/Linux distributions on multiple CD-Rs or single DVD±R are available with a $6 donation.

December 2007

Neverball – v1.4.0. *http://icculus.org/neverball/.* Free GNU General Public License source code by Robert Kooima and Debian and Fedora 7 executable packages. Tilt the floor to roll a ball through an obstacle course. In the grand tradition of Marble Madness and Super Monkey Ball, Neverball has you guide a rolling ball through dangerous territory. Balance on narrow bridges, navigate mazes, ride moving platforms, and dodge pushers and shovers to get to the goal. Race against the clock to collect coins to earn extra balls. Also included is NeverPutt, a multiplayer miniature golf game built on Neverball. The current version includes 75 Neverball levels and 62 Neverputt levels. Linux, FreeBSD, OSX, and Windows are supported. Neverball requires a hardware accelerated OpenGL video card, a 500 Mhz or faster microprocessor, SDL, SDL_mixer, SDL_image, and SDL_ttf (included with major distributions).

WP Clipart – v4.0. *http://www.wpclipart.com/index.html*. Free public domain clipart collection and viewer assembled by Paul Sherman. WP Clipart is an attempt to make a useful clipart package of public domain images for use in word processors. It includes an optional cross-platform viewer/editor written with Python/wxWidgets. The collection contains non-transparent PNG images, scaled down images, midtones expanded for inkjet print quality, etc. It is suitable for documents as well as Web graphics, but also has business application (credit cards, promo graphics) and educational uses (pictures of all US presidents, all country flags alphabetically listed, all US states, historical figures, and a sign language alphabet). As of 20 November 2007, the collection includes 19,350 images.

Kernel Source – *http://www.kernel.org/*. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.23.8 and testing 2.6.24-rc3).

Chuck's Clips

by Chuck Roberts, WACUG Member

Digital Photography Utilities Have you ever needed some help while editing digital images prior to printing? One of the reasons I use Photoshop Elements is because of the compatibility with Photoshop. You see, most of the plug-ins that were created for Photoshop will also work with Photoshop Elements — and the fact that Photoshop is the de facto industry standard for image editing software means lots of plug-ins are available. That single fact alone opens the door to lots of additional and helpful tools.

Last month I wrote about plug-ins that helped remove noise from digital images. This month I'm talking about a box of four plug-in tools in one box. onOne Software is one provider of plug-in tools for Photoshop and most of their tools work with Photoshop Elements. However, they have taken four of their plug-ins and scaled them back from the professional version (and price) and created a special product collection just for Elements. This product is *Essentials2 for Elements*.

Depending on how well you have developed and perfected your selection and editing skills and your techniques of working in Elements, one or more of these four plug-ins may be just what you need.

The package includes four different plug-ins: *Make it Better!*; *Cut it Out!*; *Frame it!* and finally, *Enlarge it!* These plug-ins are combined into a single product that is very cost effective. While these utilities are somewhat reduced in capability from their respective big brothers, they still have their place in my im-age-editing arsenal.

Make it Better! provides a before and after comparison for you to choose which looks better. Simply compare color, contrast and brightness adjustments side-by-side and pick the best looking images to adjust your image. This module combines the power of several Photoshop Elements image adjustment dialogs into a single interface.

Use *Cut it Out!* for cutting the subject or object out of the background for insertion into another image. While making a complex selection is possible with the tools provided in Elements, sometimes textures, colors, transparency or opacity of the subject (like hair, smoke, glass, or netting) can make the task almost impossible. *Cut it Out!* really comes through in these situations.

Frame it! is a fun way to add a frame to the image. You can add realistic film and darkroom edge and border effects to your images. Or, you can add artistic edges like torn paper, brush strokes or even realistic frames and mats you would hang on the walls. Five hundred frames are included and to be even more creative, the frames may be stacked for different artistic effects.

Enlarge it! was the reason I tried *Essentials 2 for Elements*. You see, when you begin to enlarge an image, the editing application is required to "create" additional bits of information to add to the image. This is known as resampling. – Use "up-sampling" when enlarging an image and "down-sampling" when when making the image smaller. If you simply make the image bigger without resampling, the pixels enlarge resulting in a "pixelated" apperance. Now almost all image

editing applications include tools to do this for you automatically. In fact, Photoshop and Elements both offer choices of different re-sampling methods for you to use when creating new image bits. However, I don't really understand the difference between Bicubic Smoother and Bicubic Sharper (what does bicubic mean anyway?) But the onOne web site compares the results between enlarging with Photoshop and the onOne product. *Enlarge it!* allows you to enlarge your image up to 4x and still maintain sharp edges and minute details. Their flagship enlargement application, *Genuine Fractals 5* allows enlargement up to 1000x but costs $160.

For $60, *Essentials2 for Elements* does a lot of your heavy lifting (in the image editing arena) at a reasonable price.

Visit onOne Software on the web at http://www.ononesoftware.com/ to see all their products, demonstrations, system requirements, reviews and pricing. Remember that most products are available as free downloads for evaluation with some limitations.

Would You Sign This Contract?

By Rob Rice, a computer specialist living in Anchorage and a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City
www.ccokc.org
articles(at)isp.com

Ok, here's the deal; I offer you a big, 56-inch, shiny new Filch Plasma Screen TV and I will sell it to you if you will agree to have a camera installed in your home so I may watch you watching the new television. Sound fair? You also agree that should you disable or inhibit the free operation of the camera in any way, you forfeit the television and your money. Neither am I responsible for any damages to your home from the equipment or its use nor do I guaranty privacy or even that the television will work.

Would you sign such a contract? Many of us, in a sense, have already agreed to something like the above scenario when we clicked on the End User License Agreement (EULA), the contract that accompanies most software these days.

It pretty much goes without saying that most of us do not read EULAs. They are often long, dry, and hard to understand documents written in a very small type face and crammed in a tiny window. Even if there is something bad in it, what are the chances it will have any real affect? After all "I'm one among millions".

We may often think of ourselves as just one among many cattle feeding in the pasture, so "The chances of lightening striking me are remote". But lightening did hit hundreds of folks in the form of a Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) lawsuit. Hundreds of persons have been sued for allegedly downloading music illegally. For example, RIAA filed a lawsuit against 12-year-old Brianna LaHara, whose mom had paid a $29.99 service charge to KaZaA for the company's music service, said Brianna, "I got really scared. My stomach is all turning," "I thought it was OK to download music because my mom paid a service fee for it. Out of all people, why did they pick me?" (1)

But what we have learned since Brianna's case came to light is that many intellectual property owners are using eavesdropping techniques to monitor end user compliance. Whether it's intercepting data traffic over an Internet connection or placing spyware on your computer the name of the game seems to be intimidation through litigation. Of course heavy-handed tactics do tend to produce mistakes and bad public feeling, such as RIAA's disastrous lawsuit where they sued a deceased great-grandmother who reportedly had never owned a computer. (2)

But what is interesting is that software that tends to operate in a dubious manner will typically tell you up front, or give you some hints in its EULA. Take for example this classic EULA that was analyzed by Benjamin Edelman back in 2004, he is an assistant professor at the Harvard Business School and a member of the Massachusetts Bar. It is Gator, an advertising pop-up software that often came embedded in weather monitors, organizers and clock synchronizers, (The company changed its name to Claria Corporation. GAIN stands for Gator Advertising Information Network) The EULA, with over 5,900 words of text, informed the user that:

"You agree that you will not use, or encourage others to use, any unauthorized means for the removal of the GAIN AdServer, or any GAIN-Supported Software from a computer."

That includes removing it with Adaware or SpyBot, which listed it as spyware.

"Any use of a packet sniffer or other device to intercept or access communications between GP and the

GAIN AdServer is strictly prohibited."

Meaning you cannot monitor what it is doing while it is on your computer!

Mr. Edelman's website is a very good resource for the wary and worth a look, (http://www.benedelman.org/news/112904-1.html).

Sony has faced some embarrassing headlines as of late with their music CD's EULA and rightly so. Take for example these observations by the Electronic Frontier Foundation regarding the contents of the Sony EULA:

If you file for bankruptcy, you have to delete all the music on your computer.

- The EULA says Sony-BMG will never be liable to you for more than $5.00.

- If your house gets burgled, you have to delete all your music from your laptop when you get home. That's because the EULA says that your rights to any copies terminate as soon as you no longer possess the original CD.

- You must install any and all updates, or else lose the music on your computer. The EULA immediately terminates if you fail to install any update. No more holding out on those hobbleware downgrades masquerading as updates.

- If you move out of the country, you have to delete all your music. The EULA specifically forbids "export" outside the country where you reside. (3)

Most EULAs that I have read place all of the burden and financial re-

sponsibility upon you. You pay the money, you take the risk, and you take the liability. The software company decides everything in its favor and takes no responsibility whatsoever even for the software doing what it claims to do! It would seem that you in effect given up your legal rights in exchange to use a piece of software.

Ok, so you read the license agreement but the mind numbing experience had you re-reading the same sentence over and over and by the time you were done you felt like the first documented case of someone having actually died from boredom. What is worse, you still don't know what it said! But cheer up, there is help available. For example, The Electronic Frontier Foundation has a helpful article titled, "Dangerous Terms a User's Guide to EULAs" by Annalee Newitz. (4) It describes some of the more dubious terms found in some EULAs and what to look out for. Such as:

1. "Do not criticize this product publicly."

2. "Using this product means you will be monitored."

3. "Do not reverse-engineer this product."

4. "Do not use this product with other vendor's products."

5. "By signing this contract, you also agree to every change in future versions of it. Oh yes, and EULAs are subject to change without notice."

6. "We are not responsible if this product messes up your computer."

You can also use some of the EULA analyzers that are available. While they are not a substitute for carefully reading a user agreement they

can be very helpful by flagging suspect sentences, especially when you have an insanely long contract such as the over 32,000 words found at the Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum's web site. Figuring this would bring any EULA analyzer to its knees, I put it through the Spyware Guide's on-line EULA Analyzer. (5) It performed beautifully and flagged areas that the Analyzer thought suspicious, including:

You agree to pay us three thousand dollars per unsolicited e-mail sent, or prohibited comment posted to the CPRR Discussion Group, or telephone call and fifteen thousand dollars per e-mail address added to your commercial mailing list in violation of the foregoing, plus damages. The CPRR Museum participates in Project Honey Pot which allows us to track and help catch spammers who harvest e-mail addresses from our web pages.

One analyzer that I have been using for several months now is the EULAlyzer by Javacool Software LLC, who also publish SpywareBlaster.

This is an application that is very simple to use, just click analyze and then drag the application's pointer over the EULA and automatically copies it into the program. Click the "Analyze" button and it gives you its assessment almost instantaneously.

The EULAlyzer personal is free for educational and personal use and a Pro version with added features is also available. (6)

If you are still not convinced of the importance of reading the EULA, you might consider this; the folks over at PC Pitstop (http://pcpitstop.com) decided to see just how many

people read the agreement. In their EULA they actually offered monetary compensation for reading the document! It stated:

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

A special consideration which may include financial compensation will be awarded to a limited number of authorize licensees to read this section of the license agreement and contact PC Pitstop at consideration@pcpitstop.com. This offer may be withdrawn at any time.

Unfortunately it took four months before anyone collected. Doug Heckman was the first person to email them in 3000 downloads! For his efforts PC Pitstop gave him $1000. So there you have it, incentive to read the license agreement!

Reading EULAs can actually be quite an interesting experience. Read enough of them and you quickly learn how bold some companies have become in trying to thwart trade laws. But don't take my word for it, take a look at some of the Microsoft, Google, or as the hardware industry attempts to apply the same yoke on its customers, Lexmark EULAs and see what they have to say, you may be amazed!

(1) Fox News, "12-Year-Old Sued for Music Downloading" http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,96797,00.html
(2) BetaNews, "RIAA Sues Deceased Grandmother" http://www.betanews.com/article/RIAA_Sues_Deceased_Grandmother/1107532260
(3) Electronic Frontier Foundation, "Now the Legalese Rootkit: Sony-BMG's EULA" http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/archives/004145.php
(4) Electronic Frontier Founda-

tion, "Dangerous Terms A User's Guide to EULAs" http://www.eff.org/wp/eula.php
(5) Spyware Guide's on-line EULA Analyzer, http://www.spywareguide.com/analyze/analyzer.php
(6) EULAlyzer, http://www.javacoolsoftware.com/index.html

This article's reference to the Electronic Frontier Foundation should not be construed as an endorsement of the organization by the author. Rob Rice is a computer specialist living in Anchorage Alaska and a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City. Rob can be contacted at articles@isp.com.

http://www.spywareguide.com/analyze/analyzer.php

http://www.javacoolsoftware.com/index.html

http://www.benedelman.org/news/112904-1.html

http://www.eff.org/wp/eula.php

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WASHINGTON AREA COMPUTER USER GROUP

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Meeting of the Washington Area Computer User Group (WACUG) general membership will be held at 1:00 PM on Saturday, January 12, 2008 at the Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Virginia 22035, for the purpose of electing by ballot the President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer to the WACUG Board of Directors and other such business of the Corporation as may properly come before them.

All members are invited to review the WACUG Articles and Bylaws before the Annual Meeting. Digital copies are available online at URL http://www.wacug.org/articles.txt and http://www.wacug.org/bylaws.txt. Hardcopy will be available for review at the January meeting.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

Submitted by Milt Mikosinski, Nominating Committee Chair
In accordance with Article VI, Section 1.a. of the WACUG Bylaws, the Nominating Committee presents the names of individuals who have stated their intention to run for election to the 2008 WACUG Board of Directors in the designated roles.

Candidates for President:
Paul Howard

Candidates for Vice President:
Geof Goodrum

Candidates for Secretary:
Bill Walsh

Candidates for Treasurer:
Robert Rott

The Nominating Committee will open the floor for additional nominations from the membership at the Annual Meeting. If only one nominee for each office is received, the membership may sponsor a motion to elect the nominees to the Board by acclamation. Otherwise, ballots will be distributed to the membership to elect four members to the Board of Directors.

The new Board may elect up to ten additional Board members at the January Board Meeting. If you are interested in serving on the Board but do not wish to enter the election, notify one of the elected Officers after the Annual Meeting.

If you have not joined WACUG or renewed your WACUG membership for 2008, you are not eligible to vote at the 2008 Annual Meeting or run for the Board. However, memberships will be available between 12:30 PM and 1:00 PM on meeting day.

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How Does Windows Handle USB Devices?

Written by Dave Gerber, Program Chair, Sarasota PCUG, Florida; member of the "Live on the Internet" Bits and Bytes radio show team
Dave_bytes(at)comcast.net
http://www.davebytes.com

One subject that often comes up is how Windows handles USB (Universal Serial Bus) devices and what you can do when USB devices don't work as you expect. First, let's talk about the two versions of USB that you'll probably encounter:

USB 2.0: typically runs at 480 mb/sec, which is faster than the original FireWire standard and much faster than SCSI. This is more appropriate for large data transfer, such as to external hard drives, and necessary to connect CD or DVD burners. However, some people still prefer FireWire for devices like video cameras, because FireWire is really a network that allows devices to be more interactive.

So how do you know which USB you have? If your computer was made sometime in the last few years, chances are its USB ports are version 2.0, which are backwards-compatible with 1.1 devices. One way you can tell which version your computer has is to look at the Device Manager in Windows XP:

- Press Windows Key + Break to open Device Manager (or click the Start button, then right-click My Computer and select Properties).
- Click the Hardware tab, then click Device Manager.
- At the bottom of the list, click the plus sign next to Universal Serial Bus controllers.

If your computer is equipped with USB 1.1, you'll see a device or two called a Host Controller or Open Host Controller.

If your computer is equipped with USB 2.0, you'll see a device or two called an Enhanced Host Controller or USB 2.0 Controller.

Any USB device you buy will have the regular USB trident logo and any high-speed USB device will have the red, white and blue high-speed logo.

If you connect a high-speed USB device to a low-speed USB port on your computer, Windows will prob-

ably give you a message that the device can run faster if you connect it to a high-speed port. A USB 2.0 internal expansion card costs about $20 and a USB 2.0 notebook adapter (fits in the PC Card slot) costs about $40.

The most common problem people have is when they connect a USB flash drive (sometimes called a thumb drive) to a computer and the computer doesn't recognize it.

First, let me say that these are great devices. Connect one to your computer and it works like a removable hard drive.

When you connect a USB device to a computer running Windows XP, the computer will detect it immediately. When that device is a USB drive, you'll probably see a message on the taskbar that Windows detected a new device, followed by a dialog box that asks if you want to open the drive to see its contents, play a movie and other choices. Windows will also assign a drive letter to the device. But sometimes you won't get this dialog box, and when you open My Computer manually (Windows Key + E), you won't see the device listed. That means there's a drive letter conflict.

Here's how you fix it:

- Select Start/Control Panel, then double-click Administrative Tools. (You may also have Administrative Tools directly on the Start menu.)
- Double-click Computer Management.
- On the left side of the Computer Management console, select Disk Management.
- On the right side, you should see a device listed as a removable drive, probably with the

same letter as another drive you're already using.

- Right-click the white bar where it shows the letter, then select Change Drive Letter and Paths.
- Select the letter, then click the Change button.
- Pick a letter not already in use from the list, then click OK.
- Click OK on the warning message, then click OK again. (I assign U: to all USB flash drives, since I never use more than one flash drive at a time.)
- Close the Computer Management console.
  When you go back into My Computer, you should see the USB drive with the new letter.

Another common problem is running out of ports. When USB started being implemented, the idea was that you would daisy-chain the devices together. So computer manufacturers would put in only two ports (always in the back) and only one port on laptops. For a variety of reasons, the daisy-chain idea never caught on, and computers made today typically have four ports in the back and two in the front, for quick access.

If you run out of ports, you can fix the problem -- as with so many others -- by applying cash. Buy an external USB hub for anywhere from $10 to $40, depending on size, number of ports and power. A hub will split a single USB port into several more. The better ones have their own power supply, so your devices don't have to rely on the computer for powering the USB connection. When there isn't enough power to go around for all the devices, they can go offline.

This brings me to the last problem I'll mention: USB devices going of-

fline because of reasons unrelated to power shortage. This was fairly common when you had many devices connected using USB 1.1 in versions of Windows older than 2000, where the devices had to supply their own software to get USB to work. (Native USB drivers were first included with 2000, then made more robust in XP — and Vista, presumably). If this happens, simply unplug all the USB devices, then plug them back in one-by-one. If any are daisy-chained together, connect the parent devices before connecting the child devices.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

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Surprising New Search Engine

By Sandy Berger, Compu-KISS
www.compukiss.com
sandy(at)compukiss.com

Google has been my search engine of choice for several years, but recent developments have made me change my alliance to a new search engine.

Perhaps you read about it. A few months ago, 20 million of AOL's customers' Web search queries appeared on the Web. These included the user's ID, the query they typed into the search engine, and other information.

Newsmakers picked up on the story because of some of the dramatic Web searches performed. For in-

stance, AOL user 2708 searched for "I hate my ex boyfriend," "how to humiliate someone," "free angry stuff to send to an ex lover," and "makehimpay.net". User 17556639 looked for even more vicious information with searches on "how to kill a wife", "photo of dead people," "decapitated photos," "wife killer," and "steak and cheese." (Guess they got hungry.)

After the sensationalism died down, many people realized that the true story was that search engines are keeping a collection of information that can lead to a personal dossier of an individual. AOL's information included user numbers that were identified by cookies, but users can also be identified by Internet addresses, bringing them closer to our true identities.

All of the big search engines keep such information. Recently Google, AOL, Microsoft, and Yahoo were subpoenaed to turn over information of this type to the Justice Department. Of the big four, only Google refused to release the information.

In response to this story, one search engine, Ixquick, immediately issued a press release stating that they are taking steps to provide privacy protection for their users. Ixquick stated that after a search, they will immediately and permanently delete all personal search details.

I was impressed by a company who thought that protecting our privacy was more important than gleaning information from our searches and selling data for marketing purposes. I had never heard of Ixquick, but I immediately surfed over to www. ixquick.com. I was impressed with

what I found.

Ixquick, which is owned by a Dutch company, is a metasearch engine. That means that it searches several databases to get its search results. Ixquick uses Yahoo/Alta vista, Gigablast, Ask Jeeves/Teoma, Open Directory and 7 other search engines. It is available in 18 languages.

Ixquick marks the search results with stars, one star for every search engine that chooses that particular Web site as one of the ten best results for your search. This effectively gives you the relevancy of the search results. Also, the Ixquick interface is clean and easy to use. It allows you to quickly choose if you want your search to find only one of the words of your search phrase, all of the words, or the exact phrase. There is also a place where you can easily enter words that you may want to eliminate from your search. You don't need to fool around with pluses, minuses, or quotation marks as you do with some popular search engines.

I was extremely impressed with the Ixquick's International Phone Directory.

Just type in a name and city or state and you can actually find people. Ixquick's Reverse Directory can tell you who's calling when you enter a telephone number. With Bigfoot and most other people directories now charging for people searches, this is an extremely useful free search tool.

Ixquick also has a comparison shopping service and an image search feature. Like Google and others, Ixquick offers a search toolbar.

After using Ixquick for a few weeks, I can honestly say that I have been very happy with the results. Using it in conjunction with Google gives you a wonderfully wide selection of search results. If, however, you want to really keep your searches private, then you will want to use Ixquick exclusively. After the recent AOL debaukle, I feel that Ixquick is providing a great service not only as a search engine, but also as a leader on privacy issues.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

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The Garage

By Berry F. Phillips, a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City contributor to the e-Monitor
http://www.ccokc.org
bfpdata(at)1access.net

IT was born in a garage! The garage was located in Menlo Park, San Mateo County, California and was a maternity ward for the birthing in March 1975 of the Homebrew Computer Club. The 1999 made for television movie. "Pirates of the Silicon Valley (and the book on which it was based, "Fire In the Valley: The Making of the Personal Computer") describes the role the Homebrew Computer Club played in creating the first personal computer.

Hackers were attracted to the garage like steel to a magnet since in those days it was just another name for a computer enthusiast like nerd or geek. In the old days a hacker is one who "hacks" through a computer problem and who writes his own code to fix it. In modern times a hacker has unfortunately a negative connotation which should be correctly called a cracker, a combination of the word, criminal and hacker. The hackers wanted to "homebrew" their own machines using parts from the Altair computer kit, computer chips such as Intel 8080, or any other computer equipment. While the members of the Homebrew Computer Club were hobbyists, most of them had electronic engineering or programming backgrounds. I am reminded of Bill Gates' Open Letter to Hobbyists which lambasted the early hackers of the time for modifying and pirating commercial software programs. Several founders of microcomputer companies including Bob Marsh, Adam Osborne, Lee Filsenstein, and Apple founders, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniack were founding members of the Homebrew Computer Club. Thirty years later in 2005, a reunion celebration was held as part of the Vintage Computer Festival sponsored by the Computer Museum. Upon the completion of the activities in the exhibit hall, there was an autograph signing as well as vintage computer equipment for sale that took many a hacker back to those early days they "homebrewed" their computer.

The Homebrew Computer Club's newsletter was one of the major forces that influenced the formation of the Silicon Valley created and edited by the members. The first issue was published in 1975 and continued in several designs ending after 21 issues in December 1977.

Who would have ever thought that a garage would be a maternity ward for the IT (Information Technology) Industry? I have decided to elevate the status of the lowly garage in my mind especially since I found out many of our largest corporations were also born in a garage! Why I am thinking now that a garage should not be for cars or junk but a shrine dedicated to American ingenuity and innovation!

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The Cursor

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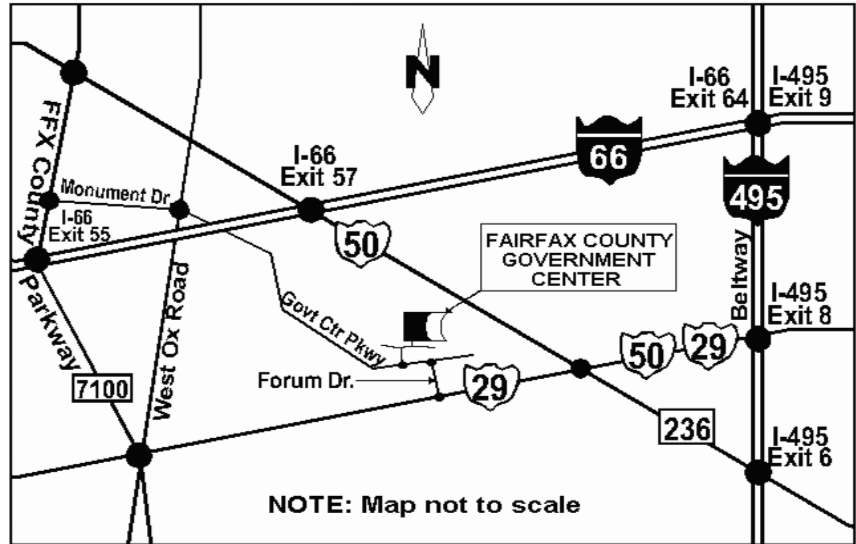Hardware Upgrades/Repair   List others below

Form Mem2007

Next WAC Meetings: • **Jan 12** • **Feb 24** • **Mar 15** • **Apr 19** • **May 10**

Call (703) 370-7649 for the latest meeting information or Visit our Web Site at:
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January Meeting will be
held at the Fairfax County
Government Center
Fairfax, VA

Go through front door
about 25 feet then follow
sign to the Meeting Room
on the right

Service Desks Open at
12:30 Meeting Starts at
1:00 PM
FREE ADMISSION
BRING A FRIEND!

After Retirement, Who Are You?

By Gabe Goldberg, Advisor, Region 2; Columnist, CompuKISS. com

Gabe(at)gabegold.com

Retirement — even temporary job loss — can trigger discomfort with one's changed identity. Especially for those who have been strongly career oriented, the simple question, "What do you do?" can lead to fumbling for an answer. And when socializing or doing business or volunteering, it can be awkward not having the usual trappings of the grown-up world such as business cards.

Though called "business cards", they're hardly restricted to that context. Stay-at-home spouses, volunteers, and other folks often need a quick way to provide identification and contact information such as email address or Web site URL. They can also list concise emergency information and instructions such as medical history, allergies, medications, and someone to contact.

But with modern proliferation of such data — landline telephone number, cell phone number, instant messaging screen name, LinkedIn or other social networking Web site address, Skype number, etc. — it's a challenge conveying one's whole story quickly.

Designing and purchasing cards the traditional way, using a real-world printer, can be a nuisance or daunting challenge, not to mention expensive. And personally printed cards — whether laser or ink-jet — never seem quite as polished. For an online alternative, visit VistaPrint, <www.vistaprint.com>, a user-friendly and economical source of personalized cards and many other customizable products.

Among VistaPrint's many attractive bargains is the opportunity to order 250 cards for free, paying only shipping. The small "catch" is that there will be a small/tasteful VistaPrint ad on the cards' back. But for a small fee, the ad can be omitted. And larger quantities can be ordered for rates far below those of local print shops.

These bargain cards aren't limited to boring just-the-facts designs; more than 40 backgrounds cater to the most serious or the most fanciful among us. My cards are business-like, while my wife's show a more flowery and artistic personality. Having browsed the site's design spectrum I occasionally recognize fellow VistaPrint customers from their cards! More elaborate designs are available at slightly higher prices and custom designs can be uploaded to the site.

VistaPrint runs occasional sales and promotions, during which other products (sticky notes, T-shirts, desk calendars, invitations, announcements, notepads, letterhead, etc.) are offered for just the cost of shipping or at greatly reduced prices. I've gotten essentially free personalized rubber stamps and refrigerator magnets showing my business card design. And the site offers a small bonus for referring new customers.

A very convenient feature is the site remembering details of orders for reuse or modification. So when I've moved or changed contact information, I haven't needed to redesign my cards from scratch: I simply update the information and reorder.

Having cards handy in pocket or purse eliminates having to scribble contact information on scraps of paper, and avoids someone having to later puzzle what's written. One warning applies, though: Consider how much information to reveal. Telephone number and email address, perhaps with city and state, may suffice without compromising privacy.

Fake Check Scams on the Internet Explode

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

Iwilsker(at)apcug.net

WEBSITES:
http://fakechecks.org
http://fakechecks.org/prevention.html

You may remember the recent case of a local woman who responded to a "work at home" opportunity where she would accept payments from the customers of a business, deposit the checks, deduct her generous commissions, and then wire the balance elsewhere.

Recently, in my High Tech Crime

Consortium (HTCC) listserv, an investigator posted the following inquiry (redacted): "Is anyone working a case involving a fraudulent check from XXX Bank on the account of YYY Financial Trust Company, a supposed winner of a drawing scam. My victim received this letter and check, deposited it and XXX BANK told her it was good so they put the money in her account. Turns out it was not. She of course was told to wire "taxes" in the amount of $4425.00 to a subject XXXXX in Houston, Texas, but the money gram was picked up in XXXXX."

Recently, (October 3), the Reuters news service ran a story "Spam-scam crackdown nets $2 billion in fake checks". The story goes on to explain, "An international crackdown on Internet financial scams this year has yielded more than $2.1 billion in seized fake checks and 77 arrests in the Netherlands, Nigeria and Canada, U.S. and other authorities said on Wednesday. The scammers, often West African organized crime groups, use ploys such as "spam" e-mail offering to pay recipients "processing fees" for depositing checks, which later turn out to be phony, and sending the ostensible proceeds to the scammer, authorities said." Demonstrating how prevalent this scam is, the Reuters article goes on to say, "Two-thirds of Americans said they received at least one potential scam contact per week, and 18 percent said they or a family member had fallen for one, in a survey conducted for an alliance of banks, consumer groups and the U.S. Postal Service. Grant said complaints to her group about fake checks have risen 60 percent this year, and the average victim loses about $3,000 to $4,000."

In a parallel news story at FoxNews.com (October 3), "Postal Service Declares War on Nigerian Scam", in discussing the same seizure writes, "So far this year, an average of more than 800 people a month have filed complaints about such scams. Hoping to stem the losses, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service announced an international crackdown Wednesday in which more than 540,000 fake checks with a face value of $2.1 billion have been seized." The financial and emotional impact of being a victim can be disabling, "Retired people have lost their nest eggs and young families have been defrauded of their savings for a home."

If 800 people a month report losses to the Postal Inspector, one may wonder how many other victims are too ashamed or embarrassed to report the crime which victimized them.

You may have noticed some TV commercials warning about these scams, another indication of the degree of the threat. The commercials are promoting a consumer education website fakechecks.org, a creation of the National Consumers League, and sponsored by groups such as the American Bankers Association, American Express, Capital One, JP Morgan Chase, Visa, Western Union, and the United States Postal Inspection Service. The meat of the website is a curt warning that says, "There is no legitimate reason why anyone would give you a check or money order and ask you to wire money in return."

The major types of scams that use these methods are foreign business offers, rental schemes, love losses, sudden riches, overpayment, and work at home scams. The common thread in all of these is that in response to an email, phone call, or letter, the victim received certified or cashiers' checks, or money orders, and was directed to deposit them in their personal bank accounts. Immediately after depositing the instruments, the victim was directed to deduct his commission or fee, and then wire the proffered balance (often via Western Union) to the crook. The checks and money orders would bounce as they were typically counterfeit, forged, or otherwise phony, leaving the victim with the financial loss for the amounts wired to the crook. The proceeds of the wired funds are often picked up overseas, and not at the address stated in the original offer.

Many of us have received the ubiquitous Nigerian 419 scam from the relative of some oil minister who was killed in a plane crash, and the widow needs help in investing the money. In the original scam, still circulating by the millions, the victim is to wire money to Nigeria or some "barrister" in London in order to pay the taxes and fees to release the funds, for which the victim is to receive a generous commission. In a new iteration of the scheme, the victim receives an email or letter that alleges that the crook claims to have a check which can be used to pay the taxes and fees, and in exchange for depositing the check and wiring the net proceeds to a third party, the victim can withhold a generous commission. Of course, the check is worthless.

In another version, also distributed in the millions, the victim receives an email, letter, or fax claiming that they have won an international lottery. In the past, the victim had to come up with the taxes and fees on his own, and wire the money to the crook in order to collect the winnings. Now the scheme sends the victim an authentic looking check which is to be used to pay the foreign taxes and fees on the prize winnings. The victim deposits the check, which may also include a small percentage of his winnings, and wires the taxes and fees to a

third party. The check bounces, and the victim is out the proceeds, often in the $3000 to $4000 range.

I have actually had students who advertised their cars online, and received a call or email from a barrister in London representing a client who wanted to buy the car for the full asking price. They would then overnight a certified check to the seller for more than the selling price of the car, and ask the seller to wire the balance back to London, sometimes after deducting a generous fee or bonus. A bonded courier will be by to pick up the car. Of course there is no courier, and the check is no good, leaving the seller with his car plus a several thousand dollar loss.

Another student recently brought me an email where she could make hundreds of dollars a week by accepting checks and money orders from a seller that needed an American presence, asking her to deduct her 20% commission, and then wiring the proceeds to some distant place. The scam is obvious.

Greed and gullibility can affect all races and religions. The website fakechecks.org may provide a valuable warning to those who might fall victim. If the Postal Service can seize 540,000 fake checks worth $2.1 billion, one may wonder how many were not seized, and made it to the victims. One can only wonder how much more was lost by the victims, often those who can least afford it.

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Why Update your Computer?

By Kathy Jacobs, President,
Phoenix PCUG, AZ
president@phoenixpcug.org
www.phoenixpcug.org/

For Christmas this year, we gave my father a piece of software that requires Windows XP SP2. Imagine my surprise when he emailed back that he didn't have SP2.

Besides getting him a copy of SP2, I found out that I would need to explain to him why he needed it. I thought some of you might benefit from the information as well.

Like many computer users, my father views his computer as something that he should just be able to use. He doesn't think he should have to put any time into maintenance of the computer. I hear this quite frequently, but don't understand it. Would you buy a car and never put gas in it or never change the oil in it? Computer maintenance is just like the maintenance of your car.

The first line of maintenance for your computer should be Microsoft Update or Windows Update. Security holes are being patched every month. Those patches are made available to you for free from Microsoft for your benefit and for mine. Mine? Yes mine. If you don't keep the security holes on your machine patched, then you make it easier for someone to use your machine to attack my computer - even if I am patched. Also when I send you an email the programs can harvest my email address and add it to lists so that I get more spam.

The second line of defense is a good anti-virus program. Again, you can't just buy it and expect it to run forever. You need to update it regularly, and run it regularly. If you don't have your anti-virus up to date, you

will only be catching the viruses that were out when you bought the program. That means that any virus that has come out since you bought the package can still sit on your computer and attack from there.

The third line of defense is anti-spyware software. This software will prevent someone from coming in and "owning" your computer. What do I mean by owning? Spyware programs are frequently used to keep track of what you do on your computer. A common misconception is that anti-spyware is only needed when you are on the net. In reality, spyware can be installed in seconds while you are downloading your email and then it will run while you are off-line. When you get on-line again, the spyware will call home and send back everything it has learned about your machine.

The final line of defense is your firewall. If you have Windows XP SP2, you have a firewall installed. By installing and activating your firewall, you make yourself less visible to the bad guys out on the web. If they can't see you, they may not spend the time to come find you. Especially if your neighbor has an open, unpatched, unprotected system. Adding the protection of an outbound firewall to Windows can also help plug leaks and alert you to behavior by friendly programs that you may still want to control.

The way I look at these four lines of defense is the same way I would if a bear is after me. I can't outrun the bear. What I can do is make it less likely that the bear will come after me. That is the same attitude I want you to take: Make your computer less open to the bears coming after it.

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This and That

By Elizabeth B. Wright, a member of ccOKC and a frequent contributor to the eMonitor, Computer Club of Oklahoma City
www.ccokc.org
james(at)qns.com

How much time are you spending upgrading, both hardware and software? New operating systems, programs that won't run on older systems, changes in the internet, memory hog programs and graphic cards? If you are keeping up with the trend toward power, then all of these things probably apply to your computer life. But are they worth it?

For myself, I have found that so much time and money have been invested in trying to keep up with the times. Keeping up with the Joneses doesn't even apply here. Just trying to stay current on the internet is enough to make most of us upgrade, upgrade, upgrade. But all of this has come with a severe penalty. I find it is taking much too much of my valuable time and that not enough of that time is being spent productively. If there wasn't a deadline for this column, would I even find the time to write it? Some big changes in direction are in order I think.

Until Microsoft makes everything we already own completely useless, I find that most of what I need to do with the computer can be done with much older programs. For instance, if I want to be sure someone can open and read a document; I still save it as ASCII text. Oh yes, we have .pdf and other so-called portable text formats, but so what? The most portable is still the above mentioned ASCII. The output is usually in exceedingly small files. There is no formatting possible, but if you are merely transmitting information, what need is there for more than an old-fashioned typewritten letter? Most word processing programs still offer the option of saving the file as a .txt file. Personally, when I want to be sure the file can be accessed by someone else, I type it in Notepad. I've even been known to use really archaic programs, just for kicks.

If you are earning your living with mathematical programs such as accounting, then where do you draw the line on updating? Does your older software do the job, and does your older computer do that job fast enough to ensure that you meet your deadlines so you can get paid for your work? But if your clients upgrade their software and you find that you must submit spreadsheets, etc. to them in a new format, then you are caught in the trap. So far most new programs will read some of the data from older versions of their software, but when will that change? About the same time as the printer manufacturers found out they could make more money selling ink rather than printers, one can only assume that the software companies were probably thinking "why can't we do something like that?"

When it comes to graphics however, don't even think about using older software and computers, unless of course you have all the time in the world to wait for changes to take place when you are enhancing your photos. Once again, if this is your job, you simply can't afford to be slow. But even for hobbyists, speed is really essential to graphic manipulation.

Where is the bottom line on speed versus money? Each of us has to decide on the point at which we achieve the balance of using our computers for productive output without further upgrades. It is just as easy to write this column on my oldest computer, but since working with photos is my hobby; my fastest computer will have to be used. However, from now on, the two machines will be used to do a specific job, rather that keeping everything on just one of them. As for the internet, as long as it can be accessed with something other than the computer dedicated to the photos, then that is the one that will be used.

Hopefully I can keep my useful work separate from the internet, the object being to avoid contamination as much as possible. But I'm not sure how long the older, slower computer will serve my internet connection. If you are limited to one computer, you might look into removable hard drives in order to keep your data safe from the bad guys out there. But that takes us back to the money issue.

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