



# The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the  
Washington Area Computer User Group



Meeting Location  
Fairfax County  
Government Center



Next Meeting:  
August 16, 2008



## Presidential Bits

### August 2008 Meeting

By Paul Howard

Kurt DeSoto's July presentation on the "Digital Television Transition" drew a big crowd and was very appreciatively received, as many members were able to clarify the many nuances of the DTV revolution, and the termination of most analog broadcasting on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Kurt's presentation, and links to a variety of resources are available on the Recent Meetings page of the group's web site: <http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html>. Bring your flash (thumb) drive or a blank CD-R to one of our WAC meetings to obtain 50 megabytes of material from a vast number of government and commercial sources Kurt has compiled on this topic. Neal Grotenstein discussed several methods for concealing your email address from address collection robots, when your email has to be posted on a web site.

Our August 16<sup>th</sup> meeting will be held at the Fairfax County Government Center, from 12:30 to 3:30 PM. WAC's Bob Mason will be presenting a discussion on the latest version of Microsoft's productivity suite - Office 2007: What's New and Worthwhile? The user interface

for the Office suite of programs has been changed for the first time in years. Such "opportunities" often win praise from new users to these programs, but provide challenges to long time users. Join us on the 16<sup>th</sup> and find out Bob's take on this and other features of this latest iteration of the "standard" suite of programs used by business and home users.

Don't forget the program that allows WACUG members to sign up for a variety of telecommunications services from Verizon, including FiOS. Using a special phone number and a numeric code identifying WAC, your order will result in Verizon's sending a contribution to the group. An order for a full range of FiOS services - TV, internet and telephone - will result in a \$65 donation to WAC, for example. The fine print notes that some other promotional offers may not be available through the donation program - but we hope you'll try this approach if you require telecom services. Call 1-888-695-5299, and use WAC's code - 12426.

Do you have a computer or related technology interest you'd like to tell your WAC colleagues about? We're looking for additional presentations

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## Bonus Articles in the Download Edition

- Converting CD-based Music to MP3...
- Painter 4 Essentials a First Impression...
- Recovering Files from a Hard Drive

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# Lloyd's Web Sites for August, 2008

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

Sites for August 2008

1. Check a broker's history – [www.nasdaq.com](http://www.nasdaq.com) also [www.nasaa.org](http://www.nasaa.org)
2. Map and Driving Directions – [www.us.map24.com](http://www.us.map24.com) – This site provides maps and driving directions for the USA, Canada, and Europe.
3. U.S. Postal Service Home Page – [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)
4. Old Farmer's Almanac 2008 version – [www.almanac.com](http://www.almanac.com) – Fun and practical information for everyday life including moon calendars, planting charts, recipes, weather predictions, and more.
5. Weather.com – [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) – Consistently rated in the Top Five for News, Entertainment, and Information web sites by Media Metrix, [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) features current conditions and forecasts for over 77,000 locations worldwide, along with local and regional radars.
6. Guinness World Records – [www.guinnessrecords.com/default.aspx](http://www.guinnessrecords.com/default.aspx). Home page for the Guinness World Records. Free sign-up required for some features.
7. How GPS Receivers Work – [www.howstuffworks.com/gps.htm](http://www.howstuffworks.com/gps.htm). –For less than \$100, you can get a pocket-sized gadget that will tell you exactly where you are on Earth at any moment. As long as you have a GPS receiver and a clear view of the sky, you'll never be lost again.
8. U.S. Mint 50 State Quarters Program – [www.usmint.gov/mint\\_programs/50sq\\_program/index.cfm?flash=yes&action=faq\\_50sq](http://www.usmint.gov/mint_programs/50sq_program/index.cfm?flash=yes&action=faq_50sq)  
A series of circulating quarters being issued from 1999 - 2008.
9. Kids.gov – [www.kids.gov](http://www.kids.gov) – Kids.gov is Uncle Sam's family-friendly site that links to over 500 websites from government agencies, schools, and educational organizations, all geared to the learning level and interest of kids.
10. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration – [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov) – (NHTSA). Includes many driving tips and car and truck safety features.



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for the remainder of year - please contact [president@wacug.org](mailto:president@wacug.org).



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## NCTCUG

Visit our "sister" user group. The National Capital Technology and Computer User's Group meets the first and fourth Wednesday of the month. They meet in Carlin Hall in Arlington at 5711 South 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Visit their web site for more information, a map and directions:

<http://www.nctcug.org/>  
Meetings start at 7:00 PM

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**Washington Area User  
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**ACUG**



## GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WAC

### Review: Magellan Crossover GPS

After juggling maps and making unplanned detours during an April trip to southern California, I decided it was time to buy a Global Positioning System (GPS) unit that I could use in my car and on travel. However, I also hike and wanted an outdoor GPS with topographic maps to help me navigate, particularly in the desert with no marked trails.

In May, I found the Magellan CrossoverGPS™ (eBay, factory refurbished, \$220), which combines vehicle, outdoor/hiking, and marine/boating navigation functions in a single unit. The unit also features a basic MP3 music player and a JPEG and BMP format image viewer. The GPS modes, MP3 player, and image viewer are mutually exclusive functions – you cannot listen to MP3s while using GPS or view topographic maps while routing in GPS vehicle mode. The CrossoverGPS uses the SiRFstarIII GPS chipset, Mi-

crosoft Windows CE core 5.0 operating system, has a 3.5" color touch-screen, includes a vehicle 12V DC cigarette lighter adapter, an AC adapter, a USB cable, a suction cup windshield mount and cradle, and tools and manual on CD-ROM. A built-in rechargeable battery provides up to 8 hours of continuous use. The unit accepts Secure Digital (SD) memory cards (not included), which are used to backup and restore GPS data (address book, waypoints, tracks), MP3 files, and photos. The unit is sealed to IPX-4 specifications, which means it is sealed against rain, but cannot be submerged.

The unit I purchased came with an older version of the GPS firmware, but Magellan provides a free firmware upgrade download after registering the product through their web site. I highly recommend checking the firmware version, as the upgrade has a much better user interface. Magellan also includes the firmware upgrade on CD with an update to the street maps and points of interest on SD card (CrossoverGPS NA Map and Software Update V2, retail \$79.99). The pre-installed street maps do not accurately represent the new Springfield Mixing Bowl exits nor the Wilson Bridge project. With the major road projects currently underway in the Washington, DC area, I believe it is better to wait for a future map update.

For vehicle navigation, the CrossoverGPS includes street maps of Canada and the US, including Alaska, Hawaii, and Pu-

erto Rico. The built-in database has 1.5 million points of interest (POIs), including restaurants, gas and vehicle repair stations, libraries, parks, etc. The user can store custom POIs and frequently used addresses. Addresses can be entered by zip code, city name or nearby POI and street address using the on-screen keyboard. The unit has very clear graphics with 2D and optional 3D split window views of upcoming freeway exits. The text to speech feature announces upcoming turns very clearly by street name up to twice before the turn and with a user-selectable chime, bell, or beep at the turn. If a turn is missed, the unit is very quick to calculate a new route. The user can also select to avoid toll roads, use the fastest route, the shortest route, minimize or maximize use of freeways, and exclude particular roads from the recommended route. Up to 20 destinations can be added into a single trip, but the destinations are in user-defined order – the software does not optimize the order of the destinations. The user can set a preference to automatically suggest detours if the freeway speed falls below 15 MPH for a user set period of time. The unit also supports an optional TrafficKit accessory (retail \$99.99) with a built-in FM receiver for real-time traffic information, which the GPS can use to find the quickest route to a destination. The TrafficKit includes three months of service; an annual subscription is available for \$60. The coverage area inclu-

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des major metropolitan areas in the US, including Washington and Baltimore.

For hiking, the CrossoverGPS includes built-in 90 meter resolution topographic maps for the 48 contiguous United States (the unit is also compatible with Magellan 30 meter resolution MapSend® Topo maps, available separately). The unit can record and save tracks (continuous latitude, longitude, altitude and time) and waypoints (user defined point), and has easy entry of the current location as a base camp. The POI database is also available, so hikers can search for and plot bearings to the nearest services. In addition to the topo map view, there is a simulated compass view that shows the current direction of travel, direction to the next waypoint, and direction to sun and moon, as well as latitude, longitude, elevation, date/time, speed of travel, and trip odometer. There is a hold button that reduces power consumption (dims display) for longer hikes. The unit also comes with a re-

movable green rubber covering to protect the case, though the display is still exposed. At 9.4 ounces with the covering, the GPS is a bit heavy, probably due to the large capacity battery. The unit will just barely fit in a shirt pocket with the rubber cover in place.

I have not used the marine/boating navigation mode, but the features correspond to those in the outdoor/hiking mode. The built-in map appears to be the same topo map used in outdoor/hiking mode, but Magellan offers detailed MapSend BlueNav™ marine and MapSend Lake maps as additional cost add-ons.

Some users reported gripes. The CrossoverGPS does not have an external volume control; volume is only adjustable through the on-screen menu (7 levels plus mute). Many users report that Magellan's telephone support is very poor. A hiker noted that there is no way to recharge or replace the built-in battery while on extended hikes.

In my personal experience, the CrossoverGPS intermittently reported poor signal and inaccurate locations during a mountain hike in Shenendoah National Park, although it reported multiple GPS satellites in view. I found that sometimes turning the unit off and on again helped to reacquire a reliable GPS signal. The unit was unable to maintain a good signal from a window seat during a jet flight to Denver. I tried the MP3 and image viewer functions, but it appears that Magellan PC Tools (which only

runs on Microsoft Windows 2000 or XP) is required to upload and manage music and images. Being a GNU/Linux user, I tried loading files directly onto the SD card, but the unit did not recognize them. I have not looked for an Open Source program to replace Magellan's limited software. However, I have used Open Source software such as Viking and GPSBabel to read and convert my GPS hiking tracks and waypoints from the SD card to my Gentoo Linux system and overlay the navigation information on maps. On my next desert hike, I plan to use the same software to upload trail waypoints to the unit. I am also learning how to geotag digital photos with location information so the photos can be linked to trail maps.

In summary, the CrossoverGPS works extremely well as a vehicle navigation GPS, with a clearly understandable menu and text to speech pronunciation of street names (with v2.14.00.01 firmware upgrade). It is less well adapted for outdoor use compared to dedicated outdoor GPS units, but provides a reasonable compromise if you don't want to carry multiple GPS units on trips. The music player and image functions are basic function and limited by the fact they cannot be used while the GPS navigation is operating. These features would be better if the music and image file management was built into the GPS instead of relying on proprietary MS Windows software on a PC to do this.

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See page 7 for images of Geof's GPS

### **Press Release: NETGEAR WGR-614L Wireless Router**

Open Source Wireless-G Router (WGR614L) Delivers Higher Processing Power and More Memory for a Wide Variety of Customized Applications and is Supported by a Dedicated and Responsive Open Source Community

SANTA CLARA, Calif. – June 30, 2008 – NETGEAR®, Inc. (NASDAQGM: NTGR), a worldwide provider of technologically advanced, branded networking solutions, today announced the launch of the Open Source Wireless-G Router (WGR614L), a full-featured wireless router designed to serve as a reliable, high-performance platform to support a wide variety of applications created by the open source community.

The high-performance WGR-614L, which is "Works with Windows Vista" certified, features a 240 MHz MIPS32® CPU core with 16 KB of instruction cache, 16 KB of data cache, 1 KB of pre-fetch cache, and incorporates 4 MB of flash memory and 16 MB of RAM. In addition to an external 2 dBi antenna, the WGR614L integrates a second internal diversity antenna to provide enhanced performance and range. The router supports free open source Linux®-based Tomato and DD-WRT firmware and will soon support OpenWRT.

The WGR614L is supported by a dedicated open source router community, [www.myopenrouter.com](http://www.myopenrouter.com), which provides open source firmware downloads, forums, blogs, articles, source code, and user guides, and provides users with dedicated and responsive support by open source experts.

"The launch of the WGR614L is significant to the open source community as there has been a growing demand for more powerful platforms to support a rapidly growing segment of open source enthusiasts that are seeking to create more robust, commercial-grade applications for their wireless routers," stated Som Pal Choudhury, senior product line manager for advanced wireless at NETGEAR. "In addition to adding a more powerful processor and additional memory to the proven Broadcom® platform, the most popular open source firmware, Tomato and DD-WRT, are available on WGR614L making it easier for users to develop a wide variety of applications. An important feature of our offering is the dedicated and responsive open source community which enables users to easily exchange ideas and troubleshoot issues. New applications currently being developed by this community include traffic shaping applications, redirections to captive portals for hotspots, guest access via a separate SSID, upstream and downstream QOS, and intelligent bandwidth monitoring."

The NETGEAR Open Source Wireless-G Router (WGR614L), which features one 10/100 Inter-

net WAN port and a four-port 10/100 LAN switch, incorporates an 802.11g access point to support wireless connectivity at speeds of up to 54 Mbps. The WGR614L supports static and dynamic routing with TCP/IP, VPN pass-through (IPSec, L2TP), NAT, PPTP, PPPoE, DHCP (client and server), and Bigpond. A Stateful Packet Inspection (SPI) firewall protects the network from intruders, and the wireless connection is secured with support for 40-, 128- and 152-bit WEP encryption, Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA), WPA2-PSK, and Wi-Fi Protected Setup (WPS). Additional security features include: Exposed Host (DMZ), MAC address authentication, URL content filtering, logs and e-mail alerts of Internet activity.

The NETGEAR Open Source Wireless-G Router (WGR614L) is backed by a one-year hardware warranty and is available now via select retailers, direct marketers, e-commerce sites and value added resellers at a retail price in the U.S. of \$69.

About NETGEAR, Inc. NETGEAR (NASDAQGM: NTGR) designs technologically advanced, branded networking solutions that address the specific needs of small and medium business and home users. The company's product offerings enable users to share Internet access, peripherals, files, digital multimedia content and applications among multiple personal

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computers and other Internet-enabled devices. As an ENERGY STAR® partner, NETGEAR offers products that prevent greenhouse gas emissions by meeting strict energy-efficiency specifications set by the U.S. government. NETGEAR is headquartered in Santa Clara, Calif. For more information, visit the company's Web site at [www.netgear.com](http://www.netgear.com) or call (408) 907-8000.

## 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 July 3 – July 30, 2008.

Distribution
<a href="#">Absolute Linux 12.1.05</a>
<a href="#">BeleniX 0.7.1</a>
<a href="#">BLAG Linux And GNU 90001</a>
<a href="#">CentOS 5.2 Live CD</a>
<a href="#">Debian GNU/Linux 4.0r4</a>
<a href="#">Devil-Linux 1.2.15</a>
<a href="#">Foresight Linux 2.0.4</a>
<a href="#">Gentoo Linux 2008.0</a>
<a href="#">Gibraltar Firewall 2.6</a>
<a href="#">GoblinX 2.7</a>
<a href="#">GoblinX 2.7 "Micro"</a>
<a href="#">GoblinX Premium 2008.2</a>
<a href="#">IPCop 1.4.20</a>
<a href="#">LinuxConsole 1.0.2008</a>
<a href="#">NimbleX 2008</a>
<a href="#">Parsix GNU/Linux 1.5r1</a>
<a href="#">Parted Magic 3.0</a>
<a href="#">Poseidon Linux 3.0</a>
<a href="#">Red Hat Enterprise Linux 4.7</a>
<a href="#">Ubuntu 8.04.1</a>
<a href="#">Ubuntu Muslim Edition 8.04.1</a>

## Ulteo Applications System

### xPUD 0.7

## Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on CD. In addition, 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](mailto: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.

## August 2008

**Armagetron Advanced** – v-0.2.8.1. <http://armagetronad.net/>. Free GNU General Public License source code, RPM executable package, and Ubuntu executable package by the Armagetron Advanced development team. Armagetron Advanced is "A Tron clone in 3D". Tron was an arcade game based on the movie of the same name, released by Disney in 1982. The original game consisted of 4 sub-games, the only one of concern is the 'Light Cycles' one, in which the player uses a left/right joystick to control a 'Light Cycle' which leaves a wall behind it wherever the cycle goes, turning only at 90

degree angles. The player must then get the AI to crash into their wall while avoiding hitting the AI's own wall themselves. Those were the humble beginnings of Armagetron Advanced's game play, which has now blossomed into 16 player mayhem, with highly advanced AI, network game play, and, of course, all in a 3D environment.

**Mozilla Firefox** – v3.0.1. <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/>. Free Mozilla Public License source code and executable by the Mozilla community. Firefox is a graphic web browser that is fast, secure, and is customizable by the user through add-ons and themes. Top features include: Password Manager - Remember site passwords without ever seeing a pop-up; One-Click Bookmarking - Bookmark, search and organize Web sites quickly and easily; Improved Performance - View Web pages faster, using less of your computer's memory; Smart Location Bar - Find the sites you love in seconds—enter a term for instant matches that make sense; Instant Web Site ID - Avoid online scams, unsafe transactions and forgeries with simple site identity; Full Zoom - See any part of a Web page, up close and readable, in seconds; Platform-Native Look & Feel - Browse with a Firefox that's integrated into your computer's operating system. This release fixes security issues in version 3.0.

**jobBuddy** – v0.3.1. <http://job-buddy.sourceforge.net/index.html>.

See jobBuddy page 7



Free GNU General Public License executable Python code by Sam Pottinger et al. jobBuddy searches six top job sites and displays listings in a single interface. It can also hide jobs users don't want, and can update results at a later time. There is no registration or third party service involved, so searches can be directly sent to the sources. Users can "dig deeper" into search results to see a wider spectrum of job options. A duplication checker ensures that you don't see the same listing more than once.

**Sockso** – v1.0.5. <http://sockso.pugh.com/>. Free GNU General Public License executable Java code and source by naph. Sockso is a personal music server for everyone. It's designed to be as simple as possible so that anyone with a mouse and some MP3 music files can get their friends listening to their music across the Internet in minutes.

**Kernel Source** – <http://www.kernel.org/>. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.26).



GPS Compass



GPS Location



GPS Street



GPS Topographic

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## Skype 4.0

By Joe Nuvolini, Webmaster  
& APCUG Rep, Pikes Peak  
Computer Application Society, CO  
[http://ppcompas.apcug.org/  
nuvo\(at\)nuvolini.com](http://ppcompas.apcug.org/nuvo(at)nuvolini.com)

I've been a Skype subscriber for some time now. What is Skype, you say? Well, it's an online chat/phone/video service which has, as of the end of March, some 309 million registered users. Last I heard, that is more subscribers than all the US telephone services combined! It allows you to make computer to computer calls free worldwide. It can support 12 million users at a time. In addition to audio and video chat, you can instant message, send text messages to phones, and share files. You can call from computer to phone as well.

It has three levels of service for the computer to phone service. For \$2.95 per month you can make free computer to phone calls anywhere in the US and Canada. The \$5.95 service includes the US, Canada, and Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey Mexico. For \$9.95 per month you get unlimited free computer to phone calls worldwide. They point out that unlimited means up to 10,000 minutes per month. Let's see, 10,000 minutes is over 6.9 days! I'm currently subscribing to the \$2.95 service. To call overseas with my service it runs about 2.1 cents per minute to Europe or from Europe back to the States. Skype has been offering video calling as well since 2005. Their data compression allows quality voice transmissions on a bandwidth of as little as 2kbs and video on 6kbs. It has a new version, 4.0, which is in beta testing. It allows you to see the person you are calling full screen. For this feature to work well you need 90kbs.

I'm using it and it seems to work real well. This full screen mode will be very useful for the computer user group community.

While at the Association of PC User Groups (APCUG) Convention held in conjunction with the January 2008 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) attendees in their forum with the vendors discussed presentations at user group meetings. Over the years, the cost of sending representatives out to user groups for the purpose of promoting their wares has become no longer cost effective. We discussed the use of Webinars (live presentations across the Internet).

This new version of Skype looks to be ideal for such a program and it can be done at little or no cost to the vendors and user groups. If you haven't tried Skype, you should. You can download the current version (3.8) at: <http://www.skype.com/download/skype/windows/>. If you are adventurous and want to try 4.0 beta go to: <http://www.skype.com/intl/en/download/skype/windows/beta/>.

By the way, if you have wireless Internet access you can purchase a WiFi phone at the Skype online store and it will allow you to make calls whenever and wherever you have wireless Internet access. There's a lot more information which you can checkout at their Website: <http://www.skype.com>.

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## AutoMatting™ — Unique Digital Matts ... Extraordinaire

From Image Trends Inc. — The  
Science of Imaging  
by Neil Longmuir, a member of the  
Winnipeg PC User Group Inc.,  
Canada  
[www.wpcusrgrp.org](http://www.wpcusrgrp.org)  
[longmur\(at\)ms.umanitoba.ca](mailto:longmur(at)ms.umanitoba.ca)

"AutoMatting automatically creates a unique matt for each image which is designed to make the photographer's work more attractive and appealing to the customer in a slide show or viewing mode." AutoMatting is a digital matting software program that creates a unique matt for each image. The traditional way to display photographs, was to mount the photograph to a matt board, and fit that mounted photograph into a matt opening cut to the size of the photograph. Matting a photograph helps separate the photograph from the surrounding background. Matting a photograph gives each photograph it's own visual unique and attractive look.

The way images are shown to customers, friends or family tends to be a bit boring. A set of prints is made from a roll of film or digital images. The pictures would be taken out of the photo lab envelope and passed around to customers, friends and family to look at.

This approach is fine if there are only a few pictures, but what if there are a large number of images. One solution is to create a slide show. Creating a slide show takes time to create. One major problem with a typical computer monitor or TV display is that the aspect ratio of the monitor or TV is not the same as the standard typical 3x2 aspect ratio of the images. Then, when we mix

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portrait (vertical) images with landscape (horizontal) images the images are not the same size. Portrait images are smaller than landscape images and have vertical black bars on each side. Landscape images have smaller black bars on the top and bottom. The bottom line is that you want your images to be visually more attractive to the viewer.

The solution to making the images more attractive is to use AutoMatting to create a unique matte for each image in a folder and resize that image to the aspect ratio of any monitor or TV screen.

Also, if there are sub-folders under the main folder, those sub-folders can be included by checking the included sub-folders in the upper left corner. Once the images to be processed are selected, press Process Images at the bottom of the screen.

AutoMatting operates in a batch mode and creates a sub-folder of

images using the colors and patterns in the original image plus a unique beveled edge border. The final result is an image that looks great on the display medium with no black bars appearing on the display. Figure 1 shows basic AutoMatting screen. Figure 2 shows the unique matting of a landscape image while Figure 3 shows the unique matting of a portrait image. Note in both cases there are no black bars around either image.

### Conclusions

Automatting is a perfect example of a software application that was “thinking outside the box.” This “New Wave” thinking application has given all end users whether they are professional photographers or ordinary every day photographers a great way to show their images to everyone on whatever display medium.

This is a terrific product. AutoMatting is available for a free “try before you buy” download. Visit [www.im-](http://www.im-)

[agetrendsinc.com](http://agetrendsinc.com) and download the trial version for yourself. The cost to purchase this program is \$49.95 and is available for both the Windows and MAC platforms. This is a very impressive innovative product that works great for a new look to your images.

Neil's rating (\*\*\*\*\* – five stars )

I would also like to thank the kind folks at Image Trends Inc. for providing me with a copy of the AutoMatting for review.

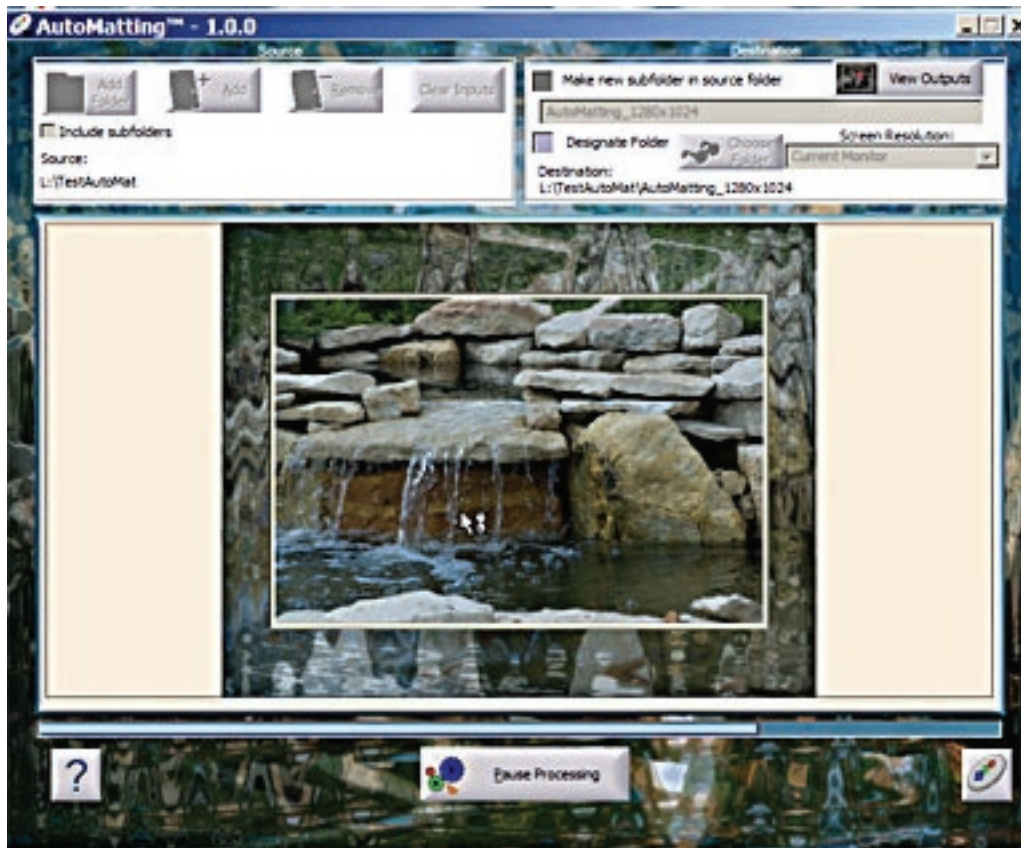
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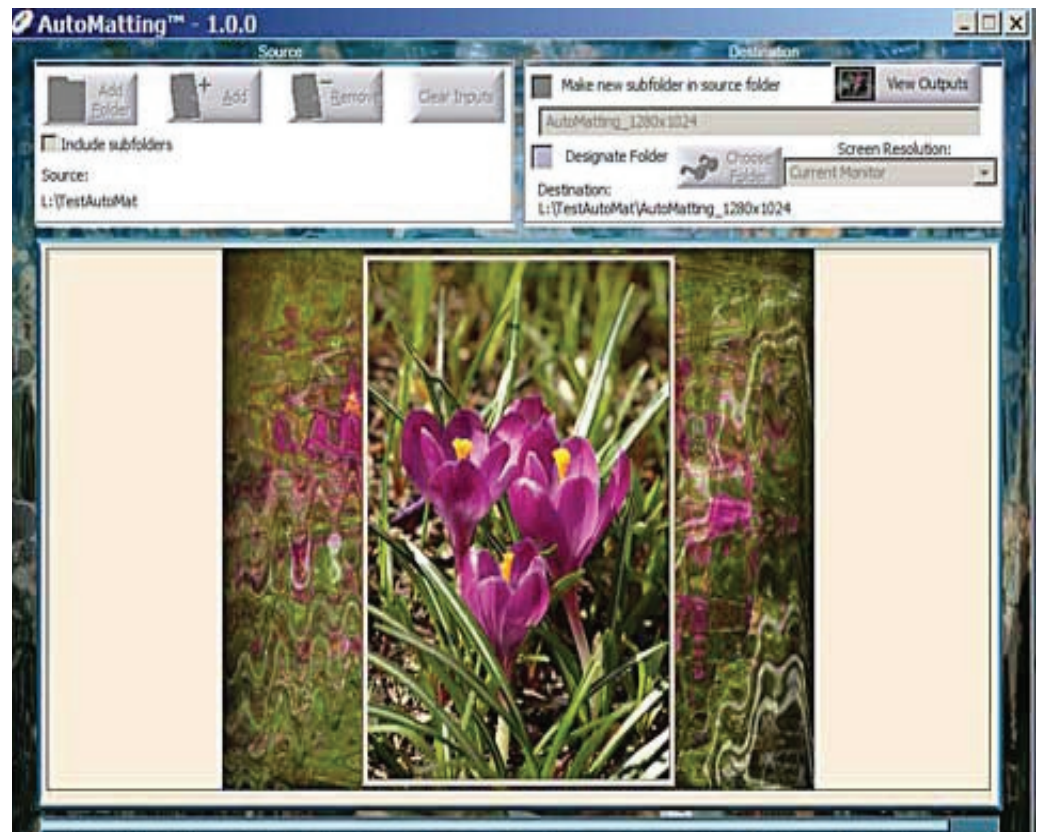
*Screenshots continue on page 10*



AutoMatt Fig 1



AutoMatt Fig 2



AutoMatt Fig 3

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*The Cursor* provides news, commentary and product information to members of the Washington Area Computer User Group.

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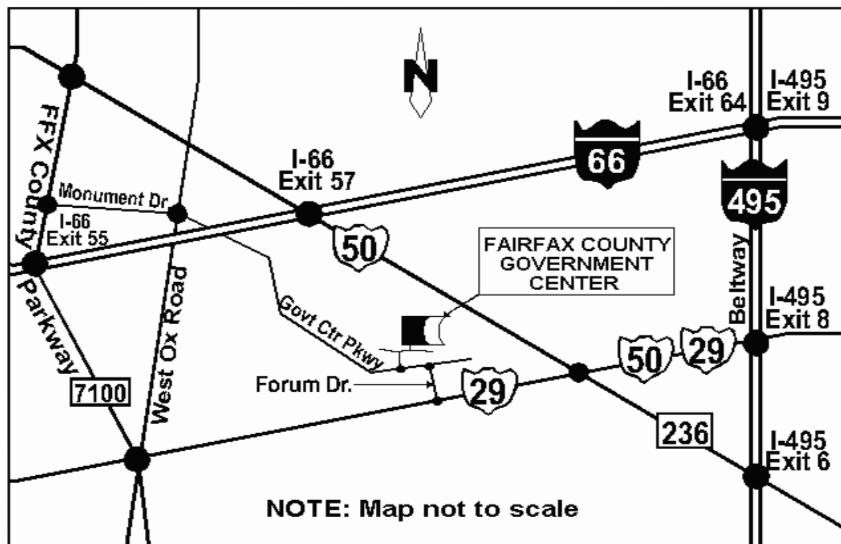
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## Converting CD-based Music to Compressed Audio Files

By Mike Moore, Editor, Bowling  
Green Area Microcomputer User  
Group, Kentucky  
[www.bgamug.org](http://www.bgamug.org)  
[ml.moore\(at\)insightbb.com](mailto:ml.moore(at)insightbb.com)

I spent the equivalent of two or three days in January, working a few minutes at a time, converting all of our CDs to MP3 format. I had been dreading this project, thinking that it would take too much time, but it really was not that bad and the results are going to be worth it.

A few years ago I purchased a 400-CD jukebox type CD player. This device has the capability of displaying a short line containing the album's title, using a standard PC keyboard, but the process is complicated with problems. It's easy to get CDs in the wrong slot and of course, you can only play them in the room where you've physically situated the jukebox unit.

In the past few years, we've been getting away from the album and becoming more focused on individual songs. This lamentable trend has been fueled by the 99 cent price point associated with downloading music by the song. Artists and producers alike have vilified this process, claiming that the artistic sum worth of songs on an album is greater than the tunes taken as individual songs.

I can buy into this sadness, to a point. I remember the smell of vinyl LPs, unwrapping the cel-

lophane outer wrap, and the incredible detail the producers went into in packing artistic value into the finished product, right down to the order the songs appear on the album. These days, you just Google the album or artist title and download the Jpeg, that's about it. For a fee, a program called iTunes will do this for you automatically.

So why would a guy spend the time to rip (compress) the tracks of a CD or other ancient audio product to MP3 files? There are a few good reasons to do this.

For one thing, the devices that play music have become decentralized. What I mean by that is if you can imagine your computer as the "record player," then it's not much of a stretch to think of playing music anywhere in the house, car or workplace.

Doing this in the past meant locating the song you want (which may or may not be an easy task), finding the CD (or tape, or LP) it's recorded on, and hoping that it's not damaged.

Then once you've got it, you carry it to where ever you want to hear it. For me, this was often the car, and a car is a great place to scratch or otherwise ruin a CD, and I've also known friends whose entire CD collections have been stolen from vehicles. Physically moving music and other files from player to player is sometimes humorously referred to as "Sneaker Net"

But once you begin to think of your songs and other media in terms of compressed MP3 files,

they become at once more searchable, more replaceable, and more portable.

Compressed audio files, though the wonder of a shared internet database called Gracenote (formerly CDDb), contain informational tidbits that can be searched. On the other hand, ordinary music tracks on a Compact Disc have no information associated with them at all, not even the name of the song. By converting CD-ROM music to MP3 files, your database can pull up a playlist for you using information encoded in the MP3 file. Most ripping software (such as C-Dex, available at <http://cdexos.sourceforge.net/>) will query the CDDb so that you won't have to manually type in the names of the songs or the name of the CD.

Compressed audio files can be stored on any hard drive in the house and can be made available on inexpensive MP3 players, iPods, and Multimedia computers that attach directly to your sound system. There is usually no special hardware to buy - you can just feed the stereo output from your computer's sound card to the audio input on your TV or stereo amplifier.

Most of the MP3 player devices out there do not require a lot in the way of software - you generally plug them into a computer, they assign themselves a drive letter, and you can just copy your songs to the devices as if they were another hard drive. There

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are even self-contained wireless hard drives (see: <http://www.apple.com/airportexpress>) that will broadcast your music wirelessly to any networked computer in the house!

Compressed audio files cannot get scratched like CDs do, and if your iPod or MP3 player is stolen or accidentally formatted (happens all the time!), or even if your entire CD collection is stolen, it's no longer the end of the world. You just re-copy the files back to another device and you're good to go.

Though not exactly small, compressed audio files do lend themselves much better to e-mail. A typical MP3 music file is around 3 to 6 megabytes, which is just under the threshold of being too large to send to someone using dial-up internet. If both ends of the connection have high-speed, it's no problem at all, as this amount of data can be transmitted by most DSL and cable internet services in about 10 or 20 seconds. The MP3 compressed format is "lossy" in the sense that some of the music data is lost during compression, compared to the original recording, however I've never been able to tell the difference between a compressed song and a non-compressed track on a CD. The data you lose is not data that manifests as part of the music.

By the way, the songs as recorded on CDs you buy are very large - 50 to 80 megabytes would not be uncommon. For those of you

audiophiles who need compression but don't want any data loss, consider using the FLAC mode of compression (See <http://flac.sourceforge.net> for information). FLAC stands for "Free Lossless Audio Codec"

So, there are a host of reasons why we would want to compress our audio collection, but what is the downside? The only problem I can think of is that most automotive and older CD players cannot recognize the MP3 or any computer generated music format. Some of the newer CD players can, but it's not something that people generally know. So, for example, when I transferred an audio book selection to CD for my wife, she found that the CD player in her car refused to play the media, even though her car is not that old. My car, a Chevy Monte Carlo, played the disk without a problem even though it's an older car than hers. So in this situation you may want to take advantage of software that does the reverse of ripping - it would take MP3 files and lay them down on the CD as if they were ordinary Audio CD tracks. iTunes and many CD-writing utilities such as Nero will do this for you.

Now does anyone wanna buy a used 400-CD jukebox player?

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## Painter 4 Essentials, a First Impression

By Dave Chalmers, Editor, Kern Independent PCUG, CA  
[www.kipug.org](http://www.kipug.org)  
[newsletter\(at\)kipug.org](mailto:newsletter(at)kipug.org)

Corel's demonstration of their products at the recent Southwest Computer Conference showed one new product that really interested me. Corel Painter 4 Essentials is a real painting program, not a photo editing program. It has the features of being able to paint or draw with a computer. If you have a shred of drawing talent, you might really like this program.

Now I have no talents this way unfortunately. Why I would buy a program like this, being a photographer, might surprise you. Painter has a great feature that will auto paint or draw from a photo. In this mode you pick a style from many artistic techniques and stand back.

Will this look great for all photos? The simple answer is no. If you have a lousy picture you will probably end up with a lousy painting. Photos that are dependent on a lot of fine detail to work will also not be a good candidate for this product. Simple landscapes or portraits or more abstract photos will probably work the best. Now having said that, there are always exceptions that will work, trying the process only takes some time.

You start with a photo that has

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been corrected and cropped using a photo editing program. Jpeg's, tiff, and PhotoShop psd files will work. Just open them in Painter and start selecting the artistic medium you want. Once the program commences you will see a very blobby and abstract image in the beginning. As the process continues, details emerge; you can stop the drawing at any time or let it go to completion. Once done you can go into using your own painting efforts to add or subtract details to enhance the painting. A good example of this would be a portrait. Increasing the details around the eyes usually helps the overall composition. If some of the background contrasts too much with the person, you can blur and tone down the background.

A graphic tablet is a real plus with Painter, as it uses the stylus for changing the brush characteristics, as you go. A mouse works fine, but it doesn't have as much flexibility as the tablet. Wacom makes some tablets that are fairly inexpensive. Please note, a tablet is not required to get this program to work.

Printing with this program is quite simple. It doesn't have a dedicated color management system as more expensive programs, but if you can print a good photo, then printing with Painter is no problem.

Painter comes with some excellent video tutorials that really clue you in on the features and give a great how-to aspect to it. They

are logically arranged and each segment is not too long. Painter even comes with a nice printed manual, with illustrations. The manual generally follows along with the tutorials.

Retail price is \$99 and the member price is \$79. It installs on both PC's and MAC's. As a supplement to a photo editing program, I certainly recommend it.

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## Recovering Files from a Hard Drive

By Vinny La Bash, a Member of the Sarasota PCUG, Florida

[www.spacug.org](http://www.spacug.org)  
[labash\(at\)spcug.org](mailto:labash(at)spcug.org)

**H**ave you deleted a file that you need and you don't know how to get it back? The first step is to make absolutely sure that it has been deleted. Open your Windows Recycle Bin and double-check. Is it in there? If so, simply right-click on the file and choose Restore.

If you have emptied the Recycle Bin the next step is to restore the file from your latest backup. You do back up your data regularly, don't you?

Unfortunately, there is no native "Undelete" command in Windows XP. This is a mystery because Microsoft had a nifty undelete feature in Windows

3.1 which somehow disappeared in Windows 95 and subsequent versions of the operating system. This is abysmal for Windows users, but profitable for third party software developers.

It's important to understand that when a file is deleted it is not actually removed from your system. Windows deletes only the first letter of the file's name and replaces it with a marked for deletion character. This makes the file "invisible" to windows, and if Windows needs the space for something else, it has no qualms about overwriting your valuable data.

What this means is that if you accidentally delete a file, you have a limited amount of time to recover it before windows stores something else over the same space. It may not happen right away, but it will happen eventually.

Since there is no way within XP to recover a lost file, you have to turn to a third party solution. The good news is that there are several excellent programs that will do the job easily. The even better news is that these programs are free. Isn't that nice?

Use Google or your favorite search engine to find FreeUndelete, PC Inspector File Recovery, or Undelete Plus. All of them work well though you may find one easier to use than another. That's a matter of personal preference.

You need to be cautious about this. If you download the utility

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directly to your hard drive, you run the risk of storing the undelete program over the very data you are trying to recover. If you have a second hard drive, you can download to that or better yet, download directly to a thumb drive. That avoids all danger of losing important data, and it has the additional advantage of immediate portability.

The programs all work similarly. Direct any of the programs to a specific disk and you will get a list of all deleted recoverable files on the drive. You may also get a description alerting you that the file(s) may be wholly or partially recoverable. That's good to know.

Direct any recovered files to an external hard drive if you have one. Don't save anything to your hard drive until you have recovered everything you need. Use Windows Explorer to manage the recovered files. Group them into categories to sort or group the files so you can easily determine if they are program files, data files or something else. Some files may have data missing if Windows overwrote some of the sectors where it was stored.

If after all this you haven't been successful, your best alternative is to consider a data recovery service. These can be a devastating drain on your wallet, so don't use these services to recover saved game files.

Do some comparison shopping as rates can vary considerably. Good luck and watch those sticky fingers when they hover near the

delete key.

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