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Everyone's A Publisher, And Blogs Are Our Printing Presses

By Gabe Goldberg,
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Just when we think we understand technology and its buzzwords, it all changes. E-mail, chat rooms, Web boards, instant messaging, and cell phone cameras—haven't they been around forever? But one of this year's hot words is still a bit mysterious: blog. It's neither the villain in a Star Wars movie nor a weather phenomenon: it's simply an abbreviation for "Web log". A blog is an online diary or journal, usually casual and open for all to read.

Blog topics vary as widely as the people who create them. They can be personal how-was-my-day record-keeping; focus on topics such as politics, technology, religion, etc.; and include pointers to other online resources—such as other blogs!

To be interesting and effective, blogs need constant care and feeding. Blogs attract visitors, links, and buzz by being timely, so people are unlikely to visit blogs that don't frequently show new and interesting content.

But before you learn to read blogs—and it's often as simple as visiting Web sites! -- you'll need a reason to do so. Searching Google for "blog" and "senior citizen" yields almost 30,000 hits. That's too many to explore but shows that blogging offers something for all ages. So I'll explore a few interesting blogs, then describe ways to explore the "blogosphere" (the worldwide and ever-growing collection of blogs).

Hosted on a colleague's Web site, Dr. John Huth's blog [www.jimbuie.blogspot.com/john_huth/] highlights his personal crusade to reduce senior citizens' isolation through computers. Recent posts include "Video-Conferencing: the Killer Application to Reduce Isolation and Depression Among the Elderly" and "Bedside Computers in Hospitals".

TravelPod [www.travelpod.com/], an elaborate and polished Web site, describes itself as the Web's "original travel blog". The assortment of travel journals, travel-

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Hard Drive HouseKeeping Is Vital

By Dennis Schulman, Tampa Bay Computer Society

For those of you who surf the net on a regular basis - and that includes those who use dialup access as well as cable or DSL - it is absolutely crucial that you take your hard drive housekeeping more seriously than you ever thought necessary. Many users think that by having a suite of utilities, such as Norton or McAfee, that you are protected. You might be, but I seriously doubt it for so many reasons I won't go into it now except for three:

You use auto update and auto scan. This requires that your computer be online at the time to run the auto update. In the case of cable or DSL, that is possible, but the computer has to be on at the time also. In the case of dialup, the computer won't go online unless your password is saved and used automatically. That, of course, defeats keeping friends and annoying children from messing up the computer without your knowledge. So, you might want to run your antivirus update manually, just to make certain it worked and there were no errors.

The second reason is based on the fact that if you did not clean house before scanning, you risk the possibility of the antivirus finding a virus it could not delete or quarantine and you did not know it. You also risk the possibility of not knowing if the auto update was not run successfully for one of many reasons (and time and space won't permit that discussion at this time) and consequently your subsequent full system auto scan may not be able to recognize the latest nasties you have managed to acquire.

There is a third, more obtuse, reason. If you don't really know if your system is truly clean and clear of all the bad stuff, how will you know what to do when you get a message that says something to the effect: "It has been determined that your computer has been sending messages infected with the _____ trojan horse virus to what appears to be the email listing of your address book. If you do not take appropriate action immediately, your email service will be discontinued. If your anti virus program has failed to protect you, please download the following trojan horse removal tool and run it immediately."

So, here is a housekeeping procedure I use — which is manual — because then I am more certain that I know the status of my files than most of the "suite" programs. And it doesn't use much - if any — of my system resources except when I use it. Just in case you think you have all the utilities you need, let me comment that I am not an expert on your system, but I spend more time now than ever before on systems that have too many overburdensome utilities that are truly unnecessary and in some cases more dangerous than what they claimed to be designed to do. What I am proposing is basically using 3 little free utilities that only work when invoked, along with utilities that already come with your computer.

Run Disk Cleanup (under System Tools under Accessories on the Programs menu) and process all options (don't worry about compressed files, but do them at a later time when you have nothing else to do, since it could take quite a while if you haven't done it the first time.)

Clear your browser cache, In Internet Explorer go to Tools, Internet Options. Delete cookies and delete all offline files. In Netscape Communicator go to Edit, Preferences, Advanced, Clear Memory Cache and Clear Disk Cache)

Open Windows Explorer (right-click on My Computer, select Explore), Select the folders/View option and select show all files except system files (You can leave it this way.) Find any folders called tmp, temp, or cookies. Unless you have a good working knowledge of what cookies you need or do not need, you probably don't need the contents of any of the temp, cookies, or temporary internet folders except the index.dat file (you might want to save the contents of the History folder)

Empty the Recycle Bin

Update and run the latest core version of Adaware SE Personal Edition (currently version 1.05). Once the scan is complete, click on an object found, right-click a lined item and select all, click next and remove all.

Update and run the latest version of Spybot (currently version 1.3.) Before running the scan, run immunize. Then run Look for Problems. Once problems are found, select them all and click on Fix Problems.

Note: Some spyware may be associated with programs you want to use, so read the help section for a further understanding of the features and options on both of these programs. These spyware objects detector utilities can be downloaded from www.download.com or www.majorgeeks.com.

There is a third utility, called a hijack remover. There are many available, but I like CWS shredder.exe (current version 2.00) (use www.google.com to find the program) Just make certain you are not online and that your browser is not open when you run it. You may be surprised and pleased if it finds something and fixes it (generally really bad stuff).

Now you should be able to update and run your anti-virus more successfully than ever before. The only catch is that it takes time. Once you figure out about how much time each step takes, you can determine whether you can walk away and come back later when it is done.

I recommend running HouseKeeping at the end of every day you go online — if you can manage it. (*cough! cough!*) Otherwise, run it every 3 days for certain.

Now, if you know your computer is clean and pure, then this is the only condition to justify running the defragmentation utility (once a week or twice a month). Defrag does not “fix” anything. It enhances the performance of a healthy environment. If you attempt to defrag a “sick” system, you could make it worse to the extent that the computer will fail to boot or run. If you have Windows 2000 or Win-

dows XP, you can run defrag directly. If you have Windows Me, 98, or 95, run it in Safe Mode. I prefer running Defrag in Safe Mode as I have a UPS and the computer can complete the defrag, even if the lights go out in the house.

Now that you have successfully learned the housekeeping routine and understand its importance without the need for complex and sometimes dangerous free software utilities that can cause conflicts, you can set up the program scheduler to run your housekeeping routine for you and just check up on it from time to time to see that it is accomplishing your wishes.

Feel free to email me for further details and other fine, free utilities available for keeping your hard drive and system performing at its best.

Dennis Schulman, known as the PC Miracle Man, has been a practicing field consultant in Largo, Florida for over 22 years. He has been a member of the Tampa Bay Computer Society for over 15 years and was the editor of its sometimes 40-page newsletter for 5 years. He can be contacted at dschulman@myrapidsys.com.

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Why Can't I Open This File?

By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.

Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida

There are times in every computer user's life when the computer seems to be deliberately trying to increase your level of frustration. One of these little moments is when you receive a file from an associate and no matter what you do, you can't open it. The file can be a document, a picture, a spreadsheet or any number of other types. So why does this happen? And what does it have to do with these things called extensions or suffixes?

Believe it or not, every file name on your computer has a three digit suffix. I know if you have never used any OS other than Windows you may never have seen this suffix or file extension. But they really do exist. If you open "My Computer" or Windows Explorer, select "Tools" from the menu. Then click on "Folder Options" and in that window click on "View". In this list some items are checked and some are not. If there is a check mark in the item "hide extensions for known file types", remove it. Then click on "apply to all folders". You will get a message telling you that the change will occur the next time you open a folder. Now open up any folder and look at the array of file extensions. Go from folder to folder and see how many different extensions you can find.

So now you see that the number of different extensions seems to be limitless. Or at least enough to bring on some confusion. Why is there such a proliferation of these three figure suffixes? Let's look again at the "Tools" menu and "Folder Options". This time click on the tab for "File Types". The upper window lists "Registered file types". Now scroll through the list until you find "Adobe Acrobat Plug-in file". This has an extension of API and in the lower window you find a short explanation as to which program can open this file. In this case, Adobe Acrobat. Keep scrolling down through the list. You will probably find the BMP suffix. This is a picture file and usually opens with Microsoft Paint. However, on my computer it has been associated with IrfanView, a graphics viewer. Keep scrolling to get an idea of all the different file types and their extensions.

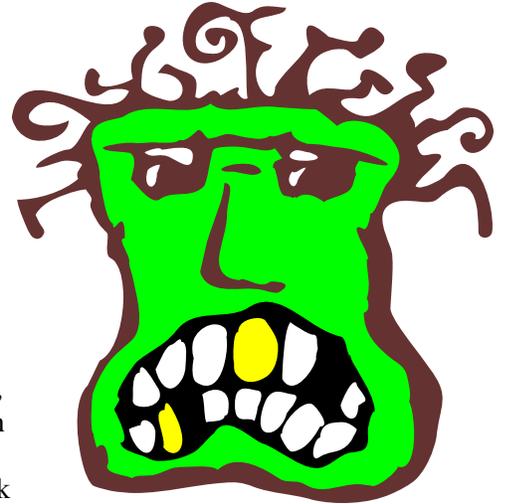
If you click on enough different file types you will notice that each type is generally, but not always, associated with an application.

When you click on the change button, the preferred application is listed at the top. You can change this to another application but then double-clicking a file of that type may result in a error and it won't open. Applications such as Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, Microsoft Works, Excel, etc., can only open files that were created by them unless they have the appropriate translator for the document. This goes back to the reasons for the file suffixes. The suffix tells Windows what application is needed to open a particular file. Every application capable of creating files uses a different format for the file header and body information. This formatting allows Word, for example, to open a document that has specific margins, type face, printer assignment, etc. The same is true for other applications.

Let's take a look at some of the definitions associated with the file structure of a Word file.

"FIB (File Information Block): The header of a Word file. Begins at offset 0 in the file. Gives the beginning offset and lengths of the document's text stream and subsidiary data structures within the file. Also stores other file status information." "DocFile: A Word docfile consists of a main stream, a summary information stream, a table stream, a data stream, and 0 or more object streams which contain private data for OLE 2.0 objects embedded within the Word document."

"Document: A named, multi-linked list of data structures, representing an ordered stream of text with properties that was produced by a user of Microsoft Word."



“Datastream: The stream within a Word docfile containing various data that hang off of characters in the main stream. For example, binary data describing inline pictures and/or form fields.”

From these descriptions you can see that a Word document has a very specific structure that has to be read and interpreted in a specific way. Other applications can't read a Word file unless they have a translator for it. Even then, the translation may not accurately reflect the content and format of the original file.

Another file format is that of database files. In a dBASE file, or a FoxPro file, the first byte identifies the version that created the file. Consequently, older versions can't read files created with newer versions of the program. For a number of years Microsoft created similar problems in Word documents by changing the file format every time a new version of Word was released.

Another application that has its own file formats is Microsoft Works. This application can create text documents, database files and spreadsheets. None of these files can be opened by other programs. The interesting thing is that Works can save files in Word format, WordPerfect format or RTF (rich text file). It can even open most of these formats. But Word and WordPerfect are unable to read files in the native Works format.

Another problem exists with picture (graphic) files. Although your web browser should be able to read the most common formats, they have to be associated with the browser. If they are not, you will get an error when you attempt to open the file. Every graphic format has a different structure and may not always open in your photo software.

The most common formats used on the web are GIF and JPG (jpeg). However, these are two very different formats. GIF is a compressed format that is referred to as a “lossless” compression. In other words, you don't lose any detail in the process of compression/decompression. However, GIF can not use more than 256 colors. That makes it less usable for color photos than other formats. However, for web page logos and other small graphics, GIF is ideal. The file size is small, so transmission time over the

Internet is quite short.

Photographs can be sent by e-mail using the JPG format which is very compressible. Jpegs can be compressed to 10% of their original size which greatly reduces transmission time. However, the greater the compression, the greater the loss of detail. Jpegs are a “lossy” format. The detail that is lost by compression can never be recovered. If the picture is important, you should always keep an uncompressed master in a safe location.

Another “lossless” graphic format is TIF or TIFF (tagged image file format). This is the best format for color pictures and should be used to save the master copy of important photographs. The major problem with TIF files is that they are very large. Much larger than jpegs. For example, a file from a digital camera was 526 KB in its native format. When converted to TIF and compressed, it took up over 6 MB on the hard drive. However, not every graphics program can read TIFF files. If yours can't, then you need something like IrfanView, a free file viewer.

So the answer to the original question is: you either don't have the application installed on your computer or you don't have the application associated with the file you are trying to open. Now, if you know the application that created the file and if you have it on your computer, you can solve the problem. You only need to associate the file with application. To do this open “My Computer” and select the “Tools” menu and “File Options”. Click on the “File Types” tab and then scroll to the file extension for the file you want to open. Click on “Change” and select the application you want to use to open the file.

All of this discussion assumes that the file has not been corrupted. Even minor damage to the header of file can keep it from being opened. Transmission of files between computers is always subject to possible damage. Now maybe those undamaged files can be opened with a little less frustration.

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Browser Doohickeys, Doodads & Gizmos

By Vinny La Bash, vlabash@home.com

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Most people change their surrounding to suit themselves. Your desk probably has some pictures that trigger pleasant memories. You may have added some new plants to your garden. Whether you have engaged in something as monumental as redecorating your house or as trivial as changing the default ring on your cell phone, your general point is to make your surroundings look and act they way you want them to, not the way someone else thinks they should.

Tweaking your internet browser isn't any different. Due to the number of software add-ons available, you can change or add many different features. Some allow you to change the appearance of the interface; others help you to retrieve information more quickly. Several of them may even make using the internet easier. Despite their sophistication, most install quickly, and the majority of them are free.

Almost everyone who searches the Web uses Google, Yahoo or both. There are many other search engines, but these two dominate the bulk of the traffic. Switching between the two sites gets old quickly, so why not try Google's tool bar? It maintains a link to Google's web site, allowing instant access to many of Google's features no matter where else you may be on the Web. You can search, spell-check, block pop-ups, even turn UPS tracking numbers into web links.

Yahoo's tool bar has similar features, and it lets you search on-line yellow pages. You can check local movie and TV schedules. Yahoo has a nice email element, and it's very strong in financial features. You also get an anti-spyware tool.

Yahoo's tool bar is easy to find. Go to <http://www.yahoo.com>. Look toward the upper right hand corner of your browser window, click on the link, and follow directions.

For Google's entire bag of goodies, direct your browser to <http://www.google.com>, and then click on the more button. You may need to scroll down the list of other tools to get to it. When you're finished make a trip to <http://labs.google.com> and enjoy the feast. This is Google's technology sandbox. These are prototype projects Google is currently working on, meaning they are not quite finished yet. Even if you're not particularly adventurous, try the new Map feature. You may be so impressed you'll never use Mapquest again.

I do a lot of research online, and I have become a fan of Net Snippets because I can straightforwardly save a snapshot of a web page or any part of the page. The utility lets me save these "snippets" to organize for offline viewing. This eliminates the need to search for the same page multiple times, and is a godsend if the site ever goes offline. Net Snippets is the kind of tool you never knew you needed, but now you can't live without it. There is no one thing that grabs you, but a host of little things like the ability to highlight and annotate that make Net Snippets a "must have" tool. Get it at <http://www.netsnippets.com/>.

RSS readers are rapidly emerging from obscurity to necessity. Depending on whom you ask, RSS stands for "Rich Site Summary", "RDF Site Summary", or "Really Simple Syndication". RSS is a dialect of XML and its "geek-speak" nature has probably contributed to its slow acceptance, but its benefits are undeniable. The technology notifies you whenever something on your favorite web sites changes.

The original RSS was designed by Netscape as a format for building portals of headlines to mainstream news sites. It has rapidly evolved into something far different and much more useful. Get news headlines, stock quotes or alerts when an item you've been waiting for is available. You can save yourself a lot of time because you don't have to visit individual web sites to see what's new. A large

29 Useful Bookmarks — Part 2

By Richard Johnson, TUGNET www.tugnet.org

The Web is a marvelous resource, and most of us come nowhere near tapping its full potential. I've attempted here to list 29 websites that without any necessary downloading provide exceedingly useful free non-specialized services and tools, that require no particular knowledge except how to navigate the World Wide Web.

9. Furl www.furl.net

Bookmarking is useful, but what do you do when you find that a bookmarked page has disappeared (left the Web)? Or maybe it's still there, but—as with many newspaper sites—you can't read it without going to a paid archive. This won't be an issue if you've Furled the page. Furl allows you to create a set of special bookmarks that can be easily searched or browsed—or shared with others—but whose contents are permanently stored on your hard drive. (If you feel the need to save parts of a page, try Net Snippets Free at www.netsnippets.com/basic. This does require a download.)

bonus is that RSS feeds can't be tampered with. What that means is they are immune from attacks by spyware, viruses, Trojans, and other assorted evil-intentioned software.

In Windows, Pluck is the most popular RSS add-on. It's easily downloaded from <http://www.pluck.com>. If you're still using the basic plain vanilla browser, try at least one of these tools to boost your web experiences.

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10. Gold Star Events <http://snipurl.com/bl9o>

Gold Star enables admissions to a large variety of live California productions at 50% off or better. After your (free) registration, you'll receive regular email notices of well-described shows in the zip code areas of your preference. There's a small per-ticket service fee, usually between \$3 and \$7.

11. Password Generator

<http://mistupid.com/computers/passwordgen.htm>

Random characters compose the safest passwords. This tool will create a password with random characters according to your specifications. On your instructions, will even avoid ambiguous characters [o and 0, 1 and I].

12. Zap2it www.zap2it.com

With Zap2it you can check out both TV and movie schedules. Various options let you permanently personalize each set of listings, to give you just the information you need, in the format you prefer.

13. Acronym Finder www.acronymfinder.com

Don't be baffled by acronyms and abbreviations you encounter on the Web and elsewhere. This site offers definitions for over 398,000 such terms. Optional downloading of any of a number of search tools (for various browsers) will allow you to view a definition almost instantly.

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Network Your Home Or Office Internet

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director;

Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; radio & TV show host

Website: <http://www.homeplug.com>

On my weekly radio show (KLVI 560AM 1-3pm Saturdays) I am frequently asked questions about connecting an internet source to a home network, such that several computers can simultaneously share the internet connection. This type of home networking is typically only practical if there is a broadband source, and generally impractical if the source is dialup, and a voice phone line is to be shared for internet access.

Basically, there are three good options available, and each has its relative advantages and disadvantages, and varies in terms of cost effectiveness based on individual circumstances. The three basic methods or technologies available for home or small office networking are wired, wireless, and "homeplug".

Wired networking is a viable choice if it is practical to run a network cable between computers. The cable, which can be relatively inexpensive if purchased in bulk from electronics or home/hardware stores, but somewhat pricey if purchased in pre-cut sections at retail stores. Cable can be run through an attic, suspended from cup hooks along a ceiling, run along baseboards, or other methods that comply with appropriate safety and electrical codes. Other than running the cable, the installation of the network is fairly simple, and requires readily available and generally inexpensive hardware, manufactured by countless companies. A device called a router is connected to the broadband input, and the computers are connected via network cable to the router. Most wired routers come with a floppy or CD with simple configuration utilities that allow the network to be setup and functioning within minutes of connection. Wired routers can be purchased from discount stores, electronics stores, office supply stores, and a variety of other sources. Since almost all contemporary computers, both desktop and notebook, come with an integral network connector, generally no other hardware is required other than the router and cable. In terms of security, wired is generally the most secure method of networking. Many of the inexpen-

sive wired routers include some type of hardware firewall to protect the network from intrusion, but it is still generally a good idea to have a software firewall on each computer.

One of the most popular methods of home or small office networking is wireless, often referred to with its industry standard designation, 802.11, with a letter suffix, such as an "a", "b", or "g". The suffix indicates which version of the standard hardware complies with in terms of frequency, and bandwidth. Generally, the least expensive and most widely used type is the 802.11b, which shares the same 2.4 GHz digital frequencies of many cordless phones and other household electronics, which may possibly cause some interference with the wireless connection. Under ideal conditions, 802.11b can transfer data at a rate of up to 11 megabytes per second (Mbps). The newer 802.11a and 802.11g standards offer higher transmission speeds, and will likely encounter less interference from household appliances, but some interference is always a risk.

To connect computers to a wireless network requires a wireless router, and a device called an "access point" for each computer. The main advantage to a wireless network is the ease of installation, and the flexibility of not being connected to a wire while surfing the net. The wireless router is connected to the broadband input, and an antenna on the router broadcasts the signal to the access points. Range is a function of building construction and interference, but at typical household and small office distances and construction, a single router is typically adequate. Users should be sure to follow the instructions included with the router in terms of placement in order to maximize the signal. Many wireless routers include some form of hardware firewall, but again a software firewall on each computer is generally recommended. "Access Points" are generally small devices that attach to a computer either through a USB port, or to the network input on the computer. As they are radio transceivers, placement will affect performance. It is imperative to note that unless the integral encryption and other security options offered by the router and access points are implemented,

there can be some serious security issues with wireless connections, in that it is easy for unauthorized persons to access the network.

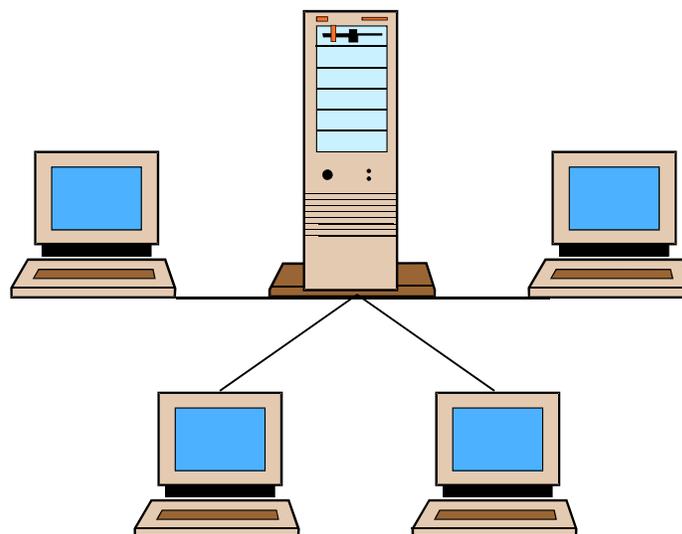
Wireless routers and access points are readily available wherever electronics are sold, including discount stores, warehouse clubs, office supply stores, and other retailers. As the technology has been improving, prices have been plunging. Some provisos are in order at this point; first, be sure that whatever wireless hardware is purchased, be sure that it is compatible, in that the suffix “a”, “b”, or “g” match, although much of the hardware available today will work with any standard, often listed as “a/b/g”. A second proviso is the “weakest link” factor, in that a wireless (or any other network) connection is only as fast as the slowest segment. If a broadband connection is running at 2Mbps, a faster wireless connection may be wasted unless files or hardware (such as printers or video) are being shared among the network. It should also be noted that many of the new home theater devices now coming on the market utilize the same wireless interconnectivity and hardware as computers, and may require the newer and faster standards of connectivity.

There is a third technology available for home and small office networking that is still in its infancy, but holds a promising future, and most of the major networking hardware manufacturers such as Belkin, Linksys, GigaFast, IOGear, Netgear, and others are producing compatible hardware. This technology is called “Homeplug” (www.homeplug.org) that can safely utilize the existing household electrical wir-

ing as an already wired network. Homeplug compatible hardware is priced about the same as wireless, but is not yet as readily available as traditional wired or wireless hardware, but it may be worth the effort to shop for it. The standard, which meets UL and other safety requirements, is possibly the easiest to configure, has a 14Mbps bandwidth, and is more secure than wireless. To connect broadband to Homeplug, the broadband input is plugged into a Homeplug input device (similar to a router), and that device is then simply plugged into a standard wall electrical outlet. Any computer in the home, as well as many of the newer entertainment devices, are then connected to any other electrical outlet in the house via an adapter that connects to the computer with a traditional USB or network plug. In terms of security, the broadband signal does not typically pass through the household junction box, making it extremely difficult for neighbors and others to access the connection or network. As with all other forms of networking, a software firewall is still necessary on each computer.

If a user is bearing the cost of broadband, and has more than one computer in the home or office, then one of these networking technologies may be a useful method to connect those computers to the internet.

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Tech News

By Sue Crane, Editor, Big Bear Computer Club, www.bigbearcc.org sue.crane@charter.net

September 2005

Free Services Are Being Used To Install Malicious Code

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

Insect "Extermination" Via Mini Robots.

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

Vector Capital Purchases WinZip

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

Better Eating Through Nanotech

Major food producers are using nanotechnology to improve the quality of their foods, although some warn that the technology may be misunderstood by consumers. At a Nano4food conference food scientists, material scientists and nanotechnicians met to

discuss how the technology is being used to improve the consistency of yogurt or cheese, packaging technologies, and even how to "wall off" the most nutritional components of food in favor of tastier alternatives. However, as nanotechnology moves forward, consumers will have to be informed and educated about the possible benefits and hazards of using it.

Microsoft Finalizes Genuine Advantage

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

There Is No "Superfetch"

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

End Of Analog TV?

Millions of American television sets that receive only analog over-the-air broadcasts could go dark if not upgraded by Jan. 1, 2009. That deadline was suggested by members of the U.S. Senate's Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. The committee is readying legislation expected this year that would require all American televisions to run on digital signals by the end of 2008. That would free up the analog, or 700 MHz, spectrum for other uses. Under current law, analog television would be cut off on Dec. 31, 2006, or when 85 percent of households are capable of receiving digital signals, whichever comes sooner. Last month, the FCC proposed to move the date by which all televisions with screen sizes of 25 to 36 inches must contain digital tuners up to March 2006. All televisions, VCRs and DVD players would have to carry the technology by 2007.

New Media Center Device

Microsoft will soon ship a wireless Media Center keyboard and remote control that will help people who have Media Centers in their living rooms interact with the machines. The device features beveled edges for easy two-handed holding, an integrated pointing stick, full Media Center remote-control functionality, a full-sized keyboard with special Media Center buttons, and even power buttons for the PC and TV.

October 2005

Nothing Is Ever Really FREE

Linus Torvalds, creator of the Linux OS, has begun protecting his trademark for the term Linux. He's doing so to protect users from unauthorized and confusing use of the name. Torvalds first trademarked Linux several years ago but has rarely defended its use. The licensing fees for Linux are modest. LMI is charging \$200 to \$5000 for each license; most sublicensees end up paying \$200 to \$500. Most Linux companies have enthusiastically agreed to the licensing terms.

AMD Asks Intel For A Duel

Major US newspapers in September showed an AMD processor standing in a boxing ring waiting for Intel to appear for a duel later this year so consumers can see who has the best dual core processor. Dual-core chips have two processor cores on a single piece of silicon, boosting performance and reducing power consumption compared to two single-core processors. AMD released its first dual-core Opteron processors earlier this year. Intel said that it will release its first dual-core server chips later this year, ahead of its original schedule. But regarding the duel, Intel was not available for comment.

PC Has Water-Cooled Radiator

NEC took the wraps off its Valuestar G Type C, a new desktop PC that has a radiator embedded in the water cooler unit built into the back of the chassis. The company said the added refrigeration will let consumers overwork the included Intel Celeron processor but keep the PC running at 30 decibels, which is whisper voice. PC noise is increasingly a concern as more powerful computers require stronger and often louder cooling systems.

New IE 7.0 Is For Windows Only!

Sources at Microsoft have announced that IE 7.0 will henceforth be referred to as Windows IE 7.0, highlighting the fact that the browser is integrated with Windows and isn't a standalone product. According to a source at Microsoft, the change signifies that IE will no longer be available for other platforms. Users should simply consider IE 7.0 to be part of Windows.

No More Textbooks?

Students at Empire High School in Vail, AZ started class this year with no textbooks. Instead, the school issued laptop computers to each of its 340 students, becoming one of the first U.S. public schools to turn away from printed textbooks. Empire High, which opened for the first time this year, was designed specifically to have a textbook-free environment.

(Continued on page 13)

Selections From The DealsGuy

Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group

What's In Your Computer?

Here is another data gatherer that sounds good. Bob Balogh writes a monthly column called "Window Pains" for Boca Bits, newsletter of the Boca Raton Computer Society Inc. and it's always very informative. In the May 05 issue, he wrote about Everest Home Edition 1.51 (version 2.20 at this writing) that will collect all the important information about your computer. I won't list all the information it collects here, but you can find that out at [<http://www.lavalys.com>]. Best of all, the home edition is free. Bob is not the only person who authors informative columns each month in Boca Bits and you can access their newsletter at [<http://www.brccs.org>]. You'll find it interesting.

What's a Skin Clock? An Edited Announcement Received In June Offering A Discount

"Our company has released the personal assistant for Windows – Skin Clock. It is a personal reminder integrated with a new trendy tray clock. We would like to inform all user group people about a 25% discount as a part of our launching campaign.

Eugene Kryukov [eugene@alcyonesoft.com]"

For immediate release

With Alcyonsoft You Needn't Choose Between Style and Functionality. Skin Clock Has Plenty of Both.

June 23, 2005 — Alcyonesoft announces today the launch of its Windows integrated personal assistant. Skin Clock has become an advanced replacement for the standard Windows clock. Besides a choice of professionally designed skins for your new system tray clock, the program features personal notification service and time synchronizer. Just make your alarm centre know your appointment time or a report deadline and it will remind you what you have on the agenda. The only other thing your personal assistant needs to know is whether you prefer just a note, or a note and a pleasant chime, or should it launch an application for you.

"The idea of Skin Clock came from our customers," explains Eugene Kryukov, CEO of Alcyonsoft. Skin Clock is shipped with a portfolio of skins, ranging from neo-modern to futuristic to classic. By grading the hue of the clock panel you can easily integrate it into your desktop color scheme. You can synchronize your system clock with the Internet time server. Alternatively, you can rely on automatic synchronization. Unbounded range of ways to customize your Skin Clock can be found in the Options menu.



Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC) Meetings

WAC Meetings will be held on August 20 & September 17, 2005, 12:30 PM to 3:30 PM. at Micro Center, Nutley Street, Fairfax, VA.

You do not need to be a member to attend. For more information on WAC meetings and events, call the WAC AnswerLine (voice) at (703) 370-7649. Also see WAC's Web Site at

<http://www.wacug.org/>



Nov. 23rd, Carlin Hall, 7 PM
"Build Your Own Computer" — build session

<http://www.nctcug.org/byocomputer.html>

Skin Clock v.1.0 Features at a Glance

- ⊗ Highly customizable intuitive interface
- ⊗ System tray integration
- ⊗ A portfolio of skins for the time panel
- ⊗ Alarm centre with a choice of reminder options
- ⊗ Automatic and manual time synchronization

Pricing and Availability

Skin Clock 1.0 runs under Windows 95/98/ME/NT/2000/XP/2003 server platforms and costs \$29.95 (USD) for a single-user license. Free technical support is extended to all registered users. A trial version is available as a free download at [<http://www.skin-clock.com/files/skin-clock.zip>]. More information about Alcyonsoft can be found on the official website: [<http://www.alcyonesoft.com>].

Product page link: [<http://www.skin-clock.com>]

E-mail: [eugene@alcyonesoft.com]

Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheap-skate) Click [bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>].

(Continued from page 11)

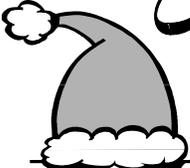
TMPs Make E-Commerce Safer

Trusted Platform Modules, if you've never heard of them, are chips that store cryptographic information needed to unlock hard drives, authenticate network log-ons and perform similar tasks. What is exciting about TPMs is their role in electronic transactions because they make sure the money and the product get to their proper destinations, via "anonymous certificates." Hacking such a certificate would not give criminals access to personal information such as credit card numbers, since the transaction is done on your side of the network, not on the server-side.

eBay Rethinks Recycling

Faster, more advanced computers, cell phones and electronics offer endless possibilities for enrichment, learning and entertainment. But as consumers and businesses keep pace with the introduction of exciting new products, we are faced with a mounting challenge: what to do with the products we're upgrading from. The Rethink Initiative brings together industry, government and environmental organizations to offer a fresh perspective and new answers to the challenge of e-waste. On their website you can find information, tools and solutions that make it easy – and even profitable – to find new users for idle computers and electronics, and responsibly recycle unwanted products. <http://rethink.ebay.com/>

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.

Have a "Ho Ho Ho"

HOLIDAY

NCTCUG Annual Financial Report, Fiscal Year 2005

By Paul Howard, Treasurer

NCTCUG finished its fiscal year on September 30 in excellent financial condition. Thanks to the generosity of our members, about one third of our income is from donations, either directly as contributions made with dues payments, or through the Pizza SIG.

In our last week of the fiscal year, we acquired a new screen to be used with the video projector purchased last year in conjunction with WACUG. Thanks to research by John Keys, this screen further enhances our presentations at meetings. It provides a significantly brighter image for audience viewing than the old screen was able to display. Additional insurance was obtained for the club's personal property. WACUG will share a portion of this cost, based on the value of the projector. We made expenditures this year on new business cards and trifold brochures to enhance our membership promotion efforts.

Member donations were received this year from: Fred Cook, Sy Fishbein, Paul Howard, Maralee Johnson, Blair Jones, John Keys, Richard Leggett, Mike Pafford, Ron Schmidt, Charlie Treadway, Chuck Throneburg, and Nick Wenri. Pizza SIGS were sponsored by Blair Jones, Paul Howard, and several times by Dean Mires.

In April, the Board of Directors approved changes to the group's certificate of deposit account. Previously, our "rainy day" funds were invested in a single, six month CD, which was tapped, when needed, for a cash infusion to our checking account, or allowed to roll over. Instead, a "CD ladder" with 3, 6, and 9 month maturities was established. This will provide the ability to access these funds, if needed, on a quarterly basis, avoiding possible interest penalties.

Also in April, the Projector Replacement Account, established as part of our agreement with WACUG, was changed from a restricted accumulating fund within our checking account, to a fully funded portion of another certificate of deposit. We had been setting aside \$22.26 each month since projector purchase. Now, a CD that will mature in February, 2007 contains \$801.36 earmarked for possible use when the three year agreement with WACUG comes up for renewal. This allows us to earn some interest on these restricted funds.

Our account balances at the close of the fiscal year (September 30th) are: Checking Account \$1,874.00. CD accounts: Restricted - \$801.36; Unrestricted - \$3223.69

This Annual Treasurer's Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2005 has been approved by the Board of Directors of NCTCUG. The account balances noted above, and the Cash Flow Report below are hereby certified as correct.

Paul Howard, Treasurer
James Rhodes, President

The "organizational documents" area of our web site contains additional information about the user group's financial operations, including last year's Financial Report for comparison purposes.

Cash Flow Report	
FY '05: 10/1/04 - 9/30/05	
Revenues	
Pizza SIG	251.75
Donations	<u>285.00</u>
Total Donations	<u>536.75</u>
Dues	1,100.00
Interest Income	51.55
Total Revenues	<u>\$1,688.30</u>
Expenses	
Insurance - Liability & Personal Prop.	164.00
Legal - VA Corporation fees	50.00
APCUG Membership dues	50.00
Post Office Box Rental	<u>160.00</u>
Total Administrative	424.00
Printing - Bus Cards & Brochures	<u>65.97</u>
Total Membership & Public Relations	65.97
Computer / Projection Screen	<u>384.35</u>
Total Meetings & Other Services	384.35
Newsletter Postage	240.00
Newsletter Printing	<u>703.78</u>
Total Newsletter	943.78
Total Expenses	<u>\$1,818.10</u>
Results from Operations	(\$129.80)

(Continued from page 1)

logues, travelers, and destinations inspires me to hit the road! You can browse highlighted stories or search on interests. For example, having enjoyed a trip to Denmark about 15 years ago, I found dozens of bloggers discussing the country.

Web site Moreover collects news and information from thousands of editorial sites and more than a million blogs. Its "Consumer: Senior News" page [http://p.moreover.com/cgi-local/page?index_seniors] includes varied material such as travel, insurance, retirement, and crime.

This article appeared originally on AARP's Computers and Technology Web site, <www.aarp.org/computers>. © AARP 2005. Permission is granted for reprinting and distribution by non-profit organizations with text reproduced unchanged and this paragraph included.

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.

John Woolington hosts a simple but deep technology blog well worth visiting [www.maturetechnology.blogspot.com/]. Titled "Technology Is Not The Simple Life", it includes observations and opinions about coping with change.

For anything-goes fun, visit Wil Mosher's blog [www.dailysnooze.blogspot.com/]. He's a curmudgeon and proud of it, noting that he "hides in his hole by day, emerging at night to frolic and fornicate in the moonlight... When he gets off the couch!"

Ken's Weblog [www.kengory.blogspot.com/] proudly shows a fellow's family, friends, politics, humor, and favorite Web links. It's clear that having a blog is like having your personal TV station or magazine!

Gossip Cooler [www.seniorcitizens.com/weblog/gossipcooler.html] is a daily blog about growing older. The site it's on has useful info and links interleaved with many advertisements; since there's no hint who writes or runs the site, be careful.

(Continued on page 16)

NCTCUG Information

NCTCUG, Post Office Box 949, Arlington VA 22216

Club Information call: 301-577-7899

Web Site: www.nctcug.org

Officers and Directors

All officer terms expire 2006

President	Jim Rhodes	703-931-7854
1st VP	Ron Schmidt	301-577-7899
2nd VP	Roger Fujii	703-426-5917
Treasurer	Paul Howard	703-860-9246
Secretary	Roger Arnold	301-946-7770

Director: term expires

Bill Walsh	2006	703-241-8141
Charles Throneburg	2006	703-476-6283
John Keys	2006	703-451-0896
Nick Wenri	2006	703-759-3938
Fred Cook	2007	703-815-1423
JJ Davies	2007	703-379-9222
Sy Fishbein	2007	703-536-5894
Dean Mires	2007	301-931-2400

Article Submissions

Articles, helpful hints, and other items of interest to readers of the NCTCUG Journal are always welcome and will be published as soon as possible after submission. Priority is given to members' contributions. Items may be submitted via modem to the BBS or on diskette. Submissions to the BBS should be uploaded to the Newsletter Conference and a message left for the Editor. Files should be straight ASCII, unformatted, with C/R only at end of paragraphs; no indents for paragraphs should be used. Preferred format for diskettes is MS-DOS 3½ 720k or 1.44Mb. Diskettes in other formats may be submitted but there will be a considerable delay in processing. If absolutely necessary, items may be submitted in hardcopy only but these will also meet with delay.

Membership Policy

The National Capital Tandy Computer Users Group, Inc. is a non-profit [501(c)(3)] organization founded in 1978 to educate users of all Tandy computers and MS-DOS compatible computers. Membership dues are \$25.00 (U.S. Funds) per year, with a \$5 surcharge for international mail. Membership in NCTCUG includes membership in all SIGs, access to the BBS and software libraries, and subscription to the Journal published 8 times per year. Applications may be obtained at any club meeting, by downloading from the BBS, by calling one of the officers or board members, or by writing to the club. A sample newsletter, membership application and related information may be obtained by enclosing \$1 and mailing your request to Jim Rhodes, 201 S. Kensington Street, Arlington VA 22204.

Advertisement Policy

Members' advertisements: Ads are accepted from members for non-commercial purposes at no charge. Copy should be sent to the Editor in the same format as article submissions. Commercial Advertisements: Ads are accepted from commercial advertisers at the rate of \$60 per full page, per appearance, with discounts for multiple insertions. Smaller ads are priced accordingly. Payment for ads must be made in advance of appearance. Advertisers must supply a permanent address and telephone number to the editor.

Reprint Policy

Permission to reprint articles from the NCTCUG Journal is given to school, personal computer club, and nonprofit organization publications, provided that: (a) NCTCUG Inc. receives a copy of the publication; (b) credit is given to the NCTCUG Journal as the source; (c) the original author is given full credit; and (d) the article author has not expressly copyrighted the article. Recognition is one means of compensating our valued contributors

Newsletter Staff

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Blair Jones 202-362-7344
bjones44@bellatlantic.net
Exchange Newsletter Editor
Ron Schmidt 301-577-7899

COMPUCENTER BBS

Is no longer in operation. It has been replaced by the 'compucenter' mailing list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

If you are moving

Please send your change of address to the club PO box as soon as possible to avoid missing issues.

Thank You!

(Continued from page 15)

A woman artist/activist/writer's blog [www.windchimewalker.blogspot.com/] offers her responses to world events, disability, and life. Describing herself as a "raging granny", she leaves no doubt where she stands on issues. Blogs like this show the Internet's power to share ideas and create communities by allowing readers to comment on what Patricia says.

A simple blog [www.lazydazers.com] lets you read about and see pictures of a couple's RV travels and adventures.

Finally, the Ageless Project [www.jenett.org/ageless/] is a fascinating compilation of Web sites (not all are blogs) illustrating that "the personal, creative side of the web is diverse and ageless".

Blogs and RSS are becoming increasingly popular and are getting good press coverage [www.techweb.com/article/showArticle.jhtml?articleId=57700173].

You can visit the blogs I've referenced as simple Web pages with normal hyperlinks. Many blogs are also readable via RSS (Rich Site Summary), an Internet technology which can bring material from multiple publishers/blogs to you as it's published, without your having to visit multiple Web sites. I read RSS "feeds" via my email software, Mozilla Thunderbird, and through a Web site which collects RSS feeds [www.bloglines.com/myblogs].

NCTCUG, Inc.
P.O. Box 949
Arlington VA 22216

HAPPY
NEW
YEAR

First Class

December 2005/January 2006

1st Wed. (12/7, 1/4)

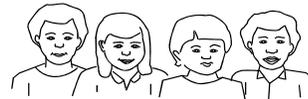
7 p.m. General Meeting

4th Wed (12/28, 1/23)

7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (1/16; none in December)

7 p.m. Board of Directors



All meetings are at **Carlin Hall**, 5711 S. 4th St., Arlington VA: East off of Carlin Springs Rd, just south of Arlington Blvd/Route 50.

