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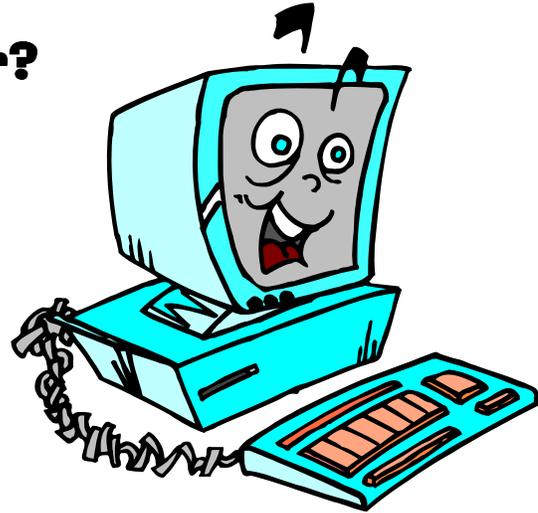## Buying A New Vista Computer? Read This First!

By Sandy Berger, compukiss.com
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Windows Vista is finally ready for prime time. Over the last several months, the drivers for many devices like printers and scanners have been updated to accommodate Vista. Most software has also been updated to be Vista compatible. If you are ready for a new computer you may be ready for Vista. However, you might want to do a little homework before you make your purchase.

While many devices and much software have been made compatible, not every software program or every piece of hardware will work with Vista. So before you make the move you should check with the manufacturer of your peripheral devices like printers and scanners to make sure that they can be used with Vista. You should also check the compatibility of software programs that you use. Most hardware manufacturer's offer updated drivers which you can obtain at their website at no extra cost. Although some software manufacturers offer free updates, for some, you will to have to purchase a new version that is compatible with Vista. For instance, the anti-virus program that you are using on your Windows XP computer will probably not work with Vista. While many of today's computers come with anti-virus software, they are usually only good for one or two months. So be sure to leave a little extra in your budget to purchase any necessary software updates. With careful investigation, you should be able to decide which of your programs will need to be updated and how much it will cost before you make your computer purchase.

Purchasing a Windows Vista computer is a bit more difficult for the average computer user because there are several very different versions of Vista. Windows XP came in two main versions, Home and Professional. The choice was fairly easy. Home suited most home users and Professional was better for businesses. With Vista, Microsoft has muddied the water by offer-

Inside Spring

Google Street Views To See... Streets, Places, Routes And Faces!

By Linda Gonse, Editor and Webmaster, Orange County IBM PC Users' Group, CA
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Beyond the curiosity of the new panoramic on-the-road reality shots, Google's detailed Street Views give you a feel for really being where you want to go. Although only a handful of large cities are represented in these views, it's still likely you will want to look for destinations in them occasionally.

If you aren't familiar with Street Views, go to www.Google.com and click on Maps, a link at the top of the screen. Type in a location of a street or a city. If one of the boxes at the top of the map shown says "Street View," click on it.

A map looking like a plate of blue spaghetti shows where panoramic shots were taken.

Zoom in to see streets outlined in blue. A "person" icon (that's you) is facing in the direction you are heading. You can move the icon to wherever you wish to go, or simply double-click on one of the blue-lined streets.
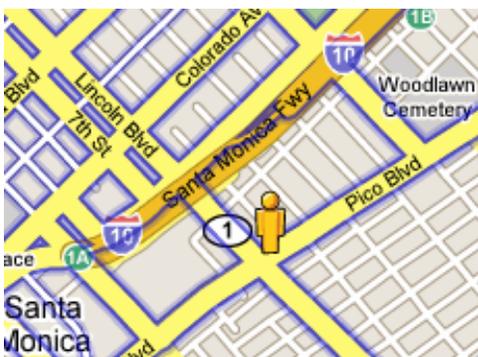
You can enlarge a panoramic shot to full screen, so you don't have to squint to see into a little peek-a-boo window.

Other handy features allow you to zoom in and out, and to "drive" along a street or freeway by clicking on an arrow with your mouse. You can look in all four directions, of course, and the names of the streets and the routes are superimposed on the photos. You can even email the view to family or friends.

In the meantime, a different type of map searcher is ignoring the privacy controversy caused by Google Street View's high-quality, crystal-clear, panoramic photos, and are magnifying certain side-of-the- road scenes they find and sharing them online!

What they've found falls into categories, which include actual lawbreaking or crimes in progress, people doing ordinary things that seem extraordinary when you know that people worldwide will be seeing them; surreal sights caused by the panoramic camera being halted or later photo-stitching in an editing program; visual commentaries about places and people; and street views divulging the homes of the famous, or landmark homes and places. Map searchers uploaded these mini-slices of life to www.streetviewr.com.

Check out the maps and see what you can find. Maybe you'll even see yourself in one of the shots!

The Phenomenon of Facebook — Part III
Love and Dating in the 21st Century

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Facebook is one of the most valuable tools in the dating world, and is today's version of the little black book.

Users of the social network can display their relationship status on their profile, along with the name of their significant other. This information is visible to their 'Facebook friends', and is simply a click away.

Like many single college students, I depend on Facebook to keep me informed in the social lives of those around me. It is useful, convenient, and makes survival in the dating world much easier.

Imagine that Bobby is interested in dating Susie. In the old days, poor Bobby would have to get to know all of Susie's friends just to determine if she is available. Or worse, Bobby would have to ask her out and risk the embarrassing possibility that she is actually going steady with Charlie.

Thanks to Facebook, Bobby can simply log on, and read on the News Feed section, next to a picture of a broken heart, that "Susie and Charlie have ended their relationship". And then, our Bobby can make his move with newfound optimism and self-confidence.

College students are using the site to learn more about potential dating partners, and to communicate with them in a low-stress environment. With Facebook, there is no need to endure awkward phone conversations in order to get to know someone.

Facebook even offers several ways to flirt with your Facebook friends, like sending virtual kisses and hugs.

I often see groups of women gather around their laptop, discussing the profiles of a certain guy. Some users will visit the profile of their dream date repeatedly, in order to stay informed about what is happening in their life.

While this may seem slightly fanatical, it certainly provides an easier approach to dating. Social networking sites like Facebook are providing clarification and information that is making finding love a little easier.
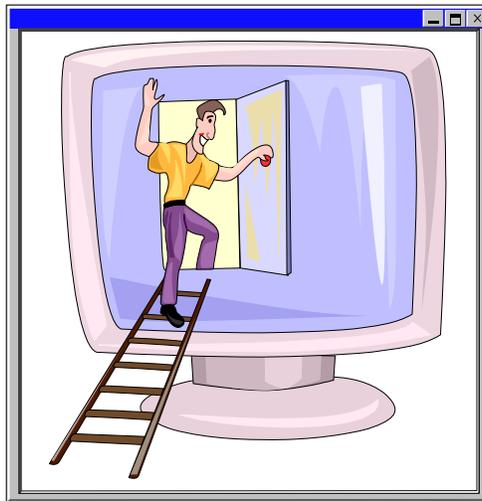
My favorite aspect of the site is the fact that it seems to understand that some of our relationships are difficult to define. For these situations, it offers the "it's complicated" option to explain your relationship status.

Finally, Facebook is a great way to simply attract the attention of a certain someone. Displaying a more exciting facebook picture, or writing an interesting note is often enough to capture the interest of that individual.

Although dating will always bring with it much heartache and strife, Facebook is at least providing an advantage to its users. As it continues to expand the possibility for love, Facebook is bringing good news to single college students everywhere.

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Make Vista Work Better

By Vinny La Bash, Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL
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No matter how good an operating system may be, someone will complain that it could have been better. Vista is a very good operating system that some people find wanting. Some people are never satisfied, but that is not the issue here. Of course Vista should have been better, but Microsoft has only so much time and resources to develop a system, and Vista was late to market in addition to being less than perfect.

In this article we'll show how to make Vista work better for you, and that's all we can reasonably ask of any operating system. Let's take care of the power users first. Power users are too impatient for menus. They think menus are for wimps. After encountering Vista User Account Control they may have a point.

Left-click the orb at the bottom left side of the screen.

In the Search box type `cmd.exe`.

Right-click on cmd.exe and choose Properties from the popup menu.

Select Pin to the Start Menu.

The Command Prompt is now always available from the Start menu. If you would like to make additional tweaks to the prompt, right-click the shortcut from the Start menu and choose Properties.

The blinking cursor, otherwise known as the insertion point, tells you where you can type or insert text. The cursor can be difficult to locate because it's so thin, but Vista has a way to fatten it up.

Open Control Panel.

A dialog box appears. In the upper right corner, type `Optimize visual display.`

The Ease of Access Center icon will appear. Select the link below the icon.

Locate the Make the focus rectangle thicker box and put a checkmark in it.

Set the thickness to whatever you like. Don't get carried away with some ridiculous number. Bumping up the thickness by one or two points should be sufficient.

When you install a large high resolution monitor, you quickly become aware of the relationship between high resolution and eyestrain. Vista provides a way to make text easier to read without having to sacrifice resolution.

From the Start Menu open Control Panel.

In the Search box at the upper right corner of the dialog box, type `adjust font size.`

The resulting list will probably consist of one item, Adjust font size.

Select it and you can choose to accept the larger text option or click on the Custom DPL button and experiment.

Vista comes equipped with an excellent Snipping Tool that was originally designed for a different version of Windows. In its generosity, Microsoft chose to include the tool in every version of Vista except Vista Home Basic, which is fine because nobody should buy Vista Home Basic. Snippy lets you capture any portion of a screen, either rectangular or free form. You can then paste it into a document, email or save it as a graphic. Don't use it to copy and paste text for editing because a graphic image can't be edited like text. Here's how to get it:

From the Start Menu type `snip` in the search box.

The Snipping Tool should be at the top of the list. Right-click on it and select Pin to the Start Menu. You can also add it to the Quick Launch Bar if you like.

Vista has added several new wrinkles to the Quick Launch bar. It's been around since Windows 95, but it's never been more useful. If you hold the shift key

down while right-clicking on a shortcut, you will see an expanded popup window with additional options. One option is to put the shortcut icon on the Quick Launch bar. You can still use the traditional drag and drop method, but having another alternative when the desktop isn't visible is always helpful.

When the Quick Launch bar is active, that means you can see it on the Task bar. If you need to activate Quick Launch right-click on a clean area of the Task bar. Drag your mouse to the Toolbars option, and select Quick Launch.

Each of the first ten shortcuts on the Quick Launch bar has its own custom keyboard shortcut. If the Calculator is the third icon from the left, press the Windows key and the number 3 and you activate the calculator. Limiting the number of built-in keyboard shortcuts may be Microsoft's way of telling you that more then ten items on the Quick Launch bar is too many.

Vista keyboard shortcuts are a great way of performing little tasks more easily. Instead of having to reach for your mouse, you can press two or three keystrokes. There are those keyboard shortcuts that are common to all versions of Windows and now there are some new ones. Among the new features introduced in Windows Vista is a new set of shortcut keys that are used to launch various programs or perform different tasks. These new keyboard shortcuts are listed below.

- Windows Key + G (cycles through the Gadgets)

- Windows Key + L (locks the computer)

- Windows Key + U (activates the Ease Of Use Center)

- Windows Key + X (cycles through the Mobility Center)

- Windows Key + Spacebar (moves the focus to the Sidebar)

- Windows Key + Pause (opens the System Properties portion of Control Panel)

- CTRL + + Tab (opens persistent Flip 3D) :

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Need A Sticky Note? Put It On Your Computer!

By Linda Gonse, Editor & Webmaster, Orange County IBM PC Users' Group, CA www.orcopug.org editor(at)orcopug.org

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Sticky note programs for your PC, as you might imagine, are a utility that takes the place of paper Post-It notes that we all stick to our monitors!

But, sticky note programs I've researched this year discouraged me from even trying them out. Sometimes they didn't have enough features, or if they did, they were expensive.

Then, someone recommended a program called Stickies, created by Tom Revell, at www.zhornsoftware.co.uk/. So, I looked at Stickies on the web page, liked what I saw, and downloaded the program.

My first discovery about the program is that it is small, 953Kb, and doesn't interfere with system files and doesn't write to the registry. In fact, Stickies stores all its information in a single text-based .INI file. When was the last time you had a program on your computer as well-mannered as this one?

An icon in your system tray will allow you quick access to Stickies' features and options. From this dropdown list you can manage your Stickies notes, configure them, get help, and download new skins. When you do make a Sticky, it won't disappear unless you tell it to, and it stays where it is placed. You can edit, format, and print them. Make as many as you want, or as many as your screen space will permit. But, to save room and keep Stickies organized, they will snap to each other and to the sides of the screen where they can be neatly lined up. You can even "hide" them from view.

Besides viewing Stickies on your screen, you can attach them to a website, a document, or a folder,
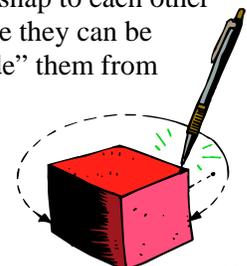
Tweak Your PC To Keep It Running Fast, Feeling Good And Looking Young!

By Lou Torraca, President MOAA Computer User Group, HI www.the-tug.org Af06hi(at)gmail.com

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Last week, I was explaining to a friend that I am a quick launch toolbar aficionado {:-)

"What the heck is that?" he asked. I said I was just referring to the fact I use it instead of the desktop to keep all my shortcuts, actually, lots of shortcuts, at least on my main PC. As we continued to talk about this I found myself explaining a lot of stuff I have done with my PCs and notebook in the past 6 or 8 years! An obvious question came up: "Where do you come up with these things?" At that point I explained I call these "things…tweaks" and they come from dozens and dozens of places including many newsletters, also some regular blogs, newspapers, radio shows, other PC users I talk with and of course, the real biggie, MICROSOFT! Yup, their knowledge base contains millions of tips, solutions and you guessed it…TWEAKS! Our conversation ended with a suggestion that I put some "tweaks" in my column, so what follows are some that I like. But first, a reminder, whenever you decide to play, experiment, alter, or as I say, "tweak" an otherwise functioning computer, either do a backup first, or at least, set a restore point you can return to if what you do doesn't work out for you. If you don't know how to do that, click on start and then help and support and then choose index and type in system restore.

At the end of this list, I have a couple speed tweaks which I advise should only be used by advanced users, and you will also see I advise again to backup or set a restore point. With that in mind, here is my list.

The area that sits between the start button and the tray (with the clock), on the bottom of your screen, is called the Taskbar.

I think one of the best additions you can make to your Taskbar is the Quick Launch Toolbar. Quick Launch gives you fast access to Internet Explorer and Outlook Express, and it includes a Show Desktop icon. It's really easy to open your Quick Launch Toolbar.

Right-click the Taskbar, click on Toolbars, and choose Quick Launch. The Quick Launch Toolbar now appears on your Taskbar right next to your Start button. You'll find the Quick Launch Toolbar very useful and to move all the icons you have on your desktop, just drag and drop them on the QL taskbar. You can play around with it and also expand it if need be. After you drag an icon there, you can delete it off your desktop so you have a neat looking space where I put different pictures every week or so. To be really neat, I hide the whole thing so it automatically disappears until I Point at it with my mouse. Right click on start, properties, taskbar and check auto hide.

If you can copy or move things to a folder, keeping information on your computer more organized is easier. Here is how to add copy or move to a folder to Windows Explorer. Open Windows Explorer (not Internet Explorer) by clicking on Start and then on My Documents. Next, click on an empty area of the standard button bar, the one that starts with the Back button. Last, [right] click on customize. In the available toolbar buttons list, click on copy to and then click on add to add it to the current toolbar buttons list. Click on Close to complete the customization work. Now the next time you click on a file or folder, the Move to and Copy to folder buttons will appear

If you ever have the need to copy both files and folders to a CD, as in backing up your important information, here's an easy way to do it. Click on Start, and then click on My Computer. Now right-click on your hard drive (usually drive c:) and click on Explore. Now you have a complete list of the files and folders on that drive. Click on any file or folder, and then, while holding down the Ctrl key, click on any other file or folder you wish to copy to a CD/DVD. When you have finished, click on edit, copy to folder. From the list provided click on the CD/DVD R/W (Read/Write) drive you want to send your selection to, and then click Copy at the bottom of that small window. This will result in a folder with those items waiting to be copied. Put in a CD/DVD and click on write these files to CD to the left.

Windows XP has several utilities programs that manage various aspects of XP. You can run any of these utilities by using them as "run" commands. Click on Start, and then click on Run. In the Open: box, type one of these shortcuts and press the Enter key or click OK.

`control` Opens Control Panel
`clipbrd` Opens Clipboard Viewer
`notepad` Opens simple text editor
`WordPad` Opens Word-like text editor
`compmgmt.msc` Computer management
`devmgmt.msc` Device manager
`diskmgmt.msc` Disk management
`dfg.msc` Disk defrag
`eventvwr.msc` Event viewer
`fsmgmt.msc` Shared folders
`gpedit.msc` Group policies
`lusrmgr.msc` Local users and group
`perfmon.msc` Performance monitor
`rsop.msc` Resultant set of policies
`secpol.msc` Local security settings
`services.msc` Services. (Run shows up when you have classic menu selected.)

I use My Computer, which shows me all of the drives on my computer, like the floppy drive (A:), the Hard Drive (C:), and others that include DVD and CD drives and removable drives, all the time. Having My Computer show a menu of its items as your mouse pointer touches the My Computer link on the start menu is a quick way to get to what you want. To set this up, right-click on the start button, and then click on properties. Click on the customize button and then open the advanced tab. In the start menu items window, scroll down to my computer, and click next to

display as a menu. Now click on OK, and again on OK. (This one is the opposite of the one above in that you need to select start menu instead of classic.)

That little area to the right at the bottom of your desktop can get pretty crowded. One way to get more space is to do away with the clock. You can eliminate the clock by right clicking on any blank section of the Task bar, and then clicking on Properties. On the Taskbar tab, click on the checkmark next to "Show the clock" and finally click OK. You can also check the hide inactive icons box to gain a bit more space.

When you click on Start and open My Computer, you have to right-click on a drive and then click Explore to get the "Explore" view of that drive. If you simply double-click on that drive, you get the drive's contents. The Explore view is better because you can work with folders in the left pane and folder contents in the right pane.

To have My Computer open the contents of a drive in the Explore view, from within My Computer click on Tools and then on Folder Options. Open the File Types tab and then click on (NONE) Folder, to highlight it. Now click on the Advanced button, make sure Explore is highlighted, and then click the Set Default button. Click OK, and then click Close.

Now when you open a drive in My Computer it will display in the Explore mode.

Your my documents folder in windows XP holds, by default, your documents, the My Pictures folder and the My Music folder. For most of us, the My Documents folder holds everything you use most.

To make the contents of that folder invisible to nosy folks, do this: Click on Start and right-click on My Documents. Now click on Properties, and then open the General tab. Click in the box next to Hidden in

the attributes section and click ok. Now click on Apply, Select "Apply changes to this folder, subfolders and files," and click ok.

This is not encryption, it just makes it harder for a casual user to open your private folders. When you want to view all files again, just reverse the process.

Speeding up your PC is always something most of us think about and the following tweaks are intended to do just that for your XP Pro operating system, but beware, these are intended for advanced users and involve using the registry…not recommended for the faint at heart! Before even considering them, do a registry backup- Here's how:

Modification of Windows Registry files, which contain settings and other information Windows needs to operate with is risky if you don't take care. Make a mistake here can cause your PC to stop working. So it makes perfect sense to make a back-up copy of your registry files before you attempt any modifications. Create a batch file to back up your Registry, and then automate the process with an icon on your Desktop.

Click on Start, Run, and then type NOTEPAD. Click OK or press the Enter key. Now you have Notepad open to a blank page. Type "Regedit /E C:\AAAA" (without the quotes) and press the Enter key. Now click on File on the menu bar at the top of the Notepad window, and then click on Save As. In the Save As window, click in the box next to File Name: and type c:\windows\system32 \REGBACKUP.BAT. Now click on the down arrow to the right of the Save as type: box and select All Files. Click on the Save button, and close Notepad. To create a shortcut to the registry backup, right-click on the Desktop, click on New and then on Shortcut. At the cursor type c:\WINDOWS\SYSTEM32 \REGBACKUP.BAT and click on Next. Now type Registry Backup   and click on Finish.

If you want to change the icon for your new shortcut, right- click on it and click Preferences. Click on the Change Icon button, click Ok when the Change Icon window opens, and then double-click on the icon you want to use. Click OK

Another way to be sure you are safe is to backup your complete computer using either True Image (my favorite) or Ghost…both of which completely copy an image of your entire computer. Also, do a system restore point (see the help menu for how to) this may be

the quickest way to go back to where you were if you have problems, but if not, the True Image or Ghost backup will do the trick.

Here's a way to make XP even faster, by making sure that Operating System functions stay in memory (RAM), because memory is much faster than your hard disk. Try this: Click on Start, on Run, and then type REGEDIT and click OK or press the Enter. The word REGEDIT is not case-sensitive. Now double-click on HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE. Drill down by opening System\CurrentControlSet\Control\Session Manager\Memory Management. Right-click on the DisablePagingExecutive entry located in the right pane (side) of your screen and select Modify. In the Edit DWORD Value dialog box, type the number "1" (without the quotes) in the Value data field. Click OK and then close the Registry Editor. Finally, make sure you don't have any open programs, and restart your computer so that the change you made can take effect.

Lastly, it seems that our Windows XP computers just get bogged down with stuff we don't want or use. One way to get more performance out of your computer is to disable the "last access/update" feature. The NTFS file system in Windows XP maintains last access/update details for each file and directory on your computer's hard drive. This information is useful sometimes but for most of us, this may not be of much use most of the time. This process takes a lot of resources from your computer, so it may make sense to disable it. Once you have done that, you'll still have access to last modified information for files and folders. Here's what you need to do. Click on Start, Run, and at the prompt type REGEDIT and press the Enter key. Now click to open HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE, and then drill down by clicking on SYSTEM and then on CurrentControlSet, Control and finally on FileSystem. On the right side of the Regedit screen, look for the data key "NtfsDisableLastAccessUpdate."

ing five versions: Home Basic, Home Premium, Business, Enterprise, and Ultimate.

Let me clarify your options. Whether you are a home user or a business, the Ultimate version will give you everything that Vista has to offer including remote access, scheduled backups, special encryption, Windows faxing, and all of the entertainment features in Vista. Although you will pay more for Ultimate, it does include everything you could possibly want.

While home users can certainly use the Ultimate version, for most the Home Premium version will suffice. This is an excellent version that includes the Media Center which gives you great features for working with photos and music. With a TV tuner in your computer, this version, like the Ultimate version, will let you watch TV on your computer and record television programming just as you would with a stand-alone digital recorder or TIVO, but with no monthly charges. It has a themed slide shows and DVD Maker software included. It also has several cool games like Chess, Titans, Mahjong Titans, and Inkball. In reality, Home Premium is the only fully featured home version.

Double-click on that key and then just set its value to 1. Click OK to save the change and then close the Registry Windows. The next time you boot-up, this change will take place and give you a bit more performance from your Windows XP computer. That's it so…

Not really, but after all that it is probably time to relax and forget the PC for awhile, so be careful out there while you enjoy all the fun things to do with your new toys and on the 'net.

Aloha, Lou

The Home Basic version of Vista is one you will want to avoid. It seems that Microsoft created this version for the sole purpose of getting people into Vista cheaply and having them pay more to upgrade to a better version later. The Home Basic version is stripped of many of the features that make Vista so good. It has none of the television, photo, or music features that are found in the Home Premium version. It doesn't even include the scheduled backup that is included in all of the other versions. So Basic is stripped of many of the features that make using the computer easier and more entertaining.

Home Basic doesn't have the Aero Glass interface that is standard in all other versions. This interface is what makes Vista so visually appealing when you are using it. It also gives you a smoother-performing desktop. In my opinion, it is also easier on the eyes. While some may say it is just cosmetic, I think it is a great loss not to have it.

If you purchase a computer with Home Basic, Microsoft makes it easy to upgrade to Home Premium online. Just pay them more money and download the upgrade. However, Home Basic only requires 512MB of ram, while all the other versions require 1GB (twice as much) of memory. Also Home Basic will run on a computer with lower graphics requirements. So you may find that the new computer you just purchased with Home Basic does not have the power to run the better versions of Vista like Home Premium or Ultimate without adding more memory and upgrading the video card. Also since Home Basic is so "basic" it does not even come close to meeting the requirements for most networked businesses.

The bottom line is……Stay away from Vista Home Basic. If you purchase a new computer for home use, stick to Home Premium or Ultimate. If you purchase a new computer for your business, the choices in Vista are not always clear cut. Check with a knowledgeable consultant to determine which version of Vista best suits your needs.

If you do a little research before you purchase that Vista computer, you will be happier with your purchase.

Bot-Nets

By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D. bwsail at yahoo.com www.spcug.org

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Keeping your computer safe while connected to the Internet is becoming more and more difficult. The "attackers" are becoming more sophisticated and are sharing more ways to get their software into your computer. Business Week recently ran an article on the major security problems expected in 2008. Unfortunately, most of them arrived long before the new year started. We have been warned for years that it was possible to recruit unprotected computers into networks that could be controlled by an external source. This recruitment network problem has gotten much worse over the past few years. It is estimated that 7% of the computers connected to the Internet have been infected with a Botnet program. So what is a "Botnet"?

A robot or "bot" software program allows a computer to be remotely controlled without the knowledge of the computer's owner. When you have a number of "bot" controlled computers it is referred to as a "botnet". All of the computers in the botnet carry out commands issued by the network controller. Just one example of what can be done with a botnet is the sending of spam. The controller can easily have 100,000 computers in its network. So the botmaster will contract to send out one million e-mail messages. The network can then send ten messages from each of the compromised computers. With the constant connection to the Internet using cable or DSL the computer owner will have no idea that his/her computer has been the source for ten spam messages.

Now you might say that the idea that someone can control 100,000 computers in a botnet is ridiculous. However, as of October 2007 a major Internet security service had the IP addresses of over 12 million computers that were infected with bot software. There is also a newer threat called the Storm Worm botnet that has infected millions of computers just this year. In addition to its computer recruiting ability, it has built-in defenses that are preventing security services from analyzing it. In an E-Week article it was noted that ".. Storm worm is sending DDoS attacks to not only the researchers looking into it but to anybody on their subnet, within 5 seconds of (their) initiating efforts to fight it or examine it". A DDoS attack is a "distributed denial of service" which can bring down a computer system or network by overwhelming it with messages. A very large volume of messages are sent by the botnet in a very short period of time. It is estimated that the Storm net controls over one million computers. This would make it the most powerful supercomputer in the world, exceeding the computing power of all previous computers.

People frequently wonder why anyone would want to produce viruses, worms and other kinds of Internet attacks. Years ago it was primarily because "they could do it". Today, it has become a real source of financial gain. Let's take a look at one financial resource created by controllers of botnets. On many web pages you find ads of various types that are sponsored by Google. When these ads are clicked, the advertiser pays Google who, in turn, pays the owner of a web page, usually 80% of the fee. So the botmaster sets up a web page and contracts with Google to display ads. Then, using the botnet, sends commands to the computers in its net to click on the ads. This results in payments to the botmaster. So even with a small botnet of say 5-10,000 computers, the botmaster can easily obtain $15,000-$20,000 per month in fraudulent payments. When you consider that the known botnets all have more than 100,000 compromised systems, you get a better idea of the scale of the fraud involved. This type of click fraud has been estimated to make up 5-20% of the payments made by search companies.

Another use of large botnets is extortion. The botmaster can send an e-mail to a corporation warning that a DDoS will take place at a specific time unless a payment is made. As I mentioned earlier, spam e-mail contracts are also a source of revenue for botmasters. As these networks proliferate, the sale of the IP addresses of robotically controlled computers is also favored as an income source.

So far it would appear that the only persons affected by botnets would be corporations. However, if your computer is infected, everything you do can be reported to the botmaster. Bots can incorporate

"keylogger" software. That will record keystrokes, especially any related to passwords, user names or other desirable information. Another function of bot software is screen capture. It can record an entire screen and transmit the data to the botmaster. A compromised computer can also be used as a base for finding other unprotected computers to be recruited into the net. Another consider-ation is that the largest number of computers are those in the hands of private individuals. So you may be a major part of the problem if your computer is infected by a bot.

Once a computer has been compromised, the bot software is usually designed to hide and protect itself. For example it will search for and disable any other malware located on the computer or its associated network. It may also hide itself by means of a rootkit. It may also block updates of any anti-virus or anti-spyware software. It may even fake the process so the user believes that an update has taken place. One of the most common modifications involves changes to the Windows host file or by changing the location of the host file and altering the registry.

There are also some traps on the Internet that can lead a user to download bot (Trojan) software without real-izing it. Phishing e-mail can lead to web pages that have automatic download links for bot software. Web pages can be hijacked and links added to lead the viewer to web sites that contain "free" software links that are actually hidden bot programs. Bot programs are incorporating "social engineering" functions which serve to entice users to unknowingly download malware. People are the weakest link in the security chain. E-mail, web pages, instant messaging, social contact web sites are all used by bot malware as a means of collecting information and linking to compromised computers.

Many times the actions of a computer user are governed by visual clues. An attacker may take advantage of this by providing false visual clues on a web page or a pop-up. If the dialog box or pop-up is intrusive the user may click inappropriately just to get rid of the intruder. This can lead to the download of a bot.

So how do you know if you've been infected? The easiest way to tell is related to how you have been protecting your computer from infection. Do you have *all* of the following?

a) hardware firewall.

b) software firewall that checks both incoming and outgoing messages.

c) anti-virus software that is updated at least daily.

d) anti-spyware software that you either run weekly or that runs in RAM constantly.

e) keep your Windows software patches up to date.

If you don't use any of these safety mechanisms, then your machine is almost 100% guaranteed to be compromised. Even if you have taken all of these precautions, you can still be infected. However, the most effective mechanism for dealing with bots is to prevent their getting into your computer. So you have to keep the software up to date and you have to use it.

Ideally, your firewall hardware/software combina-tion should keep you invisible on the Internet. Bot programs are constantly searching for unprotected computers with open ports. You may not be aware that your computer has over 64,000 ports that can be used for communication. The most common usage are the ports in the lower range, under 1,024. How-ever, some bots use high end ports (>60,000) for transmission of commands. One place you can check your computers port and its invisibility on the Internet is www.GRC.com. The Gibson Research site provides a free port scan and much good infor-mation on interpreting the findings as well as how to protect your system.

Ideally the anti-virus and anti-spyware software would be able to find and remove any bot software that made its way onto your computer. However, this software needs to know the "signature" of the malware in order to identify it. So the producers of the malware are always a step ahead of the good guys. The security services have to find and disas-semble the new malware before they can devise the protection against it. So it is up to the user to keep the security software as current as possible to reduce the chances of infection. Like it or not, security on the Internet is a never ending battle.

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor of physiology. He has been working with personal computers for over thirty years, developing software and assembling systems.

FBI Asks "How Aware Are You of the Dangers of the 'Net?"

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; Radio and TV Show Host Iwilsker(at)apcug.net

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Websites

http://www.fbi.gov/page2/nov07/
cyberspeech110607.html
http://www.fbi.gov/pressrel/speeches/
mueller110607.htm
http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=4723
http://housecall.antivirus.com
http://safety.live.com
http://www.gcn.com/online/vol1_no1/45386-1.html

This is not the column that I had originally prepared for publication this week. As regular readers may know, I frequently lecture on computer security topics, and have written numerous columns on security topics over the years. While many of us surf the net oblivious to the online threats that face us, many others are aware of the threats, and sadly, many have learned of the threats the hard way. The online threats that we face on a regular basis have not been lost on our federal government leadership.

FBI Director Mueller recently gave a speech at Penn State University where he warned about the cyber threats that we all face. He started his speech talking about the recent World Series, where the tickets for the Rockies' home games were initially unavailable online because some hacker had made the website inaccessible. He referenced the cyber attack against the country of Estonia last spring, where a coordinated attack from computers around the world, "… shut down banks and emergency phone lines, gas stations and grocery stores, newspapers and television stations, even the prime minister's office." Director Mueller went on to explain the effect of a similar attack here in the United States, "If we lose the Internet, we do not simply lose the ability to e-mail or to surf the web. We lose access to our data. We lose our connectivity. We lose our intellectual property. We lose our security. What happens when the so-called 'Invisible Man' locks us out of our own homes, our offices, and our information?" This brings up the question, "…given the growing presence of the web in our personal and professional lives, how aware are you of the risks of attack via the Internet?"

In his speech, Director Mueller was poignant in describing the situation that is facing us online. There were several key points in his speech that require some additional discussion. One point he made was, "The growing intersection of terror and the web." He described the case of Younis Tsouli, who went by the screen name "Terrorist 007", who was an al Qaeda webmaster. Taking advantage of most of the contemporary online threats that we all face, Tsouli broke into servers to get the data bandwidth he needed to carry out his nefarious schemes, and used "phishing" (authentic appearing but counterfeit websites to steal personal information), to steal credit card and personal information. With these purloined credit card numbers and personal information, he managed to purchase over $3 million worth of deadly supplies and equipment for terrorists. Tsouli also created a website "You bomb it" patterned after the popular "YouTube", which he hoped would become a centralized website for terrorists to exchange information. Director Mueller explained that local internet service providers could unknowingly run a server that is helping terrorists, and that we, as the innocent victims of identity theft, could end up financing terrorist activities.

Another threat facing us, according to Director Mueller, is "The rise of bots", where networks of computers are unknowingly taken over for nefarious purposes. One of the most common ways of taking over a computer is to plant a type of Trojan on the computer referred to as a "zombie", which effectively makes the infected computer a zombie under the control of persons unknown. According to recent security statements, some "bots" consist of over a million infected computers. It is well known in cyber security circles that the many variants of the Storm Worm, which is still spreading to infect countless computers, mostly through email attachments, has created millions of zombies. While many of these bots are currently being used to spread spam email, generating riches for the "bot masters" or "bot herders" who sell their purloined capacity, there are more dangerous uses of bots. It is important to note that owners of zombie infected computers are unaware

that their computers are infected, and are a component of an illicit bot spreading spam and chaos to other computers. Director Mueller stated, "Once under their thumbs, these networks can wreak all kinds of havoc, from shutting down a power grid to flooding an emergency call center with millions of spam messages."

"Hackers are using sophisticated techniques to steal sensitive intelligence, scientific research, and communications data." This is what the Director is calling "the invisible man" where an unknown cyber intruder oversees everything on a network, including what people are typing, and reading any files stored on a computer or on a network. Since most cyber intruders will never leave any indication that they have viewed your files, stolen your passwords, and copied your critical and confidential data, you will never even know that you have been victimized and your data has been compromised. Once victimized in this manner, you will never know how much damage has been done, maybe until it is too late.

The federal government is actively fighting international cyber terrorists, and contemporary news accounts are rife with stories about criminal and espionage cyber attacks from China, Russia, Iran, Iraq, and other unfriendly countries. Despite governmental attempts to secure our computer infrastructure, much of the responsibility falls upon us individually. We must accept responsibility for the safety and security of our own computers. As has been appealed many times in this column before, we absolutely must have updated defenses in play on our personal computers. Antivirus, anti-spyware, and firewall software are imperative on our computers; after all, it is the personal computer that is the target of the zombie Trojan, and it is millions of personal computers like your and mine that make up these huge bots that can wreak such havoc.

For those who would be interested in seeing what a cyber attack warning might look like, an unofficial Israeli website that disseminates anti-terrorism information, the "DEBKAfile", has recently posted such a warning about a massive upcoming cyber attack on the US (www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=4723). I am typing this prior to the date of this next alleged "cyber jihad" attack on the United States (November 11, Veterans' Day) and you will certainly be reading this column after that date. I hope that this warning, as have many other such warnings, turned out to be false. In fact, several security authorities such as McAfee, and Computerworld magazine, have argued that the DEBKAfile warning is a hoax, and that the information presented is unreliable. Another publication, Government Computer News, also belittled the warning, but the column that said that had the subtitle, "Don't cancel your day off yet" (www.gcn.com/online/vol1_no1/45386-1.html). This cyber attack warning is but one example of what Director Mueller is warning about.

Since the antivirus and anti-spyware on our computers can be compromised or neutralized by a zombie that slips through our defenses, it is a good idea to perform a free online security scan from one of the many available. My two personal favorites are Trend Micro's Housecall (housecall.antivirus.com), and Microsoft's online OneCare at safety.live.com (click on the shield in the middle of the window). A successful scan by either or both of these services will likely indicate that your computer is clean of viruses, worms, Trojans, spyware, and zombies. Make sure your firewall is installed and updated. As I complete most of my security presentations, I close with the expression, "Practice safe HEX."

Let's Clean "Start-Up"

By Bob Elgines, Editor, Colorado River Computer Club, AZRCC Editor
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Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups

Does your computer boot-up or run slow? Maybe there are too many programs running in the back ground. Let us do the following check first.

Hold your CTRL & ALT buttons and press the DE-LETE button.

Click on the PERFORMANCE tab: is your CPU Usage running more than 10% or is your Physical Memory being in total use?

Go to START then RUN, type in "`msconfig`" which stands for Microsoft System Configuration. In Windows VISTA you can find RUN in the ACCESSORY folder under PROGRAMS.

The System Configuration Utility windows will come up.

First go to the upper right tab labeled STARTUP, here you will see the list of items that load during startup. Of course some you want, some you don't. In the first column labeled STARTUP ITEM gives a very rough idea to what it is referenced too, but the second column labeled COMMAND, is much more useful. Too read it better, widen the column out by holding your mouse symbol over the vertical line located before the next column label. A double arrow will appear, then hold down left mouse button and move it to the right. This information tells you where it is located and in some cases which program is using it. Uncheck those in question, you can put them back in

later if you need too. Do not uncheck you Antivirus or Spyware programs.

Next go to the tab on top labeled **SERVICES**, this show all of the programs running now. You do not want to uncheck those labeled Microsoft under the MANUFACTURER column, so to start off, lets put a check mark in the box below labeled "Hide all Microsoft Services".

Now while you are reviewing the other programs running in the background note the fourth column labeled STATUS. If it says STOPPED, then don't worry about it. We just want to stop the strange ones that are RUNNING. You can uncheck those that you are not familiar with, here again you may bring them back in later.

After un-checking all those items under tabs STARTUP & SERVICES, then click on APPLY and CLOSE.

The System Configuration Utility will now ask you to RESTART (or Boot) your computer.

After restarting a window will come up stating System Configuration Utility has been changed, be sure to put a check mark in the bottom left (labeled "Don't show this message or launch ….") before clicking OK.

If you improved your operation of your computer, you can put back in the items one at a time until you find the program that was slowing you down.

Washington Area Computer User Group

WACUG Meeting will be held on March 15 & April 19 , 2008 from 12:30 to 3:30 pm . at the Fairfax County Government Center, 2000 Government Center Parkway, 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/

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http://www.nctcug.org/waugp.html**

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so they only appear when the objects they are attached to are on the screen.

Stickies are portable, too. You can transfer Stickies from one computer to another over your TCP/IP network connection, to your PDA and back again, or send to friends in email.

They can be set to "sleep" and appear on a specified date and time, as announcements or reminders. They can even play a sound alarm so they get your attention when they "awaken"!

What's fun is being able to customize the notes with various fonts, colors and buttons. You can even download customized skins from a big selection to change the outward appearance of the notes — plain, borderless, simple border, etc. The notes can be resized, just like the sticky notes in Acrobat.

Stickies are located in five categories within the application so you can see and manage them. You can

search for information in Stickies, wake sleeping Stickies, restore closed Stickies and detach Stickies.

What else? Oh, yes! Another attractive feature of Stickies is...the program is free!

What are you waiting for? Try it out and see if you like this little program as much as I do!

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NCTCUG Information

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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.

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COMPUCENTER BBS

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

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/compucenter/

If you are moving

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

Thank You!

A Cautionary Tale

From Judy Taylour,
Chair of the Editorial PUSH Committee
(excerpt from email to member group editors....)

"Hi Editors, here are the articles for October and November. I apologize for not getting the October articles to you before the end of the month but I'm still doing clean-up from the fire in Canyon Country CA. I evacuated with 4 out of 5 computers (wonder why I didn't bother to take the Vista computer J), (2 of the computers are my grandson's — 10 and 7), all the flattop monitors, flash drives, school curriculum notebooks, etc. When I got to my daughter's she asked if I had the pictures in the car – oops, forgot those. Have decided to give each of the three kids their baby books, photo albums and various momentos through their school career — obviously I'm not the one to keep those items. Backing up is so very important and that is really brought out when you have to evacuate. If I hadn't had time to take all of the computers, I would have been OK with just my external HD which backs up everything 24/7."

Now: have you backed up your computer lately??

Regards, and Happy Spring Maintenance!
                    Blair Jones, NCTCUG Editor

March/April 2008

1st Wed. (3/5, 4/2)
7 p.m. General Meeting

4th Wed (3/26, 4/23)
7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (4/21; none in March)
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.

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