

# The NCTCUG Journal

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## Keeping Up

By Paul Howard (NCTCUG)

### You Need Adobe Acrobat Reader !!

There's something about human nature that makes us presume that everyone's experience is like our own. Put three folks in a room, and six arguments can probably be easily generated. As I pursue my webmastering duties for the two computer clubs and the local professional organization I volunteer for, I find myself guilty of presuming that everyone's got a PC configured like mine.

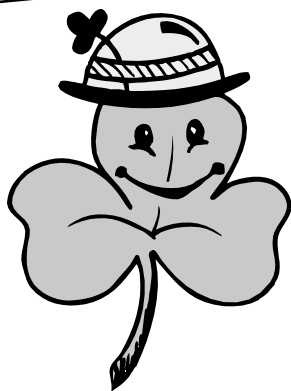
After building a web page to help folks get to a meeting, with the directions and maps included as Adobe Acrobat PDF (portable document format) files, I found out that the world is sometimes different than that I see through my computer's screen.



Adobe Acrobat Reader is a vital program for computer users today, and is invaluable for web users, because a great many documents are archived on the web in PDF format. Many software packages no longer come with printed manuals. Whether this is wise, saving trees, if you will, it has made Acrobat Reader almost ubiquitous, since it comes on many distribution

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# Understanding CD-R & CD-RW Technology

## Part 2: CD-R And CD-RW Software

By John C. Lee - Thousand Oaks Personal Computer Club

Reprinted from the July 2002 Nibbles & Bytes, Journal of the 1000 Oaks Personal Computer Club, via User Friendly, Los Angeles Computer Society

### CD-R & CD-RW Software

The first comprehensive software for recording and re-writing CD was developed by Adaptec. Recent versions of the software are made by Roxio, a subsidiary of Adaptec. A year or two ago, a German software company, named Ahead Software GMBH, made its debut in this country by offering a CD-R and CD-RW software called Nero Burning ROM. The software is similar to Roxio software in most respects except some minor differences in features. Quite a number of drive makers have switched to the use of Nero software with their drives mainly for cost reasons, I guess.

The following discussion will be mainly directed to Roxio software, but the mechanics of the processes are equally applicable to Nero software. The Roxio software consists essentially of two separate programs: Easy CD Creator for recording and DirectCD for rewriting.

### Easy CD Creator

You can use this program to perform recording of audio CD and computer data as well as reading computer data from data CD or ripping (audio extraction) audio files from an audio CD. Clicking either the Audio or the Data button in the initial menu opens the program. The main display of the Easy CD Creator program is an Explorer type window, with the directories and subdirectories shown in the top left pane and folders, files or music tracks shown in the top right pane. You can select from this top pane data files or music tracks that you want to record by clicking the ADD icon on the toolbar or dragging and dropping them to the lower right pane. The lower left pane lists, the file folders and icons for the type of CD you select to create. You can also rearrange or change the recording order of these files or music tracks by dragging the selected file to the position where you want it to appear in the lower right pane.

You can click the arrow next to the NEW icon to display a drop-down menu. The menu will list the different types of CDs you can select to create, including Audio CD,

Data CD, Multi-session Data CD, CD Extra, Mixed Mode CD and Bootable CD. Before we delve into details of these types of CDs (in Part III), we will first discuss some of the other aspects of the Easy CD Creator program that are pertinent to create these types of CDs.

### Data And Audio File Formats

When computer data or audio tracks are recorded to a CD-R or CD-RW, they assume file formats that may not be supported by all types of drives or environments. In the following we will discuss some of the more important CD file formats used in the Easy CD Creator software program.

ISO 9660: This format is used for creating Data CD. The CD in this format can be read in CD-ROM and DVD drives on platforms including DOS, Macintosh, OS/2, Windows and UNIX. However, the ISO 9660 standard limits the directory and file names to not more than 8 alphanumeric characters and extension to not more than 3 characters as in DOS systems.

Joliet: This is the format used to record most Data CDs and is the default option in Easy CD Creator software. You can use file names up to 64 characters in length. Joliet can also record the associated DOS standard name (8+3 characters) for each file, so that the CD may be read on DOS systems or earlier versions of Windows.

CD-DA: CD-DA stands for CD-Digital Audio format with a file extension of .cda. It is the first standard for the audio CD that can be played in all CD-ROM, DVD drives and Audio CD Players. All audio tracks or audio files are recorded to CD-R or CD-RW media in this format. Music CDs generally belong to this category. It has the CD digital sound quality with a bitrate in the same range as the Wave file. Wave is the equivalent format to CD-DA when written into the hard drive. Bit rate (bitrate) is the amount of digital audio information recorded on a CD or hard drive in Kbits per second. The higher the bitrate, the better is the sound quality.

**WAVE:** Wave format with a file extension of .wav is commonly used for computer audio files. It is part of the general RIFF Standard (Resource Interchange File Format). It is an uncompressed audio format with a bitrate of 1411 Kbps, and hence has a large file size. The file can take up 10.5 MB space for each minute of playing time. Wave files can be recorded from the hard drive to audio tracks (with CD-DA format) using CD-R or CD-RW media in the CD-RW drive. A reverse process called ripping can extract audio tracks from an audio CD to audio .wav files in the hard drive.

**MP3:** MP3 stands for MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3. It is the most popular compressed audio format used for portable MP3 music players and for transferring audio data via the Internet. At an industry standard bitrate of 128 Kbps it retains almost the same CD quality as a Wave or CD-DA file, which means a reduction of file size to 0.96 MB for each minute of playing time. As with the Wave files, the MP3 files can be recorded from the hard drive to CD-R or CD-RW audio tracks. Similarly MP3 files can be extracted to the hard drive from audio CD tracks. Easy CD Creator software has plug-in encoders to extract audio tracks to Wave, MP3 or WMA files.

In some OEM versions of Easy CD Creator, you can only extract to MP3 with bitrates less than 56 Kbps, which gives Stereo quality instead of CD quality. So you may want to elect an alternate approach by ripping the audio tracks to Wave files, and then converting the Wave files to MP3 files with higher bitrates using some other software. Some of the more sophisticated software such as RealJukebox Plus or Music Match is capable of encoding MP3 files with different fixed bitrates as well as variable bitrates (VBR). With VBR, more complex sections of a track, such as those with many instruments playing simultaneously, may require more "bits" of computer information to create a high-quality sound. These sections of a song are recorded at a higher bitrate based on the quality level you choose (that is, if you choose 128 Kbps, the most complex parts of your track are recorded at this bitrate). Less complex sections can be accurately represented using less information, and may be recorded at a lower bitrate. Hence the VBR will give further reduction in file size with hardly any detectable degradation in sound quality.

**WMA:** This format with an extension of .wma is mainly used by the Windows Media Audio Player for "audio streaming" on the Internet. A bitrate of 96 Kbps is the usual default setting, and its sound quality cannot match that of the MP3 format even at a bitrate of 128

Kbps. Like Wave and MP3 files, WMA files can be recorded to or extracted from the CD audio tracks.

There are several other audio file formats such as .mes, .lqt, .au, .aif, .rm, .ra, .rmx, and .rmj. The last four of them are used by the RealNetwork Player, mainly for Internet audio streaming like WMA. I personally like to use the RealNetwork Player, because it usually delivers faster buffering on the Internet and better sound quality than the Windows Media Player.

## CD Writing Methods

Three ways of writing data or audio tracks to the CD-R or CD-RW disks are used in the Easy CD Creator program: Disk-at-Once, Track-at-Once and Session-at-Once. The method you should use would depend on the type of CD you are going to create. For Audio CD (or audio part of a CD Extra or Mixed Mode CD), a track is referred to as a music track or a song in the music CD; while for Data CD (or data part of CD Extra or Mixed Mode CD), a track is referred to as a stack of data that may contain one or a number of data files or folders. A session is referred to as a single continuous pass of writing without pausing. A session consists of a lead-in, data or audio tracks and a lead-out. The lead-in and lead-out areas signify the beginning and end points of a session. They are not part of the data, but contain information about the session itself.

**Disk-at-Once:** This method is used when writing a complete disk in a single operation without pausing (also in one session) followed by the closing of the CD. This means that file or audio data cannot be added later, even if the full capacity of the blank disk has not been used. This writing method is used in creating Audio CD, Data CD or Mixed Mode CD.

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**Track-at-Once:** This method is used when writing data to a disk one track at a time. More tracks can be added later if there is enough space left on the disk. The Track-at-Once method is sometimes referred to as Multisession. If you want to record data later after a session, be sure to leave the CD open by unchecking the Close CD button. Multisession Data CD uses this method. Make sure to set Mode 2, CD-ROM XA as the writing mode for Multisession CD. Otherwise some CD-ROM drives may not be able to read the Multisession CD.

**Session-at-Once:** This is a 2-session writing method used to create CD Extra format CD. The audio tracks will be recorded in the first session and the data will be recorded in the second. In the lower left pane of the main window CD Layout, you will see two folders: one audio and the other data. Click the first folder and add audio tracks to be recorded. Then click the second folder and add data to be recorded. Both sessions will then be recorded one after the other.

### **Digital Audio Extraction (Ripping)**

Audio extraction is a reverse process to Audio CD recording. You can select one or a number of music tracks (CD-DA format) from an audio CD and convert them to Wave, MP3 or WMA files on the hard drive, by clicking the Extract button on the display window of the Easy CD Creator program. On the Extract dialog box, you can also choose the bitrate for the extracted files.

These audio files can only be played using audio programs such as RealJukebox Player, Windows Media Audio Player or Music-Match on the PC. Sometimes, you may want to store these files in a CD in their own formats. To record these audio files to a CD-R or CD-RW in their respective formats, you have to treat them as data files and use Data CD program to record them. If you use the Audio CD program, these files will all be converted back to music tracks in CD-DA format. Anytime you use Audio CD (or the audio portion of CD-Extra or Mixed Mode CD) to record audio files or audio tracks to CD-R or CD-RW media; they, will always be recorded to audio tracks in CD-DA format.

### **Image File Recording**

Normally, you record a CD from a source drive (CD-ROM or DVD) to a target CD-RW drive. But if you only have a single CD-RW drive, you can still create a CD

using the CD Image (an option in the File menu). First you insert the source CD (data or audio) in the CD-RW drive to create a CD image file (in Windows Temp directory of the hard drive). A CD image file is an exact representation of the whole set of data as it appears on a CD, in terms of both content and logical format. This may be an ISO 9660 image (adhering strictly to the ISO 9660 standard), or some proprietary format such as the .cif format used by Easy CD Creator. After the image file is created, you will be prompted to remove the source CD and insert a blank CD-R or CD-RW media. You can then record the content of the image file to the CD-R or CD-RW disk.

If you intend to make a number of copies of CDs from a single source CD, it is more expeditious to employ the image file recording instead of recording from the source CD individually. After you record the first copy, you should save the image file. Subsequent copies of CD-R or CD-RW disk can then be recorded directly from the saved image file in the hard drive, without having to recreate the image file.

DVD drive has a limited maximum speed of 16X. In some cases you may be able to obtain a faster recording using the image file than using DVD as a source drive. Creating an image file is usually carried out at the CD-RW drive reading speed, and the recording from the hard drive is usually carried out at the CD-RW drive recording speed, which may be higher than the 16X DVD speed. In fact, some RW drive makers recommend the use of the image file recording instead of recording from a source drive, because the image file recording is more reliable and free from the buffer under-run problem.

### **System Tests**

The main purpose of the system testing is to find out how well your system's components: CD-ROM, DVD, CD-RW and hard drive can work together. The Easy CD Creator contains three tests. The Data Transfer Rate test calculates the average speed at which data can be read from the source drive. The Audio Extraction rate test determines the average rate at which digital audio information can be read from the source drive (CD-ROM, DVD or CD-RW drive) to the hard drive. The Recording test determines the recording speed at which your system can support. You can perform the first two tests, when you first acquire your CD-RW drive to get some idea about the transfer rates and extraction rates of each of your drives, but these two tests are not essential for later CD recordings.

The Recording test is an option you can choose when you create a CD. The test actually performs a simulated recording to determine and set the speed at which the CD should be recorded, before the final recording is carried out. Hence, the whole process including the test and the actual recording will take twice as long as if you perform the recording without the test. You can skip this test to save the time by setting the recording speed yourself, once you know the speed your system can support.

## CD Copier

CD Copier is a subprogram of Easy CD Creator. It allows you to make exact copies of Audio CD, Data CD, Photo CD, Video CD, CD Extra or Mixed Mode CD (results are not certain with Mixed Mode CD). CD copying should all be carried out using the Disk-at-Once writing method. You can also create an image file to copy CDs with the CD-RW drive only or to make multiple copies, as described in the section of Image File Recording. To create an image file you have to select the option of Advanced>Disk Copy>Copy Source CD to the Hard Drive First in the CD Copier window.

## Direct CD

DirectCD is a program that allows you to write files directly to a CD-R or CD-RW disc in much the same way that you copy files to a floppy diskette, a removable drive or another hard drive. DirectCD lets you read and write your files directly to your CD with any software application that can read from and write to a drive letter. Some examples include:

Software applications, such as Microsoft Word, when you use the Save or Save As commands

Windows Explorer when you erase files or drag and drop files to and from the CD-RW disk

## The Windows Send To Command

The DirectCD program uses a Me system based on UDF v1.5 and this file system gives you a drive letter access to your CD-RW drive. The program also uses packet-writing technology to write data to the CD-R or CD-RW disk. Using the packet writing method, data can be written in much smaller chunks than are possible with the current Disc-at-Once and Track-at-Once methods used in

Easy CD Creator program. Some CD space (roughly 100MB) will be assigned and used by the file system. So in a 650MB disk, only 550MB is usable space for writing data.

DirectCD includes a Wizard that guides you step-by-step through the process of preparing and ejecting CD-R and CD-RW disks. It also includes a data compression feature that allows you to copy more data files to the disk.

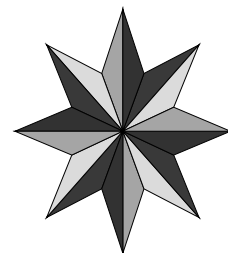
Before you can write data to your CD, you must first format the disk, as you would have to do with a floppy diskette or a hard drive. When you insert an unformatted blank CD-R or CD-RW disk in the RW drive, the Wizard will automatically prompt you to format the disk. After the formatting, the Wizard will cue you that the disk is ready for use. If you are formatting a CD-RW disk that has been formatted before, you can select either Quick format or Full format in the Format Disk window. You can also select the Compression option if you are using a CD-RW disk and you want to enable data compression on the disk.

DirectCD will work with both CD-R and CD-RW disks. However, there is no real advantage of using CD-R disks with the DirectCD program, because once the data is written on a CD-R disk, it is burned on it permanently, and you cannot erase any part of the content. "Deleting" files from a CD-R disk only makes the files invisible to the file system but does not free up any space on the disk for re-writing as in a CD-RW disk.

A word of caution: Once a disk is formatted in DirectCD, it can only be used with the DirectCD program in the CD-RW drive. It can neither be unformatted nor used with Easy CD Creator program.

## Coming In Part III: Create Different Types Of CDs

- Audio CD
- Data CD
- Multisession Data CD
- CD Extra
- CD Mixed Mode CD
- Digital Audio Extraction (Ripping)
- Rewritable CD
- Bootable CD



## It's Income Tax Time: Use Your Computer?

by Ira Wilsker, Golden Triangle PC Club

From the I/O Port Newsletter, Tulsa Computer Society

There may be no substitute for a good tax accountant if your income tax situation is complicated. Just as it may not be a good idea for "Joe Citizen" to do his own legal work without an attorney, for many, doing their own complex income taxes without professional help may not be a good idea. Many choose to use a neighborhood income tax service, either a local "ma and pa", or one of the seasonal branches or franchises that pop up like mushrooms this time of year, often disappearing just as quickly.

For many computer users willing to tackle the task themselves, there are several income tax software programs available. A visit to any local office supply store, electronics store, or even the discount stores and club stores, will enable the user to find a selection of popular tax programs available to the retail customer. The two top retail sellers are H&R Block's "TaxCut" series, and Intuit's "TurboTax" series. Both are available in basic and deluxe packages offering a variety of services. Both are often available with high value rebates, making them very inexpensive, sometimes even "free after rebates". Both are often available with bundles of personal finance programs, antivirus programs, legal assistance software, and other perks, typically free or very inexpensive after rebates. I recently purchased one of these programs, along with a finance program, legal program, and an antivirus program, all for about \$10 after rebates.

The level of competition between TaxCut and TurboTax is obviously very high. Both programs are easy to use, offer free online updates, include almost all common tax forms, print IRS approved tax forms on most printers, and include some type of guarantee of accuracy. For those living in states with a state income tax, both programs offer an option to do those taxes as well. "E-Filing" is included with both, often free for one or more returns. Both programs can import financial data from a variety of popular personal finance software, as well as previous years' programs. Both offer connections to corporation, mutual funds, and others who allow the

downloading of income and withholding information online. Both offer sophisticated error checking, and warn of potential audit flags. Information from a variety of IRS publications, as well as third parties, is often included to answer any questions that may arise.

Since both TaxCut and TurboTax have been selected as the "best" by different financial and consumer publications, neither one has any clear-cut software advantage over the other, as both are more than capable of accurately calculating and printing tax forms, provided that accurate information is entered. The old computing acronym "GIGO", meaning "garbage in – garbage out" applies especially well to tax software. If wrong information is entered, the results will be wrong. To minimize the effects of "GIGO", both programs offer a variety of checks, but it is still the responsibility of the user to verify the accuracy of the data entered.

Once installed from the CD, the software presents an attractive and intuitive interface. If prior years' taxes were done with an earlier version of the software, and in some cases even competitive software, that data can be quickly imported, pre-filling many of the lines on the tax forms. If personal financial software, such as Quicken or Microsoft Money has been used to track personal finances, appropriate information can often be imported into the tax programs. Again, it is imperative to recognize that the software can only compute the taxes accurately if accurate information is inputted.

Since our income tax system is complicated, with many twists and loopholes, a variety of methods are available to enter data. Both programs offer three basic options that can be used interchangeably to enter data. One way to enter data is to use the on-screen tax forms that can be filled out line by line, with all calculations made by the software. Another way is to use an interactive questionnaire, where the answers given by the user are used to fill in

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## More on Tax Software

by Ira Wilsker, Golden Triangle PC Club

From the I/O Port Newsletter, Tulsa Computer Society

Last week in the EXAMINER, I had a column on the two most popular income tax software preparation programs, H&R Block's TaxCut, and Intuit's TurboTax. Since I wrote that column, some new information has been released.

First, the good news; the IRS recently announced a program that may allow millions more taxpayers to calculate their taxes online for free, and file them at no charge with the IRS on the IRS E-FILE system. The IRS has created the "Free File Alliance", a cooperative arrangement between the IRS and several private organizations to provide free online federal income tax preparation services to qualified individuals, along with free electronic filing. The goal of the IRS and the alliance is, according to the IRS website, to "provide free tax preparation and filing to at least 60 percent of the American taxpayers, or approximately 78 million people". Generally, those using the short 1040EZ form qualify, but each provider is free to set their own qualifications.

H&R Block is offering the free service to eligible taxpayers with an adjusted gross income of less than \$28,000, and Intuit is offering its online version of TurboTax free to qualified individuals with an adjusted gross income less than \$27,000, or to most taxpayers qualified for the "Earned Income Tax Credit." Some companies, such as "TaxSlayer" are offering free services to all active duty military personnel. Another company, "TaxAct", is offering the services to individuals with an income greater than \$100,000. "TaxBrain" is offering the service to most taxpayers over the age of 50, while "OnlineTaxes" is offering the service free to anyone younger than 20. Some other providers are offering free services to all residents of specific states, but so far, Texas and Louisiana are not listed. A full list of free providers, and their individual eligibility requirements is available online at <http://www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp>.

While this is an online program, requiring internet access, it is accessible from public computers commonly available in libraries, schools, and other pub-

lic places with internet access. Several community service agencies, including many religious organizations, will also be providing public access to the service. According to the IRS website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov), those eligible will benefit by quicker tax preparation, faster refunds, built in accuracy and error checking, and acknowledgement of receipt of electronically filed forms. The private providers of the service have pledged to strictly respect the privacy and confidentiality of filers.

Now, there is some possible bad news about one of the popular income tax programs, TurboTax, regarding a controversy about a utility included in TurboTax. Several media websites are reporting that TurboTax is using a product activation and copy protection system called "Safecast" or "C-Dilla". A product key based on the computer's configuration is transmitted to Intuit once the software is installed, and Intuit sends back a code that unlocks the software. Safecast possibly prevents the software from being run on a computer after that machine has been upgraded, and monitors the CD-RW drive, preventing backup copies of the CD. Concerns have also been expressed that if a user upgrades his hardware after filing his taxes, TurboTax will only have limited functionality. Anecdotes are also appearing online that users who installed TurboTax, and recently purchased a new computer, have been unable to reinstall their TurboTax on the new computer. If installed on a new computer, some reports claim that tax forms cannot be printed or amended. Simply, taxes can be prepared and filed only from a single computer; if the computer is upgraded or replaced, TurboTax will not fully function.

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appropriate forms, make calculations, and recommend potential tax-saving options. Another way to enter data is the “shoebox” option, where W-2, 1099, and other forms are entered on a fill-in-the-blank basis, with the information automatically posted to the correct places. Regardless of the entry method used, context sensitive and interactive help is always available to help explain most questions or difficulties that may arise. Once all of the data has been entered, the programs will calculate the taxes, determine any refunds or payments, check for errors and audit situations, provide vouchers for payments and estimated taxes, and print relevant forms ready for submission on paper or electronically. The software may recommend changes to W-4 withholding forms, to better meet future tax needs, including printing a new W-4 to be provided to the employer.

Both programs will also provide “what-if” scenarios, showing the impact of IRA accounts, or other tax saving strategies. Since neither TaxCut or TurboTax has any clear-cut advantage over the other, and both are quite capable of preparing accurate tax returns, it is a matter of personal choice which program to use. Whichever program is used, it is important to realize that the data must be entered accurately in order for the tax returns to be calculated properly. April 15 is coming in about two months, and the use of tax software may be a

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Safecast supposedly also monitors the computer even when TurboTax is not running, consuming about a megabyte of memory. It has also been alleged that Safecast remains on the system and monitors even if TurboTax is uninstalled. To help soothe over the controversy, Intuit, the publisher of TurboTax, recently released an uninstaller for Safecast. According to the Intuit website, the uninstaller will automatically be provided TurboTax users when the user updates the software. Intuit, which has a reputation of being responsive to consumers, says that they will monitor the situation, and respond accordingly.

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- ⊙ You are not running you machine/session of a network/RAID configuration
- ⊙ Make sure you have the latest version DirectX (a must), WMP (a must):
- ⊙ If your “Input digital device” is on USB, then remove all other USB external equipment.
- ⊙ You may also find it beneficial to enable DMA for all your drives.

There are DVD-RAM and DVD+RAM which allows you to save up to 9.6GB of Data, but hard drives are much cheaper, like 20GB for \$69.00 or lower. It is just not FAST and EASY as they have stated in their advertising!

This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an International organization to which this user group belongs.

## Microslop Haikus

### From The Internet

*A file that big?  
It might be very useful.  
But now it is gone.*

*Yesterday it worked  
Today it is not working  
Windows is like that*

*The Web site you seek  
cannot be located but  
endless others exist*

*Chaos reigns within.  
Reflect, repent, and reboot.  
Order shall return.*

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## Preparing Your Computer For A New Operating System

By Guenter Schoett, Fallbrook Computer Club (schott@tbf.com)

*An easy and safe way to add and manage a new OS with System Commander 7 (?)*

I have been debating for some time now how best to install the new Windows XP Professional operating system on my computer. Reading various articles and technical newsletters can be a virtual adventure and impress upon you the four most-important facts before jumping into the arena:

1. Read all instructions very carefully and follow them
2. Back up your system because extensive changes will be made to your hard disk
3. Make a bootable diskette for your current OS. To create a new bootable floppy disk, click on Start, Settings, Control Panel, and then the Add/Remove Program's icon. Now click on the "startup Disk" tab at the top, and select Create Disk. You may be asked to insert the Windows OS CD. When you have a startup disk, it allows you to start your computer, run diagnostic programs, and fix many problems.
4. Clean up your machine's hard drive by deleting unnecessary memory hogs and run Scan Disk followed by defragmentation. Although the backup and boot diskette may never be necessary, they provide a safety net should you experience serious bugs or problems that overwrite critical areas on your hard disk.

I was not quite sure whether to add an additional hard drive on my machine and facilitating a clean install or simply to upgrade from my Windows 98 SE. One of our club members (Bill Wolf) suggested the use of a helpful automatic preparation software package for adding operating systems. It's called *System Commander* and widely recognized for quality and reliability. You can find more information and other related operating system management products on the company's Web site at <http://www.v-com.com>. The product can be directly purchased from VCOM for \$69.95.

OK, I got their software and installed it on my computer. I should have said "I was trying to install it". Seconds into that process a window popped up and informed me: "System Commander has detected a disk manager program such as EZ-BIOS or Ontrack installed on your system. These programs will not operate properly if System Commander is installed. The installation will be cancelled". So I checked to see if I had any of them but did not.

Obviously, something else was holding me up. But what? The extensive (200+pages) user manual for Version 7 might give me the answer. Right? Not exactly! In chapter 9 (Troubleshooting) or anywhere else nothing refers to my first problem.

Contacting Technical Support was my next step. On page 195 of the manual you are encouraged to check the index to see if you can save yourself a phone call. Also mentioned is a troubleshooting assistance program called "SCIN" which allows you to press F1 or Alt-H in most places to get context sensitive help. Unfortunately, the program had not been installed as I mentioned above, and I couldn't take advantage of that lifeline. OK, let's go to the Website [www.v-com.com/support](http://www.v-com.com/support) and seek help.

I entered details about my problem, sent it as an E-mail and was informed that a support technician was going to respond within 3 days, and often much sooner. The answer came the following day!

It read:

"Dear Customer,

Downloading and installing v7.03 should solve that problem. This was an error that was corrected in v7.03."

Good. So I went back to the company Website and tried to locate version 7.03. Could not find it but instead discovered the System Commander 7

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Maintenance Release page which indicates what you will need to update System Commander 7:

System Commander 7 installed on your computer  
System Commander 7 Serial number  
2 blank formatted 1.44MB diskettes  
The Update file: sc703\_us.exe  
Download size: approximately 4.2 MB

“Holy Moses” I said, wouldn’t it be much easier to just let you download an update file? In my case, this wouldn’t have worked anyway because I was unable to install this software in the first place.

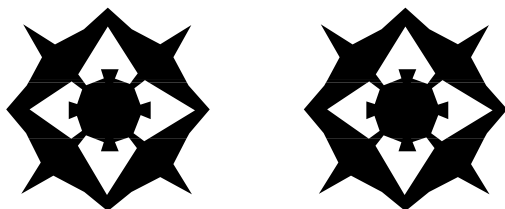
But wait, this is getting more complicated. Next you find instructions on how to obtain the System Commander 7 update:

Fill out and submit the online Download Request Form. You will need your serial number to complete the form. (For DOS users only, click on the DOS Version Download Request Form). After you have successfully completed the form, you will be able to download the update file sc703\_us.exe.

Note: While not critical, for Windows 9x/Me users, please rename the file C:\SC\SC7.EXE to SC7OLD.EXE before running the sc703.us.exe update program. If you fail to do so, the older SC7.EXE utility program will not be updated.

This last bulleted item really raised my eyebrows. If it is not critical, why go through this whole process?

Well, since I am a fairly tolerant and understanding individual I filled out the online form to see where all this would lead me. My 56K modem had a good day and it took only 13 minutes for the download. And in order to follow all procedures, I sent another E-mail to the Support team to find out how to interpret the “Critical” designation referred to in the note.



The following answer arrived on the next day:

“Dear Customer,

The reason it is not “Critical” is that you will probably not have to start over with the oldest file. Even if you do have to, the latest update will update the original file utility program when it is applied.”

The good person who wrote that message completely ignored my initial question of how to rename that important original file that still resided on the CD and not on my hard drive.

Obviously, another message had to be dispatched in which I stated that the techi person completely bypassed this problem and that I could not see how this response could help me. I then suggested that we cut this run-around game and they should send me a new CD that included the update and will allow me to install System Commander. This was Friday evening.

Here is the answer that came Monday morning:

“Dear Customer,

Here is the latest full copy. (See attached file: SystemCommander7.exe)”. Hurrah, no more problem! Think again. Just as it happened originally with version 7.02, the installer quit a few seconds into the installation procedure and a similar message appeared on my monitor screen:

“System Commander has detected the EZ-BIOS disk manager on your system. This program will not operate properly if System Commander is installed. The installation will be cancelled”. Am I lucky or what?

So, again I went back to searching my computer by entering “EZ-BIOS disk manager” into the search box. 172 answers popped up but unfortunately none included EZ-BIOS. I had copied the installation message with Printkey 2000 and sent it together with the entire list of file names to the technical support team and repeated my request for help. Here is what I received the following day, which was Tuesday:

“Dear Customer,

You don't say what version of SC7 you have. This is a false error message It should have been corrected by the v7.03 update. If you do not have v7.03 installed, download it from our website. If you have installed it, let me know and we'll continue working on this issue”.

I am beginning to feel as if I am writing the script for a cyber soap opera. BTW, what is a “false error message”? In my answer to the last customer support message I mentioned that I have been very patient for one week now, but would love to receive a solution to this software problem?

Let's see what tomorrow's mail might bring. Here comes the answer:

“Dear Customer,

It means that we are detecting something in the BIOS that appears to be a drive overlay (such as EZDrive or EZBios), but as we discuss this, we find that you have never had a drive overlay installed. Therefore we are displaying an error message that is “false.” We are aware of this issue we don't know at this point what is triggering this error message, in some cases it seems to be related to Western Digital hard drives, but that is not true in your case. The issue is in Engineering and they will have a solution and a new update soon. I'm sorry it is turning into such an inconvenience for you. The only way I can narrow down the possibilities is to have you try the latest update, v7.03, and gather as much information as possible”.

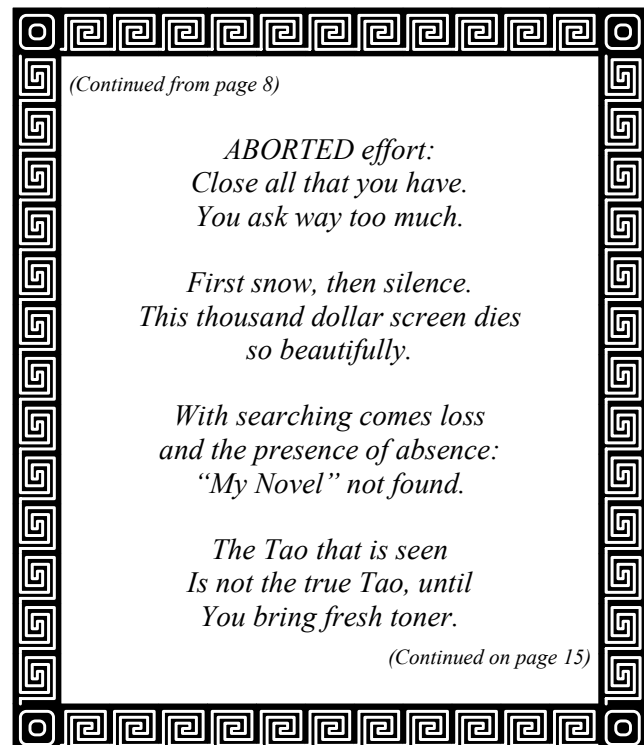
OK, now I know at least where the problem is located, namely in the engineering department for this software. But doesn't the last sentence sound a bit ridiculous? They sent me that update and it does NOT work. I dispatched another E-mail for an explanation on the last part and when this update will be available for customers like me. Here is the answer:

“Dear Customer,

I should have been more clear -QA is narrowing the cause(s) of this problem and Engineering is writing an update that will correct it/ them. It was necessary to see if v7.03 will install or not. Several drive overlay issues were fixed in v7.03 and yours may have been one of them. We are being told about a month for the update”.

Doesn't this sound as if I have been a guinea pig for this vendor? Well, I still want to finish this article and review the “working edition”, and if everything goes well, the conclusion of this dramatic development will appear in next month's edition of our news magazine. Would have loved to install Windows XP by now but this has to wait for another month, I guess.

Guenther Schoett is the editor of the Fallbrook Computer club. This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an International organization to which this user group belongs.



## Selections From The DealsGuy

Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group

### You'll Come Clean With This One

I saw this at Comdex and liked it. Mine works great. The **LENSPEN** is a very efficient and easy-to-use optical lens cleaning system. It's designed for all optics including cameras, camcorders, telescopes, binoculars, riflescopes and spotting scopes. Containing a non-liquid compound that will not spill or dry out, the LensPen system is safe, user-friendly and its compact size fits into almost any pocket.

Then there is the MiniPro for smaller lenses. MiniPro is specially designed for digital and advanced photo system cameras, microscopes, pocket binoculars, and small eye-pieces. The same LensPen cleaning system is employed in this great new product: a soft, natural brush to wipe away excess dirt, and a flexible cleaning tip with special cleaning compound.

These products are said to be safe to use on all lenses. Offers flexible cleaning tip, non-liquid cleaning compound that will not spill or dry out, reduces static built-up, prevents corrosion and fits easily into any pocket or bag. Check the product further at [ <http://www.lenspen.com> ]. The DealsGuy price on either the LensPen or MiniPro is \$9.95 in US funds plus S&H, which will be about \$6.00 in the USA. To order at that price, contact Leona Borsa at 1-877-608-0868 and mention the DealsGuy column, or use the magic words 'Bob Click' when ordering. This deal is good until April 30, 2003.



### Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC) Meetings

Future WAC Meetings, 12:30 PM to 4 PM at the Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Virginia:

March 15th - Personal Financial Management Using Your Computer  
April 19th - Adobe Photoshop Elements 2 - Image Editing Software

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/>

### Do You Need A Fix?

Don Singleton, APCUG Vice-president, alerted me to this one. It is called BigFix and is actually a free download. It analyzes your computer to see what fixes it might need, then guides you through them. It also alerts you of updates you need and does that for you. Here is their description:

"The BigFix solution leverages the reach of the Internet and the power of modern computers to create a mass preventive maintenance system that enables mass identification and elimination of computer problems before they cause failures. The BigFix solution can automatically monitor and detect a problem, proactively alert users or administrators to the problem before a failure occurs, and fix it on one or more machines at once with the click of a mouse. Because the BigFix solution can find and cure thousands, even millions of computers at once, it changes the nature and economics of technical support as well as desktop management. Unlike other available approaches, the BigFix solution simplifies maintenance, reduces support costs, and increases user satisfaction by finding problems before, not after, users experience a failure."

To download this product, go to [ <http://www.bigfix.com> ]. Don gave me the URL for an in-depth write-up by Richard J. deJongh of Tulsa Computer Society. [ <http://tcs.org/ioport/nov02/bigfix.htm> ] I have not tried it so I have no experience using it.

This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [ [Bobclick@mindspring.com](mailto:Bobclick@mindspring.com) ]. Visit my Web site at [ <http://www.dealsguy.com> ] for past columns. Also, I keep adding interesting articles (taken from user group newsletters) to my "Articles of Interest" page for viewing or downloading.

### Reminder from Deals Guy

Don't forget, your members get 20% off any O'Reilly book they purchase directly from O'Reilly. Just use code DSUG when ordering: <http://www.oreilly.com/>

## Buying a DVD recorder

By Bob Elgines, [elginesz@rraz.net](mailto:elginesz@rraz.net)

Well the prices are coming down, now under \$300 and as low as \$220, for a DVD recorder. The blank disks are now under \$2.50 each in lots of ten or more. But beware, the great decision as to which format is still under debate, DVD-R or DVD+R! If you just wish to make videos either one should work in most DVD players made after the year 2000, but not all. Cheaper DVDR disks and players will not work.

Support out there is very weak to almost NONE! Much time is needed to be invested like 4 to 10 hours to make a 2 hour video DVD, of which several programs require you to sit in front of your computer.

Most of the software is over-priced and does not work without many problems and no support like "Video Studio 6" by Cyber. The best so far has been "MyDVD" by Sonic. Some of the suggestions listed below came from them.

The best input devices are: "USB Instant DVD" by ADS (\$160), "Bungee DVD" by Pinnacle (\$150), "DCS 100" (\$170) and "DCS 200" by Dazzle (\$230). They all come with software that have individual problems, and advertise "Fast, Easy & Fun", boy that is a huge JOKE! It's Slow, Hard, & Will drive you nuts .

If you can not provide all of the suggestions (really necessary evils) below then don't get involved. I became one of their guinea pigs and I am about to throw it all in the circle file and call it a loss.

My ASUS computer is an Intel P3 @ 866MHz, 256MB RAM @ 133MHz, 60GB Hard Drive @ 7200rpm ATA100, ATI Radeon 32MB video card, with the "USB Instant DVD" input device (I tried out the DAZZLE equipment, but it had big noise problems and they had NO support at all), VIVASTAR (LF311) DVD-R recorder. I have tried two operating systems such as Win 98SE and Win ME and saw no difference, went back to Win 98SE.

For Windows '98 — 'XP users start off with these suggestions on getting ready to record a DVD:

- ⊙ Install at least 256 MB of RAM
- ⊙ Disable the Screen Saver
- ⊙ Disable the Turn off Hard Disks option
- ⊙ Disable the Hibernation option
- ⊙ Disable the Network Time Server (Win'XP)
- ⊙ Disable Text to Speech (Win'XP)
- ⊙ Disable any scheduled tasks (for example, virus scan)
- ⊙ Do not increase Virtual Memory beyond Windows' recommended setting
- ⊙ Close any other running applications
- ⊙ Do not copy any large files while capturing
- ⊙ Do not allow any remote activities, such as PC Anywhere or Timbuktu connections
- ⊙ Your hard drives are formatted to NTFS (which has no files size limitations Win'XP)
- ⊙ You have at least 21 gigs available on a single drive
- ⊙ You have the latest drivers for the following: DVD Rom, burner, CD-ROM and burner.
- ⊙ Your hard drives have been defragmented.
- ⊙ In particular, while capturing video, do not use your PC for any other activity. Video capture requires all your PC's processing power, and any action such as inserting a disc or receiving e-mail may cause errors in the captured video files.
- ⊙ Your monitor resolution must be set to 1024x768 16 or 32 bit color
- ⊙ You are running ASPI driver 4.6. No higher, no lower. If you are unsure, you can go here to find out and/or download the appropriate driver: <http://aspi.radified.com>

*(Continued on page 8)*

*(Continued from page 1)*

CDs with new software. Acrobat Reader allows software manufacturers to put entire manuals on CD, thus reducing printing expenses, and shipping expenses. As one who's always thought a "book" to be the ultimate 'portable document' I'd argue that printed manuals are still "must haves" for PC users.

However, it's easy to understand the question from the producers' point of view, since many users never consult a manual, and many manual sets become doorstops. As an inveterate reader, who often ponders software problems while "on the seat of ease" as Patrick O'Brien's termed it in the Aubrey-Maturin series of fiction novels, I'm not a fan of the "missing manual." Electronic manuals are generally searchable, and when provided with a conventional table of contents and index, are perhaps even more efficient than a printed manual for finding things.

But, whether you like your manuals on screen or in paper, electronic documentation's here to stay, and Adobe Acrobat Reader is the conduit to those forms. For a webmaster, being able to convert documents to PDF format is a tremendous time saver. As the web became popular, many programs included the ability to generate output files for the web, inserting appropriate html (hypertext markup language) tags in the files. However, some of these efforts are rough, to say the least, and generally require substantial tweaking if one wishes to have a web display that looks something like the original document.

In the case of publishing a spreadsheet for the web via the html generation features of Excel, the file generated tended to be huge, as Excel generated all kinds of tags for all the possible attributes of every cell in the spreadsheet. It's not uncommon for a simple one page spreadsheet to grow to an html document of 100k, something like a twenty-fold increase in size. All that overhead detracts from the efficiency of a web site.

Software applications which can generate an Adobe Acrobat file can vastly simplify a webmaster's tasks, and save lots of time. The spreadsheet noted above, output as a PDF file, might amount to an 8k file, which will download and display quicker than a 100k html file, even given that the Acrobat Reader application may have load and start up on your PC.

Corel's Office suite, Perfect Office, has output PDF files through a number of versions. Micro\$oft Office 97 generated PDFs, but that ability disappeared in the Office 2000 series. Looking through a book on Office XP, and checking the product's web site doesn't show that PDF output capability's returned. Does anyone have Office XP that can comment? I suspect it doesn't exist, because of the existence of shareware programs directed specifically at adding that capability to Office 2000 and Office XP.

If you purchase the Adobe Acrobat creation program which lists for about \$249 (some refer to it as Distiller), you'll have the ability to "Print to PDF" from any program that will send output to a printer. This allows the true portability of the PDF format and the usefulness of the free Adobe Acrobat Reader program to come into its own. You can share documents with computer users on Mac or PC platforms, and what application programs your correspondents have won't matter. As long as they have the Acrobat reader program, they'll be able to view the document with the look of the original.

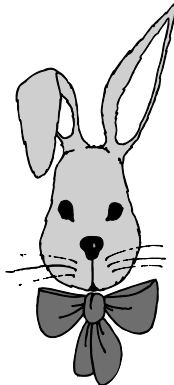
There are a variety of PDF creation programs available as shareware, with prices typically ranging from \$49 to \$99, for those who seek a less expensive approach to making PDFs than the full Acrobat program from Adobe.

If you're having an eyestrain day, Reader can ease the pain! The current version of the Acrobat Reader allows the user to expand the size of the image up to 1600 times, and reduce it in increments, either picked from a list, or input by the user. Acrobat Reader also allows the user to cut and paste text and graphic images from Reader to the Windows clipboard, which makes PDF documents even more "portable."

The great part about Acrobat Reader is its cost - it's tough to beat free. If you haven't bought a new piece of software lately with it included on the distribution CD so you can read the electronic manual, then it's time to surf over to the Adobe web site and download the Reader software. The most fully featured version of Acrobat Reader 5.1 is 13 megs, so it will take a while to download, but you can do it while eating supper or watching a TV show, so it's ready when you're finished.

One of the download options is a download manager, which then goes out and gets the larger program, and will pick up where it left off if your session's interrupted. Ultimately, you've downloaded an executable file that, when double-clicked on, will extract the necessary files, start up an Install-Shield wizard, and provide a desktop icon and an entry in your start menu. Then you'll be ready to really expand your horizons with all the material that's now available to you off the web via Acrobat Reader.

**Enjoy!!**



*(Continued from page 11)*

*Windows NT crashed.  
I am the Blue Screen of Death.  
No one hears your screams.*

*Stay the patient course  
Of little worth is your ire  
The network is down*

*A crash reduces  
your expensive computer  
to a simple stone.*

*Three things are certain:  
Death, taxes, and lost data.  
Guess which has occurred.*

*(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](http://www.nctcug.org)

### Officers and Directors

All officer terms expire 2003

President	Jim Rhodes	703-931-7854
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Fred Cook	2003	703-921-1749
JJ Davies	2003	703-379-9222
Sy Fishbein	2003	703-536-5894
Dean Mires	2003	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 3 1/2 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 1977 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 10 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/>

### 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)

*You step in the stream,  
but the water has moved on.  
This page is not here.*

*Out of memory.  
We wish to hold the whole sky,  
But we never will.*

*Having been erased,  
The document you're seeking  
Must now be retyped.*

*Rather than a beep  
Or a rude error message,  
These words: "File not found."*

*Serious error.  
All shortcuts have disappeared.  
Screen. Mind. Both are blank.*

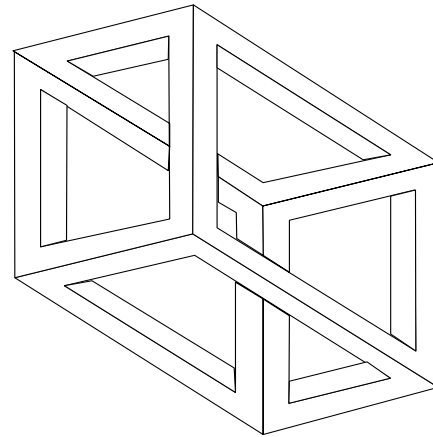
### March/April 2003

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

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

3rd Monday (4/21; no meeting 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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# First Class

