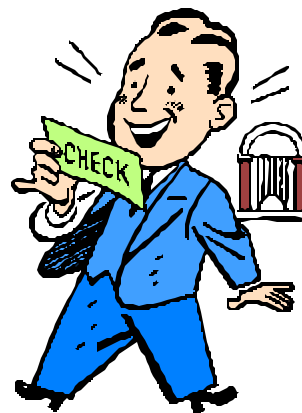# The NCTCUG Journal

Keeping Up
By Paul Howard (NCTCUG)

Counterpoint: Rebates — Another Truth

Roger A. Poverny wrote "The Truth About Mail-In Rebates" for TUGNET, The User Group Network of Granada Hill, CA. This article was reprinted in the Jun/Jul issue of the NCTCUG Journal, and is available on-line at: http://www.tugnet.org/na2003_3.htm (TUGNET's got a great web site — be sure to visit!)

Roger's article is loaded with great tips to insure that you get your rebate when you buy computer hardware or software. However, I think he seriously misses the point in apparently calling for legislative action to eliminate rebates, and vocif-

erously complaining about them to the FTC, Better Business Bureaus, and retailers. I've done some informal polling of the members of two computer user's groups, and folks who like rebates outnumber those who don't by at least five to one.

While I've talked with user group colleagues who say, "I've never gotten a rebate!" I compare that with my own experience. In those instances where I've not gotten a rebate, I

Inside

Time Flies, And Memory Fades

by Paul Howard, NCTCUG

Some time in August will mark the twentieth anniversary of attendance at my first TCUG meeting. I forgot how I first learned of the organization, but before moving to Virginia, I had been a member of the ACGNJ (Amateur Computer Group of New Jersey) and knew about the value of user groups.

My phone inquiry for information resulted in a lunch meeting with a club ambassador in Rosslyn, where I was working at the time. I'm embarrassed to say I've forgotten the gentleman's name, particularly since he paid for lunch. In looking through the original club directory, which Bill Lathom, Dale McRoberts, and I put together in May, '85, I spotted the name of Robert Williams, a Model III user from Lorton. I think he was the generous "face of TCUG" because I seem to recall his name was Bob, and he commuted south on I95. But, to Bob Williams, or whoever introduced me to TCUG, now NCTCUG, thank you so much for that wonderful introduction.

My first meeting was at the Wakefield Forrest Elementary School in Annandale. This was a welcome diversion, because I hadn't yet moved to Virginia. Working in Rosslyn, living in a "corporate" apartment at Oakwood in Seven Corners, and flying home to NJ on the weekends — what a drag. The worst part was going back to the apartment after the meeting and not being able to apply any of the new things I heard about — because the computer was back in NJ.

What came next is murky — we moved to Virginia, to our new home, on Nov. 1st '83. I've been unable to find any newsletters until the January '85 edition. In June of 1985, I became editor of the newsletter, and my activity in some club position has persisted ever since.

The purpose of this article is a message of thanks, for all the help I've received from TCUG/NCTCUG members during the past twenty years. You've bailed me out of all kinds of hardware and software scrapes over the years. Things I've learned about

through the group, like PCAnywhere, enabled me to suggest solutions to problems at work that have brought me pats on the back, and a boost in the wallet. Your friendship has been priceless — I value my time at meetings, including Pizza SIG, such that vacations, and other activities are often scheduled around our meetings.

We've often teased each other through the years about getting our dues money back in the answers to questions, or whether someone's asking more questions than their $25 dues payment calls for — but the answer, as far as I'm concerned, is that everyone probably gets back at least ten times the value of their dues.

Last week, I mentioned at a meeting that I was having difficulty in the office printing out, on our shared LAN printer, Adobe Acrobat PDF files, which are increasingly important in many businesses. Also, in addition to the PDF problem, several of us have been getting strange results when printing out Micro$oft Word documents containing bullet points. Dean Mires suggested deleting the LAN printer, re-installing it in software as a local printer and installing the latest drivers for the printer, and then reinstalling it as a network printer. *KA-CHING* !!! Right on the money. I'm back in business. Tomorrow I help my office colleague through the process so he can print everything again. After three months of no solutions from the PC support staff, NCTCUG assistance triumphs again. Thanks, Dean, and everyone, for twenty wonderful years, and at least twenty more to come !!
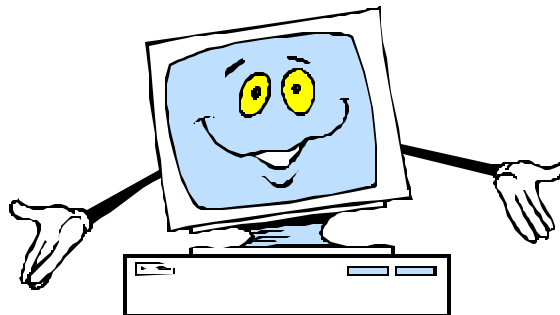
SPAM — Bane of the Internet

By Ira Wilsker

I hate it; I absolutely hate it. I open my email in the morning and find up to 100 email solicitations offering illegal cable TV descramblers, cheap prescription drugs without a prescription, devices and treatments for "personal enhancement", university degrees without attending class, voyeuristic opportunities, and the infamous offers of easy riches from the family members of deceased Nigerian dictators. I can typically spend over a half-hour daily deleting this trash. Most of us find the "unsolicited commercial email" a mere nuisance, but to our internet service providers it has become an expensive proposition to process this "spam" email, as it steals internet bandwidth, hard drive space, and processor time, with the costs passed on to us subscribers. What may even be worse is the blatant fraud and criminal solicitations that many of us experience.

According to a report released by the Federal Trade Commission on April 30 (www.ftc.gov/reports/spam/030429spamreport.pdf), much of the spam mail we receive contains false claims as well as other deceptive, and probably illegal, content. To determine the degree of proliferation and deception in spam, the FTC created what appeared to be private websites containing unique email addresses only used on those sites, and posted material in popular newsgroups and chat areas, again using unique email addresses. During the collection phase, over 11,000,000 spam emails were sent by citizens, or received by the "dummy" email addresses created for this purpose. Since many internet users wonder where and how spammers get their
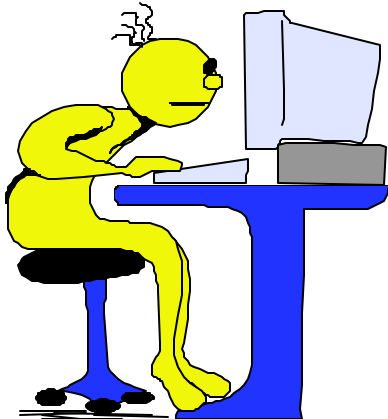
email addresses, the FTC found that 86% of the email addresses used on their websites and newsgroups were harvested and resold by spammers. The FTC also tracked the success rate of the "remove me" links commonly given by spammers, and found that 63% of the remove requests were not honored. The FTC also found substantial misrepresentation in the sample emails analyzed, including false "From:" and "Subject:" lines, often clearly intended to trick the recipient into opening the message. Many of those messages (17% of "Adult" spam with false headers) would then display pornographic images without any regard to the age or emotional status of the recipient.

In the analysis of about 1000 spam emails, the FTC found that 20% of the emails were for what the FTC labeled "Investment or Business Opportunities", including such offers as work-at-home, franchise opportunities, chain letters, and other non-securities offers. "Adult" spam, consisting mostly of pornography and dating services, accounted for 18% of all spam, while "Financial" spam, consisting of credit card offers, mortgage refinancing, cheap insurance, and other related items composed 17% of spam. Close behind were "Products and Services" (16%), "Health" related spam offering dietary supplements, disease prevention, and physical enhancement (mostly sexual in nature) accounted for 10% of all spam. Only 7% of the spam was for computer or Internet related equipment or services. It should be noted that all of this spam received by the FTC was indeed unsolicited, and not in response to an inquiry made by FTC staffers, even though many of the emails claimed (falsely) to be a reply to an inquiry, or the result of signing up for an "opt-in" service.

The FTC also investigated the accuracy of the email headers, and found that one-third of all spam mail had false "From:" lines in an attempt to disguise the source of the email. Almost half (46%) of the spams with false "From:" lines appeared to be from an acquaintance of the recipient, apparently to trick the recipient into opening the message. Another 13% of

What You Should Expect From Your Recycled Inkjet Cartridge

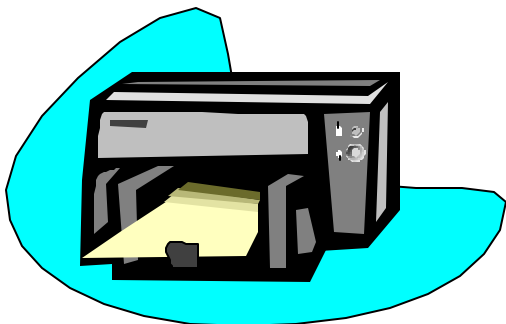## A Guide For The New User Of Recycled Inkjet Cartridges

Reprinted from the Space Coast Journal via User Friendly, the Journal of the Los Angeles Computer Society

If you are new to recycling — in particular to the use of recycled inkjet cartridges — we think it might be helpful for you to understand how your cartridges work and to learn more about what you should expect from your recycled inkjet cartridges. You already know recycling is good for the environment and that you can save up to 50% off the price of your cartridges by recycling. But just how long will your recycled cartridges last? To answer that question, let's first look at how they work.

Operation Of Print Head

The print head and circuitry which perform most of the work of the inkjet printer are contained on the small inkjet cartridge itself. Today, there can be anywhere from 48 to 320 nozzles or "jets" on the print head located at the bottom on your cartridge.

Each nozzle or jet is smaller in size than a human hair and each is connected electronically to a heater or resistor which heats and cools the ink inside the cartridge. When the ink is heated, a bubble forms. When the heat source is removed, the bubble "bursts" sending dots of ink on the page through the nozzles or jets. These dots form the print characters on the page at the rate of up to 6000 drops per second. The heating and cooling process is happening at very high rates of speed, too. It was once be-

lieved that the heaters in the cartridge would only last for one use of the cartridge. But we've learned that the heaters will continue to do their work and the jets will continue to fire for more than one use of the cartridge in most inkjet cartridges. In fact, the heaters or resistors on most inkjet cartridges will continue to fire until they either burn out completely or weaken significantly. On the average, that happens from the third to fifth time the cartridge is used.

How Many Times?

How many times a cartridge can be recycled varies from cartridge to cartridge. From 5 to 10% of most common cartridges can't be recycled even once. Some cartridge styles, including most tri-color cartridges, have higher "unserviceable" rates. At the same time, some cartridges can be recycled more than five times. The only thing that is predictable is that all inkjet cartridges will eventually wear out — and this probably won't happen at the same time your cartridge runs out of ink. Once you decide to start recycling your inkjet cartridges, keep in mind you'll eventually have to buy new cartridges. Inkjet recycling doesn't mean you'll never buy another new cartridge. It just means you can save money for several cycles until your cartridge needs replacing. Each time you do recycle, you'll see those savings mount.

Wearing Out?

So what are the signs that your cartridge is getting worn out? If a jet in your cartridge is "burned out", you will see horizontal bands or white streaks in your print. Print characters may appear incomplete and fill on graphics will show areas with no ink.

A word of caution, these white streaks can also be caused by other problems, so don't assume your cartridge is gone when you see them. Some of the things that can cause the white streaks are fixable.

Another sign that your cartridge may be nearing its useful life is the appearance of dramatically lighter than normal print. This can mean the heaters are weakened and putting less ink on the page. Again, this can be caused by other "fixable" problems. Here are some common fixes that can often resolve a print problem in an inkjet cartridge:

1) Run a little warm tap water over the print head. This can dissolve any ink which may have dried in the cartridge. This is especially helpful if the cartridge has been removed and exposed to air for any length of time.

2) "Dirty resistors" or heaters can often be cured by cleaning the contacts on the cartridge and on the printer carriage. This can be done with water or alcohol. After cleaning, snap the cartridge in and out a few times to be sure you have a good connection between contacts in the cartridge and the printer.

3) "Smeary" print can be caused by build-up of ink on the wiper blade found in most HP Deskjet models. If this is your problem, clean the wiper blade according to printer manual instructions.

If these tricks don't work, contact your dealer to have your cartridge tested. Save a print sample to help diagnose the problem. The dealer may have cleaning methods and other procedures which may solve the problem. Once the dealer has fully tested the cartridge, you'll either have the problem fixed or you'll learn the cartridge has reached its useful life. Then it's time to buy a new cartridge and start recycling again.

Since we know all inkjet cartridges will fail eventually your dealer can't be expected to replace your cartridge when it wears out anymore than you would expect your car dealer to replace your car when it wears out. But most dealers will allow you to recycle another cartridge at no cost if your cartridge fails before it is less than 75% used. The warranties on most inkjet cartridges do have a time limit — both new and recycled — because inkjets can be harmed when removed from the printer for extended time. So contact your dealer as soon as you suspect your cartridge may have a problem.

Although, inkjet cartridges won't last forever, we know from successful testing and use throughout the world that recycled inkjet cartridges work and they can save you money.
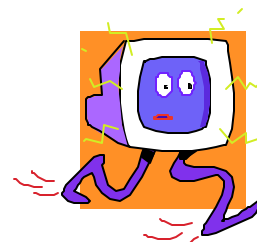
So don't throw those cartridges in the trash — it's like throwing money away.

Election Notice

The NCTCUG Annual Meeting and election of Officers and Directors will be held at the regular club meeting on Wednesday, October 1, 2003, 7 p.m. at Carlin Hall.

Anyone interested in running for office, please contact one of the officers listed on page 15.

Thank you!

Requiem For A Mouse

by E. M. Hazell

It had served me faithfully, that little mouse, for at least a year. And in this time and place of throw-away societies one year is considered a long long time as far as faithful service, rendered by a mechanical device is concerned. That little mouse was of the bobtail variety. It was referred to as wireless and could travel quite a distance from that desktop village of mine. Of course sometimes the cats thought of making off with it, but I usually discouraged that. That little mouse died quietly. It just left that little cursor stranded in the middle of the monitor and nothing short of crashing the computer could persuade that cursor to move. When Faye called I was just about in the middle of a temper tantrum. I hate it when mechanical devices get the best of me.

"Did you say the mouse is wireless?" Faye asked.

"Yes," I responded.

"Did you check the batteries?"

Of course I hadn't. Bright and brilliant Mensa person that I am, whatever made me think that the wireless mouse and keyboard needed some source of energy, like maybe a few batteries. I thanked Faye for that helpful assist. Then I called the Guru just in case it could be something more serious. He

agreed with Faye. He did, however, remain on standby just in case something else was wrong. I had promised Faye to have my column in and in order to do that, I had to have access to my village.

"How long have you had that wireless set," Clarence inquired. By now I was beginning to be sort of hesitant about giving out any more information about my latest debacle.

When Clarence asks a question, a truthful answer seems to be well, shall we say mandatory? Lies, even little white lies are not the stuff that good relationships and solid friendships are made of. I value Clarence as a friend as well as a computer guru.

"Since Christmas," I said.

"Since Christmas and you never once wondered where the energy for that mouse comes from?"

He didn't say anything about that Mensa thing but I could read his mind even from a distance.

"Where did you buy it?"

Actually I hadn't bought it, it had been a Christmas gift from my son; a totally unexpected Christmas gift. I hadn't been unhappy with my long_tailed mouse. I set out the following morning to purchase batteries. The mouse wasn't the only critter at this establishment dining on batteries. Faye and Clarence had been correct about pointing out to me the importance of changing batteries. As it turned out, batteries could not resuscitate my bobtailed mouse. Something more series was wrong in that entire wireless set up. *"Where is that old keyboard and mouse?"* Clarence ask as he was about to attempt to get things straightened out again. *"I think I might have accidentally sort of given it away,"* I replied. That was a lie; accidentally was stretching the truth a little. And now it was time for another lesson. That lesson is clearly imprinted on my mind: ALWAYS KEEP A BACKUP HANDY.
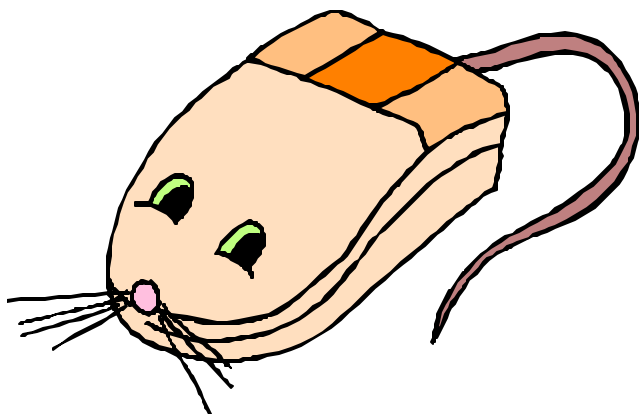
I'm writing this column on Clarence's backup device. I still have another lesson to learn, like how to purchase the kind of device most suitable for my own personal computer needs. But in the meantime I'm having to compose a proper requiem for my fallen comrade. *"Whoever heard of a requiem for a mouse, and a mouse as a sidekick is laughable,"* Nor was it thinkable that I should get by with anything here without Grandmama putting in her penny's worth of opinion. But this time I had her. *"Walt Disney died a rich man because of a mouse in his desk drawer."* "I don't see you getting rich with your mouse!" *"That's a different mouse!"* "A mouse is a mouse is a mouse; a mouse is a varmint and the only good mouse is a dead mouse." As far as Grandmama was concerned, that was an absolute. Mice usually ate in to the profit as far as the farmer was concerned. I conceded. Grandmama would always be right. Still, there was that brave little mouse that responded to my every click.

"Last time it was that brave little Umax. Now it's that brave little mouse. Maybe you starved it to death when you didn't provide those 'batteries.' Any plans for some demise next month?" I took a moment before I responded. "I'm thinking of having my office exorcised to keep the spirit world away." "Didn't I tell you I had myself immunized against exorcisms? " There seemed to be a gentle breeze and she was gone. I could have sworn it was a kiss on the cheek. I could never bar her from own private little kingdom. Life would be so terribly dull with out her. Of course, there was still the matter of a requiem for my bobtailed mouse. A few bars of Beethoven entered my mind. And as I hummed along I thought: *Why not? I'm certain Beethoven wouldn't mind.*

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.
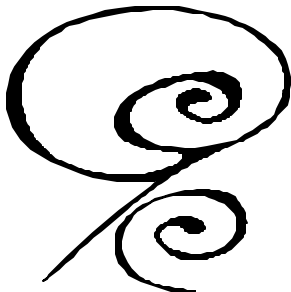
these emails appeared to come from an established business relationship, and 14% had blank sources. Some spammers (3%) try to trick the recipient into opening the messages by showing that the message appeared to be from the recipient himself!

The "Subject:" line of spam was only slightly less deceptive; with 22% of spams containing false subject lines, with one-third of those having a stated subject totally unrelated to the content of the message. 42% of these false subject lines alleged to show some existing business or personal relationship with the recipient. Cumulatively, 44% of all spam mail had false "From:" and/or "Subject:" lines. Personally, I do not understand how anyone could transact business, including possibly sending credit card information, to an unknown individual who is lying about his true identity; that is a real setup for fraud and loss.

The body of the message also often contained deceptive information, with 40% of all spam mail containing one or more falsehoods in the content of the message; of those messages touting "Investment or Business Opportunities", a full 90% contained false information, while 49% of the "Health" spams had falsehoods. 47% of the travel and leisure related spams contained false information. Considering the "From:", "Subject:" and body of the spam mail, the cumulative number of false emails rises to 66%, with 96% of all "Investment or Business Opportunities" containing misinformation. Again, it amazes me that so many Internet users are gullible and fall for these deceptions. Despite some states requiring commercial email to contain the prefix "ADV" in the subject line, only 2% of all spam complied.

Then there are the chain letters, which often claim to be legal, even to the point of being endorsed by government agencies. According to the FTC, "Nothing is further from the truth."

It may get worse — spammers are now targeting our cell phones, and most of us pay to receive text messages, shifting the cost of spam almost totally to us, the recipients.

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

Digital Photography

By David Berkowitz, Pasadena IBM Users Group

At the June, 2000 user group meeting, Hewlett-Packard talked about digital cameras. Pasadena IBM User Group member David A. Berkowitz supplied valuable URLs as well as a terrific tutorial that covers both digital cameras as well as scanners.

I have a couple of URLs—and a series of tips—that I can recommend to the other members. Anyone who is going shopping for a camera should learn a lot more about them before going near a store.

One more thing: Before I bought my HP Photosmart P1100 [printer], I took a compact flash card to the store, inserted it into the display model at Staples, then printed "my own" photos to judge the quality. When I saw what this printer could do on plain paper, I was sold. It was really nice to be able to use photos that I took—instead of a canned, optimized photo that was purposely created as a demo by the manufacturer.

You can't do that with many printers, but for those who are considering the 900 or Photosmart series from HP, I highly recommend it. The P1000 and P1100 have both Smartmedia and Compact flash support, so anyone that already owns a camera, or can borrow a memory card with some personal photos on it, should give it a try.

Batteries

Some cameras ship with two types of batteries: Alkaline and Nickel Metal Hydride.The alkaline batteries are intended for temporary use while the Nickel Metal Hydride batteries are charging. They have to be conditioned before first use, which takes several hours. The alkaline batteries go fast and that type of battery should only be used if nothing else is available. On the other hand, the Nickel Metal Hydride batteries are excellent. I can usually get over one hundred photos per charge with my Epson 850z—and that includes use of the flash and LCD. I bought a spare set of four at Radio Shack for less than $20 and I always have a spare set ready if I expect to take lots of pictures.

AC Adapter

Nice to have, but not necessary if you do what I do. For less than $8.00 I bought a compact flash-to-PC Card adapter and I use that to transfer the images to my notebook.

For those who need to transfer images to their desktops, there are CF-to-USB readers that sell for around $30. Either solution makes transfers directly from the camera unnecessary.

StorageCompact Flash memory is a good buy these days and will get even better. My camera shipped with a scrawny 8MB card, so I bought a 64MB card. With that card, I can take 91 photos at 1600 x 1200 (with moderate compression) or over 940 images at 640 x 480.

If you are going to take the camera outdoors, an AC adapter will not do you much good. Anyone who buys a digital camera will have to buy more memory or be very selective about which photos he/she keeps.

Some cameras come with Smart media memory and Sony is trying to make their memory sticks the memory of choice. Most people go for CF these days, for its higher capacity and for its compatibility with the PC card standard.

It's important to look for type II support. Nikon has been criticized because their otherwise great cameras only support type I. Luckily, there are fairly large capacity type I cards on the market.

Some cameras that support CF type II also support the IBM microdrives, which follow the CF type II standard. How about 340MB of storage for about $450? Expensive, but much less expensive per megabyte than CF memory.

User Interface And Operational Features

Some very good cameras have controls that are a pain in the elbow to use. Some others take almost all control away from the user. My Epson has a very good interface and lots of nice features, but much of the interface requires use of the LCD. The LCD is almost impossible to see well in bright sunlight, so some of the options are hard to use outdoors. Luckily, this camera can be used as a point-and-shoot model—and the results are pretty good in fully automatic mode.

One reason why I bought it was because it can also be used in a virtually manual mode. Though I do not have much experience with photography, I felt I might miss the ability to select the settings I want.

Having more control makes taking pictures more fun. It also provides a learning experience. I don't like products that take control away from the user, but that's my choice. Others may seek out that type of product.

LCD vs Viewfinder

You expressed your preference for using the viewfinder over the LCD. That only works well if you are taking pictures at some distance from your subject. Almost all digital cameras are rangefinder cameras: The viewfinder is a separate element and it is positioned away from the camera lens assembly.

When you compose a picture, you are seeing a different view of the subject than the one the CCD sees. Because of that you have to deal with parallax error. If you don't know how to deal with it, you will not get the shot you intended, and you will probably cut off someone's head in the process!

Another problem with almost all cameras is that the image area seen in the viewfinder/LCD is different from the area captured by the CCD. Because the manufacturers are conservative (want to help the user), the image captured is usually larger than the one you saw in the viewfinder/LCD. It varies from one model to another, but it means that you may have to crop the final image to remove an unwanted part of the picture. That removes valuable pixels and reduces the effective resolution of the final product.

A Few Terrific URLs

Steve's Digi-Cam is one of the best sites on the web for reviews and general information about digital cameras. His product reviews are more thorough than what you will find in any magazine. (The reviews contain so much detail they can be used as an owner's manual.) Check it out and you will that some people just like to vent and/or trash the products or companies they don't like. (http://www.steves-digicams.com/)

Scantips is a great site for information on scanners and how to use them. Wayne Fulton does an excellent job of explaining why you scan for your target device—not for the maximum resolution. The user group presenter was trying to make that point, but she got drowned out by all of the noise surrounding her. (http://www.scantips.com/)

Digital Camera Resource Page One user group member used this extensively when he was shopping for a digital camera about 18 months ago. (http://http://www.dcresource.com/) As usual, I've been at this for longer than I intended, but I think the information will be of use to others. Everything I said above (and much more) can be found on the web sites that "focus" on photography. David Berkowitz can be reached at daberk@mindspring.com.
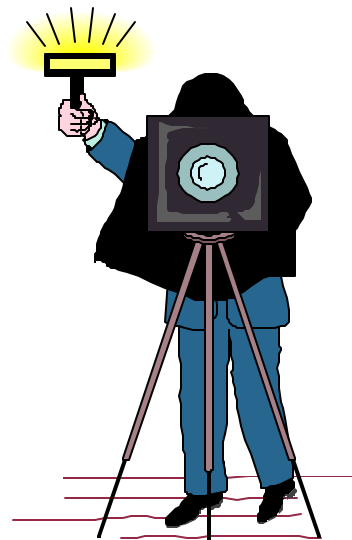
Software Download Sources

By Ira Wilsker ira@apcug.org

In some of my recent columns, I wrote about several software products that were available for free download from their authors' websites. Several loyal readers have asked for information on websites where they can view many titles, and download them from a single source. This column is in response to those requests.

DOWNLOAD.COM —Claiming to be one of the largest sources on the Internet for downloadable software, download.com is a subsidiary of CNet. While CNet originally started as a 30-minute cable TV show, it has now developed into an Internet powerhouse with much of its growth due to "dot.com" acquisitions. Download.com is an assimilation of several other former premier download resources into a single, easy to navigate supersite.

With several hundred thousand titles available for Windows, Mac, Linux, Palm, PocketPC, cell phones, and other platforms, download.com may have earned its laurels. At the top-right of the page is a search box; a topic or title can be entered in the box, and the pull-down menu gives the choice of searching in all downloads, Windows only, all of CNet (including reviews, news, price comparisons, etc.), or searching the entire web. If a particular title is unknown to the user, a simpler and classical menu interface is available.

The major menu topics are MP3 and Audio, Internet, Games, Business, Mobile (Palm, PocketPC, cell phone), Multimedia and Design, Web Developing, Software Developing, Utilities and Drivers, and Home and Desktop. Each of the menu headings when opened reveals a comprehensive lower directory of detailed topics, with several levels often appearing below the main topic.

A little browsing practice of the menus will reveal a generous cornucopia of choices, sometime numbering in the thousands. Once a software topic is found, and multiple titles are displayed, simply clicking on the column headers "Name", "Date", "User Rating", or "Downloads" can sort alphabetically, by date, by user ranking, or by download volume, respectively.

A quick review of just the top few "most popular" downloads will indicate that for some software titles, literally millions of copies of individual titles have been downloaded from download.com.

For those who browse this site frequently, a click on the "New Releases" heading on the main page will show the latest additions to the site. On the date that I am typing this, 1105 new titles have been added so far today. As another example of the dependency that many place on this site, the top download of a "new program today" (the evening that I am typing this), is already over 162,000 downloads, and one file "new this week" has had almost one-half million downloads from download.com in the past seven days.

As an additional online tool to help narrow the surfers' choices, many of the screens also allow the user to sort by operating systems, license terms (free to use, trial versions, commercial), file size, and category can be selected.

Other headings on download.com can also be used to narrow searches. These headings on the main page include "IS/IT"; "Software Developer" for programmers; "Web Developer" for web page authors; "Business"; "Personal Tech" which includes audio and video utilities, internet utilities, and home and desktop utilities; "Mobile" includes Palm, PocketPC, WindowsCE, Psion, EPOC, and cell phone software; and a huge "Games" section. As a source of downloads, download.com is an excellent resource.

TUCOWS —"The Ultimate Collection of Winsock Software" originally started as a source of Internet related utilities, but has now grown into a massive network of local websites offering an extensive collection of software for a variety of platforms. Containing over 30,000 updated titles, TUCOWS has become one of my "personal favorite" resources. With software available for Windows, Macintosh, Linux, BeOS, Windows 3.1 (still available!), PDAs, and a variety of other platforms and operating systems, TUCOWS is a geek's paradise.

In order to make downloads faster, and complying with the "netiquette" that says that downloads should be done close to home, TUCOWS has hundreds of local mirror sites around the world that are frequently updated with the latest in titles. A listing of all current TUCOWS mirrors is online at www.tucows.com , at the "Choose Your Mirror" link near the center of the page. In Texas alone, there are over a dozen local sites offering the TUCOWS service, with EXP offering the service locally in southeast Texas at tucows.exp.net.

Connecting to a local TUCOWS server shows a tabular heading of "Business", "Games", "Home and Education", "Internet", "Multimedia", "Systems and Utilities", and "Themes". Also on the main page is a weekly list of the top 100 downloads, indicating the popularity of specific titles. The number one downloaded title, which was the topic of a recent column here, is the excellent Irfan View software, which I personally use on a frequent basis.

For those who desire to keep up with the latest in available software, TUCOWS offers a free daily email describing the newest software. By clicking on a tab at the top of the main page, another menu will appear showing sub-topics. The "Internet" tab, for example, opens a menu with an even dozen categories with easy-to-understand topics. It is here, for example, that Internet related software from spam killers to instant messaging services could be found.

There are many other fine resources available to locate and download available software. One warning is to beware of some sources, because it has been documented that some sites, as well as several of the file sharing sites, can be sources of viruses, worms, and Trojans embedded in downloaded software. While not perfect, reliable sources such as download.com and TUCOWS are generally safe places to find software.

Experimenting with and using downloaded, often free, software can be a significant enhancement to your computing experience.

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.

Humorous Quotations About Computers

Reprinted from Toggle newsletter, Tacoma-Seattle Area Microcomputer UG via User Friendly, the Journal of the Los Angeles Computer Society

A computer is like an Old Testament God, with a lot of rules and no mercy.   *— Joseph Campbell*

A computer lets you make more mistakes faster than any invention in human history with the possible exceptions of handguns and tequila.   *— Mitch Ratliffe*

A human being is a computer's way of making another computer. Yes, we are their sex organs.
                              — Solomon Short

All parts should go together without forcing . You must remember that the parts you are reassembling were disassembled by you. Therefore, if you can't get them together again, there must be a reason. By all means, do not use a hammer.
                    — EBM computing machine
                    maintenance manual, 1925

Computers are useless. They can only give you answers.   *— Pablo Picasso*

Computers will never take the place of books. You can't stand on a floppy disk to reach a high shelf.
                              — Sam Ewing

Don't explain computers to laymen. Simpler to explain sex to virgins.
  — Robert Heinlein (The Moon is a Harsh Mistress)

Hardware: the parts of a computer that can be kicked.
                              — Jeff Pesis

Man is the best computer we can put aboard a spacecraft... and the only one that can be mass produced with unskilled labor.   *— Werner Von Braun*

No computer has ever been designed that is ever aware of what it's doing; but most of the time, we aren't either.   *— Marvin Minsky*

Selections From The DealsGuy

Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group

Watch That Power Rating

Some are aware of the recall on APC uninterrup-table power supplies. I bought a APC 350 VA UPS a while back and thought I was having problems with it recently. I called APC tech support to see if mine was affected by the recall (turns out it was) and the guy started asking me about what I had plugged into it. I had my 900 MHz Athlon desktop computer, my NEC XE21 monitor, my DSL modem and my Linksys router on it. He then told me my unit would not be covered under the recall because it had been overloaded. He offered me a special deal below wholesale (his words) for a new one (much larger).

When I questioned him further, he said that my 350 VA UPS would only handle about 280 watts and my computer's power supply alone is 350 watts (rating). Considering all that, he said I would need at least a 700 VA unit, and probably more. I was never aware that just a computer and monitor alone would over-load that UPS. I was under the impression that the 350 VA only had to do with how long it would sup-port your computer after the power went down. Live and learn. Looks like I need to spend a lot more money. I'm telling you this so you'll be aware. In

the past though, I used a 600 VA UPS for several years with no problem. According to his analysis, it would have been much too small. I have since found that my problem was not with the UPS, but instead was a defective power cord. Moving it seemed to get things working again and I thought it was the UPS's plugs. I finally tried a new power cord, which solved the problem. I also have a dif-ferent brand UPS now.

Let's Shrink It

While reading the DATA BUS, newsletter for SouthEastern Michigan Computer Organization, I saw the special for PicoZip at a 40% discount. I e-mailed Christopher Tan, the developer, asking if I could have the same special for the column and he was happy to oblige. PicoZip is a file compression utility that Supports ACE, ARC, ARJ, BH, CAB, GZ, JAR, LHA, LZH, RAR, TAR, TGZ, Z, ZIP, ZOO, XXE and UUE file formats. (Whew, I never heard of some of them) I understand it is a full-featured automated backup tool. Also comes with lifetime free upgrades.

To get a better explanation of this product, check the Web site [http://www.picozip.com]. The nor-mal price for PicoZip is $24.95, but my readers can get it for only $14.95 by using the special coupon code "PZDEALSGUY" when you access the special URL [http://www.picozip.com/coupon/coupon.php?couponid=PZDEALSGUY] to order. This offer is valid through August 31, 2003. File size is about 2.59 MB.

There is a review for PicoZip posted on my Web site on the Other Articles/Reviews page written by Franz Breidenich of SEMCO.

Need a Web Host?

Matt McCann needs no introduction to all of you. You have seen Matt in action many times doing presentations for your users group, and they were

Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC)Meetings

WAC Meetings will be held on August 16th & September 20th, 12:30 PM to 3:30 PM at the Fairfax County Govern-ment Center, 12000 Government Center Park-way, Fairfax, Virginia.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/

always memorable. Matt is offering something new, hosting for your Web site, and e-mail. According to his e-mail announcement, you can register your domain name for just $9.95 per year, or transfer your present domain name for the same including a one-year extension. Not bad! Web hosting is as low as $5.95 per month including one free e-mail account.

Check it out at [http://www.webhostinganddomains.net] for more information and pricing. I have been friends with Matt for many years and have confidence in the product he sells. I wish him the best with this new product. There are cheaper deals for this service, but we all know Matt well.

Ink Jet Deal Is Jetting Back Again

I don't often repeat a deal, but this one was very popular. Susie McLean of Inksell.com agreed to repeat the original deal offered last year and extend it until the end of this year (2003). The differences are: the expiration date, the coupon code, and free shipping on orders over $49.00 (an improvement). I am repeating it below with the changes.

"InkSell.com is a discount printing Supply Company that specializes in cartridges for all makes of ink jet and laser printers, solid ink printers, copiers, and fax machines. We sell brand names, new compatible cartridges (for most brands), and remanufactured cartridges and refill kits. Our compatible cartridge quality is certified to match that of the manufacturer and our prices are up to 70 and 80% less. We would be happy to offer DealsGuy readers a 10% discount on purchases at our online store.

"A discount coupon code will be valid through December 31, 2003. To redeem the 10% discount, (not valid with any other discount or offer), simply visit our site, [http://www.inksell.com], place your order and continue to 'check out' where there will be a blank to enter the discount coupon code (DealsGuy2003). The discount will be automatically calculated. Should anyone have questions or need assistance, phone customer service at 1-800-255-0483, or send e-mail to [help@inksell.com]. Don't forget the free shipping on orders over $49.00."

Its Not Free This Time — But It's Still A Bargain

Colleen Toumayan from Executive Software e-mailed me to let my readers know that they have a good price on Undelete and Diskeeper bundled together. The bundle is $39.95 and would normally be $59.90 if bought separately. About Diskeeper: "they say built-in defragmenters are slow, labor intensive and use too much system resources to keep up with the performance demands of today's computing needs. Ultimately, they don't get used. Running Diskeeper is like hiring an expert to constantly monitor and maintain your system's maximum performance."

About Undelete: "you store a lot of data on your computer, and you need to protect it 24/7. Re-creating accidentally deleted files takes a lot of time, and using backups to restore deleted files is not always reliable—especially if you've created and deleted something between backups. New Undelete replaces your recycle bin with a Recovery Bin, which catches all the files you delete so file recovery is quick and easy."

These products in the bundle are for home use and you can check them further at [http://consumer.execsoft.com/home.asp] to order them if you wish.

Talk About Tweaking!

Many of you have used TweakUI and loved it. It performs many very useful tasks for Windows. Lee Reynolds of Boca Raton Computer Society Inc. wrote
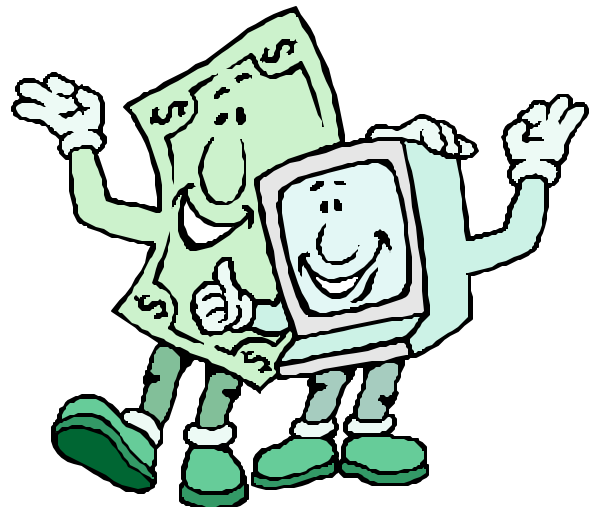
some time ago in his monthly "Nibbling At The Net" column about another even more useful utility that he feels is much better than TweakUI. It is Xteq X-Setup and can be found at [http://www.xteq.com]. It's absolutely free for home users. However, they do take donations if you enjoy using it.

This product has an incredible number of features that you can hardly imagine. It is also updated constantly. To add to its value, it also offers to help other software such as Office 97 and 2000; not to mention hardware installed on your computer. Sounds like a great product. Thanks for letting us know Lee.

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 any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [Bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [http://www.dealsguy.com] for past columns. I have also been busy putting up some interesting new articles on my Web site, so take a look. My thanks to the authors I was able to reach. However, they don't all answer their e-mail so I miss posting many very good articles there.

failed to send in the UPC tab, missed the "submit by" date, or bought the wrong companion item. But I've applied for dozens of rebates over the years, and with the exceptions noted, in came the checks.

So, why am I a rebate fan? Consider — let's say the average rebate is $20. It takes about 15 minutes to fill out the rebate coupon, clip the UPC tab, copy all the pieces for my records (I use my scanner, as Roger suggests, for that chore) and address and stamp an envelope. Experience tells me I'll get that rebate check — and be reimbursed for my time at an $80 per hour rate!

I can't fault the manufacturers for insisting that I observe all the nit-picky conditions on the rebate form — they're compensating me at over $160,000 a year to follow directions <grin>! I think the most important part of insuring you get the rebate is, as Roger suggests, sit down as soon as you get home and see what's required. Load up the software, or plug in your new toy, and make sure it works. Then, get all the pieces together and apply for the rebate!

One thing a computer can do that most humans can't is be sealed up in a cardboard box and sit in a warehouse.   *— Jack Handey*

There is only one satisfying way to boot a computer.
                              — J. H. Goldfuss

They have computers, and they may have other weapons of mass destruction.   *— Janet Reno*

The most likely way for the world to be destroyed, most experts agree, is by accident. We're computer professionals. We cause accidents.
                              — Nathaniel Borenstein

To err is human—and to blame it on a computer even more so.   *— Robert Orben*

Usenet is like a herd of performing elephants with diarrhea—massive, difficult to redirect, awe-inspiring, entertaining, and a source of mindboggling amounts of excrement when you least expect it.
                              — Gene Spafford

Wow! They've got the Internet on computers now!
                              — Homer Simpson
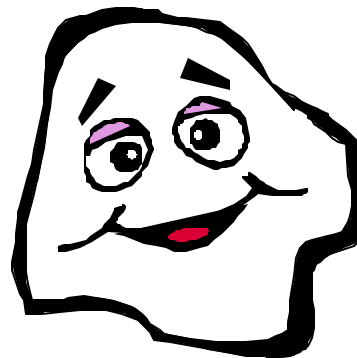
(Continued from page 14)

The rebate process is getting better, with some retailers, like Staples, allowing on-line applications. That cuts down on the number of pieces that need to be sent to the rebate processing center. Several of the rebate handling firms allow you to follow the flow of your application within their process over their web site. With luck, if you overlooked something, you might have the opportunity to fax or mail the missing piece before the deadline expires. That, of course, is extra work. Follow quality precepts, get it right the first time, and your check will get cranked out.

I will admit to hauling out the magnifying glass on occasion to read the fine print of some rebate coupons, but I needed that glass anyway to see some of the images in the clip art books I use for livening up web pages. I've also been known to resort to enlisting my significant other to quality check my rebate submissions. So, I

intend to continue checking the weekly advertising supplements in the paper for attractive rebate opportunities — and hope you'll do the same.

"Yes, Dear, I think it's a great idea to go to lunch today. Umm, you wouldn't mind a short detour to <tech toy store>? I need to pick up another piece of software for the scanner. Yes, it's on sale, and there's a great rebate thrown in that will cover the cost of lunch." But that's another story.............

NCTCUG Information

NCTCUG, Post Office Box 949, Arlington VA 22216

Club Information call: 301-577-7899   **Web Site: www.nctcug.org**

Random Bits

Blair Jones, NCTCUG

Google Fudd

Thanks to a member of a (non-computer topic!) mailing list that I'm on —

"Did you know that if you click on the Google site and then select Preferences (right side) and go to languages, along with French and Irish [and numerous other languages], you can select Elmer Fudd as a language?"
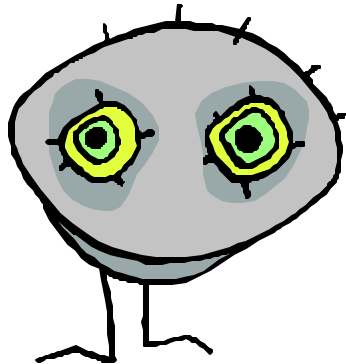
Yard Sale Serendipity

Right after I bought a digital camera, I was at my community yard sale. A young woman there was selling some of her boyfriend's (I'm not sure if that's "ex-" or not) computer "stuff". Included was a card reader for a certain type of memory card — I thought it would work with mine so I bought it — no manual or anything with it, but it had "SD" on it and that part looked right. For $2 how far wrong could I go? If I couldn't use it, someone else among us could!

I went to the company website, downloaded the driver, and Voila! Worked like a charm!

So keep your eyes peeled, you never know what you'll find in the oddest places. ✐
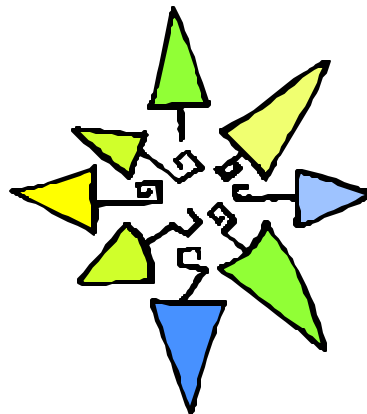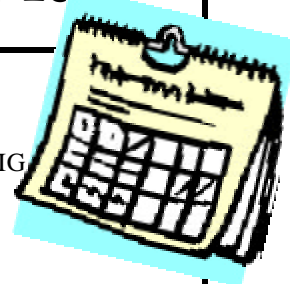
August/September 2003

1st Wed. (8/6, 9/3) **7 p.m.**
Virginia General Meeting

4th Wed (8/27, 9/24) **7 p.m.** Internet SIG

3rd Monday (9/22) **7 p.m.**
Board of Directors
(No meeting in August)

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.

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

First Class