



The NCTCUG Journal

www.nctcug.org

October 2007

Volume 30 Issue 6

Safe Computing With Consumer Reports

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Website: <http://www.ConsumerReports.org>

In the several years I have been writing this column, it is very unusual for me to write about a magazine. I subscribe to several print magazines, and quite a few online versions, but there is one magazine I especially look forward to each month, and that one is Consumer Reports. While best known for its evaluations and ratings of appliances, motor vehicles, and countless household items, it occasionally does cover computer and other technology products. For those interested in computer security and safety for the layperson, the September 2007 issue is a keeper. If you can find it on the news stand after reading this, I strongly urge you to purchase a copy; if you can not find a copy for sale, then it will likely be worth a trip to the library to read.

What makes the September 2007 issue so applicable to us and our computing safety and security is the cover story "Stop ID Thieves – 19 ways to protect yourself online". The bulleted subtitles on the cover

are: "New threats to avoid"; "Best software for viruses, spam & spyware"; and "Don't get hooked by a 'phish'". About a dozen well written pages in this issue on computing security and software provide the reader with a wealth of useful and easy to comprehend "non geek-speak" information on the topic. Following the security articles are reviews and ratings of popular desktop and notebook (laptop) computers, which add to the usefulness of this edition. There is also a wealth of other non-technical information in this issue, including such wide ranging topics as ratings of popcorn to health insurance providers to dark chocolate.

In a section titled "Protect Yourself Online – State of the Net '07" (pages 28 – 34), "Net Threats" are explained. Identity theft opens the article, with a statement credited to Symantec, that identity thieves are paying from \$14 to \$18 for every stolen identity, with a cost in 2006 to businesses and consumers of a staggering \$49.3 billion, according to Javelin Strat-

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A Router Can Help Protect Your Computer

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A few years ago, you had probably not heard the term "router", unless you used one in your wood-working class in high school. Today, you hear much more about the word "router" when it is used in conjunction with computers and the Internet. In the computer world, a router is an important piece of equipment and one that is making its way into everyday terminology. So I would like to tell you a little about what a router is and what it can do for you.

A router is a hardware device that connects networks of two or more computers and forwards data across a network of computers. Devices like network printers can also be hooked up to a router. Routers that you might see in home and small business use are generally small rectangular or square devices about 6" to 8" in size. This type of router will have ports on the back where you can hook in computers, broadband modems, and other devices. A router has lights that indicate its status and the status of the connected devices. Wireless modems often have small antennas. Routers can usually sit on a desktop or the floor, but they can also be hung on a wall.

You can think of a router as a kind of traffic cop that stands on the corner and routes the traffic to their final destination. Just as a traffic cop knows which direction a car is coming from and which way it wants to go, a router knows what data comes from each of the computers, what data each computer has requested, and what data to return to each computer. Routers are the workhorses of the Internet. They make sure that your email gets to your intended recipient rather than one of the millions of other computers. Within a smaller network routers make sure that the data or the webpage that you request is returned to your computer and not the computer of your co-worker or other family member.

While routers have been used for years in the Internet and by businesses, the proliferation of home networks has brought the router into the home and into the realm of the average computer user. In a home, a router typically is used to share an Internet connection. It connects a home network of two or more computers with the network of your Internet Service

Provider (ISP), giving each of your computers Internet connectivity. Your ISP issues you one address on the Internet, called an IP or Internet Protocol address. If you have multiple machines at home, a router lets you share that single IP address.

The router watches the traffic going out and waits for the response to the outgoing traffic. It then routes the incoming traffic to the proper computer within your home network. Since the router is watching all the traffic, it knows what information you have requested and only allows incoming traffic that is expected. So if your computer has requested a Web page, it will allow that Web page to come into your computer. Other traffic that has not been requested is tossed aside and not allowed to come in.

This ignoring of unexpected incoming traffic has an interesting side effect. It actually protects your computer from many malicious attacks from the outside. So the router, since it protects all the computers on your network, is considered a hardware firewall.

In fact, a router plus the firewall that is built-into Windows will, in my opinion, give the average user all the protection that they need. That is, provided that they follow safe computing procedures, like not opening unexpected email attachments and running a good antivirus program.

For heavy duty computer users who want to make sure that their computers are completely protected, third party software firewalls, like those offered by Symantec, McAfee, and Zone Alarm, do offer the added safeguard of watching the traffic flowing in and out of each software program on your computer. However, these firewalls can slow down your computer. They often ask the computer user to permit or deny permission for programs that request Internet access. If you are just an average Joe, it can often be very difficult to determine if

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Configuring Outlook Express

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You can greatly improve your e-mail experience by properly configuring Outlook Express, which is the default Windows e-mail client. Outlook, which is included with MS Office, is a completely different program, but it has a similar user interface for e-mail. The two programs are similar enough that you should have no trouble adapting these procedures to your version. You should modify them as you get more experience with your particular mix of e-mail messages.

By default, Outlook Express has X folders. You should add to these to organize your e-mail messages to make them easier to find in the same way that you organize your file system by using folders there. Set up a separate folder for each major category of e-mail that you send and receive. With Outlook running, click on "File", select "New", and then click on "Folder...". Put the desired name in the "Name:" box and select

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you should grant or deny that permission since the names of the files are often nebulous. I can't tell you how many times I have been called to repair someone's Internet connectivity only to find out that they had inadvertently told the firewall to deny Internet access to a program that can't function without it.

So having a router not only lets you share an Internet connection, it also protects your computer without slowing it down. As a matter of fact, even if you only have one computer, you can still use a router between your broadband Internet connection and your computer to help protect your perimeter. With the price of small routers falling to under \$50, a router can be a wise investment for today's computer user, even if they have to pay someone to come in and set it up for them.

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"Personal Folders" in the "Select where to place the folder:" box. Move the messages in your Inbox to the appropriate folders. While you're at it, delete any you don't need. You will probably find some messages that don't belong in any folder; just leave these in the Inbox. Consider having Outlook Express empty the Deleted Messages folder every time you exit the program.

You will now set up a series of rules that tell Outlook where to place incoming messages, using the following procedure. Click on the Organize icon and then the Rules Wizard menu item. Click on the New... button to create a new rule or the Modify... one to change a rule. Assuming you are creating a new rule, the first screen asks you what kind of rule you want, which is usually "Check messages as they arrive." At the bottom of each screen is a window showing the rule as you've defined it so far. You can click on any underlined terms in the rule to change them. (When you are defining a new rule, you must define these before you can go the next screen.) The second screen lets you specify for which conditions you want to test. In the third screen you set what to do with the message, and the fourth one lets you add any exceptions. Finally, name the rule.

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First, establish the rules to move incoming messages to the desired folder. Make the following choices for the rules screens. Screen 1 – “Check messages as they arrive”. Screen 2 – “from people or distribution list”. (Select the names from your address book.) Screen 3 – select both “move it to the specified folder” and “stop processing more rules”. (Click on specified and select an existing folder or create a new one.) Screen 4 – you probably won’t need any exceptions. Screen 5 – give the rule the same name as the folder. Repeat this until you have specified folders for all the people from whom you regularly receive mail.

By default, Outlook indicates junk mail by showing it in gray and adult content in purple. (I love that we use the new-speak term “adult” to describe content that most of us lose interest in by the time we leave adolescence.) To get rid of it, set up the following rule. Screen 1 – “Check messages when they arrive”. Screen 2 – “suspected to be junk e-mail or from Junk Senders”. (You will see a message asking if this is to be applied to every message you receive; select “Yes”.) Screen 3 – “move it to the specified folder”, probably “Deleted Items”. Screen 4 – no exceptions. Screen 5 – name it “Junk Senders”. Repeat this procedure, but for screen 2 select “Containing adult content or from adult content...”.

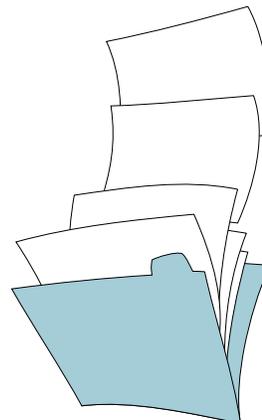
You will probably find that these filters are not very effective. The following step is quite effective in eliminating spam, but it deletes all messages sent to you on a “copy to” (cc) or “blind copy to” (bcc) list. I use bcc routing on the Roundtable and Hardware SIG meeting notices. Unless you have set up a rule to route messages from me to a folder and then to stop processing other rules, Outlook will delete these meeting notices. Repeat again but select “Where my name is not in the To box” in screen 2. Monitor the results of this rule in case you need to add exceptions. Note also that if you don’t have your incoming mailed sent to folders as above, you will need exemptions for every correspondent that uses cc or bcc routing.

If you follow my suggestions, you are sending all suspect e-mail to the Deleted Items folder. On my PC, everything in this folder is erased each time I exit Outlook, which means that you should look before you exit, at least for a month or so. By the way, I find that many such messages attempt to access the Internet when you open them. I think that they are just downloading graphics, but I don’t want to take a chance that they are doing something sneaky. After I download my e-mail I disconnect so I can abort such actions. (If you have high-speed access you probably can’t easily do this.)

Your last step is to order your rules list. The rules moving the desired e-mail to the correct folders should appear at the top of the list. Since they stop checking other rules after they move a message, they will prevent the spam filter rules from throwing out messages from people with whom you regularly correspond. To do this, click on “Rules Wizard...” and use the “Move Up” and “Move Down” buttons to sort the rules. You will have to reorder the rules each time you add a new one.

You will probably find that some spam still gets through. You can add to your junk senders list by right clicking on the message, selecting “Junk e-mail, and clicking on “Add to Junk Senders list”. However, many spammers change their e-mail address with each message, making this ineffective. In such cases, see if you can identify the junk in some other way, perhaps by looking for specific words or in one of the fields (address, header, etc.). Keep in mind however, that your goal is not to completely eliminate spam, but to reduce it to a manageable volume. Don’t let yourself become obsessed.

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Renew The Artist In You: ArtRage 2

A Review By Rob Rice, a computer specialist living in Anchorage, Alaska and a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City; <http://www.ccokc.org> [articles\(at\)isp.com](mailto:articles(at)isp.com)

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

Spring is a season of light, color and renewal; it is a season that can bring out the artist in all of us. When I look at a product like *ArtRage 2*, by *Ambient Design*, I can feel some of that same renewal that spring offers right there on my computer screen. A clean, well behaved and very intuitive product, the free version of ArtRage 2 is about as difficult as finger painting.

Coded in the low stress environment of a New Zealand forest, just outside of Auckland, ArtRage is a nice blend of a simple user interface with the power to create high quality work. I say that ArtRage is about as difficult as finger painting and I mean that, but do not think that it shares finger painting's limitations. One look at some of those samples on this page (From the Ambient Design website) should be obvious.

Since its initial release by former MetaCreations Corporation employees Andy Bearsley and Matt Fox-Wilson in 2004 as a free product, ArtRage has been

steadily polished and improved. Available in English, French and German versions, for both Windows and MacOSX, a new edition for the UltraMobile PC is also available.

A recipient of many awards, ArtRage comes with a good user's manual and several helpful tutorials are available on the Ambient Design website, such as how to paint a Macaw.

Installing and opening ArtRage 2 offers no surprises, such as ads, spyware, or pressure to buy the full version. You are greeted with a clean interface. On the lower left is your Tool Picker which contains:

- Oil Brush.
- Pencil.
- Palette Knife.
- Eyedropper.
- Felt Pen.
- Chalk.
- Crayon.
- Eraser



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More tools are added in the full version such as Airbrush, Paint Tube, Glitter, and Paint Roller.

On the lower right is the Color Picker. At top is a menu containing such familiar options as File, Edit, Tools, and Help.

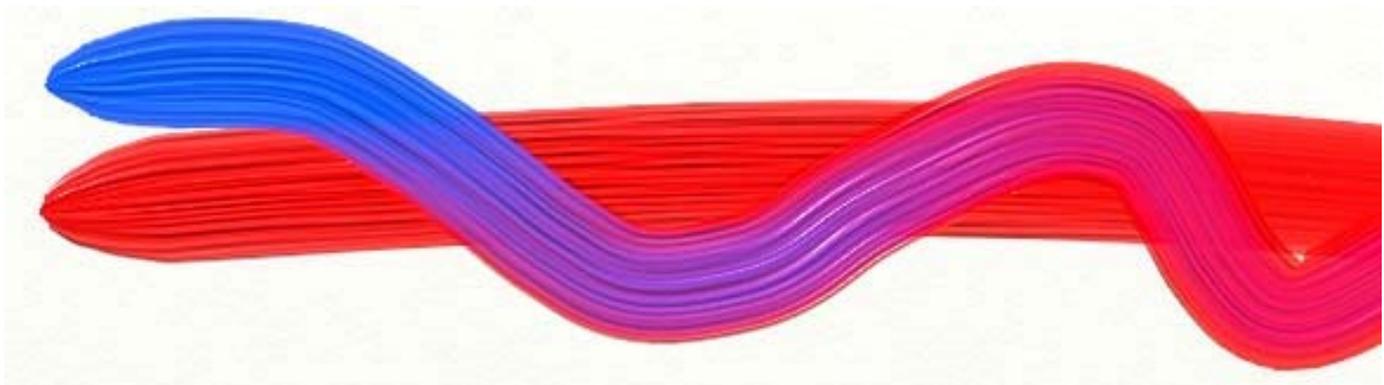
Various other menus are located at the sides which allow for brush pressure and tilt angle. One of my favorite features is the Tracing Images and References feature. With Tracing Image the original is projected on to your canvas so that you can use it as a guide while you sketch and paint. Other features include (From the Ambient Design website):

- **Layers:** Paint on transparent layers to build up more complex images without the paint blending with your underlying work. The texture of the underlying paint will still show through, as if it were dry on your canvas. ArtRage also provides full support for all 23 Photoshop layer blend modes.
- **PSD Support:** Import and export PSD files, with their layers intact.
- **Custom Colours:** Load and save custom colour set and colour pickers to fine tune your colour work.
- **Crop & Resize:** Crop and resize your paintings during work.

- **Simple, Intuitive Interface:** The ArtRage interface is easy to understand and doesn't get in the way of your work. In fact, it even gets out of the way while you're painting...
- **Customizable Canvases:** Change the grain, colour, and even metallic nature of your canvas at any time during your work.
- **Canvas Positioning:** Move, Scale, and Rotate the canvas to your preferred angle.
- **Tablet Support:** ArtRage uses your tablet's pressure and tilt support where available.
- **Tool Cursors:** Every tool has a cursor that tells you exactly how big the tool head is, to make it easier to see what's going to be applied.
- **Multi-Monitor Support:** ArtRage supports multi-monitor systems.

It appears that every effort has been made to make the painting and drawing as realistically as possible - even down to providing a water glass to clean your brush in!

Paints blend predictably or not at all, your choice. Textures, blending and smudging all appear extremely accurate.



As I mentioned earlier, there is a Full version which sells for \$19.95. It unlocks several features such as the Metallic Paint option; with this feature enabled you can paint with gold and silver oil paints, sparkling glitter, silver leaf sprays and more. Tools can be switched to Metallic mode for a range of effects.

Checking with the forums to see what users were saying about the product, a common topic was how, after using the free version of ArtRage, they bought the full version and never looked back. After playing with the free edition, I can see why. ArtRage 2 is a terrific program and worth the money. ArtRage 2 is rare combination of a program that can do high quality work and yet make the computer fun again!

Windows: Windows XP, 2k, or Tablet PC. 800 MHz processor or faster and 256 megabytes of RAM.

Macintosh: Macintosh OS X 10.3.9 or later. G4 processor or faster and 256 megabytes of RAM. ArtRage for OS X is a universal binary.

Ambient Design: <http://www.ambientdesign.com/>

ArtRage 2 at Ambient Design:
<http://www.ambientdesign.com/arage.html>

ArtRage 2 Quick Start Guide:
<http://www2.ambientdesign.com/files/quickstart.zip>

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Software Review: Adobe Photoshop Elements 5

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Adobe Photoshop Elements 5 is a photo editing and organizing program that also includes easy to use features to backup your photos, and really fun creative ways to show off your photos to family and friends.

Adobe Photoshop is the top of the line photo program for the professionals and costs hundreds of dollars. Elements (under \$100) has many of the same features as the professional version with a lot of fun and easy features added in, making it the software choice for the non-professional user like you and me.

The software installs the Adobe Photo Downloader in your system tray and is ready instantly whenever you plug in your camera or memory card. Your photos are downloaded into the Organizer where you have easy access to them for viewing, tagging, creating collections, printing, emailing, creating all the fun projects, or switching to the Edit mode for a Quick Fix or Full Edit. Your photos are identified by Elements in Catalogs. You can have multiple catalogs for different users of your computer in the family, or say for photos that you may use for work which you want to keep separate from home photos. You can even use the Organizer to select photos to order prints online or size and send through your email client. Your photos are managed by date with a timeline across the top of the screen that is very easy to navigate when you are looking for a photo at a specific time on the calendar. The Tags and Collections feature takes a few extra minutes when you first download the photos, but sure makes it easier to select certain photos when you are ready to create a project. Tags can be given for photos of specific family, friends or places and events. Collections work in a similar fashion but could include several different people, say in a vacation.

Since software packages come with little or no manuals, I find that one of my first places to explore is the Help feature. The Adobe Help Center, which is on the Help menu, includes a very extensive index of help on the program as well as hyperlinks to video tutorials on the Adobe web site. The Help Center includes a very good Search tool with easy navigation and even a

Bookmark feature where you can bookmark a topic that you may want to return to again quickly. I was also offered free online tutorials from Adobe after I registered the software. Be sure to take advantage of this offer. There are eleven video tutorials that give a very good overview of everything from getting your photos into Elements to creating fun creative projects. Another quick way to get to help on any of the tools on the screen is to hover your mouse over the tool and a link appears that takes you directly to the Help Center on that tool. You will find that you don't miss the manual with this complete Adobe Help Center.

When the Elements program starts there is a Welcome Screen where you can choose to open the Organizer, Quickly Fix Photos, Edit and Enhance Photos, or Make Photo Creations. Once you decide which mode you want to begin with you can set the Welcome Screen to always open in that mode or stay with the Welcome Screen. Since you need to open a photo in order to edit it or select several photos for projects it made sense to me to always open in the Organizer mode.

With a right click of a photo in the Organizer you can select the Go to Quick Fix feature as a truly "quick fix". With this feature you are able to fix the most common problems with your photos without having to know any of the more advanced features. Now mind you the advanced features are in Elements, but you may find that you seldom need to go into that mode to get the results that you want. With Quick Fix mode you have auto buttons for lighting, color, sharpen and red eye. Then if the auto button doesn't quite get the photo like you want there are fine tuning levers to adjust to finish the job. If you just can't get the look you want you can click the Full Edit tab from this window and go into the more fully featured mode of Elements to complete the task.

Some of the new features for editing in Elements include correct lens distortion, sharpen blurred edges, fine-tuning with curves, creating dramatic black and

whites and support for raw files. One of my very favorite features of Elements in the Full Edit mode is the Artwork and Effects Palette. From this palette you can pick from dozens of backgrounds, frames, graphics and shapes. Then select a style for that object from a dozen more selections and just drag and drop onto your photo. This palette includes different themes for effects, filters for effects and text styles, all applied with a double click. There is even a Favorites area where you can drag an effect that you especially liked and want to get back to quickly. A couple other favorites of mine in the Full Edit mode are the Adjust Color for Skin Tone and the Spot Healing Brush. If you have a photo where the skin color just doesn't look right you can use the Adjust Color for Skin Tone feature to quickly change the skin tone by using the eyedropper over the skin. If you want the result a little more tan or blush there are easy adjustments in that same dialog box. The Spot Healing Brush works wonders for those marks and blemishes just by clicking over the area. There is also a new feature called Magic Extractor that provides an easy wizard to extract an object (or person) from your photo. Again there are fine tuning options in this

wizard if the extraction is not quite what you want. I found that this features works very well. The red eye fix in Elements 5 is by far the best red eye fix that I have used in a photo editing program. There is even an option to have red eye corrected as your photos are being downloaded from the card reader.

Elements 5 has added a Back-Up and Restore feature that allows you to back up your photo catalogs to a server online (you have to sign up for this service). The online back up service through Adobe PhotoShop Services gives you a 30 day free trial. There is also a Back-Up feature that will do Full and Incremental back ups of your catalogs to a CD or DVD, another drive, or another folder on the hard drive. This feature is Wizard driven and makes this very important task quick and easy, without leaving the Elements software. This feature is right there on the tool bar along with all the other online services.

Once you have your photos downloaded, edited and backed up it is time for the really fun part of Elements 5 – creating projects like photo book pages, photo layouts, album pages, greeting cards, CD and

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DVD jackets and labels, slide shows, VCD's with menus, photo galleries and flipbooks for the web, photo calendars, and PhotoStamps. Most of the print projects can be printed on your own printer or ordered through an online service that can be set up with a wizard right in Elements. I didn't register for the online service but was very tempted by some of the neat projects that can be created and then sent off for printing and delivery. For instance the photo calendar can be created with 12 of your photos and then step through the wizard to choose the cover, page layout, and title, etc. Then through the wizard the calendars will be printed, bound and mailed – what a great idea for Christmas gifts!

I decided to create a slide show with photos taken at Disney World. After selecting the photos from the Organizer and then selecting Slideshow from the Create menu the wizard started with slide show preferences and then the main Slideshow Editor opens with very full featured options that are available in most of the stand alone slide show programs. This feature is like a program within a program – I am really impressed with the scope of the Slideshow Editor. There are transition options, panning and zooming, audio and narration, and adding blank sides and graphics and text.

Once you have the show the way you like it the Output feature opens another wizard for options to save the show as a file, burn to disc, e-mail the show or send to a TV. The wizard works great burning to a Video CD format. (The only option that I would like to see added would be to burn to DVD.) If you have several slide shows that you would like to burn to one CD you can select the Create a VCD with menu and the wizard will allow you to add multiple slideshows and then create a menu before burning.

The next project I tried was to create a Photo Gallery. With the same Disney photos selected the Photo Gallery opens a wizard with three types of galleries; Web Galleries, Animated or Interactive. With Web Galleries chosen the wizard asks for arrangement of the photos on the page and a style with both options showing thumbnails of how your choice will look. Next the wizard opens a dialog window with more options to customize, such as Gallery Title and Slide-

show duration and effects. You then can select where to Share the gallery; either choose Do Not Share (which saves to your hard drive), Photoshop Showcase (more about this later), My FTP Site, or CD. I also tried the Animated and Interactive galleries with the same photos. The wizard makes creating these very complex shows a breeze. If you don't know how to publish to your web space a dialog box offers simple steps to help with that task, or you can register and sign on to the [free](#) Adobe Photoshop Elements Showcase feature. This is an online community for users of Elements to upload and share their photos and galleries.

Each project that you create and save is added to the Organizer at the top. If you want to edit a project you just double-click the project file and the wizard that was used to create it opens. All of the print projects like the Photo Book Pages, Photo Layouts and Album Pages, are saved (with multiple pages when applicable) with a .pse extension. The print projects are wizard driven and offer step by step selections for size, layout, theme and then additional options depending on the project chosen. I decided to make a print project of a CD cover and label for the Disney slide show that I created earlier. The wizard walked me through the entire process opening Elements in the Full Edit mode with my selected photo and all the layers in the layer palette created – it truly seemed like magic. Since you are left in this mode you can then adjust or fine tune the project before saving and printing it.

One feature that I was not able to try but may be of interest to some reading this review is the ability to download and upload photos from a mobile phone.

I highly recommend Adobe Photoshop Elements 5. There is an upgrade rebate in the box of \$20, so if you are using an older version you can take advantage of that. The price today at Amazon.com is \$69.99 with free shipping and your \$20 rebate makes the total price \$49.99. There are other special offers at local stores and online. Visit Adobe's web page www.adobe.com for system requirements.

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Software Review

Zoo Tycoon 2: Zookeeper's Collection

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This game could easily capture the interest of all age levels. Grandparents looking for a great item to have around for the grandchildren should read on! Children of all ages, including the child in all of us, might get a lot of

joy (and learning) by giving Zoo Tycoon 2 a try. After that, you may be hooked. James, (my eleven-year-old son) and I have been given this wonderful opportunity to test drive this game. We will share with the rest of you what we have discovered, enjoyed, learned, and we will even mention a few areas that we see could be improved upon.

Zoo Tycoon 2 is packed full of options, both within the software and on the Internet. When you first open the game, a screen is opened that allows you to see "Zoo News" and the "Community." Upon clicking one of these selections, you can be connected to the Web page that will allow you to join the Web forums and to get additional downloads. You can get tips, bonus downloads for free, and you can purchase additional expansion packs that can be added on to your game. For example, right now they are offering the Dinosaur pack. Or you can just click in the lower right-hand corner of this opening screen which gives you the option to Play.

Running a zoo with this game is incredible. The player gets to start from the beginning. There are a lot of choices. From the layout of each animal home size to the various animals you bring in, the variety is amazing. If there is something you don't know about the animal you are selecting, there is a symbol of a book that you can click on. It will bring up a window with

the information that you would need to know. You also get to lay out the food and gift shops. James says, "Don't forget to give your visitors maps in various locations." You can set up viewing binoculars and recreation areas that include inflatables to jump on and various activities for everyone. Donation boxes can be set up through the zoo, along with water fountains and other facilities. You also get to turn on your camera and go take snapshots of your animals to compile a photo album. When the animals are happy, they will have wonderful bright green grins hovering above their heads. You make them happy by giving them enough room, the right habitat, coming in and cleaning them, feeding them the right food, and finding just the right toys they like to play with. They are really happy when you remember to do all of this and give them a mate. If your zoo is lucky, they will have babies. Sometimes twins are even born.

Your zoo can become the most sought out tourist attraction yet! You can create a wonderful Jeep vehicle tour that the visitors will line up and wait their turn for. This takes them among the animals and really allows for some close-up photography. You can even put in a sky tram that will allow your guests to get a bird's-eye view of the animals in their natural habitats. You can choose the Zoo Guest Mode, which allows you to go in among your animals and be a participant with the various activities taking place with your animals. You can even choose to swim with the penguins!

Upon being asked to give a review of this software, we were also asked to include any complaints and suggestions that might make it better. We pondered this and came up with a few. In James' opinion, he would like to see the Zoo Guest Mode expanded. He loves that he can be active in his own zoo by swimming with the animals and walking through the zoo. It would be nice to include the ability to be able to do other various activities such as eat in the restau-

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rants, buy food from the booths, play in the children's play areas, and to be able to look through the binoculars. While building and creating your zoo and running it, there is always the same music playing in the background. It would be nice to have a variety of music to select from. Another item that we would like to see but never discovered was a bilevel viewing area for some of the animals. For instance, the Hippopotamus loves to swim, but the only view we could arrange was for the guest to be looking down on him in the pool. It would be nice to set up an area that would include a looking glass area similar to an aquarium. That would enable the different angles. James says a petting zoo would be nice! Last, we never could find the proper food for the koala. Therefore, we could never keep him in our zoo.

As a mother and a home educator, I was continuously amazed at what educational value this game has. Any adult should try these types of games at least once before being too quick to ridicule games. There is always so much going on. The player must continuously keep up with it all. They are multitasking tenfold! They must constantly go in and clean and feed the animals. If the guests seem unhappy,



they must find out why and fix the issue. They must research the animals to know what the proper habitat will be. They learn that taking care of anything or anyone is not easy. They also get the joy and reward of being successful. I was so impressed by my son's progression in his created zoos. He also loves to open his zoo from the beginning and give a formal presentation. It is very impressive. We will definitely be adding this one to our own personal collec-

tion.

Are you interested? Here is a little bit of detailed information that you may want to know. We hope this gives you an idea of what to expect as you get started. The ease of use is excellent. On loading the game for each user, you are asked, "Would you like to learn how to play Zoo Tycoon 2?" (This makes it very easy to jump right in.) If you click on the green check mark, then it will take you through various tutorials teaching you the particulars of the game. You can also choose to do a Campaign, a Challenge, or a Freeform game from the main menu. One thing to remember is that while you are in your level working, you must use your keyboard keys to get back to the main menu. Maybe they will add an Exit button. Until then, use the Escape key to bring up the option to save, exit or return to main menu.

If you choose a campaign, then you are given a list of objectives that you are to complete. The first three titles to choose from are tutorials of the various game themes that are included with this installation. One is Zoo Tycoon 2, the original, while the other two are the tutorials for the Endangered Species and the African Adventure expansions that are included in the Zookeepers Collection. The tutorials are highly useful for someone who is not familiar with the particulars of playing Microsoft Games. Other titles include Zoos in Trouble, The Globe, and Conservation Programs. When you select one, the details are listed in the right column of the screen telling you the various information of that specific selection. Items such as the location your zoo will be in, the difficulty level, the map size of your zoo, and the amount of money you get to start with to create your zoo.

The Challenge selection is set up with a little bit more choice to accept or decline the challenges being offered. They present you with specific criteria that you can say yes or no to. When you accept, you can be rewarded, but if you fail the challenge, there can be negative consequences. With the challenges, you have a little more freedom. You can even increase the amount of money you have to start your zoo with. When playing this level, you can decline until you feel you have had enough time to get your zoo started and are ready to focus on tasks.

The Freeform game is exactly as it implies. You have unlimited cash and you are not given any objectives or goals. You can just feel free to play and build your zoo up to a success. This level seemed more enjoyable to my son at first. It allowed him time to discover the game and its methods.

With all of the above choices, you are always given the same screen while playing. When the game begins, you see three main and very important items along the top of the screen. In the left you see five stars that are hollowed out that fill in as your zoo gains popularity. In the center you have a message queue that keeps you informed of various situations throughout the game. For example, you may get a note saying that your Pygmy Hippopotamus is pregnant. Or you may be notified that one of your animals needs more room. In the top right corner you see your operating funds. You can increase your revenue through admissions, donations, and profits from your concessions, restaurants, and the gift shop.

Zoo Tycoon 2 is rated "E" for Everyone to Everyone 10+. As an ICON member who saw a lot of grandparents looking at various game systems at our March of Technology event, I would suggest some turn straight to their PCs. This is good clean fun, and most will enjoy it and never even suspect there could be any benefit other than fun. It is recommended to have Windows XP or Vista, 512 MB RAM, 1GHz Processor, 1 GB hard drive, Video Card of 32 MB hardware, T & L Direct X 9.0 or later.



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Washington Area Computer User Group

WACUG Meetings will be held on **October 13, 2007 [2nd Saturday]** from 12:30 to 3:30 pm . at the Fairfax County Government Center, 2000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA .

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

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

Club News

From Paul L. Howard

Several meetings ago, I presented a demo of **RoboForm**, an Internet password manager and form completion program.

I've arranged a 20% discount on this program; the company discounts their other products when you buy one. I've used this product since just before the new year — after seven months, I'd collected, or logged into 47 web sites needing passwords — financial, banking, healthcare, etc. Information stored on your computer is encrypted, and requires only one password to access/start the program. You can also print out a list of all your passwords, to store in your Safe Deposit box. There is a trial version of the program available, with somewhat limited features.

Go here for the discount: http://www.roboform.com/php/pums/rfprepay.php?lic=wacug_rf&buydirect=yes

You can learn more about this program at Siber Systems' web site - this is a Fairfax County firm! <http://www.roboform.com>

This program is a great way to securely access web sites with non-trivial passwords, and fill out the typical on line ordering form with one mouse click.

Try it — you'll like it!

Club Election Notice

The NCTCUG Annual Meeting and election of officers and board members will be at the October meeting — October 3, 2007, 7 p.m. at Carlin Hall.

Anyone interested in running for office, please contact any board member. All officers and four board positions are to be voted on.

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egy & Research. A survey conducted by Consumer Reports found that an individual's chance of becoming a "cybervictim" is about 1 in 4, as consumers continue to fall victim to internet criminals. About 8% of us revealed sensitive personal and financial information in response to bogus emails. Other material findings of the survey indicated that despite the wide availability of antivirus and anti-spyware software, we are still being victimized by the virus and spyware threat. Over the past two years, 38% of us had our computers infected by a virus, while in the six months preceding the survey, 34% reported a spyware infection. It was estimated that 1.8 million of us replaced a PC not because it was obsolete or worn out, but because they were virus infected. Spyware infections caused us to replace an estimated 850,000 computers! Despite the ominous threats, 17% do not have antivirus software installed, and 33% do not have spyware protection.

It was also estimated that 3.7 million US households with broadband internet go online without the benefit of a firewall, a hardware or software product that can provide significant protection from online intrusion by hackers. In a finding that I have personally demonstrated locally, the survey found that fully half of all wireless internet households do not implement even the simplest precautions, such as enabling wireless encryption. No wonder so many of us are victimized by internet crooks.

As most of us can attest to, spam (unsolicited commercial or junk email), is still a significant annoyance, with one-half of the respondents reporting high levels of spam (page 30). While many computer users reported that their computers had been infected by viruses, one-fifth of respondents had a major virus problem that was costly to resolve, costing an average cost per incident of \$100, with an estimated total damage of \$3.3 billion. While more common than viruses, spyware was also costly to remove with about 9% of respondents saying that it cost them an average of \$100 each to eradicate, for a total cost of \$1.7 billion. Sadly, despite frequent warnings in this column and elsewhere, 1 in 81 respondents lost money from an account by being a victim of phishing (a common form of identity theft using spoofed emails and websites), with an average loss of \$200; that still totaled an estimated \$2.1 billion (page 31). Consumer Reports does an excellent job presenting the solutions to these common internet problems and threats, this information well justifying the purchase of this issue.

Many of us sell or donate our old computers after we no longer need them. What many do not consider is the personally sensitive information that may still reside on the hard drive, and how that information can be illicitly purloined by identity thieves. Consumer Reports has a recommendation on a free software product (Eraser) which can safely delete information from a hard drive before disposing of the obsolete computer.

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The media and computer gurus should be shouting out the 19 tips that Consumer Reports calls the “Best ways to stay safe online” (pages 32 and 33). Many of the tips should be familiar to readers of this column, and are common sense to many who surf the net. The tips include such items as activate the protection already provided by your operating system and browser, updating and renewing the operating system and security software, turning off the computer when not used for long periods, consider a Mac, watch downloads, consider an integrated software security suite, run antivirus software, run two anti-spyware programs, use credit cards appropriately, protect personal information, and other great tips.

I am frequently asked for my recommendation on security software. While we all have our opinions

based on personal experiences or anecdotal information, the September 2007 issue of Consumer Reports actually tested many of the products available. It is especially noteworthy that some of the best sellers at retail came out in the extremes of the testing, either at the top or bottom of the ratings. Trend Micro’s PC-cillin Internet Security 2007 was the top performing security suite (page 36), and Trend Micro also had the top performing antivirus program (also integrated in the suite). Trend’s free standing anti-spyware product took top honors (page 38), as did its antispam product (page 39). For those considering renewing an existing security program or purchasing a new one, these reviews and ratings may provide much valuable information.

I do not think that I have ever previously recommended a specific issue of a national magazine in this column. Now, I strongly urge you to get a hold of the Consumer Reports September 2007 issue with the “Stop ID Thieves” cover story. In terms of computing safety and

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NCTCUG Information

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Web Site: www.nctcug.org

Officers and Directors

All officer terms expire 2007

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Article Submissions

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

Membership Policy

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

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Thank You!

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security, this may be one of the most valuable and low cost investments you can make. A subscription to Consumer Reports, which has published other technology reviews in the past, would also be a great idea. Just do it.



Happy Halloween

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

First Class



October 2007

1st Wed. (10/3)

7 p.m. General Meeting

Annual Meeting & Election

4th Wed (10/24)

7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (10/15)

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.