The NCTCUG Journal
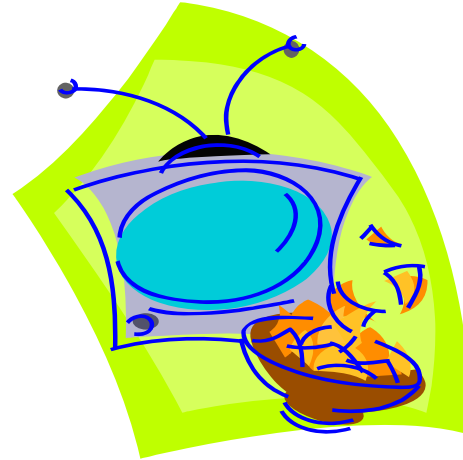
Keeping Up

By Paul Howard

I have seen the light <grin>! As I write this, I've been a Verizon FiOS subscriber for about a month. The big attraction for my household of this FTTP or "fiber optic cable to the premises" was FiOS TV service. I've been an "off the air" TV person for the 25 years I've lived in VA. About 85% of US households have cable or satellite TV services. Until I retired in late 2003, I never had the time to watch that much TV. Now the choices seem endless, and that's without any of the premium movie packages, or sports premium services.

I am constantly in awe of the FiOS picture quality — granted, it's standard def, since I haven't sprung for a high definition TV yet. As the local television stations upgraded their antenna systems to broadcast hi-def, digital signals, I lost the ability to count on a reliable signal from several local non-commercial broadcasters. With FiOS, everything is sharp and static free, and Verizon includes the multiple broadcasts that many stations now offer, as the new digital transmissions offer the ability to get three or four programs in the same 6 MHz RF bandwidth used by the old analog TV approach.
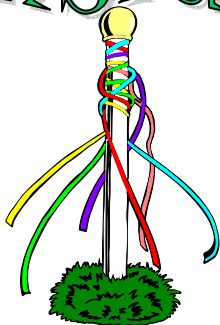
Set-top boxes (read: monthly fees per each) are required to get the full range of features, such as video on demand (VOD), and fancy program guide. The standard def set-top boxes offer limited video output choices — S-VHS being the highest quality. The standard def DVR (digital video recorder) doesn't offer an RF (coax cable) output. There is a "digital adapter" box available at $3.95 a month that doesn't give access to VOD and super program guide, vs. the standard def set-top box at $5.99 a month.

TV sets can be hooked up to FiOS coax cable without a "box" to receive Verizon's local tier of service, which carries the local broadcast channels and lots of government and college / university broadcasts in 50 chan-

Inside

Moving on to Vista

By Neil Stahfest, Shareware Librarian, Tacoma Area PC User Group, WA
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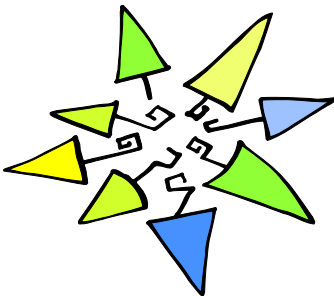
Part 1

I tested a pre-release version of Windows Vista last year. I thought that the eye candy was nice but there really wasn't a lot about the program to make it worth upgrading my PC to use it. Since then I've heard stories about problems with Vista that made me even reluctant to upgrade to it. But, things happen. I "needed" a new laptop to demonstrate programs for the Flight Simulator S.I.G. <wink><wink> Many of you will be buying new computers in the next year or so, so I'll share some of my experiences and impressions with you.

I took the plunge in August 2007 and bought a new HP laptop. And of course it only comes pre-loaded with Windows Vista. (Note – If you buy a new PC, make sure you get at least the Vista Home Premium Version. The Home Basic Version is crippled, you won't like it, and the manufacture may even provide the Premium version as a "free" upgrade.)

I opened the box, plugged in the battery charger, turned the PC on (per the instructions) and the computer worked. HP pre-activates Windows Vista saving you from going through the exercise of activating it. I had to answer a few questions, of course: name, password, my preference for mydesktop, etc. Nothing too difficult. So now I have Windows Vista and it works.

Connection to my wireless home LAN was important to me; fortunately Vista made that very easy. Just follow the Internet Wizard, a click here, a click there and you are connected. The first thing I used the Internet connection for was to check for Windows Vista updates.There were about 18. I'm not sure what they were all supposed to do, but for now, I decided to trust Microsoft and installed all of them.

The next few days were spent playing with the computer, learning what things did.I sure miss the days when you got a "real" manual with a PC. It took me five days to discover a pressure sensitive strip at the top of the keyboard that lets you increase and decrease speaker volume by sliding your finger over it. Searching the Hewlett Packard web site I located a manual for my computer (in .pdf format) and downloaded it for future reference.

I never have cared for the touch pads that they put on laptop PCs to provide a mouse function but this one works pretty good. Still, I prefer a real mouse. Unfortunately, this laptop doesn't have the standard mouse connector like my old laptop. HP only provides USB connections so none of the mice I have will work on it. A check at the web site of my favorite PC supply store indicated that they were out of stock. As luck would have it, later the same day, I was walking past the writing supplies area in my local Safeway when I spotted a laptop mouse manufactured by Targus. For $19 and change I bought a cute little two button USB optical mini-mouse (no mouse pad required) with a little thing on the connecting wire that lets me pull out as much or as little wire as I need. Problem solved! (Update – I lost my original mouse after about three weeks. I discovered that Office Max sells a variety of mini-mice made by different manufacturers. I bought another Targus mini-mouse.)

Personal computers are very personal. I spent most of the first week that I owned this computer customizing it. I added utility and application programs that do what I need to do the way I like to do it. Vista may offer "better" ways to organize and present information. If so I'll probably discover them. In the meantime my desktop looks similar to my old Windows XP computer, littered with desktop icons that are shortcuts to various programs.

Part 2

One of the most irritating things about Windows Vista is the repetitious messages that appear whenever you attempt to install a new program. First you see a box with that asks, "Are you sure you want to run this program?" Once you get past this point, you see another box which says, "Unidentified program wants access to your computer", "Allow" or "Cancel". In some cases, once the program is installed, every time you attempt to run it you see a warning, "A program needs your permission to continue".

I suppose this is part of Microsoft's attempt to improve security and protect users from "malware". For a long-time, "experienced", Windows User, these warnings seem like overkill. One of the first things I did was to search the Internet for a way to turn them off. Microsoft will tell you not to do this (it weakens their security system) but, for the knowledgeable user, here is the solution. Click Start --> Control Panel. In the left panel, make sure that you are in the Classic View. Double-click User Accounts. Click "Turn User Account Control on or off". Clear the check box and click OK. Reboot the computer.

I'm not sure if I like the new Vista Start menu. You open it by left-clicking on the Start button or pressing the Windows key. The colors are more brilliant in the new menu and the order of some things has been changed to place things that are used more frequently near the top. For those who prefer something closer to what you see with Windows XP, Microsoft has provided an alternative. Put your mouse pointer on the Task Bar at the bottom of the screen and left-click. In the window that appears click on "Properties". Click on the Start Menu tab; then click on the button for a "Classic Start Menu" and click OK. Notice that at the bottom of this page is a hyper-link (blue text) "How do I change the way the Start Menu looks". Click on it to see the many options.

For those who want to change the right half of the NEW Start menu, place your mouse pointer on the Task Bar at the bottom of the screen again and right-click. In the window that appears click on "Properties" and then Start Menu tab and click on the "Customize" button. The top half of the screen shows all of the
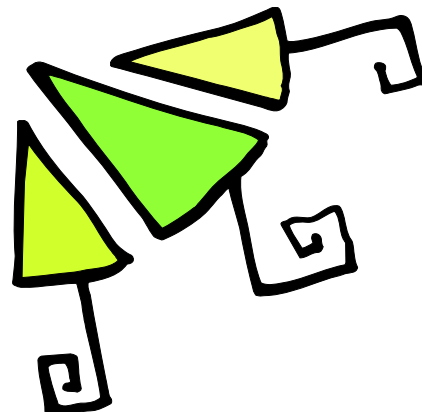
items that are available and the manner that they are available (you'll probably have to scroll down to see everything). Point and click to turn items on and off. Experiment a little. Turn things on and off. You can reverse the selections that you made if you don't like them or click on the "Use Default Settings" button to restore everything to the original condition. Note that you can do the same thing if you select the "Classic Start Menu" instead of "Start Menu".

There was one "last" convenience item that I wanted to add to my desktop. I like to go directly to "Computer" (it used to be called "My Computer" in Windows XP) for fast access to hard drives and file folders without going through the Start Menu. This is easy to set up in Vista - just right-click on an empty area of the desktop and click on "Personalize". On the left side of the window, under "Tasks", click on "Change Desktop Icons". Under "Desktop Icons", click on "Computer" so a check mark appears in the box next to it.

Before you leave this window, notice that you can also change the icons that are used for each of the selected items. You can also pick one of the default icons, click on the "Change Icon" button and select an alternate from a library of icons. If you change your mind about the icon you picked you can click the "Restore Default" button. When you are finished with changes click OK.

Next month we'll look at more things you can do with the desktop.

Yahoo! – Internet Powerhouse

By Ira Wilsker

Websites

http://www.yahoo.com
http://my.yahoo.com
http://maps.yahoo.com
http://mail.yahoo.com
http://finance.yahoo.com
http://calendar.yahoo.com
http://www.yahoo.com/r/xy   - Everything Yahoo!

Back in the earliest days of the internet, in January, 1994, two Stanford graduate students created one of the first canonical websites "Jerry's Guide to the World Wide Web" which was among the first searchable guides of websites. In April, 1994, Jerry Yang and David Filo renamed their website Yahoo!. By the end of 1994, while the internet was still in its infancy, Yahoo! had received over one million hits on its website. Now, according to Wikipedia (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahoo), Yahoo! is the most visited website on the net, with over 412 million unique users, and over 3.4 billion page views a day (October, 2005 data).

Yahoo!, which started as a menu based directory of internet websites, now is a comprehensive source of online services. According to an interactive directory on the main Yahoo! page at www.yahoo.com, there are just 21 distinct services listed, with over 100 total Yahoo! services listed on the "Everything Yahoo!" page (More Yahoo! Services) at www.yahoo.com/r/xy.

I have been an active Yahoo! user since it was "Jerry's Guide" in early 1994, and made extensive use of its menu to located information on the thousands of websites then listed and categorized. Today the number of websites listed on Yahoo! is in the billions, and Yahoo! is generally considered as the second largest search engine, right behind Google.

In addition to its search functions, which many prefer over Google, I personally use several other Yahoo! services on a regular basis. On all of my computers the startup page displayed when my browser loads is My Yahoo! (my.yahoo.com). I have this page personalized to display my stock quotes, market summary, weather for several selected cities, dozens of selected news and feature categories, daily and weekly appointment calendar, lottery results, email summary, TV schedule, lowest airfares to the cities I fly to on a periodic basis, and several other items of choice. The My Yahoo! page also supports as a resource the now common "RSS" news feeds, which allows the current display of information from countless other sources. I have tried several other popular startup pages, but have always returned to My Yahoo! which is my personal favorite.
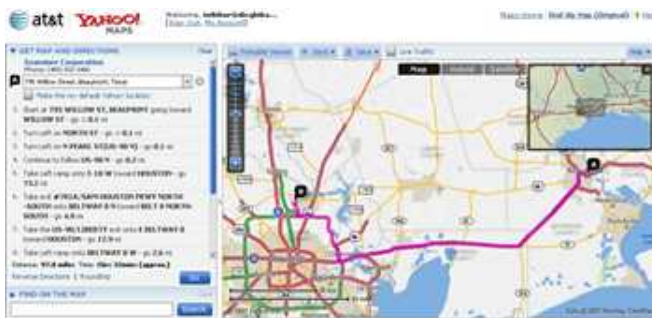
Yahoo! Mail is another very popular service offered by Yahoo! Millions of people have Yahoo! email accounts. I personally have two Yahoo! email accounts, and my wife and daughters also have Yahoo! Email accounts which they use to supplement the email accounts provided by their employers or schools. Yahoo web based email can be accessed from anywhere there is internet access, and is compatible with all browsers. Yahoo! offers a full featured free email service at mail.yahoo.com. The basic free account currently offers 2 gigabytes of mail storage, and one of the best spam filters in the industry. Yahoo! Mail also filters all email and attachment for viruses and other malware. The free Yahoo! Email also supports almost all email programs, for those that prefer a mail reader, rather than traditional web mail. I periodically download my Yahoo! web mail into either Eudora or Outlook Express, depending on which Yahoo! email account I am using at the moment. For those who still prefer using web mail, as millions do, Yahoo! offers two viewing options; the traditional web mail interface, or the new "beta" email interface that appears on the screen much as Outlook or other email reader would appear. It should be noted that Yahoo! also offers an upgraded (fee) email service for businesses and those with their own domain names. It has been rumored in the media that Yahoo! may start to offer email accounts with up to unlimited storage.

For those interested in investing, and who like to follow the latest financial news, Yahoo! offers a comprehensive and free financial news resource at finance.yahoo.com. Topics accessible by tabs include investing, news and opinion, personal finance, and "my portfolios". Each tab opens a directory of relevant topics which provides comprehensive financial information. The personal finance tab connects to

information on banking and budgeting, career and work, college and education, family and home, insurance, loans, real estate, retirement, taxes, and how-to guides. Active investors may find the "My Portfolios" tab helpful in that it allows the user to enter and save any number of stocks, bonds, and mutual funds, as well as indices, and display the current (subject to exchange required delays) values. Charts, news, messages, profiles, statistics, and other useful information are provided on each portfolio item listed. For those who want nearly real-time portfolio valuations, the user can also enter number of shares, costs, and other information, which will then display a detailed table of gains and losses, as well as summary information.

I was recently visiting two of my kids out of state, and needed some information on shopping and restaurants. I went to maps.yahoo.com and entered their address, and generated a street map of selectable scale. On the screen I could select the type of business I was looking for, and the name and location would be displayed on the map. Clicking on the icon created on the map would provide additional information on the selection. We were able to read reviews of restaurants, and with a single mouse click we could generate detailed driving directions from the house to the restaurant or other desired business. I have found this service invaluable when staying in hotels and I want to know what is nearby. When driving directions between points are generated, the user can decide what to print and display, such as directions only, directions and detailed maps, or maps only. This service is useful to both the traveler who
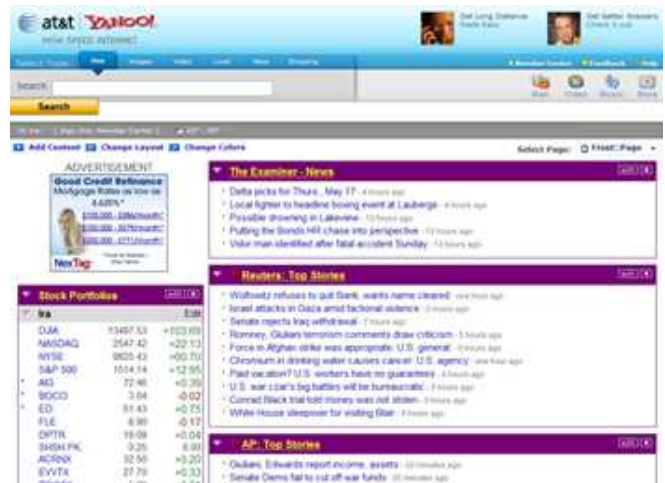
needs driving directions and information on way-points, and the local user trying to find points of interest. According to a recent news article, in April, 2007, there were 29.4 million users of Yahoo! Maps, making it one of the top mapping services on the net. Yahoo also recently announced that it is adding detailed driving directions to Maps for 34 European countries, enhancing its broad appeal.

It should be no surprise to readers of this column that I am a very busy person. By choice, I use Yahoo! Calendar at calendar.yahoo.com. I can enter appointments, events, and other activities with starting and ending times. I can also have repetitive events, such as board meetings, automatically entered on the cal-

endar by specifying "third Thursday" or some similar notation. Yahoo! Calendar and can also import and export information between it and Outlook, as well as most PDAs such as Palms and Pocket PCs. Items listed on the calendar can be kept private, or can be selectively displayed as public, such as if an organization desires a public calendar of events. Yahoo! Calendar also offers the free option of emailing reminders, or sending the reminder to a cell phone or other mobile device.

There are many other useful and mostly free services offered by Yahoo!, such as personal webpage hosting (Geocities), and excellent instant messenger program (Yahoo Messenger). I suggest that computer users from novices to geeks explore the offerings from Yahoo!. There is much to like and use.

Google Search Bar and Your Telephone Number

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

If you know someone's telephone number, how hard would it be to find that person? Well, with Internet resources, it couldn't be easier. Type any telephone number into the Google search bar and you will quickly be given the name and address that relates to that number.　　Even a bit scarier is the fact that right next to the name and address is the word "map". Just click on that word and the location in question is marked with a big green arrow on a detailed map. One more click and you can see the building with that address from a satellite view.

I say this is scary because it is. This information may be put to good use by friends and relatives, but in the hands of a stalker or a criminal, it can be highly dangerous. Imagine how easy it would be to find a woman who lives alone in a rural area. Or think about a child who might innocently give out their telephone number and have a pervert be able to find their exact location so easily.

If you think that you are exempt from this because you have an unlisted or unpublished number, think again. Google states, "Our phone and address listings are gathered by a third party provider, which collects telephone directories and other public records available elsewhere on the web." It is the "other public records" that might get your telephone number into these listings. They use everything from public utility records, court records, and property records, to business records. I was able to easily find the names and addresses of several people who have unlisted telephone numbers.

Because of privacy complaints, Google has initiated a way to be removed from this reverse telephone lookup. Just search for your telephone number in google and click on the link with your name. You will be taken to another page with an obvious removal link.

E-Mail Responsibilities

By Bob Schwartz, Member of HAL-PC, Texas
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Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups

E-mail is a very valuable method of almost instant communication. However, many people operate under an illusion that it is private. It is not. Once sent, it is effectively broadcast to the world. So one should NEVER send anything that they might regret. Once it is sent, it is now in other people's hands. The recipient may or may not care as much about controlling your e-mails distribution as you do.

Just suppose you send something clever about someone you know to a friend or acquaintance and they bring it up on the screen. Then, they take a break and go to coffee, leaving it on the screen. Another person passes by, snoops, and sees the e-mail. They also think it is clever, and make a copy of it and send it to someone they know, etc.

Or, the employer records all e-mail traffic passing within their company, which they have every right to do, since the equipment is theirs.

Worse yet, some people send messages that they believe are benign and strictly business, yet some self-anointed "god" thinks otherwise.

Yet even sneakier are viruses that can unknowingly, by you, forward your e-mails elsewhere; or, police and other snoops tapping your connection. There are innumerable ways by which your "private" traffic can go public.

It's Not Just Entertainment Any More

By Gene Komaromi, Member of the Computer Club of Green Valley, Arizona
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In the past, we've commonly thought of computer games, especially those played on game machine platforms, as pure entertainment. Times have changed and many games have become educational as well as physical training devices.

Learning has become fun for both kids and adults. Here's some information that will keep you ahead of the digital gaming curve.

DS — Handheld Games for Senior Citizens Nintendo has a hot selling hand held video game machine called the "DS" for "Double Screen." The device opens with two visible screens, one is a display screen and the other is a "Touch Screen" which serves as the controller interface. The DS has a series of games designed with "older" users in mind. They are Brain Age, Big Brain Academy and Flash Focus.

All three have been recommended by AARP, and Brain Age has been shown to improve mental performance in independent tests. Brain Age and Big Brain Academy have a series of games, practice exercises and tests that are designed to improve and evaluate cognitive skills, and best of all "they're fun." They chart and graph improvement and will keep records for several individuals.

Have you ever had a problem with that vision test on your driver's license exam? Then Flash Focus was made for you. It too has games and exercises, but instead of improving your brain they improve your eyes.

Wii Want to Play

The hottest new gaming console is the Wii, another product from Nintendo that has games designed for the older kids, real older kids. The game controller is a little motion sensitive device that straps on the user's wrist. Participants interact with the game by moving their arms.

In the Detroit area, aerobic classes and movies have been replaced by Wii in many senior citizen centers. "Bowling" seems to be one of the most popular games. I've played it, and yes, it's exactly like the real thing. The motion of your arm, as you approach a virtual bowling alley, allows you to curve the ball and add some spin. Wii bowling leagues are springing up all over the country. Nintendo is about to release an exercise program for the Wii that uses a floor pad as a controller.

Shortcuts

By Mike Moore, Editor, Bowling Green Area Microcomputer User Group, Kentucky
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Why do some icons on your desktop have a little white arrow embedded in the picture?

These are shortcuts (sometimes called links). They are small files that represent and "point to" the real thing. When you double -left-click on a shortcut icon, Windows reads the location of the file to open from within the shortcut file, then opens the target file. Shortcuts are, in the lingo of computer programmers, symbolic links to actual files. They don't contain any of the file's information—they just point to it. In real terms: if Peoria, Illinois was a file, then its shortcut would be the map telling you how to get there.

Why do we use shortcuts? Why not just put the real, actual file on your desktop? There are several reasons. First, since a shortcut does not contain any of the target file's information, it can be deleted without damaging the file it points to. Therefore, placing shortcuts on the desktop (or in any directory) is safer. Accidental deletion of these links will not affect anything other than you may lose track of where your file was!

The other reason is that you can have many shortcuts and place them anywhere you might need quick access to your file. For example, when we give away computers, we organize the software links in various folders on the desktop. There's a folder for Educational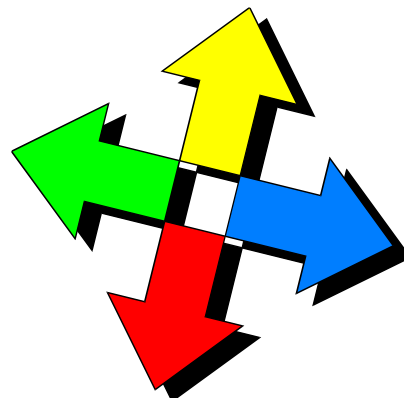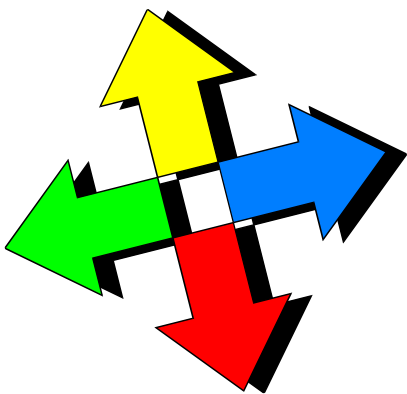 software and Game software links, and for the software that is both Educational and Fun, we put links to the same program in both the Educational and Game folders. You can rename shortcuts to anything you want, and it won't affect the real name of the file they point to.

Shortcuts are also portable! If I know for sure that a program will be in a certain place on nearly every PC, I can e-mail a link to someone and tell them to place it on their desktop. Double-clicking on it should open that file on my recipient's PC! E-mailing a link is much more of a sure bet than e-mailing an executable file—because most e-mail servers just won't allow executables (files ending in .EXE) to be sent!

How does one create a link? The best way is to find the file you want the link to refer to, then do a single right-click on it. This brings up a context menu where you can create the shortcut. Once the shortcut is created you can move it to any directory or to the desktop.

For creating desktop links, Windows provides a shortcut wizard that allows you to create a shortcut for any file type including a web page or another folder. From anywhere on the desktop, right click and select 'New' and then 'Shortcut' to activate this wizard.

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Binary Floodgates On The Internet Backwaters

By Mike Moore, Newsletter Editor, Bowling Green Area Microcomputer Users Group, Kentucky
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Back in the days before the World Wide Web, when computers connected directly to each other over telephone lines, we had a piece of software called a Bulletin Board System or BBS. BGAMUG operated a BBS from about 1989 through 2001 and aside from being responsible for the marriage of at least one member we know about, we amassed a collection of files that totaled, at last count, some 45 gigabytes in size, which was pretty impressive when you consider that there was not one among them that was copyrighted and marked as non-distributable material. Unlike many "boards" of the day, BGAMUG took special pains to make sure that the material we funneled through our member's modems was all above board and free of distribution issues.

So-called pirate BBSs, where copyrighted software was swapped like recipes at a county fair, were not illegal to visit, but there were a few high profile cases with big fines involved and even jail time for the pirate system operators. For the most part, though, our legal system didn't seem to be effective in prosecuting even the most flagrant cases, and the most that a copyright holder could hope for seemed to be a civil remedy by bringing suit.
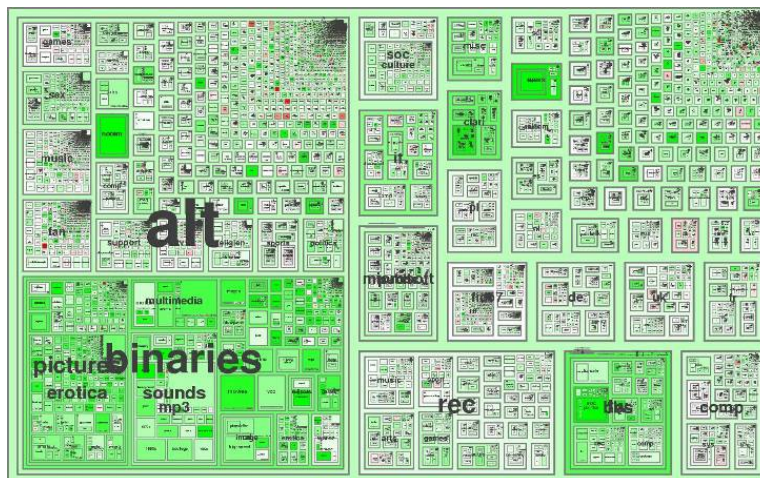
Now the stakes have certainly been raised in terms of the volume of material swapped, and the material that is swapped today seems to be music more often than the latest PC game, but the copyright system in this country is still not very clear on the issue of sharing

binary information. What is evident is that it's the user's responsibility to determine whether or not a given body of information has a copyright assigned to another individual, and also to figure out how much of it can be used (viewed, listened to, stored, forwarded, sold, whatever) and still fall under the "fair use" doctrine.

Instead of this turning into a dissertation on copyright law, I will instead offer the foregoing as simply a caution. Please do not download copyright material and don't use it unless you have clear permission or fair use rights. And please don't take any of the following as a cookbook for copyright subversion because it's not meant that way.

Having got that *caveat* out of the way, let's go somewhere where the World Wide Web doesn't go – USENET! [Pronounced YOOZ net].

Usenet is the bulletin board of the internet, and like a real bulletin board, its information is emblazoned on the internet like a ten foot high plasma billboard on Times Square in New York City. Usenet was conceived by a pair of graduate students, John Ellis and Tom Truscott at Duke University in 1979. Now lurid and lawless, Usenet has been given the unseemly reputation of being the Las Vegas of the internet because of the terabytes of binary pictures posted minute by minute in an unending stream of first-amendment fodder.

And we can find some dandy files on Usenet. Clip art, genealogical records, MIDI music and classical music, sound libraries, electronic books, recipes, quilting patterns, maps, GPS info, high quality desktop wallpaper, icons, and almost anything you can think of. This material is not usually found on the World Wide Web for several reasons, but primarily because people that put up web sites generally want to sell you something, and you can't very well sell what is found on Usenet because it is sometimes difficult to find out if it's under copyright or not.   You can usually find someone to charge you for a collection of postage stamp images (for example) on the web, when in fact the sellers of the collection most likely just downloaded it from Usenet in the first place (probably in violation of a copyright or two!)

Usenet is and always was just text messages posted on internet machines known as news servers. Old timers still refer to Usenet as "net news" even though most of the posts have nothing to do with news. News servers use a protocol known as NNTP to transmit new messages on to other news servers down the pipe. The effect is that a new message posted to an NNTP server gets copied again and again over the course of hours or days until all of the news servers of the world have the message or file in their database. This copying occurs a little like e-mail, except that there is no way to make a post private. In fact, there is no way to address a Usenet posting to anyone but "ALL."   Usenet bears another resemblance to e-mail, and that is there is a LOT of spam (or pointless messages, ads and porn). But if you know where to look, or just exercise some very patient trial and error, you can find some great repositories of information. If you are looking for *one specific file* though, you had better be really lucky! Trolling for files on Usenet is a bit like fishing on a commercial fishing boat: you're going to pull up just about everything that gets caught in your net!

Even though it's text based, binary files (images or programs, for example) can be uploaded and downloaded to Usenet with ease, thanks to some very clever programming that allows seamless conversion from text to binary and back again.   The difference between text and binary is not that important – just think of text as messages you can read, and binary as graphics, video, audio or program files.

Messages are organized by topic into a system with the following "top level" names:

Comp [computers]
Misc [miscellany]
News [internet news, such as new groups or new policies about usenet]
Rec [recreation]
Sci [science]
Soc [social and behavior, religion, philosophy]
Talk [just that, talk, mostly of the flapping jaw variety!]

Subgroups are separated by periods – for example, rec.sports.tennis, and this fully formed topic name is called a **newsgroup.**   Unfortunately, the process for creating new newsgroups is not overseen very well, and over the years the list of newsgroups available has become truly massive and quite often inane, vulgar or pointless. There is also not a good standard convention for naming newsgroups, and thus we have many more "top level" domains that I'd really rather not see.

The top-level newsgroups can be considered the backbone of Usenet and, with the exception of the advertisements and some dramatic grandstanding in some of these groups, they can be fairly informative. In particular, Usenet news is a good place to obtain an anecdotal history for just about any given industry, profession, product or technology.

But now comes the red-headed stepchild of Usenet: **alt.**

ALT is a top level newsgroup hierarchy that was created to dump whatever didn't fit in the other, more official newsgroups.

The alt groups carry most of the message traffic on Usenet, and as the tag implies, this is where the alternative thinking comes out in the Usenet crowd! The alt.binaries newsgroups collectively carry thousands of gigabytes of information across the internet daily. And where do you complain if someone posts something objectionable? You don't. There's no help desk and no complaint center. Usenet runs itself, as there is no news server that has any special authority over any other server.   US courts have consistently held that the ISP that houses this information is no more responsible for its content than the owner of your local news stand would be responsible for the content of the magazines he or she sells.

Most of the files on Usenet are found in the alt.binaries section of newsgroups, and it is from these newsgroups that your news reader software (see below) will automatically process the messages into finished files that are ready to view, listen to or execute on your computer.

This seems like a good time to point out that executing any file obtained from an untrusted source really has to be scanned by a good, up-to-date viral scanner **before you execute it.** The safest policy is to just not run these files unless you do so on a computer which you won't lose any sleep over, should it become infected. However, it is difficult to obtain an infection from a document or audiovisual file, so these are probably safe to read or listen to.

You will find some groups on Usenet that end with '.d ,' which stands for "discussion." So for example, we have the alt.binaries.sounds.midi newsgroup, which contains actual MIDI files (Musical Instrument Digital Interface files), whereas alt.binaries.sounds.midi.d would be a group devoted to the text based *discussion* of the material found in the former newsgroup. In this context, the word *discussion* means posting information about a given topic, as opposed to real-time chat in a split-screen "chat room" environment. There is nothing real-time about Usenet because each client computer can be expected to update its Usenet database at different times, quite at random.

There *are* some groups that are **moderated**, where a real person is charged with the task of vetting everything that's posted before you actually see it. This person or group, naturally, is known as a moderator, and they are really the only thing close to an authority on Usenet. As you might expect, some moderated groups have a better track record than others in keeping out the riff-raff and spam.

There is an interesting history of Usenet and how newsgroups came to be named at this link: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usenet

You can receive and post Usenet articles (or binary files) by employing a *news reader* which is also sometimes referred to as an *NNTP* reader (nntp is the Network News Transfer Protocol).

If you would prefer not to have to download and install a news reader, you can skip the hassle of learning the ins and outs of a new program. Try going to http://groups.google.com in your browser, and clicking on some of the links. Google Groups is a "front end" or interface to Usenet without the news reader. However, unless things have changed since I last took a look at Google Groups, they don't support the alt.binaries newsgroups, therefore you won't find any files on Google Groups.

My favorite news reader is called XNEWS, created by a fellow named Luu Tran. There is a user manual posted on the internet at this link: http://xnews.newsguy.com/manual.html

Xnews is a free download and there is no expectation for you to pay anything to the author of this utility. You can get the program at this link: http://xnews.newsguy.com/release/xnews.zip

The program does not need to be installed, you can just unzip it to a directory somewhere on your computer and run "xnews.exe." Setting up "Xnews" is probably more easily accomplished in a workshop setting than a newsletter.

[*NCTCUG Ed. Note — I use Outlook Express for both mail and newsgroup reading and sending.*]

Washington Area Computer User Group

WACUG Meeting will be held on May 10 , 2008 **[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/

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For more information see:
http://www.nctcug.org/waugp.html

Hulu Offers Free TV and Movies Over The Net

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

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

Websites

http://www.hulu.com
http://www.hulu.com/browse/alphabetical/tv — TV Shows Alphabetically
http://www.hulu.com/browse/genre/tv — TV shows by Genre
http://www.hulu.com/hd — HD Videos
http://www.hulu.com/browse/network/movies — Movies by Studio
http://www.hulu.com/browse/genre/movies — Movies by Genre
http://www.adobe.com — Adobe Flash Player (Free)

One of my readers recently emailed me about an offer he received via email (probably a spam email) about a $50 program that will allow him to view what was described as satellite TV over the internet, without paying a monthly fee. According to the email, with this program, he could discontinue his cable or satellite service, and watch over 3000 channels on his computer. I researched the product he referenced and found that it was a multilevel marketed program that was, in my opinion, deceptive in that it did not offer real satellite TV, but instead only offered a software utility that could receive the thousands of streaming videos already available for anyone to view for free, and that often required no special software to view. I strongly recommended to the reader that he not purchase the product, and instead just search for streaming video, and to keep his current TV provider.

In researching this service I came upon a recently released and legitimate way to view thousands of TV programs and movies over the internet, for free, and only using any of the common internet browsers. This free service (registration required) is the Hulu service available online at www.hulu.com. Hulu was founded in March of 2007, and is a joint venture owned by NBC Universal, and News Corp, and financed by $100 million of venture capital. As I type this, Hulu is offering advertising supported content from over 50

sources, such as Fox TV, NBC, MGM, Sony Pictures, Warner Brothers, Lionsgate, 20th Century Fox, and other providers. The content available for viewing includes TV shows, full length feature films, and clips. Several full length, prime time shows are available on Hulu the morning after they air, and include such popular shows as The Simpsons, and The Office. There are also dozens of classical TV shows, available as full length episodes, including such favorites as Miami Vice and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. If users are willing to put up with unobtrusive ads, often in the lower right corner of the image, or standard TV type commercials, they can watch for free such full length feature films as Ice Age, Three Amigos!, and many others. Hulu is headquartered in Los Angeles, with research and development being done in China.

Hulu will play on almost all current browsers as they are currently configured, and require no special software or add-ons to utilize the service, and requires a broadband connection to view the videos. Almost all computers already have Adobe's Flash Player installed, but if not, Flash Player is a free download from Adobe at www.adobe.com.

Once registered at hulu.com (free registration), a broad selection of videos becomes available for viewing at will. As I type this, there are about 11,200 full length TV episodes and feature clips available, with more being added daily. Currently available for viewing are almost all of the episodes of The Simpsons, 30 Rock, The Office, Knight Rider, House, Medium, Bionic Woman, American Dad!, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, 24, Prison Break, Heroes, about 160 full length children's cartoons (Woody Woodpecker, Spiderman, Astro Boy, and many others), and other TV shows of all genres. For those partial to Saturday Night Live skits, there are about nearly 500 available, including such contemporary issues as presidential politics. TV wrestling fans would appreciate the over 300 matches available for viewing, while NBA fans can view over 140 clips from professional basketball games. A collection of recent (2008) full length college football games, including many of the

(Continued from page 13)

bowl games are available for viewing, including the 2007 and 2008 Sugar Bowl, Cotton Bowl, Fiesta Bowl, and others, enough to satiate any college football fans, and keep them glued to the computer screen for days on end. Soap opera addicts will appreciate the well over 100 clips from Days of Our Lives. In total, Hulu lists 25 different TV genres for every taste, making something available for everyone. The large assortment of TV shows (and movies as well) can be displayed by clicking on "Type" (TV or Movie), and then "Genre"; this will display only those selections that meet both criteria. Simply clicking on the image of the selection will play that selection. All of the TV shows can be displayed in one window alphabetically at www.hulu.com/browse/alphabetical/tv, and can be run by clicking on their titles.   All of the TV shows can also be displayed in one window, sorted by genre at www.hulu.com/browse/genre/tv.

Hulu is not just about TV, but also full length feature films, clips, and trailers. As I type this, there are 760 movies available, of which 80 are full length feature films, the remainder being shorts, clips and trailers. According to Hulu, the most popular full length films viewed by members are Ice Age, Master and Commander: The far Side of the World, The Girl Next Door, The Jerk, Usual Suspects, Planet of the Apes, Weekend at Bernie's, Dragon – The Bruce Lee Story, Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, Three Amigos!, All Dogs Go to Heaven, and dozens more. Movies are divided into 10 genres, including action and adventure, animation, comedy, crime and mystery, documentary and biography, drama, family and kids, horror and thriller, music, and sci-fi and fantasy. Movies can be

selected by genre, or by studio. Opening www.hulu.com/browse/network/movies will display movies alphabetically by studio, with full length features being clearly indicated. Each of the movies shown is hyperlinked (click on the title) directly to the movie. Similarly, all of the movies can be sorted by genre, and displayed in one window at www.hulu.com/browse/genre/movies.

Hulu is about to roll out "HD" (High Definition) videos, and currently has 20 HD movie trailers available to demonstrate the service at www.hulu.com/hd. Since HD video carries more data then conventional video, the system requirements are higher to view HD. In order to view the HD videos, the computer must have a minimum of Flash Player 9.0.115.0 (a free download from Adobe, available for most operating systems), a 2.5Mbs or faster broadband connection (many of the basic broadband services are incapable of operating at this speed, and a premium or upgraded broadband may be required to view HD), a fast processor (3Ghz minimum for Windows or Linux, or a 1.83Ghz Intel Core Duo for Mac). Almost all modern computers of recent manufacturer meet the minimum RAM and video requirements to view HD videos.

While not a substitute for cable or satellite TV, Hulu can provide countless hours of entertainment for free. Since new content is frequently added, and additional providers are being solicited, Hulu has the potential for becoming a major entertainment resource.

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So, the BOTTOM LINE is: compose your messages with care, check the addressees listed, and review the message before pressing the "SEND" key.

Oh, by the way: do not think that once sent and "deleted", that the file is gone from your computer. When you "delete" a file, this DOES NOT ERASE THE FILE. All this does is change the first letter of the file name in the directory. The file, in all its glory, remains untouched on the hard drive, which is why it is so easy to recover it. Technology has provided a variety of means to recover and reconstitute "deleted" files.

To conclude, e-mail is a tremendously valuable means of almost instant communication. Just make sure that you use it carefully, thoughtfully and wisely.

Bob Schwartz is a HAL-PC member, retired EE, 14 patents, technical writer, active in civic affairs: President, Brays Bayou Association; Vice President, Marilyn Estates Civic Association; Correspondence Secretary with the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy.
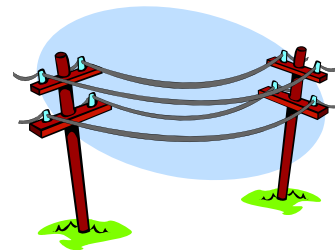
(Continued from page 7)

Yet, if you want to remove your name and address from the entire Web, you should be prepared to settle in for a long, tedious task. Removing my telephone number from Google was easy. Unfortunately, I quickly found more than a dozen other places that had my telephone number listed including Yahoo, InfoSpace, Intelius, AnyWho, and addresses.com. Each one of these has a different method for removing your name and number, and often the process is quite convoluted. At Yahoo, there was an obvious "Remove my Listing" link. But the link went to the Yahoo help pages, which were not at all helpful. It took me about 30 minutes of searching to find the correct removal link. (http://phone.people.yahoo.com/py/psPhoneSupp.py)

Although most of the major search sites did not have listings for cell phones, I found that I could get the names and addresses for many cell phones numbers at Intelius for just $14.95. Getting your name and address out of Intelius is even more complicated than removing it from some other websites. To opt out of

Intelius they require that you fax them a copy of your driver's license or a notarized form proving your identity.

Even if you take the time to eliminate your name and address from all the directories that you find today, you might appear in some new directory tomorrow. Yet, if you want to guard your privacy, it may be worth the effort to eliminate yourself from as many of the directories as possible. It may also be time to realize that a simple thing like a telephone number can now lead to more personal identification than you ever imagined. Perhaps we need to start guarding our telephone number as carefully as we do our social security number.

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NCTCUG Information

NCTCUG, Inc. 201 S. Kensington St. Arlington VA 22204-1141

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

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All officer terms expire 2008

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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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Members' advertisements: Ads are accepted from members for non-commercial purposes at no charge. Copy should be sent to the Editor in the same format as article submissions. Commercial Advertisements: Ads are accepted from commercial advertisers at the rate of $40 per full page, per appearance, with discounts for multiple insertions. Smaller ads are priced accordingly. Payment for ads must be made in advance of appearance. Advertisers must supply a permanent address and telephone number to the editor.

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COMPUCENTER BBS

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

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

If you are moving

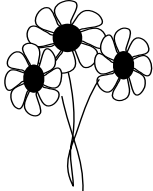**Please send your change of address to the club address as soon as possible to avoid missing issues.**

Thank You!

(Continued from page 1)

nels. In the month I've had the service, two channels of content from local broadcaster MHz Networks (Channel 56) have disappeared from the local tier. Those "missing" channels appear, with about twenty others, in a tier called "Local Plus" but I can't figure why they've been eliminated from the base local tier.

The "no box" connection works fine with TVs with totally electronic tuners, but only the channels Verizon has included in the VHF portion of the spectrum work on a 30 year old GE 10" color set with electro-mechanical tuners. You know the ones — round tuner knobs, that go ka-chunk, ka-chunk for VHF channel changes, and click, click, click for UHF channels as you turn the knobs. I suspect there aren't many TVs of that vintage still in active service. That TV works fine with an off-the-air, digital TV converter box I plan to write about in my next column.

FiOS offers a variety of Internet service plans, depending on the connection speed you want to pay for. I chose the 15mbs down, 2mbs up. My speed tests are fairly consistent at 14192 kbs down, 2133 kbps up. Note that we're talking megabits and kilobits here — the common denominators for transmission speed. You've gotta divide by 8 — eight bits in a byte — to start getting close to figuring how long it should take to download big files — and then you have

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May 2008

1st Wed. (5/7)
7 p.m. General Meeting

4th Wed (5/28)
7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (5/19)
7 p.m. Board of Directors

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

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to factor in the handshaking and error checking. But — it's really fast, when compared to the days of dialup, which is only a bit more than two years ago for me. (I didn't get DSL until January 2006). FiOS is now offering symmetrical speed — 15mbs up and down is offered at $65 in some areas, soon to be rolled out in most FiOS territories.

For more on my installation and how FiOS works, see the "Recent Meetings" page of the web site: http://www.nctcug.org/recmtgs.html

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