

Akron-Canton PC Users Group Electronic Newsletter

January 2003

Ants in my Hub

By Paul Lujan by way of an e-mail forward

So, last night, I come home after a 4-1/2 hour drive back from LA (note to law enforcement officials: that's a "6" there, really), and sit down in front of the computer to check my mail. My connection is, for lack of a better word, ass-slow. I go to look at the hub to see if everyone else is having this problem.

Nope, Mike and David's activity lights are busily flickering; it's only me who has been screwed. I reach down to fiddle with the connection, and notice that the hub is covered with ants (as well as my hand, after the fiddling). "That's odd," I think to myself, "what would ants want with our hub?" But I'm way too tired to deal with it at the time, so instead I go to sleep.

I wake up this morning, and decide to investigate further. Yep, the hub is definitely swarming with ants. And it doesn't look like the ants are just going over it to somewhere else (especially since there aren't any tasty ant

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From the DealsGuy by Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

My wife and I attended Fall Comdex and the APCUG activities. It was nice seeing friends I seldom see otherwise. In spite of losing still more sponsors, APCUG did find a few new ones, which is hard to do these days. It was sad to hear about Casady & Greene scaling their operations to bare bones. Luckily Bonnie Michell was able to remain and our user group prices are still on the Web site. I feel that APCUG is asking too much of the vendors, causing us to lose them. I don't agree that you folks would not attend the APCUG functions without the FREE meals.

I asked a couple of APCUG officers about the stats for APCUG attendees and was told to count them in the book in our package. Someone later announced 350 attendees and I counted over 124 user groups represented, "according to the book." Guess I shouldn't bother asking next time.

Not much in the way of deals this month with only three days between my return from Comdex and the column deadline. I'll fill in with Comdex comments, which is another sad story. You probably knew that there were 1000 less booths at last year's Comdex and this year was no exception with yet another 600 fewer booths. Everything including

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January 6, 2003

Stark Tech Main Auditorium

North Canton, Ohio

6:00 PM *Jargony* by Rick Lubinski

7:30 PM Q&A 8:00 PM *Windows*

***Tips and Tricks* by Frank Ramsey**

¹The Deals Guy

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registration was inside the LV Convention Center (old part) with plenty of space left over. Many booths were smaller than last year and there were numerous booths with names, but no occupants. Key3Media, owner of the Comdex shows, is severely stressed financially, and for sale. On the other hand, they have already announced that Comdex will be back in Las Vegas next year Nov. 15 - 20, 2003 (to dispel rumors), and I believe it will still exist there, but we'll see.

I noticed that the trend started by Microsoft of having a Partner's Pavilion with many of their associated vendors parked in a six foot booth within several small islands of booths has spread to many other large vendors, too numerous to mention. That way those vendors can get exposure to the show floor's attendees, but at a greatly reduced cost. Comdex officials also complained bitterly about the many companies showing their wares at private suites in nearby hotels without bearing the cost of Comdex. Those officials certainly have a point, but they seem to miss the point of making the show affordable. I work in trade shows all the time and am aware of the tremendous costs for an exhibitor, some of which are ridiculously high, such as freight.

PDAs and accessories were in abundance as well as wireless networking. I saw a small keyboard for the Palm that was interesting (just slightly larger than the Palm itself), but the guy wouldn't work out an offer except to sell them to me in quantity so I could do it myself. No thanks. The Wrist PDA caught my eye and it was a PDA in the form of a wristwatch, using the Palm OS. Take a look at <http://www.abacuswatches.com>. Looks like the ultimate in data portability.

Mercedes had their lineup of cars on display again this year since they are one of the sponsors for the Tech Fair. The one with the retractable steel roof, which quickly folds together and into the trunk, was pretty impressive while still leaving adequate trunk space, priced at only \$86,000, but I forgot my Visa. You could test drive them outside in the parking lot on an obstacle course laid out with pylons, and I'm told you could run the heck out

of them.

The Tablet PC was also in high profile at Comdex, but was not very popular among attendees. I was impressed by the dual screen laptop I saw. You heard correctly, two screens for your laptop and the keyboard was lying there separate with the laptop sitting on its side folded open. [<http://www.dualscreen.com>] Mitsumi is introducing a floppy drive that also contains three other slots for plugging in your memory cards and it will read them direct, to be introduced soon. Mitsumi also displayed their Parrot shaped PDA that retrieves e-mail, alerts users to new messages, reads messages aloud and reminds users of appointments. Don't know if it needs crackers or not. [<http://www.pc-mascot.com>] The USB (solid state) drives about the size of the cigarette lighter were all over the place, and some media people even got one in their press kit. I never struck gold there but one company promised me a deal on them. We'll see. I heard that one last year.

Toshiba was showing their new 63" digital flat screen display, which was very impressive, to be introduced in a month or so. Others had their own new large screens and some were just as bright while not being gas plasma. Many people, including myself, do not like the new aspect ratio (width versus height, 16 x 9) of the new high definition displays, but it looks like they will cram it down our throat anyway. How about CyberLock's line of cylinder locks that can be programmed and can keep track of their usage without the user's knowledge. Great product. [<http://www.videx.com>].

A booth was selling Nisis digital cameras (Pocket DV2) [<http://www.nisis.com>] that would take both stills and AVIs. It was small and stills could be 1280 x 1024 or 640 x 480 pixels while an AVI would be 320 x 240 pixels. It could also be used for a PC cam and there were other features. I decided that for \$120.00 I'd take a chance. He was selling them as fast as he could get them out of the case and write them up. Later, I saw that Jerry Stevens also had them in his booth with his ink jet refill products. Wish I had known that. Actually, I had even talked with Jerry before without noticing the two different cameras he was selling.

DVD was everywhere in all forms, both hardware and software, too numerous to mention, even replicators. However, there are still two major camps, each saying theirs is the best. There was almost no Linux there (I only saw United [<http://www.unitedlinux.com>]), but there was a small open source two-day show called ApacheCon at Alexis Park Resort. I didn't find out soon enough to go.

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The Deals Guy

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For people with pets was the iSeePet by AlphaOmega Soft. It makes it possible to provide for your pet when you are away from home. In other words, at the office you just stop your work briefly and connect to the Internet. Then you can take a look at your pet and push the button to give the pet a small or large dinner. I'm sure that little break would pick up many people's day. [<http://www.iseepet.com>]

I'm out of space, but I've tried to mention items that others probably would not write about. I also have one of the order forms for Comdex CDs and videos. There was much more, but enough of this dribble, let's look into the two deals.

Still Good

The Gear Software deal is still good for January. To find this DealsGuy special, go to [<http://www.gearsoftware.com>] and look for the DealsGuy link on their Home Page. The coupon code is "Click." The keyboard offer from Man and Machine for free shipping is only good until January 15, 2003. Visit [<http://www.man-machine.com>] and use the code "Click."

How About A Backup For Your AntiVirus Protection!

That's right, many still accidentally trigger a virus, and quicker than the wink of an eye, it goes into your address book and merrily e-mails itself to all your friends. That is if you are using Outlook or Outlook Express and have not installed the patches, and perhaps even then. What's that, you've been meaning too do just that "when you have time!" The same with updating your AntiVirus? Sure!! Viralock is used in conjunction with whatever antivirus software you are using. Its job is to allow the virus NO escape from an infected computer. To reiterate: while traditional antivirus products work mainly to PREVENT a virus intrusion, Viralock works seamlessly beside your normal AV to prevent all viruses, known or unknown, from getting out of your computer to infect your friends, which would be very embarrassing.

It does this by encrypting the e-mail addresses found in popular e-mail programs such as MS Outlook and Outlook Express. You may say that your present AV will do the job of preventing you from ever getting an infected computer. Haven't you read that viruses such as some Klez variants can go in and turn off your AV while it does its dirty work? With Viralock, this won't matter since the e-mail

addresses in your program will be encrypted to prevent this. Feel better now? Take a look at [<http://www.viralock.com>] for a better explanation.

The normal selling price is \$19.95, but until February 28, 2003, you can buy it for just \$14.95 by getting it from their Web site and using the coupon code "DealsGuy" to order. You can also download a free version for trial if you prefer. Remember that Viralock is NOT an AV, but is used in addition to your AV protection. Designed mainly for MS Outlook and Outlook Express right now with a Eudora version in the works.

An Interesting Spam Tool.

I saw SpamNet at Comdex and you can try the beta version free right now until it is finished with the development. We are all sick of spam (except Hormel, of course) and SpamNet is a Microsoft Outlook add-in that stops spam immediately. SpamNet does not delete spam, but only moves it to your Spam folder with just a click of your mouse. Every time a consumer uses the one-click "block" feature to remove spam from their in-box, they also notify the SpamNet community at large. This automatically blocks spam for all other SpamNet consumers. On the other hand, if they think a certain message is NOT spam, they can click an "unblock" button to share their knowledge with the network. It's sort of like a "community" fighting spam together.

I haven't studied it to see how all this works, but you can download the beta version from [<http://www.cloudmark.com>] as well as read up on what it is all about. I did read just recently, in a UG newsletter, a short write-up by a member who was pretty happy with the service. Check it out. You'll be surprised at who the cofounder is.

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

Ants in my Hub

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treats anywhere nearby); they're clearly going into and out of the hub. Some of the ants going in are even carrying little white pellets. "Is that food?" I wonder. "Where is it coming from?"

I unplug the hub and pick it up, and then kill all of the ants that come out of it. And kill some more ants. And kill some more ants. This goes on for a while. I begin to think that the little white pellets look an awful lot like eggs. I shake the hub, and it sounds like someone has poured a handful of coarse sand into it. "That's odd," I think to myself, "I could have sworn this hub didn't come with the sand option." I initially thought that there were just some ants here, but it's pretty clear I've got more on my hands now.

So, I decide to take a closer look at the hub. Unfortunately, the hub boasts a screwless construction, but I know that my screwdrivers can be used for more than merely removing screws, so I start prying. As I do so, a bunch of ants and eggs, as well as what look like larvae (basically, they look like slightly-smaller-than-normal ants, but a very pale brown instead of black) continue to fall out (into the sink, since I've become clever enough to do this over the sink).

I finally get the thing open, and see a bunch of eggs lying on the circuit board, but less than I would have expected if there's really a colony set up here. So, I figure that they're probably under the circuit board, and set to work unscrewing the circuit board to take it out of the box.

Jackpot! (That is, if my goal were to win an ant colony, which it really **wasn't**.) The entire bottom of the box is coated with eggs, and I see a large ant which I can only assume is the queen. I terminate the queen with extreme prejudice, and then wash out the box (it's made of metal, so I figure it'll be okay.)

The circuit board, on the other hand, I can't just wash off (since I hold hopes of saving the hub, not really wanting to have to drop \$30 on a new one), and there are lots of eggs wedged in small places, like between the link lights or between the chips connected to the ports, where they'll be really hard to get out of. So, I set the circuit board aside for the moment to take a shower.

When I come back, I notice that the ants have actually done me a favor! (Suckers!) In their futile attempts to save the colony, they've picked up the eggs themselves to scurry around like maniacs, solving my problem. I pick off the ants, and then vigorously shake the board to try to dislodge

anything still stuck in the ports, and much to my surprise another queen falls out. (I've read that Argentine ants can have more than one queen per colony, but this is still a surprise, especially since I thought I had already gotten almost everything.) I dispose of her, too, clean up the remaining ants, and figure I might as well try putting the hub back together. Not that I can completely undo my prying, but hey, that's cosmetic anyway.

Much to my surprise, it actually works! And my performance is back from miserable to normal. Ants 0, Me 1.

Man, I hate ants. If I could choose one genus to completely wipe off the Earth, assuming that it wouldn't, like, destroy the ecosystem (but really, what depends on ants? Anteaters? Well, they're not doing a very good job, are they?!), it would be them. Well, okay, I suppose I should probably choose something like mosquitoes, since even though they're less personally annoying to me, they still have the whole large-scale disease-spreading thing. But I'd expect some serious compensation from the WHO for not choosing ants! --*Paul Lujan. Article reproduction coordinated by Steve Bass, Pasadena IBM Users Group.*

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

Use Your CD Drive More Productively

By Ira Wilsker

Almost all newer computers come with a CD-RW drive, a CD drive that can write and rewrite compatible CD discs. For older computers, with a standard CD reader (play only, not write), the addition of a CD "burner" is a very popular and fairly inexpensive upgrade. A simple review of the Sunday sale books for the major electronics and office supply stores shows an abundance of CD-RW drives for between \$30 and \$100, often after rebate. These drives are typically easy to install, and may possibly be installed in addition to the existing CD reader (good for copying CDs), or as a simple replacement. If internal installation is not desired, there are several external CD-RW drives, advertised weekly, that connect to an available USB or firewire port. The external drives, typically the USB models, are also often a good choice for older notebook computers where internal installation is difficult or impossible. The Sunday ads often show the external USB drives for under \$100, after rebates.

Almost all CD-RW drives, whether factory installed, or after-market add-on, come with some CD burning software. The most widely distributed CD software provided with the drives is from Adaptec, or Adaptec's successor (Adaptec sold their CD writing software division), Roxio. Another common software package included with some drives is from Nero, while other drives come with a variety of lesser-known software titles. As the price of blank CD discs plunges, often "free after rebate", burning (writing to) CDs has become very popular. Still, many PC (and Mac) users are not using their equipment to its potential; large number of users still only use their CD-RW drives in read mode to install other software, and not to burn discs.

As had been stated many times here in previous columns, the three most important words in computing are "Backup, Backup, and Backup". Remember that "Murphy's First law of Computing" states that "A properly backed-up hard drive will never fail; a hard drive that has not been recently backed up will always fail at the most inopportune time." All too many users who have ready access to CD-RW drives have lost all of their important files to viruses or hard drive failures, despite the ease and low expense of copying important files to CD discs.

The common blank discs hold from 660 to 700 megabytes of data, and are very inexpensive. Other than some time, there is no great investment

to back up critical files at a minimum, or even better, entire hard drives.

There are a variety of excellent utilities available to backup hard drives. Some CD-RW drives come with a "lite" or "limited" version of popular backup programs. While minimally functional, these "lite" versions often lack useful functions such as compression (getting more data on a CD disc than its native capacity), or incremental backup (only backing up new files or files modified since the previous backup). I have been using "BackUp MyPC" from Stomp Software (www.stompinc.com), which was formerly known as Backup Exec, by Veritas (Seagate). This program is probably one of the most full featured backup programs, and easy to use. BackUp MyPC can backup to almost any type of device from CD-RW drives, tape drives, Jazz and Zip drives, and other devices.

Some competing products are Roxio's Go Back, Norton's Ghost, and NTI's BackUp Now (which I have also used). Since almost all computers can utilize some form of CD writer, and blank discs are cheap, there is absolutely no reason NOT to have at least critical data files backed up. The cliché "ounce of prevention..." is most apropos here. With over one in five PCs currently infected with at least one variety of the Klez worm, several versions of which are capable of destroying critical files on a hard drive, backups are imperative. The appearance and rapid spread of other destructive worms and viruses, such as the new "Hunch" worm which explicitly destroys the files in the Windows, My Programs, and My Documents directories, emphasizes the need for backing up hard drives. Still, probably the most damage is done by the old-fashioned hard drive crash. Remember Murphy's law, and always have a reasonably current backup of critical files. For long-term archival purposes, better quality CD discs are advertised as having a 100-year archival life.

There are other popular uses of CD burners. One of the most popular and most controversial uses is burning music to blank CD discs. Often in the popular MP3 format, or in native commercial music CD format, studies show that this is the most popular use of CD burners. Provided that copyright laws are rigidly obeyed, and we all know that they always are (snicker), homemade music CDs are very widely created and used. Online music or swap services, ranging from the now defunct Napster, to the very much alive and controversial KazAa and Morpheus, as well as the legitimate

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commercial music sites such as Sony, are popular sources of such music. Another popular use is copying entire CD discs. Generally, it is considered "ok" to make a single archival backup of commercial CDs, provided that the copy is only used as a backup, and properly disposed of (destroyed) when the original software is no longer needed. With some software CDs, and an increasing number of commercial music CDs, this archival backup is becoming more difficult to create as sophisticated copy protection is being utilized more commonly.

Many use their CD drive, often with rewriteable CD-RW discs, as an additional, but removable adjunct to their hard drive. This allows archival and portable storage of massive amounts of data, at minimal expense. CDs are often ideal for moving large files between computers.

There are several other uses for the CD-RW drives now so common in our machines. Many other CD drive utilities are readily available for download, such as from tu cows.exp.net/system/cdrutil95.html or tu cows.exp.net/mmedia.html. Use the drives as they can be used, but make absolutely sure that critical data is frequently backed up.

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Notice To Newsletter Readers

We are now completely electronic! I have deliberately not changed formats much.

Colored or shaded backgrounds are not used specifically because members requested not to. It seems that this newsletter will be printed out on a lot of ink-jet printers which would make a lot of wet, slow-drying paper!

This brings up a point, however. Is this newsletter going to be read on a monitor? Or is it going to be read by people printing it out? Those are two different venues to be optimizing for!

How do you vote? How can we serve you better? What do you want?

Let us know. Your executive committee is listening. Use the e-mail addresses on the last page to communicate.

We are listening!

December 2002 Meeting

Dick Lash gave a cogent and knowledgeable review and demo of Norton's Ghost, a disk backup program.

Jerry Schaefer gave us the intro to using DOS, even under Windows 9x.x. This is not trivial, but very usefull!

Your newsletter editor has photos of this meeting with Dick and Jerry. However, he is having "technical difficulties" getting simple edited jpeg files into the MS Publisher program for the newsletter. Many apologies to members and both Jerry and Dick. But thanks to both for very informative programs!

Art McRowe, Newsletter editor

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Future Events	
Sun., Jan. 19th, 2003	Peter Trapp Computer Show at Tadmor Temple off I-77 to Arlington Road, Akron, OH (Exit 120)