

ACPCUG Newsletter

**Akron Main
Public Library**

December 6, 2005

Dec. Program:

Starts at 6:15 PM

***Internet Free For All
by F. Ramsey & Art
McRowe + Q&A +
Board Elections***

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December 2005

Akron-Canton PC Users Group

**From The DealsGuy For Janu-
ary 2006 by Bob (The Cheapskate)
Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users
Group.**

I can't emphasize enough the value of users group help and here is an example: The other day while preparing to drive over to our beach condo for a couple of days, I wanted to copy a floppy disk containing some important files not backed up. When I attempted to copy it, the process stopped in the middle telling me my second disk was corrupted. I tried to stop the process so I could use another disk, but couldn't get the procedure to go away. Even when I killed Windows Explorer, then restarted it, and was ready with a new disk, it tried unsuccessfully to resume the process. Finally, I decided to reboot the computer in an effort to clear it, and when it tried to restart, all I got was the opening Intel screen and nothing more. After forcing the machine to shut down, and a brief pause, I tried to start the computer again and it would not go past the startup Intel screen.

Horror set in and I wondered what I might have done to screw it up, and what to do next. I was lost! All of a sudden I remembered something I had read only a couple days before in a users group newsletter while browsing a write-up about their Q & A session. A member reported that they could not get their computer to boot and finally removed a USB Flash Drive they had been using before they shut it off. It booted up just fine with the flash drive removed. Since I was using a USB Flash Drive while trying a

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new backup program, I removed it, tried to boot again, and was very relieved when the computer booted normally. I am running Windows XP Professional.

I can't remember which newsletter I read that in, but my thanks to the user group community and the newsletters I receive from them. I read them from cover to cover, especially about their Q & A sessions and sometimes find good information that I think my readers might use. It was interesting that when I tried rebooting again with a 256 Meg USB Flash Drive plugged in; it booted just fine, but would not boot with the one gig USB drive plugged in. I would never have thought to remove that flash drive so I hope my experience was useful to my readers.

***Problems in Dell Land**

I read in Ed Foster's Gripe Line about a company that had bought almost 200 Dell Optiplex GX270 PCs, and when a known defect arose concerning a capacitor on the motherboard that tended to swell and cause problems, it should have been covered by their support contract, but Dell didn't live up to their agreement. They started to replace them, but after more problem boards were found, they stopped and instead wanted the company to trade them in. For financial reasons the customer didn't want to do that and eventually any negotiations stopped. It was known that some larger companies with the same problem had gotten it resolved, but nobody knows why. Up until now, I had thought Dell had a good name in the industry and I don't know the outcome. Ed Foster's Gripe Line URL is [<http://www.gripe2ed.com>], but I couldn't find this story posted at this writing since I read it in an August issue. You need to set up a password to access the Gripe Line Web site. For other information about the problem, check [<http://www.dslreports.com/forum/remark,13709831>].

For the folks who ask me about the trade shows, we recently worked the National Safety Council Show [<http://www.safety2005.org>] that was very interesting. It used about 500,000 square feet of exhibit space and had over 20,000 attendees from around the globe. You wouldn't think so, but I saw some cutting-edge technology featured there. Like many trade shows here, they had an evening party for attendees at Universal Studios.

We also worked the interesting Bank Administration Industry show. [<http://www.bai.org>] You would have easily recognized many names exhibiting there, which included well known ATM machines, security names and software companies like Microsoft, Adobe, Oracle USA and many others well known to users group people. The exhibit area was about 400,000 sq. ft. of area. Free food for the attendees too. Attendance was about 12,000. Central Florida is a hotbed of trade show activity, but we only work a few of them.

***Still Good**

Don't forget the deal is still good for the WebBuild Express software for creating your Web site. To download it at [<http://store.esellerate.net/nfti/store>], use the coupon code CPN8348901136, when it calls for it, to receive your 25% discount. I have a trial version but I have not tried it out yet. Between health problems and laziness, I don't have much for you this

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month, but I hope you took advantage of the APCUG announcements for deals.

***The Lost Can Often Be Found**

Have you ever deleted a file and later found you should not have done that? No problem, just go to the Recycle Bin and get it back. Come to find out though, it has been dumped by the Recycle Bin. Now you have another problem; but not if you have PC Inspector, which can do unbelievable things when it comes to recovering deleted files from your hard drive. Of course, your hard drive has to be working properly for it to work.

Best of all, PC Inspector is Freeware and it can be downloaded at [http://www.pcinspector.de/file_recovery/uK/welcome.htm]. However, if you have used Secure Clean or Wipe Drive, forget about it. I found this in a newsletter, but have not tried it personally.

***An Announcement For NeoDownloader (Edited to shorten)**

We offer a special. User group people get a 25% discount on the new version of NeoDownloader by email request..

September 27, 2005

Neowise Software, the leading developer of task automation tools, announces the newest major version of their NeoDownloader. This powerful multithreaded tool for automatic downloading of pictures, audio and video files now features the unique Web Spider technology that guarantees a fast and steady download for both high and low bandwidth. With its improved interface, new image viewer and media player, NeoDownloader expands the horizons of your web experience by improving your Internet browsing habits.

Each download job you trust to NeoDownloader starts with a profile where you can set file types, size limits, resolution, and scanning depth. The program scans the site of your interest and picks out only the files that match your profile. The download is fully automated but you can control it through the download progress window and fine-tune its performance. The download can run simultaneously with scanning, or after full scanning of the site is completed. Downloaded files become instantly available in the image preview zone of the program window.

The new version includes a collection of project templates and sample projects to get started fast. The built-in image viewer and media player provide instant access to downloaded files. A Drop basket and a set of hotkeys help you to launch a project from any application. The download library replicates source sites and organizes files in an easy-to-use way. The password list secures automatic login to password-protected websites.

NeoDownloader v2.0 Features at the Glance

* Downloads pictures, audio and video that match user preferences

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- * Filters for file type, size, resolution and URL keywords
- * Settings for the scanning depth for internal and external links
- * Up to 10 simultaneous connections
- * Support for password protected sites
- * New project profile settings
- * Drop basket facility to download from other applications
- * Built-in image viewer featuring slideshow and wallpaper setting support
- * Built-in media player

NeoDownloader runs under Windows 98, NT 4.0, Me, 2000, XP platforms and costs \$39.95 (USD) for a single-user license. Free lifetime technical support and minor upgrades are extended to all registered users. A fully functional evaluation version is available as a free download at

[<http://www.neowise.com/ftp/NeoDownloaderSetup.exe>].

Company Website [<http://www.neowise.com>].

Product page link: <http://www.neowise.com/neodownloader/>

Email: [alexey@neowise.com].

Best regards,

Alexey Surkis

CEO of Neowise Software

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. Be sure to check the new announcement pages on my Web site. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click

[bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>].

Informative Tech News

By Bob Elgines; CRCC Editor; elginesz@rraz.net

More Free Spyware - There is another one out there like Spybot called SpyBlaster which can be downloaded at : www.javacoolsoftware.com . There is a slight catch, you will need to manually update, unless you pay \$10 for an automatically update subscription. This unlike Spybot will prevent installation of spyware.

PCI Express vs AGP-8X Graphic Cards - Are they here to stay? The PCI-Express cards are about the same speed and higher in price. So don't run out and change your Mother Board to accommodate the PCI-Express. The only difference right now is the Bandwidth, but there are not programs out there to use this advantage. It's main use would be used in Gaming.

Windows 2000 Info! - Microsoft released an update containing a collection of previous patches. The final service pack for Windows 2000 is SP4, which was released in March, 2003. Support for Windows 2000 will end in 2010.

What is "Windows XP N"? - Windows XP N is a version without the MS Media Player. Windows XP Home (the standard version) sells for the same price.

What is "Windows XP Media"? - Basically the standard home version with all of the latest photo, music,, and movie enhancement pack. This includes such things as Plus!Photo Story, Media player, Movie Maker, etc. These items can be download from Microsoft for free in most cases.

New Microsoft Windows Software - Microsoft's new operating system called "Longhorn" has been officially named "Windows Vista", and is set to be released to the public in 2006. The three new goals are summarized as Clear (new methods), Confident (better security) and Connected (seamless) by Microsoft developers.

New WD Hard Drive - Western Digital released a new high-class series of Caviar drives and announced a new high capacity drive of 400 GB SATA (Serial). This drive has a speed of 7200 rpm, 16 MB of cache, and a transfer rate of 150 MBps. The WD Caviar SE16 400 GB is priced at approximately \$280 with a three year warranty.

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

Don't be a loser at the rebate games

by **Jim Sanders**, Editor, North Orange County Computer Club
editor@noccc.org

Most of us have bought something that sounded like a great value — “After Rebate or Rebates.” Everywhere from a great price to FREE! Most are legitimate. Most require a fair amount of work to claim. Most are never claimed. Most say you will have to wait 6 to 10 weeks for a check (for some that turns into 6 to 10 months). Many have tricky fine print. A few are out-right scams!

Below are a list of things that you should do, as opposed to just think about, if you're going to buy an item with a rebate and have any real intention of claiming the rebate and actually getting it. Following that are three emails that dealt with a denied rebate claim for our new President Elise Edgell.

If you are going to buy an item with a rebate, while you are at the check-out stand, **NOT AFTER YOU GET HOME**, do the following:

- Write down the sales clerk's name then ask him to show you that you have all the items needed to claim the rebate. Ask him to put an X on the correct UPC barcode.
- Make sure you have a copy of the correct rebate form(s). Some are inside the box. You just paid for the item, it is yours, open the box and read the terms.
- If it is an upgrade rebate, it is better to find out if your old product qualifies **BEFORE** you go to the store. Check the vendor's website, call the store and ask!

READ THE FINE PRINT! THEN READ IT AGAIN!

- Read the “Proof of Purchase” requirement list.
- Does it require the original “Sales Receipt” or is a copy OK. If the original is required, ask the store for a duplicate original that is acceptable for a product exchange if there is a problem with the product. Some stores provide a “Rebate Receipt.” Make sure that matches the requirement list.
- Check the postmark requirement; I have seen one that gave you only three days to get it postmarked. Don't wait till the last day to mail it.
- Make sure a website address and/or telephone number is included that you can use to contact the rebate center about your rebate. Most of the up-scale rebate centers include an 800 number.
- Make two copies of ALL documentation submitted. If a cheesy rebate

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center decides to tell you they never received your request, without copies, you're up the proverbial creek. I am working on an article about using your scanner for this purpose.

- I think it is a good idea to include one of the documentation photocopies with the submission to make the point that you have copies. Mark it "CC: Vendor, My Files." On the larger rebates, buying the \$0.95 proof of delivery service at the post office is cheap insurance. Having a witness to the mailing doesn't hurt. Error on your side of the game. If it says 6 to 8 weeks, check at 6 weeks, don't wait three months. Be reasonable with phone calls but check the website as often as you like. Mark your calendar to remind yourself to check on the rebate. Keep a folder for all of your rebates. Move completed ones to another folder. Once you get your rebate check, read how long it is good for. Some are good for 6 months. Most are void after 60 days. A few are void after 30 days. I got one that was expired when it was delivered. When you think you have been shafted, don't just grimace and bear it, complain. Complain to the retailer. Complain to the vendor. If all else fails, file a complaint with the FTC at www.ftc.gov. You can also file a complaint with the Better Business Bureau at www.bbb.org. Taking the retailer to Small Claims Court is an option.

The email exchange with BFG Technologies, Inc.

Dear Sir, My name is Jim Sanders, and I am the editor of the North Orange County Computer Club's newsletter, the Orange Bytes. PDF copies of the publication are available at <http://www.noccc.org>. For several weeks I have been gathering material for an article on the rebate games. Our members should see it in the next issue of the newsletter. This is a hot issue with our members as a number have been burned by various rebate offers. In a lot of cases it was due to not reading the fine print, not crossing all T's or dotting all I's, a claim that the request was never received or not received in time.

In some instances the rebate was a pure scam. A few refused rebates may be caused by human error on the part of the highly trained, intelligent, well paid staff of the rebate center. A common reason given for a rebate denial is that a required piece of documentation was not included.

All too often, that claim cannot be refuted as the original was sent in and the suggestion to photocopy all submitted documentation was not followed because of the hassle involved. In an interesting coincidence of timing, our club President, Elise Edgell, showed me the rebate denial post card that she received on 7/16/2005. The reason given for the refusal: "We did not receive a sales receipt with your request." She purchased a BFG GeForce FX

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5500 OC at a special Fry's Electronics' one day sale where a \$50 rebate was offered on your product. In this case, Elise did scan all the documentation sent in with the rebate and kept it as a JPG file. In addition, the original documentation was stapled to a printout of that file and a notation was hand printed on that sheet, in bold marker pen: "CC: Vendor, My Files." That file is attached to this email. As both of us bought the product and requested the rebate in the same way, it will be interesting to see if I get the same post card.

I understand that you contract the rebate function to other companies, but the typical club member that has a problem thinks the problem is with the company that made the product and offered the rebate. It is your reputation that suffers, not the rebate center.

Would you express your opinion on which of the above reasons might be the cause of this rebate being denied?

Sincerely,
Jim Sanders, Editor, NOCCC Orange Bytes

Hi Jim,

Thanks for contacting BFG Technologies, and thanks for giving us the opportunity to clarify this particular rebate situation.

Looking at the picture in your attachment of Elise's submission, it appears there is not a copy of her "Sales Receipt" included along with the other required items.

In addition to the "Rebate Form/Receipt" and the "Proof of Purchase" cut from the box, a copy of the "Sales Receipt" is required. With Fry's it can sometimes be confusing because they label the Rebate Form as a "Rebate Receipt". This could lead a customer into thinking that the form was both the rebate form AND the sales receipt, although they are actually two separate items.

Some additional information that may be of interest; this is one of two rebates that have the highest redemption rates we have ever run. This indicates to us that majority of customers are including all the correct documentation and getting the rebate for this particular program.

In this particular case, the rebate house did refuse the rebate on proper grounds. However, we will contact the rebate house and approve Elise's re-

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bate, and yours as well. We often do that for customers who contact us and believe that that they were denied incorrectly. We look into individual cases and make approvals where the facts support it.

Thanks again for giving us the opportunity to respond. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact us.

Kind regards, John @ BFG

Hi John,

Thank you for your quick response and also for fixing the problem.

In an effort to resolve why it became a problem in the first place, I made a trip to the Anaheim Fry's Electronics store. I asked to speak to the person in charge of dealing with rebates. The woman that responded to that request was pleasant enough, but not very helpful. I asked why Fry's was having their checkout clerks tell customers that the "Rebate Receipt" is the same as the full sales receipt for rebate purposes. Her response was:

"Well, sometimes it is and sometimes it's not." The discussion lasted several minutes. It bogged down into questions of semantics, perception, lack of explicit wording, and responsibility. Her rebuttal to your assertion that it is a "Rebate Form/Receipt" was that if you cut that form in two just above the line "Rebate Form:" you have a "Receipt" and a "Rebate Form." That to help the customer by not having multiple, small, separate documents that are more easily lost, or difficult to match up with the appropriate rebate form, they are printed together. That the "Proof of purchase requirements: Section 3, says "a copy of your receipt," not "Sales Receipt," not "Full Sales Receipt," not "Rebate Receipt," just "Receipt." That obviously the "Rebate Receipt" is a receipt. I commented that the Fry's IT department controlled what is printed and how it is printed. That it would be trivial for them to better separate the two forms with a couple of extra blank lines, a line of asterisks, and a line that says "Cut here." That they could easily have changed Section 3 to explicitly state what kind of "Receipt" was required. That if printing the "Rebate Receipt" is supposed to be a courtesy to the customer, it would be trivial to have the computer print out a "Duplicate Sales Receipt" when that was required by the vendor. That if Fry's is going to the effort to provide this courtesy service at all, they should go the extra step, and endeavor to do it correctly, rather than in the current, confusing, fashion. I commented that Fry's apparently feels it is their responsibility to remind customers that they should make a copy of all documentation submitted for a rebate by handing out a yellow sheet with that warning, why

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not expand it to include a caution about the receipt problem.

Her response was in essence, I don't have any control over what the IT department does. I counted to ten, thanked her for her time and left. I hope this feedback helps you with future programs.

Sincerely,
Jim Sanders Editor, NOCCC Orange Bytes

On 7-23-05 we put on our best optimistic face and went to the <http://www.rebatestatus.com> website to see how well the rebate had been approved. We were hoping to see a message like: "The check is in the mail.," and lo and behold we did. Pony Express or 4th Class, but in the mail.

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Where did all those photos go? File Management

By Jack Wilfore, Hilton Head Island Computer Club, South Carolina

www.hhicc.org/

Do you find that when photos get transferred from your camera to the computer, you feel you have lost control? For now, let's see if we can't gain back just a little of that control.

When photos transfer from your camera to your computer, it's really important for you to know exactly where they go and where they get "filed". There is nothing more frustrating than having your photos or other images or documents, or letters or scans get filed in your computer, and then you can't find them later.

FILE MANAGEMENT

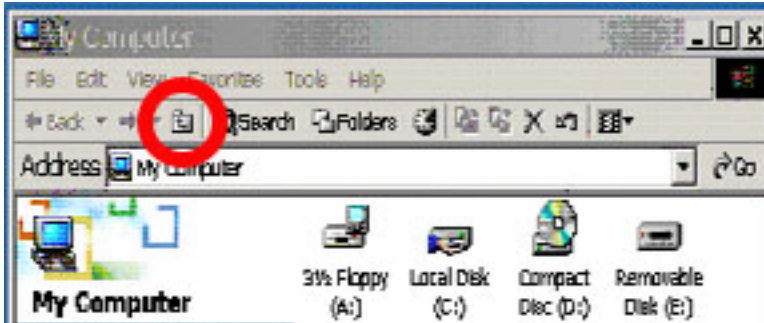
This brings us to the subject of this article, "File Management". Let's begin with the thought that your computer is nothing more than a big filing cabinet. Now it's up to you to decide where and how to organize your "files" on your computer, just as it is with the file cabinet in your office.

DISK DRIVES

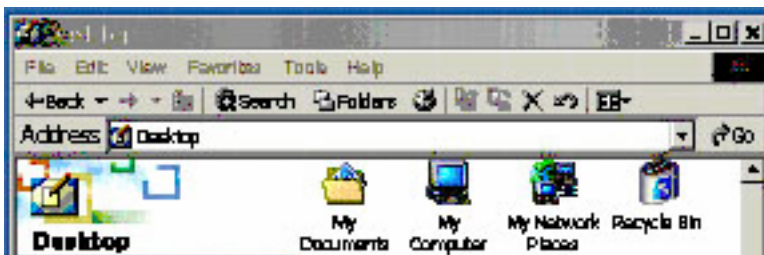
Before we get to actually managing your files, a brief review of how your computer stores data. Computers store data on "drives", some drives are inside the computer and some may be outside or external to the computer. You probably already know that the "C" drive stores everything inside the computer. It is the heart and soul of your computer, and when you have a disk crash, it's usually your "C" drive that goes, and you are out of business. Other drives may include an "A" drive for use of a floppy disk, and a "D" drive designated as CD-ROM drive which is for your CD's. Other external drives, also get assigned letter designations, and could include removable or external drives such as zip drives, or memory cards, or docking stations, or cameras, etc. If you left click on the "My Computer" icon on your desktop, you can see these disk drives. You can also view what's on each drive by using your left mouse button to double-click on the A, C, or D icon.

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There is one very important icon I want to point, when you are looking at "Windows". The top bar (usually blue) across the top of a window is the Title Bar, the next bar down on the above window is a Menu Bar, and the third bar down is the Task Bar. On this screen shot, I want to point out one very important icon, the UP ONE LEVEL icon within the red circle, which usually looks like a folder with an up arrow. Get familiar with and use this icon to move around within your "drives", or file cabinet.



Try it! If you left mouse click that UP ONE LEVEL icon, the next window you see is the Desktop. Within the Desktop window, you can see the "My Documents" folder, which

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is the cornerstone of the file management structure.

FILES, FOLDERS AND THE FILE CABINET

I like to think of drives as file cabinets. They store electronic items such as documents, photos, images, spreadsheets, programs etc. Drives may have individual files (usually not a very good idea), and folders which usually contain a collection of files on a particular topic or a particular use.

Recall that the "C" drive stores everything. Now as these files come in, we just can't let them go anywhere, this is where we can actually put them into an appropriate folder of our choice. And this is how you will get your file cabinet organized.

Let's review two key items:



Folders provide that organizational structure to a disk drive, just as they do in a file cabinet. First, you will put labeled folders into your cabinet/drive. Each folder will have a name. When you view the contents of a disk drive, folders are normally listed in alphabetical order. New folders can be created by right clicking on your desktop, and selecting New > Folder. The new folder appears on your desktop with the blue title where you can now type the name you have selected for that folder. These folders can now be dragged and dropped, wherever you want them.



Files can and usually are put inside folders. This is where you will put your documents, your photos etc. In order to be able to find your documents later within an overstuffed folder, you give each document a unique name. On a PC, it is wise to use the following naming conventions for both folders and files: A file name is made up of two parts: (1) the name of the document and (2) the file extension which is usually assigned by the computer. If you don't see the file extensions in Windows XP, go to Desktop>Tools>Folder Options>View Tab and then unclick "Hide extensions for known file types." You may name a file anything you wish (with some punctuation limitations), but it is preferable to name a file something you are likely to remember later. File names should be no longer than 8 characters whenever possible. Although Windows (and Mac) allow longer file names, you may get in problems while transferring files to other computers if you use longer file names. Also, use only letters and numbers in your file

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names. Special characters like "-", "/", "&", or blank spaces must be avoided in the file name. The second part of a file name is the extension. In the file text.doc, the word text is the file name and the .doc is the extension, identifying this as a Word document. A period always separates the two. The extension identifies what kind of a document you have. Some examples of file extensions are:

- .txt : plain text
- .doc : Microsoft Word Document
- .htm or .html : Web document
- .gif , .jpg , .bmp , tif , : images
- .ppt : PowerPoint Presentation

THE STRUCTURE

The File Management structure has a tree type organization or is "hierarchical". And, you have the ability to set up that structure just as you would with the file cabinet in your office. Here is a graphic of one such structure:



Windows Explorer INSERT Windows Explorer Graphic

(Start > Programs > Accessories > Windows Explorer) is one way of looking at the internal file structure of your computer. The following screen capture shows many parent folders, also known as directories, with sub-directories (or sub-folders) and then files expanding beneath them.

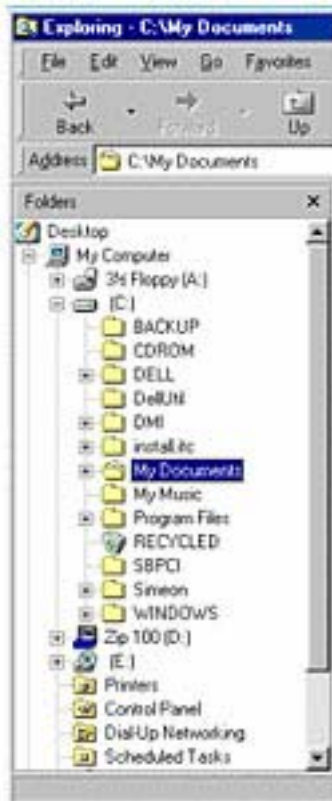
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In this example, clicking the plus sign beside My Documents expands the files and additional sub-directories inside, or beneath My Documents.

Clicking the minus sign sign collapses the sub-directories and files.

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To clarify how this new knowledge can help, when photos are transferred to your computer, whatever the transfer method might be, somewhere you will be asked to decide “where do you want these photos to go?” Sometimes the program will want to put your photos in either 1) a folder it creates, sometimes named with today’s date or 2) into a folder which already exists perhaps as part of your camera software. If this is your preference, make note of both the folder name and its location or path. Sometimes the program will ask you ... and then you can browse and select the destination folder of your choice. In my case, I created a special folder called “from camera” and located that folder in My Pictures, which is in My Documents, which is on my Desktop. Every time I do a photo transfer, I make sure the pictures are going to the “from camera” folder. I can decide later which photos to keep and where I want to store the “keepers”. Either way, you should now be able to sketch out on a piece of paper, ahead of time, exactly where your photos are going, which was the objective of this article.

If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, please feel free to send Jack an email at jwilfore@hargray.com

More information on the subject of “File Management” is readily available

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on the Internet, especially from academic sources. Some of the material for this article has been extracted and credit is due these four excellent references:

Furman University's File Management or Where Did It Go?

<http://facweb.furman.edu/~pecoy/mfl195/tutorial/>

Duke University's Window's Explorer: Managing Your Files

<http://www.duke.edu/~dhewitt/tutorials/explorer/explor.html>

University of Virginia File Management

<http://www.itc.virginia.edu/desktop/docs/fms/pc/structure.html#hierarchy>

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TID BITS

Gregory West, Editor, SCUG Report

Sarnia Computer User Group, Canada

editor@scug.ca

Tid Bits is a regular column, featured in SCUG Report

"The Sky's The Limit"

Fewer and fewer people today are using that term, and for good reason. In many areas of life there are no limits, including technology. For instance: "As their average commute time rises, North Americans are making their vehicles increasingly homelike, with cushy seats, multiple zones of climate control and DVD players. So it's no surprise that the next big thing in vehicle accessories is satellite television" (Associated Press). I say, never mind with the TV, how about running WIFI through the FM radio; now that would be a good limit for all of us.

Gussed This Gadget?



MP3 player, I presume? Well, you are half-right, partially...Up for a new cell phone and more? Be prepared to see the people around you wired for almost everything: " Sony Ericsson W900 is a high quality fully specified music player, phone and imaging device capable of super-fast downloads of all types of multimedia – music, video and graphics." This gadget is a UMTS machine...what the heck is that? It is a "(Universal Mobile Telephone System): Third generation telecommunications system based on WCDMA-DS." (google search). With a 2 GB card you can listen to over 100finger0 songs while calling your boss to explain why you are late for work again. According to Sony, this Walkman/Phone/etc. is also "an entertainment device the W900 exploits the UMTS-delivered capabilities to the full, delivering fast and smooth download and browsing of video, games, sound and graphics. The high performance 3D Java gaming engine is put to the test with the embedded Asphalt Urban GT 3D from Gameloft, where users can experience the thrills of extreme racing at the wheel of the ultimate sports cars." What, no WIFI yet? Darn!

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Ok, This One Was An Easy Guess? Sort of...

Not really; yes it is a USB flash drive, however this baby is much more than your average storage case. This is bionopoly. Say what?

According to gizmodo.com, this is what is known as a fingerprint reader, "the first USB drive with built-in biometric authentication" or a "bio Computer-on a stick." Most thumb or flash drives will only store your files; Bionopoly does much more and for about the same price as the others. This gadget claims it will "will pave the way for you to do away with the usual start up process of your computer and directly boot to it. This is because the bootable USB flash drive has a built-in operating system of its own. The system further contains OpenOffice to support Microsoft Office files, the Mozilla FireFox web browser, an email client, as well as an instant messaging client which supports services like Yahoo and AOL and a PDF creating program." Fabulous features, however I am going to wait until they offer more GBs of storage...and the price wars really begin.



Extra protection for your Firefox

One of the reasons Firefox is safer than IE is that Firefox does not entertain Active X controls.

Now Firefox gets even safer with a new "NoScript" control feature.

"NoScript" is a program designed for the Firefox browser to allow you to

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control websites from automatically using JavaScript, Java. You control which sites you want to use these features, the sites you trust such as your "home-banking" web site.

"This whitelist based pre-emptive blocking approach prevents exploitation of security vulnerabilities (known and even unknown!) with no loss of functionality... Experts will agree: Firefox is really safer with NoScript."

"Staying safe has never been so easy!. Experts will agree: Firefox is really safer with NoScript" -

<http://www.noscript.net>

For all Firefox extensions go to:

<https://addons.mozilla.org>

Convert Your Files to PDF - fast and free

It doesn't get much simpler to make your own PDF-creations. Some free PDF makers insert advertising or watermarks, but not the CutePDF utility. And to make things even better, this program's "configuration choices are pretty close to nil" (PCWorld November 2005).

Get the full details and program download here:
www.cutepdf.com

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The New, the Best, and the Worst

November 2005

Collected by Pim Borman, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

swipcug@sigecom.net

Vista...

“A distant view or prospect, especially one seen through an opening, as between rows of buildings or trees.” (*Dictionary.com*)

It is also the name of the long-awaited next version of Microsoft Windows, not available until at least the second half of 2006 but already widely previewed and discussed in the PC magazines. What do we glimpse in the distance? Should we fight or switch?

The most significant improvement in Vista might well be security, stated to be a primary goal. Only time will tell – we'll still be facing continuing patches, updates and periodic Service Packs, I expect.

New Internet Explorer 7 will be a major make-over, mostly to catch up with features long since available in Opera and Firefox. It will also be available to current Windows XP users. Windows Media Player gets a boost, but will also be available in Windows XP.

Vista will appear in 32 and 64-bit versions, to accommodate the new 64-bit CPUs now available from AMD and Intel. Visually, the windows will sport new folder icons that show thumbnails of their contents, although I wonder how they handle folders with dozens of subfolders and files. If your graphics card can handle it, the icons will also be semi-transparent, wow!

Originally, Vista was supposed to support a new file system, WINFS. I understand that this file system does away with branching directory trees to store files. Instead, files all get dumped in large containers, maybe such as the current “My Documents” areas. Instead of assigning unique file names you label the files with any number of suitable tags, similar to the labels currently used in Picasa2 (see the minutes in this issue to read about Larry Goss's presentation in October). The contents of the files are also indexed on the go to facilitate a search for keywords such as already provided by Google Desktop Search and Yahoo Desktop Search. Vista is expected to include a similar search function even before WINFS eventually is implemented. But WINFS will not initially be part of Vista.

As *PC Magazine* puts it “... it increasingly appears that Vista's differentiating features, aside from the sleek new shell interface, will be the ones that are less visible to typical users: hardened security, better diagnostics, and improved manageability in enterprise environments.”

Vista will require an up-to-date computer system, with plenty of processor speed, memory, and graphics capability. Manufacturers of scanners and printers will surely provide the necessary drivers for newer equipment, but older peripherals may no longer work. Will it be worth the additional cost and aggravation to upgrade?

Dedicated gamers will love it – they need all the speed they can get, at any cost. Also, if you work with demanding graphics programs, large databases or similar CPU-intensive programs you'll probably want Vista for better support of multi-core, 64-bit CPUs. Media enthusiasts will love the new features, but why use them on a general-purpose computer?

For the rest of us, we're probably better off waiting until we need to buy a new computer that is almost certain to include Vista, whether we like it or not. At least we'll get it at a discount. I estimate that MS Windows, Office and Media Player contain at least 50% bells and whistles that are of no interest to 75% of its users.

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Last year Microsoft announced a crippled version of Windows, called Windows XP Starter Edition, being made available at low cost in certain developing countries. According to CNet News.com (<http://snipurl.com/winstart>) the local versions of the program were made available in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, India and Russia. Cost in Thailand was reported to be \$36, not including MS Works. Its intended use is in local schools for the obvious reason: catch 'em young. Read on...

...Or Else?

"The MIT Media Lab has launched a new research initiative to develop a \$100 laptop—a technology that could revolutionize how we educate the world's children. To achieve this goal, a new, non-profit association, One Laptop per Child (OLPC), has been created."

"The machines, which will run a version of the Linux operating system, will also include other applications, some developed by MIT researchers, as well as country-specific software. 'Software has gotten too fat and unreliable, so we started with Linux.'" (<http://snipurl.com/mitlap>)

These two quotes from recent MIT press releases point at new directions in the Computer Revolution. First of all, there is the realization that computers are here to stay as a basic necessity in a civilized society. To the three **Rs** of basic education we need to add a fourth **R** Requirement, computer liteRacy. The cost of general purpose computers has to come down further to make them available to every school child, even in this country, let alone in the developing nations. That clearly includes the need to eliminate the high cost of the MS Windows operating system and commercial productivity programs written for MS Windows. Essentially free Linux is the obvious alternative.

Here is another quote, from desktop.linux.com (<http://snipurl.com/INaccess>): "A number of Indiana high school students returning for the fall semester will find brand-new Linux desktops in their classrooms. Under the Indiana Access Program, which uses desktop Linux systems and standard hardware configurations to keep costs low, Wintergreen Systems Inc. and Linspire Inc. are providing computers for classrooms. The arrangement could result in as many as 300,000 Linux machines being deployed during coming years, the companies said in a statement." And Indiana is arguably not a third-world nation.

When a new generation of students gets weaned on Linux, they are likely to continue using that operating system in the future, creating the critical mass that it takes to become generally accepted as an alternate desktop tool. Some of the students will inevitably be interested in hacking the system, resulting in new and improved programs, as well as some new Linux viruses, I fear. Their efforts will be facilitated by the availability of all the underlying code, in contrast with MS Windows programs that jealously hide the source code.

Besides the effort to introduce Linux in school computers, several large cities as well as developing nations, notably China, have made it a priority to deploy Linux-based desktop computers. In the near future most of the growth of Linux will probably take place in developing areas of the world. Acceptance in the USA and other Western countries will be slowed by the difficulty or reluctance to transfer databases from MS Windows-based programs to comparable Linux programs. It may take another generation, but after maturing overseas Linux is likely to return in force to the Western world.

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Computer In A Smart House

Linda Soloski, Greater Tampa Bay PC User Group

I got this from a friend who just moved to North Carolina. Her husband is being deployed to Iraq.

Hello, everyone! It is so good to return to the land of the living.

We've had quite an adjustment getting ourselves here to North Carolina, electronically speaking.

The saga began in Brandon [Florida], when — for some unknown reason — Verizon decided to disconnect our service four days early. Repeated attempts to get back online failed, as did numerous attempts to retrieve all my lost email correspondences (which I had not yet saved) and all of my email contacts.

Charlotte, my DAR friend, actually located your address on a scrap slip of paper stuck between the kid's medical record and the telephone book!

So, please, if you have a mass email from me with numerous addresses, forward it to this new address, as I am trying to compile a list from scratch. Did I mention that no one at Verizon seemed to know that one could actually store email addresses in their "Address" box? Interesting.

Finally, with much ado and nothing to show for it, we get to North Carolina. We bought our house in a nice little rural neighborhood with quiet streets, so quiet in fact, that apparently the cable company had no idea we existed.

For three weeks, I called back and forth trying to get someone to acknowledge that we are here and we do indeed exist. On the third week without internet access, I have completed my 12-step compulsive-computer-user-withdrawal program and the pangs have started to subside when the cable guy stops by to say we do, indeed, exist and our lines, as I've repeatedly shouted, are running all through the house.

Did I mention we purchased a "smart" house? Yep. It's so sophisticated that you can turn electronics on from any phone or internet extension anywhere in the world. (Too bad we can't get internet, huh?) The entire house is hard-wired with wireless internet, surround sound, security systems, the works!

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Then we move to step two.

The "other" cable (not the one that says you exist, a different one) has to come by and actually stick the cables together and connect them to their box.

Another nine days go by and the drool and shaky hands are back. It's so hard to be addicted to technology. I'm telling you, the guy seemed to have a glow all around when he approached the door and I thought I heard the faint sound of harps playing.

Now I wish I could say I'm exaggerating, but seven hours, yeah, SEVEN HOURS later, he still can't get the lines hooked up. Apparently our "smart" house is smarter than our cable guy.

He leaves, then returns, then calls the home office, then another cable guy. At 7 p.m., my husband comes home and dismisses the guy in lieu of going to dinner and asks him to come back the next day.

"Sure" the guy says. Of course, the next day, no one shows. After several calls we're told only the home office can schedule and the next available slot is five days from now. A familiar pang hits my gut like an alcoholic at a night club.

We press on and five days later, not one, not two, but THREE cable guys show up. In 15 minutes, we're up and running. Internet, email, the works! HALLELUJAH!

So you think now we are we up and running? Nah. Once again, our "Smart" house has outsmarted us. Our 21st century top-of-the-line electronic package left us without a connection in the dog-gone office! ('Cause no one wants a computer in the office, right?)

I'm off to Best Buy for a wireless router to network with our smart house. Installation, as is always the case, was a blast! I never realized I had a drinking problem.

That night, before I've had a chance to surf even the first Website, we have a terrible electrical storm. No problem, we've got the monster surge protector, we'll be fine.

You guessed it! No power.

The next day, no computer, either. I wish I could say I am joking. Two

trips to Best Buy's "Geek Squad" and I'm told I have no — let me repeat that — NO HARD DRIVE. They try rescuing it, but, as is par for this course, there is just no saving it. I take a week off to lick my wounds and try to heal then run out and buy a new laptop.

Now I have a nice new computer that is completely useless until I fill it up with all of the software I lost. Did I mention I HATE electronics? I've lost all my family tree stuff, all my World War II information, all the stuff on book publishers for the family history, the Daughters of the American Revolution stuff, everything. I would appreciate anything that any of you may have that could help me rebuild. And yes, I'm putting it all on CD this time so as not to lose it.

As for my internet days, I'd like to say I'm cured. But like a bad addiction, I find myself inexplicably drawn to the blue-gray glow of the computer screen and the hum of a hard drive kicking in is like the melodic sirens off the coast of tiny islands, drawing unsuspecting sailors toward their doom.

At least for that brief period, when everything works according to plan, I may be able to reach that euphoric nirvana of a captain sinking with his ship, knowing he's going down doing what he loves.

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Ram & Reason: A Virus and Incident Checklist

By Rob Rice, Member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City

Much has been said about virus and malicious software prevention, but what if all of your precautions fail? So there you are, happily clicking along the Internet when suddenly a popup ad obstructs your view. You start to close it and then another and then another pops up so that in just a few seconds there are so many pop-up ads that you cannot possibly close them all as they just keep coming. So what do you? Delete them as fast as you can in hopes that they will stop? Turn off the computer? Suddenly a program appears from nowhere and informs you that you have been infected with a Trojan virus and the program needs to scan your system so that the Trojan can be removed. The problem is that you do not remember ever having installed this program. Do you trust it?

There are some industry-accepted procedures for dealing with this type of incident and any virus or Trojan infection. Just follow these five simple steps in the following order to minimize damage:

1. Do not turn off your computer unless you are certain that your files are being actively deleted!
2. Disconnect the network cable from your computer and/or turn off your wireless connection.
3. Write down any error messages and the names of any programs or software that was running at the time the infection occurred.
4. Mark the computer "Do Not Use".
5. Run any of your applications that you are certain are yours and that might have opened identifying a virus attack. Next, run your antivirus, anti-Trojan tools.

Step One:

Do not turn off your computer. Not every trojan and virus is the same so this rule will have exceptions, but generally you do not want to turn off the computer unless you can see that the virus is deleting your files. If you think that it can be stopped from deleting your files without turning off the computer, then this is a better option than turning off the computer. The reason is that while turning the computer off will temporarily stop the damage more harm can come when you turn the computer back on. System files can be infected when loading, boot sectors contaminated, hard drive partitions erased, registries corrupted. For example, on a Windows system every time you make a major system change one of the first things that it wants you to do is reboot, "To allow the changes to take affect". In the case of a virus or trojan, the last thing we want to do is to allow the changes to

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take affect.

Step Two:

Disconnect the network cable from your computer and/or turn off your wireless connection. Trojans are designed to open a door and let other Trojans, spyware and viruses in. Physically disconnecting its link to the Internet stops this behavior, prevents your personnel information from going out and prevents other machines from being infected. Many checklists have this action rated number one and for good reasons. I rate it here as step two because step one is simply a quick decision that can have a significant impact on the recovery outcome.

Step Three:

Write down any error messages that appear and the names of any programs or software that was running at the time the infection occurred. This is important not only for repairing the system but also for identifying which alerts are real and which ones are bogus. Error messages that contain misspellings and poor grammar are likely bogus and generated by the virus.

Step Four:

Mark the computer "Do Not Use". This is in case you get called away and have to leave the system alone for any length of time.

Step Five:

Run any of your applications that you are certain are yours and that might have opened to identify a virus attack. Next, run your antivirus anti-Trojan tools.

It's possible that your antivirus or anti-Trojan software may have detected the attack and started running a system scan or is prompting you and waiting for instructions. If you are certain that it is your software then let it do what it wants to do and let it clean the system. If you have any doubts as to whether the program is in fact one of your programs then **DO NOT RUN THE SOFTWARE!**

Some Trojans actually install and run a program pretending to be antivirus/anti-Trojan software and scan your system all the while claiming to be cleaning your computer. In reality it is part of the Trojan. Some of these programs look very commercial and very polished so be careful!

Rob Rice is a computer specialist working in Anchorage, Alaska. Rob can be contacted at articles@isp.com

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ACPCUG Club News

NEW VENUE, well returning to! AKRON MAIN Library

Maps & Description on ACPCUG Website, www.acpcug.org

NOTE TIME is 6:15PM! This is because free parking starts after 6:00 PM. If you're parked at 5:59 PM, you'll be charged for the *WHOLE TIME!* (Policy stinks, but that's what it is!)

FROM North or South on Rt. 8 freeway: Exit *West* on Perkins Street going down the hill to a third light on *High Street* (one-way going South, left).

Cross E. Market and *immediately* look for parking building entrance on your right. Go down to lower level for indoor connection to library.

Upcoming Computer Shows:

No Peter Trapp Shows in 2005 announced.

Club Officers area code 330, unless noted otherwise			
President	Frank Ramsey (2007)	699-4711	aframsey@yahoo.com
VP, Community Liaison	Rick Lubinski (2005)	928-7179	lubinski@bright.net
Secretary	Walt Ruthenburg (2006)	283-7867	wruthenburg@usa.net
Assistant Treasurer	Murray Davis (2006)	440-248-0021	murray5050@yahoo.com
Treasurer	Jim Albright (2005)	923-8686	jra823a@netscape.net
Newsletter Editor	Art McRowe	666-3189	acpcugnews@yahoo.com
VP, Software Evaluation	Dave Bohm (2007)	762-6745	boh320@aol.com