

ACPCUG Newsletter

**North Hill
Public Library**

February 7, 2005

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Feb. Program:

Starts at 6:00 PM

VOIp (Voice over Internet Protocol by Dave Bohm + Q&A + Discussion of ISP's

February 2005

Akron-Canton PC Users Group

**From The DealsGuy for
March 2005,
by Bob (The Cheapskate)
Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users Group**

I was going to take an old computer to our beach condo because even though it was old and slow, it would be plenty good enough for just checking my email and miscellaneous tasks. Then around Thanksgiving prices started dropping on new computers and I saw a Dell ad with a 2.2 gig Celeron processor, 256 megs RAM, CD-ROM burner, 17" monitor etc. for \$399 and a \$50 rebate, making it just \$349. That sounded great, so I went to a local mall with a Dell kiosk so I could ask questions, and ordered one. It also included free two-day shipping. I wasn't the latest and greatest, but actually a good computer much more modern than my old one, and cheap.

A week later I saw a Dell ad with the same configuration, but also including a printer, for \$349 and no rebate. I still had not received the computer I ordered so I called Dell to cancel the original order and get the new deal. They said the original order was already

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shipped and I should have received it by now. After some conversation about what happened to the two-day shipping, they gave me a \$35 Dell store credit for the inconvenience of not having received it yet. Then I hit them up for the printer at no extra cost because of the new ad. After a little argument and a five-minute wait for a consultation, they finally conceded and promised to send the printer free of charge.

Five days later I finally received the original computer package I had ordered and was pleased with it. I promptly sent for my rebate and three weeks later was amazed to receive \$60 instead of \$50. However, I still had not received the free printer promised. I called Dell again, gave the tracking number, and found the order had been cancelled, but was offered the option to talk to a human. I laid a guilt complex on Dell for the whole thing and after a pause, they again promised to send a free printer. Two days later a Dell printer arrived and when I opened the box, it was an all-in-1 machine, better than I had expected. Prices in ads have been much higher since and I feel I got a great deal.

The two announcements below look like interesting products, but I have not tried either one.

Tax Time

I forgot to remind you before about the free version of Tax Act for doing your Federal income tax as well as state tax. Visit [<http://www.taxactsoftware.com>]. You can download a program FREE to calculate your Federal Income tax. This is the third year I have played with it and while there are a few things I would like to see improved, you can't beat the price. There is also a pay-version, which I use, for \$12.95 that is well worth the price since it gives you one free E-tax filing. The pay version will import last year's data into the new version, which saves a lot of time. You can also do your tax right on the Tax Act Web site if you prefer. All in all, Tax Act is a good deal.

You can also do your tax right on the IRS's own official Web site. I have not tried that, but Ira Wilsker wrote an excellent article on that and if it is not in your newsletter, check the APCUG Web site. I've seen other free options for doing your own income tax calculation, but I don't have that info handy.

Don't forget that AARP has hard working volunteers who will do your tax FREE if its not too complicated, such as if you have rental homes or apartments. Check with your local AARP chapter for the times and places. If you are unsure about whether they will do yours, take it to them and ask. The worst they can do is say "sorry."

Media Catalog Studio Announcement

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This was sent to me in November of 2004. They offer a 15% user group discount. Check their Web site for more information.

“For Immediate Release

Catalog and classify your media collection easy!

November 10, 2004 ManiacTools Releases Media Catalog Studio 1.7

“Media Catalog Studio is a handy software application that classifies and tracks media files on hard-drives, floppies, external drives, CDs, DVDs and other storage media. Importantly, the information about the media files does not need to be entered manually. The program automatically detects MP3, WMA, APE, OGG, WAV, AVI, WMV, MPEG, Video and Audio CD files and inputs this information inside a database. Moreover, the software comes with CDDDB support, an online database that exports information about songs (Title, Artist, Album, Year) directly from Internet.

“All data entries can be sorted by artist, album, year, bitrate, frequency, genre, category, rating, or any field/category. The search in the database can be conducted using multiple parameters, like file properties (name, size, etc), tag information or lyrics. Media file lists can be customized to display information in any way or order. As an added perk, the program features an internal tag reader and editor for audio and video files, duplicates finder, and supports an option for storing pictures. In addition, the application creates Winamp and Windows Media Player play-lists with a few mouse-clicks. The other great features are MS Excel export options and Media Tracker; a feature that shows the user where a necessary media file is located.

“Media Catalog Studio has received over a dozen awards for its usability, including the prestigious Five Cows rating at Tucows.Com, and Editor's Pick at MyMusicTools.com. The program is translated in all major European languages. A free version of Media Catalog Studio Lite 1.7 is available now; [<http://www.maniactools.com>]. The freeware Lite version supports up to 5 disks in database. An upgrade to a Pro version costs \$24.95 US Dollars/Euros for individuals and \$34.95 US Dollars/Euros for businesses and organizations. We offer a 15% discount to members of your user group. The discount coupon code is 4567841341 and is redeemable at [http://www.ManiacTools.com/soft/media_catalog_studio/discount.shtml]. If you have any questions, please contact Alex Pavlenko at [press@maniactools.com].

“Company Website

[<http://www.maniactools.com>]

Product Page

[http://www.maniactools.com/soft/media_catalog_studio/]

Download

[http://www.maniactools.com/media_catalog_studio.exe]

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Here is an announcement for Fontonizer

I received this announcement in November of 2004 and they offer a 15% discount to user group members.

"Our company, Fast Reports Inc., would like to announce the release of Fontonizer for Windows 95/98/ME/NT/2000/XP. To get 15% discount for Fontonizer use Coupon Code 'UserGroupPR-FO' on register here: [<https://secure.element5.com/shareit/checkout.html?productid=168090>].

"Fontonizer is making big waves in web-design and publishing industries. While an average PC has about one hundred different fonts installed - marketers, designers, publishers, editors and print professionals often have collections with 5000 different fonts or more. With so many fonts, only very experienced professionals can match font name with its appearance. But Fontonizer is not merely a font viewer, though it comes with this function built-in. Fontonizer is a font organizer.

"With Fontonizer, any professional can easily classify fonts. First, one creates categories - like "Business Letter Body", "Groovy and Hip", "Classy", "Headlines", "Attention Grabbers", "Exotic", "Fine print", "Comments and footnotes", "Hand written", "Miscellaneous". Then, fonts are "placed" in these categories, so they can be easily located when necessary. The best thing about Fontonizer is that it works with fonts that aren't currently installed on a PC. In fact, it works with fonts that are stored not only on hard-drive, but CDs, DVDs, flash-drives and External Drives.

"Even though the fonts may not be installed, you can write a word or sentence to see how it looks. If necessary, Fontonizer will automatically show a list of the same word or phrase visualized with different fonts. This way one can easily compare and find the font that is most appropriate for a certain occasion.

"Finally, Fontonizer comes with even more functions font professionals need. For example, the program performs installation /deletion / restoration of the deleted fonts. Plus, Fontonizer is capable of displaying "symbol table" of any font, even if it was deleted. With Fontonizer, professionals can experiment not only with fonts and sizes, but backgrounds as well. Fontonizer is distributed electronically over the Internet; a free demo version is available at [<http://www.fontonizer.com/>] for evaluation.

The price of a single license is \$29 US Dollars for a single copy.

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

Product Page: [<http://www.fontonizer.com/>]

Download: [<http://www.fontutilities.com/download/fo100.zip>]

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Buy Link: [<http://fontutilities.com/order.htm>]"

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 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>]. I have posted new Web pages with announcements I received in 2004. Sorry they are not well organized, but what is there was a lot of work, as they all have to be edited. I have received some since then and will also post one of these days.

Firefox: A program popularized by open source programmers

by Linda Gonse, Editor, Nibbles & Bits

Orange County IBM PC Users' Group

www.orcopug.org

The latest version of Firefox, an open source program, formerly Mozilla, and before that, Netscape Navigator, was released to popular acclaim near the end of 2004 from www.mozilla.com. Many people, tired of security problems and perpetual patching of Internet Explorer, have begun to make the switch to Firefox. I was one of them. It was an easy transition to import my bookmarks, favorites, and other items, and set up housekeeping in it.

But, it was a real surprise to find free "themes," a change of appearance for Firefox. Feeling the exhilaration of discovery, I downloaded Nautipolis, Red Cats, Gray Modern, and Littlefox, and others; finally settling on Littlefox. Then, I discovered "extensions." Extensions are little programs, originally called applets, that run from within Firefox. Their specialized capabilities add to the functionality of Firefox and quickly become features you just can't live without. There are about a dozen I use, including: Weatherfox, QuickNote, Titlebar Tweaks, SpoofStick, Copy-PlainText, and Tabbrowser Extensions.

One extension that makes my online life simpler is called QuickNote. It allows me to copy and paste from browser pages into a tabbed notepad available right in the browser. It saves me from opening Word or Notepad and working back and forth from one of them to the browser window.

Fascinated with the free extensions, I tracked down QuickNote's creator, Jed Brown, to ask him to tell me how he got started and why he wrote the program. Also, QuickNote had earned five stars as a popular

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Firefox item, I wondered if Jed thought it might end up being incorporated into Internet Explorer.

He said, "I became involved with Mozilla back in the 90s. I was a frequent user of what was then the Mosaic browser when the World Wide Web had just begun. Netscape was born from Mosaic and I was instantly a user of Netscape Navigator.

"Once the "browser wars" began, I was a devoted Netscape user who really loathed how Microsoft used their OS dominance to spread use of their browser. Unfortunately, after Netscape released its 4.0 browser, MS was right on their tail and produced an even better and more standards-compliant browser.

"Despite the better browser, I was loyal and stayed on NS as long as I could. Around the time when Netscape 5 was going to be released (1998 I believe), they decided to open-source their browser. That sparked my interest and I got my hands on the code as quickly as I could. Once the open source community realized that the NS code was a huge hack and badly organized, they decided to start from scratch and create what was to be the fastest most compliant browser ever. This was too good to be true.

Unfortunately this was no easy endeavor and would take over three years to get even close to a final product. In the meantime, Internet Explorer was the superior product (over NS 4.x) and was becoming the browser of choice for many -- including myself. "I wasn't hacking on any of the code, but I did start testing the releases from the first public beta release. Since that day, I used this new engine and code base as much as I could, but always had IE there for sites that did not work in the new, young and untested engine.

Once Mozilla had matured (version 0.8) and became usable on a daily basis, I switched over and said goodbye to IE for good.

"The folks at Netscape had a brilliant idea called XUL that would allow them to write the interface to the browser once, and allow it to run on any platform possible. This meant Mozilla looked the same on Windows, Mac, Linux/ OS 2, etc. This same technology allowed authors like myself to start creating programs that would live on top of the Mozilla platform and extend its functionality (now called "Extensions").

"As a high school student back then, I started a project called "QuickNote" that would allow easy access to a notepad-like sidebar for easy note taking.

"While my extension was popular and used amongst many Mozilla users, Mozilla was plagued with bad interface design decisions from Netscape and AOL who later bought Netscape, so it really never hit it well with anyone but "geek" users. A few talented programmers at Netscape (Hyatt, Blake, Goodger, etc.) realized this and in their free time started a new pro-

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ject based on Mozilla, but much more simple, that was meant to be only a browser instead of a full suite like Mozilla was. This eventually turned into what Firefox is today.

"Thanks to Firefox (formerly Phoenix and Firebird) much more attention was brought to it and a much larger user base. More interest in Mozilla, XUL, and extension development arose. This has led to over 200 extensions made for Mozilla applications, and has brought together programmers from around the world, like myself, to join in and help make Firefox/Mozilla better.

"For example, QuickNote was a project I was doing by myself in my free time. But now many different users contribute code and translation. A Russian programmer, Nickolay Ponomarev, has joined with me and contributes to QuickNote on a regular basis.

The whole idea of multi-platform and open source software is amazing as it has brought thousands of people together under one cause, despite language and cultural barriers. This in part, is thanks to Mozilla and its example that open source software can be just as good -- and in this case -- better, than proprietary software."

We asked Jed what he sees for Firefox in the next couple of years?

He said, "I think we will see a continuous trend in the growth of Firefox users. Once Microsoft won the browser wars, it dismantled its IE team, and left users high and dry. Firefox is filling this void, bringing a new and fresh idea to the World Wide Web and making it the place it should have been (virus/popup/spyware free) years ago.

"I also can see more and more companies embracing Firefox in their internal networks and products they offer to their users. Google, Amazon and many others are already starting."

We also wondered if Mozilla/Firefox will survive and grow through the efforts of the open source community. Or will Microsoft will gobble up talented program writers such as Jed, and IE will remain dominant?

"Mozilla/Firefox will definitely survive, and be vital for the years to come," Jed said. "Microsoft is far behind with Longhorn and even when it ships it will take years to get users to migrate over. In the meantime Firefox will continue to see growth in users on multiple platforms, and be extremely important to the survival of Linux as a desktop alternative. Sure MS will copy features and do its best to find exploits in Firefox. No software is perfect, but I believe the very nature of Mozilla and Firefox appeals to users and gives the Web freedom from control from one sole company. As time goes by, I think the average user will begin to understand this and realize the importance of alternative products and that they are superior in many aspects.

"The other huge benefit that Firefox has as a browser and Mozilla, in

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general, as a platform, is their mutiplatform nature. As a programmer, I can create any application or extension based on Mozilla and easily make it work on every platform that Mozilla/Firefox runs on. This allows users to use any system they like, perhaps Unix/Linux at work, Mac OS on their laptop and Windows XP at home, and yet feel no difference when it comes to surfing the web and using the applications/extensions built on Mozilla. Microsoft has no real answer to this (although .Net tries) and it is a huge selling point to both users and corporations."

(You can email Jed at contact_me@jedbrown.net, and look for programs he has written for Firefox at Mozilla.com.)

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The Computer Corner

by Joe Shipley, Phoenix PC Users Group NEWS

www.phoenixpcug.org

Protecting Your Computer During the "Flu and Virus" Season

With all the viruses and other malware around, I have accumulated a group of software that I consider to be necessary 'protection' for any computer that connects to the Internet.

The software I recommend consists of:

Ad-Aware <http://www.lavasoft.com/>

Spybot Search & Destroy <http://www.safer-networking.org/en/mirrors/index.html>

CWS shredder http://www.intermute.com/spysubtract/cwshredder_download.html

Zone Alarm http://www.zonelabs.com/store/content/catalog/products/sku_list_zs.jsp

AVG Antivirus <http://free.grisoft.com/freeweb.php/doc/2/Ing/us/tpl/v5>

Pop-Up Stopper http://www.panicware.com/product_psfree_download.html

All of these programs are FREE. Millions of people are using them. For Ad-aware alone, there have been more than 90 million downloads just from Download.com.

Once these programs are on your system, you need to make sure they are updated. AVG and Zone Alarm have automatic updating; the others need to be updated by clicking a button.

Ad-Aware and Spybot specialize in removing spies and malware from your system. They each will remove some bad things the other does not, so I use them both.

When running Ad-Aware, first do an update to check for the newest definition files. After updating, run the program. If the program finds items which need to be removed, you'll see a display of the items suggested for removal. If there are no check marks in the boxes to the left of the item name, right-click in the frame and choose the "Select All" option. This will check all the items for you. Click on "Next" to move the items to a quarantine area. Once quarantined, the items are removed and will refrain from causing you any problems. If you remove something you really need, you can go to the quarantine area and recover the item to have it restored.

Upon installation of Spybot, the program will search for updates and give you the opportunity to download them. Do so. Updates are good. After updating, run the Immunizer to make sure you block about 2,000+ bad sites. Once updated, go to "Search & Destroy" to begin searching for more

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than 24,000 (as of this writing) spies, malware, Trojans and other bad things, which if found, will be removed from your system.

One of the features included with Spybot that I recommend is called "Tea Timer." This feature advises you every time a change is proposed for your startup files. Viruses, worms and Trojans will often insert instructions into the startup files. By utilizing Tea Timer, you can determine if a change to these files should be permitted or not. The logic of whether or not to allow a change is simple: if you just installed some software and you're prompted for a change, it's probably ok. But if you're prompted for a change and you did not just install new software, just click NO. When in doubt, keep it out. You can always add it in later.

CWS shredder can be used to remove a specific group of web search files that can hijack your browser to take you to certain websites and use specific search engines, whether you want to or not. The shredder removes those web search hijackers.

Zone Alarm is a terrific firewall that advises you of every attempt made by your computer to access the Internet, and of each attempt by the Internet to access your computer. At first it may seem like an annoyance, but once you catch on to the rhythm of how it works, it will greatly reduce the number of unauthorized Internet accesses without your consent. The program runs in the background, and gives you the chance to let it learn which Internet sites are acceptable and which aren't. For example, the first time you go to do online banking, you may see a message asking you if you want to go to a specific site. If you say "NO," you won't be able to reach your bank's web site. Don't be alarmed. Try your bank again, and when you're prompted to see if you really want to go to the bank's site, then check the box "Remember this site" and click on the "Allow" button. The next time you want to go to the bank's site you'll get right in.

AVG Antivirus is a good antivirus program, self-updating, and will scan email as well as perform a regular antivirus scan. You can even setup automatic virus checking to have your system scanned when it's convenient for you. With AVG you can, as Ron Popeil says, "Set it and Forget it!"

The last component of my protection package is Panicware's Popup Stopper. This handy Popup blocker actually works. And if your bank's web site uses popups which are being stopped, you can hold down the control key to temporarily disable the stopper to let you receive popups you actually want. You can also open the control center and disable the stopper at any time if the handy control key feature doesn't do the job for you.

So this flu season you can get added protection by using the software described above, and minimize your downtime.

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TECH NEWS – January 2005

By Sue Crane, Vice President / Editor

The Big Bear Computer Club

www.bbcc.org

The search engine wars get more interesting by the week. Google is partnering with some of the world's most prestigious universities to make it easier for Web users to scan the schools' vast library holdings. The collaboration of Google and research institutions that include Harvard, the University of Michigan, Stanford and the New York Public Library is a major stride in an ambitious Internet effort. The goal is to expand the Web beyond its current valuable body of material and create a digital card catalog and searchable library for the world's books, scholarly papers and special collections. Meanwhile, Yahoo is adding local traffic information to its maps service, including roadwork and accident reports as well as the approximate speed at which traffic is proceeding along specific roads. The service, part of Yahoo Maps, will offer accident reports and road construction information for about 70 U.S. metropolitan areas. The service will also provide driving speed information for about 22 of those areas. The traffic information is layered on top of a map at the user's request. Icons are used to indicate accidents or construction, while color codes are used for the speed information. And America Online is testing a Web-based e-mail service that will compete with Yahoo Mail, Microsoft's Hotmail and Google's Gmail. the beta service for America Online's free Web-based e-mail is available to AOL subscribers only. But it will eventually be offered to the public for free.

With a floating screen, Mitsubishi's Scopio due next year will truly be a portable computer!. This headset with an eye-sized, eye-level LCD creates the illusion that a 10-inch display is in front of the viewer. The Scopio comes with a belt-carried unit with a CPU to process images and video. It can be attached to a cell phone, video player, or other device.

Two Japanese companies, Toshiba and Memory-Tech, say they've developed the world's first DVD that can be played on both standard and high-definition DVD players, using the HD-DVD format. HD-DVD has the backing of the DVD Forum.

You can get anything on eBay -- except justice. That's what one disgruntled litigant found when she snarkily offered a New York City judge for sale on the popular auction site. Even though the highest bidder offered more than \$100, she found out the hard way that crime just doesn't pay. And the judge was not amused.

Residents of 13 western states can check all three of their credit reports for free at AnnualCreditReport.com. The Midwest will come on stream

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on March 1, the South on June 1, and the East on Sept. 1. Previously, you had to buy this information from the three credit reporting companies: TransUnion, Experian and Equifax. The three reports can vary. That's why all three, and not just one, are available. Check your credit report online at: <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/cra/index.jsp>

The California Energy Commission unanimously approved standards to be phased in beginning in 2006 that would require household appliances including televisions, VCRs, DVD players and cell phone chargers, to run on one to three watts. Even when idle, such appliances now typically gobble up two to 10 watts. Commissioners estimate that compliance with the new guidelines will save commercial and residential power customers more than \$3 billion over 15 years.

iBrattleboro.com is at the forefront of Web publishers delivering local news. What's is that they are relying on local residents. The idea is that citizen-generated content lowers costs and creates more loyal audiences. One intriguing experiment started in May when the Bakersfield Californian launched a community Web site called the Northwest Voice (www.northwestvoice.com). The site has no paid writers except for a lone editor. It employs only four people full-time, gets most of its content from readers. Last month, the J-Lab Institute for Interactive Journalism at the University of Maryland announced a \$1 million grant program to fund what it calls "micro-local" Web news experiments around the country. Funded by the Knight Foundation, each initial grant will amount to \$12,000 and go to nonprofit groups creating community news sites.

Microsoft is setting an example for customers as they introduce a second security measure for their internal networks: smart cards for every employee. By the end of 2005, tens of thousands of telecommuting Microsoft employees will be issued the cards, which will be required to log on to the company's networks.

President Bush signed a new four-year ban on state and federal taxation of Internet connections. The latest version of The Internet Tax Nondiscrimination Act expands the original dial-up definition of access to include DSL, cable modems and wireless Internet connections. The bill blocks states from differentiating for tax purposes between dial-up and broadband hookups.

Intel's products for the digital home and digital office in 2005 will give consumers and IT managers more capabilities than just raw performance, and the company plans to highlight those products. Earlier this year, Intel canceled two single-core desktop and server designs and announced plans to accelerate the development of dual-core processors. Intel is planning to

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design and market its desktop processors in platforms, similar to the way the company brought the Pentium M processor, a new mobile chipset and new wireless capabilities to customers as part of the Centrino platform. Intel expects to bring 64-bit capabilities to its desktop processors in the first half of 2005 (Microsoft's 64-bit Windows XP operating system is scheduled to ship in the first quarter of next year). In 2006, Intel will bring out the Bridge Creek and Averill platforms for the digital home and digital office. These platforms will feature Intel's security and virtualization technologies that it highlighted at recent Intel Developer Forum conferences. Microsoft's next update to the Windows operating system, code-named Longhorn, will be required to take advantage of the hardware-based security and virtualization technologies that Intel plans for 2006.

A report from U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP), a nonprofit group that sets standards for the drug industry, says that as more hospitals have implemented automated systems for administering drugs the number of errors associated with them has risen. Kenneth Kizer of the National Quality Forum says: "Technology offers great opportunity to reduce errors, but it's not a panacea. You can't just throw a computerized system in and expect that everything's fixed. It has to be done right. The technology is only as good as the people who use it."

Microsoft next year plans to host its first developers conference dedicated to the Microsoft Office System, underscoring the company's strategy to make Office a foundation for customized business applications. The conference will take place Feb. 2 through 4 in Microsoft's home town of Redmond, Wash., and will feature Microsoft chair Bill Gates as its keynote speaker. The company said Monday that it expects about 800 developers from independent software vendors, consulting partners and corporate customers to participate.

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The Wonder of the Current Computer Hardware Transitions By Timothy Everingham, TUGNET, www.tugnet.org teveringham@acm.org

When we have been changing computer hardware standards frequently, it has been one thing at a time. At other times those in authority say that if we are going to change one thing lets get some other changes done too. We are going through much more of the latter right now.

The thing that is more in the forefront of change currently is the move from PCI and AGP motherboard card slots to PCI Express (PCIe). PCI Express also changes the way data is transferred (serial rather than parallel) and has more intelligent data traffic management. This puts you in the position of having to decide whether to migrate to the AGP and PCI cards when upgrading to a new processor and motherboard or buying a new computer, something that is more of a problem if you recently paid a lot of money for a high end AGP graphics card or have a specialized PCI card where there is no equivalent PCIe card available. However, there are motherboards currently available that have both old and new type slots.

On the other hand you could go to the other extreme by buying a computer with the new NVIDIA SLI system. That is a motherboard with two PCIe graphics slots where you can run two NVIDIA graphics cards in parallel to get a 3D graphics performance boost similar to what was done to the old 3dfx Voodoo 2. We also started a shift last spring from Sockets 940 and 754 to Socket 939 for AMD 64 bit processors (Socket A remains for 32 Bit AMD processors) and from Socket 478 to 775 for Intel Pentium 4 processors, which also limits your upgrade options. Dual core processors, which have two CPUs on one chip, will be coming out for workstations, servers, and desktops in the second half of this year. Support for dual core processors will come from more of a BIOS change than socket change; however, some motherboards will be able to support dual core processors by upgrading your flash BIOS, but others will not. We also are making the transition from DDR to DDR2 system RAM, and some motherboards only support DDR2.

Now you think you have had enough. I am nowhere near finished. We now have a new power supply standard too. ATX Power Supply 2.01 is in process of replacing ATX Power Supply 1.3. Newer motherboards have different power connectors now. The new connector has 24 pins rather than the old one with 20. There have been adapters for the 1.3 power connectors to fit 2.01 compliant motherboards, but now we are going to move to adapters for 2.01 power supplies to fit into 1.3 compliant motherboards. Some motherboards and power supplies had AUX connectors, but the new standard does away with that. One thing that is nice with the new standard

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is that having SATA drive power connectors is now mandatory rather than optional. Also power supplies under the new standard are supposed to be more efficient. Nevertheless be aware that some power supply manufacturers have been exaggerating the capacity of their power supplies.

However, this new power supply standard is just a step in another transition, the move from the ATX motherboard and case design standards to BTX design standards. I say standards because there are three different BTX motherboard design formats: BTX, MicroBTX, and Pico BTX. BTX replaces the standard ATX motherboards, with MicroBTX going against the Mini-ATX motherboards and PicoBTX goes against the ITX motherboards. Part of the reasons for the change is to redesign the airflows in the case to get rid of all heat generated by the latest processors.

The airflow of BTX designs is from the front of the computer straight through to the back of the computer rather than typical lower front intake with exhaust in the upper back. The CPU has been repositioned towards the front of the computer so it gets the cool air first. That means a redesign of the power supply to a new BTX standard. Also a thermal module has replaced the standard CPU heat sink and fan. It takes a more global approach in covering the highest heat producing components sitting on the motherboard, including the CPU. Intel is the one who is pushing this because their Pentium 4s have higher clock speeds than an equivalent AMD Athlon 64 chip, which means they produce higher heat. There is so much heat that Intel had to abandon their goal of producing a 4 GHz Pentium 4 chip. As such AMD is not in such pressure to move to BTX, so BTX motherboards supporting AMD processors will be a few months behind those supporting Intel processors. The first BTX motherboards just recently came out, and should become dominate in 2006.

What does all this mean? By the second half of 2005 if you have a computer that is more than one year old it will probably be better to get an entire new computer rather than upgrade. This puts into motion another round of the old computer becoming the backup computer and the old backup computer becoming a boat anchor, flowerpot, or for the more adventurous: Christmas or Chanukah display control system for the whole house and yard. However, because there are so many changes with these transitions that many people will get a new computer sooner than normal, resulting in some of the retiring old backup computers being new enough to where nonprofit organizations and schools may want them. As such the probability is that not just those selling computers and computer components benefit from the chaos caused by this round of the wonder of computer hardware transitions.

Timothy Everingham is CEO of Timothy Everingham Consulting in Azusa, California. He is also part-time press in the areas of high technology, computers, video, audio, and entertainment/media and has had articles

Moving to a New Computer System

by Gene Barlow, User Group Relations

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Many users buy a new computer during the holiday season when sales are everywhere and prices are low. Perhaps you got a new computer recently, too. By now, you have your new computer all set up and you are busy learning all the new things you can do with it. But, you find that you miss having a familiar program or some files from your old computer on your new computer. How can you move your programs and data files from your old computer to your new computer is a question I hear often. Done a step at a time, this can be a long and hard process to complete. Finding all of your programs and files on your old computer and then installing them and getting them to work on your new computer is not the easiest thing to do. There is a software utility called Move Me by Spearit software in New Jersey that can make this process a quick and easy thing to accomplish. Let me share with you this month a bit of information about this amazing software utility.

First, you place your old computer and your new computer next to each other on a work table or counter. Then you connect the two computers together with one of three different communication cables that will let your two computers talk to each other and move files between them. The fastest of these communication cables in a standard local area network (LAN) connection. If both your old and new computers have ethernet ports on them, you can connect the two with either an inexpensive CAT-5e UTP Crossover cable (under \$5 typically) or a couple of standard LAN patch cables connected to a LAN Hub. If you don't have ethernet ports on both computers, but have USB ports on both of them, you can use a special USB1.1 or USB2 File Transfer Cable (\$30-40 from www.spearit.com) to connect your old and new computer. The third option is to use a special parallel transfer cable (\$12) between the two parallel (printer) ports on the two computers. While this is slower than the other two connection options, you can always count on your computers having parallel ports.

When you have your old and new computer connected together with one of

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the three cable options above, you run Move Me on both computers. Before you begin to transfer your files between the two computers, Move Me needs to validate your serial number with Spearit software. You will need an internet connection on one of your two computers or even a third nearby computer to do this. The Move Me screen on your old computer will tell you where to connect to and what information to submit in your Validation internet run. Move Me is licensed for moving files from a single computer and cannot be used to move files from another computer later on. The validation takes only a minute or two to complete and then you are ready to start moving all of your files from your old computer to your new computer. Here's what happens as the move progresses. Move Me gets a file from your old computer and looks to see if it is already on your new computer. If not, it copies the file across the cable and installs it on your new computer. Then it goes back and gets the next file on your old computer. It continues this process until all files have been copied from your old computer to your new computer. The entire process may take an hour or more to complete, depending on the number of files on your old computer needing to be copied and the transfer cable speed. Move Me copies all of your data and setting files between the two computers. It also copies all of your application programs between the two computers. It even copies the registry entries from your old computer and merges these into the registry of your new computer so that your application programs can run on your new computer. The only things that are not copied to the new computer are your operating system and any files that were already installed on the new computer. Your old computer is not changed in the Move Me process. So, it will continue to run exactly as it did before the move. Your new computer should now have all of you applications, data files, and setting on it from your old computer as well as anything that was on it before the move began. At this point, you should test all of your programs to make sure they run on your new computer. Some older DOS and Windows applications may not run on Windows XP whether they were transferred with Move Me or installed directly on the new computer. You will need to get a new version of these older applications from the software developer. Other low level utilities, like PartitionMagic, will need to be reinstalled on your new computer in order to

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get the WinXP version of the program on your new computer. In general, you will find that most of your application programs will work just fine on WinXP.

Move Me is an amazing utility that can save you hours of work migrating all of your files from one computer to another. If you have an older computer that you want to retire as soon as you can get all of your files off it, Move Me is exactly what you need to use. Move Me on a CD lists for \$50, but you can purchase the same product at the user group discount price of just \$30. Look for it in our User Group Store at www.usergroupstore.com and click on any of the yellow "Buy Now" buttons to get to our secure web order form. Complete the form including the special user group code of UGNL0105 and submit it. You may share this discount offer with your immediate family and close friends. These prices are not available to others not involved with a user group.

I hope this month's newsletter has made you aware of this exciting Move Me utility from Spearit software to help you move to a new computer. Let me know if you have questions about anything in this newsletter by sending me a note to gene@ugr.com. Thank you for your attention.

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Ask The Expert - Bluetooth

by Joe Schmitt Bits & Bytes Online
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What is this "Bluetooth" I keep hearing about and do I need it?

Whenever something like a mouse or keyboard is connected to your computer, there are protocols and standards in place so that the computer can talk to the keyboard and it operates properly. The same scenario also applies to anything that connects to a computer or other electronics around your home. Your TV needs to know how the cable signal is formatted so that you get the sound and video. Bluetooth is a wireless protocol that allows electronics to communicate. Bluetooth goes beyond your computer to integrate electronics across a wide spectrum. Bluetooth operates on two levels. The first is that all Bluetooth devices operate on the same radio frequency and speak the same language. Secondly they all share the same procedures in exchanging data and verifying the data is received. That is sort of like being able to speak the language and know the customs so no one misunderstands.

Bluetooth a standard developed and employed by close to 1,000 different companies. This protocol would allow you to take a cell phone, get into a car with a Bluetooth radio and transfer the call to the stereo so your hands are left free. Later you could take that same phone and possibly transfer contact information from the phone to a computer. This is just one example. Bluetooth can be found in phones, keyboards, PDA's, and even stereo headphones. It could potentially show up anywhere you have a wire to connect two devices now.

Is this something you need? Just like anything else with computers, the answer depends on whether or not it meets your needs. Do you need a Bluetooth keyboard or mouse? Not if the wires don't bother you. Could you use it to link your PDA or Pocket PC to the computer? Yes and that might be the most likely scenario that Bluetooth would aid you in. If you are the type of person that likes portable gadgets as much as your computer, Bluetooth may be something to take a serious look into. For more information on the standard itself and some of the products that use it, check out the following sites: www.bluetooth.com and www.bluetooth.org

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IRS and “Free File Alliance” Again Offer FREE Online Tax Preparation and Filing

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Board of Directors

It's that time of year again. Our mailboxes are brimming with W-2's, 1099's, and other ubiquitous indications of our daily financial lives. Preparing our forms 1040, 1040A, and 1040EZ are typically not our favorite annual right of spring. This year, the fine folks at the IRS and their partners, the “Free File Alliance” are again offering their free online federal income tax preparation and electronic filing services. Unlike past years, where only selected groups of people, such as students or military, could utilize the free services, this year there are free services available for almost all federal tax filers.

The main IRS website at www.irs.gov has at the top: “Free File - Ever missed a good thing and regretted it? Don't miss Free File. Millions of eligible taxpayers can use Free File — a free online service that let's you prepare and file your tax return electronically. It's smart, free and fast. Don't miss it!” According to the IRS, about 6.5 million people took advantage of the opportunity last year.

The process is relatively easy. The first step is to enter the IRS Free File website at “[www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp?](http://www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp)” where the various filing services offered by the Alliance can be viewed, and eligibility for each can be determined. Eligibility determination for each service is the second step listed. Some of the 15 resources listed have a maximum “AGI” (adjusted gross income) ceiling. Others will only prepare forms 1040A or 1040EZ online, while some others will prepare taxes for residents of specific states. Other members of the Alliance will prepare and e-file taxes for free based on age, often under 25 or over 60, while others (such as H&R Block, TaxAct.com, and TurboTax for the Web) have no restrictions on who can use the free services, and are available to all. After the free preparer is selected, the user will be directed to a non-IRS website to complete the online preparation. The taxes are calculated, and proper forms are electronically filed with the IRS using a secured link. An acknowledgement is automatically generated via email notifying the filer that the return has been accepted or rejected.

The IRS notes that several of these companies also offer a fee-based online preparation service, and the only way to be assured to get these services for free is to link to them directly from the IRS Free File website, and not directly to the company websites. It should also be noted that these companies do not generally prepare state income taxes for free, and that there may be a charge for preparing state income taxes, but users referred from the IRS site are under no obligation to incur any tax preparation ex-

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penses for the preparation and filing of federal income taxes, provided they were originally eligible for the services.

Electronic filing by these free resources, or other similar commercial resources, has several advantages, according to the IRS. Some of these benefits are that it takes less time to prepare online than on paper, refunds can be processed much faster, returns are more accurate (provided accurate information is entered), and acknowledgement of receipt is generated so you know the return has been filed, and other tangible and intangible benefits. The IRS also has a statement that the software used by the providers for the free service is "comparable" to the software used by these preparers for their commercial (paid) clients.

The IRS is well aware that not all taxpayers have internet access, so it is arranging for such groups as churches and community associations to provide the internet access so as to promote the widest possible use of the free service. The IRS is also supporting such volunteer groups as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE).

Some individuals will justifiably question their personal privacy when entering this data onto a private company's website. The IRS has approved the security and privacy policies of the participating companies, and all of the providers must also have a recognized third-party privacy and security certification. Information provided to these companies can only be used for the preparation of income tax forms, and no other purposes not explicitly authorized by the user. The IRS will monitor all of the providers for compliance, and the companies are required to promptly alert the IRS if any privacy or security problems are encountered. The IRS has set up an email address with the Free File Alliance at helpdesk@speedymail.com, where anyone can get technical assistance about the Free File website, or resolve issues with any of the listed providers. Any user who is not satisfied with the selected free provider is free to try another provider that he may qualify for.

The Free File Alliance is a result of the IRS' Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, which in part has a goal that 80% of all returns are to be filed electronically (e-filed) by 2007, and requires the IRS to make available to taxpayers free online filing options.

Last year (2004) saw 6.5 million e-filed returns, and the IRS hopes to triple the number this year. That still leaves many millions more that will have to e-file in order to reach the 2007 goal. The 15 companies listed that are providing free filing services are a good step on the path of meeting the IRS' goals.

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In search of "VCR for radio" **by Frank Bollinger, ORCOPUG**

www.orcopug.org

I recently began recording radio programs on my computer. Here's how it happened.

Background

This story began more than 40 years ago when I became addicted to talk radio. Over the ensuing years, I've enjoyed many hours of entertaining and informative programs. Topic oriented shows about personal finance, law, cars, and (of course) computers filled the weekends. Hog heaven until the radio stations rearranged their schedules. When the dust settled, three of my favorites were on simultaneously. On top of that, I'm also a baseball fan, so Dodger and Angel games sometimes presented five alternatives at the same time. Bummer. Why couldn't there be a VCR for radio?

First Solution

I heard about a special radio and tape recorder from C Crane & Co. The tape recorder runs at 1/4 speed, so you can get a 3-4 hour program on one side of an audio cassette. Two problems are that the recorder is a bit bulky to lug around and the tapes won't play in typical tape players. So, I also acquired a portable player capable of recognizing the slow speed.

Now I could listen to one program and record another. But, there are three programs. One night, I heard about something called Radio YourWay. This is a radio with a built-in timer that saves programs on a memory card. It also has built-in memory. Radio YourWay turns out to be one of those neat ideas that works, but is so aggravating to use that you wonder if it is worth it. For example, programming it is clumsier than any VCR you can imagine (I've had many, and mastered them all fairly easily). A couple other quirks added to my frustration. Fast forwarding is exceedingly slow. It takes several minutes to get to the second or third hour of a 3-hour program. Even worse, if you pause playback more than a couple minutes, it re-sets to the beginning and you have to wait even longer to get to your new starting point.

It was quite a shock to discover how much harder it is to "time shift" radio than TV. But, even with these challenges, at least I could now record two and listen to the third live. Not perfect, but manageable, until the timer broke on the C Crane recorder. Now, I had to choose which program to miss. Not acceptable after being used to hearing all three.

The next solution

My next idea was to find a device like Radio YourWay, but easier to use. An Internet search led to something called "Replay Radio." Since I

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have Tivo for recording TV, and Replay TV is a competing product, this name was quite intriguing. It turned out to be PC software that claims to work like "Tivo for Internet Radio." I love my Tivo so I explored further, discovering that it could record programs and had an impressive list (several hundred) of radio shows to choose from. The only apparent drawback was that it recorded MP3 files. Remember, I'm a talk show junkie, not a music aficionado. So, selecting this approach would mean I'd need something to play back the recordings or be chained to my computer. (At this point, I wasn't sure, but it sounded like I'd need an MP3 player).

Alas, Replay Radio has a serious flaw -- it can only record one program at a time (As noted above, I want to do three). An exchange of emails confirmed this shortcoming and led me to another program, called WM Recorder. Fortunately, its on-line documentation explicitly stated it can do up to eight concurrent recordings. One potential glitch -- it doesn't create MP3 files. The same documentation did recommend a program to convert the recordings.

So, I downloaded the software and ordered an Apple iPod (MP3 player) from Amazon.com. Since I don't like using earphones, I also ordered a speaker apparatus that the iPod can plug into for playback.

Mission accomplished, right? Not quite. I successfully recorded several radio programs. All played well on my PC. The next step was to convert them to MP3 files. Guess what? The "recommended" conversion program didn't recognize the .asf files created by the recording software. Being the audio "expert" I am, my first question was "What the @\$% is an asf file?" Back to the Internet, where I researched audio file formats and found alternative software. Two allowed trial downloads that were able to handle the asf files. Curiously, after another email exchange, I found out that I could simply change the asf file extensions to wma and the recommended program would make the conversions. Apparently, asf and wma are two different Microsoft audio formats. Still, it's easier to use a conversion program, since it can batch many at once.

With that problem solved, I'm now able to record several programs on a predetermined schedule. I can use the iPod with earphones when out walking and with my speaker apparatus around my home. I've even used the speaker gadget in my car.

This trip was a roller coaster containing numerous ups and downs with continuing challenges. For example, I found out where one of the originating radio stations is located when Bob Brinker's Money Talk turned out to be a Kansas City Chief's football game. Sometimes the recordings don't work, and one of the programs I want doesn't have an Internet broadcast.

Despite all that, it was a grand adventure, I had a lot of fun doing it, and am enjoying listening to programs I was missing before. The time from

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the cassette recorder failure to having all the components assembled and functioning successfully was about two weeks. Oh, yes. What about music? Can't say. I may be the only person who bought an MP3 player NOT to play music.

Here's the final hardware and software configuration:

-
1. WM Recorder (Records the programs) (\$29.95 from www.wmrecorder.com)
 2. WM VCR (Schedules the recordings) (\$9.95 from www.wmrecorder.com)
 3. River Past Audio Converter (Converts the asf files to MP3) (\$29.95 from www.riverpast.com)
 4. Apple iPod (MP3 Player) (Approximately \$230 and up, depending on source and model)
 5. Altec Lansing InMotion Portable Audio (Speaker gadget for the iPod) (Approximately \$110, from various sources)



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ACPCUG Club News

February meeting at the Akron North Hill Branch Library, again. If you need a map, it's at our web site. Parking just north of library building on Oakland Av. just off Cuyahoga Falls Avenue.

Membership Dues Changes: The ACPCUG Board announces a change in the dues structure. Starting (I believe) Jan. 1, 2005, dues will be \$20/yr for new and old members. If members are over 60 years old, dues will be \$15/yr. This reduction is made possible by the switch to e-mail newsletters. Recent dues payees will *not get a refund*. Instead they will get a membership extension. Exact details will be ironed out when snowbird Jim Albright will be returning north (with all our money—joke!)

Upcoming Computer Shows:

No Peter Trapp Shows in 2005 announced yet.

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