

ACPCUG Newsletter

**Akron Main
Public Library**

June 6, 2005

**June Program:
New Venue!!**

Starts at 6:15 PM

***Nero Application Suite,
Make a Video DVD by
Frank Ramsey + Q&A***

Inside:

Page 1—Deals Guy

**Page 6—CCleaner by Dick
Lash**

**Page 8— Five More Annoy-
ing PC Annoyances by
Steve Bass**

**Page 12— The Latest on
DVDs by Bob Elgines**

**Page 13— Tech News by
Sue Crane**

**Page 16— Protecting Your
Internet Passwords by
Gene Barlow**

**Page 18— Does Microsoft
Listen? By Bud Bondiotti**

**Page 21—The New Best &
Worst by Pim Borman**

**Page 24—Everyone's a
Publisher by Gabe Gold-
berg**

**Page 27-Double Threat
Online Travel Scam by Ira**

June 2005

Akron-Canton PC Users Group

Wilsker

**Page 30-Cables: The Miss-
ing Part of Upgrades By
Timothy Everingham**

Page 33—[ACPCUG News](#)

From The DealsGuy For
July 2005, Greater Orlando
Computer Users Group by Bob
(The Cheapskate) Click

*Purchase Dates For Hard Drives

I quickly heard from readers ex-
pressing their displeasure about the
HD warranties I wrote about last
month. I didn't like the fact that a
HD warranty starts on the build
date either and I don't know where
the purchase receipt is for a new
drive I bought (shame on me). I
may be able to find it, but this HD
has been lying around here for a
while. Your purchase receipt for a
Western Digital drive means you're
covered, but I don't know other
manufacturer's policies. When I
opened the box for a new Western
Digital 80 gig HD the other day, the
warranty wording for it was inside
its box, under the drive, printed on
the bottom layer of the box. The
warranty is "for one year from the

(Continued from page 1)

date on my original purchase receipt." That works, but also included was a card to purchase a three-year extended warranty for \$14.95. Stores don't let you open the box to read the warranty but they might show you a copy, or refer you to a URL.

*Email Problem Fixed

I got the run-a-round from Earthlink tech support trying to get my old Eudora e-mail program back in operation when it stopped working. They said port options could not be changed for their new servers (true). I downloaded Eudora's version 6.2.1.2 sponsored (free) e-mail program to try. Eudora has a link to Earthlink's own Web site for a tutorial to set up the Eudora product. Earthlink's support didn't inform me of that, but it still didn't work right. I bought the paid version and Eudora's tech support walked me through steps to make the change that Earthlink's tech support said couldn't be done in ver. 6.2 either. It involved copying and pasting a file to get the option. It works now and could also be done on the sponsored version, but how would you know without tech support. In all, Earthlink's tech support was no help, although apologetic; and it would seem they were very wrong.

Remember "CameraMate VideoSafe" and "CameraMate Real Time Video" by Zio Corp. from last month's column with rebates (sticker on the product's box bought from the retailer) extended through Sept. 30, 2005.

*Popular Deal Revived

Twice in the past few years I have featured a discount on products purchased from InkSell.com, and both times I featured it, the deal was quite popular. I am not familiar with prices on inkjet products so you should do your own research. Bryan Hawkins, marketing manager, has offered to repeat this deal for us and it is as follows: "We are going to do a promo code for your readers. The code is for 15% off all compatible "inkjet" products. OEM cartridges are excluded. The promotion starts today (5/16/05) and runs till a year from now. The code is "pcdeals2005".

Their Web site is [<http://www.inksell.com>] for product information. To order, go to checkout and put in the shipping information then click on the "continue" button. After putting in the billing info, there is a place to enter in the your email address for e-mail confirmation. Below that is the coupon promotional code field for entering the code "pcdeals2005", then click "apply." Or; Mon- Fri. 9am - 6pm CST order by phone at 1-800-255-0483.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

***Why Not The Latest Locking System For You**

I thought the battery-operated lockset that opens with a keypad was great technology for the door to my house, but I like this product better. How about just laying your finger on a pad and having the lock automatically open. You can also set it up so a different finger performs another action, such as opening your garage door. eKeyUSA Systems offers biometric fingerprint technology for everything from home to business, and its possible to even track who enters, and the times. I was impressed with this product when I saw it.

Get more information at [<http://www.ekeyusa.com>]. You don't need a computer for the lock to operate, but eKey can be used with a computer to keep a log of the users. The weatherproof reader can be used either inside or outside to trigger a device such as a door striker plate or garage door opener. Keep in mind that eKey only provides the biometric fingerprint products to operate electronically controlled locks, but they do not sell locks. However, you might find locks to work with this product at [<http://www.smarthome.com>].

Home models offered include:

1. Ekey TOCAhome with 1 output for a door/gate (1 relay) – MSRP - \$699
2. Ekey TOCAhome 3 with 3 outputs for doors/gates (3 relays) – MSRP - \$899
3. Ekey TOCAhome pc with 3 outputs for doors/gates (3 relays), incl. RS232 interface, cable and PC-Software – MSRP - \$1149

DealsGuy readers are offered a 30% discount from those prices. Contact them at Hassan.Hares@ekeyUSA.com or (941) 782-1227. To get this discount, use the password "dealsguy05."

*An Announcement I Received (Edited)

Company: WisePixel Multimedia

E-mail: [press@wisepixel.com]

HandySnap1.0: High-impact screenshots without complexity

"WisePixel Multimedia announces HandySnap 1.0, a screen capture utility for Windows platforms. With HandySnap, you can illustrate your multimedia presentation, manual, or marketing copy with screenshots that will make it not only aesthetically pleasing and professional - you create an easy to understand presentation that will convey complex information in a manner

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

anyone can grasp within seconds.

“HandySnap features a concise, Photoshop-style toolbox interface which floats on top of other applications and takes minimum space on the desktop. Its clear design is familiar to millions of Photoshop users so the user learning curve is minimal. The interface consists of three main areas with a set of icons - capture tools area, built-in editor, and screenshot operations area. Any screenshot action can be performed in one click on an icon without walking through complex drop-down menus.

“HandySnap enables you to capture any portion of the screen by using a resizable trimming frame, take a snapshot of an active window or the whole desktop. After a screenshot is taken, the image displays in a separate window where it can be further edited. The user can add a multitude of markers, including textual comments, pixel art symbols, arrows, free-hand lines, rectangular frames, and ellipses. You can experiment with a semi-transparency effect and modify color and line size. All objects can be easily moved over the screenshot.

“Easily configure hotkeys to trigger capture actions. With the hotkey support, you can take snapshots of drop-down menus, splash-screens and other events which, as a rule, can not be captured. You can get HandySnap to automatically generate file names for screenshots based on the specified pattern, send screenshots to the clipboard, or save them to files.

“HandySnap 1.0 runs under Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP and costs \$29.00 (USD) for a single-user license. User group members get 20% off the regular price using coupon code GRP01 through August. A 30-day fully functional evaluation version can be downloaded free at [http://www.wisepixel.com/downloads/hsnap_setup.exe]. (also download link)

For more information, please visit [<http://www.wisepixel.com>].

E-mail: [press@wisepixel.com]

***Another Announcement, (Edited)**

“April 12, 2005: Neowise Software today announced the release of RoboTask 2.2, the latest version of a high performance automation tool for the Windows platforms. The application features a unique set of over a hundred automation options that will give users with almost any level of

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

computer competence - from home users to experienced programmers - the ability to automate their routine computing tasks and eliminate many time consuming manual operations.

"It will help you automate backup processes, folder synchronization, cleanup of temporary folders, e-mail retrieval and processing, just a few options out of one hundred available. Get more focus on work with no need to write complicated automation scripts.

"RoboTask works transparently throughout the OS and consumes minimum resources. By default it launches at Windows startup and sits in the system tray. It features a clear, self-explanatory GUI interface that displays a list of tasks, their current status, provides a quick access to the task-related operations and program settings. By clicking on the 'Create New Task' icon, you open the wizard-style dialog that will assist you in selecting an action, configuring its behavior settings, and setting up an action trigger.

"With sixteen event triggers in hand, you have full control in defining when and how to launch automations. You can get them executed at any specified run time or after a certain time interval. Power users can go beyond these scheduling basics.

"RoboTask 2.2 is designed for Windows 98/Me/2000/XP/2003 and costs \$99.95 (USD) for a single user license. We offer users group members a 25% discount on RoboTask until Aug. 31, 2005. The coupon code is 'RT-discount-25'. Registered customers are entitled to free upgrades to any minor version. A 60-day fully functional evaluation version of the program is available for free at (direct download link) [<http://www.robotask.com/downloads/RobotaskSetup.exe>]. (2.7 Mb)

"Product page link: [<http://www.robotask.com>]
E-mail: [oleg@neowise.com]"

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>].

CCleaner reviewed. by Dick Lash, ACPCUG Member

9 months ago I purchased a program called Investor 3000 for about \$180. It ran once on my notebook computer with WinXP Pro and would not function again.

I contacted the Vendor and was assured it should work and that I should try turning off any firewalls, pop-up blockers etc. and if it still would not work they would gladly refund my money. They also gave me permission to try it on other computers. I did all the above with the same results, including trying it on my PC at work with Win2K Professional.

I contacted the vendor again and they were willing give me a refund or - - - if I wanted, they would send me another program called Stock Signal Pro which costs about \$100 more for free. I opted for that and although I really didn't like it as much, I could not complain about their policies. Each time over the ensuing months I got an opportunity to try Investor 3000 on another computer, like in December I purchased a new laptop with WinXP home edition, I would again get the same results. Program ran once and would no longer function.

A few weeks ago I read an article somewhere that suggested downloading a freeware program called CCleaner. It is located at www.ccleaner.com. It's a small file, 428k, with the download located on the left-hand side, page down. Don't get sidetracked into some of the other offers as they are pay-for type utilities. The Website purports: CCleaner (Crap Cleaner) is a **freeware** system optimization and privacy tool. It removes unused files from your system - allowing Windows to run faster and freeing up valuable hard disk space. It also cleans traces of your online activities such as your Internet history. But the best part is that it's fast (normally taking less than a second to run, and FREE!

It supposedly works on Internet Explorer, Firefox, Windows and is a Registry cleaner.

I downloaded and installed it on my six month old notebook, clicked on the Analyze button and after five or ten minutes it showed me a whole bunch of stuff it wanted to remove. I clicked on the Run Cleaner icon and received the tersely worded "This process will permanently delete files from your system. Are you sure you wish to proceed?" warning. At this point I did become a little nervous as my notebook has my whole personal and business life on it and even though I preach it, I'm not very diligent about backing stuff up. I clicked on OK and after a couple of minutes it finished. I could have saved the listing but didn't bother.

Tried running my Investor 3000 and it worked perfectly. I was afraid it might have just been the result of an improvement in that program so I

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

quickly went to my desktop computer and tried running Investor 3000. It did not work as usual. So I downloaded, installed and ran CCleaner there also and lo and behold Investor 3000 worked again.

I wrote to the authors of Investor 3000 telling them about my success and they wrote back a very nice letter thanking me as they had others who had experienced trouble with their program and could now offer them a solution.

I got back on the CCleaner website and clicked on the link to send the developer some money and thanked him for his wonderful solution.

Since running this program I have found only one item that no longer worked. It was a link to my son's web site for our family newsletter which was quickly fixed. All of my investment programs, my company access software and programs and my banking and personal Internet links still work and although my new notebook is very fast, I believe it runs a little quicker now. It recently removed 492 megs of mostly cookies and temporary internet files.

I highly endorse and recommend this program.

"May the fleas of a thousand camels infest the crotch of the RealPlayer developer who decided to stick icons in my system tray, Startup menu, and desktop, and may his arms be too short to scratch. --Snarfed from Internet, author unknown.

"I want to thank Bill Gates, his Microsofties, and the entire Redmond Empire. Without them, this book wouldn't be possible (or even necessary)."

Five More Annoying PC Annoyances

Steve Bass tackles five of his most irritating annoyances.

By Steve Bass, Contributing Editor, PC World; by Steve Bass, author of PC Annoyances, 2nd Edition

When I wrote PC Annoyances, I thought I'd soon run out of annoyances to fix. Ha! No sooner had the book landed in bookstores than I was barraged with email from--who else?--PC World and O'Reilly readers, tossing me more annoyances to handle.

That led to the second edition of PC Annoyances. I've added 160 more annoyances--and fixes--to the new book. (You can grab a copy on Amazon at <http://snurl.com/annoyed2> or see at a chapter sample at: http://snurl.com/sample_annoy.)

It didn't take long (nothing does with computers, right?) for readers to send another batch of irritating problems. So, for your reading pleasure, here are yet more annoyances. (These are actual annoyances contributed by annoyed PC World and O'Reilly readers.)

Speed up Adobe Acrobat Reader

The Annoyance: I use Adobe's Reader 6 to read Acrobat PDF files, and it takes aeons to load on my already slow PC. Isn't there a way to speed it up?

The Fix: There's a quick-and-dirty fix that will make the Reader fly onto your screen. It's a free tool--Adobe Reader SpeedUp--that removes many of the add-ins the Reader ordinarily loads and few of us need. Get the tool at the http://snipurl.com/adobe_speedup.

Kill Some Time: The guy's (almost) a marketing genius. He's been covered all over the internet. Too bad he doesn't have an area code on his truck, eh? <http://www.snurl.com/plumbtruck>.

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

SP2 says "Reboot now"

The Annoyance: OK, so I have Automatic Updates set to Automatic in Windows XP. But no matter what I'm doing, this last upgrade keeps smacking a message in the middle of my screen asking if I want to reboot now or wait until later. It's happening every ten minutes and driving me nuts, and no, I can't turn off this alert.

The Fix: Unpleasant as it is, when Microsoft has an update it considers critical for you to install, Automatic Updates slams an icon in your system tray. That's its not-so-subtle way of informing you that upgrades are available to download and install. But here's the rub: on these oh-so-very-critical updates, Windows wants you to reboot your system once the installation is complete. And like a pouty three-year-old, it doesn't care what you're in the middle of doing.

So when you click on the icon in the system tray and choose either Express Install or Custom Install in the dialog that appears, you're stuck. XP will keep reminding you to reboot until you're so aggravated that you throw in the towel, close all your open apps, and reboot.

My recommendation? Wait till the end of the day before clicking on the icon and agreeing to take the update.

Kill Some Time: How about reminiscing back to the time before web bugs, spam, and, well, the internet. Remember "NYC's Bozo Show," "Wonderama," and "The Felix the Cat Show"? (Didn't think I was that old, eh?): <http://www.tvparty.com/lostny2.html>.

Unfreeze Windows XP

The Annoyance: You're happy because your recent upgrade to Windows XP Service Pack 2 went like a breeze. But all of a sudden, your system freezes.

The Fix: I know, you want me to tell you why XP crashed and how to prevent it from happening. You could try switching to a Mac or waiting for me to write a 1,600 page-tome (neither of which I suspect will happen). In the meantime, here's a quick way to get yourself out of the jam. Even though Windows XP is locked up solid, chances are good you can still open Task Manager by pressing Ctrl-Alt-Del. In Task Manager, click on the Processes tab, choose Explorer.exe, and click on End Process. Then select File -> New Task (Run), type explorer, and click on OK. No harm if it doesn't work; nifty rescue if it does.

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

Kill Some Time: The best I could do on Escape (<http://snipurl.com/dodgeit>), a tough and deeply annoying game, was 9 seconds. I could probably do better with my eyes closed. You'll find out right away that bumping the black frame ends the game.

AOL idle Terminator

The Annoyance: I've about had it with America Online. Even if I'm downloading a big file, I have to respond to that pesky "You have been idle" warning. Hey, AOL, I'm not idling!

The Fix: You need the Terminator. And no, it's not the California governor. It's a tool that keeps your AOL connection cooking past the 46-minute envelope allowed by AOL. And it doesn't matter whether you're downloading a humongous file or just sitting and, yes, idling. The program's free to try and costs a mere \$5 if you keep it. Grab a copy at http://snipurl.com/AOL_terminator.

Kill Some Time: I'm often accused of offering links that are too cerebral. That, of course, just ain't true. Witness Blacksheep (at <http://snipurl.com/blacksheep>), a cool mouse-clicking Flash game. The trick is to pass the cursor over just the black squares, never the red ones. (Warning: lower your PC's volume.)

Importing DVD presentations in PowerPoint

The Annoyance: I'm well experienced with PowerPoint and can import most everything--except DVD videos. I've been hunting high and low for a way to do it; is there a trick I'm missing?

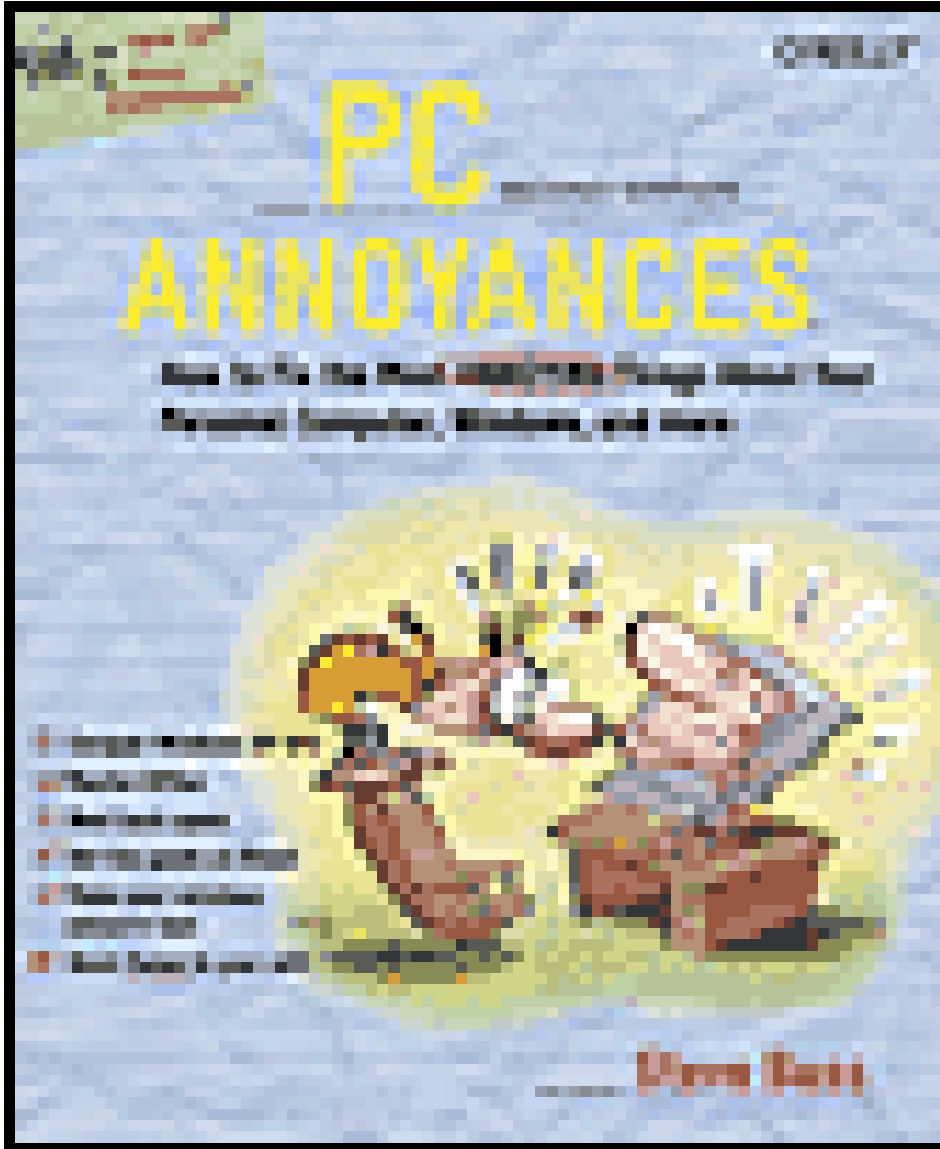
The Fix: You can call off the dogs. The trick is to spend \$99 for Visible Light OnStage DVD for PowerPoint. The handy utility adds itself to PowerPoint, and with it you can import DVDs to your heart's content. For details--and a trial version--visit <http://www.snipurl.com/visiblelight>.

Kill Some Time: You know what happens when you get to a web page that no longer exists, right? You get a 404 error. Here's a 404 that's a huge waste of time and will keep you busy past at least one deadline: <http://www.ukpaganlinks.co.uk/404.htm>.

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(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)



The Latest on DVDs

By Bob Elgines, Colorado River Computer Club Editor, Lake Havasu, AZ

The DVD world is going crazy. The price range is from \$59 to \$130 well within most of our budgets. DVD blanks are down to 50 cents a piece, almost as cheap as CDs. The top four recorder manufacturers are Plextor, Toshiba, Pacific Digital, and Memorex.

Speed is up to 16X, which is max on the outer part of the disk, but only 8X blanks are readily available.

Dual layer (8.5 GB of data space) is labeled as the latest big deal, but is it really? These disks are hard to manufacture and are very expensive. The most important thing is, what will they play in? Well not much of anything. Most DVD players will not recognize the format and neither will your older recorders. So I don't look for this to do anyone much good even in the future.

What is in the future (next year)? The digital world has still been undecided on DVD-R and DVD+R formats, so most of your recorders will do both. Now we come to the future of introducing two new formats named "HD-DVD" and "Blu-ray". These new formats have been developed to use the new blue-laser, where has, they have been using the red-laser in our present recorders. Red laser single level DVDs have 4.7 GB of capacity where the Blue-laser single layer DVDs will have a capacity of 15 (HD-DVD format) to 25 GB (Blu-ray format) at present.

A HD (High Definition) two hour movie uses about 17.4 GB with out max compression. The compression schemes (MPEG-2, MPEG4, etc.) will be the same for both, so there will be no big difference in playback quality. Here we go again, new DVD players will be needed and this reminds us of the old video tape war on formats "Beta" and "VHS". Remember VHS won out due to more recording time and lower costs. Will this be true of the two blue-laser formats? Only time will tell.

These Blue-laser recorders and players will be coming out near the end of this year or the start of next year, but I think we are going to have to wait and see if they can decide on a format for the blue-laser.

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.

TECH NEWS

By Sue Crane, Vice President / Editor, Big Bear Computer Club, CA

www.bigbearcc.org

sue.crane@charter.net

Traditional 911 Services not available from VOIPs

The Texas attorney general filed a lawsuit against Internet telephone service Vonage, saying the company fails to clearly tell consumers about the limits of 911 emergency calling over its service. The suit stems from an incident last month in Houston where a husband and wife were shot by burglars while their daughter tried to call 911 on a Vonage line and reached a recording. Independent VOIP providers typically do not have access to the traditional 911 system which carries calls to emergency dispatchers and transmits data about the caller's location. As a work-around, Vonage tells customers they need to activate a 911 service, but that service directs calls to administrative telephone lines that in some cases are unanswered.

MRI in a Pill

A South Korean semiconductor manufacturer has announced an image sensor for pill-size cameras that doctors can use to obtain accurate information about a patient's digestive tract. The image sensor can take up to 50,000 photographs in an eight-hour tour of the patient's insides by taking two pictures a second. Mass production will begin in the second half of 2005.

Mouse Adaptor for Shaky Hands

IBM has developed an adjustable mouse adaptor that compensates for the shakes of patients with hand tumors and other causes of uncontrollable shaking. According to the International Essential Tremor Foundation, in the US alone nearly 10 million people are affected by essential tremor, the most common form of hand tremors. This adaptor will plug in between the mouse and computer and is compatible with existing mice.

Cell Phone Helmets for Bikers

Motorcyclists are now able to talk and ride by using a mobile-phone headset for crash helmets, demonstrated at the CeBit trade show. The headsets (full-face, open-face and flip-up), have audio capabilities at speeds up to 62 miles per hour.

Now You CAN Return Unwrapped Software

In the settlement of a California lawsuit Microsoft, Symantec, Adobe and others have agreed to publish EULA agreements on their websites for their

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from page 13)

respective products, while CompUSA, Best Buy, and Staples agreed to allow consumers to return unwrapped software for full monetary refunds, even if the shrink-wrap has been opened. Details of the settlement can be found at: <http://www.techfirm.com/AmendedComplaint-Filed.pdf>

Great New Escape

Virtual reality, technology that gives users the feeling they are somewhere else, can be of great value in treating people suffering from a variety of physical or psychological conditions. Therapy based on the technology is being used in a small number of U.S. clinics to treat burn victims and people with phobias such as the fear of flying, spiders, and heights. Researchers say the technology holds enormous promise for treating PTSD, addictions and for use as a distraction technique in painful dental and medical procedures, including chemotherapy and physical therapy.

Creative Commons Rewrites Copyright!

When Chuck D and the Fine Arts Militia released their latest single, "No Meaning No," They encouraged everyone to view, copy, mix, remix, sample, imitate, parody and even criticize it under a new licensing scheme called Creative Commons that some say may be better suited to the electronic age than the controversial copyright license. More than 10 million other creations -- ranging from the movie "Outfoxed" and songs by the Beastie Boys to the BBC's news footage and the tech support books -- have been distributed using Creative Commons licenses, which allow artists to keep "some rights reserved" rather than "all rights reserved". Online users can go to www.CreativeCommons.org and search its archives.

WinFS to be included in WinXP Update

Microsoft has said it plans to add support for WinFS to Windows XP. The operating system will support all three key Longhorn components WinFS, Avalon, and Indigo. WinFS is built on top of the fundamentals, which would include security features and technology to make sure applications and drivers don't conflict. A first beta of Longhorn is set to ship by the end of June. Microsoft plans to have a beta test version of WinFS available when Longhorn ships, probably late next year, and add it as an update to WinXP later. Microsoft is expected to handout a pre-beta preview release at the Microsoft Win HEC Conference.

New Photoshop CS Details

Adobe is still finding its bearings after it unintentionally released details of its next Photoshop upgrade. The company quickly pulled down the an-

(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

nouncement, but Google never forgets. Check out Publish.com's rundown of the new features: <http://ct.eletters.whatsnewnow.com/rd/cts?d=181-431-1-278-41858-19872-0-0-0-1>.

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Protecting Your Internet Passwords

by Gene Barlow

User Group Relations
Copyrighted April 2005

The internet plays an important role in our lives today. Almost everything we do has an internet possibility to it. We can access our bank accounts over the internet. We can pay our bills and loans using the internet. Every business that we have an account with lets us access our account and update our records over the internet. We can purchase airline tickets, reserve hotels, and rent cars over the internet. Each of these offers us personalized accounts to make these tasks easier to do. We can even buy groceries, tickets for movies, and order our prescriptions over the internet. How much easier it is today to do all of these things with our internet access. Of course, having access to these internet accounts requires that we set up a private ID and password for each of them. A typical user may have 20 or 30 of these account IDs and passwords to keep track of. So, while the internet has made our life easier in many ways, keeping track of these security codes has gotten harder to do.

Some users will try to bypass these methods set up to protect their privacy and personal information. To avoid keeping track of many codes, some individuals will use the same ID and password on all of their accounts. This is certainly not very secure. Once these common codes are discovered, they open up the hacker to all of your personal accounts. Others will write their codes down on yellow sticky notes and paste them to their computer display. This is also not very secure. Anyone that walks by your computer will see these codes and be able to get into your private accounts without any problem. The real solution is to set up difficult and different passwords for each of your accounts and keep these in a very secure place. That is exactly what WhiteCanyon's MyPasswordVault helps you do.

MyPasswordVault is a database program that stores its information on your computer in an encrypted format so that nobody can find this file and see all of your codes. You still need to remember a password to gain access to MyPasswordVault, but all of the rest of your codes are guarded safely inside the vault. So, when you need to access an account on the internet, you simply open up MyPasswordVault, find the ID and Password for that account, and copy and paste it into your account access fields. You will be able to safely and quickly access the many accounts that you have set up on the internet. This is a great software utility that will let you safely and quickly enjoy all of the advantage of using the internet for your financial

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

transactions.

MyPasswordVault is offered by WhiteCanyon software at the list price of \$25. You can purchase this valuable product at the user group discount price of just \$17. 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 UGNL0405 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 an exciting new software offering from User Group Relations to make your computer usage more productive. 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.

Gene Barlow is the president of User Group Relations, a consulting firm specializing in promoting computer products to the user group community. He has over 40 years of experience with computer systems. He worked for IBM for 34 years in various technical and marketing positions. He managed IBM's user group support organization when IBM introduced the IBM PC till he retired 14 years later. In this role, he helped hundreds of user groups get started and is sometimes called the Father of User Groups for his involvement. He was the first sponsor of the Association of PC User Groups and was a guiding influence on this organization for many years and funded many special projects for them. When he left IBM, he set up his own consulting firm and has represented many software clients to the user group community the past 9 years. He currently represents Optimal Access, Acronis, WhiteCanyon, and Spearit software companies and their exciting products. He is an outstanding speaker, writer, and helper of end users and loves working with user groups. He may be contacted at gene@ugr.com.

Does Microsoft Listen?

By Bud Bondiotti, Editor, PC Post, Modesto PC Users Group, CA

After a long frustrating ride with my desktop computer and its numerous error problems, the day came when I knew the only thing to do was to do a factory reinstall. I lived with the errors and frustration for a long time, since I knew I didn't have all of my data backed up although I did keep up with all the updates and precautions one normally takes when dealing with the "Internet World." On making a backup, my start off point would be to backup all the data that I wanted to hang onto, including my vast music collection and tidbits of information that I have picked up over the years. One of the wonderful points of owning a computer today is that the cost and feasibility of backing up your data is so much easier than 10 years ago. Back then, one had to utilize recording media (floppies, tape and such) that couldn't always be depended upon to keep the data safe. In addition, you had to allot a large block of time for completing the backup. Today, with the availability of large capacity DVD disks or external hard drives, backing up is easier and faster. Case in point, I backed up my 250 gigabyte hard drive in a little over an hour to my external 300 gigabyte hard drive, while tidying up my computer area. So on with the story.

After performing everything I could think of to prepare for the big event, I got out my restore CDs and settled in for the battle. After putting CD number one in the drive, I received a message that the reinstall could not be performed from the desktop and that I needed to shut the computer down and reboot from the CD-Rom drive. So I exit windows and reboot with the CD in the CD-Rom drive, and the program starts to do its thing. I'm thinking I could be done with this by mid-afternoon and then things start going wrong. An error message stating that the hard drive partition is not big enough to handle the operating system is found so that process will be halted. Well, so much for a simple chore.

I try once more with the same results and then realize that I'm going to have to find a solution to the problem so I take the restore CD out of the drive then boot up the computer and head to the Sony website to see if they have an answer to my problem. After searching the online database for over an hour with no results, I realize I'm going to have to pay for human tech support, so the next chore is to find a phone number that I can call for tech support. After a little searching, I finally locate the number and get ready for another wait to talk to someone who can help me out. After a short period of time (15 minutes or so) and a credit card charge of \$19.95 (my computer is out of warranty), I finally get to talk to Todd. I ex-

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

plain the problem to Todd and he says the first thing we need to do is to get to the bios menu, so we go into reboot mode and before the screen changes I start tapping the F2 key and the system goes to the bios menu. Todd then instructs me to go to the exit section and arrow down to the "restore system defaults" line and select that. I do so and then "save changes and exit." The system boots up and Windows starts its usual routine. Todd then says to put my system restore CD back in the drive and reboot. While following Todd's able instructions, I watch as the factory restore program starts up and allows me to complete my original objective. Thanks Todd, \$20 well spent. So, with the system restored, I head on to reinstalling all of the programs that I need to do the things I like to do.

After getting the factory restore project completed, I next wanted to upgrade to Windows XP professional as I need the extra power that program gives with networking. This part went very smoothly and now it was time to start reinstalling all of the additional programs that I use on a daily basis. My first step was to re-install Microsoft Office 2003 and it actually went smoother this time than the first time I installed it. After installation, I always make it a habit to reboot the computer even if the system doesn't ask me to. After the reboot, I started checking out the Office applications, and to my satisfaction everything worked smashingly. Once again, I rebooted and, to my dismay, I got a closing error message that I was all too familiar with from my previous installation. Starting to get that sinking feeling, I rebooted again and again to see if the error was a fluke or what. To my disappointment, it wasn't a fluke and so I was faced with trying to fix the problem. After a moment or two's thought, I realized that the problem occurred after installing Office 2003 so I set off to the Microsoft website to see if anyone else may have had the same problem and to see how they fixed it. Just my luck, no one else in the world had the problem so I began thinking about contacting tech support and paying them to help me solve the problem. After a long drawn out search, I finally found the number for tech support and, of course, all of the times were busy; the wait time was over an hour and they suggested that I try emailing my problem to tech support. I thought that this last suggestion was probably the least expensive and prepared in my mind what I needed to say.

After sending my email to tech support, I prepared for a long weekend wait to hear back from Microsoft. The next morning, Saturday, I received a phone call from Microsoft, not an unusual occurrence since I became a Microsoft Partner but I was surprised when the gentlemen on the other end started asking me questions concerning the error message I had questioned. After I described the error message in a little more detail, the gen-

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

tleman asked if I was going to be home in an hour. I said I was and he assured me that a real live tech support person would call back and try to help me solve the error. I was shocked that someone would take that much interest in my problem, and warily waited for the phone to ring. Within 45 minutes the phone rang and a gentlemen named Amit Singh helped me walk my way through the problem. It turned out to be a conflict between a Sony Viao program and Microsoft. After about two hours of trial and error, my computer was back to being the error-free system that I enjoyed using. My conclusion is that the big guys do listen – you just have to learn where to yell.

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The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman

SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

www.swipcug.org

RISC, CISC, EPIC and The Cell

Almost from the inception of the microprocessor, a philosophical debate has been raging as to what design is better. A dumb processor capable of only a few simple procedures, referred to as a RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computer) processor, could do simple operations very fast. A smart processor, capable of performing more complicated procedures, called a CISC (Complex Instruction Set Computer), would be slower with simple tasks but faster with complicated operations. For instance, a RISC processor capable only of addition and subtraction of whole numbers could be faster in performing sorting tasks, but would require extensive software instructions to perform a floating point multiplication that a CISC processor could perform immediately with its built-in hardware. RISC had the additional disadvantage that its programs had to be larger than similar programs for CISC processors, a big disadvantage in the days that computer memory came at a premium. On the other hand, the greater complexity of CISC processors made them more expensive to make.

In the mid-90s Apple decided to use RISC processors (e.g. the Motorola 68000) in their computers, while IBM-PC clone makers settled on the CISC architecture, even though IBM was pushing RISC processors. For reasons that have little to do with chip architecture, the Wintel community ended up outselling Apple about 20:1, making the CISC chips the clear winners.

In recent years processor chip designs have begun to merge, where RISC chips have more complex instructions and CISC chips are more efficient. Intel referred to the Pentium II as a CRISC design. Intel's major competitor, AMD, started out with a RISC design but still manages to produce chips that are compatible and competitive with Intel's Pentiums.

The next major advance in computer architecture is the use of multiple processors working together, dubbed EPIC (Explicitly Parallel Instruction Computing). This calls for rewriting computer programs if they are to make use of the new architecture. Many computer applications can be divided into separate operations that can be run simultaneously. Mathematical simulations such as those involved in weather forecasting are one example. Playing World-Master class chess is another one, and large sorting programs

(Continued on page 22)

(Continued from page 21)

and spreadsheet-type manipulations are easily run in parallel fashion. Intel and AMD have both announced that upcoming powerful desktop computers will have multiple processors.

And now history repeats itself. Sony, Toshiba and IBM (STI) have announced a new microprocessor called The Cell. Cells are designed, RISC-like, to do just a few things very fast but also to work together to achieve optimum results. It might be called an EPIC RISC. Few details about The Cell have been published, other than the basic patent issued in 2002. According to IBM on its Web site: "IBM expects Cell to define an entirely new way of operating. Cell's underlying architecture will enable it to manifest itself into many forms for many purposes, helping to open up a whole new set of applications. Incorporating this architecture, chips will be developed for everything from handheld devices to mainframe computers."

Four of the Cells will power Sony's next-generation games console, the PlayStation 3. However, it is expected that The Cell will also be capable of powering super-fast desktop computers. An excellent article about The Cell can be found in *The Economist* (February 12, 2005, thanks to Louis Ritz). There is also a summary in *PC Magazine* (April 12, 2005).

In Brief

Several months ago Google announced a new, free desktop search program. It is still under development and does not (yet) index Acrobat .pdf files. Other search programs immediately came up with competing versions. According to *PC Magazine* (3/22/05) the best of the free desktop search programs at present is Yahoo's desktop search (desktop.yahoo.com), a lite version of the outstanding \$75 X1 that they rate best of show.

Those miserable spyware intruders continue to get more sophisticated and the anti-spyware producers are in a constant battle to provide the best protection and, if necessary, removal tools. Yesterday's champions, AdAware and Spybot Search & Destroy have been overtaken by newcomers Spy Sweeper 3.5 (\$30, www.webroot.com) according to *PC Magazine* (2/22/05) or CounterSpy 1.0 (\$20, www.sunbeltsoftware.com) according to *PC World* (April 2005) which rated the earlier version 3.2 of Spy Sweeper as a close second best. Take your pick.

Do you depend on Quicken to download your financial data from banks and brokers? Well, Quicken is ending online services and tech support for Quicken 2001 and 2002 so you'll need to upgrade to Quicken 2005. And that version will no longer support importing data via the .qif format and

(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from page 22)

will only support the .ofx format in its WebConnect and DirectConnect features. Microsoft Money 2005 will also support online services for just two years. PC World (April 2005).

Linspire (nee Lindows) has released its long-awaited version 5 of its user-friendly Linux distribution. They report that it took 3½ years to develop and cost \$20 million. Subscribers to its Click 'N Run library of self-installing Linux-based programs can download the new distribution for free and burn it to a self-booting CD-ROM. As a long-time user and promotor of the Linspire programs I eagerly obtained the new version to evaluate its new features. Sorry to say, Linspire 5.0 confirms the maxim that odd-numbered versions of major programs are often buggy and are best avoided. Fortunately, the distribution comes on a "live" CD that can be used to boot the computer and run the program without making any changes to the computer's hard drive or settings. I tried to boot the Linspire CD on my old Inspiron 3800 laptop, the one I have used daily for more than a year with Linspire 4.5 – laptop edition. The screen assumed all sorts of weird color effects and the program hung, presumably. Shutting the computer off fortunately left it unharmed by the experience and still capable of running the older Linspire version. On my newer Inspiron 5150 laptop the CD seemed to boot OK, but the mouse was stuck at the edge of the screen and the programs did not respond to keyboard inputs. Again, no joy, but no harm was done. Finally I actually installed Linspire 5.0 on my desktop computer in partitions on a second hard drive that I have used previously to evaluate Linspire as well as other Linux distributions. This time the install was successful, but the Grub boot manager did not recognize the presence of Windows ME on the other hard drive, making Windows essentially inaccessible – not an acceptable result. I had the same problem with the Mepis Linux distribution, which also uses the Grub boot manager. So for now I am sticking with the old and proven Linspire 4.5 distribution until they work the bugs out of 5.0.

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Everyone's a Publisher, and Blogs are Our Printing Presses By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor and Columnist, AARP Computers and Technology Website

Just when we think we understand technology and its buzzwords, it all changes. E-mail, chat rooms, Web boards, instant messaging, and cell phone cameras -- haven't they been around forever? But one of this year's hot words is still a bit mysterious: blog. It's neither the villain in a Star Wars movie nor a weather phenomenon: it's simply an abbreviation for "Web log". A blog is an online diary or journal, usually casual and open for all to read.

Blog topics vary as widely as the people who create them. They can be personal how-was-my-day recordkeeping; focus on topics such as politics, technology, religion, etc.; and include pointers to other online resources -- such as other blogs!

To be interesting and effective, blogs need constant care and feeding. Blogs attract visitors, links, and buzz by being timely, so people are unlikely to visit blogs that don't frequently show new and interesting content.

But before you learn to read blogs -- and it's often as simple as visiting Web sites! -- you'll need a reason to do so. Searching Google for "blog" and "senior citizen" yields almost 30,000 hits. That's too many to explore but shows that blogging offers something for all ages. So I'll explore a few interesting blogs, then describe ways to explore the "blogosphere" (the world-wide and ever-growing collection of blogs).

Hosted on a colleague's Web site, Dr. John Huth's blog [jimbuie.blogs.com/john_huth/] highlights his personal crusade to reduce senior citizens' isolation through computers. Recent posts include "Video-Conferencing: the Killer Application to Reduce Isolation and Depression Among the Elderly" and "Bedside Computers in Hospitals".

TravelPod [www.travelpod.com/], an elaborate and polished Web site, describes itself as the Web's "original travel blog". The assortment of travel journals, travelogues, travelers, and destinations inspires me to hit the road! You can browse highlighted stories or search on interests. For example, having enjoyed a trip to Denmark about 15 years ago, I found dozens of bloggers discussing the country.

Web site Moreover collects news and information from thousands of editorial sites and more than a million blogs. Its "Consumer: Senior News" page

[p.moreover.com/cgi-local/page?index_seniors] includes varied material such as travel, insurance, retirement, and crime.

John Woolington hosts a simple but deep technology blog well worth visiting [maturetechnology.blogspot.com/]. Titled "Technology Is Not The Simple Life", it includes observations and opinions about coping with change.

For anything-goes fun, visit Wil Mosher's blog [dailysnooze.blogspot.com/]. He's a curmudgeon and proud of it, noting that he "hides in his hole by day, emerging at night to frolic and fornicate in the moonlight... When he gets off the couch!"

Ken's Weblog [kengory.blogspot.com/] proudly shows a fellow's family, friends, politics, humor, and favorite Web links. It's clear that having a blog is like having your personal TV station or magazine!

Gossip Cooler [www.seniorcitizens.com/weblog/gossipcooler.html] is a daily blog about growing older. The site it's on has useful info and links interleaved with many advertisements; since there's no hint who writes or runs the site, be careful.

A woman artist/activist/writer's blog [windchimewalker.blogspot.com/] offers her responses to world events, disability, and life. Describing herself as a "raging granny", she leaves no doubt where she stands on issues. Blogs like this show the Internet's power to share ideas and create communities by allowing readers to comment on what Patricia says.

A simple blog [www.lazydazers.com] lets you read about and see pictures of a couple's RV travels and adventures.

Finally, the Ageless Project [jenett.org/ageless/] is a fascinating compilation of Web sites (not all are blogs) illustrating that "the personal, creative side of the web is diverse and ageless".

Blogs and RSS are becoming increasingly popular and are getting good press coverage [techweb.com/article/showArticle.jhtml?articleId=57700173].

You can visit the blogs I've referenced as simple Web pages with normal hyperlinks. Many blogs are also readable via RSS (Rich Site Summary), an Internet technology which can bring material from multiple publishers/blogs to you as it's published, without your having to visit multiple Web sites. I read RSS "feeds" via my email software, Mozilla Thunderbird, and through a Web site which collects RSS feeds [www.bloglines.com/myblogs].

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Double Threat Online Travel Scam

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director and Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX
iwilsker@apcug.net

Most of us like to travel, and would especially enjoy a travel bargain. We may have checked with reliable travel resources such as our local travel agents, airlines, cruise lines and hotels but were unable to find the deal that we wanted. We check the major travel sites such as Expedia, Orbitz and Travelocity, but still can not find a deal that makes us happy. Since we are experienced Internet users, we go to the major search engines such as Yahoo, Google or Alltheweb, and search for bargain travel sites. We notice some websites that appear at the top of the listings, sometimes in the premium paid listings on the search engines, that allege airline tickets, hotel rooms, and cruises at far below the prices charged by the reputable sources that we are familiar with, so we click on the links. One link may be for CheapClouds.com, claiming deep discounts off published airfares; another link may be for Busysky.net that offers comprehensive travel services with fares far below those offered by travel agents or other online travel websites. Two other websites offering unbelievable travel bargains that appear in the paid or premium listings on the search engines are Crazytickets.net and Submitprice.net.

Tasting a good deal, we click on one of these sites and see a travel site similar to the better-known and reputable sites with which we are already familiar.

We search for airfares and find tickets for about half of what we would pay elsewhere; we find hotels and cruises similarly priced. Unable to resist such bargains, we select our trips and we are asked to enter our credit card information. A familiar window appears that asks us for our credit card number, security code (the three or four digit code on the credit card), expiration date, and name on the card. With a sense of excitement, we eagerly await the confirmation, which we are told may take a few minutes, but are instead presented with an official looking window that says that our credit card information could not be processed. We are then presented with an option to pay with another credit card, or pay by an alternative means. Thinking that it is just a simple glitch, and not wanting to lose the opportunity for a glorious vacation at a bargain price, we enter the required information for another credit card. We are again greeted with the same screen that it could not be processed, and are then told to contact customer service by email, utilizing the link and transaction number provided on the screen.

(Continued on page 28)

(Continued from page 27)

A short time later, we will receive an email from the travel company apologizing for the inconvenience, and claiming that their bank is having trouble processing credit cards. Since the price quoted is only valid for a very short time, the traveler is asked to use alternative methods of payment – wire the proceeds via Western Union. Readers of this column may feel a hint of skepticism at this point, remembering that sometime ago I wrote that while a legitimate method of sending money, wiring money via Western Union to pay for Internet purchases should raise a red flag of suspicion. Still, eager not to let the bargain of a lifetime get away; we follow the instructions on the email from customer service. The address to wire the money to may raise more suspicions, as the destination is not in the United States, but instead in Bulgaria, Romania or Thailand. An inquiry email back to customer service may bring a prompt canned reply that the reason why the deal is so good is that these prices are only available for tickets purchased outside of the U.S., along with an assurance that they will be honored by the airlines, cruise lines, and the hotels. Still not wanting to lose out on this dream vacation, we send the money via Western Union, exactly as requested. We will then receive an email stating that it will take several days to receive our tickets, and are provided with a web link and tracking number to show our tickets are on the way.

After not receiving the tickets in the time specified we click on the tracking number, and are given another canned response that they are being processed, and should be delivered in the next few days; following up clicks several days later display the identical statement. An email reply from customer service reiterates the message. By the date of the dream vacation, no tickets have arrived, dashing any dreams of a good time.

We have become the victims of another very nasty scam circulating on the Internet. What is especially insidious about this scam is that it is a “double whammy,” in that we are not only out of the money for the trip, since the money sent via Western Union is virtually unrecoverable, but we have also given unscrupulous unknown parties our credit card information!

This is not some fictitious scenario by a mystery writer but a documented scam. The scam has become so pervasive that even some of the antivirus companies have posted warnings about it on their websites. There is anecdotal evidence that, in several of the cases, the victims’ credit cards had been illicitly charged for a variety of goods and services in the days immediately following the fraudulent transaction, possibly committed by the same travel thieves.

(Continued on page 29)

(Continued from page 28)

The websites mentioned above were real, and are well documented, but are currently offline (as I type this). Based on their success at defrauding countless victims, it is likely that they will reappear under different names.

In order to be safe when shopping for travel bargains, be sure to use a reputable resource, such as a local travel agent, airline or hotel website, or trusted third party website. If you pay with a credit card, there is some degree of protection from fraud from the credit card company. Never wire money, especially overseas, to pay for a travel bargain. We work too hard for our money to have miscreants steal it from us under the false pretenses of a travel bargain.

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Cables: The Missing Part of Upgrades

By Timothy Everingham, TUGNET, Granada Hills CA

www.tugnet.org

teveringham@acm.org

When you are in the process of building a new computer or upgrading one; you may just think you have to only buy the component parts such as CPU, motherboard, case, power supply, RAM, video card, hard drives, and CD/DVD player or writer. However, what a lot of people don't think about are the cables to connect all of these together. Many people have gone to the computer store or swap meet and when they get to install a part they realize they don't have the cable or adapter needed and have to take the time to go out again to buy it. Thinking through your computer purchase cabling needs before you leave home, or at least before you leave the computer store, can save you the hassle and time of making that additional trip. If you have to order from a catalog and have it shipped to you days may be lost before you can complete your installation.

These days motherboards do come with a lot of cables, but are they the right ones for your application and are there enough of them? We are in a transition from the EIDE interface for hard drives and CD/DVD players and writers to the SATA interface. With EIDE cables you have up to two drives on a parallel cable that are flat ribbons or twisted into a round cable; but SATA drives are connected via thin serial cables that have one for each drive connecting directly to the drive controller, usually on the motherboard. If you have a floppy drive you will need a cable for that too. So far I have only been talking about data cables, not power cables. SATA drives also have different power cables than EIDE drives. Also CD/DVD players and writers some times have different power connectors than EIDE hard drives, sometimes using a floppy drive type power connector. Also, if you have a mid to high level 3D video card you may have to plug in one or two power connectors because they need more power than what they can get from the motherboard, and the power connectors for PCI Express video cards are different than those for AGP video cards (There are two different type of connectors for AGP cards too). Then there are the different connectors for case fans.

Also a lot of newer motherboards are connected to the power supply via a 24 pin connector instead of the more traditional 20 pin. Some 24 pin motherboards can have you just plug in a 20 pin plug, but others do not

(Continued on page 31)

(Continued from page 30)

recommend that. Then of course we get into the audio cables for your CD/DVD player/writer to plug into the sound card or sound circuit on the motherboard. You also may need USB or Firewire (IEEE 1394) cables for within the case to get them from the motherboard to the sockets or external ones to get them out to your devices.

So how do you find out what cables you need? If possible you can look at the parts themselves or the box they come in. There is the visual of the connectors and information on the part or box about what the part needs. Be wary however on just taking it from the visuals. Some cables that have the same type of connectors at their ends are rated differently on speed or other factors. An example of this is EIDE data cables. Typical rating for these cables is 33, 66, 100, or 133 MHz. In with EIDE components hooked together it is the slowest component that sets the data the data speed on the EIDE bus. If the EIDE drive controller cannot communicate with the drives at one speed because the cable is not capable of handling data transmission at that speed without errors, the controller will drop the speed of the entire EIDE data bus. As such having EIDE components rated at 133 MHz and connecting them together with a cable only rated at 66 MHz greatly increases the risk of the drives data transfer operating below 133 MHz. You also get into issues of it may be the right type of cable; but has the wrong connectors at the ends, which you can run into with Firewire (IEEE 1394), USB, and other cables. Other sources for this information are the manufacturer's website or those of online retailers that sell the part. You may have to look at the parts manual to find information about its power connectors. However, how do you get to see the manual before buying the part? Many manufacturers have the manual to their parts on their website in PDF format so you can just download the manual. This is sometimes the only way you can easily find out whether a motherboard needs a 20 or 24 pin power connector or it can take either. From these same sources you can also find out what cables come with a part.

You should look at the power supply you are going to use or if you can't examine it, probably because you have not bought it yet, find out the specifications. There are different ATX standards for power supplies, with ATX 12V 2.01 being the latest (For additional information read "More Performance: The New Power Supply Standard, ATX12V 2.0" at Tom's Hardware Guide www.tomshardware.com. Look at what connectors it has and how many of each (20 or 24 pin, P4, and EPS motherboard connectors, 4 pin Molex for 5.25" format EIDE drives and some fans, floppy drive, SATA, auxiliary, and PCI Express video card. Depending on what

(Continued on page 32)

(Continued from page 31)

you find and your needs you may need power splitters or adapters. Many older power supplies do not have SATA drive power connectors, but only those that are used for EIDE (Be aware that some SATA drive power adapters do not have a +3.3V connection, which is required by some drives). Only some of the recently introduced power supplies have a PCI Express video card power connector. If you have enough components in your system where your present power supply may not be able to handle the load, it might be better to get a new power supply which has the newer type of connectors you need.

One thing you also should consider is how your cables will affect airflow in your computer. Many people use round EIDE cables rather than flat because of this issue. The good use of cable ties can help with this problem. Especially if you live far away from a computer store, are using online retailers, or going to a computer swap meet that you would have to pay again to re-enter it is especially important to be sure you have all the cables you need for your computer upgrade or building project. Researching what you need ahead of time can prevent wasting time and money and increasing your frustration. May you have the cables you need, and not buy cables you can't use.

Timothy Everingham is CEO of Timothy Everingham Consulting in Azusa, California. He is also Chair of the Los Angeles Chapter of ACM SIGGRAPH. Timothy is also part-time press in the areas of high technology, computers, video, audio, and entertainment/ media and has had articles published throughout the United States and Canada plus Australia, England, & Japan. Further information can be found at <http://home.earthlink.net/~teveringham>.

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ACPCUG Club News

NEW VENUE! 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 yet.

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