

ACPCUG Newsletter

**North Canton
Public Library,
185 North Main St.
North Canton, OH
July 10, 2006
6:00—8:45 PM**

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July 2006

Akron-Canton PC Users Group

**From The DealsGuy for
August 2006**

by Bob (the cheapskate)

Click,

**Greater Orlando Computer Us-
ers Group**

Last month I published an announcement for a product that could copy DVDs. We included what we found about downloading an additional product that was necessary to accomplish certain tasks, and I was accused of encouraging illegal activities. Maybe I should have worded it differently, but the fact is, I simply published the announcement for a free product, along with our findings, and made the information available so an editor, or reader, could use it, or not use it, however they wished. I had two complaints (from the same UG) and that group chose not to make the column available to their members, which is their choice. This is not an apology because there has been tremendous interest in these products; I simply reported the facts and people are responsible for their own actions. I have read a number of articles in UG newsletters containing opinions concerning the law and the tactics of

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publishing companies. By the way, since last month's column, their product pricing and lineup has changed.

There are also those who would argue that a gun shop encourages murder, and I could use other similar issues that might be said to imply illegal activity. Recently I published an announcement for a product that recovers passwords. That could also be used for an illegal activity if used on a stolen computer. With all the write-ups and notoriety about new and controversial copyright laws, I wouldn't even try to explain the legalities of anything. Is it legal, or illegal to make a backup copy? Do you know for sure? Also, Shrink2Five has other uses and we did not include a link for Machinist2.dll. My proof reader suggested that car companies must encourage a long list of illegal activities, including manslaughter, since they sell cars that can do such things.

Actually, I am not a fan of publishing companies' tactics and the UCITA or DCMA laws. If those officials have their way, you would not be able to give, or even lend, anything published after you have read or listened to it. From what I read, they want all used book stores shut down as well as all libraries, and you would even be arrested if you were caught lending a book or CD to a friend. Who knows where it all might end when it comes to the pockets of some corporate bigwigs. However, I have no interest in any of this copying stuff. I have no time and have not bought a music CD in years, nor do I rent videos or go to a movie. The performers and executives involved with that industry are grossly overpaid, but they don't make any money from me. I don't watch much TV now, but if they keep adding commercials, I'll shut that off too. While I'm on my soapbox; if I am paying for cable TV, why should I have to put up with all those commercials? People are much too tolerant of being taken advantage of, and about what they are paying for.

***Do Your Homework**

The announcements below have been edited to shorten them so be sure to check their Web sites for better information. Remember, I have not tried any of these so I have no knowledge about their reliability.

(Continued from page 2)

***Check That Malware, And For Free!**

Put an end to all types of Malware, at no cost: The a-squared Web Malware Scanner 2.0 hunts undesired Spyware modules and dangerous Trojans, Backdoors, Keyloggers, Worms, Dialers, Rootkits, Hacking Tools, Riskware and TrackingCookies; all from within the Web browser and no software must be installed. All users having Internet Explorer and a fast Internet connection, such as DSL, can make optimum use of the scanner.

The a-squared Web Malware Scanner 2.0 uses over 350,000 signatures and an ingenious heuristic algorithm for detecting pests on the local computer and this scanner can be used directly from the Web browser. The user can choose from four different scan functions depending on the time available for a scan. The quick test provides rapid results, while a detailed analysis of the entire computer can take a while. A Riskware recognition system can also be enabled that informs the user of programs that are usually harmless, but are often used by Malware for specific tasks. There is also a paid version that they recommend as quicker and better with a 30-day free trial.

a-squared Web Malware Scanner 2.0: <<http://malwarescan.emsisoft.com>>

a-squared Anti-Malware: <<http://www.emsisoft.com/en/software/personal>>

Product details Malware-IDS: <<http://www.emsisoft.com/en/software/ids>>

Order a-squared Anti-Malware: <<http://www.emsisoft.com/en/order/homeuser>>

Phone: +43-664-3446068 (German)

Fax: +43-6272-73083

Email: <info@emsisoft.com>

Web: <www.emsisoft.com>

***Lets Compare Data**

ZsCompare allows users to efficiently synchronize computers, backup data, compare different versions of files, verify that CDs have been copied correctly, manage Zip files, review changes to source code, and more. Users can easily run comparisons on local directories, networked computers, or removable media, such as CDs, DVDs, and flash drives. zsCompare is highly customizable to meet a wide range of needs.

ZsCompare 3.0 adds many new file and freeform text comparison features, including the ability to compare text from Microsoft Word documents and

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PDF documents. Also, zsCompare provides additional control over how the comparison is performed with predefined options for common comparisons. Finally, the new version of zsCompare permits direct editing of the contents of a file from the results. ZsCompare 3.0 operates on Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux. It runs on the Java platform, a copy of which is included with the zsCompare installation. ZsCompare 3.0 is available in three editions: Professional (\$199.95), Standard (\$99.95), and Lite (\$35.00). For a 20% discount, my readers should enter the coupon code "DealsGuy" when purchasing a license at <<https://www.zisasoft.com/store/order.shtml>>. The Lite Edition contains basic comparison and synchronization functionality. With the Lite Edition, users can compare directories, zip files, text files, and freeform text. All versions include free lifetime upgrades and free technical support.

More information, including a complete list of enhancements and a fully functional 30 day trial version, is available at <<http://www.zisasoft.com/products/zsCompare/index.shtml>>.

Sales: <sales@zisasoft.com>

Telephone: 1 (303) 638-9235

Fax: 1 (720) 862-2089

***The Arnold Schwarzenegger Of Windows?**

Tame Windows with Actual Window Manager 4.01. Microsoft Windows is the most widely used operating system today and its window architecture is a brilliant invention. However, this architecture comes with a bit of baggage and a degree of frustration, especially when you work with several windows simultaneously. With many applications open at once Windows becomes heavily cluttered, which in its turn cuts down on your computational productivity. The more windows you open, the more time you spend to manage them and less focus is on the job. Monotonous clicking, window clutter in the taskbar, switching between windows, their positioning and resizing may double and even triple the time you need to concentrate on your job.

Upon installation, Actual Window Manager adds its buttons to each window in your system and allows you to navigate them in new ways. Instead of the taskbar, you will be able to minimize windows to the task tray or to the edge of the desktop or roll them up, or unroll, like blinds. If you need to multitask in several applications at once, you can simply pin all necessary windows on top without the need to bring up each one several times a day. In fact, you have over 40 other controls to automate routines related to

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windows. You can apply a predefined level of transparency to any window, automate positioning of windows, resize them and change priority from the title bar menu and more.

Over 450 suggestions were carefully considered and reflected in a more intuitive user interface. The customization of options has become much simpler, and the choice of options wider. In addition to subtle customization abilities, the program has a list of presets for most popular applications that allow you to use Actual Window Manager in the "install-and-go" style.

Read the complete description of features at <<http://www.ActualTools.com/windowmanager/>>

Download a no-cost evaluation copy from <<http://www.ActualTools.com/files/aimsetup.exe>>

Pricing and Availability

Actual Window Manager 4.0 runs under all Windows platforms and costs \$39.95 (USD) for a single-user license. Registered customers are entitled to the unlimited functionality, free updates and lifetime technical support. Additional information on Actual Window Manager, a collection of tutorial articles and success stories, as well as a 60-day evaluation copy is available from <<http://www.ActualTools.com/>>. UG members should visit our User Groups Support page <<http://www.actualtools.com/usergroups/>> and click the "Get 20% discount" Link, then follow the instructions.

E-mail: <info@actualtools.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>>

Accessing Family Accounts in Cases of Emergency

By Gabriel Goldberg, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, AARP Computer & Technology Website, www.aarp.org

It's clear how important it is for each of us to maintain current wills, powers of attorney, medical directives, and other such documents. And family members, trusted friends, and advisors such as lawyers need quick access to them. In their absence, at stressful times, important actions and decisions become needlessly difficult.

With much data now stored electronically, emergency preparedness requires that loved ones or advisors can access personal information stored online, on computers, and in electronic gadgets like cell phones and PDAs (personal digital assistants, Palms and Pocket PCs). This preparation merely adds our electronic lives to a readiness checklist. It's no more exotic or worrisome than opening joint bank accounts or giving a house key to a trusted neighbor.

Actions we should take are as unique as our legal, medical, and financial profiles. Preparation is especially important because laws and business practices don't match today's technologies.

News stories highlight some of today's challenges and risks. A soldier in Iraq used e-mail and a Web site to communicate with the world. When he was killed, his parents wanted to preserve what he had created. But his ISP refused to allow access or provide the data, citing privacy concerns. Similarly, when a Texas man's wife died, he cancelled her cell phone. The company also disconnected his phone, which had been on the same account. He couldn't reactivate it, leaving him isolated at a difficult time.

Where to begin? Many such legal and logistical problems can be avoided by simply including two names on accounts such as online banking and investing, mortgage service, bill paying, e-mail, and Web services. This way either person can deal with accounts on the other's behalf. But ensure that both names aren't required for routine actions.

Then record account names, passwords, and Web addresses for family members, trusted friends, or a lawyer, accountant, or executor. They needn't have the list until it's to be used so just ensure that they can find it and that it's kept updated.

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Those of us in the baby boomer "sandwich generation" may have parents and children to look out for and with whom to share our technology preparation information. Preparation requires replacing the common mindset of independence with one of readiness and collaboration. An estate attorney can be a valuable resource, providing legal documents, objective advice, and what-if scenarios.

Commercial services are arising to help. Denver-based Family Matters USA [www.familymatters.com] claims to have "identified, researched and solved over 120 tasks that an estate executor or family could perform". They believe that while privacy issues affect all sorts of accounts, proper legal forms, a legitimate need, and perseverance (sometimes escalating to a supervisor) will yield the desired information.

While organizations typically handle employees' work information during emergency situations, supervisors and individuals should inventory what they use on the job and how others might need to access it.

At home or at work, the largest obstacle to emergency preparation is the wealth of information we use from memory. You can start an inventory by noting details of online accounts, Web site bookmarks saved, and passwords stored. Then make a list to share with someone who may need to follow in your electronic footsteps. Remember to safeguard your list, whether it's on paper, a PC, or a USB drive [www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/hardware/secure_usb_drives.html]. But don't hide the list itself behind a secret password!

Finally, there's a very tangible step to take. Emergency responders encourage using a high-tech replacement for traditional wallet contact-list cards [www.macmillandictionary.com/New-Words/050808-ICE-number.htm]. They commonly check victims' cell phones or PDA directories for entries filed under "ICE" ("in case of emergency") to determine whom to call.

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Backup Awareness Month

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio & TV show host
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WEBSITES:

<http://www.backupawareness.com>

<http://www.ntius.com>

<http://www.symantec.com>

<http://www.backupawareness.com/bestpractices.html>

In case you had not heard, June is Backup Awareness Month. It is not a federally recognized holiday, nor is it one acknowledged by resolution from some governmental authority, but an awareness service of one of the largest manufacturers of hard drives, the newly merged Maxtor and Seagate.

Sure, Maxtor and Seagate will benefit if we all rush out and purchase a large capacity hard drive so we can backup our critical data in the event of a hard drive crash, or other tragedy that can damage or destroy our computers. This is really more of a win-win situation, as there is a very valid need for timely and comprehensive backups of our data. Lessons still unlearned from Rita, Katrina, and Wilma, as well as other countless disasters, fires, thefts, and other debacles should teach us that if we have a good backup of our files, we can easily survive a catastrophic data loss, and be back in operation promptly.

Imagine in any business or other commercial environment how much information is stored on hard drives. Hard drives are electromechanical devices, and as such will indeed fail at some time. Murphy's Law dictates that a hard drive will always fail at the most inopportune time. Now imagine what would happen to that business or organization if suddenly all of its critical information was gone. No accounts receivable; no accounts payable; no client lists; no purchase orders; no employee or student data; no payroll and tax records; no correspondence; no records of any kind; and a plethora of other potentially devastating losses. Next imagine the time and cost that a company would incur if it had to rebuild that amount of information from paper records, if the paper records indeed exist. Can you conceive the utter devastation that a company would suffer with a catastrophic data loss?

Data loss is not just a corporate or organizational threat, but a personal one too. On my home computer, for example, I have countless family photos,

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tax records, family financial information, archives of correspondence and other important documents, music, bookmarks, address books, email, and other information that would probably be irretrievable in the event of a complete hard drive failure. I really do not think that the IRS would accept as an excuse the fact that my hard drive crashed, losing my financial records.

We can backup our data in many ways without any substantial expense, or we can utilize sophisticated backup solutions. Backing up can be as simple as copying critical files to CD, DVD, flash drive, or other storage media, using the integral copy function available on all computer operating systems. We can use software, such as NTI's Shadow or Backup NOW! to manage our backup functions to our chosen media, or we can use utilities such as Symantec's (Norton) Ghost, to make a bit by bit copy of our hard drive which can be copied to a new hard drive, making it a mirror image of the original, ready to go. Now that broadband internet connections are more of a rule than an exception, there are commercial services that will do online remote backup and storage at off-premise locations, secure and separate from the host or home location.

Seagate/Maxtor have published some "best practices" (www.backupawareness.com/bestpractices.html) defining the tasks necessary to insure the ability to recover our precious data. These practices can be summarized by the following tips (details on the website):

Develop a backup schedule – Make it routine, and not a task that we have to remember to accomplish. Most modern backup software and utilities either backup in real-time (NTI Shadow), or can be scheduled at predetermined times (NTI Backup NOW!).

Back up everything – it is not necessary to waste time sorting data, as the speed of backup utilities, hardware, and hard drives, as well as the large capacity of new hard drives, make it unnecessary to determine what to backup

Give yourself room to grow – The rule of thumb listed on the site recommends that the minimum size of backup drives (or other media or storage solutions) should be at least double the current size of the hard drives being backed up.

Back up automatically – Referred to in the industry as "Set it and Forget It", is a viable adjunct to backing up on schedule. Some real-time off-site

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backup services use a high speed internet connection to automatically back up all new data to an external location. Many software utilities are almost transparent, and perform backups automatically, and unattended.

Rotate backups – Use more than one drive or other system for backup. There are always risks that the backup itself can be damaged or otherwise flawed, and there is safety in redundancy. It is a good practice to store at least one current backup physically away from the location being backed up such that a catastrophe (fire, flood, etc.) at the host will not destroy the backup. It is also a good idea to be able to take a backup with you in the event of a crisis, such as when I took my external hard drive with a current backup of all of my files, when I evacuated from Hurricane Rita. With this external drive, I could also access critical files from another computer if needed, prior to returning home.

Don't procrastinate – Do not put off until tomorrow what you must be doing today. The complete Murphy's First Law of Computing is, "A properly backed up hard drive will never fail, but the first time that you do not have a current backup, your hard drive will always fail at the most inopportune time." Sadly, all too many of us learn the importance of a backup immediately after our hard drive fails, as we come to the realization that all is lost.

June should not really be backup awareness month; every month should be backup awareness month!

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Web 2.0 and The Evolution of the Small Office/ Home Office (soho)

By John Abbott, member of the Bentsen Grove Resort Computer Club,
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Will the evolution of Web 2.0 have any lasting effect on the proprietary software vendors? I believe so to a limited extent. There are a myriad of new Web 2.0 companies springing up hourly. Each offering something unique to attract users. For some, this will prove satisfactory enough that they will no longer purchase proprietary mail programs or word processors, and possibly even spread sheets.

The advent of Open Office has most certainly put a dent in the profit margins of Microsoft's Office Suite. There is a new look coming from Microsoft Office that adds a lot of eye candy to their existing Suite, but not a lot of additional function. I believe that between Open Source and the Web 2.0 companies the bottom line at Microsoft will feel their presence.

Even though Microsoft is reacting to the popular features of Mozilla's Firefox browser by copying most of them into Internet Explorer 7. IE7 still doesn't have several of the most advanced features of Firefox like ad blocking and several extensions made available for free download. And the folks at Mozilla aren't sitting around waiting for Microsoft to catch up, they are already beta testing Flock, a Web 2.0 oriented browser with blogging and social tagging built into its rich function package. However, if you don't consider yourself a true Web 2.0 Juggernaut then you may not enjoy it as much. It is designed to accommodate the blog grabbing and social bookmarking of web sites.

Google is clearly among the leaders in Web 2.0 features. They offer on line mail, on line calendar, financial portfolio tracking, the best search engine on the planet, news aggregated to your personal interests, image search, even a Linux search engine or a couple of other specialized search engines. And Google was the company that forced the email providers into offering 2 Gigabytes of storage for their mail. [<http://www.google.com/intl/en/options/>]

But there are other companies close on the heels of Google. My current favorite is inbox.com inbox offers personalized email, with spell checker, rich text (font control) manageable folders and the absolutely best spam system on the Internet. You can set your Spam to capture any mail not from some-

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one in your address book. Or you can set it to challenge anyone not in your book and then hold that challenged mail in an "Unverified" folder where you can accept or permanently reject it. Along with the email, you are offered 2 Gb of storage with folders containing your various upload/download type .: music, documents, pictures or files. And if that weren't enough, inbox also offers a calendar that emails you up to 3 reminders on calendared events. [<http://www.inbox.com>]

Another great company is Zoho. Zoho derives its name from SOHO (small office/home office) and it has laid in virtually everything one would need. The Zoho stable contains email, spread sheets, planners, collaborative white boards etc. Their banner program is Zoho Virtual Office and it is complete with reminder calendars, email, a virtual drive (only with XP) Instant Messaging, task management, and all of it can be collaborative for up to 10 users. Not all of the features are available on the free packages, but small version is available for you to try before you buy. [<http://www.zoho.com>]

The only thing missing from a small office/home office would be a telephone. Ah, but you can have that on-line too. From full service phone systems like Packet8 to totally free Gizmo and Skype. The packet8 system will give you an adapter to plug your phone into, or you can buy a Uniden phone system with a base phone and up to 10 wireless handsets for \$79. Or you can use your current phone connected into their free adapter and your up - both systems carry a \$20 a month fee for caller ID, three way calling, and your choice of area code and depending on where you live you can keep your phone number. If you want to get exotic if you buy their VideoPhone and then the same \$20 a month. [<http://www.packet8.net/>]

But for the true Web 2.0 user, Skype or Gizmo reign supreme. Each is totally free, and has adapters for a web camera. Of course, if you are not calling another SIP subscriber you will have to buy an outgoing AND an incoming outside line. I prefer using Gizmo because it has superior audio setup and a test point to call to check for echo suppression or the lack thereof. [<http://www.gizmoproject.com>] [<http://www.skype.com>]

And finally for setting up those conference calls you can always use the services of Gizmo which offers a free conference system. For those using Gizmo, it is entirely free. For those checking into the conference from their cell phones or land line phone they will pay the standard rate to their provider. There is a great company called Live Office that gives you much better control (mute, mute group, roll call etc) and it too is absolutely free and the quality of the connection much improved over Gizmo. And should you

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need to step up to a toll free call in system, Live Office offers them for a variety of rates.

[<http://freeconferencing.liveoffice.com/>]

And now you are equipped to take your entire home office with you in a USB thumb drive. And depending on the version you use, it can all be automatically encrypted. SOHO has become portable and secure.

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Tech News

By Sue Crane, Editor, Big Bear Computer Club

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Ian Wright has a car that blows away a Ferrari 360 Spider and a Porsche Carrera GT in drag races, and whose 0-to-60 acceleration time ranks it among the fastest production autos in the world. In fact, it's second only to the French-made Bugatti Veyron, a 1,000-horsepower, 16-cylinder beast that hits 60 mph half a second faster and goes for \$1.25 million. The key difference? The Bugatti gets eight miles per gallon. Wright's car? It runs off an electric battery. For a look under the hood, go here: [javascript:openWindow\('popups/2006/biz2/wrightspeed/frame-set.exclude.html','728x445','toolbar=no,location=no,directories=no,status=no,menubar=no,scrollbars=no,resizable=no,width=728,height=445'\)](javascript:openWindow('popups/2006/biz2/wrightspeed/frame-set.exclude.html','728x445','toolbar=no,location=no,directories=no,status=no,menubar=no,scrollbars=no,resizable=no,width=728,height=445')).

New security features in Windows Vista will largely eliminate the need to run separate antispysware or firewall software, according to a new analyst report. Vista does not include antivirus functionality; Microsoft plans to sell its Windows Live OneCare antivirus software separately starting next month. But while the changes in Vista should reduce the risk for most users, the security features mean upgrading won't be easy. The annoyance would come from features such as User Account Control, which is to be enabled by default and lets users run Windows with fewer privileges. "Although the new security system shows promise, it is far too chatty and annoying," wrote analyst Andrew Jaquit

Virtualization provides not only a way to use computers more efficiently, but it also offers a new, relatively painless way to install software. VMware and other virtualization advocates are working hard to promote the software distribution and installation technique. However, licensing constraints pose a significant impediment. VMware, long considered the market leader for virtualization software, potentially changed the virtualization software market by announcing that the upgrade to their GSX Server product would be renamed VMware Server and made available for free to anyone who wants it. Although VMware Server is free to download, test, and deploy, it may not be totally free to run in

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perpetuity. VMware plans to sell support plans for VMware Server that are anticipated to cost \$350 - \$400 per installation. These plans will be made available once VMware is out of beta and released.

A few small companies will start to offer services and products for converting hybrid cars like the Toyota Prius that currently get around 50 miles per gallon into plug-in hybrids that rely more heavily on electrical power and can get about 100 miles per gallon. But conversion won't be cheap--at least initially. California's EDrive Systems will charge around \$10,000 to \$12,000 to install the extra lithium batteries needed to turn a standard Prius into a plug-in hybrid when its service begins later this summer. At that price, and with gas at \$3 a gallon, it would take around 160,000 to 200,000 miles of driving to break even. But some groups are looking to the do-it-yourself crowd for a cheaper solution. CalCars is working with independent inventors to bring the price of a DIY kit based around an open blueprint to about \$3,000. Mass manufacturing, though, could lower the prices dramatically over time. Andrew Frank, a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of California at Davis said "We can't switch from where we are today overnight. It will take 20 years or more to take the PHEV (plug-in hybrid electric vehicle) to get into our society," Frank said. Nonetheless, "we can greatly reduce the amount of liquid fuel we use for transportation,"

The next energy source: Barnyard animals? Microgy, which has discovered that manure and other waste products from cows, pigs and other livestock is a largely untapped source of energy. The company builds industrial-sized "digesters" that, through heat and microbes, reduce mountains of waste into gas or electricity that can be reused on the farm or sold on the open market. The plant will start shipping natural gas (methane) in the third quarter and, when fully operational, will churn out an estimated 1 billion cubic feet of biogas a year.

AgraQuest is one of a rising number of companies promoting biopesticides--substances that kill bugs with selectively bred microorganisms, rather than chemical concoctions. A novel fungus called Muscador lives naturally in the bark

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of a type of spice tree found in Central America and other tropical regions, emits a cocktail of about 30 gases that kills a variety of pests. Muscador-based products will likely start coming out this year. Organic biopesticides comprise only a small fraction of the overall \$30 billion pesticide market, but they are growing rapidly.

The DARPA plans to hold its 3rd contest for robotic vehicles in November 2007, with a first prize set at \$2 million. The entrants will have to carry out a simulated military supply mission in a mock urban area. and complete a 60-mile course in less than 6 hours, autonomously obeying traffic laws while merging into moving traffic, navigating traffic circles, negotiating busy intersections and avoiding obstacles. A location for the finals of the DARPA Urban Challenge has not yet been named.

Lego expects to release software, hardware and Bluetooth developer kits. The firmware code and the developer kits should be available by August when Mindstorms NXT is publicly available. 114 Mindstorms fans have been taking part in an invite-only developers program. The idea is that they will be able to write books about Mindstorms, as well as create new software and designs for it. the developer program participants are now free to discuss their projects, and much of that work should begin appearing on the Mindstorms Web site <http://mindstorms.lego.com/?domainredir=www.mindstorms.com> soon. the Bluetooth developer kit details the Bluetooth protocol built into the NXT microprocessor. That should enable users to design programs allowing any Bluetooth device to interact with Mindstorms NXT robots

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Essential Processes, How You Can Tell

By Vinny La Bash, Member of the Sarasota PCUG, Florida

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Every other computer article these days seems to be about Windows Vista, a long promised operating system that won't make its appearance for almost another year. Why all the fuss about something that doesn't even exist yet? It's as far advanced over Windows XP as Windows 95 was over 3.1, that's why. That's nice, but we don't have Vista to take us to Nirvana today. We common folk have XP. That's not bad, but we don't have Vista as promised. Maybe this time next year I'll be writing about a Vista tip to make life easier while we're all anticipating the release of Vienna, the follow on to Vista. While we're waiting, here's something to make the wait easier.

If you press Ctrl+Alt+Delete to bring up the Windows Task Manager and then activate the Processes tab, you see a long list of computer services that run in the background while you're working with your system. You've undoubtedly received recommendations that you should shut down or disable the unessential processes to improve system performance. This is sound advice, but how can you tell what's essential from what could be shut down without clobbering your operation? Try the following to get a fighting start in that direction.

Restart your system and when it begins to reboot press F8 repeatedly until the Start Up menu appears. Select the Safe Mode option from the menu. If you get another screen asking you to select the operating system, choose the one which applies to you. In most cases, you will see one choice and it will be Windows XP Home Edition, Windows XP Professional Edition or Windows XP Media Center Edition. A bunch of programming gibberish may fill up your screen next and your system may appear to be 'frozen' for a minute or two. Relax, but don't touch anything, especially the keyboard or the mouse.

Eventually something like the normal Windows Welcome Screen will appear and you will be asked to sign in. If you are the only one using your system and your user profile has full Administrator privileges, you can safely log on to Windows Safe Mode. If you're not certain, use the Administrator Profile.

You will now be confronted with a formidable looking dialog box containing an ambiguous explanation of Safe Mode. Click the Yes button. When the desktop appears, don't panic. The icons may look very different, but nothing is wrong. One of the characteristics of Safe Mode is to load only the minimum number of video drivers that will support the lowest resolution your monitor can handle. This guarantees you will have a visible screen in Safe Mode. Everything will be back to normal when you restart, but you will probably have to rearrange your icons.

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Press Ctrl+Alt+Delete. This time the Windows Task Manager displays a considerably shorter list in the Processes section. This list represents what's really essential to keep Windows running. Don't shut down or disable anything in this short list when you are running in Windows normal mode. You run the risk of not only crashing your system, but you may not be able to boot up again without doing a repair reinstall of your operating system. The idea here is to improve the performance of your system, not put yourself out of business.

You can make a handwritten list of the processes that are running in Safe Mode and use that as a reference, but here is another method.

1. Click on a blank area of the Windows Task Manager to make sure it is active. Click the Processes tab.
2. Press Alt+PrtScrn to capture the image of the dialog box and store it in the clipboard area.
3. Close the Windows Task Manager Dialog box.
4. Click on the Start button.
5. From the Start Menu, open the All Programs section.
6. Open the Accessories Menu.
7. Start the Paint program.
8. From the Edit menu select Paste to put the stored image in the canvas area.
9. Save the image on the Desktop, the My Documents folder or in any folder where you can retrieve it easily.
10. Close Paint.
11. Restart Windows.
12. Rearrange your icons if necessary when the desktop appears in normal mode.
13. Open Paint as you did in Safe Mode.
14. Retrieve and print the Task Manager Dialog box image.

You can copy and paste the image in your word processor or another application if you prefer. When you shut down or disable any process not on your short list, you can be confident that you won't inadvertently clobber your system while trying to improve its performance. What about all those other programs running in the background? That's a subject for another article.

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.

The New, the Best, and the Worst

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

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Times Change

Leafing back through old copies of The P-See UrGent, I notice that I started this monthly column in February, 1998. That makes this about the 80th installment – hard to believe. It started out as a discussion of things New, Best or Worst in the computer world, but much has changed since then. We are no longer impressed with incremental improvements in CPU performance. Arguments over the most proficient Web search engine have pretty well been settled for now. Discussions of viruses and other malware have grown way beyond the scope of this column. LCD monitors are no longer “prohibitively expensive, suffer from poor brightness, a narrow viewing angle, and relatively sluggish refresh rates.”

I began to look for long-range trends in computer technology. In my July-August 1999 column I mentioned the birth of a new Web search strategy based on evaluating hyperlinks to identify the most relevant Web sites for a given search term. I specifically described a search program, called *Clever*, that was being developed by the clever folks at IBM and was highly successful. Typically, IBM used it only internally and did not make it publicly available. As a footnote I added that a similar program, being developed at Stanford University, was made available in beta form. Its name? Google.com. IBM missed the boat again.

It is no coincidence that I read about Google in the June 1999 issue of *Scientific American*. The most interesting new developments with potential long-term importance are not first reported in *PC Magazine* or *PC World*, but in high-quality publications with a more general readership. I often find interesting developments reported in *The Economist*, the outstanding British weekly news magazine, as well as on the Web site of the *BBC News*. Other good sources are national newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*, but I don't get to read those regularly. As a sign of the times, the April 22nd issue of *The Economist* carries three full-page in-your-face ads touting the energy advantages of AMD Opteron processor-based servers (e.g. “You could've hired 250 engineers, 570 IT support people, 5,235 interns, and one new CIO with the amount of money wasted by non-AMD powered servers”). No mention of Intel (which is feeling the competition). David is starting to kick sand in Goliath's face!

On the other hand, *PC Magazine* is now mostly dedicated to gadgets, including a review in its May 9, 2006 issue of the Mercedes ML 350, which is loaded with electronics and sells for up to 70 thousand dollars. A 20-page review of Vista, not expected to become available until January 2007 at the earliest, reports that only 50% of current computers will be able to use it. Very few will be ready for the much-ballyhooed Aero Glass interface without upgrading their graphics capabilities.

PC World stays closer to specific computer topics, but how many "50 Best New Sites" and "Best Free Stuff" do we need? The most important contributions of these PC Magazines are their product evaluations. Otherwise, how would we have known that AMD managed to overtake Intel in CPU technology?

Wi-Fi Progress

In just a few years, as equipment cost dropped to affordable levels, wireless connections between computers in households have become commonplace. Several IEEE standards assure interoperability between different makes of equipment. The most popular standard today is 802.11g, capable of connecting at speeds up to 54 megabits per second (Mbps). It is backwards compatible with the older 802.11b which operates at up to 11 Mbps. A third standard, 802.11a, operates at up to 54 Mbps and uses a different frequency range to minimize interference with other equipment. It is not often used.

The IEEE has almost completed work on a new standard, 802.11n, that should increase the transmission rate to a maximum of 540 Mbps. In anticipation of the new standard, several wireless connection providers have been marketing new products that provide faster connections over greater distances. According to *PC World* (February 2006) Netgear's \$180 RangeMax 240 Wireless Router and \$100 Notebook Adapter can connect at close range at about the same rate (100 Mbps) as a standard wired 10-100 Ethernet connection. The router has 3 antennas and transmits over 3 non-overlapping bands within the allotted 9.4 Mhz frequency band to achieve this performance.

The high speed may be useful when you use bandwidth-gobbling applications such as VoIP telephony, network gaming, or streaming audio and video. If you mostly use a wireless Local Area Network (LAN) in your home to share an Internet connection you have no need for premium high-speed wi-fi equipment. The fastest download speed available from my local cable provider, SIGECOM, is 6 Mbps with its premium Xstream service. At that speed, even the slowest 802.11b equipment is adequate for short distances. The 802.11g standard is preferred for connections at greater dis-

tances while maintaining sufficient transmission rates.

Since I bought a new computer I moved the laptop upstairs to my den at the other end of the house. As a crow would fly, if it were allowed inside and capable of penetrating floor joists and air conditioning ducts, the distance between the computers is about 35 feet. This is well within the range of 802.11g equipment in open areas, but due to the intervening obstacles I was unable to establish a reliable connection between my standard Netgear router and the Dell laptop with its built-in Dell-brand, 802.11g capable Wi-Fi adapter. I disabled that adapter and plugged in a standard Netgear wireless USB adapter (WG111v2) with the included USB cable. This gave me a strong connection to the router at the other end of the house, with a reported transmission speed of the full 54 Mbps. Although the cable allowed me to set up the adapter within several feet of the laptop computer, it was actually sufficient to Velcro the adapter to the lid of the computer so that it was roughly parallel with the antenna of the router. It goes to show that the quality of the Wi-Fi equipment can make a significant difference in the results when conditions are less than optimal.

Should You Shisen Sho?

Browsing through the games available with Linux distributions such as Linspire and Xandros, I happened on a Mah-Jongg variety called Shisen Sho. If you like to play Mah-Jongg you ought to give it a try – it is definitely habit forming. The game starts out with a square grid of Mah-Jongg tiles. The size of the grid can be varied, but I found 24x12 a suitable size. The goal of the game is to remove identical tiles in pairs, with the restriction that a pair of tiles can only be removed if they can be connected with no more than 3 straight lines (horizontal or vertical) without crossing other tiles. You can specify that the game must be solvable, although that doesn't guarantee that you'll actually solve it on a first try. The secondary goal is to solve the game in the shortest time. The game remembers previous scores to let you assess your increasing proficiency. My first game took me 40 minutes, but since then I have managed a few in slightly under 20 minutes.

There are many versions for Windows available. A listing is available on <http://home.halden.net/vkp/vkp/shisensho.html>. I downloaded a game by Daniel Valot from <http://dvalot.free.fr/games.htm> that is well implemented, but Google displays many other versions also. Shisen, in culinary circles usually called Szechuan after the Chinese province, is also known as Four Rivers. Give it a try!

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Computer Hysteria: Pew

by **Berry F. Phillips**, a member of the CCOKC and a regular writer for the CCOKC website and the eMonitor

www.ccokc.org

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"Pew" could conjure up several images in your mind. For example, you might think of a human expression uttered upon inhaling the exotic perfume of a skunk! Perhaps you might think of an aching back from that hard wooden pew at church! What does pew have to do with computing? Perhaps nothing caution because you are reading in the CHZ, the Computer Hysteria Zone!

The Pew Charitable Trusts, an independent nonprofit, was established between 1948 and 1979 by the children of Sun Oil Company founder Joseph Pew and his wife, Mary Anderson Pew, with the creation of the Pew Memorial Foundation honoring their parents' memory. In 2005, the foundation invested \$177 million to fund the various trusts including the founding in 1999 of The Pew Internet & American Life Project which studies the social and civic impact of the Internet, often considered the most far-ranging, behavior-changing communications innovation since the invention of printing.

The Project produces reports that explore the impact of the Internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care, and civic and political life. The Project aims to be an authoritative source on the evolution of the Internet through collection of data and analysis of real-world developments as they effect the virtual world.

The basis of the reports are nationwide random digit dial telephone surveys as well as online surveys. This data collection is supplemented with research from government agencies, academia, and other expert venues, observations of what people do and how they behave when they are online, in-depth interviews with Internet users and Internet experts alike and other efforts that try to examine individual and group behavior. The Project releases 15-20 pieces of research a year, varying in size, scope, and ambition.

Latest trends from the project reports show the number of adult users are now almost equally divided between men and women representing 73% of American adults who use the Internet which currently represents approximately 147 million people. Here is what we do online: Send e-mail (91%), use a search engine to find information (91%), search for a map or driving direction(84%), look for health/medical information (79%) , research a

product or service before buying it (78%), check the weather (78%), look for information on a hobby or interest (77%), get travel information (73%), get news (68%), buy a product (67%), surf the web for fun (66%), buy or make a reservation for travel (63%), look for political news/information (58%), and for lesser percentages of use on online activities visit www.pewinternet.org whose website was used to research this article with my appreciation.

While researching this Pew article, I began wondering if the article might be good enough to be submitted to win a "Pewlitzer" Prize! On second thought that would be just plain "pewlish!"

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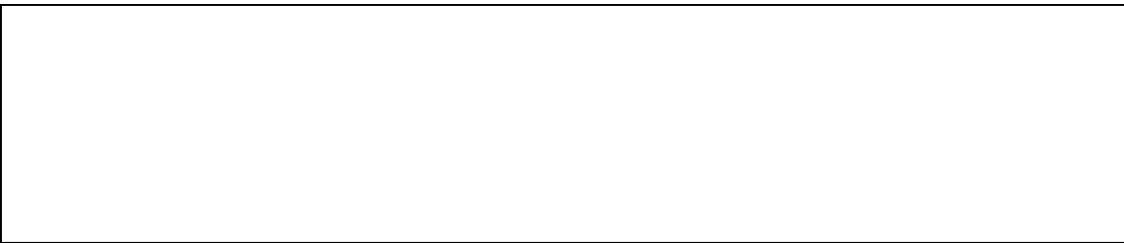
Note: Meeting Place:
 North Canton Public Library
 185 North Main Street
 North Canton, OH 44720
 I-77 Exit (Portage) turn *EAST*.

From Rt.77, take the Canal Fulton/North Canton Exit (Portage St.)

Head east on Portage St. (If traveling north, you will turn right. If traveling south, you will turn left.)
 Follow Portage for approximately 1 1/4 miles to a sign that reads: "All thru traffic bear left."

Do not bear left. Continue straight on Portage until it dead-ends at Ream St.

Turn left on Ream. The Library is the 2nd building on your right. Small amount parking alongside and more across the street at rear of building.



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