ACPCUG Newsletter

Akron Main Public Library

June 5, 2006

June Program:

Starts at 6:00 PM

Trend-Micro PC-illin Software for Security Presentation

Inside:

June 2006

Akron-Canton PC Users Group

From The DealsGuy for July 2006

by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click,
Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

We worked some great trade shows last month including the McDonalds Worldwide show. Attendees were from around the world and food was all over that show. Most of the food was from around the world and didn't appeal to me at all, such as the burgers with "rice burger" buns, and the shrimp burgers. An attendee could take a 15-minute tour showing some of their methods for preparation and quality control, then get a Big Mac and fries. Another day I had the largest Big & Tasty (a McDonald's burger selection) I ever saw. An ice cream booth continuously gave out plenty of cones and sundaes.

I was stationed at some exit doors one day and heard music I knew was hit country & western music. I finally looked inside and there on a small stage was Jo Dee Macina, live, performing some of her hit songs. There were only about 100 people there, but it was an unannounced performance sponsored by an exhibitor. I also worked at a

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door for their sessions area (including concerts) during a rehearsal by Destiny's Child. While I enjoyed the music, I was extremely impressed by the sound system setup for that concert. A convention hall is very difficult to get quality sound unless expensive speakers are used that specifically direct its sound to control reverberations. This was one of the best sound systems I have heard in those halls. I'm sure there was easily a million dollars worth of sound and video equipment there.

We just finished working the SAP Sapphire Show <http://www.sap.com/sapphire> that was combined with the ASUG (Americas' SAP Users' Group) <http://www.asug.com> show with about 14,000 attendees. Very few major companies were not represented. I was told that attendees paid anywhere from $1600 to $2400 depending on the Sapphire Show category they registered for. Fortunately, I was watching the computers for registration. They had food daily for their staff and I was invited. In July we might work a Microsoft show that will be one of the largest trade shows ever held in Orange County Convention Center.

***Do Your Homework!**

Below are some announced freebies and I am passing them on with reservations since I have not tried any of them. I asked my proofreader, Bob Clyne, to just take a look at the announcements and will include some of his comments. The first product might pique your interest, as it did his, but be sure to look it and the others over thoroughly before you make your decision to try them. I have edited out much of the announcement text so go to their Web sites listed for more complete information.

***DVD Copying Anyone?**

ShrinkTo5 has released version 2.02 of ShrinkTo5 GUI, a new DVD copying engine distributed at no cost to anyone. This application lets you copy and shrink your favorite DVD disks in brilliant quality, which is complemented by a surprisingly high processing speed. You can copy an entire DVD, copy the main movie only, or copy its content elements selectively. The output can be saved to the hard disk drive as an ISO image or compressed and burned onto one DVD disk. The best thing in copying DVD disks with ShrinkTo5 is that it no longer involves tedious and sometimes confusing configuration. ShrinkTo5's AI chooses the perfect balance automatically.

DealsGuy Note: Bob Clyne says the free version contains Adware; WhenU to be specific and recommends against it. He also says the $19.95 version,

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containing no adware, is available from Download.com and you can try it for three days before you have to buy it. He suggests getting the Machinist2.dll before getting ShrinkTo5 if you intend to copy encrypted DVDs. The program will not work on encrypted/copy protected DVDs i.e. most commercial DVDs, without the Machinist2.dll, which for legal reasons, they don't supply. The Machinist2.dll can be challenging to find, but he did find it a few places, some of which were Warez sites.

Some of the features for ShrinkTo5 GUI are:

- Support for Machinist2.dll. The program has been modified to support new Machinist2.dll. Now, ShrinkTo5 has a unique ability to make DVD backups that cannot be handled by other DVD copying software like DVDShrink.
- Free burner plug-in. The ShrinkTo5 GUI package comes with FoxBurner, a shell plug-in that allows you to burn directly from the Windows Explorer. You don't have to donate or download a burner separately.
- ISO Image. Along with burning onto DVD disks, copied images can now be saved as ISO images on the hard disk drive and burned onto disks later if the need arises.
- Auto-Repair. New ShrinkTo5 lets you automatically restore scratched and defective DVD disks so that their content can be accessed and copied.
- Dynamic Compression. The code of the dynamic compression rate has been enhanced, which now allows users to get an even sharper picture.
- Built-in Player. New ShrinkTo5 features a built-in player that allows the user to view selected video tracks. This gives you more control over the copying process.

Read more information about ShrinkTo5 GUI at <http://www.shrinkto5.com/software.asp>
Watch the online tutorial demo at <http://www.shrinkto5.com/gTour.asp>

ShrinkTo5 is available as Basic and Professional. Both versions run under Windows 2000/XP. The Basic version is available as a free download from <http://www.shrinkto5.com/software.asp>. The Professional is available as a three-day trial. The price of the Professional version is $19.95 download, or $24.95 plus S&H box USD. Both versions are compiled without DeCSS. To enable ShrinkTo5 to decrypt CSS, users should download "Machinist2.dll" from the Internet.

Product page link: <http://www.shrinkto5.com>
Download link: <http://www.shrinkto5.com/_data/ShrinkTo5AdFree.exe> (4.77 Mb)

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E-mail: <info@shrinkto5.com>

Postal address: ShrinkTo5.com, 2005, Fritz-Windisch Str. 11, 40885 Ratingen, Germany
Phone: 02102 146205
Fax: 02102 146206

***Might Be a Good Service, And Free!**

Trisnap Technologies has released System Spyware Interrogator 3.0 Tech Edition. 'They say that, "System Spyware Interrogator (SSI) is a free tool that detects and removes malicious software from clients' computers. It uses Trisnap's unique Predator technology to compare applications running on a client's computer with an online database of spyware definitions to immediately reveal all suspicious applications. The consumer edition of System Spyware Interrogator offers monthly, quarterly and annual priority fee-based automatic removal options. The Tech Edition also offers Alternate Directory Scans, File Hash Generation, Intelligent Hijackthis log parser and a memory process killer. SSI is linked directly to one of the largest malware databases in the world at <www.spywaredata.com>."

DealsGuy note: 'Note the fee based options! You'll find out more on their Web site, but Bob and I had trouble understanding it. The Tech Edition also offers Alternate Directory Scans, File Hash Generation, Intelligent Hijackthis log parser and a memory process killer. SSI is linked directly to one of the largest malware databases in the world at <www.spywaredata.com>.

Learn more about Tech Edition at <http://www.spywaredata.com/spyware/download.php>.
Download and try it in action from <http://www.spywaredata.com/download/ssisetup.exe>

SSI 3.0 Tech Edition runs under Microsoft Windows 2000/XP/2003. Additional information on the product, as well as its free version is available from <http://www.spywaredata.com>

Postal address: Trisnap Technologies, 4519 Santiago Ln, Bonita Springs, FL 34134, USA

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*Protect Those Passwords, OK, and Free Too!

The program uses a strong encryption mechanism which prevents unauthorized access (256-bit AES - Advanced Encryption Standard). Every user can create a file of his/her own (the program is virtually an SQL database, featuring simultaneous work of several users). In this file, every user has a hierarchically structured list of folders (you can create the new ones, delete, rename, etc.). Each password record you add to one of these folders contains the following fields: subject, user name, password, URL, file path, comments. The user has an ability to create an unlimited number of extra fields to store data. In addition to this, you can set an expiration date for your password.

Aurora Password Manager has a built-in password generator, which chooses arbitrary combinations of symbols and generates passwords that are impossible to guess. Get the feature list from the Web site. Bob Clyne commented that, "I did not see a privacy statement on their Web site. They do have a bunch of awards listed on their Web site, but none of them were from places I had heard enough about to have confidence in. I did not find anything bad about the company or the product."

Availability
Aurora Password Manager runs under Windows 98/Me/2000/XP/2003. You can download it at <http://www.animabilis.com/password-manager/download/Password-Manager-Installer.exe> (2.13 Mb)

Product page link: <http://www.animabilis.com>
E-mail: <egorov@animabilis.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>

Online Librarians Never Say Shhh!

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

Libraries have improved since baby boomers attended grade school. Research assistance once only available in person or by telephone is blossoming into diverse online "ask a librarian" services, handling questions ranging from general curiosity and homework-related to business research.

Friendly Online Librarians Never Say Shhh!

Growing up, I was lucky to live just a few blocks from a great neighborhood library. I fondly remember the children's librarian encouraging my love of reading and books. The library was rebuilt while I was in elementary school; I was recently shocked that the "new" library was undergoing renovation and improvement. Then I realized that what seems like yesterday was five decades ago!

The good news for us all -- near libraries or not -- is that libraries have greatly improved in that 50 years. Research assistance once only available in person or by telephone is blossoming into diverse online "ask a librarian" services. These handle all sorts of questions: general curiosity, homework-related, business research, etc. Just don't expect medical or legal advice.

E-mail assistance has been available for some time. Librarians sometimes like it because they can answer questions as they have time, and it avoids people waiting on line or holding on the phone. But it can be slow if a question must be clarified -- that's important, since people often don't ask what they really want answered! And online interaction lacks face-to-face intimacy, voice tone, body language, which all help communication.

In addition to accepting e-mail, libraries use Web forms for submitting queries, take questions via instant messaging, and offer interactive Web chats. Highly interactive instant messaging and Web chats allow quick conversations, often providing answers within a few minutes. Newer technologies such as VoIP (voice over IP, Internet telephony) and MS
(cell phone text messaging) may soon increase research availability.

Library policies vary regarding answering non-resident questions; some specialized queries (local history, obituaries, newspaper clippings, etc.) must be handled by a library near the area of interest. That brings genealogy questions from far away as people research their ancestors.

Most queries are handled at no cost, though some searches incur charges. A library card usually isn't needed. Some libraries currently mail printed research results; e-

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mailing images will provide faster service and reduce costs.

Behind-the-scenes technology helps librarians manage queries, ensuring that all questions are answered and eliminating duplicate responses. Shortcuts fill in frequently used answers.

The same sorts of questions are asked online as are posed by phone or in person, with addition of sensitive areas such as sexual issues. Queries often deal with homework -- math, science fair challenges, etc. – and country reports. Librarians enjoy the occasional obscure gem, such as being asked about "modeling the economic infrastructure of railroads in Great Britain".

The geek expression "24x7" means that something is available all day, every day. Since people expect this full-time access to e-mail, the Web, shopping, banking, and other online services, they're enthusiastic about being able to ask questions whenever they occur.

But it's hard for libraries to provide this never-anticipated level of service, especially when off-hours demand may be limited. So they support each other locally/nationally/internationally by sharing round-the-clock assistance chores. Questions are entered locally and routed to on-duty librarians -- who sometimes work from home in pajamas, answering off-hours long-distance queries.

Even librarians sometimes need help -- so their world-wide Stumpers mailing list lets them share baffling questions.

Librarians and the public are learning together to use electronic tools. New technologies facilitate supporting diverse clienteles by – for example -- facilitating non-English services.

Here are a few tips regarding online queries: provide your name/e-mail/phone for answering and clarification; use plain text (not formatted) for easy reading; don't nag, allow time for an answer – but follow up in a week or so. Finally, contact the correct library. A
library in Plymouth, Michigan has received queries about Plymouths in Massachusetts and England!

Using online library services is easy once you have an Internet connection. Some libraries favor PCs with Windows and the Internet Explorer Web browser, but Linux and Macintosh systems are increasingly supported. There's generally no software download or install. Browser pop-up blockers or firewalls sometimes get in the way but they're easily customized.

Start by finding your library's Web site For example, I locate my library by submitting

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"fairfax county" library

to Google [www.google.com]. Or I could click from my county government Web site to the library pages. Or Googling library questions yields many library sites offering answers. Then look for links like Ask-A-Librarian! or "Homework Help!. Links and services will vary; when I click Ask-A-Librarian, I can choose between chatting, e-mailing, or (of course) actually visiting a library.

In researching this article I challenged my library with two questions. I was delighted that they quickly named the obscure British TV show whose name I couldn't remember (The Duchess of Duke Street) and found a science fiction book containing a short story I wanted to reread.

No matter how they evolve, whether as buildings or online, libraries' core mission is everlasting: providing timely information in a customer-friendly format.

Printing Better Pictures

by Robert Spotswood, Member of HAL-PC, active in the Linux SIG and a freelance computer professional
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When a dot is not a dot
Have you ever tried to print out a picture that looks good on your monitor only to be disappointed with the result? Does it come out way smaller/ bigger than you expected or look really grainy?

This is not a random act by your computer. In order to understand why it happens, and more importantly, be able to prevent these problems, you have to understand when a dot is not a dot.

This is not an easy subject to grasp initially, but if you play with it just a little, the light bulb will light and it will become almost second nature very quickly.

Conventions
There are two types of graphic images: bitmap and vector. This article focuses exclusively on bitmaps. If in doubt about which type your picture is, it's probably bitmap. Bitmap pictures are composed of a series of dots called pixels.
While the terms DPI (dots per inch), PPI (pixels per inch), and SPI (samples per inch) technically have different meanings, in practice they are all interchangeable. Only DPI will used in this article.

Any printer referred to is limited to the inkjet variety unless stated otherwise, although almost everything here applies equally to laser printers. Although this article focuses on examples using the GIMP, all the theory and much of the practice applies to almost all graphic software.

Monitors
Your monitor displays everything as a series of dots, regardless of the picture type. For instance, if your screen size is 800x600, then you are looking at 800 dots by 600 dots. The dots can be almost any color and they do not have a fixed size. A typical 17" monitor can have screen sizes from (at least) 640x480 to 1280x960. Since the physical size of your monitor can't change, the size of the dots must change. The more dots you have making up your screen, the smaller those dots will be.
As far as your monitor is concerned, one pixel (see the definition of pixel

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above) equals one dot. Because the icons (including text) and wallpaper on your desktop are composed of a fixed number of dots, shrink those dots and the icons and wallpaper get smaller (see Fig. 1 and 2). Be aware that most desktops have a scaling feature for the wallpaper, called stretch in Windows, so you may not see the wallpaper actually change size if this feature is turned on. However, the quality of your wallpaper may go down dramatically if the wallpaper's actual size is small and you increase the screen size too much.

Figure 1 (above) A 640x480 wallpaper on a 640x480 screen.
Figure 2 (below) A 640x480 wallpaper on a 1024x768 screen.

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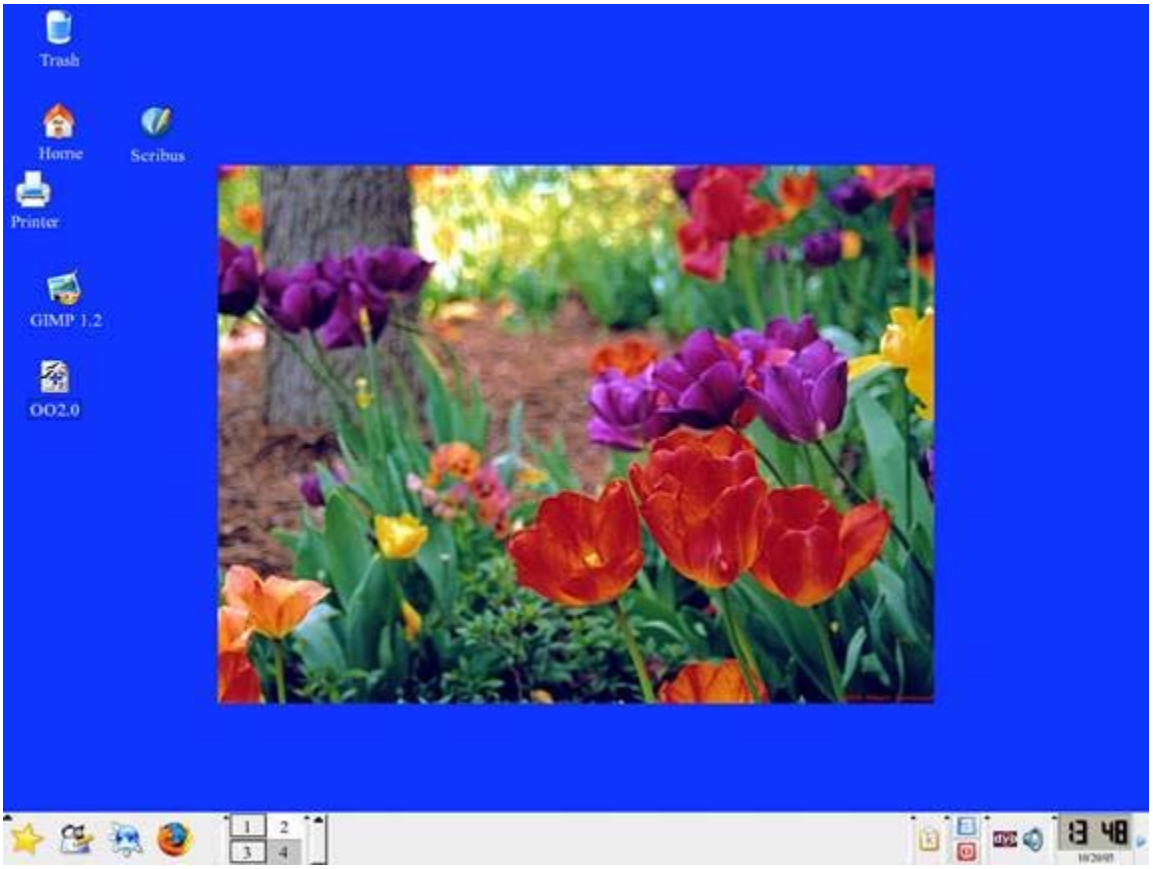

The same thing applies to any pictures you may have. A picture with 640x480 pixels will display fully (at 100% resolution) on any screen size at least 640x480. A picture 1600x1200, on the other hand, will require scrolling on any screen smaller than 1600x1200.

Printers

Printers, like monitors, create the printed picture/output image by using a set of dots. But that is where the similarities end. Unlike a monitor, a printer's output isn't a screen with variable size pixels, but a piece of paper with fixed dimensions. Paper is measured in inches, not pixels.

Printers create the image (and text) by using a grid of dots. The number of dots the printer can make in one inch is what's known as DPI or Dots Per Inch. Obviously, the higher the DPI, the better the output the printer is capable of. A higher DPI means more detail and a lower DPI means less detail. If the DPI is set to low, the picture will look very grainy and poor. For a normal piece of paper, the graininess usually starts to show somewhere below 200 DPI. For things like highway billboards, the DPI used can be from 36 to 72 DPI.

Unlike a monitor, the dots are of a fixed color. A black and white printer

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cannot actually print gray, but only black. The paper is usually white, so white is just the absence of printing. Grays are simulated by printing dots in a grid. These grids are called halftones. Newspapers use halftones that are very coarse and usually visible even without a magnifier. The more black pixels, the darker the gray. Conversely, the fewer the black dots in the grid, the lighter the gray will be. Thus, one image pixel can require several printer dots. Some printers are capable of varying the size of the printer's dots, but for simplicity's sake, this will be ignored.

The size of the grid and the max DPI of the printer affect how well the printer can reproduce shades of gray (and color). Gray includes the colors black and white. For a 1200 DPI printer:

A 1x1 grid shows 2 shades of gray with an effective DPI of 1200 (1200/1 aka line art).
A 3x3 grid shows 10 shades of gray with an effective DPI of 400 (1200/3).
A 6x6 grid shows 37 shades of gray with an effective DPI of 200 (1200/6).
An 8x8 grid shows 65 shades of gray with an effective DPI of 150 (1200/8).

Thus, the more shades of gray you need, the more image detail you have to give up, or the more detail you want, the fewer shades of gray you will get.
Color printers are similar to black and white printers except they usually have four ink colors (CMYK - Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and blacK). Instead of orderly grids, color printers use dithering (with error diffusion).

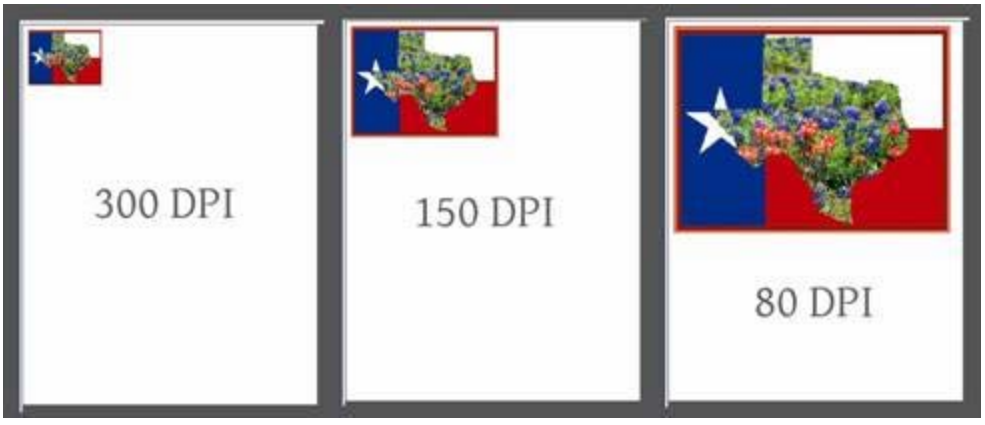

Figure 3 (above) The exact same picture printed at 3 different DPI's. Dithering is the use of somewhat randomized scattered dots. This tends to look smoother than grids, but the theory is similar. One image pixel can require several printer dots.

In practice, the upper limit for inkjets comes about because the dots of in-

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dividual color become larger than the grid to hold them. In addition, the ink can bleed, especially on regular paper (photo paper lessens this problem). The practical upper limit is (on good photo paper) between 240 to 300 (maybe 360) DPI. On regular paper, due to ink bleeding, 150 DPI is about as good as it gets. For other than inkjet printers, try not to go much below 200 DPI if you want a good print out.

Converting between the effective DPI (which is the same as the DPI you or the software pick), the printer's max DPI, and picking the colors to use at a given DPI is handled by the printer driver and not something you can really change. Just be aware that using a high DPI may not give you the detail, or color reproduction, you expect.

DPI and Print Size

In addition to affecting the number of colors, DPI also affects the physical size of the printed picture. The print size on paper is determined by two things: the number of pixels in the picture and the DPI setting used by the software for that picture.

Some software and some file formats do not support changing the DPI setting. Some programs do support changing the DPI and just don't mention the term DPI (or PPI or SPI). Some programs such as desktop publishing software and word processing software will show you a WYSIWYG version of your picture at its relative print size. This is usually based on the DPI of the picture.

The physical print size is just the picture size (in pixels) divided by the DPI. For instance, a 400x800 pixel picture printed at:

100 DPI will be 4 (400/100) inches x 8 (800/100) inches
200 DPI will be 2 (400/200) inches x 4 (800/200) inches
300 DPI will be 1.33 (400/300) inches x 2.66 (800/300) inches

Figure 3 shows the same picture (640x480) printed on letter paper using 3 different DPI values. The only thing changed between the three is the DPI. As you can see, the higher the DPI, the smaller the picture. This is another reason that trying to print at your printer's maximum DPI is not the best choice.

Setting the DPI in the GIMP for versions 1.2 is done by right clicking on the picture and choosing "Image" -> "Scale Image" and setting either the DPI or the print size (see Fig. 4). The DPI is called "X resolution" and "Y resolution". Both the X and Y values should almost always be set to the same

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number. As you change one, the other will automatically adjust. As mentioned above, DPI and print size are intertwined and one can not change without the other changing.

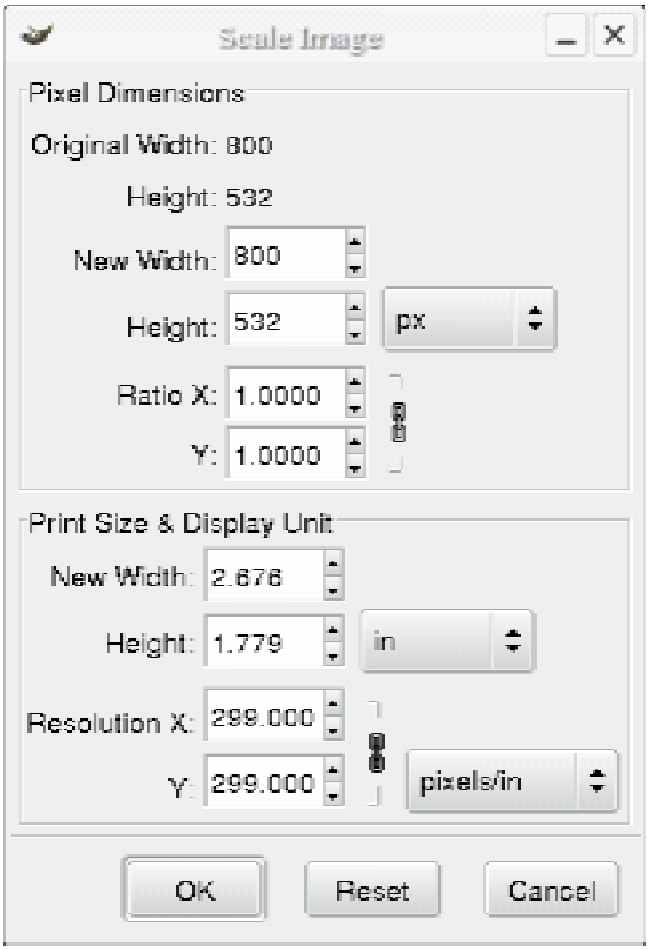

Figure 4 (above) The GIMP 1.2 DPI and print size control.

For the GIMP 2.2 (everyone using version 2.0 should upgrade to 2.2) the DPI (or resolution) control is found in "Image" -> "Print Size" (see Fig. 5 and 6). While it is also found under "Image" -> "Scale Image", do not use it there. It is too easy to change your picture size by scaling accidentally.

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Figure 5 (above) Getting to the GIMP 2.2 DPI and print size control.

RSS Explained

By Phil Shapiro, member of the Capital PC User Group, Virginia Macintosh Users Group, Washington Apple Pi, Young Hackers and Scholars Libre Users Group pshapiro@his.com

RSS - really simple syndication -- is a labor-saving tool that allows people to
tune into information sources that interest them. The information source could be a blog, a podcast, a videocast or any web site that includes RSS feeds.

The value of RSS accrues when you subscribe to multiple RSS feeds. You can then monitor multiple information streams with a minimum of effort.

There are many different software tools for subscribing to RSS feeds. One of the most popular is a web site named Bloglines. Some web browsers let you subscribe to RSS feeds. Safari 2.x and Firefox are two browsers that do. Firefox lets you to subscribe to RSS feeds using something called Live Bookmarks. You can also use a Firefox extension named Sage to subscribe to RSS feeds.

RSS's primary value is that it brings information to you without you having to visit multiple web sites. In a knowledge economy, anything that streamlines the flow of information from producer to consumer gives benefit to both producer and consumer. You tune into the information you do want, and tune out the information you don't want.

Some Examples of How RSS Simplifies Peoples' Lives

I asked some technology consultants to explain how RSS brings value to peoples' lives. Curtis Brown at MissionMovers.org, in Seattle, is a strong believer in RSS. He explains, "RSS has invaded every part of our life, but we just don't know it. RSS is an information delivery method that gives added convenience to both senders and receivers of the information."

As an example, RSS feeds can be used by a nonprofit organization to distribute different kinds of information to different people. One RSS feed could be the organization's calendar of events or classes. Another could be a call for volunteers. A third feed might be information for funders. The more feeds an organization offers, the more narrowly tailored the information delivered to people served by that organization or supporting that organization.

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Here are some other examples of RSS feeds. A used car dealer can have an RSS feed that details newly arrived used cars. A public library could have an RSS feed of newly purchased books. A police department can have separate RSS feeds for different neighborhoods, giving up-to-date information on safety concerns in each neighborhood.

Curtis Brown explains that information received in an RSS feed can be filtered by keyword and colorized in text. So you have control over the RSS feed. You decide the ways in which that stream of information is going to serve your needs.

Curtis explains that RSS feeds become immensely useful when people work collaboratively in a wiki. (A wiki is a web page that different people can edit.) Changes to the web page can be monitored via an RSS feed. This allows anyone participating in the wiki to have a clear idea of who is adding the most value to the wiki. RSS allows for better monitoring and gives added transparency to the collaborative process.

Curtis goes on to explain that there are two kinds of RSS feeds -- static feeds and dynamic feeds. A static feed might be sports scores or the feed from a single blog. A dynamic feed is a stream of information where there is searching going on to pull out specific pieces of information to add to the stream.

It's also possible to combine several RSS feeds into a single new feed. One web site that let's you do that is rssmix.com. Why would want to do that? Suppose you live in a metropolitan area with several different library systems spanning several counties. Each library system provides an RSS feed of the events happening within their library system. You'd like to keep track of library events in multiple counties. rssmix.com would let you combine RSS feeds in that way.

Another RSS enthusiast, Bruce Roy, in Sydney, Australia explains - "I have found the RSS facility in The Next Generation of Genealogy Sitebuilding (TNG) very useful for the family tree site. It enables people interested in following the family tree to get information about changes to the tree without having to check the website's "What's New?" or wade through the data."

One other advantage of RSS is that it lets you tune out mainstream media and tune into alternative media and personal media. If you find the CBS

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Evening News a touch thin in how it covers the news, with RSS you have an alternative source of news where news stories don't need to be squeezed into 45 second slots.

Another RSS enthusiast, Winthrop Morgan, in the Washington DC-area had this to add:

"Regarding your request for examples of how RSS brings benefits into peoples' lives, I highly recommend you consider including Join Together Online as a great Win- Win- Win model.

Join Together Online (JTO) (http://www.jointogether.org) has long been a pioneer in using the Internet to support people working on substance abuse and gun violence issues. Every month, one million JTO web pages are viewed by over 350,000 people.

JTO uses RSS feeds to not only help their web presence spread, but also to provide vital to support state, municipal, and nonprofit drug treatment and prevention program managers and their audiences. While these programs' web masters might have a modest web presence, they lack the wherewithal to continuously produce new content, or even gather and republish it. Without new content, their audiences lack a reason to come back to their Web site. The JTO RSS service enormously increases both the return visit value of these sites and the presence of authoritative information in this highly charged information space.

To keep the RSS feeds fresh and riveting, JTO employs a small editorial staff
who aggregates both online and offline news on substance abuse funding, policies, and more from authoritative sources. They edit this news down to its essential content, and then republish it via RSS, as well as to users of their site and subscribers to their e-mail news services."

RSS Relieves Cluttered Email Inboxes

If you have traditionally received a lot of your information via email, RSS can provide some relief to your inbox. Would you like to follow a particular email list, but can't stomach subscribing to one more email list? If that list is on Yahoogroups, you can follow the list via the list's RSS feed. An excellent free tool for reading RSS feeds is Bloglines. (http://www.bloglines.com)

RSS feeds are almost always spam-free. The provider of the RSS feed does-

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n't want you to unsubscribe from the feed -- so they treat you with respect.

Ben Sheldon, in Lowell, Massachusetts, passes along this RSS tip: "Google still only offers email news alerts, but this utility lets you use create an RSS feed out of any Google News search term. [http://www.justinpfister.com/gnewsfeed.cfm]
I aggregate my name, my projects (DigitalBicycle, ServiceSpeak), and my street and city so that if something happens I should know about, I will."

If you're still with me, I'll pass along a few small tips of my own. I use RSS, Bloglines and my Digg.com account to keep track of what Digg stories my friends are digging (i.e. voting for.) I just copy the RSS feed from the bottom left of http://digg.com/users/pshapiro/friends and then paste it into Add Feed in Bloglines.

Between Katie Couric and the 50 friends I have on Digg, which do you think provides the richer quality of information to me? Right. Just for kicks I subscribe to the Associated Press RSS feed, so I'm in the loop with whatever Katie knows.

I also use the free service at Squeet.com to send me an email whenever one of my friends submits a story to Digg.com, so they don't have to let me know about their submissions. That email alert capability might well come to Digg sometime.

I use RSS to keep me posted on new items of interest to me that are posted to Del.icio.us. For example, if anyone submits an item to Del.icio.us with the tag digitalstorytelling, I find out about that really easily in my Bloglines
account.

That puts me in touch with anyone doing digital storytelling anywhere on the
planet. And I don't even have to subscribe to another email list to be in touch with them. I like that.

Phil Shapiro
The author is a former president of Virginia Macintosh Users Group and
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This article -- with associated links-- can be found on the web at http://rssexplained.blogspot.com

Swissbit – Victorinox Do Everything USB, MP3 Swiss Army Knife

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WEBSITES:
http://www.swissbit.com
http://www.victorinox.com
http://support.swissbit.com/pdf/s.beat_Fact_Sheet.pdf
http://www.victorinox.com/index.cfm?page=242&lang=E

Hey dads! With Father's Day fast approaching, maybe you should get copies of this article, and leave the copies at strategic places around the house where key members of the family are likely to see them. Dads are often hard to buy gifts for, and all too often end up with that ubiquitous neck tie that typically works its way into the back of the closet, and eventually accidentally falls into the bag headed for the rummage sale. Maybe instead of the well intended, but often useless gift that we dads sometimes receive, perhaps a really fun high tech gift would be more appropriate.

The most intriguing item that I have seen, that would make a fantastic gift for dad on his special day, is a combination Victorinox Swiss Army Knife, USB flash drive, FM stereo radio, voice recorder, and remote control MP3 player, manufactured and distributed by Swissbit (www.swissbit.com). Named the "S.Beat", this device is true to the multi-function traditions of the classical Swiss army knife, but with a modern twist. Externally, it looks like an aluminum scaled Swiss army knife, complete with the white cross logo, sharp knife blade, spring opening scissors, and nail file. Internally, it contains a removable USB 2.0 high speed flash drive (available in 1 GB, 2 GB, and 4 GB capacities) that also contains an MP3 player, FM stereo radio, voice recorder, and rechargeable lithium polymer battery. A separate remote control also bears the trademarked Victorinox white cross logo, and contains an earphone jack, volume and track controls, and power on and off. The remote control can be worn around the neck with the included lanyard. For international travelers, the built-in lithium polymer battery can be recharged using the included "USB World Charger", which can handle voltages from 110v to 220v, and is compatible with the outlets in over 150 countries. The battery, which may take up to 2.5 hours to fully charge, will power the player for about eight hours. The tiny FM radio can be preset to listen to up to 15 stations, and the MP3 player (which also supports WMA

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and OGG Vorbis formats) has a three line backlit high-contrast display.

Victorinox and Swissbit have taken the flying traveler into mind with this device which has earned a “FlySmart” logo. Since the knife and scissors component would be banned on commercial airline flights, but many travelers would still like to listen to the MP3 player, the player itself can be separated from the knife, maintaining full functionality. The knife portion of the device can then be appropriately placed in the checked luggage, and can be reunited with the player at the destination.

This device is simply amazing, fitting all of the components in a standard sized Swiss army knife about three inches long, half an inch wide, and about, three-quarters of an inch thick, and weighs a scant three ounces. The box containing the S.Beat included the knife and MP3 player unit, remote control, high quality stereo headphones with neck strap, a protective cap (covers the USB plug when the player is removed from the knife), arm strap for outdoor sports activities, USB extension cable, USB world charger, instruction book, and CD containing the software utilities.

Since this device is just being introduced in this country, but has been available in Europe for a while, it is something that dad will find both unique and exclusive. It should be available shortly at any retailer stocking a large assortment of Victorinox products, but is currently available from several online sources. The version with the 1 GB capacity has a retail price of $189, with some domestic outlets offering this S.Beat at a small discount. The larger capacity 2 GB and 4 GB models were recently introduced in Europe, and should be available shortly in this country.

Being so new on the market, there have only been a few reviews published, but they have been universally positive. One such published review is quite representative of the several that I found. It says, “Fantastic product! Beautiful metal finish, sturdy and compact. The included headphones are top-notch - no need to spend another 50 bucks for a real pair like with all other players you buy nowadays. Sound quality will blow you away, menu user interface is comprehensive yet simple and intuitive to use/learn. Didn't even have to read the manual. And best of all; it works without some special drivers or software. Just use what you're used to for your audio and data files.”

Come to think of it, maybe we should not wait until Father’s Day; maybe we should not only consider this extremely useful gadget for dad, but mom, and our new graduates as well. In fact, this would make a great gift for

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anyone special, including yourself!

Tech News

By Sue Crane, Editor, Big Bear Computer Club, California
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Cosmeo is bringing Discovery's online encyclopedia into homes via it's Web site. The site resembles the screen of a handheld game device and features video clips and interactive games. Content providers, including Scholastic Corp. and the Public Broadcasting Service, are customized to meet the curriculum standards of different states. The service is available for $9.95/month.

Microsoft announced that it has delayed the mainstream launch of Vista until next year. Steve Sinofsky, the head of the Office unit, has been tapped to lead Windows development. Following its push back of Windows Vista, Microsoft confims the Office 2007 release will move to next year as well. It's been reported on a number of blog sites that Microsoft will release Windows Vista with 8 different versions, but no pricing information is available yet . . .

Microsoft is also building in a tool, Windows Performance Rating, that will rate a PC based on how well it is running and on how much it can take advantage of Vista's capabilities to help average consumers easily understand their Windows Vista PC's overall performance. As for systems slowing down over time, that's another issue that Microsoft is trying to tackle. Meanwhile, Vista is being designed to shut the door on spyware. It will introduce important changes at the heart of the operating system, as well as to Internet Explorer, and include Windows Defender, an anti-spyware tool.

An error in McAfee's virus definition file released mid-March caused consumer and enterprise antivirus products to flag Microsoft Excel, AdobeUpdateManager and other applications on users PCs as a virus called W95/CTX". Files were deleted or quarantined, depending on the user's settings.

When Microsoft first talked about Windows Live in November, most of the "Live" products were MSN services that had been rebranded. Since then Microsoft has added more than a dozen new products under the Windows Live umbrella. MSN executive David Cole explains, "Microsoft's goal is to continuously update and launch products". Over the next 3-6 months, Microsoft expects to ship more Windows Live technology into the marketplace than during their entire 10-year

OS history. Microsoft's new ad-serving engine, AdCenter, is at the heart of Windows Live. AdCenter draws on user demographic information to help drive more targeted marketing. Microsoft has even talked about using advertising as a way to pay for traditional desktop software. Meanwhile, the list of Windows Live services continues expanding to include all the basic portal services.

Take a look at the Ice Weasels, Space Cookies and Cheesy Poofs, high school teams competing for top merit in the 15th annual robotics contest sponsored by FIRST (For the Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). With about $10,000 worth of donated hardware and software, high school students are given 6 weeks to assemble a functioning robot that can move around a court and shoot Nerf basketballs for points. Part of the challenge is for teens to find and work with mentors who are experts in technology and science. Once registered, the teams are given 3 boxes of hardware and software and a programming language called Easy C that allows them to write a program for the robot's onboard computer. Also included is Autodesk's 3D Max Studio animation software so they can create a 30-second animation. The game itself is roughly 2 minutes long, with robots that are 2 feet wide by 4 feet high. For the first 10 seconds, the robots must make as many baskets as possible; the robot with the most points from the first 10 seconds then gets to play offense. Winning bots will go on to compete at Atlanta's Georgia Dome at the international finals.

Neurofeedback, a form of conditioning that rewards people for producing specific brain waves, taps youths' fascination with animation and electronics to sweeten frightening medical treatments. While this form of treatment has been around for decades, incorporating video games marks a new frontier that taps young people's fascination with animation and electronics to sweeten often frightening, lengthy and tedious medical treatments. Video games are being used, for instance, to help sick children manage pain and anxiety during hospital stays. A young leukemia patient inspired "Ben's Game," which let him fight the cancer cells invading his body. A private island called Brigadoon in Linden Lab's "Second Life" virtual world is open only to people with Asperger's syndrome and autism. West Virginia's public schools are battling obesity by making "Dance Dance Revolution"--a step-to-the-beat video game--part of their curriculum, while Nintendo has made a splash with its new "Brain Age" mind-exercising game. CyberLearning's Smart BrainGames system targets symptoms

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arising from brain injuries, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities. Priced at $584, the system is built on NASA technology that used video games and neurofeedback to train pilots. Traditional treatments, such as prescribing the stimulant Ritalin, behavioral therapy and education, are often covered by health insurance, while neurofeedback usually is not. Despite such hurdles, some medical practitioners are advocating the new approach.

Kyle MacDonald is on the verge of successfully completing a project that sounds absurd: Trading--with the help of a blog--a single red paper clip for a house. Since embarking on his house hunt last year, MacDonald has traded with people from across Canada and the United States and is now sitting on a year's free rent for an apartment in Phoenix. MacDonald is confident he's going to succeed, and hopes it can happen by the July 12 anniversary of the project's launch. And his goal is getting tantalizingly close. The project has allowed him to initiate a Net cult following that's hoping he'll succeed, too. Popular blogs such as boingboing have been tracking his progress.

TRAVELING WITH A VIDEO CAMCORDER

by Joseph Asling, Video Project Coordinator
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Summer is coming and it's time to go somewhere interesting and photogenic. Many people carry cameras when they travel and not a few of us take camcorders. Here are a checklist and a few suggestions for coming back with better video.

Pre-Departure

Equipment Checkup - Make sure your camcorder is in good shape. Run a few minutes of tape and see that it looks and sounds OK, otherwise take it in for cleaning. Allow at least two weeks for turnaround.

Camcorder Size - If you haven't bought your camcorder yet, consider the following: if you plan to do candid shots of people, buy a small, unobtrusive camcorder. Not only will it fit better in your carry-on luggage, but it will attract less attention. Also, some museums allow them in where they will reject larger camcorders because the big ones look professional.

LCD Screen - I usually shoot through the viewfinder, but an LCD screen is useful.

Computer Connection - Make sure your camcorder has an IEEE-1394 ("Firewire") or USB2 connector, whichever you need to capture to your computer.

DVD vs Tape - Some newer camcorders record to a DVD instead of tape; since it is more difficult to do computer editing with these, I recommend a camcorder which uses mini-DV tape.

Filters - ALWAYS keep a filter on your lens – a scratched filter is cheaper than a scratched lens. A transparent or UV filter is fine for most uses; tinted lenses are of less use because the auto-white balance of the camcorder tries to compensate for it. For sunny days I like a circular polarizer to suppress reflections on glass and water and to make the sky appear bluer. It also doubles as a neutral density filter. Pay the extra for good double-coated glass filters.

Sunshade - If your camcorder has a sunshade with an atypical connector,

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buy a sunshade which screws onto the front of the filter (I use a round rubber collapsible one).

Camcorder Stand - Tripods are big, heavy, and slow to set up. A monopod gives you much of the stability of a tripod, and if you buy one with a quick-release extension it takes only five seconds to set up. Plus, it doubles as a walking stick on difficult terrain. Spend an extra $20 for a quick-release for the camcorder.

Lights - I don't recommend you travel with any lights. Unless you're on a professional shoot they aren't worth the trouble.

Tape Supply - Take plenty of tape – I take at least 10 hours' worth! Buy good quality brands such as **Sony** or **Panasonic** (people I trust have said bad things about **TDK**).

I buy Sony at *www.taperesources.com* but there are other reliable websites which will sell packs of five for as little as $3 per tape. (As an aside, NEVER record with the extended time setting on your camcorder – you may not be able to play it on any other camcorder.)

Head Cleaner - Carrying a head-cleaning tape is probably a good idea, although I've never had to use it in the field.
Batteries - If you run out of power you are going to be distinctly unhappy. Buy *at least* one high-capacity extra battery. And don't forget to pack your recharger. If you are going abroad make sure you have *two* plug adapters (research what type of adapter you need for where you'll be), and that your recharger is multi-voltage.

Headsets – These are nice to have but not essential. If you have a microphone monitor output, take a compact headset (like **Walkman** earphones) for monitoring music. Make sure the plug is compatible.

Weatherproofing - Bring some paper adhesive tape — if you are going to be in a dirty or sandy environment seal the tape door with it so you don't get sand into the works. If you may be in the rain figure on bringing some kind of plastic cover (maybe large plastic zip lock bags).

When You're There
Rule 1: tape is cheap! - If you *might* want a shot, shoot it! Every shot should be at least ten seconds long if possible and if you are going to zoom, shoot several seconds before and after the zoom. You'll thank yourself

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when you're editing.

When you put a fresh tape in your camera, run about a minute of "throwaway" video. Most dropouts occur at the beginning and the end of a tape, and some capture programs can't handle the first few seconds of a tape.

Watch the Background - Many a shot has been ruined by a telephone pole growing out of someone's head or a distracting item behind the subject. Often moving a few feet to one side will fix the problem. A corollary to this is to find a good angle: one with clear sight lines and no-one in the way. And don't get in the way yourself. Years ago, I was in Chichicastenango and a funeral procession happened by. The mourners stopped in front of the Church – and a German tourist with a big camcorder shouldered them out of the way and started videotaping the coffin and the deceased! I cheered when the locals drove him away with rocks.

Tricks for Big Crowds- If you are in a crowd which you can't see over, hoist the camcorder up on your monopod. If you open the LCD screen and tilt it down you can see what you're shooting (so, there *is* a use for that screen).

Tricks for the Kids - One more use for the LCD screen — see if you can reverse it so that the people you're shooting can watch themselves while you are recording. You'll get terrific reactions from kids.

Candid Camera - If you are trying to take candid shots, hold the camera at waist level and watch the subject through the LCD screen. Before you do that go into the menu and turn off the red recorder indicator light so your subject won't know you are recording. It doesn't always work — in Morocco, one sharp-eyed fellow noticed from 30 feet away what I was doing and came over with his hand out for money. I paid him, of course.

In the Rain - Check the lens frequently when shooting in the rain. Raindrops on your video are understandable but disconcerting.

Narration - If you are shooting something which needs describing, just dictate in a low voice while you shoot; your voice will be audible on the tape. Of course you'll have to cut out the audio when you edit, so you don't want to do this over anything you will want to hear as well as see.

Consider what you will say on the voiceover when you edit the video, and

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make sure you have names and events correctly. I write them down in a little journal every night.

Music - Think about the music you'll use with the video and record it if you hear local musicians. I have sometimes let a tape run most of an hour just to capture live music (another reason to have plenty of tape).

Background "Chatter" - When traveling with friends, I delicately remind them that anything they say will be picked up by the camcorder. It cuts down on extraneous conversation and four-letter words in your audio!

Documentation - Make sure you label each tape with the trip, location, and tape number. When you put it back in the plastic cover, slide the little switch to lock it so you can't accidentally record over it. I keep camcorder, tapes and critical accessories in my carryon baggage. The accessories I can't fit in the carryon go in the checked luggage.

X-Ray at Security - The X-ray machines at security checkpoints have never hurt my videotape, but I'm not sure about the more powerful X-rays of checked luggage.

Bon Voyage!

Why Do You Get So Much Spam?

by Vinny La Bash, Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.
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The earliest recorded instance of what may be described as spam occurred on May 3, 1978. A sales representative for Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) named Gary Thuerk sent a message to everyone on the Arpanet data base (now known as the Internet) on the West coast of the United States. Thurek wanted to notify the recipients of an open house that his company was hosting a demonstration of new models of the DEC-20 computer.

In 1978 the Arpanet had a certified "acceptable use policy" which said it couldn't be used for anything except research and education. Thuerk's action was a very clear violation, and when DEC got a very strong response from the Arpanet community objecting to the misuse, the company promptly promised to stop. Spam would not appear again for many years.

Today, estimates of the amount of email that is defined as spam range from 66% to 94%. Whatever the actual figure is, the good news, if you want to call it that, is that spam appears to be leveling off.

Congress has passed anti-spam legislation. Spam receivers are angry, Internet Service Providers try to filter out spam messages, and spammers are loathed by the general community of internet users. Why do spammers continue to operate in the face of all this general repugnance?

In an article for Wired Magazine, Brian McWilliams provides a very depressing answer. McWilliams discovered a security flaw on a website operated by a group selling pills guaranteed to enlarge the male sexual organ. The reporter found that over 6,000 orders for the product had been placed in a time span of about a month. Business and medical professionals, athletes, and even women bought the pills. Many buyers made multiple purchases at $50 per bottle, despite an obvious lack of credit card security on the site. The web site provided no way to contact the company except by placing an order.

Being a good reporter, McWilliams was not deterred by the company's efforts to hide behind fake registration data, disconnected phone numbers, and phony email addresses. Eventually he revealed that the company was owned by a 19 year old high school dropout, and a neo-Nazi adherent.

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The business appears to be highly profitable, net costs being about $15 per bottle of pills, but according to the FDA, there is no credible evidence that the product works.

Now you know why you get so much spam. It's because people who should know better respond to it and buy products from these companies.

Selling products of dubious value is not the only kind of spam on the net. This week alone I have won three European lotteries, and there are at least a dozen people in Nigeria who each want to give me $12 million dollars for helping them launder money. Notification came just yesterday that Bill Gates is going to give me $500,000 because I forwarded a few emails for a good cause.

Perhaps the best way to reduce the number of people buying from spam is to educate people about the problem. Unfortunately that takes time, but if we don't take the time to tell people why they shouldn't buy from spam, they will continue doing it.

If you are responding to spam, please stop. Be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Web 2.0 and Portable Computing.

By John Abbott, member of the Bentsen Grove Resort Computer Club, Mission Texas
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Portable Computing has always lagged behind the rest of the computing market. This is probably because there are currently less mobile devices than computers. But that is about to change. According to Steve Rupel (leading PR company on the planet) billions of mobile devices will reach the market this year and by 2010 there will be 50 million of them sold quarterly.

Mobile device? You won't be calling them Pocket PC or Cell Phone long; maybe PCC for Personal Communication Center. The merger of all forms of digital communications is rapidly taking shape. Cell phones now contain very limited access to the web, receive very limited email, and take limited resolution pictures – oh and they work as phones too. With smaller and more low powered devices quickly coming on scene these limits will expand exponentially.

My project over the past month has been the installation of an Operating System on a USB Flash-memory Device (UFD). I started with a full blown Linux distribution on a USB 80 gigabyte micro hard drive. Well after some real torture and lots and lots of reading I managed to get it operational. However, in editing the boot file I managed to misspell something and now I've got to start all over again.

But I did find a couple of small Linux distributions: Damn Small Linux and Puppy Linux. I downloaded the ISO files for each and started working on a flash drive. Today I managed to get the thumb drive fully functional. Along the way I've learned a lot about what I still need to learn about executing from a CD or a UFD. But DSL in a tube really works.

Why do this? Well because I know that Web 2.0 is going to dominate the future of the web. With more and more of the platform being located on the Internet, less and less will be required on your local computer. The computer will take on more and more of the role of thin client (from a client/server relationship where all the applications are on the server). This in turn will have a direct impact on the cost of computers which will no longer have to come with expensive 3rd party software. So I created a portable thin client.

Web 2.0 (platform on the web) will take away a great deal of the chest thumping over O/S because the web interacts with all operating systems. The feature rich web already offers on-line mail processing that works perfectly with thin client or host computer. I am an advocate of Google's Gmail. I can access it on the web where it neatly threads my messages and stores up to 2.5 Gigabytes of mail in the in-basket or in the search able archive. From within that mail system I can also originate chats with my friends and maintain my calendar. I can make my calendar or part of it accessible to colleagues for event coordination.

I can use Zohowriter.com for my word processor. Zoho is a full strength word processor with all the power you find in Works, Word or Open Office (or any of the dozen or so word processors available. I am able to store my documents on-line, download them to my computer, publish them on the site so they can be collaborated by associates whom I have previously arranged access. I can upload files from remote files (my computer or yours) and modify and store or simply store them on-line. And as an added feature I can use Zoho as a mail client; sending, receiving and originating email. Zoho automatically assigns you an email account when you register (free).

There will be some who say: “well I can have several programs open at once on my desktop.” And my response would be, fine, I have multiple web pages open on my computer as I use Zoho to write this. I have a page set up with Wikipedia to check facts, the weather, my Google mail, my personal mail web account, XM radio playing great jazz. And in a few moments I'll open another and watch the news on TV – all from my thumb drive. I sure hope my Gizmo or Skype phones don't ring during the news!

ACPCUG Club News

Nice to be back! *AKRON MAIN Library*
Maps & Description on ACPCUG Website, www.acpcug.org

NOTE TIME is back to 6:00PM! This is because while free parking starts after 6:00 PM, you get your parking ticket stamped by security and the first hour is free anytime. **This is a policy change,** and for the better! So meetings again start at 6:00 PM. Just don't forget to have your ticket punched (..err stamped).

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.

Dues Reminder: *2006 dues are due!* $12 / year on January 1. Adjustments for recent payments, etc. made. See Treas. Jim Albright

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