

Orange Coast IBM PC User Group

README.DOC

September 1999

Newsletter

Volume 15.9

The September 25, 1999 9:00 am
General Meeting will feature
Powerquest with Gene Barlow

Orange Coast College
Chemistry Building
Room 207

The October 30, 1999 9:00 am
General Meeting will feature
TBA

Orange Coast College
Chemistry Building
Room 207



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Costa Mesa, California 92626-3934

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PAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Wayne Ali

This is my last message for my term as your president. I have a question that has been in my mind for the last few weeks: "Will we get members voting in the election?" Have you voted? If yes, skip the rest of this paragraph: if no, why not? OCIPUG is a user group you have chosen to join. There is an implied concept that as a group the members will participate in the activities of the group. So, what have you done for your group? Attended meetings, bought drawing tickets, won a prize at the general meeting drawing, read *README.DOC*, gone to a SIG, checked out the website, logged on the BBS, gotten the answer to a question you were stumped on? If this is all you've done, you're missing out on the good stuff!

OCIPUG was established to promote the understanding of personal computers, both for our members and the general public. That's why our meetings are open to the general public. We have several members who are engaged at the Costa Mesa Senior Center teaching seniors that mature people can learn and understand computers, people like you who have a desire to learn and need a guide.

We have several ladies and gentlemen spending hours to gather articles, publish, and mail your newsletter every month - on time. They can use people who can read an article and say it makes sense and is spelled properly. The Labeling Party each month takes a couple of hours to label *README.DOC* for mailing (a nontechnical service.) Buddy up with these people and I'll guarantee you'll get your *README.DOC* early!

There is a program every month, in a lecture hall arranged by volunteers, that someone has spent time on to contact, schedule and confirm presenters. Did you wonder where the drawing prizes came from? It's the program committee that arranges the presenters and solicits their donations. There is a need to send e-mail and letters to

increase our selection of presenters and current software and hardware for drawings. By the way, do you have lunch afterwards to meet your fellow members and network?

OCIPUG is over 200 members strong, more than many user groups in our area and the country. We are a significant group in the eyes of a presenter. Our membership represents a knowledgeable, savvy group to be reckoned with in terms of how the general public will receive a product or service the presenter offers. There is strength in numbers. Come to the general meetings.

"But I'm not one of those people that have the most modern system, nor do I push my equipment where no one has gone before." So... did you think all the other members have walked in talking geekspeak and have got it all dialed to the "nth" degree? Wrong! Most of our members are just like you. Part of the benefit of belonging to a user group is to get answers - free - as a member. Like any other enterprise you need to know the right people. Remember post-meeting lunches and SIGs?

We all see that blue screen that says you can wait while the system is busy or press Alt+Control+Delete to restart your system and lose all your unsaved data.

Do me a favor - look at the most recent computer magazine you've received. You do subscribe to a computer magazine to learn more about how to use your system, don't you? Do you get a discount as a user group member?

Need a recommendation? Talk to your neighbor at a General Meeting. Can you say, "I knew that?" Did you learn it at OCIPUG?

Some people seemed to be concerned about the group's survival. Why? Are you not getting what you expected to receive when you joined? Whom have you told? What are your expectations? What will you invest to learn an answer?

Your group has adapted to many changes this past year and, like many changes, they have been unsettling. Dues have been reduced, our meeting place has changed to a less expensive but equally suitable place. SIGs have experienced a change in location, but we are a going concern. Our Windows, Internet, and Digital Photography and Scanning SIGs are up and running. Stay tuned for more to come as interest is communicated and leaders volunteer. How about New User and LINUX SIGs? We have space and time available for more.

I would like to thank our volunteers individually who have helped us with their time, energy, and support, but I do not want to slight those who contributed what my organic and electronic memory does not recall at this moment. Suffice it to say their contributions are appreciated, recognized and key to our success.

The candidates for our election encourage me; they are positive and enthusiastic. The executive board members are your representatives. Call them if you are not getting what you want from OCIPUG. The primary thing is we are all long on ideas. We need people who are not reluctant to stand up and take action. We have the capability and ability to teach you ways to use your computer to work smarter, not harder.

There are many positive achievements we can look at this past year that are due to those who have contributed in noncomputer related ways. Think of your involvement as an investment in camaraderie and support. You will recover the investment in benefits.

Thanks for the experience of being your president. It has been hard work and a learning experience. I will still serve as past president or president if no candidate is elected to work for you and the Orange Coast IBM PC User Group. Let me know how we can help you.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Leonard Stein

Hello everybody!

As your new president, I wish to convey some of my thoughts concerning our club and where we are headed. As you know, computers have become almost a commodity like an automobile. We may know how to drive a car but be unaware how it functions. This has led to a lot of people buying a good computer and not learning how to use it, so it ends up in the closet unused and getting bypassed by newer technology. It is these people, among others, that I wish to get involved with our club. How to do this is part of my job, or at least I think it is.

I have been going through old copies of our *README.DOC* to see what we did in the past to attract our members and what has not been done to keep them. I hope to use some of these ideas as we go forward. I don't want to say too much lest I can't carry out my hopes. I intend to work hard for you, and with your help we will accomplish something worthwhile. I will need a lot of volunteers to help and with the great board of directors we elected we should get this club back to some of its former glory. Thanks...

GENERAL MEETING REPORT

August 28, 1999

Audrey Wolden

The August general meeting was held in Room 207 of the Chemistry Building at Orange Coast College. Several members present reported they had not received this month's *README.DOC*. Names and addresses will be checked to make sure the list is correct and updated.

President Wayne Ali reported on election results and declared the new board will consist of the following elected officers and directors, plus three incumbent directors.

Leonard Stein	President
Red Davidson	Vice President
Larry Pearce	Secretary
Wayne Ali	Past President
Frank Yeager	Director
Joseph Zebrowski	Director
Bob Walker	Director
Leonard Robertson	Director
Dennis Walz	Director (incumbent)
Michael Moore	Director (incumbent)
Sam Wozniak	Director (incumbent)

A visual presentation was made by Christopher Doyle of ONTRACK, a data recovery program. Their local office is located in back of Metromedia in Costa Mesa but they have offices all over the world. In July, 1999, they acquired Mijenix, which provides remote data recovery. All one need do is dial in to their number and the missing data is reinstalled. "Tiramisu Data Recovery," as it's called, copies files to another hard drive plus it can make five copies at a time.

Free copies of this diagnostic tool were handed out to those present. Mr. Doyle can be reached at (714) 641-0530, X-2202 or through his e-mail address, cdoyle@ontrack.com. The charge is \$100 for the diagnostics up front whereupon they will tell you what files they can recover. The total cost for the recovery may be anywhere from \$50 up, depending on the size of the business and extent of loss.

Mr. Doyle cautioned that their software does not work with winmodems. He showed a demo of Data Advisor noting that rapid clicks indicate a head crash; louder sounds mean they probably will be unable to help you recover your files or data. Their self-monitoring analysis and reporting ("SMART") technology shows the status of your drives, does a complete surface scan, and tests the file structure and the system's memory.

On the nature of restoring hard drives that have irrevocably crashed, he noted that Seagate drives come with a shield to protect them from the power source, contact with which could damage your hard drive. "A nice touch," he said.

"What happens if you leave your system on all the time?" someone asked. He recommends leaving it on during the day but turning it off at night to save on electricity. It's up to the individual. Wait a few seconds (15-30 or less) to power it back up again after turning it off.

The second part of his demonstration was on MIJENIX, several of which programs were raffled off later. ZIP MAGIC 98 turns zip files into documents with a mouse click automatically so there's no need to use the old unzip procedure. And vice versa. You can easily zip up your documents and send them by e-mail. However, he notes the current version will soon be replaced by the 2000 version.

Mijenix is a disk cleaner - it looks for automatic links, can delete zip files or save them into a particular format, among other things. This ensures verification that every file on a disk or CD can be successfully read. It has a system saver--backs up everything: registry files, config.sys, autoexec.bat, system, win, and protocol ini files, plus command.com. In other words, it will put your machine back the way it was. It creates a rescue disk as well. A special rate of \$25, tax free, with no shipping and handling charge, was offered to members present and order forms were passed out for the several products discussed.

Mijenix will not run on winmodems, he said, but they are working on fixes to handle it. A rebate or update price will be offered. The current "Windows Magazine" shows a comparison between Mijenix and Norton Utilities, and with Nuts and Bolts. Ontrack's product uses less space than the others.

Following the presentation, President Ali administered the oath of office to the six new board members. Their pictures were taken outside, followed by adjournment of all who wished to gather at Souplantation. (See Picture on front cover)

Meeting of the Executive Board August 30, 1999

Meeting of the Executive Board of OCIPUG was called to order by President Wayne Ali at his residence, 1413 West Marcella Lane in the city of Santa Ana, California just after 7 P.M.

Officers Present	Absent
Wayne Ali, President	Don Testa, Vice President
Larry Pearce, Treasurer	Rob Neilson, Secretary Preston Hill, Past President

Directors Present	Absent
Leonard Robertson	Jody Ali
Michael Moore	Sue Hayes
Sam Wozniac	Arlene Solomon Dennis Walz

Others Present

Leonard Stein, President Elect	
Red Davidson, Vice President Elect	
Ken Paeth	Bob Walker
Joe Zebrowski	Kevin Moser
Reg Roberts	Frank Yaeger
Dick Hunter	

President Wayne Ali asked Leonard Robertson, and he accepted, to act as recording secretary for this meeting.

President Ali defined the various secretarial functions: correspondence secretary, recording secretary for the board meeting, recording secretary for the general meeting. He said that Rob Nelissen will continue to function in some of the secretarial duties.

Robert Lynch was elected on write-in as a director. Wayne will contact him and ask for his acceptance of the directorship.

President Ali suggested using a service drawing; that is, giving tickets to drawings at the general meetings to those performing a service to the club. There was no discussion on this.

Free storage of OCIPUG's assets will come to an end in March 2000. Plans to liquidate what is in storage must begin immedi-

ately. Electronic auction on the OCIPUG web page is one suggested method.

Reg Roberts needs help gathering information for the general meeting programs. Michael Moore has access to information that may be helpful to Reg. He will get the information and forward it to Reg.

Larry Pearce, Chief Financial Officer, mentioned that the new budget starts in a little more than 24 hours (September 1).

Future of the BBS needs to be decided.

Wayne stated that he observed members seemed to like small group discussions at general meetings.

Wayne gives thanks to all who helped in the various activities in the past year. Some names were mentioned (but not recorded), but there are many more not mentioned by name. He stressed the help that was given during the move.

Wayne Ali, the outgoing president, passed the chairmanship of the meeting to the new president, Leonard Stein.

President Stein says briefly that he makes no assumptions about anything at this time. Says he is new to the club and asks all present to help him to help the club.

Red Davidson moved and Wayne Ali seconded to approve the July 26 minutes after one correction was made.

Wayne will call Rob Neilson and Rich Black and ask their help with secretarial duties.

CFO/Treasurers Report

Larry Pearce reviewed the financial report and reported that we owe three months rent for general meetings at Orange Coast College. We are waiting for their bill.

Today we have 178 members.

There were no questions. Red Davidson moved and Frank Yaeger seconded to accept the treasurer's report.

Richard Hunter reported that SIG meetings are planned for the Costa Mesa Senior Cen-

ter. Victor Olcott is our liaison to the Costa Mesa Senior Center.

Survey Report by Director Sam Wozniac
Sam Wozniac gave a brief overview of the response to the recent club survey by Sam Wozniac and Leonard Robertson.

Web Page Status Report by Director Michael Moore
Director Moore reported statistics for a two-week period ending August 29. We had 240 hits during that period, 2700 to date. An updated copy of Application for Membership is needed for the web page. Moore plans to install links to favorite sites.

PowerQuest may be scheduled for a presentation in September. Intuit has confirmed a presentation at our September meeting. Ortex is scheduled for October. Presenters can be put on the web page. History of presenters may also be put on the page.

President Stein thinks we should continue presenting OCIPUG mugs. We should get three or four bids for mugs.

We do not have a regular editor for our monthly publication, *README.DOC*.

Proposed Draft Operating Budget was presented by Chief Financial Officer, Larry Pearce. Red Davidson moved and Wayne Ali seconded to accept the proposed budget.

Auction procedures as done in the past will be available to the new president. Ken Page will help President Stein get on the internet.

The next board meeting will be on September 27, 1999 at Red Davidson's residence: 235 Lillian Place, Costa Mesa, California; (north of Del Mar and east of Orange).

Larry Pearce moved and Michael Moore seconded to remove Sue Hayes from the board for nonparticipation.

Red Davidson moved and Michael Moore seconded to adjourn the meeting at about 9 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Leonard Robertson

What is Resolution?

Lately, I've heard many misconceptions about resolution when it comes to digital cameras, scanners, printers and monitors. Each device has a resolution that represents the smallest element of a device. Manufacturers play specmanship with numbers to confuse consumers; a scanner has a resolution of 600 x 1200 dots per inch (dpi) or a 2.1 megapixel digital camera.

Resolution is usually measured in two different ways for consumers. Scanner, printer and monitor resolution is specified in dpi. Digital camera resolution is specified in terms of picture elements (pixels) that represent a fixed area. Resolution shows up in three different phases; input, image and output.

Input Resolution

A digital camera contains an array of photosensitive detector elements. Each detector element area represents one pixel. Most cameras use square pixels. Manufacturers define a megapixel as one million pixels. Therefore, a camera may have an input resolution of 1640 x 1230 pixels or 2.1 megapixels. Scanner input resolution is usually specified by a single value such as 600 dpi. A square inch therefore contains 600 x 600 or 360,000 dots. The general rule here is that more pixels or dpi means greater image detail.

Image Resolution

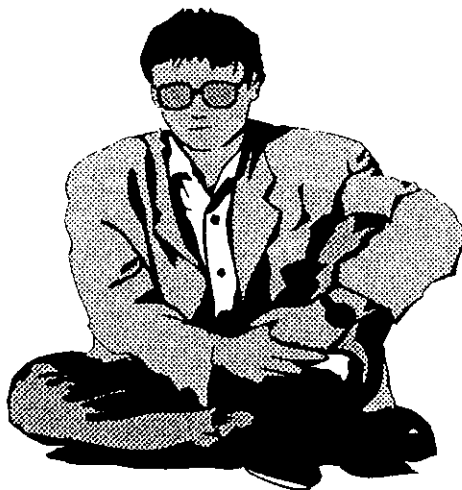
An image that is saved in a computer occupies file space. If you scan in an 8x10 color photo at 300 dpi this will take over 21 MB of hard disk space. If you scale the photo to 4x6 and scan at 600 dpi you will take up 24 MB. Likewise, the 2.1 megapixel digital camera may require up to 6.3 MB for a color image. The general rule here is more pixels, dots per inch or larger image areas means more megabytes of storage required.

Output Resolution

Output resolution is most confusing for many people. Most printers are optimized for image resolutions of 240 to 300 dpi for the range of image sizes that can be printed. The printer resolution touted by manufacturers is the number of dots that can be sprayed on the paper. When a printer outputs your image, it must figure out how to match the dots with the number of pixels in

Herb's Hangout

Herb Huey



your image. A 640 x 480 pixel image may be 5"x 3.75" in size. Thus, one pixel occupies an area of 0.0078" x 0.0078" or 128 pixels equals one inch. If your printer can print at 720 dpi, then one pixel is equivalent to 5.62 dots. I'm glad I don't have to constantly figure that out. If the printer scales down to 256 dpi then two dots is the same as one pixel.

Dpi is not the only measure of a printer's ability. The size of the dots, dot pattern and spacing as well as color saturation also determines printer quality. A good example is the difference between Epson and Hewlett Packard (HP) printers. Epson printers claim resolutions of 720 x 1440 dpi while HP printers are limited to 600 x 600 dpi. Epson printer dot size is so small with little dot overlap that printed images can look washed out due to the white spaces between dots even though each individual dot is razor sharp. Get out your magnifying glass if you don't believe it. HP printers vary the dot sizes in the image using smaller dots near edges. HP claims that 600 x 600 dpi is based on the average dot size. White areas between dots are minimized using this technique. HP also produces color rich inks that ensure great color saturation. This is why I chose an HP printer.

Scanners are often specified by two numbers (i.e. 600 x 1200 dpi). The first number is the optical resolution of the scanner. This means that the scan bar contains 600 resolution elements per inch. The second number is an indication of the precision of

the stepper motor as it moves the scan bar. The real resolution of this scanner is 600 x 600 dpi. The 1200 dpi capability means that the scanner is more than accurate enough to move the scan bar at 600 dpi.

The example given earlier of printing a 640 x 480 pixel image leads to problems. If you want to use the printer's maximum resolution then the printer needs to spread 5.62 dots per pixel. The computer and/or the printer have to figure out a way to match dots with pixels. If we set the printer resolution to 256 dpi, this leaves two dots for each pixel.

If you want to scale up to an 8x10 image, there will be 11.24 dots for the length. The picture will lose detail at this point. Fortunately, the scanner or imaging software can use a method called interpolation to create more pixels. The new pixel is created by using the average value of the surrounding pixels. Just imagine a 4x6 image at 300 dpi to be a field of evenly spaced golf balls spread over your lawn. There are 1200 x 1800 golf balls closely butted together. If you enlarge to an 8x10 image, the golf balls are no longer close together. The computer has to fill in the blank areas with new golf balls. In some cases, interpolation can do an excellent job. On highly detailed images, the effect may not be so pleasing. Therefore, it is not recommended to use interpolation while scanning.

Here are some recommendations to set input resolution. If you are using a digital camera, keep resolution at its maximum rating. This may sound like overkill, but most digital cameras use compression techniques to save the images and most of these compression schemes will lose detail. If you use an inkjet printer, most are optimized for no more than 300 dpi so it makes no sense to scan at higher resolution. Many scanners come with image editing software and they are usually set to 300 dpi.

For text and line drawings, set the printer resolution up to 600 dpi. Text scanned in at 600 dpi will allow optical character recognition (OCR) to resolve down to 6-point character size. If you only use 10 or 12-point character size, then 300 dpi is sufficient. Line art must be scanned at 600 dpi to avoid the "jaggies"—a staircase effect that becomes noticeable on diagonal lines.

Photos can be scanned in at 200 dpi with excellent results. One exception to this rule is if you want to print on a professional dye sublimation printer. Here the notion of dpi goes out the window. Scan the photo at the maximum optical resolution of your scanner. Remember that a 4x6 color photo scanned at 600 dpi versus 200 dpi will create a file that is 9 times larger (24 MB versus 2.8 MB). It doesn't take too many of these files to waste one GB of hard disk. Hopefully, these rules of thumb will help you be a better user of digital imaging products.

Signing Off

I've completed my family reunion and my daughter's graduation videos. I took a quick look at the file sizes. The family reunion video takes up 340 MB and my daughter's graduation takes up over 50 MB. These are highly compressed avi files that can be played back on the computer. However, 340 MB is too large to send on the Internet for someone else to enjoy but can fit on one CD. The file photos that I scanned or captured take up over one GB of hard disk space. The raw video footage occupies over 500 MB of disk space. I have a 13 GB hard disk and I've already used 9 GB. Christmas sounds like a good time to get another hard disk.

Windows 98 MS Fax

Richard Hunter

For those of you with new computers that came with the OEM version of Windows 98, you may notice that the fax that came with Windows 95 is no longer there. If you upgraded from Windows 95, most likely you still have the fax program. So, how do you get the fax for the OEM version of Windows 98?

You can install MS Fax by using the Windows 98 CD. Put the CD in and it will start automatically. Then, select Browse, Tools, Oldwin95, Message, and US. Then read the WMS-FAX.TXT. Afterwards, you can double click on the files to install WMS.EXE and AWFAX.EXE. That will give you the same fax that came with Windows 95.

A word of caution though, when I installed Second Edition and the modem sharing feature, it corrupted the fax program and nothing I did would get the fax back. When I removed Second Edition, I got the fax back

with no problems. I cannot say that all will have the same experience with Second Edition.

While the fax program isn't a great fax program, it is quite suitable for an occasional fax. Believe it or not, but there are some people out there that don't use a computer or e-mail. For those people the fax is a big help. They don't have to understand computer, just load the paper into the fax machine, put in a phone number and away it goes.

Hard Drive Heat

Richard Hunter

At the August General Meeting we had an excellent talk about hard drives from Mr. Christopher Doyle of Ontrack. In his talk he pointed out that heat can kill a hard drive, and that some of the newest hard drives which spin at high speed generate an unusual amount of heat. Someone also suggested that a fan could be used to keep the hard drive from getting too hot.

What is often forgotten is that air is a very poor conductor of heat. Aluminum is a much better heat conductor. For example, using the "Handbook of Chemistry and Physics" we find that air has a thermal conductivity of 0.0000568 while aluminum has a thermal conductivity of 0.418. So you can see that there is a considerable difference. What this means to a computer user or builder is that, for a desktop unit, the best way to keep the hard drive cool is to use the aluminum case to conduct the heat away from the hard drive. Thus the entire case becomes a heat sink.

Normally the hard drive is mounted to the aluminum of the case. Thus, just screwing the hard drive to the aluminum mounting plate is a big help in removing the heat from the hard drive. Now, if there is still a problem with heat, you can use a silicon heat transferring grease to reduce the thermal barrier that exists between the aluminum of the hard drive and the aluminum of the case. A tube of the silicon grease, sold by Fry's Electronics as "Transistor Silicon Grease, heat sink compound" sells for \$5.49. Fry's Electronics also has a nonsilicon heat sink grease for \$7.99.

From my experience, the thermal barrier between two metals, while much less than air, is significant, so a thermal grease is

worthwhile where heat is a problem. You can tell a lot about the heat of your hard drive simply by feeling the temperature with your fingers. If the hard drive feels hot, consider using a heat sink compound.

Of course, if your computer is a laptop, there isn't much that you can do; you will just have to rely on the thermal management of the designer. Although, as Mr. Doyle pointed out, you can control the heat in laptop computers by turning off the computer when they are not needed. Likewise, you can take some simple precautions by not using a laptop in the direct sunlight since the heat load may be greatly increased when in the direct sunlight.

When Your Computer Starts Telling You What to Do...

John Goodman

I'm pretty sure each of us has at some time had a frustrating experience with a personal computer—one which made us want to tell our computer "where to go." This article is about the flip side of that coin: When your computer tells *you* where to go—but in a nice way!

Hearing a Strange Voice

For example, the other night I was driving along, in a neighborhood with which I am unfamiliar, with my wife sitting to my right. She was holding my Dell Inspiron 7000 laptop computer. A small, yellow box with rounded edges was sitting on the dash, connected to the laptop by a slender, black cable. We were going to dinner at a friend's house—a place we haven't visited in over a year, and I could not recall the directions that would lead us there.

Suddenly a somewhat strange-sounding voice said: "Turn right onto Oak Lane in fifteen seconds." Who—and what—was that? It was the DeLorme mapping program, "Street Atlas USA," telling me my next driving direction change. That's a feature of that program which I had enabled by attaching DeLorme's Earthmate GPS receiver (that's the yellow box that was sitting on the dash).

"That's really pretty cool," my wife commented. I was a little bit surprised that she had said that, since she generally does not get excited about any computer innovation I show her. But I also completely agreed with her. Having your computer tell you, in excruciating detail, how to get to some place you want to go can be very useful—a really cool feature. With the present implementations, however, it also can be more than a little frustrating at times.

The first trick to this game is to learn how to tell your computer where you want to go, and help it figure out a route that you will, in fact, want to take. Then, with the help of that little yellow box, it can "walk you through" every step of getting there. Each time you start a new leg of your journey, the computer will announce what the transition will be to the next leg, and how long until that transition. For example, it may say, "Take state route 22 east, over ten minutes away" if you are just getting on Interstate 5 and are going to have to travel on it for over ten minutes before reaching highway 22. Then, when you get close to that intersection the computer will remind you by saying, for example, "Take state route 22 east, in 45 seconds."

How It Works—And How It Can Fail

This works well—except when it fails in some respect. And it can (and often does) fail in three general ways. First, the little yellow box requires batteries, and they don't last very long. You can get an accessory cable that will let the yellow box get its power from your car's battery (through the cigarette lighter receptacle), or from your laptop computer's battery. But if you only get the yellow box itself, you need to change its batteries every few hours. (And you need to remember to take the batteries out whenever you aren't using the box.)

The second type of failure happens when the yellow box isn't able to tell your computer where you are with sufficient precision. The yellow box is, as I said earlier in this story, a GPS receiver. GPS stands for the Global Positioning Satellite system. This is a flock of two dozen low-flying satellites that circle the globe constantly. Every one of them has an extremely precise clock on board and it sends out signals that can be used by a GPS receiver to discern how far it is from each of the GPS satellites that are within its view. Whenever the receiver can "see" at least four satellites clearly then it can provide data which, with the help of a computer with a suitable program—in my case, my laptop computer, running the "Street Atlas USA" program—allows one to know where on or near the surface of the earth one is. That is, it gives your latitude (angle above the equator), longitude (angle around the earth from an arbitrary line called the Greenwich meridian), and elevation above or below mean sea level. (There are other, standalone GPS receivers which include the needed computer and program. Since I already have a perfectly good computer and I want to use it to display maps and perform other tasks, I can save money by having a GPS receiver that is incomplete—and then relying on my laptop to complete it.)

This sounds wonderful. And it is—up to a point. The GPS system was initially created by the U.S. Department of Defense and it is managed and maintained by them. Its main purpose is to help the U.S. military personnel locate themselves accurately. The DOD has graciously allowed others to use the GPS system for similar purposes, but to keep our "enemies" from using it against us, the DOD has intentionally degraded the GPS system's accuracy for all but its own, authorized users. In essence, the GPS satellites put out signals that have some intentional and often-changing errors built into them. The resulting position errors as calculated by an ordinary GPS receiver are not so large that they make the system useless, by any means, but they do impose some limits on how it may be used.

When I first loaded DeLorme's "Street Atlas USA" program and hooked up the Earthmate GPS receiver, I was in a hotel room on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. I was amused over the next several hours as I watched the program tell me that my room was traveling on a random path, hither and yon, ranging up to three blocks away from where I knew it really was. Furthermore, the elevation of my room was reported as anything from a few hundred feet below sea level to, at other times, a few hundred feet higher than my actual elevation. Clearly, you must take this system's notion of where you are with a grain of salt.

I have had years of experience teaching physics. One of my pet peeves is when anyone who should know better quotes some value to more "places of accuracy" than is warranted. For example, if someone tells you the temperature outside is 77.352 degrees Fahrenheit, and you know he just glanced at a typical liquid in a tube thermometer, you can be pretty sure that not all (or any!) of those numbers after the decimal point are meaningful or correct.

I fault the DeLorme mapping programs for making similar errors when reporting your location. They give you the latitude, longitude, and elevation with an apparent accuracy that is hundreds or thousands of times more than is actually justified. Similarly, the dot on the map that shows where it thinks you are will wander by

many times its own diameter, giving visual evidence that the program doesn't really know where you are nearly as accurately as the size of the dot would suggest. In practice the accuracy is limited to at best around ± 300 feet horizontally and perhaps ± 500 feet vertically.

The authorized, military users of the GPS system routinely locate themselves with errors that are about ten times smaller than these values. But clever people have found a way in which ordinary civilian users of the GPS system can locate themselves almost as well as the authorized military users. That is by using what is called "Differential GPS." This system depends on there being a fixed GPS receiver at a well-known location near you which monitors the same signals your GPS receiver is monitoring, and then broadcasts correction data for those signals. That is, the fixed receiver calculates its position, notes how far in error that calculated position is, and then broadcasts that positional error as a correction signal. Any suitably equipped Differential GPS receiver in the vicinity can receive those correction signals and apply them to whatever it calculates as its position, and in that way essentially remove the errors the DOD put into the GPS signals.

The DeLorme program, "Street Atlas USA," mentions this possibility and suggests that it supports using those correction signals. But either their Earthmate receiver doesn't pick up those correction signals, or else I have not tried out the system near enough to one of those fixed receivers that broadcasts those correction signals. (I rather suspect the problem is that the Earthmate receiver was built to be as inexpensive and small as possible, and thus they left out the differential GPS capability. Typically the fixed receivers used by Differential GPS are located at airports and harbors, and I have been quite near to several of those each time I used this system.)

You may experience additional errors, added to those basic, you-can't-do-better-than-this errors. For example, if you are using this system while traveling in a car, you'll find that as you pass under a bridge or between tall buildings, the receiver is temporarily blocked from seeing all the satellites that are above the horizon. And, depending on how many it has been tracking up to that moment, and how long its view is impeded, the system may become totally confused for awhile as to where you are. Fortunately, these errors are fleeting and not too large. In fact, I was amused to see that the GPS system often tracked our actual route more accurately than the map on which the track was being plotted. (The road would curve and I could see from watching the surroundings that the curve in the road as it was shown on the map was too sharp or occurred too soon, and that the path of the GPS locations was more nearly correct.)

The third type of failure in this overall strategy for having your computer talk to you and guide you to a destination happens when the program hasn't got the right notion about exactly where you will be traveling. It may have computed a route that isn't what you want to follow, and you decide that you know better where to go for at least a part of the way. Or if you find yourself having to change route, for example if you encounter road construction and must take a detour. In either case, whenever you travel off the route the program has chosen, it will become quite confused about how to tell you to proceed, since it assumes at all times that you are

on its version of the "proper" route.

A simple example may help you understand what I mean here. When I ask the program to compute a route from my home to almost anywhere, it always leaves my neighborhood by a path I have learned is not the best way to go. So I always take my favorite way out of our development, rather than the one given on the program's route. (I think the DeLorme program would allow me to tweak its route if I understood well enough how to use all its features, but it certainly would take me awhile to do that—which is time I never want to spend, since I hardly need the program's help to leave my own neighborhood!) Until I get back on the pre-computed route, the program insists on giving me "helpful" directions that are quite simply irrelevant, considering where I actually am at that moment.

Another kind of failure of the program comes about when the maps it is using are incorrect. Mainly I have found the DeLorme programs to be amazingly complete and correct. But I have noticed occasional errors. For example, a freeway on-ramp shown as being on the opposite side of a major cross street from its actual location. That's enough of an error to be confusing to someone who doesn't know that neighborhood. And, of course, when roads are altered through new construction or repair, those changes aren't going to show up in the mapping program's database at least until a new edition is released.

Other Features and Other Mapping Programs

DeLorme offers half a dozen different mapping programs, plus "Phone Search USA"—a program that allows one to look up phone numbers for most any person or business in the USA in any of a number of different ways. They even integrate some of their mapping programs with "Phone Search USA" so you can look up a phone number and address, and then display its location on a map.

The DeLorme Earthmate GPS receiver will work with many, but not all of the DeLorme mapping programs. Conversely, the DeLorme mapping programs that do work with the Earthmate will also work with many other brands and models of GPS receiver. I have no personal experience (so far) with the Earthmate running with any other mapping program (by DeLorme or any other vendor), nor with any other GPS receiver working with "Street Atlas USA." But already, from just what I have seen (and heard), I know I like having my computer tell me where to go. (After all, men aren't "supposed" to like asking for directions—and now I don't have to, since my computer will supply them to me quite competently, most of the time.)

John M. Goodman is the author of a number of computer books, most recently "Peter Norton's Inside the PC," Eighth Edition (Sams, 1999, ISBN 0-672-31532-7). This article copyright © 1999 by John M. Goodman, all rights are reserved. You may contact the author by e-mail at <john@agoodman.com>.

Ken's Korner Cupboard Offers Some Tips You May Find Useful

Ken Fermoye

This column includes an assortment of tips, comments and answers to questions from readers that have been cluttering up Ken's Korner for some time...

Phone Combo Relieves Pain in the Neck

How many times have you tried to juggle a phone receiver and follow instructions from a support technician using your keyboard and mouse? Tough, isn't it? I don't do it anymore; instead, I use a headset plugged into a cordless phone. When I went shopping for a new cordless last fall I found a remanufactured Uniden 900MHz model on sale for half the price of a new one. Seeing that it had a headset jack, I snapped it up.

(Note: I don't hesitate to buy remanufactured hardware IF the refurbishing was done by the original manufacturer or its authorized supplier and IF it includes a reasonable warranty. I've had good luck with several pieces of remanufactured equipment over the years.)

I also got a Panasonic headset (about \$25). The combination was one of the best buys I've made in years. I use it a lot for taking notes during phone interviews, conference calls and just plain chatting. Where it really shines, however, is when calling tech support numbers. It eliminates pinning the phone receiver against your shoulder and neck during long "on hold" periods and leaves both hands free for typing and mouse use as you follow a technician's instructions. Using the headset relieves me of a chronic pain in the neck (mine was damaged by a falling tree limb).

Any phone with a headset jack will work, but the cordless/headset combo lets me walk around and talk with the phone tucked in a shirt pocket.

Love that KVM Switch! Another favorite is my KVM (keyboard, video, mouse) switch. I wrote about this in an earlier article (if you haven't seen it, ask your editor to print it), but I grow fonder of it every day. The ability to control two or more computers (my workstation and our network server, in this case) from a single keyboard,

monitor and mouse is terrific: convenient, saves space, is utterly reliable. I'm trying out several other types of switches that many of you may find helpful. Watch for an article soon.

Brass Thumbscrews The least expensive, but probably the most convenient, items I use in maintaining our office computers are brass thumbscrews that replace the normal screws used to attach case covers. They make quick work of removing and replacing the "lids" on our four computers. The thumbscrews have the same diameter and pitch as the hex-head screws they replace, of course, but you don't need a nut driver or Phillips-head screwdriver to remove and replace them.

One of our Tugnet stalwarts, Bruce Doshier, found the thumbscrews at a computer show (aka "swap meet") and bought several hundred. They were packaged in sets of six and sold to members for \$2 per package (a slight profit that went into the group's coffers). Bruce reports that you could probably get similar thumbscrews at local stores or Websites that specialize in electronic components, if they don't show up at computer shows in your area.

Browser Tip Have you tried using two browsers, one for fast Internet searching and the other for general Web surfing?

I have an older version of Netscape with graphics disabled that I use when I use search engines and do research. This allows me to do quick checks of sites to see if they offer information I want. If I do want to view a graphic on any given page, all I need do is click on its icon.

(Check your browser's manual or Help Menu for instructions on how to disable graphics.)

I use Internet Explorer 4.x for more normal, leisurely Web browsing and when I want to explore a site thoroughly. The only drawback is the extra hard drive space that having two browsers installed consumes, but with hard drives so cheap now this isn't the limiting factor that it once was.

Put Some Light on the Subject This one is really off the wall and makes you look like a weirdo, but it makes computer maintenance a lot easier for me. Like many of us who have reached "senior citizen" status,

my eyes aren't what they used to be, especially since macular degeneration destroyed my central focusing ability in my left eye several years ago. I need a lot of light on the subject when I work on a project, otherwise I have difficulty seeing the slots in screen inserts, inserting interface cards, etc.

I've tried various types of flashlights and work lamps, but they all require three hands or have other failings.

My latest solution to the problem combined a small clip-on flashlight and a baseball cap. I clip the flashlight to the bill of the cap and I can shine it directly on an area where I'm working. Even better is a clip-on flashlight I found recently that has a flexible extension. You can bend it to point precisely where you need the light, and the extension pulls it closer to your work area.

Like I said, it looks weird, but it works. (What really shook up my wife recently was seeing me wearing both the cap-and-clip combination and the phone headset! Her reaction: "It's the creature from outer space!")

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How-To - From Ken's Korner Print Selected Material from Web Pages

Ken Fermoye

First, as in making Rabbit Stew, you must catch the rabbit! In this case, before you can print sections of text from Web pages you must first select the material, then paste it into an appropriate software program (e.g., WordPad, any word processor, MS Publisher, etc.). Do that by following these steps (Selecting and Printing graphics is covered toward the end of this article).

1. Select desired text material in the normal manner by setting your cursor at the upper left corner of the text and holding down the left mouse button. Continue holding the button down and drag the cursor to the end of the material you want to select, the

release the button. Your selected text should now be highlighted.

2. Go to the Edit Menu at the top of your screen and click on Copy (or use the Control-C keyboard shortcut). If you don't already have the target software application open, open it now via the Start Menu or a shortcut icon on your Desktop. (Let's assume you will use WordPad from the Accessories Group in the Start Menu. It's quick and easy, and everyone who uses Windows 95/98 has it available.)

3. Go to the File Menu and click on New to open a new document.

4. Make sure the blinking insertion pointer (vertical bar) is positioned at the upper left of the blank page.

5. Go to the Edit Menu and click on Paste (or use the Control-V keyboard shortcut). The selected material should now appear on the blank page.

6. Now you can either save the text (using Save As from the File Menu), edit it to reformat some of the text or to remove unwanted material, or print it (by going to the File Menu and selecting Print).

I do this all the time. Frequently, when researching a subject for a future article, I first create a file by following steps 3 and 4, typing in just a title and perhaps a few notes at the top of the page, then I use File/Save As to give the file a name and save it in an appropriate folder. I visit various Websites, select helpful material and use Copy/Paste (steps 1 through 5) to insert it into the previously created file.

I often use WordPad for this, but MS Word, Word Perfect or some other word processor that offers a Find or Find/Replace function may be preferable if you assemble a large amount of text in a single file. Such software allows you to search for a word or phrase quickly and easily when necessary.

The process for selecting and printing material from e-mail is the same. Follow the same Copy, Paste, Print sequence outlined above.

If you want to print an entire Web page, simply click on the right mouse button

anywhere on the page. Select Print from the pop-up menu that appears and follow normal printing procedure.

If you want to print a picture or other graphic from the Web, do this:

1. Place cursor on designed image.
2. Click right mouse button.
3. Click on Save Picture As
4. Select the drive and folder where you want to store the graphic.
5. Save it under the original name, or give it a new name.

You can then print the graphic by importing it into an appropriate image editing program (e.g. Windows Paint, Photo Deluxe, Photo Shop, Photo Impact, etc.). Reminder: Web images are normally in low-resolution GIF or JPEG formats so they will not look as good when Printed as BMP, TIFF or other higher resolution images.

A tip here. If you're only interested in printing out the text on a page, just turn off the graphics. In Internet Explorer follow these steps.

1. On the View menu in the browser, click Internet Options.
2. Click the Advanced tab.
3. Select the Multimedia tab, and remove checks in the Show pictures, Play animations, Play videos, and Play sounds check boxes.

This will make Web pages load a lot faster, too. You can always turn the pictures, animations, etc. back on by reversing the procedure.

Actually, what I do is use two browsers, an older version of Netscape Navigator with graphics turn off, and a current version of Internet Explorer with all the goodies turned on.

I use Navigator for research and other quick-and-dirty surfing, IE for normal Web wandering when I want to see all the graphics.

'Free' Computers May Not Really Be Free in Long Run

Ken Fermoyle

Which adage do you believe? "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth" or "There is no such thing as a free lunch." When it comes

to taking advantage of many of those "free" computer offers being hyped recently, you'd best consider the latter one.

First came the giveaway offers from Free-PC and clones. They promise a free computer to people who are willing to watch continuous ads. The deals include all sort of restrictions on your Internet activity and require that you agree to answer questionnaires and otherwise give up aspects of your personal privacy.

So, in a sense, you do pay a price for the "free" computer. You lose a great deal of privacy and have restricted Internet access. Anyone with the slightest trace of paranoia won't be comfortable with these deals.

Then came free computers from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) like Gobi and InterSquid. They give you a "free" computer in return for a long-term (30 to 36 months) contract for Internet access service at higher-than-normal rates of \$26 to \$30 per month. These rates will really seem excessive in a few years for reasons explained below.

Next we got a spate of partnerships between companies like eMachines, Compaq, large electronic retailers and various ISPs or online services such as CompuServe and Prodigy (which are not true ISPs).

Most of the latter offers don't give you a free computer after all. Many are like the one Circuit City and Fry's chains have been promoting in partnership with CompuServe. Staples has a similar tie-in with MSN, Microsoft Network. Mac fans also are being wooed with offers of "free" iMacs; more on that later. They offer rebates, usually \$400.

The Fry's deal is typical. It includes a \$400 rebate on a \$499 "eMachines/Compaq" computer with 366 Cyrix MII MMX-enhanced processor, 64MB of SD RAM, 4.3GB Ultra DMA hard drive, 56Kbps modem, but no monitor. It's decent, low-end, entry-level home computer. You pay \$499 up front and wait for the \$400 rebate "within 45 days of credit approval...from eMachines/Compaq/CompuServe Internet Service."

Ah, but the cost doesn't stop there. Part of the deal is that you must sign a "contract commitment to a 3-year/36-month subscrip-

tion for CompuServe 2000 Internet Service at a monthly rate of \$21.95." And therein lies the rub. (You didn't really think that Steve Case, honcho of AOL, which owns CompuServe, would really play Santa Claus, did you? Not blooming likely!)

That monthly cost is 10-20% over the going rates (currently running from \$17.95 to \$19.95) The kicker is that \$21.95 may be double, even quadruple, what industry analysts and other experts project Internet access to cost in the not-too-distant future! Some predict monthly access fees may go as low as \$5 within a few years, as reported in the Los Angeles Times during July. Why? There are several reasons.

1. Telephone and Internet gurus report that competitive effects of the Telecommunications Reform Act of 1996 are finally beginning to appear. We have already seen long-distance rates drop substantially, to as low as 8 cents per minute in some cases. This ultimately means lower costs for Internet Service Providers.

2. Broadband technologies that offer fast Internet access are beginning to show significant growth. More users will turn to DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) and cable access, as they become available. DSL and cable not only offer fast access, the "always-connected" benefit and simultaneous multi-user capability, but they can be very competitive in cost compared with current dial-up access rates. This is especially true for users who have a second phone line, dedicated to modem use, because that line can be dropped if you get DSL or cable.

So if you sign a 3-year contract for Internet access at \$20 or \$22 per month and access rates drop to \$10 or \$12 in 12 or 14 months, your "free" computer won't be so free after all. And don't think you can terminate your service contract early to take advantage of lower rates. Read the fine print. The CompuServe contract "requires repayment of \$400 rebate plus a \$50 cancellation fee" for early termination.

As Bank of America Securities analyst Kurtis King commented in a L.A. Times Business Section article (July 3), "These contracts are pretty onerous. There's nothing free about the offers."

How about the FreeMac deal? All details weren't clear at this writing, but it appears that the offers require a 3-year commitment to Internet access with Earthlink at \$19.95/month and submission of a demographic

profile. The latter would be used to target advertisements to specific users.

FreeMac plans to distribute 10,000 free machines in October. I have no information yet on what penalty would be invoked if you try to terminate the contract with Earthlink before 36 months have elapsed.

(Author's Note: Just as I was finishing this article I received an offer of Internet access through MSN, the Microsoft Network, at \$11.99 per month. The deal is available through Costco, a large membership retailer, and requires a 3-month prepayment (\$35.97) but no long-term contract. Take this as an omen of things to come!)

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User Group Network Launches New Listservs for Grassroots Users

Ken Fermoye

The User Group Network (UGN) has announced the opening of two new email discussion lists for grassroots computer users. "Announce" is a new email listserv specifically for announcements from commercial, shareware and freeware developers. "Rumors" is a new email listserv for tips, tricks, questions, discoveries, discussions, and of course rumors.

UGN is the outgrowth of a Mac-oriented forum that started on AOL and has been reaching out to include PC users in recent years. Several PC groups have placed highly in the UGN Academy Awards during the past two years. The Sarasota PC Users Group in Florida won the top World Award for 1998, while the Houston Area League of Computer Users (HAL) and PC Alamo (San Antonio) won Best Website and Best Magazine respectively in the Large Group categories. UGN takes pride in being a spam-free online community for user groups.

"After the closing of the Evangelist, we've had literally hundreds of users comment-

ing the loss of that important source of new product announcements," says UGN spokesman Fred Showker, "so, we've launched the 'announce' list to help fill the void."

All developers are invited and encouraged to join the list and post releases and specials for their products and services.

The UGN recommends joining and posting an introduction. To subscribe, send an email to Announce-on@lists.user-groups.net.

"RUMORS" is ramping up as a "free-for-all" list for discussions, discoveries, tips and tricks. To subscribe, send an email to Rumors-on@lists.user-groups.net

Upon subscribing to either list you will be sent instructions and information.

Online submissions are being accepted at the UGN news provider site News-Serve.net -- vendors and developers are invited to utilize that facility as well: www.news-serve.net/news-center/announce.html

For online information about all the User Group Network Lists visit www.user-groups.net/ugcommunity/subscribe.html

Contact Fred Showker, The User Group Network, showker@user-groups.net for more information. Ken Fermoye, columnist (Ken's Korner) & publisher Fermoye Publications, (818) 346-9384 22250 Capulin Court, Woodland Hills, CA 91364-3005 Newsletters, Editorial Services, Graphics & Web Design "In the beginning was the Word..." And don't you forget it!

MS Office Doesn't Like To Work on Floppy Disks

Ken Fermoye

Problems I have been asked about often in recent months concerns Microsoft Office. The difficulties occur in all versions of Office, with Word documents and Excel spreadsheets most often involved. Symptoms vary, from obscure error messages to total system lock-up.

Investigating the complaints and checking several sources, including the Woody's Office Watch newsletter, I found the answer to the problems. In all cases, users were trying to work with a document/worksheet stored on a floppy disk.

Continued on page 14

UPCOMING SIG Meetings

Richard Hunter

The SIGs are alive and well, but not as well attended as I would like. If you are not attending the SIGs because you no longer need the information, perhaps you should attend the SIG of your choice to give others the benefit of your experiences. We all learn from others, if there are others to help. On the other hand, perhaps you would like a different SIG, in which case please e-mail me your request (rthunter@bigfoot.com), and if time is available and there is someone to lead the SIG perhaps we can accommodate you.

All of the present SIGs will be held at the Costa Mesa Senior Center in the upstairs classroom. The center is located at the corner of 19th Street and Pomona Avenue in Costa Mesa.

Sept 11, from 1pm to 4 pm
Session 1: **Basic Use: "An Introduction to Safe Computing"**

Introduces participants to the basics of using a computer and avoiding bad computing experiences.

Oct. 4, from 1 pm to 4 pm
Session 2: **Hardware: "Buying What You Need Without Getting Burned"**

Discussion of each piece of the computer--what it does and why its capacities are significant. Negotiation with hardware vendors is also covered.

Nov. 7, from 1 pm to 4 pm
Session 3: **Operating Systems: "Ya Can't get along without one!"**

Review of the whys and wherefores of operation systems covering the visible differences between Windows versions and what every user should know about them.

Dec. 5, from 1 pm to 4 pm
Session 4: **Applications Software: "Doing Something Useful"**

Introduction to the different basic applications--types, their gradation of complexity and cost and their operation system/hardware requirements. Also covers negotiation with software vendors.

Oct. 6, Nov. 3, and Dec 1 at 7 pm

1st Wednesday, **Internet Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting**

The Internet SIG is dedicated to topics related to the Internet, from finding an Internet Service Provider (ISP) to establishing your own web page. Generally, the sessions start with discussions of problems or observations of members or visitors; those in attendance may be able to offer suggestions or guidance toward solving whatever problem is presented. The SIG leader may have some special topic or technique to discuss or present to the group.

Oct. 13, Nov. 10, and Dec. 8 at 7 pm

2nd Wednesday, **Computer database for Genealogy Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting**

This SIG deals with the computer and computer applications used to assist individuals in collecting, storing, and organizing genealogical records.

There are a number of database genealogical programs available, so different programs may be considered, including some to help individuals manage their records. This SIG isn't committed to any one program, although the SIG will deal with the most common genealogical database programs.

This SIG doesn't deal with genealogical research. There are other organizations, such as OCCGS, dedicated to that subject.

Oct. 20, Nov. 17, and Dec. 15 at 7 pm

3rd Wednesday, **Windows Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting**

The Windows SIG deals with helping individuals use the Windows operating system and Windows applications, as related to the Windows system. The SIG leader may present some feature or program that he/she considers helpful to the users. Questions, answers and discussions are generally helpful to all in attendance to understand the features of Windows operating systems. Most of the time will be dedicated to Windows 95 and 98, but questions regarding Windows 3.X are welcome.

Oct. 27, (no meeting on Nov. 24) and Dec. 22 (tentative) at 7 pm

4th Wednesday, **Scanning and Digital Pho-**

tography Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting

With the technological advances and price reductions in scanning and digital photography equipment, this SIG has become one of interest to our members. The SIG deals, obviously, with scanning and digital photography and applications related to this area. Both scanning and digital photography have their own programs and techniques that need to be understood to make the best use of this equipment and achieve the best results. Sharing knowledge may make a big difference in your enjoyment and use of your equipment.

Computer Genealogy

Preston Hill

Ten or so genealogists attended the Genealogy SIG on Wednesday evening, 8 September, at the Costa Mesa Senior Center. They plied Chris Hansen with many questions about Family Tree Maker (FTM) and other genealogy computer programs. As usual, Chris gave excellent demonstrations of various aspects of FTM using the OCCGS projector as the OCIPUG 3-beam projector was unavailable. We thank OCCGS for allowing Chris to borrow the Epson LCD projector and hope that OCIPUG can acquire one for themselves. Advantages of FTM over most other genealogy computer programs is that it is available in most stores rather than having to be ordered directly from the author. Furthermore, there are numerous CDs available thru the Broderbund catalog that provide indexes and data for several million individuals. The OCCGS has most of these CDs available for use by members at the Huntington Beach City Library on Talbert. Starting 13 October, future meetings will review other computer programs such as Brother's Keeper, Pedigree Pursuit, Ancestral Quest, and the LDS Personal Ancestral File (PAF). Subsequent sessions will concentrate on specific techniques including basic data entry and correction, match/merge, report generation and printing, photograph and other image capture, acquisition of data from the Internet, source and other record keeping, and such other topics as the group desires. So, bring your questions, tips and tricks, and suggestions for lively discussions.

August Scanning and Digital Photography SIG

Richard Hunter

Our SIG leader, Rex Sutton, was unable to attend this SIG because of illness, so Richard Hunter acted as moderator for the SIG. We all hope that Rex will be fully recovered by the next Scanning and Digital Photography SIG.

Ken Paeth made a presentation about his choice for a printer for photographs, the Epson 750. This is a rather new unit, designed for printing photo images. Ken gave us a good synopsis of the specifications and the trouble he had in purchasing a new design just coming on the market. Ken also gave us some information on his newly purchased Epson 800 digital camera. He had shot a few pictures with it but was still in the process of installing the software on his computer to make full use of it. Ken also gave us a slide show using a TV screen. The camera is capable of feeding directly to a TV, via an RCA jack, for a quick presentation.

After Ken's talk, Herb Huey showed us the results of fix up on an old family photo that he discussed in the last paragraph of his article, "Herb's Hangout," in the August Readme.doc. The result was amazing. Herb also gave us a contrary opinion on printers. He prefers the HP printers. So we had a good discussion on printers, which was very informative.

We also had a discussion on how to set digital cameras to compensate for different lighting. For those who have the ability to adjust for the color of the light source, the discussion was very helpful.

While we had only a small group attending this SIG. I believe that everyone attending got something from the presentations.

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS... Meta-Search Tools and some unique Search Engines

Rory Patrick editor@asksam.com

This article started out to be a review of Internet Search tools (Webferret, Copernic, etc.). I then decided to check out the on-line meta-search engines (like dogpile, highway66). The end result: I've found some great information, but spent too much time doing it.

I'm going to briefly talk about the different types of software and search engines I used. Where they helped me, and where they let me down.

To test out the different search methods, I searched for 3 different types of information:

1. "Ear Infection" - My 11 month old son has a never ending ear infection, and the doctors are recommending tubes. I wanted to see what the Net had to tell me. A search engine specialized on health issues would have been my best bet, but I wanted to see how the general tools would handle this.
2. "IVR comparison" - We need a new phone system. I clicked on Yahoo a bit and found that the systems I want seem to be referred to as "IVR" -Interactive Voice Response. The desired result here was not information from a specific vendor, but an overview or comparison.
3. "Munich Rugby" - I played rugby in Munich nearly a decade ago. Since the Munich Rugby Club doesn't have a Web page, I knew that I wouldn't get a lot of relevant hits (unlike the two items above). I did, however, wonder if I would find any relevant information.

These weren't the only searches I ran, but I did these consistently in all the different search engines and with all the different search tools.

ON-LINE SEARCH ENGINES AND META-SEARCH ENGINES If you're like most people, you use one of the Internet search engines or directories (Yahoo, Excite, Hotbot, etc.) to locate information. If "one" is good, then "more" must be better. At least that's the theory behind meta-search engines (Dogpile, Highway 61, SaavySearch).

Meta-search engines allow you to enter a single search request which is passed to multiple search engines. You receive the search results from all the engines merged

into a single list. Some of the meta-search engines (Highway61 and SavvySearch, for example) merge the results and rank them according to relevancy.

OFF-LINE INTERNET SEARCH TOOLS Applications like Webferret, Copernic99, and Inforian Quest '98 are search tools that you install on your PC. You enter a search request, and they go out to the Internet query multiple search engines, eliminate duplicates, throw out invalid links, integrate the results and return them ranked by relevancy.

The off-line search tools offer a wider range of features than their on-line counterparts. For example, they give you tools for organizing and storing links, and they also let you set up recurring searches.

Both Webferret and Copernic99 have freeware version, so they're definitely affordable.

Sounds great... and it is... except for one thing: even with these tools I had a hard time finding "good" information. I was forced to spend too much time checking out dead-end sites before I found relevant information.

Let me give you some examples:

1. My search for "Ear Infection" --- most of the search engines (on-line and off-line) returned similar results. It was hard to tell the difference. And many of the items returned were a waste of cyberspace. In one meta-search, the top-rated site was not about "Ear Infections" but was about a company selling a "do-it-yourself" ear exam kit. Even the description that was displayed was misleading, "information on dealing with ear infections."

Luckily, another page on this company's Web site had useful links... one of which was the best link I found.

2. My search for "IVR comparison" was even more frustrating. Most of the sites were individual vendors flogging their wares... not that I have anything against that, I just wanted to see an overview and comparison.

One hit (returned by several engines) referred to an on-line discussion forum and even linked to a message talking about a comparison in another message... the other message was nowhere to be found.

In the end, I went to PC Magazine, searched for a review of IVR systems, and read an informative review. I'd hoped the Web would have offered another alternative.

3. "Munich Rugby" — I was shocked to find a link to "Munich Online" which had a summary talking about the "Oktoberfest Seven's Rugby Tournament". This is hosted by the Munich Rugby club. Unfortunately, I clicked on the link and got the "Munich Online" home page with an informative article about Ireland and the resurgence of the Gaelic language. No rugby.

REALITY BYTES... I'm sitting here loving the information at my fingertips, but hating what I have to do to find it. It will get better, but it might get worse first. There are a couple of disturbing trends going on:

First, all the evil tricks people use so that their Web pages appear at the top of the search results lists, for example: using misleading keywords or including invisible texts with every word known to man.

Second, many .COM sites (businesses) pay to have their sites registered with all the search engines. But these are not always the sites with the best information. Academic and research sites often have better information — but these sites are not always registered with the search engines.

Third, much of the best info is stored away in databases and not indexed by the major search engines.

Fourth, profits may lead search engines to "sell" the top spot on search results for various requests. They are already selling ads based on the search request you enter.

HELP IS ON THE WAY... Let's end with some good news. The Web is full of specialty search engines, and many of these are AMAZING. Locating people, email addresses, company information, medical information, and more can be quick and painless. I wrote about these in an earlier Surf Report (see link below).

In addition, directories like Yahoo have real live humans categorize the information. And although there is still no replacement for the human brain, programmers are trying. Two new search engines are taking a different approach to organizing information:

AskJeeves - let's you ask specific questions and gives you answers (some relevant, others way off base). It's a great approach, and I think in time it'll evolve into a very useful technology.

Google.com - this engine returns search results based on the popularity of the retrieved links.

I'll be writing more about these two sites next month. If you know of any others that might be of interest, send me an email (editor@askSam.com), and I'll check it out.

COOL LINKS

PC Magazine Overview of Meta-search engines:

<http://www.zdnet.com/pcmag/features/websearch98/meta.html>

Meta-search engines:

Highway 61 - <http://www.highway61.com>

Dogpile - <http://www.dogpile.com>

SavvySearch - <http://www.savvysearch.com>

Off-Line Internet Search Tools

Copernic99 - <http://www.copernic99.com>

Webferret - <http://www.ferretsoft.com>

Inforian Quest - <http://www.inforian.com>

Specialty Search Engines

askJeeves - <http://www.askjeeves.com>

Google - <http://www.google.com>

FREE STUFF - CONGRESS DATABASE

Feel like emailing a member of the US congress? Here's a searchable database of all congress members with names, addresses, phone numbers, committee assignments, and email addresses.

We've prepared a hypertext-linked, full-text searchable version which you can download:

<http://www.askSam.com/congress.htm>

SURFSAVER NEWS

Surfsaver wins PC Magazine's Editors Choice Award for the best Web Organizer. Click on the link below to read the complete review and see why Surfsaver beat the competition hands down. <http://www.zdnet.com/pcmag/features/utilities99/weborg02.html>

RELEASED: SurfSaver 1.5 and SurfSaver Network version. Our new network version lets multiple users save, search, and update

the information in the SurfSaver folders.

Current users can upgrade to the 1.5 single user version for free. Email tech@askSam.com for details.

Anyone is welcome to download the the current version of SurfSaver for a free 30-day trial: <http://www.surfsaver.com/download.htm>

ASKSAM - THE FREE-FORM DATABASE

Try a database that doesn't require you to structure your information... askSam is the free-form alternative to traditional databases. No programming, no complicated query languages - simply import your information and askSam will organize it. Whether it's email, research notes, or addresses, askSam is the fast, easy, and flexible way to organize your information

Download a free trial version from: <http://www.askSam.com/download.htm>

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MS Office

Even if it seems that there is plenty of room left on the floppy disk, there probably is not enough. Word and Excel often write a temporary file in the same location as the original file. That temporary file can quickly fill the available space on a 1.44MB floppy disk.

Ideally, and if Microsoft programmers were more thoughtful, you would get an easy-to-understand "Out of Disk Space" message, but no such luck! Instead, you get all sorts of strange actions and/or messages that give you no clue to the true problem.

Floppy disks also are generally less reliable and more prone to failure than hard drives. You're more likely to lose a document through mechanical failure of a floppy disk (or simply to lose it). Floppy disk drives are much slower than hard drives and Office programs run more slowly as a result.

The solution: Always copy a document supplied on floppy disk (after the obligatory anti-virus scan) to a temporary location on your hard drive. Work on the document from there and when you're finished, copy the revised file back to the floppy disk. Voilà.