

Amateur Computer Group of New Jersey NEWS

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Election Results



(Left to Right) John Raff (Director), Don McBride (Director, 1 year), Malthi Masurekar (Treasurer), Mike Redlich (President), Bob Hawes (Director), and Paul Syers (Secretary) were elected.

President's Note

Michael Redlich

Greetings and Happy New Year! As I start my second term as President of ACGNJ, I would like to take this opportunity to officially welcome everyone into 2008. It's amazing how 2007 has come and gone so quickly. All of us on the Board of Directors have been very busy this past year working on a number of initiatives. I'll mention a couple of them quickly. First, a comprehensive upgrade to our network has been designed by our Vice President, Mark Douches. Second, we have been working on establishing a partnership with Micro

Center. They opened a new store in Paterson, New Jersey, and we plan to conduct seminars at their Knowledge Center. Finally, there's TCF 2008.

Of course, TCF is an annual initiative for all of us. We consistently strive to improve the festival each year. As you may already know, TCF 2008 is scheduled for April 25-27, 2008. The Professional Conference will return for its third year on Friday, April 25. The normal weekend activities will, of course, be held on April 26-27. The TCF Steering Committee has been working on some exciting new features for this year's show. First, there will be a focus to schedule hands-on seminars. To that end, I have developed a hands-on 110-minute Java seminar that will replace the introductory and advanced 50-minute seminars that I have conducted since 2001. Second, we are working on attracting robotics enthusi-



<http://www.acgnj.org>

Founded 1975

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Tips for reviewers: Why does anyone need it? Why did you like it or hate it? Ease (or difficulty) of installation, learning and use. Would you pay for it?

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Address Changes should be directed to Martin Rosenblum (m.rosenblum@ieee.org) and/or to his attention at ACGNJ at the address below.

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Good News About Bad CDs

Robert Hawes (r.d.hawes@hotmail.com), ACGNJ

To coin a cliché: I've got some good news and some bad news. The bad news first: The sub-standard CD/DVD disk crisis is **real!** I've got proof. Anybody who thought it was safe to use CDs for long-term storage had better think again, because there definitely could be a time bomb ticking away under their data.

Now for the good news: There's something we can do about it. There's a small, **free** computer program that can help us shed light on what might be a **huge** problem. In my humble opinion, **everybody** should download their own copy of this program. Ever since I heard about it, I intended it to be this month's *pièce de résistance*; but it wound up being buried in the middle of a six thousand word article. That just wouldn't do. I believe it's so important that I've now scrapped **everything else** I planned to say this month, to concentrate on this topic only.

In the middle of my *previous* article (*Further Adventures in Time Travel*, ACGNJ News December 2007), I wrote an expose on the shoddy, sub-standard blank CD disks being sold today, and listed some sources for the few **good** manufacturers. There, I also mentioned that, of the 200-odd data CDs that I created in the last ten or so years, **one** which tested good seven years ago had now gone bad. After that article had been "put to bed", I found a second bad CD. For my own peace of mind, I had to find a way to test **all** of my home-burned CDs and DVDs; to get a handle on the size of the problem as it affected me personally. Plus, I wanted to be able to give my readers some hope as well. What I needed was a program that would read each and every sector on each disk I fed it, then report any errors it found; sort of like CHKDSK. (Naturally, I tried that. Unfortunately, CHKDSK can only understand FAT and NTFS file systems, **not** the CDFS or UDF file systems that CDs and DVDs use). Lacking a suitable third-party solution at the time, I wrote a quick-and-dirty batch file on my Windows 98 SE computer; which tested whether or not all the files on a CD/DVD disk could be successfully copied. Porting it to my XP computer required an extensive re-write, so I wound up with **two** batch files. Neither was anywhere near elegant, but each **worked**. Now I had something, albeit crude, for my own CDs. For our newsletter, I wasn't sure whether to print the two of them, or just the XP version. Ultimately,

except for test runs using my two known-bad CDs (and five other CDs that I'll explain about below), I didn't have to use either one.

That's because Bruce Arnold (fellow ACGNJ member and Chairman of our C/C++ User's Group) found two Internet downloads that look like they'll completely cover the problem:

Nero CD-DVD Speed 4.7.7.5 (<http://www.cdspd2000.com/>), and DiskInternals CD-DVD Recovery 1.0 (Evaluation version) (<http://www.diskinternals.com/cd-dvd-recovery/>).

I haven't tried DiskInternals CD-DVD Recovery 1.0 yet. It claims to restore lost or corrupted files on CDs and DVDs, which is actually **more** than I'm looking for right now. Also, as an evaluation version, it might have some kind of built-in time limit, so I won't install it until I actually need it. Each of my first two bad CDs has just a single inaccessible file. One is a fairly large executable file; the other is a huge ISO file. Neither of those file types has a good track record when it comes to being recovered. Fortunately for me, I located other copies of both files. So I don't need CD-DVD Recovery 1.0 yet; but my luck can't last forever. I'm sure I'll be using it someday.

On the other hand, Nero CD-DVD Speed 4.7.7.5 is **exactly** what I need right now (except, as you'll see below, it seems to be XP-only); and it's from a company that I already know. (I've been using their CD/DVD **burning** software for years). Apparently, the author(s) consider the program's other functions (which I haven't even looked at yet) to be more important; but it has a ScanDisc feature (yes, it ends with a "c"), and it works. As with just about everything, it has some idiosyncrasies; but it definitely does the job, and it's **free!!!** I advise anyone who needs to check the condition of their CD/DVD library (and that should be **all** of us) to download their own copy as soon as possible. We owe Bruce a big vote of thanks.

Installation (on an XP Computer)

The download is a ZIP file, so you have to extract its contents (one single file named CDSpeed.exe) to someplace. Any place will do, even your desktop. CDSpeed.exe is a stand-alone executable, so it doesn't need to be installed. Just double-click on it and it runs. By default, it opens on the

Continued

President's Note, *continued from page 1*

asts to participate in a robotics competition. We hope these new features will generate renewed enthusiasm for TCF.

One of the things that make TCF a success is the help of our dedicated volunteers. Their work is always appreciated. We are always in need of volunteers, and I encourage you to consider making a commitment to a minimum of four (4) hours of your time. For your efforts, you will receive free admission and a discounted ticket to the banquet.

So if you are considering serving as a speaker or volunteer, we would certainly appreciate your help! Please visit the TCF web site, <http://www.tcf-nj.org/>, for more information. The link

to the speaker registration form can found near the bottom of the page, but can be directly accessed at http://www.tcf-nj.org/spkr_reg.html. The volunteer registration form will be available soon, but please don't hesitate to let us know ahead of time by stopping in at one of ACGNJ's many meetings or *by contacting me directly: mike@redlich.net*.

With such a rich history, it is indeed an honor to continue my role as President of ACGNJ. I look forward to continue working with the dedicated folks on the ACGNJ Board of Directors, and to see the initiatives that we started in 2007 come to fruition in 2008. ☐

“Benchmark” tab. First, click on the “ScanDisc” tab instead. A box in the top middle identifies the currently accessed CD/DVD drive. If you have more than one drive, use the drop-arrow there to select the one you want to use. For starters, those two changes should be all you need to make. Just insert a CD, give it time to run in, then click the **S**tart button. On my computer, a good scan took about two minutes. The display window will show green dots for good sectors, yellow dots for damaged but still readable (at least for now) sectors, and red dots for bad sectors. There are also percentage read-outs on the side. Until you get used to it, it may be a bit hard to tell when the program is actually done. Often, (at least on my computer), the activity light on the CD/DVD drive just kept on blinking. Also, the scan window usually showed some red dots at the end, even for a **good** result (on my machine, about 9 times out of 10). I thought this behavior might have something to do with whether the session on the disk was closed or still open, but that doesn’t seem to be the case. When it hits a bad sector, it could slow **w**ay down. For our current purposes, there’s not much point in continuing if that happens. Since the program can’t repair the disk or recover the data, just remove the disk, mark it for a later recovery attempt, and go on to the next CD (or DVD).

Preliminary Results

Here’s the proof I mentioned earlier. As of this writing, I’ve used Nero CD-DVD Speed to process 60 of my approximately 200 data CDs, but **none** of my (who knows how many) data DVDs. My results: 50 tested good, 3 tested bad, and 7 tested “marginal” (having damaged sectors). That’s 83.3% good, 5% bad, and 11.7% ugly. (Oops, I mean marginal). Counting the two bad CDs I already knew about, my good/bad score became 80.7% good, 8% bad, and 11.3% marginal. Not as alarming as it could have been, but not all that great, either. We’ll have to see how that score holds up as I do more testing. (Ominously, those three new bad CDs all came from the same manufacturer. Looks like I did, in fact, buy some “complete garbage” disks).

As I said in my previous article: To insure against a “bad burn”, every CD I ever made was immediately given a complete binary comparison to its source from a **d**ifferent CD drive. (Any computer of mine that has a CD or DVD writer also has a second CD/DVD reader). My five (so far) bad CDs were absolutely, positively good when made. Their current damaged state definitely occurred over time, **a**fter they were created. I should also state that I take very good care of my CDs. None of these disks shows **a**ny scratches or smudges. The three newly discovered bad CDs each contain QIC files, which also have a dismal track record when it comes to being recovered. Luckily, they’re all backups of various old computers, made in the late nineties. Losing eight-year-old data from machines that were later completely imaged one last time before being upgraded out of existence isn’t that much of a loss. So I still don’t need to try CD-DVD Recovery 1.0.

Picking Some Nits

This is a **v**ery **g**ood program, and I now consider it to be **e**ssential; but nothing is perfect. Here are a few things I didn’t like:

On the CD-DVD Speed download page, it says; “Windows files can be used in Windows 95/98/ME/NT/2000/XP/Vista”, but I think that’s old information somebody forgot to update. When I tried to run version 4.7.7.5 on my Windows 98 SE machine, I got one of those errors that don’t give any option except to press OK. (The cryptic message it displayed may not ever have been truly understood by anyone except the coder who originally wrote it). All of Nero’s other new products now support only Windows 2000 (SP4 minimum), XP (SP1 minimum), or Vista. So maybe this one is that way, too. I took it to my old Pentium II-300 quadruple-OS computer. The program ran just fine on Windows 2000 SP4. It got identical error messages on Windows ME and 98. On Windows 95 SR2, it first complained about a missing DLL. Given that DLL, it got a similar but **n**ot identical error message. I guess that pretty much confirms my suspicion: it’s now NT-family-only. The page accessed by the CD-DVD Speed link above also lists four older versions, and seems to suggest that you can download them. Since Nero’s operating system support change happened fairly recently, I tried to download those old files, hoping one of them would work on 98 SE; but I **c**ouldn’t. All four “Download” links took me to the same 4.7.7.5 download page. However, there **i**s also a downloadable DOS version there. It’s from 1998, so it’s certainly old enough. Unfortunately, it **d**oesn’t have the ScanDisc function, so it’s not suitable for our current purposes.

At first, I was concerned about the “ID” field (on the right, under “Disc info”). It identifies the CD/DVD manufacturer, and sometimes it isn’t what you’d expect from the printed label. While I **l**iked having this new source of in-depth information, I was a bit leery; because I wasn’t sure exactly **w**here it was coming from. Considering the program’s small size and large feature list, there can’t have been much room left for an internal database. Could it be consulting a **r**emote database? Since I really, really, really hate programs that “call home” without first asking my permission (which I usually **r**efuse), I disconnected my network cable and re-booted my computer. CDSpeed.exe kept right on identifying manufacturers. Could it be reading this data from the disks themselves? If so, then why haven’t **a**ny of my other CD/DVD related programs **e**ver mentioned the availability of this interesting information? When I ran CDSpeed.exe under Windows 2000 on my Pentium II-300 computer (which doesn’t even **h**ave a network connection), it just displayed a single dash (-) in the ID field for every CD it tested. That seemed to quash the on-disk idea. Could Microsoft have added a local database when they released XP? Or, the first time it ran on my XP machine, could the program have downloaded its own complete copy of a remote database; and consulted **t**hat after I pulled my network plug? I was dazed and confused. Then, I noticed something. From force of habit, I’d used the top drives on each computer. On the XP machine, that was a writer. On the PII-300, it was a reader. I switched to both lower drives. Now, I got only dashes under XP, and source info under Windows 2000. So there **i**s manufacturer identification information on the disks themselves; but for some reason it’s only accessible by writers. That doesn’t explain why my other CD programs

Continued

(including Nero Burning ROM) never said anything about it before, but it does answer the question. So this paragraph was all a false alarm. My bad.

Across the bottom there's a feature that's a great idea given less-than-great execution. It's a text window that shows the name of each file on the disk, plus its position (in MB), length (in KB), and quality (in %)

The problem is: it only displays four lines, even in full screen view. Sure, there's a scroll bar on the right side; but I've got CDs with hundreds of files (and DVDs with thousands). It's just plain inadequate for the job it's trying to do. My time was limited, so I can't claim to have done a thoroughly exhaustive search; but I looked at all the setting options I could find, and didn't see any way to tell it to show only those files having *less* than 100 % quality. There *should* be, because that's all the information we really need to see, anyway. In addition (subtraction?), it has another deficiency; as I'll explain next.

Now for an Actual Bug

I don't make multi-session disks very often any more; but in the mid to late nineties (when I first started burning CDs), I tried a little bit of everything. So I wasn't too surprised when five of the CDs I processed so far had *two* data tracks each. (Tracks and sessions are *not* the same. Tracks contain data. Sessions contain tracks. For the sake of simplicity, I'm going to ignore the existence of sessions from now on, and just talk about tracks). If a CD or DVD is "closed", that's it! Nothing can be added. Even if only a couple of MB were actually written to the disk, the rest of its theoretical capacity is unusable. (That goes for CD-RW, DVD+RW and DVD-RW disks, too. If an RW disk is closed, it can't be modified except by erasing it and starting all over from scratch). However, if a CD (or DVD) is "open", one or more tracks can be added. Whenever more data is written to an open CD by adding a new track, the complete volume and directory information for the *entire CD* (not just the latest additions) will be recorded on that new track. When your computer's operating system displays the contents of such a disk, it does so by reading the *last* track on the CD.

At first, when I tested those five disks, I thought everything was OK. True, the program displayed a band of red dots at some point on each disk, but I assumed that that was the gap between the tracks (and I was right). Unlike for real bad sectors, it didn't even slow down. In fact, it might have actually speeded up a little bit. However, I didn't just take things on faith. I tested each CD using *both* my batch files. All of the files on all five CDs passed. As a double-check, I compared the final "Position" values (in minutes and seconds, rather than MB) from the lower right-hand side to "Capacity in use" values I obtained from my installation of Nero Burning ROM for the same disks (also in minutes and seconds. At least they're consistent). All five comparisons indicated that each disk's entire content had, in fact, been scanned. I was also able to use Nero Burning ROM's size information for the individual tracks to calculate the relative positions of the gaps on each CD. As I expected, my calculations matched the locations of the red bands.

However, something still bothered me, and I finally figured out what it was. On one of the disks, the "Label" field under "Disc info" was *wrong*. The name displayed there didn't match the name written on the CD. Now, I could have made a mistake when I created that CD, but I didn't think so. I ran a quick VOL command at a DOS Prompt (Command Prompt, to XP fans), and confirmed that the Volume Label matched the written name. I don't remember after all these years; but apparently, when I added files to that CD by creating its second track, I also gave it a different name. You can do that. So the Volume Label recorded on that CD's first track was different from the Volume Label on its second track; and the program was displaying the wrong one. Eureka! From that clue, I re-checked the five CDs; and (using that inconvenient scroll bar) found that the File window was displaying an incomplete list (just the files from the first track) for each one. The verdict: the program was reading its display information from the first track on each disk, *not* the last track like it's supposed to. That's a real bug, and I'll be reporting it.

A Brief Look at Drag-and-Drop

The CDFS file system is read-only, even when used on RW disks. Once written, tracks can't be changed. Many computers have software installed that allows their users to drag-and-drop files directly to RW disks, and seems to let them selectively delete files as well. That's actually an illusion. Those files aren't erased because they *can't* be erased. They're still there. What happens is: the emulation software adds a new track to the disk, containing an updated directory listing that *doesn't* include those filenames any more. Thus, their names disappear, and those files look like they're gone. In fact, they're actually still present on the disk; taking up space but inaccessible. Years ago, I did some experiments. Every drag-and-drop operation I did on one of those disks actually added *two* more tracks. In a very short time, the number of tracks on my experimental subject disk became enormous! I've never understood now such a complicated setup can be used for any length of time without collapsing. I'd certainly never trust it with *my* precious data.

For reasons that seem good and sufficient to me (but which I won't go into here), I avoid the UDF file system like the plague. So everything I said above applies only to CDFS disks. Maybe UDF RW disks have found a way to address my stability issues. I don't know, and I don't particularly care to find out. I spend what time I have available for computer study on things that I actually *like*. If you use UDF disks, maybe Nero CD-DVD Speed 4.7.7.5 will work for you; but you'll have to do the experimenting yourself. If you do, I'm sure our newsletter editor would be happy to publish your results. (She might even bump one of my articles to fit yours in).

Closing Remarks

When you run your own tests, I hope your good/bad scores come out better than mine. Since it's still December as I write this: *Happy New Year!*

See you next month.

Pinnacle PCTV HD Stick

Cass and Ruth Lewart (rlewart@monmouth.com, rlewart@comcast.net), ACGNJ

Minimum Requirements

- Windows XP SP 2, Windows Media Center Edition 2005, or Windows Vista
- Pentium 4 1.7 GHz CPU (notebook), 2.4 GHz (desktop)
- Graphics card with 64 MB memory
- 512 MB RAM (1 GB for HD viewing)
- Internet connection for Program Guide and program updates

Digital Television

The advent of Digital Television (DT), and in particular the High Definition TV (HDTV) brought joy to the consumer but also a share of new problems. The old magnetic tape based VCR worked well for time shifting for both cable and over the air antenna based reception. But when you connect an antenna to a VCR's RF coaxial input, its analog tuner will not recognize any digital channels. True, some digital cable boxes also have analog output which can be hooked to the analog VIDEO/AUDIO jacks on the VCR. However, with this setup you can no longer select channels with the VCR, it has to be done with the cable box. If you want to record different channels during your absence you are out of luck!

Miniaturization and low cost electronics made it possible to produce a digital (ATSC) and an analog (NTSC) television tuner the size of two USB memory sticks for under \$100. Having such a tuner which plugs into a USB port of a computer allows viewing and recording of digital and analog TV signals on your computer. You don't need an HDTV set to enjoy DT programs available in your area.

Pinnacle PCTV HD Stick

An example of such a device is the Pinnacle PCTV HD Stick, which we have run through its paces. The device is only 3" x 1.25" x .75", has a coaxial RF input at one end and a USB plug at the other end. The package comes with a short USB dongle to make the stick easier to insert without blocking other USB ports. The package also contains a small antenna and one CD with software for Windows XP and Vista. Also included is a Studio QuickStart Version 10 CD for XP. The list price of the PCTV HD Stick is \$99.99. A more elaborate version of the device, which we did not test, with a remote control and analog inputs, lists for \$129.99.

The PCTV HD Stick can be used with an antenna or with digital cable. It could also be used with analog cable, but then you don't get HD. As we do not have digital cable, we connected it to our old roof antenna. We installed the PCTV HD Stick on a late model HP laptop with Vista. After installing the Pinnacle TVCenter PRO (also called TVCenter 4) software, we plugged the stick via its dongle into the USB port on the laptop. We then connected the antenna cable to the coaxial input on the stick and started the Pinnacle TVCenter program. The first task was to scan for analog and digital channels. We live

on a hill with a direct view of New York City, so the program had no trouble finding 20 analog and 30 digital channels.

Unlike our Vizio HDTV which sorts the analog and digital channels (e.g. analog 13 is followed by digital 13-1, 13-2, etc.), the Pinnacle program orders channels according to their VHF/UHF frequency assignments.

Viewing and Recording

After the program scanned for available analog and digital channels we were able to view each channel on the laptop display.

We also used the scheduling feature to record programs to start and stop recording specific analog and digital channels at future times. It was actually easier to program the Pinnacle stick than doing the same on a VCR, and our scheduled recordings succeeded. Close the program, but leave the computer on and let it go to "sleep" in a few minutes if no activity is detected.

Recording to your hard drive takes approximately 6 GB per hour. Playback looks very good on the laptop or when the laptop is connected to a large screen HDTV. However, moving objects were often blurry. When you preview a channel, you briefly see signal strength and signal quality indicators – sometimes these are 100%, but not always.

We ran into a problem with playback of recordings from analog channels, which did not preserve the original aspect ratio. But the fault was not with Pinnacle, as the same recordings displayed just fine on another computer.

Other Options

You can benchmark your PC to get information about its multimedia performance. We were happy to learn that our system was fully capable of running TVCenter to watch live TV, could use the best quality settings, and was capable of decoding HD MPEG streams.

We tried recording directly to DVD instead of to the hard drive first, but did not succeed – recording streaming video was probably too demanding of resources to work with our 2x DVD discs. Not a problem, since it's easy enough to record to the hard drive, and then burn to DVD.

The Pinnacle program will download from the Internet a free TV program guide.

Final Impressions

Pinnacle PCTV HD Stick is an easy and inexpensive way to introduce DT and HDTV to your home. It also gives you capability to record both analog and digital TV programs, something you cannot do with your present VCR. For the first time, we were able to record HD. Recordings can be played back on your laptop or on your larger TV set. The scheduling of recordings was simplicity itself, so we no longer missed out on programs because one of us (who shall be nameless) made a mistake with the VCR scheduler. We're enjoying these features, and expect you will too. ☺

Pinnacle Studio Movie Box Ultimate

Cass Lewart (rlewart@monmouth.com), ACGNJ

What you get in this 8" x 8" x 8" box is both software and hardware to convert your collection of video clips, analog and digital video tapes, still pictures, audio and text into a DVD movie ready for a major Hollywood release. Well, for optimum results you also need a Hollywood director with lots of experience and a multi-million dollar budget. My goal in testing the Movie Box was somewhat less ambitious. All I wanted to do was to convert a half hour interview I once gave, from a VHS tape to a DVD.

As an engineer who likes to put his hands on something tangible I first looked at the hardware. The package contains a 6" x 3" by 1.5" plastic box with multiple jacks on two sides. One side marked OUTPUT has a USB, Video, SVideo and two Audio jacks (left and right). The other unmarked side - Input by default - has five unmarked jacks. Based on their appearance I concluded that these are composite video (yellow), left and right audio (red and white), SVideo and FireWire. When I later looked at the carton in which the Movie Box came, it showed jack designations which agreed with my assumptions. Continuing with hardware, the carton also contains a USB and a FireWire cable, which can be plugged into the plastic box and a computer. Other goodies in the carton were a green sheet for those special movie effects, where you can superimpose your picture on the picture of Mount Everest and last, but not least, a 300-page Studio/Studio Plus User Guide.

I installed the Pinnacle programs from a DVD entitled Studio Plus and from a CD entitled Studio Ultimate in this order (another correct assumption). These designations, though not clearly stated, seem to correspond to versions 10 and 11 of Pinnacle Studio. Both installations require activation keys inscribed on the installation disks. A Bonus CD is also included but I did not investigate it.

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Making a Movie

I inserted my VHS tape with the interview in the VCR, then connected the composite video and the left and right audio from the VCR to the corresponding RCA jacks on the INPUT side to the plastic box. Then I connected the USB cable from the OUTPUT side of the box to the computer.

When I launched the Pinnacle Studio three buttons appeared on the screen CAPTURE, EDIT and MAKE MOVIE. I clicked on CAPTURE, then on the START CAPTURE button. I then started the VCR. Video appeared in the Preview screen, audio played through the computer speakers. When the tape ended a half hour later I clicked on the STOP Capture button. The program now started breaking the captured



Video/Audio stream into about a dozen "Scenes" to make future navigation easier. Depending on the CPU speed, amount of RAM and other resources, this process can be done during capture or after the capture is completed. Though I selected an option to break the video stream into scenes during capture, the program decided to do it at its

leisure after the capture. This operation took about 10 minutes.

The next step after CAPTURE was to click on the EDIT button. I could see now on the screen pictures of the 12 scenes and the movie timeline underneath. I then dragged the scenes into the time line. At this point I could add titles, menus, etc. Once I was satisfied with the result and previewed it on the computer I inserted a blank DVD and pressed the third button MAKE MOVIE. I could hear the DVD drive clicking and after about 10 minutes it ejected the finished DVD.

The DVD had some problems. Though I assumed that each scene would be a separate navigable chapter, all scenes melted into a single chapter. Audio would play fine on the computer and on one of my DVD players but produced no sound on my older DVD player.

Back to the drawing board. My wife Ruth came to the rescue. She read the manual and then divided the half hour video into three chapters, added a menu screen and, after further reading, changed the audio mode to PCM. The resulting DVD was perfect. It worked with all my DVD players and could be navigated from the opening menu directly to any chapter. We later added music to the menu to play during selection.

In this review I am just scratching the surface of this product. The resulting movies can have special effects, transitions, menus and submenus, graphics and more. The resulting DVD can be recorded in standard or HD format. And it is all in a hardware and software package selling for under \$150.

Hardware/OS Minimum Requirements

- Windows XP or Vista
- 1.4 GHz processor speed
- 512 Mb RAM

For further information on the Movie Box and other Pinnacle products check www.pinnaclesys.com. You can also join a Yahoo discussion group dedicated to Pinnacle Studio software at Pinnacle_Studio@yahoogroups.com. 

From The DealsGuy

Bob (The Cheapskate) Click (bobclick@mindspring.com), Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

Last month I asked the editors for their experiences with dizziness and I heard from more than I thought I would. Almost all of their dizziness experiences were a bit different, as well as the cures, but a few people said they ended up not needing the cure because their problem eventually went away. Mine has improved some, but no thanks to any medication; it made things much worse. I read an article that I'll share with you and it's about an often-misdiagnosed type of dizziness. You may find it interesting. *Spinning-out-of-control*. While I'm at it, here are a few more articles I found interesting.

*New Take On Returns

I saw this interesting article about Lowe's new system to handle customer returns. Even if you can't find your receipt, they can help you, but this new system also discovered 8,665 fraudulent return attempts in a six-month period [articleID=201806189](#).

*The Rapid Development of Linux

[articleID=202404635](#) It had an accompanying article about seven features coming soon, but I couldn't find it on the Information Week Web site.

*From Spinning Platters to No Moving Parts

Are you tired of having a cup of coffee while your computer boots up? Read this article about the future development of computer hard drives that will speed things up. Just switch on the computer and start using it. [articleID=202404347](#).

*What a Fraud!

In November I included an announcement for Advanced WindowsCare Personal that was supposedly freeware. A reader informed me that after it scans your hard drive, it does not remove the errors it found unless you purchase the paid edition. Sorry about that one.

Below are more announcements that I received, but I have not tried them. Do your homework if you are interested in any of them.

*Are All Your Simple Projects Organized?

They Will Be Now! SimpleProjectToDo.com announces the availability of SimpleProjectToDo 1.26, the newest version of its tool for keeping track of a small project. The software is aimed at individuals and small project teams.

When you launch SimpleProjectToDo you see a tabbed window listing the tasks to do along with the summary and notes for the currently chosen task. Clicking on any of the tabs opens the window that displays its tasks. Clicking on the Now tab lets you see the tasks that you need to take action on now and clicking on the Later tab shows those that can be done soon. Finally, the Much Later tab tells you about the tasks that can be completed much later.

To add a new task, click on the Add Task button, set its priority (Now, Later, Much Later), category (Problem, Improvement, Other), and choose the status, which can be Open or Closed. If you have ideas or technical details relevant to the task, you can add them too. Important tasks can be high-

lighted to look more prominent. Now the task is displayed in its assigned tab. Type in the keyword and the program quickly returns the results. Narrow your search for the tasks by enabling only those filters you are interested in. If you need to view or show the tasks list to someone else, you can print the tasks on paper.

It offers multi-user support, making it easy to collaborate within a team. When teammates make changes to the tasks on another computer, those files can be merged together. Changed tasks are marked in red and the new tasks in blue.

SimpleProjectToDo 1.26 runs under Windows Vista, XP and 2000. It is available for \$49.95 (US) through the SimpleProjectToDo store. User group members get a 30% discount by using the coupon code "XW-7812-DEALS" when you download the product. The coupon is valid for single user licenses until January 31, 2008. Licensed customers get free upgrades and e-mail technical support for 12 months from the date of purchase. More information and its free trial copy, are available at <http://SimpleProjectToDo.com>. Direct download link: simpleprojecttodo.com/uploads/

*Do You Keep Track Of Your Own Finances?

Try This — It's Portable. Alzex announces the release of Personal Finances Portable 2.1. When you get a pay raise, you might start considering a major purchase, or perhaps saving money for your child's education, based on the fact that you will have some spare money. But the month with a pay increase comes to an end and you realize that, actually, you've ended up with no extra money because, somehow, you spent it all. In that case, Personal Finances may come to your rescue. It'll record all expenses and help you see where your money goes. It shows the total sum and percentage structure for categories, overall balance and balance on accounts.

Personal Finances has a user-friendly multilingual interface, scheduler, password protection and a very useful expense addition ability with one click. It can import/export data from/to .txt or .csv files. The application has a multiple database support and allows you to create an unlimited number of databases. Detailed information on all transactions is available for any time period. There is also an unlimited number of sections, subsections, categories, etc. Besides the basic ones, the application allows users to add more currencies upon inserting the exchange rate. Personal Finances allows you to sort by fields and group names, or by transaction. The program has the capability of logging regular transactions automatically.

If you are an active and mobile businessman, or just a globe-trotter, why keep a record of expenses in an ordinary notebook and copy those notes into your home PCs after returning home. The features making Personal Finances Portable unique in its category is that you can install and run the application from a USB flash drive; consequently, your "personal accountant" will be portable and always at hand.

Personal Finances Portable 2.1 runs under Windows 98/Me/2000/XP/2003/Vista and costs \$24.95 (USD) for a single-user license. User group members get a 20% discount on

Continued

10 Commandments for Online Shopping

Robert Spotswood ([robert\(at\)spotswood-computer.net](mailto:robert(at)spotswood-computer.net)), HAL-PC (www.hal-pc.org)

Navigating the Minefield

Just as flies are attracted to a fresh pile of manure, so are criminals attracted to large amounts of money. With online shopping sales at an estimated \$132 billion in 2006, the number of online crooks trying to steal from you has grown, too.

But just because there are crooks out there doesn't mean you have to give up online shopping. While there is no such thing as perfect security, and anyone who tells you differently is either lying or deluded, there are things you can do to stack the odds in your favor. The following 10 online shopping commandments will help you enjoy the benefits while minimizing the risks of online shopping.

Understand the Risks

If you get most of your information from the mass media, you will likely be sadly misinformed. While major data breaches make headlines, most identity theft sails under the media's radar. By definition, "news" means that it hardly ever happens. Despite the widespread belief that seems to be promoted by the mass media that identity theft occurs primary online, in truth, most occurs offline.

According to a 2004 study by Javelin Strategy & Research, 72% of the identity theft cases studied occurred offline, while only 12% started online, with the rest undetermined

(www.identitytheft911.org/articles/article.ext?sp=29). Further, the study found that those who used the Internet to keep tabs on their bank accounts and credit cards lost only \$551 on average, while those that stuck to more traditional paper statements averaged losses of \$4,543.

As you can see, using the Internet to shop and for banking isn't automatically dangerous, and offline usage isn't automatically safe. While you should exercise care, don't let unfounded fears stop you from enjoying all the benefits of online shopping (and banking).

Keep Your Computer Clean

Viruses, spyware, and trojans, oh my! If the bad guys have their software planted on the computer you use to go shopping (or banking), you lose. No matter how careful you are with your financial and credit card info on the Internet, if the bad guys can see your every move, every keystroke, then the bad guys win.

Start protecting yourself by having and regularly updating a virus scanner. Grisoft (free.grisoft.com/) offers both free AVG anti-virus software and an AVG anti-spyware program. Supplement the AVG spyware program with both Spybot (www.safer-networking.org/) and Ad-aware (www.lavasoftusa.com/).

Continued

DealsGuy, *continued*

the purchase of Personal Finances Portable by using the coupon code "pf43M5G," valid from now until March 2008. Licensed customers are entitled to priority technical support and a year of free upgrades. Your purchase is secured by a 30-day money-back guarantee. Additional information on Personal Finances Portable 2.1, as well as its evaluation copy with a 30-day trial period, is available at <http://www.financesoftware.com>. Download link: www.financesoftware.com/downloads/PersonalFinances_v2.1.exe (2,73 Mb).

*Another Portable Application For Road Warriors

Smart PC Solutions, Inc. announced Reach-a-Mail 3.0, a portable flash drive e-mail client which lets you use another computer to send and receive e-mails without leaving any traces behind. There is no need to install any additional software, or fear that someone may steal your login and password if you send an e-mail through the online mailing service at an Internet café. This utility supports 10 languages and includes a collection of artistic smiley faces. Reach-a-Mail is a small program that you download to your desktop computer and install onto almost any kind of portable memory device, such as a USB flash drive. The program comes with its own default configuration. All you need to get started is to set up your e-mail accounts and import your contact lists.

This program has a straightforward import feature that lets you import not only accounts from your desktop Outlook Express, but also e-mail messages and contacts so you don't have to tediously copy-and-paste the data or perform exten-

sive typing. You can also import account settings from another Reach-a-Mail installation. Reach-a-Mail allows you to export e-mail messages and contacts, as well as save attachments. Importing takes only a short time depending on the volume of information you are loading.

Once you have everything in the flash drive, you're free to travel around the world! Simply go to an Internet café or some other place where you can find a computer with access to the Internet, plug the flash drive into the USB port to run Reach-a-Mail and go about sending and receiving messages as you normally would. When you're finished, remove the drive and that's it. No traces are left on the computer and your e-mail correspondence is safe.

Reach-a-Mail 3.0 runs under Windows 95/98/ME/NT/2000/XP/2003/Vista. It is freeware and is available immediately from www.smartpctools.com. A commercial professional version of Reach-a-Mail with RSS reader functionality, no ad attachments in messages and better speed is also available for \$29.95 USD at <http://www.smartpctools.com/order.html>.

That's it for this month. I'll have more new product announcements on my Web site (most not offering a discount). 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. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com>. ☐

No one anti-spyware program catches everything, so you need to use multiple products to be really sure.

Don't use Internet Explorer, but use Firefox or Opera instead. Internet Explorer's bad track record plus being actively targeted make it an unsafe choice. While neither Firefox nor Opera are perfect, their track records are far better than Internet Explorer.

McAfee offers a neat, and free, plug-in for both Firefox and Internet Explorer called Siteadvisor (www.siteadvisor.com). McAfee has tested a huge number of websites for bad stuff. This plug-in shows you the results of those tests in a little bar at the bottom of the browser window. A green site was safe when last tested, while a red site has serious problems (stay away!), and a yellow site has some issues, but not bad enough to warrant a red rating. A few sites are gray, which means they haven't been tested. As Siteadvisor integrates with your browser, it will even add a color-coded rating symbol next to your search results if you use Google, Yahoo, or MSN. This helps you avoid problems, and malware, in the first place.

Stay up-to-date with your patches, and consider some sort of firewall software, even if it's an external device. Finally, never use a computer you don't trust for online shopping or banking, especially a public computer. You never know how well it's taken care of, and, being public, even the best care won't catch everything.

Shop Around

Unless what you're looking for is obscure, there is going to be more than one store selling it. This is especially true with name brand, popular items. Remember that with online shopping, visiting multiple stores is quick and easy. The range of prices can vary considerably on the exact same item.

When comparing prices, don't forget to compare shipping costs and methods, too. Sometimes a company that charges a little more may offer free shipping, versus a company that charges less but has high shipping rates.

Don't Trust That Lock

Just because your web browser shows the SSL symbol, such as a closed lock or key, that doesn't mean everything is safe. First, what type of encryption is being used? 128 bit is considered the minimum standard today, with some sites using 256 bit AES encryption, but that doesn't stop sites from using older, poorer encryption, such as 40 bit. If the website can't get at least 128 bit, don't trust them to do anything else correctly either.

SSL depends on certificates in order to work. Is the certificate issued to the company you think you're dealing with? For instance, Amazon.com's certificate says it was issued to Amazon.com Inc. This is what is expected. However, suppose the web site, buyme.cxm, certificate reads ABC company. Is something fishy going on? If you just looked at the lock, you might think everything is OK. Since very few people bother to check the certificate, a bad guy can cause your browser to display a legitimate lock, while you're at a different site than you think you are.. Anti-phishing tools are making this harder to do, but by no means impossible.

In one case, I wrote to a company I was going to order from because the certificate didn't match the company name it should. According to the reply I got back, the certificate was legitimate, and I was the first person to write them about it in the two years it had been up. The certificate was soon fixed. However, just because the certificate name does not match the website name doesn't automatically mean something is

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Back Issues Needed

The editor is attempting to build a CD containing all issues of ACGNJ News in pdf format, but our collection is incomplete. We're hoping some faithful reader has been hoarding them and will be willing to lend them to us just long enough to scan them. We promise to return them quickly. Thanks Joseph Gaffney, who loaned his collection for scanning. Below is a list of what we still need.

1985: June, July, August, September

1984: August

1976: January, February, March, April (pamphlet-size booklets)

1975: All issues except #1 (June). These are also pamphlet-size booklets.

If you can supply any of these missing issues (or scanned images or good clear copies), please contact the Editor by email (bdegroot@ptd.net). Those who supply missing issues will receive a free copy of the resulting CD as our thanks for your help. ☺

Advertising Rates

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2/3 page	4½ x 10	115	Closing date: 1st of preceding month. Ex: Apr 1 for May
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1/8 page	3¼ x 2½	30	Material should be sent to ACGNJ, PO Box 135, Scotch Plains NJ 07076
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10% discount for 3 or more consecutive insertions			

wrong. Certificates are expensive. Sometimes companies will use their parent companies certificates to save money. Some websites use their web host's certificate to save money or if they don't really need SSL and the web host sets this up automatically.

You can see the certificate's details for yourself in Firefox by left clicking on the lock in the address bar. This opens a window where you then click on details to see the certificate information. In the pictures below, the SSL lock is there, but the certificate does not match the site name (ignore any warning that comes up for this example). This is because the SSL certificate belongs to the web host, and not the website. This is an example of the website owner not needing SSL, so he went with the web host's certificate. The figures were collected using Firefox.



Figure 1: To view the certificate, click on the lock



Figure 2: Click on view to see the names. Notice this certificate uses 256 bit encryption.

Check Out the Company

Unlike brick and mortar stores, where the purchase is pretty much a simultaneous exchange of money and goods, online shops demand payment upfront. They then ship the items to you in good condition, you hope. Thankfully, you are not defenseless.

There are more than a few sites out on the web that allow users to post reviews of not just the items, but the stores. Six such sites that do this are: www.amazon.com, pricegrabber.com, bizrate.com, pricewatch.com, www.google.com/products, and

shopping.yahoo.com, where others who have bought from the company before you can post their experiences. However, you should never just look at the average rating to make your decision on whether or not to do business with this company. The ratings can be misleading.

The first thing to consider is how many ratings. The average of 1000 ratings is more telling of what to expect than the average of 2 ratings. But the number of ratings isn't the only thing to consider. How far back do the ratings go? A store that gets 1000 ratings but only goes back 2 months either does a huge amount of business, or is faking their own ratings, probably the latter.

Then you have to look at the ratings themselves. Scummy stores are not above posting positive ratings about themselves. One tell-tale sign of this is that many to most of the positive ratings all read the same, as if someone had copied and pasted. Detailed ratings have much more credibility. This is why it's important to scan the ratings, and sort from highest to low. If you see this sort of thing, stay away from the store! Any store that needs to post positive ratings about itself is a store you don't want to do business with.

The other thing to consider is the low ratings. Why were they given low ratings? Are the low ratings detailed, or do they look like they are copied and pasted? Rival stores (especially scummy rivals) are not above posting bad ratings about a good store to drive business away from the good store and hopefully to themselves.

Remember, just because the store is listed on one of the major shopping sites mentioned above doesn't mean it is a good store. Another way to check on a store is to use a major search engine like Google or Yahoo. If others have had bad experiences with the store, it's likely the search engines will find some mention of it.

Use Credit Cards, Not Debit Cards

It is important to understand that despite the Visa or MasterCard logo sported by almost all debit cards, they are not the same as credit cards, especially online. There are important protections you have by law with credit cards that don't apply to debit cards.

If you buy something that's damaged or defective and you use a credit card, you can withhold payment under the Fair Credit Billing Act, both online and offline. You must make a good-faith effort to solve the problem with the merchant first. However, if you can't resolve it, contact your credit card company and they will investigate the problem. If the card company sides with you, which will probably happen if you have a reasonable case, the charge won't be added to your bill. However, purchases made with debit cards are not covered under the Fair Credit Billing Act. Good luck getting your money back!

Some credit cards offer extended warranties and other protections for large purchases made on the card. This does vary by card, so check with all your credit card companies, if you have more than one, before buying to see which will give

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you the best deal. No debit card doing this could be found while researching this article.

Credit cards have a maximum of \$50 liability if you report the problem promptly. While your maximum direct liability with a debit card is \$500 by law, this only applies if you notify the bank more than 48 hours after you learn of the problem. Some banks promise to limit the liability to \$50, but there are numerous reports that not all banks honor that promise.

But the real danger with debit cards is they are a direct line to your checking account. A thief can drain it all, including any overdraft line of credit. While you may get most of the money back, in the meantime, you don't have access to your money. It could take the bank 10 days or more to refund your money. In the meantime, you can have checks bouncing all over town, along with the bounced check fees, and possible embarrassment.

Blocking is also a bigger problem with debit cards than credit cards. Some places, such as hotels, gas stations, and rent-a-car agencies, among others, will contact the company that issued your card to give an estimated total of the bill, their estimated total. If the transaction is approved, your available credit (credit card) or the balance in your bank account (debit card) is reduced by this amount. That's a "block." Some companies also call this placing a "hold" on those amounts. Hotels and rental car companies often add anticipated charges for "incidentals" like food, beverages, or gasoline to the blocked amount. If you are close to your checking account limit, which is far more common than with credit limits of credit cards, you can bounce checks even with enough money in the bank, while waiting for the block to be released.

Credit cards offer you much better protection than debit cards, especially online. Never use a debit card for online shopping.

Zero Liability Sounds Better Than It Is

Protecting your credit card accounts is more important than most people realize. Some people think just because your liability with credit cards is limited to a maximum of \$50, taking precautions isn't worth the effort. After all, that \$50 is only if the card itself is stolen rather than just the number, and most credit card companies tend to waive that for good customers, although you might have to call and ask. So you might believe the maximum loss with a stolen credit card is only \$50 as an extreme worst case scenario. Wrong!

Depending on how the card issuer handles things, they may close the current account and reopen a new, identical account for you, with a new card number (flipping the account). While to most people this is not a change in your credit status, it will affect your credit score. Your credit score is partially based on how long the various revolving accounts (like credit cards) have been open. Length of time accounts have been open makes up roughly 15% of your credit score. New accounts will actually cause your credit score to go down, especially if the previous account was open for years.

Your credit score touches more parts of your life than most people realize. Applying for a new car loan, home mortgage, or other loan? A flipped account means you could pay more or

even not get the loan. Insurance companies are starting to base rates partially on credit scores. A flipped account means your rates can go up.

Some employers check credit scores before hiring or promoting. Having a flipped account could make the difference between getting and not getting that position you want. Your credit score is also looked at when you connect utilities, try to rent an apartment, or even buy a cell phone. Lower scores mean higher prices or you have to buy a lesser model, if the sale happens at all.

As you can see, even if your direct liability is \$0, you still want to protect your account information. Having your number stolen can cost you indirectly in ways most people don't realize. Even if the new account isn't reported as new, you still have to wait for the new card to use it again. It is worth the effort to protect your card number.

Protecting Your Credit Card Online

So how do you protect your credit card number online? After all, you have to give them your card number to make the purchase, right? Well, for some cards, no. Let me explain.

Some credit card issuers have special programs where you can get "temporary" card numbers. By using these, your real number never goes out on the web, and hence is much harder to steal. This means you don't need to worry much about how secure the store keeps its servers. These numbers can also be canceled if the shop tries to play games with your number. For example, according to Thomas Hawk, PriceRitePhoto threatened to bill his credit card \$100 if he posted a negative review ([priceritephoto-abusive-bait-and-switch](#)). Using a "temporary" card number shuts these and other games down very quickly.

In addition, the "temporary" card numbers can be used for phone orders, or even mail orders, not just online orders. However, trying to use one at a brick and mortar store is not recommended. Cashiers really don't like it if you pull out a piece of paper with a credit card number written on it and try to pay with that.

Do not confuse the temporary card numbers with the "Verified by Visa" program. The Verified by Visa program does not work with all online stores, only those signed up for the program. It also doesn't help you with phone or mail in orders.

So how do you get a "temporary" card number? It depends on who issued your credit card. However, in every case, you must have a credit card with the bank, and must create an online account. Out of the 5 largest credit card issuers in the United States, neither Chase nor Capital One offer a temporary card numbers. Discover, Bank of America, and Citi all offer temporary numbers.

Discover Card (www.discovercard.com) offers Secure Online Account Numbers, which are temporary numbers linked back to your real number. The credit limit and expiration date are the same as your real card. The temporary number even includes the CVV code for websites that think it provides any real security. (The CVV is not random, but generated by a

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formula based on your credit card number. Do not assume the criminals don't know the formula.) According to the Discover Card website, "A secure account number can only be used at the retailer where it was first used — it can't be used anywhere else. If the secure account number is stolen, you can deactivate it without canceling your actual Discover Card Account." Of course, since it can only be used at one place, its value if stolen is far less than that of a regular number. These numbers can be used for recurring charges and automatic bill pay, provided the merchant does not change.

Unfortunately, the Secure Online Account Numbers page is rather hidden. To find it, you have to go the Discover Card home page, scroll down, then click on "Security Center". Scroll down on the new page and near the bottom you will find a "Create a Secure Number" button. Click on that to get started. A new window opens and the username and password are the same as your online account. This works with both Internet Explorer, Firefox, and even with Firefox on Linux. You should be aware that based on an admittedly small sample size, the first time you use one of these numbers, you will trigger a fraud alert with Discover. Be prepared for the phone call.

Bank of America (BoA) credit card holders can use BoA's Shopsafe program. With this program you have to sign in to Online Banking at www.bankofamerica.com or fiacardservices.com which is a redirect to <https://www.ibsnetaccess.com> (both are BoA sites). From there you can create the temporary card number. You can set the credit limit and expiration date for each number. It is only good for one merchant, but can be used for recurring charges at that merchant. It is known to work with Windows and Macs, and to work with Netscape 8.1, which is based on Firefox, so Firefox should work as well.

Citi refused to respond to questions about whether or not they even had a temporary number program. However, a HAL-PC member who has a Citi card did offer the following: "...I wanted to mention (since they didn't bother to respond to your question) that Citi does indeed have virtual credit card numbers...The card numbers have one-month expirations and can be closed by the card-holder once the transaction has been posted. They can be monitored and managed on-line through the Citi card holder's account." As these temporary numbers have one-month expirations, they are not suitable for recurring charges. It is also known that the Citi website does not work correctly with Firefox, and therefore Linux users are out of luck.

Close the Browser

Due to the nature of the web protocol (AKA HTTP protocol), it is necessary to temporarily store your credit card information in a cookie. The cookie is encrypted, and almost never written to disk. When the session (think conversation) ends,

the cookie is automatically purged and so is the key to decrypt it. So when you end your transaction, and leave the website, your credit card info is gone right? Not necessarily.

Welcome to the world of cross-selling. Cross-selling is where a legitimate merchant (or their shopping cart vendor, often without informing the merchant) cuts a deal with another company to add a link to the transaction complete page. But this is no ordinary link.

This link actually continues the session, so your credit card info is still available. The link may entice you with something like "Click here to claim your \$10 Cash Back Reward on your next purchase!". If you click the link, buried somewhere on the page, usually you will have to scroll down to see it, is a checked box saying something like "Sign me up".

As if that wasn't sneaky enough, there is some JavaScript on the page so if you then close the browser or navigate away from the page, the on-exit script kicks in and completes your "order" with the credit card info from the legitimate merchant's session. Any e-mail they send you (as required by law), if they send one at all, has a subject line designed to trip every spam filter out there so you will never see it.

Usually there is a 60-90 day free trial before the billing starts in order to hide the source of the billing. The billing is small to avoid scrutiny, and the description is often obfuscated. The billing is also recurring. One company that does this is Webloyalty.com and the charges currently appear as WLI*RESERVATIONREWARDS.

There are two good defenses against this sort of scam. First, when the page comes up that says your transaction is complete, close the browser. Don't navigate to somewhere else, just close the browser and reopen it. Second, use temporary card numbers if possible. Since both Discover and BoA temporary card numbers are only good for one merchant, the billings will be automatically rejected. You can cancel that particular number for good measure if necessary.

Use Common Sense

Finally, consider the price. If one store is way below all the others selling the exact same item, there's a reason, and it is usually not a good one! Someone once told me the following about investing, "Lost opportunities almost always come round again, but lost money never does." It applies equally on online dealing. If it seems too good to be true, pass it by.

Robert Spotswood, a HAL-PC member, is active in the Linux SIG and a freelance computer professional. He can be reached at [robert\(at\)spotswood-computer.net](mailto:robert(at)spotswood-computer.net).

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Need a sticky note? Put it on your computer!

Linda Gonse (editor(at)orcopug.org), Orange County IBM PC Users' Group (www.orcopug.org)

Sticky note programs for your pc, as you might imagine, are a utility that takes the place of paper Post-It notes that we all stick to our monitors! But, sticky note programs I've researched this year discouraged me from even trying them out. Sometimes they didn't have enough features, or if they did, they were expensive.

Then, someone recommended a program called Stickies, created by Tom Revell, at www.zhornsoftware.co.uk/. So, I looked at Stickies on the web page, liked what I saw, and downloaded the program.

My first discovery about the program is that it is small, 953Kb, and doesn't interfere with system files and doesn't write to the registry. In fact, Stickies stores all its information in a single text-based ini file. When was the last time you had a program on your computer as well-mannered as this one?

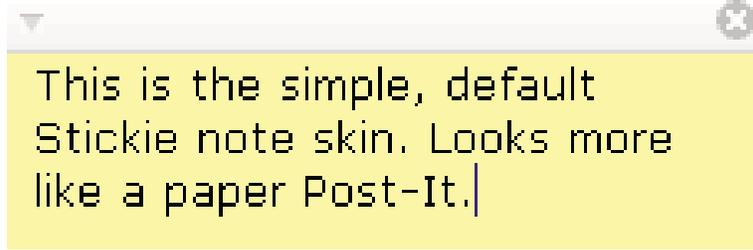
An icon in your system tray will allow you quick access to Stickies' features and options. From this dropdown list you can manage your Stickies notes, configure them, get help, and download new skins. When you do make a Sticky, it won't disappear unless you tell it to, and it stays where it is placed. You can edit, format, and print them. Make as many as you want, or as many as your screen space will permit. But, to save room and keep Stickies organized, they will snap to each other and to the sides of the screen where they can be neatly lined up. You can even "hide" them from view.

Besides viewing Stickies on your screen, you can attach them to a website, a document, or a folder, so they only appear when the objects they are attached to are on the screen.

Stickies are portable, too. You can transfer Stickies from one computer to another over your TCP/IP network connection, to your PDA and back again, or send to friends in email.

They can be set to "sleep" and appear on a specified date and time, as announcements or reminders. They can even play a sound alarm so they get your attention when they "awaken"!

What's fun is being able to customize the notes with various fonts, colors and buttons. You can even download customized skins from a big selection to change the outward appearance



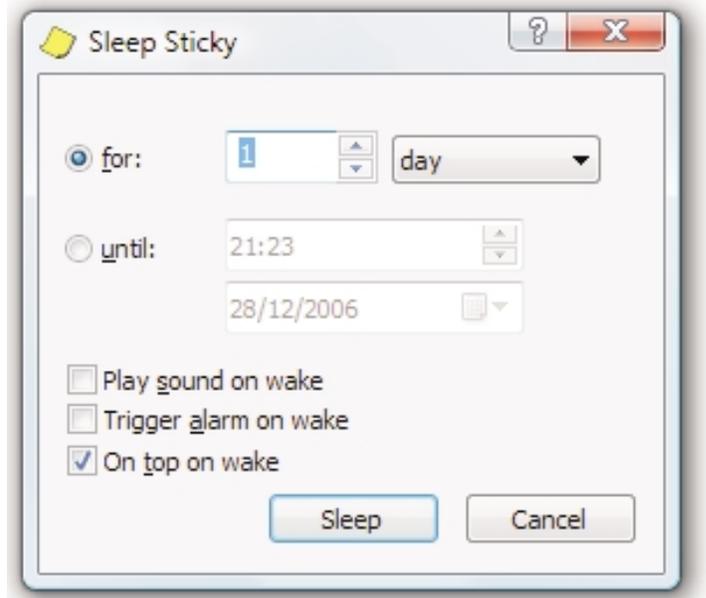
of the notes — plain, borderless, simple border, etc. The notes can be resized, just like the sticky notes in Acrobat.

Stickies are located in five categories within the application so you can see and manage them. You

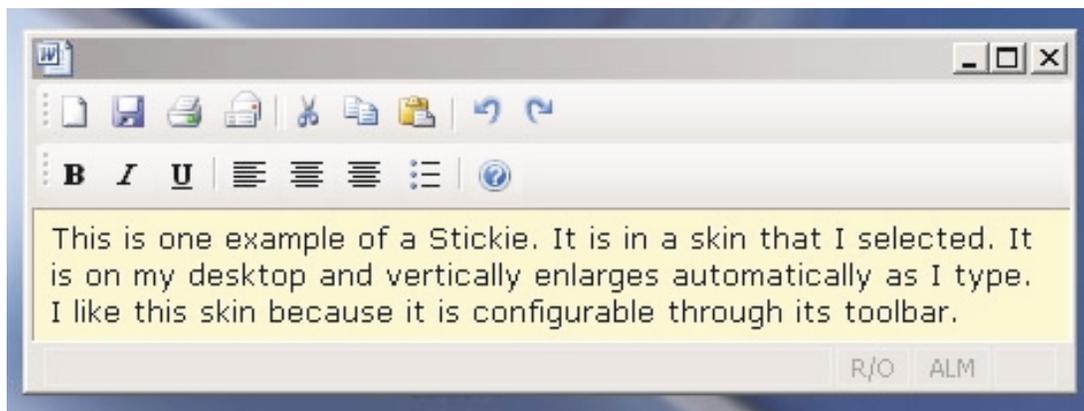
can search for information in Stickies, wake sleeping Stickies, restore closed Stickies and detach Stickies.

What else? Oh, yes! Another attractive feature of Stickies is...the program is free!

What are you waiting for? Try it out and see if you like this little program as much as I do!



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Online Consumer Help from the Federal Government

Ira Wilsker (Iwilsker(at)apcug.net), APCUG Director

President Bush has requested that all federal agencies make it easier for consumers (the general public) to locate and utilize information on federal websites. In some cases a variety of federal agencies have pooled their resources and information, and compiled the data in easy to use websites that represent several agencies in one place. Some of these integrated federal websites are consumer.gov, recalls.gov, and usa.gov.

Consumer.gov is probably the premier federal website for comprehensive consumer information. The tabs across the top of the page lead directly to such consumer topics as food, product safety, health, home & community, money, transportation, children, careers & education, and technology. The perimeter of the page contains icons and links which directly connect to specific government services.

One of the icons links to "OnGuardOnline" which says, "OnGuardOnline.gov provides practical tips from the federal government and the technology industry to help you be on guard against Internet fraud, secure your computer, and protect your personal information." There is another link for "Consumer Sentinel" which contains comprehensive information on fighting and preventing fraud and identity theft.

One link that I have personally used and strongly recommend leads to the "National Do Not Call Registry" (donotcall.gov) where you can enter your home and cell phone numbers, and prohibit most telemarketers from calling. After activation, if a telemarketer does call, there is a link to enter a complaint, which may lead to a substantial fine against the telemarketer.

You have probably seen a TV commercial hawking free credit reports, but the fine print and disclaimer advises that the credit report is only free with a paid subscription to a credit monitoring service. It just so happens that congress has required that all Americans are entitled to a genuinely free credit report once a year, without the strings or necessity of paying for a credit monitoring service. This free service is overseen by the Federal Trade Commission (ftc.gov), and linked to the consumer.gov website, or can be reached directly at www.annualcreditreport.com.

Many of us have had concerns about our children's safety while online, and consumer.gov has a linked resource for that purpose as well. The FTC has created an online child safety website "Kidz Privacy" which is a childish looking website that will appeal to kids of all ages. On this site are resources for kids, adults, the media, and teachers.

We are all faced with higher prices at the gas pump, and we generally do not like it. There are scammers out there promoting a variety of miracle products to dramatically improve our gas mileage, but there are also several legitimate tasks we can undertake to save gas. Consumer.gov obliges with an icon linked to a FTC website "Saving Money at the Pump". This is a cute, interactive website with several tips that we may find useful and money saving.

There is a pandemic of identity theft taking place which is costing our society tens of billions of dollars per year, with millions of victims of identity theft annually. Consumer.gov

has a link to the central repository of identity theft prevention and information services, which is administered by the FTC at www.ftc.gov/idtheft. On this site is a link to report identity theft, steps to follow if a victim, information on preventing theft, and other useful resources.

Many of us are inundated with prescreened credit card offers, and invitations to purchase insurance. For those who want to reduce or end this unsolicited unwanted mail, there is a link to "Prescreened Credit Offers". On this site is information on how these prescreened offers work, and how to stop them. For those who want to stop these prescreened offers, the FTC says, "Call toll-free 1-888-5-OPTOUT (1-888-567-8688) or visit www.optoutprescreen.com for details." That website and phone number are operated by the three major consumer credit reporting agencies, and they will ask for personal information, but promise that it will be treated confidentially.

Hardly a day goes by where we do not hear on the news about some consumer product or food item being recalled for a safety or health reason. Occasionally we also hear about massive automobile recalls to correct some safety deficiency. There is an icon and link on this site to a centralized database on recalls which is continuously updated. This connects to a site recalls.gov, which is a joint venture of several government agencies that are involved in consumer recalls. Categories of recalled products include consumer products, motor vehicles, boats, food, medicines, cosmetics, and environmental products. What I find especially useful and informative on this website is the list of "Recent Recalls". There are six small windows on the recent recalls page that list the latest recalls from the Consumer Product Safety Commission, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Coast Guard. Personally, I check this site regularly, and sometimes find that I have a recalled product in my house.

Some of the other useful links on the Consumer.gov website are to specialized websites such as ready.gov and usa.gov. Ready.gov is a website sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that has resources about home and personal safety in a variety of threatening scenarios. Also included on this DHS website is information for businesses continuity, and child safety during disasters. [USA.gov](http://usa.gov) is the central clearing house for all federal agencies. It uses a simple menu hierarchy that eases the location of desired information. Topics are comprehensive, and include such helpful items as government benefits and grants, money and taxes, consumer guides, and many other topics. This site can be a good starting point for someone looking for something to do on the internet,

Military personnel and families may find the link to "Military Sentinel" a very useful resource. According to the website, www.consumer.gov/military, "Military Sentinel is a project of the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Defense to identify and target consumer protection issues that affect members of the United States Armed Forces and their families." Included on this website is information on specific

Continued

Weird Windows Behavior

Sandy Berger (www.compukiss.com), compukiss.com ([Sandy\(at\)compukiss.com](mailto:Sandy(at)compukiss.com))

Have you ever been completely dismayed by your computer? Does it seem to do unusual things that you can't trace back to any of your actions? Well, you are not alone. This happens to all computer users. In the computer world, unusual things sometimes happen. Here is a list of some weird computer behavior and how to combat it.

Icons disappear

Right-click on any open area of the computer desktop, then chose Arrange Icons By. If your icons have accidentally become hidden there will be no checkmark in front of Show Desktop Icons. Just click that option and your icons will reappear.

Unusual windows appear

Windows has a lot of keyboard shortcuts that can be accidentally accessed. For instance, when I started this column, I wanted to hit the Shift key and the letter "h" for the word Have. However, my finger slipped and I hit the Ctrl key and the letter "h" instead. A window popped up asking what I wanted to Find and Replace, which is not at all what I intended. If this ever happens to you you can usually just close the pop up window, but occasionally you have to look a little further into what happened. For instance, when working in Microsoft Word, if you accidentally hit Ctrl+N, a new window will appear making it look like you just lost your entire document. If you look closely you will be able to figure out that all you have to do is close the new window and the document you were working on will reappear.

If you can't figure out what happened or you get caught in a loop, restarting your computer will usually bring you back to normal.

Lost toolbars

As noted before, an errant key press can cause a problem. This time the culprit is one of the F keys. Accidentally pressing the F11 key can make the toolbars disappear. This is often used as a feature when you want to show something in what they call "full screen mode". If this happens to you, just press F11 again to make the toolbars return.

The toolbar moves

Have you ever had the toolbar that usually appears on the bottom of the screen show up on the side or top of the screen? There is an easy way to get it back where it belongs. Just place your cursor right next to, but not on, the Start button. Then hold the mouse button down and drag the toolbar back where it belongs.

Dramatic slowdown

A dramatic slowdown can mean that your hard disk is filling up. The computer uses the hard disk as sort of a scratch pad when it computes, so when your hard drive starts to fill up, it can slow the computer down significantly. Click on My Computer and highlight the drive called Local Disk (C:). Look at the Details area to see how much space is free. You should have at least 10% of your hard drive free. If you don't, a hard drive cleanup is in order. Delete unnecessary programs and backup old files and photos to an external drive or CD so you can delete them from the hard disk. You can use the Disk Cleanup utility to empty the recycle bin and delete unnecessary temporary files. To access it, click on Start, choose All Programs, then click on System Tools where you will find Disk Cleanup listed. It will walk you through the cleanup. Once your hard disk has more free space, your computer will perk up considerably. You might also consider defragmenting your computer to speed it up. The Disk Defragmenter utility is in the System Tools area. Remember there are other things like viruses and spyware that can also slow down your computer.

No sound

Sometimes the sound gets muted by mistake. Look at the taskbar at bottom of the screen. In the right hand side you will see a small icon that looks like a speaker. If it has a red X on it, the sound has been muted. Click on the icon, then click to remove the checkmark in front of the word Mute. If you don't see this icon, go to the Control Panel and choose Sounds or Sounds and Audio Devices where you will find a place to uncheck the Mute option. Many laptops and some desktops also have a volume button on the keyboard which you can use to mute and unmute the speaker.

Mouse shudders

If your mouse is hard to control or acting erratic, it may need a cleaning. An optical mouse with a flat bottom just needs a cleaning with a damp cloth. If your mouse has a roller ball on the bottom, remove the ball and clean the rollers inside the mouse with a Q-tip soaked with isopropyl alcohol.

Hope this gets you through some of those weird Windows moments in your life.

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Online Consumer Help, *continued*

identity theft problems faced by military families, financial scams against military personnel, and other military specific information.

Other links on Consumer.gov are to the "Consumer Action Handbook", www.consumeraction.gov, and information that the disabled may find helpful at www.disabilityinfo.gov.

The website at Consumer.gov is a goldmine of consumer information that is free for the taking. I suggest that everyone

should periodically visit this website and review any informational resources that may be of personal interest and benefit.

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Free Help for Creating Greeting Cards

Sandy Berger ([sandy\(at\)compukiss.com](mailto:sandy(at)compukiss.com)), *CompuKISS*(www.compukiss.com)

A recent trip to the greeting card store left me in sticker shock. While the text with the price of the card was smaller (or is it just my aging eyes?), the price tag was definitely larger than last time I looked. Who wants to pay \$3 to \$5 for a greeting card? Instead, put your ink jet printer to work with free clip art and pre-designed cards.

You don't even have to be terrible crafty. Just check out these websites where you can get free templates of holiday greeting cards and holiday clip art. They also have a great selection of greeting cards that can be used with your own photos. So that personalized master piece won't cost you an arm and a leg.

The Canon Creative Park is one of my favorite websites for free templates to help you create greeting cards. They have cards for everything including Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, New Year's, Easter and Birthday, to name just a few. You don't have to own a Canon printer to use these greeting cards. You can use any type of color printer. The selection is excellent, and best of all, there are detailed instructions for printing and folding. If you are adventuresome, you can even customize your envelopes. While you are at this site, check out the 3D paper craft section, the scrapbooking area, and the wonderful calendar templates. All are good-looking and free.

Not to be undone by Canon, HP (hp.com / click on Festive Greetings) also has an Activity Center that allows you to create greeting cards and other crafty projects. They have some beautiful eclectic greeting cards as well as beautifully illustrated fantasy-inspired cards. Like the Canon site, the HP website gives full instructions. They also feature some un-

usual printer projects like party decorations, stickers, and puzzles.

If you use any Microsoft Office Products, especially Microsoft Word, you will find a wealth of free products in Microsoft's Celebrate Holidays with Office Clip Art and Media area. Just about every holiday is covered, but there are also many non-holiday-related themes like flags, food, technology, and business. You will find everything from clip art to borders to music. If you click on some of their outside providers like Animation Factory or iStockphoto, there is a charge for the images, but all of the clip art and templates on the Microsoft website are free. They can, however, only be used if you have the appropriate Microsoft program installed on your computer.

Presenting your friends and relatives with a homemade, customized greeting card really shows you care. On top of that creating your own greeting cards can save you money — and you might have some fun as well.

If you don't want to make your own cards, check out CardsThatGive.org where you can make your greeting card money to do more than just supporting the greeting card company. It's a very well compiled list of Charities that provide greeting cards, complete with pictures of their cards. You get some great cards, and your favorite charities get support.

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How To Find Podcasts

Mike Lyons ([president\(at\)orcopug.org](mailto:president(at)orcopug.org)), Orange County IBM PC Users' Group (www.orcopug.org)

Download the free 7.3 iTunes program from www.apple.com/itunes/ and install. Now, all you need is an mp3 player, and you're all set to download podcasts and listen to them on the go.

When you first open iTunes, click on "Podcast Directory" at the bottom next to "Report a Concern." That takes you to the Apple Store. In the upper left corner is a magnifying glass and a search space. Type in "computer." The Apple logo in the top center area changes to a candy cane-striped bar as it searches. The bar will turn solid and display the results: Name, Time, Artist, Album, Price, Popularity and Genre.

Next to the name is a grayed-out circle with an arrow in it. This leads to more information about the podcast, including description, user reviews, a list of the last 20 podcasts and a list of 5 "Listeners also subscribed to." Headings are sorted by clicking on them, so if you click on Price, the free ones appear at the top. Some of the stuff is pretty explicit, that's why they call it the "wild, wild web." Podcasts are labeled "clean," "explicit," or blank which means the rating hasn't been determined.

I look to see how often and consistently the podcast occurs (some really good ones haven't been updated since 2006), check customer comments, and the "Also subscribed to" list.

If you want to subscribe, click the "subscribe" button. To go back where you were, under the Apple logo on the left is a small button with a left pointing twirly. Click on it to get back.

After downloading podcasts, connect your mp3 player to a USB cable and right click on the file. Select "Send to" and click on the drive letter of the mp3 player to transfer podcasts to it from your computer.

Besides the iTunes Podcast Directory, you can find podcasts of Computer America shows [here](#) and National Public Radio [here](#). There are even locally-produced user group podcasts. The Los Angeles Computer Society has podcasts of their main meetings at www.lacspc.org/podcast/Archive.html

You don't have to have an mp3 player to listen to podcasts. If you left-click on the mp3 title, it plays right in your browser. Or, if you right-click on the title, select "Save Link As," and you can save it to a directory on your computer. Besides playing podcasts in mp3 players and browsers, mp3 files on your hard drive can be burned to a CD. Then, you can play them in your car. Just burn them as a music CD instead of a data CD.

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SIG News

C/C++ Programming

Bruce Arnold (barnold@ieee.org)

<http://home.earthlink.net/~barnold2002/Acgnj/index.html>

This group is devoted to programming languages in general and C, C++, and C++ for Windows programming in particular. Each month a small but hopefully useful program (complete with source code) is presented for discussion.

December: Colored Night Stars — a simple screen saver program. It uses the latest C++ compiler in Microsoft's Visual Studio 2005. There are a number of ways to refer to this compiler and code. Here's what Wikipedia says:

"The Common Language Infrastructure (CLI) is an open specification developed by Microsoft that describes the executable code and runtime environment that form the core of the Microsoft .NET Framework. The specification defines an environment that allows multiple high-level languages to be used on different computer platforms without being rewritten for specific architectures."

This screen saver has been made much simpler by the advanced graphics of the new compiler. The program may also be compiled using the free C++ Express compiler.

Here are the details of this screen saver. The object of the program is to display random colored stars on a black background. (Note: this code does not handle multiple screens.) Algorithm: Create a regular CLI Windows Forms program. Redraw random stars every 4 ... 15 seconds. Remove border and hide cursor. Handle command line arguments of /c /p /s. Handle keyboard hit to close.

Our [download site](#) has code and programs from most of our meetings.

Our next meeting January 15. ☐

Java

Mike Redlich (mike@redlich.net)

<http://www.javasig.org>

The Java Users Group covers beginner, intermediate, and advanced level Java programming. Primary focus is on developing useful/practical applets and applications, but can include topics such as Java I/O, JavaBeans, Reflection, object-oriented programming and software design issues. Meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month starting promptly at 7:30 PM.

January 8: Exploring Ajax Platforms for Eclipse: RAP & ATF — reprise of Barry Burd's presentation from October 2007. "This presentation differs from the one I gave in October because, this time, I'm prepared." ☐

LUNICS (Linux/Unix)

Andreas Meyer (lunics@acgnj.org)

<http://www.acgnj.org/groups/lunics.html>

LUNICS is a group for those who share an interest in Unix and similar operating systems. While we do quite a bit with Linux, we've also been known to discuss Solaris and BSD too. We generally meet on the first Monday of the month at 8 PM at the Scotch Plains Rescue Squad. See the web page for directions and more information. **Next meeting February 4.** ☐

Web Dev

This SIG is intended to be an open forum for all Website Development techniques and technologies, to encourage the study and development of web sites of all kinds. All languages will be considered and examined. Anyone interested please contact the Chairperson in charge. The current project is a CMS for the club. Anyone interested in starting a new project, come to the meeting and announce / explain. Provide as much detail as possible. One can also send projects to the ACGNJ Newsletter editor for inclusion in the next volume.

WebDev should be an all-encompassing development and examination forum for all issues, applications, OS, languages and systems one can use to build Websites. We currently have two Web dev languages .NET and Java as SIGs but the other languages and OS need to be investigated, examined and tested; Windows, Linux, UNIX, DEC, Vax, HP etc. Intel-PC, Motorola-MAC etc. **Our next meeting January 9.** ☐

Main Meeting

<http://www.acgnj.org/groups/mainmeet.html>

Mike Redlich (mike@redlich.net)

January 4: Digital Photography & Photoshop Elements
Bruce Arnold

February 1: Computer Crimes, Phil Frigm ☐

Window Pains

John Raff (jraff@comcast.net)

<http://www.acgnj.org/groups/winpains.html>

Our intent is to provide the members with Windows oriented application discussions both Microsoft and Linux style. The presentation will be directed toward the more heavy technological level of attendee, although newbies are welcomed.

January 18: How to Remotely Access Other Computer Workstations (Software, Hardware, Config), David Eisen

February 15: Overview of Windows Vista (part 2), Bruce Arnold ☐

Investment Software

Jim Cooper (jim@thecoopers.org)

http://www.acgnj.org/groups/sig_investment.html

The Investment SIG continues with presentations on how to use analysis programs TC2000 and TCNet. Large charts are presented on our pull down screen and illustrate the application of computer scans and formulas to find stocks for profitable investments. Technical analysis determines buy points, sell points and projected moves. Technical analysis can also be used on fundamentals such as earnings, sales growth, etc.

We're no longer focusing on just Telechart -- if you are using (or interested in) Tradestation, eSignal, VectorVest -- or just in learning how to select and use charting and technical analysis, come join us !!

Our next meeting: January 10. ☐

ru XPerienced?

Lee Reynolds (leetutor(at)earthlink.net), Boca Raton Computer Society (www.brcs.org)

Yes, the title of the column is a play on the old song by Jimi Hendrix. But in this case, what is being asked is this: do you know everything you need or want to know about Windows XP? If not, then join me in learning all about it together.

Ownership and Restrictions: If you have ever had a corrupted user profile and had to create a new account, when you tried to access the folders or files used by the old account in order to transfer them to the new one, you might have encountered a problem: Windows won't let you. Or, you might have had to reinstall XP over itself and establish new accounts. Even if all names, passwords, and settings are identical to the previous ones, you will not be able to access the old ones because each account is given a new SID (Security ID). Windows compares SIDs and not account names. If you take ownership of the old folders or files, as explained in the following article from Microsoft's Knowledge Base, you should be able to access them: <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/308421>

To Take Ownership of a File or Folder in Windows XP: You must be logged on as an Administrator to take ownership. If you're running Windows XP Home Edition, you must first start in Safe Mode and log in as an Administrator. Otherwise, you won't be able to access the Security tab of a file or folder's Property page. Also Simple File Sharing must be disabled.

In order to take ownership of a folder, start My Computer or Windows Explorer, right click the folder, and choose Properties from the Context Menu that scrolls out. Click the Security tab of the Property page that opens, and click OK on

any Security message that appears. Click the Advanced button, then click the Owner tab. In the Name list, click whatever is appropriate to the case: your user name, Administrator if you are logged in as Administrator, or the Administrators group. If you want to take ownership of the folder, click to put a check mark next to Replace owner on subcontainers and objects. Click OK. A message appears: "You do not have permission to read the contents of directory <folder name>. Do you want to replace the directory permissions with permissions granting you Full Control? All permissions will be replaced if you press Yes." Click Yes. Then click OK and reapply any permissions or security settings you want for the folder and its contents.

The method for taking ownership of a file is similar to the case for a folder. You must be logged on as an Administrator. Right click the file you want to take ownership of, and click Properties from the Context Menu that scrolls out. Click the Security tab, click OK on any Security message that appears, click the Advanced button, and then click the Owner tab. In the Name list click the appropriate item (as above, for folders.) Now you can reapply any permissions and security settings to the file.

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SIG News, continued

Layman's Forum

Matt Skoda (som359@aol.com)

<http://www.acgnj.org/groups/laymans.html>

We meet on the second Monday of the month (no meetings in July and August) to discuss issues of interest to novice users or those who are planning to get started in computing. Watch our Web page for updates and announcements. ☐

New SIG -- Mobile Devices

David Eisen (ultradave@gmail.com)

January 16: RemotelyAnywhere, Logmein, GoToMyPC, RealVNC with a power point presentation. ☐

Genealogy

Frank Warren (kb4cyc@webwarren.com)

<http://www.webwarren.com/kb4cyc/gensig.shtml>

Genealogy SIG is for genealogists interested in computers and computer users interested in genealogy, and is a forum to assist members in furtherance of both. We meet at 8 PM on the fourth Thursday each month. We do not meet in November or December. In addition to our Web page, we also have an electronic mailing list. Messages to the list should be addressed to gensig@webwarren.com. To subscribe, include the line "subscribe gensig" in the body of the message.

Due to work schedule conflicts, the SIG Leader cannot make the meetings. If anyone else would like to pick up the baton, carry the banner, help the SIG along, please let us know. ☐

DotNet

Manuel J Goyenechea

<http://www.acgnjdotnetsig.org/about.html>

<http://www.acgnjdotnetsig.org/index.html>

Firefox Activity

Firefox@acgnj.org

This SIG is intended to be an open forum for all FireFox and Mozilla techniques and technologies, to encourage the study and development of web sites of all kinds. All the browsers will be considered and examined. All are encouraged to "think out of the box" about new web site design. All members and guests are invited to check out the design concepts and voice their opinion. **Meeting third Monday of the month at 7 PM. Next meeting January 21.** ☐

NJ Gamers

Gregg McCarthy (greggmc@optonline.net)

<http://www.NJGamers.com>

www.lanparty.com

The next Friday Night Frag will be January 11, 6 p.m. to Saturday 12 noon — 18 hours for 5 bucks!

BYOC - Bring your own computer

BYOF - Bring your own food.

and if you don't like sitting on metal chairs... BYO chair! ☐

Guru Corner

If you need help with any of the technologies listed below, you can call on the person listed. Please be considerate and call before 10 PM.

Software

HTML	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
	Jo-Anne Head	908-769-7385
ColdFusion	Jo-Anne Head	908-769-7385
CSS	Frank Warren	908-756-1681
	Jo-Anne Head	908-769-7385
Java	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
C++	Bruce Arnold	908-735-7898
	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
ASP	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
Perl	John Raff	973-560-9070
	Frank Warren	908-756-1681
XML	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
Genealogy	Frank Warren	908-756-1681
Home Automation	Frank Warren	908-756-1681
Operating Systems		
Windows 3.1	Ted Martin	732-636-1942

Discount Computer Magazine Price List

As described by the DealsGuy

	1 yr	2 yr	3 yr
Computer Games	\$10.95	20.95	29.95
Computer Gaming World	14.95	28.95	41.95
Computer Shopper1	16.97	32.95	47.95
Dr. Dobbs Journal	15.95	30.95	
Mac Addict	10.97		
Mac Home Journal	15.97	29.97	
Mac World	12.95		
Maximum PC	9.95	18.95	27.95
Microsoft System Journal	21.95	39.95	
PC Gamer	12.95		
PC Magazine (22/44/66 Issues)	25.97	48.95	68.95
PC World	16.95		
Wired	6.00	12.00	17.00

These prices are for new subscriptions and renewals. All orders must be accompanied by a check, cash or Money Order. Make payable to Herb Goodman, and mail to:

Herb Goodman, 8295 Sunlake Drive, Boca Raton, FL 33496

Telephone: 561-488-4465, e-mail: hgoodman@prodigy.net

Please allow 10 to 12 weeks for your magazines to start. For renewals you must supply an address label from your present subscription to insure the correct start of your renewal. As an extra service I will mail a renewal notice about 4 months prior to their expiration date. I carry more than 300 titles at excellent prices — email for prices. ☐

ACGNJ MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Sign up online at <http://www.acgnj.org/membershipApplication.html> and pay dues with PayPal.

	US/CANADA	FAMILY OF MEMBER (No Newsletter)	Dues	FOREIGN	STUDENT	SENIOR CITIZEN (Over 65)
1 Year	\$25	\$10		\$55	\$20	\$20
2 Years	\$40					
3 Years	\$55					\$45

Mail this application and your check to:
AMATEUR COMPUTER GROUP OF NEW JERSEY, INC., P.O. BOX 135, SCOTCH PLAINS, NJ 07076

New Member Renewal Address Change

First Name _____ Last Name _____ Phone _____

Mailing Address _____ E-Mail _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ URL _____

What topics would you like to see covered at club meetings? _____

Other Local Computer Groups		
Princeton Macintosh User Group: 7:15 pm 2nd Tuesday, Jadwin Hall, A-10, Washington Rd, Princeton, (609) 252-1163, www.pmug-nj.org	Linux Users Group in Princeton: 7 pm, 2nd Wednesday, Lawrence Branch Mercer Library, Rt#1 & Darrah Lane, Lawrence NJ http://www.lugip.org	New York PC: 3rd Thurs, 7 pm, PS 41, 116 W 11th St. For info call hotline, (212) 533-NYPC, http://www.nypc.org
Computer Education Society of Philadelphia: Meetings & Workshops at Jem Electronics, 6622 Castor Ave, Philadelphia PA. www.cesop.org/	Brookdale Computer Users Group: 7 pm, 3rd Friday, Brookdale Community College, Bldg MAN Rm 103, Lincroft NJ. (732)-739-9633. www.bcug.com	NJ Macintosh User Group: 8 pm, 3rd Tuesday, Allwood Branch Library, Lyall Rd, Clifton NJ. (201) 893-5274 http://www.njmug.org .
PC User Group of So. Jersey: 2nd Mon., 7 pm, Trinity Presb. Church, 499 Rt 70 E, Cherry Hill, NJ. L. Horn, (856) 983-5360 http://www.pcugsj.org	Hunterdon Computer Club: 8:30 am, 3rd Sat, Hunterdon Medical Center, Rt 31, Flemington NJ. www.hunterdoncomputerclub.org , (908) 995-4042.	NY Amateur Computer Group: 2nd Thurs, 7 pm, Rm 806 Silver Bldg, NYU, 32 Waverly Pl, NYC. http://www.nyacc.org
Morris Micro Computer Club: 7 pm 2nd Thurs., Morris County Library, Hanover Ave, Morristown NJ, (973) 267-0871. http://www.morrismicro.com	Central Jersey Computer Club: 8 pm, 4th Friday, Rm 74, Armstrong Hall, College of NJ. Rich Williams, (609) 466-0909.	NJ PC User Group: 2nd Thurs, Monroe Rm at Wyckoff Public Library, 7 pm. Maureen Shannon, (201) 853-7432, www.njpcug.org
Philadelphia Area Computer Society: 3rd Sat, 12 noon Main Meeting, groups 8 am-3 pm. Upper Moreland Middle School, Hatboro PA. (215) 764-6338. www.pacsnet.org	NJ Computer Club: 6:15 pm, 2nd Wednesday except Jul & Aug, North Branch Reformed Church, 203 Rt 28, Bridgewater NJ. http://www.njcc.org	Princeton PC Users Group: 2nd Monday, Lawrenceville Library, Alt Rt 1 & Darrah Lane, Lawrenceville, Paul Kurivchack (908) 218-0778, http://www.ppcug-nj.org

Classified

FREE TO MEMBERS. Use our classified ads to sell off your surplus computer stuff. Send copy to Classified, ACGNJ NEWS, P.O. Box 135, Scotch Plains NJ 07076 or e-mail to the editor, bdegroot@ptd.net. Classified ads are free to members, one per issue. Non-members pay \$10. Send check payable to ACGNJ Inc. with copy. Reasonable length, please.



<http://www.apcug.net>

Radio and TV Programs

Computer Radio Show, WBAI 99.5 FM, NY, Wed. 8-9 p.m.

Software Review, The Learning Channel, Saturday 10-10:30 p.m.

On Computers, WCTC 1450 AM, New Brunswick, Sunday 1-4 p.m. To ask questions call (800) 677-0874.

PC Talk, Sunday from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., 1210 AM Philadelphia. 1800-876-WPEN, Webcast at <http://www.pctalkweb.net>.

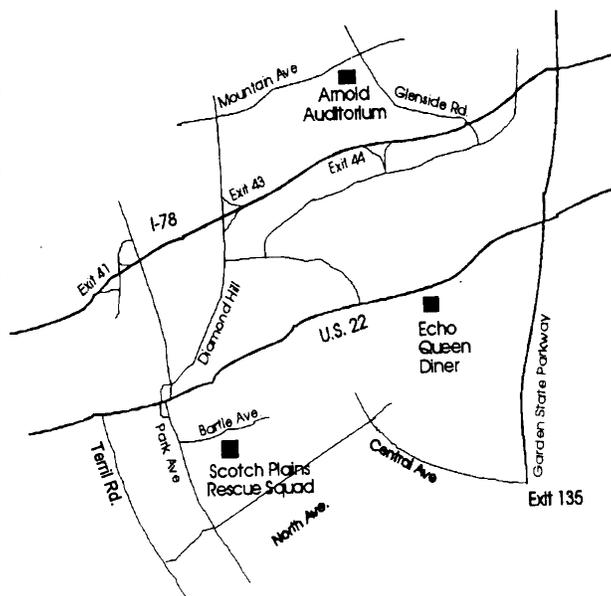
MarketPro Shows

<http://www.marketpro.com/>

November 10 & 11: NJ Convention Center (Raritan Center), Edison

November 24 & 25: Meadowlands Expo Center, Secaucus

December 15 & 16: Meadowlands Expo Center, Secaucus



Directions to Meetings at Scotch Plains Rescue Squad, 1916 Bartle Ave., Scotch Plains NJ

From New York City or Northern New Jersey

Take Route 1&9 or the Garden State Parkway to US 22 Westbound.

From Southern New Jersey

Take Parkway north to Exit 135 (Clark). Stay on left of ramp, follow circle under Parkway. Bear right to Central Avenue; follow to Westfield and under RR overpass. Left at light to North Avenue; follow to light in Fanwood. Right on Martine (which becomes Park Ave). Right on Bartle Ave in middle of shopping district. Scotch Plains Rescue Squad (2-story brick) is located on the right. Do not park in the row next to the building — you'll be towed.

From I-78 (either direction)

Take exit 41 (Scotch Plains); follow signs to US 22. Turn right at light at bottom of hill and use overpass to cross Rt. 22. Follow US 22 Westbound directions.

From US 22 Westbound

Exit at Park Avenue, Scotch Plains after McDonalds on the right, diagonally opposite Scotchwood Diner on the left, immediately before the overpass. After exiting, turn left at the light and use overpass to cross US 22. Bear right at bottom of ramp to continue south on Park Avenue. Turn left at the second light (a staggered intersection). Scotch Plains Rescue Squad (2-story brick) is on the right. Do not park in the row next to the building — you'll be towed. We meet on the second floor, entering by the door at the right front of the building.

From Western New Jersey

Take US 22 Eastbound to the Park Avenue exit. The exit is about a mile past Terrill Road and immediately past the overpass. Exit onto Park Avenue South and follow the directions above to the Rescue Squad building. ☒

Google Search Bar and Your Telephone Number

Sandy Berger ([sandy\(at\)compukiss.com](mailto:sandy(at)compukiss.com)), [CompuKISS.com](http://www.compukiss.com) (www.compukiss.com)

If you know someone's telephone number, how hard would it be to find that person? Well, with Internet resources, it couldn't be easier. Type any telephone number into the Google search bar and you will quickly be given the name and address that relates to that number. Even a bit scarier is the fact that right next to the name and address is the word "map". Just click on that and the location in question is marked with a big green arrow on a detailed map. One more click and you can see the building with that address from a satellite view.

I say this is scary because it is. This information may be put to good use by friends and relatives, but in the hands of a stalker or a criminal, it can be highly dangerous. Imagine how easy it would be to find a woman who lives alone in a rural area. Or think about a child who might innocently give out their telephone number and have a pervert be able to find their exact location so easily.

If you think that you are exempt from this because you have an unlisted or unpublished number, think again. Google states, "Our phone and address listings are gathered by a third party provider, which collects telephone directories and other public records available elsewhere on the web." It is the "other public records" that might get your telephone number into these listings. They use everything from public utility records, court records, and property records, to business records. I was able to easily find the names and addresses of several people who have unlisted telephone numbers.

Because of privacy complaints, Google has initiated a way to be removed from this reverse telephone lookup. Just search for your telephone number in google and click on the link with your name. You will be taken to another page with an obvious removal link.

Yet, if you want to remove your name and address from the entire Web, you should be prepared to settle in for a long, tedious task. Removing my telephone number from Google was easy. Unfortunately, I quickly found more than a dozen other places with my telephone number listed including Yahoo, InfoSpace, Intelius, AnyWho, and addresses.com. Each one has a different method for removing your name and number, and often the process is quite convoluted. At Yahoo, there was an obvious "Remove my Listing" link. But the link went to the Yahoo help pages, which were not at all helpful. It took me about 30 minutes of searching to find the correct removal link. (phone.people.yahoo.com/py/psPhoneSupp.py)

Although most of the major search sites did not have listings for cell phones, I found that I could get the names and addresses for many cell phones numbers at Intelius for just \$14.95. Getting your name and address out of Intelius is even more complicated than removing it from some other websites. To opt out of Intelius they require that you fax them a copy of your driver's license or a notarized form proving your identity.

Even if you take the time to eliminate your name and address from all the directories that you find today, you might appear in some new directory tomorrow. Yet, if you want to guard your privacy, it may be worth the effort to eliminate yourself from as many of the directories as possible. It may also be time to realize that a simple thing like a telephone number can now lead to more personal identification than you ever imagined. Perhaps we need to start guarding our telephone number as carefully as we do our social security number.

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ACGNJ MEETINGS

For the very latest news on ACGNJ meetings visit the ACGNJ Web Page (<http://www.acgnj.org>)

Tuesday, January 2

7 P.M. - Board of Directors meeting.

Friday, January 4

8 P.M. - Main Meeting, Mike Redlich (mike@redlich.net).

Monday, January 7

8 P.M. - Lunics (Linux/Unix). Andreas Meyer (lunics@acgnj.org)

Tuesday, January 8

7:30 P.M. - Java, Mike Redlich (mike@redlich.net) 908-246-0410.

Wednesday, January 9

7 P.M. - WebDev SIG, Evan Williams (tech@evanwilliamsconsulting.com)

Thursday, January 10

8 P.M. - Investing Software, Jim Cooper (jim@thecoopers.org).

Friday, January 11

6 P.M. to 5 A.M.- NJ Gamers. Gregg McCarthy (greggmc@optonline.net), 732-721-6507. Break 8 to 10 P.M.

Monday, January 14

8 P.M. - Layman's Forum, Matt Skoda (som359@aol.com), 908-359-8842.

Tuesday, January 15

7:30 P.M. - C/C++ Users, Bruce Arnold (barnold@ieee.org), 908-735-7898

Wednesday, January 16

7:30 P.M. - Mobile Devices, David Eisen

Thursday, January 17

8 P.M. - Dot Net, Manuel J Goyenechea

Friday, January 18

8 P.M. - Window Pains, John Raff (john@jraff.com).

Monday, January 21

7 P.M. - Firefox Activity, David McRitchie (firefox@acgnj.org)

Friday, February 1

8 P.M. - Main Meeting, Mike Redlich (mike@redlich.net).

Monday, February 4

8 P.M. - Lunics, Andreas Meyer (lunics@acgnj.org) 

All meetings, unless otherwise noted, are at Scotch Plains Rescue Squad, 1916 Bartle Ave., Scotch Plains, N.J.
Directions and map inside back cover.