The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

In the Bonus Pages Download Edition:

Building a Vista PC

Blurbs from Steve Bass

Upgrading HW & SW

Presidential Bits

September 2007 Meeting

By Paul Howard

Our August meeting was a showcase for several useful software tools. Chuck Roberts demonstrated the Acronis Disk Director Suite, a hard drive partitioning utility, and Acronis True Image Home 10, a feature rich backup utility. Discounts are available for these programs from User Group Relations, see: http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html

I demonstrated RoboForm, a password manager, which keeps user IDs and passwords encrypted on your computer, and allows log ins to Internet sites with a single mouse click. At the conclusion of the meeting, members inquired about a discount for RoboForm. A 20% discount has been arranged. The link to obtain this discount is: http://www.roboform.com/php/pums/rfprepay.php?lic=wacug_rf&buydirect=yes

At September 15th's meeting, Chuck Roberts will discuss "Basic Workflow for Processing Digital Images." What do you do first? What's the best way to proceed? Using Photoshop Elements V5, Chuck will discuss a sample workflow as well as discussing PEv5's organizer to catalog and manage your images and allow keyword searches – sounds like digital asset management to me. Some demonstrations will also be included. After Chuck's presentation, Lorrin Garson will talk briefly about Cryptainer, a nifty piece of software for encrypting all kinds of files and has a function to send encrypted e-mail... all for free. See http://www.cypherix.com/cryptainerle/. As you might expect, the company offers a more robust product for a price; see http://cypherix.com/store.htm?eventid=3.

Got a program you're wild about? Please consider writing an article for the Cursor, or giving a presentation at a meeting. Contact Chuck Roberts or myself to discuss your ideas. We're also eager to hear about the topics you'd like to learn about.

Watch the web site and your email for more details. Please plan to join us – your attendance is important and bring a friend!

Lloyd's Web Sites for September, 2007

by Lloyd Johnson, WACUG Member

http://www.wacug.org/ is the URL for the Washington Area Computer User Group. Visit it for past issues of Web Sites with hyperlinks

September 2007 Sites

1. Language Dictionaries – There are over 6,800 known languages spoken in the 200 countries of the world. 2,261 have writing systems (the others are only spoken) and about 300 are represented by on-line dictionaries as of May 11, 2004. This site by yourDictionary.com presents its current list. New languages and dictionaries are constantly being added to yourDictionary.com; as a result, this site contains one of the widest and deepest set of dictionaries, grammars, and other language resources on the web.   Also #3 has dictionary information
http://www.yourdictionary.com/languages.html

2. Check out this clock...amazing. World Clock – http://www.peterrussell.dreamhosters.com/Odds/WorldClock.php

3   100 Most Often Misspelled Words in English – This site by yourDictionary.com, provides a list of the 100 words most often misspelled in the English language with the correct spellings and explanations where applicable. www.yourdictionary.com/library/misspelled.html

4   Consumer Price Index – A authoritative site by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Consumer Price Indexes (CPI) program produces monthly data on changes in the prices paid by urban consumers for a representative basket of goods and services.
http://stats.bls.gov/cpi

5. U.S. Naval Observatory: Data Services –This U.S. Naval Observatory resource provides information on many types of astronomical phenomena, including: moon phases, sun and moon positions, eclipses, date of Easter, the Earth's seasons, Julian calendar date conversion and information on sunrise, sunset, moonrise, moonset and twilight times, and more.
http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data

6. Encyclopedia Smithsonian – Encyclopedia Smithsonian helps answer frequently asked questions about the Smithsonian with links to resources on subjects from Art to Zoology

http://www.si.edu/Encyclopedia_SI/start.htm

7. Snoring – Forty-five percent of normal adults snore at least occasionally, and 25 percent are habitual snorers. Problem snoring is more frequent in males and overweight persons, and it usually grows worse with age. This site provides information about snoring www.entnet.org/healthinfo/snoring/snoring.cfm

8. Ready for some Football – http://football.about.com

9. United States Postal Service: Hold Mail – Whether you are on vacation or an unexpected business trip you can rest easy knowing your mail is safely held for you at your local Post Office. This online service will electronically notify your local Post Office to hold your mail. For same day service, online requests must be submitted by 2AM CST Monday - Saturday. Mail can be held from 3 to 30 days. The Post Office will resume normal delivery of your mail on the date you specify. Online access to request this service is currently limited to certain ZIP Codes – https://dunsapp.usps.gov/HoldMail.jsp

10. How Spam Works – You block it, you filter it, you unsubscribe from lists you actually want to be on, and still it lands in your inbox. Where does all of this spam e-mail (also known as "unsolicited commercial e-mail") come from? Why is there so much of it? Is there any way to stop it? This HowStuffWorks article answers these questions and many others about spam – http://computer.howstuffworks.com/ref/spam.htm?cid=e37
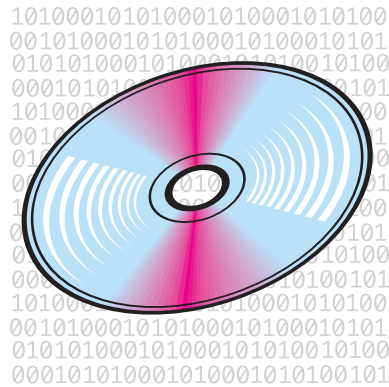
GNU/Linux SIG

by Geof Goodrum, WACUG member

GNU/Linux Distribution Releases

GNU/Linux distributions are complete GNU/Linux operating system and application software collections. Many are freely downloadable or can be ordered on CDs or DVD at low cost. DistroWatch (*http://www.distrowatch. com/*) lists the following distribution release announcements for the period August 1-29, 2007.

Distribution	DistroWatch Information
Absolute Linux 12.0.3	http://distrowatch.com/absolute
ALT Linux 4.0	http://distrowatch.com/alt
Arch Linux 2007.08	http://distrowatch.com/arch
Ark Linux 2007.1	http://distrowatch.com/ark
Bluewhite64 Linux 12.0 Live DVD	http://distrowatch.com/bluewhite64
Debian GNU/Linux 4.0r1	http://distrowatch.com/debian
EnGarde Secure Linux 3.0.16	http://distrowatch.com/engarde
Freespire 2.0	http://distrowatch.com/freespire
Linux from Scratch 6.3	http://distrowatch.com/lfs
Linux Mint 3.0	http://distrowatch.com/mint
Momonga Linux 4	http://distrowatch.com/momonga
Mutagenix 2.6.18.6-2	http://distrowatch.com/mutagenix
PAIPIX 7.0	http://distrowatch.com/paipix
Parsix GNU/Linux 0.90r1	http://distrowatch.com/parsix
Pioneer Explorer 1.0	http://distrowatch.com/pioneer
Puppy Linux 2.17.1	http://distrowatch.com/puppy
Sabayon Linux 3.4e	http://distrowatch.com/sabayon
sidux 2007-03	http://distrowatch.com/sidux
SmoothWall Express 3.0	http://distrowatch.com/smoothwall
Wolvix 1.1.0	http://distrowatch.com/wolvix

Job Opportunity: Linux System Administrator/Operator, Vienna, VA

Croix Connect is seeking two (2) Systems Administrators for an exciting, large-scale project. To view an example of a past, similar project, please review: http://croix.timberlakepublishing.com/files/Real%20Time%20Data %20Access%20Solution.pdf

This position requires 2 or more years of Linux Systems Administration and Operations experience. Required skills include: Linux, Testing, and System Documentation. Preferred skills will include: SAN storage, Netcool, Alarm Management, Distributed Systems Operations.

This position requires excellent technical skills and strong communication skills. This position will interface with the end-client at all levels and requires excellent communication skills, including the ability to clearly explain design choices and discuss alternatives with colleagues and managers.

If you are interested and qualified for this role, please submit your technically detailed resume, hourly rate, and contact information. Selected candidates will be required to complete an initial phone screen and two in-person interviews. The apply-to URL is: http://www.pro-hire.com/candidates/JobProfile.cfm?szReturnto=Careerportal&szOrderID=430172&szCandidateID=0&szWID=15401&szCID=69306

These are positions with us (we're not a staffing agency); we want to utilize people as independent contractors to us. We intend to have start date of October 15, 2007. The project is slated to last to the end of 2008.

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on the monthly CD. In addition to the monthly CD described below, WAC can provide CD-R and DVD±R media for any downloadable GNU/Linux operat-

ing system distribution (e.g. Fedora, Mandriva, Ubuntu, Debian, Knoppix). Please note that download versions of commercial distributions do not include official technical support nor printed documentation.

Discs are available only by pre-order. Contact Geof Goodrum by e-mail (linux@wacug.org) at least 48 hours before meeting day to order or for more information. Single CD-R discs are available with a $3 donation; GNU/Linux distributions on multiple CD-Rs or single DVD±R are available with a $6 donation.

September 2007

Cultivation – v8. http://cultivation.sourceforge.net/. Free Public Domain C++ source code by Jason Rohrer and executable Debian package (v7). Cultivation is a game about a community of gardeners growing food for themselves in a shared space. Cultivation is quite different from most other games. It is a social simulation, and the primary form of conflict is over land and plant resources - there is no shooting, but there are plenty of angry looks. It is also an evolution simulation. Within the world of Cultivation, you can explore a virtually infinite spectrum of different plant and gardener va-

rieties. All of the graphics, sounds, melodies,and other content in Cultivation are 100% procedurally generated at playtime. In other words, there are no hand-painted texture maps - instead, each object has a uniquely "grown" appearance. Every time you play, Cultivation generates fresh visuals, music, and behaviors. Cultivation requires OpenGL and a mouse. A 400MHz CPU and accelerated 3D graphics card are recommended.

gPodder – v0.9.5. http://gpodder.berlios.de/. Free GNU General Public License executable Python code by Thomas Perl. gPodder is a Podcast receiver/catcher written in Python and pyGTK. It manages podcast feeds for you, and automatically downloads all podcasts from as many feeds as you like. If you are interested in Podcast feeds, simply put the feed URLs into gPodder and it will download all episodes for you automatically. If there is a new episode, it will get it for you. It supports download resume, if the server supports it.

Semantik – v0.5.3a. http://freehackers.org/~tnagy/kdissert.html. Free QPL source code by Thomas Nagy. Semantik (previously Kdissert) is a mindmapping-like tool to help students produce complicated documents such as presentations, dissertations, thesis, and reports very quickly and efficiently by associating ideas graphically in a tree structure. While targetted mostly at students, Semantik can also help teachers, decision maker, engineers and businessmen. The current generators are PDF documents (based on LaTeX: article, book), PDF presentations (based on LaTeX: Beamer, Prosper), text processing files (ODF such as OpenOffice.org Writer, Impress or Koffice), plain

text and internet documents (html). Semantik requires Qt 4.2 or later and Python 2.3 or later.

GNU/Linux Distibution Updates – http://mirrors.fedoraproject.org/publiclist/Fedora/7/. Security and bug fix monthly updates for Fedora 7.

Kernel Source – http://www.kernel.org/. The latest versions of 2.4 and 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms.

What is Net Neutrality? — An Editorial

By Bruce Jacobs, Editor, Phoenix PCUG, AZ

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Usually the articles in the newsletter are very black and white. The articles tell how to do something, or why you should backup… This article deals with a subject that is more controversial than that. It is my attempt to explain a subject is complex and which I can not discuss without my opinions coming into it. My opinions do not necessarily represent the opinions of the user group.

So what is Net Neutrality? In simplest terms it is a movement which has as a goal creating legislation or federal regulations which will regulate some plans of some ISPs.

The specific plans that are proposed that have people the most upset is the idea of charging websites for preferred access to their customers. For example, they would like to get money from Google and if they do

not they may slow the connection between you and Google.

I have to give some history here to explain some of what is going on. The Internet was mostly free of regulations. You can put almost anything up on a site and people could access it or they can ignore it. Your ISP is paid to give you access to the internet and does not care what you do while online unless you share your connection with your neighbors. There was no spam and very very few internet viruses.

ISPs also "oversold" their connections they knew that everyone would not try to get online at the same time so they used formulas to determine how much infrastructure they would need for each customer. In the old days this was mostly how many phone lines they needed for each customer. (How many remember getting busy signals when dialing in?). Even today, when browsing the web, typically you go to a site, its contents are downloaded to your computer. Then the computer becomes mostly idle while you read the page.

Most of the original ISP's were companies which had as their primary business providing access to the internet. They were not phone and entertainment providers like we have today. Also there was no real conflict of interest if they were owned by a phone company.

Things have changed over time. As dedicated lines became available, the ISP's started to separate the customers into two classes: Business and Home users. Business customers were likely to use their connection 24 hours a day and use more bandwidth. The business customers were charged more for access be-

cause of this. They at first policed this mainly using the honor system. In some rare cases, they would cut a violator off.

We now have lots of malware on the internet. This malware has caused lots of problems for the ISPs. Frequently a customer's computer would get infected and would attack the computers belonging to other customers of the ISP. Computers would get infected and start sending out millions of spam emails. Or the infected computer would turn itself into a webserver to host pirated music or other nasty content. One partial solution to these problems was to use filters at the ISP to block this traffic. This was necessary evil in my opinions

Some people also are considered by the ISP to have abused the network. All of the above things that computers can do because they are infected have been done by customers on purpose. There are other things customers have done which have resulted in a single customer using more resources that the average customer. Sometimes these uses are not considered legitimate by the ISP.

Many ISPs have set up limits on how much bandwidth a customer can use in a month. I frequently download software from the internet. Legal downloads like Linux CDs and trial software. Because of this I am sure that I frequently use several times the average amount of bandwidth of the average user some months.

Perhaps I need to step back for a second and describe some of the costs of business that ISPs have. They have the typical costs of doing business: buildings, labor, taxes, electricity, etc.

They also have special costs that are almost unique to ISPs. They pay

for the infrastructure that connects them to their customers (sometimes it is indirectly). The faster the connection to the customer, the more it costs the ISP. Frequently in the United States, the hands of the ISP are tied and the ISP can not easily increase the connection speed between them and the customer.

The ISPs also pay for their connection to the Internet backbone. This is the part of the internet that connects all the ISPs together. The cost of this access is based in large part on the amount of data they send over the backbone and how fast a connection to the backbone they have.

Companies like Google, have to make contracts with ISPs and pay for their bandwidth and connection to the backbone either directly or indirectly as well.

Another revolution is occurring on the internet. This is the media revolution. New services are coming to the internet, which are only possible because more and more users have high speed access. I can purchase music or other content on line and download it to my computer. I can listen to an internet radio broadcast of a basketball game. I can watch a movie from YouTube or a live broadcast of an event. People are also using their high speed connections to make free phone calls using services like Skype.

According to ISPs these activities are putting stress on their networks in ways they had not planned for.

Many ISPs would like to use the filtering tools they have in place to limit the speed of access to these services. Critics of these plans point out that the ISPs have been advertising these same services to the public for years as a way of driving customers to their high speed access plans. Whether this is legitimate or

not is a matter of opinion. If these types of changes are made, customers should be made aware of them so that they can make inform decisions when deciding which ISP to sign up with and what plan they want.

Another change that has occurred is the ISPs have changed from a business point of view. In today's world, ISPs are not generally the small companies that only provide internet access. They are phone companies, cable companies, cellular, and entertainment companies. Access to free phone service, movies and music is in direct conflict with the interests of the parent companies.

The ISPs would like the right to discriminate against some of this traffic and let other traffic go through unimpeded. This would probably be something like having two lanes of traffic. A fast lane for approved traffic, and a slower lane for the rest.

If you have made it this far, you can understand some of my opinions on these issues. You may not agree with them but the background was needed so you could understand.

I believe that ISPs have some right to regulate the traffic that is going through their network as long the primary purposes is to ensure that the network stays useable and they are upfront about what they are doing to everyone evolved. There is currently no law on the books that I am aware of that makes this a requirement.

However, no one should have to pay an ISP for priority access to their customers. I pay GoDaddy every month for use of a server and access to the internet based in large part on how many people visit our sites. We should not have to start sending checks to ISP's as well. Because the web is so democratic and diverse is why the web is as great as it is. If the ISPs are allowed to do this in

markets where they provide service, they will not be able to do this with fairness.

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Safe Computing with Consumer Reports

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WEBSITE:

http://www.ConsumerReports.org

In the several years I have been writing this column, it is very unusual for me to write about a magazine. I subscribe to several print magazines, and quite a few online versions, but there is one magazine I especially look forward to each month, and that one is Consumer Reports. While best known for its evaluations and ratings of appliances, motor vehicles, and countless household items, it occasionally does cover computer and other technology products. For those interested in computer security and safety for the layperson, the September 2007 issue is a keeper. If you can find it on the news stand after reading this, I strongly urge you to purchase a copy; if you can not find a copy for

sale, then it will likely be worth a trip to the library to read.

What makes the September 2007 issue so applicable to us and our computing safety and security is the cover story "Stop ID Thieves – 19 ways to protect yourself online". The bulleted subtitles on the cover are: "New threats to avoid"; "Best software for viruses, spam & spyware"; and "Don't get hooked by a 'phish'". About a dozen well written pages in this issue on computing security and software provide the reader with a wealth of useful and easy to comprehend "non geek-speak" information on the topic. Following the security articles are reviews and ratings of popular desktop and notebook (laptop) computers, which add to the usefulness of this edition. There is also a wealth of other non-technical information in this issue, including such wide ranging topics as ratings of popcorn to health insurance providers to dark chocolate.

In a section titled "Protect Yourself Online – State of the Net '07" (pages 28 – 34), "Net Threats" are explained. Identity theft opens the article, with a statement credited to Symantec, that identity thieves are paying from $14 to $18 for every stolen identity, with a cost in 2006 to businesses and consumers of a staggering $49.3 billion, according to Javelin Strategy & Research. A survey conducted by Consumer Reports found that an individual's chance of becoming a "cybervictim" is about 1 in 4, as consumers continue to fall victim to internet criminals. About 8% of us revealed sensitive personal and financial information in response to bogus emails. Other material findings of the survey indicated that despite the wide availability of antivirus and anti-

spyware software, we are still being victimized by the virus and spyware threat. Over the past two years, 38% of us had our computers infected by a virus, while in the six months preceding the survey, 34% reported a spyware infection. It was estimated that 1.8 million of us replaced a PC not because it was obsolete or worn out, but because they were virus infected. Spyware infections caused us to replace an estimated 850,000 computers! Despite the ominous threats, 17% do not have antivirus software installed, and 33% do not have spyware protection.

It was also estimated that 3.7 million US households with broadband internet go online without the benefit of a firewall, a hardware or software product that can provide significant protection from online intrusion by hackers. In a finding that I have personally demonstrated locally, the survey found that fully half of all wireless internet households do not implement even the simplest precautions, such as enabling wireless encryption. No wonder so many of us are victimized by internet crooks.

As most of us can attest to, spam (unsolicited commercial or junk email), is still a significant annoyance, with one-half of the respondents reporting high levels of spam (page 30). While many computer users reported that their computers had been infected by viruses, one-fifth of respondents had a major virus problem that was costly to resolve, costing an average cost per incident of $100, with an estimated total damage of $3.3 billion. While more common than viruses, spyware was also costly to remove with about 9% of respondents saying that it cost them an average of $100 each to eradicate, for a total

cost of $1.7 billion. Sadly, despite frequent warnings in this column and elsewhere, 1 in 81 respondents lost money from an account by being a victim of phishing (a common form of identity theft using spoofed emails and websites), with an average loss of $200; that still totaled an estimated $2.1 billion (page 31). Consumer Reports does an excellent job presenting the solutions to these common internet problems and threats, this information well justifying the purchase of this issue.

Many of us sell or donate our old computers after we no longer need them. What many do not consider is the personally sensitive information that may still reside on the hard drive, and how that information can be illicitly purloined by identity thieves. Consumer Reports has a recommendation on a free software product (Eraser) which can safely delete information from a hard drive before disposing of the obsolete computer.

The media and computer gurus should be shouting out the 19 tips that Consumer Reports calls the "Best ways to stay safe online" (pages 32 and 33). Many of the tips should be familiar to readers of this column, and are common sense to many who surf the net. The tips include such items as activate the protection already provided by your operating system and browser, updating and renewing the operating system and security software, turning off the computer when not used for long periods, consider a Mac, watch downloads, consider an integrated software security suite, run antivirus software, run two anti-spyware programs, use credit cards appropriately, protect personal information, and other great tips.

I am frequently asked for my recommendation on security software. While we all have our opinions based on personal experiences or anecdotal information, the September 2007 issue of Consumer Reports actually tested many of the products available. It is especially noteworthy that some of the best sellers at retail came out in the extremes of the testing, either at the top or bottom of the ratings. Trend Micro's PC-cillin Internet Security 2007 was the top performing security suite (page 36), and Trend Micro also had the top performing antivirus program (also integrated in the suite). Trend's free standing anti-spyware product took top honors (page 38), as did its antispam product (page 39). For those considering renewing an existing security program or purchasing a new one, these reviews and ratings may provide much valuable information.

I do not think that I have ever previously recommended a specific issue of a national magazine in this column. Now, I strongly urge you to get a hold of the Consumer Reports September 2007 issue with the "Stop ID Thieves" cover story. In terms of computing safety and security, this may be one of the most valuable and low cost investments you can make. A subscription to Consumer Reports, which has published other technology reviews in the past, would also be a great idea. Just do it.

Is there a laptop in your future?

By Sandy Berger, www.
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Want to get a laptop so you can surf the Web from your lawn chair this summer? Or perhaps you just want to be able to share your Internet connection between your computer and your spouse's computer?

In either case, a wireless network is essential, but sometimes interference makes wireless problematic. Let me shed some light on the subject.

The main component of a wireless network is a wireless router (or a wired router and wireless access point). I talked about routers in my previous A Router Can Protect your Computer article, so I won't go into the details and routers except to say that a wireless router is simply a router that works on radio wave frequencies to connect computer and other equipment without hard-wiring. A wireless access point works in the same manner.

If you are technically inclined, you might want to try to set the router up yourself. The setup is not too difficult, but adding the necessary security can be problematic for a technophobe. So if you are in that category, hire someone to set up the wireless network for you. If you try it yourself and can't get the security in place you will also want to consider hiring someone to secure your network. An unsecured wireless network leaves your computer vulnerable to infiltration by others and can cause numerous problems including identity theft. Once you add the security to your router, you are safe from having others jump on your network. The software for the security is included with your router.

For the most part, wireless networks work very well, but I have seen many cases where interference can cause problems. The most popular wireless networks right now are 802.11b and 802.11g. Both of these popular wireless connections work on the 2.4 GHz frequency that is already crowded with wireless telephones, microwave ovens, garage door openers, wireless mice, remote controls, and baby monitors.

So if you are thrown off your wireless network when your garage door opens or the wireless telephone rings, you will want to assume that you have two or more gadgets interfering with each other. When trouble-shooting wireless interference problems remember that the proximity of the items makes a big difference. If your wireless telephones work on the 2.4 GHz frequency and cause interference with your "b" or "g" router, you can, of course, go out

and purchase phones that work on a different frequency to eliminate the interference. But you may not have to do that. Simply moving your telephone away from the router may do the trick.

While the 2.4GHz frequency is quite crowded, it does have 11 different channels to choose from. So look in the documentation that came with the phones and/or the documentation that came with the router to learn how to change the channel. Once you know how to do that you simply need to make sure that the router and the other piece of equipment are on different frequencies so they don't interfere with each other. Choose channel 1, 6, or 11 for your router to give it the best chance at a frequency that does not overlap with any other frequencies.

If you still have interference problems, you can consider purchasing an 802.11 n router. These are the newest wireless routers. They work on the much less crowded 5.8 GHz frequency. The "n" routers have greater speed and range than the "b" or "g" routers. I put one in my home where other routers had trouble transmitting the signal far enough and it works like a charm. I can even put my 5.8 GHz wireless phone right by the router without any interference. There is currently one caveat in choosing an "n"

router. The "n specification has not yet been completely finalized. That means that there could be some minor changes in the technology before it is completely standardized. So you will be purchasing a router that is what they call draft or interim model.

To the average user, this means that if the final standard is changed drastically it could possibly be incompatible with the "interim" "n" router you have purchased. That possibility is remote, and even if it happens, your system will still work. You might, however, not be compatible with other "n" systems. That is not likely to happen and, if the standard is changed when it is finalized, most router manufacturers will be able to send you a firmware update to make your router compatible.

I love my wireless "n" router, and while others have chided me for being on the "bleeding edge", I don't think I am taking much of a chance, and it provided a solution to my problem.

As more and more computer are being purchased for the home, wireless networking is becoming more and more popular. While we haven't yet actually freed ourselves from our piles of wires, sitting on the patio, in the kitchen, or in the bedroom surfing the Internet without any tethers can be a very freeing experience.

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Update to Vista? Maybe!

By Jim Sanders, Vice President, North Orange County Computer Club, CA
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The old adage never buy version one of any piece of software, is beginning to look like it should be applied to Windows Vista as well. I have read a number of articles from different sources talking about the problems that people have had trying to implement Vista. I have run into a few myself. The latest involved helping a customer move his documents from his existing Windows XP machine to a new HP computer with Vista Home Premium preinstalled. He was using the Windows Office 97 version of Outlook and wanted to transfer his e-mail, address book, and contacts to the new machine. The problem is Office 97 is not compatible with Vista.So the first thought was to go to the store and buy the Student-Teacher Edition of Microsoft Office 2003, which includes Outlook 2003, while I worked on the machine.

So he drives to his local friendly OfficeMax store to find that they no longer have stock on the old 2003 Student-Teacher Edition of Microsoft Office. However, they do have the new Home Office and Student 2007 version. At the same $150.00 price as the old 2003 version, that seems like a good deal and is still reasonably affordable. Except, the Home Office and Student 2007 suite does **not** include Outlook and the next version up that does, costs another $100.00.

A little research found another problem, the 2007 version of Outlook does not know how to import from the 97 version. Seems you can only accomplish that goal by first exporting to Outlook Express. The new computer came bundled with Microsoft Works. Works is not as full featured as Office, but good enough. So in effect, he would be spending $250 dollars for Outlook. So we looked at the Vista replacement for Outlook Express – Windows Mail. Same problem, it does not know how to import from the Outlook 97 version.

As Eudora knows how to do that import function, and is of course free, I down loaded it to the new machine. It seemed to install OK, and opened when I clicked on the icon. I needed to learn how to do the import, so I clicked on help. A small error window popped up that said "Cannot open file." To keep a long story relatively short, I eventually Googled the fact Vista has deleted support for the .hlp files. I do not know how many thousands of programs use those files, but unless they are a current program that the author is willing to update, you have a problem if you are using one of those programs. After a bit more research, I found a reference that said Microsoft has condescended to allow the proletariat to download

a crippled version of those support files.

In a related scenario, if you are a user of Adobe's software, but not the latest version, you will probably have a compatibility problem with Vista and your program. Adobe has a PDF file on their web site that gives the details of this issue. The location of that file is: www.adobe.com/support/products/pdfs/adobe_products_and_windows_vista.pdf. The way I read that file, new and very current releases of Adobe's software will work or be updated for free. Somewhat older versions of Adobe's software will have Vista updates that you can purchase. Even older versions of Adobe's software will not have updates available at all.

As one looks at the up front cost of the Vista OS, the cost of updating one's hardware to meet the decent performance requirements of Vista, and the cost of updating (if you can) your existing software, sticking with with XP for a while is looking better and better.

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Vista SP1 Coming in January 2008

By Lance Ulanoff of Ziff Davis,
Publisher of PC Magazine
Aug 30, 2007.

When I spoke to Brad Goldberg, general manager of Windows Product Management for Microsoft last year, he danced around the subject of Windows Vista SP1, saying there was no schedule and that it was not an important milestone. Now we have a schedule, and it sounds as if SP1 will be something of a milestone, coming roughly one year after Vista's initial release. The update will feature security, performance, and hardware and standards updates and enhancements. My guess is that there'll be even more when SP1 finally rolls. I wonder if Microsoft will find a way to sprinkle in some of the "Wow" people have been looking for.
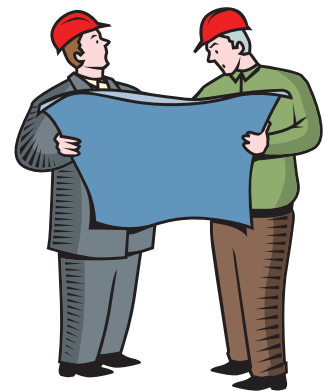
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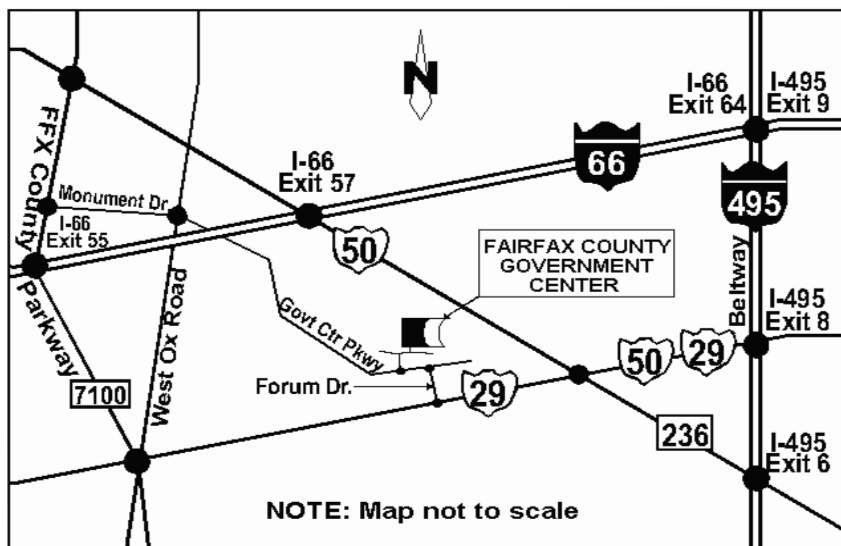
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Building a PC for Vista

By Dan Hanson, the Great Lakes Geek
cap(at)magnuminc.com

The Great Lakes Geek needed to build a new PC for the Computers Assisting People (CAP Inc.) Resource Center. It will be used for CAP operations but also so that the volunteers and others can become familiar with Windows Vista and learn about it the CAP way - hands on.

Windows Vista is the first version of Windows that provides different user experiences depending on the hardware it is running on. We wanted to have the "ultimate" Vista experience so I built a hot machine and loaded Windows Vista Ultimate on it.

Ultimate is just as described - the ultimate version. It includes all the features of the Home, Premium, Media Center, Mobile and Business versions.

As the ad says, Windows Vista Ultimate is "The most complete edition of Windows Vista—with the power, security, and mobility features that you need for work, and all of the entertainment features that you want for fun."

We unveiled the new system at the Hardware SIG and everyone took a look at the guts of the PC. The crew wanted to know the specs of the PC and why some of the components were chosen. So I created a webpage at

http://www.greatlakesgeek.com/other/cap-pc.htm

that explains what's in the PC, why those components were selected and what it all means. It also has lots of links to Windows Vista resources and info and reviews of the components.

Since Vista provides different experiences for different hardware, you need to have some kind of metric to let you know what can and cannot run. This metric is a built-in feature called the WEI - the Windows Experience Index.

The WEI is designed to help consumers understand how well Windows Vista and the software running on it will perform on a specific PC. So if you check your WEI score (from Control Panel - Performance Information and Tools) and it turns out to be 3.2 and the new game you want to play requires a 4.1, you know that you need to upgrade your hardware (and hence your WEI score) or you won't be able to play the game as intended.

The WEI score comes from the assessment of 5 different areas of your system:

1. Processor - Calculations per second

2. Memory - Operations per second

3. Graphics - Desktop performance for Windows Aero graphics

4. Gaming graphics - 3D graphics performance. Useful for gaming and 3D business applications

5. Primary hard disk - The data transfer rate of the primary hard disk

Higher scores indicate a better Vista experience on your PC. The hot new CAP PC almost maxed out the WEI with a smoking 5.8 score! You can see the exact components at the afore-mentioned webpage but basically the system has 2GB of fast DDR2-667 RAM, an Intel motherboard with Intel 975X Express Chipset and Intel Core 2 Duo E6600 2.4GHZ CPU.

The graphics are great – an NVIDIA GeForce PCI Express card with 512MB so we can run the cool Aero interface and everything else.

It has a fast 300GB SATA drive (lots of SATA ports on the motherboard for other drives which we may set up in a RAID array) and what was described as "The Worlds fastest DVD rewriter."

I figured the power consumed would be around 300W so went with a power supply of 460W to handle growth.

Good thing because the CAP guys immediately installed a floppy drive (I don't build them into systems anymore except by special request) and a 2nd hard drive.

Be sure to visit http://www.greatlakesgeek.com/other/cap-pc.htm for more details on the components of this PC and why they were chosen as well as plenty of useful links about Windows Vista and hardware.
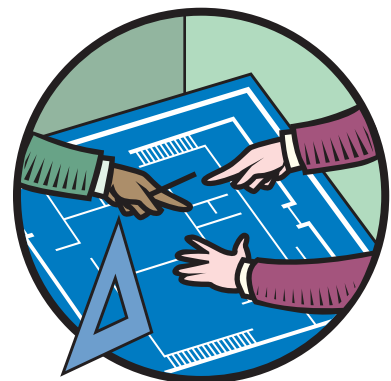
Blurbs from Bass

By Steve Bass, PC World
Columnist and Author
Stevebass(at)earthlink.net

Wonderful: Microsoft's free Virtual PC

I've been using it for three weeks. It's perhaps the best way to play with new utilities, for instance, try out a different anti-virus program, or just fiddle with Windows.

I run another copy of Windows XP within Windows XP. Some people load up Vista in the virtual machine while others play around with Linux.

It takes no super skill set to install or use, and provided you have enough RAM (I'll say about 1GB), the VPC will run happily. I was worried that it would slow down my PC. I have just one VM window running, and even at that, it's open only when I was using it. Overall, with 2GB of RAM on my PC (and 512RAM allocated to the VM when it was running), I didn't experience any sluggishness.

If it doesn't suite you, or it slows down your PC, just uninstall VPC like you would any other application.

You can get around the XP licensing issue (and activation) of two versions of XP on one PC easily. Some people (not, uh, me) call Microsoft for an activation and try to explain to the overseas tech person that yes I have this copy running on a PC, but all I'm trying to do it set it up on the same PC using Microsoft's VM product. Chances are good they won't understand a word you're saying, not be able to find "VM Product" on their tree-based help chart, say screw it in their language, and give you the activation code.

Or you could just rely on XP's 30 day activation deadline. As the deadline approaches, delete the XP virtual machine (it's only a big swap file) and start again with a new installation.

Get Microsoft's Virtual PC

http://snipurl.com/virtualpc1

Read how to install and use VPC

http://snurl.com/usevpc

Gotcha! Geek Squad Caught Stealing Porn

In a three-month sting, the Consumerist loaded a PC with porn, set it up with a keylogger, and asked the Geek Squad to install iTunes. The hidden program recorded everything and produced a very revealing video. Watch as the tech pokes around, finds what he wants, and copies files to his flash drive.

http://snurl.com/geekpornsquad

Assorted short blurbs

Have you ever heard a Mockingbird outside you window? It's the bird that sings mostly at night and mimics other birds. The Superb Lyrebird goes one better my imitating, with eerie accuracy, everyday sounds, such as chain saws, car alarms, and well, just listen and be amazed. http://snipurl.com/Lyrebird

Do you have any idea what's holding up your cursor? I think you'll be quite surprised. Click on the link below to find out. Make sure to move your cursor quickly and double click every so often.

http://www.1-click.jp/

The Real Group is very entertaining. They remind me a little of Manhattan Transfer. Listen to them sing the Five Song Basie Medley and don't miss it when the lead singer imitates an instrument. It's at about 3:17 minutes. Click here for info about the group. [Thanks, Gus.]

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URpLESNyydE

If you enjoyed the first video, here's another with them working impromptu. Watch the beginning for the setup and skip past Yesterday until they start doing pseudo-opera at 2:40 minutes. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcRlBQF2AYc

Hassle-Free PC: Smart Fixes for Gnarly PC Problems

http://snipurl.com/HF_0707

I'll bet your Start Menu is messy because it's jammed with programs. There's probably a good chance you can't even remember where any of the programs are on the menu. Try popping up Launchy (alt-space), type the first few letters of the program you want, hit Enter, and Launchy launches it.

http://www.launchy.net/

They know damn well they're breaking the law. Yet I get at least three automated calls from them a week. I have a plan -- make an appointment to have my carpeting cleaned and then slap a small claims court notice to appear into the hand of the guy arriving at my door. Read more on my blog:

http://snipurl.com/BestCarpet

Rate PC World Magazine: Here's the PC World survey page for the current issue. You don't have to be a subscriber; give it a whirl and be eligible for a $500 Amazon certificate (which accounts why I haven't had a raise in a while). http://snipurl.com/PCW_Survey

Time Killing Videos

Check out "High Power Job," a video about an occupation that makes

me grateful I'm a safe and sound writer.

http://www.glumbert.com/media/highpower

The Slinky Humans video held my attention for the full five minutes. (But what in the world it's doing at a Sea World Amusement Park is beyond me.) But it appears they've taken a cue, so to speak, from Mummenschanz.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAPBaXLJvYI

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO3B6hESM3I

You know how I like magic, right? Well here's a brilliant bit of it with just the correct amount of misdirection.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voAntzB7EwE

Two Useful Tools

FileMenu Tools: The context menu of Windows Explorer gets messy. FileMenu Tools gives you a way to customize it.

http://www.lopesoft.com/en/fm-tools/info.html

ReCase: It's a small issue, but it may bother you: all the filenames in a specific folder are in upper, lower, or mixed case. Here's a tool that will fix it.

http://bluefive.pair.com/recase.htm

Free Directory Assistance

There are two new, free directory assistance services you can use on either your cell phone or home landline.

I like Google a little better because it'll dial the number for me. Details:

http://blogs.pcworld.com/

tipsandtweaks/archives/004120.html

In the other hand, TellMe is faster and easier to use, and definitely has a better voice presence. Unfortunately, what spoils it is that it won't connect me. Details:

http://www.tellme.com/products/TellmeByVoice

http://betafeedback.tellme.com/forum/b-gb/m-1171475327/

Either way, their both free and useful.

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Thoughts on Upgrading PC Hardware and Software

By Dick Maybach, Columnist, Brookdale Computer User Group (BCUG) Brookdale, NJ

www.bcug.org

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I can think of three valid reasons for upgrading a PC: (1) to try something new, (2) to improve performance, and (3) to solve a problem. Trying something new means you are treating your PC as a hobby. In this case you don't really need to upgrade, but you want to. Just bear in mind that there are risks, which means that you may get more adventure than you planned on. Improving performance is difficult to justify, unless your system is

very old. Almost any system will do just fine surfing the net, word processing, balancing your checkbook, etc. Upgrading your hardware will often provide no discernable speed-up, because the speed is really limited by your typing speed or Internet connection. Upgrading your software may actually slow things down, because newer software has more features and requires more computer resources. This leaves problem solving. Your hard disk may be full; your motherboard may have only old, slow version 1 USB ports; or your bank may require a recent version of Quicken for on-line banking.

You shouldn't upgrade to Windows Vista unless you replace the PC, and even then you may have problems. A friend of mine bought a new Dell PC with Vista and found his old printer wouldn't work and he could no longer access the Internet. Operating system designers can't possibly test every combination of hardware and software. As a result, they concentrate on new components, since most operating system sales are for new computers, and there may be problems with older peripherals and software.

You should back up all your files before you make any system change, no matter how trivial. And any time you open your system case, you should use a grounding strap to avoid damaging components with static electricity. This is especially important during the approaching winter months, when the humidity in your house is low.

Let's look at the easy upgrades first. Adding RAM is usually not difficult; just plug it in and look at your CMOS screen to be sure the PC has

recognized it. (Of course you must use the correct chips. Check your PC manual.) You can usually add new peripherals, such a CD-ROM, DVD, or a second hard disk drive without problems, although if you have already filled all of the available ATA slots, you will have to add a second disk controller. Take your system to a reliable shop if you have doubts about your abilities. Replacing a hard disk is somewhat more difficult, because you must transfer all your software to the new unit, which requires disk copying software. You can't just copy your files with Windows Explorer.

More adventuresome is installing a new motherboard. Be aware that upgrading your motherboard may not result in a noticeable performance improvement unless you also upgrade your hard disk and/or your video controller. If your current motherboard is very old, you must also upgrade its case and power supply. Changing the video controller or monitor is also not too hard. Most monitors are plug-and-play so Windows should automatically recognize your new monitor.

When you buy new peripherals, be sure you get any drivers they need. Many PC manufacturers don't include a complete Windows, but strip off all the drivers except for the equipment they sell you. If necessary, download any missing drivers from the Internet before you change your hardware.

An alternative to an upgrade is a complete new system, and the vendor will insure that all the software and hardware plays well together. This leaves your old system intact so you can transfer your files without risk of losing anything.

Regardless of your approach, you must also choose where and what

to buy. *Where* is a choice between mail order and a local dealer. *What* is a choice between name brand and commodity hardware.

The choice between mail order and local dealer depends on how much experience and time you have. The low profit margins in PC hardware mean that both component manufacturers and system assemblers spend little time on testing. Dead-on-arrival hardware and infant mortalities are common. When this happens you are entirely dependent on the company that sold it to you. If you purchase from a mail-order firm, you must either trouble-shoot any problems yourself or ship the entire system back to the seller, while a good local dealer can often make repairs in a few hours. You are trading off convenience for cost, because using mail order can often save you a few dollars.

Name brand hardware costs more than its commodity equivalent. The difference is between Sound Blaster and "Sound Blaster equivalent". I favor name brands. You can be sure that every vendor of software that uses sound has tested its products with Sound Blaster cards, but it is impossible for a small manufacturer to test its sound card with every program.

The less you pay for a system, the more likely it is to contain commodity parts. System manufacturers and assemblers usually purchase components on an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) basis, and most parts sold at computer shows are OEM. The cost of these is less because the dealer relieves the manufacturer from all customer support. This means that the component manufacturer often won't even talk to the end purchaser. Your only warranty is from the seller, and you

must select him or her with care.

Finally, schedule any upgrade when you have some time. Plan on taking a weekend for simple jobs and more for complex ones. I've found that I need a couple of weeks (not full time of course) to get my PC fully functional after reinstalling an operating system for example.