



The Cursor



Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

Meeting Location
Fairfax County
Government Center



Next Meeting:
April 19, 2008



Presidential Bits

April 2008 Meeting

By Paul Howard

Get those taxes done - just in case you forgot - it's that time again! I've been wrestling with mine, and thought I was going to have to give up on the Virginia version of TurboTax. I made a mistake, and didn't think I'd be able to rectify it - but I was finally able to get back into the form and make a correction during the review process. The "interview" section of the program just wouldn't let me back to the section where I entered an incorrect amount for an estimated tax payment.

How many of you have run out and invested in the HP MediaSmart Home Server that Lorrin Garson told us about at the March meeting? Seems like a terrific backup solution for the home - and probably for many small offices. Lorrin's presentation is available on the "recent meeting page" of the group's web site: <http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html>

Also at March's meeting, I talked briefly about the installation of Verizon's FiOS service, and showed a short slide presentation adapted from a Verizon to FCC explanation

of how FiOS works. That will also be available on the recent meeting page shortly.

This month's WACUG meeting will be on the third Saturday of the month, April 19th, at the Fairfax County Government Center. Chuck Roberts will be talking about the latest edition of PhotoShop Elements, which is version 6 of this very popular photo editing and graphics creation and manipulation program. His primary topic will revolve around some of the new features, plug-ins and add-ons for PSE 6, but he'll also remind us of some of the basic features that make this program so popular.

We think we've found a winner for our board meetings and social get-togethers after the board meeting. At Bob Rott's suggestion, we gathered at the Wegman's store after the meeting. Everyone picked up a tray of food, with available varieties seemingly endless, and headed for the dining areas on the floor above the main shopping area. You're very welcome to join us! We do have to get the meeting business accomplished, of course - but the atmosphere's good for socializing, as well. Hope to see you there!



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Lloyd's Web Sites for April, 2008

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

April 2008 Sites for April 2008

1. 100 Milestone Documents www.ourdocuments.gov/content.php?flash=true&page=milestone. A list of 100 milestone documents, compiled by the National Archives and Records Administration, and drawn primarily from its nationwide holdings. The documents chronicle United States history from 1776 to 1965.
2. Daily automotive information watchdog. www.motorwatch.com
3. Do you want to know if an automobile has had the air bag replaced? Enter vehicle identification number at www.carfax.com/airbag
4. FlightAware Flight Tracker <http://flightaware.com> -
FlightAware is a free flight tracker that will change what you think about live flight tracking and aviation data. Related sites: [USA Today Flight Tracker](#) | [Aeroseek Flight Tracker](#) | [Airline Toll-free Numbers](#).
5. Statistical Abstract of the United States - www.census.gov/prod/www/statistical-abstract.html The Statistical Abstract of the United States, published since 1878, is the authoritative and comprehensive summary of statistics on the social, political, and economic organization of the United States.
6. Data and Statistics on Older Americans - www.cdc.gov/nchs/aging.htm This site by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provides statistics, data and resources to monitor the health of older Americans, and to assess health protection goals of increasing the number of older adults who live longer, high-quality, productive, and independent lives.
7. All Recipes - <http://allrecipes.com> - Looking for recipes? All-recipes has more than 40,000 free recipes - all created, tested, reviewed and approved by home cooks worldwide.
8. MyMoney.gov - www.mymoney.gov MyMoney.gov is the U.S. government's website dedicated to teaching all Americans the basics about financial education. Whether you are planning to buy a home, balancing your checkbook, or investing in your 401k, the resources on MyMoney.gov can help you do it better. Throughout the site, you will find important information from 20 federal agencies government wide.



NCTCUG

Visit our "sister" user group. The National Capital Technology and Computer User's Group meets the first and fourth Wednesday of the month. They meet in Carlin Hall in Arlington at 5711 South 4th Street. Visit their web site for more information, a map and directions: <http://www.nctcug.org/>
Meetings start at 7:00 PM

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Comodo Security Freeware for Microsoft Windows

By Geof Goodrum, WAC

I find myself the caretaker of the user group's laptop, which I configured to run the Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition and the Kubuntu GNU/Linux operating systems, selectable at boot time. As security is always a concern, I keep both OS's up to date with software patches. However, keeping Windows XP secure requires an effective network firewall, a recent antivirus program with frequent virus signature updates, and a spyware blocker, also with frequent malware signature updates.

While WinXP includes a basic firewall that blocks incoming network attacks, it does not notify the user or block unusual network activity that might indicate an existing virus or malware infection on the PC. One popular replacement option is the freeware version of ZoneAlarm® by Zone Labs. However, the free version has limited functionality as an enticement to upgrade to the commercial version. Another freeware option is Comodo Firewall Pro (CFP) v3.0, which received high marks in reviews from PC Magazine and C|NET.

PC World names CFP as one of the „101 Fantastic Freebies“ in their May 2008 issue.

Comodo also offers free antivirus and antispyware software for Microsoft Windows and free signature updates. In return, Comodo simply asks customers to consider their commercial security products and services, which include secure FAX and e-mail, web site vulnerability scanning, and digital certificates for e-mail and web site authentication.

I installed Comodo Firewall Pro 3.0, Comodo AntiVirus 2.0beta, and Comodo BOClean Anti-Malware 4.25 onto the Dell Inspiron 1100 laptop for evaluation. The laptop features a 2.0 GHz Intel Celeron CPU, 640 MB SODIMM RAM, 20 GB Hitachi Travel Star hard disk (4200 rpm, ATA100, 2 MB buffer). The Operating System was Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition SP2 with patches current as of 31 March 2008.

The Comodo software was a straightforward download and installation. Existing antivirus software should be removed prior to installation. The Comodo programs do not interfere with each other but are not integrated, either. The Comodo Firewall replaces the Windows firewall. The Comodo AntiVirus software does not show up in the Windows Security Center, so Windows will complain about No Protection. I found the boot time on the system increased noticeably from approximately 1.5 minutes to 3 minutes (including time to access my home wireless network from Firefox 2.0.0.13) – most of the difference is apparently due to Comodo BOClean AntiMalware, which does a complete scan of the system memory and running processes on startup.

During installation, the firewall software scans the system for common software to modify its rules, though it seemed to miss many common programs. When an unknown program tries to access the Internet, the firewall software pops up a window to ask whether to allow or deny the program's request and gives options to remember your response for the future and submit the program to Comodo for analysis. After a few sessions, the firewall pop-ups diminish in frequency if the responses are remembered, though show up again for newly installed software. The firewall has settings for basic and advanced users, and provides detailed information about which programs have been granted access, which have been denied, and other firewall activity.

All three programs can be opened through the system tray, and include animated icons to indicate activity. BOClean can be configured not to start at boot time, but this is not recommended for obvious reasons. The firewall and antivirus products are not easily disabled at boot, though advanced users can do this through Windows Services. All programs can be closed (which leaves the system vulnerable), and include uninstall utilities if you decide to remove them completely. The antivirus and antimalware programs receive automatic daily updates when the system is connected to the Internet, or can be updated manually from the program interface. The firewall's program interface has an updater, as well.

Unlike many freeware (adware) products, the Comodo programs do not have obtrusive advertising like pop-up ads or annoying splash screens.

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Comodo provides technical support for the free products through forums and Frequently Asked Questions on its web site.

In summary, the Comodo security products are full-featured like their commercial counterparts and well-worth checking out, especially if you use the default Windows firewall or don't have updated antivirus and anti-malware software installed. The system requirements are summarized below. More information and downloads are available at the Comodo web site, <http://www.comodo.com/>.

Comodo Firewall Pro v3.0

- Windows XP – 32 and 64 bit versions
- Windows Vista – 32 and 64 bit versions
- 64 MB RAM
- 55 MB free disk space for 32-bit; 75 MB for 64-bit
- 20 MB download for 32-bit, 29 MB download for 64-bit

Comodo BOClean: Anti-Malware Version 4.25

- Windows For Workgroups 3.11 (Win32s required)
- Windows 95, 95A, 95B, 95C (Winsock 2 required)
- Windows 98, 98SE
- Windows ME
- Windows NT4 (SP2+ required)
- Windows 2000
- Windows Server 2003
- Windows XP (any, including 64)
- Windows Longhorn Server
- Windows Vista (any, including 64)
- 1.3 MB download

Comodo AntiVirus 2.0 beta

- Windows XP (SP2) / Windows 2000 (SP4 or later)
- 50 MB available space on your

hard drive

- 128 MB RAM
- Intel Pentium 300 MHz processor (or equivalent)
- Not compatible with Windows 9x

GNU/Linux SIG

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.com lists the following distribution release announcements for the period February 28 – April 2, 2008.

Distribution
Clonezilla Live 1.0.9-19
Dreamlinux 3.0
Foresight Linux 2.0
Frugalware Linux 0.8
Kiwi Linux 8.03
KNOPPIX 5.3.1
Linux Mint 4.0 "KDE"
Linux-EduCD 0.9
Momonga Linux 4.1
Parsix GNU/Linux 1.0r1
Parted Magic 2.1
PelicanHPC GNU Linux 1.3
Slax 6.0.3
SystemRescueCd 1.0.1
Zenwalk Live 5.0

Linux Software of the Month

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

April 2008

Bos Wars – v2.5. <http://www.boswars.org/>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable by the Bos Wars Team. Bos Wars is a futuristic real time strategy (RTS) game. In a RTS game, the player has to combat enemies while developing a war economy. Everything runs in real-time, as opposed to turn-based games where the player always has to wait for his turn. The trick is to balance the effort put into building the economy and building an army to defend and attack the enemies. It is possible to play against human opponents over LAN, Internet, or against the computer. Bos Wars successfully runs under Linux, MS Windows, BSD, and Mac OS X. Requires X-Window System and an accelerated graphics card with OpenGL for best graphics performance.

Firefox – v3.0 beta5. <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/all-beta.html>. Free Mozilla Public License source code and executable by the Mozilla Foundation. Although still a developer release, the Mozilla Foundation has declared this beta suitable for end users. This new, major release features significantly faster page updates, reduced memory usage, excellent compliance with web standards, and better look and feel, among many other improvements.

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OpenOffice.org – v2.4.0. <http://www.openoffice.org/>. Free Lesser GNU General Public License (LGPL) source code and executable by the OpenOffice.org community. OpenOffice.org (OOo) is an integrated suite of office applications, including a full-featured word processor, spreadsheet, presentation manager, graphics editor, and database manager. OOo uses the international standard OpenDocument XML file format, but also reads and writes Microsoft Office file formats. This new release has many significant improvements, including support for Microsoft Access 2007 databases, drag and drop of spreadsheet rows and columns, 3D animated transitions for presentations, selection of rectangular sections of word processor text, and support for PDF/A-1 (ISO 19005-1) output.

Kernel Source – <http://www.kernel.org/>. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.24.4 and pre-patch [2.6.25-rc7](#)).



Moving on to Vista

– Part 5

by Neil Stahfest, Librarian, Tacoma Area PC User Group, Washington
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As most PC users know, after you've used your computer for a while the data on your hard drive starts to get fragmented. This affects your computer's performance and causes programs to run more slowly. With Windows XP, as well as all previous versions, you had three ways to defragment your hard drive. You could do it manually (click Start --> All Programs --> Accessories --> System Tools --> Disk Defragmenter). You could do it manually (click Start --> All Programs --> Accessories --> System Tools --> Disk Cleanup). Or you could create a scheduled task to do it for you automatically (click Start --> All Programs --> Accessories --> System Tools --> Scheduled Task and then click on "Add Scheduled Task" and follow the wizard instructions).

Windows Vista automatically defragments your hard disk for you. Not only does it defragment your hard disk, but it does it in background mode. This allows you to do other things on your computer while the defragmenting program is being run. The down side of this is that programs will run more slowly while the defragmenting process goes on. On the other hand, because automatic defragmenting runs fairly frequently it should not take too long to complete.

Of course you still have the ability to defragment manually. Right-click on the "Computer" icon on your desktop and select properties. In the window that appears, click on "Performance" (lower left cor-

ner), then "Advanced Tools" (upper left corner) and then "Open Disk Defragmenter". Notice that at this point you have the options of scheduling when the defragmenter runs or running it immediately. At this point Vista will defragment ALL hard drives that it finds on your computer. Previous versions of Windows allow you to select which hard drive to defragment. Windows Vista SP1 (when it is released) is supposed to add this capability to Windows Vista.

While we are on the topic of computer performance, lets go back to the "Performance Information and Tools" screen (right click on the "Computer" icon, click on "Properties" and click on "Performance" in the lower left corner of the screen). Note that this screen provides you with some general information about the performance of your computer. It numerically scores processor, memory, graphics and hard disk performance. You'll find links on this screen that explain what the numbers mean and how to improve your computer's performance. Many of the suggestions do not require changes to you hardware but recommend changes to the programs that you run or do not run.

On the upper left side of the "Performance Information and Tools" screen you'll find a number of tasks which control how your computer performs. If your PC is a laptop, click on "Adjust power settings". On the new screen, examine the "Power Plan". The decision you make here effects the length of time that your laptop will run between battery charges and its speed. Most laptops come configured to balance performance against battery endurance. There are many options available.

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If you normally operate your laptop plugged into an external power source, you'll want to change the setting to maximize performance.

Before we leave the "Performance Information and Tools" screen, you should also look at "Adjust visual effects" (in the upper left corner under "Tasks"). When you click on this item you'll see three tabs. We are only going to address the "Visual effects" tab for now. The first button, "Let Windows choose what is best for my computer" is probably selected. This gives you the maximized "eye candy" on your computer but may have a negative effect on performance when resource intensive programs are running (i.e. Video editors). Notice that you have additional choices to "Adjust for best appearance" and "Adjust for best performance" as well as a "Custom" button that lets you choose what features to turn on and off. If your computer performance appears to be sluggish, try selecting "Best performance".

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The Computer Corner – Spring Clean Your Computer

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While you're cleaning everything else around your home and office at this time of year, don't forget to clean your computer. There is truth to the saying, "A clean computer is a happy computer."

With the time we spend creating and working on our systems, we should do all we can to keep them running smoothly and give them long, healthy lives. So here are some things we can all do to prolong the lives of our systems. As a cautionary note: backup all your important items before doing any maintenance on your system. If you don't feel comfortable opening your system or editing the Registry, then don't do it! But what I intend to discuss here is not rocket science. These items are the same ones I perform when I clean my clients' systems.

Blow the Dust Out!

Dust is your computer's enemy! So get rid of it. The electronic components in a system generate heat. Heat is bad for a system. The more dust in a machine, the hotter it will run. When motherboard components get overheated, they "take a powder" and just shut themselves off until they can cool down. By keeping the insides clean your system will run cooler, thus letting it run longer.

Most generic systems have 4 to 6 screws that hold the case cover on. If you have a Dell, HP, Compaq,

Gateway or other major brand system, look in the owner's manual or online to find out how to open your case. By removing the sides of the computer you'll gain access to its guts which is where the cleaning can be done. I use a small hand-held vacuum to suck up the dust balls. I use the crevice tool, that's not the one with the brush. You can also use canned air or air from a compressor to blow the dirt out. Be careful not to bump or touch any components on the motherboard while cleaning. Keeping one hand on the metal case while you clean should discharge any static electricity that might have built up.

With the vacuum, don't forget to suck out the dust that has accumulated in the power supply. There are usually vents on the side opposite the circular fan. I vacuum out from both the fan-side and the vent side. Note: if you are blowing rather than vacuuming, don't blow air into the floppy drive or cdrom/dvd units. Unless they are filthy and already don't work, you don't want to risk getting dust on the optics inside. And remember, blowing air into a computer really just moves the dust from the computer to somewhere else! I suggest you do it outside, if possible.

If you have a mouse that has a ball, think about getting a mouse that uses laser light instead. But if you want to clean the mouse, open it up, wash the ball with warm, soapy water, and gently scrape the gunk off the three rollers inside. Your mouse will act like new after a good cleaning.

You can also vacuum your keyboard. You'd be amazed at how much junk you'll find if you just turn it over and shake it up a bit. I have even

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gone so far as to wash the keyboard to get rid of spilled soda. An hour or two in the Phoenix sun and the keyboard is ready to go!

Cleaning the Software

Before running software cleaners such as Ad-aware, Spybot Search & Destroy and a good antivirus program (I like the free AVG), it makes sense to delete unneeded files and programs. Might as well not clean any more than you have to! This might be the time to use System Restore to create a Restore Point before you eliminate something you shouldn't. Better safe than sorry.

In the Documents and Settings area, look for the Local Settings folder for each user. If you can't find it, you may need to turn on the "Show Hidden Files and Folders" option on your system. To do this, open up Explorer, from the menu bar at the top go to Tools-Folder Options-View-Show Hidden Files and Folders.

Under Local Settings, I delete everything in the Temp folder. I also delete everything in the Temporary Internet Files folder also. Once that's done, I go to the Windows folder, and delete everything in the TEMP folder. Caution: some of you create your own Temp folders into which you may put things you might not want to delete. Check that out before doing a mass deletion.

Open the Registry

Again, if you're not comfortable editing the Registry, don't. You can back up the Registry (entirely or just specific keys) before proceeding. I mention this item in order to delete the "Compress Old Files" key before proceeding to the next step. You can either search for this key using the Find feature, or go to:

HKEY_Local_Machine\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\VolumeCaches .

The second key down should be the CompressOldFiles key, if it hasn't already been removed. If it's there, RIGHT click on it and delete it. You don't need it. Close the Registry and proceed.

Clean Up Drive

To clean up your drive further, go to My Computer. For each hard drive, RIGHT click on the drive, left click on Properties, and then click on Disk Cleanup. If you didn't remove the CompressOldFiles key earlier, it may take a long time before the system responds. If you did, shortly you'll see files which may be deleted from your system so you can recover space. After cleaning these up you may see an increase in available disk space.

Clean Up Internet Explorer and Firefox

One of the easiest things you can do to keep your computer clean is to get rid of Temporary Internet Files that are stored on your computer. Here's how to do this for immediate relief:

- Internet Explorer - delete Temporary Internet Files:
 1. Open Internet Explorer.
 2. Select the Tools menu.
 3. Select Internet Options.
 4. Select the General tab.
 5. In the Temporary Internet Files section, click the Delete Files button.
 6. Do not check the clear Offline Content box. Click Ok.
 7. Click Ok to close the Tools window.
- Firefox (Mozilla) - clear browser cache

1. Open FireFox (Mozilla).
2. Click the Tools menu.
3. Click Options.
4. Click Privacy.
5. Click the Clear button for Cache.

If you use Internet Explorer, go to Tools-Internet Options-Advanced and almost at the end, put a check mark in the box that says "Empty Temporary Internet Files folder when Browser is closed" and IE will automatically delete the files when you close the browser.

Add/Remove Programs

In the Control Panel, you can add and remove programs you no longer need or use. If you are not sure, Google the program in question and then decide. You might want to opt to leave in any program you are not sure about. But if you still have games or programs you have not used in years, toolbars you don't want or need, or other items of no significance to you, clear them out. As I've said before, Google first, then if you're still not sure, leave them in. Often programs will have their own Uninstall feature. If you decide to remove a program, first go to Start-Programs and find the menu item of the program you want to delete. If it is there, check to see if there is an Uninstall menu choice and if so, I'd start with that before using the Add/Remove programs feature.

Spybot Search & Destroy and Ad-Aware

These are two FREE programs that do a great job cleaning up malware, spies, and other things that slow your system down. You can find them on the Internet at www.download.com

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, or just Google them. After installing them, make sure you use the update feature before doing a scan. These programs are updated almost daily, so it pays to take advantage of the latest updates.

Get Rid of the Language Bar

Control Panel, Regional Settings, Languages, Details, Languages, Uncheck the “Show Language Bar” box to get rid of the Language Bar at the bottom of your screen. If you use the Language Bar, by all means don’t get rid of it.

Keep Your Antivirus Updated!

Whichever AV program you use, if it is not updated you’re not getting full protection! Security suites slow systems down! I don’t use them. Google “AVG Free” to get a free antivirus that does a good job, and then configure it to have it updated and run it daily.

Task Manager

Quite often slow performance is directly related to the programs that are running. RIGHT click on the Taskbar to open and look at duplicate program entries under Processes – click on the title of the Processes tab to sort alphabetically. If you see multiple instances of the same program running, for example, outlook.exe, odds are you’re having some kind of problem. If you’re not sure about what a process is, Google it to find out or leave it alone. If you click on the CPU tab twice, you’ll see which programs are using the most memory. Find the memory hogs, check them at Google, and then begin to end processes you don’t need. If a process is critical, Windows won’t let you close it.

MSCONFIG

Go to Start – Run and type in “msconfig” (don’t type the quotes) and click on “OK” and look in the Startup and Services areas to check to see what programs might not need to start. If you know they are not needed, uncheck them. If you have a problem after restarting, then re-check them. If you’re uncertain, Google the file names and learn about them.

Defrag Your System Regularly

Go to <http://www.auslogics.com/en/software> to find free software to defrag your hard drives. I recommend defragging at least monthly to keep your system running smoothly. This is a nice program, FREE, and it’s pleasant to watch. Keeping your hard drives defragmented will add life to your system and speed up performance when saving and retrieving files.

The suggestions above are based upon a system running Windows XP Pro. With Vista things may be in different places. The operation should be very similar, however, so doing a search in the Help & Support area may provide the answers you’re looking for.



Photodex ProShow Review

By Tom Ekvall, Northeast Wisconsin PC User Group newsletter editor
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I love creating – and watching— photo slideshows, also known as photo montages or video montages.

They are exciting as photos and video clips are set to music with special

effects and sounds added to the production. Memories no longer need to be kept in photo albums or shoeboxes. The slideshows can also be burned onto a DVD or CD, shared by email or uploaded to a web site, or even kept as a screen saver.

I remember many years ago my dad used to take plenty of slides with his Nikon camera and would put together slide shows (real slides) of his trips, camping outings, and other occasions that all of us would watch. He even did travelogues that he showed to senior groups and others of his trips complete with two slide projectors, a dissolve unit, tape recorder and all the equipment to put on a first class production. He did slideshows of Civil War battlefields, the Smoky Mountains and other popular sites.

Slideshows must have become a family interest as my sister who lives near Denver also enjoys putting together photo montages on DVD of her vacation trips for others using a Macintosh computer. ProShow will not work, though, with the Mac Operating System; however, it can be used with success on those newer Intel-based Macintosh computers with a program such as Boot Camp that allows Macs to run Windows-based products.

Today there are plenty of software on the market for producing slideshows ranging from free ones through Microsoft with simple effects to ProShow by Photodex Corporation of Austin, Texas, that represents to me the “tops in class” of anything available.

Slideshows can be done as part of photo editing programs, created through video editing software that allows adding photos to a video

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production, or as a stand-alone product.

I tried out a number of slideshow products and feature for feature, nothing can compare with ProShow, especially the Producer version targeted at professionals who want the ultimate in what a slideshow can deliver (\$249.95). The company also offers a ProShow Gold version (\$69.95) aimed at photo enthusiasts that packs a wallop in creating simply amazing shows. The price is for download versions; add \$20 for download plus box version of Producer and \$10 for Gold.

The Gold version offers many of the features of the Producer model and both outshine any other product I have seen. There is also a Standard Version for under \$29.95, but I would opt for no less than the Gold version. The latest version is 3.2 with upgrades available free for 12 months.

What the ProShow products offer is the ability to fully customize any aspect of the production from beginning to end.

The product is available only through Photodex, either as a download or as a box version. The company also has a first-class support service for unlimited free help, including that for a trial version good for 15 days that you can download. I called in with a question that was immediately resolved. The company is dedicated to providing the highest quality service. I cannot think of few other sites that provide free technical support to trial version customers. My only complaint about the trial versions is that while fully functional, the output bears a strip across the middle of the slides noting that the photo show was created

on trial software. By purchasing the product you receive a registration code that will eliminate the strip. Support help is available seven days a week by phone or by email.

I installed the Producer version of the product on a HP laptop computer running Windows Vista Home Premium with an AMD Turion 64 dual core processor and 1 gigabyte of RAM. No problems with the installation and everything set up perfectly. I was able to produce my first slideshow without reading instructions, attesting to the simplicity of the product while offering many customization tools that add a “WOW” factor to the production. The product will also run on Windows XP. The Producer version requires at least 1 gigabyte of RAM and a 1 gigahertz processor. The Gold version will run on Windows ME or 98 and can get by with 512 megabytes of RAM.

My first show was one featuring the college liaison person for the Northeast Wisconsin PC User Group which meets at the Fox Valley Technical College. He has been a longtime member and is also an avid balloonist and attends the computer and electronic shows in Las Vegas. We collected pictures of him and of the user group over the years, which I then used to create a DVD show. I had most of the presentation done early had brought my camera to our January meeting, at which time I took pictures of him talking about the Consumer Electronics Shows. Within minutes, the pictures were downloaded into the show, set to music and a DVD created in a manner of minutes presented to him as a surprise.

I found the rendering speed of the final product to be very fast to create the final product.

There are numerous features about the program (both Producer and Gold versions) I like which make it a must have. These include:

- The ability to add background music simply playing an audio CD on the computer and importing a track directly into the program; a show can also be created whereby the photos will automatically sync with the length of the music or link specific photos to specific tracks. I did a wedding show in which the wedding music began as the bride walked down the aisle (my wife). There were 150 photos and four sound tracks in the 15-minute production. I also did a one-click audio sync to a family Christmas show timing the photos (and transitions) to the length of a Christmas song recorded by my wife’s cousin, who records children’s music.
- Over 280 transition effects (much more than I could ever want, although it does not pay to put too many in a show without it becoming a distraction. The transitions can be set as to time length or set automatically for the show duration.
- Probably the best I have seen in motion effects (the pan and zoom or “Ken Burns” effect) for a slideshow program with the ability to do precise controls modifying many different aspects of each slide
- Layering capabilities that allow unlimited layers on any slide that can create amazing effects. With the Producer version, you can add video clips onto a still

See *XP Disk Maintenance Tools* page 10

photo slide

- Masking and keyframing opportunities with layer opacity control on the Producer version only that enhance the layering effects as to motion with the slides with precise control
- Supports more than 100 input file types and can output to ipods, cell phones, Zunes, YouTube, and other portable devices; Producer version also supports RAW photos
- DVD burner support included with both Gold and Producer
- Video clips can be added to the show with both versions while video can be added as a layer in the Producer version

Other features of note include unlimited undo's, photo editing capabilities, multiple captions and text that can be animated to one or more slides, real time preview, drag and drop rearranging of slides, the ability to customize the background, built-in audio and video trimmers.

Tutorials are available through the company's website (www.photodex.com) as well as three DVDs through the company that cover layering, keyframing and audio controls (\$49.95 each). There are several user groups that I joined through Yahoo groups dealing with Proshow and the Producer version, where users offer comments about the product and its features and upload shows for others to critique. I get numerous posts each day from group members.

For photo professionals and others in the corporate world, the Producer version offers the ability to allow viewers to interact with the presentation on a computer, such

as enabling the person to access a particular web site or other information, pause the presentation, or interact in other ways. A great tool for real estate professionals who may want to showcase their properties or lead them to links of places and information of interest. The Producer version also allows optional watermarking to protect the photos in the show.

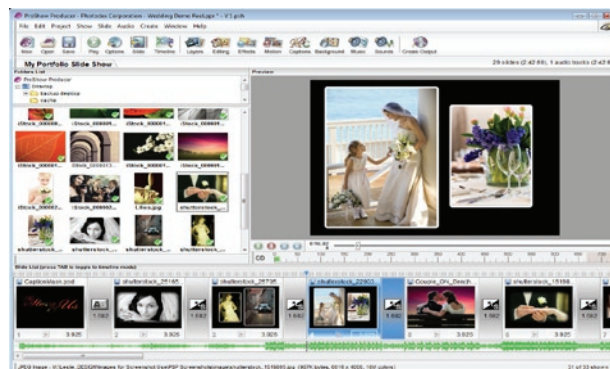
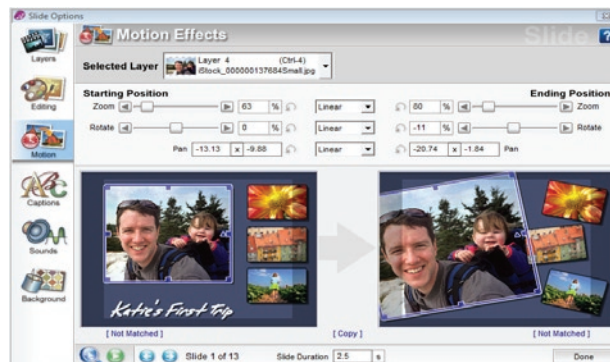
The one thing the product does not have that I could determine is the ability to print pictures from the produced show, which may be an issue for someone wanting to share pictures with other for them to print out if desired.

In summary, this is a fantastic program. Either the Gold or Producer version will provide a professional tool to create exciting slideshows that you and others can enjoy. Producing a slideshow takes only a short time and the wide variety of control options enhances the creativity you can put into the show. If you are

hooked on creating slideshows, I would opt for the Producer version even if you are only a photo enthusiast based on the added features, such as keyframing, masking, and timing controls. Settings can also be saved for creating future shows.

The slideshows so far produced were simple and basic, but very entertaining. Next month I will review in the newsletter the more dramatic effects that can be created such as keyframing, layering, and masking and training tutorials available from the company to create these effects. After watching videos produced by others on the ProShow user group sites, I can attest to the amazing things that can be done with a collection of photos.

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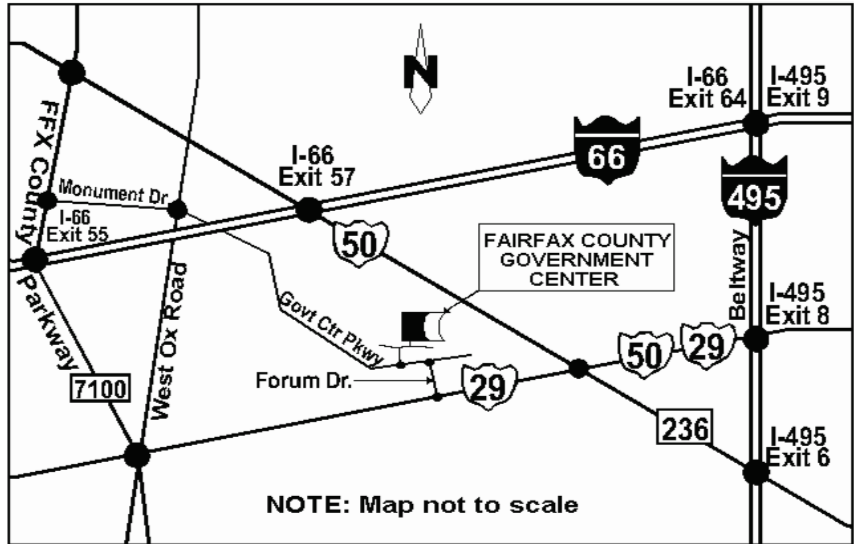
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on the right

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