

The NCTCUG Journal

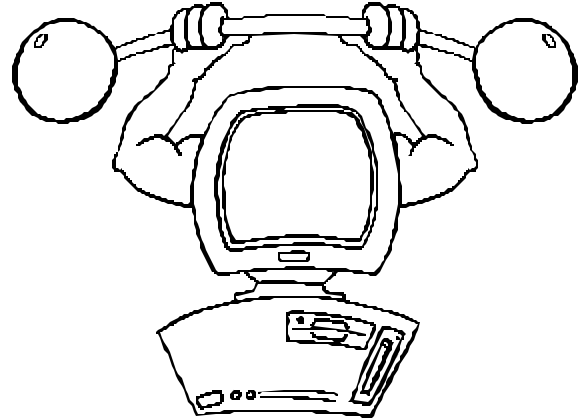
www.nctcug.org

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Keeping Up

by Paul Howard (NCTCUG)



NCTCUG Computer Upgrade

The club recently received a large box from Microsoft's Mindshare User Group program. Included were a knapsack, CD storage carrier, several pamphlet sized books on XP and Pocket PC, and the latest TechNet support CD. Other items included the latest versions of Money and Encarta, and a copy of Windows XP Professional. If you'd like to review Money, TechNet, or Encarta, please contact Paul Howard.

In order to insure our group's demo computer would meet storage and memory requirements for the installation of XP Professional, the board of directors authorized the purchase of additional SDRAM and a larger hard drive. These components were installed at the meeting on 1/23/02. You may view pictures of the new components and some of your NCTCUG friends on the group's web site. Start your tour at:

<http://www.nctcug.org/photindx.html>

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The Internet? I Can't Live Without it!

By Steve Bass, Pasadena IBM Users Group

The computer was turned off (really!) and I was sipping coffee and reading the Sunday funnies.

There's Cathy searching for airline tickets on the Internet. In one panel, a friend describes spending an hour juggling flight schedules on screen, trying to find the best time and low price. Another friend tells about finally giving up after experiencing the World Wide Wait at every airline site she visits.

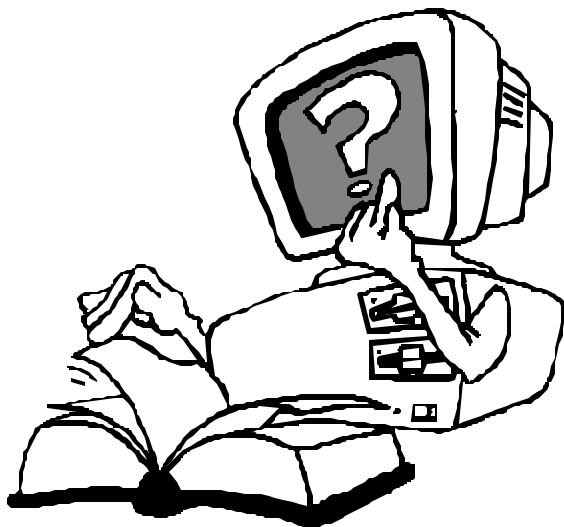
Cathy also pokes around the Web and after four hours online, finally finds the perfect, discounted ticket.

When she finally gets on the flight, the passenger next to her explained how his discount ticket cost him \$20 less than Cathy's.

The punch line? He apparently doesn't own a computer and got his ticket by making a ten-minute phone call.

Of course the guy missed the point. I mean, why in the world would anyone want to do something by phone when you could use modern technology?

Okay, I'll admit that I've done it. I'll invest 20 minutes using a dozen search engines trying to find a phone number for a restaurant. Oh, sure, I know—it's in the Pasadena Yellow Pages. And the book's sitting on the bookshelf just across the room. But that's the point, right? It's not within reach—and I'm already logged on. <smile>



Seriously, used judiciously, the Internet's a tremendous tool. In the last few weeks, I've been able to use the Web to: Get an obscure part for a camera lens, find replacement vinyl straps for a lawn chair, buy discounted wallpaper (50 percent less than the local shop), learn more about Home Theater devices than I could at a local store, find an out-of-print book, and hire a fencing contractor. Here are some other examples:

Improve On This

The fencing guy came by way of ImproveNet, a web site that hooks me up with a contractor. You plug in the details of the job and they find a contractor in your area who is qualified to handle the job. The site reports whether the contractor has a general liability insurance certificate on file with ImproveNet, has a license in good standing, a clear financial history, and a clear legal history. Each item is updated quarterly.

So far, I've had good luck twice: first with a concrete job and again with the fencing contractor. Check it at www.improvenet.com

Beam It To Me, Scottie

Last year I had a satellite dish installed on the roof and subscribed to DirecTV. It's terrific—the picture's digitally and stunningly crisp, the signal's never failed (hello? Charter Communication? How's your cable doing?), and the available programming is excessive. We're getting all the basic channels, a few premium channels, as well as the Independent Film Channel—all for a little less than cable service. (www.directv.com)

With all that high-tech beaming into the house, I don't want to sit in front of the TV and stare at DirecTV's on-screen scroll to keep track of what's playing. Instead, I use TV Grid, a nifty Internet service that jumps through hurdles for me. (www.tvgrid.com)

First, it offers what every other TV service has—a grid listing your favorite stations. So far, no big deal.

But when I move the cursor on top of the movie or show, a description appears in another frame. Click on the link and another Java-based window pops up letting me quickly jump to one or two movie review sites (<http://www.mrqe.com/> or <http://www.imdb.com/>). Then the film's title is inserted into the search engine saving me keystrokes. Very cool.

It gets better: I want to watch a specific movie, say, the Producers, I can create a Perpetual Reminder. TV Grid searches every morning, e-mailing me if they find a match.

Inside DVD

Do you have a DVD player? Then sign up for a free DVD of Infinity, a 1996 movie starring (and directed by) Matthew Broderick. It's an account of the personal life of Manhattan Project scientist Richard Feynman. First read some reviews here... <http://us.imdb.com/TURLs?COM+0116635>

I discovered the free DVD — from Inside DVD: The DVD Entertainment Magazine — on the Web. www.insidedvd.com/

Log onto Inside DVD's Web site, register, and they'll send you a DVD. Free. No hooks and no obligations.

And nope, I haven't received any e-mail or junk mail and I've been signed up for six months. That's because the DVD's advertiser sponsored.

Nonetheless, it's loaded with movie trailers, music, previews, and other stuff (and, because it's DVD, you can blithely ignore anything you're not interested in viewing).

Shopping For A DVD—Or Anything Else?

If you haven't tried comparison shopping on the Internet, you're missing a ton of fun. Even if you don't buy anything on the Web, these resources take the hassle of comparing products and features.

The very best site at feature comparisons is www.compare.net. I started by searching for a DVD player. Once the models came on screen, I could click a few DVD models and in a few seconds, I had a grid on screen showing each product feature compared to the

others. You can also drill deeper and have the site get you pricing.

There are loads of sites that'll check for low prices, but the two most comprehensive I found: Excite's Product Finder (www.jango.com/xsh/index.dcg?) and Bottom Dollar (www.bottomdollar.com/).

But It Doesn't Stop There.

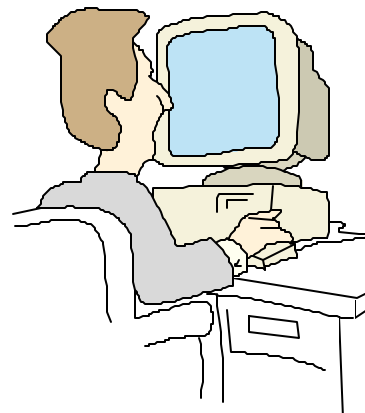
As I began shopping for an A/V receiver, two PIBMUG members told me about the Audio Review site (www.audioreview.com). I searched the site, found the A/V unit I was interested in, and found—ready?—75 independent reviews.

People rate themselves as audiophile dweebs, casual users, or audio enthusiasts, and then post a review. The value is tremendous; I soon learned that the model I chose was both underpowered and had problems with high-range frequencies. It was a bad choice for me. I figured the reviewers were on the same wavelength as I so I sent e-mail to a number of them, asking for recommendations.

The replies were equally valuable. I read the reviews of another receiver and it helped with the buying decision. Better than relying on a Circuit City salesperson? You bet!

In the meantime, I've got to go online. A new Cathy's just been posted. <http://www.ucomics.com/cathy/>

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World Magazine, frequently writes for Forbes ASAP, and is the president of the Pasadena IBM Users Group. He often writes with his tongue in his cheek. Write to him at stevebass@earthlink.net



Let Your Computer Be Your Guide

Using Your Computer to Plan Your Highway Routes

By Ira Wilsker, Golden Triangle PC Club

Reprinted from the I/O Port Newsletter, Tulsa Computer Society

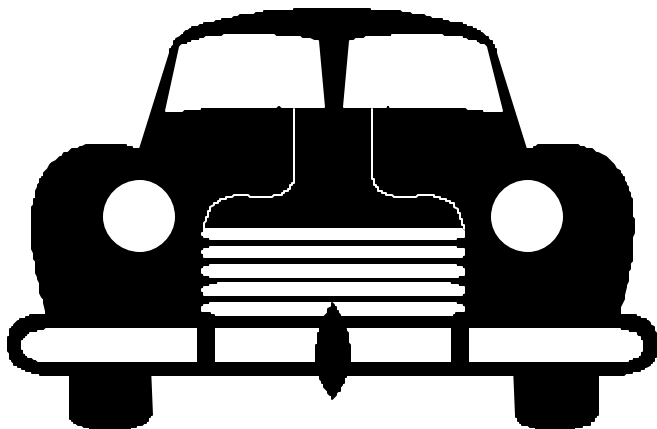
In recent issues of the Examiner, I have provided a variety of travel tips and money saving ideas for vacation and business travel. Even though bargain air travel and cruises are excellent ideas for a vacation, most of us still prefer to drive to our vacation or business destinations. There is an abundance of free websites and inexpensive software that can create detailed route maps to and from virtually any address in the country, along with some interesting devices to ease the routing part of the trip. Many of the online and software resources also include Canada, some include major Mexican cities, and European destinations.

One of the most popular sites to create detailed driving directions is Yahoo at <http://maps.yahoo.com>. Simply click on "driving directions" and then enter the street addresses, and in seconds a detailed routing is on the screen. Another excellent online routing resource is Delorme's Earthamap at <http://www.earthamaps.com>. Click on "directions" enter the addresses, and the route is created, ready to print or email. The main map is interactive and can be zoomed, scrolled, and re-centered to easily view any desired details. Mapquest, at <http://www.mapquest.com>, offers extremely detailed travel maps with the "driving directions" feature. Again, enter the addresses, and detailed directions are generated. An interesting feature of the Mapquest site is that it offers as an

option the ability to download the data into a "PDA" or "Personal Digital Assistant" such as a Palm, Handspring, or similar device. Another interesting feature is the "Re-Display" function, which allows for an additional selection of map views. Personally, I like the "Turn-by-Turn Maps with Text" option. While a larger file to print or download, it does provide for a small but detailed map of every turn or change in direction on the route. For those who have trouble following written directions, these small maps are a great help. The "Locations Along the Way" option adds selected lodging, dining, automotive, retail, and other places of interest to the maps.

A competitor that has recently upgraded its offering is Mapblast at <http://www.mapblast.com>. Mapblast's recent addition of "LineDrive" directions supplements its traditional routing service. The "LineDrive" uses an easy to read linear route map, with directions and distance clearly readable for each segment. The overview maps are interactive and can be zoomed, printed, downloaded into a PDA, or emailed as desired. By clicking on the "step-by-step directions" option, extremely detailed maps are generated showing each leg of the route in detail. Each of the detailed maps is also interactive, allowing for the user to enlarge the maps for each leg, and zoom in or out as necessary. Options exist to add lodging, dining, retail, and service locations to the maps. For purists, Mapblast still offers the traditional routing maps, similar to its major competitors, but the "LineDrive" and "step-by-step" options make this one of the more useful online routing sites.

Some travelers will want to use more detailed and personalized information than what is available on the net, and have the options to customize their routes, rather than utilize the standard routes generated by above websites. For example, when I visit my daughters in Fort Worth, I prefer to take Highway 105 to Conroe, or 105 to 146 to 190 to Huntsville, and pick up I-45 there. Typically, the web-based sites do not allow for such variations without plotting the information as a separate trip for each of the desired legs. This is where the routing software has one of its advantages. There are several excellent software packages available for trip routing. One of the most inexpensive, usually available with a rebate, is Microsoft Streets & Trips 2001. This software provides flexibility in planning



and modifying routes and stopovers. A feature "Optimize Routes" automatically recalculates the route to show the most efficient route, as plans change and other points of interest are added. Streets & Trips can show the maps in traditional format, or in a topographic mode simulating geographic features. A feature "Pocket Streets" allows for the downloading of routing information and maps into a PDA using Windows CE. Another interesting feature, now common with almost all routing software, is the ability to interact with some of the GPS, or Global Positioning Systems. For those who want to always know where they are at any time, and how to get anywhere from where they are, by connecting a compatible GPS receiver to a notebook computer, and running Streets & Trips, an exact location is shown on the notebook screen. As with almost all software, it is necessary to keep the information updated; some minor software updates are available for Streets from the Microsoft website, but the most recent is dated July, 2000.

One of the largest publishers of high quality mapping software is DeLorme. DeLorme offers what may be one of the widest and most comprehensive selections of mapping software available, including its top selling Topo USA series of digitized topographic maps, Street Atlas USA, and the AAA Map'n'Go series. For off road, fishing, hunting, hiking, or other outdoor adventures, the Topo USA series uses extremely detailed and accurate topographic maps. Containing road information along with over 300,000 miles of trails, railroads, boundaries, geological and topographical data, the Topo USA software is capable of generating custom maps and routes.

Another DeLorme product that I have personally used extensively is Street Atlas USA. Claimed to be the top selling digital map product in the country, Street Atlas USA contains virtually every street address in the country, and is easily searchable for any address. In addition to finding an address, it will also quickly provide a route map between selected addresses, including waypoints, detours, retail stores, restaurants, tourist attractions, parks, rest stops, service facilities, and other points of interest. Extremely detailed route maps, including turn-by-turn maps and directions, make this an invaluable resource. The data produced can also be downloaded into properly equipped PDAs for extreme portability. A unique feature of Street Atlas USA is that when it is used with a GPS receiver, the software can generate spoken directions through the speaker on a notebook or other portable computer. For example, it will announce turns, exits, or selected points of interest in real time, with its synthesized voice; far better than a mother-in-law in the back seat! Another valuable feature of Street Atlas USA is its ability to

access current online weather, traffic and construction updates in order to plan an efficient route. Software updates are frequently posted to the DeLorme website.

Another DeLorme product that has been very successful is their AAA Map'n'Go. Combining DeLorme's outstanding digital map technology, with the AAA's 66,000 AAA-rated restaurants, accommodations and attractions, as well as recreational vehicle facilities, campgrounds, ATM machines, and other features, users will find this an excellent resource for detailed highway travel planning. As with many other DeLorme products, Map'n'Go offers an online, up-to-the-minute weather, event and construction information update. Route maps printed using Map'n'Go can be formatted in a variety of ways to suit most preferences. For many years, I used the AAA "Tripticks" strip routing maps, and that is what I select when using Map'n'Go. These provide for detailed road information, distances, times, attractions, and other points of interest. When used with DeLorme's Earthmate GPS receiver and a notebook computer, Map'n'Go offers real time location information. Widely available for under \$30, many find Map'n'Go a most useful highway resource.

Regular readers of this column know that I like gadgets, and one of my favorites is my Garmin Emap GPS system. About the size of a pocket calculator, my Emap shows my location elevation or altitude, course, speed, location on a detailed map, nearby points of interest, highway exit information, and routings to almost any location in the world. Capable of being zoomed in to street level, or zoomed out to a world map, the Emap can show details formerly only available in a large printed atlas. When used in conjunction with Garmin's MapSource Metro Guide software, it does a lot more! Metro Guide is but one in a series of CD based maps available from Garmin, and contains extremely detailed information on roads from highways to local streets, attractions, hotels, facilities, retail establishments, hospitals, and a huge variety of other information. Offering customized routing information like its competitors, Metro Guide also offers current online updates of road construction, weather, special events, and other situations that could effect a routing. Used by itself, Metro Guide is a very capable, detailed, and accurate tool for trip planning, producing excellent detailed directions and route maps.

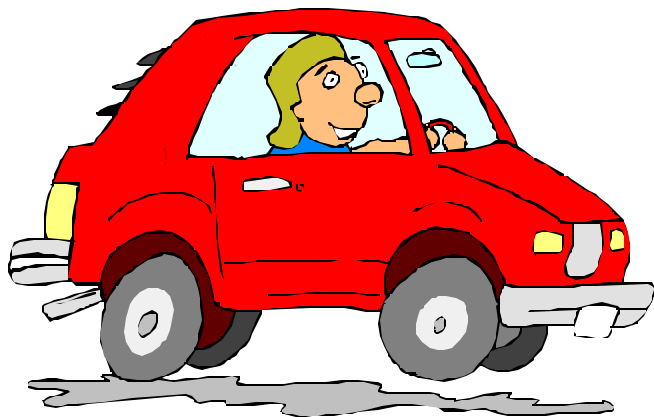
Companion domestic mapping software from Garmin in-

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cludes such diverse titles as United States Roads & Recreation, United States TOPO (topographic maps), United States Waterways & Lights, and Fishing Hot Spots. For international travelers, Garmin also offers WorldMap, Canada MetroGuide with Roads & Recreation, Europe Roads & Recreation, and Europe MetroGuide. The European map software is similar to the American software in that it has local streets and addresses, routings, attractions, lodging, restaurants, retail and service establishments, banks and ATM machines, medical facilities, and a variety of other temptations. These CD based maps cover (individually) Austria, BeNeLux, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, and Switzerland. What is most interesting to me is that all of the Garmin software interfaces with most of the Garmin GPS devices, including my Emap. If, for example, I loaded the regional component of their "Waterways" software into the memory of my Emap, I could show a real time detailed map of the waterways, along with the course and waypoints necessary to reach my destination. Service facilities, restaurants, and other points will be clearly shown on the Emap, and with the click of a button a course will be generated on the screen, with an estimated time of arrival. All of the information will be continuously updated. I have used my Metro Guide software on several occasions, and it performed admirably, both with and without my Emap.

When my wife and daughter first drove to Miami to find my daughter an apartment during law school, they took my Emap with their route programmed by Metro Guide, and the local information from the metro Guide for Miami in its memory. Sitting quietly on the dashboard, where its built in antenna can see the satellites, it tracked their progress east on I-10. With one button, it would accurately show what facilities were at each upcoming exit, as well



as the current speed. Using this feature, they could easily decide in advance where to stop to eat, or to fuel. What surprised them was when they approached the exit for Crestview, FL, where they had hotel reservations for the night, the Emap gave them advance notice, as the hotel was one of the waypoints automatically programmed by the Metro Guide software. It told them first that the exit was approaching, then exit here, then turn right on the highway, and then told them to turn right as they approached the hotel driveway. Metro Guide told the Emap where the local restaurants were, and the Emap calculated the directions to get to them. In Miami, with the local information programmed from the Metro Guide CD, simply entering a street address, or a type of business, the Emap showed the route. All of this in a pocket calculator sized package, with the information uploaded from the Metro Guide CD. Along with the route maps printed from the Metro Guide, getting lost may be a thing of the past. I have used the software and my Emap in Fort Worth, and Las Vegas with ease.

Another fun thing was using the Emap on an airplane; it showed course, speed, altitude, and a map of our current location, updated every 2 seconds. Supposedly accurate to about 20 feet, and using the zoom feature on the built in maps, I could see exactly what we were passing over, and could easily identify cities and geological features. Using the Canadian or European mapping software from Garmin, similar functions can be used internationally.

There is so much good highway routing information available on the Internet, as well as fine software available, that planning a road trip should be easy and fun. When used with a PDA, Pocket PC, or notebook computer, the quality of road trips can be enhanced substantially. When combining the software with a GPS system, the opportunities are almost limitless, as the fear of being lost is virtually eliminated. To quote a famous commercial, "Try it — you'll like it!"

Ira Wilsker is an Instructor IV of Management Development at Lamar Institute of Technology. Ira has been working with computers since 1965 when he took his first computer class at the Illinois Institute of Technology, in Chicago. A past president of the Golden Triangle PC Club, and a board member of the Association of PC Users Groups, Ira is a frequent guest on the local television news, and has lectured locally to internationally on a variety of computer topics ranging from computer and Internet basics, to CyberCrime, and Community Oriented Policing. Ira is the host of the Computer Information Hour on KLVI 560AM every Tuesday, 6-7pm

Can Spam

by Brian Backman

Anyone who has had an e-mail account for more than twenty three and a quarter milliseconds has received Spam, so there's no need for a lengthy description of it.

Basically, Spam is unsolicited advertising e-mail messages. It is also a really tasty meat product that goes great with pineapples and sliced jalapenos, but that's not the kind we're dealing with here.

My goal for this article is to give you a few pointers on how to reduce the amount of Spam you receive or possibly eliminate it, and some ways to deal with it when you do get it.

Before we get started, you should understand that there are two kinds of e-mail advertising.

Opt-In And Opt-Out

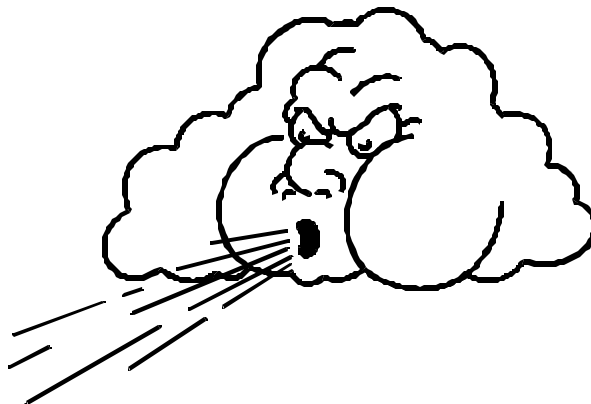
Opt-out is Spam. Opt-in is any sort of commercial mail, such as newsletters, catalogs and sales flyers that you have agreed to accept. Usually, you agree to accept these as a condition, reward or benefit of registering with an online service (remember PriceLine?). Be careful about the difference. If you get a message that you believe is Spam, think first about any agreements you may have made recently. It would be really poor form to report a legitimate, sweet, loving, angelic emailer as a putrid tool of the Devil, Spammer.

With that in mind, *to the ramparts!*

Attempt Oo Eliminate

I don't believe that you can totally eliminate Spam, but this is as close as you can get:

Filter out mail from any sender whose address is not in your address book. This is the anti-social method, but absolutely the most effective. Set up your mail system so that it will compare the sender's address to those in your address book. If the sender's address does not match anything in your address book, the mail will be rejected or redirected away from your inbox. This is fairly simple to set up, though not all mail systems offer this feature. Us-



ing Hotmail as an example, go to Options, then Inbox Protector under Mail Handling. For Level of Protection select Custom, and then check only—The senders address is in your Hotmail address book. If you really don't want to be bothered, you can also select the trash can as your discard folder.

While this method seems foolproof, I have heard anecdotal evidence that some Spam has slipped through, so I can't guarantee it. Also, remember that this will not protect you from any virus that an "approved" sender might mail you.

You should also keep in mind that this will prevent you from receiving any mail you have requested, such as newsletters you sign up for, unless you can get their address into your address book first.

This can be very annoying as when your Uncle Finster's lawyer sends you a message that the old boy is about to croak and you'll not get a dime of the inheritance unless you show up at his bedside pronto.

Anti-Spam Mail Accounts

This one usually incurs a fee, so move on if you're a cheapskate.

There are mail systems out there whose main claim to fame is the near total elimination of Spam, as well as aggressively reporting Spammers. These services use a combination of methods to prevent Spam. I'll give a quick description of the most famous one, SpamCop (URL listed at end). When you sign up with SpamCop, give them a list of approved sender addresses. Mail from these senders will pass through unimpeded, exactly as in the Hotmail example previously mentioned.

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Now things get complicated. Any mail from a service provider that is on SpamCop's approved list, or that SpamCop has never heard of, will be passed through as well. Any mail from a service provider whose name is on the Evil Children of Satan list will be placed into a "holding area." The sender will receive an automated reply explaining that they've been blocked because their service provider is in league with the minions of Hades. The sender can then fire back a reply that he or she is not a spammer and this was a legitimate message. The mail will then be sent on to you.

If you do receive Spam, you report it to the mail service and they'll take care of reporting it. If a provider causes a lot of complaints from members, then that provider will be considered scum of the earth and placed on the bad list.

You don't totally eliminate the Spam, but you do cut it way down and get the satisfaction that providers who generate a lot of Spam will be inconvenienced.

Try To Fight Back

Ah, you valiant fool. Do not go quietly... Rage, Rage!

Fighting back is OK as long as you understand that you will ultimately lose. At best, you may close down a few Spammer's accounts, but they will just open new ones. At worst, your mail account may become unusable.

But if you want to try...

When you open a message that turns out to be Spam, there will almost certainly be a link at the bottom that you can click on to cancel further messages. This seems pretty easy, just click and end the torment.

Right?

Don't you believe it!

What you're really doing is proving to the Spammer that your e-mail account is valid and that you read Spam. The vicious little insect will then sell your address to others of its species and you will be inundated.

You could try reporting the Spammer. This may give you

some personal satisfaction, but don't think for a minute that it'll accomplish much.

First off, you'll need to set your e-mail system to "display full header information." What you're doing here is inserting all of the available routing history into the message when it's displayed, rather than just who sent it to you and the date of transmission.

This will, hopefully, give enough information to the Spammer's provider that they can track down the weasel.

The downside is that the full display option takes up more space. It'll also insert a mountain of text into your mail when you forward messages. You can delete it, but it's extra work to do so.

Sooo, the question is, are you willing to put up with all the extra gobbeldygook just to report a Spammer?

Your email service provider's Help should tell you where to report Spammers, but usually it will be "abuse@" followed by the provider's name. For example, abuse@yahoo.com.

You need to forward the Spam message to the "abuse@" address, making sure that you have the full header showing. Now the problem with that is that you had to open the Spam to forward it. Guess what? The Spammer may now know that you read the message and you will again be inundated.

Maybe it's worth it to you just to report. However, I have reported Spammers numerous times and all it got me was some very nice automatic responses and an increase in Spam mail.

Now, you can use certain tools to try and trace the Spammers yourself and report them.

For example, Whois (<http://www.cix.co.uk/~net-services/spam/whois.htm>) from Net Services is supposed to show information on the originator of the mail. You can then send a complaint to their provider.

Another program from Net Services is Spam Hater (http://www.cix.co.uk/~net-services/spam/spam_hater.htm). This program is supposed to help you trace and report Spammers as well.

I haven't tried either (Whois is freeware by the way), but

they may be worth a look.

Accept Fate, But Reduce The Pain

As you may have noticed by now, I'm a bit of a fatalist. Then too, I don't have time to go chasing Spammers and I'll bet you don't either. Of course, if you're truly committed to going after the vermin, I applaud you. If I were retired or even just single, I would certainly take a shot at them now and then.

All I do is delete any and all messages that I do not recognize.

That's it. The whole Tamale.

Spammers have a way to get notices that you opened their mail. I'll say it again, whenever you open a Spam message, the Spammer knows it. Now you have just verified that your address is valid. Your address will be sold. You will get more Spam. End of story.

Whenever I forwarded Spam from Hotmail accounts to abuse@hotmail to report them, I got replies that there was nothing that could be done because the addresses in the message were fake. Within days, I was flooded with Spam from hotmail addresses. The same results from Yahoo and Netscape. On and on.

When I started simply deleting the Spam, the volume slowly decreased.

Well, on my Hotmail account there is one other thing I do; perhaps your account has a similar feature. In Options go to Inbox Protector under Mail Handling. In the Level of Protection, select Custom and then check only—Your address appears on the "To:" or "Cc" line and The sender's address is in your Hotmail Address Book. This seems to have cut down on my Spam somewhat, but it's not certain.

Well, that's it. The sites listed next can give you much more information. If you really want to fight, check them out.

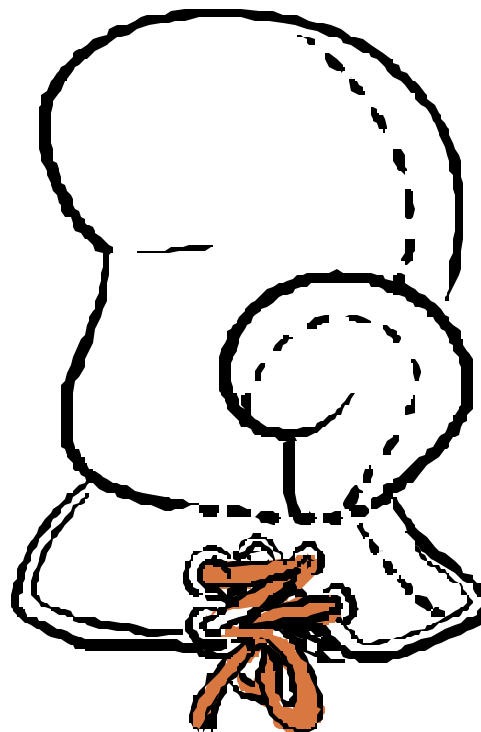
More Info And Help

Here are links to some sites that will give you more information and help on fighting Spam

- 📧 JMHO on Spam (<http://home.att.net/~marjie1/index.htm>): Great information site.
- 📧 Spam Cop (<http://spamcop.net/>): Spam free e-mail and reporting assistance along with more info.
- 📧 Fight Spam on the Internet (<http://spam.abuse.net/>): More info and some tools!
- 📧 Spam FAQ (www.mall-net.com/spamfaq.html): Some good resources, redundant info, a stirring call to arms!

Brian has worked in Tech Writing, Training, Quality Testing and Help Desk, as well as some Web Development. He is a regular at the Internet SIG.

This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an International organization to which this user group belongs.



Getting Started With Internet Music

By Bruce Fries — Author Of The MP3 And Internet Audio Handbook

This article provides an overview of what you need to record and play music on your computer and how to get music from the Internet.

Introduction

New audio compression technologies, such as MP3, allow you to use your computer as a digital jukebox that can hold thousands of CD-quality songs. You can quickly find and play any song with a click of a mouse and never have to worry about tapes wearing out or records getting scratched. Instead of spending hours making tapes or programming a CD changer, you can compile customized playlists in minutes.

Audio compression also makes it practical to download music from the Internet, where you can access thousands of songs from artists all over the world. With MP3, you can download a four-minute song in less than 15 minutes (with a 33.6 kbps modem), compared to more than 3 hours for the same song in CD audio format. Now you can sample a wide variety of music from the comfort of your home and find some great music from independent artists you might not otherwise be exposed to.

Music on the Internet

On the Internet, you'll find music in the form of files that can be downloaded to your computer; music that you can listen to as it's "streamed" over the Internet (similar to the

way you listen to AM and FM radio), and physical media, such as records, tapes and CDs, that you can purchase and have shipped to you.

Downloadable music is simply music in the form of a computer file (usually MP3 or WMA format) that you can download from a Web site to your computer. Downloadable music can be played on your computer, a portable digital audio player like the Rio 800, or newer CD players the Rio Volt (www.riohome.com).

Streaming audio enables you to listen to digital music without having to wait for the entire file to download. Streaming audio is used by many online music stores to play short clips from songs so you can listen to samples before they send you the record or CD. To listen to streaming audio, you need a sound card and an internet connection.

Digital Audio Formats

MP3 (technically, MPEG Audio Layer-III) is a standard format for compressing digital audio. MP3 squeezes audio files to about one tenth of their original size, while maintaining close to CD quality.

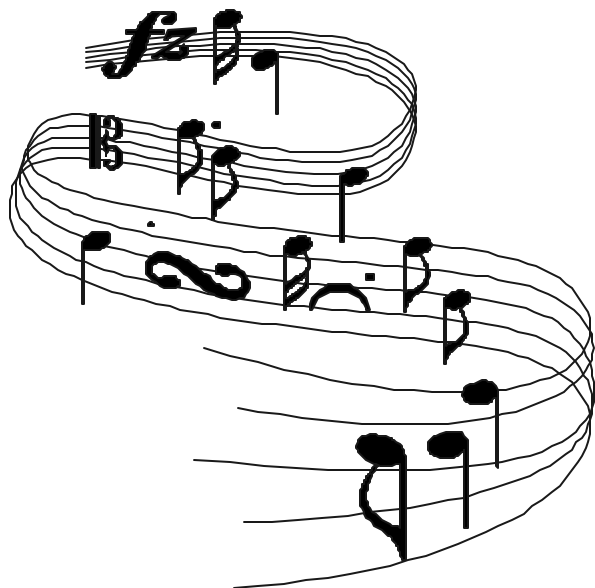
RealAudio was the first widely used system for streaming audio and video over the Internet. It is a proprietary format, but it is used by many online music stores for sample clips of songs, and by many Internet radio sites.

WAV is the default format for digital audio on Windows PCs. WAV files usually contain PCM format audio, which means they are uncompressed and take up a lot of space (10MB/minute for CD quality audio).

Windows Media Audio (WMA) is a proprietary format developed by Microsoft. WMA is supported by most full-featured player programs and by many portable players

Internet Radio

Internet radio is a form of streaming audio, usually in Real Audio or Windows Media Audio format. MP3 can also be streamed, but is more commonly used as a downloadable format. Spinner (www.Spinner.com) provides a nice tuner interface with access to dozens of stations and programmable presets. Sites like



Live365.com and Radio.Sonicnet.com allow you to set up a personal radio station, which you customize by selecting the artists and the types of music you want to hear.

Hardware Requirements

To listen to music on your PC, you need a sound card. To play MP3 files you need at least a Pentium PC (133mHz or faster recommended) or a PowerPC Macintosh. A CD Recordable (CR-R or CD-RW) drive is recommended for recording audio (Redbook format) or MP3 (data format) CDs.

You will need plenty of RAM, lots of free disk space, and a modem to download songs or listen to music streamed over the Internet. To convert your existing CDs into MP3 files, you'll need a CD-ROM drive that is capable of digital audio extraction (DAE) — commonly called ripping.

Software Requirements

To play MP3 files, you need a player program or a portable player that supports MP3. The latest versions of the Windows and Mac operating systems come with built-in players, but you'll be better off using an all-in-one program like MusicMatch Jukebox (www.musicmatch.com) because it has more features and is easier to use, even for non-technical users

MusicMatch Jukebox includes everything you need to create, organize and play MP3 files. MusicMatch supports ripping from CDs, analog recording from records and tapes, and burning MP3 files directly to a CD. MusicMatch also automatically organizes your MP3 files into separate folders by artist, album, genre and other categories.

To listen to Internet radio you need a program that supports streaming audio. At the very least, you should install the latest versions of the RealPlayer (www.real.com), Windows Media Player (www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia) and a full-featured audio player, such as MusicMatch Jukebox. These programs will allow you to listen to the majority of Internet radio sites.

Downloading Music

To obtain songs in MP3 format, you can download them from the Internet, create them from prerecorded music or obtain pre-made MP3 CDs. Web sites like www.MP3.com and www.EMusic.com offer thousands of downloadable songs in MP3 format. Many of these songs are

free, and those that aren't usually cost only a dollar or so.

Napster (www.napster.com) is an MP3 file sharing service that maintains a central directory of shared MP3 files that exist on individual user's computers. Users search by song title or artist name and Napster displays links to matching files on the computers of other users. Each link lists the file's resolution and size, and the speed of the user's Internet connection. The first user then selects and downloads the MP3 file directly from the other user's computer.

Creating Your Own MP3 Files

To create MP3 files from records or tapes you'll need to record them in real-time, using a sound card. You should use a good stand-alone recording program like Cool Edit 2000 (www.cooledit.com), since the sound recording applications that come with most computers are fairly limited. Cool Edit also has a nice audio clean-up plug-in that can remove clicks, pops and hiss from the sound before you convert it to MP3 or burn it to a CD.

When you record using Cool Edit, the song will end up as an uncompressed WAV (pronounced wave). The advantage of a WAV file is that you have the option of editing it to adjust the volume or trim off unwanted silence before it is converted to MP3 or burned to a CD. MusicMatch can also record from analog sources like records and tapes, but lacks the advanced editing features of Cool Edit.

WAV files can be recorded directly to an Audio CD or converted to MP3 files. The process of creating an MP3 file is called encoding. Encoding compresses the audio by removing sounds that most people can't hear. The size and sound quality of the MP3 file is a function of the bit-rate used — the higher the bit-rate, the larger the file and the better the sound quality.

To create MP3 files from an audio CD, the best method is to bypass the sound card and rip the audio directly to your hard disk. Ripping is better than recording through a sound card because it results in a perfect copy without added noise or distortion. Because it is a digital process, ripping is also much faster than recording. For example, a system with a fast CD-ROM drive can rip a four-minute song in less than 30 seconds. Recording the same song through a sound card will always take at least four minutes.

Most audio CDs do not contain information, such as art-

(Continued on page 12)

ist names and album and song titles. To save you from having to enter this information manually, programs, such as MusicMatch, can automatically get this information from the CDDDB (www.cddb.com) and use it to automatically name the files.

Organizing Your Music

Now that you've downloaded or created MP3 files, you need a way to organize them. MP3 files can be organized in one big folder that contains all files, or they can be grouped in separate directories with similar music. It's up to you to decide which method to use, although if you have more than a few hundred songs you should organize them in separate directories.

Playlists are optional text files that contain the name and location of each audio file. Each playlist is like a tape with unlimited capacity, where songs can be added, deleted or moved around without the need to re-record the tape. Playlists can be created and read by text editors and programs like MusicMatch.

Playing Your Music

You can play songs from Windows Explorer or Mac Finder by double-clicking on them. If your system is set up properly, this should automatically launch the player software (if it's not already running). You can also play individual songs by launching the player and using its "File Open" function.

If you have created playlists, you can load one into MusicMatch, set the "repeat" mode on, and sit back and enjoy hours of continuous music. You can use the player

controls to jump forward or backwards in the list, and you can click on individual songs to play them out of order. MusicMatch's playlist manager allows you to add, delete and change the order of songs and even save the playlist to a new file.

Recording Your Own CDs

CD recordable drives (CD-R and CD-RW) can be used to record create music CDs with compilations of songs from different albums and to back up data from your computer's hard disk. CDs are usually recorded in either audio or data formats.

Audio format CDs have the advantage of being playable in most CD players, though the capacity is limited to 74 minutes of music (approximately 18 four-minute songs). MP3 files are just data files as far as a CD recorder is concerned, so you will need to record them to a data format CD.

With MP3 files, you can record more than 12 hours (about 200 songs) of high-quality music on a single CD, in less than 20 minutes with a 4X CD-R drive. You can also use MusicMatch Jukebox to uncompress MP3 files and record the music to an audio format CD.

For More Information

For more information on recording and playing music on your computer, pick up a copy of *The MP3 and Internet Audio Handbook* (\$19.95) from www.TeamComBooks.com or read it online for free at www.MP3Handbook.com.

Bruce Fries is a writer, technology consultant and entrepreneur who lives in Silver Spring, Maryland. He is an associate of the Audio Engineering Society and the founder of TeamCom Books, a customer-focused publishing company that combines the best of traditional print publishing with new media, such as e-books and the Internet.

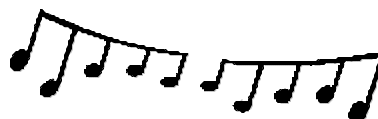
This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an International organization to which this user group belongs.

[NCTCUG Ed. Note: as of January 2002, Napster has a notice that "In early 2002, we plan to launch the new Napster membership service and start a whole new chapter in music file sharing. While still offering the core functions -- finding, sharing, and discovering digital music through the Napster community -- the new membership service will have an all-new look and feel and some cool new features for members and artists alike."]



Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC) Meetings

The March WAC Meetings will be held on Saturday, March 23, 12 – 4 p.m. at the Fairfax County Government Center. You do not need to be a member to attend. For more information on WAC meetings and events, call the WAC AnswerLine (voice) at (703) 370-7649. Also see



Software Review: PC Data Finder 5.5

By Don Peet, Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

Reprinted from the Sarasota PC Monitor, December 2001

Almost everyone who uses computers loses something. Beginners usually lose items they type because they forget to save their work or simply 'finish' and turn off the computer. Everyone gets beyond these mistakes early.

But all 'experienced' users of computers still 'lose' files. The files are actually still contained right in their computers, but the users simply can't remember what they named them. They write business letters, notes, comments, memos, or emails and name them logically so they can recover them later. They make countless spreadsheets. They devise code for Websites or construct slides for presentations. But then when the time comes to recall a file they suddenly can't think of the name of the file, or perhaps where they placed it, or even when they worked on it. Or the file that was supposed to be there simply has 'disappeared' because the name they are searching with was actually a name they used sometime in the past. These people soon discover that they can use Windows Explorer to find files that are lost. They can search by the file name, by the date, the amount of memory it took, the type of file and even search for words in the text. But as people use computers, the number of files they've saved might eventually number in the hundreds or even thousands. In the small business where I work we have 125,000 files in 20 computers in which to 'find' information. Microsoft Explorer can take too long to search among so many files. Sometimes users who are hunting among many files will enter their search criteria and receive hundreds of responses.

PC Data Finder answers the call to hunt through the multi-gigs of memory quickly. It does this by indexing. The user tells the program what types of files to index (or just to index ALL the files). Almost any type of file (including PDF and ZIP files) can be indexed. Then the program goes through all the files and makes an index of every single word and its whereabouts. This takes a few minutes (one reviewer indexed 3 gigabytes in two minutes). PC Data Finder can then be used to instantly find any document the users have made as long as they can remember a unique word in the document. Or if a unique

word can't be recalled, the user can use Boolean searches (using AND or OR or NOT) to limit the search. They can even search for phrases or search for words 'near' each other. The program can also search for 'wildcards'. Combinations of these search methods can also be used.

I recommend this program for anyone who has multitudinous documents to search through. PC Data Finder is produced by Silverlaketechnology.com and can be found at that Website. After you download it you can use it for 15 days with no limits. It contains a help menu which is very helpful in getting started and which has many examples of search methods.

PC Data Finder v. 5.5 release 12, Silverlaketechnology.com, 1.5mb, shareware, Windows 95,98, NT, 2000, Download for 15 day trial, registration \$39.95.

Copyright 2001.



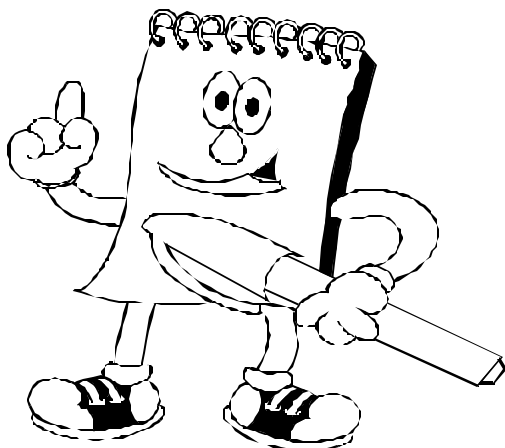
Transform The Windows Start Menu

By Steve Bass, Pasadena IBM Users Group

Reprinted from the I/O Port Newsletter, Tulsa Computer Society

Customizing The Start Menu Is A Snap

I was sitting on the back deck, a Sierra Nevada Pale Ale in hand, and leafing through Microsoft's Windows XP Reviewer's Guide. I was describing to my wife how XP made better use of the Start button than Win 98, when she casually said she hated it. "I never use the thing," she went on, not realizing I was under a moral obligation to make sure she was using the Start Button correctly. "I can get to all the programs I regularly use," she continued, "by clicking an icon on my desktop." Oy vey, I thought, the 293 icons-on-the-desktop syndrome. I had my work cut out for me. (Needless to say, she's never seen my collection of 70 Desktop icons, but that's another story altogether.) "I'm a computing professional," I said empathically, hoping she wouldn't challenge me, "so tell me all about it." "Besides," she was on a roll and there was no stopping her, "when I open the menu and click Programs, another menu slides out, then another, and half of them aren't even programs I have anymore. To get to the program I want takes, I dunno, 20 minutes." Was that in real or computer time, I wondered, grabbing my beer, trying to decide if I should start the barbecue or plunge deeper into the abyss. "The Start Menu," I said, easing back into the conversation, "is fully customizable. Give me ten minutes and I can show you how to make it look, feel, and act just the way you want it to." Step into my wife's office and I'll show you what I did to her PC. I'm basing my tips on Windows 98 so while some will work in Win95 (and certainly in Win ME), you'll need to do some fiddling on your own.



STARTing To Understand

The first thing to be aware of is that the Start Menu is built upon directories (folders, if you're new to this sport) and shortcuts. If you'd like to make a sub-menu, just add a new folder. Don't forget, a shortcut simply points to the program and can be safely renamed, moved, or even deleted. You might also think of your old program groups (hello? Win 3.1?) as the folders on the Programs menu.

The Structure Of Start

When you click on the Start Button and the menu pops open, you'll see three sections. Depending on your PC, the lowermost part has Shut Down and Log Off. The middle section includes Run, Help, Find, Programs, and other entries.

Folder Fodder

The top section is the most troublesome and may have tons of stuff. What happens when you install a new application is that the program, in collusion with Windows, adds a folder either to the top portion, the Programs area (again, just a folder), or worse, both spots. In my case, at least before I made the Start Menu my own, I had 12 entries (and few that I used often) because of the proprietary way these arbitrary, capricious, and dumb programs install themselves.

Making The Change

To reorganize items on the Start menu, just keep in mind they're all menus or shortcuts, and all your moves can be unremoved. If you're a novice and want to experiment, try this: Close all your applications so you're at the Desktop. Open the Start Menu and slide any item from the upper portion onto the Desktop. Don't like it there? Two remedies to try: Right mouse click on the Desktop and select and click Undo Move. Or just slide the entry back onto the Start Menu by dragging it to the Start Button, waiting for the menu to appear, and dropping it where you want to see it. Cool (and easy), eh? Now open Start, Select programs, wait for the menu to pop out to the side, and try the same thing. Move, delete, and rename items by dragging and dropping, or using the right mouse button to copy and paste.

Win Explorer Meets Start

If you want to be a power user (or pretend to be one), open Windows Explorer and head for \Windows\Start Menu. Both of those files are shortcuts and correspond to the upper portion of your Start Menu. Try this: Rename any item (press F2, a shortcut). Then open the Start Menu. The change is effective immediately. Now click on the Programs folder and take a few minutes examining the contents. Each folder matches what's in your Start Menu, right? Begin rearranging items in a logical way. For example, I created a folder named "tools" and moved every system tool, utility, and applet into it. Another folder? Multimedia for all of my music programs. Ditto for security, photos, and games. Now move programs you use often to the upper portion of the start menu. Here's a trick: I take frequently used programs, ones I use daily — PowerDesk, Eudora, IE, Word's Open Doc, Snagit (a screen capture tool) — and stick a shortcut for each one in the Quick Launch part of my taskbar. Do it by right clicking on an empty area on your taskbar, click Toolbars, and make sure that Quick Launch is selected. Then from Win Explorer or PowerDesk (or even your Desktop), drag a program onto the Quick Launch bar. It will add a shortcut (that's done automatically) and you can slide it along the Quick Launch area to suit your needs.

A Clean Start

As you poke around the Start Menu, my guess is you'll find more than a few dead links, programs that you've uninstalled but are still in the Start menu. Instead of hassling with it, use Start Menu Cleaner, a freeware utility which cleans the start menu by removing unneeded shortcuts and folders. It's available at <http://www.mithril.d.se>. If you want to fiddle with other settings on your PC besides the Start Menu, say, changing icons or editing the Add/Remove Programs list, grab a copy of More Properties 2.0. It's free to try and a dollar if you continue using it. <http://home.global.co.za/~olivier/imaginary/mp20lite.zip>

Hey, I've gotta go. My wife's wondering if I can show her how to modify Word's Toolbar.

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World and runs the Pasadena IBM Users Group. Write to him at steve_bass@pcworld.com. Check PCW's current edition at <http://www.pcworld.com/resource/toc/index.asp> and sign up for the Steve Bass online newsletter at www.pcworld.com/bass_letter.

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Article Submissions

Articles, helpful hints, and other items of interest to readers of the NCTCUG Journal are always welcome and will be published as soon as possible after submission. Priority is given to members' contributions. Items may be submitted via modem to the BBS or on diskette. Submissions to the BBS should be uploaded to the Newsletter Conference and a message left for the Editor. Files should be straight ASCII, unformatted, with C/R only at end of paragraphs; no indents for paragraphs should be used. Preferred format for diskettes is MS-DOS 3 1/2" 720k or 1.44Mb. Diskettes in other formats may be submitted but there will be a considerable delay in processing. If absolutely necessary, items may be submitted in hardcopy only but these will also meet with delay.

Membership Policy

The National Capital Tandy Computer Users Group, Inc. is a non-profit [501-c(3)] organization founded in 1977 to educate users of all Tandy computers and MS-DOS compatible computers. Membership dues are \$25.00 (U.S. Funds) per year, with a \$5 surcharge for international mail. Membership in NCTCUG includes membership in all SIGs, access to the BBS and software libraries, and subscription to the Journal published 10 times per year. Applications may be obtained at any club meeting, by downloading from the BBS, by calling one of the officers or board members, or by writing to the club. A sample newsletter, membership application and related information may be obtained by enclosing \$1 and mailing your request to Jim Rhodes, 201 S. Kensington Street, Arlington VA 22204.

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COMPUCENTER BBS

Is no longer in operation. It has been replaced by the 'compucenter' mailing list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

If you are moving

Please send your change of address to the club PO box as soon as possible to avoid missing issues.

Internet Explorer Tip

Tip Of The Day

From pcmag.com Tips Section

Microsoft Internet Explorer, Internet Explorer 5

Exporting Your Favorites in IE 5

“If you have access to more than one computer (for example, one at work and another at home) and you'd like the same Favorites list on both of them, you can export your Favorites list as an HTML file, copy it to your second computer, and then import the file into Internet Explorer or open the file in another browser. To import the file in IE 5, pull down the File menu and choose "Import and Export", step through the wizard and select the Favorites file you want to import and the file you want to export it to.”

March/April 2002

1st Wed. (3/6, 4/3) **7 p.m.** Virginia General Meeting

4th Wed (3/27, 4/24) **7 p.m.** Internet SIG

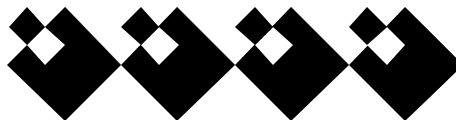
3rd Monday (none in March; 4/15) **7 p.m.**
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