# The NCTCUG Journal

Keeping Up
By Paul Howard (NCTCUG)

The Worm Turned – On Me!

Getting a new PC in August offered the opportunity to network my new and old machines together. I hauled them to NCTCUG, and the gang helped me get the XP Athlon 2100+ talking to the PII 400, using a single LAN cable between the computers. I managed to work out the network printer install options for the old machine to share the new machine's printer. I was able to scan a document with the old machine, and print a copy through the new machine.

That was, until the old machine got infected with the "W32.Opaserv.Worm." Once connected to the Internet, the computer would carry on seemingly endless exchanges over the modem with servers unknown. I updated the Norton Antivirus definitions, and the scan popped up with this nasty worm. I used the Norton inoculation tool, and downloaded a special,
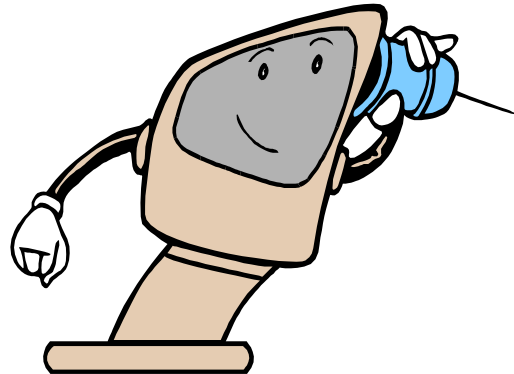
single purpose disinfectant program from Symantec's web site. However, every time I went to the 'net, the same modem exchange was observed, and the 'worm warning' would pop up from NAV.

I decided it was time to put the old horse out of its misery, and hauled the computer into another meeting, where the gang helped me blow away the old Win95SR2, and install Win98SE. The worm seems to be gone, but I'm planning to take
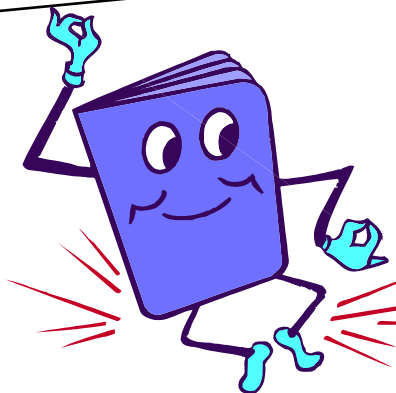
INSIDE

Understanding CD-R & CD-RW Technology
Part 1: Functional Performances Of CD-RW Drives

By John C. Lee - Thousand Oaks Personal Computer Club

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Introduction

As the CD-R and CD-RW technology advances and prices for the CD-RW drives and their media drop rapidly, it is no surprise to see that almost every personal computer sold today comes equipped with a CD-RW (ReWritable) drive. There is, however, a lot to learn about this technology, if you want to get the most out of your CD-RW drive. This article, which is prepared with this objective in mind, is composed of three parts:

Part I covers the discussion of the functional performance of CD-RW drives and the points to be considered in purchasing a new CD-RW drive. Discussion on the structural and functional differences between the CD-R and CD-RW media is also included.

Part II discusses various aspects of the software used with the CD-RW drives, including data and audio file formats, CD writing methods, digital audio extraction, image file recording, system tests and CD copier.

Part III contains illustrations showing the steps to be followed in creating different types of CDs.

Part I

Functional Performance Of CD-RW Drive

Most CD-RW (recordable and rewritable) drives sold today are capable of performing the following 3 main functions:

Record CD audio tracks or computer data onto CD-R or CD-RW media.

Write or rewrite computer data onto CR-RW media as onto a Zip drive disk or a floppy disk.

Read data from CD to the PC or play music CD as in a CD-ROM or DVD drive. It also performs ripping which is a process of converting CD music tracks to WAVE audio files on the PC.

Drive Speeds

The RW drives are generally classified by the maximum speeds they can run to perform the above three functions. For example, a 16X-10X-40X CDRW drive is capable of recording at a maximum speed of 16X, rewriting at a maximum speed of 10X and reading or ripping at a maximum speed of 40X.

When the first CD-ROM drive was introduced, it was run at a speed of 1X, which could play CD music and could read data at about 150 KBps. Since then great advances in drive technology have been made, and it has been reported that the fastest CD-ROM drive can now reach a speed of 52X (7.8MBps), and the fastest CD-RW drive can reach speeds of 4OX-12X-48X equivalent to 6MBps-1.8MBps-7.2MBps. Many RW drive manufacturers have made claims that a 50 minute audio CD can be recorded in less than 3 minutes. So when you buy a CD-RW drive, speed is the first criterion you should consider. You should also make sure that the speeds of the media you are going to use are compatible with your CD-RW drive.

Notice that the CD-RW drive speeds are all quoted as maximum speeds, which are the maximum data transfer rates attainable when the head is recording over the outer circles of the disk. If the drive is run at a constant angular velocity (CAV), the transfer rate decreases as the laser head moves toward the inner periphery of the disk. With the CAV method the minimum transfer rate may be about 0.45 of the maximum value and the average transfer rate is around 0.73 of the maximum value. Several CD-RW drives employ constant linear velocity method

(CLV). In this method, the data transfer rate is held constant by adjusting the disk angular speed according to which portion of the disk data is being recorded on. CLV drives are somewhat noisier, because they have to be run at higher angular speeds that may result in higher loads on the drive mechanism. One drive maker, Yamaha, employs a partial CLV-CAV arrangement, in which the disk is run at CLV over the outer peripheral circles, and CAV over the inner peripheral circles. It is always a good practice to set the recording speed of the CD-RW drive at half of the maximum speed of the slower drive.

Buffer Under-Run

When you record audio or file data from a source CD-ROM (or DVD) drive to a target CD-RW drive, the target drive must receive a continuous flow of data (without interruption) from the source drive via the PC. In order to safeguard against perturbations in data transfer rates between the drives, buffer memory (varies from 2 to 8MB with different drive makers) is usually provided in a CD-RW drive to store data from the PC. But if the source drive is consistently slow and lapses in sending data to the target drive, the buffer memory can eventually be depleted. This condition is termed as "Buffer Under-run", and the result is an aborted recording and a ruined CD-R disk.

Buffer under-run usually occurs when the CD-RW drive is set to run faster than the source drive. So it is important to take precaution to set the recording speed on the CD-RW drive lower than that of the source drive. Normally this is not a problem if you use a high-speed CD-ROM drive or a hard drive as the source drive (unless the hard drive is highly fragmented). But if you use a DVD as a source drive, which has a limited maximum speed of 16X, you should not set the recording speed to more than half (8X) of the maximum speed. In some cases, you may be able to achieve a faster recording by using Image File Recording (discussed in Software section) instead of using the DVD as a source drive.

Recording can also be interrupted and aborted if a resident program on the PC starts to run during

recording. Therefore precaution should be taken to close all programs that may be scheduled to run during the recording session.

Burn-Proof Technology

Some CD-RW drives are equipped with burn-proof sensors to detect and prevent the buffer under-run. When the sensor detects that a buffer under-run is about to happen, the drive will pause and record the location where it stops. As soon as the buffer is fully replenished by the PC, the sensor starts to synchronize the last recorded point with the new data collected in the buffer and resumes the recording. For more details on burn-proof technology, log on: http://www.sannet.ne.jp/BURN-Proof/faq/. If you are thinking about purchasing a new CD-RW drive, make sure the drive is burn-proof. Though the burn-proof technology provides some protection against occasional buffer under-run damage, it is still advisable to take the previously mentioned precautions to avoid repeated buffer under-runs.

CD-R Media Versus CD-RW Media

Two types of CD media (CD-R and CD-RW) are used with the CD-RW drives. CD-Recordable (CD-R) disks are coated with green, gold, or blue dye. The CD-R drive writes data by using the laser beam to burn tiny pits into the dye layer. The disk is read by a head that simply looks for the absence or presence of the reflected laser light. The burning process is irreversible and the burned pits remain on the disk permanently. For this reason, CD-R drives are often referred to as CD-Burners.

CD-Rewritable (CD-RW) disks are lined with crystalline materials. The CD-RW drive writes data by altering the alignment of the crystalline structures in the media. These changes in the crystalline structure alter the phase of the effected light, when the disk is read by a laser. The disk can be "wiped clean" in an erase process that realigns the crystalline elements. Tests on these media have shown that the disks can be re-recorded up to 999 times. The estimated storage life for the CD-RW disk is about 30 years, and that of the CD-R disk is 75-200 years.

CD-R media recorded with audio tracks are compatible with nearly all CD-ROM drives, DVD drives and Audio CD players (except the earliest models of CD and DVD players). Data recorded CD-R can be used on CD-ROM or DVD drives. CD-RW media can only work on CD-RW drives, although some Multiread (MR) CD-ROM and CD players that are compatible with CD-RW media have been recently developed, but they are still rare and expensive.

Both CD-R and CD-RW media disks can be used for performing the three functions as previously discussed. Nowadays, the cost of CD-R disks has come down so low that most users do not even bother to use CD-RW disks for recording. I personally like to use the reusable CD-RW disk for tests or trial runs in recording before I burn a permanent CD-R disk. Of course, CD-RW disks have to be played on a CD-RW drive.

Coming in Part II:
CD-R And CD-RW Software
     Easy CD Creator
     Direct CD

Coming In Part III:
Create Different Types Of CDs
     Audio CD
     Data CD
     Multisession Data CD
     CD Extra CD
     Mixed Mode CD
     Digital Audio Extraction (Ripping)
     Rewritable CD
     Bootable CD

when you open the program, click on View and select "Bcc Field." Eudora and Netscape Navigator also have blind recipient capabilities.

Yahoo! And Hotmail users can find the "Bcc" field for entering addresses in the online address header. The Juno mail software works very just like AOL, in that you can enclose multiple addresses in parentheses to make them blind, and as with AOL, they must be separated by a comma. By doing this each recipient will see only their own address, and not anyone else's, just as with this message.

So far, because Mac's represent such a small percentage of the computers in use, the people who create the worms and viruses do not make them work with Mac computers. However, anyone using a Mac who does not hide the recipients of their e-mails makes their recipients vulnerable to the possibility of being hit with a virus from someone else on their CC list!

Anyone who wants to protect their privacy and safety will appreciate your doing this. Few things about e-mail bother me more than when something I sent gets forwarded to a large list of people I don't know, and because my address is now in their message base, I am then vulnerable to receiving a virus or one of those hoax warnings from them… or anyone to whom they forward that message.

Please try to use blind recipient lists. It will make us all safer from viruses, worms and hoaxes.

Gabe Kingsley is a San Francisco Bay Area based consultant and can be reached by e-mail: words4use@yahoo.com only if you promise to blind copy him.
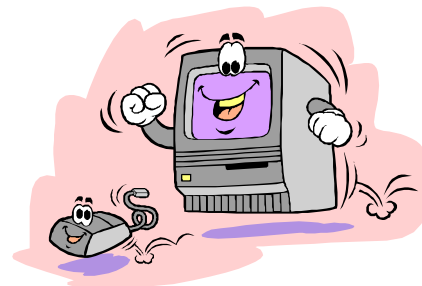
Quick: Delete The JDBGMGR.EXE File!!

By Gabe Kingsley, PIBMUG's San Francisco Special Correspondent

I've received a few of these dumb alerts over the past week. You haven't received one? It's an e-mail hoax pretending to be a virus warning that tells people to delete their Java Debugger Manager file, called jdbgmgr.exe.

What really ticks me off is the open list of recipients, often 30 to 50 of them, that become fodder for all sorts of junk through the systems of others.

So I'm on a one-man crusade to get people to use Blind Ccs for all mail, unless there is a compelling reason (such as a work group, etc.) in which they need to know who else received the message. Heck, I even send out tutorials for most e-mail programs to eliminate any excuses they may have.

Here's what I tell people whenever they forward me an ALERT!! ALERT!! About any virus:

Hey, Klez?

The most recent e-mail virus you're asking about is the Klez, and it has powers not seen in earlier types.

Klez can select an e-mail address at random from a CC list in a message on your or someone else's computer and send itself to the recipients of other messages. It's not limited to those addresses in your address book. In addition, it can "spoof" the return address, so that even if you were not the sender of a message infected with the Klez virus, your name and address may appear as the originator.

This is bad stuff and we should expect a raft of "me too" versions to come along!

Another, less harmful but no less irritating offense is the warning running around the world, advising you to delete a specific file from your system because it contains a virus. This is a hoax! The file, jdbgmgr.exe, is one that Windows put there and enables certain Java scripting capabilities. You need it!

You may receive either the Klez virus or the relatively innocuous hoax warning described above because your name and address were in someone's CC list.

One of the greatest potential dangers is in the e-mails that are forwarded, forwarded and forwarded again by unwitting people. I'm sure you get them every day, and may even pass them along. The result is list after list of available addresses the Klez virus can use to send itself to people you don't know, and for people you don't know to send it to you, possibly giving the impression it came from you.

When you forward a message, COPY ONLY THE TEXT into a new message and send it to your friends. DO NOT just forward the existing message, complete with the previous lists of recipients and their addresses. If you want to forward a message, take care to manually remove the list of previous recipients to preserve their safety. It's really easy.

Learn And Use Blind cc

When sending messages to a group of people, unless it is REQUIRED that each one see the names of all others who received the message, PLEASE USE A BLIND RECIPIENT list. I am not aware of an e-mail program that does not allow you to send messages to a list of "blind" recipients, in which each person who receives the messages sees only their own address, and not the entire list of recipients.

If you have AOL, it is the easiest thing to do: Simply bracket all recipients in a pair of parentheses (address1, address2) each separated by a comma.

If you use Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express, there is a special field for "Bcc" (Blind copies) just below the "To" and "Cc" rows. If you do not see it

Google Is Great

By John Lenihan, Pikes Peak Computer Application Society

Listen to any of the technology talk shows or read articles that discuss "search engines" and you'll see that Google has been rated high for a long time. I find it accurately displays whatever I'm looking for, so much so, that it's like having an encyclopedia of knowledge at my finger tips. Newer engines are coming out, but I still trust Google to find my answers. But have you dug deeper down into what's available with this search engine? Well read on, because there's a lot more to it.

Let's start by using the basic search window found on http://www.google.com. When my computer runs into a problem and can give me enough of an understandable error message, I've found that typing the message into a Google search window usually gives me enough hits to help me narrow the problem. My son called me a few months ago and said he thought he had sent me a virus, and wanted me to delete the file called sulfnbk.exe. It sounded a little fishy, and since he was close to his computer, I asked him to type the file name into Google. He saw the words HOAX come up in big block letters. Google saved me the hassle of trying to resurrect that file later. If you want to narrow your searches to just Microsoft-related pages, you can click on "Advanced Search" and go to the bottom of the displayed page and click on "Microsoft." Thus, if you have an operating system or Microsoft application question, this narrows the boundaries of the search. You can also get there directly by going to http://www.google.com/microsoft.html.
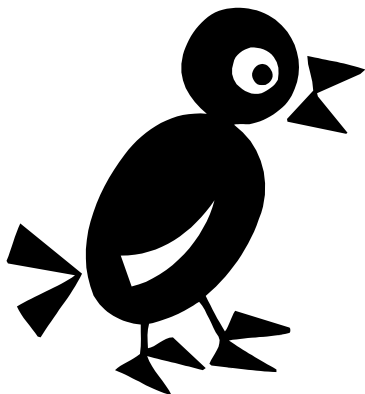
Notice from the "Advanced Search" page that other narrow searches can be done for Apple, BSD Unix, Linux, and Government-related sites.

Try doing a "vanity search" by typing your name in the search box. Or even try it with friends you've lost contact with. I've found some long-lost souls just by doing this. Enter a name, city, state, or zip code for a business or a person and see if you get a hit. You may be surprised at how easy it can be to find information about yourself. Enter a phone number and see if you get a name back. If Google recognizes what you entered as an address, you'll get a street map back.

Google is so good at finding things that there was even a game called "googlewhacking" where people would try typing in a combination of words that just returned one search reply. It's fairly hard to do unless you use some really obscure word variations.

Looking at the basic search screen on the opening Google page, you'll notice four tabs on top. The default is the Web tab, which we were just using. The next one is the Images tab, taking you to http://images.google.com. This will allow you access to millions of images on the Web.

Suppose your child is doing a school report on oak trees. Type "oak trees" into the images search engine and you'll find plenty of pictures for the report. Of course, I need to pass along the disclaimer that lots of stuff on the Web is copyrighted, so you need to be careful how you use what you find. But I doubt you'll get into too much trouble using a picture in your school report.

But I did hear that teachers could use Google to search for text phrases in reports to check for plagiarism.

There are thousands of newsgroups in cyberspace, covering thousands of topics, and only so much time in a day. The third tab over is the "Groups" tab and

it will let you find out what is (or was) being discussed out there that you would be interested in. For example, if you're thinking of buying a new digital camera, type the model number in the Groups search window. You'll see messages from people in various newsgroups that discussed that item. You can use this method to monitor almost any topic you have an interest in.

The last tab over at the top is the "Directory" tab. Click here and you'll see Web pages organized into directories by topic, much like you'd see at Yahoo. For example, click on "Computers" and you'll see almost 50 computer topics arranged by categories, any one of which takes you to many other Websites. They advertise they have over 1.5 million pages indexed in this directory.

Want to keep up with current news stories? Go to http://news.google.com and enter in a news topic. Say you wanted to stay abreast of the Hayman Fire that burned close to us a few months back. Entering those words into the search window resulted in stories from newspapers all across the country. Google would even tell you how old the stories were, with many only hours old.

For the linguists out there that need help translating short pieces of text from one language to another, there's http://www.google.com/language_tools. Need help translating "yo quiero" from Spanish to English, then give it a try.

Want to see additional tools being worked on by the Google development team? Look at http://labs.google.com. Four tools are listed, the most interesting to me being the glossary. If you come across an unfamiliar word or phrase and go here, you'll get a link or pointer to pages that offer a definition. Another tool at this site is Google Sets, where you can type in a few related words, and it give you a list of more related items. There's also a voice recognition tool to help you search Google by phone, and a keyboard shortcuts tool that lets you search Google without a mouse.

I hope I've convinced you why Google is great, not only as a search engine for the Web, but also for its many other capabilities for specialized searches. Do you ever wonder how history would look if recorded by the types of searches being done on the Web? Then look at the year 2001 laid out at http://www.google.com/press/timeline.html. You can see what was on the minds of many people that year by the searches that were requested. So search wisely—historians may learn about us, while we learn about what interests us.

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.

Time to Consider A Notebook (Laptop) Computer?

By Ira Wilsker ira@apcug.org

One of the questions I often have been asked on my weekly radio shows, and emails from readers of this column is, "What would be better (for me); a new laptop or a desktop computer?"

A simple review of the Sunday sale-books from the major office supply and electronics stores clearly shows that there is an abundant supply of notebook computers available. Standing in the security lines at the major airports also shows the popularity of notebook computers.

So, which one is better? Desktop or notebook? As I have consistently replied, "What are you going to use it for?"

If a computer is intended for home or office use, likely in one location for a period of time, a desktop computer is more practical. Usability features, such as a full size keyboard, large screen monitor, and readily accessible drives, coupled with significantly lower prices for comparable machines, make the desktop the clear choice in this scenario. Another factor is longevity. The average useful life of a desktop computer, according to both personal experience and published reports, is typically four to six years. Desktop computers are also usually easy and relatively inexpensive to upgrade or repair. The average desktop computer becomes functionally obsolete long before it physically fails.

Notebook computers, commonly called "laptops" by many, have some very strong advantages, compared to desktop computers, as well as some very strong disadvantages. The obvious advantage of a notebook computer is portability. At Golden Triangle PC Club meetings, when I would have to present, I would often have to drag my desktop from home to the meeting place; it was heavy, bulky, and easy to break. Lugging around the computer, monitor, keyboard, and mouse was a headache. I was not the only one hauling a monster around. For a while, I had a "lunchbox" computer that I used for my presentations. It contained a standard sized PC motherboard, hard drive, floppy, and other internal parts, along with an integral 7" monitor. The keyboard snapped over the front of the computer, closing it. While mine was a home built, no-name generic, it was the early lunchbox computers that gave Houston's Compaq its early competitive edge. While still large and heavy, it was portable.
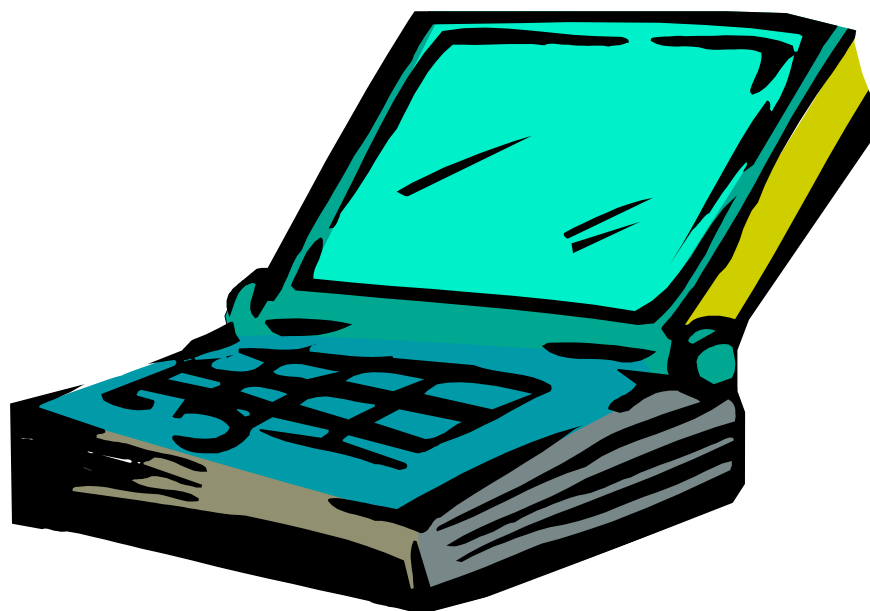
Today's notebook computers are a far cry from my long-gone lunchbox. They are a fraction of the size and weight of the old lunchbox machines, but contrary to other high-tech electronic items, have not dropped substantially in price. Feature for feature, it is not rare for a notebook to be twice the price of a comparably equipped desktop computer. The relatively small size, and light weight is what makes today's notebook computer popular. They are convenient portable, and can often run for a few hours on their internal battery, but those are about their only major advantages. For those who need portability, such as businesspersons who travel and need computing power, or people like me who frequently do presentations, a notebook computer is a near necessity. For those who want the power of a modern PC, in an even smaller and lighter package, the next generation of "Pocket PCs" is speculated to do to the contemporary notebook the same thing that the notebook did to the lunchbox; render them functionally obsolete. Pocket PCs will be covered in a future column.

The disadvantages of a notebook computer are many, yet still they are a necessity to many users. Other than their relatively high cost, notebook computers are also typically fragile, difficult to repair, hard to upgrade (other than swap hard drives or add memory), and according to widely published tests, have a much shorter operational lifetime than do desktop computers. Notebooks are also subject to easy loss or theft. In a recent news article, citing a report from Safeware, an insurance company that specifically insures computers for loss or damage, notebook computers have a far higher rate of loss. In 2001, for example, Safeware states that an estimated 600,000 notebook computers were lost or stolen, up 53% from the year 2000. A large part of this increase is due to the rapid increase in sales of notebook computers. Notebook computers are also one of the most obvious items to steal (and stolen) at airport security checkpoints, due to their small size, high value, and obvious nature. By comparison, while there is an estimated seven times as many desktop computers in use than notebooks, only 15,000 desktops were reported stolen in 2001, according to Safeware.

While there are "ruggedized" notebook computers, such as Toshiba's Toughbook series marketed to law enforcement, utility, and construction companies, the majority of notebooks are very easy to break, and expensive to repair. The notebook reviews published in the major computer magazines often include a "drop test" where an open notebook computer was gently pushed off a tabletop on to a carpeted floor, simulating a common falling accident. Many notebooks suffered major physical damage, with some models of major brands shattering to utter destruction. In addition to extraordinary care in protecting from theft, notebook computers must also be transported in quality protective cases. I have seen people ruin a $2000 notebook in a $29 carry case, a false economy. Screens are especially sensitive to physical shock, can easily crack, and cost several hundreds of dollars to replace.

Lacking a large physical volume to circulate cooling air while turned on, notebook computers are more vulnerable to heat damage than desktops. Often containing only tiny cooling fans, and using the notebook itself as a heat sink, overheating is the principle cause of internal notebook failure. The more powerful the processor, the more prone the notebook is to overheating, a well-documented problem. I have heard several anecdotal stories of fairly new notebooks failing when left on overnight, due to overheating. I recently replaced my oldest daughter's notebook due to that exact cause. Published reports indicate that the average life expectancy of a notebook computer is only about 18 months, before it is lost, stolen, accidentally broken, overheated, or worn out. Notebooks, on average, have only about a fourth of the longevity of a desktop.

Desktop or notebook is a common decision to be made. Weigh the advantages and risks before purchasing either.

Selections From The DealsGuy

Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group

How About A Backup For Your AntiVirus Protection!

That's right, many still accidentally trigger a virus, and quicker than the wink of an eye, it goes into your address book and merrily e-mails itself to all your friends. That is if you are using Outlook or Outlook Express and have not installed the patches, and perhaps even then. What's that, you've been meaning too do just that "when you have time!" The same with updating your AntiVirus? Sure!! Viralock is used in conjunction with whatever antivirus software you are using. Its job is to allow the virus NO escape from an infected computer. To reiterate: while traditional antivirus products work mainly to PREVENT a virus intrusion, Viralock works seamlessly beside your normal AV to prevent all viruses, known or unknown, from getting out of your computer to infect your friends, which would be very embarrassing.

It does this by encrypting the e-mail addresses found in popular e-mail programs such as MS Outlook and Outlook Express. You may say that your present AV will do the job of preventing you from ever getting an infected computer. Haven't you read that viruses such as some Klez variants can go in and turn off your AV while it does it dirty work? With Viralock, this won't matter since the e-mail addresses in your program will be encrypted to prevent this. Feel better now? Take a look at [http://www.viralock.com/] for a better explanation.

The normal selling price is $19.95, but until February 28, 2003, you can buy it for just $14.95 by getting it at [http://www.viralock.com/dealsguy]. Use the coupon code "DealsGuy" if necessary. You can also download a free version for trial if you prefer. Remember that Viralock is NOT an AV, but is used in addition to your AV protection. Designed mainly for MS Outlook and Outlook Express right now with a Eudora version in the works.

However, I just heard from one person who had big problems and he said it took two days, with the help of Earthlink Tech support, to get rid of Viralock and get his machine back to normal, so be aware. I hope I hear from someone who had better luck. [http://www.viralock.com/dealsguy].

An Interesting Spam Tool

I saw SpamNet at Comdex and you can try the beta version free right now until it is finished with the development. We are all sick of spam (except Hormel, of course) and SpamNet is a Microsoft Outlook add-in that stops spam immediately. SpamNet does not delete spam, but only moves it to your Spam folder with just a click of your mouse. Every time a consumer uses the one-click "block" feature to remove spam from their in-box, they also notify the SpamNet community at large. This automatically blocks spam for all other SpamNet consumers. On the other hand, if they think a certain message is NOT spam, they can click an "unblock" button to share their knowledge with the network. It's sort of like a "community" fighting spam together.

I haven't studied it to see how all this works, but you can download the beta version from [http://www.cloudmark.com] as well as read up on what it is all about. I did read just recently, in a UG newsletter, a short write-up by a member who was pretty happy with the service. Check it out. You'll be surprised at who the cofounder is.

Greetings Folks, Ya'll Soon Have A Virus, If Ya Follow Instructions

Did you receive one of those eCards? I did, and obviously from a name I knew, but when I found I had to download something to view it, I chose to delete it because I didn't want to be bothered. Little did I know that I did myself a favor. I read in Ed Foster's Gripe Line column (InfoWorld) about the eCard, which is, in reality, a virus that goes into your address book and sends itself out to your friends. According to Ed's column though, antivirus companies didn't treat it as a virus at first because you had to

read the EULA (End User License Agreement), then a second EULA to install it and actually get the virus. In other words, the virus would be on your machine with "your" permission if you agreed to the EULA, so it was your own problem. The EULA actually states that it will use your Outlook address book to send the "eCard" to your friends. He writes that the AV companies now have information posted about it and admit that it is a virus in reality. What's next! Read those EULAs before simply agreeing just so you can do a quick installation.

Tax Time

If you want to do your own taxes free, go to [http://www.2ndstorysoftware.com] and download their free standard version of Tax Act. Many use Tax Act and say it works well, but if you want, they have an upgraded version that you pay for. In fact, last year, my own taxman did my taxes with the professional version of Tax Act. I think I'll try doing them myself this year as they are less complicated now. If my next column asks for somebody to bail me out, you'll know I made a mistake, somehow.

Can't Afford Acrobat?

I realize there have been ways published lately to make up a PDF file free, but there is another solution at low cost. Here is the description sent to me:

"Jaws PDF Creator provides an affordable and reliable means of creating PDF documents and it now generates PDF 1.4 files as its standard. Ideal for corporations, graphic artists, print publishers, Web publishers and government organizations. Jaws PDF Creator is widely used in corporate and other markets, and as the core technology for Internet printing services. Jaws PDF Creator works in two modes. It installs as a printer in the Windows or Macintosh Printing System allowing you to print to a PDF file directly from any application, or it appears as an icon on the desktop enabling drag-and-drop conversion of PostScript, or EPS files, directly to PDF. Jaws PDF Editor enables you to view, edit and save PDF files on computers using Windows NT, Windows 2000 and Windows XP.

"Another product, Jaws PDF Editor, has many viewing and navigation features. You can navigate via bookmarks, the page list, thumbnails, or links. Reviewer/mark up tools include comments, highlight, strikethrough, and underline, each with an associated pop-up comment window to add additional information. Search for words or phrases in a PDF. Select text with the text and paragraph-select tools and copy into other applications. Auto-rotate while printing so files containing both portrait and landscape pages print in the correct orientation. Other page manipulation tools include insert, delete, reorder, and extract pages. Jaws PDF Editor can be a companion application to Jaws PDF Creator, or can be used as a standalone application."

Until February 15, 2003 (perhaps longer), Jaws PDF Creator V2.11 can be purchased at a 75% discount for just $25.00 (US funds) by calling 1-800-927-9921 or going to [http://www.insight.com/jaws]. It is a download (4.8 meg). V2.11 is not the latest version, V3.0 of Jaws PDF Creator is now out and would be available at an additional $30.00. However the V2.11 does almost as much.

(Continued from page 11)

Jaws PDF Editor (the companion software) is also available for just $25.00 (1/3 off the list price) (3.9 meg download). They are available separately because not everyone needs both products. For more description, visit [http://www.jawspdf.com]. You can even sign up for the free on-line WebX tutorials there. They say the advantage of the Jaws product over free ones is the many features and the quality of the PDF. You can also get $100 off any Jaws PDF server. So far, I have not had the time to try this product. Many of us received it at Comdex.

Sort Of A Swiss Army Knife For Your Computer

A few columns ago I wrote about Power Desk for your file management needs because several readers recommended it. Paul Witheridge from Sarnia PC UG in Sarnia, Ontario, tells me he much prefers a file management program called Total Commander, formerly Windows Commander. He feels it is superior to them all, so you might want to take a look, although it is shareware, not freeware. It is a Swiss company (hence Paul's Swiss army knife comment) and their ordering procedure is a bit con-

fusing, but I think you'll figure it out. No cost to give it a try and see what you think.

Total Commander, version 5.5, and the features are listed below:

- Two file windows side by side
- Multiple language support
- Enhanced search function
- Compare files / synchronize directories
- Quick View panel with bitmap display
- ZIP, ARJ, LZH, RAR, UC2, TAR, GZ, CAB, ACE archive handling + plugins
- Built-in FTP client with FXP (server to server) and HTTP proxy support
- Parallel port link, multi-rename tool
- New: WinXP support, background transfer manager, TAR+GZ packer
- And many more!

If you like it after your trial, the price is $28.00 American and they take your CC. You'll find the download at [http://www.ghisler.com]. I didn't try it, but I would like something better than Windows Explorer. I checked into a deal, but they declined. I'm passing this one on because some others also say it's a good product.

This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [Bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [http://www.dealsguy.com] for past columns. Also, I keep adding interesting articles (taken from user group newsletters) to my "Articles of Interest" page for viewing or downloading.

Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC) Meetings

The February WAC Meeting will be held on Saturday, February 15th, 12:30-3:30 p.m. at Verizon Online, 1880 Campus Commons Drive, Reston Virginia. The topic is Basic Digital Photography and PC image editing / cataloging tools. 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 WAC's Web Site at
http://www.wacug.org/
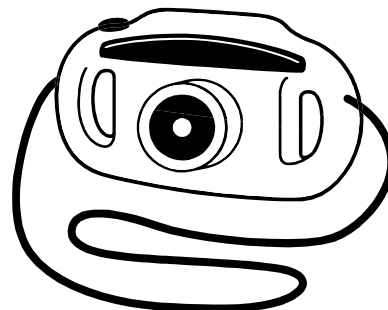
Computing Factoids 2

Complied by Steve Bass, Pasadena IBM Users Group
There are unrelated things I pick up in e-mail that are terrific —
but not long enough for an article. Here are two of them.

Saving Paper? Ha!

I just bought a program (which I think is excellent) called "Cool Edit Pro" from Syntrillium (www.syntrillium.com) which is audio editing and processing program.

The registration card has a box to check that has this amusing statement:

"Yes! Please send me a hard-copy manual. (A complete manual is included on your CD. In the interest of paper conservation, Syntrillium ships hard-copy manuals only on demand.)"

So I can print it out (conserving their paper) or have them send me something that should have been in the box in the first place (conserving my paper, 225 pages for the manual plus 42 pages for the addendum). Since I paid $399 for the program, I think I'll conserve my paper instead of theirs.— *Stan Slonkosky*

Listen Up and Take Heed!

I always tell people to unplug their PC when working on the insides. It's something I never do. My unsolicited advice? Do it. All the time.

Here's why: I added a sound card to my wife's PC the other day. Easy enough, right? Then, while the system was up and running, I replaced the cover. I've done it that way since I started with PCs in 1983. This time it bit me on the butt. The case cover touched an add-in card and the systemboard fried. Better it should have happened to my PC, you know what I'm saying? *-Steve Bass*

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World and runs the Pasadena IBM Users Group. He's also a founding member of APCUG. Check his Home Office columns at http://snurl.com/homeoffice and sign up for the Steve Bass online newsletter at http://snurl.com/signup

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.
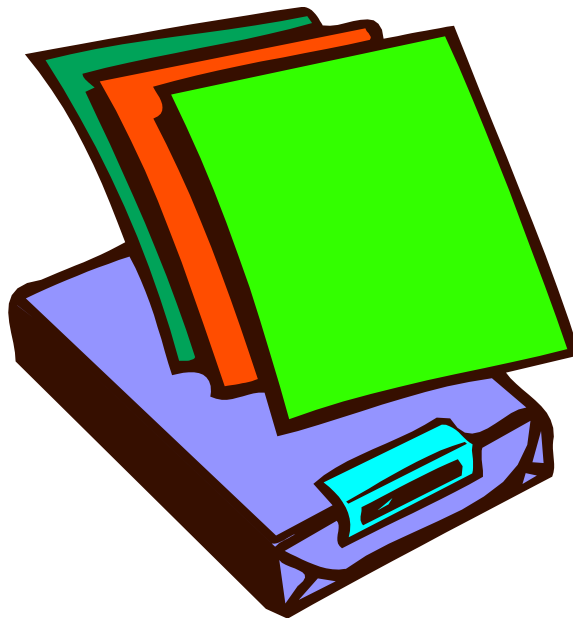
the computer back to the next meeting for some additional tweaking. While the networking between the two machines seems to be recognized by both, I haven't been able to share files or print, so it's time to get some hands on training by the experts.

I'm also having trouble with the HP ScanJet 5100C, which can't seem to find the proper drivers. This uses a parallel port SCSI connection, some in the group denigrate as a vile kludge. It worked well for me, although I managed to hose it up for some functions with the installation of OCR software under the old Win95 operating system. The doubters have been advising an upgrade to a USB scanner, but I tend to be loyal to the old solutions, and would like to get some more use out of the scanner before sending it to the bone yard. Besides, I need my "copy machine" function back for recording rebate coupons and sales slips !

Technotoys And Rebates

Around my house, the highlight of the week is the plastic-wrapped package of ad inserts for the Washington Post. I'm not sure we'd miss the Sunday paper, but the ads – man, call out the bloodhounds! "Let's go to lunch, uhhh, do you mind if we stop off at (XYZ techtoy store) on the way?"

At the end of November, I ran out to take advantage of a deal on Adobe Photoshop Elements, Version 2. CompUSA had it on sale for $60 (pennies discarded), and the package contained a $30 coupon for upgraders. The next day's ads had a number of solutions to problems. We now have upstairs and downstairs offices, and since we spend lots of time on-line, communications has been shouted back and forth, since the phone lines are tied up. On to Google for a seach of the 'net for a Ten-Code list, then off to Staples for a couple of Cobra FRS walkie-talkies, complete with rechargeable batteries, and a dual unit recharging stand. Twenty bucks, after 10 clam rebate. "How about a 10-7?" "10-4, I'll 10-21 Domino's!"

In the same flyer was the answer to a number of needs. Our 17 year old dinner-time sanity saver (answering machine) had been getting gratchy. An

AT&T branded unit, complete with 900 MHz portable handset, after $20 rebate, was thirty bucks. The new answering machine talks – "Machine On, two calls, yada yada." Why, we can even have three mailboxes – "Press One for Ma, Two for Pa, Three for Fido!" And, now, I've got five devices with buttons on the coffee table that look like the TV remote, or the phone handset, take your pick! Staples lets you register for rebates on-line, and track the status thereof, but you still have to wait for the snail mail delivery of the sales receipt and UPC code to the rebate processing center.

For a number of years, we've used a Marriott-branded credit card, that accumulates points with our purchases, the idea being, of course, that we'd use the points towards staying in Marriott hotels and resorts. At the beginning of the holiday season, we got a brochure with an alternative way of using the points towards merchandise from Hammacher Schlemmer, Sharper Image, and similar sources. Lo and behold, there were several digital cameras to choose from, the perfect stocking stuffer! The UPS guy in a Santa hat rang the bell about eight days after web order – this Marriott Rewards system doesn't compete well with most web merchants on processing order to delivery times, but I became the proud owner of a Sony DSC-P71 without direct cash outlay.

Now came the real push to scrutinize those ads for bargains. As the pixel count of digital cameras have increased, I'm not sure that every manufacturer has provided a reasonable media storage option in the base package. To their credit, Sony provided a 16 meg Memory Stick with my 3.3 megapixel camera – that provides 10 pictures at highest resolution. I've seen many cameras outfitted with only an 8 meg storage option out of the box.

Surprisingly, the Christmas Day ad from Radio Shack seemed to provide the best local deal for additional Memory Sticks. I picked up 128 and 64 meg units for $50 and $30 after $20 and $10 rebates. Radio Shack also had a Dazzle USB reader that accepts 7 different types of camera media. Since I also use a camera on the job that records

on Smart Media, the Dazzle unit was a good match for my needs, and was $30 after a $20 rebate. Media readers are great – downloading images directly from the camera to a computer takes far too long, and is a notorious battery eater.

I was chagrined to discover that my new camera would not accept alkaline batteries – although it accepts two AA sized cells, only nickel metal hydride batteries may be used. The camera included a

charger and two cells, but no camera case. Sony offers an accessory kit, that includes a camera case, two more cells, a fast charger (seven times faster than the included charger – there's the hook!) but the tab is fifty dollars. I found a Ray-O-Vac package at Circuit City with four nickel metal hydride cells, charger, case, and a mini-tripod for twenty bucks. Granted, it's not a fast charger, and the cells are rated 1600 mahrs rather than 1750 for the Sony branded units, but I think this kit will meet my needs very nicely.
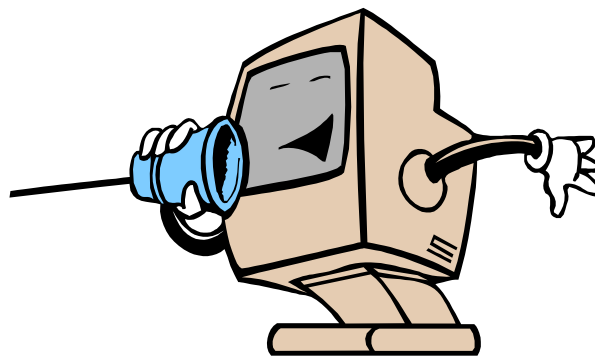
NCTCUG Information

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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 3½ 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.

Advertisement Policy

Members' advertisements: Ads are accepted from members for non-commercial purposes at no charge. Copy should be sent to the Editor in the same format as article submissions. Commercial Advertisements: Ads are accepted from commercial advertisers at the rate of $60 per full page, per appearance, with discounts for multiple insertions. Smaller ads are priced accordingly. Payment for ads must be made in advance of appearance. Advertisers must supply a permanent address and telephone number to the editor.

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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.

Thank You!

Tidbits from the Web

By Blair Jones, NCTCUG

Feeling cooped up in the winter?

Try looking pictures from the space program!

There's a gallery list at
http://www.space.com/php/multimedia/imagegallery/

For an interesting look at the universe from the outside (way outside) to the inside (way inside), have a look at
http://micro.magnet.fsu.edu/primer/java/scienceopticsu/powersof10/index.html

If you just want to watch the time go by, try
http://yugop.com/ver3/stuff/03/fla.html.
To waste it while you watch it, check out
http://www.potatoland.org/pl.htm

How do I find some of these sites? I subscribe to Steve Bass's Home Office Newsletter! PC World has a number of free newsletters. Go to
http://www.pcworld.com/resource/newsletters/index.asp?sub_source=PCWXH4
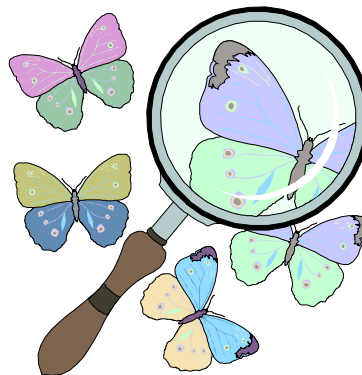and see what might interest you.

February 2003

1st Wed. (2/5) **7 p.m.**
Virginia General Meeting

4th Wed (2/26) **7 p.m.** Internet SIG

3rd Monday (2/17) **7 p.m.**
Board of Directors

All meetings are at **Carlin Hall**, 5711 S. 4th St., Arlington VA: East off of Carlin Springs Rd, just south of Arlington Blvd/Route 50.

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