

The NCTCUG Journal

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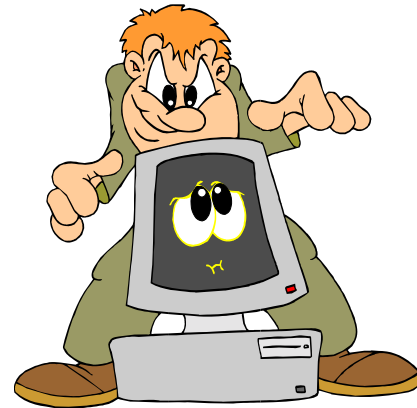
Volume 26 Issue 4

Keeping Up

By Paul Howard (NCTCUG)

It's Here Somewhere ...

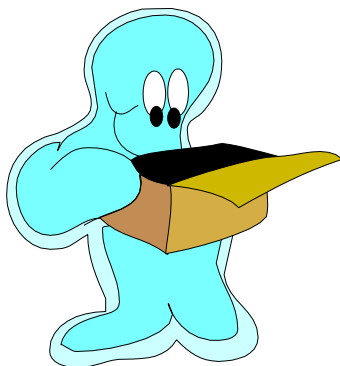
Talk about jealous. Jerry Pournelle got the best title for his Byte Magazine column — “Computing at Chaos Manor!” (<http://www.jerrypournelle.com/>) Clicking on WordPerfect’s thesaurus feature, maybe I should use “Ciphering at Bedlam’s Bastion?” What with Eddy Tor’s subtle note, “The ‘next issue’ is being done now!” I find it time to roll up the metaphorical sleeves (and it looks a little delinquent in a t-shirt.) Now where’s the pile of stuff I collected for this month’s effort? I know it’s here somewhere!



Last time, I described being faced with what appeared to be a hard drive failure on my primary computer. After cobbling together a backup computer — just in case — I started to dive into the primary computer. I picked up a copy of Smart Computing Magazine’s “PC Troubleshooting” Learning Series guide, because it had a section on reloading the Windows XP operating system from scratch. (That was one of the references I was trying to find before I started writing this column.)

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The Truth About Mail-in Rebates

By Roger A. Poverny, TUGNET

Reprinted from the July 2002 Nibbles & Bytes, Journal of the 1000 Oaks Personal Computer Club, via User Friendly, Los Angeles Computer Society

Mail-in rebates are a bonanza for retail computer stores: They can advertise a very low sales price (or even a free price, after mail-in rebates), and then charge buyers of these so-called bargains a higher-than-normal sales price. It brings in the customers who are looking for good deals, and who may purchase other items while they are in the store. It means higher sales figures for the retailer since these mail-in rebates are underwritten by the manufacturers, and they cost the retailers nothing. It also creates a cadre of unhappy customers. Why? Consider this: according to the Wall Street journal, up to 95% of people forget to claim the rebate. They end up paying more for the product than they would have without a rebate. For those who make the claim, there are a variety of reasons why the claims go unpaid. Some of these reasons are detailed below.

Let's start with this premise: manufacturers don't want to rebate money to you, so they put a number of obstacles in your way. Sometimes the rebate forms are hidden in the store or you have to ask the cashier for a copy. The rebate form lists the submittal requirements in great complicated detail so that a simple non-compliance error on your part will void your claim. You must include a copy of your purchase receipt (sometimes with the purchased item circled or underlined) along with the original UPC

code from the package. Be careful here, as some packages have multiple UPC codes with different numbers. Then you must mail the completed rebate form, with inclusions, to a specified address (usually a fulfillment house hired to handle the rebate). There is always a window of opportunity; i.e. an "offer expiration date" and a "postmark before" date. Most mail-in forms tell you to expect your rebate in eight to ten weeks.

Very seldom will a rebate check arrive by the promised waiting period: you are forced to call their 800 number (although some don't have a toll-free number) to find out what the holdup is. The manufacturer is counting on you to forget that a rebate promise date has passed. If you do remember to call them, this is generally when the excuses start. Typical excuses are: "We didn't receive your UPC code or register receipt," "We never received your letter," "You didn't complete your rebate form properly," "The offer has expired ...or is no longer funded by the manufacturer." The fulfillment houses are experts at not paying, and as a matter of fact are hired by some manufacturers just because they are so tough. Many times you will get a postcard, not a letter, saying you were denied a rebate. Postcards are easy to lose or throw away in the trash, which is why many rebate checks are mailed in the form of a postcard. They

don't even look like checks! Most people will stop trying once they have been rejected. The manufacturers count on this. At a FRY's the other day, a customer relations representative pointed at two 4-drawer filing cabinets and said they were full of customer complaints about rebates. That's eight drawers of unhappy customers, and they represent only that five percent (according to The Wall Street Journal) who actually sent in their rebate forms. After all is said and done, probably 2% of the customers receive a rebate check.

Money Matters



Manufacturers and retailers make more money from us when the items they are selling have mail-in rebates, so it doesn't seem likely that the practice will end any time soon. The number of items using rebates appears to be rising exponentially, and the customer is the loser. It is just plain unfair. How can we fight back?

Fighting Back

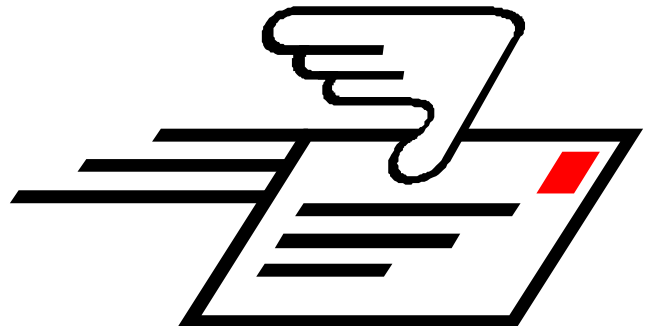
There are two ways to fight back: (1) Politically, through our Legislatures, Better Business Bureaus, Federal Trade Commission, Retail Store Managers, etc. We can write letters or call and complain; (2) The second method is to make it so costly for the manufacturers to offer these rebates that they will abandon the practice. We can do this by making sure we get every one of the offered rebates. If you follow the directions outlined below, you will get every one.

1. Make sure you have the rebate form before you leave the store. Check the form to be sure you fall within the offering's dates. Also ask the cashier for a second copy of the purchase receipt.
2. As soon as you get home, remove the UPC code from the container or wrapping before you throw the packaging away. If you intend to try out the product first to make sure you want to keep it, and don't want to remove the UPC code yet in case you want to return it, see #7 below.
3. Read the form carefully so that you will comply exactly with their requirements. Read it a second time before you fill it in. Don't forget to circle or underline the item on the receipt if required to do so.
4. Make copies of everything you send, including the UPC code. This is where most people falter since they don't have copy machines. They set it aside to take to work or to a copy store and forget about it. But, most of us have scanners! Use them to make your copies. Even most fax machines will work.
5. Staple together all the pieces: receipt, UPC code, rebate form. Then they can't say they were not with your submittal, or must have fallen out of the envelope.
6. Mark the mailing date on your copy. Also mark the date when the waiting period ends, 8 to ten weeks later.
7. This next step will help you to remember. Go to: www.memotome.com (memo to me) and sign up for their free e-mail reminder service. Have them to send you an e-mail when the rebate check was promised.

If you are trying out a product prior to sending in the rebate form, ask for a reminder in a couple of weeks.
8. If you haven't gotten your check after the promised time, call the telephone number listed on your copy of the rebate form. Try to talk to a live person. Tell them the waiting period has passed and insist that you be paid. Keep on insisting if you get the brush-off. Ask to speak to a supervisor. Mark the names of those you talked to, the dates and excuses on your rebate copy. If necessary, send another copy of your submittal in case they deny receipt of all submitted items.
9. If all else fails, go to the retail store where you purchased the item. Bring your paperwork and insist that they do whatever is necessary to get you the rebate check.

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Home Networking Options

by Ira Wilsker, Golden Triangle PC Club

From the I/O Port Newsletter, Tulsa Computer Society

Now that computers have attained “appliance” status in many homes, and many homes have several computers, networking is popular. Networking allows files to be exchanged between computers, printers to be shared, and a single Internet connection available to any connected computer. Home networking is popular in residences using broadband Internet service, such as DSL or cable, which allows connected computers to share the access.

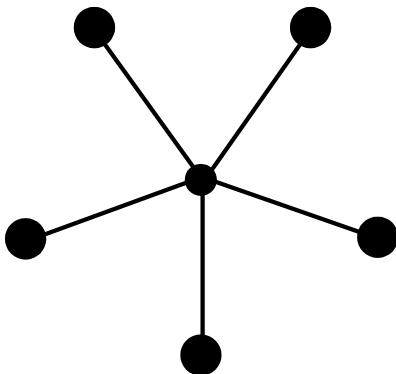
There are several options available for home networking. The most popular options currently available are the traditional wired network, a wired technology using the existing household electrical system, networks using the existing phone lines in the house, and wireless systems.

A wired network, while often the lowest in hardware cost and offering the greatest speed (theoretically up to 100 megabits per second), may be the most difficult and expensive to install, if network cable must be run throughout the house. A quick review of the Sunday ads shows network routers, the device that routes data between the computers, available for as little as \$20. Almost all new computers, desktop or notebook, include a “NIC” or “network interface card”, so connecting the computers to the router is easy, if no difficult cabling is necessary. If a desktop computer needs a network card, they are available for as little as \$10, while older notebook computers may use a “PCMCIA” network card, available for about \$30. For those needing a network card, but do

not want to install one internally, external network cards using the USB interface are available in the \$40 range, and can easily be moved between any compatible computers.

The only significant disadvantage to the traditional wired network is the cost and effort of running the cable through the house. Unless the homeowner wants the cable to be visible throughout the house, a factor that many consider unsightly, running the cable in the attic and dropping it to a computer, is often a chore. There are several local companies that will run the cable, but may be expensive, offsetting the relative low cost of the hardware. Another disadvantage to a hardwired network is the difficulty and cost of relocating computers in the house.

The newest of the standardized technologies is the “homeplug” system, utilizing the existing household electrical wiring. By simply plugging an adapter into any household wall socket, and connecting the computer, that computer becomes a part of the network. While there have been earlier attempts by manufacturers to provide the convenience of utilizing existing home electrical wiring for networking, it’s only in recent months that a successful standard has been achieved. The new standard “Homeplug 1.0”, www.homeplug.org, has been set, and many manufacturers are now producing reasonably priced equipment. Capable of a speed of 12 megabits per second, homeplug is one of the easiest and most cost effective to install. The homeplug device simply plugs into any electrical outlet in the home, and a connector, usually USB, plugs into the computer. The standard provides for electrical isolation, interference and noise protection, and resistance to power surges. Homeplug has been tested in hundreds of older and newer homes, with a variety of wiring and electrical loads, and had a near 100% success rate. To relocate a computer elsewhere in the house, simply move the adapter to a nearby electrical outlet, and the computer is on the network. Since no additional cabling is necessary, the only cost is the homeplug router (one per house) and adapters for each computer. Homeplug compatible



devices are now available in many local stores. An integral encryption function ensures that the network cannot be easily accessed outside the home. One warning; there are other non-standardized products on the market offering similar convenience and function. These are not interchangeable and often less expensive, but may not meet the same electrical standards.

An older method of using existing household facilities for networking is the somewhat similar "phoneplug" system. It has not gained the popularity of the homeplug system. Phoneplug uses the existing telephone wiring in the house to network computers. Offering a similar capacity to the homeplug system, phoneplug is slightly less convenient because phone jacks are not as widely distributed around the typical home as electrical outlets. Otherwise, the systems are somewhat comparable in price and capacity, but are not generally interchangeable. Some manufacturers, such as Linksys, are now making some home routers with both phoneplug and homeplug compatibility.

For the portability, wireless networks are extremely popular. The 802.11b standard uses the same 2.4ghz frequency as many popular cordless telephones and microwave ovens. Very available locally, and from a variety of manufacturers, the hardware is often featured in the Sunday sale books at excellent prices. Capable of a theoretical 22-megabit bandwidth, it has excellent capacity for almost any home application. A wireless router is necessary, along with some type of "access point" for each computer. Available as internal cards, USB, or PCMCIA formats, it has become widely adopted. Many newer notebook computers, Pocket PCs, and other PDAs are 802.11b capable. 802.11b is now becoming available in coffee shops, hotels, airports, convention centers, and other public locations, allowing broadband access. There have been some documented cases of interference between some 802.11b devices and household electronics. One warning about 802.11b is to be sure to use the maximum data encryption provided by the hardware, and not to use default encryption settings. A newer 802.11a standard, much faster, and using the 5.5ghz frequencies, is having some technical problems and conflicts which may impede its widespread adoption.

Using a home network can greatly enhance the computing experience for the family.

Are You Having "Buffer Underrun" Errors With Your CD Burner?

By Ira Wilsker

During one of my recent radio shows (KLVI 560AM, Tuesdays 6-7pm, Saturdays, 1-4pm), I received many calls asking how to overcome the infamous "Buffer Underrun" error when writing to CD-R discs. While many of the newer CD-RW drives have built-in protection to prevent this error, the vast majority of CD-RW drives in use are subject to this most frustrating disc-ruining error.

According to several of the CD-RW drive manufacturers' websites, as well as the websites of several of the major CD burning software publishers, this error is the single most common problem encountered by users when creating CD-R discs. A buffer underrun occurs when the buffer or memory cache (temporary storage) either built in the CD-RW drive, or supplied by the CD burning software, can not keep up with the data being written to the CD disc. Normally the buffer receives data from the computer, and parcels it out to the disc, the buffer supposedly holding enough data to feed and write smoothly to the CD-R disc as it is also receiving data from the computer. Ideally, the data stream should be smooth and continuous. If, for any of many reasons, the buffer does not have the requisite amount of data available, it is possible that a buffer underrun error may be created. Common causes of this error are inadequate system performance (not enough memory, slow processor, hard drive problems, too many programs loaded and running), and low quality or defective CD-R discs.

There are several simple tasks that can be done to reduce the chance of buffer underrun errors due to poor system performance. Most CD burning software indicates the maximum speed that the CD can write, typically in the format of "8x" or "10x" on a pull down menu. By selecting a writing speed one or two levels lower than the maximum, the error often disappears. Running both the Windows integral Scandisk and Defrag programs, or similar third party utilities, can possibly ensure that the hard drive is not the culprit causing the errors. Most of the CD

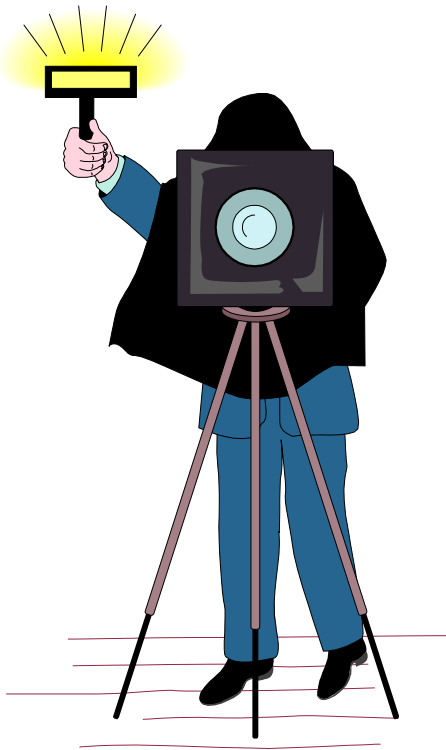
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My New Camera

By John Hoffmann, CAUG

This story starts out back quite a few years ago when I bought my very first ever camera. I bought it at the local drug store, a Kodak box camera using 120 film — whatever that meant. I think it cost \$13 but I really cannot remember these details from the 1940s. Although I was never a Matthew Brady, I did use this camera all through my high school years. I wonder where all those black and white photos prints have gone?

My first “real” camera was purchased in Japan while I was a guest of our USA government in Korea. It was a state-of-the-art 35-millimeter Canon camera. Being in a foreign country for an extended stay made a great opportunity for taking lots and lots of pictures. This I did faithfully — actually, there was nothing else to do. I did learn how to setup and read a light meter. Then I could pick a shutter speed and set the aperture. Just had to focus and then take the picture. I got quite good with this equipment.



In this era of my picture taking days, one would send the Kodak 35-mm film in to Kodak for developing and they would send you a replacement roll of film along with the picture prints. Of course this practice was ruled illegal as it cut off competition of other wannabee film sellers.

Anyway, I still have all those pictures or should I say 35 mm slides — boxes of 'em right along side of the Kodak carousel projector. It's all collecting dust now but I am about to scan and computerize these slides.

The Canon camera broke once and I could not get it repaired, so I got out of the picture-taking business. My wife took up the slack with a \$100 35 mm camera. This generated a lot of pictures on paper and a lot of albums. I think we look at albums more then we look at slides — too much trouble to set up the projector. These albums are slowly being scanned and the pictures converted into digital picture files.

Now, folks, the digital world is upon us. I taught myself computer technology starting in the early 1980s. As technology got better — better equipment — I got interested in the digital camera as it aided and abetted my computer hobby.

About three-and-a-half years ago, I bought my first digital camera. It was state-of-the-art, cutting edge, 2 megapixel Nikon camera. I was planning a long driving vacation and just had to have this camera — ever hear of that excuse before? Well, almost every picture I took was point-and-shoot.

Thank goodness the digital cameras do so well in automatic. I took few pictures outside of the automatic settings. Mostly, these did not work out well as I failed to read the manual. The next chapter in this saga has me joining our CAUG Digicam Special Interest Group (SIG).

This participation has, in effect, force-fed me into taking different kinds of pictures in different ways. Heavens to Betsy, I had to learn how to use more of

those buttons and settings on my camera. I am getting better at picture taking and have read the camera manual from cover to cover. Found out there is a whole new language written in small icons. Just another hurdle, I guess. In any SIG group, you get out of it what you put into it. This is true for me in the Digicam group.

Computer technology changes very fast, as we all know. Digital camera technology has improved immensely the past few years so much so that a good digital camera takes as good a picture as a regular 35-mm camera. Of course, there is room for both types of cameras in our picture-taking world. Digital camera changes have followed improvements in computer technology. The digital camera is nothing but a small computer, which makes picture taking very automatic. Most of the buttons are to undo some of the automatic stuff and, therefore, heads back to the old ways of setting film speed, shutter speed, and aperture size. A \$1000 digital camera at 2 megapixels four years ago can now be bought for about \$300. Of course, there are newer and better \$1000 cameras, which brings me to the final chapter.

My new camera is another Nikon. The major feature that attracted me to this camera is the 8X (telescoping magnification parameter) optical zoom and a 5 megapixel sensor. High megapixels is the name of the game for amateur digital photographers like myself. The more mega-pixels, the higher the picture quality at a good size (say 8" by 10" or so.) Lots of new features. Some of these features resemble what can be done to digital pictures electronically with a good computer graphics program.

A few new (new for me anyway) characteristics of my Nikon 5700 cameras are worth mentioning. First, the battery requirements are way up and one needs to use an expensive, high quality lithium-ion battery which must be recharged frequently. Secondly, the memory requirements are horrendous.

For my old Nikon camera, I used a 32 megabyte (MB), 64MB and 128 MB flash cards to hold all the digital information on pictures I had taken. At the very highest picture quality (means no compression

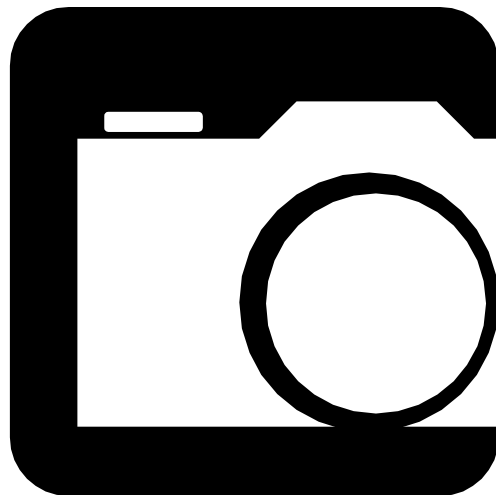
for storage.) I could take up to 45 pictures. On long vacations, I would lower the quality a little (minimum compression used) and could take over 250 pictures. Of course, even lower quality would lead to over 1000 pictures from my three flash cards. Now, I can only take eight very highest quality pictures — not near enough for any trip.

Now Nikon, and a few others, have a new card format that doubles the number of high quality pictures you can take on a given flash card, called RAW. This format is not yet standardized so each camera manufacture has its own version. The RAW format reads the camera sensor data but does not construct the picture although a thumbnail-size picture is available. The RAW picture format must be converted to a picture so the various computer graphics programs can be used for viewing it. The camera software does this conversion.

Haven't much track record with the new camera yet so will end this story at this point. The newsletter is not a place to view a picture from my new camera. Come to the Digicam SIG and I will show you a high quality picture taken with a 5-megapixel camera.

John Hoffmann is the SIG leader of our computer user group's Digital Camera SIG. Email: mhoffman@stx.rr.com

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Outrageous Help Desk Stories

From The Help Desk Of A Company That Would Rather Stay Anonymous
Article reproduction coordinated by Steve Bass, Pasadena IBM Users Group

Printer problems

My favorite story comes from my past when working in a tech support organization for a computer company. At the time of this story, the company had released some buggy spooler software in their product, which was a database product.

We were quite used to frantic customers calling after trying to run an end-of-month job to complain that nothing is coming out of the printer. The typical fix was to dial-in to their computer, go into a debugger and through a laborious process unplug the confused spooler software so the job would print. We would then admonish the customer to install the latest patches.

In this particular instance, the customer called at the end of the day, frantic and upset. A couple of us sat around a terminal and modem and dialed into the system. After pawing through the entrails of the machine for a while, the tech next to me talked to the customer on the speakerphone.

Tech: "would you mind going over to the printer?"

Customer: "OK, I'm there."

Tech: "Do you see a white, square button labeled, 'On Line?'"

Customer: "Yes, I see it."

Tech: "Is it illuminated?"

Customer: "No."

Tech: "Please press it once."

Customer: "OK, I did that...Wow! The most amazing thing just happened: the report is spewing out of the printer. Good job! Thanks a lot!"

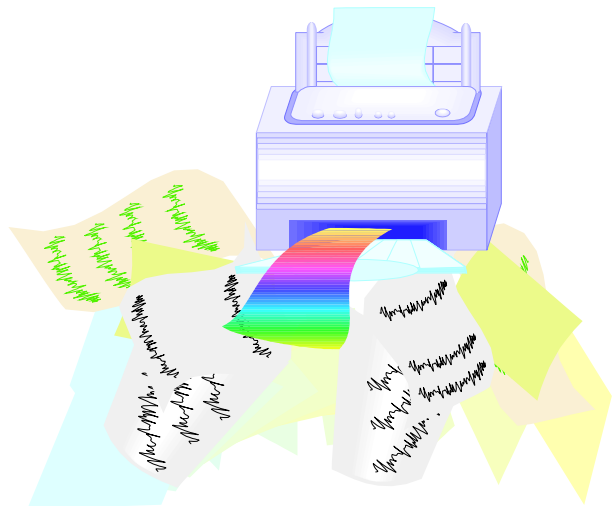
And this, of course, is why most companies don't use local support. They know it is impossible to kill someone over the telephone.

Upside Down Envelopes

A long-time user complained that the network printer had begun printing envelopes upside-down. I told her the printer could not be printing them upside down, but the envelopes had to have been inserted backward. She insisted that she had been putting envelopes into that printer in exactly the same way for over a year and she knew it had always worked that way before. My solution was to open the printer, take out the toner cartridge, shake it up a bit, turn the envelopes around, reinsert the cartridge, and have her try again. Voila! "See," she said, "I KNEW I had loaded the envelopes right! It really was something wrong with the printer!"

It's Magic!

This incident occurred at a previous employer. It was not an outrageous complaint, but was more an example of how incompetent users can be. A user came to me complaining that she could not get any of her documents to print. I went through the normal checks to make sure everything was functioning properly, which it was. I then determined that she had not logged on properly to the Novell network so her documents were not getting to the networked printer.



Without her knowledge, I got her logged on, but before I printed anything, I thought I would have some fun with her. I asked her if she was familiar with the terms bits and bytes, and she said she was. I told her that her computer sends bytes of information through the network to the printer to be printed.

But for some reason, there were a large number of bytes clogging the line to the printer. We then went over to the printer where I unplugged the network connection. I told her we had to let the bytes “escape” out of the line so it would be clear to print again. I plugged it back in, went to her machine and printed a document. She was amazed!

After that, whenever she had a problem, she asked me to come “Clean the lines again.”

Black And White In Color

Received a call from a new user wanting to know why her documents were not printing in color. I told her that the printer is a black and white laser printer. She said well the program said what you see is what you get. I told her again that the printer is only prints in black and white. She continued to blame the software and her computer and wanted someone to come take a look at it.

Click The Power Switch

I had a guy who was sitting in the building with all the power off calling me and screaming that he could not print his Excel spreadsheet.

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(Continued from page 5)

burning software uses that hard drive as intermediate storage while the CD is being created, and the rule-of-thumb is that hard drive space of at least 150% of the amount of data being written must be readily available on the hard drive. If cluttered with obsolete data, simply cleaning the c:\windows\temp directory by deleting obsolete files can often help prevent the problem. In many older Windows computers, mostly running Windows 98 and 95, the CD drive settings may be incorrectly configured. Go to My Computer – Control Panel – System – Device Manager – click on the “+” to the left of “CDROM” to show the drive model – click on the CD drive to highlight it – click on properties – Settings – and check both “Disconnect” and “Auto Insert Notification”, and uncheck “Sync Data Transfer”. On many computers, properly setting this configuration alone may be adequate to eliminate the error.

If inadequate system resources cause the problem, it may also be easily resolved without the necessity of spending money to add memory or install a faster processor. Sometimes programs that have been already exited leave kernels of code or data in memory that unnecessarily consumes resources; typically the easiest method to restore those resources is to simply reboot the computer. By simply stopping any unnecessary programs from running in the background, and not performing any other tasks while burning CDs (multitasking), system resources consisting of CPU power, memory, and other resources may be easily and quickly made available. That traditional method to stop unwanted programs that may be running is to either right click on their icon in the taskbar and click on “close”, or do a CTRL-ALT-DELETE, followed by task manager on newer operating systems, and “end task” all programs running except “systray” and “explorer”, before burning the CD. After the CD has been successfully created, reboot the computer in order to load antivirus software, and other desired utilities. Another option, which may also improve general system performance, not just CD writing, is to stop unnecessary programs from loading at all during the boot “start up” sequence. Detailed instructions on how to do this for all Windows operating systems can be found by clicking on the first link on my radio show web page at www.mycomputershow.com. An

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Ants In My Hub

By Paul Lujan By Way Of An E-Mail Forward

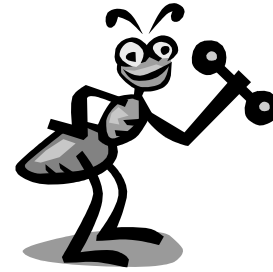
So, last night, I come home after a 4½ hour drive back from LA (note to law enforcement officials: that's a "6" there, really), and sit down in front of the computer to check my mail. My connection is, for lack of a better word, ass-slow. I go to look at the hub to see if everyone else is having this problem.

Nope, Mike and David's activity lights are busily flickering; it's only me who has been screwed. I reach down to fiddle with the connection, and notice that the hub is covered with ants (as well as my hand, after the fiddling). "That's odd," I think to myself, "what would ants want with our hub?" But I'm way too tired to deal with it at the time, so instead I go to sleep.

I wake up this morning, and decide to investigate further. Yep, the hub is definitely swarming with ants. And it doesn't look like the ants are just going over it to somewhere else (especially since there aren't any tasty ant treats anywhere nearby); they're clearly going into and out of the hub. Some of the ants going in are even carrying little white pellets. "Is that food?" I wonder. "Where is it coming from?"

I unplug the hub and pick it up, and then kill all of the ants that come out of it. And kill some more ants. And kill some more ants. This goes on for a while. I begin to think that the little white pellets look an awful lot like eggs. I shake the hub, and it sounds like someone has poured a handful of coarse sand into it. "That's odd," I think to myself, "I could have sworn this hub didn't come with the sand option." I initially thought that there were just some ants here, but it's pretty clear I've got more on my hands now.

So, I decide to take a closer look at the hub. Unfortunately, the hub boasts a screwless construction, but I know that my screwdrivers can be used for more than merely removing screws, so I start prying. As I do so, a bunch of ants and eggs, as well as what look like larvae (basically, they look like slightly-smaller-than-normal ants, but a very pale brown instead of black) continue to fall out (into the sink, since I've become clever enough to do this over the sink).



I finally get the thing open, and see a bunch of eggs lying on the circuit board, but less than I would have expected if there's really a colony set up here. So, I figure that they're probably under the circuit board, and set to work unscrewing the circuit board to take it out of the box.

Jackpot! (That is, if my goal were to win an ant colony, which it really **wasn't**.) The entire bottom of the box is coated with eggs, and I see a large ant which I can only assume is the queen. I terminate the queen with extreme prejudice, and then wash out the box (it's made of metal, so I figure it'll be okay.)

The circuit board, on the other hand, I can't just wash off (since I hold hopes of saving the hub, not really wanting to have to drop \$30 on a new one), and there are lots of eggs wedged in small places, like between the link lights or between the chips connected to the ports, where they'll be really hard to get out of. So, I set the circuit board aside for the moment to take a shower.

When I come back, I notice that the ants have actually done me a favor! (Suckers!) In their futile attempts to save the colony, they've picked up the eggs themselves to scurry around like maniacs, solving my



problem. I pick off the ants, and then vigorously shake the board to try to dislodge anything still stuck in the ports, and much to my surprise another queen falls out. (I've read that Argentine ants can have more than one queen per colony, but this is still a surprise, especially since I thought I had already gotten almost everything.) I dispose of her, too, clean up the remaining ants, and figure I might as well try putting the hub back together. Not that I can completely undo my prying, but hey, that's cosmetic anyway.

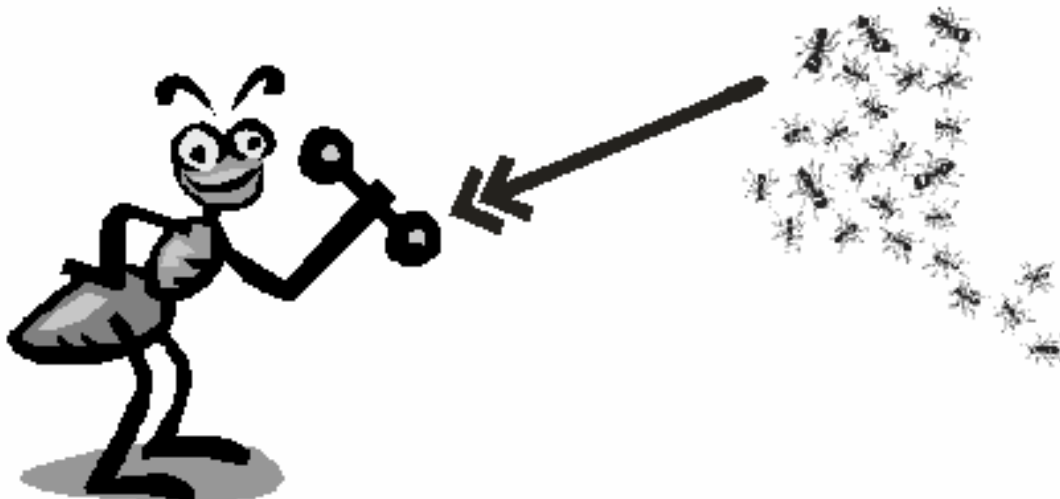
Much to my surprise, it actually works! And my performance is back from miserable to normal.

Ants 0 Me 1.

Man, I hate ants. If I could choose one genus to completely wipe off the Earth, assuming that it wouldn't, like, destroy the ecosystem (but really, what depends on ants? Anteaters? Well, they're not doing a very good job, are they?!), it would be them. Well, okay, I suppose I should probably choose something like mosquitoes, since even though they're less personally annoying to me, they still have the whole large-scale disease-spreading thing. But I'd expect some serious compensation from the WHO for not choosing ants! —*Paul Lujan. Article reproduction coordinated by Steve Bass, Pasadena IBM Users Group.*§

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using the article as long as it is kept in context, with proper credit given to the author.

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.



**ENLARGEMENT OF ANT
CARRYING AWAY DATA PACKETS**

Selections From The DealsGuy

Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group

Beware If You Remodel A Dell

I read this in the Macon Users Group's newsletter and thought you might like to know about it. Dell computer is a very popular choice and many people own them. What if you decide to upgrade your Dell's power supply or motherboard? You could easily fall into a trap if you are inexperienced since these parts in a Dell are proprietary. Seems that several wiring connections are reversed. You are advised to do your homework. Either get the parts from Dell, or replace "both" the motherboard and power supply if you use non-Dell parts. I hope this information prevents somebody from encountering a serious problem had they not known.

Need Memory? I Think I Do, But Can't Remember

Lots of people purchase their memory on the Web and a very popular place is from Crucial. Did you know that they have a special deal just for user group people? Neither did I. Thanks to Russell Albach of The Alamo PC Organization, I can pass his information on to my readers. Head for [<http://www.crucial.com/usergroups>] and you'll find your-

self eligible for a 5% discount. However, if you took advantage of the exceptionally good user group special offer from Intel for APCUG Complex attendees, you won't get any help from Crucial though because they do not carry RDRAM. If you need memory, many consider Crucial highest in quality. I checked with their sales department before writing this up and they said to go ahead. As far as I'm concerned, we need all the help we can get when making a purchase.

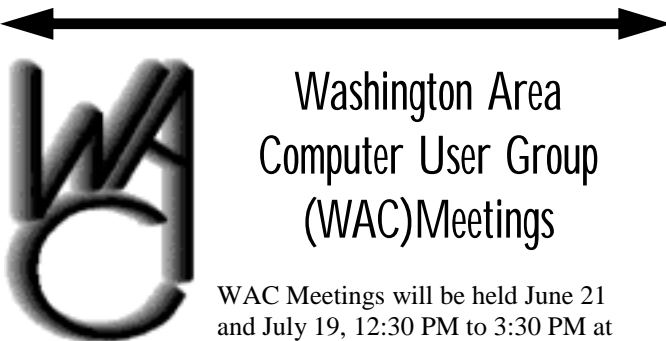
Plenty of Choices For An Office Suite

In the past, I have mentioned several office suites that were either free or low cost. This is just a reminder list for your perusal. I realize that they may not have all the features that you would get in MS Office, but you can save a lot over purchasing the big names. It is a known fact that most office suite users only know about 30% of a program's capabilities, so why be captive to a big name? Below are some alternative office suites:

<http://www.gnome.org> (Windows & Linux)
<http://www.hancom.com> (Windows & Linux)

<http://www.gobe.com> (Windows & Linux)
<http://www.thinkfree.com> (Windows, Mac & Linux)

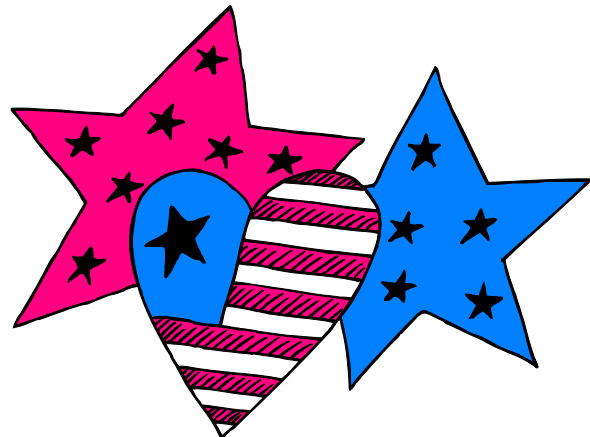
<http://www.staroffice.com> (not free any more, but not expensive) (Windows, Linux & Sun Solaris)



Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC) Meetings

WAC Meetings will be held June 21 and July 19, 12:30 PM to 3:30 PM at the Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Virginia. 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/>



Fed Up With Doubleclick cookies?

I don't remember where I saw this, but some of you may have noticed that if you use AdAware or another spyware sniffer, it usually finds a cookie by Doubleclick on your machine. Take it off and it will be right back. They actually provide a way to opt out of that situation. Point your browser to [<http://www.doubleclick.com/us/corporate/privacy/privacy/ad-cookie/>]. One click at the bottom will do it, but be sure to read the caveat on their Web site. After opting out, it tells you which cookie NOT to delete; otherwise you have just defeated your objective.

Free Photo Editor

GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program), which boasts many of Photoshop's features without the high price tag will create layers, feather, manipulate text, and even animate. You'll find handy floating palettes just like in Photoshop as well. One drawback noted in the write-up I read is no support for GIF files. Download it at [<http://www.gimp.org/~tml/gimp/win32/downloads.html>].

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 any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheap-skate) Click [Bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>] for past columns. I have also been busy putting up some interesting new articles on my Web site so take a look.

(Continued from page 9)

alphabetical list of programs that may be in the startup, along with an indication of if they are necessary or unnecessary, is the second link on my website. Being connected to an "always on" broadband internet connection, such as DSL or cable can also consume resources. If the error occurs, disconnect from the net.

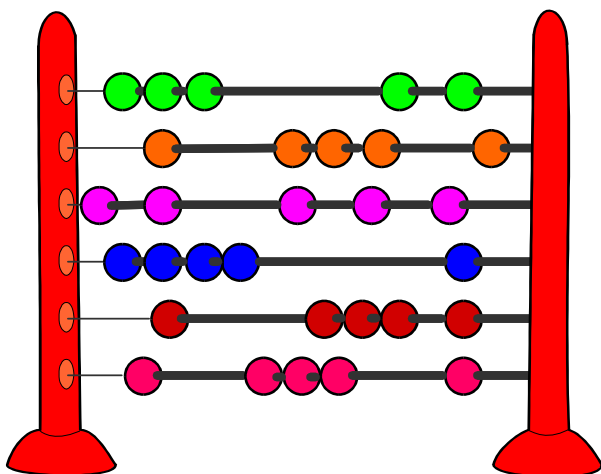
Another possible cause of the error may be the CD burning software itself. Most software included free with CD-RW drives is the "lite" or "limited" version lacking some of the features of the full commercial versions. Check your software publisher's website for updates to the version of software being used, as these may resolve the buffer underrun problem. Newer versions of the software, sometimes downloadable either as free upgrades, or available to registered users at a discount, may also resolve the problem. Some CD burning software better manage resources and buffers than others, and a software change may show improvement. Many of the CD software publishers offer a free trial version of their product for download; this may be a useful exercise.

The CD-R media itself can be the culprit. Newer disc technologies, often using a blue or green dye on the writable side of the disc, can usually be written to faster and more reliably than the older, and cheaper, silver dye technology. The difference in price between the better quality blank CDs, and the no-name cheap generics is often small, considering the savings in both ruined discs, and the time to create them.

By properly configuring your computer and software, the CD burning experience can be less frustrating, and more productive.

Ira Wilsker is a member of the APCUG Board of Advisors, hosts a radio show, writes a column for his local paper and is on the faculty at the Lamar institute. Email him at: ira@apcug.org.

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(Continued from page 1)

Following the guide's directions for reloading XP, including reformatting the hard drive, I had the computer chugging along, until the format process reached 55%. Twenty minutes later, the progress bar reached 56%, and waiting five more minutes seemed to point to hours to completion — and a questionable drive. I aborted the formatting, and installed the new 120 Gig Maxtor drive I'd acquired 'just in case.'

I also spent some time disconnecting the IDE ZIP drive installed in the system. In the last issue, I described how the back up system I built cleverly installed its ZIP drive with the designation of drive "C" — and, in at least one instance, an installation program deposited components on the ZIP drive instead of the system's hard drive, or drive F, as designated on that system. I discovered that it wasn't enough to remove the power cable from the ZIP drive — the drive's ribbon cable connection had to be removed as well. Even without power, the computer recognized that the ZIP was present, and might have designated it other than desired.

The new hard drive formatted without a hitch, and Windows XP installed itself. Then comes the joy of reloading all the application software I use, and reloading the backups of all

my files. The most frustrating part of all this has been finding some of the personal preference option tweaks in various programs that make the programs work the way I like to. I'm still looking for the option that starts my Netscape mail client in "plain text" when I compose a new message, and the one that eliminates the Instant Messenger popup when I invoke the browser. Funny, I don't get the Messenger Popup if I open up the mail client before opening the browser.

I'm still wrestling with my home theater system's DVD player. Circuit City's repair folks said they could find nothing wrong with it. I am unable to get color output from the component video outputs. Got it hooked up in CC's store — color abounds. Drag it home — no color from component outputs to two TVs, while the S-VHS output works fine. Perhaps the unit doesn't like the drive home from the store?

I bought a set of cables, just in case — no difference. I expect cables are the high margin area of the consumer electronics business these days. I will undoubtedly return the ones I bought — \$50, priced \$10 higher than the manufacturer's list I found on the web, but the cable's connectors are also not as advertised on the package.

What really got me looking hard at them was the fact that the cable barely stayed plugged in to the TV. Strange, for new cables, which are usually "stiff" — tough to plug in, and just as hard to extract. The Monster Cable packaging touted how snug they fit — with a split center pin, and "six cut" turbine connector. Sorry, but not in the package I bought. An ordinary center pin for the signal carrying part of the standard RCA plug, and "four cut" turbine portion of the shield connection. But maybe I'm doing better than video fanatics — Monster Cable sells a really high end component video cable set for a list of \$200. PT Barnum, where are you, now that we need you? Don't we ascribe the old saw about "sucker born every minute" to him?



(Continued from page 16)

Going Somewhere?

Want to know what's going on where you're going, or where to see a type of event? Take a trip to <http://whatsonwhen.com>

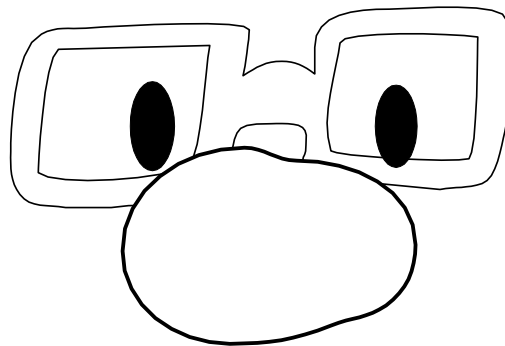
How else would you know about where to buy a camel? There's the Douz Camel Market, Thursdays in Douz, Tunisia. "Every Thursday, the oasis town of Douz becomes a buzzing trading centre for the buying and selling of camels."

If you missed the Running of the Bulls, try out the Palio of Siena on July 2, 2003. "For the Siennese, the *Palio* horse-race around the Piazza del Campo is a matter of life and death. Daring, bravado, lunacy, bribery, poisoning and death-threats have all played their parts in the event since its inauguration in 1310."

Drowning In Spam?

ZDNet has reviews of spam and spyware fighting software. There's also a guide to car technology. See the links at their home page <http://www.zdnet.com/>

Have a nice summer!



NCTCUG Information

NCTCUG, Post Office Box 949, Arlington VA 22216

Club Information call: 301-577-7899

Web Site: www.nctcug.org

Officers and Directors

All officer terms expire 2003

President	Jim Rhodes	703-931-7854
1st VP	Ron Schmidt	301-577-7899
2nd VP	Roger Fujii	703-280-1243
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Director: term expires

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Blair Jones	2004	202-362-7344
John Keys	2004	703-451-0896
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Fred Cook	2003	703-921-1749
JJ Davies	2003	703-379-9222
Sy Fishbein	2003	703-536-5894
Dean Mires	2003	301-931-2400

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 CR 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.

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

Blair Jones, NCTCUG

These are a few sites I've found recently that you might find interesting. I found some through magazine articles, others by browsing computer-related web sites, and others from references in newsgroup postings.

More From Google

Check out the choices at Google services, <http://www.google.com/options/>

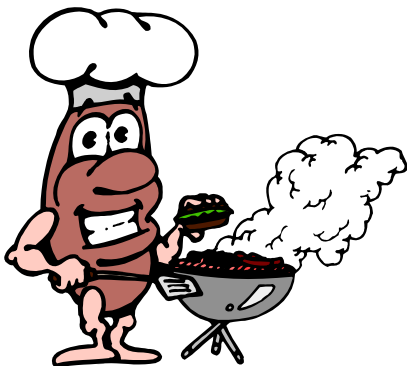
One of the most interesting sections is the labs, where the things they're working on are available to try out. <http://labs.google.com/>

Try searching on tandy computer user group in the Google viewer. <http://labs.google.com/qviewer.html>

There are also more specialized, or limited, search tools – to a particular topic, or a school website, for example, or a search for images.

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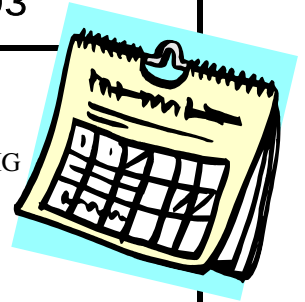
June/July 2003

1st Wed. (6/4, 7/2) 7 p.m.
Virginia General Meeting

4th Wed (6/25, 7,23) 7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (7/21) 7 p.m.
Board of Directors
(No meeting in June)

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.



First Class