

The NCTCUG Journal

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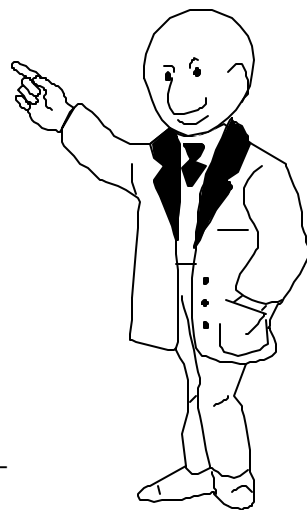
Volume 27 Issue 2

Keeping Up

By Paul Howard, NCTCUG

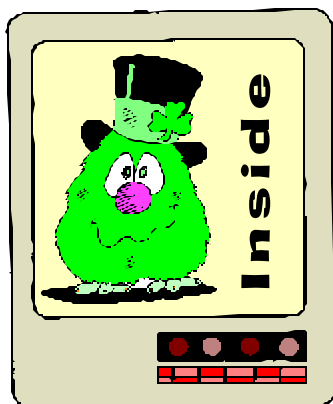
Meeting Presentations Coming Your Way

Dodge the snowflakes !! Learn more about your computer, software, and technology at upcoming NCTCUG meetings. Through our membership in the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), we'll be offering demonstrations from a variety of companies in the form of "Presentations in a Box." Companies put together printed presenter guides, and PowerPoint slide shows on their product (s), so that one of our members can demo the product or discuss the topic without having to spend weeks in preparing. While there's still work involved, the "pain" is substantially reduced, and we all gain knowledge of new products and services. Generally, there are handouts and trinkets for the audience, gift for the presenter, and door prize items for the audience, and offers for reduced user group pricing.



Jim Rhodes presented Pricegrabber.com, a web-based site allowing comparison of product prices and vendors, at the January Internet SIG meeting. Opportunities exist for individuals and businesses to sell products through Pricegrabber.com. Some interesting features include "bottom line price" which when chosen as the sort key for a particular product, adds product price and shipping / handling charges, for a true low price presentation. Another feature allows you to enter a price you'd be willing to pay for a particular product - you get an email when a vendor's price meets your price point. Several web sites offering product reviews, such as PC World, use

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Still Annoyed With Your PC? Keep Fighting Back!

Steve Bass tackles another handful of his most irritating annoyances

By Steve Bass, Contributing Editor, PC World (and allegedly famous author)

You know the drill—readers send me the PC behaviors that annoy, irritate and aggravate; I spend countless hours finding fixes.

Here are another four egregious examples of Windows annoyances—and fixes. I'll also provide a few time-wasting, deadline avoiding (and often weird) Web sites I've discovered.

The big collection of annoyances—over 100 of them—are in *PC Annoyances: How to Fix the Most Annoying Things About Your Personal Computer*. (Caution: another shameless plug to follow.) If these annoyances are annoying—and you like the fixes—well, maybe you'll buy the book. You can get a copy here at: <http://www.snipurl.com/annoyed>

Boot Boring IE Icons

The Annoyance: Internet Explorer's Favorite's icons are nothing more than Microsoft's dull, blue "e" emblem. I'd much prefer anything other than these tiny logos reminding me how much I've spent on Microsoft products.

The Fix: This one's easy (and if you like it, you really, really need to buy my book—there are dozens of fixes just like this one.) Start by right clicking on any icon, then on Properties. Choose Shortcut, select Change Icon, then Browse, and click on any file ending in EXE. You'll likely see an icon (maybe not; not all EXE's have icons). Find an icon you like and click OK and OK again.

If you have the time and inclination, poke around in other folders in \Windows and \Windows\System for other EXEs that have icons you can use.

Kill Some Time: You'll find these images from the Hubble more than just incredible—they're just stunning. Find them at:

<http://snipurl.com/hubble>

Search Animations Begone

The Annoyance: I was annoyed with Office Clippy and your book showed me how to dump it. How about the irritating animation in XP's Search feature?

The Fix: Start a search from the desktop by clicking F3 and then take one last look at the dumb animation. Click Change Preferences at the bottom of the Search pane, press "Without an animated screen character," and say adios to the creature.

*"I want to thank Bill Gates, his Microsofties, and the entire Redmond Empire. Without them, this PC Annoyances wouldn't be possible (or even necessary)" —
Steve Bass*

Zap Microsoft's Passport

The Annoyance: I just bought a new PC and don't plan to leave the country. So how in the world do I stop that annoying icon from asking me if I want to sign up for a Passport.

The Fix: By now it's probably stopped—Microsoft's perky Passport account.net Messenger appears the first few times you access try to connect to the Web. If it doesn't—or you're impatient—click the Passport message and when the window appears, select Cancel.

Kill Some Time: Almost everyone jokes that the number one way to fix any PC annoyance is to switch to a Mac. Before you do, check out their new iToilet, a little something that may change your mind. It's at http://snipurl.com/i_toilet

Disable the CapsLock Key

The Annoyance: I keep accidentally hitting the darn thing on my notebook, and I'm getting mighty sick of typing things that look like a dumb ransom note. When I'm in Word, of course, AutoCorrect fixes the problem (usually), but in other apps, it's a pain in the butt. Can the CapsLock key be disabled?

The Fix: Whenever I get a chance to circumvent something Microsoft should have built into Windows, I get a warm, content feeling. The fix will cost you ten minutes, including downloading "Disable the Caps Lock key," an aptly named free utility. The utility works in Win 95, 98, SE, and XP (I haven't tested it using NT or Windows 2000, but it's benign and won't do any harm if it doesn't work.) Get the zipped files at <http://snipurl.com/capslockoff>. Unzip it to any folder using Windows Explorer.

Now you'll need to create a shortcut on the desktop that points to the utility. Right-mouse-click any empty spot on your desktop, select New, and choose Shortcut. In the "Command Line" (98 and ME) or "location" (2000 and XP) field, type "C:\Windows\CapsLockOff.exe" /off making sure to include the quotes. (Substitute the location of the utility if it's not in "c:\Windows.") Click Next and you'll see a new shortcut with the name "CapsLockOff" on your desktop.

Now it's an easy task to drag the desktop shortcut over to the Start menu and hover until you see All Programs (Programs in Windows 98 and ME); continue hovering until the Startup icon appears and drop the icon onto that folder. "Disable the Caps Lock key" will now automatically run when you boot your system.

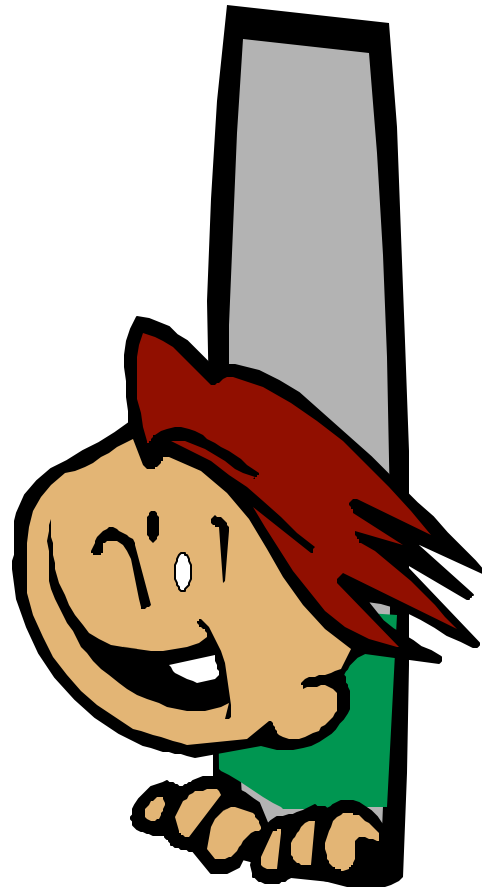
If you're an advanced PC user, pick up three REG files (small pseudo-programs that modify the Registry) that change the Capslock key to shift, completely disables it, and changes it back to normal. The files are available at <http://snipurl.com/capslock2>

Kill Some Time: Need something to do that doesn't take creating a shortcut on your desktop? I have just the thing—it's the "Specs of the Century" site. They present you with specs and you try to figure out who they belong to. Try it here: <http://snipurl.com/specs>

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Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World and a founding member of APCUG. He's also the author of PC Annoyances: How to Fix the Most Annoying Things about Your Personal Computer, O'Reilly Press. It's available on Amazon at <http://snurl.com/annoyed>

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"May the fleas of a thousand camels infest the crotch of the RealPlayer developer who decided to stick icons in my system tray, Startup menu, and desktop, and may his arms be too short to scratch. —

Snarfed from Internet, author unknown

Computers From The Very Beginning — Monitors

By Charlie Paschal, Editor/Publisher, Palmetto Personal Computer Club, Columbia, SC
Columnist, The (Columbia) State newspaper, SC

Just as understanding computer memory can be confusing, so can understanding a computer display, one of the most important parts of a computer.

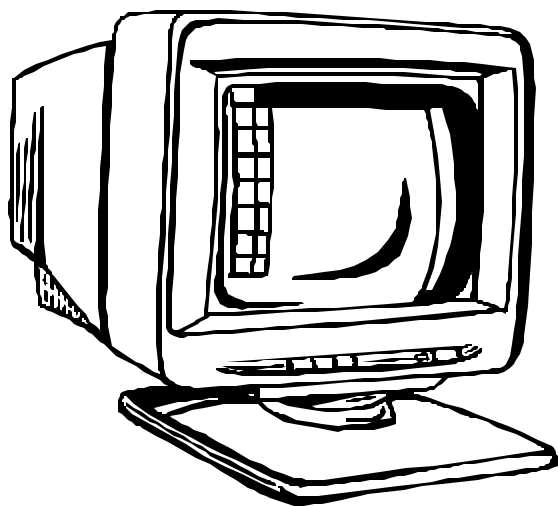
The display, which also can be called a monitor, is connected to a computer by a cable that attaches to a video card inside a computer. Troubles with a display can be traced to the cable, the card inside the computer, software that drives the card, the display itself or some piece of equipment nearby.

Monitors can be found in various sizes and shapes but even the best of monitors can be made to look bad if any of the other parts and pieces are not working correctly or of poor quality. A monitor is only as good as the video card in your computer and the software that runs that video card and monitor.

Let's focus first on the monitor.

Of all the parts and pieces that make up a computer system, the monitor is one part that you shouldn't scrimp on. If you plan to have a computer for a long time, then buck up and spend the money for a good one. Although you may buy a new computer, you can always use your old monitor on it—especially if you buy a good quality monitor.

In that purchase, there's a lot to consider.



Although you can find monitors less than 17 inches in size, I don't recommend buying one. Since some very cheap systems come with smaller monitors, it's something you should guard against when looking at buying a system that comes with a monitor.

Resolution and dot pitch are very important when it comes to monitors.

A computer screen is made up of dots and these are measured in dot pitch. In this case, you always go with the lowest number, with a cutoff of 28 dot pitch. Anything larger than that will give you a grainy display. More expensive models come with a dot pitch of 24.

Resolution is another measure of a monitor. Common resolutions include 640x480, 800x600, 1024x768 and 1280x1024. Even if your monitor can do higher resolutions, if your video card can't, then you won't be able to use them.

Why should you care about resolution? By using higher resolutions, you can fit more on your screen. A Web page viewed at 640x480 displays very little information. By boosting your resolution to 800x600 or 1024x768, you can fit more pixels on the screen, thus increasing your viewing area.

Another feature to check before buying a monitor is its refresh rate. Although many makers claim their monitors are able to display higher resolutions, these are often delivered at a rate lower than 72Hz, meaning that your eyes will see flicker. This is hard on your eyes and will make your eyes tire quicker than a higher refresh rate.

In today's world, the hot item is a "flat panel" LCD monitor; but, just because it's hot and the salesmen are pushing it, doesn't mean you should buy it. Although many of us lust after a flat panel, there are drawbacks:

- ☐ Small type often doesn't look good on one. If you're considering one, be sure to look at some small type faces in the store before you buy it. If a salesperson is handy, get them to start Wordpad (or Word) and make the type nine- or 10 point. Be sure to check around the edges of the LCD to see if the image blurs on either side.
- ☐ Often, an LCD is "fixed" to a certain resolution, such as 1024x768. Be sure that you like the way icons and type appears on screen before buying. If the type is too small (or too large), try another resolution. If the type appears jagged or blurry, then the LCD might look best at one resolution.
- ☐ Color is not rendered sharply by less expensive flat panels. If it's a bargain basement flat panel, the color on a normal CRT probably will be better.

The availability of these flat panels mean that the CRT monitors—the old style larger monitors—are getting less expensive. About a year ago, I purchased a 21-inch Sony (almost top of the line) for less than \$500 off the Internet. It has beautiful color, is capable of rendering higher resolutions at a high refresh rate.

The push to flat panels also has opened up a huge market for used monitors since many people are replacing the older CRTs with this new style of monitor. Because of this, I've found used 17-inch monitors for less than \$80 and 19-inch monitors for about \$125.

Bottom line: A good rule of thumb for monitors is at least a 1024x768 resolution at 72Hz, no dot pitch larger than 26 and no smaller than 17 inches.

Unless you've got a space problem (CRTs are much larger than flat panel monitors), I'd stick with CRT monitors rather than a flat panel, which will cost less in the future as manufactures ramp up production of them. You can bet on that.

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It's Spring Cleaning



Don't forget to "clean out" your hard drive!

And BACKUP! BACKUP! BACKUP!

More On Spam, The Bane Of The Internet

By Ira Wilsker

Recently, here in the Examiner, I wrote about the report from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) citing the prevalence and deception common in “unsolicited commercial email”, more commonly referred to as “spam”.

According to a report recently published by Ferris Research, it is estimated that spam will cost American businesses over \$10 billion this year, considering computing resources, labor costs, and lost productivity. According to the email filtering service Brightmail, in the month of March 2003, 45% of all email was spam, compared to only 16% in January 2002, a 181% increase!

The FTC has created a website with good information on spam, including tips on reducing the volume received, as well as ideas on preventing spam. This site is online at www.ftc.gov/spam, and contains much helpful information.

As has been stated previously in this column, email addresses are typically harvested from websites, newsgroup postings, chat rooms, and other sources. Many web merchants also sell lists of customers, and there are also some Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and email providers that sell subscriber lists. Many of the free email subscription services offering jokes, recipes, news, and other information, support themselves by selling subscriber information. Many software publishers sell lists of registered users. Some viruses, worms, Trojans, and spyware may harvest the users’ personal email addresses, and possibly even hijack an address book. Once harvested, email addresses, often millions of them, are compiled and sorted, and then sold and resold countless times.

Some spam mail is sent using even more insidious means, such as by software installed by some of the popular file sharing programs, concealing the real source of the spam. Another method, recently re-

ported on securityfocus.com, in an article “Rise of the Spam Zombies”, is the rapidly spreading use of worms and viruses as a means of sending spam mail from infected computers. One especially nasty Trojan is the “Proxy-Guzu”, which makes the infected computer and Internet connection available to spammers, who can then send spam from that computer, again obscuring the real source. If the source is traced, it will point back to the infected computer. “Proxy-Guzu” may be installed on the victims’ computers after the users open emails claiming to have images from an “adult” webcam, or other forms of pornography. Another backdoor Trojan worm, “Jeem”, has been around for about a year, and enables unauthorized access to the victims’ computers for the purpose of “laundering” spam email, again making the true source undetectable, and showing the source as the infected computers. This again emphasizes the oft-stated necessity to have updated antivirus software installed, as well as the need for a firewall and anti-spyware software.

The FTC has suggestions on making your email address less vulnerable to harvesting. The FTC suggests that your email addresses not be posted to the public. Many users have public email addresses used on websites, newsrooms, and chats, and private email addresses only given to family and trusted friends, but never publicly used. Another FTC suggestion is to be careful about submitting your email address to a web merchant or other website; read the sites’ privacy statements, being sure that your email address will not be sold or used for other purposes. Refuse to give your email to any site that will not protect it, and opt-out of any sites that have previously been joined. Of course, once an address is available and harvested, it can never be totally removed from spam lists. If a site with a privacy policy also offers to share your information with “selected partners”, be sure to refuse such sharing.

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New Year's Computing Resolutions

By Ira Wilsker

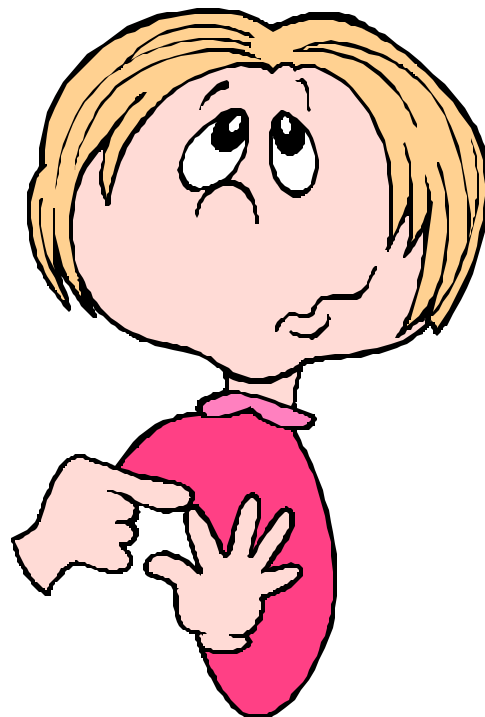
Good grief! I don't know about you, but I tend to keep new years' resolutions about as well as I can stay on a diet. These resolutions may make us feel good, and indicate our good intentions, but the likelihood of our keeping them is often remote. Hopefully, we can keep some resolutions about our computing, and implement them on a permanent basis, making our time spent with our computers more enjoyable and less aggravating.

"Backup Backup Backup" are the three most important words in computing. Murphy's First Law of Computing is "A properly backed up hard drive will never fail; but a hard drive that does not have a current backup will always fail at the most inopportune time". There have been several reviews of backup hardware and software in this column over the years, and all worked ok to some extent, but there is one irrefutable fact about backing up your hard drive. That is that you need a current backup, period. At least weekly, backup critical data files so that if your hard drive or computer fails, you can restore your programs from their original CDs, and then restore your data files from the backups. It would be even better to make a full backup (everything), and then periodic incremental backups (only those files new or changed since the last backup). Most backup software has this as a feature. Since almost all recent computers have a CD burner, and blank CDs are cheap, there is absolutely no excuse for being wiped out by a hard drive failure or a virus. The basic software that comes with CD burners or pre-installed on factory computers with CD burners is totally adequate to copy critical data files to a CD. Each blank CD holds over 600 megabytes of data, so it will only take a few to do a backup right now. If an external hard drive or DVD burner is available, there is no excuse for not having comprehensive backups. If Murphy is correct, and you do have current backups, then you have nothing to fear.

If you have been a regular reader of this column, you could already guess my next mandatory resolution for all computer users — keep your antivirus software updated on at least a daily basis. Viruses,

worms, and Trojans are getting nastier, more sophisticated, and capable of doing more damage than those in the past. Contemporary computer worms can easily steal your identity and send your highly personal information to unknown individuals with larceny in their hearts. Other viruses can destroy the critical data on your computer, hijack your internet connection and attack the national infrastructure, or commit other heinous acts. There is absolutely no reason not to have current antivirus software installed. Price can not be an issue, because there are still several freeware titles available from AVG (www.grisoft.com) and AVAST (www.avast.com). Recently Microsoft and Computer Associates (CA), announced that for a limited time the \$50 CA antivirus and firewall suite can be downloaded for free (for personal use) from www.my-etrust.com/microsoft, and includes a year of daily updates. Other popular retail antivirus products, such as McAfee's VirusScan, and Symantec's Norton Antivirus, are currently available for nominal prices, after rebates; they may even be free

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Resolutions

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(after rebates) when purchased as a bundle along with some of the major income tax software. Once installed be absolutely sure that the antivirus software is updated at least on a daily basis.

“Practice Safe Hex” is a comprehensive computing term meaning be careful on the internet, especially with email and while browsing. This includes never responding in any way (including “remove me” requests) from spammers, and instantly deleting any spam email. This also includes never opening any email of suspicious origin, or with suspicious attachments. This especially means be very suspicious of email attachments from acquaintances, as most modern viruses and worms hijack address books and send themselves out randomly selecting a “to” and “from” email address from the victim’s address book, also meaning that such email did not really come from the apparent sender. This method of human engineering makes it attractive to open the infected email, as well as makes it difficult to track the real source. Be suspicious even if antivirus software is installed and updated, as many of these new viruses spread rapidly, often infecting computers faster than the antivirus publishers can post updates. Other forms of “safe hex” include killing spyware (Spybot Search and Destroy, free at www.safer-networking.org), and using a firewall to keep intruders out of your computer. Outpost (www.agnitum.com) and ZoneAlarm (www.zonelabs.com) are available free for personal use, and are excellent quality. It is also imperative that the operating system security patches are installed (windowsupdate.microsoft.com).

Another variant of safe hex that warrants a resolution is to stop forwarding hoaxes and urban legends. These can be harmful, so check out any interesting stories or reports at urbanlegends.about.com or www.snopes.com before forwarding them, even if they were sent to you by a reputable person.

Ira Wilsker is the Advisor for Region 8, APCUG Representative & Bylaws Chair for the Golden Triangle PC Club, a columnist for The Examiner in Beaumont, Texas, and has two radio shows. He also graciously shares his articles with the APCUG editors. There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Spam

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Many ISPs now offer some form of email filtering, which can offer a varying quality of protection from spam (and viruses). If your ISP offers it, sign up for it; some ISPs offer active filtering, while others simply subscribe to one of the many “blacklists” that block emails from all senders in a block of addresses. Many blacklists also stop large amounts of legitimate email along with the spam, and often block innocent senders who are blacklisted, as 46% of spam (according to the FTC) has forged “From:” headers.

There are now many spam filtering software products that can be installed on personal computers. Some are from the leading antivirus publishers and other major software publishers, and others are independently produced. Much of the technology is immature, and some of the products are of dubious utility, but most offer some degree of protection from spam. I have tried several, and had mixed results, none being totally accurate. The highest success rate I found when experimenting with spam filters was the commercially available Brightmail service. Brightmail is no longer available directly to individuals (used to be free), but many ISPs subscribe to its service. Emails are routed through the Brightmail server, where each message is electronically scanned for spam, and sorted. “Clean” email is forwarded to the subscriber, and the email filtered out is available on the Brightmail site for a limited period, where the user can inspect it, and approve it for receipt, if desired.

Federal legislation controlling spam is making its way through Congress, but there is a powerful lobby resisting the measure. Federal legislation will also be ineffective in stopping spam from foreign sources, but something needs to be done to decrease the rate of spam. Some pundits are currently calling spam the biggest threat to the Internet, even worse than viruses, worms, and Trojans.

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Would You Like Printer Repair With Your Order?

By Mark Presky, Los Angeles Computer Society, Los Angeles, California

Hunger contributed to the repair of my inkjet printer. Several months ago I was driving along Santa Monica Blvd. in West LA, approaching a set of the Golden Arches, when I realized that it was Filet-O-Fish Friday (99 cents), and I was hungry. I have significantly reduced my consumption of fried foods, but the thought of deep fried compressed minced cod (or whatever they use) oozing with a glob of fatty, salty tartar sauce was too much to resist — I must have been REALLY hungry.

After receiving my order I sought a clean table upon which to dine. There was one unoccupied small table well seasoned with various condiments, so I looked further to a larger nearby table occupied by only one gentleman. After asking if I might join him at the table, and introducing myself, I started up a conversation. He was dressed in a jacket and tie, so I asked what he did for a living. When he said that he serviced computer peripherals including printers and fax machines — my ears perked up. I told him that I had been wrestling with a frustrating printer problem for over a year and hated giving up. He inquired further.

Problem

I told him that my HP 694C would print a page or two and then stop suddenly often mid page, to inform me that the printer carriage was unable to move. Over the months I had discovered that by turning the power off and then using rubbing alcohol (not orally consumable spirits) to clean the stainless steel or chrome shaft upon which the carriage with the ink cartridges traveled, I could get it to print another page or two or three ... if I was lucky. After several months of this I finally replaced the 694C with an even older HP 600 monochrome printer (manufactured in the days before humans were upgraded with retinal cones) of my father's that I kept in the closet for emergencies.

Solution

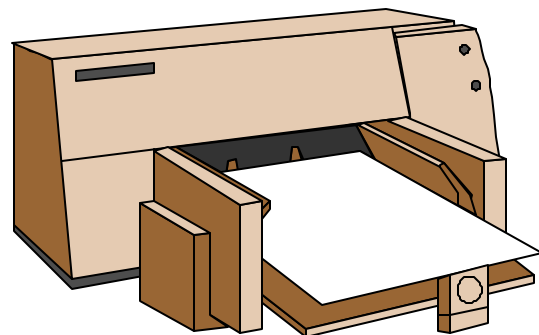
The gentlemen said that it sounded like the bearings underneath the carriage were clogged with dried ink. I asked him how ink would even get there. He responded that ink tends to distribute itself everywhere inside most printers. He is no longer amazed at the places he finds it doing damage.

He suggested using a small amount of Windex on tissues to dissolve and tease out the congealed ink from the bearings, and then to lubricate, sparingly, the shaft upon which the carriage moved.

Fixed

Later, I pulled the inoperable printer from my closet and set it up on the kitchen table. I assembled some discount glass cleaner (sorry, Windex) and several off brand Qtip type cotton tipped sticks and went to work. Close examination revealed a glob of gelled ink on either side of the carriage adjoining the shaft. I must have gone through about 20 of these cleaner dampened cotton tipped sticks before the amount of dissolved ink coming from the sides of the carriage where it joined the shaft began to subside. It just kept coming and coming. There must have been a cartridge's worth of ink in there (OK, I exaggerate a bit). I then used the tiniest bit of silicone gel lubricant (an amount the volume of about a quarter of an

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Help! Help! Help!

By Mick Topping, Springfield MO Computer Clubs, Feb-2002

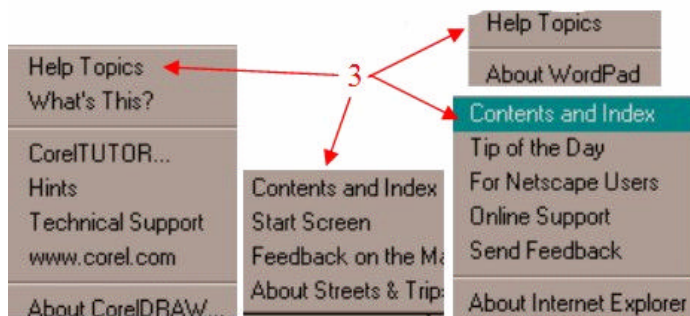
This is an article for beginners. That is, it is mostly for beginners, but maybe human-nature being what it is, some of us intermediate users need to be reminded about how to *ask your computer for help*. It is stereotypical that “guys” don’t look at the manual except as a last resort, just like they don’t ask directions when lost. But the help tools on your computer have a big advantage, in that no one will know you have used it, so some face is saved. So, that is what this article is about—using the built-in help features of your PC. This is not a step-by-step instruction, not enough time, space, and smarts—this is encouragement to try it yourself.

Don’t get me wrong, there is nothing immoral with the “poke-and-hope” method of computer use, I do a lot of it myself, and of course, many more advanced users greatly appreciate a chance to display their skills and help you out personally. Sometimes, there is no choice other than getting outside assistance, because the beginner may just not have the language to describe what he wants to the relatively stupid *help* program. And the *help* program is truly STUPID! It will present you with information, but frequently, it is either information you don’t want, or that you can’t understand (that language barrier again)—*help* programs are written by programmers after all, and they have little experience with English and users in general. But proper etiquette is to try to find out for yourself before asking.

Which programs have help—You will rarely use a Windows application that does not have *some* help built in. The help files *may* be limited, and of minimal use, but frequently they are a virtual textbook on your application. Internet applications, such as the browser and the Email client (and many other recent programs) will not only have the built-in help, but will have an internet interface to the vendor company help database. MS Office applications (Excel, Word, PowerPoint etc) have a specialized little dancing icon (called the *Office assistant*) that makes some beginners feel more comfortable using the help feature, and makes most experienced users nauseous. But almost all applications will have medium sized built-in help document that can be accessed with similar means. The document *usually* contains an index, a table-of-contents (ToC), and a word-search function. It may also contain a *bookmark* function to allow quick return to favorite pages. The index and ToC work just as their paper book counterparts.

How do you get to help—Like every other task in Windows, there are several ways to get *help* started. For most programs, the *menu* contains a *help* item, (as shown in here) that causes a list of help choices to drop down.

Probably the least helpful, but nice to know is the **about** choice--(1) on the menu. This selection displays the program’s version number, and frequently other reference material, very useful when contacting technical support. Usually found at the bottom of the list.



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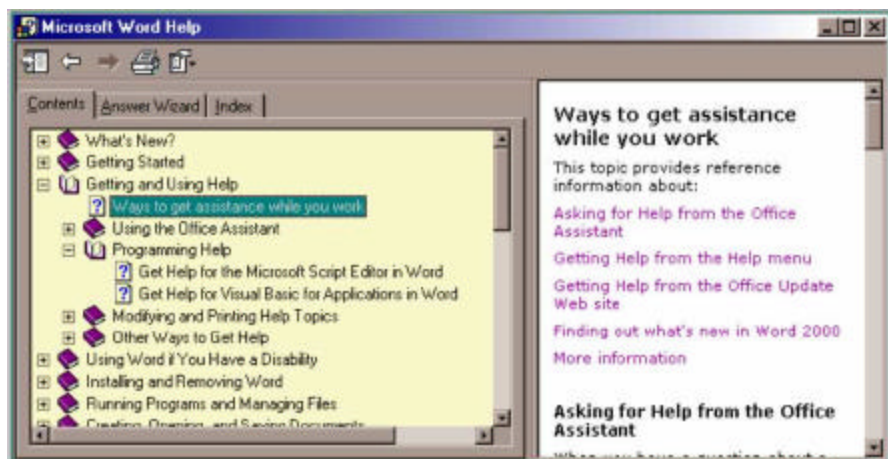
In the middle of the help drop-down list is a variety of choices (2)—perhaps an access to a web resident help function, perhaps a “what’s this” button (click it, then click other items to get info on that item). Some programs have a debugging tool in this area, and Microsoft Office applications may have a special, transitional help tool to aid in migration from other vendor’s programs. Features in this middle area can be any sort of useful tools, MS Office puts their incredibly irritating *Office Assistant* here—try it you may find it useful. (Gag, retch, barf...)

But the nucleus of the help system, usually the top selection (3) goes under a variety of names. The most common are labels like **Program help**, or **Help Topics**, or **Contents and Index**, or **Help and Support**. Actually, anything that the program author decides is descriptive can be used to label the main help entry point. Here are some samples.

What can you expect from Help—Well, don’t plan on *Help* being your only source of knowledge on a program. It is usually the case that programs are written in a great hurry. The software marketplace is a cruel taskmaster, and usually as soon as a program is finished, it is hurriedly deployed. Something like “All right, we are done!—oops, hold it, we gotta stick some help stuff on there—OK, there, she’s ready to go”. Well maybe it is not quite that bad, most *Help* files contain a lot of information.

Help for Windows itself is found using the *Start* then *Help* or *Help and Support* buttons, depending on version.

Here is a sample *help* tool, from Word 2000, showing basic functions. Shown, is the *Contents* list—the *Index* (self explanatory) and the *Answer Wizard* (a search tool which will take literal questions as input) are available by clicking page-tabs above the left pane. The table of contents display has a hierarchy of chapters, where sub-chapters or topic titles can be seen by clicking the “+” beside the little book.



The icons at the top of the frame include ways to change the display of the help pane, print a topic, and go back to a topic just viewed. Unfortunately, Word Help is one of those that do not have a book-marking function. Note that there is no help-on-help button—Bad Microsoft! Well, there is some help-on-help several chapters into the table of contents—fairly common trick of lazy programmers. If you are having trouble using the *Help* feature, look down the *Contents* list, to check for advice on how to use help.

Large applications such as Excel and Word will have *Help* that is equal to a several hundred-page book, and newer versions of the program have imbedded “tools” (buttons) that will “demonstrate” (go to that feature of the program and simulate running it) how to accomplish certain actions. Well written *Help* tools will always have many hot links that will quickly jump to internal and external references, or similar topics.

Unfortunately, all applications have somewhat different *help* environments. Some have a simple two pane window, one containing ToC, or search result topics, and the other containing readable text and graphics. Other applications will have no useful help visible until the topic is selected, at which time the ToC and Search window vanishes. It can be re entered, but not too conveniently. This makes it impossible to give a step-by-step instruction help, you will have to work your way through it. But while it can be somewhat confusing the first time, there is no damage that will result from pressing the wrong button on the help menu. And it is well worth the effort to experiment.

(Continued on page 15)

Selections From The DealsGuy

Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group

This Is No Hoax

This may sound like a broken record, but I find this stuff interesting. In the 12/22/03 issue of InfoWorld, columnist Ephraim Schwartz wrote an article about exploding batteries in cell phones and laptops. It concerns the change from nickel metal hydride to lithium-ion batteries. Seems the new technology can lead to "thermal runaway." He says it is not a frequent problem for a battery to explode, but it is certainly a distinct possibility and has happened, although he did not mention anything about gas stations. <G> His article should be posted at [http://www.infoworld.com/article/03/12/19/50OPreality_1.html].

Two of my readers told me that gas stations in their area have signs posted forbidding cell phone use while pumping gas. I'm not the only one who wants to be careful. I've also had messages explaining to me that Hydrogen power is NOT any safer than gas.

In other news of note, one of our favorite vendors is being bought. It was reported that VPN and firewall vendor "Check Point Software Technologies Ltd." acquired desktop firewall maker Zone Labs Inc. for \$205 million. It was said that Check Point must inte-

grate more security into the desktop and that they plan to do that. I hope the free version of Zone Alarm remains free for home use.

You might be interested in knowing that Microsoft is reconfiguring the jobs of the managers in charge of operating system development. It is supposed to improve the product quality and a lot of other things. Haven't we heard that one before? I hope it works. I imagine it does become a big problem when you sell the most prolific operating system in the entire world and all the hackers lay awake nights trying to exploit it, and often succeed before it is even officially released.

Why Pay For Income Tax Preparation!!

If you have a simple income tax to make out, don't pay for the tax return prep because you just might qualify for the IRS's very own **FREE** File Service. Check further for that at [<http://www.irs.gov>] and if you feel its really not that simple, or you are a klutz with the computer, call 1-800-829-1040 to find the closest Volunteer Income Tax Assistance location. That free service is meant for the elderly, low-income people, disabled folks, or people with problems speaking English. My wife says I seem to qualify in all those ways when she has a honey-do job. Don't forget the free income tax service for uncomplicated tax returns by AARP volunteers, most of whom are actually specialists donating their time. Call your local AARP chapter for more information.

How's Your Credit These Days?

With identity theft so rampant today, people should do themselves a favor and occasionally check their own credit. You can't be too careful and a simple way to get the most information is to check with Equifax where you can get reports from all three credit-reporting agencies (Equifax,



Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC) Meetings

WAC Meeting will be held on March 20 and April 17, 12:30 PM to 3:30 PM. at the Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA

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/>

Experian and TransUnion) for just \$29.95. Yes, I know they are working on a law for you to get your credit report at no cost, but don't hold your breath for that right now, even though it's in the works. Most people don't know that if you have a low score (around 600) for your credit rating, your interest rate will be higher than if your credit rating was near 800. That could mean thousands extra for a mortgage.

Free Phone Calls – Yup, All Over The Globe

My thanks to JB Hillard of Chautauqua Cyber Club who sent me this item for the DealsGuy column. Check out [http://ui.skype.com/help_faq.html] where you can set up an account to make free phone calls all over the globe. It uses peer-to-peer technology and is presently available only to Windows XP and 2000 operating systems. They say it may work with ME or Win98, but that is not promised. The download is free and right now you would be a beta tester. However, later when they are further along with the development, there may be a subscriber fee. Check it out.

This One Does it Better

I received a message the other day from Colleen Toumayan of Executive Software telling me they are offering Diskeeper Professional Edition 8.0 bundled with Undelete Home Edition for just \$49.95. [<http://consumer.execsoft.com/home.asp>] (Diskeeper will not install on Microsoft Windows Server Operating systems, although they do have a version that will for more money.) Colleen was kind enough to send me the software because I had never used it before. After trying it out, I became convinced. I am used to starting the defrag in Windows and leaving the room to do something else while it works, but Executive Software's Diskeeper has shown me there was a better way.

Undelete does what it says and can sure be handy in some cases. I often delete things by holding the shift key so it will bypass the Recycle Bin. Once in a while I regret doing that and Undelete helps with that problem. I'm not sure how long this special offer will last. By the way, if you delete something from a floppy or external drive, they don't normally end up in the Recycle Bin either.

It's interesting that Undelete replaces the Recycle Bin with a "Recovery Bin." What is the difference — too much for me to explain here, but it catches much more than the Windows Recycle Bin does, such as items I just described. Go to [<http://consumer.execsoft.com/home.asp>] for more information and to order this bundle at the special price.

Get Out Of Here You #@&% Spies!

Most of you know about spyware that sometimes finds its way on your computer, and some freeware to get rid of it such as AdAware and SpyBot. Here is something called Spyware Blaster that is said to prevent spyware from even being installed on your machine. I read about it in a users group newsletter, but neglected to make a note so I could credit the person who recommended it, but the concept sounds interesting. [<http://www.wilderssecurity.net/spywareblaster.html>] is the place to take a look and see what you think. Since it is free, trying it is cheap. However, the developer does ask for a small donation if you like it. Remember that sometimes trying to remove trial software can be a problem. I have not tried this product so I cannot speak from experience. Try it at your own risk. If you read through the material on the Web site, it is said to also do other tasks.

This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies 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 Cheapskate) Click [Bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>] for past columns and many interesting articles I have taken from various users group newsletters.



(Continued from page 1)

Pricegrabber.com as the source of price comparisons when you chose a link to check prices. Handouts and raffle T-shirts completed the evening's offering.

At the February general meeting, I'll be talking about various publications of Sandhills Publishing, including *Smart Computing*, *PC Today*, and *Computer Power User*, and a series of computer related references and guides. Attendees will receive copies of *Smart Computing*, and there will be door prizes, including a year's magazine subscription, a five volume reference library, and other guides and reference publications. A special program for NCTCUG members will also be introduced. Members purchasing subscriptions of two or three years in length will receive a reference guide as a bonus. For every five subscriptions purchased, NCTCUG will receive a subscription gift certificate for door prize purposes. More details will be available soon on the web site, or contact me for information.

Ron Schmidt will be presenting information on products of Aladdin Systems, when he's able to return to our meetings after recovering from the challenges of hip replacement surgery.

Dean Mires will be taking several meetings to present portions of the new Microsoft Office suite, in-

cluding Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Door prizes will be available.

We seek newsletter reviews or meeting presentations for Microsoft Works suite, and Digital Image 9 suite. 'Presentation in a Box' materials not currently available for these products.



Here are some of the other products and topics we need presenters for — please contact me for more details — and to volunteer !!

Blue Squirrel Spam Sleuth — Spam stopping software

Action Front Data Recovery Labs — HD data recovery services

TechSmith Corporation — Snagit & Camtasia

Jasc Software — Paint Shop Photo Album 4/
Paint Shop Pro 8

Intel — Centrino Technology, two other topics

AMD -- seminar presentation material

Active PDF — PDF Composer

In Memoriam

Robert W. MacFarlane

Bob MacFarlane, a member of NCTCUG's board of directors, passed away on December 13th. Bob's thoughtful advice will be missed at our meetings. He'd participated in the audit of the prior two fiscal years of NCTCUG's financial records on November 17th, helping review the transactions that keep the group operating. Bob drew on his many years of financial experience in federal government service, and as treasurer of his church.

In remembrance of Bob, a dozen NCTCUG members have contributed a total of \$180 to the Meals on Wheels Program of the Arlington Presbyterian Church. During the funeral service for Bob, his minister noted that, when she'd visited Bob during a hospital stay several years before, his first words were to "tell the Meals on Wheels coordinator I won't be able to drive this week!" We hope our contributions will help carry on this work our friend felt so important.

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If you have one of the new High-Rez displays, you may find the fonts tiny, and no obvious way to adjust them, but many newer help programs are based on the web-browser, and fonts will respond to the same <Ctrl>+<Mouse-Scroll>.

Shortcuts to help—Help can virtually always be obtained by pressing the <F1> key. Unfortunately, it is not very consistent in the type of help it provides. Some applications use the <F1> key to just start help. Some will allow starting to use a feature, like beginning to work a menu choice, then pressing <F1> to launch help already opened to the right section. Still other applications use <F1> to start the “What’s This?” function, that allows clicking on a menu, button or other screen object for a short explanation of its function. Most commonly, the “What’s This?” function is started by <shift>+<F1>

Favorites, Printing, etc.—Most applications help tools have no way to mark areas for future reference, but at least Windows does. It is very worthwhile to skim down the list of top-level chapters, picking areas that look interesting, expanding those, and book-marking the topics in windows that you are interested in. Then when you get a slow minute, pop open help, look in your favorites, and learn how things work. Printing is something you should be careful with. *Help* can be so enormous, that printing can be very expensive. My recommendation is to print only those recovery tools that you may not be able to get on line, or lengthy step-by-step processes. And finally, the main and most important suggestion, is to *practice* it. Open an application, or just Windows, and *help* yourself.... – Mick

NCTCUG Information

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Club Information call: 301-577-7899

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Officers and Directors

All officer terms expire 2003

President	Jim Rhodes	703-931-7854
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Fred Cook	2005	703-921-1749
JJ Davies	2005	703-379-9222
Sy Fishbein	2005	703-536-5894
Dean Mires	2005	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 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!

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apple seed) and spread it over the shaft. Although I spread it so thin that I couldn't see it, I then wiped off most of that with a clean tissue. From my years of experience maintaining medical equipment I have learned that less is usually better in these situations.

Conclusion

Now, time for the test. I replaced the older printer on my system with the newer, and hopefully, fixed instrument. After plugging it in and powering it up, I requested the printing of a 6-page document. IT WORKED! After all the hours of frustration I had endured with that printer I was not satisfied. I now ordered it to deliver another 6 pages. And another. I was ecstatic.

My day was made. And I owe it all to fast food. It maybe clogged my arteries, but it helped me clean out my printer's clogged carriage bearings.

Hey guys and gals, maybe we should be trolling for new LACS members at fast-food outlets, offering to help with computer problems.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member.

NCTCUG, Inc.
P.O. Box 949
Arlington VA 22216



First Class

Spring

March/April 2004

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

4th Wed (3/24,4/28)
7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (4/19; none in March)
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.

