

The NCTCUG Journal

www.nctcug.org

November 2005

Volume 28 Issue 7

Keeping Up

By Paul Howard, NCTCUG

Build Your Own Computer !!

NCTCUG and Intel® will be jointly sponsoring a “Build-Your-Own PC — Part 1” seminar, to be held at Carlin Hall on November 2nd at 7 PM. If you’ve ever wanted to build your own PC to save money, get more bang for your buck, customize a PC, or just learn what goes into the making of a PC, then you won’t want to miss this free seminar. Attendees will be provided information on the process and will be given the opportunity to join NCTCUG in order to take advantage of special component prices available only to participants in a special “Build-Your-Own PC — Part 2” workshop to be held on November 23rd, and December 7th. Details will be announced at the seminar, and in emails to members and friends.



The same “Build Your Own PC” seminars will be offered by our sister group, WACUG, on November 19th, 12:30 -3:30 PM, at Micro Center, Fairfax, and on December 10th, at the Fairfax County Government Center. Our hope is that members of either group with scheduling conflicts will have multiple opportunities to attend these meetings with identical presentations.

(Continued on page 14)

**I
n
s
i
d
e**



Getting Started with a New PC	page 2
Search Engine Tips And Tricks — Part 2 — Beyond Google	page 4
Protecting Your Computer During the “Flu and Virus” Season	page 7
10 Commandments For Happy Windows Computer Owning —	
How To Reduce Your Computer Headaches	page 8
FTC Names Its Dirty Dozen:	
12 Scams Most Likely to Arrive Via Bulk Email	page 11

Bringing Home Baby — Getting Started with a New PC

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor, Region 2

Columnist For AARP's Computer And Technology Web Site, ggoldberg@apcug.net

Most purchases provide instant gratification—you buy, you bring home (or have delivered), you enjoy. Groceries, clothes, toaster, furniture, etc., don't involve study, burdensome chores, or required add-ons for safe usage. While it's worth reading a new car's owners manual, and installing home electronics sometimes requires assembly and cabling, no other burden matches that of a personal computer.

Wait, you might say: Plug it in, turn it on—simple. But reality isn't so simple. There's a lot to do before a PC can safely be used on the Internet, and still more is required to ensure long-term problem-free operation. This article outlines what to do; more info is available on this site and by Googling for specific terms used.

No matter where you buy your PC—brand-name Web site, electronics store, custom builder—get all CDs, manuals, registration cards, and warranty material for hardware/software that's installed. You may need this material to purchase discounted upgrade versions or to apply fixes.

Similarly, warranty material facilitates getting hardware/software support if you can't get satisfaction from your system's vendor. You may pay a little extra for software installation CDs or an image restore CD (which restores your hard drive's delivery-date contents); this is a worthwhile expense.

Assemble and turn on the system, but don't go online. Make sure the system boots properly and that all components operate. There's often a short "no questions asked" period during which dead or defective systems can be returned or exchanged easily. You may have trouble later getting problems resolved, and the vendor may insist on repairing the system instead of replacing it.

Note terms of rebates your purchase includes and submit them promptly. Many vendors won't pay rebate claims submitted even one day late.

Record hardware model and serial numbers for your PC and components. My PC builder provided all boxes and packing material, since it often contains useful information. Submit product registration material; though it may generate junk mail, it lets vendors notify you of problems or new updates/versions available.

At this point you may feel the need to get organized. Good idea! Just as you've likely organized files for auto repairs, health records, and such, your PC deserves a filing system. You can pick the structure—file cabinet folders, PC-specific storage containers, whatever – filing everything makes things much pleasanter later.

Part of my system—optional but valuable—is recording changes I make to my PC, software I install, upgrades I download, problems I have, configuration settings, and communications with vendors. So I can later refer to the log and be sure what happened. Some people print screen shots—image captures—of important configuration settings, for reference in case they must be recreated.

Plan how to separate data from software, to simplify backing up and restoring what's most valuable and hardest to recreate. This can be as simple as establishing a directory or folder in which you store all applications' data, or it may involve dividing your hard drive into data and software partitions. If you're replacing a PC, copy data you're

migrating onto the hard drive and ensure that it's complete and readable. Don't discard the old PC until you're sure you copied everything you need. Plan and implement a backup scheme and test it occasionally by restoring files.

A standard PC likely included a "software bundle". If you're lucky, this includes applications you want. In most cases, bundles are apps you'll never use. To remove clutter, consider deleting what you're sure you won't need, using application-specific uninstall tools or Windows' built-in Add/Remove Software tool.

If hard drive partitions have meaningless labels (e.g., “IBM Preload”) you can set them to useful values (“Dad’s PC”, “C:”, etc.). Run scandisk and disk defragmentation tools to ensure you’re getting a clean start.

If you’re working on a Windows XP system, install Service Pack 2 before going online. You can order this on CD from Microsoft or borrow a copy. This large set of fixes will protect you against many—but not all! -- online risks by (among other things) upgrading and enabling Microsoft’s software firewall.

If you’re on a broadband (cable or DSL) connection, install a router between your ISP connection and your PC and configure it to be secure.

Now install/update/run anti-virus and anti-spyware software.

Run Windows Update (click Start, then All Programs) to download and install recent fixes. This may require repetitions and reboots until no additional fixes are available. Run this periodically—at least monthly.

You can ensure that device drivers (software links for hardware components) are current by visiting Web sites for your PC manufacturer and hardware components.

Install your applications one at a time with a “cooling off” period in between. This ensures that each works properly and helps identify problems. A good rule when working on PCs is to change one thing at a time, else you can’t pinpoint what effects changes cause. After each installation, run any “check for updates” functions.

Consider downloading a Web browser to use instead of the built-in but insecure Internet Explorer. Many alternatives such as Mozilla Firefox improve security and provide better browsing functions. If you use IE, set options to be more secure than default values.

I’m not sure whether it’s good or bad news that Windows is infinitely customizable. As you use different Windows functions and applications, browse their Options/Tools/Settings/Customization menus. You’ll likely find simple changes that accommodate your preferences.

Finally—and in spite of warnings about risks—don’t be afraid: enjoy your PC and the Internet it brings to you. But be careful and sensible. Don’t open unexpected attachments; don’t answer e-mailed requests for personal information; be cautious about installing software from unknown vendors.

This article appeared originally on AARP’s Computers and Technology Web site, www.aarp.org/computers.

© AARP 2005

Permission is granted for reprinting and distribution by non-profit organizations with text reproduced unchanged and this paragraph included.

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.



Search Engine Tips And Tricks

By Richard Johnson, member of TUGNET, California. www.tugnet.org rj@theskillspool.org

Part 2: Beyond Google

As helpful as is Google, it's a mistake to overlook the other search services. There's nothing wrong with turning first to Google (or another search service of your choice). It's a good idea, however, to pick out and bookmark at least a few competitors, for special situations. A good place to start is the search comparison chart at www.infopeople.org/search/chart.html.

Both MSN Search and Yahoo! Search have undergone major recent changes, and both merit special attention. MSN Search (search.msn.com) now affords access to Encarta Encyclopedia, with a two-hour "free pass" that will be renewed with every new query. Check out also its Near Me option (akin to Google Local), that will point you to services and events in your area or another area you specify.

Yahoo! Search (search.yahoo.com) has brought out My Web to track past searches. My Web will save both the links and the actual pages (so you'll still have access should the page be removed from the Web). Yahoo will organize these saved pages as bookmarks. For details, go to myweb.search.yahoo.com/myresults/benefits.

Many of the following search tools are in beta, and so may become even more useful after further development. All are free to individuals.

Comparing And Augmenting Search Results

You might be surprised to learn that if you compare the top ten results from any two search engines, fewer than half of those results will likely be found at both. An excellent way to see what either Google, Yahoo, or Ask Jeeves comes up with (that your standby didn't!) is to use the Jux2 tool, at www.jux2.com.

Yagoohoo!gle (yagoohoogole.com) presents side-by-side Yahoo and Google results.

Another way to go is to type in your query at Topic Hunter (www.topichunter.com), and then click on the names of any of the sixteen search engines Topic Hunter supports.

Copernic Meta is the free successor to what formerly was a fee-only download. A Windows Desktop or browser toolbar will facilitate simultaneous searches on multiple search engines. www.copernic.com/en/products/meta

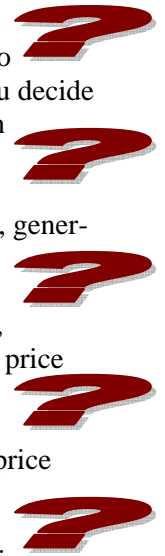
Special-Purpose Search Engines

Shopping

When it comes to shopping, the Web can do far more than take your money. To help you decide how to spend it, a new search engine still in beta, Become (www.become.com), zeroes in on buying guides and product reviews (although you will find merchant links also, generally farther down).

Once you have a better idea of what to buy, you'll want to use one of the multitudinous price comparison sites. Pricing Central (www.pricingcentral.com), acts like a clearing-house, utilizing the resources of many price search engines. For books, music CDs, and videos, AddALL (www.addall.com) and Books Price (www.booksprice.com) figure in shipping costs for your location. AddAll has a slightly larger bookstore database, but Books Price will calculate costs for multiple purchases.

If you like to shop by catalog, take a look at Catalog City (www.catalogcity.com). For specials at local brick-and-mortar establishments, try Cairo (www.cairo.com) or ShopLocal (www.shoplocal.com).



Other Special-Purpose Engines

For straightforward answers to simple questions, check out Brainboost, at www.brainboost.com. Promoted as an “answer engine,” Brainboost asks you for plain-English questions (not search words), and its results are answers, not links. (A link will accompany each answer, for further research.) Another popular tool for factual information is Answers.com (www.answers.com), which de-emphasizes links even further and gives more extensive answers. An optional free download lets you bring up Answers.com results by alt-clicking any word on your screen, on or off the Web.

For deciphering acronyms, you can't do better than Acronym Finder (www.acronymfinder.com), with definitions for over 398,000 acronyms. Optional tools (for various browsers) will allow you to view a definition almost instantly.

To take advantage of Amazon's Search Inside the Book capability, you may want to use A9 Search, at <http://a9.com>. (A9 also features search history tracking.)

For news there are many good choices. BBC News at <http://news.bbc.co.uk> is excellent for international news, as is World Press at www.worldpress.org. For old news (as early as 1990) without the fee charged by other sources, try The Seattle Times, at <http://archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/web/index.html>. For the most up-to-date news, AlltheWeb Advanced at snipurl.com/eljf is excellent, and will let you sort and filter results prior to your search. CNN.com (www.cnn.com) and the revamped Yahoo! News (<http://news.yahoo.com>) are good general-purpose news sources. Most or all of these allow you to set up news alerts to email you of new developments in issues of interest.

Toolbars

These days almost every search engine and its cousin has an associated toolbar for free download. In addition to the Copernic Meta toolbar (covered above), a few you might want to consider are:

Y!Q DemoBar. I really like this one, in part because it's small enough to fit easily on the same line as my Internet Explorer address bar. (To squeeze it onto that line you may want to “unlock” the IE toolbar, using the right-click menu, and shrink the address bar. You can adjust Y!Q's size, using its options menu.) The DemoBar's sole function is to enable context-based searching. Clicking it will yield results related to page text you've highlighted, optionally modified by text you've typed in its search box.

yq.search.yahoo.com/splash/demobar.html

Earthlink Toolbar. This is available to anyone (not just Earthlink subscribers). Its major innovation is its Scamblocker option, to guard against phishing. It also offers a Google search box, a pop-up blocker, and clickable changing news headlines. Like Y!Q, it can be shrunk down to fit on the same line as your address bar. www.earthlink.net/home/software/toolbar

MSN Toolbar. Features pop-up blocking and search term highlighting. Can be expanded to implement desktop search and form filling/password management. <http://toolbar.msn.com/default.aspx>

A9 Toolbar. Gives you the ability to add notes to Web pages. Also includes pop-up blocking, search history tracking, online bookmark creation, search term highlighting, and site info. (Some have found it difficult to use.) <http://toolbar.a9.com>

Yahoo! Toolbar. The big brother of the Y!Q DemoBar. Includes the DemoBar's functionality, and in addition facilitates Yahoo's My Web (see above) and spyware protection. <http://beta.toolbar.yahoo.com>

Google Addenda

Overall, the best search engine is still Google. (See Part 1.) Here are nine more Google tips and tricks:

An adaptation of Google Maps will search for rental and for-sale housing around the country, in a price range you specify. For each result you'll be told whether a picture is available. Then if you choose you can link to the original listing (which is from Craigslist) [www.craigslist.org]. Go to www.paulrademacher.com/housing.

(Continued on page 6)

Google's Search by Number feature will give you information about numbers you type in the search box. The most useful example of this was covered in last month's article—entering a phone number to use Google as a reverse directory. But other numbers can also yield valuable information. For instance, entering just the area code will bring up a link to a map of the area. You can also get information by entering UPS, USPS, and FedEx tracking numbers, Vehicle Identification Numbers (VINs), and even UPC codes.

The Google Calculator can do anything your stand-alone calculator can do, and a lot more. It's especially useful for conversions, by employing the operator "in." For example, to find the number of teaspoons in two cups, you'd type "teaspoons in 2 cups" [without the quotes] in the Google search box. For myriad other uses go to www.google.com/help/calculator.html.

The best way to use Google News is via its Advanced New Search, at snipurl.com/elhs. This allows you to sort by date, limit by news source or location, specify the date range, and easily modify your search in other ways.

When typing a phrase into the search box, as with other search engines, you enclose the phrase in quotation marks. To save yourself keystrokes when there's no text following the phrase, omit the ending quotation mark. (Google will fill that in for you.)

Google Maps (covered in Part 1) can be re-centered by double-clicking, but more useful is the user's ability to drag the map area—thousands of miles if necessary!

In using Google Local (also covered in Part 1), be sure to click on the links for the establishments of interest, to disclose useful data about them (which can vary considerably). Also: You can limit your Google Local searches as you please. For example, you might enter "restaurant inexpensive view," to find a low-cost restaurant with a good view.

Google's new My Search History will from any computer let you view by date or easily find anything you've ever searched for after signing up. Together with each of your past search queries

you'll find the links you used from that search's results. (Cf. Yahoo's My Web, above.) For details, go to www.google.com/searchhistory/help.html.

Some of you who attempted to implement the minus sign as a stand-in for NOT, in accordance with the suggestion in Part 1, may have had a problem resulting from the line break in the printed article. This will be resolved if you make sure there's no space between the minus sign and the (following) search term to which it applies.

I've been asked why in Part 1 I described how to use Google to find a business but not a residence. The answer is that the syntax for locating a residence is rather complicated. You'll find it at www.google.com/help/features.html#wp. Three points, though: (1) The necessary elements must be typed in the order given. (2) Don't insert extra elements (like a street address, even if you know it). (3) In spite of what Google lays out, don't bother inserting commas between the elements. Note that both the business and residence search will include handy Google Maps links with your results.

Richard Johnson is a writer and editor, and founder/administrator of FREE FOR ALL The Skills Pool, a 29-year-old membership organization (<http://theskillspool.org>).

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.

Build Your Own Computer

**For more information see
Keeping Up on page 1 and
the club website at
[http://www.nctcug.org/
byocomputer.html](http://www.nctcug.org/byocomputer.html)**

The Computer Corner

Protecting Your Computer During the "Flu and Virus" Season

By Joe Shipley, Phoenix PC Users Group NEWS www.phoenixpcug.org

With all the viruses and other malware around, I have accumulated a group of software that I consider to be necessary 'protection' for any computer that connects to the Internet.

The software I recommend consists of:

Ad-Aware <http://www.lavasoft.com/>

Spybot Search & Destroy
<http://www.safer-networking.org/en/mirrors/index.html>

CWS shredder
http://www.intermute.com/spysubtract/cwshredder_download.html

Zone Alarm
http://www.zonelabs.com/store/content/catalog/products/sku_list_zs.jsp

AVG Antivirus
<http://free.grisoft.com/freeweb.php/doc/2/lng/us/tpl/v5>

Pop-Up Stopper
http://www.panicware.com/product_psfree_download.html

All of these programs are FREE. Millions of people are using them. For Ad-aware alone, there have been more than 90 million downloads just from Download.com.

Once these programs are on your system, you need to make sure they are updated. AVG and Zone Alarm have automatic updating; the others need to be updated by clicking a button.

Ad-Aware and Spybot specialize in removing spies and malware from your system. They each will remove some bad things the other does not, so I use them both.

When running Ad-Aware, first do an update to check for the newest definition files. After updating, run the

program. If the program finds items which need to be removed, you'll see a display of the items suggested for removal. If there are no check marks in the boxes to the left of the item name, right-click in the frame and choose the "Select All" option. This will check all the items for you. Click on "Next" to move the items to a quarantine area. Once quarantined, the items are removed and will refrain from causing you any problems. If you remove something you really need, you can go to the quarantine area and recover the item to have it restored.

Upon installation of Spybot, the program will search for updates and give you the opportunity to download them. Do so. Updates are good. After updating, run the Immunizer to make sure you block about 2,000+ bad sites. Once updated, go to "Search & Destroy" to begin searching for more than 24,000 (as of this writing) spies, malware, Trojans and other bad things, which if found, will be removed from your system.

One of the features included with Spybot that I recommend is called "Tea Timer." This feature advises you every time a change is proposed for your startup files. Viruses, worms and Trojans will often insert instructions into the startup files. By utilizing Tea Timer, you can determine if a change to these files should be permitted or not. The logic of whether or not to allow a change is simple: if you just installed some software and you're prompted for a change, it's probably ok. But if you're prompted for a change and you did not just install new software, just click NO. When in doubt, keep it out. You can always add it in later.

CWS shredder can be used to remove a specific group of web search files that can hijack your browser to take you to certain websites and use

(Continued on page 8)

10 Commandments For Happy Windows Computer Owning How To Reduce Your Computer Headaches

By Robert Spotswood, Hal-PC, Houston, Texas

I work as a computer tech and I see lots of different computer problems. But I see certain problems again and again.

While it means more business for me, lots of those problems could be easily avoided saving my customers money and aggravation. Here are ten commandments, which, if followed, will greatly reduce your computer headaches.

I. Use A Virus Scanner

Get one and keep it up to date. The brand doesn't make a big difference. Keeping it up to date does! A virus scanner that has not been updated recently (recently being about 1 or 2 days), is only slightly better than no virus scanner at all.

Keep the virus scanner active and do regular scans of your system. Trying to install a virus scanner after you already have a virus infection usually isn't going to do any good. If the viruses are active, most will attack any virus scanner and prevent it from working or installing properly. The only way to stop this is to have an up-to-date virus scanner active when the virus first tries to infect you.

II. Protect Yourself From Spyware

Viruses aren't your only threat. Spyware is another, and virus scanners do almost nothing about it, although that is just starting to change. Spyware, aside from invading your privacy, can crash your computer, make it run slow, hijack your browser (especially Internet Explorer), annoy you with pop-up

(Continued from page 7)

specific search engines, whether you want to or not. The shredder removes those web search hijackers.

Zone Alarm is a terrific firewall that advises you of every attempt made by your computer to access the Internet, and of each attempt by the Internet to access your computer. At first it may seem like an annoyance, but once you catch on to the rhythm of how it works, it will greatly reduce the number of unauthorized Internet accesses without your consent. The program runs in the background, and gives you the chance to let it learn which Internet sites are acceptable and which aren't. For example, the first time you go to do online banking, you may see a message asking you if you want to go to a specific site. If you say "NO," you won't be able to reach your bank's web site. Don't be alarmed. Try your bank again, and when you're prompted to see if you really want to go to the bank's site, then check the box "Remember this site" and click on the "Allow" button. The next time you want to go to the bank's site you'll get right in.

AVG Antivirus is a good antivirus program, self-updating, and will scan email as well as perform a regular antivirus scan. You can even setup automatic virus checking to have your system scanned when it's convenient for you. With AVG you can, as Ron Popeil says, "Set it and Forget it!"

The last component of my protection package is Panicware's Popup Stopper. This handy Popup blocker actually works. And if your bank's web site uses popups which are being stopped, you can hold down the control key to temporarily disable the stopper to let you receive popups you actually want. You can also open the control center and disable the stopper at any time if the handy control key feature doesn't do the job for you.

So this flu season you can get added protection by using the software described above, and minimize your downtime.

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.

ads, and download porn. These things have cost people jobs and ruined relationships (see www.wired.com/news/infrastructure/0,1377,63391,00.html).

Spyware can come in with other “free” programs, or can be installed silently if you use Internet Explorer (termed drive-by-downloading). If a window pops up asking to install software, say no, unless you were expecting it.

While not all “free” programs are bad, avoid “free” programs without checking them out first. As a general rule, open source programs are unlikely to have spyware.

Don't use Internet Explorer (use Mozilla or Opera instead), and check for “little pests” regularly. Spybot and Ad-aware are two free and good programs for dealing with spyware. Spyware “experts” tend to prefer Spybot over Ad-aware, but both are good programs. Prevention is the best medicine however.

III. Don't Open Strange Emails

Never, ever open or respond to an email that in any way seems suspicious. Don't even preview it, especially in Outlook or Outlook Express. It doesn't matter who it appears to come from. That can be faked unless you use digital signatures correctly, and most modern worms do fake the sender.

Don't rely on your virus scanner to protect you either. Email viruses can spread around the world in minutes. Your virus scanner will be at least a day behind the most current threat.

No legitimate company will want you to open an attachment or enter your user info in a form from an out-of-the-blue email. Companies also do not send patches (see commandment VIII) via email. Should you actually find a company that does these things, find somebody else to do business with. Your information is not safe with them.

If at all possible, do not use a Microsoft email client. Use a Mozilla or Opera based program (among others) instead. Microsoft's poor security record AND actively being targeted make for a lousy combination.

IV. Never Respond To Spam

Never respond to or buy something from an email that you even THINK is spam or unsolicited, even if it's something you are interested in. Spammers spam because it is profitable. It is profitable because enough people buy or respond. Buying anything from or responding to spam is just throwing gasoline on a fire. In addition, often, the spam involves something either fraudulent or illegal. If it's something you are still interested in, do a web search, and buy from there.

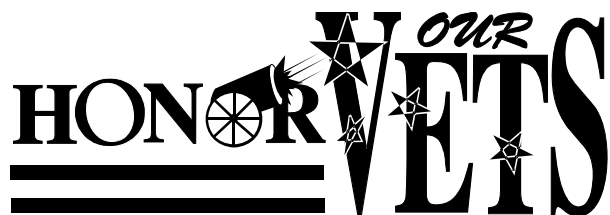
Always be careful of where you put your email address. Putting your email address in some form (paper or electronic) is one way the spammers get your address, especially contest promotions, i.e. fill out a form for a chance to win a prize and the form asks for an email address among other things. Posting your address on a website or Usenet are two other ways spammers get your address.

V. Perform Regular Backups

Sooner or later, it's going to happen. Something important gets deleted. It doesn't matter if it was a virus, equipment failure, or just not paying enough attention when hitting the delete key. This includes not just erasing files, but overwriting data. The recycle bin or undelete programs can't help you then. Doing proper backups are your best, and cheapest defense against these disasters.

Take care of your backup media. Don't leave CD's lying in the sun or tapes near magnets. Finally, don't forget to test the restore process once in a while! A backup you can't restore is worthless, and the practice you get in restoring will help you avoid mistakes and panic when the time comes to do it for real.

(Continued on page 10)



(Continued from page 9)

VI. Help The Tech

Having computer problems is normal. Sooner or later it happens to everyone. When it is time to seek help, don't lie. Chances are the tech will see through the lie very quickly, and even if he doesn't, it only makes it harder for him to help you. Be as specific as you can. Write down the exact error message. Tell him anything you think might be important. He can't read minds and he wasn't there when you did ____ (fill in the blank).

Don't "clean up" your computer before you bring in (or take the computer to) the tech. This can, in rare cases, disguise the cause of the problem.

If getting phone support, be in front of your computer, have it turned on and booted up, and have the application(s) already open (if appropriate). Many phone support techs are rated (and promoted or fired) based on how many calls per hour they answer, not on whether they actually help you. Take too long and you may find your problem is "We do not support that. Goodbye." Be patient and describe everything you see. Phone support is one of the hardest types of support to do.

Finally, swearing like a sailor or threatening the tech will not get your system fixed any faster or cheaper. In fact, the reverse may happen.

VII. Get Some Computer Training

You don't have to be a mechanic to drive a car, but you still have to have training. No one is born knowing how to drive, and no one is born knowing how to use computers. Know the basic terminology, specs, and workings of your computer. This knowledge can reduce your need for professional help (aka the tech) and make working the tech more productive when you do need it.

Think of the training as an investment in yourself. Once you learn how to use your computer your [computer] life will become more productive and enjoyable. HAL-PC offers a variety of free or low cost training. Take advantage of it.

VIII. Apply Patches Regularly

Programming is easy, but creating perfectly secure programs is very hard to impossible. Mistakes happen. When they do, fixes (often called patches) are issued. While some of these patches may cause problems, it is usually better to install the patch than not.

Free and open source software usually just issues new versions rather than patches, so don't forget to upgrade. There are mailing lists you can sign up for to tell you when new patches and new versions are issued.

Using Windows update regularly is a good way to stay current with your patches. Be warned, however, that Microsoft does not always issue patches in a timely manner, and neither do some other software companies. You can't patch without a patch.

Sometimes, a patch will not fix the problem it was intended to fix or may even open up other security holes. Do not make the mistake of thinking that just because you are current on all your patches that you are safe. You're not!

IX. Pay Attention To Your Computer's Security

The wrong types of people are interested in your computer, even if you are just a home user on dial-up. Even if you don't have any valuable data (unlikely; credit card info, banking info, perhaps work info are just a few examples), your machine could be used as a source of spam, used to host illegal materials, or even as a launch pad for attacks on other systems.

A dial-up user, or someone with a connected modem, could be disconnected from his ISP (Internet Service Provider) and silently reconnected to another overseas. The next phone bill will be quite shocking.

While there is no product that can make your computer secure, a firewall and virus scanner are a good start. Running more than one firewall and one virus scanner at the same time is usually a bad idea. It does little to increase your security, while greatly increasing problems you will have.

FTC Names Its Dirty Dozen: 12 Scams Most Likely to Arrive Via Bulk Email

[NCTCUG Ed. Note: this was a press release received Feb. 2005 by APCUG and sent to editors as part of the regular article distribution service. I don't think things have gotten any better since then! Be careful out there. bj]

Email boxes are filling up with more offers for business opportunities than any other kind of unsolicited commercial email. That's a problem, according to the Federal Trade Commission, because many of these offers are scams.

In response to requests from consumers, the FTC asked email users to forward their unsolicited commercial email to the agency for an inside look at the bulk email business. FTC staff found that more often than not, bulk email offers appeared to be fraudulent, and if pursued, could have ripped-off unsuspecting consumers to the tune of billions of dollars.

The FTC has identified the 12 scams that are most likely to arrive in consumers' email boxes. The "dirty dozen" are:

X. Give Your Computer Regular Maintenance

Computers, like all things, work better if they receive occasional maintenance. A scandisk and defrag every month will help keep your computer running smoothly. Dusting inside your computer every so often is also a good idea. Seek professional help if you are unsure how to do this. Smaller computer shops will often teach you how to do this yourself for free or a small fee or you could make a friend at HAL-PC. Finally, your computer case is not a refrigerator door. Don't stick magnets on it.

Robert Spotswood, a HAL-PC member, is active in the Linux SIG and a freelance computer professional. He can be reached at robert@spotswood-computer.net.

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.

1. Business opportunities

These business opportunities make it sound easy to start a business that will bring lots of income without much work or cash outlay. The solicitations trumpet unbelievable earnings claims of \$140 a day, \$1,000 a day, or more, and claim that the business doesn't involve selling, meetings, or personal contact with others, or that someone else will do all the work. Many business opportunity solicitations claim to offer a way to make money in an Internet-related business. Short on details but long on promises, these messages usually offer a telephone number to call for more information. In many cases, you'll be told to leave your name and telephone number so that a salesperson can call you back with the sales pitch.

The scam: Many of these are illegal pyramid schemes masquerading as legitimate opportunities to earn money.

2. Bulk email

Bulk email solicitations offer to sell you lists of email addresses, by the millions, to which you can send your own bulk solicitations. Some offer software that automates the sending of email messages to thousands or millions of recipients. Others offer the service of sending bulk email solicitations on your behalf. Some of these offers say, or imply, that you can make a lot of money using this marketing method.

The problem: Sending bulk email violates the terms of service of most Internet service providers. If you use one of the automated email programs, your ISP may shut you down. In addition, inserting a false return address into your solicitations, as some of the automated programs allow you to do, may land you in legal hot water with the owner of the address's domain name. Several states have laws regulating the sending of unsolicited commercial email, which you may unwittingly violate by sending bulk email. Few legitimate businesses, if any, engage in bulk email marketing for fear of offending potential customers.

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

3. Chain letters

You're asked to send a small amount of money (\$5 to \$20) to each of four or five names on a list, replace one of the names on the list with your own, and then forward the revised message via bulk email. The letter may claim that the scheme is legal, that it's been reviewed or approved by the government; or it may refer to sections of U.S. law that legitimize the scheme. Don't believe it.

The scam: Chain letters-traditional or high-tech-are almost always illegal, and nearly all of the people who participate in them lose their money. The fact that a "product" such as a report on how to make money fast, a mailing list, or a recipe may be changing hands in the transaction does not change the legality of these schemes.

4. Work-at-home schemes

Envelope-stuffing solicitations promise steady income for minimal labor-for example, you'll earn \$2 each time you fold a brochure and seal it in an envelope. Craft assembly work schemes often require an investment of hundreds of dollars in equipment or supplies, and many hours of your time producing goods for a company that has promised to buy them.

The scam: You'll pay a small fee to get started in the envelope-stuffing business. Then, you'll learn that the email sender never had real employment to offer. Instead, you'll get instructions on how to send the same envelope-stuffing ad in your own bulk emailings. If you earn any money, it will be from others who fall for the scheme you're perpetuating. And after spending the money and putting in the time on the craft assembly work, you are likely to find promoters who refuse to pay you, claiming that your work isn't up to their "quality standards."

5. Health and diet scams

Pills that let you lose weight without exercising or changing your diet, herbal formulas that liquefy your fat cells so that they are absorbed by your body, and cures for impotence and hair loss are among the scams flooding email boxes.

The scam: These gimmicks don't work. The fact is that successful weight loss requires a reduction in calories and an increase in physical activity. Beware of case histories from "cured" consumers claiming amazing results; testimonials from "famous" medical experts you've never heard of; claims that the product is available from only one source or for a limited time; and ads that use phrases like "scientific breakthrough," "miraculous cure," "exclusive product," "secret formula," and "ancient ingredient."

6. Effortless income

The trendiest get-rich-quick schemes offer unlimited profits exchanging money on world currency markets; newsletters describing a variety of easy-money opportunities; the perfect sales letter; and the secret to making \$4,000 in one day.

The scam: If these systems worked, wouldn't everyone be using them? The thought of easy money may be appealing, but success generally requires hard work.



Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC) Meetings

WAC Meeting will be held on November 19th 12:30 PM to 3:30 PM. at Micro Center, Nutley Street, Fairfax, VA. The topic will be: Home Networking, Part 1; Build Your Own Computer, Part 1.

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/>

7. Free goods

Some email messages offer valuable goods—for example, computers, other electronic items, and long-distance phone cards—for free. You're asked to pay a fee to join a club, then told that to earn the offered goods, you have to bring in a certain number of participants. You're paying for the right to earn income by recruiting other participants, but your payoff is in goods, not money.

The scam: Most of these messages are covering up pyramid schemes, operations that inevitably collapse. Almost all of the payoff goes to the promoters and little or none to consumers who pay to participate.

8. Investment opportunities

Investment schemes promise outrageously high rates of return with no risk. One version seeks investors to help form an offshore bank. Others are vague about the nature of the investment, stressing the rates of return. Many are Ponzi schemes, in which early investors are paid off with money contributed by later investors. This makes the early investors believe that the system actually works, and encourages them to invest even more.

Promoters of fraudulent investments often operate a particular scam for a short time, quickly spend the money they take in, then close down before they can be detected. Often, they reopen under another name, selling another investment scam. In their sales pitch, they'll say that they have high-level financial connections; that they're privy to inside information; that they'll guarantee the investment; or that they'll buy back the investment after a certain time. To close the deal, they often serve up phony statistics, misrepresent the significance of a current event, or stress the unique quality of their offering—anything to deter you from verifying their story.

The scam: Ponzi schemes eventually collapse because there isn't enough money coming in to continue simulating earnings. Other schemes are a good investment for the promoters, but not for participants.

9. Cable descrambler kits

For a small sum of money, you can buy a kit to assemble a cable descrambler that supposedly allows you to receive cable television transmissions without paying any subscription fee.

The scam: The device that you build probably won't work. Most of the cable TV systems in the U.S. use technology that these devices can't crack. What's more, even if it worked, stealing service from a cable television company is illegal.

10. Guaranteed loans or credit, on easy terms

Some email messages offer home-equity loans that don't require equity in your home, as well as solicitations for guaranteed, unsecured credit cards, regardless of your credit history. Usually, these are said to be offered by offshore banks. Sometimes they are combined with pyramid schemes, which offer you an opportunity to make money by attracting new participants to the scheme.

The scams: The home equity loans turn out to be useless lists of lenders who will turn you down if you don't meet their qualifications. The promised credit cards never come through, and the pyramid money-making schemes always collapse.

11. Credit repair

Credit repair scams offer to erase accurate negative information from your credit file so you can qualify for a credit card, auto loan, home mortgage, or a job.

The scam: The scam artists who promote these services can't deliver. Only time, a deliberate effort, and a personal debt repayment plan will improve your credit. The companies that advertise credit repair services appeal to consumers with poor credit histories. Not only can't they provide you with a clean credit record, but they also may be encouraging you to violate federal law. If you follow their advice by lying on a loan or credit application, misrepresenting your Social Security number, or getting an Employer Identification Number from the Internal Revenue Service under false pretenses, you will be committing fraud.

(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 1)

Details on the seminars and a series of FAQs are available on the web site at: <http://www.nctcug.org/byocomputer.html>. Those building computers at the “Part 1” sessions must be members of NCTCUG or WACUG, and must have signed the disclaimer form available on the web page noted above, and must turn it in at the build session. Information on the available computer parts kits and the order process is available at: <http://www.pcclub.com/byo/>

Members ordering the component kits should have them sent to their home. At the time of this writing, neither group has been able to arrange receipt, storage and transportation of the kits to the meeting places, other than by individual participant.

“I Shoulda Stood In Bed!”

An expression my dad used, I suspect borrowed from a thirties radio program, for “one of those days” when something always seems to go awry. Technology’s been biting me regularly of late, making me want to throw the covers over my head and hide for a day or three.

In my last column, I discussed the installation of an ATI TV Wonder Pro Card in my computer. I was enjoying watching the TV news in a small window on my computer as I worked on my email. All was fine for a while, and then — it stopped talking! The picture was fine, but the sound output was gone.



Well, not entirely — I’d get sound for about four seconds when I clicked on the TV application icon. As soon as the TV picture popped up in the window, the sound would disappear.

I finally found that double clicking the speaker in the system tray would bring up the “big” volume control panel, not just the single slider volume control of one mouse click. The “wave” slider had a check in the “mute” box — a click to uncheck “mute” — and stereo sound burst forth from the PC speakers for the TV show in question. Roger Fujii suggested that some of the TV applications were notoriously flakey, and that perhaps an option to mute the sound was set when I’d shut down the PC with the sound muted. Now I make sure to exit the TV application only when the sound is blasting loud and clear.

Back in the days before there were PCs to occupy all my spare time, my primary hobby was repairing TV sets. After a few forgetful incidents when I left my soldering iron plugged in for several days at a time, I ran all the power for my workbench through a master switch. An electrical box held the switch, and a pilot light with a big red plastic jewel. The pilot light’s glow was real hard to miss when the overhead lights were turned off — so no more left on test equipment or soldering irons.

Several weeks ago, the pilot lamp finally burned out after 30 years’ use, and I picked up a package of two at Lowe’s. I screwed in the new bulb, and “flash”... I thought lightning had struck. Examining the package, I discovered it read “12” volts, not “120” — the bulb’s innards vaporized so thoroughly they look like mercury on the inside of the glass.

Somewhere, I’ve read a statistic that only 15% of the US population still get their TV reception over the air from TV stations’ transmitters, with the majority opting instead for cable, satellite, and soon — fiber optics, when Verizon’s FIOS goes beyond high speed internet and provides television services. Well, I’m in that 15 percent, using a couple of Radio Shack antennas in our garage attic and an amplified “Master Antenna TV” (MATV) system, using coax cable to distribute signals to five TVs and my computer video card.

Some time ago, I started having trouble with UHF reception, which seemed to start when WMPT-22, in Bowie, changed their antenna system for broadcasting HDTV. Linda and I are big fans of the "International Mystery" series that runs on WNVN / MHZ-56, and I even added a UHF-only antenna to our MATV system to try and improve reception. After all, we needed to feed our craving for cop shows from Italy, Germany, France, Sweden, Australia, and the UK!

From June on, our TV reception deteriorated on VHF stations also, from about 6 to 9 PM, and I thought all the stations must be getting ready for the HDTV changeover. I was really getting annoyed when I couldn't watch much of the Hurricane Katrina coverage with a decent picture. One evening the sound on WETA-26 got so bad, I pulled out my battery operated emergency TV / Radio — and discovered it got a decent picture and perfect sound, not only for ch.26, but others as well. Finally, I called Ron Schmidt, the only other "no cable" person I know, and had him check his reception. No prob-

lems in Maryland quickly pointed to my 22 year-old MATV signal amplifier.

I jumped on the internet and ordered a new amplifier. No more problems with signal from 6–9 PM. And, while doing some wiring re-arrangements, I ran coax from the antenna to the old amplifier, directly to a TV. I discovered that when I disconnected the old amplifier from AC power, the TV signal on UHF stations actually improved — proof positive! Time to consign that piece of electronics to the scrap heap. So, we've got good TV reception, just in time for the new season. This year, another "vast wasteland" of ghosts, alien invasions, and more awful "reality TV." But I'll confess — I'm curious to see the remake of the '70s Darren McGavin vehicle, "The Night Stalker" — as long as they don't run around cutting people up with chain saws!

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 2005

President	Jim Rhodes	703-931-7854
1st VP	Ron Schmidt	301-577-7899
2nd VP	Roger Fujii	703-426-5917
Treasurer	Paul Howard	703-860-9246
Secretary	Roger Arnold	301-946-7770

Director: term expires

Bill Walsh	2006	703-241-8141
Charles Throneburg	2006	703-476-6283
John Keys	2006	703-451-0896
Nick Wenri	2006	703-759-3938
Fred Cook	2007	703-815-1423
JJ Davies	2007	703-379-9222
Sy Fishbein	2007	703-536-5894
Dean Mires	2007	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 C/R only at end of paragraphs; no indents for paragraphs should be used. Preferred format for diskettes is MS-DOS 3½ 720k or 1.44Mb. Diskettes in other formats may be submitted but there will be a considerable delay in processing. If absolutely necessary, items may be submitted in hardcopy only but these will also meet with delay.

Membership Policy

The National Capital Tandy Computer Users Group, Inc. is a non-profit [501(c)(3)] organization founded in 1978 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 8 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.

Reprint Policy

Permission to reprint articles from the NCTCUG Journal is given to school, personal computer club, and nonprofit organization publications, provided that: (a) NCTCUG Inc. receives a copy of the publication; (b) credit is given to the NCTCUG Journal as the source; (c) the original author is given full credit; and (d) the article author has not expressly copyrighted the article. Recognition is one means of compensating our valued contributors.

Newsletter Staff

Editor

Blair Jones 202-362-7344
 bjones44@bellatlantic.net
 Exchange Newsletter Editor
 Ron Schmidt 301-577-7899

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!

(Continued from page 13)

12. Vacation prize promotions

Electronic certificates congratulating you on “winning” a fabulous vacation for a very attractive price are among the scams arriving in your email. Some say you have been “specially selected” for this opportunity.

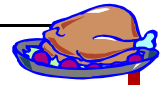
The scam: Most unsolicited commercial email goes to thousands or millions of recipients at a time. Often, the cruise ship you’re booked on may look more like a tug boat. The hotel accommodations likely are shabby, and you may be required to pay more for an upgrade. Scheduling the vacation at the time you want it also may require an additional fee.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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



First Class

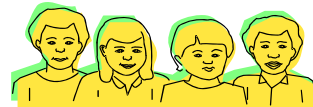


November 2005

1st Wed. (11/2)
7 p.m. General Meeting

4th Wed (11/23)
7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (11/20)
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.

