The NCTCUG Journal

Keeping Up
by Paul Howard

If you missed Bill Walsh's presentation on the radio spectrum, you need to pull on your learning hat and do some research. Getting to see the radio spectrum was fascinating, especially learning about things that we didn't know were there. But the "wow" moment was the discussion centered on where some popular communications are going.

Do you realize the TV we've all grown to love and hate, good old analog TV, disappears from the airwaves on February 17, 2009, so that we've got to get new TVs with digital tuners, or converter boxes, to receive the digital TV signals that will be all that's available after that point? Those with cable service 'should' be ok, because the cable box most subscribers use should make the digital to analog conversion necessary for those with "old" TVs.

In addition to changing the mode of broadcasting from analog to digital, the primary TV frequencies will be changing from the VHF TV bands, which will be reallocated, supposedly to emergency services, to the UHF TV band. Currently, VHF TV channels 2 - 6 occupy the radio frequency spectrum between 54 - 88 MHz; channels 7 - 13 range from

174 - 216 MHz; each TV station broadcasts across 6 MHz of the radio frequency spectrum. For a station list of area stations, see: http://www.dcrtv.com/mediaw5a.html DCRTV.COM is also a great site to keep up with local radio and tv station personnel changes and gossip.

Another facet of Bill's presentation was the advent of HD Radio, which purportedly allows AM stations to sound better and broadcast a stereo signal, and FM stations to sound better, or more likely, to broadcast one or more additional streams of programming in nearly the same radio spectrum.

Inside

Gerry Says

**By Gerry Gerstenberg, 1st Vice President,
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Here are some suggestions to get your computer
back up to speed.

Viruses

Check your system for viruses and Trojans, make
sure that your antivirus definitions are up to date.
Viruses, worms, and Trojan Horses can all create
serious system slowdowns.

If you're already running anti-virus software, make
sure the virus definitions are up-to-date. I use AVG
from http://www.Grisoft.com. It is free as is Avast at
http://www.Avast.com. Only run one Virus Checker
at a time.

Spyware/Malware

Check your system for spyware and malware.

This can be done by using a spyware detector
like Ad-Aware found at http://www.Lavasoft.com
and/or Spybot Search and Destroy, found at
http://spybot.com/en/index.html.

Keep Them Up To date

I also use Microsoft Antispyware. It can be
downloaded from http://www.Microsoft.com.

Improve Online Security

🖥 Install and configure a firewall.

🖥 Turn off unnecessary networking software.

🖥 Download and install Windows updates on a
    regular basis.

🖥 Secure your Web browser by using such options
    as setting its "security zones."

Remove System Clutter

Delete any unneeded icons from the Windows
desktop and Start menu tree.

Each one requires a little time to process when the
system is booting up, and each one eats a little bit
of system memory. It seems like every bit of soft-
ware you install these days wants to claim its
space on your desktop, whether you need the pro-
gram or not. Right click on Start then Properties
then the Start Menu Tab.

Clean Out Fonts

Fonts are wonderful things. But unused or useless
fonts are a drag on system performance. Windows
loads all your fonts at bootup, just to keep them
handy in case an application needs them. But the
more fonts you have, the more resources Windows
consumes in keeping track of them. You probably
have dozens of fonts you won't ever need. Periodi-
cally go into Windows Fonts folder – Start then
run and type in ($C:\Windows\Fonts$) and re-
move any unused Fonts. Select each font (hold
down SHIFT or CTRL while clicking to select
contiguous or noncontiguous groups, respectively)
and choose Delete from the File menu. Double-
click a font to view a sample.

Do A Disk Cleanup

This will remove some of the junk that is clutter-
ing up the temporary file folder. Click on Start
then All Programs then Accessories then System
tools and finally Disk Cleanup. Follow the instruc-
tions. This process will take a few minutes.

Uninstall Any Software You Will Never Use

Examples are the AOL and other ISP installations preloaded at the factory and any other preinstalled software. Access the Control Panel, select Add/Remove Programs (Add/Remove Programs in Win98 and WinMe), and systematically remove anything that isn't absolutely necessary. You need to decide what is necessary to you. Reboot after each uninstall for the best results.

Run MSCONFIG

Go to Start then Run. Type in `msconfig` and click on the startup tab. Then uncheck any program you do not want to start when the computer starts. These programs take time to run when the system starts up, and they take up precious system memory. This will keep the icons from appearing in the Windows Navigation Tray on the right side of the task bar.

Defragment The Hard Drive

A full hard drive isn't your only potential problem. Even with plenty of free space on a drive, the file system can become so fragmented that Windows can't efficiently access and store data. The OS stores information on a hard drive in sectors. When there aren't enough contiguous sectors available, Windows stores parts of files in different places on the disk and then keeps track of them all in a file allocation table. Removing files and applications further scatters sectors on the disk. Thus, over time, fragmentation occurs as more and more files are split up and stored in more and more places. And, because the system has to search more places to find files and work harder to put them together, fragmentation is a major drag on system performance. Run Windows Disk Defragmenter tool to re-arrange files in the most optimal way.

You may have to reboot and defrag several times to get the hard drive defragmented and the files compacted completely. From the Start menu, open Programs, Accessories, and then System Tools.

Open the Disk Defragmenter utility. In WinXP, let the utility analyze each drive to assess its level of fragmentation and determine whether it's worth defragging.

Do you have any running processes that don't need to be running?

Check this by doing Ctrl, Alt, Delete, choose Process tab, make sure that everything that is running is necessary. You can also try this to see what is preloading: Start > Run, type in "msconfig" (without the quotes) Click the Boot.ini tab and then select the /SOS switch. Now instead of seeing that black and white progress bar you will now see in real time what files are being loaded. This can give you a clue where it is hanging up.

Keep It Simple

WinXP's default set of animations and transitions is pleasing to the eye. But it doesn't do your PC any favors, especially if your hardware is a couple years old. All that sliding, fading, and shadowing takes a toll on memory and processing power. But WinXP animations aren't an all-or-nothing proposition. You can customize which effects to use or let Windows handle the decisions. Access your System Properties from the Control Panel (or by right-clicking My Computer and selecting Properties). Select Advanced then select Settings under Performance. Select Adjust for best performance. All entries will be unchecked. You can then selectively check any animations and transitions that you would like to keep. Click apply and OK.

Windows' Disk Cleanup utility will help you free up hard drive space, giving Windows and other applications more room to work.

Navigate to the Advanced tab and select the Settings button in the Performance category. Prioritize performance, appearance, or let Windows choose a middle route. Alternately, choose the Custom option and enable or disable specific visual effects by checking or unchecking their respective entries.
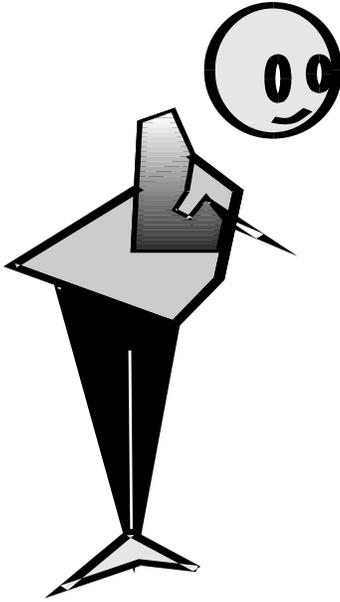
(Continued from page 3)

File System

Organize and maintain your files to keep your PC running smoothly. Here are some tips for the specific areas.

Make Room

A full hard drive will bog down your system on all fronts. For one, as the drive fills up, Windows has to search more and more data to fulfill each request. More importantly, though, a full disk hinders the OS' ability to move files around temporarily and to manage virtual memory. First, empty the Recycle bin. You can easily lose hundreds of megabytes to files just sitting around waiting to be fully deleted. Then, run Microsoft's Disk Cleanup utility. From the Start menu, you will need to go to Programs, Accessories, and System Tools. Open Disk Cleanup, select the drive, and click OK. The utility will analyze the system and offer suggestions. Check each box and click OK. Next, uninstall unused applications. From Windows' Control Panel, select Add/ Remove Programs.
Remove any programs you don't use, especially applications preinstalled by the manufacturer. Finally, archive infrequently used data to removable storage.

Remove Temporary Files

Disk Cleanup doesn't get rid of everything. Free up even more space by manually searching for and deleting temporary files. Most applications use temporary files to store session-specific information, back up active files, and (in theory) delete them when you close the program. But sometimes, for a variety of reasons, temporary files aren't deleted. So they sit, taking up valuable disk space,

and not doing anything remotely useful. Open Windows' Search tool (called Find in Win98) from the Start menu. Find all files beginning with a tilde (~) (search for "~*.*") and all files with a .TMP file extension (search for "*.tmp"). Remove any that aren't immediately associated with an open file or application.

Perform Regular Maintenance

Don't make Disk Cleanup, temporary file removal, Disk Defragmenter, and antivirus scanning one-time activities. Without proper maintenance, system speed will continue to degrade needlessly. Schedule these activities using built-in tools (as with most antivirus programs) or using Windows' Task Scheduler. From the Start menu, navigate to Programs, Accessories, and System Tools. Open Scheduled Tasks. Double-click Add Scheduled Task to launch the Scheduled Task Wizard. Choose an application you want to run (Disk Cleaner, for example), set the schedule, and enter the login information of a user with permissions to run the program.

A Little Goes A Long Way

The secret to optimal PC performance is recognizing that every little improvement helps. By implementing a variety of techniques, including those we just described, you'll slowly but surely see system performance improve and maintain itself at a peak level.

The Changing World

A Review Of Vista By David Steward, APCUG Advisor, Region 8 And Program Chair, Alamo PC Organization, Texas www.alamopc.org dsteward(at)apcug.net

The title of this article explains a lot. With the release of Microsoft's newest iteration of Operating Systems, Vista, we are going to be making a lot of changes in how we perform day-to-day tasks on our computers. For once, I think they actually got it right. With a more intuitive interface, a lot less cluttered desktop, easier networking and a much more robust security system, Vista will indeed go a long way in making the lives of us who spend a great deal of time staring at a computer screen easier and more exciting.

Getting Started

The first thing that you will notice when opening the box is that Vista is shipped on a DVD instead of a CD, as all of the previous operating systems from Microsoft have been. There are a couple of reasons for this. The first is that Vista is packed with much more content than has been available in the past. Things like Windows Defender, Sidebar, Snipit (a screen capture utility and more), built-in Fax and Scan, and Windows Live Meeting all of which are designed to make life easier.

The second is that regardless of which version (see below) you purchase, all of the versions are included on the DVD. The version that loads depends on the installation key that you receive with the purchase. What does this mean to us, as consumers? It means that you can upgrade the OS version any time you want, and the media is already on the disc. All you need to do is the purchase the upgraded "key" and the system will do the rest.

As mentioned above, Vista is being offered in many different versions. Each version is, of course, designed around a specific type of user. At the time of this article's writing, the following versions are being offered:

Vista Home Basic – Basic package. Contains all the usual things that you would expect to be included in an operating system plus many new enhancements.

Vista Home Premium – Adds support for the Media Center PC, the Tablet PC, automated backups, Windows Areo and Glass, built in DVD authoring, and much more.

Vista Business – Version scaled for business use

Vista Ultimate – The whole enchilada. Contains everything including support for multiple processors.

For a detailed description of each version, and to help decide which is right for you, visit http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/editions/default.mspx.

On a little side note here, I want to caution the readers to not think only in today's terms when deciding which version of Vista to choose. With the advent of the multiple core processors and initiatives to put more processors on the motherboard, each with multiple cores, you might want to consider the Ultimate edition, as it directly supports multiple processors, up to 128 gigs of memory (on 64 bit machines) and makes use of the higher buss speeds associated with multiple cores. Plus, as you will see later, it grows with your system.

Entertainment

As I said previously, Vista is designed to make your life easier. Plus, a lot of the OS has been wound around the entertainment capabilities of today's PC. With built in DVD, CD and TV (with tuner card installed) support, any PC can be turned into the main entertainment center of your house.
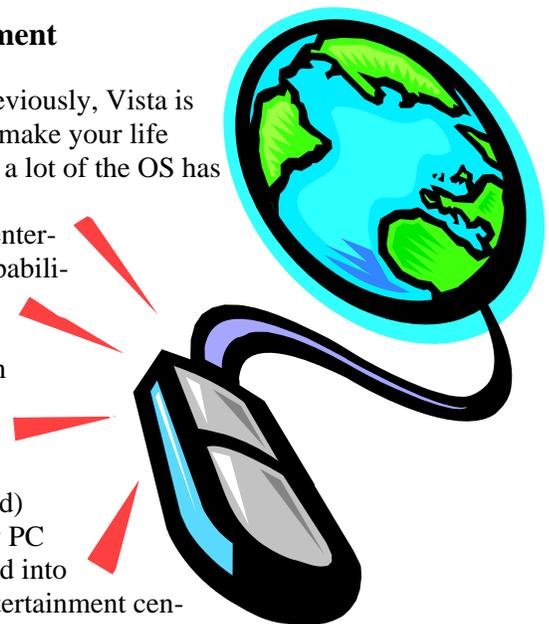
(Continued from page 5)

Most of us have grown up using a PC for normal things like word processing, spreadsheets, digital photography, listening to music, email, and surfing the web. Basically, everything that we can do while sitting about 2 feet from the computer screen. Well, a new "buzz' word in the industry is the "10 foot" experience. It encompasses things that we can do away from the computer. This includes experiences like storing all of your DVD's and videos on your computer's hard disk, and viewing them from anywhere in your house. Being able to show slideshows of your photos on your TV in the den, listening to your music files in the bedroom including changing the playlists a you desire. Vista makes this possible. And, Vista's Media Center capabilities will couple with your Xbox360 and use it as a media extender.

If you want to see if your computer is Vista capable, visit the "Vista Upgrade Advisor" at http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/upgradeadvisor/default.mspx. The Upgrade Advisor will perform a very thorough search of your system's hardware and installed software and let you know what needs to be changed before upgrading to Vista.

The Meat

Let's get to the actual operation of the software. Before I installed Vista, I ran the included Upgrade Advisor, which informed me that I needed to remove the "Nero Burning Rom" software before I could install Vista. In addition, it cautioned me that although Vista would run on my system, I would not achieve the full performance of the graphics engine due to the installed drivers for my video card. Specifically, I would not be able to run the Aero or Glass enhancements. At the time, I did not consider that a good enough reason to rush out and purchase a new high end graphics card, so I went ahead and installed Vista, after removing Nero. I chose to upgrade my existing system, as I have a ton of programs installed, and did not want to have to re-install all of them. So, after entering a few basic pieces of information, including the "key", Vista took off and performed all of the upgrade functions without any further input from me. This is good as it took almost 2 hours to completely install and upgrade the system. At one point, I

thought that it was stuck and that I would have to start over, but it wasn't. It just took that long to load the features and enhancements, and upgrade the existing programs.

This might be a good time to point out that I am performing this review on a 2 year old Sony Vaio Media Center PC, which has a Pentium 4 running at 3.4 Ghz, 1 GB of RAM, a 320 GB drive, and a 64 MB on board graphics card. I have partitioned the drive into 2 partitions, a 80 GB program partition, and a 240 GB data partition.

Finally, the upgrade finished and the system rebooted into Vista. The first thing that you see is a screen titled the "Welcome Center". From this screen, you setup all of the basic things like security, users and internet settings. This is all accomplished by wizards that lead you through the process step-by-step. You can also view some very informative videos that introduce you to the features of Vista. It also gives you the opportunity to register and go online with Windows Live, a place where you can setup your own personalized start page with Live Mail access, news, weather, RSS feeds, etc…however you want it to look.

After you finish setting up all the necessary features, it is time to explore and have fun. I am not going to write about every feature and function, as I would have to write an entire book to cover it all, but I am going to highlight a couple of things that I think will be of interest to us all.

First, Vista has a ton of informational type of screens that tell you a lot about your particular system and hardware. One of these is called "Performance and Information Tools" which is accessible from the "System and Maintenance" button on the Control Panel. This is where you can find out what your system experience rating is. This will let you know how Vista will perform under different conditions, and whether or not you can take advantage of some of the enhancements like Aero or Glass on your desktop. My particular system rating was 2.8. The reason for the mediocre rating was because of the graphics chip that was on the motherboard. Everything else had a rating of 4.2 or above. I really wanted to use the Aero on my desktop, so I rummaged around in my computer room, and found an nVidia 6600 graphics card. After install-

ing it, I re-ran the performance rating test, and my system rating increased to 4.1, which allowed all of the included enhancements. It was well worth the time.

Another feature that is accessible from the Control Panel is the "Problem Reports and Solutions". This area keep track of every time a program stops running for any reason, or has a problem installing, and logs it into a database. From time to time, you should check this area and see if a fix for a particular problem has been released. Vista will automatically download the fix, apply it, and test it on your system. Why is this important? It means that you do not have to wait for a service pack to repair individual problems.

There are many more features on the Control Panel that you will want to explore and play with, including the ability to change the partitioning of your drive, schedule tasks and view event logs. Believe me, Vista is an information geeks dream.

Another new addition is Windows Mail, which replaces Outlook Express. I used to prefer Outlook Express over Outlook because of its ease of operation and Windows Mail has not changed my mind. Windows Mail operationally looks like Outlook Express with one major enhancement. It has an automatic spam and phishing filter integrated in the program, and it works. It is so nice to look at my messages and not have to wade through 200+ messages wanting to sell me stock or change my anatomy.

Getting back to the desktop, one of the features that I really wanted to see was the new Aero feature. Aero is the high performance desktop experience that has been introduced in Vista. Basically, it allows a much more robust and dynamic view of the desktop and the components running on it. For example the Glass feature turns the individual windows translucent so you can see what is going on in windows under it. The Flip 3D function allows you to quickly "flip" through all of the open windows until you find the one that you want. In addition, when a window is minimized, you can hover your mouse over the button on the taskbar, and see exactly what that window looks like. Plus, Aero gives everything a much smoother appearance making it easier on the eyes. It is hard to describe Aero in words, but trust me, you will like it.
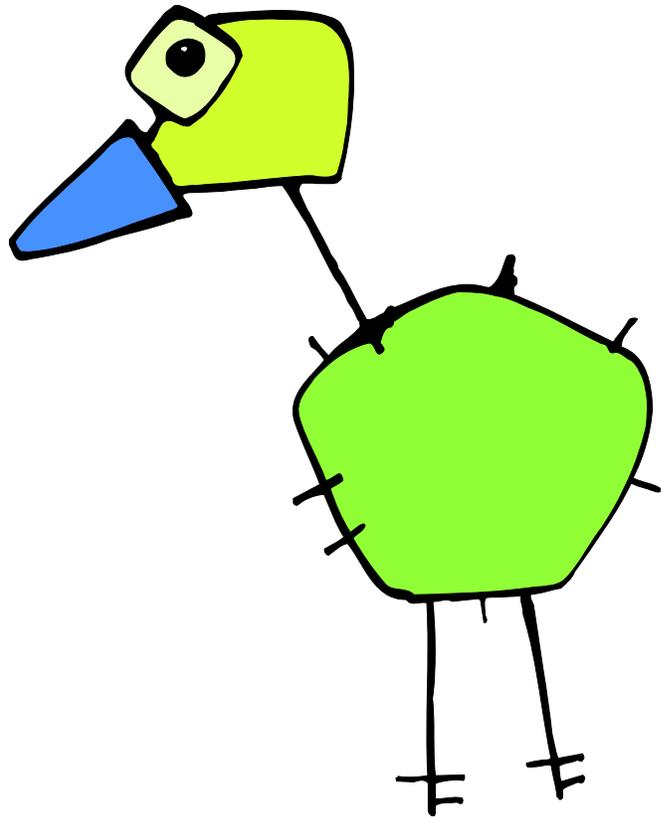
Another new feature is Gadgets. Simply put, they are little gadgets or programs that you can place on your desktopn to help you. Things like a clock, news feeds, stock tickers, RSS feeds, or even games. Now, this is what Active Desktop really means. <G> You can adjust the transparency of each of them so that they do not distract from the workspace.

Ultimate Extras

For those of you that take the plunge and opt for the full blown Ultimate version, there is a bonus. Microsoft has announced the Vista Ultimate Extras program. This entails new additions to the Ultimate package that will be added as time goes on. Things like new gaming experiences with Windows Hold'em Poker, added security with the bit-locker encryption system, and my favorite, Dreamscape, which turns your desktop background into a true "active" desktop by allowing motion video to be run on the desktop. It is truly an unbelievable sight. And, more will be added in the future, allowing your system to grow as time goes on.

For the gamers reading this, Vista is going to change the way that you play games on the PC. Microsoft has included DirectX 10 with the shipping versions of Vista. DirectX 10 is a much more robust API that allows a more realistic appearance in games. In addition, you can use your Xbox360 controller on your PC now, and it will take advantage of all of the controller features like vibrate and positive feedback.

Having said all of this, I do want to note that I did have some problems while running Vista. I have had a couple of programs that flat refuse to run in Vista, specifically shareware video editing and video conversion programs. I am presently working with the support engineers to rectify this. I also found that although Microsoft says that Vista will run well with 1 GB of memory, and it does, Vista really wants as much memory as it can get. I noted a significant improvement when I installed another gig of memory. Same thing is true about the graphics adapter in the system. I recommend at least a 128 MB card, and preferably a 256 MB card if you want to run Aero and Dreamscape. This will ensure that there is no noticeable loss of system performance.

I know that this is supposed to be a review of Vista, and it has ended up sounding like an advertising blurb about the product, but I am very excited about the new Operating System. I truly believe that Microsoft has finally listened to the user community, and has made a concentrated effort to include the enhancements that we have been waiting for. I am actually enjoying sitting in front of the screen again.

Next time I will review Vista on a laptop, and I promise that it will be shorter <G> Until then, *ya'll have fun*.

Moving To Vista — What Not To Do

By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS
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Microsoft's long-anticipated new operating system, Windows Vista, is finally here. After months of testing I can say that it is a stable program and is more secure than any previous version of Windows. It also has a great new look and some wonderful new features. Just remember that there are always gotchas with a new operating system. Here are a few of the "don'ts" when moving to Vista.

First, five different flavors of Vista are available in the US: Home Basic, Home Premium, Ultimate, Business, and Enterprise. ***Don't*** bother with Home Basic. It doesn't have "Aero", the rich new visual interface. It doesn't have the advanced multi-media features for photos, movies, and television. It doesn't even have the cool new chess or mahjong games. All of this is missing, but Microsoft is still selling the Home Basic upgrade for $99. The full version of Home Basic is $199. If you buy a new computer with Vista, make sure that you get at least the Home Premium version. You can get a comparison of the different versions of Vista and what they offer at the Microsoft website.

Happy Mothers Day!

Another don't….***don't*** try to upgrade without a large hard drive and at least one gigabyte of memory. You can use the Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor to determine if your computer is ready for Vista. Most older computers will come up lacking. So, you may not want to upgrade at all. Although Vista's better security is enticing, if you are happy with your Windows XP machine you may want to keep using it a bit longer because it may be not be economically beneficial to upgrade. The Vista product upgrade can cost several hundred dollars. That plus the cost of extra memory and/or other hardware upgrades may make it wiser to just purchase a new computer with Vista preinstalled.

Don't expect every software program to work with Windows Vista. Intuit, the makers of the popular Quickbooks program have notified their users that no older versions of Quickbooks will run on Vista. Only an upgrade to Quickbooks 2007 will let Quickbooks users run the program on a Vista computer.

Because of the major security changes in Vista, most antivirus programs will also need an update to be able to run on Windows Vista. If you purchase a new computer it may come with a trial subscription to Symantec or McAfee that will get you started but you will have to purchase a new version in the future or move to a free antivirus program. Again upgrading an old computer may be problematic because the old antivirus software will need to be removed before the new version is installed. Experience has taught me that it is often difficult to remove all the various pieces of an existing antivirus program. This is one experience you may want to avoid.

Some programs will also have trouble with Windows Vista new user controls which make it more difficult to make changes to your computer. This bolsters the operating system against hackers, but can confuse some existing programs. Simple changes or work arounds for these types of problems can easily be found on the Web. For instance, I couldn't run Adobe Photoshop CS2 upon installation on my Vista machine, but a few simple changes which I found documented on the Web, solved the problem quite easily.

Also any specially written or high-end software programs may not work with Vista. This will not affect the average user, but if you have any unusual or spe-

cialty programs you will want to check out compatibility.

Much of today's current hardware will work with Windows Vista. Of course, you may want to check the manufacturer's website to be sure before you make that assumption. You may need to update a hardware driver or two. If you have older hardware, some may not work with Vista. So check it out before you move to Vista.

Of all the hardware problems, you can expect the most problems with audio equipment. Windows Vista has a new audio stack which means that it handles the audio data structure differently than older versions of Windows. Also this audio change was made quite late in the Vista development process, so audio manufacturers may not have caught up yet. While this will probably not impact the average computer user, if you have any high-end audio equipment, make sure you check our compatibility before you migrate to Vista.

One last don't…..***don't*** worry about the 64-bit version of Vista. If you have a 64-bit processor on your new computer like the Intel Core2 Duo or AMD 64-bit processors you may be thinking about trying out the 64-bit version of Vista. ***Don't*** do it unless you want to be on the "bleeding" edge of technology. Most hardware does not currently have 64-bit drivers and the 64-bit version of Vista does not support the widely used 32-bit drivers. Also there is currently very little software that actually takes advantage of the 64-bit system. So leave the 64-bit version as something to dream about. It will be more secure and faster, but it is not yet ready for prime time.

However the 32-bit version of Vista is ready for immediate use. The best way to move to Vista is to buy a new computer with Vista preloaded. Just be sure you check out these gotchas before you put your money on the counter.

The Internet, What Is It?

By Hilton Kaufman, member of the Chicago Computer Society, Illinois
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(This is the first of a short series of articles explaining what the Internet is.)

The Internet is one of those things that is a bit tricky to define and explain. It is a network of computer networks that provides various services, such as e-mail and the World Wide Web, with a hierarchy of naming conventions to consider. No one can tell exactly how many computers are part of the Internet at any moment as individuals are constantly signing on and off.

There is also the historical aberration that the intended structure of the Internet is not how it works today. It was supposed to be a bunch of independent connections and multiple possible routings so that if one part went down, say the area in lower Manhattan about five years ago, messages could go through on another route. Now everything goes across country on a backbone consisting of maybe five or six parallel main trunk lines.

It also was once for government and educational use only. Many government functions now use newer networks with connections totally separate from what we know as The Internet. They may or may not permit connection to the Internet for routine matters, but severely limit who can get into the secure internal networks. Schools seem to find that the Internet works fine for them. Much of the Internet involves commercial entities today.

While the Internet was originally designed for use within the United States of America, it is quite international in scope. How it works in various countries may or may not be subject to various controls. However someone with the right equipment might be able to tap into a satellite that carries Internet signals. Yet a very great portion of Internet traffic is in or at least involves the United States
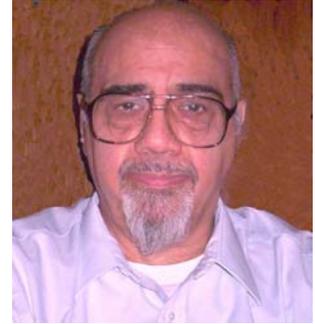
It is the services on the Internet that make it interesting to the ordinary user. Historically it was used for short messages and moving files from one location to another. The messages might be nothing more than a notice that a file was ready to be transferred or that it had been successfully received. It grew into something in which anyone could bring useful files to their local computers and send complex messages with files often attached.

The technology for providing and receiving many services has changed and become more complex, yet more user friendly. Internet capable technology is often used in local networks called Intranets, which may or may not be connected to the overall Internet. Different individuals work with the Internet in ways that may be unique to them. The ordinary person does not know or care how it works, just that he or she can use it for the desired services, such as sending e-mail messages.

The Internet can be something mysterious and quite technical. It can also be something that appears easy to use. This may depend on what one wants and what is loaded on a particular computer. Very often a company that one uses to connect and receive services tries to make things look as simple as possible to the end user.

(Future articles in this series will explain how the Internet is hooked together, the addressing system that sends things to the right place, and some of the services available over the Internet.)

Hilton Kaufman serves as the technical support person for the procedures writing unit of an Illinois state agency, where higher level technical support personnel are concerned with the details of Internet connections and services. As such, he uses the software provided to him to create forms, convert documents into PDFs, advise members of his unit as to how to use the available software, and similar tasks. For his home computer, he can go all out and get a powerful machine that allows him to do things like playing games and surf the web without getting in trouble. He has prepared a number of articles aimed at novice users on the basics of standard computer programs.

YouTube Revolutionizes the Internet!

By Linda Gonse, Editor & Webmaster, Orange Country IBM PC Users' Group, California
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Just when I thought creative ideas were running out for ways to use the Internet, along comes YouTube, www.youtube.com. Its content includes movie and TV clips, music videos, and amateur works — such as video-blogging. The innovative site's popularity is staggering. Almost 20 million visitors browse YouTube each month, according to Nielsen/NetRatings. And, in confirmation of YouTube's originality, Time magazine named it the "Invention of the Year" in 2006.

Although I only discovered YouTube in December 2006, it was founded in February 2005. In about a year and a half, YouTube has been so successful Google sealed the deal to buy it in November 2006 for $1.65-billion! Not bad for a site that was launched with a video of a co-founder's cat playing with a dangling string!

Now, "Users upload 6500 new videos to the site every day," according to a January 2007 Time magazine article. Many of the videos are taken with home camcorders and cell phones. In fact, videos that showed L.A. police repeatedly punching a suspect on the ground, a college student being tasered, and an outraged comedian yelling disparaging ethnic descriptions, were shown on television news after first being uploaded to YouTube. These homemade videos, which were a sensation on the news, initially prompted me to check out the site.

Incredibly, YouTube viewers watch 100 million videos each day — up from 10 million last year. The most-watched clip, with over 36+ million views is a compilation of head-butt animations inspired by the one Zinedine Zidane administered in the 2006 World Cup soccer game.

YouTube is free. You only need to sign up if you want to leave comments about the videos, rate them, or upload your own.

Choose videos from categories like Recent Videos below, which include viewer ratings, video length, and description

Online Retirement Planning Resources

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX;
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Websites

http://finance.yahoo.com/retirement
Yahoo retirement calculator
http://finance.yahoo.com/calculator/retirement/ret-02

Money Magazine-CNN retirement planning lessons
http://money.cnn.com/pf/retirement/
http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/
money101/lesson13

Fidelity Investments online interactive retirement
calculator
http://www.fidelity.com/myPlan

Let's face it; many of us are working hard and may
or may not be planning for retirement. All too many
of us are present oriented, and do not adequately plan
for our financial future. Whatever your political per-
suasion or beliefs, social security retirement income
is only intended as a minimal safety net, and not a
comprehensive retirement plan. Many of my college
students have expressed concerns that either social
security will not be around for them to collect when
eligible, or that benefits will be cut back as the ratio
of workers to social security recipients declines.

Many of us are lucky enough to have 401(k) or 403
(b) tax sheltered retirement plans, while others
among us may have IRAs, either traditional or the
newer Roth plans. Many of us blindly accept that
our employer will take care of us. Most of us are not

independently wealthy, and will have to depend on
ourselves to provide for our own retirement, either
in part or in full. Very few of us have a reliable
prediction of how well off we will be financially at
retirement.

There is an old cliché that "information is power",
and by having good information and acting on it in
a timely fashion, we may have a financially com-
fortable retirement. Fortunately, the internet has
many reliable resources that can help us with our
retirement planning, regardless of our current age or
fiscal situation. Some retirement planning re-
sources are available from the financial media web-
sites, while others are available online from broker-
ages, insurance companies, and mutual fund spon-
sors.

The online service Yahoo has extensive financial
information freely available, including a compre-
hensive personal finance section. One such section
is its retirement information at finance.yahoo.com/
retirement. This page, which is continually up-
dated, is rich in retirement information. Included
on this page, as I type this, are topics including a
variety of "how to" guides, "questions and answers"
on retirement topics, and a variety of financial cal-
culators.

One calculator available for free from Yahoo is its
online retirement calculator at finance.yahoo.com/
calculator/retirement/ret-02 . This online calculator
is easy to use and confidential, and does not require
any type of registration, but it does ask some very
personal questions necessary to provide a retirement
solution. The Yahoo retirement calculator asks for
current age, income, spouse's income, predicted
rate of inflation, desired retirement age, and other
pertinent information. While not totally compre-
hensive, the results provided by this calculator are a
graph showing retirement balance and retirement
income and an annualized table displaying age, sal-

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For more information see:
http://www.nctcug.org/waugp.html

ary, beginning retirement balance, additional savings required, inflation adjusted desired retirement income, projected social security income, withdrawals from retirement account, and ending retirement account balances. While no online retirement calculator should be counted on to be absolutely accurate in predicting the future, this calculator will at least give the user a ballpark concept of what to expect at retirement under different scenarios.

Money Magazine and CNN have online retirement resources at money.cnn.com/pf/retirement. As I type this, the page is displaying information on 401(k) plans and possible hidden fees which can eat away at returns, how to draw upon a 401(k) at retirement, information on accepting a pension or lump sum distribution, "The last 401(k) guide you'll ever need", and strategies for a comfortable retirement. On this page are also links to a variety of calculators to calculate savings nest eggs, debt reduction, a "millionaire" calculator to predict when the user will accumulate a cool million, and other calculators.

Many brokerage houses, insurance companies, and mutual funds have online retirement information. One of my personal favorites is the "My Plan" available online from Fidelity Investments at www.fidelity.com/myPlan. No registration is required to use this comprehensive calculator. This calculator has a friendly and helpful audio voice accompanying the simple questions asked. The use of a slider to enter information, as well as to demonstrate the impact of any changes is commendable. With only five simple questions, the calculator will demonstrate potential retirement scenarios. Small grey question marks are displayed adjacent to each term used and will open a window explaining each of the terms. The first question asks your age, followed by (second question) your current income. The third question asks how much you have already saved for retirement, followed by (fourth question) an inquiry about how much you are putting aside each month for retirement, including employer contributions. The final question asks about your investment style, with the slider ranging from "Short Term" (no stocks, no bonds, 100% cash instruments) to "Most Aggressive" (100% stocks, no bonds, no short term investments). As a solution, the calculator returns a pair of bar charts showing projected results at retirement if

the market does poorly, or if the market performs about average. The calculated retirement goal shown is for 85% of pre-retirement income, poor market conditions, estimated social security income, and no other retirement income. Clicking on the link "Our assumptions and methodology" will give the details on how the projections are determined, based on statistical information.

On the myPlan "Snapshot" projections page are sliders for "Time" (retirement age), "Money" (contributions), and "Investment" (style and risk categories of investments). By adjusting these sliders right and left, the scenario will interactively change demonstrating in real-time the effects of the changes. Clicking on the boxes at the top of the "Snapshot" allows the user to vary age, income, and amount of savings, all of which will effect the graph shown.

The best time to have started to plan for retirement was "yesterday". Since "yesterday" is past, we should all plan now for tomorrow. These and other reputable resources may be a big help in our retirement planning.

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Distinguishing Forests From Trees In Search Engine Results

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor and HCIL Media Fellow gabe(at)gabegold.com

Some people cherish details without grasping the big picture. They can't see the forest for the trees, always miss the landscape's glory. Searching the Web can feel like this. Search engines cheerfully deliver millions of search result hits without revealing patterns or gaps in the data. Even worse, hardly anyone looks beyond the first screen of search results. Researchers are investigating how organizing search results provides contextual and visual cues that make searches more powerful.

We all know people who cherish tiny details but never quite grasp the big picture. They're figuratively unable to see the forest for the trees, missing the landscape's glory while obsessing over whatever grows in front of their nose.

Sometimes searching the Web feels like this. Google or any favorite search engine can cheerfully deliver a thousand—or two million—search result hits yet not reveal patterns, groupings, or gaps in what it quickly but mindlessly displays. Making things worse, hardly anyone looks at search results beyond the first screen or two; we either settle for one of the first few links, or add search words to prune our results. But this runs two risks.

First, we may miss a key Web site that for some reason isn't highly ranked by our search engine. Not everyone knows that search engines rank results using proprietary criteria; even worse, ranking methods often change without notice, so identical searches days or weeks apart may yield very different results. Second, there's no clue or cue about search result patterns. And the human mind can't grasp a thousand — let alone two million—links to see what they might collectively reveal.

Enter Bill Kules and Ben Shneiderman, respectively Graduate Research Assistant and Computer Science Professor at the University of Maryland. They're investigating how organizing the display of search results provides contextual and visual cues that make searches more powerful.

Their technology, partially supported by an AOL Fellowship in Human-Computer Interaction, is ideal when searchers are unsure of the target or goal. This is a variation on the famous Supreme Court quote: searchers may not know what they're looking for, but they recognize it when they see it.

Washington Area Computer User Group

WACUG Meetings will be held on April 21 & May 12, 2007 [*note: 2nd* Saturday]
from 12:30 to 3:30 pm . at the Fairfax County Government Center, 2000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA .
Topics: 4/21: Microsoft Office 2007 - What's New and Worthwhile with This Major Upgrade? Presented by Bob Mason; Internet Shopping Comparison Web Sites, by Geof Goodrum.
5/12: Real Photographers Like It RAW — the Real Lossless Digital Photography Format Presented by Chuck Roberts.

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/

NCTCUG Meeting Topics

April 25th - Ann Jaekle

Windows Live OneCare — Security Software

Details:
http://www.nctcug.org/mtgtopics.html#apr25

May 2nd Special Time - 2 PM to 4 PM

Smart Computing
Marcy Kremer, Sandhills Publications

Details:
http://www.nctcug.org/mtgtopics.html#may2
(Follow links to special PDF files for this meeting)

Results, arranged in meaningful and stable categories using structures created by Kules' SERVICE program (as opposed to the ad hoc clustering used by some commercial search engines), are shown in a compact listing in the left side navigation bar. Important text (title, snippet, URL) is arranged for efficient scanning and skimming. SERVICE retains benefits of the traditional ranked results list, while adding an overview.

The list allows efficiently scanning and skimming title/snippet/URL—which remains a critical task. The categorized overview adds another perspective on results, showing their distribution across categories. The overview also lets users explore results, narrowing them to a single category or subcategory.

Categorizing results is proving to change peoples' search style. For some searchers, the categorized overview simplified formulating queries. They issued a somewhat broad query and then browsed the appropriate category. Others used the overview to organize exploration of results, first perusing results in the Business category, then Science, Health, etc. Other users only used categories when frustrated by normal searching.

An interesting surprise is that empty categories—which might have been expected to include results—are in fact meaningful in some searches. For more information visit

http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/categorizedsearch.

NCTCUG Information

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Article Submissions

Articles, helpful hints, and other items of interest to readers of the NCTCUG Journal are always welcome and will be published as soon as possible after submission. Priority is given to members' contributions. Items may be submitted via modem to the BBS or on diskette. Submissions to the BBS should be uploaded to the Newsletter Conference and a message left for the Editor. Files should be straight ASCII, unformatted, with C/R only at end of paragraphs; no indents for paragraphs should be used. Preferred format for diskettes is MS-DOS 3½ 720k or 1.44Mb. Diskettes in other formats may be submitted but there will be a considerable delay in processing. If absolutely necessary, items may be submitted in hardcopy only but these will also meet with delay.

Membership Policy

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

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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 1)

As with many new technologies, the initial receivers for HD Radio are relatively expensive — $200 and up for the ones I've seen advertised. But, unlike XM and Sirius, there's no subscription fee for the extra "channels." For industry "propaganda" and lists of stations in the local area broadcasting in HD, see: http://hdradio.com/ For the technical aspects, a starting point is http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/hd-radio.htm which includes a discussion and links regarding some of the controversial aspects of this particular selection of broadcast technology by the FCC.   Also, you may want to check out Wikipedia's article on HD Radio, which has a lot of technical material, and links to other resources.

Researching the HD Radio portion of this article has led me to some fascinating stuff, especially regarding the selection of one system of improved AM radio audio frequency response over another. Broadcasting, both radio and television, has had many controversies in its history over technical issues and patents. Such disputes seem to be continuing.
See: http://www.wrathofkahn.org/wst_page5.html

I also spent hours following links on radio station transmitter tours, radio history, and other topics that caught my eye — an Internet junket of a kind I'd not taken in several years. Where does the time go?

May 2007

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

4th Wed (5/23)
7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (5/21)
7 p.m. Board of Directors

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

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