



The Voice of FCUG

January 2003 Volume 23 No. 8 Contents

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**Meeting 7:30 pm 4th at
New Canaan Historical
Society
13 Oenoke Road**

BOILERPLATE

"The Voice of FCUG" is the monthly newsletter of the Fairfield County Computer Users Group, Inc., a registered non-profit organization dedicated to helping members use their PC computers.

FCUG Members can exchange their ideas and opinions through this newsletter, at a monthly meeting held the first Tuesday of most months, at occasional SIG programs, and on a bulletin board reached from the Club Internet Web-site at www.fcug.org.

FCUG Meetings and SIG groups are open to the public. Membership costs \$30/Yr, prorated. For information and payment contact

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To submit articles or letters for The Voice send an e-mail message to thevoice@fcug.org, hopefully with article attached, or mail paper, or even a diskette in ASCII, Word, or WordPerfect format to:

The Voice, 280 Main Street, Westport, CT 06880

Keep those card and letters coming, folks!

The Editor's Desk

Nothing much to add this month, except that since there was no meeting in December, there is not true description. Also, the body of the magazine is fortuitously full already. So this space might as well be used to give a brief outline of the December Party, which went off as advertised. Just under 50 people attended (two CTPC members who were not members of both clubs were given a special welcome) and enjoyed meeting each other's families before the meal while noshing and drinking. Wine flowed freely, as well as soft drinks. (Maybe some people approached the bar for special service, but this was not noted.) We then took our places at the tables, eating copious amounts of salad, ziti with tomato sauce, sausages and peppers and delicious chicken parts, before the staff came to clear the places and provide us all with welcome coffee and a strangely out-of-place (to this mind) birthday cake of a dessert.

Ben Briggs, who had done us all proud, introduced our Fearless Leader, Charles Bryk, who gave a few words of welcome, and then Alan Abrahamson, who fielded some questions from the floor. Due to the absence of the usual scribal equipment, these were not recorded, but most seemed to center around Internet security.

Votes of thanks were offered all round, we handed back our really neat name cards (they hung round the neck instead of piercing our chests or curling up and off our clothes), stepped out smartly into the frigid weather and were home before 11p.m. An enjoyable gathering; many thanks again, Ben!

-ooOOoo-

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Program for 7th January 2003

Call to order Fearless Leader – Charles Bryk 7:30

Novice topic: Keyboard Shortcuts – Andy Burns 7:40
With possible help from Roger Giler, Andy will show us how to let our fingers do the walking when the mouse is all fluffed up.

Q and A: Moderator – Art Bettauer 8:00

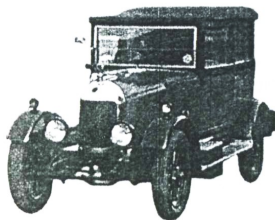
Epicurean Break Chef du Soir – William Sessions 8:20

Main topic: Microsoft Access – Ed Congleton. 8:30
Ed will introduce us to database principles using Microsoft's database program, ACCESS, a part of Microsoft's Office Pro product line. He will demonstrate its wide range of features.

(Possibly followed by a raffle)

Adjournment 10:00

LOOKIN' FOR A RIDE?



If anybody who wants to attend meetings has a transport problem, please mention it and together we will look for a solution. You can also contact Membership Chairman Dick Booth (dick.booth@juno.com or phone 203-847-8047). He can tell you who lives near you, or might pass by on their way.

As We Were – FCUG January 1983

December Minutes – by Pat Todd

“Games night 1982 was terrific. . . .Nominations for vice-president will be resumed in January so as not to intrude on the . . . evening.

“John Krause gave the moist astounding report. He has put every single program that has ever been printed in the Voice . . . on disk, all 162 of them. . . . For only \$9 you can have a binder containing every back issue from 1980. Back issues from 1981 are \$12 (fatter) and 1982 are also \$12. [Ed.Note: Now you know how I know all this!] . . . Everyone applauded John's efforts. . . Thanks, John Krause.

“George Phillips wants to start a Visicalc sub group. . . . Alan announced that the Kanthal Corporation has boxes of toggle switches (110 volts, 3 positions) – yours for the taking . . . Dick Carricato gave away a data separator and several teletype ribbons. Then Herman Parks gave away a teletype machine . . . Must be the Christmas spirit.

“The club agreed to buy a Percom double density board for the New Canaan Country Day School's Model One, so that we can then put in lower case. We missed Bob Jackson. Hope he can work out the conflict that prevents his presence at the meetings.

“. . .The place was packed with sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, neighbors. And with the popcorn and cookies . . . it seemed to be a tremendous success. Games Hight is special.

“The winners of the door prizes this month were Robert Maiaro and Dennis Palmiero.”

Newsletter Reviews – by Dennis J. Palmiero

21 newsletters mentioned, including the first from a new club – Connecticut Computer Society.

Babbage, the language of the future – by Tony Karp. (reprinted from DATA PORT, June 1982)

“. . .Babbage is based on language elements that were discovered after the design of Ada was completed. For instance, C.A.R.Hoare, in his 1980 ACM Turing Award lecture, told of two ways of constructing a software design. 'One way is to make it so simple that there are obviously no deficiencies.' The designers of Babbage have chosen a third alternative – a language that has only obvious deficiencies. Babbage programs are so unreliable that maintenance can begin before system integration is completed. . . .”[Ed.Note: Remind you of some of today's offerings?!!]

“Structured languages banned GOTOs . . . replacing them with the simpler IF-THEN-ELSE structure. Babbage has a number of new conditional statements that act like termites in . . . your program:

“WHAT IF – Used in simulation. . . Branches before evaluating test conditions.

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“OR ELSE – Conditional threat, as in: 'Add these two number OR ELSE!'

“WHY NOT? -- Executes the code that follows in a devil-may-care fashion.

“WHO ELSE? -- Used for polling during I/O operations.

“ELSEWHERE – This is where your program really is when you think it's here.

“GOING GOING GONE – For writing unstructured programs. Takes a random branch to another part of the program. Does the work of ten GOTOs.

“. . .Babbage offers the following loop statements:

“DON'T DO WHILE NOT – This loop is not executed if the test is not false (or if it's Friday afternoon).

“DIDN'T DO – The loop executes once and hides all traces.

“CAN'T DO – The loop is pooped.

“WON'T DO – The CPU halts because it doesn't like the code inside the loop. Execution can be resumed by typing 'May I?' at the console.

“MIGHT DO – Depends on how the CPU is feeling.

“DO UNTO OTHERS – Used to write the main loop for timesharing systems so that it will antagonize the users in a uniform manner.

“DO WAH – Used to write timing loops for computer-generated music.

“. . .Babbage offers a variety of case statements:

“JUST-IN-CASE – For handling afterthoughts and fudge factors. Allows you to multiply by zero to correct for accidentally dividing by zero.

“BRIEF CASE – To encourage portable software.

“OPEN-AND-SHUT CASE – No proof of correctness is necessary.

“IN-ANY-CASE – This one always works.

“HOPELESS CASE – This one never works.

“BASKET CASE – A really hopeless case.

“. . . As you can see, Babbage is still in its infancy. . . I call on the data processing community for help in making this dream a reality.”

Compu-Games – by John Krause. A word search game. Answer on the next page.

The Mailbag – a letter from Dave McGlumphy of Red Bank, TN.

Scriptit Made Clear – Book review by John Krause.

Ask Alan – five pages of Qs and extensive As, including program listings.

CALENDAR/BAS – by Own Black Jr. Two pages of program listing.

Binary to Hex/Hex to Binary – by Alan R. Moyer (reprinted from CINTUG). Two more pages of program listings and comments.

Li'l Bits – from John Krause. Listing pieces, comments, and a reminder that Voice reprints are available.

Q&A – C.C. DeLan

Abstracted from the September 2002 issue of Hard-Copy, the journal of the Chicago Computer Society

Q: *I recently installed Office 2000 on XP. With Word 97 I managed, after lots of trial and error, to rid myself of most of its little annoyances. Among the worst of those was Word's insistence by default to show all URLs as underlined hyperlinks, which makes documents look silly.*

But either Word 2000 has eliminated the possibility of correcting this, or it is buried in a different spot in the menus, or I am an idiot. I hope you won't confirm the latter.

A: Relax, it's not your fault. In its infinite wisdom, the maker of Word decided that the 97 menus weren't confusing enough. So for Word 2000 is changed them.

For the benefit of those still struggling with Word 97, let's go through the procedure for both it and the 2K version, noting how to remove your favorite annoyances plus a few of mine:

Word 97:

1. Click Tools on menu bar.
2. Select Autocorrect tab.
3. Click "Autoformat as you type".
4. Uncheck "Automatic numbered list".
5. Uncheck "Automatic bulleted lists".
6. Uncheck "Capitalize first letter of sentence".
7. Uncheck (your favorite) "Internet and network paths with links".
8. Uncheck "Ordinals with superscript".

Word 2000:

1. Click Format on the menu bar.
2. Select autoformat.
3. Select Options.
4. Proceed more or less as from number 3 above, unchecking only whatever annoys you.

Q: *I read about a great way to stop spam and thought I'd share it with you. It's called "whitelisting". Instead of trying to blacklist e-mail from unwanted sources, you set up a rule in Outlook Express that sends mail from the addresses you recognize into its own folder. You can then ignore/delete everything else.*

A: So if a distant relative dies and leaves you a million bucks, and his lawyer sends you an e-mail informing you where to pick up your inheritance, you'll never see it. Very clever.

If you're in business and a friend gives your e-mail address to a new prospective customer who wants to buy your product or service, you'll never know.

If a prospective employer gets your e-mail address so that he can offer you the job you've always wanted, you'll be clueless.

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If an old friend from high school or college, whom you've lost track of, e-mails you. . . . Well, you get the idea.

Whitelisting is an excellent system. For anchorites, secret agents and those who have no conception of the value of e-mail. I continue to be amazed at how many self-defeating, not to mention self-annihilating, schemes are devised to turn the Internet into jelly.

Q: *In the July 22 Chicago Tribune there was a letter to the tech guy asking about how to stop the unending blitz of popup windows triggered by some less-than-reputable websites. I know exactly what the questioner meant, as I've also run into this.*

It's not the simple popup ads, like the ubiquitous X-10 camera popups, or insurance or travel ads. Rather, it's a barrage of new windows, sometimes including completely different sites with different URLs. As fast as you close one another pops up.

The answer given was, "I strongly urge all users to shut down their computers as fast as possible without responding to any of the windows or trying to shut them. Just hit Start and then pick the Shut Down choice. Then power up by pressing the 'On' switch "

Now I know that works, because I've done that for a long time before I read the answer. But there must be a better way. The Trib tech guy says that even the best popup killers, like Pop-up Stopper [free at www.popupstopper.net. C.C.] won't work on this nasty phenomenon. But I find it hard to believe that there's no other solution than to hit the big red switch. C'mon, C.C. I'll bet you have something up your sleeve to deal with this junk.

A: If anyone would be foolish enough to take your bet, they would lose and you would win.

The reason that the Trib guy couldn't give the correct answer is because he is one of the many bemused, bothered and bewildered folks who are blind to the value of personal software firewalls. He apparently thinks they are a waste of time and that they cause more trouble than they're worth.

This problem is simply one more example that proves that such prejudice is foolish and counterproductive. Personal software firewalls are among the best investments a PC user can make.

And the best personal software firewall costs so little and works so well that I don't understand why anyone would resist downloading and installing it. You've read about it here and in other columns in Hard-Copy.

It is ZoneAlarm. You can download it from www.zonealarm.com. It is free for personal use. No cost. No fee. No money. Ever.

(They make their money by selling a "Pro" version to businesses. The Pro version has some nice additional features, but it doesn't do anything protective that the free version doesn't. So unless you need or want those specific features, save your money.)

I won't go into detail here about the many wonderful things that ZoneAlarm does to protect your PC. But among those, it is the ultimate popup-blitz-stopper.

Here's how it works:

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When a rogue website starts flooding you with window after window after window of sites and/or ads or gimmicks, so that the more you try to stop them the more windows are launched in endless succession and there seems to be no exit other than shutting down . . . simply right-click the ZoneAlarm tray icon.

Then select “Stop all Internet activity.” You can now close each and every window, ad or other annoyance without any result other than an error message saying that the page cannot be displayed.

When all the rogue windows are closed, uncheck the “Stop all Internet activity” choice in ZoneAlarm. Enter a new URL, or click a bookmark or favorite to take you away from the sleaze site that trapped you.

It's easy. It's hassle free. It's convenient. It's satisfying to get the better of the slime-balls who inflicted that particular set of Java or ActiveX nettles on you. It's even fun.

Zone Labs ought to pay me a commission for all the publicity I give their product. But I guess it's unrealistic to expect a percentage of a product that they give away. Still, there's always the chance that they'll offer me a bribe from some slush fund. One can only hope.

There may be another way of dealing with the problem too. Download and install the Mozilla browser (www.mozilla.org). It includes an option to decline to open unrequested windows. I haven't tested that function, but as Mozilla is free, it's worth a shot. . . .

Q: I need to rotate some text in Word 97 in order to print it sideways, along the right side of the page. (Don't ask.) In other words, a sentence should start at the top right and end at (or near) the bottom right, with the top of the letters at the right and the bottom of the letters at the left. I thought this should be easy to do, but must be missing something, as I can't find a way to accomplish this relatively simple task.

A: OK, I won't ask.

Click Insert, Text Box. When the box appears, click it (to give it the focus). Right click a blank space next to your existing toolbar(s). Select Text Box. Click the icon “Change text direction.” Play with it until it looks the way you wish.

Q: I enjoyed the article in the august H-C re using Google. But I've heard that there are some unspecified dangers inherent in the Google toolbar. Do you anything about this?

A: Don't panic.

I haven't checked it personally, but according to GreyMagicSoftware, an Israeli security outfit, without any user interaction, the vulnerability would allow an attacker to clear toolbar history, uninstall the Google app, tap keyboard input, re-route searches and allow files to be read and programs to execute in the “My Computer” security zone.

But GreyMagic also says, “We notified Google about these problems on 31-Jul-2002 and worked with them to fix the issues. Google has been very responsive and quick to produce a fixed version (1.1.59/1.1.60).

“The new version began distributing on Wednesday (07-Aug-2002) noon

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using the auto-update feature in the Google toolbar. Therefore, most of the toolbar's users should be protected from these vulnerabilities by now.”

Details are at <http://sec.greymagic.com>.

Q: *I'm fed up with dialup Internet service. Fortunately, after years of being unable to get any sort of broadband, I now have a choice of cable or DSL.*

Costs are about the same, but trying to decide which is “better” is next to impossible. A friend tells me that because DSL has a direct link to the telco, it is faster, more reliable and more secure than cable, which is shared. While I don't have any data to confirm or refute that assertion, my intuition tells me that there must be more to it than that. Can you enlighten this murky subject?

A: Your friend is half right, which is akin to being a half-wit. He's on the right track, but running in the wrong direction.

Among the difficulties in explaining the practical differences between DSL and cable is the fact that while DSL is theoretically “better”, in the real world, i.e. the services actually being offered to home users (at least in the Chicago area), the opposite is more likely to be true.

Yes, DSL uses a phone line that is linked more or less directly to your nearest telco CO (central office). But beyond that distance (of up to three miles or so), your connection goes into the general phone line pool (or more accurately, swamp). That direct line is shared (unless you have dedicated DSL line, which is rare for home users) with your voice calls. That results in cross-talk between voice and data, so Ameritech provides (or you can buy) filters to eliminate or at least minimize the problem. The filters work pretty well.

The cable network is shared between you and all your cable neighbors (within whatever distance AT&T or RCN have set). So that the more devices (TVs, cable modems, gaming) are connected, the more likely it is that performance will degrade. Cable is also subject to RF (radio frequency) or electromagnetic interference.

In practice, in the Chicago area, it is my experience that the major differences between the available consumer cable and DSL services are two:

Speed: Typical cable speed range between 700-1500 Kbps (kilobits per second). Typical home user DSL speeds reported to me range from 600-800 Kbps. Both cable and DSL are capable of much higher speeds, but are capped by the providers.

Always on versus PPPoE: Cable is always on, while typical DSL installations utilize point-to-point protocol over Ethernet (PPPoE), the latter meaning that the connection times out and is suspended until one clicks an icon to authenticate it. While the connection is quickly re-established, it may not facilitate, for example, automatically downloading one's e-mail every 10 minutes.

Regarding security: If you don't have a home network, uncheck File and Print Sharing in the network configuration applet. Otherwise your system can be visible on the entire local cable network.

If you do have a home network, leave File and Print Sharing enabled, but install a personal firewall and/or a cable/DSL router. I recommend the firewall

and router for both cable and DSL services whether or not you have a network. Routers are now available for as little as \$30 after rebates, and provide excellent security whether or not you need or use them for anything else.

Q: *When I click the Start button and the popup menu appears, there are (in Win 98) 3 sections, reading upward: 1) Shut Down, Log off; 2) seven categories dear to the heart of MS, from Run to Programs; 3) a privileged section of some programs which occasionally increases in number. These are whole or partial, or aspects of some program groups.*

It is unclear to me how/why they get the privilege of appearing there. Did their vendors pay MS for prominence? Are they useful there? If not, can I trounce them? Have they feelings? Would I regret it?

A: Gee, you noticed that, did you?

Instead of answering, I shall show you how to answer this question for yourself.

Select any program from your normal programs folder. For example, WordPerfect, preferably just the executable program file itself, not the folder that contains auxiliary files. (If WordPerfect is already there select something else, of course.)

Right-click it and drag it to the “privileged” section. Release the mouse button. From the popup menu select “Create shortcut her.”

Now you see how easy it is to get programs there. Right-click on any of the ones already there and select Properties, then click the Shortcut tab (if it's not already selected). You'll see that all the programs listed there are simply shortcuts, i.e. pointers to the real program files.

To remove a program from the list, right-click its shortcut icon and select Delete.

If you have some Windows system-type files there, like Windows Update, etc., I recommend leaving them alone. Even though they are mere shortcuts, Windows does have feelings, which it is not a good idea to offend – unless you're planning to switch to Linux immediately. In which case you shouldn't be asking these questions.

Other shortcuts can be deleted or added as the caprice takes you.

Q: *The famous Taskbar at the bottom of my Win 98 screen displays, at the right near the clock, a startup group containing icons of some programs. These appear to be self-installed by some self-important programs. I understand their intended purpose is to have some essential programs preloaded and standing ready in the wings for a call on stage. Not pre-loading them speeds up boot time. I forgot how to trim back the startup group. Might you restate the procedure?> Which are the names to keep in the group list?*

A: Click Start, Run. Enter “msconfig” (without quotes). The System configuration utility will, eventually, pop up.

Click the Startup tab. Seek out the programs whose icons you don't want to run at Startup. The more programs you uncheck, the better will be the infamous system resources.

But take care. Some programs must run at Startup in order for Windows

to run, or at least for it to run properly.

Don't uncheck anything that you don't recognize or don't understand or of which you are unsure. If you want to know what those unknown items are, of course, you can always ask. I might even answer.

Q: *I notice that the Win XP startup screen is replete with pretty picture options, individualized approach channels, and a procedure layout differing from my prior one. I'd heard that a new and befuddled user can convert the XP opening approach to the former kind G*d intended. How do I do so?*

A: Well well well. You are a capricious one.

You really ought to consider getting used to XP's way of doing things. Else Microsoft may disown you. [OK, they don't own you yet, but not for lack of trying. OTOH (on the other hand) as capricious as you are, they may not want you. Lucky guy.]

You can, of course, make a temporary change in the XP logon screen to see if you really want to return to the dreary old one.

To temporarily use the classic logon screen, press CTRL+ALT+DEL twice on the Welcome logon screen.

But if you're determined to make the change:

To configure Windows XP to use the classic logon and shutdown screens for every logon session, do the following:

1. Click Start, and then click Control Panel.
2. Double-click User Accounts.
3. Click Change the way users log on or off.
4. Click to clear the Use the Welcome screen check box.

Being the dictatorial type that you are, perhaps you want to control how everyone who uses your precious PC logs on. In that case:

If you want to set up a requirement for a user to press CTRL+ALT+DEL before the classic logon is displayed (as used to be done with Win NT):

1. Click Start, Run, type regedit, then click OK.
2. Select the Winlogon subkey at the following registry location:
HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows NT
 \Current Version\Winlogon.
3. Click Edit, New, then click DWORD value.
4. Change the value name to "DisableCAD" (without the quotes) and press ENTER.
5. Keep the data value set to 0, which is displayed as 0x00000000(0).

But you probably don't want to go to all that trouble. Besides, fooling around with the Registry is dangerous and foolhardy. Forget it.

Now maybe you just want to revert to the ol' Classic desktop look and feel:

1. Right-click and empty space on the desktop, click Properties.
2. On the Themes tab, click Windows Classic in the Theme box.
3. Click OK.

Or maybe you'll be satisfied with changing the Start menu style:

1. Right-click Start, the Properties.
2. On the Start Menu tab, click one of the following options:
 1. To select the default Start menu, click Start menu.
 2. To select the style from an earlier version of Windows, click Classic Start menu.

The next time you click Start, the Start menu will display accordingly.

You can further customize the Start menu style: Click Customize. Play around to your capricious heart's content. Maybe it'll keep you too busy to ask me any more questions for a while.

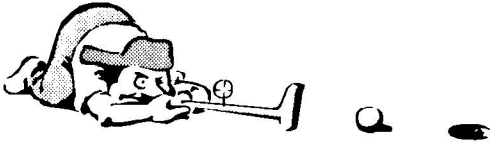
Q: *The XP desktop screen seems to insist on a regularized, standard, minimal spacing of its displayed icons. Can I persuade it to permit greater packing density, or does it rule its domain with a stricter urban plan? No, I do not create a tenement screen; I just like to have the edge, around a slightly reduced window, display other options.*

A: Sheesh. Picky, picky, picky. You could easily take the Ms. Finicky Championship away from Lucy.

Right-click a blank spot on the desktop. Point to (click) "Arrange icons by". In the popup menu uncheck "Align to grid."

Fiddle-futz your icons as you will. Much good may it do you.

--ooOoo--



*N*ose to the Ground

Last month I mentioned the plan to “enhance” motherboards with a Big Brother chip. “Palladium” was the code name, with the new spy chip being called “Fritz”. Fritz will check your files on boot-up and delete all unacceptable material. One thing is not clear: what is “unacceptable”? If Fritz finds Open-Office, will it be deleted because it is not a “commercial” product? Or does the rule only apply to commercial products which have not been registered? And why should I register everything if I don't want?

Anyway, if all this is in fact true and comes to pass, you will no longer be telling people your PC is on the fritz; Fritz will on your PC!

Now, on the heels of that news comes the story, broken last November, not only by foreign journalists but even cited and strongly criticized by William Safire in the N.Y. Times (9th November 2002), that the Homeland Security laws will allow the construction of a master data base of all recordable activities of all U.S. citizens: banking, investments, credit cards, highway tolls, travel tickets, ATMs, you name it. Seems George Orwell was right and Big Brother is the new national hero? Low profiles, everyone.

* * * * *

Mentioned recently a similar move in Europe to require all ISPs to record everything, in case the police wanted to investigate someone, but on fipr.org there is a report that Europe's Data Protection Commissioners have decided the idea is impractical, if not illegal. They said that “such retention would be an improper invasion of the fundamental rights guaranteed to individuals”, and commented that “systematic retention of all kinds of traffic data for a period of one year or more would be clearly disproportionate.” Hope someone here reads that and thinks again.

* * * * *

More troubles at the Nose desk. Windows ME began to run really slow. Ran Norton AntiVirus, but it was so abysmally turgid that, after an hour or two, I canceled it, decided I must have inherited some sort of major virus unawares, and set out to reinstall Windows. ME went on over itself quite smoothly, but the sloth continued. Measurable minutes to get started; web exploration, for from surfing, seemed to be using the old-fashioned diver's suit with the lead feet – nothing felt right.

So, the drastic solution. First step (after saving key files elsewhere): delete the entire Windows directory and load afresh. Great improvement at

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last, though I had to reinstall, one by one, all my applications.

Things slowed up again after the Norton package was included. Pressed the Ctrl-Alt-Delete combination to show the active programs, and noticed two activities new to me: programs known as Nprotect and, if I remember right, Ndetect. I must have empowered them at some point. Stopped them, and all returned to normal. Wish I had spotted them earlier.

Don't know what, in my machine would have caused these two to block things so badly, but it really seems they were the culprits. I guess they were spending so much time double-checking things that there was precious little time left for anything else.

* * * * *

Saw the Register reported on a speech by Steve Blamer given in November where he said MS didn't realize how big it had become in the market when it was playing Real Hardball. Pull the other one, guys!

* * * * *

More on that continually-too-dynamic front. You no doubt red about Bill G. giving all sorts of things to India,. With strong hints that they get rid of open-source software. VnuNet reported in the latter half of November that the C.E.O. Of MS Israel hinted Linux might be contravening MS patents. What a great trick! Patent something and then sue your competitors for ignoring your rights. Doesn't matter if you are right or wrong; in having to reply your competitors will surely be financially damaged, to say the least, while your pockets are deep enough to withstand almost anything. Where is the Dept. of Justice when we need them? In bed with Bill, of course!

* * * * *

Oh, and the worm turns, sometimes. It was reported in several places about the same time that what are believed to be previews of alpha versions of the Longhorn OS (the next XP, or whatever) have been spotted on the Internet!

* * * * *

According to Newsforge.com in November, an independent study by "The Aberdeen Group" showed that Linux has recently had more virus advisories than Windows. But these results may not be statistically significant; in the first ten months of 2002, Windows had none, while Linux and open-source systems went from one in 2001 to two in 2002. An anonymous "network system" had six, and Apple iMac had four.

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Hear of Braid? It's a Windows virus which, like the old LoveBug, copies itself into several places in your software, searches for e-mail addresses and sends itself to them. Don't have an e-mail program? Don't worry – Braid has its own, built in.

Kapersky Labs, an antivirus company in Moscow, Russia, recently had a visit. Hackers broke into their system, lifted their entire mailing list, and sent a virus warning to all their clients. Of course, the “warning” had the virus attached!

Suppose you had a virus warning from Symantec, or McAfee, with a special “patch” attached? Not impossible, I suppose.

* * * * *

Well, you need not worry. Our government is on the ball. VnuNet in Europe reports that in this country, now the Homeland Security bill has made it into the books, convicted hackers face life n prison. A little idea called the Cyber Security Enhancement Act (CSEA) was tacked on. As VnuNet says “CSEAA allows law enforcement officers to carry out Internet or telephone eavesdropping without first obtaining a court order. It also demands life sentences for hackers who 'recklessly' endanger lives.” The version in the Senate also carried an exemption from the Freedom of Information Act for anything federal agencies deem “Critical Infrastructure Information”. Not sure what we have now, but it may need watching.

* * * * *

Don't want to sound too critical; there have been some precedents. Other countries have Draconian laws of their own, some of them on the books from years back. DORA, the Defence of the Realm Act, in Britain, comes to mind. On 8th August 1914, as World War I started in Europe, the House of Commons passed it without debate, giving the government powers to suppress published criticism, imprison without trial and take over pretty well anything for the war effort. Food rationing came under that heading, for example. Publishing information that was considered of use to the enemy became a punishable offense, including any reports of the war and news that was “likely to cause any conflict between the public and the military”. The atrocious conditions in the trenches could not be printed.

(An antiwar novel of the time, “Despised and Rejected” by A.T. Fitzroy, was published April 1918. A thousand copies sold before it was banned and its publisher successfully prosecuted for sedition. Another book was restrained until after the war ended.)

But, funnily enough with today's news, complaints came from the U.S., and in 1915 five selected journalists were allowed to report the war. A few more were added later. All reports were censored by the authorities, as was all mail home from the front.

As far as I know, DORA has never been officially repealed. All mail in and out of Britain during World War II was censored, n case you didn't know.

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Enough of the history lesson. This is supposed to be a computing magazine. Send in computing stuff and it should see the light of day here!

* * * * *

Oh, in case you want to check this and lot of other things for yourself, I am indebted to www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk. A very interesting teaching site full of information on many subjects, particularly history. They have been publishing weekly since 3rd October 2001, and you can subscribe if you want to receive their stuff in e-mail form.

* * * * *

Oh, and as December loomed, Michael Robertson, he of Lindows fame, reported:

“Q: How do you get the best price possible for Microsoft software?

“A: Buy LindowsOS computers or sign up as a Builder and then negotiate with the Microsoft sales rep.

“Microsoft . . . has quietly instituted an initiative to attempt to undercut Lindows.com in key accounts in order to block our growth. Here's how it works. Microsoft sales representatives have been instructed to be on the lookout for businesses or OEMs (computer manufacturers) who are migrating some of their machines to LindowsOS. If they believe there's a credible threat for a substantial installation of LindowsOS computers, they can request authorization to offer radically lower prices in an attempt to stem the adoption of LindowsOS. The discounts are not a measly 2% or 5%, but substantially greater – potentially more than 50% off previous pricing levels. . . . The program goes under such cleverly disguised names as 'competitive pricing' and 'marketing development funds'. To qualify, businesses have to have an installation of LindowsOS machines and/or sign-up for the LindowsOS builder program (www.lindows.com/builders) and convince the Microsoft sales representative that [they will be] placing an even larger order of LindowsOS products. Armed with this information, it's possible to negotiate radical discounts on Microsoft products.”

'Nuff said for this month. Happy New Year, everyone!

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What's Your E-Mail Licence Number?

By Steve Bass – PIBMUG

From the November 2002 issue of the Newsletter of SYDTRUG, the Sydney (Australia) TRS-80/MS-DOS Users' Group.

Washington is considering legislation that will force you to get a licence before you can send e-mail. No, don't worry; you'll still be able to receive e-mail without any restrictions.

Sure, I'm kidding. But it's no joke. People send out lots of e-mail, with much of it needlessly long, valueless, bandwidth-hogging, inaccurate and, of course, dumb. (Did I miss anything? Right – e-mails full of Fwd: Fwd: Fwd: and > > >.)

Over the years, I've collected e-mail tips, ways to help you create e-mail that not only doesn't annoy others, but actually makes your e-mail worth reading.

Think in Paragraphs

You'd be surprised how many e-mails have one long paragraph. Oddly enough, you may be using paragraphs but your e-mail program may be missing the hard carriage returns. Suggestion: send yourself, or a buddy, an e-mail and see how it looks. If necessary, add two 'returns' between paragraphs when creating the e-mail.

Write Short

Keep your sentences short and limit yourself to three short paragraphs. Go beyond the Bass Int'l limit of, say, four paragraphs and there's a good chance it won't be read.

No Subject? Adios!

Here's my steadfast rule: if I don't know you very well and your message has a blank subject line, it goes into the trash. The reason is there's a strong possibility a virus or worm is attached.

Use Smart Subjects

Say the right thing in the subject line and your recipient gets fair warning what to expect in the message. For instance, even before I started using Yahoo Groups, I started my message subject with "PIBMUG". For one thing, it helps AOL and Hotmail users, the people who get tons of spam, sort out real messages. (Others thought PIBMUG messages were spam, but that's another story.)

More important, it makes applying rules or filters to e-mail easy. For example, after a Home Office column hits the newsstand, I sometimes receive 100 messages a day. That's in addition to the usual stuff from PR flaks and PIBMUG correspondence. So I've encouraged everyone who sends me jokes to

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start the subject line with 'jokes', enabling me to separate them from business messages.

“Fwd: Fwd: Fwd:”

Of course, if you get lots of e-mail your threshold for junk isn't very high and subjects can give strong clues for what to delete right off the bat. For instance, if I see more than two “Fwd: Fwd:” in the subject, it's immediately sent to the trash. Adios!

That's Not Funny

Make sure you at least read the joke before sending it. That's a great technique for determining if it's really funny. No, really – people often send me lame jokes that are excruciatingly bad. Keep a mental note of the type of joke you send and match it up with their response (or non-response). You may notice you rarely hear back when you send a text joke but often get an “LOL” from a cartoon.

Want to see if people are reading your mail? Flood them with lame jokes – I mean fifth generation forwards of ribald stories or cartoons that weren't funny when they first ran in Playboy twenty years ago. Then slip in a legit e-mail and see if you get a response.

And if you're still going to send jokes, please remove the millions of “> > >” brackets. The damn things make everything difficult to read.

No Reply Needed

I send dozens of e-mails each day with an explicit message that the recipient need not reply. That's only polite, because many times the e-mail's just an FYI. SO, right above the message I type “This is just an FYI so no reply is necessary or expected. -- Steve.”

Who Are You?

Many users haven't changed the “Reply to” name in their e-mail program, and it drives me crazy trying to figure who's writing. For instance, one person uses a period – that's tight, a dot – as his name. So when I look at the e-mail header, I haven't a clue (and still don't) who he is. Another person didn't know what to use so he stuck “Netscape” into the field, figuring, well, something needed to go there. Head for your e-mail program's Options and poke around until you find a spot that asks for a “Reply with” or “Real Name” and put in your name.

Mail List Netiquette

Many of you subscribe to interactive mail lists. I'm on many, and I moderate quite a few, including my broadband and CD-ROM Yahoo Groups. When you reply to a message on this sort of list, it's essentially the same as sending e-mail, but with added restrictions.

Here are a few list rules to consider adhering to and maybe applying to your emails:

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Don't Wast Bandwidth

So many messages, so little time, right? Well, avoid responses that the entire list won't find useful and feel obligated to at least glance at. So don't reply to the entire list with "thanks", "good idea", or "I'll try it!". Instead, reply to the sender. Look carefully and you'll probably see the sender's e-mail address near the top of the message.

Good one, Steve!

In case you weren't clear about Wasting Bandwidth, consider this: when replying to messages, do it only when you have something substantive to say. Sorry, "Good one, Steve" does not qualify as substantive.

Snip, Snip

When replying, it takes a few seconds to snip extraneous junk and leave only essential portions of the previous message. No matter what you do, get rid of the tag line – the info about subscribing and unsubscribing – from the previous message.

Keep Snipping

Did I explain that it's best to quote only those brief portions of the previous message, and only items that are necessary to make your point? Good. I'm not kidding.

Avoid HTML

Stick with straight text when replying or sending messages on lists. Not everyone's e-mail program can read all your fancy fonts and formatting.

Keep Files to Yourself

Attachments are usually frowned upon on mail lists to avoid any chance of getting a virus.

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World and runs the Pasadena IBM Users Group. He's also a founding member of APCUG. Check PCW's current edition as www.pcworld.com/resource/toc/index.asp and sign up for the Steve Bass on-line newsletter at pcworld.com/bass_letter.

--ooOoo--

Operating Systems

Alan B. Abrahamson

I've been around the OS (Operating Systems) game since 1980 on home computers. Before that, circa 1959, I worked with DEC and IBM mainframes and their OSs. In the home arena, I've worked with such long-past names as: TRSDOS, LDOS, VTOS, NEWDOS, DOSPLUS, PCDOS, CPM and SINCLAIR. In modern times I've used DOS, from Version 1.0 through the current 5.1. I've used Windows from Version 1.0 through 3.1. I've worked with Windows 95 through 98, NT, 98SE, NT4, Windows Millenium and now the current Windows XP Home and Professional (actually 5.1.2600 SP1).

Let's talk machines. I'll skip the mainframes and start with the home computers. I had a Radio Shack Model I with a very low serial number. I never owned a Model II, III or IV, but I worked with all of them. I had a clone of the IBM PC running at 4 MHz on an 8086. I forget some of the interim boxes, but I just recently retired a 166 Mhz system. I still have two older machines. One is a Pentium II running at 350 Mhz with WINDOWS XP Pro on board. The other is a Pentium III running at 600 Mhz under WINDOWS Millenium. My latest purchase is a DELL 8200 running WINDOWS XP Professional at 2.53 Mhz.

Although I was a beta tester for Windows XP two years ago, I stuck with Millenium until now. I think I made a mistake. I really like this XP system, as well as my new computer. The speed of the machine is great, although it's not helping my poor typing. It is a special pleasure to burn CDs quickly, edit photos and movies with ease – and the 512 MB of memory allows me to have many applications open at once. I find this indispensable in working with graphics. I'm not sure what percentage of my pleasure should be shining on the OS, or the fast machine, so let's just say there is a good combination here.

With prior machines I never blamed the machine for problems. It is easy to bash Bill Gates and Microsoft for the software and its bugs. I'm sure this has improved over time, but the bugs and malicious Internet attacks require vigilance and some expertise to foil. In the past the dreaded BSOD (Blue Screen of Death), or a total lockup or crash, was the norm. Since I have been working with XP Pro these several weeks, I have not had this happen. It is not that misbehaving programs don't go South, it is just that XP traps and handles it very well in the Task Manager.

I found XP, with a little patience on my part, was able to address all of my legacy equipment. I had a bit of a hassle with the Lexar PC Card Reader and the Ezonics USB WebCam II. I was able to find substitute drivers on the web that are working well. My older HP III Laser and Epson 600 Inkjet were recognized at once. In fact the driver for the Epson is far superior to what I had used in the past. My older Acer scanner was happy and the new driver I found for it is great. My Olympus 550 digital camera uses the native WIA (Windows Image Acquisition Service) in XP and it is a dream. A very nice, fast USB highway is provided from camera to computer.

Some have told me that they don't like the glitzy colors and strange new

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interfaces. I have grown to like them very much in a very short time. I have changed some of the standard views for folders, like the Control Panel, because I found it took me too long to find what I wanted jumping from one fancy screen to another. I even have gone to the one-click interface and think I like it, but I could always change back.

Since I'm providing a good review on XP, let me lay some praise on DELL for providing an excellent box. It worked as advertised immediately. All pieces and parts were there. I connected to the Internet and my home network effortlessly. The innards were immaculate and well prepared. The skimpy manuals were good enough for me and walked me through how to add a second hard drive to the system. All hardware was in place and the case was a snap to open – and screw-less.

Now one never knows when the Fickle Finger of Fate will up and get you. Writing this article for the Voice will probably trigger some problem I hadn't anticipated. But, for today I'm a happy camper with my Windows XP Pro. It's sure a far cry from TRSDOS.

--ooOoo--

THE PARANOID'S GUIDE TO TECHNOLOGY by Joe Lavin

*Reprinted with permission of the author from the California Computer News
(www.ccnmag.com)*

There's so much about technology to fear that I can hardly keep track of it all. But instead of worrying, I say we should have fun and embrace the paranoia. With that in mind, here's an A-to-Z guide of all there is to fear about technology.

Accidental e-mail – Ever forward a stupid message from your boss to all your friends along with your comments? Just remember that the reply and forward buttons are awfully close to one another., You wouldn't be the first to learn this the hard way.

Bill Gates – He's probably up to something right this minute. I just know it.

Carpal Tunnel – I know my hands are sometimes sore. Will computers hobble us all in a few years?

Data mining -- Not only do they know everything about you, but they may also be compiling all that information into one convenient database. Who are they anyway? I wish I knew.

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Entrapment – A few years ago, Elizabeth Field started a Web site called Infidelity Busters. For about \$50, people could hire her to proposition their spouse or loved one online to see if he or she (but mostly he) would respond. (Mostly, he did.) She would then send the transcripts to her clients as evidence. Her site is now defunct, but the potential is still there.

File loss – When did you last back up your data?

Googling – If you have a distinctive name, it's often easy for a stranger to find information about you online. And it doesn't even have to be your information. In a recent story, the New York Times interviewed one man who lost a date with a woman because she ran his name through a search engine and found it listed on a site for transvestites. It was another person with the same name, but the damage had already been done. It might be time to do some ego surfing just to see what your name calls up.

Hacking – Worrying about hacking isn't just for the office any more. If you have a cable modem, or DSL, at home, you better have a firewall as well.

Identity theft – If you do steal my identity, my aunt is having a family get-together next week. You're invited.

Jail – Some members of Congress recently asked the Justice Department to begin using the 1997's No Electronic Theft Act to prosecute those who swap music and movie files through peer-to-peer services. If the value of all your downloaded files is over \$2,500, under this law you could be sent to prison for “not more than five years”, while \$1000-worth of files would get you one year. Hardly makes all those free downloads seem worth it, does it? My advice: when the big, tattooed prisoner asks you why you're in prison, try not to say it was for downloading music with your fancy new computer.

Kidney thieves – Have you heard about the guy who woke up in a tub full of ice with only one kidney? Don't worry. It's not true, and neither is much of the other stuff you read online. Just remember: if it happened to a friend of a friend, it probably didn't happen at all.

Lightning – Lightning could strike your computer at any time. That would be bad.

Minesweeper – Take it from em, this little game can really suck your life away. Ditto for FreeCell and Solitaire.

Newsgroup archiving – Most Usenet messages since the mid-90s have been catalogued online at Google. Do you really want your ill-advised 1994 post to alt.fans.battlestart.galactica to remain online? I didn't think so.

Online addiction – I've had my doubts about online addiction, but many clinicians believe computers can be very addictive. (See Minesweeper above.)

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For some of us, it may be time to step away from the mouse.

Procrastination – There are literally a million places I could go online instead of finishing this article.

Quality control – If software companies really believe they are releasing bug-free applications, then we should all be terrified.

Replacement – What happens if companies become so efficient that they make our jobs obsolete? The good news is that my computer at work keeps crashing so we may not have to worry about being replaced for at least a few more years.

Smart cards – If in the future all my information is located on one convenient smart card, what happens when I inevitably lose it? Will I still exist?

Telephones – Nobody knows for sure if cell phones can cause cancer, but just in case, don't let that antenna get too close to your head.

Upgrades – I don't know about you, but whenever I hear the word upgrade, I instinctively reach for my wallet just to see if all my money is still there. Some companies get it right the first time. Other companies make computer products.

Viruses – whatever you do, don't open that attachment!

Wearable computers – Between pedestrians distracted by the computers they wear and motorists yakking on cell phones, the future will probably feature a lot more car accidents. Plus, what if my wearable computer doesn't match the rest of my clothes?

X-rated spam – These days, I get so much offensive spam that I'm afraid to read my e-mail at work. “No, Sir, I'm not looking at porn. That hot young babe site on my computer? That's just spam!” Sure, your boss may believe you, but I'd still look behind you before checking e-mail.

Y2K – Well, not exactly, but on February 7, 2036, your computer may stop working. That's because many operating systems track time as the number of seconds since 1900. When the 32-bit integer that records the seconds rolls over in 2036, all hell may break loose. Are you prepared?

Z – Relax. I couldn't find anything for the letter Z, so maybe it's all gong to be okay after all.

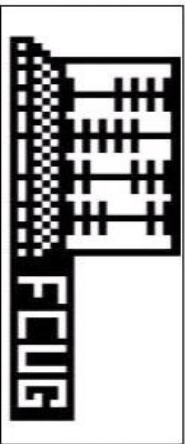
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