

The Voice of FCUG

May 2003
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Contents

The Editor's Desk	2
Program	3
Where did it fall. . ? - Lynn Marron Bloom	4
FCUG Board Meeting 11 March 2003	7
The Way We Were - May 1983	8
Ashampoo WinOptimizer - Ogden Douglas	9
Nose to the Ground	11
Internet Security - Jerry Maizell	14
Linux Down Under - John Mercer	18
FCUG Meeting 3rd June 2003.	22

Meeting 7:30 pm 6th
at New Canaan
Historical Society
13 Oenoke Ridge 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. Non-commercial and non-profit users are free to copy or quote material herein; proper credit and sending a copy of the publication to the Editor would be appreciated.

Members can exchange 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.

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

Let's **start** those card and letters coming, folks!

The Editor's Desk

We are on the eve of another completed year. The next issue will contain the annual call-for-dues envelope – well, tear-out, fold-up, weird-oh-thingy which you are supposed to send back to our Esteemed Treasurer. It's been another fun year, though the pickin's are getting fewer. APCUG, to which we subscribed and which had a web-site replete with all sorts of articles for the copying, has dropped that material source and replaced it with a selective mailing to interested parties, according to my contacts.

So the barrel bottom has been scraped a couple of times, with reviews of strange products of which there may, in truth, be little sign in the pukka magazines, since most of them are either freeware, or shareware. Also too many cartoons. . .

I must thank, also, the members who send in offerings to appear in print – and apologize, perhaps, to a few who didn't, perhaps, realize they were going to be publicized in quite this way.

Also, many thanks to the Chicago Computer Club, whose fantastic magazine continues to produce great stuff. If we are supposed to be helping members, answering their question sis one of the best ways, I think. And the (if I am right) triumvirate who make up the fictional C.C.DeLan, are much to be praised for their complete, and entertaining, replies. (Mea culpa, Sir, if my information is wrong and you truly are a single person!)

-ooOOoo-



Program for 6th May 2003

Call to orderFearless Leader – Charles Bryk 7:30

Novice topic:Google – Nick Fellner. 7:40
Nick will lead us into little-known corners of the famous Search Engine site

Q and A:Moderator – Nick Fellner. 8:00
Back by popular demand. We have to stop meeting like this, Nick!

Epicurean BreakChef du Soir – Frank Frederickson. 8:20

Main topic: The Magic of MP3 – Marv Fleischman 8:30
What it is and how to use it.

(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.



Where Did It Fall Off The Truck?

By Lynn Marron Bloom

My mom might have been out of mother's milk, but she did pass on to me a Black Belt in shopping strategies, most of which don't work buying computers. In 1981, for my first word-processing computer, after months of research, I narrowed it down to two choices. I really preferred the Commodore, which added a little bells-and-whistle program that allowed your keyboard to play music. Still, since I was investing the cost of good used car, I realized it was far more important to go with a company that was going to be around for the long run. I bought a double-density Osborne – two days before the reliable Osborne Company went into bankruptcy and three days before I couldn't boot it up.

I learned something that day: when you shop for a computer, you are buying something that has a high infant mortality rate; has so many models you can't write them down; or may be from a company going out of business. If you get past that, a computer will also be obsoleted while you are carrying it out to the parking lot. Shopping for computer equipment is either a horror or an orgasm or both.

Today we are going to discuss finding a place to buy from. Searching the Bargain news or the local classified for used computers tends to get you way overpriced, antique equipment. A guy who spends five thousand dollars in 1985 thinks you are getting a bargain paying \$500 for his 640K. As a general rule, unless you like to endlessly take things apart for an intermittent blue screen, it is better not to buy somebody else's problem. And if you manage to pick up the latest, fastest laptop at the flea market dirt cheap, you might want to know that they are selling "I've been stolen" programs. If those programs have been installed on a stolen computer, should you use your bargain on the Internet, the computer might try to "call home", alerting its former owner to your present location.

Then there are the computer stores, like CompUSA, Gateway, or Renaissance (for used computers). They have products you can feel, touch and key. They sell endless accessory items. Some even have in-store service. They might also sell you computer lessons. They do have occasional sales.

CompUSA is legendary for its "drag-you-in" sales of small items that, with rebates, are pretty much free. Check the Sunday newspaper circulars. If you want to get a good deal, do your research on features, prices, brands, warranties and reliability.

For months we were in the market for the best deal on a color laser printer. At the top of our short list was a Minolta 2300 DL Magicolor. When the President's Day sale ads came out, we found a \$200 price break, two-day sale on the Magicolor at Staples. Sunday, the store opened at 10: we were in the parking lot (with others) at 9:00 A.M. At 10:03, one guy was just asking for the printer aisle when Lenny was wheeling out the last Magicolor box to the

The Voice of FCUG – Page 5

line forming at check out.

The established Computer stores will sometimes give warranties on top of the factory warranties. They may even sell you an extended warranty (good precaution if you are buying a laptop). Ask them to check for returns of refurbished computers with warranties. Sometimes at a legitimate Computer Store you will even find a sales associate who can explain the choices to you – but remember, if he's got ten outdated models and a newbie you might come with a brand-new, dying dinosaur.

Of course, you can try the office equipment stores like Staples and Office Max. You have less of a chance of the salesperson knowing how to turn on the computer, but they have good prices; they can do catalogue orders; have sales and should have warranties. Sometimes they will actually have the equipment plugged in. (A great way to get free computer lessons is to just go into store after store and ask for demonstrations. For my first computer, I made up a folder with samples of all the formats I typed in. Took this with me to the stores, and they let me practice. When I got stuck, the guy had to show me how to work the programs. Today, most stores wouldn't have the patience, but Gateway in Norwalk still might.)

That leaves the “club” stores like Costco, BJ's and Sam's Club. You have to pay \$30.00 or so for a yearly membership. In their electronics section, you get to root through stacks of boxes piled up on shelves. No sales person really. No plastic bag to carry it home in. But most name brands have a manufacturer's warranty (this should be stated on the box). These price club items are usually on the low end. High on looks, lower on memory, but they perform more than satisfactorily for most low-end users and make great graduation gifts. And, while you are there, you can look at the latest patio furniture and pick up a six-pound package of sausage.

If you know what you are buying and are just looking for good prices and a wide range of availability, there's buying over the Internet. We have had a great deal of success buying from www.tigerdirect.com and www.computergate.com. Also www.costco.com has had some good-price items, including some refurbished with warranties. Just remember to factor in shipping and handling when you are doing price comparisons. It is always helpful to buy computers with a credit card if you have to return or fight warranty problem. Make sure you know each site's return policies!

Now we get to the real fun – the Bizarre Bazaars, or Computer Fairs. A promoter rents a high school, sports area, or hotel lobby, and some vendors set up tables for a one-day Computer Show. You pay a price, usually (with a coupon) \$6, to get in. Once inside you can get a slim-line monitor, cable adaptor, business card paper, software, tons of memory and fresh popcorn. When Harry Potter II was being promoted, to be put on DVD in a month and a half, the Computer Fairs were selling it for \$16 (sans DVD extras). The merchandise isn't usually black market, but it may be a little gray. Still, the prices are good and if you know what you are looking for you can cut a very good deal. If it's the end of the day and there are a lot of similar items on other tables, you might try haggling over the price. Ask – you might get a discount for cash; otherwise go with a credit card.

The Voice of FCUG – Page 6

Shopping the Computer Fairs is very social. You'll meet all your other FCUG buddies there. Check the Internet for schedules; locally, we often do www.coganfairs.com and www.marketpro.com. When viewing the Internet sites, remember to print out any price-off coupons for the show. When you go, if they have a mailing list for sites and coupons, try to get on it. The software tends to be older versions, but selling at greatly reduced prices, often \$10.00 for a program, six for \$50. At Staples, to buy a current basic Quickbooks with fancy box, it's #214. At Costco, it's \$169. At the Computer Fair, an older version ran \$65. It's not the latest and greatest, has no manual or fancy box, but it does exactly all we'll ever need.

Yes, if you don't know what are looking for you can bet taken, but long-time promoters won't allow vendors with many complaints. Some of the vendors have been at those fairs for years, and are expecting to live off repeat customers. Good vendors will explain their product and replace a dead-on-arrival drive with no problems.

How do you find a "good vendor"? If it's your first time at the fair that's a problem, but many of the FCUG club members attend these regularly and for a free hot dog will go around with you and point out the bargains and most trust-worthy dealers.

Okay, we've told you where to go, you know what to buy, go for it! Yes, you can get hurt, but that's what true love is all about.

--ooOOoo--



I think this system is just ME!

FCUG board meeting 11 Mar 03

Gordon Nugent

Attending: Lenny Bloom, Lynn Bloom, Dick Booth, Charles Bryk, Andy Burns, Ed Congleton, Bill Hart, and Gordon Nugent. Guest: Jim Sullivan.

Future main or novice possible subjects: Web page design and startup, by Ed, September or later. Computers in astronomy, Martin Hamar. Editing digital photos, advanced techniques. Drive mapping. Setting up your Ebay selling photos with URL references. Could also be a future SIG topic; Jim reports CPC has an expert who could handle this. Revisit our Forum Bulletin Board; Alan Abrahamson is on this daily, an underutilized club resource. How teleprompting works, including stage directions.

Club Treasury: Ed reports 12-month closing balance of \$4,075.13, down about five percent from previous year's close. Membership dues income was up 9.5 percent to \$2,820.00.

DSL access: Lenny says provisional cable setup could link us to Historical Society's new service as early as next meeting. Ed will follow up.

Voice: Bill reports next issue ready to go.

Pre-meeting setups: Some members should arrive early to help with increasing numbers of chairs needed. Moving refreshment table to front will let us accommodate up to 100 persons with safety exits remaining clear.

Handbook: John Roy is thinking about the next edition.

Insurance: Ed observes that the club's liability insurance policy is due for renewal soon, and requests Gordon produce the file from storage for review.

Meeting subjects:

April: Adobe Acrobat, Bea Mull

May: MP-3, Marv Fleischman

June: Scanners & OCR, Alan Abrahamson

Refreshments: Linda Maranis has the schedule complete through November.

CPC: Jim says they will do History of the PC at their March meeting and plan a joint meeting with us on the Mac for late April.

Membership promotion: Extra printing of Voice latest issue is agreed as handout for our Norwalk Library exhibit; Bill will do it. Night-light needed for driveway sign to flag our meetings. Dick's new contact card will smooth incoming flow on meeting nights.

Club projector: Back in action with Lenny's new cable.. Lamp (\$200) has logged less than 100 hours, may be good for 100 more, and will give us ample warning rather than mid-meeting failure.

Next Board meeting: At Lynn and Lenny's home.

THE WAY WE WERE – MAY 1983

Disk crashing made easy – John Krause. Two pages, including this warning artwork:



TRS-80/Novation “Cat” modem interface – Chuck Sabol.

“It is possible to connect a modem to the TRS-80 model without using a RS232 communications port.” Three pages, including full-page circuit diagram of link-up.

How soon they forget! -- Herman D. Parks. Sub-title: A Real-Life Drama About Trouble-shooting Memory. Two pages.

Compare Two Directories – Dave McGlumphy. Four pages, including two program listings.

Big Letters Plus – John Krause. Three pages on Banner printing, with program.

1. Some Goodies – Sid Gross. A page of useful TRS-80 information.

The Voice of FCUG – Page 9

Ask Alan – Alan Abrahamson. A different Q&A, with one Q in diary form.

“For Sale: Model I,2 Drives, Percom Doubler II, Lower Case, Keypad, ALPS Keyboard, LYNX Modem. . . . \$1300 negotiable. . . .”

Bugs and Tidbits – John Krause. One page as titled.

The Gamer's Corner. Word Search rectangle.

Bounce/Bas – Bruce Hansen. One page program listing.

-ooOoo-

Ashampoo WinOptimizer

Ogden Douglas

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The Ashampoo WinOptimizer Suite is Shareware, with a free download (for a 30-day trial run, after which you pay). I received a copy on the PC World 20th Anniversary CD. If you didn't get one, do a Google search. Don't know why, but ashampoo.com was not replying when I checked it first, so followed a trail to vnunet.com, which was offering it at \$29.99 (! -- none of the old 'stay about 35¢ away from the next buck, so the clients think it's cheaper' stuff these days), which they said was a \$10 discount. It is reported to run on Windows 9X, ME, NT, XP and 2000. Pretty well covers the Microsoft Waterfront.

Ashampoo was originally developed in Germany, but all the screens and documentation have been translated for us less-cosmopolitan types. The

The Voice of FCUG – Page 10

opening screen offers the main options, each of which is a separate program, involving closing the menu screen and opening the selected option after a pause. (When you have finished with the option, close it and the main menu reappears.) The options are:

Drive Cleaner – scans your drives for unnecessary material.

Registry Cleaner – scans your registry files for unnecessary material.

Internet Cleaner – cleans out work files after a surfing session, so that, hopefully, spyware cannot learn where you have been.

Internet Tuner – adjusts your TCP/IP settings for optimum surfing speed.

Startup Tuner – allows you to adjust your start-up program choices.

File Wiper – cleans out files with multiple overwrites so that spyware cannot read your rejects.

DLL Cleaner – checks for unused and duplicate DLL files.

Driver Cleaner scans your drives for unnecessary material. It has the following sub-choices:

Drives allows you to choose which drives to check.

Filters allows you to define the types of file to find. For example, “*.bak” is one of the standard filters provided, but you can add your own, or remove ones you do not want included.

Exceptions provides a list of folders and files which should be excluded from the search. Again, you can add or remove names if you wish.

Options is a list of nine toggle-switch boxes for more adjustments to the standard search.

Scan is where you start the drive scan.

Results shows the full list of candidates for removal. Once more, you can fine-tune the results by removing those you want to keep, and finally you can tell the program to delete the list of those remaining.

Registry Cleaner does much the same for registry entries. You are allowed to (and you should!) create a backup first if you wish.

Internet Cleaner will clean up the files left after a surfing session, so that where you have been is not available to spy programs.

Internet Tuner will alter your TCP/IP parameters if you are using TCP/IP (basically, if you are using a modem connection). You can make alterations manually if you wish to (and know enough about the subject), or an automatic adjustment can be chosen.

Startup Tuner allows you to make changes to the list of programs which automatically start at boot-up. I would have guessed that msconfig would

The Voice of FCUG – Page 11

probably give you similar control.

File Wiper will really clean the unused portion of your drives so that no indication remains of old material. There are four levels of Wipe: Quick, Standard, Secure and Military Standard. The Standard Wipe involves writing over every byte twice, the Military seven times, with the others in between. You can also rename wiped files and folders with random byte sequences so that any hints of previous content are removed. Wow! Talk about secure! You then name the files you want to delete, press Wipe and wait for the Results.

DLL Cleaner makes a check for unused DLL files. Options allow you to define what you mean by duplicate: whether the file sizes have to be identical as well as the names, and so on. After the Scan you are, again, given the option of deleting the perpetrators or not as you wish.

The Drive Cleaner found 783 unnecessary files and released 635MB on my 20GB of hard disk space. However, after finding over 5,000 DLLs on my two drives the program elected to delete none of them. Must be fairly clean around here. . .

All in all, Ashampoo WinOptimizer did a good job of cleaning up several years' worth of detritus. The company also makes a Media Player, an UnInstaller and something called Illuminator. But those will have to wait for another day.

---ooOoo---

NOSE TO THE GROUND

In March there was a large computer fair in Hanover, Germany (CeBIT) and speakers were reported to be dismissing the idea of cyber-terrorism as a figment of the US government's imagination. Why, they pointed out, would terrorists waste time trying to break computer systems when they could much more readily destroy the computers themselves with bombs?

“I think the hype's coming from the US government,” said Bruce Schneier, a security expert, “I don't believe terrorists will attack the infrastructure with computers – they'll use bombs. If I were a terrorists I wouldn't be looking at computers. If I can't get my email for a day I'm not terrorised, just annoyed. He pointed out that in Yugoslavia bombs were used to destroy the infrastructure; no-one wasted time trying to break down the Slav networks electronically.

The Voice of FCUG – Page 12

On the other hand, the conference was told that criminal gangs are increasingly online, looking for banking and credit card details and also for trade secrets and industrial processes. It's still a rough old world out there. . .

* * * * *

Talking of criminals, when the U.S. was about to pounce on Iraq, a new worm, Ganda, appeared, purporting to show the recipient screensavers made from Iraqi spy satellite pictures. The message title options included 'Spy pics', 'GO USA !!!!', 'G.W. Bush animation' and 'Is USA always number one?'. It's apparently not very virulent, but still – if you are tempted to look, don't!

* * * * *

VnuNet reported in march that a Microsoft executive they interviewed said Linux was more of a threat to Unix than to Windows.

“We don't see Linux taking market share away from Microsoft – only Unix,” he said, arguing that Linux was limited to peripheral tasks like file and print servers. He also cited a report, mentioned here some months back, by the Aberdeen Group, that claimed there are more security alerts from Open-source systems than Microsoft ones.

Interesting, since Steve Ballmer last September spoke of Linux as a serious competitor. Also several large companies, such as Unilever and Morgan Stanley, have recently announced they will be using Linux. Following The Voice's lead, eh? It's nice to be in the forefront!

* * * * *

O.K. The European Commission, which has been investigating for some time now the anti-social behavior of TBOR, has found them guilty – but so far it seems they are unsure how to proceed after that. The problem is coming up with a ruling which defines behavior limits and provides no loopholes. (Could one say a company that writes so much software with holes in it will be expert at finding holes in other people's work?) Anyway, more later, I suspect. Seems the Europeans are hoping to be tougher than the DoJ, which caved in a while back.

* * * * *

And another item from the Register in March said that maybe MS is in fact moving to adopt some of the ideas of the Open Source community. In their ASSP .Net Starter Kit License (presumably addressed to OEMs?) they seem to be hinting that way. The Register says “. . . the salient features are that you can modify the software, distribute in source code form and create derivative works without having to check with Microsoft or pay royalties. You do have to tell the recipients you've made changes and when those changes were made, and you have to distribute under the new Microsoft licence, but

The Voice of FCUG – Page 13

that's pretty much it. It moves away from the 'look, don't touch' approach that's previously characterized shared source, and gives the impression that developers using this licence model will be doing so to develop software of value, rather than operating largely as unpaid bug-hunters for Redmond."

As a lone example it may not mean much, but if the idea catches on and more examples creep out of Redmond, who knows?

* * * * *

31st March the BBC had a news tidbit reporting that Apple is dropping the classic iMac – at least, they will not be offering it to you and I, though they may still offer it to schools. Sort of odd, since the electric-hued little rhomboids have been thought by many to have been the savior of the company when Apple was not doing so well. Of course, they still have the eMac and that strange-looking flat-screen, angle-poise-style iMac. So I guess the TV ads will still be with us. That one where the computer in the window apes the guy in the street was fun.

* * * * *

Now here's a Herculean task (also found on the BBC web-site): from October, an EU directive will make unsolicited e-mail illegal across member states. Spam is giving businesses great trouble and lost productivity cop8ing with the stuff. So the UK government, for one, is suggesting that businesses should get prior consent before sending unsolicited e-mail advertisements. (Sounds a little like the opt-out arrangement here for telephone spam. That doesn't always seem to be working, either; apparently certain fund-raisers, poll-takers and others claim they are exempt.)

But these regulations are also to cover cookies and other web-page spyware, which should be plainly indicated and permission obtained before your personal history and foibles are shot off through the Web. That's an interesting idea; hope they extend it over here!

They also intend to raise heavy fines on persistent spammers. Sounds good – spam at the Nosehole is running about 80-90% of message content at present.

* * * * *

Another goodie from the Beeb: a British company called NXT has developed a computer screen which doubles as a speaker, eliminating the need for those little boxes. Not quite sure whether they make the flat screen itself vibrate, or just have speakers around the rim, but it sounds as though the former is the case. Have had enough trouble with my monitors recently without having the screen shatter on a high note form an operatic diva. . .

---ooOoo---

Internet Security: Step by Step into the Fog by Jerry Maizell

(Copied from Volume 18, Number 1, the first 2003 issue of Hard-Copy, the journal of the Chicago Computer Society [www.ccs.org])

Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint – Mark Twain

Taking bad advice about computers is likely to have less serious consequences than bad advice about health, but both fields are full of quacks.

Computer quacks divide rather neatly into two categories: those who spread fear and confusion by exaggerating the dangers of the Internet and those who blithely assert that there is nothing to worry about.

The popular press offers both, often within the same pages of our daily newspapers. A so-called “news” article may warn of cyber-terrorists while a columnist in the same publication may boast that he doesn't bother with firewalls or antivirus programs because they're more trouble than they're worth.

If it looks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's . . . a Computer Writer

A typical example of the latter is in the Chicago Tribune's computer questions column of Dec. 28. This is part of the author's reply to a reader who just got DSL service and wants to know how to protect his PC:

“. . . I'm pretty agnostic about this kind of stuff. I'm even cooler to the idea that everybody who gets a DSL, or cable modem line should shell out money for a firewall-software that monitors all incoming and outgoing Internet traffic to warn of potential problems. . .

“For my money one can avoid any attacks that a firewall might fend off simply by switching off the file-sharing feature on their computers. . .”

If you have a home network and turn off file-sharing you may be protected . . . from yourself.

The result for many users is confusion leading to paralysis. Since they don't know what to do they do nothing. As I so elegantly put it in my previous column, internet security is like eating Spaghetti-Os with chopsticks – possible, but messy.

In that column I outlined some of the real dangers along with some of the ways I approached defending against them. But as I hinted that I wasn't satisfied with Norton Internet Security (NIS), some of you may be wondering what path I finally followed.

Having had occasional problems over the years with uninstalling Norton programs, I waited until I plucked up my courage and set aside enough time to attack the project. Before starting I reviewed the uninstall instructions in Symantec's online knowledge base. Symantec, obviously aware of the kinds of problems that lurk in uninstalling their stuff, provide detailed

The Voice of FCUG – Page 15

instructions in case things go awry, at least for uninstalling Norton AntiVirus (NAV, which is included in NIS). If you're interested, see <http://service1.symantec.com/SUPPORT/nav.nsf/docid/2001061911223206>.

In the event, Windows Add/Remove Programs applet did away with NIS without fuss. Now I needed to start fresh with new security components. After rebooting I installed the full version of NAV 2002, which is valid for a year of updates, unlike the six-month version bundled free with NIS on my new Compaq.

I have a simple system for antivirus protection: I buy a new version of NAV every year. More accurately, I buy a new version of Norton SystemWorks every year, but I don't install SystemWorks.

The cheap & (maybe) safe rout to Virus Defense

So, why buy the whole kit and kaboodle of SystemWorks and not install it? Because a careful shopper can get it for around \$20 or less, after discounts and rebates. That's five bucks cheaper than paying Symantec for another year's subscription to virus definition updates. (Sometimes you can get SW or NAV alone free after rebate and upgrade.) And you get a bunch of other useful apps thrown in, like Ghost, GoBack (Personal Edition), Norton Utilities – and, depending on the version, some less useful ones (like CleanSweep, or CrashGuard, which is apparently not there any more.)

I've had so many problems with SystemWorks in the past that I don't trust it. So, instead of clicking Install on the CD, I click Browse CD, find the NAV folder and double-click the NAV Windows Installer Package (NAV.MSI).

Caution: as with any software installation, your mileage may vary. While you can depend on Windows to be annoying, any given system may react with different annoyances. All I can do is explain what works for me and urge you always to be prepared for problems (by backing up important data) when installing software of any kind.

SystemWorks' readme file sounds a warning: "Individual products must be installed through the SystemWorks install only. If you attempt to launch the NAV.MSI file manually, you will get an error message stating that you don't have the proper administrative privileges. . ." I have never gotten such a message and haven't encountered problems. But you have been warned. Symantec wants you to follow its regular Install program, un-checking the applications that you don't want. I have reports from some users that it works for them. You pay your money and you take your chances. Either way, back up your data first.

One down, three to go: Step Two – Cookies and Referrers

Installing Norton AntiVirus, however, was just the first step. In my vision of security for home computer users there are four components:

- Virus defense
- Referrer and Cookie defense
- Software defense
- Hardware defense

The Voice of FCUG – Page 16

Most browsers now include decent protection against unwanted cookies, as well as a means of managing useful cookies. Some sites require cookies and almost all online shopping carts do.

One system I've used is to set my main browser to *block* all cookies (with a few exceptions). Then when I need to visit a site requiring cookies I launch Internet Explorer, which I set to *accept* all cookies. It's klunky, but it works, more or less. It would be better to have a complete cookie management system, one that also handles referrers.

One of the things I liked about NIS was its blocking of referrers. Referrers tell websites about the previous site(s) you visited, and perhaps some other things, none of which information I want strangers to have.

Get a Cookie-eating, Referrer-rejecting Cop – for free

So when I made the decision to uninstall NIS I needed to find another application to handle that function. Reaching back into research I did a few years ago I found CookieCop, a free utility from PC Magazine. It worked well enough then, but not as well as my favorite of the time, AtGuard (which is now incorporated into NIS).

Downloading and installing the new version of CookieCop took but a few minutes. (Get it at www.pcmag.com, click Downloads, then search or find it listed alphabetically.) To my delight, CookieCop's latest incarnation does everything one could want. It keeps track of what it does and can be set up to suit almost anyone's preferences. In my current two-hour Internet session its statistics tab shows that it has rejected 243 cookies and removed 270 referrers.

Mark Sweeney, at the download site, does a great job of explaining how and why CookieCop does its magic, so I won't go into it other than to note that it sues a proxy system, so this is one case where you must follow the setup instructions.

While its default setup will work well, it's worth paying attention to the details after initial setup. That is especially important if you use more than one browser. I use four: Mozilla, Opera, Netscape and Internet Explorer. I did not set CookieCop to work with IE, as I consider IE an auxiliary tool, which I use when I must give in to the whims of the unreconstructed Microserfs. That is a personal choice, not a "rule". There ain't no rules for computers – at least, none that count for much. What works, works. The trick is in finding what works best for you.

Step Three – Software firewall: ZoneAlarm

Though ZoneLabs make a good pitch for the \$39.95 Pro version, ZoneAlarm is still free for personal use. So even if you follow the Trib guy, you won't have to "shell out money for a firewall." (Download it at www.zonelabs.com. You'll have to poke around the site a bit to find the free one.)

It is easier to use than ever – at least for new users. I'm used to the old one and I'm still not comfortable with ZA's look and feel. But then I don't like wearing new shoes either.

There is a kernel of truth in the Trib guy's assertion that one can be safe

The Voice of FCUG – Page 17

from incoming attacks without deploying a firewall. But there is more to the story and more kinds of threats and/or annoyances than are dreamt of in that simplistic philosophy. Among the problems that a software firewall can handle is software already installed on your computer that wants to reach out to the Internet for reasons other than normal browsing or e-mail. Not all of this “phone-home” software is what one would typically categorize as “spyware.” As noted in my previous column, NIS found 75 Internet-enabled programs on my system, of which 53 were from Microsoft. Some of the 75 are legitimate, like Norton AntiVirus, which contacts the Internet to update virus definitions. Others are . . . suspect, to say the least. I like to be able to control what they're doing, when and why.

Except for the “why”, ZA lets you approve/disapprove their actions. I usually disallow them the first time they request Net access, then watch to see if there are any unhappy results. If so, I'll allow them next time. Once it's clear that an application is entitled/not entitled to Internet access you can check a box to have ZA remember your decision and let it proceed uninterrupted in future or be automatically blocked.

It's not difficult to set ZA up or to use it, though it can be confusing for a first-time user. But it includes a step-by-step tutorial that shows and tells you what ZA does and the basics of managing it.

Step Four: Rooting for Routers, whether you need one or not

Routers are now so cheap and so easy to plug into your system that there's no longer any reason not to have one, whether you need it or not. The point of a router in a home computer setup is to link two or more computers in a local area network (LAN) and share a broadband Internet connection (DSL or cable) among the PCs. But even if you have only one PC and a broadband connection, a router can serve as an effective hardware firewall, making your system invisible to outsiders.

And routers, which not long ago sold for hundreds of dollars, can be had by careful shoppers for as little as \$20-\$30 After rebate. The most commonly discounted brands are D-Link, Siemens and Belkin, though LinkSys and Netgear are also available cheaply. All of them have good reputations.

My first router was a \$500 SpeedStream, my second a LinkSys for \$130 (it now goes for around \$50) and my third (waiting to be installed) is a D-Link -- \$29.99.

This isn't the place to discuss wireless routers, but if you go the wireless route note that many wireless devices come with encryption turned off by default. Make it a priority to turn WEP (wireless encryption protocol) on during setup. Otherwise your network is broadcasting to the neighborhood. There's more to it than that, though, so don't go naked into that wireless night.

Now . . . Ignore all the above?

Having led you down the garden path into the fog that is Internet security, you may be rolling your eyes and wondering why, if the Internet

requires so many defences, you shouldn't go back to snail mail and the boob tube and leave the Internet to the geeks and freaks. Don't be intimidated. I have good news for you. There is a simpler way. A one-shot solution.

Not so comprehensive, but it will leave you far better off than following the advice of the popular press Pollyannas who tell you there's nothing to worry about.

Norton Internet Security is an excellent program, but from my viewpoint it suffered from two problems: it was relatively expensive and it didn't include a way for temporarily and easily blocking all Internet access. That is, it didn't have a temporary Internet stopper in the 2002 version I was suing. For its 2003 release Symantec has copied that feature from ZoneAlarm. NIS now has a "Block Traffic" button.

Invoke it before touching any HTML E-mail and you will at least protect yourself from the home-phoning bugs planted in so much spam. As of this writing Symantec is offering a \$30 rebate, bringing the price into the under-\$50 range.

If even installing NIS is too much trouble for you maybe you'll be doing the rest of us a favor by drawing all the hackers and crackers to your system so the rest of us can relax.

----ooOoo----

Linux Down Under

OR A TRS Model 4 user first acquires a PC.

By John Mercer

*Adapted from e-mail messages by John Mercer, Editor of the Newsletter of SYDIRUG,
The Sydney TRS-80/MSDOS Users' Group.*

(Some of us may remember our first essays into the GUI environment...).

It seems to me that the people who write documentation for anything to do with computers are largely guided by the same considerations:

1. Virtually nobody reads the documentation anyway, so why bother making it either meaningful or understandable?
2. However, as there is a section of the public which seems to expect that documentation will be provided, we will make a token effort to see that SOME is available, but we will make sure that it does not give much help. If anyone complains that information is missing, we will just tell them they should have known that.

On a somewhat less cynical note, it does truly seem that, while documentation may be perfectly clear to whoever wrote it, they have not allowed for the fact that it may not be clear to the reader – and they have also fallen into the trap of ASSUMING that the reader possesses knowledge which, in fact, they may not.

The writers of the Red Hat 7.2 documentation seem to have gone out of

their way to make the whole business confusing. For example: Chapter 3 deals with the GUI installation program. Before they actually tell you anything about this, they point out that if you don't wish to use the GUI install program, you can view in "text" at the prompt. You should refer to Chapter 4 for a brief overview of text mode installation instructions.

So, naturally, you then turn to Chapter 4 to find out what it is all about. What do you find in Chapter 4? The second paragraph tells you that if you are new to Linux you should read Chapter 3, as most of the concepts explained there also apply to the text mode installation. Would it not have made it so much easier for the reader if they had explained (in Chapter 3) that, while the general concepts were covered in that chapter, the text mode installation would be dealt with in Chapter 4?

Both chapters refer you to an appendix titled "An introduction to disk partitioning". This starts off quite well by explaining the historical reasons for disk partitioning and the general ideas behind it. Then they get down to cases. One case mentioned is where the drive as yet has not data on it and will be used exclusively for Linux. This, thought I, is the very thing I am looking for. Foiled again!! They discard this situation as being very unlikely, and do not bother to enlarge upon it. More ASSUMPTIONS!! Hard Luck, Harry!!

The dealer set up my 40GB drive and it is all Linux. But what *I* can do with my machine is not by any means the same as what an *experienced user* could do with it. It was only because it was virtually no longer possible for me to connect to the Internet with my Model 4 that I was persuaded to get the Linux machine in the first place. The vast majority of my access to the Internet with the Model 4 had been to download article files from the APCUG BBS for reprinting in "SYDTRUG News". By the time I had got the Linux machine to connect satisfactorily to the Internet, the APCUG BBS was no longer functioning. At first it seemed that the money, time and trauma spent in reaching that point had been virtually wasted, as I had little wish to become involved in learning new systems and new programs, when my old faithful Model 4 did most of what I needed. True, it was slow, and yes, unzipping zip files was a chancy exercise, but on the other hand, as the APCUG BBS was no longer functioning, there were no more zip files to deal with. So, all in all, I didn't feel any great urge to investigate the Linux machine.

However, I remembered that Ev Quinnett of APCUG sends some articles each month by e-mail to those newsletter editors with their addresses listed in the Central Data Base. As it seemed that I had been the only member of our group's committee who exhibited any interest in APCUG, and I had never had practical access to the World Wide Web prior to getting the Linux box, our CDB entry had never been updated. This naturally meant that we were not receiving these monthly contributions. It was therefore necessary to set the wheels in motion to obtain the necessary login ID and password so that we could make the updates required. This was done – though not by me – and in due course I was able to receive the material.

The first few months' articles received included a number in Rich Text format. Unfortunately, [the Model 4 program] Allwrite cannot handle these. It was very remiss of the Tesler brothers not to provide this facility, but I guess

they would make the feeble excuse that they couldn't be expected to predict that it would ever be necessary. A poor excuse, of course, but there it is. :-)

As I did not have a full-blown word processor installed in the Linux box at that stage I could only make use of these articles if someone else converted them to ASCII files for me. Unfortunately, just converting the files to ASCII format is not sufficient. It is also necessary to provide hard copy derived from the RTF file, as so many of the word processors in this day and age substitute extended ASCII characters for ones which are included in the true ASCII set. This means that when the so-called ASCII file is loaded into Allwrite, it is peppered with graphics characters which I am unable to identify. A small amount of math calculation will tell me what the binary value of the character is, but this still doesn't tell me what it has meant to represent in the original printed form. (At least so far, I have not come up against graphics embedded within files. Illustrations have been contained in separate files which can then be disregarded. If the illustration should prove to be absolutely essential for understanding the article, then, regretfully, that article will not be used. However, this has not yet happened.)

Someone did mention to me that most modern word processors can load most of the different text file formats and save them in ASCII format. So when I came across one of these on a CD which came with either a book or a magazine, I don't now recall which, I decided to try to install it. However, I was absolutely horrified to find that it would occupy in excess of 100MB of disk space. I could not countenance the idea of lading up this much garbage simply to read in a file and then write it out in a different form. Besides which, I had not idea how to go about the installation process, so that idea got nowhere very quickly.

Truly has it been said that “The perfect is the enemy of the good.” It seems that, in the ever-continuing effort to add more bells and whistles to word processing documents and files, the amount of RAM and disk space required is completely disregarded. Often a word processor file which I have downloaded and which takes up some 10 to 20KB or even more of disk space turns out to have less than 2KB of actual text. The rest is just overhead. Probably the designer of the word processor, and possibly even the person who entered the article, may feel that this is justified, but I simply cannot see it. One only has to consider the number of programs which have been devoted to managing libraries of fonts to realise that some people at least seem to have gone completely overboard.

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A glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel!! A most fortuitous event has occurred. :-) By Snailmail I received the March issue of “Australian PC World”. In it was an advertisement for their publication, “Linux Minibook”, which carries no less than six cover CDs – a three-disk set for Red Hat 8.0, a two-disk set for Mandrake 9.0 and a further disk of various Linux utilities, etc. Having had no success with loading Red Hat 7.2 onto my 20GB drive it seemed that, provided I made sure the 40GB drive was not in the computer, there was little risk attached to attempting to install Red Hat 8.0 on the 20GB drive. So I “bit the bullet” and asked my local newsagent to get a copy of the “Linux

The Voice of FCUG – Page 21

Minibook”.

When this arrived, I lost little time before attempting to install Red Hat 8.0. Wonder of wonders! It installed successfully. The instructions provided in the minibook were most helpful, although I still managed to miss out on a few points. But mostly that was my fault. I have since reinstalled it a couple of times to get things a little different to the first arrangement, and am gradually getting the hang of it.

I included Gnome in the installation and one of the greatest immediate benefits is the fact that is now possible for me to use Open Office Writer to convert the .RTF files which come from APCUG into .TXT files which I can transfer to my Model 4 for processing. I must say that, either I am extremely slow in the uptake, or these GUI-type word processors are exceptionally unintuitive. I seem to go round and round in circles getting a very short way in a very long time trying to work out what to do to achieve a particular result. Regrettably, the on-line help is often little or no help to me. But, thankfully, I am gradually getting somewhere. One thing which confuses me is working out when to use the “filthy rodent” to perform an action – also, whether to press its left or right ear, or perhaps even the middle one. How does one tell when it is necessary to double-press?

It seems that it will be along time before I can persuade myself to attempt to actually use Open Office Writer for producing documents. The whole thing seems likely to deafen me to any suggestion that I desert Allwrite. When one considers that Allwrite was way ahead of anything available from TBOR (The Beast Of Redmond) for a number of years, it would probably still be ahead by a country mile if the Teslers were still supporting and improving it. But dreaming along those lines is unfortunately quite unrealistic.

I have not yet got around to investigating how to set the new installation up for logging into my ISP, so I still use Red Hat 7.2 for e-mail. But it is presumably only a matter of taking the time to look into things to get it set up correctly. I imagine that when I locate the appropriate files in 7.2 it will simply be a matter of inserting the same information into the correct files in 8.0 to get things to work. At least I certainly hope so/

So, all in all, there does seem to be a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Once can only hope that it is not an oncoming, runaway, freight train. Probably I am not the first person to discover that, the more I learn, the more I discover just how little I know. There is so much to learn, and so little time in which to learn it. . .

---ooOoo---

FCUG Meeting 1st April 2003

It was a first – the weather played April Fool: snow at lunch time! But luckily it did not stick and 45 people gathered at the Historical Society for the monthly meeting.

Pete Stair made (he said) two announcements: (1) The room will shortly be wired for microphones; (2) DSL will be in the closet very soon, too. (Not out of it?) -- and (3) – to keep us on our toes – New Canaan is looking for Webmaster trainees. Too late by the time you read this, but those interested were asked to report to the Lapham Community Center at 1pm on 14th April.

Roger Giler gave the Novice presentation: “The Mouse and Us”. Trouble with a resolution clash between his prepared slides and the display unit, so most of the slides had, sadly, to be bypassed.

Xerox Palo Alto Research Center developed the GUI interface – then gave it away (Xerox management saw no use for it) to Apple and Microsoft.

A Mouse is a pointing device. First it was connected through the serial port; then the PS/2 mouse appeared, and now the USB port can be used. The latest have two buttons and a central wheel which can double as a button and special control. A Trackball “mouse” is like a regular mouse upside down. Optical mice operate by sensing movement from changes in the appearance of the underlying surface. Connection is made by wire, though now there are wireless and infra-red mice. A pen mouse is pen-shaped and is used with a touch screen, where sensing determines what part of the monitor screen is being touched. Gyroscopic mice sense movement by pressure on a gyroscope axle, and can even be used by waving them in the air. And for the foot fetishist, the gymnast and the disabled, there are even “Foot Mice”.

Laptops come with touch pads, where a finger moving across the pad causes pointer movement on the screen, or the “pointing stick”, an eraser-like stub usually between the letters G and H on the keyboard.

Mice can be modified via the Control Panel to operate left-handedly. And if the usual Double-click to open a file or program is hard for you, make a right-click to display a menu, from which “Open” can be selected.

Disk Husta fielded the questions, and started with a brief run-down of his credentials for so doing. In passing, those of us who did not know were interested to learn that ENIAC was built in Norwalk.

Q: My optical mouse works jerkily with my new naval-ship-picture pad.

A: Mice are army tools!

A¹: The optical sensor is misled by the sharp lines of the picture.

Q: My Gateway computer uses AOL; now my telephone bills are huge.

A: Gateway bundles AOL. Give it up and switch to Netscape and cable linkage.

A1: Write to Consumer Protection about it.

Q: On booting my XP machine I get “ghost windows” on my screen. Maybe a program called CSScript is responsible.

The Voice of FCUG – Page 23

A: Does it happen in Safe mode? Check what is started; run MSCONFIG; turn off items in the Startup list selectively until the problem goes away.

Q: When my hand gets near the microphone jack I have audio feedback.

A: Open the Volume Control panel and reduce the microphone volume setting.

Q: Using Office XP, when I close Word and error message appears.

A: Reinstall.

Q: I make photo CDs; now an HP program always opens to display my pictures.

A: Go to Explorer | Tools | Folder Options | File Types; alter the associations.

A': Programs like Irfanview and ACDSee can set picture associations for you.

Q: Can I write on a CD with a pen?

A: Yes.

Hugh Robertson provided the refreshments, and the meeting broke u for several minutes to help him by disposing of most of them. Conversation flowed with the apple juice, doughnut holes and Oreo cookies.

Bea Mull gave the main talk, on Adobe acrobat. The well-known Acrobat Reader can read and print files in PDF (“Portable Document Format”) form. Developed about 1985, PDF preserves a document's fonts, layout, colors, everything; the output is a true copy of the input. Acrobat itself (available for around \$200-\$250) can also convert documents, add signatures and create and save interactive forms for users to complete on-line.

With Acrobat installed you can create a PDF file directly from your word processor: ask for a file to be printed and then press the triangular down arrow at the end of the window where the printer is displayed; one of the other options will be “Acrobat Distiller”.

Government agencies use Acrobat, including the IRS and the Census Bureau. The CTPC newsletter uses Acrobat also. PDF files are good for archiving, as the files are authentic, reliable, complete, usable and unalterable – though we were shown how one can tweak a document (very slowly). But, when this is done, the associated metafile material will clearly show that the original document has been modified.

As usual with Bea, the subject was clearly and interestingly presented, and the audience were on the edge of their chairs the whole time. (Though ti must be confessed that, overcome by the warmth of the room and the lateness of the our, your reporter, halfway, changed to a pumpkin, and was caught in mid-yawn by an unexpected question from the speaker. Sorry about that. . .)

Then Herman Parks smiled benignly down upon us – and, again, the first prize winner present was our Fearless Leader, Charles Bryk. Once more, he removed himself from the running, but made it clear that it does not follow that he will always do so, if this happens again and the prizes catch his fancy.

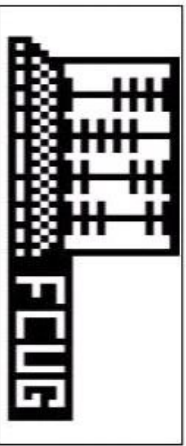
The three good prizes having been received by a Lucky Triumvirate, the rest of us wiggled our chairs onto the chair trolleys and hobbled off into the incipient drizzle.

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