WINNERS Notepad

WINdows usERS

New Year's Computing Resolutions

By Ira Wilsker

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

"Backup Backup Backup" are the three most important words in computing. Murphy's First Law of Computing is "A properly backed up hard drive will never fail; but a hard drive that does not have a current

Bits & Bytes & Xp

By Siles Bazerman

I am in the midst of editing 60 digital photos taken on a Disney Cruise. I went in December with six members of my family. Before I went, I put all thirteen of my subscription mail list memberships on browser mode. That meant that I could access them and read mail using my browser, but would not receive email from them. Since these lists range from one message every few weeks to over 200 per day, I did not want my mailbox filling up while I was gone. I would suggest that you consider doing the same if you are going to be gone for very long. Actually I did not access the internet during the entire ten days I was gone, even though access was available on the ship, and even free during certain specified days and times. Yes, I survived, as can you, and I did not even miss it.

I am editing these pictures using both Jasc Paint Shop Pro v8 and Jasc Paint Shop Photo Album v4. The January 2004 issue of *PC WORLD* reviews nine photo-editing programs and rated Paint Shop Pro v8 the "best buy." It is not quite as full-featured as Adobe Photoshop, but is priced at $95 versus $649 for the Adobe suite. It fairs very well in competition with Adobe Photoshop Elements, however.

I download my camera using Photo Album as it makes it very easy to sort pictures by date, event or

topic. You can easily move a picture from one album to another by drag and drop or use "send to." It even has some photo editing capabilities, and I usually use them for a quick-and-dirty edit to see if the photo is worth keeping. I switch to Paint Shop Pro for the actual editing, but switch back to Photo Album for printing. This latter change is not necessary, but is just my preference. My wife sometimes likes me to do some printing with borders or trim effects which this program allows.

Microsoft has released to beta SP2 for WindowsXp in late December. The full release will be available in late first quarter or early second quarter 2004. It is much more security oriented than any previous patch. First, updating will be more automatic than previously. Microsoft learned that even IT managers cannot be counted on to update WindowsXp on a regular basis, even with critical security updates. Second, the built-in firewall will be activated by default upon installation. There have been reported cases of virus or Trojan infestation upon installation with broadband connections always on. Some people run without firewalls or AV programs, as they feel they are immune or that it will only enrich software companies to use them.

General Meeting January 10
Orange Coast College
9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon
in Science Room #149

Intel Hyper-Threading

PURPOSE

WINNERS, a computer association, is a volunteer organization providing a forum for sharing information and experiences related to Windows-based software, encouraging ethical use of computers and software, and offering service to our communities.

MEMBERSHIP

Annual membership is $20.00 for individuals; $5.00 each additional family member.

MEETINGS

WINNERS generally meets the second Saturday of each month from 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon at Orange Coast College in the Science Building, Room #149, 2701 Fairview, Costa Mesa.

FUTURE MEETING DATES

★ January 10
★ February 14
★ March 13
★ April 10

backup will always fail at the most inopportune time." There have been several reviews of backup hardware and software in this column over the years, and all worked ok to some extent, but there is one irrefutable fact about backing up your hard drive. That is that you need a current backup, period. At least weekly, backup critical data files so that if your hard drive or computer fails, you can restore your programs from their original CDs, and then restore your data files from the backups. It would be even better to make a full backup (everything), and then periodic incremental backups (only those files new or changed since the last backup). Most backup software has this as a feature. Since almost all recent computers have a CD burner, and blank CDs are cheap, there is absolutely no excuse for being wiped out by a hard drive failure or a virus. The basic software that comes with CD burners or preinstalled on factory computers with CD burners is totally adequate to copy critical data files to a CD. Each blank CD holds over 600 megabytes of data, so it will only take a few to do a backup right now. If an external hard drive or DVD burner is available, there is no excuse for not having comprehensive backups. If Murphy is correct, and you do have current backups, then you have nothing to fear.

If you have been a regular reader of this column, you could already guess my next mandatory resolution for all computer users—keep your antivirus software updated on at least a daily basis. Viruses, worms, and Trojans are getting nastier, more sophisticated, and capable of doing more damage than those in the past. Contemporary computer worms can easily steal your identity and send your highly personal information to unknown individuals with larceny in their hearts. Other viruses can destroy the critical data on your computer, hijack your internet connection and attack the national infrastructure, or commit other heinous acts. There is absolutely no reason not to have current antivirus software installed. Price can not be an issue, because there are still several freeware titles available from AVG (http://www.grisoft.com) and AVAST (http://www.avast.com). Recently Microsoft and Computer Associates (CA), announced that for a limited time the $50 CA antivirus and firewall suite can be downloaded for free (for

President's Message

*H*appy 2004!

Last year's COMDEX show may be the last. With disappointing attendance and only a few major companies exhibiting, the annual meeting in Las Vegas will have to undergo a major transformation this year just to stay in existence. The event reminded me more of computer swap than THE event of the computer industry. In the past, COMDEX was where companies rolled out new products, sealed new business deals, and entertained each other for five busy days. Not anymore.

There was talk about moving the show to another city, holding smaller regional events, focusing on different aspects of computer and digital technology or letting the event just die. We'll see what happens in the next few months and see if COMDEX survives another year.

Some people are placing their bets on the ever-growing CES (Consumer Electronics Show) which runs from January 8-12. Companies have abandoned exhibiting at COMDEX in favor of CES. The show has grown steadily over the last several years with attendance expected to be over 175,000 this year while COMDEX barely attracted 50,000. Integration of computers into our daily lives through multimedia and digital technology has made computers more of a consumer item than ever before. In the late eighties, Bill Gates wanted to see computers become an appliance, and it looks like that's almost completed.

If you have a topic of interest that you'd like to learn more about or if you are that expert in some phase of computers or software, why not volunteer to be a presenter at one of our monthly meetings? Sharing your wealth of information with others is what user groups are all about. Contact Terry Currier to learn more about being a presenter.

George and Cathy Margolin have announced their resignations from the Winners Board of Directors. Both George and Cathy have given their time and themselves to many years of distinguished service in the user group community serving as officers, directors and members of numerous committees. We thank them for their service to Winners and look forward to their continued presence at our monthly general meetings.

We now have two openings for board members with Winners. If you are interested, please contact one the current board members and let us know your interest.

See you there.

Steve

personal use) from http://www.my-etrust.com/microsoft and includes a year of daily updates Other popular retail antivirus products, such as McAfee's VirusScan, and Symantec's Norton Antivirus, are currently available for nominal prices after rebates; they may even be free (after rebates) when purchased as a bundle along with some of the major income tax software. Once installed, be absolutely sure that the antivirus software is updated at least on a daily basis.

"Practice Safe Hex" is a comprehensive computing term meaning be careful on the internet, especially with email and while browsing. This includes never responding in any way (including "remove me" requests) from spammers, and instantly deleting any spam email. This also includes never opening any email of suspicious origin, or with suspicious attachments. This especially means be very suspicious of email attachments from acquaintances, as

most modern viruses and worms hijack address books and send themselves out randomly selecting a "to" and "from" email address from the victim's address book, also meaning that such email did not really come from the apparent sender. This method of human engineering makes it attractive to open the infected email, as well as makes it difficult to track the real source. Be suspicious even if antivirus software is installed and updated, as many of these new viruses spread rapidly, often infecting computers faster than the antivirus publishers can post updates. Other forms of "safe hex" include killing spyware (Spybot Search and Destroy, free at http://www.safer-networking.org), and using a firewall to keep intruders out of your computer. Outpost (http://www.agnitum.com) and ZoneAlarm (http://www.zonelabs.com) are available free for personal use,

and are of excellent quality. It is also imperative that the operating system security patches are installed (http://www.windowsupdate.microsoft.com).

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

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Ira Wilsker is the Advisor for Region 8, APCUG Representative & Bylaws Chair for the Golden Triangle PC Club, a columnist for The Examiner *in Beaumont, Texas, and has two radio shows. He also graciously shares his articles with the APCUG editors. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.*

They completely disregard the free programs, feeling that they can not be effective if they are free. They also probably click "YES" on every popup they see, and then wonder why their machine runs so slow. Again, they do not use popup stoppers or Spyware detection programs.

SP2 will probably contain a bi-directional firewall, blocking both inbound and outbound communication that is not

authorized by the user. Also it may contain a popup stopper. Remember this information is based on Alpha and very early Beta releases and may change by release date. Also, expect changes in both Outlook Express and Windows Messenger (not Instant Messenger) for more security. Active X will be modified to give the end user more control to block malware from running without user consent. This will not help those who blindly check everything without thinking.

This will be a huge download, as it will not only contain new patches, but also all patches released since SP1. It will also contain the full SP1. It might pay to obtain a CD from Microsoft, which should be available for just a nominal shipping and handling charge. Historically, this has been about $9.95. It may also be available as a CD included with newsstand copies of computer magazines. SP1 was distributed that way in the UK, although not in the US.

Altec Lansing VS4121

By Terry Currier

While I really liked the Altec Lansing 221 speakers, the one thing I missed was a Bass/Treble adjustment. I thought that the subwoofer adjusted for the sound. It is partly true, but in getting the VS4121 with a Bass/Tremble adjustment I could **immediately** tell the difference. And this was before making any adjustment. The 221s are great for gaming, but if you listen to music or watch any DVDs on your PC, you want better sound and more control. It is kind of like having round steak and enjoying it, but then you get to try a T-bone. You notice the difference. I have a Battleship game where, if you are not familiar with it, you line up your ships on a grid and you try to sink your opponent's ships while he is trying to sink yours. Well, before the shots would fire with a bam; now the shots fire with a boom. It just is so great having the Bass control. Everything comes out strong and crisp. I also notice the speakers which are higher up project better. The subwoofer is housed in a solid-wood cabinet, and the whole set just looks really cool.

System Specifications:

- Sound Pressure Level (SPL): 97 dB
- Total Continuous Power: 31 Watts RMS
- System Response: 25 Hz – 15 kHz (-10dB)
- Signal To Noise Ratio @ 1 KHZ INPUT: > 73 dB
- Front Speakers: 6 Watts/channel 4 ohms @10% THD @ 150 - 20000 Hz 2 Channels Loaded
- Drivers (Per Satellite): Two 28mm full-range and one 3" mid-bass driver. Dimensions: 4" (W) X 4.7" (D) X 9.2" (H)

- Subwoofer: 19 Watts @ 4 ohms @ 10% THD @ 20 – 150 Hz Single Channel Loaded
- Subwoofer Driver: One 6.5" long-throw woofer. Dimensions: 8" (W) x 9.9" (D) x 13.6" (H)

MSRP is $121.95

Comes with a one year warranty 7 day a week support.

http://www.alteclansing.com

Online Information for the Elderly & the Disabled

By Steve Rosenthal,
Secretary, Space Coast PC Users Group,
Cocoa, Florida

On Tuesday, July 22,2003, Kim Komando (http://www.komando.com) had a link to a site that is of major interest to EVERYONE approaching retirement, Social Security, and/or who is permanently disabled for any reason. The site is sponsored by the National Council on the Aging, and hosted by AOL's GovernmentGuide.com. It is called http://www.benefitscheckup.org and is a comprehensive guide and list of any and all programs that are available to the "older generation," i.e. adults who are ready for Social Security or on permanent disability. This is a "must-see" site for anyone with questions of importance about their benefits at or near 65.

The opening page has several choices: 1) How to Use the Site, 2) Tips, 3) Sponsors, 4) Support for N.C.O.A. (National Council On Aging). The first place to go on the site would be the "Benefits CheckUp" button, which will take the reader to several pages that ask important and pertinent questions about the individual, spouse and any dependents living in the household. There is a second button that takes the reader to a page for prescription drug information and savings.

I would suggest starting with the Check Up button, and going through the questionnaire, filling out ALL the questions as accurately as possible. The reader will need information on: A) State & Zip Code, B) Dates of birth for individual and spouse, C) Type of residence, D) Length of time living there, E) Veteran status, F) Employment History as it refers to governmental employment, G) Prescription Medication List (very important), H) Current income and their sources, I) Current Expenses.

Get this information together BEFORE entering the site, as it will speed the process of "filling in the blanks." The reader has only 20 minutes to answer all the questions, before the site 'times out,' meaning the reader will have to start all over from the beginning.

Once the reader has started the questionnaire (Click the 'Click Here' button), there are about 35 or so questions, on approximately 10 different pages, some of which will require detailed information on medications, household income, work status, marital status, and the like.

A detailed questionnaire on current medications will probably take the longest, so it is advisable that a current list of medications be written out and by the computer when answering this part of the questionnaire. Not all drugs are listed; some are listed as generic meds.

After filling in all the information, the site will then take a minute or so to assess the input, and select a list of sites and contact addresses/phone numbers for applications for various programs that would be valuable to the individual, assist limited income individuals who need help with their bills and even suggest further research for available programs for the retired and limited income families.

The federal government offers tax breaks and some private companies offer reduced price medicines for individuals and families on fixed incomes, which help retirees and the disabled cope with month-to-month living expenses and 'survival.' As far as I can tell, none of the information is stored—it is erased after the 20-minute time period has elapsed. It doesn't appear to be 'collected,' and if it is, it would only be for statistical purposes, since the site does not ask for a name, address, phone number, Social Security number, or any other personal identifying information directly traceable back to the individual. Answering the questions honestly simply retrieves information for the reader. In total, there are about 40 questions, and the most comprehensive is the one about prescription meds.

With ALL of your personal information at hand, it should take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey, and another minute or two for the site to retrieve the pertinent information for your specific situation. The results will vary according to each individual's input and can list a few or several sources for further printing out the final results, as names, addresses, phone numbers and web sites can be extensive and comprehensive, depending on the individual's answers to the questionnaire. Examples of the results may include:

1) Golden Access Passport, 2) Food Stamp Program, 3) Medicare Counseling through the SHINE organization, 4) Real Property Tax & Other Exemptions, 5) Homestead Property Tax Deferral (for FLA residences in particular), 6) Earned Income Tax Credit, and other qualifying programs, depending on income status.

These are by no means the total list; you will get a list that applies directly to YOUR specific needs and income level. Anyone with a computer can access this information, and if you don't have a computer at home, your local library (or even a neighbor, friend or family relative) can access the site, fill in the required information, retrieve the results, and print out the information for you to follow up via letter or phone call.

The Internet is chock full of, and a FANTASTIC source of information if you know where and how to look for it. This particular information might take an individual months to collect separately, but on the Internet, it took only 20- 30 minutes to gather, print, and store in a file that can be referred to over and over again.

I was able to download the PDF file with ALL the information in text form, which I can then read at my leisure or constantly go back to as a reference source. Anyone who is interested in available benefits should access this site, and do the questionnaire for themselves. Again, the name of the site is http://www.benefitscheckup.org and is available 24/7.

Take advantage of what the Internet has to offer; you'd be surprised at the wealth of information available. If you need further information, my email address is stever43@bellsouth.net. Feel free to contact me, and I will do my best to help you find the information you are seeking. Good luck with your search, and use the Internet to its fullest capacity, you'll be pleasantly surprised at what it has to offer.

Inhuman Computers

by Elizabeth B. Wright
Oklahoma City PCUG

Older-model automobiles, airplanes and boats could be cajoled, sweet-talked and occasionally reasoned with. That's why many people gave their cars, aircraft and water craft names (usually women's names) and made them part of the family. But that is mostly because they operate by virtue of the internal combustion engine principle. (I'm talking about the days before computer chips replaced some of the mechanical functions of vehicle operations). Also cars often take on the personality of the owner, much like pets do.

Computers, on the other hand, have no soul, no compassion, and certainly no desire to please. The computer is amoral (not immoral, except in the hands of some people), totally insensitive to invective or other forms of oral communication, cannot be humiliated by ridicule or strengthened by praise, and most certainly doesn't respond to human reasoning. The occasional kick only makes them more intransigent (and they break easily).

But your computer can sometimes be tricked. Since they have no sense of humor or sense of belonging, they do not understand that they can be replaced easily, usually by a superior, yet cheaper, machine. So they are not really trying to cooperate when you succeed in outsmarting them, they just honestly don't know any better.

Computers crash in ways that lead you to believe there is absolutely no way to recover any of your most valuable information. But one of the best tricks of the trade is to just (in the words of a long ago Oklahoma City weatherman) "turn the d__n

thing off." Given an overnight rest, many computer crashes can be mitigated, at least for the short term, long enough to move your stored data to some other media, or even to another computer. Along with giving the machine an overnight rest, it is often advisable to unplug it from the electrical outlet after turning it off, to further enhance the rest period. I am not suggesting that this is an infallible procedure, but I personally have had it help more than once, and have talked with a lot of other people who have had similar luck.

Another trick, and this one is rather obvious, is to have more than one hard drive. Storing your important documents on both drives helps with recovery should one drive fail. Again, the computer doesn't care whether it has one hard drive or a dozen. As long as it knows the drives are there, you can pretty much do your own thing. You wouldn't necessarily have two engines in your car, but two or more hard drives is a good idea. Help is out there to recover your data if one of the drives is still functioning, even if it isn't the boot drive.

Trick number three: Although the computer doesn't tell you so, it does like a cool and hopefully dust-free environment. It doesn't know it needs this, but when it decides to roll over and play dead, it is often because it is suffering from heat exhaustion. The newer the computer, the hotter it will get while it is on. Since many people now leave their machines running 24/7, the heat problem can become critical. Internal fans are the beginning, but keeping the computer in a relatively cool part of the room is also important. Keeping it in the vicinity of the heat ducts during cold

weather is not a good idea. That just causes the internal cooling equipment to perhaps not be able to handle the job adequately.

Trick number four: Dirt and other stuff (bugs for example) can get into the computer case; it doesn't hurt to have someone who knows how to do it clean out the insides of the shell. I don't advise doing this if you aren't really technically adept as those small parts are so sensitive that you could do a lot more damage than just leaving it dirty.

Trick number five: In spite of how you might think you are communicating with your computer with fancy screen icons, word commands and pictures, the computer only knows two commands. They are "on" and "off." Most of the on/off switches are in those tiny chips, but the more you can think in terms of how little the computer actually understands, the more you can see why confusing it with conflicting programs can overwhelm its ability to function. More and more of us are wanting to use the latest and most sophisticated programs on the market, but just be aware that each new addition has the potential to cause your computer to become unstable. PLAN AHEAD!! BACK UP YOUR WORK!!

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Elizabeth Wright is a member of the OKCPCUG and a regular writer for the eMonitor. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

PowerCinema 3.0

From CyberLink

By Terry Currier

I'm a big fan of the CyberLink PowerDVD for watching movies on the computer. CyberLink's latest for video watching is a suite. The PowerCinema 3.0 lets you watch DVDs, video, look at pictures, and play music.

Movies and Videos

The interface on the bottom will control the usual Stop, Play/Pause, Fast forward/back, Volume up/down, Speaker on/Mute. For each click, the fast forward/back increases its speed from .5x, 1x, 1.5x, 2x, 4x, 8x, 16x, 32x. I did find it really funny to watch a martial arts fight scene at 1.5x speed. For DVDs, you also have the option to choose the movie's main menu, switch chapters, control subtitles, and language. If the DVD has the option of Angle (switches among available camera angles) you can also do that.

Controls include selecting widescreen or 4:3 (fullscreen). Two other settings include Pan & Scan which displays the central portion of DVD titles in a widescreen aspect ratio, and allows you to move the display area to view more portions of the video. CLPV (CyberLink Pano Vision) is a non-linear video stretching technology that produces minimal distortion in the center of the picture. The CLPV was my viewing choice. The viewer can also control the brightness/contrast/saturation ratios of a movie.

PowerCinema will show MPEG1, MPEG2 (if DVD drive is installed), AVI, WMV, and ASF files video files.

Pictures

   Got pictures? PowerCinema will show them to you in a slideshow format. I liked that it shows thumbnail views of the pictures and videos, like Windows Explorer. Makes it easy to verify which ones you want to view. You can also view them individually if you want. You can set the duration for how each slide is shown before automatically advancing to the next slide in a slideshow. The transition effects between each picture can be set for None, Fade, Wipe, Page, and Random. If you want, you can have it play background music for the slideshow. The music will play for the duration of the slideshow, looping if necessary.

Music

   I played music from CDs, and WMA, MP3 and Wave files from my hard drive. You can play the music sorted by album, artist, playlist or random.

System Requirements

- Operating Systems: Microsoft® Windows® XP Home/Professional Edition.
- CPU: Intel® Pentium® III 450 MHz or higher, or any AMD Athlon processor
- Memory: 64 MB of RAM (128 MB or more recommended)
- Hard Disk: 500 MB
- Video Display Card: Graphics card and SVGA monitor capable of 1024 x 768 @ 32-bit resolution and support for DirectDraw overlay (actually I ran it most of the time at 800x600 with no problems.)
- Soundcard and DVD drive

MSRP is $59.95. Company Info: CyberLink USA, 510-668-0118, www.gocyberlink.com

January 10   9 a.m. to 12 noon
Orange Coast College
Science Building Room #149

See a presentation of how Intel implements Hyper-technology with their motherboard. See just how much faster it helps.

By the way, Intel sent a really sharp computer bag for the raffle.

SAN DIEGO FWY. **405**

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