W!NNERS *Notepad*

In This Issue

CES 2004 Storage/Cameras

First thing to remember here is when USB 2.0 is mentioned, the devices are backward compactable with 1.0, but just slower. For the most part the manufacturers state that the USB devices will work with Win98, 98SE, ME, 2000, XP, MAC OS 8.6 & higher, Linux 2.4.0 and higher.

Storage (USB flash drives and external hard drives)

Archos
http://www.archos.com

The Arcdisk is a 20GB external hard drive for backing up. There is support for MP3 and WMA music formats. The ARCDisk is the world's smallest and lightest 20-gigabyte external hard drive. It is smaller than a floppy disk and weighs 2.7 ounces. It uses USB 2.0 interface, and is also available in a 40GB drive.

Freecom
http://www.freecom.com

The Freecom USBCard is a flash drive the size of a credit card, and not much thicker. It uses USB 2.0 with a transfer

Bits & Bytes & Xp

By Siles Bazerman

This is a column I have known was coming for quite a while. Yet, I hate to write it. This will be my last for now. I have found it increasingly harder and harder to find topics that interest both me, to write about, and to you, to read about. I am running out of things to say.

This has been a long run, starting in October 1995. That first article was a review of a Windows95 uninstaller. Bits and Bytes and Windows xx started in January 1996 and has been published ever since. It evolved from Windows95 to Windows98 to Windows98 SE to WindowsMe to WindowsXp. It has been an interesting journey. Along the way I have met many fine and interesting people, learned much and enjoyed more.

Frankly I am tired. Tired of being creative every month; tired of monitoring three to five hundred postings to the various WindowsXp newsgroups; tired of seeing the same five or six questions multiple times a day. So, I am going on an extended vacation from writing this column.

Will I be back? Quite probably. Will I write another monthly column? Possibly, but not high on my priority list at this moment. When I will resume writing is dependent on when something catches my interest. It may be later this year when WindowsXp SP2 is released. It may not be until

"Longhorn" is released in 2006, or some point in between.

In the meantime I would like to thank all the editors I have worked with—Sunny Locke, Linda Gonse, Kay Winnert, Judy Taylour, Sue Crane and Mitchel Chesney. It has been fun working with you and being friends with you. I hope to keep this up in the future. I would also like to thank the unknown editors around the US and Canada that have occasionally reprinted my articles. It is a very nice feeling to find your name in some newsletter from a far off place. I have had one article, about the hoax "Microsoft" letter with a virus attached reprinted at least fourteen times that I know of.

In the meantime if any of you come up with any ideas that you think might interest me, let me know. Who knows, it just might inspire me to write again.

Last, but definitely not least, I want to thank my readers, especially those of you who stuck it out through all 100 columns. Without your positive reenforcement and helpful comments I would not have been able to go on for so long. Your support made it all worthwhile.

So for now
-30-
Siles

General Meeting March 13
Orange Coast College
9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon
in Science Room #149

Digital Camera Workshop

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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

★ March 13
★ April 10
★ May 8
★ June 12

President's Message

*T*he February General Meeting featured a great presentation by Rich Blumenthal of Scansoft's Dragon Naturally Speaking speech recognition program. The talk demonstrated that much progress has been made over the years to improve both speed and accuracy. Much of this can be attributed to better programming, better equipment and the availability of more computing resources such as processor speed and available memory.

I recall that around 1991, IBM, Learnout & Hauspie and Kerzweil were developing and perfecting their products. Accuracy was around 85-90% with about 45-90 minutes required to train the program with your specific speech pattern. Even then, slight changes in voice quality, such as a cold or stuffy nose, would cause the program to produce inaccurate text. To overcome some of the hardware deficiencies, the companies sold the software with extra memory or processor boards dedicated to the speech program.

Speech recognition is still a dream for most of us. It's still not "Star Trek" quality, but it has been improved significantly. I've dabbled with the products over the years and sampled new versions as they were released. I have to say, this product is very good. It took me no more than five minutes to train the program with my voice pattern. For a quick check, I selected several paragraphs out of some magazines. Even complex topics, such as a discussion of financial strategies, were accurately converted to text.

As Rich pointed out during the presentation. Use these types of programs to get the majority of your thoughts in writing so you can come back later to edit and format your document. With practice, you can produce a fully formatted document ready to distribute.

I recently went to purchase software to update some of my applications. I was pleasantly surprised that many of the software vendors are now packaging their products into a standard size 5.25 x 7.5 x 1.25 box. I found the various assortment of sizes offered before as a waste of shelf space in many cases and added to a cluttered look. Thanks to all the companies adopting this packaging. It will make my software library look more organized now.

We still have two vacancies on our Board of Directors in Winners. If you are interested, please contact one the current officers or board members and let us know of your interest.

See you at the next meeting.

Steve

rate of 5 MB per second. It comes in 128, 256, 512 megabyte (MB), and 1 gigabyte (GB) capacity. There is a convenient push-out connector, and comes with password protection software. Marked as *preliminary* they have a designed USBCard Bluetooth. The one I liked the most, also marked *preliminary* (but I know they are coming out with it) is the Freecom FHD-xs. This is a external hard drive USB 2.0 powered. It is about the size of a floppy disk. There is a SYNC button for easy data synchronization. Then for the traditionalist they have the FHD2 Pro. It is a mobile external hard drive, USB 2.0 with 20, 40, and 80 GB sizes.

Fujifilm
http://www.fujifilm.com

Fuji Photo Film announced the development of a patented, organic dye that will eventually allow DVD-R recording capabilities at speeds spanning 1X to 16X. The unique dye coating will ultimately make it possible to record the equivalent of a full-length, two-hour movie in less than five minutes. Additionally, this new dye coating can be used in the manufacture of a Blue-Violet LASER write-once optical disc, with recording capacity of 23.3 GB. Their upcoming 1 GB xD-Picture Card Flash Memory card, will be available in fall of 2004. The xD-Picture Card is comparable in size to a penny. Current capacity is from 16 MB to 512 Mb, with capacity expected to reach 8 GB on a single card in the near future. NANOCUBIC technology will deliver data cartridges and digital videotapes that can store one-terabyte native (uncompressed) and floppy disk capacities to three gigabytes.

HP
http://www.hp.com

Their USB digital drive is unique in that it is upgradeable. You buy the casing for $25. You then buy the memory for it,

which is Secure Digital (SD). So if you find your 32MB card is not enough, just buy a 64, 128, 256, or up to 512MB SD card. Slide the old SD card out, put the larger one in and you are set. The unit has a pull out connection for easy insertion. It uses USB 1.0

IOGEAR
http://www.iogear.com

Somewhat different IOGEAR combined 32MB of flash memory and a mouse. With a retractable cable to avoid

tangles, it has 800 dpi resolution. Their 2.5" ION hard drive connects with USB 2.0 with sizes of 20, 30, 40, 60, and 80 gigabytes. Transfer rate is 480Mpbs.

Lexar Media
http://www.lexarmedia.com

Think of a flash drive, super size it, and you come up with the JumpDrive 2.0 Pro. It is a USB 2.0 flash drive going up to 2 Gigabytes. The increased storage capacity of the is supported by a 40X speed rating. JumpDrive Traveler is a

USB 2.0 flash drive that enables Internet browsing from Internet connected computers without leaving history or session information on the host computer. It allows users to access email, bookmarks and other personalized Web settings from PC computers. Additionally, the software provides file synchronization to quickly and easily update files. To do this it stores Internet activities, such as URL histories and cookies, onto the USB flash drive, and securely erases them from the hard drive of the host computer when the user exits the program.

MediaGear
http://www.mediagear.com

They don't really have a flash drive. What they do have are cases for you to put in digital media into. This lets you use

some of the extra or old digital media, and turn that into a flash drive. You can use CompactFlash (CF) I & II, MicroDrive, xD-Picture card, SmartMedia, MemoryStick or MemoryStick Pro, or Secure Digital (SD).

Memorex
http://www.memorex.com

ThumbDrive USB 2.0 is perfect for storing data, digital photos, video and MP3 files. It boasts a category-leading 8 MB per second data read speed that is up to 50 percent faster than competitor models. Available with 128MB, 256MB and 512MB of storage.

Norcent
http://www.norcent.net

The Norcent 2.5" external hard drive connects via USB 2.0, with a transfer rate of 480Mbps. Sizes are 20, 40, and 60 GB. Yes they have USB thumb drives with sizes being 64 to 256 MB. If you want something different take a look at the UP-1001 Ball Point pen USB drive. Interface is USB 2.0 data transfer rate of 480Mbps. Memory capacity is 64MB to 256MB. Now, really different is their Watch Drive – tells the time and stores your data at the same time. Shock Proof and Anti-static, USB 2.0, memory capacity is 32MB to 256MB, and comes with a LED status indicator.

SanDisk

SanDisk Corporation introduced a 512 MB and 1 GB version of the Cruzer™ Mini, an embedded USB 2.0 hi-speed "key chain" flash drive. The Cruzer™ Titanium is a USB 2.0 hi-speed flash drive with a write speed rating of 13 MB per second and a read speed of 15MB per second. The drive has a titanium-coated metal casing, and a suggested retail price of $199.99 for the 512MB version. CruzerLock is a file encryption product that safeguards user-selected files or data from being accessed by others in case the device is lost or stolen. They also have a 2 GB SanDisk Memory Stick® PRO™, the highest capacity available in this card format.

Toshiba

Toshiba showed a 0.85-inch hard disk drive (HDD), the first drive to deliver multi-gigabyte storage in a sub-one-inch form factor. It was remarkable to see it in the display case. Expected to be available in 2GB and 4GB capacities, Toshiba will start sampling the new drive in summer 2004, with mass production to begin in

late 2004. Expected to boost the functionality of a new generation of products, including mobile phones, digital audio players, PDAs, digital still cameras, camcorders and external storage devices. Available now is 1.8-inch embedded hard disk drives in 20GB (single platter) and 40GB (dual platter) capacities.

Verbatim

Store 'n' Go USB Drives are USB 2.0 flash drives with sizes ranging from 32MB all the way up to 1GB capacity. Password security features protect your data from unauthorized access. Granted, the CD/DVD discs are not terribly exciting, but I did think their Vinyl CD and movie DVD discs were cool looking.

CES Digital Cameras (video & still)

Canon

Canon's three new digital camcorders ZR80, ZR85 and ZR90 will be in stores beginning in March for estimated selling prices of $399, $499 and $599. Enhancements found in the digital camcorders include: *Skin Detail Mode* that automatically recognizes and softens skin tones when shooting close-ups of

people; *End Search* feature that locates the end of the last recorded scene with one touch of the button; record *Motion JPEG* – short movie clips saved to the SD Memory card for easy email attachment. Optical zoom is 18x on the ZR80, 20x on the ZR85 and 22x on the ZR90 models. Factor in the 360x digital zoom on ZR80 model, the 400x digital zoom on the ZR85 unit and the 440x digital zoom on the ZR90 model. The camcorders feature a 2.5" LCD Screen, a Color Viewfinder, an IEEE 1394 terminal, an assortment of digital effects and fades, and a seven setting Program AE function that offers a choice of Easy Recording, Auto, Sports, Portraits, Sand & Snow, Low-Light and Night shooting modes.

Concord Camera

Featuring a 3.1 Megapixel CCD the Concord Eye-Q 3341z has a 3X optical/4X digital zoom. Their Eye-Q 4360z is a 4 Megapixel (MP) digital camera with 3x optical and 6x digital zoom. Both comes with 16 MB of internal memory and use SD memory. They can record AVI video clips at 320x240 resolution at 30 frames per second. The 4360z has a burst speed of 7 images at 3 images per second. It has macro focus of 10cm, auto and user selectable white balance and preset exposure modes. The Concord Eye-Q 2040 is a 2.0 megapixels, (1600 x 1200

Resolution), with 4x digital zoom. It also uses SD memory. What I liked about it was the rubberized feel, smooth yet easy to grip.

Hitachi

Hitachi showed the UltraVision Digital® DZ-MV550A, and DZ-MV580A camcorders. They comes with light chassis with a comfortable grip and a new Quick Mode menu function that allows for easier navigation through the camcorder's menu system. Additionally, the DZ-MV580A adds an optional 16x9 widescreen filming format for DVD-RAM recording. The camcorders can record digital still photos directly to the DVD-RAM disc or to a MultiMediaCard (MMC) or Secure Digital (SD) flash memory card. Users can select between increased recording quality or extended recording time. The camcorder's DVD-R function shoots approximately 30 minutes of high quality DVD video in fine mode or approximately 60 minutes in standard mode. The DVD-RAM discs offer in-camera editing. This allows consumers to shuffle scenes and add special transition effects including fades and wipes without the need for a computer.

JJ Communications

Not your usual digital camera. This one is made for close ups. Shaped like a electric toothbrush with a lens on the end. It literally is a digital microscope for $200. It will magnify images up to 150 times. Hook it up to the computer through the USB cable and display the image on the monitor. Medical professionals can use it for examinations, or a hobbyist engineer can examine objects in great detail. It can also double as a web cam for video conferencing.

Kodak

The EASYSHARE LS743 camera boasts a 4 MP resolution and 16 megabytes (MB) of internal memory, allowing photo enlargements up to 20 x 30 inches. The EASYSHARE LS753 camera goes one step further with 5 MP resolution and 32 MB of internal memory. They have large 1.8-inch high-resolution indoor/outdoor LCD screens. The Share button also allows individuals to immediately select photos for printing

and even e-mailing, with up to 32 e-mail addresses stored in the cameras' memory. Both feature a new, professional-quality SCHNEIDER-KREUZNACH C-VARIOGON 2.8X compact optical zoom lens and the new KODAK Color Science image processing chip for phenomenal image quality with rich color, accurate skin tones, low noise and precise exposure. TV-resolution (VGA) movie capture and playback capability, multiple sound themes, and a SD card/MMC memory expansion slot.

Kyocera
http://www.kyoceraimaging.com

The Finecam SL300R impressed me. It is a 3.17 megapixel camera that is small (3.9"W x 2.5"H x 6"D) light and yet easy to work with. Using what they call RTUNE Image Processing Technology, from the time you turn it on and it is ready for you to take a picture, is less than a second. With a shutter lag time of .07

second it can capture 3.5 frames per second. It has a 3x optical zoom, and uses SD memory. Focus is Wide, Spot, Manual Macro, and Infinity. The swivel lens/flash body rotates for the hard to capture/view shots. Shoots movies at 30 frames per second up to the limit of the card.

Olympus
http://www.olympusamerica.com

At 3.2 MP the D-560 is a compact digital camera with 3x optical zoom, and 3.3x digital zoom. Choose between Portrait, Self-portrait, Landscape, and Night Scene mode for desired results or mix it up and record a mini movie via

QuickTime® movie mode. PictBridge™ technology lets you print directly from any PictBridge-enabled printer. It uses the Olympus brand xD-Picture Card. It can take panoramic pictures.

Norcent
http://www.norcent.net

A 4 MP digital camera the Norcent 4800Z has a 3x optical zoom lens. The LCD panel is 1.5" TFT, (110,000pixels), comes with build in 16MB flash memory, and uses SD memory. Preview mode has a 4x digital zoom. The Norcent 5000Z is a 5MP digital camera with the same features as the 4800Z.

PENTAX
http://www.pentaxusa.com

PENTAX's new 3.2MP Optio33LF digital camera comes with an LCD monitor that swivels 180 degrees horizontally and up to 270 degrees vertically. Features include a movie mode to record video, a variety of picture and shooting modes, 12 MB of internal memory, and built-in auto flash. It has a 3x optical zoom lens that combines with a 2.7x digital zoom for a total zooming capacity of 8.1X zoom. Macro mode lets you capture images as close as 0.33 ft (0.1m). There are seven picture modes including Portrait, Self-portrait, Flower, Sunset, Landscape, Surf, and Snow. Simple selection of Movie mode allows movie files without sound to be recorded with durations from one second to 30 seconds for MultiMediaCard use, or up to available memory card capacity for SD memory card use. The video files are recorded with the clarity of 320 x 240 pixels in AVI format.

Philips
http://www.philips.com

Philips Electronics' Key Ring digital camcorder (KEY07) serves as a digital camera, with 640x480 resolution. Operation of the camcorder is simple with its one button control, direct USB plug and play, and direct battery recharge

through the USB. For added convenience, the Key Ring allows users to carry data files with them for easy transfer. Available in retail May 2004 at a suggested retail price of $64.00. With 64MB users can take up to 400 1.3 Mega pixel quality pictures, or store and carry data files equal to 44 floppy disks.

Sharp
http://www.sharpusa.com

Sharp introduced the VL-500 and VL-800 models. They feature a color 2.5 inch CG Silicon LCD for views under all lighting conditions. It can be turned 240 degrees. It has a 10x optical zoom with a 700x digital zoom. The battery will last for 2 hours. It can take 1.33 MP digital stills, and can record in 16:9 widescreen. There is a SD card slot. Connects with USB or iLink.

Toshiba
http://www.toshiba.com

The new PDR-4300 is a four megapixel digital camera with 2.8x optical and 2.2x digital zoom. The lens is an all-glass f-2.9 with a 35mm focal range of 35mm to 100mm. The lens is designed for use with conversion lenses and filters from Tiffen. Shutter speed is 1/2 -1/1000 second. It will record video at 16 fps without audio at 320x240. Their PDR-5300 is a 5.0 megapixel camera with 3x optical and 4x digital zoom. It records video at 320x240. Both use SD memory.

Veo
http://www.veo.com

Veo showed the Photo Traveler 130S™ a 1.3 megapixel camera designed to utilize Secure Digital IO™ (SDIO) card slots on select handheld devices. It has standardized JPEG encoding, which allows users to easily transfer photos between devices or print 3"x5" photos directly from their handheld. The lens design features a 180 degree swivel lens. Their Wireless Observer uses 802.11b and can be placed up to 300 feet from any

WiFi access point. Both have 640x480 resolution.

Vivitar
http://www.vivitar.com

The VIVICAM 4000 digital camera is a compact 6.36 megapixel with 3x Optical Zoom for $600. Available May, 2004 it's shutter speeds is from 8-1/1500 second. The macro function allows

images to be made at distances as close as 4 inches. The LCD display is a 2.2" color TFT. Video clips may be recorded at either 640 x 480 or 320 x 240 resolution with sound. The ViviCam 3935 is a 5.25MP digital camera with 3x optical zoom and movie-clip capability. It has 11 MB of internal memory. Maximum resolution of 2560 x 1920 for still-images or 320 x 240 for movie clips with audio. Both cameras use SD memory cards. Just for the fun of it look at the MagnaCam 10x25x1Compact Binoculars with built in

digital camera. It has 10x magnification in a lightweight and compact binocular with the added benefit of being able to photograph your images and transfer still images, or movie clips to your PC.

Accessories For Digital Cameras

Epson
http://www.epson.com

The Epson P-1000 has a 10 GB hard drive and can print directly to select

Epson printers. With it users can simply take their CompactFlash Type I and II, IBM Microdrive™, Memory Stick®, Smart Media™, and Secure Digital, pop it into the unit to download and print the images. It has a 3.8" LCD high resolution screen to display up to 262,144 colors. The user can also zoom in and rotate images to inspect them closely. Users can even play back the images as a slideshow for viewing and sharing quickly, and easily. If the user wants to share images on an even bigger screen, the photo viewer has a video interface—NTSC or PAL—that can connect directly to a television, monitor or projector with video input.

MediaGear
http://www.mymediagear.com

For storage the MediaGear Flash-HD 40GB drive lets you copy your images from any Flash Media to it. It reads CompactFlash Type I and II, IBM Microdrive, Memory Stick, Memory Stick Pro, Smart Media, Secure Digital (SD), MultiMediaCard (MMC), and eXtreme Digital (xD). It works with USB 2.0. Simply put the media in the appropriate slot, press the button, and your images are copied to the hard drive. The 40GB is a pocket size with a suggested retail price of $300. They also have a desktop model with 120GB, and the SRP for it is $250.

Pacific Digital
http://www.PacificDigital.com

New digital products include Wireless MemoryFrame™. A stand-alone, 80-image, stereo-sound, electronic photo album. Transfer photos wirelessly from a PC over 802.11b, or from a digital camera, or card-reader over USB directly into it. The images are displayed on a 8x10 inch TFT flat screen LCD screen. Comes with software that allows users to add captions, stereo sound and special effects to slideshows. They also have a 5x7 inch version.

ImageScape

ImageScape is a gathering of press people for showing of products related to digital imaging. I enjoy it because they have a panel of industry experts who gives their opinions of where technology is going. The following is some of the information I gathered there.

There are almost 70 million digital cameras in use. Digital cameras are now out selling film camera. Camera phones are limited by users not able to send the pictures to phones other than their own providers. To get pictures to others they upload to websites for others to see there. They expect camera phones sales to explode in the future, much like they are in Japan. They said the average person gets 22 photo emails a month. For those that don't get any, I think my nieces are making up for you by sending so many to me.

Some of the comments giving by digital camera users that are sore spots include;

- Too many steps to get picture
- Cables not included
- Something not compatible
- Don't have the time to learn how to use it
- Now that they have the pictures what do they do with them?

Storage issues for digital camera owners

- What format do I use to put them on a CD?
- Print images, always have hard copy last resort
- Store digital images in multiple ways
- CD/DVD
- Image management/archival software
- Online photo service
- Digital storage has huge benefits and drawbacks
- Must be managed in order to not lose precious memories.

Favorite way to share photos

- Email is #1 application for digital photos – it's great!
- Prints is #2 method
- Online photo albums are popular

Users comment on-line picture albums are great. They like the ease of showing them on TV. They do feel that the industry needs to prepare the user for what really needs to be done before being able to print, or store images

Executive Software Diskeeper

By Terry Currier

Do you have a lot of free time? Or rather, to be more precise, how much time do you give up waiting for your hard drive to finish defragging? I'm sure many of you have started the defrag program and go off to see a movie, shopping, or even leave it while you sleep. You keep putting it off because it takes so long. With Diskeeper 8.0 from Executive Software, it doesn't take up your whole afternoon. It is fast and easy. In fact, using what they call "set it and forget it," sets it up to run at a set time or day of the week. It can handle drive sizes up to four terabytes.
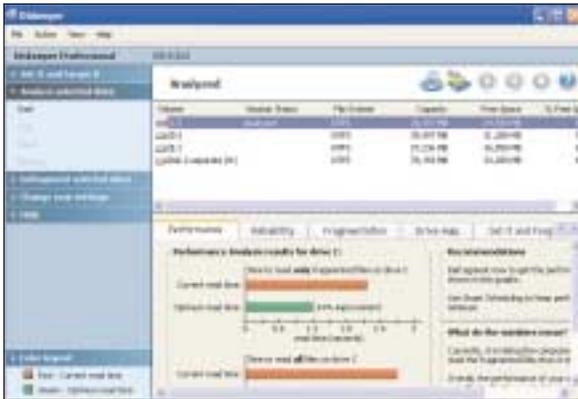
The point of defragging is to get all your files together. It helps the computer by taking a shorter time to find all of the files it needs to work with. The question you're asking is "How can it be faster?" Well, the defrag that comes with Windows looks at everything, including what you use the most often and moves them up closer to the front. The reading and moving up files takes a long time, a loooong time. Diskkeeper realizes that things don't really have to be moved up. It reads/looks only for fragmented files. It tells you how many there are and the amount of improvement there would be after defragging those files. If you then tell it to go

ahead, it will then consolidate just those files. To explain why only those files, I will cheat and use their own explanation.

Free space consolidation might be important if you have to create one gigantic contiguous file, but it has no effect on performance. As a result, Diskeeper uses algorithms that achieve the highest speed from your drive regardless of the arrangement of the free spaces on the drive and on the screen. And it does so without wasting time on excessive consolidation of free space. We simply go for the fastest possible file access times and then stop.

Even so, you might ask, why we don't continue and rearrange the files further to get a neat display? The answer is, 'Because it takes computer power to do so.' We long ago decided that it would be wrong to consume more of your computer's performance than we give back. So Diskeeper defragments until the disk is in top shape PERFORMANCE-wise and then stops. Any further work is a waste of your computer resources.

A step forward—you can have it defrag your Master File Table (MFT) that the operating system uses for locating the files. You do that by making changes in the setup so when you do a manual reboot it will defrag the MFT. Doing this can open up larger areas of contiguous free space for new file creation and modification. They

do make a recommendation of backing up before doing so. I did it and it took a whole eight minutes. I notice that they have a run *CHKDSK* box for the user to check. This helps prevent corrupt files from being moved to bad disk sectors. In fact, I found out from the Microsoft website that they recommend running *CHKDSK* before using the defrag program.

Diskeeper Home Edition cost about $30 and is for home computers running Windows XP Home Edition or earlier. Diskeeper Professional Edition costs about $50 and is for the higher-end systems (so to speak) such as XP Professional, 2000, NT, Media Center, and Tablet. For enterprise systems they have the Diskeeper Administrator version.

I myself just do it manually, maybe every fourth day, and it only takes a few minutes to do all of my drives. By the way, while this is running, you can still do other things on the computer, not like the operating system defrag. Okay...it's not free but it does give you more free time, and what is that worth to you?

You can check out a 30 trial version at

http://www.execsoft.com/trialware/trialware.asp

Performance Analysis results for drive D:

Time to read **only** fragmented files on drive D

Current read time:

Optimum read time: 69% improvement

read time (milliseconds)
0   80   160   240   320   400
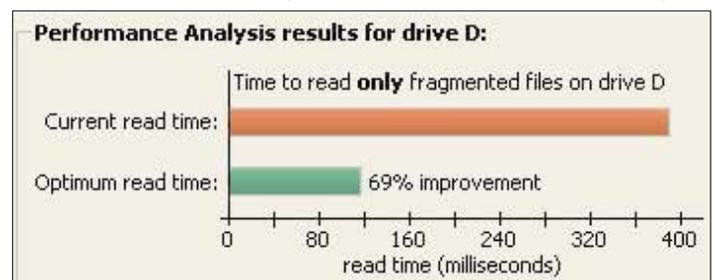
Netflix

By Terry Currier

Most of us have rented movies. We have for years rented various tapes from the Video Giant store near us. Now we have started watching DVDs and rented some of them. After all, the quality is much better with DVDs. You also often get deleted scenes that you would not get (because they would not fit) on video tape. But, we have not been in the Video Giant store for months. I have been using Netflix.com to rent DVDs.

If you rent 5-6 DVDs from a video store then you most likely would equal the monthly rental from Netflix. It cost $19.95 a month to belong. With that you can check out (rent) three movies at one time. You choose the movies and they send them to you in envelopes with prepaid return mailers. Couldn't be much easier. What it comes down to is how many movies you would rent for it to be a value to you? If you would normally spend $19.95 a month, then Netflix is definitely worth a try. By the way, they do have a free, one-month trial for new customers. They go first class each way so they normally arrive in two days to my house and when I return them, I get an acknowledgment from them quickly. With the quick turn around, I can normally watch at least one a day and send it back. That works out to my getting about 12 movies a month.

They have more than 15,000 movies for you to look over. I have to look at them and return them quickly, since my list queue (choices for them to send) is up to 32. My daughter, who has a collection of about 200 DVDs, is now asking me to rent ones that she can watch. They do have upgrade packages where for $39.95, you can take out up to 8 movies at a time, or for $29.95, up to 5 movies. I may have to do that just to catch up. You can sign up for a trial at
http://www.netflix.com

Ergonomic Gizmos

by John R. Chait D.C.,
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*Member of the Sarasota Personal
Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida*

How do you use your laptop?

Are you an occasional user who works on your laptop for short periods of time, or are you a full-time user with the laptop as your main computer? Occasional users will have less ergonomic risk of problems developing than full-time users.

Laptop Posture

Laptops violate basic ergonomic design requirements, so using a laptop is a tradeoff between poor neck/head posture and poor hand/wrist posture.

Occasional Users

Find a chair that is comfortable and that you can sit back in. Position your laptop in your lap for the most neutral wrist posture that you can achieve. Angle the laptop screen so that you can see it with the least amount of neck deviation.

Full-time Users

Position this on your desk in front of you so that you can see the screen without bending your neck. This may require that you elevate the laptop off the desk surface using a stable support surface, such as a computer monitor pedestal. Use a separate keyboard and mouse. You should be able to connect a keyboard and mouse directly to the back of the laptop or to a docking station.

Use the keyboard on a negative-tilt keyboard tray to ensure a wrist neutral posture. Use the mouse on an adjustable position mouse platform. The design of laptops violates a basic ergonomic requirement for a computer, namely that the keyboard and screen are separated. In the early days of personal computing desktop devices integrated the screen and keyboard into a single unit, and this resulted in widespread complaints of musculoskeletal discomfort. By the late 1970s, a number of ergonomics design guidelines were written and all called for the separation of screen and keyboard. The reason is simple, if the keyboard is in an optimal position for the user, the screen isn't and if the screen is optimal the keyboard isn't. Consequently, laptops are excluded from current ergonomic design requirements because none of the designs satisfy this basic need. This means that you need to pay special attention to how you use your laptop because it can cause you problems.

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Under Attack by Cyber Worms

By Ira Wilsker

If you use email, as you most likely do, you may have noticed the recent increased onslaught of worms and viruses. Using a variety of techniques, the latest attacks are once again flooding our inboxes with dangerous content, as well as seeking out security holes in our systems and attacking us through our internet and network connections.

One insidious family of new pests is the group referred to as the "Bagel" or "Beagle" virus and worm family. Now spreading endemically, as I type this, are sixteen variants, referred to by the sequential letters "A" through "K". These nasties were explicitly designed to slip through most spam filters, and many antivirus scans, by concealing their malicious payload in a

password-protected zip (compressed) file that can only be opened by opening the email, and clicking on the attachment, and entering the password shown. The rapid appearance of the many variants also makes it easier to slip through our antivirus defenses, and more difficult to protect against. While most of us are reluctant to click on attachments from unknown senders, these creatures try to use "human engineering" to trick us into opening the email and activating the attachment. This is accomplished by spoofing the "From:" line and making it falsely appear to be from the management, tech support, email server, billing department, or other department of your ISP (Internet Service provider). They use an internal template to create a variety of subjects and messages incorporating the name of the ISP in order to appear to be authentic. Some of the common subject lines are "E-mail account security warning," "Warning

about your e-mail account," "Email account utilization warning," "E-mail account disabling warning," and similar subjects. The body of the message typically starts with some variation of "Dear user of (the name of your ISP)," followed by text indicating that your email account is about to be disabled, you have been sending out infected emails, the email server will be shut down, and similar attention getters. The punch line may be of the type "For more information see the attached file" or "Please, read the attachment for further details." To make it look even more legitimate and secure (and to bypass spam and virus filtering) it may contain a closing line to the effect of "For security reasons attached file is password protected" or "The password is (password)."

The infected email is signed with "Sincerely," or "Best wishes," or some nicety, and often has a tagline "The team, http://www.(the name of your ISP)"

Attached to the email is an innocent looking file possibly with the filename (ending in ".zip") "Information," "Readme," "Document," "Message," or some other innocuous name. If this file is opened, and your antivirus software does not detect the payload, the computer will be instantly infected. Once infected, the worm will search your computer for any email addresses, and use its built-in email utility to replicate itself to the email addresses found on your computer, again spoofing the name of the recipient's ISP as the sender. If you think about it, this is both a clever way to entice even a suspicious victim into opening the attachment and infecting his computer, and an insidious thing to do to countless thousands of innocent victims. One of the common payloads in the Bagel/Beagle series is a utility that deactivates many of the popular antivirus programs and prevents them from being updated, leaving the computer open to later attacks. Some versions also open a port through a firewall (ZoneAlarm is often targeted) allowing external "backdoor" access to the computer, and broadcasting the IP address of the vulnerable computer over the Internet. Fortunately, many of

the Bagel/Beagle variants have code in them that will cease their propaga- tion between March 14 and 25.

In another trick, some of the new virus and worm writers are trying to fool us into believing that their content is safe by including a falsehood either in its subject or as a closing tagline that the message has been scanned by a major antivirus program (most often Norton AntiVirus). Just because an email is from someone you know, and contains a line indicating that it is certified as safe, do not believe it. The creator of the worm is lying to you by concealing the real sender by spoofing the "From:" line to appear that it is from an acquaintance, and including the "certified virus free" tag.

The massive recent attacks by the authors of the Netsky, MyDoom, and Bagel/Beagle viruses and worms have created a battle among themselves, indicated by messages encoded in their respective payloads. According to several antivirus companies, the code includes attacks on each other, such as when Netsky attacks a computer already infected with MyDoom or Bagel/Beagle, Netsky tries to deactivate them, while installing its own malicious code, and stating "We kill malware writers. They have no chance." The author of Bagel responded in a quickly released variant "Hey Netsky... Don't ruin our business. Wanna start a war?" Later variants of these three malicious products have continued the dispute.

Wouldn't it be nice if these virus authors spent more time and effort fighting each other, and less time trying to infect our computers?

FREE online virus scans are available at the following websites:

http://housecall.antivirus.com
http://www.pandasoftware.com
http://www.bitdefender.com
http://us.mcafee.com

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IRS Again Offers Free Online Filing Services

By Ira Wilsker

We should have received all of our W-2's, 1099's, and other tax forms by now. Many of us struggle filling out tax forms manually, trying to decipher forms that have so many links and connections you feel that you have to be a genius octopus to connect all of the parts. Some of us use one of the popular tax software packages such as Tax Cut or TurboTax, and others use accountants or commercial services to prepare our most dreaded of forms. For those looking for an alternative, the IRS is again coordinating a variety of free online filing services.

The logical starting place is the IRS website at www.irs.gov. At the top of the page is a link "Free File – Start Here for Free Online Filing." Clicking on the link opens a new page with pre-filing tips, step-by-step instructions, and a "help center" with frequently asked questions.

While the free filing services are coordinated and regulated by the IRS, the services themselves are provided by a number of individual profit seeking companies or non-profit organizations. Any company listed is prohibited from mandating the purchase of any additional services, and the listed services must be absolutely free to those qualified to use the services.

The IRS site also states, "IRS Free File does not endorse Refund Anticipation Loans (RALs) or any other advance refund banking products."

The site also states that your privacy and financial information will be protected by the providers listed, and that these providers must meet commercial privacy and security standards, and be certified as such by a recognized issuer of privacy and security certifications.

The process of getting started is a rather simple three step process.

First is the "Start Now" button on the "Free Online Filing" web page; second is a determination of eligibility, as different providers have different requirements; finally the third step is linking to the private provider's website, separate from the IRS site. If you find that you are ineligible for a particular company's free offerings, simply return to the IRS site and repeat the process by selecting another likely service. It should be noted that while millions of us are eligible for these free services, many of us will find that we are ineligible for any of many reasons. Once a satisfactory service has been selected, then the tax return information is completed online, with the completed documents being "e-Filed," or electronically filed with the IRS.

Fifteen online providers of free filing services are listed. Each has its own requirements that may be based on residence, income, age, military status, and other factors. While some services are clearly for lower income individuals, some of the free services are available for individuals who have an adjusted gross income (AGI) of up to $100,000. Some are available to residents of specific states, regardless of income level. None of the listed services offered free filing to Texas residents without regard to income level, though an even dozen of the services are available at no charge to Texas residents who meet other requirements. One of the services, FreeTaxUSA, is listed as available to all Louisiana residents at no charge. Several of the companies listed provide free service to all active duty military personnel, regardless of residence or income. Some services provide unrestricted service based on age, either younger than early 20s, or older than 62 years of age.

For those unsure about which service to consider, a button on the IRS page "Guide me To A Service!" uses a simple form to direct the user to appropriate services based on a short series of personal questions. These questions are age, estimated adjusted gross income, state of residence, number of W-2 forms, possibility of using a form 1040EZ, probable eligibility for the "Earned Income Credit", and military service. Once completed, a list of likely service providers is presented, allowing for the user to easily choose a provider.

All of the providers in what the IRS refers to as the "Free File Alliance" provide for electronic filing of tax returns.

E-Filing, as the IRS calls it is relatively safe and secure, and, according to the IRS website, can generate refunds in as little as 10 days, with faster refund service available to those who select having their refunds direct deposited to their bank or credit union accounts.

While these services are freely available online at no charge to many, they may not necessarily be the best alternative. Even if eligible to utilize one of these free services, the onus of decision making is solely on the individual, as most provide no comprehensive tax advice, meaning that it is quite possible for the user to miss deductions or credits that he may be eligible for, thus overpaying. It is also the responsibility of the user to accurately and completely enter data, as there is no one to verify the accuracy of the data entered. To use an early cyber cliché, "GIGO," which means "Garbage in—Garbage Out," the final return can only be as accurate as the information entered.

Clearly, the free filing alternatives may be attractive to many individuals, but for many others the more traditional tax preparations resources may be a superior alternative. The choice is yours; choose wisely.

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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.

March 13 9 a.m. to 12 noon
Orange Coast College
Science Building Room #149

Digital Camera Workshop

The Digital Photo Guy (TDPG) Digital Camera Workshops or Presentations are for regular people who simply want to know how to use their digital cameras and get more out of their digital photos. Lee covers two basic topics: 1) How to get the most out of a digital camera (or how to buy one) and 2) How to share and display great digital photos. The target audience is people who want to buy their first digital camera, those who recently bought a digital camera or those who want to do more with their photos.

Lee's Credentials

As a former engineer, marketing executive and assistant professor, Lee Otsubo is able to explain complex technologies thru simple-to-understand terms and analogies. Lee's engineering background enables him to dissect the technology and his marketing experience helps him reduce the jargon down to easy-to-understand features and benefits. Over the past year, TDPG has presented to over 5000 attendees at resorts, PC user groups, retirement communities, senior centers, conferences and many other venues.

After the meeting the PIG SIG will go to China Olive Restaurant
3420 S Bristol St, Santa Ana, CA 92704-7248
Phone: (714) 957-2688

SAN DIEGO FWY. 405

ADAMS AVE.

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MERRIMAC PARKING

Lewis Center

Room #149

FAIRVIEW DR.

P

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