

The Plain Truth about Casual Software Piracy

by Matt Slot, Ambrosia Software

Here's a fascinating article about piracy and how it affects a small software firm.

It's a rare day when a shareware programmer gets firm statistics on the extent of software piracy, but just recently, I got that chance.

You see, the company I work for, Ambrosia Software, writes and publishes shareware—software that encourages users to make lots of copies and share them with friends. It works like this: we write a game or utility and make it available for download and on low-cost CDs, so you can install it and try it out for a while—kick the tires and drive it around the block a few times, so to speak. If you like it, you can buy the product; if not, just delete it or pass the CD on to someone else.

<http://www.ambrosiasw.com>

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Bits & Bytes & Xp

By Siles Bazerman

Some vicious virus writers and distributors (Are there any other kind?) have added a new wrinkle to the game. They are sending e-mail purportedly from Microsoft with an attachment. The attachment is supposed to be a patch or fix for a virus problem. In reality, it is the VIRUS! Now that this ruse has been exposed to the public, look for similar e-mails from "Symantec," "Computer Associates (McAfee)," and all the other anti-virus companies. Remember, none of them distribute patches or updates this way. At the most, if you are a subscriber to any anti-virus program, you will get an e-mail notice that an update is available for download at a company site. Microsoft does not issue virus patches. They do have security updates available at their FTP and HTTP sites, but again, unless you subscribe to one of a number of their services, you will not get anything. If you are a subscriber, you might get an advisory telling you of the availability of the fix and where to download it. It is only in extremely rare cases and after personal contact with Tech Support that you might get a direct attachment. I have never seen this happen and have only heard rumors about it.



I review three Usenet Newsgroups daily regarding Windows Xp. I have noted very few actual problems with the operating system itself. The vast majority of questions and discussions fall into about three categories.

Windows Activation

A large number of people seem unable to grasp the concept that they need to have a separate license for Windows Xp for each and every computer they wish to install it on. They argue about it constantly and make rationalizations about it. They are met with counter arguments ad infinitum. Neither side takes into account that the EULA has never been tested in court and is an agreement, not law.

Self-inflicted problems

Some users blindly install Windows Xp without ever checking if their hardware will support it, or if their software is compatible. They do not run the compatibility checks or, if they do, they do not believe the results. Windows Xp is much more demanding of hardware and particularly of memory. Marginal chips that will run Windows 98 or even Windows Me will not work with Windows Xp. Memory can be checked by use of a free download of Memdoc. Compatibility can be checked by either a download from Microsoft, or on the Windows Xp CD or on free disks available from a

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Telephone Help Line

| PROGRAM/SOFTWARE | NAME | PHONE | TIME |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|---|
| CompuServe | Cathy Grammer-Margolin | 949-645-5950 | 6-10 p.m. & weekends |
| CorelDraw 5 | George Margolin | 949-645-5950 | Most times |
| CorelDraw & Ventura & PhotoPaint | Sunny Lockie | 949-644-0103 | 6-10 p.m. weekdays 9 a.m.-10 p.m. weekends |
| Hardware | Jonathan Means | 714-542-2204 | 6-9 p.m. |
| Internet | Cathy Grammer-Margolin | 949-645-5950 | 6-10 p.m. & weekends |
| Novell, NT & Networking | Jonathan Means | 714-542-2204 | 6-9 p.m. |
| Quicken & Quickbooks | Max Lockie | 949-720-8170 | 6-10 p.m. & weekends |
| Windows 95,98,Me,Xp | Siles Bazerman | 714-897-2868 | 9 a.m.-8 p.m. |
| Word for Windows | Cathy Grammar-Margolin | 949-645-5950 | 6-10 p.m. & weekends |
| WordPerfect Windows | Sunny Lockie | 949-644-0103 | 6-10 p.m. weekdays 9 a.m.-10 p.m. weekends |

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Ed Koran 562-427-2560
edk246@aol.com

Info/Message Line 949-644-0295

Website:

<http://members.aol.com/ocwinners>

FUTURE MEETING DATES

- ★ April 13
- ★ May 11
- ★ June 8
- ★ July 13

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

Digital Photograph

*Pig Sig at Soup Plantation
near Harbor & Adams in Costa Mesa*

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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.

number of sources. It is very accurate.

Failure to update drivers

Just because the driver for your hardware worked in Windows 98 does not guarantee it will be suitable for Windows Xp. Many companies have updated the drivers for their products across the line, but some will only update their most recent products. They do not seem to care if they leave the owners of older devices high and dry.

The remaining problems seem to revolve around two pieces of hardware—video cards and CD Writers. Video cards are a problem as far as picking the correct driver from the multitude out there. Many cards will work with the generic drivers that are supplied with Windows Xp, but not all features are implemented by these drivers. Windows 2000 drivers will usually work if you are lacking specific drivers for Windows Xp. Also, AGP cards may have to be cut back from 4x which worked with an earlier OS to 2x or even 1x to work properly. Refresh rates also have to be carefully checked and correctly assigned.

CD writing, both hardware and software, seems to be an ongoing problem. Many older CD-Rom devices are no longer supported by the software companies. Both Roxio (EZCD) and Ahead (Nero) maintain lists of supported units on their web sites. The software that comes with brand new CDRW or CD-Rom units should specify if it is for Windows Xp. Any updating must follow the instructions for not only the order that patches must be applied, but when to reboot or not reboot. If this is not done precisely, the update will fail. Uninstalls must also be done exactly as outlined on the web sites.

The last problem concerns DOS legacy problems. DOS is non-existent

President's Message

The reach of the Internet

By Terry Currier

The reach of the Internet sometimes amazes me. I wrote an article in 1998 about the Slides and Sounds presentation program. About a year and a half later the company stopped making it. It was put on the North Orange County Computer Club web site. A couple of times a year I get an emails asking for information about the program. This latest one really amazed me

I beg it, if possible, of give me any information on her I recover of a copy of the Software "Slides & Sounds" of INMEDIA Presents. Thank you! Yours sincerely.

GINO GAGLIARDI Architect - Italy

I think that is a pretty far reach.

At our last meeting, we talked about how to back up your computer. I mentioned that as a safety net, I make a copy of my system files. I copy my system.dat, user.dat, win.ini, and system.ini to a folder I named backup. If my computer crashes or a new program messes it up I replace the corrupted files with my backups. I said I created a batch file to copy the files over in case of a problem. You have to change the attributes of the *.dat files or you can not replace them.

```
attrib \windows\system.dat -h
attrib \windows\system.dat -r
attrib \windows\system.dat -s
attrib \windows\user.dat -h
attrib \windows\user.dat -r
attrib \windows\user.dat -s
copy *.dat \windows
copy *.ini \windows
```

Spring Internet World is coming to the Los Angeles Convention Center April 24-26. to see information about it go to

<http://www.internetworld.com/events/spring2002>

Terry

in Windows Xp. There is a DOS Box available that can be accessed from the run line as CMD or Command. The latter works better for most purposes. If this does not run the program, then try it in the compatibility mode as Windows 98 or Windows 95, if it ran in either of those two. If it required a reboot to

DOS, then do just that. Use a DOS boot disk and then run your program. Boot disks can be made with Windows Explorer, right clicking on the A drive and choosing format. Did you know you can download just about any type of boot disk you want from www.bootdisk.com?

PIRACY

Continued from page 1

We make money, and stay in business, by selling software that competes with commercial products for quality and entertainment value, while remaining priced so that it doesn't stretch the pizza-and-beer budget of the average college student. There's no bait-and-switch going on. You get a fair chance to try out the product and decide if your \$25 could be better spent elsewhere. We think our software is competitive—25 will cover a burger run and movie ticket for about three hours of entertainment, but a good game can entertain you for days or weeks—and we won't make you watch Jar Jar Binks.

A few years back, Ambrosia's software was distributed on the honor system. You could download the software and use it forever, scot-free except for the friendly reminders that you had the software for 1,500 days and still hadn't beaten level 6. This was obviously a big leap of faith on our part, but it built up an almost cult following among Mac users. What we lost in sales, we made up in good will. As a business model, the honor system wasn't ideal, but it certainly was idealistic, and it helped put Ambrosia's founder, Andrew Welch, through college and kept Ambrosia's employees supplied with pizza and beer. (I think there's a law of conservation at work there.)

This was all fine and good, except that eventually Andrew graduated and everyone else got sick of pizza and beer. Ambrosia grew from an interesting sideline into a full time place of employment. The company became an entity with its own purpose, its own office space, and its own gravitational pull. It also developed an insatiable appetite for cash, because as any MBA will tell you, the lifeblood of business is green.

This period of growth and rampant consumption was constrained only by the limited diet afforded by the generosity and honesty of others. Basically, money was tight. One way we encouraged users to pay for the game *Escape Velocity* was to introduce the character of Captain Hector, who would remind (and eventually harass) players who were still unregistered after an extended period of play. When we compared sales of *Escape Velocity* to those of our previous products, it became apparent that either pizza and beer had become a lot more expensive or that some people needed an extra nudge—such as from Captain Hector—to do the right thing and pay up.

Locking the Front Door

Shortly after I joined the Ambrosia team, Andrew forwarded me an article that illustrated the benefits of crippling software. In short, the author of a shareware program found that people were five times more likely to register and unlock a crippled version of his software than they were to register software that came fully functional from the outset. It was the final straw in our camel-breaking, decision-making process. We would still make shareware, but we would no longer stand there waiting for handouts on the street. We'd charge admission.

<http://hackvan.com/pub/stig/articles/why-do-people-register-shareware.html>

Let me tell you, we heard about it. Many who had praised us for our idealism were now calling us sellouts. It didn't matter that little changed for our paying customers. They still got their codes quickly, and had unlimited access to the game. It was the principle of the thing. Okay, it was a little inconvenient if you'd lost your code or wanted to install it on your new Power Mac 7500, but we could

resolve that quickly in response to a phone call or an email.

I mean, we like being cool and fair, but even a cult following can get tiresome. (Cultists don't shower, they track in mud, and they leave you to pick up the check.) Besides, the mantra kept repeating in our heads: five times as many registrations, five times, five times. I don't think it ever was quite that good for us, but we definitely saw an increase in sales that helped Ambrosia weather some tough times. (No, we never actually ran out of pizza, but there were times when we had to mop up spilled beer with borrowed rolls of toilet paper.) It was a hard decision, but it was a business decision, and it turned out to be the right one.

Time passed. Our staff continued to grow and evolve, and my wife and I begat our son. Luke. Nothing brings home how untenable your professional and financial situation is like having a family. When it was just my wife and me, we could fool ourselves into thinking that we were just coed roommates living on a college budget—but no more. Pizza and beer had given way to diapers and life insurance.

Diapers and Life Insurance

So I'm working for this shareware company, and I want to make sure that my job is secure. You have to understand that even a 10 percent variance in Ambrosia's registrations means that someone may need to start checking the employment classifieds. At the same time, it's becoming more evident that people aren't just not paying for our software—they're actually going out of their way to share license codes with others over the Internet. Some ingenious folks have even reverse-engineered our software and figured out how to generate their own license codes.

We don't live with our heads in the sand. We knew what was

happening. The Internet was the great facilitator of homework assignments and world peace, but it had also become a way for people to get registration codes for any software they wanted. We felt action was required, but we remembered the trauma of our last change in policy when we required people to register the software instead of just asking nicely.

So over the course of numerous lunches (many of which didn't include pizza or beer, but did involve some yummy sandwiches from Arby's), we discussed various ways for improving the whole registration system from our standpoint without making the process onerous for our loyal customers. Simplicity was the keyword. The final piece of the technical puzzle fell into place one weekend as I drove through Canada, when I recalled a bit of algebra that would make our license code algorithm quite secure without violating any treaties or munitions bans.

When I finally contacted Andrew, I said to him one word: polynomials.

The blank look on his face continued for a long time as I explained how we could factor the serial numbers, secure our products, and even distribute codes that would expire and stop working when exposed to prolonged sunlight. With his grudging consent, we sketched out and implemented the first pass at the "new Ambrosia registration system."

The fundamental change we made was to build the current date into the license code itself. That timestamp is then used at just one point in the process: it forces the user to activate the product within 30 days, or the code expires and won't activate anything. Now—and this is important—the timestamp has absolutely no effect on the operation of the software after the code has been entered. Once personalized for the user's computer, it remains fully

functional forever (unless someone wipes the system clean).

Snapz Pro X

The first product to use the new registration system was the latest version of our flagship utility, Snapz Pro X, which started shipping in June of 2001. Over the course of the summer, the system silently and steadfastly worked as intended. Most people didn't care that the license codes were now 12 digits instead of 8, and registrations continued apace. It wasn't until September that we received any negative feedback.

<http://www.snapzpro.com>

You see, in September Apple upgraded Mac OS X to version 10.1, and many people were paranoid enough to reformat and perform a clean install. That meant the data file containing the software registration was lost, forcing most people to reenter their license codes. It also meant that anyone whose serial number was generated before August needed to contact us by phone or email to get an updated code. Of course, these people had paid already, so we renewed their codes quickly and free of charge.

It's been our experience that people are often too busy or forgetful to store their license codes in a safe place, so it's inevitable that every major system release is followed by a barrage of requests for missing codes. To handle the tremendous load of people who had misplaced their codes (as well as those who saved them only to find they had expired), we created an email address, lostcodes@ambrosiasw.com, dedicated to generating new codes. When Joe User entered the expired code, he was prompted to send us an email (it required only a click), and someone would respond to the request as soon as possible. Yet we were constrained by the laws of time, space, and the New York State Department of Labor, so our staff was

available to answer requests only during regular business hours.

After several customer complaints, we decided to remedy this problem by automating the process of renewing an expired code. When an expired code is entered for Snapz Pro X, the user is encouraged to request a new license code from our automated server right then and there! Renewing the code takes only two extra clicks, maybe an extra 30 seconds overall, but it puts the power back in the hands of the user. He can decide when to update his system, install software, and renew his license code at his leisure. Even at midnight just before a four-day weekend.

So you are probably curious about the benefits of expiring codes. Why would anyone want this hassle? Let's look at the three categories. For paying customers with an Internet connection, the extra work is minimal. An email sent to Ambrosia that's answered within one business day. For those organized enough to save their original codes, there isn't even a wait. They get the code on the spot. The only inconvenience comes to those people trying to enter a pirated code.

Which brings us back to the question, "How many people are using pirated codes?" The plain fact is that most people are honest unless given a chance to be dishonest. If they stumble across a working license code for software, or do a quick Internet search, then they can quickly enter the code and cover their self-loathing with the adrenaline rush of blasting aliens and squishing fish. Only the most hard-core computer user will try to reverse-engineer the software and crack the copy protection—and I'll be honest, there's isn't much we could do to stop them. Crackers enjoy the challenge itself, the tougher the better, so if they want it badly enough, they'll find a way.

Historically it's been difficult to measure software piracy, but our experience is that the vast majority of

users lack the time or inclination to modify software to bypass license checks. Here's the rub: these users might actually buy the software if it weren't so easy to find pirated codes. Thus, expiring codes are a good way to defeat (or at least hamper) this kind of casual piracy. The serial numbers stored in databases and posted to the Internet are viable only for a short while before they must be renewed.

Ironically, it's these casual pirates who are helping me measure the impact of piracy on our sales. You see, to renew a stolen code, Joe User must contact a computer in our office. There's nothing nefarious about it. He sends us the user name and expired code and gets back a new license code or a suitable error message. We don't encrypt the data, we don't grab any personal information, and we don't even open a connection without explicit permission. But when Joe User clicks that bright shiny Renew button, our server records the product, user name, and the Internet address he came from.

For the first two days after we posted the latest update to Snapz Pro X, our server was busy. Of the 194

different hosts that tried to renew a license code, 107 of them sent in pirated codes (click the URL below to view a screenshot of an actual server log file; the entries highlighted in red are attempts to authenticate pirated license codes). Incredibly, more than 50 percent of the people installing the update entered one or both of the pirated codes we've known about for months.

Some of these people even tried several different variants on the names when the server refused them access ("maybe I misspelled it"), and one guy got so frustrated he pounded the Renew button over and over every four seconds ("WHY _click_IS_click_THIS_click_NOT_click_WORKING???") until our server blacklisted him for flooding.

http://www.tidbits.com/resources/620/pirate_log_red.gif

You don't have to remind us that the sample isn't statistically valid. Nevertheless, we think it's a reasonable approximation of reality, if not a little conservative. It certainly reinforces our perception that casual piracy is both significant and widespread.

Hopes for the Future

Maybe I didn't look these people in the eye, but they know I'm watching them. They indicated a real interest in our software when they thought they could use it for free, and this gives me hope that some may yet decide that registering is easier and more satisfying than stealing our hard work. If not, then either they were forced to stop using the software or they'll likely encounter me again, somewhere

down the road. Next time, I'll bring Captain Hector.

I also hope this article explains to our customers (and other computer users out there) the impact that piracy has on small software firms like ours. I hope they can appreciate our decisions regarding the registration system and agree that the extra 30 seconds and two clicks are a minor inconvenience. If everyone pays for the products they like and use, companies like Ambrosia can stay in business and continue making cool products for everyone to enjoy.

Finally, I hope that these changes give me a little more job security, so I can continue doing what I love with some of the coolest folks I've ever met. Because I plan on working here as long as I possibly can, making great software and saving enough money so my kids can eventually go to college, where they can enjoy their share of beer and pizza.

Reprinted with permission of the author. Matt Slot has worked for Ambrosia for nearly five years, but life isn't just fun and games for the Bitwise Operator. When he's not calculating polynomials and fighting off pirates, Matt enjoys reading a good book (Terry Pratchett), watching a little television (24), and playing with his two kids (Luke and Kaleigh). You can reach Matt at fprefect@ambrosiasw.com

or visit the Ambrosia Software site at www.AmbrosiaSW.com.

This article originally appeared in TidBits, a Mac newsletter.



Namo Webeditor 5

By Terry Currier

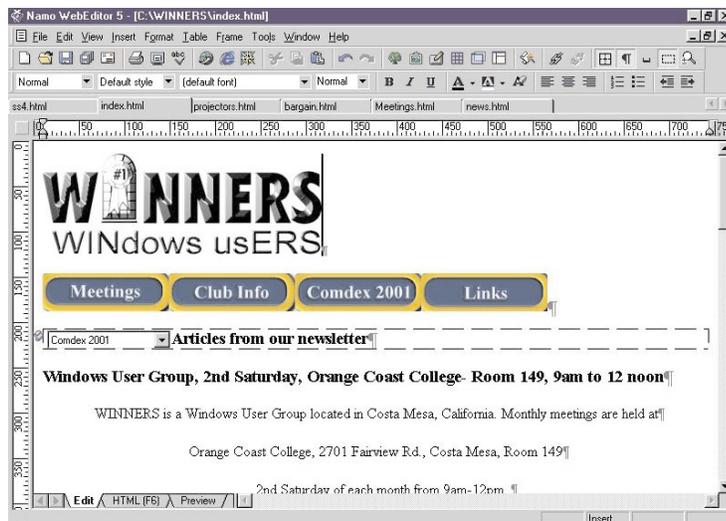
The hype of Namu is that you can create a web page with no experience. Well I never have created one before and after reading what it could do I was interested in trying it. As it turns out, it lives up to the hype. Namu is marketed by Jasc which, by the way, provides excellent support. I requested information via email twice from them and each time got an answer early the next day. I went on a business trip to Detroit and thought I would first install Namu on my notebook to practice with it. The notebook has Windows ME, which turned out to have a problem with the installation. The MFC42.DLL which is used by many programs for installation was blocking this installation. I had to rename the DLL as a BAK for it to finish. Turns out though even after the installation it will not come up with the MFC42.DLL. I have to leave it as a BAK or Namu will not come up. On my desktop system with Windows 98SE there were no problems.

Namu can create some great-looking pages including adding professional features. While I did start out with the WINNERS web pages, even if you don't know what to start with, Namu can help. It has over 200 customizable templates and themes. The layout is consistent while the theme is followed throughout with the background and buttons. Many of them are very well done. For a person just starting out I recommend looking at them for ideas. Using the theme makes it easy to start with, but I would have liked a drag-and-drop capability for the buttons and bars. From the circuit theme I really liked the buttons that looked like computer chips. To get them I had to click on Insert, Site Element, Theme Objects, then select

the element I wanted to be inserted. To get the button, I had to bring up the theme and then export the button. After that I could bring it up under "My Resource." As for images to use as buttons, background, banners, bars, or labels, there are plenty to keep you busy just looking at them. Namu includes animated gif files for each of the aforementioned elements. They also include some cool animated flash buttons, and a lot (thousands) of clip art for you to use.

Putting a web page together

You have three modes to work in. Edit, HTML, and Preview. With the Edit mode you lay out the page the way you want it to. It is, of course, What You See is What You Get. In



the Edit mode you don't have to know HTML, you just work with it like a desktop publisher. Use the Layout table to line up the graphics and text. You can also import a web page you have loaded from your web browser, or load up one you've saved. In the HTML mode you can type code directly, making up a page or modifying it. Namu lets you do code validation, browser compatibility checks, and tag clean-up. With Preview you will see it just like you would on the Internet.

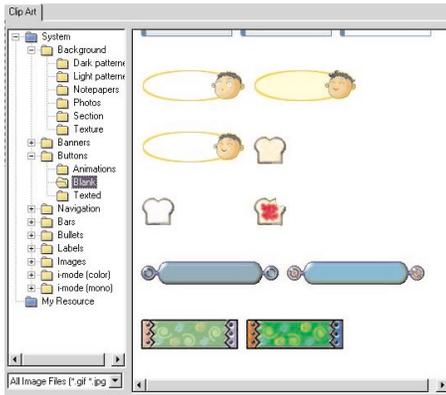
You can put in clipart or import pictures. There are great tools to work

with the graphics. When inserting images you can put them right in and resize directly if needed. From that function you can also add a hypertext, or taking two images you can create a rollover. If you have a large picture, you can resize it, or use the Image Slicer. The Slicer actually divides up the image so that rather than waiting for one large picture to download, it does it in sections. That way you still get to show the large image you want, without the long wait the viewer hates. Right clicking on the image will bring it into Image Effects. There you can lighten or darken, rotate, crop, work contrast, resize, or change the background color. You can also add a bevel, frame, or drop shadow. If you have a number of pictures you

want to publish on the web, use the Photo Album feature. Its so easy you'll be amazed. Choose the pictures you want, and if you want the picture names or frames added. It then creates the album. You see it on the page in thumbnail format and clicking on a

picture takes you to a blown up version, very cool.

Want more than just static images? You can insert movies in either QuickTime or Windows Media format, vector based Flash or ShockWave animations, and sounds in MIDI and RealAudio are supported. I did not try it, but Namu will let you build a database-driven web site. They have a Database Wizard to help you set it up. Choose dynamic document format (ASP, JSP, and PHP are supported) connecting to the database using ODBC, JDBC, or MySQL.



Their Site Manager helps you to keep control of various aspects of making a web site. Using it helps with designing (Site Wizard), file management, and publishing. The report part will let you sort the files by their types, and checks whether there are any broken links or orphan files. For publishing, they include an FTP program.

Making up or adding a table is as easy as doing it in MS Word. Tell it the number of rows and columns and it adds the table, or you can draw what you want. Nammo will let you make or add frames to a web page—as easy as clicking on a button—and like the table function, you tell it how many and which way you want them to be.

Two other programs are included with Nammo. Capture is a screen capture program. With Gif Animation, you can create a Gif animation very easily. Just be sure to adjust the delay time between frames or they switch very fast.

The Script Wizard may be the most useful item. You can create menus including Text, Navigation bars, or a Drop-down menu. Add special effects such as a fade in/out upon entering or leaving a web page. Have a marquee flow text from one side to another, or in a text box. Replace images with another creating a rollover, or apply animation to a paragraph or image causing it to move in a certain way when loaded. Create hyperlink buttons or animated banners. You can show the current time on your



web site in a text box, or a Pop-up (which I will NOT do.)

System Requirements

- Windows 95, 98, Me, NT 4, 2000, or XP
- 32 MB RAM (Windows 95/98/Me) / 64 MB RAM (Windows NT4/2000/XP)
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 4 or newer (for internal preview)
- 800 X 600 or higher resolution display (256 colors or higher recommended)
- Hard disk space: 12 MB (minimal installation), 80 MB (standard installation, excluding Clip Art and European spelling dictionaries), 220 MB (complete installation, including Clip Art) which is what I installed.
- CD-ROM drive (for installation)

- Previewing documents created using the Database Wizard requires Microsoft Personal Web Server or Microsoft Internet Information Server to be installed on your com

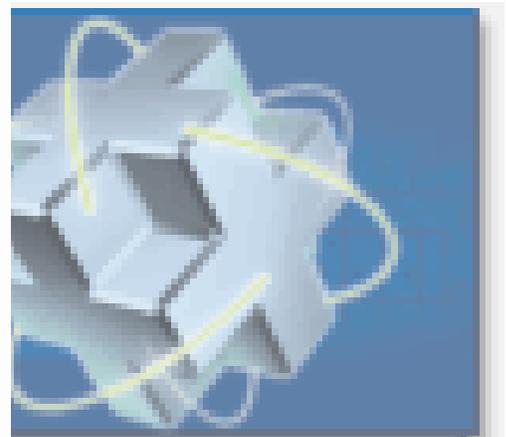
Summary

Remember that I don't claim to be an expert with lots of experience of creating web pages. That's the point of working with Nammo. You don't have to be. It truly helps a beginner to create great-looking web pages. I'll give it 4.5 points out of 5.

Price \$139 download (30Mb) or \$149 boxed from Jasc at

<http://www.jasc.com>

or (952) 930-9171. If you own a competitor you can get \$30 back. If you want to try it out, you can download a 30 day trial version.



PentaZip 5.0

By Terry Currier

I reviewed the 4.0 version of PentaZip last year and really liked it. What is there not to like? Starting with the same three lines I said last time. Everybody needs a Zip program, whether they know it or not. This is an absolute need if you go on the internet. A Zip program allows the files to be compressed to a smaller size and to group all needed files into one file for ease and speed of down or uploading.

Version 5.0 does everything 4.0 did and with more features. No problems with the installation, it takes about 33Mb of space. You would expect a new version to work on Windows XP. In fact it is the first compression program to have earned all three Microsoft logos: Designed for Windows 98/NT, Certified for Windows 2000 and Designed for Windows XP. In addition to Zip files, it will support compressed archive formats including: Ace, ZOO, RAR, ARJ, ARC, CAB, TAR, GZIP, BH, LZH, LHA and JAR. All of these formats can also be converted to Zip, ZGB, LHa, CAB, TAR, GZip. It will also support UUEncode, XXEncode, Mime64 and BinHex. After installing PentaZip it plugs into Windows Explorer so when you double click on a zip it opens it in PentaZip. Right click and you get more options such as testing or printing, from the Utility part of PentaZip.

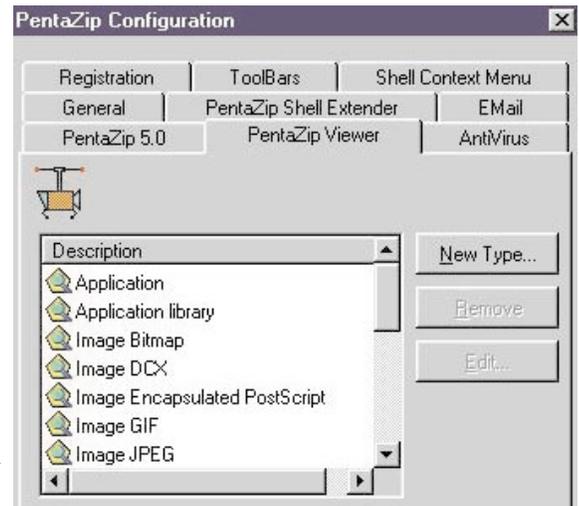
Extract/UnZip

When you want to extract a zip file, you can put it any where you want and make sure the file is freshened or updated. Freshened means that only the files that have the same name as a file (or files) that already exists in the destination directory and the date and time of the existing files is older than the file to be restored. Updated means only files that do not exist in the destination folder, or files that have been modified more recently then inside the zipped file. Another option is the Convert LF/CRLF (carriage-return, linefeed) used for text files. If you don't want to extract a executable file (.exe or .com) you can run it from within the zipped file. If the zip file is damaged you can attempt to repair it.

Viewer

The best part of PentaZip is the viewer which lets users "see" the contents of their files without having to use the program they were created within. The viewer also allows users to open files without triggering Macro viruses that are sometimes found in Excel and Word documents. The viewer supports many formats (more than 50) such as ASCII, Text, Hex, MS Word Doc and RTF, HTML, Excel XLS, AVI, MOV, JPEG, BMP, GIF, TIF, WMF, PCX, MPG, MP3 AutoCad DXF and DWG, and others. In the viewer you can zoom down to 5% or up to 1000%. Have it open an associated program, for example clicking on run for a Word .DOC file will start up Word and load that file. Changes to that file can also be saved. Actually I opened a DOC file in the view was able to edit it without loading Word and then saved it with the changes in Rich Text Format (RTF.) You can save it as a RTF, text, or HTML file. It saves it as a separate file in the My Documents folder, not replacing the one inside the zip. The viewer also lets you copy, paste, rotate, or convert to gray scale, or half tone. The viewer will let you save from one graphic format to another and you don't have to use it only in zip mode. After you install PentaZip it is plugged in as a viewer so right clicking on a .jpg file you can view it with the PentaZip viewer and convert it to a .tiff file. Other features include:

- You can open more than one Zip file at a time. This allows you to use drag and drop files between different Zip files.
- Unzip, Zip, Zip&Mail and SFX&Mail using the right mouse button is available everywhere with Windows Explorer or any other file management program you may be using.
- Scripting that allows you to create self-running programs for frequently performed zipping and unzipping tasks
- Scheduler is designed to give you an easy way to automatically carry out things you do on a regular basis. Scheduler can run PentaZip



scripts or any other executable file (.exe) file on your system. You can set events to happen daily, weekly, or monthly.

- Antivirus support that can verify the integrity of any compressed archive
- SFX and Splitter support that create self Extracting files and also split large files into sections to ease downloading and email handling, or fitting on diskettes.
- Email support that allows you to attach any file or compressed archive to an email message automatically. PentaZip can interface most email system (such as Outlook, Outlook Express, Eudora, Netscape Mail, etc.), but not AOL.
- A fully customizable toolbar
- It will support multifile/multi-folder compressed archives larger than 4GB, using its ZGB™ format. Lets face it, if you're using it for anything larger than that, send the whole hard drive.
- Create self extracting files for both Windows or DOS.
- Search for specific files inside any Zip archive using the standard Windows "find" interface (including by name, date, date range and size)

Download PentaZip 5.0 today at

<http://www.pentazip.com/>

for \$49.95. You can download a trial versions good for 30 days from there. A boxed version will be available for \$59.95. For registered owners of 4.0 there ist 50% off.

Toss Out That Shoebox

New software makes the chore lots easier

By Steve Bass,
Pasadena IBM Users Group

It's the middle of March and I'm more than a month early on my taxes, a rare occurrence by anyone's standards, especially mine. Now don't get me wrong, it's got nothing to do with me. Heaven forbid I make a deadline. The credit belongs to my tax guy (yeah, that's how I refer to him. He's a guy, does my taxes, and has been a tax guy for years).

As tax guys go, he's even-tempered and patient. But every year he loses his professional cool at the site of me and my shoebox coming into his office. Last year he said, "Go buy a computer tax program, Bass" handing me back my shoebox. "Anything will do," he said, "just make sure it doesn't include a shoe box."

It turns out that once I started using a tax program, I actually enjoyed getting things organized. The process is simple: I just went through and answered the program's questions. Some programs, such as TurboTax, allowed me to fill in a screen that is a pretty accurate rendition of an IRS tax form (real enough to cause some anxiety).

Other programs are less realistic—you answer questions on screen and move from field to field. And if you're using an accounting program, there's a good chance you can

export data to a variety of tax programs. For example, Intuit's TaxCut accepts data from Quicken. By the way, most tax programs will print out IRS approved forms on a laser printer and some even include software for electronic filing.

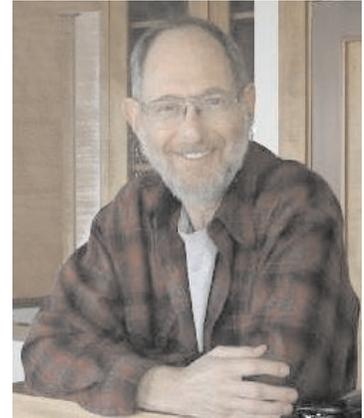
Give Me Some Help

Every program I tried offered extensive help so even inexperienced users can get some on-line reassurance. At any point you can stop the process and get advice. TurboTax's chatty, comfortable tone reminded me of my tax guy (it obviously didn't see the shoe box on my desk). All tax programs let me play "what-if" scenarios to my heart's content. I was able to see the effect of, say, buying a new car, or adding a new deduction to the family. And TurboTax compares your deductions to the national standard to make sure you're not out of line, saving you a potential audit.

Of course, there's a downside to doing my taxes on my own. Every so often I'd get a message suggesting a talk with my, uh, tax guy. I ran into one snag when I tried to figure out if I was able to deduct a unique retirement fund from my state taxes. And here's where I get a little squirrely with tax programs because the answer was not

forthcoming. My solution? Find a tax preparer who's willing to answer your questions and double-check your computer generated return.

Here are some recommendations if



you decide to use tax preparation software:

- If you have a simple return, don't hesitate to do-it-yourself. Your return will be more accurate, you might have fun, and you'll likely save some money.
- If you have a complicated return, and someone does your taxes, try a tax program and compare the results. Do that for a year or two and if you don't see much of a difference, consider working exclusively with the software.
- To get the best price on tax preparation software, compare the prices of local discount stores to mail order companies. Many mail order firms bundle the federal and state versions for a lower price.



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

Discovering your Hard Drive

by Gene Barlow, User Group Relations

The heart of your computer system is your hard drive. The operating system that controls your computer lives on your hard drive. All of the application programs that you run to do productive work with your computer also reside on your hard drive. Even your very important data files are stored on your hard drive. Your hard drive is the single most important component of your computer system. Fortunately, your hard drive has the ability to be set up to meet your individual needs. It is the only part of your computer that you can tailor to your specifications. Unfortunately, most of us do not know how to change our hard drives or what the best ways are to tailor a hard drive to our individual needs. This article will show you the basic steps you need to take to really take advantage of your computer's hard drive.

There are four basic steps you need to take to tailor your hard drive to your individual needs.

1. Learn about your hard drive and what possibilities you have in setting up your hard drive.
2. Develop a plan about how you want your hard drive to serve you and what steps you need to take to accomplish this plan.
3. Make a thorough backup of your current hard drive before you start to make any changes to it.
4. Start to change your hard drive according to the steps outlined in your plan.

If you follow these four steps and not try to bypass any one of them, you will succeed at tailoring your hard drive to meet your personal needs. If you try to skip over any of the first three steps in order to rush to the fourth step, you may well run into problems that will prevent you from tailoring your hard drive and may even damage your current system. Let's explore the first of these basic steps to tailoring your hard drive in a bit more detail.

Learn about your hard drive

We've all heard the expression, "if all else fails, read the manual." With your hard drive, this is especially important to follow. While your hard drive is not impossible to learn about, it is complicated enough to require some study before you attempt to tailor it in any way. Unfortunately, information about your hard drive is not easy to find.

A few years ago, the PartitionMagic manual contained some good general information about hard drives. Today, most of this information has been removed from the manual, leaving only the reference information on how to use the partitioning utility. However, some of the early information on hard drives has been saved on the PartitionMagic CD. To retrieve this general information on hard drives, put the PartitionMagic CD in your CD reader and when the automatic first screen comes up you will see one of the items listed as "Documentation." Select this item and you will see a list of the various documents stored on the CD in pdf format. The two you should print and read are "Basic Concepts" (29 pages) and "Installing a Second Operating System" (17 pages). These papers are a bit technical to read and they do not offer any recommendations as to what are the best ways to organize your hard drive, but they are a good starting point in learning about your hard drive.

A better way to learn about your hard drive is an educational CD entitled *Discovering your Hard Drive* that I recently published. This CD is divided into the following seven topic sections:

- Understanding your Hard Drive is an easy-to-follow look at the internal workings of a physical hard drive. It is a great place to start to learn about your hard drive.
- Upgrading your Hard Drive will help you to determine if your current hard drives are adequate and how you can upgrade them if they are not up to snuff.

- Organizing your Hard Drive helps you with the basic organization techniques to set up your hard drive. These are the concepts that the rest of the CD is based on.
- Managing your Operating Systems will show you how to run more than one operating system on your hard drive. This is a key concept that you should master.
- Moving to a New Operating System will help you understand how to move to a new release of Windows, like Windows XP. This topic is especially important today.
- Backing Up your Hard Drive is the first thing you should do before you start to organize your hard drive and the last thing you should do once you get your hard drive set up as you want it.
- Securing your Hard Drive will show you how to secure your private information from hackers and identify thieves. This is the way of the future that we need to understand now.

Each topic shows you a series of presentation slides and you hear my voice describing the points you need to learn. It's an easy way to sit back and watch and listen to the information being presented. In a short time, you will understand your hard drive much better and will know how you can modify it to meet your personal needs.

The *Discovering your Hard Drive* CD can be ordered from www.ugr.com/order

Use the special order code of UGNL0402. The user group discounted price for the CD is only \$20 plus a small shipping fee. This is the ideal way to get started to setting up your hard drive to meet your personal needs. Your copy of the CD is available now and can be at your door in less than a week. Order it today.

Gene Barlow
User Group Relations
PO Box 275
Orem, UT 84059-0275

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

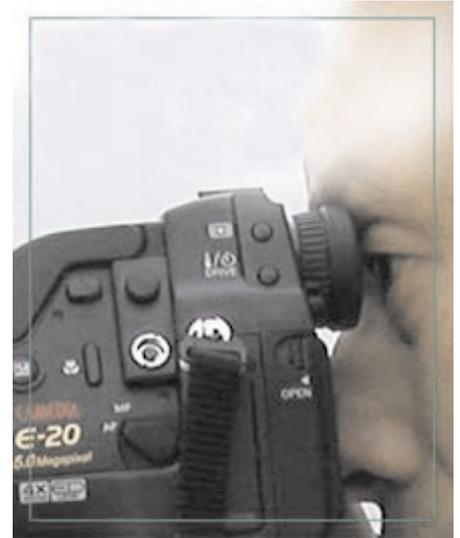
How to take pictures with a Digital Camera

Our panel of experts in digital picture taking include Steve Dela, Rudy Wolf, George Margolin, and Terry Currier

Each panelist will SHOW you how to take a picture in different situations. Then we will show the taken pictures on the screen with the different settings. Some examples include how to take a picture with sunlight behind the subject, in front of the window, in the shade, or in the dark.

Do you know how to pick the right ISO setting?

Or even how to use it and why?



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P. O. Box 9274
Newport Beach, CA 92658

