

W WINNERS

Wotepad

WINDOWS USERS NOVEMBER 2005

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review

Vox Proxy 3 Right Seat Software

By Terry Currier

Vox Proxy is a plug-in for PowerPoint. It uses 3D animated characters to enhance and make a PowerPoint presentation more entertaining and fun. One of the rules for a good presentation is not to have everything listed in the slide. The presenter must be part of the show and not have the audience have to read everything. The Vox Proxy characters become another presenter that can explain in more detail something on the slide. Vox Proxy uses Microsoft agents (the characters) providing them animation.

They include some really good tutorials for the user to go through before making a script. The script is actually a program to have the character do or say what you want. The tutorials will take about 50-60 minutes to go through them. After that, work with the wizard for a while to get the feel of how it works. Also look at how the tutorials are set up.

Continued on page 3

The Insiders' Guide to craigslist. . .

By Richard O. Johnson
TUGNET, CA
rj@theskillspool.org

If you're not using craigslist, it's time you joined the crowd. This phenomenally successful community bulletin board serves over ten million online users in a single month, and, except for modest fees in three cities for help-wanted ads, all its services are without charge.

If you're one of the uninitiated few, you use craigslist by posting your needs or interests in any of various categories, like jobs, for sale, services, housing, personal, etc., or by reading and acting on posts submitted by others. The craigslist for this area is at

<http://www.orangecounty.craigslist.org>

Beyond its imperfect documentation, craigslist support is in practical terms non-existent (understandably so, in view of its enormous popularity and its staff of just eighteen). That's one of the reasons for writing this Guide.

Posting

Posting is straightforward. You just find the prominent "post to classifieds" link (it's at the upper-left corner of the main page), drill down

to the appropriate category, and fill out the simple form.

The first page to which posters are directed will invite them to create an account. You don't really need an account, but it'll take only a minute or so to set up, and can make things a lot easier. So do get that account.

Should the need for which you posted be met right away, that's the end of it. In most cases, however, you'll want to re-post. Without re-posting, your post will stay up (in Los Angeles) for between 10 and 30 days, depending on the category, but you don't want to wait nearly that long. Posts appear in chronological order (last submitted on top), and readers will typically stop perusing after about two days' worth of posts. (You can always edit your post, but editing won't move it up as will re-posting.)

Another way to improve your response rate is to post in more than one category. But don't do that before reading about craigslist's...

Restrictions

Craigslist is replete with rules and regulations. Trouble is, they're not particularly easy to find, they're not all in one place, and, worst of all,

Continued on page 4

Telephone Help Line

PROGRAM/SOFTWARE	NAME	PHONE	TIME
CorelDraw & Ventura & PhotoPaint	Sunny Lockie	949-644-0103	6-10 p.m. weekdays 9 a.m.-10 p.m. weekends
Hardware	Jonathan Means	714-542-1653	6-9 p.m.
Internet	Cathy Grammer-Margolin	949-645-5950	6-10 p.m. & weekends
Novell, NT & Networking	Jonathan Means	714-542-1653	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

General Meeting November 19

Fountain Valley Library
10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Mobile Devices

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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.

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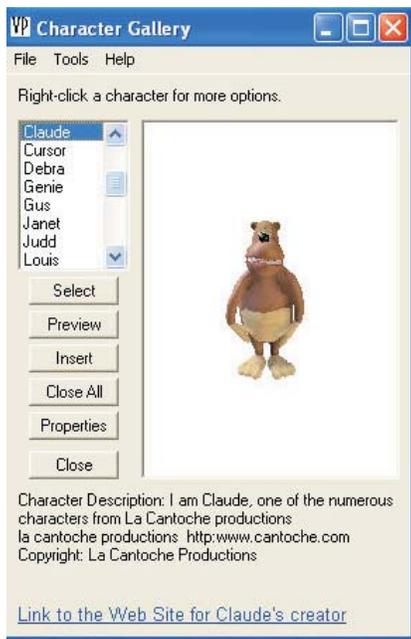
Charles Schreiber 714-378-1253
cschreib@csulb.edu

Website: <http://windowsusers.org>

FUTURE MEETING DATES

- ★ November 19
- ★ December 17
- ★ January 15
- ★ February 19

You can choose the 3D character from a list of 27 men, women, animals and others. When you choose



the character, you can also choose the voice to be used. There is a list of 8 men and 2 women voices. The voices are not bad, but they do still have the sound of computer generation. You can type what you want the character to do or say directly into the script or work with the wizard. It uses a Text-To-Speech engine. You can also record what is to be said into a WAV file and have Vox Proxy “say” that.

AT&T has an enhanced Text-To-Speech program with better human sound. The cost of it is \$60 and you can get it at <http://www.naturalvoices.com>

It comes with 10 text-to-speech engines so you can have it speak in Spanish, German, French, British English, English, and one Indian-accent English voice.

Again, the tutorials are not just a good learning place, but they are also good to watch and get ideas. The Script Wizard helps you have the character say, do, move, or gesture. Each character has a list of moves,



commands, gestures and facial expressions. Within the script, you can have it do some PowerPoint commands such as click or go to the next slide. As part of the presentation, you can put in commands to play a video file, read or show a Excel or Word file.

In Version 3, Right Seat Software said they added support for two new Microsoft products: the PowerPoint 2003 Viewer and Windows Media Player 9. I found I also had no problems with Windows Media Player 10. Windows Media Player 10 has support for MPEG 4, so I like having it installed.

Some of the other enhancements:

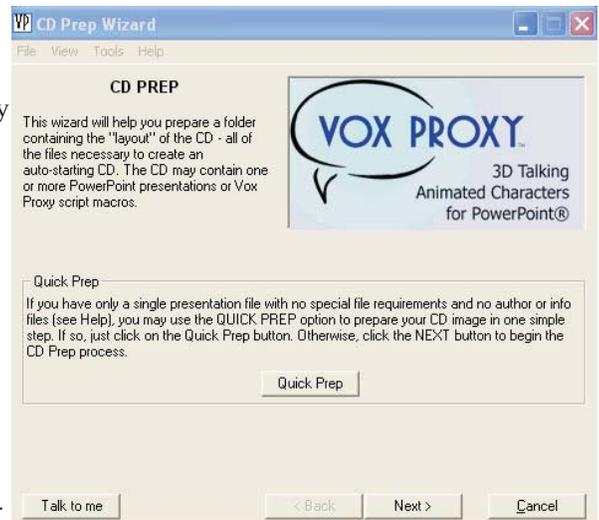
- Macro scripts can be created to do certain tasks or say certain things that you want to use more than once. Enhanced is the ability to embed macro scripts into PowerPoint presentation files or into other Vox Proxy script macro files. This embedding capability allows you to distribute self-contained presentations to other users without having to distribute any script macros separately. You can now use the RunMacro commands to run a script macro or presentation residing on the internet.
- The online help system comes with context-sensitive help topics. Speaking of help, Right Seat installs a number of help files including a 157 page manual for Vox Proxy, but does not put a link in the start menu. Be sure to look in the Vox Proxy help folder.

- The Display Clock command displays a digital clock with optional

timer. You can specify an alarm sound file. ScaleCharacters is a new command allowing you to specify an “authored” screen resolution (width). When the file plays, it will scale all characters up or down to match the size at the authored resolution. Input command provides a simple single-field input form. It allows you to ask the user for text data and assign it to a Vox Proxy variable. For example, you could ask for the user’s name and then use the name in speech. Character animation pull-down lists now include a Print menu item so you can print a list of animations for that character.

CD Prep Enhancements

I was able to work with a CD Prep Edition and it was kind of fun creating a presentation and then



copying it to a CD. The Prep program will help create a CD that will auto-start on an end-user’s computer and run slide shows with Vox Proxy scripts without requiring the user to have first installed the Vox Proxy Player. The CD Prep program creates a “CD image” folder on your hard drive that contains all of the files and folders to be placed on the CD. It includes the necessary Vox Proxy Player files as well as the PowerPoint Viewer. You will use your CD-burner software to copy those files and folders to the CD. The CD Prep Wizard stepped me through the

process of what I wanted and needed on the CD. CDs created with CD Prep can be configured to run automatically from the PowerPoint 2003 Viewer, bundled on the CD, so that it will run the same whether the user has PowerPoint or not. Once the CD is put in a computer it will install (if needed) the Microsoft Agents and speech components so the slide show will run.

Vox Proxy costs \$199—as an option you can purchase a CD prep which allows users to burn the presentation to an auto-starting CD. That option will bring the total cost to \$228.95. Upgrades to Version 3 from any previous version of Vox Proxy are available at a price of \$99. If you already have the CD Prep edition, your upgrade is included in the \$99 upgrade fee. If you do not have CD Prep and wish to upgrade to it, a CD Prep upgrade is available for a limited time for an additional \$29.95 (normally \$49.95).

Not for the casual user, but if you do a lot PowerPoint presentations, this is a product that will help make them even better.

<http://www.voxproxy.com>

Minimum System Requirements

- Windows® 95/98/Me/NT/2000/XP
- PowerPoint® 2000 or 2002
- 128 MB RAM
- 150MB free disk space
- Screen resolution: 800 x 600 minimum
- 300 MHz or faster processor
- Microphone if you use VP speech recognition



CRAIGSLIST

Continued from page 1

some of the most crucial ones are not published at all (until you're found to be in violation, and by then you may be "blocked")!

If you want to see what rules are written down, find the craigslist Terms of Use, Frequently Asked Questions, and General Posting Guidelines. But bear in mind that other unstated rules may bear equally on your submissions. Here are the most important craigslist rules:

You may not post "essentially the same item" before deleting the old item. This applies even when posting in a different city or category. So if your post lends itself to more than one category, you need to alternate the categories. (You may possibly be able to get around this restriction by using different email addresses.)

Craigslist confuses this issue by appearing at one point to sanction posting "in multiple categories." This suggests that in some circumstances such multiple posts may be accepted. So if you want to try it, go ahead. The worst that can happen is that your second post will be refused.

You may not post the same item more than once in 48 hours. This rule is not strictly enforced. That is, if you delete and re-post your Thursday noon post at 8 am Saturday, chances are there will be no problem. But it's unwise (and really unnecessary) to post as often as daily.

Your post may not contain a link "to a commercial website or auction." This is an example of a rule I haven't been able to find anywhere, until I was blocked for violating it! Note that craigslist does not define what makes a website "commercial." My listing on the web of free summer shows, that contained a small link to my organization, was deemed to be "commercial." You'll be safe if you

don't link to any website, but instead invite the reader to email you for more information (very easily done—see below). Linking to a webpage without any links on it is also safe.

Posting Tips

Craigslist makes it easy as pie for its users to respond to your posts. If you want phone calls, simply include your phone number in the writeup. If you want emails, craigslist will "anonymize" your email address, never to be seen by responders. These folks will click on a link to respond, and that response will go to craigslist, and then to you.

Each anonymized email response will refer to the unique number for that particular post. So if you're running several similar posts, you can easily track your responses to see which ones are most effective.

The body of your post can be either in plain text or HTML. If you choose plain text, craigslist will automatically convert any Web addresses starting with <http://> to links (but exercise care before including a Web address—see above). You can't otherwise mix plain text and HTML (don't add a few HTML tags to a plain-text submission).

You can add photos or other graphics to your post, in one of two ways.

If your post is under the heading of "for sale/wanted," you'll be invited to add a picture from your hard disk. Otherwise (providing you're submitting in HTML), you can add graphics with the `` tag. See craigslist's FAQ for more details.

How Best To Post

The following assumes you're using Windows, and have postings suitable for several categories. (You can adapt these guidelines to other circumstances.) Performing these steps will reduce the re-posting

process to about a minute a day, while giving you maximum exposure.

Compose your posts. If possible, create an entirely different post for each category. If sufficiently different, posts promoting the same transaction may display simultaneously without a problem.

Create your account, by using the link on the “post to classifieds” page.

Create three bookmarks for your browser. One will be your account page, another will be the craigslist post page, and the third will be the browse page (the craigslist main page for your locality), for reviewing others’ posts.

Submit your posts.

Wait two or three days.

Open your account page. Decide which post you’ll want to re-run. Click on that post.

You’ll be given two choices, Edit and Delete. If you want to re-run the post in exactly the same category, choose Delete. Then go back to your account page, click on the deleted post, and you’ll be able easily to re-run it.

If you want to re-run the post in a different category, click on the Edit button, to bring up your “raw” post. Then using Ctrl-A and Ctrl-C, copy that raw post to the Windows clipboard. Go back to your account page and delete the post. Finally, open the post page that you’ve bookmarked [step 3 above], and post in the appropriate new category.

Wait a day, and repeat steps 6 through 9.

If you’re promoting the same transaction in several different categories, it may be to your advantage to stagger the posts. To this end you’ll want to keep one or more initial posts for a longer interval than the others.

Browsing Tips

Here are two tips for using craigslist to take advantage of others’ posts.

A little known source of great bargains consists of offers on craigslist to sell unwanted gift cards. This situation stems from the fact that many holders of gift cards either paid nothing for them, or paid well below the face value. For example, DiscoverCard distributes merchant gift cards at half price through its “Cashback” program.

To secure such a bargain, visit your bookmarked “Browse” page, and execute the “for sale” link. Then in the keyword search box, enter “gift card” (with the quotation marks), and pick out the offers that appeal to you. Don’t hesitate to bargain with the seller for a lower price. (Aim at no more than 50% of face value.)

Once you’ve made a deal, be sure you meet the seller at the store, to verify the amount of credit remaining on the card.

Craigslist has joined forces with Google Maps at

<http://www.housingmaps.com>

to help you better locate available housing throughout the country. You’ll be able to specify your price range, and you’ll see at a glance whether there’s a picture or pictures of the property. Once you make your preliminary selection, you’ll be taken to the original craigslist post.

Richard Johnson is a writer and editor, and founder/administrator of FREE FOR ALL The Skills Pool, a 29-year-old membership organization.

<http://theskillspool.org>

He is a volunteer with TUGNET HelpContact for assistance with Internet Explorer, Outlook Express, and Gmail. He welcomes feedback, at rj@theskillspool.org.

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.

The Mystery of File Extensions Explained

By Dave Gerber

Advisor, Region 1

Dave’s Bits & Bytes, A Periodic

Newsletter for the Members of the

Sarasota PC User Group and the World!!

GIF, JPG, TXT, DOC, HTML, WAV, BMP, ETC

You’ll see them over and over again as you encounter manuals, web sites, and anything related to your computer. Tons of file extensions. Whole pickup truck loads of ‘em running back and forth on the info highway.

File extensions are easy enough to understand, and with just a bit of history, you’ll know everything you need to know about files, and not a bit more.

Back in the DOS days (DOS stands for Disk Operating System), before the invention of Windows, every file had to be named with a maximum of 8 characters, and could include a three letter “file extension.”

For example, lets say you want to save that recipe for Quesvos Rancheros. You were forced to use a maximum of 8 characters. So you call it queranch. Hmm, in Spanish, that’s like, “What ranch?” Or that’s a loose translation, at least.

You were limited. Severely. So along comes the long file name. You can use a whole mess of characters now, calling your file “My greatest recipe using eggs and tortillas since

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NTI Shadow

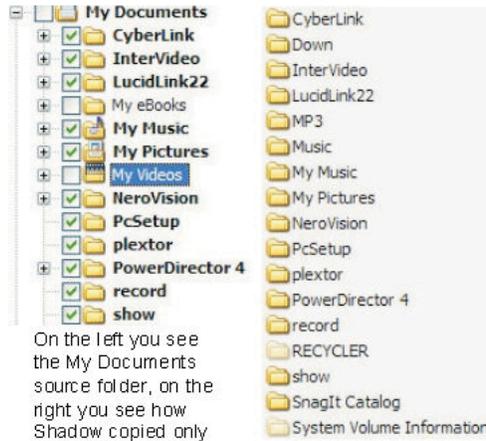
By Terry Currier

Backup programs back up those files you want at appointed times. Shadow from NTI (Newtech Infosystems) is not a true backup program. It is used to mirror the contents of folders to wherever the user wants. Their target market is people who want to protect their data, but not necessarily back up all of the computer. When you first start up Shadow, click on new and you're looking at a simple interface with five buttons on the left side: what, where, how, when, and summary.

What



Click on the add and it brings up a browser for you to check off which folders you want to back up. You can not select individual files—only folders. It will copy all of those folders' files and the subfolders beneath it. It mirrors my actions. If I change a file within the source folder, it will copy it to the destination drive. If I copy a file to a source folder which it monitors, it puts a copy of the file in the mirrored folder. Be aware when you deleted a file, Shadow will do the same on the mirrored folder. Works the same for corrupted or infected files. When Shadow sees that a file



On the left you see the My Documents source folder, on the right you see how Shadow copied only the checked folders to the other drive

is changed, it will copy that file. Shadow saves the file to the destination in its native

format. This means there will be no encryption or compression—it is an exact copy of the original. Really nice that you don't have to bring up another program to restore a file. Just copy it back.

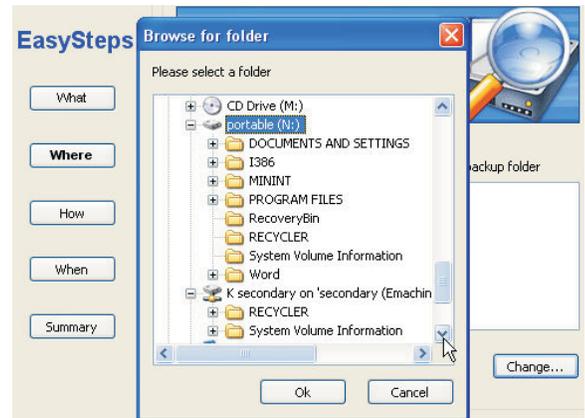
One thing I found out about the what and how of using Shadow.

When you pick a folder that has a number of subfolders to back up, it copies them whole and intact. But what if you don't want all of them? For example, say you want to back up the My Documents folder that contains your Word and Excel files. Windows also puts subfolders under My Documents: My eBooks, My Music, My Pictures, and My Videos. You know you have no files in My eBooks, and you don't want to save My Video, so you uncheck the boxes. What will happen is that on the destination drive you will have separate folders for My Music, My Pictures, and any others subfolders you had. They are not

grouped together. Further, any of those Word and Excel files you wanted to save were not, since that top folder was not checked off. I found that out when I thought I would save my Windows folder, but not the Windows updates. Shadow put 50 folders on the destination drive with no grouping.

Where

When you click on the Where button, you'd think a browser would open up for you to choose where to put the backup. Actually, you still have to click the change button. Why? If they can bring up a browser



for What, they should have done the same for Where. You can back up to another drive, or to a folder on a drive. You can also back up to a USB flash/thumb drive.

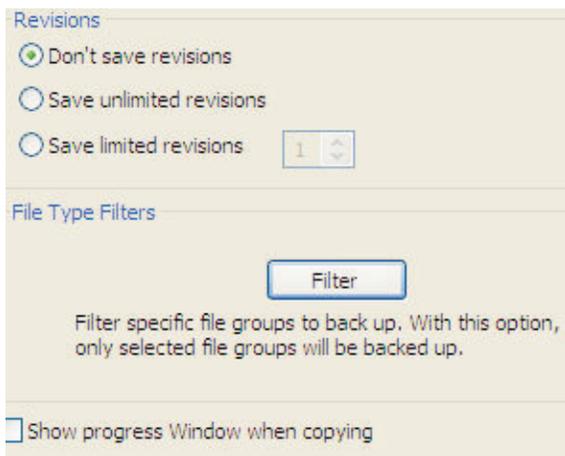
Shadow put a hidden file on my USB flash drive which identifies it as being the one USB drive to copy the files to. NTI says, "Because driver letters are dynamically assigned to removable store devices by Windows, the applications should execute a backup job to a removable device only if that unique device was used when first configuring the job."

In practice, not quite. I put one flash drive in and set up a job to back up my test folders. That worked fine—it did copy and delete

what it was suppose to do while it was attached. I then took it out and copied some other files to the source folders after putting in a different flash drive. Shadow did not copy the added files to the new flash drive, but when I did a revision of a document in the source folder it did copy those to the new drive just as if the original device was in. After reattaching the original flash drive, Shadow updated it correctly.

How

This is where you can truly create backups. How lets you configure



revisions to save. You can save none, unlimited, or up to 9 versions. So when you revise a file, it will copy the saved version to the mirrored folder, but also archive a copy (copies) in another folder labeled Revisions before overwriting it with the newer version. Shadow gives me the option of up to 9 copies, but their guide says up to 5 versions may be saved.

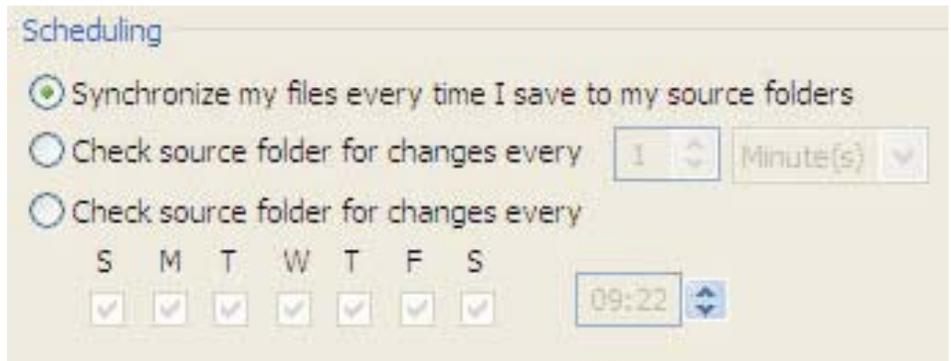
You can use Filter to save just those certain files you want, saving you time and space for the backup. Filter will let you select all or;

- Audio - MP3, Wav, etc
- Picture - JPEG, TIF, BMP, etc.
- Video - MPG, AVI, MOV, etc.
- Document - Doc, XLS, PDF, etc.

I noticed that when I used the filters it did not copy my html files. You can choose to have Shadow show a progress window while copying. I used it and liked the

pop-up window showing when files are being backed up.

When



You can schedule it to perform the actual backup operation immediately after data is modified, every certain number of minutes/hours/days, or on certain days at specified times. I chose immediately after I made a change, and it does copy the file right away.

Summary

Through each of the actions you click next till it gets you to the end where Shadow summarizes the job to you. If something is wrong you can go back and edit it. Actually you can edit or delete a job any time you want.

Beyond the aforementioned things, what I found most problematic was that Shadow did not install itself into startup. The user could set up a job

and think they were protected. But, when the computer is restarted, Shadow is not loaded and no backups are performed. You will have to start

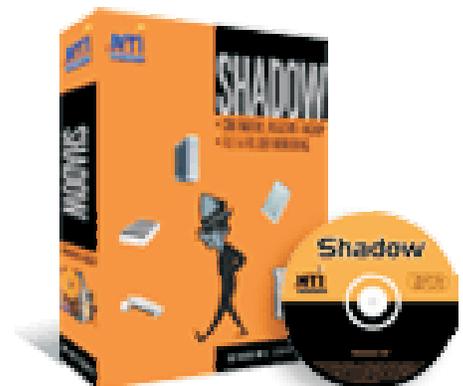
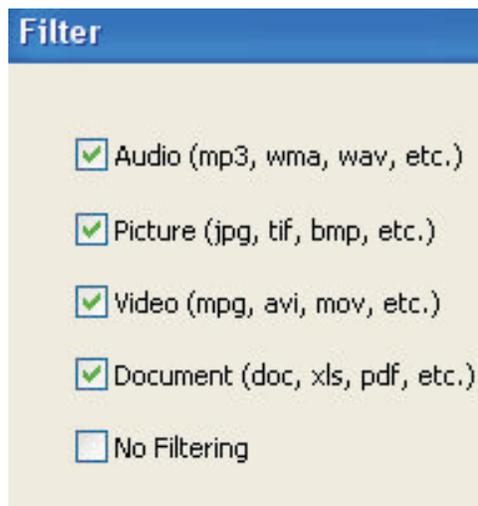
it yourself to keep backed up. I sent an email to NTI saying "I see upon shutting down or rebooting the computer the program does not restart itself. Is it suppose to be in startup?." I received an automated response back from NTI, but no answer from them. They said give them 48 hours, but after 4 days there was no response.

Conclusion

Is Shadow a good program and worth the money? Well yes, because anything that helps the user protect and backup the computer is a good thing. Right now NTI has a special price of 99 cents rather than \$29.95. Go to

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

and click on the top banner. What I would recommend is taking the offer of 50% off the Backup Now! suite for complete protection.



Legal Bytes: Trolling for Wi-Fi—Is It Legal?

By John Brewer
Computer Club of Oklahoma City
eMonitor, October 2005

Local area networking has experienced a profound change in recent years. Wired networks are still the norm but wireless networking is popular at homes and businesses. There are several issues worthy of exploration regarding this topic and this column will explore these issues in some detail in this and future columns. One issue is the legality of accessing an “open” wireless network and the other issue is the necessity to protect a wireless network.

Wikipedia states that “wardriving” involves the use of an automobile and a Wi-Fi-equipped computer, such as a laptop or a PDA, to detect Wi-Fi wireless networks. It is also known as “WiLDing” (Wireless Lan Driving), originating in the U.S. with the Bay Area Wireless Users Group (BAWUG). It is similar to using a scanner for radio. Many wardrivers use GPS devices to measure the location of the network, find and log it on a website. For better range, antennas are built or bought, and vary from omnidirectional to highly directional. Software for wardriving is freely available on the Internet, notably, NetStumbler for Windows, KisMac for Macintosh, and Kismet for Linux.

Wardrivers make identification and access of wireless networks a sport, but is the sport legal? Is there a clear-cut answer or does it depend on the facts?

A recent Florida case provides some guidance. A Florida man, sitting in his SUV and using a laptop, was accessing wireless

networks in a residential neighborhood. The St. Petersburg Times reported the matter and made the observation that “a drive through downtown St. Petersburg shows how porous networks can be. In less than five minutes, a Times reporter with a laptop found 14 wireless access points, six of which were wide open. I’ll guarantee there are tons of people out there who have their wireless network being exploited but have no idea. And as we see more people utilizing wireless, we’ll see more people being victimized.” The Florida man was indicted and convicted.

“Wireless fidelity, or ‘Wi-Fi,’ has enjoyed prolific growth since catching on in 2000. More than 10-million U.S. homes are equipped with routers that transmit high-speed Internet to computers using radio signals. The signals can extend 200 feet or more, giving people the ability to use the Web in the back yard of his Crescent Heights home, but also reaching the house next door, or the street.”

The expansion of Wi-Fi hot spots is part of this phenomenon. With a wireless-capable laptop, it is possible to access the Internet at places called “hot spots,” and they are everywhere. Some charge for access but many provide free access. There is an inherent risk in this technology. The router that provides the wireless access point has an identifiable internet protocol (IP) address. Anyone accessing the Internet through that router will appear to be authorized to use that IP address. Someone with a nefarious intent can create a possible legal nightmare for the person responsible for that IP address. The ability to look through the IP

address and identify the computer behind the DHCP server is more difficult.

A recent case in Michigan involved the unauthorized access of an unsecured Wi-Fi network at a Lowe’s home improvement store to steal credit card numbers. A 20-year-old and a friend stumbled across the network while cruising around in a car in search of wireless Internet connections—wardriving. He was convicted.

An emerging threat is the “evil twin” attack. A person with the proper equipment sets up a local hot spot and overpowers the Wi-Fi network. Any computer user who accesses the bogus Wi-Fi network is then at risk by the evil twin. The Wall Street Journal has reported an evil twin setup at a technology conference in London. Hackers set up evil twins that infected other computers with viruses and gathered information on the users.

It is apparent that security is an important issue in a wireless network. The original standard was called WEP (wired equivalent privacy). WEP is a form of encryption, but the level of encryption is relatively weak. An improved form of encryption for wireless networks uses AES (advanced encryption standard). AES is strong encryption.

There are ethical issues in accessing a wireless network unless one has specific authority. Is it similar to a form of electronic trespass? Does it constitute a form of theft from the internet service provider? One can argue both sides of these questions easily.

The next column will investigate the legal issues of these questions in

more depth. In the interim, owners of wireless networks should consider the security of their networks. Improvements can be made to the wireless network fairly easily. A company by the name of Force Field Wireless has some excellent suggestions regarding wireless security. See www.forcefieldwireless.com. Some of the tips are:

- Enable WEP. Make sure you use the largest WEP key size that the equipment supports.
- Change the SSID (Service Set Identifier) to something non-descriptive. Do not give a name, address, or any other useful information to potential hackers. Do not use the default SSID.
- Change the default password(s) on the access point. The default passwords of most network equipment are well known and could allow an intruder to gain access to the access point.
- Disable Broadcast SSID. If the access point supports “closed system” or allows one to “disable broadcast SSID,” use this feature. This will make the network essentially invisible to almost all scanning methods.
- Update the firmware and drivers on access points and wireless cards. It is always wise to use the latest firmware and drivers on access points and wireless cards. Manufacturers commonly fix known issues, security holes, and enable new features with these updates.
- Enable MAC-based filtering. This feature limits access to unique wireless cards.
- Turn off access points when not in use.
- Try to position access points in the center of the house or building. This will minimize the signal leak outside of its intended range.

Prudent use of security features in a wireless network can prevent misfortune.

John Brewer practices law in Oklahoma City, is a member of the Governor’s and Legislative Task Force for E-Commerce, and enjoys issues relating to eBusiness and cyberspace. Comments and questions are welcome and can be emailed to johnb@jnbrewer.com.

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.

Network Your Home or Office Internet

By Ira Wilsker

APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; radio & TV show host

On my weekly radio show (KLVI 560AM 1-3pm Saturdays) I am frequently asked questions about connecting an internet source to a home network, such that several computers can simultaneously share the internet connection. This type of home networking is typically only practical if there is a broadband source, and generally impractical if the source is dialup, and a voice phone line is to be shared for internet access.

Basically, there are three good options available, and each has its relative advantages and disadvantages, and varies in terms of cost effectiveness based on individual circumstances. The three basic methods or technologies available for home or small office networking are wired, wireless, and “homeplug.”

Wired networking is a viable choice if it is practical to run a network cable between computers. The cable, which can be relatively



inexpensive if purchased in bulk from electronics or home/hardware stores, but somewhat pricey if purchased in pre-cut sections at retail stores. Cable can be run through an attic, suspended from cup hooks along a ceiling, run along baseboards, or other methods that comply with appropriate safety and electrical codes. Other than running the cable, the installation of the network is fairly simple, and requires readily available and generally inexpensive hardware, manufactured by countless companies. A device called a router is connected to the broadband input, and the computers are connected via network cable

to the router. Most wired routers come with a floppy or CD with simple configuration utilities that allow the network to be setup and functioning within minutes of connection. Wired routers can be purchased from discount stores, electronics stores, office supply stores, and a variety of other sources. Since almost all contemporary computers, both desktop and notebook, come with an integral network connector, generally no other hardware is required other than the router and cable. In terms of security, wired is generally the most secure method of networking. Many of the inexpensive wired routers include some type of hardware firewall to protect the network from intrusion, but it is still generally a good idea to have a software firewall on each computer.

One of the most popular methods of home or small office networking is wireless, often referred to with its industry standard designation, 802.11, with a letter suffix, such as an “a”, “b”, or “g”. The suffix indicates which version of the standard hardware complies with in terms of frequency, and bandwidth. Generally, the least expensive and most widely used type is the 802.11b, which shares the same 2.4 GHz digital frequencies of many cordless phones and other household electronics, which may possibly cause some interference with the wireless connection. Under ideal conditions, 802.11b can transfer data at a rate of up to 11 megabytes per second (Mbps). The newer 802.11a and 802.11g standards offer higher transmission speeds, and will likely encounter less interference from household appliances, but some interference is always a risk.

To connect computers to a wireless network requires a wireless router, and a device called an “access point” for each computer. The main advantage to a wireless network is the ease of installation, and the flexibility of not being

connected to a wire while surfing the net. The wireless router is connected to the broadband input, and an antenna on the router broadcasts the signal to the access points. Range is a function of building construction and interference, but at typical household and small office distances and construction, a single router is typically adequate. Users should be sure to follow the instructions included with the router in terms of placement in order to maximize the signal. Many wireless routers include some form of hardware firewall, but again a software firewall on each computer is generally recommended. “Access Points” are generally small devices that attach to a computer either through a USB port, or to the network input on the computer. As they are radio transceivers, placement will affect performance. It is imperative to note that unless the integral encryption and other security options offered by the router and access points are implemented, there can be some serious security issues with wireless connections, in that it is easy for unauthorized persons to access the network.

Wireless routers and access points are readily available wherever

order at this point; first, be sure that whatever wireless hardware is purchased, be sure that it is compatible, in that the suffix “a”, “b”, or “g” match, although much of the hardware available today will work with any standard, often listed as “a/b/g”. A second proviso is the “weakest link” factor, in that a wireless (or any other network) connection is only as fast as the slowest segment. If a broadband connection is running at 2Mbps, a faster wireless connection may be wasted unless files or hardware (such as printers or video) are being shared among the network. It should also be noted that many of the new home theater devices now coming on the market utilize the same wireless interconnectivity and hardware as computers, and may require the newer and faster standards of connectivity.

There is a third technology available for home and small office networking that is still in its infancy, but holds a promising future, and most of the major networking hardware manufacturers such as Belkin, Linksys, GigaFast, IOGear, Netgear, and others are producing compatible hardware. This technology is called “Homeplug”

<http://www.homeplug.org>



electronics are sold, including discount stores, warehouse clubs, office supply stores, and other retailers. As the technology has been improving, prices have been plunging. Some provisos are in

that can safely utilize the existing household electrical wiring as an already wired network. Homeplug compatible hardware is priced about the same as wireless, but is not yet

as readily available as traditional wired or wireless hardware, but it may be worth the effort to shop for it. The standard, which meets UL and other safety requirements, is possibly the easiest to configure, has a 14Mbps bandwidth, and is more secure than wireless. To connect broadband to Homeplug, the broadband input is plugged into a Homeplug input device (similar to a router), and that device is then simply plugged into a standard wall electrical outlet. Any computer in the home, as well as many of the newer entertainment devices, are then connected to any other electrical outlet in the house via an adapter that connects to the computer with a traditional USB or network plug. In terms of security, the broadband signal does not typically pass through the household junction box, making it extremely difficult for neighbors and others to access the connection or network. As with all other forms of networking, a software firewall is still necessary on each computer.

If a user is bearing the cost of broadband, and has more than one computer in the home or office, then one of these networking technologies may be a useful method to connect those computers to the internet.

WEBSITE:

<http://www.homeplug.com>

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FILE EXTENSIONS
Continued from page 5

the invention of the wheel.” The sentence between the quote marks is the name of the file, or “filename.”

The stated character limit is 255, but in reality it comes in just a tad under, like 253 or something. The techies can quibble over that. Regardless, it’s l-o-n-g. And more than adequate to describe the content of your creation!

Now, notice that many files have extensions. They all do, really. In fact, your computer doesn’t know what to do with a file if it doesn’t have an extension. The extension is the three letter part following the main name. (You didn’t see an extension on my quevos rancheros example, because I left it off.) Here’s an example:

My Word processing report.doc

The “.doc” part of the file’s name tells Windows to use the program that’s associated with .doc files to open it. So, let’s say you’ve got Microsoft Word installed. Whenever the Windows operating system realizes you’ve clicked a file with the extension “.doc” it fires up Word, and Word opens the file. Presto.

There are lots of file extensions. Here’s a table for you that includes a few common file types you may encounter during your web travels.

Common file types

Extension	Type of file
txt	Text File, such as Notepad produces
doc	Document File, for example, MS Word
gif	Graphics Interchange Format (graphics)
jpg	Joint Photographic Experts Group (graphics)
pdf	Portable Document File
htm	Hypertext Markup (special coded text files)
html	Hypertext Markup Language (ditto)
zip	Compressed file requiring special software to decompress the file
tar	Same as zip. Just another compression style
pdf	Portable Document File (universal text file)
wav	Sound files
bmp	Bitmap files (graphics)

If you try to open a file extension that’s unregistered (unregistered means Windows doesn’t know what to do with it ‘cause there’s no association in the Windows Registry), Windows throws the Open With dialog box at you This dialog box lets you decide what program to open the file with. For example, I tried to open the file named ‘java.usj’ and I got this screen as a result. Since nothing on my computer is set up to edit or open a ‘.usj’ file, I have to locate and use a program that “understands” that type of file extension. Now that’s another trick altogether!

Commonly, people will send Power Point presentation files or Microsoft Publisher files as attachments to people who don’t have Microsoft Office installed on their computer. So those files cannot be viewed unless the appropriate software is installed.

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November 19 - 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Fountain Valley Library

Fountain Valley

On November 19 we will have Cheryl Wester coming to talk about Windows Mobile Devices. Cheryl has done this presentations at a number of user groups.

Windows Mobile devices are made up of Pocket PCs, Pocket PC phone editions, SmartPhones, and Portable Media Centers. Her presentation will cover the basics, who uses them, why she uses them, how to use them, and how they can make your day go smoothly. She will be sharing the features that are standard and some of her favorite third party products. Cheryl will be bringing a GPS system, Bluetooth headsets, keyboards, etc..

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