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Would You Sign This Contract?

by **Rob Rice**, a computer specialist living in Anchorage and a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City, www.ccokc.org

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Ok, here's the deal; I offer you a big, 56-inch, shiny new Filch Plasma Screen TV and I will sell it to you if you will agree to have a camera installed in your home so I may watch you watching the new television. Sound fair? You also agree that should you disable or inhibit the free operation of the camera in any way, you forfeit the television and your money. Neither am I responsible for any damages to your home from the equipment or its use nor do I guaranty privacy or even that the television will work.

Would you sign such a contract? Many of us, in a sense, have already agreed to something like the above scenario when we clicked on the End User License Agreement (EULA), the contract that accompanies most software these days.

It pretty much goes without saying that most of us do not read EULAs. They are often long, dry, and hard to understand documents written in a very small type face and crammed in a tiny window. Even if there is something bad in it, what are the chances it will have any real affect? After all "I'm one among millions."

We may often think of ourselves as just one among many cattle feeding in the pasture, so "the chances of lightning striking me are remote". But lightning did hit hundreds of folks in the form of a Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) lawsuit. Hundreds of persons

have been sued for allegedly downloading music illegally. For example, RIAA filed a lawsuit against 12-year-old Brianna LaHara, whose mom had paid a \$29.99 service charge to KaZaA for the company's music service, said Brianna, "I got really scared. My stomach is all turning," "I thought it was OK to download music because my mom paid a service fee for it. Out of all people, why did they pick me?" (1)

But what we have learned since Brianna's case came to light is that many intellectual property owners are using eavesdropping techniques to monitor end user compliance. Whether it's intercepting data traffic over an Internet connection or placing spyware on your computer, the name of the game seems to be intimidation through litigation. Of course, heavy-handed tactics do tend to produce mistakes and bad public feeling, such as RIAA's disastrous lawsuit where they sued a deceased great-grandmother who reportedly had never owned a computer. (2)

But what is interesting is that software that tends to operate in a dubious manner will typically tell you up front, or give you some hints in its EULA. Take for example this classic EULA that was analyzed by Benjamin Edelman back in 2004; he is an assistant professor at the Harvard Business School and a member of the Massachusetts Bar. It is Gator, an advertising pop-up software that often came embedded in

weather monitors, organizers and clock synchronizers. (The company changed its name to Claria Corporation. GAIN stands for Gator Advertising Information Network.) The EULA, with over 5,900 words of text, informed the user that:

"You agree that you will not use, or encourage others to use, any unauthorized means for the removal of the GAIN AdServer, or any GAIN-Supported Software from a computer."

That includes removing it with Adaware or SpyBot, which listed it as spyware.

"Any use of a packet sniffer or other device to intercept or access communications between GP and the GAIN AdServer is strictly prohibited."

Meaning you cannot monitor what it is doing while it is on your computer!

Mr. Edelman's website is a very good resource for the wary and worth a look (www.benedelman.org/news/112904-1.html).

Sony has faced some embarrassing headlines as of late with their music CDs' EULA, and rightly so. Take, for example, these observations by the Electronic Frontier Foundation regarding the contents of the Sony EULA:

If you file for bankruptcy, you have to delete all the music on your computer.

(see *EULA* on page 2)

(*EULA—continued from page 1*)

- The EULA says Sony-BMG will never be liable to you for more than \$5.
- If your house gets burgled, you have to delete all your music from your laptop when you get home. That's because the EULA says that your rights to any copies terminate as soon as you no longer possess the original CD.
- You must install any and all updates, or else lose the music on your computer. The EULA immediately terminates if you fail to install any update. No more holding out on those hobbler-ware downgrades masquerading as updates.
- If you move out of the country, you have to delete all your music. The EULA specifically forbids "export" outside the country where you reside. (3)

Most EULAs that I have read place all of the burden and financial responsi-

bility upon you. You pay the money, you take the risk, and you take the liability. The software company decides everything in its favor and takes no responsibility whatsoever, even for the software doing what it claims to do! It would seem that you have in effect given up your legal rights to use a piece of software.

Ok, so you read the license agreement, but the mind-numbing experience had you re-reading the same sentence over and over and by the time you were done you felt like the first documented case of someone having actually died from boredom. What is worse, you still don't know what it said! But cheer up, there is help available. For example, The Electronic Frontier Foundation has a helpful article titled, "Dangerous Terms: a User's Guide to EULAs" by Annalee Newitz. (4) It describes some of the more dubious terms found in some EULAs and what to look out for, such as:

- 1 "Do not criticize this product publicly."

- 2 "Using this product means you will be monitored."
- 3 "Do not reverse-engineer this product."
- 4 "Do not use this product with other vendors' products."
- 5 "By signing this contract, you also agree to every change in future versions of it. Oh yes, and EULAs are subject to change without notice."
- 6 "We are not responsible if this product messes up your computer."

You can also use some of the EULA analyzers that are available. While they are not a substitute for carefully reading a user agreement, they can be very helpful by flagging suspect sentences, especially when you have an insanely long contract such as the over 32,000 words found at the Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum's website. Figuring this would bring any EULA analyzer to its knees, I put it through the Spyware Guide's online EULA Analyzer. (5) It performed beautifully and flagged areas that the Analyzer thought suspicious, including:

You agree to pay us three thousand dollars per unsolicited email sent, or prohibited comment posted to the CPRR Discussion Group, or telephone call, and fifteen thousand dollars per email address added to your commercial mailing list in violation of the foregoing, plus damages. The CPRR Museum participates in Project Honey Pot which allows us to track and help catch spammers who harvest email addresses from our web pages.

One analyzer that I have been using for several months now is the EULAnalyzer by Javacool Software LLC, who also publish Spyware-Blaster. This is an application that is

(see *EULA* on page 3)

(EULA—continued from page 2)

very simple to use; just click *analyze* and then drag the application's pointer over the EULA and it automatically copies it into the program. Click the *analyze* button and it gives you its assessment almost instantaneously.

EULalyzer personal is free for educational and personal use and a Pro version with added features is also available. (6)

If you are still not convinced of the importance of reading the EULA, you might consider this: the folks over at PC Pitstop (pcpitstop.com) decided to see just how many people read the agreement. In their EULA they actually offered monetary compensation for reading the document! It stated:

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

A special consideration which may include financial compensation will be awarded to a limited number of authorized licensees to read this section of the license agreement and

contact PC Pitstop at consideration@pcpitstop.com. This offer may be withdrawn at any time.

Unfortunately, it took four months before anyone collected. Doug Heckman was the first person to email them in 3000 downloads! For his efforts, PC Pitstop gave him \$1000. So there you have it, incentive to read the license agreement!

Reading EULAs can actually be quite an interesting experience. Read enough of them, and you quickly learn how bold some companies have become in trying to thwart trade laws. But don't take my word for it, take a look at some of the Microsoft, Google, or Lexmark EULAs and see what they have to say; you may be amazed!

(1) Fox News, "12-Year-Old Sued for Music Downloading"
www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,96797,00.html

(2) BetaNews, "RIAA Sues Deceased Grandmother"
www.betanews.com/article/

RIAA_Sues_Deceased_Grandmother/1107532260

(3) Electronic Frontier Foundation, "Now the Legalese Rootkit: Sony-BMG's EULA" www.eff.org/deeplinks/archives/004145.php

(4) Electronic Frontier Foundation, "Dangerous Terms A User's Guide to EULAs" www.eff.org/wp/eula.php

(5) Spyware Guide's on-line EULA Analyzer, www.spywareguide.com/analyze/analyzer.php

(6) EULalyzer, www.javacoolsoftware.com

This article's reference to the Electronic Frontier Foundation should not be construed as an endorsement of the organization by the author. Rob Rice is a computer specialist living in Anchorage Alaska and a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City. Rob can be contacted at articles@isp.com.

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Windows Calendar

by Lynn Page, Editor, Crystal River Users Group, Florida, www.crug.com

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Windows Calendar, built into Windows Vista, helps you plan your activities and coordinate your plans with those of others. With Windows calendar, you can set up multiple calendars and view a single or multiple calendars at a time. This makes it easy to compare the calendars and look for conflicts in scheduling.

I personally use the calendar in Outlook for my scheduling, but if you don't have Office, the Windows Calendar is a great planning tool. It is especially useful if you need to handle a variety of different schedules. Set up a calendar for everyone in the family or group. Then use Windows Calendar to integrate them to compare daily activities. I quickly set up the three calendars for display in this combined view.

Appointments

With Windows Calendar, you can create appointments and set up an alert to remind you when the appointment is approaching. Set

Windows Calendar to alert you minutes, hours, or days ahead of time. I set my reminders in Outlook for 2 days notice.

If you attend regular meetings, like the CRUG membership meeting, set up recurring appointments. In Windows Calendar, create one appointment and then have the calendar set up a series of similar appointments at the selected intervals.

Tasks

Windows Calendar includes a personal task list. For each task, describe what is required, set a completion deadline, choose a priority ranking, and then track your progress right in the calendar. You can set reminders like those for appointments. As a task is completed, simply check it off the list.

Sharing Calendars

With Windows Calendar, you can set up individual calendars for multiple people. This makes it easy for people using the same computer

to coordinate their personal schedules. They can quickly compare information from any or all of the calendars, side-by-side in a single view. Each person can manage their own schedule and view the others' calendars, selectively or all at once.

Set Up a Calendar

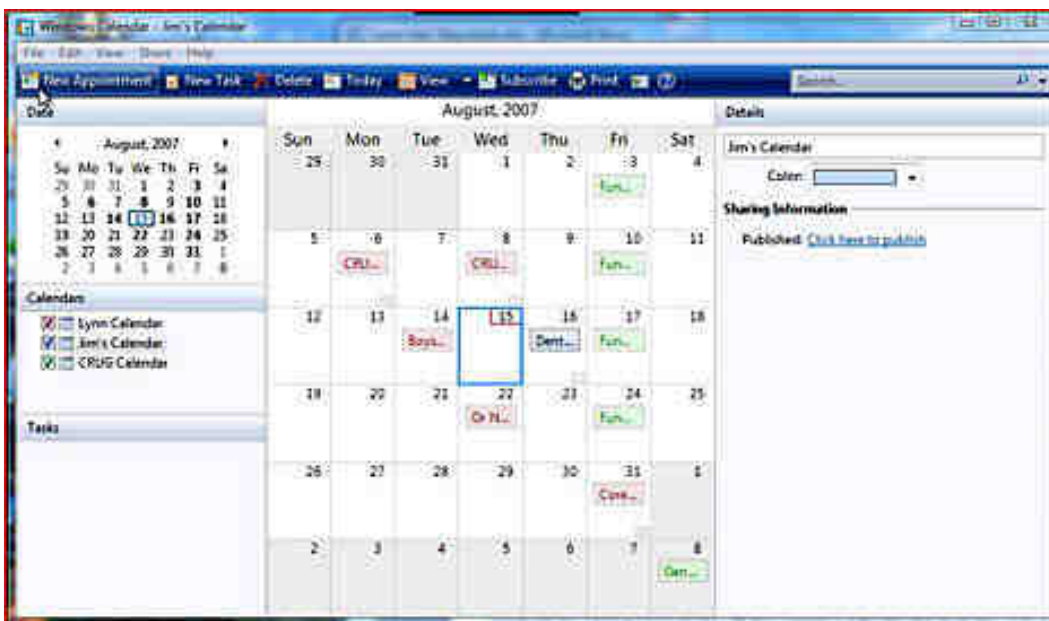
To set up a calendar in Windows Vista, click Start and type Calendar in the Start Search box. In the results, click Windows Calendar under Programs to select it. A calendar opens with the name assigned to the computer. You can generate this calendar or in the File drop down menu select *New Calendar* and start fresh.

In the new calendar, type in a name in the Calendars task pane and click *Enter*. This calendar and any others appear in the Calendars task pane. Clicking to add checks in the boxes next to the calendar lets you see those selected together. In the Details pane, select a color to help identify each calendar.

Add Appointments and Tasks

Once the calendars are set up, you can add appointments and tasks. Click *New Appointment* or *New Task* on the toolbar and add the information. You can even publish your calendar to your website and send invitations and appointments by email.

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The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman, Webmaster, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc., swipcug.apcug.org

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Email Reliability Woes

Banks, mutual funds, credit card companies, utilities, they all want to send me my monthly statements in electronic form over the Internet, "for my convenience," and incidentally to save on the cost of mailing them out the traditional way. Do I go along with that? No way, José! Just think of all the things that can go wrong.

Security. I already receive regular emails, mostly delegated to spam folders, from fake financial organizations such as PayPal, eBay, and banks all over the world. How am I going to distinguish the fishes from the phishes? I do have online access to some of my financial accounts, but I use them strictly one-way: I access them directly by typing in the URL. Some financial institutions have expanded security beyond the usual user name and password check, to let me verify that I'm dealing with the genuine institution. Before I present my user name and password, I am shown a prearranged word and an image to make sure that I am dealing with the genuine website, not some phisher in Nigeria. Such two-way passwords are a good idea, and using an image instead of a word adds additional security.

More security. I still have to worry about key grabber viruses that record what I type. An up-to-date reliable anti-virus program may prevent that, or not. Making payments online can also be hazardous, especially if I can't be absolutely certain I'm not addressing a phisher. I have a Citibank credit card account that will provide me online with a one-time credit card

number to be used for a single transaction. That minimizes the risk of fraud. But how am I going to archive online statements securely for years to come unless I print them out first? If necessary, does my own printout provide the same level of proof as an original bank statement?

Reliability. Because spam now makes up the largest part of email crossing the Internet, Internet Service Providers increasingly install spam filters to remove the chaff from the wheat. The problem arises when the spam filter removes legitimate messages without notifying the sender, or even worse, the recipient. It seems to happen all the time, and not only because it is easy to misspell an address. Recently I used my local provider, Sigecom.net, to respond to an email from a niece who uses myway.com. Fortunately I was notified by "blackhole.myway.com" that the response bounced, with an error message indicating that there was a mismatch between sender addresses somewhere along the way. Since Sigecom forwards email via another email provider (Mira-something-or-other), that could have been the problem. I sent the response again, using Google email that time, and all was well.*

A week later, I sent a SWIPCUG email message to 49 addressees using my Google email account. Two of the mailings, both addressed to members at att.com, were blocked because "it was sent by a system that we have reason to think has sent high levels of spam to our customers in the past." Maybe other members did not receive the message either, but I wasn't noti-

fied. Again using Google mail, I resent the message without trouble to just the two blocked recipients. Maybe att.com balked at the fairly long list (49) of addressees?

One of our members, associate director at the local public library that hosts our meetings, was unwittingly deprived of messages sent to him and about 10 other members who informally constitute our planning committee. The library has its own email system, guarded by a properly named "barracuda" to swallow anything smelling of spam. The system administrator managed to retrieve the messages, belatedly, once he was aware of the problem, and loosened the rules to get our member back in the loop.

It goes to show that even if you are not personally plagued by spam woes, your email communications are still affected. Its security and reliability must be paramount if we are to trust it to replace snail mail in delivering important notices. At the least the sender should be notified, and blocked email should be made available to the recipient in a special folder to allow quick verification of its status. Yahoo and Google mail deposit at least some suspected spam in a separate folder. It takes only seconds to check that folder and remove all the spam while being able to save a genuine message.

More Reliability Issues. When an email address is changed, it is difficult to let all the correspondents know, and chances are that some of them will forget to change all their email address folders. Contrary to

(see *The New* on page 6)

(The New—continued from page 5)

good old snail mail, there is no friendly post office that forwards email. Also, the slightest typo will make email undeliverable. Add to that the times that the Internet is inaccessible because of hardware, software or network problems, and it is clear that email cannot be counted on for the timely and secure delivery of financial and billing statements.

Once Upon A Time...

in a far away land, when I was still a young lad, clocks sat on mantel-pieces and had to be wound every so often. They didn't keep very accurate time, and we kept them running at least five minutes fast so we wouldn't miss the train. You see, trains left the station on the exact second in the schedule and the best place in town to find the accurate time was from the big clock at the railroad station.

Now we have clocks and watches that listen at night to the shortwave radio and adjust their time to the nearest second by synchronizing with an atomic clock in Colorado. As a good nerd, I regularly compare the time shown by the atomic clock on the wall with my atomic watch to make sure they agree to the second. And now we travel by planes that sometimes manage to leave the gate within an hour of the scheduled departure time. Or not at all, as the case may be. Progress...

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Hasta la Vista—Gadgets and the Windows Sidebar

by Lee Reynolds, Member BPCA (Broward Personal Computer Association, Inc.), Florida, www.bpca.com

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I'm told the literal meaning of "hasta la vista" in Spanish is "until the seeing." Or maybe a more adequate translation is "see you later." But in this column, I'm using that phrase to invite you to take a look at Microsoft's latest version of Windows: Vista.

Devotees of the Apple Mac have for some time had available, in their OS X Tiger operating system, something called Dashboard, which allows them to have what are called Widgets (mini-applications that provide a very simple, tightly focused interface for common tasks) available for instant use. Now Windows Vista introduces something similar in its Windows Sidebar. This is a narrow strip of "Gadgets" that can be parked along either the right or the left side of your Desktop. You can also drag the Gadgets off the Sidebar and place them somewhere on the Desktop. You can configure the Sidebar to start either every time Windows starts, or only when you want it to appear. It is available on the Start Menu under All Programs | Accessories | Windows Sidebar.

There are a number of ways you can configure the Sidebar after you right click it and select Properties from the context menu. For example, you can set it so that Sidebar is always on top of other windows; you can hide or unhide it from view (unhide it by right clicking the small Sidebar icon in the Notification Area of the Taskbar and select Open); if you have multiple monitors connected to your pc, then you can configure which one the Sidebar is displayed on. You can add and remove Gadgets from the Sidebar (perhaps the easiest way is to right click the small plus (+) sign above the Gadgets and select Add Gadgets from the context menu), and detach them from or reattach them to the Sidebar. You can have

multiple copies of the same Gadget open in the Sidebar if you want (which might be convenient for clocks or weather gadgets, for example), and you can drag them to different positions up and down in the Sidebar.

The built-in Gadgets for Windows Vista include: an onscreen Calendar, a clock that can show the time in any time zone or city, a Gadget-based version of your email Windows Contacts, a CPU meter which consists of two gauges that show the load on your computer's microprocessor and RAM, a simple currency converter, a notepad for jotting down reminders, a photo slideshow, a weather Gadget, and others. In addition, there are dozens of other Gadgets you can choose from if you aim your web browser at microsoftgadgets.com. You can even design your own Gadgets and submit them to Microsoft at one of the links on the above page.

With each Gadget, you can choose from a right click menu which allows you to close the Gadget or adjust the opacity of the display, among other options. When you move your mouse over a Gadget, you will see a little "X" icon and one that looks like the head of a wrench. The X icon can be used to close the Gadget, while the wrench icon accesses that Gadget's property page. With the right click menu of the Windows Sidebar icon in the Notification Area, you can choose to Open the Sidebar if it has been closed, Move Gadgets to the Front, access the Property page for the Sidebar, Add Gadgets, get Help, or Exit the entire Sidebar application.

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Portable Data

by **Corinne Goeke**, a member of the **Computer Club of Green Valley, Arizona**, gvcc.apcug.org

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Which of the following is an item for storing computer data?

- A Thumb Drive
- B Jump Drive
- C Flash Drive
- D Key Drive
- D Memory Stick
- E USB Stick
- F UFD
- G All of the above

If you guessed "G," good for you. All of the above names refer to UFDs or "USB Flash Drives." USB, of course, refers to those little rectangular ports you can find (although there never seems to be enough of them) on the back and front of most computers.

So what is a UFD? You see them connected to people's key chains, hanging around necks on a cord and stuck in pockets and purses! Simply put, a UFD is a really convenient data storage device. Think of a one-gigabyte UFD as being 694 floppy disks all packed into a two-inch long by 1/2-inch wide package.

UFDs are data storage devices that have replaced CDs, floppies and

other methods of carrying data from computer to computer. Plug one into a USB port on any computer, and you can read and write files on it. It is now the method of choice for transporting data that you need often.

In fact, there is a special class of UFDs called U3 that can also store applications. Plug one of these UFDs into a computer, and you can run Mozilla Firefox, Open Office, or even utilize an operating system such as Linux.

The cost of a UFD depends upon the number of bytes it can hold. A 64 megabyte UFD used to be considered more than enough storage. But as the size of data files has increased, so has the size of UFDs. Fortunately, the price for large storage has dropped considerably. You can pick up a 1 Gigabyte UFD for around \$15. A large UFD currently available is a 16 GB that sells for \$133 at www.newegg.com.

Finally, your choice of UFD can reflect your individuality. You don't have to settle for the standard gray plastic housing. You can buy UFDs that look like twigs

(www.oooms.nl) or even animal characters (lab.mimoco.com).

So, if you find you need to transport data files from computer to computer, a UFD is an easy solution. They are available anywhere you can buy electronics.

A word of caution. To avoid losing data, be sure to eject a UFD before removing it from the USB port. You can go to *My Computer*, right click on the UFD device and select eject. Or you can use the Safely Remove Icon on the lower right corner of your desktop.



Typical UFD next to a quarter

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Attack of the Clone

by Mick Topping, a member of the ICON
(Interactive Computer Owners Network), Missouri, www.iconusersgroup.org

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I have been dragging my feet on Vista. I really don't see much in it that I think I need. However, it is getting time for a new laptop; the hard drive on the old one is getting a little crowded, and a little busy, and slow on startup. What I really needed was a way to distract myself from how much I wanted a new LT, and maybe delay getting a new one until Vista gets a little more debugged.

Here we go—a really good deal at a local store on a laptop hard drive, I never could resist a good deal. The staff guy had a hard time finding the special.

A bit of confusion on the sale circular. But finally found it. Then he says “you are not going to install that by yourself?!? We have a fine technical staff that can do that sort of thing for a small fee.” I had done a similar install before, and did not remember much of a problem, so I politely declined.

The first surprise on opening the box was, right on top, a big yellow card, with bold print: READ THIS! Q. Can I install this drive myself? A. This kit is designed for professional installation ONLY! None of the temporary storage

devices, hardware, software, specialized tools, or instructions that may be needed to install this drive is included in this kit.

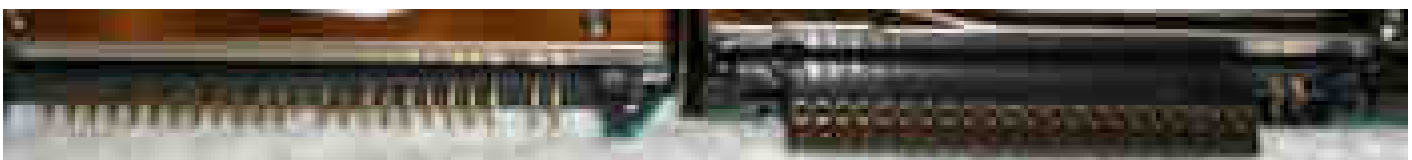
All right, a challenge—the only thing I love more than a good deal, is a technical challenge. I then worked about 4 hours on studying, preparing and executing stuff like partitioning, formatting, managing, drive-imaging, copying, followed by several more hours of FIXMBR, FIXBOOT C:/, copying NTLDR...and generally suffering extreme frustration. Things that worked in years past seemed to no longer work.

After I slept on it, I realized there may be an easier way. This new drive is a Seagate hard drive, a product of the most advanced HD company on earth! (Says so right on the box.) They must know that they could sell more HDs if they make it easy to transfer stuff to the new HD! Off I go, to www.seagate.com/www/en-us/support/downloads/. After a bit of poking around, I find

MaxBlast 5, a Maxtor program. (Maxtor is now a Seagate subsidiary.) However, MaxBlast looks really promising. It is a free download; it is a product of Acronis who makes several high quality disk cloning and data-backup products.

Now we are making progress. I download and install Maxblast 5. Maxblast has a 60-page manual online, which I read thoroughly (OK, maybe 10 minutes), then run it. One of the choices is Bootable Media Builder. This allows the creation of a CD that is “bootable.” Flash or other USB also supported—but your BIOS must support USB booting to use it. Note that Windows is *always* using the disk it is booted from, making this disk hard to copy, but by using a bootable CD it is possible to start the computer while the existing hard drive is not in use by Windows, so it can be more easily copied. Maxblast has two modes for Bootable Media Builder: The Full version, and the Safe version. The “full” version seems more appropriate for using

(see *Clone* on page 9)



(Clone—continued from page 8)

USB devices, which I will need to use (for externally attached USB drive), so that is what I choose. And since I wish to make a bootable CD, I choose the ISO image, which is the standard format for this capability.

About ready to make a clone of my hard drive. Since the laptop has no capability to add additional internal drives, the new drive is connected externally through a USB-IDE cable (under \$20 for a cable that will interface with 2.5" and 3.5" internal drives).

After the bootable CD is created, Power off the computer, then connect the cable to the computer and the new drive. Put on your good glasses, and examine the large end of the cable closely. There is a set of holes that match the pins on the disk drive, and where one pin is missing on the drive, there is one hole that is plugged on the adapter. If you have an adapter for 3.5 as well as 2.5 drives, there will be one set of holes for either type of drive. Some (about 4) of the pins will remain exposed (no holes).

In theory, this setup should work when plugged in after the power is on, but with weak USB power, there have been reports of the drive not spinning-up fast enough and the drive logic indicating a bad drive. Turn on power, and quickly insert the CD. If the computer boots to Windows, you can shut down and retry. Note that you may have to change the BIOS set-up to boot from the CD before the HD. BIOS setup procedures are different on every machine, but are usually accessed by hitting F2 or Delete while booting, but before Windows starts. (Check your user's manual.)

The Clone Disk is the choice, and if you are happy with your existing disk setup (no partitions, or like the existing proportions) the default may be best. I was able to increase several of my partitions for some

slack, and have room for a 20GB spare.

After you have finished the cloning process, it is time to swap the internal hard drive with the external drive.

Remember that laptops have a battery—don't do *any* work on the inside of the laptop without first removing the battery. In fact, don't do anything without reading the appropriate sections of your particular laptop's users manual. They are all a little different.

Laptop HDs are usually in a small slide-out tray; my tray was held in place by two screws. The drive is held in the tray by two more screws. If you try really hard, the removal and replace process can be extended to 10 minutes, but most folks will finish the task in about 5. Note that these screws are frequently tiny, so it is a good idea to do this work on a light-colored surface, in a well-lit work area.

In addition to the screws holding the drive in place, there will likely be a small adapter that fits over the pins on the IDE drive and makes it compatible with the connector inside the laptop's tray holder. This figure shows the HD naked connector pins on the left, and the pins with the adapter installed on the right. This adapter has the same hole pattern as the USB-IDE cable adapter. Note that there are two groups of pins, the 4 pins (on the right) separated from the larger group (on the left), and the 4-pin group is not used in this application, either for the internal drive adapter, or the USB-IDE connection.

Be careful when handling the drive to avoid static discharge. Hardwood floors and leather soled shoes are preferred over carpets and sneakers in the work area. Also, the drives should never be squeezed on their flat surface—when inserting the pins in either the USB-IDE connector, or the

internal adapter, grasp the drive by the edges to avoid placing too much pressure on the flat surfaces of the drives.

The ability to easily replace a a HD is very valuable. This gives you a way to do risky experiments, such as using questionable or incompatible software, or perhaps editing the registry, while minimizing the risk of having to do a total system reinstall.

The MaxBlast program requires at least one Seagate Technology or Maxtor disc drive, as well as several other pretty easy-to-meet requirements. I did not try to see if it would work on other drive brands, and I don't know if it checks. It is a pretty nice feature though, particularly for laptops, where there is no space to add a HD, only to replace a HD.

I would personally not recommend this as a primary data backup, as it is a little tedious, and backups should be as easy as possible. So, HD replacement could be thought of as a way to upgrade the system, as well as a sort of super system-restore. If your laptop is seriously important, such as work related, for a business, get it set-up well, functioning smoothly, and then (after making a separate back-up of your data) create a clone of your hard drive, and swap it to make sure it is a good copy. Then, if the worst happens, your hard drive dies, just swap in with the original. Maybe even take the spare with you on trips, along with a little screwdriver...

Just don't lose it!

References:

www.harddriveupgrade.com

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