



MUG Monitor

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Next Meeting:

New Gadgets at CES (Consumer Electronics Show)

by Club President Louis Vitale

Macon Community Facilities Building
February 12th, 7 PM

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Recording Audio

By **Bart Koslow, Software Review Coordinator, Thousand Oaks Personal Computer Club, Thousand Oaks, CA, topcc.org**

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Nowadays it is no problem to record video from a TV broadcast, VCR or other source using a Digital Video Recorder. When I began to look into recording music broadcasts off the air, I found that there were external Audio recorders, but they were expensive, beginning in the \$250 range and up. This is twice as much as a similar Video Recorder.

Since I wanted to create CDs from broadcast music and I had DVD/CD burners on my computer, I decided that using my computer was a better and cheaper alternative. One possibility was a TV/FM card for my computer which may be purchased for \$30 to \$40 and up. However, I found a cheaper method. My stereo system was only a few feet from my computer, so I connected an audio output from my audio receiver to the line in on my computer sound card. I happened to have a cable with two RCA connectors on one end going to a single stereo connector on the other end. Just what I needed. I connected the RCA connectors to audio out on my receiver and the stereo connector to the line in on my sound card on the computer.

Now all I needed was a program that could access the sound card and record the input. I hit the jackpot. Roxio Easy Media Creator has just the program. Not only that, but once you complete your recording, Roxio has a basic sound editor that enables editing of the sound files, and programs to burn the files to a CD or DVD. The Roxio program will access a number of inputs besides the line in. You may access your phone line,

CD player, microphone input, and other inputs including Internet Radio broadcasts received on your computer. You may also decide which type of file format to record: WAV, MP3, or WMA; what fidelity to record; and where to save the recorded file. In addition, there is a recording level meter and control.

Once I turned on my stereo receiver and accessed the Roxio recording program, everything went well. I recorded a long broadcast for a few hours and then my computer told me I had a problem and had to close the Roxio program. I lost my whole recording, but now I knew it worked and tried again.

This time I closed all the programs I did not need and disconnected from the Internet to get less interference when I recorded. After editing the recorded audio file, I successfully burned it to two CDs.

If you have music cassettes or even VCRs with music, you may use this technique to transfer music to CDs. If you have cable or satellite TV service with accompanying radio, you may use the above procedure to record from your set top box to your computer. I

(see Audio on page 2)

New Gadgets at CES

by **Lou Vitale, Club President**

February 12th, 7 PM

Macon Users Group Franklin, NC

Please see the printed edition
for contact information

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Monthly Meetings

MUG meets the second Tuesday of every month at 7 P.M. in the Macon County Community Facilities Building on Georgia Road (US 441 South).

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Website

www.maconusersgroup.org

Volunteers Available

The following club members have thoughtfully volunteered to be on call for other members having problems or needing a little extra help. If you would like to add your services, please email the newsletter editor.

Lee Alexander
Jerry Ray
John Rymer
Jack Wallingford

(Audio—continued from page 1)

have satellite service with SIRIUS radio, and am now recording live and historical music broadcasts that interest me.

I next discovered that in many cases I could bypass an external stereo receiver, set top box, or recorder by using Internet Radio which may be played using Windows Media Player, iTunes Player, Real Player or other free media players. All you have to do is find the radio station that is broadcasting the music you wish and then enter the URL for its streaming audio broadcasts into the Player software. I did a search using Google and found there are numerous Internet radio station locators, found the station I wanted and entered the URL. Now I had the music coming in directly to my computer from the Internet with no intermediary device. In order to save the music, I again resorted to Roxio's "Capture Audio from Sound Card" program and changed the input from "Line In" to "Stereo Mix," and recorded the broadcast to a file. Edited the audio file and burned it to a CD and I was finished. It all worked like a charm.

Now, I do not need a Stereo Receiver, external recorder or even have to add a TV/ FM card to my computer.

The simple solutions are always the best ones.

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Linux SIG

with Jim Swanson, Mentor

The next Linux SIG meeting is Tuesday, February 19 at 7:00 PM in the meeting room at the Macon County Public Library on Siler Road.

Treasurer's Report

Phyllis Minnich

Balance forward.....	1793.25
Income: interest, dues, 50/50.....	172.00
Expense.....	(153.00)
Balance*	
(including equipment fund).....	\$1812.25
*Equipment Fund (50/50, auction).....	706.50
Investment Fund.....	2026.53



CES is billed as the world's largest consumer electronics trade show. I had the privilege, along with 140,000 of my close friends, to check it out. Of course, the fact that I had to spend 3 days in Las Vegas was not a problem. What struck me the most was the unreal nature of the whole experience. Staying at "Planet Hollywood" on the strip and taking cabs to the 7 huge halls for the show could not be more different than being in Franklin.

The excuse, I mean reason, for being there was to see where our electronic future was actually heading. Some major trends were clear, and many new products are on the way into our lives. I will show you some of those new electronic marvels at our next meeting, but for now let's look into the immediate future of our electronic existence.

It is a time of evolution, not revolution, in the industry. No big breakthrough products or technologies were evident at the show. But some clear trends did emerge from the showroom floor.

Convergence is where one device takes on many different functions. Such as a cell phone that is a music player, a video player and a personal computer. Or a flat screen that is a computer monitor, HDTV receiver and media center, or a fine art picture frame. A car navigation device that is a phone, internet link, and display device. More functionality and less hardware is the key to this trend. It has been well under way for years, but has matured into many useful products that were on display and are now available to consumers.

Thin is in; every major flat screen manufacturer was out to see how thin

their screen could get. One inch is the new *fat*. I am not sure why this is so important, but it was a very big deal. There was important news and it came from Sony. They displayed the first production OLED screen; this is a completely new technology. It was only an 11-inch screen and 3 credit cards thin, but the real news was its resolution and contrast ratio. Even staring at it from 12 inches away, it looked to me like a very high quality photograph in motion. Of course at \$2500 each, don't expect to see it at Wal-Mart any time soon.

Wireless is in. I don't mean your cell phone; I mean no wires to any device. When you hang that 42-inch flat screen on your wall, there will be no wires, it will link wirelessly to all the hardware now sitting in a closet. Place a new digital camera next to your computer and it will wirelessly transfer the pictures to your hard drive. Put your credit card on Microsoft's new interactive table and it will automatically read the card. Place your cell phone on a table and it will charge automatically, no physical connection necessary. Who knew wires were such a big problem?

GPS technology is now in almost all small devices. Of course it is in car navigation systems, cell phones, and security devices of all types. But Google and other mapping companies now use it extensively to locate where a picture was taken or where a store is located. Cameras have it to identify the location of the picture you just took. Even dog collars now have them. If you dog wanders off, leaving a prescribed area, you get an email from the collar telling where he is. I can see divorce lawyers and elder caregivers being interested in using this device.

HD DVD vs. Blu-Ray—the battle to be the next content format has been fought for years, but now a winner seems to be clear. Blu-Ray may have finally gained enough support from the major content providers to make HD DVD the next "Beta Max." The Disney Blu-Ray exhibit was by far the most elaborate display at the show. An almost full-size pirate ship was used to promote the "Pirates of the Caribbean" Blu-Ray disk.



Keep in mind that a Blu-Ray has a capacity of about 20 GB. What if you could get 832 GB in a 2.5-inch solid-state device half the thickness of a deck of cards? Would that change the world? Short answer, *yes*. BiTMICRO introduced such a device at CES. It could store 400 HD movies, or 1,200 regular movies, 2,000 hours of television or 250,000 songs. It is set to ship to manufacturers in the third quarter of this year. No price set yet.

I imagine that within a few years, the SSD (Solid State Disk) will be reduced in size to a flash drive that you could put in your pocket or wear as jewelry. You could have \$5,000 worth of content hanging around your neck.

One "trend" is clear: I will go next year if the gods allow it. The siren call of the Bellagio's dancing waters and the thrill of the Mirage Volcano have me firmly in their grasp and I have no intention of resisting.

Five Reasons Not to Fear a \$200 Linux PC

by Erica Ogg, News.com, published on ZDNet News, Jan 24, 2008

submitted by Lee Alexander

Linux is not just for computer whizzes.

In fact, buying Linux and learning how to use it are easier than ever, thanks to the open-source operating system's expanding presence in affordable computers and mainstream retail outlets.

In quick succession, the number of mass-market, sub-\$200 desktops has tripled—from one to three—in less than three months. At the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas earlier this month, small form-factor PC maker Shuttle debuted its \$199 KPC. The catch? It's not preloaded with Windows, but an operating system based on Linux. Then last week, Mirus and Linspire collaborated on the Mirus Linux PC, which is now for sale at Sears.com. It's \$299 (although an included \$100 rebate brings it to \$199), and is preloaded with Freespire 2.0, an Ubuntu-based Linux distribution.

But the beginning of the low-cost computer trend actually started last fall. The Everex gPC showed up on the shelves of Wal-Mart for \$198, a low price even for a desktop PC. It's bundled with speakers, a mouse, and a keyboard, and it comes with 24-hour tech support. The operating system is called gOS, a version of Ubuntu 7.10. Sure, that may be almost unpronounceable for most average consumers, but despite that, Wal-Mart is having trouble keeping the gPC in stock.

Linux is getting more mainstream exposure than just appearing in inexpensive computers. It's now being offered by two of the world's largest PC manufacturers, Dell and Lenovo, and is making its way into tiny—not to mention trendy—inexpensive laptops, like One Laptop Per Child's

XO, Everex's CloudBook, and Asus' Eee PC, all of which come with Linux preinstalled. In the case of the Eee, it is doing surprisingly well with consumers.

So what are we to think now that Linux, long popular among a very narrow niche of computer users, is making its way to mainstream retail outlets? Perhaps that trying a \$200 Linux PC isn't as risky as some might think. Here are five reasons why.

Lower barrier to entry

At \$200, that's not a huge penalty for trying an unfamiliar operating system packaged by a hardware company you may not have heard of before. Just to put it in proper perspective, \$199 is less than half the price of an iPhone, and is roughly equivalent to about 5 percent of the cost of a new decent-quality 32-inch high-definition TV or five to six tanks of gas. If you don't have a ton of expendable income, you can always put off updating your current Windows or Mac machine for six months, try it out, and see what you think.

Preinstalled is perfect for newbies. True, the biggest headache associated with most versions of Linux these days is the actual installation, but that's the case for any operating system, Stephen O'Grady, principal analyst for Redmonk, points out. Installing Windows from scratch on a machine can hit snags just as much as installing a version of Linux. But, he added, "If you're getting it preinstalled, the manufacturer has done the legwork to make sure the individual parts in the machine work with the operating system involved." All of that can translate to fewer headaches for the user.

And maintenance is relatively easy. That's because most versions of Linux come with package management. Unlike Windows, which just updates the operating system itself, Ubuntu, for example, will update the OS plus any of the applications included. "The average everyday user doesn't have to do anything," O'Grady said.

Familiarity breeds loyalty

Linux is getting easier to use all the time—and better looking. The past two years have seen the most consistent leaps in the improvement of the user interface. In the last year alone, 3D desktop effects—a la Windows Vista and Mac OS X—have been introduced.

"There has been some effort in recent years to make the transition more comfortable by mimicking some of the user conventions of Windows or Mac OS," said O'Grady. For instance, a "Start" menu or an applications "dock." The Everex Green PC runs gOS, whose desktop looks strikingly similar to Mac OS X.

The specs are acceptable for general use

All of the companies making sub-\$200 Linux machines—Everex, Shuttle, and Mirus—use brand-name parts you've heard of: Intel processors and chipsets; ATI graphics cards; and more. Mirus' and Shuttle's Linux PCs come with a minimum of 1GB of memory, and Everex's comes with 512MB, upgradable to 2GB. All three have an 80GB hard drive, enough to do basic computing tasks. It should be noted that none of the offerings is a complete PC, however. The gPC and the Mirus lack a monitor, and the Shuttle comes with nothing but the PC.

(see *Linux* on page 10)

Moving on to Vista, Part 3

by Neil Stahfest, Shareware Librarian, Tacoma Area PC User Group, WA, www.tapcug.org

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Your PC's desktop is the largest, most user-defined area on your PC's screen. It contains all your own shortcuts, folder icons and your personal desktop picture. The desktop is really just a personal file folder on drive C. That means that any work you do on the desktop is saved for you on Drive C and not lost when you turn the computer off. Of course any documents, pictures, etc. that are "saved" on your desktop can be moved or copied to other folders on your hard drive.

After a while, some of—make that most of us, find our desktop becomes loaded with program icons and shortcut icons. Program shortcut icons are a convenient way to get to programs that you use a lot. Unfortunately, when you install new programs, most of them add a desktop shortcut, and soon you have a desktop full of shortcuts, making it hard to find a shortcut when you want it. Here are a couple of solutions to this clutter.

The left end of the taskbar contains a "Quick Launch Toolbar." By default, Windows Vista places one or two program icons here (i.e., Internet Explorer). You can drag a limited number of additional shortcut icons for your favorite programs to this area and save space on your desktop. A "feature" of the Quick Launch Toolbar is that you only have to point at the program icons there and left-click once to start the program. This might seem a little confusing at first if you are used to double clicking on a program icon to start it, but you'll probably get used to it pretty fast.

Program shortcuts on your desktop point to programs that are also listed in

your Start menu. The most frequently used programs can be seen when you click on the Start button. On the Start menu, click on "All Programs" to see all the other programs installed on your computer. You may need to use the scroll bar to see all of them and you will probably find more programs than you have shortcuts on your desktop. So, once you confirm that a program shortcut points to a program listed on the Start menu, you can safely delete infrequently used desktop shortcuts.

A third approach to reducing desktop clutter is to consolidate shortcuts. If you have multiple programs that do similar tasks (i.e., a photo catalog and picture manipulation program), create a desktop folder named "Photos." Then drag your shortcuts into the "Photos" folder and you're done.

Vista comes with a new set of desktop pictures. Access to alternate

desktop pictures is similar, but slightly different, from what you may be used to with Windows XP. Right-click on an empty area of the desktop and click on "Personalize." On the "Personalization" menu, select "Desktop Background." An array of available pictures will appear. Scroll through the pictures and select one. Make a selection from "How should the picture be positioned" and click OK

That's fine if all you want to use are the pictures that came with Vista. What if you want to use something different? Just follow the steps list above, but when you get to the "Desktop Background," instead of selecting one of the available pictures, next to where it says "Picture Location," click once on "Windows wallpapers." You'll see a list of other areas that contain

(see *Moving On* on page 10)



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The Deals Guy

by Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users Group



Problem Resolved

Last month I mentioned a reader had tried the free Advanced Windows-Care Personal (from my November column), but in order for it to fix the problems, he needed to upgrade to the pay version, so he stopped there. I later received a message from Ira Wilsker telling me it worked fine without upgrading, and that he had demonstrated it to their group. My proofreader also tried it with no upgrade demand, so I downloaded it and it removed what it found without upgrading to the pay version. I don't know where my reader went wrong, but he's going to try it again. Sorry for the mixup.

No Operating system?

What's a Hypervisor?

I saw this article (tinyurl.com/2zjucc) about using servers without operating systems. This doesn't affect home users, but could it in the future? I found it interesting.

I severely edited the items below so thoroughly check their websites for full information. I have not tried them.

A Firefox Add-on

iMacros for Firefox was designed to automate online activities within the Firefox web browser. With iMacros, users can create macros to automatically check the same sites every day, remember passwords, complete web forms, and upload or download files, among other activities. They say, "Whatever you do with Firefox, iMacros can automate it." Notable examples include stockbrokers who create macros to extract online stock quotes, shoppers who use them to automatically compare prices at online stores and website owners

who use them to get daily downloads of their page rankings.

iMacros for Firefox allows users to share macros and scripts in a way similar to how they share bookmarks on the many social bookmarking websites. After creating a new macro, users can use just one click to share it with their friends as a link, or by distributing the link via email and social bookmarking websites, or by embedding it in a website or blog for public access. Script sharing is now so popular that iOpus has even created a special site for script-sharing on del.icio.us.

iMacros for Firefox is free for personal and commercial use. Users may opt to upgrade to the business version with guaranteed response times and advanced features. Additional information and the software download link are available online at www.iopus.com/imacros/firefox. The software may also be downloaded directly from the official Mozilla site for extensions at addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/3863.

Video File Conversion

Video Mobile Converter v1.0 supports digital video files in the following formats: .AVI (audio video interleave), .ASF (advanced systems format), .MOV (QuickTime movie), .MPG/.MPEG/.MP4 (moving pictures experts group) and .WMV (windows media video). Once you choose a video, Video Mobile Converter loads the video and lets you define how much video to convert. Users also have control over the video and audio quality during the conversion process. Users control the height and width of

the video, its frame and bit rate as well as its overall quality. Users also control the sample rate, bit rate and overall quality of the video's converted audio, along with the option of splitting video files during the conversion process enabling very large video files to become smaller and more easily managed.

Lastly, Video Mobile Converter can output the converted video in the following formats: .3GP and .3G2 (for use on 3G network mobile devices that use GSM or CDMA network protocols), .MP4 (for use on mobile devices, such as iPod classic, iPod nano, iPod touch, iPhones, cellular phones and other mobile devices), and .PSP (for use on Sony PlayStation Portables).

Video Mobile Converter v1.0 runs under all versions of Microsoft Windows, including Vista, and costs \$29.95 for a single-user license. User group members get a 20% discount. For some reason they didn't respond to my request for the special ordering procedures, so you can email Michael Kaba (sales@geovid.com). Could be the because of the holidays. Licensed users are entitled to the fully functional copy of the software and free updates. Further information, as well as a free, fully functional evaluation copy is available from www.videomobileconverter.com. For more information, go to www.geovid.com. Download link:

Help For Your Website

SeoAdministrator is a popular professional tool for webmasters and SEO specialists. We released a new module called "Site Analyzer" that will be of interest to all webmasters, (see *Deals Guy* on page 10)

Microsoft Patches Still Another Patch

by Bob de Violini, a member of the Channel Islands PCUG, CA, www.cipcug.org

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

From the once is not enough department, Microsoft has, again, patched a patch. This time, it involves patch number MS07-069, which is a cumulative security update for Internet Explorer 6 installed on Windows XP Service Pack 2 only. Apparently the initial patch released on December's patch Tuesday caused computers to experience an unexpected crash or hang upon launching Internet Explorer. If you, like I, have updating set to notify but not download and install, or if you visit the Windows Update site on your own once a month instead of using Auto Update, then by all means please go to the Windows Update site and grab the fix as soon as you can. The fix doesn't require a reboot; it just makes a minor registry entry to prevent IE6 from crashing again.

Internet Explorer and G-mail

Rolling right along, there was some debate during December with regards to a "vulnerability" that exists when visiting Google's web-based email site, Gmail, with Internet Explorer. When the "bug" was pointed out to the computer industry media, both Microsoft and Google denied the root of the problem was with theirs. Apparently, an investigator has claimed that IE improperly stores files in its cache and that the scripting of Gmail allows this to be exploited, which would allow someone to steal any user names and passwords for Gmail that have been entered since the last time the IE cache was purged. The simple way around this is to use a browser besides IE when you visit Gmail or, if you must use IE for checking your mail with Gmail, first purge the cache and all cookies and then log in to the site. To purge IE's cache, inside IE go to the Tools drop

down menu and select Internet Options. Now, in the middle of the Internet Options box, click the Delete Cookies button and click OK in the box that pops up. Next, click the Delete Files button and click OK in the box that pops up. Now click the OK button at the bottom of the Internet Options box, and you're all set. There has been no other news about this issue, so using another browser or purging IE's cache is the only solution for now. By the way, the biggest risk for this behavior appears to be if you're sharing computer access such as that which is available at a public library or a shopping mall where you pay for a few minutes of high-speed Internet access.

Critical Updates for QuickTime

For those of you who are fond of using Apple's QuickTime media player, there have been a couple of updates released in December to fix a

few critical security vulnerabilities. If you only updated QuickTime once during that timeframe, you might want to visit Apple's site to get the latest update. The most recent version of the player (without the iTunes add-on) is 7.3.1.70. While you're at the Apple site, you might want to download and install the Apple Software updater, which makes it very easy to keep QuickTime updated. Just click on it and watch it do its thing.

HP computer vulnerabilities

For those of you who have Hewlett Packard laptops and desktops, there is a vulnerability in HP's Software Update software. This vulnerability can allow an attacker to turn your computer into a useless collection of metal and plastic that's completely unbootable. HP rushed out a fix in around four days, and it's now available for your download. Computer

(see *Patch* on page 11)

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Bot-Nets

by **Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.**, a regular columnist and member of
the Sarasota PCUG, Florida, www.spcug.org

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups

Keeping your computer safe while connected to the Internet is becoming more and more difficult. The "attackers" are becoming more sophisticated and are sharing more ways to get their software into your computer. *Business Week* recently ran an article on the major security problems expected in 2008. Unfortunately, most of them arrived long before the new year started. We have been warned for years that it was possible to recruit unprotected computers into networks that could be controlled by an external source. This recruitment network problem has gotten much worse over the past few years. It is estimated that 7% of the computers connected to the Internet have been infected with a Botnet program. So what is a "Botnet?"

A robot or "bot" software program allows a computer to be remotely controlled without the knowledge of the computer's owner. When you have a number of "bot" controlled computers it is referred to as a "botnet." All of the computers in the botnet carry out commands issued by the network controller. Just one example of what can be done with a botnet is the sending of spam. The controller can easily have 100,000 computers in its network. So the botmaster will contract to send out one million email messages. The network can then send ten messages from each of the compromised computers. With a constant connection to the Internet using cable or DSL, the computer owner will have no idea that his/her computer has been the source for ten spam messages.

Now you might say that the idea that someone can control 100,000 computers in a botnet is ridiculous.

However, as of October 2007, a major Internet security service had the IP addresses of over 12 million computers that were infected with bot software. There is also a newer threat called the Storm Worm botnet that has infected millions of computers just this year [2007]. In addition to its computer recruiting ability, it has built-in defenses that are preventing security services from analyzing it. In an E-Week article it was noted that "Storm worm is sending DDoS attacks to not only the researchers looking into it but to anybody on their subnet, within 5 seconds of (their) initiating efforts to fight it or examine it." A DDoS attack is a "distributed denial of service" which can bring down a computer system or network by overwhelming it with messages. A very large volume of messages are sent by the botnet in a very short period of time. It is estimated that the Storm net controls over one million computers. This would make it the most powerful supercomputer in the world, exceeding the computing power of all previous computers.

People frequently wonder why anyone would want to produce viruses, worms and other kinds of Internet attacks. Years ago it was primarily because "they could do it." Today, it has become a real source of financial gain. Let's take a look at one financial resource created by controllers of botnets. On many web pages you find ads of various types that are sponsored by Google. When these ads are clicked, the advertiser pays Google who, in turn, pays the owner of a web page, usually 80% of the fee. So the botmaster sets up a web page and contracts with Google to display ads. Then, using the botnet, sends commands to the computers in its net

to click on the ads. This results in payments to the botmaster. So even with a small botnet of say 5,000–10,000 computers, the botmaster can easily obtain \$15,000–\$20,000 per month in fraudulent payments. When you consider that the known botnets all have more than 100,000 compromised systems, you get a better idea of the scale of the fraud involved. This type of click fraud has been estimated to make up 5–20% of the payments made by search companies.

Another use of large botnets is extortion. The botmaster can send an email to a corporation warning that a DDoS will take place at a specific time unless a payment is made. As I mentioned earlier, spam email contracts are also a source of revenue for botmasters. As these networks proliferate, the sale of the IP addresses of robotically controlled computers is also favored as an income source.

So far it would appear that the only persons affected by botnets would be corporations. However, if your computer is infected, everything you do can be reported to the botmaster. Bots can incorporate "keylogger" software. That will record keystrokes, especially any related to passwords, user names or other desirable information. Another function of bot software is screen capture. It can record an entire screen and transmit the data to the botmaster. A compromised computer can also be used as a base for finding other unprotected computers to be recruited into the net. Another consideration is that the largest number of computers are those in the hands of private individuals. So you may be a major part of the problem if your computer is infected by a bot.

(see *Bot-Nets* on page 9)

So You Have a New Digital Camera

by Robert M. Mayo, Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA, www.clickers.org

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups

If you were lucky enough to get a new camera for Christmas, congratulations! However, along with this jewel, I'm sure you also got a complicated user's manual. I hate 'em! But cheer up; all the mystery will soon go out of that book.

When I bought my first digital camera, I felt lost. I had never worked from menus before, and they seemed so overly complicated. However, after a couple of dozen shots of my refrigerator, washing machine, and the cats, I began to feel comfortable with my new toy. And now, it seems intuitive; I can make changes in the settings without mental effort. In fact, I don't know how I ever got along without the wonderful features this camera has! So the point is: play with it; check out all of the menu options in the privacy of your home so you won't have technical problems later.

Following directions in the manual, you're not going to hurt it!

• • •

Between photo sessions, it's best not to leave your rechargeable batteries on the charger. Many chargers provide a trickle that's excessive over a period of time, and this will degrade the cells.

• • •

In what we laughingly call "the good ol' days," we had a choice of films to use in our cameras. That was wonderful! There were so many films for color pictures available, as well as the still popular black-and-white shots. And within those two groups, there were fast (ISO 400) Kodak Tri-X films for B&W news (action and nighttime) pictures, as well as slower (ISO 25) Kodachrome film for beautiful, fine-grained slides. If you were happy with black-and-white prints,

there was very fine grained Panatomic-X (ISO 32) that could produce great enlargements. There was a film for everything! But what if you had the Panatomic-X in your camera, and six frames hadn't been used yet; and you wanted to shoot a night baseball game under floodlights? You could remove the unfinished film from the camera, or you could bang away at the kids in order to finish the roll. Sheez! What a waste! Plus, you had to obtain a roll of the faster film, too. But with your digital camera, you have all of those "films" in the camera at the same time—color or B&W—with a choice of ISO values to be selected as you need them, regardless of the number of shots you've already made. If only they had done this years ago!

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(Bot-Nets—continued from page 8)

Once a computer has been compromised, the bot software is usually designed to hide and protect itself. For example, it will search for and disable any other malware located on the computer or its associated network. It may also hide itself by means of a rootkit. It may also block updates of any anti-virus or anti-spyware software. It may even fake the process so the user believes that an update has taken place. One of the most common modifications involves changes to the Windows host file or by changing the location of the host file and altering the registry.

There are also some traps on the Internet that can lead a user to download bot (Trojan) software without realizing it. Phishing email can lead to

web pages that have automatic download links for bot software. Web pages can be hijacked and links added to lead the viewer to websites that contain "free" software links that are actually hidden bot programs. Bot programs are incorporating "social engineering" functions which serve to entice users to unknowingly download malware. People are the weakest link in the security chain. Email, web pages, instant messaging, social contact websites are all used by bot malware as a means of collecting information and linking to compromised computers.

Many times the actions of a computer user are governed by visual clues. An attacker may take advantage of this by providing false visual clues on a web page or a pop-up. If the dialog box or pop-up is intrusive,

the user may click inappropriately just to get rid of the intruder. This can lead to the download of a bot.

So how do you know if you've been infected? The easiest way to tell is related to how you have been protecting your computer from infection. Do you have all of the following?

- a hardware firewall.
- b software firewall that checks both incoming and outgoing messages.
- c anti-virus software that is updated at least daily.
- d anti-spyware software that you either run weekly or that runs in RAM constantly.
- e keep your Windows software patches up to date.

(see Bot-Nets on page 11)

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The Web browser is your friend

It sounds simple, but most of what the average user wants to do with a computer these days can be done online: word processing, spreadsheets, e-mail, photo editing, and more, which means less storage is less of an issue. You want e-mail? Gmail and the included GTalk instant-messaging feature are free. And Google's Docs and Spreadsheets Web apps get all of your office productivity done online (though most of the three PCs have open-source versions of Microsoft Office). For watching videos, there's YouTube and Hulu.com. And rather than downloading a photo editing tool, anyone can upload their photos to Flickr and use Picnik's editing software right in the browser. The success of devices like the gPC and Mirus Freespire—both are sold out at Wal-Mart and Sears.com, respectively—and even the more expensive and portable Eee PC, is a surprise to most.

“The success is, in part, driven by the fact that for people doing an increasing percentage of day-to-day tasks like e-mail in the context of software as a service, at that point it soon doesn't matter what operating system you have,” said Redmonk's O'Grady. “If a majority of (computer) usage is browsing the Internet and doing things like that, (Linux) is perfectly credible, perfectly usable.”

(Moving On—continued from page 5)

pictures and colors. Want to use a photograph that you saved to your computer instead? Click the browse button. On the left side of the “Browse” screen, click on “Pictures.” From the Picture folders on the right side of the Browse screen, make your selection, use the “How should the picture be positioned” if needed, and press the Open button to finish.

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(Deals Guy—continued from page 6)

including those who look after personal websites. The new module helps you to keep a website free of errors such as broken links. Regular use of Site Analyzer will ensure that problems are quickly and easily spotted so they can be fixed. Download a free demonstration of our easy-to-use tool from www.seoadministrator.com/seoadministrator.exe

Site Analyzer, Developed by by FlamingoSoft of Vancouver, BC, is designed to automate the vital web management task of monitoring and improving website performance. Site Analyzer performs comprehensive scans of a specified website and alerts web managers to a range of common problems including broken links, faulty image links, errors in HTML code and missing meta tags using a variety of report formats. Site Analyzer can also create sitemaps in both human and machine formats ready for uploading. The link vendor will be able to see which pages are “overloaded” with external links and perhaps suspend link sales on those pages. System Requirements: Windows 95/98/ME/2000/XP/Vista. Priced from \$70 (Standard) to \$150 (Expert); we are offering this great software to user group members at 50% discount (\$75 instead of the usual \$150) which includes lifetime support and free upgrades. For the 50% discount, go to tinyurl.com/275e3u. Check their website URL for full info: www.seoadministrator.com.

Easier Way To Remove USB Devices

USB Safely Remove enhances the native Safely Remove function in Windows and enables you to remove and unplug any USB removable device in one mouse click or hotkey. It can give correct names to the devices, lets you rename them and find out what application or process is locking the

USB device, preventing it from safe removal. It's easy to unplug the wrong one by mistake because many of them have the same name. Unlike the native Windows option, USB Safely Remove shows all USB devices currently plugged into the computer and lets you remove any of them and the program gives unique names to the devices on its menu. The software is primarily aimed at those users who have more than one USB device.

USB Safely Remove 3.2 runs under Windows 2000, XP, 2003, Vista and is available immediately for \$20 from SafelyRemove.com. User group members can purchase the program at a 25% discount. Use the coupon code: CUG25 on the Buy Now page. Licensed users get unlimited functionality without nag screens, free technical support by email and free lifetime upgrades. More information on the product, as well as a free trial copy is available from safelyremove.com/ug.

That's it for this month. I'll have more new product announcements on my website (most not offering a discount). www.dealsguy.com. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click, bobclick@bellsouth.net. Editor's note: This column has been edited for space and content considerations.

Classified Ad

Club members can place free ads to buy or sell computer-related items. Send ads to rhonda1114@verizon.net. The deadline for the next issue is Friday, Feb. 29, 2008.

For Sale: Compaq Presario PC bought in 2000, good for someone who wants to try Linux. 10 GB HD, 128 MB RAM, CD ROM and TDX CD burner. Keyboard, mouse, speakers, monitor. ME O/S. Owner's manual, recovery CDs. Full working condition. You pickup in S/W Franklin. \$100 firm. Call Dana Kennedy at 349-3754.

(Patch—continued from page 7)

security experts suggest installing it even if you don't use the HP Software Update function at all, as just having the software on your computer makes it vulnerable. One catch—you have to run the vulnerable software to get the update to fix it. HP has had no comment about it at all, and there's no mention of it on its website. Please keep in mind that the HP Software Update software is completely separate from, and unrelated to, any other updating software that is installed on the computer like Windows Update or Microsoft Update.

Windows Vista change

Shifting gears toward Vista, Microsoft has announced that, effective with Service Pack 1 for Vista due out in the first quarter of this year, those with cracked or counterfeit copies of Vista will no longer have their machines made to run in reduced functionality mode by the Windows Genuine Advantage validation tool. Instead, they'll just get nagged about once an hour to get a legal copy of Vista on their machines. Microsoft has said that this new stance is in response to customer and partner requests. Time will tell just how well this new policy goes over.

Adobe Flash patch coming

This next item pertains to a good number of folks reading this and deals with an application that runs within the vast majority of the Internet browsers in use that's called Flash. This application enables you to see animated ads and other "mini movies" within your browser. There have been a couple of very widely publicized bugs in it, one of which has been patched. The other one is under investigation by Adobe, which has pledged a fix early this year. The way I read the security bulletin, it will probably be out by the end of January, and may already be out by the time you're reading this at home.

As of this writing, the latest version of the Adobe Flash player is 9.0.115.0. This version number will, no doubt,

change as soon as the second bug is patched. The Adobe security bulletin about the second patch can be found at tinyurl.com/2kktqs. When you get there, you'll find it on the technical side of things, but there's a section titled "Preventative Measures for End-Users" which spells things out in plain English for the rest of us.

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(Bot-Nets—continued from page 9)

If you don't use any of these safety mechanisms, then your machine is almost 100% guaranteed to be compromised. Even if you have taken all of these precautions, you can still be infected. However, the most effective mechanism for dealing with bots is to prevent their getting into your computer. So you have to keep the software up to date and you have to use it.

Ideally, your firewall hardware/software combination should keep you invisible on the Internet. Bot programs are constantly searching for unprotected computers with open ports. You may not be aware that your computer has over 64,000 ports that can be used for communication.

The most common usage are the ports in the lower range, under 1,024. However, some bots use high-end ports (>60,000) for transmission of commands. One place you can check your computer's port and its invisibility on the Internet is www.GRC.com. The Gibson Research site provides a free port scan [ShieldsUp!!] and much good information on interpreting the findings as well as how to protect your system.

Ideally, the anti-virus and anti-spyware software would be able to find and remove any bot software that made its way onto your computer. However, this software needs to know the "signature" of the malware in order to identify it. So the

producers of the malware are always a step ahead of the good guys. The security services have to find and disassemble the new malware before they can devise the protection against it. So it is up to the user to keep the security software as current as possible to reduce the chances of infection. Like it or not, security on the Internet is a never-ending battle.

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor of physiology. He has been working with personal computers for over thirty years, developing software and assembling systems. This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups. All other uses require the permission of the author at bwsail@yahoo.com.

Quick Tips

by Lee Alexander

Smart Computing—Unless you are a PC Expert, get yourself a subscription to Smart Computing magazine. If you subscribe online, be sure to click on User Groups on the left-side of the page to give Macon Users Group credit—5 new/renews gets the club a free subscription. The website is www.smartcomputing.com and the price is \$29 for 1 year (12 issues) or \$48 for 2 years.

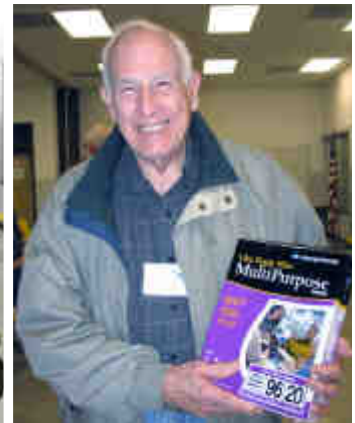
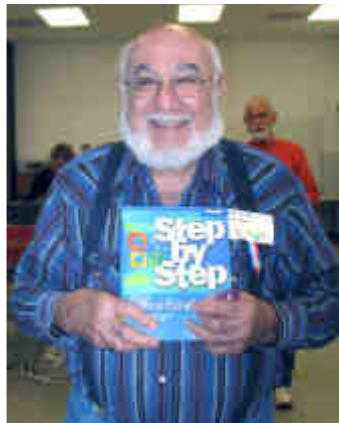
Optimize Storage—For IDE hard drives (does not apply to SATA drives) make sure the IDE Controller is using DMA (Direct Memory Access), if available. From Device Manager, double-click the Primary IDE Channel. Under the Advanced Settings tab, set the Transfer Mode to DMA when Possible. For a second physical hard drive, repeat for Secondary IDE Channel.

HDTV—Got an HDTV, LCD or Plasma? Plug it into a surge protector strip to preserve your investment. Using the strip's ON/OFF switch not only adds a degree of protection, but saves electricity for the almost-instant-on device by not using a "standby mode."

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