



MUG Monitor

Macon Users Group—Serving Southwestern North Carolina and Northeastern Georgia

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April 2008

Next Meeting:

Requiem for Privacy

by Lizz Russell
Macon Community
Facilities Building
April 8th, 7 PM

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Tech Talk

by Lizz Russell

*This month, I will be conducting—
A Memorial Service for Privacy*
It's gone. There used to be a thing called privacy. It was those things that one kept to oneself or only shared with a close circle of people, such as where you lived, what you owned, what you found interesting, your birthday, and much, much more.

There are new and "invisible" computer-based technologies that are capable of invading privacy to a level that makes privacy a thing of the past. We are living in a new world that is just emerging. It will fully emerge when the transition to high definition TV becomes official, for many of these technologies will be using the freed-up frequencies.

I have put together a presentation about some of these new devices to let you know what they are and how they work. I'll be telling you about RFID, hidden RFID scanners, computer robot networks with batteries and transmitters the size of match heads, infallible lie detectors, and more. I hope you will find it informative, and I hope to see you there. If I can afford a scanner, I'll bring one so that you can see what's on you.

Updates and New Releases

When security flaws and major problems are uncovered in programs such as Windows, updates are issued. Updates come in various sizes. There are individual updates, update rollups, and service packs. An update rollup is a medium-sized group of updates bundled into one update. A service pack is a large group of updates combined into one big update (usually around 100).

Microsoft has released Service Pack 1 for Windows Vista. Many of the initial problems that came with Windows

Vista are finally resolved. One of the most irritating is white screens. While you're working, the screen suddenly goes white. (If this happens to you, press the Alt and F4 function keys together, and the white screen will go away.) This problem has been fixed by installing updates for most computers running Windows Vista.

Service Pack 3 is almost out for Windows XP. Word on the street is that this final service pack is excellent and will make Windows XP run the best it has ever run. Right now, it is still in testing so that Microsoft can get the bugs out. I highly recommend that you do *not* download the test version of this service pack, because there are a lot of problems with the test version. Wait until it is officially released.

Service packs and updates are installed automatically if you turn automatic updates on from the Control Panel. Otherwise, they can be obtained by running Windows or Microsoft Update from the program menu.

A Change in Internet Threats

Threats from being connected to the Internet are continuously becoming more sophisticated. It used to be that viruses were the greatest threat, but now it has moved more towards identity theft via Trojan keyloggers and phishing. Update your protection frequently!

Hope to see you at the meeting.

Requiem for Privacy

by Lizz Russell
April 8th, 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).

MUG Monitor Staff

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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

Quick Tips

by Lee Alexander

Optical Drives Tip

If you are adding data to a CD/DVD that has been used in a previous session, you want to insure that the new burn will use *Continue Multisession*. That is the nomenclature used in Nero, similar phrases should be available in other burning software. Advice is to have the disk inserted **before** you bring up the application. Nero, in particular, will detect the previous session and use *Continue Multisession* automatically.

Registry Tweak

We start with the usual cautionary warning—save the Registry before playing in its quicksand. When you invoke *regedit*, it typically takes you to where you last left off. It can be tedious to back up level by level to a new destination. Ah!—there is a shortcut. The left arrow key will backup successive levels and, if you hold it down, it will take you to the very top. There, a single right arrow key will show the five HKEY hives for a fresh start.

Linux SIG

with Jim Swanson, Mentor

The next Linux SIG meeting is Tuesday, April 15 at 7:00 PM in the meeting room at the Macon Country Public Library on Siler Road.

We are tentatively planning to move our meeting date to the 4th Tuesday instead of the 3rd Tuesday, to avoid conflicts with other groups. This is not cast in stone (yet), so if you have a better suggestion, get in touch with Jim Swanson at jswanson@verizon.net.

Treasurer's Report

Phyllis Minnich

Balance forward.....	1104.22
Income: interest, dues, 50/50.....	57.00
Expense.....	(125.88)
Balance*	
(including equipment fund).....	\$1035.34
*Equipment Fund (50/50, auction).....	742.50
Investment Fund.....	1572.27

Lou's Views!

MotoSpeak

by Louis Vitale (aka 44RAILGUY)



In 1984, my wife gave a series of seminars on students' learning styles. The cassette tapes of those lectures will form the basis of Barbara's new book, so she wanted to transcribe them. The newest version of *Dragon Naturally Speaking* promises to do the job with ease. Voice recognition software has come a long way since I first saw it demonstrated over 10 years ago. What we did not count on, was the fact that voices change in 23 years. We had run up against one of the few limitations to this powerful software.

Like the Video Phone or the Flying Car, voice recognition software had always been more promise than fact. That is not true anymore. It impacts most of our lives every day in obvious and in some very subtle ways.

The most obvious is the automated call center. It's that annoying list of menu options you hear when you call a business, and you are required to speak your choices to some sweet sounding computer. It can route you to another computer, or to a *real* person if you are lucky. If you do get another computer, you can pay a bill, set up an appointment, check your bank balance, or buy a product, all without a human on the other end of the line. Given the variations in human speech, language differences and on line static, that is amazing.

A revolution is beginning in the medical records field. As I sat in my wife's cardiologist's office, I watched him take notes on his laptop. These notes, whether typed or spoken, are now being transcribed by voice recognition software directly into patient's files. It used to take 2 to 3 weeks for a doctor's notes to be tran-

scribed by a person and arrive back in a patient's file. Many times that was way too late to help the patient.

In one recent advance, Dictaphone Dragon NaturallySpeaking Medical version 9 now includes 80 different vocabularies, each specific to a division of medicine (such as radiology). To increase its accuracy, the company has some 500 internal speech scientists working to advance the software's accuracy. Another recent improvement involves increasing accuracy by calibrating the software to "understand" accents, which greatly helps doctors who don't speak English as their native language. The software's accuracy rate is currently 98 percent and rising, according to the company.

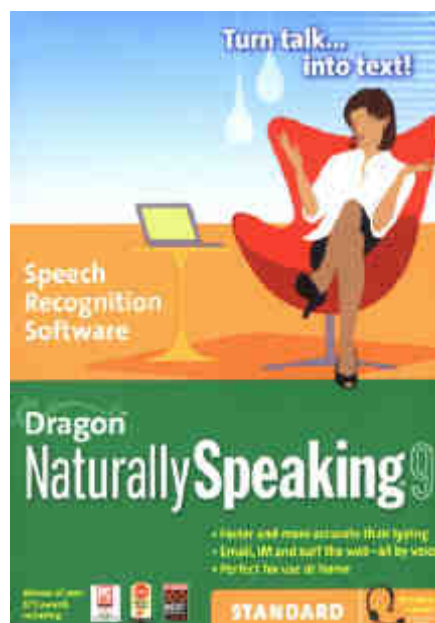
As some of you know, I just bought a new cell phone, a MotoRazr V3m. Since it is not a "smart" phone, I did not think I could carry on a conversation with it, but I was wrong. Press one convenient button, and its voice recog-

inition program "MotoSpeak" starts. I say "Call" and it says "Who, or what number?" I speak a name on my contact list or a phone number, in a natural voice, and it repeats it to check accuracy. I say "Yes" and it calls the number. It has not been wrong yet, and this is a *dumb* phone. The smart phones probably can help you select a wine at your favorite restaurant.

Have you ever seen those car commercials where the driver tells the car to call home and it does? As you can imagine, that is only the beginning. In car navigation, it is now as simple as telling the car the address you are looking for, and then following the spoken turn-by-turn directions to your destination. The 2005 Honda voice recognition system can recognize 700 commands. I did not know there were 700 things a car could do!

On a more serious note, we are at war with Muslim fanatics who want to destroy our country and our culture. Information is one of our best defenses, and listening in on world-wide communications of all sorts is a necessary way to get that information. *Very powerful* computers are monitoring all those calls, and they are using voice recognition software to sift through the noise to hear the one call that could prevent the next "incident." Do I like it? No. Is it necessary? I think so. We can only hope technology can aid us in our struggle.

In the meantime, I will call customer service at Dragon Naturally Speaking and see if the sweet sounding computer will connect me with a real human who can help me transcribe those cassette tapes.



The Deals Guy

by Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users Group



Are You Ready To Tax Your Brain?

AlbyMedia has released version 1.1 of PIQE: Chain of Puzzles. It contains a variety of challenging puzzles, and allows you to compare your results with other players. It's a set of engaging puzzles giving you a real challenge. The game has progress check to provide you with detailed information on your development. The game has three difficulty levels, offering more sophisticated puzzles after you beat the easier ones. Please visit piqe.albymedia.com for a free trial of the product.

PIQE: Chain of Puzzles runs under Microsoft Windows and costs \$14.95 for a single-user license. AlbyMedia offers user group members 15% discount using coupon code ALBY-JMGJ at tinyurl.com/2o8zud. Licensed customers get free technical support and free upgrades.

Here's Another Freebie

DVDVideoSoft, an Internet resource dedicated to free software, multimedia software guides, and tutorials has just updated Free Video to Flash Converter. The new version features 30+ player skins and new easy-to-use web integration, just copy and paste html code to the site or blog. Convert video files to flash (SWF and FLV). Convert the whole movie or just a portion. Free Video to Flash Converter is available at tinyurl.com/329vvv for free download. The program contains no spyware or adware. No activation or registration is required. Just download and use it.

This is the 15th free program developed by DVDVideoSoft. All titles are available at tinyurl.com/36nw7b for immediate download. Also here are lots of guides and tutorials

related to different video tasks like burning and ripping DVDs, making DVD copies, converting between all video formats and more. All our programs run under Windows Vista/XP/2000. We respect our users' privacy and there's no spyware or adware.

Comfort Should Be The Golden Rule!

Comfort Software Group announces Comfort Keys 3.0, a update of the popular hotkey management tool. The new version supports non-standard keyboard types (ergonomic and Dell Inspiron 6000); speaks two new languages; has adjustable sensitivity for fast input of capital letters, spaces and other characters; has the option of hiding in the system tray and features an enhanced hotkey management window with a full list of hotkeys and new groups.

Comfort Keys is a multifunctional hotkey manager for Windows Vista, XP and 2000. The integrated clipboard manager extends the capabilities of the standard Windows clipboard allowing you to save an unlimited number of copied objects and reuse them as much as you want, and makes sure your clipboard data is saved in case of a power failure or hardware crash. It also features an advanced task switcher, sound control tools and a virtual keyboard that facilitates the choice and configuration of your hotkey combinations. You can quickly switch languages, convert the selected fragment of text into another language (or case), run keystroke macros, easily manage a window and even restart the computer using the keyboard.

A personal license of Comfort Keys costs only \$29.95. A multi-user

license ranges from \$21.95 to \$6.95. The company offers a 30-day money-back guarantee on all orders. More information on Comfort Keys, as well as its free trial version, is available at tinyurl.com/2u6k8t.

Products can be purchased from Plimus, the official reseller of Comfort Software Group products. Major credit cards (VISA, MasterCard, Amex and Discover) are accepted. User Group members get 30% discount at: tinyurl.com/33nqgo.

Wow! What a Clock!

ALSEDI Group announces version 2.6 of PerfectClock. It delivers any number of realistic clocks onto the desktop or replaces your wallpaper with clock wallpaper. PerfectClock lets you know the time in the most convenient way by looking at stylish analog or digital clocks. Enjoy having as many clocks on the desktop as you need, each displaying the time for the defined time zone. You can use the wallpaper clock as a screensaver. PerfectClock supports scaling. You can set a label to a clock and customize fonts, color, position and other parameters. The Reminder feature is also customizable. On the official website are dozens of clock and wallpaper clock skins. It allows you to adjust hue, saturation, brightness and contrast to reach optimal appearance of the clock.

You can manually create a unique skin without being a programmer. ALSEDI Group has prepared a special offer for all new customers. Everyone purchasing PerfectClock can order a Personal Family Photo Clock Skin at no cost. It only requires selecting a frame pattern, sending a photo or two,

(see *Deals Guy* on page 5)

Handy & Free: Small Utilities

by Lee Alexander

USBDeview

The proliferation of USB (Universal Serial Bus) devices can lead to a management problem as more and more devices are connected to your PC. Many devices derive their power from the USB ports, and not all ports are capable of supporting daisy-chained strings of hardware. You can use Windows' Device Manager to investigate the USB ports. Get there by right-clicking My Computer and selecting Manage. In the Computer Management dialog box, under System Tools, select Device Manager. From there, scroll down to USB elements to examine the usage of the ports.

Now for the labor-saving good news: a nifty little (48 KB zip download) utility from Nir Sofer (an oft-time guest on the defunct TV series, The Screen Savers) named USBDeview will give you not only what is plugged in to your USB ports but also a history and a plethora of information on the devices. Get it from www.nirsoft.com. For a faster route to the download, use find.pcworld.com/60045.

Classified Ad

See the printed edition.

JR Screen Ruler

This handy onscreen ruler can be set to read pixels, inches, picas, or centimeters with a digital output of the cursor position. A right-click on the ruler brings up a context menu to flip the ruler horizontal to vertical, and other options. The free JRuler is quick and simple; JRuler-pro has a 15-day free trial period and can be purchased for \$19. I found it very handy for graphic layouts and photo sizing.

Double Killer

Once upon a time I burned a few CDs to give photos to family members. In the process, I copied those files in their original camera images to folders for a sort of bulk operation. I kept them (the folders) for a while in case I wanted to burn more CDs and then forgot about it. This free utility from Big Bang Enterprises quickly found the duplicates when I selected a parent folder—the default option is to include subfolders. In a matter of a few minutes, I was able to move 49 files totaling over 8 MB to a new folder for later deletion. This was done as a cautionary method until I prove the safety of the program. A quick route to the 391 KB download (it extracts to 794 KB) is via find.pcworld.com/59945. A pro version, promising more options and faster scans, is available for \$20.

(Deals Guy—continued from page 4)

and the skin will be delivered to you in three days. This skin makes a great present for family events. Visit www.perfect-clock.com to get the trial version of the program.

PerfectClock runs under Windows Vista/XP/2000. The Standard Edition costs \$16.95 for a single-user license and the Professional Edition, supporting the Wallpaper Clock feature, costs \$23.95. Licensed customers are entitled to the fully functional version of the product, free technical support and free upgrades. Get a 20% discount on the registered Professional version at tinyurl.com/24s87e, and 20% discount on the Standard Edition at: tinyurl.com/2yp44r. Company website: www.alsedi.com.

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.

Directory Updates

See the printed edition.



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SERVING ALL OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

Look Ma, No Hands

by Bruce Jacobs, Phoenix PCUG newsletter editor, www.phoenixpcug.org

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This article was not typed. I dictated it using the speech recognition feature in Windows Vista Ultimate.

I have been using this feature on and off for certain applications for a while and it has its good points and its bad points.

The intent of the software is to allow the user to speak words into the computer and for the computer to recognize those words, understand that some of them are commands, and also understand that some of them are input to programs. In other words, when I say the words "please save me," the computer must decide whether to add the words to the document I am editing as if I had typed them, or add the word "please" to the document, and then bring up the save dialog box to save the document with the name "me."

The program that is attempting to do this has two major hurdles to conquer. It has to recognize the spoken words correctly. This is helped by the training exercises. But it has its limitations.

It must also understand *in context* which of those words are commands and which of those words are to be part of my document. As time goes on, you learn to pause before speaking a command. So in the above example of "please save me," I would say the words altogether relatively quickly in order to enter them in my document. If I wanted to add the word "please" to my document then save the document, I would speak the word "please," then pause for a few seconds, then say

the word "save." This would bring up the save dialog box and I could continue as if it were a command.

As far as the good points are concerned: If I'm working off a printed list, or when I know for sure what I want to say clearly, it can be a much faster way of inputting text than for me to type it. Some of that is due to my typing speed being somewhat slow. I am a faster typist than most hunt-and-peck folks, but I would never be able to keep a job as a secretary. It is also much better at spelling than I am.

If I don't know what I'm going to say in advance, the program does not facilitate me speaking what I want to say and then recomposing it later. Some of this may be my fault. I find that I can type up an article by hand and maintain enough control so that in the end I have something coherent. When I just speak out what I want it does not always make sense. I spend way too much time revising it.

One of the disadvantages is that you need to spend a little bit of time training the voice recognition system. The system works best when you are running a very simple application such as WordPad or Notepad. It can even be used to some extent in Microsoft Word. However, when using an application such as PowerPoint, the program spends so much time trying to figure out what possible commands you might be wanting to perform and not enough time actually realizing that you are trying to enter words.

Another problem is homonyms. These are words that sound the same

but they have different meanings in English except for the possibility of some contextual clues. There is no way for the speech recognition software to know whether I want "2," "two," "to," or "too." During setup, the program asks you if they can look at the contents of documents on your hard drive to help you determine what word you used most often and in what context. This does help it guess which homonym you want.

The final problem I wish to discuss is the editing features. Whenever I create a text document, I will want to fix mistakes. There are some commands in the software that will help fix mistakes, but they are limited and clumsy. Some of them will even (in theory) help prevent mistakes by the voice recognition software in future. All that being said, I find that editing documents using the voice recognition software is very frustrating. I always resort to using the arrow keys and the mouse to navigate through the document.

Vista speech recognition is a helpful tool when transcribing printed text or when words have been spoken into a tape recorder. However for initial composition of documents or editing I do not find it useful. I do not believe that I could ever learn to use it as a complete 100% substitute for the keyboard and mouse. I would not consider it a replacement if I were disabled.

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Hasta la Vista

by Lee Reynolds, a member of the Boca Raton Computer Society, FL and regular contributor to Boca Bits, the BRCS monthly news magazine, www.brsc.org

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

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.

Configuring the Taskbar

The Taskbar works very much like previous versions of Windows, particularly XP. You can configure some options on how it operates by right clicking an empty area on it and selecting from a popup context menu. For example, you can decide to:

- Have various toolbars such as the Quick Launch toolbar and a Desktop or Documents toolbar displayed
- Show all open windows "cascaded" like a row of dominoes one behind the other, or show them side by side, or one on top of another to cover the desktop
- Minimize all the windows to show the Desktop
- Start the Task Manager application; or lock the Taskbar so that its settings cannot be modified without unlocking it first.
- If you select Properties from the context menu, you are given further ways of customizing the Taskbar.

As in Windows XP, there are options to:

- auto-hide the Taskbar (it reduces to a very thin line which only becomes visible as a normal Taskbar when you put your mouse over that thin line)
- keep the Taskbar visible over other open windows,
- group similar Taskbar buttons for the same application in a stacked list.

New Option

A new option available in the Taskbar properties page is to determine whether or not hovering your mouse over a Taskbar button shows a live preview of the corresponding window (thumbnail).

Customize the Notification Area

Unlike XP, you now have a separate tab to customize the Notification Area, which is the part of the Taskbar on the right hand side that normally shows the system clock, a volume control for your speakers, a Network icon, a Safely Remove Hardware icon, a Power icon (if you are using a laptop on battery power), and others. You can put a check mark next to Hide Inactive Icons and then click the Customize button, in order to access a list of all icons that have shown up in the Notification Area.

This is broken down into two lists: those icons that are currently showing in the Notification Area, and those that have shown up in the past but are not currently there now. For each icon, you click to access a drop down list to choose Hide when inactive, Hide, or Show.

System Time

One of the things that you can show on the Taskbar is the system time (and that was in previous versions of Windows also), but this now has some modifications.

Hover your mouse over the system time in the Notification Area, you get a balloon tip telling the system date and day of week, but if you click on the system time instead, up pops a nice looking circular clock and a calendar of the current month, with a link to the Control Panel area where you can change the date and time settings.

In that area of Control Panel, you can now click on a tab for Additional Clocks and configure up to 2 more different system clocks to be active, each with a different time zone and time of day perhaps. If you do that, then hovering your mouse over the system time in the Notification Area will modify the balloon tip to show all active clocks, whereas clicking on system time will now show all these different clocks side by side, together with the calendar of the current month.

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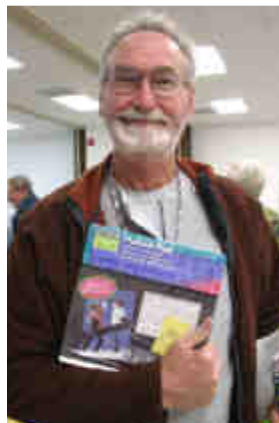
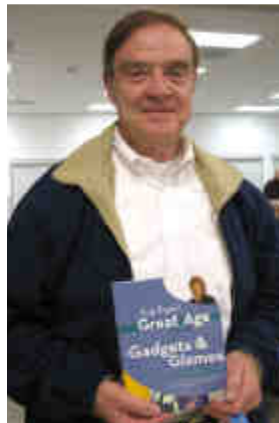
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