



MUG Monitor

Macon Users Group—Serving Southwestern North Carolina and Northeastern Georgia

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May 2008

Next Meeting:

The Post Office Online

by Franklin Postmaster
Avis M. Davis
Macon Community
Facilities Building
May 13th, 7 PM

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Tech Talk

by Lizzz Russell

Over the past few weeks, I have been seeing a rise in computer viruses after a relatively less active time. Over one 3-day period, I removed over 3,000 viruses from around 6 computers on my bench. That amount is no record, but it is a trend. (My current record is finding well over 300,000 virus-generated files on one machine.)

One of them was slicker than grease on a painted cement floor. The customer had actually paid \$35 for a virus that said it was an antivirus. How insulting is that?

People frequently ask me why someone would create a virus. Here's a partial list of what I will call VSIGs (Virus Special Interest Groups).

DAMOB—people trying to steal your money

ISPY—people trying to steal your personal information

EX—people trying to track you and what you do

PORNIES—people who want to make sure you see someone naked

DOCDOC—people who want your medical information (note pair o' docs)

BOTies—people who want to control and use your computer

EIEIAA—Entertainment industry people that want to punish illegal downloaders

CHAOS—Foreign governments that want to destroy our infrastructure, steal our money, steal our ideas, track us, and control us.

CRIERS—People who need to express themselves politically

JASS—Just absolutely silly and stupid

Interesting Note: On the black market for writing viruses, the current street price of getting somebody to write a virus has dropped to under \$50. Sounds like more victims of outsourcing to me.

YAIN (Yet Another Interesting Note): According to Grisoft, the company that makes AVG, currently one out of every thousand websites on the internet downloads something to your computer without your knowledge or consent. They call it "drive-by downloading."

What can you do to protect yourself? The first thing is to make sure you have a current antivirus program. If you have virus protection program from two years ago or earlier, it is obsolete. Further, I advise updating your virus protection every time you go online.

If you have high speed internet service, always remember that you are connected to the internet whenever your high speed modem is turned on. This increases your exposure, and you only have to be connected to get

(see Tech Talk on page 2)

The Post Office Online

by Avis M. Davis,
Franklin Postmaster
May 13th, 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

Rhonda Tomlinson, editor

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

(Tech Talk—continued from page 1)

infected. I personally like to turn off or disconnect my high speed modem when I'm not emailing or surfing.

AVG is dropping Windows 98, Windows ME, and Windows 2000 (AVG is my #1 choice for free home user protection). If you have a computer that goes online and you can't use AVG, go to www.download.com and download a copy of Avast (my #2 choice for free home user protection). Avast requires that you register after a 60-day trial, but it is still free after registration.

DO NOT USE MORE THAN ONE PROGRAM FOR VIRUS PROTECTION. This is very important. Some people think more is better. I've seen machines with multiple antivirus programs all running at the same time. The truth is that it could make a machine more vulnerable as the programs fight each other, and it absolutely makes the machine much slower.

It is important that you know that there are viruses that target every operating system out there. Contrary to popular opinion, there are MAC attacks.

There are even cell phone viruses, IPOD viruses, MP3 viruses, and blue tooth viruses. Perhaps as kitchen appliances add computer technology, there will even be refrigerator and stove viruses. The possibilities are endless. "Yeh, let's turn that oven up to 550 degrees F and really bake that turkey." And don't forget the futuristic "Let's melt everything in the freezer" virus.

Linux SIG

with Jim Swanson, Mentor

The next Linux SIG meeting is Tuesday, May 27 (the 4th Tuesday) at 7:00 PM in the meeting room at the Macon Country Public Library on Siler Road.

Treasurer's Report

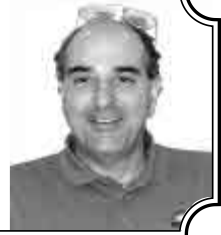
Phyllis Minnich

Balance forward.....	1035.34
Income: interest, dues, 50/50.....	21.00
Expense.....	(155.39)
Balance*	
(including equipment fund).....	\$900.95
*Equipment Fund (50/50, auction).....	763.50
Investment Fund.....	1572.27

Lou's Views!

The India Pictures

by Louis Vitale (aka 44RAILGUY)



A good friend traveled to India over a year ago. She took her small pocket Olympus camera to record the adventure. Near the end of the trip, she lost the camera and all her pictures on public transportation in one of India's teeming cities. Through a succession of almost unbelievable occurrences, her camera and its precious pictures were found and returned to her. If I had not seen the camera in her hand, I would not have believed it.

My first comment to her was, "Have you saved the pictures?" No, she said, but she promised she would soon. She carried the camera and the pictures around in her purse for over a year, but never downloaded the pictures from the camera or backed them up.

Now she was soon to leave for the Far East again, and asked me to take the pictures off the camera and put them on her brand-new laptop. Knowing the history of the pictures, I was very careful to do it right the first time. I created a new folder on her laptop and put the camera memory card in my card reader, attached to her laptop.

I told her the safest and fastest way to download pictures off a camera is to put the memory card in a card reader or a memory card slot on your computer, and then drag and drop them into a folder. This bypasses all the camera and computer software, since it is a simple transfer between drives.

I was most careful to right click the mouse and select "Copy" and not "Move," this way if something went wrong, the pictures would still be on the memory card. Never erase the card

until you are sure the actual pictures are on your computer, not just the thumbnails or a shortcut. As she sat beside me, that is exactly what I did.

The next thing we knew, the pictures were *Gone*. Of the 255 pictures, there were 10 thumbnail images and the rest were blank files. Every effort to read the pictures on the computer failed. When we put the memory card back in the camera, our only option was to "Format Card." The memory chip had failed.



The sense of loss was palpable. I was sure I had done something wrong, but what? I insisted that she not use the card again and buy a new one for this trip. As she left, I promised to do what I could to get her pictures back.

Since she took the memory chip with her, all I had to work with was the corrupted files on her laptop. With the help of some very knowledgeable friends and Google, I got to work. I began by downloading JPG recovery programs. There are many and they can be expensive, but as with most software of this kind, a trial version is usually available. One finally worked, and I was able to recover over 200 of the pictures.

What had occurred was a corruption of the "header" on each file. With the right software, the header can be reconstructed and the image data reassembled. It did not work for all of them; in some cases the data itself was lost.

When she returns, I will try to actually recover the image files on the memory card itself. Again, with the right software it should be possible.

I was amazed to find what a common problem this was. I knew that you could recover accidentally erased files on a computer drive. In that case, all that is actually erased is the filename. Simple software allows you to rename the files as long as they have not been overwritten. Files that have been corrupted by a failing mechanical drive or by a failed memory chip are more difficult to retrieve, but as in this case, recovery is possible with the right software.

One of the many lessons to be learned from this experience is not to give up and assume nothing can be done. Depending on the value of the lost data, there are often many ways to retrieve it. Many companies provide data recovery services for industry and individuals. Many of these companies specialize in recovering data from failed or damaged hard drives. And as I found out, there is quite an extensive library of data recovery software available to the individual, if you are willing to pay the price.

Of course the main lesson to be learned from this episode is that a *purse* is not a good backup device.

Hulu Offers Free TV and Movies over the Net

by Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, *The Examiner*, Beaumont, TX; radio & Talk Show Host

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

One of my readers recently emailed me about an offer he received via email (probably a spam email) about a \$50 program that will allow him to view what was described as satellite TV over the internet, without paying a monthly fee. According to the email, with this program, he could discontinue his cable or satellite service, and watch over 3000 channels on his computer. I researched the product he referenced and found that it was a multilevel marketed program that was, in my opinion, deceptive in that it did not offer real satellite TV, but instead only offered a software utility that could receive the thousands of streaming videos already available for anyone to view for free, and that often required no special software to view. I strongly recommended to the reader that he not purchase the product, and instead just search for streaming video, and to keep his current TV provider.

In researching this service, I came upon a recently released and legitimate way to view thousands of TV programs and movies over the internet, for free, and only using any of the common internet browsers. This free service (registration required) is the Hulu service available online at www.hulu.com. Hulu was founded in March of 2007, and is a joint venture owned by NBC Universal, and News Corp, and financed by \$100 million of venture capital. As I type this, Hulu is offering advertising supported content from over 50 sources, such as Fox TV, NBC, MGM, Sony Pictures, Warner Brothers, Lionsgate, 20th Century Fox, and other providers. The content available for viewing includes TV shows, full-length feature films, and clips. Several full-length, prime time shows are available on Hulu the morning after they air, and include

such popular shows as *The Simpsons* and *The Office*. There are also dozens of classical TV shows, available as full-length episodes, including such favorites as *Miami Vice* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. If users are willing to put up with unobtrusive ads, often in the lower right corner of the image, or standard TV type commercials, they can watch for free such full-length feature films as *Ice Age*, *Three Amigos!*, and many others. Hulu is headquartered in Los Angeles, with research and development being done in China.

Hulu will play on almost all current browsers as they are currently configured, and require no special software or add-ons to utilize the service, and requires a broadband connection to view the videos. Almost all computers already have Adobe's Flash Player installed, but if not, Flash Player is a free download from Adobe at www.adobe.com.

Once registered at hulu.com (free registration), a broad selection of videos becomes available for viewing at will. As I type this, there are about 11,200 full-length TV episodes and feature clips available, with more being added daily. Currently available for viewing are almost all of the episodes of *The Simpsons*, *30 Rock*, *The Office*, *Knight Rider*, *House*, *Medium*, *Bionic Woman*, *American Dad!*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *24*, *Prison Break*, *Heroes*, about 160 full-length children's cartoons (*Woody Woodpecker*, *Spiderman*, *Astro Boy*, and many others), and other TV shows of all genres. For those partial to *Saturday Night Live* skits, there are about 500 available, including such contemporary issues as presidential politics. TV wrestling fans would appreciate the over 300 matches avail-

able for viewing, while NBA fans can view over 140 clips from professional basketball games. A collection of recent (2008) full-length college football games, including many of the bowl games are available for viewing, including the 2007 and 2008 Sugar Bowl, Cotton Bowl, Fiesta Bowl, and others, enough to satiate any college football fans, and keep them glued to the computer screen for days on end. Soap opera addicts will appreciate the well over 100 clips from *Days of Our Lives*. In total, Hulu lists 25 different TV genres for every taste, making something available for everyone. The large assortment of TV shows (and movies as well) can be displayed by clicking on "Type" (TV or Movie), and then "Genre;" this will display only those selections that meet both criteria. Simply clicking on the image of the selection will play that selection. All of the TV shows can be displayed in one window alphabetically at www.hulu.com/browse/alphabetical/tv, and can be run by clicking on their titles. All of the TV shows can also be displayed in one window, sorted by genre at www.hulu.com/browse/genre/tv.

Hulu is not just about TV, but also full-length feature films, clips, and trailers. As I type this, there are 760 movies available, of which 80 are full-length feature films, the remainder being shorts, clips and trailers. According to Hulu, the most popular full-length films viewed by members are *Ice Age*, *Master and Commander: The far Side of the World*, *The Girl Next Door*, *The Jerk*, *Usual Suspects*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Weekend at Bernie's*, *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Three Amigos!*, *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, and dozens more.

(see *Hulu* on page 10)

How to Forward Email

by **Vinny La Bash**, a member of the **Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida. www.spcug.org**

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

Let's examine a typical email scenario. After opening your email, you find a message that you simply must share with all your friends. You press the "Forward" button and one way or another get all their email addresses in the "To:" box. Feeling quite satisfied after pressing the "Send" button, you sit back and take satisfaction in the joy you are sending to others.

You should be ashamed of yourself. You have just exposed everyone on your mailing list plus any people who received the email ahead of you to unending streams of spam, spyware, viruses, and other assorted electronic junk and mischief that hackers are prone to these days. What you have done is prove conclusively that you don't have a clue about the proper way to forward email. Your license to compute should be revoked immediately.

As messages get forwarded in this way they move along the internet, and the list of email addresses embedded in the note gets longer and longer. All it takes is for just one of these folks to get a virus or some other kind of malware, and everyone who has their email address in that list can be infected.

Anyone can take those email addresses, sell them or send out their own junk mail. Assuming you are a mature responsible adult, you most likely would not want to harm anyone, even inadvertently. What does a conscientious person do to stop or better yet, prevent damage?

When you click the "Forward" button, you enter the edit mode of your email client. Before you do anything else,

DELETE all the other email addresses appearing at the top of the message. Let me repeat. DELETE them by highlighting them and THEN pressing the Delete button on your keyboard. It doesn't take long. When you've finished, delete any other junk that isn't actually part of the message, such as information about the original sender. Delete anything that is not part of what you want to send.

If you're sending the message to more than one person, do not use the To: or Cc: fields for adding email addresses. Always, always use the BCC: (blind carbon copy) field for listing the email addresses. The people receiving the message will see only their own address.

Some email clients don't automatically show the blind carbon copy option. If that's the case, click on where it says To: and your address list

will appear. Highlight the email address and choose the BCC: option. It's not much effort, and it eliminates the possibility of someone using the email addresses inappropriately. When you send using the blind carbon copy, everyone receiving the message will see "Undisclosed Recipients" in the heading information.

If your email client requires that something be in the To: field, send the message to yourself and use the BCC: field for everyone else.

Remove any FW: in the subject line. Better yet, clean up the subject line completely by fixing any spelling or grammatical mistakes. Why let someone else's errors appear as your own?

Sometimes you will receive an email that is a petition. It states a

*(see **Email** on page 11)*



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The Deals Guy

by Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users Group



I read an enlightening article about data center design; even the security was above and beyond what you and I would imagine. Read about new ideas for cheap cooling methods and an interesting concept for filling in the gap between the time the power goes out and your backup kicks in. Well into it, you will read about very tight security. A year ago, I gave you an article about a group of consultants hired to test the security of a company, and they made a joke of the entire building's security; and data security itself, in just a few minutes. I doubt their techniques would work in the facilities described in the article. Here is the Information Week URL: tinyurl.com/2lonhw

Enjoyed The Show

I did manage to browse the Electronic House Expo for three hours of pure pleasure (I had to hurry). It was not a large show, but there was enough there to keep you fascinated. I saw mirrors that could change to a TV or monitor in an instant. That large mirror on the wall was hiding a TV screen that was able to shine right through it with a sharp picture. This one is interesting: www.ad-notam.com.

There were many booths with distributors of automation components for all facets of the home or business, including Worthington, one of the most well known. I was fascinated with some of the doorbell/intercom systems that include a wide-angle camera whose image could be displayed on a dedicated monitor, or appear on your TV to show who is there. Push a button on your remote to ask the nature of their visit and if it was a family member, or your beer-drinking buddy whose TV went out during a game; push a button on the

remote to unlock the door. If it was your mother-in-law, you could tell her you weren't home. However, I didn't see an "eject" button on the remote for salesmen, leaving room for further development. I stood where I could easily reach the doorbell button and my entire upper body showed plainly on the screen. I don't remember if that one was Nutone, www.nutone.com, or another company. eKey was there again with biometric locks. Here are some URLs of interest: www.eholovision.com, www.eKeyusa.com, www.linearcorp.com, and www.litetouch.com.

Several companies were showing universal remote controls and touch screen systems. Most people would probably think of remote controlled lighting and thermostats, but there are plenty of other items that should be included. Remote cameras around the property, a driveway gate, pool pump, alarms and maybe even devices to feed your pets, and that's only part of the list. I couldn't help notice that using a universal remote (similar to your TV remote) was not as easy as using a touch screen device because a touch screen icon often brought up a menu of other labeled icons for choices, but the button on the remote called for action, so you better get it right the first time. I read in Electronic House magazine, www.electronichouse.com, about an installation beyond "my" finances, but it was interesting what was done in this home: tinyurl.com/2w7bsf.

The EHX show included plenty of luxury audio products to enjoy from your easy chair, featuring great surround-sound. There was even a plush chair with the sound strategically located and controls at your fingertips.

Solid Drive, www.soliddrive.com, was featuring a product that would make a speaker out of anything, and actually, the sound produced was great (including good bass) from a large glass panel that also featured a large rectangular thin film fastened to it that allowed a projected TV picture to be shone through it clearly. There were also products that would hide your TV when it was not turned on, by showing art from your choice of artists inside a beautiful wooden frame, or could automatically cover it with tapestry: www.vutec.com, www.tapestriesltd.com, www.visionartgalleries.com.

Two companies with central vacuum systems were there with impressive products; here is one: www.airkinglimited.com. There was a great little digital camera/camcorder being sold there that could publish your pictures or movies to the web. One booth had a favorite of mine, a motorized drapery rod that could be programmed, or operated with a remote. I loved the motorized drapery rod we had for about ten years, but it finally bit the dust. It would take a lengthy article to describe that show adequately.

At the same time, other computer-oriented shows were going on in nearby hotels, another over in Tampa, a Microsoft Show nearby and the prestigious Winter Park Art Festival. There are many computer-oriented trade shows these days. Microsoft will be back here in June with the large Tech Ed Developers show and the IBM show in early April.

I have not tried the products below.

(see *Deals Guy* on page 11)

Moving on to Vista, Part 5

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

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

As most PC users know, after you've used your computer for a while, the data on your hard drive starts to get fragmented. This affects your computer's performance and causes programs to run more slowly. With Windows XP, as well as all previous versions, you had three ways to defragment your hard drive. You could do it manually (click Start --> All Programs --> Accessories --> System Tools --> Disk Defragmenter). You could do it manually (click Start --> All Programs --> Accessories --> System Tools --> Disk Cleanup). Or you could create a scheduled task to do it for you automatically (click Start --> All Programs --> Accessories --> System Tools --> Scheduled Task, click on "Add Scheduled Task," and follow the wizard instructions).

Windows Vista automatically defragments your hard disk for you. Not only does it defragment your hard disk, but it does it in background mode. This allows you to do other things on your computer while the defragmenting program is being run. The down side of this is that programs will run more slowly while the defragmenting process goes on. On the other hand, because automatic defragmenting runs fairly frequently, it should not take too long to complete.

Of course you still have the ability to defragment manually. Right-click on the "Computer" icon on your desktop and select properties. In the window that appears, click on "Performance" (lower left corner), then "Advanced Tools" (upper left corner) and then "Open Disk Defragmenter." Notice that at this point you have the option of scheduling when the defragmenter

runs or running it immediately. At this point, Vista will defragment *all* hard drives that it finds on your computer. Previous versions of Windows allow you to select which hard drive to defragment. Windows Vista SP1 (when it is released) is supposed to add this capability to Windows Vista.

While we are on the topic of computer performance, let's go back to the "Performance Information and Tools" screen (right click on the "Computer" icon, click on "Properties" and click on "Performance" in the lower left corner of the screen). Note that this screen provides you with some general information about the performance of your computer. It numerically scores processor, memory, graphics and hard disk performance. You'll find links on this screen that explain what the numbers mean and how to improve

your computer's performance. Many of the suggestions do not require changes to your hardware, but recommend changes to the programs that you run or do not run.

On the upper left side of the "Performance Information and Tools" screen, you'll find a number of tasks that control how your computer performs. If your PC is a laptop, click on "Adjust power settings." On the new screen, examine the "Power Plan." The decision you make here effects the length of time that your laptop will run between battery charges and its speed. Most laptops come configured to balance performance against battery endurance. There are many options available. If you normally operate your laptop plugged into an external power source, you'll want to change the setting to maximize performance.

(see *Moving On* on page 10)

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Converting CD-based Music to Compressed Audio Files

by Mike Moore, Editor, Bowling Green Area Microcomputer User Group, KY, www.bgamug.org

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I spent the equivalent of two or three days in January, working a few minutes at a time, converting all of our CDs to MP3 format. I had been dreading this project, thinking that it would take too much time, but it really was not that bad and the results are going to be worth it.

A few years ago, I purchased a 400-CD jukebox-type CD player. This device does have the capability of displaying a short line containing the album's title, using a standard PC keyboard, but the process is complicated with problems. It's easy to get CDs in the wrong slot, and of course, you can only play them in the room where you've physically situated the jukebox unit.

In the past few years, we've been getting away from the album and becoming more focused on individual songs. This lamentable trend has been fueled by the 99 cent price point associated with downloading music by the song. Artists and producers alike have vilified this process, claiming that the artistic sum worth of songs on an album is greater than the tunes taken as individual songs.

I can buy into this sadness, to a point. I remember the smell of vinyl LPs, unwrapping the cellophane outer wrap, and the incredible detail the producers went into in packing artistic value into the finished product, right down to the order the songs appear on the album. These days, you just Google the album or artist title and download the Jpeg, that's about it. For a fee, a program called iTunes will do this for you automatically.

So why would a guy spend the time to rip (compress) the tracks of a CD

or other ancient audio product to MP3 files? There are a few good reasons to do this.

For one thing, the devices that play music have become decentralized. What I mean by that is if you can imagine your computer as the "record player," then it's not much of a stretch to think of playing music anywhere in the house, car or workplace.

Doing this in the past meant locating the song you want (which may or may not be an easy task), finding the CD (or tape, or LP) it's recorded on, and hoping that it's not damaged.

Then once you've got it, you carry it to where ever you want to hear it. For me, this was often the car, and a car is a great place to scratch or otherwise ruin a CD, and I've also known friends whose entire CD collections have been stolen from vehicles. Physically moving music and other files from player to player is sometimes humorously referred to as "Sneaker Net"

But once you begin to think of your songs and other media in terms of compressed MP3 files, they become at once more searchable, more replaceable, and more portable.

Compressed audio files, through the wonder of a shared internet database called Gracenote (formerly CDDb), contain informational tidbits that can be searched. On the other hand, ordinary music tracks on a Compact Disc have no information associated with them at all, not even the name of the song. By converting CD-ROM music to MP3 files, your database can pull up a playlist for you using information encoded in the MP3 file. Most ripping software (such as CDex, available at

cdexos.sourceforge.net) will query the CDDb so that you won't have to manually type in the names of the songs or the name of the CD.

Compressed audio files can be stored on any hard drive in the house, and can be made available on inexpensive MP3 players, iPods, and multimedia computers that attach directly to your sound system. There is usually no special hardware to buy—you can just feed the stereo output from your computer's sound card to the audio input on your TV or stereo amplifier.

Most of the MP3 player devices out there do not require a lot in the way of software - you generally plug them into a computer, they assign themselves a drive letter, and you can just copy your songs to the devices as if they were another hard drive. There are even self-contained wireless hard drives (see www.apple.com/airportexpress) that will broadcast your music wirelessly to any networked computer in the house!

Compressed audio files cannot get scratched like CDs do, and if your iPod or MP3 player is stolen or accidentally formatted (happens all the time!), or even if your entire CD collection is stolen, it's no longer the end of the world. You just re-copy the files back to another device and you're good to go.

Though not exactly small, compressed audio files do lend themselves much better to email. A typical MP3 music file is around 3 to 6 megabytes, which is just under the threshold of being too large to send to someone using dial-up internet. If

(see *CD Music* on page 10)

The Switch to Digital TV

by Sandy Berger, CompuKISS, www.compukiss.com

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

The switch to digital is on the way. On February 17, 2009, U.S. broadcast stations, who are currently broadcasting in both analog and digital, will turn off their analog signals and will transmit only in digital. What's this mean to you?

Most consumers who get their television from a cable or satellite provider won't notice a difference. Cable and satellite companies are not required to make the transition, so they can continue to broadcast in both analog and digital. Eventually, though, if your cable company moves to all digital, you will not be able to get the cable straight from the wall, but will need a box from your cable company. Most cable customers already have a cable television box, anyway. Don't worry about that now, your cable company will notify you, if and when that happens. And it may be years down the road.

The people who will be most affected by the transition to digital are those who get their television "over the air" with rabbit ears or an antenna in the attic or on the roof. Older analog televisions will not be able to pick up the digital signal. You don't, however, have to go out and buy a new TV. You simply will need to add a digital-to-analog converter box to your television. These boxes are already available in stores like Wal-Mart, Best Buy, Circuit City, Radio Shack, and Target. They will be priced between \$40 and \$70.

Luckily for those with rabbit ears and old televisions, the government has created a \$1.5 billion coupon program to subsidize the cost of the converter boxes. This program is

being overseen by the National Telecommunication and Information Administration agency. Each household, regardless of how they receive their television, is eligible to receive two \$40 coupons. The coupons are available now. As I write this, over 5 million coupons have already been requested.

To get a coupon, you can apply online at www.dtv2009.gov or call the 24-hour hotline, 888-DTV-2009 (888-388-2009). You can also mail a coupon application to P.O. Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208-2000. The program itself expires on March 31, 2009. The government is trying to get everyone ready as quickly as possible, so be aware that the coupons expire three months after they are mailed to you. Since many television stations are already broadcasting in digital, you can use the converter box immediately.

If you are still asking why we are doing this, the official government explanation is that switching to digital TV will free up parts of the valuable broadcast spectrum for public safety communications such as police, fire departments, and rescue squads. The bigger reason, though, is that some of the spectrum will be auctioned to companies for advanced wireless services. This, of course, will be very lucrative for the U.S. Government.

It may be a good thing for consumers, as well. With the digital converter box, even your old analog television may give you a better picture. You will also be able to see more channels, as some broadcasters will choose to multicast programs. Multicasting means that a

broadcaster can split up its signal into several channels, each with a different set of programs. This type of programming is only available with digital broadcasting.

One thing to remember is that digital television is not high-definition television. Although high-def TVs will display digital television, you do not need a high-def TV just because of this transition. Digital broadcast television includes both Standard Definition (SD) and High Definition (HD) formats. You can watch both standard definition and high definition programming on an analog TV hooked to a digital-to-analog converter box, but the high definition won't give you the full high-definition quality that you would receive on a high-definition television.

If you have a newer TV that you purchased in the last few years, it may already support digital. Look at the markings on the television to find out if it has a digital tuner built-in. Words like "Digital Tuner or Receiver", "DTV", or "HDTV" indicate that it will display the digital programming. However, if your television says "HDTV Monitor", "Digital Ready" or "HDTV Ready", you may still need a converter box.

If you need more information on the move to digital television, check out the Federal Communication Commission's DTV Web site at www.dtv.gov. They have done a good job explaining everything you need to know.

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(Hulu—continued from page 4)

Movies are divided into 10 genres, including action and adventure, animation, comedy, crime and mystery, documentary and biography, drama, family and kids, horror and thriller, music, and sci-fi and fantasy. Movies can be selected by genre, or by studio. Opening www.hulu.com/browse/network/movies will display movies alphabetically by studio, with full-length features being clearly indicated. Each of the movies shown is hyperlinked (click on the title) directly to the movie. Similarly, all of the movies can be sorted by genre, and displayed in one window at www.hulu.com/browse/genre/movies.

Hulu is about to roll out “HD” (High Definition) videos, and currently has 20 HD movie trailers available to demonstrate the service at www.hulu.com/hd. Since HD video carries more data than conventional video, the system requirements are higher to view HD. In order to view the HD videos, the computer must have a minimum of Flash Player 9.0.115.0 (a free download from Adobe, available for most operating systems), a 2.5Mbs or faster broadband connection (many of the basic broadband services are incapable of operating at this speed, and a premium or upgraded broadband may be required to view HD), a fast processor (3Ghz minimum for Windows or Linux, or a 1.83Ghz Intel Core Duo for Mac). Almost all modern computers of recent manufacturer meet the minimum RAM and video requirements to view HD videos.

While not a substitute for cable or satellite TV, Hulu can provide countless hours of entertainment for free. Since new content is frequently added, and additional providers are being solicited, Hulu has the potential for becoming a major entertainment resource.

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(Moving On—continued from page 7)

Before we leave the “Performance Information and Tools” screen, you should also look at “Adjust visual effects” (in the upper left corner under “Tasks”). When you click on this item, you’ll see three tabs. We are only going to address the “Visual effects” tab for now. The first button, “Let Windows choose what is best for my computer,” is probably selected. This gives you the maximized “eye candy” on your computer but may have a negative effect on performance

(CD Music—continued from page 8)

both ends of the connection have high-speed, it’s no problem at all, as this amount of data can be transmitted by most DSL and cable internet services in about 10 or 20 seconds.

The MP3 compressed format is “lossy” in the sense that some of the music data is lost during compression, compared to the original recording, however I’ve never been able to tell the difference between a compressed song and a non-compressed track on a CD. The data you lose is not data that manifests as part of the music.

By the way, the songs as recorded on CDs you buy are very large—50 to 80 megabytes would not be uncommon. For those of you audio-philes who need compression but don’t want any data loss, consider using the FLAC mode of compression (See flac.sourceforge.net for information). FLAC stands for “Free Lossless Audio Codec.”

So, there are a host of reasons why we would want to compress our

when resource intensive programs are running (i.e., video editors). Notice that you have additional choices to “Adjust for best appearance” and “Adjust for best performance” as well as a “Custom” button that lets you choose what features to turn on and off. If your computer performance appears to be sluggish, try selecting “Best performance”.

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audio collection, but what is the downside? The only problem I can think of is that most automotive and older CD players cannot recognize the MP3 or any computer generated music format. Some of the newer CD players can, but it’s not something that people generally know. So, for example, when I transferred an audio book selection to CD for my wife, she found that the CD player in her car refused to play the media, even though her car is not that old. My car, a Chevy Monte Carlo, played the disk without a problem even though it’s an older car than hers. So in this situation you may want to take advantage of software that does the reverse of ripping—it would take MP3 files and lay them down on the CD as if they were ordinary Audio CD tracks. iTunes and many CD-writing utilities such as Nero will do this for you.

Now does anyone wanna buy a used 400-CD jukebox player?

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Directory Updates

See the printed edition.

Post Office Reminder

Forever Stamps will be on sale until May 9th for 41 cents each. The rate increase goes into effect May 12th.

(Email—continued from page 5)

position and directs you to add your name, address, and sometimes other information. Then you're supposed to send it to as many people as possible. If enough people do this, an email can contain hundreds if not thousands of names and addresses.

The longer the list gets the more valuable it becomes to a spammer or hacker, because the names and email addresses are valid. If you really want to support the idea behind the petition, a personal letter to the eventual recipient carries a lot more weight than a piece of paper with a long list of names. When you think about it, lists like these can be generated from telephone books. Do you really think that a member of Congress is going to pay attention to something that could be so easily faked?

Sometimes these petitions come with statements or warnings that the emails are being traced. Don't believe it. While technology is constantly improving, there is still no way to trace emails through the internet.

One kind of really annoying email is the one that promises that something wonderful is going to happen, but only if I forward the message to at least ten people in the next ten minutes. However, if I fail to do so, some unspeakable evil will surely befall me. I always fail to do so, and nothing bad has happened yet, but I wonder if this could be the reason I haven't won the lottery.

Before forwarding some version of an Amber Alert, take a little time to check out the story behind the message. Most of these messages

have been circulating around the internet for years. Some of them have been around for a decade. Almost all of them are much less than they seem.

Some sites that will help:

www.hoaxbusters.com
 urbanlegends.about.com/od/internet/a/current_netlore.htm
 ciac.llnl.gov/ciac/bulletins/h-05.shtml
 www.snopes.com
 www.vmyths.com

You may not be able to stop this stuff on your own, but you can stop contributing to it.

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(Deals Guy—continued from page 6)

How About An Add-on Toolbar!

ALToolbar, www.altools.com/ALTools/ALToolbar.aspx, offers their latest toolbar. ALToolbar is a new add-on that extends Internet Explorer with its suite of tools. It improves many common Internet tasks, making them faster and easier.

- Search popular websites faster.
- Visit favorite sites instantly.
- Securely store logins and bookmarks online.
- Automatically login to websites.
- Navigate easier with mouse gestures.
- Capture full web page screenshots.

ALToolbar is a suite of Internet tools designed for faster and easier Internet usage by real people. ALToolbar, like other ALTools, is completely free. We only ask that you enjoy it enough to tell a friend.

Need Some Tweaking?

YL Software announces WinUtilities 6.1, the newest version of its system-tweaking suite that offers over 20 computer productivity tools. WinUtilities provides everything a user needs

to remove junk data, and improve PC performance. The WinUtilities update offers users additional features as well as improvements on the technologies. For more information, or to download a free trial, please visit tinyurl.com/44jvg6.

Two modules, Duplicate Files Finder and Registry Cleaner, are now able to export reports. Other advancements include an improved File Undelete Module for NTFS and FAT32 volume; an improved Plug-ins Editor for the History Cleaner module; improved compatibility for Windows Vista 32-bit and 64-bit systems, plus an improved Registry Cleaner.

Computers accumulate a great deal of junk files. Applications can add things we may not be aware of and you should get rid of these things, but you may not have to if you install WinUtilities. It includes such tools as Junk File Cleaner, Registry Cleaner, Memory Optimizer, System Information, Registry Backup, File Encryption, Safe Uninstaller, Duplicate File Finder, File Shredder, Data Recovery & File Undelete tools, etc. WinUtilities

also includes an Internet Tracks Eraser, with Cookie Manager and Secure Deletion. The software is \$39.99, but we get a 30% discount. The following links take you to a PayPal page to buy the product with 30% discount.

WinUtilities 6.1 Personal License, \$28: tinyurl.com/2exswj

WinUtilities 6.1 Family License, \$49: tinyurl.com/2ypg2h

WinUtilities 6.1 Corporate License, \$350: tinyurl.com/2e9hrq

WinUtilities 6.1 runs under Windows Vista, XP, 2003 Server, 2000 and 98. Registered users get a fully functional product, a year of free upgrades and life-of-product technical support. Additional information and a 30-day evaluation version are available from www.ylcomputing.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 Cheap-skate) Click, bobclick@bellsouth.net. Editor's note: This column has been edited for space and content considerations.

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Postage

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April's Door Prize Winners



Gene Hultgreen won April's
50-50 jackpot!



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For even more great computer
articles, download this month's
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