

Diablo Blue

January, 2003



The Monthly Newsletter of the Diablo Valley PC User's Group

January 9, 2003 Meeting Announcement Computer Security with Steve Israel

Our January meeting will be on the second Thursday this month. That's because the first Thursday falls on January 2nd, and some DVPC members (and officers) will be traveling that week. So, mark your calendar and join us on January 9.

We will have Steve Israel, DVPC's president emeritus, who will discuss computer security. Computer security isn't just having an anti-virus program installed on your PC. It's a lot more. And Steve will tell us about all of the components of computer security, including why it's essential that you keep your anti-virus definitions up to date, how to prevent hackers from invading or trashing the files on your system, what a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack is and how your PC might be taken over by a hacker to be a part of the attack, and much more.

DVPC meetings are held in the lobby conference room in Building B at the Bank of America Technology Center office complex in Concord, located near the northeast corner of Clayton Road at Galindo (see the Map to Monthly Meetings on page 15). Please use the entrance that's on the east side near the southeast corner of the building. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. and the meeting starts at 7:00 p.m.

The New Users SIG holds its meetings at 6:30 p.m. prior to the regular DVPC monthly meeting on the first Thursday of each month at Bank of America building B. We discuss whatever is confusing or puzzling new PC users. If you are a new user of PCs who would like to meet with other new users – and some experienced users who can answer your questions as well – then join us at the New Users SIG meetings at 6:30 p.m. prior to each DVPC monthly meeting.

We'll also have the Networking Table from 6:30 to 7:00; if you have something to sell or trade, need technical help, or just want to exchange views, visit the Networking Table. We will have one of our pre-meeting games, with a great prize for the winner! Also, as usual, we'll have library disks and those great DVPC mugs (version 2) for sale, SIG news, and some of our usual great door prizes.

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President's Message

by Alan Mildwurm, DVPC

Hard to believe another year is almost gone! As I write this, Xmas is about 2 weeks away – and of course I am shy a few gifts – OK, more than a few!

Here are a few ideas for that after holiday loot you have lying around:

At our last meeting I showed the MouseCaster FM mouse (www.smarthings.com). I have now installed the mouse and it works very well and has a nice feel. Reception is fine using the included antenna. There are 28 available station presets and it is very simple to install and use. Just plug the cables into the mouse port and inline jack of your soundcard and load the software, which resides in your systray. I like the fact that I can easily record whatever I am listening to in MP3 format. This would make a great gift!

MSRP \$25.00

I am also really enjoying a set of Altec Lansing XA3051 surround sound speakers. The speakers (including a subwoofer, center channel, left and right front and rear speakers) have a very cool and modernistic form factor in black with silver grills. There is a hard-wired remote that allows you to control bass,

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Diablo Blue Article and Ad Information

Diablo Blue needs articles from the members of DVPC. See your name in print! Achieve fame and fortune! (Well, maybe just some limited fame in Contra Costa County...) We are particularly interested in product and book reviews and stories about your PC experiences. Send your articles or member ad copy as email attachments to the Newsletter Editor, rogg@value.net.

Commercial advertising is available in *Diablo Blue*. Prices are \$75 for a full page, \$40 for a half page, and \$25 for a quarter page for one insertion – or get three consecutive insertions for the price of two. For more information, call editor Ronald Ogg, at 415-281-0431 (days). Members of DVPC can submit personal classified ads that will be printed in *Diablo Blue* for three insertions at no charge. The rules are simple: up to 9 lines (as we format it), material must be suitable for publication (the editor is the sole judge of suitability), the member must be in good standing (current dues paid), and ad space is available on a first-come first-served space available basis only. If you want fewer than three insertions note that on your ad copy. If members want their business card reproduced, the rate is \$10 for one insertion, or \$25 for three insertions. The card must be horizontal and must be scannable. Send your ad copy as email attachments to the Newsletter Editor, rogg@value.net. See the deadline information in the Calendar on page 16 of each issue of *Diablo Blue*.

DVPC on the Internet

DVPC has a Web site on the Internet – thanks to our Web Team: Ron Ogg and Stan Umlauft. You can surf your way to our own domain and home page by starting your favorite Web browser and typing the following URL; be sure to save it in your browser's hotlist so you don't have to type it each time: www.dvpc.org.

DVPC Officers and Directors

Alan Mildwurm, President/Programs 510-770-5770 (work), awm@mildwurm.com

Nicholas Chase, SIG Coordinator 680-4211 (home), nachase@yahoo.com

Will Crites, Publicity 938-1291 (home), bugkiller@aol.com

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Craig Peterson, Librarian 671-7025 (home), compmail@pacbell.net

Stan Umlauft, Web Site 458-5560 (home), stanu@honeybee.com

The Board of Directors usually meets the week following the general meeting. Check the DVPC Calendar on page 16 of each issue of *Diablo Blue*, or the DVPC calendar page, for the meeting date, time, and location. You can reach any of the officers and directors by talking to them at the DVPC monthly meeting, by email to bod@value.net, or by leaving a message on the DVPC voice mail system.

DVPC Voice Mail System

DVPC has a computer-based voice mail system. The phone number for the DVPC VMS is 925-556-1449. Hear up-to-date information about monthly and SIG meetings, information about DVPC for potential new members, and a message center for Board of Directors members and SIG Leaders.

Diablo Blue is the monthly Web-based newsletter of the Diablo Valley PC Users' Group.

Editor: Ronald Ogg, Membership: Peggy Johnson

Please submit articles and columns to the Newsletter editor by email at rogg@value.net

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The Diablo Valley PC Users Group is a non-profit corporation.

DVPC is a member of APCUG, the Association of PC Users Groups, www.apcug.org

Get Involved! Learn! Join a SIG today!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Print this page, fill out this form, and enclose it with your check for \$30.00 for one year's dues with access to the Internet edition of *Diablo Blue* (\$20.00 for students who must enclose a copy of current Student ID), made payable to DVPC, and mail to: DVPC, PO Box 3244, San Ramon, CA 94583

Renewal _____ New Member _____ Referred by current member? Name _____

Name: _____

Company/School: _____ Email address: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

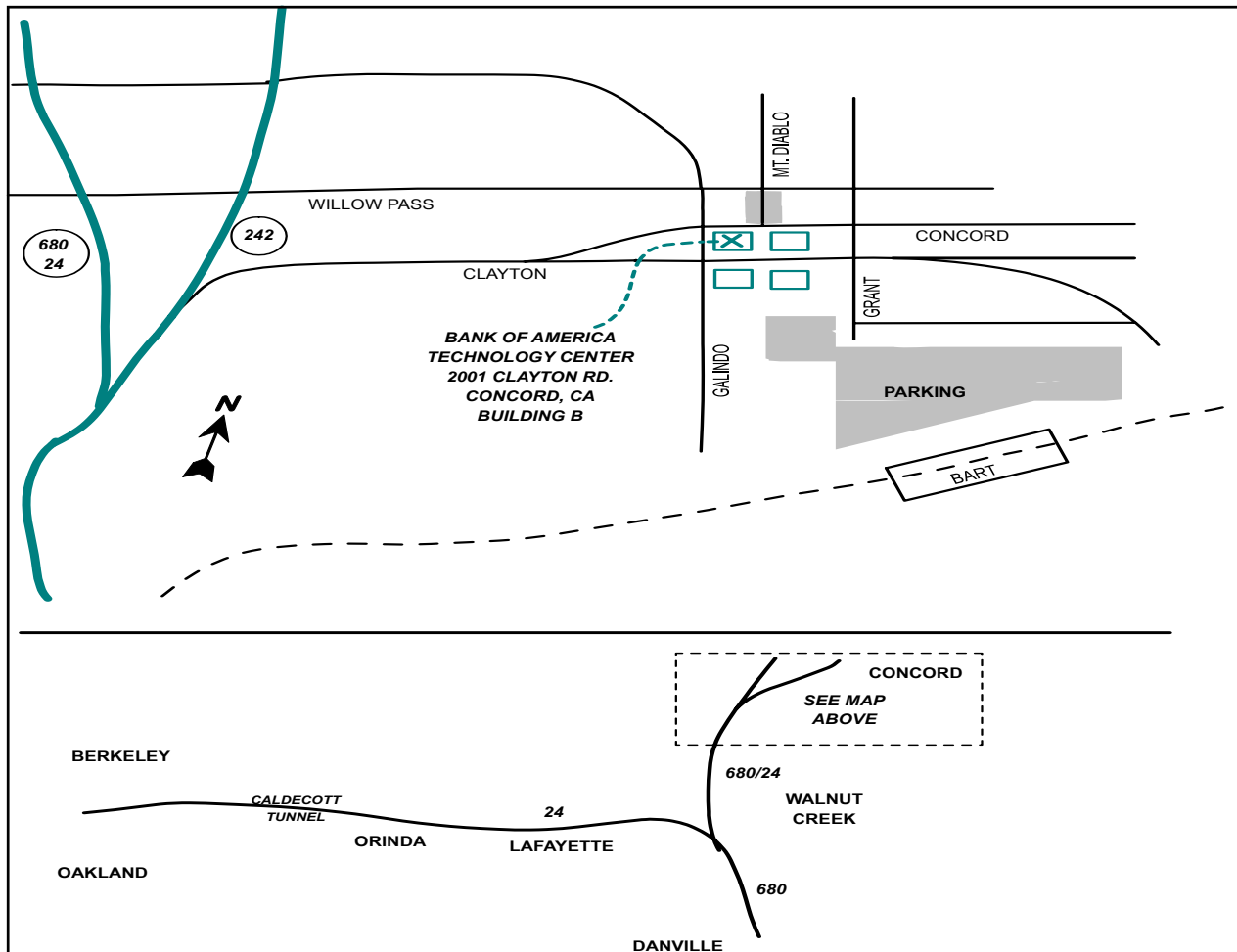
On occasion DVPC publishes a list of members for distribution to DVPC members only. Please check how you would like to be listed: No listing _____ List Name and Home _____ Work _____ phone number(s) _____

I'm also interested in these SIGs: _____

Directions to Bank of America Building B in Concord

Take the Clayton Road exit off of the 242 Freeway, and go east on Clayton Road. After about 1½ miles you'll come to Galindo, and you'll see the Bank of America complex of four high-rise buildings. Enter the door on the east side near the southeast corner of the building. Building B is the first building on your left, at the northeast corner of Clayton and Galindo. Parking: Turn right on Grant Street (the first block past Galindo), then right into the BART parking lot at the back of the BofA complex. Or turn left on Galindo then right onto Concord Avenue to find street parking.

Be sure to observe parking regulations! Concord parking officers are very efficient!



Advanced Developers SIG *SIG Co-Leaders Ron Ogg, (rogg@value.net) and Bill Morris (bill@soft-trak.com)*

The Advanced Developers SIG is a learning co-op. Every month we choose a topic and let people know where they can learn about it. We then get together and go over the information. We hope that if everyone learns a little on their own, and when we get together everyone can learn a lot. If you are an advanced developer you are invited to join the ADSIG. Beginners will want to get some serious development experience before joining the SIG. See the ADSIG page on the DVPC web site at www.dvpc.org/clarion.html for meeting location, dates, and time.

Our regular scheduled meetings for the remainder of the year are cancelled. Soft Velocity is going to do some product launches by the end of the year. These along with the current ASP templates may give us some interesting topics. Keep in mind that the group is not strictly a Clarion for Windows platform and is open to and encourages topics relating to other programming and computer related subjects.

The best way to keep informed about the Advanced Developers SIG, including meeting dates, times, locations, and topics, as well as any schedule changes, is to send an email to Bill Morris (bill@soft-trak.com) asking to be put on his email announcement list for the ApDev SIG.

Advanced Users SIG *Jeff and Sharon Noyer, SIG Co-Leaders – 778-4348*

The Advanced Users SIG meets on the third Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at 4208 Amargosa Drive in Antioch. The Advanced Users SIG is for anyone interested in discussing advanced topics such as hardware and software issues, cutting-edge technologies, networking, servers, troubleshooting, etc. Please join us to participate in this very informative and educational forum. We hope to see you at the meeting!

Directions: Go east on Highway 4 through Antioch to the Hillcrest Avenue exit. At the light at the end of the exit ramp, go right onto Hillcrest Avenue, and then stay towards your left. At the 3rd light, Hillcrest Avenue turns to the left. Go left and stay on Hillcrest. (Landmark: "The Crossings" Shopping Center is at intersection). At the 4th light, go left onto Wildhorse Drive. (Landmark: 7-Eleven on corner at intersection). At the 2nd left turn, go left onto Meadow Lake Drive. At the 4th right turn, go right onto Amargosa Drive. 4208 Amargosa Drive is the 3rd house on your right, blue and white one-story.

Genealogy eSIG *Peggy Johnson, SIG Leader – 676-7522*

The DVPC Genealogy SIG is a group of computer genealogists who share helpful websites, databases and source information found on the internet. It's an opportunity for members seeking help to put forth a question or problem to the SIG and receive suggestions and advice. When you locate a useful website, database or visit a research facility, please email the group of the details so we also can take advantage of this information. If you wish to be included in this Genealogy SIG, please email Peggy Johnson, pegszone@aol.com.

Education and Entertainment SIG *Alan Mildwurm, SIG Leader – 510-770-5770*

The Education & Entertainment SIG usually meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month at Montevideo School in San Ramon at 7:30 p.m. Check the DVPC web site (www.dvpc.org) for information about each month's meeting. The E&E SIG is oriented to exploring the best in education and entertainment software for the PC. Come back in the fall when everyone is invited to attend our meetings, and bring your kids along - they'll have a great time, too! Directions for our next meetings: Take 680 to Bollinger Canyon Road, go west to San Ramon Valley Blvd., go south to Montevideo Rd. and turn left. Proceed east on Montevideo about 3 blocks to Broadmoor and turn left. The school is 1 block on the right. We meet in Room 22.

Internet SIG *Craig Peterson, SIG Leader – 671-7025*

The Internet SIG usually meets at 7:00 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month at Computer Renaissance, 959 Contra Costa Blvd. in Pleasant Hill. We cover everything about the Internet, from browsing and e-mail to creating your own web site and the tools for doing so.

With the end on one year and the start of a new one it is always a great chance to look back at what has changed with the internet and what we have to look forward to in the coming year. Please bring what you consider the most important changes in the last year (Napster's collapse, day trading of stocks, virus attacks...) and what you think will be new for the coming year (TIA, better firewalls, governments restricting their citizens to using only one web service...)? For more information, please call Craig Peterson at (925) 671-7025 or e-mail him at compmail@pacbell.net.

.NET SIG *Ted Armstrong, SIG Leader – 939-5874*

The .NET SIG has its meetings on the third Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m. in the Community Room at Concord Police Department building (see directions in the Windows SIG announcement below). The .NET SIG is dedicated to the new Microsoft .NET development tools, the newest Microsoft standard for developing cross-platform stand-alone and web-site applications. .NET tools include Microsoft Visual Basic .NET, Microsoft Visual C++ .NET, and Microsoft Visual C#. .NET developers can take advantage of a common toolbox, debugger, and task window, greatly reducing the developer learning curve and ensuring that developers can always choose the language most appropriate for their task and expertise. .NET gives developers the tools for integrating solutions

SIG News...

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across operating systems and languages.

The .NET SIG will provide an opportunity for .NET developers at all levels who live or work in the East Bay to network with fellow developers. The SIG will provide speakers on different .NET topics. If you or anyone you know could benefit from this SIG, please come to our meetings. Contact Ted Armstrong at ted1003@yahoo.com for more information.

New Users SIG *Bill Earl, SIG Leader – 939-5874*

The New Users SIG holds its meetings at 6:30 p.m. prior to the regular DVPC monthly meeting on the first Thursday of each month at Bank of America building B. We discuss whatever is confusing or puzzling new PC users. If you are a new user of PCs who would like to meet with other new users – and some experienced users who can answer your questions as well – then join us at the New Users SIG meetings at 6:30 p.m. prior to each DVPC monthly meeting.

PC 101 SIG *Craig Peterson, SIG Leader – 671-7025*

PC 101 IS BACK IN SESSION. After some problems getting started this school term we have found a new place to meet as well as a new place on the calendar. We will be meeting the third Saturday of the month at the Financial Services Center, 1010 Oak Grove Road in Concord. A special thanks to Peter Camejo, the owner of PAM (Progressive Asset Management), for letting us use the main conference room for our classes.

PC101 is an introductory class in how to use the computer. If you or someone you know has just started using a computer, upgraded to a new system, has a laptop that you can only use for solitaire, or just wants to ask some of those basic questions that seem “silly” join us as we have some hands on exploration of computers and their use. Hope to see you there **January 18** from 9 am to 1 pm.

Windows SIG *Ron Ogg (415-281-0431) and Walt Parsons (934-0775), SIG Co-Leaders*

The Windows SIG usually meets at the Community Room at the Concord Police Department building on the first Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m. We discuss the latest version of Windows, demonstrate interesting shareware and freeware, and have random access sessions where we all try to answer SIG members’ questions. Everyone who uses, is interested in, or is curious about Windows on their PC is invited to attend.

Directions: The Concord Police Department is at 1350 Galindo Street in Concord. From the 242 Freeway take Clayton Road east to Galindo and turn right; the Police Department building is 3 blocks south on your left. From Highway 24 take Monument Blvd. east and continue on Monument Blvd. to where it changes to Galindo; the Police Department building will be on your right a short distance past the signal at Cowell Road.

President’s Message...

(Continued from page 1)

treble, volume, stereo or surround and test the system. There are also two headset ports on the remote. The speakers have a very nice sound and it is amazing how the addition of surround sound can enhance either TV or your gaming console! Connections are a snap with standard RCA connections and included color coded cables. Hardest part: talking someone into running the cables under the house! Check out www.alteclansing.com.

Here are the specs:

- 56 Watts Total Continuous Power RMS (4x5 W/Satellites; 17.5 W/Center; 18.25 W/Sub)
- 100 Watts Total Peak Power
- 6-Speaker Dolby Surround Pro Logic

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President's Message...

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Bottom line: they sound great, look cool and add a whole new dimension to your gaming or TV enjoyment. Don't underestimate what a difference surround sound can add!!

I also just started playing with Veo's (www.veo.com) Photo Traveler for the Pocket PC. This little camera plugs into the compact flash port of my Toshiba PDA and allows me to take photos (up to 640x480 resolution) or movies. The specs are:

- Adjustable Timer
- Transfer JPEG's through Active Sync
- Automatic exposure, white balance, color control
- Swivel lens with focus
- Software to manage images both on the PDA and desktop

I have to admit I haven't mastered it yet (pix have a slightly blue tint) and I find it slow- even on my 400 mhz PDA but the feature set is certainly much more than the camera I had on my Prism Handspring. I will upload some photos after a little more experimentation.

MSRP \$99.00

(You can also get a Palm version of this unit!)

I think any of these would make a great gift for a techie!

[Next month's meeting will be on Jan 9!](#)

Our own Steve Israel will do a presentation on **COMPUTER SECURITY**. Simply not to be missed!

Hope you have a great holiday – see you at the January meeting!

OmniPage Pro 11 – A Software Review by Karl Rehak, Las Vegas PC Users Group

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software has been around for many years. Anyone who has had a need to capture an existing document for revision knows the value in having this kind of product to remove much of the burden. A little background of my own experience with OCR software might be in order before beginning the review. I have been a user of this kind of software product for over five years. Starting with the light versions of OCR products bundled with my first scanner, followed by two releases of TextBridge. This my second experience with OmniPage Pro. The first OmniPage product I used was release 10.

My general opinion of OCR software is that while it removes most of the effort in capturing printed documents, the OCR process is in itself a very burdensome activity. The software is only capable of doing so much of the effort and any ambiguities in the OCR process require interpretation that only a human being is capable of providing. As a result I haven't approached an OCR session with delight or as being an activity that would be personally rewarding. Additionally, my OCR sessions are generally infrequent and usually come in bursts that can range from several hours to several days. This means that ease of use is important and the more

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Support DVPC – Get a friend to join!

OmniPage Pro 11 – A Software Review ...

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accurate an OCR program is, the easier will be my brief but intense excursions into their use.

OmniPage Pro release 11 is the first release since Caere was bought and ScanSoft merged their OmniPage OCR program into the TextBridge product. This is also the first new release from ScanSoft in just under two years. Needless to say, and based on my past use of OCR products, I was very interested to see what has been brought to the scene. First and foremost is the claim that the product is more accurate than preceding products and my first question – what does that really mean to me? A feature called IntelliTrain has been enhanced and once again the question – what does that mean to me? Again, because of the intense interaction during OCR sessions, those were the two most significant areas of evaluation to me. Several other new and enhanced features were evaluated as the product was tested and comments regarding their value will be discussed through the review.

The bottom line measure of the value of a quality OCR product is end user productivity. As the quality of OCR products improves and the interpretation of a document's content becomes more and more a function of the computer's ability to interpret information rather than the time spent to have a human being interpret and make decisions, the higher the productivity. That is, in the final analysis, all that matters. So along the way judgments of the OmniPage improvements on user productivity will be highlighted.

The Test Begins

The first test was done primarily to allow me to gain knowledge and confidence in the use of OmniPage 11. I read the instruction manual and reviewer's notes and formulated a test plan to put the product through its paces, but first I had to know what capability was in the software. For this first test I used the documents out of the OmniPage box. The documents are very legible and of a standard size font, about 12 point Ariel. I rated each test based on the overall quality and legibility of the source document, a 10 is a very easy document and a 1 is an extremely poor quality document. These first test documents were quality 10.

The overall design of the main OmniPage Pro OCR process is built upon the age-old concept of what computing really is. The steps are Input, Process and Output – a simple concept. Add into that each of those processes can be broadly segregated into three different approaches. They can be done manually, automatically or described through a wizard. I tried each method as I tested and found that they are very similar and easy to learn and use. It takes no additional effort to move from one approach to another.

The input describes the source of the OCR; it can be a black and white, grayscale or color document. It can also be a computer file. Introduced with this release is a scanable file type, Acrobat files. More on the PDF scanning ability will be covered later.

The process part of the three elements allows the user to describe what he or she wants as a result. Among the choices are to preserve the page structure of the source, scan it as a single continuous column of information, include or exclude tables or to output to a spreadsheet format. The program also recognizes over 100 different languages.

Finally, the output function allows the user to save the information as a file for a word processor or other computer program, output to mail or copy the output to the clipboard. There was another interesting output available – speech. More on that later.

The first scans from the manuals went as expected. It interpreted everything with only three suspect words in three pages of scanning. A word with a registration mark (the circle R) next to it is a example of a suspect word. It guessed correctly and I only had to confirm the program's choice. The interpret rating was 100% and again, the document type was a 10.

Test Two

Alright the parties over, time to see just what this program can do. For second test I selected a sampling of a legal document, reproduced many, many times, originally bound in a plastic binder with half inch slots, later converted to three-hole punched paper. The document because of numerous copies over the years was heavily speckled. I called it the document from hell. This is characteristic of many of the scans I had done in the past and where the personal productivity factor went in the dumper. Lots of interpretation needed and in the older OCR programs the remnants of holes and slots were interpreted as characters. The documents also had to be cleaned of speckles and marks manually with older OCR programs. Further the document had a filing number stamped on it of a different size and slant. Document quality 2 at best on my scale, I decided to name this part of the test 'Extreme Scanning.' The illustration, "Legal Document," shows an image of the document quality.

Four pages were scanned and the overall scan accuracy was 93.93%. On the first page it highlighted 17 words. Of the selections it had guessed correctly 15 times and I had only to confirm the choice. I had to select from a provided list of choices twice, and the correct words were in the list.

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**Bring a Friend to a DVPC Meeting
Help Them Grow their PC Knowledge
Help Grow DVPC Membership**

OmniPage Pro 11 – A Software Review ...

(Continued from page 8)

I'm convinced that lawyers invent words so nobody knows what they are talking about. The net in the OCR test was that the document was loaded with legalese and OmniPage Pro flew through the legal words just fine.

The additional pages had slightly less selections to decide; apparently the IntelliScan feature was doing its job. The parts of the documents that contained remnants of holes and slots were passed over by the program, no need to clean them beforehand or eliminate wrong interpretations on the part of OmniPage.

Its beginning to get too easy for this program (and me), so for the final scan of the legal document I decided to place it in the scanner at about a 10 degree angle. It scanned fine. The program automatically aligns the text. When I took the document off of the scanner I realized I had also put it in upside down. The program had also fixed that. I became a believer.

At this point I was sold; the effect on my overall productivity in the OCR area was great. No more speckle and hole removal or spending countless hours interpreting information. But I figured there had to be one more test I could do.

Test Three

I had achieved my goal of watching the program pass the extreme scanning test, but what else would put it to the test after that? Looking over my bookshelf I saw an old copy of the Bible. The pages are 4 ½ inches wide and 7 ½ inches long, the font was too small for me to measure but is about 7 point or less. Lots of unusual words, numbered verses and italicized footnotes. I placed it on the scanner at a 10-degree angle and hit the scan button. The illustration, "Interpreting the Bible" shows what the program saw. The result was 100% accuracy, 13 suspect words and no changes. On the scale of document quality I put it at about a 6.

I'm amazed at this performance and now we're in bonus territory in our extreme scanning test.

The Bonus Round

Added to the program with this release is the ability to OCR Acrobat files. To do this test I found a 'readme' file in my Acrobat folder and scanned it in. It is a 21-page file and all 11,000+ words were input at 100% accuracy with 64 suspect words. Again, the registration symbol and similar characters required confirmation that the interpretation was correct. No changes had to be made.

Added to this release is voice output. I had a lot of fun with this. There are a variety of voice types but the one that was easiest for me to hear was called "Sam." Sam sounds like Steven Hawking. What is the value of this you ask? If you hold the original in your hands, the voice will read what it has and you can do a word-by-word review of captured information. Sam will not have much of a career as a stand up comic, but he can come in handy. Personally, I doubt that Sam will have a serious place in my OCR activity, when the OCR process is done I have a very high level of confidence that it is correct and the voice read back is a redundant activity. Perhaps future releases will find more for Sam to do.

The program supports over 100 languages; however, Chinese, Japanese, and Hebrew are not among them.

Conclusion

All in all, ScanSoft has delivered a product matched to its promise. The product is more accurate than previous releases and is easy to use. As each release improves accuracy, the user productivity soars; I would estimate that productivity improvements of an order of magnitude over previous releases can be realized. What used to take 10 hours of effort can now be done in 1 hour. The more complex the document and the poorer the condition the more work the current program will take on, relieving much of the effort of capturing documents.

The program test was a lot of fun to do. The burden of Optical Character Recognition has been lightened. ScanSoft has delivered a significant release and OmniPage Pro release 11 is its name.

You can contact author Karl Rehak by Email at karl@idea4u.com.

Special Raffle Promotion

Bring a guest to a DVPC meeting, you get 10 Raffle tickets!
If your guest joins at the meeting, you get 10 Raffle tickets –
and your new member guest *also* gets 10 Raffle tickets!!

DVPC Web Site has Virus Notifications by Ron Ogg, DVPC

We now have the top ten virus alerts and virus hoax notifications courtesy of Sophos, a leading corporate anti-virus software publisher. Take a look on our Sophos Anti-Virus page, www.dvpc.org/sophos.html. You'll see three tables:

1. Sophos Virus Alerts
2. Sophos Virus Hoax Notifications
3. Viruses Most Commonly Reported by Sophos Last Month

Click on the links in each of the tables to go to the Sophos web site and view the information about the particular virus or hoax.

SBC/PacBell Opt-Out Versus Opt-In by Walt Parsons, DVPC's Official Curmudgeon, Accept No Substitute!

In recent issues of the San Francisco Chronicle, David Lazarus has reported on SBC/PacBell's plan to share personal information about its DSL broadband Internet customers with Yahoo. SBC/PacBell has entered into a marketing arrangement with Yahoo to sell what, in their advertising, is implied to be an AOL-like interface to the Web that's hosted by Yahoo. The bad deal for customers of SBC/PacBell is that they (we!) were sent an insert with our phone bill a couple of months ago, an insert that said that if we didn't want our personal information to be shared with Yahoo we had to explicitly opt-out. Did you notice the insert in your phone bill? I sure didn't. So, David Lazarus wrote a series of three articles about this subject in the Chron. The first of the articles included an email address where you can opt-out of information sharing – a really valuable service, thank you, David!

Here are links to the three articles so you can read all about it, followed by a link to SBC/PacBell's web site where you can select to opt-out yourself, if you are inclined to do so.

1st article: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/11/27/BU199268.DTL>

2nd article: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/12/04/BU139983.DTL>

3rd article: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/12/13/BU191399.DTL>

SBC opt-out URL: <http://sbc-pacbell.com/rescpni>

Computer Chronicles Sings Its Auld Lang Sine by Nick Chase, DVPC

The link below will take you to USA Today's report about the demise of the Computer Chronicles TV show that appeared on PBS stations across the country. Computer Chronicles was taped at the KCSM studios at the College of San Mateo, and KCSM was one of the show's co-producers, so there's a local Bay Area relationship.

How sad. Many of us began our Journey with Computer Chronicles when 1 K of RAM was a huge upgrade. Stewart Cheifet was an excellent host, covering a broad range of topics, and was always interviewing interesting industry honchos. It is hoped that syndication might save this show, or perhaps Alan and Steve would like to purchase it and continue? Or invite Stewart Cheifet to speak at a DVPC meeting?

You can read the original article with all of the sad details on the USA Today web site at:

www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2002-12-12-pc-show_x.htm.

Best Wishes to You for a happy healthy holiday season and New Year 2003.

SpamAssassin Pro – A Software Review by Ron Ogg, DVPC

Spam is running amok! And I don't mean the lunchmeat that comes in a can, the favorite of the Hawaiian Islands. No, this "spam" is no one's favorite, except maybe the advertisers who are overusing email to an excess that has Federal government legislators considering new laws that will supposedly stop the assault. And much of the spam is advertising sites or products that are sexual in nature or contain adult content. It's not just adults – kids who use email are receiving these spam messages as well.

There are tools that are supposed to help us stem this unwanted tide. ISPs are employing spam detection that prevents spam messages from ever arriving in your inbox. But these detectors are also trapping a significant number of messages that users actually want to receive, but depending on the ISP and the detector they are using, the users may never have the opportunity to see what they are missing. Email programs have built-in junk email filters that are supposed to screen out messages that are spam or contain adult content. But these filters usually have the same problems as ISPs' detectors, passing some spam and blocking some messages that are not spam. Most email programs come with the ability to define rules that let us identify the senders or message content

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we want deleted as messages arrive in our inboxes. But these rules sometimes conflict with each other or don't work the way we intended.

What to do about spam email, what to do?

Well, there are a number of third-party anti-spam software packages and web-based services.

The web-based services require that you use their service as your email provider, which means that you have to either change your email address or have all of your email forwarded to the service. You usually can't use your favorite email program, but have to use web-based email similar to HotMail or Yahoo Mail. What they provide is similar to what ISPs' spam detectors provide, but not as conveniently.

Third-party anti-spam software packages are more useful, because they run on your PC and you don't have to change your email address or have your email forwarded. These packages come in two primary flavors. First, those that intercept your POP3 email, check it for spam, then your email program interfaces to the anti-spam package as if it was your ISP's email service. Second, those that are plug-ins or add-ons to your email program, the majority of which work with Microsoft's Outlook and/or Outlook Express.

I checked out the reviews of a wide variety of anti-spam programs, and ended up being dissatisfied with those that I read about. What I wanted was an anti-spam program that would plug into Microsoft Outlook 2002 (the version I use at home), that would have built-in rules for moving spam to a Spam Mail folder, but that would allow me to override the rules to both select email addresses or entire domains that I wanted to block and to identify email addresses that I don't want blocked. These selection processes should be easy to use, just the click of a button. And there should be a way for me to change my mind! If I assign someone to the blacklist by accident, I want to be able to remove them. And there should be a way to be able to assign an entire domain to my blacklist – there are a lot of spammers who keep changing the name part of the email address (like `jb4567@buysomething.now`, `83ej@buysomething.now`, etc.), and it makes more sense to exclude the entire domain (like `@buysomething.now`).

So I went on a search. I checked out the specs of many anti-spam programs, read reviews, and even downloaded demo versions and tried them out. iHateSpam, SurfControl, Spam Inspector, SpamKiller, MailShield, Spam Agent, Matador, Spam Outpost, Email Remover. Lots of programs. No winners. Then I found SpamAssassin Pro from Deersoft (www.deersoft.com). Here was what I was looking for – it had almost all of the features I wanted, and some that I hadn't even thought of were included as well.

SpamAssassin Pro is a plug-in for Outlook 2000 and Outlook 2002; there is no separate program to run. It's not available for any other email program, though the Deersoft web site promises support for Outlook Express "Real Soon Now". And it only works with POP3 email accounts, so users who have IMap and Web email accounts need not apply.

SpamAssassin Pro uses a database that includes a whitelist of email addresses that you want to allow and a blacklist of email addresses you want to block. SpamAssassin Pro adds a new email folder to Outlook, Junk Mail. Any spam that is found in an email message routes that message to the Junk Mail folder; you can then look through the messages in the Junk Mail folder and decide if it really from someone from whom you want to receive email, and you can then add it to the whitelist. Any message in your inbox that you consider spam can be added to the blacklist. Pretty soon almost all of the spam that you normally receive in your inbox is gone. Note that not all of the spam is eliminated. Deersoft's web site states that it provides the "Immediate end to 95% of spam in your inbox". This is more comforting than publishers who claim their anti-spam software will eliminate "100%" or "all" spam. Fuggetit! Not possible. There are too many smart spammers out there that use techniques that will prevent ANY anti-spam program from blocking them automatically.

You get a new toolbar with the following buttons:

- Register: This button bugs you to purchase and register your copy of SpamAssassin Pro (for only \$29.95) using the registration number that will be emailed to you.
- Allow Sender: Adds the sender's email address to the whitelist; use this when the sender's email message was sent to the Junk Mail folder and you want to receive messages from this sender.
- Block Sender: Adds the sender's email address to the blacklist; use this when an email message from a spammer is in your inbox and you don't want to receive any more messages from this sender.
- Allow Recipient: Some mailing lists are sent to the email address of the list, and the actual recipients are blind copied; this button allows you to add this recipient to the whitelist.
- Block Recipient: This button allows you to add a mailing list recipient to the blacklist.
- Scan Folder: This button filters spam out of an existing Outlook folder and moves spam messages to the Junk Mail folder.
- Settings: This button brings up a tabbed dialog box that lets you set options for SpamAssassin Pro.

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Changing Your E-mail Address?
Tell us so you will continue receiving Diablo Blue!
E-mail your name and new information to changes@dvpc.org

SpamAssassin Pro – A Software Review...

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Now let's take a look at the Settings dialog box and what's on each tab.

- The General tab lets you adjust settings in four different categories:

Spam Processing Options: This is where you can select the folder where you want junk mail (spam messages) sent. You can also choose whether you want messages sent to the Junk Mail automatically marked as Read, and whether you want the subject line of spam messages to include some words that will alert you that the messages contain spam.

Interface Options: You can decide whether you want a confirmation dialog box to be displayed when a sender is being allowed or blocked, and whether the SpamAssassin Pro toolbar is to be displayed on the Outlook toolbar.

Statistics: This shows how many incoming email messages have been received, and how many were identified as spam.

Product Registration: This section shows your SpamAssassin Pro registration status.

- The Whitelist and Blacklist tabs let you add, remove, and edit the whitelist and blacklist. Each has two sections, one for the sender's email addresses, and one for the recipient's email addresses.

A common editing use is to change an email address to a domain address; for example, if you clicked the Block Sender button when you were viewing a message from 83ej@buysomething.now, and you want to block all email from this domain, you can edit 83ej@buysomething.now so it reads *@buysomething.now. The * wild card can be used to designate that "any" characters can be inserted in place – for example, adding refinace@*.* will block all email from anyone who uses an email address with the name "refinace" regardless of the "@domain" it comes from.

When you first install SpamAssassin Pro, it asks if you want to add the email addresses in your contacts folder to the whitelist. If you skip this step, you can use the Import button on the Whitelist tab to run the process at any time.

- The Language Filtering Tab lets you filter out email messages that are not in your native language. By default, all languages are included, but this can be changed to accept only email written in English or any combination of languages.

OK, what's wrong with SpamAssassin Pro? Not much, but here are a few things that I'd like to see added to the program:

1. Add on-line help. There's no help available anywhere in the program.
2. Add buttons to Block Domain and Allow Domain. This would eliminate a lot of the editing I needed to do to prevent any email name from a spammer's domain to be blocked, not just one specific email address.
3. Sort the Whitelist and Blacklist when you are adding or editing an entry.
4. Provide a way to print the spam blocking rules, including the whitelist and blacklist.
5. Add a nationality (TLD) filter so you can block messages from national domains like ".ru" and/or ".kr" and/or whatever.

I've found SpamAssassin Pro to be easy to use and set up. You can download a demo, and it can be ordered from Deersoft for only \$29.95. Highly recommended!

SATA by George Griffin, DVPC

Just when you think you have your computer bull by the horns, either the rope breaks, or a new bull shows up.

One of "El Toro's" newest technical products is a new rendition of hard disk drive interface design and operation. This one is a significant change in hardware interface design philosophy, going from a parallel drive interface to a serial drive interface. This is SATA, or Serial ATA.

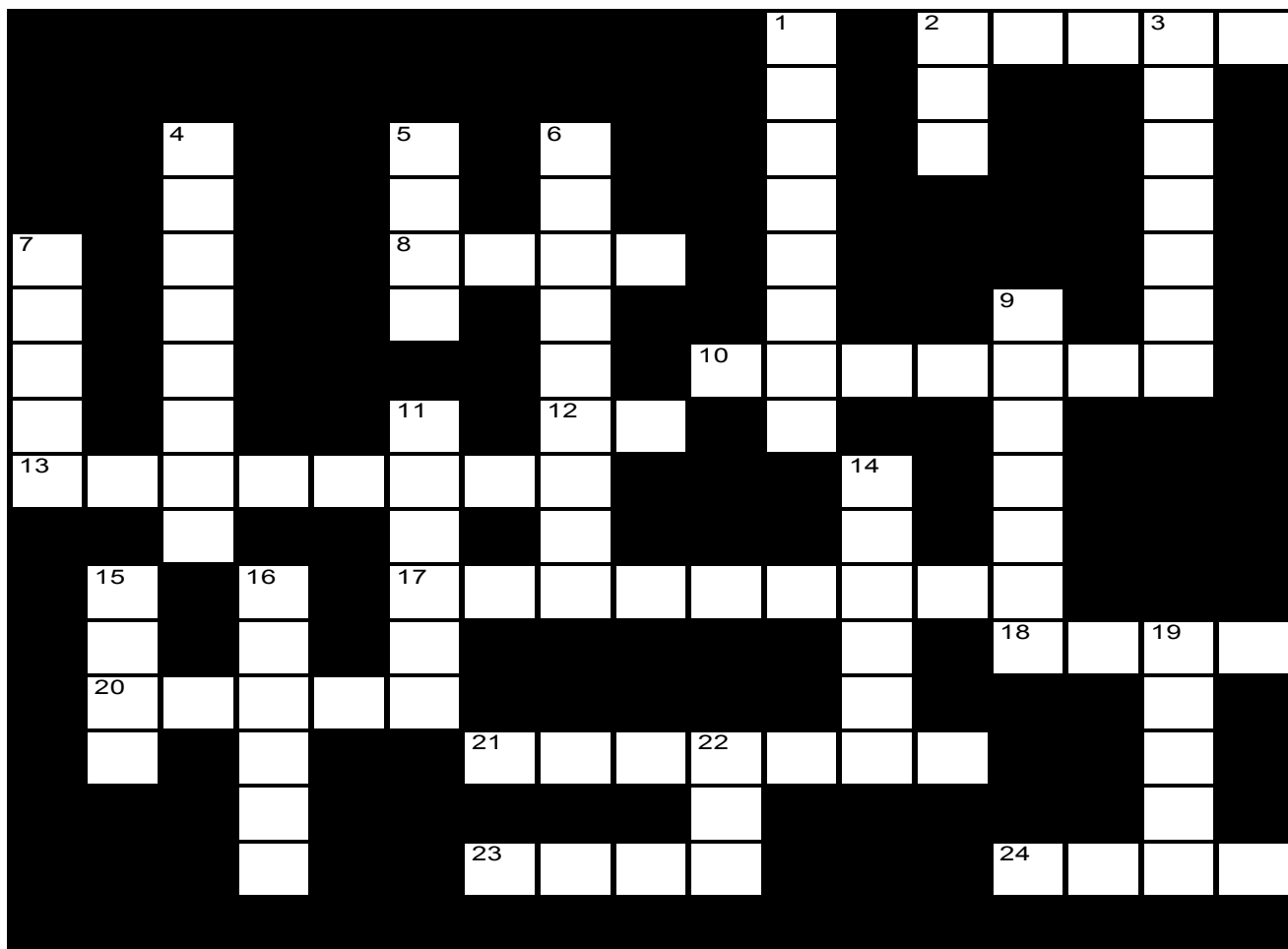
This new design has quite a few potentially positive upsides. Speed is the most prominent. The present parallel system has kind of reached an impasse at 133 MB/sec. PC World magazine ran a test set up that did not show too much of a speed advantage with the first SATA drives on the market, but the potential is there to double or triple the band width speed. The interconnect cables that hook up a hard disk drive to the SATA controller adapter are only a quarter of an inch wide, which cleans up some of the rats' nest inside the computer case, and also allows for much better air circulation – and that is becoming quite important in today's new high-performance PCs.

What does SATA stand for? The "S" means Serial, and the ATA means "AT Attachment". The AT refers back to those original IBM PC AT motherboard systems, and IBM defined AT as "Advanced Technology". The most basic term was IDE which means "Integrated Disk Electronics". This was followed by EIDE, "Enhanced IDE". Then came ATA/66, ATA/100, and so forth. Just accept that it all of these are a type of hard drive interface, and the most commonly used in personal computers today. ATA disk drive have been around for quite a while. Up to now, they have been parallel interface drives. So, now we have serial interface drives, SATA, the subject of this little article.

The next type of hard disk drive interface is SCSI (Small Computer System Interface) – which is a subject for another day.

Give a DVPC Membership Gift Certificate!

Computer Crossword
"Emergency"
by Craig Peterson, DVPC



With winter storms threatening to blow down power lines, strand motorists on their way back from skiing, and fill our streets (if not the streams and rivers) with enough water to enter our homes it is time to look at those guides on how to survive during a _____ (you can fill in the blank for California with anything from earthquakes to killer bees). After you have gathered the food, water, blankets, and other supplies (go to for a complete list) sit back under your battery powered light, listen to your battery powered radio, and take some time to solve this month's puzzle.

If you need some help, you can break out those other emergency books (dictionary, encyclopedia, crossword puzzle dictionary...) or you can check out the answers at www.dvpc.org/solution.html.

Across

- 2. What needs to be agreed to before an emergency as to where family members will meet
- 8. Home for those who are camping or homeless
- 10. Way to provide light, not recommended indoors due to fire danger
- 12. Useful tool for firewood and fire fighting
- 13. Garment used when out in the rain
- 17. Nice thing to gather around in the dark
- 18. Plastic sheet used for covering items to keep them dry
- 20. Cooking unit
- 21. Oil or battery light producing device
- 23. Federal agency that helps in disasters
- 24. Three days of this is needed for emergencies
- 2. This portable device can hold your emergency information as well as phone numbers to call
- 3. Extra, dry items needed in an emergency
- 4. Kit needed in any home and car
- 5. These members of the family need food and supplies as well
- 6. Portable power unit
- 7. As with #5 down, you need three days of this
- 9. Something nice to snuggle under with someone else at night
- 11. Hot liquid consumed in great quantities in an emergency
- 14. Something to warm up to when it is cold
- 15. Something to have on hand if the ATM's go out
- 16. Tool for use in digging an "emergency bathroom"
- 19. Battery powered device to obtain news and updates in an emergency
- 22. Liquid drink that can fill in if #9 across runs out

Down

- 1. Type of phone needed if stranded

DVPC Board Meeting Minutes by Tom Krauss, DVPC

Going for a new personal record, I successfully made it to the second Board meeting in a row. I arrived five minutes early (see last month's ramblings regarding the promptness and dependability of your Board members) and found I was nearly the last one to arrive. Nick saved me from that ignominy by showing up a few minutes later.

Ron had a tape recorder running to preserve the meeting for posterity. But an hour into it, the recorder shut off with a loud click. While Ron worked frantically to resolve the technical problem, the rest of us politely refrained from discussing any important club business. This was really quite easy for us: for sixty minutes we had managed to avoid club business, so it was no problem to continue for a few more minutes. Ron soon discovered that it was not a hardware problem. It turns out that you can only record one hour on a sixty minute tape... *[Ron thought it was a 120 minute tape, but noooo... it was a 60 minute tape. Too bad. – Ed.]*

The meeting began with a review of a brochure for a new video camera which records directly to DVD-RAM. From there we moved on to printers. Tip of the Evening: Staples is having a sale – \$50 off of every printer they carry. This is doubtless over by the time you are reading these minutes, but I thought you might like to know what a great deal you missed. Speaking of deals, there was a great deal of discussion about printer quality, particularly regarding digital photos, and about digitizing slides and old photos. Ron snuck in some hints for his Christmas list, but generally these were things even he can't afford, so I'm guessing it will be a disappointing Christmas day at the Ogg household. *[Of course, because Ron still believes in Santa, and because he thinks that he might some day win the lottery (despite the fact that he doesn't buy any lottery tickets on the {probably correct} assumption that his chances of winning the lottery are about the same whether he buys a lottery ticket or not), there's always a chance that a Canon EOS 1Ds digital camera (\$8,000.00) and/or a 42" Gateway plasma LCD-Screen HDTV (\$3,000) and/or a Compaq Tablet PC (\$1,800) could end up under his tree on Christmas morning. – Ed]*

The discussion veered to a brief discussion of phone, TV and internet service options, but then made a sharp turn to the topic of "Electronic kits I built myself". I jokingly asked Ron if he still had the first crystal set he built. He did build one, but doesn't have it. I was surprised to learn that five of us had actually built crystal sets. They were antiques when I was a young child, and although I know Ron, Charlie, Will and Nick are all much older than me, I didn't realize they were *that* old. The crystal set was the beginning and end of my electronics career, but these fellows had gone on to build a variety of radios, TVs, and a variety of other Heath Kits. (Why am I not surprised that Ron even built professional-level oscilloscopes?)

As nine o'clock drew near we began to feel a little guilty, and some DVPC business was accomplished. Alan updated us about upcoming speakers, and Ron discussed some email messages he had received regarding DVPC. Ron gave a status on the cost of printing the new brochures (high, so he is still investigating alternatives). Charlie had not seen the revised brochure, so we provided him a draft. Being Charlie, he quickly began suggesting revisions. This set others off, but fortunately we were able to curtail the discussion after a few minutes. Charlie recommended a two step printing: first the logo and borders in DVPC blue. A supply of pages with only the blue border would be set aside for use in special one-time print runs, allowing for future changes in the brochure content. We would print the rest of the blue border pages with the current brochure text and pictures, which would be in black. If memory serves me (something it does less and less these days), Charlie made a similar suggestion back around June of 1999, which was the last time the brochure was being revised. We ignored him then, too.

Time to Consider a Notebook Computer? by Ira Wilsker, APCUG

One of the questions I often have been asked on my weekly radio shows, and emails from readers of this column is, "What would be better (for me): a new laptop or a desktop computer?" A simple review of the Sunday sales flyers from the major office supply and electronics stores clearly shows that there is an abundant supply of notebook computers available. Standing in the security lines at the major airports also shows the popularity of notebook computers. So, which one is better? Desktop or notebook?

As I have consistently replied, "What are you going to use it for?" If a computer is intended for home or office use, likely in one location for a period of time, a desktop computer is more practical. Usability features, such as a full size keyboard, large screen monitor, and readily accessible drives, coupled with significantly lower prices for comparable machines, make the desktop the clear choice in this scenario. Another factor is longevity. The average useful life of a desktop computer, according to both personal experience and published reports, is typically four to six years. Desktop computers are also usually easy and relatively inexpensive to upgrade or repair. The average desktop computer becomes functionally obsolete long before it physically fails.

Notebook computers, commonly called "laptops" by many, have some very strong advantages, compared to desktop computers, as well as some very strong disadvantages. The obvious advantage of a notebook computer is portability. At Golden Triangle PC Club meetings, when I would have to present, I would often have to drag my desktop from home to the meeting place; it was heavy, bulky, and easy to break. Lugging around the computer, monitor, keyboard, and mouse was a headache. I was not the only one hauling a monster around. For a while, I had a "lunchbox" computer that I used for my presentations. It contained a standard sized PC motherboard, hard drive, floppy, and other internal parts, along with an integral 7" monitor. The keyboard snapped over the front of the computer, closing it. While mine was a home built, no-name generic, it was the early lunchbox computers that gave Houston's Compaq its early competitive edge. While still large and heavy, it was portable.

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Time to Consider a Notebook Computer?...

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Today's notebook computers are a far cry from my long-gone lunchbox. They are a fraction of the size and weight of the old lunchbox machines, but contrary to other high-tech electronic items, have not dropped substantially in price. Feature for feature, it is not rare for a notebook to be twice the price of a comparably equipped desktop computer.

The relatively small size, and light weight is what makes today's notebook computer popular. They are conveniently portable, and can often run for a few hours on their internal battery, but those are about their only major advantages. For those who need portability, such as businesspeople who travel and need computing power, or people like me who frequently do presentations, a notebook computer is a near necessity.

For those who want the power of a modern PC, in an even smaller and lighter package, the next generation of "Pocket PCs" is speculated to do to the contemporary notebook the same thing that the notebook did to the lunchbox: render them functionally obsolete. Pocket PCs will be covered in a future column.

The disadvantages of a notebook computer are many, yet still they are a necessity to many users. Other than their relatively high cost, notebook computers are also typically fragile, difficult to repair, hard to upgrade (other than swap hard drives or add memory), and according to widely published tests, have a much shorter operational lifetime than do desktop computers.

Notebooks are also subject to easy loss or theft. In a recent news article, citing a report from Safeware, an insurance company that specifically insures computers for loss or damage, notebook computers have a far higher rate of loss. In 2001, for example, Safeware states that an estimated 600,000 notebook computers were lost or stolen, up 53% from the year 2000. A large part of this increase is due to the rapid increase in sales of notebook computers. Notebook computers are also one of the most obvious items to steal (and stolen) at airport security checkpoints, due to their small size, high value, and obvious nature. By comparison, while there is an estimated seven times as many desktop computers in use than notebooks, only 15,000 desktops were reported stolen in 2001, according to Safeware.

While there are "ruggedized" notebook computers, such as Toshiba's Toughbook series marketed to law enforcement, utility, and construction companies, the majority of notebooks are very easy to break, and expensive to repair. The notebook reviews published in the major computer magazines often include a "drop test" where an open notebook computer was gently pushed off a tabletop on to a carpeted floor, simulating a common falling accident. Many notebooks suffered major physical damage, with some models of major brands shattering to utter destruction. In addition to extraordinary care in protecting from theft, notebook computers must also be transported in quality protective cases. I have seen people ruin a \$2,000 notebook in a \$29 carry case, a false economy. Screens are especially sensitive to physical shock, can easily crack, and cost several hundreds of dollars to replace. Lacking a large physical volume to circulate cooling air while turned on, notebook computers are more vulnerable to heat damage than desktops. Often containing only tiny cooling fans, and using the notebook itself as a heat sink, overheating is the principle cause of internal notebook failure. The more powerful the processor, the more prone the notebook is to overheating, a well-documented problem. I have heard several anecdotal stories of fairly new notebooks failing when left on overnight, due to overheating. I recently replaced my oldest daughter's notebook due to that exact cause. Published reports indicate that the average life expectancy of a notebook computer is only about 18 months, before it is lost, stolen, accidentally broken, overheated, or worn out. Notebooks, on average, have only about a fourth of the longevity of a desktop.

Desktop or notebook is a common decision to be made. Weigh the advantages and risks before purchasing either.

The author can be contacted at ira@apcug.org. There is no restriction against any non-profit group using the article as long as it is kept in context, with proper credit given to the author. This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an International organization to which this user group belongs.

Buying a DVD Recorder Drive by Bob Elgines, APCUG

Well, the prices are coming down, now under \$300 and as low as \$220, for a DVD recorder drive for your PC. The blank disks are now under \$2.50 each in lots of ten or more. But beware, the great decision as to which format is still under debate, DVD-R or DVD+R! If you just wish to make videos, either one should work in most DVD players made after the year 2000, but not all. Cheaper DVDR disks and players will not work.

Support out there is very weak to almost NONE! Much time is needed to be invested, like 4 to 10 hours to make a 2 hour video DVD, of which several programs require you to sit in front of your computer.

Most of the software is over priced and does not work without many problems and has no support like "Video Studio 6" by Cyber. The best so far has been *MyDVD* by Sonic. Some of the suggestions listed below came from them.

The best input devices are: *USB Instant DVD* by ADS (\$160), *Bungee DVD* by Pinnacle (\$150), *DCS 100* (\$170) and *DCS 200* by Dazzle (\$230). They all come with software that have individual problems, and advertise "Fast, Easy & Fun", boy that is a huge JOKE! It's Slow, Hard, & Will Drive You Nuts.

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Buying a DVD Recorder Drive...

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If you can not provide all of the suggestions (really necessary evils) below, then don't get involved. I became one of their guinea pigs and I am about to throw it all in the circular file and call it a loss.

My ASUS computer is an Intel P3 @ 866MHz, 256MB RAM @ 133MHz, 60GB ATA100 Hard Drive @ 7200 rpm, ATI Radeon 32MB video card, with the *USB Instant DVD* input device, VIVASTAR (LF311) DVD-R recorder. I tried out the DAZZLE equipment, but it had big noise problems and they had NO support at all. I have tried two operating systems, Win98se and WinME, and saw no difference, so I went back to Win98se.

For Windows 98 and XP users, start off with these suggestions on getting ready to record a DVD:

- Install at least 256 MB of RAM
- Disable the Screen Saver
- Disable the Turn off Hard Disks option
- Disable the Hibernation option
- Disable the Network Time Server (WinXP)
- Disable Text to Speech (WinXP)
- Disable any scheduled tasks (for example, virus scan)
- Do not increase Virtual Memory beyond Windows' recommended setting
- Close any other running applications
- Do not copy any large files while capturing
- Do not allow any remote activities, such as PC Anywhere or Timbuktu connections
- Your hard drives are formatted to NTFS which have no files size limitations (WinXP)
- You have at least 21 GB available on a single hard drive
- You have the latest drivers for the following: DVD-ROM and burner, CD-ROM and burner.
- Your hard drives have been defragmented.
- In particular, while capturing video, do not use your PC for any other activity. Video capture requires all your PC's processing power, and any action such as inserting a disc or receiving e-mail may cause errors in the captured video files.
- Your monitor resolution must be set to 1024x768 16 or 32 bit color
- You are running ASPI driver 4.6. No higher, no lower. If you are unsure, you can go here to find out and/or download the appropriate driver: <http://aspi.radified.com>
- You are not running you machine/session of a network/RAID configuration
- Make sure you have the latest version DirectX (a must), WMP (a must):
- If your "Input digital device" is on USB, then remove all other USB external equipment.
- You may also find it beneficial to enable DMA for all your drives.

There are DVD-RAM and DVD+RAM which allows you to save up to 9.6GB of Data, but hard drives are much cheaper, like 20GB for \$69.00 or lower. It is just not FAST and EASY as they have stated in their advertising!

The author can be contacted at elginesz@rraz.net. There is no restriction against any non-profit group using the article as long as it is kept in context, with proper credit given to the author. This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an International organization to which this user group belongs.

[Editor's Note: Sony has released their DRU-500 combination drive that reads DVD-ROMs and CD-ROMs, and write to DVD-R, DVD-RW, DVD+R, DVD+RW, CD-R, and CD-RW media. It is also the fastest DVD recorder available today. This internal IDE/EIDE drive is available from major mail order resellers like www.buy.com for as little as \$325 plus sales tax and shipping. Here are the specs:

Read Speed – 32x (CD)/8x (DVD)
Write Speed – 24x (CD)/4x (DVD-R)/2.4x (DVD+R)
Rewrite Speed – 10x (CD)/2x (DVD-RW)/2.4x (DVD+RW)
Interface Type – IDE/EIDE
Cache/Buffer Size – 8 MB]