The Outer Edge

The Friendly Computer Club Helping Make Computers Friendly

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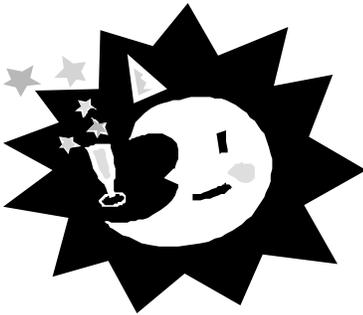
Attendance at the
December general meeting
111 members and 12 guests

**WE WELCOME
NO NEW MEMBERS**

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ROOT DIRECTORY

COMMAND.COM
By Andy Toth, President

In the Executive Meeting Notes a reference is made to a new computer for the club. Ventura County Computers will put one together that will support multiple operating systems. This machine will be used for both the beginners SIG at the monthly general meeting and the SIGs at Ventura County Computers. This has a real advantage as the MS Operating systems are not consistent, and differences can be shown with a simple reboot. Recently, I have been experiencing "Operating System Shock." I have left the comfort of Win98 for WinME and Win2000. Change always interrupts security but is necessary to move forward. Remember, I moved into the PC world kicking and screaming. I wonder what it would have been like if UNIX systems were as affordable?

I am going to digress and talk about games, one game in particular. I cannot even remember its name, but my longest encounter with it lasted 32 hours one weekend. I guess I could have been considered a hardcore gamer. A lot of people could. The game was removed from the machine as it ran so much after work hours and on weekends that it interrupted the calculations the machine was doing. It ran on a Vax1100, I think. The operating system was Eunice, Dec's version of UNIX. The year was 1986. What made this game so appealing was that it never repeated itself and it could not be won. There were no graphics, only defined boundaries on a screen full of symbols. The hero was an "*," and potions, charms, scrolls, armor and weapons were all symbols of one kind or another. The task was to work your way to the 28th level of the dungeon, recover the ring, and make your way back to the surface. Once at the surface, who knows what would happen? I actually never made it. The keyboard was the interface, your strategy and imagination the real gem. The TRICK, each time you met demise and restarted, the association of symbols with objects changed and, even more interesting, the dungeon layout and monsters on each level changed. It was a totally new game.

Memorization of keystrokes was useless. "Absolute Blind Luck" was essential. I almost believe that your strategy was

Executive Committee Meeting Notes

December 2001   By Martha Churchyard, temporary secretary

The CIPCUG Executive Committee meeting was on Dec. 4, 2001.

Present: Art Lewis, Toby Scott, Helen Long, Craig Ladd, Martha Churchyard, George and Arlene Lakes, Andy Toth, Ken Church, David Minken.

The club needs a new computer for the Beginners' SIG and other uses. After discussion, the board approved a motion authorizing up to $1,000 for the purchase of a new desktop computer from Ventura County Computers. It will be ready for the January meeting, sooner if possible.

SIGs and general meeting programs were discussed. Presentations from Belkin and AI[2] are in the process of being scheduled. Everyone agreed that this month's meeting using a high-speed Internet connection was very successful. We hope do another one in the future if the Cowan Center is available. Toby's list of useful Web sites will be posted on his Web site.

The cost of the mailing label program that we share with two other organizations is increasing from $254.70 to $279.45 per year. The board approved a motion that the club pay the full amount for this year now and then bill the other users.

Arthur Jensen has resumed the job of Librarian, so members will have the use of the library again.

Why join CIPCUG?
Here are just a few of the reasons: Monthly SIGs, a monthly program, a monthly newsletter, a discounted Internet Service Provider, a library of computer books and videos, discounts on a variety of books and software, access to computer help through F1—Your Help Key, friendships with other computer users and the chance to help others with your knowledge.

Coming up: Using a high-speed Net connection

Programs

Don't forget that we're back at the regular location — Freedom Center — on Saturday, Jan. 4.

Our program will feature a demonstration of Windows XP, the new Microsoft operating system. Here are some Microsoft comments on its newest operating system:

Windows XP Professional: The fastest Windows ever, Windows XP Professional includes networking and other features that make it ideal for business and advanced home computing. Starts faster. Launches apps faster. Creates content faster. eTesting's report confirms that Windows XP Professional has the speed you need. Windows XP.

Home Edition: The right operating system for entertainment and home use, Windows XP Home Edition helps you do more with your computer and the Internet. Wait less, enjoy more. eTesting's report shows Windows XP performance on key tasks, such as launching applications, roars past previous versions.

Of course, not everyone has been as favorably impressed as Microsoft's publicity department, so there could be some difficult questions for the presenter.

Other programs coming up:

Saturday, Feb. 2 MGI, makes of PhotoSuite and other picture- and video-editing programs.

SIGs

All our Special Interest Groups (with the possible exception of OS/2 when it resumes) are presented at Ventura County Computers. From the 101 Freeway, exit at Telephone, take Telephone south to McGrath, turn left and go one block. Turn right on Goodyear and then right again into the second driveway. Unit 117 is the back, right corner of the industrial building.

The Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are sponsored by CIPCUG and led by volunteers. There is no charge for members to attend. Signing up for the class is no longer necessary as our classrooms are large enough to accommodate our club's needs.

January door prizes

The door prizes for January will be (1) Hewlett Packard DeskJet 640C color printer, (2) Logitech Internet Keyboard and Optical Mouse and (3) Symantec Norton AntiVirus 2002 (they finally arrived).

The Microsoft prizes include Windows XP Professional, a cordless Microsoft Optical Mouse, Money Deluxe 2002, Encarta Reference Library 2002 and a couple of other minor give-aways.

We have two types of raffle tickets: one for any prizes offered by the presenter and one for club-provided prizes. The tickets for the presenter's prizes are free and limited to one per member. The tickets for the club-provided prizes are $1 each, $5 for six tickets, $10 for 13 tickets and $20 for 26 tickets and are available to anyone.

SIG reminders available by e-mail

To keep members up to date on coming SIGs, Andy Toth has agreed to offer an e-mail reminder service to club members. Sign up and he will automatically send you a reminder about two days before each SIG, indicating the topic, location, and date.

We hope that this service will remind more people about coming SIGs. Check the front page of the CIPCUG Web site in the "Latest Page Revisions" or at the bottom of the SIG INFORMATION page. Or, if you want to sign up without going to the Web page, send an e-mail to <siginfo@cipcug.org> with the subject line "subscribe" to be placed on the list.

If no moderator is listed, the SIG is not officially scheduled. Check the Web page before you attend to make sure there will be a moderator.

Here's the SIG schedule for January:

Thursday, Jan. 17: Mike Strecker — Internet Question and Answer session.

Tuesday, Jan. 22: Toby Scott — E-mail

Thursday, Jan. 31: Andy Toth — Basic HTML

More about: Command.com

learned and reinforced as you proceeded to the lower levels. Just to let you know the time invested, one level had a particular devious monster. It took about three hours to get to that range of levels. It probably took 25 attempts to defeat it. The monsters on the next level were even more devious. Hardcore is an understatement. Yes, one could save games at various levels and resume them.

Where is this going? Well, this was probably the first venture into a sort of Virtual Reality game. In the near future, you may see this capability with incredible graphics. High speed will soon be defined as 20MHz connections to the Internet. Just as my grandmother went from the horse and carriage to a man walking on the moon, we, too, shall see things that are incomprehensible.

The Holiday Season is upon us. I want to wish you all a Happy Holiday Season, and prosperous and Healthy New Year.

December SIGs, Q&A, program combined

Questions answered and program presented by Toby Scott

Reported by John Weigle

This is a combined report on the beginners/Internet SIGs, question-and-answer session and program. The three blended together because of the high-speed Internet connection in the James F. Cowan Conference Center. The Beginners and Internet SIGs were combined because no second room was available at the center. — Editor

Beginners/Internet SIG

Q: Can anyone read your e-mail?

A: The e-letters are posted on the Ventura County Computers Web site <www.vccomputers.com>, which can also be reached through a link on the CIPCUG site <www.cipcug.org>.

Q: If I want to add RAM how do I determine the proper kind?

A: RAM needs to match. If it doesn't, the computer usually won't boot. If there are very minor timing problems, it will boot but will be flaky sometimes. With RAM as cheap as it is, I'd buy it all at one time rather than trying to match it.

Q: What's best, DSL or cable?

A: User-satisfaction surveys at <www.dslreports.com> show much higher satisfaction with cable than DSL. I've had slightly more problems with cable, but when I've called for help the support from cable has always been far superior.

Q: Which is faster?

A: "The answer is which way is the wind blowing." My cable has been slightly faster, but not enough to be significant.

The real key is not how fast the connection is. If I had the choice of a 1.5-megabit dial-up connection or a 33.6 always-on, I'd go for the always-on. "The biggest problem with dial-up is that you have to dial up," and that's what takes the time. At work, I have 12-14 windows open all the time with my always-on connection. I do a lot of writing so I keep a dictionary, thesaurus, search pages and other pages open. The always-on connection "tremendously improves the quality of using the Internet."

Forget the speed differences between cable and DSL. You want to look for support and a reliable connection. Nothing works perfectly 100 percent of the time, but you want to be as close to that as possible.

Q: I send e-mail to many people. Is there a way to save the addresses as a group so I can send to them again? Can I retrieve the names from that list to add more?

A: Some e-mail programs want the names separated by semicolons and some want them separated by commas, so first you have to determine which your program uses.

You can easily select names from the address book to add to the "To" line or the "BCC" (blind courtesy copy, which means you don't show all the e-mail addresses to everyone who gets the e-mail) line.

You can also create groups by going to File > New Group in Outlook Express.

Q: In shared contacts, the names I put in go to the main list, too. How can I put a name in just a group and keep it out of the main list?

A: I don't know of any way to do that (neither did anyone else).

Q: Is Outlook Express in Windows ME?

A: Technically, it's in Internet Explorer, which means it is in every version of Windows since Win95, but since the default installation of Windows includes Internet Explorer, the answer is basically yes. You can install Windows without IE and Outlook Express, but it's very hard to install without it. It is possible. If you want to use a different mail program, just leave Outlook Express alone and use whatever you want.

Juno, America on Line and CompuServe have their own mail programs, so you can't use Outlook Express with them. Actually, you can now with CompuServe, but it takes a bit of searching to find out how.

Q: How do I add an address to my address book when I reply to e-mail?

A: In Outlook Express, go to Tools > Options > Send and check "Automatically add people I reply to in my Address Book."

Q: We changed our Internet service provider, and now all my e-mail goes to my husband. How can I get my mail to come to me?

A: In Outlook Express go to File > Identities > Add new identity. Fill in the blanks and follow the instructions to create a new identity.

Then go to Tools > Accounts > Add > Mail and follow the instructions.

Then go to your husband's identity, click on Tools > Accounts, highlight your e-mail account, > Properties > Advanced and click on "Leave copes of messages on server." This will leave copies of messages on the server so your new

identity/account setup will get copies.

Don't confuse Identity with e-mail accounts when you do this. They are two different things.

Q: I have a floppy with 100 addresses on it. I want to put them on a new computer, but it will let me do only one at a time. Each one is a separate text file.

A: It's better to go to the old machine and copy the Windows address book (it will have the extension .wab) and then put it on the new machine. On the new machine, go to Import and point it to the old file. Don't export it to individual text files.

Q: If you already have names on the new computer, will this add to them or replace them?

A: It will add to them.

More Q&A: E-mail prompts many questions

Q: I have a contact list in Outlook Express. How is it related to the Windows address book?

A: The address book is shared with other programs. The contact list lets you do things like add information or notes or track meetings with it in Outlook Express. You can merge names and addresses from either the contact list or address book. They look similar and have similar functions, but they work differently.

Outlook information is stored in .ost or .pst files if you need to copy it.

Q: Can you delete all messages at one time?

A: If you want to empty the Trash every time you close the program, go to Tools > Options > Maintenance and click on "Empty messages from the Deleted Items folder on exit."

Q: I can't get Outlook Express to show in Hotmail.

A: Go to Tools > Accounts > Mail > Add and put in your Hotmail address.

Click Next and see that HTTP servers shows Hotmail.

This creates a Hotmail folder in the list of folders. It works pretty seamlessly, but it will be slower than using your regular e-mail.

Be sure to tell the program it's a Hotmail account.

Outlook Express won't handle Yahoo mail.

Q: I have a Net Zero logo on the screen and have changed my provider. How do I delete it?

A: Go to Dial Up Networking in My Computer and delete the folder for that account.

Q: I'm getting e-mail from people I don't know. How did they get my address?

A: If you're getting lots of e-mail from people you don't know or from people you do know that just doesn't look right, it's almost certainly the result of a virus. We'll talk more about that in the Q&A session.

The session broke here for the business meeting. Then the regular Q&A began, with Toby showing a home page he created quickly in HTML consisting of just links to favorite sites. He used the page throughout the Q&A and program to show some of his favorite Internet sites.

Regular Q&A session

A (continued): In the combined SIGs we had just started discussing viruses.

One of the best sites for virus information is Symantec's Antivirus Research Center <www.sarc.com>, which has lists of the latest viruses, free removal tools for many viruses and instructions on how to delete them manually. This often requires editing the registry, which isn't something I recommend for new users.

Almost all the latest viruses are distributed as e-mail attachments. If you save the attachment to a disk, you have

Photo by Jerry Crocker

GETTING READY: Toby Scott makes pre-meeting adjustments so he can use the high-speed Internet connection for the combined SIGs, Q&A and program portions of the December meeting.

the virus on your computer, but the computer is not infected. The key is not to open attachments.

The first thing most viruses do is send copies of themselves to everyone in your address book, so "not opening attachments except from friends is a recipe for disaster." Your address isn't likely to be in the address book of strangers, just people you know, so getting mail from people you know doesn't automatically mean it's safe.

We had a machine in the store while I was off, and it was so unusual that Rick called me at home to tell me about it. It had six live viruses on it, and Norton Antivirus stopped after finding 3,600 infected files. Rick finally had to reinstall Windows because many of the infected files were DLL files that Windows needs to operate. He got rid of most of the infections by running Norton Antivirus in DOS mode.

Q: Why don't people have antivirus programs on their computers? They aren't that expensive.

A: This machine did have Norton Antivirus, but it hadn't been updated since 1999. If you regularly update your antivirus definitions and upgrade the program to get the new engines every couple of years, you "should be reasonably safe." I've had five or six viruses get into my mail files that Norton Antivirus didn't have a fix out for yet, so even if you're religious about getting new definitions you can still get a virus on the computer.

Generally, I keep deleted items and check them when I get new definitions. I do a full scan on the machine at work

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More Q&A: Computer suffers massive virus attack

every night.

Q: Can links in e-mail give you a virus?

A: Not if you have the Windows security patches through at least August 2000.

Q: When do you get the virus alert?

A: It depends on how you've set up the antivirus program. You have three options in Norton: manual scans only; scan files when you start to open them, but don't scan e-mail as it arrives; or scan e-mail as it arrives.

Sometimes, the scanning as e-mail arrives doesn't work. Norton 2001 establishes its own POP3 server on your computer, downloads your mail to that and then runs the antivirus program before putting the mail on your computer. Sometimes it can't log on and you have to go back to standard e-mail settings (your POP3 server and user name will be different, just change them back) and download a batch of mail that way. Then go back to Norton Antivirus and tell it to start scanning mail as it arrives again.

This isn't a problem for everyone. Some people have the program run flawlessly forever. I don't know what causes the problem.

Q: I had Go Back on my Gateway computer. It's in Norton System Works. Can I install it and then remove Go Back?

A: Yes, but you can also install System Works without putting Go Back on in the first place.

Go Back and similar programs let you take your computer back in time if a new installation messes it up. But there are down sides. You can't run FDISK on a hard drive that has Go Back installed because it changes the boot sectors. If it works fine for you, it's fine, but if it doesn't you can have real problems fixing them. *(Gene Barlow also noted at lunch after the November presentation that Go Back doesn't allow dual booting either. — Editor)*

Q: What about restoring XP?

A: I don't know. We've tried to get XP up and running on several computers and had no luck. ASUS, the world's largest motherboard manufacturer, doesn't support XP even though Microsoft says some of its boards are compatible.

Tech Data, which sells premade computers that we buy some of, also doesn't have any recommendations to make it work well. We had similar responses from two other motherboard manufacturers. "All of the motherboards are a generation behind" because Microsoft didn't share the code with them to make the boards work well. The Tech Data people are "really upset with Microsoft."

If you have a 500-800 megahertz machine that's reasonably current, you can probably upgrade to XP without major problems, however.

Q: Someone I know sent me and several other people change-of-e-mail-address notices. One of the other people got a virus and thought it came from the person who sent out the notices. Can a Mac give a virus to a PC?

A: No. Macs are no less prone to virus attacks because they all have vulnerabilities, but the number of hackers trying
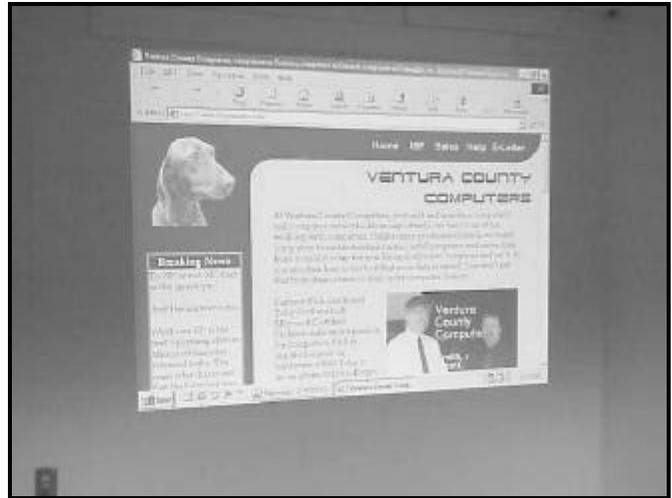
Photo by Jerry Crocker

ONE OF MANY: Toby showed us a lot of Web pages during December, including this one from Ventura County Computers. That's Roxie at the upper left and Toby and Rick at lower right.

to make their names by writing Mac viruses isn't very big.

Q: I sent e-mail to a dozen people and two of them with Macs got dozens of copies of it. Why?

A: I don't know for sure without looking at both machines, but it's easy for people to set up accounts to leave mail on the server without realizing it. Most servers keep messages for some period of time, and some automatically delete messages after some period. If you delete the message from your machine, the server thinks you haven't gotten it so it downloads it again. You can set your e-mail program to tell the server to delete messages after they've been downloaded. "The server is dumb and stupid. It does what you tell it to do."

To change your settings in Outlook Express, go to Tools > Accounts > Properties > Advanced and check or uncheck Leave Copy of Messages On Server.

Q: Some programs let you download just e-mail headers and decide if you want the whole message. If you do, you download it; if you don't want it, you delete it from the server without going through the download. Mailwasher is a good one.

A: It's available at <www.mailwasher.net>. Such programs are also good if you get a problem e-mail that you can't download. You can use these programs to delete the problem message so you can get the rest of your mail.

Q: Do your comments on XP apply to Windows 2000?

A: No. It's the best operating system Microsoft has produced, as far as I'm concerned, and I use it at work and at

ALMOST READY: Mike Strecker, who was drafted to be Toby's keyboarder for the combined SIGs, gets ready to take his spot. This overall view shows the room we used in the Cowan Conference Center in December.

Photo by Jerry Crocker

More Q&A: Where do viruses come from?

home.

Q: Will I have problems using FDISK on Windows ME with Go Back?

A: Yes. At boot up you'll have to go to the Go Back menu and uninstall it.

Q: I got a returned e-mail from someone I had supposedly sent mail to, but I have no idea who the person is. It was supposedly mail I had sent that couldn't be delivered.

A: People go to Hotmail and other accounts and harvest e-mail addresses. It's hard to know what happened in this case.

Very often you'll get e-mail that says "click here to remove your name from this list." Don't do it. There's a one in 10 chance that you'll get off that list but a nine in 10 likelihood you'll be added to a lot of other lists because you've just confirmed that the e-mail address is active.

If you don't want to see a lot of the mail you're getting, set up filters in your e-mail program.

Go to Tools > Messages > Rules, where you have lots of choices for mail rules.

You can send messages with certain words in the subject lines or from certain people to Trash or other folders (such as Family). "Teen" in the subject line will screen a lot of the porno sites, although "sex" and "xxx" don't work as well as they once did because the senders have realized

they're too obvious and don't use them as much as they used to.

You can use "opt in" or "opt out" screening.

For instance, you can have all mail go directly to the Deleted Items folder unless it's from certain people and then check the Deleted Items folder periodically to make sure there's nothing in it you want. If there is, you have to add the person's name to the list of mail to allow. Or you can have mail from certain people routed to different folders, such as family, and delete all the rest.

If you do this, be sure to check the "stop processing rules" box on each rule because your last rule should be to move all the other mail to Deleted Items. If you don't check "stop processing rules," the program will send the mail to the noted folder first and then move it to Deleted Items when it reaches the last rule.

The opt-in procedure is to find all the messages that meet certain specifications and follow the rules.

At this point, the Q&A ended.

After the coffee and doughnut break, Toby started his program presentation.

But first he pointed out that the screensavers on the computer he was using (it belongs to his daughter, Jessica) came from <www.aaathemes.com>.

She picked the world traveler theme, but the site has several available.

More Q&A: What do I do with firewall warning?

Program

The presentation concentrated on some of the things that can be done with a high-speed, always-on Internet connection. Toby didn't get to show every link on his list but promised to get them posted on the Web (they're at <www.vccomputers.com/internetsig.cfm>) and are on page 9 of this issue of TOE).

Before we start, if you have a full-time Internet connection, you want a firewall. Don't use the Norton Personal Firewall, which is junk. One of the best firewalls is Zone Alarm at <www.zonelabs.com>, where you can get either the free or paid version. The paid version has a few more bells and whistles, but the free version is satisfactory for most users. The next best program costs $600 or more and is meant for servers. There's a feature in Zone Alarm that will alert you to updates.

Q: If you have a router with a hardware firewall do you need another firewall?

A: No.

Q: If Zone Alarm or another firewall tells you someone is trying to hack you, how can you find out who it is?

A: It's better not to worry about it. The firewall stopped the attack, and most Internet service providers don't have the staff to handle complaints. The last thing you want to do is get the hacker so angry at you that he intensifies his efforts with something like a denial of service attack.

One reason you need a firewall is hackers who have been caught and agreed not to do certain activities again. But they seek out unprotected computers to store their files (pornography, viruses, etc.) on. They'll put Trojans on such computers so they can tell them when to take certain actions.

Some day an FBI agent might come knocking on the door of your home or business and announce that the bureau has traced child porn or viruses to your machine and they need it for evidence even though they know you're not involved in the crime. Can you afford to be without your computer for several years until the trial is over?

"You can't be always-on without a firewall. If you're dialing up, it isn't much of a risk."

Q: I have Zone Alarm and get pings. What do they mean?

A: Pings are requests for information from your computer — basically, "are you there? If so, please respond." Pinging will tell you how long it took for the ping to come back and is often used for tests, but many big users, such as Microsoft, have turned the function off. You can still ping Yahoo.

Ping only establishes if a computer exists and can be reached.

If you want to try it go to a DOS window and type (without the quotation marks) "ping (nameofsite)."

If you want to test your computer's security, go to Gibson Research at <www.grc.com>, click on Shields Up and run the test there.

Q: If I don't have a firewall, what should I watch for?

A: Most Trojans will be caught by up-to-date antivirus programs. If yours is older than a 2000 version, I'd get a new one. Update your definitions regularly, but if you only update the definitions and don't get a new program periodically you'll be using an older engine for the scan, and it might miss some newer types of viruses. Also, most programs charge for updates after the first year, so buying a new program isn't as expensive as it might sound at first.

You also need to check for Windows updates periodically. You can do this from Start > Settings > Windows Update or, in Internet Explorer, from Tools > Windows Updates. You must be signed on to the Internet to do this. When you reach the Updates page, go to Product Updates and look for Critical Updates first. "Anytime you see a critical update, get it ... They almost always close some kind of vulnerability."

The size of the critical updates download will vary depending on when you last checked. If you've never checked and have anything older than XP, it could be quite large. Follow the instructions to download and install (installation is usually automatic for these).

Q: I've done this several times and keep getting told I need the same ones.

A: That normally doesn't happen. If you think it is happening, check the Installation History on the Microsoft Web page to compare what you've already done and what you're being told you need.

"You should be doing the updates like once a month, something like that." They're free. The critical updates will be rolled into one package, the size of which depends on when you last got any.

You should also get any ActiveX packages, which are also security issues.

Some of the updates can be downloaded with others; some must be downloaded alone. The page will tell you which is which.

You should also get the Internet Explorer 5.5 Service Pack 2. Internet Explorer 6 is out, but you don't really want it yet. It's all set up for Microsoft's new .net operations and XML authoring, but the .net tools won't be available until February or so. IE 6 also does not include Java or Quick Time, so if you want to use Web sites that use them you'll have to download them separately, in which case you have three sets of hands on your browser and if you need tech support, you'll probably be in trouble.

The site <www.traceroute.org> will show you how long it takes information to get from your computer to the one you're trying to reach and how many servers it went

More Q&A: Motherboards and chipsets

through to do it. It also tells you what's seen when you're pinged. If you have the traceroute program on your computer, you can run it from a DOS window.

If you want to know whether your problem with the Internet connection is yours, your ISP's or the Internet's, go to Internet Traffic Reports <www.internettrafficreports. com>, which will show you how all the major servers are working. The loss of @Home servers the night before our meeting caused a number or problems on Internet speed (the company declared bankruptcy).

If you're considering upgrading to Windows XP, be sure to check the hardware compatibility list at Microsoft's site. Go to <www.microsoft.com/hcl> to be sure your hardware will run under the new operating system.

Q: How do I determine the best motherboard and chipset?

A: There's no way to answer that accurately. By the time you tested all the boards and chips, the data would be too old to be meaningful.

Q: What about upgrading BIOS?

A: For a BIOS upgrade you must have the exact matching BIOS and Flash Utility.

If you need a BIOS upgrade, I'd encourage you to have it done professionally. You can order some upgrade chips, but in some cases, you might destroy the motherboard by trying to get the old chip out. Not all BIOSes can be upgraded.

Outlook Express problems? Go to <www.tomsterdam. com>, which is an excellent example of what one person can do when he digs deeply into a single subject.

Q: I've noticed that each time you open a new window in Internet Explorer (hold the Shift key and click on the link), it's not full screen. Can you force it to be full screen?

A: I don't know of a way.

Finally, if you have a Windows problem, go to the Microsoft Knowledge Base. Microsoft periodically moves and redesigns the page (it had been redesigned since Toby looked at it on the Friday before the meeting), but it can be found by going to <www.microsoft.com> and clicking on Support. "You can usually find a solution for your problem here" once you figure out how to use the search engine properly.

Here's the list of Toby's favorite sites

This is the complete list of Web sites that Toby Scott planned to show us at the December meeting. It's now part of the Ventura County Computers site <www.vccomputers. com> and will be updated periodically. To find it, go to the site, go to Help and click on My Home Page. — Editor

This page started out as a simple index page for a presentation I made to CIPCUG on Dec. 1, 2001. However, because I had grown increasingly disgruntled with My.Yahoo. com as a home page as a result of their decision to sell pop-under pages (these are ones that come up under the page you are looking at, so that you see the ad when you close or minimize the page you are looking at). Pop-unders are so obnoxious that I have ceased using My.Yahoo as my home page. I plan to make this page my home page, with links to all the sites I like and use on a regular basis.

You are welcome to use it as your home page if you like, or simply as a list of potentially useful links. I'll keep the graphics, fancy tricks and other junk at an absolute minimum so it loads fast even on a 56K modem.

My Two Favorite Search Engines

Google <http://www.google.com/>
AltaVista <http://www.altavista.com/>

General Research

Research It <http://www.itools.com/research-it/> Dictionary, Foreign Language Dictionaries, Thesaurus, Familiar Quotes, Maps, UPS Package Tracking and more, all in one place.

Encyclopedia Britannica <http://www.britannica.com/> If you need an encyclopedia, this is the one.

Library of Congress <http://lcweb.loc.gov/global/ explore.html> I could write a book about the resources to be found here.

The Awesome List <http://209.8.151.142/awesome. html> One of the oldest Internet lists, kept up-to-date, with one man's list of outstanding web sites.

Hoovers <http://www.hoovers.com/> The best stock screening tools on the net.

Computer Help

Microsoft Knowledgebase <http://support.microsoft. com/default.aspx?LN=EN-US> Tricky to use, but it has tons of information about virtually any problem you might be having with any version of Windows (yes, even Windows 3.1).

Traceroute Database <http://www.traceroute.org/ #USA> If you have really slow connections and want to find out where the problem lies, use a traceroute to backtrack to your site. You should see quite easily where the slow link(s) are.

DSL Reports <http://www.dslreports.com/> The best site for information regarding DSL and cable modems, in-

More on Toby's favorite Web sites

cluding a speed test, tools to change your networking settings to speed up high-speed access and reports on outages and problems.

Gibson Research Corporation <http://www.grc.com/> Steve Gibson has an absolutely fabulous site, including a security check (Shields Up). Be sure to run Shields Up every couple of months to keep up to date with the latest hacker ploys.

Internet Traffic Report <http://www.internettrafficreport.com/cgi-bin/tr_chartpage.pl?NorthAmerica> See graphically, where there are problems on the Internet. Helpful to determine if the problems you are experiencing are caused by your own provider or are a wider problem.

Microsoft DLL Help <http://support.microsoft.com/servicedesks/fileversion/dllinfo.asp?fr=0&sd=msdn> If you have a problem with a dll file, this is the place to fix it.

Microsoft Download Center <http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/search.asp> Lots of tools and add-ons for Microsoft products. Get filters to read Word 2000 files in Word 97, etc.

HCL <http://www.microsoft.com/hcl/default.asp> Before you change operating systems, be sure to make sure everything on your system is compatible.

Bob Cerelli's Site <http://www.onecomputerguy.com/> Bob Cerelli has been maintaining a help site for Windows 95 and later for ages. He has some of the best tips and tricks for tuning your version of Windows out there.

Tomsterdam — Outlook Express Help <http://www.tomsterdam.com/> Outlook Express and only OE, but if you are having a problem with OE, this is the place to go.

Symantec Antivirus Research Center <http://www.sarc.com/> A fabulous resource for virus information. Includes many removal tools for current viruses and you don't have to be a Norton AV subscriber to use them.

My Favorite Programs

NoteTab <http://www.notetab.com/> I presented NoteTab to the club a while back and have done many SIGs on its features. Absolutely the best text editor out there, with its own macro language, file management and more.

Photoshop Help <http://www.adobe.com/support/products/photoshop.html> Adobe's PhotoShop help site. Lots of stuff for PhotoShop users.

Real Help

Ventura County Computers <http://www.vccomputers.com/> What can I say? You're here so you know it is the best.

Making a simple Web page

If you want to do what Toby did and make a home page consisting entirely of links, here's a sample of the HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) he used for just the headings and links on the page he showed us. The coding for the parts of the page on the VCC Web site that have the contents and images is not included. The page is black type on white background..

<html>
<head>
<title>Title if you want one (it appears in your browser's title bar, not on the page</title>
</head>
<body>
<p>This page started out as a simple index page for a presentation I (Toby) made to CIPCUG on December 1, 2001. …</p>
<h1>Favorite Sites</h1>
<h3>My Two Favorite Search Engines</h3>
Google
AltaVista
<h3>General Research</h3>
Research It Dictionary, Foreign Language Dictionaries, Thesaurus, Familiar Quotes, Maps, UPS Package Tracking and more, all in one place.
</body>
</html>

Continue in this format by cutting and pasting the coding (the material in the less than and greater than brackets) and substituting the wording you want until you've listed all the sites you want on the page. It is best to do this in a text editor, but if you do it in a word processor be sure to save it as DOS or ASCII text, not in the word processor's format. Save the document with a .htm or .html extension and put it in a folder you can find again. Go to your browser and open the page to see if it looks the way you expected. If it does, set it as your home page. If it doesn't look right check your coding.

Web page: President's messages available

By Helen Long

<helen@cipcug.org>

Why didn't someone tell me that I hadn't been posting the President's Message? When I finally remembered to check it out, I found that I had six months of them to post. Thank goodness I had the Publisher files for all of the newsletters that John had sent me.

If any of you ever take the time to download the newsletter I do want to brag about Mike Strecker's page. I had been doing such a miserable job of scanning it and nothing I did seemed to improve it. I have not changed my scanning settings, but I do have WIN ME. I attribute that excellence to the way ME handles scanning. Probably not correct but you will have a hard time convincing me the gremlins in my computer have shifted their interest. Thanks, Rick, for convincing me to go to ME with the new computer.

Check out the Tech Support Page. I have updated it with the latest phone numbers for Ventura County and the San Fernando Valley. When IS-WEST dropped all its 8500 (last four digit) phone numbers it made a few changes in phone numbers. We have called all the ISP subscribers, but I now have the correct information on the Tech Support Page.

Those of you with the club's ISP service having problems with the availability of the 200-1000 line can also try the Thousand Oaks line, 601-0166, from Camarillo or the 289-1479 from Oxnard as alternative numbers. We have been having exceptionally good service, and in two months I have had only about four trouble calls from Oxnard and Camarillo. Perhaps these alternative phone numbers will resolve this problem for you.

Craig Ladd has submitted something from the Langa List concerning a little program called TestRun by Bernie Built, an Australian. The Langa List reader continues: "It uses batch files to duplicate the Windows registry, restarts Windows and then runs any apps you want to test from the duplicate or 'dummy registry.' It has lots of explicit warning screens and prompts, which I find useful. I've enjoyed downloading, using and testing freeware for years. I learned a lot about Windows systems from my perhaps too naive

Safe Mode and bootlog.txt

By Jim Thornton

<jthorn@gte.net>

This article describes what the Safe Mode and the bootlog.txt are and the advantages of using these two items together in resolving your computer's slow startup time. Part one explains what the Safe Mode is and how to access it, while part two introduces the bootlog.txt file and how to use it in identifying the load times of your computer's drivers and which ones have failed to load. Drivers are the unseen hardware program files that improve the performance and features of your computer.

Have you ever seen your computer in its "Safe Mode"? Safe Mode is a special diagnostic tool available in Windows 95, 98, Me, and 2000 and is easily identified by the words Safe Mode appearing in each of the four corners of your monitor's screen. In addition, your desktop will most likely run and look different, it will appear to be slower and the icons may be larger (because of a screen resolution of 640 x 480 pixels) with fewer colors (only 16 colors instead 256 or higher). Note: Being in the Safe Mode does not protect your computer against viruses or hackers.

The reason for the different appearance is that when Windows boots up in the Safe Mode, all of its startup files and hardware drivers will be skipped (not loaded). Only the most basic keyboard, mouse, and VGA (Video Graphics Adapter) drivers will be loaded. Your CD-ROM (if you are using Windows 95) and your parallel, serial, and USB (Universal Serial Bus) ports will be unavailable. If you are using your PS/2 keyboard and mouse, you won't have any keyboard and mouse problems in the Safe Mode; in contrast, if you are using a USB keyboard or mouse, you may find that they are not working. This might be a good reason to keep your old PS/2 (non-USB) keyboard and mouse whenever you upgrade to USB. Some of the newer USB keyboards and mice have a second cord connector (PS/2) and if both connectors are plugged into your computer, your keyboard or mouse will continue to function without its enhanced features whenever you are in the Safe Mode or you have a USB problem.

By loading only the most basic drivers, your problem-isolating and -resolving capabilities will be greatly enhanced. For example, suppose you installed a new driver for your video card, but when you rebooted, your monitor

More on Web page

method of 'just try it.' I did install TestRun myself, and it is very easy to use. I installed a couple of applications while using it, and switching between Registry and CopyofRegistry and I like it. — Greg." The site is

<http://testrun.cjb.net/>.

screen went black and remained dark even through you rebooted numerous times. Without a screen, there is no way you can find your way to your Device Manager to disable or uninstall the offending driver.

How can you correct this? Very simply, just manually go into the Safe Mode and after Windows finishes loading, go to your System Properties window (depress together the Windows and the Pause/Break keys), click on the Device Manager tab, double-click on Display Adapters, highlight your adapter, and uncheck the "Exists in all hardware profiles" box. Next click on OK and reboot. Now your computer will boot up with a workable video driver and your desktop will reappear. Either keep this default setting or install the proper driver. An alternate method would be to click on the Remove box after you have highlighted your adapter, click on OK and on OK again, and reboot. Now Windows will "see" your adapter as a new hardware device and will install its default Windows' video driver.

How do you get into the Safe Mode?

Windows 95 — Depress the F5 key at startup, right before the Windows graphics screen come up. Some technicians suggest that you should start tapping the F5 key during startup to make sure that you get to the Microsoft Windows Startup (MWS) menu. On some computers, you may need to depress the F8 or Ctrl key instead of the F5. Once the MWS menu appears, enter the number from the menu for the Safe Mode, and press Enter.

Windows 98 or Me — Depress or continue to tap the Ctrl key until the MWS menu appears. On some computers, you may need to press the F8 key. Type the number for the Safe Mode and press Enter.

Windows 95, 98, or Me — Another easy way to go into the Safe Mode is to use your Windows startup diskette, sometimes called your emergency boot diskette. Insert your startup diskette into your drive A and reboot. Depending on the version of Windows, you will see the drive A prompt; type in "C:" (without the quotation marks) and depress the Enter key. Next you'll see the C drive prompt; change directories to your Windows directory by typing "CD \Windows" and depress Enter. At the C:\Windows prompt, type "win /b" and depress Enter. Once the MWS menu appears, enter the number for the Safe Mode, and press Enter. On the later versions of Windows, especially Windows Me, for example, you will need to use "win /d:m" instead of "win /b". The best solution for your computer is to type, at the C:\Windows prompt, "win /?" and Enter, then select the appropriate switch (/b, /d:m, etc.) for your computer from the displayed choices. Also, in some versions of Windows, an intermediate menu may appear asking if you want to use your CD drive, etc., in these cases, just select the Minimal Boot option.

BEGINNERS CLASS

December 2001

Mike Strecker   roostermike.roosterm@gte.net

FORWARDING MESSAGES
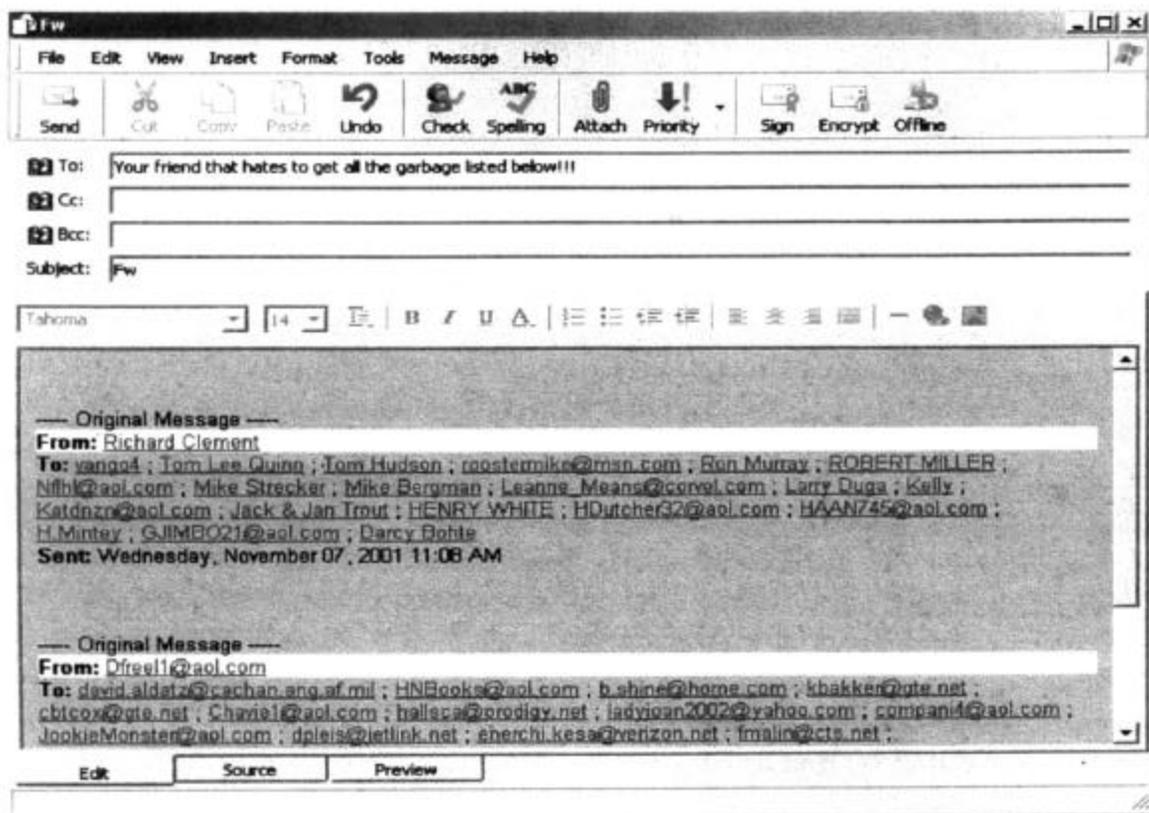
In just about every Beginners Class, someone comments about receiving e-mail with sometime pages of addresses from the person that forwarded the message to them (as show in figure above).

Here is the procedure to follow so you no longer irritate the person you are forwarding a message to:

Click on the forward tab, you will then see what is shown above. Next drag the cursor from left to right (hold left mouse button down) starting with the first line of text, drag all the way down until you have highlighted all the text (addresses) you want to get rid of. Then hit the delete key on the keyboard. That's all there is to it!

More on Safe Mode, bootlog.txt

Windows 2000 — During the normal startup, watch for the special Troubleshooting and Advanced Startup Options message to appear, then press the F8 key. Type the number for the Safe Mode and press Enter.

Windows NT — Refer to Document 294 in your User Manual, for instructions "How to Boot Windows to VGA mode."

Safe Mode also has other advantages besides problem resolutions. I always run Windows' Disk Defragmenter in the Safe Mode, as it completes faster than in the Windows' normal mode. Norton Utilities' SpeedDisk (Norton's version of Disk Defragmenter) won't run in the Safe Mode, while Microsoft's Disk Defragmenter will run in the normal Windows, in the Safe Mode, and in the DOS mode.

Bootlog.txt and how to use it

This part of the article introduces the use of the Boot Log Analyzer, enabling you to read your bootlog.txt file in order to identify drivers that are either slowing down your startup time or that are failing to load.

Windows creates a special helpful file (bootlog.txt) upon request during normal startup; it will be placed in your root directory. This text file faithfully records the loading or failure to load of each driver.

You will want the most current version of your bootlog.txt file; thus, you will need to restart your computer as if you were going into the Safe Mode. From the MWS menu, enter the number for Logged (\Bootlog.txt), and press Enter. Now Windows, for this session only, will record the current driver loading activity into its bootlog.txt file and save its previous version as bootlog.prv. After Windows is loaded, you will need to make the hidden (invisible) bootlog.txt file viewable. Click on My Computer from your Desktop, Tools from the Menu bar, Folder Options from the pulldown menu, the View tab, Options, Show All Files, and finally OK. Now you can view and print out your bootlog.txt file by using Notepad, Wordpad, or any similar word-processing program. Another easy way to find a hidden file is to use Windows Explorer's Search function.

The bootlog.txt is a large file; for example, my bootlog.txt file is over 20 pages long. The file identifies each driver as it loaded and whether or not the load was successful. A typical entry will read: "[00092E23] Initing esdi_506.pdr" and the next line reads: "[00092E3B] Init Success esdi_506.pdr". With a bad entry, the second line would read: "[00092E3B] Init Failed esdi_506.pdr". This latter example would indicate that you had a driver that didn't load and that there was a problem. You would want to search your bootlog.txt file and identify all such failed statements.

With entries like this, how can you determine the amount of time it takes to load a driver? The problem is you can't. However, there is a freeware program called "Boot Log Analyzer" (version 1.22) that produces a more readable copy of your bootlog.txt file by adding column titles (Time, Duration, and Event) and by sorting the numerous entries by the loading time in ascending order. The loading time of each driver is displayed in milliseconds (thousandths of a second). What you want to look for is any driver that failed to load or took an abnormally long time. Generally speaking, each driver should load in less than seven seconds. Other features of the program are that you may display only the drivers that were slow, failed to load, or both; save the file, or search for specific entries. The Boot Log Analyzer is available from <www.vision4.dial.pipex.com>.

Should you discover any slow loading drivers or failures, you will want to resolve these problems to improve the performance of your computer. You may seek the advice of your favorite service technician or an easier way is to use the Internet to search for solutions. Use your search engine of choice and type in the name of the driver that failed or was slow. From our previous example, you would type in "esdi_506.pdr" and read the numerous responses. Frequently, you will see read a response and solution directly from the developer of the driver. In fact, in this example, the first document found was one from Microsoft's Product Support Services titled "ScanDisk Errors on IDE Hard Disks Larger Than 32 GB," and this document describes the problem and provides a remedy.

Note: All the instructions given in this article were tested on a Windows Me computer; earlier versions of Windows may be respond slightly differently.

These files can be dangerous

Certain files that arrive as e-mail attachments are especially dangerous. Here, from Harley Hahn's latest book, "Internet Insecurity," is a list of the extensions that identify files that can contain a virus or other program:

.bat — batch file
.chm — compiled HTML file
.com — program
.exe — program
.htm — HTML file

.html — HTML file
.js — JScript program
.jse — encoded JScript program
.lnk — Windows shortcut (link)
.pif — program information file
.vbs — VBScript program
.vbe — encoded VBScrpt program
.wsf — Windows Script File program
.wsh— Windows Scripting Host Settings File

Membership report: Is it time to renew?

By Ken Church

<membership@cipcug.org>

Total membership: 331

RENEWAL INFORMATION: The renewal dues are $25 for single membership, $30 for two or more family membership.

Please send renewal payments to:
**CIPCUG MEMBERSHIP
P.O. BOX 51354
OXNARD, CA 93031-1354**

Or bring your payment to the January meeting.

Nov. 2001 renewals past due, Final Notice:

Mbr #	Last Name	First Name	Pd to Date
0516	Cantarini	Billy	200111
0738	Dutro	Georgia	200111
1041	Hubbard	Yvonne	200111

December 2001 renewals due:

Mbr #	Last Name	First Name	Pd to Date
0829	Bates	Don	200112
1042	Connors	Timothy D.	200112
1000	Grether	Arline	200112
0644	Hochberger	Lyle	200112
0390	Kelly	Bob	200112
0643	Kinoshita	George	200112
0825	Pinkerton	Ron	200112
0171	Ranson	Stan	200112
0828	Rosenbloom	Jean	200112
0827	Rosenbloom	Richard	200112
0910	Smitley	Lee	200112
0645	Wallace	Sandra	200112
0125	Zakas	Len	200112
0650	Zakas	Trish	200112

January 2002 renewals due:

Mbr #	Last Name	First Name	Pd to Date
0544	Beardshear	Paul	200201
0835	Brown	George	200201
0956	Buford	Don L.	200201
1003	Casey	Richard	200201
0654	Cayou	Mylo	200201

Mbr #	Last Name	First Name	Pd to Date
0948	Cordeiro	Frank	200201
0547	Creasap	Barry	200201
0548	De Magri	Oscoe	200201
0053	Dedeaux	Gene	200201
0947	Ellis	Dick	200201
0054S	Erickson	Elden	200201
0088	Gandin	Dr.Morris	200201
0647	Harte	Maureen	200201
0754	Harvey	Harmond	200201
0551	Hernandez	Anselmo	200201
0552	Hernandez	Susan	200201
0953	Hill	Keith F.	200201
0540	Jennings	Clay	200201
0175	Lee	Michael	200201
0757	MacArthur	James	200201
0056	Malinowski	Roy	200201
0126	Manning	Don	200201
0554	Muskat	Vel	200201
0753	Otterson	Dick	200201
0834	Oxman	Howard	200201
1008	Perko	John	200201
0950	Skultety	Tony	200201
0840	Waterman	Ginnette	200201
0839	Waterman	Marc	200201
0836S	Willett	Dr. Nancy	200201
0557	Wilson	Woody	200201

**Happy Holidays and warm wishes
for the New Year.**

Return to vendor

By Bruce Pechman

<bigbruce11@hotmail.com>
Atlanta PC Users Group
Reprinted courtesy of APCUG

With holiday gift season encroaching upon us with un-relenting fervor, what better time to examine and evaluate the collective return policies from major national retailers? For this article, I excluded Web purchases, as Internet buying invokes another set of circumstances (except for shipping issues and small print, the policies should remain comparable). Whether you're on the receiving or giving end of computer-related software or hardware this holiday season, it's a prudent investment to know your return rights at prevailing retailers.

Before delving any further, let me state that returns of "computer software and computer related hardware electronics" can be a very thorny affair, with your rights varying from state to state and store to store.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for these hi-tech returns to fall under the "gray area" of such policies and established laws. In particular, if you buy software and decide you are unhappy with the product for any reason, you could be in for a "sorry, all sales are final attitude" from your retailer. There are two sides of the coin on this rather sticky situation. The retailer takes an inflexible stance for several reasons, but the prevailing justification is the illegal copying of media thanks in part to CD-RW drives costing around $100. Not everyone agrees with this methodology. "Bad Software" is a book by Cem Kaner and David L. Pels about getting your money's worth when you buy computer software. The book is written to assist you with getting a refund, support, or compensation for significant losses caused by defective software. As I said — it's a gray area. If the software does not perform as claimed or is bug-ridden, should you have to bear the loss? You can demand, and sometimes get, a refund from where you bought the software, but you better visit the Web site <badsoftware.com> or buy the book prior to doing battle. Another path is to review the software box and see if the software maker directly warrants a MBG for 30, 60, or 90 days. Remember, software is not like a jacket you can try on … there is no way to know in advance if the software will adequately cover your needs or is buggy by just reading the side panel of the box. Fortunately, if the software is unopened and sealed, most retailers will gladly accept the return with a sales receipt within a specified period of time.

When it comes to hardware and electronics it's more of a black-and-white world of delineated guidelines. With the exception of the increasingly popular 15 percent or higher open box or "restocking" fees, your rights are reasonably negotiable for exchange, refund, or credit within a 30-day period and with a sales receipt. Be aware of unreasonable restocking fees that can come back to bite you. Can you imagine paying a 15 percent restocking charge on a $2,000 computer you decided you didn't like five days later because the keyboard was not right for you? Well, if you purchased that computer at CompUSA you would have just flushed $300 down the toilet — that is an expensive "oops."

One last caveat — with the exception of the week after Christmas, all major retailers will require an original receipt and valid ID for returns or adjustments. That said, here are four large national chain's return policies ranked from best to worst. As return policies are subject to change and modification without prior notice, these are the store policies in writing as of November 2001.

1. BestBuy: This retailer is in the number one spot for several reasons. Aside from having great prices, it

F1—Your Help Key
(Revised Dec. 11, 2000)

CIPCUG INTERNET SERVICE

(For general Internet and Communications programs, see Communications/Internet)

Jerry Crocker, 486-0308, 6-10 p.m.
normsplumb@aol.com,
Roland Fleig, 983-8707, mornings
schwable@cipcug.org,
George & Arline Lakes, 983-2969, 2-10 p.m.
thelakes@cipcug.org,
Helen Long 642-6521
helen@cipcug.org
David D. Minkin, 484-2974, 5-12 p.m., weekends
dddave@compuserve.com,
Claude Whelchel, 482-4017, 8-12 a.m.
claude@cipcug.org

COMMUNICATIONS/INTERNET (GENERAL)

World Wide Web	DM, TS
Compuserve.	DM
Note Tab Pro.	TS
Procomm Plus	DM, WB

DATABASES

dBASE.	GM
MS Access	LP

DOS RP

EDUCATIONAL / CHILDREN TZ

E-MAIL

Lotus:CCMail.	DM
Outlook	TS
Outlook Express	TS

FINANCIAL

Quicken	JD

GENEALOGY TL

HARDWARE, UPGRADING JM, JD

HTML TS

NETWORKS TS

OS/2 LZ

SPREADSHEETS

Lotus 1-2-3	GM
Microsoft Excel	DM, LP
Quattro Pro	DM

UTILITY PROGRAMS

Norton Utilities	DM, JD
PCAnywhere	DM
PC Tools .	WB
XTree Gold.	DM

WORD PROCESSING

Microsoft Word	BW, DM, MR
WordPerfect.	DM, GM, JD

WINDOWS

Windows 3.1	DM, JM
Windows 98, 95	DM, JM
Windows 2000	TS
Windows NT	TS

Initials	Name	(805)
BW	Bart Wood	482-4993 (e)
DM	David Minkin	484-2974 (e);
	d: voice mail	339- 1729
GM	Gracia Marks	484-7572 (e)
JD	John Daily	650-0029 (b)
JM	Jerry McCloud	(818) 889-6176 (e)
LP	Laura Pacheco	L5Enigma@Earthlink.net
LZ	Len Zakas	388-8452 (b)
MR	Marvin Reeber	984-1974 (b)
RP	Robert Provart	498-8477 (b)
TL	Terry Lee	tdlee28@hotmail.com
TS	Toby Scott	289-3960 (d)
	tech@cipcug.org	
TZ	Trish Zakas	388-8452 (b)
WB	Dr. William Burger	653-6889 (e)

Phone: (d) = days; (e) = evenings; (b) = both

ISP = $15 Monthly
Sign up now!

Are you tired of looking at all the ads on your free Internet or free E-mail service? Are you looking for a reliable ISP at a reasonable price? How does $15 per month plus $15 processing fee sound to you? You will also have the advantage of a special DOMAIN name; however, it may not be a name of your own choosing. It is the name of the club that provides this service to its members; CIPCUG.

To sign up, contact one of the club's techies in the F1 — YOUR HELP KEY (page 17) under CIPCUG INTERNET SERVICE. Call one of them you may know or one in your area and they will be glad to provide you with the details necessary for signing up. Checks should be made payable to CIPCUG and forwarded to Treasurer, c/o CIPCUG, P. O. Box 51354, Oxnard CA 93031. Don't forget to include the $15 set-up fee in your first sign-up check. You may make payments in three-month, six-month or annual increments. (Renewals can also be mailed to Treasurer; just be sure to mention the dates that your check is to cover).

We have had over a year of flawless service to our club members. There is no program to install, you will be making use of the programs that are already on your computer. It is a simple matter to talk you through the set-up as it is today — much easier than it was in the past. If you are the least bit timid about setting up your computer for our service, a club member will be glad to come to your house and make the necessary set up arrangements. How many ISPs do you know who will do this? Our agreement will also give you a 5 MB Web page allowance.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call any of the Tech Support team and they will either answer the questions or find out the answers for you.

More Return to vendor

also claims the least restrictive return policy of merchants in this group. BestBuy usually is first to have new product releases on its shelves. Although it sometimes charges a 15 percent restocking fee (unless defective), it's only applicable to notebook computers, camcorders and digital cameras.

2. Circuit City: Circuit City's 15 percent restocking fee extends to all computers, monitors, and printers. Now here is its gray area: "and related merchandise." This statement is open to interpretation, but generally I have found grieving my case in a diplomatic manner to the store manager can be fruitful. Circuit City prices can be less competitive on some items so keep an eye on its circular advertisements to get the best deals.

3. CompUSA: This retailer plays hardball on any return. It is not quite as nasty as Media Play, but it will even soak you for a 15 percent "Open Box Fee" for a $20 joystick. The CompUSA "Open Box Fee" goes as far to state: "…on ANY open item." In other words if you opened it and return it — you getting zonked for 15 percent of the purchase price!

4. Media Play: Media Play is just flat out malevolent when it comes to returns. Read the back of a Media Play receipt some time. Notice the first sentence: "All returns are subject to management approval." In other words, management can deny your return of any product at any time for any reason. How subjective is this policy? So if the store manager is having a bad day, he or she just says, "you can't return that." I have also found its prices to be very uncompetitive. If you buy anything at Media Play I have two words of advice for you … buyer beware. I avoid this retailer like the plague!

Some helpful tips do help your "happy returns" go a little smoother at holiday season. Always try to keep the original bag, box, receipt, and packaging if opened. Always be as pleasant and cheery to your returns clerk as possible: "Oh, gosh, where did you ever get that shirt with the embroidered Elvis rhinestones — I love Elvis, too! Now about this camcorder…" Happy Returns!

(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 corner:

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: At the November meeting, a member asked what SMART stands for in relation to hard drives. Toby couldn't remember the meaning of the acronym, and I couldn't find it quickly in any of my references, even though my hard drive has the capability. Then the January issue of Smart Computing magazine showed up with a review of a product (DiskAlert) that uses SMART.

SMART is Self-Monitoring Analysis and Reporting Technology, which, the magazine says, "notices preliminary symptoms of drive failure." The problem, the article continues, is that "many users lack the software that lets them hear its cries for help."

The $99.95 program supposedly does, at least on WinNT/2000/XP, although it's hard to know how one would be sure of that until a drive started to fail.

Anyway, there's the answer.

MICROSOFT: It appears that the suit against Microsoft is either of little interest to our members or they have no opinions on it. Only one of you responded to my two requests for thoughts on the matter.

For what's it worth, I question that the Justice Department should have gotten involved in the whole affair. Microsoft was doing what most big companies want to do: Drive out the competitors and capture the major portion of their market.

And, while I'm glad there is competition, I can't help but wonder what the PC world would be like if, for instance, six software companies had equal shares of the operating system market.

How popular would computers be if we not only had to pick what word processor, spread sheet or database programs we wanted to use but also had to decide on an operating system and then determine which programs worked on it?

And what if the computer at work had a different operating system than the one at home or on your laptop? Would you be able to take the work home or on the road with you? (Of course, on second thought, there might be a tremendous advantage if you couldn't.) Would all our employers be willing to buy us computers that ran the operating system they liked just so we could work at home? I doubt it. As it happens, I'm in that situation: We use Macs at work, and I have a PC at home. Do I want a Mac? No way.)

Does this mean that Microsoft's business practices couldn't be improved? Of course not. But whether the government, through the courts, can or should try to make the improvements is another matter. Personally, I don't think so.

First, technology moves faster than the executive and judicial branches have ever been able to. By the time the "corrections" were made, they might not even be needed.

Second, the government has not shown it's especially adept at running businesses of any kind — and many of the regulations it's attempted, such as in cable TV and long distance phone systems, didn't accomplish what was promised. But I'm straying into political realms where this column probably shouldn't go …

HAPPY HOLIDAYS: It's that time of year when a whole series of religious and secular holidays fill the calendar. Whatever you celebrate, I hope you enjoy it and have one of the best new years ever, filled with whatever you hope for: health, wealth, success — or peace on earth.

May your computers not crash, your software work as expected, your ISP keep your connections open when you want them and your utility programs protect you from whatever gremlins try to attack your computer.

Happy holidays and happy new year!

— **John Weigle, Editor**

Treasurer's report

November 2001
By Art Lewis

<treasurer@cipcug.org>

Category Description	11-1 through 11-30 2001
Income	
Advertising	$ 90.00
ISP Income	240.00
New Members	140.00
Raffle	-79.05
Renewals	540.00
Software Sales	35.00
TOTAL INCOME	**966.00**
EXPENSES	
Coffee-Doughnuts	2.45
Equipment	416.23
ISP Expense	424.00
Storage	45.00
TOE	557.39
TOTAL EXPENSES	**1,445.07**
TOTAL INCOME – EXPENSES	**-479.07**
Unrestricted Funds	$6,739.10
Restricted Funds	1,879.00
Bank Balance 11-30	8,618.10

The Outer Edge

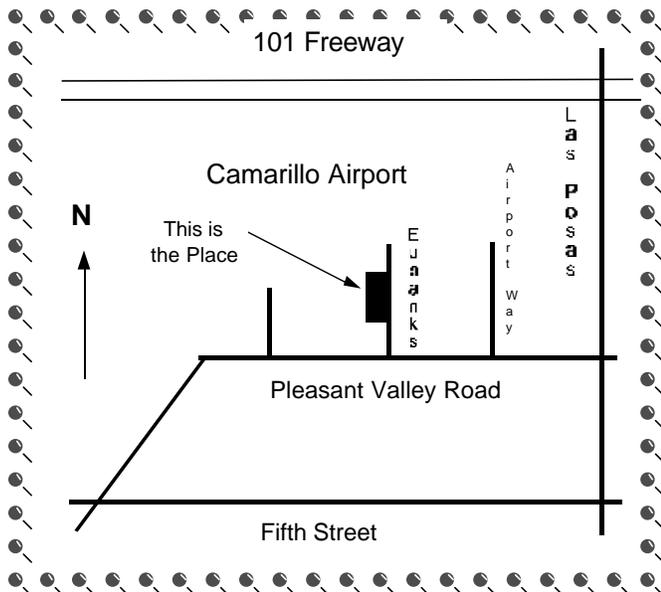Channel Islands PC Users Group
P.O.Box 51354
Oxnard, CA. 93031

DATED MATERIAL
Please Do Not Delay

DUES REMINDER

If the number after your
name is 0201, your mem-
bership dues are payable
in January 2002

JANUARY 2002 MEETING OF
CHANNEL ISLANDS PC USERS GROUP

Saturday morning, Jan. 5,
at
Freedom Center,
Camarillo Airport
515 Eubanks (at Pleasant Valley Road)
Camarillo, Calif.

Meeting Schedule:
0845-0930 Beginners SIG
0845-0930   Internet SIGs
0930-0945 Business Meeting
0945-1030 Q&A Session
1030-1055 Break - Please contribute requested
                       amounts for coffee & doughnuts
1100-1200 Program: Windows XP