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PPCUG*NEWS*

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Monday, October 18, 2004
Bill Machrone, PC Magazine columnist

Bill Machrone will talk about a variety of new technologies and the results of a reader survey on preferences for new technology. He may also bring some new products for show-and-tell.

Bill was the editor-in-chief of PC Magazine during its formative years, from 1984 to 1991, was the founder of PC Magazine Labs, and created the benchmark tests and comparison reviews that have become the standard for computer magazines. He subsequently went on to found the corporate testing facility, ZD Labs, launched Corporate Computing magazine, Ziff Davis Internet Magazine, Yahoo! Internet Life, and ZDTV, which later became TechTV.

He is an award-winning editor and writer, having been recognized by the Computer Press Association, the Magazine Publishers Association, and the National Association of Business Press for various best article, best columnist, and best magazine awards.

Bill is currently a columnist and contributing editor for PC Magazine, and writes on a broad range of topics from the societal issues of technology to practical hacking, from the business of IT to state-of-the-art entertainment technology. He often speaks to user groups, trade associations, and industry groups.

Lawrence Library
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
US Alternate Route 1 South & Darrah Lane, Lawrenceville, NJ

*Meetings of an organization at any of the facilities of the Mercer County Library System
in no way imply endorsement of its programs.*

In this issue:

Coming Events:

November 8, 2004 - TBA
December 13, 2004 - Holiday Party and Elections

Website Hint: Handouts, tables of links, files, etc. from past presentations are often available at the PPCUG web site. To find them look up the program of interest on the schedule and check for any hyperlinks.

Minutes of the September Meeting

The meeting began at 7:30 with these Q&A items: Norton System Works 2004 causing problems on a Win2000 system; How should a person backup their system before downloading and installing a program?; Power was lost when defragging a disk. When power was restored the disk was unusable; During an install of Encyclopedia Britannia, it asked to have a version of Quick Time removed before installing it's own version of QT. Add/Remove was used but EB continued to say the other QT version was still present. Person manually edited the registry (Gulp!) to remove some remaining QT entries.

At 7:50, Vic Laurie started an excellent presentation on Safe Shopping on the Internet. Vic has posted the slides and a list of referenced hyperlinks on the topic on his web site at: http://www.vlaurie.com/computers2/general.htm.

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Web Link of the Month

If you use software from many sources, it's sometimes hard to keep track of when updated versions have been released. Calendar of Updates is one place where new releases of many of the most-used programs are noted. Entries are color coded to show the general program type. Find it at: http://www.dozleng.com/updates/index.php?act=calendar#.

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Lexmark Printer Recall

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission announces the following recall in voluntary cooperation with the firm below. Consumers should stop using recalled products immediately unless otherwise instructed. Name of product: Lexmark, Dell and IBM Laser Printers; Units: 39,431; Manufacturer: Lexmark International Inc., of Lexington, Ky.; Hazard: These printers can short-circuit, posing an electrical shock hazard to consumers.

Incidents/Injuries: None reported. This recall is being conducted to prevent the possibilities of incidents or injury. Description: The recall includes Lexmark, Dell and IBM brand laser printers. The brand name and model number for the Lexmark and IBM laser printers can be found on the front of the printer. For Dell laser printers, the brand name is on the front of the printer and the model number is inside the front cover. The recall includes the following model numbers: Lexmark E232, E232t, E330, E332n, E332tn; IBM Infoprint 1412, 1412n; Dell 1700 and 1700n.

Sold at: These Lexmark printers were sold directly through distributors, and at electronic, office supply and computer stores. IBM printers were sold directly through authorized distributors and resellers and via IBM's web site. Dell printers were sold directly through the firm's Web site. These laser printers were sold from May 2004 through August 2004 for about $200. Manufactured in: China

Remedy: Consumers should immediately stop using the laser printer, unplug it, and contact their corresponding laser printer company to register their product to receive a free replacement laser printer. Consumer Contact: For more information, contact Lexmark Web site at recall.lexmark.com or toll-free at (877) 877-6218 between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. ET Monday through Friday or between Noon and 6 p.m. ET on Saturday; Dell Web site at www.1700printer.com or toll-free at Dell (888) 245-3959 between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. CT Monday through Friday; or IBM Web site at www.printers.ibm.com or toll-free at (800) 426-7378 anytime.

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"Phishing"- an Internet Scam
Vic Laurie, PPCUG

A growing Internet scam that has caught many people has been given the name "phishing". This type of scam uses phony emails to fool people into revealing important personal information such as credit card numbers, account usernames and passwords, social security numbers, etc.

Figure 1. Example of a "phishing" email.

"Phishing" is a form of identity theft that used to be done over the telephone. Now, however, the crooks have gone high-tech and are using the Internet for their con games. Most commonly this consists of sending out emails purporting to be from a legitimate source such as a financial institution. Under some false pretense, such as the claim that your account needs verifying, an email will ask that you go to a Web site by clicking on a link in the email. When you go to the Web site, you are asked to "update" or "confirm" personal information such as account numbers and passwords. The Web sites may look just like a legitimate page but they are bogus sites designed to steal from your accounts. The link in the email may read like it leads to an authentic site but actually takes you to a fake page.

The first large-scale example was several years ago when many AOL users were tricked into divulging their passwords. Their accounts were then used for the scammer's purposes. Since then, many other institutions have been attacked. For example, in 2003 many people received e-mails supposedly from eBay claiming that the user's account was about to be suspended unless they clicked on the provided link and updated their credit card information. The scammers use mass-mailing methods and many of the recipients did not even have an eBay account. However, all it takes is 1 or 2 per cent responses for the con to result in a nice haul.

Recently, banks have been a favorite target. An example of a scam email that I recently received is shown in Figure 1. Note the psychological tricks known as "social engineering" (http://netsquirrel.com/articles/socialengineering.html) in the email. The very problem that we are concerned with- identity theft- is brazenly used as a way to induce you to allow identity theft. It plays on your fears. Moreover, the email looks like a real Citicorp email. Also note something about the link- it is a JavaScript link (extension JSP). This is a different trick that doesn't take you to a fake site that looks like a real Citicorp site. Instead, it takes you to a page that uses JavaScript to generate a pop-up form and then redirects you to the actual bank site. What appears on your screen is a fake form on top of a legitimate page.

ISPs, banks, etc. do not ask for passwords and the like to be entered by email. Be suspicious of any email message that asks for personal information. Don't ever follow a link in an email that asks you to update or verify sensitive information. If you want to contact a company, go to their Web site by using a link from your records or telephone them.

If you would like to test how good you are at recognizing "phishing" messages go to this quiz site (http://survey.mailfrontier.com/survey/quiztest.html) where examples of actual "phishing" are mixed with legitimate mail.

The section below lists a number of references on "phishing", including what to do if you think you have been scammed. You should also report scam efforts to your bank or other account.

• Anti-Phishing Working Group- http://www.antiphishing.org/
• FTC consumer alert- http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/pubs/alerts/phishingalrt.htm
• Better Business Bureau- http://www.bbbonline.org/idtheft/phishing.asp
• Microsoft's view- http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spam/phishing.mspx
• PC World article- http://www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,115140,00.asp
• PC Magazine- http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,1573371,00.asp
• John Dvorak- http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,1566739,00.asp

•Social Engineering- http://netsquirrel.com/articles/socialengineering.html

•Practice recognizing "phishing"- http://survey.mailfrontier.com/survey/quiztest.html

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ACM / IEEE-CS
Princeton Chapters

October 21, 2004: Computer Graphics Film Show, SIG-GRAPH Video Review (joint meeting with ACM SIG-GRAPH – Princeton Chapter and Princeton Media Communications Association)

For the twenty-fifth year in a row, we are kicking off our season of meetings with the very popular computer graphics film show. This will also be the ninth year for our current graphics speaker, Jeff Posdamer. Jeff will be showing some of the latest and greatest of the computer generated animated films that were shown at recent ACM/SIGGRAPH computer graphics conferences. Jeff will show a variety of technologies: scientific visualization graphics, commercial graphics used in television and movies, and some examples of current computer graphics research. The films include everything from state-of-the-art supercomputer technology to graphics that can be done with today's personal computers. Come see why this is the best attended meeting we have all year. Date: Thursday, October 21, 2004, 8:00 pm (Refreshments at 7:30 pm). Place: Sarnoff Corp., Routes 1 and 571, Princeton, NJ. Information: Dennis Mancl (908) 582-7086, André Bondi (609) 734-3578. On-line info: http://www.acm.org/chapters/princetonacm.

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Beat the Scammers!

Here's a great tip when you are led to a web site that you think might possibly be a spoof of a site with financial implications such as a bank, eBay, PayPal, etc. Such spoof sites are set up to gather names and passwords from unwitting users. That information is then used by the criminals to steal money by logging into the real site using the stolen credentials.

The tip is to initially enter any fake string in both the user name and password fields. A spoof site will not know that your made-up information is fake and will accept it as authentic. If you are at a real site, it will complain that your information is invalid. If, and only if, you get such an error message, you can feel confident that you are at a real site and can then safely enter your actual information.

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Help! I've been hijacked…
Sherry Zorzi,
Cajun Clickers Computer Club, LA **

First it was viruses, worms, and spam. Then came Trojans spyware, and pop-ups. The newest scourge plaguing Internet surfers is browser hijackers, and one very nasty one is making the rounds in the Baton Rouge area causing all manner of grief for folks.

Browser hijackers are malicious programs that change browser settings, usually altering designated default start and search pages. The newest versions are going beyond messing with your browser settings. One of the worst, called "Cool Web Search" is particularly hard to remove.

Symptoms

How can you tell you have a browser hijacker? If your start page is suddenly different, that's a clue. Often the hijacker won't let you change your start page back to your preferred page. You might also notice a new "helper" toolbar added to your browser.

Another clue can be a changed search page. If you used to get MSN as your search page when you click the "Search" button but now some other page is coming up, you've likely been hijacked.

Some of the hijackers will load a page that looks like Google but isn't really Google – a particularly dastardly trick. Many will give unexpected search results. You may search for some innocent topic and get lots of results that lead to porn sites. If you search on "spyware" or the name of a hijacker program, the browser may either freeze up, or give you only benign results making it look like the hijacker program is a good thing.

Many folks who've been hijacked find that porn sites have been added to their favorites list. Some report pornographic files being downloaded. Some are being redirected to porn sites when mistyping a URL (web address).

Other symptoms include pop-up ads even though you're running a pop-up stopper program. These pop-ups can appear more rapidly than you can close them and can freeze your system quickly. You may notice drastically reduced resources or messages that your system is low on resources or virtual memory. Or you may receive dramatically increased spam. Frequent lock-ups are a common complaint as is painfully slow performance.

Some of the hijackers can even disable your firewall, your anti-virus software or your spyware killers. Or they can prevent anti-virus software and spyware detectors from being updated.

In the past, we were safe from most Internet threats so long as we kept our anti-virus software updated and ran a firewall. Running Ad-Aware or Spybot Search and Destroy once a week or so cleaned up any spyware that had crept in but we never had much trouble. If we were smart enough not to download junk and not to open attachments, we were pretty safe. But times have changed and we must change our thinking too.

This recent rash of nasty stuff came in through a security hole in Microsoft Windows. Those who did not update Windows in a timely manner were sitting ducks for the Cool Web Search hijacker. From now on you must keep Windows up to date, especially with the so-called "critical updates."

Cure

The newest browser hijackers are particularly difficult to remove. You can try the following but be sure to follow the steps in order. If you don't know what you're doing, you should take the infected machine in to one of our local computer shops and let them fix it for you. It's possible to mess your computer up really badly while trying to remove a hijacker!

1. If you're running Windows ME, Windows 2000, or Windows XP, you must first turn off the system restore feature. Otherwise any problem you fix will just return when you reboot the computer. Search your Windows Help screens for instructions on how to disable System Restore for your version of Windows. Warning: You will lose all restore points you've previously made!

2. Download the Cwshredder tool from downloads.com or any of the many sites that make it available. If you're infected with a hijacker, go to a non-infected machine to download your tools. Be sure you get the absolute latest version of Cwshredder since it is updated every few days. New variants of these hijackers appear at an amazing rate and you must have the latest Cwshredder to detect and clean them all.

3. Reboot your machine and run Cwshredder again.

4. Run Ad-aware. Be sure you update it first. If you don't already have Ad-aware, get it at www.lavasoftusa.com.

5. Reboot your machine and run Ad-aware again.

6. Run Spybot Search & Destroy. Be sure to update it first. If you don't have Spybot Search & Destroy, get it at www.safer-networking.org.

7. Reboot your machine and run Spybot again.

8. If everything seems to be clean now, be sure to turn Windows System Restore back on!

Don't let a browser hijacker ruin your tech-life! Keep Windows updated. Install and run a firewall. Install, keep updated and run anti-virus software. Install, update and run spyware cleaners. And encourage Congress to nail these hijacking jerks!

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Which Office Suite Should You be Using?
George McGinnis
Chautauqua Cyber Club **

Word processors, and office suites, as used in the modern computer, have an interesting background and history. In the beginning the word processor was the most sought after of all the programs. The heyday of the word processor was in the late 1970's-early 1980's when serious home computing was first getting started. Word processors were the first thing most people wanted to use on the home computer for the simple reason that they viewed the home computer as a replacement for the typewriter. If you wanted to write a letter, you needed a word processor.

It wasn't very long before we were inundated with a plethora of the pesky things, each claiming to be the best. How many can you recall? I recall PC Write, Rite Writer, Volks-

writer, Word Star, Peachtree Text, and Perfect Writer. There were numerous others. The first one I used was PC Rite. It came with the computer a local computer guru built for me in 1982. The word processor was an extra and cost $20.00 as I recall. I had the first edition. At first it worked very well for me but I gradually discovered several bugs and problems. For example, it did not have an automatic "save" feature. I recall once I had typed several pages of a story which was somehow deleted. It was gone! I complained to the program's author that he needed to add the automatic "save" feature. He added it to the next version and gave me a free copy because I had made the suggestion. I suspect other word processors of the time had similar problems. Then along came Word Perfect. It was the most mature of them all, and also the most expensive. Word Perfect became the default word processor for business throughout the United States and its fame spread very rapidly. I can recall as recently as 15 years ago when our local University decided that Word Perfect was to be the only word processor to be used for administrative purposes by the University. At the time I warned them that Word Perfect was soon to be supplanted by Microsoft WORD but my warning was ignored. I wonder how much that blunder cost the University.

In the late 1970's, the addition of a spreadsheet and database made their appearance. I recall that Lotus 1-2-3 and VisiCalc as spreadsheets and Dbase 3 as a database were popular early on.

Now to the question: Which suite should you be using today? The answer is to continue using the present one if you are pleased with it and if it handles all your situations. But is that really the answer?

At present we have three champions in the field. Two are well known, Word Perfect Office and Microsoft Office. The third is hardly known at all, but it is out there and it should become known. I am referring to Open Office.org, V. 1.1.1. This latter suite is available as a free download, or can be purchased on a CD. It contains a word processor, a spreadsheet, a database, a draw program and a presentation program.

Recently the Ziff Davis publication e-WEEK participated in a test to try to determine if, for example, Microsoft Office could be replaced by OpenOffice.org for use at a large business. One of the reasons for the test was potentially to save money; for example Word Perfect Office costs about $199.00, and Microsoft Office 2003 Professional is about $359.00. A business must purchase a license for a certain number of copies, and 100 licenses are not unusual. The cost becomes critical when the business decides it must upgrade.

The test they made is impressive. e-WEEK obtained as volunteers several large businesses, and also obtained volunteers from the same businesses who regularly used Microsoft Office. The information about the test and its results is contained in the e-WEEK April 26, 2004 edition. My interpretation of the results is that for ordinary work the free download is quite adequate. However, for more complicated functions, Microsoft Office is preferred.

How about the ordinary home user, like you and me? I think it boils down to money. If you have lots of it, use Microsoft Office, and upgrade it as needed. Depending on the version, you can have a word processor, database, spreadsheet, presentation program, and various other features, all at a price. Next on the list would be Word Perfect Office which is less costly but still a full featured suite. It contains a word processor, spreadsheet, database, presentation program, and Dragon Naturally Speaking, a voice recognition program.

If you want a word processor with the look and feel of Microsoft Word, and a not too complicated spreadsheet and database, the free Open Office.org will fill the bill and the price is right. Try it. You might like it. Go to www.openoffice.org and get the free download or purchase the CD.

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Tech News
Sue Crane, Vice President / Editor,
Big Bear Computer Club, CA **

The Check Clearing Act for the 21st Century Act goes into effect Oct. 28 and will encourage the banking industry's use of image technology. If you ask for a canceled check for proof of payment, you'll likely receive an IRD (Image Replacement Document) instead.

This fall, Californians will start paying $6 to $10 more for every monitor, flat panel, laptop and TV sold in the state -- the result of a recycling law that will take effect Nov. 1.

Google queries can return Web sites that list personal information including names, addresses, phone numbers, and credit card data of hundreds of card holders. Google would not comment, but they've decided to allow anyone to request the removal of any document that includes a Social Security or credit-card number—simply send a note to help@google.com with a link to the page. So far this year, Visa has had 20 sites pulled from the Web for trafficking in stolen credit cards.

Mayo Foundation will use IBM's Blue Gene supercomputer for mathematical modeling required to understand gene and protein structures and their interactions to get clues about disease causes. The technology, aimed at improving diagnosis, curing diseases and developing individualized treatment, may help Mayo understand which genes might be responsible for certain diseases, including various cancers.

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