PPCUG

NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

Monday September 9, 2002

Creating Videos DVDs on Your PC
Doug Dixon

**Doug will discuss the current hardware and software technologies
used for creating video DVDs on the PC and a look in
what the future holds in store for this technology.**

**Doug Dixon is a Technology Leader doing research in multimedia PC applications
at the David Sarnoff Research Center in Princeton NJ**

At
Lawrence Library
Meetng Rooms 1 & 2
US 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 implies endorsement of its programs*

In this issue

Joel May, (left) getting some video footage prior to his presentation on "Creating Movies with your Computer" at the August General Meeting.

Digital Photo by: Tom Carman

About PPCUG

General Meetings

Second Monday of the month at the Lawrenceville Library.
Route 1 and Darrah Lane.

7:00-7:45 PM: Social Time / Tech Corner

7:45 PM: Meeting Comes to Order

8 PM: Featured Presentation

For information about upcoing meetings or joining PPCUG call 908-218-0778 to leave a message.

Board Meetings

For Meeting Location, Date and Time, call 908-218-0778

Board meetings are open to All.

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Annual Dues Rates

Normal dues rate is $30 per year.
New Members Only: after February, the rate is $2.50 per month times the number of months remaining in the year.

Presidents Message
by Paul Kurivchack

Labor Day marks the end of the summer, the start of the new school year, cooler weather and football. This year, September will ring in the first anniversary of the World Trade Center attack. Even though I work in Mid-Town Manhattan, far enough away from the immediate terror of downtown, but still too close for comfort. I will be back again on the 27th floor overlooking the Hudson River, after a short stint on the 35th floor facing Times Square, looking up and down the river for errant airliners. While I hope that September 11 could just be another day, it never will be the same. I hope that we all can make the day as normal as possible to prove to the world that we cannot be stopped from doing the things we love to do.

While I'm on the subject of tragedies, let me tell you about my month of August. My wife of twenty-seven years became ill on August 3 getting progressively worse until finally on the day of the general meeting she was admitted to the hospital with a variety of symptoms. The next day she was rushed into emergency surgery and spent the next seven days recovering from colon and an appendix surgery along with the colostomy. It is going to be a long six months of recovery for her and some new extra duties in my household. I now have become the cook, dishwasher, laundry person and most importantly, the nurse. So if things don't always come together over the next couple of months, this is why. If you can, please pitch in to set up the room for the meeting and lend a hand to Tom Carman and Don Arrowsmith if I am running late. The LCD projector is going to be placed in the hands of a member who always attends the meetings so that we will not have the presentation go on without it.

From the feedback I received, Joel May made a great presentation on making videos using your PC. I hope that everyone who attended learned a thing or two so you can become the next award winning video director.

Septembers meeting, while still in the video making area, moves up to the technology of the DVD and burning your own disks by Doug Dixon of Sarnoff Labs. Please let all your friends, relatives, co-workers know about Doug's presentation to our group. For those who attended last years joint meeting with the Princeton MAC Users Group will remember the great presentation he made on MP3/Audio Technologies. We are going to be treated to another outstanding presentation by Doug, so it would be nice to have a full house.

See you all on the 9th.

Spam Control

By: Vic Laurie - PPCUG

It isn't just your imagination. The amount of junk e-mail or "spam" (also called *unsolicited commercial e-mail*) has been increasing at a substantial clip in recent months. Congress is trying to get into the act, editorial writers are pontificating, the ISPs are complaining, but meanwhile the spammers continue on their merry way. One estimate places the amount of spam at 30% of all e-mail. Jupiter Media Metrix, who monitor e-mail content, estimate that by 2006 the average Internet user will be receiving several thousand spam messages annually. Many active Internet users already get that much or more. It is also projected that by then total spending on e-mail marketing will reach $9.4 billion, compared to $1 billion this year (http://techupdate.zdnet.com/techupdate/stories/main/0,14179,2855979,00.html).

But that cost does not include the hidden expenses to all of us. Spam is more than a nuisance that merely causes clutter in the mailbox. It is a substantial tariff on all Internet users. For example, it is estimated that 5-10% of the charge paid to ISPs is necessary because of spam. Businesses have costs due to lost productivity from the time employees have to spend reading and dealing with spam.

Aside from its cost, spam is an unalloyed nuisance and time-waster. Another problem is that a good fraction of spam can be deemed pornographic or at least suitable for adults only and children who use e-mail are apt to receive inappropriate material. So what can we do? Avoiding spam entirely is not really possible but here I will update my previous article (http://www.ppcug-nj.org/articles/vic_laurie/diet.html) on ways of cutting down the deluge and filtering out the more offensive stuff.

How They Find Us

In theory the best defense against spam is stay off the mailing lists. So how do we get there in the first place? Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to keep your e-mail address hidden from determined marketers. Once on a list for any reason, your address may be sold and resold many times until it is on dozens of lists. CDs with millions of e-mail addresses are readily available for a few dollars. Any action that you take that might expose your e-mail address on the Internet can end you up on spammer's lists. Participation in chat rooms, newsgroup discussions, investment forums are all ways to get on lists. In a practice called "harvesting," spammers use software called "spiders" to regularly comb the Internet for addresses. Also, many ISPs offer the option of being listed in a directory and these are fair game for advertisers.

Shopping on the Internet, signing up for newsletters, entering contests, registering to download software, or other activity requiring that you provide your e-mail address can also get your name on lists. Although reputable merchants, newsletter writers, shareware sites, *etc.* will respect your privacy, some sites may feel free to sell your name to others. Always look for a statement of the policy on privacy before signing up for something.

Another method used by spammers is the "dictionary" attack. By combining all common words and names (with variations like joe1, joe2, joe3, *etc.*) with all the common providers such as AOL, Hotmail, MSN, Earthlink, computer programs can generate millions of possible e-mail addresses. Many of these will be legitimate and the spammer doesn't care about the ones that bounce. The cost of mailing to a lot of incorrect addresses is too small to be any deterrent. (Thus some people advise using uncommon combinations of symbols for your e-mail address.)

Avoiding Spam

One method of dealing with spam is to block or filter mail from known spammers or with particular subjects or key words. This can be done either on your e-mail program or with special software. The common e-mail programs like Outlook Express allow for setting up rules that apply to categories like senders, subjects, and textual content. Check your particular e-mail client for the details. For example, in Outlook Express go to the menu under *Tools-Message Rules*. The problem is that spammers keep changing or faking their ostensible names and addresses as well as using phony subjects. Personally, I have found that rules and filtering may keep out a little spam but that for the most part it isn't a satisfactory answer to the problem. You can also install some extra software. There are a slew of utilities devoted to stopping spam. For reviews of some see http://www.zdnet.com/products/stories/reviews/0,4161,2870419,00.html http://www.zdnet.com/anchordesk/stories/story/0,10738,2872788,00.html
http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,4149,7382,00.asp
http://www.pcworld.com/features/article/0,aid,97430,pg,8,00.asp One popular free program is MailWasher, http://www.pcworld.com/downloads/file_description/0,fid,20000,00.asp Sam Spade (http://samspade.org/) is another popular source.

There are also services that will filter your mail. By collecting large databases of known spammers and using their client's e-mails to keep up with the latest tricks and twists of the spammers, these services can be better at stopping spam than software located on your own computer. These services naturally slow down the processing of your mail since it has to go through their server. A couple of these services are http://mailcircuit.com/
http://www.spammotel.com/
http://spamcop.net/

Note that no matter whether you filter mail with software on your own computer or use an external service, some spam will get through and some legitimate mail will get blocked.

Although there are many ways to try to block spam from arriving in your mailbox by using software or filtering services, my experience is that spam has reached the point where one of the best defenses is to have more than one e-mail address. You can reserve one address for friends and relatives and have a second throwaway address that is changed fairly regularly. This second address would be the one that is used whenever it might be subject to public exposure. Many ISPs allow for an account to have multiple mailboxes and one can be set aside for junk. If the volume builds up, the box can be discarded and replaced by a new one. Another route is to use one of the free Internet e-mail services like Yahoo or Hotmail. Yet another approach is to use one of the services that provide e-mail addresses with a limited

An Introduction to Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

By: Paul D. Caris - PPCUG

The acronym GIS stands for Geographic Information Systems, a field that was once relatively little known. Many people have probably used GIS without knowing it by visiting any one of a number of travel directions web sites (MapBlast, MapQuest, Yahoo Maps, etc). Numerous people are now using handheld Global Positioning Sytems (GPS) receivers when camping, boating or hiking. These devices provide a reading of one's location in latitude and longitude by receiving transmission from satellites in Earth orbit. GIS is far more that this, however. Once the realm of highly skilled computer operators and programmers, GIS is now much more accessible to the common person, particularly via the Internet.

This article provides introductory information on GIS and mapping resources on the Internet, and can be used as a staring place for those who are interested in learning more about the topic. If you are already somewhat familiar with GIS you may want to skip ahead and visit some of the web sites mentioned. A second article will provide more information for those who want to go beyond what they can find online, by illustrating what can be done with free GIS data-browsing software.

What is GIS?

So, what is GIS? In simple terms, GIS is computerized or computer-assisted mapping. In the days before computers revolutionized the field, cartography was a complicated manual process, requiring knowledge of mapping as well as design and drafting skills. Because cartography was done with pen and ink on Mylar, a great deal of pre-planning was required and mistakes were difficult to correct. With today's high-powered computers, sophisticated software and a wealth of digital GIS data, most computer users can make their own maps. GIS does require special skill and knowledge in its professional usage, but it is now possible for common folks to dabble in the world of GIS and do their own analysis and create useful maps to answer their own geographic questions. Although the definition of the term can be debated, it is commonly defined as the combination of computer graphics with information on the location of objects in space and associated attribute data (information on the object for which we have a location). This information is contained in a database and data files are commonly referred to as "spatial" or "geospatial" data because they contain information about the location of objects in space.

For example, a point, symbolized by a red dot for which we have an x,y location, represents a specific object (e.g., fire hydrant, light pole, or whatever). Graphically, objects are commonly represented by points, lines or areas. What makes GIS so useful is that layers of information can be overlaid and spatial relationships can then be calculated between and among the data layers representing real world objects (see www.gis.com for additional information). [Figure 1 here] Another example, might involve finding the location of toxic waste dumps in the vicinity of the a drinking water well. Or, calculating the total acreage of open land remaining in your town or county, and how long it will take for it to be built-out given the current pace of land development. These are the kinds of investigations that GIS was designed to answer.

GIS is still a relatively new field, having grown up along with the development of the computer. The field has matured over the years and there currently exists a great deal of freely available data developed by GIS practitioners in government, private and non-profit sectors. As a GIS Specialist for the State of New Jersey, I utilize highly specialized GIS software and spatial data. However, much of the same spatial data as that professionals use is available for download via the Internet.

Finding GIS Data

Where do you find these data files? Here are some links, starting with those focused on New Jersey data. Because GIS is helpful in answering environmental questions, much of the available spatial data is environmental in nature. Therefore, a good place to start looking for data is the NJDEP-GIS web site: www.state.nj.us/dep/gis. [fig 2 here]. This site provides lots of background information on GIS, as well as data downloads and advice on what to do once you have obtained the data. You may also want to take a look at back issues of the GIS Update to see how the agency has bee using GIS for environmental protection. I also suggest recommend the NJ Office of GIS site, http://www.state.nj.us/ogis, which is an excellent place to learn about GIS. The NJ Office of GIS also manages the NJ Spatial Data Clearinghouse, where you can search for even more data (http://njgeodata.state.nj.us). You have a choice of searching metadata (which is data documentation, or data catalog records), the GIS User directory (who's who of NJ GIS), or the Digital Library (mainly for text-based documents). [Fig3 here] Currently, there are over 550 metadata records, but the number of files continues to grow. If you don't find what you are looking for, keep in mind that the site is still rather new and that more data will be added over time. Just for the record, you should find all of NJDEP's publicly available spatial data cataloged at the site.

Beyond New Jersey State government, you may want to visit the Geography Network (www.geographynetwork.com/), which bills itself as "an online resource for finding and sharing geographic content, including maps and data, from many of the world's leading providers. You can spend many hours exploring and browsing free data from all over the world. [Fig 4 here] Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), Inc., the company that developed the site, is one of the leading vendors of GIS software. The Geography Network includes free data as well as fee-based data and services (but these are clearly marked). Try out the Geography Network Explorer, or click on "Free Resources." What the Geography Network introduces you to however, is probably one of the most important developments in GIS: the *Internet Map Service* (IMS) also known as Internet Web Mapping. However, IMS is a topic for another article, as is the topic of free software available for viewing GIS data or the new Internet Map Services.

For a preview you can check ESRI's ArcExplorer by pointing your browser to: http://www.esri.com/software/arcexplorer/index.html.

Additional introductory information on GIS can be found at the following URLs:

· www.gis.com (provides lots of background information)

· http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/gis-files/index.htm (A good intro to GIS provided by Ordnance Survey, Britain's mapping agency, akin to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Also check their home page at www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk

· http://mapping.usgs.gov (The mapping and GIS site of the USGS).

Some Interesting cartography links:

· http://geography.about.com/cs/cartography
· http://feature.geography.wisc.edu/histcart
· http://www-map.lib.umn.edu/history_of_cartography.html
· http://www.mappingsciences.org.au/journal.htm
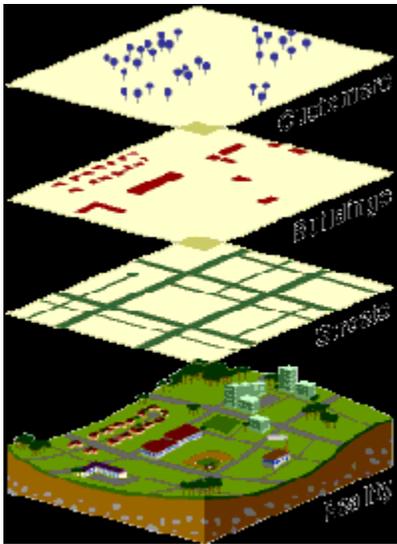

Figure 1. GIS Data Layers

Figure 2. The NJDEP GIS Site
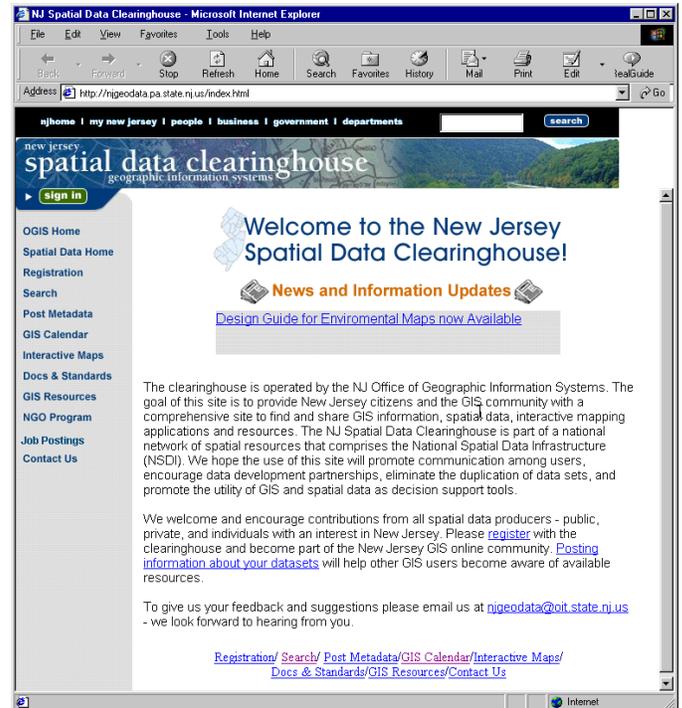
Figure 3. The NJ Spatial Data Clearinghouse
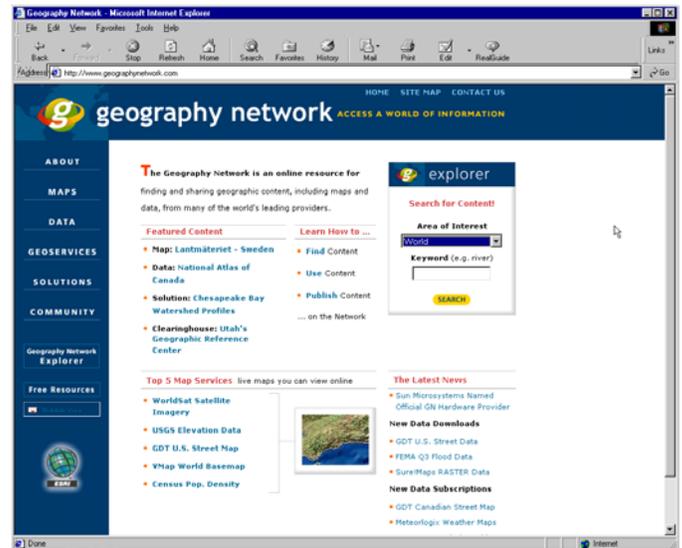
Figure 4. The Geography Network

Computing Factoids
By: Steve Bass - Pasadena IBM Users Group

Hard Drive Repair Conundrum

A PIBMUG member was struggling with a faulty hard drive. An Ontrack product manager provided an answer.

Question: I have a question about getting rid of data on a hard disk. I have read articles about reformatting and assorted software that gets rid of your data. However, I had a hard disk crash and must return the old disk to the system vendor in order to have my credit card credited for the cost of the new one they sent me (under warranty).

I do not want them or the OEM to be able to recover that data. With the disk not working, how do I get rid of the data? If I hold magnets around it, will that work? Should I drop it in a boiling pot of chicken soup? Your advice would be appreciated.

Smart-ass Answer: Chicken soup may work provided you remove all the fat, chicken feet, and carrots (strangely enough, celery and onions can stay).

More realistically, I have to admit I'm stumped. Lemme call in some experts from Ontrack, the hard drive recovery company. Mark? Any ideas? —Steve

Ontrack's Response:

The magnet idea isn't going to work unless you've got some incredibly strong magnets laying around. A degaussing unit strong enough to erase the platters of a hard drive would generate a field that would damage other magnetic media within several yards. Also it would erase the servo-patterns on the drive used to control the movement of the read/write head, so it would certainly ruin the drive.

We've requested ideas from the real experts, our clean room technicians. They had a few solutions, but nothing simple. You could see if an authorized shop (like a disk recovery shop who has authority to break a drive seal without voiding the warranty) would take on a special job (for a fee) to open the drive and degauss the platters.

You could request to review the warranty policy from your HDD manufacturer and see if they have a policy for protecting data that may be on a warranty returned drive.

Trust the HDD manufacturer to destroy the platters as part of the end-of-life of a returned drive. —Mark

Better Backups

After using tapes and zip drives for back ups, I finally decided to just back up to another hard drive. To simplify the process, I installed two mobile mounts and connected the IDE cables so that the upper mount or drawer is an IDE1 master and the lower drawer is an IDE2 Master. I purchased two drives of the same capacity. Both are jumpered as masters. The original is in the upper drawer, and the backup will be placed in the lower drawer.

I use "Drive Copy" which with installation generates a 3.5" floppy "Drive Copy" boot disk. The boot disk is used to start the copy process. Make certain that your 2 hard drives are labeled such that you will copy from the original to the backup, and not from the backup to the original.

Remove the backup and set it aside for that sad day when the original fails or is infected with a virus. The reason that I like

this approach is that if the original drive fails, I can just power down and remove it from the drawer and insert and boot the backup, which is already jumpered as a master drive, and you are immediately up and running. Whereas if you were using a tape you have the problem of trying to salvage the original from the tape, hoping that it works. The same is true of Zip disks.

I will usually start the backup when I go to bed and it is done in the morning. The cost of a 2nd hard drive is probably cheaper than a tape drive or Zip drive and the cost of the tapes and zip disks just add even more cost. ––Clifford Ford (kb6ia@earthlink.net)

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World and runs the Pasadena IBM Users Group. He's also a founding member of APCUG. Check PCW's current edition at www.pcworld.com/resource/toc/index.asp and sign up for the Steve Bass online newsletter at www.pcworld.com/bass_letter. §

lifetime. For example, SpamGourmet (http://spamgourmet.com) will give you addresses good for a certain number of uses only.

The last and perhaps best defense is common sense and the "delete" key. Don't open obvious spam messages and be very careful about responding to "Remove me from this list" type of addresses. That may very well just get you on more lists. Also note that formatted spam may contain "Web Bugs" that tell the spammer if you have opened that mail (http://zdnet.com.com/2100-11-523504.html?legacy=zdnn).

Fighting Back

Really egregious spammers can sometimes be stopped (often only temporarily) by reporting them to their ISP. Unfortunately, the actual e-mail address that is the source of the spam is frequently disguised and you may need to decipher the header that comes with e-mail. The header is usually not displayed and you will need to consult the settings for your individual e-mail program to see how to read headers. A reference on headers is at http://digital.net/~gandalf/spamfaq.html. Also, SpamCop (http://spamcop.net/) will help with finding the actual origin of a spam e-mail. If you want more information or really feel like taking up the cudgels and doing battle with spammers, here are some sites to help in the fight:

    http://www.junkbusters.com/
    http://www.elsop.com/wrc/nospam.htm
    http://spam.abuse.net/
    http://www.spamcon.org/index.shtml
    http://www.cauce.org/
    http://www.ftc.gov/spam/
    http://www.spamhaus.org/rokso/index.lasso

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(Last Update: August 30, 2002)
Send Updates to kurivchp@optonline.net for inclusion in this listing.


Minutes for the General Meeting
August 12, 2002
By: Don Arrowsmith

Sol Libes opened the meeting at 7:45. Subjects of the questions from the floor included GoBack, Klez virus, using MS Access with forms and books for Windows XP.

At 8:08 Joel May began the main program on Creating Movies with your Computer. Joel brought his Windows 98 desktop running Pinnacle Studio version 7. He also brought his video camera and had taped random scenes in the meeting room before starting his presentation. Connecting his camera via an IEEE-1394 (Firewire) cable into a digital capture card in his computer, he transferred 6+ minutes of video. The program copied the data onto the hard drive and then segmented the video into scenes. Joel then began illustrating the features of Pinnacle Studio by previewing, selecting and assembling scenes onto a timeline. Adding transitions, cutting, varying the displayed speed, and inserting still video and title screens were shown. The audio was chosen from recorded camera track, background tracks, clips, and recorded narration. By the end, he had produced an entertaining video of the start of our rather boring meeting. Joel also discussed the various ways that the completed project could be saved for viewing on the web, on a computer, on a CD or VHS tape. Actually saving the sample movie was not done as this takes a considerable amount of time for the computer to process all the data.

Look here for information on just-released Pinnacle Studio version 8: http://www.pinnaclesys.com/ProductPage.asp?Product_ID=577&Langue_ID=7

Doug Dixon on DVD's!
September 9, 2002
Lawrence Library
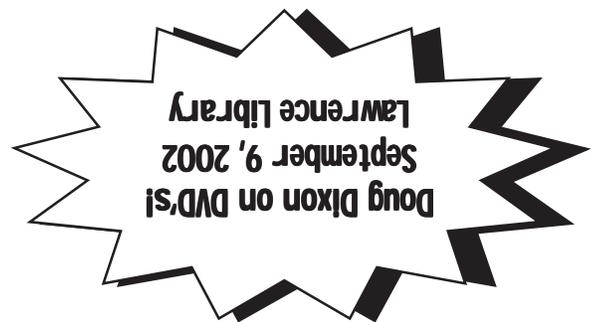
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