July 2003 Volume 19 Number 7

PPCUG*NEWS*

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

Monday, July 14, 2003

From Video to DVD

Don Slepian

How to create a music Video DVD on your personal computer.

At:
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

From the (new) editor: A huge thanks to Paul for his five long years of work in editing our newsletter. It was always out on time and looked very professional!

I hope that I'm also able to produce monthly issues that you find interesting and informative. Feel free to send me comments, pro or con. And please consider writing an article. No matter what your computer skills are, other members would be interested in your program reviews, your tips, your favorite URLs, your favorite freeware, etc. There are two 'filler' articles in this issue that came via APCUG. We'd much rather have an article from you!

- Don

General Meeting Minutes
June 9, 2003

President Clarke Walker began the meeting at 7:44 by noting that the current issue of Consumer Reports has an article on PDAs, which will be the topic of the October meeting. He also showed a promotional DVD that Microsoft is distributing entitled "Do Amazing Things with Windows XP". Q&A from the floor covered topics including: Running AdAware to look for spyware; A BIOS error message that appears during boot asking for a second hard drive that had been physically removed and removed from the BIOS settings (it was suggested that the cabling be verified or the BIOS version be checked for an update); Running Scandisk in W98 froze and could read but not write to the hard drive – reseating the cables cured the problem; Is it possible to use a monitor with separate RGB, luminance and sync connectors with a standard video card; On a W2K system advertising popups appear regularly even after checking for spyware; Using a multifunction printer/scanner/FAX on the same phone line with an answering machine.

At 8:04 Vic Laurie began the main program on batch and script files. He covered the various types, their differences and what they are suitable for: Batch, VBScript, JavaScript (Jscript), and REG files. He illustrated several uses for file cleanup or backing up files. A handout giving many web references for further information and Vic's PowerPoint file are available at the PPCUG website (see the Meetings page).

Command and Control
Vic Laurie, PPCUG

Do you have the feeling that the computer tells you what to do instead of the reverse? Would you like instead to feel that you actually have something to say about how your computer works? Here's some tips on ways you can take control and be the one giving the orders for a change.

I have written previously in the newsletter about the command line in Windows XP and the new and enhanced commands that are available (http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/command.htm). I also mentioned how these new features make it possible to write more powerful batch files. In this article I will expand on what some of the commands can do for the average PC user. The command line is available not just in Windows but in most operating systems and system administrators regularly use it for administrative tasks. However, many PC users are unaware that the command line can be quite helpful to them also.

In Windows XP the command prompt can be obtained in a variety of ways. Depending on your setup it may be an entry in the **Start|All Programs|Accesories** menu. Perhaps a quicker route is to open **Start|Run** and enter "cmd" (without quotes). A black and white window (the colors can be changed) containing the command prompt will open. The window looks just like the old DOS window but it isn't. By entering "help" a list of many (but not all) of the available commands can be obtained. To obtain details about a particular command, enter "*command-name /?*" For example, for details about "copy" enter "copy /?" (without quotes). If you have the Professional version of Windows XP, there is a very extensive help file *ntcmds.chm* that can be obtained by entering " hh ntcmds.chm" in **Start|Run.** Unfortunately this feature is missing in the Home edition but it can be viewed on-line at the (very long) link http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/home/using/productdoc/en/default.asp?url=/windowsxp/home/using/productdoc/en/ntcmds.asp.

For convenience, in the examples below I will use simple names for files and folders without indicating the full path. Please remember that paths for all commands are relative to the folder indicated in the command prompt itself unless explicitly indicated otherwise. The default reference folder is usually *C:\Documents and Settings\(log on name)*. Thus if a reference is made to a file *somefile.txt*, the computer assumes you

mean *C:\Documents and Settings\(log on name)\somefile. txt*. If what you really want is *C:\Windows\somefile.txt*, then you must enter the entire name with the correct path. A convenient way to be able to open the command prompt in a folder of your choice can be obtained by installing the Microsoft PowerToy "Command Prompt Here". The right-click context menu will then contain an entry for opening a command prompt in any selected folder. Download at http:// www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/pro/downloads/powertoys. asp

In this short space, we can only briefly discuss a few of the commands but I would like to mention some aspects that are new to Windows XP. Some of the commands are superficially the same as in the old DOS but all are now full-fledged 32-bit applications. Also many have expanded capabilities provided by new or better switches. The delete command "del", for example, now has a switch "/s" that provides for deletions in sub-folders. Thus the command "del /s myfolder*" will delete all files in *myfolder* <u>and</u> all files in any sub-folders of *myfolder*. Note the convenient asterisk wildcard "*", which allows for multiple deletions in a single user operation. Together with the switch "/s", a single "del" command can clean out Temp folders and do other useful housekeeping chores. Add the "/q" switch to run in quiet mode so you aren't asked if you really want to delete for every single file. To remove folders (directories), use "rmdir" (just "rd" will also work). Again there is a switch "/ s" for deleting sub-folders. Folders must be empty before they can be deleted. (By the way, the old command "deltree" is still there but only in a 16-bit version. Since long file names are very common and can easily lead to trouble, "deltree" should no longer be used in Windows XP.)

Making directories or folders with sub-folders is now easy. The command "mkdir" or "md" can make a whole tree. The command "md new\new1\new2" will create a folder "*new*" with a sub-folder "*new1*" that in turn has a sub-folder "*new2*".

For copying large numbers of files or backing up a large folder, the command line is often the fastest and easiest way to go. The command "xcopy" is a very useful and powerful command for this purpose. (The old DOS also had an "xcopy" command but it sometimes caused trouble with long file names. The XP version has no such problems.) "xcopy" comes with an alphabet soup of assorted switches that give it great versatility for use as a file backup utility. Enter "xcopy /?" in a command prompt to see them all. For example with the switch "/d:[*mm-dd-yyy*]" only files changed after a given date are copied. Thus the command
xcopy my folder mybackup /d:06-01-2003
 will copy all files from *myfolder* that have changed since June 1, 2003 to the folder *mybackup*. If no date is specified the switch "/d" will copy all files that have changed at any time.

If you have ever wanted to make a list of all the files con-

tained in a particular folder, you will have discovered that the Windows GUI provides no easy way to do this. It is very straightforward, however, when using the command line. The command "**dir myfolder**" will list the files and folders contained in *myfolder*. Again, there are switches that provide for various modifications of the command. For example "/h" will show hidden files and "/s" will list the contents of sub-folders in addition to those of the main folder. Of course, the normal output of the command is to the screen. To output to a file the command is
dir myfolder >listmyfolder.txt
where ">" is the redirection symbol. The file *listmyfolder.txt* will be created by the command. Output can also be redirected straight to a printer but I think it is better to first create a file and then print from there if hardcopy is desired. These lists can be a lot longer than you might think.

"dir" is one of the original commands as is another command that I find handy. There are certain folders that I use over and over and I like to have ready access to them. One way to do this is to use the command "subst". This command allows you to assign a drive letter to a folder. Since drives are at the top of *My Computer* and browse lists, it makes the folder very easy to get to. To assign the "Z:" drive to a folder *myfolder,* enter "**subst z: myfolder**". Unless you are working from the parent folder of myfolder you will need the full path for it. The assignment only lasts until the computer is shut down so I have a one-line batch file in my Startup folder that reinstitutes the assignment.

There are so many commands that we can only give the briefest sketches here. I urge you to look into as many as possible since I feel you will be surprised at how useful some can be. For example, there are a whole host of commands for checking network functions and for use on the Internet. (Many have names that begin with "net…") There are new ones as well as versions of the well-known commands such as "*ping*" and "*tracert*". As more and more people have home networks, these commands are assuming greater significance to the average PC user.

SPAM – Bane of the Internet
Ira Wilsker

I hate it; I absolutely hate it. I open my email in the morning and find up to 100 email solicitations offering illegal cable TV descramblers, cheap prescription drugs without a prescription, devices and treatments for "personal enhancement", university degrees without attending class, voyeuristic opportunities, and the infamous offers of easy riches from the family members of deceased Nigerian dictators. I can typically spend over a half-hour daily deleting this trash. Most of us find the "unsolicited commercial email" a mere nuisance, but to our internet service providers it has become an expensive proposition to process this "spam" email, as it steals internet bandwidth, hard drive space, and

processor time, with the costs passed on to us subscribers. What may even be worse is the blatant fraud and criminal solicitations that many of us experience.

According to a report released by the Federal Trade Commission on April 30 (www.ftc.gov/reports/ spam/030429spamreport.pdf), much of the spam mail we receive contains false claims as well as other deceptive, and probably illegal, content. To determine the degree of proliferation and deception in spam, the FTC created what appeared to be private websites containing unique email addresses only used on those sites, and posted material in popular newsgroups and chat areas, again using unique email addresses. During the collection phase, over 11,000,000 spam emails were sent by citizens, or received by the "dummy" email addresses created for this purpose. Since many internet users wonder where and how spammers get their email addresses, the FTC found that 86% of the email addresses used on their websites and newsgroups were harvested and resold by spammers. The FTC also tracked the success rate of the "remove me" links commonly given by spammers, and found that 63% of the remove requests were not honored. The FTC also found substantial misrepresentation in the sample emails analyzed, including false "From:" and "Subject:" lines, often clearly intended to trick the recipient into opening the message. Many of those messages (17% of "Adult" spam with false headers) would then display pornographic images without any regard to the age or emotional status of the recipient.

In the analysis of about 1000 spam emails, the FTC found that 20% of the emails were for what the FTC labeled "Investment or Business Opportunities", including such offers as work-at-home, franchise opportunities, chain letters, and other non-securities offers. "Adult" spam, consisting mostly of pornography and dating services, accounted for 18% of all spam, while "Financial" spam, consisting of credit card offers, mortgage refinancing, cheap insurance, and other related items composed 17% of spam. Close behind were "Products and Services" (16%), "Health" related spam offering dietary supplements, disease prevention, and physical enhancement (mostly sexual in nature) accounted for 10% of all spam. Only 7% of the spam was for computer or Internet related equipment or services. It should be noted that all of this spam received by the FTC was indeed unsolicited, and not in response to an inquiry made by FTC staffers, even though many of the emails claimed (falsely) to be a reply to an inquiry, or the result of signing up for an "opt-in" service.

The FTC also investigated the accuracy of the email headers, and found that one-third of all spam mail had false "From:" lines in an attempt to disguise the source of the email. Almost half (46%) of the spams with false "From:" lines appeared to be from an acquaintance of the recipient, apparently to trick the recipient into opening the message. Another 13% of these emails appeared to come from an established business relationship, and 14% had blank sources. Some spammers (3%) try to trick the recipient into opening

the messages by showing that the message appeared to be from the recipient himself!

The "Subject:" line of spam was only slightly less deceptive; with 22% of spams containing false subject lines, with one-third of those having a stated subject totally unrelated to the content of the message. 42% of these false subject lines alleged to show some existing business or personal relationship with the recipient. Cumulatively, 44% of all spam mail had false "From:" and/or "Subject:" lines. Personally, I do not understand how anyone could transact business, including possibly sending credit card information, to an unknown individual who is lying about his true identity; that is a real setup for fraud and loss.

The body of the message also often contained deceptive information, with 40% of all spam mail containing one or more falsehoods in the content of the message; of those messages touting "Investment or Business Opportunities", a full 90% contained false information, while 49% of the "Health" spams had falsehoods. 47% of the travel and leisure related spams contained false information. Considering the "From:", "Subject:" and body of the spam mail, the cumulative number of false emails rises to 66%, with 96% of all "Investment or Business Opportunities" containing misinformation. Again, it amazes me that so many Internet users are gullible and fall for these deceptions. Despite some states requiring commercial email to contain the prefix "ADV" in the subject line, only 2% of all spam complied.

Then there are the chain letters, which often claim to be legal, even to the point of being endorsed by government agencies. According to the FTC, "Nothing is further from the truth."

It may get worse – spammers are now targeting our cell phones, and most of us pay to receive text messages, shifting the cost of spam almost totally to us, the recipients.

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The Sorry State of Software…
George Siegel,
PIBMUG's Special Correspondent

For the last six months or so, I've become increasingly irritated by the ever growing amount of junk that comes with every new software release. You know what I'm talking about—registrations, cookies, tray icons, background processes, pop-up screens, newsletters, affiliate programs, ad infinitum.

At first, I thought maybe it was just me; heavy workload and all that. Then, a couple of weeks ago, I helped an old friend set up his new PC and I reinstalled all of his 1997-vintage software including PhotoShop, PageMaker, MS-Office and a half dozen other major apps. I finished in record time. No hassles, no online anything, no sales pitches. It felt great.

Then, over the next few days, I had to deal with the following:
A PC that had suddenly slowed to a crawl after the installation of the 164MB printer driver. (Yes, 164MB of "full printing system" on a $99 inkjet printer.) I replaced it with the 1.12MB file version from the vendor's website and all returned to normal.

A cheesy checkbook program that analyzes your entries in order to make recommendations on how to get out of debt, and apparently is in a position to offer you a bank loan. George Orwell would be proud.

A new computer that had no Internet Explorer and no Internet Connection Wizard. The two choices were to sign up for—and launch—the preloaded AOL or the preloaded DellNet. My cable-connected client didn't want either one. I finally found Internet Explorer as a hidden file and set up the necessary icons but it was a sad waste of 45 minutes. And of course there were the usual viruses, spyware, pop-ups, etc.

In the midst of all this, I realized the cause of my frustration. My role has traditionally been to "add" software and configuration elements to make a computer do that which a client needed. Today's software does too much. (When was the last time you needed to imbed a sound file in your Word document?) I now spend my time loading additional software to block or remove features that no one wanted in the first place. This is nonsense and we shouldn't be accepting it.

So here's where you come in. As user group members, you've probably tested more versions of more apps than most users. Make a list of the most recent, stable versions of all the various applications that don't have all the junk features. The minimum requirements are that they be Y2K compatible and run on 32-bit Windows. Once you have the list finished, you can make it clear to your computing buddies that there is simply no reason to ever pay for newer versions of those programs until—or unless—the junk is removed, and any real needed improvements in functionality are needed.

Here's where to start:

MS-Office 97 does everything that most businesses will ever need. No reason to buy anything newer. If your new PC has Word 2002 bundled with it, remove it and load Office 97. You'll never have to spend another dime for an office suite.

Quicken 2000 (or thereabouts). It's just a checkbook! Whatever version you have, keep it. If your new computer has a newer version bundled with it, delete it and load your existing version. It will run faster and work just fine.

Okay, you get the idea, right? It will give you a great opportunity to tick off software companies while enhancing your user group position as champion of the little guys.

Hey, Protect Yourself, Willya?

You may remember the last time we had a beer, we briefly discussed the general gullibility of new and untrained Internet Users, and our ability, through experience, to quickly see through most of the scams and ploys one finds on the Web.

Recently, I was at the office of a client with about six employees, all of whom recently received e-mail accounts. In no time at all, they were receiving all sorts of spam. I learned that they had all been engaging in various risky activities including sending each other email greeting cards on a regular basis, each trying to outdo the other.

I explained that things such as e-cards are a no-no because they exist primarily to gather names for spammers. I went on to say that no one would spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to put up a sophisticated e-card system unless they had a way to recover their costs. And that even on the web, you can't get something for nothing.

Their response? The sites seemed friendly. Indeed the sites themselves as well as the e-cards have been created with a disarming, warm and fuzzy feel.

Then the client asked me how to make the spam all go away. I had to tell them that it was too late. They had to either live with, and spend time and energy constantly fussing with spam blockers, or change their e-mail addresses.

I find that my admonishments to clients regarding safe practices are either ignored or rebelled against. It's probably that I'm pressed for time and tend to use a very direct approach ("Stop that, you idiot.")

The job of every user group member is to use your demeanor and verbal skills to present the best practices employed by experienced users in a positive, compelling way. Teach them what would be roughly the online equivalent to street smarts. The idea is to not only give users the needed information, but also to convince them that doing things correctly is much "cooler" than being duped by every ploy that comes along.

Hey, I got a virus!

Want some golden rules to prevent getting a computer virus?

1.   Don't trust any attachment; scan each one.
      (But what else is new…)
2.   Update your anti-virus signature today.
3.   Do a quick, free Internet scan with
      www.comandondemand.com

Or, if you use MS-Outlook and are tired of playing this silly game, then download and install the Outlook e-mail security patch, by itself or included in one of several other service packs. It blocks all conceivable active attachments and is nicely described at www.slipstick.com/outlook/esecup.htm.

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Coming Events

August 11, 2003 - The Web - Behind the Curtains

September 8, 2003 - Genealogy - Blanche Sneath

October 20, 2003 - Pocket PC (Third Monday!)

November 10, 2003 - Recycling Inkjet Cartridges

December 8, 2003 - Annual Meeting and Party