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Monday, November 10, 2003

Recycling Ink Cartridges
Jim Griggs

Annoyed by the high cost of replacement cartridges for your printer? Would you like help in finding the right photo paper for your project? Jim Griggs will talk to us about re-inking printer cartridges and choosing papers for use in inkjet printers. P.S. INK in Northfield, NJ is a family owned, mail order business founded in 1985. It is now a leader in the Inkjet Cartridge Refill Kit and InkJet Cartridge Re-Manufacturing markets on the web at http://www.psinkmaster.com/.

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

Save $10 on your 2004 PPCUG renewal! Read your monthly newsletter online and pay only $20 dues. All members will get an email when the new issue is available at the PPCUG web site. Since we'll save money by not printing and mailing your copy, we'll pass on the savings to you. For you dinosaurs out there: If you prefer to receive a printed, mailed copy of the newsletter, indicate that on your renewal form and pay $30 in dues.

Coming Events:
December 8, 2003 - Annual Meeting and Party

President's Message
Clarke Walker

First, a reminder that at our next meeting we will be accepting nominations for the officers of our club. The offices appear on the masthead and on the web site. Everyone who is a current officer has agreed to continue if nominated and in December elected. However if you are interested in an office or wish to nominate some one please let me or one of the other officers know.

I found last month's presentation by Rich Catena on Pocket PCs very interesting. However I think I'll wait on purchasing one. The form factor is a little too small. And I want one that can take nice pictures and record music. The tablet PC that Rich brought with him was very interesting.

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October Meeting Minutes

The meeting came to order at 7:30 with Clarke noting that members often bring used magazines available for anyone to take home. O'Reilly book catalogs and 20% discount offers were also on the side table. Nominations for 2004 officers were solicited; A slate will be announced at the next meeting with the vote occuring at the December meeting. Q&A topics were: Partitioning hard drives in Windows XP; Generating summaries over multiple worksheets in Excel; Excel window being wider that the screen dimensions; Cheap ISPs; Getting an illegal instruction error in Real Player and Outlook Express.

At 8 PM, Rich Catena of HP began the evening's presentation on the Microsoft Pocket PC system. He described some of the Pocket PC specs (240 x 360 screen; ARM RISC or XSCALE processor) . It's available on 3 platforms and is now a 3rd generation OS. He talked about several different units and brought working examples of many of them. The trends have been towards smaller, more powerful, longer battery life, color screens and wireless or bluetooth connectivity. Some future developments were outlined. More info is available at www.hp.com.

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Outlook Express Tip:
Correcting a bad header
Don Arrowsmith

I save many back issues of online newsletters in Outlook Express folders and many of these arrive via my Yahoo! email account. At the end of both 2001 and 2002, some email that was delivered on December 31 had the following year listed in the delivery time. I'm not sure whether it is because I use EST and the Yahoo! Server runs on PST or whether Yahoo has another problem. In any case, I keep my mail listed by date so these messages were always appearing in the list long after they were actually sent and at the end of the list, annoyingly after newer messages.

If this happens to you, here's how I fix the message headers. Open OE and select the folder with the bad message. Drag the message to your Desktop and then start Notepad or your favorite text editor. Load the message from the Desktop and search

through the headers (which are always at the beginning) until you find the bad year string. Change it to the proper year, save the message and exit the editor. Back in OE, drag the corrected message from the Desktop back into the proper folder in the Folder list.

Both the original and corrected message should now appear in the folder. Open the corrected one to verify that it's OK and then delete the original one, which should be at the end of the list.

I've also used this method to correct a newsletter message where the subject line indicates an incorrect issue number. If Yahoo! sends me more mislabeled email this December, I'll be ready for them.

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Help!
Vic Laurie

They may not be as certain as death or taxes but computer problems are something we are all likely to encounter sooner or later. I have previously discussed things that PC users should do to forestall trouble as much as possible in the articles
http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/clean.htm
http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/basics.htm
http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/refresh.htm
http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/backup.htm
If trouble comes anyway there are some troubleshooting suggestions at
http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/trouble.htm.

Although following the suggestions in the articles above can help you to prevent or to take care of your problems, there may come a time when you have a situation where you have no idea what to do next. Where do you turn for help? Before you go for assistance from some precocious 12 year old kid that you know, you might consider a little additional research. There is an enormous amount of support on the Internet and in this article I will suggest some places to find information or people that can help.

If you have Windows XP and you haven't already looked in the Help function, try it. It includes an Internet search and can actually be useful (You can skip it in Windows 98/Me.) Otherwise, try tapping into the Microsoft resources on the Internet. The Microsoft Knowledge Base is an enormous collection, containing much useful information. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to find things, and when you do find it, you have to wade through the Microsoft-speak that is used for writing the articles. Nonetheless, this is the ultimate source for answers about many problems. Go to the link http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=fh;[ln];kbhowto. Another Microwave site is the Microsoft Windows XP support center at http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=fh;en-us;winxp.

Searching
Searching the Microsoft knowledge base is often easier if you use Google. Go to the Google Advanced Search, enter your search criteria and add "site:microsoft.com" at the end. For example, to search "registry editor" use "registry editor" site:microsoft.com. Another way is go to the "Domain" line and specify "Only return results from the site or domain microsoft.com". Google can also be a great way to find information about computer problems on the Internet in general, but you need to know how to narrow down your search. Otherwise, you will be overwhelmed with the number of links that turn up. Some tips on how to use Google are given by Steve Bass at http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,110970,00.asp

I have found the Microsoft Newsgroups to be very useful, and here too, Google is the way to find things. Use the Advanced Groups Search and specify "Return only messages from the newsgroup *microsoft.public.*" The wildcard asterisk will allow a search of all the Microsoft groups. If you can narrow the search even more, that will simplify the search. For example, for Windows 98 questions try just the groups *microsoft.public.win98.*" For Windows XP questions try *microsoft.public.windowsxp.*" If you know how to use a Newsgroup reader, you can submit your question to a particular group and see if one of the many experts who frequent the groups will answer. You can also use the new Microsoft Newsgroups Website at http://communities.microsoft.com/newsgroups/default.asp.

Another way to search for answers to your problem is to use the "Windows Tips Search Engine" provided by Brian Livingston at http://www.briansbuzz.com/. This facility allows you to simultaneously search some of the best sources on the Web. The listed sources are Annoyances.org, JSI, Inc., Langa List, Lockergnome, PCWorld.com, Tom's Hardware, Windows 2000FAQ, Windows Web Solutions, WinInformant, WinNetMag, WinSupersite, Woody's Watch, Brian's Buzz, E-Business Secrets, and Window Manager.

Help forums
There are large numbers of help forums on the Web. These are of varying quality but many have knowledgeable regulars who will try to answer questions that you submit. Most require some sort of registration and sign-in but are generally free. I personally stick with the Microsoft newsgroups but here are a few you might try (in no particular order).

Bud Allen's troubleshooter
http://www.wintrouble.net/

Internet-help.net
http://www.internet-help.net/

Tech Support Guy
http://www.helponthe.net/

Computing.net
http://www.computing.net/

PC Guide
http://www.pcguide.com/vb/

PC 911
http://www.pcnineoneone.com/

PC Mechanic
http://forum.pcmech.com/

PC Magazine forums
http://discuss.pcmag.com/pcmag/start/

PC Pitstop
http://www.pcpitstop.com/

Tech Support Alert
http://www.techsupportalert.com/

If you are willing to pay for help, Steve Bass of PC World recommends
http://www.pcpinpoint.com/web/. He has other recommendations at
http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,110970,00.asp

I haven't tried it but a subscription help site that some people might like is Ask-Dr-Tech
http://www.askdrtech.com/

Vendor Sites

Some of the bigger vendors maintain sites where questions can be asked about problems relating to their products. Most require a password. Some are more useful than others. Unfortunately, many vendors only offer generalized FAQs and don't pay much attention to individual questions. The general trend is to cut down on customer support. For example, Symantec used to have some good newsgroups but not any more. Sometimes the FAQs or canned answers do help to solve problems due to documented bugs, so it may be worth trying. Some software companies have support forums where users can exchange experiences and these can be worthwhile.

To conclude, let me make an editorial comment (also known as an opinionated remark).You may note that I have not suggested phoning vendor tech support lines. Personally, I would rather go to the dentist before calling up any vendor for what passes as tech support these days. The industry as a whole has seen a marked decline in the quality of customer help and support. You can read all about it in the *PC World* article http://www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,105854,00.asp or in the *PC Magazine* article http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,4149,1185057,00.asp. Or see Scot Finnie's professional assessment at http://www. scotsnewsletter.com/36.htm#rotw. In my opinion, talking to vendor tech support is the last desperate resort and is to be avoided if at all possible. Be aware that all too often there is

a substantial charge. If you must call, be sure to have all the facts about your problem lined up beforehand. You will *really* waste your time (and the tech's) if you are vague about what your problem is.

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CD Burning Tip
Sol Libes

I encountered a problem with the CD Burner on my system. When writing a large amount of data to a CD-R I received an error and the disk was no longer finalized. It worked OK if I was just writing a small amount of data. I suspected that the drive had developed an alignment problem. I removed the drive to take a look at it. When I did that I heard things moving around inside of the case. I opened the case and found that there were three clear plastic rings, about an inch in diameter, floating around inside the case. I found that these rings came from one of the CD packages I had purchased. The case was one of these tall round cases containing 50 CDs. The rings were at the bottom of the case. They must have stuck to the last CD I removed from the package. I have now learned to carefully inspect CDs before I put them in the drive.

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Planet Lab

PlanetLab is an experimental global network of computers, designed to allow researchers to develop and test powerful new types of software that are not confined to a single computer, treating the global network as one large, widely distributed computer. PlanetLab will be described at the next meeting of the Princeton Joint Chapters ACM/IEEE On Thursday, November 20, 2003, 8:00 PM. More info at http://www.acm.org/chapters/princetonacm/mtg0311.html.

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MSCONFIG
(Microsoft Configuration Utility)
Secrets to your computer startup
Bruce Cramer
Alamo PC Organization, Inc., San Antonio, TX

Do you ever wonder what takes your computer so long to start up? In most cases the reason for that is that computer manufacturers and software developers think you need or even want all those programs and accompanying little icons to startup every time that you turn your computer on. By the time Microsoft, Compaq or whoever your computer manufacturer is, and a few software companies are done with your computer you probably have 10 or more different programs running into each other every time your computer starts. Most of the programs that startup when your computer starts up are being shoved in there vying for room for no reason at all, but you can prevent that. I used to work as

a computer technician at a national computer chain store where they charged a pretty penny for this little operation but you can do it at home armed with a little knowledge.

First of all, MSCONFIG stands for Microsoft Configuration Utility. If you click on Start, run, then type MSCONFIG you will see 6 tabs. On the far right you will see Startup.

Click on the startup tab and there you see what loads up when your computer starts. Many applications put items in your startup group that are absolutely unnecessary such as Real Player streaming audio, calendar birthday reminder, bill payer reminder to name a few. Even if you have 512 megabytes of RAM or more I don't recommend that you load any unnecessary applications on startup, hopefully you will know about aunt Jenny's birthday before your computer tells you. Its like the guy who is unpacking the family car at the beach, he dropped the family off near the water so they are there ready to have fun but dad has to go park the car ½ a mile a way then walk through the hot sand loaded down with the sun tan lotion, towels and ice chest. Do you really think he needs to carry any more? Even without the beach balls and rafts he's lucky if he doesn't fall and spill the sun tan lotion all over the towels – yes that would be a mess.

After you turn your computer on it has to wake everything up (BIOS, network card, ports, etc.) load all its drivers, the bare essential applications, and the fonts. The only startup items you absolutely need are:
ScanRegistry
TaskMonitor
SystemTray
LoadPowerProfile
Your antivirus software

There is an extensive and regularly updated list of startup files and what they do here <http://www.pacs_portal.co.uk/startup_pages/startup_full.htm>. As of February 27, 2003, this guy had 2,277 files listed. I applaud his enthusiasm, but he really should get out more often. The general rule of thumb is — if in doubt leave it alone. After you uncheck the boxes of unneeded items and click Apply, OK, you will be asked if you want to restart or exit without restarting. You can do either, but you will not reap the benefits of unloading the items until after you restart. After you restart your computer Microsoft will give you a message that says you have run the MSCONFIG utility and wants to know if you are satisfied with the results. If you do not want to see this message again, check the box. You should notice an immediate improvement in performance and stability, all for free and you did it yourself the all natural way without adding more programs such as Ram Booster or an "optimizer" program which only leads to more memory use and possible software conflicts.

MSCONFIG is not available for Windows 95, NT, or 2000. However there is a free "Startup Control Panel" at Mlin.net that will work just as well for Windows 95 and if you are using Windows NT or 2000, you can download the official, Windows XP version of MSCONFIG on the Tech Guide Web site.

Bruce is recently retired from the Army and is a regular volunteer at the "Doctor is In" each Friday at the Learning Center. He is A+, Network+, I-Net, certified as well as a Microsoft Certified Professional in Windows XP, and provides on-site computer services to individuals and businesses.

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Would You Like Printer Repair With Your Order?
Mark Presky
Los Angeles Computer Society

Hunger contributed to the repair of my inkjet printer. Several months ago I was driving along Santa Monica Blvd. in West LA, approaching a set of the Golden Arches, when I realized that it was Filet-O-Fish Friday (99 cents), and I was hungry. I have significantly reduced my consumption of fried foods, but the thought of deep fried compressed minced cod (or whatever they use) oozing with a glob of fatty, salty tartar sauce was too much to resist - I must have been REALLY hungry.

After receiving my order I sought a clean table upon which to dine. There was one unoccupied small table well seasoned with various condiments, so I looked further to a larger nearby table occupied by only one gentleman. After asking if I might join him at the table, and introducing myself, I started up a conversation. He was dressed in a jacket and tie, so I asked what he did for a living. When he said that he serviced computer peripherals including printers and fax machines - my ears perked up. I told him that I had been wrestling with a frustrating printer problem for over a year and hated giving up. He inquired further.

PROBLEM
I told him that my HP 694C would print a page or two and then stop suddenly often mid page, to inform me that the printer carriage was unable to move. Over the months I had discovered that by turning the power off and then using rubbing alcohol (not orally consumable spirits) to clean the stainless steel or chrome shaft upon which the carriage with the ink cartridges traveled, I could get it to print another page or two or three ... if I was lucky. After several months of this I finally replaced the 694C with an even older HP 600 monochrome printer (manufactured in the days before humans were upgraded with retinal cones) of my father's

that I kept in the closet for emergencies.

SOLUTION
The gentlemen said that it sounded like the bearings underneath the carriage were clogged with dried ink. I asked him how ink would even get there. He responded that ink tends to distribute itself everywhere inside most printers. He is no longer amazed at the places he finds it doing damage.

He suggested using a small amount of Windex on tissues to dissolve and tease out the congealed ink from the bearings, and then to lubricate, sparingly, the shaft upon which the carriage moved.

FIXED
Later, I pulled the inoperable printer from my closet and set it up on the kitchen table. I assembled some discount glass cleaner (sorry, Windex) and several off brand Qtip type cotton tipped sticks and went to work. Close examination revealed a glob of gelled ink on either side of the carriage adjoining the shaft. I must have gone through about 20 of these cleaner dampened cotton tipped sticks before the amount of dissolved ink coming from the sides of the carriage where it joined the shaft began to subside. It just kept coming and coming. There must have been a cartridge's worth of ink in there (OK, I exaggerate a bit). I then used the tiniest bit of silicone gel lubricant (an amount the volume of about a quarter of an apple seed) and spread it over the shaft. Although I spread it so thin that I couldn't see it, I then wiped off most of that with a clean tissue. From my years of experience maintaining medical equipment I have learned that less is usually better in these situations.

CONCLUSION
Now, time for the test. I replaced the older printer on my system with the newer, and hopefully, fixed instrument. After plugging it in and powering it up, I requested the printing of a 6-page document. IT WORKED! After all the hours of frustration I had endured with that printer I was not satisfied. I now ordered it to deliver another 6 pages. And another. I was ecstatic.

My day was made. And I owe it all to fast food. It maybe clogged my arteries, but it helped me clean out my printer's clogged carriage bearings. Hey guys and gals, maybe we should be trolling for new LACS members at fast-food outlets, offering to help with computer problems.

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