PPCUG*NEWS*

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Google
Joel May
Monday, February 14, 2005

Google is arguably the most popular as well as the most powerful search engine available. But did you know that, in addition to searching the web, Google can do calculations, provide dictionary definitions, check airport and flight status, track FedEx and UPS packages, scan L.L. Bean catalogs, find pictures of J. Lo and more? We'll discuss how to use all the powerful features of this great search engine.

Joel has spent most of his adult life teaching, first at the Graduate School of Business of the University of Chicago and, subsequently, at the School of Public Health of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. He holds a BS degree in Economics from Albright College and an MBA and PhD in Economics from the University of Chicago. He's been using computers since 1961, the Internet since 1974, PCs since 1979, and the World Wide Web since 1994.

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:

March 2005 —Paul Kurivchack on using OnTrack's hard disk recovery utilities.
April 2005 —TBD
April 16, 17—Trenton Computer Festival (www.tcf-nj.org)
May 2005 —Vic Laurie on his Six Favorite Programs.
June 2005 —TBD

Minutes of the January Meeting

Clarke started the meeting at 7:35 PM. He circulated a list of those who paid extra money to have a paper copy of the Newsletter delivered. There was a brief discussion on the status of the club's website.

Technical questions from some of those in attendance were discussed. First question: After downloading the new versions of Symantec, with help from technical support, a member had gotten back a lot of stuff he had lost but not the scanner icon. Last week, it reappeared. He tried it but just as he was about to scan a page, a "Script error" appeared. The error could not be removed by clicking either or both of the choices offered! He uninstalled and reinstalled but the problem remained. Tom V. suggested that a registry cleanup was required since uninstall doesn't always clean up everything. There was a suggestion to remove the device driver and then reboot. There may also be a corrupt DLL. To a question that Robert Weinberg had about Ad-Aware and Spyware, the recommendation was made that you quarantine whatever is found and then delete it. It was also affirmed that Spybot is dependable and that Spyware is outstanding. In any case, it was recommended that two or three of these programs be used. There was a question about Norton disk scan finding 15 registry errors and fixing them. Then next week it finds the same 15 registry errors. It was suggested data be backed up, then the registry be renamed and put somewhere else. If you can find the CD that came with the disk, it will probably give an honest evaluation of the drive.

Kim Goldenberg presented "Single Disk Linux". You can get Linux on a credit card sized CD that holds about 50 Megs. Kim demonstrated KNOPPIX v3.7 which he ran from a CD in a partition he had Linux format at the end of his Windows hard drive. During boot, it shows everything that it's doing. This info is useful to have during server work. You can go to KNOPPIX.net and print documentation on the program. You can also download Knoppix from the site. Although 3 or 4 years behind, the Graphics Manipulation Program, GIMP, included with Knoppix, is in the same vein as Photoshop. This version also includes Desktop Planetarium; Acrobat Reader; an Open Office package; a partition editor, qtparted; Popup notes; a Palm tool, WINE. A similar program, Crossover Office that costs about $100, is included in some versions of Linux; it allows you to run Windows programs under Linux, for example, IE. You can have multiple desktops (the default is 4) that don't interfere with each other. However, you can copy and paste between the partitions. This is great for getting your feet wet in Linux without damaging the computer. If you plan to copy Linux to your hard drive, Kim recommends you spend around $60 and buy RedHat's version or similar and then set up a dual boot.
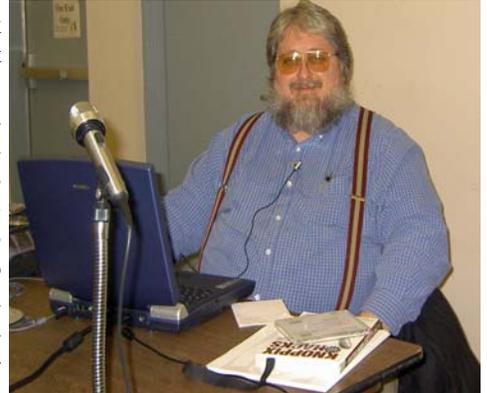
- Submitted by Joe Budelis

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President's Letter

Our next meeting is February 14th. The same day as Valentines Day. This means some of you may have to decide whether to take your special person to dinner or come to the meeting. Or you can try sending an electronic greeting card (like at www.hallmark.com) and see if you can get permission to come.

Joel May will be presenting a talk and demonstration of the Google search engine. Joel is both experienced in computers and in giving presentations. And maybe, if needed Joel will show us how to search for a Valentine's date (or a new mate if the electronic greeting card wasn't well received.)

- *Clarke Walker*

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TCP/IP and Networking Tools

by Vic Laurie, PPCUG

There are dozens of networking tools available for Windows XP. Most of these are specialized and are mainly of interest to professionals who are maintaining a large network. Many, however, are relevant to the Internet and some of these can be helpful to the average PC user. The tools of interest to the discussion here are a few of the TCP/IP utilities. (Go to reference 1 below for a complete list.) TCP/IP refers to the set of protocols (Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol) that are used for Internet connections and on most networks. Discussing TCP/IP is beyond the scope of this article but fortunately, it is not necessary to understand the gory details of TCP/IP in order to make practical use of the tools considered here.

All of the tools are run by opening a Command window and entering the appropriate command. Go to **Start-Run** and enter "cmd" to open a Command window.

Windows IP Configuration Tool (ipconfig)

The Windows IP Configuration tool (ipconfig) is the command-line equivalent of the accessory "Winipcfg" that was present in Windows 9X/Me. It is used to display the TCP/IP network configuration values. To open it, enter "ipconfig" in the command prompt. If you are connected directly to the Internet, you will obtain your IP address. (For a discussion of what an IP is, see the previous article at http://vlaurie.com/computers2/Articles/Name.htm) Figure 1 shows the result for a broadband connection where the IP is assigned automatically. Here the IP is your computer's temporary address on the Internet.
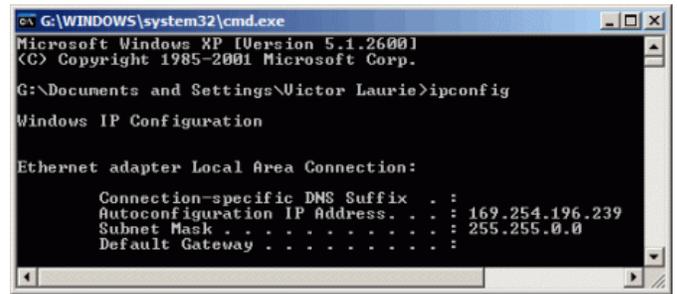
Figure 1. Window for IPCONFIG

If you are on a local area network using a router, the information is different. You do not obtain the IP corresponding to the network's address on the Internet. (To obtain the IP that the Internet sees, go to a source such as DSL Reports "Whois".) The IP given is the local address on the network. This information can be helpful in diagnosing network problems. Also listed is the "gateway" or router address on the local network. Figure 2 illustrates the result.
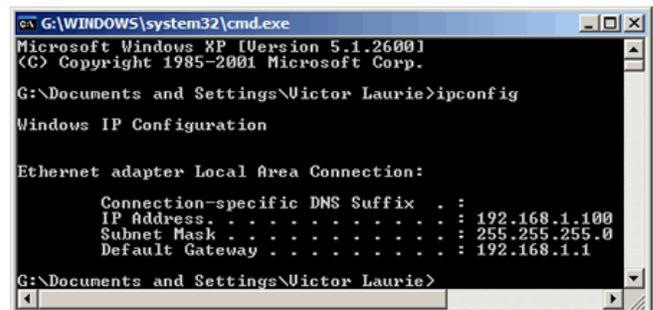
Figure 2 IPCONFIG window for a router connection

Switches for IPConfig

There are also a variety of switches for *ipconfig* that add functions. These are invoked by entering "ipconfig / {switch}". To obtain a list of switches, enter "ipconfig /?" or "ipconfig -?" The switches of most interest to everyday use are "release" and "renew". Note that IP addresses are typically assigned or "leased" for a period of time, often a day or more. It sometimes happens that IP addresses are no longer valid or are in conflict. Problems can often be solved by first releasing the IP address and then renewing it. Sometimes cable or DSL modems that seem to be disabled can be restored this way. If you travel and use broadband connections elsewhere, you will sometimes find this procedure of releasing and renewing the IP address to be necessary.

For a detailed output of network parameters, you can use the command "ipconfig /all". Unless you are experienced with networks, however, this may be more than you want to know.

Ping

Ping is an old Unix tool that has been around for a long time but many PC users are unfamiliar with it. Ping sends out a packet to a designated Internet

host or network computer and measures its response time. The target computer will return (hopefully) a signal. It is a way of determining the quality of your connection to another site. You will also receive an IP address that corresponds to the user-friendly type of URL. To use ping, open a command window (or DOS in Windows 9X/Me) and type: ping <hostname>. For example, to ping Dell enter "ping dell.com". Please note the use of a hostname, not a complete URL. The prefix "http://" is never used. Many sites also do not require "www". By convention, 32 byte packets will be transmitted four times. You will receive a screen output that looks like Figure 3
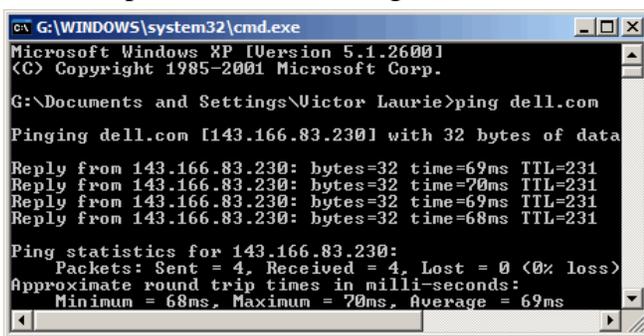

Figure 3. Output from "ping"

The screen tells me that the IP for *dell.com* is 143.166.83.230 (For the moment, at least-IPs can change.) It also tells me that the average round trip time for a packet was 69 milliseconds, which means I have a good connection to *dell.com*. Long reply times of several hundred milliseconds are indicative of a slow connection. Note that some major sites such as *microsoft.com* do not like being pinged and block pings. In that case you will get a "Request timed out" message.

In addition to being used on the Internet, "ping" is often used to test connections on local networks. More details can be found in reference 2 below.

Tracert

Tracert (trace route) is another old Unix tool and is related to Ping. The actual path between two computers on the Internet is not a straight line but consists of numerous segments or "hops" from one intermediate computer to another. Tracert shows each step of the path taken. It can be interesting to see just how convoluted it is. The times for each hop and the IP addresses for each inter-

mediate computer are displayed. Tracert shows up to 30 hops. It is convenient for finding if there is one particular segment that is causing a slow or bad connection. More information can be found in reference 3.

References

TCP/IP utilities

http://www.microsoft.com/resources/documentation/windows/xp/all/proddocs/en-us/tcpip_utils.mspx

How to use Ping to test a connection

http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/home/using/productdoc/en/default.asp?url=/windowsxp/home/using/productdoc/en/sag_TCPIP_pro_PingConnect.asp

Tracert

http://www.microsoft.com/resources/documentation/windows/xp/all/proddocs/en-us/tracert.mspx

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IRS and "Free File Alliance" Again Offer FREE Online Tax Preparation and Filing

By Ira Wilsker
APCUG Board of Directors

It's that time of year again. Our mailboxes are brimming with W-2's, 1099's, and other ubiquitous indications of our daily financial lives. Preparing our forms 1040, 1040A, and 1040EZ are typically not our favorite annual right of spring. This year, the fine folks at the IRS and their partners, the "Free File Alliance" are again offering their free online federal income tax preparation and electronic filing services. Unlike past years, where only selected groups of people, such as students or military, could utilize the free services, this year there are free services available for almost all federal tax filers.

The main IRS website at www.irs.gov has at the top: "Free File - Ever missed a good thing and regretted it? Don't miss Free File. Millions of eligible taxpayers can use Free File — a free online service that let's you prepare and file your tax return electronically. It's smart, free and fast. Don't miss it!" According to the IRS, about 6.5 million people took advantage of the opportunity last year.

The process is relatively easy. The first step is to enter the IRS Free File website at "www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp?" where the various filing services offered by the

Alliance can be viewed, and eligibility for each can be determined. Eligibility determination for each service is the second step listed. Some of the 15 resources listed have a maximum "AGI" (adjusted gross income) ceiling. Others will only prepare forms 1040A or 1040EZ online, while some others will prepare taxes for residents of specific states. Other members of the Alliance will prepare and e-file taxes for free based on age, often under 25 or over 60, while others (such as H&R Block, TaxAct.com, and TurboTax for the Web) have no restrictions on who can use the free services, and are available to all. After the free preparer is selected, the user will be directed to a non-IRS website to complete the online preparation. The taxes are calculated, and proper forms are electronically filed with the IRS using a secured link. An acknowledgement is automatically generated via email notifying the filer that the return has been accepted or rejected.

The IRS notes that several of these companies also offer a fee-based online preparation service, and the only way to be assured to get these services for free is to link to them directly from the IRS Free File website, and not directly to the company websites. It should also be noted that these companies do not generally prepare state income taxes for free, and that there may be a charge for preparing state income taxes, but users referred from the IRS site are under no obligation to incur any tax preparation expenses for the preparation and filing of federal income taxes, provided they were originally eligible for the services.

Electronic filing by these free resources, or other similar commercial resources, has several advantages, according to the IRS. Some of these benefits are that it takes less time to prepare online than on paper, refunds can be processed much faster, returns are more accurate (provided accurate information is entered), and acknowledgement of receipt is generated so you know the return has been filed, and other tangible and intangible benefits. The IRS also has a statement that the software used by the providers for the free service is "comparable" to the software used by these preparers for their commercial (paid) clients.

The IRS is well aware that not all taxpayers have internet access, so it is arranging for such groups as churches and community associations to provide the internet access so as to promote the widest possible use of the free service. The IRS is also supporting such volunteer groups as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE).

Some individuals will justifiably question their personal privacy when entering this data onto a private company's website. The IRS has approved the security and privacy policies of the participating companies, and all of the providers must also have a recognized third-party privacy and security certification. Information provided to these companies can only be used for the preparation of income tax forms, and no other purposes not explicitly authorized by the user. The IRS will monitor all of the providers for com-

pliance, and the companies are required to promptly alert the IRS if any privacy or security problems are encountered. The IRS has set up an email address with the Free File Alliance at helpdesk@speedymail.com, where anyone can get technical assistance about the Free File website, or resolve issues with any of the listed providers. Any user who is not satisfied with the selected free provider is free to try another provider that he may qualify for.

The Free File Alliance is a result of the IRS' Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, which in part has a goal that 80% of all returns are to be filed electronically (e-filed) by 2007, and requires the IRS to make available to taxpayers free online filing options.

Last year (2004) saw 6.5 million e-filed returns, and the IRS hopes to triple the number this year. That still leaves many millions more that will have to e-file in order to reach the 2007 goal. The 15 companies listed that are providing free filing services are a good step on the path of meeting the IRS' goals.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

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Link of the Month
Trial software from Microsoft: http://www.microsoft.com/products/info/render.aspx?view=22&type=std&content=22/EvalCenterHome&ss=22/xslt/campaignhome

Have you discovered a useful link. Then share it with the members of the P PC UG.

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Bluetooth

By Joe Schmitt
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What is this "Bluetooth" I keep hearing about and do I need it?

Whenever something like a mouse or keyboard is connected to your computer, there are protocols and standards in place so that the computer can talk to the keyboard and it operates properly. The same scenario also applies to anything that connects to a computer or other electronics around your home. Your TV needs to know how the cable signal is formatted so that you get the sound and video. Bluetooth is a wireless protocol that allows electronics to communicate. Bluetooth goes beyond your computer to integrate electron-

ics across a wide spectrum. Bluetooth operates on two levels. The first is that all Bluetooth devices operate on the same radio frequency and speak the same language. Secondly they all share the same procedures in exchanging data and verifying the data is received. That is sort of like being able to speak the language and know the customs so no one misunderstands.

Bluetooth is a standard developed and employed by close to 1,000 different companies. This protocol would allow you to take a cell phone, get into a car with a Bluetooth radio and transfer the call to the stereo so your hands are left free. Later you could take that same phone and possibly transfer contact information from the phone to a computer. This is just one example. Bluetooth can be found in phones, keyboards, PDA's, and even stereo headphones. It could potentially show up anywhere you have a wire to connect two devices now.

Is this something you need? Just like anything else with computers, the answer depends on whether or not it meets your needs. Do you need a Bluetooth keyboard or mouse? Not if the wires don't bother you. Could you use it to link your PDA or Pocket PC to the computer? Yes and that might be the most likely scenario that Bluetooth would aid you in. If you are the type of person that likes portable gadgets as much as your computer, Bluetooth may be something to take a serious look into. For more information on the standard itself and some of the products that use it, check out the following sites: www.bluetooth.com and www.bluetooth.org

All unattributed articles are solely the fault of the editor.

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