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PPCUG NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP



Jen Clausen

Monday, July 11, 2005

Computers can sometimes be a cruel game of hide and seek. *Smart Computing* knows how you feel so ready or not here we come! This July, Jen from *Smart Computing* is on her way to guide us through *Smart Computing* and put an end to the nerve racking games of computer hide and seek.

Jen will give a live demonstration of www.SmartComputing.com to show how you can put these powerful tools to work for you!

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.*

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Coming Events:

August 8 —Sol Libes on Creating an Animated Slide Show
September 12—Chris Jarocha-Ernst on Creating Web Pages with Netscape Composer
September 13 —Ira Fuchs on Open Source Software
October 17—TBA

About PPCUG

General Meetings

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

7:00 PM: Social Time / Tech Corner

7:30 PM: Meeting comes to Order

7:45 PM: Featured presentation

For information about upcoming meetings or joining PPCUG, see:

<http://www.ppcug-nj.org>

or email us at:

ppcug.nj@gmail.com

(Please include "OK" in the subject line.)

Board Meetings

Board meetings are open to all members. Notice of an upcoming meeting will be posted on the web site.

Board Members

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2005 Annual Dues

Dues are \$40 per calendar year with a mailed newsletter or \$20 per year with online access to the newsletter. New members pay \$3.25 or \$1.75 per month times the number of months remaining in the current year.

Minutes of the June Meeting

Clarke started the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

There were several questions about viruses and what can be done to prevent them from infecting your computer. Several members recommended ZoneAlarm.

Doug Dixon gave the feature presentation on audio and video players. His presentation can be found at: <http://www.manifest-tech.com/>

Doug brought some of his latest "toys" to the meeting. They included:

- Sony VAIO PCG model laptop
- Apple iPod Shuttle
- SanDisk Sansa e130
- Truly MP310
- Apple iPod Mini
- Apple iPod Photo
- Creative Zen Portable Media Center
- SmartDisk Flash Trax XT
- Kyocero Phone running PalmOS
- Samsung SCH-a 890
- Sony PlayStation Portable



Doug Dixon



Members





President's Message

In September we will be having two meetings! We were trying to schedule Ira Fuchs for October but could not find a date so we have teamed up with the Princeton Mac User Group. They meet on the 2nd Tuesday at Jadwin Hall on the campus of Princeton University (<http://www.princeton.edu>).

Since we already made arrangements with Chris Jarocha-Ernst to talk on September 12th we are going ahead with the normal meeting night.

We need speakers for our October 17th and November 14th meetings. Please let Sol Libes, sol@libes.com, know if you wish to give a presentation or know some one to recommend.

- Clarke Walker



VoIP for Dummies! How to choose the best VoIP Plan

by Joe Budelis
Member of the Princeton PC User Group

This is a brief description of how today's VoIP systems work and pointers as to how one can go about choosing an appropriate VoIP plan. The slides accompanying this article are on-line at "[VoIP for Dummies](http://shopforld.com/VoIPforDummies.php)" (<http://shopforld.com/VoIPforDummies.php>).

VoIP for the residential or small-to-medium business user is the use of a broadband internet connection for phone service rather than the use of POTS (the Plain Old Telephone System). VoIP is also known as broadband phone service, I-Net telephony, Internet phone service and IP Phone service. Normally, VoIP shares your broadband internet connection with other devices via a router. A Digital Terminal Adapter (dta) is the interface between the router and a normal analog telephone. So, you plug a dta into your router and your normal phone into the dta. Alternatively, some VoIP plans use an IP phone in which one device contains all the functions of the dta and a phone.

Initially, VoIP was implemented PC-to-PC. Some plans still provide that option. However, when VoIP was first attempted some years ago, voice quality was poor. Improvements in technology have greatly improved voice quality to where most people can not tell the difference most of the time. In fact, the regular phone companies are routing some of their POTS calls via VoIP systems.

Some advantages of VoIP are low cost toll calls and phone portability – you can take your dta and thus your phone number with you to anywhere that you have access to a broadband internet connection. There is also a low cost to have phone numbers in other toll areas. For example, let's say you have a VoIP number in your home town in Central NJ but that you have either a group of relatives or business contacts in Seattle. You could obtain a virtual VoIP number for as little as \$1.99 per month that rings at your NJ VoIP number. It could be a local number in Seattle so that all those in Seattle who call you will be making a local call. Additionally, many features that your local phone company charges for are available at low cost or no additional cost on a VoIP system since they are provided via software. Incidentally, that also means that they can be updated or upgraded by a simple software download from the web.

Some disadvantages of VoIP are your phone is down if the broadband connection is down and also, your phone adapter occasionally needs to be rebooted. Incidentally, since most VoIP plans provide voice mail at no additional cost, if the broadband connection is down, incoming calls will go to your voice mail. Someone who has never used a PC would probably find the rebooting to be very annoying. My experience is that my VoIP adapter has to be rebooted perhaps once a month on the average – more so when you are making network changes and less if your network is very stable. Of course, sometimes the router also needs to be rebooted, again mainly when network changes are made. Although at this time, most VoIP plans have CallerID available at no cost, CallerID with name is “coming”. Normal 911 service is not available.

Not all VoIP vendors offer 911 service and, when they do, you pay extra for it. You must enter the location where you will be using the dta into a database. Although it will probably be changing soon, right now, except for Packet8 Enhanced 911, VoIP vendors send 911 calls to administrative lines rather than to the emergency numbers that normal POTS 911 calls go to. An eventual solution to the dta location problem is probably to use GPS in the dta to identify its location. Some cell phones are being built today to provide 911 location info in that manner. The FCC recently passed a ruling that requires VoIP service providers to provide normal 911 service as a part of their standard service by October 2005.

You can use the plan comparison spreadsheet at <http://shopforld.com/VoIP.xls> to compare VoIP plans. Although only certain plans are listed, you can add additional columns and list other plans that you may wish to compare. Note that the purple cells denote aspects that some users find to be especially desirable about some plans. The Freedom Unlimited plan is highlighted because that plan is very popular giving unlimited calling to any phone numbers in the USA or Canada for \$19.95 per month. More info on any of these plans can be found by clicking the links at the top of the spreadsheet. If you have any questions, you are invited to E-Mail Joe Budelis at his E-Mail ID on the PPCUG members' page.



Link of the Month

Want to check the credentials of your doctor? For doctors registered in New Jersey go to:

<http://12.150.185.184/dca/index.jsp> and
<http://www.state.nj.us/lps/ca/bme.htm>

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



Simple Password Practices Keep PC and Online Data Secure

by Gabe Goldberg
APCUG Advisor and Columnist, AARP Computers and Technology Website

Password dilemma: We can't live an online life without them, but if they're too numerous to remember, they encourage unsafe practices. What to do?

First, basics. A password is just the key that opens a computer lock. It may gain access to a newspaper's online edition, protect banking records, let you bid on auctions, open a frequent-flyer account, or do any-

thing requiring verified identity.

Some Web sites assign passwords; most allow choosing them. Rules for selecting passwords are easy to find but are often impractical. Don't use easily guessed familiar names or words; use letters and numbers and special characters? OK. Avoid anything related to facts about yourself? Makes sense. Don't share passwords with anyone? Good advice. Change passwords periodically? Oops, it's a memory test [<http://www.evalu8.org/staticpage?page=review&siteid=8906>]. Use unique passwords everywhere? Hm, that takes a *lot* of passwords. Don't write them down or store them in a computer file? Tilt!

Maintaining passwords is a nuisance. So some people use one password for everything -- a bad idea, since sharing or compromising one access opens them all. Password hierarchies are common: use one password for financial matters, another for commerce, and one for trivials such as newspaper sites. That avoids revealing your sensitive e-mail/password combination to junk Web sites.

But don't use a common password for all e-commerce sites (www.amazon.com, www.buy.com, etc.) since they're occasionally hacked. And treat sites like PayPal as financial rather than e-commerce. And don't just guess which password you used on a site; some sites lock accounts after just a few failed log-ins.

As passwords proliferate, it's common to store them in a computer file. And having too many site-assigned passwords guarantees the need to record them. But please, don't call the file "passwords.txt" and don't use the word "password" in it. The paranoid and geeky encrypt such files, but that risks losing the file by forgetting the encryption key.

You can print and save registration pages, but that leads to bulky files, cumbersome to search and requiring updating. Some people use an address book or print lists of sites and accounts, then handwrite passwords. But that still needs updating, and can be lost, destroyed, or found by someone untrustworthy.

If you have multiple email addresses, note which you use on a given site, since that's often the key for logging in or receiving password reminders.

Hackers use special software to attack logins, applying dictionary word lists and other guessing techniques. Passwords are described as "strong" (hard to crack) if they have at least eight characters, include upper/lower case and punctuation characters and at least one digit. So even if you use a memory aid for remembering passwords -- such as words from a poem -- convert them to strong passwords in a way that only you will know.

High-tech devices can add security, but they're usually used only in business settings; they include biometric devices which check fingerprints or eye structure and random logon-key generators.

Software password managers are more practical. These record and secure passwords and then auto-fill online logins. Good ones offer a "don't remember/don't ask" option to avoid recording info about sensitive sites. Encryption is desirable but not mandatory; it should be possible to secure the password manager itself with a master password.

Many managers are free, some are bought, and common software such as Web browsers and e-mail clients often includes it. Google returns many hits related to "password manager" and classy software site Tucows [www.tucows.com] numbers 300 such tools. Before installing one, make sure it supports your

software applications, especially if they're non-Microsoft.

Many people don't secure home computers -- but consider cleaners, workers, friends wandering through, perhaps even having permission to use the computer. Suddenly security becomes more appealing. If you handle money online, check banking/financial sites occasionally for unauthorized transactions.

Remember that you may occasionally need access to secure sites while away from your computer. You can copy passwords to a thumbdrive or PDA or simply print them, but remember that they're powerful keys and must be protected. Before traveling, check your passwords so you're not surprised on the road. If you leave your computer running, you can access it remotely via tools such as GoToMyPC.

On business-owned PCs, separate personal from work-related material. Determine whether your office has policies for personal computer use and monitoring of computer activity. Some businesses install key-stroke loggers which can capture passwords before they're encrypted. And remember that system administrators can often defeat security measures as part of their job, so you may not want to store sensitive personal material at work.

Work and home PCs both need disaster preparation, so family members or colleagues can access what's needed in an emergency. Work-related passwords and instructions can be stored securely so they're available but can't be secretly used.

For home computers and facilities such as e-mail and finance, remember that many ISPs and companies have privacy policies prohibiting revealing information to family members, even in cases of illness or death. Instructions and important passwords should be stored with essential family records. Note that changing situations may require special care -- for example, a divorce might motivate tight security.

This article appeared originally on AARP's Computers and Technology Web site, [www.aarp.org/computers]. (c) AARP 2004/2005.



Freecycle Network Offers Never-Ending Garage Sale (And It's All Free!)

by Gabe Goldberg
APCUG Advisor and Columnist, AARP Computers and Technology Website

"It's not easy being green", sang Kermit the green Muppet frog. But it's getting easier, as people, corporations, non-profit organizations, and government agencies recognize benefits of conserving and recycling resources of all sorts.

There have always been opportunities such as garage sales, flea markets, and thrift shops for casual/local exchanges of goods. Most of us have likely both bought and sold: giving new life to things we've enjoyed but no longer need, cashing in gifts we can't quite imagine using, and finding economical goods courtesy of neighbors and charitable organizations.

Before we recently moved [http://www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/life_online/Articles/a2005-01-05-preserving_tech_moving.html], my wife and I took the opportunity to get rid of anything we thought was surplus. Fortunately, we beat the year-end crush at places like Salvation Army. But in December I did see 18-wheelers being loaded with goods from people who suddenly remembered the tax deduction for making such donations to charitable organizations. And I wondered how much of the tonnage being hauled would actually be sold and reused.

As in many other areas, the Internet lends new sparkle and efficiency to an old idea: using things until they're completely worn out. It's really true that one person's junk can be another person's treasure. In fact, the worldwide Freecycle(tm) Network [www.freecycle.org] offers goods at the Internet's favorite price (at least for buyers): free! Perhaps best of all, the Network offers in-person one-to-one transfers making it likely that goodies will go places where they're cherished.

The Web site notes:

The worldwide Freecycle Network is made up of many individual groups across the globe. It's a grass-roots movement of people who are giving (and getting) stuff for free in their own towns. Each local group is run by a local volunteer moderator (good people). Membership is free.

The Freecycle Network was started in May 2003 to promote waste reduction in Tucson's downtown and help save desert landscape from being taken over by landfills. The Network provides individuals and non-profits an electronic forum to "recycle" unwanted items.

Freecycling is interesting because, while it could only be done on the Internet, it has a very local focus. That is, while Web sites and discussion mailing lists draw worldwide clientele, physical transfer of free goods is constrained to relatively small areas.

So Freecycle operates as locally oriented mailing lists. For example, in the Washington, DC region, there's a huge list for the central city (one of the top ten lists with more than 6,000 people), and many suburbs have their own lists with dozens or hundreds of subscribers.

The main Freecycle Web site lists rules and etiquette, which are echoed by welcome messages to new subscribers. It's all simple and reasonable: Goods offered must be available for pickup in the local area; stick to recycling, avoid politics, spam, and off-topic messages; begin all e-mail subject lines with one of the words OFFER/TAKEN/WANTED/RECEIVED

Rules such as "Keep it free, keep it legal, keep it safe for all ages" prohibit offering or requesting items such as guns, prescription drugs, "adult" material, alcohol, and cigarettes. Pets are OK, though. Only free and physical stuff is allowed; barter/exchanges/sales are barred, as are services offered or wanted.

I'm told that the list is best read in individual messages rather than digests (which collect dozens of messages into one e-mail) since offered items are often snatched up in just a few minutes. A reply in five minutes might be too late!

Messages are transmitted by the Yahoo! Groups Web site [groups.yahoo.com] so list archives can be searched. This allows making sure that no TAKEN or RECEIVED has been sent for the OFFER or WANTED you're about to answer.

Donors can decide which request gets the goods. First-reply-wins is a fine approach, but some decide based on why a person needs something. Businesses can use Freecycle to dispose of goods -- for example computing equipment that's usable but not marketable. A company with 25 monitors might offer them to a Freecycle list -- perhaps specifying minimum pickup of five. So smaller companies, recycling organizations, or community-minded individuals could collect and redistribute them where they're needed.

A very unscientific analysis of about 40 postings divided into 16 OFFERs, 12 TAKENs, 10 WANTEDs, and two RECEIVEDs -- a very respectable success rate for OFFERs and WANTEDs! As of when I'm writing this, more than 2,000 large and small communities have Freecycle groups with more than 700,000 members. And the Web site gives step-by-step instructions for starting one where there is none. Go forth and Freecycle!

This article appeared originally on AARP's Computers and Technology Web site, [www.aarp.org/computers]. (c) AARP 2004/2005.



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