PPCUG*NEWS*

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Application Picks for the Digital Home

Dave Whittle

Monday, April 10, 2006

In the ideal digital home, PCs and consumer electronic devices are not only protected against Internet security threats, but work together to deliver digital media such as pictures and video and music to the parts of your home where you want it.

Dave will introduce some of his favorite technologies, products, and services that solve real problems and can help make life a little bit, or a lot better, for each of us. "Whittle's Picks" are hidden gems from companies large and small, old and new, with outstanding, innovative offerings.

Dave's been a leader in the PC revolution since 1979, and an opinion-leader in the PC industry since his days as OS/2 Evangelist at IBM in the early '90s. Most recently, he's been writing for *Smart Computing*.

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 Schedule

April 21 - 23 - TCF'06 at the College of New Jersey
May 8 --------- Alfred Poor on Will your next computer be HDTV?
June 12 ------- Joel May on Understanding eXcel
July 10 -------- Paul Kurivchack on Microsoft's next OS— Vista
August 14 ---- Martin Mosho on How to Start a Successful eBay Business

Minutes of the March Meeting

The meeting started at 7:30 p.m. by President Clarke Walker.

Martin Mosho had to cancel his presentation because a college scheduled him to teach a class that evening.

So Clarke Walker pulled together a demonstration of some of his favorite applications. Read his article to get an overview of the applications.

We concluded the evening with a viewing of excerpts from the BBS Documentary. This is a fascinating documentary about the age of the BBS. You can find more information at http://www.bbsdocumentary.com/.

Clarke Walker by Judge Landis

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PICTURES OF THE MARCH MEETING

Sol Libes by Judge Landis

Help Wanted
Secretary

The group is in need of a Secretary to take minutes of the meetings. Also to read and respond to club email. Please see Joe Budelis for more information.

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President's Message

At the meeting we decided not to run the package pick-up area at the Trenton Computer Festival this year. A thank you to those who offered to help but we did not have enough volunteers..

The TCF is three days long this year. Friday will be for a Professional Conference. The usual lectures and sales will take place on Saturday and Sunday. The dates are April 21 to 23, 2006 and more info can be found at: http://tcf-nj.org/

- Clarke Walker

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Link of the Month

Kim Goldenberg suggests "mike's list" at www.mikeslist.com.

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

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AN ASSORTMENT OF TIPS

by Vic Laurie., http://vlaurie.com
Member of the Princeton PC Users Group

Normally, I try to write an article centered on one or two themes. But there are thousands of tips and a large number of them do not fit so readily into a particular category. This time I am going to present an assortment from some of the tips that I find helpful.

How to get information about your system

I often help people with computer problems and very frequently it turns out that they know very little about what is actually on their computer. If you want to know things such as how much RAM you have, what hardware and software are installed, and many other interesting details about your PC, you can use a Windows accessory called *System Information*. On most XP systems it can be found in **Start-All Programs-Accessories-System Tools**. Another way to open System Information is to enter "msinfo32″ in **Start-Run**. This also works in Windows 98/Me computers.

When System Information opens, it will show you a system summary with a number of useful entries. It will also have detailed information about these major categories:

- Hardware Resources
- Components
- Software environment
- Internet Settings
- Office Applications (if installed)

How to alphabetize the Programs and Favorites lists

A surprising number of PC users are unaware of the simple method that is available to keep the **Start-All Programs** list in alphabetical order. As new programs are installed, they are often tacked onto the end of the list and after a while the list becomes jumbled. To keep things neat, open the **All Programs** list and right-click on any entry. The context menu that appears will contain an entry "Sort by Name". Click that and the list will be alphabetized. Folders will be listed first.

A very similar operation can keep your Favorites list in order. In Internet Explorer, open the Favorites menu and right-click on any entry. Here too, the context menu will contain an entry "Sort by Name". In Firefox open the Bookmarks menu and the procedure is the same.

Watch out for differently formatted diskettes

If you have ever tried to use an A: drive diskette formatted in Windows 98/Me to boot into Windows 2000/XP, or vice versa, you will have encountered the fact that the boot sectors of a formatted diskette are not the same for all Windows systems. The boot code of a DOS/Win9x/ME diskette loads and executes the IO.SYS file whereas the boot process of Windows 2000/XP involves the NTLDR file. Many preformatted diskettes have DOS formatting and will not work as a XP startup disk unless reformatted in XP.

Screen captures or screenshots

Sometimes you might like to make a snapshot of what appears on your computer screen. Maybe you want a picture of a complicated error message to send to a technician. Or maybe you want to show someone a picture of a particular feature of a program. Whatever your reason, there is a readily available built-in way to make a screenshot of the display on a Windows computer. It is an old trick but, nonetheless, it isn't as widely known as you might think.

To capture the complete screen display, press the *Print Screen* (or *PrtScr*) key. Then open the Windows accessory *Paint*. Generally Paint can be opened by going to **Start-All Programs-Accessories**. When Paint is open, go to the **Edit** menu and click "Paste". An image of your screen should appear. Next open the **File** menu and click "Save As". Choose a name for the file and the place where you want it saved. Generally, it is probably better to save as the file type JPEG. The default file type is a 24-bit bitmap but that will be a much larger file than a JPEG. To capture only the active window and not the whole screen, press the keyboard combination *Alt+Print Screen*. Then use Paint as previously described.

Actually, you do not have to use Paint if you prefer something else. Since the screen capture is an image saved in Clipboard, you can paste into an application of your choice. For example, you can paste into a Microsoft Word document or PowerPoint slide.

Large hard drive support

Hard drives keep getting bigger and 200+ GB drives are now common. However, if you have an older computer, you may not want to rush out and buy a big hard drive. Older systems may have trouble recognizing drives that are over 137 GB. The original design specification for the ATA interface only provided 28-bits for addressing drives. Newer computers have 48-bit Logical Block Addressing (LBA) but older BIOSes will need to be upgraded or some sort of drive overlay used. Also Windows operating sys-

tems prior to Windows XP SP1 (or Windows 2000 with Service Pack 3) do not support 48-bit addressing although some Intel chip sets can be upgraded for Windows 98/Me systems.

Finding a lost mouse pointer

When I am using a laptop with a pointing stick or a touch pad, I sometimes lose the pointer because it goes somewhere off the screen. The pointer can also get obscured when using certain graphics programs. Windows XP has a mouse locator setting that can be useful in these situations. Go to **Control Panel-Printers and Other Hardware-Mouse**. In the Mouse Properties dialog box click the tab "Pointer Options". At the bottom of the window that opens, there is an entry, "Show location of pointer when I press the CTRL key". (The wording is a little misleading. It should say "when I press and *release* the CTRL key".) Putting a check there will activate this feature. The only drawback is that using the CTRL key for other reasons may also flash the pointer location.

Use Limited Accounts in Windows XP

Many experts recommend that PC users not use the Administrator Account in Windows XP for daily use. Instead set up a limited account. By using a limited account you take out some insurance against an infection by a worm or Trojan. If you do get infected, the limited account cuts down the damage that can be done. The security columnist Roger Grimes states that "70 to 90 percent of all current malware threats would fail to work if the end-user executing them did not belong to the local administrators group".

To set up a limited account go to Control Panel-User Accounts. When you set up an account, it is also a good idea to use a password to protect it.

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CLARKE'S MARCH 2006 PRESENTATION AT THE P PC UG

by Clarke Walker, Clarke-Walker@msn.com
President of the Princeton PC Users Group

Here is a summary of the applications I showed at the March 2006 Meeting.

Yahoo! Widgets

Yahoo! Widgets is a collection of applets that run on your desktop to deliver information to you. The Yahoo! Widget engine can be downloaded for free from http://widgets.yahoo.com/download/

From here you can install the engine and some sample widgets. There are hundreds of widgets and you can create your own in case you can not find something you like. Currently I have running Moon Phase, SysMonitor and Yahoo! The Weather.

Yahoo! provides a "Heads Up Display" to temporarily hide the desktop making it easier to see the widget displays. This is great because my windows desktop is already cluttered with icons.

There is also a version for computers running Mac OS X 10.3 or newer. (In case you want to downgrade.)

Microsoft Movie Maker and PowerPoint

A quick way to make titles and credits is to use PowerPoint to create slides. Then "Save As" the slides as JPEG File Interchange Format (*.jpg) files. They will be put into a subfolder with the same name as your PowerPoint file. To make it eas-

ier I use "Title" as the name of the file and the individual slides are then out in the subfolder "Title". I have a template I use for these slides to make this process easy and consistent.

Then "Import into Collections" the slide files into Movie Maker, http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/updates/moviemaker2.mspx. Once done and positioned on the timeline create a movie using "Send to DV camera". You can also "Save to my computer" the movie and use it later in producing a video.

The resulting title and credit screens are a little crude but this is a fast way to produce them. Movie Maker and similar application have their own title and credit features but they can be cumbersome to use and difficult to reuse.

DVD Architect Studio 3.0

I have tried several video production software packages but I have found DVD Architect of Sony's Movie Studio + DVD the easiest and yet powerful. It is also reasonably priced and often available with a rebate. This is a "pro-consumer" product. It has more functionality than the entry level consumer products but lacks the sophisticated features that professional use to make theatrical movies.

With the Movie Studio + DVD package you get the Video Capture product to capture video from your camera and the Vegas Movie Studio for video editing. These are both easy to use products with many extra features to produce good looking videos. One nice feature I appreciate is they give an estimate as how long it will take to do the current operation. This way I know if I should sit and wait or go take a nap or come back much later. The Capture product lets you know how much space in minutes you can store on your hard drive. It also allows you to spread the video file over multiple drives. And it lets you know if and how many dropped frames there were.

The main purpose of DVD Architect Studio is to write video to DVD disks. It offers pre-built themes and the capability to create your own themes and menus. Like the other products it gives an estimate as to how long it will take to create the DVD. And if you later make a change to the layout it will try and reuse the intermediate files.

Sony offers trials of this and other products at: http://www.sonymediasoftware.com/download/default.asp

Google Earth

There are three versions of Google Earth. The free version (http://earth.google.com/download-earth.html), the Plus version and the Professional version. The Plus version adds the ability to import data from a GPS and spreadsheets. This version requires an annual fee. Google Earth Pro is for professionals and commercial applications and has a significant fee attached to it.

Google Earth has many features but the coolest feature is the fly over for trips from one location to another.

HARD DISK DISASTERS

by Dick Maybach, N2nd@att.net
Member of the Brookdale Computer User Group, New Jersey, http://www.bcug.com

Hard disk failure is the most serious PC problem, because it jeopardizes all your data. Even if everything else in your PC dies, if your hard disk is good, you can just move it to a new machine and be back in business as though nothing had happened.

The first problem is to recognize hard disk failure. Look for one or more of the following symptoms.

- A squealing or clicking noise – you will have to open your system case to find where the noise is coming from. Diskette and CD-ROM drives and fans can produce similar noises.
- A longer than usual time to boot up.
- A longer than usual time to open a folder or file.
- Spontaneous file or folder name changes.
- Frequent error messages.

- Missing or corrupted files or folders.
- Frequent "blue screens of death".

If these begin to appear, immediately copy your data files (most likely your *My Documents* folder) to another device, preferably one with removable media, such as a CD-ROM or a DVD. Do not turn off your PC and do not spend time trying to diagnose the problem before saving your data. Every second you delay increases the likelihood that more data will be lost.

Clearly, the best defense is to back up your data before you have a problem. However, few people do this, and even if you do, it may have been some time since your last backup.

If your hard disk fails before you can save your data, all is not lost. If your data is very valuable, for example if it's customer data, you can send your disk to a commercial firm that specializes in data recovery. This service will cost from several hundred to several thousand dollars, but usually there is no fee unless they are at least partially successful. If you decide to do this, shut of your PC immediately and contact the firm for instructions. If your data is worth less than this amount, there are two things you can try that may work.

- Remove the hard drive from the system unit and give it a light tap by holding a screwdriver by its blade and tapping the unit with the handle. Reinstall the hard drive and reboot.

Remove the drive and place it in a freezer for several minutes, until it is cold to the touch. Reinstall and reboot.

If either of these works, move your data to a safe place immediately.

If you have only a partial disk failure, save as much data as you can; then try the following.

- Restart your PC, but before Windows boots get into the BIOS setup utility. If you watch the screen carefully, you should see directions on how to do this. Often you will press F2 or F10. Look for an area called Utilities or something similar and run any drive diagnostics available.

- Run CHKDSK. (Click on *Start*, then on *Run…*, and at the prompt type "chkdsk x: /r", where x: is the drive in difficulty. If c: is problem drive, you will probably see a message that chkdsk can't check the drive now, but will offer to check it the next time you restart. Answer "y" and reboot.

Run diagnostics supplied by your drive manufacturer, or if you don't have one, use Western Digital's Data Lifeguard Diagnostics, available free from http://westerndigital.com. Versions are available for both Windows and DOS.

You can take some simple steps to prolong the life of all your PC components.

- Keep the system unit clean, especially if it sits on the floor. Once every month or two open the system case and remove any dust and debris with a vacuum. I prefer this to compressed air, which just moves the dirt to a new resting place.

- Don't move your PC while it's operating; especially, don't jar it.

Use a power surge protector or preferably an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). The latter are widely available for $100 or so. Besides reducing stress on your components, one of these will save your data if the power fails. I always had a UPS at work, and every so often I would see the lights blink and hear streams of profanity from other offices whose occupants did not have one.

Modern PC components are quite reliable, and the chances are that you will replace your computer before anything fails. However, you should have a plan in case there is a problem. Similarly, the chances are that you will replace your car without ever having an accident yet you still wear a seatbelt, and carry insurance.

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Tip: Create an Icon for your hard drive

by Clarke Walker, Clarke-Walker@msn.com
President of the Princeton PC Users Group

Ever want to create an icon for your disk drive? You probably never thought of doing so but it is easy and makes your hard drive unique.

Create a folder named "Autorun" at the root of your hard drive. Then open the standard Microsoft Paint application. As an example select the "text" tool and create an area of 32 by 32 pixels. You can use the magnifier to make it easier to see. Type in a few letters like your initials. The characters you type are turned into graphic objects so you may have to redo this until you get what you want. Try playing with different colors and fonts styles. Save the drawing in JPEG format with an extension of "ico" in the Autorun folder (example: AUTORUN\yourLOGO.ICO).

Use a text editor like Microsoft Notepad to create a file named AUTORUN.INF in the root directory of the hard drive with the following lines:

```
[autorun]
ICON=AUTORUN\yourLOGO.ICO
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When the hard drive is mounted on startup of your system the Autorun.Inf file will be read and the icon you create will appear next to the drive list.

Have fun!

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