PPCUG NEWS

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Understanding Excel - Tips, Tricks & Unused Features

Joel May

Monday, June 12, 2006, 7:30 p.m.

Excel is much more than rows and columns, formulas and lookups. It is capable of many tricks that most of us don't use and are even unaware of. In this presentation, Joel May will explore some of these underused features such as advanced charting, date arithmetic, filtering, pivot tables, scenarios and functions.

Joel has spent most of his adult life teaching. He holds a BS degree in Economics from Albright College and an MBA and PhD in Economics and Statistics from the University of Chicago. Since his retirement in 1995, he has volunteered his time teaching computer skills to senior citizens at the Ewing SeniorNet Computer Literacy Center, reading for the blind at the NJ Library for the Blind and Handicapped and singing in Princeton Pro Musica and the Hopewell Valley Community Chorus.

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

Minutes of the May Meeting

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

Alfred Poor talked about the current state of High Definition Television and tips on buying this kind of equipment. Alfred has a newsletter at http://hdtvprofessor.com/HDTVAlmanac/

Alfred Poor by Judge Landis

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Pictures from the May Meeting

by Judge Landis, judge@alumni.princeton.edu
Member of the Princeton PC Users Group

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

As I write this my daughter, Catherine, is in New Orleans helping to fix homes damaged by hurricane Katrina. When I offer her my digital camera to take with her she noted that she has seen many still pictures of the devastation and rebuilding. And asked if she could borrow the video camera to take some action pictures. It made sense to me so she took both with her. Thus I have included the following article on "Traveling with a Video Camcorder".

Back by popular demand is Joel May. This time he will be talking about "Understanding Excel - Tips, Tricks & Unused Features".

- Clarke Walker

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Link of the Month

I try to stay away from selecting commercial sites but since ABC will only offer their TV programs for free until the end of June I decide to include them. You will need a fast Internet connection. The picture quality is impressive.

http://dynamic.abc.go.com/streaming/landing

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

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Traveling With a Video Camcorder

by Joseph Asling., Jasling@pacbell.net
Video Project Coordinator of the Monterey Bay User's Group—PC www.mbug.org

Summer is coming and it's time to go somewhere interesting and photogenic. Many people carry cameras when they travel and not a few of us take camcorders. Here are a checklist and a few suggestions for coming back with better video.

Pre-Departure

Equipment Checkup - Make sure your camcorder is in good shape. Run a few minutes of tape and see that it looks and sounds OK, otherwise take it in for cleaning. Allow at least two weeks for turnaround.

Camcorder Size - If you haven't bought your camcorder yet, consider the following: if you plan to do candid shots of people, buy a small, unobtrusive camcorder. Not only will it fit better in your carry-on luggage, but it will attract less attention. Also, some museums allow them in where they will reject larger camcorders because the big ones look professional.

LCD Screen - I usually shoot through the viewfinder, but an LCD screen is useful.

Computer Connection - Make sure your camcorder has an IEEE-1394 ("Firewire") or USB2 connector, whichever you need to capture to your computer.

DVD vs Tape - Some newer camcorders record to a DVD instead of tape; since it is more difficult to do computer editing with these, I recommend a camcorder which uses mini-DV tape.

Filters - ALWAYS keep a filter on your lens – a scratched filter is cheaper than a scratched lens. A transparent or UV filter is fine for most uses; tinted lenses are of less use because the auto-white balance of the camcorder tries to compensate for it. For sunny days I like a circular polarizer to suppress reflections on glass and water and to make the sky appear bluer. It also doubles as a neutral density filter. Pay the extra for good double-coated glass filters.

Sunshade - If your camcorder has a sunshade with an atypical connector, buy a sunshade which screws onto the front of the filter (I use a round rubber collapsible one).

Camcorder Stand - Tripods are big, heavy, and slow to set up. A monopod gives you much of the stability of a tripod, and if you buy one with a quick-release extension it takes only five seconds to set up. Plus, it doubles as a walking stick on difficult terrain. Spend an extra $20 for a quick-release for the camcorder.

Lights - I don't recommend you travel with any lights. Unless you're on a professional shoot they aren't worth the trouble.

Tape Supply - Take plenty of tape – I take at least 10 hours' worth! Buy good quality brands such as **Sony** or **Panasonic** (people I trust have said bad things about **TDK**).

I buy Sony at *www.taperesources.com* but there are other reliable websites which will sell packs of five for as little as $3 per tape. (As an aside, NEVER record with the extended time setting on your camcorder – you may not be able to play it on any other camcorder.)

Head Cleaner - Carrying a head-cleaning tape is probably a good idea, although I've never had to use it in the field.

Batteries - If you run out of power you are going to be distinctly unhappy. Buy *at least* one high-capacity extra battery. And don't forget to pack your recharger. If you are going abroad make sure you have *two* plug adapters (research what type of adapter you need for where you'll be), and that your recharger is multi-voltage.

Headsets – These are nice to have but not essential. If you have a microphone monitor output, take a compact headset (like **Walkman** earphones) for monitoring music. Make sure the plug is compatible.

Weatherproofing - Bring some paper adhesive tape — if you are going to be in a dirty or sandy environment seal the tape door with it so you don't get sand into the works. If you may be in the rain figure on bringing some kind of plastic cover (maybe large plastic zip lock bags).

When You're There

Rule 1: tape is cheap! - If you *might* want a shot, shoot it! Every shot should be at least ten seconds long if possible and if you are going to zoom, shoot several seconds before and after the zoom. You'll thank yourself when you're editing.

When you put a fresh tape in your camera, run about a minute of "throwaway" video. Most dropouts occur at the beginning and the end of a tape, and some capture programs can't handle the first few seconds of a tape.

Watch the Background - Many a shot has been ruined by a telephone pole growing out of someone's head or a distracting item behind the subject. Often moving a few feet to one side will fix the problem. A corollary to this is to find a good angle: one with clear sight lines and no-one in the way. And don't get in the way yourself. Years ago, I was in Chichicastenango and a funeral procession happened by. The mourners stopped in front of the Church – and a German tourist with a big camcorder shouldered them out of the way and started videotaping the coffin and the deceased! I cheered when the locals drove him away with rocks.

Tricks for Big Crowds- If you are in a crowd which you can't see over, hoist the camcorder up on your monopod. If you open the LCD screen and tilt it down you can see what you're shooting (so, there *is* a use for that screen).

Tricks for the Kids - One more use for the LCD screen — see if you can reverse it so that the people you're shooting can watch themselves while you are recording. You'll get terrific reactions from kids.

Candid Camera - If you are trying to take candid shots, hold the camera at waist level and watch the subject through the LCD screen. Before you do that go into the menu and turn off the red recorder indicator light so your subject won't know you are recording. It doesn't always work — in Morocco, one sharp-eyed fellow noticed from 30 feet away what I was doing and came over with his hand out for money. I paid him, of course.

In the Rain - Check the lens frequently when shooting in the rain. Raindrops on your video are understandable but disconcerting.

Narration - If you are shooting something which needs describing, just dictate in a low voice while you shoot; your voice will be audible on the tape. Of course you'll have to cut out the audio when you edit, so you don't want to do this over anything you will want to hear as well as see.

Consider what you will say on the voiceover when you edit the video, and make sure you have names and events correctly. I write them down in a little journal every night.

Music - Think about the music you'll use with the video and record it if you hear local musicians. I have sometimes let a tape run most of an hour just to capture live music (another reason to have plenty of tape).

Background "Chatter" - When traveling with friends, I delicately remind them that anything they say will be picked up by the camcorder. It cuts down on extraneous conversation and four-letter words in your audio!

Documentation - Make sure you label each tape with the trip, location, and tape number. When you put it back in the plastic cover, slide the little switch to lock it so you can't accidentally record over it. I keep camcorder, tapes and critical accessories in my carryon baggage. The accessories I can't fit in the carryon go in the checked luggage.

X-Ray at Security - The X-ray machines at security checkpoints have never hurt my videotape, but I'm not sure about the more powerful X-rays of checked luggage.

Bon Voyage!

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AMD's Visionary Gamble

by Jim Hinwood, Ehinwood@msn.com
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We computer enthusiasts have been the spectators in what I like to think of as a grand race. Leaving all the David and Goliath analogies aside, I like to think of the computer revolution like a car race. Different technologies race around the track — if one pulls a little too wide on a turn, it falls behind, only to make it up on the straightaway later. One "spinout" and you can be permanently out of the race.

There have been some grand reversals in this past year, quite unlike what I've seen in any other business. Quick and decisive changes leading to *huge* differences in market share. When I first started to play with computer hardware, **Intel** was king. For 35 years **AMD** (Advanced Micro Devices) was the "Beta" to Intel's "VHS": a lot of people would only buy computers with Intel chips even though in many ways AMD was the better value. The problem that Intel ran into was the buildup of heat, and the gamble by AMD on the 64-bit processor. Intel ran their chips as close to 4 GHz as they could, but they couldn't seem to crack the 4 GHz ceiling. A lot of gamers did, by going to water cooling, but nobody in the mainstream wanted to deal with water cooling.

Then, multimedia computers came in as the next best thing. With **Microsoft** wanting to make headway into your living room, they came out with a new operating system, **XP Media Center**. Now we had an operating system strictly for a media center PC in your living room, but without a solution to the heat problem, we had water cooling, or a computer with a CPU fan that sounded like a leaf blower. You don't want to watch a movie when the computer running all of your media devices sounds like someone starting a two-cylinder motorcycle!

The other problem is obvious — you don't want laptops that will scorch the gonads off anybody foolish enough to use it on their lap (and eventually you won't be calling it a "laptop" anymore)! Intel found a solution in the **Pentium M** for the laptop, reducing clock speeds and heat, and increasing battery life. AMD focused on 64-bit computing. When AMD presented 64-bit architecture, there weren't going to be any applications to really take advantage of 64-bit computing for a long time and no operating system in sight, but the AMD chips had immediate and substantial gains in performance for gamers and they started to trounce the Intel chips in any performance face-off.

Also, clock speed doesn't remain as important when you have a 64-bit pipeline. Instead of continuing to increase clock speeds, 64-bit computing doubles the amount of data that can be processed per clock cycle. 64-bit architecture also means exponential amounts of memory that can be addressed. The best home computers can address 4 GB of RAM if the motherboard can handle it, but with 64-bit computing you can run 1 terabyte (1,000 GB of RAM). RAM is very fast and this adds substantial gains to the whole package. AMD then went to a true dual core processor which put two chip cores on the same die, the equivalent of two microprocessors in one. Then you need fewer clock cycles to process the same information — speed can remain the same with double the processing power and running 250 times the RAM.

With the addition of dual core processors and the expected increases in performance that come from splitting the processing of information between chips, AMD has again raised performance without increases in heat. These three things: 64-bit architecture, larger amounts of RAM, and splitting the processing between dual lower clock cycle cores have, for the moment, catapulted AMD from a distant second to an over 50 percent market share in personal computers. AMD is in first place for the first time in their 35-year history.

Does this mean the end for Intel? Not anytime soon, with Intel being seven times as large as AMD and with 34 billion dollars in revenue. Intel earns in 11 days what AMD will earn all year. Intel also sits on 14 billion dollars in cash, to AMD's 1.1 billion. This gives them a huge advantage in research and development and in building state-of-the-art production facilities. AMD's surge in market share is due as much to the stumbling of Intel as it is to its own genius. The only thing that seems to be holding AMD back is the refusal of **Dell** to use AMD chips. If consumer demand becomes great enough for AMD chips

and Dell makes a reversal, it could mean huge gains for AMD. It remains to be seen if Intel can soon regain the summit on which it once stood firmly!

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Excerpts from TechNews

by Sue Crane, Scrane5@socal.rr.com
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What's Your "Brain Age"?
If millions of Japanese are to be believed, it is the secret to a happy and healthy old age as millions of them take up Nintendo's brain training. Players have to complete puzzles as quickly and accurately as possible, including reading literary classics aloud, doing simple arithmetic, drawing, and responding rapidly to deceptively easy teasers using voice-recognition software. The player's "brain age" is then determined. The first in the English-language series of games, Brain Age, is due for its US release on April 17, followed by Big Brain Academy in May. Brain Training for Adults, a package of cerebral workouts aimed at the over-45s, is said to improve mental agility and even slow the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's disease and also proves addictive to over-45s anxious to ward-off old age.

Google Desktop 3 is a free, downloadable program that includes an option to let users search across multiple computers for files. The application automatically stores copies of files, for up to a month, on Google servers. From there, copies are transferred to the user's other computers for archiving. The data is encrypted in transmission and while stored on Google servers. The Electronic Frontier Foundation has urged consumers to boycott the software, warning that Google could be forced to turn over the data to the government.

Internet Usage
Nearly one-third of American Internet users go online just for fun rather than to check e-mail, read news or use a search engine according to Deborah Fallows, senior research fellow at the nonpartisan Pew Internet & American Life Project, which examines the social impact of the Internet. A survey of 1,931 Internet users found 30 percent of respondents said they went online "for no particular reason" on the previous day. The survey also showed that 34 percent of online men were surfing for fun on an average day, compared with 26 percent of women. The Survey said that sending or receiving e-mail ranked highest with 52 percent of Internet users saying they did this on a typical day. Using a search engine ranked second with 38 percent, while reading news online was third with 31 percent.

Microsoft Office 12 (Office 2007) will offer new features, including an all-new user interface and new XML-based file formats, but no significant price increase. Office Standard will sell for $399, while Office Professional will sell for $499. Microsoft released an initial beta of Office 2007 in November 2005, with a second beta planned for this spring. The company is replacing its Student and Teacher edition with a $149 Home and Student edition that can be used by all home users and removing the Outlook and including OneNote. The Student and Teacher edition and the home version of Office can be used on up to 3 PCs in a home, but cannot be upgraded. The ProPlus version will include Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Access and Publisher plus the Office Communicator, InfoPath and server-based content management and forms management capabilities. Many of the new capabilities will be included in SharePoint Portal Server, which has been expanded to handle forms management, spreadsheet hosting and content rights management. The "Core CAL (client access license)" combines li-

censes for Windows Server, Exchange Server, Office SharePoint Portal Server and Systems Management Server. The new "Enterprise CAL" includes those licenses, as well as Microsoft Operations Manager, Microsoft Office Live Communications Server and rights-management and security products. Microsoft is also using the SharePoint brand for a new Web site development program. Microsoft Office SharePoint Designer 2007, like Microsoft's Expression Web Designer software is based in part on FrontPage. Office 12 is scheduled for release in fall 2006.

When Microsoft first talked about **Windows Live** in November, most of the "Live" products were MSN services that had been rebranded. Since then Microsoft has added more than a dozen new products under the Windows Live umbrella. MSN executive David Cole explains, "Microsoft's goal is to continuously update and launch products". Over the next 3-6 months, Microsoft expects to ship more Windows Live technology into the marketplace than during their entire 10-year OS history. Microsoft's new ad-serving engine, AdCenter, is at the heart of Windows Live. AdCenter draws on user demographic information to help drive more targeted marketing. Microsoft has even talked about using advertising as a way to pay for traditional desktop software. Meanwhile, the list of Windows Live services continues expanding to include all the basic portal services.

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