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PPCUG NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

Starting a Successful eBay Business

Martin Mosho

Monday, August 14, 2006, 7:30 p.m.

Martin will discuss starting a full, or part-time, successful eBay business.

Some of the topics he will cover are: Where to get merchandise? Obtaining liability protection from manufacturers. Ship products yourself or have the manufacturers do it? Martin will also cover the advantages of using eBay.

Martin has 40 years in Advertising Sales and Marketing management with several major publications and also owned a retail business and franchise.

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 Schedule

Sept. 11 -----John Goodwin on Building Your Own PC
Oct. 16 -----Vic Laurie on Searching the Web for Medical
Information
Nov. 13 -----Hank Kee on Wireless Network Security
Dec. 11 -----Member's Holiday Party
January 8, 2007 ----- 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.

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President:

Clarke Walker 609-883-5262

Vice-President:

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2006 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 July Meeting



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

Paul Kurivchack gave a live demonstration of the current Beta of Vista .

Paul Kurivchack by Judge Landis



Pictures from the July 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 *
* a Board Member for more information. *
*



President's Message

As a review of Paul's presentation on Vista I have included an article previewing the new operating system.

And as a prelude to September's talk I have included an article on building your own personal computer.

- Clarke Walker



Link of the Month

Shawn Novatt, Executive Producer of The WOR Morning Show—www.wwor710.com, suggested on air this web site that lets you see how popular a name is:

<http://www.babynamewizard.com/namevoyager/Inv0105.html>

Want to more know about Windows Vista? Then visit the official Microsoft site at:

<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/>

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



Windows Vista; A Preview

by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., bwsail@yahoo.com

Member of the Sarasota PCUG, Florida, www.spcug.org

As you all probably know by now, Vista is the next version of Windows that Microsoft will be releasing. It was supposed to be available this November, but it's release has been postponed to after January 1, 2007. However, that 2007 release date relates to the non-business versions of Vista. In other words, the versions that most of us will be using. The "enterprise" or business versions are expected to be shipped this November, unless something else slips.

As Dr. Goldstein pointed out in last month's "Bits & Bytes", there will be more than one "consumer" or Home edition. You should realize that the six versions of Vista that are expected are really only two more than are currently available in Windows XP. In XP you have the Home and Professional versions plus the Multimedia and Tablet PC versions. In Vista you will have Vista Starter, Vista Home Basic, Vista Home Premium and Vista Ultimate. (Please remember that these names may change by the time Vista is actually released.) The non-consumer versions will be Vista Business and Vista Enterprise. I will limit the scope of this article to the consumer versions of Vista.

Now for a disclaimer. Although I have a beta copy of Vista, I have not yet installed it on my computer. I do have a large enough partition I could install it and dual-boot my machine. However, current anti-virus, firewall and anti-Trojan software will not run on Vista. There are not yet any new versions of these security programs available for Vista. Consequently, I have no intention of installing this Vista software on my main working computer. I have just acquired a second-hand system that I intend to use with nothing but Vista and connect to the Internet only when absolutely necessary. So this article is being written based on the most reliable sources I have been able to find that have been testing the beta version of Vista. After I return from my two months road-trip, I'll start working with the Vista beta. For those not familiar with the term "beta", this

refers to pre-production software or a testing version of software that is not yet ready for the market.

Now, back to the various versions of Vista. The Starter edition is a very low end version that will support only 32 bit software. Its exact limitations don't seem to be available yet. So, we'll just have to wait and see what Microsoft does with this version of Vista. It is fairly certain that it will not support the new graphics interface called "Aero". In fact, it doesn't appear that the Home Basic edition will support this new graphics interface either. However, Home Basic will require a minimum of 512MB of RAM. From most reports it appears to me that Vista running on less than 1 GB of RAM will be seriously slow. Just like computers that try to run XP on only 128 MB of RAM.

So what does Aero offer the average computer user? If you have a 3D graphics card with enough video RAM (128 MB or more), then Aero will provide an entirely different appearance on your screen. (Some commentators have compared the Aero graphics interface to that of the Apple Macintosh OS X!!) Graphics designers refer to some of the capabilities as transparency, blurring, window previewing, and graphical rollover indicators. The easiest way to describe some of the effects is to provide some examples. The minimize, maximize and close indicators that you find in the upper right corner of your current window will change color as you pass your mouse over them. And this color will spill out around the edges of the icon. This gives you an additional visual indicator when your mouse is in the right position. Another example is when you place your mouse on the shortcut on the taskbar you will see a thumbnail view of the program. So when you are multi-tasking you can easily see which application you want. Or, you can check on the progress of a video feed or other running processes. Some other advantages of Aero are the ability to see "around the edges" of windows to the windows behind. This involves the transparency and blurring referred to earlier. This is advantageous to those who do multi-tasking. This ability is also apparently built-in to the new tabbed interface being included in Internet Explorer 7. There is also a change to the Alt-Tab function which allowed users to tab through the list of running programs to find the one they wanted to shift to in earlier versions of Windows. In Vista this function, now called Flip, allows users to see a larger thumbnail view of open programs. There may also be a related 3D view which will show all the open windows twisted to a 45 degree angle. The user can then cycle through the windows by repeatedly pressing the Tab key.

The Aero graphics will be incorporated in the Home Premium and Ultimate versions. However, it requires a minimum of 128 MB of fast video RAM, DX9 3D support and a minimum of 1 GB of system RAM. Some comments have led me to believe that it will not work with motherboards that use shared RAM for the video function. It requires a separate graphics card. Also, I would never recommend trying to run a system with these minimums. They should both be doubled at the very least. If your PC doesn't have this capacity, then you will still be able to run Aero, but in a limited or basic mode. It will not display all the features found in the full Aero mode.

There have been a number of articles related to hardware requirements to run Vista. In my mind, I think it's a little early for these specs to be firm. One thing you can be sure of, Vista will require more RAM, a large hard drive and a fast central processor. Both Intel and AMD are touting their latest generation of processors as being necessary for running Vista. It does appear that current single core processors will be able to run Vista in 32 bit mode. I suspect that at some later date you will need to consider a dual-core 64 bit processors or a 32 bit processors that runs hyperthreading. Naturally, the 64 bit processor will have a definite advantage in running Vista.

The other questions is, how well will Vista run current 32 bit software? Most of the new computers currently being manufactured have 64 bit processors. These are designed to work with both 32 bit and 64 bit operating systems. Vista will be a 64 bit OS. There are very few 64 bit software applications available and most of your current software is, or should be, 32 bit. It is expected that "well behaved" 32 bit software will run on Vista without problems. Only those applications that don't install system level drivers or try to take control of the OS are considered well-behaved. You will have to replace your anti-virus and firewall software. That is a given. New Vista applications should be available when Vista comes on the market. The same is true of anti-trojan/anti-parasite software. Other software that might be a problem would include video games and multimedia applications. Those of you who have been running Windows for a few years and have upgraded from earlier versions are already familiar with one of the real road blocks to getting started with a new OS. That's right – device drivers! Every device driver for your hardware like printers, scanners, external USB drives, etc, will have to be re-written. Early adopters of Vista will have similar problems.

Windows XP runs 16 bit software in "Windows on Windows" (WOW) emulation mode. Vista will run 32 bit software in much the same way using an emulation layer to talk to the software. This converts the 32 bit program calls to 64 bit code. This process should be transparent to the user. Now, if you still have some 16 bit software or DOS software, it really is time to upgrade. These will not run on Vista without the use of third-party emulation software. There is no indication that Microsoft will support 16 bit or DOS applications.

Now the next topic is one that is really of primary interest with this Windows upgrade. It is also the one for which the least info is available. That is – Security! Windows XP and Internet Explorer have developed quite a reputation for being full of security holes. In spite of all the efforts to plug the gaps, new ones keep showing up. Microsoft has indicated that Vista will be far more secure than previous versions. The problem is that in trying to tighten the security net, Microsoft seems to be making things more difficult for the average user. With XP Home, the user generally operates in an administrator mode so that new applications can be installed and unused ones removed without having to set up additional permissions. With both XP Home and XP Professional, Microsoft has tried to get individual users to use a limited non-administrator mode on a regular basis. This has been singularly unsuccessful. The reason for running in the limited user mode is to prevent malware from accessing system applications in the Windows director and subdirectories and/or the registry. When the computer is set up so that accessing these functions requires a password, less damage can be done, by any outside influence, to the operating system or to the installed applications. However, because the limitations of the user mode are so great, most Windows users end up running in the administrator mode to simplify making changes to their computer. Well, it appears that Microsoft is going to change that. Vista will enforce the limited user or user account control (UAC) to prevent the user from having constant access to administrative functions. Microsoft obviously doesn't believe that users can be allowed unlimited access to their own computers. Included in this there may be increased blocking of online software distribution. You may get more pop-up warnings when your installed software tries to access the Internet. Nearly all applications need to access the Internet at one time or another. This gives them the capability to download updates, patches, bug fixes and other security related information. Many applications also need to hook into the operating system in ways that are similar to those used by malware. If your operating system is constantly popping up warning windows and telling you that your computer is at risk, how would you react? Especially if responding to these warnings by clicking on "Cancel" closes the program and prevents you from using an application. You may try to go back and run all of your applications as an "Administrator" as you did in XP. However, Vista has various levels of "Administrator" and may still require you to enter a password for non-Microsoft applications. Now for the caveat: Vista is not yet in final beta form, therefore there can be many changes, especially in the security setup. It will depend in part, on the comments from the testing community. Hopefully not all of them will be system administrators for large corporations. What Microsoft has admitted in one of their own tech articles is that "Windows services represent a large percentage of the overall attack surface in Windows". That is a direct quotation. So if Windows is the problem why are they trying to solve it by limiting the ability of users to use their computers and their software?

Over the coming months I will continue to provide updates on my own experience with Vista as well as information I obtain from other beta testers. We'll see just how much benefit we'll really get from this Windows upgrade.

Dr. Lewis is a former university & medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail: bwsail@yahoo.com.



A Lot of Assembly Required

by Karen Rhodes, waxtadpole@comcast.net

Honorary Member of the Rochester Computer Society, Inc., www.rcsi.org

My computer died. It was old, in computer terms, and the motherboard had had it. It wasn't much of a task to get my data files off before it completely went west, as I keep most of my data on Zip disks or USB portable drives. But it was time for me to get a new com-puter.

It isn't my first choice to go to Gateway or Dell or Hewlett-Packard and buy an already assembled machine. First, I want on my com-puter only the software I will be using, not some techie nerd's idea of the latest "in" thing. Second, I don't want to have to go round and round with some-one on the other end of a telephone about what com-ponents are available. The bottom line is that I want what I want when I want it, and nothing more – or less.

My preference for assembling is made much easier by having someone in-house who is experienced at it – my husband, who is a computer specialist. He does everything; he installs hardware, software, LANs, the whole works. There are some things he doesn't know, but he knows enough to be able to put together a computer -- one that works. He's done it before, for himself and for others, on the job and at home.

He did the shopping for me because I get lost when it comes to putting one part of the computer in concert with another, and

knowing what is more likely to work with what. You notice I said “more likely;” there never is a guarantee that it’s all going to work once you get it together!

Having done business with Newegg.com before, he settled on them. He gave me a list of recommendations. I ordered; the next week, we had all the parts. That next Saturday, after breakfast, the assembly began.

I’ll go through the process he used, making what I think are some important points to remember (marked by bullets).

- Don’t always settle for the power supply that comes with your case. I ordered a mid-range case, which came with a 350 watt power supply. Probably not enough for my powerful and large genealogy database program and a lot of multi-tasking that will inevitably accompany its use, and certainly not enough for the motherboard I bought, because I also play games for which I bought a powerful graphics card and a muscular motherboard. And the motherboard I ordered states in its manual that it requires a minimum of 400 watts in the power supply. I bought 550 watts.

- If you do boost the power supply or you live in a hot climate (both apply to me), buy extra case fans. They’re inexpensive, and the extra cooling they provide is crucial to computer health.

The case came with one fan installed. My husband put in the two extra case fans first. Then he put in the power supply (Just PC model JPC-550C-12V). Next he put onto the motherboard (EPOX EP-8 NPA) the CPU (AMD Sempron 64 3100+), the memory (Corsair, 1 GB), and the graphics card (MSI NVidia P317). The sound card – sound chip, really – and the Ethernet card are integrated onto the motherboard.

All during the installation, my husband used his digital camera to take pictures of each component and of the process. In addition, for my own file, I made notes of all the model numbers and serial numbers.

- Document, document, document! You’ll be glad you did when a tech support person you’re talking to on the phone about your misbehaving computer asks you for the serial number on your hard drive. You’ll have the information right in front of you, either in a paper file or in a photograph, and won’t have to open up the case and bend yourself into a pretzel to get the serial number off the hard drive!

Meanwhile, back at the installation procedure, when my husband installed the motherboard into the case and tried to hook it up to the power supply, we hit a snag.

- Understand that the connector on one part which is supposed to connect to another part may not match up and may need an adapter.

In my case – you’ll forgive the pun – the power supply connector was 20-pin and the mother-board’s corresponding connector had 24 pins. No panic yet – there was an adapter in with the motherboard. But when my husband tried to hook it up at the power supply end, the connector wouldn’t connect. It was miss-manufactured.

- Understand that there are going to be snags and that you just have to accept them when they happen, and come up with solutions. Cussing is optional.
- Understand that nature always sides with the hidden flaw.

We live in a rural area, outside of an unincorporated little town in Florida. The nearest city is Jacksonville, up in the next county. It’s quite a ways – especially at these gas prices – to go into the city for our needs. We try to avoid it as much as we can. However, there was not another adapter of the type we needed nearby.

The next day, Sunday, my husband and I made a 60 mile round trip into Jacksonville to CompUSA for another adapter. He had been told on the tele-phone that morning that they had 20 of the item in stock. Fine. We got there, carrying with us the faulty adapter and the case’s original 350 watt power supply as a test bed, since it had the same type of connection. Which leads me to:

- Be prepared. If you need to go to the store to replace a faulty component, take the bad one with you! Don’t try to remember what type, brand, number or placement of pins... you never will. And telephone ahead, and make sure you talk to someone who knows what he’s talking about, or should!

We looked all over the store, ending up at a rack right beside a help station. A young woman came to the counter. We asked

her about the adapter. Her first answer was the wrong one: "We don't have those." I informed her curtly we had been told over the phone they had 20 of that item in stock. She then gave some lame routine about not having been there long and something about some boxes just having come in. She looked to her left, at the rack where we ended up, and said, pointing, "There they are, right there."

- Do not take nonsense from store personnel. Speak plainly and to the point. Go to the next level, if you have to, repeating that subroutine as many times as necessary, until you get satisfaction.

We wanted to open the package and see if the adapter therein would fit the power supply. We didn't mind making one 60 mile round trip, but would have been angry to get the new adapter home and find it also didn't fit! The young woman said we'd have to pay for it first, then take it to Customer Service and talk to them about opening and testing it. Thence we went. Two young men confirmed what we'd been told, then gave us a look that said, "Okay, go away." Not me. I took out my money, plunked it down on the counter, and said, "There's my green." I took the receipt, and then we opened the package, took out the adapter, and tried it. It fit.

- Always ask for what you want. Be firm, even adamant, about it.

I could have ordered another of the adapters from Newegg.com, I'm sure. But there would have been several days' wait, and I wasn't willing to do that when we could find one near and in a short time. The thing only cost \$7, and I probably would have paid that much just in shipping!

- Be willing to shell out a little bit more to get what you want when you want it.

Back home, the assembly proceeded: hard drive (Western Digital Caviar RE 160Gb), DVD-RW (LiteOn SHW-160P6S), DVD/CD-ROM (LiteOn SOHD-6P9SV), card reader (Arrow Micro AICR-01), and the old 3.5" floppy drive from my old computer. He set it all up with the monitor (Sam-sung SyncMaster 740N: I had to treat myself to a flat-panel monitor), the keyboard (LiteOn SK-1688U), and the mouse (Radio Shack optical mouse 26-592, which I already had), and tested it.

It all worked!

I had followed all of my husband's recommendations except for one.

- Even if someone who knows more than you makes recommendations, check them out and see what you think.

When making my hardware selections, I had gone online to Newegg.com and read the reviews and specifications for the components my husband had picked out. I agreed with all except one: the keyboard. The keyboard he selected was criticized in user reviews for sticking keys (which was why I had trashed my old keyboard) and for having too short a cord. I need a longer cord in my setup, so I selected another keyboard, which I'm happy with.

We set up the machine at my desk. We looked at the BIOS and set it up the way I wanted it, which didn't involve many changes. Then it was time to install Windows XP professional (SP2). It seemed to go well, by all appearances, but we know how deceptive that can be! And it wasn't long until we found out we'd hit another snag. Somehow the OS had set itself up to think the C: drive was a removable drive which had no disk in it, and it wanted to call the hard drive "local drive I:." That would not have worked with some software which insists it be placed on Drive C:. This snag also caused the persistent appearance of an error message telling me that there wasn't a disk present in C: when I knew there jolly well was.

- Murphy loves operating systems! Whatever can go wrong, will.

Here I will make a long story short: we used a software program my husband has (Darik's Boot and Nuke) to wipe the hard drive and start all over again. It took two more tries installing Windows XP Professional before the stupid software decided to give the drives their proper names.

- Be patient, persistent, and courageous when installing software, especially the operating system. It is going to fail a few times before succeeding, trust me!

The computer works well, all things considered. I am not able to play a couple of my games, for evidently they require Intel rather than AMD chips. I haven't yet, but I'll go to the respective web-sites and see if there are any patches for us orphaned AMD users!

- No matter how well the installation goes, no matter how well the computer is working, there will still be problems. They're inevitable; get used to it or go back to the mid 20th century!

The important thing is that it will run my genealogy software (The Master Genealogist), word processor (OpenOffice.org), email program (Pegasus), and browser (Firefox), and other things vital to me. As well, it will run some of my games, so I'm happy with that.

- Once you get it going – enjoy it!

Karen Rhodes is not a techie, but she does appreciate a well-put-together computer. She's had many careers, some of them quite brief, and is currently studying genealogy through the distance learning facilities of the University of Toronto. She lives in Florida with her husband, her younger daughter, and a calico cat named Tiger.



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