Home Computer Security

Joe Perignat

Monday, March 12, 2007

There are bad folks trying to do bad things to home Personal Computer users. They want to get hold of your personal information and use it for illegal purposes. They want to use your Personal Computer to spread spam. Some may even try to cripple your computer.

This presentation is aimed at the home Personal Computer user and covers security terminology and the ways Personal Computers can be compromised. The Speaker will show you what you need to do to stay out of harms way. He will provide information on where to go for further information on Personal Computer security and where to obtain free Personal Computer security software to protect yourself.

Joseph Perignat is an independent consultant to home and small business Personal Computer users. He also teaches home Personal Computer fundamentals at Bucks County Community College. He has spent over 25 years in the pharmaceutical industry responsible for Information Technology Departments.

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:

Upcoming Schedule

April 9 ------ Vic Laurie—Windows Vista Now or Later?
April 27, 28, 29, 2007 ------ Trenton Computer Festival at TCNJ
May 14----- Gabe Goldberg—Association of Personal Computer User Groups
June 11----- Dave Brody—Astronomy: Explore Space on Your PC
July 9 ------ TBA
August 13 - TBA

Minutes of the February Meeting

At 7:30 p.m. Clarke started the Meeting.

Doug Dixon told us about his trip to the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, NV. Doug bought many "toys" and innovations for us to see and touch.

Doug has plenty of information at http://www.manifest-tech.com/

Doug Dixon by Judge Landis

- Submitted by Clarke Walker

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Pictures from the February Meeting

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

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President's Message

At the February meeting only one person had some exposure to Vista and it was at work. We will keep taking a poll at every meeting and ask for feedback on the Vista operating system.

This month Joe Perignat will be speaking about Security. I heard Joe a few month ago speak at Princeton Public Library. Joe has excellent advice and I encourage you to invite your co-workers, family and friends to this meeting.

- *Clarke Walker*

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The Board thanks the following for renewing their membership in the Club.

Albert Axelrod	David F. Kulp
Tomas M. Bagdas	Paul Kurivchack
John J. Best	Houston E. Landis
Hans Breme	Vic Laurie
Joe J. Budelis	Joe Lazar
Thomas Carman	Judith Leondar
Albert Chasan	Sol Libes
Jon Cohen	Lloyd N. Lewis
Helen Crossley	Martin M. Mosho
Williem & Isabella Einthoven	Philip Papier, Jr.
Frank H. Foulkes	David R. Shinkfield
Dawson H. Gibson	Diane E. Subber
Kim Goldenberg	Thomas L. Vanisko
Bill Hawryluk	Clarke Walker
Scott B. Kardos	Robert Weinberg
William R. Krisak	Robert S. Willis

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Link of the Month

The US Homeland Security web site is:

http://www.dhs.gov/index.shtm

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

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Pandora – a Free Music Resource

by Sandy Berger, sandy@compukiss.com
CompuKISS, www.compukiss.com

The Internet is filled with free resources, but some are better than others. Here is one of the best free music resources on the Web.

Pandora is one of my favorite music websites. Just surf over to www.pandora.com and type in a song or an artist that you

like. Pandora analyses your choice and creates a music station with similar-sounding music. It will then play comparable songs that it thinks you will like. You can add more music and/or artists to the station to refine your choices. You can also tell Pandora whether or not you like the song that is playing. It uses your likes and dislikes to refine the songs it chooses. You can create up to 100 different stations with different types of music.

Pandora was created by the Music Genome Project, a group of musicians and music-loving technologists who have broken music into hundreds of music attributes or "genes" such as melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, orchestration, arrangement, lyrics, and harmony. They then use high-tech methodology to analyze the musical qualities of each song and rendition.

The results are uncanny. I created several music stations with different genres that I like and in almost every case I was presented with similar music that I found very pleasing. You can experiment with different combinations. For instance, putting James Taylor and Willie Nelson together gave me an interesting, but likable mix of music.

Pandora is pretty smart. Typing in The Christmas Song and choosing Diana Krall as the artist gave me a whole station of mellow Christmas music which is just what I was looking for. Typing in The Nylons and Take 6 gave me a nice selection of acappella and harmonistic music.

Pandora also lets you bookmark songs or artists so you can remember what you liked. You can look up more information about artists and songs right on the site. Two clicks will lead you to iTunes or Amazon where you can purchase the music. You can also share your music by emailing your stations to friends.

Pandora is ad-supported so you will see ads for everything from gym shoes to cell service. I found the ads to be unobtrusive, but if you want to get rid of them, you can pay to eliminate them. For $36, you get 12 months of unlimited use with services exactly the same as the free version, but without the ads.

Since the ads don't bother me, I'll continue to use the free version of Pandora. It's an entertaining website that provides much listening pleasure to keep me company when I am working on the computer.

If you are into music, you may also want to check out two other music resources. MusicIP Mixer and Goombah. Like Pandora, both of these sites provide intriguing music adventures.

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The Changing World
A Review of Vista

by David Steward, dsteward@apcug.net
APCUG Advisor, Region 8 and Program Chair, Alamo PC Organization, Texas, www.alamopc.org

The title of this article explains a lot. With the release of Microsoft's newest iteration of Operating Systems, Vista, we are going to be making a lot of changes in how we perform day-to-day tasks on our computers. For once, I think they actually got it right. With a more intuitive interface, a lot less cluttered desktop, easier networking and a much more robust security system, Vista will indeed go a long way in making the lives of us who spend a great deal of time staring at a computer screen easier and more exciting.

Getting Started

The first thing that you will notice when opening the box is that Vista is shipped on a DVD instead of a CD, as all of the previous operating systems from Microsoft have been. There are a couple of reasons for this. The first is that Vista is packed with much more content than has been available in the past. Things like Windows Defender, Sidebar, Snipit (a screen capture utility and more), built-in Fax and Scan, and Windows Live Meeting all of which are designed to make life easier.

The second is that regardless of which version (see below) you purchase, all of the versions are included on the DVD. The version that loads depends on the installation key that you receive with the purchase. What does this mean to us, as consum-

ers? It means that you can upgrade the OS version any time you want, and the media is already on the disc. All you need to do is the purchase the upgraded "key" and the system will do the rest.

As mentioned above, Vista is being offered in many different versions. Each version is, of course, designed around a specific type of user. At the time of this article's writing, the following versions are being offered:

Vista Home Basic – Basic package. Contains all the usual things that you would expect to be included in an operating system plus many new enhancements.

Vista Home Premium – Adds support for the Media Center PC, the Tablet PC, automated backups, Windows Areo and Glass, built in DVD authoring, and much more.

Vista Business – Version scaled for business use

Vista Ultimate – The whole enchilada. Contains everything including support for multiple processors.

For a detailed description of each version, and to help decide which is right for you, visit http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/editions/default.mspx.

On a little side note here, I want to caution the readers to not think only in today's terms when deciding which version of Vista to choose. With the advent of the multiple core processors and initiatives to put more processors on the motherboard, each with multiple cores, you might want to consider the Ultimate edition, as it directly supports multiple processors, up to 128 gigs of memory (on 64 bit machines) and makes use of the higher buss speeds associated with multiple cores. Plus, as you will see later, it grows with your system.

Entertainment

As I said previously, Vista is designed to make your life easier. Plus, a lot of the OS has been wound around the entertainment capabilities of today's PC. With built in DVD, CD and TV (with tuner card installed) support, any PC can be turned into the main entertainment center of your house.

Most of us have grown up using a PC for normal things like word processing, spreadsheets, digital photography, listening to music, email, and surfing the web. Basically, everything that we can do while sitting about 2 feet from the computer screen. Well, a new "buzz' word in the industry is the "10 foot" experience. It encompasses things that we can do away from the computer. This includes experiences like storing all of your DVD's and videos on your computer's hard disk, and viewing them from anywhere in your house. Being able to show slideshows of your photos on your TV in the den, listening to your music files in the bedroom including changing the playlists a you desire. Vista makes this possible. And, Vista's Media Center capabilities will couple with your Xbox360 and use it as a media extender.

If you want to see if your computer is Vista capable, visit the "Vista Upgrade Advisor" at http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/upgradeadvisor/default.mspx. The Upgrade Advisor will perform a very thorough search of your system's hardware and installed software and let you know what needs to be changed before upgrading to Vista.

The Meat

Let's get to the actual operation of the software. Before I installed Vista, I ran the included Upgrade Advisor, which informed me that I needed to remove the "Nero Burning Rom" software before I could install Vista. In addition, it cautioned me that although Vista would run on my system, I would not achieve the full performance of the graphics engine due to the installed drivers for my video card. Specifically, I would not be able to run the Aero or Glass enhancements. At the time, I did not consider that a good enough reason to rush out and purchase a new high end graphics card, so I went ahead and installed Vista, after removing Nero. I chose to upgrade my existing system, as I have a ton of programs installed, and did not want to have to re-install all of them. So, after entering a few basic pieces of information, including the "key", Vista took off and performed all of the upgrade functions without any further input from me. This is good as it took almost 2 hours to completely install and upgrade the system. At one point, I thought that it was stuck and that I would have to start over, but it wasn't. It just took that long to load the features and enhancements, and upgrade the existing programs.

This might be a good time to point out that I am performing this review on a 2 year old Sony Vaio Media Center PC, which has a Pentium 4 running at 3.4 Ghz, 1 GB of RAM, a 320 GB drive, and a 64 MB on board graphics card. I have partitioned the drive into 2 partitions, a 80 GB program partition, and a 240 GB data partition.

Finally, the upgrade finished and the system rebooted into Vista. The first thing that you see is a screen titled the "Welcome Center". From this screen, you setup all of the basic things like security, users and internet settings. This is all accomplished by wizards that lead you through the process step-by-step. You can also view some very informative videos that introduce you to the features of Vista. It also gives you the opportunity to register and go online with Windows Live, a place where you can setup your own personalized start page with Live Mail access, news, weather, RSS feeds, etc….however you want it to look.

After you finish setting up all the necessary features, it is time to explore and have fun. I am not going to write about every feature and function, as I would have to write an entire book to cover it all, but I am going to highlight a couple of things that I think will be of interest to us all.

First, Vista has a ton of informational type of screens that tell you a lot about your particular system and hardware. One of these is called "Performance and Information Tools" which is accessible from the "System and Maintenance" button on the Control Panel. This is where you can find out what your system experience rating is. This will let you know how Vista will perform under different conditions, and whether or not you can take advantage of some of the enhancements like Aero or Glass on your desktop. My particular system rating was 2.8. The reason for the mediocre rating was because of the graphics chip that was on the motherboard. Everything else had a rating of 4.2 or above. I really wanted to use the Aero on my desktop, so I rummaged around in my computer room, and found an nVidia 6600 graphics card. After installing it, I re-ran the performance rating test, and my system rating increased to 4.1, which allowed all of the included enhancements. It was well worth the time.

Another feature that is accessible from the Control Panel is the "Problem Reports and Solutions". This area keep track of every time a program stops running for any reason, or has a problem installing, and logs it into a database. From time to time, you should check this area and see if a fix for a particular problem has been released. Vista will automatically download the fix, apply it, and test it on your system. Why is this important? It means that you do not have to wait for a service pack to repair individual problems.

There are many more features on the Control Panel that you will want to explore and play with, including the ability to change the partitioning of your drive, schedule tasks and view event logs. Believe me, Vista is an information geeks dream.

Another new addition is Windows Mail, which replaces Outlook Express. I used to prefer Outlook Express over Outlook because of it's ease of operation and Windows Mail has not changed my mind. Windows Mail operationally looks like Outlook Express with one major enhancement. It has an automatic spam and phishing filter integrated in the program, and it works. It is so nice to look at my messages and not have to wade through 200+ messages wanting to sell me stock or change my anatomy.

Getting back to the desktop, one of the features that I really wanted to see was the new Aero feature. Aero is the high performance desktop experience that has been introduced in Vista. Basically, it allows a much more robust and dynamic view of the desktop and the components running on it. For example the Glass feature turns the individual windows translucent so you can see what is going on in windows under it. The Flip 3D function allows you to quickly "flip" through all of the open windows until you find the one that you want. In addition, when a window is minimized, you can hover your mouse over the button on the taskbar, and see exactly what that window looks like. Plus, Aero gives everything a much smoother appearance making it easier on the eyes. It is hard to describe Aero in words, but trust me, you will like it.

Another new feature is Gadgets. Simply put, they are little gadgets or programs that you can place on your desktopn to help you. Things like a clock, news feeds, stock tickers, RSS feeds, or even games. Now, this is what Active Desktop really means. <G> You can adjust the transparency of each of them so that they do not distract from the workspace.

Ultimate Extras

For those of you that take the plunge and opt for the full blown Ultimate version, there is a bonus. Microsoft has announced the Vista Ultimate Extras program. This entails new additions to the Ultimate package that will be added as time goes on. Things like new gaming experiences with Windows Hold'em Poker, added security with the bit-locker encryption system, and my favorite, Dreamscape, which turns your desktop background into a true "active" desktop by allowing motion video to be run on the desktop. It is truly an unbelievable sight. And, more will be added in the future, allowing your system to grow as time goes on.

For the gamers reading this, Vista is going to change the way that you play games on the PC. Microsoft has included DirectX

10 with the shipping versions of Vista. DirectX 10 is a much more robust API that allows a more realistic appearance in games. In addition, you can use your Xbox360 controller on your PC now, and it will take advantage of all of the controller features like vibrate and positive feedback.

Having said all of this, I do want to note that I did have some problems while running Vista. I have had a couple of programs that flat refuse to run in Vista, specifically shareware video editing and video conversion programs. I am presently working with the support engineers to rectify this. I also found that although Microsoft says that Vista will run well with 1 GB of memory, and it does, Vista really wants as much memory as it can get. I noted a significant improvement when I install another gig of memory. Same thing is true about the graphics adapter in the system. I recommend at least a 128 MB card, and preferably a 256 MB card if you want to run Aero and Dreamscape. This will ensure that there is no noticeable loss of system performance.

I know that this is supposed to be a review of Vista, and it has ended up sounding like an advertising blurb about the product, but I am very excited about the new Operating System. I truly believe that Microsoft has finally listened to the user community, and has made a concentrated effort to include the enhancements that we have been waiting for. I am actually enjoying sitting in front of the screen again.

Next time I will review Vista on a laptop, and I promise that it will be shorter <G> Until then, ya'll have fun.

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Excepts from: THINGS, THINGLETS & THINGASSOS

by S. Jack Lewtschuk, blacklion@royal.net
Monterey Bay Users' Group-PC Columnist, www.mbug.org

WORDS OF WISDOM

If builders built houses the way programmers build computer programs, the first woodpecker to come along would destroy civilization!

BACKING UP *OUTLOOK* CONTACTS

Outlook stores all data in a single file called a ".PST file". This file contains your contacts, e-mail, calendar items and tasks. It's easy to back up your entire Outlook .PST file—just locate it and copy it as you would any other file. Backing up individual folders within Outlook is also easy, so you can export your entire "Contacts" list. Simply highlight "Contacts" in your Outlook folders list. Then click "File," and "Import and Export" to open the "Import and Export Wizard." Select "Export to a file" and click "Next," to choose from a list of options (I recommend Microsoft Excel as the best one to choose in order to export all your contacts into a nicely ordered spreadsheet). After making your selection, click "Next." You'll be given the option again to select the folder you want to export. Highlight it, click "Next," and specify the name and location where you would like to save your file (use the "Browse" button if needed), click "Next" and then click "Finish."

You can use the same procedure with other items in the Outlook folder list. This is handy if you only want to export certain parts of your Outlook data file. You can use the files with other programs such as a "Database." You can also use it to share information with other people. Say you want to share your contacts with friends or coworkers: just export them, and others can import your list into their Outlook program.

To import a file, click "File," and "Import and Export." Select "Import from another program or file," click "Next," and select the type of file from which you're importing. In this case, select "Microsoft Excel" and click "Next." Click "Browse" to locate the file you wish to import, and then select your import options. You may want to allow duplicates, or you may wish to replace duplicates with imported items. You can also specify that duplicates not be imported. Click "Next," select the destination folder, click "Next" again, and finally, click "Finish."

NOVICE CORNER

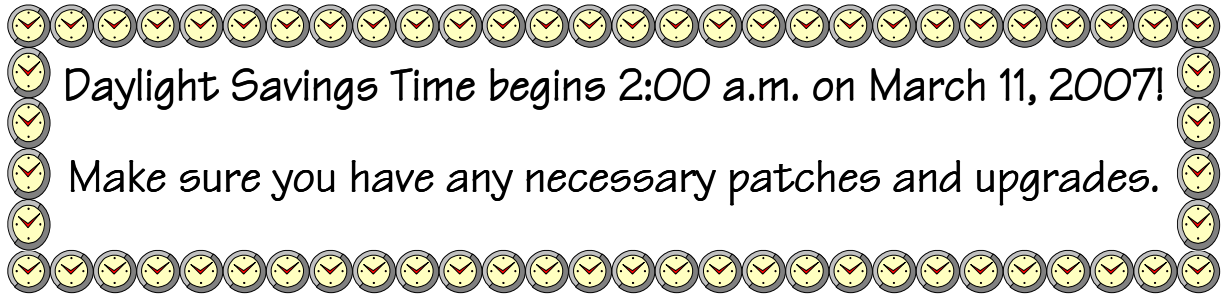Starting Your Computer in "Safe Mode"

At some point in time you may need to start your computer in "safe mode." You should print these instructions before continuing as they will not be available after you shut your computer down in step two.

Click "Start," click "Shut Down," and then in the drop-down list click "Shut down." In the shut down window dialog box, click "Restart," and then click "OK." When you see the message "Please select the operating system to start" or "Windows" appears on the screen, press the "F8" key several times. Use your arrow keys to highlight the appropriate "safe mode" option, and then press "ENTER." If you have a dual-boot or multiple-boot system, choose the installation that you need to access using the arrow keys, and then press "ENTER."

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All unattributed articles are solely the fault of the editor.

Daylight Savings Time begins 2:00 a.m. on March 11, 2007!

Make sure you have any necessary patches and upgrades.