

MotherBoard

Volume 22, Issue 12

December 1, 2004

This Month At NOPC

SMART COMPUTING MAGAZINE

by

***AMBER
COFFIN***

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Calendar of Events

Club Elections

At the December meeting we will be electing officers and directors to lead the NOPC in 2005. The officers are President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. In addition, we have three Directors at Large. These seven members constitute the Club's Board of Directors. Each member of the Board serves a one year term. The Board meets once a month, usually the second Wednesday. The meeting is held at McCann's Electronics, 100 Division Street (corner of Division and Airline Drive).

Listed below are the current candidates for 2005:

President – Ray Paternostro Jr.

Vice-President – Clarke Kissel

Treasurer – Don Herrmann

Secretary – Carl Henderson

Director at Large – Albert Fox

Director at Large – Mary Prinz

Director at Large – Tom Ford

Any current member in good standing can run for a position on the Board. If you want to know more about the duties and responsibilities of each position, please contact Virginia Kieran (kierano@bellsouth.net, 504-887-5746) or Tom Ford (tomford@bellsouth.net, 985-643-3172).

At the December meeting, the Nominating Committee will present the candidates listed above. In addition, nominations for the Board can be made at the meeting. The member nominated must be present at the meeting to run. We will then vote for each officer and director. Come out to the December meeting and take part in the election of your Board for 2005.

Raffle for Microsoft Windows XP Professional

The New Orleans Personal Computer Club will be starting a new raffle for a new copy of Windows XP Professional to be given away at the end of the January 2005 general membership meeting. This program is the full, sealed, stand-alone copy (not the upgrade version) and retails for around \$300 from most retailers.

The price for the raffle tickets remains the same as in previous raffles: \$1 per ticket, or \$5 for six tickets. As in previous raffles, this is open to club members only. Please purchase as many tickets as possible and help support the club. Profits from fundraisers like this go straight into the club treasury and are used to help defray operating costs.

Smart Computing

We are pleased to have as our December presentation, “*Smart Computing*” magazine. The Smart Computing User Group Representatives from “Smart Computing” will be Ms. Amber Coffin and Ms. Ashley Hannant. This is the 2nd time that Smart Computing as been to our NOPC meetings.

Here are 10 reasons for subscribing:

1. 5 Magazines For The Price Of 1!

When you subscribe to any magazine from Sandhills Publishing, you are getting much more than a magazine.

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2. Interactive Q&A Board

Subscribers tell us daily how the Q&A Board saved them from costly tech-support bills. Use the search function to find out if other subscribers have already answered your question. Or post specific questions and receive very timely answers to even the most difficult PC problems.

3. Plain-English Editorial

We produce the cleanest, easiest-to-understand editorial in the computing category so you can make the most of your computing free time.

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Our Web site is the ultimate computing resource, but if you can't find an answer to your technical questions, contact us. We are staffed to help you find a solution to your problem.

7. Guaranteed Lowest Price

Every subscriber receives the absolute lowest price: \$29. We don't charge loyal subscribers more on their renewal, and you will never find a lower price

than is available on our Web site.

8. Minimal Advertising

Each publication is limited to 19 pages of advertising per issue. Compare that to hundreds of pages in most computing magazines.

9. Privacy

We do not sell, trade, or otherwise distribute any personal data on our subscribers.

10. Risk-Free

All subscriptions are risk-free; you can cancel at any time and receive a refund for all un-mailed issues.

Additionally, as a Subscriber, you will have access to much more information on the Smart Computing website, which is NOT available to non-subscribers.

When you subscribe as a NOPC User Group member, your club earns FREE subscriptions for use as the club desires. For every 5 (five) subscriptions received from NOPC, they will award NOPC 1 (one) free subscription! Friends and family's subscriptions count too, so spread the word!

This deserves repeating... “*Smart Computing*” is just one of five magazines published by Sandhill Publishing. They also publish “*PC Today*”, “*ceLifestyles*”, “*Reference Series*”, and “*Computer Power Users*”, all available to subscribers from the website.

If you are not a subscriber, this is a great time to become one. Get a subscription as a Holiday gift for a friend or a business associate. Already a subscriber: extend your subscription at the meeting. I am a subscriber, and I plan to use this opportunity to extend my subscription.



Understanding USB

by Vinny La Bash,
vlabash@home.com

Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users
Group, Inc., Florida

Hail USB! Until a few years ago if you wanted to add an external device to your computer, such as a scanner or a Zip drive, it needed your one and only parallel port. The trouble with this was that your printer had already staked out that territory. One way of getting around the problem was installing an A/B switch. However, if you needed more than one device, you had to install an A/B/C/D switch. Sometimes moving among these devices meant having to turn one off before you could use another, and often you had to reboot before your machine would recognize another device on the switch.

Early Palm Pilots and digital cameras sought your serial port. Computers had, and most still have two serial ports, but they were slow and almost always involved installation of controlling software.

There were also devices that came with their own controller cards. This meant you had to open the case and install the card in an expansion slot, provided you had one available. Things could get crazy quickly, and you had to handle IRQ conflicts, more cables, and additional power cords.

Rescue arrived with the introduction of the USB port (Universal Serial Bus) that lets you attach almost anything to your computer quickly and easily. Windows XP is designed to support USB so device conflicts are gone. The standard allows up to 127 devices on a single USB port. In practice, no one uses that many devices. USB connectors let you attach everything from TV tuners to modems. It's an amazingly flexible technology. If you had a toaster with a USB connection you could hook it up, but it's doubtful you could watch bread turn brown on the screen.

Installing a USB device is incredibly simple. Windows XP senses it through a process called auto-detection, and asks for the driver disk if it's needed. If you have previously installed the device, XP activates it, and it's ready for use. Part of the beauty of USB is that you can connect and disconnect devices at any time without having to reboot your machine or change any options. If a cable is built-in to a USB device it will connect to your computer with its own "A" connector. Otherwise it will connect with a "B" connector. "A" and "B" connectors are of different sizes and shapes so there is never a question of

getting them mixed up.

Today, most desktop computers are built with least four USB ports. That is inadequate, but there are relatively inexpensive USB hubs available that act as expansion devices. The number of ports available on an expansion hub can vary from as few as two to as many as seven, depending on your needs and how much you care to spend. Plug the hub into your computer, and then plug your devices into the hub. You can chain hubs together, and build dozens of available USB ports on a single computer.

The USB standard lets USB connected devices draw their power from their USB connection to the PC. This works well for mice, digital cameras, web cams, and other devices that use small amounts of power. Printers, scanners, and other high power accessories require their own power supply, and they can be plugged into hubs that do not have their own power supply. If you run out of USB sockets and you have a lot of low power devices, get a powered hub so you don't overwhelm the PC bus.

Inside your computer the USB bus lets the computer act as a host to all USB devices attached to it. If you have the up-to-date USB 2.0 standard, data can be transferred at up to 480 megabits per second. If you were moving text, that works out to about 30,000 pages of documents per second. That's a maximum rate, not typical of actual use. Nevertheless, it's impressive.

USB has other advantages. You can plug in or remove USB devices without having to reboot your machine, and the computer can put USB devices into an inactive state when conserving power. XP queries all USB devices when your machine powers on, assigns each one an address, and determines what kind of data it needs to send or receive. XP keeps track of the total bandwidth of all the attached USB devices. If the combined devices reach 90% of the 480 megabit maximum, XP denies access to any additional devices. The remaining 10% is reserved for transmitting control characters, stop and start transmission codes, error checking, and other overhead.

USB 2.0 encourages the development of innovative products that would be impossible to develop with the older standards. It's the solution for all PC users who want an instant, no-hassle way to connect new hardware like digital joysticks, scanners, digital speakers, digital cameras or a PC telephone to their computer. Plug and Pray has truly become Plug and Play.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), brings this article to you.

Help! My Computer Is Down and I Can't Get It Up

by *Ira Wilsker,*
APCUG BOD

Columnist for the Examiner, Beaumont, TX

I am embarrassed to say this, but I had a major problem with my computer recently. It would only boot to a blue screen that said that it had a problem, and Windows XP stopped to prevent any damage, and gave an error code. It said to uninstall any recent programs or hardware, and recommended starting in safe mode. This can happen to anyone at any time, and has happened to me before. Most of the time, a simple power-off then reboot will resolve the problem, as these blue screens are often itinerant, and may not recur, and a simple reboot may rectify the problem. I turned the power off, waited a few seconds, powered on, and attempted to reboot, and that discouraging blue screen reappeared, instead of my desktop. I rebooted again, and selected safe mode, allowing the computer to fully boot in that manner. As designed, since many drivers and programs do not load when booted into safe mode, it loaded normally. Usually, when I had this problem in the past, exiting from safe mode, and rebooting generally rebooted the computer properly, and I could do my work. Not this time, the computer was being stubborn; now I could better sympathize with some of the callers on my show who express frustrations, and even state that their computer hates them.

I went into safe mode again, and uninstalled the Microsoft Critical Update I had downloaded and installed the previous evening. Confident that this was the problem, as there are often such complaints posted online after every critical update, I was sure that this would resolve itself, and my computer would then reboot normally. Feeling twangs of anger, my computer rebooted into the now familiar blue screen of boot failure.

While approaching despair, I knew that all was not lost because the previous evening I had performed an incremental backup (only new or changed files since the previous backup are saved) to my external hard drive, so I was certain that all of my critical data could easily be restored if that option became necessary. Still the frustration of being unable to boot the computer was mounting. Fortunately, in addition to a very current backup which could be restored as a last resort, there are other less stressful and viable options to overcome whatever was creating my problem.

Windows XP and ME have a not very well known feature "System Restore" as an integral function. Ideally, the system restore function should take a snapshot of

critical system files and settings at each successful boot, and prior to any major changes. I have been certain to make sure that my system restore is always functioning, and also manually create another restore point prior to making any changes in software, registry, or other critical items. It is important to note that those people who leave their computers on 24 hours, may not have new restore points periodically created automatically by the system, making it quite possible that a restore may not use the most up to date information. System restore can be located in XP at Start – Programs – Accessories – System Tools – System Restore.

When opened, two choices will be presented: create a restore point, or restore the computer to an earlier date. By default, unless intentionally changed, XP will save restore information until 12% of the hard drive is used for that purpose. Once the limit is reached, older restore points are deleted using "FIFO" (first in, first out). Other than a few minutes of time, it almost never hurts to create a restore point, unless the hard drive is approaching capacity. Many users are not aware if there has been a recent restore point created, and it is easy to find out by opening the system restore function, and clicking on "Restore the Computer to an Earlier Time". A calendar will appear, and dates that contain restore points will be in bold. Clicking on a date will show the restore points created on that date. To restore the computer to that time, click on the date and time desired, and the automated process will run, rebooting the computer upon completion, and making the computer as it was at that date.

Once created, restore points cannot easily be modified, which may create problems if an unknown virus or Trojan is infecting the computer. When this happens, the virus or Trojan is saved along with the requisite necessary data. If such a restore point is selected, then the malware is restored along with the desired data, re-infecting the computer. This is a surprisingly common way of re-infecting a computer after antivirus software deletes active threats.

A system restore function is not included with Windows 95, 98, NT, or 2000, but there is an excellent alternative, that also works well with ME and XP. WinRescue, available at www.superwin.com, creates a separate registry backup each time the computer is booted. With WinRescue, the system registry can be easily restored if problems occur.

Now I have to get back to work, and restore my computer.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), brings this article to you.

What Time Is It? Set Your PC Clock

By Ira Wilsker,
APCUG Board of Directors
Columnist for *The Examiner*, Beaumont, TX

I get a lot of emails that have an incorrect time stamp on them, placed there by their computers that have an incorrect time and date. I was asked on my radio show, "So what's the big deal about having a wrong time and date on my computer?"

There are several reasons for having a correct time and date on your computer. One reason is that if your computer has an incorrect date and time, and you send email with that incorrect time, it may not be noticed by the recipient and remain unread, or it may be filtered out by some spam filters. I sort my incoming email by date so I will always see the newest messages first. If the sender has a clock that is set "slow", then that email will not be near the top of my list, and if the clock is too slow, then I may not see the message at all because it may show up as an old, out of date message. Since many spammers purposely set the date and time either far in advance, or far in the past, so that their spam email always appears first or last on an email list, many of the spam filters delete emails that are extremely off in their dates and times.

Another reason to have a correct date and time is to better enable searches on your own computer. Almost all versions of Windows have had as a search function "date and time" to find files created, accessed, or modified in a specific time frame. If downloaded or shared files are received with a correct time, and the computer clock is significantly off, there may be discrepancies making some file searches difficult.

Many professionals bill their clients based on time, and those that use their computers to bill the time need an accurate time on their computers in order to bill accurately. There may also be legal ramifications in having a correct or incorrect time on the computer. I recently did a forensic analysis on a computer involved in a legal case, and there was a question explicitly about when certain things were done with the computer. The defendant in the case was a professional engineer, and billed clients for his computer time, using a utility expressly for that purpose. He used a program that frequently checked his computer clock against the official government time (www.time.gov), and logged any differences, which were slight. Since his computer clock was accurate, always within a second during the period in question, there was evidence so strong in his favor that the case was dropped. If his computer clock had been significantly off, there may have been a strong case against him, as a key piece of defense evidence would have been missing.

There are several reasons for computer clocks not having the correct time. Some computer users never set their computer clock, similar to the flashing "12:00" on many VCRs. I have worked on computers that had the wrong time zone set, simply because the user never reset the time zone and clock after it was purchased, and still had the default time zone set by the manufacturer. Many computers lose time on their computer clocks due to a well documented interference with the clock from some "soft modems", "controllerless" modems, or "WinModems" that sap processing power from the CPU chip while online. A symptom of this is sometimes a "jerky" cursor that does not move across the screen smoothly while online. Another reason for losing time on a computer clock is a weak battery in the computer. Most users are unaware that there is a small battery in their computers, often a watch or calculator battery, which powers the CMOS chip while the computer is turned off. While some newer computers use a small rechargeable battery, which has a longer but still limited life, the typical computer battery may only last for a few years until it must be replaced. One necessary proviso is that the user should use one of several utilities to back up the CMOS data before replacing the battery, or the system defaults will be used. After replacing the battery it is almost always necessary to reset the clock.

There are several utilities that will automatically reset the clock with little or no user intervention. These range from integral Windows XP utilities, to freeware, and commercial software. XP has a free built-in time check utility that can transparently reset the computer clock. It can be found by clicking on control panel – date and time – internet time. Additional information is available by clicking on start – help – and entering the search term "time synchronization". I recommend using the nist.time.gov link which will set the time to "official" time. The XP time utility may not function properly or give an incorrect time if the utility is blocked by a firewall, or if it is set to a local network time, which may also be inaccurate. The clock can also be set manually by double clicking on the clock and entering the time; just be sure that the time zone and daylight savings time are set correctly from the "time zone" tab.

I also use an excellent free utility to check my computer clock, AboutTime 4.8. It is available for download at www.arachnoid.com/abouttime, along with detailed instructions and trouble shooting. Personally, I have it set to the U.S. Naval Observatory time at tick.usno.navy.mil. I have found the Navy time server to be the most reliable connection.

Now you have no excuse for an incorrect computer clock.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), brings this article to you.

DO YOU KNOW HOW SAFE YOUR CREDIT CARD NUMBER IS?

By S. Jack Lewtschuk,
Monterey Bay Users Group – PC, California
Columnist & Immediate Past President
November 2004 mbug-pc newsletter

How many times have you typed your credit card number or password into your computer? Any idea what happens to it?

When you type in a password, it is stored in random access memory (RAM), where it is held temporarily until other data overwrites it or the computer is turned off. But every so often, the computer copies the contents of its RAM onto hard disk, where it is easy prey for a hacker, who can read it directly or design a worm to e-mail it back. The longer sensitive data is in RAM, the more likely it is to be copied onto the disk, where it stays until it is overwritten – which might not happen for years.

On the other hand, do you know what happens to your credit card number after you hand your card to a clerk in a store or server in a restaurant? He/she has your number *and* your signature.

Are you paranoid yet?

SECURING YOUR CREDIT CARD BEFORE YOU LOSE IT

Keep a record of your credit cards and other contents of your wallet. Place the contents of your wallet on a photocopy machine or scanner; copy both sides of each license, credit card, etc. You will know what you had in your wallet and all of the account numbers and phone numbers to call to report the theft and cancel the cards. Keep the photocopy in a safe place.

If you do lose your wallet, don't forget to call these numbers to report it:

- Equifax 800.525.6285
- Experian (formerly TRW) 888.397.3742
- Trans Union 800.680.7289

THE SECRET GUIDE TO COMPUTERS

The Secret Guide is available at every New Orleans Personal Computer Club General Meeting. The latest printing is available for only \$15.00.

If you wish to reserve a copy, contact Carl Henderson either at secretary@nopc.org or (504) 466-3954.

- Social Administration Fraud Line 800.269.0271
- Your local police department to file a theft report.

MYTHS VIII – TO SIGN OR NOT TO SIGN THE BACK OF YOUR CREDIT CARD

By the way, have you heard the idea that it is best *not* to sign the back of your credit cards? That instead of signing, you can print the words: "SEE ID" or "ASK FOR PHOTO ID?"

Here is what major credit card fraud departments had to say:

- **MasterCard** – To not sign your card is an urban legend that sounds sensible, but is not a good idea.
- **American Express** – We have warned merchants not to accept your credit cards if they aren't signed.
- **VISA** – They agree with the other credit card companies and said that merchants are instructed not to finish the transaction until you sign the back of your card.

So, the idea of not signing the back of your credit card is an example of a very popular urban legend that is false. *Sign your credit cards immediately when you receive them.*

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), brings this article to you.



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NOPCC Directory

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Publicity	Jackie Elliott	publicity@nopc.org	455-6203
Webmaster	Manuel Dennis III	webmaster@nopc.org	835-7656

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Web Lab	Edward Jahncke	editor@nopc.org	897-1205

Other Important Numbers / Addresses

Club Hotline	Recorded messages. Meeting Information. Open 24 Hours	887-5746
NOPCC BBS	Bulletin Board System for members. The original way to PC communicate.	486-7249
NOPCC Web Site	On the World Wide Web. Our own home page and club information.	www.nopc.org

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December 2004

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1 NOPC Gen Mtg J.D. Meisler School 6:30p-8:30p	2	3	4 Living with Home Electronics WTIX 890AM 10:00a-11:00a
5 Computer Solutions WSMB 1350AM 11:00a-12:00a	6 VBLG @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	7	8 NOPC BOD @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	9	10	11 Living with Home Electronics WTIX 890AM 10:00a-11:00a
12 Computer Solutions WSMB 1350AM 11:00a-12:00a	13 VBLG @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	14	15	16 New User's SIG @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	17	18 Living with Home Electronics WTIX 890AM 10:00a-11:00a
19 Computer Solutions WSMB 1350AM 11:00a-12:00a	20 VBLG @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	21 Genealogy SIG @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	22	23	24 <i>Christmas Eve</i>	25 Living with Home Electronics WTIX 890AM 10:00a-11:00a
26 Computer Solutions WSMB 1350AM 11:00a-12:00a	27 VBLG @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	28	29	30	31 <i>New Years Eve</i>	<i>New Year's Day</i>

The New Orleans Personal Computer Club (NOPCC) is a private non-profit organization chartered under the State of Louisiana. Its purpose is to provide an open forum for discussion and education of the membership in the use and application of PCs, peripheral equipment and software. The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author (s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the NOPCC, its members or its officers. The club does not verify for accuracy the articles in this newsletter and leaves verification of accuracy to its readers. Articles in this newsletter may be duplicated as long as credit is given to the author (s) and the NOPCC. Annual Dues Schedule: Regular Member, \$40/yr.; Family Membership, \$60/yr.;

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