This Month At NOPC

A Plethora Of Topics by

*Ray Patenostro
Ashton Mouton
Tom Ford
Mike York*

President's Message

Hello everyone, hope everyone's machine is running okay.

I want to take a moment to thank all the members for participating in the group. Your support (both through the yearly dues and the other fund raising activities that the club conducts) helps the club stay alive and running year after year and the NOPC board really appreciates it. Please help spread the word of what a value the club is and encourage friends and family to join and participate in the meetings and SIGs.

I would also like to thank everyone that donates equipment for the auctions at the monthly meetings. However, I do need to point out that if an item does not sell, it still needs to be handled in some way after the meeting. This means that if you bring in an item and no one bids on it, please help lighten the load on the board members and take it back.

Speaking of fund raising, our current raffle is for a new retail copy of Microsoft Publisher with Digital Image Pro. Help the club out and purchase many tickets!

Recycling reminder: There are collection materials for printer toner and ink cartridges just outside the entrance of the cafeteria at each meeting; all items collected are recycled in an environmentally friendly manner. Everyone who attends is encouraged to participate in this, even if it's just taking a mail-in bag or two (or more). Surely everyone knows at least one other person who has an inkjet printer?

Okay I'm done, see you at the meetings…

Ray

March Meeting Presentation

At the May meeting there will be a plethora of topics, all given by members of the NOPCC. Mike York will give us an update on the activities of the Computer Programming SIG (special interest group). Ashton Mouton will tell us how to create a unique password. Ray Paternostro will discuss the website, bugmenot.com. And Tom Ford will detail some of the many features of Yahoo! including mail, music, groups, games and movies. As always, questions will be welcome. Mark your calendars with a red pen, create an entry in your PDA or Pocket PC, update Outlook (all versions) and join us on Wednesday, May 4, 2005. The monthly meeting of the NOPCC starts at 6:30pm on the first Wednesday of every month. Location of the meeting is the J.D. Meisler school cafeteria at 3700 Cleary Ave. Metairie. Use the entrance through the breezeway on Pharr Street.

Microsoft Publisher—2003 Raffle

The New Orleans Personal Computer Club will be conducting a raffle in May for a new, sealed in the box retail copy of Microsoft Publisher 2003 with Digital Imaging. It helps the user create impressive marketing materials for print, Web, and e-mail. The Digital Image Pro program included in this package includes 200 filters, Adobe Photoshop Filter plug-in support, and a wide variety of brushes, distortions, and colorization options. This program retails for around $200. For more information on this program, v i s i t   M i c r o s o f t ' s   s i t e   a t : http://www.microsoft.com/office/publisher/prodinfo/digital.mspx

Raffle tickets are available to NOPC members at the cost of $1 per ticket, 6 for $5. Help support the club by purchasing a few, and encourage friends and family to join the club so they can have the opportunity to buy tickets and have a chance to win this as well. The winning ticket will be pulled at the end of the May membership meeting. Maybe it will be you?

APCUG - Benefit of Membership

 Region 8 members.... Corel is once again enthusiastically supporting the user group community and we sincerely welcome them back. Please visit the APCUG User Group special pricing page at http://www.corel.com/specialusergroups The boxed software is 50% off list and includes both Corel and Jasc products. They are currently putting several presentations-in-a-box together in addition to the Jasc PIAB. Thank you in advance for forwarding the information about the Corel UG special pricing page to your members. Happy computing, Judy Taylour, Chair Member Services

What to do with Your Tax Refund!
LCD vs. Plasma TVs
(presented by Philips)

Currently, flat TVs are created using two different technologies: plasma and Liquid Crystal Display (LCD). The foundation of the plasma TV is over a million tiny glass cells that are charged with a mixture of neon and xenon. Behind these cells are colored phosphors, which are chemical compounds that emit light when energized.

Each cell has three phosphors; one red, one blue, and one green. When activated by an electrode, the plasma cells emit invisible UV light. The UV light strikes the red, green and blue phosphors on the back of the display and thus creates the pixels that form the image you see on the screen. LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) technology works differently. Liquid is suspended between two transparent panels. Within the liquid are crystals that, when activated by voltage, re-position themselves so that they either allow the light to pass through the panel and or block the light. This process is similar to turning on and off a million light bulbs. Fluorescent tubes behind the panels supply the light source. Both the lit and unlit crystals create visible pixels that cumulatively compose the image on the screen.

Pros and Cons of Each

Brightness
Brightness in LCD and plasma screens is typically expressed as candelas per square meter (cd/m2). Typically, plasmas are listed at 500-700 cd/m2, but independent reviewers say that that the brightness of plasma is closer to 100 cd/m2. Conversely, LCD TVs typically get a brightness rating of 450 cd/m2, again when measured independently.

Contrast Ratio
Contrast ratio is the measurement of the brightest white against the blackest black that the TV can create. The higher the contrast ratio, the easier it is to discern details on the screen. Current plasmas measure contrast ratios of up to 3000:1. However, independent reviewers believe that measured in real world viewing situations, contrast ratios for plasma TVs drop to approximately 200:1. Conversely, LCD TV contrast ratios range from 350-450:1 when measured using the same realistic standards.

Color Saturation
Color saturation describes the amount of grey in a color. The more grey, the lower the saturation. Plasma has the advantage over LCD in the area of color saturation because of it's method to light blocking. Plasma is able to completely turn off pixels when not in use, so that no stray light dilutes the colors. The way LCD technology works means that there is some stray light and therefore obtaining true color is difficult.

Screen Size
Right now, the plasma market offers TVs as big as 60 inches, and no plasma TV is available smaller than 32 inches. LCD screen sizes range from 13 inches to 46 inches, and because of manufacturing innovations, larger models are becoming available every year. Look for

LCDs to catch up in this area soon.

Viewing Angle
Historically, plasma TVs have had a larger viewing angle, at about 160 degrees, when measured against older LCD TVs. However, the newer model LCD TVs have viewing angles up to 175 degrees.

Burn In
Burn in is what happens when an image stays on a plasma screen for an extended period of time. LCD's are not at all susceptible to burn in. While Plasma TVs are vulnerable, some newer plasma TVs have added features that combat it.

Lifespan
Typical plasma TVs have a life span of 20,000 to 30,000 hours, which equates to at about 20 years of usage if you have the set on for 4 hours a day. The lifespan of an LCD TV is typically 50,000 to 60,000 hours, or about 40 years running 4 hours daily.

Response Time
Response time is the amount of time, measured in milliseconds (ms), that it takes for a pixel to go from active to inactive and back to active again. Lower numbers mean faster transitions and fewer visible image artifacts. Plasma TVs were made to handle rapid movement on the screen more effectively. They can have response times as low as 15 ms. LCD TVs started as PC displays, and so the need to show fast movement wasn't critical; somewhere around 25 ms. LCD manufacturers have been steadily improving their response times as the demand for fast moving, full motion video has increased. Newer model LCD TVs can have response times as fast as 16 ms.

Power Conservation
Because the crystals in LCD TV do not produce light, the technology is labeled as "non-emissive," which means it does not give off radiation like the CRT. Cold cathode light sources, like fluorescent tubes, which use only a little power, are used to illuminate the image. LCDs also use less power than plasma televisions, because plasma requires powering hundreds of electrodes to stimulate the phosphors.

Conclusion
Knowing that flat TV is not going away, there is no time like the present to start enjoying all the advantages that these new technologies. Check out Philips line of Plasma and Flat TVs online today. *A blatant ad, but some good information nevertheless. Before you buy, Talk to Gerry McCann.*

Smart Computing Tips

Lighted USB Cable For More Than Just Looks - If your computer tower sits under your desk, chances are that you've had to fumble around in the dark when making cable connections on the back of your computer. Well the folks at Belkin, whose motto is "Connecting people with technology," have come up with a solution for those dark spaces: lighted USB (Universal Serial Bus) cables. These new cables look like any other USB cables until you connect them to your computer. When you do, you'll discover that the connectors on both ends of these USB cables contain special, low-power-consumption, super-bright LEDs (light-emitting diodes) that provide enough light to illuminate the connector panel on the back of your computer. The cables retail for around $15 and come in 6-foot lengths with lighted Type A and Type B connectors in four colors.

Back Up The Registry
& Set A Restore Point In WinXP/WinMe -
If you absolutely refuse to perform a whole-system backup, then at least create a Windows System Restore Point and back up your Registry. To create a Restore Point, go to Start, select All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, and System Restore. Select Create A Restore Point, click Next, give the Restore Point a name (such as Before Tweaking), and click Create. If needed, you can restore your system back to this point in time on this same screen. To back up your Registry, click Start, select Run, type regedit in the Open field, and click OK. Right-click My Computer and choose Export. Set the Export Range to All, save the file with a name (such as Before_tweaking.reg), and click Save.

Beyond Stickers & Markers:
Putting labels and artwork on your CDs and DVDs has come a long way since the days of Sharpies and adhesive labels. Here we will show you how to use thermal printing technology to create professional-looking discs by printing directly on your optical media. Click here: http://www.smartcomputing.com/support/links.asp?id=812.

Surviving The Crash:
For many people, thinking about their hard drive failing is like contemplating their own mortality. Some never give it a serious thought, while others obsess over the reasons and the timing. And unfortunately, it's a matter of when, not if. Click here to find out what to do when your hard drive takes a dive: http://www.smartcomputing.com/support/links.asp?id=813.

4 Steps to Lock Down Your Wi-Fi Network
by Kim Komando - 8/30/04

Q. I've heard that running a wireless network can make you vulnerable to hackers. Is this true, and if so what can I do to protect myself?

A. Wi-Fi is a popular way to network home computers. It's relatively inexpensive, convenient and fairly simple to set up. But most users don't take the extra step to lock it down. This can be a grave error. Wi-Fi uses radio waves to transmit information. These waves can penetrate the walls of your house or apartment. They are then up for grabs. Hackers take advantage of unsecured Wi-Fi networks. Some, called war drivers, drive around neighborhoods looking for open networks. Some are just keeping score, but others may attempt to access your personal data. By following four basic steps, you can keep your information safe and the bad guys out.

1. Stop broadcasting to the world. By default, most access points send a short message repeating the network's name. The network's name is called the SSID (Service Set Identifier). Anybody who lives (or drives) nearby can easily detect that you have a wireless network, find its name and jump onto it. By disabling the SSID broadcast, you are no longer telling the world around you that you have a wireless network. Additionally, rename the SSID. Don't use your name or something easily identifiable.

2. Change the password on your access point. Default passwords are common knowledge. If unchanged, it takes only minutes to figure out the proper password. When you change the password, make sure you use a combination of numbers and letters. The most secure are alphanumeric combinations, such as 3n07tY5. However, such combinations are difficult to remember. At the least, try not to choose an obvious password (last name, street name, dog's name, etc.).

3. Use encryption. There are two standards of encryption. Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP) is an older and less secure method. It uses a non-changing 64- or 128-bit key. Although it's not the best encryption, it is better than nothing. Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA) uses 256-bit encryption, which is much harder to decode. WPA is also dynamic—it's constantly changing. By the time a hacker breaks the key, it will have changed. If you're buying new gear, insist on WPA. Even if you have old equipment, you may be able to get WPA through a firmware update. Firmware is software written on a chip inside a piece of hardware. Check your manufacturer's Web site. Encryption does have a downside—

it can slow your network. But that is preferable to a lack of security.

4. Enable Media Access Control (MAC) filtering. Media Access Control is an address assigned to each wireless card. All wireless devices have unique MAC addresses. The address includes six sets of paired characters and is usually printed on the back of your wireless card. MAC filtering tells your access point to grant access only to MAC addresses you enter. You can do your own security check after implementing these measures. Install the free program NetStumbler (http://www.netstumbler.com) onto a laptop or PDA. This program will detect open Wi-Fi networks. After installing the program, walk around the outside of your house with your portable to see what a hacker may see. It shouldn't detect anything. Even after locking down your Wi-Fi network, it's still somewhat vulnerable. A determined hacker can eventually break down any security walls. But by taking preventive measures, you can make it difficult. Probably, the hacker will just move on.

IS IT A STROKE?
from Ed Hughes, Space Coast PC Users Group

A True Story

Susie is recouping at an incredible pace for someone with a massive stroke - all because Sherry saw Susie stumble - -that is the key that isn't mentioned below - and then she asked Susie the 3 questions. So simple - - this literally saved Susie's life - -

SOMETHING WE ALL NEED TO KNOW...
IS IT A STROKE?

Sometimes symptoms of a stroke are difficult to identify. Unfortunately, the lack of awareness spells disaster. The stroke victim may suffer brain damage when people nearby fail to recognize the symptoms of a stroke. Now doctors say a bystander can recognize a stroke by asking three simple questions:

*Ask the individual to **SMILE.**
*Ask him or her to **RAISE BOTH ARMS.**
*Ask the person to **SPEAK A SIMPLE SENTENCE.**

If he or she has trouble with any of these tasks, call 9-1-1 immediately and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher.

After discovering that a group of non-medical volunteers could identify facial weakness, arm weakness and speech problems, researchers urged the general public to learn the three questions. They presented their conclusions at the American Stroke Association's annual meeting last February. Widespread use of this test could result in prompt diagnosis and treatment of the stroke and prevent brain damage.!

Still in a bad humor, maybe you have crossed the....

grumble line

A grumble line is the plotted amount of light from the sky that will be available in a building once an adjacent building has been erected. In building construction in certain countries, a builder may need to recognize the legal "rights to light" of nearby building owners. Accordingly, formulas have been created for calculating the grumble line and these can be computerized. The term apparently originated prior to electric lighting when one candle-power was said to be the level of light below which a clerk would begin to grumble about the difficulty of reading. The grumble line was the line in the room beyond which there was insufficient light, or in another version, a line halfway across a room within which a reader could read without complaint or else an interfering barrier would have to be removed. Rights to light in buildings date to the Roman era, when many houses and apartments had solaria both for heat and light. Although English common law supports the concept, U.S. law has tended to give precedence to the right of landowners to build without regard for adjacent property's access to light. With the advent of solar-heated buildings, courts have become more open to the rights to light and other solar rays. In the U.K., light entitlement was defined in the Prescription Act of 1832, called "Ancient Lights" or "Rights to Light." This law applies to windows that have been in use for over 20 years. More recently, English courts have specified the grumble line as the line that traces out the 0.2% skylight factor on a surface 850mm above floor level in a room. A grumble line is calculated before and after building construction. If the line calculated after construction infringes on the rights to light, the owner of the building may sue for an injunction to stop building or for compensation. Development planners in the U.K. often work under local guidelines that require much more light than the courts would require under the "rights to light" law.

XSL

XSL (Extensible Stylesheet Language), formerly called Extensible Style Language, is a language for creating a style sheet that describes how data sent over the Web using the Extensible Markup Language (XML) is to be presented to the user. For example, in an XML page that describes the characteristics of one or more automobiles for an insurance company, a set of open and close tags might contain the name of an auto manufacturer. Using XSL, you could tell the Web browser that the auto manufacturer name should be displayed, where to display it on a page, and that it should be displayed in a bold font. Think of an XML page as similar to an HTML page (like the one you are reading now), but containing data in identified fields rather than text and graphics. XSL gives a de-veloper the tools to describe exactly which data fields in an XML file to display and exactly where and how to display them. Like any style sheet language, XSL can be used to create a style definition for one XML document or reused for many other XML documents. XSL is based on and extends the Document Style Semantics and Specification Language (DSSSL) and the Cascading Style Sheet, level 1 (CSS1) standards. It is being developed under the auspices of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

Or maybe you would like to manifest your frustrations...

Ten practical jokes we don't recommend:

(We especially don't recommend you play any of these practical jokes on your spouse or teenage children.)

1. Never change the keyboard default from "English" to "French."

2. Never change the mouse pointer options to display pointer trails.

3. Never switch the "M" and "N" keys on the keyboard.

4. Never remove the ball under the mouse.

5. Never install Clippy, a retro-syle office assistant parody that offers useless advice like: "Your mouse just moved."

6. Never configure the AutoCorrect option in Microsoft Word to replace the word "the" with the word "my."

7. Never take a screen shot of the computer's desktop with a document open, save it as a bitmap and make the bitmap the computer's wallpaper. Never EVER sit and watch the person try to close the application.

8. Never turn on the num-lock.

9. Never pull a connection cable out just far enough that it looks like it's connected but really isn't.

10. Never put tape over the sensor of an optical mouse.

Submitted by Tom Watkins
Member, NOPCC

How to Report Tech Problems to Get Answers

By Gabe Goldberg,
APCUG Advisor and Columnist,
AARP Computers and Technology Website.
ggoldberg@apcug.net

Using computers and technology means having questions and problems. But you can't get answers and solutions without asking the *right* questions. A little preparation can be a big help in solving annoyances, mysteries, and disasters.

How to Report Tech Problems to Get Answers

The more we use computers and technology, the more questions we have and problems we need solved. But it's hard to get answers and solutions without asking the *right* questions and describing the problem at hand. We're specific when visiting

the doctor or auto mechanic: we describe what's wrong and when it began. We may even imitate the noise our car makes for the mechanic.

But when faced with computer oddities and malfunctions we sometimes revert to unhelpful generalities such as "My email is broken" or "My printer stopped working" or "I get an error when I start Word". Problem reports such as these don't allow diagnosing a problem; at best, they elicit a response like "Tell me more".

It saves time to collect as much information as possible before asking for help. As a bonus, gathering problem details and considering relevant factors can often allow solving problems oneself!

Just as a doctor or mechanic needs details, someone analyzing a computer problem must know the environment in which it occurred. So describe your computer (hardware/ software/ networking/ application/etc.) to provide context. Mention your operating system (Windows 98/ME/XP, Mac OS, Linux, etc.), what version of what application failed (Internet Explorer 6.0, MS Word XP, etc.), what Internet connection is used (dial or cable/DSL), and any other details that may help.

Don't omit details -- it's better to have too much information than to miss a crucial factor. Sometimes it's worth capturing screen images showing a problem; tools for doing this will be described in a future article.

Other important steps in describing symptoms and getting help are:

Distinguish facts from guesses and interpretations.

If an error message was issued, write it down, word-for-word. Then check it for accuracy. (Often searching Google for the error message text or a distinctive chunk -- entered in quotation marks -- will yield information on a problem.)

Note what you did just before the problem occurred and whether anything else odd happened since you last rebooted and before the problem at hand.

Mention whether the problem happened before, and if so how you resolved it.

List whatever (hardware, software, settings, network, *anything*) changed recently.

Explain if you attempted to solve the problem and what resulted. (Remember that rebooting often cures problems, though without explaining them.)

Note where you've already looked for information (product manual or Help, company Web site or FAQ, etc.).

Reread your query imagining you know nothing about the problem except what's in the query. Add what's missing that someone else needs to know in order to help.

To help friends or service personnel respond to your question -- and to let the question be filed and found -- use a meaningful Subject line, not Help!, Urgent, or Question. Describe the context (e.g., Windows XP) and the problem (e.g., Windows Update never finds new patches).

To help your helper help you --

Be clear about your overall goal, don't focus on an intermediate step you think is necessary -- you may distract someone into addressing how you're trying to do something rather than what you actually want to do.

Ask for help in the right/best place. AARP's Computers and Technology Web board <http://community.aarp.org/rp-computers/start> hosts many people with deep and diverse experience who are most generous with their time offering help and advice. And the Internet hosts thousands of mailing lists and newsgroups specializing in every imaginable topic. Searching for find the best place to pose a question will get you better

and more complete answers and avoid your seeming like a novice for posting out-of-place queries.

As you work with an individual or a group, collaborate -- don't try to overpower them. Be respectful, not belligerent; don't make them feel stupid even if you feel they are. They may have missed a detail, you may not have conveyed the whole story.

If you're working with someone at a company help desk, don't try to "pull rank" based on age or experience or professional credentials. Mention past interactions with the company, emphasizing positive outcomes.

Finally, a longish document from Eric Raymond -- an influential leader of the "open source" (shared software development) movement – at http://www.catb.org/~esr/faqs/smart-questions.html provides useful tips, though it's a little too harsh in places for my taste. But his comments on how to ask questions and where to seek help are interesting and helpful.

This article appeared originally on AARP's Computers and Technology Web site, <www.aarp.org/computers>. (c) AARP 2005. Permission is granted for reprinting and distribution by non-profit organizations and this paragraph included.

NOPCC Directory

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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*

May 2005

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 **Computer Solutions** WSMB 1350AM 11a-12p	*2* **Computer Programming** @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	*3*	*4* **NOPC Gen Mtg** J.D. Meisler School 6:30p-8:30p	*5*	*6*	*7* **Living with Home Electronics** WTIX 690AM 10-11a
8 **Computer Solutions** WSMB 1350AM 11a-12p	*9* **Computer Programming** @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	*10*	*11* **NOPC BOD** @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	*12* **WebLab SIG** @McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	*13*	*14* **Living with Home Electronics** WTIX 690AM 10-11a
15 **Computer Solutions** WSMB 1350AM 11a-12p	*16* **Computer Programming** @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	*17* **Genealogy SIG** @ McCann's 6:30p-830p	*18*	*19* **New Users SIG** @McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	*20*	*21* **Living with Home Electronics** WTIX 690AM 10-11a
22 **Computer Solutions** WSMB 1350AM 11a-12p	*23* **Computer Programming** @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	*24*	*25* **Digital Media SIG** @McCann's 7:00p-9:00p	*26* **Internet SIG** @McCann's 7:00p-9:00p	*27*	*28* **Living with Home Electronics** WTIX 690AM 10-11a
29 **Computer Solutions** WSMB 1350AM 11a-12p	*30* **Computer Programming** @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	*31*				

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