

Mother Board

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September 5, 2007

***This Month
At NOPC
Securing
Wireless
Lan's
by
Ray
Paternostro***

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Dumb Things to Avoid While Using Your Computer

by Vinny La Bash,
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To paraphrase a recent TV commercial, we all do dumb things, but doing them with your computer doesn't have to be one of them.

Most of us know that our computers work better when they are plugged into an active electrical outlet, but ask any service technician how many times he or she has encountered that situation, and you may be surprised at the answer. Every one of us, no matter how experienced, has done at least one dumb thing with our computers. Maybe you pressed a wrong combination of keys and changed a setting you didn't mean to disturb. Maybe nothing much happened or you ended up crashing your system.

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This Month at the NOPCC Wireless Router Security

As a growing number of households migrate to broadband internet service and with more than one computer, routers have become a fairly popular addition to home and small business networks. Continuing this trend, wireless routers allow for computers with both wired and wireless-capable network adapters to access the internet and each other. Although all routers have security features many users do not enable them, mainly because of unawareness, or fear of the unknown. Our speaker for September will be Mr. Ray Paternostro, Jr. He will show us the different methods of security available in today's routers and also highlight the potential pitfalls of not using these functions.

Ray is the current vice president and past president of the NOPC Club. He has worked in Information Technology and has been a valued club member for the past 13 years.

Mark your calendars, create an entry in your Palm Treo 700wx, update Outlook and join us on Wednesday, September 5, 2007. The monthly meeting of the NOPC Club 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. For more information please visit our club's web site at <http://www.nopc.org>.

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Whatever does or doesn't happen, paying attention to what you're doing combined with a dash of forethought can prevent most dumb mistakes.

Dumb Computer Mistake # 6: Failing to install or keep your anti-virus and anti-spyware programs up-to-date.

Some people think that keeping these programs current is too much trouble. Others quibble because sometimes they have to disable their anti-virus program to install another application.

Don't be misguided. Viruses and spyware can gum up your system to a point where your machine can be rendered useless and inoperable. You could be a victim of fraud or risk turning your machine into a "zombie" where a third party can use your computer for criminal activities. Innocent people have been arrested and charged with downloading child pornography. They had no idea that their machines were compromised for illegal purposes, yet they found themselves in deep trouble.

Dumb Computer Mistake # 5: Indiscriminately installing freeware and shareware you find on the internet.

If you are guilty of this it's only a matter of time before you get infected with a piece of sloppily written software that will cause your system to behave erratically or crash. If you follow dumb with dumber by installing pirated software, don't ask me for help.

Dumb Computer Mistake # 4: Share your files and peripherals with the immediate world.

Turn off file and printer sharing. Unless you do this you could open your computer to access by using a public wireless hotspot with your laptop. Even if you don't use a laptop be aware that Windows, by default, has administrative sharing for the root of each drive. You can turn this feature off in the Systems Administration portion of the Control Panel.

Dumb Computer Mistake # 3: Browse through the internet without a firewall.

People new to computers are most likely to make this mistake. They tend to be entirely unaware that they need a firewall because nobody told them what a firewall is or why they need one. This lack of knowledge exposes them to every virus, worm or

malicious hacker in the computer universe. Fortunately, this exposure can be easily corrected. Many modems and routers have built-in firewall protection. Personal firewalls can easily be downloaded from the web. Go to www.avast.com and download one of the best all around network security programs in existence. The best part is that this excellent program is free to the general public.

Dumb Computer Mistake # 2: Picking weak passwords.

Every hacker in the known universe understands that many people use their children's or grandchildren's name as a password. Cracking that kind of security is as easy as breathing. Don't use a family member's birthday or social security number as a password either. It's the kind of information that is all too easy to obtain. Don't create passwords from a dictionary. Hackers have programs which automatically compare passwords against dictionary entries.

Passwords should be at least 8 characters long, and be a combination of upper and lower case characters and numbers. The common objection is that they are hard to remember. That also makes them hard to crack. Create a phrase that you can easily remember and use the first letter of each word along with logical numbers. For example, "Our vacation in Jamaica begins on the fifth day of August" becomes OviJbot5do8. A password like that is impossible to guess and is not found in any dictionary.

Dumb Computer Mistake # 1: Never backing up your data or system files.

Even if you never do any other dumb thing while computing, failure to back up your data can negate everything else if you lose important information. There are too many things that can go wrong for you not to be backing up your data. Hard disk crashes, fire or water damage, tornados, hurricanes, magnetic interference, and theft are just a few of the many things that can damage or destroy data.

Backing up data can be time consuming and inconvenient, but losing your data could be catastrophic. There are many strategies you can use to protect your data, but any strategy is better than none. Don't think that merely copying your data files to an

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external disk constitutes backing up. Make copies of your essential data to three CDs or three sets of CDs. Keep one set at home, but in a different room than where the computer is housed. Keep another set at the office if you work for a living. If you're retired ask a friend to keep a set for you. Do the same for your friend. The third set of disks should be kept in a secure place like a safe deposit box.

Data is the only irreplaceable thing on your computer. You can replace hardware, operating systems and application software, but you can't go to a store and buy a replacement copy of your data.

The dumbest thing I can remember doing is backing up my data files to a RAM disk.

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Tom Ford

Clarke Kissel

AUGUST, 2007 Meeting Presentation Recap

Last month's presentation was by Clarke Kissel on preparing for a hurricane by protecting your family's photographs. He demonstrated his technique of scanning the photos into his computer and then saving them to a CD or DVD.

If you only have photographs, then just about any scanner will suffice, and the only thing you need to concentrate on is the software that is bundled with the scanner. If you have "slides", then be careful to select a scanner that has the backlighting needed for slide copying. Not all scanners have this feature.

To the enjoyment of those present, Clarke gave

delightful anecdotes on the numerous photos he used during the demonstration. His presentation showed another side of Clarke that was unexpected. Further demonstrating that "you can't tell a book by its cover".

Besides demonstrating the scanning of photographs, Clarke amused the club with his presentation of old TV commercial jingles which he like to search out on the Internet. The members present were challenged to identify the products the jingles were promoting and the first correct answer won a CD of several hundred jingles which Clarke had collected.

Because these jingles come in different audio and video formats, he gave the club the names and URL's of several "free" software that would convert the numerous file formats into Windows Media Player or mp3 (which is becoming more common on most computers these days.). Note: the gift CD was in CDA (CD Audio) format.

Capture YouTube video with free vixy.net and convert the flash files to other formats compatible with Windows Media Player. You can even convert the flash files to mp3.

Capture .ram files (RealPlayer) with the WMRecorder (free trial) at wmrecorder.com.

Google "inurl:ViewerFrame?Mode=" (no quotes) and view and control networked webcams from around the world.

Download a free and easy audio editor at download-audacity.org

If you did not attend that meeting, you missed a good one!!!!



Improve Computing Pleasure with Free Widgets for Windows and Mac

By Ira Wilsker,
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WEBSITES

<http://widgets.yahoo.com>

<http://widgets.yahoo.com/gallery>

Many of us are extremely busy, and often lack the time to search the internet for items of frequent interest. Many of us have dull and boring desktops displayed on our monitors, often using the default images of our computer or software maker. Fortunately for us, there is a free service offered by Yahoo!, called "widgets".

Widgets, also known as "gadgets" by some web services, are small programs that display a wide variety of information on the otherwise wasted space on our desktops. This information is automatically updated on a frequent basis, providing the user with current data without loading another program or browsing to a website, as widgets are displayed on the desktop on a full time basis.

Widgets is the name for the products distributed by Yahoo!, and gadgets are distributed by other web service providers. While similar in appearance and function, widgets and gadgets are generally not interchangeable, and in order to conserve system resources, users should choose gadgets or widgets, but not both.

Yahoo!'s widgets can be found at widgets.yahoo.com. Upon opening that page, the user is greeted with a button to download the widget engine, which includes about a dozen popular widgets, including a picture frame (displays digital photos on desktop), weather display, notepad, daily planner, maps, stock ticker, and others. The opacity of widgets can be controlled to make them nearly opaque, hiding the desktop behind the widget, to almost totally transparent, fully displaying the desktop. Widgets can be dragged and dropped anywhere on the screen. I have a lot of icons on my desktop, and my widgets cover several of the icons, but this is not a problem as I drag the widget out of the way whenever I want to access those previously covered icons.

The widget engine works on Windows XP with service pack 2, Windows 2000 with service pack 4, Vista, or Macs with OS X 10.3.9 or higher. An internet connection is necessary in order to update the widgets, and 512 megabytes (minimum) ram is recommended for improved performance.

Among the default widgets included with the widget engine, I personally have the stock ticker and weather widgets loaded and running, and also have a TV widget which displays the shows for the next few hours on the channels of my choice.

The stock ticker widget is very easy to use, and is automatically updated every few minutes. The default listings are for popular quotes, such as the Dow Jones Industrial Averages, NASDAQ, Yahoo!, and similar issues. It is very simple to modify the listing to show any desired quotes and indices, and the number of issues displayed is only limited by the space available on the desktop.

The weather widget is customizable for any city or zip code, and graphically displays the weather for five days, current conditions, temperature, and moon phases. By moving the cursor over the weather widget (sometimes it also requires a mouse click), a balloon opens which displays the humidity, barometric pressure, wind chill or heat index, wind direction and speed, and the time of most recent update.

The widget I seem to refer to the most is the TV widget called "TV Tracker", which can be downloaded from the Widget Gallery. Once downloaded and installed, a city and zip code is selected, which displays the on-air, cable, and satellite options and carriers locally available. Selecting the appropriate carrier displays a two hour grid of what is on television. Different genres, such as sports and movies are highlighted in different colors for easy viewing. Clicking on a highlighted title will "fetch" the description and details of the movie or sports event, displaying it in a sub-widget adjacent to the primary widget. I will be honest and say that there are several cable channels available to me that I simply never watch, and TV Tracker easily allows for the display of only selected channels, making the display that much easier to follow.

The widget gallery, widgets.yahoo.com/gallery, cur-

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rently lists 4242 Windows widgets available for download, and 3977 widgets for Mac, in a variety of categories. As I type this, Yahoo! is featuring Motor Trend Magazine's "Gas Alert Savings" widget which displays a localized list of the lowest priced gas stations in the area, and is available for both Windows and Mac. Widgets can be searched by name, type, or date. The widget categories listed in the gallery are latest (4242 widgets), updates (2158 widgets), fun & games (575 widgets), date & time (470), news feeds (952), system utilities (354), sight and sound (554), geek stuff (120), cam viewers (273), widget tools (63), app (application) enhancers (109), search tools (352), and various (miscellaneous, 416). Each category may contain hundreds of different widgets, all of which are available for free download.

I have downloaded several other widgets, and selectively load them when I want, and stop them when no longer wanted. In Windows, widgets as a group can be controlled by clicking on the widget icon in the system tray, near the clock. The widget icon is a black background, with two diagonal and interlocked gears. Right clicking on the widget icon displays a comprehensive menu of options which allows the user to control the appearance and function of widgets, load and unload widgets, and otherwise control their behavior.

Some widgets that I selectively use are news feeds which display real time news headlines from hundreds of sources, live weather radar, streaming audio from dozens of radio stations from all over the globe, and many others. Although I have never used it, there is even a pregnancy calculator widget!

Widgets can be a fun adjunct to improve the satisfaction and use of our computers.

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A router can help protect your computer

By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS

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A few years ago, you had probably not heard the term "router", unless you used one in your wood-working class in high school. Today, you hear much more about the word "router" when it is used in con-

junction with computers and the Internet. In the computer world, a router is an important piece of equipment and one that is making its way into everyday terminology. So I would like to tell you a little about what a router is and what it can do for you.

A router is a hardware device that connects networks of two or more computers and forwards data across a network of computers. Devices like network printers can also be hooked up to a router. Routers that you might see in home and small business use are generally small rectangular or square devices about 6" to 8" in size. This type of router will have ports on the back where you can hook in computers, broadband modems, and other devices. A router has lights that indicate its status and the status of the connected devices. Wireless modems often have small antennas. Routers can usually sit on a desktop or the floor, but they can also be hung on a wall.

You can think of a router as a kind of traffic cop that stands on the corner and routes the traffic to their final destination. Just as a traffic cop knows which direction a car is coming from and which way it wants to go, a router knows what data comes from each of the computers, what data each computer has requested, and what data to return to each computer. Routers are the workhorses of the Internet. They make sure that your email gets to your intended recipient rather than one of the millions of other computers. Within a smaller network routers make sure that the data or the webpage that you request is returned to your computer and not the computer of your co-worker or other family member.

While routers have been used for years in the Internet and by businesses, the proliferation of home networks has brought the router into the home and into the realm of the average computer user. In a home, a router typically is used to share an Internet connection. It connects a home network of two or more computers with the network of your Internet Service Provider (ISP), giving each of your computers Internet connectivity. Your ISP issues you one address on the Internet, called an IP or Internet Protocol address. If you have multiple machines at home, a router lets you share that single IP address.

The router watches the traffic going out and waits for the response to the outgoing traffic. It then routes the incoming traffic to the proper computer

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within your home network. Since the router is watching all the traffic, it knows what information you have requested and only allows incoming traffic that is expected. So if your computer has requested a Web page, it will allow that Web page to come into your computer. Other traffic that has not been requested is tossed aside and not allowed to come in.

This ignoring of unexpected incoming traffic has an interesting side effect. It actually protects your computer from many malicious attacks from the outside. So the router, since it protects all the computers on your network, is considered a hardware firewall.

In fact, a router plus the firewall that is built-into Windows will, in my opinion, give the average user all the protection that they need. That is, provided that they follow safe computing procedures, like not opening unexpected email attachments and running a good antivirus program.

For heavy duty computer users who want to make sure that their computers are completely protected, third party software firewalls, like those offered by Symantec, McAfee, and Zone Alarm, do offer the added safeguard of watching the traffic flowing in and out of each software program on your computer. However, these firewalls can slow down your computer. They often ask the computer user to permit or deny permission for programs that request Internet access. If you are just an average Joe, it can often be very difficult to determine if you should grant or deny that permission since the names of the files are often nebulous. I can't tell you how many times I have been called to repair someone's Internet connectivity only to find out that they had inadvertently told the firewall to deny Internet access to a program that can't function without it.

So having a router not only lets you share an Internet connection, it also protects your computer without slowing it down. As a matter of fact, even if you only have one computer, you can still use a router between your broadband Internet connection and your computer to help protect your perimeter. With the price of small routers falling to under \$50, a router can be a wise investment for today's computer user, even if they have to pay someone to come in and set it up for them.

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The Nightmare

By Berry F. Phillips,

a member of ccOKC and a frequent contributor to the eMonitor,
Computer Club of Oklahoma City

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My computer growled like some prehistoric monster rebelling at being awakened from a deep slumber and then checking my financial data online almost by habit. Terror pulsed through my veins as I no longer existed; all my personal data had been deleted! I then checked to see if my credit cards were in my wallet, which gave me a momentary feeling of security that I still existed. However, the panic returned when I remembered the credit cards while having a physical reality actually have only a cyber reality. What did I do wrong? Do you suppose the last time I kicked my computer out of frustration caused this animosity? On the verge of hysteria, I shouted, "I am too young to be cyber terminated and deleted into nonexistence!"

Looking for something to save me from termination, I am very appreciative of the National Cyber Security Alliance (NCSA) for their contribution to this article. NCSA is a go to resource for cyber security awareness and education for the home user, and small business, and education audiences. NCSA is a private partnership whose sponsors include the Department of Homeland Security, Federal Trade Commission, and many private-sector corporations and organizations.

"The widespread availability of computers and connections to the Internet provide everyone with 24/7 access to information, credit, financial services, and shopping. The Internet is also an incredible tool for educators and students to communicate and learn. Unfortunately, some individuals exploit the Internet through criminal behavior and other harmful acts. Criminals can try to gain unauthorized access to your computer and then use that access to steal your identity, commit fraud, or even launch cyber attacks against others. By following the recommended cyber security practices outlined here you can limit the harm cyber-criminals can do not only to your computer, but to everyone's computer.

However, there is no single cyber security practice or technological solution that will prevent online crime. These recommended cyber security practices that highlight that using a set of practices that include Internet habits as well as technological solutions can make a difference. The National Cyber Security Alliance's Top Eight Cyber Security Practices are practical steps you can take to stay safe online and avoid becoming a victim of fraud, identity theft, or cyber crime."

Here are the eight NCSA cyber security practices to stay safe online: "1. Protect your personal information. It's valuable. 2. Know who you are dealing with online. 3. Use anti virus software, a firewall, and anti-spyware software to help keep your computer safe and secure. 4. be sure to set up your operating system and Web

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CLUB SUPPORTERS

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. Or contact Mary Prinz either at: secretary@nopc.org or (504) 455-1412.

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browser software properly, and update them regularly. 5. Use strong passwords or strong authentication technology to help protect your personal information. 6. Back up important files. 7. Learn what to do if something goes wrong. 8. Protect your children online." Upon awakening after having once more dozed off in front of my com-

puter while online, I saw my personal data that confirmed I really did exist. I am alive! I have not been deleted! It was only a nightmare. I simply must stop watching those late night horror movies, kicking my computer in frustration, and improve my online security practices to avoid cyber fireworks.

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September 2007

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1 Living with Home Electronics WIST 690AM 10a-11a
2	3	4	5 NOPC Gen Mtg J.D. Meisler School 6:30p-8:30p	6	7	8 Living with Home Electronics WIST 690AM 10a-11a
9	10	11 Genealogy SIG 7:00 pm Call 887.5746 for meeting location	12 NOPC BOD @ McCann's 6:30p-8:30p	13	14	15 Living with Home Electronics WIST 690AM 10a-11a
16	17	18	19 PMI GNO <u>General Meeting</u>	20 New & Intermediate User SIG Old Metairie Library 6:30p-8:30p	21	22 Living with Home Electronics WIST 690AM 10a-11a
23	24	25	26	27	28	29 Living with Home Electronics WIST 690AM 10a-11a
30						

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.; and Students (under 21), \$20/yr. Meetings are held at 6:30 on the 1st Wednesday of each month at J.D. Meisler Jr. High School on Cleary Avenue in Metairie, Louisiana.

NOPCC Directory

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Director At Large	Jeanne Okamoto	director3@nopc.org	455-0977

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Internet	Ray Paternostro	internet-m@nopc.org	737-9099
New Users	Tom Ford	new-user@nopc.org	985-643-3172
Web Lab	Edward Jahncke	editor@nopc.org	985-892-4797

Other Important Numbers / Addresses

Club Hotline	Recorded messages. Meeting Information. Open 24 Hours	887-5746
NOPCC Web Site	On the World Wide Web. Our own home page and club information.	www.nopcc.org