This Month

At NOPC Town-Hall Meeting Discussing Internet Browsers

Inside this issue:

It's Not Just Entertainment Any More

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In the past, we've commonly thought of computer games, especially those played on game machine platforms, as pure entertainment. Times have changed and many games have become educational as well as physical training devices.

Learning has become fun for both kids and adults. Here's some information that will keep you ahead of the digital gaming curve.

DS - Handheld Games for Senior Citizens Nintendo has a hot selling hand held video game machine called the "DS" for "Double Screen." The device opens with two visible screens, one is a display screen and the other is a "Touch Screen" which serves as the controller interface. The DS has a series of games designed with "older" users in mind. They are Brain Age, Big Brain Academy and Flash Focus.

All three have been recom-

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This Month at the NOPCC
New Meeting Location

For our April meeting, we would like to have some of our members talk about the internet browsers they use. Most of us use Internet Explorer but there are other browsers available like Firefox and Opera. We need you to talk about your browser. Let me know which browser you use and if you can tell us about your browser at the April meeting.

For this to be successful, we need your help. Please contact me as soon as possible if you would like to participate.

Just a reminder, we will be meeting on April 2, 2008 at a new location. Our meeting will start at 6:30PM at the **Goldring-Woldenberg Jewish Community Center on 3747 W. Esplanade Ave., Metairie, LA 70002**. **Click on the name for a map**. You can park in the well lighted lot. Go through the main door and down the hallway to the cafeteria. See you there.....

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mended by AARP, and Brain Age has been shown to improve mental performance in independent tests. Brain Age and Big Brain Academy have a series of games, practice exercises and tests that are designed to improve and evaluate cognitive skills, and best of all "they're fun." They chart and graph improvement and will keep records for several individuals.

Have you ever had a problem with that vision test on your driver's license exam? Then Flash Focus was made for you. It too has games and exercises, but instead of improving your brain they improve your eyes.

Wii Want to Play

The hottest new gaming console is the Wii, another product from Nintendo that has games designed for the older kids, real older kids. The game controller is a little motion sensitive device that straps on the user's wrist. Participants interact with the game by moving their arms.

In the Detroit area, aerobic classes and movies have been replaced by Wii in many senior citizen centers. "Bowling" seems to be one of the most popular games. I've played it, and yes, it's exactly like the real thing. The motion of your arm, as you approach a virtual bowling alley, allows you to curve the ball and add some spin. Wii bowling leagues are springing up all over the country. Nintendo is about to release an exercise program for the Wii that uses a floor pad as a controller.

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New Technology Terms
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Words, words, words….In the fast-moving world of technology, new words and phrases are constantly introduced. In order to keep up with the times, you need to learn about the current terminology. This need not be a drudgery. In fact, it can be fun to see what new words and abbreviations are popular. Check these out and you can wow your friends next time computers and technology become the subject at the 19th hole or the neighborhood cocktail party.

SSD (Solid-State Drive)
This is a type of memory that you will be hearing more and more about in the future. It is a type of flash memory that has no moving parts. Some small laptop computers are appearing using SSDs for storing data instead of hard drives. Because SSDs have no spinning disks like the ordinary hard drives, they offer improved battery life for laptop computers. They also have better data access speeds than hard disks.

404
You may recognize this as a common message on the Internet. It indicates that the requested page could not be found. This may mean that the page has temporarily or permanently moved and is not currently available. However, recently the term 404 has come to have another meaning. It refers to someone who is totally clueless. From the error message "404 not found", this has become a slang term meaning that the person's brain could not be located. If you decide to call your spouse a 404, make sure that he or she has not read this column or you'll be in big trouble.

Crowdsourcing
Using the skills of a wide variety of people to do a job or perform a task is called crowdsourcing. The people who perform such a function are often found on the Internet. Although these people can be paid, often they are often volunteers.

Geotagging
This is technology built into a digital camera or part of a camera add-on device that is able to tag each photo with the exact location that the picture was taken. Photos can then be sorted based on where they were taken. They can also be plotted on maps.

HDMI (High-definition Multimedia Interface)
This is a newer audio and video interface that is often found on televisions, DVD players, video game consoles, video cameras, and other video equipment. This type of connector replaces older standard connectors like composite video, S-Video, component video, and DVI. HDMI carries both audio and video in one cable. It supports digital rights management systems. HDMI cables can be very expensive in comparison to older audio and video cables.

One Laptop per Child (OLPC)
Led by Nicholas Negroponte, this is a nonprofit or-

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ganization whose mission is to design, manufacture, and distribute affordable laptop computers to children around the world. The laptops were initially called the "$100 laptop", but the final build cost almost $200 each. In 2007, the One Laptop per Child organization started distributing these laptop computers to children in developing countries. The laptops are bright green and white portable computers with special features like a sealed keyboard. They are called XO computers.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

Search Engine Optimization is the process of tweaking a website to improve the volume of traffic that is produced by search engines. The idea is to give the website a higher ranking in the search engines thereby producing more traffic to the site. SEO includes using keywords and website design to get higher rankings with search engines.

Skype

This is an online service that allows users to make telephone calls over the Internet. The software is free and there is no charge to call the computers of other Skype users. Your computer must have a microphone in order to use Skype. With the addition of a webcam, Skype callers from computer to computer can also place video calls where they can both see and talk to each other. Skype also allows you to call landlines and cell phones for a fee. Skype has other services such as instant messaging and file transfer.

FTW

This stands for "For The Win". You may remember it being a part of the game show "Hollywood Squares" where a certain square would be selected "For the Win." It is also used in some online games like World of Warcraft. It is now a popular term that usually projects a boast, as in "I did it FTW." It is often used ironically and sarcastically.

Bot

A bot computer is one that has been infected with some type of malware that allows the computer to be controlled by an outside entity. Millions of computers are bots that are now under the influence of malware distributors who use these computers to send out spam, attack other computers and websites, and carry out scams and identity theft. The computer owner is usually unaware that their computer has been compromised since this activity is performed in the background.

BotNet

A series of bot computers, sometimes as large as millions of computers is called a BotNet. The BotNet does the bidding of some entity that has compromised the computers and taken control of them by installing some type of malware.

Zombie

This term that means the same thing as a Bot. It is a personal computer that has been infected with a virus that allows an outside force to control it. Such a computer can be used to send out spam or attack other computers without the owner's knowledge. Millions of computers today are zombie computers. They are part of a Zombie Network of computers that are controlled by hackers.

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All Computers Wait at the Same Speed

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I first heard that phrase about ten years ago at a geek conference in Seattle. A decade ago is earlier than the Stone Age in computer years. It was probably meant to make fun of the propeller heads that couldn't live without the fasted CPU on their motherboard. The geeks' concern with processing speed seemed ridiculous to those who understood that computers spend very little of their time processing information. They spend it waiting for us to tell them to do something. You would certainly find your life very boring if you had to spend 99% of your time waiting for other people to act before you could do anything.

What are we talking about? We're talking about keeping your system properly tuned so that you don't have to wait while it tries to do its job. It's no secret that Vista has had performance problems. Microsoft has promised that their upcoming service pack should resolve most if not all performance issues. We've heard similar kinds of promises from Redmond before, but this time they say they really mean it. In fairness, not every performance issue

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can be laid at Microsoft's doorstep, but it's always fun to blame them because they're such an easy target.

Vista puts great demands on your CPU due to Aero and other assorted graphical gizmos built into the product. They should have named it the Eye Candy OS. Responding to the user community, Microsoft also added security features and additional functions that were not present in XP. When you ask your CPU to do more, you're adding overhead. This means you need more CPU power or you live with a slower system. If Vista performance has been less than stellar, the good news is that you can do something about it other than buying a new computer. Here are some of the things you can do to make Vista more appealing from a performance standpoint.

You're probably tired of hearing this one. It's like mother telling you to eat your vegetables. You know she's right, but you don't want to hear it. ADD MORE MEMORY. Vista is hungrier for RAM than any of its predecessors, and with memory as cheap as it is, it doesn't make sense to keep it on a starvation diet. XP runs great on one gigabyte of RAM. Vista should have two gigabytes as a minimum, and you won't go wrong by installing even four gigabytes.

Even with enough physical memory, Vista can still act like a tired old dog if you have a lightweight video card. Go into the Performance Information and Tools utility in Control Panel, and check out your video card with the Windows Experience Index. You need a video card that's certified for Vista Premium and supports Direct X 10. Use the money you save on RAM to buy a good video card. Don't try to do this one on the cheap.

A real help to good performance is bringing your power settings to the High Performance option. Do this from the Power Options utility in Control Panel. The default setting is Balanced which is OK for XP but not Vista. The High Performance setting gives you full access to all the Power in the CPU.

Turn off the sidebar. While this feature is visually appealing, it has few socially redeeming traits. Turning off this feature can sometimes result in significantly faster startups and shutdowns. Disable the sidebar by right-clicking it. Select Properties, and remove the checkmark in the box that starts the

sidebar when Vista wakes up.

Fine tune your indexing options. Vista has a great search feature, but it's totally dependent on indexing the files and programs on your hard drive. It's a mixed blessing. You have a fantastic search capability when you index all locations, but you take a performance hit. By indexing fewer areas, performance will improve, but your search feature will be less robust.

Vista won't let you turn off indexing completely, but you can disable indexing for locations that may not be important to you. Do this from the Performance Information and Tools utility in Control Panel.

Here's another "eat your veggies" type tip. Empty the Recycle Bin and adjust it so it doesn't take up more than 2% of your hard drive. Right click on the Recycle Bin, select Properties, and make the necessary adjustments in the dialog box. Don't forget to defrag your disk once in a while, and empty the Recycle Bin before you defrag, not after.

Open My Computer from the Desktop. Right click on the C: drive, select Properties and check how much space you have left on your hard drive. If you're approaching 90% or more, you need to take non-essential files and move them to another location. Vista needs free disk space to perform certain housekeeping functions, and if it has to hunt around for room or use virtual memory, your performance hit could be enormous.

Keep your device drivers up-to-date. Device drivers were designed to ensure that programs or hardware peripherals could "talk" to the system without problems and do their jobs properly. Newer drivers can improve 3D performance, fix bugs and other graphical glitches in games and video programs. Device drivers can avoid memory conflicts and prevent programs from squabbling over resources. Newer device drivers can support innovative features within applications, and ensure compatibility among different programs.

These are only some of the things you can do to improve Vista performance. Removing unnecessary startup programs, preventing spyware and virus infections, and updating old software are additional steps you can take. If your system is frequently hanging up or crashing after doing everything you can do to improve performance, then it's time to

consider reformatting your hard drive and reinstalling everything, but that's another article.

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Botnet—The Evil Network
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This one might even be too much for Webman. There is a community of evil geeks who own a number of computers that are used exclusively for delivering viruses.

Usually backdoor Trojans, the virus is designed to infect the average computer users machine when launched periodically from the evil geeks' "Zombie" machines. The virus does not necessarily cause problems on the targeted computers but it uses these average users' machines to deliver spam. With this chain reaction method, huge quantities of spam can be spread with very little chance of tracing it to the source. ISP's have admitted they spend more of their resources on combating these "Botnets" than the old-fashioned crackers and hackers.

"If you suspect you are being used as a pigeon for a botnet operator, it is worthwhile downloading a good, tested anti-virus application that has a tracking firewall. The usual symptom that suggests there is a botnet present is a dramatic slowdown in performance."

Aside from cluttering up the internet with spam, the botnet can deliver "denial of service" attacks. This is a serious financial concern for companies trying to establish themselves on the internet as well as institutions that provide important community services.

The usual routine is, the spammer, who wants to get a message out to the world, pays the botnet operator, who then sends the file to his zombies which in turn launches the spam to the innocent distributors. Sometimes, banks of computers in offices and institutions are commandeered by the botnet operator for this criminal activity.

In preparing this article, I could not find proof as to how the original virus is delivered to the unsuspecting so I am assuming it is the usual method. Either the user clicks on a deceptive button while surfing the net and triggers a download, or an email attachment is opened unwittingly. The culprits often use a harvesting program that goes to the ISP server and gathers all their email addresses. Some mass mail programs actually send email to the addresses on the server at the same time they are collecting the addresses for future use.

Botnet applications are cleverly designed so they often escape detection by anti-virus software. However, some firewalls such as ZoneAlarm will track incoming and outgoing calls so if the user is patient enough to investigate each of the unidentified communiqués going on between the hard drive and the internet, the botnet may be found.

If you suspect you are being used as a pigeon for a botnet operator, it is worthwhile downloading a good, tested anti-virus application that has a tracking firewall. The usual symptom that suggests there is a botnet present is a dramatic slow down in performance. As always, it is a good idea to search the internet for the latest information on topics like this because the war between good and evil is forever evolving.

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The New, The Best, and The Worst
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Do You Ubuntu (yet)? A Linux Update

In February of 2002 I wrote here:
"*It has been said that Windows XP is less buggy than its Windows 95, 98, and Me predecessors; damnation by faint praise. XP is also more expensive, can only be used on a single computer, and presents many incompatibilities with existing hardware and software. It hogs resources. That led me to wonder how Linux is coming along.*"
Replace "XP" with "Vista" and history repeats itself. Furthermore, add that online security has dramatically worsened and that the security of Windows Vista is at best only marginally improved.

At the time I got a copy of the Red Hat Linux 7.2 distribution (list price $60), included in a 1000+ pages "*Linux Bible*" and proceeded to evaluate it. I found that the lim-

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ited software included in the distribution was nice and useful, but trying to install additional programs from the Internet was a nightmare.

Six years later desktop Linux has matured beyond recognition. Lindows, later renamed Linspire, was the first distribution making it a one-click operation to download and install software from a large online library. Originally the cost of acquiring Linspire and a one-year subscription to the library was $100, but more recently the service has been available for free. I am still using an older version of Linspire daily, mostly for Web browsing, accessing email, and playing Freecell, Yukon or MahJongg.

In 2004 Marc Shuttleworth, a South African by birth, started a free new Linux distribution called Ubuntu ("humanity towards others"). In 1999 he sold Internet security software he had developed to Verisign for about $575 million. He spent $20 million of that on an 8-day trip by Soyuz to the Space Station and had plenty left over for a free software project. By now Ubuntu has become the most advanced and popular desktop Linux distribution, with the help of numerous volunteer contributors.

Ubuntu undergoes continuous upgrades as new and improved software is being developed and tested. Twice a year, in April and October, a new version is released. The latest version is numbered 7.10, for October of 2007, and is nicknamed "Gutsy Gibbon." (The next issue in April, version 8.4, will be named "Hardy Hero." You get the drift).
I installed Ubuntu side-by-side with Windows XP on my desktop computer, equipped with an AMD Athlon64 X2 4800+ dual core processor, 1 GB of RAM and an nVidia GeForce 7600 graphics card. I put it in a separate Linux partition on my hard drive previously used for Linspire. Before committing to the installation I ran Ubuntu off the CD to verify that it was compatible with my hardware.

Once installed, Ubuntu was ready to go. It automatically set up my connection to the Internet with **Firefox**, and with my permission downloaded a large number of updates and additions released since October. The **OpenOffice.org** suite of programs, comparable to MS Office, was ready to go. I already had been using the Windows version of OpenOffice Writer so there was no learning curve whatsoever. **The Gimp**, an advanced graphics program similar to Adobe Photoshop Elements and with comparable features, came preinstalled. I also found **drivers** for my HP 812C printer and my Epson Perfection 3490 Photo Scanner. With all the necessary tools at hand I had no difficulty producing the January newsletter, including typing the articles, downloading articles from other user groups, and designing the layout and the new masthead. I printed the newsletter ready for Xeroxing and used OpenOffice Writer to save a separate version (omitting treasury data) to pdf format for distribution on the Internet.

Ubuntu provides many additional Linux programs:

- **Thunderbird,** well-known program.
- **Pidgin,** an Messenger graphical multi-protocol instant messaging client, capable of using AIM/ICQ, Yahoo!, MSN, IRC, Jabber, Napster, Zephyr, Gadu-Gadu, Bonjour, Groupwise, Sametime, SILC, and SIMPLE all at once.
- **GRAMPS,** genealogy program capable of GED-COM files that are used in such programs as FamilyTree Maker for Windows. It can produce reports in various formats, such as text, HTML and PDF.
- **Gnucash** can track finances in multiple accounts, keeping running and reconciled balances. It has a graphical user interface, double entry, a hierarchy of accounts, expense accounts (categories), and can import Quicken QIF files and OFX files.
- Multiple **sound**and **video**programs for burning and reading CDs and DVDs, ripping and creating audio CDs, recording sound clips, playing movies, etc.
- **Popular games**, including **aisleriot** (anagram of solitaire)**,**a large collection of card games, including Freecell. Also **blackjack**, **glchess**, **gnome-sudoku,gnometris** (Tetris), **gnomine** (minesweeper), **mahjongg,**and many others.

Additional programs can be installed with the **Add/Remove**function. Some powerful Linux programs that are not (yet) specifically adapted for Ubuntu can be retrieved with the **Synaptic**package manager, an easy-to-use graphical program to download applications from the Internet. I used it to download and install **Scribus**, an advanced desktop page layout manager capable of producing commercial grade output in PDF and Postscript. Difficult to use for a non-professional, but it worked just fine.

Installation
It is easy to install Ubuntu and Windows on the same computer in separate partitions. Previously that required manually repartitioning your computer with a program such as Partition Manager, but the latest Ubuntu version, Gutsy Gibbon, includes its own Linux-based partition manager, **GParted**, and automatically uses it to scan your computer for available space and to reconfigure that space (with your approval) to install itself. During boot-up the computer displays a menu of startup options, including Windows or Ubuntu.
I evaluated the ease of installation on an old Dell Inspiron 3800 laptop computer, with a 600 MHz Celeron CPU, 320 MB RAM and 880MB free disk space. Installation alongside the existing Windows Me went flawlessly. The computer didn't have a network card, but Ubuntu recognized the PCMIA wireless network card and connected

CLUB SUPPORTERS

to the Internet after I provided the router parameters.
"Sounds Great, But Why Bother?"
For the same reasons people move out of the city to the suburbs: **security and cost**-of-living. To enjoy the best of both worlds, install Ubuntu side-by-side with a basic Windows program. No need for expensive MS Office or Adobe programs. Use Ubuntu for safe online access, and keep Windows for those few occasions were Linux does not (yet) provide the means. As time goes by, it will probably be possible to abandon Windows altogether. Give it a try!

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April 2008

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2 **NOPC Gen Mtg Goldring-JCCenter 3747 W. Esplanade 6:30p-8:30p**	3	4	5 **1st Congressional District Republican Runoff GO VOTE!**
6	7	8	9 **NOPC BOD @ TBD 6:30p-8:30p**	10	11	12
13	14	15 Income Tax Day	16	17 **New & Intermediate User SIG Old Metairie Library 6:30p-8:30p**	18	19 Passover Begins
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

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