The New Orleans Personal Computer Club Newsletter

Mother Board

This Month

TV is going Digital! How will it affect you? by Randall Feldman

Inside this issue:

!Danger: Music Download!
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"On September 8, 2003, the recording industry sued 261 American music fans for sharing songs...."

That partial quote is from an Electronic Frontier Foundation article (http://www.eff.org/wp/riaa-v-people-years-later) that provides an in-depth description of RIAA (Recording Industry of America) activities, with many references. Lawsuits filed by the RIAA over the past five years have resulted in severe financial hardship to individuals that were targets of RIAA legal action—and some of those defendants claimed that they were not aware that they had violated the law.

Legal consequences for anyone caught in a violation of copyright infringement laws have now increased.

On October 13th, 2008, a new law, the Prioritizing Resources and Organization for Intellectual Property Act was signed that provides new federal enforcement powers and higher penalties for copyright infringement.

This Month at the NOPCC

Wed Dec 3 NOPCC the New Orleans Computer Club will have its regular monthly meeting beginning at 6.30 pm in the Ochsner Hospital Hotel Conference Center, Caldwell Room

A presentation by Randall Feldman, President and General Manager WYESTV, about the changes to digital effective Feb 17 , 2009. The old technology the United States has used for television will go away. All the broadcast channels you have watched will be handed back to the F.C.C. New channels have been assigned and all are digital. If you are not prepared, you will receive no television at all. What will change? What will remain the same? How many more times will you have to buy a new television set to stay current? Mr. Feldman will talk about the technology involved and the new services that will be available.

Members are exhorted to invite other members as well as guests.

Parking is free in the Ochsner Hospital Garage.

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For details, see this CNET news story: http://news.cnet.com/8301-13578_3-10064527-38.html.

Briefly, (from the CNET story©—used with permission from CBS Interactive, Inc., copyright 2008, all rights reserved) "...the law consolidates federal efforts to combat copyright infringement under a new White House cabinet position, the intellectual property enforcement coordinator, who will be appointed by the president. ... The law also steepens penalties for intellectual-property infringement, and increases resources for the Department of Justice to coordinate for federal and state efforts against counterfeiting and piracy. The so-called Pro-IP Act passed unanimously in the Senate last month and received strong bipartisan support in the House."

We often forget that under our legal system, ignorance of the law is no defense. For those readers with family members, friends and acquaintances that are casual computer users, now may be the time for a reminder that, however tempting, free music downloads may result in serious legal problems. And, for any member of those same groups that use the internet as their primary source of music, that reminder may be an absolute necessity.

To paraphrase a different warning, "free music downloads may be injurious to your financial health." You, your family, friends and acquaintances all need to be informed consumers before downloading "free" music or sharing music files.

Let Me Count the Ways I Like Linux
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I used to use Microsoft Windows up to Windows 98. I then switched to Windows NT in a dual boot system with Linux. However, when I went to boot NT one more time and NT gave me a message to the effect "I'm sick, fix me," I said goodbye to Windows and Linux has been my main operating system since. I found Linux applications to match all my user data. I was able to move all that data from the NT file system (NTFS) to the earlier Windows file system (FAT). From there I copied all the data into the ext2 file system, which was used by Linux at the time.

Now let me count the ways I like Linux:

1. Linux resembled the HP-UX operating system   (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HP-UX)   I was using at work. This made going between work and home easier.
2. The roots of the Linux operating system go back to the late 1980's. By the time I decided to switch to Linux, it was a viable (if little known) multi-user, multi-tasking operating system for Personal Computers. That meant I could establish more than one user for my PC and run multiple programs simultaneously—I was not restricted to either the Windows or MAC operating systems for those PC capabilities. And, of course, Linux was (and still is) free.
3. Linux comes with a distribution of the X windows protocol produced by an international consortium. To understand this capability, think of it as "...providing the basic framework for building Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs), and moving windows on the screen and interacting with a mouse and/or keyboard." (extracted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X_windows). Because this capability was (and is) not built into the operating system, it provides greatly enhanced flexibility for anyone creating Linux applications.
4. For those familiar with the Windows and MAC operating systems, it is surprising to realize that the software that creates what you see as the "desktop" can actually be a separate application program. I use the GNOME desktop together with X windows. This desktop (one of several that can be used with Linux) allows me to use a number of different screens and switch between them as I wish. This allows me to open an application on one screen and switch to a different screen to open another application. From   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNOME: "The GNOME project puts heavy emphasis on simplicity, usability, and making things 'just work....'"
5. There are a wide range of user applications available, as well as tools to write your own applications.
6. Linux has (and has had for some time) a

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reputation for stability. The operating system doesn't crash unless the user does something to make it crash. Around 1997 (about the time I decided to change to the Linux operating system) I read an article (in a Linux magazine) professing to use two computers as near identical as production processes allow. They loaded one computer with Microsoft Windows and the loaded the second computer with Linux. They ran similar bench mark programs on both computers. The machine loaded with Microsoft operating system crashed in a short time. The machine loaded with Linux continued to run for as long as the comparison experiment was set to run.

7. Many distributions of Linux are as easy, or easier to install than Microsoft Windows.

8. A person can customize and/or build a Linux operating system to meet individual needs.

9. Many distributions of Linux include such primary applications such as the Firefox web browser, OpenOffice, an office suite similar to Microsoft Office (word processor, spreadsheet, presentations, etc.), and a number of other "name brand" applications.

10. Linux can be cost free. There are hundreds (or more) of applications written for Linux and there is a growing library of applications.

Microsoft Windows was the new kid on the block at the time I switched to Linux from my point of view and it did NOT do many ordinary things well.

Mac versus PC
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We have all seen the popular Apple television commercials encouraging computer users to switch from Windows to Mac. Not only are the commercials convincing, but Apple has made some moves that make the Mac a viable option for computer users. In years past, the biggest drawback to purchasing a Mac was that Windows software was incompatible with a Mac. You couldn't use Windows software that was not available in a Mac version so switching from a PC to a Mac meant repurchasing all your software applications.

Then Apple made the move from Motorola processors to Intel processors. This made the Apple hardware compatible with Windows software. Any Mac that you purchase today is able to run both the Windows and the Mac operating system. You can do this by using a free Apple program called Boot Camp that is available to all Mac users. Using Boot Camp, you have to reboot the computer every time you want to switch between the two operating systems. Another option makes using Windows on a Mac even easier. If you purchase a simple virtualization product like Parallels, you can switch on the fly.

Being able to run Windows on a Mac has been a boon to Apple. In 2004 their market share in the operating system segment was a little over 3%. Today it is close to 8% and growing.

There are fewer worries when using a Mac. For the most part, Macs are almost completely virus and spyware free. It's not that Macs are actually more secure, it's just that with the viruses and programs that infiltrate computers to steal information and to send out spam are operating system-specific. In other words, the hackers have to create their programs to run on either Windows or Mac. Since the Windows operating system is currently running on over 90% of computers, that operating system is the most likely target for the bad guys. So right now, Macs are ignored by most hackers.

It can also be said that Macs run their software better than PCs. The reason that this is true is that because Apple produces all of the hardware they can have strict control over every hardware component. So the software producers know exactly what hardware their software will run on. In the PC world, slight differences in the hardware can cause software headaches. As you know, with HP, Dell, Acer, Sony, Gateway, and many others producing the hardware, there is compatibility, but not necessarily full hardware/software compliance.

So why doesn't everyone switch to the Mac? Well, it can be summed up quite easily in one word, "Price". Macs always have been, and are still are, more expensive than PCs. Often Macs can cost several hundreds of dollars more than comparable Window's machines. This week Apple announced

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their first sub-$1,000 laptop computer. The MacBook will now be selling at $999. Their higher-end MacBook Pro will start at $1,999. In contrast, you can buy many Windows laptops for under $1,000, and some are now even under $500.

Another thing that makes the Mac more costly is that when you purchase an Apple computer it comes with the Mac OS X operating system. If you want to run Windows on your Mac as well, you will have to purchase a full version of Windows. As I write this, Amazon is selling the full version of Windows XP Home Edition for $179. A full version of Windows Vista Home Premium is currently selling at Amazon for $222. If you want to add the ability to easily switch between the two operating systems, you will have to dish out about $80 more for Parallels or another good virtualization program. In some cases those added costs can almost double the cost of a cheap PC.

The other reason that some people won't switch to a Mac is that they don't want to have to learn to use a new operating system. But if you are currently using Windows XP and you purchase a new computer now, you will have at least a slight learning curve to make the transition to Windows Vista.

If Apple would lower their prices and create a free program that would let you run Windows without rebooting, I wouldn't mind purchasing the additional Windows software necessary to be able to run both operating systems on a Mac. In fact, I think that those two changes would have people flocking in droves to the Mac. But then, if the Apple operating system gains a bigger market share, hackers will start targeting it as well as Windows. Oh well, I guess life in the computer world really does mirror life in the real world. It seems that nothing will ever be perfect in either world.

Parallels Desktop for Mac is the first solution for Intel-Macs that give you the flexibility of running Windows on a Mac OS X simultaneously without rebooting.

Password Protection
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When technology is good, it is very, very good, but when it is bad it can be truly atrocious. So it is with the hacking of Sarah Palin's Yahoo email account. The bad guys are out there using technology for their own advantage. Whether they are serious hackers who want information for devious purposes or young students who just want to show their technological prowess, this theft shows that everyone is vulnerable.

The recent hijacking of Sarah Palin's email account is also a great example of how a hacker can gain access to an email account and how email accounts need to be better protected against such penetration.

We currently rely on passwords to protect most of our online activity. Professional hackers often use "password crackers" to guess passwords. Anyone can easily find these hacker tools on the Internet. They can even be purchases on CD. There are wordlists for common passwords and dictionary combinations of possible passwords in a variety of different languages. These tools are all aimed at giving a person all the technical tools that they need to guess passwords.

In Sarah Palin's case, however, the perpetrator didn't even have to use tools like this. A hacker identifying himself as "Rubico" claims to have been able to change the password on Sarah Palin's Yahoo Mail account quite easily. All he had to do was use her email name to log into the Yahoo Mail's interface and select the option to reset the password. Yahoo then asked him to provide her birth date and zip code, which have become public knowledge. He then had to answer her self-chosen security question which was where she met her husband. After several television interviews of Sarah and her husband, the answer to that question also became public knowledge.

Sarah Palin was thrown into the public arena quite quickly, but even those of us who are not public figures may find that their passwords and answers to security questions can be easily guessed. Do you use the name of your spouse, children, pet, favorite sport, birthday, or wedding date as your password? Have you entered security questions like place of birth or favorite color that are easy to guess?

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Privacy as we knew it before the Internet is now a thing of the past. With the Internet, more of our lives are online than most of us realize. Many people use blogging as a past time and post information on MySpace, Facebook, and other social networking websites. Once posted, all of that information is publicly known. And the Internet is archived, so even when you remove current information, previously posted information can still be found in Internet archives. That information can be used to guess passwords and access personal information.

So here are a few ground rules that may help keep your private information a little safer online:

1.　Use passwords that are not easy to guess and cannot be easily cracked. (Look for more on how to choose good passwords in next week's column.)

2.　Choose a security question that others will not be able to guess the answer to. Or answer the security question with an answer that you create which is not necessarily the true answer.

3.　Use unique passwords, especially for important services and websites like banking sites and email.

4.　Keep your passwords private. Don't leave them on a sticky note on your computer screen or keep them in an unencrypted file on your computer.

5.　Change your passwords often.

6.　Do not change your password by clicking on a link in an email from someone claiming to be a system administrator, bank representative, or other seemingly reputable party. They may not be who they say they are. When you want to change your password, always type in the address yourself so you know you are at the real website rather than a bogus one.

7.　Use one credit card for all online purchases. This will limit your financial exposure.

8.　Keep your operating system up-to-date.

9.　Use a good anti-virus and anti-spyware programs.

10.　Consider using an encrypted password manager program.

Check the Compu-KISS website at www.compukiss.com for more information on choosing good passwords.

THIS AND THAT

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LOST AND GONE FOREVER....... OR NOT.

Well, it finally happened. A picture which had taken far too much of my time was finally ready for printing. I sent it online to my favorite photo store. Expecting to see a picture good enough to share with family, it was a great disappointment when I picked up the print to see that parts of it were not up to that standard. A renewed frenzy of "fiddling" with it resulted in losing track of the names used for the changes. When I thought I had everything in order, I chose to eliminate the extra files. And did I do a good job. Not only did I choose the unwanted files, but also included the one version which was half way good. No recycle bin, no delete, but the ultimate "destroy." In other words, probably only the CIA would be able to recover the file from my hard disk.

Starting from scratch with the original image, I tried to retrace my steps to reach the same quality as the lost file. I had the hard copy print, so I knew what I wanted it to look like. But for some reason nothing worked and my renewed efforts to enhance the picture did not give me the results I had previously attained. But there was real improvement in one area that was so lacking in the lost image.

The newest image was then uploaded to the photo store and while doing so I noticed that the original picture was still online. And as in all things ethernet, the image could be reloaded to my computer via a download. It was a little difficult, but the end result was I got my picture back. Then the problem areas of the picture were corrected and the end result was a very acceptable print. So while a lot of time was spent on a rather insignificant picture, the knowledge obtained as a result made it well worth the effort.

After a recent study group meeting my friend Dorothy asked me if I learned anything. My answer was the same as always. I never attend any kind of

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meeting that I DON'T learn something. Now maybe it isn't something that will change my life forever, but more often than not it is something that enriches my life, if even in a small way. In addition to that, whenever someone asks me for help, usually we both learn something. The most recent request for help reminded me, once again, when helping someone over the phone with a computer problem, it is important to have them start at the very top of their computer screen and describe exactly what they see all the way down. With that information it is often possible to pinpoint a possible area of trouble and generate ideas for solutions. Many times the description of the problem, while usually understandable, does not contain that one little piece of information that will lead to the answer. So by following the procedure of top to bottom on the screen, we solved the problem and I took away at least as much from the experience as did the recipient of my help.

As humans age time seems to fly ever more swiftly by. But I don't think that is what has been happening in real time when it comes to technology. It looks to me like many things are moving so rapidly that we almost miss them.

Not all that long ago it was hard to imagine a small 8 Gig USB drive that could fit on your keychain. So portable, so useful. Of course they came on the market and were being sold at prices often over the $100 mark. Now they are practically throwaways, good for birthday presents, stocking stuffers for Christmas, Hanukkah and other celebrations as well as any other gift giving occasion. Should this be troubling? Perhaps it signals the end of one technology era and the beginning of another. My crystal ball is a bit cloudy on this one, so I will leave it to the more savvy writers to tell you the answer. All I know is that for now those handy little USB drives are so useful that it's hard to imagine how we did without them. At the present time we are seeing 16 Gig USB drives with prices over $100. How long before they will be things of the past?

Who uses USB drives? There probably isn't anyone out there who travels with a computer who doesn't keep some information on them. They are somewhat safer than storing everything on the hard drive of a laptop. Thieves target laptops in airports, hotel rooms and any other place people might be careless enough to leave one unattended. If all the information a person needs to do his/her job is on the machine, and if it gets stolen or damaged then the consequences could be disastrous. Even a one or two Gig USB drive will hold a lot of information and can be so much more easily protected. In an emergency situation, a new laptop with enough software already installed on it to do business can be purchased, sometimes even in large airports, and keeping essential files on the USB drive will get a person back up and working almost without missing a stride.

Of course there are other uses for them. My favorite use for the little devices is to transport image files whenever it is necessary. Those occasions usually are to share pictures with family or to use digital images in study groups or classes and also occasionally to get prints from a kiosk in the stores which offer that service. Mostly I do that when I just have a few prints that I need. For large orders I still upload my image files online.

Maybe Santa Claus will put a 16G drive in my stocking this year.

SMART COMPUTING MAGAZINE
www.smartcomputing.com

Editor: I try not to use the "Motherboard', New Orleans Personal Computer Group newsletter to sell things, but if you are looking for a great Christmas, Hannukah or other special event present, then consider giving (or getting) a subscription to this excellent magazine. There have been other computer magazines around , but they more advertising than articles of interest to computer users. Not Smart Computing....

Plus they have an excellent Tech Support program that responds amazingly fast. I went on line to their Tech Support section and got an immediate response (it happened to be a slow day...lucky for me), and the tech asked permission to log onto my computer and take it over. I allowed him to do so, and within 5 minutes he had diagnosed my problem, and left me with some internal links to help me if my problem reoccurred. What service!!!

When you get a subscription, let them know that you are a NOPCC member as the club gets a rebate from Smart Computing. For every 5 subscriptions from club members, the NOPCC gets donated 1 free subscription to use as a door prize.

Here are some tips from Smart Computing:

Plasma TV Benefit— In a dark room, black parts of a plasma's picture look truly black (high contrast ratio). Motion looks smooth, and the picture looks similar from any practical viewing angle.

CLUB SUPPORTERS

HDTV Mounting Tip—   You can hang an LCD (liquid-crystal display) TV on a wall or ceiling mount with ease, as they're typically lighter than plasma HDTVs. An LCD works well on a TV stand, too.

Okay, these aren't Computer tips, but theya re good to know at this time of the year if you are considering having one big present for the family to enjoy before the all your money goes to h**l!

Keep Smiling....
It confuses your enemies.

December 2008

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3 **NOPC Gen Mtg** Ochsner Hospital Hotel Conf Center 6:30p-8:30p	4	5	6
7	8	9	10 **NOPC BOD** @ TBD 6:30p-8:30p	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18 **New & Inter-mediate User SIG** Old Metairie Library 6:30p-8:30p	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

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