This Month

What Does Your Computer Do for You!

Members Helping Members

Inside this issue:

A "STRESS-FREE" PC

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As you know, there is no such thing as a totally "Stress-Free" PC, but there are many things you can do to reduce the stress and worry of owning one.

As we use our PC's, many of us worry about losing our data files, losing our email, losing our Music, our iTunes, our connectivity to the Internet, losing power in the middle of a critical activity, losing our ability to boot the PC, losing control of our PC to hackers, Spy-ware, etc. Wow, we worry a lot! It's a wonder we dare use our PC's at all.

To help solve and minimize these worries, here is a collection of ideas to help

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This Month at the NOPCC
Members Helping Members Night

For our July 2nd meeting, we want to hear from you about anything relating to computers. That's right, anything. Do you have a program you use every day that saves you time, can't get enough of guitar hero or do you just enjoy your 50" computer monitor. Whatever you think would be of interest to our members, we want to hear about it. All you have to do is tell us, your friends and computer enthusiasts, about it at the July meeting in five to seven minutes. And did I mention there will be prizes for every participant!

Remember, the motto of our group is members helping members.

To make this meeting go smoothly, we need to know in advance who will be informing all of us. When you have a minute, email Tom (tomford@bellsouth.net) or call (985-643-3172) with your presentation.

Step up to the plate, go for the long touchdown, serve the winner, make that strike and let our members know about your gem of an application, game, equipment, mouse, etc. It will be a great evening for everyone.

Mark your calendars, create an entry in your PDA and/or Moto q, update Outlook and join us on Wednesday, July 2, 2008. 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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protect your computing environment. These steps are not really that difficult or expensive. In fact, many are free. There is lots of help available to you from User Groups, Friends, Internet Googling, PC Magazines, etc. to implement these suggestions. Details for implementing many of these suggestions are in the various self-help documents on my website at: www.jrmcknight.net.

Will it take a lot of time and energy to implement thess ideas? Yes, at first, but once you have these processes in place, the regular time spent is minimal. Will I see a payback? You will only see a tangible payback for your time and energy if you experience some kind of catastrophic situation. Just like house insurance; if everything keeps running smoothly you will never know if it was worth it. You do get the warm fuzzy feeling of being protected, and you will sleep better at night.

Here are the three main areas of action. First: Protect your PC from bad things happening. Second: Prepare your environment so you can recover if bad things do happen. Third: Practice Secure Behaviors.

PROTECT YOUR PC FROM BAD THINGS HAPPENING:

1. Buy yourself Hardware Router *(Even if you only have one PC)*

   a. The Router acts as a hardware Firewall.

   b. Put it between your PC and your Modem.

   c. Be sure to change the Admin Log-in password from the default to something private.

   d. Either disable the Wireless feature and hard-wire your connection, or lock-down the Wireless using WPA Encryption and a password.

2. Make sure the Windows Firewall is active.

3. Make sure Windows "Automatic Updates" feature is active and all your critical/important Windows updates are installed.

4. Install and activate an Anti-virus Program. Set it up to scan incoming e-mails.

5. Install and activate Windows Defender and other free Anti-Spyware programs. Defender will continually scan your PC for harmful activities (Note: Vista comes with Defender built-in).

6. Firefox (free) browser is generally safer than Internet Explorer.

7. Install McAfee Site Advisor (free) on each of your Internet Browsers. It helps identify risky sites. *(Note: It is not related to McAfee's Anti-virus or security suite.)*

8. Buy yourself a Battery Backup Power Unit (unless you use a Laptop), so if you lose power at a critical time, you can gently close the PC down.

9. E-mail:

   a. The best single thing you can do to secure your e-mail is to pick a good password. Do not use a single word, but a short phrase, and include some numbers. ie: "happy2cu4now" or "my5kidsrgr8". I avoid passwords that include I, l, 1, 0, o, or O. Too easy to confuse my memory. I prefer to stick with all lower case for ease of entry, but if you like finger exercise, you can include UPPER CASE and special characters to make it even more secure. Be creative: "C@@LDUDE" could work and easy to remember.

   b. Set up your email program to block images, unless OK'd by you.

   c. Using "Plain Text" e-mail is safer than using "HTML" e-mail, but not as pretty.

   d. Note: Your anti-virus program can scan incoming e-mails, but does not fully protect you.

   e. Thunderbird is a more secure e-mail client than Outlook, Outlook express, or Windows Mail.

PREPARE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

(so you can recover if bad things do happen.)

1. RESTORE/INSTALL DVD/CD's: Make sure you have your "Windows Install" or "System Restore" DVD/CD's on hand (or kept safe off-site). You need these in case of a catastrophic failure. If you do not have them, many manufacturers have instructions on how to burn your own Restore DVD/CD. Do it!

2. BACKUP PLANS: Put multiple Backup processes in place that include:

   a. DATA BACKUPS: Plan regular backups of all your personal data to CD/DVD's (and kept safe off-site).

   b. IMAGE BACKUPS: Plan regular "Image" back-ups of the entire hard-drive, preferably to an external Hard drive. *This is a full image of your main Hard-drive that can be used to completely restore the PC back to normal.*

   c. TESTING: Test your back-up process to make sure it can restore the system. This is less risky if you do it when you first buy a PC, because you have your system restore DVD's (hopefully) to put things back as they were when you bought it.

   d. ONLINE BACKUPS: If you like, sign up for an on-line automatic backup service like Carbonite, Jungledisk, or Mozy.

   e. RESTORE BOOT DISK: Create a Boot-Disk (using your Backup Program), so if you need to restore from a backed-up image, you are ready to go.

This disk should be tested for "bootability" and then kept off- site.

f. FLASH DRIVES: **Warning:** Do not trust Flash Drives as your only means of data backup. They are prone to unexpected catastrophic failures. Having 2 or 3 duplicate Flash Drives would possibly be a reasonable alternative to DVD/CD's for your personal Data.

3. HARD COPY BU: Write down or print out all your critical info, passwords, access info, log-in ID's, etc. and save off-site. Print out a hard copy of all your e-mail contacts and save off-site.

4. PASSWORD FILE: If you keep a list of Passwords on your computer, make sure the file is hidden and/or protected by encryption. Name your password file something that only has meaning to you. Do not name your file; "passwords.doc". Duhh. Use something off-beat, like Recipes.doc or Flowers.doc. Also, there are "Locker" Programs that are free or cheap that will hide, encrypt, and password protect your personal data files.

PRACTICE SECURE BEHAVIORS
E-MAIL:
1. Never open e-mail attachments from strangers.
2. Never click a button or link in an email. If desired, copy & paste the link into your browser and make sure it is going where you think it is going.
3. Be cautious about opening attachments & links from friends and family. Especially if it is something that was forwarded from someone else.

ANTI-VIRUS ~ ANTI-SPYWARE SCANS
1. Run a full Anti-virus Scan at least once a month.
2. For each of your Anti-spyware Programs, run updates and a full scan weekly or at least monthly.

SECUNIA SCANS
Once or twice a month, run a Secunia "Software Inspector" scan to make sure your most common programs are up to date against vulnerabilities. This runs from their website. You do not have to download any programs.
BACKUP, BACKUP, BACKUP
1. Do your planned backups regularly. At least once a month, backup all your personal data files, emails, pictures, etc. to CD/DVD's, and put them somewhere offsite. (A safe-deposit box or a friend or relative's house).
2. At least monthly, backup an image of your main Hard Drive to an external or second Hard drive.
3. If possible, physically take the external hard-drive containing your backed up image off-site so you can recover easily in case of fire, flood, theft, etc. (A

safe-deposit box is good). *There are now many small cheap external Hard drives that will easily fit in a Safe-Deposit box. Buy two and alternate them.*
4. Periodically printout a hardcopy of your passwords and contacts. Save off-site.
5. Keep your external Hard-drive powered off when not in use.

HARD-DRIVE SURFACE ANALYSIS SCANS
Run a maintenance scan quarterly or semiannually on all your hard drives using a utility like "Spin-Rite". This helps assure you against a surprise hard drive failure.

REFERENCES & RECOMMENDED PROGRAMS:

MOZILLA Products:
- Firefox Browser - Free: www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/
- Thunderbird E-mail Client - Free: www.mozilla.com/en-US/thunderbird/
  See Thunderbird Step-By-Step setup at: www.jrmcknight.net/

ANTI-VIRUS ~ ANTI-SPYWARE Products
- McAfee Site Advisor - Free: www.siteadvisor.com/
- AVG Free Anti-virus - Free: http://free.grisoft.com/doc/downloads-products/us/frt/0?prd=aff
- Defender - Free: www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.mspx#
- AVG Anti-spyware - Free: http://free.grisoft.com/doc/downloads-products/us/frt/0?prd=asf
- Ad-AWARE 2007 - Free: www.lavasoftusa.com/products/ad_aware_free.php
- SpyBot Search & Destroy - Free: www.safer-networking.org/en/spybotsd/index.html

SOFTWARE SCANS & BACKUP:
- Secunia Software Inspector - Free: www.secunia.com/software_inspector/
  Requires the latest version of Java to run: www.java.com/en/download/index.jsp
- Spin-Rite Program: www.grc.com/sr/spinrite.htm
  The SpinRite Storage Utility Program is not free, but is money well spent.
- Acronis True Image Backup Utility www.ugr.com/
  This program is available at a discount at the above listed site and includes a free Tutorial CD.
- Automatic Online Data Backup sites: www.carbonite.com/ & www.jungledisk.com/ Carbonite is currently $50.00 per year for unlimited storage. Jungledisk is variable priced on usage but cheap.

BATTERY BACKUP POWER UNITS (also called a UPS: Uninterruptible Power Supply):

- When buying a UPS, I suggest you add up all the power ratings on all the PC equipment you plan to   connect to the unit, then pick a unit about 1.5 times that amount. ie: If your usage is 300 Watts, buy at least a 450 Watt UPS (equal to about a 700 VA unit).

- The VA rating (Volt-Amps) vs Watts rating is confusing. With PC equipment, 1 Watt is about 1.6 VA. I go by Watts. If the tag on your PC says 2.0A and 120V, then calculate 2.0 Amps x 120 Volts or 240 watts for that device. (VA would be about 400)

- A UPS that is rated too small will fault when first powering on all your equipment at once.

   The first 30 seconds or so is when the highest power usage occurs.

- The most reliable brands seem to be APC and BELKIN. Triplett is OK.

**Always check for the latest version of this document at: www.jrmcknight.net

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The Art of Keeping Cool
Part 2: Non-fan Computer Cooling

by Jerry Goldstein,
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Last month we went into how to cool off your desktop PC with fans. In Part 2 we look at alternative and leading edge ways to cool your computer. We also discuss how to keep your laptop from frying.

To reduce computer noise pollution computer designers have come up with many solutions to reduce the heat. Strangely, liquids have proven successful in cooling computers. Liquids provide two benefits over air cooling your computer. Liquid computers run quieter than fan cooled ones and water is better than drawing out heat than air. For complete submersion of computer parts manufacturers have immersed the computer in a variety of oil, synthetic motor oil works well but cooking oil is also used. The oil is low conducive so the electrical parts are not damaged. Complete submersion is typically only used on extreme density computers made for business purposes. One problem with oil

is that it evaporates so proper maintenance of topping off the oil must be done.

You may say water and electronics don't mix (go ahead and say it, no ones around) but computer designers have worked out a way. The water flows inside tubes through the computer passively pulling the heat off the components of the computer. It works the same as your cooling system in your car. A number of computers hit the market last year using water cooling systems. The obvious problem is leaks but since water cooling has proven successful with gamers, due to waters increased heat absorbing ability over air cooling, you'll probably see more computers next year cooled by water. Just make sure you don't change a water cooled computers parts in excess of the manufacturer's parameters or you may overheat the computer and cause a pipe to leak or burst.

To assist in reducing CPU heat sinks are used. Heat sinks are the fins you see rising above the CPU. Often the CPU fan rests on top of the fins as well. The heat sink works by giving additional square footage for the heat to dissipate. Kind of like when you spread out to cool off in a summer breeze. The extra space lets the air get to the heat.

Laptops pose a unique cooling problem as they are tightly packed and sit flat and horizontally and compared to the desktop's vertical tower. Heat likes to rise but, with the laptops configuration the heat gets trapped and needs to be blown out the bottom or sides. Laptops are more to user error as people tend to forget the laptop sides need to be kept free of anything that could block the exhausts. No exhaust equals a fried computer.

When this happens it may be cheaper to buy new laptop than to try to fix the parts. Than again it may be better for you to avoid laptops if you can not remember to keep them clear of blockage.

A common mistake laptop users make is to use them in bed. The laptop sits ensconced in the bedding getting all nice, warm, and cozy. That is until they fry. If you want to use your laptop in bed buy a laptop writing pillow. These are pillows with a hard surface on one side to keep the laptop free to breathe. Than you only have to make sure you don't fall asleep with your finger on the delete key erasing your "great American novel".

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To assist the cooling of laptops you can buy a laptop external fan. These are powered off the laptop's usb and some even come with additional usb ports so you don't lose the port. These fans blow cool air on the bottom of the laptop helping to drop the temperature. You can also try to save some money by buying a notebook stand that will raise your laptop a bit off the desk to give the laptop a bit more air space below it to cool off. I find that the stands are being penny wise and pound foolish though. The money you invest in the laptop fan will save you more in the long run giving your laptop added longevity

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"Computune-up"
by Berry F. Phillips,
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Do you want your computer to run faster and increase your productivity? Of course; if you have major problems, you will need to contact your manufacturer and/or professional technical support. Many of those costly major problems can be prevented by doing "computune-ups" yourself. Yes, you can do it even without being a computer geek! My thanks to Microsoft for some of the information in this article.

"Computune-up" (Software)

1. Clean up your desktop! If you have not used a program for a year or one that you never use that came bundled with your system why not delete it. You will get more space on your hard drive in return.

2. Clean up your system tray to the left of time on your Taskbar! When you remove icons from your system tray that you rarely use, it will speed up your system since your computer has to locate those programs whenever you boot up. I love a little freeware program called Code Stuff Starter that shows you what is running and lets you easily turn those programs on or off.

3. Defragment your computer and your registry which will make your system run faster by consoli-dating fragments on your hard drive and registry. I use freeware programs like SmartDefrag and Aus Logics Registry Defrag and there are others available on the Internet.

4. Check your memory. The more programs you have running the more demand on your system memory (RAM). Adding more memory to your system will increase speed and is very easy to do without paying for expensive technical support. You can do it with minimal instruction or have a technically-oriented friend or club member do it since it only takes a few minutes to replace.

5. Keep your operating system updated and run utilities weekly! I strongly suggest you download needed freeware software for your system from "46 best ever freeware programs" thoroughly tested and rated with commentary.

"Computune-up" (Hardware)

1. Make sure your computer is unplugged before cleaning and not plugged in until your system is dry after cleaning!

2. Make sure you have the following tools available: a screwdriver, can of compressed air (available from a computer store), cotton swabs (not balls), rubbing alcohol, paper towels or anti-static cloths (available from a computer store), and water.

3. Clean the inside of your computer case! Using a screwdriver remove the side of the case opposite your motherboard. Touch as little as possible inside the computer, keeping fingers away from cards and cords due to static electricity. Blow air around all the components and along the bottom of the case, keeping the nozzle four inches away from your machine. Blow air into the power supply and into the fan from the back of your computer case. Blow air into the floppy disk and CD drives. Wipe the inside cover with a lightly moistened cloth before replacing it using your screwdriver. Clean every three months if your computer is on the floor or an especially dirty environment. Clean approximately every six to eight months in a normal environment.

4. Clean the outside of the case! Run a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol around all the openings on the back of your case giving them one swipe with a dampened swab and one with a dry swab. Clean the remaining outside of your system. Do this

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whenever you clean the inside of your system.

5. Clean the mouse by taking out the screws and going inside with an alcohol swab. If there is a rubber ball, clean it with water, and let it dry. Then clean the outside of the mouse. Many mouse problems are simply caused by a dirty mouse.

6. Clean the keyboard! Turn it upside down and gently shake it and most of the crumbs and dust will fall out. Blow air in and around the keys. Take an alcohol dampened cotton swab and clean the top and sides of the keys. Do this monthly; your keyboard gets very dirty and can even spread germs. If you have a laptop, follow the same procedure but take extra care with your machine.

7. Clean the monitor with a moistened paper towel or a soft lint-free cloth. (You can purchase monitor cleaning products from a computer store). Don't spray liquid directly on the screen but spray on the cloth. Wipe the screen gently to remove dust and fingerprints. (Never touch the back of the monitor). I suggest you purchase a special cleaning solution from a computer store for laptop computers.

If you have finished your "computune-up," you are on your way to being transformed into a computer geek! Do not be alarmed for the "geeks shall inherit the earth"! Bill Gates, chief geek and founder of Microsoft Corporation, has already made it; he is the role model for the rest of us!

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Backup Data and Program Files Separately

By Gene Barlow
User Group Relations
http://www.ugr.com/index.html

Gene Barlow, of User Group Relations, has visited the NOPCC several times, bringing to the club's attention some excellent software at reduced prices that make protecting your data easier.

He has recently written a newsletter titled "*Backup Data and Program Files Separately*" . It is about 5 pages long, making it too large to include in the *Motherboard*, but you can download a PDF version of this important information at:
http://www.ugr.com/nl0608.pdf

iPod Replacement
by Sandy Berger,
CompuKISS
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Too many technology stories are sad tales of aggravation and obsolescence. So today I'm going to tell you a story about a digital device with a happy ending.

About 2 years ago, I decided to purchase an iPod. After shopping around, I found that the iPod nano was selling for $149 just about everywhere. However, the Sam's Club in Cary had it for $138.77. So why pay more? When I made the Sam's Club purchase, the store clerk offered me a service policy, which I immediately rejected. When he asked why I wasn't interested, I told him that I had learned from past experience that most of these insurance policies were a waste of money because they were expensive and didn't cover the problems that I might actually have with the item. He assured me that this policy was different. For just $14.88, I could get a 3-year policy that gave me a new iPod for most anything that went wrong with my iPod, including a battery that ran out of juice. My husband suggested that since I am a heavy-duty iPod user, I should go ahead and purchase the policy. Since I use my iPod in the car and at home in a dock every day, I was fairly sure that the iPod battery would give out before the 3-year deadline, so it seemed like a logical move. I purchased the policy. Yet all the time I was wondering if the clerk was just a good salesman or the policy was really that good.

Last month, I found an answer to that question. My iPod started acting weirdly. It was completely freezing up. No matter what button I pressed, it gave no response. Although I had encountered problems like this with computers, I was surprised to find my iPod acting just like a Window's computer. In computer world we call it the blue screen of death. I don't know if it has a name on the iPod, but it turned out to be a similar type of aggravation.

At first it didn't seem like much of a problem because Apple had a solution. Just turn the Hold button on and off a few times, then press and hold the Menu button and the center of the scroll wheel at the same time. Hold them down for about 10 seconds until the Apple icon appears on the screen. This worked great, restoring the iPod immediately, without losing any of my audio programs and music. Unfortunately, the freezes became more and more frequent. I was having to perform this reset 4 or 5 times a day so it became a real pain.

CLUB SUPPORTERS

It was time to go back to Sam's Club, but I agonized with that. How could I show them the problem since it happened only sporadically? My discomfort turned to glee when the Sam's Club clerk didn't even try to duplicate the problem. She asked me for the receipt and earbuds and charging cord that came with the iPod. Once I produced those, she promptly refunded the price of the iPod plus the price of the insurance policy. I could have just kept the refund, but instead I headed over to the electronic aisle to pick out a replacement.

My old model iPod was no longer available, but I was also pleasantly surprised to find that the new models were selling for exactly the same price I had paid for the older model. On top of that, the new IPod nanos had twice as much memory, larger screens, and the ability to play videos. This was turning out to be really good! For exactly the same price, I was able to purchase a new, more capable iPod with a new 3-year insurance policy.

Talk about a happy ending…… I am now enjoying watching video podcasts on my new iPod in addition to using it for audio podcasts and music. If anything happens to it in the next 3 years, I can get another replacement. While I don't usually purchase insurance policies for digital equipment, this one turned out to be a real winner.

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I might as well work, I am in a bad mood anyway.

July 2008

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

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New Users	Tom Ford	new-user@nopc.org	985-643-3172

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.nopc.org*