This Month At NOPC

Tom Ford Mike York and Ray Paternostro Three for One!!

Inside this issue:

IRS Again Offers Free Online Tax Preparation and "e-Filing"

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director;
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WEBSITES:
http://www.irs.gov
http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118986,00.html - Free File page
http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118992,00.html – Free File Instructions
http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118993,00.html - Information
http://www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp - List of participating Companies
http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-efile/free_file_agreement.pdf - Free File Alliance Agreement
http://www.irs.gov/espanol/article/0,,id=163297,00.html - Free File in Spanish

Whether we like it or not, April 15 is fast approaching. It does not matter if we are due a refund, or owe Uncle Sam a bundle of money, we still must complete our income tax forms and file them appropriately with the IRS. This is a task that very few enjoy, and many more do not relish. While preparing our tax returns becomes more complex and time consuming, the IRS has once again contracted with a number of tax services to prepare our taxes online for free, if we are eligible. According to the IRS, the goal of the free file program is to enable 70% of taxpayers (97 million people, according to the IRS) to take advantage of the free online service; for calendar year 2007 (taxes due April 15, 2008), the calculated ceiling on eligibility for the free service is an

This Month at the NOPCC

Tom Ford. Mike York and Ray Paternostro have put together a jambalaya of topics to preset to those in attendance at the March General Membership meeting. Three presentations in one night! You will hear about advanced features of Spybot, how to use CCleaner and some tips and tricks of Microsoft Office.

Mark your calendars, create an entry in your PDA, update Outlook (and Express), create a Google map, don't party too much on Mardi Gras and join us on Wednesday, March 5, 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.

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adjusted gross income (AGI) of $54,000. In addition to preparing federal tax returns for those eligible, the providers will also "e-file" (electronically file) the returns at no charge to the taxpayer. It should be noted that the IRS does not charge for receiving e-filed returns, but does not currently accept e-filed returns directly from individuals without first going through a third party service, for which a fee may be charged. There is no e-file fee for taxes prepared by the free preparers who participate in the IRS free file program.

The free filing service was created in 2002, and renewed again in 2005, when the IRS created a public – private partnership called the "File Free Alliance, LLC" where the IRS contracted with several tax preparation companies to offer free online tax preparation and filing. The Free File Alliance evolved from a "President's Management Agenda", which created a series of 24 "e-government" initiatives designed to improve government to citizen electronic capabilities. Originally, the program was limited to 60% of taxpayers, but the 2005 contract expanded the eligibility to 70% of taxpayers. The current agreement between the IRS and the preparation companies expires in October, 2009. The income eligibility ceiling, currently at an AGI of $54,000, is adjusted annually such that 70% of taxpayers will remain eligible. Members of the Free File Alliance must conform to strict IRS established security and privacy requirements which insure the sanctity of the free filing service.

According to the IRS, there are several advantages and reasons for using the free tax services provided. The IRS claims that users can get their refunds in as little as 10 days, if they opt for direct deposit. Unlike commercial tax preparation offices, the online services are available 24/7, and taxes can be completed and filed at any time of the day prior to April 15. The IRS also claims that the service is environmentally friendly, in that it saves mountains of paper. Users of the free online services will benefit through the automatic checks for accuracy, and will receive a confirmation within 48 hours that the return was received by the IRS.

Users of the free filing service must start at the IRS website, IRS.gov, and initially access the free tax services through the IRS website. Many of the companies that are a part of the Free File Alliance also offer paid commercial tax preparation services, and the only way to get the service for free is to initialize the process through the IRS website. The list of participating companies, 19 of them, includes such well known companies as H&R Block, and software companies such as TurboTax. It is the responsibility of the user to verify his eligibility both for the program (up to $54,000 AGI), and for the Free Alliance partner selected, as many of the partners have additional eligibility requirements for the free service. The user can either browse the list of individual companies (www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp), or can use the button "Guide Me To A Company" to narrow down the choices of free tax preparers. Several of the companies, such as H&R Block's "TaxCut Free File", "Tax$imple Deluxe Version", and "eSmart Tax by Liberty Tax Service" are available to anyone with an AGI of less than $54,000, and who are also aged 50 or less. "TaxSlayer Free Returns" is available to anyone aged 25 to 68, or active military who meet the income requirements. "TurboTax Freedom Edition" is free to anyone with an AGI of less than $30,000, or active duty military with an AGI of up to $54,000. "Complete Tax" will do any age with an AGI of $12,000 to $54,000, while "Free TaxAct" will do anyone aged 19 to 54 who has an eligible AGI. Other free preparers have different eligibility requirements, including several that will prepare taxes for people for any age, but have geographic restrictions, in that they only prepare taxes for residents of specific states. Some of the preparers, such as "Online Tax Pros" specify that they also prepare taxes in Spanish. While not a requirement covered in the agreement with the IRS, many of the preparers listed will also prepare and file state income tax returns for residents of states that have a state income tax (Texas does not have a state income tax). While a few will prepare state income taxes for free, most have a nominal charge to prepare and e-file state taxes.

Once the taxes are prepared and completed online through one of the free providers, the returns are electronically checked for accuracy, and then e-filed directly with the IRS. The preparer will receive an electronic confirmation from the IRS that the return was received, and forward that confirmation to the taxpayer, typically within 48 hours of filing. If the taxpayer is due a federal refund, and selects direct deposit, the refund is deposited to the taxpayer's specified account in as little as 10 days.

The IRS is to be commended for coordinating this service, available to nearly 100 million taxpayers.

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One improvement to the service that I would like to see is to allow those of us who prepare our taxes ourselves with commercial software, to be able to upload our returns directly to the IRS without having to go through a third party. That would be a great service to the millions of us who choose not to use, or who are not eligible for, the free filing programs, but would like the convenience of e-filing without sending our personal and private information to a third party.

For the eligible 70% of taxpayers who can utilize the free service, there are few good reasons not to use the service. The price can not be beat.

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E-Mail Responsibilities

By Bob Schwartz,
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E-mail is a very valuable method of almost instant communication. However, many people operate under an illusion that it is private. It is not. Once sent, it is effectively broadcast to the world. So one should NEVER send anything that they might regret. Once it is sent, it is now in other people's hands. The recipient may or may not care as much about controlling your e-mails distribution as you do.

Just suppose you send something clever about someone you know to a friend or acquaintance and they bring it up on the screen. Then, they take a break and go to coffee, leaving it on the screen. Another person passes by, snoops, and sees the e-mail. They also think it is clever, and make a copy of it and send it to someone they know, etc.

Or, the employer records all e-mail traffic passing within their company, which they have every right to do, since the equipment is theirs.

Worse yet, some people send messages that they believe are benign and strictly business, yet some self-anointed "god" thinks otherwise.

Yet even sneakier are viruses that can unknowingly, by you, forward your e-mails elsewhere; or, police and other snoops tapping your connection.

There are innumerable ways by which your "private" traffic can go public.

So, the BOTTOM LINE is: compose your messages with care, check the addressees listed, and review the message before pressing the "SEND" key.

Oh, by the way: do not think that once sent and "deleted", that the file is gone from your computer. When you "delete" a file, this DOES NOT ERASE THE FILE. All this does is change the first letter of the file name in the directory. The file, in all its glory, remains untouched on the hard drive, which is why it is so easy to recover it. Technology has provided a variety of means to recover and reconstitute "deleted" files.

To conclude, e-mail is a tremendously valuable means of almost instant communication. Just make sure that you use it carefully, thoughtfully and wisely.

Bob Schwartz is a HAL-PC member, retired EE, 14 patents, technical writer, active in civic affairs: President, Brays Bayou Association; Vice President, Marilyn Estates Civic Association; Correspondence Secretary with the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy.

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A.J. Levy Presents:

While scouring the Internet, A.J. found these questions and responses that may be helpful to other members of the NOPCC.

Question1:
I am looking for information about how I can export my Favorites and Address Book from my AOL account to another browser and any other email service.

There may be multiple methods for doing this, but one simple approach is to use a service called TrueSwitch, which is specifically designed for this purpose. It can be found at www.trueswitch.com.

Question 2:
Is there an application that will uninstall all the "craplets" and their preferences from a Windows machine?

Yes. It's called "PC Decrapifier," and can be downloaded at pcdecrapifier.com. It is designed to remove from a new Windows PC all of the un-needed trial programs, add-on programs and adver-tising come-ons that PC makers typically cram onto the computer that are collectively known as "craplets." These items can slow down a new ma-chine and occupy disk space better used for pro-grams and files you actually want.
http://mailbox.allthingsd.com/

A.J. Levy is a long time member of the New Orleans Personal computer Club.

Smart Computing Bits

Another Man's Treasure:
Almost everyone has at least an old cell phone or two lying around the house. Donating these older gadgets will both declutter your home and help someone out. Many organizations, including women's shelters, provide reprogrammed phones to people in high-risk situations. Secure The Call (www.securethecall.com) is a nationwide organiza-tion that collects phones and programs them for 911-only purposes. If your old phone is totally ka-put, recycle it. Best Buy, for example, has collection bins for cell phones, inkjet cartridges, and recharge-able batteries in the front of each of its stores.

Camera Modes:
Use the Beach/Snow mode on your digital camera when you're in a situation with a lot of glare: the sun reflecting off snow, sand, water, or even shiny metal, for instance. Ordinarily, the camera's light meter would react to this glare by sensing more light than is actually there, thus underexposing the shot. Beach/Snow mode counteracts that tendency. The trouble is, though, these are often the trickiest conditions to shoot under, so the camera may still be fooled. Examine your shot, and if it still looks dim, try another with your exposure compensation set to +1.

Wireless Router Issue:
If your wireless router drops the connection to your home computers, there are some things you can do to try to solve the problem. Your wireless router as-signs an IP (Internet protocol) address to each of the computers on your network. If your computer drops its wireless connection and doesn't produce any error messages, you can probably reinstate the connection by reassigning an IP address via router. Routers generally use DHCP (Dynamic Host Con-figuration Protocol) to automatically assign IP ad-dresses, so you'll want to release the router's DHCP assignments and then force it to assign new IP addresses.

To force a DHCP release, enter your router's firm-ware menu and look for a DHCP Release feature. Your router's manual or the firmware's support documentation will help you find the feature. Many routers feature DHCP Release and DHCP Renew buttons that let you quickly complete this task.

Smart Computing magazine offers these computers tips to its sub-scribers as part of their e-mail information program. to individuals and computer user groups. All other require publisher's permission.

Benefits of Using a Computer Sandbox

By Gene Barlow
User Group Relations
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A computer Sandbox is newer technology that is not very well known, but, it can be quite useful in many situations. By using a Sandbox utility, you can place your computer in a protected state where you can try some rather risky things on your computer and not have your computer damaged in the trials. Once you place your computer into Sandbox mode, you can safely run anything on your computer, knowing that all changes to your hard drive will not be permanently made to your computer. While in Sandbox mode, your computer runs as if all changes to the hard drive were actually made to your system. But, at the end of using the Sandbox, you can throw away these changes, putting your computer back exactly the way it was before enter-ing the Sandbox.

Let's take a look at some real life situations to better understand the benefits of using a Sandbox utility.

Installing New Software
Everyone knows that when you install a new soft-ware product on your computer, parts of the product are placed all over your computer's hard drive. En-tries are made to the Windows Registry, special supporting files are place in certain directories of the operating system, and other shortcut and set-ting files are scattered in various places on your hard drive. These are in addition to the main folder that is installed on your hard drive with the software programs. Most software will uninstall easily, but

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often pieces of the product are left behind on your hard drive. These leftover pieces of orphaned software can build up and slow down your computer. Some software products include hidden viruses or other bad programs as you install them. The end result is that installing new software on your computer can be a risky thing to do.

Using a Sandbox to install and test new software is a much better approach. With a Sandbox, you put your computer in Sandbox mode before you downloaded and installed the new software. Since the Sandbox lets you use the newly installed software just as if it had been permanently installed on your computer, you can run the new software to try it out and see if you like it. You can also run virus utilities to see if the installation gave you a virus you were not expecting. If you find viruses on your computer or just decide you do not like the newly installed software, you can get out of the Sandbox and throw away all traces of that software product and any hidden virus that came with it.

Letting Others Use Your Computer
Another reason to use a Sandbox is to let others use your computer. Other users may change your computer to match the way they like to use computers. For example, many of us have grandkids that come to visit and want to play on our computer. They may download games they like, change your wallpaper and default font sizes. They may pick up viruses in the process of getting your computer changed to their needs. When they leave, your computer no longer is the same as it was before they arrived. It may take you days to get it working again like you want it to. With a Sandbox, you can place the computer in Sandbox mode before they arrive and then let them play on your computer to their hearts content. When they leave, you simply exit the Sandbox and throw away all changes that they made to your computer. It is instantly back the way it was before they started to use it.

Computer Labs and Classrooms
User groups that have computer labs or classrooms have a similar situation. The classroom computers are setup carefully by the instructors before the class begins. Once the students have used the computer throughout the day, the computers are different and modified from what they were in the beginning of the day. This may cause problems for the students that follow them, so the instructors will often restore the computer's hard drives to put them

back to normal. With a Sandbox, this long restore process is not needed. Instead, put the computers in Sandbox mode at the beginning of the day before the students arrive. Then at the end of the day, exit the Sandbox and throw away all hard drive changes made by the students. The computers are quickly returned to their normal state as you exit the Sandbox.

Browsing the Internet
Much of the Spyware that you pick up on your computer comes from simply browsing the internet. Some web sites are designed so that simply passing your cursor over a part of the screen is enough to activate a download of Spyware to your computer. Not only that, but your privacy is at risk when you browse the Internet. Windows automatically saves all of the places you browse to and all of the screens you see on the Internet. Browsing the Internet in a Sandbox is a much better approach. Place your computer in Sandbox mode before you start to browse the internet. Then browse all of the sites you want to. When you are done browsing the internet, exit out of the Sandbox and throw away all Spyware and traces of web sites you may have visited.

We offer three excellent Sandbox products that you may want to use on your computer. Let's look at each of these briefly to help you decide which one would best meet your needs.

StorageCraft ShadowSurfer
The smallest and least expensive Sandbox we offer is ShadowSurfer by StorageCraft Software. This product is the quickest product to install and the easiest product to use of all of our Sandbox products. With ShadowSurfer, all changes to your hard drive are always thrown away when you exit the Sandbox, which is what you want in most cases anyway. This excellent product runs on Win2000 and WinXP systems and is available from us at the discount price of just $20. This is an excellent beginning Sandbox product for most home users.

Acronis True Image 11 Home Try&Decide
The next step up in ability and price is a feature that Acronis has added to their new True Image 11 Home backup utility. This feature is called Try&Decide and it is a Sandbox feature built into this award winning backup utility. Try&Decide requires that you create and use the Acronis SecureZone on your hard drive to contain the temporary

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changes to your hard drive. When you exit the Sandbox with this product, you can choose to keep all changes to your hard drive or throw them all away. This excellent product runs on Win2000, WinXP, and WinVista operating systems and is available from us at the discount price of just $29 for a download or $33 on a CD. This is a very good Sandbox feature that comes with an outstanding backup utility.

StorageCraft ShadowUser Pro

The most advanced Sandbox utility we offer is ShadowUser Pro by StorageCraft Software. This is a professional-level Sandbox product that has many options and features to it. With this product, you can password protect the controls of the Sandbox, so that nobody can disable the Sandbox unless they know the password. Perhaps the biggest differences between this product and the other two Sandbox products is that you can pick and choose what files to throw away and what files to keep as you exit the Sandbox. This top of the line Sandbox product runs on Win2000 and WinXP operating systems and is available from us at the discount price of $47. This is the product you should use if you are running a public computer workstation that needs tight controls.

A Sandbox offers you a new way to protect your computer from damage from the software you install or access on the internet. It also keeps your hard drive safe from damage caused by others using your computer. The selection of Sandbox products we offer lets you pick and choose which one is right for your needs. To order your Sandbox product, go to www.ugr.com and find the Sandbox product you are interested in. Then click on the Buy Now button on that product page to place your order using our secure web shopping cart. As you complete your order indicate the order code of UGNL0108 to qualify for these excellent discount prices. If you have questions about this new technology or about any of these products send an email to gene@ugr.com and I will try to help you.
Gene Barlow

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This is one of a series of monthly technical articles that I distribute to those that have subscribed to this newsletter. Watch for them and learn more about your computer and its hard drive. You are receiving this newsletter because you subscribed to it or have purchase products from us. To subscribe to this newsletter, send me an e-mail (geneAugr.com). User group newsletter editors may print this article in their monthly newsletter as long as the article is printed in its entirety and not cut or edited.
Editor: While some might consider this to be an ad for the products that Gene Barlow sells, it is also a great learning tool for all computer users. Gene provides support above that of the original software vendor. His newsletters are always educational.

NOPCC New / Intermediate Users SIG Meeting Schedule

The New/Intermidiate Users SIG (Special Interest Group) has their meeting dates set for 2008.

The SIG meets at the Old Metairie Library at 2350 Metairie Road.

There is additional parking for this library at the American Legion Hall on 2431 Metairie Road.

The meeting room is to your left as you enter the library, just past the circulation desk.

The scheduled meeting dates are:
3-13-2008
4-17-2008
5-15-2008
6-19-2008
7-17-2008
8-21-2008
9-18-2008
10-16-2008
11-20-2008
12-18-2008

if you have a friend who has just gotten a new computer, or has had a computer but still can't seem to get the hang of certain operations, let them know about these classes.

This SIG provides individual attention to each attendees questions. It is not a "canned" format that may or may not address your concerns.

Pass the word!!!

Smart Computing -
Tip Of The Day: February 27, 2008

Sit Close & Sit Tall
When using your mouse, one of the worst things you can do is slouch while sitting in your chair. Slouching causes you to sit too far from your PC so you have to extend your arm further and reach up to control your mouse.

CLUB SUPPORTERS

You'll feel less stress on your back and your arm, wrist, and hand if you sit tall in your chair, close enough to your computer table or desk so the natural curvature of your arm places your hand right on your mouse. You'll likely need to turn your wrist out a bit to operate your mouse, which isn't ideal, so you might want to experiment with positions.

HAPPY EASTER

March 2008

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1
2	*3*	*4*	*5* **NOPC Gen Mtg** J.D. Meisler School 6:30p-8:30p	*6*	*7*	*8* **1st Congressional District Election-Go Vote**
9	*10*	*11*	*12* **NOPC BOD** @ TBD 6:30p-8:30p	*13* **New & Intermediate User SIG** Old Metairie Library 6:30p-8:30p	*14*	*15*
16 Palm Sunday	*17*	*18*	*19*	*20*	*21 Good Friday*	*22*
23 Easter Sunday	*24 St. Patrick's Day*	*25*	*26*	*27*	*28*	*29*
30	*31*					

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.;

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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*