

NEXT MEETING, AUGUST 3

**TIPS ON TOOLS FOR YOUR
TECH TOTIN' TOTS**



INSIDE:

BACK TO SCHOOL TECH • DACS' YOUNGEST DIRECTOR • THE TAB CARD ERA • MEMOIRS OF COMPU SERVE • PC PITSTOP OVERDRIVE • PC SPEED DEMONS • IS IT REALLY HDTV? • PLUS, MORE SIG NEWS, COMMENTARY, AND ANSWERS TO YOUR COMPUTING QUESTIONS

**SPECIAL
SUMMER
DOUBLE
ISSUE**

President's File



It's hard to believe that the year is more than half over. It seems like just a few weeks ago there was snow on the ground. And, here we are, in August, and it will be less than four months to snow again. Yes, I know it's a bit premature to be thinking about that—we all know stores will have Holiday decorations out before October is done. But, given the pace at which things have been going for me, I have to think that far ahead to attempt to head it off, and start 2010 out a bit slower.

As I write this there is a special on regarding the Fortieth Anniversary of the Moon Landing. Just yesterday we watched a movie at the Mansfield Drive-In (<http://www.mansfielddrivein.com>). As disconnected as those things seem to be, it is one of the few weeks my kids can actually relate to things their grandparents will remember well.

While Drive-Ins are few and far between, a lot has changed. There isn't a monaural awkward bulky speaker—it has been replaced by tuning your car stereo to a particular station (based on which screen you're watching). Care has even been taken to pitch the parking hills and color-code poles so SUV's do not block the view of compact cars. The last drive-in I had been to was called the Stardust (it was in Michigan) back in the early 80's and I don't recall such 'care'.

And then, with new technology, the story of the Moon Landing is retold in high-definition digital cable. The TV's, cable boxes, and TiVo's have more computing power in them than the spacecraft of the era. Thankfully the Mythbusters took on the challenge of debunking Moon Landing Hoax stories. Some of us can even watch those shows on our phone—a device with more computing power than the first space shuttles.

What will 40 years from now bring?
Hope to see you at the next meeting!

—Rob Limbaugh
dacsprez@dacs.org

DACS Profile

Our Youngest Director

by Patrick Libert

We are delighted to have Joseph join our Board of Directors in 2009. His intense interest in computing and his youth are notable. It is best to let him tell us his story in his own words:

"My name is Joseph Tobin; I am fourteen years old, in the eighth grade and on the DACS Board of Directors.



I was first interested in computers when I was about eight years old, when I started playing video games. It intrigued me how it was possible to make a 'virtual reality' out of something called a 'program'. I started using computers in the 'Windows 2000' era, and began getting into the basics of using a graphical computer, still unsure of how these programs happened. As I continued my investigation, my passion for computer related things grew. Around the age of 12, a close friend of mine, who was also inter-

JOSEPH TOBIN, Cont. on page 3

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Postmaster

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Editorial Committee

Managing Editor:	Patrick Libert
Associate Editor:	Allan Ostergren
Production Editor:	Marc Cohen
Copy Editor:	Patrick Libert

Contributors

Charles Bovaird	Richard Corzo
Sean Henderson	Mike Kaltschnee
John Lansdale	Jim Scheef
Jeff Setaro	Annette van Ommeren

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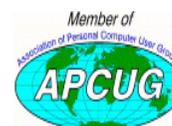
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Patrick Libert
APCUG Liaison
plibert@dacs.org



Apple User Group

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Officers

PRESIDENT: Rob Limbaugh (203) 648-9176 relimbaugh@dacs.org
VICE PRESIDENT: Positions Open
SECRETARY: Mary Tobin • **TREASURER:** Charles Bovaird

Directors

dacsboard@dacs.org

Charles Bovaird	(203) 792-7881	cbovaird@dacs.org
Howard Berger	(860) 355-9837	hberger@dacs.org
Richard Corzo	(203) 797-1518	rcorzo@dacs.org
Sean Henderson	(203) 837-7068	shenderson@dacs.org
John Lansdale	(914) 533-2002	lanzdale@yahoo.com
Patrick Libert	(860) 567-9586	plibert@dacs.org
Rob Limbaugh	(203) 648-9176	relimbaugh@dacs.org
Jim Scheef	(860) 355-0034	jscheef@yahoo.com
Jeff Setaro	(203) 748-6748	jasetaro@yahoo.com
Joseph Tobin		josephdacs@gmail.com
Annette van Ommeren	(914) 232-0149	avanommeren@dacs.org

Committees

NEWSLETTER: Patrick Libert: dacseditor@dacs.org, (860) 567-9586

PROGRAM: Position open (VPprograms@dacs.org)

WEB MASTERS: Richard Corzo (rcorzo@dacs.org), (203)797-1518

Annette van Ommeren (annagraphics@earthlink.net), (914)232-0149

MARKETING AND PR: Sean Henderson (pr@dacs.org)

APCUG LIAISON: Patrick Libert (plibert@dacs.org)

RESOURCE CENTER: (203) 748-4330 • **WEB SITE:** <http://www.dacs.org>

HelpLine

Volunteers have offered to field member questions by phone. Please limit calls to the hours indicated below. Days means 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; evening means 6 to 9:30 p.m. Please be considerate of the volunteer you are calling. HelpLine is a free service. If you are asked to pay for help or are solicited for sales, please contact the dacs.doc editor; the person requesting payment will be deleted from the listing. Can we add your name to the volunteer listing?

d = day e = evening

Program	Name	Phone #	
APL	Charles Bovaird	(203) 792-7881	(e)
ASP.Net	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)
C#, VB	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)
Electronics	Andrew Woodruff	(203) 798-2000	(d e)
Interface-Instrumentation	Andrew Woodruff	(203) 798-2000	(d e)
PhotoShop/Dreamweaver	Annette van Ommeren	(914) 232-0149	(e)
SAS	Lewis Westfall	(203) 790-0229	(e)
Statistics/Data Analysis	Charles Bovaird	(203) 792-7881	(d e)
SQL	Lewis Westfall	(203) 790-0229	(e)
SQL Server, MySQL-5	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)
Malware	Jeff Setaro	(203) 748-6748	(d)
VB.Net, Visual Basic	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)

JOSEPH TOBIN, Cont. from page 2

ested in computers, lent me a book called, Learn to Program, by Chris Pine. It taught how to program in Ruby language. To my surprise, it was very easy to follow and even comical at times. I was programming in no time at all.

That friend later introduced me to Linux, which he told me could be burned to a live CD to try it out. The Distro he recommended was called Knoppix, which uses the KDE Desktop Environment and many popular applications. I told my uncle, who currently has a job in computers, about this and he explained that I could create a 'Dual Boot', so I could run both Windows and Linux on the same machine. I originally installed Fedora as my second OS but found it a bit hard to use compared to what I had been using on Windows. My uncle then recommended that I read books on Linux so I could learn how to use it and become familiar with the OS.

The first book I bought was called, Linux in Easy Steps. It was very well written and taught me a lot about Linux. Since then, I have worked with many different Distros and am currently running only Linux on my computer. I have also started getting into Vector Graphics, playing with HTML, and some more complicated programming languages.

I joined DACS and the Linux SIG. I was then nominated and voted to be on the Board of Directors. I have learned a great deal and I enjoy discussing Linux with the group. One of the most appealing aspects of the DACS group is that my comments and questions are always welcome. I enjoy trying new things, and look forward to continuing with DACS."



Do you have a burning computer question, but can't make it to the meeting or just never seem to get your hand up in time? Email your inquiry to Jim Scheef, the answer guy, at askdacs@dacs.org, and your question will be taken up at Ask DACS at the next meeting.

Meeting Preview

Back To School Tech

by Rob Limbaugh

IT IS ALMOST NECESSARY for kids to have computer technology at their disposal from High School on up.

In Middle School, kids are being prepped using presentation software, photo editing suites, pod-casting, and other 'high-tech' skills. Word processing skills are being introduced even in middle school or earlier in many places around the country.

Many colleges now require students to have a computer. Some even tell you what particular models and brands

are acceptable, what software you need, among other details.

This year is a great time to take advantage of sales on hardware and software to leverage the best of everything.

But, what do you **really** need? Do you need a new computer? Do you have to buy what the school says? Isn't the other version of that 'office' suite better? Who will fix it? How can I keep from going broke on the software?

Not sure if you should buy a new computer for your student? Hesitant to replace



the expensive machine you bought them just two years ago? Mac? PC? Netbook? What about PDA, phone, music player? AAAARRRRGGGGHHHH!

These and other questions will be answered in our August meeting. The DACS crew will bring an informative slant on how to go back to school with the best bang for your buck! We'll give you practical guidelines of what to look for, how to get it, and what to do to protect the investment.

DACS meetings are held at the Danbury Hospital auditorium. Activities begin at 6:30 p.m. with registration and casual networking. The meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. with a question and answer period (Ask DACS), followed by announcements and a short break. The featured presentation begins at 8:00.

As a reminder, our General Meetings are free and open to the public so invite anyone you know who would be interested in this topic.

Commentary

Significant Bits - July 2009

by Sean N. Henderson

Editing for Fun and Profit

COMPUTERS ARE GREAT for editing nearly anything. Many people just starting out with computers, or others that feel intimidated about computers, may not realize how to go about the process of editing words, images, sounds and other items. If this is you, read on and learn how to edit anything!

File Handling

Everything on a computer is a file. So here are some tips about "handling" files.

1. Do not put spaces in file names.

Windows will let you do it, and encourages it, but this is a failing of Windows. Learn to use the underscore and or dash. For instance, someband_some-song-title_track9.mp3 or some-org_some-document_20090115.html.

2. Before doing anything, make a dated or numbered copy of the file first.

This is not such a big deal if the file is received as an attachment in an email, but still a good idea. Using a date in the format of yyyyymmdd and or yyyyymmdd_hhmm makes files sortable in the directory listing.

This is helpful also if the directory is seen remotely by way of FTP (File Transfer Pro-

ocol) or otherwise. This is also helpful for where file details are not available.

3. Turn on filename extensions in the folder views in Windows.

One of Microsoft's more dumbfounding defaults. Ever see two files with the same name, but different icons? That

is likely because in Windows the option not to show the filename extensions is selected. It is hard to think why anyone would want to know only part of a filename. Make sure filename extensions are turned on.

I prefer seeing directories (folders) in Windows or otherwise in "Details" view, and all system files visible.

Formatting

Some of you might be involved in maintaining a website, or sending out HTML email for an announcement.

4. Use a competent text editor for markup.

If editing markup (HTML, CFML, XML, or any "ML"), you may be tempted to use a WYSIWYG editor, or a full blown "Integrated Developer Environment" or IDE. It is not necessary. Neither do you need to use MS Word or OpenOffice or any other office suite's word processor. Just use a

good text editor with syntax highlighting, and indent your code properly using tabs not spaces.

You will want to choose an editor that can edit "rectangles" à la Emacs on UNIX. A good text editor for Windows is *Crimson Editor*, but there are many others. UNIX has three very good editors - Emacs, *Vi (Vim)* and *Pico* (installed with (A)Pine). There is a stand-alone version of Pico called Nano, that is good also. Emacs is probably the best editor ever written, but the Windows port is not an exact replacement and doesn't "sit well under the fingers".

While .rtf (Rich Text Files) are lightweight, they are not universally viewable outside of Windows, so avoid saving files in that file type.

5.1. Use CSS or your word processor's spacing features for spacing paragraphs.

If using a word processor, adjust the before-and-after spacing. If editing HTML, use CSS (in-line or otherwise) to adjust the before-and-after spacing, or use a BR tag or two. The trend in HTML is to use tables for tabular data, and to use paragraph marks for paragraphs, and neither of these for spacing or layout.

HUMAN FACTOR

7. Learn to type.

This cannot be stressed enough. People say they are not good at computers, but most of the time the barrier appears to be that these people never took the time to learn how to type well or navigate their machine without the mouse. Try not using the mouse and maybe even using "the prompt". To this day I still have at least

one "prompt" or "shell" open each session. To get to the prompt in Windows, type 'Win + R + cmd(Return)' (without quotes and where Win is the Windows key). If you do not like the current prompt, you can try something like 'prompt \$P\$ _\$+\$G(return)' (without quotes) to get something more friendly. To exit a prompt, type 'exit'.

8. Learn the keyboard shortcuts (a.k.a. hot keys) for the editor you are using.

For instance, in Windows and using MS Excel, there should rarely be a reason to touch the mouse. Excel can be regularly navigated by keyboard shortcuts for 95% of tasks. Your left pinky should be capable of jamming on the tab button repeatedly to move through links on websites or cells in a spreadsheet, options in dialog menus, or whatever. Shift-tab generally does the same thing except go the reverse direction.

The idea here is that the more often you have to move your hands from keyboard to mouse and back, the slower the pace of editing is going to be.

9. Think about hand position for your chosen editor.

For the Emacs text editor I have found that the traditional "home" position (level knuckles parallel to the row, index fingers resting lightly on the f and j keys) on the

keyboard were not as efficient as having my knuckles angled towards my body. Meaning my left pinky resting on the Escape key (above the tilde), my left thumb resting on the alt key, and the right hand a mirror of that.

Laptops will mess up correct hand position or whatever hand position you were used to before you got a laptop (assuming a laptop was not your first machine). There is no standard, really, when it comes to keyboard layout on laptops, so find one that works for you. For myself, I need a wide backspace key and the control keys on the outside on the bottom row. Having the Function (Fn) key on the outside of the lowest row tests my hand positioning and accuracy, not to mention my mentality.

FILES AND FILE FORMATS

10. Choose the right file format.

I like to choose the most basic file type I can. Often this is a plain text file (.txt, .html, .csv). If I have a spreadsheet project with just one sheet and mostly numbers, I will save it as a .csv or .tab file, which is a plain text file with a different filename extension and either a comma (.csv) or tab character (.tab) used as a field delimiter (separator).

These types of files can be brought into more elaborate files later.

The same goes for writing. Try starting with plain text, or HTML, and move up to MS Word, MS PowerPoint or OpenOffice files as needed.

Choosing the lowest tech file-type keeps things portable, small, and lightweight. Plus, plain-text files are less prone to viruses than binary files like .doc, .xls, and others.

For image editing, if starting with a .jpg or .gif file, use MS Paint to save it as a .bmp before making any changes. Repeatedly saving over .jpg and .gif files will just degrade the image to a mess. Note that exporting a .bmp to a .jpg or .gif from MS Paint may introduce some color reduction, depending on the nature of the original file, and the version of Windows/MS Paint used.

Lastly, some types of files are "project" files, and contain other data besides the actual item you are working on. For audio, Audacity uses project files. For images, programs like GIMP and Photoshop use project files. What this means is that the final output file types (.mp3, .jpg) will be different than the working file type (.aup, .psd).

Hope this helps. Happy editing!

SEAN HENDERSON is a DACS director.

From the Editor

Editorial Bits

by Patrick Libert

Program Review

We were all very disappointed earlier this month when Lesa King had to cancel her presentation for our July General Meeting.



When are we not fascinated by her intimate knowledge of Photoshop and Photoshop Elements and how these programs can transform our photographic skills.

Lesla was most apologetic and we are working with her to reschedule this presentation soon.

Labor Day Holiday

This year, Labor Day falls on the same day as that scheduled for our September General Meeting.

Consequently, there will not be a General Meeting on Monday, September 7,

2009. We looked at the possibility of re-scheduling but this was not possible primarily due to unavailability of the Danbury Hospital Auditorium.

DACS.doc

In view of this cancellation, the next issue of DACS.doc will be a combined issue for both August and September. We have a lot of added content on some thought provoking topics. We hope that you will enjoy this double issue as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

We always welcome additional submissions for the newsletter. I am always amazed at the depth of knowledge from all our contributors. As I edit the articles, I learn so much from their content that the monthly "chore" becomes enjoyable.

Many of you must have pet subjects about which you would like to talk. So, go ahead and write it up and send it to my attention at dacseditor@dacs.org. We will all enjoy it!

This is Your Last
Newsletter

If the membership date on your
mailing label reads

**EXP 6/3/2009
or earlier**

You need to renew your
DACs membership

NOW

When dining at the

DACS Resource

Center, please

carry your

leftovers

out with

You.

Thanks!

The
Management



Time and Spaces

Before Computers –The TAB Card epoch

by Charles Bovaird

BEFORE COMPUTERS there were tabulators. Before tabulators there were calculators. Before calculators there were analog calculators. Before analog calculators computation was performed using writing instruments and mental calculations.

Tabulating machines relied on input data in the form of punched cards. These electro-mechanical machines used electrical relays to control the card transport mechanism, mechanical storage devices, and the printing mechanics.

A special purpose electro-mechanical calculator example is The Turing Bombe used for code breaking (crypto-analysis) during WWII.

Other mechanical calculators used in business during the tabulating epoch are the Comptometer, the Marchant, and the Monroe calculating machines.

Examples of analog calculators are the slide rule, astrolabe, abacus, logarithmic tables, and Artillery firing tables.

Examples of writing instruments, paper, pen, chalk, papyrus, and blackboards.

Accountants in the 1950's used 14 to 21 column accounting forms (illustrated) also referred to as Tab Sheets or worksheets for managing account data (see below top).

This involved cross posting account values into appropriate column categories, manually adding up the columns, validating the column sums, and resolving any posting or addition errors.

Tabulators and calculators were not available in the classroom. Slide rules were used in some courses. Education in the use of logarithmic tables was standard.

Treating each of these epochs, history shows there is overlap between one epoch and the next.

This article will focus in on the tabulator epoch experienced by the author and defined by the IBM tabulating card. During this epoch other companies were competing in the commercial business tabulator market though IBM was dominant.

The tabulator epoch began about 1860 and was initiated by Herman Hollerith's invention of the tabulating machine used to process data for the 1890 U.S. Census.

The tabulator epoch ended about 1968 when the punched card equipment was no longer used inside IBM. The punched cards demise started about 1950 with the introduction of large commercial electronic computers using vacuum tube technology and magnetic tape media. During this period source data was read from punched cards and written on magnetic tape. Later, punched cards were displaced by typewriter keyboard devices controlled to write on to magnetic tapes. The magnetic tapes were then used as input to computers. In some cases punched tape was used. Typewriter keyboard devices were later displaced by monitor/keyboard devices (IBM 3270).

The IBM punchcard measured 3 1/4" x 7 3/8". It came 2000 cards to a box. The card columns were numbered left to right one through 80. The card rows were identified top to bottom as 12, 11, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 respectively.

The IBM TAB card, illustrated below at bottom, was found stapled to the bottom of a furniture cabinet. They could be ordered with printing tied to specific job processes. The cardpunch machine could print the characters that represented the columnar punched holes. This card was used on IBM 360 machines and the punched holes were coded for alphanumeric interpretation. The 12 rows from top to bottom were 12, 11, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. The letters A to I used a 12 punch, J to S and 11 punch, T to Z a 0

punch. Special characters and punctuation required three holes per column. Cards had the top left corner cut to assist in card orientation relative to other cards in a deck of cards.

Tabulating operations required processing an ordered sequence of cards. To prepare the cards for tabulation required the use of card punches, card sorters, and card collators.

Throughout the tabulating epoch machines improved in card processing speed and card handling reliability. A tabulating job could require one or more card decks with some jobs requiring thousands of cards. Card decks were manually transported between card punching machines, sorters, collators, and tabulator. The output of a tabulator was a series of printed reports. Many looked like a current spreadsheets or database reports. The machines, as a group, were referred to as Electronic Accounting Machines (EAM).

Sorting machines.

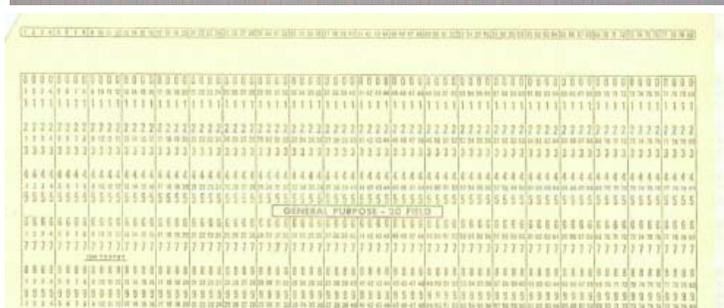
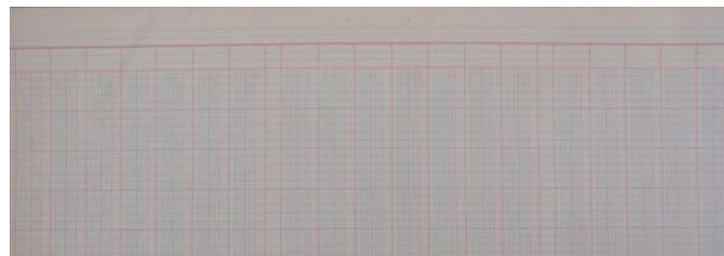
A deck of tabulating cards had to be run through the sorter column by column. If there were multiple punches in a column it had to be run through the machine has many times as there were punches in that column. To control this each run required setting some tabs to select the appropriate row selection settings. The operator had to collect the cards from the individual hoppers in the proper sequence and place them in holding racks above the sorter in such a way that the order was maintained. The quality of the process required skilled operators and a high degree of cooperation between individuals on the data processing floor as well as between operating shifts. Any error introduced by card handling or machine error would likely require starting the sort over from the beginning.

Collating machines

Collating machines were used to merge two sequenced card decks into one. The collator had a wired plug board to control the field selections and merge sequence rules. Different plugboards were used for each unique collating process. The correct board had to be placed in the collator before running a job related collating sequence.

Tabulating machines

Tabulating machines were the most complex. They had a card reader, a wired plug-board control panel, a mechanical print-



ing mechanism, and banks of relays. The typical tabulator could handle paper of various widths up to 120 characters across. Tabulating totals and logic were managed by wiring the plug board control panel. Up to five-part carbon paper could be used. Printing was accomplished by moving the pin feed paper into the proper vertical position where a row of print could occur. For each column the appropriate type slug would be aligned with each print hammer position. Each hammer would smash the paper into an inked ribbon and into the type slug. Multiple hammers firing to create a line of print was quite noisy. Multiple tabu-

lators running in the same room sounded like a foundry.

Additional background on tabulating machines can be found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabulating_machine and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IBM_407.

It is important to note that during the tabulation card epoch customers purchased the use of machines by rental agreements. Machine repairs were included in the rental cost however since machine down situations could adversely affect processing schedules and costs, the reliability of installed machines and the

quality of the repair effort was a key value to both the customer and the supplier. In IBM employees who repaired machines were called "Customer Engineers" to identify the true scope of their responsibilities.

Punched card systems played a key role in the 1890 US census, the implementation of the Social Security system, and World War II armed forces supplies management. Written lists or a deck of punched cards were the data storage device of this epoch.

Next - the vacuum tube computer epoch

PC Performance

Speed Demons

by Bill Roman

THERE IS AN ISSUE that I feel must be addressed, since the issue continues to come up on a regular basis. As a PC technician I constantly get asked why the clients' computer has become so slow, and if there is anything wrong with it.

The first thing I tell the client is that there are two main culprits that contribute to a PC becoming very sluggish. The first being lack of RAM memory. This answer usually elicits a quick response from the user that they "only do e-mail, Internet and word processing" or some similar response. I then go into a discussion with the user that there are two kinds of memory in a computer: hard drive storage, which holds all their music, pictures, documents, etc. and RAM, or working memory. A user could have plenty of hard drive space to store all of their documents and stuff, but when they don't have enough RAM, the computer will, over time, become slower and slower.

Why you ask? When the computer was originally purchased (usually somewhere between 2 and 5 years ago) Windows XP, in this case, required about 512MB of RAM to run properly. As Windows critical security updates and service packs are installed, as well as upgrades and updates to all sorts of programs used on a daily basis (antivirus, Internet Explorer, AOL, Adobe Reader and Flash Player, printer updates, etc), the programs NEVER get smaller, always bigger.

Now, several years later and the programs being used are double or triple in size, but the computer is the same one with

the same specs as when it was purchased. Adding more RAM memory is a quick, cheap way to improve performance to an aging computer, and extend life before a replacement is in order. Windows XP should have at least 1024 MB (1GB) of RAM to run properly, and Windows Vista (32bit) needs 3GB of RAM. More is not better in the case of Vista for technical reasons I will not go into in this article.

This is only half the battle. The other half is to beat down what I will call the "moochers". Years ago when I would inspect a computer for sluggish performance, it was usually because of a rogue game that was installed. Back then quite a few games adopted the theory that the only reason you owned your \$3000 or \$4000 computer (yes, it was that much back then, even more depending on how far back you go) was to play some ridiculous \$49 game. The game would change many settings that allowed the game to work properly, but made it miserable to perform simple tasks like type a letter.

Now, in 2009 every program under the sun assumes that they are the main focus, and must be given priority at all times. What does this mean to you, the end user? Each time when an upgraded revision of Adobe Reader comes out it always wants to include the new "MSN Toolbar" or "Yahoo Toolbar" etc. This adds unnecessary junk to your browser, which slows down getting online. In addition, many of these programs load an additional program when Windows starts to speed it up when starting it. This is



just lousy practice that is a very poor substitute for tight efficient programming. If the program was small and lean there would be no need for "speed loaders," which make your computer take an exorbitant amount of time for Windows to start.

Not to pick on, but a classic example of this is how much Apple's iTunes has grown through the years. iTunes 6 which was released in January 2006 was about 35MB in size. iTunes 7.5 was 52MB and iTunes 8.1 (the current release) is now up to 70MB. The program is twice as large only three years later, and loads a number of programs when Windows starts to aid loading this memory hog.

What to do about this? In short be mindful when installing updated programs to unselect add on toolbars and, if available, to kick them out of starting up when Windows loads. I have discussed at our local computer club meetings to do your best to keep running processes to a minimum. By clicking control, alt, delete once (with no programs active) will bring up the task manager and show how many processes are running. A good number for Windows XP is less than 35, and for Vista it's about 45.

Startup Cop and the free CCleaner utilities have the ability to disable or remove programs from starting, but I would check online in a Google search before disabling anything unless certain. I do hope this article sheds some light on the subject of pokey computers. Remember, it's not so much the hardware as it is software that kills a computer! Until next time!

BILL ROMAN is advisor to the Board of Directors, The PC Users Group of Connecticut. www.tpcug.org; br@numbercrunch.com

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Memoirs of CompuServe

by Jim Scheef

IT'S BEEN ABOUT FIVE years since I finally canceled my original account, #76137,757. By that time my sysop account was dead as well, so it has been some time since I tried to log on to CompuServe. (I still spell it with the capital 'S' out of old habits.) When I saw a news item that the last remnants of the CompuServe Information Service (CIS), re-named CompuServe Classic by AOL, had finally closed, I guess the real surprise was

that there was still something to close! In the fifteen years that I was active on CompuServe I had fun and made many friends. It was a community. Today I think social networking is the closest thing to providing the same online community, of course without the educational and business parts that are now provided collectively by the Internet.

CompuServe, the online service, (CIS) began in the mid-to late-seventies as a way to make more money from the existing time-sharing service that was used only during business hours. Before this time, the company had offered just raw timesharing beginning in 1969 where the users wrote their own applications. It was these early users who wrote the first forum applications. In the beginning each forum was different. What's a forum? Well, by the time I started using CompuServe in the mid-eighties, a forum was similar to a BBS (bulletin board system) in that it offered multiple message boards (sort of like the DACS Community Forums only better), online chat, and a library area for files and documents. By this time, all the hundreds of fora all used the same software, making the service much easier to learn. From its inception, until the nineties, CompuServe ran exclusively on DEC computers. The forum software ran on DEC-10 and DEC-20 computers – the largest machines DEC made. When DEC discontinued that line, CIS parent H&R Block purchased a California company that made DEC-20 clones.

The service consisted of the timesharing plus the national network that allowed connecting by way of a modem and ASCII terminal. For many years CIS ran its own proprietary packet-switching network nationwide competing with Tymnet and Telenet. The Danbury node made the connection a local call.



Like most computer systems of the time, the user interface for all of CompuServe was ASCII text. When you logged in, the system displayed a menu of options on your terminal, or the terminal emulator program running on your computer. The computer could be anything from a Commodore 64, Apple II, or my IBM PC. Naturally CIS was a major source for shareware programs. Remember ProComm? That terminal program became so popular, it had its own support forum!

My association with CompuServe began shortly after I added a 1200 bps modem to my IBM XT. Online services were hot and there were many competing for users of all kinds. If you recall, AOL began as a combination of services oriented to Apple and Commodore users. CompuServe was broader than just computers. There were forums that specialized on every topic and legal form of employment. CIS added business databases like Nexus/Lexus, Official Airline Guide (OAG), IQuest, and many more. Until American Airlines opened EAAasy Saber to regular users, OAG was the only way for non-travel agents to electronically book airline tickets. CIS was one-stop shopping for people willing to pay for the service! To use the service you used menus or commands that made DOS seem simple by comparison.

And CompuServe was not cheap. When I first joined, the connect charges varied with your connect speed from as low as \$9 per hour at 300 bps to \$36 per hour at 9600. (This is from memory, so I could be off by a couple bucks.) Of course 9600 bps modems were way out of reach of mere mortals. The popular speed then was 1200 bps which was a compromise between a

cost of \$12 per hour and time watching stuff appear on the screen. Connect charges dropped gradually over the years until pressure from the Internet forced CIS to adopt a flat rate in 1997. I was really fortunate in that I had a boss who recognized inexpensive training when he saw it and subsidized my online habit.

CompuServe was an information aggregator. In other words, they provided a platform and others provided the content. The forum owners were independent contractors who were paid for the connect time they generated. This is why CIS was so resistant to a flat rate fee structure. To me the initial attraction was the IBM PC Forum. This forum grew into three or four fora supporting the IBM PC and clones. Don Watkins managed these forums with a cadre of paid and volunteer sysops. Don was the wizard sysop or wizop. (The term sysop is short for system operator.) I ran up some awful bills following the discussions in that forum. Then I discovered that many hardware and software companies in the PC industry also had support forums on CompuServe, like Ashton-Tate, Lotus, WordPerfect, Hayes, Compaq, Microsoft and many more. My bills got worse.

The I discovered a program called ZapCIS, later renamed TAPCIS. This amazing piece of magic automated the process of logging on CIS, and then navigating to one forum after another. Initially CIS management fought these third party programs as something that would reduce connect time, but soon they realized this was not the case. When their connect time was more efficient, subscribers (called members on the service) would participate in more discussions that more than made up for the fact that TAPCIS made the connect time hyper efficient. Similar programs were written for just about every platform including the Amiga, Macintosh, OS/2 Presentation Manager, and on and on. All of these programs followed a similar procedure that involved two or three passes on CIS. When you set up the program, you configured it for the various forums and sections of forums you wanted to follow. The first connect session would download all of your email and then visit each forum and download all the message headers in your areas of interest. It would then disconnect so you could review all this offline without any ticking clock. You would select the message threads you wanted to read and start the second pass. This time TAPCIS would download all the messages in the marked threads as well as upload any email you have written and, again, disconnect. Now you could read and reply to the downloaded

COMPUSEVERE, Cont. on page 15

Special Interest Groups

SIG NOTES: August/September 2009

ASP.Net. Focuses on Web site/server application development using Microsoft Visual Studio, C#, VB, Javascript and SQL Server programming tools. Starts with Random Access, followed by a programming discussion with examples.

Contact: Chuck Fizer cfizer@snet.net.

Meets 1st Wednesday, 4-6 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.

Next Meeting: Aug 5, Sep 2

Digital Imaging. Digital cameras, retouching and printing.

Contact: Ken Graff at 203 775-6667 graffic@bigfoot.com.

Meets last Wednesday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.

Next Meeting: Aug 26, Sep 30

Jobs. Networking and jobs search

Contact: Charles Bovaird, 203-792-7881 aam@mags.net.

Meets by e-mail.

Next meeting: TBA

Linux. Provides Help in installing and maintaining the Linux operating system. Also of interest to Apple owners using OS X.

Contact: Drew Kwashnak 203-910-6477 (Cell)

Meets 3rd Wednesday, 7:30 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.

Next Meeting: Aug 19, Sep 16

Macintosh. Focuses on all aspects of the Mac operating system.

Contact: Richard Corzo macsig@dacs.org.

Meets 1st Thursday at DACS Resource Center at 7 p.m.

Next Meeting: August 6, Sep 3

Open Source Web Programming. Focuses on open source tools for Windows and Linux.

Contact: John Lansdale, 914-533-2002.

Meets 3rd Monday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.

Next Meeting: On hiatus

PC Maintenance. Review of PC hardware and OpSys maintenance and use.

Contact: Charles Bovaird, 203-792-7881 aam@mags.net.

Meets irregularly, at the DACS Resource Center, announced by e-mail.

Server. Explores Back Office server and client applications, including Win NT Servers and MS Outlook.

Contact: Jim Scheef jscheef@telemarksys.com

Meets 2nd Thursday, 7 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.

Next meeting: Aug 13, Sep 10

Tech Projects. This SIG Will work on DACS "Online Community projects as well as other areas from practical application solutions, to brainstorming and to tweaking Commercial products. All skill levels and backgrounds are welcome. The goal is to mix, match and customize technology to fit our needs.

Meets 1st Wednesday, 7 p.m. at the DACS resource center.

Contact: Rob Limbaugh at (203)648-9176, relimbaugh@dacs.org

Next meeting: Cancelled

VB.Net.. Focuses on Smart Client Windows application development using Visual Studio, VB, C# and SQL Server programming tools. Starts with a random access session , followed by Object Oriented discussions and programming with examples.

Contact: Chuck Fizer, 203 798-9996 cfizer@snet.net or Greg Austin, 845 494-5095 greg.austin@ryebrookpba.org.

Meets 1st Wednesday, 7 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center, preceded 1 hour with a shared cost pizza snack.

Next Meeting: Aug 5, Sep 2

Virtual Computing. This SIG will explore virtual computing technologies and how to leverage them as additional system resources. Our main focus will be on the free VMWare products, but we will also look at other technologies and tools.

Meets 4th Tuesday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center

Contact: Rob Limbaugh relimbaugh@dacs.org, 203 648-9176

Next Meeting: Combined with Server SIG.

Web Design. Applications for designing and creating Web sites.

Contact: Annette van Ommeren avanommeren@dacs.org.

Meets 3rd Tuesday, 7-9 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.

Next Meeting: Aug 18, Sep 15

Windows. This SIG will discuss ways to get the most out of your system and applications, how to do new things, and other options in terms of hardware and software to help make life easier. All skill levels are welcomed and encouraged to attend

Contact: Rob Limbaugh relimbaugh@dacs.org, (203)648-9176

Next Meeting: On hiatus

SIG News & Events

ASP.Net & C#VB.Net. One thing leads to another, and a random question brought us to another visit to our work in progress, the Calendar application. That opening question was to place buttons on a Web page in a chosen order.

We examined how Cascaded Styles Sheets (CSS) can be manipulated with an adroit use of Java Script to place buttons by use of specificity in setting code priorities to ensure a dominant role for CSS. This achievement must be seen in details of the code in which its coding strategy was illustrated.

An excellent Web site to help programmers get up to speed is this one: <http://www.w3schools.com/css/default.asp>, where

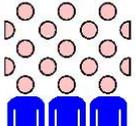
there is a tutorial on CSS. To lift off into orbit a student can study this book: *Dan Cederholm, Bulletproof Web Design.*

Reinforced by a snack of pizza with onions and pepperoni, we charged to a new topic: the Master Page.

It is a Visual Studio concept that this page is to be a template for all Web pages in the application. We reviewed the RSS Feeds application to see how various appearances of a Web page are changed to get meaningful displays. Of special interest was a tour of the view state of a Web page to see how

August 2009

Danbury Area Computer Society

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PC Maintenance

PC PitStop OverDrive – Free Online Testing and Analysis

by Ira Wilsker

OFTEN, IT SEEMS THAT our computers just do not seem to run well. There can be many reasons for poor performance related to hardware

various components in the computer,



and software issues. While there are many utilities which can be purchased or downloaded and installed that can run a battery of diagnostic tests on a computer, one of the most popular and comprehensive testing services is free and online. This service is PC PitStop OverDrive, available online at pcpitstop.com/betapit.

PC PitStop is very popular, with over 100 million tests run. Tests can be run anonymously (no registration required), or the user can register for free, and track computer performance over time. The diagnostic exams are safe, and performed through the Internet Explorer browser. Since many of the tests are performed using Active-X, PC PitStop will not work on Firefox or other browsers, and requires that Internet Explorer be used. The tests are performed on

Driver Recommendations					
Driver	Down load	Current Driver	Proposed Driver	Rel. Notes	Pit Notes
Creative SB Audigy		7/26/02 5.12.4.252	3/4/09 6.0.01.1370		
Logitech USB WheelMouse		7/1/01 5.1.2600.0	11/7/03	None	None

Driver Test Results				
Category	Driver	Make	Driver Details	Driver Status
Batteries	CyberPower Battery Backup	Cyber Power Systems, Inc.	11/16/06 1.2.0.0	
DVD/CD-ROM Devices	HL-DT-ST RW/DVD GCC-4320B		7/1/01 5.1.2535.0	

including the video card, CPU chip (processor), memory, and disk drives. No settings on the computer are changed by PC PitStop, and no content on the hard drive is accessed, meaning that pri-

Recommended Fixes			
Test Description (Click each item for more detail)	Area	Result	Status
Increase Free Space (Drive C:)	Performance	23% Free 17227 MB	
Disable IE Saved Passwords	Security	Enabled	
Disable Firefox Saved Passwords	Security	Enabled	
Reduce System Restore Capacity	Performance	2766 MB	
Empty Recycle Bin (Drive C:)	Performance	649 MB	
Update Sound, video, and game controllers Driver	Drivers	7/26/2002 5.12.4.252	
Update Mouse and other pointing devices Driver	Drivers	7/1/2001 5.1.2600.0	

ate data is safe and not being read by PC PitStop. Once the diagnostic process is completed, a report card is produced designating the conditions of what is found. Only with the users' express consent will the automated repair utilities attempt to fix many of the problems that are found. The entire diagnostic process is fairly fast, just taking a few minutes.

The first step in running PC PitStop OverDrive is to download and install an Active-X utility, which takes only a few seconds on a broadband connection. All of the diagnostics are per-

formed on web pages that use Javascript or Active-X, which display in real time the tests being performed. The first test collects information about the PC itself, such as the CPU type and speed, capacity of disk drive, video resolution, BIOS, memory, Windows version, browser version, and a listing of what is currently running on the computer. After the basic data is collected

Performance Results			
Test Description (Click item for more detail)	Test Area	Test Result	Test Status
Drive SMART Status	Disk	Good	
Increase Free Space (Drive C:)	Disk	23% Free 17227 MB	
Internet Receive Buffer	Internet	256960 bytes	
Visual Effects Test	Windows	Optimal	
IE Cache Analysis	Disk	48 MB	
Temporary File Analysis	Disk	2 MB	
Browser Cache Overflow	Internet	48 MB	
Internal Clock Offset Test	Windows	1 secs	
Memory Load	Windows	73%	
Most Fragmented File (Drive C:)	Disk	-98	
Video Acceleration Check	Video	Enabled	
Internet Download Speed	Internet	2566 Kbits/sec	
Internet Upload Speed	Internet	312 Kbits/sec	
Memory Check	Memory	1024 MB	
Installed Font Test	Windows	375 Fonts	
Reduce System Restore Capacity	Disk	2766 MB	
CPU Load Test	Windows	21%	
Video Resolution Test	Video	1024 Pixels	
System Restore Test	Windows	Enabled	
Disabled Devices Test	Windows	None	

(no personally identifiable information is collected), the computer hardware is tested. These tests will determine the speed of the system and the health of the CPU chip, as well as the condition of the memory, disk drives, video, and internet connection. One warning is in line here, and that is that users with epilepsy or other ailments that may be affected by rapidly changing colors and patterns should not view the graphics card component of the tests. Once the diagnosis is completed, PC PitStop will analyze the data collected, and make recommendations about performance improvements. A full graphical report is provided to the user.

On my computer the entire process was completed in about four minutes.

YahooWidgets.exe

File Information

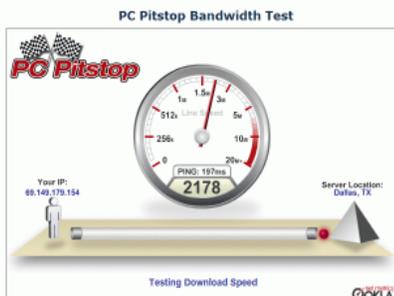
The following information was collected about this file during testing.

Full Path	C:\Program Files\Yahoo!\WidgetEngine\YahooWidgets.exe
Vendor	Yahoo! Inc.
Product	Yahoo! Widgets
Version	4.5.2
File Size	4742184 bytes
CPU	Unknown %
Memory	8 MB

Our running programs database has the following information about the most likely source and function of this program.

Description: Yahoo Widgets
Recommendation: Not an essential component, but see the information below before disabling it.

PC Status	Software	Malware	Performance	Drive Health
28.8 seconds	18.6 seconds	3.3 seconds	82.1 seconds	70.4 seconds



This Flash-based test will check your ping time, download bandwidth, and upload bandwidth from the nearest of four servers, located in Los Angeles, California; Dallas, Texas; Washington, D.C.; and London, England.

Why Our Tests Are Safe

PC Pitstop uses signed ActiveX controls and JavaScript to run its tests. No settings are changed during the testing process. With your permission, our tests exercise various components of your PC including video, processor, memory and disk drives. During the testing, you'll hear your hard drive clicking and your monitor will flash various colors and patterns. This is a normal part of the evaluation process. No settings are being changed.

Most importantly, NONE of the private information on your hard drives is being accessed. What information you do voluntarily give us, such as name and e-mail address during the optional registration process, is kept confidential. We do not sell it or share it in any way with any other company. Check our stringent [privacy policy](#) for full details.

At the end of the tests, you will get a report card that details our findings. In some cases, we'll offer an automated program that will fix the problem. Those programs will not run unless you agree to it by clicking on the link or icon that launches the program.

In that time, several dozen tests were performed, and the results of each were displayed. The reports are tabbed into the categories of Summary, Performance, Security, Software, and Drivers. Clicking on a tab may open another level of information. Under the Summary tab is a tab for Fixes, which displays any problems found on the computer. Moving the mouse cursor over a displayed problem will give the user a brief description of the problem. Clicking on any item will open another window with very detailed information giving instructions on resolving the problem. The Summary – Rankings selection displays how the computer tested compared to the millions of other computers tested. In my case on this old computer, I have a very fast processor (top 7% of those tested), but I am sorely lacking memory (bottom 43%) and hard drive space (bottom 23%). My video card performed well, being in the top third that have been tested.

Performance is what matters to most of us when it comes to our computers. The tab "Performance Results" lists 32 performance categories, and the results of each performance test. Items that pass the diagnosis are displayed with a check mark, and those that fail are noted with a bold red "X". By correcting whatever deficiencies are found may lead to an improvement in performance may result.

Security is another category that should be of high concern, and PC PitStop checks for 37 security breaches, including a very quick scan for viruses and spyware. Included in the security diagnosis are browser tests, desktop security, file download and pop-up ad security, cookie analysis, and other security issues. Each item is clearly displayed and rated, with additional information and fixes being only a click away.

The Software diagnostics displays the name and version of all software installed on the computer, as well as Microsoft hotfixes and updates. The Software – Processes displays the software that is currently running on the computer along with the CPU usage and memory used for each. Clicking on the title of any software listed will display detailed information about that software, as well as any recommendations.

Our computers are heavily dependent on the drivers installed for our components and peripherals for proper performance and security. PC PitStop identifies the drivers installed on the computer, and shows those that are in need of updating. If an updated driver is recommended, a link to the download may be displayed.

I have run PC PitStop OverDrive on several computers and found it to be a very fast and reliable tool to identify the hardware and software problems on the computer. I have registered as a user so I can track performance degradation over time. PC PitStop Overdrive is free, very fast, and comprehensive. It is an outstanding tool to check out the condition of any computer, and possibly resolves any hardware and software issues that may degrade security and performance.

IRA WILSKER is APCUG Director, a columnist for The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio Show Host. iwilsker@apcug.net

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WEBSITE:

<http://pcpitstop.com/betapit>

Test Description (Click Here for more Detail)	Test Area	Test Result	Test Status
Windows Service Pack Check	Windows	Up to Date	✓
Virus Quick Scan	Windows	No Viruses Found	✓
Browser Security Level	Security	Acceptable	✓
Downloaded Font Security	Security	Good	✓
Active X Download Security	Security	Good	✓
Signed Active X Security	Security	Good	✓
Active X Initialization Security	Security	Good	✓
Unsafe Active X Script Security	Security	Good	✓
Unsigned Active X Control Security	Security	Good	✓
Mixed Content Security	Security	Good	✓
Active Scripting Security	Security	Good	✓
Java Scripting Security	Security	Good	✓
Paste Operation Security	Security	Good	✓
Data Sources Across Domains Security	Security	Good	✓
Copy/Paste Security	Security	Good	✓
Desktop Item Installation Security	Security	Good	✓
IFrame Security	Security	Good	✓
Binary Behavior Security	Security	Good	✓



PC Status	Software	Malware	Performance	Drive Health
Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
Time	Time	Time	Time	Time

PC Status Scan Progress		
✿✿✿	Checking make/model...	5.4 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking processor...	1.6 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking video...	0.5 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking main board...	0.3 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking memory...	0.4 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking Windows setup...	0.7 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking disks...	0
✿✿✿	Checking drives...	D:\ 1.5 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking hardware...	60 0.8 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking monitors...	60 15.5 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking CD drives...	0 0.4 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking CD drives...	0 0.6 seconds
✿✿✿	Sending results to PC Pitstop...	Time

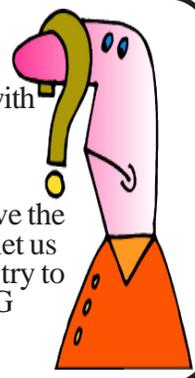


PC Status	Software	Malware	Performance	Drive Health
28.8 seconds	18.6 seconds	3.3 seconds	Time	Time
Time	Time	Time	Time	Time

Performance Scan Progress		
✿✿✿	Testing memory...	2.3 seconds
✿✿✿	Testing processor...	6.8 seconds
✿✿✿	Testing 2d video...	2.6 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking disk usage...	1.9 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking software configuration...	1.4 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking Firefox settings...	0.6 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking Windows settings...	0.6 seconds
✿✿✿	Checking for DRM software...	0.4 seconds
✿✿✿	Testing drives...	Z:\ - setting path 15.8 seconds
✿✿✿	Testing 3D video...	Time
✿✿✿	Sending results to PC Pitstop...	Time



Are you up to your nose with computer questions?. DACS Special Interest Groups may have the answers. If not, let us know, and we'll try to create a new SIG that helps



Circuit Writer Version 7.0

by Jim Scheef

This month we have some milestones to acknowledge.

Cyber Warfare

FOR THE FIRST TIME (AFAIK) U.S. government websites were attacked from outside our borders in attacks that were quite possibly instigated by a foreign government. Last April I mentioned cyber attacks (dacs.org/archive/0904/feature1.htm) that effectively shut down Internet access for the entire country of Kyrgyzstan (no jokes here, this is serious). This time both civilian and official government websites in both the U.S. and South Korea were attacked by what some are calling “hackivists” or hackers with a political motive to avoid blaming the North Korean government. For some background on this I suggest reading “Cyberattacks Jam Government and Commercial Web Sites in U.S. and South Korea” in the New York Times (tinyurl.com/mvd5q). Many people believe that the government of North Korea is sending a shot across the bow of the U.S. ship of state to express their displeasure over reaction to recent North Korean missile tests and nuclear programs. Sites attacked over the Fourth of July weekend include the New York and NASDAQ Stock Exchanges plus the Treasury Department, Secret Service, Federal Trade Commission and Transportation Department. The attacks were distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks from botnets of 50,000 to 65,000 computers, as reported in the article. An MSNBC article “U.S. eyes N. Korea for ‘massive’ cyber attacks” (tinyurl.com/lv2qnq) puts the number at a more modest 12,000.

If this seems trivial, you might look at the writings of Carolyn Duffy Marsan, (networkworld.com/Home/cduffy%20marsan.html) a columnist in Network World Magazine, who has been writing about this topic for some time. I suggest starting with her June 8 article “10 things you didn’t know about cyberwarfare” (tinyurl.com/lozdnv) in which she points out that cyberwar can be subtle, favor the little guy, and may not just target military and government targets. An attack that crippled our credit card clearing networks would cause chaos everywhere as public liquidity vanished (i.e.: no one could buy

anything). Another much-discussed scenario is an attack against the electric grid. Cyberwar need not be “clean” with just bits flying across wires, but may combine with physical warfare. What if a cyber attack had followed the World Trade Center attack of 9/11? A lot of physical infrastructure was destroyed or shutdown for days by 9/11. In the confusion that followed, a serious cyber attack could have caused further chaos in our financial system extending both the physical and emotional recovery. The recession that followed was bad enough as it was.

Making all this more difficult is the fact that there is no clear definition of cyberwar and the anonymity of the Internet makes it difficult to prove who is responsible for a cyber event. In the recent case, it is not clear the North Korean government is behind the attacks as the machines directly involved are part of a botnet. When an attack begins, it can take time to determine where the botnet control point is located. The number 1 point in the “10 things” article is that you must win the first battle: “In conventional warfare, the country that wins the first battle doesn’t necessarily win the war. Think Pearl Harbor. But with cyberwarfare, you need to win the first battle because there may not be a second. The enemy may have so wiped out your critical infrastructure through coordinated cyberattacks that you can’t mount an effective defense and are forced to surrender.”

In “The fog of (cyber) war” (tinyurl.com/mlhvo6), author Don Tennant reports that China and Russia have the most highly developed cyberwarfare capabilities but also says that Iran and North Korea have “known cyberwarfare aspirations.” This was published before the July 4 attacks.

This issue has the attention of both the Obama administration (see tinyurl.com/cmo97h and tinyurl.com/ctytf1) and those who would like to make a buck. As military spending for weapons programs may slow, the New York Times has devoted a series of articles to the topic of Cyberwar (tinyurl.com/oo72lu). “Contractors Vie for Plum Work, Hacking for U.S.” is a good one. The first cyberwar attack may have been the attacks on Estonia in 2007 as reported in the New York

Times article “Digital Fears Emerge After Data Siege in Estonia” (tinyurl.com/2kdy2d).

Before we move on, I’d like to note that cyberwar need not involve multiple nations. “Five technologies Iran is using to censor the Web” on Network World gives the somewhat surprising ways that Iran and other repressive or insular countries use to prevent their citizens from reading the “wrong” stuff. All such regimes say they just want to block pornography and such to protect their citizens, but somehow other content fails to get through. Unfortunately the article does not mention who makes the hardware used by Iran and China to make all this work.

Microsoft News

After all that doom and gloom, we are on to more pleasant topics (yes, really!). The headline “Microsoft stuns Linux world, submits source code for kernel” (tinyurl.com/kqaga7) sure caught my eye! The code, released under the GPLv2 license, is to aid running Linux run on Windows Server 2008 and the Hyper-V hypervisor, so it is not entirely altruistic. Follow the links in this article to read about possible compatibility and performance issues. This is obviously a first for Microsoft. It will be interesting to see where else they might feel an open source release benefits their objectives.

Next we have “Bing,” the so-called new Microsoft search engine formerly known as Live Search. Initial reviews have surprisingly been good. “Bing Starts Strong and Keeps Climbing” (tinyurl.com/mhqspr) in the New York Times says that Bing has been a modest success as measured by market share. David Pogue is moderately optimistic in “Bing, the Imitator, Often Goes Google One Better” (tinyurl.com/ns6xpf) pointing out a number of areas where Bing is better – better than Google. For those of you who cannot believe this, there is a website bing-vs-google.com where you can compare results. In my own test, I entered “hiking CT” and looked for the Connecticut Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club (ct-amc.org), a website that I maintain. Naturally the best search engine will have this site ranked higher. Google won.

So, if Microsoft has this at least moderate success in Bing, why have they renewed their talks with Yahoo? The short New York Times article “Yahoo and Microsoft Said to Be Closer to Search Deal” (tinyurl.com/koogc9) covers what is known about the talks between the companies.

Google News

The news here is Google's new operating system called Chrome OS. The official word from Google is in a blog at tinyurl.com/mkt6lv. For a mainstream news look, we have "In Chrome, Hints of a Real Rival to Windows" (tinyurl.com/lbtp47) from the New York Times plus "The Incredible Shrinking Operating System" (tinyurl.com/nl7e8o). This is a lot of attention for an OS that has yet to be released to the public. The key point about Chrome OS is what it does not include, which is a lot when compared to Windows. Chrome is based on Linux but includes only one application: the Google Chrome

browser. Anything you want to run must run inside that browser. As you might gather, Chrome the operating system is targeted to Netbooks and similar web or cloud-oriented computers. So you can run the Chrome browser on Windows or you can run it without Windows. This is the nightmare that kept Bill Gates and now Steve Ballmer awake at night – that something might come along that would eliminate the need for Windows. Netscape Navigator is the first time he had the nightmare and the browser wars was the result. Everyone expected Linux to create something similar, but, well, no. This time could be different. When combined with cloud-

based applications like Google Apps, Chrome could become a "complete" computing solution for the basic tasks for which most people buy a computer. The Wikipedia article (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Chrome_OS) is still short (there's not that much detail to write about) but covers many of the basic concepts with some good references. This is so new that a search in a couple weeks could get much better results – even when searching in Google!

As you can see from the version number, this marks the start of my eighth year writing this column. I hope you all enjoy it.

CompuServe, Cont. from page 8

messages at your leisure. If you had any replies, a third pass would send them on to the appropriate forum. TAPCIS would do a similar function for the forum libraries to automate downloads. One of the best parts was that because TAPCIS knew all the arcane commands, you didn't need to. It was fabulous and worth every penny of the \$50 it cost.

The single feature that made CompuServe better than any other online service was message threading. Threading is the linkage of the original messages to its replies in a parent and child relationship so that a later reader can follow the entire conversation. In a CompuServe forum threads could go on for months and, up to the forum message-base size limit, all the messages in the thread could always be retrieved in proper sequence. There were commands to retrieve just the parent or an entire thread from any message down the chain. This meant that you never needed to quote the message to which you were replying because the reader could easily retrieve the original. Today in email lists like Yahoo Groups, an individual message may have a short reply, followed by the full text of the twenty messages that came before. What a waste of bandwidth! And bandwidth was something precious to each user who was paying for every connect minute.

Back in my General Foods days, I used a fourth generation database product called FOCUS from Information Builders, Inc. FOCUS, running primarily on IBM mainframes, enabled programmers to build applications faster than just about any other tool. The FOCUS users group was called FUSE (the meanings of these acronyms are long ago lost in time). In 1989 the annual FUSE conference was held in Reno, NV, and I took full advantage of this by going out early for a week of skiing around Lake Tahoe. At that

conference, the FUSE board decided to open an online support facility, something I had been pushing for some time. A year later we opened the FUSE Forum on CompuServe at the conference in Boston. I was the Wizop (head sysop) with several expert FOCUS users as sysops. Together we started to offer online support to other users. A few months later, Information Builders opened their own support forums, also on CompuServe, where senior support staff answered questions about features, bugs, and the hidden techniques that made FOCUS so powerful. Our forum shifted to more user group activities like lobbying for new features and verifying bug reports.

One of the perks of being a sysop was a "sponsored account" which translates into "someone else pays the bill." Freedom! The reality was that my connect time really did not change as I already used TAPCIS and there is only so much time.

The FUSE and FOCUS Forums remained open for a little more than seven years when the Internet finally proved overwhelming. One of the regional FUSE groups opened an Internet listserv (email list) on BITNET for FOCUS users. At the same time companies were linking their internal email systems to the Internet and the convenience of "free" corporate email beat the cost and effort of CompuServe. Many companies, including Microsoft, moved their official support to the Internet and CIS lost its luster.

Believe it or not, somewhere during this time, I tried AOL, BIX (BYTE Information Exchange), and Prodigy. On AOL, I never got past the trial period as it was just absolutely terrible when compared to the technical forums on CIS. Many DACS members tried Prodigy when we (DACS) were asked to help beta test the service when it was just starting up. Watching the screen draw at 1200 bps got old after about ten minutes. Of course there was little content so I found Prodigy super dull. Prodigy was unique, to

my knowledge, as the only online service to use a true implementation of videotext. Videotext was an early attempt to mix text and graphics (of a sort) on one screen. None of these services had anything close to the CompuServe forum software.

The beginning of the end for CIS came with the sale to AOL. In the mid-90s CompuServe management had finally acknowledged that the DEC-10s and -20s would not last forever and had started to rewrite the entire system to run on Windows NT servers. As part of this they improved the forum software, incorporating every feature the sysop community had ever wanted. We were elated and then along came the Internet. Oops. Well, they took the NT-based system and added an absolutely fabulous web interface at about the same time that Internet competition had forced dropping the connect time charges in favor of a monthly flat rate - \$27.95 for all you could eat. This, combined with Internet access, seemed to make CIS competitive. Whatever the reason, H & R Block, CompuServe's parent company (they had renamed the company with a lower case 's' some years earlier) sold out. WorldCom bought the network and AOL bought the online service. CIS became AOL's price brand as AOL moved to decimate what was left of the former CompuServe to make the AOL service look more attractive. It was sad.

Please do not regard this as a definitive history. This is almost entirely from memory and I have undoubtedly made mistakes here or there. My archives of messages from the forums is on a backup tape somewhere that I no longer have a working drive to read. Media obsolescence. Whenever I have to scroll an email up and down to figure out that people are talking about, I remember CompuServe, the king of the online services.

Jim Scheef is DACS President Emeritus

Is It Really HDTV?

by Richard Corzo

IF YOU ATTENDED the DACS HDTV presentation last August (<http://www.dacs.org/archive/0809/review.htm>), you heard a lot of great information on high definition televisions. You may have acquired an HDTV since then, but is the picture you're seeing really in high definition, or just a standard definition picture stretched to fill the wide screen? You might be surprised how many people are not watching HDTV on their HDTVs. I've seen it happen with a friend, a relative, and a coworker—they weren't really taking advantage of the high definition capability of their HDTV.

In addition to your HDTV set, you need a source and a proper connection to the TV to be able to view HDTV. If you're one of the few who only receive their TV over the air, then you're probably already set. The U.S. has completed its transition from analog to a digital broadcast transmission system. HDTVs (at least those sold after March 1, 2007) have an "ATSC" tuner capable of receiving these digital broadcasts. Note however, that not every channel or program is broadcast in high definition, i.e. at least 720 lines of vertical resolution. Some channels or programs, although broadcast digitally, are only at the standard definition 480 lines of vertical resolution. But if the program is broadcast in high definition, 720 progressive or 1080 interlaced lines of resolution, there is nothing more for you to do to ensure you are seeing HDTV.

The question I really want to address is for those who are using a cable or satellite TV tuner. That's where you're more likely to be missing out on the full HDTV experience if things aren't set up right. If you're a cable subscriber and your cable box is a few years old, it's likely you'll need to upgrade to a newer HDTV-capable model. The new cable box should have an HDMI

connection on the back, or at least a triplet of component video connections, color-coded red, blue, and green. These will correspond to connections on the back of your HDTV. (See picture of TV rear panel.) A single HDMI cable is capable of transmitting both digital video and digital audio. Component cables are only capable of transmitting video, and so must be paired with audio cables (color-coded white and red) to transmit the stereo sound. Alternatively the component video cables could be paired with an optical digital audio cable.

So you might assume that if you had your cable company install a new HDTV-capable cable box or DVR, that they would set it up properly for your HDTV, but that wasn't the experience of my friend in New Fairfield. I went over to see his new TV and he noticed that the picture wasn't as good as he remembered seeing it in the store, or as good as his other friend's HDTV picture. I went into the setup menu of the cable box and discovered a setting to tell the cable box what kind of TV it's connected to. Make sure it says widescreen 16 X 9 instead of standard 4 X 3 TV. There may also be a setting for the TV's resolution, so make sure that matches the capability of your TV, i.e. 720p, 1080i, or 1080p. That made a big difference in

viewing the HD channels, and made my friend very happy.

There is likely a similar setting in your DVD player's setup menu, and unless it's at least 7 or 8 years old like mine, there will also be a setting for "progressive scan." Choose that to get the best picture on your HDTV, along with connecting the DVD player with at least the red, green, blue component cables, or better yet HDMI if your DVD player has it.

Another thing you'll want to note when viewing the cable program guide, is which channels are HD channels. For convenience they're often in a block of channels rather than scattered throughout the channel range. If you want to view the network broadcast channels such as NBC, ABC, CBS, at their best, look for them in that HD block of channels, because the place where you used to watch them is still being transmitted simultaneously in standard definition for older TVs connected to cable.

There's another pitfall that might be preventing you from seeing HD channels in HD. My sister had upgraded to a cable DVR last year before getting an HDTV this year, so she already had an HDTV-capable cable box. She even managed to buy an HDMI cable to go from the DVR to the new TV, but she also had a coaxial antenna cable going from the DVR to the HDTV. What she hadn't figured out was that she needed to select a different TV input, i.e. the HDMI input, using her TV remote and the TV menu. This allowed her to view the HD channels in their full high-definition glory. She even noticed the audio sounded better, which was now being transmitted digitally over the same HDMI cable. If I recall, this also meant she had to use the cable remote to change channels, but the TV remote to change volume. This idea of selecting a different TV input should be familiar if you already have a DVD player hooked up to your TV.

I have mentioned DVD players, and many people are happy with the picture they get when connecting it to their HDTV. Although of good quality, standard DVDs are still limited to 480 lines of resolution. At some point you may want to consider getting a Blu-ray player, which gets full 1080p resolution from the new Blu-ray discs.

I hope these tips have helped you more fully enjoy your HDTV.

RICHARD CORZO is a computer programmer and Mac maven who loves to tinker with operating systems. He can be reached at macsig@dacs.org



Ask DACS

June 2009

by Jim Scheef

WE WELCOME QUESTIONS FROM the floor at the start of our General Meetings. In addition, members who are not able to attend the General meeting may submit questions to askdacs@dacs.org. We will ask the question for you and post the reply in *dacs.doc* and on *dacs.org*. Please provide as much information as possible, since we can't probe during the session.

AskDACS is a Question and Answer session before the main presentation at the monthly General Meeting. We solicit questions from the floor and then answers from other audience members. My role as moderator is to try to guide the discussion to a likely solution to the problem.

This month was a special extended AskDACS session due to the last minute cancelation by our feature presenter. As a result, I'm adding a new paragraph marker "D" for discussion or digression to the regular "Q" and "A".

D – We started with a discussion about Vista activation that began with my story about how the activation period for my Vista virtual machine (VM) installation had expired. I use instances of Windows running in Microsoft Virtual PC to allow testing websites using different versions of Internet Explorer. A new purpose for these VMs is demonstrating solutions to questions at AskDACS – hence the Vista and Windows 7 installations.

When preparing for the meeting, I tried to start the Vista VM and found that the activation period had expired. Unfortunately, when presented with a menu of options, I chose to enter a new key code and went looking for the installation DVD. When I could not find it and could not find a way back to that original menu, I ran out of time. Now as I write up the discussion, I tried the VM again and there was the same menu. This time I picked "Activate Windows now" and it did. We will now have a (rather slow) way to demonstrate Vista problems. As a user, I intend to skip Vista, the "DOS 4" of Windows. (If this reference makes you chuckle, let me know.)

D – A side discussion started when someone gasped at all the icons I

have on my desktop. These are all "temporary" shortcuts to websites I want to revisit soon. A member commented that following the upgrade to Internet Explorer 8, all of his desktop icons disappeared. An extensive search failed to find these files anywhere on the hard drive, but following a reboot, they all miraculously returned. No one could explain this behavior.

Q – If I upgrade to Windows 7, will I need to replace all my software?

A – Despite all the discussion at the meeting, the real answer is that until the final version ships, no one will know what software will fail to run on Win7. Windows 7 has an XP Mode that is based on virtual machine technology. This is intended to allow older software to run on the new operating system. So as good as this sounds, a member pointed out that only the "better" versions of Win7 will include the XP mode. So, those users who will need it most, the ones who want to buy a low-end PC with the most basic version of Windows, will not have the option of XP compatibility. Once again, we will not know this for sure until the final version ships later this year. Consensus was that Office 2003 should work well on Win7 but the earlier the version, the less likely it is to run properly. (Older versions that are no longer supported on Microsoft Updates should be retired anyway due to the unpatched security vulnerabilities inherent in many older Microsoft applications that support VBA programming).

D – We then had a minor digression about the ribbon bar in

Microsoft Office 2007 applications. Personally, I do not like the ribbon bar menus because I have not learned how to use them. If you do not have Office 2007 yet, I suggest that you try the OpenOffice.org suite of applications which has "normal" menus that approximate Microsoft Office. Version 3.1 was released recently and it will be fine for most people. Yes, there can be odd font substitutions when passing documents between Microsoft Office and Open Office. Stick to the normal Windows fonts like Arial and Times Roman and you will be fine. Naturally, if you use exotic fonts supplied with either suite, they will be missing in the other and thus the application must substitute what it has available.

Another option is ZoHo.com, a set of completely online Office-replacement applications. Most of the common applications are free to use and run in most any modern browser. ZoHo apps can now be used off-line via Google Gears.

Q – My antivirus program stopped working recently and now I can't get to the Symantec website; what can I do? (The details of this question were not clear in the recording).

A – There are many trojans and other malware that disable anti-virus programs in their effort to remain undetected. The Conficker worm is an example. Blocking access to antivirus vendor websites is part of the plan. This is most often done thru changes to a file called "hosts" file that part of the TCP/IP configuration of most computers. Back in the infancy of the Internet, the hosts file is how friendly names like dacs.org were translated into IP addresses. This function is now handled by the domain name server (DNS). On Windows machines since NT, this file is located in `SystemRoot\system32\drivers\etc\` where "Systemroot" is the directory where Windows is located, normally `C:\Windows`. By convention since the beginning of time, the file has no extension.

Here is the host's file on my laptop:

```
# Copyright (c) 1993-1999
Microsoft Corp.
#
```

```
# This is a sample HOSTS file
used by Microsoft TCP/IP for
Windows.
#
# This file contains the mappings
of IP addresses to host names.
Each
# entry should be kept on an in-
dividual line. The IP address
should
# be placed in the first column
followed by the corresponding
host name.
# The IP address and the host
name should be separated by at
least one
# space.
#
# Additionally, comments (such
as these) may be inserted on in-
dividual
# lines or following the machine
name denoted by a '#' symbol.
#
# For example:
#
# 102.54.94.97 rhino.acme.com
# source server
# 38.25.63.10 x.acme.com # x
client host
127.0.0.1 localhost
127.0.0.1 doubleclick.com
Everything after a pound sign
on any line is a comment, so only
the last two lines have any affect.
The line "127.0.0.1 localhost" is the
loopback entry that is needed for
proper operation if TCP/IP is
installed and there is no physical
network connection. I added the line
"127.0.0.1 doubleclick.com" to
prevent any access from my
computer to DoubleClick. I see a lot
less advertising as a result; the
trade-off is that a few web pages take
a little longer to load. One member
said that his hosts file has many
hundreds of entries that prevent
access to known bad sites. Malware
may add a line like "127.0.0.0
symantec.com" to prevent access to
the Symantec website. More
malicious malware will replace the
127.0.0.0 with an actual IP address
to redirect your computer to a site of
their choosing where they can infect
your machine with more bad stuff.
The ability to modify this file is a
very powerful tool to take control of
your computer.
```

The Wikipedia entry for the host's file (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosts_file) has a link to

instructions on editing the hosts file on Vista machines. The "eye chart" test to see if you are infected with the Conficker worm is at: tinyurl.com/cp9ew5.

Q – I want to synchronize files between my home and office computers. How can I do this?

A – This started a discussion of almost as many alternatives as people in the room. Solutions included:

- Copy files to a USB memory "key fob" drive and carry that to and from work. Programs like Allway Sync (<http://allwaysync.com/>) can automate this process. The Microsoft tool called Windows Briefcase came with Windows starting with Win95. The Wikipedia article en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Briefcase (Microsoft_Windows) seems out of date but explains the basics.

- Open remote access to the home computer and use Remote Desktop or other remote control to copy files to/from the work computer.

- Upload files to a file storage website like dropio.com, Windows Live [SkyDrive](http://SkyDrive.com), box.net, freedrive.com, and many more. Some of these free sites have closed, like xdrive.com, so be wary. Search "free online file storage" and take your pick.

- For a totally automatic solution, install *Unison* on one computer that can be accessed from the Internet and run the sync from the other machine. This is a more sophisticated solution that is worth the effort only if there are a lot of files.

- There are a number of synchronization services available on the Internet that may or may not be workable in an office scenario. Windows Live Sync must be installed on both computers and there is a version for the Macintosh.

- Install the FTP (file transfer protocol) server service on one computer that is accessible from the Internet and use an FTP program like FileZilla (filezilla-project.org) which is an excellent open source FTP client. Again a more involved solution that has serious security implications.

D – I asked for members to relate their experiences using the Google

Chrome browser. Those who said they have used it reported that it works as advertised. It has a very simple user interface where everything – websites, search criteria, etc., are all entered into the address bar. I use it very little, mainly because it is not compatible (so far) with RoboForm, the program I use to manage passwords.

D – This led to a serious digression into RoboForm (roboform.com), a shareware program from Siber Systems that "Remembers passwords so you don't have to." I store all my web passwords – well over 300 – in RoboForm which then automatically feeds them into the logon screen of the appropriate website on command. All of these passwords are stored encrypted and I need only remember the one password that unlocks RoboForm. I find this solution to be vastly more secure than using the same password everywhere as so many people do. When I create a new account on a website somewhere, I use Roboform to generate a secure password (12-character pseudo random string with varied case and numerals) which I paste into the website form. The length and content of the generated password is configurable to meet any criteria. As you enter a new password Roboform saves the user id and password in an encrypted file for that website. Siber Systems also has a file synchronization program called GoodSync (goodsync.com) that I use to keep all these passwords automatically up to date on my network.

Another feature I really like is that you can store personal information (also encrypted, of course) in RoboForm to automate filling out web forms. The software gives very good control over what is entered and warns when potentially critical information is entered. The "pro" version of RoboForm costs \$30 and removes the 10-password limit of the trial ware. There are versions for any recent version of Internet Explorer or Firefox and derivatives, and a portable or "to go" version that runs off a USB or flash drive. Versions for several mobile platforms (smartphones, PDAs) are "display only" but make the data

Q – I use Google Mail and have been

notified several times that I am running out of space but each time they seem to increase the limit. Now I'm nearing eight gigabytes and have received an email that I have 1/2 a gigabyte left and they have a "special offer". Has anyone else noticed this or received similar messages?

A – The GMail webpage (gmail.com) shows that GMail offers “Over 7349.805949 megabytes (and counting) of free storage so you’ll never need to delete another message.” It appears that no one in the audience that evening would admit to having saved that much email and that GMail presently has no arbitrary storage limit. This area has become quite competitive as Hotmail used to have a limit of 200MB but now offers 5GB to a free account (I was wrong about this at the meeting). I have a Yahoo Mail Plus account (\$20 per year) and was told some time back that Plus accounts had “unlimited” storage. This would be competitive with Hotmail and GMail.

Q – Google offers beta search engines from time to time. How can I find out about these and use them if warranted?

A – The consensus was that the beta search engines are targeted to specific areas. By searching in Google Labs (googlelabs.com) I found eleven projects related to search, but no special search engines.

A member related his experience searching for an article in an Icelandic magazine whose name requires special characters. No amount of searching could find the magazine’s website. When a friend sent him the name of the author spelled using the Icelandic characters, Google found the website immediately.

Disclaimer: Ask DACS questions come from members by email or from the audience attending the general meeting. Answers are suggestions offered by meeting attendees and represent a consensus of those responding. DACS offers no warrantee as to the correctness of the answers and anyone following these suggestions or answers does so at their own risk. In other words, we could be totally wrong!

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benefits achieved in a Microsoft development project could be circumvented to achieve benefits in network management by obviating the need to send the view state between server and client repeatedly.

The strategy to keep this view state at the client keeps the network humming rather than dragging slowly with poor response times. Today we joined the smart set by declaring independence from sodden strategies for coding.

Linux. The July Linux SIG meeting continued our focus on the Linux server with a brief introduction of Samba sharing and folder permissions.

The demonstration did not quite go as planned. This will offer a great incentive to determine what did or did not happen properly as well as to work through our sample situation. Part of what took time out of the meeting was getting the “server” (actually an old laptop) on the network and accessible by everybody else on the network.

We looked at the `/etc/samba/smb.conf` file which controls which files are shared and which are not. In it we had 3 entries; users, shared and logs. The idea was to have them show different folder permissions and their effects for access by owner only (users), groups (shared) and read-only (logs).

In August, we’ll see if we cannot finish some of our permission issues and get a nice file accessibility structure in place before we move on to the next server function, the web server.

Server, Networking and Virtual Computing. At the July meeting we repeated the process of configuring a storage area network (SAN) server using a Linux distribution called OpenFiler which allows connections via iSCSI. We did this a couple of months earlier but we had another server to configure and the review made the process much clearer.

Unlike when you map a “drive” from one computer to a share on another computer, an iSCSI connection tricks the client computer into believing the remote space is a real physical hard drive. This is the key to storage virtualization which separates the server “horsepower” from the disk space. If a server fails it becomes easy to give a new server access to the same disk space without actually moving anything.

The SAN server uses RAID arrays to make vast amounts of storage space extremely reliable so the failure of a single disk does not bring down critical business functions.

We will take a vacation in August, so that meeting is canceled. The next Server, Networking and Virtual Computing SIG will be Thursday, September 10 at 7 p.m. in the DACS Resource Center.



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August 3

DACS presenters,
Back to School:
Saving money on tech

September 7

Cancelled, due to
Labor Day

October 5

Pete Basel,
Overclocking

November 2

Medical
Technology