

February 2001

Volume 12, Issue 2

Technology Tools that Talk-and Listen

New communication tools for the disabled will be the topic of discussion at the next monthly meeting of the Danbury Area Computer Society on Tuesday, February 6, 2001. The 7:30 p.m. meeting will be held at Danbury Hospital Auditorium, and is open to the public.

Leading the program will be David Goldberg, president of Health Science, a New Jersey-based provider of augmentative and alternative communication for the speech-impaired (AAC). Goldberg will discuss the growing field of assistive technology for the handicapped and how it is helping bridge the gap between the physically disabled and mainstream society. The presentation will focus on public and private funding sources, application to specific types of disability, and a hands-on demonstration of the products being used.

A measure of the influence of computers on our lives is how much we seem to take them for granted. Like our cars, we rarely ask what makes them work, but how we turn them on and off and get where we want to go, and using a keyboard and a mouse are no more complicated than operating a clutch, gear shift and steering wheel. But for people with disabilities, these simple tools can be a hindrance, or even a barrier to accessing their PC or navigating the digital super highway.

A diverse group of innovators ranging from amateur inventors to Ph.D. engineers, the AAC industry has grown to more than \$250 million in annual sales. Chief among its products are switches that allow users to input data by movement of a finger, toe, head or eye; and keypads that differentiate between varying degrees, prox-

imity, or duration of touch. Most systems include a voice synthesizer to convert words on the screen to speech, in order to communicate with others or to provide audible feedback to the user.

Although primarily developed for use by the physically disabled, this technology should provide a glimpse into a future in which we all gain more control of our environment through interaction with computers.

A special guest at the program will be Shirley Fredlund, Executive Director of Voice For Joanie, a New Milford non profit foundation that provides, at no charge, communication technology for victims of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease)—a condition that destroys neurons controlling muscle movement, leading to total paralysis. Using an infrared eye switch, ALS patients can blink to select text on the screen and have it "spoken" by a voice synthesizer. Danbury Area Computer Society provides technical support and volunteers to Voice for Joanie.

DACS meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every month at Danbury Hospital Auditorium. Activities begin with informal networking at 6:30, followed by questions and answers and Club announcements. The formal program gets underway at 8 p.m. For more information, see the DACS Web site at www.dacs.org or call the Resource Center at (203) 748-4330.



President's File



I think it was my third month in DACS. We had just moved our monthly meetings from Brookfield Library to Datahr Rehabilitation Center, when Shirley Fredlund rose to ask for volunteers for Voice for Joanie, a program she had

founded to provide computer-assisted speech to victims of Lou Gehrig's Disease. In response to Shirley's plea, a new SIG was created in DACS to help coordinate volunteers, and an appeal was launched for charitable contributions and donations of used equipment.

Voice for Joanie had gotten its start 18 months earlier as a memorial to Shirley's friend Joan Margaitis, a resident of Morris and victim of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a disease which causes the body to reject its own nerve cells, resulting in muscle degeneration and paralysis. Through Shirley's efforts, IBM had donated a portable computer, a voice synthesizer, and an infrared switching system that would enable Joanie to communicate by blinking to select words and phrases on the screen and having them spoken out through the system loudspeaker. Joanie's life struggle, which ended just before the equipment arrived, became the inspiration for Shirley's personal crusade, which through hard work and relentless publicity, had already brought the gift of speech to five other victims of ALS.

Today, after more than ten years in operation, Voice for Joanie has provided that gift of speech to more than 300 people throughout Connecticut and nearby New York State, and has 60 computer systems currently on loan to individuals suffering

from ALS, MS, and traumatic injuries. Through its promotional efforts and technical support, DACS has been able to attract more than \$25,000 in computer industry donations and awards, and has received recognition for its part from IBM, Microsoft and the Association of PC User Groups. We are proud of our contributions, but we humbly recognize that none of this could have happened without the dedication, persistence and hard work of Shirley and her loyal core of volunteers.

We will have more to say about Voice for Joanie; but it is important here to point out that the hardware used for ALS patients is just a small part of a growing field of computer technology that will revolutionize the way people with disabilities—and perhaps the rest of us—communicate and interact with our environment. It's called Augmentative and Alternative Communication, and it will be the subject of our next monthly meeting on February 6.

A part of the billion-dollar Assistive Technology industry, AAC seeks to develop tools for people unable to speak or otherwise communicate. In addition to ALS and MS patients, this technology has applications for victims of traumatic brain injury, stroke cerebral palsy and a wide range of learning disabilities. These are all conditions where computers can provide the flexibility, unlimited choice and continuous one-on-one attention required by people with special needs.

David Goldberg, president and service representative for Health Science, Inc. of Princeton, NJ, will explore the directions the assistive technology market is taking, and demonstrate some of the cutting-edge products his company provides. These can include switches that are activated by unconventional means, such as movement of the head, eye, chin, foot or arm (or by proximity, with no movement at all); alternative input devices including special keypads, touchscreens and voice activation; and feedback tools such as word prediction, abbreviation expansion and speech conversion.

That is quite a mouthful. But if all this seems esoteric and unrelated to everyday computing, think about voice recognition—an alternative communication tool for a persistent minority of the workplace disabled: higher level managers with type O qwertyosis. This and many other changes in office automation, environment control and robotics, will eventually revolutionize the way we all work, manage our homes and organize our leisure.

—ALLAN OSTERGREN
DACSPREZ@AOL.COM

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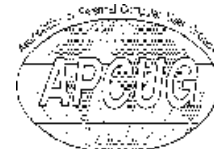
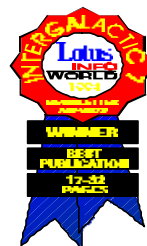
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HelpLine

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

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Directors' Notes

A Regular Meeting of the DACS Board was held at the RC at 7:30pm on January 8, 2001. Present were Messrs. Buoy, Bovaird, Cohen, Neary, Pearson, Preston and Setaro and Mrs. Gaberel. Also present were Mrs. Nancy Greger and Mr. James Scheef. In the absence of the President, Vice President Setaro presided; Secretary Larry Buoy kept the records of the meeting. The minutes of the meeting held on December 11, 2000 were approved.

Treasurer Bovaird reported total checking account balance, Certificates of Deposit (in the amount of \$10,310.52) and postage on hand of \$22,548.19, less prepaid dues of \$7,452.00, for a net of \$4,785.67. He also reported current membership of 537.

After discussing the potential obsolescence of the CD-ROM collection of freeware, shareware and trial software obtained from APCUG, it was agreed to label same "DACS" and offer it free to any member desiring it at future general meetings.

There being no new developments regarding the upgrading of the computer at the RC, further discussion thereof was tabled.

Don Neary presented a list of questions regarding DACS relationships with other user groups and with vendors, including APCUG and regional user group cooperatives to pool vendor presentations. It was the general consensus that such initiatives had minimal results at best. Presentation possibilities discussed included navigating eBay, portable computing devices, including laptops and wireless or hand-held, virus protection and the Linux operating system.

The board was advised that Rachel Clarke of Words+ cannot make the scheduled presentation on Assistive Technology scheduled at the February general meeting, but that David Goldberg, President and Service Representative of Health Science, organizer of the planned presentation, would handle the entire program.

With Mrs. Greger standing in for Director Matthew Greger, unable to attend this meeting, various observations were made, regarding accessibility and responsibilities for the RC, as well as the equipment therein. Mr. Greger also proposed seeking other venues for a "Resource Center" and possible partnering or sharing space with compatible organizations.

Following a short discussion of the disposition of the annual "Jerry Award" of \$750.00 by APCUG to DACS in recognition of its public service, it was unanimously resolved that it be passed on to Voice for Joanie at the February general meeting on Assistive Technology.

—LARRY BUOY

PC Media

Do Compact Discs Degrade?

by Bob Starrett

The answer to this question is easy and apparent: of course compact discs degrade. As with every other material, eventually time, temperature variations and the elements will take their toll, on the disc as a whole, as well as each element that comprises that disc. The real question is, how does disc degradation affect readability?

According to the Optical Storage Technology Association (OSTA), CD-R discs have a long lifespan:

"Lifetime estimation of any storage medium is a very complex and statistics-based process. Improper testing or measurement procedures can seriously impact and compromise lifetime estimates. ANSI Committee IT-9 is currently developing comprehensive guidelines for CD-ROM and CD-R life estimation. The CD-R media manufacturers have performed extensive media longevity studies using these industry-defined tests and mathematical modeling techniques, with results claiming longevity from 70 years to over 200 years. The primary caveat is how you handle and store the media. With proper handling and storage, your CD-Rs will outlive you."

It is one thing to say that discs will last that long. But while we grow old waiting to find out, we need to take some precautions and not rely stiffly on numbers such as these.

How long can you store a disc before you need to possibly reburn it to preserve your data? And is a CD really the best place to store important data for a long period of time? A comprehensive study of this topic is best left to someone or some company that has the deep pockets to perform it. The resources necessary to burn, test, age and retest media of different dyes, reflective layers and coatings are enormous.

In the meantime, the best we can do is use existing surveys and anecdotal evidence as a guide. While somewhat

old, two studies are also available that provide a little insight into how the media manufacturers look at the longevity issue. The studies are rather technical, but if you want to look at them you can find them here:

TDK - <http://www.cd-info.com/DIC/Technology/>

[CD-R/Media/TDK.html](http://www.cd-info.com/DIC/Technology/CD-R/Media/TDK.html)

Kodak - <http://www.cd-info.com/CDIC/Technology/CD-R/Media/Kodak.html>

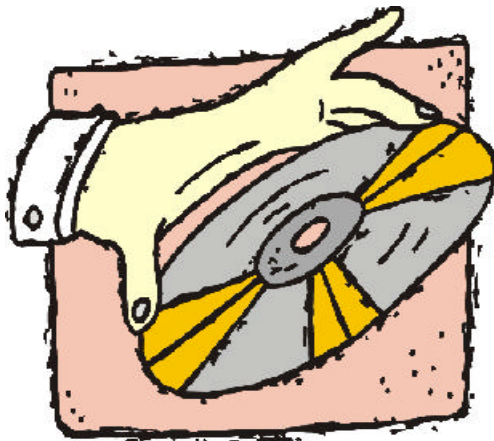
US News and World Report also has an interesting article with a useful chart comparing the lifetimes of several types of storage media. It draws the startling conclusion that unless you buy certain high-quality brands, your CD-R discs may last as little as two years! But note that the National Media Lab took issue

with the manner in which its data was used to produce the chart and does not agree with the conclusions drawn (www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/980216/16digi.htm)

It sure would be nice to conduct our own study, but let's do the best we can with what we have on hand. Let's look at some really old discs and see if they are readable. In my personal collection, I found three CD-R discs that were at least 10 years old. These discs have not gone through any aging process or artificial stimulus. They have had a nice home in a jewel case, have made several trips to California and back, been joggled, of course, but otherwise they should be in good shape. They are clean discs without scratches, the kind that go into a jewel case right after recording and stay there.

Of the three, one was unreadable in four different models of Plextor drives, while it worked fine in a Kenwood 72X TrueX CD-ROM drive. But the fact that the Plextors could not read it and the Kenwood could, caused me to make a copy of it off the Kenwood, because this ten-year old disc contains data that I may need in the future. I feel safer now with the original and a backup that the Plextor drives are happy to deal with.

When will I check it again? Probably in a couple of years. Does this mean that you have to check all of your discs every so often to make sure they are still readable? Well, not everything, but do check your most valuable discs at least every year or two. Hopefully, you don't have so many that this becomes an undue burden. Just try to save the checking and re-recording for truly valuable discs of irre-



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placeable material, rather than copies of popular audio CDs, for example.

The other two discs were both readable in a professional CD tester and the Plextor drives, as well as the Kenwood drive. One had an error rate in the CD tester comparable to a freshly recorded CD-R disc, and the other had error rates higher than I would like, but still well within the maximum error rate considered safe for CD-ROM discs.

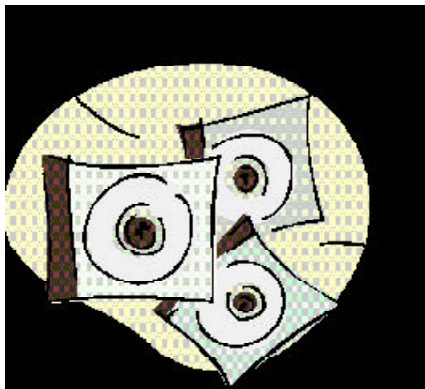
These discs were not tested for errors when they were made, so we do not know how the current error rates compare to the original and therefore cannot really judge degradation. But we do know that out of three ten-year-old recorded discs, one was on the edge, another was middling, and a third was just fine after all that time. Obviously too small a sample to draw any conclusions from, but the best we can do with what we have. One additional thing to note is that CD-R media has improved in the interim, at least discs from quality vendors have. There are also a lot of no-name brands now that may be worse than our 10-year-old discs.

If your job is to manage a large collection of stored data on CD-R for a company, then you have a rather large task ahead of you setting up protocols and procedures for archival disc testing and

re-recording. But for most of us, the time spent checking key discs will be minimal.

So the controversy over the actual life expectancy of CD-R discs continues and our quick anecdotal testing does not

solve the mystery. Just be careful with crucial data, use good quality media, and store and treat it correctly. Chances are that you have at least 10 years before you need to start worrying.



This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer

User Groups (APCUG), an International organization to which this user group belongs.

Voice for Joanie

Help give the gift of speech
Call Shirley Fredlund
at 355-2611, ext. 4517
and become a
Voice for Joanie
volunteer.



I got the Millennium Bug.
My IRA went from 2K to 1K almost overnight

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12/19/2000 thru 1/20/2001

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Further information?
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Microsoft Review

At Home with Microsoft

By Marlène Gaberel

The January 2nd presentation by John Stroiney of Microsoft was concise, short and to the point.

John started his presentation by giving the audience a tour of the Encarta Language Learning in Spanish www.encarta.msn.com/products/info/LearnSpanish.asp There is also Encarta Language Learning in French, which I wish, by the way, John had chosen since I know more French than Spanish.

Encarta Language Learning has a study planner that lets, for example, a person intending to visit Spain or any other Spanish-speaking country, to set a target date to assemble enough Spanish knowledge to be able to hold a basic conversation. The study planner would indicate that with a certain number of hours per week much knowledge can be attained. The user can vary the amount of time as needed. The software also has a progress tracker that a student can review on a frequent basis to see where he/she stands.

Many different aspects of language learning such as conversation, grammar and pronunciation are available with the program. A student or anybody who wishes to acquire additional foreign language could use that program. John pointed out that the software was available in both standard and deluxe versions, with a headset included for listening to conversation and voice recognition for pronunciation that can be assessed.

According to John, the standard version retails for about \$30.00 and the deluxe for \$50.00. The deluxe version contains additional resources, such as two Audio CDs that can be listened to when away from the computer and a 240-page workbook to practice with additional activities. In addition, a full-screen video CD that allows for full screen viewing of the videos in the program. This last feature can be especially useful for teachers and families. In my opinion, at the prices that John stated, the software seems impressive and very comprehensive.

The highlight of the evening was probably the demo of Combat Flight Simulator II, Pacific Theater. <http://www.microsoft.com/games/combatfs2/>. The game is based on historical government sources and in-depth interviews with Japanese and American WWII veterans.

A 200-page manual accompanies the program with pertinent historical details about the air battles in the Pacific. The introduction has interesting 1940s cartoons. John demonstrated a landing on an air carrier. He did not want to tell the audience how long he practiced but his attempt soon failed.

Though John is a very eloquent speaker for Microsoft, he may not be the best game player. To what do I compare?



My older son plays games and Flight Simulator and he can stay "a l i v e" much longer than John. The requirements for Combat Flight Simulator

II, Pacific Theater are rather high. When the game came out in early Fall, my son bought it. Although I was able to install the game, it kept on crashing the computer. The reason, I suspect, is that my video card is not 3D. Even though I tried to by-pass the 3D feature, the game did not play at all on my computer. My son was very disappointed. I know from experience that games can be very demanding. My three-year-old computer just does not cut it with games like Simulator II.

John also mentioned that Microsoft offers two different types of joysticks to play Combat Flight Simulator II, Pacific Theater. www.microsoft.com/products/hardware/sidewinder/devices/default.htm One is the basic Sidewinder and the other the Microsoft SideWinder Force Feedback 2 which provides the feel including the difficulty of operating a real airplane stick.

John then briefly mentioned MSN Explorer, Microsoft's other browser. <http://explorer.msn.com/home.htm>. Its appearance is similar to an AOL interface, and also features e-mail. It is free to download and there is no need to be an MSN subscriber. One specific advantage is that a user can listen to music or watch a video while browsing the Web or using E-mail

without having to open separate programs or windows. Windows Media Player is included and provides leading performance and supports a wide range of formats, including Windows Media and MP3.

The MSN Explorer is installed on the MSN Companion, <http://devices.msn.com/msncompanion/> Microsoft's e-machine to surf the web and send e-mail. John said that the MSN Companion may be the ideal appliance in a kitchen to get, for example, virtual recipes or for someone who is only interested in accessing the Internet but has no need for a full-blown computer.

Finally, John gave us a web address to check at <http://www.microsoft.com/business/howto/> for users of Office Microsoft 2000. The goal of the site is to make users of Office 2000 aware of tips and tricks enabling users to save time and to work more efficiently.

John ended the meeting by raffling some of the software he had presented. Some members left with a copy of Combat Flight Simulator II, Office 2000 and the new golf game Links 2001 <http://www.microsoft.com/games/links2001/>.

Within one hour the audience had a good idea of Microsoft's latest software and hardware.

MARLENE GABEREL is a DACS board member and VP for Public Relations, who learns as much about computers from her sons, Joshua and Zachary as she does from DACS. You can e-mail her at: marlene_gaberel@yahoo.com.

Voice for Joanie

Special thanks for the following
Voice for Joanie volunteers:

Jeff Chodack
Shirley Fredlund
Bill Hatch
John Heckman
Tom Lamb
Mike Mcloughlin
Joann Miller
Frank Ruiz
Steve Schwab
Tom Shulman

Macinations

Office 2001 - Macintosh Leapfrogs Windows?

By Mike Kaltschnee

It's a strange world when Microsoft, which makes Windows, invests \$150 million in a competitor such as Apple. It's even weirder when they ship a new version of their best-selling software for Macintosh before their own Windows version. I have a feeling that they might be doing it to keep Apple alive and the anti-trust government lawyers off their backs. Without Office, I really believe that the Mac would die a slow, agonizing death.

Microsoft is busy putting the finishing touches on Office 2001 for Windows, but has already shipped Office 2001 for the Mac. Although it lacks the Windows products like Access and FrontPage, it does include the core applications: Word, Excel, & PowerPoint. These three applications are used by almost every computer user to write, calculate, and present information. I have used these programs for at least 10 years, and it's hard to remember the commands when I find myself trying to use WordPerfect, Lotus 123, Persuasion, or any other competing product.

I was recently given a copy of Office 2001 for the Macintosh to review. The first thing I noticed was the new packaging - a CD case. Finally someone figured out that we throw away the boxes software normally comes in. This new packaging, which I hope they use for most of their new software, holds 10 CDs.

Installation is a breeze. You simply drag and drop the Office 2001 folder onto your hard disk. A few brief questions, such as which

folder to put it in, and you're done. Installation takes about 10 minutes.

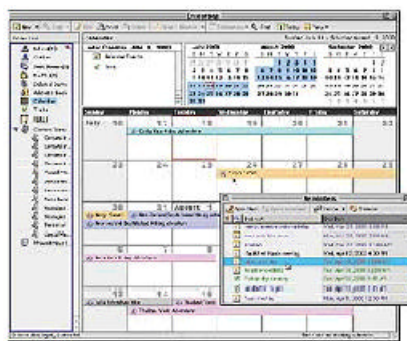
The first software feature I noticed was the new Project Gallery. This is a similar feature to the opening screen of Microsoft Works. Instead of giving you a blank page to start with, they've wisely designed a screen that lets you pick a

project to work on, such as a resume, letter, invoice or Web page.

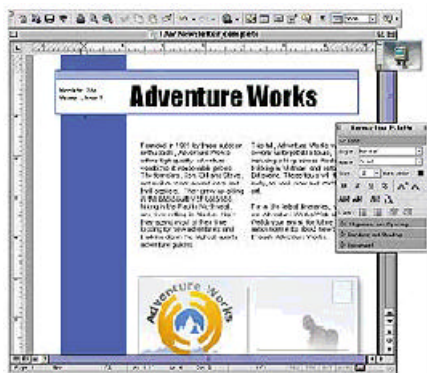
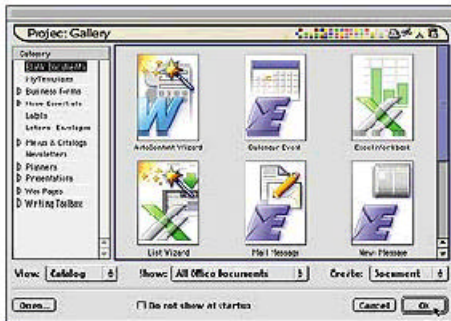
Speaking of Web pages, it's even easier to create a Web site in Office 2001.

For a long time you could create a document and save it as an HTML file, or Web page. Now you can use the Project Gallery to create a simple Web site. It's still not as powerful as a product like FrontPage, but for some simple Web work or putting information on your intranet, it'll do the job.

Entourage is the



newest addition to the Office family. It's designed to be your calendar, email program, to do list, address book, and more. I currently use Eudora for my e-mail, but it lacks the integrated scheduling and task management. Entourage can also sync with my Palm computer, making it more useful. I'm not sure I'm going to switch, but I'm seriously considering it.



The interface has been updated to a more Mac-like look and feel. They even "borrowed" a feature from Adobe's GoLive product - floating palettes. While you're working in any of the Office 2001 products you'll see a floating palette that reflects the type of work you're doing. If you're working in Word, it'll allow you to quickly change the font, style, alignment, spacing and more. This was a great idea, and I can't blame them for using it. They have also made the product look more like OS X, with some transparency effects and design changes.

Office 2001 includes a bunch of goodies as well. There is more than 120 mb of free clipart, useful templates and wizards, and more on the CD.

The biggest application missing from Office 2001 is Access, the database. Microsoft has attempted to address this shortcoming by creating a tight interface between Office and FileMaker Pro, the best-selling database for the Mac. While not 100% compatible with Access, it does address most business needs for creating and maintaining data on the Mac.

One thing to keep in mind is the upcoming release of OS X. Shipping in March and bundled with all computers starting next summer, it will require another upgrade of Office to run native under OS X. Microsoft has announced a tentative ship date of next fall for the OS X version and a 1/2 price discount for anyone who buys Office 2001 now.

Should you upgrade? The upgrade is relatively expensive, at \$259 or \$429 for the full version. I think the new features (including better compatibility with the Windows version of Office) make it worthwhile for anyone that uses Word, Excel, or PowerPoint daily. I think the upgrade price is a bit steep, but think about what life would be like without these great applications.

System requirements include a Power PC Macintosh, at least 32mb of RAM, OS 8.1 or greater (OS 8.5 recommended), and at least 160mb of hard disk space.

Mike is a DACS member who loves Microsoft for making Office for the Macintosh and keeping Apple alive - a very strange thing. You can contact him by e-mail: mike@demorgan.com.

Special Interest Groups

SIG NOTES: November 2000

ACCESS. Designs and implements solutions using Microsoft Access database management software.

Contact: Bruce Preston, 203 431-2920 (bpreston@mags.net). Meets on 2nd Tuesday, 7p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: Feb 13

ADVANCED OPERATING SYSTEMS. Explores and develops OS/2, Linux, and NT operating systems. For meeting notes and notices, follow link to Don's site on dacs.org.

Contact: Don Pearson, 914 669-9622 (pearson@attglobal.net). Meets on Wednesday of the week following the general meeting, 7:30 p.m., at Don Pearson's office, North Salem, NY.
Next meeting: Feb 7

BACK OFFICE. Explores Back Office server and client applications, including Win NT Servers and MS Outlook. The SIG meets 2nd Thursday, 7 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.

Contact: Jim Scheef (jscheef@telemarksys.com)
Next meeting: Feb 8

GRAPHICS. Create/print high-quality graphics and images.

Contact: Ken Graff at 203 775-6667 (graffic@ntplx.net). Meets on last Wednesday, 7p.m., at Best Photo Imaging, Brookfield.
Next Meeting: Feb 28

INTERNET. Acquaints DACS members with the Internet.

Contact: Richard Koser (rkoser@worldnet.att.net). Meets on 3rd Wednesday, 7p.m., at the DACS Resource Center. Members' suggestions are welcome.
Next Meeting: Feb 21

INVESTMENT STRATEGIES. Discusses various investment strategies to maximize profits and limit risk.

Contact: Paul Gehrett, 203 426-8436, (pgehr4402@aol.com). Meets 3rd Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Edmond Town Hall, Newtown.
Next Meeting: Feb 22

MACINTOSH. Discusses Macintosh hardware and software.

Contact: Chris Salaz, 203 798-6417, (crsalaz@kami.com). Meets on 3rd Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.,
Next Meeting: Suspended until further notice

VISUAL BASIC. Develops Windows apps with Visual Basic.

Contact: Chuck Fizer, 203 798-9996 (CFizer@compuserve.com) or Jim Scheef, 860 355-8001 (JScheef@Telemarksys.com). Meets on 1st Wednesday, 7p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: Feb 7

VOICE FOR JOANIE. Provides and supports people with Lou Gehrig's disease with special PC computer equipment.

Contact: Shirley Fredlund, 860 355-2611 ext. 4517 (voiceforjoanie@juno.com). Meets on last Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., at Datahr, Brookfield.
Next Meeting: Feb 27

WALL STREET. Examines Windows stock market software.

Contact: Phil Dilloway, 203 367-1202 (dilloway@ntplx.net). Meets on last Monday, 7p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: Feb 26

WEB SITE DESIGN. Fundamentals of design for the Internet.

Contact: Matthew Greger, 203 748-2919 (matthew@thebuisenesshelter.com). Meets second Wednesday, 7p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: Feb 14

SIG News & Other Events

Back Office/Visual Basic: The January meetings of the Visual Basic and Back Office SIGs were combined with the Access SIG for a presentation by Adam McElhinny from Component One. Adam demonstrated the features of two newly released controls, SizerOne and TrueDbGrid Pro. SizerOne is a control that makes it easier to control how a form appears when the user resizes it and TrueDbGrid Pro seems to do everything else that anyone could possibly want. It was an enjoyable presentation.

The Visual Basic SIG discusses all aspects of software development using VB and VBA from the client side. Everyone is welcome, from beginners to experienced developers.

The Back Office SIG covers Windows NT server, network infrastructure and server-side software development (SQL Server, ASP, web pages, etc). We talk about everything from home networking to SQL Server stored procedures to politics.

In February, the SIGs return to their normal schedules. The VB SIG will meet Wednesday, February 7th at 7pm in the DACS Resource Center. The Back Office SIG will meet Thursday, February 8th at 7pm in the DACS Resource Center.

Internet. In January the DACS Internet SIG convened to hear Brian Backman present "Using the Internet to Find People." It turns out that finding names, addresses and phone numbers is much easier than finding e-mail addresses, except for targets at academic institutions.

See the discussions and links thoughtfully posted at Brian's Website: <http://www.thebackmans.com/searchers.htm>.

The Internet Special Interest Group meets [usually] at 7:30 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month at the DACS Resource Center on the lower level of Ives Manor located at 198 Main Street, a few buildings north from the Danbury Public Library. Open discussion of interesting sites and other Internet matters precedes and follows the presentation. Members' suggestions for Internet SIG topics and participation are welcome and even essential; contact Richard Koser at rkoser@worldnet.att.net. Next meeting: 7:30 p.m. Feb 21.

Web Site Design: January's meeting was on "Getting Listed - The Basics on Keywords, Meta tags and Search Engines." We went over setting up your page so it's "robot" friendly as well as discussing various methods of submitting your site to Yahoo, Excite, Lycos, Google, and the others. I want to thank everyone for coming.

On February 14th, our special Valentine's topic will be "Developing your Database." We will go over:

- (a) keeping track of the information you obtain from the internet;
- (b) implementing your data;
- (c) database driven web sites; and,
- (d) off-the-shelf software vs. custom. We look forward to seeing you there.

February 2001

Danbury Area Computer Society

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5	 7:00 PM GENERAL MEETING Assistive Technology	7:00 PM Visual Basic Chuck Fizer, 203 798-9996 7:30 PM ADVANCED OS Don Pearson 914 669-9622	 7:00 PM BACK OFFICE Jim Scheef 860 355-0034		10
11	 7:30 PM BOARD OF DIRECTORS	 7:00 PM ACCESS Bruce Preston 203 431-2920	7:00 PM WEB DESIGN Matthew Greger 203 748-2919	 7:30 PM INVESTMENT Paul Gehrett 203 426-8436		 NEWSLETTER SIG NEWS DEADLINE
18	19	20	 7:30 PM INTERNET Richard Koser rkoser@att.net	22	23	24
25	 7:00 PM WALL STREET Phil Dilloway 203 367-1202	 7:30 PM VOICE FOR JOANIE Shirley Fredlund 860 355-2611	 7:00 PM GRAPHICS Ken Graff 203 775-6667			

Music Music Music

Skip-free Music to Go

By Mike Kaltschnee

I recently found myself working in New York City with a 5-hour daily commute (door to door). This has caused me to search for ways to make the commute more enjoyable: books, magazines, chatting with fellow commuters, talking on a cell phone, or just thinking. I knew I needed music, but how?

I already carry a somewhat heavy Powerbook computer, paperback book, magazine, and papers for work, and the last thing I needed was a heavy CD player and a 20-pack of CDs. I wanted something small, compact, with great sound, but not a portable radio. I am the type of person who will listen to 10 or 15 songs for hours and be perfectly happy.

I finally realized it was time, once again, to try an exciting new technology to solve a problem. This always worries me, because I spend hours on buggy software and doing things that would be solved in a later release of the software. This time I was pleasantly surprised.

I decided to purchase an MP3 player to help ease my weary commute. MP3 is the name of a format used to compress and store music. A CD typically holds only 20 songs, but has tremendous capacity: 640 mb. There is very little compression of the music in a typical CD. However, using MP3, you can fit as many as 170 songs on one CD-R (which costs about 50 cents). The problem is that with most types of compression there is a loss of quality. With MP3, you have some control over the compression and resulting quality. If you are a typical user (like me) you'll probably notice it only on highly compressed files.

You're probably wondering how to take your CD collection and turn it into MP3 files. There are many programs which take your CD and turn it into an MP3 file, known

as encoders. Most MP3 players come with encoder software, but you can also find a huge selection (for Mac or Windows) at www.mp3.com. A typical song goes from around 32 mb to 3 mb (about 10 - 1 compression). This means that you can fit about 10 songs on a 32 mb player, or 20 on 64 MB.

You can also get MP3 files on the Internet. However, since I've been making my living for the past 15 years on copy-

righted material (software, computer graphics and writing), I must advise you to pay for what you enjoy. So, make sure you only download music you own - or buy the CDs for music you like. Napster, a popular file-sharing program enables you search other people's collections to

find music. You can also find special MP3 files on fan sites or even free from the artists. I think the greatest MP3 files are from rare collections or unpublished live versions, things you can't buy.

I started looking at MP3 players, and found many places that sold them. They range in price from around \$89 to \$699. The large price range is due to the type of storage used. Most MP3 players use memory cards, which are expensive - around \$170 for a 64MB player. There are some CD players that have the ability to play MP3 files on CD-R, and they start in price from \$89. You could fit 500 songs on 3 or 4 CD-R's and carry a huge selection of music with you. The most expensive ones use a hard disk, and can hold up to thousands of songs. Some of the new PDA's are starting to support MP3 playback, but it's been an expensive option.

I had another criteria for selecting an MP3 player. I love to read, but I'm starting to loathe the \$8 cost per book (I read several per week). I've never been into audio books or books on tape, but since I have so

much time on my hands, I figured it was time to hear the author or famous actor read to me.

Audible.com offers a special price on the Diamond RIO 500 64mb player. It costs \$99, but has a \$50 rebate, so your cost is about \$49. However, to get this special price you have to sign up for the \$9.95 per month "Audible Listener" program (1 year). You get 2 full audio books each month, and I figure that's about 1/2 price for the books I would normally buy. Without the Audible promotion you would pay \$170 for the RIO 500.

They claim you can fit 32 hours of the spoken word on the player, or a mix and match of MP3 files and books. I had some trouble when I downloaded Stephen King's "On Writing" book—it deleted the music on the player. So, I just have to download the music again. I think the Audible software needs some work, but otherwise it's an amazing bit of technology. The super-compressed version of the book by Stephen King sounds a bit metallic, but it's neat to hear him read the book to you.

Things you need to look for in MP3 players include size, memory, expandability, included software, headphones, software and firmware upgrades, and battery life. Make sure you don't get a serial interface—it'll take forever compared to a USB interface to transfer your music.

The only real complaint with the RIO 500 is the headphones. I simply replaced them with my favorite Sony in-ear headphone, and I was in audio heaven.

MIKE is a DACS member who loves being on the bleeding edge but hates the sight of blood. You can contact him by e-mail: mikek@demorgan.com.



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A Memorial

Memories of Jim Menousek

One of the things I will always remember about Jim was his dry wit. He would point to my calculator watch and say "Hey, isn't that one of those 'geek' watches?" and he was pointing to it with the hand that had his own 'geek' calculator watch on it. That may seem stupid, but it cracked me up.

Jim was a true Mac enthusiast and he was always willing to lend a hand. One day my son brought home an old Mac SE/30. It would power up and looked like it was somewhat functional, but would not boot. I really had no knowledge of this vintage Mac, but I knew just the guy who did. I called Jim and he was more than happy to come over and take a look at it. Well, it turned out that the box was pretty well cannibalized. It had no hard drive, no memory, and it looked like the floppy drive was defective, too. I had a hard drive and some 1 meg SIMMs to put in it, but there was no bracket to mount the drive. Jim said that he thought he may have a bracket and suggested that he could take the whole thing with him and work on it back home. Well about 3 days later he called and said he was coming over with the SE/30. Of course it was fully functional. He found a bracket to mount the drive, put in the memory and he even replaced the defective floppy disk with one he had. And he didn't want a dime for anything. That was Jim.

I will not forget Jim for that. Not just because he was so generous, but because he sowed a seed into my life which I'm trying to carry on. And that's to help other people in need with our own knowledge and expertise, if we are able. I think that's the spirit of the DACS organization of which Jim Menousek was the epitome, both as an educator and a friend.

David Brown



...
When I purchased my refurbished Power Mac, I brought the unit down to the MAC club last year and had a glitch with the system which

Jim jumped right into to . . . getting right to the inside workings and locating the trouble in record time. After fixing the problem, he then explained to me in detail as to how he went about fixing the unit and encouraged me to get to know my machine in a "friendly" manner and not to be afraid of the internal components.

His style was also professional and kind. He will be missed.

Joe Czarnik

...
Jim was one of the most wonderful people that I have ever met. He would come to my house whenever I called him and spend hours with me, helping me learn the language of computers.

Jim helped me with my 8000 person mailing list and all sorts of business applications! He was a very generous man with his time and talent and he had a very dry sense of humor.

He had a lot of patience, even though he was so far ahead of most of us in the language of computers. I will always have a fond place in my heart



for Jim. I placed him in my dedications on my new CD "Life is Love & Love is You."

Sherry Winston

...
Nothing special to say about Jim Menousek except that he was always ready to try to help. I do remember him bringing in disks with special little applications he found helpful, and I'm still using a couple of them.

Even though I haven't attended very much in the last year or so, I'll miss the Mac interest group and especially Jim's smiling face.

Harlan Jessup

...
He took the time to install a new hard drive on my old Performa, and add RAM to my wife's laptop...you can say that!

John Tenaglia

...
I am the proud owner of Jim's de-Microsofted attaché case. He was so proud, in his witty way, to show me what he had done. He removed a Microsoft IMITATION leather patch and sewed a cloth Apple patch in its place.

He and I had a friendly competitive edge to our friendship. If someone had a problem we would try to solve it quicker than the other. Also, if someone brought a show-and-tell gadget to the Macintosh SIG, we would both want to check it out first.

What I enjoyed most with Jim, was when he and I began repairing and upgrading Macintosh Users' computers at

the Mac SIG. And if the grateful Macintosh owners offered us money, we strongly encouraged them to join DACS instead.

It was our subversive way to save people from being subjugated to the only Macintosh place in town.

Well, towards the end of his life, while visiting him regularly, I got to meet and know his son Andrew, with whom I remain in touch.

I have met people who, though they embrace computers, stated they would not use email, the web or cell phones...but since have, as future folks will.

Chris Salaz

...

Of course, everyone will be telling stories of what a great guy Jim Menousek was; how he helped so many people with their problems with computers (and Life); how marvelous was his sense of humor (my puns were puny compared to his); how great was his contribution to his community and his family; and how special was his humanity. I was a multiple recipient of this humanity through his many generosity to me and to the user group. When I had to leave Danbury and give-up leadership of Dacs Mac SIG, Jim, knowing how sick he was, and how little good time was left to him, still agreed to shoulder shared responsibility for continuing the SIG. When Marc and I took our month-long tour of the USA, carrying the then-little-known GPS receiver, Jim loaned us a valuable Mac laptop to run the first Mac-based GPS mapping software. The experience was the basis for a *dacs.doc* article. I wanted to own that machine that had so well endured the rigors of that adventure, and haggled with Jim for years over a fair price. Just before his death, Jim made a gift to me of that laptop. It is now one of my most dearly cherished possessions. This summer it will be testing the latest version of that amazing mapping software (MacAPRS) while bolted to the tank of a motorcycle. I hope Jim will be looking after the safety of his Thursday's Child, and of its grateful user. Thanks, Jim, for being a model of how to live Life with Love, grace, generosity, character, integrity and class.

Robert Constantine

The Tube

Relief in Sight from Barrage Of Irsome TV Commercials?

by Ken Fermoyale, Tug-Net

Are you fed up with the seemingly endless barrage of commercials crammed into your favorite TV shows and sports events? If so, join the club! But relief may be in sight, according to Electronic Digest (Sept. 5, 2000 issue).

The magazine reports that sophisticated new integrated circuit controllers will improve performance of Set-Top Boxes and Personal Video Recorders (STBs/PVRs). The new ICs will make the devices less expensive and more versatile. This should eventually change their status from novelties with appeal to a limited market of "early adopters" to appliances that gradually will take the place of today's VCRs.

Electronic Design also notes that the new controllers "can be used to manage arriving and departing data streams, into and out of set-top boxes, storage devices, digital TVs, and PVRs," from a variety of sources, including broadband cable, satellites, terrestrial and IP (Internet Protocol) networks.

What does this have to do with computers? PVR technology is digital, like computers, not analog like VCRs, and data is stored on a hard drive, like computers, not on magnetic tape. A PVR will do everything that a VCR can, but with significant improvements.

For example, I have about given up on watching a lot of TV when it is aired, especially movies. Instead, I record them on a VCR and

play them back later, fast-forwarding through commercial breaks. This scenario works even better with a PVR. You can record a program in real time

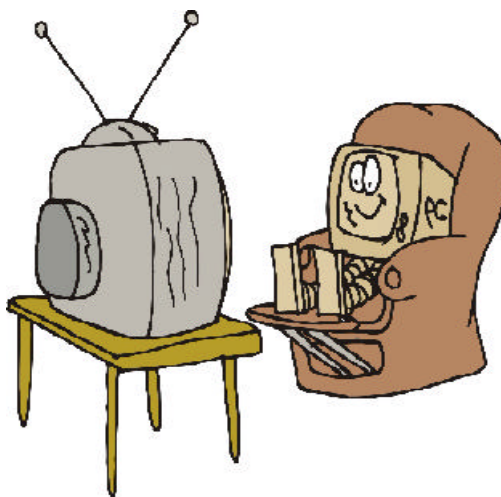
but pause it at any point, at a commercial break, for example.

The PVR keeps recording the program while you get fresh coffee, go to the bathroom or whatever. When you return and hit the Pause button again, the recorder picks up where it left off, playing the

program back from the hard drive. Now you can fast forward quickly through the commercials and enjoy what you really wanted to see.

You will also be able to do your own instant replays; just rewind, then replay segments you want to view again. You can also preprogram a PVR to record favorite programs automatically, just as with a VCR.

(Ed. Note: If you currently use a PVR and service like TiVo, Ken Fermoyale would love to hear about your experiences with these technologies for possible use in a future article. E-mail him at kfermoyale@earthlink.net.)



Ken Fermoyale, columnist (Ken's Korner) & publisher Fermoyale Publications, (818) 346-9384, 22250 Capulin Court, Woodland Hills, CA 91364-3005 E-mail: kfermoyale@earthlink.net, <http://www.zyworld.com/wordsmithken> Consulting, newsletters, Website design "In the beginning was the Word..." And don't you forget it! This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an International organization to which this user group belongs.

Random Vectors

The Pursuit of Elegance

By Virtual_Jack

The pursuit of excellence. A virtue admired by all, but practiced by few. But if everyone admires it, why doesn't everyone dedicate his or her time and effort to it? There are reasons and excuses: no time, pressure to get the job done, necessity of just making money any which way, and so on, and on. The pursuit of excellence is actually a luxury requiring both the right circumstances and the opportunity.

And so is revealed one of the great advantages of being a computer programmer. Writing computer code requires excellence, else it just doesn't work. The managers and administrators understand this, so computer programmers are given both the time and opportunity to constantly improve their mastery of their craft. Managers and administrators who do not recognize this are soon found responsible for project disasters and quickly relocated by their managers.

Succeeding as a computer programmer requires constant adapting to machine capability and new operating systems. Every piece of software written is to do something new and different. Often it is to do something that has never been done before. True, there is a great deal of code written to fix bugs and modify existing programs, but even that requires all the skill and knowledge required to write original stuff.

Writing computer code requires the fine touch that any master craftsman develops over years of practice. And it has the additional challenge that the craft itself is constantly changing. It also requires the mental skills to interpret and translate program requirements written in human terms and intentions. The programmer has to convert the words and diagrams to the functional capabilities of the computer machine.

The computer programmer is the link between the user and the machine. He or she must relate and bond to both. It is a most marvelous role to be in. And it is a most marvelous line of work to be in.

The hazards of the job actually come more from the machine side than they do from the user. There is a definite temp-

tation to favor the machine more than the user/manager. The user/manager can complain and make the human side of your life miserable. The machine, never. The machine rewards you when your code works by performing magnificence. When your code is not working, the machine just doesn't do anything or doesn't do it right, but it's never anything personal.

So there is a definite temptation to indulge the elegance side of programming over the mundane, practical consideration of program maintenance, clarity and readability.

Considering an example that first appeared in a Byte Magazine article many years ago can illustrate this. The system requirements are that a program variable is an integer, which always has a value of either 1 or 2. The program requirement is to flip that value. If it is a 1, make it a 2. If it is a 2, make it a 1.

Now there are many ways to code this operation. Most are straightforward and practical. But there is also an elegant way that is faster, shorter, and much more pleasing to the ego than the others.

(Suggestion to the Reader. Take a moment to work out this "elegant" solution before reading on.)

The straightforward solution is some variation of

```
if (I=1) then I=2; if (I=2) then
    I=1;
```

What this is saying is that the variable is in the memory location whose address is represented by I. Go to that location and test the contents of that location. If it is the integer 1, then replace that content with the integer 2. Repeat the process in the next statement testing for the other value. Of course, if the above were two sequential lines of code, the value would never be 2 and the obvious bug would show up eventually.

So we then would write something like

```
if (I=1) then I=2 else I=1
```

That would work. Or we could go back to our version with the bug and correct it by writing

```
if (I=1) then I=2; Go to 100;
if (I=2) then I=1; 100 continue
```

But, of course, here we use four lines of code to do what we could do in one line. And the four lines look pretty simplistic and dumb. We certainly wouldn't want to do that.

OK, now what about our elegant solution, which I am sure you have all worked out. We simply write

```
I=3-I
```

Beautiful. We don't even bother testing. We take the integer value of 3, subtract whatever the contents at I are, and put the result right back into I. Neat. Cool. Programmers love to do that sort of stuff.

Unfortunately, while elegance may be a halo, the world actually runs on practicality. Our elegant solution is the stuff that bugs are made from. While it would work perfectly in Version 1.0, down the line there will be problems. There will be new features, new hardware, and new versions. The original programmers will be long gone. Something else will change. Perhaps the assumption that the value of the variable will always be a 1 or a 2 will change. Perhaps a maintenance programmer will be looking for a conditional test in the thousands of line of code, perhaps, perhaps, perhaps...

So as reluctant as we programmers may be to admit it, we have to acknowledge that our klutzy four liner is probably the better choice. The execution time and the few extra bytes of machine instruction are negligible in today's machines. The code structure allows safer modification. It is obvious what the code is doing.

So our satisfaction must come from knowing that we could have done it the elegant way. In a transient moment of noblesse oblige we make it easy for the maintenance programmer in the years to come. When we finally see all that code working and doing what we wanted it to do, everything feels great and worth it all. And our bond to the machine grows ever stronger.

Virtual_Jack is an old, retired computer programmer who never wants to lose that bond.

RandomAccess

January 2001

By Bruce Preston, Moderator

Q. I recently upgraded my system to Windows Me, 20GB hard drive, 128MB of RAM, keeping the original 200MHz Pentium. I run MS Office, Norton Utilities 2001, Internet Explorer. I notice RAM dropping to around 0 when applications are opened and running. System Resources hover around 68%. Any ideas as to how to improve performance?

A. You didn't indicate as to whether all of the Norton Utilities are running as a matter of course. Since you are watching RAM and System Resources, we suspect that you have all of them running. These applications do not run "for free," they consume resources just as would any other application. We suggest that you only run the ones that you really need at the moment. The amount of RAM you have should be enough to support the list of applications you are running. Use Task Manager (Ctrl-Alt-Delete) to determine what else is running—you don't need to have Real Player running unless you are listening to music, for example.

Q. Dell provided Outlook Express until January 31, 2001, after which they are providing MSN. I loaded MSN, it was supposed to have imported my old address book, but it didn't. Now the system no longer connects automatically - I have to establish the connection by hand. Any suggestions as to how to get it going again.

A. MSN's support line should be able to walk you through their configuration; you are more likely to get help from rather than from Dell.

Q. Is there anything "wrong" with the AT&T dial-up internet service being offered at \$4.95/month?

A. If they are your long distance carrier, and you use less than the 150 hour per month cap, it is probably fine. Just be sure to read the fine print as to what happens if you exceed the usage limits.

Q. What about free internet services? Are there any?

A. Blue Light from K-mart, and Costco's services were mentioned. You do have to use a specific browser/e-mail client to use these, and will have advertising in your face at all times. If you can live with that, go for it.

Q. Half of the files I receive via email are unreadable. Outlook Express reports that they are MIME-encoded and won't display them. What should I do?

A. MIME encoding of messages is a basic Internet standard; Outlook Express should be able to decode them. We suspect that somehow your installation got corrupted, or you accidentally disabled the decoding capability. For example, when the Melissa virus was rampant, many people disabled options in Outlook Express. The only one that really needed to be disabled was Windows Script Hosting. Try re-installing Outlook Express and watch to see if it offers a "custom" installation. (Select the Windows Setup tab in Add/Remove Programs and select repair installation) Examine the options offered. There are decoders built into various other products, but to use these would require user intervention—it should happen automatically.

Q. I purchased Windows Me, my machine is currently running Windows 98 SE. I have been told by some to install it, by others to not bother. What is the recommendation?

A. If you purchase a new machine and it comes with Windows Me, that's wonderful. It is a bit gray, however, as to whether you need to do an upgrade from Windows 98 SE to Windows Me. The "Me" release has more multimedia capabilities if you are interested in multimedia. The configuration rollback feature is nice if you are prone to adding applications and games frequently and are thus exposed to throwing your installation off balance. It comes

with the latest version of Internet Explorer—but you can download that, or get a CD at a nominal charge. Updated drivers and security patches for Windows 9x versions of the operating system are available for downloading. Windows Me is a bit easier to set up for local area networking or internet connection sharing, but the older versions weren't impossible. You will lose some backward compatibility to very old DOS applications, if you have any of them left. If we haven't given you a "I've got to do that" reason in this list, then you probably don't need to upgrade to Me.

Q. Has anyone gone from Windows 98 to Windows 2000?

A. Yes, several have. It is highly recommended that you backup your data, and then do a "clean install" rather than have it inherit your old configuration. That way you don't come out of the upgrade with all of the "wrong" settings in your registry that were there in the old operating system.

BRUCE PRESTON is president of West Mountain Systems, a consultancy in Ridgefield, CT, specializing in database applications. A DACS director and moderator of the Random Access segment at the monthly general meetings, Bruce also leads the Access SIG. Members may send tech queries to Bruce at askdacs@aol.com.

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