BITS AND BYTES

The Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

February 2008

GENERAL CLUB MEETING 7:00 P.M.
Meets 4th Wednesday of the month at the
Midland Community Center
2001 George St., Midland, MI
http://mcc.apcug.org/

This month's date: February 27th

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: Howard Lewis
will be presenting a program on
"Pre-Environments" - preventing loss of
stored information on your computer.

PROGRAM COORDINATORS
Contact :
Larry Piper   larryP56@chartermi.net
Co-Chairman-Joe Lykowski joseph@lylowski.com

What you missed!

In **January**,Bill Tower discussed hard disk imaging, why
you should do it, and the differences from a simple
backup. The primary advantage is the speed of recovery
of your drive if your operating system or hard drive fails.
A typical image restoration can take 15 to 30 minutes
versus hours or days of reinstalling your software.

Upcoming Activities

If you have ever had your system go south and you
weren't quite ready for that, you might be able to recover
it by going into something called a "pre-environment."
Howard Lewis will be showing how to do this at the
February meeting by using a freeware program called

The President's Corner

I was recently reading an article by John
Dvorak where he talked about some con-
sumer privacy advocates who have peti-
tioned the FTC to create a new list called
the "do not track me" list. This list is
similar to the "do not call" list, but deals
with tracking our online surfing habits
versus trying to sell us things via the
phone. With more and more people sign-
ing up for the Do Not Call List, many companies are turn-
ing to web-based sites to generate sales through our web
browsing. I know that some people have turned off cookies
completely in their web browser, but I sort of think this is
sort of like shooting yourself in the foot as you lose some
of the benefits that cookies provide. I typically prefer to
leave my cookies turned on, but purge them whenever I
leave my web browser. Needless to say, the big Web-site
companies are the ones who are squawking the loudest so
we will have to wait and see what comes of this proposal.
At this time, I'm sort of intrigued by this list, but will hold
off judgment until I see what (if anything) materializes.
What do you think about such a list?
        — Howard Lewis
*(The above comments are the opinion of the author and do
not necessarily reflect the views of the Midland Computer
Club.)*

BartPE. By using BartPE, you can build a Windows XP
environment on a bootable CD, which will allow you to
recover your data and possibly repair your system. In the
worst case scenario, you will be able to restore the image
you created using the techniques discussed in January.

March will have Joe Lykowski giving a presentation on
various system utilities which may be necessary to figure
out what is wrong with your PC. Many of these utilities
can be included on the "pre-environment" CD discussed at
the February meeting and run without starting up the oper-
ating system on your hard drive which may be corrupted.

2008 MCC OFFICERS

POSITION		EMAIL:
President	Howard Lewis	lewis3ha@chartermi.net
Vice Pres.	Bill Tower	stressed@tir.com
Treasurer	Bob Miller	barloshelties@sbcglobal.net
Membership	Gary Ensing	gensing@juno.com
Editor	Jan Ensing	btiger6@juno.com

http://mcc.apcug.org/

Special Interest Groups:

CLUB PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Chairman	Larry Piper	larryP56@chartermi.net
Co-Chairman	Joe Lykowski	

BOARD MEMBER

Mary Branson	molly688@chartermi.net
Robert Hughes	MIDItunez@yahoo.com

INTERNET SIG

Terry Brown	t_bbrown@yahoo.com

PUBLICITY

Kathy Bohl	kbohl30265@aol.com

Board Meeting
The next board meeting will be 7 p.m., March 11, 2008, at Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church, 5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland.

Look Ma No Hands By Bruce Jacobs, Phoenix PCUG newsletter editor

www.phoenixpcug.org

editor(at)pcug.org

(Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups. This article was not typed. I dictated it using the speech recognition feature in Windows Vista Ultimate.)

I have been using this feature on and off for certain applications for a while and it has its good points and its bad points.

The intent of the software is to allow the user to speak words into the computer and for the computer to recognize those words, understand that some of them are commands, and also understand that some of them are input to programs. In other words, when I say the words "please save me", the computer must decide whether to add the words to the document I am editing as if I had typed them, or add the word "please" to the document, and then bring up the save dialog box to save the document with the name "me".

The program that is attempting to do this has two major hurdles to conquer. It has to recognize the spoken words correctly. This is helped by the training exercises. But it has its limitations.

Membership Enrollment form

NAME _____   PHONE_____

ADDRESS _____ *CITY* _____

ZIP _____ *EMAIL ADDRESS* _____

Membership dues FAMILY ($20)   STUDENT ($15)   NEW Member ____   renewal ____

Please fill out the above form and mail it along with payment of check or money order to :

MIDLAND COMPUTER CLUB   **Attn: membership chairman**
P.O. box 132
Midland, MI 48640-0132

you may also pay for membership at a regular club meeting

Useful, useless and strange (in no particular order) Web Sites:

This month features a series of "time-waster" videos that came from a year-end article from Steve Bass at PC World magazine:

http://www.radarsync.com/vista/	If you have a machine running Microsoft Windows Vista, you might want to go to this site to check for updated drivers. Radarsync is updated daily with links to the newest drivers for Windows Vista.
http://www.keyxl.com/	This site contains a list of some of the most common soft-
http://tinyurl.com/266mx9 http://tinyurl.com/3ccrba	If you've never seen a train snowplowing the tracks you can watch the snow fly with these YouTube videos. With the second video, the plow even gets stuck!

Tips, Tricks & Techniques

Find out how much RAM your PC has

As a general rule, your computer will perform faster and better with the addition of more Random access memory (RAM). This memory is usually measured either in megabytes (MB) or gigabytes (GB. Here's how to find out how much RAM your PC has:

On the Start menu, right-click on My Computer (Computer in Windows Vista) and select Properties.
In Windows XP, under the General tab, the RAM can be found in the Computer section of the
screen. In Windows Vista, the RAM can be found in the System section.

Using Shortcuts in Internet Explorer

Keyboard shortcuts are handy productivity producers for most people. Following is a list of some of the more common shortcuts used in Internet Explorer:

Key Combina-	Definition	Key Combina-	Definition
<Alt>-D	Go to the Address bar	<Ctrl>-<Enter>	Add www. Before, and .com
<F5> or <Ctrl-	Refresh the current Web	<Ctrl>-<F5>	Refresh current Web page re-
<Esc>	Stop downloading a Web	<Ctrl>-E or <F3>	Show or hide the Search bar
<Ctrl>-F	Open the Find dialog box	<Ctrl-H>	Show or hide the History bar
<Ctrl>-I	Show or hide the Favorites	<F11>	Toggle full-screen mode on or
<Ctrl>-N	Open a new browser win-	<Alt>-<Home>	Go to your Home Page
<Ctrl>-O or	Open the Open dialog box to		

Add Page Numbers To Your Documents (Microsoft Word 2002/2003)

If you are writing a Microsoft Word document that is longer than a couple of pages, it is best to number each page. You use the Headers and Footers toolbar to add page numbers to each page. Adding page numbers is a relatively simple task:

1. From the *View* menu, click *Header and Footer* which will cause the **Header and Footer** toolbar to appear.
2. Click the *Insert Page Number* button (   )
3. Click the *Close* button.

Basic page numbers will now be displayed in your document.

Using Keywords For Locating Files (Windows XP)

Windows XP allows the use of keywords with certain types of files. This is convenient for locating a specific picture, Word document, etc. via the Search function within Windows. You can assign keywords to TIFF, JPEG, MP3, WMA, WMV, and Microsoft Office files. To assign keywords to a file:

Locate the file on your computer, *right-click* the file and choose *Properties*.
Next select the *Summary* tab.
Now type any meaningful keywords into the *Keywords* field.
Finally click *OK*.

To locate a file with a keyword(s):

Click on *Start* and then *Search*.
Next select *All files and folders*.
And then type in one or more of the keywords under the field entitled *A word or phrase in the file* and click *Search*.

A list of all files containing that (those) keyword(s) will be displayed.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

It must also understand "in context" which of those words are commands and which of those words are to be part of my document. As time goes on, you learn to pause before speaking a command. So in the above example of "please save me", I would say the words altogether relatively quickly in order to enter them in my document. If I wanted to add the word "please" to my document then save the document, I would speak the word "please", then pause for a few seconds, then save the word " save." This would bring up the save dialog box and I could continue as if it was a command.

As far as the good points are concerned: If I'm working off printed list or when I know for sure what I want to say clearly, it can be a much faster way of inputting text than for me to type it. Some of that is due to my typing speed being somwhat slow. I am a faster typist then most hunt and peck folks, but I would never be able to keep a job as a secretary. It is also much better at spelling than I am.

If I don't know what I'm going to say in advance the program does not facilitate me speaking what I want to say and then recomposing it later. Some of this may be my fault. I find that I can type up an article by hand and maintain enough control so that in the end I have something coherent. When I just speak out what I want it does not always

make sense. I spend way too much time revising it.

One of the disadvantages is that you need to spend a little bit of time training the voice recognition system. The system works best when you are running a very simple application such as WordPad or Notepad. It can even be used to some extent in Microsoft Word. However when using an application such as PowerPoint, the program spends so much time trying to figure out what possible commands you might be wanting to perform and not enough time actually realizing that you are trying to enter words.

Another problem is homonyms. These are words that sound the same but they have different meanings in English except for the possibility of some contextual clues. There is no way for the speech recognition software to know whether I want "2", "two", "to", or "too." During setup the program asks you if they can look at the contents of documents on your hard drive to help you determine what word you used most often and in what context. This does help it guess which homonym you want.

The final problem I wish to discuss is the editing features. Whenever I create a text document I will want to fix mistakes. There are some commands in the software that will help fix mistakes, but they are limited and clumsy. Some of them will even (in theory) help prevent mistakes by the voice recognition software in future. All that being said, I find that editing documents using the voice recognition software is very frustrating. I always resort to using the arrow keys and the mouse to navigate through the document.

Vista speech recognition is a helpful tool when transcribing printed text or when words have been spoken into a tape recorder. However for initial composition of documents or editing I do not find it useful. I do not believe that I could ever learn to use it as a complete 100% substitute for the keyboard and mouse. I would not consider it a replacement if I was disabled.

+++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

The New, The Best, and The Worst
January 2008
Collected by Pim Borman, Webmaster, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.
http://swipcug.apcug.org
swipcug(at)gmail.com

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

Needles, Haystacks and Processing
Finding the needle in a haystack is the proverbial example of an impossible task. Wrongly so. Spread the contents of the haystack out over a large area and get 1000 helpers to each check a small amount of hay. The needle will be found in less than no time. It is a basic example of parallel processing.

According to WIKIPEDIA (http://en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/SETI), as far back as 1960 astronomers were speculating that any intelligent life forms present in the Universe might be detected by electromagnetic signals reaching us from space. Some astronomers started a Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) on a limited scale that over the years grew to include multiple radio-telescopes searching more and more radio bands for significant signals.

It soon became clear that looking for intelligent signals amongst the enormous volume of recorded data was even worse than finding a needle in a haystack. Parallel processing to the rescue! With an untold number of personal computers worldwide, capable of Internet access and sitting idle most of the time, an enormous amount of potential processing power was going untapped. The University of California at Berkeley (UCB), with sponsorship of The Planetary Society, started project **SETI@home** in 1999 to put many of those com-

6

puters to work. They found many volunteers willing to download a small program on their computers, running in the background, to analyze small chunks of radio-telescope data for signs of intelligence and return the results. As of now there are some 3 million contributors, but nary a sign of intelligent life yet. In any case, the enormous amount of computer processing by this project far surpasses what the best supercomputer might be able to do, at least until quantum computers will have been perfected.

The success of SETI@home inspired many other volunteer computing projects supporting worthwhile scientific causes. According to *The Economist* (12-8-2007) these include design of drugs against AIDS, search for new prime numbers, climate modeling and many others. It requires some snappy programming skills to send small chunks of a large problem to thousands of computers, provide them with the means to perform a set task, return the results, and combine the results for final evaluation before sending out a new crop of queries. That task has been made easier with a dedicated program, **BOINC** (Berkeley Open Infrastructure for Network Computing), made available by UCB. Over 40 BOINC projects are in operation, including many life sciences, Help Conquer Cancer, and Discover Dengue Drugs.

Impressive as the computer power may be that is being exerted on these projects, there is still room for significant improvement. The short history of the PC not only includes a dramatic improvement in CPU processing speed, but also in auxiliary components that speed up graphics performance. In response to the extreme image rendition requirements of computer games, fast graphics cards have become available that use special processing chips and hardware to relieve the load on the Central Processing Unit. Rendering the millions of pixels that make up a screen image is perfectly suited to parallel processing, a task for which the graphics chips are optimized. Further adapting these chips to participate in general purpose programming may be a way to increase the parallel processing power of a desktop computer anywhere from 10- to 50-fold. NVIDIA and AMD, the largest graphics-card manufacturers, are working on it. Nvidia has already set up a product line for non-graphics applications and is developing a specialized programming language to go with it.

Next time you hear complaints that something is like finding a needle in a haystack, tell them it's easy: many hands make light work.

Foxit Reader for PDF Files

Acrobat Reader is now at version 8 and has been getting more powerful but also more cumbersome with each successive iteration. Steve Bass (*PC World, January 2008)* found a free program, Foxit Reader and Printer, that is compact, fast, and includes some nice extra features. I especially like that it allows searching all the PDF files in a directory for keywords. I tried that on a directory where I keep all the newsletter files since 2000 and got almost instantaneous results. Impressive! The print function works just fine. Foxit also has more sophisticated tools for annotating and writing PDF files and forms, but adds evaluation marks to the output unless you buy the Foxit Pro version ($39). You may not need that, since there are several other (free) ways to create PDF files, including openoffice.org Writer and MS Office 2007 (with a special download from Microsoft). My Epson scanner can scan images and also output them as PDF files. But at $39 Foxit is a bargain compared to Acrobat 8 Standard at $299.

Download Foxit Reader and Printer free from http://www.foxitsoftware.com/. Linux versions are also available.

This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups. All other uses require the permission of the author (see e-mail address above).

Connected or Discombobulated?
Ramblings by Judy Lococo, Director, Kentucky-Indiana PCUG
www.kipcug.org
judy(at)thorobred.win.net

Everywhere you look today, someone is always talking about "connectivity" and how our new, improved world demands it. The more I see of this phenomenon, the less I think we are connected. The Internet and identity thieves have made us a nation of anonymity, and paranoid anonymity at that. We are electronically connected, but are losing the ability to look into people's eyes, read their body English, listen to the voice inflections, and interact one-on-one with another human being.

It's even impossible to keep up with all the acronyms! WiFi, DSL (I remember ADSL), URL, etc., have become entrenched in our lives so much that we no longer flinch when we hear one of them. And they keep stacking up at warp speed, so that even the nerdiest of us has to visit a website occasionally to find out what one means.

The morning newspaper used to be a shared experience at the breakfast table. Now it's read online with only the parts that a reader prefers coming across the screen, and you don't discuss your opinions with the rest of the family, nor listen to theirs. You no longer have to scan through the business section to find the crossword puzzle. You don't have to pore through the sports pages to find automobile tires. IOW (another TLA), you don't even have to talk to a soul without being considered rude.

Going to an office is not nearly as important as it once was. Now employees can work an 80- hour-week at home, without health insurance or retirement benefits. But you can work in jeans or sweats, so there's considerable savings on wardrobe.

The chat rooms are so rampant with predators that parents are restricting their children's surfing, and rightly so. But these chat rooms are yet another example of not connecting with a real, live, breathing person, only an image, which may or may not be accurate.

Email has replaced letter writing to the extent that I have to wonder if script handwriting will also be obsolete soon. Remember calligraphy? Have you seen any within the last three years? Will the dictionary of the future have "u r 2" as a comeback phrase? Will schoolchildren even be taught English grammar or typing?

And, of course, how could I not mention the answering machines, voice mail, and all other means of not speaking to people who are trying to contact you. If you reach a person on the first attempt, are you supposed to believe that person is not busy? Is this why nobody bothers to answer their phone any more, only return phone calls? If all one does is return phone calls, what happens when the one you're calling also only returns phone calls?

As if all the time spent behind a monitor isn't enough, our automobile windows are now designed to keep others from seeing you. So if there is actually a person around who is considerably higher up on the social ladder than you are, you have to roll your window down for them to see you! How gauche is that?

I have to admit, I'm just as guilty as the rest of the world of spending too much time on email and INet (look it up already...) It is a lot of fun to laugh out loud at a joke that somebody forwards, or follow a link to a You Tube video. I am not addicted, but afraid of what will I will have to face if I don't check it daily. I guess you could say I'm not connected, I'm tethered. <BWG>

How To Find Podcasts   by Mike Lyons, President Orange County IBM PC Users' Group, CA
www.orcopug.org   president(at)orcopug.org

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

Download the free 7.3 iTunes program from www.apple.com/itunes/ and install. Now, all you need is an mp3 player, and you're all set to download podcasts and listen to them on the go.

When you first open iTunes, click on the "Podcast Directory" at the bottom next to "Report a Concern." That actually takes you to the Apple Store. In the upper left corner is a magnifying glass and a space to search for a word or phrase. Type in "computer." The Apple logo in the top center area changes to a candy cane-striped bar as it searches. The bar will turn solid and display the results: Name, Time, Artist, Album, Price, Popularity and Genre.

Next to the name is a grayed-out circle with an arrow in it. This leads to more information about the podcast. It includes a description, user reviews, a list of the last 20 podcasts and a list of 5 "Listerners also subscribed to."

Headings are sortable by clicking on them, so if you click on Price, all the free ones appear at the top.

Some of the stuff is pretty explicit, that's why they call it the "wild, wild web." Podcasts are labeled "clean," "explicit," or blank which means the rating hasn't been determined.

I look to see how often and consistently the podcast occurs (some really good ones haven't been updated since 2006), check customer comments, and the "Also subscribed to" list.

If you want to subscribe, simply click on the "subscribe" button. To go back where you were, under the Apple logo on the left is a small button with a left pointing twirly. Click on this to get back.

After downloading podcasts, connect your mp3 player to a USB cable and right click on the file. Select "Send to" and click on the drive letter of the mp3 player to transfer podcasts to it from your computer.

Besides the iTunes Podcast Directory, you can find podcasts of Computer America shows at www.businesstalkradio.net/weekday_ host/Archives/cc.shtml and National Public Radio at www.npr.org/rss/podcast/podcast_directory.php.

There are even locally-produced user group podcasts. The Los Angeles Computer Society has podcasts of their main meetings at www.lacspc.org/podcast/Archive.html

You don't have to have an mp3 player to listen to podcasts, though. If you left-click on the mp3 title, it plays right in your browser. Or, if you right-click on the title, select "Save Link As," and you can save it to a directory on your computer.

Besides playing podcasts in mp3 players and browsers, mp3 files on your hard drive can be burned to a CD. Then, you can play them in your car. Just burn them as a music CD instead of a data CD.

This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups. All other uses require the permission of the author (see e-mail address above).