

the HUG Update

The Newsletter of the Harrisburg pc User Group

Web Site - <http://hug.paonline.com>

19th Year, Charter Member 

Spring Cleaning For Your Computer At April GenMem Meeting

Winter's end brings with it the hope of new beginnings & growth. But last season's old growth has to be pruned back to keep things in shape. So it is with computer hard disk drives. These are filled with all kinds of data from earlier days: shareware and demoware we have tried, programs we still use, programs we no longer use, and all those documents that go with those programs. Within a few months it is hard to recall which documents go with what programs.

Join us on Tuesday, April 9 for "Spring Cleaning For Your Computer: Taming the Ever-Growing Data Anaconda," with Dennis Mumma, as we wrangle this Gordian knot that has grown from megabytes to tens and hundreds of gigabytes.

Bear in mind that terabyte drives cannot be much more than a year away from the consumer market.

Dennis Mumma is our Windows Support Member, helping out at nearly every HUG Computer Workshop. He also works throughout the week at SeniorNet, training Seniors and repairing systems. Dennis has been a webmaster and enjoys building his own homebrew PCs. Earlier Dennis thrilled Members when he introduced us to both Windows ME and XP.

All General Membership meetings are held on the **second Tuesday of each month** at 6:45 P.M. in the basement of Skyline View Brethren in Christ Church, 7733 Hillcrest Avenue. *See inside for directions.*

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April 2002



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

President, Editor Lou Samsel
(lou.samsel@pa.net) Harrisburg 564-8273
First Vice-president Mark Berkheimer
(mark@panetwork.com) Hummelstown 583-2148
Second Vice-president Hazen Meek
(hazen.meek@verizon.net) Harrisburg 652-5129
Treasurer John W. Reinhardt
(jreinhardt@state.pa.us) Palmyra 838-5085
Secretary, Editor, EDS Administrator Joseph Ronemus
(joseph1618@aol.com) Camp Hill 737-0364

SUPPORT MEMBERS:

Trustee Wes Samsel
(w.w.samsel@worldnet.att.net) Harrisburg 541-0486
Trustee, Public Relations Director Axel Walsen
(awalsen@paonline.com) Harrisburg 652-7587
WebMaster Dennis Zellers
(dzellers@paonline.com) Annville 867-4278
Founder/Editor Emeritus Jack Stahl
(johnstahla@aol.com) Harrisburg 652-9097

MAILING ADDRESS:

Harrisburg PC User Group (HUG)
5 Sycamore Lane
Palmyra, Pa. 17078

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\$15 (electronic newsletter only)
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Classified Ads in *The HUG Update* are
FREE to members.

Computer Related Ads:
Page \$30, half page \$15.
Non-Computer Ads:
Page \$50, half page \$25.

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Meeting Schedule

General Membership Meeting:

HUG for Linux, OS/2, DOS, and Windows (all) meets the *second Tuesday* of each month, at the Skyline View Church, 7733 Hillcrest Avenue, Harrisburg. See inside for directions. Next scheduled meeting: **April 9, 2002**. See inside for directions.

Visitors Welcome!

HUG Computer Workshop:

The HUG Computer Workshop (formerly known as the DOS/Windows SIG) where beginners' questions are answered and problem computers are analyzed for free, is held on the *third Sunday* from 2:00 to 4:00 P.M. (**April 21**), at the Skyline View Church, 7733 Hillcrest Avenue, Harrisburg. See inside for directions.

Visitors Welcome!

HUG Executive Board Meeting:

The Executive Board of HUG meets on the *third Thursday* of each month from 6:00 P.M. to 7:30 P.M. in Brian's Pizza, 6301 Grayson Rd., in the Swatara Square Shopping Center, near the east shore WalMart. **April 18, 2002**.

Visitors Welcome!

Other Information:

Electronic Distribution System for the HUG Update: Members who have chosen to receive their newsletter subscription electronically will be notified by Email of availability for downloading. YOU must provide a correct email address and inform us of any changes thereafter. HUG assumes no responsibility of delivery.

UPDATE ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS:

Please use ASCII text (.TXT) for submitted articles. Related images may be submitted in TIFF, PCX, GIF, or BMP formats of two to sixteen colors, but if it looks good to you in black and white, then it will most likely look great printed here.

A Reminder.

This could be your last Newsletter. If the date on your mailing label is circled in red, this is your last Newsletter. If the date is highlighted in yellow, dues are due now.

Directions to GenMem and Computer Workshop Meetings Location

- ! East on US 22 through Colonial Park
- ! Right on Fairville Avenue (look for sign, "Skyline View.")
- ! Left on Hillcrest. Church is on right. Enter through side doors. Note: Church is visible from US 22.

Show/Auction Schedule

MarketPro Computer Show & Sale

www.marketproshows.com

(see website for directions to a specific show)

Upcoming Harrisburg Shows:

State Farm Show Complex

April 20&21

Carlisle Fairgrounds

May 11-12

Other Shows in greater area:

King of Prussia April 6&7

York April 13

Lancaster April 14

Timonium April 13&14

Allentown April 20&21

Fort Washington April 27&28

Gettysburg May 18

Newark, DE May 19

Notes:

- 1) All shows are from 9:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M..
- 2) Always check the MarketPro web site schedule for changes, just before driving to a show.
- 3) <http://www.marketproshows.com/visitor/coupon.asp>

Computer Auction Schedule

Keystone State Auctioneers, Inc.

"Computer Parts and Electronics"

www.keystoneauctioneers.com

717.558.9188

5970 Derry Street, Harrisburg

(Behind the Bakery)

These auctions are usually held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and on Saturday mornings. Weekday auctions begin at 6:20 P.M. with previews starting at 5:20 P.M.. Weekend auctions begin at 10:00 A.M. with previews starting at 9:00 A.M.

April Auctions -

4/9 Chambers Hill Fire Co.

4/23 Chambers Hill Fire Co.

4/25 Emmaus Fire Co., 50 South Sixth St

Their blurb:

"Excess inventory sale. New and used IBM and Compaq computers, Pentiums, 486's, and more. 100's of accessories, cases, speakers, and monitors. Lots of 'as-is' products to be sold to the highest bidder (floppies, power supplies, logics, etc.). Inventory subject to change."

PC Parts, Inc.

"Great Parts at Great Prices"

www.pcsurplusonline.com

1.800.666.9373

1800 Paxton Street, Harrisburg

(Near Brenner Dodge)

PC Parts auctions are held sporadically, usually on a Saturday morning at 10:00 A.M. with previews beginning at 9:00 A.M.. If you're interested, check the classified column for 'Computers' in The Patriot-News. Also, look for the sign in front of their store and their web site. Note - Check PC Parts web site for auction dates.

The Computer Guy Show

A weekly LIVE computer and Internet information, help & talk show that you can listen to with your computer, featuring Guy Partin, a computer professional for the last 15 years. Friday evenings 8 to 9 P.M. FREE PC & Internet Help line during the show: 730-6737 or join the on-line chat room. Look for *PAwebcast 2* stream.

www.pawebcast.com

HUG's 2nd Tuesday GenMem Meeting Notes

For March 12, 2002

~ by Joseph Ronemus

This evening our presenter did not show up. So, after breaking up into small discussion groups for a half hour, President Lou Samsel called the meeting to order at 7:15 P.M. We had about 21 attendees turn out for this evening, as all but one Board Member and one of two Trustees.

Small discussions included how best to upgrade a Dell 4300 to Windows XP without losing data, database administration/data entry on the PalmOS with MobleDB Lite coming in from Microsoft Access and Core/Borland Paradox, PalmOS freeware like Mapopolis, and a few more.

Yours truly and HUG Windows Support Member Dennis Mumma were preparing to highjack the meeting into a PalmOS presentation. I was pondering how we could put Dennis' Palm m505 and my Handspring Visor under the overhead projector system for the group to view and this made me wonder if anyone that makes Palm devices or third party peripherals for them made a cradle that output the tiny 65,000 color screens to a standard VGA port. Out of nowhere Dennis produced his svelte Compaq notebook saying, "Now, all we need is Palm emulator, like POSE for Windows. We could download it and plug this PC into the VGA projector . . ."

But the President had other ideas. Lou pulled the blackboard to the front of the room to diagram the answer to a question from a new member, Carlos Chatman, about hard disk drive partitions. Lou diagramed the drive controller, the hard drive and the cables and explained the differences between SCSI and IDE specifications as they are important to the user.

Then he talked about the master boot record and the partition table. He explained reasons for using multiple partitions, like those arguments for using multiple directory folders, for running multiple operating systems, for security and so forth.

Then we segued to a discussion of sectors on the

physical media and the clusters that Microsoft operating systems like to write to and just how the two are related.

We touched on how different partitioning programs work like MS-FDISK, the Linux open FDISK program for DOS, Partition Magic and Partition Commander. While the Open DOS FDISK program lets you lay down partition tables for -- of course -- Linux (EXT32), it also writes tables for DOS (FAT-16), Windows (FAT-32/VFAT), OS/2 (HPFS), Windows NT/2000/XP (NTFS), and many more. A better bet for the newbie to change partition sizes, add partitions, change active partitions is are the other two third party utilities Partition Commander and Partition Magic. These run in an easy to use graphical user interface on Windows, DOS and Linux and correct often overlooked drive errors without losing data. Using the third party tools means that one usually does not have to reformat and reinstall the base OS and all the applications and data, but all recommend doing so only after a complete back up of at least vital data, just in case.

Next, Lou fired up a computer system that HUG donated to the church where we meet. The old IBM 286, circa 1989, was sporting not just the 1.5 inch 720 Kilobyte floppy disk drive, but also a massive (for its time) 420 Megabyte fixed disk drive! Obviously an aftermarket retrofit performed by a HUG member. Running IBM's PC DOS 3.3, but only accessing a smaller portion of the total hard drive space available, Lou viewed the partition table with FDISK that came with this version of DOS. After he removed the old partition table and wrote a new one, we were still in the same boat, using only a portion of the drive space available. I pointed out that this was a limitation of this version of DOS.

Since I am a Microsoft Certified Professional, someone thought I might be "pushing" a certain brand. But no, I was pointing out that when this version of DOS was released hard drives of the size of the one installed in this system were only a pipe dream. Programing a version of FDISK at that time which addressed beyond a certain sized drive would be to support what could become little more than vaporware at a later date. I recommend replacing the 720 KB floppy with an IBM 1.44 MB if the BIOS supported it and updating this system up to PC-DOS 7.0, Open DOS 7.0, or MS-DOS 6.23, even though some applications that come with these OSs may not be usable. The choice of which one or how high of a version they want to climb up to depends on what they

want to use the system for and what third party applications they need to run. If they just wanted to run an office suite of apps and the system has or can accept a legacy VGA adapter, then I would go with GeoWorks Ensemble and DR-DOS 6.0.

A member wanted to know how to fix a problem with Microsoft Access on Windows XP. It seems Access, which comes with Microsoft Office XP Professional, is hogging all the processor cycles from XP. Various members pointed him to some things to look at. Himself one of HUG's more humble power user's, he had already exploited many of the troubleshooting steps recommended from the floor. Now the wheels are turning for this member in the collective mind of our group to help him come up with a solution. Hummm, if we only had something like an email discussion group to football this issue back and forth. Oh well, maybe some day.

Searching out technical support at sites like Microsoft TechNet, Microsoft Support, and Internet Newsgroups were recommended.

The meeting closed at 8:30 P.M.



*HUG's 3rd Thursday
Executive Board Meeting
March 21, 2002
~ by Joseph Ronemus*

President Lou Samsel could not make this evening's Board meeting due to a prior engagement. So, First Vice President Mark Berkheimer called the meeting to order at 6:26 P.M. Also in attendance this evening were Second Vice President Hazen Meek, Trustee Wes Samsel, Past President George Eckard, Windows Support member Dennis Mumma, and Yours Truly.

The Minutes of last month's Board meeting -- published in the March issue of the club's Newsletter -- were accepted into the record.

Mail announcements for HUG that came to Yours Truly were read. First, APCUG North East Region's annual User Group Officers Conference, 'Intergalactic 15' is coming on Saturday April 20 in New York City. Interested HUG Leaders may contact me for more info. Second, MarketPro computer shows is offering computer recycling days on March 23 & 24 down in Maryland. I will contact MarketPro to see if we can set up a similar recycling program at future Harrisburg shows we agree to attend in exchange for a mention in their email announcement and/or website.

The next MarketPro shows in Harrisburg are on Saturday April 20 with Mark Berkheimer and Sunday April 22 with Lou Samsel. Any Member who wants to find how get into the show free all day and qualify for prizes contact Mark or Lou.

April's General Membership meeting presentation is still slated to be "Spring Cleaning for Your Hard Drive," with Dennis Mumma. May's will feature Lou Samsel in "A Tour of Your Motherboard."

At the request of the Board, Yours Truly will contact Axel Walsen to see if he would like to continue as Trustee since he has moved away from the area. Dennis Mumma indicated willingness to volunteer for this position if Axel resigns.

George Eckard has someone in mind for the Public Relations role.

Dennis Mumma reported that he has finished setting up the new listserv account at Yahoo. Mark Berkheimer recommended starting a second listserv for all HUG members, while retaining the current one for the HUG leaders to communicate. Watch for an official announcement to come from the Board on this new service to members when it is officially opened to all.

HUG's Third Sunday
HUG Computer Workshop
March 11, 2002
~ by Joseph Ronemus

Windows Support Member Dennis Mumma tried to help Member Toni Donchek hook up a scanner bought new several years ago, but never used. Unfortunately the scanner no longer included the proprietary interface card that it requires be installed into the system. While finding the right gender changer might work to hook it up to another SCSI controller or a parallel port, such a solution would only be a step in trying to get it to work, not necessarily fixing it. So Dennis recommended that she just pick up a new USB scanner for about \$49 and avoid sinking even more into a scanner money pit.

First Vice-President Mark Berkheimer was working on setting up a Pentium 100 system, running Microsoft Windows 95, that was donated to the club for duplicating disks. Installing and configuring a SCSI buss controller, a SCSI CD-Reader and a SCSI CD-ReWriter took the majority of his time this day. The club thanks George Eckard for donating all the SCSI hardware. Mark also doubled the memory from 32 MB to 64 MB. Later, we could add another 1.44 MB floppy diskette drive. Then the system can be used to copy the most common distribution media for members, like Linux CDs, shareware, freeware, Windows drivers, and so forth.

Meanwhile, Past President George Eckard was working on an HP Vectra for new Member Carlos Chatman, setting up Microsoft Windows 95 on it. New Member John Clark was monitoring the process. Dennis Mumma logged on to the web to locate a sound card driver for this system. Unfortunately HP's web site listed at least seven different models within this line of products and the system was no longer clearly marked as to just which model it was. Since we could only get 26.4 Kbit connection this day, downloading all the different possibilities became impossible.

Cliff Charles and Eric Paul were popping back and forth from workbench to workbench taking in all the action. New Member Skip Jones also stopped by in the last hour with a Dial Up Networking problem.

Trustee Wes Samsel worked on a Pentium 75 system donated to the church for the children's room and added a CD-ROM and a sound card to it. Now they run newer multimedia programs for the crumb crunchers.

Yours truly busied himself taking these notes so that those of you that could not attend had some idea of what transpired, although it is difficult to convey just how much fun we all had with these endeavors. It seems I can either interview the troubleshooters and the members seeking help to take notes of what is going on or I can throw myself into the mix of solution providing [see last month's article "How I Spent the HUG Sunday Computer Workshop"]. But not both.

As you can tell by this description of our HUG's March Workshop, we repaired a few computers and everyone had a good time. Even though you don't have a computer with a problem you can still stop by and learn some techniques of computer repair. Everyone there usually has a good time even if they just hang out. So perhaps we'll see you at the next computer workshop!



From the DealsGuy

for April, 2002

~ by Bob Click,

Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

***Any Takers?**

I have been writing this column for better than seven years and enjoyed it throughout. Because of declining health conditions, I would like to "pass the pen" to a new writer. It needs new blood anyway, with fresh ideas, not to mention more energy. If anybody is interested in buying the "Deals Column," please let me

know. You would get the domain name as well, although the new person would probably want to develop his or her own Web site, but mine is available if you wish. After all my work building it to the widespread extent it has attained, I do not want to just give it away. I do hope there is somebody interested in keeping it alive and selling it should attract only a serious individual.

It is possible to make money with the column's Web site, but I have never tried that. So far, I have always borne the expense of writing it myself. I have no doubt spent several hundred dollars over the years, but I do not regret the investment considering all the friends I made along the way.

If I have no takers, I will probably still do it for a short time, but I need to spend more quality time with my wife instead of sitting in my computer room. We purchased a beach condo in Daytona Beach (second home) and hope to occasionally try watching the surf roll in when we have the time. Maybe I can start a new user group there since many of the residents have computers. Want to attend a user group meeting "on the beach?" No sharks please!

***Still Good**

The 10% discount coupon for Inksell.com is good through April 30, 2002. Simply visit their site, [<http://www.inksell.com>], place your order and continue to check out where there will be a blank to enter the discount coupon code (D0302). The discount will be automatically calculated. Phone customer service at 1-800-255-0483, or send e-mail to [help@inksell.com] if necessary.

*I have had little time to work on the column this month, so most of it will be things I have noticed in user group newsletters. I hope you find something useful. Living in Florida often brings lots of company and we have been no exception this winter.

***Latest From Gene & Linda Barlow**

Linda Barlow sent me this updated list of special prices on PowerQuest and AccessData products for user group people.

PartitionMagic V7 \$35 (list \$69.95)
Drive Image V5 \$35 (list \$69.95)
DriveCopy V4 \$25 (list \$49.95)
SecureClean \$25 (list 49.95)
CleanDrive \$20 (list \$39.95)

Gene has developed an educational CD called "Discovering Your Hard Drive" which includes four hours of information (Gene's description) about how to organize, upgrade, migrate to XP, backup and secure your hard drive. There are even product demonstrations on the CD. Having seen Gene's hard drive presentation a couple of times, I have to think his "Discovering Your Hard Drive" CD would be very useful. The price is \$20.00 (List \$39.95).

Shipping and handling is only \$5.00 on each order. To order, go to [<http://www.ugr.com/order/>]. Use the code UGDEALS02.

***Just In, A Deal For A Great Database That's Been Around Awhile**

I asked Richard Rabins of Alpha Software about a special and he responded with the following offer. Alpha Five (for Windows) is regularly \$149.00, but for a limited time, he will offer it to user group members for just \$129.00 + \$8.00 shipping. Not only that but he will include this neat little Zip Code finder for no extra cost in that deal (normally \$24.95). Just type in the zip code and it automatically fills in the city and state. To order, call 1-800-451-1018 and mention "code 77." Tell them you belong to a user group. Visit [<http://www.alphasoftware.com>] for a better description of the product.

I use Alpha Four occasionally, but have never upgraded. Alpha is a relational database that works

well. I especially liked it when they had people on Prodigy that helped you with your problems. That ended long ago. I have not tried their tech support lately. In fact, I still have the DOS version. (I can hear everybody already on that one.) They still offer a DOS upgrade.

***Keyboard for the Palm, Anyone? (From Sacramento PC Users Group Newsletter)**

Silkyboard is a portable keyboard that can be used on the Palm. It is said to be better than the Graffiti according to the review I read by Tom Anderson of the Sacramento PC Users Group. It passed his test and is available at [<http://www.silkyboard.com>]. It was \$29.95, regular \$39.95, but I'm not sure if that price is still good. I included it because it is an interesting item.

***Finjan's SurfinGuard to guard your files. (Reviewed in SW Indiana PC UG Newsletter)**

Here is something that guards your files from being changed unless you agree to it. A virus will usually change something, and this software will see it and ask you if it's OK, or not. It guards other changes, such as to your network connection as well. It can be downloaded at [<http://www.finjan.com>] and is FREE for the home user. Unfortunately, it is not compatible with Windows XP and IE 6. Use this if you don't have virus protection, perhaps even if you do have it.

***E-mail For a Mac, Anyone? (From Central Kentucky Computer Society newsletter, Computer File)**

If you are looking for new software for your e-mail needs, try looking at the following URL where you will find many. [<http://www.emailman.com/mac/clients.html>]. They are not all free. Since I have been neglecting Mac people lately, this is for them, but there may also be PC items there as well.

***Watch That Spyware, (from Charlotte Bytes, newsletter of Charlotte County Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.)**

If you're thinking about using a program called Gator (a software that keeps track of user names and passwords for Web site logons and forms), be aware that it has a Trojan horse built in that will (behind your back) download spyware to report on your activities. A good firewall, though, will prevent it from dialing out to report. Surprisingly, Gator is a very popular utility. As has been said many times, read the EULA (End User Licensing Agreement) when installing. I just thought it would be good to warn you.

***More on Antivirus, (From the Chautauqua Cyber Chat newsletter)**

They mentioned a favorite Antivirus of their members, AVG, which can be found at [<http://www.grisoft.com>]. It is free for home users. Take a look. The article included Trend Micro's free "House Call" at [<http://www.housecall.antivirus.com>]. Also referred to was Computer Associate's new suite of protection software at [<http://my-etrust.com>] (I just heard CA was ending this free program, so check for sure). While I'm at it, Panda provides a free virus check at their Web site with the latest signatures. [<http://www.pandasoftware.com>]. I might warn you that for an AV check of your system on line, you must disable your firewall if you have one.

* That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [Bobclick@dealsguy.com]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>] for past columns. Also, there are interesting articles from user group newsletters on my "Articles of Interest" page for viewing or downloading, with the author's permission.

Hard Drives and Mobile Rack Mounts and the Latest in Computers

~ by Hazen Meek

Yes it's me again with a thought or so... A member of our club had some removable hard drive mobile rack mounts in his computer and convinced me that they would be of value to me. Not!!!!!!

[*Editor's note:* These removable hard drive mobile rack mount units consist of two basic components: a plastic or metal removable hard drive caddy and a plastic or metal 5 & 1/4 inch bay rack mount. The rack mount is affixed to the system chassis in an empty bay. The hard drive connects to data and power cables inside the caddy box and is snapped together. Then one attaches the system power and data cables to the drive bay rack mount. When the caddy is slid on to the bay rack mount's rails, a special proprietary connector pipes data and power between the drive and the system. Most such units include locking mechanism of varying quality and with increasing price and quality perhaps power and data access LEDs, switching, high-speed data circuitry, cooling fans, external drive sequence selection, and finally "hot-swapping" compatibility. Basic plastic units run from \$7.00 at local computer shows to full-featured hot-swappers for around \$150.00 each.]

I had two of them and have had nothing but trouble out of them. One of them burned a printed circuit board trace out. So, out of frustration, we fixed it by re-soldering the trace and found that when locking it in place that the mobile rack did not actually fit properly. Another member of our club called me because his computer would not boot properly. His machine also had two of these removable racks. He told me that his computer would not boot properly, so I had him shut down his machine and reinsert his removable hard disk caddy which housed his hard drive. He was then back up and running.

Approximately 4 months later he called me and told me

his machine would not boot, but this time the light was on. So he picked me up and we went to his house and sure enough the light was on, but it would not boot. So we put in a Windows Start Up disk. Once it booted to DOS from the StartUp disk, I typed in DIR C: which it said was not located so I tried DIR D:. Same as before. So DIR E:, then F:, then G:, all the same. The A: drive it found, but not any of the other possibilities so we removed the removable hard disk caddy and put that caddy in the top removable hard disk caddy holder [or rack rail] and we were now back up and running.

So as one of your clubs Vice Presidents, I would recommend that you should stay away from removable hard drive caddies, rails, and racks until they become more stable.

Hard Drive Considerations

Another small bit of advise: I also know that there are 100 gig hard drives on the market, but I also know I have had a 30.7 GB for over a year and have not needed any extra space. I would like to have a 100 gig but is it necessary? No, even though I have written many an article for the club and reviewed many a piece of software, I still have space and no problems. I also removed the mobile racks and have had no hard drive trouble. We all want the latest and the newest but if only if it works OK. At the speed it is now if you have plenty of hard drive space, leave it alone.

Upgrade Considerations

If you are going up in processors you should check with a local dealer and ask if you will see any difference. I went from an AMD 500 MHz to an 850 MHz and it wasn't until I got the 850 that I noticed any difference. If you do a lot of spreadsheets and need it for mathematical equations, then there might be a need. In most cases to go from a 500 MHz to 550 MHz you most likely will not notice much difference.

I found for the most part the speed of your hard drive and the bus speed of you main board can make a difference, so to upgrade your computer you need to

see what your computer actually needs. To even begin to upgrade you need to get a piece of paper and write down:

- 1) what my main board or motherboard can handle in size CPU.
- 2) What speed is my motherboard bus capable of.
- 3) what speed is my hard drive capable of.

Now once you have found these out, take them to a computer show or a local dealer to find out what is necessary to upgrade your computer or even if it is wise to upgrade rather than buy new. You might just want to buy another computer and keep your old stable one for use at home.

I know how much you wish to have the best and fastest, but if you are not a game player or mathematician or graphic artist or engineer you might just have the "I've got a hole in my pocket" disease. As for myself, I have found it is much wiser to ask for help in making an intelligent decision, not because I have the money to spend but simply is it necessary now especially with all the latest options and newest technologies being tested. If you must just go out and buy the latest greatest remember these monies might be needed for your health or your families.

Outlook and Viral Infections

Now I have heard several members talking about how by using Microsoft's Outlook Express you leave yourself open to viruses. Well, if you use Outlook Express, you can buy Norton AntiVirus 2002 and select to have all E-mail coming to you to be checked for infection. A lot of people have said it is also important to check each E-mail you send as well. However, I believe if you install and run an antivirus on a regular basis and your machine is virus free, it would be hard for you to give some one a virus you do not have. So, I only check those E-mails that I receive, which should be sufficient.

Anyway until next time, I hope this helps you on your quest.

Are User Groups Infected With Funnel Vision?

~ by Lynn L. Kaue,

*From the "Blue Chip News" a publication of
the Saginaw Valley Computer Association
Saginaw, MI*

Funnel vision is a malady that too often infects small organizations. This malady isn't restricted to user groups per se as it can infect any organization. The development of the malady originates from the thinking that only information gathered from a closed group is important or meaningful. I've seen the writing of editors pleading for articles from their members so that they will have something to put into their publication. This article is intended to bring to light my thoughts and opinions I've come to realize since I became involved as editor over eight years ago.

It is no secret that the SVCA exchanges newsletters with other user groups. They are a wealthy source of information and differing ideas that we use for a number of purposes. I've long seen a pattern that I call "Funnel Vision" that can invade a user group and cause its demise. There are many forms.

When I speak of funnel vision I am speaking to how a group attains information. We all know that a funnel is a cone shaped device that is large at one end and tapering to a small opening at the other. We use a funnel to pour liquids or powders into containers with small openings. The reason is that the liquid we are pouring into the funnel may originate from a saucepan (larger source) that contains a lot of liquid but by its very shape doesn't allow a small stream to flow from it. Thus, the funnel contains the overflow, the transfer of liquid is contained, and the liquid is transferred into the smaller container.

User groups are small containers while the APCUG community is the larger container. If we learn to use the resources of the large community we can use the information to educate our members.

Symptoms of the Disease

As I scan the newsletters we receive, and those I access online, I find two distinctive forms of funnel vision evident. The worst form are the newsletters that contain only advertising with a short message from the President

covering the reports of the groups last meeting or where he or she last traveled. There is no information transferred to the reader except for advertisements. I've often wondered why the group wants to spend its money publishing each month. Possibly it's because it is a source of revenue and the monetary reward is all that is important to them.

The less insidious form of funnel vision is more widespread. These newsletters are by and large a good-looking publication with a decent layout. The funnel vision becomes evident when it becomes apparent that only members of the group are contributing to it. Sadly, the editor has elected to only publish articles written by its own membership.

As I watch them over a period of time it becomes apparent that few new insights or ideas are being shared. All the information is basically being recycled into new forms of wording but little new information is offered.

Over the years I have watched the publications of these groups diminish in size. One that I looked forward to reading each month has shrunk from a 12 page to a 4-page publication because of lack of content. Every so often an article will appear by one of its writers that contains a tip or trick, a warning, a new idea or an insight about something the writer experienced the purpose of publishing a newsletter.

Sometimes, I receive a newsletter where the editor has left a page or two blank with a note on it that reads: "This page is blank because nobody contributed anything this month." While it is intended to encourage writers to contribute it has a negative effect. People join user groups for two purposes: to be informed or entertained. When people are cajoled into having to write something, even if it's trivial, this is in my opinion funnel vision at its worst.

Reviews

To often publications contain nothing but reviews written by its members. I'll admit that I am not one to get really excited about reading reviews. I'm not opposed to publishing reviews but I feel that there is a need for balance. My reason for speaking on reviews is that I see it as a form of funnel vision because it again restricts information to a closed group. An argument is that it is a method of getting people to write and contribute to the newsletter. The intent is to have the writer develop into a person who will write creatively.

Yet, if the only information attained is from the closed group where do the seeds of creativity come from? How

creative can a person get if all they are reduced to is writing a review in order to have something to print in a newsletter? Possibly, if they were exposed to articles written by authors of other groups they would get the vision and motivation to write something truly creative. When they see what others do they learn to see outside of themselves and look at new products and ideas with a new purpose.

Looking Through The Funnel

To this point I have been speaking of how I perceive some groups look at their organization through a funnel. When the focus of information is contained from within their own group they are looking at the user group community from the large end of the funnel and seeing it restricted by the small end their own group.

I suggest they take the funnel, turn it around and look through it from the small end. You'll see a bigger picture. This bigger picture is the APCUG community. I, as an editor, scan newsletters printed and electronic for fresh new information and use them in our publications. No, the SVCA is not unique in this approach. Some of my favorite exchanges are the newsletters that also contain a nice mix of articles written by their own members plus those attained from others. These groups have learned to use the whole APCUG user group community for information and support. There are no blank pages in their publications.

I've watched the larger group publications like Big Blue and Cousins of Canada and Capital PC User Group of Washington DC. They originate from large member organizations that have people within their membership who write a series of articles focused on their areas of expertise. As I've watched their publications through the years I found that they also use articles from other groups. The point is, they too contribute and acquire from the entire APCUG user group community.

Conclusion

The point I have been trying to make is to encourage editors to use the entire user group community as a resource. There is a wealth of information available and some ideas that are totally new. To attain these resources all that they have to do is to turn their funnel around to see the bigger picture. There is no need for a group's publication to go wanting for a lack of articles. Use the resources from those who learned how to use a funnel for the greater vision the APCUG community.

What is HUG all about???

Members helping members, who are seriously dedicated to computers to enhance their lives and their work. At meetings, they enjoy the camaraderie while sharing valuable tips, seek answers to problems, view demonstrations, listen to presentations, participate in raffles, door prizes and auctions.

Next Meeting: April 9 (second Tuesday) from 6:45 to 8:45 PM, At the Skyline View Church, 7733 Hillcrest Ave, Harrisburg

HUG Computer Workshop: April 21 (third Sunday) from 2:00 to 4:30 PM, At the Skyline View Church, 7733 Hillcrest Ave, Harrisburg

HUG Executive Board: April 17 (third Thursday) from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM, In Brian's Pizza, 6301 Grayson Rd., in the Swatara Square Shopping Center, Harrisburg

The Help Desk (Specialized and General Help on Call or by Email by Members for Members)

Ralph Corigliano, Denver, CO - VisualBASIC/VisualC/C++/.NET	ess@attbbs.com
Dennis Mumma, Mechanicsburg - Win 98/SE/ME/MSIE 4+/More (netwizzz@earthlink.net)	796-0955
Lou Samsel, Harrisburg - Linux SIG Founder (lou.samsel@pa.net)	564-8273
Dan Grabenstein, Harrisburg - OS/2	652-1607
Justin Zellers, Anneville, PA - Windows (all), SQL/ODBC, Networking	j_zellers@yahoo.com
Ed Smith, Harrisburg - GFA BASIC Programming	545-3037
Bill Chen, Harrisburg - Database / Networking (aimaim@usa.net)	540-9566

Please Note: This Could Be Your Last Newsletter, Unless Paid By The 15th Of The Month. It Is Your Responsibility To Check Your HUG Expiration Date Which Appears After Your Name On Your Address Label... Dues Can be Mailed In Or Paid At Meetings. If Date On Your label Is Circled In Red, This Is Your Last Newsletter. If Date Is Highlighted In Yellow, Dues Are Due Now.



INSIDE:

- HUG Info and Announcements
- Member Reviews and Columns
- Classified Ads

AND MUCH, MUCH , MORE!!!

Harrisburg pc User Group
5 Sycamore Lane
Palmyra, Pa. 17078