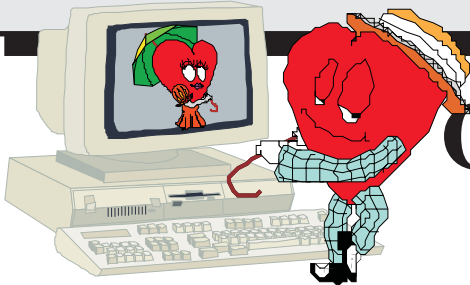


MID-CITIES PC USERS' GROUP

February 2002 Newsletter



Quips N' Tips

by Rick Howell

In 1965, Gordon Moore, co-founder of chipmaker Intel Corporation made an observation that the number of transistors that could fit on a square inch of integrated circuits doubled every two years since the integrated circuit was invented. Recently, Moore himself blessed a change in his law, accelerating the time to every eighteen months. This is the current definition of Moore's Law. Most experts expect Moore's Law to hold for at least another twenty years.

In 1981, Vernor Vinge, a science-fiction author invented the concept of cyberspace in his essay entitled "True Names". Vinge's essay along with "Neuromancer" by William Gibson are considered classic texts of cyberspace visionaries and are required reading by many college professors. Vinge's essay is so timeless it was recently reissued by Tor Books with the title "True Names: And the Opening of the Cyberspace Frontier". It is an interesting book containing a collection of essays by many of today's great cyber visionaries. It is on my "required reading" list.

Anyway, to get back on track, in 1991, Vernor Vinge coined the term "Singularity". The Singularity is that point in time when computer intelligence exceeds human intelligence. Computer visionary and MIT professor Ray Kurzweil predicts the singularity will occur around 2030. Personally, I think we are on the verge of the singularity already. When a computer operating system is developed which will take advantage of natural language processing (computer speech and voice recognition) and is capable of discrete data mining of Internet sources, that will be the first step into the singularity. I do not think

we are twenty-eight years away from that.

Artificial intelligence is now a way of life. So many of our computer systems and modern programs use artificial intelligence built into the code. Even the car you drive, unless you are driving a '59 Edsel, uses AI to control the gasoline/air mixture the engine runs on. Even many of the new kitchen appliances have AI pre-programmed into controller chips. It's everywhere, it's everywhere. So, what is the next step from artificial intelligence? That would probably be artificial consciousness. The ability of a machine...to determine what is happening at any time within it's own circuitry and possibly make changes to itself to correct errors or adapt to changing environments. Interestingly enough, much of this has also already been done. IBM has done extensive research on fault-tolerant processors. These processors can adapt to all types of external stimuli and reconfigure themselves to provide a stable computing environment. This is the beginning of artificial consciousness.

In my humble opinion Moore's Law is not quite correct. Moore's Law should recognize that technology is advancing not on a straight-line scale, but geometrically along a curved line. As technology advances technology more and more, the rate of advance will become astounding, far surpassing what we can only begin to imagine today.

The future looks interesting....and very close.

See y'all at the meeting.

MEETING NOTICE

by: George Miner

When: Tuesday, February 12th, at 7:15 PM

Where: Old Bedford School (in 1800 block of Bedford Road)

Program:

Editor's note: As of right now the program has not been finalized and cannot be announced.

We will get together at the I-Hop after the meeting for coffee and conversation. Bring a friend. All are welcome.

Fly the Flag
Presidents'
Day
Feb. 18th



The Department of Homeland and PC Security

The Latest Maintenance and Protection Tools Safeguard Your Data

By Patrick J. Suarez

[Patrick J. Suarez, a member of the Dayton Microcomputer Assn. Inc., is a nationally recognized Internet writer, trainer, speaker and consultant. He has appeared on numerous radio and TV programs across the United States. He is the Internet speaker at DMA®'s semi-annual Computerfest® trade show in Dayton, OH each spring & fall. Mr. Suarez published a tutorial software program called "The Beginner's Guide to the Internet" in 1993, and a book by the same title followed in 1995. In addition, Mr. Suarez has been published by Que. Mr. Suarez operates a Web site supporting people who have just learned that they have a tumor. He has just completed a project with Qwest Communications in Dublin, Ohio, as a Senior Technical Communicator.]

Former Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge now heads a new federal department with the off-kilter title of the Department of Homeland Security, sort of evoking Aaron Copland's music and amber waves of grain. We all know why such a move became necessary.

Just as we now have to keep an eye on things around us in these United States, you must do likewise with your Windows-based PC. Think of computer security as a microcosm of the larger society in which your computer exists, with two fronts of defense against losing your precious data and your software's carefully cobbled-together configuration, what with patches and upgrades and all.

The first front of defense ironically involves protecting your data from the computer in which it resides. Let's begin with the fearsome registry, that chamber of horrors that holds information about your hardware and software and, if allowed to corrupt with a slowly mounting volume of incorrect or outdated entries, will bring about the demise of your entire system. Finally, someone has invented a program that corrects erroneous entries and removes unneeded data. It does so thoroughly and carefully. It scans every line of the registry and builds a list of wrong entries. It then sweeps this list to find new references in your system for the list's entries. In two mouse clicks, the whole registry is scrubbed clean. This wonder of wonders is Registry Healer 3.0 from <http://www.zoneutils.com>. It costs \$19.95, the best double sawbuck you ever spent.

.Next, remove fragmentation, the tendency for data

to break up into multiple pieces that scatter around your hard drive, with Diskeeper Pro 7.0 from Executive Software (<http://www.diskeeper.com>). The program runs \$45 as a download. Diskeeper is the most honest defragger around; sometimes, even multiple passes won't completely defrag a drive. Diskeeper shows you the before and after, and sometimes the after requires another pass or two. And then you might never get to 100% defragmentation. My son's computer has a 60-gigabyte hard drive, and it fragmented so terribly that Norton Utilities couldn't read it. Diskeeper made some progress, but that drive is beyond even Diskeeper's ability to put digital Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Moral of the story: Defrag at least every other day.

And then there are those stray DLL files that hang around long after you have removed an application from your system. DLL files sit in C:\Windows\System and act as code libraries for Windows programs. Think of them as executive assistants to .EXE files, (e.g., word.exe). Word.exe needs an army of DLL files to help it do things like creating Word's screen images with which you are so familiar. It also needs them to help it perform actions (e.g., saving files, etc.). The popular "disk cleanup" programs you see on store shelves no longer seek and destroy old DLLs. But AnalogX's DLLArchive does. Actually, DLLArchive stores DLLs it removes from C:\Windows\System in another directory. Once you are absolutely certain that the DLLs that DLLArchive has banished are no longer needed, you can empty that folder (C:\Windows\DLLArchive). Final note: I do recommend Norton's Clean Sweep. It does safely rid your hard drive of unneeded files that build up during Web browsing. Get Clean Sweep at any store that sells software.

Add a final touch with DiskPie, an application from <http://www.pcmag.com> that tells you which programs are hogging your drive.

Voila! You've gained back hard drive room and rid your system of stuff it doesn't need and could get you into trouble. And, I'm going to make a statement that I swear is true: Since I have been using the products described above, I have had no problems, none, with

Continued on next page

The Department of Homeland and PC Security

Continued from Page 2

Windows Me. It has been as solid as a rock. No kidding. What better endorsement can I give these programs than that?

Let's move on to the other PC defense front, protecting your data from outside influences. First, stop using Microsoft Outlook. Because there are none so deaf as those who will not hear, I'm going to be pushy and obnoxious in the rest of this paragraph. It's the only way I can get through to those who need to read this. Ready? I know that there are obstinate corporate wanks out there who overglorify this deadly program, and they do so with a certain level of stuffy arrogance. Fine. You people are exactly the problem: every virus writer in the world writes to Outlook's well-known (and permanent) design flaws. But the Microsoft mindset is a wondrous thing to behold, so you folks will continue to gather and spread viruses at unprecedented rates. Here's a news flash: there are alternate programs out there that work just as well and that do not help the spread of malicious e-mail code. OK, that's off my chest, and it ought to generate a certain level of e-mail traffic to the editor and publisher of this newsletter. At least I hope so.

You need firewall software, a Trojan horse sniffer, and an effective antivirus program. This is such well-trodden territory that I won't reiterate the obvious. I will tell you that my favorite trio of protection in this arena is ZoneAlarm Pro (finally, thank heavens, available on retail software shelves everywhere); Trojan Remover from <http://www.simplysup.com> (\$24.95); and Norton Antivirus 2002, newly redesigned with the smartest antivirus engine that automatically grabs updates from its home Web site. I've tried them all and Norton gets my vote. ZoneAlarm Pro, by the way, makes my Windows based computers totally invisible to everything on the Internet.

Essentially, my PCs can see the world, but the world has no idea that my PCs even exist.

My advice is to go one more mile, then, and visit <http://www.scumware.com>. Download and run AdAware, Surf + and Gator. These programs remove spyware from your system. Spyware is insidious code planted by advertisers in your registry and Windows folder. This, friends, is going to be a big deal in Congress as users face off against marketing muscle. These guys want to climb into your wallet, psyche and

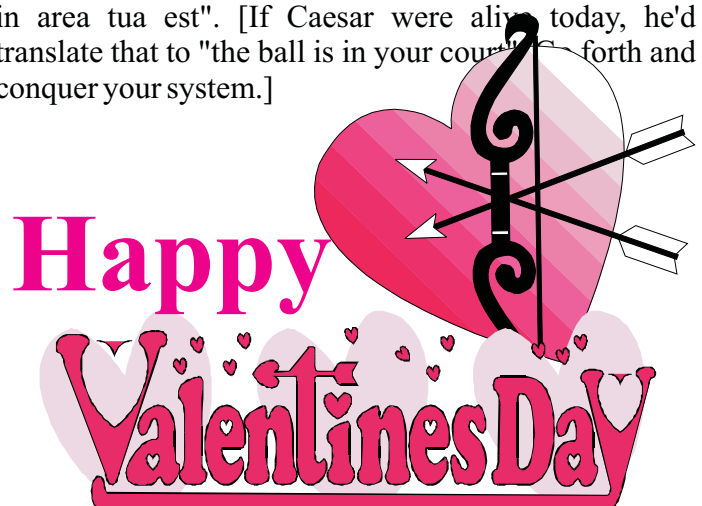
soul, and they'll stop at nothing in terms of Web bugs and bots to get there. Be on your guard. Tell them to take a hike.

I find it sad that we must invest so much time and energy into protecting us from each other. What a glorious tool the computer continues to be. But with good comes evil, and you have to gird your digital loins against the world that exists past your firewall.

I leave you with a few thoughts. First, sometimes these programs can give you wrong information, but it's easy to tell when they do. I tried to install the new Real One, the latest edition of Real Audio, into my Windows Me computer. After installation, Real One would not open. So, I tried to use Add/Delete Programs and the uninstaller failed. I manually extricated the program from my hard drive and registry. When I ran DLL Archive, it found 1,700 DLL files suddenly orphaned. Registry Healer found 1,548 registry errors. Clearly, this was nonsense and you learn what to trust and what not to trust with these programs. The installation and forced removal of Real One tipped my Windows Me over the edge and into the Chasm of Registry Oblivion. I reformatted the drive and installed, gasp!, Windows XP. Since I had not installed a new operating system on that drive in years (Windows 95 became Windows 98 which became Windows Me), it was time to rebuild everything from scratch. Real One was the program that finally did my system in.

Second, all of the programs I described in this article are for protection in the Windows environment. On my Linux computer, I need none of this.

And I rarely have a problem. Now, as they say, "pila in area tua est". [If Caesar were alive today, he'd translate that to "the ball is in your court" - forth and conquer your system.]



THE MID-CITIES PC USERS' GROUP

The Mid-Cities PC Users' Group is a not for-profit organization whose objectives are:

- * to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and experience,
- * education in the form of seminars and programs, and
- * community as pertains to the computer industry.

Annual membership is \$24.00 per family with one vote per membership. Members are encouraged to notify the Membership Chairperson of any change of address as soon as possible to continue receiving their monthly newsletter. Please address any notifications to: Mid-Cities PC Users' Group: Attn. Membership Chair, P.O. Box 54141, Hurst, TX 76054

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THE MID-CITIES PC USERS' GROUP NEWSLETTER

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