

MID-CITIES PC USERS' GROUP

November 2001 Newsletter



Quips N' Tips

by Rick Howell

I hope none of you have fallen for Intel's marketing ploy to pawn off an inferior product which is an interim bridge to a new technology. In an effort to be "one-up" on AMD, Intel released their 2 GHz processor based on their Willamette core, an old technology architecture with a 256K L2 cache, when they have promised their new 2 GHz processor based on the .13 micron 2 GHz Northwood core with a 512K L2 cache by the end of the year. So, what does this mean? Early customers who are intent on having the fastest processor available are stuck with a processor that is not significantly faster than their 1.7 GHz processor released earlier this year. The smart thing to do, if you are intent on Intel, would be to wait until the 2 GHz Northwood processor comes out later this year or early next year. Pricing of the 2 GHz Willamette processor is currently about \$562, a premium price compared to the 1.7 GHz processor's price of \$193. The Northwood processor will have to be introduced at approximately the same price as the Willamette processor in order to be marketable. When this happens, Intel won't be able to give away the Willamettes, and the resale value of Willamette-based computers will drop by several hundred dollars. Nothing like programmed obsolescence. It is a market-ing strategy that has worked so well for both Microsoft and Intel at great expense to their customers. Thanks for giving us your money. We look forward to taking it again next week.. Ad Infinitum. (Please note: Prices are subject to change from the time this article was written.)

And, to make matters worse, AMD is now marketing their new 1.5 and 1.6 GHz processors with processor equivalency ratings. You can buy a 1.5 GHz processor with the designation 1500, 1600, 1700, or 1800 and the 1.6 GHz processor with the designation 1900. These numbers represent the chips they are comparable to in a competitors brand....I won't mention who the competitor might be. Do you guys get as tired of this marketing BS as I do? Why doesn't somebody just make a clearly superior product and call it the Whoop-Ass chip?

The recent upheaval of the stock market is weeding out the dot-coms that have had trouble getting their books into the black. Financially unstable technology companies are finding their investors knocking at the door looking for a refund. Many are having to declare bankruptcy or look for bigger companies to buy them up. It is a great opportunity for the big boys to acquire some leading-edge technology at bargain-basement prices. Sorry, I left my check book at home. Some analysts are predicting an upturn in technology stocks before the end of the year.

Microsoft has been in the news recently because of security problems with Internet server software. Outlook is a continual target for virus propagating disgruntled hackers. So far, though, the prime victim of the hacker has been the individual who may have been deprived of his system for a couple of days while the computer was in the shop getting antibiotics. That has changed now, though. Microsoft has licensed it's Windows Media technology to over 275 companies to create secure distribution systems for audio and video content. One company, Pressplay, set to debut this year will offer up to 125,000 music titles by subscription. You pay a monthly fee and you get to play X number of songs. Copying of the content is prevented by Microsoft's digital rights management software. Or is it? An anonymous hacker, nicknamed "Beale Screamer" (a

reference to the movie "Network") has released a program called FreeMe which disables the security measures designed into the Microsoft software. Imagine, all 125,000 titles suddenly appearing on the internet free for download. Could tend to upset the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America), the chief proponent of the DMCA (Digital Millennium Copyright Act) and big-time litigator who is currently suing 2600 Magazine for publishing the code to decrypt DVDs. Certainly they would go after the hacker if they can discover his identity, but shouldn't Microsoft be named as a responsible party as well for selling software with obvious security

MEETING NOTICE

by: George Miner

When: Tuesday, Nov. 13th, at 7:15 PM

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

Program: What to Do Before Calling Tech Support. There will be roll playing by club members and you are sure to learn what not to do! We will also get together at the I-Hop afterwards for coffee and talk. All are welcome.

Continued on page 2

Quips N' Tips

Continued from Page 1

problems? For too long, Microsoft has sold incomplete, buggy software, fully aware the software had problems, and allowing the customer to debug the programs for them. Now, they have a customer from an industry that loves to litigate. Could be interesting.

Did you ever wonder about the two-letter country designation you see on some web sites? Some of them are pretty easy to figure out, like .ca for Canada or .gb for Great Britain. But some people might not know that .de is Germany or .kp is North Korea. So, how do you find out what letters go with what country? It's just a matter of knowing which standard to look for. There is an ISO 3166 standard which list countries by two-letter, three-letter, and numerical designation. The two-letter code is the Internet standard. Do a search for ISO 3166 and you will find all you ever wanted to know (at least about country codes).

I don't know how many of you are thinking about buying digital cameras, but you will find some great prices on digital cameras popping up all over the place. Seems like

everybody wants to make a camera these days, and with the features getting better and cheaper, you will find many of the lower resolution cameras now dropping in price like a memory chip. Check all the shopping bots on the web and you will find some great deals. Also be sure to check Ebay because a lot of people are upgrading to the four and five megapixel cameras and dumping their old cameras for decent prices. It's a buyer's market out there. Also with the greater number of people getting into digital photography, the prices are coming down on flash memory cards for the cameras as well. Just make sure you know what features you want on your camera and remember to think about the difference between optical zoom and digital zoom, the amount of storage needed for higher-resolution photos, battery life, and storage media. If you are serious about buying a camera, you might want to pick up a copy of SmartComputing's PC Photos & Video, another publication in their Learning Series.

See y'all at the meeting.



In Sites

Excerpts from PC Magazine - May 2001 issue on great utilities!

The new OS Windows XP will read email, word documents and more to the reader.

For those hard of seeing screens, try buying bigshot magnifier (\$99.) From <http://www.hotmagnifier.com> or the freebee lens 1.4 at <http://www.abfsoftware.com>.

Those wanting more than one clip board, Windows default, try clpomatic, free at <http://www.pcmag.com>. It stores multiple text items. For screen capture tools try H y p e r s n a p - D X at \$ 3 5 . d i r e c t at <http://www.hyperionics.com> or for \$39.95 use Snagit 5.2 at <http://www.techsmith.com>.

For the hard to see try Speaking clock deluxe 3.0 at \$15. from <http://www.luxaeterna.com>, you gets alarms, stopwatch, a calendar , and a calculator.

For the blind there are small devices that sit on a tea or coffee cup that beep when you have poured in water to 1/2" of the brim. If the waters boiling hot it will beep twice to advise the risk of burning.

For managing file directories get Powerdesk4 for free at <http://www.ontrack.com>, this product can show you two directories at once. To see a detailed list of what's running on

your PC at any given moment get Another Task Manager from <http://atm.idic.caos.it> This product provides a remarkable level of detail on processes, threads, windows and memory usage.

To improve Internet performance get SkyLam Software Intelli Dial Up 2.51 free, from <http://www.skylam.com> it parameters are predefined for either dial up or LAN connection, or pay 19.95 for Modem Booster 2.3 from <http://www.inklineglobal.net> for a program that does empirical testing to dynamically set your optimum rate.

For music with your mood in mind, try these web sites, <http://www.echo.com>, rated a best choice by editors at PC magazine. Eighties pop try <http://www.957thebeat.com>, for a d u l t c o n t e m p o r a r y t r y w a r m 9 8 at <http://www.warm98.com>.. You'll find lots of stuff at <http://www.shoutcast.com> using mp3 streaming. Try Spinner for 150 stations of music at <http://www.spinner.com>.. You can create your own music site at <http://www.sonicnet.com>. At <http://www.realguide.real.com/tuner> you can hear the world but the sound quality is slow and sometimes unrewarding.

**Happy
Thanksgiving**

Got A Tech Problem? Get It Solved Fast & Free

By C. C. Holland, Managing Editor, ZDNet.com Anchor Desk, Thursday, October 26, 2001

If you've ever been stuck on hold listening to a tinny, string-symphony version of "Against All Odds"--or worse yet, a recorded message that tells you over and over just how important your call really is--you might share with me a distaste for customer-support lines.

Dealing with customer support for, say, your bank or a mail-order merchant, can be bad enough. But getting through to the right person to answer your computer-related questions can be darned near impossible--or, at best, pretty frustrating. **ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE A NEWBIE**, a system crash or even a minor setback like a toolbar disappearing could have you racing for the phone to ask for guidance. Chances are, you'll spend an awful lot of time with the receiver glued to your ear. Worse, you might not even get the help you need.

A [recent article](#) from *PC World* illustrates this problem. According to a survey of 27,000 *PC World* readers, customer support is at an all-time low. Even Dell, normally a paragon of customer service, got dinged for its lengthy hold times and for leaving customer problems unresolved. But do you really have options besides contacting your hardware and software manufacturers directly? Indeed you do. Better news yet: All the options I'm going to tell you about are completely free.

YOUR FIRST STEP: Try to get it from the horse's mouth. Most vendors provide at least some basic FAQ pages on their corporate Web sites, and many offer extensive, searchable "knowledge bases." Before you look for that 800 number, it's not a bad idea to check out these pages first. Other folks have probably had the same problem you're experiencing, and you might be able to find the solution with a quick search.

Examples of such pages include the [Dell Knowledge Base](#), the [Microsoft Product Support page](#), [Hewlett-Packard Support](#), and [IBM Support and Downloads](#).

If that doesn't work, and your problem isn't urgent (smoke isn't pouring from your monitor, your boss isn't screaming about a 5 p.m. deadline as your hard drive remains comatose), you might try one of these Web sites for help.

[Protonic.com](#). You can submit your question directly and get a response via e-mail, or choose to post your problem in the public forums. Either process is completely free, although to submit an e-mail question you'll be asked to register (at no cost, simply by providing your name, e-mail address, username, and password). The service isn't limited to one particular platform--you can ask Windows, Mac, or Linux questions--and the site's informational page notes, "We can help you with anything from step-by-step software installation help to explanations of computing terms." Sounds like a deal to me.

[Tech Support Guy](#). Support here is primarily through

message boards, although there's a fee-based, live-person option. As with Protonic, you'll be asked to register (for free) before you post a problem, but you can browse through threads as a lurker. I was impressed by how quickly many of the questions were answered; for example, one post submitted at 10:04 p.m. about an invalid Windows system disk error received a detailed reply from a moderator just 12 minutes later (probably about how long it took to type it). Now *that's* good customer service.

[PC Mechanic](#). This site is a gold mine of information and reference materials, including tutorials, how-to manuals, and product guides. It's particularly strong with hardware and operating systems issues. You can post your problems on discussion boards, search through troubleshooting FAQs, and learn to be your own PC expert by checking out the site's numerous [content channels](#). Plus, the site's news, reviews, and commentary make for engaging reading, even if you're not trying to rescue a moribund computer.

[Webopedia](#). This isn't really a tech support site, but it's worth listing here because many customer-support calls originate from users who have no idea what a particular computer term means. If you're baffled by a word, phrase, or error message, search for it here and see if things get cleared up. For example, if your manual tells you to type in an [IP address](#) and you have no idea what that means, look it up here. In addition to a solid definition, Webopedia also provides links to outside resources--in this case, an IP addressing tutorial and instructions for changing an IP address in Windows 95, among others--which can help clarify things further.

So put down your phone and pick up your mouse. The answer to your problems might be no more than a free click away.

Windows Web Sites

<http://www.windowsupdate.microsoft.com>

<http://www.winplanet.com>

<http://www.activewin.com>

<http://www.winguides.com>

[Http://www.fixwindows.com](http://www.fixwindows.com)

<http://www.winportal.com>

<http://www.wmeworld.com>

[Http://officeupdate.microsoft.com](http://officeupdate.microsoft.com)

<http://microsoft.about.com>

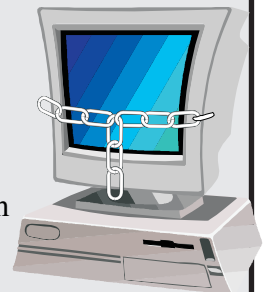
<http://www.tucows.com>

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie>
alex for news bar.

<http://www.winapplist.com/interne/plugins.htm> (for IE 5)

<http://www.help.com/cat/3/310/656> (for IE 5)

<http://www.3dspotlight.com> (for IE)



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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CONTRIBUTING ARTICLES

Article Style: Type all copy flush left without justification; use word wrap feature for your paragraphs. This includes headings, by-lines, and the first line of each paragraph. Place a credit by-line (author's name) between the title and first paragraph. Leave no blank lines between paragraphs. Use only one space between sentences.

File Formats: MS Word or Word Perfect is preferred. If formatting is crucial and you do not have access to the above programs, send a hard copy to show the layout.

Submitting Articles: You may use one of two methods. Uploading the article to Nancy Hester at newsletter@mcpcug.org or you can hand them to her on diskette (3.5" preferred) during the general membership meetings.



Thanks a lot!

Deadline: The last Friday of the month prior to intended publication.

Advertising Rates:

7½ in. x 9 in.	Full Page	\$40.00
7½ in. x 4 in.	Half Page	\$20.00
3¼ in. x 4¼ in.	Quarter Page	\$12.50
3½ in. x 2 in. Business Card		\$5.50

Discounts: 3 months = 5%; 6 months = 10%. 1st month full price, discount applies to months thereafter.

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