

DATA LINE



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Meetings

SCV Senior Center
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February 8 - Back to the Basics;
The Digital Photo Guy

March 8 - Back to the Basics;
Bruce Fries - Digital Audio
Essentials

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Membership Application
Membership Benefits
Around Town

Just returned from CES! At 6:00, Bruce McFarland will let us know what's new in the consumer electronics industry. And I bet he'll also tell us about the fabulous food he got to eat at his press activities!

At 7:00 we're going to start our Back to the Basics series and build a computer. We'll have a video camera viewing the action and you will be able to see the computer being built on the big screen. We'll also be loading on XP Professional.

Bring your questions for the Q&A session.

Back to the Basics - January. What's in the box? Participate in building a computer. See how easy it is to replace your computer's battery, upgrade memory, We'll also load on Windows XP Professional. Software and applications actually make your computer useful and something more than just a pile of electronic circuitry with (sometimes) blinking lights.

February. Moving applications to a new computer and more on software. Yes, we will be asking questions such as "Why doesn't this computer understand English?", "What do you mean I don't have enough memory?" and "Why is the printer making 194 copies of that letter I just wanted to get rid of?"

March - The Internet - linking your computer to the world. How does the Internet work? How does one computer talk to another? How to access your computer when away from home.

April - Communicating with the world. E-mail – set up a web-based Gmail account, attach pix, docs, PDFs, download same.

The Beginner's Corner

What Your Computer Really Does When It's Idle

by Vinny La Bash, vlabash@home.com
Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

You're sitting at your machine, thinking about what to do next, when your disk drive starts whirring and the light flashes, indicating that something is going on. What is your machine doing? Your hands are nowhere near the keyboard or the mouse, and you can be relatively certain that neither telepathy nor telekinesis is at work.

One possibility is that your system is loading automatic updates from Microsoft.com because you set your system to download updates automatically. The same could be true for anti-virus programs, firewalls or any application software that offers this type of automated service.

The Task Scheduler may be running a background utility. Your automatic backup may be kicking in, or an online subscription service is delivering requested information as part of a service it provides. Any number of similar operations could be going on. There is a dark side to this. You may be infected by a spyware program reporting back to its master over the internet. Most spyware blabs about your web surfing habits to a commercial entity so that it can tailor ads to your individual tastes. Many people consider this annoying or intrusive. Nevertheless, the designers of these programs have no desire to hurt you. They want only to sell you something.

However, something far less benign could be going on. A program could be attempting to steal your banking information, PIN numbers, credit card records, social security information, and other financial data with the intention of draining your bank account.

A Trojan horse program may be downloading spam to retransmit from your machine, making it look to recipients that you are the spammer. Other programs make your machine a "zombie" or a node in an array of machines designed to launch a Denial of Service (DOS) attack on a web site.

Worst of all, there have been instances reported of stealth programs downloading child pornography and retransmitting it to another machine. These programs make it look like you are the culprit, making you subject to arrest and incarceration. This kind of frighteningly malicious activity has been rare, but the danger is real.

If you are concerned about this, and you should be, Windows XP offers a solution:

Click Start.

Click Run.

In the text portion of the Run dialog box, type cmd and click OK.

This brings you to the Command Interpreter, which starts out by displaying the Version of XP that's running on your machine and some copyright information. Now enter the command netstat -o, which displays network statistics about your current active connections.

There are five columns of information displayed. The Proto column tells you what communication protocol is being used for a particular process. In most instances this will be TCP (Tele-Communications Protocol). This is irrelevant for our purposes. Local Address is your machine.

Foreign Address is the IP address and port number of the machine the process is communicating with.

State informs you if the communication session is sending or receiving, waiting, acknowledging or finished.

PID (Process Identifier) is the piece we need, because it identifies the process (program) that

is controlling the communications session from your computer.

4. Perform the Ctrl+Alt+Del keystroke sequence to bring up the Windows Security window.

5. Click Task Manager.

6. Click the Processes tab.

7. Click the PID column. This sorts the information, making it easier to find the program you're looking for.

Note: If the PID column is not displayed, you can activate it from the View menu.

Examine the PID list until you find the PID number(s) you found with the netstat command. If it's msnmgr.exe or iexplorer.exe, there is nothing to worry about. These are normal Windows XP processes and no cause for concern. There are many other legitimate Windows XP processes that are likely to be listed in the Task Manager.

How do you tell the good from the bad? Unfortunately, Windows itself isn't much help in showing what any given process is doing and you can't shoot them all and "let God sort them out". A search of Microsoft's web site won't yield useful information.

A great place to find valuable information about common Windows processes is:

<http://www.liutilities.com/products/wintaskspro/processlibrary/>

This site contains information about all common Windows processes, and the site administrators do an excellent job of keeping posted information current.

Knowing what's going on in your system is good, but the best protection against intruders is to keep your anti-virus, firewall, and other specialized protection programs up-to-date. :

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Tech News

By Sue Crane, Vice President & Editor
Big Bear Computer Club

Microsoft Previews IE7

Internet Explorer's program manager, Eric Lawrence, recently posted a blog that said IT7 plans to support the Transport Layer Security protocol by default. He also explained how IE7 will behave differently from earlier versions when it encounters potential security problems. From an HTTPS page, users will be forced to access insecure content via the information bar, since only the secure content will be rendered by default. IE7 is also rumored to have tabbed browsing similar to competitor Firefox.

A Computer for Every Kid

A \$100 laptop? A global effort is underway to make it happen by next year. It was a pipe dream only a few months ago but soon will be reality. An ambitious effort from MIT Media Labs to put a \$100 portable in the hands of every child in the world is picking up big corporate partners, top engineering talent, and interest from several countries. One Laptop Per Child (OLPC), a nonprofit venture, is expected to start distributing machines late next year and to produce 100 to 200 million in 2007.

AMD plans 4-core Opterons by 2007

Advanced Micro Devices put a quad-core server processor on its road map and promised to upgrade its software investments, as it outlined its general technology direction for the next couple of years. The new processor will incorporate four cores connected together by a new version of the

Hypertransport Interconnect technology, and will support DDR3 (double data rate 3) memory. The 2006 dual-core chips will also introduce AMD's Pacifica virtualization technology and its Presidio security technology into AMD-based systems. AMD's goal for 2006 is to improve its standing within the business PC market, both in desktops and notebooks.

Phishers use Phony IRS Tax Refund to Scam Consumers

A spam e-mail message has been sent around the world telling people they are eligible for a \$571.94 tax refund from the IRS. The e-mail offers a link to a fraudulent IRS Web site, but the link actually goes through a legitimate Government Web site. The link in the phishing e-mail goes to a forged IRS Web site that asks for a Social Security number, tax returning filing code and credit card details including security codes and PIN. The government is aware of the issue and is working to fix it.

New TiVO Product Promotes Targeted Ads

After introducing a generation of television viewers to the joys of skipping over ads, TiVO plans to launch a new service to let its subscribers seek out the advertisements they've cut loose from their TV viewing. Digital video recorder (DVR) maker TiVo is positioning the new service, scheduled for a mid-2006 launch, as a way for subscribers to find targeted ads in categories that interest them. The opt-in technology will let TiVo subscribers use keyword searches to look for information on specific products or services. The ad service will be free for subscribers; pricing for advertisers is still being determined.

Microsoft Considers Making Desktop Apps Free – With Advertising

Although no specific plans have been made, executives within Microsoft are examining whether it makes sense to release ad-supported versions of products such as Works, Money, or even the Windows operating system itself. Microsoft officials confirmed the authenticity of the paper, dated winter 2005, but declined to comment on its contents. But

Chief Technology Officer Ray Ozzie and Chairman Bill Gates outlined some of the opportunities and the challenges Microsoft faces in a series of October memos. In the blunter of the two memos, Ozzie said Microsoft had an obligation to act on the shift to ad-supported software. .."It's clear that if we fail to do so, our business as we know it is at risk," Ozzie wrote. "We must respond quickly and decisively." The company's exploration of ad-supported software extends even to Windows, it's most important product. An ad-supported version of the operating system could make some sense, Microsoft researchers argue, noting that the product reportedly earns \$9 per year per user.

A New Kind of Music Label

Forty years ago Jac Holzman changed music distribution with the release of The Doors' album on his independent Elektra music label. He's introducing a similar change with Cordless Recordings – the first all-digital music label operated by a major record company, the Warner Music Group, which is launching on the Web and on digital music services such as iTunes and RealNetworks' Rhapsody. Music from the label's first six bands is being sold only online in 3-song "clusters" instead of albums. The bands will be promoted on blogs and sites like MySpace. Artists get to keep ownership of the master recordings they release under Cordless. If they want to release their music elsewhere after a short contract is up, they are free to do so. The Cordless Recordings labels is an experiment for Warner Music, which has increased its focus on digital distribution, and a bet that inexpensive Internet distribution and marketing may give labels a cost-effective way to nurture new bands. On the label side, it's an attempt to reach out to a music-consuming world that is deserting radio and record stores for iTunes and MySpace.

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For less than a computer how-to book, a yearly user group membership is the best accessory you can buy for your computer.

Online "My Family Health Portrait"

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; radio & TV show host

WEBSITES:

<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory>

<https://familyhistory.hhs.gov>

<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/download.htm>

|

Recently, a relative in another state was hospitalized via an emergency room admission. His new wife of just a year did not have much information on the family health history, so urgently needed by the physicians in order to diagnose and treat my relative. Urgent phone calls followed, gathering the requisite family medical history to enable the appropriate diagnosis and treatment. Philosophically, what if a comprehensive family medical history could have been immediately available? This circumstance is not unique, but a reasonable solution has been available for free for over a year at www.hhs.gov/familyhistory, courtesy of the U. S. Surgeon General's Office

This site explains the necessity of such data with the statement, "Health care professionals have known for a long time that common diseases - heart disease, cancer, and diabetes - and even rare diseases - like hemophilia, cystic fibrosis, and sickle cell anemia - can run in families. If one generation of a family has high blood pressure, it is not unusual for the next generation to have similarly high blood pressure. Tracing the illnesses suffered by your parents, grandparents, and other blood relatives can help your doctor predict the disorders to which you may be at risk and take action to keep you and your family healthy." In

order to accomplish this task, the Surgeon general offers two simple options; one an online web maintained version hosted on a secure server (that is what the "https" means in the internet address) at <https://familyhistory.hhs.gov>, the other a 1.6mb downloadable "Zip" file which may be stored on a home computer, and utilized in the privacy of the home. The files created in either version can easily be exchanged among family members via email or disc.

In the online version, a family history can be newly created, or an existing version can be uploaded from the home computer to the secure Surgeon General website where the data can be managed, and then saved back on the home computer; no personal information is saved or captured by the government computer, protecting the privacy of the user. It should be noted that much effort has gone into the creation of this web based service, in that it explicitly works equally well with almost all known browsers, including Internet Explorer, Firefox, Mac Safari, Netscape, and many other browsers.

The first step in using the online version is to "Create a Family History", or to "Load a Saved Family History" if a file had been previously created. The preliminary step is to create a personal profile, where basic information such as name, gender, height, and weight are entered. The personal profile continues with a simple checklist of major common diseases (such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes), and age of onset, followed by a fill in the blank chart of other diseases. After the personal health history is created, there is then an opportunity to create a family profile. The family profile states "Only add family members that are biological (blood) relatives (not adopted or step-relatives)." Similar fill in charts are presented to complete the information for the other family members. Data can be modified, added, or deleted at any time. Once the user has completed entering the basic family information, a button "Go to My Family" takes the user to the basic "Family Health Portrait" where a family health tree can be

displayed or printed; this family tree contains symbols and abbreviations immediately recognizable by a health care practitioner as a basic family health history. Other family members, such as aunts, uncles, and other blood relatives can be added to the list as well. Other family members listed on the family tree can have their own personalized family tree created at this point, and the entire file can be downloaded to the user's computer, leaving no personal data on the HHS computer.

If for privacy or other reasons, the user does not wish to enter personal family health data to the secured website, the downloadable version is a self-contained version of what is available on the website. Once uncompressed with any zip utility (built in to Windows XP), the file is easily and quickly installed. The software does require the Microsoft ".Net" utility, version 1.1 or later, available for free at windowsupdate.microsoft.com. Once installed, the entire process is completed in the privacy of the home, with no personal data leaving the computer, unless the user desires to send the data files to other family members to complete or use as a basis for their own family health history.

With this information readily available both within a family unit, and shared with other blood relatives as appropriate, family health histories can be easily maintained, and distributed or printed as needed.

Many times we cannot recall family health problems that family members may have had which may give us a predisposition, or otherwise genetically affect us. With this free service and software from the Surgeon General, we may all be better able to provide our health care professionals with the information that may prove so vital to our health care and treatment.

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Care and Feeding of CD's

By Lynn L. Kauer, Editor
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I read an interesting article in the September 2005 issue of Popular Photography written by David D. Busch titled, "The Truth About Disc Rot." It paralleled some other magazine and news articles I have read on the same subject. The following is what we should know and understand about CD (and DVD) discs as storage devices. For the purposes of this article, CD's and DVD's are considered the same as far as backup media is concerned. The only difference is that DVD's can hold more data.

We save things that are important to us. Those of us who take digital photos know that simply storing them on the hard drive of our computer is not a wise or safe thing to do as the disc may crash and we will lose everything. Thus, we copy the photos to a CD or DVD disc so that they will be always available for a long period of twenty or more years. However, will they really be there when we look for them?

The media of choice for backup and storage purposes less than ten years ago was tape backup. Some commercial enterprises continue to use digital tape for backup purposes. Tape is rarely used, if at all, for home use anymore. Actually, the backup media of choice for commercial use is moving toward external hard drives. Where does the CD fall into all of this?

There are hosts of backup utilities that utilize the CD for backup purposes. Most CD manufacturers advertise that CD media is good for 20 to 100 years depending on the depth of marketing they are trying to offer. The National Institute of Standards Technology (NIST) tests

products for longevity. The catch is that longevity is available if the user adheres to very strict rules and standards. Let us look at some interesting facts.

Handling

When a CD is burned, a laser shoots through the bottom of the disc into the dye layer located under the top protective plastic covering on at the top of the CD. This is the layer where the laser burns pits into the dye layer to allow the compute to interpret what is being written by the computer. When the bottom side of the disc becomes scratched or soiled, the laser is diffused and the data is not clearly written.

Secondly, if the top layer becomes damaged, moisture can penetrate the surface and cause the layer to slowly disintegrate and is the beginning of what is called "Disc Rot."

How often have you watched someone open a CD case and directly pull on the edges of a CD until it is released from the case? Notice how the CD is bent while it is being removed? This bending is causing tiny cracks to develop in the reflective (protective) layer of the CD. To properly remove a CD from the case, press down on the inside of the retaining plastic that holds the CD in place. This causes the retaining ring to become slightly smaller so that the CD slides off easily with out bending forces.

When handling, always pick up or carry the CD by the outer edge. Avoid placing your fingers on the read (bottom) side of the disc as this will cause acid penetration of both protective layers to begin.

Reliability

CD-R is a disc that that can be written to once while CD-RW are discs that can be written to many times reportedly 1000 times. CD's that the least reliable for archival purposes are the CD-RW's. These discs include a layer that is altered by the CD burner each time it is rewritten. Experience has shown that when these discs are used with another computer, it

is a common for the second computer to be unable to read it.

I burn a new music CD monthly for each show that I do. (I entertain at nursing and retirement homes.) I burned and placed the CD-RW into my karaoke player, it would not recognize it. In addition, my second computer would not recognize it either. Only the computer that originally burned the CD was able to read it! Imagine if I had saved all of my music and photo images on a CD-RW. When the computer would eventually be replaced, the disc would likely be unreadable. It is better to save data on CD-R discs, as they are readable with any computer with a CD player.

CD-R's aren't permanent either. The organic dyes layer that the burner works with are similar to dyes in film. When exposed to sunlight, heat, cold and humidity and UV exposure the dye layer changes over time. How often have you watched someone place a CD on the dashboard of a car or keep it in a glove box? Proper storage of CD's is critical to their useful longevity.

Dyes

There are many types of dyes used for the production of a CD. To quote the above mentioned author, "Under the NIST's accelerated "stress test," which includes exposure to very bright light, high temperature and humidity, recorded CD discs using phthalocyanine dye combined with a gold/silver allow reflective layer proved to be considerably more stable than all other types of CD-R media. Discs using azo dye as the data layer had less stability under light, temperature and humidity testing. Media using cyanine dye performed well when exposed to light, but had longevity problems under temperature and humidity stress.

DVD's, which generally use a modified form of a stabilized cyanine dye for the recording layer, are less predictable in terms of longevity. NIST data suggest that, despite lower data capacity, you might be better off in the long run using premium CD-R's instead of DVD+/-R discs."

The author went on to say that it's not always possible to tell what kind of dye was used for the manufacture of the disc because the dyes can be tinted. Cyanine based CD's (most common) have a light green or blue tint on the data side. Phthalocyanine dyes are often light green while the azo dye tends to have a blue color.

While it's possible to tell the dye type by reading the specs from the manufacturer, a better indicator might be the reflective layer. If a gold reflective layer was used then the likelihood of using a good quality dye is increased. Be aware, some cheap discs appearing to have a gold layer may be simply paint. Buyer beware!

Recommended brand discs are Fujifilm, Imation, Kodak, Maxell, TDK, Verbatim and Mitsui/MAM-A.

Protection and Care of CD's

Manufacturers recommend storing CD's vertically in a cool, dry area instead of horizontally. The reason is to prevent warping and damage from humidity.

Also, never use solvent based pens to write on them similar to permanent felt tipped pens. The solvent can penetrate the protective layer and damage the reflective layer below. The only safe place to write on the top of a CD is in the clear center portion of the hub when using a felt tipped pen.

It is better to apply a label to the top of the disc for identification purposes. Never write on the label with a ballpoint pen when it is applied to the disc. The tip of the pen can cause stress cracks in the protective layer.

When using CD-RW discs, I use removable labels — www.digitalinnovations.com.. They can be written on many times and then removed and replaced as necessary. For discs that I intend to keep for archival purposes I print the contents on the label with an ink jet printer — www.fellowes.com.

When cleaning to remove fingerprints or

smudges on the read side on the read side of the disc, always use a CD or lens cloth wiping radially out from the center. Never clean using small circular motions on small portions of the disc as it can cause diffusion of the laser beam. Isopropyl alcohol or clear or soapy water can be used to clean a grimy disc. Never use acetone, anti-static agents or wood based products such as toilet paper or facial tissue to clean a disc.

When applying labels, be sure to center the label on the disc to avoid "off balance" condition when the disc is being used. When the disc is rotated at high speeds, the "off balance" condition can unbalance the disc and cause problems with high speed readers. For this reason I purchased a label applicator that perfectly centers the label each time versus putting the label on the disc "by eye."

The Future

Like the 1.4 MB floppy drive, tape drives, Zip discs and LS 120 disks that are no longer being used, the CD as we know it will likely bite the dust in about ten years. I predict the media of choice for backup and archival purposes will be that of external drive media similar to USB jump drives and flash card burners or other external drive sources. Personally, I use a 160 GB external hard drive to backup my computer data including music and photo files. Because of transportability, I also backup my music and photos on CD's and store them at an offsite location in a safety deposit box.

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Happy New Year

Computer Humor



The top ten signs that someone is using your e-mail account

10. "Honey, why is an 18-wheeler from Amazon.com backing into our driveway?"
9. One Secret Service agent is sitting on your head while another is slapping cuffs on you.
8. Apparently, your flame war with DonCorleone@mafia.com is about to turn ugly.
7. When you log on, your computer says "You've got lawsuits!"
6. You're suddenly getting more Spam than the Hormel outlet store.
5. Sotheby's says the Rembrandt is yours and that you now owe them \$71,000,000 and change.
4. You now have 130,000 ClubTop5 subscriptions and the list moderator is on the cover of Business Week.
3. Terse "Knock it off, Oedipus" e-mail from your Mom.
2. Your wife calls you at the office to report that Pogdi, your Pakistani mail-order bride, has arrived.
1. "The resistance welcomes your involvement. Your contact information has been forwarded to a local insurgent who will bring supplies and reinforcements to you immediately."

A USB Primer

By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.
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By now most computer users are familiar with the term USB or Universal Serial Bus. This connection port on your computer is designed to replace the older serial, parallel and PS2 ports. Probably within a year you won't find any new computers with these older ports. They will have only USB. There are some things you might find useful about USB ports and hubs which could reduce or eliminate problems in dealing with them.

USB ports have a number of advantages over the old system of parallel/serial ports. They do not require I/O memory space or individual IRQ lines. Anyone who has had to work with older computers and operating systems will remember the problems of trying to prevent IRQ conflicts when connecting external devices such as scanners or modems. How many times did the sound card manage to steal IRQ's that you had to have for another device? USB also allows for automatic device configuration and hot-plug capability. The hot-plug or hot-swap function means that you don't have to power down the computer and go through a restart when you want to connect a new device. Instead you simply connect or disconnect the USB cable. The computer will recognize the device and connect to the proper driver. That is assuming this isn't the first time you have used the device and that the driver has already been installed. You commonly have to install drivers for external hard drives, printers, scanners, card readers, etc. You generally don't have to install drivers for mice and keyboards that connect to the USB ports.

Next, consider that USB operates at three possible speeds: low speed or 1.4 megabits/second, full speed or 12 megabits/second, and high speed or 480 megabits/second (mbps). Low speed and high speed can be used with either USB 1.x or USB 2.0 hosts. The high speed can be used only with USB 2.0. The host is the computer that

provides the USB connections. For USB 2.0 operation the host computers "root port hubs" must support USB 2.0. That means the computer must have USB 2.0 drivers that are supported by the operating system. Windows XP (service pack 1.0) and Windows 2000 both support USB 2.0. The root port hubs are the USB connectors on your computer and are usually connected to the motherboard. You can also identify them in the Device Manager where they will show under the USB Host Controller.

Although the USB specifications indicate you can daisy-chain up to 127 devices from one port, this is not likely to happen because of the power drop that occurs over long connections. You can get external hubs that allow you to connect 4 – 7 devices to a single root port hub. The external hubs are repeaters that relay transaction information from the computer to a device connected to the hub's port. There is a catch to this as well. Some USB 2.0 hubs will decrease their maximum output if you have a USB 1.x device attached to a port. This means that any USB 2.0 device attached to the hub may not function or will function at a lower speed. I learned this the hard way with an external USB 2.0 hard drive. I thought the problem was the drive, but it was the hub. I had a USB 1.0 card reader attached to the hub and as a result the current output to each port was reduced to the point that it was not sufficient to run the drive. This occurred even though the hub and the drive had external power supplies.

An ample power supply is necessary to operate USB devices. Root hub ports can provide 5 volts and up to 500 milli-Amps (mA) of current. The USB power specifications state the USB ports should provide between 100 mA and 500 mA. Devices connected directly to the computer are able to obtain the maximum current. So let's take a situation where we have a hub connected to the computer's root port hub. The hub is receiving 500 mA of current at about 5 volts. If only the current received through the connecting cable powers the hub, the output from each of its four hubs

will be only 100 mA. This is referred to as a "bus-powered" hub because it receives its current solely from the USB bus in the host computer. However, if the hub has its own power supply and is receiving at least 1.6 Amps from this supply, then it can provide a 500 mA output at each port. In this case, the hub should be able to support high-speed USB 2.0 devices.

On some computers you will find an icon in the system tray that is a "hardware disconnect". In this instance, you need to double click the icon and wait for it to permit you to disconnect the hardware device. This icon does not appear with all USB devices. Since installing SP2, I haven't seen this icon in my system tray. There are some reports of computers with SATA drives showing this icon. Since the SATA drive is supposed to be hot-swappable like USB devices, I'm not surprised that the icon shows up. However, with my Seagate SATA drive, I still don't see this icon. That may be because my motherboard doesn't support the hot-swap function even though it supports SATA drives.

When you plug in a USB device to either a hub or a computer port, there is an initial identification process referred to as the "configuration" step that occurs. During this configuration process the device can not draw more than 100 mA. If it does, the process will fail and it will appear that the device failed to work. The configuration process identifies the device, its drivers, and its power requirements. Only after this process is complete will the device be able to draw more than 100 mA current. Since this process is not instantaneous, some time must be allowed by the user before attempting to use the device. In addition, this configuration may not occur if the device is plugged into the computer before the computer is turned on and booted. In these cases, it may be better to connect the USB device after the computer is fully operational. Most of the time, the computer will identify and configure the device during the bootup.

Microsoft has a knowledge base article on trouble-shooting USB problems (#310575).

Typically the problems relate to drivers or power problems. However, they also point out that high-speed devices should be connected with high-speed cables only. The low speed cables may distort the signal as a result of their reduced amount of shielding. Another really complete source of trouble-shooting information can be found at:

<http://www.usbman.com/winxpusbguide.htm>. This has references for Windows ME as well as XP and Windows 2000. However, anyone who hasn't dumped Windows ME should seriously consider doing so as soon as possible. WinXP is such a tremendous improvement over ME and will really make your computing experience much more enjoyable. My computer hasn't locked up or crashed in more than six months, probably longer. I really don't keep track anymore.

So what devices are typically high speed and require USB 2.0? Let's start with external USB hard drives. Seagate has a very interesting technical paper on external hard drives. In this paper they state that most 2 1/2" external drives require 1000 – 1100 mA during the start-up cycle and then can function at the 500 mA maximum current available from the USB port. They also state that most USB ports can support up to 700 mA on a continuous basis. This is something I have not found elsewhere. Consequently, my recommendation is that when looking for an external drive, pick one with its own power supply. I wouldn't want to depend on one that drew all its power from the USB bus.

Other high-speed devices include laser printers, scanners, and multi-function printers. All of these should have their own power supply. Other devices that operate at full-speed and don't need external power are blue-tooth adapters and card readers. This is only a partial list of what is available in USB devices. Just remember when you are looking at them that the term full-speed does not 480 mbps, instead it is the slower 12 mbps.

Dr. Lewis is a former university & medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers

for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail: [bwsail at yahoo.com](mailto:bwsail@yahoo.com).

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December Meeting Wrap-up

As usual, we had a great presentation by Hank. He showed us how easy it is to fly from Van Nuys over the SCV using Microsoft's Flight Simulator. He thinks that the program won't be updated until 64-bit is the standard. He also showed us some combat games – some that are very realistic.

Gene Barlow was our featured vendor for the evening. As always, we went home knowing more about our computers than when the meeting started. Gene demonstrated Acronis Disk Director Suite 10 – a great tool to help organize your HD. You can add partitions and resize partitions without losing your files on the drive.



You can also setup and run multiple operating systems on your HD. We also got to see Acronis True Image 9.0, a backup tool that lets you backup your entire HD and everything on it, as well as incremental backup images. My favorite was WhiteCanyon MySecurityVault Pro, an encrypted database utility that will let me safely save the ID and Password sets that I need to access accounts via the Internet. Now I can stop getting a new password every time I access one of my accounts! Another product in his stable is Acronis Privacy Expert Suite 9.0. This is a whole suite of security products including a spyware detection program, a Pop-up blocker, plus more. I'm also going to give this one a try. In fact, I bought copy for my son and son-in-law. As usual, the Barlows offered deep user group discounts to attendees. Visit their User Group Store at www.ugr.com and check out all of the products they represent.



Tips & Tricks

Back to the Original - Dave Gerber, Sarasota PCUG

We've all done it. At some time or another we've all inserted a picture into a document, worksheet or presentation and started altering its appearance. Let's make it larger... no smaller... no wait, we'll stretch it only vertically. And let's lighten the colors and crop it a bit over here. Next thing you know you've got a mess and you're looking at the undo button thinking "How far back do I have to go to fix this one?". Or maybe you figured that it would be faster to delete the destroyed picture and re-insert the original.

Both of these ideas work but there's a quick and easy one button solution to your problem. Interested in the "how to"?

Yeah, I thought you might be.

When you have a picture selected the Picture toolbar should open. If it doesn't don't panic!

Try a right click on the picture and choose Show Picture Toolbar from the menu or use the View menu, Toolbars submenu, Picture choice.

At any rate, once the toolbar is open you're only one button away from a reset of the picture to its original state.

The button you're looking for is on the far right end—the Reset Picture button. Click it and Poof! Your picture is restored no undo or re-insertion required.

As you're browsing Web pages with Internet Explorer, you may come upon some sites that offer graphic images for downloading, for example ... Dave "Bytes". You can save Web graphics on your computer hard drive in one of the following three ways:

As a graphic file for viewing and printing in the My Pictures folder.
To do this, right-click the graphic and then click Save Picture As on the image shortcut menu.

As the wallpaper for your desktop.
To do this, right-click the graphic and then click Set as Background on the image shortcut menu.

As a Desktop item that appears on your computer desktop.
To do this, right-click the graphic and then choose Set as Desktop Item on the image shortcut menu.

Note that if you save a Web graphic as the wallpaper for your desktop, you have a choice between tiling the image (that is, duplicating it across the entire desktop), centering it in the middle of the desktop, or stretching it so that it fills the entire desktop (which most often results in a severely distorted image). Also note that some Web graphics (photographs and works of original art, usually) are copyrighted, and Web designers do have a way to disable your right click function while you're surfing their Web sites.

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Level of computer skills (please circle)

Novice Average Expert

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Don't forget to bring your empty toner or inkjet cartridges to the meeting. We'll turn them in to Precision Computers and they will donate \$0.25/each (inkjet) or \$1.00 (toner) to a local school.

If your work doesn't recycle cartridges, ask if you can also donate them.

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