NEWSbits

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March: Building Your Computer

The topic was "Building Your Own Personal Computer with Jerry Montalbano. Using a "Presentation in a Box" by Intel, it appeared Jerry had a mission as well as "his work cut out for him": Show a presentation about the hardware aspect of computing.

Choosing such a complicated topic was a difficult decision and quite a challenge. There has to be a delicate balance of discussion if a presentation about building a computer is to be successful and comprehensible. Considering the complexity and nature of computer components, the task at hand was several fold: First, Jerry had to show slides of devices that are rarely known to novices.

For example--a chipset (the system's database of info), SATA (serial ATA hard drive), integrated sound or graphics, and Dual in-line DDR2 (Direct Data: today's state-of-the-art high quality and performance RAM modules. Test results found that upgrading the RAM from 128MB to just 512MB can increase performance up to 35 percent!). Why, many more advanced users can hardly keep up with these technologies which change on a daily basis.

Secondly, as the challenge began, Jerry took individual items which are found in today's modern system and broke each down in to a more-understandable concept. For example, suppose one needed to know which sort of system was needed to quench the gaming taste for a member's son. More modern systems are indeed needed in this case. Jerry expressed that having a computer's processor might be 3.0 MHz (the speed of a computer is measured in "megahertz"—compare this to a vehicle traveling at 30 miles per hour, the more miles one can achieve in an hour, the faster the vehicle must travel). ***(Building, continues on page 5)***

Summer Sizzle Raffle
Office Depot $250.00

Perhaps you need a new printer, scanner, camera or office equipment? Tickets: 7 for $10.00!

Upcoming Presentation *May 7*

PC Myths, Legends&Misconceptions

WITH **Jerry Seregni**

All wireless networks are insecure, right? The guy who invented eBay built it for his girlfriend, right? Apple Computer was founded by two 20-year-olds, right? Jerry Seregni of WWL-TV's Eyewitness Morning News ('Digital Gumbo') will dispel the myths and separate fact from fiction about computer security, broadband access, and dozens of other carved-in-stone rules that simply aren't true. *Don't miss it!*

Configuring a Basic User's PC

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor & Columnist, AARP Computers and Technology Website

Don't be alarmed by the high-falutin word "configuring". It just means deciding what components — otherwise called "parts" — will perform various PC functions. It's like old-days car buying: reviewing a dealer checklist to pick dozens of individual features, from radio to power steering to disc brakes and more.

The good news is that almost any current PC with a printer and Internet connectivity will handle mainstream requirements. That means that a generic Windows PC is usually adequate — but you should upgrade if you'll do anything challenging or exotic.

Just as when buying a car, the first step in buying a computer is deciding what you'll do with it: e-mail, Web searching/viewing, word processing? Financial work with Quicken? Digital photography? Simple games? Ultra-demanding tasks like high-end games and digital video editing?

Just as when making any major purchase, a small investment in learning pays off for years. Before buying a PC, learn the basics: — take a class, buy a book, attend local computer user group meetings, consult Web sites, read technology magazines at the library.

As you look at applications' system requirements (processor speed, RAM size, hard drive storage capacity, video card speed and memory, etc.) note differences between minimum and recommended specifications. Vendors are often too optimistic — and that's being charitable — about what's needed for their software to run productively. It's much safer, and not much more expensive, to buy at least the recommended choices. In fact, I usually buy a little more power than I need. This bumps cost just a little and it avoids future problems and upgrades. Purchasing this way greatly extends a PC's life and makes it more compatible with future innovations, at least for a while.

Remember that as PCs evolve, a range of choices is always available, from bleeding-edge new to borderline obsolete. An equally valid – and more economical — approach to configuring is finding the current technology "sweet spot" the point where cost, performance, compatibility, and useful life are in balance.

A key decision is whether to buy a brand-name system or an unknown-brand machine, have a PC built to order, or build it yourself. Choices for laptop computers are much more limited: brand-name systems dominate, trailed by a few off-brand manufacturers. There are no build-it-yourself options, though manufactured systems can be customized extensively.

Each purchasing choice has advantages and advocates. Brand-name systems can be evaluated and compared by consulting references such as Consumer Reports magazine, are available everywhere via catalog or online shopping, and may have better standard or optional warranties (often worthwhile for quick service and peace of mind). But brand-name systems sometimes suffer from using commodity parts vs. best-quality components.

Unknown-brand machines can be reliable money savers or risky acquisitions. I'd only buy such a system from a trusted store with a flexible return policy. I favor having PCs built to order by small local shops with established reputations, offering maximum flexibility and consultation during design.

(Configuring, continues of page 9)

Back to BASICS

"Have you tried "Back to Basics?" "Back to Basics" is a very popular member benefit.

Long time board member & Member Representative Margaret Wynn as well as other members have devoted themselves to helping members & new guests with their questions and problems in a semiprivate environment that is a quickly growing segment of our membership! *Meets from 9:30-10:20 A.M. monthly before the general meeting.*

Try it once, you'll instantly want to join the group at a low price membership of only $25.00 per year...(Where else can you get so much information at about 2 bucks a month?) We're the "best kept secret in the whole Metro area" according to ***WWLTV's Jerry Serigni of Digital Gumbo!*** Don't wait—join today and enjoy *all the member benefits!*

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Hi, CCUG-PC Members!

"These Times—they are a changin'"

I can't begin to tell you how many times I've discussed the following topic with the board of directors and group members: "Our group does not have the same makeup that user groups once encompassed. Indeed, "Times-are-a-changin'!"

I wasn't in a user group as some of the old-timers were in the early '80's. This decade to most of you is not necessarily foreign, as most of you lived way beyond this era. But, to me and I'm sure so many of you was a user group. I can't say that a user group (beyond NOPC) existed in our community until CCUG-PC came along at the beginning of the nineties decade.

Back in the early eighties, however, a computer users' group seemed to be comprised of "nerds &techies." The minds buzzed with anxious techni-brains wanting to check each others systems who had less than 4 MHZ processors, or commodores, Atari's and Radio Shack toys. The software of choice included spreadsheets, databases, wordprocessors in DOS, few text-based games or those who wrote them as nerdy programmers–minds-a-bustin' with creativity and more "gravity" than I've seen in quite a while.

Even up to the early ninties, most of the software used in these groups were of the same makeup: databases, word-processors and spreadsheets. Courses at the community college were centered around these applications, and everyone discussed these much in the way we discuss the Internet's e-mail or chat rooms. Nevertheless, it's what we talked about and brought in presenters like Borland, Microsoft, Lotus, IBM and Symantec–companies that who may never again grace the CCUG-PC doorstep, because they too have changed their marketing plans to include these as presentation software.

Then, multi-media and the Internet broke the interest of computer users as folks "multi-tasked", surfed or spindled their computer interests toward clipart, graphics programs and photo-imaging. *Times-they-are-a-changin'*.

At this month's presentation with Sue Wessing, we're showing a "creative" type of software and things we can have fun. In fact, the store walls and Net are chock full of so many software that have expanded walls and inventory so much that making decisions about which program we should use or like to try is as tough as which meals to prepare, car to buy, or girl/guy to marry! Decisions, decisons. Not like yesteryear which seemed as if only 3 or 4 programs were available on the shelves– that made our minds up quickly. Indeed if we match up what was then with now–"Times-they-seem-to-have changed so much..."

Jerry Montalbano

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NOTICE!!

Upcoming Dates in 2005

April 9	August 6
May 7	September 10
June 4	October 1
July 9	November 5
	December 3

1996 Lotus Intergalactic Newsletter

CCUG-PC

ARTICLE CONTRIBUTIONS

NEWSBITS Newsletter is published monthly by CCUG-PC. Articles for publication *must* be submitted, typewritten and on disk to our newsletter staff by the **15th** of the month for publication. We welcome all articles of computing interest and we reserve the right to edit when appropriate. **SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH US**. If you have a tip or technique with a software program (or hardware), please enlighten us. All computer related articles are welcomed. Please submit your contributions to us in a file of any disk format or upload to **jerryccug@cox.net** for our N**ewsbits Newsletter** Staff. CCUG-PC would love to hear from you! Submissions from our members, or reprints from other publications are welcomed, but do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Board of Directors nor the membership. Reprints are granted when credit is given to the author. Submissions of any content, articles or materials become property of CCUG-PC for sole use and publication.

FROM THE DEALS GUY

by Bob Click, **Greater Orlando Computer User Group**

My wife and I worked some great trade shows lately and they just keep coming. We worked real estate shows that didn't have spectacular exhibits, but they did have great speakers. Since we worked security for the production crew putting together great entertainment for attendees, we met all the celebrities when they came in back stage. My wife got a nice greeting from Dr. Phil McGraw and we met Tony Robins (famous motivational speaker), Brooks Robinson (Ball player), James Brolin (Marcus Welby, MD. and Hotel) and Katie Curic. The most interesting thing in the exhibit hall was, two guys sculpting a giant sandcastle, which was impressive. They worked the entire show doing it.

Among others, we worked the PMA (Photo Marketing Assn. show). [http://www.pmai.org] It was a great show with over 29,000 attendees. All the great names in photography, hardware, cameras and software were there with fantastic booths. Plenty of very large printers were being demonstrated also. Unfortunately I had personal business and ended up with little time to browse that show. The Panasonic booth had a wonderful scale model village as a simulated winter snow scene. It had all the usual old time village buildings and vehicles, some small rotating carnival rides, moving ice skaters on a simulated ice rink, moving snow skiers, a working train and other working models. It was very impressive in about a 12-foot square area. Lights came on in buildings and streetlights when nighttime was simulated. The person setting it up told us he could put one in our living room if we liked, but we told him we didn't have room. (money either)

One day I was entering the show floor and Jerry Stephens from Toronto Users Group yelled at me. You probably remember him from the days when he was active in APCUG. We had little time to talk, but it was sure nice to see him.

The Nikon booth had eight young people dressed in bright yellow jump suits and riding yellow electric scooters all around outside the building greeting people. They were giving out yellow candies on a card inviting folks to visit the Nikon booth and get in on the daily drawings for fabulous prizes. Another booth was giving away USB flash drives, which is getting more common all the time.

Best of all, we worked the Home Electronics Expo [http://www.ehxweb.com], one of my favorites. Talk about a candy store venue; that was it for me. I saw many cabling, switching and speaker booths along with companies for planning your digitally controlled house. There were speakers in all kinds of configurations that could blend into the décor of your house or garden and patio; for example, some looked like a rock [http://www.stereostone.com].

In one booth they had a luxury easy chair with a controller that was precoded for over 680 movies (1-888-442-3269). Just pop in your favorite movie on a DVD and the console recognizes the movie and creates the sensations quite realistically for what you are seeing on screen while in that easy chair. It even simulates a bumpy road and only six grand for it all. I often sleep through a movie so that wouldn't work well for me. My proofreader wondered how the chair handled the bullets in a shooting scene, or a steamy sex scene.

I saw door locks controlled by a sensor that could recognize your thumbprint to open the lock, then the same sensor could recognize another fingerprint to open or close your garage door [http://www.ekeyUSA.com]. I may have a deal on them. Another corp's technology tracks all use of locks in your company &who uses them, & puts the data on a website that could be easily tracked from anywhere by the proper person.

I loved the Panasonic doorbell that had a camera in the button panel. When a presence is sensed, it turns itself on along with a light, if needed, and you could see who was there on a small LCD monitor inside. The entire person was visible, even at close range. That will be out in July and I want one [http://www.panasonic.com/CSD]. I didn't see them on the Web site, but maybe soon.

There was a booth with weather stations that were elaborate and looked very sturdy. It looked to be more of a commercial unit and they used a computer monitor for the stats [http://www.weatherhawk.com]. They had an attachment that would verbally tell you what you wanted to know, including "please shut your windows as rain is imminent." I saw dozens of big screen plasma and LCD monitors, and TVs. The one that impressed me most was the NEC 61" plasma screen. It was so sharp and crystal clear that it almost looked three-dimensional.

There was just too much to write about in this article, but you can take a look at the show's Web site to see the exhibitor list. It was not a large show, but certainly a good one with about 9,000 attendees. I had notified several editors who asked me to e-mail them it was coming again after I wrote about it last year, but didn't run into them. The NCSA (National Systems Contractors Assn.) show [http://www.nsca.org]. will be here March 10 and I hope to at least explore it. I'm told it's a similar type of show, except mostly for contractors and installers.

Another Deal From Gene and Linda Barlow:

User Group Relations has another interesting and helpful product for you. These days our computer life is chuck full of ID and passwords and we are urged to change them

(Bob Click continues on next page 5)

(Deals, continued on page 4)

frequently. So how do you remember them all? You could write them all down and hide the list under your mouse pad <G>, or you could get smart and use MyPasswordVault by WhiteCanyon Software to store all those IDs and passwords and keep them at your disposal. Linda sent me the product just before deadline so I haven't tried it yet, but I will soon because it has some great features. Make life easier with this unique product and use the discount offered to users group members to buy it for just $15.00 (MSRP $25.00). Go to [http://www.usergroupstore.com] and use the special code UGDEALS to order.

Attention Gamers!

NevoSoft announces a new space shooter/puzzler game below: (edited so check their Web site)

"SAINT PETERSBURG, Russia. - January 27, 2005: NevoSoft is proud to announce the release of Zzed, the latest version of an electrifying space shooter mixed with lots of action, adventure and puzzle. Zzed will put the player into the spaceship and take on a tough galactic mission with over 60 levels to win. With superb cartoon graphics, exhilarating gameplay and original music, Zzed will be the ultimate source of enjoyment for kids and parents alike.

"The game comes to life as Zzed, a young and ambitious alien, has been sent on a special mission by his corrupted boss, Mr. Zzapone. There, in the backwoods of the galaxy Zzed will have to protect the space foundries of his boss from vast space garbage fields. However, the real reason of the mission is Zzapone's fear that Zzed will throw him down the corporate throne. Zzed leaves home with a heavy heart as the assignment separates him from his beloved alien sweetheart. To win the ticket back home, Zzed has to remove all space garbage from around the galaxy."

"Zzed is not all about shooting. The game will also challenge your reaction and thinking, said Alexey Serebrov, CEO of NevoSoft. "As you go from level to level, the speed of garbage fields increases. Therefore, you will have to act fast and smart.

"Availability: Zzed runs under Windows 98/Me/2000/XP and costs $19.95 (USD). Registered customers are entitled to the unlocked gameplay, free updates and lifetime technical support. An evaluation version of the game limited to the 40-minute gameplay is available for free at: [http://www.nevosoft.com/zzed/zzed_demo.exe]. For more information, visit us at [http://www.nevosoft.com]. Use a 10% discount for purchasing the game for user group members. Just use coupon - ZZED-3B51 - during ordering process and you get the game only for $17.95 (instead of $19.95). Or you may simply order discounted Zzed by clicking on this link: [https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?&ss_coupon=ZZED-3B51&item=8323-15] We didn't see the discount coupon working yet, so you may have to e-mail them as I had no time to contact them at this point. Sorry!

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 or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthusiastic I might sound.

Bob (The Cheapskate) ***Click!!!***

Spring Fling Raffle Winner Announced

Winner, Brenda Rhodes and Jerry Montalbano

The winner of the Spring Fling Fund Raising Raffle for 2005 has been announced–and is Brenda Rhodes. The drawing was held at the General Meeting on March 5. Brenda was elated to learn her ticket had been drawn. The raffle prize was the BenQ 17" LCD Panel Model FP731. Congratulations to Brenda for winning a prize that we all know would make her computer desktop smile as she makes use of it! Incidently, the group raised about $125 from the raffle. Thanks to all for their kind donations in making the event successful and fun.

Volunteer!

CCUG-PC

EVENTS CALENDAR

April, 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Mar 27 On Computers WODT AM 1280 12:05PM-3:00PM Web/CNet	*Mar 28* TechTV Daily-Mon-Fri The Screen Savers 6 PM Cox Ch.344	*Mar 29*	*Mar 30* *Can you write an article about a product you've tried?*	*Mar 31* *We can use your help! Just submit it to us. We'll do the rest!!*	*Apr 1* April Fool's Day	*Apr 2* No meeting because of Crawfish Festival
Apr 3 	*Apr 4* TechTV Daily-Mon-Fri The Screen Savers 6 PM Cox Ch.344	*Apr 5*	*Apr 6* 	*Apr 7* Gather up your unneeded donated items for our monthly auction!	*Apr 8* ⇨ **NOTE:**	*Apr 9* ***Pixifun Creative Software with Sue Wessing***
Apr 10 On Computers WODT AM 1280 12:05PM-3:00PM Web/CNet	*Apr 11* TechTV Daily-Mon-Fri The Screen Savers 6 PM Cox Ch.344	*Apr 12*	*Apr 13*	*Apr 14*	*Apr 15* Newsbits Deadline	*Apr 16* Living with Electronics: Jerry McCann WTIX 10:00 a.m.
Apr 17 On Computers WODT AM 1280 12:05PM-3:00PM Web/CNet	*Apr 18* TechTV Daily-Mon-Fri The Screen Savers 6 PM Cox Ch.344	*Apr 19*	*Apr 20*	*Apr 21*	*Apr 22*	*Apr 23* Passover Living with Electronics: Jerry McCann WTIX 10:00 a.m.
Apr 24 On Computers WODT AM 1280 12:05PM-3:00PM Web/CNet	*Apr 25*	*Apr 26* **BOD Meeting** 	*Apr 27*	*Apr 28*	*Apr 29*	*Apr 30* Living with Electronics: Jerry McCann WTIX 10:00 a.m.
May 1 On Computers WODT AM 1280 12:05PM-3:00PM Web/CNet	*May 2* 	*May 3* Gather up your unneeded donated items for our monthly auction!	*May 4*	*May 5* Cinco de Mayo	*May 6* ⇨ **NOTE:**	*May 7*

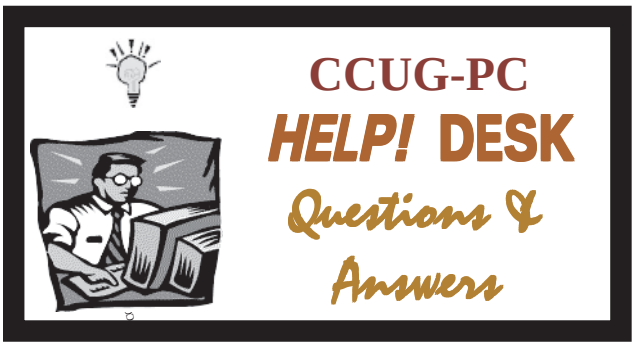
CCUG-PC Meets: 10AM Myths & Legends with Jerry Seregni

CCUG-PC General Meeting

8201 W. Judge Perez (Gov't Complex Bldg.), Chalmette, LA.

Board of Directors Meeting

Nunez Community College Library Conference Room 1-102



with Jerry Montalbano

Q ***I know I can't put MS XP on more than one computer. Do you know if I can put MS Office XP Professional on more than one?***

A The same licensing applies for MS XP as it does for OFFICE XP. Although it will install on it, it needs to be activated within 30 days, of your system boot is in trouble. I believe an exception would be a laptop that is an "extension" of the office where you do work when you go home. That's because you won't be at your computer to run the office PC and the home laptop, (unless you have someone using your computer at work, or perhaps are using your home to log in to exchange files, etc. Not to sure in this case).

In any circumstance however, you have to activate it by going online to the MS activation site, or calling their toll-free number and get activation numbers to put into the computer which "activates" WINXP or MS-OFFICE XP. If you try, you'll get rejected as it keeps track of specific hardware that makes up your computer, and it'll know a New or changed computer has taken place. There are times I add so much to a computer (3-4 hardware parts), that my computer needs "re-activation".

When XP came around (counter-measure for piracy), the world changed in adding one system to multiple computers. Even Symantec and others are getting into the "activation" spirit by implementing it into their software. The the home user, it's abominable to have to buy 3 packages of Office at $300-500 a pop for the family computers.

Q I have quite a few old “restores” in XP that might need deleting/addressing. I just know it’s taking up disk space. What’s the procedure?

A Yes, you can free disk space by deleting restore points. Go to the Start button-Choose: All Programs | Accessories | System Tools | Cleanup | More Options. You will have the option of deleting your restore points.When you are done create at least one restore point as a back up. I create two or three in the event that one is corrupted and fails if I try to restore and it’s damaged to get me back in event software or hardware causes problems.

5 Gifts for Grads

by Kim Komando

Graduation time is here. Here are five hi-tech gift ideas that any grad will love.

1. A digital camera

There are scads of digital units around. A three-megapixel camera is more than enough for most non-professionals. This camera will produce quality prints up to 8 by 10 inches. Look for one that has an optical zoom 3X or higher and takes short videos with audio. Cameras in this class include the FujiFilm FinePix 3800 ($332) and the Olympus Camedia C-740 Ultra Zoom ($500).

For less money, a two-megapixel camera is still a fine choice. It will produce prints up to 5 by 7 inches. Here, the Canon Powershot A40 ($299) and the Nikon Coolpix 2500 ($300) should please your graduate.

If your grad already has a digital camera, don't fret. There are numerous add-ons any photographer would appreciate. Since most digital cameras come with a low-capacity memory card, a higher-capacity memory card makes a great gift. Just make sure you get the right type to fit his or her camera. Add a carrying case and some rechargeable batteries and the package is complete.

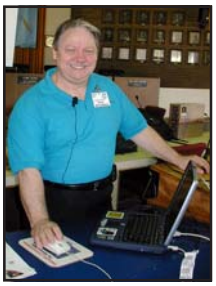
2. A decent computer

This is a great time to buy a good computer. Prices are low and computers are powerful. Expect to pay less than $1,000 for a desktop, a little more for a laptop.

In a desktop, you'll need a 2.4GHz Intel chip or 2400+ AMD chip, 256 megabytes of RAM, a CD-RW drive, and a 60-gigabyte hard drive. If your grad already has a monitor, there's no need to buy another.

In a laptop, you need a 2.0GHz Intel chip or a comparable AMD chip; 256MB of RAM, a CD-RW drive and a 30GB hard drive. Either Home or Professional edition of Windows XP should be fine.

(Komando, continues on page 9)



(Building, continued from page 1)

He told the audience that Intel (the maker of the today's modern Pentium 4 processor), has a worthy competitor named AMD (American Micro Devices) and its speed has met or surpassed that of Intel in its history. "Gamers love AMD", he said--because the chip is "over-clocked" (or pushed to the limits beyond what the industry has tested it in tolerable limits).

However, he said that doing so can place the chip (his point that a processor is the primary choice of how the system will be built or bought) or motherboard at risk of damage by engaging in the practice. Knowing what speed you can afford (Jerry described this as the "sweet-spot" to determining the best "bang per buck") can be a starting point, whether buying or building. Then, one can buy an appropriate motherboard, RAM, etc. based on this decision.

Each PowerPoint slide shown had a component exhibited to move along with Jerry's dialog. Just about everything that a system is comprised was displayed in the presentation: From A-Z, it was a regular checklist for all within a system and accessories that are needed as well. Even a case for all components to reside was included in Jerry's demonstration (Jerry likes a couple cases, one is proprietary such as the Alienware case and te Antec case of solid construction).

If there was anything not mentioned, it would have been incomplete; and this was not the case in this comprehensive program. The demonstration explained places that one could get better deals (a trade-off exists between getting appreciable pricing through mail-order sites like Tiger Direct or NewEgg online or locally where a good warranty and a place to return problem computers). Should one attempt the building him/herself? Jerry says that's the point to satisfaction, sometimes getting a good computer at good pricing can be achieved if some skills and determination are used. Having someone build one is the second option and of course, we know that quality mail-order companies like Gateway, Dell, HP/Compaq are out there as our third choice.

The meeting lasted 45 minutes and was jam-packed with gourds of great info when making a decision to purchase or build (whether it be personally or by one's guru, knowing what's involved in the building process can lead one to a wise and cost-saving decision).

Finally, Intel donated beautiful key rings, complete with blue-light to be distributed to CCUG-PC members. An Intel knapsack was donated and the lucky winner? --Jerry. Thanks to Jerry for all the hard-work and giving CCUG-PC members a "breakdown" on tough components usually seen and understood by the more knowledgeable. What a show!!!

(Komando, continued from page 4)

In the Macintosh, microprocessor speeds are lower, but the computers are about as fast. The other specifications are good for the Mac, too. Prices are higher.

3. A portable music player

Your grad is downloading tunes, so he'll need a portable MP3 player. Look for one that is at least 20 gigabytes. It will store about 5,200 MP3 tunes. Apple's acclaimed iPod ($475), which works with both Mac and Windows, holds 20GB. Creative Technology's Nomad Jukebox III ($300) is also a 20 GB player.

Size is important. You'll want one that can easily fit in a pocket or backpack pouch. The iPod is smaller and lighter than the Nomad. Plus, the iPod offers 20 minutes of anti-shock memory. The Nomad has only 5 minutes. There's another benefit to owning an MP3 player. If your grad is a traveling man, he can use his MP3 player for backups, too.

4. A personal digital assistant

A PDA will help keep your grad organized. These powerful little computers are easily distinguished by their operating systems and prices.

Palm is the most widely used operating system. This means your graduate will have greater software choices. But it suffers from a non-intuitive handwriting-recognition program. The alternative, Pocket PC 2002, is easy to use because it follows Windows closely. There are fewer choices in software, but that's not a big handicap. Its handwriting-recognition program is much easier to use.

Under-$300 machines will give the graduate adequate RAM to store phone numbers and some programs. The over-$300 group generally offers wireless access to the Internet right out of the box.

5. A way to call home

It's confusing to find the right calling plan. Telebright, http://www.telebright.com, makes the chore easy. Enter your ZIP code to get providers in your area. Afterwards, check up to three boxes to get a side-by-side comparison.

A calling plan isn't much good without a cell phone. Phones have to be matched up to the calling plan. And many calling plans offer free or low-price phones as part of the deal.

But your graduate may expect more of you. You can get a nice phone with an Internet browser for about $100. Want a camera in the phone? Figure $350 or more. Buy it with a plan, though, and you may save $200.

Kim is a radio host, with daily and weekend shows. She also writes a weekly column that runs in more than 100 newspapers nationwide.Copyright C 2003, WestStar TalkRadio Network. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

(Configuring, from page 2)

And I've enjoyed watching my PCs take shape as they're assembled from a tableful of parts!

Some people build their own PCs, often with training and mentoring from computer user group volunteers. This demystifies system innards, greatly facilitating diagnosing and repairing problems and upgrading components. Build-to-order and build-yourself allow specifying brand-name parts for improved performance and reliability.

No matter where you purchase, look carefully at monitor choices. Traditional CRT monitors prices have declined, allowing buying larger devices with better resolution. And newer/thinner/lighter LCD panels offer a powerful — though sometimes less flexible — alternative. Visit stores to compare brands and models and explore settings to match your preferences.

Decide how you'll back up your software and data. Choices include a second — perhaps external or removeable — hard drive, writable optical media such as DVD, and tape. The first two are most often used, with each having unique advantages. Follow your backup plan regularly; nothing ruins a day like losing months or years of can't-be-replaced data, not to mention having to reconstruct all your software.

Small choices can make large differences in productivity and comfort. For example, mouse technology has advanced far beyond the traditional two-button wired device. Mouse alternatives include trackball and wireless devices, gadgets with many extra programmable buttons, wheel mouses allowing horizontal/vertical scrolling, etc. Considering how much time you'll use your pointing device, it's worth spending a little extra money to have the device that suits you best!

Windows offers many choices for easing use — enlarging type, making keyboarding easier, providing special audible and visual cues, etc. Accessibility options are found in different places — usually via Control Panel or the Start menu. It's worth exploring these to tailor your PC to your individual preferences. Similarly, small add-on programs can greatly improve a PC's comfort factor. Remember that Windows is highly configurable: you can change how it looks and operates. As you become familiar with your new PC, explore options/settings/preferences. Just as you wouldn't insist on driving a car with seats and mirrors exactly as they came from the dealer, don't be captive of Microsoft's initial settings!

Name-brand computers usually include software bundles. Vendors shout about how valuable they are and how much money you're saving on them — but that's only true if you'll use the software provided. As soon as you have your machine, examine pre-installed software and remove anything you know you won't use. Then defrag your disk and then install the programs you'll use. These simple steps will make your machine run better by decluttering it.

Finally, If you understand how to do this, use built-in tools such as MSCONFIG to chop out unneeded services started by default when your system boots.

Software bundles often include junior-grade versions or limited-time trial copies of critical tools such as anti-virus and anti-spyware software. For system reliability and security, upgrade these to full versions and subscribe to update services.

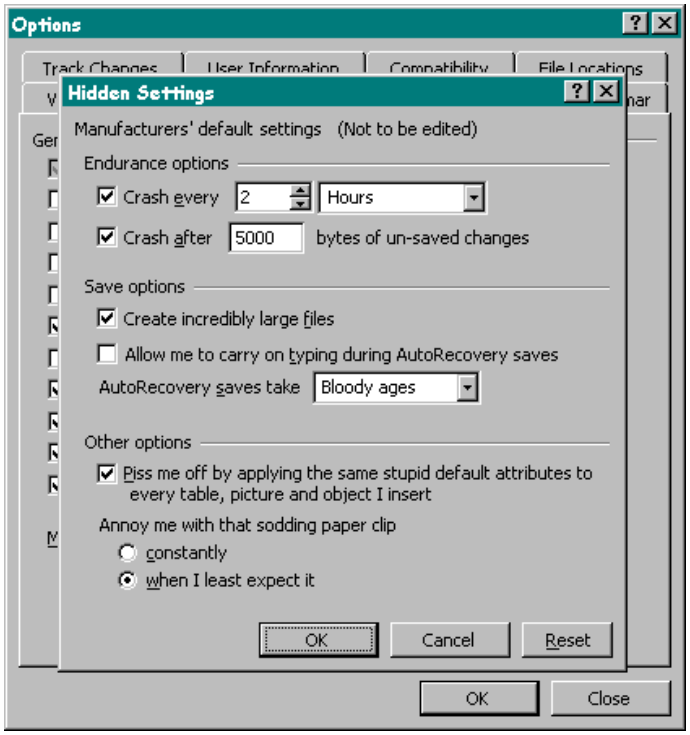
Not much else in modern life besides computers keeps getting faster/better/cheaper. And it's not hard to find or build a computer that meets needs for several years, runs reliably, and doesn't break the bank.

(This article appeared originally on AARP's Computers and Technology Web site, <www.aarp.org/computers>. (c) AARP 2004. Permission is granted for reprinting and distribution by non-profit organizations with text reproduced unchanged and this paragraph included.)

Didya Notice??!! At theMarch Meeting?

- A CD of WWL's Jerry Seregni failed to play properly as it previously failed in the Back to Basics as well. So much for CD movie conversions.
- After the Basics group lost its place to be held in February - was again available for members in March.
- At a recent meeting, Garland Hilton won the Raffle on his birthday. This time his guest won the Spring Fiesta LCD raffle - Notice: It was her birthday this time.

SETTINGS YOU FEAR!!!



Fantastic Computer Tips

More Useful Tips

CLEANUP STARTUP ITEMS IN MSCONFIG.

Do you ever uninstall programs and they are still listed under startup items in msconfig? Personally, I found myself with 30 such items from old installs. Microsoft leaves you no way to clean up this list, but have no fear, I have figured it out for you. (Note: Be sure to backup the Registry firstly!).

1. Open MSconfig and click on the startup items tab

2. Open Regedit and naviate to HKLM/Software/Microsoft/Sharedtools/MSconfig/startupreg

3. Compare the list of registry keys under startup reg with their counterparts in msconfig.

4. Delete the keys which are no longer valid.

5. Voila! You've cleaned up msconfig.

HOW TO GET "My Briefcase" IN WINDOWS XP

Go to C:\WINDOWS\system32\dllcache. look for a file named "syncapp". double click it. an icon should appear on your desktop that says "My Briefcase". double click it. it will come up with this window that tells you how to use it.

SHAREWARE PICK OF THE MONTH:

(Try before you buy--smart software of all sorts...)

Copernic Desktop Search - Copernic announces the official launch of its new and improved desktop search product, Copernic Desktop Search v1.5.

Desktop Search can ferret out bookmarks, documents, images, music, video and e-mails—including contacts and attachments. Once located, you can preview most files without opening them.

http://www.copernic.com/

Mac: The next time you have a project that involves surfing the net, try theConcept. Using your favorite search engine is easy. Finding the information you need is harder. Instead of spending your time clicking through page after page of search engine results, why not search smarter with theConcept?

theConcept queries your favorite search engine, visits each search result and analyzes the text from each linked page – leaving you with time for more important matters. When it's finished, theConcept presents you with the key words and phrases defining the very essence of your search.

www.mesadynamics.com/theconcept.htm

Many shareware are available at download.com, cnet.com and shareware.com.

Any of you who haven't joined the CCUG-PC Yahoo Online Group are doing yourself and your PC a disservice.

With all the things that are packed into a limited time frame for the monthly meetings we can't possibly answer all your questions fully or tell you: the latest news and virus alerts, software bugs and patches, scams, trojans, spywares, new technology, workarounds, new software, great sites for pc resources, hardware and software bargains, the many MS bulletins that come out each month and more.

There's no time limit on our CCUG-PC Yahoo Online Group We have over 400 members from all around the world who will take all the time needed to get your questions answered and your problems solved. You can post anything pc related and if it needs a reply check back at your convenience and see if anyone has one for you.

It also takes some of the stress off of Jerry and other techs as they can respond when time is available and not have to rush to something else to keep on schedule.

This is the best Free Support you'll find anywhere and you can do it from work or home! Try it, you'll like it.

Buster Matthews,
Yahoo Group CCUG-PC Online Moderator

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Jerry Montalbano, Editor at 279-2761

Rent Me Now & Support CCUG-PC!

The ever-popular Internet provides vast amounts of information to users. Newsbits will feature many popular Internet activities, sites and Internet addresses available and offer brief descriptions for your cyberspace pleasure. Here are this month's hottest Internet sites. Check them out!

April : Sites of the Month

freshdevices
FRESH AND FREE UTILITIES

Fresh UI is a fresh solution for configuring and optimizing Windows. Loaded with hundreds of useful hidden settings in Windows XP/2000/NT/ 98/95/Me, this software covers the customizing and optimizing techniques that you'll be glad to know.

www.freshdevices.com/

www.tvparty.com/vaultcomm.html

Classic car commercials! Pix and videos of yesteryear's great cars for the road. From a California Highway Patrol car (remember CHIPS?) to an Olds' 61, you 'll appreciate good taste in old cars!

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CCUG-PC's *annual membership dues* are **$25.00.** Please keep abreast of your membership dues date. You can determine your expiration date by doing the following:

1. *Check your Newsbits mailing address label.*
2. Inquire at the membership table.
3. Remember your dues date from the time you joined.

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