

Fight back: viruses, spyware and other cyber invaders

Veteran Modesto Bee technology reporter Patrick Giblin will offer his pithy personal view on how to get rid of the current crowd of computer invaders threatening to mess up the most well behaved computer system, when the Modesto PC User Group meets on Thursday, May 27.

Giblin, who has spent several years studying cyberspace, its possibilities and its dangers, has published a couple of Modesto Bee articles on the onslaught that this month blanked computers from here to Hong Kong

and beyond.

And, he has been more than happy to report that this area suffered less than others: "That's because more people are keeping their anti-virus software updated," he quoted the experts as saying.

The Random Access Q&A SIG will begin at 6:30 p.m. with the presentation to follow at 7:30 in St. Paul's Gym on St. Paul's way, off the intersection of Oakdale Road and Briggsmore Avenue.

For meeting location see inside back page
Next Meeting
Thursday,
MAY 27,
Random Access SIG
6:30 pm
Meeting at 7:30 pm

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Next board meeting

Come have dinner with the board at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 1, at Ridgeway's Restaurant, Modesto.

Be sure and check our web site at least once a week: www.mpcug.net

Modesto PC User Group Officers

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PC Post

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Bud Bondietti and Elizabeth Leedom, Presidents Emeritus

Join The Modesto PC User Group

Web site: www.mpcug.net

To join MPCUG (or just get more information about us go to our Web site and fill out the new member form or mail your check to: MPCUG, P.O. Box 5122, Modesto, CA 95352-5122. Membership is just \$24 a year and includes 12 issues of the PC Post along with participation in all meetings and events. You will also receive e-mail advising you of extra events or news.

The PC Post and Editorial Policy

The PC Post is published 12 times per year and is available to all group members as a membership benefit. Annual group membership dues are \$24.

For information write:

Modesto PCUG PO Box 5122, Modesto, CA 95352-5122

Opinions expressed in the PC Post do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the members as a group or the Board of Directors.

The PC Post encourages group members to submit articles for publication. We would like to have articles which deal with the writer's experience with computer hardware and software.

An article may deal with any computer-related subject provided it contains no libelous or offensive material. We can't use information copied from other publications without written permission except for quotes.

Articles should be submitted in MS Word text. Do not spend time formatting your article such as indents or centering. Please use only one space between sentences. and do not use bold, italicize or otherwise format the submission as we can't guarantee results in translation to Publisher. Proof read

and run your spelling checker. Watch for special upper and lower case in brand names. Do not tab or indent to layout text.

If you want to include a graphic, please contact the editor for instructions.

We reserve the right to edit articles, for length or to improve readability. Longer articles may be published in several parts. We will not knowingly promote unlicensed businesses.

Letters to the editor are encouraged. All articles and letters to the editor should be submitted to the editor via email as an attached file. Call him at (209) 667-1980 before submission. Please include your name, day and evening phone numbers, and email address for contact.

The MPCUG exchanges some articles with other user groups around the country via the Association of PC User Groups (APCUG). If for any reason you object to having your article distributed to APCUG member organizations for re-printing, please notify the editor at the time you submit the article. Your wish will in no way affect publication of your article in the Post.

Production notes: Prepared using **Microsoft Publisher 2003**, MS Office 2003, Minolta laser color printer and a lot of sweat and tears.

President's Corner

By Sid Losher

My Presidential term is starting to come to a close. Only two months to go. Members need to express their thoughts on who should run the club next year. Please contact a member of the nominating committee — Jim Goodman, Linda Kerwood or

Terry Fix — with your suggestions.

The Nominating Committee must make its report on nominees at the May general meeting. All positions are open except treasurer. Voting will take place at the June general meeting.

Nominating Committee

By Jim Goodman

2004 Nominations Report

Each year, the president appoints a nominating committee that attempts to find people to fill open positions. This year, there were four openings and the committee was able to fill three of the four positions.

Nominations will be open from the floor at the May and June meetings for all positions except treasurer. The vote will take place during the business portion of the June meeting. If you wish to run for

one of the offices, please contact Jim Goodman. See inside front page of this PC Post for his contact information.

The slate for the June Election 2004:

President: open
Program VP: Elizabeth Leedom
Secretary: Terry Fix
Director At Large: Hank Mudge

Jim Goodman, chairman nominating committee

Membership Chairman

By Hank Mudge

Welcome New Members for month of March:

Rick McCombs
Ed Sill
Virgil McVicker

Members Renewing in March:

E & Virg Watts
Donald Risen
Wendel Torrison
Tony Parisi
Hank Mudge

Welcome New Members for month of April:

David Futrell

Members renewing in April:

Bettie Nickerson

Members who's Dues expire in May:

Alfred Kaufman

Members who's dues expire in June:

JJ Schneider	B. Gene Gibson
Stan Loeb	Harold Bates
Frank Lowry	Allan Romander
F. Richard Lutz	Gene Richards
Dick Krupa	Ozier & Wilma Martin
Al Gordils	Klem Nielson

Within the next two months, the club will be facing another election of officers for the upcoming 2004/2005 year. A nomination committee report (see above) has been submitted for print and submission to the Board of Directors at the June board meeting. We currently have one position open (club president) with no one wishing to fill the chair. Although our by-laws are set up that the vice president shall assume the position of president should no one run for office, this puts the board at a disadvantage. Please consider running for office.

Worms, terrorists and Sasser

Genealogy.com problem continues

Stockham's presentation and digital photos

By Claude's Delphia, editor emeritus

Genealogy.com problem continues — Last month I wrote about Genealogy.com wanting to charge me a \$9.99 per month subscription for something I didn't sign up for. Despite my effort to cancel this subscription, guess what showed up on my credit card this month? You get only one guess. So I was thinking it's going to be round two in dealing with Genealogy.com. However I did receive an unsolicited call from Genealogy.com and the rep explained that there were a known limited number of customers who were having this problem. He confirmed that my subscription was canceled and that a refund was in process. I'm not going to hold my breath.

Worms, terrorists and Sasser — With what's going on in the world, is it any wonder that at some point terrorists, have or will attempt to use the Internet to attack us individually or as a nation? A May 6th PBS Frontline show spent a whole hour dealing with the subject of the potential of a "Cyber War." It was one of the scariest shows I've seen. It featured Richard Clark, former Whitehouse security director and other current government Cyber space experts and their opinions of what is possible or even likely. As I remember it, they pretty well feel that Al Qaeda has already attempted to use the Internet to damage business in the United States. They feel it is only a matter of time before terrorists make further attempts to damage infrastructure such as the national power grid. For more information, go to the following link.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cyberwar/>

Some of you should already be able to figure out what I'm going to say next. As of this writing, the new Sasser Worm has risen to a level 4 on Symantec's warning scale. You can read about it by going to their website at www.symantec.com.

You might think this is a stretch, but for those of you who don't have your computers properly protected with anti virus software, and firewalls for

those of you connected by cable or DSL, your computer could be playing host to a future terrorist Internet attack. How, you might wonder, could this happen? It's all too easy. Hackers of the terrorist variety simply need to tell their computer to look for unprotected computers. They then send worms to your computer, if it is not protected, which in turn can broadcast what ever the terrorists want from your little old computer room. Do you really want to take a chance that your computer can be used to attack the United States? If in doubt, there are MPCUG members who can help you.

Great presentation — Kirk Stockham, member of MPCUG and a high tech forensics investigator, gave a great presentation at the last general meeting. Some of us were willing to stay longer, but as fate would have it, Kirk's video camera and software combination stopped working at the very last part of the meeting. He was going to show us how to get a video signal into our computer and onto a CD or DVD. Maybe he can be talked into doing that at a future meeting.




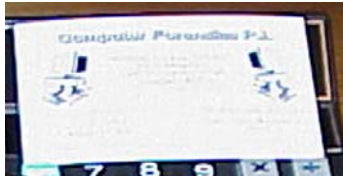


For those into digital photos, he showed us some software that did a good job of demonstrating the differences in digital images and the various quality levels. This software — ACDSee — also showed us the differences between digital resolution and file size, in particular in JPG files.

This graphic demo was really helpful in understanding the differences in the quality of digital photos, resolution and file sizes.

But most impressive was to use the blowup feature on the software at different resolutions so that we could graphically see the value of high resolution digital cameras. At a certain point of the blowup, you could see exactly where the pixelization made the picture unusable or unacceptable. In other words, you couldn't see enough detail to make the

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Comparison of resolutions and photos

Resolution	Photo size in inches	File size	Mega pixels	Original	2x zoom
640x480	1.6x2.13	82.8 kb	.31		
1024x768	2.56x3.41	190 kb	.79		
2272x1704	5.68x7.57	1.8 megs	3.87**This would be the equivalent of a 4 mega pixel camera.		

Note that the file sizes above are JPEGs, which means they are compressed. On some cameras, you can take uncompressed files, but these are dramatically bigger files, in the range of 5 megs per single photo. That means you could only get 3 photos on a 16 meg memory stick, which is what most cameras come with.

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photo valuable either for evidence or to see what you needed in just part of the photo. It was the best presentation I've seen to show graphically what is going on.

Above is a chart which demonstrates some of the issues of working with digital images and especially the issue of blowup of detail advantages.

Kirk demonstrated other photo issues, such as dealing with flash photos, but we don't have room for that discussion here.

Looking at the blowup factor, who wouldn't want the highest megapixel camera s/he can afford? The higher the resolution, the more you can blow it up or the better you can look at details. In Kirk's business, the details of a high tech investigation could allow him to solve a case.

Sometimes we don't realize how lucky we are. If you were an amateur photographer in the old days and had your own darkroom, you will understand just how much flexibility digital photos give you now. There's even a program that will take motion blurred photos and remove the blur. The example I've seen is pretty incredible, but if you think about it, this is something that computers are made for. They can take a problem, analyze what went wrong and then reverse the damage.

In my seven years as a news darkroom tech, I remember being frustrated by the limitations of paper sizes — trying to fit the picture to a 5x7 or 8x10. I also remember having to process lots of bad pictures that could easily be improved or saved with the new digital technology.

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As noted above, the huge files, anything much over four megapixels, can be a problem. Huge files mean that they take longer to save to the camera's memory whether it's a memory stick, or with some cameras, a small hard drive. And that can potentially mean a longer time before you can take the next picture. This is different for each camera as each manufacturer has different techniques for handling the storage process issues. Also the newer large mega pixel cameras have advanced so that they have ways of saving the pictures faster and then buffering them to the permanent memory. But these are going to be the more expensive cameras.

There is a partial solution to the huge file problem and that is to take closeups of the items in a scene and then using software that puts the picture together. For evidence purposes, Kirk could have taken a picture of just the gun and ruler and then moved over the items taking close-ups of each item he needed as evidence. This would in effect give anyone using this technique much greater detail to examine.

Another point I learned recently is that you should save the JPG files taken by the camera in a TIF or other uncompressed format before editing. You can then edit these without losing quality. When you are ready to give them to someone or put them on a website, you can convert them back to JPGs and they will look fine.

Just a reminder, I believe I explained before that you should always set aside your original photos in a separate directory. For example, I will have in my pictures directory, a directory called John's baby with a subdirectory called Originals. I will put all the unedited pictures here for safekeeping. In the pictures directory under, for example, John's baby, I will have the pictures I will actually edit. The concept is that you can't go back to the original if an editing process goes bad if you haven't saved the original in a separate place.

I'm often asked what camera I recommend. Of course the answer always depends on how you are going to use it. Just about any camera will do if you are just going to take snapshots. However if you are going to take serious pictures for family or work, then you really need to look at a minimum of five megapixels and you need to consider whether the

camera maker is known for high quality lenses. Photo optical glass is a science all its own. It won't make much difference if you have the maximum number of pixels if the lens quality is poor or just average. If the lens isn't really sharp, then each pixel is going to record a slight blur no matter how high the resolution. I've owned Nikon's for over 30 years and never regretted the expense for their superior glass. I sold some of the old SLR lenses a while ago and because they were so good to begin with, I recouped a lot of my original investment.

Pics for websites — As some of you may know, all pictures that are going to be used on a website have to be below a certain file size or they will take too long to download for the average person browsing the Web. A one megapixel picture is really going to be a problem for the average website. A three megapixel picture is going to tax even DSL or cable modem website browsing. If the picture is really important, maybe the viewer will be willing to wait, but certainly the average picture that you find on a website needn't be of that quality.

The real issue on these photos is how to prepare them for website use. Basically you could take the picture at 14 megapixels (Kodak has one for around \$4,900. This price does NOT include a lens!) This would result in a 13.7 megabyte file, way too big for all except the most unusual website.

It would be great to edit such a picture. Obviously you might want to crop it to a smaller size picture for the website. If you have a commercial site and have potential customers dialing in, bit files take too long to ask them to wait to see a picture of a teddy bear. So the pic still needs to be compressed. Any average, even free, photo editing software will allow you to compress the file down to something reasonable like under 100k, or preferably 30-40k. This is more than adequate for general viewing.

A website can always offer the opportunity to view the picture at a larger or high quality size. I did that recently when I was selling some camera equipment on EBay. I put in small photos for the auction ad, but then gave the potential bidders the address of the high quality images, which I had stored on my own website. The viewers knew in advance that these high quality detailed photos would take a while to load in their browser. Quite a few people took

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Letter to the Editor

Every year, MPCUG faces a crisis in who will run for the various offices up for election at the June meeting. Each year it appears to be more difficult to get someone to run for president.

This year appears to be no exception. But there are other factors this year that make MPCUG's future look bleak. We are continuing to lose members and finances have forced the end of a mailed version of the PC Post. There is a lack of new blood to move this club forward. The same people can't continue to try to keep the group alive. First of all, they are tired and some are backing off. Unfortunately, at some point you need people with a new enthusiasm in order to keep something going and to make it grow.

As usual, someone needs to step forward to keep things going. If someone just does it because no one else will, that isn't healthy for the group. New ideas are needed before it's too late.

For someone new, who may have gotten a lot out of this group, it's time to step forward and help the group survive.

Claude Delphia, member since 1983.

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advantage of the high quality images, and it was a very successful auction effort with some prices going well over what I expected. The high quality pictures may have made a difference. Personally I won't buy something if the auction picture doesn't give me a good idea of what I'm buying. And by the way, that means good lighting, fairly good close up with lots of detail. If the picture has a lousy background which in some cases interferes with the object, I might pass on buying it. For example, an ornate flowery vase won't show well on a lace table cloth. With all the good cameras and simple techniques, there really isn't a good reason to have a bad picture for EBay.

An example of a bad EBay photo.



Is DOS Really Dead?

By Charlie Paschal, PPCC

Microsoft official made the break with DOS with Windows 2000. Although it tried to "fake" out the public by saying that Windows ME did, it wasn't true. With some information off the Web, a true bootup diskette can be made that will access ME with a floppy.

That's not true with 2000 and XP, which makes a true break with DOS -- you can't start either operating system with a boot disk. You can, though, bootup an ill-acting system with a boot disk that contains the correct files out of your root directory.

Both 2000 and XP use an NTFS file system -- if you use the native file system the system expects -- that supposedly can't be accessed with a floppy. There are certain floppies -- available on the Internet -- that can be used to access NTFS volumes.

Another floppy, also available on the Internet, allows a user to boot from it to a version of Linux that allows someone to access and change the administrator's password. It's useful for someone who has forgotten the administrator's password.

Hex, binary, Decimal numbers

By Charlie Paschal, PPCC

Ever wonder what people are talking about when they mention binary and "hex" numbers? It's the way computers "talk" and the language they understand. Our system, of course, is the decimal number system, which is 10 base. Binary is 2-based, while hex is 16-based. The binary is where you get the "1s and 0s" from because that's the only numbers used in that system.

For example, the number 11 in decimal is 1011 in binary and B in hex. Since 1s and 0s can easily show numbers from 0-9, hex is used to represent numbers from 10 through 16, meaning at A is 10, B is 11, etc. Because binary numbers can get complex, hex is used because it makes it shorter to write and it's easier for humans to remember.

If you ever want to do some conversions yourself without having to learn the mathematical way of doing it, use Windows calculator. Go to View and select scientific. Plug in a number in decimal and then click on Hex or Bin to see the number in that system. For example, 999 is 3E7 in hex. In binary it's 1111100111. See? You can remember 3E7 but it's not as easy to remember the binary version.

For beginners only -- Using Internet to increase buying power

By Charlie Paschal, Editor/Publisher, Palmetto Personal Computer Club, Columbia, SC

Buying on the Internet may intimidate some (not me) but the Internet can serve other purposes, such as a way to check prices against what you can find locally or in other nearby stores.

Ten years ago, I can't tell you the times I would buy something and then two weeks later find it for \$50 or \$100 less at another store in another city or town. After the normal fussing, I'd blame myself for bad judgment, although in those days I had no way of avoiding it.

Now, though, with the Internet, there is no excuse.

First, a couple of points to remember about the Internet:

- Items, in most cases, will be less expensive on the Internet.
- Shipping costs must always be added into the cost of an item.
- In some cases, you might save on taxes, but that depends on several factors.
- Chain stores, such as Wal-Mart, Target or Best Buy, usually charge the same for an item, even if it's in another state.
- Some items might be refurbished or reconditioned, so make sure that the item you're looking at is actually new because used items will be priced less.

There's several ways to check the price of an item, but you must do some homework first.

- Get the item's name and model.
- If you can't get all that information, get as much as you can.
- Plug that information into a search engine site, such as www.google.com.
- To get "real people" reviews of products, type that same name into www.deja.com.

Another way to use the Internet is to check the features of different models or the features of a model you're thinking about buying. This can reap dividends because while doing this research, you may find that the model you're buying might not have the features you really need.

Let's take digital cameras, for example. While using a broad search at google using only the term digital camera might bring up thousands of hits, it might turn up other digital cameras that have additional features you haven't thought about while shopping. As an example, you probably will find a site that lists digital cameras, feature-by-feature, giving

you a better idea of what you need to look for in a camera.

Among those hits, too, could be information that can save you money in other ways. A good example is a modem, a device that hooks up to a telephone line to connect to the Internet. Most computers come with what's called a "soft modem," meaning it uses the computer's computing power rather than its own.

Although this might sound good, it's actually bad because these modems are cheap, cheap, cheap. If you're on a poor telephone line, you might want to get a "real" hardware modem so you can have a better chance at higher-speed connections. By reading the information you get on modems, you could learn that a hardware modem is more expensive but in the long run, will offer considerably better performance.

Sometimes buying higher quality pays dividends.

This also brings up another way you can use the Internet besides buying goods: reviews.

We all know the old saying about everyone having an opinion but on the Internet you can always find opinions and reviews of products. Despite everyone thinking the Internet is all about technology, the truth is that you can find information about every product known to man, including cars, furniture -- you name it.

The two sites mentioned above can help you find reviews of nearly every product or real time opinions about products. Remember, though, that you must weigh the opinions, reading several before making up your mind. There will be some fervent opinions on both sides.

To produce some of these, just type in the name of the product and the word review afterwards. For example, type in Ford Taurus reviews and hit search. Do this in each of the search engines to get not only reviews written by professionals but reviews written by "real people" who don't normally write for a living. Quite often, the real people reviews give you more information than the professional ones.

You don't always have to buy on the Internet to reap its benefits. Browse, search, research; all of them can make your life more interesting -- and safer.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.



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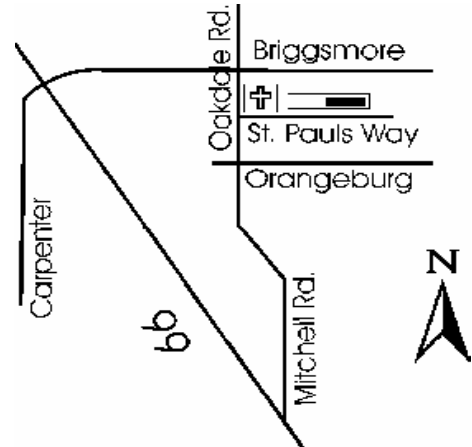
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Claude Delphia, publisher, 209-537-9604

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The Club's Meeting Place

Our General Meetings and the Random Access Special Interest Group is held in the gym behind St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 1528 Oakdale Road, Modesto (between Briggsmore and Orangeburg, north of Century Center). The church faces Oakdale Road and the gym faces St. Paul's Way.



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Special Interest Groups

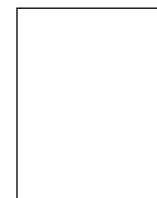
SIG meetings are held at the discretion of the leader and participants. Sometimes the date, location and time have to be changed or a meeting cancelled. Give the leader a call before the meeting if it is your first time. Call Bud Bondietti if you know of changes — phone 667-1980 or email sig@mpcug.net.

SIG Name	Leaders	Phone#	Date / Time / Note
Beginners' SIG ..	Bud Bondietti	667-1980	6:30 p.m., 2nd Monday, Denny's 1525 McHenry Ave.
Random Access Q&A			6:30 p.m. before general meeting
Board Meeting ...	Sid Loshner	545-0853	6:30 p.m., 1st Tues. after gen. mtg. Call for place.
Website SIG	Jim Goodman	579-0122	Looking for a place to meet.
Genealogy SIG ..	C. Delphia.....	537-9604	On hiatus
Women's' SIG....	Liz Leedom.....	523-4218.....	On hiatus

Membership renewal: As with all organizations, MPCUG is run solely by volunteers. That means that when your membership comes due, someone must send you a reminder, sometimes several times. We try to cut back that need by printing your expiration date and a message on your mailing label letting you know your membership status. Please help by renewing your membership in a timely manor. It saves user group money and volunteer time.



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