



In this issue:

- Kurt talks about viruses
- Mike salutes the *Columbia* crew
- Dr. John talks about operating systems and copyrights
- David talks about high-tech antiques
- Kevin talks himself into a job

Users Helping Users with Solutions in Computing

Virus talk By Kurt Keller

Everybody knows that viruses are nasty creatures. In the real world many can cause pain and disease, can be a hazard to our health and in the extreme a threat to our life. Their electronic cousins generally have less impact on our physical life. They crash computers, erase hard drives and steal e-mail addresses. But nothing of this threatens our life - usually.

Usually? Well, computer viruses very well can threaten the physical world, though indirectly. Imagine what could happen if due to such a small piece of

malicious code your employer's personnel department loses track of how much they should pay you at the end of the month? Or worse: all the records of your bank account are erased? Disastrous: a hospital loses all the data about its patients?

You are not infected, but I got a virus from you...

Viruses become cleverer all the time. This can be quite nasty. At work, recently complaints about viruses or unrequested mail coming from our site are on the rise. This even though we take anti vi-

rus measures for our 5000+ users seriously. As it turns out, these infected mails are not being sent by any of our users at all. So what happens?

Address books have been in use for ages, even before everyone had a computer sitting on the desk both at home and at the office. Usually you can't remember the addresses of all your correspondents. So it's common to jot them down into an address book. The electronic version of these are even more convenient as you can create aliases and you

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Got Computer Problems?

Join the Club!

The Tokyo PC Users Group is Japan's largest English speaking personal computer club, with a particular interest in bilingual computing. Users of any platform

or OS, of any ability, from occasional web surfers to genuine geeks and gurus should check out our on-line newsgroups and monthly meetings. We all have techniques to learn and tricks to share.

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About the Tokyo PC Users Group

www.tokyopc.org

Here you can find out about upcoming meetings and events, catch up on past meetings you may have missed, browse the newsletter online, and find out about all of the membership services.

(Contributors are always welcome. Mail your commons, suggestions, or interest in helping out to:

tpc-webmasters@tokyopc.org.

TPC Mailing Lists

The group provides mailing lists that mirror each of the newsgroups. Send a blank message to: info-lists@tokyopc.org to receive a catalog of the current lists and complete information on how to subscribe.

TPC Newsgroups

The group runs its own private news server that you can access over the internet from anywhere in the world. There are newsgroups for everything from help requests and Windows troubleshooting to non-computer topics like movies and dining around Tokyo. Set up your newsreader to point to news.tokyopc.org or visit <http://www.tokyopc.org/tpc/newsgroups.html> for a "no-setup" way of trying out the service.

Snail Mail Correspondence

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E-mail Correspondence

Mail: president@tokyopc.org, or any of the listed officers with questions or suggestions for the TPC.

Membership

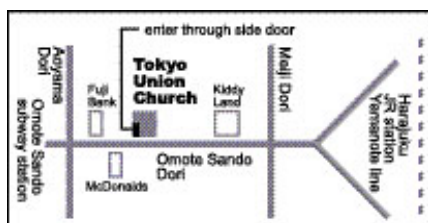
Individual: ¥10,000 per year. Includes newsletter, admission to regular monthly meetings, priority registration to SIGs and workshops, and other benefits.

Corporate: ¥25,000 per year. Full details:

www.tokyopc.org/tpc/join_tpc.html

Monthly Meetings

Meetings are the first Thursday of the month (2nd Thursday in case of Holiday conflict) in the basement of the Tokyo Union Church. Doors open at 6:30pm and the meeting begins at 7:00pm. Fee for non-members is ¥1000. See the map below.



From Omotesando station, take exit A1. When you reach the street, with the Hanae Mori Building on your left, continue downhill to the Tokyo Union Church on the corner of the third side street. Turn left at the church and use the side entrance inside the carport. Take the stairs down to the basement to the meeting room. Note that the TPC is not affiliated with any religious group. (Most of us head down the road to Shakey's for beer and pizza after the meetings.)

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TPC Exec Meetings are held on the Monday following the General Meeting. All are welcome to attend.

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I was going to devote this month's column to talking about recent and planned system upgrades for Basilisk, but I habitually leave this space for last as I put together the newsletter, in case I find a better use for the page, and as I was working on the finishing touches of this issue, the TV I was perfunctorily watching while working suddenly grabbed all of my attention, and kept it throughout a long, sad night of following the *Columbia* disaster.

I was driving late at night in 1986, listening to live radio coverage of the *Challenger* launch, and was shocked as it exploded shortly after liftoff. Yesterday, it wasn't quite realtime as the tragedy unfolded, but it was nearly so, and no less shocking. This time in happened just before landing after a successful mission, before those assembled to congratulate the crew on their accomplishments.

Once again, space exploration has exacted a grim toll, in the lives of the crew and the feelings of their families, friends, and colleagues. Once again, no doubt, many will raise the "Is it worth it?" and "Wouldn't the money be better spent on...[insert favorite cause]?" topics.

Something like 7.5% of GDP is spent in the US on Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. About 4% is spent on the military, for a per person cost of about \$2000/year...and that hasn't changed much in 50 years, although overall government spending per person has quadrupled in that time. NASA's budget represents about 0.15% of GDP, of which roughly half is related to manned space programs.

I believe that the space program (and not only the US part of it) more than pays for itself. What's more, I believe



The Midnight Writer

By Mike Lloret

that it should be funded, and funded well, even if it didn't. I believe there is great value in funding research that advances human knowledge, and believe it's short-sighted to expect an immediate return.

The National Science Foundation indicates that quite a few people share my opinion in part at least:

In 2001, 81 percent of NSF survey respondents agreed with the following statement: "Even if it brings no immediate benefits, scientific research that advances the frontiers of knowledge is necessary and should be supported by the Federal Government."

I think that a visit to this website might be instructive:

<http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/srs/seind02/c7/c7s2.htm>

My observation of many other government programs doesn't lead me to recommend throwing still more money at them; but I'm not likely to convince anyone to come around to my view, nor do I want to. I *do* want to salute the crew of the *Columbia* and to offer condolences to those who mourn them. They died in pursuit of goals that they thought worthwhile, fully aware of the risks. Even if I didn't share their goals, I would call that heroic.

<http://www.isset.org/doc.php?pagelocation=22&doc=362>

<http://spaceflight.nasa.gov/shuttle/benefits/index.html>

<http://www.sti.nasa.gov/tto/>

(Virus Continued from page 1)

don't need to bother copying the address information into your e-mail software, just type the alias and that's it. Very easy, a real time saver. In order to use this convenience, of course you will have most of the addresses you use in the address book.

We already had to get used to viruses spying into our e-mail address books and picking out information from there. They use the addresses in there to spread out further; our correspondents are the next victims. Now the latest mutants of these electronic robbers and waylayers even go a step further. In order to hide even better they do not only use the entries in our address books for selecting victims, they now even use these addresses at random as sender addresses. So if my computer is infected with such a virus, and my friend Tom, working for IBM, and my other friend Jack, working for Citibank, both have an entry in my e-mail addressbook, such a virus could send infected mail to Tom which looks as if it was coming from Jack. Of course rumours will start immediately, saying that Citibank is infected with a virus, even though, in fact, both Citibank and IBM are clean but my home PC is the culprit.

It comes worse still. Recently certain viruses also use file attachments at random. They simply select any one file on the hard disk and attach it to an infected e-mail. Just a couple of weeks ago we had a call from a company saying that they repeatedly got virus infected e-mail from some address, but with attached copies of bank statements issued by our bank. Alarm bells going off. If such mail was in fact coming from within our organization, this could mean not only big legal trouble, but also a lot of negative publicity if the gossip papers got hold of it. The customer said he never uses a computer for banking transactions and it was completely impossible he had such a file on his hard drive.

Apparently, at the bank nobody had got such a file either. Where the heck was this copy of a real bank statement coming

from? Thanks to the sharp eyesight of a colleague we could finally find out what had happened. Two letters which should be 'ff' actually were interpreted as 'tt' in the file in question. This is a typical error when converting scanned files; if the file had come from the bank, this kind of error should not happen, as such files would not be scanned from paper, but produced directly from the database. Actually, the customer had the paper statement scanned by a friend because he had to mail it to abroad as a confirmation of payment. The scanned file was sent directly from his friend's computer and our customer never actually had that file on his own computer.

Unfortunately the computer of his friend was unknowingly infected by a virus and, Murphy's law applies, the virus chose exactly the file of the scanned bank statement to be used as attachment in virus mail. You might want to be careful what kind of information you process with your computer...

Vaccination costs; Disinfection costs more

These days it is more than just bad practice to have no anti virus software installed on your desktop. Every day lots of money in form of lost productivity and lost data goes down the drain due to viruses. Tell me, how much did you pay for your PC? How much did you pay for your software? And how much does a virus scanner cost these days? Peanuts compared to what you pay for all your other hardware and software. Anti virus software should be as commonplace as seatbelts in a car.

Don't depend on any centrally installed virus gateway only. With tunnelling technology such as we use more and more, sometimes without knowing, such centrally installed virus scanners miss more and more traffic. Even simple HTTPS sessions can not be monitored by them. A locally installed and activated anti virus scanner on each workstation is absolutely mandatory these days.

"If such mail was in fact coming from within our organization, this could mean not only big legal trouble, but also..."

There are lots of products and many of them are fine. But while not too long ago you could get away with some product that had only monthly manual updates I surely recommend something which updates itself automatically at least daily. Aggressive viruses can spread around the world in a matter of hours and by the time you read about it in the papers, it might already be hard at work on your machine.

What you also should check for is whether the product scans only certain file types. If so, leave it on the shelf and turn your eyes toward something which can be configured to scan all file types. Not only executable files and file types with macro commands embedded are vulnerable nowadays; even PDF, JPEG and other file types can be contaminated and abused.

Times when you exactly knew when a new file entered your computer are definitely over. With virtually any computer on the planet connected to some type of network, files flow into your computer and leave it constantly; even an e-mail or a webpage is a file. Good luck just about any of the anti virus software does now constantly check memory and accessed files for malicious code. If the product you're eyeing does not, you probably mistook a computer museum for a computer shop.

I can't give any specific recommendation and no product will give you 100% protection, but 90% protection already goes a very long way. Using a bit of common sense and a grain of paranoia, possibly coupled with two different scanning engines, you might even get 98% protection. For the remaining 2% you'll have to depend on your luck. In the references section you'll find a couple of links to anti virus software vendors.

A final word about hoaxes. Most of the time, if you get an e-mail saying that this and that virus has been let loose and you should warn all your friends, it is a hoax. Don't waste valuable bandwidth forwarding such mail to everyone. In a company

environment forward the message only to your anti virus administrator or to your help desk but to nobody else. If you want to check out whether this news is really true, the best bet will be to have a look at the webpage of some anti virus software vendors. They usually also have a list with these hoaxes.

References:

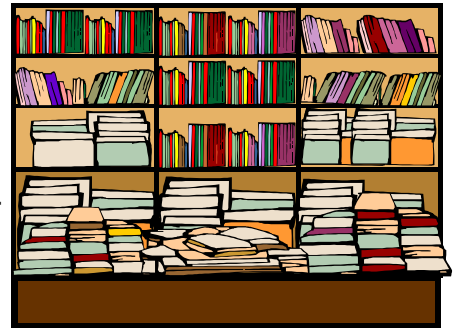
- **F-Secure:** <http://www.f-secure.com/>
- **Kaspersky Lab:** <http://www.kaspersky.com/>
- **McAfee Security:** <http://www.mcafee.com/>
- **Norman:** <http://www.norman.com/>
- **Symantec:** <http://www.symantec.com/>
- **Panda Software:** <http://www.pandasoftware.com/>
- **Trend micro:** <http://www.trendmicro.com/>
- **Sophos:** <http://www.sophos.com/>
- **PINBOARD:** <http://www.pinboard.com/>
- **HighTechSamurai:** <http://kurt.www.pinboard.com/>

"Times when you exactly knew when a new file entered your computer are definitely over."



The Absent Minded Professer

- Operating System Convergence -
By John Philips



The new **Macintosh** operating system, **OS X** (<http://www.apple.com/macosx/>), is based on **BSD**, a very similar system to **Linux**. This means the Mac system finally has a command line interface for those users who want one. It thus becomes the most user-friendly approach to Linux on the desktop, combining the power, networking ability and stability of **Unix** with the user friendliness of traditional Macintosh. Of course the Linux license requires free distribution, so Apple couldn't use it without losing control of the operating system and making the source code public. BSD was the closest they could get and still have a proprietary system, but it will seem very familiar to anyone used to Linux, without that scary learning curve.

Meanwhile, **RedHat** (<http://www.redhat.com/>), still the most popular Linux distribution by far, sets its default GUI configuration to look and act very much like **Windows**. Windows remains the overwhelmingly dominant operating system, so RedHat seems to think that making the environment as familiar as possible is the best way to attract new users to Linux. Like Windows, they also make it easy to boot directly into the GUI, without having to launch the GUI from a command line interface. Of course it's still Linux, so it's much more configurable than Windows, but it is designed to be as familiar as possible to Windows users,

especially when first set up.

Windows (<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/default.mspx>), on the other hand, still seems to be trying to become a cheaper version of Macintosh for PC owners. It seems ages since it was even possible to set it up so that you could boot directly into a command line interface. Each successive incarnation of Windows has made it harder and harder to even find the command line interface. It is still there, but it is buried further and further down in the hierarchy of commands launched from the "Start" button, it has much less functionality, and its help files are history. They've stopped calling it "DOS" at all. Perhaps they think their users are allergic to DOS. Perhaps they did it because they promised customers they would eliminate DOS, and changing its name is the easiest way to do that. There are still several useful command line programs, such as telnet and ftp, but you have to search for them. I have shortcuts to them, and even to the command prompt itself, on my Windows desktop, because otherwise it's so hard to find them.

What's going on here? It looks like three operating systems chasing each other's tails. Linux (or at least RedHat, which outnumbers all other Linux distributions put together) is trying to become Windows, Windows is trying to become a Macin-

"Perhaps they did it because they promised customers they would eliminate DOS, and changing its name is the easiest way to do that."

tosh, and the Macintosh is trying to become Linux.

One thing it suggests is a great deal of insecurity on the part of those who design, write and distribute the various operating systems. Each of them seems to have its eye on one of its competitors. Actions speak louder than words, and the actions of RedHat, Microsoft and Apple seem to suggest that each of them thinks one of the others is doing more right than they themselves are. Which of them is right? If that one is right, why is it trying to imitate one of the others? This is like a gigantic, slow motion game of scissors, paper, stone, in which each company tries to outguess the other, but in which none of them seems to be sure of its own superiority.

"This is like a gigantic, slow motion game of scissors, paper, stone, in which each company tries to outguess the other..."

Another thing it seems to suggest is that there is a central point they are all circling around, that an ideal operating system would incorporate aspects of all three. Such an ideal system might be highly customizable, and allow users to choose which aspects of the operating system they wanted to install, the way the Linux system does. It might also have the user friendliness of the Macintosh. It might have the large number of available applications that Windows provides. It might in fact be one of the emerging hybrid systems, such as **Lindows**. Or it might not. I think if anyone really knew where convergence was going to end up they would take us there.

How, from where, or even whether, such an operating system will emerge I have no idea. I am not even sure that it is a good idea for such an operating system to emerge. I like the

idea of having various operating systems available, each with its own advantages. Today the advantages of various operating systems are obvious: Linux is the cheapest and most readily supported version of Unix, and is thus widely used to support networks. As a form of Unix it is designed for networks, and remains the system of choice for those who need a simple, inexpensive networking solution. It also works fine on old computers, and is an ideal system for someone who wants to learn what computers are all about.

Macintosh, on the other hand, remains the most user-friendly OS. The addition of OS X hasn't changed that, in fact it has arguably made the Mac even more user friendly, since there is a command line interface for those who want it. This interface is a lot easier to access than the command line prompt on Windows. If you want to be a power user and get into the details of applications, and even write your own, you can. If you just want to use your basic applications with minimum of hassle and tech-speak, you can do that, too. And Mac remains the most useful platform for those who work with graphics and video, or those with complicated language and character requirements in their word processing.

True to its original goal of making a cheaper version of a GUI, Windows has become what Mac originally promised to be: the computer for the rest of us. It may still be the poor man's Mac (although the relative price of Macintosh computers has come down a great deal) but it is no longer just a really clunky interface for DOS. In fact, it is harder and

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harder to find DOS on it. It is harder and harder to understand features like the Registry, though, and the increasing complication of each incarnation of the Windows OS mean that it is becoming easier and easier to mess it up, and harder and harder to straighten it out. Where it is headed I have no idea, and I'm not sure even Bill Gates knows what he's doing with it anymore. But right now it has not only the most available applications written for it, it has upwards of 90% of the personal computer market. Its PC monopoly is so complete that in the recent anti-trust case against Microsoft it was revealed through subpoenaed Microsoft e-mail that the cost of competing operating systems (free in the case of Linux) never even entered into the Microsoft price calculations. There just is no effective competition for desktop PCs.

Homogeneity of operating systems and applications, specifically the effective monopoly of Windows and the widespread use of other Microsoft software such as **Outlook Express**, has been an important factor in the spread of viruses. Macintosh and even Linux are not immune to viruses (if you don't believe me you can search the **Symantec**, **MacAfee** or other anti-virus sites for "Linux" and find viruses like Linux.Jac.8759). It's just that so few computers run such operating systems that few people bother to write viruses for them, the few viruses targeting them spread much more slowly than those targeting ubiquitous software like Windows and Outlook Express, and those Linux and Mac viruses are more easily captured and cured than

are the more prolific and epidemic Windows viruses.

If Microsoft's functional monopoly were really challenged, I have no doubts but that the sick minds who sit around writing viruses would start spending as much time writing them for Linux, Macintosh and whatever other OSes were popular as they do now writing them for Windows, just as more and more software companies would release Linux and Macintosh versions of their applications. It ought to be easier to write useful applications (and viruses) for an operating system whose source code was in the public domain.

Speaking of which, in most of the legal fighting about proprietary code, copy-lifting etc. little attention has been paid to the original purpose of patent and copyright law: the public good. The statesmen who wrote the US Constitution and incorporated into it the first comprehensive system of patent and copyright didn't do that because they believed that authors and inventors had a natural right to their writings and inventions. They did it to promote the progress of arts and sciences for the rest of society. Here's what they said:

The Congress shall have power . . . To promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries;

Think about that. Here were revolutionaries who had just fought and won a revolution based on the idea that human beings had inalienable rights, and that the purpose of gov-

"It ought to be easier to write useful applications (and viruses) for an operating system whose source code was in the public domain."

ernment was to secure those inalienable rights. They didn't believe that intellectual property rights were inherent, natural rights, but only that it would be good for society if Congress granted creative people the exclusive right to their creations for a limited time.

Thoughts are free, and no one has a right to own the thoughts of another, even if they were the first one to think those thoughts. There is no such thing as intellectual property: property is permanent. So-called intellectual property rights are the creation of government for the good of society, not a natural right of writers and inventors.

So why do we have patent and copyright law? Because society is better off if inventions and artistic creations, including books, paintings, etc., are encouraged. The American system encourages them by guaranteeing to authors and inventors, for a limited time, the rights to their creations, if in turn they agree to make public the invention.

Before this system was created many inventions died with their inventors, who were afraid to make public their techniques. The US federal government undertook to use state power to enforce a monopoly for inventors, for a limited period, if the inventors, in return, would make public their invention. Similar rights were guaranteed to authors to encourage literary creativity. The results were astounding.

Not only was scientific and technological (and literary and artistic) creativity increased among Americans, but creative and inventive people

from around the world began to emigrate to America, and other countries were forced to adopt forms of copyright and patent law for their own protection. Such laws are no longer controversial. Only the standard by which they ought to be brought into concord is controversial.

What does this have to do with computer operating systems? Patent law was long overdue by the end of the 18th century, but copyright law only brought the system of producing books and magazines into line with the reality of the print revolution of a few centuries earlier. It will probably take centuries for us to evolve patent and copyright law that reflects the reality of the cyber age in promoting the interests of society. Seen from the point of view of the original intent of the framers of the US Constitution, however, it is clear that something is wrong with the Windows system. The Windows source code, like the formula for **Coca-Cola**, is still secret. It probably won't die with Bill Gates, but it will probably never be released into the public domain, either.

What if someone steals it? Does Bill Gates have a right to it? Can he sue to force the government to enforce a monopoly for him? I don't see how. How can you register a copyright, or a patent, on something you keep secret? The whole purpose of copyright and patent law is to put inventions and other creations in the public domain by protecting them for a limited time. Of course the government can't force Microsoft to make the Windows source code public, any more than they can force Coca-Cola to make its secret formula public. They ought to be able to make him

"So-called intellectual property rights are...for the good of society, not a natural right of writers and inventors."

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David Parry

Ionic Column *in exile*

Englishman David Parry lived, worked and played in Tokyo from 1980 to 1994 and was a member of TPC from 1986. He was Newsletter Publisher from late 1988 to early 1990 and began the Ionic Column in 1992. This column even won a prize and an honorable mention back in 1992. Currently based in Düsseldorf and working as a translator, he returns to Japan electronically via the Internet.

The *Ionic Column* this month was intended to continue with the topic of **Linux**, based a series of online exchanges last September with **Marc Prior**, but work prevented me from getting started on that, and Marc may also want to make some changes as a result of new information in the interim. So here I am, way up against the deadline – actually, way past the deadline and not a story in sight. It's enough to give any self-respecting newsletter contributor a conniption fit – whatever that is. So I glanced around the office, looking for inspiration, and my gaze fell upon the shelfware sitting forlornly in one corner.

Welcome to my own little museum of computing

It's a sad sight. Software that was paid for but never paid its way, assorted hardware artifacts that might have been useful, or might even be useful one day. Although I ruthlessly prune my collection of software and hardware of items that are clearly redundant, I still keep anything that might be needed under certain circumstances. Like a pair of 5.25" drives that performed yeoman service in the past, but which are now enjoyed a probably well-earned retirement. There is at least one program that I still use that cannot be installed as such, only copied from computer to computer because the master disks are five-inchers, but I manage anyway. So I keep bits and pieces such as an old IDE controller, an elderly VGA card, and even the old **Intel SatisFaction** fax card. The latter would still work, except that the last

drivers were for **Windows 3.1**. And that and other cards are ISA, so they would be useless once I have a PC without any but PCI slots. I would be like a sailor confronted with a mermaid – no way to plug it in.

The military connection

Thinking of museums set me musing on the various museums and castles I have seen around the world with their collections of (mostly) obsolete military bric-a-brac. Some of the items such as swords were used for literally hundreds of years, many old guns must have been used for a century or more. I always wonder what stories an old musket might have to tell; decades of hapless owners learning to handle the thing and no doubt spending many a happy hour cleaning it. Did a weapon like that spend its entire military life being carried around on parades or on sentry duty, or did it end the life of at least one person? In most cases there is no way to know for sure, so you can only envisage what the owner / user of the gun thought about it or did with it if you have military experience. (Which I don't.)

It is somewhat the same when you see old cars and motorbikes, except that these sometimes come back to life and trundle around, thanks to the efforts of rabid enthusiasts. I well recall the loving care devoted on my first car and how much it meant to me, the “how much” often being expressed in very concrete form at the cash register when buying spare parts to keep the ailing iron horse in condition. And the many happy hours that I spent patching up holes where the iron had successfully converted itself into various forms of oxide, better known as rust. All that time and effort, expended on something that has long since been recycled. What do you have to show for it?

Beethoven from the broom cupboard

It is a similar story in the electronics world. All that money spent decades ago on TV sets

or stereo equipment. New and shining and full of promise while sitting on the shelf in the shop, it somehow seemed to age rather quickly and it was time for something new and better. At that time stereo equipment was making rapid progress, so enthusiasts such as my brother wanted to buy something newer and better almost every year. Rather like computers today, in fact. But electronic equipment does not age well. I recall when my father bought one of the first portable transistor radios back around 1960. It seemed like a toy, but it worked almost as well as the valve-driven monsters of the day, given that the speaker was very small. And in no way comparable to the audio quality that you can get from small speakers today. Evidently I must be showing my age, since I am amazed that even the little add-on speakers for multimedia on PC's are about as good as top-end equipment from the early 1960's, even for bass, back in the days of huge speakers and “Beethoven from the broom cupboard”.

A shabby face

You often see old radios and other electrical equipment at flea markets. They look rather sad, even if they are relatively new and clean, because they age so quickly. Part of it is that the design somehow looks dated, utilitarian as the design of the cheaper stuff always is, and part of it is that plastic simply does not last well. It lasts well enough in the sense of not decomposing, meaning that the landfills of the world are littered with something that will not biodegrade and is not easy to recycle, but it loses its appearance very quickly. The equipment that I have in my office is in various tasteful shades between beige and a sort of mouse gray, modified by a certain yellowness. A fax machine that was in direct sunlight for a few years was not far off the color of a canary by the time I sold it. Darker plastics just fade, but not uniformly. The inner parts often look old because they are dusty, but PCBs usually clean up quite well.

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But plastic seems to have this unfortunate quality of tenaciously holding onto particles of dirt, resisting all attempts at cleaning. Unpainted metal can be resuscitated to look like new in most cases, as can be seen from restoration work on antiques. But the antiques of the electronics age will go down in history with a shabby face.

Big companies such as **DEC** and **IBM** keep examples of their machines in a museum. The bigger computers basically consist of metal frames with painted panels all round, so they still look reasonably clean. But apart from the physical appearance, what can one divine of the early days of computing from simply looking at boxes? What do they convey of the immense efforts and cost involved to keep them running?

The cost issue is quite relevant. Now that PCs are produced and sold like any other commodity electrical appliance such as a washing machine – and for about the same price, it is easy to forget just how very expensive the first computers were, or, in these days of cheap packaged software and easy piracy, the costs of producing custom software. The first PCs cost more in terms of the number of dollars alone than the ones available today, which makes the current crop of computers a huge bargain when you consider the 20 years of inflation in the interim.

A few days ago I was in an electronics store and happened to spot a 19" monitor from **LG**, doing a double-take when I saw the price. My 19" Hitachi monitor is now about four

years old, and cost about 5-6 times as much as the new **LG** model. It used to be that cheap 17" monitors were dubious, and then they improved. Now it seems that even 19" tubes are good. As yet the flat screen monitors still cost more than a glass tube model of the same screen area, but this could change within a few years. I refuse to predict how long, since I recall reading around 1970 that color TV would never catch on because it would be too expensive, the complexity of the shadow mask was simply too much for high-volume production. It wasn't so, of course. If the demand is there, the technical problems can be solved. Talking of which, it seems that one problem with some of the new technologies such as OLED is that the materials involved are very sensitive to moisture.

With work deadlines pressing unmercifully, that's all for this month. More ramblings next time.

Comments or feedback or more information? A chance to be famous? Contact me at DAParry@t-online.com or mail@daparry.com. (Note: the WWW address listed in previous articles no longer exists.)



"If the demand is there, the technical problems can be solved."

(Perfesser Continued from page 9)

some kind of an offer he couldn't refuse, though. It's for the good of society.

Links:

For more information on the Microsoft antitrust case:

- http://www.usdoj.gov/atr/cases/ms_index.htm
- <http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/legalnews.asp> http://www.msnbc.com/news/COMJUSTICEVSMS_Front.asp
- <http://news.findlaw.com/legalnews/lit/microsoft/>

For more information about computer and property rights crime:

- <http://www.cybercrime.gov/>

For more information on the US Constitution:

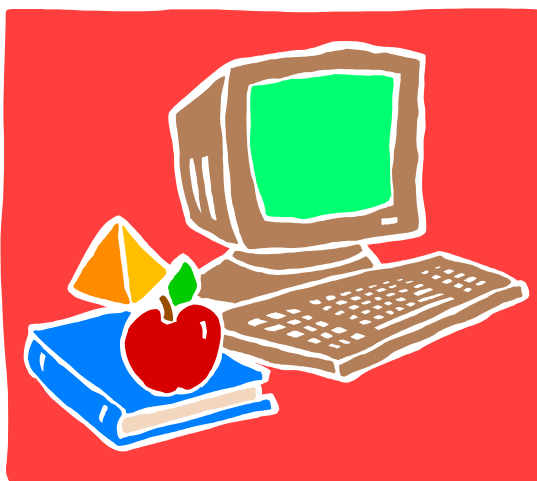
- http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution_overview.html
- <http://www.constitutioncenter.org/>

and my own Constitution quiz:

- <http://human.cc.hirosaki-u.ac.jp/philips/Quiz.htm>

John Edward Philips, Ph.D.

<http://www2.gol.com/users/philips/>



The Hero's Box

[Every chance I get, I'm going to showcase a story about or statement from one of the TPC's heroes: someone who is working to make the TPC better for us all. It's fitting that the first is Kevin Ryan, who has done very much for us over the years in several capacities. —Mike]

Just looked at the first electronic issue of the newsletter and read your editorial and find the reasons for your change of mind pragmatic and the sacrifice of your long-held position laudable. I think in the end the transition to electronic format will benefit our members.

I do see some teething problems. The newsletter is obviously a print document put up on the web, as intended. The problem here is that we get the worst of both worlds. None of the benefits of paper (portability, clean user interface, simplicity), and none of an electronic document (linking, expanded contextualization, and in some cases multimedia.) The only advantage so far is using color (which makes it a lot more exciting). *[snip]*

Language Learning and Technology is a refereed journal <http://lt.msu.edu/> that has solved these problems. Essentially, they create two versions of each issue, one in pdf format as we do now, and another in HTML so that it is more searchable on the web, and more accessible. Although linking is possible in pdf format, it is more natural to see it in HTML, and therefore, to take advantage of the web-based version of the newsletter I would like to make a proposal.

We need a new position, that of assistant editor in charge of html format. His job would be to take the pdf version of the newsletter (or perhaps the content before it gets converted to pdf) and make a web-based newsletter out of it. At the beginning he (or she) would work out the best template format so gradually it would become a job of plug in content into the web-based format.

Also as part of the job would be to promote the online version of the newsletter, and send out emails so that members know that it is available, and other know what they are missing. (I am not sure if this is the publicity person's bailiwick). People should know easily how to print out the pdf version on their computers, or alternatively access content online.

If you guys decide that this is a good idea, and you are looking for a volunteer for this job, I know of one. Me. —Kevin Ryan

"It's for the good of society."



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