



SOFTWARE REVIEW

iHateSpam *by Chris Taylor*

In the September issue of the *Ottawa PC News*, I reviewed SpamNet, which uses the collective knowledge of thousands of Internet e-mail users to determine what is and isn't spam. In the October issue, I looked at SpamAssassin Pro, which is based on the open source SpamAssassin and uses over 400 rules to weigh the likelihood of a particular piece of e-mail being spam. The rules are laid bare for all to see and modify as they see fit.

For my final review, I look at Sunbelt Software's iHateSpam, which takes what I would consider to be a more traditional approach. It applies hidden rules to look at inbound e-mail to determine if it is spam or not. Before I looked at iHateSpam, I assumed the approaches used by SpamNet and SpamAssassin Pro would be more effective, the former because real people are making the determination and the latter because of the flexibility afforded by exposing the rule set. I was wrong. I found iHateSpam to be at least as effective as SpamNet and SpamAssassin Pro.

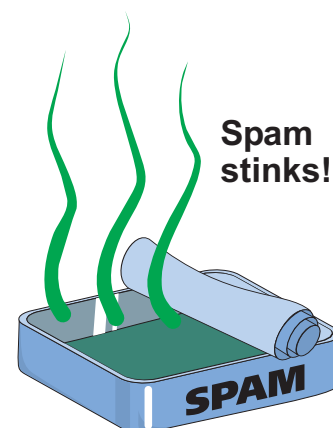
iHateSpam comes in two flavours, one for Outlook and one for Outlook Express. This review covers only the Outlook version, as that is what I use most of the time. If you use Outlook Express, you should look at the manual, which is downloadable from the Sunbelt Software web site. The program operates considerably differently from the version for Outlook. The Outlook Express version doesn't have as much functionality as

the Outlook version, and the treatment of rules is different: The OE version imports rules into the rules engine built-in to OE, unlike the Outlook version, which uses its own engine. Spam detection rates are not as high in the Outlook Express version as in the Outlook version. The license for iHateSpam allows you to run both versions on one machine. You can put an extra copy on a laptop at no additional charge, as long as you are the primary user of iHateSpam and don't use the laptop copy at the same time as your desktop copy.

The installation program routine for iHateSpam steps you through a number of options that will get the program configured more to your liking. It finds your address books and offers to add those contacts to your *Friends* list so that e-mail from them will not be treated as spam. You then choose a threshold level which tells iHateSpam how aggressive it should be in trying to eliminate spam. Of course, the more aggressive you set the program, the higher number of false positive you will get. The lower the setting, the more likely it is that spam will get through. I left it at the middle, *Default* level, as I assume most users will do likewise.

Finally, you are given the option of turning on character set blocking, where anything with a specified foreign character set, such as

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Here's a way to prevent FrostByte!

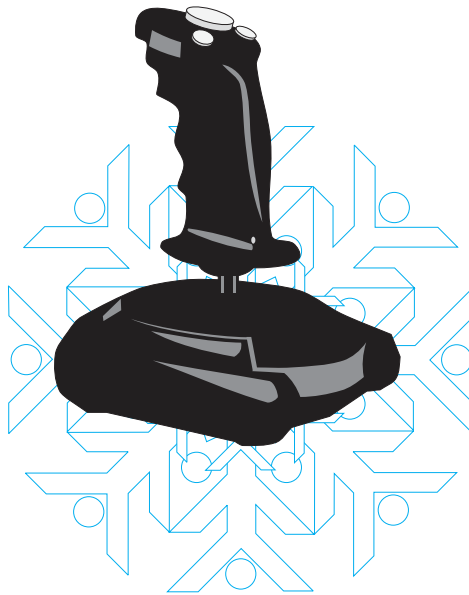
by Timothy Mahoney

Come to the December OPCUG meeting and keep warm while Harley Bloom from Bloom Microtech shows us a large assortment of the latest in computer products suited for the Holiday gift giving season.

After the presentation you'll have a chance to try out some of the selected demo products Harley always brings and ask him questions too!

And don't forget, there's usually great gifts for the lucky door prize winning member at the end of the meeting.

Also feel free to invite your family and friends, specially those who might be wondering what to buy for that computer person who has everything.



DTP Opportunity

by Bert Schopf, Ottawa PC News editor

Ever wondered what goes into producing a monthly newsletter? Interested in *really* using those nifty graphic applications on your hard disk?

Now's your chance to explore desktop production on a guided tour and help out the club at the same time.

I'd like to invite anyone interested in learning publication layout skills to take over production of this newsletter. It's pretty simple and doesn't require a degree or special skills. I will arrange a training session in my office on production of the newsletter in whatever page layout software you prefer. The club will try to obtain copies of software that is required - all we need is you!

Interested parties can contact me at: bert@blackbirdpcd.com.

The next newsletter will be produced between Christmas and New Year's.



CALENDAR

Meetings	Date	Time and venue
OPCUG General Meeting	Wednesday, Dec. 11 th	7:30 p.m. Auditorium of the National Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd.
Internet SIG (I-SIG)	Wednesday, Dec. 11 th	Come and join our discussions!
Developers SIG	Wednesday, Dec. 11 th	Immediately following the main OPCUG presentation, and occasionally at other locations in the region.
Delphi User Group	TBA	8:00 p.m. at Chapters Store in the Pinecrest Mall (at the Queensway)
Ottawa Paradox Users Group	3 rd Thursday each month	6:00-8:00 p.m. — Corel Bldg 1600 Carling Ave

Please note that unless otherwise noted, SIGs meet at 9:00 p.m. (immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting).

Korean or Turkish, is automatically treated as spam.

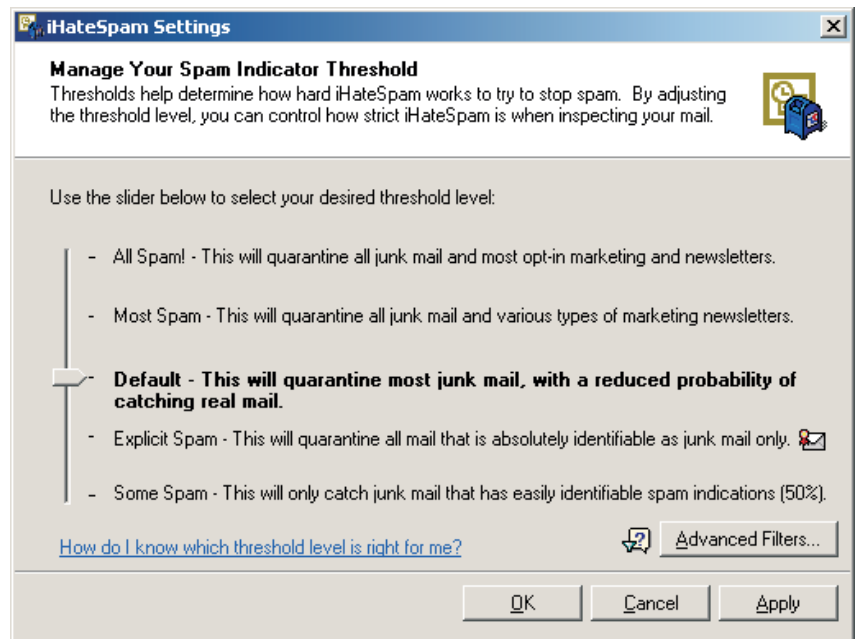
Once the installation finishes, Outlook sports a new toolbar with buttons for the most common functions;

- *Clean Folder* – check the currently selected folder for spam. You have the option of just checking unread mail or all mail and you can choose a date range.
- *Quarantine/Un-Quarantine* – if the current message is in the Inbox, this quarantines it. If in a quarantine folder, this button will send the message back to the Inbox.
- *Bounce* – send the spammer an undeliverable message. The idea is that the spammer will take you off their mailing list if it appears the address is invalid. Ya, right... If it makes you feel good, go ahead. But don't expect it to really help.
- *Report* – this will try to analyze the source of the message and report the spam to the spammer's ISP, SpamAbuse.org, etc. Comparing the results of this to results from Spamcop.net, I would say avoid this feature. It is wrong more often than it is right. In Sunbelt's defence, proper checking is neither easy nor fast.
- *Add to Friends* – whitelists the sender's address so future e-mails from this address will not be treated as spam.
- *Add to Enemies* – blacklists the sender's address so future e-mails from this address will be treated as spam.
- *Manage Friends/Enemies Lists* – two buttons that allow you to edit these lists.
- *Options* – opens the options dialog.

The *Options* dialog offers quite a few ways to control how the program works.

You can control what dialog boxes pop up to tell you what is going on, set where your quarantine folders are located and whether to use a single folder, or four folders which categorize the spam as Adult, Hazardous, Junk, or Subscription.

There are some options for those who access an Exchange Server, including the option to not quarantine anything from users on the



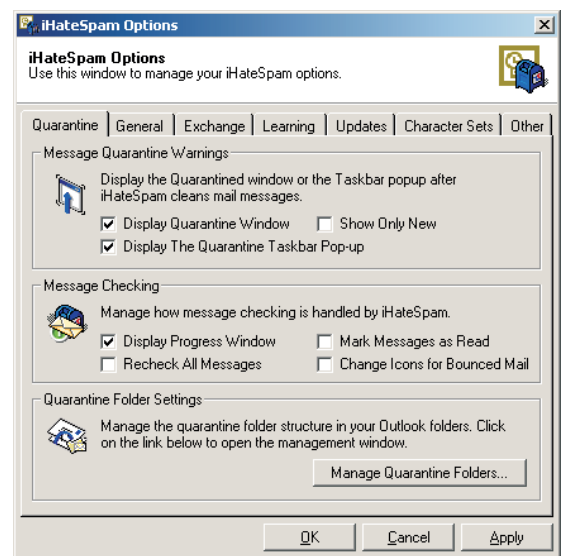
Define the threshold of what you consider spam.

Exchange Server. It would be really nice if this worked, but it doesn't. I received confirmation from tech support that this is their "number one" bug to work on.

One option allows you to participate in iHateSpam's Learning Network. When enabled, the buttons *Quarantine* and *Un-quarantine* switch to *Is Spam* and *Not Spam*. Using these buttons will send the selected e-mail to Sunbelt Software. The idea is that they can look into why the e-mail was not categorized properly and improve their filters. If you enable this feature, you should be careful. As with SpamNet, you could accidentally send confidential information to the vendor. At least the iHateSpam license agreement does not assign all rights to the e-mails to them, unlike SpamNet's.

Automatic Updates to both the software and filters is enabled by default, and iHateSpam will check for spam filter updates every time the program starts. You can turn this off and check for updates manually when you want to with a button in the *Options* screen. Automatic program updates only happen for major

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updates. There are sometimes minor updates not triggered at program start-up. If you want, you can use the manual update button to check for minor updates.

One tab in the Options dialog box allows you to automatically block spam that uses any of 15 foreign character sets.

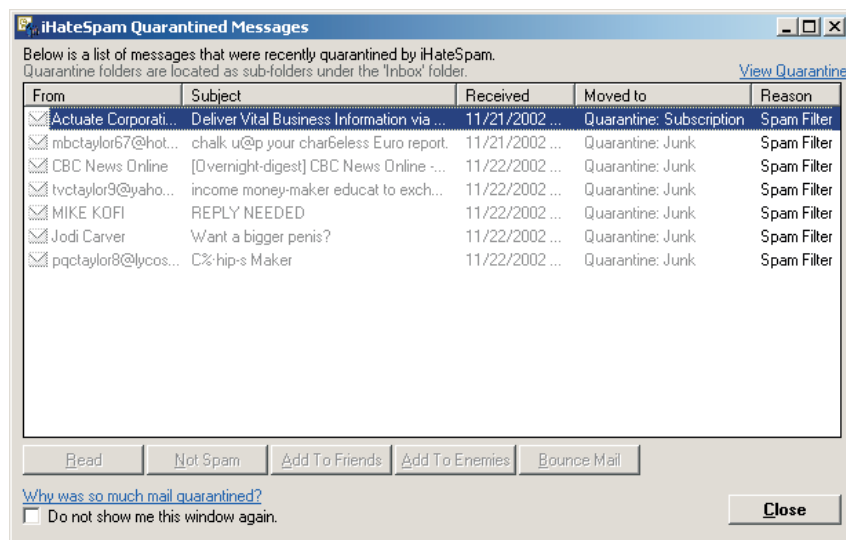
Finally, there are several options that can speed your use of the program, such as automatically adding the address to the *Friends* list when you mark something as not being spam.

It took me a while to realize it, but there is another area you should explore in order to get the most out of iHateSpam. In addition to the toolbar, which includes the *Options* button as described above, an *iHateSpam* menu is added to Outlook. There is some duplication in functionality between the iHateSpam menu and the Options dialog, but some configuration options are only available from the menu.

While you had a chance to set the *Threshold* level during installation, the *Options* dialog does not have a means of modifying that. But it can be found on the menu. There are five levels available;

- *All Spam* – should catch all junk mail, along with most mass-mailed newsletters and “opt-in” e-mail
- *Most Spam* – should catch all junk mail and a lot of newsletter material
- *Default* – should catch most real spam and possibly some non-spam
- *Explicit Spam* – should catch only e-mail that is for sure spam
- *Some Spam* – should catch only e-mail with big-time spam indicators

If you find you are getting too many false positives, you can lower the threshold. If you find you are getting too much spam, you can raise it.



Quarantine window - can you spot the false positives?

There is a menu option for *Personal Rules* which are really powerful. I was initially concerned that iHateSpam could not whitelist based on the *To:* address. As mentioned in previous articles, I receive a lot of mailing list e-mail. This is typically *from* a great number of people, but it is always addressed *to* a single address: the list address.

The *Personal Rules* section, once I found it, allowed me to easily create rules so that anything addressed *to* a particular address is never quarantined. There are many options available. You can check properties such as size, contents of the body, existence of an attachment, an attachment name, the sender's domain, etc. Operators such as “contains”, “>”, and “= true” are available, depending on the property. The list of actions includes things like “delete”, “quarantine”, “do not quarantine”, etc. This is very powerful stuff and allows you to fine-tune the program to handle the type of e-mail you receive.

By default, iHateSpam will only deal with items that are in your Inbox. If you have Outlook rules automatically moving items to other folders, check out the menu option for *Mailbox Inspectors*. You can easily specify any folders and from then on, iHateSpam will monitor those folders as well as the Inbox.

Personally, I think all menu options should be moved into the *Options* dialog box.

I seriously wonder about how iHateSpam classifies spam. Examples of items classified as *Adult* were;

- An e-mail from an anti-virus vendor on file system permissions required by their product
- A newsletter from *Windows and .Net Magazine*
- A message from Microsoft Premier Support regarding Windows 2000 SP3
- A reply from McAfee's Anti-Virus research labs about the Badtrans worm

Unless Sunbelt Software fixes this, I recommend using a single quarantine folder.

iHateSpam did a very good job of quarantining real spam, missing only a couple in the several weeks I have been using it. However,

like SpamNet and SpamAssassin Pro, I found it caught quite a few false positives. Most of these were mass-mailed newsletters that have many of the characteristics of spam, but I really wish a company would find an effective way of not treating things like *The Daily Dilbert* as spam. After a couple of weeks of diligent use of the *Add to Friends* button and a few new *Personal Rules*, I have seen the false positives drop dramatically.

I am unwilling to adjust the spam sensitivity threshold lower, as that will let more spam through. Because of this, I don't expect false positives to disappear. A draft of a message I was preparing for my boss listing my areas of responsibility was treated as spam! Should I be worried about what that says about my job?

Overall, I am quite happy with iHateSpam. I find it as effective as SpamNet and SpamAssassin Pro in picking up real spam. As with SpamNet and SpamAssassin Pro, I have to remain vigilant in watching the quarantine folders to ensure I find any false positives. I find the user interface in iHateSpam to be more polished and it offers more flexibility than the other two programs. Of the three programs, iHateSpam is the one that will remain on my system, at least for now.

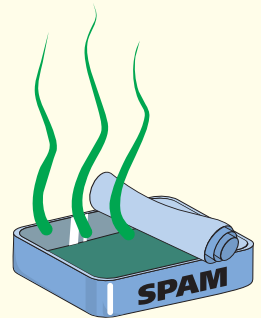
iHateSpam costs US\$30, which includes the first year of updates. It requires Windows 98 or better and Outlook 2000/XP or Outlook Express 5/6. You need a Pentium 200 or better with at least 32MB RAM and 12MB of disk space.

You can download a fully-functional 30-day eval of iHateSpam from the web site at www.sunbelt-software.com. As well, you can download PDF files of the complete documentation.



Choosing the best anti-spam program

Over the last three months, I have reviewed three programs that take different approaches to spam filtering. All are quite effective at significantly reducing the amount of spam that ends up in your Inbox. All catch some non-spam e-mails. So which one is best? That all depends...



SpamNet: Great for those who want to leverage the knowledge of hundreds of thousands of other users.

SpamAssassin Pro: Great for those who want to roll up their sleeves and fine tune the program rules. The ability to effectively do so may be beyond most users' capabilities, however.

iHateSpam: As effective as the other two and more polished. Much more configurable than SpamNet and much easier to configure than SpamAssassin Pro. My personal favourite.

But I do have to add; in the coolest name category, SpamAssassin Pro wins, hands down!

What's next?

All three programs I looked at operate in fundamentally the same manner. They look for key indicators in the content to decide if something is spam. But these indicators are primarily *other people's indicators* and do not necessarily take into account the types of e-mails *you* receive. The problem is typified by the following; if I receive an e-mail with the words *penis* and *Viagra* in it, I am 100% sure it is a spam. However, the same is probably not true for a doctor.

The newest darling in anti-spam is Bayesian filtering. This is a statistical technique where you teach the program what is and isn't spam. The program continually learns from you and keeps getting better and better over time. For background information, see www.paulgraham.com/spam.html. A free, working implementation that works with any POP3 e-mail account and uses Perl scripts can be found at popfile.sourceforge.net. Version alpha 1.3 of the open source Mozilla includes Bayesian anti-spam filtering.

Personally, I think Bayesian filtering holds the most promise for the future of anti-spam. I am convinced that all anti-spam vendors will be either switching to Bayesian filters or including them as a major weighting factor in their products.

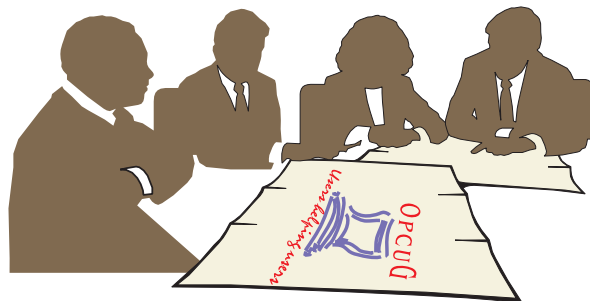


OPCUG Elections

Wayne Houston is head of the committee for the upcoming elections for the 9-member OPCUG Board of Directors. He is still accepting nominations. The rules are as follows;

- All nominations must be received by December 31, 2002
- All nominees must be members in good standing of the OPCUG, Inc.
- Nominees may nominate themselves or may be nominated by another member.
- Nominations may be submitted in writing; by email to awhouston@sympatico.ca, by postal mail to Wayne Houston, 6405 Sugar Creek Way, Orleans, Ont, K1C 1X9, or in person to Wayne at a general meeting of the OPCUG.
- Nomination should include the fact that the nomination is for the Board of Directors for 2003, your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and membership number (if known). If you are nominating someone else, the same information for the nominee should be included.

Confirmation of receipt of nomination will be by e-mail only. If more than 9 nominations are received, there will be an election at the February, 2003 Annual General Meeting.



All members are encouraged to consider running for a position on the Board. If you want to find out more about what is involved, please speak to any current Board member.



Prize Winners *by Mark Cayer*

In addition to the free copy of a demo version of the Alpha Ver.5 software to all in attendance, a number of club members walked with an assortment of goodies from the Nov. 13th general meeting:

- Alpha Ver. 5 t-shirt winners included Frank Anglin, Hugh Burwell, Eric Clyde, Harald Frieze, Charles Jefferson, Bernard Lipski and Alex Mack.
- An Alpha mousepad went to Herb Kelland.
- The door prize winner of a full copy of the Alpha Version 5 database software was Doug Poulter.
- Our raffle for a copy of Microsoft Frontpage was won by Bob Herres.

Many thanks to Microsoft and Alpha Software for supporting the OPCUG.



December Raffle *by Chris Taylor*

Thanks to Microsoft's Mindshare program, we have a copy of Microsoft Picture It! Digital Image Pro v7.0 to raffle off at the December general meeting.

This powerful image editing program includes over 3,000 project templates and over 150 special effects. With it, you can simulate a variety of painting techniques, reduce backlighting, adjust shadows, midtones, or highlights, and adjust brightness, contrast and tint. Street price - \$150.

Tickets are \$1 for one, \$2 for three, or \$5 for ten.

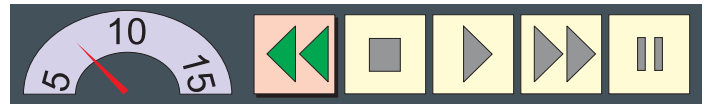


Rewind... *by Bob Gowan, OPCUG Historian*

This column was launched in our last newsletter (November 2002) as part of the lead-up to the 20th anniversary of the formation of the OPCUG next spring. My goal is to include a summary of some of the contents of previous issues for this month, from 5, 10 and 15 years ago. Where no newsletter was published for a given month, I will try to provide some information from other issues of the same year, that I haven't already covered in this column. Potentially, the column could continue for five years with little or no repetition of content – 'though I won't promise that I'll still be doing it in 2007.

5 Years Ago ...

I have not been able to locate a newsletter for December 1997. If anyone has a copy, or can confirm that it did or did not exist, please contact me. In this column, I will summarize some contents of the six-page October '97 issue produced by Chris Seal (Editor), Julie Dustin (Assistant Editor) and Jean Vaumoron (Layout). The cover page featured an article by Harald Freise (Chairman) on the upcoming presentation on Pentium processors by Intel, scheduled for Wednesday, October 1, at the Museum of Science and Technology. Harald also reviewed the trip-planning software, "Door to Door" by TravRoute Software. Some problems with the new Microsoft Office '97 were explained in another article by Bob Walker (Facilities Co-ordinator). These included Word '97 incompatibility with Word '95 file format (the '95 DOC file produced by Word '97 was actually an RTF file), and problems when using Outlook '97 and Exchange. Two hand-held PCs, the Psion Series 5 and the HP320LX, were reviewed and compared in an article by Jerry Gault. Both are compatible with Windows applications – Jerry seemed to prefer the Psion. The DTP SIG had a column written by Bert Schopf, which included a review of the September presentation by H. "Clem" McClemens on preparation of the publication "The Military Mapper" and a preview of the October DTP SIG presentation by Corel on "PhotoPaint." Other SIGs in operation five years ago were the Fox SIG (Bob Thomas), Internet SIG (no co-ordinator indicated), OS/2 SIG (Jocelyn Doire), Paradox SIG (Larry Chop) and Windows SIG (Chris Taylor).



10 Years Ago ...

The December 1992 issue (Vol. 9, No. 11) of the "Ottawa PC News" was a four-page "Bonus Issue" prepared by co-editors Lynda Simons and Chris Seal and their Assistants, Julie Dustin and Susan Phillips. The cover story was a preview of the upcoming presentation, on Tuesday, December 15, 1987, at Sir Robert Borden High School, by Microsoft on their newest home entertainment products. The next (Jan. '93) issue included a review of that presentation so I'll keep you in suspense as to what products they showed until next newsletter. The December issue also contained an article by OPCUG Secretary Robert Parkinson on an undocumented internal command in DOS called "Truename", that was supposed to return "a fully qualified filename ..., one that includes a drive letter and complete path to the file from the root directory." The article goes on to say that the command can "appear to lie." Check the full newsletter article to find out about its limitations. The other main article in the issue is "part 7", of a column entitled "Making your computer suit your needs" by Beginners Corner SIG leader, Eric Clyde. It continues Eric's coverage of the DOSKey command, specifically DOSKey Macros, with a review of what they are and when to use them, and a comparison of Macros and Batch Files. No other SIG co-ordinators were listed on the masthead, but other newsletters from adjacent months show an active "FoxSIG," led by Andrew Ross MacNeill, a "DTP SIG" headed by Julie Dustin and a "Windows SIG" co-ordinated by Susan Phillips.

15 Years Ago ...

It seems likely that no newsletter was published in December 1987. At that time, meetings were held at the National Research Council Auditorium on Sussex Drive, on the last Wednesday of the month, but there were no meetings in July and December. Thus, I will cover some of the material published in the October 1987 issue instead. Most notable, from a historical perspective at least, is that the acronym "OPCUG" appeared on the header of the cover page of the October issue. This may be the first time the acronym was used – I have not yet found it in any earlier issues. It is used several places elsewhere in the Oct '87 issue, and although it was not found in the Nov '87 issue (that I summarized last month), OPCUG seems to have come into more common use since then. Note that

OTTAWA PC NEWS



Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in July and August. The opinions expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the club or its members.

Member participation is encouraged! If you would like to contribute an article to *Ottawa PC News*, please submit it to the newsletter editor (contact info below). Deadline for submissions is three Saturdays before the next General Meeting.

Group Meetings

OPCUG meets on the second Wednesday in the month, except July and August, at the Canada Science and Technology Museum, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meetings are 7:30–9:00 p.m. and Special Interest Groups go until 10 p.m.

Fees

OPCUG annual membership: \$25 per year.

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Rewind... continued from page 7

the official name remained the “Ottawa IBM PC User Group” for several more years. Some other notables of the Oct ’87 issue were announcements for the “First Annual OPCUG Computer Exchange Market” – a “swap meet” held Sunday, November 1, 1987, and the “OPCUG Message Centre” – a new phone line with an answering machine - for leaving messages for the Executive and ordering “library disks” for pickup at the next meeting. Way back then, “The Whole Bit” was a show “produced jointly each month by Ottawa-area computer user groups and Skyline Cablevision.” Sandy Shaw was our representative for the show. New (in Oct ’87) member Michael Czirfusz was trying to start a Desktop Publishing SIG. The “Packages SIG”, led by Eric Clyde, covered Word Processing, Spreadsheet and Database software. There were also hardware SIGs, for the PCjr (led by Tom Mimee) and the PC/AT (with Gord Hopkins), and an “Enable SIG”, headed by Bob Laidlaw. Finally, members Paul Baudet, André Cyr, Jackson Hibler and Mike Roy were the “Newsletter Team” in late 1987.



CLUB NEWS

Membership has its rewards



by Joc Doire

A \$5 reward is offered to any member who locates confused, lost, or frustrated newbies, experts or anybody who deals with computers and brings them to membership director Mark Cayer.

Mark will have everything ready to quickly process the subscription and get your reward. You can go out and help as many poor souls as you can find, and then we will do our best to help them with monthly meetings, monthly newsletter, SIGs, message board, web site, etc or by simply having a place to chat about computers.

Good luck to all!

