



OTTAWA PC NEWS

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May 1999

Y2K Alert

Year 2000 Upgrades: The Real Cost?

By Terance P. Mahoney

Has your bank sent you strange notices threatening to cancel your line of credit if you can not prove you have a Y2K compliance program you are implementing for your small business? If the banks are concerned, shouldn't you be? You know, don't you, that the accelerated tax write-off is only available for computer equipment replacing non-compliant equipment acquired by June 30, 1999? You aren't secretly planning on going shopping for replacement equipment in the last 2 weeks of June are you? Or even worse, shopping in December?

What makes you think computers will be available then? There are still many businesses that have been too busy to upgrade yet. Could prices go up if there are equipment shortages? Ummmh?

Gee guys! These are interesting points of view, but they miss the point as far as Y2K readiness goes. The real cost of upgrading your systems is not the cost of the hardware.

Then it must be the cost of software, right? I mean, you are going to be upgrading to Windows 98, or NT Work Station aren't you? After all, your new system comes with it installed doesn't it? And you have some new hardware that won't run on older systems anyhow. But doesn't that mean you might not be able to run the DOS or 16 bit Windows software you currently use?

Sure, but the cost of an integrated Office product isn't that great, particularly if you qualify for some sort of upgrade. (This includes almost everyone who is upgrading hardware as far as I can see.) So where is the Real Cost?



Data Migration

I know, it's the cost associated with making sure the data I've already accumulated can be used with my new software. For example, I have to get

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Next meeting: **WEDNESDAY, May 5th, 1999**

Intel Inside

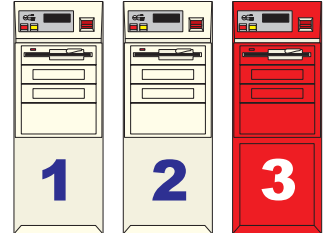
Computer users awoke recently to a new reality: the Pentium !!!.

The latest powerhouse introduces even higher processor speeds (up to 500 MHz) and an updated version of MMX called Streaming SIMD (Single Instruction Multiple Data). While MMX

added increased floating point capabilities (primarily useful for graphics and CAD) this newer instruction set extends to every facet of today's computer scene, for example:

- 3D Graphics—improved rendering speed, more sophisticated lighting effects, better surface textures,
- Animation—improved effects and rendering speed,
- Imaging—increased frame rates, colour depths and faster processing of complicated filter algorithms,

PENTIUM



- Video—promotes increased frame rates, real-time MPEG2 encoding/editing, and
- Speech Recognition—generally improves response time.

Everyone—remember to bring a friend or friends—is invited to hear Intel's Jon Coxworth explain the latest wrinkles and perhaps glimpse the future (Is a 133 MHz bus "out there?"). If you are not impressed with the scope of knowledge of your retailer's sales staff then bring your questions and issues to this meeting.

You will not go home disappointed (unless you expect a freebie P!!! computer).



Calendar

Meetings	Date	Time and venue
OPCUG General Meeting	May 5 th : Intel Inside See Coming up article above. June 2 nd : to be announced	7:30 p.m. - National Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd.
Ottawa Paradox Users Group	Third Thursday of each month	6:15 pm - Inly Systems, 1221a Cyrville Rd.
FOX Pro/Developers SIG	To be announced	7:15 pm - Sir Jean Talon Building Conference room, Tunney's Pasture, Holland Ave. (north of Scott St.)
PIG SIG (or is it WING SIG?)	May 5 th , after all the other SIG's - All questions, be they serious or not	"Good Times" cafe at Shoppers City West, Baseline and Woodroffe

my old addresses out of Sidekick and into Outlook. And I've been archiving all my old correspondence as zipped doc files: I wonder what word processor we used in 1984? Can my new Word import those files? How about those MultiPlan spreadsheet files?

Guess again, I've just given you a clue. Data migration will be a significant factor, but it is not where most of your cost will come from.

Training

New operating system. New software. New features in new versions of software. New ways to use software. Are you and your employees going to be just as productive as you were with the old software? Do they know the difference between clicking and dragging? Do you know what happens when you click the right mouse button? What happens when you click the wrong mouse button? (It must be next to the "any key.") Immediately productive? After you have had time to learn how to use your new replacements? After how long?

Might we need some training? Of course, your business will take care of itself while you learn. But, could there be a lot of people trying to get training or trainers at the last minute? Considering demand and supply, could this make courses and trainers more expensive? Is it time for another "Ummmh?"

Ummmmh!

If there is a moral to this short article it is stop procrastinating!

It's in your interest. Consult with someone now if you need help. Don't be too busy. It's your business. It's your future.



Plan now. Generally, hardware has become a commodity. This means that we've come to expect instant gratification. We can just buy it now. However, do we know what our replacement software will require? Could there possibly be a better solution? Will the better solution be a commodity item or might it require a little planning? Is it as readily available as other hardware or software is?

Plan now! Could consultants, or even knowledgeable computer sales people be in short supply in June or December? Could even your Y2K knowledgeable friends be a little busier than usual then?

How about your suppliers: will they be ready? I was less than impressed a few months ago to find that Maxtor had closed production to upgrade to Y2K readiness. They were not shipping

warranty replacement drives because of this. Normally they would cross ship. We were out of pocket because we had to find an immediate replacement to keep our client's business operational.

How about your clients? Will you be letting them down? Will they think you are letting them down? Will they still be your clients when you do get operational?

Plan now! Could all the Y2K knowledgeable be hiding in bomb shelters in December? Nahh! I don't believe this one. I kind of wonder where my bank manager will be though.

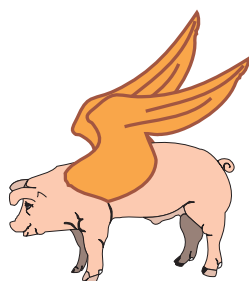
April 2, 1999 © 1999, Terance P. Mahoney, Synergysys



Club Life

Fly West

The "Good Times" cafe at Shoppers City West, Baseline and Woodroffe, for chicken wings and a drink after the General meeting: may be the best and most informative SIG meeting of the evening. See you there!



Club life

Reuse, recycle

Bring your old computer magazines, books, or any other computer paraphernalia you want to GIVE AWAY to the general meetings, and leave them in the area specified. If you don't bring something, you may want to TAKE AWAY something of interest, so look in on this area. Any item left over at the end of the meeting will be sent to the... recycle bin.



Soft Karaoke *by David Reeves*

Does it make sense for someone who doesn't even sing in the shower to review Karaoke software? I thought so, so I did and I was impressed with what I found.

I firmly believe that first impressions are lasting impressions and if kept simple, things work. Apparently, Vorton Technologies, distributor of Soft Karaoke holds the same belief. Installation of Soft Karaoke is so simple that all the instructions are printed on the CD. At first, this confused me since most software comes with multiple pages of instructions. Thinking this was too good to be true, I gave the CD to my six year old daughter and had her install the program.

Before you could sing the opening lines to O Canada, which is included on the CD, Soft Karaoke was installed on our 486 PC! The selection of songs provided on the CD contains a larger number of kids' songs and my kids were delighted that they recognized most of them.

Song selection is through a simple but attractive menu system. Once you have selected your song, pressing the space bar accesses the control or "Player panel". The Player panel allows you to adjust the volume control, scan forward and backwards through the song, stop the song at any point and rewind to the beginning. My kids quickly learnt how to use the tempo button since they like to sing faster than the default setting for some of the songs.

If a microphone is connected to your PC, Soft Karaoke will automatically recognise and configure itself to support it. Unfortunately, on my PC and the two other PCs that I used for testing, the automatic microphone configuration did not work. The reason it did not work: the sound mixer on all three machines was pre-configured to have the microphone turned off. How to turn it on was not immediately obvious, since I had to go through the options selection on the Mixer control panel.

Soft Karaoke on-line documentation is very good and it does document the solution to the microphone installation problem. However, I was disappointed that it was very hard to find the

text describing the solution particularly since they have a hyperlink to a section called Troubleshooting. I would suggest more cross links between the Automatic Microphone Setup help section and other help sections for the microphone. On the initial start-up of the program, a popup window providing a hyperlink to the Quickstart section of the help file would be useful. Alternatively, a small tutorial or walkthrough of the features and functions of Soft Karaoke would contribute to the ease of use of this fine product.

Since I could not easily find a solution to my microphone problem, I decide to send Vorton Technologies support desk an email. I give top marks to Vorton Technologies support desk. They quickly responded to an email which only vaguely described my problem. After a quick clarification of the problem, they provided clear and detailed instructions on how to set up the microphone.

Unfortunately, their efforts were a waste of time. The microphone that is supplied with Soft Karaoke is unidirectional.

If you want it to pick up your voice you need to hold it uncomfortably at a right angle to your mouth. I never did figure out how to obtain greater amplification. My kids don't notice and use the microphone as a prop.

Soft Karaoke is a well thought out and constructed entertainment package. Overall, it is easy to use. My children and their friends enjoy using it and it has quickly become one of the more heavily used CDs. Now if I could just figure out what "pitch" is and whether or not it will help me sing better!

PS. Representatives of Vorton Technologies demonstrated Soft Karaoke along with several of their other products at our April general meeting. Judging by the response from the audience, they found the product as enjoyable as I did. It is hard to argue with that many people when they are singing along to Day O!



Bring a guest to OPCUG!

Our club is all about users helping users. It stands to reason that the more users we have in the group, the more knowledge resources we will gain, which benefits everyone in the club!

All club members are encouraged to bring along a guest to one of our meetings. Many of you are already doing this—good for you! This grassroots approach introduces computer enthusiasts to the OPCUG who might not otherwise consider attending a meeting.

What's in it for you? Well, apart from making your club meetings a more vibrant experience, you could win something! Every guest you bring into the March, April and May meetings gives you one ticket on a special draw to be held at our June meeting. The prizes are impressive: CorelDraw 8, donated by Blackbird PCD; Microsoft eXtreme-in-a-box III/Technet CD-ROM, donated by Microsoft Mindshare; DriveCopy 2 and PartitionMagic 4, donated by PowerQuest; Vorton Financial Tools and Children's Sing-Along Karaoke, donated by Vorton Technologies; and, a free year's club

membership. When you come to a meeting, see the contest registrar at the door with your guest. Sign your guest in and you will be given a ticket which you hold onto until the big June draw.

The guests you invite are under no obligation to take out a membership (but they may anyways if they like what they see!). Plus, if your guests do take out an OPCUG membership by the end of the May meeting, you qualify for an extra three tickets. You can bring more than one guest to any meeting. Your guests are invited to attend General Meetings and the SIG sessions afterwards. OPCUG reserves the right to restrict presenter's draw prizes to OPCUG members only.

E-mail your net-buddies. Talk to that guy or gal in your office who is always talking in bits and bytes. Bring your neighbours, bring your cousins. Hey, bring your barber if he's into computers!



Club Life

Graphics SIG off to a good start *Jean Vaumoron*

The turnout at the Graphics SIG meeting after the April general meeting was impressive. It is indeed good news to find so many club members are interested in this aspect of computing. We were also proud to welcome several members of the Computer section of the RA Photo club and we hope that this will lead to further exchanges in the future.

Users helping users is particularly important in the graphic field where so many programs only have limited information in their manuals and certainly very few answers to "How do I do that?" types of questions. Most of what we learn is through conversations with other users, be they "clipartists", photographers, genuine graphic artists or amateurs who have tried to "draw" on screen what they could not draw on paper.

The topics discussed in the first meeting ranged from digital camera performance to conversion from bitmap drawings to "Corel Draw type" vector drawings and vice-versa, specialised magazines on digital photography and computer art, printing artwork on large sheets of specialised paper, cloth, etc. These lead to some discussion on the use of layers in PhotoShop ("objects" in PhotoPaint). We also looked



at the printouts of several pictures already posted in the Colour supplement of the bulletin.

Any topic on graphics can be discussed, and we are looking forward to another fruitful happening next

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WINDOWS

DUNC PETRIE'S CORNER

BEGINNERS



Hardware Review

AOpen 56K Modem

While shopping for a 56K modem I was pleasantly surprised to find that this upgrade can be relatively painless to the pocketbook. AOpen (www.aopenusa.com), a division of Acer Laboratories, offers two internal versions: an ISA bus (model FM56-ITU) or a PCI bus model. Several local users were very happy with it; that seemed like a good reason—coupled with the modest cost and the need for speed—to try it out. I decided to purchase the ISA version since I was short of PCI expansion slots (Don't ask!).

The modem employs the Rockwell chipset and supports both the K56 Flex and the V.90 protocols: merely flash the BIOS. The unit is shipped with the K56 Flex configuration; however, I upgraded it to the V.90 protocol. With the exception of the flash upgrade file itself, which I obtained from the AOpen website, everything is included on a bundled floppy and a CD-ROM. This includes: utilities, communications and fax software (QuickLink), comprehensive instructions, trouble-shooting FAQs, and layout diagrams of the board.

This modem also supports: fax operations (Group 3), video conferencing, telephone answering, voice mail, caller ID, distinctive ring and ring wake-up. I did not bother to enable the assorted voice functions, caller ID or ring functions. A connector is provided to attach to the system's sound card. Some vintage sound cards might lack the requisite connector. The dealer told me, but I did not verify, that the AOpen sound cards possess the necessary connector. Other sound cards would require an internal auxiliary input.

Thoughtfully, all the necessary cables were included. A microphone, necessary for some options, was not provided. The specifications for it did not seem unduly restrictive; I expect that most low-cost mikes would perform

adequately although convenience and comfort would favour the headset style.

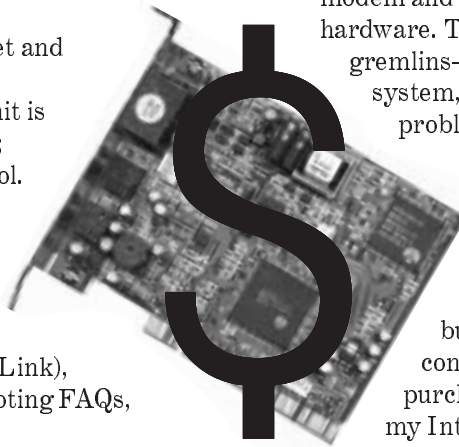
One potential problem: some dealers claim that the ISA bus version is no longer available; if true, then my vendor must have cornered the market with his wholesaler. Suffice to say: "Shop around." Apart from the different bus connection, the units have apparently identical specifications.

Windows 98 seemed reluctant to say goodbye to my old modem and initially refused to recognize the new hardware. This I attribute to the foibles of Windows and gremlins—or whatever. Once recognized by the system, everything went smoothly. I had similar problems with the old modem during its original installation; old habits die hard, I suspect.

Compared to my old 28.8 modem, downloads are significantly faster. Not only have I doubled (and then some—or it seems that way) my download throughput but also I believe that the results are more consistent: fewer rate fluctuations occur. I purchased this modem shortly before I changed my Internet provider; however, the comparative speed observations hold true with both ISPs.

Unlike most of the name-brand competition, these modems are inexpensive. The PCI bus version was about \$65 around Christmas: suppliers were hard-pressed to maintain stock. Curiously, the ISA version may be slightly more expensive. Is this market supply and demand or, as one retailer told me, straight-faced: "An ISA modem is more expensive to manufacture."

In summary, I have found the AOpen modem: is trouble-free; has a stable V.90 driver; has good documentation; provides an adequate selection of communications software (not tested); and is reasonably priced. Now, who wants a 28.8 modem...



Security Alert

Shades of Pentium 3

Providing you have not purchased a Pentium III with a hardware-embedded serial number, you believe you have no personal privacy concerns... unfortunately, no!

Reuters, the news agency, is relating the latest “that’s not a bug, it’s a feature” courtesy of Microsoft.

Apparently, any computer with an Ethernet card will generate—unknown to its user—a unique “hardware ID” at the time the machine is connected to Microsoft to register that company’s software. This occurs even if the registrant specifically said “No” to these procedures.

Microsoft claims that its sole intent was to assist its help-line support staff to provide faster responses in the event of a request for technical assistance.

While Microsoft’s intent may be totally transparent and genuine, others propose darker objectives. Rightly or wrongly, Microsoft now basks in the cloud of suspicion that Intel’s Pentium III serial number flap has caused. This is aggravated by the revelation that Office 97 has an option to generate a unique identification number for each document created on a machine.

Coupling these two flaws—according to this theorem—would allow Microsoft several permutations. This “feature” would track the installation of software on each individual machine on a company’s network and build a remote database

inventory (presumably at Microsoft) of that company’s software holdings. This could be reconciled against software licence purchases to determine if a company were in compliance—hardly an unexpected response given Microsoft’s determination to eliminate piracy of its software products.

More sweeping (or ominous, depending upon your perception) is the suggestion that Microsoft could assemble a database of profiles based upon the unique document identification number that could ultimately source the creation of any document by computer, user (company) and the generating software application.

In response, Microsoft has stated that it will purge any improperly obtained data from its repository. Upgrades (aka patches) are expected from Microsoft for both Windows 98 and Office 97 during 1999. These patches, according to Microsoft, will (among many other things) eliminate both these procedures. The enabling code will not appear in Office 2000.

In an unexpected twist, these signatures (and some dogged sleuthing) apparently led to the arrest of the Melissa virus’ creator. Unfortunately for Microsoft, the “rightness” of its scheme has not received commensurate applause.



Windows 98 utility

Quiktray

Windows 98 ships with a utility to add or delete items from the System Tray: the reserved area on the right side of the Taskbar adjacent to the clock. It is included in the Resource Kit (This version is actually a subset of the full product but it has the most desirable, end-user options.) that is located in the \Tools\Reskit\Desktop folder on the Windows 98 installation CD. As an aside, the Resource Kit offers many useful time-savers; however they are not installed automatically with Windows 98—presumably, this frees Microsoft from providing support.

Once installed, run it from the Resource Kit menu or from Windows Explorer. It will place its icon in the System Tray.

To add applications to the System Tray area using Quiktray, click on its icon in the System Tray. An application dialog box will appear on-screen. Click on the Add button and navigate to

the desired application; select it; and then click Open. The icon for this new application should appear in the System Tray area. Repeat as desired. When you are finished, click Close. (Do not click Exit or it will disable Quiktray.) You can now use the system Tray icons to launch the added applications.

Quiktray must be running (its icon must be visible in the System Tray area) to afford access to the added applications.

One important caution: the more applications you add, the greater the demands upon Windows resources—including RAM; there is “no free lunch.” Excessive use of this shortcut will bog down your system.



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. Deadline for submissions is four Saturdays before the general meeting.

Group Meetings

OPCUG normally meets on the first Wednesday in the month, except in July and August, at the National Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meeting times are 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Fees

Membership: \$25 per year.

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Dunc Petrie's corner (continued from page 7)

System update

USB 2.0 specification

Isn't the pace of technology wonderful? No sooner has USB arrived on systems and peripherals have finally started to appear than... sorry, you have last year's (or should that be "week's") model.

That's right: the original consortium (includes Intel, Microsoft, Compaq, NEC, Hewlett-Packard and others) that crafted the current USB specification have started to map out the wish list for version 2.0. Key features include:

- performance at least an order of magnitude faster (120-240 Mbps versus the current 12 Mbps),
- backwards compatibility and
- no significant price increase.

What a leap!

On the other hand, a truly "universal" Universal Serial Bus would be a wondrous simplification. Could all the hardware manufacturers and other interested parties ever make it happen? Regrettably, USB, version 2.0—while improved—is not a suitable candidate.



Graphics SIG (continued from page 5)

month. This time we could talk about clipart, combining images, and the use of colour, grayscale images and line art, but above all this SIG should remain a forum for exchanging information. All questions are welcome. Don't be shy, maybe somebody in the group will have the answer to your problem... and maybe you have the answer to somebody else's problem.

Do not forget the June presentation; this is your chance to show not only your work but how you did it. !



Club News all about Club Life!

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