Bits & Bytes

A Publication of the Kern PC Users Group

A Evening of weather With

Doug Iverson Channel 23 Meteorologist

Volume 21 Number 03

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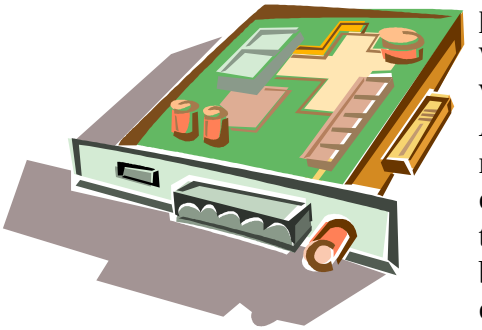
Table of Contents

Keep Your Hard Drive	*pg 4*
New OS	pg 6

The Editor Sez.

Our next meeting is going to be a little different. We are going to get an evening of weather by Doug Iverson from Channel 23. We will also get a tour at the station and see how computers are used at the station. Weather prediction is one of the areas where computing power is used to the max.
Our paper this time is composed of completely foreign content. Unfortunately there were no offerings this time from members.



I'm now experimenting with a new video board. ATI Technologies has a combo video/ tv tuner board. It's called the 9700 All in Wonder Pro. I'm looking forward to recording some tapes I have and converting them to DVD. The whole area of video is new to me. The software out there is in some ways at the beginning. The state of DVD recording reminds me when CD recorders were the state of the art. Remember early CD recording? I know some of you out there remember those days.

Ed.

Keep your Hard Drive Driving

by Chris Doyle, Ontrack

Here's a quick quiz: What takes a licking yet keeps on ticking? Right—your hard drive. The truth is that hard disks manufactured in the last few years last longer than that old clunker you're using as a doorstop.

Here's the surprise. You can squeeze a longer life—maybe even keep a faulty drive trucking—with a few easy tips.

= The silent killer of hard drives is heat—especially high-speed SCSI drives. My recommendation? Use a hard drive cooling fan with all hard drives. You can buy them direct at http://www.3dfxcool.com or at FRY's. I have cooling fans for both my IDE and SCSI drives. In the lab, we have cooling fans on the drives at all times.

= Optimize your hard drive on a daily basis. As much as a pain this may be for some, optimizing your drive has several benefits. Besides optimizing the files, this process also catches many minor problems that may manifest themselves into a major problem later.

Examples? Cross linked or orphan files. Another good reason is that if you do have a problem accessing data on your drive, when a utility is run, such as Norton, nuts and bolts, tiramisu, the chances of recovery are much higher if the drive has been optimized recently. (By the way—Mijenix (http://www.mijenix.com) makes a great utility to perform this function <<Smile>>)

Without questions, you must run SpinRite on all of your drives once a quarter—at number five, the highest. This is a personal recommendation. Steve Gibson's utility is excellent, and will find many if not all surface defects before they manifest themselves further. Trouble in Paradise, also known as TIP, is an excellent tool for Zip disks. Should I mention backing up your data on a regular basis? Do it often, early, and often and early.

Examining your power supply is critical. It's not too difficult to tax a power supply in some systems if they are fully loaded. If possible, I recommend you make sure that the systems have a decent power supply—at least 250 watts or more. (PC Power and Cooling makes the best). Also make sure that your hard drives have their own independent power connection, not shared by other devices. An uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) is another good idea (and don't sweat, these things are much more reasonably priced then in the past).

Many people ask whether it's best to keep your computer running all the time—or better to turn it off and on. My recommendation is turn your computer on in the morning and off at night. I also think that disabling all power saving devices is best for hard drives. Forcing a hard drive on a desktop PC to spin down every 15 min of inactivity—and then waiting a minute or two to spin up—is worse than turning the computer off and on.

Never, ever move the computer while it is up and running. (Try telling that to laptop users!) Any blow to the computer—it tips over, is dropped an inch or more—and that bump gets transmitted directly to the hard drive. Most of the time it will cause a minor head crash. Worst case? It will cause bad things to happen. No, don't ask. But you'll be calling Ontrack to get an estimate. <<smile>>

Don't forget about static when handing drives. The newest and highest performing drives come with (hushed tones, please) Giant MR Heads. They're <*M*>*extremely* sensitive to static. Ontrack has redone all of our static procedures to handle this technology, and I can tell you from first hand experience that static will kill drives dead.

Drives that make clicking, thunking, or grinding noise are experiencing a mechanical problem of some sort. No surprise, huh? But each time the drive is powered up, the more that damage is occurring on the drive. If data recovery is needed in this case, please *please,* please—the less you do to the drive, (powering up or using utilities) the more data we can recover. And the faster we can recover it.

If you think you have a problem with a drive, try going to the manufacturers Web site. Download the specific utility they make to check the drive. Since the utility comes from the manufacturer, they know how to check specific issues with their drives.
Here are some examples:
= Quantum: QDPS
= IBM: DFT
= Western Digital: WD Diag
= Maxtor: MaxDiag (I think)
= Ontrack's Data Advisor: This tool will work with all drives And it's probably the safest tool to use to check a drive.

Here's a tip for tinkers, users that do a lot of testing of drives. In many cases, it's very difficult to get rid of a hard drive after installing a particular operating system or file system type. That's especially true when using programs such as System Commander.
Try booting up with Ontrack's Disk Manager. The utility has a feature that will write zeros to every sector of the drive. This puts the drive back into the shape it was when it came from the factory. After the process is done, it's easy to partition

and format the drive. Don't forget, though, that this will destroy all information on the drive.

Here's one for all of you SCSI users lurking out there (including me). Keep your drivers current. Driver and BIOS updates for your SCSI card can make a world of difference in how your drive performs. Don't forget to make sure you follow the specifications for cabling and termination.
Okay, now that you have some new tools for preserving your hard drive, I have some bad news. I saw a 40GB drive advertised at FRYs for $29.99 (after rebate). <<just kidding>>
OnTrack's Chris Doyle loves to hear hard drives happily humming. You can reach him at CDoyle@ontrack.com §

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using the article as long as it is kept in context, with proper credit given to the author. This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international Organization.

Preparing your Computer for a New Operating System

By Guenter Schoett, Fallbrook CC email schott@tbf.com

An easy and safe way to add and manage a new OS with System Commander 7 (?) I have been debating for some time now how best to install the new Windows XP Professional operating system on my computer. Reading various articles and technical newsletters can be a virtual adventure and impress upon you the four most-important facts before jumping into the arena:
1. Read all instructions very carefully and follow them
2. Back up your system because extensive changes will be made to your hard disk
3. Make a bootable diskette for your current OS. To create a new bootable floppy disk, click on Start, Settings, Control Panel, and then the Add/Remove Program's icon. Now click on the "startup Disk" tab at the top, and select Create Disk. You may be asked to insert the Windows OS CD. When you have a startup disk, it allows you to start your computer, run diagnostic programs, and fix many problems.
4. Clean up your machine's hard drive by deleting unnecessary memory hogs and run Scan Disk followed by defragmentation. Although the backup and boot diskette may never be necessary, they

provide a safety net should you experience serious bugs or problems that overwrite critical areas on your hard disk.

I was not quite sure whether to add an additional hard drive on my machine and facilitating a clean install or simply to upgrade from my Windows 98 SE. One of our club members (Bill Wolf) suggested the use of a helpful automatic preparation software package for adding operating systems. It's called System Commander and widely recognized for quality and reliability. You can find more information and other related operating system management products on the company's Web site at http://www.v-com.com. The product can be directly purchased from VCOM for $69.95.

OK, I got their software and installed it on my computer. I should have said "I was trying to install it". Seconds into that process a window popped up and informed me: "System Commander has detected a disk manager program such as EZ-BIOS or Ontrack installed on your system. These programs will not operate properly if System Commander is installed. The installation will be cancelled". So I checked to see if I had any of them but did not.

Obviously, something else was holding me up. But what? The extensive (200+pages) user manual for version 7 might give me the answer. Right? Not exactly! In chapter 9 (Troubleshooting) or anywhere else nothing refers to my first problem.

Contacting Technical Support was my next step. On page 195 of the manual you are encouraged to check the index to see if you can save yourself a phone call. Also mentioned is a troubleshooting assistance program called "SCIN" which allows you to press F1 or Alt-H in most places to get context sensitive help. Unfortunately, the program had not been installed as I mentioned above, and I couldn't take advantage of that lifeline. OK, let's go to the Website <www.v-com.com/support> and seek help.

I entered details about my problem, sent it as an E-mail and was informed that a support technician was going to respond within 3 days, and often much sooner. The answer came the following day!

It read:
"Dear Customer,
Downloading and installing v7.03 should solve that problem. This was an error that was corrected in v7.03."

Good. So I went back to the company Website and tried to locate version 7.03. Could not find it but instead discovered the System Commander 7 Maintenance Release page which indicates what you will need to update System Commander 7:

System Commander 7 in stalled on your computer
System Commander 7 Serial number
2 blank formatted 1.44MB diskettes
The Update file: sc703_us.exe
Download size: approximately 4.2 MB

"Holy Moses" I said, wouldn't it be much easier to just let you download an update file? In my case, this wouldn't have worked anyway because I was unable to install this software in the first place.

But wait, this is getting more complicated. Next you find instructions on how to obtain the System Commander 7 update: Fill out and submit the online Download Request Form. You will need your serial number to complete the form. (For DOS users only, click on the DOS Version Download Request Form). After you have successfully completed the form, you will be able to download the update file sc703_us.exe.
Note: While not critical, for Windows 9x/Me users, please rename the file C:\SC\SC7.EXE to SC7OLD.EXE before running the sc703.us.exe update program. If you fail to do so, the older SC7.EXE utility program will not be updated.

This last bulleted item really raised my eyebrows. If it is not critical, why go through this whole process?

Well, since I am a fairly tolerant and understanding individual I filled out the online form to see where all this would lead me. My 56K modem had a good day and it took only 13 minutes for the download. And in order to follow all procedures, I sent another E-mail to the Support team to find out how to interpret the "Critical" designation referred to in the note.

The following answer arrived on the next day:
"Dear Customer,
The reason it is not "Critical" is that you will probably not have to start over with the oldest file. Even if you do have to, the latest update will update the original file utility program when it is applied."

The good person who wrote that message completely ignored my initial question of how to rename that important original file that still resided on the CD and not on my hard drive.

Obviously, another message had to be dispatched in which I stated that the techi person completely by-passed this problem and that I could not see how this response could help me. I then suggested that we cut this run-around game and they should send me a new CD that included the update and will allow me to install System Commander. This was Friday evening. Here is the answer that came Monday morning:
"Dear Customer,
Here is the latest full copy. (See attached

file: SystemCommander7.exe)". Hurrah, no more problem! Think again. Just as it happened originally with version 7.02, the installer quit a few seconds into the installation procedure and a similar message appeared on my monitor screen: "System Commander has detected the EZ-BIOS disk manager on your system. This program will not operate properly if System Commander is installed. The installation will be cancelled". Am I lucky or what?

So, again I went back to searching my computer by entering "EZ-BIOS disk manager" into the search box. 172 answers popped up but unfortunately none included EZ-BIOS. I had copied the installation message with Printkey 2000 and sent it together with the entire list of file names to the technical support team and repeated my request for help. Here is what I received the following day, which was Tuesday:
"Dear Customer,
You don't say what version of SC7 you have. This is a false error message It should have been corrected by the v7.03 update. If you do not have v7.03 installed, download it from our website. If you have installed it, let me know and we'll continue working on this issue".

I am beginning to feel as if I am writing the script for a cyber soap opera. BTW, what is a "false error message"? In my answer to the last customer support message I mentioned that I have been very patient for one week now, but would love to receive a solution to this software problem? Let's see what tomorrow's mail might bring. Here comes the answer:
"Dear Customer,
It means that we are detecting something in the BIOS that appears to be a drive overlay (such as EZDrive or EZBios), but as we discuss this, we find that you have never had a drive overlay installed. Therefore we are displaying an error message that is "false." We are aware of this issue we don't know at this point what is triggering this error message, in some cases it seems to be related to Western Digital hard drives, but that is not true in your case. The issue is in Engineering and they will have a solution and a new update soon. I'm sorry it is turning into such an inconvenience for you. The only way I can narrow down the possibilities is to have you try the latest update, v7.03, and gather as much information as possible".

OK, now I know at least where the problem is located, namely in the engineering department for this software. But doesn't the last sentence sound a bit ridiculous? They sent me that update and it does NOT work. I dispatched another E-mail for an explanation on the last part and when this update will be available for customers like me. Here is the answer:
"Dear Customer,
I should have been more clear -QA is narrowing the cause(s) of this problem and

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Engineering is writing an update that will correct it/them. It was necessary to see if v7.03 will install or not. Several drive overlay issues were fixed in v7.03 and yours may have been one of them. We are being told about a month for the update".

Doesn't this sound as if I have been a guinea pig for this vendor? Well, I still want to finish this article and review the "working edition", and if everything goes well, the conclusion of this dramatic development will appear in next month' edition of our news magazine. Would have loved to install Windows XP by now but this has to wait for another month, I guess.

Guenther Schoett is the editor of the Fallbrook Commputer club as well as I believe the Advertising Director. If you use his article please send him an email to let him know. Thanks.

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The Software I use is

[ ] WIN 95	[ ] WIN 2000 ME
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The Kern Independent PC Users Group — KIPUG is a nonprofit organization of computer users — novices, experts, professionals and hobbyists. KIPUG welcomes all new members interested in computers. A General Meeting is held on the second Thursday of the month at the Kern County Superintendent of Schools Building, City Center, at 17th and L streets in Bakersfield. Meetings run from 7:00 PM until 9:00 PM and include a business meeting along with product demonstrations, door prizes and a drawing.

Membership Information and Benefits:

General Meetings are open to the public, free of charge. The public and guests are welcome but certain benefits apply to members only.

To become a member, complete the form above and mail your check to KIPUG.

Member Benefits Include:

- A monthly newsletter — *Bits & Bytes* — a place to publish your articles!
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Meeting Time is 7 pm