

Dan's Desktop

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Technobabble: Price Watch

HARD DRIVES

Maxtor 8.4 gigabyte hard drives have been advertised at Staples for \$190. Ten and 13 gigabyte hard drives are available also..

ZIP DRIVES AND DISKS

The price of a 10 pack of Zip disks has dropped to \$100 at most retail outlets. Sam's Club sells the 10-pack for \$80. Sam's Club has internal Zip Drives packaged with 5 Zip disks for \$130.

\$2000 GATEWAY PC

- 8 Intel® Pentium® II processor 450MHz w/ 512K Cache
- 8 64MB 100Mhz SDRAM Expandable to 384MB
- 8 EV700 17" color monitor (15.9" viewable area)
- 8 16MB AGP Graphics Accelerator
- 8 10GB Ultra ATA hard drive
- 8 DVD III ROM Drive & 3.5" Diskette Drive
- 8 Integrated Sound Blaster AudioPCI 64D & Boston Acoustics BA635 Speakers
- 8 U.S. Robotics 56K Voice Winmodem
- 8 Mid-Tower Case
- 8 Multi-function Keyboard & Microsoft IntelliMouse w/Gateway Mouse Pad
- 8 McAfee Anti-Virus Software
- 8 Microsoft Windows 98 & Microsoft Home Essentials and Quicken Basic 99

\$1000 GATEWAY PC

- 8 Intel® Celeron™ processor 366MHz w/ 128K Cache
- 8 32MB SDRAM
- 8 EV500 15" color monitor (13.9" viewable area)
- 8 4MB AGP Graphics
- 8 3.2GB Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- 8 13X min./32X max. CD-ROM drive & 3.5" Diskette Drive
- 8 Sound Blaster AudioPCI 64V
- 8 GCS100 speakers by Altec Lansing®
- 8 Telepath® 56K Modem Design for the Internet
- 8 Micro-Tower Case

USB Port Devices Now Available

WHAT DOES USB MEAN?

It stands for Universal Serial Bus.



WHAT IS A PORT?

A port is a physical connector on the PC that is used to connect external devices to the PC. A *parallel* port is usually used to connect a printer. LPT1 is usually the name for this port. A *serial* port is generally used to connect devices such as an external modem or a serial mouse. A serial port is often referred to as a COM port.

WHAT IS A BUS?

The bus is a pathway where electronic signals pass from one part of the computer to another. To "get on the bus", a device, such as an internal modem, would be plugged into the PC by means of an expansion slot. By plugging the expansion board into the slot, the board is being plugged into the bus to become part of the computer.

WHAT IS A USB PORT?

A USB port is an external connector that allows for the simple plug-in of external devices to the bus. This means someone can add a device without opening up the PC box.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USB?

Benefits include:

- Many more devices can be hooked to the PC
- No need to open up the PC
- Devices can be added or removed without powering down or restarting Windows
- Device drivers generally not needed
- Virtually any type of device can take advantage of this connection, if designed for it.
- No need to worry about addresses and IRQs
- Better performance.

WHAT DEVICES ARE AVAILABLE?

Current or soon to be available devices include:

- Keyboards, mice, and other user interface devices
- Speakers with onboard sound card
- Printers
- Scanners
- USB Hubs to allow additional devices to be added beyond the two ports generally available.

If you are in the market for a scanner and you have a USB port, you should try to find one that uses a USB

1998 Stories from the Front Lines

VIRUSES CAN MAKE YOU ILL

Two clients had major virus problems in 1998. Neither had virus protection. In both cases, viruses had infected the boot sector of the hard drive. I was able to remove the viruses from both computers.

Unfortunately, in one case we needed to reformat the hard drive. The customer did not have a backup. I was able to retrieve most of the client's data before we reformatted the hard drive and reloaded all the software.

My PCs encountered viruses twice this year. One was on a diskette from a client, the other was from a diskette my wife used to do work at home. My virus protection detected them both.

BACKUP TO PROTECT YOUR BACK

Several of my clients in 1998 would have been well served by doing regular backups of their PCs. At a minimum, business and personal data should be backed up. Some clients had hard drives fail. Some inadvertently deleted critical files. A couple had software problems that created errors on the hard drive. One client moved programs to other locations on the hard drive which caused them to stop working.

One client's computer stopped working after a leak developed in the business office's roof. Fortunately, the water only caused the keyboard to short out. It was replaced for \$25.

The worst case I heard all year was someone who inadvertently reformatted a hard drive, wiping out years of business data that had never been backed up.

WHERE DO THEY GET THE ENERGY?

Power fluctuations seem almost commonplace these days. One of my monitors and the motherboard on my new PC died this year. I believe problems with power helped to bring on these problems.

One client lives in an area that has been plagued by power outages for years. That person fortunately had minimal problems. On two or three occasions, power went out for short periods of time while I was at a client business site. Besides potential damage to PCs, these outages cause business to be disrupted.

IS IT IBM APTIVA OR CAPTIVA?

Two clients have IBM Aptiva PCs. IBM included proprietary hardware and software on many of these machines that make them difficult to upgrade. For example, many have a combined modem and sound card that operates with IBM's MWAVE software. One client had a nightmare situation upgrading an Aptiva. Only the client's repeated calls to IBM finally resolved the

problem. Rumor had it that a class action suit was in the works here.

BUYER BEWARE?

One client was yelled at by the manager of a shop when pointing out some problems that the shop failed to fix. The manager said she didn't know what she was talking about.

Another client had his computer upgraded at a major PC retailer. The PC had problems from that point on.

A client put his PC up for sale on consignment at a local PC store. He noticed one day that it was no longer in the store. The store had no record of selling it. The issue was resolved weeks later, only after the client refused to leave the store until they either gave him the PC or a check. They wrote a check.

WINDOWS 98 OR BUST!

A client attempted to upgrade his laptop computer to Windows 98. Unfortunately, there was not enough space for it. Even less fortunately, the upgrade program didn't notify him until after the upgrade was 60% installed. As a result Windows 98 was not entirely installed. This was not good. After freeing up disk space, I reinstalled it. Unfortunately, laptops are not standized like most desktop computers. He spent about 10 hours on the phone with Microsoft over the next week to make Windows 98 work. He also ended up buying a new modem.

NETSCAPE ESCAPE

The race between Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator seems to come down to which bugs someone is willing to tolerate. In my client's experiences with Netscape Communicator, Internet Explorer seems to fare better. One client downloaded Communicator at a time when they were charging \$40 for the upgrade. It never seemed to work right and was difficult to set up. Another client used Communicator for a while when it suddenly started behaving differently, to the point of it not being able to retrieve e-mail. A third client installed Netscape, along with the existing Internet Explorer. Confusion seemed to ensue until Netscape was removed.

A MIND OF ITS OWN

One client's PC kept shutting itself down intermittently. The problem: two of the three fans in the unit were clogged with dust, causing the central processor to overheat.

These are just a few of many incidents I encountered in 1998. Here's to a Happy 1999!

Y2K, Not Too Far Away

MIDNIGHT, DECEMBER 31, 1999, THEN ...?

Y2K. It strikes fear into the hearts of people everywhere these days. It stands for year 2000. It deals with the issue of how computers will handle the change from 1999 to 2000. Will many computers and computer programs think 2000 is really 1900, thereby bringing on an era of darkness and social unrest?

Or are you just worried about your PC?

HOW YOUR PC COULD BE AFFECTED

There are basically four levels of concern that should be investigated:

1. CMOS/BIOS
2. Windows (or other operating system)
3. Individual Application Programs
4. Data

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

There is no one program that can systematically check all aspects of your PC for Y2K problems. The comprehensive programs that do exist tend to be overpriced.

The best bet is to address each of the four areas of concern separately.

CMOS/BIOS - Download a utility from the Internet that will verify that your system's CMOS can handle the year 2000 change. If the utility indicates a problem, you will need to download and carefully install a BIOS upgrade.

Windows - Unless you have done it already, you will need to download the year 2000 fix for whatever version of Windows you have. Even Windows 95 and 98 have some Y2K problems. Visit www.microsoft.com for details.

Applications Programs - Now the hard work begins. You will need to check each software vendor to determine if fixes need to be downloaded and applied. Some Internet sites exist that list known problems and fixes.

Data - Most office programs tend to make assumptions about any 2-digit years it sees. For example, the years as 00, 23 and 63 would be seen to represent 2000, 2023, or 1963. The biggest data problems will be those related to custom created data used in customized programming. Most PC users will not be affected by data problems.

For most people, any Y2K problems will just be minor annoyances. Older PCs are likely to have some minor problems. PCs purchased since 1996 are least apt to have a problem. In any event, no matter what you do, there are no guarantees that a Y2K bug doesn't lurk somewhere.

New Year's PC Resolutions

There are many things PC owners should or should not do that might make for a happier and healthier New Year for themselves and their PCs.

- Back up your computer's hard drive. At a minimum back up your data. Keep a backup copy of critical data offsite.
- Never borrow nor lend software installation disks. Besides the legalities involved in doing this, I have seen many people suffer by not having the disks when they needed them to add software components or reinstall software.
- Use an Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) to protect your PC from all sorts of power fluctuations and outages.
- Check for Y2K problems.
- Run Scan Disk and Disk Defragmenter utilities on a regular basis. If you have Windows 98, use the Maintenance Wizard to automate this.
- Apply fixes to your operating system. For Windows 98 users, run Windows Update regularly.
- Monitor your use of hard drive space. Never leave less than 200 megabytes of available space.
- Keep virus protection software up to date. If you don't have it get it. If you do, update virus definitions regularly.
- Delete documents you no longer need. Uninstall software you never use. Archive to disk documents you will likely never need again.
- Keep dust, liquids, and debris clear of any component of your computer. If your computer is more than a couple of years old, get the dust blown out of it.

Back Up.

Do it now before

it's too late!



Personal Support for:

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- Home Offices
- Families

Please call:
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E-Mail: **DanHenry@prodigy.net**

Web Site: **pages.prodigy.net/danhenry**

Dear Clients,

One of the ongoing challenges I face in this business is maintaining my financial goals while continuing to be affordable to people in the small business and home environments. Many consultants charge \$50 an hour or more to do the type of work I do. According to the Hartford Courant, one consultant in the Farmington Valley charges \$65 per hour for tutoring. I continue to believe that rates of \$50 an hour and above are too high for many small businesses and families.

At the same time, I have to factor business costs into my hourly rate. Advertising, transportation, computer equipment, and software are my biggest business expenses. A lot of time and some money also go into keeping current with technology and to expand my services to better support my clients. Together all these expenses represent several thousand dollars.

After carefully reviewing the issues, I have decided to slightly increase my hourly rate for just the second time in five years. **As of March 1, my hourly rate will be \$35 per hour.**

I continue to appreciate the great support of my clients. Client referrals are my greatest source of new customers. These referrals have provided a good source of income and are instrumental to my being able to maintain a competitive rate.

Wishing the best to everyone for 1999 and Y2K,
