Dan's Desktop

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Technobabble

HARD DRIVE PRICES CONTINUE FALL

The price of a 10 GB hard drive has now fallen to below $100. I even spotted a deal for $80 in the. A 30 or 40 GB drive can be had for around $200. When purchasing a hard drive, please remember to check its speed as well as its size. Some drives are only 5400 RPM while others are 7200 RPM. (Having seen 33 1/3, 48, and 78 RPM records spin, its hard to imagine anything as fast as 7200 RPM!)

NETWORKING HOME PCS GROWING

More and more homes have more than one PC. Many of these homes plan to get cable or DSL Internet service and they want to be able to share that connection among their PCs. They might also want to share files or printers. So the industry has responded with all sorts of ways to network home computers through telephone jacks or through some wireless devices instead of through conventional network wiring. Frankly, I haven't totally understood these other ways of networking or why someone would use them. They usually cost a good deal more than conventional networking and they tend to be much slower. Networking a couple of computers together involves installing a network interface card in each and connecting together them with a cable. Sometimes a network hub or "backbone" is used as well. The software for networking is included with Windows. An Internet router box can be purchased for about $200. Such a box can provide a good firewall to prevent outsiders from accessing your internal network through the Internet.

PC DEALS ABOUND

In mid-October one of my clients bought a Dell PC for $800. The price was so good in fact that the business bought two of them. Here are the features that $800 bought:

- *566 MHz Celeron Processor*
- *64 MB Ram*
- *10 GB Hard Drive*
- *56 K modem*
- *48X CD ROM Drive*
- *Software includes Windows ME and Office 2000 Small Business Edition*
- *17 inch monitor*

This PC will be more than sufficient for the business in question. Many might want to consider upgrading from 64 MB to 128 MB of RAM memory and also going with a 20 GB vs 10 GB hard drive. This would result in an increased cost of about $150. Going with a Pentium III processor would add another $140 or so.

Motel 6 Online Troubles

VACATION 2000

I spent months planning my family's 2000 vacation to Florida. The car trip included stops in Baltimore, Atlanta, Cape Canaveral, and Myrtle Beach. The car trip was entirely planned using Microsoft Streets & Trips 2000. The program did a very good job routing us door to door from home to each motel, to the Florida resort, and back home again.

RESERVATIONS

This trip included stays at eight different motels during the driving portion of the trip. We needed two rooms each night. To minimize expenses we decided to stay in *Motel 6* at every stop.

In February and March, I used the *Motel 6* online reservation system. All reservations were confirmed immediately online. All seemed to be fine.

NO SHOW CHARGE

At the end of May, one of the *Motel 6's* billed me for a night's stay. As it turns out, this was a no show charge for failing to stay one month before my requested reservation date.

JUST THE FAX

Given that our vacation was coming up real soon, I decided I had better call *Motel 6's* 800 reservation number to reconfirm the reservations. I was then given another 800 number to call. As it turned out, online reservations cannot be confirmed by the reservation system. Online reservations are faxed to each *Motel 6* location and so are not entered in the centralized computer system. I had to call each location to verify my reservations. (Motel 6 did credit my American Express card for the no show charge.)

A .375 AVERAGE IS EXCELLENT IN BASEBALL!

After calling each motel, I discovered that five of the eight reservations had problems. I also discovered that I had erred in entering the date of a sixth reservation. I rebooked the reservations that were in error over the phone.

Upon staying in the motels we discovered a couple of more errors in our reservations including some price variances. There were also other annoying problems such as rooms not being near each other, a lock that wouldn't accept the card keys, the need to change rooms due to an air conditioning problem, and one terribly uncomfortable mattress.

Although we probably saved money staying in *Motel 6*, don't look for us there again. Next year we'll fly.

Always double check any travel plans you make on the web. Seriously consider using a travel consultant for any complicated plans.

Time To Upgrade/Time To Replace?

PC Getting Sluggish?

If your PC seems to be crawling along lately you might be thinking of upgrading or replacing it. For example, my Pentium II 266 MHz seemed to get particularly sluggish after installing *Microsoft Money 2001*. The hard drive seemed to be working a lot and I spent time waiting for it. My PC is just over two years old and I wasn't about to replace it.

Why Bother To Upgrade?

Given the price of PCs today, spending a couple hundred dollars to upgrade the PC might seem like throwing away money. But $200 is still less than the $800 and up it might cost to buy a new machine.

Also, there are costs associated with replacing a computer that many people don't consider. For instance, if I re-placed my PC, I would need to reinstall all the software and copy all the data from my PC including all docu-ments, e-mail, address books, and databases. I would need to once again customize software settings and set up my Internet and banking accounts. I would also have to rein-stall hardware such as my printer and scanner. This could take anywhere from 3 to 7 hours or more.

Don't Even Bother To Upgrade If . . .

If your PC's processor is slower than 233 MHz, you probably should not put any more money into the PC unless your long term plans include replacing the mother-board including the processor and memory.

Most Effective Updates

Two things you can do to beef up your PC are adding more memory and replacing the hard drive. If your PC has less than 128 MB of memory and you deal with large files, or keep lots of applications open, you may see an immediate improvement my increasing memory. Memory costs about $80 for 64 MB depending on the requirements of your PC. Some memory costs much more.

Besides giving you more space for applications and data, a new hard drive may be at least 50% faster than your current drive. If you replace your hard drive be sure to buy one that is 7200 rpm. Most drives come with software to copy your existing drive. I have had very good luck with Maxtor drives I have purchased at Staples.

On my PC, I doubled my RAM to 128 MB and replaced my old 4 MB hard drive with a 7200 RPM 20 GB Maxtor drive. The performance improvement was dramatic. In my case, the hard drive seemed to make the biggest dif-ference. The old drive seemed to be slowing down and defragmenting it did not seem to help.

The $200 I spent made a tremendous difference in the performance of my machine.

Please call me if you need advice or assistance upgrading your PC.

Software To Consider

Along with others I have previously written up in the newsletter, I have found the following software titles to be very useful. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions on their usefulness to you.

Iomega QuikSync 2.0

I wrote up the previous version of this product in my last newsletter. It is used with a Zip drive to copy files from one or more folders on your hard drive. This version allows for a great deal of customization. I have my QuickSync pointing to just about every data folder on my PC. Unlike the earlier version, I am able to set a time that the data is to be copied each day and set how many versions of each file I want saved. This eliminates problems the old version caused by copying files as soon as they changed. The software can be downloaded for a free trial from www.iomega.com. It will cost $20 if you wish to keep it beyond the trial period. I strongly recommend it for any one who has a Zip drive or a Zip CD Writer.

Microsoft Plus! Game Pack: Cards & Puzzles

This CD includes the Bicycle Card Collection and the Puzzle Collection that have previously been sold separately. These games are entertaining to adults as well as children. The *Puzzle Collection* includes 10 games that are puzzles along the lines of Tetris. The *Card Collection* includes Crazy 8s, Cribbage, Euchre, Gin Rummy, Go Fish, Hearts, Oh Hell, Old Maid, Pinochle, Schafkopf, Scat, and Spades. The card games can be played against one or more computer players or against players on other computers. The other computers can be connected via

Windows Millennium Edition

WINDOWS ME VS. WINDOWS 2000

Microsoft had originally planned Windows 2000 as the replacement for both Windows 98 and Windows NT. Windows 98 and NT are so different that it just couldn't be done. They look alike but they operate very differently.

Windows 2000 is the upgrade to Windows NT. Windows NT and 2000 are used by larger corporations that need the stability and security they provide. Windows NT/2000 has fewer device drivers available. It also requires considerably greater technical support. Windows 95, 98, 98 SE, and ME are used by smaller businesses and families who do not have the technical support available that is needed for Windows NT/2000.

WINDOWS ME FLAVORS

ME comes in three flavors:
- Upgrade for Windows 98/98 SE for about $50
- Upgrade for Windows 95 or 98 for about $90
- Windows ME standalone $200

Windows ME has had mixed reviews. I've installed it on my PC and my family's PC and have been happy with it. The most noticeable changes are the different icons that are used on the desktop and how much more quickly Windows starts. Another useful feature allows you to alphabetize Start program listings.

Windows ME better protects system files from becoming corrupted. ME also let's you reset Windows files to what they were at an earlier time in case you make a change to your PC that fouls things up. I used this once recently and it was a real time saver if not a life saver.

Do not upgrade to ME if :
- Processor is slower than 200 MHz
- RAM is less than 32 MB
- Hard drive has less than 1 GB available
- The PC is a laptop (without checking with manufacturer).

If you have Windows 98 and your system is relatively problem free, you my wish to forego the upgrade.

Old PCs Needed, Tax Write-Off Available

Are you replacing your old PC with a new one and do not know what to do with the old one? The students at St. Mary's School in Newington could put your old PC to good use. St. Mary's currently uses 486 PCs so even your old Pentium 133 MHz PC would be welcomed by the school. To donate your old PC to the school, please call principal Tom Gersz at 860-666-3844 .

local network, Internet, modem or serial port.

The Plus Game Pack costs about $20. I purchased mine at Staples on sale for $15.

MICROSOFT MONEY 2001

In the press, most reviews comparing *Money* and *Qucken* now give the edge to *Money*. I upgraded from *Money 98*. *Money 2001* has a bit of a different look to it which takes some adjustment but it has lots of benefits.

With more and more companies giving out stock options, *Money 2001* is a good tool to have to keep track of option values and vesting dates.

I did have a couple of problems with *Money 2001*. It seemed to run much slower than the old version. This seemed to improve a bit when I turned off a lot of the bells and whistles that I didn't need. It improved even

more after upgrading my PC. I don't recommend using this on older machines. I also have had some check printing problems when printing less than a full page of checks.

I purchased the deluxe version which includes some tool that give financial advice, but I have yet to make use of them. Compare the standard version features to the deluxe version before buying as you may find that the deluxe features may not apply to you. If your existing software does the job, there is no need to update.

Money 2001 costs anywhere from $20 to $60 depending on the version and where you purchase it. Rebates are available as well. Costco Warehouse seemed to have the best price on this.

Please let me know if I can assist you in selecting or using software to accomplish your goals.

Dear Clients—

The holidays will be here before you know it and even more people will be shopping on the Internet this year. Don't wait until the last minute if you shop on the Internet or you may be disappointed. Last year I had excellent service from *Amazon.com*, *JCPenny*, and *Staples*. Goods were delivered just a few days after orders were placed. *JCPenny* has a huge selection of merchandise and ships from the warehouses they use for their catalogs. *Staples* ships from local stores.

You might want to be wary of shopping over the Internet with companies that have limited experience in Internet or catalog sales. Last year *ToysRUs* oversold their online service and delivery capability and disappointed many shoppers.

Shopping over the Internet can save time and gasoline, especially during the holiday season. Last year I wa able to buy all my wife's presents on the Internet.

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Have you:

ρ   Backed up your files?

ρ   Updated your virus protection?

ρ   Downloaded and installed free
    program updates?

ρ   Run Scandisk and Disk

Go to www.danhenry.net for the complete text of this newsletter along with links to additional information.