

Dan's Desktop

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Technobabble

WINDOWS AND OFFICE UPGRADES

At the end of 2001, Microsoft will be releasing its new operating system, Windows XP. This will be the update to all prior operating systems including Windows 98, Windows ME, Windows NT, and Windows 2000. Windows XP will come in both business and home versions. It will be the first home version that is based entirely on Windows NT and will no longer be based on DOS.

The operating system will have a new look and will be much more stable than Windows 95/98/ME. However, most existing users of Windows 95/98/ME would be best advised not to upgrade to XP as the memory, hard drive space, and processor requirements are rather hefty even according to Microsoft. An upgrade could be troublesome.

At the same time, Microsoft has announced the release of Office XP. Frankly, most people are happy with Office 97 products. There is no need to upgrade to Office 2000 or Office XP.

MICROSOFT RESTRICTS INSTALLATIONS

Office 2000 includes copyright protection software. New installations of Office 2000 allow 50 uses of the product before it becomes necessary to register it with Microsoft. If the software is not registered, then it will not be accessible after the 50th use. Microsoft will also include this feature in Windows XP and Office XP. This can be inconvenient for users, especially for those needing to transfer software to a new machine. However, there are many, many illegal installations of software out there.

Legally there should be a separate copy of software purchased for each machine in the home or business. Penalties for violating a copyright can be costly. If a business buys one copy of Microsoft Office or Windows and installs it onto multiple PCs, the business could be subject to fines running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

INTERNET USAGE CONTINUES TO GROW

Over 60% of households in Connecticut now have Internet access. In some parts of the country, the percentage ranges even higher.

AOL CONTINUES TO GROW

AOL has now reached 29 million subscribers worldwide. Number two, MSN, has just reached the five million mark. While most service providers are losing millions of dollars each year, AOL's revenue is believed to exceed one billion dollars. AOL recently released version 6.0.

Scanning Slides and Negatives

SCANNER LIMITATIONS

I've been very happy with my HP scanner and have no plans to replace it. However, I have been disappointed that it cannot scan slides and negatives. There is no adapter available that would allow it to do so. I have lots of slides of my own and some that have been handed down to me that I want to preserve, share, or print using my PC. I did not want to spend \$300-700 for a scanner comparable to the one I own that would also do slides. The typical price for a standalone film scanner seemed to be quite high also.

EUREKA: PRIMEFILM 1800U SCANNER AT BJ'S

Shopping at *BJ's Wholesale* one day, I stumbled upon a film scanner that only cost about \$170. It didn't take long to realize that this purchase could be a good investment for my business.

The *PrimeFilm 1800u* scanner allows me to scan a slide or negative at true resolutions up to 2400 dpi. The included software can increase the resolution beyond that.

After some experimentation, I was in business scanning slides. The scanner nicely interfaced with my PaperPort Deluxe 7.0 software which made enhancing the images simple.

PHOTOS STORED ON CDS

I was able to easily store 100 or more high resolution photos in JPEG format on a CD using my CD writer. I can easily view the images or customize them using a variety of programs including some that come with Windows.

PRINT IT!

I printed some of the scanned slides on our Lexmark Z22 printer using Kodak Picture paper. At the printer's best setting of 1200 dpi, an 8X10 picture takes about 20 minutes to print. The pictures come out unbelievably clear and almost rival the results of bringing the slides or negatives to a film processor.

Keep in mind that a slide or negative is rather small so some adjustments must be made to print an image at a desired size. I used Microsoft Photo Editor to resize and crop the images for printing.

SLIDE & NEGATIVE SCANNING SERVICES

Please call me if you have a set of slides or negatives you would like transferred to CD. I am also able to scan photographs and other documents. I can easily make multiple CDs of the same set to share with friends and family. Viewing and managing photos on a PC is fairly easy depending on your PC and its software.

Laptops: The Future of PCs?

WHAT I DID LAST SUMMER

Last summer I was away on vacation for over two weeks. Clients I see very frequently were warned that I'd be away but it was impossible to notify everyone or to predict if a potential new client may try to reach me. Although I checked voice mail messages using my cell phone, I had no way to check my e-mail. Needless to say some people wondered why I didn't answer their e-mails, but most figured it out.

WHAT I'LL DO THIS SUMMER

I decided that I could avoid a lot of problems by buying a laptop before my next vacation. That way I could at least respond and let clients know I was on vacation. The real difficulty would be ensuring that I stayed "on vacation."

Additionally, I knew I could buy and install the *Microsoft Trips and Streets 2001* on the laptop and have access to maps of the entire country available to me. This software is useful in directing me from wherever I find myself to where I really want to be. It also enables me to find nearby attractions such as restaurants, hotels, cinemas, and museums.

THE PLAN VS. THE DEAL

After carefully considering what I wanted in a laptop, I ended up compromising my plans when I saw a good deal from Toshiba in USA Today. The advertised model was available at several retailers including Circuit City where I bought mine.

Besides the price being cut by \$200, Circuit City also had a \$100 mail in rebate in effect for a few days.

I bought a Toshiba Satellite model for \$1200. Circuit City offered me an extended four year service contract. I initially rejected it but reconsidered when they dropped the price of the PC by another \$75 to induce me to take the contract. A service contract is probably an excellent idea for a laptop anyway since they are more difficult to repair and since they are more apt to be damaged since they get lugged around so much.

THE SPECS

My Toshiba has the following specifications:

- 650 MHz Celeron processor
- 64 MB RAM
- 6 GB Hard drive
- DVD/CD ROM Drive
- 13.2 inch TFT display
- 8 MB video memory
- 56K modem

- LAN port (Network Interface)
- 2 USB Ports
- Printer port
- Monitor port
- Mouse/keyboard port
- 2 PC card slots
- 3 1/2 floppy drive

I compromised slightly on processor speed, memory, and hard drive space but got everything else for a good price. I think I got a really good value.

WIRELESS INTERNET: SPRINT PCS INTERNET

Now I decided to get totally mobile by using my cell phone connected to my laptop to dial up my Prodigy Internet service. First I needed to buy a \$40 adapter from Sprint that would enable the Sprint PCS phone to be connected to the laptop. Mine connects through the serial port. I encountered some problems making this work.

Problem: The Sprint PCS software would not install on my PC. I had to download more up-to-date software from their web site.

Problem: My laptop doesn't have a serial port. So I needed to buy a USB to serial port adapter. I tried a couple of models before I found one by Belkin that did the job.

Problem: I still couldn't connect through Sprint PCS. I needed to get my phone's software updated, free of charge, at my local Sprint PCS store.

After a few more tries I got everything working. I'm not sure the effort and cost were totally worthwhile. Connections are made at only 14.4 Kbps and minutes used for the Internet are at an additional cost of 35 cents minute. For an additional \$10 per month I could use my regular minutes instead. I decided to pass on that for now. However, the next generation of cell phone technology (often called "G3") promises higher speeds, perhaps even rivaling cable and DSL connection speeds.

WIRED INTERNET AND LOCAL NETWORK

In order to facilitate interacting with my other PCs and to share their Internet connection, I added a few new network connections to my home PC network so that my laptop can easily tap into files, printers, and the Internet connection of my home network. I can plug into the network with the laptop in my office, the living room/dining room area, or in the bedroom where I have set up a work area. Unlike my office, my bedroom is air conditioned so I may be working up there sometimes during the summer.

PC ANYWHERE

Of course, this summer as I sit working in my air conditioned bedroom, I might really prefer to be running programs that are on my desktop computer. Well, I can actually run my desktop computer from my laptop by using *PCAnywhere* Software. *PCAnywhere* is installed on both the desktop and the laptop PC. The desktop acts as the host. I can then use the laptop to remotely control the desktop computer over our home network just as if I was sitting in my office. *PCAnywhere* can also be used to remotely access PCs through a direct phone connection or over the Internet.

PCs EVERYWHERE

I have recently read that laptops (often called notebook computers) may be the wave of the future. Why have a big stationary PC when you can take it with you? Hardware is available that enables a laptop to connect to a network without wires. For direct Internet connections, Sprint PCS now has a wireless modem that plugs into a PC card slot on the laptop. You can have a fully functioning PC without all the clutter of wires and you can take it with you. Laptop prices are now low enough that purchasing one is now more practical.

My wife likes my laptop so much that she wants one of her own to bring back and forth to work. My children will probably want laptops when they go to college. Plus, it is fairly quick and easy to plug a standard monitor, keyboard and mouse into a laptop either directly or through some sort of docking device. I may never buy another tower PC again!

Please feel free to contact me for advice on buying a PC or if you would like me to review PC specifications before you purchase a PC. A quick review now could save you a lot of trouble later.

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 .

Microsoft Hidden Costs

BUGS CAUSE LOSSES IN PRODUCTIVITY

Most businesses have lost productive time and money as a result of bugs in Microsoft products. My business has been affected by this as well. It may take me hours to figure out the cause of a software glitch on my computer or on one of my clients' computers. Most of this time generally cannot be billed in total or at all to my clients. Fortunately, Microsoft maintains a library of information that can usually help to resolve problems. However, finding the specific problem that matches the one in question can be very time consuming. Here are a few I have encountered in the past year or so:

- After installing Access 97 on a client's new PC, we could not get any Access database to open. A message indicated that Access was not properly registered. After efforts to reinstall Access failed to resolve the problem, I researched the problem on the Internet. The problem related to a font that was installed by Microsoft Publisher. Publisher had been preloaded by Dell into the PC. Once I eliminated the font and reinstalled Access, the databases worked fine.
- A client using Access 2000 began having seemingly random errors related to the Access jet engine. I found no references directly to this problem. I did see that a newer version of the database jet engine was available. In desperation, I downloaded and installed it. The problems went away.
- Another client was getting bad results when merging Excel data into labels in Word. An extra line of address information was sometimes carried over to several labels in a row. After a couple of weeks and searching through hundreds of articles dealing with mail merges, I found a reference to the problem and a way to work around the problem. There was not an update to fix Word.

MICROSOFT NOT ALONE

Microsoft is not alone in having buggy software that inconveniences its customers. Antivirus software updates sometimes cause problems. A recent upgrade of my McAfee Antivirus program slowed my PC to a crawl. After a few hours I was able to fix the problem which related to a log file. I then checked with McAfee to make sure my actions didn't disable checking for viruses. Norton has also had problems with bugs. And nearly everyone has had experience with those "illegal operation" messages.

If you have trouble with software glitches or if your PC seems unusually sluggish, I may be able to help. Please call or e-mail me.

Dear Clients—

I've now been in business for over seven years. One of the dilemmas I have always had is how to structure my fees. My clients range from individuals in the home to major corporations. For some clients I set up their new PCs and show them how to get around the Internet or how to write a letter. For some clients, I primarily do programming for Microsoft Access databases. Regardless of the client or the service, I have consistently charged the same rate, contrary to the advice I've been given by many. I wanted to keep things simple and rational.

Well, I've finally made a decision to establish a dual rate structure along lines that make sense. **As of May 1, 2001, database programming services are subject to a rate of \$50 per hour.** The skill set for these services is a good deal different from the other services I provide. This rate is still well below the going rate for this

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—Thanks, Dan



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Have you:

- ρ Backed up your files?
- ρ Updated your virus protection?
- ρ Downloaded and installed free program updates?
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