

BYTES & PIECES

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER OF THE HOBART COMPUTER USERS GROUP INC.

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WE'RE BACK

After a short break, during which I manage to lose a chunk of my document files, *Bytes & Pieces* is back. For those of you who have just joined the mailing list, *B & P* is a more-or-less weekly electronic newsletter distributed by email and via our website. As such, it is far more suitable for late-breaking news items, members' classified advertisements and the like, than is our printed newsletter *Keyboard & Mouse*. *K & M* is currently produced ten or eleven times a year, but rising costs may force us to reduce its frequency. For those of you who wish to print *B & P*, it is available as a PDF file, which can be downloaded from the website or, on request, can be sent to you as an email attachment.

<http://hobartpcgroup.org.au/>

MEMBERS' CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

All members are entitled to place free classified advertisements in either of our publications, but, in the past, few have chosen to do so. If you have something to sell or exchange, or something you want to buy, and need a quick response, then *Bytes and Pieces* is the place to advertise. However, not all members currently receive this electronic newsletter so you may want to place an advertisement in *Keyboard & Mouse* to reach

all of the membership. Advertising copy for *K & M* should reach the Editor by the 9th of the month prior to the issue month. For example, an advertisement intended to appear in our August issue, should be lodged by 9 July. Distribution of the August issue is scheduled to begin at the meeting on the fourth Tuesday of July.

editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au

RULES OF THE ASSOCIATION

The Management Committee has finished its deliberations on the Rules of the Association and a draft of the revised rules has been prepared, thanks to efforts of John James, Kevin Burgess and Sid Davis. This will be converted to a PDF file and placed on the website for members to download. Copies will also be available at the next meeting. You are invited to suggest any amendments that you think would improve the draft. However, these suggestions must be submitted in writing, either by email, mail or handing to a member of the Committee and should reach the Committee before the Committee Meeting on 12 August 2003. This will enable the Committee to consider them carefully. Be aware that amending one paragraph or clause may mean amendments to another. Also be aware that some provisions have to be in accordance with the relevant Act. For those reasons, your amendment may have to be rejected. If it is, feel free to raise the matter for discussion at the Annual General Meeting, when the draft comes up for consideration.

The motion to be considered at the AGM sets aside the existing Rules and replaces them with the draft (as amended by the meeting). It is therefore important that all members who intend to be at the meeting, familiarise themselves with it so that they know what is proposed.

<http://hobartpcgroup.org.au/>

DATA RECOVERY

I have often written “Back it up or you **will** lose it”, so, naturally, when my backup of my documents was somewhat out of date, I managed to delete the entire folder. What was I to do? Could the files be recovered and, if so, how should I go about it?

In a situation like this it is important to act immediately, or as soon thereafter as possible. Windows does not immediately wipe out your files. It changes the first letter of the filename to indicate that the space that data occupies can be reallocated as free space and used to save files on. Once that space is reused, all is lost.

To recover the data you need a specialist program that can track the blocks of data and reassemble them. One such is *FixIt Utilities* from VCom. This product was previously owned by (Kroll) Ontrack. I have version 4 and I tried to recover the files with that. It was partially successful. It recovered the loose files in the *My Documents* folder, but not those files that had been placed in sub-folders within *My Documents*. I am not sure why.

A few days later, I bought a magazine and it had *PC Inspector File Recovery* on it. This remarkable **freeware** program can recover files that have been deleted even from a **quick** formatted disk. With it, I was able to recover further files, but not all of them (because of the delay).

It is simple to use. Its interface is similar to *Windows Explorer* with a tree on the left and the details on the right. Scan your disk with it and it list folders and files that may be recoverable in a *Deleted* folder in the lefthand tree. Click on a green folder – these are the ones where some recovery is possible. On the right *PC Inspector* will show you what, if any, contents is recoverable. Click on Edit/Select all, or select the files you want individually. Click on the Save button and tell the program where to save the files.

Note: You should save the files onto another drive. Otherwise you may overwrite some of what you are trying to salvage. Note also that files in the root directory are more prone to being lost.

Don't wait until you have a disaster. Go to their website, download and install a copy now before you lose valuable files.

<http://www.convar.com>

DRIVE IMAGING

One way to ensure the safety of your data is to make an image or copy onto another hard drive or partition on your computer. There are numerous programs to do this ranging from reasonably cheap to quite expensive. Among the better-known are PowerQuest's DriveImage and Norton's Ghost.

I set out to try and find a freeware application that could do this kind of copying and came across one possibility – a program which can make a copy of your hard drive onto a slave drive in your computer. It is called ID-COPYMASTER (sic) and can be found at:

<http://www.ics-iq.com/login.cfm?CFID=14774154&CFTOKEN=28706564>

I have yet to try it, but it sounds promising.

The “slave drive” does not have to be mounted permanently in your computer. You could use a cradle that allows its removal. This would enable you to use your Zip drive for small backups (e.g. your documents) and the hard drive slave for a complete copy of your master hard drive.

At the very least you should make copies of your documents and a CD burner is ideal for this. With prices now well under \$100, a CD writer should be on your shopping list if you don't have one. You could even consider upgrading your old slow one to the latest 52X 24X 52X, couldn't you?

Here's Fred Langa's explanation why drive imaging is the way to go:

[L]et's very briefly review what "imaging" of a hard drive is, and why it's the best form of backup:

Standard (non-imaging) backups are file-oriented: Each file you're backing up gets copied to the backup medium, one file after another. That's OK, as far as it goes, but it usually means it's difficult or impossible to copy any files that are in use by the operating system itself or by the user; your backup may not be as complete as you think! There also can be problems when you restore a standard backup: Again, in-use files may not be able to be restored properly, even if they were originally saved OK. Plus, whatever files can be restored will be overlaid onto an existing setup, so you end up with a mix of freshly-restored files alongside old files. This means restoring from a standard backup may not be able to correct some software problems, and may not be able to bring your system back to "like new" condition, no matter what you do.

"Imaging" a hard drive is very different. It's disk oriented instead of file oriented: The imaging tool copies the first sector of the hard drive, no matter what it contains, then copies the second sector, and so forth. This means that the image contains not just a bunch of files, but an exact copy of your hard drive's complete contents AND structure.

This means that an image gets EVERYTHING, including even the placement and order of files on the drive. Thus, if you image a defragged hard drive, and later restore that image, you'll also be restoring the drive to the freshly-defragged state. In contrast, restoring a normal backup usually results in increased fragmentation.

In practice, this means that if (for example) you make an image of a fresh install of an OS, with everything tuned; tweaked, and optimized to perfection, you can restore the drive to that perfect condition at any time just by reverting to the stored image. Think about it: No matter how scrambled or messed up your system is, just restore the image and you're back to like-new perfection in a matter of minutes!

But a good imaging tool can do even more: It also will let you selectively restore individual files, if that's all

*you need: You don't *have* to restore everything in the image, unless you want to. You can see why imaging is such a big deal: It not only provides all the benefits of file-by-file traditional backups, but also gives you much more--- the ability to totally restore your system to a 100% perfect state, in minutes.*

That's why imaging has been at the heart of my recommended backup process, as described more fully here:

<http://www.langa.com/backups/backups.htm>

Fred regularly puts out a free email newsletter, packed with useful information. To subscribe create and send a new email to:

subscribe-langalist@lyris.dundee.net

LINDOWSOS

Fred also reported that he had found a better imaging tool than PowerQuest's Drive Image in *BootIt NG*. BootIt also serves a boot manager and, as such, is of interest to Lindows users. LindowsOS has what Fred describes as a "very aggressive" LiLo boot manager. Because of this it won't normally reside happily with other operating systems and versions, other than Windows.

Enter BootIt. Fred reports that its boot manager over-rides the LindowsOS one and makes it possible to run other operating systems alongside it. At \$USD34.95, it sounds like a product that should be on my shopping list. I'll report in more detail when I have had a chance to try it for myself. However, Fred's recommendations are carefully researched and usually prove to be spot on.

<http://www.bootit.com>

LINSIG

TasLUG held a successful meeting last Friday evening, demonstrating the versatility of Linux with office applications, DVD, games and more. Four of our LinSIG members attended and found that TasLUG has members with considerable expertise who are willing to help anyone wanting to step into the "Brave New World" of desktop Linux.

If you want a look at Linux without having to make alterations to your hard drive, grab a copy of the Knoppix distribution. This runs from the CD on which it comes without installing anything on your hard drive. It is a good way to look at the quality of the desktop and applications that Linux gives you.

Remember this is the world of free software – freely available, freely modifiable and, in many cases, free of cost. It is making such inroads into the desktop market that Microsoft has admitted that it sees Linux as a threat. The forthcoming battle between the colossus and the anarchic forces of the OpenSource software world should be fascinating.

<http://www.taslug.org.au/>

BEWARE OF JULIA ROBERTS

According to a report on VnuNet, Julia Roberts is the name of a new virus that will totally trash your machine. For details see:

<http://nl2.vnunet.com/News/1142158>

FIVE STEPS TO BETTER COMPUTING

Here are the five steps to weekly computer maintenance. Follow them and you will minimise the problems that computer crashes can cause.

1. Update your virus definitions

- Members of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. who attend meetings or read the newsletter will have heard this one *ad nauseum*, but you would be surprised by the number of people who have **never** updated their virus definitions.
- If you use AVG, one of the best free antivirus programs, you can update by right-clicking on the icon in the system tray and choosing *Run AVG Control Centre*. Choose the Update tab and click on the Update Now button. AVG will go online and check for an update. If there is one, it will automatically download it and pause for you to OK the installation. Depending on the extent of the update, you may then be asked to reboot. That's it! Quite painless and easy to do. Do it now, do it weekly (or even two or three times a week).

2. Run Windows update/Software update

- Running Windows update every week may be a bit of overkill. However, you do need to patch the holes in Windows as patches become available. Arguably, waiting a couple of weeks after a patch is released may be beneficial. Microsoft have recently released a few patches that have required a further patch and, in one instance, released one which was subsequently withdrawn. By leaving it a week or two, you can be sure that the patch is not going to introduce more problems than it solves.
- If you are using an older version of Windows, download the patches to your hard drive, burn them onto a CDR disc and keep them with your Windows installation disc. Install them whenever you have to a re-install.

3. Run ScanDisk

- ScanDisk is a built-in tool from Microsoft that scans and, in most cases, repairs errors on your hard drive. These errors usually occur when your computer crashes and has to be restarted. Using it regularly will improve stability. In the early days, when hard drives were less reliable, some people even used it every time they booted up!
- The technical explanation is that
 - Your files are stored on your hard drive in data groups called "clusters", sometimes these clusters can become "cross linked" with other clusters belonging to other files, or they can simply become "lost" from the rest of its fellow clusters.
 - When you run scan disk the utility saves the "lost" file fragments into new files that you can view called "check" files (*.chk). It also repairs cross-linked clusters by making a copy and pairing it to two separate families (the original and the cross linked one).

4. Run Defrag

- ScanDisk stabilizes your computer. A disk defragmenter speeds up your computer. According to our friends at WhatIs.com (the best technical glossary on the Net):
 - When a file is too large to store in a single location on a hard disk, it is stored on the disk in discontinuous (not adjacent) parts or fragments. This fragmentation is "invisible" to the user; however. The locations of the fragments are kept track of by the system. Over time, disk access time can be slowed by fragmentation since each fragmented file is likely to require multiple drive head repositionings and accesses. (There's nothing you can do to prevent fragmentation, by the way.)*
- A disk defragmenter is a utility that rearranges your fragmented files and the free space on your computer so that files are stored in contiguous units and free space is consolidated in one contiguous block. This also improves access time to files that are now contiguous. Windows includes a utility to carry out defragmentation. It is called Defrag and is found in the System Tools (in most versions part of the Accessories).

<http://www.whatis.com>

5. Backup your data

- If you don't know how, pop over to Fred Langa's excellent article and learn! You'll find it at

<http://www.langa.com/backups/backups.htm>

If you have Norton's SystemWorks, or V-Com's FixIt Utilities, you can carry out steps 3 and 4 in one operation. In addition, these utilities can be set to scan for viruses, carry out repairs to the Windows Registry and clear away temporary files, thereby freeing up space. If you have them, run them instead of steps 3 and 4, but carry out the scanning and defragging with whatever software you have regularly. This will definitely improve the stability of your system.

<http://www.vcom.com/>

YOUR HOME LIBRARY

Do you know that some information databases on the Internet charge for access? Good information is a valuable commodity and sites like MacquarieNet require you to pay for access. But there is a way around that.

Some of you may know that holders of a current State Library card can access that data, and data in many other databases without having to pay, thanks to a consortium of libraries who purchase access on your behalf. Some of the databases can only be accessed from a Library terminal, but there are about a dozen that you can access from home.

<http://www.statelibrary.tas.gov.au/>

If you didn't know that, then you obviously weren't at the meeting this week. Don't assume that you know as much as the guest speaker does. We get guest speakers along because of their expertise. As many of them ad lib their talks, there are no notes available to be included in our newsletters. Miss the meeting and you miss out on the information.

I make no apologies for that because it is the way it works. Meetings are held for your benefit and, if you want to get real value from your membership, you need to attend.

Unfortunately, this HCUG-list doesn't reach a lot of our members and they are usually the ones who could benefit most from attendance at meetings and reading our email newsletters. If you know anyone who hasn't subscribed, show them how easy it is.

<http://lists.southcom.com.au/mailman/listinfo/hcug-list>

In an effort to rectify the situation, we are asking members to supply their email addresses when renewing their membership. These will be added to a mailing list automatically and we will then be able to send out email newsletters and other advices to our members.

If you don't want to be included, you will need to opt-out by emailing the Editor.

editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au

The other reason you may want to email me is to request the PDF version of these newsletters. Your name will be added to a separate mailing list and the PDF version will be sent to you as an attachment. To read it you need Acrobat Reader installed. If you don't have it, or don't have version 6.0, go to Adobe's website and download a copy. It is an important tool with many documents on websites and CDs being in this universal format.

<http://www.adobe.com>

Peter Campbell
Editor